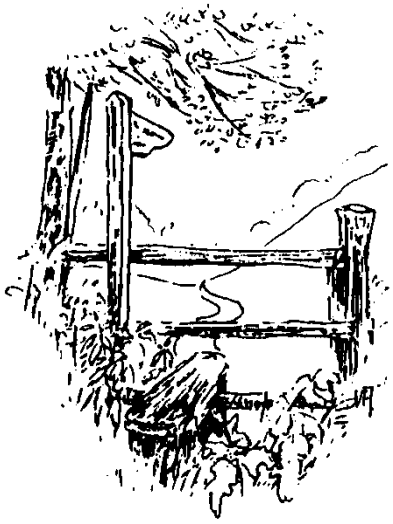
THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP



Often I had gone this way before:
But now it seemed I could never be
And never had been anywhere else;
'Twas home: one nationality
We had, I and the birds that sang,
One memory ....

'Home'

NEWSLETTER 82 AUGUST 2019

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Chairman's welcome – July 2019

Welcome all to Newsletter number 82. As I read back through previous editions, I am overwhelmed by the eloquence of the writing that prevails throughout, and the 'power' of the English language to stir emotions – sadly in both a positive and negative manner.
In particular, in an article written by our current editor Julia Maxted in Newsletter 76 September 2016), she refers to her late mother, Elizabeth Parkhurst (Edward Thomas's niece) having a gift for using English in a way that made "every word count". Julia has clearly taken this to heart, and we are very grateful that she brings this expertise to her editorship of this Journal on behalf of the Fellowship – thank you, Julia.

2019 has been relatively busy this year as the Committee strives to extend the reach of Edward Thomas into new schools and colleges that may not be aware of the resources available within the Fellowship and its network – including the Study Centre in Petersfield.

Should any members or people they know have contacts with schools, colleges or universities who they think would like to know more about Edward Thomas and the Fellowship, please contact David Kerslake, whose contact details appear above.
As I close my welcome, I would also like to draw your attention to the following items that appear later:

- The proposed creation of an 'Acquisition Fund', and a recent acquisition; and
- An update on accessing the Edward Thomas Study Centre in Petersfield as the Museum has now closed for 15 months for building work.

Finally, you will recall that I mentioned in the last newsletter that at the AGM members would be asked to consider changing the date of the Birthday Walk from March to April. The members attending voted in a majority of 2:1 to leave the date as it is. There was a suggestion from the floor that the format of the day be changed slightly – keeping the morning walk and AGM as they are, with a different approach to the afternoon activities – and this is under consideration by the committee.

Thank you and I hope you enjoy reading the rest of the newsletter.

Jeremy Mitchell

The Birthday Walk, 2019: Morning walk

March the Third

> 'And when it falls on Sunday,….
> This day unpromised is dearer
> Than all the named days of the year
> When seasonable sweets come in….'

Perhaps March 3rd 1915 was a fine day with 'seasonable sweets': I'm afraid we couldn't say that about this year's walking weather and yet, and yet…. in true Fellowship spirit twenty-five of us set off in a light drizzle from Bedales for the walk that Mike Cope had planned. The first section was familiar- a gentle climb through lane and field to the foot of the Shoulder of Mutton Hill and a much tougher climb up to the Stone where we paused for three readings.

The theme of the day was that of legacy – the legacy of both Edward and Helen. I found it perhaps surprisingly fresh and thought provoking. 'Words' was read by Pam and Steve Turner. Gwilym Scourfield read a hardly-known Seamus Heaney poem, 'In a Field', commissioned by the Poet-Laureate to remember 1st World War poets. It is his last-known poem, reflecting most poignantly on Thomas's 'As the team's head-brass'. Finally Ben Mackay read his son Edward's poem 'Stone House Asylum, 1932' on Helen's visit to Ivor Gurney in the asylum.

We moved on to less well-known territory, along Old Litten Lane towards Cobbett's View, passing through a classic Hangers woodland of beech and yew orchestrated by a lively wind. In 1822 Cobbett had been determined to ride over Ashford Hanger and persisted against advice- slippery mud, steep incline and so on. As he reached its highest point he was delighted and wrote that it was as if he were looking down at a sea, so wide was the view across Hawkley and the surrounding plain:

> "Those who had so strenuously dwelt on the dirt and dangers of this route had said not a word about the beauties, the matchless beauties of the scenery".

We paused for readings there even though a light rain, the last of the morning, fell. The Thomas's life at Steep and what it meant to them was the theme of three readings. Rob

Woolliams, a Master's student who had joined us for the first time, read the Home poem, 'Often I had gone this way before' with its sense of homecoming linked with the nationality he shared with the birds. I read from my novel '*A Conscious Englishman'* a passage in which Thomas is preparing to leave Steep and realizes that he had been as near to knowing a 'home' there as he could, and that his love for it and for England brought with it the necessity of leaving. Lastly Michelle Kerslake read wonderfully from Chapter 8 of *Under Storm's Wing* a passage with all Helen's vitality and joy: no doubt the facts were coloured by her subjectivity but it was a pleasure to hear and brought a smile to our faces.

> "So I whip of my apron and put on thick shoes, and away we go all day long, tramping by footpaths through woods and fields, happy to be free of the house and the study and the children, running hand in hand down bare hillsides, or walking single file along the narrow paths the dog's mercury has left in the woods."

The sheer skill and music of Helen's writing struck me most forcibly as it was read aloud. Consider the structure and the rhythm in this passage:

> 'These were my red-letter days when my spirit rose in thankfulness for the richness of life. Sometimes when he saw how happy I was he would say: "Helen, you ought to have a different sort of husband, one who would always be happy and careless and never cruel; who would always love your untidiness as I love it now, and not mind your short-sight as I don't mind it now, and kiss you much oftener as I kiss you now." "Well then" I would say, "perhaps if you were such a husband I should be somebody different too, and perhaps not so happy as I certainly am now. So that's that." '

Suddenly the weather improved at this point. Much of the walk was then an easy descent through beech woods, along mossy paths to the east of the Shoulder of Mutton where signs of recent management of the woods could be seen. There was a brightness in the sky as it neared one o'clock and our straggling group arrived at the village hall for lunch and a viewing of the A.D.Cooper film, *Home to the Hangers*, showing so movingly the very Hangers where we had just been walking.

I had set out in the rain that morning not expecting a great deal, not to be renewed in my sense of the special nature of Thomas, the poems, the life and landscape. I was wrong. Thanks so much to Mike Cope for arranging an exceptional experience.

Margaret Keeping

The Birthday Walk, 2019: Afternoon walk

Although the rain eased off over the lunch period, it started again just as we were about to set out from Steep Village Hall for the afternoon walk. In the garden of 2 Yew Tree Cottages, Barbara Kinnes read 'Old Man', crumbling a sprig of the plant in her right hand, as she read the poem. Members listened attentively in the rain, many of them donned in full waterproof clothing. The second reading was from *'Under Storm's Wing'* about the Thomas' time at the house (1913- 1916) and how they enjoyed working in the garden.

'We soon had the garden in order-vegetables mostly with a border of flowers. By the only door into the house we planted the herbs which Edward so loved.'

Helen Tweedy read the piece under an umbrella, as the wind blew the rain sideways and dampened the pages of the text.

We walked past the Cricketers Inn, and then along a sunken lane with high banks, past a cottage with a high pitched roof and a crumbling malmstone wall to Berryfield Cottage - the Thomas' first home in Steep. Here Richard Purser sheltered in the porch as he read another passage *from 'Under Storm's Wing*,' explaining why the Thomas' moved to Steep in the first place and how Helen found their first home there.

‘Merfyn was now six years old and we felt we had better move to a place where there was a school. We remembered Bedales, the co-educational school in Hampshire I had heard of years ago. So I went to see the school and the country, and if I liked both, to make inquiries about a house’.

High above the garden of Berryfield Cottage, the wayfaring mists swirled around the hanger, as the rain continued unabated… drip, drip, drip. We returned via the usual path past Little Langleys and then took a different route to All Saints Church, Steep, via the farmyard of Oakhurst farm. Although the wet weather was not what we’d hoped for, it did make for a more intimate experience as members huddled together under umbrellas, listening to the readings.

Mike Cope

Walkers on the Morning walk, at the Memorial Stone on Shoulder of Mutton Hill.

The Edward Thomas Fellowship Poetry Competition 2019

The Fellowship’s annual Poetry Competition was initiated and endowed by the poet’s grandson Edward Cawston Thomas. Now in its fourth year there has been an excellent response with over three hundred poems entered, most of them being of a high standard. Judged by the prize-winning poet and reviewer, Jane Draycott,

The competition is, we are informed, regarded as a serious and prestigious one. Maggie Davison for ‘Jacket’ won the First Prize. The two joint Second prizewinners are Richard Meier and Oliver Comins for ‘Faculties’ and ‘Winter Search’, respectively. The six Highly Commended poets are Alyss Dye, Lindsay Rossdale, Helen Boyles, James Driver, Mark Fiddes and Tista Austin.

Margaret Keeping

Jacket

When he put his jacket on,
the daughter’s soul in her wanted
to follow him through the slammed door:
to pour the lightning from face to jam jar
or press it between the locked pages of
her diary in the bedroom drawer;

to match his strides with hurried steps
upstream to the castle, watch the sun
play hide and seek with paternal stone;
to come home with the river's rush,
two pebbles washed smooth in symmetry;
but the child in her knew she had to stay,
frozen by her mother's tears.
Together they'd watch the ticking hands,
share the catch of breath
at the flick of the latch on the backyard gate.
And no-one would speak of that lost hour
after he took his jacket off.

Maggie Davison

Winter Search

The clouds were too high and snow
was not one of the services being provided.
On the year's shortest day, you'd think
there'd be a chance of getting some,
but the hours raced through with nothing
more than two sheets of packaging,
wind-blown, disappearing into the river.
We discovered a rug of cyclamen
growing in half-shade below alder trees
somewhere beyond the tennis courts.
Wrought and pale, neither white nor pink,
the flowers appeared to be glowing
as they lay there like new-fallen snow,
defying the sky and its low hanging sun.

Oliver Comins

Faculties

Woods, a wild garlic carpet –
a walk before calling in on
my mother, who has good days, and my father –
then up, out into a long-haired common
to stand beneath, beside the somewhere
skylarks, and down to where the grass
stops for the forest (with a working sawmill,
so the sign says) which thins
to farmland torn off by the first
or last road in the village, Timber Close
(the name makes sense now) with the oblong
bungalow "grandma's parents used to live in",
though what yet do our children care
about such things as when or where, who even.

Richard Meier

Edward Thomas Fellowship Poetry Competition 2019 – Judge's Report

It's been a pleasure again to be judging the Edward Thomas Fellowship Poetry Competition for a second time, and in a year that has attracted a record number of entries. Even with no specific theme stipulated, there were still an extraordinary number of successful poems united by similar Thomas-related themes – attentiveness to the natural world, the quiet apprehensions of private feeling and, in an enjoyable coincidence this year, several strong poems about music or with musical references.
Another unmistakable emphasis this year was on the uncannily frequent explorations in the poems of light after darkness, spring after winter - perhaps a function of the competition's timing around the year's turn, but also in some subliminal way perhaps connected with our current extended time of political uncertainty.
All of the highly commended and winning poems were chosen for their fusion of grace and dynamic attention to detail, travelling far in a few words, creating in their short space whole worlds and atmospheres that seemed unique and complete. First Prize winner **'Jacket'** by Maggie Davison had all these qualities in strength, brought alive with moving emotional subtlety as the child's acute understanding recreates the longed-for scene beyond the slammed door whilst never moving from the room. Richard Meier's **'Faculties'** works with beautiful poise to hold our attention throughout the single sentence of the poem's narrative, resulting in a compelling sense of simultaneity across its several time-frames, making the reader turn straight back to the beginning to read again. Oliver Comins' **'Winter Search',** with its quietly propulsive line-turns and vivid creation of scene, was a stand-out gem among the several midwinter poems submitted, its spare fullness a model of the power of suggestion and association, and a fitting winner in a competition dedicated to the spirit of Edward Thomas.

Jane Draycott

A Nest of Singing Birds, published by the Fellowship is a collection of poems chosen from entries to the Edward Thomas Fellowship's 2017, 2018 and 2019 Poetry Competitions. It includes the prizewinning and highly commended poems of each year.

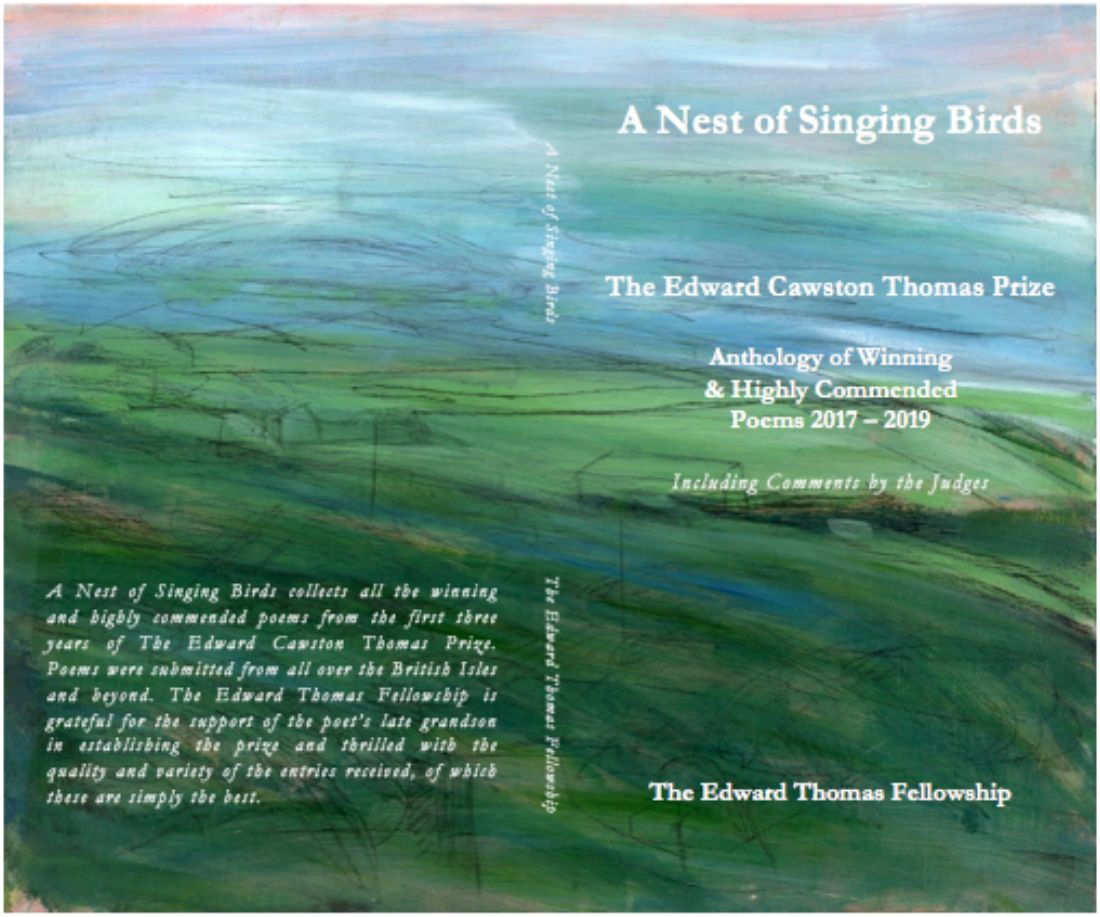
The natural world, including human life as one element in it, together with memory and the past, inspires many of the poets. Not surprisingly, many poems showed that their authors had learned from Thomas. The qualities identified by Edna Longley and Andrew Motion, among others, were often apparent – that sense of thinking aloud, the quiet spoken voice, attention to small details and a modern sensibility.

