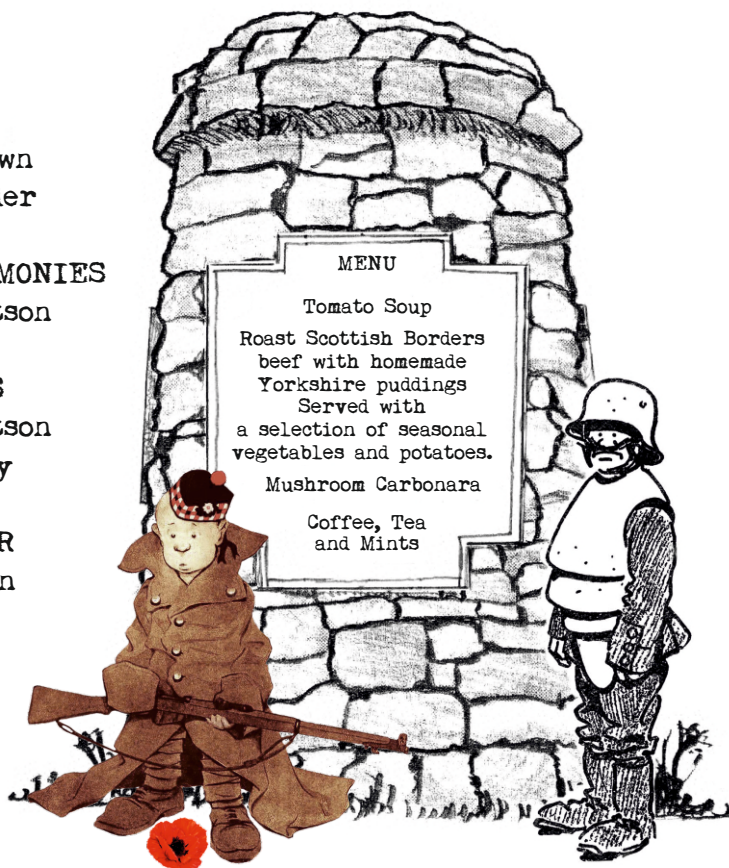


**SPEAKERS**  
Peter C. Brown  
Jack Alexander

**MASTER OF CEREMONIES**  
Craig Herbertson

**MUSICIANS**  
Craig Herbertson  
Ivor Ramsay

**AUCTIONEER**  
Scott Wilson



CITY OF EDINBURGH



FALKIRK



ST BERNARD'S



THE ROYAL REGIMENT  
OF SCOTLAND

Designed by Jack Alexander  
Images from his McCrae's Battalion Collection  
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# THERE'S ROOM FOR YOU

McCRAE'S BATTALION TRUST  
Remembrance Lunch  
The Royal Scots Club  
Edinburgh  
12 November 2023



# ENLIST TO-DAY



## McCrae's Battalion Trust – A Message from Jack

WELCOME TO THE ROYAL SCOTS CLUB for our annual Remembrance Sunday Lunch. This is a historic building, purchased after the Great War and dedicated to 12,000 members of the Regiment who lost their lives in the conflict. There's a ledger in the entrance hall with every one of their names inscribed for posterity. A new page is turned to the light every day. A further 40,000 members of the Regiment were wounded, some so severely that they were unable to return to their pre-war occupations. And some suffered so gravely from shell-shock that they were unable to find any kind of peace for the rest of their bewildered lives.

This was – and is – a soldiers' club: its rooms still echo to the sound of old conversations – strange, sinister words, unfamiliar to anyone who didn't wear the famous cap badge: Gallipoli, Festubert, Aubers Ridge, Loos-en-Gohelle, the Somme, Arras, Passchendaele. And (of course) the Glory Hole, La Boisselle and Contalmaison. We come here – most of us as civilians – to honour the memory of men from our communities who cast aside the safety of their common lives to take up arms against a vicious and determined foe. Would we do the same today? And if we did, would we want future generations to remember?

It's strange to think that we've reached a point where the act of Remembrance – so familiar to the generations that followed the two World Wars – has become marginalised. When I was young everyone wore their poppy with pride. That was the slogan. 'Wear your poppy with pride!' Today the country seems fragmented and many old traditions are withering in the heat of demographic change and global warming. Where does this leave McCrae's Battalion?

McCrae's (as many of you already know) has already been forgotten once. I don't know how many times I've said this but when I started researching the 16th Royal Scots (to give the battalion its Sunday name) the story was hanging from a cliff-top by its fingertips. The Veterans Association was long disbanded (its precious records consigned to the dustbin) and only a handful of survivors remained across the world. The Regimental Colour had fallen and no one was left to pick it up.

