

A Few More Writers and Books of World War I

R. Eden Martin

August 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the commencement of the Great War. The fuse was lit on June 28, 2014, when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. Though Serbia apparently had nothing to do with the murder, Austria made demands which Serbia could not satisfy. Thinking they had a “blank check” from Germany, the Austrians then mobilized. The armies of Russia and Germany mobilized in response. And, as was famously said by the British Foreign Secretary, Edward Grey, the lamps began to go out.

But not all the lamps. For all its death and devastation, the war produced some of the finest poetry and prose of the 20th century. As Caxtonians this fall brush up on their history by rereading Barbara Tuchman’s *Guns of August* (1962) or Liddell Hart’s *The Real War* (1930), a few may remember passages from poems they read long ago in a college anthology, or recently in one of the many popular novels set in the time of the war, perhaps the “regeneration trilogy” of Pat Barker.

I have collected bits and pieces of World War I literature for many years. I’m sure my interest grew out of the fact that my father and his older brother were both soldiers in the American Expeditionary Force in France in 1918. Their letters from France were recently published, in *Letters Home, 1918-1919* (Chicago, 2012). Perhaps someday some great-grandchild will read them.

The *Caxtonian* has already published several of my pieces on the “war poets”: Thomas Hardy (April 2009), Isaac Rosenberg (December 2009), Robert Graves (March 2011), and Siegfried Sassoon (January 2013). Now seems the right time to note a few more favorite writers and books of the war. A couple of these writers – Brooke and Buchan – would not be found on any “great authors” lists today. Of course, a poem or writer or book may appeal to readers or collectors for reasons other than literary merit.

RUPERT BROOKE

The Soldier

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England
given;

Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her
day;

And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Rupert Brooke (1897-1915) was the fair-haired young Englishman of his generation. W.B. Yeats called him “the handsomest young man in England.” He attended Kings College, Cambridge, where he studied literature. In 1913 Brooke travelled to America, then to the South Seas, writing articles for a London newspaper. He was one of the group of poets centered in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock that included Wilfrid Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, and John Drinkwater – and later Robert Frost and his good friend Edward Thomas, who, though not yet a poet, would come to be regarded as one of the greatest of the “war poets.” Shortly after the war

began, Brooke was commissioned in the royal navy. He died from an infection in April 1915 off the island of Skyros in the Aegean.

Bernard Bergonzi, who wrote a fine book

about the literature of the war, *Heroes’ Twilight*,¹ didn’t like Brooke’s poetry. According to Bergonzi, “the greatest of the myths which dominated the English consciousness” during the war was that “which enshrines the name and memory of Rupert Brooke.” Bergonzi wrote: His sonnet, “The Soldier,” though “among the most famous short poems in the language,” is considered great by “the numerous readers for whom the excellence of poetry lies in the acceptability of its sentiments rather than in the quality of its language.”²

Bergonzi added that “Brooke was psychologically unstable, with a paranoid streak, and for quite long periods was on the edge of a nervous breakdown.” The appearance of his sonnet so shortly before his death “is what promoted him to the status of a hero and martyr.”

The sonnets themselves are not very amenable to critical discussion.... Considered more narrowly and exactly as poems, their inadequacy is very patent.... Brooke’s poetic gifts were never robust, and he was very far from being the most talented of the Georgian group....³

Other criticism has focused on the fact that Brooke romanticized the war. He wrote early, before the worst of the war’s horrors manifested themselves, so his poems lack the hard-edged realism exemplified by the writers who later experienced life in the trenches – poets such as Sassoon and Graves.

Well, I like Brooke’s sonnets – particularly “The Soldier.” Probably it is

because of the sentiments – which Bergonzi thought should be secondary to the language. Perhaps it is the contrast between the nobility and Englishness of those sentiments and the



Rupert Brooke, portrait by Sherrill Schell from 1914 and *Other Poems*.



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blood and body parts which permeated the later, more "realistic," poetry of the trenches.

In my *Caxtonian* piece on Robert Frost (November, 2005), I recounted how Frost, who had moved to England in 1912, took his family north to Dymock in the spring of 1914 in order to be with his friend Wilfrid Gibson and the other poets who had settled there. Brooke was a member of the Dymock group, who had decided to publish a new quarterly poetry magazine, *New Numbers*. Edward Thomas was also there during that golden summer before the war.

In November and December of 1914, Brooke wrote his five "1914" sonnets. They appeared first in Volume I, Number 4 – the December 1914 issue – of *New Numbers*. Three of them, including "The Soldier," were republished in Chicago a few months later by Harriet Monroe in the April 1915 issue of *Poetry*. About the same time, on Easter Sunday, April 4, Dean Inge, preaching in St. Paul's, quoted "The Soldier" from the pulpit. It was reprinted in *The Times* the next day. Brooke's volume of collected verse – *1914 and Other Poems* – was published in an edition of 1000 copies in mid-April. His shirtless photograph, taken by Sherrill Schell in 1913, appeared as a frontispiece.

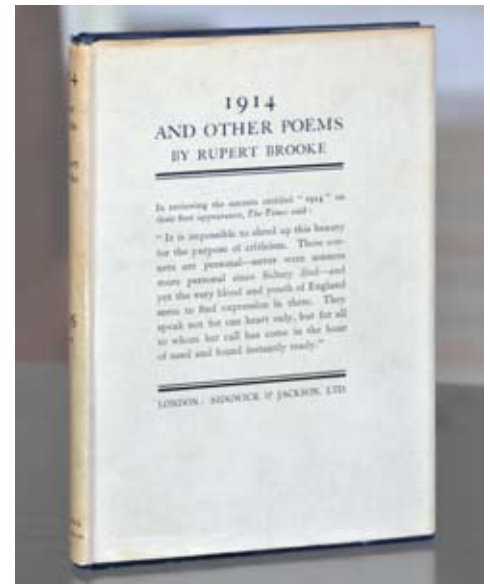
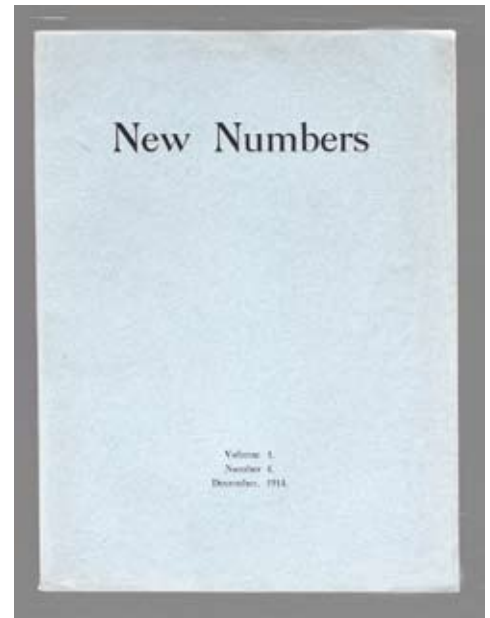
A few days after his volume appeared, Brooke died in the Mediterranean from an infection. An obituary written by Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, appeared three days later in *The Times*. Churchill wrote:

A voice had become audible, a note had been struck, more true, more thrilling, more able to do justice to the nobility of our youth in arms engaged in this present war, than any other more able to express their thoughts of self-surrender, and with a power to carry comfort to those who watch them so intently from afar. The voice has been swiftly stilled. Only the echoes and the memory remain; but they will linger.

