

## THE FORMATION OF THE BRITISH LEGION

The main purpose of the Legion was straightforward: to care for those who had suffered as a result of service in the Armed Forces during the war, whether through their own service or through that of a husband, father, or son. The suffering took many forms: the effect of a war wound on a man's ability to earn a living and support his family, or a war widow's struggle to give her children an education.

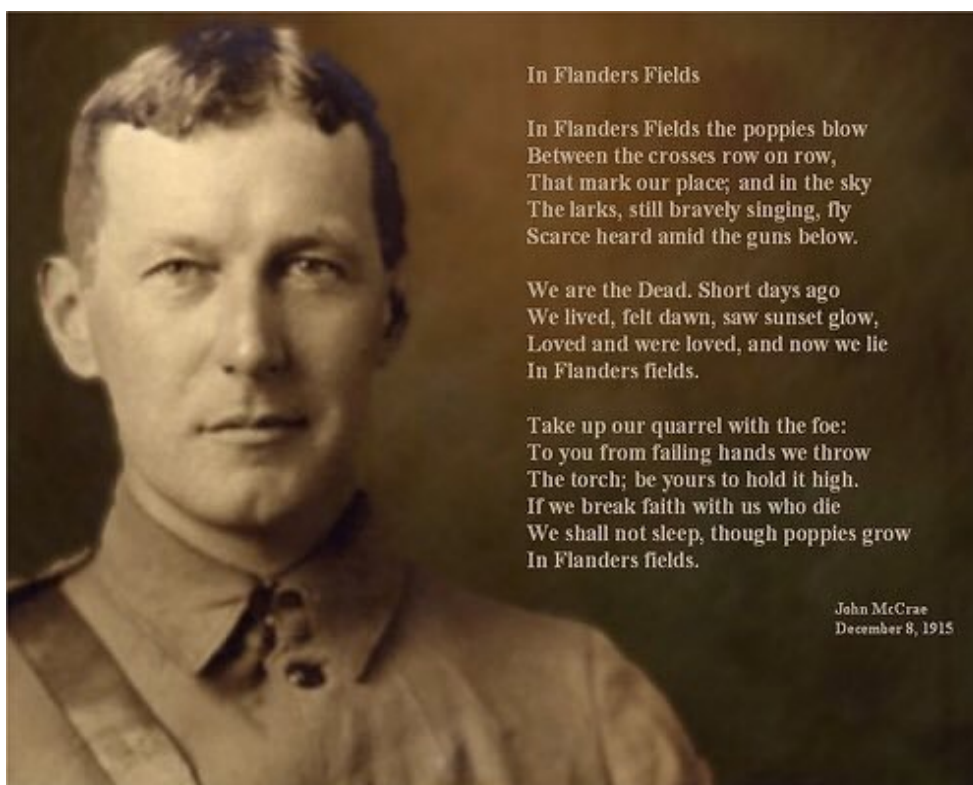
As a result of the war, Britain's economy plummeted and in 1921 there were two million people unemployed. Over six million men had served in the war - 725,000 never returned.

