

O.M.M.'S

CRUX CHRISTI NOSTRA CORONA

AN ANNOTATED EDITION AND COMMENTARY
OF A POST-WORLD WAR 1 ACCOUNT
OF BELGIAN WAR SITES

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Emma Demarée, May 2017

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ADDENDUM: Photographic Reproductions of the Bruges and U.K. Typescripts.

Due to the large size of the addendum (c.88 MB), it is no part of the uploaded scripton. It can however be provided via a separate WeTransfer by simple request to the author Emma Demarée. It can also be consulted at UGent Library (Gent), at Kenniscentrum of In Flanders Fields Museum (Ieper) and at Provinciaal Archief Westflandrica (Sint-Andries).

INTRODUCTION

Crux Christi Nostra Corona, the text at the centre of this paper, has so far been known as an anonymous text read by very few. Two versions of it exist, one in the Cultural Library of the Province of West-Flanders in Bruges, and a reduced one in the family archives of its author, who calls herself O.M.M. It is factual but at the same time it reveals literary tendencies. It was written several years after World War 1 by someone who was not a direct witness of the slaughter at the front, but who nevertheless saw the devastating results of it back in England and who was personally affected by its cost. Although the amalgamation of these factors is not unique, it certainly contributes towards making this account worth investigating. The text reflects on a conflict which had an enormous impact on the history of the world by telling a very personal story, while at the same time attempting to convey a universal message.

Crux Christi Nostra Corona is the author's narration of a trip to Belgium, which she made with her parents in the summer of 1922 to visit the grave of their son and brother, who had died in Belgium shortly after the end of the First World War. While travelling through Belgium, she wrote down her impressions of the country's cities and people and later organised these thoughts in a typescript which she organized in the form of six letters by O.M.M. addressed to someone who is likewise not fully named in the text. Through an auction in the 1970s, her little book found its way to archives in Bruges, where it stayed out of sight for more than forty years. Now that I have had a chance to rediscover it, it is the aim of my investigation to uncover the identity of both the elusive O.M.M. and her mysterious addressee.

The idea for this thesis arose as the result of my bachelor paper¹, which focused on the comparison of two World War 1 witness accounts, Achiel Van Wallegghem's diaries² and *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. Because there was so much more that could be explored and be written about this second text than the themes I touched upon in my paper, and because the typescript had never been studied before, the decision to do just that for my master dissertation was quickly made.

¹ Demarée, Emma. *The Great War and Witnessing – Death, Suffering and Destruction in the Diary of Achiel Van Wallegghem and the Letters of Olive Mary Mercer-Clements*. Bachelor Paper. Ghent University, 2016.

² Van Wallegghem, Achiel, and Jozef Geldhof. *De Oorlog Te Dickebusch en Omstreken*. Brugge: Genootschap voor geschiedenis, 1964.

Van Wallegghem, Achiel. *Oorlogsdagboeken 1914-1918*. Translated into standard Dutch by Willy Spillebeen. Tielt: Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, 2014.

Van Wallegghem, Achiel. *1917 – The Passchendaele Year. The British Army in Flanders*. Translated into English by Guido Latré and Susan Reed. Edward Everett Root Publishers, 2017.

As already suggested, my study of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* will be of a historical as well as of a literary nature because of the hybrid character of the text. The historical approach can be justified by the fact that the typescript has never been published before and therefore needs not only a scholarly edition, but also some vital background information as well as a more specific clarification of some of the facts and events which are described in it. A literary approach imposes itself already in the title, which suggests a metaphoric interpretation of the war events and their aftermath in the light of a Christian framework.

This dissertation is divided into three main parts. The opening section will establish the historical foundation on which the succeeding parts will be constructed. Chapter 1 will focus on the discovery of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript, its technical aspects, as well as a basic overview of its content. In the second chapter a step-by-step explanation will be given of the elaborate research that has been conducted to uncover the identity of O.M.M. A fundamental component in this part of the paper will be to identify her as Olive Mary Mercer-Clements, and to describe the contact that has been made with some of the descendants of the Clements family. The correspondence with them has been of significant importance in the discovery of the revised version of the typescript and in providing useful documents and photographs. The third chapter deals with O.M.M.'s brother William Vincent Clements, who died in Belgium in 1919. The fourth chapter in the first part of this paper gives a brief content of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* in the form of a chronology of the journey to Belgium in combination with the topic of battlefield tourism. It will serve as an introduction to the second part of this dissertation.

This second part, which is the most extensive one, consists of the complete text by Olive Mary Mercer-Clements, edited in such a way that it combines the most authoritative elements of the typescript in the archives in Bruges, with those of its revised copy in possession of Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' relatives. The account is provided with textual notes, which point out the differences between the two versions, and are supplemented with explanatory notes and photographs, which explain and illustrate some of the terms or passages that can be found in the text.

The third and final part of this thesis will be dedicated to the analysis of the content of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. An attempt will be made to find out Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' motives behind the creation of the typescript, why she made so many revisions, and what the significance of those corrections is. Furthermore, some attention will be paid to O.M.M.'s writing style and how she made use of literary works to illustrate and emphasize the messages she was trying to convey. Eventually it will be clear that *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* is a remarkable reflection on the First World War, showing its devastating effects, on a personal as well as on a larger scale, while at the same time spreading a message of hope and peace.

PART I
HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

1. The *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* Typescript: Discovery and Description

I first came across *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* in December 2015, during the *Westflandrica* exposition, organised by the “Provinciale Erfgoedbibliotheek” (Provincial Heritage Library)ⁱ, the cultural library and archives of the Province of West-Flanders, to celebrate its 50th anniversary. This exposition displayed diverse pieces relating to West-Flemish history.



Fig. 1: *Westflandrica* exposition, Bruges, 2015.

One of the topics of the exhibition focussed on the First World War, and it was there that my eyes fell upon one of the pages of the typescript. The information label, which stated that the little book was a “literary account of a journey to the battlefields of the First World War by a British nurse, ‘Jo’ (1922)”ⁱⁱ, immediately raised my interest. Because only one page of the book was displayed, I later consulted it in the archivesⁱⁱⁱ where I learned that it had arrived there after an auction in the early 1970s. It was bought by the former archivist and founder of the archive, Luc Schepens (1937-1986), one of the first authorities on World War One in West-Flanders.

ⁱ In July 2016, the complete heritage library was transferred from Bruges city center (Tolhuis, Jan van Eyckplein) to the Archival Department of the Province of West-Flanders, Gistelse Steenweg 528, 8200 Sint-Andries.

ⁱⁱ “Literair verslag van een reis naar de slagvelden van de Eerste Wereldoorlog van de Britse verpleegster ‘Jo’ (1922)”

ⁱⁱⁱ Inventory number 337 AD2

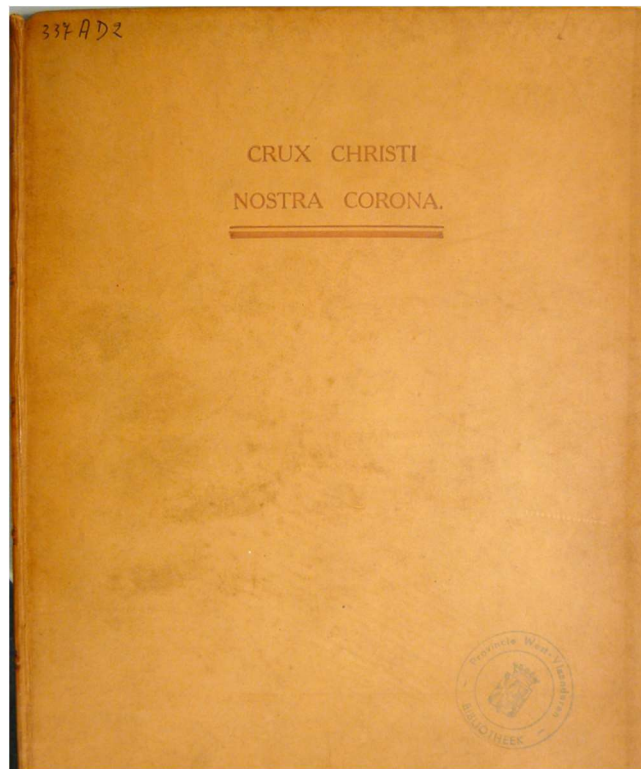


Fig. 2: the leather cover of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript in the Cultural Library of the Province of West-Flanders in Bruges.

The information on the inside of the cover revealed that *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*, written by O.M.M., is “a typescript of 56 pages, written in the form of 6 letters, each signed “Jo”, to “My dear Billie” and that it describes “a visit to the Flanders battlefields in 1922”. Furthermore it states that the text is “illustrated with 48 pasted-in original photographs” and that the cover is made of “full leather” (see Fig. 2). The author of this introduction is unknown, but it is clear that they did not know who this O.M.M. was, seeing that they mentioned that “from the text it would appear that the author, a woman, lived in the Weston-Super-Mare area, and had served in Belgium during the war, possibly as a nurse” (see Fig. 3). As the word “typescript” suggests, the text was written by means of a typewriter, which indicates that it had not been published as a real book and that this copy would be the only existing one.

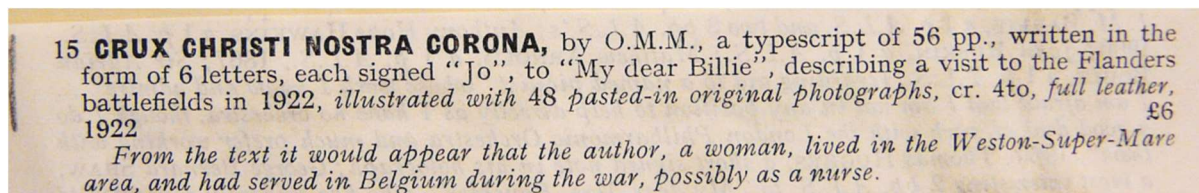


Fig. 3: introductory information.

Consultation of the typescript proved the information on the label to be correct. The book was indeed created by someone with the initials “O.M.M.”, while the letters were each signed with “Jo” and addressed to a certain “Billie”. More details about the person behind the initials or the names in the letters or about the circumstances in which the account was written, could not be deduced at first

glance. A quick read revealed that the typescript itself is divided in six parts, which are preceded by a short foreword (written on Tuesday 18 July 1922, in London) in which the intention of the letters is explained. The first five letters are a narration of the writer's trip through Belgium in July 1922 and contain factual descriptions, which are illustrated by the photographs, but also personal reflections and occasional Bible verses and lines from poems. What the information label did not mention, is that the last letter, which is very philosophical and spiritual in comparison to the preceding ones, was written in England, several days after the journey in Belgium, during a Girl Guides camp (see Fig. 4).

As for the layout and design of the typescript, except for the very first page everything was typed on the recto side of the paper, and the photographs, which were probably made by the author herself, were all attached to the verso sides. Moreover, some of the pages throughout the typescript were left blank. The dimensions of the typescript are 26 by 21 cm, and the paper is of a very fine quality, displaying the watermark: "Arena Bond, Made At Croxley".

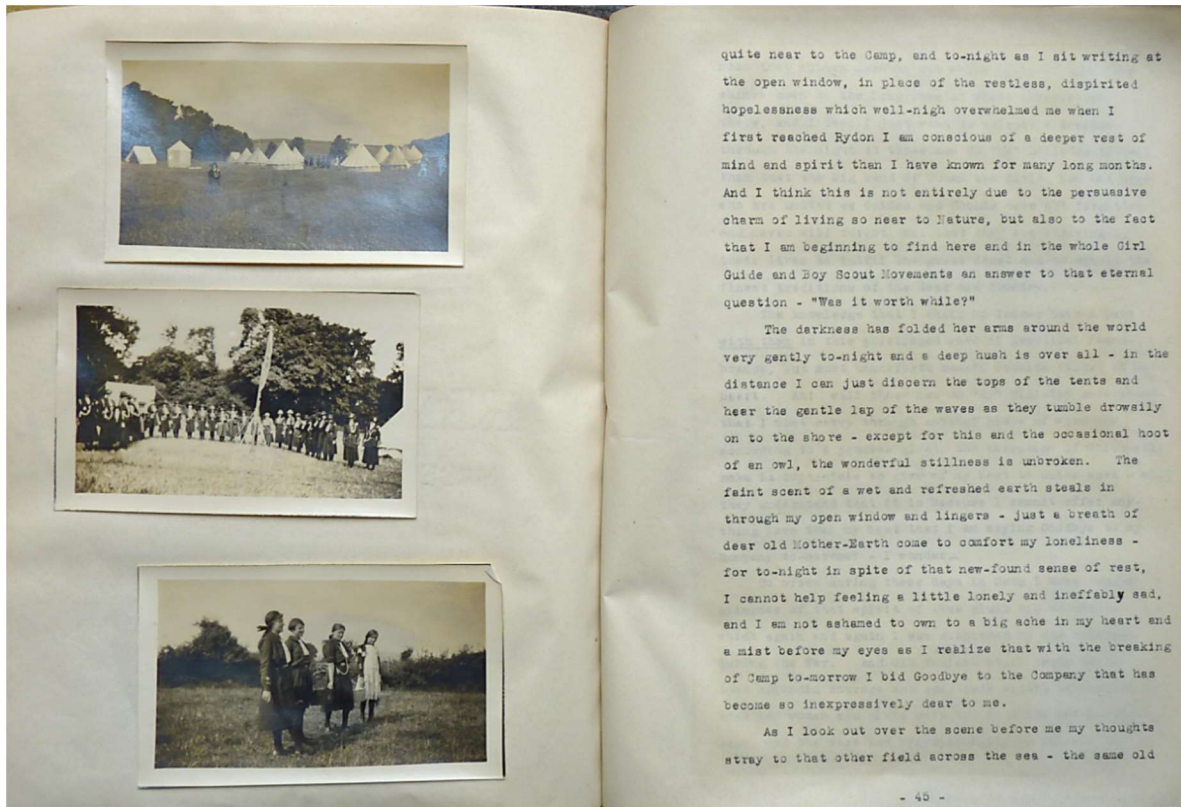


Fig. 4: a typical page from the typescript, with photographs illustrating letter 6, written at the camp of the Girl Guides at Williton.

So far I have given an account of my discovery of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* and what it consists of, but before I will proceed to a more detailed analysis of the actual content of the typescript, which will be conducted in part 3 of this paper, the next logical step is to take a look first at its author, O.M.M., to get a better understanding of the circumstances in which she wrote her letters and of the motives she might have had to write down her experiences.

2. Olive Mary Mercer-Clements

2.1. The Search for O.M.M.¹

As a result of the fact that the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript had stayed out of sight for more than forty years, not much is known about its origin. This is somewhat problematic when it is the aim to examine its content closely, because without background information such as who wrote the text, under which circumstances and with what motives, the legitimacy of the document becomes questionable. That is why the focus of this chapter will lie on the identity, and to some extent on the life, of O.M.M. More specifically, a detailed step-by-step account will be given of the personal research that was conducted to unravel the identity of the woman behind *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the little concrete information I had at my disposal to start my investigation was the fact that the letters in O.M.M.'s typescript were addressed to a certain "Billie" and signed with "Jo". This was not a lot of information to go by. Moreover, seeing that the initials "O.M.M." do not correspond in any way with the name "Jo", a first question arose: was O.M.M. the same person as Jo? The difference in names might suggest that two different people are referred to: Jo, who wrote and signed the letters, and O.M.M., who collected them in the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript. This hypothesis, however, was quickly undermined by the fact that the letters were addressed to "Billie", a name which does not correspond to any of the initials used in "O.M.M." either.

Because the names "O.M.M.", "Jo" and "Billie" led to inconclusive results, I decided to shift the focus of my investigation, and the clue that really launched the research process, was located at the beginning of the typescript: it was dedicated to a certain "W.V.C.", who, according to the text, had died in the 50th Casualty Clearing Station in Huy, Belgium, as well as to the 2nd Company of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides (see Fig. 5).

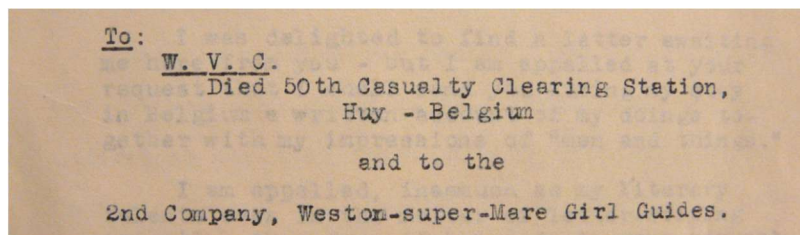


Fig. 5: O.M.M.'s dedication at the beginning of the typescript.

The dedication to the Girl Guides made sense because from the last letter it was already clear that the author was a member of this organisation. The dedication to W.V.C. led me to believe that he had been a soldier during the war. My suspicion was confirmed when I searched for him on the site of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and was able to identify W.V.C. as Second Lieutenant William Vincent Clements (see Fig. 6).

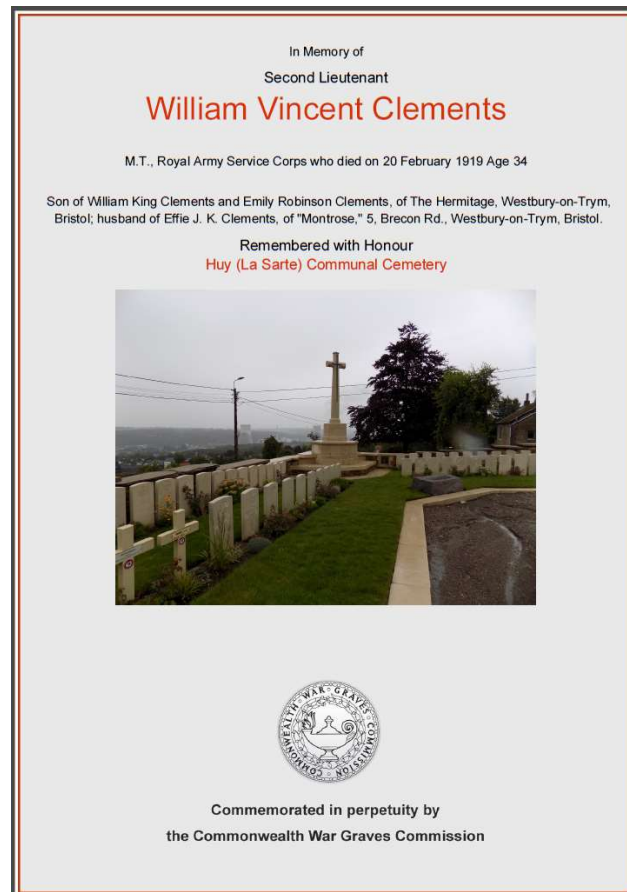


Fig. 6: commemorative certificate of William Vincent Clements.

He had died on 20 February 1919 at the age of 34 as a result of pneumonia, most likely caused by the Spanish flu, and was buried at the Communal Cemetery in Huy, Belgium, a place which was visited and described by the author in the letters as well. This was a first indication that there was indeed a personal connection between William Vincent Clements and "Jo", which warranted digging deeper into the background of the soldier.

The additional information on the site of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission mentioned that William Vincent Clements was the son of William King Clements and Emily Robinson Clements, that he was married to Effie J. K. Clements, and that they lived in Westbury-on-Trym, a suburb of Bristol. With the help of Joanna Legg, my contact person in the United Kingdom, I was able to consult online censuses about the Clements family. The census of 1901 told us that William King Clements was a grain merchant with five children. William was the eldest with two younger brothers, Reginald and Bernard, and one younger sister with the name Olive M., aged 8, so born around 1892-1893; a later census listed her as Olive Mary. The eldest sister Emily Ida, then 15 years old, did not reside at home at the time of the 1901 census (see Fig. 7).

Warak DO	Went	M	26	
William K. Clement	Head	M	42	Grain Merchant
Emilie P. Do.	Wife	M	40	
William V. Do.	Son	S	16	Grain Merchant's (Apprentice)
Reginald A. Do.	Son	S	13	
Bernard R. Do.	Son	-	11	
Olive M. Do.	Daughter	-	8	
Allice Reevil	Servant	S	22	Servant (Domestic)

Fig. 7: census Westbury-on-Trym, 1901, showing the Clements family.

The name of William’s sister immediately drew our attention because of its apparent resemblance between that name “Olive Mary” and the initials “O.M.M.”. As a result of this discovery, Joanna Legg and I wondered if William’s sister Olive could have been the person who created the typescript, despite the fact that the initials did not completely match.

We shifted our focus once again, this time from William Vincent Clements to his sister Olive Mary. Because the introduction at the beginning of the typescript mentioned that the author had possibly been a nurse during the war, we consulted the site of the British Red Cross, which listed her as a World War 1 volunteer. Olive Mary Clements served in the army as a nurse from April 1914 until November 1918 in London and Bristol (see Fig. 8).

Surname Clements Recd 9 MAR 1919

Christian Names Olive Mary (Mr., Mrs. or Miss)

Permanent Address: The Hermitage
Westbury on Trym Bristol

Date of Engagement April 1914 Rank Nurse Pay

Date of Termination Nov. 1918 Rank Motor Driver Pay Part Paid

Particulars of Duties See Below -

Whether whole or part time, and if latter No. of hours served

Previous Engagements under Joint War Committee, if any, and where

1914 - 168 hours Charing X Hosp; sent by S.J.A.B. - Paid
 1914 & 15 - Motor driving to meet trains of wounded at Bristol Station day or night
 1915 - 2 weeks at S.J.A.B. Hosp; Military Barry Island Cardiff (Voluntary) & 7 months in Royal Herbert Hosp: Woolwich. Paid.
 1916 - 5 months Queen Alexandra Hosp; Millbank. (Paid)
 1917 - 6 months ambulance driving in Bristol. (Voluntary)

Honours awarded

- 1914 – 168 hours Charing X Hosp: Sent by S.J.A.B. – Paid
- 1914 & 15 – Motor driving to meet trains of wounded at Bristol Station day or night
- 1915 – 2 weeks at S.J.A.B. Hosp: (Military) Barry Island Cardiff (Voluntary) & 7 months in Royal Herbert Hosp: Woolwich. Paid.
- 1916 – 5 months Queen Alexandra Hosp: Millbank (Paid)
- 1917 – 6 months ambulance driving in Bristol. (Voluntary)

Fig. 8: Olive Mary’s nursing records.

This new information convinced us even more to believe that O.M.M. was indeed Olive Mary Clements. Another clue that supported this hypothesis was the fact that the typescript was, as mentioned before, also dedicated to the 2nd Company of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides. After consulting a map, it became clear that Weston-super-Mare was located only 20 miles (32 km) away from Westbury-on-

Trym, where Olive and her family originated from, so it would make sense that Olive was a member of the Girl Guides in Weston-super-Mare.

Because of Olive Mary Clements' personal connection to William Vincent Clements, as well as her possible association with the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides, it seemed sensible to accept that she was indeed O.M.M., because this person had dedicated the typescript to both.

The next logical step was to suspect that Olive Mary Clements had not only collected the letters, but that she had also written them herself, and that she signed them with "Jo" instead of her proper name. This thought could be supported by the fact that, according to the letters, "Jo" visited the place where William Vincent Clements was buried, and that she wrote about her last days with the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides.

Some pieces of the puzzle were still missing, however, because three questions remained unanswered. Firstly, if Olive Mary Clements was O.M.M., where did the second letter "M" in the initials come from, or in other words, why did she not use the initials "O.M.C."? Secondly, if Olive wrote the letters, why did she sign them with "Jo" and not with her proper name? And thirdly, who is this "Billie", the addressee of the letters?

Rather accidentally, I managed to find the answer to the question of the initials. While looking for more information about Olive Mary Clements on the internet, I hoped to find the proof that maybe she had married and taken her husband's surname starting with the letter "M", which would then explain the initials "O.M.M.". Unfortunately, I could not find any indication that Olive Mary Clements had indeed been married. What I did discover however, was a document attesting that a woman called "Clements Olive M. M." had died in 1960 in Bristol at the age of 67 (see Fig. 9). As she was born around 1892-1893 and died in Bristol, this was undoubtedly "our" Olive Mary Clements.

DEATHS REGISTERED IN JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH, 1960.				
	Age.	District.	Vol.	Page.
<u>CLEMENTS,</u>				
-- Nellie	78	Plymouth	7 a	668
-- <u>Olive M.M.</u>	67	Bristol	7 b	302
-- Royal R.	70	Sidcup	5 b	795

Fig. 9: Olive M.M. Clements listed in the UK's deaths index of January-March 1960.

Building upon this new information about her death, I came across a page from *The London Gazette* of 5 April 1960 (see Fig. 10).

MERCER-CLEMENTS, Olive Mary.	† Henleaze Park Drive, Westbury on Trym, Bristol, Spinster. 21st March 1960.
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Fig. 10: O.M.M.'s death notice in *The London Gazette* of 5 April 1960.

The page contained a list of recently deceased people, their address, marital status, date of death and information about their solicitors. Olive Mary Clements was one of the deceased, but she was listed as

“Mercer-Clements, Olive Mary”. Finally, I had identified the name behind the second “M” in the initials, but it was still a mystery why Olive Mary had adopted this name sometime during her life. In the records from the UK population register of 1939 (see Fig. 11), Olive’s surname “Clements” is crossed out and replaced by “Mercer-Clements”. This means that not only she must have officially changed her surname around 1939, but also that the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript must have been created around that time, so years after her trip to Belgium in 1922.

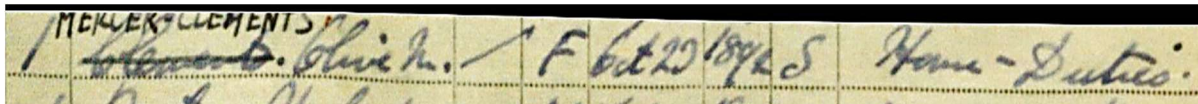


Fig. 11: census of Weston-super-Mare, 1939, showing the name change from “Clements” to “Mercer-Clements”. This census was made at the beginning of WW2 (September 1939) in order to have a list of everyone who could be of use in the war effort.

More visual proof of Olive’s name change can be found on the headstone of the Clements family grave in Canford cemetery, Westbury-on-Trym, where her surname is also “Mercer-Clements” (see Fig. 12).



TO THE
DEAR MEMORY OF
WILLIAM KING CLEMENTS
THE BELOVED HUSBAND OF
EMILY R. CLEMENTS
WHO PASSED AWAY
AT THE HERMITAGE, WESTBURY-ON-TRYM
APRIL 10TH 1925. AGED 66 YEARS.
“ONLY GOODNIGHT BELOVED NOT FAREWELL.”

ALSO OF THE ABOVE
EMILY R. CLEMENTS
WHO PASSED AWAY
AT THE HOMESTEAD, DOWNS PARK WEST
AUGUST 25TH 1946. AGED 86 YEARS.
“THE NIGHT IS GONE.”

ALSO OF
WILLIAM VINCENT 2ND LIEUT. R.A.S.C.
DEARLY LOVED ELDEST SON OF THE ABOVE
WHO DIED AT THE C.C.S. HUY
FEBRUARY 20TH 1919. AGED 34 YEARS.
BURIED HUY COMMUNAL CEMETERY
LA SARTE BELGIUM.
“ROCK OF AGES CLEFT FOR ME.”

ALSO OF
OLIVE MARY MERCER-CLEMENTS
DAUGHTER OF
WILLIAM KING AND EMILY ROBINSON
DIED MARCH 21ST 1960. AGED 67 YEARS.



Fig. 12: the Clements’ family tomb stone in Canford cemetery, Westbury-on-Trym. Names from top to bottom: William King Clements (father), Emily R. Clements (mother), William Vincent Clements (brother, buried in Huy) and Olive Mary Mercer-Clements. (Photos taken by Ben Hodge of the Canford cemetery administration).

