

West Dean and East Dean

Distance: 5.9 miles/9.5 km, with a 482 ft / 147m climb to the hill, otherwise moderate walking

In Pursuit of Spring: Chapter 4 From Dunbridge over Salisbury Plain

Refreshments: The Old Brewers, East Dean SP5 1HU (Check website for opening days and times)

Map: Explorer 131

How to get there: Trains run to West Dean every hour from Salisbury (check timetable).

If driving, West Dean can be approached from the west, via Dean Lane off the A36 Salisbury Rd, or from East Dean on the Lockerley Rd or from the north on the Dean Rd from Tytherley.

Park on Rectory Hill, north of the level crossing.

West Dean, where I entered Wiltshire, a mile from East Dean, is a village with a Red Lion Inn [now closed], a railway station, a sawmill and timber-yard, and several groups of houses clustering close to both banks of the river, which is crossed by a road bridge and by a white footbridge below.

West Dean straddles Hampshire and Wiltshire. Woodlands lie to the north and the geology yields mostly chalk with some flints and clay. Built on the River Dun, it is an ancient settlement with remains of three Romano-British villas. It was named Deaone in Saxon sources, Duene in Domesday. The modern name evolved over time. In 1796 a canal was begun and was operating by 1802; the railway came through in 1847. When Thomas visited the area, the village men worked on the Norman Court Estate as agricultural labourers or in the brick and timber yards. Others were employed in by the blacksmith, wheelwright, in dairying and building and on the railway.

Thomas, an admirer of Gilbert White, notes that the clergyman-writer was also *curate at West Deane, near Salisbury, accepting it, writes Mulso, 'because it was your sentiment that a clergyman should not be idle and unemployed.'* He often rode from Deane to Selborne – a fine ride to one with an eye for the downs. (*A Literary Pilgrim in England*)



Edward Thomas: Dean Hill

1. Walk back into West Dean



West Dean House



Mary Wortley Montagu



Andrews' and Dury's 1773 Map of West Deane showing West Dean farm

Pass the redbrick wall of **Dean House** on the left. It is a 17-18th century construction, frequently added to subsequently. Part of it may have been a brewhouse; it was certainly the rectory when Edward Thomas passed through. It was sold off in 1961 and a new rectory was built further up the hill. In 1473 the parish of West Dean was enlarged with its centre at St Mary's Church. This building declined (see notes for 11 of this walk) and the new flint and redbrick **St Mary's Church**, on the right, was built in 1866.

The influential Evelyn family bought the manor of West Dean in 1618 and built West Dean House and terraced gardens (demolished in 1823) on the site of the present church. It was a Parliamentary stronghold during the Civil War. The young Mary Peirrepoint (1689 – 1762) eloped from here in 1712 with Edward Wortley Montagu. He became ambassador to Constantinople and her letters relating to this tour of duty as well as on other matters are celebrated. She was an early advocate of smallpox inoculation. During the French Revolution the house became a refuge for French émigré nuns who felt compelled to move on, owing to the harassment from the navvies employed on the construction of the Salisbury-Southampton canal.

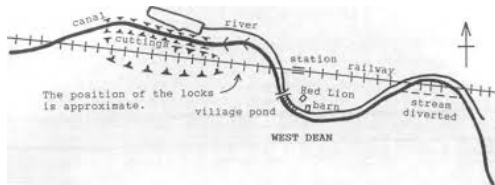
At the end of chapter 3 of *In Pursuit of Spring*, Thomas decided to take the train to Salisbury: *Luckily a train was just starting which would bear me away from Dunbridge to Salisbury. I boarded it, and by eight o'clock I was among the people who were buying and selling fish and oranges to the accompaniment of much chaffing, but no bad temper, in Fish Row.* He would have passed through the station at West Dean.

The line from Eastleigh to Salisbury had been opened up in 1847 when this station was built.

2. Go over the level crossing down to the bridge over the River Dun.



West Dean bridge and station, BM



The course of the canal at West Dean

3. Continue up the Dean Rd in the Salisbury direction. Immediately past Ordnance House on the left is a National Speed Limit sign. Here, go left up the bank through an unmarked break in the hedge and a gateway into a field. Follow the lefthand side of the field to the end of the hedge by the beech trees. Go left into the adjacent field and follow its righthand edge uphill.



Royal Naval Armaments Depot

This walk does not include West Dean Farm, though Thomas paused there as he rode to Salisbury.

