



[World War One Centenary : Continuations and Beginnings \(University of Oxford / JISC\)](#)

Digital sites of memory - have we remembered them?

by Kate Lindsay

2018-11-11 12:01:31

A post reflecting on the work on digital archives. Shared by Kate Lindsay, founder and project manager of the Continuations and Beginnings site and other digital projects. Originally posted at <https://katelindsayblogs.com>.



Tyne Cot Cemetery, Belgium. Photo by me, 2007. (CC-BY-NC)

10 years ago this week, at London's Imperial War Museum, I stood before an audience of historians, literary estates, relatives of war poets, and colleagues to launch a [new digital archive](#) to support the study of First World War poetry. The archive contained over 7000 carefully selected and digitized poetical manuscripts and primary source material (letters, diaries, photographs etc.) related to some of the [best known poets](#) of the War. For the first time these manuscripts, which are dispersed across the globe in archives, libraries and private collections, were brought together into one place. They were accessible to anyone with an internet connection and made available

under an open licence for use in education and research.

In terms of manuscript studies the release of these items into the public sphere was significant. It not only reveals the poets' lesser known works, but enables us to look at the much anthologised poems with new perspectives. Some of the poets never saw their work published in their lifetime as they lost that life to the War. Editors posthumously pieced together drafts of poems to create their interpretation of the final work. Now the student or academic can study these drafts and question why decisions on words and form were made. In addition, to be able to see the workings of the poet on their drafts raises insights into their experiences and writing. For instance in a poetical draft of ['Dulce et Decorum Est'](#) we see Owen struggle to find the appropriate word to describe what it looks like to watch a man die from a gas attack, as he crosses out each word we feel his struggle to watch a man die so horrifically. In many cases the manuscripts held additional symbolism to the poem itself. In the case of Rosenberg, dried trench mud fell from a draft of ['Daughters at War'](#) as I unfolded the flimsy Salvation Army paper. The draft was frayed and stained with water and dirt. The materiality of War was literally etched upon the poetry.

For the poets whose lives stretched beyond the War, their manuscripts provide insights into a continuing battle between what can and can not be remembered, for whilst they survived the War it never let them return. Edmund Blunden, one of the greatest poets of memory, when interviewed poignantly expressed 'my experiences in the First World War have haunted me all my life and for many days I have, it seemed, lived in that world rather than this'. There are three items I still think about often in relation to these poets. Two maps sketched by [Edmund Blunden](#) and [David Jones](#) years after the War as a result of dreams they had had 'their memories of events were vividly intense but their recollection of things like place names were not' the missing pieces in the need to remember which they searched for in their subconscious. The third is Robert Graves' first edition of his war memoir *Goodbye to All That*. Held in the Berg Collection in New York Public Library, the text is littered with corrective annotations by Sassoon and Blunden who disagreed with Graves' interpretations and memory of events. Sassoon's own personal copy of the text has been revealed to show rather more brutal asides: 'rot?', 'fiction?', 'faked?', 'skite'.

The availability of these primary sources, and the various tools we employed to allow users to explore them has not only made them available to enhance curriculum and research, but has provided an opportunity to understand the writers and their work more deeply and release them from the commemorative role to which they have so often been appropriated. At a deeper level their poetry does not sit comfortably with the military-style remembrance ceremonies hosted by the church and state, as [there is no place for 'pity' or 'never agains' in today's political and economical campaigns](#). I'm not convinced that Owen would have enjoyed last week's 'Wilfred Owen Commemorative Edition' of *Songs of Praise*, or even been a fan of poppies to be honest. It was good to see Owen's ['Anthem for Doomed Youth'](#) and Siegfried Sassoon's ['Aftermath'](#) featured in last night's televised *Festival of Remembrance*. It is rare that the poetry of the soldier poets feature in Remembrance events, it was one of a few striking moments that brought humanity to the 'celebration?', although they were flanked by uplifting military parades and hymns. As well as the literary related manuscripts, the archive also contained some 6500 digitized historical items to provide further context to the War covering themes such as the homefront, women in war, propaganda, the war in the Middle East, etc. What is significant about these items is