Something that was very striking, was Olive's interest in the name "Mercer", not only because she adopted the name, but also because she used the heraldic motto of the Mercer family, i.e. "Crux Christi Nostra Corona" as the title of the typescript. Furthermore it needs to be mentioned that several of Olive's cousins had "Mercer" as a third first name. It seemed to have been a family tradition to use the name "Mercer" throughout several generations. This family connection could explain why Olive attached so much value to the name.

Now that the question of the initials "O.M.M." was solved, I decided to focus on the second one: if Olive Mary wrote the letters, why did she sign them with "Jo". The answer to this question was found in another newspaper. *The Gloucestershire Chronicle* of 13 October 1917 dedicated a complete article to the death of T. Bernard Holloway, one of the uncles of Olive Mary (a brother of her mother). He had committed suicide and the article listed in great detail all the people who had attended the funeral or had made a flower tribute. Olive Mary was one of the latter and she wrote: "Just all my love, Unkie. From your "Joe" (Olive)" (see Fig. 13). The fact that she used the name "Joe" to make a tribute to her uncle, shows that she was known by her family, or at least by her uncle, under this nickname.

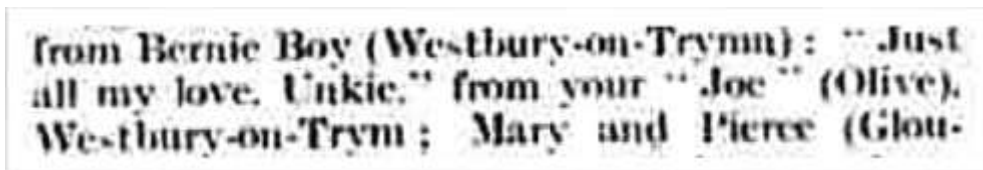


Fig. 13: O.M.M.'s flower tribute to her deceased uncle in *The Gloucestershire Chronicle* of 13 October 1917.

Now having discovered Olive's nickname "Joe" or "Jo", it was clear that she used it to sign the letters in *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. This led to the belief that she addressed them to someone who was very close to her, very likely someone of her family. It is striking however, that she collected the letters in a typescript and that this probably happened around 1939, since she used the initials "O.M.M.", which refer to the name she had adopted around that time. If she had really sent the letters to someone named "Billie" in 1922, why did she still have them in her possession all those years later? The logic behind this course of action and a conclusive answer to the question about the identity of this "Billie" will probably never be found, yet a strong hypothesis can be made. It is highly possible that Olive Mary never had the intention to send the letters to anyone. It would even not be too presumptuous to suggest that she only wrote them as a way to collect her thoughts.

The more familiar one becomes with Olive's reflections and musings, the more it feels like one is reading a diary, one that was composed in the form of fictional letters. This can also be supported by a quote at the end of the last letter: "And now I must close this the last letter of my 'journal', for the first signs of dawn are already stealing into the room and I must snatch a few hours sleep before presenting myself in the camp for breakfast" (O.M.M. 53).

As to the identity of the addressee of the letters, Billie, it is probable that this name refers to Olive Mary's brother, William Vincent. This theory can be supported by two facts. Firstly, "Billie" is a nickname which is often given to people with the name "William", and secondly, Olive dedicated the typescript to her brother. William Vincent Clements had already been dead for more than 3 years by the time Olive visited his grave in Belgium, but it is very likely that she was still mourning the loss of her brother. Addressing her letters to him may have been a way to cope with those feelings. It is clear that the bond between the members of the Clements family was strong, even after death. This can be seen in the fact that Olive dedicated her typescript to her brother, but also in the fact that after the death of Emily Robinson Clements, the mother of Olive and William, in 1946, William's name was added to the family tombstone, even though he already had a grave in Belgium.

Whatever motives Olive had to create the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript, it is clear that it was her intention to stay anonymous seeing that she only used initials and nicknames, for herself ("O.M.M." and "Jo") as well as for her brother ("W.V.C."/"Billie"). Despite her efforts, the story behind the typescript has now been uncovered more than 55 years after the death of its author.

Some further online research provided more details about O.M.M.'s life, which made it possible to get a better idea of the person behind the text. Olive Mary (Mercer-)Clements was born on 23 October 1892 in Bristol and grew up in Westbury-on-Trym. As mentioned before, she joined the Red Cross as a nurse during World War 1. She performed clerical work and drove wounded soldiers to different hospitals. Thanks to the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript, we know that she made a trip to Belgium in 1922 and that she was a member of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides for some time during her life.

Around 1939, she lived in Weston-super-Mare and it was around that time that she changed her surname to "Mercer-Clements". According to the passenger list of a voyage to Australia in 1951 and 1952, O.M.M. had moved to Reading (Berkshire). It is not clear whether she actually made these trips because on both lists her name appears to be crossed out.

Apart from "home duties", O.M.M. did not have a real profession during her life, and this probably explains why she moved so often. She died a well-off spinster on 21 March 1960 at the age of 67 in Westbury-on-Trym (Bristol), where she had resided since 1954.

2.2. The Search for Relatives of O.M.M.

Now that O.M.M.'s identity had been uncovered, the question arose if it would be possible to find close relatives of Olive who are still alive. If this was the case, they might be able to provide interesting information about Olive and her family. As O.M.M. had never been married, I had to search for grandchildren of her brothers, i.e. grandnephews or grandnieces. Using birth and marriage registers, and indexes of the deceased (with limited information), a brief list of possible relatives could be made up. It was a calculated risk, but once again, I was lucky. I managed to get in touch with a fraternal grandnephew of Olive, Simon Clements (West-Sussex), grandson of Olive's brother Bernard, and with a granddaughter of William Vincent Clements, Ann Barton (Blackwell near Bristol).

As could be expected, they were both surprised to hear about the existence of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript in Belgium, written by a great-aunt, and were happy to provide additional information, documents and some old photographs of Olive and the Clements family. A selection can be found below:



Fig. 14: the Clements family around 1907. Back row: father William King Clements (1859-1925), mother Emily Robinson Clements(-Holloway) (1860-1946), son Bernard R. Clements (1889-1976). Front row: probably niece Marjorie Clements (b.1901), son Reginald H. Clements (1887-1965), daughter Olive Mary Clements (1892-1960). Brother William Vincent and sister Emily Ida were already married and are not on the photo. (Simon Clements).



Fig. 15: photo of the Clements siblings around 1898: from left to right: Olive Mary, William Vincent, Bernard, Emily Ida (b.1886) and Reginald. (Ann Barton)



Fig. 16: Olive Mary Clements photographed with her English cocker spaniel in 1935 in Weston-super-Mare, where she lived at the time. (Ann Barton)



Fig. 17: Olive Mary Mercer-Clements as a member of the W.V.S. (Women's Voluntary Service) at Reading during WW2. Just like during WW1, she performed voluntary service during WW2. (Simon Clements)

2.3. The Discovery of a Copy of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*

When searching the family archives to find more information about O.M.M., Simon Clements discovered a typescript with the title “*Crux Christi Nostra Corona*” as well. Comparing it with the one in Bruges, it soon became clear that it was a copy, made by O.M.M. by means of carbon paper. After her death in 1960, Olive's brother Bernard inherited the copy. His son Derek handed it over to his son Simon.

Although the document is a copy, there are quite a few differences between the two versions. The ‘Bruges-version’ is the original one, whereas the ‘UK-version’ (the one in the possession of the Clements family) contains a lot of corrections in which sometimes whole sentences and even complete paragraphs are covered up or crossed out (see Fig. 18). Moreover, every possible allusion to the identity of O.M.M., or to the circumstances in which the text was written, is wiped out. The date in the foreword is crossed out, for example, making it almost impossible to know that the trip to Belgium was made in 1922. Another example is the substitution of the place name “Weston-super-Mare” in the dedication by “- -”. The implications of these kinds of textual differences will be analysed in detail in the third part of this thesis.

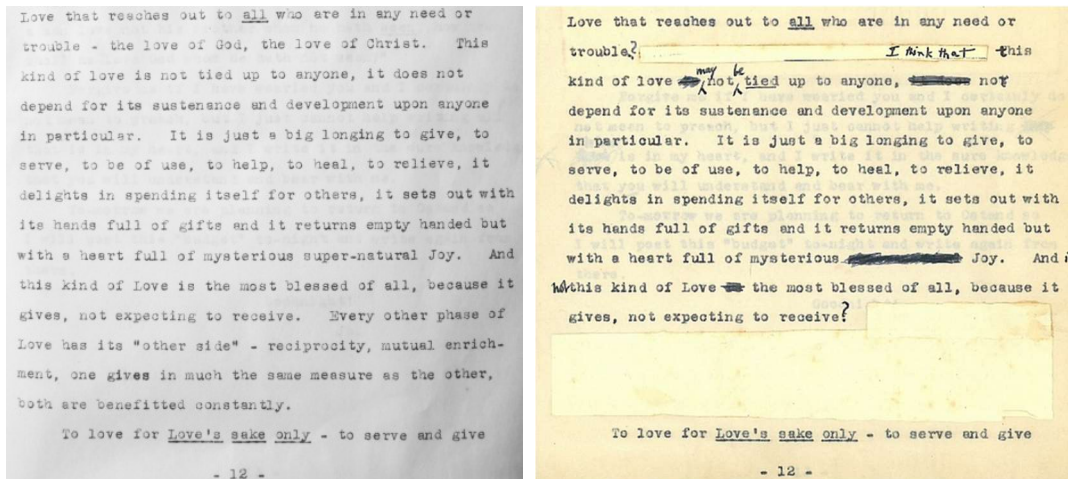


Fig. 18: comparison between the unadulterated Bruges-version (left) and the UK-version with O.M.M.'s corrections (right).

Apart from a few additional photographs in the UK-version, all the pictures are identical, but some of them are not attached to the right pages anymore.

The covers on the other hand, are completely different. Whereas the Bruges-version has a beige-coloured leather cover, the UK-version has a jeans-like cardboard one on which the titled is displayed in golden letters, surrounded by an equally golden border. It is interesting to compare this cover to the one of a similar typescript which made an appearance in the BBC show "Who do you think you are". In the episode of 25 January 2017, the British actor Sir Ian McKellen shows the typescript of his late grandmother, entitled "MOTHER MAC" which was made in 1937 (see Fig. 19). The great resemblance between the two documents could suggest that the creation of typescripts such as *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* was popular during the late 1930s and thus that O.M.M.'s typescript was made around that time as well.

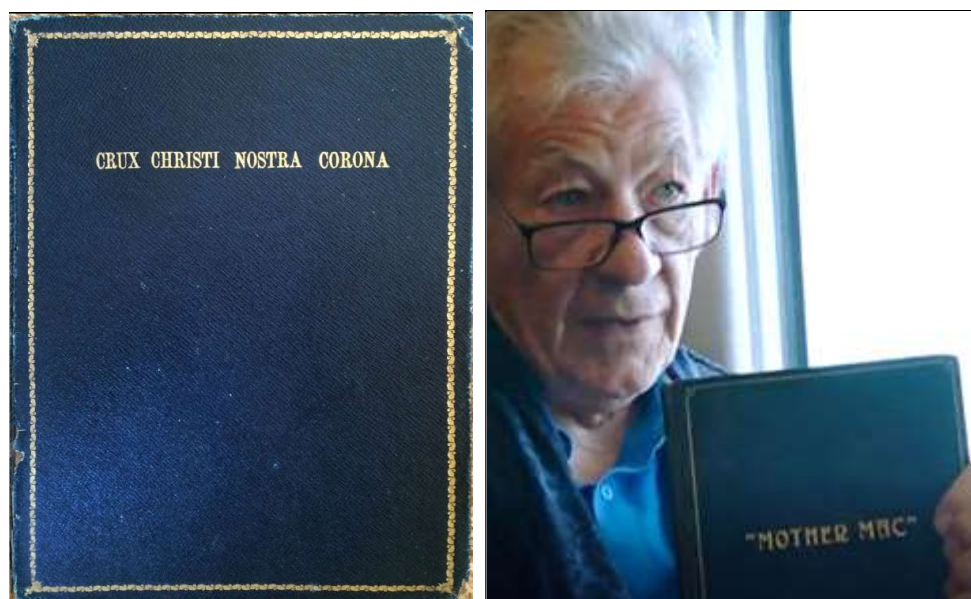


Fig. 19: the cover of the UK-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* (left) and Sir Ian McKellen showing his grandmother's typescript "Mother Mac" (right)

Another interesting difference between the Bruges-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* and the UK-version, is that in the latter the dedication note at the beginning is crossed out and replaced by a pencil-written one. The revised dedication reads “W.V.M-C.”, instead of “W.V.C.”, the “M” here obviously refers to the name “Mercer”, even though William Vincent’s surname was never changed to “Mercer-Clements”. This little alteration clearly shows that O.M.M. wanted to impose her new name on, or at least suggest it for, other members of the family. Furthermore, the UK-version contains a page with the coat of arms of the Mercer family accompanied by an old poem (see Fig. 20). These two elements, in addition to Olive’s name change, prove that for some unknown reason the name “Mercer” meant a lot to her. It almost seems like an obsession.

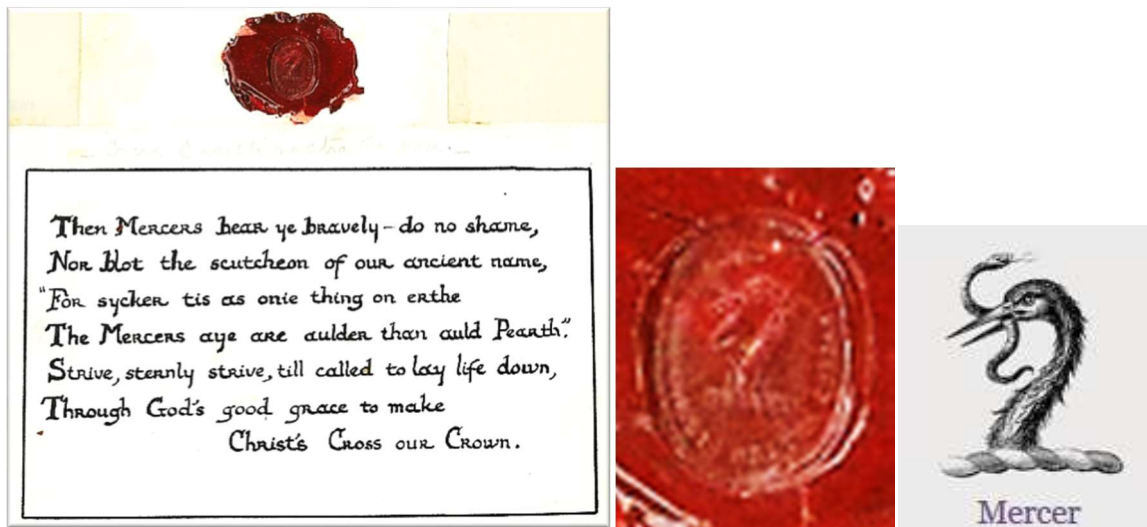


Fig. 20: the seal and an old poem of the Mercer family at the beginning of the UK-version details: head and neck of a stork holding an eel or serpent in its beak.

The discovery of the revised version of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript was of great importance, because the information that can be obtained by comparing the two documents can shed a new light on their content and on the personality of O.M.M. The modifications which can be found in the UK-version, and which were probably made some years after the typescript was first created, reveal O.M.M.'s restless mind. Furthermore, it might suggest that she had the intention of publishing her little book, but whether this was the case or not will presumably remain a mystery.

The importance of having now answered virtually all the vital practical questions concerning the authorship of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript is that first of all, the letters gain a lot of credibility as a World War 1 witness account when the person who wrote them can be identified. More importantly, the research that has been conducted to get to know the person behind the typescript has made it possible to get a deeper understanding of the text, which in turn stimulates a better analysis of its content.

3. William Vincent Clements

As the title suggests, this chapter will focus on O.M.M.'s brother William Vincent Clements. It is relevant to do this because the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript came about as a direct result of O.M.M.'s trip to Belgium to visit her brother's grave. Moreover, the typescript is dedicated to him, directly at the beginning, and indirectly because he is addressed in every letter.

William Vincent was born on 3 August 1884 in Bristol. He followed the footsteps of his father and became a corn and grain merchant. In 1907 he married Effie Jean Kirkpatrick (Munro) (1885-1959). Together they had one child, Kenneth Vincent Mercer (13 December 1908-11 November 1971).

At the start of the First World War, the family lived in Easton-in-Gardano, near Bristol.

1	W. Vincent Clements	Head	26	Married					Corn & Hay Merchant
2	E. J. K. Clements	Wife	26						
3	K. V. M. Clements	Son	3						

Fig. 21: census Easton-in-Gardano, 1911, the family of William Vincent Clements.



Fig. 22: William Vincent Clements, his wife Effie Jean Kirkpatrick Clements (née Munro) and their son Kenneth Vincent Mercer around 1910.

All three Clements brothers became servicemen during the war. William Vincent, the eldest, was on Home Service in the UK until the end of the war. He is enlisted as Private M/303731 and was promoted to second lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps at the end of the war. He was sent to France and Belgium to join Casualty Clearing Station 50 (50/C.C.S.), which followed the progressing troops². Some months after the end of the war, in January 1919, he was one of the millions of people across the world

who caught the Spanish flu. He died, just like six others, on 20 February 1919 at the at the 50/C.C.S. in Huy and was buried at the communal cemetery at Huy La Sarte, now grave number II. A. 14. The corner in which his grave is located, is Commonwealth territory.

Around the time of his illness and death, there was correspondence between the hospital in Huy and the family in England (see Fig. 23-24).

<p>U</p> <p>no: 50 C.C.S. B. E.F. Belgium. Feb: 18th 1919.</p> <p>Dear Mrs Clements,</p> <p>I am so sorry to tell you your husband Lieut. Clements is seriously ill with Broncho-Pneumonia following Influenza. It is a terrible disease, & there is so much of it about just now.</p> <p>I hope to have better news for you in a few days we are doing all in our power for your husband, & he is such a good patient which is so much in his favour.</p> <p>I am Sister in the Officers' Ward. Will write again tomorrow & let you know & how your husband</p>	<p>is.</p> <p>Mother is ill herself or she would have written to you yesterday.</p> <p>Yours sincerely, J. Fraser.</p>
---	--

Fig. 23: letter of 18 February 1919. "He is such a good patient."

<p>copy U</p> <p>No. 50 C.C.S. B. E.F. Belgium. 7. 3. 19.</p> <p>My dear Mrs Clements,</p> <p>Your letter to Sister Fraser came today and as she has gone from here I opened it.</p> <p>I am so sorry for you all, and so grieved that I was ill at the end of your brother's illness and unable to write you. I know him well, he came to us ^{on 12th inst.} and was very ill from the beginning but we did not give up hope till about the 18th. He was very good and patient and spoke of you all. At the time of his illness & death we were full up and really were having</p>	<p>an awful time in all the wards wards. In the Officers' Ward luckily there were no other seriously ill cases and he had a day and night nurse practically to himself.</p> <p>I have asked the Chaplain to write you to-day also. With heartfelt sympathy.</p> <p>Sincerely yours (Signed) Janet Orchardson. Mation.</p>
--	--

Fig. 24: letter of 7 March 1919. "He was very good and patient and spoke of you all."



Fig. 25: the former École Normale in Huy, used by the 50th C.C.S. where William Vincent Clements died. c.1910 & 2016. On the old postcard, marked with an arrow towards the second floor, “Where W.V.C. died.”



Fig. 26: William Vincent Clements’ grave at Huy la Sartre as it was photographed by O.M.M. during her visit in 1922. She placed a flower wreath against his cross. His name was spelled wrongly as “LIEUT. W. E. CLEMENTS”. This photograph was not attached to the Bruges-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. (Simon Clements)



Fig. 27: the inscription on the back of this photograph reads: "M&F standing beside Vincent's grave - Huy Communal Cemetery, La Sarte. July 1922". It depicts the father and mother of William Vincent at his grave. In the foreground of the picture: the white headstones which would replace the wooden crosses. This photograph was not added to the typescript. (Ann Barton)



Fig. 28: the headstone on William Vincent Clements' grave at the cemetery at Huy La Sarte, with details of the inscriptions (2016).

The engraving on William Vincent Clements' headstone reads: (see Fig. 28)

SECOND LIEUTENANT
W. VINCENT CLEMENTS
ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS
20 TH FEBRUARY 1919

“ROCK OF AGES CLEFT FOR ME”

These last words were ordered by William Vincent's mother (see Fig. 29) and form the first line of the famous hymn “Rock of Ages” by Reverend Augustus Toplady, written sometime between 1762 and 1764. The legend goes that Toplady was inspired to write the hymn after he got caught in a storm and had to find shelter. He managed to hide in the cleft of Burrington Combe, a rock in Somerset, not far from Bristol and Westbury-on-Trym. According to H.J. Wilkins³, who was the vicar in Westbury-on-Trym in the first half of the 20th century, the hymn enticed “thousands of tourists [to] visit this Combe and gaze at the rock styled “the Rock of Ages”” (Wilkins 5). Undoubtedly the Clements family, who also lived in Westbury-on-Trym, were very familiar with the hymn and found comfort in it, seeing that its first line is inscribed on William Vincent's grave as well as on their family grave (supra).

Badge sign No. and Layout	Head- stone No.	TEXT				No. of Letters in text
		Line 1	Line 2	Line 3	Line 4	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1192/1E	61	TO AWAKE	IN A BETTER WORLD	WHERE MISUNDERSTANDINGS	ARE NO MORE	52
		(Mrs. B.E. Webster, 44, Palmer Park Avenue, Wokingham Road, Reading).				
1078/12	62	ROCK OF AGES	CLEFT FOR ME			20
		(Mrs. E.R. Clements, The Hermitage, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol).				

Fig. 29: headstone schedule, 1922 (CWGC)

4. Brief Content of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript

As mentioned in chapter 1, O.M.M.'s typescript contains the description of a trip to Belgium in 1922. The account is written in an interesting combination of two styles of writing. On the one hand there are the factual descriptions of the places O.M.M. and her parents visited. She reported on many Belgian cities, more specifically on their roles in the war, the damage they suffered and their reconstruction after the war. There are also descriptions of the landscapes which convey an interesting combination of chaos and order. Chaos, because the landscapes still bore the marks, like open wounds, of the countless shells that had rained down for four years, and because of the trenches, which, like scars, were still distorting the ground. Order, because of the signs of repair such as the construction of official war cemeteries and monuments to commemorate those who fought and died during the war.

On the other hand, in contrast with the factual descriptions, there is the frequent appearance of very philosophical and religious passages in the text. These describe moments in which O.M.M. reflected on the cost of the war and on the loss of values such as true love and true friendship. To illustrate these feelings, she often quoted Bible verses and lines from poems of several poets. It is mainly these more philosophical passages that show how deeply she was touched by the war and its aftermath.

Before taking a closer look at these philosophical descriptions, which will be done in part 3, an attempt will be made to reconstruct and summarize the chronology of the trip and the letters:

- Wednesday 19 July: trip to Oostende/Ostend.
 - Thursday 20 July: start of letter 1 written in Ostend, departure to Brussels.
 - Friday 21 July: Belgian National Day, sightseeing in Brussels, glimpse of the Belgian king and queen.
 - Saturday 22 July: Brussels - Etterbeek - Ottignies - Gembloux - Namur - Dinant - Namur - Huy (and cemetery La Sarte) – Leuven/Louvain - Brussels, all by train, letter 1 finished in Brussels. (see Fig. 30)
 - Sunday 23 July: letter 2 written in Brussels about the second part of the trip made the previous day.
 - Monday 24 July: return to Ostend.
 - Tuesday 25 July: trip Ostend - Zeebrugge - Heist/Heyst - Brugge/Bruges - Ostend. (see Fig. 31)
 - Wednesday 26 July: "Flanders Fields tour" (see Fig. 32): starting in Ostend to Koekelare/Coucquelaere (Leugenboom gun) - Beerst - Diksmuide/Dixmude - Merkem - Steenstraete - Boezinge/Boesinghe - Ieper/Ypres - Brielen - Woesten – Elverding(h)e - Oostvleteren - Hoogstade - De Panne/La Panne - Veurne/Furnes - Wulpen - Nieuwpoort/Nieuport - Lombardsijde - Ostend.^{iv}
- Letter 3 written in Ostend about the Koekelare-Beerst part of the trip.

^{iv} Place names in Flanders: official Dutch names followed by their name in old Flemish spelling (if significantly different) or their equivalents in French-English (if existing).

- Thursday 27 July: letter 4 written in Ostend about the Dixmude-Merkem-Steenstraete part of the trip.
- Friday 28 July: letter 5 written in Ostend about the Steenstraete-Boezinge-Ypres part of the trip.
- Saturday 29 July: departure from Ostend via Dunkirk back to London.
- Sunday 30 July: stay in London, visit to the Election Day at the Westminster school.
- Monday 31 July: stay in London.
- Tuesday 1 August: return home.
- Wednesday 2 August – Friday 4 August: home.
- Saturday 5 August - Sunday 6 August: attending the Girl Guides Camp in Williton.
- Monday 7 August: last letter written at the Camp.

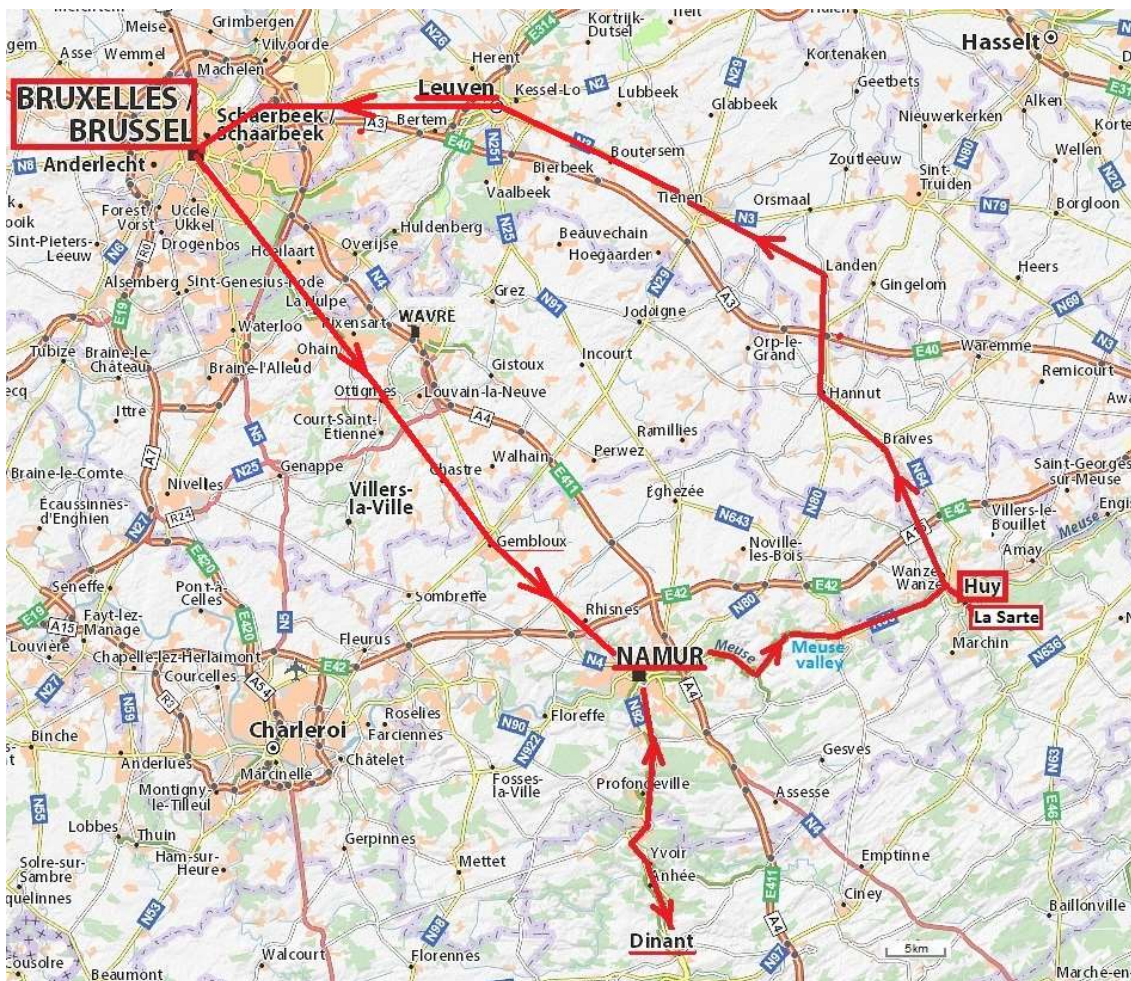


Fig. 30: the route followed on Saturday 22 July 1922: Brussels – Namur – Dinant – Namur – Huy – La Sarte – Leuven – Brussels, all by train.



