



The First World War **experienced**

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- The Allied Powers
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Introduction: The First World War Experienced

Have you ever wondered why you might be wearing a poppy in November, or just how many people actually fought and died in the First World War? This booklet provides a close-up look at some of the experiences of the First World War and its commemoration. It highlights how the war affected soldiers and civilians while it was being fought and once the guns had fallen silent.

Despite the fact that the First World War started a hundred years ago, it has remained ever-present; its history, myths and memories are all around us. Images of mud, trenches, of a lost generation of young lives squandered in a seemingly futile war come readily to mind. A poppy is all that is needed to summarise and symbolise the tragic loss of life during the war of 1914–1918. In popular memory, the conflict lives on through countless books and television programmes and through the famous war poets, whose often disillusioned vision of the war has become our own. ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ – Wilfred Owen’s iconic poem that almost every schoolchild in Britain has read since the 1960s – has shaped the memory of the war, and the success of popular novels such as *Birdsong* and *War Horse* have ensured a continual presence of the war in

our collective memory. As a result, many of us feel we ‘know’ this war.

This booklet brings aspects of the First World War close-up, highlighting the experience of fighting, dying in and surviving this ‘war to end all wars’, and it also questions some of our assumptions about the war. How were soldiers affected by fighting and how did they cope with fear, vermin and disease? With the threat of injury and death ever-present, we also look at casualties. Incredibly, on average, 6000 soldiers were killed every day in this war and many more suffered horrific injuries.

How did civilians experience the war? We focus on hunger and bereavement as two particularly important aspects of the war experience. And finally, we look at commemoration. The rituals of remembrance established in the aftermath of the war still continue to be observed a hundred years on. The passing of time, and of the last veterans, has not removed the war from our collective consciousness. While historians (and politicians) continue to argue over the war’s alleged futility, the centenary commemoration will remind us of the war that shaped the history of the twentieth century and was arguably its defining tragedy.

Fighting

In Britain, we associate the First World War with trenches and mud, and 'the Western Front' has become shorthand for the war. But this isn't how every, or even most, soldiers experienced the war. Fighting didn't just occur in the fields of France and Belgium, but in the deserts of the Middle East and the jungles of Africa, on the oceans and in the mountains. This truly was a world war.

On the Western Front, very large armies were packed into a relatively small area. They dug extensive networks of trenches to defend themselves against their opponents and it became very difficult for either side to gain territory. For much of the war, there was very little movement and it became a war of attrition – each side attempting slowly to wear down the other. It wasn't until the final months of the

war that the lines of trenches were decisively broken.

The Eastern Front, by contrast, was far longer than the Western Front and troops were less densely packed. As a result, the lines of trenches were thinner, there was more movement and breakthroughs were still possible. Elsewhere, such as in the European colonies of East Africa, war was even more mobile. Here allied and German forces, often consisting of colonial subjects, clashed on varying terrain. Small armies were stretched across vast areas, in a war of sweeping movements and quick battles. Conditions could be just as bad, if not worse, than on the Western Front: extreme heat and tropical diseases took their toll and around 100,000 soldiers died here.

Soldiers reacted in different ways to the horrors of warfare. Some, like Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon, were appalled by what they saw and wrote bitter poems and memoirs

which continue to influence how we think about the war today. But we shouldn't assume that all men reacted like this. In Vienna in December 1914, the magazine *Weltblatt* published the following:

“Our boys understand very well how to become comfortable in the trenches and they are even able to engage in card games whenever there is a lull in the fighting. At any rate, a letter from the battlefield at Bozen contains the following amusing episode: Three soldiers were lying in a trench near each other and playing hazard. Each one had put in twenty heller, and the object of the whole game was that whichever one of the three would shoot to death the first Russian who appeared would win the sixty heller. About a quarter of an hour later, a Russian made his appearance about 250 paces away. The sentry, who had the edge on the others, shot and killed the Russian, whereupon, his face wreathed in smiles, he joyously collected his winnings. The merry gamblers were Reidmüller, Wagner and Habitzl, the last of whom won the prize.”



Some soldiers found that they enjoyed killing, often to their own surprise. Henry de Man, a lieutenant in the Belgian army wrote:

“As trench mortar officer, I was given command over what is probably the most murderous instrument in modern warfare... One day... I secured a direct hit on an enemy encampment, saw bodies or parts of bodies go up in the air, and heard the desperate yelling of

the wounded or the runaways. I had to confess to myself that it was one of the happiest moments of my life.”