We have included the Judges' Reports (by poets Jenny Lewis and Jane Draycott) for their very instructive commentaries and insights, which will be of special value to those thinking of submitting poems to magazines or competitions in future.

We are grateful to all the poets for giving their permission to publish and to the judges for their care and attention, and we hope that all readers will enjoy the anthology and find some new insight or delight within its pages.

Copies will be available for purchase at future Fellowship events, or alternatively by post from David Kerslake, 3 Bream Close, Calne, Wiltshire, SN11 9UF for 5 GBP, (plus 1.50 for postage and packing).

Margaret Keeping, Competition Coordinator



Edward Thomas Fellowship/John Clare Society Joint Study Day 2019

Our Autumn Study Day this year is being held jointly with the John Clare Society in Clare's home village of Helpston on 21st September. Dr Erin Lafford, Post Doctoral Research Fellow in English at the University of Derby will be comparing Thomas and Clare's poetic works, Dr Sam Ward of Nottingham Trent University on the life journeys of Clare and Thomas, and Dr Erica McAlpine of Oxford University on the relationship between poets and landscape (landscape journeys).
For tickets and more information please contact our Membership Secretary, David Kerslake, whose details are on the first page of the Newsletter.

The following is an extract from 'John Clare' in 'A Literary Pilgrim in England', first published in 1917 by Methuen.

"It is hard to imagine a combination with more possibilities for wretchedness than that of poet and agricultural labourer. I mean a poet of any known breed. Of course, it is easy to invent a poet suddenly making poetry of all that dignity and beauty in the labourer's life which we are so ready to believe in. But such a one has not yet appeared. It is doubtful if he ever will, or if we ought to complain of the lack, since what we want to see in some perhaps impossible

peasant poetry has always been an element in great poetry. If we knew their pedigrees, we should find more than one peasant among the ancestors of the poets. In fact, every man, poet or not, is a more or less harmonious combination of the peasant and the adventurer.

In no man have these two parts been more curiously combined than in John Clare, a real poet, however small, and actually an agricultural labourer out and out. He was far from being the kind of peasant poet who would be invented in an armchair. Mortal man could hardly be milder, more timid and drifting, than Clare. He heard voices from the grave, not of rustic wisdom and endurance, but

> ‘Murmuring o'er one's weary woe,
> Such as once 'twas theirs to know,
> They whisper to such slaves as me
> A buried tale of misery: —
> ' We once had life, ere life's decline,
> Flesh, blood, and bones the same as thine;
> We knew its pains, and shared its grief,
> Till death, long-wish'd for, brought relief;
> We had our hopes, and like to thee,
> Hop'd morrow's better day to see,
> But like to thine, our hope the same,
> To-morrow's kindness never came:
> We had our tyrants, e'en as thou;
> Our wants met many a scornful brow;
> But death laid low their wealthy powers,
> Their harmless ashes mix with ours:
> And this vain world, its pride, its form,
> That treads on thee as on a worm.
> Its mighty heirs — the time shall be
> When they as quiet sleep as thee!’

He looked back to childhood, asking:

> ' When shall I see such rest again?’

Contact with the town —

> ‘In crowded streets flowers never grew,
> But many there hath died away’

— sharpened his nerves for natural beauty. The poet consumed the labourer in him, or left only the dregs of one, while the conditions of the labourer's life were as a millstone about his neck as poet. As a young man, sometimes neither labouring nor poetry could satisfy him, and he would escape to two brothers named Billings, men given to ‘poaching, hard drinking, and general rowdyism,’ whose ruinous cottage at Helpston was nicknamed ‘Bachelors' Hall. His biographer says that he was ‘too deep a lover of all creatures that God had made’ to become a poacher, but that nevertheless, for all his ordinary shyness, ‘he was at these meetings the loudest of loud talkers and singers.’ He seems to have taken most of the opportunities of leaving his cottage and Helpston, and most opportunities of coming back to them. Marriage meant crowding into that fourth part of a cottage with parents, wife, and children.

For a short time he was a minor celebrity, meeting some of the great men of his day, such as Coleridge and Lamb, after the publication of ‘Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery’ in 1820. But he was then no more fitted for the literary life than at birth he was fitted for the life of the fields. Delicate and passionate, he was early broken by under-feeding and

over-drinking, so that he could love only the incidents of the country, the birds, the flowers, the young girl like a flower:

‘Nor could I pull
The blossoms that I thought divine
As hurting beauty like to thine.’

Unlike Burns, he had practically no help from the poetry and music of his class. He was a peasant writing poetry, yet cannot be called a peasant poet, because he had behind him no tradition of peasant literature, but had to do what he could with the current forms of polite literature. The mastering of these forms absorbed much of his energy, so that for so singular a man he added little of his own, and the result was only thinly tinged with his personality, hardly at all with the general characteristics of his class.

His work is founded chiefly on literary models. Yet he lacked the intellect and power of study to live by the pen as he lacked the grit to live by hoe and pitch- fork. A small income was subscribed for him, but he failed to found even a moderately sound productive life on it. Never, except in fancy rhyme, had he the Plenty which he desired, or the cottage of his verses, ‘After reading in a letter proposals for building a cottage.’ His only lasting pleasure was in remembering happier things, with the reflection:

" Ah I sweet is all that I am denied to share;
Want's painful hindrance sticks me to her stall"

He said truly:

'No, not a friend on earth had I
But mine own kin and poesy.'

He never became any more docile to the fate of agricultural labourers than he had been when a young man. After walking home for the first time with the girl who was to be his wife, and saying good-bye, he waited about, watching the lights of her house, for an hour or two. He then set out homeward, but lost his way in the dark, and sat down contentedly when the moon rose, to write a love-song. In the morning he awoke by the brink of a canal where he had slept, exhausted at the end of a long night's wandering.

But it was in his power to do for his native district something like what Jefferies did for his. He possessed a similar fresh, sweet spirituality to that of Jefferies, a similar grasp and love of detail. Some of his plain descriptions anticipate and at least equal the ‘Nature article’ of today. His was a pedestrian Muse:

‘who sits her down
Upon the molehill's little lap,
Who feels no fear to stain her gown,
And pauses by the hedgerow gap.’

And he often wrote long formless pieces full of place-names and of field-lore charmingly expressed, songs uttering his love and his pathetic joy in retrospection, poems mingling the two elements. A thousand things which the ordinary country child, ‘tracking wild searches through the meadow grass' has to forget in order to live, Clare observed and noted — as, for example, how in July's drought:

‘E'en the dew is parched up
From the teasel's jointed cup.’

In putting down some of these things with a lowly fidelity, he often achieves a more rustic truth than other poets, as in —

> ‘And rambling bramble-berries, pulpy and sweet,
> Arching their prickly trails
> Half o'er the narrow lane.’

Sometimes he attains almost to magic, as in —

> ‘For when the world first saw the sun.
> These little flowers beheld him, too;
> And when his love for earth begun,
> They were the first his smiles to woo.
> There little lambtoe bunches springs
> In red-tinged and begolden dye.
> For ever, and like China kings
> They come, but never seem to die.’

He was something more and less than a peasant become articulate. For example, he had an unexpected love, not only of the wild, but of the waste places, the ‘commons left free in the rude rags of Nature,’ ‘the old molehills of glad neglected pastures.’ Though he did call the henbane ‘stinking,’ he half loved it for the places, like Cowper's Green, where he found it, with bramble, thistle, nettle, hemlock,

> ‘And full many a nameless weed,
> Neglected, left to run to seed.
> Seen but with disgust by those
> Who judge a blossom by the nose.
> Wildness is my suiting scene,
> So I seek thee, Cowper Green.'

To enumerate the flowers was a pleasure to him and he did so in a manner which ‘preserves them still dewy, or with summer dust, perhaps, on ' an antique mullein's flannel-leaves.' Can he ever have cultivated his garden? If he did, and then wrote —

> ‘Hawkweed and groundsel’s fanning downs
> Unruffled keep their seeded crowns’

he must have been a kind of saint; and, indeed, he had such a love for wild things as some saints have had, which he shows in the verses :

> ‘I left the little birds
> And sweet lowing of the herds,
> And couldn't find out words,
> Do you see,
> To say to them good-bye,
> Where the yellowcups do lie;
> So heaving a deep sigh
> Took to sea.’

When he lamented leaving his old home, he did not mention the building itself, but the neighbouring heath,

> ‘its yellow furze,

Molehills and rabbit tracks that lead
Through beesom, ling, and teasel burrs . . .'

the trees, the lanes, the stiles, the brook, the flowers, the shepherd's-purse that grew in the old as well as the new garden:

'The very crow
Croaked music in my native fields.'

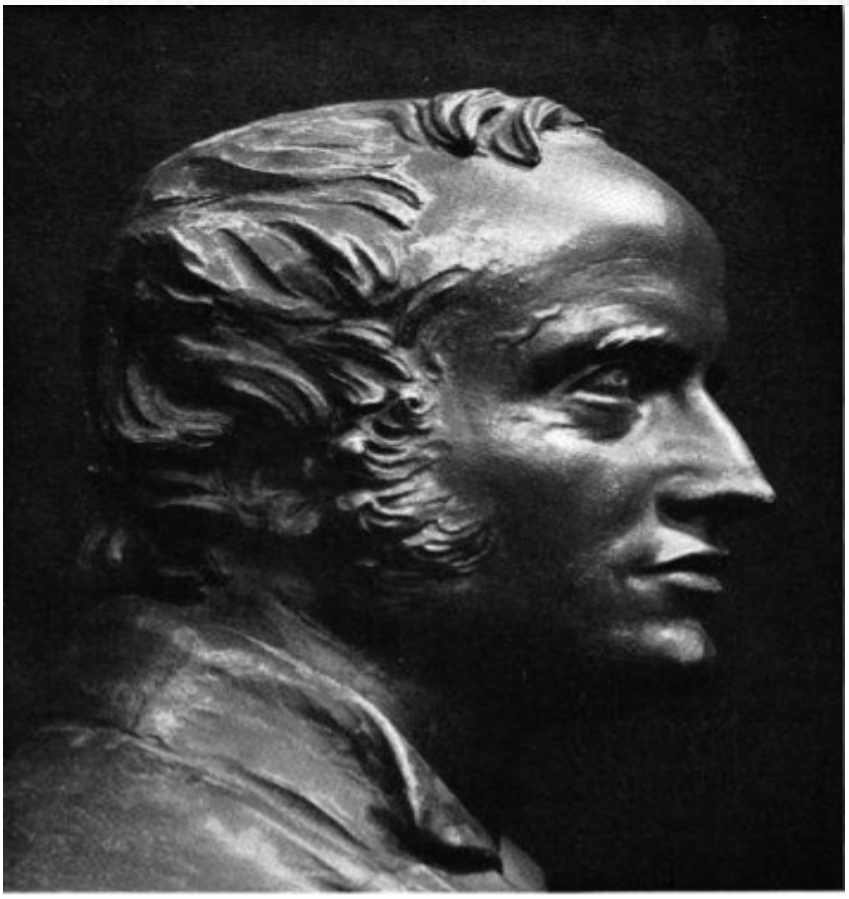
One of his Asylum Poems, first printed by Mr. Arthur Symons, is full of place-names that were music to him, and become so to us — 'Langley Bush,' 'Eastwell's boiling spring,' 'old Lee Close oak,' 'old Crossberry Way,' 'pleasant Swordy Well' again, 'Round Oak,' 'Sneap Green,' 'Puddock's Nook,' 'Hilly Snow' — as he mourns:

'And Crossberry Way and old Round Oak's narrow lane
With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again.
Enclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain.
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
And hung the moles for traitors, though the brook is running still
It runs a naked stream cold and chill.'

But he had the farm life also by heart, and, along with blackbird and robin and magpie, drew the dog chasing the cat, the cows tossing the molehills in their play, the shepherd's dog daunted by the rolled-up hedgehog, the maids singing ballads at milking or hanging out linen around the elder-skirted croft, while:

'The gladden'd swine bolt from the sty.
And round the yard in freedom run,
Or stretching in their slumbers lie
Beside the cottage in the sun.
The young horse whinneys to his mate,
And, sickening from the thresher's door,
Rubs at the straw-yard's banded gate,
Longing for freedom on the moor.'

No man ever came so near to putting the life of the farm, as it is lived, not as it is seen over a five-barred gate, into poetry. He gives no broad impressions — he saw the kite, but not the kite's landscape — yet his details accumulate in the end, so that a loving reader, and no one reads him but loves him, can grasp them, and see the lowlands of Northamptonshire as they were when the kite still soared over them.



Above: John Clare's school book, inside front cover. Below: Bust of John Clare, 1828 by Henry Behnes Burlowe (The Catalogue of the John Clare Collection, Northampton Public Library (1964)

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The Poetry of To–day
A Crowd of Pleasant Singers But No Heaven – Sent Choir
By Edward Thomas

If we were to regard the loud and general voice of readers, critics, booksellers, lovers of poetry and lovers of what is approved, plain men and writers of letters to the papers, it would be hard not to be persuaded that the poetry of to-day is bad; that even if it were good, it would not be popular, because, we are told, people do not care for poetry; and that, very likely, modern life makes impossible the production and enjoyment of poetry.

And it is, I believe, quite true, that among poets of to-day – not, of course, including Mr. Swinburne – Mr. Kipling alone has a vogue at all comparable to that of the poets of the last generation, whom most people think great and established.

Of Mr. Kipling's success some explanation is easily given. He has undoubted vigour, and the will to live and to persuade; his reputation in prose is to his advantage; he has new, or at least novel, material, and the appeal of his subjects would be strong, even if it were not strengthened by his obvious patriotism and by rhythms that are as hard to put by as barrel organ tunes. No one else, has, I think, such a combination of advantages likely to be effective among great numbers of men.