Fig. 31: the route followed on Tuesday 25 July 1922: Ostend – Zeebrugge – Heist – Bruges – Ostend.



Fig. 32: the route followed on Wednesday 26 July 1922: the West-Flemish war zone.

The grey line is the frontline, the adjacent blue zone is the inundated Yser valley. At the bottom of the picture, the Ypres Salient.

As the trip of 26 July is quite long with a lot of visited places, it is hard to believe that it was made on one day only, especially since most of the roads were still in a bad shape. The reference to Hotel Splendid in Ypres with the comment “The tariff was quite good”, which can be found on page 36 of the typescript, seems to suggest that they stayed there at least one night. With this in mind, and with the knowledge that the typescript was not typed before 1939, one can wonder how accurately O.M.M. remembered the chronology of the trip.

It is clear, however, that the trip to Belgium had a dual purpose: visiting the grave of brother and son William Vincent Clements in Huy, and touring the former battlefields and relics of World War 1. Battlefield tourism or front tourism was very popular at that time and during the 1920s, numerous battlefield trips were undertaken by the British. These trips were often very nicely organized and the tourists could rely on guidebooks such as the Michelin battlefield guide *L’Yser et la Côte belge*, published in 1920, which “was part of a whole series of publications encompassing the entire Western Front. The Michelin guides were characterised by their reliability and their interesting illustrations”⁴ (Deseyne 83). It is very likely that O.M.M. and her parents followed a scheduled route as well.

SPECIAL WEEK-END TRIPS TO OSTEND.

(Without Passports) from Whitsuntide to end of September. Full Board and Accommodation (Three Nights), including Taxes and Service. Prices to include a Motor Tour to THE MENIN GATE and YPRES BATTLEFIELDS.

Itinerary.—Middelkerke, Lombartzyde, NIEUPOORT (to see trenches and famous Locks), Ramscappelle, Pervyse, DIXMUDE, Woumen, Steenstraate, Boesinghe, YPRES (Packet Lunch), stop of two hours to see CLOTH HALL, MENIN GATE, etc. Return via Shrapnel Corner, Zillebeke, HILL 60, HELL FIRE CORNER, St. Julien (Canadian Memorial), Poelcappelle, Houthulst Forest, Clercken, Praat Bosch Forest, Couckelaere, Moere (to see Long Max, the gun which bombarded Dunkirk), OSTEND.

	2nd Class and		3rd Class and	
1st Class.	1st Class Boat	2nd Class	1st Class Boat	3rd Class.
£5 7 0	£4 14 0	£4 5 4	£4 3 2	£3 14 6

Applications for Prospectuses should be addressed to:
THE SECRETARY, YPRES LEAGUE, 9, BAKER STREET, LONDON, W.1.

Fig. 33: advertisement from the Ypres League for trips to the Ypres battlefields c1928-1930. Besides the Ypres Salient, the Koekelare-Leugenboom gun, Dixmude and Nieuwpoort were on the program as well.

One last comment which could be made about the historical aspects of the typescript, is that it is certain that O.M.M. made a second visit to Huy and La Sarte after 1922. The UK-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* contains three additional photographs of the two places. This became clear after noticing that they have rounded inner corners which are different from the other pictures, which have square corners. Moreover, one of the additional photographs shows William Vincent’s grave of which the wooden cross is already replaced by the typical white headstone (see Fig. 34). The two other photographs were taken from the balcony of the Hotel de l’Aigle Noir, the same place where O.M.M. had had a meal during the first visit (see Fig. 35).

By analysing the chronology of the trip to Belgium and by taking a closer look at the technical and historical details of the typescript, one can state conclusively that O.M.M. did not create the typescript right after her tour of the Belgian battlefields.



Fig. 34: photograph taken during the second visit and attached in the UK-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. White headstones have replaced the wooden crosses. William Vincent Clements' grave is the second one from the right.

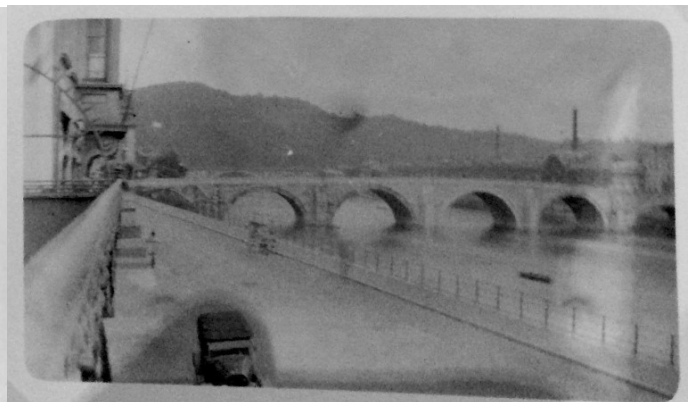


Fig. 35: two photographs attached in the UK-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* taken from the balcony of the Hôtel de l'Aigle Noir during the second visit to Huy

¹ Websites and archive search engines used to find the identity of O.M.M.:

<http://www.cwgc.org/> Commonwealth War Graves Commission
<http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/History-and-origin/First-World-War>
World War 1 volunteer nurses
<http://www.freebmd.org.uk/> Civil registration index of births, marriages and deaths UK
<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/> UK censuses 1891, 1901 & 1911
<http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> UK census 1939, probate rolls, etc.
<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/> search with "Clements Olive Mary 1960"
<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> *Gloucestershire Chronicle* of 13 Oct. 1917

² CCS - Casualty Clearing Stations

"A Casualty Clearing Station was part of the casualty evacuation chain, further back from the front line than the Aid Posts and Field Ambulances. It was manned by troops of the Royal Army Medical Corps, with attached Royal Engineers and men of the Army Service Corps. The job of the CCS was to treat a man sufficiently for his return to duty or, in most cases, to enable him to be evacuated to a Base Hospital. It was not a place for a long-term stay.

CCS's were generally located on or near railway lines, to facilitate movement of casualties from the battlefield and on to the hospitals. Although they were quite large, CCS's moved quite frequently, especially in the wake of the great German attacks in the spring of 1918 and the victorious Allied advance in the summer and autumn of that year. Many CCS moved into Belgium and Germany with the army of occupation in 1919 too. The locations of wartime CCSs can often be identified today from the cluster of military cemeteries that surrounded them."

Casualty Clearing Station Nr 50 (50/C.C.S.) successive locations:

Hazebrouck (French Flanders): 15 - Jun 1917 -> Mont des Cats/Katsberg (French Flanders): Jun 1917 - Mar 1918 -> Roye (Somme): Mar 18; Mar 1918 - Aug 1918 -> Tincourt (Somme): sep 18 - Oct 18 -> Bohain (France, Vermandois): Oct 1918 - Dec 1918 -> **Huy (Belgium, Wallonia): Jan 1919 - May 1919** (where William Vincent Clements died)

Baker, Chris. "The Casualty Clearing Stations." *1914-1918*, <http://www.1914-1918.net/ccs.htm>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2017.

³ Wilkins, H.J. *An Enquiry concerning Toplady and his Hymn "Rock of Ages" and its Connection with Burrington Combe Somerset*. J.W. Arrowsmith LTD., 1938. pdf

⁴ Deseyne, Alex. "Battlefield tourism on the coast after WWI." *De Grote Rede* 36, 2013, pp. 82-89.

PART II

CRUX CHRISTI NOSTRA CORONA

ANNOTATED TYPESCRIPT

Preliminary Note on the Edited Text

O.M.M.'s *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* has never been published before, and the texts of the only known copies of the typescript (the one in Bruges and the version kept by descendants of O.M.M.'s brother in the United Kingdom) have never been edited before this dissertation, which therefore itself takes the form of a scholarly first edition. O.M.M. made a lot of alterations in the UK version of the typescript, but those seem to have been done in a hurry and consequently do not look very neat. Moreover, those changes solely focus on the content of the text, leaving it full of (for our time) unusual or archaic ways of spelling, punctuation and capitalisation. In the hope of making "Crux Christi Nostra Corona" easier to read for contemporary readers, I have taken the liberty to edit the text myself by eliminating any inconsistencies or elements which made it unnecessarily more complex, and by altering obsolete spelling of certain words, so that it might meet the requirements of the English language as they are today. As for the more archaic syntax of certain sentences, I have left them mostly unaltered, seeing that it did not interfere with the understandability of the text. Because the edits can all be divided in a number of different types, it would be pointless to indicate every single one of them, and that is why I will give a brief overview here of each type of correction, each with an example from the typescript:

Original	Correction
Inconsistent capitalisation of nouns in the middle of a sentence: e.g. ... an O rphanage has an o rphanage has ...
Unnecessary use of hyphens in (compound) words: e.g. shell-marks, to-day	shell marks, today
Inconsistent placing of quotation marks: e.g. ... impressions of "men and things." ... and then the spiritual".	... impressions of "men and things." ... and then the spiritual."
Notation of big numbers: e.g. ... two hundred and eighty mining centres 280 mining centres ...
" " and ' ' e.g. ... my "headquarters" I revisited many old 'haunts'.	... my headquarters ... (in cases like this, the quotation marks are omitted because the word in question is not unusual nor part of a quotation) ... I revisited many old 'haunts'. (in cases like this, the single quotation marks are maintained because the word in question is considered to be exceptional (in O.M.M.'s time) or informal English)

Furthermore, after asking the advice of both Prof. Marcel De Smedt, an expert in the field of text edition from the university of Leuven, and from professor of English Literature and Culture Guido Latré from the University of Louvain, the promotor of this thesis, we decided that it would be best to combine the two existing versions of the typescript (the unadulterated one, which from now on will be referred to as the “A-version”, and the revised one, the “B-version”), creating a new, third version which incorporates the best of both. To do this, my point of departure was the A-version to which I added the changes that O.M.M. had made in the B-version when I deemed them appropriate or relevant. Sometimes, however, it seemed to me that certain alterations in the B-version, especially omissions, took away some of the value of the original content of the typescript, and in those instances I opted to leave that specific part of the A-version unaltered. I realise however that it might be useful, especially with regard to the analysis of the typescript, to make clear which elements are original and which are not, and that is why I established a system of textual notes right underneath every page to indicate each alteration. The system consists of three types of notes:

- **Alterations in the B-version which I did *not* take over:**

Line number(s): original text > **B:** alteration in the B-version

e.g. 56-57: we had tickets > B: we had invitation[s]

or

100: I must ‘fly’! > *left out in B (crossed out)*

- **Alterations in the B-version which I took over:**

Line number(s): **A:** text from the A-version ; **B:** alteration in the B-version

e.g. 24: A: Hotel Aigle Noir ; B: Hotel de L’aigle Noir

- **My own alterations:**

Line number(s): own alteration < original text

e.g. 42: I had no time < I had not time

Underneath these textual notes the explanatory notes can be found. These consist of explanations of certain abbreviations, place names and quotes, and background information on historical events O.M.M. refers to in her typescript. I included the photographs that she took during her trip in Belgium as well; they can be found on the opposite pages (just as in the typescript) along with extra in-depth information that did not fit in the section of the explanatory notes.

As a final note I would like to mention that I have tried to be as faithful as possible to the typescript’s original layout, but that it was often necessary to change the length of the pages because I wanted to avoid starting the next page in the middle of a sentence or a paragraph (which is often the case in the typescript). To make it easier to track down a certain passage in the copies of the typescript, which can be found as an addendum, I have added the original pagination in the left margin of the

text. This, together with the line numbers, which can be found on the right side of the text, will also be useful when I will be referring to a particular section of the typescript in the following chapter of this paper.

The photographs which are marked with the year “1922” are the ones taken by O.M.M. herself and which she attached in the typescript. The ones marked with “2016” or “2017” are taken by myself. Apart from the captions in O.M.M.’s handwriting, right underneath or next to the photos, all information or explanation added, is provided by myself.

Thou could'st not bear God's best
Save, as it were through veilings;
Thou could'st not love His best
But through the toil of failings;
When thou hast learned, through much disaster
To prove thyself grim failure's master –
Then shalt thou see God's best.

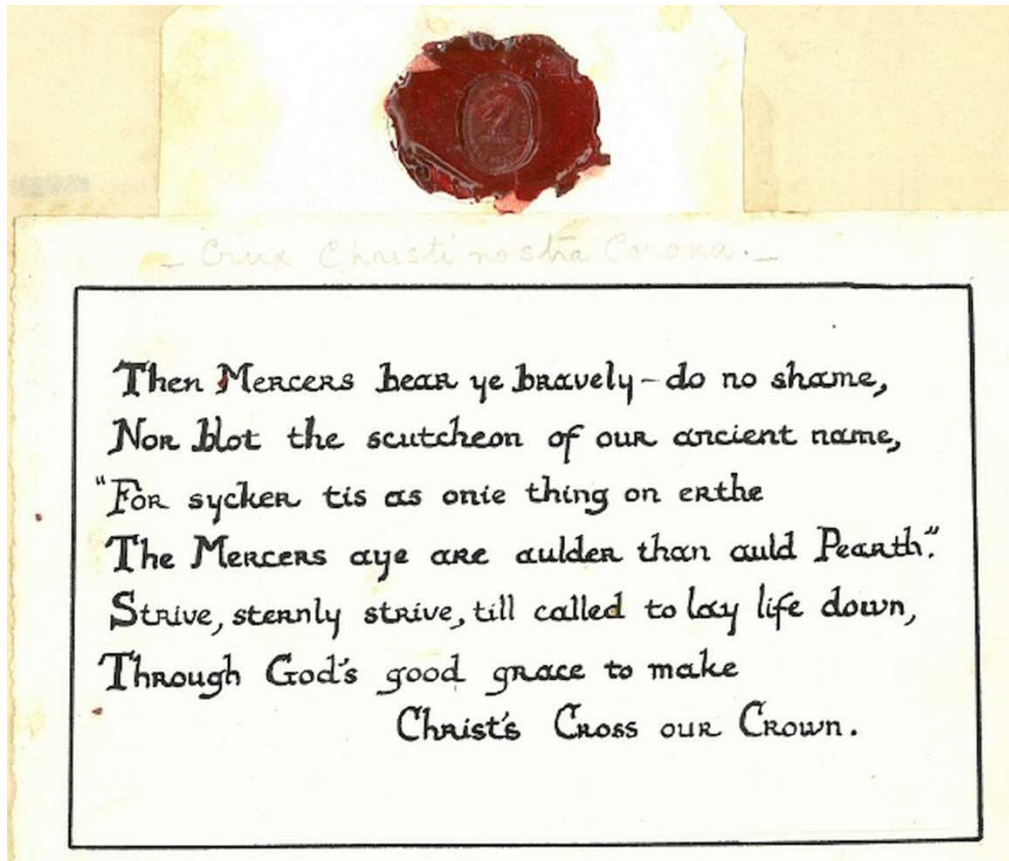
M.L.H.

This poem, with which O.M.M.'s *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* opens, bears the title "God's Best" and was written by Minnie Louise Haskins (1875-1957). It appeared in *The Gate of the Year*, a poetry collection which was published in 1940. Most of the poems in this collection however, were written before 1906 and had already been printed in small books named *The Desert* (1918) and *The Potter* (1918).¹

CRUX CHRISTI NOSTRA CORONA.

By

O.M.M.



This wax seal stamp with the crest or coat of arms of the Mercer clan or family was not present in the A-version of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript, but was added in the B-version. It depicts a stork which is holding a writhing snake in its beak. According to the Mercer Chronicle, “the stork in heraldry represents filial piety and the serpent was the emblem of success”. Underneath the stamp, the following motto can be read:

Then Mercers bear ye bravely – do no shame,
Non blot the scutcheon of our ancient name,
“For sycken tis as onie thing on erthe
The Mercers aye are aulder than auld Peaath.”
Strive, sternly strive, till called to lay life down,
Through God’s good grace to make
Christ’s Cross our Crown.

The quotation consists of only the last seven lines of a much longer text. This complete text presents a more in-depth description of what is depicted on the crest and what the meaning is behind all the elements that are represented. The last seven lines then, the ones which O.M.M. incorporated in her typescript, are a reminder to all descendants of the Mercer family to bravely bear their “scutcheon” (i.e. their coat of arms) and not to stain it or blemish the name. Moreover they are encouraged to live a life in which they prove that they are worthy of the sacrifice that Christ has made for them (“Christ’s Cross”) by handling their struggles with dignity. Furthermore, the passage mentions that the Mercer family is a very old one, older than the city of Perth in Scotland with which the family is closely connected from very early on.²

To: 1
W.V.C.
Died 50th Casualty Clearing Station,
Huy – Belgium 5
and to the
2nd Company, Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides. 10
- Crux Christi Nostra Corona -
Then Mercers bear ye bravely – do no shame,
Non blot the scutcheon of our ancient name,
“For sicken tis as onie thing on erthe
The Mercers aye are aulden than auld Pearth.” 15
Strive, sternly strive, till called to lay life down,
Through God’s good grace to make
Christ’s Cross our Crown.

1-8: B: *deleted and rewritten in pencil on the opposite page as:*

W.V.M-C.

died 60/CCS - Belgium- Feb: 20th 1919

To: The Second Company - - - Girl Guides

11: B: *handwritten in pencil*

12-18: B: *in calligraphic writing (see opposite page)*

12-18: Mercer wax seal stamp with the crest or coat of arms (*see opposite page*)

<u>Foreword</u>	1
London	
July 18 th 1922	
My dear Billie,	5
I was delighted to find a letter awaiting me here from you – but I am appalled at your request that I shall send you during my stay in Belgium a written account of my doings together with my impressions of “men and things.”	
I am appalled, inasmuch as my literary talents even in the matter of letter-writing are nil – therefore if I accede to your request and send you from time to time all the news I can, you must understand quite clearly that I do so <u>only</u> with the object of pleasing you.	10
I hope to visit some, at least, of the battlefields and will remember that that area holds for you a very special interest and will try to write you a faithful account – only begging you once again to overlook all faults of penmanship, and to bring to the perusal of my letters a spirit of kindly sympathy rather than one of criticism.	15
Jo	

1	I.	1
	Ostend July 20 th	5
	We arrived here yesterday after a very fair crossing – left Dover in calm waters but about two hours out ran into a big swell which I at any rate did not feel too happy about, and the announcement that lunch was served held no interest for me at all!	
	Did you receive the letter I sent you from London? Oh! It was just grand to be in town again and you will understand the memories that came crowding upon me as I revisited many old ‘haunts’, the scenes of a part of my war service.	10
	Strolling through St. James’ Park, I was delighted to meet three Q.A.I.M.N.S. sisters and almost immediately afterwards an old veteran friend.	
	Of course I ‘looked in’ at the hotel which for a short period in the first war days constituted my headquarters – there still remain two of the old staff who served me so well then and I wondered if the cloak room attendant remembers that night when I and one or two others, being out without the necessary late pass, considered it unwise to sign for a room, and she assisted us to do a quick change from uniform to ‘civies’ (another forbidden luxury at that time!) afterwards covering up our tracks for us. How gay and light-hearted we all were then; and now I believe I am the only one of that little group left.	15 20

11: - the scenes ... war service. > *left out in B (crossed out)*

14-19: Of course ... for us. > *left out in B (covered up)*

12: Q.A.I.M.N.S.: stands for Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service. The organisation, which was the successor of the Princess Christian's Army Nursing Service Reserve, was created in 1902, shortly after the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Queen Alexandra, the wife of king Edward VII, gave her name to the Service and was its president “until her death in 1925, when Queen Mary succeeded to that office”. During World War One the Q.A.I.M.N.S. played a very important role, serving “on every front, in every campaign”. After the war, the Service went through a couple of reorganizations until in 1949 it officially became a part of the Army and changed its name to the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps or Q.A.R.A.N.C.³ The Q.A.I.M.N.S. would have been easily recognizable thanks to their typical uniform: a grey ward dress accentuated with a scarlet cape, white muslin cap and an oval silver badge.⁴ Although O.M.M. was not a member of the Q.A.I.M.N.S. during World War 1, seeing that she volunteered as a Red Cross nurse, she probably would have felt a connection with the three nurses she encountered in London, which is confirmed by her being “delighted” to have met them.

18: ‘civies’: “Civies” is a colloquialism used by members of the military or by people who wear a uniform to refer to their normal everyday or “civilian” clothes. As a nurse in the Red Cross, O.M.M. would have worn a uniform as well, and if the text is any indication, it seems that she was not often allowed to change into her ‘civies’.⁵



1922: the wreck of the HMS Vindictive in the harbour mouth of Ostend. Photo taken at high tide.

The HMS Vindictive, a British war vessel built in 1899, was partially destroyed during the Zeebrugge Harbour Raid on 23 April 1918 (St. George's Day) to block the harbour. Half damaged, it was reused as a blocking ship on 10 May 1918 to block the harbour mouth of Ostend, which succeeded. After the war, it was dismantled and only the bow was kept as a war memorial and is now situated at the beginning of the (new) eastern wall of the harbour of Ostend.⁶



2017: the bow of the HMS Vindictive at the new eastern harbour wall in Ostend.

You used to come to Ostend before the War so it is not necessary for me to linger over a description. There are very few signs now to indicate that this seaport suffered from the attacks made upon the enemy forces holding Ostend in the earlier days of the War, or from the German operations – although I understand that the new lighthouse, the marine station, about 160 private residences and various churches and schools were badly damaged – while the hotels situated along the Digue de Mer were pillaged and the woodwork used for fuel by the Germans. 25

The remains of the *Vindictive*, which was sunk by the British at the entrance to the harbour to prevent exit being made that way by the enemy, has been brought further inland and raised nearer to the surface for the purpose of completely destroying her, the work of destruction being carried on at night. 30

After dinner last evening we went to the Kursaal where the orchestra of 120 members gave some quite good renderings of music by the more modern masters until half past ten, when of course the ballroom became the centre of attraction.

3 I must not stay to write any more now as we have decided to go on to Brussels today by train – it is so intensely hot that it will be a relief to be out of the glaring sun. So for the present, goodbye. 35

1922 - Brussels as seen by O.M.M.



The Royal Palace in Brussels.



Brussels seen from the Kunstberg. On the left: the tower of the gothic city hall.



Busy market day in Brussels.

Brussels

July 22nd

40

I had no time to add more on Thursday after we reached here.

Yesterday, July 21st, was the first of the Belgian National Fête Days, which originated at the time of the Belgian Revolution of September 1830, but which, owing to the uncertainty of the weather in that month of the year, is now observed in July – the celebrations extend over three days during which period of time the whole population throughout the country is on holiday. Night and day the bells have been pealing forth from the church towers almost unceasingly, and processions which include as many as eight or ten bands continually parade the streets, which are decorated, and at night brilliantly illuminated. 45

The country on the way here from Ostend is interesting although flat but it is well cultivated and the crops (chiefly wheat, oats, garlic and potatoes) appeared to be in very good condition. 50

41: I had no time < I had not time

47-48: eight or ten < eight and ten



1922: Market Place in Brussels.



1922: Market Place in Brussels and Broodhuis.

66-67: "There's a street where the cobble-stones harass the feet": from "The Old-Fashioned Town", a poem by Ada Leonora Harris:

There's an old-fashioned house in an old-fashioned street
In a quaint little old-fashioned town.
There's a street where the cobblestones harass the feet
As it struggles uphill and then down;
And though to and fro through the world I must go
My heart while it beats in my breast
Where'er I may roam, to that old-fashioned home
Will fly back like a bird to its nest.

In that old-fashioned house in that old-fashioned street
Dwell a dear little old-fashioned pair.
I can see their two faces so tender and sweet
And I love every wrinkle that's there.
I love every mouse in that old-fashioned house
In the street that runs uphill and down,
Each stone and each stick, ev'ry cobble and brick
In that quaint little old-fashioned town.

The old-fashioned house mentioned in the first line of the poem refers to the house of Charles and Maria Harris, the uncle and aunt of the poet, and referred to as a "dear little old-fashioned pair". They lived in Witney, Oxfordshire. The poem was put to music by William Henry Squire. The song came out in 1914 and was very popular throughout the First World War.⁷

- 4 While out sight-seeing in Brussels I was just in time to see the King and Queen
of the Belgians drive up in their motor car to the Palace where I had gone to take one
or two photographs. Later they both attended a special service in the Cathedral – we 55
had tickets to admit us, but the heat of the day was overpowering and we each of us
felt that we could not endure the stifling atmosphere inside the building. Instead, I
hunted up a Kodak shop and prevailed upon the man in charge to repair my camera
which was not working satisfactorily, and in spite of the day being a holiday, he very
cheerfully obliged me and opened up the premises especially to do my work. 60
- Brussels is far too well-known for me to attempt to enlarge upon it.
- The inhabitants are very proud of the fact that a German flag was never
allowed to fly over the town hall. When the German authorities demanded the use
of the great flagpoles these were handed to them having first been cut in pieces!
- We have done very little walking but enough to intensify the hearty dislike I 65
have always entertained for cobble stones. “There’s a street where the cobble stones
harass the feet.” It reminds me of the days in the W.F.C. when the hard and heavily
nailed boots provided by a generous government (!) were still capable of reducing
5 ‘freshers’ to the verge of tears, and poor old ‘Quin’ having come to the conclusion
that the only pliable spot in the whole footwear was at that corner of the leather (I 70
use the term leather figuratively!) where the weight of the stamping machine had
left an impress of the now well-known arrow, in desperation discarded the offending
articles and continued her homeward journey bare footed! But that belongs to
another story told elsewhere.

55-56: we had tickets > B: we had invitation[s]

67-74: It reminds ... told elsewhere. > *left out in B (covered up)*

61-64: The occupation of Brussels began with the arrival of the German troops on 20 August 1914. It is unclear if O.M.M.’s information about the cut flag poles is correct, but it is true that the people of Brussels were outraged by the atrocities which the Germans had committed in other Belgian cities earlier that month. As a result, they expressed their anger in various ways such as waving Belgian, French and British flags, singing patriotic songs and even destroying German shops and houses.⁸

66-67: “There’s a street where the cobble-stones harass the feet” (*see opposite page*)

67: W.F.C.: Women’s Forage Corpse. This organisation was formed in 1915 and later became a part of the Army Service Corpse (A.S.C.). The women who worked for the W.F.C. were responsible for the food provisions and care of the many horses that were deployed during the war.⁹ From O.M.M.’s text it would appear that at one point she was a member of this organisation. The mentioned arrow on the boots that she wore during her time in the W.F.C. refers to the so called “broad arrow” which is used by the Government of the United Kingdom to mark government property.¹⁰

69: ‘freshers’: A fresher is someone who is new to a certain experience or profession. Here O.M.M. refers to new members of the W.F.C. who still had to get used to the hard and painful work.¹¹

Needless to say, we have met with many humorous experiences from which we 75
 have derived a good share of laughter and to which 'Happy John' contributes in no small
 measure, for he too possesses a most delightful sense of humour and just 'bubbles over'!

We have been to Namur – the country all the way from Brussels is very hilly and
 wooded and I was constantly reminded of some parts of our English scenery – once 80
 especially I was reminded of C---- Park, it only required Sir George and Lady B---- to come
 along with hounds! And again further on, part of an extensive forest recalled very vividly
 Sir Robert H--- and his beloved B----k Park.

