

A collection of war poems displayed at Discover
Stamford as part of the centenary commemoration
in 2014

From the Collections of Lincolnshire County Council Heritage Service

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 to win?
And who wants to save his skin –
Do you, my laddie?

Jessie Pope



From
'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 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?

Eleanor Farjeon



In a Restaurant, 1917

Encircled by the traffic's roar
Midst music and the blaze of light,
The battle-jaded khaki knights
Throng, sleek and civilised once more.

Oh, one there was who, long ago
(Three centuries or is it years?)
Adored the splendour and the tears
Of London Ebb – of London Flow.

Oh, one whose very presence gave
The common air an added grace,
Now in our hearts an empty place
And far in France an unmarked grave.

Eleanour Norton



The Battle of the Swamps

Across the blinded lowlands the beating rain blows chill,
The trenched earth turns to water,
The shell-holes ooze and fill,
A tragic land where little
that's sweet or sane survives –
O, hungry swamps of Flanders that swallow up men's lives!

Muriel Elsie Graham



Nature in War-time

The banished thrush, the homeless rook
Share now the human exile's woe.
Mourns not that forest felled, which took
Three hundred years to grow?

Grieve not those meadows scarred and cleft,
Mined with deep holes and reft of grass,
Gardens where not a flower is left,
Fouled streams, once clear as glass?

And yon green vale where Spring was found
Laughing among her daffodils...
Winds sweep it now; a battle-ground
Between two gun-swept hills.

S Gertrude Ford



Socks

Shining pins that dart and click
In the fireside's sheltered peace
Check the thoughts that cluster
thick –

20 plain and then decrease.

He was brave – well, so was I –
Keen and merry, but his lip
Quivered when he said good-bye

–

*Purl the seam-stitch, purl and
slip.*



Never used to living rough,
Lots of things he'd got to learn;
Wonder if he's warm enough –
Knit 2, catch 2, knit 1, turn.

Hark! The paper-boys again!
Wish that shout could be suppressed;
Keeps one always on the strain –
Knit off 9, and slip the rest.

Wonder if he's fighting now,
What he's done an' where he's been;
He'll come out on top, somehow –
Slip 1, knit 2, purl 14

Jessie Pope



An Only Son

I have slain none except my Mother. She
(Blessing her slayer) died of grief for me.

Rudyard Kipling

Epitaphs of the War, 1914-1918

At the Movies

They swing across the screen in brave array,
Long British columns grinding the dark grass.
Twelve months ago they marched into the grey
Of battle; yet again behold them pass!

One lifts his dusty cap; his hair is bright;
I meet his eyes, eager and young and bold.
The picture quivers into ghostly white;
Then I remember, and my heart grows cold!

January 1916

Florence Ripley Mastin



Exposure

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent
Low, drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient
Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous
But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

Wilfred Owen



From
Picnic
July 1917

We lay and ate sweet hurt-berries
In the bracken of Hurt Wood.
Like a quire of singers singing low
The dark pines stood.

Behind us climbed the Surrey hills,
Wild, wild in greenery;
At our feet the downs of Sussex broke
To an unseen sea.

And life was bound in a still ring,
Drowsy, and quiet, and sweet...
When heavily up the south-east wind
The great guns beat.

We did not wince, we did not weep,
We did not curse or pray;
We drowsily heard, and someone said,
'They sound clear today'.

Rose Macaulay



The Great War

Whenever war is spoken of
I find
The war that was called Great invades the mind:
The grey militia marches over land
A darker mood of grey
Where fractured tree-trunks stand
And shells, exploding, open sudden fans
Of smoke and earth.
Blind murders scythe
The deathscape where the iron brambles writhe;
The sky at night
Is honoured with rosettes of fire,
Flares that define the corpses on the wire
As terror ticks on wrists at zero

Vernon Scannell



The Convalescent

....

They'll 'ave a little flag 'ung out – they'll 'ave the parlour gay
With crinkled paper all about, the same as Christmas Day,
An' out of all the neighbours' doors the 'eads'll pop to greet
Me comin' wounded 'ome to' Enry Street.

My missis – well she'll cry a bit, an' laugh a bit between;
My kids'll climb upon my knees – there's one I've never seen;
An' of all the days which I 'ave known there won't be one so sweet
As the one when I go 'ome to 'Enry Street.

Cicely Fox Smith



War Girls

There's the girl who clips your ticket for the train,
And the girl who speeds the lift from floor to floor,
There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain,
And the girl who calls for orders at your door.
Strong, sensible, and fit,
They're out to show their grit
And tackle jobs with energy and knack.
No longer caged and penned up,
They're going to keep their end up
Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

Jessie Pope



Silent Night

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace



Stille Nacht

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht,
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!
Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

*A Christmas Prayer
(From the Trenches)*

Not yet the great release
For men, when war shall cease.

So must the guns our carols make,
Our gifts must bullets be,
For us no Christmas bells shall wake;
These ruined homes shall see
No Christmas revelry.



Cyril Winterbotham

Christmas, 1916: *Thoughts in a V.A.D. Hospital Kitchen*

There's no Xmas leave for us scullions,
We've got to keep on with the grind:
Just cooking for Britain's heroes.
But, bless you! We don't really mind.

We've scores and scores of potatoes,
And cabbages also to do;
And onions, and turnips, and what not,
That go in the Irish Stew.

We're baking, and frying, and boiling,
From morning until night;
But we've got to keep on a bit longer,
Till Victory comes in sight.

Then there's cutting the thin bread and butter,
For the men who are very ill;
But we feel we're well rewarded;
For they've fought old Kaiser Bill.

M. Winifred Wedgwood



First Snow in Alsace

The snow came down last night like moths
Burned on the moon;
It fell till dawn,
Covered the town with simple cloths.

Absolute snow lies rumped on
What shell-bursts scattered and deranged,
Entangled railings, crevassed lawn



As if it did not know they'd changed,
Snow smoothly clasps the roofs of homes
Fear-gutted, trustless and estranged.



The ration-stacks are milky domes;
Across the ammunition pile
The snow has climbed in sparkling combs
You think; beyond the town a mile
Or two, this snowfall fills the eyes
Of soldiers dead a little while.....

Richard Wilbur

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

*Captain E.H. Brittain, M.C. Written four days before his death in action in the Austrian offensive on the Italian Front, June 15th, 1918.

The Cenotaph

The man in the Trilby hat has furtively shifted it;
The man with the clay pipe has pushed his fists deeper into his pockets;
Beparcelled women are straining their necks
To stare.

Through the spattered windows of the omnibus

We see,

Dumb beneath the rain,
Marshalled by careful policemen,
Four behind four,
The relatives of dead heroes,
Clutching damp wreaths.

Within the omnibus there is silence
But for a sniff.

Ursula Roberts



From *Epitaphs of the War* - Canadian Memorial 2

From little towns in a far land we came,
To save our honour and a world aflame.
By little towns in a far land we sleep;
And trust that world we won for you to keep!



Rudyard Kipling

Elegy in a Country Churchyard

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And birds and bees of England
About the cross can roam.



But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.



And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet.

G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)

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 Brooke (1887-1915)





New Year, 1916



Those that go down into silence...

There is no silence in their going down,
Although their grave-turf is not wet with tears,
Although Grief passes by them, and Renown
Has garnered them no glory for the years.

The cloud of war moves on, and men forget
That empires fall. We go our heedless ways
Unknowing still, uncaring still, and yet
The very dust is clamorous with their praise.

Ada M. Harrison