What I have called the will to live and persuade is remarkably rare in poets of to-day. By the phrase, I do not mean the possession of a programme which is never forgotten; but a clear, dominating aim, founded upon strong principles, or consistent emotions, or a mature view of life, and supported by a desire, never quite conscious, to make an impression upon other minds. The two poets, Mr. Watson and Mr. Yeats, who have been nearly as effective as Mr. Kipling, and one who might have been, Mr. Davidson, seem to have this characteristic.

But is poetry, therefore, bad, and is it unpopular because it is bad?

When I look at my two hundred volumes of recent verse, and think of the other two hundred which have been used a spills, &c., I see no reason for thinking so.

Every notable age of poetry has been succeeded by one that belongs to more or less cloistered poets, and those usually lyrical. Thus Donne, Carew, and Crashaw succeeded the Elizabethans, representing nothing like the same national stir of thought, and yet living on as surely as their predecessors. Perhaps the poets of to-day will some day be admitted to have occupied a similar position. They are lyrical, frequently in form, nearly always in attitude. They are cloistered. They make no nest of singing birds, but are scattered up and down a great thicket, singing aloof and seldom heard together.

To a contemporary observer they seem to have no great striking characteristics in common. They have little of the hearty confidence of older poets; they are pathetically conscious of their solitude. When the work of a number of them is printed together, there is no such harmony as there is in Elizabethan song books or eighteenth-century miscellanies. The result of this variety and of the intense individuality of much of their work, is that many of them are followed by small groups of readers of remarkable devotion. They are not so covered with praise and admiration as used to be fashionable. But they are, perhaps, cared for more intimately.

It would be easy to mention ten or twenty that have such a following. Some of them are men who have made innovations in style that are likely to be as important as the

Spenserean stanza or the couplets of Coleridge and Shelley. Were their readers gathered together, they would make a public, not as large as the public of Tennyson, Browning and Mr. Swinburne, but considerable. Not more than one of them, perhaps, is likely to gain a similar position to that held for fifty years by these men. Yet more than one or two are likely to endure, as Donne and Carew and Crashaw endure, since it cannot be that such intimate and passionate attachment as is given to them will leave no legacy behind.

But it is unnecessary to talk of immortality. It is a writer's business to serve his age nobly. Immortality is a possibility, and not to be calculated: it may even be wisely regarded as an irrelevant accident, and those who have survived their age have not always served it.

This view may seem to support the current one, that poetry is unpopular. But such a statement is unsatisfactory. Looking back at the successes of poetry in the past, I seem to see much servility in the popular approval, and, if not servility, an amazed and not very intelligent bewitchment, not unlike that which explains the popularity of music. The use, in poetry of language which is not that of the every day, must often have overturned the judgment of those who never considered the nature of its effectiveness. Thus, sentiments on mourning cards, which would be ridiculed in prose, in verse are accepted reverently by persons "perplexed in the extreme".

Similarly, readers of country newspapers are annually bewitched by unrhythmical and ill-rhymed groups of words about robins, the poor, plum-pudding and the birth of Christ. But such persons are becoming sophisticated, and read little verse. For this kind of thing which it parodies is to be found in prose everywhere. The old-fashioned prose differed much in subtle ways, but little in apparent ways, from current speech. Modern prose, for better or for worse, is farther removed, and ordinary persons venture upon flights in print which never pass their lips in speech. Goldsmith and Fielding never did. So, seeing so-called "poetical' matters in prose, many good men and women see much difference.

I am inclined, therefore, to think that, among people who do read verse to-day, there are fewer than ever who are ignorant of the nature of verse, and I would conclude that prose has taken readers from verse, - readers who are really not needed. If they are to be brought back, it must be by narrative, and narrative is no longer a favourite form.

Hopeful men might suppose that the dramatic form, with its wide appeal, and old traditions of popularity, will some day restore the fortunes of poetry. But have they noticed the fate of Mr. Newman Howard's "Savonarola" in print, or of Mr. Davidson's 'Queen's Romance' on the stage? Have they noticed that, where the drama used to be an excuse for the stage, the stage is now the excuse for the drama? Have they noticed that the tendency of the stage is towards a time when actors will frankly give renderings of the ways of actors, and not of men, as indeed is now commonly, but not frankly done?

This is not the place to discuss, *i.e.*, to condemn, the question as to the possibility of great poetry to-day. We are told that it is an age of science, and unpropitious to poetry. But there is no reasons why science, which is always moving, and yet perhaps no nearer a conclusion, because its field is infinite, should oppress the poet: nor any reason to suppose that science is now to be considered more important, or at least more hostile in relation to poetry than it was in the day of Callimachus or of Milton, upon whom it had no oppressive effect. Evolution need kills no more poets than phlebotomy did.

The question as to the possibility of enjoying poetry to-day is equally unimportant. People are said to be looking in vain for a poet who has absorbed and rejoiced in all modernity. Surely that is nothing more than to say that they are looking for some verse from Mr. Chesterton.

But, among the many things which I have paused over, there is one which cannot be altogether omitted. The majority has its rights, and they must be respected. And the majority of modern poets deserve a word of recommendation, especially as one cannot be sure that any man one meets in the ordinary ways of life, the man who sells one a hat or a cheese, is not one of them. For they are a most diverse company of men: virtuous or not; modest, flamboyant; deserving laughter, deserving tears; pilferers, parodists, and men for whom the happy past furnishes no sort of precedent; men deep in classic lore, and men who have never studied anything; writers of epics, plays, romances, lyrics, epitaphs, odes on the coronation of

Edward VII; men who do not prefix their photographs to their works, and men who ought to imitate them.

Sometimes their volumes are called pages from a busy life; they might all have similar titles, since it is evident that their chief quality is haste. The purposes which these serve are many. Their best purpose is to show us for how much the theory of inspiration is responsible, when inspiration is taken to mean a combination of ignorance, carelessness, and effrontery.

***The Book Monthly*, August 1905**

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Thomas' critical and topographical work: implications for his own poetry

Edna Longley's major edition of Thomas's critical writing refers to its bearing on his poetry, commenting that 'His criticism....unusual in being before the event, survives as its best interpreter.'(1).
It is well known that Thomas worked for all but two years of his writing life at what he often decried as hack work, exhausting in quantity and not always congenial to him. Country books, some book length studies of literary figures Keats, Pater, Borrow and reviews of contemporary authors, meant bread and butter for him and his family. He also reviewed a range of editions and biographies, extending over centuries, from Chaucer to Wilde! His editor and biographer, R. G. Thomas, calculated that Thomas wrote a minimum of 1,122 reviews and nine books of literary criticism. (2)

The very early work was, to quote Davis, 'set on automatic pilot for the lofty and inspecifically beautiful' (3). Lamb and Pater were his models at that time. Longley comments that Lamb was widely imitated in the late nineteenth century and the results were pompous and complacent. Thomas came to see Pater as artificial, not good at conveying truth when the cultivation of sensibility was an end in itself: 'for the last hundred years ideas and the material of ideas have come to the reading classes mainly through books and bookish conversation. Their ideas are in advance of their experience, their vocabulary in advance of their ideas, and their eyelids 'are a little weary' (4).

He made a defence of 'living and social words, unlike Pater's self - consciously chosen words which stick out like raisins 'on an ill made cake which will get burnt'. (4). Thomas disliked the decorations of decadent romantics, Swinburne especially, and had reservations about Keats, whose work he considered beautiful but somehow static. Predictably he saw little to enjoy in the eighteenth century. Pope's poetry was, he said,' dinner table work [which] dealt with nothing...not discussed at the best houses.'(5)

His critical titles show a bias towards the rural and to Romanticism. Narrative fiction was not of interest to him, and it is clear that his interest lay in poetry, especially that of his contemporaries: he wrote of his 'pure love of praising the new poetry' (6). He was, inevitably, extremely well-read, and scrutinised everything in terms reaching across history. In reading the old he would make reference to the new, and vice versa; in a review of 1904 he wrote 'to have a Future it (poetry) must have had a past.'(7). Thomas was searching for a poetic theory to which he could subscribe, and his criticism showed an eager interest in the critical work of others.

He valued the complete achievement of the Romantics, not simply the better known elements: he was consciously a 'Romantics man'. Longley argues that his identification with the Romantics was much greater than with his Georgian contemporaries. Certainly the influence of Wordsworth is evident in the poetry in theme and form. Coleridge was the critic he most

admired on Biographia Literaria he wrote, 'His scattered pages on poetic diction are all that can at present form the basis of any true criticism of Poetry'. (8).

Thomas believed that the new century required a new poetry and the body of his criticism amounted almost to a crusade to champion new poetry against the tide of reprints, rubbishy poetry, and critical indifference to new work which he valued. In a review of 1910 on contemporary poetry he foretold the prevalence of the lyric 'at least so long as individualism makes way in literature' and wrote that 'the best lyrics seem to be the poet's natural speech' (9).

Questions of 'individualism' were considered in a review of new verse for the Daily Chronicle in 1904, with the distinction made between 'writing about oneself' and 'self-expression'. Thomas looked for individuality, for the sense of a recognisable 'person' with unique qualities: on de la Mare he wrote, 'It is hard to find one new and common element in modern books. But if such is to be found it is the assertion of the individuality of the individual.' But he did not like the egotistical, praising de la Mare for having 'no significant first person singular, no confession, defiance, lament or hinted mystery.'(10).

Thomas recognised Yeats as the first hero of the modern revolution. He was interested in the Anglo-Irish revival and in Irish rhythm as 'a cause of renewal of youth in modern verse' (11). Significantly for his own poetry, he was interested in wanting to disown jingoism and Imperialism and in substituting a more 'inward local, cultural, and mythic sense of England', (12), influenced by Irish cultural developments. Thomas's well known volte-face on Pound's poetry has been often discussed by scholars: a favourable and perceptive review of 'Personae' in June 1909 was followed by a damning one of 'Exultations' in September (13), while in letters he was more dismissive still. In the first he appreciated Pound's 'prickly, brusque intensity of effect' and commented on the use of' a number of archaisms in chaste and simple vocabulary. Six weeks later he retracted in a letter to his friend Gordon Bottomley, saying that Pound 'is not and cannot be very good' and that he was ashamed of his enthusiastic review and its 'cheapening of praise!'. 'The second review referred to Pound's 'meaningless suavity and skill' and to what for Thomas would be a touchstone, a failure to express the self in a way that avoided egotism;

'When he writes in the first person he is so obscure as to give some excuse for finding him incapable of self-expression. And in both personal and detached poems he is, as a rule, so pestered with possible ways of saying a thing....'(13).

Longley believes that, at that time of intense partisanship in criticism he was drawing up aesthetic battle lines in a debate still continuing. Paradoxically Thomas respected the influential critic and author, Arthur Symons whose work revolutionised Eliot's poetry. He wrote enthusiastically of his 'The Symbolist Movement in Literature' (14) but he voiced objections what he called the 'purified poetry' of the Symbolists.

It was when Thomas read Robert Frost's collection, 'North of Boston', for the first time that he found a poet whom he could fully endorse, and he did so memorably:

'This is one of the most revolutionary books of modern times, but one of the quietest and least aggressive. It speaks, and it is poetry. These poems are revolutionary because they lack the exaggeration of rhetoric, and even at first sight appear to lack the poetic intensity of which rhetoric is an imitation.....The metre avoids not only the old-fashioned pomp and sweetness, but the later fashion also of discord and fuss...In fact, the medium is common speech and common decasyllables, and Mr. Frost is at no pains to exclude blank verse lines....Yet almost all these poems are beautiful. They depend not at all on objects commonly admitted to be beautiful; neither have they merely a homely beauty, but are often grand, sometimes magical....the separate lines and separate sentences are plain[but] they are bound together and made elements of beauty by a calm eagerness of emotion.'(15)

He saw Frost as the middle way 'between dead traditionalism and frenetic Modernism': 'The metre avoids not only the old-fashioned pomp and sweetness, but the later fashion also of discord and fuss.' The remedy for the old, pretentious decadence he saw in Swinburne and Pater he had found in Frost:
'words....that will do all that a speaker can do...by tone and pitch of voice, by speed, by pauses, by all that he is and all that he will become.' Frost 'demonstrated 'absolute fidelity to the postures which the voice assumes in the most expressive intimate speech.'(16).

The values which he recognised in Frost were to be reflected in his own poetry, although he quickly moved away from the dialogue form to find his own forms. Thomas wrote to Frost that he wanted to 'wring the necks of all my rhetoric the geese.' and refers to having already been 'on to the scent' in Pater and in earlier reviews. (17).

Edna Longley has a splendid image with which to contrast Pound and Eliot's 'bulldozer' demolition of the nineteenth century with that of Thomas and Frost. They, seeing a 'library' which was an 'ornate, outdated edifice, [removed it] brick by brick, until it no longer blocked the way forward.'(18).

