

C K Scott Moncrieff

1. C K Scott Moncrieff was born into a well-to-do Scottish family in the late 19th century. While a schoolboy, he received an entree into the gay literary coterie centred on Robbie Ross, Oscar Wilde's lover, leading to a lifelong friendship with Wilde's son, Vyvyan Holland.

2. After being sent home with a leg badly broken by a British shell during fighting in April 1917, he was given a desk job at the War Office, from where he tried to secure Wilfred Owen a home posting to save him from a return to the front.

3. In 1919, he began to translate Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. By 1929 he had translated seven volumes – and was kept from the eighth and last only by his death from stomach cancer in 1930, at 40. His translation, daringly retitled *Remembrance of Things Past* and published in 1922, was criticized for taking too many liberties.

4. In 1923 he was recruited by the British intelligence service and moved to Italy, where he used his writing as a cover while reporting back about military

manoeuvres, naval bases and Brits with suspected Fascist sympathies.

5. Virginia Woolf described reading Scott Moncrieff's Proust as an 'erotic experience'; F Scott Fitzgerald called it a 'masterpiece in itself'; and Joseph Conrad declared Scott Moncrieff's version to be better than the French original. A new translation did not appear until the 1980s.

'Chasing Lost Time: The Life of C K Scott Moncrieff – Soldier, Spy and Translator', Jean Findlay, Chatto & Windus, £25.00