



Stories of WW1 ? an introduction

Article Author:

[Tony Bradman](#) [1]

[206](#) [2]

Byline:

Tony Bradman on a new collection by top authors

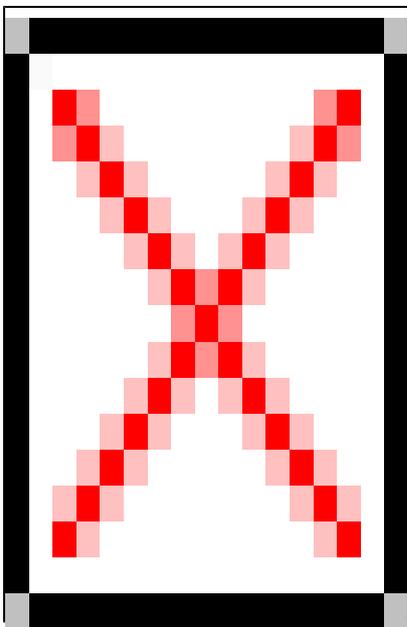
The best way to remember the war is through the words of writers, says **Tony Bradman**, editor of a new collection of stories about World War One.

I only really became properly aware of the First World War when I went into the Sixth Form of my south London grammar school, way back in the early 1970s. I had chosen to do English Literature as one of my three A levels, and found myself studying the poetry of Wilfred Owen. I was soon totally gripped by his work, the tiny number of beautifully written, deeply felt poems about his experiences as a young officer that he had managed to complete before he was killed in action a week before the war ended.

Reading them made me want to find out more about him, and about the war itself. So I read whatever I could find - the poems of Siegfried Sassoon, for example, and the great memoirs of the war, Sassoon's own **Memoirs of an Infantry Officer**, and **Goodbye to All That** by Robert Graves, both of whom knew Owen. I read lots of history books too, and learned what a wasteful conflict the war had been. It began in 1914 and lasted over four years, during which eight and a half million soldiers died, almost one million of them from Britain and its then empire. There was fighting in many parts of the world, but it was the horror of trench warfare in France and Belgium that captured my imagination - the slaughter of thousands of young men for a few yards of bomb-blasted mud.

Of course, when I first started reading Wilfred Owen's poetry, many of the soldiers who had fought in the war were still alive, elderly men in their 70s and 80s. They have all gone now, but most families still have stories about great-grandfathers who fought in the trenches, great-uncles who were killed, others who returned maimed or disabled for life, either physically or mentally. The First World War - or as it was called at the time, The Great War - runs like a scar through all of us. In many ways it made this country what it is today, and that is why we should always remember it. That's the point of all the war memorials, of all the Remembrance Day services, of all those poppies we buy.

If you want great stories, then you need great writers



Yet for me the best way to remember the war is through the words of writers. This is something Wilfred Owen himself recognised. He wrote that 'true poets must be truthful', and by this I think he meant that the truth of what happened is to be found in the poems and stories written about it. That's where you'll find an understanding of the impact of the war on the people who lived through it, and who came after. And that's why I came up with the idea for this anthology ? **Stories of WW1**. I thought there couldn't be a better way for today's young readers to find out about the war than by putting a collection of great stories in their hands, especially as it's being published in this centenary year.

If you want great stories, then you need great writers. I asked some of the best talents writing for today's children if they would be involved, and a dozen of them said yes - so there are wonderful stories from Children's Laureate Malorie Blackman, Ian Beck, Tim Bowler, Paul Dowswell, Jamila Gavin, Adele Geras, Nigel Hinton, Sophie Masson, Geraldine McCaughrean, Oisín McGann, Linda Newbery and Leslie Wilson. They were all keen to write about the war, some of them even having personal family stories that they wanted to tell in fictional form, and they were all great to work with - an editor's dream.

I wanted this book to cover as wide a range as possible, which is why you'll find stories set in very different places. There are stories about young men in the trenches, of course, but also about the people they left behind, and about what happened to them and their families because of their experiences. There are stories about the impact of the war on children, in this country and in France and Belgium and Germany. There are stories about soldiers from Britain's empire who fought in the war, young men from Ireland, India and Australia. There is sadness and pain and suffering in these stories, but there is hope too, and I have a feeling that if Wilfred Owen himself could read them, he would approve.

I like to think so, anyway.

Stories of WW1, Orchard Books, 978-1408330357, 304pp, £7.99 pbk

[Tony Bradman](#) [3] has also written several books about the First World War with his son Tom. **My Brother's Keeper** (A&C Black) is the story of Alfie, who joins the army at the age of 15 - as many boys did - but quickly discovers to his horror that life in the trenches of Flanders in 1915 is far from his dreams of wartime glory. There are also two books on the Franklin Watts Edge list ? **Duel in the Sky**, a story about a young pilot in the Royal Flying Corps; and **Through Mud and Blood**, a story about a young British soldier fighting alongside US troops in the last months of the war.

Page Number:

2

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