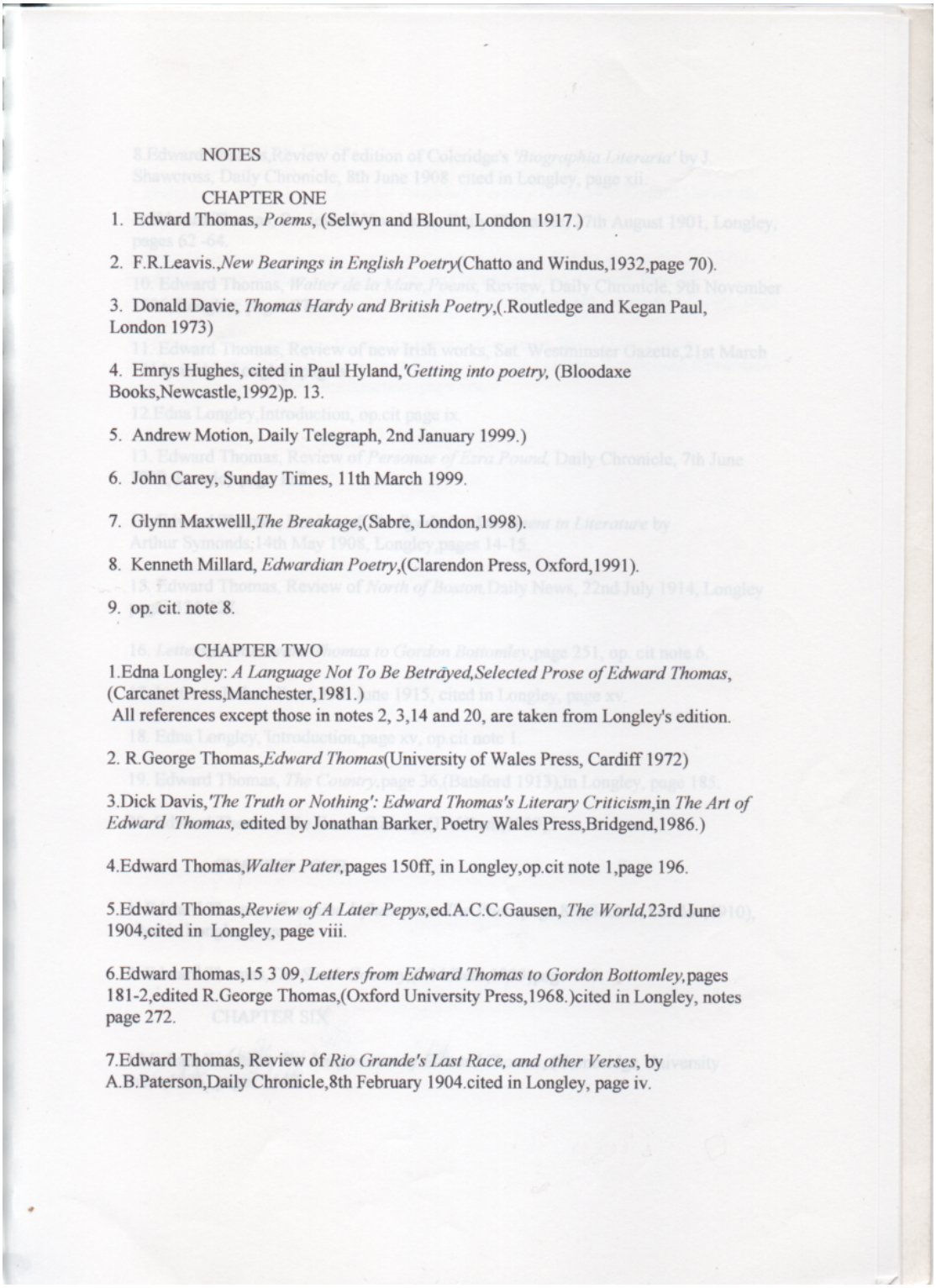
Significant for his eventual output as a poet were Thomas's other 'bread and butter' works: prose books on topography and country matters. He had enormous admiration for Richard Jefferies, repeatedly calling him a poet, and in the country prose tradition - Cobbett, Gilbert White, Jefferies, Isaac Walton - was well-read as in literature. His own prose and poetry recapitulates this prose inheritance. But he wearied of the early twentieth century's 'back to Nature' fashion and complained that he had to review bad verse 'up to the neck in the country!'(19).
He had a detailed knowledge of natural history and of country life, but even in much of the prose writing he sought to transcend that: the detail was to be seen within an imaginative, individual vision. The Romantic tradition of the vital relationship between Man and Nature continued, but with greater attention to, and distinguishing between, subjectivity and objectivity. Thomas had an investment in seeing the essentials of the native tradition, and poems like 'The Chalk Pit' and 'Sedge Warblers' encapsulate his belief in plainness and truth against any attempt to dramatise or fantasise rural life.

A frequent theme in his prose was that of the inhabitant or citizen of the Earth, and of Man's position among the Earth's other inhabitants. The human species could be understood through its folk culture: Thomas saw national identity as deriving from the character of the people, from the landscape and from literature, and his identification with the English people, which cost him his life, was intense without being chauvinistic. 'In his poetry these themes were to be taken up again, sometimes prose passages being transformed into verse where the 'outer scene gives access to an inner theatre' in Leavis's words. Thomas's years as a 'doomed hack', often grinding out works to order for little financial reward, marked him in several ways. He was seriously depressive, more than once was near to suicide, and was moody, melancholy and difficult. He was also ironic and amusing, in his criticism and his rural prose, and especially about the tasks he was given by some publishers what he called the "'Omes and 'Aunts" works on well-known writers' localities for example!

But as an astute and respected critic who had had to acquire a profound knowledge of centuries of English writing, Thomas was in a strong position to evolve his own values and principles in advance of beginning to write poetry. The themes of his travel prose were to be transformed into verse. They include the journey, the nature of beauty and of happiness, the sense of other possibilities, what is meant by 'home', memory and history and also anxiety about the efficacy of words. It was on reading Thomas's 'The South Country' (20) that Frost told him that he was 'a poet all along': Thomas did not suddenly discover an entirely new

voice, but he was sufficiently encouraged to use his own voice in a new form. Sadly, he had only four years of life in which to develop that form before he was killed in 1917.

Margaret Keeping



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THE LATE EDWARD THOMAS
BIOGRAPHER OF RICHARD JEFFERIES
KILLED IN ACTION

Every Swindonian and lover of our beautiful meadow and Down country will hear with deep regret of the death - killed in action - of Mr. Edward Thomas, who had a very strong and sympathetic interest with Swindon. No man has done more, and in more capable language painted the beauties of the environs of our town.

Of all the heavy tolls of the war among our literary writers none is heavier than the death of Edward Thomas. His nature stories and word pictures of woodland and meadow will be found in the best journals and magazines dealing with that subject. That he was admitted as the chief biographer of Richard Jefferies will lay every admirer of the author of " The Story of My Heart," under a deep and everlasting tribute to Edward Thomas's memory.

The following warm tribute to his memory from one who knew him will no doubt be read with interest: -

Edward Thomas, the distinguished author, who fell in battle on Easter Monday, while regulating the fire of his battery from an advanced post, as Observing Officer of Artillery, had many close connections with Swindon. He was the eldest son of Mr. Philip Thomas, L.S.O, well know to a past generation of Swindonians as a pupil-teacher at the Great Western School in the time of Mr. Braid. The grandmother of Edward Thomas was living in Swindon during his boyhood and youth, and he was in the habit of spending his holidays with her. This brought him into the country Richard Jefferies, a writer after his own heart, whose biographer he became, and, in the opinion of good judges, his successor, as a man with a genius for describing and interpreting the life of English fields and woods. These had from childhood, been a delight to him, as they happily are to most children. But with him there was keen power of observation, intense feeling, and a great gift for expressing these in beautiful words. He was an author in his teens, a work of his having pleased the publisher, Blackwood, who issued it under the title of "The Woodland Life". It contained a number of nature Studies, together with a Year's Diary of the Field and Woods, written in 1895, when the author was seventeen years old. In the Easter of that year he walked from his home in London to his holiday place in Swindon, by way of Hungerford and Marlborough.

The first notable book by Edward Thomas was the "Life of Richard Jefferies." This was hailed by "The Times" reviewer as a fine performance, and it has remained a standard work, now to be had in its cheap form. Later, he did the same thing for George Borrow, another famous open-air man, greatly admired by Thomas, who had written a sketch of him in the shape of an introduction to the "Everyman" edition of Borrow's " Bible in Spain," which roused the enthusiasm of the "small but fierce tribe of Borrovians".

All this time our author was tramping over Southern England and South Wales, and brought out a succession of books describing his observations, impressions and reflections, such as "Beautiful Wales," "The South Country," "The Heart of England," and "The Pursuit of Spring". A recent writer has said that he had a most passionate love of the English countryside …….,and this power had been nourished in the neighbourhood of Swindon along the canal side to Wootton Bassett, around Coate Reservoir, and elsewhere. Two of his articles in his first book were on "Lydiard Tregoze" and "A Wiltshire Molecatcher".

During this time he had solemnly dedicated himself to the literary life. He had been educated at the famous St Paul's School and won a scholarship to Lincoln College, Oxford.
Inducements were made to lead him into the Civil Services, or some other safe profession, but all these he put aside, being determined to live the life of a lover of Nature, and to sink or swim by the work of his pen.
In later years Mr. Lloyd George had Edward Thomas put on the staff at a comfortable salary. Much against his will he tried desk-work for about a week, and then threw it up, along with the nice income, and went back to the precarious livelihood of literature.
As well as indulging his love of natural scenery and country life, Edward Thomas became deeply versed in the literature of England, and held high positions as critic and reviewer. In this capacity he wrote in several of the leading periodicals, and published volumes on Walter Pater, Maeterlinck, and Swinburne. One novel he also wrote, "The Happy-go-lucky-Morgan (sic)," a tale of a Welsh family, who made a home in London, as well as in Wales.

His last book, written just before he entered the Army was "Life of Marlborough". The works that best expressed his own mind and heart were three slight volumes of essays, "Roseacre Papers," "Light and Twilight", and "Rest and Unrest". These won the approval of some of the best judges of literature, for their beautiful turns of thought and language. One of his by-pieces just before enlistment was the putting together of a collection of patriotic prose and verse, taken from the classics of patriotic English literature, under the title of " This England." In the preface he says he wished "to make a book as full of English character and country as an egg is of meat. If I have reminded others as I did myself continually of some of the echoes

called up by the name of England, I am satisfied." A famous critic said it was the best thing of its kind ever done.

He joined the Artists' Rifles O.T.C with a view to getting a Commission. Here he soon excelled in military map-work, and was requested to stay on as Instructor. This he did for some time, but after great losses a year or so ago in the ranks of the officers he felt he must get to the front. He became a cadet of the R.G.A., and in the course of training, again saw his beloved Wiltshire at Trowbridge and one or two other places.
After joining the Army his spirit seemed to become more intense and sought expression in poetry, and only a few days before his death his first poems were given to the world under the name of "Edward Eastaway", in a Poetry Annual published by Constable. He had just time to read the reviews in "The Times Literary Supplement", and "The New Statesman" which hailed him as a genuine poet, with the truth in him, and a real gift of the imagination. Two posthumous works remain to be published, "A Literary Pilgrimage", and his last legacy, a volume of poems.
Swiftly comes the end. Easter Monday found him in the forefront of a famous battle, and the man who had so often shown his passionate love of England by his pen, now revealed it by giving up his life, facing her deadly enemy, who longs to destroy all the beauty, all the nobleness for which the name of England stands.
He was not the first man of literary fame thus to fall. His friend, Rupert Brooke was before him. To these men of high sensitivity it is given to know in higher degree than to others the lovely things that are implied in the name of England, and no wonder they are eager, like many thousands not so gifted to give up their lives in her defence.
These sacrifices will not have been made in vain; they will secure the safety, the honour and the high spirit of England to be carried on for generations and centuries yet to come, for the enrichment and ennoblement of the world, and of humanity.

Swindon Examiner Saturday April 28 1917
Transcribed by Julia Maxted, with thanks to Richard Knowles of Rickaro Books, Wakefield

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A Sense of History

I enjoyed every aspect of Richard Emeny's (R.E) book, 'Edward Thomas: A Life in Pictures' immensely but the one aspect that particularly appeals is the way in which the author's own sense of history reveals Edward Thomas's sense of history. In both cases it is not history only in a bookish, academic way, although that is present. (Edward studied history at Oxford and wrote a book on Marlborough) but much more than that. The author shows that Edward Thomas had an imaginative view of history that understood how the psychology of the past creates the attitudes of later ages. This is seen most vividly in R.E.'s reference to the letter Edward, after staying with relatives in Wales wrote to his Oxford tutor, Owen Edwards:

'Already, this air, that seems to contain something essential to me, in spite of my accidental cockney nativity has done one good...' adding that 'The blood of conquered and conquerors is in our veins, and it flushes the cheek at sight of the west.'

And there were the visits to his grandmother in Swindon and his exploration of the Marlborough Downs 'littered with sarsen stones, ancient trackways such as The Ridgeway, deserted settlements and prehistoric earthworks.' R.E. states in a striking phrase that 'this was paradise to a boy already in thrall to the past.' R.E. shows how he applied his historian's eye to every hedgerow, to changes in rural places he cherished and the people whose biographies

he wrote. This sense of history helped E.T. to understand the change from the rural to the industrial. For Edward, history was also a way of understanding himself, of where he had come from. In his ramblings on the Downs, he had absorbed the long view of history and it was this, R.E. maintains that also gave him a detachment from contemporary politics.
Richard Emeny also shows how Edward's sense of history owes so much to his 'phenomenal knowledge' of Literature, especially the Romantics and Wordsworth in particular from whom he understood the psychological shift from rural to urban. The thoughts and most importantly the feelings of an age are best absorbed and understood through contemporary literature.

There was also the walking. R.E. makes the point that the Romantics had been the first generation who had no need to walk. They walked for pleasure, as a means of stimulating discussion. When E.T. walked the Icknield Way, he knew the earth beneath his feet and learned from the people of all classes he met as he shook off the social restraints of Victorian England. It was, moreover, this historical understanding that fed into his strand of patriotism which R.E. explains in an utterly convincing way.

Edward Thomas did not espouse Rupert Brooke's Public School kind of patriotism of *'dulce et decorum est pro patria mori'*. This line from Horace about being sweet and fitting to die for one's country was bone of the bone to public school boys steeped in the Classics which dominated their education at the time. Their mindset was the Roman way of doing one's duty and seeking honour and glory. E.T. could not respond to the outbreak of war with fervour. At the same time he could not have been further from the jingoism whipped up by the newspapers. ('This is no case of petty right or wrong'). His patriotism stemmed from a knowledge of the landscape and people of England. (In the First World War it was always England that was spoken of; in the Second, it was Britain.) As the 1914 war went on, however, E.T. could not ignore events such as the death of Rupert Brooke and the sinking of the Lusitania. This and the feeling of guilt that others were dying for him as well as his love of the countryside he knew that led him to pick up a handful earth and say that it was for this he had enlisted.

R.E. has at various points given the wider background of the world's cultural developments. I loved reading that in 1913, Gropius published 'The Development of Modern Industrial Architecture, Picasso was arrested on suspicion of stealing the 'Mona Lisa' and that Louis Armstrong a twelve year old celebrated the New Year by shooting a revolver in the air and was also arrested, that the first Aldi store was opened in Essen, Freud was practising in Vienna and Adolf Hitler was painting pretty watercolours of famous buildings'. Throughout R.E.'s knowledge of history puts E.T.'s life in focus. The book is a delight for other reasons too: the accounts of friendships and family, not to mention, as the title of the book indicates, the wealth of pictures, of photographs, maps and letters. E.T. may have been detached from the modernist movements of the time but R.E. has shown how he ploughed his furrow and in doing so was on the side of the long view of history in that today in an age of climate change, nothing can be more pressing than an understanding of one's environment.

Mary MacGregor

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Stephen Reynolds

There is a section in my book, *Edward Thomas, A Life in Pictures*, about Thomas's friends. I included this because friends and friendship were of the utmost importance to him. Constraints of space meant that some lesser-known friends had to be omitted. Stephen Reynolds was such a one. Their association lasted for only five or six years, but was of importance to both men.

Reynolds was born in Devizes, Wiltshire, in 1881, where his father owned The Bear Inn, the principal hotel in the town, where the Reynolds family had been businessmen for several generations. A previous owner of The Bear was Thomas Lawrence, father of Sir Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy. Thus the inn nursed two artistic talents, albeit a century apart. Wiltshire was to be an important link between Reynolds and Thomas.
Reynolds' father took part in local politics and public life generally; much respected he tended to the flamboyant and was notably charming. The family were church going and strong Protestants. Reynolds became disenchanted with his father and much of his family, regarding them as too comfortable and middle class. His feelings for his father echoed those of Thomas for his own father.

