

Deepening Understanding

UKS2 Historical Narrative

In Flanders Fields by Laura Curtis



*'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'*

John McCrae

'The larks...they were always singing...'

As I walked up the gravel path, I took off my cap and felt the crunch underfoot. No other sound broke the hush of the place I had come to visit, the place where I had come to pay my respects. Ensuring that the leaf on my poppy was pointing to 11 o'clock - the time when the guns fell silent exactly 100 years ago - I knew I had done the right thing coming here to this place where every day, without fail, the history of the past was remembered. A special place where brave souls who have lived before us are honoured. As I journeyed onwards, I looked before me at my fellow



humans strolling solemnly along the quiet paths, hugging their loved ones just that little bit tighter. I let my eyes fall upon the rows and rows and rows of pure white crosses marking the resting place of thousands of young men whose lives had been cut short. Swaying gently, in between the white, were crimson red poppies; they were then - and now - an emblem of life, the only plants to grow in the battered, barren battlefields once the guns of World War One had fallen silent.

Despite not wanting to picture the horrors that befell this place, I knew that to pay my respects - and fully understand. I had to. I knew I had to admit that over the course of four years - during 1914-18 - this was where 1,000,000 soldiers were wounded, went missing in action or lost their lives. Feeling the weight of the past upon me, I stepped onwards, on the very same patch of ground other feet once trudged.

It had taken a while but finally I found him; I had followed him to Belgium, to Flanders, to Ypres, to his final resting place. Reading the inscription and his name on the cross caused my head to droop. There he was. I sighed as I felt the little piece of paper in my pocket. Yes, I had done the right thing following in his footsteps and coming here - except he was coming to fight and I was coming to remember him. I read his name once more and was flooded with sensations I had never felt before; I felt my heart beat with solemnity, respect, reflection - and hope. What a privilege it was to be here.

I had never met him of course. He had died in November 1914, aged only 21. Bravely, he had left his little village believing that it would all be over by Christmas; for him not only would he not be home for Christmas - he would never be home for any future Christmas. For he was killed; fighting bravely for his country in conditions so ghastly that many of those who returned home would never be the same again.

I looked up at the sun as it fought for dominance in the grey November air. 'The larks...they were always singing...' His words drifted off the page and



floated around my mind as they had done so for the whole journey across the English Channel until I had arrived here at the Menin Gate.

By now it was 19:59 and I took my place, watching from the edge of the small crowd of onlookers, waiting for the final few seconds to tick away until the stroke of 8pm when the ceremony would be performed. As I stood there, listening to the Last Post echoing beautifully, hauntingly, the wreath was laid. This was followed by the minute of silence where we remembered, felt humbled and gave thanks....

It was then that I heard a sound that made tear well in my eyes, made my heart beat that little bit faster. I breathed deeply and listened to the sweet song floating along the misty air. It was a lark, singing, just like the larks would have been singing one hundred years ago, a beacon of joy amidst all the sorrow. It was their brave tune, virtually inaudible amidst the monotonous, ceaseless gunfire and constant thuds of the shells falling that my great-grandfather just heard and remembered. Closing my eyes, I let my fingers tighten around the ancient, old, crumpled - yet altogether priceless - piece of paper that had accompanied me on my trip. I was bringing it back to the place where it had been written. Withdrawing it carefully and letting it breathe once more, I unfolded it with trembling fingers and read the words he had scribbled with trembling hands all those years ago.

“We no longer fear death: we are already in hell. Yet, I can hear them...the larks. Their little voices and their wings give me hope that one day I too may fly out of here...”

As I walked away I turned one last time and I’m sure that I saw him, drifting off into the rows of white. And I smiled.

And the lark was still singing.

