WE SHALL KEEP THE FAITH

Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields,
Sleep sweet - to rise anew!
We caught the torch you threw
And holding high, we keep the Faith
With All who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led;
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies,
But lends a lustre to the red
Of the flower that blooms above the dead
In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy Red
We wear in honor of our dead.
Fear not that ye have died for naught;
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought
In Flanders Fields.

Moina Michael, November 1918

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A SOLDIER’S CEMETARY

Behind that long and lonely trenched line
To which men come and go, where brave men die,
There is a yet unmarked and unknown shrine,
A broken plot, a soldier’s cemetery.

There lie the flower of youth, the men who scorn’d
To live (so died) when languished Liberty:
Across their graves flowerless and unadorned
Still scream the shells of each artillery.

When war shall cease this lonely unknown spot
Of many a pilgrimage will be the end,
And flowers will shine in this now barren plot
And fame upon it through the years descend:
But many a heart upon each simple cross
Will hang the grief, the memory of its loss.

John William Streets (killed and missing in action on 1st July 1916 aged 31)
POETRY & SONGS FROM WW1

IN MEMORIAM

So you were David’s father, And he was your only son, And the new-cut peats are rotting And the work is left undone, Because of an old man weeping, Just an old man in pain, For David, his son David, That will not come again.

Oh, the letters he wrote you, And I can see them still, Not a word of the fighting, But just the sheep on the hill And how you should get the crops in Ere the year get stormier, And the Bosches have got his body, And I was his officer.

You were only David’s father, But I had fifty sons When we went up in the evening Under the arch of the guns, And we came back at twilight -

O God! I heard them call To me for help and pity That could not help at all.

Oh, never will I forget you, My men that trusted me, More my sons than your fathers’, For they could only see The little helpless babies And the young men in their pride. They could not see you dying, And hold you while you died.

Happy and young and gallant, They saw their first-born go, But not the strong limbs broken And the beautiful men brought low, The piteous writhing bodies, They screamed “Don’t leave me, sir”, For they were only your fathers But I was your officer.

Ewart Alan Mackintosh (killed in action 21st November 1917 aged 24)

BEFORE ACTION

By all the glories of the day And the cool evening’s benison By that last sunset touch that lay Upon the hills when day was done, By beauty lavishly outpoured And blessings carelessly received, By all the days that I have lived Make me a soldier, Lord.

I, that on my familiar hill Saw with uncomprehending eyes A hundred of thy sunsets spill Their fresh and sanguine sacrifice, Ere the sun swings his noonday sword Must say good-bye to all of this; - By all delights that I shall miss, Help me to die, O Lord.

Lieutenant William Noel Hodgson, MC

Serving with the 9th Battalion the Devonshire Regiment, Lieutenant Hodgson was on the Somme battlefield in June 1916 preparing for the Battle of the Somme. Originally scheduled to be in August, it was brought forward to the 29th June. Bad weather in the week building up to the battle meant the date of the attack was moved by two days to the morning of 1st July 1916.

Within an hour of the attack it is said that Lieutenant Hodgson was killed. He was aged 23. He would never again see a sunset. It is believed that he wrote the poem “Before Action” on 29th June.
NOW THAT YOU TOO

Now that you too must shortly go the way
Which in these bloodshot years uncounted men
Have gone in vanishing armies day by day,
And in their numbers will not come again:
I must not strain the moments of our meeting
Striving for each look, each accent, not to miss,
Or question of our parting and our greeting,
Is this the last of all? is this - or this?

Last sight of all it may be with these eyes,
Last touch, last hearing, since eyes, hands, and ears,
Even serving love, are our mortalities,
And cling to what they own in mortal fears:
But oh, let end what will, I hold you fast
By immortal love, which has no first or last.

Eleanor Farjeon

Eleanor Farjeon was born in London and is best known as an author of children’s stories.

She was a close personal friend of the poet Edward Thomas and his wife Helen in the last few years of his life. She loved Edward, but knew that expressing her feelings to him would mean the immediate end of their friendship. They often visited each other and went on long country walks together. She typed his poems for him and submitted them, on his behalf, under the pseudonym of Edward Eastaway, to various publications.

Helen was aware of Eleanor’s feelings towards Edward and was perfectly content with the situation, believing that it might help to make Edward a little happier.

This moving poem is about saying goodbye to Edward Thomas for the last time.

TO MY BROTHER IN MEMORY OF JULY 1st 1916

Your battle-wounds are scars upon my heart,
Received when in that grand and tragic ‘show’
You played your part,
Two years ago,

And silver in the summer morning sun
I see the symbol of your courage glow --
That Cross you won
Two years ago.

Though now again you watch the shrapnel fly,
And hear the guns that daily louder grow,
As in July
Two years ago.

May you endure to lead the Last Advance
And with your men pursue the flying foe
As once in France
Two years ago.

Vera Brittain

Vera Brittain’s wartime experiences consisted of almost four years’ service as a VAD nurse.

