

Fallen Fields

First World War 1914–1918

Before the war

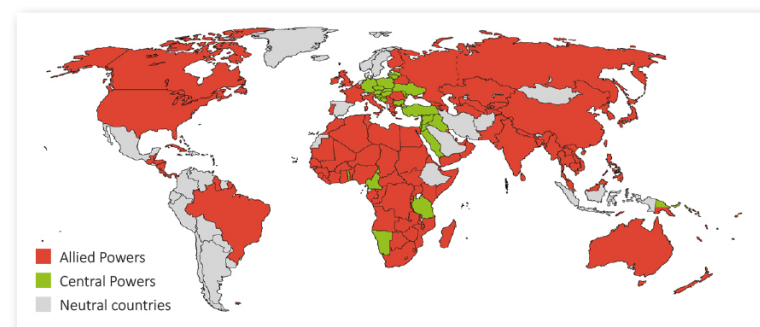
In the early 1900s, Britain was one of the world's most powerful nations and had a large empire. British politicians wanted to avoid war and there had been a period of peace in Europe. However, Germany was becoming a cause for concern, ruled by an ambitious **kaiser** who was envious of Britain's military strength.

Causes of war

The First World War started after the **assassination** of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on 28th June 1914. However, other factors, including **imperialism**, **nationalism**, **militarism** and **alliances** between countries, also contributed towards war breaking out.

Warring countries

The war was fought between two groups: the **Central Powers** (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire) and the **Allied Powers** (Serbia, Russia, France, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium and the United States of America). The USA joined the Allies in 1917. Some countries remained neutral during the war.



Becoming a soldier

When war broke out, the army needed soldiers. Initially, men did not have to fight but were persuaded to join by **propaganda**. Later on, **conscription** was introduced meaning that men aged 18–41 had to join the army. Hundreds of thousands of men were sent to battlefields in places such as northern France and Belgium.



Life in the trenches

Soldiers on both sides dug deep, narrow ditches called **trenches** in the ground to hide from enemy attack. Soldiers lived in the trenches for weeks at a time and thousands were killed in battle. Trench conditions were terrible. They were smelly, muddy and infested with lice and rats. The soldiers did not get much sleep and were woken to complete daily chores or fight. During rest time, soldiers wrote letters and sometimes played card games.

Weapons and technology

During the First World War, both sides used a combination of weapons such as **artillery**, poison gas, tanks and aircraft. Some of these, like poison gas and tanks, were newly-invented and being used for the first time. Poison gas was one of the most feared weapons of the war and was fired into the trenches inside shells. Its effects included vomiting, sore eyes, blistering skin and internal and external bleeding.

Life on the home front

The war changed people's lives at home in Britain.

Rationing, bombing and strikes by discontented workers made life difficult for people living on the **home front**. New jobs were created to help with the war effort, including jobs for women that had previously been done by men, such as working in **munitions** factories. Children were also expected to help with the war effort by doing jobs around the home. Some men refused to fight for moral reasons. They were known as conscientious objectors and were often treated harshly.

The end of the war

The war ended in 1918 at 11 am on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Germany signed an **armistice**, an agreement for peace, that had been prepared by Britain and France. The Allies celebrated the end of the war, and in London, a huge crowd gathered in Trafalgar Square. On the 28th June 1919, exactly five years after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Germany and the Allied Powers signed a peace treaty called the Treaty of Versailles.

Remembrance

The poppy is a symbol of remembrance. During the First World War, poppies grew on barren land such as old battlefields. A Canadian doctor called Lt Col John McCrae was inspired by the sight of the poppies to write a famous poem called *In Flanders Fields* after his friend died at Ypres. After the war, the poppy became an official symbol of remembrance.

First World War timeline

1914

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|------------------------------|--|
| 28th June | Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated in Sarajevo |
| 28th July | Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia and Russia mobilises its troops |
| 4th August | Germany invades Belgium and Britain declares war on Germany |
| 6th–10th September | First Battle of Marne |
| 19th October – 22nd November | First Battle of Ypres |
| 24th–25th December | Christmas truce |

1915

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| 17th February | Battle of Gallipoli begins |
| 22nd April | German forces launch their first gas attack near Ypres, Belgium |
| 7th May | A German submarine sinks the British passenger ship, <i>RMS Lusitania</i> |
| 31st May | London suffers first German Zeppelin attack |

1916

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| 9th January | Battle of Gallipoli ends |
| 21st February – 18th December | Battle of Verdun |
| 2nd March | Conscription for unmarried men aged 18–41 is introduced in Britain |
| 25th May | Conscription for married men aged 18–41 is introduced in Britain |
| 31st May – 1st June | Battle of Jutland |
| 1st July – 18th November | Battle of the Somme |
| 15th September | Britain deploys the first ever tank used in warfare |
| 7th December | David Lloyd George becomes the British prime minister |

1917

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| 6th April | USA joins the war to support the Allies |
| 17th July | The Royal Family change their surname to Windsor to appear more British |
| 31st July – 10th November | Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele |

1918

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| January | Compulsory food rationing is introduced in stages in Britain |
| 1st April | The Royal Air Force (RAF) is formed in Britain |
| 8th – 11th August | Battle of Amiens |
| August | Allies force the German army to retreat |
| 9th November | Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates as ruler of Germany |
| 11th November | Armistice is signed between France, Britain and Germany |

1919

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| 28th June | Treaty of Versailles is signed, formally ending the war |
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Glossary

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| alliances | Groups of countries that promise to protect and support each other. |
| Allied Powers | Also referred to as the Allies. Serbia, Russia, France, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium and the USA. |
| armistice | An agreement made by both sides in a war to stop fighting for a certain time. |
| artillery | Large, heavy guns used in land warfare. |
| assassination | The killing of a prominent person, often for political or religious reasons. |
| Central Powers | Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire. |
| conscription | Compulsory enlistment for state service, typically into the armed forces. |
| home front | The everyday life and activities of civilians living in a country at war. |
| imperialism | A desire to conquer other countries through colonisation, use of military force, or other means. |
| kaiser | The German emperor. |
| militarism | The belief that it is important to have strong armed forces and that they should be used to gain land and political power. |
| munitions | Military weapons, ammunition, equipment and stores. |
| nationalism | The belief that a person’s home country is better and stronger than others. |
| propaganda | Information, especially biased or misleading, used to promote a political cause or point of view. |
| rationing | A system allowing each person to have only a fixed amount of food. |
| trenches | Long tunnels dug into the ground to protect soldiers from attack. |