

**War,  
Memory,  
Trauma**

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# War, Memory, Trauma

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# Introduction

The poems in this collection emerged from a one-day workshop hosted by Dr Sarah York, an historian of medicine at the Centre for the History of Medicine, University of Warwick, in collaboration with Stoke Park School and Community Technology College, and Jane Commane of Nine Arches Press. The event, held at Stoke Park School in Coventry, was attended by a very enthusiastic and productive group of Year 9 pupils and involved a range of activities using images of twentieth and twenty-first century conflicts, a selection of war poems and media depictions of war, as well as object handling.

Oral history presentations from veterans Mike Bennett, Paddy Garner and Richard Ofori-Yentumi, and Help for Heroes County Coordinator Alec Murray, gave access to soldiers' unique perspectives of war and life in the armed services. The pupils were captivated by these personal testimonies and gained a great deal of inspiration for their wonderfully creative and evocative poems.

The workshop is part of Dr Sarah York's larger public engagement and research project about the psychological impact of modern warfare on individual soldiers, which also includes a collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. An exhibition and associated events in June 2012 will capture the traumatic experience of war for both

service personnel and the civilian population, providing a window into a 'special' world that for many is impossible to imagine and fully understand.

*Dr Sarah York*

**Centre for the History of Medicine,  
University of Warwick.**

**April 2012**

**[www.go.warwick.ac.uk/warmemorytrauma](http://www.go.warwick.ac.uk/warmemorytrauma)**

# **Last memory of my father**

These glasses mean the world to me,  
not my own but my father's.  
The last thing I remember  
is him coming home,  
and by the next morning gone.  
Forgot his glasses,  
I will keep them until he is home.  
But he never returned.

*Luke Furby*

# Yesterday's Tomorrow's Today

Yesterday I was walking down my local lane,  
now I'm rushing through the front line.  
Slowly my friends disintegrate alongside  
my quality of life.  
The pressure's on my shoulders and  
I feel psychologically older.

Today I am rushing with my comrades  
all there but so isolated.  
The letters from home make me ache  
and tensions climb, time to time.

Now the pain shoots through me,  
bullet-like and sly, catching me off guard.  
From now and then the sounds  
all come back, the smell and the  
sights a scene from a dated film.  
Sometimes, I wish I could defuse  
this on-going bomb.

*Bethany Grace Healy*

# The Talking Spoons

Alone in a soldier's box  
I lay there thinking of the shops  
where I was bought by Edward's grandfather  
as we sail away from the harbour.

What an adventure we had at sea.  
Before he lost his leg and knee.  
Me and Edward travelled to the nurse  
after that, I saw my owner's hearse.

Edward is now my owner.  
He's on the front line.  
Months on end he killed until he got shot.  
Left alone we lay in his cot.

The nurse came over to care and treat  
But this wound cannot be beat.  
He thanks her for her goodwill,  
I no longer stay with him and kill.

Edward is now dead.  
My owner is now Nurse Fred.  
I'm with her while she treats the soldiers,  
The talking spoons have many holders.

*Kelsey Peel and Beth Cookson*

# Memories from the Rubble

Last week we heard from an archaeologist who was digging up belongings of people from WW1 and hoping to find some weapons; sticking out slightly through the rubble, a dirty bronze colour. "We pulled them gently out of the dirt", said the archaeologist.

*Lewis Hudson*

# I Save Lives: Tin Box

I save lives!  
Let me tell who I am  
and what I am.  
I am the medic's tin box of lives  
I behold many things.  
I live and work in Germany  
but I originally lived  
in England. I saw  
many things, including  
the Battle of Dunkirk  
I was alive (and young) at  
the end of WW2.  
By the way,  
I might have saved your  
Great-granddad's life.

*Aaron Drinkwater*

# Heaven Awaits

The sacrifice of the soldier  
Horrible shock like frozen time  
Emotion of death on the line.

Blood like an endless river  
Life in the far distance and a light of memory  
Objects through the memory of home  
Out my door goes my hope  
Down in the trench where no one can hear me cry

Of the sorrow if night will ever come  
Fear of death always rose up in my heart  
Death within the  
End the place it starts  
People like me sigh at bloodshed  
The end comes soon no doubt  
Heaven awaits.