I went south-west again on my original road, in order to be on the road nearest to Dean Hill. This took me over broad and almost hedgeless fields, and through a short, disconnected fragment of an avenue of mossy beeches, to West Dean Farm. Nothing lay between the houseless road and the hillside, which is thick here with yew, except the broad arable fields, with a square or two given up to mustard flowers and sheep, and West Dean farm itself. It is a house of a dirty white colour amidst numerous and roomy outbuildings, thatched or mellow-tiled, set in a circle of tall beeches. The road bends round the farm group and goes straight to the foot of the hill, and then along it.

The former Red Lion pub on the left has had various incarnations since the 1600s when it was a dairy and two farms. Its façade was added in the 1790s. It has been known as The Crown, The Lion and became the Red Lion in 1905. It was unusual in that the bar was divided by the Wiltshire-Hampshire county border. A dairy remained attached right up to WWII. It has been a private residence since 1995.

This river crossing was guarded by a pillbox during WWII; it was demolished in 1961. The bridge was, in fact, a double bridge until this one was built in the 1930s. The earlier river bridge was the village focal point. Adjoining it, a second bridge was built to go over the 27-foot-wide canal which ran parallel to the river. The canal was a link in a larger project connecting Andover with Salisbury and Southampton Water. The Salisbury-West Dean section, with 7 locks, was opened in 1802 and carried chalk, lime and manure. Shareholders became wary and funds became scarce; by 1810 the project was dead. The canal bed was reclaimed and related brick and



Railway to underground tunnels

4. Go through the gate at the end of the field and continue forward, passing security gates on the left, and continue to the road, Dean Lane. Turn left and go uphill, following it through a sharp bend to the right.

5. Just before the crest of the hill, look for a stony layby on the left. Walk through the gap to the right of the gate and continue forward following the hill contour on a broad grassy trackway, with the treeline up on the right.



Norman Court, West Tytherley



Dean Hill, BM

stonework was cannibalised for local buildings.

To the left lies the land which held the former Royal Naval Armaments Depot. As Britain prepared for war in 1938, 583 acres of Dean Hill farmland was requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence for the creation of a Royal Naval Depot for heavy weapons for the Portsmouth fleet. Irish miners, Scottish fitters and local labourers tunnelled into the chalk hillside and built 24 bunkers. Many associated brick and concrete offices, laboratories and 150 workshops (with internal gantries for the inspection, repair and refurbishment of weapons) were constructed, as was a special gauge rail link running south of East Dean Church for the transportation of armaments. High blast banks were raised to protect neighbours. The site opened in 1941. It continued to be operational till 2004, storing sophisticated weapons for all three military services as Defence Munitions West Dean. It was a staging post for the transport of nuclear weapons. It was closed in 2004 and has morphed into Dean Hill Park, a light industrial and office complex. Most of its acreage reverting to agricultural and conservation use



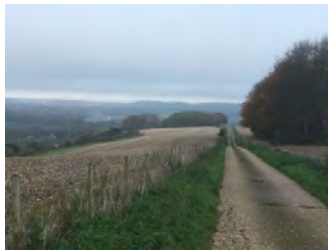
One of the West Dean Hill pillboxes, BM

In his Fieldwork Book 53 of May 1912, Thomas notes *Dean Hill E(ast) of Salisbury a long level ridge E(ast) + W(est) w(ith) a lovely slope to N(orth) thinly or thickly covered w(ith) darkest yew + sometimes crowned in yew or beech or both singly or in cluster or line*



Dean Hill ridge (on the right)

6. Follow the path as it kinks to the left to Deanhill Barn. Continue along the concrete driveway for two thirds of a mile, passing the trig point (366 ft/111m).



Looking towards Lockerly, BM

7. As the path swings left continue downhill, passing Dean Hill Barn Farm and continue to the road and East Dean.

8. At the East Dean road, turn left and continue forward, taking care to be seen by traffic. This is ET's IPOS route.

The walk continues along this *lovely slope*.

A transmitter will be above on the top of Dean Hill. Also on the right is an eight-sided pillbox. At least seven will be seen on this stretch of the walk, some succumbing to ivy and weathering. With fear of an invasion after the Battle of Britain, defence lines were constructed across the country. The Home Guard manned these rural defences and were instructed to hold off the anticipated Wermacht Panzer divisions until army reinforcements could be summoned. Tank traps were constructed at river crossings – there was one in West Dean.

In the distance to the left and on the ridge carrying the Clarendon and Monarch Ways, the white building is Norman Court in West Tytherley. Set in 150 acres of parklands, it takes its name from medieval owners. It was bought by the Baring family and later the Singers, the major employers in the area. The death of the owner at El Alamein led to the estate being sold in 1945. The court has been owned by a succession of private schools. To the right of it can be seen the tump of Woolbury Ring, a 20-acre hill fort east of Stockbridge. Further along and rightwards to the south east lies Romsey, the Test Valley and the installations of Fawley Refinery on Southampton Water, backed by the Isle of Wight.

