

When the Guns Started Firing



**Poems about the First World
War**

by

**Chesswood Middle School
Worthing, 2014**

To commemorate the commencement of World War One, a group of pupils were chosen to take part in a poetry writing session. They were joined by Roger Stevens, a local poet, who inspired them to write in a variety of different styles and who helped capture their imaginations. Roger has published several poetry books and you can find out more about him on his website: www.poetryzone.com

They visited the nearby Sidney Walter Centre, previously a local school. A brass plaque in the building listed the names of 32 local Worthing men, ex pupils of the school. A local historian spoke to them and gave them brief details of the part some of the soldiers played in the war and how and where they died.

Before they began writing their poems, they worked together in small groups researching various aspects of World War One including The Battle of the Somme, the Navy, life in the trenches and a timeline of events in the War. This gave them a powerful insight of what the lives of the men involved may have been like and it provided them with many thought-provoking ideas.

The school also had a visitor from BBC Radio Sussex, Simon Furber, who came to see the poems as they were written and developed. He also recorded the children talking about what they had been doing and attended a school assembly where the children read out their poems to the whole school and their parents, who had been invited to come along.

The first session started with Roger Stevens asking everybody to come up with one line describing War. This is the result:

When you hear my name, I am the chill that runs down your spine

I am the machine gun that mows the hollow soldiers down

I am the bullet that pierces the night

I am the shadow that will slowly kill you

I am the gas bottle that opens

I am the darkness that turns out every light

I am the light that is hope.

I am the barbed wire that is as sharp as a sword

I am the bullets piercing the hearts of the living

I am the bombs that scatter on your farms

I am the silence that shows the men have fallen

I turn all happiness into sour violence and all the excitement into sadness

I am every soldier who is shell-shocked into madness

I am the ghostly voice that says, "You are next..."

I am the voice of Death.

A Difference

by Ethan Young

Day after day I watched bullets fly
Rousing over remnants of my friends
Day after day I watched people die
Upon their expiry was the moment's end

Their demise marked with blood
For you these noble men and women died
Their lives sullenly ended with a thud
For their country they tried

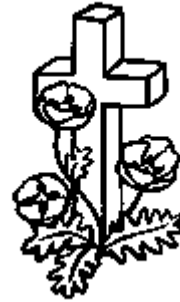
is the end
The end of their existence
Their lives suddenly end
They were the soldiers that made the difference

I fought for my family, my friends
I fought for you
I bled for my family, my friends
I bled for you

Did I make a difference?
Did I make you proud?
Did we make a difference?
Did we make you proud?

I watched people die
Only to have a glimpse of death's bullet
Bombs dropping nearby

Did I make a difference?
Did I make you feel pride?
Among my existence
For you I died...



This



A Rat's Tale

by Henry Francis

I am a rat in the trenches.
My pink, clawed paws, pressed into the murky mud.
I am a rat.

I venture to the mighty, towering skyscrapers' so called walls.
I am a rat.

My feet are still sinking, covered in anhydrous crusty mud.
I am a rat.

When the whistle blows it'll be my lucky day.
I don't know how many hallowed soldiers will die
But all for me.
I am a rat.

That febrile general almost trod on my precious tail.
I am a rat.

My feet pad over the oozy mud as I wander
Unsure what will happen next.
I am a rat.



A Soldier's Day

by Sam Cundy

I wake up finding rats crawling all over my face,
We eat our meagre breakfast of putrid bacon & beans,
I shave using a sharp stick and a facepack of mud,
We get the half-baked orders from our thick-headed
Generals.

The dreaded moment appears and the whistle blows,
The monstrous German machine guns mow us down,
Wails of the wounded and the dying all around me.
Horrific screams fill the air making an atmosphere of
anguish.

I discover friends have gone to a better place, maybe.
We give them a funeral before the rats get to them.
We're dropping like ripe apples off a tree from
disease.

I go to the toilet and watch out for German shells.

I've survived the day but will I see tomorrow?

Clubs to Space Lasers

by Owen Simmons and Sam Cundy

We have clubs!

But we have iron spikes in our clubs

We have bows and arrows

But we have bows and flaming arrows

We have wooden ships

But we have iron ships

We have machine guns

But we have missiles

We have tanks

But we have space lasers

Diminishing

by Ethan Young

Rousing under what remains of dawn

I have fought for too long

Slowly the moon flounders as the sun rises for morn

As they sing the everlasting song

The remnants of my brother's bodies with no souls

Bled to death by demon-like men

They will remain on history's scroll

Wounded to death by demon-like-men

Has anyone wondered why we are diminishing the human race?

Bullets spraying, dying violently

In this terrifying place

Our lives ended quickly and silently....

Disgusting

by Luke Roberts

Dirty, muddy trenches

It was always that way

Slimy floors filled with the stench of mud.