In a sense, though, Brittain’s war was a war without end, as her sense of loss at the deaths of those dearest to her remained with her all her life, and formed the inspiration for a large proportion of her published writings.

She was working in the hospital in Camberwell when Edward, who had received his long-awaited commission in 1916, arrived to recover from wounds received on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. He died in 1918.

Her first poetry was published in August 1919, Verses of a V.A.D, which contains this poem.
GUNS AT SEA
by Imtarfa (an unknown naval officer)

Let me get back to the guns again, I hear them calling me,
And all I ask is my own ship, and the surge of the open sea,
In the long, dark nights, when the stars are out, and the clean salt breezes blow,
And the land's foul ways are half forgot, like nightmare, and I know
That the world is good, and life worth while, and man's real work to do,
In the final test, in Nature's school, to see which of us rings true.
On shore, in peace, men cheat and lie - but you can't do that at sea,
For the sea is strong; if your work is weak, vain is the weakling's plea
Of a "first offence" or "I'm only young," or "It shall not happen again,"
For the sea finds out your weakness, and writes its lesson plain.
"The liar, the slave, the slum-bred cur - let them stay ashore, say I,
"For, mark it well, if they come to me, I break them and they die.
The land is kind to a soul unsound; I find and probe the flaw,
For I am the tears of eternity that rock to eternal law."

Written by an unknown naval officer, this poem (first verse reproduced here) is a parody of John Masefield's Sea Fever. It was originally published in The Muse in Arms, an anthology of British war poetry published in November 1917 during WW1. The poets were from all three branches of the armed services, land, sea and air, from a range of ranks (though mostly officers) and from many parts of the UK. Twenty of the poets who contributed to this volume died during the war.

TO JOHN (The Hon. John Manners)

O heart-and-soul and careless played
Our little band of brothers,
And never recked the time would come
To change our games for others.
It's joy for those who played with you
To picture now what grace
Was in your mind and single heart
And in your radiant face.
Your light-foot strength by flood and field
For England keener glowed;
To whatsoever things are fair
We know, through you, the road;
Nor is our grief the less thereby;
O swift and strong and dear, good-bye.

One of the war poets, Gerald William Grenfell was the son of 1st Baron Desborough and Lady Desborough, of Taplow Court, Bucks. His brother Julian Henry Francis also fell.

He served as a Second Lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade 8th Bn and died on 30th July 1915 aged 25. His name appears on the Menin Gate Memorial.

John Manners was the son of the third Baron Manners and served as Lieutenant in the Grenadier Guards 2nd Bn. He died on 1st September 1914.

Gerald William Grenfell
RAIN, 7 Jan 1916

Rain, midnight rain, nothing but the wild rain
On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
Since I was born into this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be for what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Edward Thomas

WHEN YOU SEE MILLIONS OF THE MOUTHLESS DEAD

When you see millions of the mouthless dead
Across your dreams in pale battalions go,
Say not soft things as other men have said,
That you’ll remember. For you need not so.
Give them not praise. For, deaf, how should they know
It is not curses heaped on each gashed head?
Nor tears. Their blind eyes see not your tears flow.
Nor honour. It is easy to be dead.
Say only this, ‘They are dead.’ Then add thereto,
‘Yet many a better one has died before.’
Then, scanning all the over-crowded mass, should you
Perceive one face that you loved heretofore,
It is a spook. None wears the face you knew.
Great death has made all his for evermore.

Charles Sorley
FOR THE FALLEN (SEP 1914)

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,
England mourns for her dead across the sea.
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Solemn the drums thrill: Death august and royal
Sings sorrow up into immortal spheres.
There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

Robert Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)

First published in the Times on Sept 21 1914. Laurence Binyon wrote it while working at the British Museum, and did not go to the western front until 1916, as a Red Cross orderly. The poem's fourth verse is now used all over the world during services of remembrance and is inscribed on countless war memorials.

FRAGMENT (1915)

I strayed about the deck, an hour, to-night
Under a cloudy moonless sky; and peeped
In at the windows, watched my friends at table,
Or playing cards, or standing in the doorway,
Or coming out into the darkness. Still
No one could see me.

I would have thought of them
- Heedless, within a week of battle - in pity,
- Pride in their strength and in the weight and firmness
And link’d beauty of bodies, and pity that
This gay machine of splendour ’ld soon be broken,
Thought little of, pashed, scattered . . .

Only, always,
I could but see them - against the lamplight - pass
Like coloured shadows, thinner than filmy glass,
Slight bubbles, fainter than the wave’s faint light,
That broke to phosphorous out in the night,
Perishing things and strange ghosts - soon to die
To other ghosts - this one, or that, or I.

Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915)

After hesitation about what course of action to take at the start of the First World War Rupert Brooke joined the navy. He was a witness at the siege of Antwerp before writing his famous set of five sonnets called 1914. Though he had seen the devastation and suffering created by the war he kept it all at an emotional distance from himself, denying the realities of war.

