

War correspondents

By Fiona Carruthers

IN DECEMBER 1915, just nine months after enrolling as an arts student at Sydney University, 18-year-old Arthur Wheen packed away his books and set sail for Egypt as a volunteer with the Australian Imperial Force.

Over the next three years Wheen served in the thickest of the action at the Somme and Ypres, was wounded twice, reached the rank of lieutenant, and was awarded the Military Medal and two Bars for his bravery.

His wartime experience had a profound effect on the young Wheen. Ten years later, by now working as a librarian at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, he was approached to translate into English a novel, *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, by a then unknown German author, Erich Maria Remarque.

Wheen, who had no formal qualifications in German, later wrote: "I found that I understood it less by reason of my knowledge of German, which I have but imperfectly, than by virtue of having made the experience recorded in it ... the startling feature of the book lay in its revelation of the fact that the enemy on the other side of No Man's Land was, as near as damn it, our very selves."

Instead of a literal translation – nothing new in the West – Wheen gave the book an inspired and poetic English title, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It was an immediate best seller around the world, and still ranks as the greatest account of the First World War in any language, and one of the most powerful anti-war books ever written.

The collaboration led to a friendship between Remarque and Wheen that reads like a novel in itself. Remarque, exiled in a remote corner of Switzerland after the book was banned by the Nazis, shared his thoughts in a lengthy correspondence with his Australian translator. Both had fought on the Western Front, both were wounded – Remarque being hit by shell splinters after only six weeks on the Western Front – and left disturbed by the horrors of war. Both turned to the arts for solace. Finally, in the years after the war, both men left their respective homelands for good.

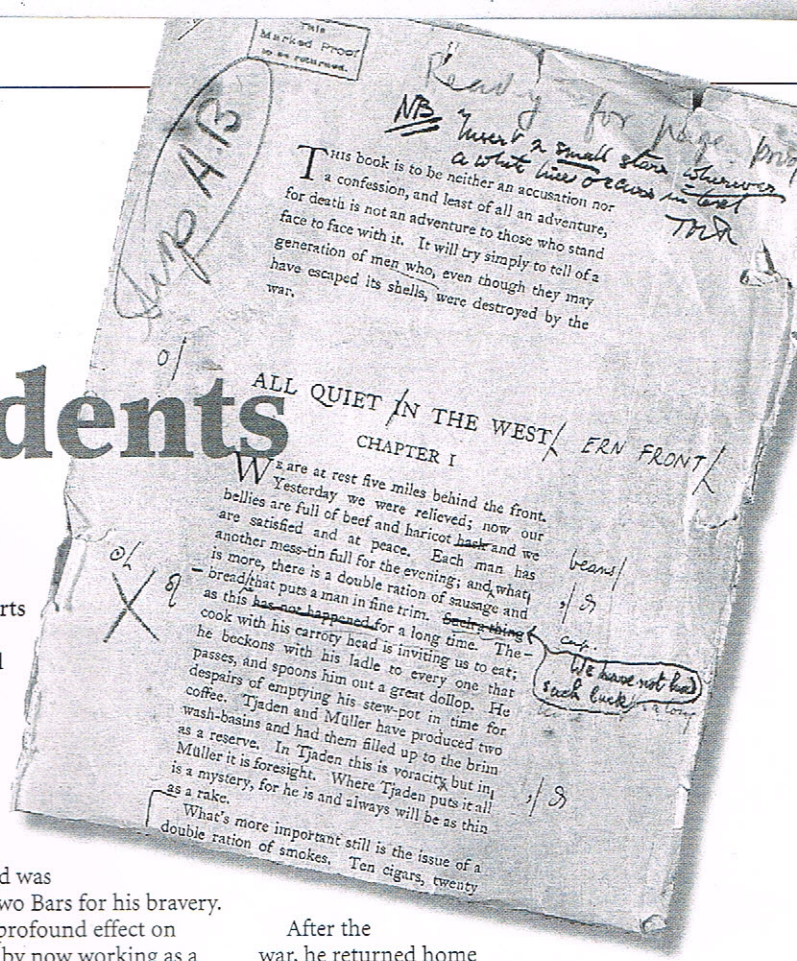
But while Remarque is remembered as one of Germany's most significant writers, little is known of the man who delivered his greatest novel to the English-speaking world.

