

**Art and War:  
The Artists  
Rifles and  
Romford,  
1915 to 1918**

## Introduction

The Artists Rifles was a volunteer regiment of the British Army, established on 28 February 1860 as the 38th Middlesex (Artists) Rifle Volunteer Corps, with headquarters at Burlington House, London. Its first commanders were Henry Wyndham Phillips, a portrait painter, and Frederic, Lord Leighton, associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The Artists' distinctive cap badge, featuring the Roman gods Mars and Minerva, symbolised the conjunction of art and war that their regiment represented.

In September 1880, the corps became the 20th Middlesex (Artists) Rifle Volunteer Corps, with headquarters at Duke's Road, London. It formed the 7th Volunteer Battalion of the Rifle Brigade from 1881 until 1891 and the 6th Volunteer Battalion from 1892 to 1908. The regiment saw active service during the Boer Wars (1880-81; 1899-1902), and during 1900 it increased to 12 companies. On 1 April 1908, as part of the Haldane Reforms, it became the 28th (County of London) Battalion, and by 1914 there were three sub-battalions.

When World War One broke out, some enlisted members of the Artists Rifles were selected to be officers in other units of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division. In 1915, selected Artists officers and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) were transferred to run a separate Officers Training Corps at Romford. The camps were based at Gidea Hall (demolished in 1930), Hare Hall (now the Royal Liberty School) and Balgores House (now Gidea Park College). Thousands went through their training here, and more than 10,000 became officers. Cadets included the poets Wilfred Owen and Edward Thomas, artists Paul and John Nash and illustrator Alfred Leete, who are all still well known names. After their training, officers were commissioned into different regiments; Owen joined the Manchester Regiment whilst Thomas became a member of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

During the course of the War, the Artists Rifles earned a significant number of battle honours, including 8 Victoria Crosses.

The Artists Rifles disbanded in 1945 but was re-established in 1947 as part of the Special Air Service Regiment. Today, the full title of the Regiment is 21 Special Air Service Regiment (Artists) (Reserve).

## The Early History of the Artists Rifles (1859-1901)

The origins of the Artists Rifles can be found in a meeting that took place on the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1859 in London. Here, resolutions were passed to go ahead with defence measures against an impending attack from war and this was to be achieved by raising and enrolling volunteers. Within a month a Volunteer Corp was raised by Lord Derby's government.

The volunteers were not a particularly desired choice for invasion fears. Even the Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief of the Army from 1855 to 1895, is quoted as regarding volunteers to be "a very dangerous rabble" and "unmanageable bodies that would ruin our Army".

A political view expressed by Lord Palmerston in 1855 held volunteers to be "too costly, of no real military value and unfitted by habit, occupation and constitution to meet the hardship of campaigns".

However, by 1860 the report was already published and the movement was well on its way.

The poet laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson, wrote the poem "The War", published in The Times on 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1859. The poem included the concerns of the time, and in a way similar to Lord Kitchener's call for a volunteer army just 50 years later, contained a straight-forward appeal to the reader:

There is a sound of thunder afar  
Storm in the south that darkens the day  
Storm of battle and thunder of war!  
Well, if it do not roll away,  
Storm, Storm, Riflemen form!  
Ready, be ready against the storm!  
Riflemen, riflemen, riflemen form!

(Signed T)

Martin Tupper, poet, was erroneously attributed but the title of one of his poems "Defence not Defiance" became recognised as the adopted motto by the volunteer force. Days later a volunteer corps was raised under the "Yeomanry and Volunteer Consolidation Act of 1804".

A volunteer would take an oath of allegiance and would be liable to serve on actual or contemplated invasion.

He could be exempted from Militia Ballot but required to participate in the minimum of 8 drills in 4 months or 24 per year. Out of emergency he could resign on 14 days' notice and was subject to military law only when under arms. Lords Lieutenants were responsible for administration and officers and uniforms. All arms, equipment, ammunition and other expenses were to be met privately. Premises provided by commanding officers.

The main purpose of the volunteer corps was to teach the use of the rifle in order to prepare units to operate in open country in their local areas.

The Government later relented and supplied ammunition but did not provide the Rifles! But new Government did, by issuing 25 Long Enfield rifles per 100 volunteers.

Later, further measures were made including safer ranges, approved uniform, instructors, musketry courses, and a manual entitled "Drill and Rifle Instruction for Volunteer Rifle Corps", also known as "The Green Book".

