

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those who strive to promote peace in a challenging world, in particular teachers and educators everywhere.

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Front Cover: David Chalmers

Rear Cover additions: Liam Kitto

Chapters 1 & 2 with additional material by Len Friskney

Publisher: *tredition GmbH*, Halenreie 42, 22359 Hamburg, Germany

ISBN

Paperback 978-3-7497-0835-2

Hardcover 978-3-7497-0836-9

eBook 978-3-7497-0837-6

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One Day in December

D.B. Lewis

with Len Friskney

*Wilfred Owen, The Bombardment and
Scarborough in the First World War*

Also by D.B. Lewis

A Little Bit of Trouble in London

Plotting Shed (Ed.)

Great Aunts and Armadillos

Return to Premantura

A Wedding in Hoar

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Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have supported this work in whatever way and in particular; my co-author Len Friskney; Stewart MacDonald and Mark Vesey of the Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre; David and Angela Chalmers; Liz Baxter and Julie Vinson and the staff at The Clifton Hotel; David Henderson of the Western Front Association; Adrian Perry of Scarborough Civic Society; the German U-Boat Archives at Cuxhaven and Peter Weber for translating the original German texts; Meg Crane and Sam Gray of the Wilfred Owen Association; Simon Powell of the Britannia Hotel Group; Denise Gilfoyle; the Outreach Department at the Stephen Joseph Theatre; Ali Watt and John Pattison of Beach Hut Theatre Company for their constant theatrical inspiration; Robert Parkinson of Blue Sky Graphics; Mark Haynes, Elsa Monteith and all the performers and staff at Westborough Methodist Church, Scarborough; the late Joyce Bell, artist and poet, together with Jonathan Brown, lecturer at the Worker's Educational Association for inspiring my interest in Owen and the war poets; Rob Webb and Liam Kitto at Bryn Stowe Publications; Debbie Seymour, Andrew Clay, Esther Graham, Jennifer Dunne and Ruth Yoxon of Scarborough Museums Trust; Wayne Murray of the proposed Scarborough Social History Museum; Callum Nash for the cast and rehearsal photographs; all the staff and students at Scalby School, Scarborough, in particular Liz Stockhill and Paul Offord, who were so welcoming in my visits; all my colleagues in the International Police Association Writers Forum, both here and abroad for their continued support and friendship in all things literary; to Rod Jarman, Adrian Rabot and Ed Sherry of the London Policing College and Youth United for providing me with both inspiration and work; to Sue Wilkinson and The Scarborough News (formerly Evening News) for help with publicity and press cuttings; Sylvia Anderson, Mirko Esquivel, Theresa Reichelt and Nadine Otto of the publishers '*tredition*' for their support and advice; Liz Dyer, North Yorkshire County English Advisor and Regional Co-ordinator for the National Literacy Trust; all the staff and volunteers at Newby and Scalby

Library, in particular Lesley Newton; Mark Marsay of Great Northern Publishing in Scarborough; Doug, Louise, Evie, Will and Hugh Stanway; Mike Bortoft at the Church of St Martin on the Hill, South Cliff; and Felix Hodcroft, Tony Howson, Mark Thompson, Heather Stoney, Jo Reed Turner, Dorinda Cass (of the Scarborough Writers' Circle), Wanda Maciuszko, Jen Thomas, Sandy Sandevik; and almost finally, to all my other fellow authors and performers in Yorkshire for their constant help in sustaining the various writing and theatrical endeavours we all seem to become involved in. A final thank you to fellow author, Maria Fuller, who as a very professional PA, has promised to sort out my incommensurable filing systems, and to my wife, Sonia, for once again supervising the proof reading.

The cover imagery is an artistic photographic creation from the 2014 production of *'One Day in December'* entitled *'Futility'* by David Chalmers. I am grateful to him and to Angela Chalmers for the use and reproduction of their art in this work. The cover wording and rear imagery is by Liam Kitto of Bryn Stowe Publications, Scarborough.