that they were not digitised from collections in the Imperial War Museum or The British Library, [they were contributed by members of the public during a three month crowdsourcing initiative](#). From our teacher and academic workshops we knew there was a need for more contextual resources, but digitisation costs were high. We also knew that we were sitting on an untapped archive of hidden materials that resided in the general public's attics and bottom drawers, objects relating to their families and their communities. Each object with a story to tell. We designed a campaign to ask the public to share the histories passed down to them, asking them to photograph any objects they had and upload the images with descriptive information to a specially-built website. We also held a series of [Community Collection Days](#) in memory institutions across the UK. In the style of the *Antiques Roadshow*, people could bring in their items, speak to experts about their significance, and then have them digitised and uploaded by our team. We put together a portable digitisation studio that we could transport by train, plane and automobile and that was cheap and easy to reproduce by any group that wanted to run their own event (How To's were made available [on the website](#)). The model was a success, and in 2011 it was picked up by the European Digital Library (Europeana) and rolled out across the continent. The team continued to work with partners in over 20 countries including extensive work in Germany, to continue to collect the hidden memories of World War One, both online and over 200 collection day events. Hundreds of thousands of items and their stories have been recorded and are now [openly available for reuse online](#).

The community collections include everything from letters to medals, trench art to uniforms, and even a postcard from the young Adolf Hitler about his dental treatment in 1916. Fascinating as this is, it's reasonable to ask what use or meaning such an eclectic collection actually has. For me the value lies in their potential to provide rich sites of exchange between academia, cultural heritage, and the public. Knowledge is not just the property of the University it resides in the wider community and the two can complement each other 'providing leads for new research, and new understandings. The collections hold the raw material of school projects, essays, enlightened browsing, and informative relaxation. The images are often bold and interesting. Teachers can take and use them at all educational levels and carefully selected they have something to say to both adults and children. You can find examples that relate not just to your country, sometimes even your home town. You can tap into experience across nations, move the War beyond the Western front, beyond the experience of the British Tommy, examine its impact across nations and cultures. It is a European (web) site of memory for a shared experience.

Other initiatives fell out of these collections? [Wikipedia edit-a-thon](#) to update and add new articles; [transcribe-a-thon](#) to provide searchable text of the digitized letters, diaries, and other documents; [data visualisation](#) to present the War in new and engaging ways; [social media role play](#); the development of [resource packs](#), [virtual world simulations](#), [agent-based models](#) to explore how history may have changed if events had twisted and turned in other directions. There have been inter-generational workshops, reminiscence work, [multimedia](#) and [theatre](#) productions, [a podcast series](#), and teacher development days. The collections and their interpretations were supporting the 'battle of academia' to challenge the collective memory of the First World War 'a shared set of ideas and values about what it was like and what it meant for those involved: that it was all fought in the muddy trenches of France and Belgium, it was futile, most soldiers died and those who survived went mad or wrote poetry. Oh and we mustn't forget the women, for they won the vote as the result of their war service. None of these things are whole truths. In particular the British experience of death and grief looks quite different in a global context. This is not to downplay the tragedy of loss of life or the pain of those left behind, but to turn a lens upon a 'world' war where fighting took place in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and Far East, in the air and at sea. A war where troops were enlisted from across the globe and fought far from home, where in villages across Asia and Africa the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and children were changed forever when they lost their sons, husbands, or fathers.

One of the most powerful resources we created were [a set of interactive maps](#) using location data provided by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The user can spin the earth and see the sheer number of cemeteries there are in the UK with a war grave. Why are they here? Why are there 9 war graves in a tiny

cemetery at Trekkopje in northern Namibia' What happened there?

Consider the following:

- New Zealand lost 5% of its male population aged 15-49, which makes it the nation with the largest percentage of deaths during the conflict.
- 140,000 Chinese contract labourers were hired by the British and French governments, forming a substantial part of the immigrant labour force working on the Western Front during the war.
- Upon joining the War, 200,000 African-American troops were inducted into the US forces and served in Europe.
- The largest explosion of World War One occurred on December 6, 1917 when a munitions ship blew up in the harbour of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Nearly 2,000 people died and some 9,000 were injured in the disaster.
- France recruited between 1914 and 1918 nearly 500,000 colonial troops, including 166,000 West Africans, 46,000 Madagascans, 50,000 Indochinese, 140,000 Algerians, 47,000 Tunisians and 24,300 Moroccans.
- 2 million African troops were recruited during the War to serve as soldiers and labourers. Out of those men it is estimated that 157,100 labourers lost their lives, and 97,900 soldiers. When African civilian losses are added to those of the military, African fatalities during the war probably exceeded 1 million lives, or more than 1 per cent of the population. On a par if not more than Britain's loss.
- In the Battle of Gallipoli, where out of a total of 3000 Indian combatants, some 1624 were killed, a loss rate of more than 50 per cent.
- 1/3 of military deaths in the War were a result of the Spanish Flu, its rapid spread enabled by the conditions of war, movement of troops and supplies, and the gathering of crowds during the armistice. The Spanish Flu killed more people than the death toll across nations of the two world wars.

