

Wilfred Owen:

An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Owen, Wilfred, 1893-1918
Title:	Wilfred Owen Collection
Dates:	1898-1982
Extent:	3 document boxes (1.26 linear feet)
Abstract:	The Wilfred Owen Collection in the Ransom Center spans the years 1898 to 1982 and comprises Owen's letters to his family and others, several works by Owen, Edmund Blunden, and Siegfried Sassoon, along with works and correspondence concerning his life and career.
Call Number:	Manuscript Collection MS-03127
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Purchase, 1970 (R5180); Gifts, 1985 (G2476), 1995 (G10178)
Processed by:	Bob Taylor, 2010
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born to Tom and Susan Owen at Oswestry, Shropshire, on 18 March 1893, the eldest of four children. In 1897, the family left Oswestry for Birkenhead and eventually Shrewsbury as Tom Owen held successive supervisory positions with the railway. Between 1901 and 1910, Wilfred was educated at Birkenhead Institute and Shrewsbury Technical School, but in his 1911 matriculation exam for the University of London he failed to achieve first-class honors. Without the honors a scholarship became an impossibility, and family support was insufficient otherwise.

Owen spent the years between 1911 and 1915 in a variety of educational and vocational pursuits: he served as a lay assistant to an Anglican vicar; studied privately and at the University College, Reading; taught English at the Berlitz school in Bordeaux; and tutored the sons of a French family. This period also marks the beginning of his first systematic efforts to write poetry.

In September 1915, thirteen months into the Great War, Wilfred Owen returned to England and enlisted in the army. After military training he was in June 1916 commissioned a second lieutenant in the Manchester Regiment. Further postings and additional training followed and in early 1917 he was sent to France, where he was wounded in March and again in April.

Diagnosed with shell-shock, Owen was sent to the Craiglockhart War Hospital outside Edinburgh, arriving in June 1917. The hospital was, during the war years, a facility specializing in the treatment of officers suffering from combat-related psychiatric disorders. Not long after arriving Wilfred Owen was made editor of *The Hydra*, the patients' magazine at the hospital. His poem "Song of songs," appearing in the September 1917 issue, was Owen's first published work.

In August, Siegfried Sassoon, a war poet known to Owen by reputation, arrived at Craiglockhart. Owen quickly introduced himself to Sassoon and with the encouragement and assistance of the older man soon began writing starker and less derivative poetry based on his war experiences. In late 1917 and into 1918, Sassoon introduced Owen to writers and artists in his circle.

Light duty in the fall of 1917 and in the early months of 1918 allowed Owen a measure of leisure time to produce the majority of the poems on which his reputation is based. "Anthem for doomed youth," "Dulce et decorum est," "Strange meeting," "Parable," and "Futility" were all written in the months between the fall of 1917 and late spring 1918.

After Sassoon left the front with a near-fatal head wound, Wilfred Owen returned to active duty in France in July 1918 with the Second Manchesters. On October 2, at Joncourt, Owen replaced his wounded company commander under fire and helped repel a German attack. For this he was ultimately rewarded with the Military Cross.

On 4 November 1918--one week before the Armistice--as he was leading his platoon in crossing the Sambre Canal near the village of Ors, Owen was killed on the canal bank. As the church bells rang in Shrewsbury on Armistice Day the War Department telegram announcing his death was delivered to his parents.

Sources:

Owen, Wilfred. *Collected Letters*. London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Stallworthy, Jon. "Owen, Wilfred Edward Salter (1893-1918)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 (accessed July 2010).

_____. *Wilfred Owen*. London: Oxford University Press and Chatto and Windus, 1974.

Scope and Contents

The Wilfred Owen Collection in the Ransom Center spans the years 1898 to 1982 and comprises Owen's letters to his family and others, several works by Owen, Edmund Blunden, and Siegfried Sassoon, along with works and correspondence concerning his life and career. The collection embraces three series: I. Correspondence and Works, 1898-1918; II. Materials about Wilfred Owen, 1900-1982; and III. Prose and Poetry by Others, 1898-1955.