R.I.P.

In memory of

Mark Gay

(Musical Director, *'One Day in December'*)

Lillian Roberts

(*'Voice'* in the Westborough production of the play).

and

Joyce Bell

(Artist & poet; the original inspiration for this work).



'Wilfred Owen in Scarborough'

Digital montage created by
Robert Parkinson, 2018, for Bryn Stowe Publications

Preface

‘Why Remember?’

By David Henderson

The Western Front Association

The tumultuous events that occurred during 1914-18 have had a special resonance since the centenary commemorations of the Great War. In so many ways the events of that time have shaped what we are today.

The legacies of the early 20th century such as the broader cataclysm that was the eventual rise of Nazism and the Second World War, or the social and political movements of trade unionism and female emancipation, gained a heightened definition in the crucible of the Great War conflict.

To know what we are today, we should seek to understand why nations were moved to fight and why individuals on all sides rallied to their respective causes. We can understand by remembering Wilfred Owen and what he and countless other combatants saw, felt and suffered. We can remember the many who came back and endured through the difficult post-war years. And we can learn much from those who stayed at home to support the troops, coped with the stresses and strains of bereavement, and suffered countless other privations whilst feeding the furnace of total war.

The loss of the last of the veterans has put the Great War just beyond our reach. But we have been bequeathed a rich canon of literature, imagery and art from the conflict to help us better remember.

When we remember, we can learn and we can understand. And that is the very least we owe such a remarkable generation.

David G Henderson

The Western Front Association

westernfrontassociation.com

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The logo of the Wilfred Owen Association

Introduction: The Owen in Scarborough Story

by D. B. Lewis

Thank you for delving into this book; hopefully within these pages you will find ideas, stimulation or a confirmation of your own feelings about the destructive nature of any war or any conflict, big or small. The book has been published to commemorate the message that Wilfred Owen was trying to impart to us through the poetry that had its origins in his time spent in Scarborough in 1917 and 1918.

The message tells us of the need to strive for peaceful ways of settling our global disputes and it is this that formed the justification for this book to add to the many now existing about Owen. It is in an amalgam of several separate strands of this same message that took place throughout the commemorative years of 2014 to 2018 and are now produced in this one volume.

It is hoped that many people will enjoy the book for itself, even if they have no thought of performing the piece of community theatre that appears within the story. The play was originally intended for community performances such as those produced within schools, clubs or uniformed youth organisations as a way of bringing individuals together through one performance project, but it has resonance for the general reader and all those who visit, or care for, the wonderfully enigmatic seaside town of Scarborough.

In April 2014, I wrote and produced *'One Day in December'* as a community theatre production for that year's Scarborough Literature Festival, later to become 'Books by the Beach'. It was a commemoration about the start of the First World War in 1914 and, by the end of the project over 120 people had become involved; 100 people alone being involved in the play itself.

Owen wrote over 80 'war poems', three of which feature in the play and accompanying art installation; *'Anthem for Doomed Youth,' 'Dulce et Decorum Est'* and *'Futility.'* Together with his many letters which are in their own right

a rich insight into the life and times of a war poet and his circle, they show a progression from outright angry indignation at the loss and slaughter of young lives, move through a bitter, almost helpless despair, to end up with what appears to be a softer resignation of what Owen probably saw as his own death only months away. He was killed in action leading his men across the Sambre-Oise Canal at Ors just one week before the war ended. His parents were told of his death on the very day the Armistice was signed. I was inspired by fellow writer and artist, Joyce Bell to write about Owen and Scarborough as well as highlighting the effect war had on the townspeople, then and now. The idea of staging a community theatre production linking these themes arose from that moment.

I was formerly a member of the Metropolitan Police Central Youth Team in London and later a co-ordinator with 'Youth United', working with the Prince's Charities at Dumfries House in Scotland, and it was through these experiences that I discovered the real value of bringing disparate groups of people of all ages together. The community theatre concept came directly from that experience as the groups involved in the production were drawn largely from the 'Uniformed Youth' groups of Westborough Methodist Church in Scarborough.