A tragedy from which Reynolds never completely recovered, was the death of his mother in 1891. His father subsequently married again, and fortunately his stepmother got on well with the ten year old Stephen: they had a happy relationship, although perhaps the most important long term effect on him was that she owned a holiday home in Sidmouth, Devon, where the family spent much of the summer.

Two years after his mother's death, Reynolds was sent to Bloxham School as a boarder. Bloxham was a relatively new and spartan establishment based on a strong Protestant ethos. Despite complaining about it, Reynolds ended as Head Boy and corresponded with the Headmaster after he left. From Bloxham he went to Manchester University where he read chemistry. It was while there that he had a life-changing moment when a stop gap Head of English was appointed: Thomas Seccombe. Subsequently a friend of Thomas and a power in English letters, he was so inspirational and friendly that Reynolds decided to become a writer. Seccombe wrote an obituary of Thomas, which appeared as a letter in The Times.
Seccombe introduced Reynolds to Edward Garnett, and both men helped and encouraged him, but like most young, unknown writers he suffered much frustration, despite having articles published in the same journals in which Thomas's work appeared. In 1904 he suffered a 'nervous breakdown', brought on partly because of literary disappointments, and partly because of family difficulties, particularly hostilities with his father. A great walker in and around Wiltshire, especially over Thomas's beloved downs, he walked to Sidmouth, where it was thought the sea air would improve his health. In fact he spent much of his time in a seafront shelter, gazing out to sea, and it was here that Bob Wooley, an inshore fisherman, found him, recognised him as a man in trouble, took pity on him and invited him to his home in Bedford Square, a rather slummy area subsequently demolished and replaced by undistinguished flats and a car park. Here he found a poor, warm, friendly, generous, hard-working family, somewhat chaotic, noisy and united. They welcomed him, fed him and offered him a room which he took. In 1904 Reynolds found that as the News of the World later claimed, all life was there in the Square. He had found his cure not from fresh air, but from kind fisher people. He also saw for the first time how the lives of the poor were really lived: would the catch today be good, if not where would money to feed the children come from; would there be an accident at sea; would bad weather prevent any fishing at all; would the family be able to pay the rent and other bills?

Reynolds identified finance, or its unavailability, and safety as the two major concerns of the fishing community. When the extraction of large amounts of shingle from the beach threatened the fishermen's ability to use their boats, he became a crusader on their behalf, using his education, background in local politics, albeit only in Devizes, and his strong aggressive streak to fight their corner. He lobbied politicians, civil servants and sympathetic gentry on the fishermen's behalf, and his increasing intimacy with the literary world meant that he could enlist their support too. Members of the Wooley family were brought to Parliament and gained John Brown, the Labour MP, as an ally, while Thomas, Garnett,, Masefield, W. H. Hudson were all taken to Sidmouth to see for themselves what he was talking about.

Reynolds met Thomas at the Mont Blanc Restaurant on 10th March 1907. He had been introduced to Garnett's weekly lunch sessions there some time earlier. Reynolds and Thomas struck up an immediate rapport and friendship: they shared anxieties about work and money, and they were both good walkers and talkers. Thomas's diary carries the laconic entry, 'Reynolds good company.' Within a week, on the 18th March Thomas stayed with Reynolds at his Devizes lodgings for three days, during which they spent much time walking over the downs, a landscape well known to both men of course, talking of shared interests. Over the following three or four years, Thomas stayed on several occasions and there was a constant correspondence between the two. Letters from Reynolds to Thomas were burnt in the Steep bonfire of 1916, while those of Thomas to Reynolds mouldered in an attic until the 1930s when they either disintegrated or were disposed of- a considerable loss.

In October of that year Thomas decided he could not write a cheerful 'back to the land' book for Grant Richards. In a letter to the publisher he recommended Reynolds instead:
"I have lately seen a good deal of a man who would do very well the book you suggested to me a few months ago. As a writer he has done reviewing…….he did the country books for the Daily Mail supplement : and he has written fiction by which (it is still in M/S) he is likely to make a very great hit in a year or so- so Joseph Conrad and several critics think. Personally I think he is brilliant……He is a countryman himself and has worked on a farm and is a fisherman. But he knows London, Paris and Manchester, and he is an Honours Man in science." (8th December 1907, Bodleian Library).
Unfortunately, it did not convince Grant Richards, but it shows Thomas's belief in Reynolds' ability, his generosity and the closeness between men forged in a few months. That year Reynolds spent Christmas with Joseph Conrad in Kent and was remembered with affection by Conrad's son, Boris.

It seemed obvious that a literary career was almost inevitable for Reynolds thanks to his talents and the assistance and enthusiasm of the Mont Blanc group. Putting his second full length book first, *The Holy Mountain* was published in 1909. It is a satire on what might be called the Devizes Establishment, including his own family. It is frequently bitter, as he scrapes the open wounds of local politics, petty squabbles and middle class conventions and pretensions. It did not help his popularity in the town, and it is not successful as a novel. At times the bitterness is overwhelming, and becomes more extreme when he compared the easy, cosy, middle class of a prosperous market town with the poverty and hardship of the fishermen of South Devon. He was regarded in the town as something of a wastrel, and not a particularly bright ornament to the respected Reynolds family. The book marked his farewell to Devizes.

It is Reynolds' first book however, for which he deserves to be remembered. *A Poor Man's House* was published in 1908, and although a novel, it is a factual account of life in the Wooley family with little more than the names disguised. The book was a great success, and in practical terms its fame enabled Reynolds to work and lobby harder for the fishermen who had befriended him when he was at his lowest ebb. It is a fine first hand account, very uncommon at the time, of working class life without either sentiment or exaggeration, and a fascinating and rewarding read.

Reynolds wrote four more books, but by 1912 the attractions and importance of literature seemed less when compared with the lives and struggles of fishermen. He gradually divorced himself from the literary coterie of Mont Blanc. It is likely he had his last lunch there with Thomas in September 1912. He loosened ties with literary friends, believing their lives and work to be artificial and unreal when compared with the reality and hardship of poor fishermen and their families. Ford Madox Hueffer, with whom Reynolds had worked on *The English Review* wrote unsympathetically; "Owing apparently to some freak of his character, or to some special malaise, Mr. Reynolds seems to have abandoned suddenly his contacts

with what he calls contemptuously 'The Cultured Classes' and to have taken up his quarters in the cottage of a Devonshire fisherman." After more than a century, one can still hear the sniff of elegant disapproval. The only member of the Mont Blanc group Reynolds continued to see and count as a close friend was W. H. Hudson, whom he felt was closer to him in his views of the working class, and like him had relevant personal experience.

Thomas and Reynolds had much in common: hostility to their fathers has already been mentioned. They also shared a detestation of London and suffered form nervous illnesses of a depressive nature. Wiltshire and Richard Jefferies they both loved, walking in that county, especially over the Downs, being of great importance to them and therapeutic. They had discovered Jefferies separately, but held the same admiration for his work. By contrast Reynolds was a far more aggressive personality, a conspicuous fighter and an effective lobbyist: observation of Devizes local politics had shown him how to pull the levers of influence and power. Unlike Thomas he was homosexual. The greatest weakness in his work is lack of creative imagination: his books are always close to factual matters and their characterisation is poor.

Both men were dismissive of what might be called middle class values. Thomas's pity for city clerks in several of his books, some of the characters in 'The Happy-Go-Lucky-Morgans' for instance was his way of expressing this. Reynolds was blunter: he opposed state elementary education as of poor quality, and merely teaching working class children to read and write so that they could become clerks- wage slaves. He was not a socialist, but wanted to see the working class helped economically, then develop in their own way rather than become embryonic middle class. The Wooleys had taught him the value of their culture. He found middle class ways empty, characterless and bland, while working class life was vibrant and energetic. He wrote that political parties did not understand that life, and that the Labour Party was especially bad in that respect, as it had taken on middle class trappings. In a speech he said, "Social reform, the vote-catching thing it is, is the last and most dangerous of the cants ….. I would try to right all of what I call economic disabilities ….. but the social reform stuff, it penalises the poor by taking away from them the strength they have and forcing upon them useless imitations of middle class virtues in return ….. it is what I mean by saying that economically I am socialistic, and socially I am high Tory. That's not it but it's enough." It was this stance that caused a final breach with Garnett, a convinced socialist, but Reynolds' interests had already departed from the literary world. "They had a big catch while I was away, I ought to have been there," he wrote while Assistant Editor of the English Review.

Thomas was not a political animal and hardly ever expressed views about social affairs, but in his pleasure and admiration for the ways and values of the ordinary countryman, which he saw being overcome by modernity, industrialisation and education, as well as a drift from rural areas caused by agricultural decline, he was largely of the same mind as Reynolds. He too wanted to see economic alleviation of working class lives, but did not want its way of life destroyed in consequence. "It's no good offering me freedom from destitution if, as a condition, I must buckle under to a scheme of industrial conscription ….. The greatest tyranny to beware of in the next era is that of the intellectual ordering other people's lives- they are so well intentioned and so cruel." There is something very modern in Reynolds' view. Reynolds was appointed to a Board of Trade Inquiry into fisheries in 1912, and subsequently became the Resident Inspector of Fisheries for the South-West Region, living in Sidmouth among the Wooley family. In these capacities he worked tirelessly in the cause of the fishing community and industry. He died of Spanish Flu a century ago in 1919. He is now largely forgotten as a writer, and for his work in the fishing industry, although that work brought many improvements to the trade and way of life. However, the firm of Wooley and Reynolds still operates in Sidmouth where he is buried, and where in 1980, Bob Wooley's granddaughter unveiled a plaque to his memory on Hope Cottage his permanent home there.

Richard Emeny

A Poor Man's House was republished by Halsgrove in 2001(ISBN 1 841114 125 9. This article is a highly compressed version of Reynolds' life, and for anyone interested there is an excellent biography of him, *Fisherman' Friend* by Christopher Scoble, also published by Halsgrove in 2000. (ISBN 1 84114 092 9)

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England and Other Women: A review of *Under Storm's Wing* by Helen Thomas and Myfanwy Thomas (Carcanet, 318 pp, £14.95, February 1988, ISBN 0 85635 733 2)

Edna Longley

The structural ironies of Edward Thomas's life still condition his reputation. Just as he made a late poetic start, so criticism has been slow to gather momentum. Even the recent spate of studies – by Michael Kirkham, Stan Smith, and the contributors to Jonathan Barker's *Art of Edward Thomas* – seems more fortuitous than co-ordinated. Thomas, as Robert Frost reminded him, 'knew the worth of [his] bays'. However, it is unwise to die in war when a hegemonic project like Modernism is getting under way. Frost's reputation survived because, feigning simplicity, he appealed to the people, to readers, over the head of 'the Pound-Eliot-Richards gang'. Frost initially marketed Thomas as well as himself in the US ('I hadn't a plan for the future that didn't include him'): but this return for Thomas's influential promotion of *North of Boston* lapsed after the latter's death.

The separation of Thomas and Frost along an Anglo-American dotted line distorts perspectives on early 20th-century poetry. A history so specific to poetry has been additionally marginalised by the Modernist convergence of literary modes. Thus Frost, and Thomas, can be omitted from poetry courses in American universities where Modernist orthodoxy prevails. Their combined critical as well as creative forces might dent this orthodoxy. Thomas's review of *Exultations* (1909), no snap judgment, anticipated the direction of Pound's career: 'both in personal and detached poems he is, as a rule, so pestered with possible ways of saying a thing that at present we must be content to pronounce his condition still interesting – perhaps promising – certainly distressing. If he is not careful he will take to meaning what he says instead of saying what he means.' As if in revenge, the hard-faced men who have done well out of Modernism either ignore Thomas's poetry or patronise some fancied resemblance to Imagism – a movement he shrewdly criticised. The tendency to exclude Thomas from general discussion of modern poetry (panoptic views favour Modernism) not only severs his vital tie with Frost, but obscures his different affiliations to Yeats and Hardy. A few essays in *The Art of Edward Thomas* open out the issues, but a whiff of poet's corner lingers on. *Pace* Peter Levi, it is not quite enough to celebrate Thomas as 'certainly genuine, authentic, a true poet'.

Under Storm's Wing is a welcome reprint of Helen Thomas's *As it was* and *World without End*, first published in 1926 and 1931. It also contains a selection from further reminiscences by Helen and her daughter Myfanwy, and six letters from Frost to Thomas. Helen Thomas's vivid recall has led many, myself included, to her husband's poetry. But being essentially Helen's story, or side of the story, her memoirs again sequester the Thomas shrine or can encourage merely sentimental pilgrimage. In fact, she records Edward's life as split, psychologically and physically, between home and absence. Besides 'dark days when his brooding melancholy shut me out in a lonely exile', there were periods during which he

sought work from London editors and publishers, wrote or researched on his own, kept in touch with literary friends. The split was far from absolute, and Thomas's behaviour had its origins in what Professor R. George Thomas terms the 'two demands he made upon his wife and himself: his ideal wish to unite workplace and family home, and his fanatical dedication to the perfection of his craft' (*Edward Thomas: A Portrait*). Nevertheless, in 1908 Helen wrote angrily:

You go away here and there, on work and pleasure, meeting people of all kinds ... There are huge slices of your life that I never know of, I am quite shut out of ... Some who know you are married guess that as I never appear I'm in my true place the HOME. But now these people knew me before they ever saw you ... They'd like to see me again, I to see them, and be seen with you, your wife, not only your nurse, housekeeper etc heard of in a dim way.

(Incidentally, *World without End* defends 'women's work in the home' against 'a lot of the clap-trap of feminism'.) This angry note is muted or transmuted in the memoirs. Helen admits a recurrent jealous sense of inferiority and exclusion, but it feeds her reclamation of Edward for home and for a 'love' which was 'always the firm ground on which we stood secure and that no storm ever swept away'. *Under Storm's Wing* should be read alongside Thomas's insecure *Letters to Gordon Bottomley* – just as his poetry requires its full literary-historical context.

Last year the Thomas marriage suffered trial by *LRB* letter-page. John Pikoulis accused Jonathan Barker of editorially fudging his contentions that 'the breach between [Helen] and Edward was final,' and that he effectively deserted her for the muse of war. Pikoulis rested his case on an assertion by Lawrance Thompson, Frost's biographer: 'in the spring of 1913 Thomas became obsessed with the notion that he should divorce his wife.' Barker and Peter Hill, citing Thompson's full text and Thomas's wartime letters, more convincingly argued that Thomas equally wished to preserve his marriage, and that self-blame (as ever) dominated his state of mind. Edward Thomas's obsessions were rarely monorail: they exhausted all the possibilities and exhausted him. Frost conceived 'The Road Not Taken' as a satire on his friend's scrupulosity about the ramifications of choice. Also, a pattern of reconciliation and advance on clearer terms seems to have followed any 1913 crisis, as it did the 1908 crisis. Yet Pikoulis, who refers to 'the romanticising, self-deluding (though at the same time powerfully persuasive) views of *As it was* and *World without End*', needs further answer. He is right, I think, to insist that 'No one so much as you' addresses Helen:

My eyes scarce dare meet you
Lest they should prove
I but respond to you
And do not love ...
For I at most accept
Your love, regretting
That is all: I have kept
Only a fretting
That I could not return
All that you gave
And could not ever burn
With the love you have ...

