



NORWICH
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The Wilfred Owen Project

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1. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

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In 2017 Bousfield was commissioned by The Folio Society to create a body of work to accompany publication of selected poems by Wilfred Owen to mark the centenary of the poet's death in November 2018. For Bousfield, the concepts of place attachment, place identity and place dependency are key components of memory and identity. This project investigated the idea that experience and identity can be held in artefacts, archives and writing, and that these can be coalesced and evoked in new work commemorating Owen's life and poetry.

Research began with reading, selecting and researching Owen's poetry, life experiences and the places that formed his identity. Archives at the Imperial War Museum, Norwich Castle Museum and online provided access to artefacts, interviews, lectures, archival film, photography, trench maps, and the work of the War Artists. A visit to an exhibition of Paul Nash's work in 2017 impacted upon the outcome, as Nash's First World War landscapes were driven by an exploration of the 'spirit of place'. Nash was also an influential member of the Society of Wood Engravers, founded in 1920, to which Bousfield was elected in 2009.

Bousfield selected which poems he would work from. Drawings were made from a wide range of research materials as well as Owen's poems, and reference the physical and emotional topography of battlefield landscapes and trench networks as well as the landscapes of Owen's life, such as Broxton by the Hill, Craiglockhart War Hospital, Scarborough, Ripon, Joncourt and the Sambre-Oise canal where he was killed.

In 2019 Bousfield extended the series in a project with Dulwich College with a print dedicated to the Dulwich College pupil Leslie Paton overlaying the places where he lived, the environment of the school and the maps and front lines of the battlefield where he died in 2017.

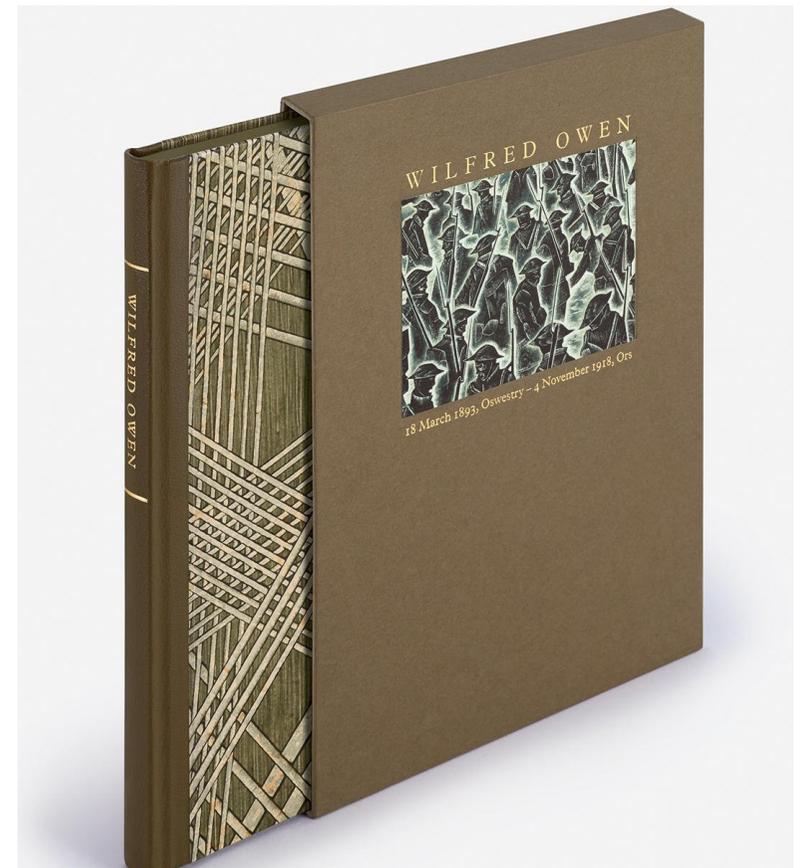


Fig.1 Wilfred Owen Selected Poems, illustrated by Neil Bousfield

2. RESEARCH PROCESS

The notion of place spans a wide field of interdisciplinary research including human geography, archaeology, anthropology and neuroscience. Memory and identity are key components within the construct of place and are encapsulated within the concepts of place attachment, place identity, and place dependency.

