

Institution: Liverpool Hope University		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Wilfred Owen and the First World War: The impact of research into the literature and events of the First World War, with a particular focus on impact during the years of that war's centenary		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005 - 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Guy Cuthbertson	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor and Head of the School of Humanities	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2012-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>At the time of the centenary of the First World War (2014-18), and especially during 2014 and in November 2018, there was significant public interest in the war and its literature. The focus here is the impact of two related books by Guy Cuthbertson, <i>Wilfred Owen</i> (Yale, February 2014) and <i>Peace at Last: A Portrait of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918</i> (Yale, October 2018). Other relevant research is also involved, especially Cuthbertson's work on Edward Thomas. Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas were both killed during the war, and there has been considerable interest in their lives and work. The research enhanced public understanding of, and interest in, issues, events and literature contributing to commemoration and challenged established opinions, both in relation to war literature and in offering a new view of the Armistice. This impact was achieved through a range of high-profile channels with wide reach, including the following: talks, podcasts, television and radio appearances; many citations and reviews of Cuthbertson's work in major publications; articles for prominent magazines; and involvement with drama productions.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Cuthbertson's research is focused on the period of the early twentieth century and especially the First World War. He has had a wide impact, especially through two popular scholarly works published by Yale University Press (which is committed to 'publishing serious works that contribute to a global understanding of human affairs', and its books 'further scholarly investigation, advance interdisciplinary inquiry, stimulate public debate, educate both within and outside the classroom, and enhance cultural life').</p> <p>Cuthbertson's <i>Wilfred Owen</i> was published by Yale in 2014. The research began in 2008. This biographical study of Owen (1893-1918) aimed to give a fresh interpretation of the man and his work, emphasising the literariness of his life, in terms of his creation of himself as a writer and the influence that other writers had upon him. It also emphasised his child-like nature, the importance of childhood and his relationship with his parents; and it explored the social, cultural and political contexts, not least the role that the class system played in his life and work. <i>Wilfred Owen</i> tackles the posthumous reputation of Owen and the misreading of Owen's work, including the popular perception of him as 'anti-war', as a gay poet, as the poet of the common soldier, or as a poet offering 'the truth', realism or reportage. Extensive archival research was carried out, using material that was previously unavailable to Owen scholars, such as the substantial Welland collection in Manchester.</p>		

Cuthbertson's most recent book was also on the First World War, and looked at the day of the Armistice, 11 November 1918 – that day was also the day when Wilfred Owen's parents were informed that he had died on 4 November. *Peace at Last: A Portrait of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918* was published by Yale in 2018, and the research mostly began in 2014. Using a wide range of material (from many archives and libraries), including newspapers, letters, diaries, memoirs, school magazines, sermons and photographs, the book provided a detailed study of a single day, which was for many people the greatest day in the history of the world. Unlike other work about that day, Cuthbertson's research emphasised the celebrations and joy, and the roles of religion and tradition, and aimed to focus on the popular response, the crowds and congregations, not just a few famous but unrepresentative individuals. Like *Wilfred Owen*, the book challenged common misconceptions and misrepresentations.

Cuthbertson has also been working on the First World War through his extensive work on Edward Thomas (1878-1917), who, like Owen, was killed at the Western Front. He co-edited *Branch-Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry* (2007), is a General Editor of Thomas's prose for Oxford University Press, and he has produced two substantial scholarly editions of Thomas's prose, *Autobiographies* (2011) and *England and Wales* (co-edited, 2011). In 2018 he gave the British Academy's prestigious Chatterton Lecture on Poetry, on 'Edward Thomas and Simplicity' (a public lecture, which was released as a podcast and also published in the open-access *Journal of the British Academy* in 2019).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Wilfred Owen (Yale University Press, 2014; paperback 2015). Book. 352pp. Also ebook.
<https://yalebooks.co.uk/display.asp?K=9780300153002>

Peace at Last: A Portrait of Armistice Day, 11 November 1918 (Yale University Press, 2018). Book. 300pp. Also audiobook and ebook, 2018.
<https://yalebooks.co.uk/display.asp?K=9780300233384>

Evidence about the quality of the research (which was also peer-reviewed before publication):