The core of the Wilfred Owen Collection was brought together in 1954 by Joseph Cohen, then a member of the English Department at the University of Texas, when he identified materials in the university's Rare Book Collection related to Owen. Cohen conducted an active correspondence in the years 1954-1956 seeking information and additional material concerning Wilfred Owen with the intention of creating a Wilfred Owen War Poetry Collection.

The Correspondence and Works Series runs to nearly two boxes and is the heart of the Ransom Center's Wilfred Owen Collection. It includes the originals of nearly all the 673 letters by Owen published in his *Collected Letters*. The letters are to Wilfred's mother Susan and other members of the family save for one to Nellie Bulman and several to Alex Paton. Of these only the Paton letters are in facsimile. Many of the letters to the Owen family have the deletions made by Harold Owen and noted in the *Collected Letters*. The original works by Owen comprise nine poems present as manuscripts in facsimile or as translations.

Series II. Materials about Wilfred Owen, 1900-1982, includes the scripts of four BBC programs produced between 1947 and 1955, along with transcriptions of a 1953 discussion between Joseph Cohen and Dennis Welland annotated by Wilfred's brother Harold Owen. A significant group of letters to Cohen from institutions and individuals having an interest in Wilfred Owen also appear in the series.

The letters from Ladislav Cejp and George Derbyshire contain enclosures concerning, respectively, Owen's work and the organization of the Manchester Regiment in the Great War. Filed with Cohen's correspondence are several pieces of third-party correspondence, including facsimiles of a Susan Owen letter to Alex Paton and one from Gordon Bottomley to Isaac Rosenberg. Also present are letters dated between 1929 and 1932 from Martin Armstrong to "Mr. Wilson" and John P. Coghlan. Armstrong's connection to Wilfred Owen is slight: he, like Owen, served briefly in the Artists Rifles and was also a poet but otherwise their lives were unconnected.

Series III. Prose and Poetry by Others, 1898-1955, includes several works in manuscript by Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon. Blunden's poems "The Only Answer" and "Thames Gulls" are both fair copies by the author, the former signed by him. Sassoon's "Concert Party," corrected and signed, may be the gift offered by Percy Muir of Elkin Mathews to the University of Texas in his August 1954 letter to Joseph Cohen.

The corrected carbon typescript of chapters 6 through 15 of *Siegfried's Journey*, along with three galley proofs, were the gift of B. W. Huebsch of the Viking Press, and his accompanying letter of June 1955 is present with the typescript in photostatic facsimile. The final Sassoon item is "The red poetry book," handwritten by the youthful poet at Christmas 1898 for his uncle Hamo Thornycroft. It is accompanied by a card signed "your loving nepew[sic] Siegfried Sassoon."

Joseph Cohen's *Wilfred Owen War Poetry Collection: a Bibliographical Checklist of 1955*, along with his 1955 draft survey of Owen-related materials then held by the Ransom Center, completes the series.

Related Material

The Ransom Center's Vertical File retains a two volume collection of works by and commentary on Wilfred Owen comprising Robert A. Christoforides's *Fragments of Peace and War* and related materials.

Other collections in the Ransom Center that contain material related to Owen include those of Patric Dickinson and Dylan Thomas. Other archives possessing Wilfred Owen material include Columbia University and the English Faculty Library at the University of Oxford.

Index Terms

People

Blunden, Edmund, 1896-1974

Cohen, Joseph, 1926-

Isherwood, Christopher, 1904-1986

Sassoon, Siegfried, 1886-1967

Subjects

English poetry -- 20th century

Poets, English -- 20th century

War poetry, English

World War, 1914-1918 -- Great Britain -- Literature and the war

Document Types

Poems

Series I. Correspondence and Works, 1898-1918

Subseries A. Correspondence, 1898-1918

Bulman, Mary Ellen, 1917 **Container 1.1**Owen, Colin, 1909-1918 **Container 1.2**Owen, Harold, 1908-1917 **Container 1.3**Owen, Mary, 1903-1918 **Container 1.4**

Owen, Susan

1898-1911 **Container 1.5**1912 **Container 1.6**1913 **Container 1.7**1914 **Container 1.8**1915 **Container 2.1**1916 **Container 2.2**1917 **Container 2.3**1918 **Container 2.4**Owen, Tom, 1913-1917 **Container 2.5**Paton, Alex, 1906-1913 **Container 2.6**