He had a deeply confused personality - given to both ecstatic enthusiasm and suicidal doubt.

Following a mosquito bite he died of acute blood poisoning on board ship on his way to Gallipoli, and was buried on the Greek Island of Skyros.
POETRY & SONGS FROM WW1

MY SON

Here is his little cambric frock
That I laid by in lavender so sweet,
And here his tiny shoe and sock
I made with loving care for his dear feet.

I fold the frock across my breast
And in imagination, ah, my sweet,
Once more I hush my babe to rest
And once again I warm those little feet.

Where do those strong young feet now stand?
In flooded trench half numb to cold or pain,
Or marching through the desert sand
To some dread place that they may never gain.

God guide him and his men to-day!
Though death may lurk in any tree or hill,
His brave young spirit is their stay,
Trusting in that they'll follow where he will.

They love him for his tender heart
When poverty or sorrow asks his aid,
But he must see each do his part --
Of cowardice alone is he afraid.

I ask no honours on the field,
That other men have won as brave as he --
I only pray that God may shield
My son, and bring him safely back to me.

Ada Tyrrell (1854-1955)

Dublin-born Ada Tyrrell was a life-long friend of George Bernard Shaw. She was the wife of the distinguished Trinity College Dublin classic scholar and Regius Professor of Greek, Robert Yelverton Tyrell (1844-1914). She was a great society hostess in Dublin, reputed for her intellect, beauty and goodness which made her Dublin Salon sought by the great and the good of the time: politicians, artists, literati.

THE TRENCHES (1917)

Endless lanes sunken in the clay,
Bays, and traverses, fringed with wasted herbage,
Seed-pods of blue scabious, and some lingering blooms;
And the sky, seen as from a well,
Brilliant with frosty stars.

We stumble, cursing, on the slippery duck-boards.
Goaded like the damned by some invisible wrath,
A will stronger than weariness, stronger than animal fear,
Implacable and monotonous.

Here a shaft, slanting, and below
A dusty and flickering light from one feeble candle
And prone figures sleeping uneasily,
Murmuring,
And men who cannot sleep,
With faces impassive as masks,
Bright, feverish eyes, and drawn lips,
Sad, pitiless, terrible faces,
Each an incarnate curse.

Here in a bay, a helmeted sentry
Silent and motionless, watching while two sleep,

And he sees before him
With indifferent eyes the blasted and torn land
Peopled with stiff prone forms, stupidly rigid,
As tho’ they had not been men.

Dead are the lips where love laughed or sang,
The hands of youth eager to lay hold of life,
Eyes that have laughed to eyes,
And these were begotten,
O Love, and lived lightly, and burnt
With the lust of a man’s first strength: ere they were rent,
Almost at unawares, savagely; and strewn
In bloody fragments, to be the carrion
Of rats and crows.

And the sentry moves not, searching
Night for menace with weary eyes.

Frederic Manning (1882-1935)

Australian author and poet. Sent to France in 1916, Manning experienced action with the 7th Battalion at the Battle of the Somme, was promoted to lance-corporal and experienced life in the trenches.
1914 – I: PEACE

Now, God be thanked Who has watched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
Where there’s no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
Nothing to shake the laughing heart’s long peace there
But only agony, and that has ending;
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915) was born into a well-to-do, academic family; his father was a housemaster at Rugby School, where Rupert was educated before going on to King’s College, Cambridge.

He was a good student and athlete, and - in part because of his strikingly handsome looks - a popular young man who eventually numbered among his friends E. M. Forster, Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, and Edward Thomas.

Even as a student he was familiar in literary circles and came to know many important political, literary and social figures before the war.

1914 – II: SAFETY

Dear! of all happy in the hour, most blest
He who has found our hid security,
Assured in the dark tides of the world that rest,
And heard our word, 'Who is so safe as we?'
We have found safety with all things undying,
The winds, and morning, tears of men and mirth,
The deep night, and birds singing, and clouds flying,
And sleep, and freedom, and the autumnal earth.
We have built a house that is not for Time's throwing,
We have gained a peace unshaken by pain for ever.
War knows no power. Safe shall be my going,
Secretly armed against all death’s endeavour;
Safe though all safety’s lost; safe where men fall;
And if these poor limbs die, safest of all.

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After hesitation about what course of action to take at the start of the First World War Rupert Brooke joined the navy. He was a witness at the siege of Antwerp before writing these sonnets.

Brooke actually saw little combat during the war; he contracted blood-poisoning from a small neglected injury and died in April 1915, in the Aegean.

Brooke’s reputation, aside from the myth of the fallen "golden warrior" that his friends set about creating almost immediately after his death, rests on these five war sonnets.
1914 – III: THE DEAD

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!
There’s none of these so lonely and poor of old,
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.
These laid the world away; poured out the red
Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be
Of work and joy, and that unhoped serene,
That men call age; and those who would have been,
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.
Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;
And Nobleness walks in our ways again;
And we have come into our heritage.

Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915)

1914 – IV: THE DEAD

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movements, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.

There are waters blown by changing winds to laughter
And lit by the rich skies, all day. And after,
Frost, with a gesture, stays the waves that dance
And wandering loveliness. He leaves a white
Unbroken glory, a gathered radiance,
A width, a shining peace, under the night.

Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915)

Some critics doubt that he would have written the sonnets later in the war had he lived. They show an enthusiasm that most soldiers and poets eventually lost; another poet, Charles Sorley, said of Brooke’s poetry, “He has clothed his attitudes in fine words: but he has taken the sentimental attitude.”

Sorley held, as a matter of fact, a low opinion of most war poetry: “The voice of our poets and men of letters is finely trained and sweet to hear; it teems with sharp saws and rich sentiment: it is a marvel of delicate technique: it pleases, it flatters, it charms, it soothes: it is a living lie.” Sorley was killed in 1915, so he did not live to see the brutal turn poetry would take in the works of Owen, Sassoon & Rosenberg.

How Brooke’s poetry would have changed in tone and imagery as the war progressed, we can only guess.

Fair or not, Brooke is remembered as a “war poet” who inspired patriotism in the early months of the Great War.
1914 – V: THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England’s, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Rupert Chawner Brooke (1887-1915)

Brooke’s obituary which appeared in the Times on 26th April, 1915 contained a piece purportedly by Winston Churchill, although it can be read as little more than a recruiting advert:

“The thoughts to which he gave expression in the very few incomparable war sonnets which he has left behind will be shared by many thousands of young men moving resolutely and blithely forward into this, the hardest, cruellest, and the least-rewarded of all the wars that men have fought. They are a whole history and revelation of Rupert Brooke himself. Joyous, fearless, versatile, deeply instructed, with classic symmetry of mind and body, he was all that one would wish England’s noblest sons to be in days when no sacrifice but the most precious is acceptable, and the most precious is that which is most freely proffered.”

THE MOTHER (1917)

If you should die, think only this of me
In that still quietness where is space for thought,
Where parting, loss and bloodshed shall not be,
And men may rest themselves and dream of nought:
That in some place a mystic mile away
One whom you loved has drained the bitter cup
Till there is nought to drink; has faced the day
Once more, and now, has raised the standard up.

And think, my son, with eyes grown clear and dry
She lives as though for ever in your sight,
Loving the things you loved, with heart aglow
For country, honour, truth, traditions high,
--Proud that you paid their price. (And if some night
Her heart should break--well, lad, you will not know.

May Herschel-Clarke (1850-1950)
THE KNITTING SONG

SOLDIER lad, on the sodden ground,
Sailor lad on the seas,
Can't you hear a little clicketty sound
Stealing across on the breeze?
It's the knitting-needles singing their song
As they twine the khaki or blue,
Thousands and thousands and thousands strong,
Tommy and Jack, for you.

Click -- click -- click,
How they dart and flick,
Flashing in the firelight to and fro!
Now for purl and plain,
Round and round again,
Knitting love and luck in every row.

The busy hands may be rough or white,
The fingers gouty or slim,
The careful eyes may be youthfully bright,
Or they may be weary and dim,
Lady and workgirl, young and old,
They've all got one end in view,
Knitting warm comforts against the cold,
Tommy and Jack, for you.

Acknowledgments:

Jessie Pope was an English poet, writer and journalist, who remains best known for her patriotic motivational poems published during World War I.

Wilfred Owen directed his 1917 poem Dulce et Decorum Est at Pope.

THE CALL

Who's for the trench-
Are you, my laddie?
Who'll follow French-
Will you, my laddie?
Who's fretting to begin,
Who's going out to win?
And who wants to save his skin-
Do you, my laddie?

Who's for the khaki suit-
Are you, my laddie?
Who longs to charge and shoot-
Do you, my laddie?
Who's keen on getting fit,
Who means to show his grit,
And who'd rather wait a bit-
Would you, my laddie?

Who'll earn the Empire's thanks-
Will you, my laddie?
Who'll swell the victor's ranks-
Will you, my laddie?
When that procession comes,
Banners and rolling drums-
Who'll stand and bite his thumbs-
Will you, my laddie?

Jessie Pope was an English poet, writer and journalist, who remains best known for her patriotic motivational poems published during World War I.

Originally published in The Daily Mail, it encouraged enlistment and handed a white feather to youths who would not join the colors. Nowadays, this poetry is considered to be jingoistic, consisting of simple rhythms and rhyme schemes, with extensive use of rhetorical questions to persuade (and sometimes pressure) young men to join the war. Wilfred Owen directed his 1917 poem Dulce et Decorum Est at Pope.
THE SECRET

You were askin' 'ow we sticks it,
Sticks this blarsted rain and mud,
'Ow it is we keeps on smilin'
When the place runs red wi' blood.
Since you're askin' I can tell ye,
And I thinks I tells ye true,
But it ain't official, mind ye,
It's a tip twixt me and you.
For the General thinks it's tactics,
And the bloomin' plans 'e makes.
And the C.O. thinks it's trainin',
And the trouble as he takes.
Sergeant-Major says it's drillin',
And 'is straffin' on parade,
Doctor swears it's sanitation,
And some patent stinks 'e's made.
Padre tells us its religion,
And the Spirit of the Lord;
But I ain't got much religion,
And I sticks it still, by Gawd.

