Commemorating the Armistice Centenary

Presenters

PAMELA MILES, JOHN MILLER, AND MICHAEL PENNINGTON

John

In the early years of the 20th century there was much talk of possible war in Europe, and opposing alliances prepared contingency plans. Bismarck had predicted "some damned foolish thing in the Balkans would ignite the next war." He was right on the geography – on June 28th 1914 the Austrian heir-apparent, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, were assassinated in Sarajevo. Austria declared war on Serbia, backed by Germany, and opposed by Russia and France. When Germany attacked Belgium Britain declared war on Germany on August 4th. On the eve of that declaration the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey, looked out at the street lamps being lit in Whitehall, and remarked sadly, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

The First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, wrote in his diary:

Michael

> **It was 11 o'clock at night – 12 by German time – when the ultimatum expired. The windows of the Admiralty were thrown wide open in the warm night air. Under the roof from which Nelson had received his orders were gathered a small group of Admirals and Captains and a cluster of clerks, pencil in hand, waiting. Alog the Mall from the direction of the Palace the sound of an immense concourse singing "God save the King" floated in. On this deep wave there broke the chimes of Big Ben; and as the first stroke of the hour boomed out, a rustle of movement swept across the room. The war telegram, which meant "Commence hostilities against Germany," was flashed to the ships and establishments under the White Ensign all over the world.**
>
> **I walked across the Horse Guards Parade to the Cabinet room, and reported to the Prime Minister and the Ministers who were assembled there that the deed was done.**

John

Next day, with the German assault on Liege in Belgium, the first battle of the War began. The German Chief of Staff, General Moltke, said that Europe was entering upon the struggle that would decide the course of history for the next 100 years. But many people thought it would be a short war. The Kaiser told his departing

troops on August 9th: "You will be home before the leaves have fallen from the trees."

A German officer leaving for the Western Front said he expected to take breakfast at the Café de la Paix in Paris on Sedan Day – September 2nd. Russian officers expected to be in Berlin at about the same time – 6 weeks was the usual allowance. In St. Petersburg the question was not whether the Russians could win, but whether it would take them 2 months or 3 – pessimists who suggested 6 months were considered defeatists.

The dissenting voice was Field Marshal Lord Kitchener's: "We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field, and maintain them for several years." This did not cheer the women of England. Katharine Tynan's poem "Joining the Colours" in August 1914 caught their mood.

Pamela

**There they go marching all in step so gay!
Smooth-cheeked and golden, food for shells and guns,
Blithely they go as to a wedding day,
The mothers' sons.**

**The drab street stares to see them row on row
On the high tram-tops, singing like the lark
Too careless-gay for courage, singing they go
Into the dark.**

**With tin-whistles, mouth-organs, any noise,
They pipe the way to glory and the grave;
Foolish and young, the gay and golden boys
Love cannot save.**

**High heart! High courage! The poor girls they kissed
Run with them: they shall kiss no more, alas!
Out of the mist they stepped – into the mist
Singing they pass.**

John

The advance of the German Army was checked at the Battle of the Marne on September 8th, followed by their retreat to the Aisne, the race to the sea for the possession of the Channel ports, and the fall of Antwerp.

At the Battle of Ypres the officers and men of the British Expeditionary Force held their ground, fought until they died, and stopped the Germans in Flanders. Not Mons nor the Marne, but Ypres was the real monument to British valour, as it was also the grave of four-fifths of the original British Expeditionary Force. After it, with the advent of winter, came the slow deadly sinking into the stalemate of trench warfare. Running from Switzerland to the Channel like a gangrenous wound across French and Belgian territory, the trenches determined the war of position and attrition, the brutal, mud-filled, murderous insanity known as the Western Front that was to last for four more years.

As David Lloyd George wrote later:

> **The wasteful prolongation of the Somme campaign after it had become clear that a break through the German lines was unattainable cost us heavily. The volunteers of 1914 and 1915 were the finest body of men ever sent to do battle for Britain. Five hundred thousand of these men, the flower of our race, were thrown away on a stubborn and unintelligent hammering away at what was then an impenetrable barrier. The loss in men was irreplaceable, less in numbers than in quality.**

As the casualties mounted, the poets in the field were also driven to convey the sense of loss. One poem still remembered is by John McCrae, written near Ypres – *In Flanders Fields.*

Michael

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

John

This plea so touched Moina Michael that she felt driven to respond with *We Shall Keep the Faith.*

Pamela

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet – to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With all who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valour led
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honour of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.

John

Amidst the slaughter there was the occasional unexpected interlude, as in the famous Christmas Truce.