* * *

He expected to die: he was willing to die for the dear England whose beauty and majesty he knew: and he advanced towards the brink in perfect serenity, with absolute conviction of the rightness of his country's cause and a heart devoid of hate for fellow-men.

The thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward in this, the hardest, the cruelest, and the least-rewarded of all the wars that men have fought. They are a whole history and revelation of Rupert Brooke himself. Joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, ruled by high undoubting purpose, he was all that one would wish England's noblest sons to be in the days when no sacrifice but the most precious is acceptable, and the most precious is that which is most freely proffered.



I'll take Churchill's assessment over Ber-gonzi's any day.

Two months later, in mid-June, Brooke's brother William Alfred was killed in action in France. It was a brutal war.

EDWARD THOMAS

This Is No Case Of Petty Right Or Wrong

This is no case of petty right or wrong
That politicians or philosophers
Can judge. I hate not Germans, nor grow hot
With love of Englishmen, to please newspapers.
Beside my hate for one fat patriot
My hatred of the Kaiser is love true: –
A kind of god he is, banging a gong.
But I have not to choose between the two,
Or between justice and injustice. Dinned
With war and argument I read no more
Than in the storm smoking along the wind
Athwart the wood. Two witches' cauldrons roar.
From one the weather shall rise clear and gay;
Out of the other an England beautiful
And like her mother that died yesterday.

Little I know or care if, being dull,
I shall miss something that historians
Can rake out of the ashes when perchance
The phoenix broods serene above their ken.
But with the best and meanest Englishmen
I am one in crying. God save England, lest
We lose what never slaves and cattle
blessed.

The ages made her that made us from
the dust:
She is all we know and live by, and we
trust
She is good and must endure, loving
her so:
And as we love ourselves we hate our
foe.

Edward Thomas (1878-1917) had some twenty books of prose to his credit before Robert Frost in 1914 persuaded him to give poetry a try. After the war began, Thomas and Frost visited several times. During their walks Thomas agonized over whether he should enlist in the army. As Caxtonians with good memories may recall, Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken," grew out of one of his walks and indecisive conversations with Thomas.⁴

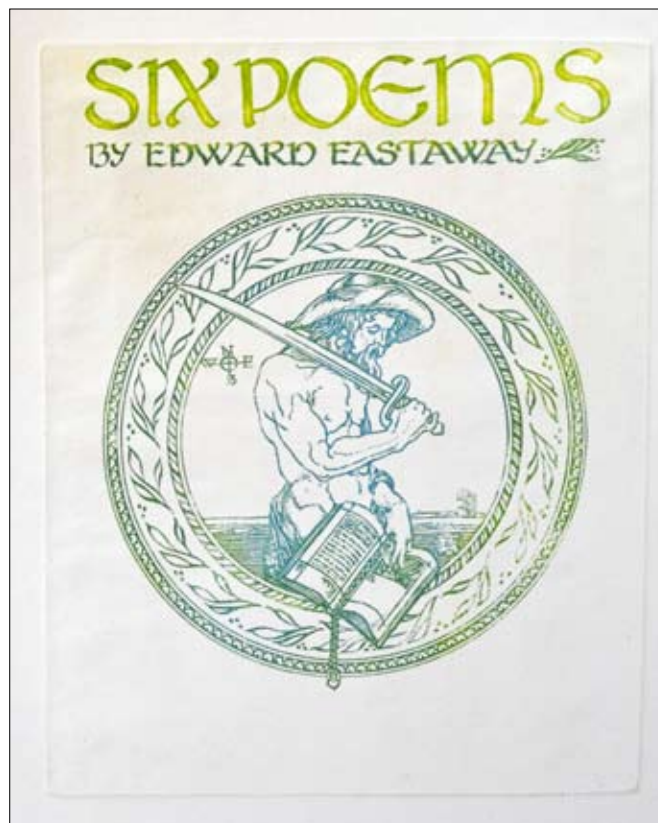
By November 1914 Thomas had taken Frost's suggestion. Under the name Edward Eastaway he submitted several poems to London editors, but they were rejected. At age 37 he was

under no legal obligation to enlist, but after much internal debate he did so, in July 1915. While undergoing military training, he continued to write.

James Guthrie (1874-1952), a Scots artist, typographer and printer, had founded the Pear Tree Press, named after his cottage in Essex. The first book issued by his press was *Some Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, in 1901.



Edward Thomas



The only book of Edward Thomas' poetry to appear in his lifetime was published by James Guthrie.

Somehow Edward Thomas and Guthrie became acquainted. Perhaps it was in April 1916, when Guthrie accepted two of Thomas' poems for publication in his capacity as a member of the editorial staff of a literary quarterly, *Form*. Guthrie then printed and published the only book of Thomas' poetry to appear during his lifetime. Entitled *Six Poems*, it appeared under the pseudonym Edward Eastaway. One of the six was "This Is No Case Of Petty Right Or Wrong."

Consisting of only 14 leaves and printed on handmade paper, the little book shows on the title page a bearded, shirtless man with a sword over his right shoulder and his left hand pointed to a book – emblematic of the writer armed and off to war.

Thomas' biographer and bibliographer, Robert Eckert, in *Edward Thomas*,⁵ explained that not all copies of *Six Poems* were printed at the same time. Consequently, there were variations in size and color. Each copy was signed by Guthrie. All were apparently numbered – some designated as "1 of 100 copies," others showing simply the number printed. Eckert says there were "less than a hundred and the plates are now destroyed." He added that Thomas saw the book before his death in 1917.⁶

My copy is numbered, "Of 100 Copies, no. 50," and once belonged to the distinguished collector Claude Prance. It bears his small plate with his address in Gozo, Malta.

In 1933, in response to an inquiry from the collector and writer Paul H. Muir, the publisher Guthrie wrote a fuzzy letter about the circumstances of the publication of *Six Poems*.⁷ As far as I've been able to determine, the letter has not been previously published.

I think I am right in saying that these poems were first done by me (around the war time) and were actually E's first printed book of poems. He gave them to me to do, as I liked his poetry, and must have seen the work, for he remarked the figure on title as being a mixture of Christ and Walt Whitman!...

