

A REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

Poems from
members of
The R C Sherriff Trust's
Rosebriars Initiative



25
the R C Sherriff Trust
advancing the arts in Edinburgh
1993-2018

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Introduction

We commemorate the past in many different ways; respectful, somber and celebratory, in tones sad, funny and lyrical and through the joy of a Jubilee street party, a small plaque on a park bench and the quiet of a two minutes silence.

2020 saw the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. Celebrations across the country were planned to commemorate the ending of the Second World War and to remember the losses, struggles, and spirit shown by those people who lived through those dark days. Sadly, all these plans were put on hold when the Nation had to face up to a new crisis, but one that saw the courage and determination of people shine through. We also a new way to celebrate the wonderful NHS and Care workers with the weekly Thursday night Clap for Carers.

Two years earlier, members of The R C Sherriff Trust's Rosebriars Initiative took part in the **A Remembrance of Things Past**, a project that was part of the commemorations for the Armistice Centenary. Inspired by family, friends or pure imagination, participants created poems on the theme of Remembrance and Commemoration. Some of the poems were used to create original pieces of choral music, composed by musician Jack Hurst and performed by Walton Voices, at Christ, The Prince of Peace Church, Weybridge on 9 November 2018, with Johnathan Kilhams conducting.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdFA9bdRJ8kedmOizF5M71-9iFNOMevXm>

The poems below are as much inspired by VE Day, as they are a commemoration of Remembrance.

On Half Day Closing

On half day closing my girlfriend and I went for a cycle ride
We rode to the river and by the bridge we found a place to hide
Not hiding from people, you understand,
Just a sheltered place to enjoy the land.
The boathouse we found where youngsters came and made it a meeting place,
There I first encountered a telegram boy, on his motor bike race,
I was 15, he was 18, he told me he'd just signed on.
Well, I signed on and married him when four more years had gone.
Celebrating each new arrival,
Four times over, "It's a Boy!"
It will never last they said,
But we had fifty-two years of joy.

Pam Francis

Somebody's Somebody

I have always been somebody's' somebody
I am known as Lois and Jim's daughter
And Carole and Wendy's sister
I'm even known as 'the other sister' in some circles.

I'm happy and love being Allen's wife,
The most wonderful and treasured position to have.
I'm Samantha, Amber, Lianne and Jordan's mum
And am grandmother to Noah, Jesse, Finn, Esben, Axel and Otto.

I was mum of Biscuit, Pepper, Harvey and Bracken
And now am mum to Shadow.
Dog owners rarely have names
Even after walking miles and spending hours walking together.

I've been an office girl, telephonist, receptionist,
A secretary and consumer relations officer.
I was a carer for my daughter
I became a professional reflexologist and still am a genealogist.

I was, and am, all of the above
But these are not who I am.
As well as being somebody's somebody
I have a name and I am me.
I am Jan, occasionally Janet,
And I am who I am.

When my soul moves on to that other realm
Send me off with a kind word and a graveside prayer.
I want no great service, no eulogy,
No flowers or tears at my passing, just remember me today.

Jan Travers

Me

Sheila Jean from Aberdeen
Went to school on Hershams Green
Sheila Jean from Aberdeen
Wore a mac of gaberdine.

Sheila Morris**Me Again**

I spy me
Drinking iced tea
On a hot day
In a café.
By the swimming pool
Trying to keep cool
I think I'll jump in
For a quick swim.
Did you see me
Drinking iced tea?

Sheila Morris

Every Thursday morning
When the day is dawning
Mike and I will sing
Something with a zing
Bring Me Sunshine
All day long
Which to us is the perfect song.

Sheila Harvey

Chester

The place where I was born
And where I love to be
There are some lovely buildings
And of course, the River Dee.
The beautiful cathedral
With its lovely stained-glass window.
The shops are on two levels
Which we all know as the Rows.
The attractive architecture
With timbers black and white
And the Roman amphitheatre
All lit up at night.
The canal with its painted Barges
That I was so impressed with,
Then there's the Roman walls
Which I've walked around many times,
And the familiar Eastgate clock
A must for photo fans.
How I long to be there
To take me back in time.

