

THE EDWARD AND HELEN THOMAS MEMORIAL WINDOW

St. James the Greater, Eastbury, Berks.



RAIN

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
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.

[7 January 1916]



Edward and Helen Thomas – with Merfyn, their first child.

EDWARD THOMAS – poet

Philip Edward Thomas (1878-1917) was born in Lambeth to a Welsh family. He married Helen Berenice Noble in 1899 whilst still an undergraduate at Lincoln College, Oxford.



After university he worked as a literary critic, countryside writer, novelist and biographer before beginning to write poetry in the December of 1914 when living in the village of Steep, East Hampshire initially publishing his poetry under the name Edward Eastaway. He had been encouraged to write poetry by his friend Robert Frost, the American poet, who visited a number of literary figures including Thomas who had taken residence in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock prior to the outbreak of the Great War.



Thomas enlisted in the Artists Rifles on 19th July 1915, was gazetted 2nd lieutenant on 20th November 1916 and embarked from Southampton for France on 29th January 1917.

Helen described their final farewell: "I stood at the gate watching him go. He turned back to wave until the mist and hill hid him."

He was killed in action at a forward observation post in the First Battle of Arras, France on Easter Monday, 9th April 1917. Buried in the CWG cemetery at Agny, he is one of the 16 Great War poets commemorated in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey (10 of whom survived the war) although only eight of his poems make reference to war, unlike those of Rupert Brooke or Wilfred Owen.

His 144 poems cover a variety of subjects including nature, rustic encounters, the seasons, the English countryside as well as a range of emotions from romantic love to deep melancholic depression. Thomas was described at the window unveiling by Ted Hughes O.M. (Poet Laureate 1984-1998) as the "father of us all".



2nd Lieutenant Edward Thomas.

HELEN THOMAS – wife, widow and author

Helen Thomas (1877-1967) wrote a two-volume autobiography, an unabashedly frank portrait of her husband in “As It Was” (London: Heinemann, 1926) describing their early life together including the time they spent with Edward’s friend ‘Dad Uzzell’ and his wife in their gamekeeper’s cottage in Wiltshire.



Helen with Merfyn and Bronwen in 1907.

The poverty in which they lived and her grief at his early death leaving her with three children, Merfyn, Bronwen and Myfanwy, are described in the follow-up book “World Without End” (London: Heinemann, 1931).

Robert Frost became estranged by Helen's explicit narration of Edward's moods in their tumultuous marriage and was not reconciled by her account of his own friendship with Thomas.

Helen also published "My Memory of W.H. Davies" (1973), the Welsh "super-tramp" poet (1871-1940) whom Edward, then the literary critic at the Daily Chronicle, had befriended in 1905 when they lived in Sevenoaks, Kent, providing him with a nearby cottage and arranging for a replacement wooden leg to be made by the local wheelwright.



Helen came with her two daughters Bronwen (1905-1975) and Myfanwy to live in Bridge Cottage, Eastbury in 1954; they are all buried in graves at the top of St. James Churchyard, Eastbury.



Helen at Bridge Cottage, Eastbury 1960.

MYFANWY THOMAS – daughter

Myfanwy Thomas (1910-2005) worked as a secretary in London and then as a teacher for 21 years in Lambourn. Merfyn (1900-1965) died before his sisters. Myfanwy dedicated her life to her father's literary genius especially the poems written in the last three years of his life. With 600 subscribers, Myfanwy commissioned the window "in celebration of the lives of Edward Thomas poet and Helen his wife".

It was installed by T&W Ide Ltd. in 1971, when Lord David Cecil, who had just retired as Oxford University Professor of English Literature, read the commemorative address and Professor George Thomas, Thomas's biographer, read some of his poems. In 1980 she agreed to a suggestion made by her friend Anne Mallinson to establish The Edward Thomas Fellowship, to promote knowledge and appreciation of her father's life and work. She described how she heard about the death of her father in her autobiography "One of these days" published in 1984: "On that bright April day after Easter, when mother was sewing and I was awkwardly filling in the pricked dots on a postcard with coloured wool, embroidering a wild duck to send to France, I saw the telegraph boy lean his red bicycle against the fence. Mother stood reading the message with a face of stone. 'No answer' came like a croak, and the boy rode away."

In 1993 Myfanwy moved to a bungalow close to her daughter Rosemary in East Garston. Her nephew, Edward Cawston Thomas, Merfyn's son, gave the address when she died in 2005 (the Village News No 221 contains an obituary by Sir Michael Howard).



