

A Poet and a Butcher Go to War

By Brenda Collins

A Poet and a Butcher Go to War

This is the story of two brave young men from different backgrounds who met in Festubert in 1916 (UW page 19) and forged a lasting friendship in the trenches of World War 1. Edmund Blunden is acknowledged as one of the very few World War 1 poets who survived the war and Frank Worley was a young butcher from Worthing. They remained friends for the rest of their lives, a relationship formed by their shared experiences of the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele.

I was attracted to this case study as I was a teacher of English with a passion for World War 1 literature and history. I knew that Edmund Blunden was a pupil at Christ's Hospital and enlisted in the Royal Sussex Regiment, so I approached Christ's Hospital Museum, where they have considerable material on the poet and his links to the school. Then, I was put in touch with Tim Worley, the grandson of Frank Worley. Gradually, a fascinating story has evolved, which has put me into contact with Frank's youngest daughter, 'Auntie Betty' and Edmund Blunden's daughter, Lucy Edgeley, who have both been invaluable in helping me with this case study.



Edmund Blunden

By kind permission of the Edmund Blunden Estate



Frank Worley

By kind permission of Tim Worley

When the 18 year old Edmund Blunden volunteered to serve with the Royal Sussex Regiment in 1915, Frank Worley, a young butcher from Worthing, had already spent a year in army training. Born at his father's fish shop in Portsmouth in 1890, he was 6 years older than Blunden. As a patriotic young Sussex man he enlisted in the 11th Royal Sussex regiment on September 11th 1914, aged 24, and it is unlikely that these two men would ever have met had not the chances-both of them would have called it the 'good luck' of war -brought them into a lasting friendship in the

trenches. The class barriers which might have prevailed had not ordinary working men and the so-called upper or educated classes been thrown closely together in the comradeship of trench warfare, did not seem to matter when a bullet could kill an officer as easily as an ordinary soldier; and this made for a lifelong respect and affection for these two men. As Blunden wrote of Frank Worley in 'Undertones of War': "A kinder heart there never was: a gentler spirit never."

Frank Worley was the youngest of 11 children and when he was born he was small and weak. His parents were told that they would never be able to rear him with so many other children to care for but his aunt, Harriet Wingfield, whom the family later called, 'Nan-Nan', had other ideas. She decided that this puny, little baby was simply not going to be allowed to die, so she took him to her home in Prospect Place in Worthing, and there she reared him and cared for him. He attended school in Worthing and when he left he became a butcher at Fletcher's in Montague Street. So it was that young Frank, as yet unmarried, responded to the declaration of war on August 4th 1914, and enlisted on September 11th 1914. On his medal index card he is incorrectly registered as Frank 'Warley' number SD/555. The 11th Royal Sussex regiment, formed in 1914, formed part of the 116th Brigade with the 12th and 13th Regiments. Called the 'South Downs' Regiments and 'Lowther's Lambs' after Colonel Claude Lowther MP who had set up recruitment offices in the seaside towns of Sussex, and accompanied by the 14th Hampshires, they saw action at both the Somme and Ypres.

Edmund Blunden had a rather different childhood and education. He was the first child of Charles and Georgina Blunden and was born in London, 54a Tottenham Court Road, in 1896. His father came from Brighton and his mother from London. They were not from an upper class background, had very little money and lived in rented accommodation. Though, with the advantage of a father who was a headmaster and a mother who had qualified as a teacher at Whitelands College in London, the young Edmund did not lack for intellectual stimulus. In 1900 the family settled down in the Kent village of Yalding, where his father obtained the post of headmaster of a Church of England Primary School. (BW p44)

Edmund loved the countryside and its various pursuits. Here, he developed his love of fishing and of cricket which was to remain a passion throughout his life. From the age of eight he began to play and became the regular scorer for the village first eleven. He was a clever boy and it was ultimately his education that marked him out as different from Frank Worley.

The first major change in his life came in 1909 when the intellectually outstanding Edmund won a scholarship to Christ's Hospital, the famous school founded by Edward VI in 1552. Although thrilled at the prospect, he was worried about leaving the security of Yalding and the comfort of village life. However, despite periods of homesickness he was soon to develop a life-long attachment to the school and he settled down into academic life as a member of 'Coleridge A' house, named after the poet

who had also attended the school.