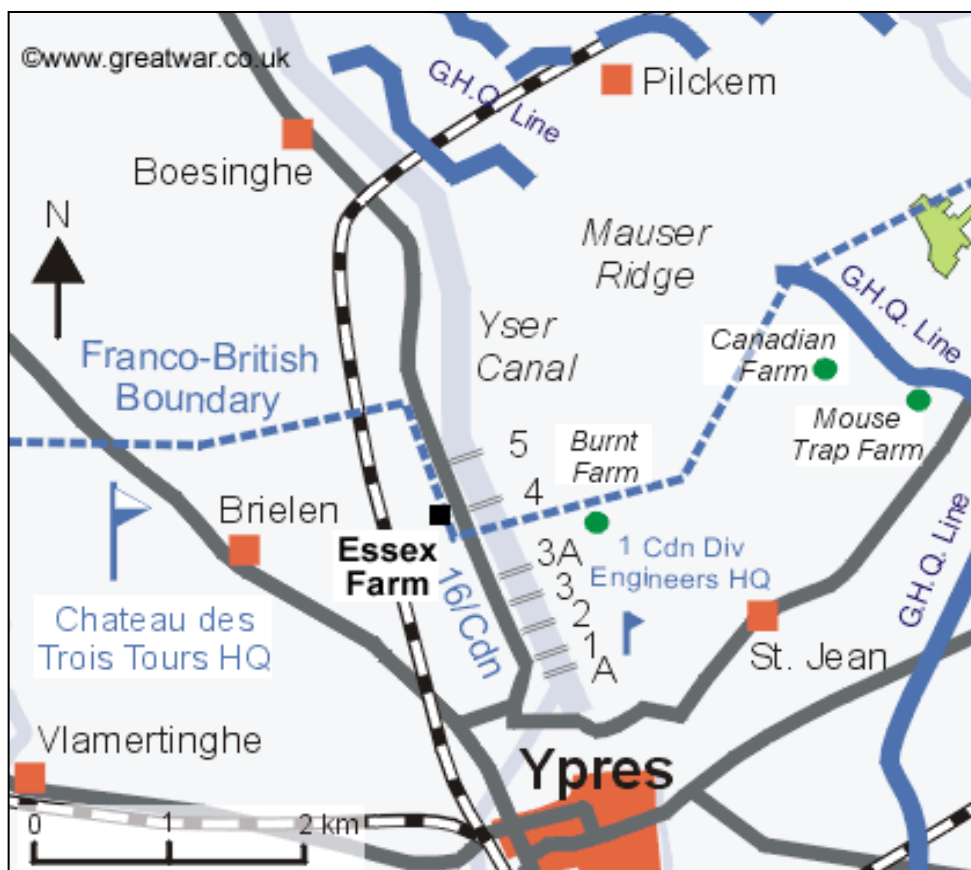
Of those who came back, 1.75 million had suffered some kind of disability and half of these were permanently disabled. Then there were those who depended on those who had gone to war - the wives and children, widows, and orphans, as well as the parents who had lost sons in the war, on whom they were often financially dependent.

This situation moved Lance Bombardier Tom Lister, a Lancastrian, so he decided that if the Government was either unable or unwilling to do anything to improve the lives of ex-Servicemen, he would do something about it himself. This led to the formation of The Royal British Legion.

During the First World War (1914–1918) much of the fighting took place in Western Europe. Previously beautiful countryside was blasted, bombed, and fought over, again and again. The landscape swiftly turned to fields of mud: bleak and barren scenes where little or nothing could grow.

Bright red Flanders poppies (*Papaver Rhoeas*) however, were delicate but resilient flowers and grew in their thousands, flourishing even in the middle of chaos and destruction. In early May 1915, shortly after losing a friend in Ypres, a Canadian doctor, Lt Col John McCrae was inspired by the sight of poppies to write a now famous poem called '**In Flanders Fields**'.





The name "Essex Farm" commemorates the Essex Regiment, perhaps because a soldier of the 2nd Battalion of the Essex Regiment was an early internment there in June 1915. Twenty-eight members of the 11th Battalion of the Essex Regiment were also buried there during 1916.

The location of Essex Farm Advanced Dressing Station (A.D.S.) is believed to be the place in May 1915 where the Canadian Army Doctor and artillery brigade commander Major John McCrae composed his now famous poem "In Flanders Fields".

The red poppies growing in the warm spring weather, amongst the military graves near to the makeshift medical bunker he was working in at that time, are believed to have been the inspiration for the poem. The symbol of the red poppy and the death of a friend, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, deeply affected John McCrae during the time of his involvement in the Second Battle of Ypres.

McCrae's poem inspired an American academic, Moina Belle Michael, to make and sell red silk poppies which were brought to England by a French woman, Anna Guérin.

A member of the French YWCA, Anna Guérin was at the American Legion convention in 1920 and saw that the sale of large numbers of artificial poppies in her home country could fund support for those still suffering the aftereffects of war, particularly orphaned children.

Anna Guérin began production of fabric poppies and travelled the world encouraging countries to adopt the symbol. She made arrangements for the first nationwide distribution of poppies in America (working with Moina Michael), saw the promotion of the poppy in Canada and the adoption of it by the Canadian League and also in New Zealand and Australia.