With the production came the first small edition of this book, in the form of an extended programme with interesting insights into the 'Owen in Scarborough' and 'Bombardment' stories. During the writing of that work, I met and worked with two local people with whom it was a real joy to be associated; Mark Vesey of the Scarborough Maritime Heritage Centre, and Len Friskney, the 'general factotum' at The Clifton Hotel, where Wilfred Owen was first billeted on his arrival in Scarborough in 1917. Both of these people readily agreed to contribute to this work and I am very grateful to them both for their dedicated efforts in helping to keep the legacy of Owen and the First World War alive in the area. In 2017, I spent some time with the students and staff at the wonderfully supportive and disciplined Scalby School in Scarborough. There, I witnessed the teaching of Owen and his legacy in the classrooms and well-

stocked library and truly felt that the teachers and educators of today were alive to the importance of the messages Owen was trying to impart.

Finally, in 2018, we, the Production Team at Bryn Stowe Publications with its theatre producing arm, 'TAFAT', launched the 'Owen Map and Trail', a guided tour around the Owen sites with the support of many of the connected Scarborough organisations. This has proved very popular and copies of the map can be obtained, free of charge, at the key places of the trail. This work provides a deeper insight into those sites and acts as a source of 'background information' for the play and its settings.

Whether you are planning to produce a piece of community theatre about the First World War, walking the Owen Trail, or visiting any of the fascinating historic sites of Scarborough connected to the story then this book should be a source of help and interest. We all hope you will find a message of hope for the future within its pages.

Central to the memory of Wilfred Owen in Scarborough, nestling just below the North York Moors and hugging the North Sea which forms a part of this story, is Len Friskney of the Clifton Hotel.

Meeting Len for the first time was like stepping back into the history books of a great long- established hotel...modest, hardworking, neat, a gentleman and character from the old school of hotel life, a life which is in danger of slipping away under the seas of plush décor, designer bars and the all too familiar cut of silver-grey, tidy corporate conformity with zero hours contracted staff.

I first went to the Clifton Hotel in search of Wilfred Owen for the short story from which the play in this work was then derived. It is a well-trodden path but, like other things in Scarborough, underrated by many – even by its own inhabitants. The Civic Society blue plaque was fading and there was little to tell me that this was one of the important venues of the Owen story as well as an essential marker on the First World War historic trail. I felt it was particularly important in the story of the futility of war with its need to continually search for an end to the conflict and global catastrophes that Owen gave us so poignantly, and powerfully, over one hundred years ago.

Talking with Len and seeing the hotel, feeling the ambient stillness together with the view from Owen's 'Five Windowed Turret Room', led to the writing of 'One Day in December'; firstly, as a short story and then as a community stage play. I interviewed Len by his fascinating Owen foyer display in the Clifton Hotel on a number of occasions. He came into the offices of the theatre company I was then running at Woodend, the creative arts centre in The Crescent, Scarborough and there, he recounted the story which he has now graciously agreed to have used in this work.

Fig 2: Part of Len Friskney's 'Owen' Display at The Clifton Hotel



Chapter 1:

Wilfred Owen in Scarborough

by Len Friskney

These two chapters are about Wilfred Owen, the First World War and Owen's association with Scarborough, in particular with the Clarence Gardens Hotel, now The Clifton Hotel on Queen's Parade. In the foyer of the hotel is a display dedicated to the poet and soldier which I have put together and maintained over the past few years. Owen was posted to the hotel after he had become a patient at Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh after suffering from 'neurasthenia' ('Shell Shock' or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, as we would now call it). He was stunned after having an accident at Bouchoir in France where he fell down a well. He resumed duties after that incident, but in April 1917 a shell exploded near him whilst he was asleep. His Commanding Officer recognised the symptoms of shell shock and sent him back to 'Blighty'. While in the hospital he was examined by a Dr Brock who favoured an 'Occupation Cure', and so Owen was encouraged to continue writing and in so doing this helped him to recover as well as helping to develop his own poetic style. Owen had an interest in writing poetry from a young age.