Edmund had received no Latin instruction at school in Yalding but having opted for the Classical Side he was taken under the wing of his housemaster H.S Goodwin who also gave him literary encouragement. He was a rare schoolmaster who tempered authority with patience and understanding. In 1914 Goodwin joined the Public Schools and Universities Battalion as a private, falsifying his age as he was actually 44, too old to enlist. He rose to the position of adjutant in the 22nd Royal Fusiliers and was wounded in action in 1914. He returned to teach at the school in 1914 and remained friends with Edmund until his death in 1955(BW p44).

There was a strong tradition of calligraphy at the school: it had always had a Writing School, which was beautifully illustrated in a 2013 episode of 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Gary Lineker discovered that one of his ancestors attended Christ's Hospital when it was still based in London, and became a Legal Writer, and Elizabeth Bridges, the Assistant Curator of the Museum of the school in Horsham, was seen showing him the evidence. Edmund developed a beautiful style himself, said to resemble that of Charles Lamb, and he always favoured the use of a steel-tipped pen; most of his books were written using such an implement.

With his own roots in the rural simplicity of Yalding and the academic culture of Christ's Hospital Edmund started to develop his writing in which these two strains were always present. Several masters took an interest in his writing and encouraged him. As a member of the Grecians' Reading Society he was exhorted by its president, W. de H. Robinson, to read modern authors and he read a paper on John Masefield's poetry in December 1913. He published his first poem in the school magazine, 'The Blue' in February 1913; a sonnet entitled "The First Winter." By October 1914 he considered that he had 44 poems worth printing and approached a printer, Mr Price of West Street, Horsham. A hundred copies were produced for sale at 6pence each, one of which can still be seen at the Christ's Hospital Museum.

Edmund was also open to all forms of exercise; by the time he left school he was captain of his house cricket team, played mostly in the second eleven, keeping wicket and sometimes scoring highly: his highest being ninety not out against St. John's, Leatherhead. He was stand-off half in the house rugby team and also played fives. He seems to have been the perfect all-round student, a credit to the school and was always very proud of the school himself.

By 1914 it was clear that war was imminent. Edmund had already begun wearing military uniform as membership of the school's Officers' Training Corps was compulsory. Whilst enjoying the physical activity and communal life that this soldiering gave him, he was appalled by war and its effects on people and places. This ambivalence was to stay with him all his life. It was school policy that those boys working for university places should complete their courses so he did not enlist until August 1915. Having arrived as a simple country boy in 1909, he left as Senior Grecian-

or Head boy- with an Oxford Scholarship and two small volumes of published verse. When he enlisted, in a typically generous gesture he left a letter with a list of books to be given to his friends George Rheam and A.R Creese with whom he played cricket in the school team. He also left a request that should he not return his scholarship should be transferred to George Rheam.



Coleridge A Cricket Team 1914
Edmund Blunden bottom left with A. R. Creese on his left
From Christ's Hospital Archives

When in August 1915 Edmund arrived by bicycle at Chichester he went to the headquarters of the Royal Sussex Regiment; he had letters of recommendation with him for a commission and became a 2nd Lieutenant. Eventually, he was sent to a large training camp at Shoreham. When Frank Worley enlisted and without the benefit of a public school education, he entered the army as a Private and worked his way up the ranks until he became a Sergeant.

Whilst he was based at Shoreham, Edmund found time to visit Brighton and to browse in its bookshops, in between bouts of lectures and physical exercise. He had even more spare time when he was moved to a camp in Ireland; a large ruined mansion outside Cork. By 1916, however, he was sent back to Shoreham and with only a few days' notice, just time to say farewell to his family now living in Framfield in Sussex he was sent to Etaples for training in using a Hales rifle –grenade. In demonstrating its use the Sergeant Major who had boasted about its safety collapsed dramatically to the ground with half his head blown off! (UWpp5).

At the age of 19 Edmund arrived in France, as a pastoral poet who had to learn very quickly how to become a soldier (BWp50). In 1919 he still referred to himself as 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat.' (UWp191) It has been recorded by his biographer, Barry Webb (BWp50), that he was never a natural soldier but he was athletic and quick on his feet, which perhaps saved him from being seriously wounded or worse. It had been noted at school that he never looked very spruce and this is evident in photographs of the period: a serious young man with penetrating eyes, a sense of a strong will and looking uncomfortable in his untidy uniform.

