

Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets - 1

Calm before the storm - Adlestrop by E.A. Thomas

In the summer of 1914, very few people contemplated the idea of a war in Europe.

On June 1st, Whit Monday, the children and staff of Kildwick school held their annual festival. After a church service, which was accompanied by violin and piano, there was a parade around the district, with hymns sung at various points. A tea followed, with coffee and buns, in the schoolroom. In the evening, games and dances were held in a field off Skipton Road, provided by Mr. Smith Redman.

The Farnhill Primitive Methodist Sunday School also held a parade, followed by a tea in the schoolroom. Later sports events took place in a field adjacent to Kildwick Hall. Each child received a bag of sweets, provided by the children of Mr. and Mrs. Riddihough of Farnhill Hall.

Later in the month, Mr. W.A. Brigg, the mayor of Keighley, and his sister, Mrs. Cecil Sharpe, the mayoress, hosted a large garden party. Despite bad weather, over 700 of the great-and-good of both town and county were present at Kildwick Hall; including the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of York, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bradford, the High Sherriff of York, the Mayoress of Huddersfield, the Mayor and Mayoress of Colne, Lady Vaux, and many representatives of Keighley Town Council.



Throughout the afternoon, when the weather allowed, music was played by Kildwick and District Prize Brass Band, conducted by Mr. Joseph Hopkinson.

The social event of the season was covered in considerable detail by the Keighley News which filled two columns with details of the ladies dresses, described "By Our Lady Correspondent".

Edward Thomas was born in 1878, and educated at Oxford. By 1914 he was already a seasoned writer. He was also a naturalist and was involved in the rediscovery of the Ridgeway as a long-distance walking route through the south of England.



On 24th June, just a few days before Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo, Thomas took a train journey through the Cotswolds on the Oxford to Worcester line, during which the train made an unscheduled stop at the station of Adlestrop in Gloucestershire.

Thomas would later transcribe his notes on this journey, virtually verbatim, to create the poem *Adlestrop*.

Many of Thomas's poems, such as *The Lofty Sky*, *The Mountain Chapel*, *Aspens*, show that he had a copious love of the English countryside. That is also true of *Adlestrop*, which provided a last glimpse of a world that, unknown at the time, was about to be changed forever.

Adlestrop by Edward Thomas

Yes. I remember Adlestrop —
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

Edward Thomas was killed at the Battle of Arras on Easter Monday, April 1917, soon after arriving in France and just weeks before *Adlestrop* was published. It is said that when he was asked why he had enlisted and was going to fight he picked up a clod of earth and scattered it on the ground and said 'Literally for this'.

Several of the Farnhill WW1 Volunteers were also at Arras, on the Western Front in the Artois region of France. Harry Bulcock was wounded though he recovered and, after the war, worked for the Kildwick Gas Company. He served in the Home Guard during World War II.

The Kitson brothers, Albert and Harry, were also wounded at Arras. After the war they returned to Farnhill and participated fully in the life of the village.