The establishment of the Corps then included:

A company of no less than 60

No more than 100 effectives

Which would have

1 captain

1 Lieutenant

1 ensign.

Several companies raised in the same locality could be formed into a battalion

Of not less than 8 companies

Or 500 men.

This would have

1 Lieutenant Colonel

1 Major

the services of an adjutant

provided by the Regular Army

An average of 7,000 recruits per month enlisted from May 1859 to May 1861

Within 2 years a considerable number of volunteer rifle corps had been raised which progressed year on year. Standards of competence and efficiency too increased.

By 1881, each volunteer battalion became part of a Regular regiment.

Changes occurred with recruitment, descriptions of corps, uniforms, training manoeuvres, parades, drills, musketry and shoots.

The Rifle Volunteers were encouraged to place equal emphasis on the social side as well as on military matters. Where a corps was able to provide its own Drill Hall, there would also be mess facilities and its own social centre. Sports were a big feature as well as volunteer pastimes such as rifle derbies, prize-givings, bands, dances, bazaars, fetes, entertainments, theatrical performances and smokers concerts.

Royalty had a hand in the encouragement and endorsement of the volunteer movement.

This has been a brief outline of the history of the militia and volunteers from early times through to the Victorian period.

We should therefore remember that the Volunteer Rifles Corps, was a unit that carved its own unique niche in the Territorials of this great nation, that remains to this day in service for this country.

## **Burlington House – the Home of the Artists Rifles**

Famous as the home of the Royal Academy and a significant gallery for major art exhibitions today, Burlington House played a prominent part in the early history of the Artists Rifles.

It all began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a young art student at Cary's School of Art in London. Edward Coningsby Sterling was seized with patriotic emotion by the threat of a French invasion. Cary's was a specialist school preparing students for entry into the Royal Academy schools.

In 1859 Edward called a meeting of his life class with the idea of forming a new volunteer group (equivalent to the later Territorials) to join up with others. By 1860, 119 recruits had formed a Volunteer Corps of Artists, at a meeting in the studios of Henry Wyndham Philips. The corps included painters, sculptors, engravers, musicians, architects and actors. This was the genesis of the Artists Rifles, otherwise designated as the 38<sup>th</sup> Middlesex (Artists) Rifle Volunteers. A temporary HQ at the Argyll Rooms was shortly succeeded by an established HQ at Burlington House which had now become the new home of the Royal Academy.

In 1860 the enrolment register included some notable members: Frederick Leighton, who was elected Ensign, Honorary Member John Ruskin, Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, John Everett Millais, elected Lieutenant, William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who were founding members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which had just broken up.

A young artist recruit by the name of William Richmond joined the Artists and soon became the Drill Corporal and then the Artists' Secretary.

At this point it must be noted that much as these were celebrated Artists, they were of no great military value to the Corps, but were magnets that attracted further recruits from the Arts' community. Membership gave them the opportunity of showing and discussing art works with their seniors. The badge chosen by the Artists consisted of two heads: Mars (the Roman God of War) and Minerva (the Goddess of Wisdom). Throughout

their existence as a unit it was worn as a cap badge together with a mainly grey uniform. The Artists were praised for their good turnout, appearance and discipline.

The Corps kept expanding in numbers, gaining five companies, "A to E". All recruits had to be introduced by a past or present member. Captain Frederick Leighton took over in command from Wyndham Phillips who had died in 1868. 1869 was the year that HQ was transferred to Burlington House from the Arts Club, then in Hanover Square, London.

When war broke out in August 1914 the Royal Academy offered the use of its galleries for any military purpose. Parts of the building were used for storage and drills. This meant the buildings and contents had to be massively insured against damage in addition to the value of the extraordinary masterpieces that were stored in "safe chambers". As the war progressed most of the male students enlisted in the armed forces.

After the war memorials were erected to commemorate those students who had lost their lives. These tablets were placed under the portico at the western end of the building. To match this, a memorial to the Artists Rifles men was later placed at the Euston end.

## **Buildings in Romford Associated with the Artists Rifles**

### **Hare Hall**

This was one of Havering's scaled down 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings lived in by the well-to-do men of substance that had survived through to 1914 set amidst its surrounding parkland. Its successive owners are commemorated in the names of the surrounding roads. Though fairly compact the building has elements of real style and graciousness. The estate was once set in further open country that lay beyond the compact town of Romford and all around was farmland until the advent of the Eastern Counties railway in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The railway ran through the southern side of the Estate and for a while the engineer of the line, John Braithwaite, occupied the house with all the paraphernalia of large scale plans, legal documents and engineer's drawings.