The word 'respond' connects the poem with Helen. Eighteen days before (24 January 1916) Thomas had written à propos 'The clouds that are so light':

Oh, you needn't think of another lady. There would have to be 2 to make a love affair and I am only one. Nobody but you would ever be likely to respond as I wished. I don't like to think anybody but I could respond to you. If you turned to anybody else I should come to an end immediately.

The poem seems to recycle and redirect the letter's phrasing. I formerly accepted Professor Thomas's assurance, as he accepted Helen's, that 'No one so much as you' concerns Thomas's mother. In the *Collected Poems* Professor Thomas gives it the title 'M.E.T.' to match 'P.H.T.', a hate-poem to Thomas's father. I notice, however, that he neither attributes nor mentions the poem in *Edward Thomas*: *A Portrait*. And Helen Thomas herself stresses the lifelong bond between Edward and his mother. Nevertheless, 'No one so much as you' need not be a literal agenda:

Till sometimes it did seem
Better it were
Never to see you more
Than linger here
With only gratitude
Instead of love –
A pine in solitude
Cradling a dove.

Thomas keeps a complex psychological scenario in dramatic suspension by taking all the syntactical roads, and by finally turning the incongruous and ambiguous into the emblematic. Nor does Thomas's poetic psychodrama only articulate present emotion: it draws on the deep strata of his whole experience. 'No one so much as you' belongs to a sequence of poems about loving, not loving, and poetry: 'The clouds ...', 'P.H.T.', 'These things that poets said', 'The Unknown', 'Celandine'. It was immediately followed by 'The Unknown', a Muse-poem:

She is to be kissed
Only perhaps by me;
She may be seeking
Me and no other: she
May not exist.

Thomas's dialectic swings between flawed relationship with a fully existing woman, and the distracting ideal who 'lures a poet'; between domestic compromise and the promiscuous imagination.

Thomas's prose features some disconcertingly ideal 'maidens' (one re-surfaces in 'Celandine'), with 'pale glorious faces' or 'the power to wield universal harmonies'. In *Feminine Influence on the Poets* he expounds his Romantic understanding of the Muse: 'the figure of a woman is introduced unwittingly as a symbol of they know not what, perhaps only of desire.' But desire sometimes look flesh. The quarrel in 1908 concerned a 17-year-old girl over whom Thomas rhapsodised to Gordon Bottomley: 'two long plaits of brown hair and the richest grey eyes ... I liked her for her perfect wild youthfulness and remoteness from myself.' But he made Helen his confidante too, and she corresponded with the girl partly as a pre-emptive strike, partly out of profounder alarm. She asked Edward: 'Is it to be the friendship of a middle-aged man, a man of letters etc etc, and of a simple schoolgirl, the sort of idyllic affair that your biographers will dote on – a passionless, innocent, intimate, uncleish, loverish affair ... Or is she meant to slip unconsciously into something more?' *World without End* covers the episode less frankly, as it does Helen's similar intervention in Edward's budding relationship with Eleanor Farjeon: '"Kiss Eleanor too," I say. And he kisses her, and she him. And we return to the house.' Of which Frost said caustically: 'She pretends to think that is large and lovely but I happen to know it was a dose she was giving him and rubbing in.' Overall we get an impression of Helen fighting off jealousy, Edward finding inspiration in occasional lusts and fancies, and a controlling marital collusion.

Frost thought that Helen's writings over-extended her control: 'I wondered if she wasn't in danger of making E.T. look ridiculous in the innocence she credited him with. Mightn't men laugh a manly laugh?' Myfanwy Thomas's preface to *Under Storm's Wing* questions 'such a conventional notion of manliness'. But in speaking up for Thomas the man's man, Frost speaks as Helen's rival and lodges his own claim. Even his beautiful letter to her after Edward's death employs the language of disputed possession: 'I know he has done this all for you: he is all yours. But you must let me cry my cry for him as if he were *almost* all mine too.' Helen's paragraph on Frost gives him full credit, yet its brevity implies an area beyond her control: 'He believed in Edward and loved him, understanding, as no other man had ever understood, his strange, complex temperament ... There began during that holiday [at Ledington in August 1914] a kind of spiritual and intellectual fulfilment.' Surely she accents 'man'. In a later recollection of the holiday she acknowledges: 'I never became close to Robert as Edward was. To Edward he was an inspiration.'

Besides the coincidence between Frost's and Thomas's ideas about speech and poetry, there was the match between two 'complex temperaments' aggravated by difficult marriages. Thus they brought to its highest pitch the potential intensity of all poets' friendships. Frost's poem 'Iris by Night – The Malverns' evokes 'elected friends' encircled by a rainbow; Thomas's parallel tribute to Ledington, 'The sun used to shine while we two walked', is, unhappily for Helen, his most fulfilled and affirmative 'love poem'. The letters from Frost in *Under Storm's Wing* suggest once again the urgent creative reciprocity which survives in their work: 'I have reached a point this evening where no letter to or from you will take the place of seeing you.' 'My whole nature simply leaps at times to cross the ocean to see you for one good talk.'

The letters also confirm that Frost and poetry alone gave Thomas much to live for:
I don't want you to die (I confess I wanted you to face the possibility of death). I want you to live to come over here and begin all the life we had in [England] ... If you can be more useful living than dying I don't see that you have to go behind that. Don't be run away with by your nonsense.

Yet here Frost too recognises a rival – the human and artistic imperative which Louis MacNeice defined during the Second World War: 'Death is the opposite of decay: a stimulus, a necessary horizon.' Thomas at the Front 'doubted if anybody here thinks less of home than I do and yet ... loves it more'. He did not have to go to war, nor to its most dangerous zone. Yet given the former, the 'culmination of a long series of moods and thoughts', the latter follows.

A sonnet written at the time of his enlistment recounts a dream in which fascination with 'a strange stream' divides him from Frost:

So by the roar and hiss
And by the mighty motion of the abyss
I was bemused, that I forgot my friend
And neither saw nor sought him till the end.
When I awoke from waters unto men
Saying: 'I shall be here some day again.'

Thomas's 'nonsense' is not Pikoulis's 'drift to the end' and 'grim recoil from people', although both positions figure in his psychodrama. The angled syntax of 'Rain' rebounds towards imperfect and disappointing life:

Like me who have no love which this wild rain
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be for what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Thomas's poetry encompasses not only 'the love of death' but the fear and knowledge of it. And his 'bemusement' by the abyss has a philosophical as well as a psychological dimension. 'The Green Roads', like 'Old Man', looks down a long vista ultimately governed by time and natural forces. The metrical contrast within each couplet, and the different stations of old man, child, goose feathers and thrush-poet, set up a counterpoint between necessity and room for manoeuvre:

The oak saw the ages pass in the forest:
They were a host, but their memories are lost,
For the tree is dead: all things forget the forest
Excepting perhaps me, when now I see
The old man, the child, the goose feathers at the edge of the forest,
And hear all day long the thrush repeat his song.

His 'long series of moods and thoughts' enabled Thomas to imagine the death of England as well as personal and universal death. It is a sign of the times, perhaps a hopeful one,that Thomas's England is coming under scrutiny. Stan Smith, in 'Unnatural Relations' (*Poetry Review*, Vol. 76, No 1/2, June 1986), emphasises the 'countervailing' influences of his Welshness, comparative radicalism, and perception that England is a subjective 'system of vast circumferences circling round the minute neighbouring points of home'. Nevertheless, he feels that Thomas has given some hostages to the propagandist 'discourse of Englishness' (as when Kenneth Baker, introducing his anthology of *English History in Verse*, pronounces that 'the two glories of this country are the English landscape and English literature'). Robert Wells's essay 'Edward Thomas and England' (in *The Art of Edward Thomas*) is less worried about Thomas mistaking an ideological construct for 'nature and inevitability' than about his provincialism and 'insularity': 'Thomas's sense of English tradition is weighed against the intellectual and cosmopolitan ... there is a vein of wilful insularity in his work which makes the cult that has grown up around him very suspect.' To simplify: Thomas's England either eases the path of multi-national capital, or puts up tariff-barriers against the multi-national poem. His attitude to the Bedales intelligentsia, as described by Helen, may be relevant: 'Edward frankly did not like them, and to them he was an enigma – a solitary wandering creature ... who had no political beliefs or social theories, and who was not inspired by the school and its ideals.'

Hence perhaps the originality of his cultural thinking. Thomas's England pioneers the break-up of Britain that Smith, after Tom Nairn, desiderates. It is devolutionary, regional, local, ecological: a challenge to 'the word Imperialism'. When he declined to aim *This England*, his wartime anthology, 'at what a committee from Great Britain and Ireland might call complete', he shrank rather than aggrandised England (Baker's forthcoming anthology can hardly be said to follow his example). Thomas was impressed by the internal self-definition of the Irish Literary Revival, and rejected 'Rule Britannia' (he called Britannia 'a frigid personification') in favour of 'Land of my Fathers': 'exulting without self-glorification or any other form of brutality', it 'might well be the national anthem of any nation that knows, and would not rashly destroy, the bonds distinguishing it from the rest of the world without isolating it'. Nor does Thomas, his reading as wide as Pound's, replace an abstract imperialism with an abstract internationalism. In his poetry England denotes, and is denoted by, specificity: 'minute neighbouring points', exact alignments of word and thing. A poem or a community cannot know everything. It needs to know itself. Helen Thomas's style occasionally sweetens Thomas's England, or reproduces the England of his prose, just as the annual cultic walk from Steep to Selborne takes only one of his roads. But his poetry of the road to France is overwhelmingly nomadic, metamorphic, invaded by the wind and rain of change. (For all the talk of 'history', few poets have Thomas's grasp of historical process.) Rather than England as Nature, we get wild Nature as England: 'On the prone roof and walls the nettle reigns.' *World without End* unbearably breaks off at Edward Thomas's final absence:

'nothing but the mist and the snow and the silence of death.' Throughout his poetry absence dissolves home, the unknown the known. He pushes England and the English language towards new interior frontiers: 'Only an avenue, dark, nameless, without end'.

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My visit to the Berg Collection, New York Public Library

Edward Thomas's 1914 book, *In Pursuit of Spring*, works at the level of a travelogue but is more than that. The idea of Winter's retreat and seeking signs of the emerging Spring created a useful structure within which he could embed impressions and observations of season and weather, landscape and its natural and human components and a variety of locations. The book is also an extended metaphor for the universal quest for connection and meaning, expressing his abiding attunement to seasonal change and carrying within it a search for personal identification with the world about him. It holds discursive reflections on admired writers and practical matters like choice of pipes and wet weather gear. Rich not only in reflections and moods, it is crammed with facts, routes, names, vistas, history and descriptions of people and places.

I have twice driven along the book's route, with my son Edward cycling it. I have revisited locations along its length to create artwork and have been working on a series of over 20 walks and short drives to take the reader out of the armchair and into 'his' territory.

I had initially assumed the book's journey was a literal write-up of a March east-to-west cycle ride in 1913. I knew Thomas had been on material-gathering cycling expeditions with his brother Julian, his friend Jesse Berridge and his son Mervyn; many letters make reference to these. I was curious as to what he had noted in his fieldwork books and what he had used to pull the narrative together. Within the text, pausing on the old steps above Tellisford packhorse bridge, he comments ambivalently on the use of workbooks, a practice he had followed since his teenage years. To see these very workbooks meant a journey to the Berg Collection in New York's Public Library.

I visited its Stephen A. Schwarzman branch on 476 Fifth Avenue over four weeks in Spring. (Between hours, I used the lending library and was pleased, when lined up to access my latest borrowing, to see, displayed in a prominent position, front cover forward, Matthew Hollis's *Now All Roads Lead to France*.) The NYPL website indicates a rich array of holdings, including a Gutenberg Bible, the first to come to America, the first four Shakespeare Folios and the earliest printings of the Declaration of Independence. And all that is just for starters.

The Berg Collection is but one of its specialist holdings, the website of which says it *contains some 35,000 printed volumes, pamphlets, and broadsides, and 2,000 linear feet of literary archives and manuscripts, representing the work of more than 400 authors.* It was established in 1940 by the prodigiously wealthy Henry W. Berg (1858–1938) and his brother Albert A. Berg (1872–1950), lovers of English and American literature. It has Caxton's 1480 edition of the *Chronicles of England* as well as one of the world's best manuscript collections. Besides a mouth-watering list of American writers, its published 'short list' of English and Irish writers includes, among others, Tennyson, Thackeray, Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Hardy,

Shaw, Conrad, Kipling, and poets Yeats, Masefield, Sassoon, Brooke, Rosenberg and Graves as well as *the world's largest manuscript holdings of Virginia Woolf and W. H. Auden*. The website list does not even include Edward Thomas.

It is of interest as to how the Berg gained the Thomas material. Carolyn Vega, the collection's curator, says, "The Library acquired the 80 holograph notebooks that comprise the "Field Notes" on August 31, 1963 from the dealer G. F. Sims of Hurst, Reading, Berkshire. The acquisition was made by John D. Gordan, the first Berg Curator. This was not the Berg's first Thomas acquisition. We seem to have begun acquiring Thomas from Sims in 1960. A 1960 Sims catalogue, from which we acquired a good deal of poetry and prose manuscripts… formed the core of the first Thomas acquisition. A scan of "New in the Berg Collection, 1959-1961" from the New York Public Library Bulletin (vol. 68, no. 2, February 1964) … describes the formation and earliest Thomas acquisitions (from 1960).
Unfortunately, I was not able to locate a 1963 Sims catalogue listing the Field Notes, but it might be out there somewhere.

My aim, then, was to examine Edward Thomas's fieldwork books, particularly for material relating to *In Pursuit of Spring*.

Seated in the panelled Berg Collection study room – with Dicken's desk, chair and table lamp in the corner – I was told that the main workbooks were in a set of eighty. The librarians, curator Carolyn Vega and assistant Lyndsi Barnes, were never-failing in their attentiveness and helpfulness. However, on my arrival they were unable to indicate which workbooks contained the information I was seeking. So by the end of my four weeks, I had constructed a schedule of these 80 workbooks – and three more bundles with a total of 23 workbooks – with each identified by Thomas's own dates and labelled contents. A copy now resides at the Berg for the reference of future students.