At Christmas 1914, British and German troops exchanged presents, but as the war progressed, such fraternisation became impossible, and accounts like these attest to the dehumanising effect of fighting in the First World War in which soldiers were both victims and killers.



German CL.III brought down in the Forest of Argonne, 1918.

Fear

Life in the trenches of the Western Front could be terrifying – particularly for men who were experiencing it for the first time. Lance Corporal William Sharpe of the Lancashire Fusiliers described the effect of shellfire on the nerves of four young recruits under his command:

“They cried and one kept calling ‘mother’ and who could blame him, such HELL makes weaklings of the strongest and no human nerves or body were ever built to stand such torture, noise, horror and mental pain.”

If soldiers were scared they often tried to avoid showing such ‘unmanly’ emotions. Officers in particular felt the need to appear brave and set an example in front of their men. In their letters home, however, soldiers would often admit to their fears. Lieutenant C. S Rawlins wrote:

“I must be a bit of coward myself after all, because I would give anything to be able to run or hurry along, anything but that slow crawling walk: or I would

like to get down in a ditch whenever the glaring star shell rises: I want to stop and hang my head and get down as low as possible. But one must stride along as nonchalantly as if out for a moonlight stroll at home!”

This ‘stiff upper lip’ attitude stayed with many soldiers until the grave. When Raymond Asquith, the son of the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, was mortally wounded in 1916, he casually lit a cigarette to assure his men he was alright. He died on a stretcher not long after.



Gas masks worn by German soldiers and their dogs 1916–1918.

The nature of modern weapons offered terrors of a nature, and on a scale, never experienced before. Take poison gas, for example, used extensively for the first time at Ypres in April 1915 by the German armies.

One of the most famous references to the horrific effects of gas can be found in Wilfred Owens’s poem ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’:

“Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!--An ecstasy of fumbling

*Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling*

And flound’ring like a man in 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.”

Gas contributed greatly to the dehumanising effect of the war. A first defence against it was urine-soaked cloths. The gas masks that replaced them held a nightmarish terror, which contributed to the psychological problems experienced by soldiers. Though in time they were effective, soldiers still doubted their ability to protect them and never lost their fear of gas, the silent killer. Even those who recovered from the immediate injuries of a gas attack suffered from long-lasting after-effects such as blindness or lung problems. Those who died from it suffocated or, in the case of mustard gas, had their skin ripped off. Modern weapons truly were the stuff of nightmares and justifiably feared by those who experienced them.

As soldiers became more accustomed to the horrors of the battlefield, they did overcome some of their fears. Aubrey Wade, a signaller in the Royal Artillery, saw how his fellow soldiers had made

a bridge over a river using human corpses. He admitted that this

“seemed about the limit of human callousness,”

but also noted that he was

“not at all squeamish, the sight of dead men having long lost its terror for me.”

In many cases, the exposure to traumatic experiences could lead to serious psychological damage, then known as ‘shell shock’ or neurasthenia. Today, mental illnesses like this are better understood and, in similar situations, we would diagnose Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. At the time, however, some

men who exhibited the symptoms, such as shaking and stammering, were seen as cowards or shirkers.

“We used to think it was cowardice, but we learnt later that there was such a thing as shell shock.”

Siegfried Sassoon is a famous victim of shell shock, and made it the subject of his poem ‘Survivors’:

“No doubt they’ll soon get well; the shock and strain

Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.

Of course they’re ‘longing to go out again’, -

These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.”



John Singer Sargent, Gassed, 1919.

Hunger

Civilians were not left unscathed by the war. As the fighting dragged on, resources became scarce and food supplies began to run out. Comparatively few civilians died as a result of being directly affected by the fighting, unlike in the Second World War. In 1914–1918, more civilians died because hunger made them susceptible to disease. The Spanish Flu, which hit Europe at the end of the war, would claim millions of victims among civilians and soldiers already weakened by hunger.

The war was not just waged on the battlefields. The Allies' naval blockade of the Central Powers meant that essential foodstuffs and raw materials were no longer reaching their intended consumers, affecting both the war effort and civilian lives. In 1914, the effects of some particular shortfalls were felt almost immediately – for example, a shortage of nitrates from Chile (essential for fertilisers and explosives) meant that what

little there was would be used for explosives rather than to help with food production. Food riots erupted in Vienna in 1915. In Germany, there was little serious deterioration of living standards until 1916, by which time turnips became the most widely used substitute foodstuff, leading to the term 'turnip winter'. Turnips were bitter, hard to digest and of low nutritional value, none of which

helped reconcile Germans with the humiliation of having to eat what had previously been considered animal fodder.

