



ST. EDWARD'S
OXFORD

Shell War Poetry

Competition Finalists



INTRODUCING THE COMPETITION

On the centenary of the Armistice ending the First World War the Shell pupils studied First World War Literature and were encouraged to write their own poetry in order to commemorate this momentous occasion.

It was very encouraging to see how many pupils entered the competition and, equally, just how impressive they were. There were poignant poems, elegies, and even an homage to Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum est...*

The pupils had clearly thought hard about their poems and it was good to see echoes of the war poets in their own work, e.g. using 'trudge' and 'boys' to emphasise the youth of the infantry and the harsh conditions.

The standard was so high that we had to extend the shortlist and the deliberation over the final winner, Lara Davidson's 'Calm before the Storm', took some time – the other two main contenders being Alice Spencer and Millie Cooper. All of the shortlisted entries received a prize and Lara will have the opportunity to take a chosen guest for a meal at a local restaurant courtesy of the English Department.

A big 'well done!' to the pupils who entered. This all bodes extremely well for the creative and thoughtful side of the budding writers at Teddies.

Calm before the Storm

All is still. The train trudging along the verdant green meadows.
Soldiers laughing, playing cards
Excited for the “Game”.
Soldiers laughing, playing cards
Then came the rain.

I stand in sludge, mud dragging me down
I8 and fighting for England, showing them proud.
The smell of crisp air sending shivers down my spine.
The sight of enemies giving me a sign.

Lightning strikes, but it wasn't from heaven
Lightning strikes, the blast from a gun
This certainly isn't fun.

Another bomb shaking the earth.
Enter the battlefield if I durst.
Soldiers running, never still.
Soldiers sprinting, escaping the kill.

The Poppies Grow

The mud squelches
And screams.
Shells land all
Around the troops.
But see how those poppies grow.

Bombs drop out
Of the sky like
Falling stars.
Taking life after life.
But see how the poppies grow.

Children clamber
Onto packed trains.
“Goodbye,” they yell,
“I love you!”
But see how those poppies grow.

Dead men lay
Across the field.
Grass dyed red
And sky turned black.
But see how those poppies grow.

By Millie Cooper

Knee Deep

Silhouettes of soldiers
In the dark, shimmering.

The gorse-brutal war
Is starting again.

Shots hurled
Into shallows, whimpers reverberate.

Blood gushing
Across the valley.

Rotted trees
Fighting for life.

Trying to cope
With destruction.

Scuttle of feet
Babble of breathless tactics.

Closer and closer
Draws the horn noise
Until....

Men are hurled in mud baths
Remains seething with bodies.

Some catching a last breath
Before hopes fade.

I am heaped in a death pile
Mud rising.

My body crumbling
Like eroded chalk.

I am knee deep
How else do you describe this?
Except it is war.

By Alice Spencer

Amid the Fallen

Bitten poplars scattered with corpses,
Whimpering cries like dogs,
The earth broken into pallid strata
Death rises.

Faint smoke smudges to the North-West
It scans the profoundly still,
Unquestioning docility
The burnt and bruised soldiers lay,
Like seething hunks of cloth.

With eye-sockets earth stained,
A despicable odour enveloped the dead,
A concoction of blood and limbs filled the trenches,
A man, obscured from light,
Lay resenting his decision.

A barren wasteland,
Teetering on the edge
Frail guns poke our world
Sinister shells devour the ground,
A hurricane of destruction.

No miracle, bonanza, just worthless war
And there I lay.
Amid the fallen.

By Jack Parry

Marching Through the Blood

Me and the lads were marching through the mud,
With noting to see but cold, dark blood.
I heard cries of desperation.
We were doing this for our nation.

The bullets flew past my head,
But another would make one dead.
I chose to leave my brothers behind,
What was I thinking in my mind?

I got shot and dropped to the ground,
Listening to the background sound.
I heard my men cry in agony,
I lay there calm but anxiously.

However, in my case it was the end,
You lads will forever be my friends.

Potius Mori Quam Foedari

The crackle of the gun,
Kills the last son.
He couldn't blame,
Me. For he would do the same.

Yet the war goes on,
And the Germans are still not gone.
My children who go to war,
Could end up dying, I'm sure.

We trudge through no-man's land,
God, will you ever lend a hand.
My soldiers are sick of war,
Because this isn't a 'game' anymore.

We carry on the endless fight,
Throughout the everlasting night.
This is a tragedy – it is bloody and gory,
It is a lie: potius mori quam foedari.

The Ally

As the red sun finally rises from the dark abyss,
The walking dead stumble across the fields,
Peppered with bullets and bombs.

Screams and shouts are let out as one
Of the deadly bombs hits near.
I see the green mist sink over the helpless
Children wishing that real home is close.

It haunts my dreams,
Those withering bodies under that fog,
Gasping for air.
Even those ghostly masked figures
That walked through, towards me, chasing me.