It later passed through a number of families whose fortunes rose and fell until the outbreak of war the grounds and house presented themselves as a suitable site for military occupation. The Sportsmen's Battalions were here for a while, going on to Hornchurch and Grey Towers. The scene was set for the ideal training base for the Artist's Rifles who took over residence.

### **Gidea Hall**

The name goes back to medieval times. The history of the house dates back before the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Sir Anthony Cooke one time tutor to Edward VI used the architect John Thorpe to complete an older version in the reign of Elizabeth I. She actually visited the house as Queen in 1568. There is also an engraving by a French artist showing Marie de Medici, mother-in-law of Charles I leaving the house after an overnight stay in 1638. This was not the house the Artist's Rifles came to occupy as it was demolished in 1718 and replaced by a rather more functional square brick edifice of Georgian period (1720). Although much plainer, the grounds were in time, graced by ornamental lakes and the Spoon Pond among the trees and flowers. Humphrey Repton is said to have landscaped the estate with the 18<sup>th</sup> century bridge at the Western end was designed by James Wyatt.

Inside there were attractive decorative features and a flight of steps led up to the front entrance. The house had been divided into separate occupation by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sir Herbert Raphael the owner generously made both Gidea Hall and Balgores available, as the size of the officers training school increased with the continuing need to supply new officers for the Western Front of World War in France and Belgium.

### **Balgores House**

Not alot is known about Balgores. It was apparently redesigned as Victorian gentlemen's residents possibly constructed around an earlier farm house. In the 1890s Mr Bose, official of the new Romford Golf Club nearby was in residences. It's convenient access to the Main Road, Hare Hall and Romford generally made it a good choice to house officers of the newly created training centre to be run by the Artists Rifles in 1915. The Union Flag fluttered over the still quite rural Balgores Lane and a huge tree stretched across nearly Balgores Crescent threatening the uncertain steering of the few local motor cars then on the road. In the nearby fields towards Romford cattle were still being fattened up for eventual sale in Romford Market.

### **THE ROMFORD WORKHOUSE**

The men of the Artists Rifles, it has been discovered were billeted not only in Hare Hall, Gidea Hall and Balgores, but in a reminiscence compiled by Miss Dorothy Hesford, daughter of the Master and Matron of the Romford Oldchurch Workhouse, we find her describing the following

“The coming of the First World War brought little immediate change in life at the Workhouse, but when large numbers of casualties began to be returned to this country, hospitals were required to accommodate them. One block of the Workhouse (Infirmary) was released for this purpose and the staff was augmented by four resident nurses (willingly assisted by local V.A.D.s)”.

In 1916 a further two blocks were taken over for the Artists Rifles, who remained in occupation for the remainder of the war. In order to release

these blocks it was necessary to transfer some of the regular inmates to other workhouses. Some went to Saffron Walden and the rest to Bromley-by-Bow, and while the former settled reasonably well, those sent to the East End of London were not so happy. As they would have been elderly poor folk who had lived most of their lives in the then country town of Romford and the surrounding rural area, the change to a grimy town atmosphere in wartime conditions must have been very hard.

For those left at Romford the presence of the Artists Rifles provided some welcome comforts. This exclusive territorial regiment numbered many wealthy young men among its ranks, and they showed much kindness to the poor and old people they found themselves living alongside. As their rations were on a more generous scale than the civilian allowances and the Workhouse kitchens were used to cook all the food, any little surplus of army supplies could well find its way to the inmates or staff.

## THE ARMY DESCENDS ON ROMFORD

Early in World War One Romford became a very busy place, not just on Market Day but with a number of different army units descending on the town. Many of the Servicemen were billeted in homes and schools. Billeting Officers had arrived in 1914, 2s 9d a soldier per day was the allowance but this did not produce enough accommodation by any means.

By a stroke of luck the new (1911) Gidea Park Garden Suburb, just east of Romford centre, contained a number of new houses built over the grounds of the former Gidea Hall, a stately Mansion.