Subseries B . Works, 1914-1918

Nine poems (manuscripts in facsimile and translations) **Container 2.7**

Series II. Materials about Wilfred Owen, 1900-1982

Correspondence to Joseph Cohen and third party correspondence, 1916-1957	Container 2.8
Works about Wilfred Owen, 1947-1982	
Allen, Walter E. "Wilfred Owen" (BBC radio production, 1950)	Container 3.1
Cohen, Joseph. Discussion with D. S. R. Welland re Wilfred Owen, with marginal comments by Harold Owen, 1953-55	Container 3.2
Dickinson, Patric. "Wilfred Owen" (BBC radio production, 1953)	Container 3.3
Fuller, Roy. "Wilfred Owen" (BBC radio production, 1947)	Container 3.4
Sassoon, Siegfried. "Wilfred Owen" (BBC radio production, 1948)	Container 3.5
Brief biographical and critical pieces (typescript, photocopy, offprint, 1900-1982)	Container 3.6

Series III. Prose and Poetry by Others, 1898-1955

- Blunden, Edmund. "The only answer" and "Thames gulls" (two handwritten poems) **Container**
3.7
- Cohen, Joseph. *The Wilfred Owen War Poetry Collection: A Bibliographical Checklist, 1955* (two copies; laid in is Cohen's handwritten and typescript "List of materials" [1955?]) **Container**
3.8
- Sassoon, Siegfried
- "Concert party" (handwritten poem, with revisions, Kantara, 1918) **Container**
3.9
- "The red poetry book""for Uncle Hamo, Xmas 1898" (handwritten) **Container**
3.10
- Siegfried's Journey* (carbon typescript, with author's corrections; 177 p. comprising chapters 6-15 together with three leaves of galley proofs) **Container**
3.11

Index of Correspondents

- Armstrong, Martin, 1882-1974--2.8
- Artists Rifles Association (P. B. Cowell)--2.8
- Berlitz School of Languages (Bordeaux, France) (A. Lowrie)--2.8
- Birmingham Reference Library (F. J. Patrick, J. C. Sharp)--2.8
- Bottomley, Gordon, 1874-1948--2.8
- British Broadcasting Corporation (Lydia Crowther-Smith)--2.8
- British Council (R. H. Milner)--2.8
- Bulman, Mary Blanche--2.8
- Cejp, Ladislav--2.8
- Chatto & Windus (Firm) (P. Raymond)--2.8
- Cohen, Joseph, 1926- --2.8 (with Birmingham Reference Library), 3.2, 3.8
- Derbyshire, George--2.8
- Duthoy, Roland--2.8
- Edinburgh (Scotland). Public Library (C. S. Minto)--2.8
- Fuller, Roy, 1912-1991--2.8
- Gray, L. T. M. (Leonard T. M.)--2.8
- Great Britain. Commonwealth War Graves Commission (W. P. L. Arnott)--2.8
- Great Britain. War Office. Records Center--2.8
- Huebsch, B. W. (Benjamin W.), 1876-1964 (The Viking Press)--3.11
- Isherwood, Christopher, 1904-1986--2.8
- Kay, Walter--2.8
- Keir, Stella M. F.--2.8
- Loiseau, Jean, 1899- (Université de Bordeaux Faculté des lettres)--2.8
- Muir, Percy H. (Percy Horace), 1894-1979--2.8
- Murry, John Middleton, 1889-1957--2.8
- National Library of Scotland. Dept. of Printed Books (David M. Lloyd)--2.8
- Nicholson, Frank Carr, 1875- --2.8
- Owen, Susan--2.8
- Paton, Alex S.--2.8
- Sassoon, Siegfried, 1886-1967--3.10
- Shapiro, Karl Jay, 1913-2000 (*Poetry*)--2.8
- Spear, Hilda D.--2.8
- University of London. Library (J. H. P. Pafford)--2.8
- Venables, Fred W.--2.8
- Viking Press (Marshall A. Best)--2.8
- Wynick, Annie--2.8