

THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



Rise up, rise up,
And, as the trumpet blowing
Chases the dreams of men,
As the dawn glowing
The stars that left unlit
The land and water,
Rise up and scatter
The dew that covers
The print of last night's lovers—
Scatter it, scatter it!

While you are listening
To the clear horn,
Forget, men, everything
On this earth newborn,
Except that it is lovelier
Than any mysteries.
Open your eyes to the air
That has washed the eyes of the stars
Through all the dewy night:
Up with the light,
To the old wars;
Arise, arise!

The Trumpet

NEWSLETTER 80 August 2018

After the centenary commemorations in 2017, there was always a possibility of 2018 appearing to be a bit anti-climactic for the Fellowship – however not a bit of it. From the ‘beast from the east’ in March that delayed the Birthday Walk by six weeks, to Richard standing down as Chairman at the AGM in April, to a range of new publications about Edward Thomas (including ‘The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgan’s’ in German) to what has possibly been the most important auction of Edward Thomas letters and manuscripts for many years, to the driest summer since 1976 (so far) it has been anything but ‘normal’.

This is my first contribution to the newsletter as the Fellowship’s new Chairman and whilst Richard will be a hard act to follow – and I am so grateful he is remaining in the wings as mentor – it is my intention to build on the work that has been achieved both in his time as Chair and in the 38 years (on the 28th September) overall that the Fellowship has been in existence. This means that the Fellowship will continue to work tirelessly to perpetuate the memory of Edward Thomas, create interest in his life and works and foster a continuing relationship with his family and descendants. I know many, if not all of you, will recognise these words as coming straight from the Fellowship’s Aims and Objectives and I am keen to reassure members of the Fellowship that this focus remains. If anything, with the creation of the Edward Thomas Study Centre at Petersfield Museum, in partnership with the Fellowship, this will take on a new dimension.

I am proud to be a Trustee of the Museum and, assuming no conflicts of interest I shall always put the interests of the Fellowship to the fore in the promotion and development of the Study Centre. These are exciting times for the Museum following a significant Lottery Award (see later) and its staff are working with other members of the Fellowship committee to develop activities that will engage more schoolchildren with the work of Edward Thomas through the Study Centre. The auction of Edward Thomas's letters and manuscripts at Bonhams in June was amazing – and I had the privilege of handling a Bedales exercise book from December 1914 that contained 'worked-up' drafts of three poems. This was Lot 290, which eventually sold for £42,000 plus fees, and VAT.

Whilst many of the prices achieved were far beyond our reach, thanks to a full grant from the Friends of the National Libraries we were successful in buying what I think may be the last letter Robert Frost wrote when staying with Edward Thomas in Steep. Due to collaboration during the run-up to the auction we have cemented our working relationships with the Friends of the Dymock Poets, the University of Gloucester, the Gloucester Archives and the National Library of Wales.

Looking to the future, September 2020 sees the 40th birthday of the Fellowship (sadly the Chequers Inn, Cholsey, where it all started is no longer there) and, although it seems a long way off any thoughts on how we might celebrate this will be most welcome. The Fellowship Committee welcomes new members to the committee and though there were no nominations at the AGM, if any members would like to serve, they should contact either David Kerslake or myself.

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity of being so closely involved with the life and work of Edward Thomas, and please enjoy the rest of Newsletter 80.

Jeremy Mitchell

AUTUMN WALK 2018

This year's Autumn Walk takes place on 22nd September. It will explore the connections between John Masefield, Edward Thomas and the Berkshire Downs, beginning at 11 a.m. at Aston Upthorpe Village Hall with a presentation by Professor Patrick Dillon (a specialist in environmental history). Lunch – brought by participants - will follow from 12-1pm after which Patrick Dillon and his daughter, artist Anna Dillon will lead the walk around Aston Upthorpe, Lollington and Aston Tirrold villages, covering this area's literary associations, notably John Masefield who lived at Lollington Farm. After the walk there will be the opportunity to visit Anna's studio.

EDWARD CAWSTON THOMAS POETRY COMPETITION 2018

Jane Draycott, who judged the poems, chose the following out of the hundred that were entered: -

- 1st prize: 'Sojourn', by Alyss Dye
- Joint 2nd prize: 'Bench' by Richard Meier and 'Rosary' by Phil Kirby
- Highly commended: poems by Carl Tomlinson, Patience Light, Roger Elkin, Sarah Macleod (two poems) and a further poem by Phil Kirby.

Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to everyone who entered.

Judge's Report

One of the really great pleasures for me in judging this competition has been the opportunity to immerse myself in so many poems which in their language and tone rekindle the spirit of Edward Thomas himself. Landscapes, both internal and external, of many memorable and private kinds

unfolded for me as I read and re-read, including (wonderfully) an extraordinary number of poems evoking birds and birdsong. Not surprising, of course, but an unexpected richness of subject matter which was a delight to encounter just at this moment in the calendar.

Among all the powerful resonances that Thomas set echoing across English poetics of the last century, perhaps the strongest has been his enduring model of the charged epiphany held within a brief lyric frame: this is something all three prizewinners, and many of the commended poems, achieved beautifully in their structures and imaginative development. The mysterious, unsettling subtlety and psychological sense of place in the first prize winner ‘**Sojourn**’, is so finely held within its unfolding rhyme-patterning that I think even after many re-readings I still probably haven’t exhausted the intricacy of association held within its *terza rima* framework. It’s a haunting, complex poem charged with wonder and uncertainty - a powerful fusion very skillfully achieved.

Deciding on a final winner from amongst three such strong top contenders was extremely hard, and I was grateful for the double second-prize award. ‘**The Bench**’ like ‘**Sojourn**’, works with beautiful musical attention in its highly personal, closely focused narrative, carrying us spellbound towards its simple elegiac resolution. That’s a quiet power which is a rare achievement, and much to be admired. In many ways, though very different poetically, the wonderfully vivid and superbly detailed narrative of ‘**Rosary**’ achieves a similar final resonance, far more visionary and dramatic, but with the same impressive sense of vision and confident authority. Edward Thomas is above all the poets’ poet, and he has come vividly alive for me again as a result of reading so many strong poems in this competition, so my thanks for that are warmly due to all the poets I’ve read, even though sadly not all can make it to the final selection.

Jane Draycott

Sojourn

First Prize

On the thirteenth day of the first month we began to feel
we would never belong
there. - That deep lane to the house by the sea,

the gnarled orchard trees and the mournful song of the
Cornish wind in the phone wires that haunted us at night.
We thought it was wrong

to get up and leave but did it matter?
Once, in a great storm, a flock of small birds came
inside. We sensed the rush and clatter

of their brittle wings against glass and heard the
motherless calves moaning as they climbed up the field
to shelter. There are no words

that can explain the strangeness of that time.

Alyss Dye

The bench

Joint second prize

My father with the pencil, me the measuring tape – a team,
in some ways – only with the last
of our four saw-cuts in the reclaimed plank did we work
out why each was angled, sloped:

we weren't square from the outset.
My father said he thought it wouldn't matter; and given
where we'd reached, I felt it better
to fix these sawn struts to the readied bench-seat

rather than protest. So then we lugged
the new bench to the hallway, where it stood, and where
it stands still, on the uneven floor – levelly, as my father
said it would.

Richard Meier

Rosary

Joint second prize

Imagine them gathered, those girls – the
side-lined or the fallen – unwanted

on St. Stephen's Eve, a watchnight of
their own design; a silent parlour,

hearth laid, nascent flames, firelight shadows
fluttering like their hearts

as, in turn, they thread the chaplet. Sweet-
earth and pepper allspice grains,

then holly berries, red as the blood that
beads on punctured finger tips.

Allspice, holly, earth then blood, until at
intervals of twelve, an acorn each:

an oak-seed for the hope of love. Their
devotion twined around a log

and set into the fire, they wait
for answers to unholy secret prayers,

for the forms of future husbands
to appear between them and the blaze.

Phil Kirby

BIRTHDAY WALK 22nd April 2018

The morning walk: Near perfect walking weather helped to make this a most memorable walk, covering lanes, field paths, woodland and open hillside. We set off from Bedales School at 10.30 a.m. passing the War Memorial where Edward's name is on the roll of honour for Steep, then climbing the Shoulder of Mutton Hill to the Memorial Stone – unveiled on 2nd October 1937. Ian Morton began with a short history of the Stone which was the culmination of efforts of a Committee chaired by Rowland Watson that included among others, Jesse Berridge, Walter de la Mare, Eleanor Farjeon, Julian and Merfyn Thomas and Henry Nevinson. Sadly Rowland Watson missed the unveiling due to illness.

The poetry readings at the Stone were *Edward Thomas Celebration (for R.L. Watson)* by John Gawsworth, read by Jeremy Mitchell, and *Memorial Stone* by William Cooke, read by Stephen Stuart-Smith. The Rev. John Owen of All Saints Church, Steep delivered a Commemoration and led the prayer.

Continuing up the hillside we passed The Red House on Cockshutt Lane and turned left down into the garden of The Bee House (Thomas' former hill-top study) where Sharyn Antonini, daughter in law of Edward Barnsley's daughter, warmly greeted us. Barnsley took over Lupton's workshop in 1923 when the latter stepped back from furniture making, and the Barnsley Workshop continues to flourish and indeed, made the bookends presented on behalf of the Fellowship to Richard Emeny on his retirement as Chair.

Members may be interested to know that the artist Allan Gwynne-Jones who was educated at Bedales School used The Bee House just after the end of the First World War as a studio. He painted *Spring Evening Froxfield* (Oil on canvas: Birmingham City Art Gallery) in 1922, and the etchings *Barn and Pond*, *Evening Froxfield* (1926) – on record as being at the top of Stoner Hill- and *House at Crossroad*, *Twilight*, *Froxfield* (1926) both in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and *A Study of Rooks* and *A Study of Starlings and other birds* (1927, both in private collections) were made from drawings executed while Gwynne-Jones and his mother were living in a small cottage built for them by Lupton in a wood at the end of his lane.

Admiring the glorious views to Lutcombe and the South Downs the readings here were *To Edward Thomas* by Alun Lewis, a great admirer of Edward Thomas and regarded by many as Britain's finest Second World War poet, read by Terry Lloyd, and *Old Man* was read by Jane Hill. We then followed the sunken path – 'that saves from the precipitous wood below' – *The Path*) down Stoner Hill, passing the wondrously clear Lutcombe Pond, and from there to Steep Village Memorial Hall for lunch via Island Farm and Mill Lanes.

We are very grateful to Mike Cope for arranging and leading the walk and to the readers.

Julia Maxted

The afternoon walk: The afternoon walk started in brilliant hot sunshine. However by the time the walkers (about 40 in total) reached the field path off Mill Lane, the sun had disappeared behind the clouds. With a view of Shoulder of Mutton hill behind, Breeda Morton read *All day it has rained* by Alun Lewis. Luckily it did not rain for the rest of the walk. At the same place, Barbara Kinnes read *Easter Monday* by Eleanor Farjeon. We were reminded that the poem was written before the news of Edward's death had

reached England. The walk returned to the main road and continued past the waterfall and up the footpath towards Berryfield Cottage. The owners were away but had given permission for us to enter the gardens. Cynthia Lloyd read *To E.T.* by Robert Frost and the youngest walker Laurie Green (Richard and Liz Emeny's grandson) read *Tall Nettles*. There is a plaque above the main door that complements the one on the memorial stone on the hill. We retraced our steps to a welcome tea and cake in All Saint's Church, Steep supplied by the Friends of Steep Church before the Birthday Tribute, the Poetry Competition awards and readings, and the AGM.

Breda Morton

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

A 1968 (British Council?) recording of a conversation between Helen Thomas and Rowland Watson was played: it concerned Steep, the dedication of the Shoulder of Mutton hillside and the Stone. Ben Mackay read *The Golden Room* by Wilfred Gibson and Helen Tweedy read *Edward Thomas in Heaven* by P.J. Kavanagh. Our thanks to the readers, who stepped in at very short notice.

To Edward Thomas

(On visiting the memorial stone above Steep in Hampshire)

I

On the way up from Sheet I met some children
Filling a pram with brushwood; higher still
Beside Steep church an old man pointed out
A rough white stone upon a flinty spur
Projecting from the high autumnal woods...
I doubt if much has changed since you came here
On your last leave; except the stone; it bears
Your name and trade: 'To Edward Thomas, Poet.'

II

Climbing the steep path through the copse I knew
My cares weighed heavily as yours, my gift
Much less, my hope
No more than yours.
And like you I felt sensitive and somehow apart,
Lonely and exalted by the friendship of the wind
And the placid afternoon enfolding
The dangerous future and the smile.