Quarters kids us it's the rations,
And the dinners as we gets.
But I knows what keeps us smilin'
It's the Woodbine Cigarettes.
For the daytime seems more dreary,
And the night-time seems to drag
To eternity of darkness,
When ye 'ave'n't got a fag.
Then the rain seems some'ow wetter,
And the cold cuts twice as keen,
And ye keeps on seein' Boches,
What the Sargint 'asn't seen.
If ole Fritz 'as been and got ye,
And ye 'aven't got a fag on,
Why it 'urts as bad again.
Then there ain't no fags to pull at,
Then there's terror in the ranks.
That's the secret - (yes, I'll 'ave one)
Just a fag - and many Tanks.

'Woodbine Willy'

THE SPIRIT

When there ain't no gal to kiss you,
And the postman seems to miss you,
And the fags have skipped an issue,
Carry on.

When ye've got an empty belly,
And the bulley's rotten smelly,
And you're shivering like a jelly,
Carry on.

When the Boche has done your chum in,
And the sergeant's done the rum in,
And there ain't no rations comin',
Carry on.

When the world is red and reeking,
And the shrapnel shells are shrieking,
And your blood is slowly leaking,
Carry on.

When the broken battered trenches,
Are like the bloody butchers' benches,
And the air is thick with stenches,
Carry on.

Carry on,
Though your pals are pale and wan,
And the hope of life is gone,
Carry on.
For to do more than you can,
Is to be a British man,
Not a rotten 'also ran,'
Carry on.

'Woodbine Willy'

The well known poets of the period, such as Owen and Sassoon, were not the only soldiers writing verse during the First World War. A large amount of "trench poetry" and songs was also written by ordinary soldiers (or at least in the style of), often published in trench newsletters and the like. One of the best known of these writers was 'Woodbine Willy', actually Revd. Geoffrey Kennedy MC, CF, who served in the war as a padre.
NEVER MIND

If the sergeant drinks your rum, never mind
And your face may lose its smile, never mind
He's entitled to a tot but not the bleeding lot
If the sergeant drinks your rum, never mind

When old Jerry shells your trench, never mind
And your face may lose its smile, never mind
Though the sandbags bust and fly you have only once to die,
If old Jerry shells the trench, never mind

If you get stuck on the wire, never mind
And your face may lose its smile, never mind
Though you're stuck there all the day, they count you dead and stop your pay
If you get stuck on the wire, never mind

If the sergeant says your mad, never mind
P'ras you are a little bit, never mind
Just be calm don’t answer back, cause the sergeant stands no slack
So if he says you're mad, well - you are.

Parody of:

Though your heart may ache a while, never mind
Though your face may lose its smile, never mind
For there's sunshine after rain, and the gladness follows pain.
You'll be happy once again, never mind

OH IT'S A LOVELY WAR!

Up to your waist in water, up to your eyes in slush,
using the kind of language that makes the sergeant blush,
Who wouldn’t join the army? That's what we all enquire.
Don't we pity the poor civilian sitting by the fire.

(Chorus)
Oh, oh, oh it's a lovely war.
Who wouldn't be a soldier, eh? Oh it's a shame to take the pay.
As soon as reveille has gone we feel just as heavy as lead,
but we never get up till the sergeant brings our breakfast up to bed.
Oh, oh, oh, it's a lovely war.
what do we want with eggs and ham when we've got plum and apple jam?
Form fours. Right turn. How shall we spend the money we earn?
Oh, oh, oh it's a lovely war.

When does a soldier grumble? When does he make a fuss?
No one is more contented in all the world than us.
Oh it's a cushy life, boys, really we love it so:
Once a fellow was sent on leave and simply refused to go.

(Chorus)

Come to the cookhouse door, boys, sniff the lovely stew.
Who is it says the colonel gets better grub than you?
Any complaints this morning? Do we complain? Not we.
What's the matter with lumps of onion floating around the tea?

(Chorus)
TO C.A.L. (The Hon. Charles Alfred Lister)

To have laughed and talked - wise, witty, fantastic, feckless -
To have mocked at rules and rulers and learnt to obey,
To have led your men with a daring adored and reckless,
To have struck your blow for Freedom, the old straight way:

To have hated the world and lived among those who love it,
To have thought great thoughts and lived till you knew them true,
To have loved men more than yourself and have died to prove it -
Yes, Charles, this is to have lived: was there more to do?

C.A.A.

