How BoT man was honoured by the French

The missing Roll of Honour commemorating the men of the Board who lost their lives in the Great War has inspired a number of DTI staff to discover the story behind some of the names inscribed on the memorial which survives today only as a photograph. One entry on it, too long to fit the standard column width, stood alone at the foot of the memorial and so caught the eye of Michael Forsey, Translations Manager with EFMD. It read: E C Donovin Croix de Guerre.

A research project which began 18 months ago with the modest aim of discovering who Donovin was and how he came to be awarded this French medal has uncovered the remarkable story of a civil servant who literally went to war with his boss.

Like his boss, Edgar Donovan, Man of Letters, which he was and was called the Civil Service's Official Muse, Edgar had decided when he was a young man that he would be a writer. He was appointed to the Board Labour Exchange in 1908. The Labour Exchanges Department had been created in 1907 by the President of the Board of Trade, William Harcourt, with William J. Penfold as its first Secretary. Records of Edgar’s work have not survived, but it is evident that he did well enough to prompt promotion, and is mentioned in a 1908 article in the Times of St Bar’s Day, 4 December 1912 and entitled, “Barnes: Edgar Donovan, whose name will be remembered long after his death in the 1916 battle of the Somme”. The story noted that “he was then with the Ministry of Munitions in the Admiralty” and observed: “It was almost entirely taken up by accounts of his public experiences and Churchill

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