

The History of Poppy Day



History KS2



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The Great War broke out over a century ago. It lasted four years and cost the lives of millions. When peace was finally achieved, the humble red corn poppy became a symbol of remembrance.



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*In Flanders fields the poppies
blow Between the crosses, row
on row...*

During the Second Battle of Ypres, in May 1915, doctor John McCrae conducted the burial service for his friend, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer. He later composed his now famous poem, *In Flanders fields*.

Punch magazine published the poem in December 1915.



The poem inspired Moina Belle Michael, an American woman who worked with injured servicemen. She thought they could make poppies, and believed that their Memorial Poppy was a way to “keep the faith” with those who had died.

She also wanted to widen the scope of the Memorial Poppy idea.





Anna Guérin, a French woman, was inspired by Moina Michael's idea. She thought Memorial Poppies could be sold to raise money in France, especially for French children orphaned by the war.

She founded the American and French Children's League, and asked the Allied nations to join in with the Memorial Poppy.



The Royal British Legion was formed on 15 May 1921. Its aim was to provide support to all those who had suffered during their service in the Armed Forces, and to support their families.

The Royal British Legion decided to use the Memorial Poppy to raise money for the war wounded. The first Poppy Appeal was held that year, and the first Poppy Day was held on 11th November 1921.



The first anniversary of the Armistice, 11th November 1919, was declared "Peace Day".

When the church bells struck 11 o'clock, people all over the country stood up and bowed their heads.

Ever since the first Remembrance Day we hold a two minute silence on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month.



The Cenotaph (which means 'empty tomb' in Greek) was built out of wood and plaster for Peace Day in 1919. People laid flowers in remembrance.

The Cenotaph was so popular that it was re-built out of Portland Stone for Armistice Day, 1920. Ever since, we lay flowers on Remembrance Day as a memorial to the 'Glorious Dead'.



A soldier whose name and rank no one knows is buried at Westminster Abbey.

Since 1920 people have visited the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

We pay our respects to all the soldiers who never knew us, but who gave their lives for us.





In 1922, Major George Arthur Hanson founded the British Legion Poppy Factory.

That year, it employed five disabled servicemen to create Memorial Poppies to sell on Armistice Day.

Major Hawson said, "I do not think it can be a great success but it is worth trying."



Nowadays, the Poppy Factory produces nearly 40 million poppies for wreaths, sprays and buttonholes.

It still raises money for the British Legion and supports injured servicemen and servicewomen.

Today, in honour of those who sacrificed so much, we wear our poppy with pride.