So where did our poet and butcher meet? In May 1916 our poet arrived on the Western Front where the 11th Sussex Regiment had relieved the 13th Royal Sussex Regiment at Festubert based halfway between Ypres and the Somme on the Front Line which the British held. ('EB A Battalion History,' an essay by Edmund Blunden written in 1933. This information was given to the author by the Blunden Estate.) The battalion's main activity centred around holding a series of 'keeps' (old sandbag ruins) and 'islands' (isolated one-man posts) near Givenchy. From this point on we have a clear record of Edmund's war: the manoeuvres he was involved in, the characters he met, his emotional response to the horrors of war and, of course, his poetic response to the scenery around him. As one of the few 'War Poets' who survived the Great War, and possessed of amazing recall, he set to work to record his experiences and published 'Undertones of War' in 1928, which has been used as a source in this study. Written largely from memory with only the aid of a few maps, it was written while he was in Tokyo. As his first introduction to his responsibilities in C Company, he had to learn about sentry groups & stores, dispositions, defence schemes, the importance of Vermoral Sprayers for counteracting gas, and general trench housekeeping; a far cry from the translations of Greek and Latin verse and the pastoral poetry which he had left behind him.

Frank Worley had been sent to Festubert in 1916 and is first mentioned by the poet when the battalion were sent to Richebourg. Circulars had been sent out about preparations for the Somme offensive and while spending some time at Cambrin Edmund writes about the "calmness and kindnesses of Corporal Worley." Frank invited the young officer for cocoa which he was brewing over a fire made from shreds of sandbags and tallow candle. As he took the mug two hand grenades burst on the parapet behind them but they were unhurt. Characteristically, Frank carried on, unperturbed, "undiverted as though a butterfly or two had settled on a flower." (UW p45). Even in these extreme circumstances the poetic sensibility comes to the fore and he can see beauty in horror. As a war-hardened veteran of 26, Frank Worley taught and nurtured the young and sensitive poet, as he did all the young men he encountered. With the shrapnel whizzing over their terrified heads, he would murmur quietly, "don't fret, lay still." (UWp45) It is interesting that even in the trenches Frank was aware of the social gulf between them as Edmund observes that he spoke in terms of regret for what he perceived to be his roughness, offering the reason that he had been in butchering all his life. Yet, the equality that being in close proximity in a war situation brings

meant that these two totally different men remained life-long friends and Edmund would visit Frank Worley in his fish shop after the war. Indeed, his daughter Betty, now in her eighties, distinctly remembers meeting Edmund Blunden when she was about 14 and he came to see her father. In a similar vein, one of Edmund Blunden's daughters remembers 'Dad' talking fondly about the kindness of Frank Worley when she was growing up. She says that war was always a constant in the Blunden family life: not alone the horror of it but the comradeship that it brought.

During Edmund's early days in France he seemed to find it easy to relax with his fellow Sussex men and he writes of their shared sense of adventure: "The sound sense of what I have seen in this short time, the chance of excitement, the return to nature feeling, and the goodwill of everyone, made a great appeal to me," (BW p53). However, as enemy activity hotted up he often felt irritated with 'Authority' and its seeming obsession with red-tape. His writing is constantly that of the poet as he was able to see a kind of beauty in the most derelict and shattered landscapes: "a great many bones, like broken bird-cages...lights, which soared and sank in beautiful curves." (UW Chap2)

Life without books was anathema to the poet and Edmund had a small war-time library, compact enough to cram into his pockets, such as Shelley, Masfield, Cobbett, John Clare, Leigh Hunt and Edward Young's 'Night Thoughts.' He discovered Siegfried Sassoon's poetry in the Cambridge Magazine at Ypres; they were to become very good friends later on. An American scholar, Carol Z. Rothkopf, has edited and published their extensive correspondence and in several of their post-war letters, Frank Worley is mentioned. In August of 1954 Sassoon wrote that he was "grieved to hear about your good and true Sergt. Worley, knowing what your memories of him are, and always will be. Deeper than plummet sounds are those Great War loyalties and fraternities." Later that year Sassoon wrote again that, "What Worley and his sort did cannot be communicated," when contemplating the significance of his own poetry from the Great War.