These are not facts that will be revisited on our national day of remembrance, for they do not fit our notion of 'we-ness' and what it means in terms of our national identity to have been the country who fought, who suffered and who won the War.

Many of these ideas and materials are recorded in an open educational resource we set up called [World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings](#), a sort of *The Conversation* for the subject of the First World War, but not restricted to academic writers. The new perspectives presented can be controversial. There are over 200 articles and resources from over 70 contributors available.

From a 21st century perspective, digital has been key to a more extensive engagement with the World War One. It has unlocked content and provided channels for more effective forms of knowledge exchange. Licensing content openly is deeply important to enable this engagement, to allow history and memory to collide and challenge each other, to make high quality resources available to not only answer questions but to raise them. The web has the potential to democratise the study of the past. Online it belongs to everyone.

So have we played a part in the Centenary? Have we remembered them? In answer to the first, it's a yes, the user stats on the websites speak for themselves. But in answer to the second it's a no, for to remember surely means we should reflect on the past to influence our present day actions and attitudes. The problem with opening up new material and perspectives is that it does not always fit the model of Commemoration which largely rests on notions of Tribute and Honour. Open strategies depend on being able to talk critically and honestly about the War, those who took part in it, and those who wrote about it. I think we are still a generation too close to the conflict to be able to achieve this.

I experienced this. I spent years surrounded by primary source material filled with accounts of horror and grief, and whilst there were also many accounts of friendship, love and humour, overall I found it desperately sad and helpless. On my work trips to France and Belgium I could reach into the soil of the battlefields and pull out bits of shrapnel, bullets and barbed wire like they were left there yesterday, not 100 years ago. I spent full days talking to the sons and daughters of those who experienced the War. Working with these projects, like the search for family history, one can't help but be shaped by modern preconceptions of the War, and this creates a barrier to deeper engagement. For some time the most important thing to me was to pay tribute to those who fought and those who were left behind, not to engage with the deeper questions about the War, unsimplify it, and question how we remember. It was only when I started working more with historians such as Dan Todman, Catriona Pennell, Santanu Das, Pierre Purseigle, the literary editors of the War poets, the contributors to *Continuations and Beginnings*, started creating powerful data visualisation, that I truly started to understand what it means to remember. To live in peace, with good international relations, where there is no threat of nationalism.

100 years is not long enough.

?Notes?

I was PI / PM on the following projects 2006-2014, working with Ylva Berglund Prytz, Alun Edwards, Stuart Lee, Pat Lockley, Everett Sharp, Michael Loizou. All projects were funded by JISC Digitisation Programme, with the exception of Europeana 1914-1918 funded by the European Commission.

[First World War Poetry Digital Archive](#)

[The Great War Archive](#)

[Europeana 1914-1918](#)

[Running a Community Collection Online](#)

[World War I Centenary: Continuations and Beginnings](#)

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[Original version](#)

Armistice: Lest We Forget

by Ylva Berglund Prytz

2018-11-11 10:25:49

How are you marking the centenary of the First World War? One option is to explore the online archives of stories and objects shared by thousands of people across the globe. Through these archives, we can take part of the stories of the men and women who lived, and sometimes died, during the conflict. Not only those who fought and fell in the First World War but also those who were part of and affected by the conflict; parents, wives, friends, colleagues, neighbours and children and grand-children for generations to come. The archives contain private letters, pictures, objects and stories, recording small details, personal moments and historical events.

This picture is part of a large collection relating to Jim Cross, despatch rider from Broadway, Worcestershire. It shows a flimsy carried by Sjt. Cross to order the cease fire on November 11 1918 at 11am. Apparently batteries were still firing as Cross arrived, some of them after the Armistice.

The collection of artefacts from Serjeant James Cross' service as a despatch rider contains numerous items, including his memoirs dictated in his 90s. This collection, and much more, can be explored, for free, online through [The Great War Archive, University of Oxford](#).

Other similar archives include the large, international [Europeana 1914-1918](#) archive and '[Lest We Forget](#)', which is still welcoming new contributions. If you have a story, object or memory relating to the First World War, share it at <http://lwf.it.ox.ac.uk/>. The Centenary of the conflict may be coming to an end, but there are still memories to share. Lest we forget. We will remember them.