Owen's thoughts, feelings, emotions and his own experiences of the horrors of war were expressed in his poems as a serving soldier and his phrase 'My subject is war and the pity of war. The poetry is in the pity' is well known, appearing as it does on the War Poets' Memorial in Westminster Abbey.

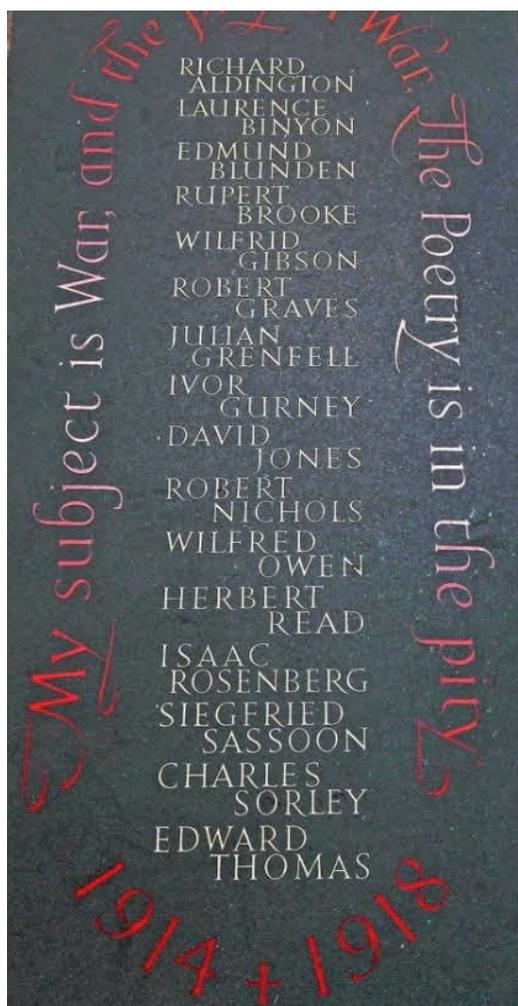


Fig 3: *The War Poets' Memorial at Westminster Abbey*

Scarborough has had its share of famous people over the years who either came to stay for short periods or were born here and these are commemorated in the many blue plaques that can be seen around the town including the one of Wilfred Owen at the Clifton Hotel. Owen was sent to the hotel, 'The Clarence Gardens' as it then was, when he was posted to Scarborough after suffering from what would later be called 'Shell Shock'. This chapter is dedicated to him, not only as a poet whose words have been immortalised, but as a man of great courage and leadership.

Many books have been written about Wilfred Owen and his poems have been frequently published. This short tribute is in no way a complete biography which can be found within those publications. But Owen already knew of Scarborough of course when he came with his family on holiday in 1905 at the age of 12 and his cousin, May Davies, had lived in the town for some years.

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born in Oswestry in 1893; his family eventually moving to Shrewsbury and his interest in poetry started at an early age. When the First World War broke out, he was a most unlikely person to choose a military career but he became a soldier and a respected officer. He expressed the futility of war, the suffering, the horror and the death as well as his experiences of that time through his poems. He became one of the great First World War poets and, in the end was well respected as both a poet and a soldier.



Fig 3a: Wilfred Owen (left) with his family in 1905 at Scarborough's South Bay.

Owen had enlisted into the Artist's Rifles in 1915, was commissioned in 1916 and became an officer in the 5th (Reserve) Battalion of the Manchester Regiment with whom he went to France on active service. In 1917, suffering from shell shock, he was sent to the Casualty Clearing Station at Gailly in France from where he was eventually transferred, via Wales, to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Slateford near Edinburgh where he met other poets including Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves who became his inspiration. His own style was developed there and writing poetry became a therapeutic aid in his recovery.