Michael

I have just been through one of the most extraordinary scenes imaginable. Tonight is Christmas Eve, and I came up into the trenches this evening for my tour of duty in them. Firing was going on all the time, and the enemy's guns were at it hard, firing at us. Then about seven the firing stopped.

I was in my dugout reading a paper, and the mail was being dished out. It was reported that the Germans had lighted their trenches up all along our front. We had been calling to one another for some time Christmas wishes and other things. I went out and they shouted "no shooting," and then somehow the scene became a peaceful one. All our men got out of the trenches and sat on the

parapet, the Germans did the same, and they talked to one another in English and broken English.

I got on top of the trench and talked German, and asked them to sing a German *Volkslied,* a folk-song, which they did, then our men sang quite well, and each side clapped and cheered the other. I asked a German who sang a solo to sing one of Schumann's songs, so he sang *The Two Grenadiers* splendidly. Our men were a good audience and really enjoyed the singing.

Then Pope and I walked across and held a conversation with the German officer in command. One of his men introduced us properly, he asked my name and then presented me to his officer. I gave the latter permission to bury some German dead who were lying in between us, and we agreed to have no more shooting until 12 midnight tomorrow.

We talked together, 10 or more Germans gathered round. I was almost in their lines within a yard or so. We saluted each other, he thanked me for permission to bury his dead, and we fixed up how many men were to do it, and that otherwise both sides must remain in their trenches.

Then we wished each other goodnight, and a good night's rest, and a happy Christmas, and we parted with a salute. I got back to the trench. The Germans sang *Die Wacht am Rhein,* it sounded well. Then our men sang *Christians Awake*, it sounded so well, and with a goodnight we all got back into our trenches. It was a curious scene, a lovely moonlight night, the German trenches with small lights on them, and the men on both sides gathered in groups on the parapets.

At times we heard the guns in the distance, and an occasional rifle-shot. I can hear them now, but about us is absolute quiet. I allowed one or two men to go out and meet a German or two halfway. They exchanged cigars, had a smoke and talked. The officer I spoke to hopes we shall do the same on New Year's Day. I said, "Yes, if I am here." I felt I must sit down and write the story of this Christmas Eve before I went to lie down. Of course no precautions are relaxed, but I think they mean to play the game. It is weird to think that tomorrow night we shall be at it hard again. If one gets through this show it will be a Christmas time to live in one's memory. Am just off for a walk round the trenches to see all is well.

John

The war in the air was a new experience for everyone, as one of the Royal Flying Corps fighter pilots described at the time:

We had to train our senses of smell and hearing, for the continuous sound and smell of our own engines and exhaust filled all our immediate presence to the exclusion of more distant smells and sounds, except the dull whoof of an anti-aircraft burst. It was the pre-hearing vision that meant so much, for it was the keenness of eyesight in spotting the Hun afar that enabled his eventual attack to be prepared for and met. The chief danger was to be surprised, to be shot down before one realised that an attack was in being.

Sometimes we played hide-and-seek with the enemy in and around large cloud formations towering in an otherwise clear sky, diving into the clouds when things got too hot, while the enemy would do the same. For the first few seconds coming out of a cloud one was vulnerable, being blinded by the sudden light, and having to pick one's bearings. It makes me shudder to think how gaily we flew into these cloud formations, not thinking about chances of collision . . .

We would also fly around the outside of a cloud formation, looking for enemy patrols, not knowing what we would come upon round the next corner, where there might always be an enemy formation doing the same thing.

Pamela

In Britain 160,000 women lost their husbands, and 300,000 children lost their fathers. In *The Wind on the Downs* Marian Allen captured that loss in a very personal sense:

I like to think of you as brown and tall,
As strong and living as you used to be,
In khaki tunic, Sam Browne belt and all,
And standing there and laughing down at me,
Because they tell me, dear, that you are dead,
Because I can no longer see your face.

You have not died, it is not true, instead
You seek adventure in some other place.
That you are round about me, I believe;
I hear you laughing as you used to do,
Yet loving all the things I think of you;
And knowing you are happy, should I grieve?
You follow and are watchful where I go;
How should you leave me, having loved me so?

We walked along the tow-path, you and I,
Beside the sluggish-moving, still canal;
It seemed impossible that you should die;
I think of you the same and always shall.

We thought of many things and spoke of few,
And life lay all uncertainly before,
And now I walk alone and think of you,
And wonder what new kingdoms you explore.
Over the railway line, across the grass,
While up above the golden wings are spread,
Flying, ever flying overhead,
Here still I see your khaki figure pass,
And when I leave the meadow, almost wait
That you should open the wooden gate.

John

Rupert Brooke's war poetry, written in the field, is some of the best-remembered still today.