Pam Smyth

The Beatles

Walking by the Waterman's Arms

One Sunday evening in May,

A psychedelic car came by looking very gay.

Looking through the glass like Alice in Wonderland,

The Beatles were staring out at us,

Two young excited fans.

Shelia Morris

Remembering the Royal Wedding 1953

What a wonderful thing to look back on

The first time seeing TV live.

Horses and carriages going by,

Thousands of people in the Mall

Trying to see the Queen.

Also watching the fly-past,

A day to always remember.

Eileen Adams

I'll Leave the Door Unlocked, My Son

I'll leave the door unlocked my son
For when you're finished at play
When childish games
With childhood friends
Are over for the day.

I'll leave the door unlocked my son
For when your work is done
When whistles sound
Across our town
And back to me you come.

I'll leave the door unlocked my son
For when you march back home
From foreign lands
Where with your Pals
They sent you forth to go.

I'll leave the door unlocked my son
Though years have passed us by
As hope
that you'll return to me
Will never fade and die.

Pete Allen (Inspired by Jane from City Wharf)

The Dreamcatcher

The Dreamcatcher is still where it's always hung when childhood nightmares it seemed to calm.

Boys and girls playing in mud they would wallow hiding and seeking making camps in a hollow.

Across the ditch they made a bridge,

While others watched them from the ridge.

It was just a rehearsal, the time came one day to fight for their country, marching proudly away.

Training completed, glory rang in their ears, the letters they sent home evoked many tears.

Digging the trenches, comrades working as one, laughing, remembering their childhood fun.

To think we enjoyed our muddy games!

But we won't change our habit of choosing nicknames!

Then valiantly surging from town to town finding the enemy, chasing them down villages, rivers, woods and farm discovering places safe from harm.

Men and women coping, in mud they would wallow hiding and seeking, making camps in a hollow.

Across the trench they made a bridge

while others watched them from the ridge, the guns fell silent, but they held back bracing themselves for another attack!

The fighting is over, the smoke cleared away exhausted they slept in a loft full of hay.

The child who marched away, as an adult returned at last sleeping in the bed for which it had yearned, The Dreamcatcher is still where it's always hung waiting for the nightmares which will surely come.

Pam Francis

Silver Jubilee

I had lovingly sewn two dresses although I hate to sew.
My girls were dressed for the occasion in Union Jacks from head to toe.
Everyone enjoyed the street party for the Silver Jubilee
It was a fitting celebration for the whole community.

Jan Travers

My Son's First Chest Hair

Look! My son shouted as he proudly bared his chest.
I looked and saw a lonely chest hair had sprouted above his breast.
He was so excited he could hardly contain his joy
It was a symbol of his manhood, he was such a happy boy.

He paraded in front of the mirror and looked down at the hair with glee.
It was such a touching moment that he had shared with me.
He hadn't noticed it growing before because his colouring was fair.
He pulled it straight to see how long it was then...
Ping!
...his chest was bare!

Jan Travers

Remembrance #1

The word Remembrance stirs so many feelings
Love and happiness, fear and sorrow.
Emotions, like waves, wash to and fro
Just as tears ebb and flow.
Tears of joy, tears of pain
Memories return again and again.
My husband's Great Uncle James
Just one of the thousands of names
Carved into white stone
Where we visit him now, one hundred years on.
Monchy-le-Preux, near Cambrai,
The village he fought for is thriving today,
We would never have known its name
Before war and death gave it fame.
James was married with children like so many others.
They lived on without him, sons, daughters, mothers.
Remembrance, Remembrance, we must not forget,
Those who came home safely – and yet
How can we know the terror they've seen?
We cannot imagine what their remembrance means.

Pam Francis

The Beatles burst upon our senses
What is this strange new sound?
Wah, wah, wah? Wah!
Is this a language from another planet
That we have yet to learn?
Or is it like the words we learnt at our mother's knee?
Is it the same words others learnt at *their* mother's knee?
It might be different words for different things.

Hazel Locke

When I was just a little girl
My whole life seemed a whirl
Every holiday was fun
Even just sitting in the sun.
At the end of the day
It was not a hooray
But going home to another day.