‘In order to become worldly things, that is, deeds and facts and events and patterns of thoughts or ideas, they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments. The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.’ (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958, p95)

The emotive nature of the subjects, research into place and archival materials result in the creation of contemporary engravings that aim to transform experience and place into tangible things.

Drawings were made with various materials, mostly graphite, using a wide range of research materials including readings of Owen’s texts. Bousfield normally works oversize but to the required aspect ratio. Drawings are scanned and resized, sometime with images layered in Photoshop. The finished image is printed onto the

engraving block and drawn over to achieve the correct density, then a very thin layer of black printing ink is applied to the block, so the drawing can be seen underneath this, and left to dry. Engravings are made by Bousfield into engineering polymer. Once the engraving is complete, the block is cleaned, locked into the press, inked up and a print is taken. The original engravings printed by the artist from the engraved blocks were made on a 1962 Vandercook cylinder proof press (The artist’s name is registered as the owner of the Vandercook Press).

The colour works were reproduced and printed in Vicenza, Italy, by LEGO with the single colour engravings being set with text and printed letterpress from polymer plates, by The Logan Press, Wellingborough, England. The book was bound by LEGO and published in London by the Folio Society in 2018.

Bousfield used the same research process when he was one of the artists commissioned to make work to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Dulwich College in 2019. His research led him to focus on the places that a former Dulwich student, Leslie Paton, lived, fought and died, as well as the war memorial and remembrance ceremony at Dulwich College. Paton died at Arras on 21 March 1917, aged 19, two weeks after arriving in France. The resulting work is a multiple block print rather than a reduction print, with four separate blocks engraved to make the image.



Fig.2 Drawing for Wilfred Owen portrait



Fig.3 Graphite drawing for The Last Laugh



Fig.4 Engraving in progress: The Last Laugh



Fig.5 Engraving in progress: Strange Meeting



Fig.6 Printing 1914 on the Vandercook press

3. RESEARCH INSIGHTS

The project extends Bousfield's practice of landscape narrative as a palimpsest of geography, memory, time and place into the experience and creative expression of a major poet of the First World War. The research, drawings, the physical process of relief engraving and publishing, alongside the poems, aim to realise Arendt's assertion of the importance of transforming the 'intangible into the tangibility of things'.

The works build upon the process and tradition of wood engraving in the creation of illustrated books but are contemporary in their nature, execution, use of colour and use of materials. Engineering polymers allow for greater flexibility within the creative process, block making processes, and facilitate a greater use of scale.

The series of work produced six double-page colour reduction engravings, two single-page colour reduction engravings, and a further eight single-colour engravings.



