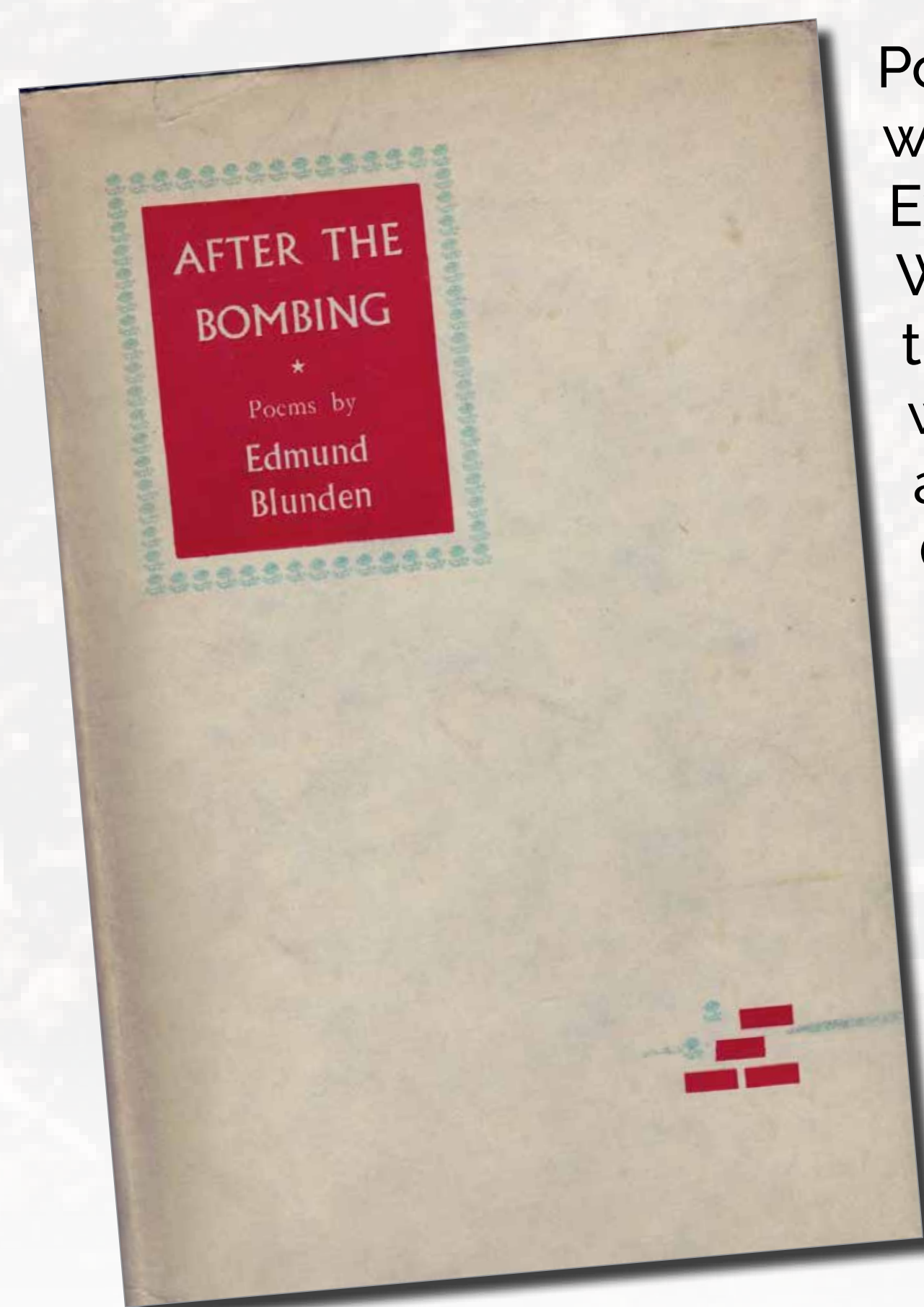




Edmund Blunden
(1896-1974)



Wilfred Owen
(1893-1918)



Poet, journalist and literary editor Blunden was the longest serving war poet. Experiencing continuous service on the Western Front he served for two years in the trenches in Ypres and the Somme. He was a close friend of Siegfried Sassoon and a contemporary of Robert Graves at Oxford after the war. Blunden's war poetry is concerned more with the psychological effects of war.