Wheen, born in 1897, was the second son of a Methodist preacher from rural New South Wales. After obtaining his leaving certificate in 1914, with honours in English and history, he enrolled in Arts I at Sydney and studied Latin, English, history and philosophy.



Main illustration: the galley proof of the English translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, showing the inspired late change to the title. Above: Arthur Wheen in London in 1942.

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After the war, he returned home and enrolled in architecture before being chosen as the University's Rhodes Scholar in 1919. He arrived at Oxford University in 1920 and spent four years there, later joining the staff of the Victoria and Albert Museum library, where he worked until his retirement in 1962.

When penned his own experience of the war in a novella, *Two Masters*, in 1923. But it was his work as a translator that made his reputation. His translation of *All Quiet on the Western Front* was published in English in 1929 and was well received as a strong translation that 'gave voice' to a generation, albeit with a handful of reviews questioning his knowledge of German.

During the early to mid 1930s, Wheen continued translating Remarque's novels and short stories. It is not known for sure whether Wheen and Remarque ever came face-to-face, although they are thought to have met once in London in the early 1930s. During the Second World War, Wheen lost contact with Remarque, who by then had switched to using an American translator.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the translation of Remarque's work was the collaboration between Wheen and the English publishing house, G.P. Putnam's Sons, to agree on the final English title, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. At the manuscript stage, the title was still close to the literal German translation, *All Quiet in the West*. The eventual title was adopted only at the galley proof stage.

Realising the historical importance of the papers and fearing for their safety in wartime London, Wheen sent them to Australia in 1940, to the safe keeping of his young daughter. For almost four decades, the precious papers languished in a relative's suburban Sydney home until Wheen's widow bequeathed the papers to the National Library after his death in London in 1971.

This article was compiled from two papers written by Arthur Wheen's great nephew, Sydney alumnus Ian Campbell (BA '69, MA '89).

REMARKING REMARQUE

The Arthur Wheen Papers

In the centenary year of Remarque's birth, Ian Campbell highlights an Australian connection to one of the world's great war novels

He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence: All Quiet on the Western Front.

He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw that he could not have suffered long: his face had an expression of calm, as if almost glad the end had come.

—*All Quiet on the Western Front*
(trans. A.W. Wheen, 1929)

With these celebrated words, Erich Maria Remarque (1898–1970) concludes his great novel, titled in its original German *Im Westen Nichts Neues*. Ever since its translation in 1929, Remarque's first novel has been known in the English-speaking world as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. While it became the best known work to emerge from the First World War, it may be surprising for readers to learn that the translator of Remarque's immortal work was an Australian, Arthur Wesley Wheen (1897–1971).

Documents relating to Wheen's translation of *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, and other novels by Remarque, form the bulk of the



Arthur Wheen Papers (MS 3656) held in the Manuscript Collection of the National Library. Like Remarque, Arthur Wheen fought on the Western Front in the First World War, and following his death in London in 1971 his widow bequeathed his papers to the Library, where they were lodged by my relatives.

Quite apart from these personal, family connections, however, the Arthur Wheen Collection has broader significance this year, which marks the centenary of Remarque's

Frank Hurley (1885–1962)
The Morning at Passchendaele 1917
From the Pictorial Collection

birth in the northern German town of Osnabrück in 1898. The Erich Maria Remarque Archive of the University of Osnabrück, in collaboration with the town, has organised a number of events in Germany to mark the novelist's life and work. It is thus fitting that the Australian links with the Remarque story are better known.