III

I sat and watched the dusky berried ridge
Of yew-trees, deepened by oblique dark shafts,
Throw back the flame of red and gold and russet
That leapt from beech and ash to birch and chestnut

Along the downward arc of the hill's shoulder,
And sunlight with discerning fingers
Softly explore the distant wooded acres,
Touching the farmsteads one by one with lightness
Until it reached the Downs, whose soft green pastures
Went slanting sea- and skywards to the limits
Where sight surrenders and the mind alone
Can find the sheeps' tracks and the grazing.
And for the moment Life appeared
As gentle as the view I gazed upon.

IV

Later, a whole day later, I remembered
This war and yours and your weary
Circle of failure and your striving
To make articulate the groping voices
Of snow and rain and dripping branches
And love that ailing in itself cried out
About the straggling eaves and ringed the candle
With shadows slouching round your buried head;
And in the lonely house there was no ease
For you, or Helen, or those small perplexed
Children of yours who only wished to please.
Divining this, I knew the voice that called you
Was soft and neutral as the sky
Breathing on the grey horizon, stronger
Than night's immediate grasp, the limbs of mercy
Oblivious as the blood; and growing clearer,
More urgent as all else dissolved away,
--Projected books, half-thoughts, the children's birthdays,
And wedding anniversaries as cold
As dates in history--the dream
Emerging from the fact that folds a dream,
The endless rides of stormy-branched dark
Whose fibres are a thread within the hand--
Till suddenly, at Arras, you possessed that hinted land.

Alun Lewis (1915-1944)

From the website: Anthem for Doomed Youth
Writers and Literature of The Great War, 1914-1918
<http://exhibits.lib.byu.edu/wwi/influence/ToEdwardThomas.html>

A NOTE OF THANKS FROM THE RETIRING CHAIR

I little thought when I wrote in the last Newsletter that I would be retiring as Chairman at the AGM this year that I would receive so many messages from members. I believe I have replied to them all, but if I have missed anyone, please accept my apologies now and also my deep thanks to everyone.

I was astonished and delighted by the gift of a set of bookends, made at the Barnsley Workshop at Wick Green. The craftsmanship is of a quality seldom seen these days, and the set will always have good use. It will indeed become a prized family heirloom. The membership of the Fellowship is, and always has been, a remarkable body of people. Thank you all.

Richard Emeny
June 2018



Our new Chair, Jeremy Mitchell, thanking Richard and Liz Emeny for their consummate contributions to the Fellowship (Photo: Mike Cope)

MARTIN HAGGERTY

Martin has been a Fellowship member since its early days. He combined a great love for the countryside with the works of Edward Thomas and other writers who saw the threats and dangers to it. I well recall a lecture he gave on H.W. Massingham in Selborne many years ago, when Richard Mabey also spoke. Martin was a conservationist long before its current popularity and Edward Thomas was the writer who expressed many of the ideals they share.

Moving from London, first to Scarborough and then to Allendale in Northumberland, one of the loveliest places in England, he has been able to live according to his principles with no car and no central heating, growing his own food. Modern technology has enabled Madeleine and Martin to conduct their businesses from a remote home, and he can undertake his research projects from there.

A Committee member for many years, this situation meant that he was able to construct our website and update it easily enough remotely and we are enormously grateful to him for his and Madeleine's time and efforts. We wish them a happy retirement.

Richard Emeny, July 2018

Note from the Editor: In 1999 The ETF (including Martin), The Ramblers' Association, the Council for the Protection of Rural and over 150 local individuals successfully defeated a proposed development of the fields of Else's Farm, near the village of Weald in Kent and the Thomas family home from 1904 to 1906, into a golf course.

Here Thomas wrote *The Heart of England*, *Beautiful Wales* and a great deal of literary journalism. In an article for *The Countryman* (May-June 1999) entitled "A poet's corner saved" Martin noted Edward's recollection of approaching the farmhouse for the first time with Helen: "... a little red farmhouse –yet not so little but that it rose with a maternal dignity among and above the sheds and stables, its children, and like it, of antique red. The home and dependencies gave out a sense of solidity, independence and seclusion. Our hearts acknowledged at once that it was desirable, saluted it and were calmly glad at the sight" (Ch.20, *The Heart of England*).

THE BONHAMS SALE, 20.6.18

The Jack Haines Collection was sold at Bonhams on 20th June. Haines was a Gloucester solicitor who befriended, and occasionally represented, the assorted poets, including Edward Thomas, who visited or lived in the Dymock area. His interests were wide and continued after the end of the First World War, Ivor Gurney being one of his friends. Locally he was principally known as a botanist, whose writings were usually published in the journals of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological and Natural History Society, the archives of which are kept at the University of Gloucestershire. Having read some of Haines's efforts at verse, Thomas discouraged him from continuing.

Up to now the Fellowship has not entered the potentially expensive arena of auctions, largely because there has been nowhere to keep valuable items. Consequently, we have occasionally helped institutions such as The National Library of Wales (NLW) with its own acquisitions. The situation has changed since the opening of The Edward Thomas Centre, based around the Tim Wilton-Steer Collection in Petersfield Museum. We are now more interested in items associated with Edward Thomas, which appear for sale.

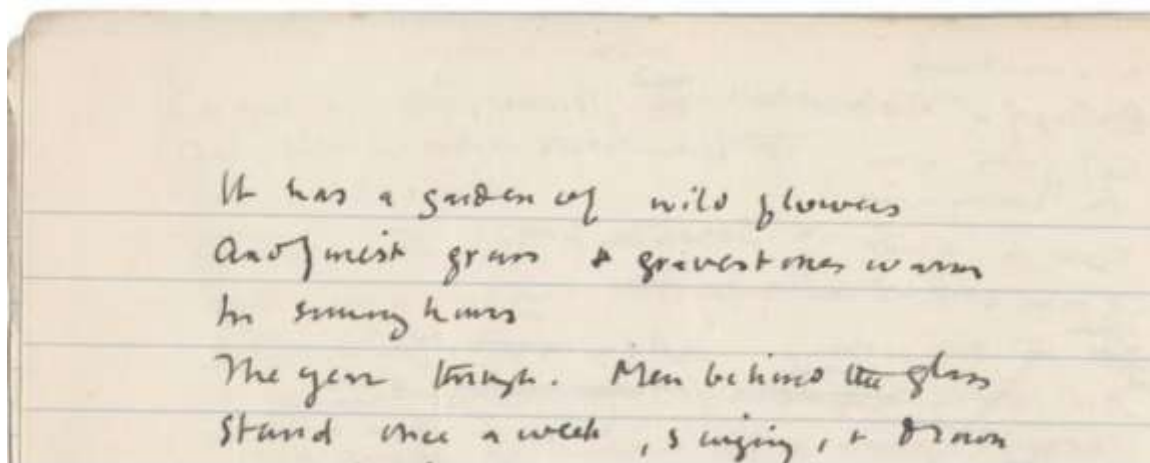
The Haines Collection is one of the richest to be sold in recent years and reflects his friendships. The sale included over thirty letters from Robert Frost to Jack Haines, one of which was written from Steep in February 1915, when Frost was staying with the Thomas family before returning to America, and another from America in 1917 in which he expressed his feelings on hearing of Thomas's death. The chief item of Thomas interest was a Bedales exercise book, which included three holograph poems by Thomas.

The Chairman discussed the sale with other interested parties including the Friends of the Dymock Poets, Gloucestershire County Records Office, University of Gloucestershire and the NLW. There were separate but overlapping interests, but it soon became clear that the NLW had far larger funds than anyone else, and it was agreed not to bid against it, which would have increased the cost, and to give it a clear field. In this way it was hoped that the bulk of the collection would remain in Britain. In return the NLW agreed to make copies for the other parties of all the items it was able to buy.

In the event the NLW decided that there were some lots that it would not be bidding for, which gave the Fellowship the opportunity to bid for those of interest to us. We bid for two: the 1915 letter from Frost to Haines sent from Steep, and the 1917 letter from him describing his emotions on hearing of Thomas's death. We had sought financial backing from several sources, chiefly the Friends of National Libraries, who were most helpful. We were successful in acquiring the 1915 Steep letter for £1300 net (£1690 including commission and VAT). The Bedales exercise book, which we knew would be out of our range, was sold for £42,000 net of commission and Vat, (£54,600), while the 1917 letter went for £4,800 net, our limit being £3,700. The NLW was successful in all its bids.

This was the Fellowship's first foray into the auction jungle and we are pleased with the results, both in terms of our acquisition and because of the co-operation between the interested parties and the Friends of the National Libraries: helpful links have been established for the future. We are also thinking of establishing an acquisitions fund and the Chairman will be writing about that in due course.

Richard Emeny, July 2018



Compositional draft of Edward Thomas' poem, The Mountain Chapel. Untitled in the notebook, purchased by National Library of Wales (www.bonhams.com/auctions/24634/lot/290)

EDWARD THOMAS, WALES AND POETRY

Celebrated English poet Edward Thomas was one of Wales' finest writers. Shortly after 7am on April 9 1917, 39-year-old writer Edward Thomas was killed by a shell during the Battle of Arras in northern France. He left a body of mostly unpublished work that has since cemented his place as one of Britain's greatest poets.

All of Thomas's 144 poems were written in the two and a half years leading up to his death. Almost immediately on its posthumous publication, his poetry came to speak for a rural England whose surviving people and culture had been decimated by four years of war. In a foreword to the

1920 Collected Poems, Walter de la Mare described Thomas's poetry as "a mirror of England", suggesting that it offered readers a portrayal of a rural nation that had been "shattered" by the catastrophic experience of World War I.

Thomas has become one of the most widely read English language poets of the 20th century. His Collected Poems has gone through numerous editions, and poems such as "Adlestrop" and "Old Man" have been widely anthologised.

Thomas has a deserved reputation as a poet with an unparalleled eye for the details of the natural world, managing through these observations to make some profound reflections on the human and environmental cost of war. His influence on subsequent generations of English poets is hard to overstate: former poet laureate Ted Hughes famously called Thomas "the father of us all".

There has been plenty of discussion of Thomas's work over the past few decades and yet there is one major aspect that has remained largely unexamined: his association with Wales.

An English poet?

Calling Thomas an English poet belies his own complex national identity. Born in London to Welsh parents in 1878, Thomas made frequent trips back to Swansea and the Carmarthenshire areas of south Wales to stay with relatives. He had strong friendships with Welsh-language poets Watcyn Wyn and John Jenkins ("Gwili"), and later attended Lincoln College, Oxford from 1897 to 1900, where he was tutored by Owen M. Edwards, one of the most significant figures in nonconformist Welsh culture.

Edwards awakened Thomas's sense of Welsh national identity – after graduating he asked his former tutor "to suggest any kind of work ... to help you and the Welsh cause". Three years earlier, Edwards had called for "a literature that will be English in language and Welsh in spirit", and it seems that Thomas took up his challenge, declaring that: "in English I might do something by writing of Wales".

Welsh in spirit

The visits to Gwili and Watcyn Wyn became more frequent and both poets feature in Thomas's 1905 travel book *Beautiful Wales*. A description of Gwili fishing in a Carmarthenshire stream also features in one of three books of Wales-oriented sketches and short stories published by Thomas between 1902 and 1911: *Horae Solitariae, Rest and Unrest, and Light and Twilight*. These books are full of Welsh subject matter, including sketches, as well as adaptations of, and allusions to, Welsh folk material and literature.

In his review work for newspapers, Thomas lamented the lack of a widely circulated collection of Welsh folk tales, something that he himself put right in 1911 when he published *Celtic Stories*, an anthology of Welsh and Irish folk stories written "when Wales and Ireland were entirely independent of England".

While Thomas's reputation as a quintessentially English writer rests largely on his poetry, it is now clear that even this is not as English as we previously thought. Welsh subject matter clearly creeps into some of his poems. The following verse from *Words* is a riddle-like reference to the tradition of Welsh bardic poetry:

*Make me content
With some sweetness
From Wales
Whose nightingales
Have no wings...*

The lines below from Roads allude to Sarn Helen, the mythical Roman road linking fortresses in the north and south of Wales:

*Helen of the roads,
The mountain ways of Wales
And the Mabinogion tales,
Is one of the true gods*

Recently, however, we have realised that Thomas's knowledge of Welsh-language poetic metres influenced his work too. Thomas's poetry has long been regarded as innovative, but critics have tended to look for its origins in his relationship with American poet Robert Frost, the Imagism movement, or in the spoken voice.

