

How to get there

Steep is two miles north of Petersfield (historic market town) just off the A3.

Transport

Limited parking is available in Church Road.

Rail: Petersfield Station: www.southwesttrains.co.uk, then a 30 minute walk up Tilmore Road, joining the Hangers Way footpath to Steep church.

Bus: Service 37 from Havant to Alton stops at Petersfield Rail Station and Sheet: www.stagecoachbus.com

Places to visit

All Saints' Church, Steep.

Bedales Gallery: www.bedales.org.uk/bedales-arts.html

Refreshments

The Cricketer's Inn, Steep.

The Harrow Inn, Steep, one mile east on Sheet Road.

A range of snacks and meals are also available in Petersfield.

Further Information

Walks in East Hampshire: www.easthants.gov.uk/walking

Petersfield Tourist Information Centre: 01730 268829.

Follow the Countryside Code: www.naturalengland.org.uk

The Hangers Way: www.hants.gov.uk/walking

The Shipwrights Way: www.shipwrights.org.uk

The Edward Thomas Fellowship:

www.edward-thomas-fellowship.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This leaflet was prepared by the late Anne Mallinson of the former Selborne Circle of Rural Writers for East Hampshire District Council. Revised 2014 by Mike Cope.

The Annotated Collected Poems by Edward Thomas, edited by Edna Longley (Bloodaxe Books).

Cardiff University Library: Special Collections and Archives for the front cover photograph.

Maps

Ordnance Survey

Explorer Map 133

Haslemere & Petersfield

(1:25,000).

**East
Hampshire**
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Edward Thomas 1878–1917

A walk around Steep



“...Fast beat my heart at sight of the tall slope
of grass and yews...”

From *When First*, poem

*Literary Walks
in East Hampshire*

Points of literary interest

East Hampshire has a wealth of literary associations. The literary walks have been devised to illustrate the work of six important writers who were close observers of their natural (and social) environment. Their combined experiences span more than two centuries of East Hampshire life.

Edward Thomas was born in Lambeth on 3 March 1878 to Welsh parents. After studying history at Lincoln College, Oxford, he was determined to live by his pen, and over the next few years produced numerous volumes of topography, essays and biographical works and wrote over a million words in reviews. Encouraged by the American poet Robert Frost, he began writing poetry in December 1914. What he left behind was a canon of some 140 poems (including *Adlestrop* and *Old Man*), before he was killed by the blast of a shell in the Battle of Arras, on Easter Monday 1917.

a No. 2 Yew Tree Cottage, one of a group of semi-detached cottages in the village of Steep, was Edward Thomas' third and final home in the area. He lived here with his wife Helen and three children between 1913 and 1916, during which time the majority of his poems were written.

b Lutcombe Bottom with its deep coombe runs into the side of the chalk hills. A cottage once stood here. Thomas recalls a ruined one in his poem, *A Tale*:

“There once the walls
Of the ruined cottage stood.
The periwinkle crawls
With flowers in its hair into the wood.”

c A path below the road which winds up Stoner Hill, away on your left, is described by Edward Thomas in his poem, *The Path*:

“Running along a bank, a parapet
That saves from the precipitous wood below
The level road, there is a path. It serves
Children for looking down the long smooth steep,
Between the legs of beech and yew...”

d The third house on the right, the Red House, was the Thomas' home from 1909 – 1913. Here Edward and Helen's younger daughter, Myfanwy, was born in 1910. She unveiled the plaque on the house in August 1985. Two of Edward Thomas' poems, *The New House* and *Wind and Mist*, refer to the house. (The house is private property, please respect the privacy of the owner.)

e The subject of Edward Thomas' first poem, *Up in the Wind*, an isolated inn (The White Horse, known locally as 'the pub with no name') lies two miles away to the north west:

“It hides from either road, a field's breadth back;
And it's the trees you see, and not the house...”

f The memorial stone was erected in 1937 when the hillside was dedicated to the memory of Edward Thomas. There is an octagonal plaque on the stone. Thomas refers to the hill in several of his poems. In *When First*, he writes:

“...Fast beat
My heart at sight of the tall slope
Of grass and yews, as if my feet
Only by scaling its steps of chalk
Would see something no other hill
Ever disclosed.”