It was when Edmund had his poetry reviewed in The Times Literary Supplement that Colonel Harrison made the request that the poet should be moved to the relative safety of the battalion HQ but the modest young man was reluctant to go; he wanted to stay with his men. So, he was given the job of 'Field Works Officer' which meant refitting trenches amongst other jobs. Much to his Colonel's dismay, he did his fair share of the manual work and by August 1916 the battalion was moved to the Ancre valley where they attacked on September 3rd.

The battalion's main objective in June 1916 was to act as a decoy to keep the Germans away from the Somme on July 1st and an unsuccessful and costly attack was made on a section of the German line known as the Boar's Head, on June 30th. In early July his company was occupying a position at the head of a mine shaft, and Edmund's asthma was particularly troublesome as a result of tear gas known as pineapple gas. By the middle of August he met up again with "My invincible friend", (UW Chap9) now Sergeant Worley, in the Thiepval Wood area.

It was during this period in that Edmund was awarded the Military Cross with the official citation: **For conspicuous gallantry in action. He displayed great courage and determination when in charge of a carrying party under fire. He has previously done fine work.**

As winter arrived the company moved to a relief position at Senlis where he and Colonel Harrison, who was his commander and later became a friend, took the men to a concert party. Later, in a similar event near Ypres, he was prompted to write 'Concert Party: Busseboom', an evocative poem, describing the enjoyment of the entertainment but ending with the stark reality that the war was ever present.

At the end of 1916 the men were moved from the Somme region to Ypres and Passchendaele, and Edmund and Frank spent the whole of 1917 in what many people say was the "nightmare of Passchendaele." (BW p68)

It was during this period in 1917 that Edmund used his experience of an incident in the trenches and wrote 'Pillbox' in which he directly celebrates the strength and humanity of his friend Frank, and illustrates the effect that a straightforward wound could have on a brave man whose nerves were stretched beyond endurance.

Pillbox

Just see what's happening, Worley, -Worley rose
And round the angled doorway thrust his nose,
And Sergeant Hoad went too, to snuff the air,
The war brought down his fist, and missed the pair!
Yet Hoad was scratched by a splinter, the blood came,
And out burst terrors that he'd striven to tame,
A good man Hoad, for weeks. *I'm blown to bits,*
He groans, he screams. *Come, Bluffer, where's your wits?*
Says Worley. *Bluffer, you've a blighty, man!*
All in the pillbox urged him, here began
His freedom; *Think of Eastbourne and your dad.*
The poor man lay at length and brief and mad
Flung out his cry of doom; soon ebbed and dumb
He yielded. Worley with a tot of rum
And shouting in his face could not restore him.
All marvelled even on that most deathly day
To see this life so spirited away.

Yet, our poet was not the only one who won a medal. In September 1917, Edmund Blunden recommended Frank Worley for the Victoria Cross, but he was actually given the Distinguished Conduct Medal, the highest award available for an NCO, for: **most conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty on the Menin Road, 25,26,27 September 1917**, during the Third battle of Ypres. Apparently, he spent those three days carrying messages back and forth along that dreadful road, constantly under heavy

fire. I was very privileged to be shown his medal and citation which is proudly held by his grandson, Tim Worley.

After seeing action on the Somme, Edmund and the Royal Sussex men were sent to the Ypres Salient: that small but highly significant semi-circle of land which jutted into enemy territory, and which had to be fought over by both sides as a matter of national pride and because it was essential to hold Ypres to prevent German access to the channel ports. He met up with Frank Worley again at Christmas in the snow about a mile from Poperinghe. To any student of WW1 this pretty little town is well worth a visit today to see the excellent Talbot-or TOC H- House where the Reverend Tubby Clayton set up a drop-in centre for all NCOs. They were always welcomed there with a cup of tea, perhaps a sing-song around the piano, and up in the chapel participation in a service held by Tubby himself. Did Frank Worley ever visit there, I wonder? I should like to think so.