THE LEFT PANEL



One of three panels containing quotations from nine of Thomas's poems, shows a tall tree in full leaf with "ET 1878-1917" and "HT 1872-1967" carved into the bark of the trunk against a background of rolling Downland hills and the sarsen stone memorial to Edward erected in 1935 on the Shoulder of Mutton hill above the village of Steep where they lived from 1906-1916. This panel is inscribed:

*"As it was" and "Perhaps I may love other hills yet more than
this" [WHEN FIRST]
"But what if I in them as they in me
Nourished what has great value and no price?"
[WHAT WILL THEY DO?]
"Imperfect friends, we men
And trees since time began, and nevertheless
Between us still we breed a mystery" [THE CHALK PIT]*

THE CENTRE PANEL



The central panel, *“In celebration of the lives of Edward Thomas poet and Helen his wife”* shows the spire of All Saints Church at Steep with the sea set, chalice-like, between distant hills; a signpost recalls a line from one of his poems *“which way shall I go?”* This panel is inscribed:

*“The glory invites me, yet it leaves me scorning
All I can ever do, all I can be”* [THE GLORY]
*But the moment unveiled something unwilling to die
And I had what I most desired”* [THE ASH GROVE]

THE RIGHT PANEL



This panel, shows the tree now gnarled and leafless, draped with an officer's Sam Brown belt and army helmet and the three scalloped thatched cottage in Wiltshire where the family lived when Thomas was researching his Life of Richard Jefferies whom Andrew Motion described as “a prose poet of the English landscape and a pioneer environmentalist. This panel “*World without end*” is inscribed:

*“There I find my rest and through the dusk air
Flies what yet live in me. Beauty is here”* [BEAUTY]

*“Or must I be content with discontent
As larks and swallows are perhaps with wings”* [THE GLORY]

*“This is my grief That Land My Home, I have never seen
No traveller tells of it However far he has been”* [HOME]

*“I should use as the trees and the birds did a language not to
be betrayed”* [I NEVER SAW THAT LAND BEFORE]

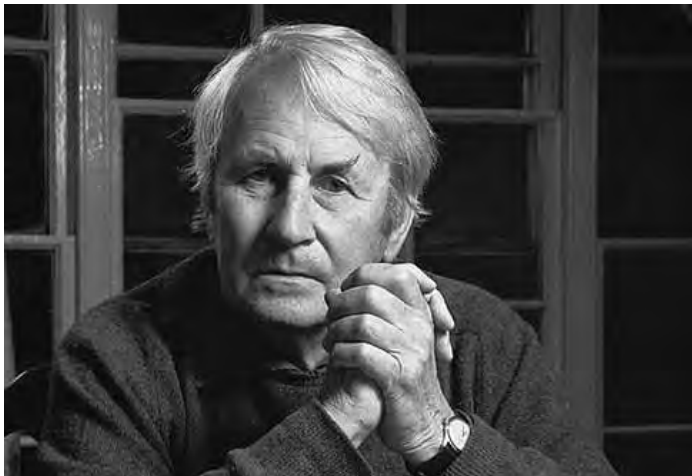
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LAURENCE WHISTLER – engraver and poet

Sir Alan Charles Laurence Whistler (1912-2000) educated at Balliol College, was a poet, an architectural historian and an artist who specialised in point engraving by electric drill.

His commissions included works on glass goblets and bowls blown to his own designs and also on large-scale panels and windows in churches and private houses. He had turned to glass-engraving in 1934 when it was almost moribund, from his knowledge that Elizabethan gentlemen inscribed verses on window glass with diamond points which they carried for the purpose.

He described his work as “a struggle towards a certain kind of landscape”. He was in 1935 the first holder of the King’s Gold Medal for Poetry and in 1975 the first President of the newly founded British Guild of Glass Engravers; he was awarded OBE in 1955, the CBE in 1973 and was knighted in 2000.



ST JAMES THE GREATER, Eastbury



The church, consecrated in 1853, was built of flint and Bath stone by the Lambourn firms, Knapp and Wilkins, builders and woodworkers, in a 13th. century style to a design of the Victorian Gothic Revivalist architect, George Edmund

Street (1824-1881). The £1,000 cost was financed partly by public subscription but mainly by Rev Robert Milman, then Vicar of Lambourn, later Bishop of Calcutta. In the previous century the 14th century Chapel of St James had fallen into disrepair and itinerant Methodist evangelists preached in the open air round the nearby 15th century cross to St Antolin, the French Christian Missionary and martyr.

Vicar: Rev. Martin Caute, Lambourn Valley Benefice.

Church wardens: Paul Reynolds, Merrita Jones.

This brochure, published in 2016 on behalf of the Eastbury Parochial Church Council was proposed by Merrita and compiled by Brian Wilson.

If you wish to contribute to the Church running costs, please put your donation into the safe box in the wall by the door.

The photographs of the Edward and Helen Thomas window and the church were taken by Neil Robertson, the Lambourn photographer.

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The Edward Thomas Fellowship can be contacted at edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk.

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