

The First World War and Poetry

'For the Fallen' Laurence Binyan, Author and Poet

This poem could well have been written towards the end of the war, yet it was first published in *The Times* in September 1914, at a time when the British public had yet to realise the horrors of the war. The public were told that the war would be over by Christmas 1914. Yet this poem came to symbolise the grief of many nations for a lost generation.

'For the Fallen' was specifically written to honour the casualties of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the first British troops to arrive on the western front. Binyan wrote the poem after the BEF retreated from Battle of Mons (23rd August 1914), which was the first major engagement for British troops of the First World War.

Binyan later said that the lines of the fourth stanza came to him first. It's this stanza that has become most famous, etched into war memorials and read at memorial services across the world. It was adopted by the Royal British Legion to be used in acts of remembrance.

Laurence Binyan was too old to serve in the army, although he did join the Red Cross and lost several close friends, including his Brother-in-Law during the war.

Discussion Points

Groups might like to consider the following:

- The importance of the war poets on literature
- Does Binyan's poem offer any significance as a historical source
- Think about the importance of national acts of remembrance. Did these acts change after the First World War?