Sheila Harvey

Listening to the radio
Imagining the scene
How I'd love to be there
The wedding of the Queen

In the cinema I saw her
The newsreel was fantastic
It all looked so beautiful
And awesome and majestic.

Eileen Adams

The Kit Bag

Is heavy with memories
So full of sorrow and love
The photos of the family
All frail and torn.
The kit bag now worn
But loved and needed
A friend to see you through.

Poppy Day

Standing in silence

Everyone around me in a pensive mood

The rain falling solemnly from the skies

My thoughts dwelling on how many tears

Had been shed over the years

Slowly I opened my tearful eyes.

10,000 men and women marched by

So tall and straight

Age had not taken their dignity

Neither had it lessened their courage.

Even the driving rain

Not dampening their ardour to pay their respect

Earlier everyone had stood in silence

But now the marchers were in a hurry to get home

The poppies lying on the Cenotaph,

A forgotten sight.

The Nation once again forgets.

Gillian Bone

Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag

They sang as we stood and waved goodbye

I prayed he'd be safe and get back home

As I waved him off, my eldest son.

Sheila Morris

Remembrance #2

Remembrance is kept behind a door,
Sometimes locked, sometimes ajar.
The door swings gently when we hear music,
Emotions are stirred, both happy and sad.
Sometimes it opens – releasing a smell,
Not always perfume it can be quite bad!
Places we've visited, people we know,
Reading a book, watching a show.
Eating food from childhood dreams
It never tastes as good it seems.
Remembrance in surroundings, familiar to you,
The pleasures experienced – the horrors too.
Words that are written, songs that are sung,
Tug at your heartstrings, bringing you down.
Or lifting your spirits that make your heart soar
Embracing the happiest memories once more.
Faces in photographs, playing tricks with your mind
Why didn't they write on the back at the time?
Memories locked away, just out of reach
Jostle and jangle like stones on the beach.
Just when you think you have worked it all out
A wave crashes in and brings with it doubt.
One thing that's certain, although memories may wane
It doesn't take much to realise them again.

(revive)

(re-start)

(renew)

Pam Francis

Now that summer's here
And we're all sitting on the pier.
The sun is out
And everyone's about.
It's that time of year
When all is cheer.

Sheila Harvey

Kit Bags

Clothing
Boots
Cigarettes
Stamps
Writing paper
Shoe polish
Toothbrush
Photos of family.

Sheila Harvey

The Medal to Touch but Not to See

The world was black
But touch he did not lack.
It all happened a long time back
The War, the Attack
He touched his medal it was a fact.

Gillian Bone

Memories

A donkey ride on the prom
Where to? Where from?
The bandstand to the pier
How very queer!

Sand in my eyes
Making mud pies
Bucket and spade
Sit in the shade
Turreted castles
Castles, castles.

Cartwheels round the lawn
As nimble as a frown.
Handstands against the wall.
Be careful! Don't fall!

Learning to ride
Falling by the wayside
Get back on quick
Feel quite sick

Shin up a tree
Grazing my knee
No trousers then
Not like men!

Roast lamb every Sunday
Right through to Thursday.
Picking blackberries in the hedges,
Fingers purple around the edges.
Hazelnuts too.
Just watch the poo!

Gardening, beekeeping,
Reciting, singing.

School lunches at 4 pence
No sitting on the fence.
Custard? No thanks,
That's only for cranks.

Saturday comes,
Oh! The doldrums.
To piano I go,
Full of woe.

November fair
We stand and stare
Coconut shys
For the guys.
Dodgems to try
Please don't cry!
The wall of Death
Takes away your breath.

The hills we roamed
The glens we combed.
Did you see that trout?
It nearly jumped out!

Down at the farm,
Came to no harm.
Eggs by the dozen
From dear old cousin.

So much learning
And much competing

Sunday chapel, full house
No room for a mouse.

Singing festival come Easter
Ent with my sister,
Mam, dad and the other two.
We sang the Hallelujah Chorus
It never bored us.

Summer holidays in London
Double decker to Brixton
Then Petticoat Lane –
Quite insane.
Oklahoma at the theatre,
A thousand-seater.
Up in the gods
With all the young bods.