I'll see if I can find out exactly about "6 Poems." Date is usually in my books, but that one was, I remember, a struggle at a bad time, and it isn't one I am proud of as a bit of printing. In fact all my new work is far
See *WORLD WAR I*, page 4



Publisher James Guthrie's letter about the circumstances of the publication of *Six Poems*.

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and away better done.

Thomas continued his training in the fall of 1916, and selected and arranged the poems to appear in a second, broader collection. He was commissioned in November, and shipped out the following spring. Robert Frost sent three of his short poems to Harriet Monroe, who published them in *Poetry*.⁸

Two months later Thomas was killed on the Monday after Easter, April 9, 1917, soon after arriving in France. His collection was at the press when he died. It was published under his own name, entitled simply *Poems by Edward Thomas* ("Edward Eastaway") (London, 1917), on October 10, 1917 – with 525 copies for England and 525 for America.⁹

Not long after his death additional poems by Thomas appeared in two miscellanies: *An Annual of New Poetry*¹⁰ and *Twelve Poets*.¹¹ His *Last Poems*,¹² containing 71 poems, was published a month after the end of the war. It included the poems that had earlier appeared in Guthrie's *Six Poems* and the two miscellanies. The first "complete" collection of Thomas' work appeared in 1920, edited by Walter De La Mare: *Collected Poems by Edward Thomas*.¹³

Some people say Edward Thomas wasn't a "war poet" at all; and it is true that few of his poems were focused directly on what was taking place in the war. But the war was the setting – it was in the atmosphere. Thomas is one of the "Great War poets" commemorated on a slate stone in Westminster Abbey's Poet's

Corner; and most critics today agree that he was one of the most talented poets of his generation.

Robert Frost included his own poem, "A Soldier," in *West-Running Brook* (1928). I think he wrote it with Thomas in mind:

He is that fallen lance that lies as hurled,
That lies unlifted now, come dew, come
rust,
But still lies pointed as it plowed the dust.
If we who sight along it round the world,
See nothing worthy to have been its mark,
It is because like men we look too near,
Forgetting that as fitted to the sphere,
Our missiles always make too short an arc.
They fall, they rip the grass, they intersect
The curve of earth, and striking, break
their own;
They make us cringe for metal-point on
stone.
But this we know, the obstacle that
checked
And tripped the body, shot the spirit on
Further than target ever showed or shone.

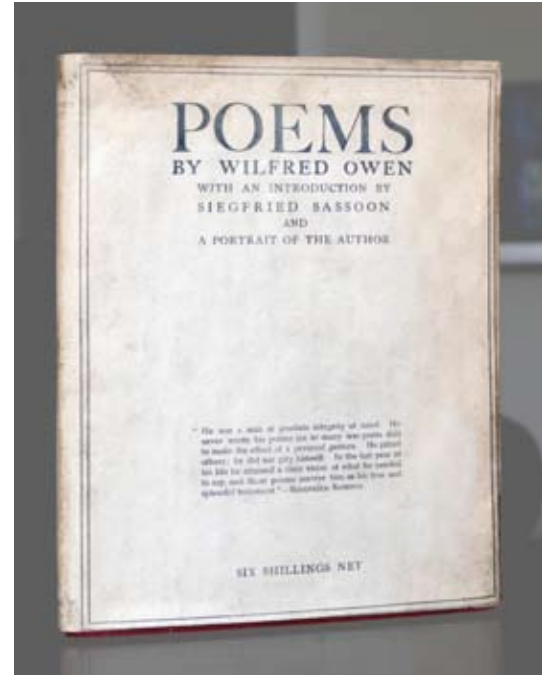
WILFRED OWEN

This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, dominion or power, except War.

Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
The poetry is in the pity.
Yet these elegies are not to this generation,
This is in no sense consolatory.
They may be to the next.
All the poet can do to-day is to warn.
That is why the true Poets must be truthful.
If I thought the letter of this book would last,
I might have used proper names; but if the spirit of it survives Prussia, – my ambition and those names will be content; for they will have achieved themselves fresher fields than Flanders.

Note – This Preface [to the 1920 collection of his work edited by Siegfried Sassoon] was found, in an unfinished condition, among Wilfred Owen's papers.

Selecting a "greatest" poet is even more pointless than picking the "greatest" baseball or football player. At least the ballplayers have records. But if some statistician were able to figure out how to do quality testing for poetry, Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) would probably win the literary equivalent of the Heisman Trophy.



Siegfried Sassoon assembled this earliest collection of Owen's poems.

Owen's story has been told often in recent years – in history, biography, and fiction. The reader who wants a fuller dose may get it in Jon Stallworthy's fine *Wilfred Owen* (Oxford 1974). Owen wrote poetry for only a little more than a year. He enlisted in October 1915, endured training, and was sent to France in late December 1916. By early January he was at the front. In March he suffered a concussion, and in June he was treated for shell-shock at Craglockhart hospital in Edinburgh, where he met Sassoon.

After being released from the hospital, Owen performed limited service in England during 1918, which left him time to write. He returned to France in late August 1918. (My father arrived with the American army a month later.) Owen was in heavy fighting during September and October, for which he received the Military Cross for gallantry. He was killed on November 4 – one week before the Armistice was signed.

Only five of Owen's poems were published during his lifetime – in journals, two anonymously. The first appearance of his work in a book was in Edith Sitwell's anthology, *Wheels, 1919 Fourth Cycle*. She included seven poems by Owen, three of which were "The Show," "Strange Meeting," and "The Sentry." Owen's work and perhaps his personality made such an impact on Sitwell that she dedicated the book to his memory.

Sitwell demonstrated remarkable judgment. She appreciated almost instantly the extraordinary quality of Owen's work. Similarly,

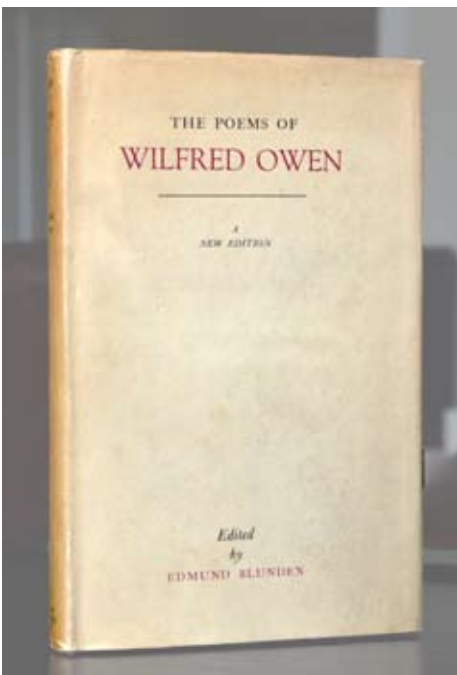


Owen's portrait, from *Poems* (1920).

after Isaac Rosenberg's first volume, *Poems*, appeared in 1922, accompanied by mostly lukewarm notices and slow sales, Ms. Sitwell wrote in the magazine *New Age* that "Rosenberg was one of the two great poets killed in the War, the other being Wilfred Owen."¹⁴

After the war Owen's friend Sassoon went through his papers and with the help of

Edmund Blunden assembled and published this collection in 1931.



