

9 years ago I went on a trip with my my parents and my husband Grant to northern France to pay our respects at the graves of 3 great uncles, all of whom were killed in the first world war. For all 3 of us it was a truly moving experience and one which we shall never forget.

In 1918 my maternal grandfather came back to Kippen at the end of the war without his brother, Duncan, who was killed in action. It was a strange feeling for Grant and I driving back from France in 2007 to Kippen. After the long journey home we passed the family farm at Brig-O-Frew and realised that we had made the return journey from France that my great uncle never did. My 2 paternal great uncles never came home either. Mum said that Grandpa McCowan rarely spoke of his time in the trenches and he never went back to Flanders to see his brother's grave. I'm sure everyone here has a similar story to tell. There are, I think, few families left untouched by the horrors of WW1.

The words and music which you are going to hear this evening are all from poets, writers and musicians who fought at the Somme, young men and women who had so much to give, but whose lives were so deeply affected or cut short so tragically. We all come to an event like this with different thoughts and feelings about war and the politics of war and I'm sure that when we look around at our world today in 2016 it's hard to understand if we have indeed made any progress.

That said I sincerely hope you will find this evening an enjoyable, poignant and respectful memorial to those who gave their lives 100 years ago and I am happy to say that as a result of this evening we have already raised in the region of £5000 for Erskine.

Ladies and Gentlemen I have great pleasure in welcoming my friends from The RCS to present to you a programme of "Words and music from the somme".