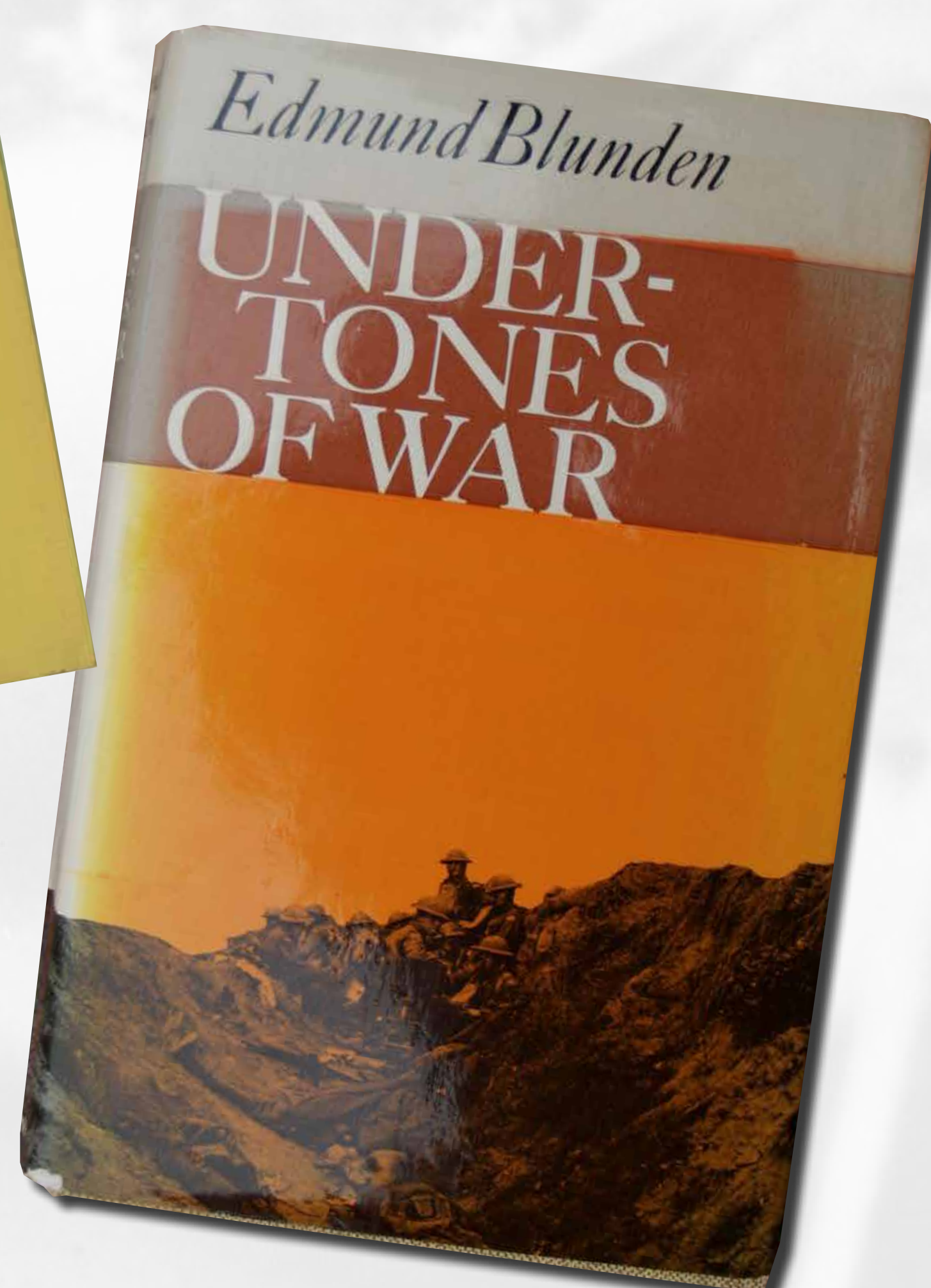
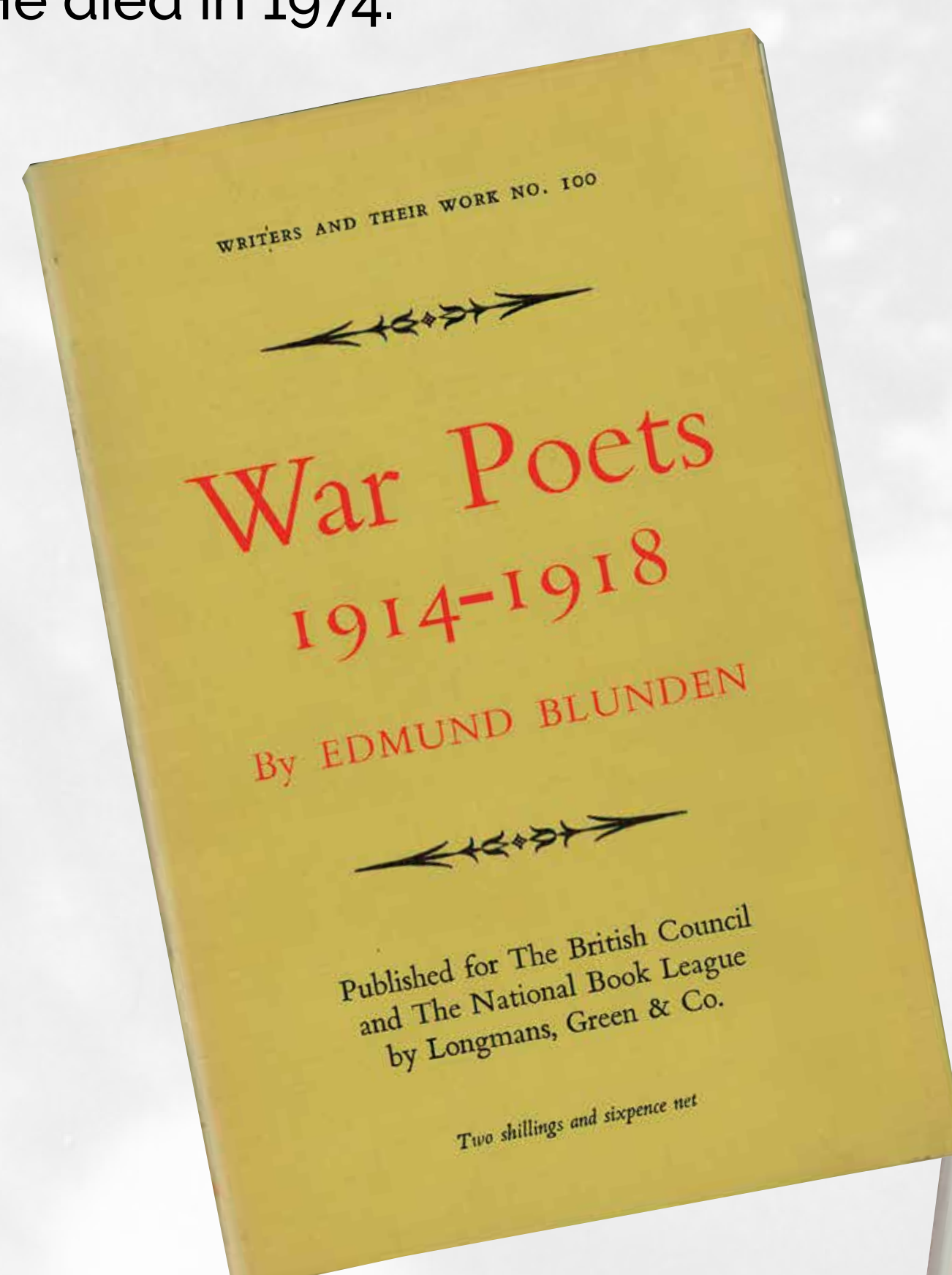
Even though he survived the war without being physically wounded he nevertheless suffered from the psychological effects for the rest of his life. His war experiences are recounted in his autobiography *Undertones of war* published in 1928. In it he describes his terrible ordeals in combat in the Somme, Ypres, and Passchendaele, describing them as