In the local rate books a number of houses developed by Gidea Park Limited and others, which were either empty or requisitioned, were occupied by the War Office as official accommodation e.g. 'Danesbury' on Squirrels Heath Avenue, 'Nyth' (ditto), 'Stablepatch' (ditto), 'Heath Cottage' (ditto), 'Writtle Cottage' (ditto) owned by H H Raphael. 41 Heath Drive, property in Gidea Close Plot 329 Parkway, 'Hazeldene' (Hare Street).

## **The Sportsmen's Battalion**

The artists were by no means the first army unit at Hare Hall. For instance the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sportsmen's Battalion arrived at Hare Hall on 17 March 1915. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion went to Grey Towers Hornchurch. An interesting member of the 2<sup>nd</sup> was Private Ferrie who was in fact a Minister of the United Free Church. This Battalion was allowed to recruit up to 45 years old but Ferrie knew of a man at Hare Hall who was 64 (he had lied about his age). Ferrie gives us an insight into what was going on. Ferrie did not succeed in obtaining a Commission as at this stage anybody not from a famous school or superior university was not considered by the Sportsmen's. Incredibly he transferred to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlands in a further effort to obtain his goal of becoming an officer.

Somehow in 1915 Ferrie succeeded in returning to Hare Hall as a member of the Artist Rifles who had taken over the site. He described the new training as very good with lectures by a former director of Sandhurst Military Academy. He relished the improved space allowed the men. There were only 25 to a hut for the Artists, whereas 40 had been the norm for the Sportsmen. Although the Sportsmen had originally laid out the camp the Artists were to introduce many improvements such as showers and other amenities.

## The Artists Rifles – Life at Hare Hall Camp

At Hare Hall Camp there were activities such as sports days conducted with a sense of fun which took the cadets' minds off the serious business of training which often occupied a full day from early morning to a late hour. It appears that members of the local community were invited to watch. Of course many of the local menfolk would be away somewhere else on wartime duty. Edward Thomas's wife was boarding not far away but most of the cadets were on their own far from their families and local middle class wives and mothers along Main Road and on the recently built Gidea Park Garden Suburb offered the fledgling officers the chance in their brief moments outside of training a chance to have tea in a homely environment and might also provide a hot bath.

Edward Upward, only a young scholar at the time, remembers his mother providing this kind of comfort to officers from the camp at her home "Edfu" in Main Road nearby.

There were local entertainments such as the early Laurie Cinema in the town and some men may have made the longer trip to Ilford where they had a variety theatre. Contemporary pictures of the centre of Romford and the Market Place and Raphael Park, published as postcards show men from the camp enjoying a brief respite from their military duties.

In 1915 following the departure of the Sportsman Battalion, the Artists Rifles used Hare Hall for training. There were forty huts for 1400 troops.

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*"We are crowded into large empty houses, sleeping on the floor, far less comfortable than the Hut. But we have Batmen to wash up, and a Mess Room with table-cloths properly set out. We expect the work to be strenuous..... We are to have a snowball fight this afternoon. We now have excellent meals (4 a day) but our quarters are most uncomfortable."*

Correspondences from Wilfred Owen to his mother, Susan March 1916

## THE AUDIBILITY OF GUN-FIRE IN ESSEX IN WORLD WAR I

As Charles Perfect recalled, local people had many disturbing recollections of certain periods when continental gunfire was clearly heard in the district on various occasions, particularly during the summer. Perfect says it was at times very pronounced and in his instance could be most distinctly heard and felt inside a built-out pantry at the rear of his house in Station Lane, Hornchurch. This gunfire often continued throughout all hours of the day and night, but for the most part it was intermittent. In his book *The Impact of Catastrophe*, Doctor Paul Rusiecki, records how Mr Miller Christy of Chignall St James, near Chelmsford, noted in his diary how he could hear the sounds of gunfire from Flanders. Once he realised what they were, Christy kept meticulous records. At one point he described a noise as

“Quite faint, though easily perceptible and quite unmistakable..... a dull and distant thud, which one seems to feel rather than hear”.

On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1916 he recorded the beginning of a week-long Allied artillery bombardment which preceded the Battle of the Somme, “firing very violent.....the most rapid.....I have yet heard”. During this week of intensive bombardment intended to weaken the German forces, the British forces fired 1.6 million shells. Instead of rendering German defences useless, this and other preparations for assault, warned the German forces of the intention to attack and they retreated underground to await the push forward. The bombardment ceased and the British moving towards German trenches, believing they would meet little resistance, were surprised by the Germans coming back to their forward positions and engaging fire. By the end of the day the British had suffered 60,000 casualties, of whom a third were dead.

