

Who were the soldiers?

World War I was fought on such a huge and mechanised scale that very few communities remained untouched. The officers had mainly received an education based on the classics and the **Victorian ideals of nationalism**.

Their attitudes towards the war first was pride and exciting, the war was seen as a noble adventure, then pride and excitement were replaced by doubt and disillusionment.

Trench warfare

Life in the **trenches** was hell because of rain and mud, decaying bodies, repeated bombings, use of poison gas. To remember the events and for distract themselves, soldiers wrote **songs, poems and letters**.

The war poets

Were a group of poets who **volunteered to fight**, actually experienced the fighting and in most cases **lost their lives** in the conflict. They awoke the conscience of their readers to the horrors of the war. The recurrent themes were: courage, patriotism, glory, pain, violence, heroism and duty.

Rupert Brooke (1887–1915)

Brooke's entire reputation as a War Poet is linked to the **5 sonnets of 1914**. He died of blood poisoning and was buried on the Greek island of Skyros. His sonnets express a **sentimental attitude to war**: the war is clean and cleansing, the only thing that can suffer is the body and death is seen as a reward because it is **glorious to die for one's country**.

The main themes in Rupert Brooke's poem "**The Soldier**" revolve around patriotism, sacrifice, and national identity and glory.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)

He was 21 when the war broke out, he was working in France as a teacher . In 1915 he went back to England and enlisted then he was sent to France and experienced military action.

He had **traumatic experiences**:

- He fell through a shell-hole into a cellar and was trapped in the dark for three days.
- He was blown out of the trench in which he was taking cover from an artillery bombardment.
- He was eventually diagnosed as having shell shock and was sent to Craiglockhart War hospital near Edinburgh.

At Craiglockhart he met the poet **Siegfried Sassoon**, Owen read the published poetry of Sassoon for the first time. A close friendship and literary partnership began which would create some of the finest poetry of the war. Every night Owen had haunting nightmares so Sassoon suggested that he should write about these memories in poetry. Wilfred Owen returned to the front in 1918. He was awarded the **military cross** for bravery for capturing a German. He never received it because he was killed on 4th November 1918, seven days before the **armistice**.

He is regarded as the greatest of the War Poets.

The poems of Owen describe the **miserable conditions** and constant stress experienced by the soldiers: mud, rats, blood, the effect of poison gas, lice....

Wilfred Owen took inspiration for the title of his most famous poem, "**Dulce et Decorum Est**" from a line of the Roman poet Horace, he uses this phrase ironically to critique the glorification of war. The poem vividly describes the horrific realities of World War I, highlighting the brutality and senselessness of war,

