

Tale from the Garden!

Our red poppy is a symbol of both Remembrance and hope for a peaceful future.

The poppy is a well-known and well-established symbol, one that carries a wealth of history and meaning with it. Wearing a poppy is still a very personal choice, reflecting individual experiences and personal memories. It is never compulsory but is greatly appreciated by those who it is intended to support.

The Western Front - During WW1, much of the fighting took place in Western Europe. The countryside was blasted, bombed and fought over repeatedly. Previously beautiful landscapes turned to mud; bleak and barren scenes where little or nothing could grow. There was a notable and striking exception to the bleakness - the bright red Flanders poppies. These resilient flowers flourished in the middle of so much chaos and destruction, growing in the thousands upon thousands.

In the Spring of 1915, shortly after losing a friend in Ypres, a Canadian doctor, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae was moved by the sight of these poppies and that inspiration led him to write the now famous poem 'In Flanders Fields'.

“In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae

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.



This poem then inspired an American academic named Moina Michael to adopt the poppy in memory of those who had fallen in the war. She campaigned to get it adopted as an official symbol of Remembrance across the United States and worked with others who were trying to do the same in Canada, Australia, and the UK. Also involved with those efforts was a French woman, Anna Guérin who was in the UK in 1921 where she planned to sell the poppies in London. There she met Earl Haig, Founder of the British Legion, who was persuaded to adopt the poppy as its emblem in the UK. The Royal British Legion ordered nine million poppies and sold them on 11 November that year. The poppies sold out almost immediately. That first 'Poppy Appeal' raised over £106,000 to help veterans with housing and jobs; a considerable sum at the time. Today's Poppy Appeal? 40,000 volunteers distribute 40 million poppies!

In view of how quickly the poppies had sold and wanting to ensure plenty of poppies for the next appeal, Major George Howson set up the Poppy Factory in Richmond, Aylesford, in 1922 to employ disabled ex-servicemen. Assembling the poppy required only one hand, allowing veterans who had lost an arm to work on the production line. This factory still employs disabled veterans, and they make approximately 36 million poppies each year. Today, the factory and warehouse produces millions of poppies each year. The demand for poppies in England continued unabated and was so high, in fact, that few poppies actually managed to reach Scotland. To address this and meet growing demand, Earl Haig's wife Dorothy established the 'Lady Haig Poppy Factory' in Edinburgh in 1926 to produce poppies exclusively for Scotland.

Today, over five million Scottish poppies (which have four petals and no leaf unlike poppies in the rest of the UK) are still made by hand by disabled ex-Servicemen at Lady Haig's Poppy Factory each year and distributed by its sister charity 'PoppyScotland'.

Remembrance in the UK today is very different than it was 100 years ago. People take part whatever their political or religious beliefs. The poppy remains a humble, poignant symbol of Remembrance and hope & in 2021 we are marking 100 years since the nation's collective Remembrance traditions were first brought together. These include the wearing of the poppy, the two-minute silence, Armistice Day, the service for the Unknown Warrior & the March-past at the Cenotaph. This year we are reflecting on what the next 100 years of Remembrance could look like by examining how, who, and why we remember.

Poppy is the common name for any of the plants comprising the Papaver genus in the flowering plant family Papaveraceae. Most poppies are found in the Northern Hemisphere, and several species of poppies are cultivated as garden ornamentals. Poppies are herbaceous annual, biennial or short-lived perennial plants. Some species are monocarpic, dying after flowering. In the temperate zones, poppies bloom from spring into early summer.

The plant can be over one metre (3.3 feet) tall with flowers up to 15 centimetres (6 inches) across. It has lobed or dissected leaves, milky sap, often nodding buds on solitary stalks.

Flowers of species (not cultivars) have 4 to 6 petals, many stamens forming a conspicuous whorl in the centre of the flower and an ovary of from 2 to many fused carpels. The petals are showy, may be of almost any colour and some have markings. The petals are crumpled in the bud and as blooming finishes, the petals often lie flat before falling away.

The flower colour of poppy species include: white, lilac, pink, yellow, orange, red, violet and blue. The ovary develops into a spherical capsule topped by a disk formed by the stigmas. The many small seeds escape from pores beneath the disk when the capsule is shaken by the wind.

Poppies have a long history in human civilization. They were already grown as ornamental plants since 5,000 BC in Mesopotamia. They were found in Egyptian tombs and ancient Egyptian doctors would have their patients eat seeds from a poppy to relieve pain.

In Greek mythology, the poppy was associated with Demeter, goddess of fertility and agriculture. People believed they would get a bountiful crop if poppies grew in their field, hence the name "corn poppy." In this case, the name 'corn' was derived from 'korn', the Greek word for "grain."

Opium, from which morphine, heroin, codeine, and papaverine are derived, comes from the milky latex in the unripe seed capsule of the opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*). It grows wild in eastern and southern Asia, and South-Eastern Europe. It is believed that it originated in the Mediterranean region. Poppies today are sold as cut flowers in flower arrangements, especially the Iceland poppy, and commonly have a prominent place in gardens, borders, or in meadow plantings. They are probably one of the most popular wildflowers.

"It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo, the ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were... those were the stories that stayed with you, that meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. **There's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo, and it's worth fighting for.**" (Samwise Gamgee, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* by J.R.R. Tolkien) During darker times it is always good to remember those who came before us and what they fought for. In a time where the world needs more humanity and good than ever, the Poppy of Hope is not only a symbol of the bravery of all those souls who put themselves on the line for us every day, sacrificing their tomorrow, so we could have our today, but a reminder to look to them for inspiration for ourselves - we can get through every dark day.

The British legion has their symbol, the poppy, which is good, but we Christians also have a symbol, and that symbol is the cross. By that symbol, we remember the greatest act of sacrificial love ever shown to a world in conflict - a sacrifice where the son of God died for us. And because he died for us, we can live in hope. John 3 v15-17 puts it this way, "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. ... For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

The Poppy is our symbol of Remembrance but let us remember through the remembering of pain and loss that there is always the light of hope, love and faith through Jesus Christ.