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[Original version](#)

Armistice 1918: an unenthusiastic response

by Philip Dutton

2018-11-09 16:37:58

Befitting a world-wide conflict that caused unprecedented human and animal casualties, vast material destruction and immeasurable suffering and misery, the ending of the First World War was greeted with displays of uninhibited joy and relief.^[1] Once the news of the 'armistice' had percolated, via rumour and the press, through to the cities, towns and villages of the Allied powers worldwide, enthusiastic celebrations were instant and extensive. Although some contemporary observers have noted a mismatch in the degree of enthusiasm shown in response to the news of peace between service personnel near the battle zones^[2] and those on the civilian home fronts, the overwhelming impression of the visual, reported and anecdotal evidence is that the immediate news of the end of hostilities was widely and fervently embraced.

Not so, and by way of utter contrast, was the response of GHQ Poona in India in November 1918. There, if the personal memory and eloquent prose of one who was present are to be believed, the military authorities calmly, and with great restraint, played down the welcome news of peace, which had filtered through to the place via local newspapers by the 12th November.

Here and there regrettable signs of spontaneous boisterousness did bubble up. Some common soldiers, territorials and the like, had cheered and sung patriotic songs in the cinema, and others had attempted to form an impromptu procession. But the official eye had looked askance on these manifestations of joy and they had petered out.^[3]

GOC Poona reacted to this epic day by 'soldiering on' and patriotically instructing all temporary RAMC officers still resident, to attend mule-saddling classes. An order which bewildered the medical officers but proved the source of great hilarity amongst combatant officers to whom, of course, it did not apply.

In fact the high degree of post-armistice lethargy displayed in Poona' stimulated noisy correspondence on the subject, and reasons for it, in the 'Times of India'. The press spotlight once focused, had its effects and no sooner than the 27 November (16 days after 'the guns fell quiet') 'a monster procession' was organised involving children, of all nationalities and faiths, marching in columns of four and waving little flags, and finally brought to a close by 'a not too costly display of fireworks'.

The source for this bizarre picture of peace tardily and reluctantly celebrated is a remarkable personal account of

First World War service: *'Memoirs of a Camp Follower'* (1934), by Philip Gosse[4]. It is a gentle, compassionate and at times delightfully humorous take on active service life and front line experience. Gosse was a brave and resourceful RAMC doctor but the unassuming story he tells lays greater emphasis on his interest in observing wildlife on all the fronts he served rather than recording the details of his (often harrowing) medical work and narrow escapes. He was a great friend of the zoologist Oldfield Thomas who worked at the Natural History Museum in London, and sent a large number of specimens, including a wide variety of small mammals, expertly stuffed[5], from the battlefields back to the curators in South Kensington.

And, if Poona in November 1918 disappointed Gosse by its reluctance to celebrate the arrival of peace, only three months previously it provided him with an instance of inspiring optimism and hope. While working at the King George Hospital in the late summer of 1918 he was in charge of a ward of seriously ill soldiers - all suffering from 'Spanish influenza' - and came across a patient who was clearly dying. This soldier was a Private in an unspecified Somerset Territorial unit, who in civil life had been a porter on the Great Western Railway and whose home was Stogumber. Gosse was familiar with the stretch of line from Taunton to Dunster, and, knowing the man's civil profession, and at something of a loss, recited the names of the railway stations on the line in the hope that it might revive his patient's spirits or at least soothe him in his last moments. The effect was remarkable in changing for the better the Territorial's physical and mental state, and the performance was therefore regularly repeated. The man eventually recovered and Gosse was convinced the recitation of the familiar place names - *'Norton Fitzwarren, Bishops Lydeard, Stogursey, Williton, Blue Anchor, Dunster, Minehead'* - had contributed significantly to his soldier's survival.[6]

We do not know, Gosse does not tell us, but how fitting it would have been for the fully recovered unknown Somerset Territorial to have witnessed Poona's belated Peace procession and that modest display of fireworks.