Edmund and Frank spent a snowy Christmas in camp in woods in Elverdinghe. Colonel Harrison held a church parade and visited all his men. Edmund writes: "I am warmed by the sight of my old confederate Sergeant Worley, in the exit of the siding: he gives his usual candid views on the situation, but is on the whole favourable to it..." (UWp109)

After a brief spell of leave in England the battalion relieved the Welsh on the edge of the Yser canal, waiting for a German offensive in the great cold. As Edmund accompanied Colonel Harrison into Ypres to view the trenches to be occupied he comments: "The sun could surely never shine on such a simulacrum of divine aberration." (UWp120) A splendid comic interlude occurs when the snow camouflage suits for patrols arrive and the parcels contain ladies' flimsy nightdresses! (BWp69)

As a thaw set in and spring came he caught up with some of his Christ's Hospital colleagues, men who were a little ahead of him in the school. With Ernest Tice, Arnold Vidler, Horace Amon and William James Collyer they made up 'The Feast of Five, when they went into St. Omer and explored. By August 1917 both Tice and Collyer had been killed: Tice met some Germans coming out of a dug-out and was shot after bravely attempting to batter the first one with the butt of his pistol and Collyer was probably killed by friendly fire from a British barrage. A soldier wrote to Arnold Vidler's mother, after receiving news of his death in 1924, describing him as: "ideal and a thorough gentleman a real-may I say-pal-to those who served under him." He had been discharged from the army in 1920 but it appears that the horrors of his war experiences were simply too much for him to bear and he took his own life.