Michael

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds: dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

John

Rupert Brooke died of sunstroke at Lemnos on April 26th 2015. When Duff Cooper heard the news he was moved to write a verse of his own about him:

Hushed is the music of the sweetest voice
That filled the shambles of our world with song.
Still is the heart that beats so brave and strong,
The heart that bids us mourn but not rejoice,
Because we know that this high soul, at peace,

Went singing down the dark and silent way,
And that there lives forever from today
A piece of England in the Isles of Greece.

Michael

Winston Churchill was similarly moved in prose:

> **The thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by the many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this, the hardest, the cruellest, and the least-rewarding of all wars that men have fought.**
>
> **They are a whole history and revelation of Rupert Brooke himself. Joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, ruled by high undoubting purpose, he was all that one could wish England's noblest sons to be.**

John

Vera Brittain lost her fiancé in 1915, killed aged 20 by a sniper, four months after his proposal of marriage.

Pamela

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,
And feel once more I do not live in vain,
Although bereft of you.

Perhaps the golden meadows at my feet
Will make the sunny hours of spring seem gay,
And I shall find the white May-blossoms sweet,
Though you have passed away.

Perhaps the summer woods will shimmer bright,
And crimson roses once again be fair,
And autumn harvest fields a rich delight,
Although you are not there.

Perhaps some day I shall not shrink in pain
To see the passing of the dying year,
And listen to Christmas songs again,
Although you cannot hear.
But though kind Time may many joys renew,

There is one great joy I shall not know
Again, because my heart for loss of You
Was broken, long ago.

John

Siegfried Sassoon, another of the great War Poets, became a touch cynical towards the end, as in this poem of 1917:

"Good morning, good morning!" the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of 'em dead,
And we're cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
"He's a cheery old card," grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.
But he did for them both with his plan of attack.

Michael

Lawrence Binyon's *For the Fallen* contains a verse that is still heard every November at Remembrance Services:

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle; they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted:
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;

They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known in the Night.

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end they remain.

John

Letters home from the Front were often received with dread, like this one from Glyn Rhys Morgan:

My Dear Dad

This letter is being written on the eve of going "over the top". It is only because I know by this time what are the odds against returning unhurt that I write it. It will only be sent in the event of my being killed in action.

You, I know, my dear Dad, will bear the shock as bravely as you have always borne the strain of my being out here; yet I should like if possible to help you carry on with as stout a heart as I hope to "jump the bags."

I believe I have told you before that I do not fear Death itself; the Beyond has no terror for me. I am quite content to die for the cause for which I have given up nearly 3 years of my life, and I only hope that I may meet Death with as brave a front as I have seen other men do before.

My one regret is that the opportunity has been denied to me to repay you to the best of my ability for the lavish kindness and devotedness which you have shown me. I had hoped to do so in the struggle of Life. Now, however, it may be that I have done so in the struggle between Life and Death, between England and Germany, Liberty and Slavery. In any case, I shall have done my duty in my little way.

Well, Dad, please carry on with a good heart, then I shall be content.
Goodbye, dearest of fathers, goodbye my brothers, may you all reap benefits of this great war, and keep happy and cheery through life.

Your affectionate son and brother,
Glyn.

Glyn Rhys Morgan was killed on August 1st, 1917, two days after writing this letter. He was 21.

John

The soldier-poets conveyed graphically their experiences in the field, as Wilfred Owen famously did:

> **Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,**
> **Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,**
> **Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs**
> **And towards our distant rest began to trudge.**
> **Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots**
> **But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;**
> **Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots**
> **Of disappointed shells that dropped behind.**
>
> **GAS! Gas! Quick, boys! - - An ecstasy of fumbling,**
> **Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;**
> **But someone still was yelling out and stumbling**
> **And floundering like a man on fire or lime - -**
> **Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light**
> **As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.**
> **In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,**
> **He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.**
>
> **If in some smothering dreams you too could pace**
> **Behind the wagon that we flung him in,**
> **And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,**
> **His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;**
> **If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood**
> **Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,**
> **Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud**
> **Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, - -**
> **My friend, you would not tell with such high zest**
> **To children ardent for some desperate glory,**
> **The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est***
> ***Pro patria mori*.**

John

Wilfred Owen served in the Army from 1915, with a break in 1917 suffering from shell-shock. In October 1918 his leadership in battle won him the Military Cross. On November 4th, just a week before the Armistice, he was killed in action on the Sambre – Oise Canal.