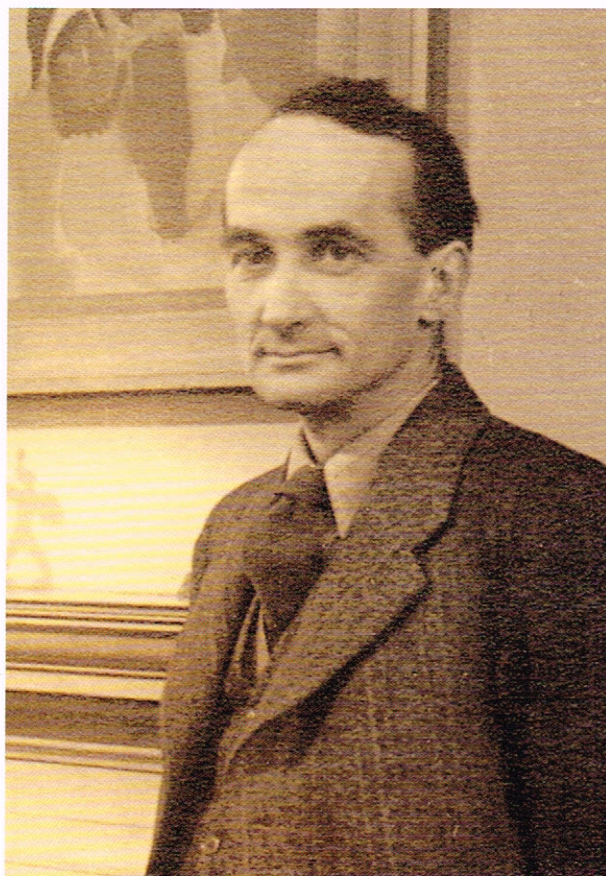


In 1916 the 18-year-old Remarque had been called up for military service in the German Army. On 31 July 1917—at Passchendaele, in the Third Battle of Ypres, and after only six weeks on the Western Front—he was wounded by British

shell splinters and saw no further action. What he had experienced at the Front in this time, however, had changed his life irrevocably—though ten years were to elapse before his evocation was to appear in serialised form in the Berlin magazine *Vossische*

Zeitung. The book itself came out in Germany on 31 January 1929: it sold 200 000 copies in the first three weeks of publication; almost half a million copies within three months in Germany alone.

But what of Remarque's English



translator? Arthur Wesley Wheen was born in country New South Wales in 1897, the second son of a Methodist clergyman. Along with his brother (my grandfather) he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces and found himself on the Western Front over much of the three years from 1916 to 1918. He was awarded the Military Medal for gallantry.

When hostilities ended, Arthur remained in England. Having entered Sydney University prior to his taking up military service and following demobilisation at war's end, he had been chosen as a Rhodes Scholar, and went up to Oxford University in 1920. He subsequently joined the staff of the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1924—a few years after another war veteran, the Englishman Herbert Read, later one of Great Britain's foremost art critics and essayists over a period of 30 years. Wheen continued to work at the Victoria and Albert, and in 1939 was appointed Keeper of the Library at the Museum, a position he held until his retirement in 1962.

It was during this period prior to the Second World War that he

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(top left) Arthur Wheen, 1941

Photograph courtesy of Gretchen Wheen

(top right) Remarque in 1928, the year in which *Im Westen Nichts Neues* was published in Germany

Reproduced courtesy of the Erich Maria Remarque Archive, Osnabrück, Germany

(opposite) French movie poster of the Academy Award-winning 1930 film

by Lewis Milestone

Reproduced courtesy of the Erich Maria Remarque Archive, Osnabrück, Germany

established his reputation as a fine translator. He had written his only novella, *Two Masters*, in 1923, a work which reflected his own experience at the Front. (The galley proofs for the work are held in the Arthur Wheen Collection.) But it was his work as a translator which was to occupy much of his career. The Library's Manuscript Collection shows us just how rich this translating effort was, and how

central his role in bringing Remarque's novels and short stories to the English-speaking world during the 1930s. The Wheen Papers hold the manuscripts covering Wheen's 1929 translation of *Im Westen Nichts Neues*: including a German typescript, Wheen's English manuscript, versions of Wheen's English typescript, and galley proofs of the translation.