Grotesquely, disfigured rats shrieking
everywhere

Utterly revolting

Size of cats and even more nauseating

Tat, Tat, Tat as the rats go

Infections, infections and death

Near death, near death

Grotesquely, rats killing us.

Disgusting!

For You

by Ethan Young

I went through inclement weather for my family my friends

I went through inclement weather for you

I fired a gun for my family my friends

I fired a gun for you

I got injured for my family my friends

I got injured for you

I bled for my family my friends

I bled for you

I fought for my family my friends

I fought for you

I died for my family my friends

I died for you....

And I would do it all again for my family my friends

I would do it all again for you.

I Got Sent To War

by Lily McCardle

By all my life I lived down here
I'd never be a soldier,
By picking wheat and sowing seeds
I'd never be in the Navy,
By feeding goats and milking cows
I'd never be a pilot,
Against all my fears and dreams
I got sent away to war.

I Remember

by Anna Grace Fenn

I remember

It hurt at first, but not for long,

It was more shock than pain.

It happened quickly – like ripping a Bandaid off.

I remember it well,

The feeling of suffocation as the bullet hit my chest,

Cold and hard.

I remember hearing the sound of my own voice

Screaming, echoing through my head.

I remember my vision getting blurry,

It was as if the world was being torn apart in front of me.

I remember the gun slipping through my sweaty fingers

I don't know where it landed,

I guess I never will.

I remember how my body

Spiralled out of control before hitting the mud.

Now here I sleep in the trenches covered in
poppies

Their petals stained red with my blood.



Over the Top

by Leah Skinner

Over the top they went that day, over the top.

Over the top their dreadful leader told them,

Over the top.

Over the top. The British all went over the top.

Over the top sixty thousand went, over the top.

Over the top is where they got shot,

Over the top.

Over the top - they all died,

Over the top.



Ricochet

by Ethan Young

I wake in a hospital next to other men
Floundered in their beds
Was it a dream, was it only yesterday that I was...
Shot in the head?
I attempt to move but my legs won't obey
I wish my body could ricochet.

Remember that day where we were fighting in the war
We fought for freedom
Remember that day where we were fighting in the war
We fought for our country, for you
I wish my body could ricochet

I was nineteen when I joined and I lost half of my life
Frightening place
I'm pretty much dead, nothing much left
What is the meaning of life, when we are diminishing
The human race
I'm pretty much dead, nothing much left....
How I wish I could ricochet...

Roll Call

By Mary Pickett

The school gates open right on time,
Boys push, shove, jostle and scramble in.
They bundle around and play gets rough,
But what's the occasional black eye between pals?
The bell rings and authority takes over.
They file in one by one and seat themselves silently at their
desks,

In grey flannelled shorts,
Pens poised, ready for action,
Silent, for fear of the master's dreaded cane.

"Biggs?" "Here sir"

"Jones?" "Here sir"

"Slaughter?" "Here sir"

"Tupper?" "Here sir"

The floodgates of Hell open,
Men, young and old, forced into an unknown and unspeakable
horror,

Following orders, they have no choice.
But, what's a lost limb or even a life between enemies?
A signal goes up and they wait and wait,
Crouched together in long, dark, damp trenches,
Now in soldiers' uniforms,
Rifles raised, ready for action,
Silent for fear of the Captain's order of "Over the top!"
The dreaded cane seems irrelevant now.

Names, not forgotten but no longer on the register of life....

Biggs

Jones

Slaughter

Tupper

The surnames in this poem are just a few of those recorded on one of the the memorials in The Sidney Walter Centre, to the ex pupils of Sussex Road School.

Shattered!

by Shula McCarthy

I am the gun that will make you run

I am the suffocating smoke that will make you
choke

I am the bullet of your last words

I am the infection that will turn your feet into dust.

I am life, I am death, I'm your never ending hell

I am the devil who will make war miserable

I am the demon who will shatter your happiest
memories.

Soldier

by Ethan Young

You have served your country, served it well
A field of flowers marking your demise
This world was your never ending hell
Rousing under remnants of the dawn,
You have won your noble prize

Above the silent many
A distant will-o'-the-wisp
Your confetti-filled anniversary
Will mark your death, with a happy wisp

Your life has ended sullenly
Bullets spraying, prying violently
A powerful blow very suddenly
It all finished very quickly and silently

Submarines and Rationing 1918

by Isaac Sefton

(with help from William Neville)

My Dad is far away
He's gone to join the fray
Our country is at war
I cannot take much more
I want him back today.
It's Gun War

Our food arrives by boat
If it can stay afloat
But U-boats lurk below
With torpedoes set to go
And their captain gets to gloat
It's Sea War

There isn't much to eat
Little butter, sugar, wheat
What there is we have to share
If we don't it won't be fair
But cake is a rare treat
It's Food War.