Online References

- Full online access to *'Memoirs of a Camp Follower'* (with some OCR errors) is available: https://archive.org/stream/in.ernet.dli.2015.528065/2015.528065.Memoirs-Of_djvu.txt
- Summary biography of Philip Gosse available via online Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (requires reader's card number for institutional access): <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/37475>

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[1] The visual evidence is there for all to see, e.g.: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/armistice-day-1918-in-pictures> (content may be in copyright - please check rights before re-use)

[2] See *'A Passionate Prodigality'*, Guy Chapman, Ivor Nicholson & Watson Ltd, 1933, pp.335-336

[3] *'Memoirs of a Camp-Follower'*, Philip Gosse, Longman, Green & Co, 1934, p.282

[4] Later re-published during the Second World War as *'A Naturalist Goes to War'*, Penguin Books, 1942. The origins of *'Memoirs of a Camp Follower'* may be discerned in the three short 'chapters' of *'Rest Billets'*, Philip Gosse (illustrated by Sylvia Gosse), Dulau & Co, 1927

[5] Gosse was inspired to assist Thomas by another medical officer, Captain Charles McKerrow, while serving with 69th Field Ambulance in France in September 1915, whom Gosse observed *'attentively skinning a field vole'* in order to make a fur muff for his young daughter's doll. See *'Memoirs of a Camp-Follower'*, p.3.

[6]

[Original version](#)

Wilfred Owen: Resonances

by Brigitte Friant-Kessler

2018-10-23 12:19:53

Owen's enduring legacy comes in a variety of shapes and forms, from Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* to Pat Barker's novel *Regeneration*, not to mention translations and poems written in homage to Owen. There are also a few 'albeit rare' examples of Owen's poetry adapted in comic book formats, and illustrations intended to accompany Owen's poems also belong to that vast body of intermedial works inspired by the war poet's lines. Among those visual responses, *Dulce et Decorum Est* would appear to represent the most frequently chosen text.

Here at the Universit Polytechnique Hauts de France of Valenciennes, we began to work with Masters students at the Faculty of Arts last academic year to produce two exhibitions: one *in situ* at the Forrester House of Ors based on art films made by the students, and another that will be held at the Centre d'Arts Ronzier from 5-13 November 2018, featuring artworks and paintings, in parallel with an international *Owen in/and France* conference for scholars (5-6 November 2018). There have been other artistic productions around Owen's burial place and the meaning of what lies beneath the ground: we were fortunate to benefit from a collaboration with professional glassmakers to experiment on how we could include remains and artefacts found in the soil of Ors in designed glass pieces. Owen's poetry is made to resonate with each artist's aesthetic mode, technique and comprehension of both the original text and its French translation

The starting point of *Resonances* was the Forrester house at Ors and the idea to let everyone apprehend the location, ponder what happened and what this meant regarding Owen's death. Valenciennes being geographically close to Ors, we wanted to give the students, who had no prior knowledge of who Owen was and where he had fallen, the opportunity to discover the site before embarking on the project. The sensorial and physical contact with the location at Ors actually turned out to be the main trigger for those young artists' inspiration. Walking along the canal, listening to noises in the forest, collecting anything from leaves, stones to fragments of tree bark, or spending time in the cellar whence Owen wrote the last letter to his mother, reading the poems, all of that stood at the core of this experience. They all came back with Owen's words ringing strongly in their minds and then created a post-Owen body of works that mingled with the memorial meaning, thus giving full meaning to the project's concept of *Resonances*. Key for the artists of the selected works pictured here was the interrelation of memory, earth, and the dialectic between the visible and invisible traces of Owen's poetry.

Special thanks for this art project go to Nicolas Devigne, Marcel Lubac and Maxime Turpin from the Faculty of Arts. They have been of great assistance and guidance to the students and are wonderful colleagues to work with.

1/ Mathilde Blondeel, *Le masque forestier (Forest Mask)*. Colour pencils, 2018, 42 x 29.7 cm based on vegetal material collected near the Forrester House.

A drawing in colour pencils designed to be a realistic representation of a stretch of ground near the Forrester House. However, as you look more and more closely, your eye will slowly identify the concealed shape of a gas mask hidden beneath the layers of leaves, drowned 'As under a green sea'. The artist's statement points out her choice is also in keeping with the realism that transpires in Owen's poems, particularly the lines 'Many had lost their boots/But limped on, blood-shod'. Originally conceived of as a protective device, the mask has, in the course of time, become a death mask and the leaves carry the reminiscent power of Owen's poems. The sweet scent of decaying leaves is the counterpoint to the irony of *Pro Patria Mori* at the end of *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Drawing in colour is a meticulous and multi-layered process, but so is the cycle of life and death that transforms bodily remains into vegetal matter, to which Blondeel wanted to offer a new life through her artwork, as well as pay tribute to Owen's poetry and legacy.