Just below the stone is a wooden seat erected in memory of Rowland Watson and his wife, who did much to promote recognition of the poet.

g Berryfield Cottage was the poet's first home in Hampshire. Edward and Helen Thomas moved here from Kent in 1906, so that their two children, Merfyn and Bronwen, could attend Bedales School.

h Two small lancet windows designed and engraved by Laurence Whistler were installed in the south wall of the church in 1978 to commemorate the centenary of Edward Thomas' birth. The right hand window was damaged beyond repair in 2010, and a replica installed. This was dedicated in December 2013 by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams.

Route

The main route is about 3½ miles (2½ hours).

- 1 From Steep church walk across playing field opposite, bearing slightly left. At far end of Common, follow footpath downhill through woodland to a swing gate at the bottom. Bear half left around field edge and continue to another swing gate and a road. Pause to enjoy fine views of the Hangers before you – the wooded slopes of Ashford Hill and the Shoulder of Mutton Hill, with its chalk grassland, where the Edward Thomas memorial stone now stands.
- 2 Walk straight ahead, up Island Farm Lane, passing Mill Meadow Farm on your right. If you look left across the field, you can just make out the silhouette of Yew Tree cottage on the distant skyline (see a).
- 3 Proceed to T-junction and then turn right. Here the lane is sunken and tree-lined, with ferns on the high banks – a common feature of this area. When the road bears sharp right, keep ahead along the Hangers Way. To the right of the path are the shallow clear waters of the Ashford Stream. Follow this track past Lutcombe Pond, with water of amazing clarity, to Lutcombe Bottom (see b).
- 4 At the end of the track, turn left along bridleway. If the climb up this path appears too steep, an alternative route – but missing points d and e – will take you more gradually to the top of the Shoulder of Mutton Hill (see directions at the end of the route). The bridleway climbs steeply up Ashford Hill between yew trees and bank-side ferns. Stoner Hill is to your left (see c). At the top, turn right into Cockshott Lane – and you are on the level again (on the Froxfield plateau).
- 5 On the right are the workshops of the famous furniture designer Edward Barnsley of the 20th century British Craft Movement.
- 6 The third house on the right is the Red House (see d). Please respect the privacy of the owners. Continue along the lane – which gradually becomes a trackway – until you reach Old Litten Lane on your left (see e). Walk ahead for a few metres, then turn right at the Hangers Way sign.
- 7 Follow the route straight down Shoulder of Mutton Hill, now bare of many of the magnificent beech trees, which were uprooted in the hurricane of 1987, until you reach the Edward Thomas memorial stone. Here there are panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and across to the South Downs. This is a fine place to pause for a while and admire the view (see f).
- 8 Continue straight down the hillside. After descending a flight of steps cut into the hill, follow field edge to a lane. At this point, you can just make out a solid stone house with a tiled roof to your right (Berryfield Cottage). This was the Thomas' first home in Hampshire (see g).
- 9 Cross the lane and continue along a tarmac drive (Hangers Way). When the drive ends, bear half left along path, which is invariably muddy. Zigzag right and then left across sloping meadow. Go right immediately after bird hide, down some steps and past a spectacular waterfall.
- 10 When you join the road, keep ahead up Mill Lane. At the first junction, go left through swing gate and retrace your steps back to Steep church – following the wood edge on your right and then the footpath through the wood to the playing field again. If you prefer to finish the walk by seeing the war memorial – where Edward Thomas' name appears in the roll of honour for Steep – instead of turning left at the swing gate, keep ahead up Mill Lane. Just after the war memorial, turn left at the T-junction and continue along Church Road, with Bedales School on the right and Steep church further along.”

A visit to All Saints' Church will enable you to see the two lancet windows, dedicated to Edward Thomas (see h).

To view the Shipwrights Way sculpture of a stack of books, commemorating, among others, Edward Thomas, walk down Church Road to Harrow Lane (opposite the Harrow Inn).

Alternative route

Bear right along the Hangers Way and follow the rising path to the top of the Shoulder of Mutton Hill. Pick up the route again at point 7, and then bear right downhill to reach the memorial stone

Map