"murder, not only to the troops but to their singing faiths and hopes."

As the literary critic Desmond Graham writes "he [Blunden] is concerned overall with 'war's haunting of the mind'; his collected war poems bear this out and if we want an idea of what it was like to fight and survive WW1 then we can go to Blunden to give it to us."

His poem 1916 seen from 1921 describes the psychological price exacted by war.

Blunden enjoyed a very distinguished post-war academic career. He had a special interest in war poetry editing Wilfred Owens's poetry collections and writing a foreword to Brereton's *Anthology of war poems* (1930). He died in 1974.



Festubert, 1916

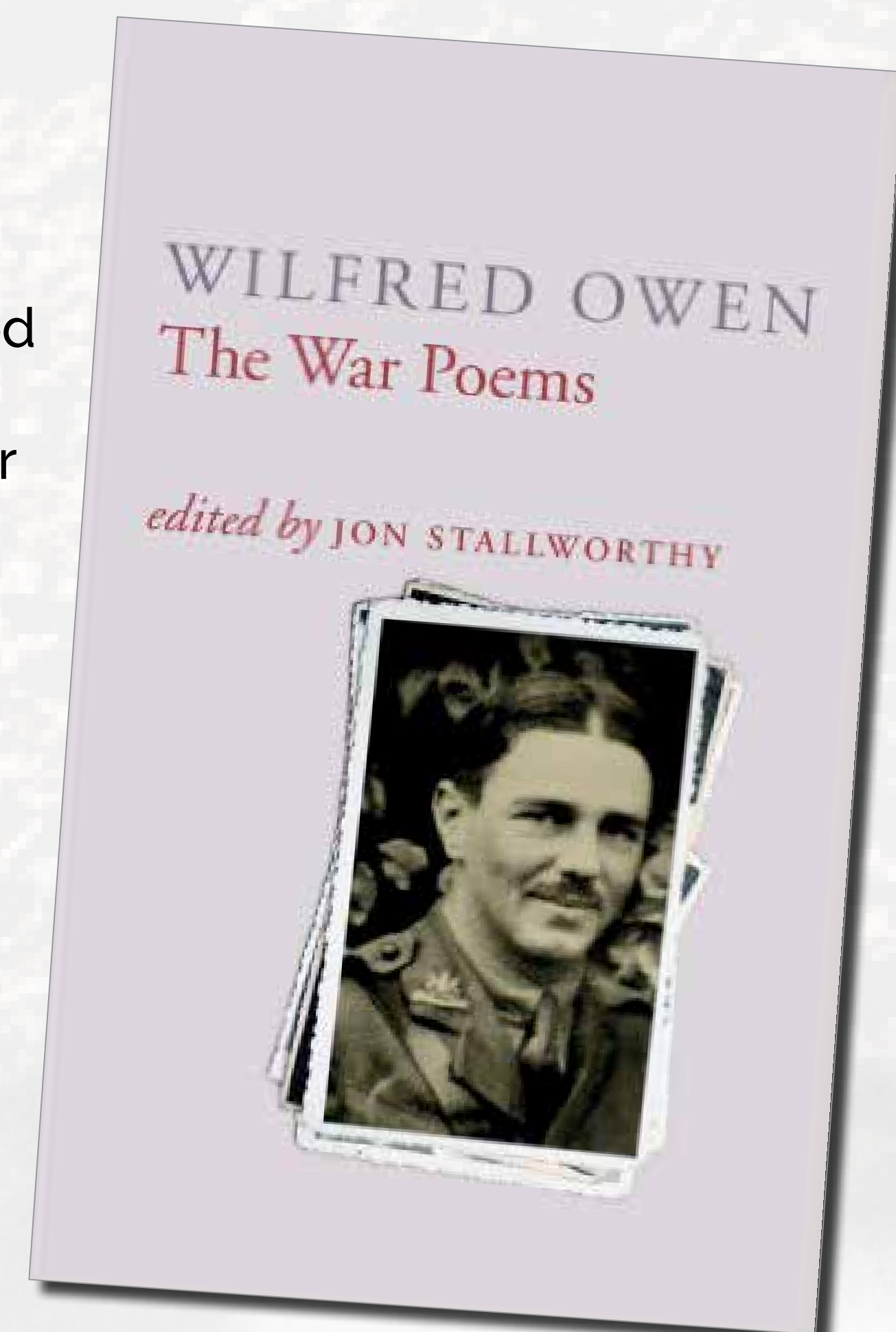
Tired with dull grief, grown old before my day,
I sit in solitude and only hear
Long silent laughter, murmurings of dismay,
The lost intensities of hope and fear;
In those old marshes yet the rifles lie,
On the thin breastwork flutter the grey rags,
The very books I read are there – and I
Dead as the men I loved, wait while life drags

Its wounded length from those sad streets of war
Into green places here, that were my own;
But now what once was mine is mine no more,
I look for such friends here and I find none.
With such strong gentleness and tireless will
Those ruined houses seared themselves in me,
Passionate I look for their dumb story still,
And the charred stub outspeaks the living tree.

Often regarded as the greatest of the war poets Wilfred Owen was of mixed Welsh and English ancestry. He was working as a teacher in France when war broke out but returned to England in 1915 where he joined the Artists Rifles Officers' Training Corps. He was commissioned into the Manchester Regiment in June 1916 but didn't leave for France until December of that year.

Although the Somme Offensive was over by that time Owen served there with the Manchesters in January 1917. He fought on the front line at Beaumont Hamel but was wounded and was taken to Military Hospital where he wrote the poem *Hospital Barge*. Throughout 1917 and 1918 he was on active duty but had periods in hospital recovering from war wounds and suffering from shell shock. It was at Craiglockhart Hospital in Edinburgh that he met Siegfried Sassoon and it was under his influence that he wrote some of his best poetry, especially his war poems such as *Anthem for doomed youth*, *Futility* and *Dulce et decorum est*.

Anthem for doomed youth was written in Craiglockhart in 1917 - Sassoon helped with the revision of the poem and suggested the title. In August of 1918 he was back on the front line in Amiens, was wounded again and awarded the Military Cross. He was killed in action on Nov 4 1918 one week before the signing of the Armistice.



ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
5 No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.
10 What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

HOSPITAL BARGE

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,
A barge round old C  risy slowly slewed.
Softly her engines down the current screwed,
And chuckled softly with contented hum,
5 Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued;
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude;
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes
10 To watch her lessening westward quietly.
Then, as she neared the bend, her funnel screamed.
And that long lamentation made him wise
How unto Avalon, in agony,
Kings passed in the dark barge which Merlin dreamed.