But in 2003 a book was written. And in 2004 the Contalmaison Cairn was built and unveiled before a gathering of nearly a thousand souls: the largest assembly of relatives of an Active Service battalion that has ever appeared – or ever will appear – on the old Western Front. In 2005 a BBC documentary was produced and in 2006 McCrae's Battalion Trust was formed to ensure that the Colour would not fall a second time.

Under the auspices of the Trust (now widely known as 'MBT') we extended the memorial with a fifth plaque – the so-called 'Orientation Table'. We added Scottish and French flagpoles; twin commemorative benches; a new memorial to Contalmaison's own war-dead (complete with solid bronze French helmet); a picnic table; a veritable museum's worth of impressive gifts from Hearts and Hibs, Dunfermline and Raith – and every other football club involved in the story. We replayed the 1914 Edinburgh Derby under floodlights in Pozières. And not a single Scottish newspaper was interested! In Edinburgh we mounted a commemorative plaque on the main stand at Tynecastle, just yards from where the Heart of Midlothian players started the story all those years ago; we brought the Heart of Midlothian War Memorial back from its Gilmerton exile and secured planning permission to redesign the concrete island on which it is marooned. And we changed the name of a street to McCrae's Place – outside the Usher Hall – where the battalion was raised in 1914. With the support of Lord Provost Donald Wilson and City of Edinburgh Council we laid a commemorative plaque there, too. It's in the paving slabs at the top of the steps.

We've taken Royal Scots and young recovering military personnel out to France on our coaches as an integral part of the McCrae's 'family'. We've forged links with governmental bodies across the world and with our friends at Orient Football Club, who join us at our service in the village every year. That service is now established as one of the largest annual events on the Somme. On 1 July 2016, the hundredth anniversary of the first day of the battle, we stood – once again – a thousand-strong (together with our French and German pals) to represent our bantam country with dignity and enormous pride. Truly Contalmaison has become a 'little bit of Scotland in a not-so-foreign field'.

In 1914 there was a famous – some might say 'infamous' – recruiting poster. It started out as the cover image of a popular magazine, *London Opinion*, and it's since been used to sell just about everything from used cars to heated rollers. Lord Kitchener was Great Britain's most famous living soldier, somewhat reluctantly appointed as His Majesty's Secretary of State for War on the outbreak of hostilities. He had the most famous finger in history. It was pointing at young men between the ages (initially) of 18 and 44. Even at that time, there were young women who took umbrage at the unfairness. I'll never forget meeting the elderly sister of one of the lads who was killed with McCrae's on the first day of the Somme. She remained incandescent with rage at the fact that she was denied the opportunity to serve. 'There wasn't a laddie in the school I couldn't flatten,' she insisted. I recall leaning back in my chair in case she attempted to prove her point. Lord Kitchener was aiming at the young.

Today McCrae's Battalion Trust is looking in the same direction – hopefully with a straighter gaze because Lord Kitchener had an unnerving squint which was often poorly disguised by contemporary photo-editors. We're thinking we're in danger of being compared to Jack and Victor – or Tam and Winston. Of course that would make Pam 'Ilsa', but I don't want to take that any further.

We're looking for young blood, fresh viewpoints and a few folk who might consider committing for the future. We think that McCrae's Battalion deserves not to be forgotten again. And the challenge – just as in 1914 – is to youth. We want to buy the land adjacent to the Cairn: we want to create a simple 'Garden of Remembrance' on the site; (and against the difficulties of ever more expensive foreign travel) we want to set our annual pilgrimage into the mortar of posterity, so that people will continue to stand at the Contalmaison Cairn on the first day of July for all coming time.

Those people cannot be – failing a few head transplants – the current Trustees. We are fogies. Effective fogies, inspiring fogies even, but fogies – nearer the end (Pamela excepted!) than the beginning. But we're also a welcoming group that has never taken ourselves remotely seriously. So far as I'm aware, we've never done anything that hasn't been hugely enjoyable and emotionally rewarding for each and every one of us. It's an honour to do this! The best way to remember the lads of 14-18 is with a smile on our faces, forging friendships and creating new memories to sit proudly beside the old. Anyone with any ideas, any suggestions for events, for fundraising, for just about anything, is encouraged to make contact. And anyone who can afford a small annual subscription is encouraged to support our work by joining the Trust as a member. Please take this programme home with you and pass it on to any interested friends; tell them what we've been up to and tell them they are welcome to get in touch.

Hopefully we'll see you in Contalmaison in the year of all our Lords 2093, when Craig Herbertson's head will be singing 'Hearts of Glory' on the body of a kilted mutant robot called Gordon.

**Jack Alexander**  
**Edinburgh, 7 November 2023**

Contact McCrae's Battalion Trust through our website:  
[www.mccraesbattaliontrust.org.uk](http://www.mccraesbattaliontrust.org.uk)