Secondary school a rude awakening.
What were they speaking?
A foreign tongue we hardly knew!
Dew, dew!
The Lord's Prayer in English we soon had to learn
But God spoke Welsh...what a turn!
The teachers wore gowns
And looked like clowns.

Subjects galore
And yet more – more.
Games in the gym
To get us slim.
Gilbert and Sullivan in the hall,
Dressed up as though to a ball.

School days at an end
Resolutions to mend
Uni to face
What a race!

One year in France,
My French to enhance
Unforgettable
Unregrettable.

21 at last
And how it's gone fast.
A living to earn
And a lot more to learn.
A gilded youth
In truth.

Nia Jones

Parenting is my vocation
Adoring my children so much
Musical on every occasion
Exuberant behaviour as such
Loving the life, I've been handed
Able and capable (too much!)

Pam Francis

Parent
Adoring
Musical
Exuberant
Loving
Able
Pam Francis

Give me help

I'm

Lonely

Let

It

Abate

Now

Go

In

Love

Let

It

Abound

Naturally

Great

Is

Life

Little

Is

Attempted

Now

Gillian Bone

How I Would Like To Be Remembered

I hope I will be remembered

In the way we remember my mum friends and family

Still recalling the things that she had done.

With dressmaking skills, recycling, make do and mend

Creating clothes making me the envy of my friends...

Underwear made from parachute silk would flutter on the line

I didn't appreciate that no one else had undies like mine!

The recipes handed down, reminiscent of halcyon days taking us back

With flavours that continue to amaze.

For a winter warmer, hot homemade ginger wine

Birthday cream cakes were legendary, perfected over time.

I have inherited her love of music and thankfully my family have too.

Green-fingered advice for successful crops, bringing delight as our garden grew.

I learnt DIY skills through helping my dad

Teaching me safely, the best guidance I had.

He helped with my art, with humour and patience making me thrive.

They taught me independence, with their guidance, to survive.

What does that say about me?

I don't have any speciality.

Most of these things I do naturally,

With laughter and love they taught me

You're just like your mum,

Or just like your dad I've often heard said,

Which makes me so glad.

They have earned the credit,

The result of their love for all I've achieved and what I've become,

The biggest compliment I strive for, you see

Is for someone to say "THEY WOULD BE PROUD OF ME."

Pam Francis

Holiday

To the Isle of Wight, we went
I will always remember this event.
The school trip by train,
Took place in the rain.

The train chugged along
And all thoughts of home were gone
We visited Wells Cathedral on the way,
Which could have been left for another day!

Sheila Harvey

O what a wonderful day
We're off on holiday
The sun is bright
On the Isle of Wight
And that's where we're going to stay.
My sister and I will play,
On the beach, in the sea, hooray!

Eileen Adam

My Kit Bag

The kit bag's lying there
Too far away to reach
I am lying here waiting
The distant guns are firing
I dare not leave my post
But there's a photo of my loved ones
I'd dearly like to see.

Pam Smyth

Life is a roundabout, so they say
Make the most of what you have.
You only get out of life what you put in
Help people when you can
Perhaps you have a build in plan.

Sam Thompson

Kit Bags

Letters from home
Also pictures of your family.
Thinking of the war ending
In the trenches with all the mud
Cigarettes to help you get through the day.

In the kit bag
Thoughts of home in family
Making friends with all the soldiers next to you.
Telling jokes to help you get through the day.
Hoping that you will still be alive
So you can get home to your family.

Sam Thompson

Remembering

I am alone now, lonely too.
Dependent on the memories of a lifetime,
Uplifting, transporting me to a higher plane,
Returning me to the past
Which was not so long ago.
Why did you have to go?
I remember when we first met,
Your captivating good looks,
Your dark, honest eyes,
Your deep, gentle voice.
And so it remained.
Why did you have to go?
Talented, placid, reliable, caring.
A quirky sense of humour
Well-loved by all.
What more could I want?
Your pain was mine.
Why did you have to go?
But I cannot be robbed
Of the stuff of memories,
Nostalgia for the past,
The place, the man, the friend.
Memories to sustain, to console,
To have and to hold.
For ever.