An issue of particular interest is the

einige Tage mit ihm dauern. Alles bisher wird nichts sein gegen diese Zeit, bis er stirbt. Jetzt ist er noch betäubt und fühlt nichts. In einer Stunde wird er ein ~~schmerz~~ ^{schmerz} ~~unerbittlicher~~ ^{unerbittlicher} Schmerz sein. Die Tage, die er noch leben kann, ~~werden~~ ^{werden} für ihn eine einzige Qual. Und wenn nicht es, ob er sie noch hat oder nicht - Ich nicke. "Ja, Kat, man sollte einen Revolver nehmen." Er bleibt stehen. Er ist entschlossen, ich sehe es. Wir blicken uns an, aber wir sind nicht mehr allein. Vor uns sammelt sich ein Haufen, aus den Trichtern und Gräbern kommen Köpfe. Wir hören eine Bekehrung. Kat schüttelt den Kopf. "So junge Kerle -" er wiederholt es : "so junge Kerle -"

Unsere Verluste sind geringer als angenommen war; - fünf Tote und acht Verwundete. Es war ja auch nur ein ~~kleiner~~ ^{kleiner} Feuerüberfall. ~~Wir haben die Feinde zurückgedrängt und sind nun wieder zurückgezogen.~~ Wir gehen zurück. Schweigend ~~haben wir uns in einem Wald versteckt.~~ ^{haben wir uns in einem Wald versteckt.} Die Verwundeten werden am Sanitätsstation gebracht. Es beginnt zu regnen. Nach einer Stunde haben wir unsere Wagen erreicht und klettern hinein. ~~Jetzt steht Platz als vorher da.~~ ^{Jetzt steht Platz als vorher da.} Der Regen wird stärker. Wir breiten Leitbahnen aus und legen sie auf unsere Köpfe. Das Wasser trommelt darauf nieder. An den Seiten fließen die Regenströmen ab. Die Wagen platzen durch die Köcher, und wir wiegen uns im Halbschleier hin und her.

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24, BEDFORD STREET,
STRAND, LONDON, W.C.2.
December 4th, 1938.

Dear Mr. When,

I am delighted to learn from Read this morning that you will undertake the task (which I hope will prove in fact a pleasure), of translating the German novel of which Read has spoken to you by Remarque. From what Read tells me it is about the best war book that has yet appeared in any country and he encourages me to believe that it should have a great success in England. We are accordingly anxious to make it our most important spring book which means that we should publish in February of next year; this in its turn means that we should like to have the translation complete in our hands by the end of the second week in January. I hope this is not driving you too hard. We will, of course, do everything we can to help you and if you will send us each chapter as you complete it, we will have it typed and returned to you at once for final revision. It might be possible, in fact, to proceed with the setting of the first half of the book before waiting for the completion of the second half, though on the other hand, I can imagine that you will very probably prefer to revise the book as a whole before letting any of it get into the hands of the printers. However, these details we will leave for later consideration. At the moment I only wish to say what a pleasure it is to us to know that the translation is in your hands; I feel sure that no one could be found better equipped in every way to do the work. I am having the typescript sent to you under separate cover to-day. Incidentally I would like to hear from you at an early date an exact title for the book, or if the German title lends itself to alternative English titles one or two suggestions for the title.