What we have missed is the formal crossover between Welsh-language literary forms and Thomas's use of intricate sound patterns. The opening lines of "Head and Bottle", for example, repeat the consonant sounds of "l", "s" and "m" across the first line, and again in the second line. There is also the internal rhyme in "sun", "sum" and "hum":

*The downs will lose the sun, white alyssum
Lose the bees' hum*

This is a clear example of *cynganedd*, the intricate system of consonantal repetition and internal rhyme which is unique to Welsh-language poems.

Thomas certainly was one of the greatest English-language poets but, one hundred years on, it is becoming clear that he belongs just as much to an Anglophone Welsh literary tradition as he does to the literature of England.

Andrew Webb

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Note from the Editor: Further selected secondary sources on this topic include:

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A WANDSWORTH RAMBLE

The Past is a strange land, most strange.
Edward Thomas, *Parting*

In the early 1980s I had enjoyed reading *In Pursuit of Spring*, Edward Thomas's creative account of a bicycle ride from Wandsworth Common to Cothelstone Hill in the Quantocks. Journeys make archetypal themes and this one does not disappoint. Thomas looks at the landscape with an artists' eye, selecting topographical elements and describing them often in terse and pared down terms, frequently with a restrained warmth of familiarity. Gentle lyricism delights throughout and it is no surprise that this work led on, with Frost's encouragement, into his claiming of the poetic form as his distinctive metier. In 1913, contemporaneously with Thomas's preparation of *In Pursuit*, W H Hudson, after reading *The Happy-Go-Lucky-Morgans* had written to Edward Garnett on 29 Dec, *He is essentially a poet... and this book shows it, I think, more than any of the others. You noticed probably in reading the book that every person described in it... are one and all just Edward Thomas.* But then he adds perceptively: *A poet trying to write prose fiction often does this¹.* Both *In Pursuit* and his poems contain journeys of his mind and developing perceptions, his pausing to gaze and reflect, his telling choice of illuminating detail, his backwards as well as forwards perspectives – all written with poignant poetic poise, balance and verbal draughtsmanship.

On rereading it in 2014 I was keen to reimagine and map out the described route. Working through the text, I identified every road, village, town, pub and topographical feature he mentioned and used this schedule to work out the route on modern OS maps. I gave a copy of *In Pursuit of Spring* to my poet son Edward, with a collection pre-World War 1 OS maps of the route. These, I conjectured, would have been close to those familiar to Thomas on his cycle rides and walking explorations. Following this, over a June weekend in 2016, I drove the route described while Edward cycled it, his partner Claire, a student in cartography, acting as navigator. We covered the route as meticulously as possible, pausing for refreshment and wild camping on two of the three nights. We walked the last three miles, with Edward pushing his bike because the chain had broken just before the end. It was an exhilarating and intriguing journey.²

¹ 'Letters from W.H. Hudson to Edward Garnett, Dent 1925

² Edward presented me with a framed reproduction of the Victorian south of England onto which he had glued a section of his broken chain to outline ET's *In Pursuit* route. This inspired a larger version, mounted on two 1913 OS maps, contemporaneous with Thomas's exploratory bike rides, now in the Edward Thomas Study Centre, in Petersfield Museum.

Having got the ‘shape’ of the route, I returned in Spring 1917 to some of the many points along the road indicated in the text which Edward Thomas had, it seemed to me, paused, gazed and marked as notable – for example Silent Pool, Dean Hill before Salisbury, Brook Farm in Wiltshire, the final view towards his beloved Wales from Cothelstone Hill in Somerset. This time I wanted to sketch and photograph these places, to somehow ‘get into’ the landscape that had inspired the writer and which he so fluently described. The resultant series of works done in acrylic and oil pastels I exhibited at our local art trail last October and, before Easter 2018, at Petersfield Museum, courtesy of the Edward Thomas Fellowship.

Friend Wendy Britton, currently Chair of Bristol Ramblers, has joined me in working at another level of engagement. We are devising and testing a series of 4 – 7-mile walks from points along the route. This will take the reader further ‘into’ the text, literally sharing and examining the viewpoint of the writer. These are circular walks, opening up chosen sections of the road to see points identified by Thomas and exploring their setting. If, in creating a circular walk, we are obliged to go *off piste* from the 1913 text, it is quite probable we will be walking related paths and lanes he explored on his numerous hikes across the terrain.

I hope I shall find more about that when I undertake a further journey, into both the text and Thomas’s engagement with the landscape, by an examination of his notebooks recording his preparatory field work for *In Pursuit*. These are housed in New York’s Berg Library. This is an open project and I have yet to give shape to the resulting study.

It will take time to fine tune the walks and to work out how to present my material in appropriate form. Below, I submit, as a tentative starting point of our walks, the one centring on Wandsworth, the epicentre of Edward Thomas’s young life and the setting-off point, in Nightingale Lane, for the journey. It moves through the remembered streets and locations of his childhood territory; each place is well documented in his writing and those of Helen and others.

The walk covers aspects of his early life – he says *My waking life was divided between home, school and the streets and neighbouring common*.³ For anyone seeking a fuller impression of this, a reading of *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* is indispensable and a reading of Helen’s *As it was* will be richly rewarding.

It was only as I literally concluded writing up my walk that I came across John Haskey’s account of the walk of 28 May 2012 led by Richard Purver and Anne Harvey.⁴ John writes, *Of course, the homes where Edward lived, and the other houses we were to visit, did not fall in a convenient straight line or in a perfect circle; so, understandably, the chosen route took in places in an order which was geographically efficient, rather than chronologically accurate!* However, the walk below reverses that order.

1. The walk starts from Clapham Junction station; if arriving by train, leave the station by the St John’s main entrance, walk through the car park and down Junction Approach to Falcon Rd.

Up to the early 19th century, Battersea was essentially a largely rural district. The coach road from London to Portsmouth ran down, slightly to the south, of what is now Lavender Hill. In the 17th century Wandsworth village was a refuge for persecuted Huguenots who fled France after Louis XIV’s revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. They established in the village, among other resourceful industrial projects, the cultivation asparagus and lavender – hence the street name of Lavender Hill. Other such names in the area are the former Lavender Lodge with its 500-foot garden on St John’s Rd (gone by 1913), Lavender Gardens and Lavender Sweep. To the west of

³ *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* (CET), written in 1913 and first published by Faber in 1938. Ch 1 Infancy

⁴ This is in ETF Newsletter 69, Jan 2013 and the walk was part of a series of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival

the north side of the Common is Huguenot Place and a Huguenot burial ground, known as Mount Nod cemetery.

In *The Ickniel Way* Thomas created the character of the Oxford-educated A.A. Bishopstone, the head of a vagrant family which perishes in tragic misery. In the deceased man's diary which he 'finds' he reads various statements of a philosophical nature and quotations from many sources, often mirroring, unsurprisingly, Thomas's own thinking. At one point he has Bishopstone write, "*The road northwards out of Arundel leads to Heaven*"; to which he had added, "*So does Lavender Hill*". Given Thomas's warm recollection of his youthful years in Battersea, this has the ring of a very personal conviction.⁵

Development came with the construction of the railway in 1838 and of its associated interchange in 1863. Around the junction grew railway-related industries and the workforce slum housing. Civic amenities, more genteel housing and a regional shopping district were created to the south of Lavender Hill. Green spaces such as Wandsworth Common were saved from development. Reckoned at 6,000 in 1840, the Battersea population increased 28-fold by the time Thomas wrote *In Pursuit of Spring*. In the latter he shows little fondness for Clapham Junction and its impersonal multitudes surging around on their shopping, business or leisure concerns: *I am not fond of crowds... The crowd that I dislike most is the crowd near Clapham Junction on a Saturday afternoon. Though born and bred a Clapham Junction man, I have become indifferently so. Perhaps I ought to call my feeling fear: alarm comes first, followed rapidly by dislike.... It is a disintegrated crowd, rather suspicious and shy perhaps, where few know, or could guess much about, the others.*⁶

Helen, perhaps with warmer feelings, remembers that Clapham Junction was often a stage on her homeward journeys with Edward after their courting walks in places like Wimbledon and Merton.

- 2. Walk down Falcon Rd.** Falcon Rd was a main thoroughfare, leading to crossroads and the junction of Lavender Hill and St John's Hill off to the right. The latter would have led to the Unitarian Chapel, attended by the Thomas family – reluctantly by Edward – and the private John's Hill House School he attended after Board School. The Falcon Inn on the left, built as a hotel and pub in 1882, was preceded by an inn dating back to 1733 and possibly much earlier. It had been by the Falcon Brook (previously named the Hydeburn brook) and faced the former turnpike road.

Until 1733 the Battersea Manor was held by the St Johns of Lydiard Tregoze in Wiltshire. They became Viscounts Bolingbroke, whose armorial bearings carried falcon wings which probably explains the name Falcon Rd and that of the pub. The St John and Bolingbroke family are commemorated by the names of various streets in the Wandsworth area.

The mention of Lydiard Tregoze, brings to mind Thomas's intense love for Wiltshire. He compiled *The Woodland Life* in 1897⁷, collected from previously-published articles, his nature diaries and notebooks. He moves through the seasons, describing their changes with delicate and minute observations. Chapter 2, describing Spring, is entitled *Lydiard Tregoze* and recounts its meadows, pools, fields and coppices which he had explored in his visits to Swindon relatives. Displaying his extensive knowledge, in this chapter alone he comments on twenty-five flower types, plus fungi, moss and lichen, ten tree species, the animals rabbit, dog and ferret, and eleven types of bird. Later, in the *South Country* he wrote, with his deep curiosity about names (so evident in *In Pursuit of Spring*), *if only those poems which are place-names could be translated at last, the pretty, the odd, the romantic, the racy names of copse and field and lane and house.*⁸ He creates a list of them and in this lyrical litany is the St John family estate of Lydiard Tregoze. The frontage of Debenhams across Lavender Hill declares its origins as Arding & Hobbs. This was the company's flagship emporium, built in 1884 and remodelled after a fire in 1909. The owners had shrewdly anticipated high profits from the rapid retail and domestic developments

⁵ *The Ickniel Way*, Constable 1916 Ch IX Streatley to Sparsholt p245

⁶ *In Pursuit of Spring*, Thomas Nelson 1914 (IPOS) Ch 6 The Avon, the Biss, the Frome

⁷ *The Woodland Life*, Blackwood, 1897

⁸ *The South Country*, Dent, 1932 edition Ch IX, p153

that would follow on from the building of Clapham Junction. The store would have been familiar to Wandsworth residents like the Thomas family.

3. **Cross Lavender Hill and go down St John's Rd.** On walking down these streets, a view of the late Victorian houses can be gained by looking up above the shop fronts. Croosh Alley on the left gives a partial glimpse into a past world with its setts, courtyard and bordering trees. The Victorian shops were established to meet the needs of the local population. A directory of 1893 lists a great variety touching on all aspects of life – dining rooms, builders, warehouses, cheesemongers, grocers, butchers and greengrocers. There was even a sculptor and an umbrella manufacturer as well as a 'medieval smiths'. Business relating to the near-defunct farming in the area include corn merchants and dairymen⁹. In the past couple of decades, the area has been extensively gentrified, the shops showing the pervasive influence of prevailing consumer fashions. Currently there are wine shops, a homeopathic practice, abundant outlets for coffee or for chic items, eating places, hair stylists and quick food joints. The shops gradually give way to domestic terraces.
4. **Cross Battersea Rise and on to Northcote Rd** where Thomas, in his *Childhood* notes, says that one winter there were *playing grounds* of the *hills of snow lining Northcote Road, the principal street...*¹⁰. This runs to the south in a shallow valley, flanked by parallel roads which rise gently on either side.