Pamela

Vera Brittain, still grieving over the loss of her fiancé and close friends, received news about her brother in June 1918:

> **There came the sudden and loud clattering at the front-door knocker that always meant a telegram. For a moment I thought that my legs would not carry me, but they behaved quite normally as I got up and went to the door. I knew what was in the telegram – I had known for a week – but because the persistent hopefulness of the human heart refuses to allow intuitive certainty to persuade the reason of that which it knows, I opened and read it in a tearing anguish of suspense.**
>
> **"Regret to inform you Captain E H Brittain, MC, killed in action Italy June 15th."**
>
> **"No answer," I told the boy mechanically, and handed the telegram to my father, who had followed me into the hall. As we went back into the dining-room I saw, as though I had never seen them before, the bowl of blue delphiniums on the table; their intense colour, vivid, ethereal, seemed too radiant for earthly flowers.**
>
> **Long after the family had gone to bed and the world had grown silent, I crept into the dining-room to be alone with Edward's portrait. Carefully closing the door, I turned on the light and looked at the pale, pictured face, so dignified, so steadfast, so tragically mature. He had been through so much – far, far more than those beloved friends who had died at an earlier stage of the interminable War, leaving him alone to mourn their loss. Fate might have allowed him the little, sorry compensation of survival, the chance to make his lovely music in honour of their memory. It seemed indeed the last irony that he should have been killed by the countrymen of Fritz Kreisler, the violinist whom of all others he had most greatly admired.**
>
> **And suddenly, as I remembered all the dear afternoons and evenings when I had followed him on the piano as he played his violin, the sad, searching eyes of the portrait were more than I could bear, and falling on my knees before it I began to cry "Edward! Oh Edward!" in dazed repetition, as though my persistent crying and calling would somehow bring him back.**

John

Duff Cooper was deeply frustrated that he was kept on Foreign Office duties for the first three years of the War, and only arrived at the Front in early 1918. His Diaries record his experiences in vivid detail.

Michael

The barrage was to come down at five, and we were to start off 20 minutes after. I got into position with my platoon some time before. The barrage was terrific – I had never heard anything to touch it. We started off at the right time. The mist was so thick that you could only see about 20 yards. My platoon was on the left – but we never succeeded in getting into touch with the rest of the Company.

We met an officer in the Coldstreams with a platoon. He said the Scots Guards had failed to get their objective – that everyone was lost, and that the trench we were in was full of Germans. I pressed on alone with my platoon, guiding myself roughly by the sound of our guns behind us. We were occasionally held up by machine-gun fire, and we met one or two stray parties of Scots Guards without officers. Finally we met a fairly large party of the Shropshires who I knew should be on our right. The officer with them did not know where he was, but we agreed to go on together. We ran into a small party of the enemy, of whom we shot six and took two prisoners including an officer.

We then learnt that we were on the outskirts of Courcelles. We had gone a great deal too far to the right. I tried to get back by going up a road to the left, but could not get on owing to a machine-gun firing straight down the road. There were several dead men lying about this road, one particularly unpleasant one with his face shot away. These were the first sights of the kind that I had seen, and I was glad to find that they did not affect me at all.
Not long afterwards I saw Number 1 Company coming over the hill behind us. Major Fryer came on to see me.

We started walking down the edge of the railway. Suddenly we noticed an enemy machine-gun shooting through the hedge in front of us. We had almost walked into it. We hurried back, and on the way were fired at by machine-guns from the other side of the railway.

Fryer told me to take a Lewis gun and a couple of sections, and capture or knock out the machine-gun. It was rather an alarming thing to be told to do. However, I got my Lewis gun up to within about 80 yards of it creeping along the hedge. The Lewis gun fired away. When it stopped I rushed forward. Looking back I saw that I was not being followed. I learnt afterwards that the first two men behind me had been wounded and the third killed.

The rest had not come on. One or two machine-guns from the other side of the railway were firing at us. I dropped a few yards away from the gun I was going for, and crawled up to it. At first I saw no one there. Looking down I saw one

man running away up the other side of the cutting. I had a shot at him with my revolver. Presently I saw two men moving cautiously below me.

I called to them in what German I could at the moment remember to surrender and throw up their hands. They did so immediately. They obviously did not realise that I was alone. They came up the cutting with their hands up – followed to my surprise by others. There were 18 or 19 in all. If they had rushed me they would have been perfectly safe for I can never hit a haystack with a revolver, and my own men were 80 yards away.

However, they came back with me like lambs – I crawling most of the way to avoid fire from the other side of the railway.

That evening at stand-to the Commanding Officer came along the line of the railway. He said to me: "The Major-General and the Brigadier are extremely pleased with the work of your platoon, and asked me to tell you so. You've done most awfully well."