Charles Alfred Lister was the youngest son of Thomas Lister, 4th Baron Ribblesdale. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission record of his death is at Charles Alfred Lister. A collection of his letters and a memoir was published by his father as Charles Lister - Letters and Recollections (1917). Lister's father identifies the author as "the Rev. Cyril Alington, the new Head Master of Eton".

FAREWELL

For the last time, maybe, upon the knoll
I stand. The eve is golden, languard, sad.
Day like a tragic actor plays his role
To the last whispered word and falls gold-clad.
I, too, take leave of all I ever had.

They shall not say I went with heavy heart:
Heavy I am, but soon I shall be free,
I love them all, but oh I now depart
A little sadly, strangely, fearfully,
As one who goes to try a mystery.

The bell is sounding down in Dedham vale:
Be still, O bell: too often standing here
When all the air was tremulous, fine and pale,
Thy golden note so calm, so still, so clear,
Out of my stony heart has struck a tear.

And now tears are not mine. I have release
From all the former and the later pain,
Like the mid sea I rock in boundless peace
Soothed by the charity of the deep-sea rain....
Calm rain! Calm sea! Calm found, long sought in vain!

O bronzen pines, evening of gold and blue,
Steep mellow slope, brimmed twilit pools below,
Hushed trees, still vale dissolving in the dew,
Farewell. Farewell. There is no more to do.
We have been happy. Happy now I go.

Robert Nichols
(Written on Expeditionary Force Leave, 1915)

Nichols, was a Winchester and Oxford-educated Georgian poet. His front-line service was however brief - after just a few weeks serving in the trenches he was invalided with shell shock and sent home to England in 1916. Subsequently serving with the British Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Information, he went on to pen war poetry that he often read to large gatherings, which included tours of the U.S.
IF WE RETURN
by F.W. Harvey

If we return, will England be
Just England still to you and me?
The place where we must earn our bread?
We who have walked among the dead,
And watched the smile of agony,
And seen the price of Liberty,
Which we had taken carelessly
From other hands. Nay, we shall dread,
If we return,
Dread lest we hold blood-guiltily
The things that men have died to free.
Oh, English fields shall blossom red
For all the blood that has been shed
By men whose guardians are we,
If we return.

Frederick William Harvey DCM (26 March 1888 – 13 February 1957), often known as Will Harvey, and dubbed “the Laureate of Gloucestershire”, was an English poet, broadcaster and solicitor whose poetry became popular during and after WW1. He joined up 4 days after the UK declared war and was posted to France in 1915 and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

Returning home in 1919, he married in 1921, and returned to legal practice. He worked largely as a defence solicitor (his own captivity convincing him that incarceration was destructive and pointless), and became known as the “poor man’s solicitor”.

"Ducks", Harvey’s best known work, was voted one of the nation’s 100 favourite poems in 1996 in a nationwide poll conducted by the BBC.

ABSOLUTION
by Siegfried Sassoon

The anguish of the earth absolves our eyes
Till beauty shines in all that we can see.
War is our scourge; yet war has made us wise,
And, fighting for our freedom, we are free.

Horror of wounds and anger at the foe,
And loss of things desired; all those things must pass.
We are the happy legion, for we know
Time's but a golden wind that shakes the grass.

There was an hour when we were loath to part
From life we longed to share no less than others.
Now, having claimed his heritage of heart,
What need we more, my comrades and my brothers?

Sassoon was a man who signed up voluntarily – eagerly and who earned the nickname “Mad Jack” in the early days of the war, thanks to his bravery in battle. Written in 1915, Absolution is Sassoon’s first complete war poem.

Sassoon said of it: “People used to feel like this when they ‘joined up’ in 1914 and 1915. No one feels it when they ‘go out again’. They only feel, then, a queer craving for ‘good old times at Givenchy’ etc. But there will always be ‘good old times’, even for people promoted from inferno to paradise!”
**POETRY & SONGS FROM WW1**

**RELEASE**

*by William Noel Hodgson*

(Composed while marching to rest-camp after severe fighting at Loos)

A leaping wind from England,  
The skies without a stain,  
Clean cut against the morning  
Slim poplars after rain,  
The foolish noise of sparrows  
And starlings in a wood  
- After the grime of battle  
We know that these are good.

Death whining down from heaven,  
Death roaring from the ground,  
Death stinking in the nostril,  
Death shrill in every sound,  
Doubting we charged and conquered - 
Hopeless we struck and stood;  
Now when the fight is ended  
We know that it was good.

William Hodgson was the fourth and youngest child of Henry Bernard Hodgson, the Bishop of Saint Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Hodgson was killed in action on 01/07/1916 aged 23 on the first day of the Somme Offensive. He was awarded the Military Cross and is buried in the Devonshire Cemetery in Mametz.

**BOMBARDMENT**

Four days the earth was rent and torn  
By bursting steel,  
The houses fell about us;  
Three nights we dared not sleep,  
Sweating, and listening for the imminent crash  
Which meant our death.