The workbooks date from 1894 to 1915. They vary in size – the earlier ones being hardbacked and almost 23cm square. Among the set of 80, for example, is FWB 46 7 x 14 cm. blue-marbled covers, Walker's Back Loop memorandum book. Others were 10 x 16 cm, from JW & Co of London, a flip-over journalist-style 'Memorandum Tablet of 50 leaves of ruled paper, for pen or pencil, Each leaf can be removed without loosening the others'. FWB 44 (1910) is an 8 x 13 cm red stiff-covered, sewn booklet of 37 pages folded into 74.

Thomas's handwriting varies greatly. Those from his school and university days are written in ink with the impeccable and sometimes exquisite rounded script taught in school. As he moves into his life as a reviewer and writer, his pace and the demands on his time increase and his writing is more hurried, sometimes in pen (usually clearer) but most often in pencil and varying in legibility. Frequently he would work through a book and, coming to the end, flip it round and work on the reverse of the previous pages. Many were fragile and all required supporting with foam mounts.
Each page has usually between 10 and 20 lines, with about six words per line. The text is swiftly punctuated with commas and full stops flying ahead; the cross-line of 't's swoop over to connecting points in the next word creating a sense of flow and speed. He uses contractions such as 'w' for 'with', *anr* for 'another'. As with the Cardiff workbook – and right across time – there are flowers pressed between the pages, some leaving their own outline on his text.

The content of the workbooks from first to last follow the pattern that formed his first published book, the 1897 *The Woodland Life* – acute observation of the natural world, its changes and mood, weather and skies. The earliest (1894-5) is a diary of venturing out with his schoolfriend Hardy, bird nesting, skating, and his reading, speculating on his possible romantic chances. The following year he includes his first attempts at poetry, such as:

O Nature! Let me love thee more:

For friendship fail
And life is frail
I love, – I hate: but as of yore
I love thee – let me love thee more.

O Nature! wheresoe'er I turn
I find no heart
The counterpart
Of mine; though hearts of men to learn
Long strive I wheresoe'er I turn.

At the other end, the Berg's last Fieldwork Book, from 1915, is crammed with ideas and fleshing out of poems such as *Up in the Wind*, *The Sign-post* and *Old Man*.

Across the years in Kent and Hampshire he logs his observations, makes transcriptions of memorial epitaphs, notes weathercocks which please him, sketches field gates, horizon lines or house frontages, jots contact addresses of friends and those he is meeting in London. He eavesdrops conversations of Cockneys and countryfolk, includes the odd observation on Rags, the family dog (as at Salisbury Cathedral, May 1912: *A knight lying w feet just on back of dog who raises his head in slight resentment as Rags does*.). He notes the words of his children (*Bronwen asks seeing a dirty abject tramp 'Do tramps have belly buttons, Mother?' ---- navels* or (1905) *Asked what I did when all the rest had gone to bed supposed I only played with the books: asked what she wd do if left alone thus, supposed she wd do as daddy does + play with the books.*) He works from maps to track the Icknield Way, describes a walk with Lupton from Brighton to Steep, or records visits to Swansea, the Gower, Llanddeusaint, Minsmere and Laugharne. He makes memos of subjects for possible stories and records more personal thoughts: *I love Nature more than man. She has no ambiguity no lies no irony: she lets me think about myself she does not wish me to talk. I do not feel ever as I do with 10 friendly faces round a dinner table* (Summer 1908). In 1909: *Happiness is name given to wh. we pursue when we know not wh we pursue. There is no such thing it is the name of the chase not of the quarry*.

On his birthday in 1910 he records: *3rd day of sun, light S and S.W. wind, pale blue skies w fleets of clouds over at times + some threats – frost at nt – larks sing – jackdaws soar + float – grey Old Man is tipped w sage green at end of each dry curved stem – green woodpeckers shout long + loud how lovely at 8 the white fields – dark woods – little houses sending thr mist of pearly smoke slowly + lighted low above dark trees + white earth – all looks new born and fair*. In June of the same year he adds, *Whenever I hear the cuckoo buried in woods in a fine way alone I think how foolish is all this business with yet I shall spend all my life*.

There are few personal references to Helen or friends, or even to his cycling companions. The main focus is not so much as a diary (though he does record the changing weather over periods of time); it is more about noting the course of roads, settlements, houses and churches, seasons, bird life and song and flora… For example, FWB 36: *Flowers in fields at top of Mutton 1 viii 09 A tiny cranesbill – thyme – self heal – pimpernel – Bartia – a sort of hairy Milkwort – a few heartsease scorpion grass, hop trefoil – a small hawkweed – upright pink mallow, daisy, clovers on the Mutton – basil, thyme, centaury, cistus, self heal, big tufted knapweed, yellow wort, lotus, ragwort, vervain, agrimony, eyebright, St John's wort, harebell, yarrow.*

As for *In Pursuit of Spring*, FWB 62 (April to June 1913) holds his *Journey intentions* which he lists as

1. *My object – to find Spring – [?] this after a London day*
   hope of Spring founders in tempest at midnight
2. *Time chosen – other Easters – my luck in this*

No county good that has no element of wildness left NB. Merton etc

3. *London contrasted w country*
4. *Suburbs – exits fr London*
5. *"landscape, e.g. Haling Park + Cottage, elmslope, rdside chestnuts by Red Deer turn to Sanderstead – Haling Down along rd or old worn w ruts parallel + big chalk pit, [?] buildings*
6. *Pipes – on clay pipes – at Guildford*

Evidently, his intentions strengthened and modified as he compiled his text.

There are some entries which he uses in detail. For example, of Holybourne in Hampshire, he notes (FWB 58 covering 21.1.12 – 4.6.13): *Holybourne* (draws diagram of main road with adjoining road rectangle) *leading off underneath indicating pines, elms, Holy Rd ch. Manor Fm oast houses Ash hops Ch. tower shingles to left a sketch of the tower and steeple Stone ivy cypress yew etc not old. stone & flint*
Shallow pond (undivided fr chyd) w 2 sallow islands. Lillywhite, Warner, Mapey, Fidler, Knight, Inwood, G Penton Brassfounder Birmingham Mem. of Worshipful Drapers resided in New St Sq remains are deposited in St Brides ph. Ch., London?
Tiny enormously splayed window with orange & blue circles alternating [2 diagrams below] off onto big/fmyd (& big square brick & ochre tiled ivy & fruit walled farmhouse) w black pigs, but vast stretch of corrugated iron that had been red roofing its soft clunch walls, lane goes up past fm w high hedges for hops; & gentle rise of hedged ploughland w copse above in the NW Pond shallow clear w white chalk floor touches rd w a lime & chestnut & ivystrangled spruce

Almost every detail is used in the text and a more personal physical connection than his smudgy fingerprint (see photo below) is hard to imagine. His notes from the same workbook – and more – on Shepton Mallet, Wells and Glastonbury entries are included in the book's narrative.

There are sparser notes on Farnham – of the castle in the main – but these are very incomplete given his detailed description of the town. The book is so specific in his recordings beyond anything I could find in the Berg workbooks that I wondered where his other notes were. In a 1914 letter to John Freeman who was anticipating a westwards cycle excursion, he writes *You will be seeing Crowcombe, Williton and Watchet I expect as I did in April and Kilve in the Quantocks*. The Berg notebooks have no record of his journey after Glastonbury, of his observations along the Polden ridge, Bridgwater, Nether Stowey, Kilve and the Quantocks. And there is little or nothing to cover the Mickleham stretch, Dorking and the run towards the Hog's Back, though Albury and Silent Pool are recorded. However, in FWB 7 (he dates it *i – iv. 06*) he has a two-page sketch of the Pilgrim's Way through Ropley, Bishop's Sutton, New and Old Alresford, Itchen Stoke, Martyr Worthy Abbotsworthy, Kingsworthy and Winchester and his walks along here must have fed into his later narrative of this central portion of *In Pursuit of Spring.* The run along the northern edge of Salisbury Plain is notably absent though he has much on Imber and the route to Joan-a-Gore's. There is strong material covering his stay at Broughton Gifford and of the lyrical evening description of an evening walk that is one of the highlights of the book.

Workbooks prior to his specific *In Pursuit* research journeys cover detail on places included in the book – Salisbury, for instance, has many entries as does Alresford. It is possible that he used this familiarity to flesh out his text on these and other places – though it still begs the question of missing recording of particular details in these places, such as epitaphs or the names of French prisoners of war buried at Alresford, which will not have been committed to memory. His notes on the London to Surrey section are skimpy; but then, his knowledge this section went back to childhood and could be easily accessed. He made great use of maps and these will have helped him construct the journey and to check out distant topography and

contour heights. It is notable that at no point does he describe available sections as an east-west journey. Most are going the other way so that the creation of a continuous narrative was a testing and skilful piece of composition.

Finally, there is no knowing just what Thomas invented in his text. His published work has many indications of invention from his rich visual imagination but I find it hard to believe that all that he actually covered and recorded is within the Berg collection.

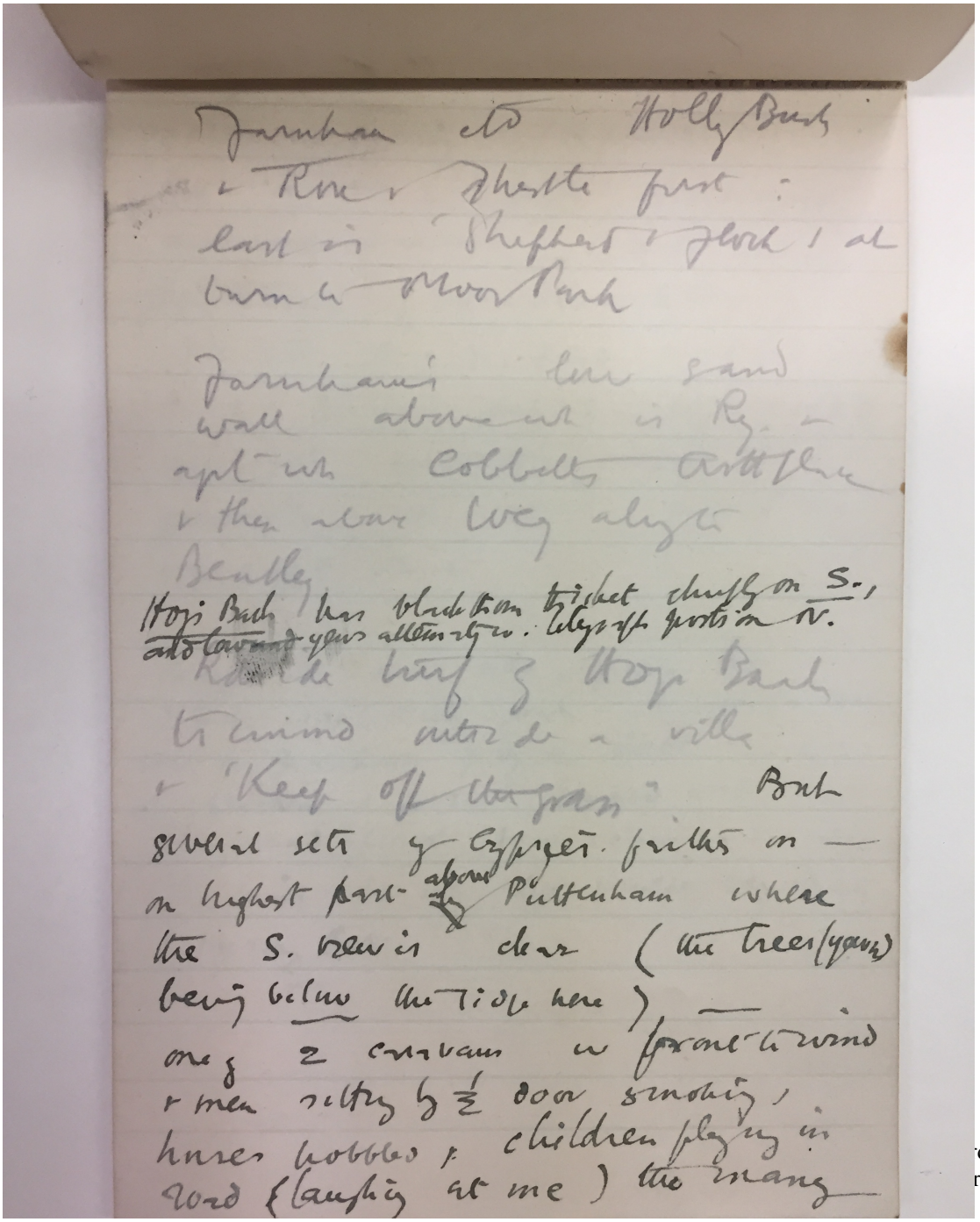
Looking at the schedule I created, it is clear that he ran notebooks side by side and that some periods are not covered by the Berg. Richard Emeny observes that Helen may well have given individual books to well-wishers and friends and that these have been lost.

I would happily have spent longer at the Berg had time and resources permitted. As it is, I took over 300 photographs of workbook text as well as some material from the Miscellaneous file – additional childhood biographical records, a 1900 letter to his Oxford friend Edna Clarke-Hall giving his unflattering impressions of 117 Atheldene Rd, the first independent family home, as well as a page of 1915 instructions on firing a rifle. I have transcribed them all. From among them and in conclusion, I quote a youthful prose emulation of his hero Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*:

Thrushes notes are becoming richer and more easy; the blackbird – confident and 'intensely human' ever, is now doubly so, and his fine wide tune comes sweetly from the woodland half a mile away – it is the voice of Spring itself. I only miss the lark; absence of meadowland must account for this gap – its song I last heard when leaves filled the air and the thistles nodded under linnets at their seed-crowded heads. The skies are blue, and at the moment rich with the Summer cirrus clouds that smile on fairer scenes than this: even the sparrows are exultant with the new life, the life of Spring, of leaping Sap, and the intensely life-breathing wind of the West. Their notes are less melancholy, are rounder and they are busy with straw and rags and rope and co from beneath the horses feet… The leaves are unsullied green, warm + damp and fresh from the fostering earth – leavened with last year's store of foliage and lift daily farther up towards the bluest sky and the appointed height whither their forerunners reached and smiled down on the grass with a wreath of blossom. Even the brambles – late answering to the breathy Spring by a show of leaf have been kissed back as it were into a new leaf in its old form – for they are last year's leaves yet fresh + glossy green. I cannot express it, but there is Spring and glowing life in the air, not the wind the azure or the sun something in the very atmosphere, a lightness a buoyancy a strength.
West wind

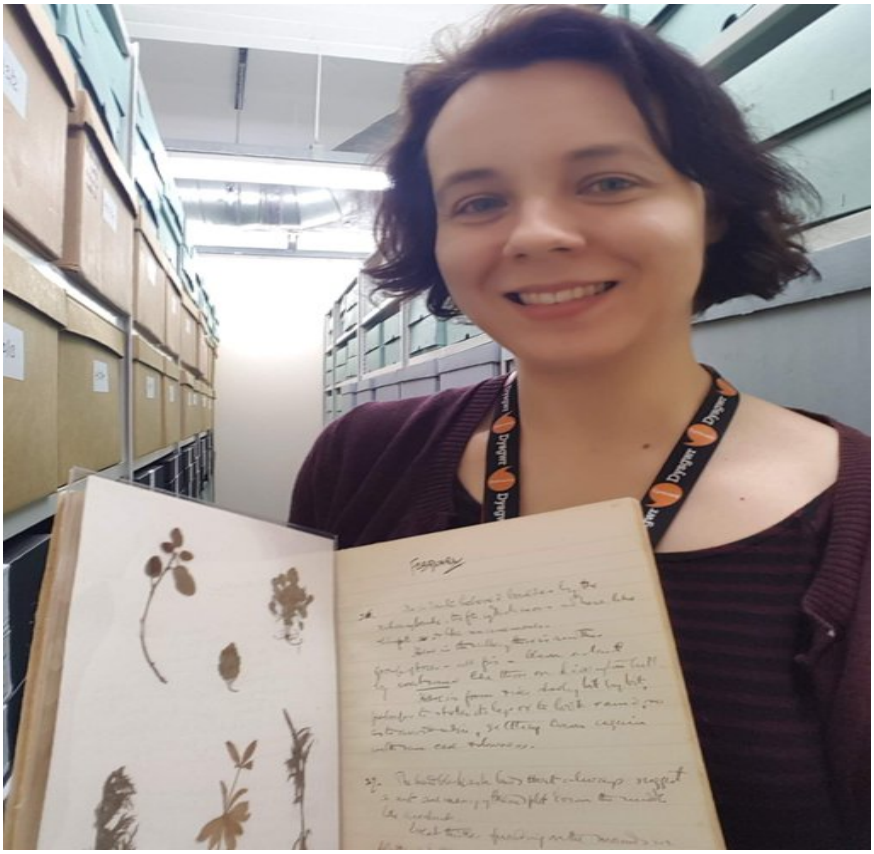
Throughout his life it seems that Edward Thomas was pursuing Spring.