Continue down Northcote Rd and, seventh on the right, turn up Wakehurst Rd, taking the short walk up to number 49 on the right.¹¹ Edward had been born to Philip Henry and Mary Thomas in lodgings at 10 Upper Lansdowne Rd North (now 14 Lansdowne Gardens)¹². They moved to 1 Tremorvah Villas, Battersea and, when Edward was 2 and with his younger brother Ernest, they relocated to this modest semi-detached brick house in Wakehurst Rd. He wrote of this Wandsworth home, *Our street like three or four others parallel to it was in two halves, running straight up the opposite sides of a slight valley, along the bottom of which ran the principal street of mixed shops and private houses. Our house was low down in the half which ran up westwards to Bolingbroke Grove, the eastern boundary of Wandsworth Common. These little semi-detached one-storied pale brick houses in unbroken lines on both sides of the street had each, even when they were new, something distinguishing them and preventing monotony. The people in them made them different. In addition, some were beginning to be draped in creepers. Some gates stood open, some were shut. One had bushes in the garden, another had flowers, another nothing but dark trodden gravel. The house above ours, in the next pair, was presumably meant for a doctor, and possessed a coach house which almost looked as if it belonged to us. That was our outward distinction. Inside from the front door to the back of the house there was as long a passage as possible, the rooms opening out of it. The staircase ran up to a room with an opaque glass window in the door, a second room and two others connected by a door. The rooms downstairs I hardly remember at all.... The passage was a playground when it was too wet or too dark to be out of doors. Here, when I had at any rate one brother – probably three or four years old when I was five or six – who could run, we two raced up and down the passage to be pounced upon by the servant out of a doorway and swallowed up in her arms with laughter. Upstairs the room with the glass door was at long intervals occupied by a visitor, such as my father's uncle James or my mother's sister, and I think cards were played there... I and at least one brother slept in one of the two connected bedrooms.*¹³

⁹ Neal's Farm stood on the west side of the railway, Burntwood and Springfield farms lay on ET's ride down Burntwood Lane

¹⁰ CET Ch 1 Infancy

¹¹ As a further example of gentrification, the current house price for this property is £1,300,00. 61 Shelgate Rd is valued at £2,525,000, 13 Rusham Rd at £3,282,000 and 6 Patten Rd at £3,474,000

¹² This is located to the right of Wandsworth Rd nearer Vauxhall Bridge

¹³ CET Ch 1 Infancy

5. **Return to the junction with Northcote Rd and cross it to go up the other half of Wakehurst Rd.** On the right, looming above all else, is the redbrick pile of **Bellville School**. This was Edward Thomas's first school. It is a substantial three-storeyed block, still retaining a large asphalt playground with its original London brick wall as in Thomas's day. *Then I entered the lowest class of a large suburban board school...* Here began a lifelong preoccupation and love of maps, reaching into his life as an army instructor in Hare Hall, Essex: *What I most enjoyed was doing maps of Great Britain and Ireland, inking in the coast lines with red, and marking the mountain ranges with thin parallel strokes arranged herringbone fashion. I never tired of the indentations of the western coasts, especially of Scotland. The line of the Hebrides I think I actually loved.*¹⁴

Looking at the school's large windows it is easy to imagine Thomas's statement: *We were huddled close together in great lofty rooms with big windows and big maps and on Mondays a smell of carbolic soap.*

Thomas graduated from the Infants to the Junior section in 1886, staying till early 1888. His father, solicitous for his elder son's future, then moved him to the private St John's Hill House School, from where he went, aged 12, to Battersea Grammar School and, at 15, to St Pauls, London.

6. **Turn left long Webb's Rd where the houses are larger and have a less confined air than in Wakehurst Rd. After a line of shops on the right, cross and turn up Shelgate Rd. Walk up to 61** From 1888 this was the second Thomas family home in the area. It bears a blue plaque. *While we were in [Wakehurst Rd] my mother presented me with four brothers at intervals of two years... Being thus seven in family we move to a large house in one of the roads parallel to the old one.... the new house had charm. Its size allowed an empty room for us to play in, and a box room... [which] was dark and housed a wooden box containing inexhaustible treasures... chiefly old books, old magazines, old photographs of unknown people.*¹⁵ So the ever-growing family had moved to this three-storeyed terraced house for its greater space and it was the birthplace of the youngest boy Julian, his favourite among his brothers. Julian was to accompany Edward on some of his cycling explorations for *In Pursuit of Spring*. Edward's first writings as a teenage author were completed here, consisting of articles springing from his observations of the natural world, some curated into his first book *The Woodland Life*. Such early writing mentions nature rambles on Wandsworth Common as well as in Wimbledon, Richmond, Merton and Swindon. It was from this house that Edward courted Helen, visiting her father James Ashcroft Noble at The Grove, Balham, and later at Patten Rd. From here, too, he went up to Lincoln College, Oxford and it remained home until he and Helen married and moved to Earsfield and later to 7 Nightingale Parade. Before that, in this home in January 1900 Merfyn was born up in the dormered attic which the recently married couple had made their own, half study and sitting room, half bedroom. Helen describes the scene vividly at the end of *As it was*.

7. **Carry on up to Leathwaite Rd, turn right and go back down Wakehurst Rd and up to Bolingbroke Grove and Wandsworth Common** which can be glimpsed in the distance. Bolingbroke House, an old red brick three-storey mansion in what was called Five Houses Lane, was on the left at the end of Wakehurst Rd. It became a hospital for the artisanal and middle classes in 1880 (it still houses Bolingbroke Medical Centre) and the greater part became, in 2012, Bolingbroke Academy. Thomas was aware as a lad, of the ever-increasing housing and civic developments, devouring boyhood haunts and semi-rural land. Though greatly interested in houses, homes and buildings, real and imagined, he had an ambivalent relationship with London's relentless growth which

¹⁴ CET Ch 1 Infancy

¹⁵ CET Ch 4 Books and School friends

colonised some of these childhood-cherished places; on the other hand, his home streets *were a playground almost equal to the Common*.¹⁶

On Bolingbroke Grove he remembers vividly being a smaller hanger-on of a swelling army of scores of older Board School boys hurling stones at the nearby grammar school students and armed with *wooden swords and pikes, or daggers, shields, pistols, bows, arrows and with horns and trumpets*, splitting into groups and hunting each other among the front gardens or pretending to be *Sioux, Mohicans, or Hurons*. Clearly, unlike today's parentally-supervised activities, Thomas enjoyed adult-free exploits, so necessary for working through hazards and risks, discovering small joys, creating a bank of treasured childhood memories.

8. **Cross Bolingbroke Grove on to Wandsworth Common, taking the path left, parallel to the Grove and the railway line.** Disraeli's 1875 Public Health Act enabled councils and pressure groups such as the Commons Preservation Society (very active in Wandsworth) to raise funding for the development of previous common land into recreational spaces for the urban population. In 1871 the Wandsworth Common Act prompted the purchase of land from Lord Spencer not only for the park but for building plots.¹⁷ Subsequent legislation, such as the 1881 Open Spaces Act, confirmed this trend.

The Common exercised a powerful influence on Thomas. The first stirrings of interest in the natural world began here, it was the crucible of his passionate curiosity about plants, trees and birdlife – all of which he shared with his brothers, with Helen and, later, with his children. It was an emotional firewall between a land that he loved and the erosion of urban sprawl. He writes with relish of the games and activities, such as fishing, smoking, hoop bowling and day-long explorations: *The Common... offered many temptations to more irregular games and aimless roving. For it was an uneven piece of never cultivated gravelly land. Several ponds of irregular shape and size, varying with rainfall, had been hollowed out, perhaps by old gravel diggings. It was marshy in other places... A railway ran across the Common in a deep bushy cutting, and this I supposed to be a natural valley and had somehow peopled it with unseen foxes. The long mounds of earth now overgrown with grass and gorse heaped up at my side of the cutting from which they had been taken were 'hills' to us, who wore steep yellow paths by running up and down them*.¹⁸ Children experience a place where they can rove, alone or with other youngsters, as somehow 'their own.' In *The Happy go Lucky Morgans*,¹⁹ (created in large part out of the writer's personal memories and feelings) Arthur must surely be referring possessively to Wandsworth Common as *Our Country*, which Arthur/Edward Thomas enjoyed along with *Richmond Park, or Wimbledon Common, all to ourselves*.

The young Edward and Helen often strolled the Common and she writes it was here, walking in early Spring, while *walking on the Common, very happy, talking of what we had been reading, what doing, what thinking, walking as usual hand in hand*, she became aware her affection for Edward had become love. On parting, it was sealed with their first kiss.²⁰

9. **Walk down the path running next to Bolingbroke Grove.** Thomas says this was lined with *venerable elms*²¹ – not now, though. Follow the path; it is bordered with ash, chestnut oak and acer trees. It leads to a pond with two small islands, edged by willows and alive with mallards, geese and the occasional heron (plus a warning not to feed them, thus encouraging rats). The

¹⁶ CET Ch 2 First schooldays

¹⁷ Spencer Park with its middle-class homes lies north of the Common. Frederick St John, 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke, 3rd Viscount St John (1732 – 1787) married Lady Diana Spencer of the Marlborough family. It was not a happy marriage and was dissolved but it links the landowners around Wandsworth Common.

¹⁸ CET Ch 1 Infancy

¹⁹ THGLM Ch XX The Poet's spring at Lydiard Constantine

²⁰ Helen Thomas, *As it Was*, (AIW) Ch 2

²¹ *IPOS*, Ch 2 London to Guildford

areas of uncut grass have allowed a rich variety of wildflowers and shrubs to thrive and it is easy to understand why Thomas was so excited by the Common and all he found in it.

- 10. Cross over the grass on to a broader path along a copse of silver birch on the left. Veer right on to the broad path which runs straight towards the railway bridge ahead. Cross this and go through the alleyway lying head between the houses. This emerges on Baskerville Rd. Walk left, noting the generous gardens of the houses over the road. Patten Rd is on the right; walk down to No. 6**

This section of the walk has taken us on the route Edward Thomas would have walked to see his mentor James Ashcroft Noble, a Liberal journalist, critic and writer and, subsequently, to call on Helen. Patten Rd is a wider street than those of the Thomas homes, indicating wealthier residents. They are spacious, semi-detached residences with pillared porches, fretted gable ends and ornate plaster embellishments; each has a basement, two storeys and an attic. Helen says this home was in a *better neighbourhood* [than 15 The Grove²², their first Wandsworth home to the east of this location] *with a garden carved out of an old cherry orchard with several fruit trees.*²³ At the time of writing there are two cherry trees in the front garden.

The family had moved from Liverpool to The Grove in 1892 and it was here Edward first visited Noble. W G Tarrant, the hymnologist, writer and minister of the Wandsworth Unitarian Chapel attended by Noble, had asked the latter to help young Edward work on his writings in preparation for possible publication. Helen says this *shy and constrained* lad responded to the *genial kindness and interest* of her father between whom there developed a fondness. From 1895, several of Edward's articles were accepted by a weekly paper of which Noble was co-editor and in the *Globe*. Under his guidance, *The Woodland Life* was prepared for publication in 1897 which, Noble having died in 1896, he *inscribed to the memory of James Ashcroft Noble*.

In November 1895, Noble wrote to Thomas, *I think that when you get to know my Helen she might make a very nice friend for you. She is a few months older than you, but she is in many ways younger than her years, and she loves Nature and beautiful things just as you do, though in some ways she is not as clever as the others* [her sisters Irene, Susan and Mary]²⁴

One day, Noble said to the youth, *“Here’s Helen dying for the country, and a good walker; why don’t you take her and show her some of the places you know?”* ... *It was from this house that we set off for our first walk to Merton.*²⁵

The walks continued throughout their life together.

- 11. Retrace your steps to Baskerville Rd and walk to the right.** At the end is **Routh Rd**; at No.3 there is plaque to David Lloyd George, counted as a friend by Edward Thomas's Liberal father. **Turn left and walk through another alleyway back to the Common. Walk right, alongside the pond on the left** Thomas says of this *ornamental pond... Empty it was, and the sodden bed did not improve the look of the Common – flat by nature, flatter by recent art. The gorse was in bloom amidst a patchwork of turf, gravel and puddle.*²⁶ Today's pond belies that description; much thought and care has been invested in this small two-part lake and its setting. Continue walking right, along the avenue lined with acacia, lime, sycamore and a variety of other trees. **The path will take you to Bellevue Rd and The Hope on the opposite side.** This road links **Burntwood Lane** down on the right and **Nightingale Lane** just over the railway bridge on the left.

Thomas gives 21 March 1913 as the starting date of his *In Pursuit of Spring* Quantock-bound journey. He first cycles along these roads flanking the Common before turning left at the bottom

²² The house was destroyed by a flying bomb in 1944.