A. R. When, Esq.,
The Library,
Victoria & Albert Museum,
South Kensington, S.W.7.

Yours sincerely
Herbert Read

I found it easy to translate for the same reason that any other infantry private found it easy to understand. For such men the startling feature of the book lay in its revelation of the fact that the enemy on the other side of No Man's Land was, as near as, damn it, our very selves

(top left) Page 55 of the German typescript, with hand-noted corrections
(top right) Putnam's publishing correspondence detailing When's acceptance of the translation task, following his discussions with renowned poet and critic Herbert Read. The issue of the book's title is raised, and the typical publishing exigencies apply
Arthur When Papers; from the Manuscript Collection

steps showing When and his publisher, G.P. Putnam's Sons, arriving at the final English title *All Quiet on the Western Front*. At the manuscript stage, as the When Papers show, the title was closer to the literal German: *No News in the West*. Only in the galley proof changes is the eventual title adopted. When's translating work continued after this twentieth-century classic. The Manuscript Collection contains the series dealing with the translation of Remarque's subsequent novel *Der Weg Zurück* (in English, *The Road Back*), published in 1931. Much had happened in Germany, however, by the time Remarque wrote his third novel, *Drei*

Kameraden (*The Three Comrades*). Following the Nazis' rise to ultimate power on 11 May 1933, Remarque's books were proscribed and publicly burned by the authorities. The author himself had left Germany for Switzerland in 1931, from where he had sent instalments of his third novel to When in London. (Indeed, because of the exile situation, this book actually first appeared in English translation, in 1937—ahead of its publication in German by the Dutch publishing house, Querido.) The When Papers contain these instalments, including various revisions, with instructions and comment by Remarque himself from his Swiss base concerning his

progress, or rather lack of progress, with the novel. Remarque's covering notes (in German), sent to When with the novel instalments over the period 1933 to 1936, provide a fascinating insight into the processes of literary translation between author and translator. (In 1939 Arthur When was offered the opportunity to translate Remarque's fourth novel—but he never completed the task. American Denver Lindsey, then Associate Editor of Colliers, took up the role where When left off.) The Arthur When Papers' international significance is highlighted by the fact that Germany's Erich Maria Remarque Archive in Osnabrück had, until 1997, been unaware of the existence of some typescripts of Remarque's short stories from 1930 and 1931. They had been thought lost in their original German, until I forwarded details of the Papers to the Archive. The Osnabrück Archive houses some 20 000 items relating to the life and work of Remarque, including an original manuscript of *Im Westen Nichts Neues* purchased for half a million pounds sterling in 1995. The Archive also holds microfilm copies of the Remarque papers (40 000 items) held in the Fales Library at the University of New York, in the

United States. (These latter holdings, bequeathed by Remarque's last wife, the actress Paulette Goddard, cover much of the author's work written in Switzerland and the United States, from the 1940s right up to the time of his death in Switzerland in 1970.)

The National Library's Arthur When Papers can thus be seen as a crucial 'link' between these other two collections—giving researchers the most comprehensive view possible of Remarque's work.

With regard to When's approach to translating this classic twentieth-century war novel, a 1931 article by When (included in the Library Collection) is of special interest. In response to accounts by Charles Bean, Australia's Official War Correspondent in the Great War, When wrote:

I have often been asked how I came to translate Remarque's first book *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The manuscript was sent to me as being one able to understand it, and on reading I found that I understood it less by reason of my knowledge of German, which I have but imperfectly, than by virtue of having made the experience recorded in it. I found it easy to translate for the same reason that any other infantry private found it easy to understand. For such men the startling feature of the book lay in its revelation of the fact that the enemy on the other

side of No Man's Land was, as near as, damn it, our very selves. As far as ex-infantrymen are concerned, there can be no question of the truth of Remarque's description of the life of the German front line soldiers, for the startling, even horrifying but sufficient reason that *mutatis mutandis*, we know only too well that it is as faithfully our own story as well ...

When's translation activity was not restricted to the work of Remarque. The Collection also houses his translations of works by lesser-known German authors such as Ernst Johanssen and Theodor Pluvier, clearly demonstrating that his skills were much in demand in that period of German history which saw the end of the Weimar Republic.

