IEPER-KENT LECTURES 2025-2026

The In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper and the School of History at the University of Kent are presenting details of their seminar series for 2025–26. This is the tenth series of seminars on the history of the First World War and is free and open to all.

5 February 2026, Ypres – Jozefien De Bock	Asylum: The mental health trajectories of Belgian refugees to the UK, 1914-1924
19 February 2026, Canterbury – Piet Chielens	*To Save Our Souls* … Scheut missionaries as chaplains for Belgian refugees in Great Britain
5 March 2026, Ypres – Jacqueline Jenkinson	Belgian Refugees in Scotland during the First World War
19 March 2026, Canterbury – Christophe Declercq	Displacement and contribution: the fascinating lives of Belgian refugees in the UK

- Ieper venue and start times: Educational Room of In Flanders Fields Museum, Cloth Hall, Grote Markt, 8900 Ieper, 7 pm.
- Canterbury venue, University of Kent, Cornwallis East Seminar Room 1, start time 6pm.
  [campus map can be found here]

Asylum: The mental health trajectories of Belgian refugees to the UK, 1914-1924

5 February 2026, Ypres – Jozefien De Bock

While the stories of the 1,5 million Belgians who sought refuge from the war in 1914 - 1918 are being researched and presented ever more clearly, the mental health impacts of their displacement and resettlement have not yet been the subject of extensive research. Such research could potentially provide important insights for modern day refugee care, as statistics show that asylum seekers and refugees are significantly more likely to suffer mental distress than the general population.

This lecture will explore the general context of (mental) health care for Belgian refugees in the UK as well as some of the contextual factors that predisposed these refugees to problems of mental ill-health. It will focus on the institutionalization of those that were deemed a danger to themselves or to others. Over the course of the war, more than 300 Belgians were taken into psychiatric institutions in the UK. There, they were the subject of repeated government intervention, the story of which will be told on the basis of personal stories, following these refugees from their arrival in England to their eventual return to Belgium.

The lecture will end with a note on the project Asylum: Refugees and Mental Health, within which this ongoing research takes place.

Dr. Jozefien De Bock obtained an MA in Contemporary History at Ghent University and a PhD in History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence. Since then, she has worked both in the cultural sector (Ghent City Museum, Amsab-Institute for Social History, Erfgoedcel Waasland) and in academia (Ghent University, Fulbright, Utrecht University). Her research interests are focused on the socio-economic and cultural history of migrants, minorities and refugees.

To Save Our Souls ... Scheut missionaries as chaplains for Belgian refugees in Great Britain

19 February 2026, Canterbury – Piet Chielens

During the First World War, over two hundred thousand Belgians fled to Great Britain, where they were welcomed with great, often Christian, charity. The Catholic Church of Belgium, led by the charismatic Cardinal Mercier, was very careful that these refugees, a majority of whom were Catholic, would not come under the influence of non-Catholics in their places of refuge. Contemporary ecumenical thinking was not yet part of the practice of Christian churches at that time. On the contrary, there was fierce competition everywhere to win souls to their own cause.

Mercier therefore sought, through his auxiliary bishop, Mgr. De Wachter, for Belgian priests who could accompany the refugees to the United Kingdom as chaplains to watch over the souls of their fellow countrymen. Among others, the congregation of Scheut, near Brussels, then the largest missionary congregation in Belgium, provided a group of some thirty young priests as chaplains. These young Scheut missionaries had mostly just been ordained and were waiting in Great Britain until they could be sent from an English port to their missions in China, Congo, or the Philippines. In the meantime, they performed their work as chaplains throughout Great Britain and were asked to report back to their superior general who had established his congregation-in-exile in Hackney. The letters of the young priests to their superior prove to be a valuable source to gain insight into the general work of the refugee chaplains, but also into the lives of Belgians in the United Kingdom at the time of the First World War. In this lecture Piet Chielens takes us into the footsteps of just some of these temporary chaplains.