Nia Jones

No holidays for us
As it was during the war
But we did have some days out
To the seaside on a tour.
We all got so excited,
'Cause we hadn't done this before.
It took a time to get there,
We thought we never would,
But then we saw the seaside
And then it turned out good.

Pam Smyth

Past Times

If we could all step back in time
You would see how things have changed,
There were many things we did without,
You'd have wondered how we managed.
There weren't many cars like we have now,
But bicycles there were plenty,
We walked to school, both there and back,
And sometimes lunchtimes too,
Which kept us all fit and healthy.
Washing was done on Mondays
With no machine to help us.
Tuesdays was the day for ironing
And what a hard slog that was.
Few of us had phones, nor television either
So we all gathered round
And listened to the wireless,
Children's Hour was a favourite,
And Dick Barton, Special Agent.
Then there was ?, and Grand Hotel,
And In the Town Tonight on Saturdays.
We went to the seaside and went on a coach

Sometimes called a Charabanc.
Music was played on a gramophone
Which we had to keep winding up.
There were no supermarkets,
Just lots of small shops
And because food went off
We shopped nearly every day.
The shops were all closed on Sundays
And always half day on Wednesdays.
How on earth did we manage?
But we all got by,
As we didn't know anything different.
Some things were good
About the 'good old days'
But would we go back?
No we wouldn't!

Pam Smyth

Dad

Oh, Dad, how tired you look
Don't worry, a short journey we took
Smiling nurses, welcomes all round
Dad trying to smile but only a nervous frown.

Bright bedroom
Airflow bed,
This will make you feel better
The senior nurse said.

Your own bathroom and shower
Help on hand
A good view from the window
To watch life go by
Don't worry Dad we will be back.

A wife and nurse for 66 years
Worrying now, has she done the right thing,
Tired, exhausted feeling sorry,
He will be fine, you need a rest,
Mum you really have done your very best.

Sam Thompson

Pisces

I can't believe I've read this
But it seems to apply to me,
I'm creative and artistic
And have empathy with others,
I know that I am patient
Which is what I try to be.

Selfless I'm not sure about,
Because I sometimes think of me
Yes, I know that I'm emotional,
And imaginative too.
Idealistic and perfectionist,
That's just the way I am.
'Cause I was born a Piscean
And then they named me Pam.

Pam Smyth

Musical Memories

I loved the music of when I was younger,
And the songs that I'll never forget.
Do you remember 'Here in My Heart'?
And the songs of Al Martino?
Pat Boone, he made us swoon,
With 'love letters in the sand'
The Fifties brought us the big bands,
With Geraldo and Ted Heath.
Then came Bill Haley and Rock and Roll,
So, we rocked the night away.
Sheet music on the piano,
Which cost a shilling then.
There were photos of the stars,
One of whom was Slim Whitman,
With his rendering of 'Rosemary'.

'Who's Sorry Now', by Connie Francis

Was a great favourite then.

'Old Blue Eyes sang My Way

And appeared in many films too.

On Sunday nights we listened

To Radio Luxemburg

For the Top Twenty of the week.

A bit later on, someone called Elvis,

We'll never forget him, will we?

There were so many more,

Too many to mention,

The Fifties I remember them well.

Pam Smyth

Memories of the Coronation

All night long we waited
In the wind and rain
The blankets we laid down on
And put up with the pain.
The crowds all around us
Were the greatest fun for all
They got us all singing
Down there in the Mall.
Eventually came the morning
With lots more crowds arriving,
As most of us were yawning
We found we had to stand.
No traffic on the road now
Except for one lone cyclist
Who was cheered the whole way,
Down towards Buckingham Palace.
A roar from the crowds now
So, something must be happening.
One coach after another
Bringing the heads of States.
And then braving the awful weather
Came the stately Queen of Tonga,
Then there's cheering for the Queen Mother.
But the loudest cheers of all
Came sweeping down the Mall,
The Coronation Coach in all its gleam
And the beautiful, soon to be crowned, Queen.

