

NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2013

ICKNIELD WAY ASSOCIATION

EDWARD THOMAS CENTENARY WEEKEND

During the summer, a number of folk have been beavering away to make sure that everything is in place for our very special autumn meeting and celebration. Ever since the IWA realised that this year marks the centenary of the publication of Edward Thomas' book 'The Icknield Way', we knew that this would be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate two very good things — our beautiful long-distance walk across six counties of England and a special book by an English poet and author who coincidentally chose 'our' path to explore all those years ago.

Together with members of the Edward Thomas Fellowship (more about them elsewhere in this newsletter), we have planned a range of activities — social, physical, gastronomical, cerebral, audio-visual and historical — hopefully something for all possible interests!

Our weekend is based around the historic village of Pirton, which lies within easy reach of some of Hertfordshire's most attractive hill country. Hills might not immediately spring to mind when you mention that Hertfordshire is your home county (!) but the Chilterns west of Hitchin definitely offer a wonderful choice of viewpoints from which to see into neighbouring counties and are a special and treasured Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

IMPORTANT DATES

**SATURDAY & SUNDAY
28TH –29TH SEPTEMBER**

*PROGRAMME DETAILS
INSIDE*

HOT PRESS!

IWA is delighted to announce that traveller and author Hugh Thomson has agreed to give the keynote address at our Centenary Weekend

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HUGH THOMSON

Hugh Thomson is the author of several books and has become a well-known authority on the exploration of the Inca heartlands of Peru. His first book, 'The White Rock: An Exploration of the Inca Heartland', was the result of a twenty-year long quest to explore and understand the Peruvian Andes in the area beyond Machu Picchu. Hugh was lucky enough to be invited on a special millennium expedition to normally closed Sanctuary around Nanda Devi in the Himalayas and in 'Nanda Devi' Hugh tells a story that has to do with politics, ecology and history, as much as with the strenuous adventure in a beautiful setting that his book so vividly celebrates.

"Thomson belongs to a rare species of explorer. He is a writer that explores and not an explorer that writes. And it's Thomson's extreme humility in the face of both danger and extraordinary success that places him in the same tradition as Eric Newby."

Geographical.



Hugh Thomson - author of 'The Green Road into the Trees'. Come and hear him speak at our Centenary Weekend

EDWARD THOMAS 'ICKNIELD WAY' CENTENARY WEEKEND PROGRAMME

The programme for our special celebratory weekend has been organised jointly by the Icknield Way Association committee and by committee members of the Edward Thomas Fellowship. We thank everyone involved for lots of effort and hard work bringing everything together for what will assuredly be a most enjoyable event.

Saturday 28th September

- 10.00am-10.30am Arrival at the Pirton Sports and Social Club (SSC)
The Recreation Ground, Walnut Tree Road, Pirton, (near) Hitchin SG5 3PX,
Landranger 166 TL150315 www.pirtonssc.co.uk
- 10.30am-12.30pm **Morning Walk** led by members of the IWA following the Icknield Way from Pirton and aiming for nearby vantage point Deacon Hill, returning along the same route. Approximately four miles with shorter options if desired.
- 1.00pm-2.00pm **Buffet lunch** at Pirton SSC. A bar will be available or, for those who prefer, there are two nearby pubs in Pirton, The Motte and Bailey www.themotteandbaileypirton.com and The Fox www.pirton.org.uk/thefox/
- 2.00pm-2.50pm **Keynote Address to be given by Hugh Thomson**
- 2.50pm-3.10pm '*Edward Thomas, Walking & the Icknield Way*' : Richard Emeny, Chairman, the Edward Thomas Fellowship
- 3.10pm-3.30pm '*The Great Stones Way*' : Ian Ritchie, Chairman, Friends of the Ridgeway
- 3.30pm-4.00pm Tea
- 4.00pm-4.30pm '*The Icknield Way*' , a film produced by Luisetta Mudie
- 4.30pm-5.00pm **IWA Annual General Meeting**
- Evening: **Evening meal** at 'The Motte and Bailey' PH.
NB. Don't forget to make your choice from the pub menu before you go on the morning walk!

Sunday 29th September

- 10.00am-12.00am **A walk** along the Icknield Way with pauses for readings from Edward Thomas led by the members of the Edward Thomas Fellowship
- Lunch No fixed arrangements

DON'T FORGET!