Anna Guérin: "The French Poppy Lady"

A French woman by the name of Madame Anna E Guérin was present at the 29 September National American Legion convention. Anna was a representative of the French YMCA Secretariat. Anna considered that artificial poppies could be made and sold as a way of raising money for the benefit of the French people, especially the orphaned children, who were suffering as a result of the war.

She was the founder of the "American and French Children's League" through which she organized French women, children, and war veterans to make artificial poppies out of cloth. Her intention was that these poppies would be sold, and the proceeds could be used to help fund the restoration of the war-torn regions of France.

Anna was determined to introduce the idea of the memorial poppy to the nations which had been Allied with France during the First World War. During 1921 she made visits or sent representatives to America, Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand.

In 1921 she met with Field Marshal Earl Douglas Haig, founder, and President of the British Legion, and persuaded him to adopt the poppy as an emblem for the Legion. The first British Legion Poppy Day appeal began in the autumn of 1921, with hundreds of thousands of French-made poppies selling across the country.

The British Legion, formed in 1921, ordered 9 million of these poppies and sold them on 11 November that year. The poppies sold out almost immediately and that first ever 'Poppy Appeal' raised over £106,000, a considerable amount of money at the time. This was used to help WW1 veterans with employment and housing.



Moina Michael: 1869-1944

It was on a Saturday morning, 9 November 1918, two days before the Armistice was declared at 11 o'clock on 11 November. Moina Belle Michael was on duty at the YMCA Overseas War Secretaries' headquarters in New York. She was working in the "Gemot" in Hamilton Hall. This was a reading room and a place where U.S. servicemen would often gather with friends and family to say their goodbyes before they went on overseas service.

On that day Hamilton Hall and the "Gemot" was busy with people coming and going. The Twenty-fifth Conference of the Overseas YMCA War Secretaries was in progress at the headquarters. During the first part of the morning as a young soldier passed by Moina's desk he left a copy of the latest November edition of the "Ladies Home Journal" on the desk.

At about 10.30am Moina found a few moments to herself and browsed through the magazine. In it she came across a page which carried a vivid colour illustration with the poem entitled "We Shall Not Sleep." This was an alternative name sometimes used for John McCrae's poem, which was also called "In Flanders Fields." Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae had died of pneumonia several months earlier on 28 January 1918.

At that moment Moina made a personal pledge to "keep the faith." She vowed **always to wear a red poppy of Flanders Fields** as a sign of remembrance. It would become an emblem for "keeping the faith with all who died." Moina had come across the poem before, but reading it on this occasion she found herself transfixed by the last verse:

*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.*

Compelled to make a note of this pledge she scribbled down a response on the back of a used envelope. She titled her poem "We Shall Keep the Faith". The first verse read like this:

*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*

By 1920 Moina Michael was beginning to lose hope that the Memorial Poppy idea would ever come to fruition. She was in a dilemma about whether to pursue her own academic career or whether to abandon it in order to devote herself entirely to the Memorial Poppy campaign. However, in the early 1920s a number of organizations did adopt the red poppy as a result of Moina's dedicated campaign.

At the Unity Conference held at the Queen's Hall, Langham Place, London on Sat 14 May and Sun 15 May 1921, the Conference adopted the Draft Constitution, together with amendments, alterations, and additions agreed by the Conference as the Constitution of the British Legion. This Constitution was to become operative from the 15 May 1921. On the 15 May 1921 at 9am at the Cenotaph, the shrine to their dead comrades, the ex-Service men sealed their agreement. The Legion had been born and formed with the amalgamation of four other associations:

## THE SHAPING OF THE BRITISH LEGION

### National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (1916)

The unofficial party consisted of several groups representing the political interests of former service personnel who had fought in the war. A silver badge was issued to all servicemen on their discharge in recognition of their service.

First to be formed was the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers, established following a meeting in Blackburn in September 1916 and initially linked to the labour and trade union movement.

The Silver Badge Party (The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers) was the unofficial title for a political movement existing in the United Kingdom during and immediately after the Great War 1914-1918.



In April 1917, the Asquith Liberal MP James Hogge sponsored a meeting at the National Liberal Club over the Military Service (Review of Exceptions) Bill, which proposed to reclassify those invalided out of the army to identify those who might be recalled to service. This meeting led to the formation of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers.