The fourth night every man,  
Nerve-tortured, racked to exhaustion,  
Slept, muttering and twitching,  
While the shells crashed overhead.

The fifth day there came a hush;  
We left our holes  
And looked above the wreckage of the earth  
To where the white clouds moved in silent lines  
Across the untroubled blue.

Richard Aldington

An English writer and poet, Aldington was best known for his World War I poetry, the 1929 novel, Death of a Hero, and the controversy arising from his 1955 Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Inquiry. His 1946 biography, Wellington, was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize.

Aldington, christened Edward Godfree, was born at Portsmouth, Hampshire, England, on July 8, 1892. At an early age, he moved with his mother, Jesse May, and father, middle-class lawyer Albert Edward Aldington, to Dover. There he grew up with his sister Margery and attended preparatory schools, after which he studied for four years at Dover College.

Aldington lived in St Richards Road in Deal between 1903 and 1906 and is commemorated with a Deal Society blue plaque.

He is one of 16 ‘Great War’ Poets commemorated in Poets Corner at Westminster Abbey.
DAWN

The grim dawn lightens thin bleak clouds;
In the hill-clefts beyond the flooded meadows
Lies death-pale, death-still mist.

We trudge along wearily,
Heavy with lack of sleep,
Spiritless, yet with pretence of gaiety.

The sun brings crimson to the colourless sky;
Light gleams from brass and steel—
We trudge on wearily—

O God, end this bleak anguish
Soon, soon, with vivid crimson death,
End it in mist-pale sleep!

Richard Aldington

THE KAISER AND BELGIUM

HE said: “Thou petty people, let me pass.
What canst thou do but bow to me and kneel?”
But sudden a dry land caught fire like grass,
And answer hurtled but from shell and steel.

He looked for silence, but a thunder came
Upon him, from Liège a leaden hail.
All Belgium flew up at his throat in flame
Till at her gates amazed his legions quail.

Take heed, for now on haunted ground they tread;
There bowed a mightier war lord to his fall:
Fear! lest that very green grass again grow red
With blood of German now as then with Gaul.

If him whom God destroys He maddens first,
Then thy destruction slake thy madman’s thirst.

Stephen Phillips
THE HUSH

There is a hush before the thunder-jar,
When white the steeple against purple stand:
There is a hush when night with star on star
Goes ashen on the summer like a brand.
Now a more awful pause appals the soul,
When concentrating armies crouch to spring;
Stillness more fraught than any thunder-roll,
Dawn European with a redder wing.
The Teuton host no conscience onward drives;
Sullen they come; to slaughter shepherded;
Timed for the shambles with unwilling lives,
With doubt each soldier is already dead.
The massed battalions as a myth shall reel;
Vainly they fight, if first they cannot feel.

Stephen Phillips

Stephen Phillips 1864 – 1915, was a highly famed English Poet & Dramatist born on 28 July 1864 in Oxford, the eldest of the thirteen children of Stephen Phillips, precentor of Peterborough Cathedral, and his wife, Agatha Sophia, a relative of the Wordsworths.

Mr. Phillips, who enjoyed considerable popularity in his lifetime. In his later career he was editor of the Poetry Review from January 1913 until his death in 1915.

He lodged and died in Griffin St. Deal. A Deal Society Blue Plaque commemorates him.

CONVALESCENCE (1914)

From out the dragging vastness of the sea,
Wave-fettered, bound in sinuous seaweed strands,
He toils toward the rounding beach, and stands
One moment, white and dripping, silently,
Cut like a cameo in lazu,li,
Then falls, betrayed by shifting shells, and lands
Prone in the jeering water, and his hands
Clutch for support where no support can be.
So up, and down, and forward, inch by inch,
He gains upon the shore, where poppies glow
And sandflies dance their little lives away,
The sucking waves retard, and tighter clinch
The weeds about him, but the land-winds blow,
And in the sky there blooms the sun of May.

Amy Lowell

The American Amy Lowell was born into an affluent Massachusetts family and educated at home and in private schools in Boston. Her financial resources helped her develop a liberated and unconventional lifestyle.

She once remarked that God had made her a businesswoman and she had made herself a poet. Over a relatively brief period she produced over 650 poems but also worked energetically to publicise and promote modern trends in poetry.

She published extensively between 1915 and her death in 1923. In addition to her poetry she lectured, promoted the work of other poets she admired and wrote literary criticism including a lengthy biography of John Keats. She received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1925 for her collection of poems, What’s O’Clock.
THE SILENT ONE (1917)

Who died on the wires, and hung there, one of two -
Who for his hours of life had chatted through
Infinite lovely chatter of Buck accent:
Yet faced unbroken wires; stepped over, and went
A noble fool, faithful to his stripes – and ended
But I weak, hungry, and willing only for the chance
Of line- to fight in the line, lay down under unbroken
Wires, and saw the flashes and kept unshaken,
Till the politest voice – a finicking accent, said:
‘Do you think you might crawl through there: there’s a hole.’
Darkness, shot at: I smiled, as politely replied –
‘I'm afraid not, Sir.’ There was no hole no way to be seen
Nothing but chance of death, after tearing of clothes.
Kept flat, and watched the darkness, hearing bullets whizzing –
And thought of music – and swore deep heart’s deep oaths
(Polite to God) and retreated and came on again,
Again retreated – and a second time faced the screen.