***PLEASE RETURN YOUR
BOOKING FORM TO TELL US
YOU ARE COMING AND THAT
YOU NEED A BUFFET LUNCH
AND EVENING MEAL***



Deacon Hill in the Hertfordshire Chilterns

WHO WAS EDWARD THOMAS?

Although many of our members will be aware already of the connection between Edward Thomas and the Icknield Way, it is quite possible that some people won't know why we are giving him so much attention this year! I am indebted to the Edward Thomas Fellowship website for this useful and informative summary of his life. www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk

Edward Thomas was known during his lifetime as a critic, essayist and writer of books about the countryside. Born in London in 1878, his happiest days as a youth were spent either wandering over the commons of South London or with relatives in the countryside near Swindon. Wiltshire was to remain his favourite county.

As a schoolboy, Thomas was encouraged to write by James Ashcroft Noble, who had recognised the boy's talent and was himself a distinguished man of letters and a neighbour. At Noble's home, Thomas met and fell in love with Helen Noble, whom he subsequently married while still an undergraduate at Oxford University. After gaining a second-class degree in History, he decided to pursue a career as a writer, having been encouraged by the publication of some nature essays and especially his first book, *The Woodland Life*, while he was still a student.

That decision, opposed by his father, led to years of poorly paid prose writing, both books and journalism. Life was a struggle for Helen, the three children and himself. Undoubtedly, this contributed to sporadic depressive illness. Nevertheless, his prose work established him amongst the foremost critics of the day.

He was moving towards the writing of poetry when, in 1913, he met and became close friends with the American poet Robert Frost, who further encouraged him to write verse, which he commenced in December 1914.

Into the next two years, he crammed all his verse writing. Before he saw his poetry in print under his own name, he was killed at the Battle of Arras on Easter Day 1917. Since then, Thomas's reputation as a poet has increased greatly and, perhaps as important, his posthumous influence on the development of English verse has been crucial. Poets as diverse as WH Auden, Philip Larkin and Derek Walcott have acknowledged their debt to him.



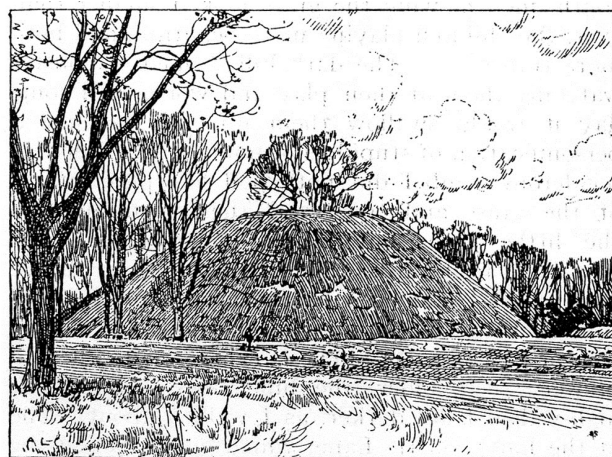
Edward Thomas at Wick Green 1913-14
© Icknield Way Fellowship

EDWARD THOMAS IN OUR NEWSLETTERS

Between 2000 and 2004, very abbreviated extracts from Edward Thomas's 'Icknield Way' appeared in Icknield Way Association newsletters. Each extract reflected upon the changes in the landscape that have taken place during the twentieth century—many of them not for the better! One of the most significant is, of course, the advent and advancement (not to say takeover) by motorised traffic on our roads. Even though a pedestrian using the Way may be some considerable distance from a highway, it is often still possible to hear the dull roar of traffic carried on the wind. Once quiet and perhaps even 'sleepy' villages are now blighted by parked cars, lumbering and stinky progress of lorries, the sudden explosive roar of a motorbike and in some places, the necessary movements of huge modern tractors with extraordinarily cumbersome pieces of equipment attached both front and back.

Our path tries to avoid too much exposure to traffic but accepts that contact with 'civilisation' is essential from time to time for all those wishing to buy food and drink, call in at a pub or to avail themselves of overnight accommodation.

On the other hand, thankfully, some things may not have changed very much!



Castle Hill, Thetford.



Castle Hill, Thetford, sketched in about 1913 (above)
and photographed in 2006

HITCHIN RAIL LINK—UPDATE

Local route warden, Alex Goldie, has been keeping an eye on the progress of the construction works for the new rail link at Hitchin. He reports that the new line is now open and has been taking three trains each day along the elevated section. Network Rail expects this to increase to 600 per week by December after about 300 drivers have received special training (into swerving gracefully - and safely, one presumes!). The new single track section is aimed at reducing delays on the East Coast Mainline as well as facilitating passenger journeys east into Icknield Way country. Alex reports that restoration of the area, including a local chalk pit and the haul road crossing the Icknield Way, is looking good.