Pam Smyth

Family Joy

Oh, how I remember my happiest days
Most shared with family in so many ways.
Picnics and parties were fun to prepare
With food and drink all laid out to share.
The blank stares from others
When we erupted in laughter,
Recalling events from long ago
Things that they will never know
But we will remember for ever after.

Pam Francis

Golden Travellers

Travelling on our American coach trip
With Indian reservation names, so romantic.
Long, straight roads across the desert,
Dotted with cactus and Joshua Trees,
The Grand Canyon was our destiny.

In the front seat, our view was the best,
When the Red Cliffs of Sedona we could see,
The courier said, 'Welcome to the West',
To celebrate our Golden Anniversary.

At sunrise we stood, hand in hand,
Savouring views of this incredible land.
Colours changing as the sun moved higher,
Rock formations created through nature's power.
We turned to each other as if to say
We will always remember this happy day.
It's six years now since he has passed
But those memories were made to last.

Pam Francis

Open House

At school when asked, where do you live?
Open house was the answer I'd give.
Everyone knew that's what it was known as
I heard it said often by visiting nomads.

Music and singing and ringing with laughter
Chimney pots dancing, that's the house that you're after.
How many lived there? I'm not really sure,
With only three bedrooms some slept on the floor.

It smells like men, I was heard to declare
When I opened the door and saw them there.
Nanny, Grandad, Mummy, Daddy, two uncles and me
Were there every day, weekends were for glee.

My uncles were in the RAF, many friends they found,
Their friends brought their friends, invading the ground.
One was a Maori rugby player, a giant to me,
Bread and dripping was his favourite every day for his tea.

I remember these times with great delight
The laughter and games going on all the night.
Two firkins of beer in the bay window set
To me they were only small barrels, and yet...

Drinking it made everybody so glad
Trying to play ping pong was really so mad.
At breakfast they'd ask for an aspirin sandwich
I didn't understand.

When it was time to make Christmas puddings everyone lent a hand.
We made hats out of card, decorations too,
All seated around the table, crepe paper and glue.

The Anderson Shelter had its share of fun
With neighbours in pyjamas, we'd burst into song.
Playing cards by candlelight, trying to keep warm.

Drinking their special medicine kept their spirits high.
Then giggling as we stumbled out looking at the sky.
Those blooming pansies keep blooming well blooming they shouted every time.
As if it was reassurance that everything was fine.

My uncles and Daddy had been away, so had many others,
When they came home it was very strange,
How we all had new sisters and brothers!
The queen and Prince Philip got married and then
The parties started all over again.

Pam Francis

Board Games

Board games can bring out the worst and the best
Squabbles over rulebooks and all of the rest.
We play it this way, you must do the same
What does it matter? It's only a game!
Most of the games played and in laughter
There's one we'll remember for ever after.
Smuggle it's called and you all have to lie
The difficult part is when they look you in the eye!
The groans when they find out you have told the truth,
Or screams, if they catch you out, raising the roof.
I can see them all now, helpless and in tears,
The giggles and guffaws roll away the years.

Pam Frances

Beatles

Pressing the entry phone to be let in,
The screaming fans were all around him
He wound up the windows on his van
The huge gates opened, the girls all ran,
Even jumping on the vans back step
Trying their hardest to keep their grip
Attempting to enter their idols estate
All day long they would lie in wait.

John Lennon was there with his psychedelic mini
Marvelling at it – he thought it looked great
He welcomed my husband's arrival when he said,
I've come to fix your telephone mate!

Pam Francis

Remembrance #3

Mother Nature is a constant wonder revealing season's changes,
Spring, summer, autumn and winter all feature on artists pages.
Trees, plants, the weather and creatures all jostle for attention,
The colours of flowers or furry little bundles they all deserve a mention.

We planted a tree in Bushy Park when they created Millennium Wood,
For my Mum and Dad and the memories of a wonderfully happy childhood.
Through winter's chill and summer's sun,
The oak bears leaves, that drop one by one.

How big it will grow,
I will never know.
It's just one more tree,
But it's so special to me.

In a beautiful setting, the memories I have,
Dance all around me, happy and sad.
Tears I shed, but when they cease,
Nature steps in to bring me peace.

Pam Francis