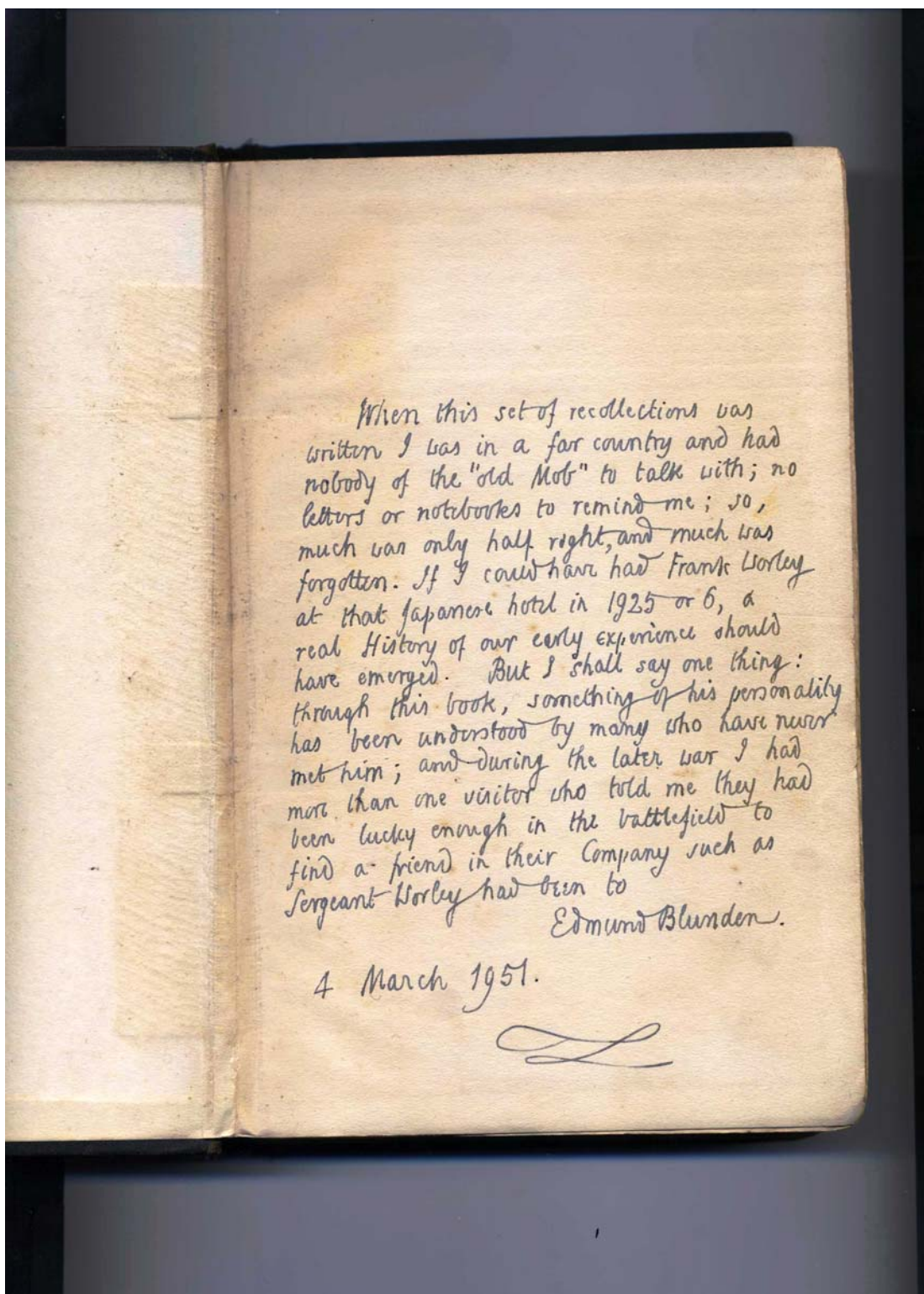


'The Feast of Five' described in 'Undertones of War' showing officers
 W J Collyer, H Amon, E W Tice, A G Vidler and Edmund Blunden
 By kind permission of the Edmund Blunden Estate.

By the beginning of 1918 the battalion had endured appalling shell fire and loss in what Edmund calls, "the slow amputation of Passchendaele." (UWp172/173) He was responsible for patrolling and maintaining the tunnels which were foul smelling and full of stinking water. Once again there is an encounter with Frank Worley at a new camp in Chippewa. Frank had started to amuse himself with drawings of places where the old battalion had been. He was given the little notebook, now brown with age, as he went off to war, by Daisy Cornford whose parents owned a nearby pub. It contains some faint sketches signed 'Spud' which was his nickname as well as some by others. His daughter, Betty, who still owns the book, says that if he had had the chance he would have been more of an artist. He only showed them to Edmund who comments that he thought his series of drawings showed a 'queerness' but loved him for the expression of simple trust he showed in him. At the time of writing 'Undertones of War' both our poet and butcher had lost contact with each other. Blunden believed that Frank was 'lost to the world,' and it was only with the publication of the book and the cry of "Where now Frank Worley? I should like an answer," (Penguin Edition p62) that they were reunited. It is thought that Frank Worley heard about the book on the radio and contacted Blunden. In a letter written to Frank in 1929 Edmund wrote,

"I can tell you it was a great moment when I arrived at the broadcasting offices the other evening and found this letter of yours. It served me well for I was feeling very nervous about the first attempt to speak on the air, and I seemed to have you with me again as if in the days when you made even no-man's land feel fairly comfortable and cheerful." Later, in the Preface to the second edition Edmund wrote more publicly ... "Among the lucky issues of the books, I count conspicuously the return into my little world of Sergeant Worley; without him I should

have seen War and Peace in other hues." He inscribed a copy of the book to Frank in 1951.



Inscribed on Frank's daughter Margaret's copy of 'Undertones of War'

In early 1918 Edmund Blunden was removed from France and posted to six months' duty at a training centre in England. Although reluctant to

leave, he was tired and increasingly irritated with senior officers. He only returned to France after the Armistice so his departure from Gouzeaucourt was, in effect, the end of his active service. As he departed he wrote, "I might have known the war by this time, but I was still too young to know its depths of ironic cruelty." (UWp191)

As for Frank Worley, he stayed on till the bitter end, having sustained a leg wound which he regarded, according to Edmund, as, "an insult rather than an injury." After the war he was discharged in December 1918 as he was suffering from shell shock.

Frank was reputedly sent to Rampton hospital where he was diagnosed with 'Religious Mania' as he was found to be in possession of a bible, which he had carried throughout the war. His Aunt, Harriet Wingfield, who had brought him up, is thought to have gone to Rampton and taken him out. "I'll look after him," she said. He was also told that he should not go back to being a butcher as they thought it might upset him, so he became a fishmonger. However, his daughter can remember him helping out at the butcher's in North Street, and wringing the necks of chickens as he sold game as well as fish in the shop!

So what did the future hold for these two men? When Frank was discharged he was told by Blunden that he would find life hard back at home. Both of them were affected throughout their lives by their experiences but Frank rarely talked about any of it.