The National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers decided to fight by elections to put its message across. In the Liverpool Abercromby by election in June 1917, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers candidate polled a quarter of the vote.

In the 1918 UK general election its National Executive approved five candidates, and local branches sponsored 25 more, considered Independent National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors

and Soldiers candidates.



In three Leeds constituencies, the candidates were nominated jointly by the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers and the Comrades of the Great War.

None of the candidates were elected although many polled substantial votes. In addition, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers sponsored a candidate in Sowerby in unusual circumstances in which he inherited the position of unofficial Conservative Party candidate and won.

The groups were politically diverse. Hogge was a left-wing Liberal, and most of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers were similarly left wing: among the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers candidates was Ernest Thurtle, who later became a Labour Party MP.

Henry Hamilton Beamish was a member of both the Vigilante Society and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers. In the 1918 general election he was one of the candidates sponsored by the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers branches but not approved by the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers National Executive, again in Clapham.

Following the election, none of the groups continued in active party politics. James Hogge resigned as President of the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers in January 1919.

Following pressure from Earl Haig, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers lifted its ban on officers being members in June 1919 and the three groups together with the Officers' Association began merger talks. At a Unity conference on May 14-15, 1921, they merged to form the British Legion.

Although not strictly speaking a founder organisation of the Legion, the National Union of Ex-servicemen is worth a mention if only by way of their badge which comes in two version metal & enamel, gilt & enamel. The National Union of Ex-servicemen did play a small part in British Legion history.

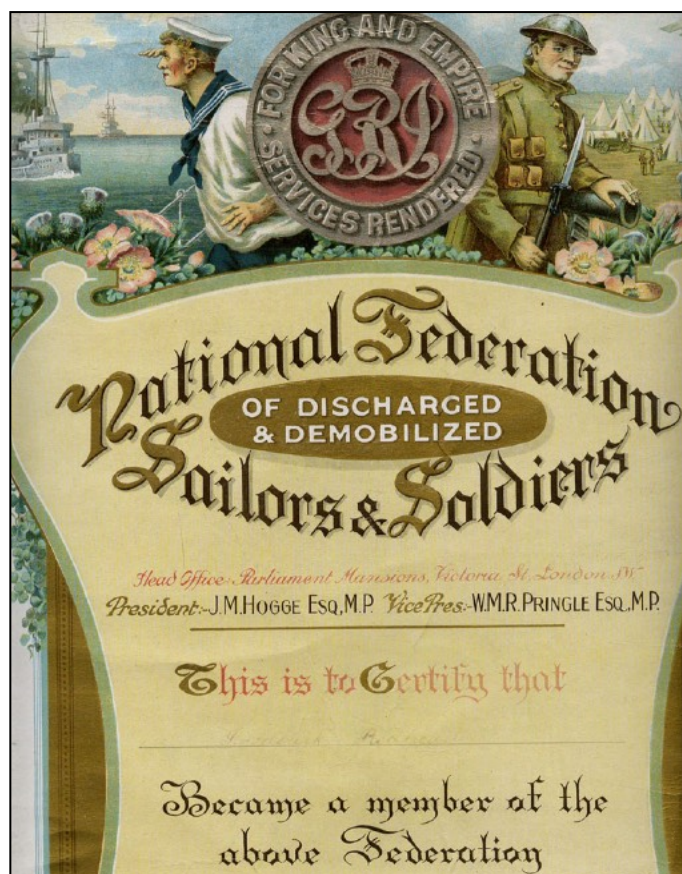
The National Union of Ex-servicemen initially took part in the unity talks of August 1920 having previously been excluded from taking part but decided to go their own way. Graham Wotton's book *"the official history of the BRITISH LEGION"* 1956 implies that were a very militant far left almost Marxist organisation that had been excluded from some of the early talks because of their political leanings.

### **British National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers (1917).**

The organisation was founded in January 1917 by various London-based veterans groups opposed to the Review of Exceptions Act, which made it possible for people invalided out of the armed forces to be

re-conscripted. It adopted the slogans "Every man once before any man twice" and "Justice before charity".