*Maria Afridi*

# The Shoe-brush

I started in a trench cleaning boots  
day after day. When the Germans  
overtook our lines I was left  
behind, but used by the Germans.  
I didn't know my British owner long  
but my second owner kept me in good  
shape. I was used in the Somme  
when thousands of men died for hardly any land.  
My German owner was killed and I  
was lost again.

*Damien Finch*

# Woodward

It has been all over Europe, in and out  
of the terrible trenches, it goes wherever death lurks  
when the smell of blood fills the air,  
battling the strong smell of disinfectant.

I've seen the tortures of war  
and I don't want to see it any more.  
I've saved countless injured men,  
I count at least one hundred and ten.  
of the many horrors I've seen,  
never again, never again, never again.

*Adam Benaissa*

# The Brush

I was looking at my brush wondering  
what it has gone through  
in the trenches and how it feels  
and the numbers of deaths it has seen  
during its time in Afghanistan.  
The noises of bombs and guns  
going off around it and the  
emotions going through the soldiers.

*Amandeep Punia*

# Coffee Spoons

I am a coffee spoon  
and my owner is a lady  
and she posted me  
to her husband  
who is in the Navy.

The lady is very lonely  
and wants to talk to  
her husband; if only  
she knew her husband felt  
the same way too.

For both of them I was very special  
because of the memories  
attached to me. For them  
I am an object with  
Sweet memories.

*Radhika Sharma*

# War Poem

At the start I was being  
made in a black polishing factory  
before the World War.  
When World War 1 started, lots of soldiers  
were buying me and other stuff  
to use in the trenches.  
When I got in the trenches,  
after men have been fighting  
they polished their shoes.  
Then they finished the war.  
I got left on the old muddy floor.  
I sunk into the mud.

*James Edwards*

# Life at War

Fire and bullets scatter through the air.  
Pale white figures lie and stare.  
Rockets and missiles fly up high.  
Brave men and women fall down and die.  
Fighters and bombers fly up ahead.  
Grieving families mourn for the dead.

*Harry Maguire*

# The 'Side-arm'

I'm used to protect,  
I'm used to fight,  
I'm used by soldiers,  
I'm used against soldiers,  
I'm in some cases like God,  
I can take life and I can save lives.  
I'm the best friend of soldiers.  
I can also be the worst  
enemy of soldiers.  
Some people know me as a 'sidearm'  
however, I'm simply a 'gun'.

*Jack Brolly*

# True War

Today, where people are going to war,  
trenches full of people like rats running around,  
trying not to be hit  
by people firing.  
Booming ball of fire  
takes people to death.  
No way back from death's grip.  
Conditions like a waste tip and scrap yard  
with thick fear in the air.  
Rockets filling the air,  
with booms filling the battlefield.  
With friends' letters telling me what happens,  
their letters describing it well,  
making me feel like I'm there.  
Crackling from trenches.  
Planes flying low, dropping bombs  
which fall near.  
Bits flying and landing in the trenches.  
You can see fire in the distance of the night.  
Body lying in the no-man's land  
— no life there, it is as dead as the body  
lying on it. Pop your head  
up and your life is gone.

*Robert Overton*

# Last Memories

My owner was young and wise.  
He wrote letters home and often lied.  
I stayed by his side  
from start to end.

It's been a very long time  
since I have seen his face.  
I think he died  
but he might be alive.

Oh, now I remember,  
he died  
by my side.

He sacrificed his life  
just to be with his wife.  
He was brave at heart  
but his brain broke apart.

*Sahar Malik.*

# Memories of Home

Sitting in the base camp,  
looking at a picture of my wife,  
trying to treasure her face  
and keeping memory in place,  
fast fading with explosions of bright lights.

Thinking am I going to get out of this hell,  
as I scream and yell.

*Rishab Singh*

# Small Tin Box

I am their saviour,  
I am all they have,  
I mend them when they're broken,  
I am their small tin box.

*Barry Richards*

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