²³ AIW, Ch 1 In Search of Spring

²⁴ James Ashcroft Noble to Edward Thomas, 30 November 1895. National Library of Wales, 22919B, f41v, f42. Quoted with permission in the January 2005 ETF Newsletter 53 by Kedrun Laurie: *The Schooling of Helen Noble*

²⁵ AIW, Ch 1 In Search of Spring

²⁶ IPOS, Ch 2 London to Guildford

on to Garratt Lane, bound for South Wimbledon, Merton and the rest of his Spring pursuit. He says this stretch of road *was tame; it was at once artificial and artless, and touched with beauty only by the strong wind and by the subdued brightness due to the rain... with its not quite lusty grass, the hard, dull gravel, the shining puddles and sharp green buds.* He notes nostalgically at the top of Burntwood Lane *the blackbird's shrubbery, the lawn, the big elm, or oak, and the few dozen fruit trees, of one or two larger and older houses surviving... The almond, the mulberry, the apple trees in these gardens have a menaced or actually caged loveliness, as of a creature detained from some world far from ours, if they are not, as in some cases they are, the lost angels of ruined paradises.*

From this road he could see the Wimbledon Electricity Works²⁷, the Lunatic Asylum,²⁸ playfields awaiting housing development and *sorry unprotected elms which have one hour of prettiness, when the leaf-buds are as big as peas on the little side sprays low down. Then on a Saturday – or a Sunday, when the path is darkened by adults in their best clothes and children come and pick the sprays in bunches instead of primroses. For there are no primroses, no celandine, no dandelions outside the fence in Burntwood Lane.*²⁹

- 12. Turn left towards the railway bridge onto Nightingale Lane. Cross the end of Bolkingbroke Grove and, two roads up on the left, is Rusham Rd. Walk up and on the right-hand side and at the corner with Sudbrooke Rd is 13 (now 12) Rusham Rd or Rusham gate.** Three steps lead up to a fine garden embracing three sides of this impressive house and to the front door in the gable end. Thomas's parents moved here in 1902, after Edward, with Helen, had left home, and it was a source of pride to his father as an outward sign of his self-betterment and improving status.

Edward Thomas, when staying here from Steep, was visited by family and friends, Robert Frost amongst them. He enjoined friends to write to him at this address and he put it at the head of many of his own letters. From this house he set off for his Quantock-bound cycle ride. While billeted here in 1915, some of his early poems were written. His War Diary poignantly records on 11 January 1917, *Said goodbye to Helen, Mervyn and Baba. Bronwen to Rusham Road.... Supper at Rusham Road with all my brothers.*³⁰ After this his father, who had a problematic relationship with his eldest son, accompanied him to the station for his last journey which took him back to the army and to France, saying, "I wish you had more belief in your cause to support you." And when Edward died, and perhaps writing with pride in his sadness at his son's death, from here he wrote to *The Times* to reveal, against Edward's wishes, that the poet Edward Eastaway was indeed Edward Thomas.

Helen stayed here for a time after Edward's death and it was here that Philip Henry Thomas died in 1920.

- 13. To conclude the walk, continue up to Thurleigh Rd, and right up Montholme Rd, left on Broomwood Rd and right onto Northcote Rd and back up to Clapham Junction.**

Benedict Mackay

²⁷ A Local Authority project, the Durnsford Road power station in Wimbledon opened in 1899, energetically promoted by engineer William Henry Preece (1834 – 1913), a telecommunications pioneer.

²⁸ Surrey County Lunatic Asylum opened in 1841, designed for 294 patients, chiefly paupers from rural Surrey, and was remodelled in later years. Built to fashionable ideas, it was constructed along a long central corridor with wards for differently afflicted patients running at right angles; these included an Annexe for Idiot Children. It was surrounded by farmland and kitchen gardens. It was transferred to Middlesex County Council c 1889.

²⁹ IPOS Ch 2 London to Guildford

³⁰ See *War Diary*, accompanying *The Childhood of Edward Thomas*, Faber 1983 edition

My thanks to Richard Emeny for answering graciously my many questions and to Gillian McGrandles and Emma Anthony of the Wandsworth Heritage Service in Battersea Library for assisting me with research

IVOR GURNEY

A festival celebrating Ivor's work in walks, talks, discussions and concerts - Ivor Gurney: High above Gloucester and the Severn Plain - is taking place in Gloucester on the 14th and 15th September 2018. More details via this website: <http://themusicalbrain.org> or by email from greg@themusicalbrain.org .

Helen Thomas' visits to Ivor Gurney at the request of Marion Scott continue to inspire artistic works in several genres including the song, 'Maps' by Martin Simpson on his album, *Trails & Tribulations*. Below are two poems inspired by this moving experience.

An Hour in the Asylum

Helen Thomas brought summer to the asylum.
Ivor Gurney, four walls walling him
Welcomed her and took flowers from her
Then opened the ordnance Gloucester maps she brought.
These had been Edward's,
Maps Edward had used when he strode the hills
And walked the lanes of Gloucestershire.

Their fingers traced its villages, its byways
But in that hour he travelled further,
Went to places she could not reach.
He smelt the air of Gloucestershire,
Smelt the scent of country in its songs.
On these maps his fingers played
The murmurings of brook meadows,
The almost silences of meandering rivers.
From Birdlip Hill, he saw Severn silver a snail's trail
And clouds tumble in the skies above Wales
And fumble hillsides of ancient mysteries.

And there were the people and the farmhouses
Where kettles bubbled on firesides,
Firesides that threw shadows
And sparks that threw upwards.

Moments later, down, down into the dark.
Down, down, down into the dark he went,
Desiring Gloucestershire earth and death, death.
Not into the dark of the asylum,
Into the dark of night skies over Severn.
Seven sisters over Severn,
The Pleiades keeping watch
And the moon pulling at his mind
And at Severn's tides
And her floods carrying him away.

Left lost on a far shore, he returned, washed
Back to the asylum where Helen watched.

Mary Macgregor

Stone House Asylum, 1932

*He trod, in a way we who were sane could not emulate, the lanes and fields he knew
and loved so well, his guide being his finger tracing the way on the map... he had
Edward as his companion in this strange perambulation and he was utterly happy...*

Helen Thomas

Private Gurney, no. 3895, at ease.
Unnoticing, unnoticed by the grinning choir who shriek
and shit, idle through the hours, slack-limbed with slacker minds,

that crack and melt the days. His spare frame,
framed at the window, almost inhabits
the *great wit near to madness*. Until this bawdy band

strikes up: no romance here. Yet still, some days rise clear
as the bright air above the sweet silt at Framilode
until, like crows at dawn in the scant yard,

terrors arrive upon the hour, whistling down the unseen wires,
with fresh news from the front as the clouds roll in.
His green eyes scan the grey imagined skyline for the sniper

who knocked Lieutenant Thomas to the mud.
Round eyes, eager as foxes beneath bold brows
tap out a morse code in memoriam.

The widow comes, strong, sight failing,
heart and arms wide-full despite the years.
Quietly, she unfolds Edward's packages of summer days

creased along the yellow spines of an old map.
She spreads their youth upon the iron bed
as if, beneath the ordinance of loss, all three can walk together:

cross the byways of their grief, unbrick the walls,
trade back a life, a mind, a love,
and journey to remembered streams.

Geese sound above their heads, veiling the skies
from unheard mortar fire. Bearded barley grows
from the cracked floors of the cell and catches the wind

in a rush of mirth. From Abbleimont and Arras to
Brimscombe, Maisemore, Leaden Banks, beneath fingertips,
inches become acres as the years unwind;

they bound up hillsides, tripping
and whooping down river banks,
under lark song, in the evening's thin bright triumph.

Edward Mackay

FROM THE ARCHIVE

As the Fellowship approaches its fortieth birthday we have decided to delve into the archive of the Newsletters – please do contact me if there is something you would like to see re-printed here: maxtedj@gmail.com or 54, Southmoor Road, Oxford, OX2 6RD.

EDWARD THOMAS – EIGHTY YEARS ON

Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter No. 36, February 1997

*‘Many members will have heard of **Franklin Lushington**, who was Edward’s battery commander in France, and who had the job of writing to Helen to report her husband’s death. Fewer perhaps will know that after the war he became a writer himself, and his novel, ‘The Gambardier’, written under the nom de plume, ‘Mark Severn’ tells of his experiences in the First World War. It contains a fictionalised account of Edward Thomas at the Front. Before he died, Franklin Lushington began an autobiographical account of his experiences, which has never been published. We are very grateful to his son, **Stephen**, a Fellowship member [sadly Stephen died – Ed.] for allowing us to publish an excerpt describing the circumstances of Edward’s death together with his own commentary and memoir of subsequent events.’*

It was eighty years ago, Easter Monday 1917, that Edward Thomas was killed on the opening day of the battle of Arras. My father Franklin Lushington, a young man of 24, commanded the battery of Siege Guns in which Edward served and died. In his unpublished account of two world wars he wrote of Edward:

“He was a quiet scholarly man, a little older than the rest of us, with a manner at once open and withdrawn. His approach to life’s problems was simple and direct. Poetry and gunnery might be poles apart, but each could be made to yield their secrets if tackled honestly and with humility. Edward had lost the youthful arrogance and affectation that betrays uncertainty. He was sure of himself and of his world and the knowledge of this shone through him as light shines through glass. His willingness to do all things for the general good rather than for himself alone, coupled with an innate modesty and goodness of heart, endeared him to us all. Yet behind it one felt a certain reserve, a kind of hidden melancholy that may have been due to loneliness. For his was a spirit beyond the common run and he may well have felt lonely at times among us. Edward loved England and the English countryside and all that pertains to an outdoor life.

North of the valley of the river Scarpe stands Vimy Ridge, whence the ground, downland, unfenced and almost treeless, drops abruptly towards the city of Arras and the Douai plain. South and east of the town lie a number of large caves and quarries from which in the seventeenth century the chalk was quarried for the rebuilding of the city. It was in one of those quarries, on the outskirts of the little village of Achicourt, that we went into action for the coming battle. On the day of our arrival a lorried ammunition column was driving through the main street when it was caught by a German concentration. In an instant the blazing exploding lorries turned the

village into an inferno and, when the German guns lifted, there was nothing left of it but heaps of brick rubble and burning wood.

It was now our turn. For half an hour the shells rained into the quarry. One plunged into the ground at Edward's feet but failed to explode. "Edward" Tom said that night in the mess, "you obviously bear a charmed life. No doubt you will be the only one of us to survive the war". There was much to be done in the short month before the battle. For in addition to all the normal routine work connected with taking up a new position in the line, the laying out of the telephone system, the selection of observation posts, the registration of targets, the building of dugouts and shelters, the dumping and counting of ammunition, the new battery was still only half trained.

Easter Monday, April 9th 1917, dawned cold and wintry. Heavy black clouds in the eastern sky portended snow and bad weather. They hung like a menace of evil over the tortured land on which the shells were falling with a slow and languid monotony as if even they were weary of this endless business of destruction. In the packed trenches long lines of haggard faced men, bayonets fixed and gas masks at the alert, waited impatiently for zero hour. In the gun positions shells were being fused and final preparations made to launch that storm of metal which was to move before our infantry from trench to trench, from stronghold to stronghold.

I looked at my watch. Edward should be at the O.P. by now. Why hadn't he rung me up? An instant later the air was rent by a swelling thunder of sound, stunning, ear-splitting, deafening. The battle of Arras had begun.

We were having breakfast when the signaller at the O.P. telephoned that Edward was dead, killed by a chance shell a moment before the barrage fell. Soon after it was reported that we had taken all our objectives. At midday we ceased fire. The enemy was out of range. It began to snow. Outside the quarry, on the track leading up towards the front of the cavalry were moving up, little men on hairy unclipped horses, muddied to the hocks; coming towards them under the falling snow were the stretcher bearers carrying Edward's body, trudging unsteadily down the rough track."

It was my father's job to write to Helen about Edward's death and his letter led to a long family friendship which he valued very much. Later I was privileged to be part of this and as I approach my own 80th birthday I remember Helen as one of the warmest, most genuine and delightful people I have ever met.

Eighty years ago Edward was a poet of less than three years; in the army he kept his poems to himself and was most anxious not to appear different or superior both in his early days in the ranks and in his last months as an officer. The MS of two of his poems was written on a page torn from an army notebook with gunnery calculations scrawled at the top, the lines written straight on as if they were prose, so that his companions should not know they were poems. One of these was 'Lights Out', a long time favourite of mine, so that it was a particular pleasure for me to read it in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, on November 11th 1985 at the dedication of the Memorial to World War I Poets.

What a change in his reputation and standing as a poet between those years! From the edition of 1920 published by Selwyn & Blount, with its sensitive and sympathetic introduction by Walter de la Mare; twelve years later recognition from F.R. Leavis in *New Bearings in English Poetry*; both early signposts to a public not yet ready to open its arms. But his greatest, steadiest, most tireless supporter was Helen who must have realised before she died how wonderfully her efforts had borne fruit.

