

# THE STORY OF THE REMEMBRANCE POPPY

In 1872 a son, John, was born in Guelph Ontario, to Lieut. Col. David McCrae and his wife Janet Simpson Eckford, the grandson of Scottish emigrants. Graduating in medicine in Canada in 1898, he spent a few months in London in 1904 to become a Member of the Royal College of Physicians. After service as an artillery officer in the Second Boer War he had a distinguished medical career in Canada. When war was declared in 1914 McCrae was appointed Brigade Surgeon and Major in command of the 1st Brigade Canadian Field Artillery. In 1915, working in appalling conditions in an often flooded bunker he treated the the wounded fom the 2nd battle of Ypres. It is said that he emerged after 17 days of hell and saw poppies blooming among the freshly dug graves. Poppy seeds germinated where the ground had been disturbed and in April and May 1915 (and in the years following) poppies flowered prolifically in the battle zones of Flanders and on the Gallipoli Peninsular.

## In Flanders Fields

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 show  
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

*John McCrae 1872 - 1918*



*Kelso High School pupils viewing McCrae's bunker*

In June 1915 he was ordered to set up No.3 General Hospital at Dannes-Camiers near Boulogne-sur-mer, first in tents and then moved into the old Jesuit College. Here were brought the wounded from the battles of the Somme, Vimy Ridge, 3rd Battle of Ypres, Arras and Paschendaele. Appointed Lt. Colonel, he was still commanding the hospital when he died of pneumonia and pneumococcus meningitis on 28th January 1918. He was buried with full military honours in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section, at Wimereux.



When his great friend Lt. Alexis Helmer was killed, John was asked to conduct the burial service, the Chaplain being absent, and wrote the poem In Flanders Fields on 3rd May 1915. It was initially published anonymously in Punch.