The Central Powers also used blockade techniques – for example, interrupting Tsarist Russia's overland trade. Meanwhile, Turkey closed the Straits in November 1914, making imports impossible via that route. As a result of blockades, shortages

of almost everything, food and basic essentials such as soap were a common feature across Europe during the war. Rationing of the most important food was introduced in Germany in 1915; while in Britain, it came into force in February 1918 (with the exception of bread).

The German author Ernst Gläser recalled the experience of being a hungry child during the war:

“ This is going to be a hard winter, sighed my mother on one of those days, as Kathinka put the meal on the table. The meal consisted of a couple of slices of fat-free sausage, daintily cut-up turnips, which were held together by a thin sauce, and three potatoes per person. The bread could well have been used to make models of small men. It was like clay.

We sat waiting, almost praying, in front of this meal. Perhaps, we thought, it would change miraculously to match our desires. While I was opening my napkin apathetically and lethargically for we had been eating the same thing

almost daily for months – my mother put her hand on the back of my neck, ran her hand almost fearfully through my hair and said softly and indistinctly: I can't do anything about it . . . tomorrow perhaps I can get a couple of eggs and some meat . . . don't be so sad . . . perhaps I can also get some white flour. She wept . . .

The winter remained hard until the end. The war began to leap from the fronts and press onto civilians. Hunger destroyed unity; within families, children stole rations from one another. Soon the women who stood in the grey lines in front of the stores were talking more about their children's hunger than about their husband's deaths. The war switched the sensations that it offered.”

Food queues were a common experience for civilians in all combatant nations. In December 1917, for example, *The Times* reported on long queues for margarine in London, with many people leaving empty-handed. Women bore the brunt of this humiliating and often fruitless

search for victuals, and they soon questioned the sacrifices that they were making, leading to war-weariness, resentment and strikes. In particular, the German factory strikes of December 1917 to January 1918 were linked to the general disquiet about food provisions, while the disgruntled women of Petrograd contributed to the unrest that led to revolution in Russia. The Bolsheviks demanded 'bread, peace and land' – in that order.



Horse carcass on a Berlin street being cut up for food, c.1918.



Vermin and disease

Soldiers were not only at the mercy of the enemy – vermin, and the discomfort and diseases they caused, also made their lives a misery, sometimes with fatal consequences. Although the First World War was the first major conflict in which more men died from wounds than disease, this fact only really applies to the Western Front. Seven times more Turkish soldiers died from diseases than from wounds, for example, and five million Russians were hospitalised as a result of disease.



The female body louse (*Pediculus humanus*), pen and ink c.1919.

Lice were a particularly widespread problem. They lived in the soldiers' clothes and bedding, as well as on their bodies. They were not just an irritant, they also spread typhus. Unfortunately, it was some time before this connection was made. Lice were particularly widespread on the Eastern Front and in prisoner-of-war camps, which led to staggeringly high losses to typhus among soldiers. The disease soon spread to civilian populations too, and it is estimated that, by 1920, around 1.5 million had died from it in Russia alone. To avoid similar casualties on the Western Front, the British took advantage of recent medical advances and, by 1915, 90 per cent of the army had been inoculated against the disease.

A number of ways of dealing with the lice were developed – they ranged from fumigation and other dangerous chemical treatments to the outright bizarre. In the Austrian army, infected clothing was placed on ant-hills, in the belief that the ants would eat

the lice, following which the clothes would be washed with cold water and soap. This procedure was, of course, utterly ineffective.

An English soldier recalled a different technique after the war:

“The chemicals that were supposed to help us fight against our intimate enemies were quite remarkable. The most successful was a girdle that had to be worn close to the body, manufactured by a large chemical company. According to the statement of the manufacturers, no louse would come anywhere near this girdle but, as soon as they would detect its presence, would scurry away in search of more attractive quarters. But my experience was quite the reverse. I discovered that the lice loved this girdle and used it as home, marriage chamber, hospital and nursery. On this girdle they would take their little walks, mate, lay their eggs and raise their young. Except on those occasions when one of them would die a sudden death by my hand, they would scarcely ever leave the girdle, save in search of food. When the manufacturer of this contraption asked

me for a testimonial as to its merit, I was certainly embarrassed. . . ”

Rats also thrived in the trenches, where they fed off scraps of food and human flesh. They were directly responsible for Weil's disease, an infectious form of jaundice, which became widespread in areas of the Western Front. Most soldiers detested rats and tried to kill them where possible, as this British soldier remembers:

“We were filled with an instinctive hatred of them, because however one tried to put the thought out of one's mind, one could not help feeling that they fed on the dead. We waged ceaseless war on them and, indeed, they were very easy prey because owing to their nauseating plumpness they were slow on the foot. . . with a run we would catch them squarely with a mighty kick and there would be one less to batten on us.