The End of War

by Muhsanah Chowdhury

Bombs are flying everywhere
Bodies lying here and there
Grey smoke covering the sky
Will the next body be mine?
Where to hide, where to stay
All the shelters are taken away
Hunger strikes and what do I think?
Is there food in the crumpled buildings for me?
Can our lives be saved? Will we live?
When will this war end? Is that what I think?
They and I can go through the broken stone,
Will there be anything to save our bones?
My life in the war, what will happen next?
Any my family, what will become of them?

I see the homes on the roads of Worthing, wrecked and ruined.
The people come out from Cranworth Road, Lyndhurst Road,
Ham Road and on other roads
A whole group of families try and find some food.
But I have a fear if they do find something a bomb will land on them
Why these punishments to all those people including me?

I think about my family,
My mother, father, sister and brother
Can THEY live?
My father has gone to war,
My mother is safe in a shelter,
Sister has gone to nurse my brother,
While I'm left alone to stand and survive.
I look at the people thinking who is next to die,
Maybe it's me.
The bombs are all dropping on me.
People from the farm are guiding the sheep to safety.
The Navy ships are helping us fight,
I can see them from even this sight.
As I think about the war,
The wind blows all the grey rotten leaves to me.
I think my story will have no end.
For my story has gone long enough to go on forever.
The End of War.

The Navy

by William Neville

(with help from Isaac Sefton)

Waves splashing upon the hull,
Being in the Navy is quite dull
The brave Navy.
All I'm doing is working in the Navy.

When we're under attack all I say is
"Save me!"
The heroic Navy.

Looking out for U-boats
The wretched little things
The fearless Navy.
U-boats in groups, wolf packs
Attacking us.

When U-boats are there
They attack the weakened ship
And sink it in a second.
With a tick of a gun
The fearful Navy.

Mines all around us blowing our ships
The invincible Navy
Those Germans will never win
Because we have an invincible Navy.

The Odd One Out

by Ruby Pescott-Khan

The odd one out,
I don't fit in.
Billy told me today in school.
His dear father went Missing in Action
I don't know where my father is –
Well, Heaven probably.

The odd one out,
I don't fit in.
To be honest, I don't believe in this whole "war malarchy"
I don't see the point.

The odd one out.
I don't fit in.
My family is a two person family, small,
No support. All my friends have support.
People to bring them through tough times. Not me. No.

The odd one out,
I don't fit in.
I can't wait for this war to end.
They can.

The odd one out.
I don't fit in.

The Song Has Been Sung

by Mawahib Chowdhury

The song has been sung
By the river of the Somme
All the green men charging
With their voices from their throats
They charge with a song so fierce and strong
The song has been sung
By the river of the Somme

The song has been sung
By the river of the Somme
Nothing has been heard but
The wind blowing hard
There was blood through the battlefield
Blood throughout
All of the dead men up and about
Their bodies were alive until they were killed
All the dead bodies lying in the black field
The song had been sung
By the river of the Somme

The song has been sung
By the river of the Somme
The jaws of death had been welcomed to earth
It was now time for the rise of a new birth
But no one was yet defeated as the Brits didn't surrender
Not until Germany was completely blundered
A new decision, a new empire
A whole load of blood, a whole load of gunfire
The decision was made
Through a man's sharp blade
The song was already sung
By the river of the Somme.

To The Ones Above Us All

by Jamie Bryder

High Statesmen and Generals
Are so brave
Out of the line of fire
Far from death and the wire.

I surrendered my innocence
(Not knowing)
To you the Generals
From above.

Men are wretched and crying
Sick of slaughter and dying
Whilst you all
Sit in comfort and dine.

But there's no pride in a prize
Gained through brainwashing and lies
You don't care
About the soldiers.

War and Me

By Muhsanah Chowdhury

Bombs are flying everywhere
Bodies lying here and there
Grey smoke covering the sky
Will the next body be mine?
Where to hide, where to stay
All the shelters are taken away
Hunger strikes and what do I think
Is there food in the crumpled buildings for me?
Can our lives be saved? Will we live?
When will this war end? Is that what I think?
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Why Not Roses?

by Bessie Wood (with credit to Anna Grace)

Roses, their petals are red like poppies, so
Why not roses?

Because poppies were the first plants to grow back

Roses their petals red like poppies, so
Why not roses?

Because poppies were the sign of blood
That came of all the men that died.

Roses, their petals are red like poppies, so
Why not roses?

Peeping their heads out of the blood-stained soil
Marking a sign of peace.

Roses, their petals are red like poppies,
So why not roses?

So one hundred years on we wear poppies
That is why not roses.



Why They Get Wounded

by Beth Formby



The fearsome thunder hits the ground and the men
Get wounded.

The only life that made it possible was for the
Nurses to come and help you.

They found it hard to do their job but tried to make
It possible for you.

They don't have
Much to help the wounded
But they can help you.

If you need me
I shall give help
But only if necessary.

If you want me to be there
You will have to persuade me.