Ms. Sitwell selected 23 poems for a separate collection. *Poems by Wilfred Owen* (London 1920). In his introduction, Sassoon wrote: "I cannot attempt to judge his work with any critical detachment. I can only affirm that he was a man of absolute integrity of mind. He never wrote his poems (as so many war-poets did) to make the effect of a personal gesture. He pitied others; he did not pity himself."

A decade later, Edmund Blunden, a fine "war poet" himself and a friend of both Owen and Sassoon, produced a new edition, including several poems not previously published, *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*.¹⁵

Blunden thanked Mrs. Owen for her help in going through his notebooks and loose papers, and repeated a story she had told him that makes the reader wince:¹⁶

He [Wilfred] gave me a sack full to burn once, with strict orders 'not to reserve a sheet'. I of course did as he wished – tho' it was like burning my heart.

When space is limited, one must choose, so I conclude this segment with Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth."

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.



T. S. Eliot published two wartime poems in *BLAST*.

T.S. ELIOT

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) surely ranks as one of the greatest and most influential poets writing in English during the 20th century. His "Prufrock"¹⁷ and "The Waste Land"¹⁸ would become landmarks that pointed English poetry in a new direction, from which it has perhaps never fully recovered. American readers and lovers of musical theater know him best for *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*.¹⁹

Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957), an English painter and author – was the co-founder of the Vorticist movement in art, and editor of the literary magazine of the Vorticists, *BLAST*, which appeared in only two numbers. Lewis served as a second lieutenant in the British artillery, and wrote the autobiographical *Blasting and Bombardiering*,²⁰ which covered his life during the war.

Eliot finished up at Harvard in the spring of 1910, spending the next year in Paris, and another back at Harvard working on his doctorate. By the fall of 1914 he was in London where he met Pound, W.B. Yeats, and Wyndham Lewis. His "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" appeared in June 1915 in Vol. VI, no. III, of *Poetry*.²¹

The second, or "War Number," of Wyndham Lewis' *BLAST* appeared a month later. In addition to Lewis' own "War Notes" See *WORLD WAR I*, page 6



WORLD WAR I, from page 5 and Gaudier-Brzeska's "Vortex (written from the Trenches)," it contained two poems by Eliot: "Preludes" and "Rhapsody of a Windy Night." They are too long to reproduce in their entirety here, but perhaps a couple of stanzas will help explain my delight when I first stumbled onto them years ago.

Preludes

The winter evening settles down
 With smell of steaks in passage ways.
 Six o'clock.
 The burnt out ends of smoky days.
 And now a gusty shower wraps
 The grimy scraps
 Of withered leaves about your feet
 And newspapers from vacant lots;
 The showers beat
 On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
 And at the corner of the street
 A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
 And then the lighting of the lamps!

Rhapsody of a Windy Night

Twelve o'clock.
 Along the reaches of the street
 Held in a lunar synthesis,
 Whispering lunar incantations
 Dissolve the floors of the memory
 And all its clear relations,
 Its divisions and precisions,
 Every street lamp that I pass
 Beats like a fatalistic drum,
 And through the spaces of the dark
 Midnight shakes the memory
 As a madman shakes a dead geranium.
 Half past one,
 The street lamp sputtered,

The street lamp muttered,
 The street lamp said, "Regard that woman
 "Who hesitates toward you in the light of the
 door
 "Which opens on her like a grin.
 "You see the border of her dress
 "Is torn and stained with sand,
 "And you see the corner of her eye
 "Twists like a crooked pin."

JOHN BUCHAN

John Buchan (1875-1940), the son of a Scottish minister, loved to walk in his country's borderlands and fish in its lakes. He studied classics at the University of Glasgow and won a scholarship to Oxford, where he received prizes for his literary work and was elected president of the Oxford Union. He became a lawyer, diplomat, publisher, a member of Parliament, and eventually Governor General of Canada. But basically he was a writer – of history, biography, novels, and fishing. The back cover of his autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London 1940) lists 55 books "by" Buchan. He edited and contributed to many others. See Janet Adam Smith, *A Biog-*

raphy of John Buchan,²² William Buchan, *John Buchan, A Memoir*.²³

I acquired my first Buchans in the late 1970's and early 1980's, back in the pre-internet days when collecting was harder but more fun.

After the war began, Buchan enlisted in the army and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps. No one today thinks of him as a "war poet." I had accumulated a fairly complete collection of Buchan's novels, biographies and histories before I realized that he had written a few poems based on his war experiences. Two of them were anthologized in a fine collection edited by Martin Stephen, *Never Such Innocence*.²⁴ Stephen's notes led me to the volume in which the poems first appeared – Buchan's *Poems Scots and English*.²⁵ I found a copy of this thin, fragile volume perched at the end of the top shelf of my six-shelf collection of Buchan's works. I had thought it was a book of poems edited by him, not realizing they were poems he had written. A separate printing of a small number of copies on special bamboo paper had been printed for Buchan, evidently for purposes of presentation. The dedication page contains the dedication to John's brother

Two shelves of Buchan: TOP Buchan's history of World War I, written for Thomas Nelson and Sons. BELOW Other books about the war.