The officers on their nightly rounds would fire on them with their revolvers and in the morning it would be a

common sight to see disembowelled rats lying amongst our barbed wire.”

The famous war poet Isaac Rosenberg also found the presence of rats unsettling and featured one in his 1916 poem, 'Break of Day in the Trenches':

*“ Only a live thing leaps my hand,
A queer sardonic rat,
As I pull the parapet's poppy
To stick behind my ear.
Droll rat, they would shoot
you if they knew
Your cosmopolitan sympathies,
Now you have touched this
English hand
You will do the same to a German
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
To cross the sleeping green between. ”*

As the frequent references to lice and rats in soldiers' writing remind us, life in the trenches wasn't just marred by fighting. Small deadly enemies lived among the soldiers, and the diseases they caused held their own terror. They were feared almost as much as the enemy.



German soldiers delousing their clothes, c.1917.

Casualties

The First World War caused unprecedented numbers of casualties. We don't have accurate figures of total war losses, but it is estimated that the war claimed the lives of between nine and ten million soldiers worldwide and around six million civilian deaths. Of the six million British soldiers who served, 44 per cent were wounded and 12 per cent were killed, giving a total of around three and a half million casualties. Most wounds were not fatal, but sometimes they were so severe that soldiers never regained their pre-war health. These included facial

disfigurement, loss of limbs and, of course, invisible psychological injuries ('shell shock').

A major source of injury and death was shellfire, which accounted for between 60 and 80 per cent of wounds, with bullets from machine guns and rifles accounting for the majority of other injuries. A high explosive shell could be devastating, killing men instantly upon impact, but soldiers were often more afraid of being struck by shell splinters, rather than being directly hit. These splinters were fragments of shell that broke off and flew through the

air at dangerously high speeds, often severing limbs on impact and badly mutilating bodies. One soldier noted how a comrade

“had got a shell fragment straight through the eyes. Both eyes had been torn out and it had damaged his brain. The poor lad was still alive, even conscious... he died four hours later.”

As new methods of killing were developed, there were also advancements in medicine to treat the growing numbers of casualties. Saline drips, blood transfusions, splints and X-rays – many of these treatments were developed and first implemented during the First World War. The triage system, still used in hospitals today, was developed to cope with the massive numbers of casualties that needed treatment following major battles. Innovations like these were a military necessity, helping soldiers recover and return to the front as quickly as possible. Doctors were under great pressure from the military authorities to pass





















men as fit to fight. As a result, many soldiers were forced to return to duty before they had fully recovered. This could sometimes be a source of resentment, as this outburst from one soldier to a doctor indicates:

“You're the greatest criminal! You only heal so that there's someone left to kill!... the generals, the emperor, all those commanders-in-chief act as they've been taught to act, but you – you've learned something different but you let yourself be used for the most shameful ignominy. You bring soldiers worn to death back to life so they can be killed again, torn to pieces again!”

Severe wounds of body and soul were an inevitable consequence of fighting on this unprecedented scale. As a result, doctors developed new expertise in plastic surgery, trying to rebuild faces ripped off by shell explosions, and artificial limbs were developed which were needed in huge numbers. Dealing with the psychological effects of the war also demanded expert care.



Representatives of the *gueules cassées* ('broken faces') at the Versailles Conference, 1919.