Edward's apprenticeship to prose was wearying but not in vain; when he came to write poems he had learnt that words need wooing, not ravaging, in fact he addresses them in the poem of that

name as if it is not he who is using them, but they him, and it is this poem that Walter de la Mare quotes in his 1920 introduction. When I was lecturing in Modern Poetry at Goldsmith's College Summer School in 1970, 'Words' was one of the poems which interested students the most. I was offered the job by the head of University College London because he had heard me give a reading.

But it is the personal memories that I value most. Helen, and later Bronwen, came to visit us at Pigeon Hoo, Tenterden, and I bicycled to stay with Helen at Starwell Farm, Chippenham, where she cooked me scrambled eggs mixed with tomatoes and gave me a copy of Middleton Murry's book 'Keats & Shakespeare'. I have too a copy of Dover Wilson's 'The Essential Shakespeare' inscribed "To Stephen Lushington, a fellow-enthusiast, from Helen Thomas, Sept 1932". I was fifteen and flattered by the description! Years later I paid at least one longer visit to Helen and Myfanwy at Bridge Cottage, and later still brought my young daughter and her friend for a day out. Helen loved young people, and they immediately took to her warm and natural welcome.

When Eric Anderson, then Head master of Eton, was appointed Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford, Edward's old college, I sent him one of the cards of ET's poems with a woodcut by Yvonne Skargon to congratulate and wish him well. In his reply of 27 April 94 he wrote "Your card brought me good news since I did not know, I am afraid, that Edward Thomas (one of my favourite poets and my wife's) was a Lincoln man."

I should like to end these rambling thoughts by quoting a letter Edward wrote to H.W. Nevinson ninety years ago. Helen gave me the original which I treasure.

The Weald, Sevenoaks 6.12.06

Dear Nevinson,

May I dedicate to you a book called The Heart of England which I have written this year? It contains my best work plus a good deal of my worst as it is done in haste. But I know you will forgive that, and it would give me great pleasure and satisfaction to thank you, in this ethereal way, for your exquisite and lasting kindness. I still hope you will come down.

Yours

Edward Thomas

THE PERSISTENT MEMORIALIST

On the birthday walk this year, the Edward Thomas Fellowship celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the erection of the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton. It had been on June 1st 1935 that the first meeting to discuss the proposal for the memorial had been held; a notice inviting subscriptions was placed in the Times on 2nd March 1936; the memorial, on land given by Lord Horder of Ashford, was unveiled by him on 2nd October 1937. At the ceremony he explained his gift as follows. "*This hillside is not mine. It belongs to all men and women who love England and the English countryside. I am only its guardian and their steward. In future I shall guard it more jealously, because from today it wears an added loveliness – the memory of Edward Thomas.*" [1]

The accompanying publicity almost certainly provided the catalyst for another such memorial, seventy miles away, dedicated to Thomas's naturalist hero Richard Jefferies, but its realisation

was not so smooth. Its instigator was Joseph Barnard Jones (1873-1952), Swindon teacher and scholar. Lady Phyllis Treitel of the Richard Jefferies Society notes that, “in the early months of 1938 he began writing round to influential people to get their support for a memorial to Jefferies on Liddington Hill. I assume it was to mention Williams too. The question is, why now? I have no evidence for this, but I suspect that he was prompted to do it by the erection of a sarsen stone memorial to Edward Thomas at about this time.” [2] Her assumption is almost certainly correct. The “Williams” referred to is Alfred Williams, another Swindon author and friend of JBJ, best remembered for his memoir, *Life in a Railway Factory*.

Coincidentally, because of his Swindon connection, one of the ‘influential people’ approached was Thomas Jeeves Horder (1871-1955). As a boy, he had lived and attended school in the town, where his father ran a successful linen and drapery business. By 1938 he was already an eminent doctor and went on to be physician to four British monarchs, three prime ministers and many other famous people.[3] He replied to JBJ on Mar. 26, 1938.

“Please forgive me for the delay in this reply to your letter of the 5th. You caught me in an unusually busy time. I am quite enthusiastic about your project. I wonder if you would care to come and see what we have done here to memorialise Edward Thomas, one of Jefferies’ great admirers? Any week-end would find me free. By all means use my name in any way you think helpful. Two questions you will, I am sure, not mind: 1. Is there any chance of securing Liddington Hill for the nation? (2) Are you sure that two men should be celebrated together?”[4]

Liddington Hill was the obvious location. It is a prominent landmark known to all Swindonians and it was special to both of the commemorated authors. Edward Thomas wrote that “Liddington Hill and its ‘castle’, a camp of a single but very deep fosse, was a chief haven to Jefferies,” [5] while Alfred Williams knew it well and wrote a poem in its praise [6].

Unfortunately there was a problem. In striking contrast to the generous example set by Lord Horder, the landowner at Liddington, W J Hughes, after giving grudging assent for the memorial, later withdrew it, offering money in compensation. JBJ reacted angrily. Believing that this would be his last dealing with the gentleman, he tore into Hughes in no uncertain manner. “We were not asking you for a subscription. Money indeed! Did you think money could atone for the irreparable wrong done by you to the sacred cause of Literature which Jefferies and Williams worthily represent? Could money wipe out your callous disparagement of the hallowed memories of these heroes whom your fellow Wiltshiremen delight to honour? It is to your undying shame that you believed it could.” [4]

Having burned his bridges with Hughes, JBJ reluctantly switched his attention to Barbury Hill, four miles away, as a substitute. He was given a location there by the owners of the Burderop estate, not actually on the castle itself, but in a less prominent position by the side of the approach road. Presumably this was the closest that the estate land came to the castle mound. Barbury was a reasonable alternative, well known to Jefferies and familiar to his readers. His four early country books were based on the Burderop estate and its surroundings, but still to JBJ it was “a work of salvage” and he believed that everyone would ask, “but why was this not placed on Liddington?” Nevertheless Barbury it had to be and things were set in motion to achieve this.

But at the same time a quite separate event altered the picture. In 1935 Ordnance Survey, in a project led by Major Martin Hotine, decided to implement a complete new control network for the whole country and at the same time unify the mapping from local county projections onto a single reference system. It was to be based on the now familiar ‘trig points’ that were to be placed at more than 6,500 vantage points around the country. When a trig point arrived on Liddington Hill, JBJ saw an opportunity for some memorial to be attached to the concrete pyramid that was already in place. Major Hotine, was happy, but permission was still needed from Hughes. After the previous exchange, JBJ realised that he could not be seen to be involved and so a letter was

written, carefully crafted by him, but purporting to come from Raymond Thompson, Director and General Manager of the Swindon Press and supported by a formal request from Major Hotine. Mr Hughes grudgingly acceded and although the “Czecho-Slovakian crisis” caused further delays, the plaque was duly affixed to the trig point on 18 November 1938. In the event, JBJ’s triumph was short lived, because, “in the autumn of 1944, vandals – in the shape of American troops – used the plaque as a target for firing practice, then wrenched it off the pillar and threw it away.” [7] It has since been recovered and now resides in the Jefferies Museum in Swindon.



The original Liddington Hill Plaque showing the bullet holes

BJJ then returned to his main objective; the erection of a free-standing memorial to Jefferies and Williams to match the one for Edward Thomas at Steep. For the latter, Alexander Keiller, heir to the marmalade business and restorer of the Avebury stone circle, recommended that his “gang of men would raise it and bring it down to the road – a feat that can only be undertaken by trained men.” [8] The offer was accepted and transportation from there to Steep was accomplished with the aid of a portable gantry and a five ton chain pulley block. The contractors for the Jefferies/Williams stone lacked such professional help and perhaps because the stone was only five miles from its final resting place, they underestimated the scale of the challenge. As a result they took, “*an age to cart the stone and fix it*”. [2] The task was eventually completed in October 1939 and the two plates fixed on 14 December. The Liddington site had contained no authors’ quotations, for fear of upsetting Hughes, but at Barbury there was no such constraint. For Alfred Williams, Lee Osborn, vice-chairman of the memorial committee, chose, “*Still to find and still to follow, joy in every hill and hollow. Company in solitude*”

While for Richard Jefferies, Henry Williamson chose, “*It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine*”

By now Britain was at war and so there could be no ceremonial unveiling of the two memorials, merely an announcement in The Times of 28 December 1939.



The Barbury Stone [9]

More than fifty years after his death, there was a final triumph for JBJ, in the form of a memorial just where he always wanted it, on Liddington Hill. Safe from the harassment of Farmer Hughes and the vandalism of American troops, on June 24th 2006 a memorial plaque and direction marker was unveiled by Lord Joffe. It was “*a millennium project planned by Liddington Parish Council who also wanted to replace the memorial plaque to Richard Jefferies and Alfred Williams that had been placed on the trig point by JB Jones*” [10]. The inscription on the plinth is as follows.

AD 2000
LIDDINGTON HILL
BELOVED OF
RICHARD JEFFERIES AND ALFRED WILLIAMS

HASTE NOT BE AT REST THIS NOW IS ETERNITY
... I FELT IMMORTALITY AS I FELT THE BEAUTY OF
THE SUMMER MORNING
RICHARD JEFFERIES

Terry Lloyd

- [1] Lord Horder unveiling the memorial stone, 2 Oct 1937, ETF Newsletter, No 17, 1987
- [2] Lady Phyllis Treitel, *J B Jones: Champion of Jefferies*, Richard Jefferies Society, Art. 79
- [3] W. H. McMenemey, *Thomas Jeeves Horder*, American Journal of Clinical Pathology, Vol. 26, Issue 3, 1 March 1958
- [4] J. B. Jones, *The Jefferies-Williams Memorial scheme*, Richard Jefferies Society, Art. 79
- [5] Edward Thomas, *Richard Jefferies*, p12
- [6] Alfred Williams, *Songs in Wiltshire*, Erskine Macdonald, 1909
- [7] *Autumn Newsletter and annual report 2006-2007*, The Richard Jefferies Society, p18
- [8] Letter from T. Raddon Head, to Rowland Hughes, 15 Feb 1937

[9] J. B. Jones, *The Liddington-Barbury Memorial*, The Swindon Press, 1941

[10] Blog, *Liddington Plaque and Viewing Table*, Richard Jefferies Society 26 June 2006

BOOK REVIEWS

Edward Thomas: A Life in Pictures by Richard Emeny. Enitharmon Press, 2017, £30

Edward Thomas had a photographer's imagination. Consider 'Tall Nettles', a better Imagist poem than anything T. E. Hulme wrote, a picture of objects at the end of their human usefulness, indiscriminately dumped in the farmyard nettle patch: rusty harrow, worn-out plough, old stone roller, the elm butt which tops them. Yet this apparently still life, like a photographic image, resonates beyond itself. These defunct objects silently impute their pasts, the generations of men who used them and disposed of them. As Thomas said of a poem of Hardy's, it is 'a moment's monument' [but] the moment is full of years, and it is an implied narrative.' The same could be said of such poems as 'Fifty Faggots', the *nature morte* of a log pile which conceals many creaturely lives as well as the human labour that created it, so that the ostensibly inanimate scene, isolated in the moment, reverberates back into the past and forward to that future where 'The war will have ended, many other things / Have ended, maybe'. Like a photograph, the poem endows this momentary scene with a numinous symbolic radiance.

It is no coincidence that *Symbolisme*, a poetic movement to which Thomas was drawn, as his study of Maeterlinck indicates, emerged almost simultaneously with the portable box camera (Jean Moréas' *Symbolist Manifesto*, 1886; the Kodak box camera, 1888-9). The photograph, in its timeless iconicity, implies many narratives, some real and some imagined. Nowhere is this correspondence clearer than in 'It Rains':

It rains, and nothing stirs within the fence
Anywhere through the orchard's untrodden, dense
Forest of parsley. The great diamonds
Of rain on the grassblades there is none to break
Or the fallen petals further down to shake.

These opening lines are a perfect verbal photograph. Time is suspended. Any movement is implicit only within that overarching negative, so that even the opening two words seem to describe a permanent state of things. (How different would be the effect of the continuous present, 'It's raining'.) As in a photograph, the observing subject is ostensibly absent from the scene, a mere self-effacing point of view. The orchard is 'untrodden'. There is 'none' to perform those actions, which would make it a human scene: treading, breaking, shaking. The poem epitomises that dispassionate recording which, twenty or so years later, Christopher Isherwood proclaimed with his famous manifesto, 'I am a camera'; or, it's not too farfetched to suggest, the subjectless objectivity which thirty years later still the *nouveau romanciers* sought to capture in their fiction. Here is a world without people, untouched in its quiddity, which Thomas's prose somewhere described as Eden before the appearance of man. If the scene is motionless, it is also apparently without emotion: there is no 'I' here to see or feel.

