

Their names live

Row upon row of sleek white headstones,
Inscriptions cut in crisp Gill font,
Silent gardeners tend with care
Neat grass paths and border flowers.
Officers and men lie side by side
For death has no respect for rank.

The scale of slaughter blunts the mind
But the cemeteries have a beauty, too.
Architects, designers of the day
Worked their best, and Kipling, who lost
His only son at Loos, chose the words.

Where no bones or bodies could be found
Massive monuments at Ypres and Thiepval
List their names in thousands;
In villages and towns through Europe
Memorial or plaque records their loss.

Other men, also casualties of war,
Were not so honoured. Three hundred names
Were hidden, their families shamed for years.
Their memory can now be recognised with pride:
Ninety years after the Battle of the Somme
The first man shot at dawn received his pardon.

Laurie Spencer