Fig.7 The Last Laugh, engraved block



Fig.8 Spring Offensive, engraved block, detail



Fig.9 The Last Laugh

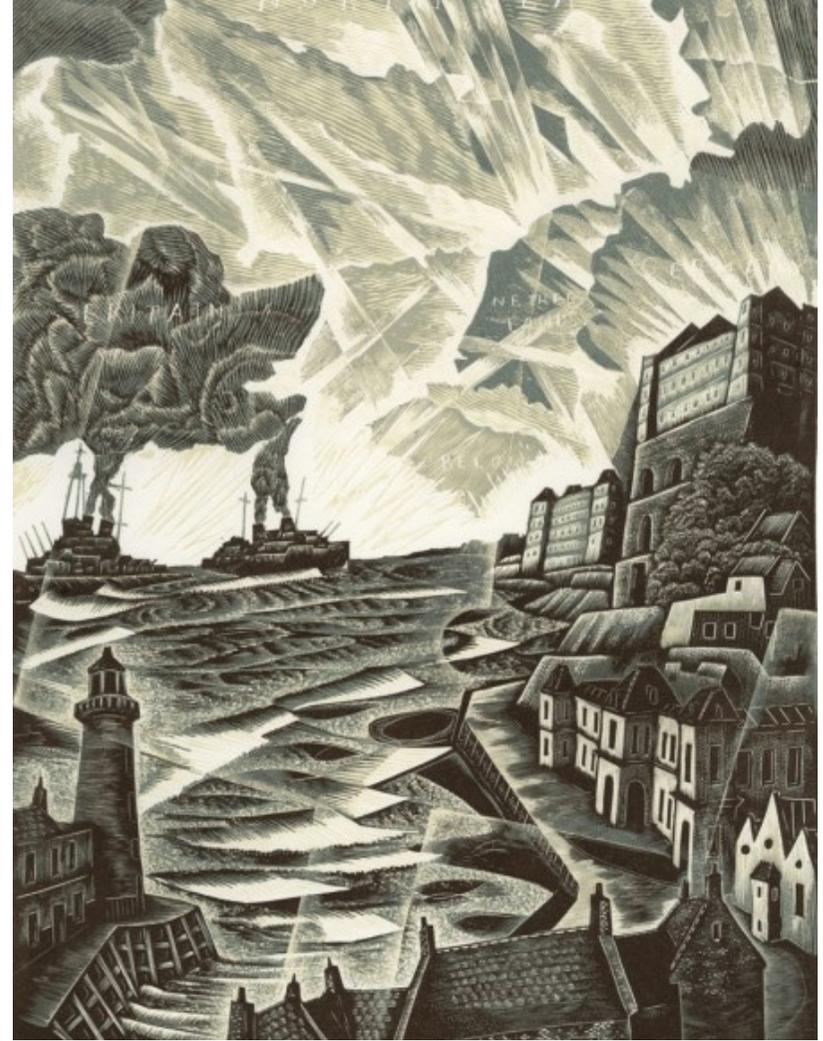


Fig.10 1914



Fig.11 Dulce et Decorum Est



Fig.12 Spring Offensive

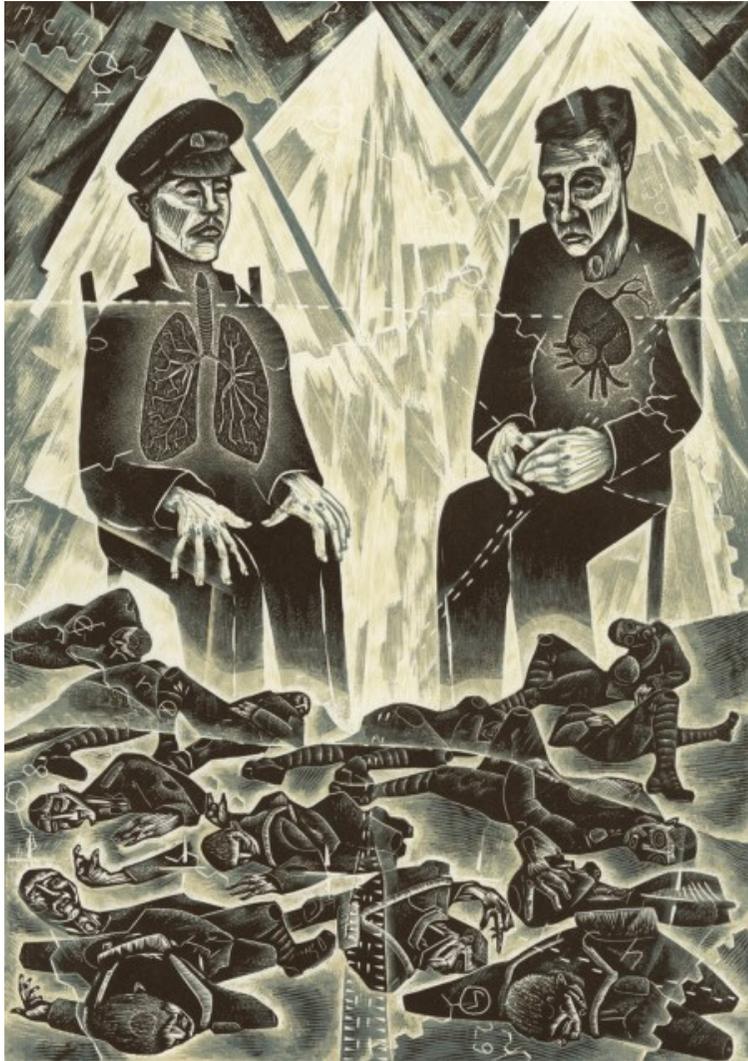


Fig.13 Strange Meeting



Fig.14 Leslie Paton: Memory and Places (Dulwich College) *not included in the Wilfred Owen book*

