

Copies of WWI literary magazine donated to Edinburgh Napier University



Original copies of a magazine edited by poet Wilfred Owen while he recovered from shell shock in Scotland have been found after a near decade-long search.

Three copies of 'The Hydra: the magazine of Craiglockhart War Hospital' have been donated to Edinburgh Napier University.

Owen contributed to and edited the publication, which also printed new work by fellow patient, and war poet, Siegfried Sassoon.

The University's Craiglockhart Campus, a hydrotherapy centre in the early 20th century, was requisitioned by the War Office as a hospital for WWI officers suffering from neurasthenia, or shell-shock.

Circumstances brought together the two great poets in the leafy Edinburgh suburb in the summer of 1917.

The University established a War Poets Collection in 1988 in memory of that heritage, but until now the permanent exhibition has relied on photocopied Hydras kindly supplied from the University of Oxford.

Now, nearly 10 years on from a public appeal for the originals, the 'lost' copies have been found – generously donated to Edinburgh Napier by the relative of another former patient who succeeded Owen as Hydra editor following the latter's return to duty.

The University believes no other collection in Scotland, including the National Library of Scotland, hold copies of two of the three donated Hydras – numbers 4 and 5 of the New Series.

“This is most welcome news and means so much for the Collection,” said librarian Catherine Walker who had devoted much of her career to curating and maintaining the exhibition.

“Having original copies back in the building where the magazines were written is a thrill and very fitting as we approach August and the centenary of Britain going to war.”

The meeting of Sassoon and Owen at Craiglockhart led to a friendship and literary partnership that critics say was responsible for some of the finest war poetry ever written.



Historian Dr Janet Morgan, Lady Balfour of Burleigh, said: “Meeting Sassoon and working together on The Hydra was a turning point in Owen’s development as a poet. Horror brought these men to Craiglockhart; their meeting gave us a handful of fragile but resilient poems that have for a near hundred years evoked the terror and pity of the Great War.

“These original copies of The Hydra commemorate that encounter; they are also a reminder of the generous and cultivated approach to medicine practised by the doctors at Craiglockhart and the atmosphere of imaginative sympathy in which art was created and minds began to be healed.

“This gift to Edinburgh Napier, a delicate and eloquent commemoration, honours all those who were at the Craiglockhart Hospital.”

The Hydras will go on display in the War Poets Collection exhibition later on this year.

Ms Walker added: “The Hydras are fascinating documents and

allow us glimpses of the daily lives of the men who found themselves sent to Craiglockhart.

“We already have photocopies of Wilfred Owen’s editorials on display, including the September 1st issue from 1917, where he comments, ‘Many of us who came to the Hydro slightly ill are getting dangerously well,’ as, of course, the men would indeed be sent straight back to the Front when they were deemed to have recovered.

“They are fascinating primary sources, and so it is a real pleasure to be able to house original copies in the Collection. We are truly surprised and delighted that they have been donated to us, particularly at this important time.”

A degree of mystery remains, however: the No.6 edition of The Hydra, New Series remains missing, north and south of the border.

James Boyle, one of the leading public figures in the British Arts world, and the current chairman of the National Library of Scotland, said: “It’s thrilling to hear of the return of the three copies of The Hydra to Edinburgh after almost 100 years. However, the search for a copy of edition number 6 dated 7 July, 1917 goes on.

“Come to think of it, Indiana Jones and the Lost Hydra would make a great movie.”