



FIRST WORLD WAR SEMINARS

ACADEMIC YEAR / ACADEMIEJAAR 2019-2020



THURSDAY 10 OCTOBER 2019
Canterbury, 6 p.m.

Pieter Trog (IFFM)

'Demographic evolution of the population of Ypres, before, during and after the Great War'

The First World War had a far-reaching impact on the civilian population of and in Ypres. When the city saw the arrival of fighting armies in the autumn of 1914, thousands of refugees had sought refuge within its walls. After the First Battle of Ypres, the city remained in allied hands, but was systematically shelled. From the spring of 1915, the situation became untenable for civilians: those who had not yet fled were compulsorily evacuated, and ended up in many different places. After the war, only part of the population would return, while another part saw no future in the completely destroyed city. New people settled in the vacant spaces. Who did and who did not return? What patterns can we see in the return of refugees and the reconstruction of life in Ypres? This contribution reconstructs the consequences of the war on the demographic composition and migration history of Ypres through a bottom-up analysis. The question of the return of Belgian refugees is a contribution to the general study of the Belgian diaspora during the First World War, a theme which is still not fully examined.

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**University of Kent, Darwin Lecture Theatre 2,
 Canterbury CT2 7NS, 6 pm**

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THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2019
Ieper, 7 p.m.

Professor Mark Connelly (University of Kent)
'Notes and Swearies: Blasphemy and Obscene Language in Soldiers' speech and song, 1914-1919'.

British veterans of the First World War often commented on the obscene language and blasphemy they experienced in the army. This talk will examine the extent to which this reputation was deserved. It will also seek to explore how and why soldiers turned to swearing and obscene language as a way of expressing their feelings. It will ask to what extent the original, pre-war regulars taught their volunteer and conscript comrades to swear, or whether it might even have been the other way round, and whether soldiers managed their language and imagery to suit different audiences. WARNING: THERE IS A LOT OF SWEARING IN THIS TALK!

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THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2019
Canterbury, 6 p.m.

Jolien De Vuyst (Ghent University)
*'Refugee relief during the First World War:
Belgian refugees in Birmingham'*

During the First World War, 1.5 million Belgians or one fifth of the total population fled the country. 250.000 were welcomed in England, which still accounts for the largest refugee movement in British history. In her PhD, Jolien researched the local refugee relief in Birmingham. In this city, the War Refugees Committee Birmingham and District (WRCB) was founded to receive and to take care of approximately 5.000 Belgians for the whole duration of the war. The Belgian refugee community in Birmingham is studied from different angles. The WRCB is scrutinized: Who organised the refugee relief? What did this refugee relief entail? For whom was the help intended? To which rights were Belgian refugees entitled? What difficulties did they experience in retrieving their rights? Descendants of Belgian refugees were also interviewed to recover some personal testimonies, as well as to question what the refugee story of their ancestors still means for them today.

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THURSDAY 16 JANUARY 2020
leper, 7 p.m.

Matt Haultain-Gall (Université Catholique de Louvain)
*'An elegy of mud, blood and darkness':
Australian war writing and the third battle of Ypres'*

'The year 1917 had been one of disaster for our arms in all save the Messines attack' wrote the Australian ex-serviceman G.D. Mitchell in *Backs to the Wall*. Few of his comrades would have disagreed. The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) lost far more men in the battles for Bullecourt (France), Messines and Passchendaele than at their 1915 baptism of fire in the Dardanelles or their infamous 1916 engagements at Fromelles and Pozières. Consequently, 1917 and the third battle of Ypres especially – the bloodiest of the AIF's 1914–18 campaigns – sat uneasily within the dominant interwar narrative of the Great War in Australia, the Anzac legend, which drew unabashedly on the language of high diction, emphasizing the elements of honour, bravery, sacrifice and salvation. Analysing the writings of returned men published during the interwar period, this paper will explore the various strategies Australian writers used to reconcile the traditional Anzac legend with notions of futility that permeated their accounts of the third Ypres campaign.

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THURSDAY 30 JANUARY 2020
Canterbury, 6 p.m.

Dries Claeys (IFFM & University of Leuven)
'Reconstructing Flanders fields after the Great War'

Although the war damage in Belgium was nowhere near the scale of the French regions *dévastées*, the Belgian countryside as well had to be restored. This was particularly the case in Ypres and its surrounding areas. Passchendaele, Messines, Langemarck were only few of the villages that were completely wiped off the map. Refugees and policymakers openly questioned the possibility to reclaim the former battlefields. Nevertheless, and in contrast with the French case, the recovery of lost ground only took a few years. Farmers returned, and with them farms and agriculture. This lecture concentrates on three questions: what were the steps taken to reconstruct Flanders fields, and how did they differ from the post-war recovery in France? How did the post-war landscapes look like, and to what extent did the Great War change them? And why did the "new" countryside develop the way it did?

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THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2020
leper, 7 p.m.

Richard Smith (Goldsmiths, University of London)
*'Imagining the West Indian soldier:
from empire to multicultural commemoration'*

The role of the 16,000-strong British West Indies Regiment in the First World War has been recuperated from a marginalized afterthought in accounts of the British imperial war effort to occupy a more central, even symbolic, position in contemporary interpretations of the conflict. This process gained momentum during the recent centenary commemorations in which West Indian participation was remembered across a wide range of media, creative initiatives and community projects. This seminar will explore a variety of historical and contemporary representations of the British West Indies Regiment to consider the extent to which citizenship in multicultural Britain is framed by past imperial military service.

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THURSDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2020
Canterbury, 6 p.m.

Gareth Hardware (Commonwealth War Graves Commission)
'Preparing the Commonwealth War Graves Commission for the next hundred years: horticultural challenges in a changing environment.'

This paper will explore the challenges and tasks facing the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in a changing world. For example, with many nations, and the wider public, now far more concerned about environmental protection, the use of pesticides is becoming increasingly problematic, and in many instances outlawed. Climate change, and trying to predict its effects and impacts, also requires much consideration and thought. And as the estate ages, there are new conservation and preservation issues to be considered. All of these challenges require much attention from skilled and knowledgeable staff, which has implications for staffing and training. Gareth Hardware, the CWGC's head of horticulture for north-western Europe, and project manager for the Commission's new visitor centre at Beaurains, will take us through these issues and the current thinking of the Commission.

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