All the way, I noticed that the trees were for the most part very tall and straight,
 splendid timber for pit props and not nearly so wasteful as the majority of the trees felled
 and cut for this purpose in England during the War. 85

76: 'Happy John' > B: John

77: for he too possesses > B: for he possesses

80-82: Unfortunately it was not possible to find out the full names of the parks and their owners.

6 Namur is situated at the junction of the rivers Sambre and Meuse, and as you will doubtlessly remember, was heavily bombarded by the German artillery in August 1914. The forts constructed between 1888 and 1892 formed the defence of the city, but these were rapidly destroyed – the last one falling on August 25th 1914.

Leaving Namur and taking rather a roundabout route we touched at Dinant 90 and several other places of interest including – Ghent (Flemish, Gent), Etterbeek, Ottignies, Gembloux, Alost (Aalst), Louvain (Leuven), Namêche, Java, Bas-Oha, Statte, Gives etc. But as so much has already been written from time to time of these places, I will not take up your leisure by writing more.

I have been scribbling away quite unmindful of the time and have only just 95 realized that there is barely five minutes left in which to dress and I have promised to be punctual at dinner tonight, as we are going out immediately afterwards.

I must 'fly'!

Jo

100

91-92: ... Ghent (Flemish, Gent) ... Alost (Aalst), Louvain (Leuven) ... > B: Ghent ... Alost, Louvain ...
 99: I must 'fly'! ; *left out in B (crossed out)*

91-92: Flemish vs. French place names: on 19th and early 20th century Belgian maps, names of cities in Flanders, the Flemish/Dutch speaking region of Belgium, were written in French, the commonly used administrative language of that time. This was also the case on the first Belgian topographical maps which the British used to create their trench maps during the First World War. It explains why for example "Ieper" and "Mesen" are still widely (and in the UK often only) known by their French equivalent names "Ypres" and "Messines".¹²

O.M.M.'s route: the Flemish cities Gent and Aalst are not on the route from Brussels to Huy as they are located between Ostend/Bruges and Brussels. Furthermore, the order of the mentioned places does not seem right. According to the descriptions, after having left Namur, they travelled in the direction of Huy along the left bank of the Meuse, consequently passing Namêche – Java (Gives is on the opposite side of the Meuse, and there is no bridge they could have crossed) – Bas-Oha – (Faubourg de) Statte – Huy. Of all the places mentioned, Leuven is the last city before arriving back in Brussels, not Namêche like the text wrongly suggests.

It is clear that they travelled by train that day, because the listed names (i.e. Namêche, Java, Bas-Oha, (Faubourg de) Statte and Huy) are all railway stations (today: NMBS line 125) situated on the left bank of the Meuse between Namur and Huy. Having once arrived in Huy, they took a taxi to La Sarte. Returning to Brussels, they must have taken the former train line 127 (out of use since 1963) from Huy towards Landen, with a connection on the line from Liège via Leuven towards Brussels.¹³



1922: view of Huy.

*River Meuse. The Bridge - the Citadel - + Cathedral Church
of Notre Dame - Huy.*

O.M.M.'s handwriting.



2016: same view of Huy today.

7

II.

1

Brussels

July 23rd

5

This letter will follow rather closely upon my last, but we are out such a lot that if I do not seize the opportunity and write now, I shall very probably not be able to do so for some days.

Yesterday we visited Huy and La Sarte – Huy is a most picturesque town situated halfway between Namur and Liège and stands at the confluence of the banks of the rivers Meuse, Hoyoux and Mehaigne. All its rivers flow through valleys, the main stream lying between vineyards, orchards and woods – with the exception of certain parts where rocky summits rise above the level. I believe that the valley of the Meuse has been described as “the most picturesque scenery in Belgium” and this is not an exaggerated description. Huy was one of the first towns attacked in August 1914, by the Germans under General von Bülow, in their attempt to force a way through Belgium to England.

The centre of the bridge across the river Meuse, built in 1294, was blown up by the Belgians in order to retard the enemy’s progress, and a torrent of fire opened up from the banks upon the German engineers as they repaired the breach, caused three days to elapse before the work was completed, and it was this delay, together with the resistance of Liège, which upset the German plan of invasion and enabled the Allies to come up in time to check the enemy’s progress.

17-18: On 19 August 1914, the Belgian army blew the bridge over the Meuse in Huy before retreating to Namur.¹⁴

18-22: The Battle of Liège was the first battle of the First World War. The city of Liège was under attack from 5 August until the surrender of its fort on 16 August 1914. As O.M.M. writes, the Belgian resistance delayed the German invasion.¹⁵

Views from the Meuse bridge in Huy towards Hôtel de l'Aigle Noir.

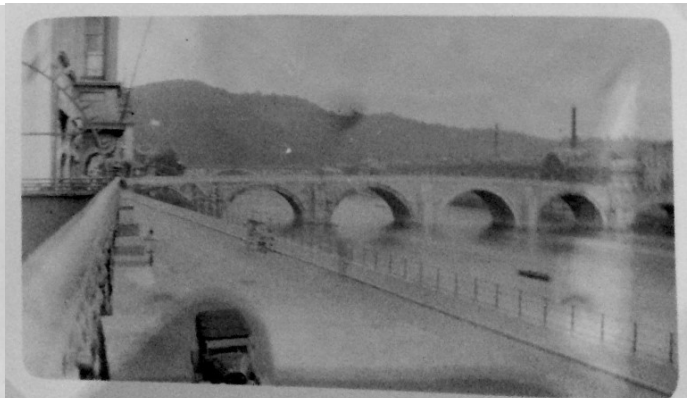
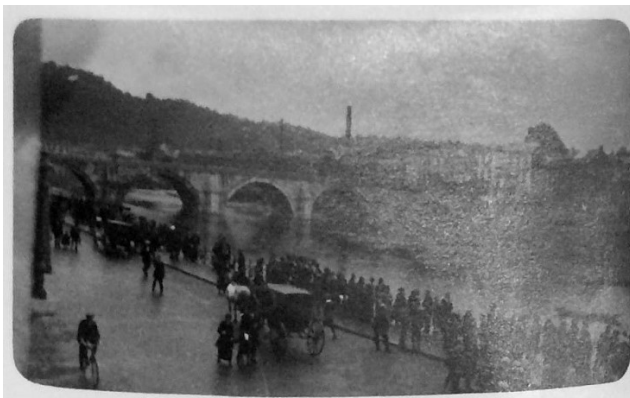


l'Hotel de l'Aigle Noir -

1922: Hôtel de l'Aigle Noir is the white building in the middle of the block.



2016: the building still exists. Nowadays is serves as a casino.



Two photographs attached in the UK-version of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* taken from the balcony of the Hôtel de l'Aigle Noir during a second visit to Huy.

Calling at the Hotel de l’Aigle Noir for a cup of tea, I was very impressed by the proprietress. She was a woman of splendid physique and had very fine features, but it was her eyes that arrested my attention and set me wondering – for in spite of a cheerful 25 manner, the eyes held in their depths an inexpressible sadness behind which there seemed to lurk an expression almost akin to horror. I had a chat with her and later learned of a terrible experience that she had been through when the town was besieged – and the story was vouched for on good authority.

All the inhabitants of Huy preserve a cheerful exterior, and unlike the majority of 30 the townspeople I have met, are ever ready and willing to help wherever assistance of any kind is needed. Of “La Guerre” and the Germans these people are extremely reluctant to speak and to a close observer it is quite evident that they still suffer from the mental strain of those years of warfare with all their attendant horrors.

23: A: Hotel Aigle Noir ; B: Hotel de l’Aigle Noir

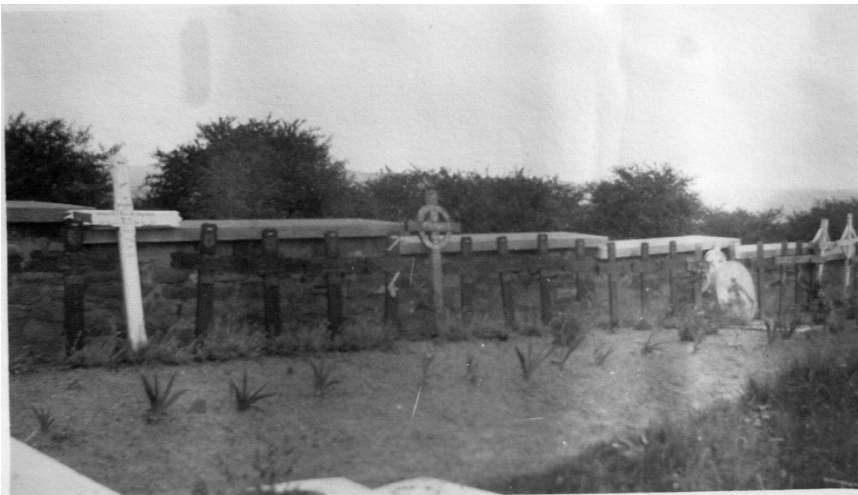
26: A: inexpressive ; B: inexpressible

24: Hotel de l’Aigle Noir (*see opposite page*)

1922 - Cemetery Huy La Sarte



Entrance Gates - Huy Communal Cemetery.



British Corner.



Belgian + French Graves.

2016 - Cemetery Huy La Sarte today



The entrance of the cemetery of Huy La Sarte.



The British section of the cemetery, with the remembrance cross and French war graves (crosses). This was O.M.M.'s "hill top" above the Meuse valley (since 1975 with the nuclear power plant of Tihange).



In the back: the British corner of the cemetery.

9 Leaving the town behind we made our way to La Sarte – a wide stretch of 35
open country standing high up on the hills and overlooking Huy, which nestles in the
valley below – in the distance Namur is plainly discernible and one can follow with
the eye the route traversed by the enemy when they entered the town on that
memorable August day in 1914.

The church, the scene of pilgrimages trough many decades, is still standing 40
and at a short distance further up the road, on what in pre-war days was just a rough
field, is situated Huy Communal Cemetery.

We found the grave we had come to visit among those of the British soldiers
– each marked by a wooden cross bearing name, rank regiment and all particulars.

The cemetery is divided into three parts viz. British, Belgian and French, and 45
German. All the graves are beautifully cared for, and we had a chat with the caretaker
of the British ‘corner’ who lives in a cottage near the cemetery – she enquired
anxiously if we thought she fulfilled her duty satisfactorily and we were able, with
truth and gratitude, to reply in the affirmative.

I was particularly impressed with the reverent bearing of our native 50
chauffeur who had followed us into the cemetery, and with the remarkable insight
and understanding that he evinced.

That hill top is a wonderfully peaceful spot commanding a fine view – there
was time to think up there and much to think about.

45-46: British, Belgian and French, and German. > B: (1) British, (2) Belgian and French, and (3) German

42-49: The Communal Cemetery in Huy La Sarte contains 109 Commonwealth war graves. It is located on the top of a hill looking down upon the Meuse valley. There was a German corner containing 56 graves, mostly from the early war days. O.M.M. consistently called the cemetery ‘my’ hill top throughout her typescript. One of the graves is the last resting place of Second Lieutenant William Vincent Clements, O.M.M.’s brother.¹⁶ (see *previous pages*)

1922 - Cemetery Huy La Sarte



Caretaker's Cottage -

The person in the background is O.M.M. and William Vincent's mother Emily Clements-Holloway.



"Nettoyee of the British Military Graves - at her cottage - La Sarte. July 1922".
(comment written on the back of the photograph)



German Corner.

In 1956, the 38 known German bodies were transferred to block 9 of the German cemetery Praetbos in Vladslo, the 27 unknown ones to the "Kameraden Grab" in Langemark.¹⁷

2016 - Cemetery Huy La Sarte today



In the back of the cemetery: the British section with the white headstones and the remembrance cross. In the background: the nuclear power plant of Huy Tihange in the Meuse valley.



Right: the unchanged caretaker's house across the road seen from the cemetery's wall.



The former German corner, nowadays the ashes meadow of the civil cemetery.

Additional photos taken at the cemetery (attached in the UK-version or from the family archives)



Detail of the row with the cross on the grave of William Vincent Clements, third from the left. Initials on the cross wrongly spelled as "W.E." (UK-version)



"M&F standing beside Vincent's grave - Huy Communal Cemetery, La Sarte. July 1922" (written on the back). The parents of O.M.M. and William Vincent standing at the cross of their son. (Ann Barton)



Photo taken during the second visit. William Vincent's grave is the second one from the right. (UK-version)

10 As I looked out over that scene and down into the valley, I pictured it again 55
 as it was in those awful days and the old old question arose unbidden to my mind
 “Was it worthwhile?” and it just seemed to me then as it does now, that all these
 men in giving their lives, left to us who remain a very sacred trust – a trust that we
 must each one strive to fulfil if their sacrifice is not to be in vain.

Do you remember how I used to say when peace was declared war would 60
 begin? And as I tried to review the situation of today, I could not but feel that those
 words of mine held more truth than I perhaps realized at the time I spoke them, and
 that although England is undoubtedly going through a grave phase of increased
 lawlessness through the brutalising effect of war, the nation has not learnt many
 lessons which the best men and women hoped for, and there does appear to be 65
 grave cause for anxiety wherever one looks, both at home and abroad. There is the
 most urgent need for every man, woman, boy and girl to bestir him or herself to
 uphold the fine old traditions of our country by living up to the highest they know,
 thus creating a fine wholesome moral atmosphere which shall solidify into public
 opinion and thereby create conditions in which the great Christian ethics can become 70
 possible and inevitable. If each one of us would adopt as his motto through life those
 words of Watts’ “My utmost for the Highest”, striving to reach that ideal, England
 would be a better England and the world a better world.

72: “My utmost for the Highest”: These words can be credited to the great Victorian painter and sculptor George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), who adopted them as his life motto. They can be found as an epigraph on the Memorial to Heroic Self-Sacrifice, which consists of 54 tables (added between 1900 and 2009) which commemorate people who sacrificed their lives to save others. The plan for the memorial, which is located in Postman’s Park in London, was proposed by Watts who himself is depicted in a wooden sculpture in the centre of the tablets. A comparison can be drawn here, and it could very well have been O.M.M.’s intention, between the ordinary heroes who are commemorated in Watt’s monument and the soldiers who gave their lives during the war. All of them died so that others could continue living, they gave everything they had (their “utmost”) for the common good (“the Highest”).¹⁸

11 And in the striving each would be doing their bit to carry out the great trust left to us by those who gave themselves so wholeheartedly and unstintingly, teaching us that love is not merely a personal matter but something much bigger and finer – for it is true that the measure of a nation’s prosperity is determined by its ideal of love – lower this and slowly but surely a canker eats out the heart of a people’s strength. 75

Out there on ‘my’ hill top in sight of God’s Acre things hold a deeper meaning and petty trivialities assume their right proportions. Oh! If only we could all be ‘big’ enough to ignore the opinions of the world and just go on quietly living our lives according to the promptings of our own hearts and conscience instead of being hedged around by narrow conventions and allowing these to direct our way. 80

Words that I read some time ago in England, return to my mind as I write: “Let the new Heaven and new Earth of simple love come” – “They Kingdom Come” must surely mean this: Christ’s Kingdom of Love, where everyone does not trample his neighbour in the struggle after worthless things, but tries to live according to the Sermon on the Mount – not goody-goody doleful lives but full of laughter and light and joy and good fellowship. 85

Surely, the writer of these things has struck a great truth and one the spirit of which was demonstrated over and over again by those great-hearted men who so cheerfully laid down their lives – a living example of the selflessness that the real love can inspire in the most ordinary of human beings. 90

75: unstintingly < unstintedly

75: teaching us > B: teaching

87: after worthless things > *left out in B (crossed out)*

89: A: The writer ... one that was ... ; B: Surely, the writer of these things ... one the spirit of which was

91: A: the real love ; B: real love

84-85: “Let the new Heaven and new Earth of simple love come” and “They Kingdom Come”: The first quote could refer to various passages from the Bible (i.e. Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13 or Rev. 21:1), the second one comes from the Lord’s Prayer (Mat. 6:9-13), which is a part of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5-7) which O.M.M. mentions as well here (on lines 88-89). Both quotes express the belief that there will come a time when people will live in a place where God’s love is everywhere and in everyone and where there will be no more misery.¹⁹

I cannot help feeling that there would be less suffering and perhaps less evil abroad in our midst today if only those who call themselves Christians could realize and learn through their love of one or two, a wide deep love for all, a love that shall seek to spend itself wisely in service all through life. To love truly – whether it be a relative, a friend, a lover, a husband, a child – is the only way in which our hearts grow, the only way in which we are being prepared for the Greater Love that reaches out to all who are in any need or trouble – the love of God, the love of Christ. I think that this kind of love may not be tied up to anyone, it does not depend for its sustenance and development upon anyone in particular. It is just a big longing to give, to serve, to be of use, to help, to heal, to relieve, it delights in spending itself for others, it sets out with its hands full of gifts and it returns empty handed but with a heart full of mysterious supernatural joy. And is not this kind of love the most blessed of all, because it gives, not expecting to receive? Every other phase of love has its ‘other side’ – reciprocity, mutual enrichment, one gives in much the same measure as the other, both are benefited constantly.

94-95: A: we who call ourselves ... through our love ; B: those who call themselves ... through their love
 96: A: spend itself in service ; B: spend itself wisely in service
 99: the love of God, the love of Christ. ; *left out in B (covered up)*
 99-100: A: This kind of love is not tied up ; B: I think that this kind of love may not be tied up
 103: supernatural ; *left out in B (crossed out)*
 103-104: A: And this kind of love is ... ; B: And is not this kind of love ... ?
 104-106: Every other ... benefited constantly. ; *left out in B (covered up)*

- 13 To love for love's sake only – to serve and give for pure disinterested motives, forgetting self in wise and loving ministry – that is the ideal.
 But to follow this path means suffering, sympathy always suffers: 110
- “Heart, are you great enough
 For a love that never tires?
 O heart, are you great enough for love?
 I have heard of thorns and briars.” 115
- Perhaps we are nearer to God, most like Christ, when we have wept for the trouble or the sin of another?
 This is what all our friendships, all our loves lead up to – this is what these human affections mean – “first the natural and then the spiritual.” “For if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how then shall he love God whom he hath not seen?” 120
- Forgive me if I have wearied you and I certainly do not mean to preach, but I just cannot help writing all that is in my heart, and I write it in the sure knowledge that you will understand and bear with me.
- Tomorrow we are planning to return to Ostend so I will post this ‘budget’ tonight and write again from there. 125

Goodnight!

Jo

108: A: in loving ministry ; B: in wise and loving ministry

116-120: Perhaps we ... not seen?” ; *left out in B (covered up)*

122: A: all that is in my heart ; B: what is in my heart

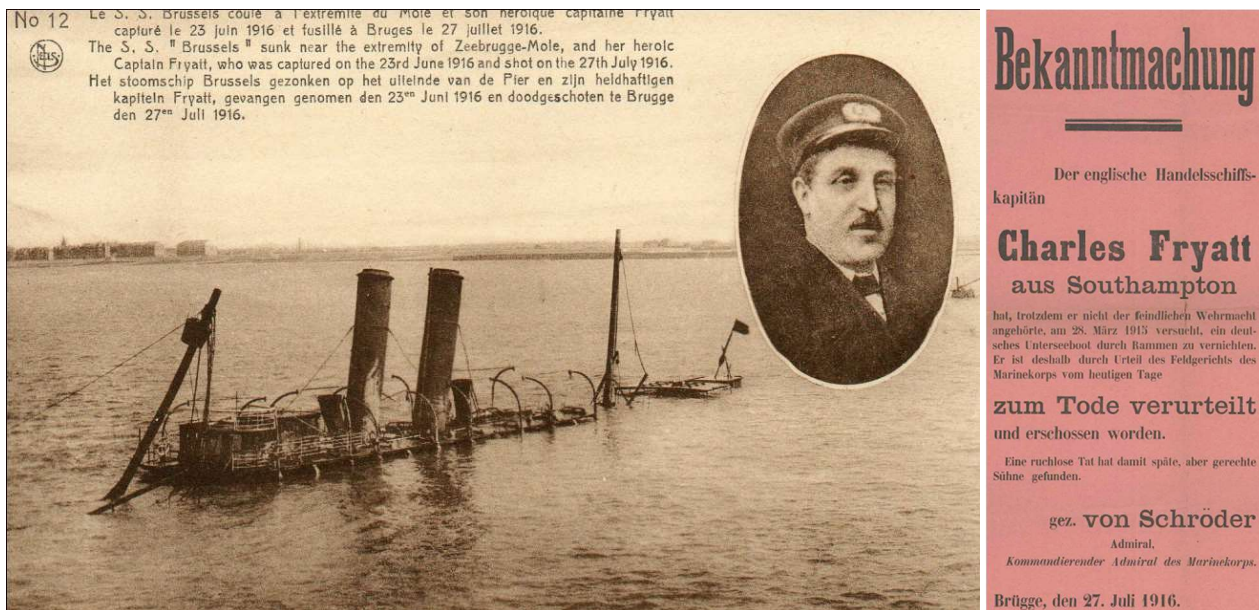
111-114: These lines come from the poem “Marriage Morning” by Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)²⁰.

119-120: 1 John 4:20²¹



1922: The Heist War Memorial. The memorial in 2016.
In the background, the Kursaal Palace Hotel that was burnt down in 1944.

This war memorial (Hippolyte Le Roy, 1921) was erected for the military and civil victims of WW1 with a memorial stone for the military and other victims, and for one of the anonymous victims of the concentration camp of Dachau (WW2). The statue shows a soldier in full dress, with his rifle at the ready, crouched down behind a barricade of sandbags supported by a primitive wooden construction on a plinth. Next to him, there is a wounded soldier, still holding onto the regimental flag in his hands.²²



Post-war postcard with the sunken SS Brussels and the picture of capt. Fryatt. On the right: his death sentence (Bruges).

Charles Fryatt (2 December 1872 – 27 July 1916) was a British captain who was executed by the Germans for attempting to sink a U-boat in 1915. When his ship, the SS Brussels, was captured off the Netherlands in 1916, it was transported to Zeebrugge. Fryatt was court-martialled and sentenced to death in Bruges although he was a civilian non-combatant. International outrage followed his execution.

The SS Brussels, along with other vessels like the HMS Vindictive (supra), was torpedoed by the British on St. George's Day (23 April 1918), in the so-called Zeebrugge Raid, in order to block the Zeebrugge harbour mouth. After the war, the S.S. Brussels became part of the British Navy fleet.

In July 1919, Fryatt's body was exhumed from the cemetery in Bruges and reburied with full honours in the UK. A funeral service was held at St-Paul's Cathedral in London.²³

14

III.

1

Ostend

July 26th

5

We reached here on July 24th from Brussels and the next day went for a run over the Royal Automobile Road to Heyst (where Captain Fryatt's ship the Brussels for some time lay a wreck) via Coq-sur-Mer, Wenduynne, Blankenberghe and Zeebrugge, and then on to Bruges.

Zeebrugge, as you well know, was used by the Germans as a submarine base, and in the cemetery there, among a number of German graves, are also the graves of 31 British men and officers of the R.A.F. and Marines. 10

Upon the spot where lie buried a number of "unknown British Soldiers" a stone cross has been erected which bears the following inscription:

15

"Lest We Forget."

In Memory of

Our Countrymen who fell on St. George's Day, 23 April, 1918

Erected by British Salvage Section.

20

St. George's Day, April 23, 1920.

I noticed that a small bunch of dying poppies lay on the grave of each German soldier. They brought to my mind the words of the song "Poppies for forgetting in a long, long, sleep", and recalling the reluctance of the people of Huy to speak of "La Guerre" and the Germans I wondered much who had put them there, and what they signified, and if the reputed silence of the inhabitants of the Valley of the Meuse had overshadowed the people of Zeebrugge too. 15

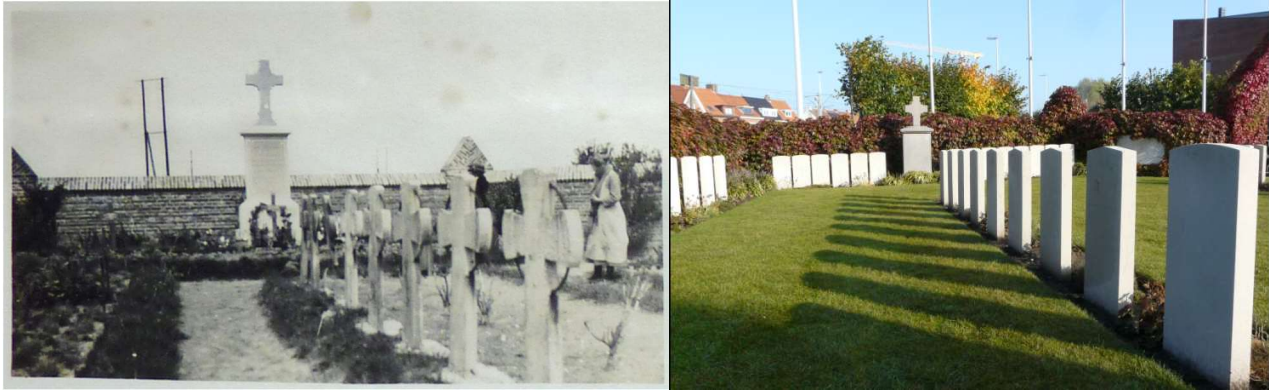
6-7: Royal Automobile Road: follows the whole length of the Belgian coast.

7: Captain Fryatt and his ship Brussels (*see opposite page*)

10-21: Military Cemetery Zeebrugge (*see next page*)

16-21: "Lest We Forget" (*see next page*)

24-25: "Poppies for forgetting in a long long sleep": from the song "Poppies for Forgetting", music by Robert Coningsby Clarke, words by Olga Fricksen. This song was composed in 1911, so at least 3 years before the poppy, which stands for death or peaceful sleep, would become the symbol of those who lost their lives during World War 1.²⁴



10-21: War cemetery in Zeebrugge. (see previous page)

In the back: the memorial cross with the “Lest We Forget” text (left: 1922, right: 2016)

This German-British military cemetery is situated next to the church of St. Donatianus. It contains the graves of 175 German and 30 British soldiers. It is administered by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission despite the fact that the majority of the graves are German.

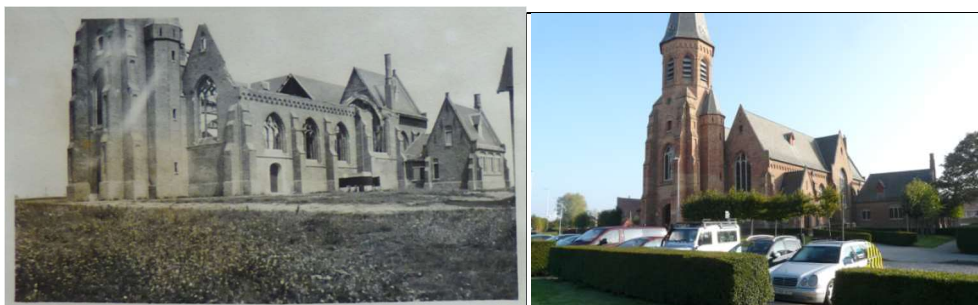
16-21 “Lest We Forget” (see previous page):

The actual text on the memorial on the cemetery at Zeebrugge reads:

“LEST WE FORGET”
To the memory of
Our countrymen who fell
On this place on St. George’s Day
April 23rd 1918
Erected by the members of the
British Salvage Section
St. George’s Day
1920

The phrase “Lest We Forget” comes from a poem by Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) titled “Recessional” which he wrote in 1897. It is very likely that he found inspiration for this poem in the Bible, more specifically in Deuteronomy 4:7-9. It is a religious poem which contrasts God’s power with the power of the British Empire. At a time in which Great Britain ruled over a large part of the world, it was easy to forget that all this earthly wealth and leadership could not be compared to the unsurpassable authority of the one true ruler: God. By repeating the words “Lest We Forget” eight times, the message of the poem is very clear: remember that God can make an end to all the successes because it is not Great Britain, but He who is truly responsible for every single accomplishment.²⁵ However, the phrase “Lest We Forget” is better known for its association with World War 1, as the first stanza of Kipling’s poem is often quoted on occasions such as Remembrance Day, on which the soldiers who fought in the war are commemorated. The phrase can also be found on countless of war memorials as is the case at the cemetery in Zeebrugge. It is a reminder to not forget the sacrifice that the soldiers made.²⁶

29: Church of St. Donatianus



Church of St. Donatianus at Zeebrugge (left: 1922, still damaged, right: 2016)

The parish church of St. Donatianus was badly damaged, chiefly by British and Belgian shells, which fell during the Allied bombardments, but as far as possible the walls 30 have been replaced by boarding; and here, amid clearly visible shell marks, the usual services are conducted.

