

# LITERARY LIFE

A look at what's new in the Sussex book world

Books editor: **Angela Wintle**

Poets, of course, were particularly busy during the Great War, memorably capturing the savagery and pity of the conflict in searing stanzas. But artists were at work across the battlefields, too.

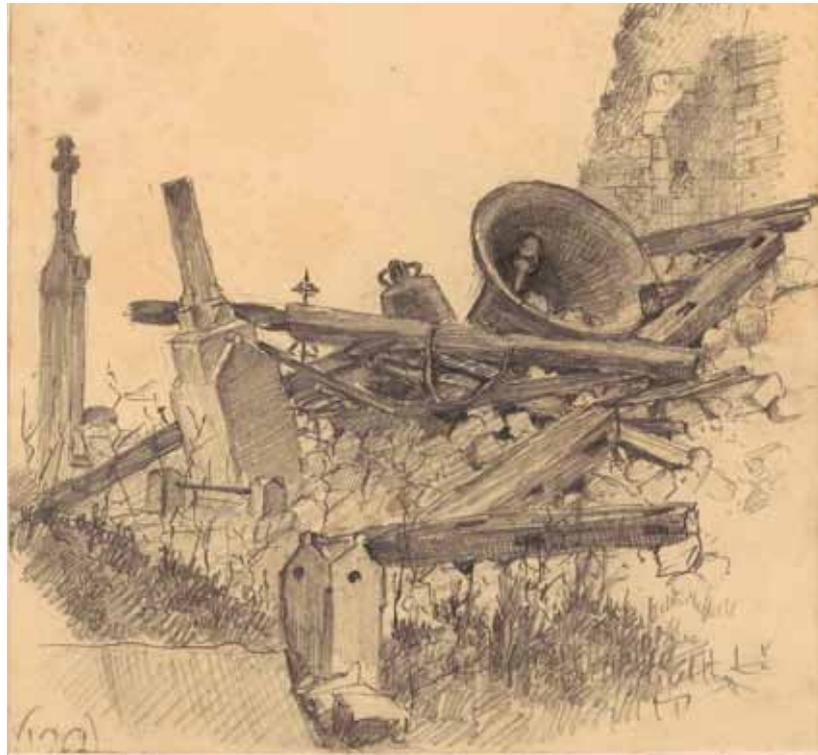
The poets still provoke our emotions with their powerful word pictures. Unlike the artists, however, they cannot show us the scorched landscape, the physical devastation of buildings and the terrifying might of explosives.

But one Sussex artist has left us his personal legacy of that war in a duet of both words and pictures – a rare memoir of its kind made even more persuasive by the fact he was also a serving officer on the Western Front.

That memoir has now become the subject of a significant Sussex publishing event in which the Sussex Record Society and West Sussex Record Office have jointly produced a magnificent tribute to the Arundel-based artist Ralph Ellis who was born in the town in 1885 and died there in 1963.

Were it not for the war, his legacy would have probably rested on his paintings of Sussex downland landscapes, portraits and huge collection of town and village inn signs, of which he was a renowned designer and painter.

But those peaceable artistic pursuits were abandoned for



Reproduced with permission of West Sussex Record Office (Add Ms 25005 59)

## A milestone memoir

The work of a Sussex artist who went to war with sword and pen has been vividly brought back to life, reveals Freddie Lawrence

four years when he joined the Royal Sussex Regiment in 1914 and served at the front until he was wounded in 1917. Amid the carnage and confusion, Ellis produced an historically valuable, handwritten, five-volume memoir portraying his experiences in images and words.

Curiously (he was an artist after all), it is his words which provide a more compelling account. The images rarely depict the real scale of devastation. Many of his drawings could be the work of a touring artist on a pleasant sketching holiday. But the words, combining an objective and detailed military memoir with a very personal account of one

man's experience, really tell the tale of life made terrible by what Ellis called 'the foul, destroying devices of man'.

In this impressive volume, his original memoir is reproduced in full colour facsimile alongside an outstanding contextual commentary by historian Sue Hepburn. It is a major milestone in the Record Society's history and a fitting posthumous accolade for a Sussex man who went to war with both sword and pen. ♦

***The Great War Memoir of Ralph Ellis: Sussex Artist and Soldier is available through the Sussex Record Society at £45 (£40 for members); [sussexrecordsociety.org](http://sussexrecordsociety.org)***

**ABOVE:** A sketch of wartime devastation taken from Ralph Ellis' five-volume war memoir

**LEFT:** Ralph Ellis as a young soldier in 1917



Reproduced with permission of West Sussex Record Office (Add Ms 25005 59)