



**...they shall not grow old as we who are left grow old,
age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn
at the going down of the sun and in the morning we will
remember them....**

Memorable Order of the Tin Hats

The Memorable Order of the Tin Hats (M.O.T.H) was founded on 7th May 1927 by Charles Alfred Evenden (Moth O). He had recognised that ex -ervicemen and women missed the comradeship they had known in wartime and operations when living ‘under fire’ and wanted to create an organization where they could share their experiences and memories.

Since the main purpose of the Order was to aid and assist each other, the acronyms (ideals) True Comradeship (TC), Mutual Help (MH), and Sound Memory (SM) were adopted and inscribed on large discs placed on the ‘top table’ at meetings.

Broadly spoken the MOTH Constitution describes the Order as an independent brotherhood of ex-servicemen and women as well as serving men and women whose membership is confined to those who served or currently serve their country in the armed services in an active theatre of operations.

The Organisation comprises of a General Headquarters in Durban, Provincial headquarters known as Provincial Dugouts, with the latter arranged in units called Shellholes. Each Shellhole is administered by an elected executive comprising of an Old Bill (Chairman), Wee Bill, Pay Bill (Finances), and an Adjutant. Other non-executive officers such as Sergeant Major, Pay Bill, etc assist this executive. The running of a Shellhole is strictly in accordance with the Constitutional precepts.



by Geniene Preston





The MOTHS own numerous administrative buildings, live-in cottages and frail care units for the benefit of these old war veterans, which they must administer, maintain and finance themselves as no assistance or subsidies are received from the government or elsewhere.

THE WEEPING CROSS

In Pietermaritzburg there is a simple wooden cross which “weeps” every year in July, when it oozes a reddish-brown resin. For more than 65 years this inexplicable phenomenon, which borders on the supernatural, has regularly occurred for a week or two around the 14th July, the anniversary of the Delville Wood Battle. A legend has grown to the effect that when the last survivor of the battle fades away, as old soldiers are reputed to do, the cross will cease its mysterious weeping. This wooden cross is made from salvaged timber taken from the ravaged trees of Delville Wood and was originally erected shortly after World War 1 in the Natal Carbineers Garden, next to the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg.

The vertical beam is inscribed “JULY 1916” and the crossbar is inscribed “2nd SAI” which honours the Second Battalion of the South African Infantry Brigade.

This Brigade, in carrying out its orders to hold the front line at all costs, decimated in six days of heroic fighting under hellish conditions.

In 1958 the cross was moved to its present site in the MOTH Circular Garden of Remembrance and since then the “weeping” has become particularly noticeable from the knots at either end of the crossbar and the mystery has often been reported in the press. This “miracle cross” as it has been dubbed, has been the subject of research and found to be constructed of timber from *Pinus Sylvester*, a pine commonly found in Europe and the annual exudation is normal pine resin with a trace of linseed oil, the latter being accounted for by the application of the oil as a preservative when the cross was moved. The mystery deepens when it is considered that the existing trees in France ooze resin during the heat and moisture in summer, whereas the Pietermaritzburg cross only “weeps” in winter.

Poppy Day

11 November



The poppy has a long association with Remembrance Day. But how did the distinctive red flower become such a potent symbol of our remembrance of the sacrifices made in past wars?

Scarlet corn poppies (popover *rheas*) grow naturally in conditions of disturbed earth throughout Western Europe. The destruction brought by the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th Century transformed bare land into fields of blood red poppies, growing around the bodies of the fallen soldiers.

In late 1914, the fields of Northern France and Flanders were once again ripped open as World War One raged through Europe's heart. Once the conflict was over the poppy was one of the only plants to grow on the otherwise barren battlefields.

The significance of the poppy as a lasting memorial symbol to the fallen was realised by the Canadian surgeon John McCrae in his poem *In Flanders Fields*. The poppy came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice made by his comrades and quickly became a lasting memorial to those who died in World War One and later conflicts. It was adopted by The Royal British Legion as the symbol for their Poppy Appeal, in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces, after its formation in 1921.



IN FLANDERS FIELDS
by John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
WE SHALL NOT SLEEP,
THOUGH POPPIES GROW
IN FLANDERS FIELDS.