On 28th October 1917, he appeared before the medical board who cleared him to return to his unit and on the 24th November 1917, he reported to the Clarence Gardens Hotel, Scarborough for 'light duties'. On arrival, and after a night spent in the Victoria Hotel in West Square, he became second in command to Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell. This involved finding accommodation for fellow officers and organising the domestic staff. In one of the many letters to his mother, Susan, he described his work;

"I have to control the household, which consists of some dozen Batmen, 4 Mess Orderlies, 4 Buglers, the cook (a fat woman of great skill) two female kitcheners, and various charwomen! They need driving. You should see me scooting the buglers around the dining room on their hands and knees with dustpan and brush! You should hear me rate the Charwoman for Lavatory basins unclean.

I am responsible for finding rooms for the newcomers, which is a great worry as we are full up. This means however that I have a good room for myself as well as my office!

I kept two officers under arrest in their rooms.....

I get up at 6.30 to see that breakfast is ready in time....

There was a guest night yesterday, which meant a gorgeous meal, whose menu I am ashamed to give you. It kept my house-lads sweating until after midnight!"

Being appointed 'Major-domo', as he called it, he was able to choose his own room. He does not state which room this was by number but my investigations suggest that it was one of the 'turret rooms' that mark out the hotel. In his letters, Owen mentions that he was in a room where 'the ceiling was so low that even a small man would have to stoop'. In the present room 493 a massive 'T' girder holds up the roof of the tower or 'turret' as we call it, so this suggests it was indeed this room in which he was to stay.

In another letter Owen writes to his mother, Susan, that '...I sit in the middle of my five windowed turret and look down upon the sea...' It is quite possible although this in part, conjecture, that he may have taken bedroom 367 on the third floor which still has a five windowed 'turret' and is right below room 493 as his office for his military duties, and used 493 as his sleeping quarters where he could escape from his duties for 'peace and solitude' to concentrate on his poetry.

During alterations to room 493 some years ago, two alcoves on the left and right of the room were blocked off but in the centre of the main wall, the position of the hearth from Owen's time is still in evidence under the carpet and below the headboard. A fire surround from another room has been placed in this room to give an effect of how it would have been at the time Owen wrote '*Miners*'.

Between 1917 and 1918, over 85 of Owen's poems and fragments can be attributed to his pen whilst at Craiglockhart, Scarborough and Ripon. Although Owen was only at Scarborough for six months in total and his time at Craiglockhart and Ripon were clearly profound, he either drafted, wrote, or revised about 17 of his most significant poems in Scarborough plus a number of sonnets and other fragments. Following my conversations with Dominic Hibberd during his visit to the Clifton Hotel in 2013, I researched the works and the

letters he wrote to both his mother and other poets, and believe these, at least, to be the ones he wrote in Scarborough;

November 1917 - March 1918 (Clarence Gardens Hotel)

'I Saw his Round Mouth's Crimson'

'Apologia Pro Poemate Meo'

'Le Christianisme'

'The Rime of the Youthful Mariner'

'Who is the God of Canongate'

'Miners'

'A Tear Song'

'A Terre'

'The Show' (Drafted)

'Hospital Barge'

June 1918 (Burniston Barracks)

'The Calls'

'Training'

'The Send Off' (Revised)

'The Parable of the Old Man and the Young'

'Disabled' (Revised)

'Kind Ghosts'

'Soldier's Dream' (Revised)

'I am the Ghost of Shadwell Stair' (Drafted Clarence Gardens, revised Burniston Barracks)

'The Sentry' (Drafted Craiglockhart, continued Burniston Barracks)

'Spring Offensive' (Revised in France)

Some of Owen's best-known works came from the 'Turret Room' including *'Apologia Pro Poemate Meo'*, *'Hospital Barge'*, *'The Rime of the Youthful Mariner'*, *'A Tear Song'*, *'The Show'*, *'A Terre'* and *'Miners'*. The inspiration for this