Piet Chielens was Director of In Flanders Fields Museum in Ieper, Belgium, from 1996 to 2021. From 1992 to 2007 he was artistic director of Peace Concerts Passendale. He aims for a constant renewal of the memory of the Great War in Flanders and to give special attention to the ways in which micro- (personal, family) and macro-history (that of cultures, nations, and the world) can be linked. In addition to numerous books in Dutch, Piet is co-author of two books in English: *The Great War as Seen from the Air: In Flanders Fields 1914–1918* (2014) and *Unquiet Graves: Execution Sites of the First World War in Flanders* (2000).

Belgian Refugees in Scotland during the First World War

5 March 2026, Ypres – Jacqueline Jenkinson

During the First World War Scotland housed close to 19,000 civilian Belgian civilian exiles and accommodated hundreds of wounded Belgian troops. Glasgow was the reception area for around 8% of the estimated 250,000 displaced Belgians in Britain. This lecture considers the experiences of Belgians living in Scotland during the war and also explains why Scottish hospitality for Belgian refugees was uniquely administered by a committee of Glasgow's municipal authority, Glasgow Corporation.

Using surviving, partial Glasgow Corporation Belgian Refugee Committee registration records for 1914 and early 1915, this lecture discusses the composition of the displaced Belgian population in Scotland. These registers record over 8,200 refugees ranging in age up to 86, including over 2,200 children aged under 16, with roughly equal numbers of girls and boys.

This lecture also explains how Glasgow's and the wider Scottish response was distinctive since the costs of supporting and housing displaced Belgians were funded by people, trades unions and churches across Scotland. Elsewhere in Britain funding for the support of Belgian refugees housed in those areas came direct from central government.

The lecture further considers the work of two Scottish women in support of displaced Belgians. Mary E. Boyle, an author and paleontologist who was matron in one of Glasgow's Belgian refugee homes, and Nurse Glen who provided the first point of contact between displaced Belgians and local Scottish medical and welfare services, as she supported and accompanied Belgian exiles who applied for admission into medical institution care.

The lecture concludes with a discussion of the swift repatriation arrangements from Scotland as the first group of Belgian refugees departed in early December 1918. By April 1919 a local newspaper reported that of the 'nearly 20,000 refugees who received hospitality in Scotland only 480 remain.'

Dr Jacqueline Jenkinson is a modern History graduate of the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. She has published widely in the fields of migrant and minority history in the First World War, on the 1919 seaport riots, on Scotland's health in the inter war era, and on medical professionalisation in the 18th-20th centuries.

Displacement and contribution: the fascinating lives of Belgian refugees in the UK

19 March 2026, Canterbury – Christophe Declercq

The talk celebrates the remarkable life of Dr. Frits Sano, a pioneering psychiatrist and researcher whose talents extended beyond the laboratory to influential roles in mental health care, cultural activism, and linguistic advocacy. His story gains renewed relevance as an inspiring narrative of refugeedom: fleeing the devastation of World War I, Sano found safety and opportunity in the United Kingdom, where he engaged with scientific communities, promoted Flemish culture, and maintained international connections. Despite personal tragedy, including the loss of his son in the last few days of the war, Sano's resilience and dedication exemplify how refugeedom can transform hardship into meaningful contributions and collaborations. His legacy underscores the profound impact refugees can have in shaping societal progress, even amidst adversity.

Christophe Declercq (Utrecht University, University of Antwerp, and University College London) obtained a PhD on Belgian refugees during World War I in the United Kingdom from Imperial College London in 2015. Within the project *Asylum: Refugees and Mental Health*, he mainly focuses on collaborating with In Flanders Fields Museum and on integrating existing lists of refugee names into online databases. Within the ARMH project, research on Dr. Frits Sano has happened alongside Jozefien De Bock, who is the primary author of a first article based on Sano that has been in part a basis for the talk (*Zuurvrij* 49, December 2025).