4. DISSEMINATION

The series of works were published in Wilfred Owen: Selected Poems by the Folio Society in 2018 with an introduction by the poet Owen Shears, winner of the Wilfred Owen poetry award in 2018. The book was a limited edition of 1,250 hand-numbered copies, each signed by Neil Bousfield. The work comprises six double-page colour reduction engravings, two single-page colour reduction engravings, and a further eight single-colour engravings. Works from the series have been widely exhibited and collected.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2czGy-g93k>

Exhibitions

(selected single engravings exhibited from the series)

Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair 2019, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, London, November 2019

Royal Academy of Arts Summer Exhibition, London, 2019

London Original Print Fair, Royal Academy of Arts, London, April 2019

London Art Fair, Business Design Centre, London, January 2019

Winter Exhibition, Zillah Bell Gallery, North Yorkshire, December 2018-January 2019

Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, August- September 2018

Winter Exhibition, Bircham Gallery, Norfolk, November 2018

Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair 2018, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, London, November 2018

Royal Birmingham Society of Artists Biennial Print exhibition, RBSA Gallery, Birmingham, August- September 2018

Royal Academy of Arts 250th Summer Exhibition, London, 2018

Awards

2018 Rachel Reckitt Prize – The Society of Wood Engravers (The Golsoncott Foundation)

2018 Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, RBSA Print Prize – ‘Highly Commended’

Links

The Folio Society

<https://www.foliosociety.com/uk/wilfred-owen-selected-poems.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2czGy-g93k>

<https://www.facebook.com/TheFolioSociety/videos/255558378475713/>

<https://www.facebook.com/TheFolioSociety/videos/412767246146070/>

The Wilfred Owen Association

<http://www.wilfredowen.org.uk/news/article/the-folio-society-wilfred-owen-selected-poems>

Dulwich College

<https://shop.dulwich.org.uk/store/product/18639/400th-PRINT-NEIL-BOUSFIELD/>

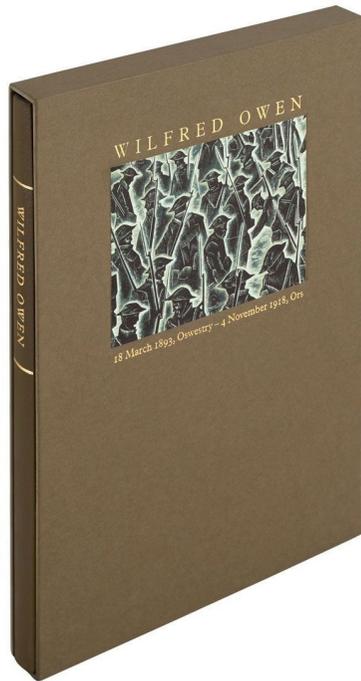


Fig.15 Wilfred Owen Selected Poems, published in London by The Folio Society, 2018
Illustrated by Neil Bousfield

