

Moravian Women’s Association – Home and Overseas Paper – November 2014

Remembering the First World War - "Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red"

This November's Armistice Day marks 100 years since the start of the First World War. Many towns, cities and communities are commemorating it in their own way. The London Borough of Islington has researched those who served and died, and put up street signs showing their names.

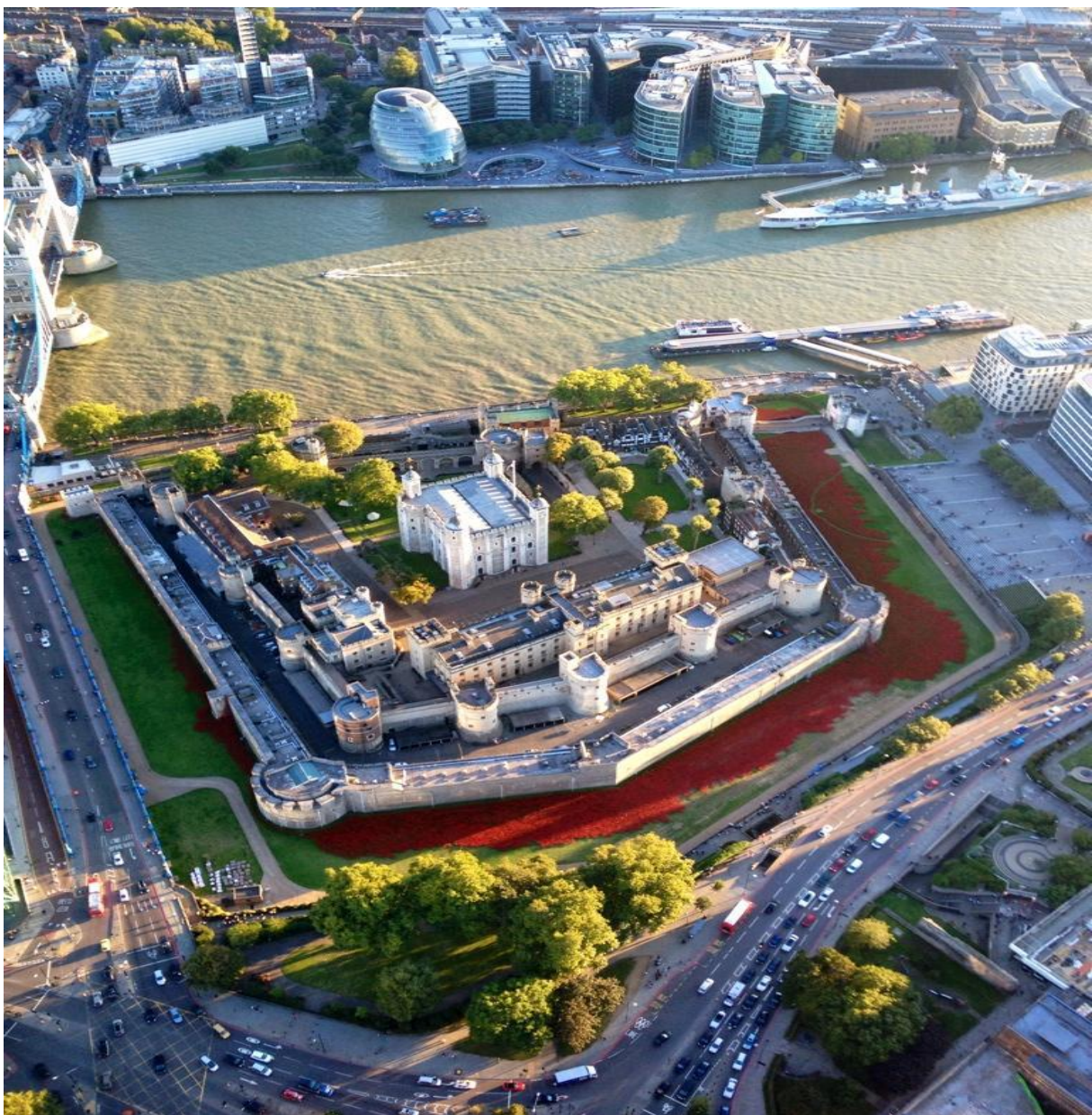


The largest and most wellknown commemoration, which has really caught the imagination of the public and many overseas visitors, has been the poppy installation at the Tower of London. It was inspired by a line in the will of a Derbyshire man who joined up in the earliest days of the war and died in Flanders. Knowing that everyone was dead and he was surrounded by blood, the man wrote: *'The Blood Swept lands and seas of red, where angels fear to tread.'* From this line came the idea for 888,246 poppies, one for each British or Colonial military fatality during the First World War. So far (mid October), more than 600,000 have been paid for by members of the public. The poppies are handmade of ceramic, using techniques which were utilised by potters during the First World War. I work just across the River from the Tower, and have watched the sea of red growing in the Tower moat for months. It is an amazing sight. You may have seen it on TV when Prince William, Princess Kate, and Prince Harry visited it. The Queen also visited it recently, and David Cameron will be visiting it in November.

The poppies have created not only a spectacular display visible from all around the Tower but also a location for personal reflection. The scale of the installation intends to reflect the magnitude of such an important centenary creating a powerful visual commemoration.

I have a friend who lives in the Tower (it is home to the community of Tower officials and the Yeoman Warders known as Beefeaters). She says *“The Poppy display is becoming quite spectacular, and by Remembrance Sunday the moat will be completely full. They’re worth a visit and can be seen from outside the Tower, and from the Wharf, so there’s no need to pay an entrance fee. There’s a roll call every evening at dusk, of the names of about 200 lost British and Commonwealth WWI soldiers who have been nominated for commemoration by their relatives, and its quite moving”*.

As well as the Royal Family and Prime Minister, there have been other celebrity visitors – even “Joey” the Warhorse came! The installation could be said to be making a terrible war into something beautiful – maybe it could only be done after all those who actually fought in the First World War have passed on. However, the hundreds of people from Britain and overseas who come to look, and listen to the evening roll call and Last Post, have been very thoughtful, respectful, and appreciative.



This photo was taken in September, the sea of red has really grown since then. PS I work in one of the buildings across the river, just behind Mayor Boris’s round glass building. **Naomi Hancock**