How did the papers come to arrive in Australia? In 1940, with Britain having been at war with Nazi Germany for a year, Arthur When and his wife sent their daughter to Australia. With her travelled the German typescript for *All Quiet* which When had worked from in 1929. For the next 30 years it was held, with other books, in my grandparents' home in suburban Sydney.

Supplementing the more central documents in the When Papers, and likewise of interest to readers and researchers alike, is a comprehensive range of press clippings, mostly

relating to the release of *All Quiet* in 1929. Herbert Read's review of his friend's translation and of the Remarque novel itself (in the London magazine *The Nation and Athenaeum* of 27 April 1929) especially deserves reading for its moving tone.

In closing this brief account of the Arthur When Papers—in this centenary year of Remarque's birth—we would do well to return to the novel itself, as it describes the impact upon the lives of our forebears who fought in that awful conflict on the Western Front 80 years ago. As the 1929 When translation of Remarque's brief foreword expresses it:

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war.

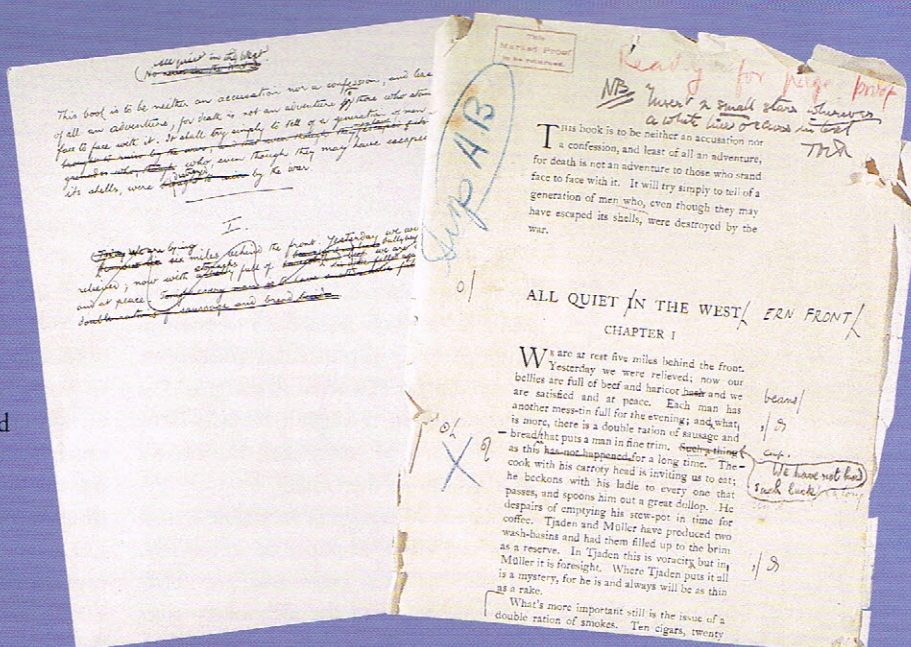
IAN CAMPBELL, great-nephew of Arthur When, is a Sydney-based public servant with interests in literary translation

The Web site of the Erich Maria Remarque Archive at the University of Osnabrück, Germany, is located at <http://www.ub.uni-osnabrueck.de/emr/intern.htm>

EVOLUTION OF A TITLE:

Draft of When's translation (left). Note that the more literal title *No News in the West* has been reworked as *All Quiet in the West*—in transition to the book's celebrated, published title (amended only at galley proof stage—shown right)

Arthur When Papers; from the Manuscript Collection





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MS 3656

Papers of Arthur Wesley Wheen (1897 - 1971)

(Microfilm Mfm G 28132-28140)

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Scope and Content Note

Papers

c.1920-65 (bulk 1920-40)

1.4 (10 boxes)

MS 3656

Available for reference

Wheen's papers were placed in the National Library by his widow. The collection contains manuscripts, typescripts and galley-proofs of Wheen's translations, together with typescripts in German from which he worked. There is some correspondence from the German authors, mostly with Remarque, and publishers. Also included are some family correspondence and a file of clippings of reviews.