This stretch of the walk is accompanied by the security fence built by the Admiralty Constabulary, for whom 30 houses were built on the Depot site – now Hillside Close.

The ridge of the Depot blast banks lie down on the left. Coming off the ridge, the rolling terrain opens out with the spire of St John's Church in Lockerly seen ahead.

Pausing to look north, remnants of the Admiralty marshalling yard, the site of transfer sheds and standard gauge railway, can be seen on the right. This



St Winfrith's Church, East Deane, BM

9. Pass the Old Brewers pub and restaurant on the left. Just beyond it on the right is Frenchmoor Lane. Follow this over the railway and, following a finger post, to the left of Park Farm drive. Where the lane bends to the right, another finger post and stile are on the left. Continue over this and across the field upwards to the house in the hedge line ahead.



The East family sawmill, BM

10. At the treeline, go to the right of the house and fence and, immediately on entering the next field, continue left, down to a track on the other side of the hedge, bear right and follow this up to the road ahead.

11. Cross the road and follow the sign for the De Borbach Chantry, passing between the houses to a gate on the left into the churchyard.

was a spur from the level crossing ahead and the Salisbury-Southampton railway. Just in front of the blast banks on the left, a narrow-gauge railway served the establishment's magazines, laboratories, workshops for the inspection, maintenance and repair of munitions and the storage magazines.

After East Dean House on the right, **St Winfrith's Church** will be on the left. Of this, Thomas writes: *On the left, that is on the Dean Hill side, stood East Dean Church, a little rustic building of patched brick and plaster walls, mossy roof, and small lead-paned windows displaying the Easter decorations of moss and daffodils. It had a tiny bell turret at the west end, and a round window cut up into radiating panes like a geometrical spider's web. Under the yew tree, amidst long grass, dandelion and celandine, lay the bones of people bearing the names of Edney and Langridge. The door was locked. ... on the other side of the road were an old cottage with tiled roof and walls of herring-boned brick, smothered from chimney to earth with ivy, in a garden of plum blossom; and next to it, a decent small home, a smooth clipped block of yew, and a whitewashed mud wall with a thatched coping. The houses of East Dean, either thatched or roofed with orange tiles, were scattered chiefly on the right.*

Water meadows lay off on the right, as does East Dean Manor and Manor Farm. Thomas's **sawmill and timber-yard** are still in the village of West Dean down to the left. In his day it had a steam-powered mill. It was, and still is, owned by the East family. It used to process the timber of the nearby Norman Court estate, moving it by horse and pole wagons. In 1913 its products included brush boards for brooms and mining timber; nowadays it produces timber for construction, fencing, joinery and



The de Borbach Chantry, BM



Memorial to Robert Pierrepont, BM

12. Take the way to the left of the churchyard gate and walk round the overgrown mound.

13. Turn right at the road and return to the start point.

flooring. It still uses locally sourced timbers along with tropical hardwoods.

I went over the river and railway uphill past the new but ivied church and the camp which lie back from the road on the left among oaks and thickets. On that Sunday morning, cows pasturing on the rushy fields below the camp and thrushes signing in the oaks were the principal inhabitants of West Dean.

West Dean's 'old' church was built of chalk, flint and sandstone rubble. In the mid-19th century it was condemned as beyond repair and decommissioned in 1971. What remains is known as the **De Borbach Chapel** now in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust. This was originally attached to the now demolished parish church. One of the graves belongs to James Thomas Cooper, who was hanged in 1831 for allegedly leading a riotous mob which destroyed agricultural machinery and farmsteads. A consecration cross can be seen on the inner door jamb and the medieval door is cross-boarded. Around the tiled and stone floor are fine 17th century iron work and alabaster, marble and limestone monuments to the Evelyn family, who owned the chapel in the 17th century. Among the more striking memorials is the one to John and Elizabeth Evelyn and his wife, with its bas-relief of their eight daughters and three sons. Another is to the angel-assisted, God-beseeking Robert Pierrepont, his leg amputated and an inscription on a gilded copper internal door bemoaning his wastrel life.



Memorial to John and Elizabeth Evelyn, BM

This is *the camp* to which Thomas refers. It is an overgrown but discernible mound and ditch, a Norman Motte fortification which held a garrison to dominate the surrounding countryside. This may have been an earlier wooden structure; no sign of stonework has been revealed. An 18th century bowling green was set on the levelled top.

With thanks to Wendy Britton of the Bristol Ramblers Association, Sara Sawyer and Tim Parkinson of the Edward Thomas Fellowship, and Catherine Carberry

© Benedict Mackay 2021