Although the Federation initially invited senior military figures to its meetings, they refused. The leadership was assumed by the left-wing Liberal Party MPs James Hogge and William Pringle, who fought for improved pensions and representation on relevant government committees. Frederick Lister later took over the presidency. The Federation's politics were thus broadly liberal, although there was a wide diversity of opinion.



In 1919, the Woolwich branch organised a march on Parliament Square, which was baton charged by police. Other branches worked closely with the trade union movement, and some set up soup kitchens.

F.B. Hughes, a member of the NFDDSS, stood on behalf of the group at the Liverpool Abercromby by-election, 1917, against Edward Stanley of the Conservative Party but was unsuccessful, taking only a quarter of the votes cast. This intervention persuaded the Earl of Derby to found Comrades of the Great War as a right-wing alternative veterans group.

The National Federation of Discharges and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers sponsored a considerable number of candidates at the 1918 general election, some jointly with the rival National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (NADSS) in what was termed the "Silver Badge Party", although none were successful.

Only five of the candidates were officially approved by the National Executive Committee: Brookes, Dooley, Gebbett, Lister and Shakesby. The remainder were put forward by local branches; these included three candidates in Leeds who were jointly sponsored by the rival Comrades of the Great War and National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers organisations in what was termed the "Silver Badge Party". During the campaign, both Dawson and Thompson were repudiated by the organisation.

### **Comrades of the Great War**

The Comrades of The Great War were formed in 1917 as a non-political association to represent the rights of ex-service men and women who had served or had been discharged from service during The Great War 1914-1918. Comrades of The Great War was one of the original four ex-service associations that amalgamated on Sunday 15 May 1921 to form The British Legion.

The Comrades of The Great War exhibition is an interesting collection of one of the more organised ex-service associations which the casual observer of the Legion History could almost see our own organisation based upon the badges in this exhibition.



### **The Officers' Association**

**(1920).**

On demobilisation after the First World War hundreds of former officers found themselves in difficulties, unable to find a job, and sometimes with no money, shelter or means of support. Many were suffering from wounds.

Earl and Countess Haig, supported by Admiral of the Fleet Earl Beatty and Marshal of the Royal Air Force Viscount Trenchard and the City of London, organised a highly successful public subscription for these Officers. This led them to found the Officers' Association (OA) in 1920: the Association received a Royal Charter in 1921.

From its inception the OA has had very close links with The Royal British Legion (TRBL). In 1922 the OA handed its fund-raising organisation over to TRBL to form the basis of the Poppy Appeal and it has sometimes been known as The Officers' Branch of TRBL. In order not to compete with TRBL and other Service Charities, the OA does not raise funds in public collections but supports the Poppy Appeal and receives 7.5% of the Annual Poppy Appeal street collection to support its work.

Throughout its existence the OA has supported Officers and their dependants in many ways, but it has consistently addressed, as a priority, helping officers find employment, providing advice and, in cases of need, financial support.

The amalgamation of these four diverse bodies can be attributed largely to two men: Field Marshall Earl Haig and Mr Tom F Lister of The Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers.

### **1920: The American Legion Adopts the Memorial Poppy**

In 1919 the American Legion was founded as an organization by veterans of the United States armed forces to support those who had served in wartime in Europe during the First World War.

In August 1920 Moina discovered by chance that the Georgia Department of the American Legion was to convene on 20 of that month in Atlanta. Prior to the convention she searched out the delegates and the Navy representative promised to present her case for the Memorial Poppy to the convention.

The Georgia Convention subsequently adopted the Memorial Poppy but omitted the Torch symbol. The Convention also agreed to endorse the movement to have the Poppy adopted by the National American Legion and resolved to urge each member of the American Legion in Georgia to wear a red poppy annually on 11 November.

One month later, on 29 September 1920, the National American Legion convened in Cleveland. The Convention agreed on the use of the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy as the United States' national emblem of Remembrance.

### **1921: French Poppies Sold in America**

In 1921 Madame Guérin made arrangements for the first nationwide distribution across America of poppies made in France by the American and French Children's League. The funds raised from this venture went directly to the League to help with rehabilitation and resettlement of the areas of France devastated by the First World War. Millions of these French-made artificial poppies were sold in America between 1920 and 1924.

