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**TRAVEL**

Saturday, June 4, 1994

**A POETIC LAD’S LOVELY LOCALES**

By Bruce J. Burnett

Sprinkled in Shropshire, England

CLASSIC AL, scholar and poet Al-


dward Houseman (1859-


-1938) was a dry, austere man who

honoured his studies and col-

league in 1886 with the romanization of

his first, unpublished collection of

poems, *A Shropshire Lad*.

Houseman was born in the neighbour-

ing Worcestershire, and as he later ac-

nowledged, the Shropshire of his poems

was "not exactly a real place."

"It was," he said, "more like the Cam-

bridge of Lytton" (an elegy poem by

John Millington). He actually spent his
time in Shropshire, often writing about

the country from a country guide, and

stated that the details in his poems were "some-
time-quite-true."

In a letter to a friend he wrote, "I had a

nondescript feeling for Shropshire because

dulls were my native horizon."

Into bare fields an air flew kites

From bare fields country houses

What are these that nestle huddled

What speckles what farms are these

Houseman's Shropshire was a mythical
country of fantasy, his "land of lost

content," the pastoral ideal that had

already been ground to grime in the dark
cracks of England's nearly industrial heart.

Indeed, it may be said the birthplace of

the Industrial Revolution is amongst the

Wrekeians from Houseman's sublime "Sh".

However, evocative scenes of Shrop-

shire were not always pastoral and idyllic.

On Wreke Field, the wind's too

tempestuous

His point flows the Wreke: yet

The ride, it drives the sagging double.

And thicken as a tempest the leaves.

Here the gale becomes a metaphor for

Houseman's troubled life. Much of the

poet's initial misfire came from his un-

suppressed heroin addication as a fellow

Cambridge student. Misses Jack

saw him as a "wild, firm, husbanded lad" who

chose to live like the poet's unen-

vied advanced. Upon graduation, Jack

took him to a teaching post in

India, but to Canada.

For a man who once wrote that "the

famous of all human passions is love of

truth," Houseman exercised amazing po-

tic beauty in the Shropshire Lad poems.

The sun on Hughley's slope

Tours almost a Earnestism's

Tours through the depths of the church

at Hughley, and Houseman knew it. The

village he had in mind had anathymer name that

did not fit the poem's cadence.

Nevertheless, Houseman's country in

southern Shropshire is still one of the

most beautiful, untrashed areas in Eng-

land. Its commercial hub, Ludlow, where

Houseman's ashes are buried in the parish

church, is often called the most attractive

market town in the country.

Ludlow is officially dominated by the

ruins of a Norman castle, the local point of

the annual Ludlow festival. Every year

in late June to early July a Shakespeare

play is performed within the castle walls.

The Ludlow branch of the Houseman

Society has developed The Houseman Trail,

a 6-kilometer excursion connecting

places that are mentioned in *A Shropshire

Lad*.

The trail starts in Ludlow:

The plan broke forth to green.

The poor stood high and moved.

"Our lives are in the hands of those

who write the poems," Houseman wrote.

In his native Shropshire, Houseman would

certainly approve of Ludlow's intact medieval ambiance. The

May fair is held every year, on Mon-

day the market still bustles, and the

citizens still play The Conquering Hero

Comes. Or come you home of Monday!

Where Ludlow market holds

And Ludlow chimes are playing

"The conquering hero comes."

Please see SHROPSHIRE — A14

Photography by Bruce J. Burnett

Stone bridge at the village of Clun, which was called

Onslow in E.M. Forster's novel

Howard's End.

Bruce J. Burnett is a freelance writer.

He lives in Vancouver.
Shropshire area is captured in verse

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Equip yourself with a map and a copy of *A Shropshire Lad* and fol- low the A4117 road out of Ludlow toward Kidderminster. After cross- ing the A69 bypass, take the left fork, the B4384, signposted Bridg- north. This road climbs over the shoulder of Brown Clee (clie is an old Saxon word for hill) offering su- perb views of the Teme Valley Clee Hills.

Brown Clee to beacon; beacon.

The alms have been paid.

From north and south the miles re- turn.

And beacon; beacon again.

After going through the villages of Borrington and Cleeveley North, bear left under Abdon Burr (bur— another Saxon word meaning feet or hill-foot, now simply meaning hill), to the tiny ancient hamlet of Abdon. Just before the hamlet is the beauti- ful Norman Abdon church. If you go through the little wicket gate in the churchyard, you will see the ra- maes of Abdon’s medieval village earthworks in the field.

Birzell’s Edge was unshaken
And bright was Abdon’s joy;
And morn between them shone;

The smooth green miles of turf.

Turn right into Abdon village and then bear left in the village of Tegg- land, following the signs back to Ludlow. The vista before you is Curbar Edge, bordered on the right by Westwood Edge with the Wells hills behind. The village of Clun is in its dis- tance. Honduras’ often-mentioned Westwood Edge in a beautiful wooded expanse overlooking southeast from the village of Maxstoke Westwood.

After crossing the River Curze and going through the village of Diddlebury, turn right on to the B4388. Drive through the villages of Aston Munday and Monnington and take the left-hand turn signposted Ruchhad. You will now be climbing on to Westwood Edge.

The road drops down the steep- side of Westwood Edge winding down Bullom Bank. Turn right at the B4771, which then climbs back to the edge of the escarpment. At the village of Presthope, there is a sharp left turn that leads down to Hightley with its non-existant village. How- ever, in compensation, the church of St. John the Baptist here does have a beautifully carved screen and some ancient stained glass.

Retire the road from Hightley, turning right back on to Westwood Edge through Hope Bower. This road has magnificent views of Long- mynd, an unspilt pristine valley. Shrop-

At the village of Priesthope, there is a

sharp left turn that leads down to Hightley with its non-existent village. How- ever, in compensation, the church of St. John the Baptist here does have a beautifully carved screen and some ancient stained glass.


The next town of Church Stretton was once a small village, but it is now- seen into a popular health resort during the late Victorian and Ed- wardian periods. Honduras’ line

in afternoon of Newport.

When dead man’s face is right,

And danger in the valley,

And anger in the sky.

Refrain to the late-year fair

held in Church Stretton. The hill

and wooded hollows of the Long- mynd could be dangerous to rivi- ters returning home. Webb refers to Church Stretton as “Shropshirine” in her novels.

Turn left at the traffic lights on to the A49 and cross under the main road for 13 km to Craven Arms. Webb calls this village The Junction.

At Craven Arms, take a quick de- tour off the Howick to visit Stickle- skeys Castle, probably the best preserved 13th-century fortified manor house in England. Then turn left on the B4388 to Clun, going through Acton on Clun and Clum- ben.

The village of Clun was called “Onion” in E. M. Forster’s novel *Howards End* (1910), which was co- partially in Shropshire. Clun is domi- nated by the romantic ruins of a Norman castle and Norman church with its massive towers-like tower.

Clun was Chetbury, Chevernclay and Clun, as the quaintest places

Under the sun.

From Clun, turn left on the A44 to
down to the River Teme at Knighton.

*To a long way further than

Knighton.

A greater place than Clun,

Where thousands may dwell and

And little will matter to men.

And little will matter to men.

In Knighton, turn left on the

A411 along the Teme, valley back

through Leintwardine to Ludlow.

The wondrous tale of narrow

is oft instilled in stone.

May every man cherish

And Ludlow fare again.