

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

Poppies are worn as a show of support for the Armed Forces community.

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.

But what is the inspiration and history behind the poppy becoming a symbol of Remembrance?

#### **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.

### **Fields of Poppies**

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.

## The spread of the poppy as a symbol

The 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 Royal British Legion, who was persuaded to adopt the poppy as an emblem for the Legion in the UK. The Legion, which had been formed in 1921, ordered nine million poppies and sold them on 11 November that year.

#### 11 Things you may not know about the poppy:

# 1. Poppies will be available during this year's Poppy Appeal

As the Royal British Legion do their upmost to protect the Second World War generation who are amongst the most vulnerable within society from coronavirus, they are asking the public to support the Poppy Appeal in a way



they never have before. Their volunteers will still be out collecting in local areas where possible.

But there will also be more cashless and digital donation options, and opportunities for supporters to host their own fundraising activity. <a href="https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give">https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/ways-to-give</a>

The Covid-19 pandemic has left some in the Armed Forces community in dire need of urgent help.

For those struggling with social isolation, financial difficulties and unemployment, to those facing the loss of loved ones and the threat of homelessness, the Legion's support is more vital than ever.

#### 2. The poppy is a symbol of Remembrance and hope for a peaceful future.

Wearing a poppy is a show of support for the service and sacrifice of our Armed Forces, veterans and their families.



It represents all those who lost their lives on active service in all conflicts; from the beginning of the First World War right up to present day.

It also honours the contribution of civilian services and the uniformed services which contribute to national peace and security and acknowledges innocent civilians who have lost their lives in conflict and acts of terrorism.

### 3. There is no 'correct' way to wear a poppy

Wearing a poppy is a personal choice reflecting individual and personal memories.

It's a matter of personal choice whether someone chooses to wear a poppy and how they choose to wear it. From paper poppies to pins, bag charms to pet poppies, and now on face masks, the best way to wear a poppy is simply with pride.















## 4. The poppy is red because that's the natural colour of the poppy flower

During the First World War previously beautiful countryside was blasted, bombed and fought over, again and again. The landscape swiftly turned to fields of mud: bleak and barren where little or nothing could grow.

But out of this devastation the delicate but resilient bright red Flanders poppies grew and flourished in their thousands.

## 5. The red poppy directly supports the Armed Forces community

Around the remembrance period a variety of poppies are worn. The red poppy is worn as a show of support for the Armed Forces communities across the UK, Allied Forces and the Commonwealth.

Only donations from the sale of our red poppies go directly towards helping the Armed Forces community. In 2019 the Poppy Appeal raised over £50 million to help support serving and ex-serving members of the Armed Forces community and their families.



#### 6. Poppies are sold in every community across the UK

Every year the rumour that poppy selling has been banned in some communities resurfaces. This is simply not true and each year thousands of volunteers from all walks of life take to the streets, train stations and supermarkets around the country for two weeks during the Poppy Appeal.

Whilst Covid-19 has presented unprecedented challenges this year, we want to ensure that everyone who wants to take part in remembrance can do so, either by making a donation for our traditional poppy, or by taking part in other activity.

In 2019 over 40 million poppies were distributed by 40,000 volunteers raising over £50 million to help support serving and ex-serving members of the armed forces community and their families.





### 7. A poem inspired the use of the poppy as a symbol of Remembrance

Shortly after losing a friend in Ypres in 1915, a Canadian doctor, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae was inspired by the sight of poppies growing in battle-scarred fields to write his now famous poem 'In Flanders Fields'. The poem inspired American War Secretary, Moina Michael, who bought poppies to sell to her friends to raise money for Servicemen in need after the First World War.



This was adopted by The (Royal) British Legion in 1921 who ordered 9 million of these poppies and sold them on 11 November that year in the first ever Poppy Appeal.

#### 8. Poppies weren't always sold with leaves

Like the natural flower, the original version of the poppy did not feature a leaf. A leaf was first introduced in the 1960s as it was the practice to make poppy sprays, (an alternative to a poppy wreath), which were made up of 5 silk poppies attached to 7 pieces of green fern.

Leaves slowly became an optional extra and by 1984 demand for them had grown to 12 million a year, although they were still issued separately to the poppy. In 1995 poppies with leaves included were made available for the first time.



## 9. Money raised during the Poppy Appeal helps support individuals from the Armed Forces community

Including providing financial advice to veterans like Lawrence Philips who was struggling to adapt to civilian life and at the mercy of a payday loan company when Covid-19 meant he couldn't work.

Lawrence turned to the Legion for support and, despite the restrictions due to Covid-19, our Benefits, Debt and Money Advice team (BDMA) were able to help him and his family.



## 10. Money raised during the Poppy Appeal helps fund services...

...like the Battle Back Centre - the first port of call for wounded, injured and sick service men and women as they start their Individual Recovery Program.



#### 11. Poppies are recyclable

All of the parts of our poppies can be recycled. After Armistice Day you can recycle your poppy at any Sainsbury's supermarket.



The Royal British Legion are committed to reducing the impact their poppies have on the environment and are working to remove all single use plastic in the future.