From Zeebrugge we motored on to Bruges, which some years ago was one of the most important cities of Flanders, and which now, despite a decrease in the population of more than one-third, is still the chief city of the Western Province of Flanders, and the seat 35 of a bishop.

Standing on the river Roya or Reye, Bruges contains within its walls many masterpieces of art, and numerous splendid old monuments and houses.

During the War, the city suffered very little material damage, but the Germans confiscated property to the value of 20,000 fr., all the wine of Bruges at 2 fr. a bottle, and 40 also all the copper – Bruges was the centre of iron foundries and coppersmiths – paying nothing at all for the latter. The iron works they destroyed, thus rendering 2,500 workpeople idle.

41: foundries < founderies

29: Church of St. Donatianus: This church was built in 1910 and inaugurated in 1911. On 8 May 1918 it was almost completely burnt down, but restoration works started in the 1920s. During the Second World War, the church was again heavily damaged, and it would take until 1951 until it would be rebuilt.²⁷

41: "Bruges was the centre of iron foundries and coppersmiths": this is historically incorrect. Bruges never had an iron or copper industry.



Cathedral Church of Saint Saviour.

1922: interior of the gothic St. Saviour Cathedral in Bruges.



2017: interior of the cathedral today. In 1935, the baroque rood-loft with organ standing between the choir and the nave was removed and placed in the back of the nave (against the tower base).²⁸

16 At a cost to the city of 23,000 fr., the enemy furnished a rest house for their officers; and
 at a further cost of 20,000 fr., built a winter garden containing marble baths in imitation 45
 of those at Pompeii, but it is recorded that the only occasion upon which the latter were
 used, was when a German bishop had one bath there! Some very fine architecture is to
 be seen both within and without the cathedral church of Saint Saviour, but I must not stay
 to describe it here, nor to tell you of the remarkable and priceless treasures to be found
 within this building. 50

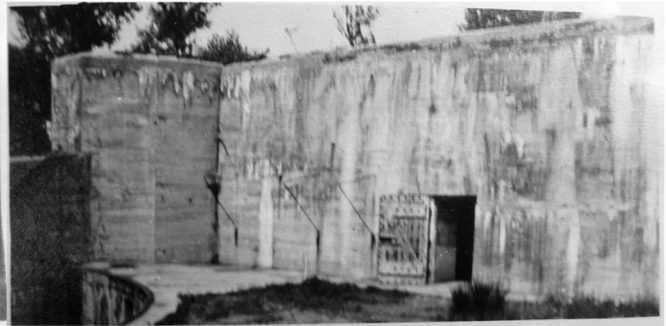
I have been unable to write to you earlier since visiting these places as we have
 been 'on the move' and only arrived back here again this evening.

The day was intensely hot when we started out to visit the battlefield area.

From Ostend, the way lay over one of the many long stretches of straight road –
 that one encounters in this country – with trees on either side and corn and flax at 55
 intervals; and I thought how terrible weary our soldiers must have become marching over
 these long and seemingly unending roads.

Our first stop was just outside the village of Couquelaere and not far from
 Leugenboom, where in the heart of a forest the big siege gun, built and used by the
 Germans, still stands. It is a veritable fiend of death and, built in 1914 by Krupp's, has a 60
 carrying power of 28 miles.

59: big siege gun (see previous page)



1922: the Lange Max gun in Koekelare.

During World War 1, in Leugenboom, a hamlet of Koekelare, 10 km behind the frontline, a huge gun, type “Lange Max”, was constructed by the Germans. It was also called “Batterie Pommern”. With its barrel length of 17.50 meter and its 75.500 kg weight, the “Lange Max” was the greatest gun at that time. There were also two colossal concrete shelters for the shells that had a diameter of 38 cm.

The gun fired at Dunkirk on 27 June 1917, 44 km away. The 411 shells made c.300 casualties and destroyed a large part of the old city centre with its gothic church. It took the shells 90 seconds to reach their target, with an interval of 8 minutes (the time needed to reload). The allies did not manage to neutralize the gun during the war. After the war, it probably was “the most successful attraction. Who knows how many battlefield tourists had their picture taken after they had climbed into the gun’s barrel.”²⁹ It was even visited by the British king Edward VIII and his son, the later king George VI, Winston Churchill and the Japanese crown prince Hirohito.



c.1920-1925: soldiers and civilians visiting the gun.



2017: the remains of the artillery platform.

During WW2, the gun was transported back to Germany to be melted into new weapons. The two shelters were dynamited in 1954 and the debris was used to fill the local roads. In 2014, the Lange Max Museum, which is dedicated to the gun and its history, was opened in Koekelare.³⁰

17 Partly surrounding it, is a munitions store built of concrete and cement and strengthened by iron girders – the walls in places being between two and three yards thick. Lit throughout with electric light, the whole is a masterpiece in its construction. Cleaned by electricity, this gun was also fired by electric power at a distance of half a mile. The work of construction occupied two hundred men daily for two years and all the materials used where brought from Germany by a special railway laid for the purpose. 65

Why were the enemy not stopped in their devil's work. There was at that time not artillery heavy enough to cause any material damage and furthermore the position of the allied armies made it almost, if not quite, impossible to get within range. Once only, after repeated attacks from the air, was it put out of action, but it is recorded that in less than an hour the Germans had repaired the damage and the bombardment continued as fiercely as ever – the shells falling, on an average, at the rate of one every two minutes. 70

The enemy's attempt to blow up the entire gun when in the latter part of the War they were forced to abandon the position, only resulted in a portion of the surrounding wall being damaged, the gun itself still remains intact. 75

18 In one part of the munitions store a Belgian ex-service man makes and sells lace, his only means now of earning a livelihood. In the course of a chat with him it transpired that he had been nursed at the Ocean Hospital by a Bristol nursing sister, which of course interested me. 80

In your last letter you ask me to tell you something of the industrial activities of this country. In pre-war days the industries, as is pretty generally known, extended in almost every direction – Belgium depending mostly on her export trade – coal and copper mines, ironworks, stone quarries, steel and zinc works, sugar refineries and glass factories constituting some of the chief activities. 85

I may just mention here that the number of small collieries within the borders are remarkable, a pre-war output of 23 million tons of coal representing 280 mining centres.

During the War, the vast majority of iron and steel works suffered serious damage – the enemy removing a quantity of the machinery to Germany and utilizing 90 the balance to make ammunition. I believe I am right in stating that out of some 79 rolling mills only 28 were still existent at the time of the Armistice, and almost half the blast furnaces were destroyed, but such is the unconquerable spirit of the people that at the end of January 1920, pig iron was being produced at 20 percent, and steel 19 at 49 percent of the pre-war level. In one year no less than 1,400 bridges were rebuilt 95 and about 2,000 kilometres of permanent way re-laid while the number of locomotives in running order was increased tenfold.

Agricultural production before the War was of course the biggest industry – the system of small holdings being encouraged throughout the country – but a great change has taken place in recent years especially in the war zone areas where 100
 owing to the lack of implements and the impoverished and devastated state of the land, cultivation has been and still is, greatly impeded, while the butter-making industry is almost extinct, owing partly to the state of the roots and pasture land and partly to the fact that the enemy carried off 560,000 cattle and 35,000 sheep and goats. In passing it may be of interest to you to know that the number of horses, 105
 pigs and fowls requisitioned or killed by the Germans was respectively 92,000, 35,000 and 1,690,000.

After leaving Couquelaere we continued our way over roads on either side of which, what had once been houses, farms, and buildings of varying descriptions lay in utter ruin, just a colossal heap of stones and debris while that a valiant 110
 attempt at cultivation had been made, was evidenced by the presence of some struggling crops – chiefly wheat, oats and a little flax. Everywhere, I found later, the Belgian people have cultivated the land wherever at all possible, even in some parts right up on the 1914 front line.

20



1922: the remains of the devastated churchyard at Beerst, only 2 km behind the front line.



1922: the concrete German dug out along the road from Beerst towards Dixmude.

At Beerst we made another halt to inspect the site of a civil cemetery and church, but nothing now remains save a few tottering headstones while the existence of a church would never be suspected, so completely has it been swept away. On the corner opposite to this desolate spot once stood a famous café but there is nothing left to indicate the fact – the ground just there representing a series of pits and the material of which the café was built lying scattered in all directions for miles around. 115 120

Continuing in the same direction, the roads now (if one can call them by so dignified a name) were full of shell holes, some of which had been loosely filled up and others only partially so – our chauffeur was a very skilful driver and he needed to be! On either side were German dug-outs camouflaged and heavily protected by barbed wire entanglements while the country for miles around presented a forsaken and barren appearance. What agony it must have been to the wounded to be conveyed in the ambulance wagons over these roads which were far worse than. 125

Your last letter also contains a request that I shall give you some idea of a German dug-out, so I will do my best to describe one situated just outside Dixmude. Built of concrete and cement, the walls and roof are strengthened by the insertion of iron bars, these acting as supports in much the same way as girders, the floor is boarded, and at intervals in the walls are narrow slits for the purpose of firing upon the enemy. 130 135

21



1922: the road Ostend - Dixmude. In the background, newly built houses at the crossroads in Beerst. On the left side of the road, newly planted trees, the tramway Dixmude-Ostend and the remains of the same German dug-out. There never stood a “huge windmill” on that spot. At the crossroads itself a mechanical flour mill was built in 1909 and demolished during WW1.³¹



2017: the same view today.

Into the roof is fitted a periscope and in addition to a complete telephone installation, the whole is fitted throughout with electric light. Leading from the main portion of the dug-out is a smaller compartment fitted with a field oven and used as a kitchen while a tunnelled passage leading to the town allowed of safe journeys being mad 'to and fro'. Here some fifty or more Germans lived, slept, worked and fought a "fortnight in and a fortnight out" – the result from a hygienic point of view being anything but satisfactory – and evidence of this is still apparent! 140

The Belgian 1914-1915 dug-outs, although constructed mostly on the same plan, were composed chiefly of earth with wooden supports, cement and concrete being used very sparingly, owing to lack of material as well as to lack of time, but there is no doubt that the work of the Germans was at that time in every way superior to that of the Allies. 145

Immediately behind the dug-out of which I have been telling you, a very big corn mill once stood, but the only indication of it is the presence of parts of the machinery which lie around, rusty, twisted, bent and riddled by shot and shell – it reminded me of lacework! 150

22 The two lines here during the fighting were divided only by the Yser canal from which both Armies had to obtain their water.

140-141: "Fortnight in and a fortnight out": This is a quote from one of the letters of William Bramwell (1759-1818), an early English Methodist and Revivalist and refers to his new working schedule: two weeks of preaching, followed by two weeks off. Here, O.M.M. notes that the German soldiers were in the trenches for two weeks at a time, before enjoying a two weeks break.³²



1922: the grave of an unknown soldier on the bank of the Yser near Dixmude, one of the many.

On the German side, at the extreme edge of the bank there is a grave which, protected by barbed wire and marked by a wooden cross, stands quite alone – it is the last resting place of “an unknown soldier.” As I stood by the side of this sacred spot my mind leapt back over the years and I saw this place as it was in the days when war was raging, and I wondered how many of the thousands who come out here sight-seeing pause to think of all that these isolated graves (which one meets with so frequently) stand for. The unknown soldier buried on the edge of this canal bank was describes to me as “just an ordinary soldier.” It is not known definitely how death came to him except that it was at night. But in a mental picture I saw him there on the enemy’s ground exhausted, spent and alone in the darkness yet facing the odds with firm resolve in eyes grown bloodshot and weary, and then I saw him worn out physically and mentally, and fatally wounded just slipping away out of reach of further horrors and suffering – dying alone, alone with God and his own brave heart. Oh! Thank God for our “ordinary soldiers.”

It is time this was in the post if it is to catch the mail – so I will only stay to add my love and will write again soon.

Jo

156: over the years > *left out in B (crossed out)*

156: I saw this place > B: I saw this place again

158-165: The unknown soldier ... “ordinary soldiers.” > *left out in B (covered up)*



Left: 1922: the German observation post in the General Baron Jacques Street in Dixmude.
Right: postcard c.1919 with the same observation tower still completely surrounded by debris.
In 1922 the street was repaved and some houses were already rebuilt. The tower was demolished at the end of 1922 and a year later, a row of new houses made people forget that on this spot once stood a huge war relic.



2017: Dixmude - Generaal Baron Jacquesstraat: the former location of the German observation post today.

Ostend

July 27th.

5

Your very welcome letter reached me today and I was keenly interested in all your news. Yesterday I sent you an account of a part of our visit to the battlefield area so I will just start now where I left off.

Shortly after leaving the grave of the unknown soldier on the bank of the Yser canal of which I wrote, we reached the town of Dixmude, on the river Yser, the population of which before the War was about 4,000. Noted for its butter market which not only supplied a large area in Belgium, but also exported to England and France, Dixmude also possessed many picturesque buildings. 10

The mills, canals, quays and bridges, because they provided a strong defence for the enemy, were destroyed by the Belgian artillery. And talking to some of the natives, I learned that the Germans took possession of and fortified all the cellar in the town, installed machine guns in each and then proceeded to carry into practice a very cleverly thought out plan, the ultimate issue of which was the formation of an almost impenetrable resisting force against the fiercest bombardments. 15

10: Dixmude: (Dutch: Diksmuide) is a picturesque medieval town at the confluence of the Yser and the Handzamevaart. Since the Middle Ages, it has been well-known for its butter market. The city was, and still is, located at the border of the West Flemish Polders, which provided fat pastures suited for the large farms which provided the milk. Every village in the region had its "Diksmuidse Boterweg" (Dixmude Butterstreet). Dixmude butter became famous even abroad. A butter fair is still organised every year.

During the entire First World War, the town was occupied by the Germans and, situated right on the frontline, it was heavily defended but destroyed completely. By 1925, the whole city had already been rebuilt in Flemish neo-renaissance style. Today, Dixmude is a touristic centre with a lot of WW1 related attractions such as the Dodengang (Trench of the Death) and the Yser Tower, an 88 m high post-war peace monument.³³



1919: general view of Dixmude just after the war. The concrete German observation towers of 1917 were still standing up surrounded by debris. The tower on the left is the one O.M.M. photographed.



1921: Dixmude, Market Place: shanties amidst the debris. Behind the shanties left: the remains of the St. Nicolas church.³⁴

24 It is interesting to note that the third day of the battle of the Yser is 20
memorable as the first occasion on which a battle was pursued at the same time
upon the sea, on the land and in the air.

Dixmude is now being rapidly rebuilt – the debris fast disappearing and the
streets being re-laid.

Just outside the town both men and women can be seen making bricks – a 25
new industry that is ‘springing up’ in the devastated areas of Flanders – the outcome
of the need of building materials for the work of reconstruction.

The present dwellings of those Belgians who have lost their all and borne the
full brunt of the conflict are worthy of mention. These “shanties” are very cleverly
erected out of mud, odd pieces of rusted zinc and corrugated sheeting, and old 30
pieces of timber varying in size, secured together with rough bolts and nails. The
whole, when complete, is extremely primitive in every way, but chatting with the
owners, I found that the predominating spirit was one of thankfulness that they had
a roof to cover them and at last could feel safe. Ah! Who but those who have actually
lived in the midst of a battle-raided country can realize what that one word “safe” 35
signifies?

34: Ah! > *left out in B (crossed out)*

35-36: A: realize what that one word “safe” signifies ; B: realize what the word “safe” signifies

29: “shanties”: to solve the high need of housing just after the war, the Koning Albertfonds (King Albert Fund) provided the means to make simple and quickly erectable barrack-like houses. Even today some of them are still occupied.³⁵ (*also see opposite page*)

I was told that an allowance is made by the Belgian government to those who have lost their homes, to the amount of three times the value, but owing to the financial state of the country, those who are eligible for this 'grant' receive only a small percentage of the total amount. The necessary materials for rebuilding are provided free and promise is given of the balance of the cash in the future! On the amount of money received however, each has to pay taxes which amount to between 40 and 50 per cent! And it must be remembered that there is necessarily a delay in the provision of the promised building material since the bricks have first to be made and are supplied in the first instance solely for the purpose of rebuilding the towns. In spite of all obstacles however, the work of reconstruction has progressed at a marvellous pace.

Throughout the actual battle areas and in those parts which I can only describe as "the back of beyond" I found the people outwardly at least very cheery and, unlike the majority of the dwellers in the big and important towns, ever ready and willing to serve each other and to extend the hand of Friendship to strangers, desiring nothing in return, but as with the inhabitants of Huy, I sensed the presence of an indefinable sadness underlying the cheerful exteriors.

To realize the sheer unconquerable grit of the people, one must see for oneself the appalling state of this part of the country which is just one vast expanse of utter desolation – one must realize too that these men and some of the women also, in addition to losing relatives, friends, and possessions have endured the most cruel hardships and been forced to witness some of the most terrible horrors and atrocities.



Woumen, situated 3 km south of Dixmude, c.1918: German photograph of the remains of the church, with the cross hanging on the tower wall. This is probably the cross O.M.M. referred to.

The tendency of the Belgian temperament inclines to the bright and cheerful and this to a certain degree must help to foster the spirit of pluck that exists but, it needs something else besides a cheerful temperament to rise above the overwhelming sufferings of those years of war and not become a crushed and broken people. 60

As far as Dixmude we had been motoring through country on that side of the river occupied by the Germans, but on leaving the town we decided to follow a route which led to the opposite side of the river and which in those same years had been in the occupation of the Allied troops. 65

'Bumping' (I cannot say driving!) out of the town over shell holes and pits, there were on either side dug-outs, wire entanglements and colossal 'dumps' of discarded wire.

A very rough German burial ground (it cannot be described as a cemetery) is situated just beyond Dixmude and in the centre there stands a cross of two rough black telegraph poles nailed one across the other. 70

The church which had once stood upon this site was in ruins – only a crucifix remained hanging in place on a badly shattered wall, the only piece of the whole building left standing upright. I may mention here that all over the battle area the churches were destroyed or badly damaged even when other buildings in close proximity had not been touched. 75
27



C. 1920-1922: Woumen: King Albert shanties form an entire new village ("Nieuw Dorp").



C. 1920-1922: Woumen, the Blankaert Chateau, destroyed during the war. It was completely rebuilt after the war and today it serves as a regional environment centre and park near the Blankaert Lake.³⁶

As far as Woumen, the country was absolutely barren – mounds of ruins lay distributed in all directions as far as the eye could see, the flatness of the picture being broken only where here and there a blackened and broken tree stump stood out against the horizon representing all that was left of the forests that once flourished in those parts. Here again were more groups of “shanties” similar to those near Dixmude and as before, I found the same spirit of thankfulness and pluck prevalent among the people. 80

The magnificent castle and park, the seat of Lord M----, is a dreary sight to behold – of the castle only a fragment of one wall remains while the park resembles a plague-stricken land. 85

Here as all over Belgium, wherever possible, in spite of the impoverished state of the land and the lack of implements, the people have tried to cultivate and grow crops, and in the middle of a field of potatoes on the outskirts of the village of Merkem, there stands quite alone, but carefully tended and marked by a wooden cross, the grave of “an unknown soldier.” 90

78: Woumen < Wömen

79: as far as the eye could see < as far as eye could see

89: Merkem < Mercken

84: The magnificent castle and park, the seat of Lord M----: O.M.M. here means De Blankaert Chateau (Kasteel De Blankaert or Blankaart) and its surrounding park designed in English style. “Lord M----” probably refers to Gustave baron de Coninck de Merckem, even though he had already died in 1895 leaving all his possessions to his wife.³⁷



2016: the monument of Armand Van Eecke along the road Woumen-Merkem near the hamlet Kippe.



1922: Steenstraete: hamlet of Bikschote on the bank of the Yperlee (Ieperlee). New houses in a devastated landscape. On 22 April 1915, the Germans started using gas between Steenstraete and Bikschote, which marked the start of the Second Battle of Ypres. This is often seen as the first systematic use, on a large scale, of chemical weapons in human history.

28 Passing out of Merkem, which is situated between the Yser and the forest
of Houthulst, just beyond the village my attention was arrested by a very fine war
memorial standing in the corner of a cornfield portraying a Belgian soldier with hat
and accoutrements discarded leaning with folded arms and slightly bowed head 95
against a pertly shattered wall, but it was the eyes that held me. I received the
impression that he was gazing out over a battle field after a big action had taken
place from which he had emerged alive leaving behind all his friends and comrades
who had ‘paid the great price’ – the expression of those eyes haunts me still.

 From Merkem we went on to Steenstraete (on the Yser and some 2 miles 100
north of Boesinghe) where in 1915 the first gas attack was made by the enemy – a
fact that I have good cause to remember. Here the two lines were divided by a
branch of the Yperlee, a tributary of the Yser, which at that spot is little more than
a stream. Over this ground without cessation for four years, shells broke up the
surface of the low-lying land – levelling the surrounding villages and towns, and it 105
was on the road between Steenstraete and Langemarck that the Camerouns
experienced severe fighting.

 The trenches and dug-outs were very exposed, far more so than those of
the enemy. The first trench I entered on the front line was overgrown with nettles
and weeds and is said to be the one in which Captain Bruce Bairnsfather discovered 110
the original of “Old Bill” – my head was on a level with the top so you can imagine
29 the agonising position a full-grown man must have had to adopt.

92 & 100: Merkem < Mercken

93: Houthulst < Honthulst

95: A: and bowed head ; B: and slightly bowed head

98: A: many friends ; B: all his friends

101: in 1915 > *left out in B (crossed out)*

110-111: and is said ... “Old Bill” > *left out in B (covered up)*

93-99: Memorial for Armand Victor Van Eecke: Van Eecke (1896-1918) was a Belgian officer who was killed in action in Merkem while trying to cut his way through a barbed wire barricade during an attack. His family bought the piece of land on which he died so they could erect this statue to honour and commemorate their son. (see *opposite page*)³⁸

110-111: Captain (Charles) Bruce Bairnsfather (1887-1959) was the creator of the comic strip *Fragments from France* featuring the cartoon character “Old Bill”, a grumpy old British soldier with a big moustache. Bairnsfather started drawing these cynical yet morale-boosting cartoons, which first appeared in the *Bystander* in 1915, when he was recovering from shell shock on the Isle of Wight. The character of Old Bill became so popular among the British troops that Bairnsfather was commissioned to continue drawing for the other Allied forces as well. Furthermore, several musical and film adaptations were made, both during and after the war.³⁹

What memories! My mind flew back and I saw this trench as it was in 1914-15-16-17-18. I saw soldiers engulfed in the water in liquid mud which more than half filled it. I heard the deafening roar of the guns and the shriek of the shells, felt the awful enveloping blackness of the night, pierced only by the sudden glare from bursting shells, heard the groans and cries of the dying and wounded, whose life blood dyed the waterlogged trenches. I experienced afresh the intolerable ache of over-strained muscles, and the countless fears and hideous visions conjured up by a distorted and over-wrought brain, when one longs with a nerve racking and overpowering desperation for just one moment's cessation of the awful inferno – until at last half-frozen, clothes all torn, soaked, and covered with mud, which yet fails to conceal the dark ominous stains, one ceases to be aware of anything save that the whole body and soul are just one big ache – conscious only of one thought which, hammering unceasingly in one's brain, urges the necessity of holding on at all costs.

Do we at home get anywhere near a true conception of the terrible mental agony that our men endured? Surely, surely not, or there would be a more united self-sacrificing and wholeheartedly determined effort made by the whole nation, both individually and collectively, to alleviate the distress of the ex-service men and the families of those who “never came back.”

113: A: My mind flew back ; B: What memories! My mind flew back

113: My mind flew back and > *left out in B (crossed out)*

113-114: 1914-15-16 > B: 1914-15-16-17-18

115-116: A: I heard again ... felt again ; B: I heard ... felt

116: blackness of the night > B: blackness of night

116-126: pierced only ... at all costs > *left out in B (covered up)*

As I stood on the edge of the trench realizing anew the meaning of “going over the top”, a sentence that I once heard in a prayer at a communion service haunted me: “Grant that we may be ready and willing to be broken for others.” And just as those soldiers were “broken” physically and mentally out in the trenches, are they not still, many thousands of them who are truly deserving of help, being “broken” today through the agony of mind and physical hardships resulting from permanent injuries, unemployment and straitened finances? 135

Henry Drummond says that “the test of religion, the final test of religion is not religiousness but love – not what I have believed and not what I have achieved but how I have discharged the common charities of life.” 140

Can we as a nation and as individuals say that we have done and are doing our utmost to help the men who fought for us? Are we each in our turn willing to endure, willing to sacrifice luxuries, pleasures and personal comforts in order to lighten the burdens of those who, when wearing the hospital red, white and blue, we petted and fêted as heroes? 145

132: anew > *left out in B (crossed out)*

138: A: straightened finances ; B: straitened finances

134: “Grant that we may be ready and willing to be broken for others”: refers to The Last Supper where Christ broke the bread and gave it to the Apostles as a symbol for his sacrifice to them. O.M.M. compares this to the soldiers who “broke” themselves for others as well.

139-141: Henry Drummond (1851-1897) was a very influential Scottish evangelist, writer and biology lecturer. One of his most famous works is called "The Greatest Thing in the World" (1874), a meditation based on the Bible's 1 Corinthians 13 which stresses the importance of love in everything one does. The lines which O.M.M. quotes here come from this meditation and convey that in the end Christians will not be judged by the (good) deeds they have done, but by all the charities and service they have not done, or as Drummond calls them, the “sins of omission”.⁴⁰

- 31 Do we really understand “the Law of love to our neighbour?” Christ taught us that anyone, irrespective of social status, who needs anything that we can give, is our neighbour. His command “That ye love one another as I have loved you”, in its breadth, depth, height and grandeur, surely eclipses anything that the world has ever seen or conceived of human tenderness? And surely it goes far beyond the mere duty of being kind to people and “doing as we would be done by?” 150
- We cannot of course like everybody, but we are told to love them. Does this sound fantastic and absurd? I think not if we pause a moment, and remember that love is not a mere sentiment, a feeling, but a strong vital wish to help, to do something for another, and if Christ’s love was such that He came to 33 years of human life experiencing exile, poverty, homelessness, loneliness, enmity and persecution, surely he came to earth in order not only to make the Great Atonement but also to give us a pattern and ideal of love? 155
- Surely to love as He loved is not to consider whether or not we can get over our dislike to this and that person, is not to worry and distress ourselves by trying to force ourselves to like but to go at once and minister to their need – should occasion arise – to act the Law of Love by serving them? Do Feelings matter as long as the motive is right? We are told to love; and love is service, love is giving, love is spending oneself for others. If we can believe the reputed tenderness, patience and sympathy of the Greatest Lover of all, His strong help to the needy and weak, His outflowing heart to all the world, can we do less then try to follow the ideal He has given us? 160
- 32 165

147-148: taught us > B: taught

150: A: eclipses anything ; B: surely eclipses anything

151: A: human tenderness and ; B: human tenderness? And

151: A: and I think it goes ; B: and surely it goes

152: A: be done by” . ; B: be done by”?

153: but we are told to love them. > B: and we are told to love them!