This illustrates the many setbacks that men of the Artists Rifles recruited into other regiments were to experience in the bloodbath of the battlefields. It is not surprising that many suffered mental problems, including Wilfred Owen and that the poets began to express their disillusionment with the conduct of the campaign.

## The Featured Artists

### Alfred Ernest Egerton Cooper (5 July 1883 to 11 May 1974)

Alfred was born in Tettenhall, Staffordshire on 5 July 1883, and displayed artistic promise at an early age, exhibiting at the Royal Academy for the first time aged just 18. He attended Bilston School of Art, Mount Pleasant, and graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1911.

Cooper joined the Artists Rifles at the outbreak of war, where he befriended Dr Barnes Wallis, who later found fame for creating the “Dam Buster” bouncing bomb. It was also during his training at Romford that he met his future wife Irene, when her parents entertained officers at their home. Though Cooper survived the War, his sight was impaired during a chlorine gas attack, and after the Armistice he was appointed an Official War Artist to the RAF.

Among Cooper’s high profile commissions were Sir Winston Churchill, The Queen, and her father King George VI; during the Blitz, the king’s medals were delivered to Cooper’s studio so that he could paint them, and he was terrified that they would be destroyed by a bomb.

Cooper died in Chelsea, London on 11 May 1974.

## **Alfred Leete (28 August 1882 to 17 June 1933)**

Alfred Leete is relatively unknown as an illustrator, however his most famous work of Lord Kitchener used on the cover of the London Opinion in 1914 as subsequently used as a recruitment poster. "Your Country Needs You" was voted the most iconic poster of the twentieth century.

Alfred Leete was born in Northamptonshire, the eldest of six children to John and Harriet Leete. When Alfred was nine, the family moved to Weston-super-Mare for John's health. Alfred was noted for his drawing skills. When he left school he became an apprentice to an architect. However Alfred was soon asked to provide drawings for articles submitted by his employer for the local newspaper. In turn the Bristol Magpie provided a wonderful opportunity for Alfred to submit his work.

With his focus firmly on becoming an illustrator, Alfred moved to London to explore opportunities. He set his sights on Fleet Street; however it was difficult finding regular work. What he did earn was meagre, his mother though sent him food parcels to keep him going!

Alfred worked as a designer for a furniture factory then a firm of lithographers. He continued to produce cartoons and sketches for show cards, posters and novelties. Then at last success! The editor of the Ally Sloper magazine bought some of Alfred's illustrations for five shillings each. Soon he was drawing for the London Opinion. His humour and artistic skills made him a regular contributor. By the age of 30 Alfred was recognised along with other black and white illustrators including Heath Robinson, John Hassall and Reginald Arkell.

In 1905 he started his long association with Punch. Many of his illustrations reflected current political themes mixed with images of his home town, Weston-super-Mare. On one of his frequent visits home Alfred met Edith Webb. They married in 1909 and lived in London.

In 1914 with the outbreak of World War One Alfred joined the Artists Rifles. This brought him to the training camps in Romford. From here he was sent to the front line where with whatever materials were available he

recorded life in the trenches. In addition he produced thought provoking illustrations of Belgium refugees and prisoners of war working to collect the crops. These were sent to his agent in London. Little is known whether these illustrations were ever used however they survive in the collections of North Somerset Museum in Weston-super-Mare along with other examples of Alfred's work.

Alfred produced a series of cartoons during World War One including Schmidt the Spy, The Bosch Books and The Worries of Wilhelm. These reflected the attitude of the time in a humour manner.

At the end of the war, Alfred returned to working in London. He was commissioned by various businesses. The Lure of the London Underground characterises Alfred's ability to add humour even to advertisements. Alongside this was his caricature of William Younger of Younger bitter who was apparently based on a fisherman from Penarth in Wales. Alfred still continued to produce illustrations for Punch, London Opinion, Tatler, Sketch and Bystanders many of which have not survived.

Always busy working, Leete was persuaded to take a holiday in Italy in 1933. There he was taken ill and rushed back home to London. He died on 17 June 1933 and was buried in Weston-super-Mare along with his parents.

A modest man Alfred said of himself that he "would rather win a medal at golf than be a member of the Royal Academy". He was a man loved by all who met him and regarded as a true gentleman.