Ivor Gurney

Gurney was not only a poet but also an extremely gifted composer. Although tormented by mental illness he wrote over two hundred musical pieces and hundreds of poems.

Ivor Gurney suffered periods of mental ill health before the First World War but his condition had deteriorated significantly by the end of the conflict. He had joined up after initially being rejected because of his poor eyesight and was subsequently wounded and gassed.

At the end of the war he had a number of temporary jobs but his mental instability worsened and he was committed to a mental asylum in 1922. Gurney never fully recovered and died in an asylum in Kent in 1937 from Tuberculosis. He almost certainly suffered from some form of bi-polar disorder.

BIRDS IN THE TRENCHES

by Willoughby Weaving

Ye fearless birds that live and fly where men
Can venture not and live, that even build
Your nests where oft the searching shrapnel shrilled
And conflict rattled like a serpent, when
The hot guns thundered further, and from his den
The little machine-gun spat, and men fell piled
In long-swept lines, as when a scythe has thrilled,
And tall corn tumbled ne'er to rise again.

Ye slight ambassadors twixt foe and foe,
Small parleyers of peace where no peace is,
Sweet disregarders of man's miseries
And his most murderous methods, winging slow
About your perilous nests - we thank you, so
Unconscious of sweet domesticities.

No Mans Land on many stretches of the Western Front offered an oddly ideal avian habitat, after all few humans ventured there in daylight. The feeling that 'every day might be your last' led to an immense appreciation of everything and a love of birds 'ran like a golden obsessive thread through officers diaries and letters'. The assiduous noting of birdlife was more than a way of passing the hours in the walled world of the trenches.

Weaving was born in Ireland in 1895, and educated at Pembroke College in Oxford. He was a protege' of Robert Bridges. He served as a Lieutenant in The Royal Irish Fusiliers on the Western front. His poems were, in the main about nature, the Irish and English countryside.
He was wounded in 1915 and invalided home.
He died in 1977.
POETRY & SONGS FROM WW1

THE STRETCHER BEARER (1916)

My stretcher is one scarlet stain,
And as I tries to scrape it clean,
I tell you what – I’m sick of pain,
For all I’ve heard, for all I’ve seen;
Around me is the hellish night,
And as the war’s red rim I trace,
I wonder if in Heaven’s height
Our God don’t turn away his face.

I don’t care whose the crime may be,
I hold no brief for kin or clan;
I feel no hate, I only see
As man destroys his brother man;
I wave no flag, I only know
As here beside the dead I wait,
A million he arts are weighed with woe,
A million homes are desolate.

In dripping darkness far and near,
All night I’ve sought those woeful ones.
Dawn suddens up and still I hear
The crimson chorus of the guns.
Look, like a ball of blood the sun
Hangs o’er the scene of wrath and wrong,
“Quick! Stretcher-bearers on the run!”,
Oh Prince of Peace! How long, how long!”

Tommy Crawford (1897-1980)

Tommy Crawford served in the 15th Durham Light Infantry during the First World War and joined the army at just 18 years old. During his time in service he fought in battles at Loos and the Somme. He was injured during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, when a bullet hit his rifle. Discharged on medical grounds, he returned to the North East of England. His poem the ‘The Stretcher Bearer’ offers a bleak and poignant reflection of the experiences of ordinary soldiers performing medical duties at the frontline.

POETRY & SONGS FROM WW1

CHANNEL FIRING

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgement-day
And sat upright. While dearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds;
The mouse let fall the altar-crumble,
The worms drew back into the mounds,
The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, ‘No;
It’s gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be.’

All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christés sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

‘That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them’s a blessed thing,
For if it were they’d have to scour
Hell’s floor for so much threatening…

‘Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).’

So down we lay again. ‘I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be,’
Said one, ‘than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!’

And many a skeleton shook his head.
‘Instead of preaching forty year,’
My neighbour Parson Thirdly said,
‘I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer.’

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

Thomas Hardy

Preparations for war included practice firing by British battleships in the English Channel, the noise of which would have carried far inland and been especially noticeable by residents of coastal counties such as Dorset where Hardy lived at the time of writing this poem in 1914.
The Great War

So difficult, the war.
After all, it's all been said,
All been done and dusted,
All been screened and read.
No living left to comfort.
No comfort for the dead.

WWI songs were the ones her
grandmother sang; her grandfather
returned from the front with all four
limbs.

They never spoke of the war.

Now people know all about it, don't
they, every archival detail.

Hilary Clare (b 1950)
lives in Ivy Place, Deal.