The rumbling of an engine that saved me,
The light from above that saved me,
The bombs on the opposition that saved us,
The suffering of the opposition that saved us.

The long journey home,
Dead faces, dead silence.
The next stop is mine.





Death's Kiss

A bouquet of smells around the battlefield.
A scent of frosted grass,
Sneaks into my nose, but
I am looking for something more trespass,
The soldiers' blood and something concealed.

His deadly body on the holy dust,
His eyes are hallow,
His heart is shallow.
Lying motionless and anxious.
He thinks about harmonious past.

I strolled to him and kneeled.
His face turned white and mute,
His face covered with wrinkles,
And the dry lips quietly yelled,
Please, leave me.

I grabbed his hand and wrapped around.
His wrists shaking, while touching me.
His heartbeat is rapidly slowing down,
As I get closer, he gives up,
And as a slave he succumbs to me.

I'm Death and I bestow you with my kiss.
This is a gift that everyone receives,
But no-one knows how it feels.
To catch a glimpse,
And give a passionately loved kiss.

By Olga Muratvitskaya

Perspective

I am not a fighter
Nor am I a lover
I am underneath you
Solid and true.

I am your stability
I am your humility
I am the earth
Crumbling with hurt.

Planes fly overhead
Dropping bombs anywhere
I am their deathbed
Of their bloodshed everywhere.

Screams fly through the air
Bullets follow after them
They slaughter without care
I cannot clean up after them.

I am soaked
Wet in red
Stifled and choked
I will too be dead.

By Adriane Yeung

Soldier

I am beneath your feet,
All around you.
I protect you from the darkness.
I am the darkness.

I do not claim to be perfect,
I am not a hero.
I fight.

I am a soldier,
Protector of liberty
Here to keep you free,
Here to make them leave you be.

I am a soldier,
Destroyer of life
Creator of strife.
The man children fear.

But this is how it has to be.
I must fight.
For you.

I don't want to do this.
To die
Just a pawn in their game.
Just another man slain.

There are no winners in this
Just survivors.
But why should I?
Why should I survive?
Why shouldn't he survive?

Is he not just a man like me?
Does he not also have family?
A mother waiting terrified.
I wonder how hard she will cry.

I am nothing but another soldier
So why?

By Joseph Osei

The Big Old Lie

We trudge through the mud
And fields of blood
We struggle through the sludge
Why won't these Germans budge?

Machine guns! Quick! Hide!
This isn't a game, my father lied.
People around me dying,
Because of all those old men lying.

I have tried to pray.
But God is asleep,
He has nothing to say.
Will our spirits be freed?
This is a bloody mess indeed.

I can't get these thoughts away
About how I might die today.
But if I go, at least I know.
This is a game that will never grow.

The Bullet

I was in a gun
Waiting; next to be flung
And he couldn't care
As he focuses on his target with a cold, hard stare.

It was lonely in the weapon
Waiting for the man's life to be threatened.
I could see the light
Waiting for the man to feel my full might.

Finally, I was released
And about to disrupt the peace
I pierced the air
And made contact, finally.

The soldier stared at his victim
And he didn't seem to care
He pulled the trigger....
But now what have I done?

By Tom McPhail

The Routine

My country is up to its neck in a fight,
But every night I see soldiers drained of their might.
I think again of the soldiers that die,
And thank God for my role in life.

I pray that less come in day by day,
But my prayers aren't answered anyway.
Everyday my routine stays the same,
Too busy to learn any of their names.

I long for the day when there is an empty ward,
And not to tend the weak, but just be bored
They come in waves, energy drained,
Never thinking of what might happen to their brains.

It will stay with them, like it was just yesterday,
Their hopes tarnished forever away.

By Ohemaa Dompreeh

The Young Boy

It is raining and it is night.
Gas! Gas! Schnell, männer!
Let's go and fight!
Wir Mussen angreifen! Schneller! Schneller!

I shot him and it had to be...
Was das geracht?
Death, "Twas him or me."
Kommet männer wir gehen iens gafecht!

I squirmed like a worm through the mud.
Granate! Granate! Aufpassen!
I could see so much more blood than mud.
Wir Mussen die liegentlassen!

Schnell! Schnell! Ich brauche ein artz!
The bullet went through me and I knew I would die.
Noch ein schuss duch mein herz und furlte kein schmerze.
I got fooled by The Old Lie!

For the Fallen

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.

They mingle not with their laughing comrades again;
They sit no more at familiar tables of home;
They have no lot in our labour of the day-time;
They sleep beyond England's foam.

But where our desires are and our hopes profound,
Felt as a well-spring that is hidden from sight,
To the innermost heart of their own land they are known
As the stars are known to the Night;

As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.



St Edward's School, Officer Training Corp Camp at Rugely, 1913