		MILITARY AND CIVILIAN DEATHS			
		TOTAL POPULATION	MOBILISED SOLDIERS	MILITARY DEATHS	CIVILIAN DEATHS*
BELGIUM		7,600,000	292,000	38,000	50,000
FRANCE		39,000,000	8,100,000	1,327,000	600,000
FRENCH COLONIES		52,700,000	449,000	78,000	—
GREECE		4,900,000	230,000	25,000	—
GB & IRELAND		46,100,000	6,100,000	750,000	600,000
BRITISH COLONIES		342,200,000	2,800,000	180,000	—
ITALY		36,000,000	4,300,000	460,000	700,000†
JAPAN		53,000,000	30,000	1,000	—
MONTENEGRO		200,000	50,000	13,000	Unknown
PORTUGAL		6,100,000	100,000	7,000	—
ROMANIA		7,600,000	750,000	335,000†	300,000†
RUSSIA		164,000,000	15,800,000†	1,800,000†	Unknown
SERBIA		3,100,000	750,000†	250,000†	300,000†
USA		98,000,000	2,100,000	117,000	—
BULGARIA		4,700,000	600,000†	88,000	300,000†
GERMANY		67,800,000	13,200,000	2,037,000	700,000†
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY		52,600,000	9,000,000	1,460,000	400,000†
TURKEY		17,000,000	3,000,000	325,000	2,000,000
		 The Allied Powers	 The Central Powers		

* Including deaths from hunger and Spanish influenza
† Estimated figures
– No significant losses recorded

Bereavement

Everywhere across Europe, from large cities to small villages, war memorials are a visual reminder of how many lives were lost in the war. However, as we have seen, the soldiers commemorated on these memorials weren't the only victims of war. There were also the bereaved – the families, wives, friends and fiancées of the dead – many of whom never saw their loved-ones return from the battlefields. Families often feared the worst when letters from the front stopped arriving; the waiting could be excruciating. One French woman spoke of



The Grieving Parents, 1931.

“such distress, to know nothing, to be alone... like a beast.”

She later learned that her husband had died.

The news could come as a total shock. Vera Brittain served as a nurse during the war, and would later become a famous writer. In December 1915 she was eagerly waiting to hear from her fiancé, Roland Leighton, who was due home on leave for Christmas. Brittain wrote in her diary that upon hearing the telephone ring she ‘sprung up joyfully thinking to hear in a moment the dear dreamed-of tones of the beloved voice’. It turned out to be Roland’s sister, Clare, informing Brittain that Roland had been killed in action. Later in the war Brittain would also lose two of her close friends, and finally her brother Edward. The grief she experienced made her determined to warn future generations about the devastating costs of war, and in 1933 she published her autobiography,

Testament of Youth, which continues to have a powerful impact on how we remember the conflict.

For some, death came right at the end of the war. On 4 November 1918, the now-famous poet Wilfred Owen died while crossing the Sambre–Oise Canal in northern France. This was a successful operation for the British, and victory was in sight, it was not until the Armistice, seven days later, that Owen’s mother discovered the news of her son’s death. And for every well-known casualty, like Owen, there are dozens of victims whose names we have now forgotten, yet whose loss was equally mourned.

Given the huge number of casualties, it was likely that by 1918 everyone knew somebody who had died in the war. One of the last surviving veterans of the trenches, Harry Patch, recalled the losses in his village of Combe Down in Somerset in his description of the local war memorial.

“The names of my close friends are on these plaques: Lionel Morris, Stanley Pearce, Charles Wherret, Harold Chivers, and my own cousin, Fred Patch, too, and dozens more who were no more than acquaintances around the village, people whose families I spoke to – the butcher, the chimney sweep, a farmer, a carpenter. They had all lost sons in the war, most in their teens and early twenties.”

Accounts like this have led to the idea of a ‘lost generation’ in Britain, but how true is this impression? We know that around 722,000 soldiers from the British Army were killed – a far greater number than for any other war Britain has fought before or since. But we also know that 6,146,574 British men fought in the war, which means that around 12 per cent lost their lives. So although most people probably knew someone who died in the war, not every Briton lost a loved-one. Around one in nine households suffered a loss, and around one in six families lost a close family member.

Nor should we overlook the huge and often far greater losses that other countries suffered. Britain’s total war dead amounted to around 1.6 per cent of the total war-time population, compared to Germany’s 3 per cent. In France it was 3.4 per cent and in Serbia it was as high as 5.4 per cent. Statistics like these should not detract from the devastating effects of such loss of life, but they do show that most men did, in fact, return from the war. In that sense, there was no lost generation. Of course, many of those who returned were severely injured or psychologically scarred, but most managed to rebuild their lives.

Although not everyone experienced the grief of losing a close family member, acknowledging death and bereavement is still a fundamental part of how we remember the war today. The grief and mourning of others affected contemporaries greatly, and they continue to move us. No doubt one reason why the

First World War is still such an emotive subject. And of course, we still honour and commemorate those who lost their lives in the First World War, in various, well-established rituals which resulted from a perceived need to honour the dead and recognise their sacrifices. It was important for the government to offer consolation for the bereaved, and assure them that their loved ones had not died in vain. Public commemoration became a crucial part of acknowledging the suffering and sacrifices so many had made in defence of King and country.