Edmund Blunden went on to have a distinguished career as a poet, biographer, writer and an academic, although he was never able to shake off the ghostly reminders of the war. In 1919 he finally became an Oxford undergraduate and decided, perhaps not unsurprisingly, to change from Classics to English. In 1920 he published 'Poems Chiefly from Manuscript,' pub. R.Cobden Sanderson, having re-discovered the poet John Clare's manuscripts in Peterborough. Clare was one of the poets that sustained him during the war years. However, being now married with one child and busy with his own writing and contributions to many journals, his academic studies waned and with the addition of financial difficulties, he accepted a job at the journal, 'The Athenaeum.' His friendship with Siegfried Sassoon stems from this time and an intimate friendship developed which spanned over forty years, apart from a brief period of estrangement.

He then went on to have a distinguished literary and academic career and to live and work in both Japan and Hong Kong. He came back to England in 1927 and worked in London and then in Oxford.

By the outbreak of the Second World War both his writing and his reading were coloured by the horrors of a return to the kind of warfare he knew and he even laid himself open to the charge of being unpatriotic, so intense was his desire to serve the peace for both Germany, which he respected and admired, and for his beloved England. Divorced from his first wife and remarried, this relationship was also breaking down.

He spent the war years in Oxford at Merton College. In 1945 he finally married Claire, who was studying English at Oxford when he was lecturing there. They met when she wrote a poem for him about cricket, always so close to his heart. His daughter Lucy says, 'no pop stars for her, her teenage passions were cricket and poetry.'

They had four daughters: Margaret, Frances, Lucy and Catherine, and with his girls and his writing he lived happily for the rest of his life. His biographer, Barry Webb, has produced a most entertaining and readable account of his long and varied life. Memories of the war continued to haunt him and much of this is present in his prolific poetic output. He died peacefully after a sudden heart attack on 20 January 1974, the Eve of St. Agnes, a most fitting date for the end of a great literary figure. He was buried in a beautiful corner of Long Melford churchyard, headed by a simple stone with the opening line of his poem, 'Seers' engraved around his name:

"I live still, to love still
Things quiet and unconcerned."

On Friday, 8th November 1996, Christ's Hospital held a celebration on the centenary of Edmund Blunden's birth. The programme of events is held in the Museum at the school, but one of the happy meetings on that occasion was between Claire, Edmund's wife and Margaret Worley, Frank's eldest daughter. We can only speculate on what they had to say to each other.

Soon after the war, Frank started selling wet fish from a wheeled stall



Frank's wet fish stall in Worthing with Frank in the white coat. From Tim Worley

at the junction of Portland Road and Montague Street. At one stage he was fined 5 shillings, a great deal of money in those days, by the council

as he did not possess the necessary licence. He married Bessie Divall on October 1st in 1922, and they had three children, David born in 1925, Margaret born in 1926, and Elizabeth or 'Betty' born in 1930. He then opened a Fish and Chip Shop at 42 North Street on which he took two mortgages. 'Nan-Nan' effectively brought up the children as Frank and Bessie were heavily involved in running their business. Eventually, the whole family helped out in the shop by serving, preparing fish and potatoes for chips or doing the frying, so it was a real family concern.

Frank had a small frame and as a young man was slightly built with round shoulders but he was athletic and in the army he had enjoyed boxing. After the war he was a life saver on Worthing seafront. Betty remembers going down to the beach where you could hire a beach hut for 2d. Frank had a swimming suit with his life savers' badge on the back so it could be seen while swimming. A rush mat was set out on the beach for bathers to get into the water more easily. Frank was a strong swimmer, easily able to get out to the end of the pier and back. I can only wonder at the thoughts going through his mind as he helped to save lives once again, only this time without the added danger of bullets flying around.

He was always a very kind and generous man, although his war experiences led to bouts of depression. His daughter describes him as 'moody', though he had a great sense of humour. Frank attended several Royal Sussex Regiment 'Southdown' military reunions, as did Edmund, sometimes taking a charabanc trip to Battle Abbey, where many had enlisted and been trained. This photo with Frank seated on the far left shows him in happier times.