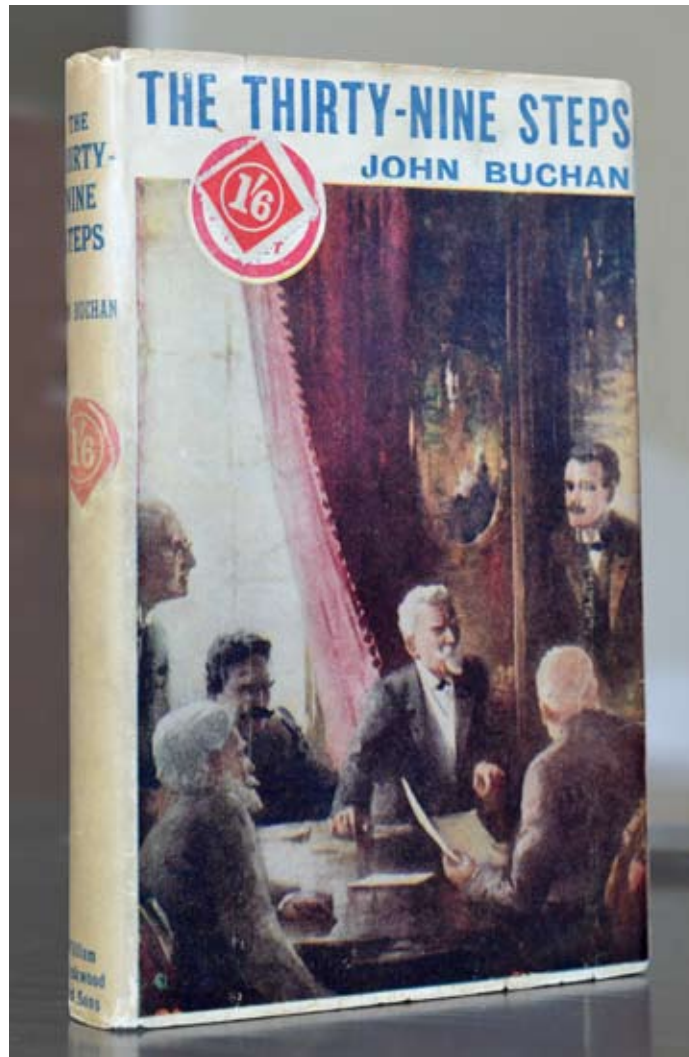


Alastair Buchan, Lieutenant, Royal Scots Fusiliers, “who fell at Arras on Easter Monday 1917” – the same place and day that Edward Thomas was killed.

Buchan was the inventor of the modern thriller – an early version of John LeCarre. Most readers probably remember him as the author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*,²⁶ which Alfred Hitchcock made into a fine film in 1935 starring Robert Donat. In the novel, which is set just before World War I, Richard Hannay is a counterespionage agent trying to prevent a spy ring from stealing secret information. Buchan did three other Richard Hannay novels – *Greenmantle* (1916), *Mr. Standfast* (1919), and *The Three Hostages* (1924). All but the last were set just before or during the war. They’re first-class potboilers. I particularly like *Standfast*, which is full of references to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Collecting John Buchan’s novels exposed me to the same hazard that besets collectors of other early 20th century books: the dust-jacket. When I bought my first copy of the first edition of *Thirty-Nine Steps* back in 1979 (for only \$175), I didn’t even know it once had a jacket. It is not too difficult to find Buchan’s novels from the 20’s and 30’s with decent jackets, but those from the teens are hard to find with jackets – and prohibitive for most collectors. Copies of *Thirty-Nine Steps* can today be found in decent condition – without the jacket – for between \$1,000 and \$2,000. According to Abe, none is presently offered with the jacket.

The first time I saw one listed with a jacket, many years ago, it was offered by a London dealer who was asking \$28,000 for the book in a wrapper “that is lacking the upper inch of the spine and rubbing down the edges as well as a couple of tape stains to the back panel.” I sent the dealer an email saying that, “If the price is a typographical error, I’d be interested in it. If that is your price, good luck.” The dealer responded that there was no typographical error: “The price would be negotiable, but certainly \$24k.” The last time I checked, the book was unsold but the price had gone up to over \$30,000 – due perhaps to changes in the exchange rate. I settled for a later impression of the book with a wrapper said to be “the same design as the first edition”



but with a different printed price shown.

Book collecting, like life, is full of compromises.

Most readers of Buchan likely do not think of him as an historian – or, much less, as a composer of propaganda. Indeed, the two seem contradictory as they embody the very-different impulses to record and order facts, on the one hand, and to influence public opinion, on the other. Yet Buchan was both.

When the war broke out in the fall of 1914, Buchan was serving as literary adviser to the publisher Thomas Nelson & Sons. In addition to – or as part of – his duties to the government, Buchan embarked on a project to write a history of the war, which would appear in parts as the conflict went on. By the time it was over, Nelson had published 24 volumes of *Nelson’s History of the War* (1915-1919), almost entirely written by Buchan. In the meantime he was made director of operations of the British government’s propaganda office. To carry out both missions, Buchan went carefully through the English and French newspapers, supplementing the news reports with information from English officers and friends

in France and Belgian refugees.

In addition to the Nelson volumes, Buchan wrote *The Achievement of France* (1915) (a series of articles for *The Times*), *The Battle of Jutland* (1916), *The Battle of the Somme, First Phase* (1916), *The Battle of the Somme, Second Phase* (1917), *The Battle-Honours of Scotland* (1919), consisting of nine articles originally published in *The Glasgow Herald*, *The History of the South African Forces in France* (1920), *The History of the Royal Scots Fusiliers* (1925), and *The Fifteenth (Scottish) Division* (1926).

After the war Buchan edited and compressed the Nelson volumes into a four-volume *History of the Great War* (1921-22). A special autographed eight-volume edition also appeared, limited to 500 sets. Unlike many history books, Buchan’s retain the sense of fresh immediacy and even uncertainty that one finds in writing about current events.

Buchan did not forget his friends who had been killed. *These For Remembrance*, privately printed in 1919, consisted of memorials to six deceased friends, including Tommy Nelson, son of the book publisher, and Raymond Asquith, son of the

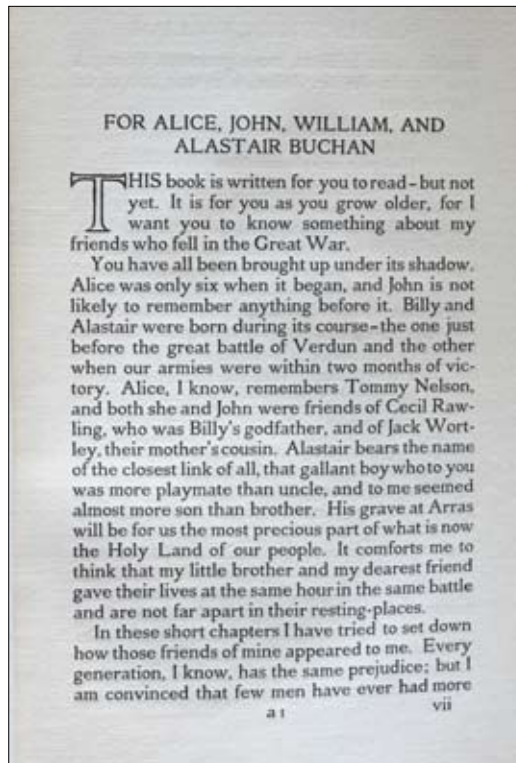
British Prime Minister. Buchan wrote the book not for their families but for his four children: “I am convinced that few men have ever had more lovable, more brilliant, more generous, more gallant friends.... So I want you to cherish the memory of the war because of the price that was paid for victory – victory for you.” Buchan’s principal bibliographer, Robert Blanchard, a distinguished Buchan collector himself, did not know how many copies had been printed, but thought there were perhaps half a dozen or so. Blanchard did not have a copy, nor did the proprietor of a London bookshop which specialized in books by Buchan.