Members of the WACCs tending graves, 1918.

Commemoration

In Britain, at 11 o'clock on 11 November 1919, the first two minutes' silence was used to mark the anniversary of the Armistice. This was unprecedented. The idea came from Sir Percy Fitzpatrick who had served as high commissioner in South Africa during the war – he modelled the silence on a practice he had observed there known as 'the three minutes' pause':

“At noon each day, all work, all talk and all movement were suspended for three minutes that we might concentrate as one in thinking of those – the living and the dead – who had pledged and given themselves for all that we believe in.”

It seemed an ideal way to honour the dead, console the bereaved and recognise the sacrifices of servicemen and women. However, three minutes was considered too long, and on 7 November the plans for a two-minute silence, to mark the armistice, were officially announced by King George V. The silence

proved to be a great success. Almost everyone was keen to observe it and, particularly in the hustle and bustle of cities, the silence was deafening, as this report from Plymouth suggests:

“For two minutes after the hour of eleven had struck yesterday morning Plymouth stood inanimate with the nation... Two minutes before the hour the maroons boomed out their warning in one long drawn out note... As the hour struck a great silence swept over the town. People halted in their walks, chatter ceased as if by magic, traffic stopped and the rumbling note of industry stayed.”

Another aspect of the Remembrance Day ceremonies was the Cenotaph – which literally means 'empty tomb'. A monument to soldiers who had not returned from the battlefield, it was initially intended to be a temporary structure used for the Peace Day Parade in 1919. It proved to be a popular focus for mourners, and on 11 November, 1920, a permanent stone structure

was unveiled in Whitehall. This was a setting for great displays of emotion:

“There was a very small boy stopping to lay a tiny plant among the flowers last night, who brought tears to the eyes even of the policemen standing by and who caused a woman who heard him to burst out in sobs. “Oh Mummy” he cried, “What a lovely garden my Daddy’s got.”



The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London.

On the same day, the body of the Unknown Warrior – an unidentified soldier chosen randomly from the Western Front – was buried in Westminster Abbey. The burial of this Unknown Soldier also triggered an outpouring of grief. The remains of many dead soldiers were never found or identified; the families of these men had no grave to visit, and many found it comforting to believe that it was their loved-one who lay at rest in the Abbey.

It was also in the 1920s that the wearing of poppies became part of the commemorations in Britain. This practice was first introduced by an American woman, Moina Michael, who had been inspired to wear a poppy by John McCrae's poem 'In Flanders Fields' (1915).

*“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
Unheard amid the guns below.”*

Moina Michael successfully campaigned for the poppy to be used as a symbol of remembrance by American veterans, and in 1921, the newly-formed British Legion decided to sell them to raise money for ex-servicemen. The practice of wearing poppies rose in popularity throughout the 1920s, and, by 1928, they were almost universally worn. In the 1930s, white poppies also became popular as a symbol for peace.

In many respects, these practices have remained largely unchanged. The two minutes' silence is still faithfully observed across the country, wreaths still adorn the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day, and poppies (red and white) are still sold and worn throughout November. However, following the Second World War, it became necessary to recognise the sacrifice of a new generation of soldiers. It was decided that a single

day to remember the dead, one that wasn't so strongly associated with the First World War, would be most appropriate. From 1945, a two minutes' silence was observed on the Sunday before Armistice Day instead. Recently, however, this tradition has changed. In 1995, the British Legion successfully campaigned to reintroduce the two minutes' silence on 11 November. Today, the silence is faithfully observed in addition to the traditional ceremony on Remembrance Sunday – remarkable proof of the enduring legacy of the First World War.

Poppies, Ramparts (Lille Gate) 2007.



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and England during the Hundred Years' War; the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century; the civil wars of the British Isles in the 17th century; slavery and serfdom in the Atlantic world in the 18th and 19th centuries; the development of nation states in western Europe following the French Revolution; and European imperialism in Africa.

Europe 1914 – 1989: war, peace, modernity (A327) – this third-level module begins with Europe on the eve of the First World War and ends with the re-unification of Germany at the end of the Cold War. As well as analysing political and military developments, it will introduce you to the key themes in Europe's economic, social, medical and cultural history.

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Acknowledgements

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Back cover

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“We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.”

To learn more about the origins of the First World War, visit www.open.edu/openlearn/greatwar

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