POEMS

The Cross

Lone Cross that casts your shadow there. All day upon a far hillside. Ye have one sleeping in your care, A boy who fought and died. While yet his brow was white and fair, And beauteous health and pride.

Lone cross, there was a day of pain, And death came stealing thro' the night. He slept and never walked again, Albeit the morn was fair and bright. And in your shadow he hath lain, Someday God sends eternal light.

Hilda Williams Bickerstaffe

Hilda Williams was a reporter for the Ormskirk Advertiser. She lived in a stone cottage known as Skittle Alley at Bickerstaffe 'Lane Ends'. She wrote the 'The Cross' and included the same in her paper on January 4th, 1917. Later she became sub editor of the Oldham Chronicle.





Bickerstaffe Remembers

We stood together on Flanders field, united as one in thought No battle raging, no gunfire sound, no mud where once you fought. We see the grass blow gently now across the peaceful land Where once you stood in battledress Rifle ready in your hand.

How can we know your feeling as you stood in endless line? One still moment then the call: “Onward men to die” What utter waste what tragic waste, Lads with much to live for Cut down like grass before the blade, Mown down in futile war.

You fell beside your comrades in cold and muddy grave All for King and country, not thinking you were brave. Too great a number for eye to count, or for pen to write. On foreign land, in foreign mud, You lost the hopeless fight.

It wasn’t only gunfire that felled you on that day, Nor shell, nor piercing shrapnel falling round you as you lay. You did not know the clouds of gas would choke away your breath . A bullet swift far kinder, Than slow agonising death.

What was your dying thought as you gave up your life? Perhaps of comrade brave: of mother, or of wife. Or perhaps you really knew as you took up your stance, That this would be your last attack, You didn’t stand a chance.

And what last earthly vision passed before your eye, Maybe the sight of muddy boots as they went scrambling by. Or was it dying comrade, or someone you hardly knew. Or did you see a bloody hand, Stretched out to comfort you?.

You lie at peace; at rest now beneath a foreign sky. You lived, you fought and died: can we or you know why? Can we know the fear

or horror that you saw? Young lives cut short by battle In the name of war.

No guns, no mud or trenches, no tree with broken bough. Just quiet peaceful gardens lie before us now. Standing to attention-white row on row of stone Bearing rank and number Or perhaps “unknown”.

Our feet on grassy carpet, walk where once you trod Some of you remembered: some known only unto God. We pause to lay a poppy, shed a tear and speak your name. Lie peaceful lads, you are not forgotten But will you know we came?

Sheila M. Beeby
Bickerstaffe

Sheila was moved to write the above poem after the Bickerstaffe Remembers Pilgrimage of 1988.