As with so many things that happen in book collecting, I acquired my copy almost by accident. In May 1982 my wife and I decided at the last minute to spend a couple of days in Edinburgh after a business trip to London. It turned out – totally by coincidence! – that the Edinburgh book fair had opened that very Friday morning. After two or three hours at the fair, we improved the rest of the day by

See *WORLD WAR I*, page 8



Buchan's *These for Remembrance*.

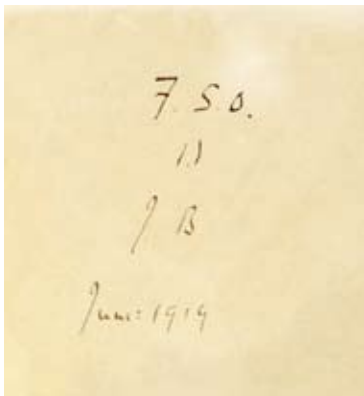


WORLD WAR I, from page 7

visiting a few bookshops. We were returning to London Saturday afternoon, which left Saturday morning to be frivolous. On a whim, I called John Updike, one of Edinburgh's well-known bookshops. I introduced myself and wondered if we might stop by. The proprietors graciously invited us to pay a visit on our way to the airport.

Edward Nairn and John Watson welcomed us and asked what authors interested me. I thought it would be creditable to mention Buchan, a Scotsman. Mr. Watson smiled and said he had a few nice items. He did indeed. He had the book of Buchan's poems, printed specially for Buchan on bamboo paper. He told me it was "scarce." There were also an early volume of stories, published in 1899, the book on the Fifteenth (Scottish) Division, and a few

Inscription from *These for Remembrance*.



volumes introduced by Buchan. And there was *These For Remembrance*. It was inscribed "F.S.O. [from] J.B. June: 1919." Those initials did not match the names of any of the six friends profiled in the book. Messrs. Nairn and Watson did not seem eager to sell it. But it was there on their shelves, offered for sale, and I was interested in Buchan. I did not know anything about the volume – other than that Mr. Nairn told me it was exceptionally rare. And it was expensive – at least by my lights over three decades ago.

There wasn't much time to think about it. The car was waiting, I gulped and bought it. I've never regretted it. I wouldn't trade it now for *Thirty-Nine Steps* in a mint dust wrapper.

Several years later I became curious about who "F.S.O." was. I wrote to the Buchan Society via e-mail and quickly received a response from Kenneth Hillier, who was working on his bibliography of Buchan, which appeared in 2008. He told me that "F.S.O." was Frederick S. Oliver, a Scotsman, author and close friend of Buchan. Before the war, Buchan had helped him publish a book through the Nelson publishing firm; and their families visited in each other's homes.

The Updike shop is still where it was 32 years ago, though Mr. Nairn died in June 2013.

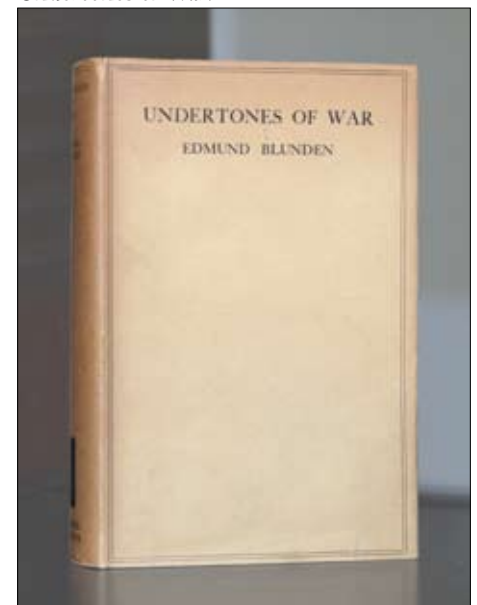
My editor says I must pick up my pace,
Or soon, he says, we will run out of space.

Edmund Blunden (1896-1974) was part of the literary circle that included Graves, Sassoon, and Owen. He grew up in a village in Kent, the son of a schoolmaster, won a classics scholarship to Queen's College, Oxford, and served with the Royal Sussex Regiment in France from May 1916 to 1919, seeing action at Somme and Third Battle of Ypres. After the war he taught literature in Japan, became a fellow in English at Oxford in 1931, and was much later (1966) elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford, succeeding Robert Graves.

Like Sassoon he arranged for his first poems to appear in small, privately-printed volumes of verse. *Poems 1913 and 1914* (1914), *Three Poems* (1916), and *The Harbingers* (1916). His first commercially-published collection was *Pastorals*:

A Book of Verses (London 1916). The editor noted in it that the poems "reveal the private thoughts and feelings of a youth passing from college to camp in verse of unusual interest and accomplishment." His poetry based on his experiences in the war is scattered through a number of volumes published over the next two decades. The first to appear after the war was *The Waggoner and Other Poems*.²⁷ *The Shepherd and Other Poems of Peace and War*²⁸ received the Hawthornden Prize. *To Nature*,²⁹ *English Poems*,³⁰ and *Retreat*³¹ came out later.

Edmund Blunden's war memoir, Undertones of War.



Blunden's first collection of war poetry *per se* did not appear until 1996 and contained 170 poems.

Today Blunden may be remembered as much for his memoirs of the war as his poetry. He wrote *Undertones of War*³² in Tokyo. Published by his friend, Richard Cobden-Sanderson, it included at the end 31 poems, which Blunden called a "supplement of poetical interpretations and variations." The memoir was well reviewed, went through a number of editions, and is now regarded as a classic. Bergonzi called it a "masterpiece": "Its gentle, exact, observant prose preserved those [war] experiences and at the same time removed their cruelty."³³ Paul Fussell termed it an "extended pastoral elegy in prose," and summed it up as "one of the permanent works engendered by memories of the war."³⁴

Complementing *Undertones of War* is Blunden's account of trench warfare written in 1918, entitled *De Bello Germanico, A Fragment of Trench History*.³⁵ It was published by the author's younger brother, G.A. Blunden, in a small edition, 250 copies on ordinary paper and 25 on special paper.

E.E. CUMMINGS

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) was a student at Harvard in 1916 when he wrote and published "Belgium," his first poem to appear in other than student publications, according to his biographer, Richard S. Kennedy, in *Dreams In the Mirror*.³⁶ On the day war was declared by the United States, Cummings volunteered for the Red Cross ambulance service in France. However, he was too much the individualist to succumb to the discipline and censorship imposed by the French authorities, and soon found himself detained in a French internment center – a sort of a prison camp. His experience there formed the basis for his first published book, a work of prose entitled *The Enormous Room*.³⁷ It's a great read, and as much a memoir of the war as a book about life in the trenches.