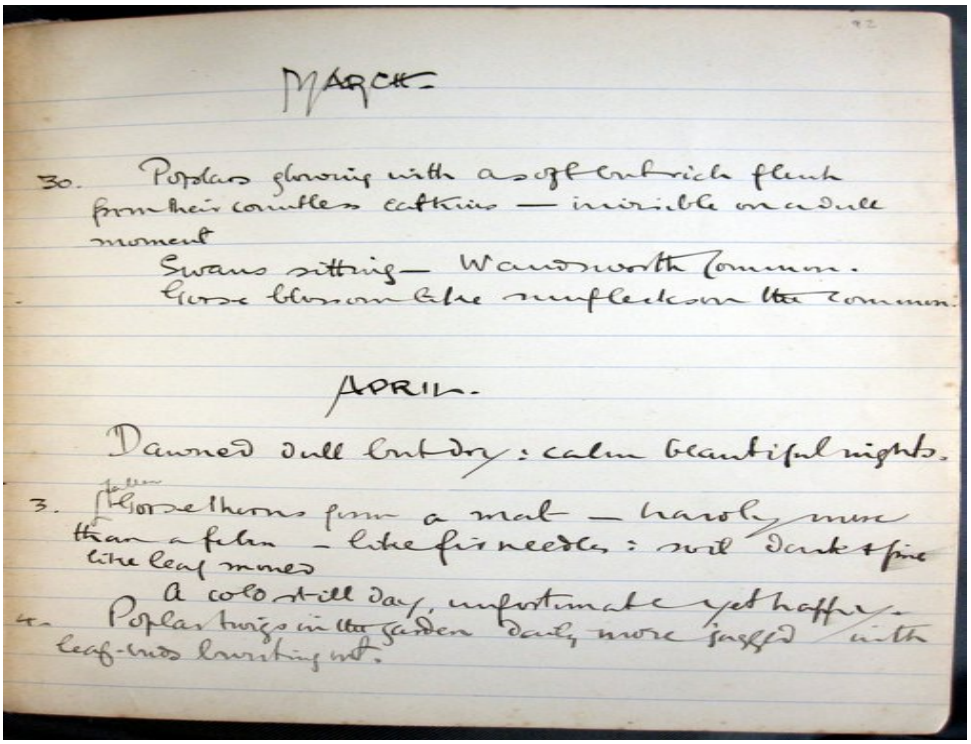
Ben Mackay



'd Thomas' (on
rolyn Vega, Berg

Following page: Cardiff University archivist Alison Harvey with one of Edward Thomas' springtime walking notebooks. Full of nature notes and illustrated with pressed foliage collected during his walks, these have been beautifully conserved by Glamorgan Archives thanks to a National Manuscripts Conservation Grant. More images at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/cuspecialcolls/albums [Ed.}





MARCH

30. Poplars glowing with a soft crimson flush from their countless catkins — invisible on a dull moment

Swans sitting — Wandsworth Common.
Gorse blossom like sunflecks on the common.

APRIL.

Dawned dull & dry: calm beautiful nights.

3. Gorse thorns form a mat — barely more than a film — like fir needles: soft dark & fine like leaf mines

A cold still day, unfortunately yet happy.

4. Poplar twigs in the garden daily more tasseled with leaf-buds bursting out.

*****

Barbara Davis

Artist Barbara Davis was a founding member and long-time committee member of The Friends of the Dymock Poets and a dedicated countryside defender. "Always keeping a keen, even a fierce eye on rural planning issues, from the encroachment of polytunnels through to the identification, preservation and mapping of paths known and used by her beloved Dymock Poets, her cottage home at Ryton was the garden location for The Garland Hut. This served as both an information hub and shelter for visitors, particularly those interested in the area's impressive literary history." *Worcester Times*, 12.12.18 Barbara sadly passed away unexpectedly on 27th November 2018. Her friends in Dymock arranged a celebration of her life in the Dymock landscape at St. Mary's Church on Friday 1st March**.**

Other news

To celebrate our co-president Michael Longley's 80th birthday, Fine Press Poetry have published a poetry book, *Ghetto*, with images by his daughter, Sarah Longley, including this poem:

December

I shall be eighty soon
I go on looking for
The Geminids somewhere
Between Cassiopeia
And the big beech tree.

Michael Longley

Friends of the Dymock Poets Poetry and Place: FDP Autumn Weekend, 5th and 6th October 2019

The autumn event this year is called Poetry and Place and will take place in the Burgage Hall, Church Lane, Ledbury at 11.30 a.m., following the annual general meeting, on Saturday 5th October.

Our discussion will compare and contrast the ways in which place inspired the poetry through talks by Professor Kelsey Thornton, FDP President and the author of many works about Gerard Manley Hopkins, Eleanor Rawling MBE, the author of Ivor Gurney's Gloucestershire: *Exploring Poetry and Place*, and long-time FDP member and countryside writer Marion Shoard.

Our walk on the morning of Sunday 6th October starts from a former gamekeeper's cottage on the edge of Astwood, an ancient woodland two miles west of Ledbury. After coffee in the cottage and an introduction to the walk by co-leaders Marion Shoard and Charles Watkins, professor of rural geography at Nottingham University and the chair of the Victoria County History of Herefordshire, we will set out on a circular stroll in the vicinity of Astwood, with stops to read poems and to contrast the use of the countryside in the poets' compared with the present day. We will return to the former gamekeeper's cottage for tea, coffee and to eat our sandwiches, then drive one-and-a-half miles to Putley village hall, where we will leave cars and set off for a circular walk around Putley, with stops for poems (not least those with an apple theme) and features of interest. Attenders can opt for the morning walk, the afternoon walk or the whole day.

W: dymockpoets.org.uk
E: contact@dymockpoets.org.uk

'And you, Helen' – Deryn Rees-Jones' exploration of the life and writing of Helen Thomas was re-broadcast on BBC Radio 4 Extra on Sun. 14 July at 5pm.

Edward Thomas' Adlestrop was the Friday Poem on BBC Radio 3's Breakfast programme on July 12, 2019

Around thirty Edward Thomas enthusiasts gathered in Rudge near Frome on Saturday 6th July for a walk around the village Thomas described in his book 'In Pursuit of Spring'.

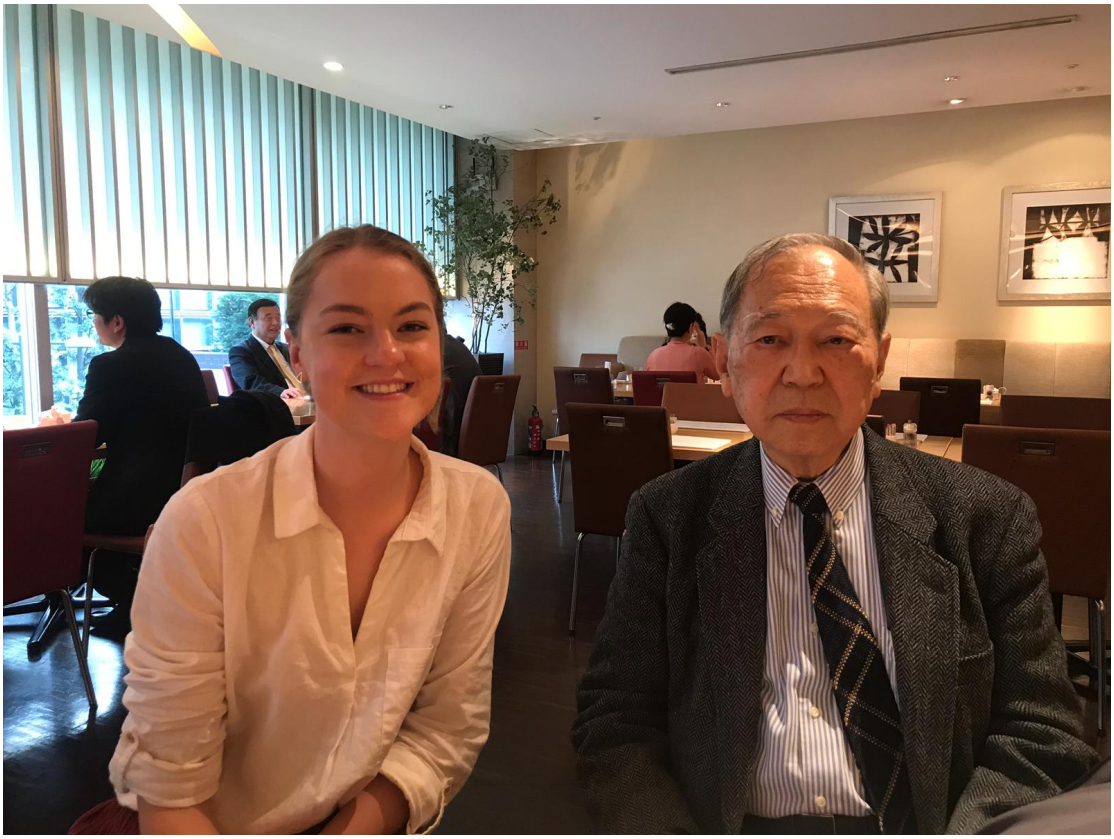
On 8th July, Rory Kinnear and Nat Segnit took on the roles of Edward Thomas and Robert Frost in Dead Poets Live at Wilton's Music Hall, London.

Nick Dear's play, The Dark Earth and the Light Sky, was staged at The Garrick, Stockport and The People's Theatre, Newcastle.

'**The Widow Thomas'** a song by Wes Finch about Helen's visits to Ivor Gurney is included on his album, *Awena*.

Pupils from Fitzalan High School in Cardiff worked with Literature Wales and the Cardiff University Special Collections Edward Thomas Archive on a project Edward Thomas Then and Now which was presented at Holy Glimmers of Goodbyes A Day of Reflection on the Poetry of War and Peace in Wales at the Senedd on 19th February.

Sophie Milner, (ET's great great granddaughter) met up with Professor Masa Otake for tea in Tokyo earlier this year. Masa's association has been a member of the Fellowship for a good number of years, and he gave Sophie a bound copy of all the letters he received from Myfanwy Thomas.



Proposal to create an 'Acquisition Fund' Prior to the establishment of the Study Centre at Petersfield Museum, the Fellowship did not have somewhere it could call 'home'. Consequently, many items of value or rarity that were donated or acquired by members invariably found their way to join the collections in Cardiff or Aberystwyth.
Now the resources of Petersfield Museum are available for the storage, and in time display, of artefacts as well as the Tim Wilton Steer book collection there is an opportunity to widen the reach of the collections.
This started last year with the acquisition of the letter Robert Frost wrote to Jack Haines from Steep in February 1915 and has continued this year with a small enamel box that had been given to Sylvia Townsend Warner by Helen.

We have also been fortunate to have been donated some items from members of the Thomas family, however if we are to be in a position to purchase important items on the open market, or from private collectors, we do need access to funds that the Fellowship does not currently have.
We were fortunate that the Robert Frost letter, which cost £1,690, was acquired with the benefit of a grant from the Friends of the National Library and that no donation from the Fellowship was required on this occasion. This may not always be the case.
At the last committee meeting, the creation of an Acquisition Fund was discussed and agreed as a sensible means of building up a separate fund of monies available to make any acquisitions that the committee feel appropriate – this will be separate to membership funds which are for the daily operation of the Fellowship.
If you would like to contribute to the fund you may do so, initially, by sending a cheque, made payable to "Edward Thomas Fellowship – Acquisition Fund", to our treasurer Barbara Kinnes. Barbara's address is Tudor Cottage, Gasden Lane, Witley, Surrey, GU8 5RJ. In time, those who wish will be able to make contributions by Standing Order, or perhaps consider making a gift to the Fellowship in their Will.

Jeremy Mitchell

Petersfield Museum / Edward Thomas Study Centre Update Petersfield Museum has now closed for the National Lottery-funded redevelopment project to start – building work is expected to start at the end of this month (July) – and all the collections, including those of the Edward Thomas Study Centre (ETSC), have been moved to secure storage elsewhere in Petersfield.
Building work is expected to be completed late summer 2020 and the museum (and Study Centre) to re-open in October next year. This is an exciting project for both the Museum and the Fellowship as the creation of the Study Centre in a permanent location will make an amazing resource available to the public and raise the profile of both organisations – and many Fellowship members have already contributed to the project, for which the Museum fundraising team are profoundly grateful. There are still opportunities to contribute, perhaps by naming a brick in a Fellowship 'space', and if you would like further information about this please contact me, Jeremy Mitchell, on 01730 267214 or by email to mitchjd.etf@outlook.com.
In the meantime, should members or their friends wish to access the collection please contact me in the first instance, using the contact numbers above, and please give at least seven days' notice so that we may arrange access.

Study Day 2020 – Early stage planning is underway for this event which will take place in Petersfield on Saturday June 13th, 2020. Further details will be made available in due course and we hope to make this a full and exciting day.

Jeremy Mitchell