156: A: and Christ’s love ; B: and if Christ’s love

158: A: and to earth ; B: surely he came to earth

159: A: but to give ; B: but also to give

159: A: ideal of love. ; B: ideal of love?

160: A: To love ; B: Surely to love

160: as He loved > B: as it is said He loved

163-164: A: serving them for Christ’s sake. Feelings do not; B: serving them? Do feelings ...?

164: A: for another. ; B: for others.

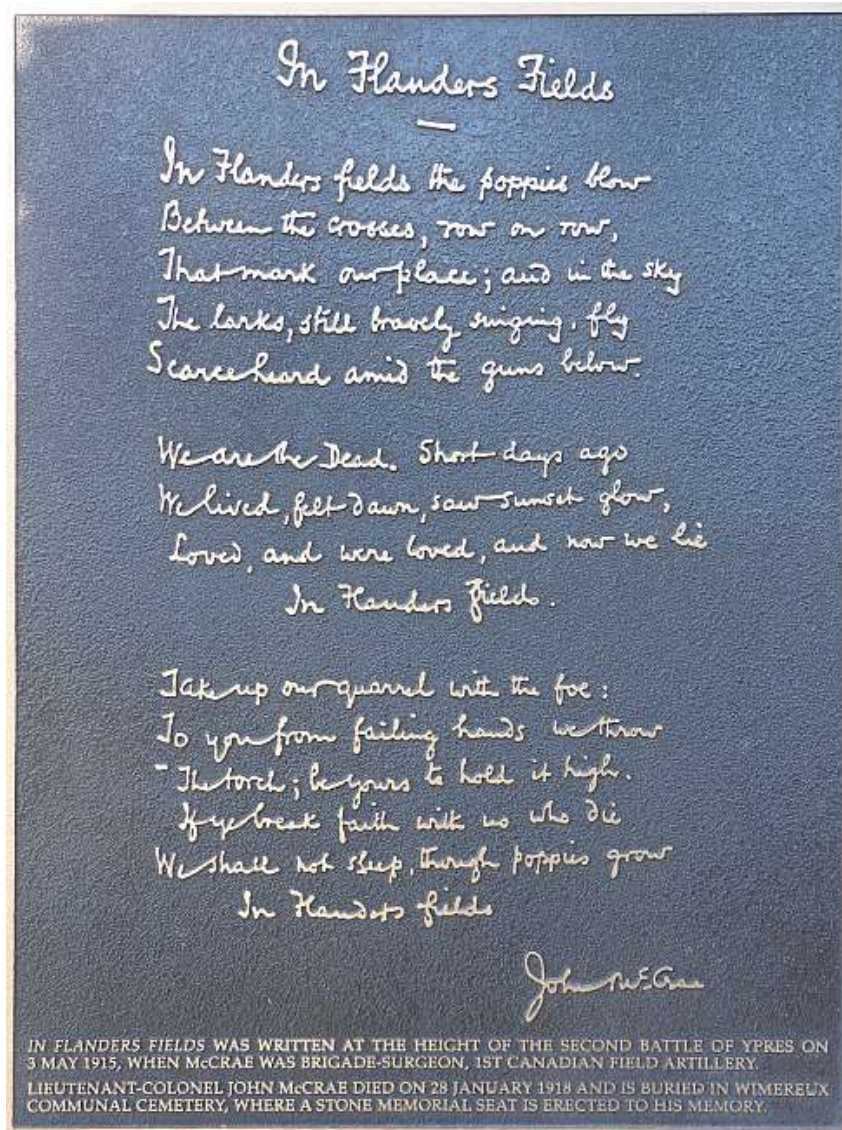
164: A: When we think of the tenderness ; B: If we can believe the reputed tenderness

166: can we do > B: can we anyone of us do

166-167: has given us? > B: has given?

147: “The Law of Love to our neighbour”: “neighbour” should be understood as not only the people who are close to you, but as any man or woman wherever they may be. The instruction to love your neighbour can be found throughout the Bible.

149: “That ye love one another as I have loved you”: John 13:34 and 15:12⁴¹



2016: the complete poem "In Flanders Fields" can be read at the Essex Farm Cemetery & Memorial between Boesinghe and Ypres.



2016: the John McCrae memorial stone at the entrance of Essex Farm Cemetery & Memorial.

Perhaps if we could but believe and get one true view of the love of God that gave His son, the love of Christ who lived and died for us, we should never again think lightly of any human soul! In this light its value becomes impressive and compelling. 170

Then “for the honour of God” we should each one of us be bound to help the needy, to love the unloved, to cheer the depressed, to comfort those that mourn, and lift up the bowed down – believing Christ has left us His own work to carry on.

Those men on ‘my’ hill top have left us their work to carry on and we must not fail. 175

To you, from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields. 180

Surely, it is the art of loving, not the art of being loved, that we all need to learn, and “it needs the largest wisdom to keep the readiest love from doing mischief.” Do we not all need therefore, to learn how to love, how to serve, when, where and how to help lest we do harm where we meant to do good? And is there one great truth to be learnt by all through the experience of life, and not alone from any sermon or book? It is this: there is no true happiness to be found either in circumstances or condition, neither can these things of themselves cause unhappiness. 185

168: A: could but get ; B: could but believe and get

168-169: the love of God ... the love of Christ > B: the love of a God ... the love of a Christ

170: becomes impressive and compelling. > B: would become impressive and compelling?

171: A: “For the honour of God” we are bound; B: Then “for the honour of God” we should each one of us be bound

173: A: - Christ has left ; B: - believing Christ has left

176-180: To you ... In Flanders fields. > *added in B (on the left page)*

181: A: It is ... we need ; B: Surely, it is ... we all need

182-184: A: We need ... do good and there is ; B: Do we not all need ... do good? And is there

184-185: A: fact that I am learning ; B: truth to be learnt by all

185-186: A: not from any sermon or book! ; B: not alone from any sermon or book?

186-187: It is this ... cause unhappiness. > *left out in B (covered up)*

176-180: These are the last five lines of the famous war poem “In Flanders Fields”, written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae (1872-1918). A memorial site was established near the Ypres Canal commemorating the Canadian physician and poet who died of pneumonia near the end of the war.

33 Love and its natural sequence, unselfish service, alone can give happiness, and it is not well to seek for happiness as such – it has a way of evading the seeker – nor is it well to expect it; but to the unselfish it comes, very surely – to the one who thinks, speaks, and lives in the service of others, happiness comes unsought. 190

The time has been passing rapidly and I did not know that it was so late! I must hurry away to bed and write beneath this “to be continued in my next!”

Jo

187: Love and > B: The truth that love and

187: and it is not > B: and that it is not

188: the seeker. > B: the seeker?

189: but to the unselfish it comes > B: but to all if unselfish it may come

189-190: to the one who thinks, speaks, and lives > B: to each if we think, speak, and live

190: happiness comes unsought. > B: happiness may come unsought?



1922: Bard Cottage British Military Cemetery between Boesinghe and Ypres. In 1922, the cemetery had not yet been redesigned and the crosses were waiting to be replaced by the typical white headstones.



2016: Bard Cottage British Military Cemetery.

In front, the typical Stone of Remembrance with the words “THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE”. This phrase, one of several suggested during the design phase, was proposed by the British author and poet Rudyard Kipling, whose only son had died during the war. Kipling's role was to advise on inscriptions and other literary matters, and the phrase used on the Stones of Remembrance is a quote from the Wisdom of Sirach from the book Ecclesiastes, in the Bible.⁴²

Ostend

July 28th

5

The lateness of the hour defeated my intention of completing the account of my battle-field tour in my letter of yesterday so I do hope that this 'a third edition' will not weary you.

Before leaving Steenstraete, I took a short walk across country to inspect a concrete shelter, and a signal post – the latter was known to the soldiers as “the trench of death” and I think no further comment is needed – the very name will bring before you a vivid vision of the battles fought in that area. 10

From Steenstraete a run of about two miles through shell-swept country brought us to Bard Cottage British Military Cemetery which is the nearest British cemetery to the front line to be found in Belgium, and here are buried the men who lost their lives chiefly 15 in the earlier years of the War. A portion of a very big field has been 'wired off', the space enclosed forming the burial ground.

It is most beautifully cared for, each grave showing signs of receiving detailed attention, and for this an ex-service man, who hails from Devonshire, is responsible.

He told me that unable to obtain employment in England, he had accepted the 20 post of caretaker to this cemetery rather than remain idle.

10-11: “The trench of death”: This was a very advanced Belgian trench along the Yser river in Kaaskerke-Dixmude (not in Steenstraete), only meters away from the German lines. As a result of this, the trench claimed many victims which explains its nickname.⁴³

14: Bard Cottage British Military Cemetery: In this British military cemetery in Boesinghe near Ypres are the graves of 1643 soldiers, of which 4 are German. The cemetery, which was named after a bridge in the vicinity, “Bard’s Causeway”, was designed by Reginald Blomfield, who was responsible for the creation of many war graves and memorials, such as the Menin Gate.⁴⁴



Essex Farm Cemetery in the 1920s, now also the site of the John McCrae Memorial.



Duhallow Farm Cemetery just after the war.⁴⁵

35 He is very anxious to find the whereabouts of some friends of him who have left Ilfracombe and gone to reside in Weston-super-Mare, so I have promised to set out on a 'voyage of discovery' on his behalf when I return to England!

It was impossible to remain long enough to make a close observation and read the inscription on each grave – they were too numerous – but I saw those of two of P's fellow officers in the H.A.C., and Kipling (the caretaker) pointed out to me the grave of a Clifton lad and asked me if I would call to see his parents when I get back, as they write anxiously enquiring about the condition of their son's grave and he thinks they would be grateful to have reassuring news from one who has personally visited the cemetery. 25 30

I noticed two more British cemeteries a little further along the road, viz: Essex Farm Cemetery and the Duhallow Cemetery, and then, with the exception of one or two brickworks, the road as far as Boesinghe, on either side is literally covered with Belgian and French cemeteries – the number of graves being a silent witness to the fierceness of the battles fought in and around that district. 35

The village of Boesinghe, where we made our next stop, is situated rather less than four miles north of Ypres and was utterly destroyed by the heavy bombardments it suffered.

36 Looking East, a splendid view can be obtained of Pilkhem Ridge, the scene of much fierce fighting.

27-30: and Kipling ... the cemetery. > *left out in B (covered up)*

32: Duhallow Cemetery < Dumhallow Cemetery

27: H.A.C.: stands for Honourable Artillery Company, founded in 1537, it is one of the oldest military organisations. During World War One, several battalions of the company were deployed in important battles such as the First Battle of Ypres.⁴⁶

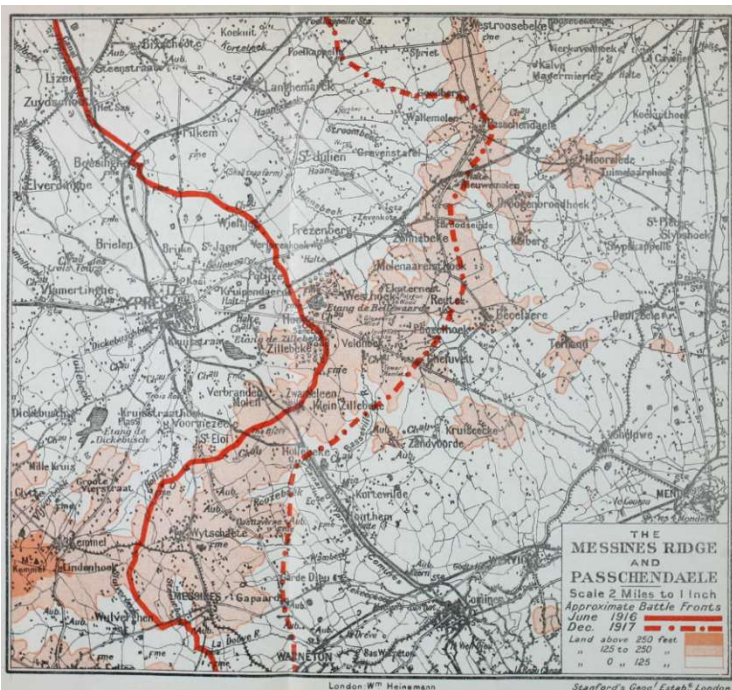
31-32: Essex Farm Cemetery and Duhallow Cemetery: Both cemeteries are located near Ypres. They contain 1204 and 1602 war graves respectively. Essex Farm Cemetery is a part of the John McCrae Memorial site (supra) and Duhallow Cemetery was used as an A.D.S. or an Advanced Dressing Station, providing first aid to wounded soldiers. (*see opposite page*)⁴⁷

38: Pilkhem Ridge: The "fierce fighting" O.M.M. alludes to, probably is the Battle of Pilkhem Ridge which was fought between 31 July and 2 August 1917, marking the start of the Third Battle of Ypres.⁴⁸



Hotel The Splendid just outside the Menin Gate in Ypres in 1919 (now Frenchlaan) where O.M.M. tasted butter of Dixmude for the first time.⁴⁹

Just after the war, a lot of wooden hotels were quickly erected in that street to accommodate the huge amount of British battlefield pilgrims and tourists. In the back, one of the hotels is still in construction. There is still no sign of the Menin Gate Memorial, which would be erected in 1927. In 1925, Hotel The Splendid joined and moved to Hotel Britannique in the new built building on the Ypres Market Place. (Research centre In Flanders Fields, Ypres)



50

Map of the Ypres Salient, the salient-shaped frontline, located on the hills around Ypres (middle left). Due to its form, Ypres was very vulnerable for attacks from three sides. The full red line shows its location between the Second Battle of Ypres (April 1915) and the start of the Third Battle of Ypres (July 1917).

During the Third Battle of Ypres (also called the Battle of Passchendaele), which took place between 31 July and 11 November 1917, the Salient was expanded 8 km eastwards towards Passchendaele, at a cost of c. 450,000 casualties. The dotted line shows the frontline after the Third Battle of Ypres. In April 1918 however, the Germans succeeded to regain the lost land (and even more) in no time during their Spring Offensive.

From Boesinghe it did not take long to cover the four miles to Ypres, which 40
 a Canadian officer aptly describes as “only a heap of ruins and a shell-swept
 graveyard, but an eternal memorial of British valour.”

I will not linger to describe here the devastations at Ypres, for so much has
 been written from time to time in the leading English papers, accompanied in many
 instances by photographs, that you will have read all about it long since, also I believe 45
 I sent you one or two photographs taken there in 1915.

We were recommended to the Hotel Splendid the best in the city at present,
 and here I tasted my first bit of the real Belgian butter. The hotel is only a very
 primitive wooden structure but we were able to obtain all we required and the tariff
 was quite good. 50

Soon after we arrived, it began to rain so I did not attempt to take any
 photographs but I purchased a film in the town where much to my amazement I
 found a shop almost in the midst of a heap of debris!

In the Ypres salient the total number of British graves amounts to 250,000,
 and these are distributed among 400 cemeteries which are scattered over the 55
 battlefields. The largest cemetery containing 13,000 graves is situated just behind
 Poperinghe at Remy Siding – 6 ¼ miles West of Ypres.

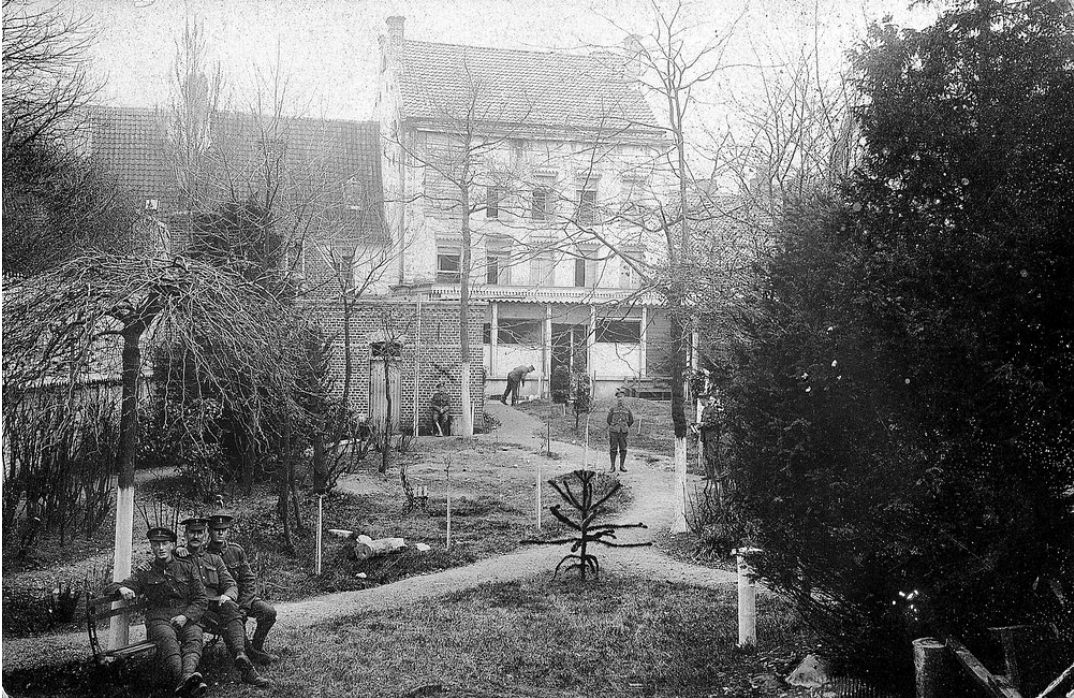
46: in 1915. > B: during the war.

41-42: “only a heap of ruins and a shell-swept graveyard, but an eternal memorial of British valour”: these are the words of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Beckles Willson, a Canadian author who wrote about his experiences during the war. The passage from which O.M.M. picked out this phrase goes as follows: “If we have pledged our honour to Belgium, we are pledged to the hilt to guard the soil of Ypres inviolate from the heel of the living enemy. It is only a heap of ruins, but it is an eternal memorial of British valour. It is only a shell-swept graveyard, but the graves are those of our heroic dead.”

47: Hotel Splendid (*see opposite page*)

54: Ypres alient (*see opposite page*)

56: Remy Siding: at the location of this World War 1 Cemetery, which is called Lijssenthoek Military Cemetery today, a lot of field hospitals and casualty clearing stations could be found during the war. O.M.M.’s statement that it is “the largest cemetery containing 13,000 graves” is not correct. In fact, the cemetery is the second largest Commonwealth war cemetery in Belgium (Tyne Cot Cemetery is the largest), containing 10,754 graves.⁵¹



1916: British soldiers resting in the garden of Talbot House in Poperinge.⁵²



1919: a similar notice from the town mayor of Ypres at the border of the "Zone de silence".⁵³

37 At Poperinghe was established “the Everyman’s Club” (or “Toc H”) and also a store depot and resting station for wounded.

At Poelcapelle, which is about two miles East of Langemarck, are the graves of 60 4,000 bodies found in shell holes, and 3,000 of these bear the inscription “In memory of an unknown soldier.” At the entrance to one of the largest of the cemeteries the following notice is displayed, and translated reads thus:

This was the city of Ypres, one of 65
the most beautiful and historic towns in
Europe. For over four years (1914-18),
two million British soldiers defended it
from the invader. Upwards of two hundred
thousand brave men died in its defence. 70
Its stones are sacred, you are on your
honour to conduct yourself reverently
here. Do nothing to despoil or desecrate
the ruins.

By order,

The Town Major of Ypres.

No words of mine can express the mixed feelings that the sight of those vast acres covered with white crosses arouse, but as I was turning away there came to my mind these words: 80

Wait thou still – it is His Will,
Though the waiting seem unending
And the pain thy heart be rending,
Comfort sure will god be sending, 85
“Wait thou still”.

Wait thou still – ‘tis not for Ill
But for good – His long delaying,
Still to Him be humbly praying 90
And unto thy heart be saying
“Wait thou still”.

80-92: but as I ... “Wait thou still”. > *left out in B (covered up)*

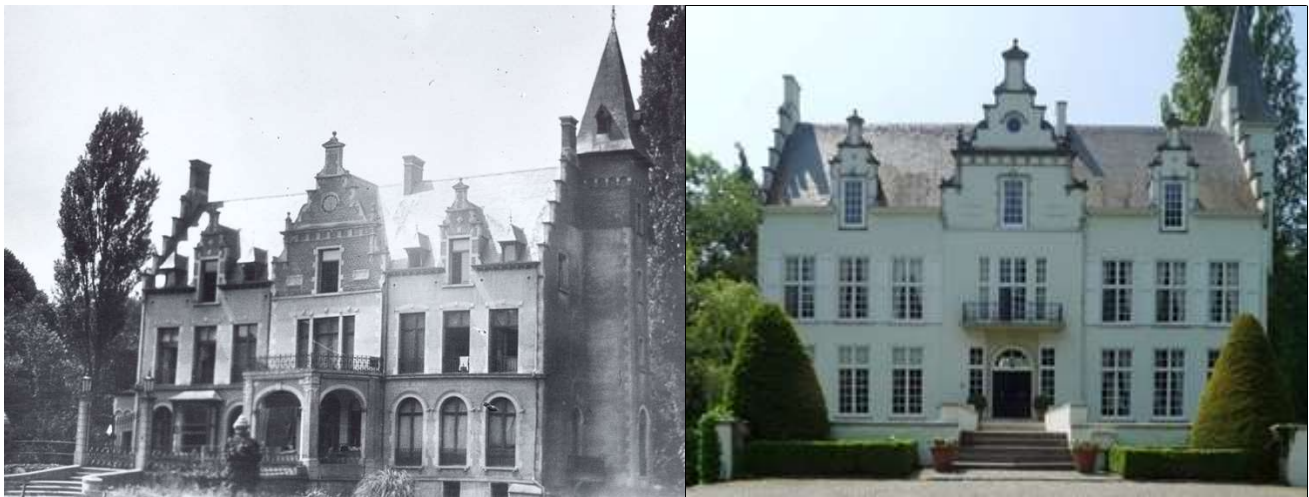
58: “the Everyman’s Club” (or “Toc H”) best known as Talbot House: this was a centre in Poperinghe, founded by Reverend Philip Thomas Byard (Tubby) Clayton, which provided rest and moral recreation for soldiers of any rank from 1915 until the end of the war. (*see opposite page*)⁵⁴



Hell-Fire Corner during the war. Canvas screens were erected next to the Menin road in an attempt to conceal movement from the Germans.

119-122: Chateau des Trois Tours: (Dutch: Kasteel De Drie Torens)

During the war a machine gun post was situated on the castle grounds. As O.M.M. writes, the castle itself was used as the headquarters of the First Canadian Division in 1915 and of the Ypres League, a society founded in 1920 by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Beckles Willson (*supra*) to remember World War One veterans, and the Anglo-Belgian Union, an organization founded in 1918 to preserve the friendship between Great Britain and Belgium.⁵⁵



Château des Trois Tours in 1915 and in 2016

The castle surprisingly survived the war despite its location close to Ypres.⁵⁶

38	Wait thou still – in silence lay All thy longing, all thy tears At His Feet – He ever hears, Soon shall Love cast out thy fears, “Wait thou still”.	95
	Wait thou still – ‘tis not in vain! For in waiting lies renewing Of thy Faith in God, subduing Lurking Doubt, the heart’s undoing, “Wait thou still”.	100
	Wait thou still – until at last God’s great Purpose be revealed That so long had lain concealed, Craving to contentment yield! “Wait thou still”. *	105
	X X X X X X	110

Ten miles south-east of Ypres is Menin – in this town the original Expeditionary Force first entrenched – and about a mile from the Menin Gate of Ypres is Hell-Fire Corner, but there is no indication left to tell of the awful ‘massacres’ that took place there. 115

From Ypres we went on to Brielen, which is roughly about a mile and a half further on the same road. On the way we passed a fine old castle which had been terribly damaged by long distance shells, but the Chateau des Trois Tours nearby, remains unharmed. The headquarters of the First Canadian Division during the second Battle of Ypres, and of several other British divisions up to the Armistice, this chateau is now an hotel and the 120
39 headquarters of the Ypres League and the Anglo-Belgian Union.

*Thanks are due to the author of these (unpublished) verses for permission to include them here.

93-111: *left out in B (covered up)*

123-124: *left out in B (covered up)*

93-109: author unknown

114: Hell-Fire Corner: This junction, situated in the Ypres Salient, where the Ypres-Roulers railroad crossed the Menin Road, got its nickname as a result of the constant firing of the Germans on anything that moved, costing the lives of many British soldiers. (*see opposite page*)⁵⁷

118-121: Chateau des Trois Tours (*see opposite page*)



During the war, Hotel l'Océan, on the coastal embankment in De Panne, was expanded and converted into the famous military hospital L'Océan.⁵⁸

It was necessary to drive very cautiously from Brielen to Elverdinge and 125
 Woesten, for the ground was just honey-combed by shell holes.

Long distance shells had reduced the town hall and a large chicory factory,
 both situated just outside Elverdinge, to a few fragments, and at Woesten the
 church which had been completely shattered during a service when 24 of the
 worshippers were killed, is being rapidly rebuilt. Two British guns, and a railway line, 130
 the latter laid by the Germans, still remain intact to the left of the road leading out
 of Woesten.

Continuing by way of Oost-Vleteren, Elzendamme, and Coxyde, where are
 extensive dunes, La Panne was reached. Here was situated the royal residence in
 1917, and here too was the large Ocean Red Cross Hospital where the Queen of the 135
 Belgians worked in the capacity of nurse and in which the Belgian ex-service man,
 of whom I told you in a previous letter, was nursed back to health by a Bristol nurse.
 The hospital building, originally an orphanage, has passed again into the occupation
 of its rightful owners.

The next little village which we reached was Hoogstade, which had suffered no 140
 40 material damage and had formed a resting base for the men from the trenches.

126, 128 & 132: Woesten < Wolsten

125 & 128: Elverdinge < Elverdinche

140: Hoogstade < Hoogstrode

135: Ocean Red Cross Hospital: During the First World War Hotel l'Océan converted into Hospital l'Océan, initiated by the Belgian queen Elizabeth and run by the Red Cross. It was the largest Belgian front hospital, treating 24,000 casualties. (see opposite page)⁵⁹



1922: two pictures by O.M.M. of the picturesque market square of Furnes. The view has not changed much.



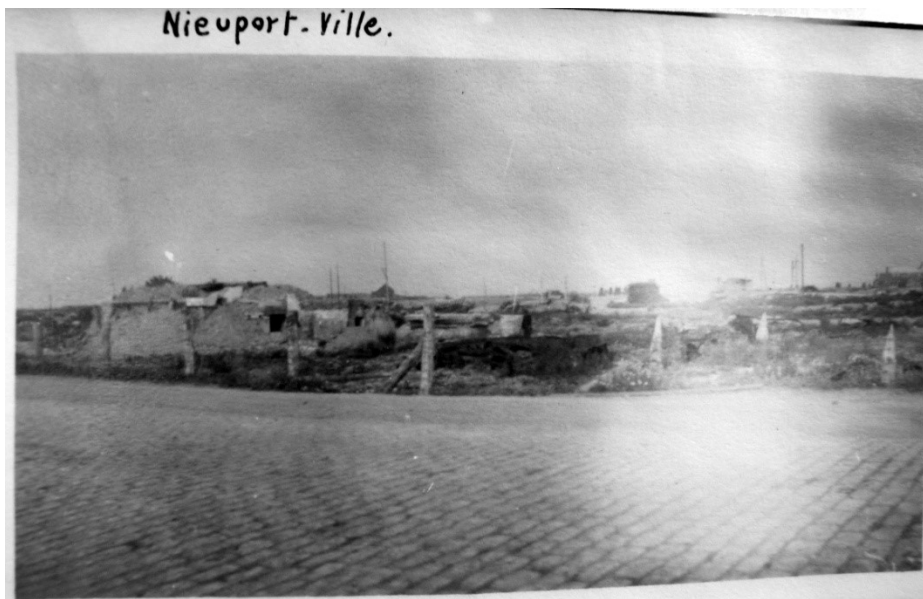
The memorial for the fallen of the 4th Belgian Army Division at Wulpen in 1922 and in 2017. The memorial was erected in 1919 with the initial inscription “Aux morts de la IVE division d’armée”. The Dutch inscription “Aan de gesneuvelden der IVE legerafdeeling” was added later.⁶⁰

- Less than five miles from La Panne is Furnes (Veurne). One of the oldest towns in Belgium, it was the headquarters of the Belgian troops during the whole battle of the Yser. Only one building in the square suffered from the several slight bombardments made on the town, but this might have been attended with very serious consequences: inasmuch as one of the bombs fell immediately behind the King of the Belgians who was reviewing troops there at the time, happily he escaped unhurt. 145
- Leaving Furnes and keeping the canal on our left we reached Léopold by way of Wulpen. At Léopold is the Memorial, a fine piece of architecture, erected in memory of the 4th Division of the Belgian Army. Out of the 40,000 men of which the division was composed and who went into action, only 7,000 returned and the 33,000 killed included the only son of Monsieur B---- whose kindness and unflinching courtesy to us throughout our visit we have deeply appreciated. 150
- Nieuport Ville, where we made the next stop, is an old Flemish town, which in pre-war days boasted a population of 3,600. The tower built by the Templars was of course of especial interest to me! Here the enemy's artillery levelled every building to the ground, and the continual fire destroyed the sluices by which the inflowing sea was held back – the result inflicting a great loss of men and material on both sides, and rendering the trenches something approaching to drains – until it became necessary to bank them up with sandbags. 155
41 160

142: ... Furnes (Veurne). > B: Furnes.