That 'I' appears, with its emotions, right at the start of the next stanza, which recalls in a distancing third person the two lovers who once walked and kissed there, 'Drenched, yet forgetting the kisses of the rain.' Nowhere does the poet acknowledge that he is one of them. He is as shut out from that drenched prelapsarian harmony of man, woman and nature as he might be in looking at a photograph. This is a figuration of the Fall, of our inevitable exile in the world of

matter, expelled from grace, as is underlined by the enjambment in the poem's penultimate line, speaking of the parsley flower which

*Figures, suspended still and ghostly white,
The past hovering as it revisits the light.*

A consciousness which is itself a ghostly revenant hovers like the poet in 'Old Man', 'listening, lying in wait / For what I should, yet never can, remember', as he watches his daughter silently sniffing the herb, 'perhaps / Thinking, perhaps of nothing'.

Richard Emeny's splendid collection of photographs, many of them previously unknown from the Thomas family archive, includes a snapshot of the young Myfanwy at Yew Tree Cottage, standing beside this very bush. (Is it still there, I wonder?) The snap has none of the aura of the numinous with which the poem invests the scene; it would take an especially artful Cecil Beaton to achieve that. But Emeny's conscientious retelling of Thomas's life, alongside pictures of the people he knew and the various houses he lived in, provides an illuminating social profile of the poet and his times. Despite what he calls the 'folksy picture' of the Ledbury crowd, Emeny is keen to establish that Thomas was not really a countryman at all, but a 'typical Liberal of the Intelligentsia' (Thomas Seccombe's description in the *TLS*), 'mildly bohemian', a highbrow and a vegetarian, whose wife Helen taught at the progressive Bedales school and made Suffrage speeches, more a 'commuter of sorts', always living close enough to a railway station to get up to London for the theatre and his passion, the ballet, and to see publishers and fellow *littérateurs*. He often stayed on his own with a variety of friends such as Vivian Locke Ellis or Clifford Bax, and at one point shared rooms with the author of children's stories and friend of Leon Trotsky, Arthur Ransome, with whom he even contemplated writing a book. Among what Emeny calls his many 'raffish and rackets' acquaintances was the disreputable 'patrician' (Thomas's epithet) Norman Douglas, with whom at one time he planned opening a village shop. It's an interesting thought.

The sheer number of places the Thomas family stayed (as Emeny reports, eight flits between 1900 and 1912) indicates just how vagrant a life they led. This is not the 'Omes and 'Aunts' type of book of which Thomas joked to friends. Emeny is an astute interpreter of the physical features of these dwellings and their environs, with photos which in their architectural and social variation speak tellingly of the family's changing fortunes. Most of the shots have the kind of flat unloved look of estate agents' portfolios, though one or two take life from the writings, such as the now demolished Rose Acre Cottage in Kent, squatting amidst a desolation, or the Red House at Wick Green of which poems such as 'The New House' and 'Wind and Mist' speak so chillingly. (There is a two-page spread of its magnificent view across the Downs.) Or again there is what Emeny calls 'the age-old, fallen-out-of-time atmosphere' of Dillybrook Farm in Wiltshire where he stayed while writing *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914). Thomas, Emeny observes, was interested in landscape archaeology, and travelling on foot brought him direct knowledge of the 'folds and traps' of the land as a real material presence, not lines on an Ordnance Survey map or a picturesquely abstracted 'view'. Nevertheless, he suggests, the persona of the 'solitary wanderer' assumed in much of the travelogues is a largely fictive device, for Thomas was often accompanied by his brother Julian or son Merfyn, or friends such as Harry Hooton, who walked the Icknield Way with him and is that book's dedicatee; or Jesse Berridge, his companion for much of *In Pursuit of Spring* (sometimes merged in the book with the mysterious 'Other Man' who is the narrator's *alter ego*). As Thomas coyly admits in that book, they sometimes travelled by bicycle. This book Emeny rightly describes as 'more human and humane' than some of the others, in part because its pages contain actual people and give the real names of the places visited, something Emeny says in passing 'possibly caused by his increasing interest in photography'.

Thomas wrote to Edward Garnett at the end of 1911 of a growing interest in photography, and intended to use his own pictures to illustrate *In Pursuit of Spring*; but his publisher had other

ideas. It is an interest I hadn't known about, and the information occasioned some thoughts. Thomas's earliest notebooks testify to his precise and meticulous eye in recording the minutiae of a particular natural scene. It is such fidelity to things that leads Emeny to speak of Thomas as a 'calm dispassionate observer without opinions.' They rarely, however, catch the atmosphere of a scene, that elusive essence which makes the whole configure and cohere. They remain exhaustive catalogues of observations, failing, in a phrase from one of his poems, to 'bite the day to the core'. Many of his finest prose passages express frustration at the way what he sometimes calls the *genius loci* of a particular lonely scene seems to taunt him with its presence/ absence, like the perpetually disappearing Lob, or the 'other man' pursued in 'The Other'. When he tries to talk up the scene with a semi-mystical rhetoric, the writing lacks conviction. These are just literary tropes, leftovers from a fake pastoral tradition, whereas the poetry transforms such scenes, squeezing a numinous frisson out of the abandonment, so that the bewilderment of not remembering, failing to grasp significance, becomes itself the new experience where loss and recollection coincide.

Robert Frost is usually credited with being the person who provoked Thomas to try his hand at poetry, suggesting that his finest writing contained many passages that could easily become poems, if the poetic angel could only be released from the marmoreal prose. There's no doubting the enormous influence Frost had on Thomas, though when I visited her little more than a year before she died, Helen Thomas remained stubbornly sceptical. At least, she had little regard for the American poet. Emeny gives an astute account of Thomas's engagement with Frost, whom he first met in 1913, having published three different reviews of him in three different places. But I was led to wonder whether he was the only influence by the two pages of photographs included here which Thomas intended for *In Pursuit of Spring*. They are competent but not particularly striking; but one thing nearly all have in common is that, though they often show buildings, roads and other human constructions, they are bereft of human presence. The one exception is a picturesque photo of what could be Childe Roland's Dark Tower, with, in the middle ground, a man holding, enigmatically, two bicycles – the second presumably that of the absent presence holding the camera. The man is probably Jesse Berridge, but he is reduced to anonymity by the surrounding scene, isolated and dwarfed and uncomfortably out of place holding the bikes which will shortly take the two elsewhere in their pursuit of spring. In the other photographs the scene is devoid of human presence. Skillfully composed, with the right balance of dark and light, earth and sky, they suggest a world after men. 'Men carve and colour the face of the land,' Thomas observed elsewhere. Yet in these photographs it is as if they did not exist, never existed. Roads and paths are empty. Houses stand bleakly in the distance. Walls, whether standing or in decay, give no hint of the men who built them. As in the opening stanza of 'It rains,' it is objects in their inhuman facticity with which we are presented. It may be, I'd suggest, that Thomas learned from his photographic experiments how to compose a scene so as to give it that disturbing edge of the uncanny.

Thomas wrote to Walter de la Mare in November 1911 that he felt there was 'something wrong at the very centre which nothing deliberate can put right, but something or somebody "Spiritual" may put it right at any moment in some inexplicable way.' This is not to say that Thomas was looking for God. 'I never quite knew what was meant by God' is almost the last entry in his war diary. He was irredeemably secular and of his age in seeing God as a human construct: 'God still sits aloft in the array / That we have wrought him, stone-deaf and stone-blind', concludes one of his poems. That 'somebody' gives a clue to his desire for something transcendent yet immanent in the material world, and it takes us back to the Edenic myth that lies shyly at the core of 'It rains.' For the absconded Eve here and in poems such as 'Like the touch of rain she was' is probably the appositely named Hope Webb, the teenage daughter of friends with whom Thomas was infatuated until her parents insisted they separate. The recurrence of the word 'hope' in his poems may be a surreptitious allusion to her. In 'When first I came here I had hope, / Hope for I knew not what' he appears to be writing about climbing a new hill, but the whole scene is suffused with libidinal excess; 'love' is the word repeatedly intertwined with hope, and if the

future and the maps may 'Hide something I was waiting for' it's not difficult to see that his heart beats faster not just from breathlessness but in erotic expectation. In that yearning for 'something or somebody "Spiritual" Thomas writes in the spirit of the troubadours, who conflated divine and earthly desire.

Emeny writes sensitively of the Hope Webb episode, as he does of Thomas's close friendship, in which Helen shared, with Eleanor Farjeon, and he is not averse from reprimanding the 'incurably monogamous' poet for his treatment of his long-suffering and devoted wife. This 'Life in Pictures' offers also many fine verbal portraits of the people in Thomas's life, whether his and Helen's parents, his college friends, fellow writers and acquaintances. A chapter on 'Friends and Friendship' contains cameos of seven men who figured large in his life, from Hooton and Berridge to Gordon Bottomley, Edward Garnett, E.S.P. Haynes, Douglas and de la Mare, only the latter two of whom retain any literary resonance. There is a moving snapshot of the cold roofs of the barrack huts at Codford Camp near Westbury where Thomas spent his last nights before embarkation, familiar from poems such as 'Rain' and 'Home,' and a wonderful photograph of Thomas's real-life 'Lob', 'Dad' Uzzell and his wife, in Salvation Army uniforms, proudly displaying their first pension books, introduced by the reforming Liberal government which swept into office in 1905 to the cheers of Thomas and his family.

There is much in this handsomely produced and lovingly elucidated pictorial biography to gratify Thomas's readers; also to provide vital insights into this formative period of the modern sensibility. Its wide-ranging narrative gives a clearer and more intimate sense of the man than any of the other biographies, something aided by its equable but at times wryly affectionate tone. The author's Jack Horner methodology pulls out some juicy plums, like the story of how the anxious poet persuaded his friend Sir Ian MacAlister to give him drill lessons in Hyde Park while he was still a civilian; or the dry account of Norman Douglas 'privately educated in Karlsruhe, where he discovered obliging girls,' and, subsequently, as a Foreign Office attachment shipped off to the St Petersburg embassy, 'whence he was rapidly extricated following a scandal in which he made pregnant a lady of the Imperial Court.' Emeny's is not a po-faced professional biography but a relaxed and sometimes amusing and amused narrative, which is fun to read. Of Thomas's friend from Oxford days, the raffish *bon viveur*, solicitor and civil rights advocate E.S.P. Haynes, whose womanising antics Thomas reported to Helen from college, Emeny repeats his daughter Renée's story of how 'his dog Wuff was trained to pull at the suspenders of female visitors, letting the elastic snap back painfully on to their thighs' – not something he would get away with these days. More seriously, Emeny is the first person to my knowledge who pins Thomas's sad little four-line epitaph 'In Memoriam (Easter 1915)' specifically to the battle of Ypres, where the Germans first deployed poison gas.

Stan Smith

Edward Thomas: A Life in Pictures by Richard Emeny, Enitharmon Press, 2017, £30

In his introduction to this tactile and luxurious volume, Richard Emeny states: 'Pictures...can imply no more than a coffee-table book, but they can also mean much more.' He proceeds to establish the point in a book that is indeed of greater practical value than a showpiece; it demands to be used, and the illustrations, many of which have not been seen before, actually *do* have textual significance as an integral part of the account itself, bringing us in many ways closer to everyday as it was lived in Thomas's time and place. This is more than Edward Thomas and his world: it is Thomas *in* his world, into which we find ourselves drawn almost hypnotically by the combination of the visual images and Emeny's evocative and persuasive writing. One of his most engaging narrative devices is to set the chronology of Thomas's life alongside parallel events on the bigger world stage. When we come to the key chapter that begins with Christmas 1912, for example, it is obvious to us with hindsight what was about to happen, and what it would mean to

Edward. Yet it is incidentally instructive and surprising to learn that 1913, while *In Pursuit of Spring* was in the making, the world saw the first edition of *Vanity Fair*, Prada was founded and the first Aldi store was opened in Essen. The effect is for the story to move, as it were, out of sepia and into currency; text and photographs together thus give us ideas and images with which we can identify, and to which we may relate, just as the best of Edward Thomas's poetry and prose establish a living and breathing reality rather than a vague Georgian nostalgia emerging from a golden pre-war mist. A lifetime of devotion to studying Thomas has bred a book in which the author's affection for his subject is evident on every page. Richard Emeny *likes* Edward Thomas, the man; the same cannot be said unequivocally about all of his biographers and critical commentators. So yes, of course this book is partial: it is a celebration. Many of the photographs come from the collection of Edward's 'Daughter the Younger', Myfanwy, with whom Emeny's family had a close relationship for many years, and it is this familiarity with the descendents of Thomas that lend this book an authenticity and authority; we learn a lot of ET's depressive illnesses, but we are reminded too that we should beware of generalised, sweeping judgements of such a complex character; the dark places were certainly there, but as Helen wrote to Harry Hooton, 'they never clouded for ever the fun loving, open air loving, lovely friend of many and all sorts of man that Edward was.' (We learn so much from that last phrase, 'all sorts of man...')