After his release from the French camp, E.E. returned to the United States just in time to be drafted into the American army. He was assigned to Camp Devens in Massachusetts for training. One day, as his biographer told the story, Cummings came into the barracks and found a big blond stranger reading on his bunk. Cummings would later give him the name of Olaf. He was a conscientious objector – "full of humor and good will." The commander could not shake his opposition to violence and so sent him off to an army

prison, where bad things happened to pacifists. Olaf later became the focal point for one of Cummings' most bitter poems.³⁸ It appeared in *W[ViVa]* (1931), his third major collection, near another of my favorite creations by Cummings: "somewhere I have never traveled, gladly beyond / any experience,..."

i sing of Olaf glad and big

*i sing of Olaf glad and big
whose warmest heart
recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or*

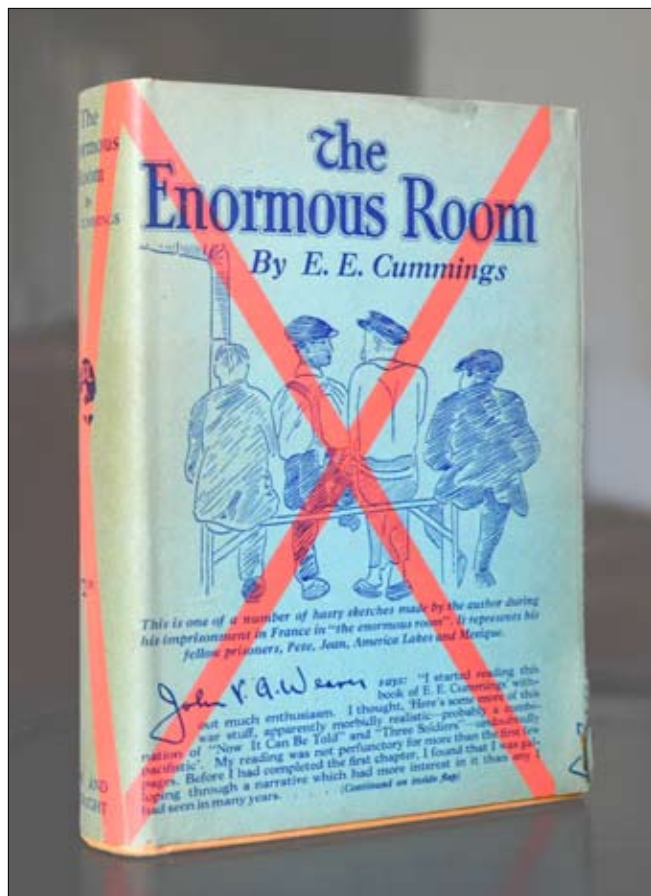
his wellbelovéd colonel (trig
westpointer most succinctly
bred)
took erring Olaf soon in
hand;
but – though an host of
overjoyed
noncoms (first knocking on
the head

him) do through icy waters
roll
that helplessness which others stroke
with brushes recently employed
anent this muddy toiletbowl,
while kindred intellects evoke
allegiance per blunt instruments –
Olaf (being to all intents
a corpse and wanting any rag
upon what God unto him gave)
responds, without getting annoyed
"I will not kiss your f.ing flag"

straightway the silver bird looked grave
(departing hurriedly to shave)

but – though all kinds of officers
(a yearning nation's blueeyed pride)
their passive prey did kick and curse
until for wear their clarion
voices and boots were much the worse,
and egged the firstclassprivates on
his rectum wickedly to tease
by means of skilfully applied
bayonets roasted hot with heat –
Olaf (upon what were once knees)
does almost ceaselessly repeat
"there is some s. I will not eat"

our president, being of which



E.E. Cummings *The Enormous Room*.

assertions duly notified
threw the yellowsonofabitch
into a dungeon, where he died

Christ (of His mercy infinite)
i pray to see; and Olaf, too

preponderatingly because
unless statistics lie he was
more brave than me: more blond than you.

* * *

By the way, as you're thinking about other war books to read, you might consider Churchill's *The World Crisis* (1923-37), which contains a great brief in support of his Gallipoli campaign.

Or perhaps Frederick Manning's novel, *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme & Ancre 1916*,³⁹ limited edition, later expurgated and published under the title *Her Privates We*. Book dealers like to quote Hemingway, who reportedly said that it was the finest book about men in war that he had ever read.

Or Solzhenitsyn's *August 1914*, the first of his Red Wheel cycle of novels telling the story of the "knots" of events leading to the creation of the Communist state. (The translated
See *WORLD WAR I*, page 11

Book and manuscript-related exhibitions: a selective list

Compiled by Lisa Pevtzow

(Note: on occasion an exhibit may be delayed or extended; it is always wise to call in advance of a visit.)

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-443-3600: **“Josef Koudelka: Nationality Doubtful”** (vintage prints, period books, magazines and other materials by the Czech-born French photographer), Galleries 182–184, 188 through September 14. **“What did Renaissance Printmakers Make of Antiquity?”** (prints featuring Renaissance artists’ attempts to understand ancient sculpture and recreate lost paintings), Gallery 205A through November 13.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Lenhardt Library, 1000 Lake Cook Road, Glencoe, 847-835-8202: **“Moku-Hanga: The Art of Japanese Woodblock Printing”** (Japanese design books from the collection of Caxton member Lisa Pevtzow), through August 10.

Chicago History Museum, 1601 N. Clark Street, Chicago, 312-642-4600: **“Vivian Maier’s Chicago”** (Maier spent her adult life as a nanny but devoted her free time and money to photography), through summer.

Dusable Museum of African American History, 740 East 56th Place, Chicago, 773-947-0600: **“Bandits & Heroes, Poets & Saints: Popular Art of the Northeast of Brazil”** (explores interacting cultural influences), through August 17.

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State Street, Chicago, 312-747-4300: **“Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows”** (silver gelatin prints of images selected from the book *Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows* by Richard Cahan and Michael Williams), special Collections Exhibition Hall, ninth floor, through September 28. **“Ideas and Inventions from the Covers of Popular Science,”** Congress corridor,

ground floor, through August 31.

Loyola University Museum of Art, 820 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, 312-915-7600: **“Crossings and Dwellings”** (historical maps, books, objects and textiles that tell the story of Jesuits and women religious who served indigenous and immigrant populations), July 19 to October 19.

The Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton Street, Chicago, 312-943-9090: **“Plainly Spoken”** (celebration of book conservator and archivist Julia Miller’s work through the rebinding of pages of her work,

Books Will Speak Plain, by book-binders across the country), through July 8.

Northwestern University Library, 1970 Campus Drive, Evanston, 847-491-7658: **“Best of Bologna: Edgiest Artists of the 2008 International Children’s Book Fair”** (illustrations featured at the Bologna Book Fair, the world’s largest annual children’s

book event), ongoing.

