



(Left) Visitors to the Memorial search for names on the Roll of Honour, poignantly decorated by bright red Flanders poppies.

The Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (now the Returned and Services League of Australia, or RSL) first sold poppies in about 1921 as a reminder of the war dead and to raise funds for its charity work. Since then, wearing a poppy has helped Australians to show, in a practical way, their support for the voluntary work being done to assist those damaged in body and mind by war. To wear a poppy is also a token of remembrance for the more than 100,000 Australian servicemen and women who have died in war.

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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.

**John McCrae**

**Robert Pounds** Department of Veterans' Affairs



### Flanders Poppies

The Red Flanders Poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*, is the poppy to which John McCrae refers in his poem. The plant is a hardy annual which grows to about 50 cm tall. It likes a sunny position protected from wind, and well drained soil turned to "a fine tilth". In compacted soil, the seeds can lie dormant. Earlier this year, as part of its schools ANZAC Day pack, the Department of Veterans' Affairs provided a packet of Flanders Poppy seeds to every school in Australia. To establish your own remembrance patch of Flanders poppies in your garden, check your local garden supplier for seeds or seedlings.

# The Ode

## is it *condemn* or *contemn*?

Every year, after ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day, letters to the editor appear in newspapers and magazines, asking about *The Ode*:

**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.**

The issue raised by most letters is whether the last word of the second line should be "condemn" or "contemn". Contemn means to "despise" or "treat with disregard", so both words fit the context.

The four lines quoted above, along with Kipling's lines from the *Recessional* hymn – "Lest we forget" – are now generally known as *The ode of remembrance*. They are the fourth stanza of the poem, *For the fallen*, by Laurence Binyon, and were written in the very early days of the First World War.

Binyon was the Assistant Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, and a respected and published poet. He was not a soldier, though he did work in France as a volunteer in a field hospital or first aid station during his annual leave. A week after war broke out, Binyon had his first war poem, *The fourth of August*, published in *The Times*. Here he was confident and optimistic, writing of the "Spirit of England, ardent-eyed". But by September 1914, when *For the fallen* was published, the British Expeditionary Force in France was suffering severe casualties. Each day, long lists of the dead and wounded appeared in British newspapers.

Binyon had actually written the poem some weeks earlier, just after the retreat from Mons began in August 1914, when the British Expeditionary Force had become the first British army to fight on western European soil since Waterloo. The four central lines that now make up the fourth verse were the first part of the poem Binyon composed: he wrote them while sitting on a cliff at Polseath, Cornwall. In finding a language and a rhythm for the poem, he drew on Shakespeare – especially Enobarbus' lines on Cleopatra, "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale" – and the Bible: "I wanted to get a rhythm something like 'By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept' or 'Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me'."

*For the fallen* was first published on 21 September 1914 in *The Times*. By the end of the year, the British composer, Edward Elgar, was setting a number of Binyon's poems, including *For the fallen*, to music, in a cycle called *The spirit of England*.