

Remembrance Sunday 2015

Remembrance Sunday is held in the UK and Commonwealth as “a day to commemorate the contribution of British and Commonwealth military and civilian servicemen and women in the two World wars and later conflicts. It is held on the second Sunday nearest to 11th November, Armistice Day – the anniversary of the end of hostilities in the First World War – at the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

Across the UK Remembrance Sunday is marked by ceremonies at war memorials, within churches and at the Cenotaph (an empty Tomb in Greek). A two minutes silence is held before the laying of the wreaths. A field gun ends the silence followed by the Last Post – then wreaths are laid – first by the Queen and other members of the Royal Family – then by the Prime Minister and other politicians – and then representatives of the armed services, the Merchant Navy, fishing fleets and civilian services. The Bishop of London leads prayers and then military bands play music as a huge parade of veterans march past the Cenotaph, wreaths are laid and the Cenotaph is saluted – as they pay tribute to all those it represents – to all those who died and lie buried elsewhere. They finally salute a member of the Royal Family.

The wearing of the Remembrance day poppies started in 1921 – the factory in Richmond opening in 1926 – it employs about 40 full time workers (many disabled ex-service men/women) and also 90 local home workers – 36million poppies each year and 80,000 wreaths. The poppy was chosen as an iconic emblem as it grew wild in fields of France where so much fighting and death took place.

WHY REMEMBER?

- Part of being human is the faculty of memory – we are wired to remember
- Memory gives us knowledge, understanding and insight
- We are connected to our memories
- Memory combines rationality and feeling

WHAT are we remembering today?

- That our lives – our thoughts and feelings are bound up with the last century especially the impact of two World Wars
- There is a general sense of horror at the enormity of lost lives and a specific sense of sadness that we lost people in our own families
- There is a sense of Thanksgiving that the concept of freedom was upheld
- That there was enormous sacrifice and bravery

HOW is REMEMBRANCE sustained?

- By ceremonies, acts of remembrance, prayer, music, the wearing of poppies, the processions etc
- By evidence for example, the military graveyards, the names on church rolls and war memorials, photographs of war, poems, paintings, documentaries, letters, military music etc
- By imagination, for example theatre (War Horse), films, books, writings
- By debate – concepts of freedom, defence, peace, restoration, reconciliation

CONCLUSION

- Today is not a glorification of war and violence but a thanksgiving for peace
- And a way of showing respect for those who perished
- And a continued awareness of the complexities of war and peace – of destruction and of safety – and of an honouring of the preciousness of human life and flourishing
- And we continue to care for those who are the victims of war and violence – those in the refugee camps – the enormous number of migrants seeking safety