Peace at Last reviewed by Professor Simon Heffer in *The Literary Review*
<https://literaryreview.co.uk/let-the-bells-ring-out>

'Guy Cuthbertson's superbly researched and exhaustive survey of the day the Great War ended [...] One of the strengths of this fine book is that the reader has the sensation that he or she actually took part in what, at the time, was regarded as the greatest day in the history of the world'

Peace at Last reviewed by Professor Nicoletta F. Gullace in *The Journal of British Studies*
<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-british-studies/article/guy-cuthbertson-peace-at-last-a-portrait-of-armistice-day-11-november-1918-new-haven-yale-university-press-2018-pp-293-2750-cloth/42961FD68CC820C791EC06CB0E822D20>

'With beautiful and detailed prose, Cuthbertson creates a work of narrative history reminiscent of Barbara Tuchman and nearly impossible to put down. [...] In doing so, he offers some subtle but important historiographical insights.'

Wilfred Owen reviewed by Professor John Sutherland in *The Times*
<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/wilfred-owen-by-guy-cuthbertson-lmddccwpnw3>

'Cuthbertson is scrupulous, thoughtful and open-minded. His book is fired with enthusiasm for the poems and respect for the man who created them. The result is a fine biography.'

Wilfred Owen reviewed by Dr Gary Day in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*
<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/books/wilfred-owen-by-guy-cuthbertson/2012918.article>
 '[a] scintillating biography [...] breathes some life into the war poet [...] Scholars of Owen, and that mythical beast the common reader, will also find much to enjoy [...] For a long time Owen has been set in stone, his poetry ossifying into anti-war cliché. Cuthbertson has made him live again.'

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Guy Cuthbertson's work has enhanced awareness, understanding, participation and engagement, and it has contributed to First World War commemoration while also challenging established opinions. The means by which the impact was made (such as through television appearances), is also often an indicator of the reach and significance of the impact. During the centenary of the First World War (2014-18), and particularly in 2014 and 2018, Cuthbertson's work had a wide audience, and he contributed to commemoration events and to the public discussion of the war, its influence and its legacy. He also offered a new view of the Armistice and of the practices of Remembrance. He raised awareness of the literature of the First World War, offered insights into the life and work of its writers, highlighted his own extensive research, and provided new perspectives on the First World War itself, especially its conclusion.

Reviews and Citations

His work has been reviewed and cited widely in the press, not just in the UK and the USA, but also for instance in publications in Switzerland, Portugal, Australia, Indonesia, Spain and India. *Wilfred Owen* has sold well (in hardback, ebook and paperback) and has been reviewed in dozens of newspapers, magazines and non-academic journals across the world, including lead reviews and cover stories, and as a 'Book of the Week' or 'Must Read'. It was for instance, chosen as one of the '**Top Ten Biographies of the Year**' by *Booklist*, as a '**Book of the Week**' (in hardback) and '**Must Read**' (in paperback) by *The Daily Mail*, and as one of the '**Books of the Year**' by the New Zealand Book Council and among the '**Pick of the Paperbacks**' in *The Sunday Times*. In *The Sunday Times* it was also the Books section cover story. It was given extensive coverage in, for example, *The Financial Times*, *The Australian*, *The Sunday Herald* and *The Birmingham Post*. In *The Birmingham Post*, Richard Edmonds stated that 'rarely has a poet been better served than by Guy Cuthbertson's sensitive and beautifully-written account [...] Should you purchase this truly lovely and deeply humane book, I guarantee you will read and re-read it – maybe for the rest of your life'. The BBC website included it in its '**Books of 2014**'. (Please see in section 5, below, sources 1 and 2, but also 10.) *Peace at Last* was reviewed widely too, for example in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Spectator* and *The Literary Review*. It was '**Book of the Week**' in *The Evening Standard* and it was included in *The Daily Telegraph's* '**Books of the Year**' (see sources 3 and 4, but also 10). In *The Evening Standard*, Robert Fox called it 'outstanding': '[a] brilliant portrayal of Britain on the day that peace broke out [...] He weaves a wonderful tapestry of the mood and events across the country [...] It is accessible history at its best'.

