



Red Corn Poppies (popaver rhoeas)

Why the Poppy

The poppy has a long association with Remembrance Day. But how did the distinctive red flower become such a potent symbol of our remembrance of the sacrifices made in past wars?

Scarlet corn poppies (popaver rhoeas) grow naturally in conditions of disturbed earth throughout Western Europe. The destruction brought by the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th Century transformed bare land into fields of blood red poppies, growing around the bodies of the fallen soldiers.

In late 1914, the fields of Northern France and Flanders were once again ripped open as WWI raged through Europe's heart. Once the conflict was over the poppy was one of the only plants to grow on the otherwise barren battlefields.

The significance of the poppy as a lasting memorial symbol to the fallen was realised by the Canadian surgeon John McCrae in his poem *In Flanders Fields*. The poppy came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice made by his comrades and quickly became a lasting memorial to those who died in WWI and later conflicts. It was adopted by The Royal British Legion as the symbol for their Poppy Appeal, in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces, after its formation in 1921.

BBC, 1918- 2008, Ninety Years of Remembrance

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
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields



By John Macrae, May 1915