

Farnhill Volunteers and the WW1 Poets – 10

Gassed !

– Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen

Along with the trenches, gas attacks have become iconic symbols of WW1.

Farnhill Volunteers known to have been gassed, include John William Dawson, Harry Hargreaves, Cecil Rhodes and Ben Hargreaves – whose death, in 1926 at the age of just 31, was partly attributable to the long-term effects of gas poisoning.



Ben Hargreaves

Perhaps the best known poem about a gas attack was written by Wilfred Owen, and published posthumously in 1920.

Dulce et Decorum Est - A Gas poem, **by Wilfred Owen**

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

(Latin: *It is sweet and honourable to die for one's country.*)