149: "Léopold": It is unclear what place O.M.M. meant because this name cannot be found on any recent or old maps. There was a hotel called "Léopold" in the vicinity however (today it still is a café), and this must be the reason this name is mentioned here. The memorial to which O.M.M. refers, is located along the Veurne-Nieuwpoort canal. (*see opposite page*)⁶¹

156: Tower built by the Templars: this tower is the remnant of the St. Laurentius Church which was destroyed for the most part in 1383. In 1917 the tower was bombarded so badly that only one third of it still remained. Nowadays the ruin is the only visible witness of the Middle Ages and the devastations of WW1 in Nieuport.⁶²



1922: pictures of Nieuport.

The pictures show the remains of the “Grand Redan”, a 17th century bastion on the other side of the Yser estuary, which was also used to defend Nieuport during WW1. British troops defended this section close to the North Sea. After the war, the Grand Redan was opened to the public. This fortification was restored by Belgian engineers in the same style as the Dodengang/Boyau de la Mort (Trench of Death) in Dixmude after the war: new timbers, steel plates and cement bags replaced the authentic remains.

After the ‘hype’ of visiting the site in the first years after the war, it was filled and covered with dredged sand from the Yser estuary and was abandoned. Today, a dredging company occupies this former war site and heaps of sea-won sand lay on top of it.⁶³

In the short period of two years, this town has been practically rebuilt and is a silent testimony to the undaunted and vigorous spirit of the people – for it must not be forgotten that the bricks have first to be made before any work of reconstruction can be commenced. There still remain just outside Nieuport some of the sand bag trenches surrounded by barbed wire entanglements. 165

Lombartzide, a village lying to the East of Nieuport Bains and which was totally destroyed, formed the extreme point of the Belgian front on the Yser, and a water-covered tract of land between it, and Nieuport Bains became during the War no man's land. 170

Through Westende, now almost completely rebuilt, Middlekerke, and Mariakerke we finally arrived back at Ostend.

42 Since I commenced to try to send you descriptive letters of the "post-war battlefields of Flanders", each one has become increasingly difficult to write, and I have become more and more conscious of my inability to paint for you a faithful picture, and this I attribute not only to the fact that, as I told you in my letter from London, I cannot claim to possess that degree of literary talent which makes the successful and pleasing writer, but also to the fact that my mental outlook has experienced something akin to an upheaval, from the effects of which I have not yet completely recovered. 175 180

Jo

173-174: A: "battlefields of Flanders" ; B: "post-war battlefields of Flanders"

177: that degree of > B: any degree of

177-178: which makes the successful and pleasing writer > *left out in B (covered up)*



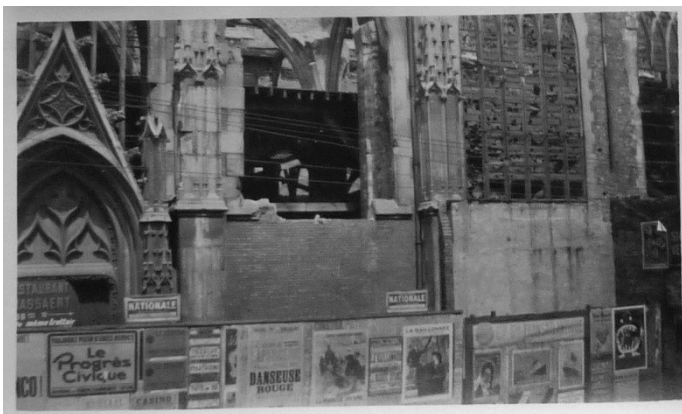
British sand-bag Trench.

1922: "British sand-bag Trench". Newly restored sandbag trenches of the Grand Redan. The restoration works were still in progress at the time of O.M.M.'s visit to the site.



The completely restored Redan, c. 1922-1923 (family collection)

Dunkirk church of St-Eloi in 1922 as seen by O.M.M. and in 2017



Although Dunkirk is situated 35 km behind the World War 1 front, it was severely bombarded during the war by zeppelins and by the 38 mm shells from the Lange Max gun at Koekelare (supra). The main target was the important sea harbour, but it was the old city centre with the gothic St-Eloi church that was hit the most.

During World War 2, Dunkirk suffered even more damage, mainly during Operation Dynamo from 26 May to 4 June 1940 when British troops had to be evacuated after being enclosed by the progressing German army.⁶⁴



1922: the destruction of the St-Eloi Church.



2017: current interior.



1922: demolished houses.

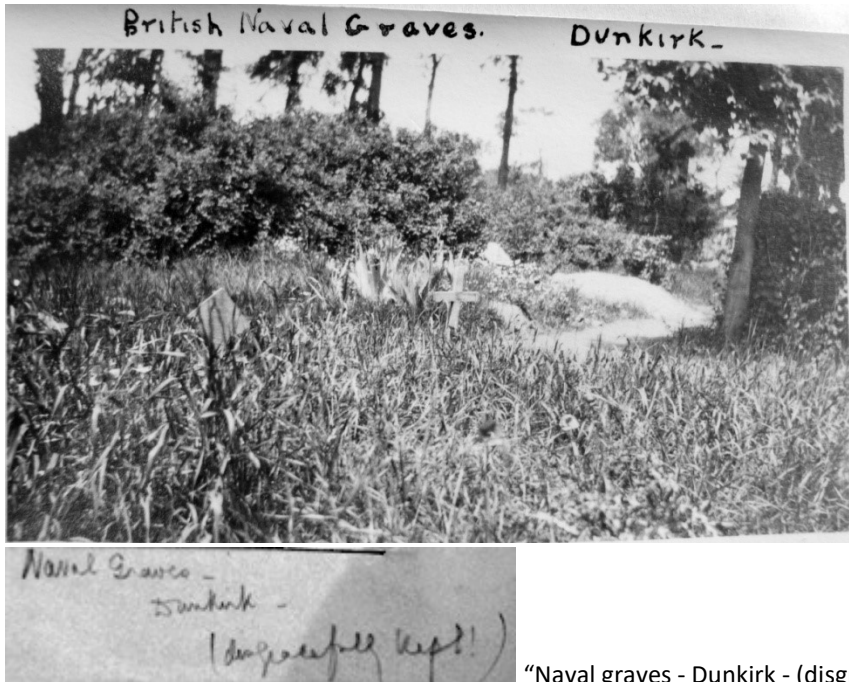


The former Belgian frontier station in Adinkerke in 1922 and 2017 (now a tobacco shop).



1922: the old road Veurne-Dunkirk along the canal called "Veurnevaart".

The British naval graves on Dunkirk's city cemetery as seen and experienced by O.M.M.



"Naval graves - Dunkirk - (disgracefully kept!)"



1922



2017



1922

Rydon,

near Williton,

Wilts,

5

England.

August 7th

We left Ostend July 29th, arriving in London on the evening of that day. On Sunday I attended the Westminster School Election Day special morning service at the Abbey where I met many old friends. 10

In the afternoon to my great delight C---- called at the hotel and over tea we were able to have a long chat.

Much has happened since the memorable night when we were last together and eventually lost each other amid a rain of shells, but those are experiences to be relegated to the back shelf of memory. 15

We were compelled at the last moment to cancel the visit to Holland which we had planned to make before returning to England and I did not write you of our visit to Mde. H----y in France as I felt I should so soon be able to tell you about it.

I was able to make a fairly thorough inspection of the damage caused in and around Dunkirk by the big German siege gun of which I wrote to you in one of my letters. The church of St. Eloi there had suffered very badly. 20

3: Rydon > *left out in B (crossed out)*

5: Wilts, > *left out in B (crossed out)*

14-16: > *left out in B (covered up)*

18-19: A: our trip into France ; B: our visit to Mde. H----y in France

3-5: Rydon is a hamlet 3 km north east of Williton, in county Somerset, not Wiltshire.

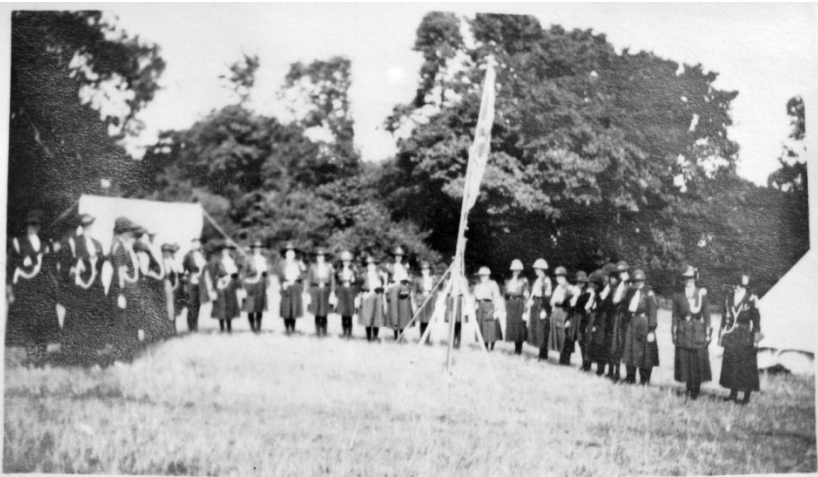
10: Westminster School Election Day: Westminster School is a very old and prestigious public school in London. On Election Day, dons of the most important universities "choose their scholars for the next year".⁶⁵



1922: General view of the camp in the meadow behind Rydon farm at Williton.

M. J. B.

UK-version: written, and at the back of the photo: "Assis: CC of Bill."



At Malo-les-Bains the casino's café is just a skeleton building while in Bergues this same
 44 gun (from which, you will remember I told you, shells were fired at an average rate of one
 every two minutes) had reduced entire rows of houses to heaps of stone and mortar, while 25
 the shell holes in the streets must be seen to realize their number and size.

We remained in London until August 1st, and then returned home and last
 Saturday I came to join the 2nd and 3rd Companies of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides
 who are in camp here.

The weather has been terribly stormy and the ground in places is a regular 30
 quagmire, but if storm clouds obscure the sun in the sky they cannot hide the sunshine
 that radiates from the occupants of this camp.

The site chosen is delightful – two miles from the village in a field high up on a hill
 with the sea just below – and the tents present a picturesque and effective background
 against the dark blue of the guide uniform. 35

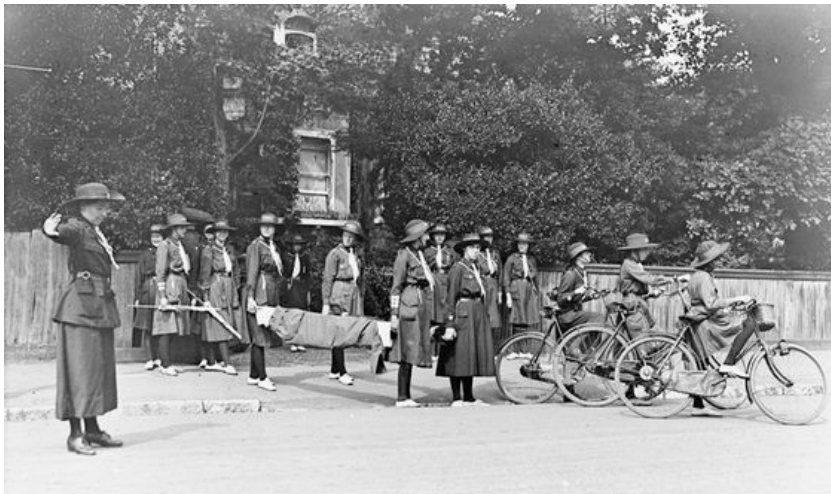
It was too wet to go to the village church yesterday and so in the evening the
 Guiders arranged to hold a service in a barn here – it reminded me of a service I once
 attended during the War held amid very similar surroundings save that it was not quite so
 peaceful and certainly not so safe! The whole 'setting' of our service yesterday touched
 me deeply – there was a compelling power in its grand simplicity. 40

28: Weston-super-Mare > *left out in B (covered up and crossed out)*

39-40: The whole ... grand simplicity. > *left out in B (covered up)*

28: Girl Guides: *(see next page)*

Girls Guides: This association was formed in 1910 by Robert Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes. The Girl Guides had a very active role during World War 1, providing clothes for the British soldiers, assisting in first-aid stations, hospitals and munitions factories.⁶⁶



WW1: Girl Guides during a demonstration.⁶⁷

45 I am not sleeping under canvas (still a wretched 'crock' you see!) but occupy
 a bedroom in a cottage quite near to the camp, and tonight as I sit writing at the
 open window, in place of the restless, dispirited hopelessness which well-nigh
 overwhelmed me when I first reached Rydon, I am conscious of a deeper rest of mind
 and spirit that I have not known for many long months. And I think perhaps this is 45
 not entirely due to the persuasive charm of living so near to nature, but also to the
 fact that I am beginning to hope that in the whole Girl Guide and Boy Scout
 Movements an answer may be found to that eternal question – "Was it worthwhile?"

The darkness has folded her arms around the world very gently tonight and
 a deep hush is over all, in the distance I can just discern the tops of the tents and 50
 hear the gentle lap of the waves as they tumble drowsily on to the shore – except
 for this and the occasional hoot of an owl, the wonderful stillness is unbroken. The
 faint scent of a wet and refreshed earth steals in through my open window and
 lingers – just a breath of dear old Mother-Earth come to comfort my loneliness – for
 tonight in spite of that new-found sense of rest, I cannot help feeling a little lonely 55
 and ineffably sad, and I am not ashamed to own to a big ache in my heart and a mist
 before my eyes as I realize that with the breaking of camp tomorrow, I bid goodbye
 to the company that has become so inexpressively dear to me.

44: Rydon > B: camp

44: deeper rest of mind and spirit > B: rest of mind

45: A: than I have known ; B: that I have not known

45: A: I think this is ; B: I think perhaps

47: A: find here and in ... an answer to ; B: hope that in ... an answer may be found to

52: wonderful stillness > B: stillness

54-58: just a breath ... dear to me. > *left out in B (crossed out and covered up)*

46 As I look out over the scene before me, my thoughts stray to that other field
 across the sea – the same old moon that shines down on the white tents of this camp 60
 shines down on the long rows of white crosses over there, and I just want to whisper
 a message through the night to those men on ‘my’ hilltop to tell them that the big
 band of women and girls, men and boys who are united as Guides and Scouts have
 not forgotten and never will forget, and that they will strive by their lives to fulfil the
 great trust left to them and to uphold the finest traditions of the dear old country. 65

The knowledge that I shall no longer have a part with them in this privileged
 work of practical remembrance, but must henceforth remain outside, ‘tugs’ at my
 heart. Ah! Will those men on ‘my’ hilltop understand that I must carry through
 another piece of work now according to a promise given, the execution of which will
 make it impossible to give of my best to Guide work – will they understand that it is 70
 because I cannot offer anything less than my best that I am saying goodbye to my
 Company tomorrow? I wonder.

So often during these days in camp I have caught glimpses of that spirit of
 fine pluck and endurance which again and again I saw displayed by our soldiers
 during the War. 75

61: A: and I feel I just want to ; B: and I just want to

64: and never will forget > B: (and surely they never will forget?)

64-65: A: they are striving ... trust and ; B: they will strive ... trust left to them and

65: dear old country. > B: old country.

66-72: > *left out in B (covered up)*

And old England still needs today that splendid courage and selfless spirit of sacrifice that
 so many of her women and girls gave her in those war-darkened days, and the task and
 47 responsibility of Guiders and Guides is not light – there must and will be times of stress,
 bringing weariness and perplexing doubts to them and to us all, but we must keep steadily
 on and however dark it may be, try to remember like the man who: 80

Never turned his back
 But marched breast forward,
 Never dreamed tho' right were
 Worst, wrong would triumph – 85
 Held – we fall to rise
 Are baffled – to fight better.

The spirit of friendship and cooperation that prevails in the Guide and Scout
 Movements is to me a cause for deep thankfulness, and you who know something of my 90
 thoughts on friendship will understand why I note with ever increasing appreciation the
 high standard of friendship which it is their aim to promote. And because “like attracts
 like” and because we inevitably love what pleases us and what appears to be worthy in
 our estimation, I do earnestly trust that the day will dawn when we shall each one of us
 learn to see and recognise beauty and worth in all around us and so grow to love the 95
 highest quite naturally and as naturally avoid the unworthy.

No one can gauge the extent to which our friendships affect our whole life and
 those of the people to whom we give our affection and trust. It is the thing that perhaps
 matters more than anything else in our life, because of its far-reaching influence.

76: And old England > B: And England

77: A: that her women ; B: that so many of her women

80-87: and however ... fight better. > *left out in B (covered up)*

89: that prevails in the > B: in

82-87: These lines come from the famous poet Robert Browning's (1812-1889) “Epilogue” to Asolando, his last
 work, which was published the day of his death. O.M.M. made some omissions and changes to the stanza (which
 is the third of a total of four stanzas). The original lines are as follows:

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.⁶⁸

48 “Friendship is one of the appointed means of saving life from worldliness and selfishness – it is a moral preservative”, (and there is no room in it for anything approaching to pettiness and small-mindedness) and to lavish admiration, trust, love, on an unworthy person who will only absorb as much as we can give in order to rob and degrade us, can only end in disaster. 100

We can be friendly with most, but real friends are rare, and if we have a true friend, let us be thankful and cherish the friendship as a priceless treasure, and see to it that we are ever more and more worthy of such a good gift. Let us pour out our best to our friend and help him or her to give us back the best – remembering that “a great love can see and own defects in the object of its affection, and still love on, but a little love fears the truth and seeks to hide it”, and above all let us never forget in all our dealings with our friends the great words “in Honour preferring one another.” 105 110

49 “How few of us have real sympathy for friendship – it is easy to say ‘I am sorry for you’, but does the heart ache while we say it? It is easy to say ‘I congratulate you’ but does the sky shine brighter for our friend’s joy?” And how few of us realize when we offer our sympathies that sympathy in the full significance of the word means “to feel with” – as far as it is possible for one human soul to enter into the sacred recesses of another. 115

105-106: A: have a real true friend ; B: have a true friend

106: A: let us thank God for it ; B: let us be thankful and

110-111: and above ... one another.” > *left out in B (crossed out)*

100-101: “Friendship is one ... a moral preservative”: O.M.M. quotes a few lines here from *The Art of Being a Good Friend*, a book about worldly and spiritual friendship, written by Hugh Black (1868-1953), a theologian and an author.⁶⁹

108-110: author unknown

111: “in Honour preferring one another”: Romans 12:10⁷⁰

112-114: author unknown

It has been said, and I think with some truth, that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who lean and those who are leaned on, and I think too, that often those who lean are apt to forget (but often with a quite unintentional thoughtlessness) that those to whom they turn for counsel and support are themselves oft-times weary, and spent and tired at heart. It sometimes happens too, that these in their love and desire to help, take another's whole burden upon their own shoulders, and somehow I have always felt this to be a mistake – that to help others, to bear, or look beyond their own burdens to help them to 'stand on their own feet' and to think of and for others seems to me to be the only true wisdom and kinder way although often it is the harder part – for should a time come when the support and counsel of that friend is removed, it is reasonable to believe that the other may find himself in the almost desperate position of a cripple who, possessing only one leg, is left without even a stick to aid him in keeping his balance and assist him to walk. 120 125 130

I would firmly discourage too, but with all patience and tenderness, that phase of adoration for some one person which finds expression in excessive emotional demonstration and which, unless checked or guided by a far-seeing, wise and tender hand is so harmful to boys and girls in the adolescent stage of life – a phase also that alas, is sometimes present in friendships among those of more mature years. 135

50

119: A: but with ; B: but often with

123-124: A: to help ... their own ; B: that to help ... or look beyond their own

124-125: A: own feet' seems ... the truest ; B: own feet' and to think of and for others seems ... the only true

126-130: for should ... to walk. > *left out in B (crossed out)*

131: A: I would discourage ; B: I would firmly discourage

132-133: in emotional demonstration; B: in excessive emotional demonstration

Lean not on one mind constantly,
 Lest where one stood before, two fall;
 Something God has to say to thee
 Worth hearing, from the lips of all. 140

Repression is bad, undue excess of demonstration is bad, both are extremes.
 It is the well-balanced giving out when and where the need is greatest that keeps
 one straight if predisposed to unbalanced giving out just to satisfy one's own desire
 to give. 145

Even in married love (which is the highest in human love – when found at its
 best) there is the 'give and take'. The one does not offer unceasingly the "gold and
 silver of the heart" forgetting that the other would like something simpler at times,
 and a wise control is essential to love and friendship if they are to flow in deep
 untroubled serenity. 150

The very cream and essence of love's joy is surely to supply another's need –
whatever the need may be. And into that greater love – which is absolutely selfless
 – the question of having love requited should not enter at all. To love wisely and
 serve wisely – not to be loved and to be served – is the ideal, and we all can get there
 only gradually helped by each other, and taught by all life's experiences. One can 155
 never be sure how long requited love may be ours. Death, change, illness may touch
 51 it, but the other is indestructible and is its own rich reward and has its own
 imperishable glory.

137-140: > *left out in B (covered up)*

143: A: where the need ; B: when and where the need

144-145: just to ... to give. > *left out in B (covered up)*

149: A: control over one's demonstrative impulse is essential ; B: control is essential

151: A: joy is to supply ; B: joy is surely to supply

153: A: I think the question ; B: the question

153: A: love requited does not ; B: love requited should

153-154: A: To love and serve ; B: To love wisely and serve wisely

154-155: A: we all have to get there gradually, and ; B: we all can get there only gradually helped by
 each other, and

158: imperishable glory. > B: imperishable glory. ... Do you agree?

137-140: This is a short untitled poem by Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Earl of Lytton (1831-1891) who wrote under
 the pseudonym of Owen Meredith. The poem appeared in *Clytemnestra and other poems* (1855).⁷¹

Often I have been told that my Ideals are much too high and accordingly impossible to attain, but I cannot believe that one's ideals can be too high, and surely it is the aim that matter rather than the hit? – for it is hard, desperately hard to aim straight and true, especially when the way lies over a long and difficult road, but have we the right to live contentedly at the foot of the heights we are meant to scale? Each has his part to play in the Eternal Scheme.

165

When the One Great Scorer comes
To write against "Our" Name,
He writes - not what/how we won or lost -
But how we played the Game.

170

Ah! How well I understand the gripping despair which at times overwhelms everything like a desperate physical pain – how well I know the doubts and fears born from discordant strife and loneliness, when with one's back to light and hope the ideal of love is lost in the relentlessness that makes of life a desert bleak and bare.

Only too well I am aware of my own shortcomings and failure to achieve, and am deeply conscious that I am still only at the very foot of the ladder that leads to the heights; and if in revealing to some extent my inmost thoughts to you in these letters I have inadvertently conveyed the impression that I have left the valley behind and reached the top of the hill, let me beg of you to banish any such ideas from your mind.

162-163: A: difficult road. Ah! ; B: difficult road, but have ... to scale?

163-169: Each has ... the Game. > *added in B (on the left page)*

171: Ah! How well > *left out in B (crossed out)*

171: despair which at time overwhelms > B: despair which can overwhelm

172: how well I know the doubt > B: ... I know too the doubts

173: A: ... strife and lonely pain ; B: strife and loneliness

173-174: A: the God of love is lost sight of, lost in ; B: the ideal of love is lost in

174: relentlessness that makes of life a desert bleak and bare. > B: relentlessness of life.

176: I am still only > B: I am only

177: A: thoughts in ; B: thoughts to you in

166-169: These are the last two lines of the poem "Alumnus Football" by Henry Grantland Rice (1880-1954), an American sportswriter. As the title suggests, the poem is an account of the life of a great American football player who, despite of the misfortunes in his later life, never gave up trying to be successful. O.M.M. again changed some of the words so they would fit better in her religious narrative. The original lines by Rice go as follows: "For when the One Great Scorer comes to write against your name / He marks—not that you won or lost—but how you played the game."⁷²

To any who may be journeying through the desert and groping in the gloom, I would like 180
 52 just to say that I have come to believe that one cannot always learn faith and trust in full
 light and ease – it is during the dark times of test and endurance that the first beginnings
 of faith come and to these I would say also:

Bear, suffer, agonise, nor think it waste, 185
 Wait through the wearing travail – yea, not haste
 To see the fruits of agony too soon,
 Nor find the peace of eventide ere noon
 Hath done her work, or pain hath paved the way
 For righteous ending of the laboured day. 190
 Enough to know that naught of strife is lost,
 That what is gained at most tremendous cost
 Is thine as cheaper thins can never be, -
 Thine with the strength of all eternity.

195
 Enough to know that when thy wings are born
 Thou too, shall view the glory of the morn
 With god upon the heights – thou too, shalt see
 How worth all agony and stress must be
 Which leads to this. Some other soul content 200
 With the warm valley's road, on fullness bent
 Crawls through the fruited orchards, clutching food
 Fallen to earth to satisfy his mood.
 But thou, my son, art made to reach the heights
 Through pain, to learn, in upward flights 205
 The mystery which led thee far away
 From sympathy and peace an hopeful day.
 Fear not – thou too most certainly shall find
 In god's good time food for thy panting mind
 And hungry heart a sustenance of soul, 210
 God - planted on the peaks to make men whole.

P.T.O.

X X X X X X

180-181: To any ... I have > *left out in B (covered up)*

181: believe that one > B: think that perhaps one

182: and ease – it is > B: and ease – that possibly it is

183: and to these I would say also: > B: I wonder so much:

185-211: This poem was written by Minnie Louise Haskins; just like the poem at the beginning of the typescript, this one was published in *The Gate of the Year* (1940).⁷³

212: It is unclear to what the abbreviation "P.T.O." refers.

53 Whatever the future may bring throughout my life, I shall treasure the 215
 friends I have made and the memory of my association with the 2nd Company. And if
 the way lies through the shadows I know that the darkness can never again be quite
 so black because there will ever be with me this star to light up the gloom, inspiring
 me to go forward a fresh hope and courage.

 And now I must close this the last letter of my 'journal', for the first signs of 220
 dawn are already stealing into the room and I must snatch a few hours sleep before
 presenting myself in the camp for breakfast. To bid goodnight to you and the men
 sleeping on 'my' Hill top and to say goodbye to my company, I would that I could
 sound, very softly, the bugle call, which to me has always resolved itself into a
 benediction but never so truly as in the peace and grandeur of this night: 225

 "Day is done,
 Gone the sun
 From the sea,
 From the hills, 230
 From the sky.
 All is well
 Safely rest,
 God is nigh."