### **5 July 1921: Canada adopts the Flower of Remembrance**

Madame Anna Guérin travelled to Canada, where she met with representatives of the Great War Veterans Association of Canada. This organization later became the Royal Canadian Legion. The Great War Veterans Association adopted the poppy as its national flower of Remembrance on 5 July 1921.

### **11 November 1921: The First British Legion Poppy Day Appeal**

In 1921 Anna Guérin sent some French women to London to sell their artificial red poppies. This was the first introduction to the British people of Moina Michael's idea of the Memorial Poppy.

Madame Guérin went in person to visit Field Marshal Earl Douglas Haig, founder, and President of The British Legion. She persuaded him to adopt the Flanders Poppy as an emblem for The Legion. This was formalized in the autumn of 1921.

The first British Poppy Day Appeal was launched that year, in the run up to 11 November 1921. It was the third anniversary of the Armistice to end the Great War. Proceeds from the sale of artificial French-made poppies were given to ex-servicemen in need of welfare and financial support.

Since that time, the red poppy has been sold each year by The British Legion from mid-October to raise funds in support of the organization's charitable work.

### **11 November 1921: Armistice Day Remembrance in Australia**

A resolution was passed in Australia that from 11 November 1921 the red Memorial Poppy was to be worn on Armistice Day in Australia.

The American and French Childrens' League sent a million artificial poppies to Australia for the 1921 Armistice Day commemoration. The Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League sold poppies before 11 November.

A poppy was sold for one shilling each. Of this, five pennies were donated to a French Childrens' charity, six pennies were donated to the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League and one penny was received by the government.

Since that time red poppies have been worn on the anniversary of Armistice in Australia, officially named Remembrance Day since 1977. Poppy wreaths are also laid in Australia on the day of national commemoration called ANZAC DAY on 25 April. This is the day when the ANZAC Force landed on the beaches of the Gallipoli peninsular at the start of that campaign on 25 April 1915.

## **24 April 1922: The First Poppy Day in New Zealand**

In September 1921, a representative from Madame Guérin visited the New Zealand veterans' association, called the New Zealand Returned Soldiers' Association (NZRSA) at that time. This organization had been established in 1916 by returning wounded veterans.

With the aim of distributing poppies in advance of the anniversary of Armistice Day on 11 November that year, the NZRSA placed an order for 350,000 small and 16,000 large French-made poppies from the French and American Childrens' League. Unfortunately the delivery of the poppies did not arrive in time to organize and publicize the first nationwide poppy campaign, the Association decided to hold the first Poppy Day on 24 April, the day before ANZAC Day, in the following year.

The first Poppy Day in New Zealand in 1922 raised funds of over £13,000. A proportion of this was sent to the French and American Childrens' League and the remainder was used by the Association for support and welfare of returned soldiers in New Zealand.

## **May 1922: French-made Poppies Sold in the United States**

In 1922 the organization of the American and French Childrens' League was disbanded. Madam Guérin was still keen to raise funds for the French people who had suffered the destruction of their communities. She asked the American organization called Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) to help her with the distribution of her French-made poppies throughout the United States.

That year the VFW assisted with the sale of the poppies in America to help keep up the much-needed funds for the battle-scarred areas of France. The poppies were sold before Memorial Day which was observed at that time on 30<sup>th</sup> May. This was the first time that a United States war veterans' organization took on the task of selling the red poppy as a symbol of Remembrance and as a means of fund raising. The VFW decided to adopt the poppy as its own official memorial flower.

## **1923: The American Legion Sells Poppies in the United States**

In 1923 the American Legion sold poppies in the United States which were made by a French company.

The following year, Major George Howson set up the Poppy Factory to employ disabled ex-Servicemen. Today, the factory and the Legion's warehouse in Aylesford produces millions of poppies each year.

The demand for poppies in England was so high that few were reaching Scotland. Earl Haig's wife established the 'Lady Haig Poppy Factory' in Edinburgh in 1926 to produce poppies exclusively for Scotland. Over 5 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.

## **Founding of the Poppy Factory in England**

In 1922 the Poppy Factory was established in the Old Kent Road, south London. It was the idea of Major George Howson MC, founder of The Disabled Society for disabled ex-servicemen and women. By making artificial poppies for sale around the anniversary of the 1918 Armistice, the Poppy Factory could employ

five disabled men during the year.