## **John and Paul Nash**

Paul and John Nash were brothers, Paul being the eldest and the better known. He studied art at the St Paul's and Slade Schools. His influences were from the romantic Pre-Raphaelite Period.

## **Paul Nash (11 May 1889 – 11 July 1946)**

### **The War Years**

Both brothers saw fighting in WW1. In 1914, Paul joined the Artists Rifles "D" Company. In 1916, he was Lance Corporal in the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of The Hampshire Regiment. In 1917 he was wounded in France.

### **Official War Artist**

In France in 1917 he was appointed Official War Artist after exhibiting drawings based on his experiences on the Western Front. He was shocked by the devastation on the battlefields of Belgium: the burnt splintered trees he likened to 'dead limb-less bodies'.

His earlier depictions were of the typically poetic English countryside but on the Frontline his works changed to the realities he witnessed daily. Here he rapidly sketched in chalk and watercolour around twelve drawings per day.

### **Post World War One**

He practised in Modern European painting, being both imaginative and experimental. He used abstraction and helped establish the Surrealist Movement in Britain. He welcomed avant-garde art into his English landscapes, that established him as one of the most influential British artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Paul was also an instructor in topography, engraver, book illustrator, writer, photographer and theatrical designer.

He died aged 57.

## John Nash (11 April 1893 – 23 September 1977)

### **The War Years**

John and Paul Nash were brothers and both served in the Artists Rifles Corp., John joining in 1916. He served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Artists Rifles Battalion in France from 1916/18 and fought at the Battle of Passchendaele. He was Sergeant and also a GHQ Guard in the Battalion and an Instructor for Specialist Training.

In 1918, John was appointed the first Official War Artist. As a painter, he was commissioned by the then Government to execute pictures that would eventually be housed in the Imperial War Museum, in London.

It was decided that permanent recordings of typical warring from this Great War should be preserved for the nation. John was still young then, but it was felt that he was more ably bodied to convey the clash of modern war with sincerity than the older painters of that time. However, he had no formal art training.

In one of his most famous paintings, The Artist Rifles are commemorated 'going over the top' at Marcoing, in France. This oil was entitled "*Over the Top – 1<sup>st</sup> Artists Rifles at Marcoing, 30 December, 1917<sup>1</sup>*".

It depicts an early morning scene, where the battalion were about to go back into the support line, when the Germans launched a fierce attack. The "B" Company had to jump out of the front line, hence "over the top" immediately upon arrival. What you see is lots of snow and mist and the great-coated men, the Lewis guns and many wounded casualties under attack of German rifles and machine guns.

Post World War 1, he painted and illustrated meticulous flower drawings for botanical publications and was also a wood engraver.

In 1940, he was elected Associate of the Royal Academy, in London and Official War Artist to the Admiralty in World War 2. In 1951, he became a

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Royal Academician. Then in 1967, he was given a major retrospective exhibition at the Royal Academy. He died aged 81.

## Wilfred Owen (18 March 1893 to 4 November 1918)

Wilfred Owen was born the eldest of four children in Shropshire on 18 March 1893, of mixed English and Welsh ancestry. Deeply religious from childhood, with an artistic temperament, Owen was a pacifist. His words explored war, that profusion of men, guns bombs, and other unspeakable horrors. Living in the trenches, with bombs exploding everywhere, and watching men die around him every day affected Owen's personal beliefs: the way he thought, and the way he wrote. He was educated at the Birkenhead Institute and at Shrewsbury Technical School (now The Wakeman School), and discovered his vocation in 1903 or 1904 during a holiday spent in Cheshire. Owen was raised as an Anglican of the evangelical school, and in his youth was a devout believer, in part due to his strong relationship with his mother, which was to last throughout his life. Shortly after leaving school in 1911, Owen passed the matriculation exam for the University of London, but not with the first-class honours needed for a scholarship (his studies suffered as Owen mourned the loss of his uncle and role model, Edgar Hilton in a hunting accident) which in his family's circumstances was the only way he could have afforded to attend.

In return for free lodging, and some tuition for the entrance exam, Owen worked as lay assistant to the Vicar of Dunsden near Reading and as a pupil-teacher at Wyle Cop School. He then attended classes at University College, Reading (now the University of Reading), in botany and later, at the urging of the head of the English Department, free lessons in Old English. His time spent at Dunsden parish led him to disillusionment with the church, both in its ceremony and its failure to provide aid for those in need. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, he worked as a private tutor teaching English and French at the Berlitz School of Languages in Bordeaux, France. There he met the older French poet Laurent Tailhade, with whom he later corresponded in French.

