

A Remembrance Reflection In an Iconic Location

— Peter Sherred —

Remembrance Sunday took on a special nature in 2018 as it coincided with the centenary of the Armistice when at 11am on the 11th day of the 11th month the Western Front of the First World War fell silent. As with other Remembrance Sundays Dover, along with towns, cities and villages across the country, paid customary tribute with the laying of poppy wreaths at the town's War Memorial having previously been engaged in a similar action in the Cruise Terminal, formerly the Dover Marine Station.

In London the annual National Service of Remembrance took place and Big Ben, which had been silenced for a long period of time for repair work, was brought back into action for the tolling that signified the eleventh hour. As Her Majesty the Queen observed the ceremony the Prince of Wales laid the first wreath followed by the President of Germany Herr Steinmeier in an exceptional act of reconciliation and when the wreath laying was complete the seemingly never-ending march past of veterans and others took place. There had been similar acts of remembrance in France during the preceding week including one when the President of France and the Chancellor of Germany met at Compiègne and signed a book of remembrance in a replica of the wagon in which the French had been forced to capitulate to the Germans in 1940.

More locally in Folkestone an image of the wartime poet Wilfred Owen was raked in the sand on the seashore only to be washed away by the tide. Owen had the misfortune of being one of the last casualties of the war being killed in action a few days before the agreed armistice.

But what did all this enhanced activity in 2018 mean and what were people remembering

exactly one hundred years on from the end of the First World War, often called the Great War? Sir Michael Morpurgo caught the sense of the occasion and the question when he asked "How should we remember? We can't. They are all gone. All we can remember is what they have done and the peace they gave us, a peace we must hold dear. All we can do is sing the anthem; tell the story." The 'they' to whom he was referring were those who are no longer with us for since 2009, when Harry Patch died, there have been no soldiers who fought in the trenches left alive. Remembrance is a collective act to recall all who died in war on land and sea or in the air and the statistics from that first global conflict are thought provoking indeed. Some 886,345 UK troops, along with Empire troops totalling 228,569, were killed and it is calculated that with something like 6 million civilian deaths the total toll was about 16 million people dead and, of course, it is important to remember this was not just in Europe but right across four continents that the 1914-18 conflict took place.

Visits to the cemeteries, so faithfully tended in France and Belgium, go some way to bringing home the enormity of the loss and the debt owed to those who died. Tyne Cot Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery and Memorial to the Missing is a Commonwealth War Graves Commission burial ground for the dead of the First World War in the Ypres Salient on the Western Front. It is the largest cemetery for Commonwealth forces in the world, for any war. The war memorials across the country, with their lists of names, were erected following the conflict not simply to highlight death but also to give an opportunity to mourn. In Ypres, Belgium, the Menin Gate is world famous as a memorial to countless numbers of the fallen. But as time passes and the 1914 - 1918 conflict becomes more distant what is there, personally, for us to remember? What

do we remember of previous conflicts that ended at Waterloo and Trafalgar for instance?

A local attempt to answer the question raised by Sir Michael Morpurgo was the focus of an excellent production put on by the Marlowe Theatre of Canterbury in conjunction with Dover Harbour Board, in the former Dover Marine Railway Station, where actors and many locals from various communities and organisations participated in 'The Return of the Unknown.' The setting was brilliant in its relevance as it was the location where many returned from fighting in the First World War and where the Unknown Soldier was brought back to this country in 1920. The audience was challenged from the start of the production as to the meaning of Remembrance today and what would it conceivably mean to people in the future, say 50 or 100 years hence? A futuristic scene from Remembrance in 2118 was a ghastly show business production of the "Come on down" ilk and simply served to demonstrate how Remembrance could lose its essential nature and become distorted for entertainment purposes. But the audience was drawn back to the present, or at least 1918, through an intermediate sequence in fifty years' time (2068) showing that what people remember cannot or should not be sanitised, over simplified or trivialised.

The interval of the production took the form of a street party where those attending were probably thinking "do we really understand what is going on here?" or, maybe "we did not book for this method of presentation and we should take the opportunity to leave" but The Victory Wartime Band brought wartime tunes and songs to the fore.