In 1933 the demand for poppies for Poppy Day was such that the Poppy Factory had to move to larger premises in Richmond, Surrey. The demand for poppies continued to grow each year. Nowadays the Poppy Factory is producing nearly 40 million poppies for wreaths, sprays, and buttonholes.

### **The Royal Charter**

The 1925 conference saw the introduction of the Legion's Royal Charter. Nearly four years in the making, it was given its formal status and empowered with the authority that covered every aspect of the Legion's work for the ex-service community. Although it changed many times over the years, it is still the focus of the Legion today.

### **The Lady Haig Poppy Factory, Scotland**



The Earl Haig Fund Scotland was set up as a Scottish charity in 1921 by its founder Field Marshal Earl Douglas Haig. In 1926 Countess Dorothy Haig, wife of Earl Haig, founded the Poppy Factory in Edinburgh. Earl Haig had been born in Edinburgh.

The charity now trades by the name of Poppyscotland, based in Edinburgh. It continues to raise funds for the Scottish Poppy Appeal, supporting veterans and their dependants in Scotland. The Lady Haig Poppy Factory produces over four million poppies each year. Approximately 30 veterans with disabilities are employed at the Factory.

Now, anyone can become a member of The Royal British Legion. We welcome men and women of all ages, whether they have served in the Armed Forces or not, to continue the work that was begun nearly 100 years ago.

It is a national charity helping people in local communities. The Legion provides information, advice, and guidance to help the Armed Forces community find and access the support they need. Though we're a national organisation, we work in local communities across the UK, delivering information, advice, and support where it is needed most, including outreach services for the most vulnerable.

Whether it's money worries, a seaside break with the family, careers advice after Service, independent living, or care in later life, we're here to help. We help people every day of the year, but we only raise about a third of the money needed through the Poppy Appeal. We rely on the help of brilliant supporters who take part in fundraising activities and challenge events for us all year round, as well as raising money at community events and fairs.

The National Service of Remembrance, held at The Cenotaph in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday, ensures that no-one is forgotten as the nation unites to honour all who have suffered or died in war.

Originally conceived as a temporary structure for the London Victory Parade by Sir Edwin Lutyens in 1919, a permanent design made from Portland stone was built in 1920, undecorated except for a carved wreath on each end and the words "The Glorious Dead". Taken from the Greek for 'empty tomb,' a cenotaph is a tomb or monument erected to honour a person or group of persons whose remains are elsewhere.

Flags flanking the sides of The Cenotaph since 2007 represent the Royal Navy, the British Army, the Royal Air Force, and the Merchant Navy.

HM The King will pay tribute alongside Members of the Cabinet, Opposition Party leaders, former Prime Ministers, the Mayor of London, and other ministers. Representatives of the Armed Forces, Fishing Fleets and Merchant Air and Navy will be there, as well as faith communities and High Commissioners of Commonwealth countries.

Each year at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, we observe a Two Minute Silence. Armistice Day on 11 November marks the end of the First World War and is a day to remember and honour those who have paid the price for our freedom.

### **The exhortation:**

***"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."***

**Response: *"We will remember them."***

### **In France**

In France, the **bleuet de France** is the symbol of memory for, and solidarity with, veterans, victims of war, widows, and orphans, similar to the British Commonwealth remembrance poppy. The sale of "bleuet de France" badges on 11 November and 8 May is used to finance charitable works for those causes.

In the language of flowers, the cornflower symbolizes delicacy and timidity, and indicates that a message has a pure, innocent, or delicate intention. The cornflower – like the poppy – continued to grow in land devastated by the thousands of shells which were launched daily by the entrenched armies of the Western Front. These flowers were often the only visible evidence of life, and the only sign of colour in the mud of the trenches.



At the same time, the term "bleuets" was used also to refer to the class of conscripted soldiers born in 1895 who arrived in the lead-up to the Second Battle of the Aisne, because of the bleu horizon worn by French soldiers after 1915.

The uniform worn by these recruits, many of whom were not even twenty years old, was distinctive because it marked a break from the garance red trousers worn by older soldiers, which were part of the standard uniform before the First World War.