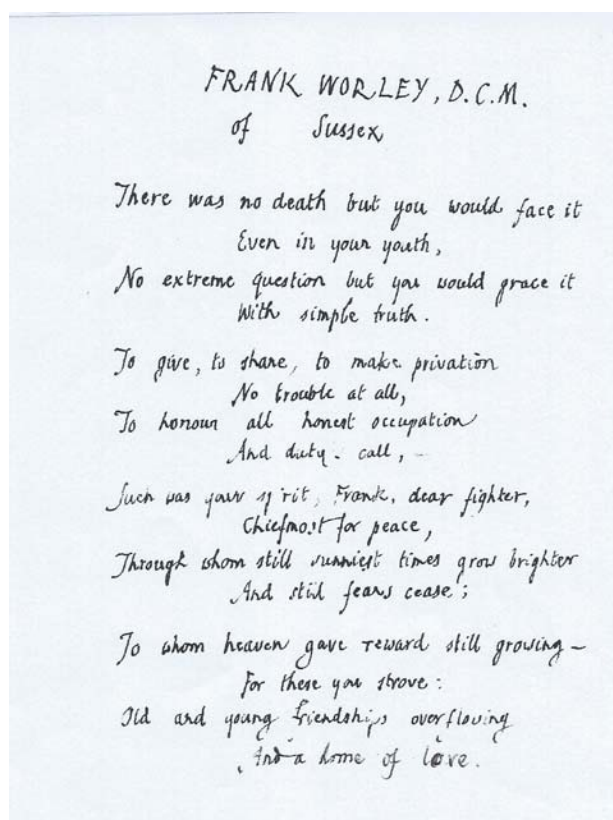


Frank, seated far left, on a charabanc outing on a 'Southdown' military reunion. From Tim Worley

In his shop there were always two queues, one for Frank's friends who paid little or nothing and one for ordinary customers, so he was never a

wealthy man. During WW2 Canadian soldiers were stationed nearby, and they liked to come to his shop after the pubs had closed, but Frank was told that he had to close by 10pm. Undaunted, he arranged for somebody to write to Herbert Morrison, Minister for Food, on his behalf, to ask for an extension in order to be able to help the Canadians. Eventually, he was given permission to close at 11pm. The Canadians who were big men, lumberjacks in civilian life, were so grateful that they would always help Frank out if there was any bother with late night customers. He showed them his WW1 medal of which he was justifiably proud, when they ragged him about their war effort. The shop was demolished in 1984 and is now the site of the Lidl store.

Frank became ill with stomach cancer in the accommodation over the shop in 1953. He was operated on but it was too late and he developed secondary tumours. His son David's wife Nona, a nurse at Worthing Hospital, cared for him and as he lay dying he asked for champagne as he said he had first tasted it in France and loved the memory of it. David went out and bought him half a bottle but sadly he could not take much, though he said he enjoyed the taste. When he died Betty and his son-in-law Bill, Margaret's husband who now ran the shop, carried him downstairs to a room where Betty washed him and changed him into clean pyjamas. He died in June 1954 aged 63, and there is his friend's poem 'Frank Worley DCM, July 1954', in the possession of his grandson, Tim, to commemorate a remarkable life and a remarkable friendship between a poet and a butcher.



I have visited many cemeteries on the Somme and Ypres, both British and German, and I have seen countless white headstones bearing the

inscription, 'Known unto God.' What has made this research both more intimate and moving is that I feel I have come to know these two exceptional men who went through the Great War and survived it. I have researched their lives and communicated with their relatives. What a thrill it was to see Lucy Edgeley writing about 'Dad', this great man whose name now joins fifteen other names in Westminster Abbey on a memorial in 'Poet's Corner' to First World War poets. If you look you will find his name alongside his great friend, Siegfried Sassoon. How happy they would both be at that.

It has been fascinating to spend time in the Christ's Hospital Museum browsing through their material on him and discovering examples of his elegant handwriting on old copies of 'The Blue' magazine, little amusing asides to his fellow contributors.

Whilst there is much to read about Edmund Blunden, there is the oral history that I have been so privileged to hear about Frank Worley. Tim, his very proud grandson has loved talking about him and is still discovering new facts about his remarkable grandfather, and Betty, Frank's daughter spoke so clearly about her 'dad' it was as though he was still very much with her.

The Great War broke down so many class barriers, and life was never quite the same again for so many people. However, the fact that these two very different men met in the trenches, fought together, suffered together and forged a friendship that transcended class, education and time, means we can say that from hatred and suffering and destruction can come love and loyalty and true friendship.

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Homepage www.poemhunter.com/edmund.blunden

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