Media Appearances

Cuthbertson has made high-profile television appearances talking about his research and raising awareness of it. He has spoken frequently on radio (eg. Radio Wales, Radio Merseyside, Radio London) and talks have been released as podcasts. He has helped to shape the media

representation of the First World War. For instance, he spoke in detail about Owen, and influenced the script and choice of locations, for a BBC programme on Owen presented by Ian McMillan, which was included in the major commemorative event, **World War One Remembered from Westminster Abbey** (BBC 2, 4 August 2014). He was also interviewed about Owen for a special episode of **Songs of Praise** (BBC 1, 4 November 2014). (See sources 8 and 10.) As a result of his research for *Peace at Last*, he played a significant part in **BBC 1's Remembrance Sunday: The Cenotaph, 2018 – World War One Remembered** (11 November 2018). This prominent programme, covering a major national event, lasted for three and a half hours (10am-1.30pm) and Cuthbertson was a studio guest through the programme - his book was also used by the BBC for the script and research (see sources 9 and 10).

Public talks and other activities

Cuthbertson has given dozens of high-profile public talks - talks at literary festivals and book signings, but also at schools, literary societies, museums and libraries. These include, for instance, his prestigious **British Academy Chatterton Lecture on Poetry**, a public lecture which is available as a podcast (see source 7) and was published as an open access resource. He contributed to a Wilfred Owen app, and to preparations and publicity for three different productions of the play *Not About Heroes* (a play about Owen). Cuthbertson wrote feature articles for the *The New Statesman* and *The Tablet*, and for *BBC History Magazine* (see sources 5 and 6), which extended the reach of his research.

Feedback

Cuthbertson has received feedback in person at talks and book-signings, and via, for instance, twitter and email; and public engagement has also taken place through blogs, online reviews and social media. Evidence of the impact of his work can also be seen in the sales figures for his books, in data on borrowing from public libraries (PLR data suggests that *Wilfred Owen* was borrowed nearly 5000 times), in downloads and subscriptions, television audience figures, and in listening figures for podcasts.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. *Wilfred Owen* reviewed by Julia Richardson in *The Daily Mail* 'Must Reads'
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/books/article-3285117/MUST-READS.html>
2. *Wilfred Owen* reviewed by Richard Edmonds, syndicated (including in *The Birmingham Post*)
<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Truth+amid+the+trenches%3B+As+the+centenary+of+the+start+of+World+War+...-a0364421792>
3. *Peace at Last* reviewed by Robert Fox in *The Evening Standard*
<https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/best-armistice-day-books-a3984416.html>
4. *Peace at Last* reviewed by Brendan Simms in *The Wall Street Journal*
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/peace-at-last-review-remembering-flanders-fields-1541968562>
5. 'The Day the World Turned Upside Down', *BBC History Magazine* (November 2018), Supplement: 24-page Armistice Magazine, pp. 4-9.

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/november-armistice-day-world-turned-upside-down-britain-world-war-one/>

6. 'The Armistice bacchanal', *The New Statesman* (4 November 2018), pp. 42-3.
<https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2018/10/armistice-bacchanal-how-britain-rejoiced-11-november-ceasefire>

7. Recording and text of British Academy Chatterton Lecture (1 November 2018)
<https://soundcloud.com/britishacademy/i-should-want-nothing-more-edward-thomas-and-simplicity/s-Ww5yw>
<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publishing/journal-british-academy/7/i-should-want-nothing-more-edward-thomas-and-simplicity/>
This lecture was also reprinted in *The Edward Thomas Fellowship Newsletter* (January 2020).

8. Television: BBC1, *Songs of Praise*, 4 November 2018:
<https://twitter.com/BBCSoP/status/1058747306076454912>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0brjdwH>

9. Television: BBC 1. *Remembrance Sunday: The Cenotaph, 2018 – World War One Remembered*. 11 November 2018. Presenter: David Dimbleby. (10am-1.30pm)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma4mdBw9kDA>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0brgkqt>

10. Guy Cuthbertson's personal website, containing extensive information on publications, press reviews and media appearances. See especially the following pages: 'Welcome', 'Television, Radio, Podcasts', 'Wilfred Owen reviews', 'Peace at Last reviews'.
<http://guycuthbertson.com>