

A REMEMBRANCE DAY

old Willie
propped up on his pillows
stone blind
with cataracts,
one of the last still living
that fought in the trenches
or could claim to remember
the nineteen-hundred gale
or a bluff-bowed Dutch herring buss
punching through the Sound.

For when it came to stories
there was none with a greater gift living,
Yeah, he could mind hailing gannets
that took a haddock line –
one minute on the sea bottom
and the next one in the heavens.

So I asked him one day about the war,
which he related
like name, rank and number;
A gunner,
with the heavy artillery.
Fought at most of the campaigns
Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele.

And that was that
as I sat like a blockhead all ears
with bated breath and eyes agog
waiting for the tale to end all tales
as he stops to sup some Sweatheart Stout
and says,
'Yes boy, I remember a Dutchman
standing in the Gaerdie burn
drinking out of his clog!'

Then he gave a laugh
wiped a weepy cataract,
the visiting hour was over
he lay back and dozed off,
and that was the last time we spoke.
Now I think of old Willie's war
Lest we forget,
and many a poor soul
who would rather have done
just that.