As the war dragged on and the novelty of the term faded, the title endured because the uniforms that fresh arrivals wore into the trenches were still new and brightly coloured, in contrast with the mud-stained uniforms of veteran troops.



The origin of the badge dates to 1916. It was created by Suzanne Lenhardt, head nurse in Les Invalides, and Charlotte Malleterre. Lenhardt was the widow of a Colonial Infantry captain killed in 1915, and Malleterre was the sister of Général Gustave Léon Niox and the wife of Général Gabriel Malleterre.

They were both moved by the suffering endured by the war wounded for whom they were responsible and, needing to provide them with some activity, organized workshops where cornflower badges were made from tissue paper. These were sold to the public at various times, with the money collected providing the men a small income. They gradually became a symbol of the rehabilitation of soldiers through labour.

On 15 September 1920, Louis Fontenaille, the president of *Mutilés de France* (fr), proposed making the *bleuet* the eternal symbol of those who died for France. This had the support of the FIDAC (Federation Interalliee des Anciens Combattants).

In 1928, after French President Gaston Doumergue gave his patronage to the *bleuet*, sales gradually spread countrywide. By 11 November 1934, 128,000 flowers were sold. From 1935, the French government made official the sale of *bleuets* on Remembrance Day. In 1957, a second commemorative day was denoted for 8 May, VE day, the anniversary of the surrender of Nazi Germany in the Second World War.

## In Germany

Germany doesn't commemorate the end of the First World War, but it does have a day to remember victims of conflict. *Volkstrauertag* or Memorial Day was established shortly after World War One to remember the more than 2 million German soldiers who were killed in the conflict.

The special day took place each year on the second Sunday of Lent (which comes either in February or March). When the Nazis assumed power in 1933, they recast the day as *Heldengedenktage* the Day of Heroes. Following the Second World War, Germany abandoned observing the occasion altogether, which citizens associated with the Third Reich.

However in 1952, *Volkstrauertag* was revived, but moved to the last Sunday before Advent in mid-November. It has been observed ever since. A second memorial was designated in Germany on 27 January. This one honours those killed during the Holocaust.

It's known in Germany as the Day of Memory for the Victims of National Socialism. It's recognised internationally as well under various names. The German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern also celebrates The Day of Liberation from National Socialism on VE Day or May 8.

The way Germany treats its war dead - even the gallant Red Baron, who shot down 80 enemy planes - helps explain why it has been somewhat difficult in figuring out how to mark the centenary of the start, or for the coming conclusion of a war that shaped the 20th century.

The reasons may run deeper than the obvious fact that they lost the war. Modern Germany has no appetite for war and shudders at the memories of Imperial Germany, with its spiked "Pickelhaube" helmets and exuberant militarism. Germans aren't sure how, or even if, they should commemorate a war that cost them 13 percent of their territory, all their colonies, huge reparations and 2.5 million lives. That may also be due to the collective memory of World War Two, as that overshadows World War One in every category from the loss of lives to the level of acceptance of guilt.

Another reason the war is lesser remembered is that the Nazis manipulated its legacy for nationalistic propaganda in their march to power in 1933. Defeat was cast as the result of betrayal of the army by weak, defeatist civilians and communist revolutionaries.

## "Forget-Me-Not" – The Floral Symbol for Remembering the Casualties of War



Basildon Borough Heritage Society

Due to its name, the forget-me-not is an international symbol of remembrance as well as a loving last farewell, coupled with the expression of a desire to stay in the minds of loved ones. In many languages, it is called the same name with the same meaning. Numerous poems and songs have been written about this flower.

The "blue flower" is a well-known motif in German romanticism. It stands for longing and love. It is also an expression of the pursuit of perfection, as well as the futility of the human search for perfect happiness.

At the beginning of the First World War, many young war volunteers romanticised and glorified the personal sacrifice for their respective countries, as yet unaware of modern weaponry and its gruesome consequences.

The self-knowledge symbolised by the "blue flower" of romanticism is a deeply individualistic motif. From today's perspective, its use as a flower of remembrance counterpoints the merciless mass carnage during this first World War.

Compiled by Basildon Borough Heritage Society  
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