Microfilm

The papers were microfilmed in 1999. The microfilm numbers appear on the last page of this list below the box list.

Biographical Note

Arthur Wesley Wheen was born in Sydney in 1897. He enrolled at Sydney University, but in 1915 enlisted in the Australian Expeditionary Force and left to fight in Europe, where he was awarded the Military Medal for bravery. On demobilisation he was chosen as a Rhodes

Scholar and went up to New College Oxford in 1920. He joined the staff of the library of the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1924. His only original literary work *Two Masters*, a brief novella based on his life at the Front was published in 1929. Over the next ten years he translated a number of works from German, several of them novels dealing with the First World War. He is especially remembered for his translation of Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* which was an outstanding success. For a while Wheen had close connections with a circle which included Herbert Read and T.S. Eliot. In 1939 he was appointed Keeper of the Library and stayed in this position, achieving some distinction, until he retired in 1962. He died in March 1971.

Series List

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 7. The Kaiser goes, 1933. 1-5
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Series Descriptions

Series 1. All Quiet on the Western Front: 1929

This series covers the whole process of the translating of the famous novel by E.M. Remarque. It contains a bound typescript in German (1927), a printed German text, Wheen's manuscript in English, versions of the English typescript and galley proofs.

Series 2. The Road-Back: 1931

This series covers the translation of the sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. There are various German typescripts, an English manuscript. and several English typescripts.

Series 3. Three Comrades: 1937

This novel was started in 1933 under the name of 'Abscheid' (Departure) which Remarque sent to Wheen in instalments. This early version was later greatly revised. This series contains the original typescript instalments of 'Abschied' with covering notes from Remarque still attached; the start of Wheen's translation of it; two versions of the German typescript of 'Three Comrades' (the first incomplete); an English manuscript; Galley proofs of the finished translation.

Series 4. Other Works of Remarque

This series contains incomplete German and English typescripts of a later novel by Remarque, which Wheen doesn't appear to have finished. This was later translated and published in America in 1941 under the name of *Flotsam*. There are also translations in typescript of various short stories: 'The Fatal Idyll', 'Silence Round Verdun', 'Karl Broeger in Fleury', 'Strange Facts III', 'Johan Bartok'.

Series 5. Four Infantrymen: 1930

This series covers the translation of the novel by E. Johanssen. It contains part of a German proof copy, Wheen's translation in manuscript, a first version of the English typescript (mixed and incomplete), a complete final version and proofs.

Series 6. Bushmen Drawings: 1930

This series consists of one file covering the work by Overmaier and Kuhr. It contains a German typescript and a manuscript translation.

Series 7. The Kaiser Goes: 1933

This covers the translating of the novel by T. Plivier. It contains the German book, an incomplete English manuscript, an English transcript, proofs and two copies of the final printed version.

Series 8. Vergil: 1934

This series consists of one file covering the translation of the short work by T. Haecker, 'Vergil, Father of the West'. It contains part of a German proof copy, a complete German typescript a few pages of an English manuscript and a typescript of the finished translation.

Series 9. Wheens own Writing

This series is one file containing the galley proofs of Wheen's short story 'Two Masters' (1929) and an essay of 1931 concerning Dr Bean's proposed history of the Great War for children, manuscript and typescript.

Series 10. Correspondence

This series contains a file of family correspondence containing four letters from Wheen to his mother, written between 1924 and 1953. Accompanying one of these is a letter from his wife and seven letters to his sister Lilly (Mrs R. Tebbutt) written between 1960 and 1967. There is a second file of correspondence relating to Wheen's translation work arranged as follows - firstly letters from publishers in chronological order, accompanying one of these (3/7/29 - Pegasus Press, Paris) a copy of the contract for the translation of 'Bushman Drawings'; secondly letters from Remarque (often undated); finally a letter from the writer E. Johanssen and two from C.E. (Eiserstein?). There is also an undated letter from the British Embassy Berlin addressed to "Dear Constance"