There are some startling cultural leaps at times. To draw comparisons between Thomas's sense of isolation and that of Stefan Zweig in the Vienna depicted in Zweig's famous memoir, *The World of Yesterday* may at first seem a bit of a stretch. Yet such is Emeny's power of connection that he can convince us that the two men had much in common, not least their 'strong sense of otherness, of exile, of not fitting in.' The phrase, 'only connect' could well be coined and applied throughout the book. Elsewhere Emeny explores the controversy of the 'fact versus fiction' debate surrounding Helen's two volumes, *As It Was* and *World Without End*, describing the text as 'one step away from direct fact', and for that reason regretting the replacement of Helen's fictional names – 'David and Jenny' – with 'Edward and Helen' in the later edition. Similarly the manner of Thomas's death – a vacuum caused by blast, or a shell through the chest? – is explored in some detail, and the evidence for both sides of the argument weighed almost forensically, with the family's changing opinions interestingly expressed. There is a fascinating and haunting photograph taken from behind the British Front Line, close to where Thomas's look-out post stood, entitled 'What Edward would have seen.' It is one of the many moments in the book in which he somehow feels very close.

Some photographs provide us with poignant footnotes to details in well-known aspects of the story; we have read for example of how Edward, having walked over from Codford Camp near Westbury to spent his last night in England at the Wiltshire home of Ivy and Tabitha Ransome, (Arthur was away at the time) with whom Myfanwy was staying, but here is a snap of Ivy with the two girls taken at the time. Later, we find the three Thomas children during the Otford time, a smiling Myfanwy between Merfyn and Bronwen who are both smoking cigarettes, and looking back at the camera with a look of what could be interpreted as studied youthful 'cool.' In many ways it is the chapters that explore Thomas's friendships, and the later family years – life after ET – that carry a particular interest; insights into personalities such as Hooton, Norman Douglas, Haynes, Garnett and Jesse Berridge among others are enlightening, and by exploring their relationships with Thomas, we gain telling clues as to the personality of Edward himself, elusive and complicated as he clearly was.

Part of that puzzle – the sense that for all the volumes of biography and analysis, Thomas remains something of an enigma as a man – may be revealed, almost as a metaphor, in the photographs themselves. Up until now, viewing the one or two photographs of Edward Thomas available, we have had access to a face that seemed to change from picture to picture. His was clearly a mobile countenance, and the flicker of a mood one way or the other was sufficient to alter his expression radically. Spread throughout this book, we probably have more pictures of Thomas gathered in one place than ever before, and we therefore have time and opportunity to dwell on these, and perhaps come closer to an imaginative composite, offering us something more of the man, at least as far as a camera's memory is capable. It is telling that in the recently discovered photographs of previously unseen late snatched moments between Edward and Helen

caught on camera together during the war, there is a relaxation and informality that I think comes closest to revealing him. That said, Emeny tells us that as far as the family was concerned, the most reliable likeness is not a photograph at all, but an etching by John Wheatley, who met Edward during training at Hare Hall, Gildea Park in Essex in late 1915; this too is included here. Edward Thomas was a keen amateur photographer, happier behind the viewfinder than in front of the lens, and there also is a selection of his own pictures here, taken during the journey that he took *In Pursuit of Spring* during 1913.

What this book will *not* provide is a critique of the poems; that is not its intention. Nonetheless, it is essential in its capacity to give us the man who wrote the work in the context of the times within which he lived. Physically, it is as stated a book that is, at first handling, almost intimidatingly handsome and richly bound, the sort of production for which Enitharmon Press is so well known. But no, this is not a work to simply grace an elegant shelf; it is a volume to be read, referred to and cited. It contains archives, letters and other documents that have never before been published. It is a book of insights, and it has the capacity to inform and enhance the knowledge of the general reader, while also acting as a source book that will provide a launching place for future study and research. It is important that Richard Emeny has given us this book. On any level it is something to be treasured.

Sean Street

A PECULIARLY ENGLISH GENIUS OR A WILTSHIRE TAOIST.

A biography of Richard Jefferies, Volume 1 The Early Years 1848 - 1867, by Andrew Rossabi, Petton Books, Foulsham, Norfolk.

This is a spacious and expansive book and I loved it. Not everyone will, as it is 780 pages long (including page notes) and covers only the first twenty years of Jefferies' life. Two further volumes will follow. On the face of it that seems very long, could deter readers, and indeed the book is full of detail. What Andrew Rossabi has done is to give an extraordinarily complete picture of the background to Jefferies' life in Coate and when staying with relatives in South London as well as his extended family for several generations, other local families from gentry to farmers and labourers, the landscape, and its usage that so affected him and the fast-growing town of Swindon. By the end of the volume I felt I had become completely familiar with all these elements of his background over a century and a half ago and indeed immersed in them.

Some readers might believe that such a detailed and widespread account is unnecessary. While that might be true for many subjects of biographers, in Jefferies' case the detailed background is essential and crucial to the man's writing and understanding it, whether it be the spiritual, or mystical, writing as appears in *The Story of my Heart*, or the more down to earth journalistic and country books such as *The Gamekeeper at Home*. The background also emphasises the small area of Jefferies' early experience. Despite his expeditions to the Marlborough Downs, or, when working for the North Wilts Herald, as far as Cirencester and Malmesbury, the country upon which most of his writing depended was no more than about three miles square. It is a tribute to the man's powers of observation and imagination that such a small part of England could supply and inspire so much material.

Andrew Rossabi makes it clear at the beginning that he is not going to write a straightforward factual biography, the principal facts of Jefferies' life being well enough known already, but to use those facts, and just about everything in his life, to show how they contributed not only to his books, but to the development of his mystical 'soul life'.

Jefferies' books and many of the essays are strongly autobiographical and reflect an extraordinarily retentive and detailed memory overlaid with emotion. Despite the contrasting content of their work, comparisons with Proust are not out of the way, and can be seen especially

in for example the childhood of Amaryllis in Amaryllis at the Fair, childhood being central to both writers.

Fellowship members will find many references to, and quotations from Edward Thomas and his biography of Jefferies, which is given considerable approval and space. In fact this is the first comprehensive biography since Thomas's. Like Thomas, Rossabi sees the key to Jefferies revealed in *The Story of My Heart*. That book is what the man was. By working through Jefferies' books, essays and journalism, Rossabi shows how the philosophy Jefferies developed is innate in them, as Jefferies gradually worked towards the fulness of his vision. His effect on Thomas is well known to members, and Rossabi joins the two of them with Hardy and D. H. Lawrence as being a quartet of writers who stood against the industrial civilisation and development, in which we live today. The M4 passes by the foot of Liddington Hill, Jefferies' inspiration.

One of the principal difficulties in marshalling together so much information is the danger of repetition, and Rossabi has been unable to avoid it, but it does not seem to matter much, and serves to emphasise various points. It is not intrusive. This is a book for all lovers of Jefferies' work and of his influence on Edward Thomas. Finally, a trivial point: Rossabi discusses at some length the possible reason why Edward Haylock, the principal model for *The Gamekeeper at Home*, was nicknamed 'Benny.' I would add a further possibility for his consideration: Keeper Haylock was a difficult and not very popular man, keepers seldom were. There is a phrase in army slang, which was certainly used until the end of The First World War, 'going for a benny.' It means going to the lavatory. What better nickname for an unpopular keeper.

Richard Emeny

Beyond Spring, Wanderings through Nature by Matthew Oates. (2017) Fair Acre Press ISBN 9781911048237

At the tail end of a long and gloomy winter "Beyond Spring" arrived to bring the promise of sunnier, warmer days. Aptly, Matthew Oates, the author begins his book with the instruction to read the book during the darker months of the year to help survive the morbidity of winter. His book is also particularly relevant as we are realising the importance of nature to our well-being both mentally and physically. As a nature conservationist with 25 years' experience of working for the National Trust his breadth of knowledge and love of nature shines through the book.

Oates draws his inspiration from the Victorian and Edwardian nature writers and poets and includes Richard Jefferies, W H Hudson and particularly, Edward Thomas. He also draws on the summer of 1976 and his wanderings around the country. A sense of place and memoirs being retained in those places is one of the themes running through the book. Written over a 7 month period from spring to the end of summer Oates explains that what matters is Edward Thomas' "way of looking at dwelling in the world". The book is a homage to English nature and our relationship with it, both good and bad, a sense of identity and the destruction of nature.

The book comprises of a series of pieces, some very short, written over a period of time and in different places across the country – a wood, on a train, the A272, heath or wood land, even a service station - Oates allows us to step gently out of a world that is often hurried and stressed to pause, take time to stop, take a breath and indulge in nature, and to stop hurtling past the world. His attention to detail allows you to be there in the moment he is describing.

Beginning at Candlemas (2nd February) in the south country on the Wiltshire Downs you are drawn into Spring with vivid detailed descriptions of the landscape and wildlife. The pieces end on 21st September, St Matthews Day on the Isles of Scilly. The lyrical prose demonstrates Oates'

deep knowledge and love of nature. Interspersed with poems and quotes that are woven into each chapter and chosen carefully to enhance the topic whether it is about the misunderstood rook, the scent of a garlic snail or the emergence of a Brimstone Butterfly. He explores the landscapes that inspire poets in the past and the present, from Coleridge and Keats to Alison Brackenbury and Keith Chandler. The influence of Edward Thomas threads its way throughout the book through his poems and prose writings and in particular 'The South Country'.

Themes in the book cover the loss of nature; a love of place; a sense of identity with landscape; place and nature, and people's relationship with them. Our connection to nature, he maintains, is under threat from economic pressures, and that we are losing our connectedness. Oates asks whether we have become shallow rooted but that the time to reconnect and develop our relationship with landscape and nature is at springtime. His intimate knowledge of flora and fauna glow throughout the book. He creates a haunting imagery of nature capturing the intimacy of the natural world and the need for good stewardship for it to survive. His prose intricately connects natural history, poetry and literary landscapes. His words sparkle and enable the reader to feel hope through the darker months, that the surprise and glories of spring are just around the corner but are also with you whilst you read.

This is a book to linger over, to immerse yourself in the words and imagery. As he says "Resist, resist, choose your own pace, and pause and look around". I have certainly taken more time this spring to appreciate it.

Jackie Tweedale

Forthcoming publications

Towns, J. *Edward Thomas and Wales* (November 2018) Parthian Books.

This book is an anthology of his prose writings set or inspired by Wales together with a detailed chronology of how the literature, topography and people of Wales impacted on his life. It includes an essay by Andrew Webb on Wales in the Poetry of Edward Thomas.

Cuthbertson, G. *Peace at Last: A Portrait of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918* (October 2018 – now available to pre-order) Yale University Press.

This book uses letters, diaries and newspapers to build an hour-by-hour account of "how the people of Britain experienced the moment that peace became a reality" at the end of World War One.

NOTICES

A SCREEN to protect the Edward Thomas window has been installed in All Saints Church, Steep by the Friends of Steep Church (Marie-Marthe Gervais)

PROPOSED MEMORIAL AT HARE HALL CAMP

Edward Thomas was a map instructor at Hare Hall from November 1915 to July 1916. Hare Hall was part of the Artists' Rifles officer training regime, and during the First World War approximately 15,000 trainees passed through. These included Wilfred Owen, Paul Nash, Noel Coward and R.C. Sheriff amongst many other soldiers who worked in the arts. While the camp disappeared many years ago, the entrance gates are still there, and local people hope to mount a permanent memorial to those 15,000 men on them. They need £7,000 for the memorial and are raising the money via Crowd Funding. If any members would like to support the initiative, details

can be found on: <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/artists-rifles-ww1-memorial>
(Richard Emeny)

The editor thanks the many members who have helped in the production of this newsletter. Please continue to send her items of news, articles, memories, (if electronically in Times New Roman and 11 font to maxtedjj@gmail.com) or by post to: Dr. Julia Maxted, 54 Southmoor Road, Oxford, OX2 6RD.



Birthday walkers, April 2018 at the Memorial Stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill, Steep, Hampshire. Photos via Mike Cope.