John

Vera Brittain's daughter, Shirley Williams, explains why we still remember those terrible four years:

Pamela

The War should now be a part of history; the weapons, the uniforms, the static horror of battles fought in trenches are all obsolete now. Yet the First World War refuses to fade away. It has marked all of us who were in any way associated with it, even at one generation's remove through our parents. The books, the poetry, the artefacts of those four and a half years still speak to young men and women who were not even born when the Second World War ended. Why are we so haunted? I think it is because of the terrible irony of the War; the idealism and high-mindedness that led boys and men in their hundreds of thousands to volunteer to fight and, often, to die; the obscenity of the square miles of mud, barbed wire, broken trees and shattered bodies into which they were flung, battalion after battalion; and the total imbalance between the causes for which the war was fought on both sides, as against the scale of the human sacrifice.

As Wilfred Owen put it in *The Send-off*:

Shall they return to beatings of great bells
In wild train-loads?
A few, a few, too few for drums and yells.

> **There is another reason, too. The First World War was the culmination of personal war; men saw the other human being they had killed, visibly dead. Men fought with bayonets, with knives, or even their bare hands. The guns themselves were on the battlefield, thick with smoke, the gunners sweaty and mud-bound. Death was not, on either side, elimination through pressing a button, but something seen and experienced personally, bloody, pathetic and foul.**

John

A hundred years ago today the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, told the House of Commons that the Armistice was signed, saying:

> **Thus at 11 o'clock this morning came to an end the cruellest and most terrible war that has ever scourged mankind. I hope we may say that thus, this fateful morning, came to an end all wars. This is no time for words. Our hearts are too full of a gratitude to which no tongue can give adequate expression.**

Lloyd George was rarely at a loss for words, but this was an extraordinary moment after four terrible years.

And there was one pen that vividly captured the public reaction to the news, belonging to the Minister of Munitions - Winston Churchill.

Michael

> **During the year 1918 the effort of Britain and the British Empire reached its highest pitch. The Imperial forces in the field against the enemy in all theatres amounted to four and a half million men, and those under arms to nearly six millions. The strength of the Grand Fleet in vessels of every kind reached its maximum, and the Germans were no longer in a condition even to put to sea. The U-boat warfare was defeated, and kept down by the operations of nearly 4,000 armed vessels flying the White Ensign. Under the protection of these agencies upwards of two million United States troops were transported across the Atlantic, of which more than half were carried in British ships, and landed in France during the year without the loss of a single life by enemy action.**
>
> **Such was the culminating war effort of a State which, before the campaign of 1918 began, had already been at war for three and a half years, suffered more than a million and three-quarters casualties, sustained a loss of over six and a half million tons of shipping, and expended six thousand millions sterling. These facts and figures will excite the wonder of future generations.**

It was a few minutes before the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. I stood at the window of my room looking up Northumberland Avenue towards Trafalgar Square, waiting for Big Ben to tell that the War was over. My mind strayed back across the scarring years to the scene and emotions of the night at the Admiralty when I listened for these same chimes in order to give the signal of war against Germany to our Fleets and Squadrons across the world. And now all was over!

Victory had come after all the hazards and heartbreaks in an absolute and unlimited form. All the Kings and Emperors with whom we had warred were in flight or exile. All their Armies and Fleets were destroyed or subdued. In this Britain had borne a noble part, and done her best from first to last.

And then suddenly the first stroke of the chime. I looked again at the broad street beneath me. It was deserted. From the portals of one of the large hotels absorbed by Government Departments darted the slight figure of a girl clerk, distractedly gesticulating while another stroke resounded.

Then from all sides men and women came scurrying into the street. Streams of people poured out of all the buildings. The bells of London began to clash.

Northumberland Avenue was now crowded with people in hundreds, nay, thousands, rushing hither and thither in a frantic manner, shouting and screaming with joy. I could see that Trafalgar Square was already swarming.

Around me in our very headquarters, in the Hotel Metropole, disorder had broken out. Doors banged. Feet clattered down corridors. Everyone rose from the desk and cast aside pen and paper. All bounds were broken.

The tumult grew. It grew like a gale, but from all sides simultaneously. The street was now a seething mass of humanity. Flags appeared as if by magic. Streams of men and women flowed from the Embankment. They mingled with torrents pouring down the Strand on their way to acclaim the King.

Almost before the last stroke of the clock had died away, the strict, war-straitened, regulated streets of London had become a triumphant pandemonium.

Safety, freedom, peace, home, the dear one back at the fireside – all after 52 months of gaunt distortion. After 52 months of making burdens grievous to be borne and binding them on men's backs, at last, all at once, suddenly and everywhere the burdens were cast down.

At least so for the moment it seemed.