 Au revoir, 235

 Jo

215-237: > left out in B (covered up)

227-234: This is the first verse of the so-called "Taps", a bugle call at the end of the day. The "Taps", sometimes referred to as "Butterfield's Lullaby" (after the composer of its tune, Brigadier General Daniel Butterfield) or "Day is done" (after its first line), is of military origin and is often played at United States military funerals. It is also linked to Guides and Scouts movements all around the world, as is the case here. The "Taps" can be compared to the "Last Post", which serves the same purpose of a military salute, but for the Commonwealth nations. Both calls are associated with World War 1 and are used to commemorate those who have been killed as a result of it.⁷⁴

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PART III
ANALYSIS

This third and final part of this paper will be dedicated to a text analysis of Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*. It is the aim, by taking a closer look at certain passages from the typescript, to get a better understanding of the text. In a first chapter, an attempt will be made to find an answer to the question why O.M.M. chose to write about her trip to Belgium. In the second chapter, the focus will lie on the author's writing style, especially on the combination of factual and philosophical or religious comments.

1. O.M.M.'s Motivation

The logical first step is to focus on O.M.M.'s foreword. It is the shortest letter of the typescript and it serves as an introduction to the following ones. This introductory letter has two explicit functions: clarifying what will be described in the other letters, namely "a written account of my doings together with my impressions of 'men and things'", and apologizing for any false or badly written information: "my literary talents even in the matter of letter-writing are nil . . . [I] will try to write you a faithful account – begging you once again to overlook all faults of penmanship". What is most important in this foreword however, is that O.M.M. clearly states that she will only write the letters because her addressee, Billie, specifically asked her to: "if I accede to your request and send you from time to time all the news I can, you must understand quite clearly that I do so only with the object of pleasing you" (Foreword). Without the background information about O.M.M. and the creation of her typescript, which has been discussed in Part I of this paper, one could easily accept that this Billie had indeed requested her to inform him about the situation in Belgium, which would immediately answer the question of O.M.M.'s motivation to write the letters. However, with the knowledge that Billie most likely refers to William Vincent, Olive Mary's dead brother, the credibility of the request and thus of her reason to write about the trip, seems to be lost. Imagining her brother as still alive and capable of asking her the favour of regular correspondence, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements clearly creates a fiction as a framework for her realistic reports.

From the research that has been undertaken, it is almost certain that the letters in the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript were never sent as letters as such. Taking this into account, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' text can be read as a personal travel journal. One can only speculate as to why she chose an epistolary narrative as the basis of her diary, but it is not hard to come up with two possible reasons. Firstly, it could have been a means to structure the notes and observations she had made during the trip. This theory can be supported by the fact that each letter correlates with one chapter of the typescript. Secondly, O.M.M. might have opted to share her comments in the form of requested letters to distance herself from the full responsibility of her writings. Her motive for doing so could be explained by the fact that she seemed insecure about her skills as a writer and (historically) accurate

observer. This already became clear in the foreword, but there is another case in which O.M.M. expresses her self-doubt by stating that she has “become more and more conscious of [her] inability to paint . . . a faithful picture, and [that she attributes this] . . . to the fact that, as [she] told in [her] letter from London, [she] cannot claim to possess that degree of literary talent which makes the successful and pleasing writer” (41).

If *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* was intended solely as a personal document however, which the concept of a travel diary suggests, why did Olive Mary Mercer-Clements feel she had to apologize for her supposed inability to write a faithful account? A possible answer to this question is that she did not intend to keep the typescript to herself, but that she wanted it to be read by others. This hypothesis would certainly explain why O.M.M. made so many corrections in the second version of the text. She edited the letters so that in her eyes they would be more suitable or appealing to any possible readers. On the whole, it is apparent that there are two main types of alterations: corrections in the more philosophical passages, which will be discussed in the next chapter, and modifications in those cases where O.M.M.’s narrative was too revealing of her personal life. Interestingly, she tried to erase every trace that would expose her or her family’s identity. Some examples of this have already been discussed in chapter one, such as Olive Mary Mercer-Clements leaving out the date of her letters, or hiding the location of the Second Company of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides in the revised version, but similar procedures can be found further along in the text, for example in the passage on page 4 and 5 where she reminisced about her war service. Seeing that she here referred to her “days in the W.F.C.” and to a friend of her (‘Quin’), and that this information would reveal too much about herself, she completely covered it up (4). But even from the A-version of the typescript, in which the text is unaltered, it had already become clear that Olive Mary Mercer-Clements had tried to stay anonymous. A passage which clearly shows this, describes the moment at which O.M.M. and her parents visited the grave of William Vincent at the cemetery in Huy: “We found the grave we had come to visit among those of the British soldiers – each marked by a wooden cross bearing name, rank regiment and all particulars” (9). O.M.M.’s description is very superficial, not only taking away any personal information, but at the same time also the significance of the moment; seeing the grave of her brother for the first time, undoubtedly something which aroused a lot of emotions, is here almost depicted as trivial.

To briefly summarise this chapter, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements most likely created *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* as a travel journal with a possible publication in mind. The fact that she organized the typescript in the form of requested letters as a way to create some distance towards her private emotions, that she wanted to make clear that she did not consider herself to be a skilful writer and that she did make sure to cover up all the information that could reveal her identity, might suggest

that she was not comfortable enough in her writing and that she therefore wanted to stay anonymous, in case her text would ever be published.

However, this hypothesis cannot be simply taken for granted. Her claim to be an awkward writer is denied by the actual quality of her writing, as will appear in a stylistic analysis. It may be part of the fiction she creates right from the start by claiming to correspond with a brother who is in fact no longer alive. Making her emotions part of a fiction, and claiming to write only clumsy little reports on the facts, helps her create the distance she needs to cope with her emotional trauma. Presenting herself as a clumsy reporter of facts, whilst addressing herself to a second person rather than simply remaining in the mode of self-expression, allows her to look at herself and her surroundings more objectively.

2. O.M.M.'s Writing Style: Facts versus Emotions

As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis as well as in Part I, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' typescript is a post-World War 1 account with a hybrid character. On the one hand it is very descriptive, fulfilling the promise O.M.M. made in the foreword: "I hope to visit some, at least, of the battlefields . . . and will try to write you a faithful account", but on the other hand, the text often deviates from this plan as a result of the many instances in which O.M.M. switched from factual descriptions to philosophical reflections, which are often complemented by quotations from poems or religious texts such as the Bible. In this chapter, which will explore the typescript letter by letter, both writing styles and the way in which they correlate with each other will be submitted to a closer examination.

2.1. Letter 1

When reading the first letter of *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*, one immediately has the feeling that one is reading a real, personal message, because its content is clearly addressed to someone who knew Olive Mary Mercer-Clements well. This feeling could be explained by the fact that O.M.M. hints at certain events or refers to certain people without going into detail about them, suggesting that the addressee would know what she was talking about, whereas to any other person it is not clear, for example:

We have been to Namur – the country all the way from Brussels is very hilly and wooded and I was constantly reminded of some parts of our English scenery – once especially I was reminded of C---- Park, it only required Sir George an Lady B---- to come along with hounds! And again further on, part of an extensive forest recalled very vividly Sir Robert H--- and his beloved B----k Park. (5)

Another explanation for the fact that the first letter feels so personal, is O.M.M.'s apparent eagerness to share some amusing anecdotes about her adventures during the war. In one of those instances she remembers her

days in the W.F.C. when the hard and heavily nailed boots provided by a generous government (!) were still capable of reducing 'freshers' to the verge of tears, and poor old 'Quin' having come to the conclusion that the only pliable spot in the whole footwear was at that corner of the leather (I use the term leather figuratively!) where the weight of the stamping machine had left an impress of the now well known arrow, in desperation discarded the offending articles and continued her homeward journey bare footed! (4-5)

This passage is not only entertaining because of the story that is being told, but also because of the way O.M.M. describes it. Her use of exclamation marks between brackets reveal her sense of humour and that she did not mind adding some ironic comments from time to time. As was also the case in the previous quotation, part of the humour is based on a mutual understanding between two people who know each other well, and not all the implications are clear to other readers.

Apart from the more personal character of the first letter, one can already notice the first instances of O.M.M.'s factual descriptions relating to the war. She reports, among others, on the fate of Ostend, which suffered a lot of damage, and on the bravery of the people of Brussels to stand up against the German occupation.

2.2. Letter 2

The second letter likewise starts with a descriptive passage, this time relating the history of Huy and its role during the war. Immediately after this however, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements exchanges her objective, detached way of writing for an empathic one, when remembering the conversation she had with a local woman:

She was a woman of splendid physique and had very fine features, but it was her eyes that arrested my attention and set me wondering – for in spite of a cheerful manner, the eyes held in their depths an inexpressible sadness behind which there seemed to lurk an expression almost akin to horror. I had a chat with her and later learned of a terrible experience that she had been through when the town was besieged – and the story was vouched for on good authority. (8)

It is clear that O.M.M. was deeply touched by the woman and her story, and it is perhaps this moment, in combination with the visit to her brother's grave, high above the Meuse valley, which is described on the next page, which leads to the first philosophical passage of the typescript:

That hill top is a wonderfully peaceful spot commanding a fine view – there was time to think up there and much to think about. As I looked out over that scene and down into the valley I pictured it again as it was in those awful days and the old old question arose unbidden to my mind “Was it worthwhile?” – and it just seemed to me then as it does now, that all these men in giving their lives, left to us who remain a very sacred trust – a trust that we must each one of us strive to fulfil if their sacrifice is not to be in vain. (9-10)

This paragraph is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, it is the first mention of the hill top to which Olive Mary Mercer-Clements would refer as ‘my’ hilltop on different occasions in the following letters, revealing how deep an impression the sight of the graves of her brother and his comrades has left on her, and secondly because O.M.M. here asks the question which was on the minds of so many people who had witnessed the terrible effects of the war: did all these people suffer and die for a good cause, or was it all in vain? Her answer to this is quite negative, she writes that “the nation has not learnt many lessons, which the best men and women hoped for, and [that] there does appear to be grave cause for anxiety wherever one looks, both at home and abroad” (10). Could this emotional comment refer to the Second World War? It certainly seems that, at the time O.M.M. wrote this, there were (growing) tensions both in England and other countries. As a result of the terrible realization that the end of World War 1 has not put a stop to the violence, she turned to her Christian beliefs, subjecting the rest of the letter to religious reflection, in the hope of finding a solution:

I cannot help feeling that there would be less suffering and perhaps less evil abroad in our midst today if only those who call themselves Christians could realize and learn through their love of one or two a wide deep love for all, a love that shall seek to spend itself wisely in service all through life . . . (12)

In the midst of these contemplations, O.M.M. quotes the following lines from Alfred Tennyson's poem “Marriage Morning”:

Heart, are you great enough
For a love that never tires?
O heart, are you great enough for love?
I have heard of thorns and briers.¹

As the title suggests, it is a wedding-themed poem, and the love that is mentioned throughout the poem is of a romantic kind. However, by selecting only 4 lines of the poem (which originally consists of 24 lines) and by placing them in a context of religious reflection, O.M.M. changed the meaning of Tennyson's words completely. Where the speaker originally expressed their insecurity about being able to love someone forever, they now wonder if they are capable and worthy enough to love like God wants them to. A distinction can thus be made between natural love and spiritual love. O.M.M. made this dichotomy clear herself by quoting the Bible a few lines further: "first the natural and then the spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46), before you are capable of loving God (spiritual), you have to love your neighbours first (natural): "for if a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how then shall he love God whom he hath not seen?" (John 4:20) (13). It is interesting to see that O.M.M. wanted to leave out this last passage, covering it up in the B-version of the typescript, in spite of the fact that she was a very religious person. Maybe she felt that it was superfluous, or that she had already deviated too much from her promise of giving objective descriptions of her trip. Either way, she finished her second letter by apologizing for "writing all that is in [her] heart" (13).

2.3. Letter 3

In contrast to the second letter, letter 3 is a very descriptive one, specifically focussing on the Belgian coastal towns and how they experienced the war. The information O.M.M. gives here is very detailed, suggesting that she must have read it in a battlefield guide. Nevertheless, there are some passages where O.M.M.'s personal input can be read. In one of the paragraphs for example, she wondered whether the citizens of Zeebrugge had suffered as much as the people in Huy: "[R]ecalling the reluctance of the people of Huy to speak of "La Guerre" and the Germans I wondered . . . if the reputed silence of the inhabitants of the Valley of the Meuse had overshadowed the people of Zeebrugge too" (14-15).

Another passage again shows Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' sense of humour when she comments on the terrible state of the roads: "the roads now (if one can call them by so dignified a name) were full of shell holes, some of which had been loosely filled up and others only partially so – our chauffeur was a very skilful driver and he needed to be!" (20).

Right before the end of her third letter, there is an interesting paragraph which deserves some attention as well, even though O.M.M. omitted it in the revised version of the typescript. It is a passage in which she described an almost transcendental experience, as the result of her physical closeness to the grave of an unknown Belgian soldier, in which her

mind leapt back over the years and [in which she] saw this place as it was in the days when war was raging . . . in a mental picture I saw him [i.e. the Belgian soldier] there on the enemy's

ground exhausted, spent and alone in the darkness yet facing the odds with firm resolve in eyes grown bloodshot and weary, and then I saw him worn out physically and mentally, and fatally wounded just slipping away out of reach of further horrors and suffering – dying alone, alone with God and his own brave heart (22).

In her essay “Recalling the Ghosts of War”², Jennifer Iles writes that such feelings of being overwhelmed by the past were “commonly expressed by tourists who were surprised by the emotional impact of the cemeteries and memorials” (172). It is indeed clear that O.M.M.’s feelings of compassion are taking over from the objective observer within her.

2.4. Letter 4

That Olive Mary Mercer-Clements was a very empathic person, becomes very clear in letter 4 as well. When giving an account of the post-war situation of Dixmude, the largest part of her descriptions is dedicated to the people of this completely destroyed town. She noticed how, despite their primitive housing situation, “the predominating spirit was one of thankfulness that they had a roof to cover them and at last could feel safe” (24). Although O.M.M. explicitly showed respect to the people of Dixmude, it is clear that she admired all the Belgians who had suffered great loss during the war, praising them for their perseverance in trying to pick up their pre-war lives:

To realize the sheer unconquerable grit of the people, one must see for oneself the appalling state of this part of the country which is just one vast expanse of utter desolation – one must realize too that these men and some of the women also, in addition to losing relatives, friends, and possessions, have endured the most cruel hardships and been forced to witness some of the most terrible horrors and atrocities. The tendency of the Belgian temperament inclines to the bright and cheerful and this to a certain degree must help to foster the spirit of pluck that exists but, it needs something else besides a cheerful temperament to rise above the overwhelming sufferings of those years of war and not become a crushed and broken people. (25-26)

In another passage, O.M.M. described a similar transcendental experience as the one in the third letter. This time however, she not only observes a suffering soldier from a distance, but instead she seems to become one herself, hearing and feeling life in the trenches all around her. Although she again left this paragraph out, it served as the introduction for another religious reflection, because it made her think about the expression of “going over the top”. The literal meaning refers to the soldiers climbing over the top of the trenches to launch an attack, but for O.M.M. it also meant giving

everything you have to offer, to help others. She asks the question if England and all its citizens “have done and are doing [their] utmost to help the men who fought for [them]” and if they are “willing to endure, willing to sacrifice luxuries, pleasures and personal comforts in order to lighten the burdens of those who, when wearing the hospital red, white and blue, [they] petted and fêted as heroes” (30). In other words, O.M.M. is asking everyone to follow the example of Christ who experienced “exile, poverty, homelessness, loneliness, enmity and persecution” and eventually death as the ultimate sacrifice for His people (31). The soldiers who gave their lives during the war followed in Christ’s footsteps, and now the same is expected from the ones who are left behind, so that their sacrifice was not in vain: “those men on ‘my’ hill top have left us their work to carry on and we must not fail” (32). Moreover, Olive Mary Mercer-Clements makes it very clear that this work must be based on love: “Feelings do not matter as long as the motive is right. We are told to love; and love is service, love is giving, love is spending oneself for another” (31). This whole contemplation must have been very important to O.M.M., because during her revisions of the typescript, she added the following lines to fortify her message:

To you, from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields. (32)

These lines come from the famous World War 1 poem “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae³. They illustrate the idea of continuing the good work of those who died for us, so they can rest in well-deserved peace. O.M.M.’s selection of these lines from the poem probably was very deliberate. When reading the line (from this poem) which directly precedes the lines that she quoted, “Take up our quarrel with the foe”, it is very clear why she did not include it in her text; it asks the reader to keep on fighting, a direct contradiction with O.M.M.’s message of love. Just like with Tennyson’s poem, O.M.M. carefully selected those lines that would support her ideas, leaving out everything that would not.

2.5. Letter 5

Letter 5 brings the reader back to the reality of the aftermath of the war. This time the focus lies on the war cemeteries which Olive Mary Mercer-Clements and her parents encountered during their trip. The view of the countless graves evokes “mixed feelings” within O.M.M., feelings on which she does not elaborate, but which she perhaps tries to express through the untitled poem she quoted:

Wait thou still – it is His Will,
Though the waiting seem unending
And the pain thy heart be rending,
Comfort sure will god be sending,
“Wait thou still”.

Wait thou still – ‘tis not for Ill
But for good – His long delaying,
Still to Him be humbly praying
And unto thy heart be saying
“Wait thou still”.

Wait thou still – in silence lay
All thy longing, all thy tears
At His Feet – He ever hears,
Soon shall Love cast out thy fears,
“Wait thou still”.

Wait thou still – ‘tis not in vain!
For in waiting lies renewing
Of thy Faith in God, subduing
Lurking Doubt, the heart’s undoing,
“Wait thou still”.

Wait thou still – until at last
God’s great Purpose be revealed
That so long had lain concealed,
Craving to contentment yield!
“Wait thou still”. (37-38)

The poem clearly has a very religious theme, so this time O.M.M. did not have to select only certain lines from it to make it fit into her narrative. Its message is very comforting, promising that good things will come to those who wait. God knows of your suffering, but before relieving you from your pain, he lets you wait to test your faith. So as long as you your trust in God does not falter, you will eventually be rewarded. It is very likely that O.M.M., seeing death and destruction in every place she visited, must at some point have had doubts about the existence of a god, so this poem may have helped her to remain hopeful and to restore her faith.

The remaining paragraphs of the letter again give a factual account of the last stops of the trip and eventually O.M.M. closed the letter by stating that her “mental outlook has experienced something akin to an upheaval, from the effects of which I have not yet completely recovered” (41-42). This final line seems to confirm that the trip, which showed her the devastating aftermath of a brutal war, had left a very deep impression on her.

2.6. Letter 6

The sixth and final letter of the *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript clearly stands out from the preceding ones, not only because it was written a few days after the trip to Belgium, during Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' stay at the camp of the Second and Third Companies of the Weston-super-Mare Girl Guides, but mainly because it almost completely consists of one emotional, philosophical reflection.

One could wonder why an account about the post-war situation in Belgium ends with the narration of a Girl Guide trip, because indeed, one would not immediately associate a Scouting movement with a conflict such as World War 1. However, from O.M.M.'s writings it is quite clear that her days in the camp, which would be her last as a member, brought back a lot of memories from the war. The work of the Girl Guides in particular, both during and after the conflict, reminded her of the efforts of the soldiers:

So often during these days in camp I have caught glimpses of that spirit of fine pluck and endurance which again and again I saw displayed by our soldiers during the War. And old England still needs today that splendid courage and selfless spirit of sacrifice that so many of her women and girls gave her in those war-darkened days, and the task and responsibility of Guiders and Guides is not light – there must and will be times of stress, bringing weariness and perplexing doubts to them and to us all, but we must keep steadily on and however dark it may be. (46-47)

Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' time spent with the Guides really seemed to have helped her to come to terms with the terrible effects of war:

I am conscious of a deeper rest of mind and spirit that I have not known for many long months. And I think perhaps this is not entirely due to the persuasive charm of living so near to nature, but also to the fact that I am beginning to hope that in the whole Girl Guide and Boy Scout Movements an answer may be found to that eternal question – “Was it worthwhile?” (45)

Both passages show that the spirit and the hard work of the Guides are exactly the elements which had been lost during and after the war and which O.M.M. wanted to see restored. They are the values such as love, faith and sacrifice on which she reflected in her other letters. In this letter, O.M.M. draws the attention to an additional value “that prevails in the Guide and Scout Movements” (47), namely that of friendship: “No one can gauge the extent to which our friendships affect our whole life and those of the people to whom we give our affection and trust. It is the thing that perhaps matters more than anything else in our life, because of its far-reaching influence” (47).

Seeing that Olive Mary Mercer-Clements underlined most if this passage, it is very clear how important friendship was to her. To reinforce her message about the power of friendship, she quotes a sentence from Hugh Black's "The Art of Being a Good Friend": "Friendship is one of the appointed means of saving life from worldliness and selfishness – it is a moral preservative" (48). In other words, when you "pour out [your] best to [your] friend and help him or her to give [you] back the best", your life will be so much more worthwhile (48). O.M.M. made sure however, to add that although one should always be ready to help one's friends, it is also important to remember that one should not "take another's whole burden upon their own shoulders" (49), friendship should be a relationship of giving and taking.

Apart from these emotional reflections on friendship, the other sentiment which is predominant in O.M.M.'s last letter, is one of meditation. It seems that during her time at the camp, where she was surrounded by her friends and by nature, she really found the peace of mind she had not felt for a while, although there is also a sense of sadness because this was her last camp:

The darkness has folded her arms around the world very gently tonight and a deep hush is over all, in the distance I can just discern the tops of the tents and hear the gentle lap of the waves as they tumble drowsily on to the shore – except for this and the occasional hoot of an owl, the wonderful stillness is unbroken. The faint scent of a wet and refreshed earth steals in through my open window and lingers – just a breath of dear old Mother-Earth come to comfort my loneliness – for tonight in spite of that new-found sense of rest, I cannot help feeling a little lonely and ineffably sad, and I am not ashamed to own to a big ache in my heart and a mist before my eyes as I realize that with the breaking of camp tomorrow, I bid goodbye to the company that has become so inexpressively dear to me. (45)

Because this last letter was written from the heart, it reveals a lot of Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' deepest thoughts and feelings, making it seem more like a diary than a letter. In the process of revising her typescript, O.M.M. must have realised this too, because she made a lot of corrections in the last letter, possibly in an attempt to make it less personal. It certainly would explain why she left out the very last page of her typescript, where she explicitly referred to it as her "Journal" (53). This is not the only alteration in letter 6 however, because when comparing the two versions of the typescript, it is very striking that of all the letters, O.M.M. left out the most passages in this last one. Moreover, the way in which the adaptations were made, deviates from the other letters. On page 49 for example, instead of neatly covering up the passage like she had done with all the other pieces of text she chose to omit, she very carelessly and seemingly very hastily crossed out the words. A few pages later, she even corrected some previous alterations. It makes one wonder if O.M.M. perhaps made those corrections towards the end of her life, sensing that someone might read it after her death, but that is

a speculation to which the answer will probably stay a mystery for ever. It can be concluded that there is a stark contrast between the appearance of the revised letter, which is chaotic as the result of the many erratic corrections, and its content, which conveys a message of peace and hope for the future. It is this message that should be taken away from *Crux Christi Nostra Corona*, or as O.M.M. wrote herself: "If the way lies through the shadows . . . know that the shadow can never again be quite so black because there will be . . . this star to light up the gloom, inspiring . . . to go forward a fresh hope and courage" (52).

¹ Tennyson, Alfred. "Marriage Morning." *Poetry Foundation*. 2017. Web. Accessed 17 February 2017.

² Iles, Jennifer. "Recalling the Ghosts of War: Performing Tourism on the Battlefields of the Western Front." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26.2 (2006): 162-180. Pdf

³ McCrae, John. "In Flanders Fields." *Poetry Foundation*. 2017. Web. Accessed 20 February 2017.

CONCLUSION

A lot has been written about the First World War, and the variation in texts about the conflict is vast. What usually comes to mind first when one reflects on this, is the extensive array of historical documents that exist. If one were able to combine them all, these documents would establish a day by day reconstruction of the war to the smallest detail. In contrast to these factual accounts, one could place literary narratives that are related to the conflict. Even when one only considers British literature about the First World War, it is not very hard to come up with a list of some of the better-known war poets such as Kipling, Graves, Owen and Blunden. Likewise, one can easily recall novels such as *Death of a Hero* (Aldington), *Testament of Youth* (Brittain) or *Parade's End* (Ford), which also address this topic. Apart from this distinction between historical and literary texts, one could also recognize the difference between the accounts that were written by people who experienced the war first hand, in the heat of battle, and those narratives composed by individuals with a less direct relationship to the conflict, either spatially or temporally.

This thesis has demonstrated that Olive Mary Mercer-Clements' *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* is a combination of all the elements mentioned above. Firstly, it is a historical document, giving an account of her post-World War 1 journey to Belgium in 1922, but at the same time it contains literary aspects as well. Secondly, it was written by someone who was not involved in the fighting at the front, but who directly felt its effects, both during and after the conflict.

It was necessary to provide some historical background information. I described how the typescript was rediscovered after it had arrived in a cultural library in Bruges almost 50 years ago, and as it was unclear who was the author behind the initials "O.M.M.", I succeeded to identify her as Olive Mary Mercer-Clements thanks to some clues in the dedication of the typescript and through profound genealogical research. This was of great importance, because it is not possible to fully understand the meaning of a text unless you have at least some idea of the person who wrote it. O.M.M. was a young well-educated Bristol woman, who volunteered as a nurse, and treated wounded soldiers who were sent back home to recover. Immediately it became clear that O.M.M.'s reasons for journeying to Belgium, were to visit the Flemish war sites as well as to search for the grave of Olive's brother Lt. William Vincent Clements. He died in Huy just after the war as the result of the Spanish flu, and was buried there. Seeing that the typescript was dedicated to him, I drew attention to him as well.

In my search for living relatives of Olive Mary Mercer-Clements, I was lucky to find a great-grandniece and -nephew of her, of whom the latter surprisingly possesses a rather thoroughly revised copy of the typescript which had been kept in the family throughout the years. As it is believed that *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* has never been published and only exists as a typescript in a cultural library in Bruges and as a revised copy in private hands, the main part of this thesis is a scholarly edition of

the complete *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* typescript. It consists of a combination of both existing versions, and incorporates the most authoritative elements of both documents. This edition is provided with textual notes, depicting the differences between the original and the revised version of the text, as well as explanatory notes and photographs, both original and additional ones, which clarify and illustrate O.M.M.'s text.

But as the typescript was written as a journal in the form of fictional letters with a lot of literary elements, it needed a deeper literary analysis. By drawing attention to some meaningful passages of the typescript, it was my aim to get a better understanding of O.M.M.'s motives to write and revise her text. Furthermore, by focusing on the more philosophical and religious moments, it became clear that O.M.M. often deviated from her plan to give descriptive portrayals of the aftermath of World War 1 in Belgium, especially with her last letter written at the Girl Guides camp just after having returned to the UK. Instead, it has become apparent that the typescript was a way for the author to entrust her feelings to paper, and yet at the same time taking some objective distance towards them. She created this distance by avoiding the usual confessional mode of the diary, and by instead writing to a second person in the form of letters. In addition, her creation of a fictional framework for these letters, addressing them to a deceased brother as if he were still alive, emphasizes her attempt to take some distance.

O.M.M.'s emotions nevertheless remain strongly present, and show how important values such as love, sacrifice, faith and friendship are to her. With her letters she attempts to interpret her emotional responses in a larger Christian framework of Christ's self-sacrifice. She regrets that her own beloved England may have lost that spirit of commitment and sacrifice. And although the text analysis showed that she mourned the loss of that spirit and the values associated with it, the overall message which *Crux Christi Nostra Corona* transmits, is one of hope for a better future for those who wait patiently.

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