Those who stayed for the second half, of the more than two hour presentation, were rewarded with a wonderfully atmospheric presentation of various aspects of the impact of war acted on small stages, that were brilliantly manoeuvred round the platform areas of the old railway station to their individual audiences,

highlighting the effects of war on people as individuals and for relationships. The production highlighted the drama of those forever lost in unmarked graves or in graves identified with the words "known only to God" thereby bringing a focus on the return of the unknown soldier. In this climactic part of the production the audience was invited to reflect on the reluctance of the King, George V, to consider the notion of the return of an unnamed soldier but when persuaded the coffin became centre stage of the final acts of a production that had left the audience initially feeling uncomfortable but then, through thought provoking sequences, understanding the need not to forget the sacrifices of so many and the legacy to the world they left behind. It certainly rose to the occasion by making the audience think of what peoples' actions mean each year and, as the First World War drifts off into history, whether the words repeated each Remembrance service, "We will remember them," still have meaning and ring true.

By addressing the question raised by Sir Michael Morpurgo, "How can we remember?.....we can't," the production at the Cruise Terminal, hopefully, led those attending to believe in an answer like "We can, but we can only do so in our own way and through our own experiences" because the Armistice, that was remembered with so much ceremony in 2018, did not end bloodshed for its consequences arguably paved the way for its return in 1939 – 1945 on a greater scale. As we look around the world today, we are entitled to ask, "Do we ever learn the lessons of history?" One of the fundamental lessons from both world wars and, indeed, from the current rivalries between nations is that when global rules and understandings are ignored, or abandoned conflicts inevitably follow with devastating consequences. So, when next standing before a war memorial or a Cenotaph, or among the rows and rows of graves in Belgium or France, remembrance should firstly take the nature of respect for the dead even though they were not known to today's generations

personally. Then, and maybe more importantly, there is the need to remember such respect for the dead needs to demonstrate that today's generations and countries that constitute the global world order have learned the lessons of war in which the fallen died while, sadly, acknowledging perhaps that the modern world with all its discord appears to have forgotten. If that is so then "Lest we forget" becomes simply a meaningless utterance - which must never be the case. People should also be recalling the many maimed and injured who did not die but who paid a terrible price for liberty.

Congratulations to the Marlowe Theatre for bringing this innovative production to Dover and to the Dover Harbour Board for making available the former Marine Station as an appropriate

setting and Dover College for being one of the sponsors. It was wonderful to see so many local organisations participating including Dover Girls' Grammar School, Dover Youth Theatre, Dover College Chapel Choir, Langdon Primary and St Mary's Primary Schools, the P & O Choir Dover, the Women's Institute of St Margaret's at Cliffe and Dover Transport Museum along with many others, both local and further away. A magnificent community engagement for this creative and thought-provoking, immersive, production.

We should remember it and the messages it sent out. After all the freedoms which are taken for granted these days did not come with no cost for those freedoms to come about were by ways that were in no means free.

River Dour Partnership Deborah Gasking

The river clean-ups are having their annual winter vacation due to access restrictions - the dark winter months are trout spawning times. For those who might be interested, here is a brief, but concise, spawning tutorial:

Trout lay their eggs in nests in the river gravels, known as redds. The female (hen) builds the nest, usually between November and January when the water is cold and carrying lots of oxygen, because that is what the eggs need to hatch. She looks for gravel with a good flow of water passing through, so the gravels need to be loose and largely free from silt. She will dig a hole, turning on her side and flexing her body. This activity will attract the attention of males who will chase each other and attempt be in place just when she lays her eggs. The process of digging and chasing can last for hours or even days.

Eventually the hen fish will release some of her eggs into the redd and the male (cock) fish will fertilise them. The hen then digs again to throw

up gravel to cover the fertilised eggs. The eggs will hatch in 60 to 97 days. Generally, it is assumed that most eggs hatch in February. The newly hatched trout are called alevins, and they live in the gravel, feeding off the remaining yolk that is attached to their body, for 14-30 days. Once the yolk has been eaten, the alevin become fry, emerge from the gravel, move towards the light and start to feed on tiny insects in the water.

Mortality rates at this highly vulnerable stage are very high. The fry are just a few centimetres long and consume a lot of energy, so they need to find food quickly, and plenty of it. They also become territorial - they want to be out of sight of other fry, so need habitat that has plenty of stones and plants to enable them to hide from the neighbours. They are still very tiny, so they need shallow water (1-40cm) that isn't too fast flowing.

The transition from living off the yolk to independent feeding is a critical life stage, and the one at which the majority of mortalities take place.