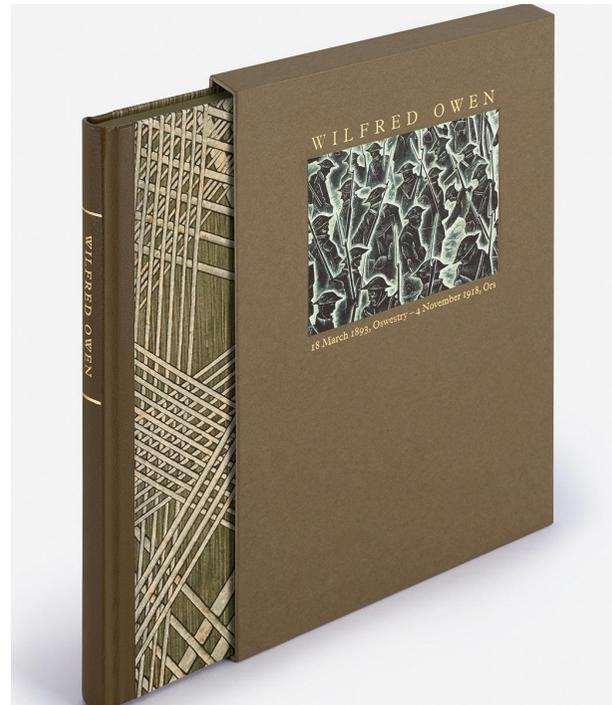


Fig.16 Wilfred Owen Selected Poems, published in London by The Folio Society, 2018
Illustrated by Neil Bousfield

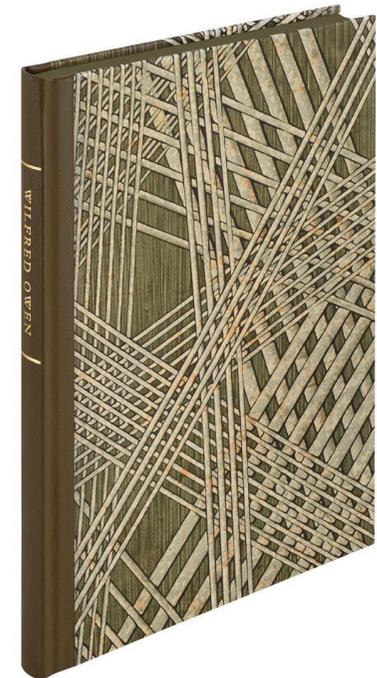


Fig.17 Wilfred Owen Selected Poems, published in London by The Folio Society, 2018
Illustrated by Neil Bousfield

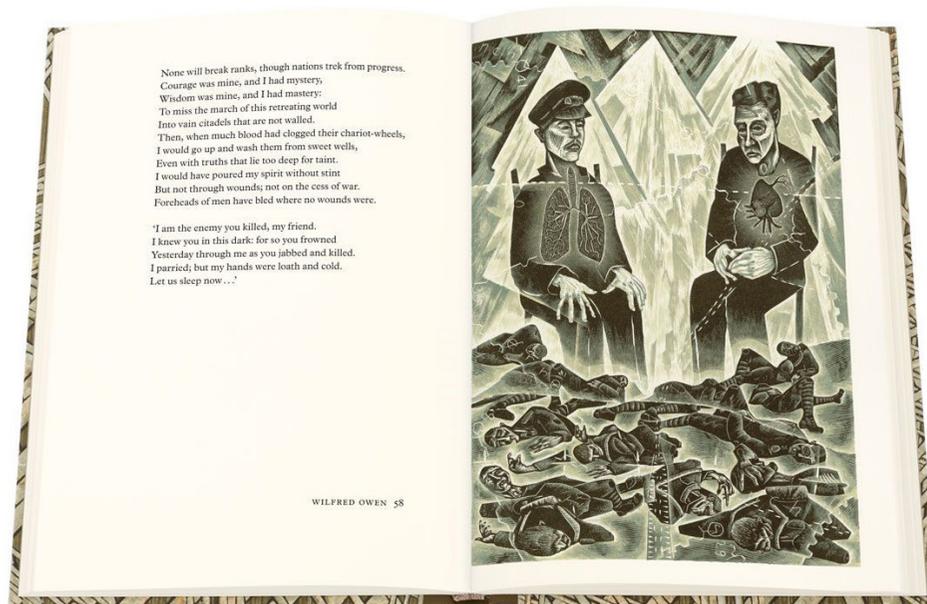


Fig.18 Wilfred Owen Selected Poems, published in London by The Folio Society, 2018 Illustrated by Neil Bousfield



Fig.19 Wilfred Owen Engravings, exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts Summer Show, London 2018



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