Hitchin flyover from the Icknield Way below Wilbury Hill
Photo: Alex Goldie

M1 BRIDGE CLOSURE AT SUNDON

The Highways Agency are planning to replace the parapets on two bridges over the M1 this autumn. The footbridge used by the Icknield Way Path / Trail at Woodcock Farm (Guidebook maps 4 & 5) will be closed from 2nd September for 13.5 weeks until about 23rd December but walkers will be temporarily diverted south via Common Farm bridge. This will add 1.6 miles to the route. However, walkers planning to travel along the Icknield Way this autumn may wish to consider taking the Toddington alternative (Guidebook maps 33 & 34) which uses a different bridge at Old Park Farm, which will not be affected.

Please go to <http://www.icknieldwaypath.co.uk/pathupdates.html> for a map of the area

FIND OUT MORE

www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk

www.hertsgeolsoc.org.uk

www.cambridgegeologyclub.org.uk

www.geosuffolk.co.uk

www.geo-east.org.uk

THE WORLD BENEATH OUR FEET

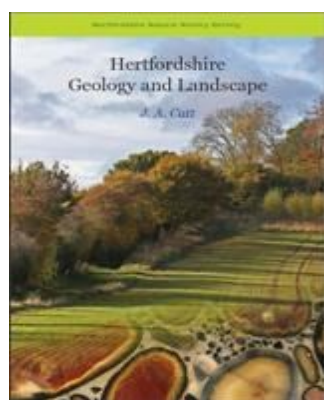
Our Chairman, Tom Chevalier, received a copy of the Spring Newsletter of the Bedfordshire Geology Group and forwarded it to your Editor who (as he well knows) is always on the lookout for items of potential interest for our News!

Unless especially 'tuned in', walkers could be accused of being largely unaware of the world beneath their feet, unless they happen to trip up on it, slide about on it, or have experienced more demanding walking/scrambling/climbing in parts of the country where it is more difficult to ignore rocky substrates! In the generally gently undulating landscapes of Icknield Way country, and especially if you have an strenuous day ahead of you with a definite evening objective, it is easy to ignore the subtle variations of soil colour and characteristics, especially when they are concealed by arable crops or grassland. At harvest and ploughing times, however, our fields are revealed to those who wish to look more closely for clues about the ancient world beneath our feet.

Our Icknield Way Walkers' Guide includes a useful summary of the geology and geomorphology of the regions that the path traverses and the word 'chalk' appears several times. Friends and associates of the Ridgeway, Icknield Way and Peddars Way sometimes refer to the 'Great Chalk Way', so it is probably obvious to most people using the Way that the underlying chalk is the significant contributor to our Icknield Way landscape.

However, not far away on each side of the Icknield Way corridor lie other characteristic rock and soil types. The Bedfordshire Geology Group was formed in 2004 by a group of enthusiastic amateur and professional geologists and they aim to encourage a greater awareness and understanding of the geology of their county as well as promoting Local Geology Sites. Members enjoy field trips, clearing overgrown sites, lectures, workshops and social events - all aimed at getting 'hands on' with local rocks and fossils. The group also arranges guided walks in order to appreciate the varied landforms and scenery of Bedfordshire. The Group's website is excellent. There are many informative and attractive downloads of their publications including general information leaflets funded by Natural England and the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund and a series of leaflets on Bedfordshire's Geological Industries and Livelihoods from the Chalk. The Group is certainly achieving their educational objective! Do take a look at www.bedfordshiregeologygroup.org.uk

Not to be outdone, Hertfordshire Natural History Society has published a magnificent book about Hertfordshire's geology and landscape. It has chapters written by local experts covering the basic geology of the county and includes detailed accounts of soils, ecology, agriculture, prehistoric archaeology, hydrogeology, mineral resources and church building stones. The editor and principal author is John A.Catt. For more information go to www.hnhs.org/view_publications



THE EDWARD THOMAS FELLOWSHIP

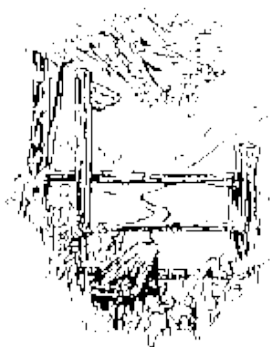
The Icknield Way Association has exchanged newsletters with the Edward Thomas Fellowship for many years, thus recognising the links between our two organisations but it is only with this year's anniversary of the publication of 'The Icknield Way' by Edward Thomas that we have really got to know each better! Once again I am indebted to the ETF website for the following information explaining a little more about what they do:

The Fellowship was founded in 1980 and exists to:

- perpetuate the memory of Edward Thomas
- foster interest in his life and works
- conserve the countryside known to ET and recorded in his writings
- keep people in touch with relevant happenings and arrange events which extend fellowship
- keep members abreast of relevant literary matters

Since its foundation, the Fellowship has arranged or assisted with various events and activities including:

- placing plaques on houses lived in by Edward Thomas
- arranging recitals of Edward Thomas's poetry and prose writings and performances of Elected Friends, Lights Out and For You, Helen, dramatic works based on his life and influence
- placing a seat below the memorial stone on the Shoulder of Mutton Hill near Steep, in memory of Rowland and Cherry Watson whose enthusiasm led to the dedication of the memorial to Edward Thomas in 1937
- encouraging publishers to reprint editions of Edward Thomas's prose works
- helping to institute in Poets Corner, Westminster Abbey, a memorial to Edward Thomas and 12 other poets of the First World War
- helping various bodies, including the Imperial War Museum, to stage exhibitions
- campaigning against proposed developments which have threatened to damage the countryside known and loved by Edward Thomas
- leading walks around places associated with Edward Thomas
- organising seminars, concerts and other events
- publishing notecards and a CD



Looking north-east along
Wood Lane near Pirton.
A fine stretch of green lane which
we will follow on
28 September

FANCY A WALK?

TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 10AM

Balsham, Cambs

6 mile circular

Meet at The Bell PH



Bob & Kathy Heale
01763 246988 or
07870 740083
Royston RA Group

SUNDAY 6TH OCTOBER 10AM

Sharpenhoe, Beds

13 mile circular

Meet at Sharpenhoe Clappers Car
Park



Mike
01462 491032 or
07815939949
Ivel Valley Walkers

SUNDAY 13TH OCTOBER 10AM

Elmdon, Essex

7 mile figure-of-eight plus 3

Meet at Elmdon Dial PH



Janet Kirtling
01763 838300
Royston Group RA

SUNDAY 19TH OCTOBER 10AM

Stetchworth, Cambs

12 mile circular starting from The
Ellesmere Centre at TL643582



Angela
01223 840585
Cambridge Group

TUESDAY 5TH NOVEMBER 10AM

Royston, Herts

12 mile circular starting from the
Heath Sports Centre Car Park



Anthony
01767 601969
Ivel Valley Walkers

SUNDAY 24TH NOVEMBER 10AM

Hexton & Lilley, Herts/Beds

8 mile circular. Meet first at Wood-
side Car Park, Hitchin



Rosalind
01462 440113
North Herts Gp RA

VOLUNTARY ROUTE WARDENS

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Maps 1-3 | Ivinghoe Beacon to A5 | Helen Fletcher-Rogers | hfrogers@dial.pipex.com |
| Maps 4, 33-34 | A5 to Sundon Hills Country Park | Tom Chevalier | tom@chevalier.me.uk |
| Maps 5,6 | Sundon Hills to Hexton-Lilley Rd | Carol Bond | carol.bond@hotmail.com |
| Map 7 | Lilley Road to Pirton | Lesley Blundell | lesleyblundell@btinternet.com |
| Map 8-9 | Pirton to Wilbury Hill | Alex Goldie | kathy_alex.goldie@mac.com |
| Map 10 | Wilbury Hill to Baldock | Chris James | chrisjames56@btinternet.com |
| Maps 11-15 | Baldock town centre to Heydon | David Allard | david.allard@ntlworld.com |
| Maps 16-19 | Heydon to Linton | James Quantrill | 01279 653899 |
| Maps 20-21 | Linton to Willingham Green | Roger & Janet Moreton | roger.janet@care4free.net |
| Maps 22-27 | Willingham Green to Icklingham | Phil Prigg | phil@prigg.co.uk |
| Maps 28-29 | Icklingham to D-house | Tom & Gill Caple | gill.caple@btinternet.com |
| Maps 30-32 | D-house to Knettishall Heath | Edward Wortley | ewortley@tiscali.co.uk |
| Maps 35-36 | Thetford Link | Mike Gee | ramblergees@hotmail.co.uk |

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