On 21 October 1915, he enlisted in the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps. For the next seven months, he trained at Hare Hall Camp in Essex. On 4 June 1916 he was commissioned as a second lieutenant (on probation) in The Manchester Regiment. After a period of convalescence at Craiglockhart in Scotland, then a short spell working as a teacher in nearby Tynecastle High School, he returned to light regimental duties. In

March 1918, he was posted to the Northern Command Depot at Ripon. A number of poems were composed in Ripon, including "Futility" and "Strange Meeting". His 25th birthday was spent quietly in Ripon Cathedral.

Although Owen was a hero, receiving a commendation award, he was not lucky enough to survive the war. After returning to the front, Owen led units of the Second Manchester's on 1 October 1918 to storm a number of enemy strong points near the village of Joncourt. However, only one week before the end of the war, whilst attempting to traverse a canal, he was shot in the head and killed.

## **Sidney Strube (30 December 1892 to 4 March 1956)**

Sidney Strube, (pronounced Stru-bee) best known as 'George', started working at the Daily Express as a cartoonist just prior to the outbreak of the Great War.

In 1915, Strube joined the Artists Rifles. Instead of being sent abroad, he served at Gidea Park where he became a PT and bayonet instructor.

He routinely had the habit of making portraits of each 'inmate' that he humorously presented to them, after they came out of the police cells!

In 1917, as Sergeant, he was transferred from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and then posted to the frontline at the Battle of Paschendale in France. Here, he contracted trench fever and trench feet. He left the army in 1918.

From 1916 to his death he contributed hundreds of cartoons to regimental journals and publications to mark regimental events. He had a very prosperous career with the newspaper as their political cartoonist.

### **Philip Edward Thomas 3 March 1878 to 9 April 1917**

He was known just as Edward Thomas was born in Lambeth, London on 3 March 1878 to Philip Henry Thomas, a Civil Service clerk, and his wife Mary Elizabeth Townsend.

Growing up in Battersea, he attended the local grammar school, before progressing to St Paul's School and then Lincoln College, Oxford, where he met his future wife Helen Berenice Noble. They married in 1899 and had three children, setting up home at Elses Farm near Sevenoaks, Kent.

Thomas joined the Artists Rifles on 19 July 1915 and was sent to Hare Hall Camp that November. During his training, he wrote several poems referencing local place names, often whilst out on map-reading courses. He remained in Romford for a year before he was commissioned into the Royal Garrison Artillery in November 1916 and posted to France.

Thomas was killed by a shell blast during the first hour of the Battle of Arras on 9 April 1917, and buried in Agny Military Cemetery the following day.

## **George Grey Wornum 17 April 1888 -11 June 1957**

After studying at the Slade School of Art, George Grey Wornum was articled to his uncle Ralph Selden Wornum, and attended classes at the Architectural Association, winning the silver medal and travelling studentship for 1909.

Wornum served with the Artist Rifles in World War One. In spite of suffering leg injuries and the loss of his right eye in France in 1916, he was to survive, spending two years at the Ministry of Defence before resuming his career as a partner of Philip D Hepworth in 1915.

A crowning achievement in spite of his disabilities was the winning of the competition to design the RIBA headquarters, 66 Portland Place, a quite revolutionary design for the time in its location and layout. It was opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1934 by King George V and it stands today as a still modern and inspirational series of spaces within the overall concept. The competition had included a staggering number of 3600 designs for 284 entrants.

# “ Cum Marte Minerva “

(ORIGINAL REGIMENTAL CHORUS)

Words by GEORGE CAYLEY Air by SALVATOR ROSA

Sons of Art, our voices raising,  
Onward we march with step so free  
Sons of Art, our voices raising,  
United thus in Harmony.

Peaceful or warlike our song shall be  
“Cum Marte Minerva.”  
Thus sing we as onward we march,  
As onward we march in Harmony.  
“Cum Marte Minerva” our song shall be.

Peaceful Arts new vigour gaining,  
Whilst we guard our liberty;  
Art and freedom thus obtaining  
Strength increased by unity.

Peaceful or warlike etc.

Danger and hardship ne'er can alarm us,  
Ready at England's call are we;  
The arts of peace themselves shall aid us,  
We fight for King and liberty.

Peaceful or warlike etc.