Pritzker Military Museum and Library, 104 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, 312-374-9333: **“SEAL The Unspoken Sacrifice”** (features photographs from Stephanie Freid-Perenchio’s and Jennifer Walton’s 2009 book and artifacts on loan from the Navy SEAL Museum), ongoing.

University of Chicago, Joseph Regenstein Library Special Collections Research Center Exhibition Gallery, 1100 E. 57th Street, Chicago, 773-702-8705: **“Researching Mexico: University of Chicago Field Explorations in Mexico, 1896-2014”** (correspondence, diaries, photographs, sketches, recordings and objects about Mexico generated and collected by scholars since the late 1800s), through October 4.



Art Institute: Josef Koudelka Photographs

STUDENT ON TANK, EYES CROSSED OUT, AUGUST 21/27, 1968. © JOSEF KOUDELKA/MAGNUM PHOTOS.



U of Chicago Library: Researching Mexico

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Caxtonians Collect: Robert S. Brooks

interviewed by Robert McCamant

Even though Bob Brooks and I joined the Caxton Club in the same year, the Centennial year of 1995, I always figured he must have been a member longer than me. During the social hour before dinner at the Mid-Day club, he was always part of a laughing crowd.

When I asked him why that was, he had a simple explanation. "Half the fun of coming to the meetings was driving down from Evanston. Joe Girardi, coming from Kenilworth, would have Herb Furse, from Glenview, in the car. They'd pick me up in Evanston, and then we'd stop for Brother [Michael] Grace at Loyola. By the time we arrived at the Mid-Day, we were almost always in a genial mood."

Now Brooks lives in Kenosha and only Brooks and Girardi, of the original team, are still with us. So the club doesn't often benefit from the bright spot of his conversation. And Brooks misses the discoveries he made when sitting at a Caxton table with someone he never met before.

He was born in Iowa. His father was in the service during WWII, serving abroad. When the war was over, they moved back to Lansing, Michigan, where his father was actually from. Michigan State was nearby, so that's where he got his liberal arts degree. It was not clear what to do with the degree, so his mother suggested he talk to her brother, who was running a real estate firm in Winnetka.

"Frankly, it looked easy," Brooks admits. "Winnetka real estate was selling itself in the sixties, and I got along well with my uncle." He ended up opening a branch office in Evanston, then moved to another firm. But by 2007, Brooks was tired of real estate and much more interested in books.

"I became a bookseller by backing into it," he explains. "I was collecting in certain areas for myself, but when I'd go to an estate sale I'd sometimes end up getting a lot of books outside my field of interest. So I had to do something with them, and I started selling them."



ABOVE Brooks at the final Club meeting at the Mid-Day. BELOW at a recent Revels.



The internet, more specifically AbeBooks, makes that pretty convenient. (Especially considering that he calls himself a "technophobe.") If you search for "Robert S. Brooks" under booksellers there, you'll find that he specializes in quite a few topics: "A & C Black Color Plate Books, Books On Books, Fine bindings,

Rivers Of America Series, Lakeside Classics/ Press, Sherlock Holmes, Baedekers, Travel Guides, Leather Sets- Easton Press, Franklin Library, Chicago- History and Architecture," it says. He has no need for a walk-in store, and not even a need for his own web site.

You can browse his books by most recently listed, by author, by price from low to high or high to low. (Current high price is for a set of "The 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 7th, 8th, 9th and 11th Annual Reports of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park 1858 - 1867," beautifully leather bound, at \$13,000. Shipping will only cost you \$4! Current low price is for Clarence Darrow on Capital Punishment, a bargain at \$4.50, though the shipping is that same \$4.)

He's tried setting up a stand at book fairs a few times, but isn't sure that it's worth the trouble.

The move to Kenosha has changed his life. "When I lived in Evanston, I could walk to many things. Now I have to get in the car." But it is an excellent place to run an on-line book business. The house is about 2000 square feet, but it also has a full basement with 9 foot ceilings and what he calls a "lookout," which brings in daylight and an interesting view to his desk.

The books are in boxes, which increases the number he can store and also buffers them from changes in temperature and humidity. "Some people say it looks like the storage room in *The X-Files*." As long as he keeps near his present 16,000 books, they fit.

Brooks is an early bird. Typically he gets up before sunrise ("I like seeing the stars when I bring in the paper, something you can do in Kenosha") and typically works 'til about 1. He claims that he is no longer collecting for himself, but in the next breath he admits that if he picks up a Chicago history item that interests him, he may not list it right away.

He is convinced that a majority of Caxton members would prefer being a bookseller or an author to being whatever they are.

§§

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"expanded" version of the novel appeared in the West in 1984.)

Or for more poetry you might dip into David Jones (1895-1974), *In Parenthesis*...⁴⁰ I find it tough going, but Thomas Dilworth, his biographer, wrote that it was "the most important work of English literature to emerge from

combat experience in the Great War."⁴¹

Or maybe Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895-1915), whom Martin Stephen, in *Never Such Innocence* (London 1988) called (at 20), "perhaps the most remarkable poet of all..."

Or... more Owen and Thomas.

§§

NOTES

¹ London, 1965.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ "Collecting Early Frost," *Caxtonian* (XIII, No. 11), November 2005), p. 12.

⁵ New York, 1937.

⁶ Eckert, p. 237.

See *WORLD WAR I*, page 12



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WORLD WAR I, from page 11

- ⁷ Letter of James Guthrie to "Dear Muir," and initialed "by P.H.M."
- ⁸ Chicago, February 1917.
- ⁹ Eckert, p. 174, fn., 242-43.
- ¹⁰ London, 1917.
- ¹¹ London, 1918.
- ¹² London, 1918.
- ¹³ London, 1920.
- ¹⁴ Caxtonian, December 11, 2009, p. 7.
- ¹⁵ London, 1931.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 3
- ¹⁷ London, 1917.
- ¹⁸ New York, 1922.
- ¹⁹ London, 1939.
- ²⁰ London, 1937.
- ²¹ Chicago, 1915.
- ²² Boston, 1965.
- ²³ London, 1992.
- ²⁴ London, 1988.
- ²⁵ London, 1917.
- ²⁶ London, 1915.
- ²⁷ London, 1920.
- ²⁸ London, 1922.
- ²⁹ London, 1923.
- ³⁰ London, 1925.
- ³¹ London, 1928.
- ³² London, 1928.
- ³³ Heroes' Twilight, p. 154.
- ³⁴ The Great War and Modern Memory, p. 255.
- ³⁵ Hawstead, 1930.
- ³⁶ New York, 1980, p. 134.
- ³⁷ New York, 1922.
- ³⁸ Kennedy, p. 320.
- ³⁹ Piazza Press, 1929.
- ⁴⁰ London, 1937.
- ⁴¹ Soldier Poets of the Great War, The Grolier Club, New York, 1988.



Photographs by Jackie Vossler



Scenes from the Botanic Garden,
June 16, 2014