2/ Nadia Ogou, *Kouni gnani yli yg*. Batik, serigraphy and installation, 2018, 225 x 125 cm

The artist's text written in African language translates Owen's last letter to his mother dated 31 Oct 1918 to show how this poet's death can resonate with contemporary wars in the world, in this case in Africa. The artist explains that she translated Owen's last letter to his mother in Snofou, one of the sixty-five languages spoken in the Ivory Coast where Ogou was born, and which has suffered from wars for decades. The title means 'From Death into the Light'. She painted Owen's letter in Snofou on a very stiff piece of khaki fabric previously dyed according to a traditional African technique. The stiffness is meant to evoke the discomfort of Owen and all the soldiers during cold nights in a humid cellar before battles such as the one along the canal on 4 November 1918. The letter to his mother is of importance as it recalls how much women at home suffer from the war when their sons die.

3/ Flicia Laude, *Portraits of Wilfred Owen*. Acrylic paint and ink on dyed linen, 2018, 150 x 230 cm.

Executed on a piece of grey linen previously dyed in khaki so as to recall military uniforms on either side of the Channel, this painting is based on a superposition of several portraits of the war poet Wilfred Owen. The overall composition is designed to create the effect of a camouflage. Red stains in ink are mixed with dirt brownish tones and dark green, all part of a Great War soldier's drudge when marching and falling on the ground. At first the viewer cannot discern the portraits, but their interconnected shapes form a pattern from which memorial strata emerge. They coexist, dissolve and resonate to remind us that the poet is both absent yet spectacularly present.

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[Original version](#)

4-11 November 1918: Wilfred Owen and armistice Day in Memory and History

by Alex Nordlund

2018-10-16 09:14:25

In an early preface to his collected war poems, Wilfred Owen wrote of his work that 'The subject of it is War,

and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity'. After having survived so much trauma and disillusion on the Western Front, Wilfred Owen was killed in action on the morning on 4 November 1918 while fighting at the Oise-Sambre Canal in Northern France. One week later, at the eleventh hour of 11 November, the Armistice went into effect. That same day, as church bells rang in the Armistice, Owen's mother would receive a telegram informing her of her son's death. If there is a poetry to the 'pity of war' as Owen believed, it lies in the timing of his death so close to the end of hostilities on the Western Front.

For most British soldiers that survived to the Armistice on the Western Front, their letters and diaries reveal a rather diverse range of reactions. After living amidst the constant noise of gunfire and explosions for years, some found the sheer silence that followed at 11 am disturbing. Feeling a sense of anticlimax, some expressed anger that they didn't get to advance into Germany. Others, after experiencing in 1918 some of the most brutal military engagements of the First World War (notably the Spring Offensive to the Hundred Days Campaign), were too tired to even care, and chose instead to sleep through it. Several soldiers desperately searched for food and (especially) alcohol to celebrate in the ruins of France and Belgium. Most soldiers, however, wondered the same thing: 'When do we get to go home??

In many ways, the Armistice cannot be remembered without invoking the tragic death of Wilfred Owen on 4 November 1918. Its timing represented what other war poets and later generations would see as the futility of the First World War. Indeed, for many, the public memory of Armistice Day would over time come to be epitomized by Wilfred Owen and his invocation of both the 'poetry' and 'pity' of war; it is the reactions of those that saw the 'pity of war' that often take center stage in the public memory of Armistice Day. Siegfried Sassoon derided in his diary the 'loathsome ending to the loathsome tragedy of the last four years' that he saw in celebrations in London (1983, 282). Robert Graves wandered off 'along the dyke above the marshes of Rhuddlan?cursing and sobbing and thinking of the dead' (1998, 227-78). Even the timing of the Armistice itself 'at the eleventh day of the eleventh month of the eleventh hour' of 1918 had a seemingly poetic ring to it.

But did other British soldiers believe that their service was pointless on 11 November 1918 and beyond? After the Armistice, these men often would say the same thing: I have 'done my bit' in the First World War. A rather vague interpretation of their wartime experiences, 'done my bit' could have many personal attitudes to wartime experience. With the Armistice approaching its own Centenary, it is important to remember that it meant *something*, not nothing, to each person for their own reasons. What, then, drove these soldiers to the Armistice and the end of the First World War? What compelled Wilfred Owen, despite his belief in the 'pity of war?', to fight to his death on 4 November 1918, with the end a mere week away?

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