

World War One Lest we forget.

I'd like to thank Mark for inviting me to give this talk; the views that you are going to hear are mine, not his. He has asked me to talk of the consequences of the war, as well as the war itself; to understand it at all we must avoid the distorting prism of our contemporary mindset and think in terms of the attitudes and perspectives of 1914 -19, and the majority opinion at the time was that the war was worth fighting.

The commonly accepted cause for WW 1 is the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo –it was in fact much more complicated, and I will make these points

There were three major wars of the first industrial revolution – the American Civil War, the Great War, and the Second World War. All were wars of attrition, of machines and industrial resources, and as more powerful weapons were developed each was more destructive than the previous war.

There had been more than 15 wars in Europe in the latter part of the 19th Century, and all had finished in less than three months. The common assumption in 1914 throughout Europe was that 'The war would be over by Christmas'. Very few foresaw that it would last for 4 years and 3 months or the ruin and destruction that it would cause.

WW 1 was fought with Victorian values and 20th century industrial ability to create mayhem. In 1914 the French army wore uniforms that Napoleon would have recognised - red trousers, blue greatcoats and white gloves. The Reichstag [Parliament] in Berlin voted a war loan in 1914 on the assumption that it would be repaid after a swift victory by French reparations and it was a Nobel peace prize winner who proposed the first use of poison gas.

The nations that were Involved were united - everyone from the highest to the lowest was certain that they were taking part in a just and righteous struggle. All the warring nation's populations were aroused to a frenzy of patriotic indignation: in England shops owned by Germans were looted, pet dachshunds abused and in Germany Ernst Lissauer wrote a poem that reflected the popular mood, the Hymn of Hate.

Verse 3 runs thus:

French and Russian they matter not
A blow for a blow, a shot for a shot
We fight the battle with bronze and steel
And the time that is coming peace will seal
You we will hate with a lasting hate
We will never forget our hate
Hate by water and hate by land
Hate of the head and hate of the hand
Hate of the hammer and hate of the crown
Hate of seventy millions choking down
We love as one, we hate as one
We have one foe and one alone – England!

It provoked derision among the allies, and some soldiers of the BEF sang it in the trenches to the understandable bewilderment of the German soldiers opposing them – but the soldiers were Scottish.

Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for war, appealed for volunteers to join the army and all sorts of recruiting organisations sprang up – such as the Mayor and Corporation, a local landowner, a self formed patriotic committee. These enlisted the volunteers under the slogan ‘join together, train together, fight together’, and, quite innocent of the horrors of war, half a million men volunteered in the first three months enlisting with their friends and relations, in tight knit groups and giving themselves appropriate titles – Glasgow Boys Brigade, Accrington Pals, Grimsby Chums. And they joined without much thought for the future, but with a sentiment of patriotic adventure. Nothing quite like it has been seen before or since. Ages ranged from 14 year old Valentine Strudwick to 66 year old Henry Webber, and from workhouse orphans like Pte Barrett VC to Private Lord Edward Beauchamp Seymour. It was the first time that the industrious and the professional classes of England had marched to war, and when the reality of it hit home after July 1916 the deep bruise on our national psyche is still painful today.

On our war memorial are the names of 20 men of our parish who were killed in WW 1, and I will talk briefly about two of them

SD2724 Private Keates, WR of Rose Green joined the 1st South Downs Battalion, which was raised by the local MP Lt Col Lowther, at Bexhill [the War Office tidied up the title later, it became the 11th Battalion the Royal Sussex Regiment]. They went to France in time to take part in the Battle of the Somme and on 21st October 1916 the Battalion attacked Stuff Trench, and he disappeared. He is one of the 72337 soldiers who have no known grave commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

Carl, or Charles Hartmann was the son of a German who had built up a successful business in England. His parents lived at 14 Kensington Square London [current price £9,100,000], and had a holiday home in Pagham. He had joined the Territorial Force, the 5th Battalion the Royal West Kent Regiment before 1914 and after an initial period in India came to the Western Front, was killed in an attack on 2 July 1918 aged 31. He is buried in Bouzincourt Ridge Cemetery only 3.5 miles from Private Keates memorial, about the same distance apart as their homes in Pagham.

In the first three months of the war the opposing Armies marched and manoeuvred. The Germans were 30 miles from Paris, when they were defeated at the Battle of the Marne and had to retreat. Battles and skirmishes during these months left many casualties, dead and wounded, unaccounted for. They were ‘missing’. At about this time Lord Cecil created the ‘wounded and missing’ department of the British Red Cross, tasked with sending parties to France to locate isolated graves and provide accurate information for relatives, This private enterprise organisation was absorbed by the Government as the Imperial War Graves Commission tasked to arrange the commemoration of the war dead, and in order to give it some clout one of the original leaders, Mr Fabian Ware, was commissioned as a Major General to lead the IWGC. Ware and his co workers decided that the cemeteries should not be a glorification of war, but a memorial to the cost of war. They set out these principles for the cemeteries and memorials:

Every soldier who was killed or missing was to have an individual grave or be named on a memorial

Cemeteries to be made to look like an English country garden.

Rank was unimportant – all had made the same sacrifice.

Buried close to where they fell – though this was not always possible.

No repatriation to the UK – as only the rich could afford this.

Individual identical headstones – more information can be displayed than on a cross

The next of kin were invited to add an epitaph – a maximum 90 letters and spaces at 1 old penny per letter or space. The overwhelming majority of these inscriptions express pride ‘Duty Nobly Done’ grief ‘His Brother Raymond Also Fell’ resignation ‘Into The Jigsaw Of Victory We Lay Our Precious Pieces’ Carl’s parents chose: ‘Their soul shall be as a watered garden and they shall not sorrow any more at all.’ The IWGC declined any epitaph that expressed hatred.

No private memorials - but there are at least 3: Lt Baron de Gunzberg, Captain Albert Ball VC RFC, and LCpl JP O’Neill 13th Bn AIF. All were erected during the war.

An iconic memorial of the Great War is the tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. David Railton, a Padre in France once saw a single grave with a rough cross on which were pencilled the words "An Unknown British Soldier". In August 1920 he wrote to the Dean of Westminster, suggesting that an unknown soldier should be buried in Westminster Abbey to represent all the dead. The King immediately gave his approval.

The body was chosen from four unidentifiable British bodies one brought from each of the major battle fields of the BEF – the Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres. It was brought to London with great ceremony, given a Field Marshals 19 gun salute as it left Calais Harbour aboard HMS Verdun and buried on 11 November 1920 at the west end of the nave of Westminster Abbey, in the presence of the greatest in the land, and a guard of honour of 100 holders of the VC.

The Great War was supposed to be the war to end all wars and those who fought in it were told they were to return to a country fit for heroes. Neither, of course, was to be the case and many ex-service men faced a bitter struggle when they returned to Britain. Almost two million veterans suffered a disability and could not work. In the aftermath of the War, the families of those who died and those who came home injured were left destitute.

Demobilisation was poorly and unimaginatively managed, which caused great bitterness.

The job market was contracting, as war time contracts were slimmed down or cancelled and the country’s economy readjusted to peacetime requirements. The initial euphoria and sense of relief that the war had been won turned to a spirit of disillusion; why on earth did we fight it, and what did we achieve? Field Marshal Douglas Haig, Commander-in-Chief of the BEF since 1915, was one of those who put pressure on the government to make adequate provision for those who had served, but without success. Many veterans self help groups had formed, and Haig persuaded the leaders of these groups to meet to discuss the issue of consolidation. On 14 May 1921, 700 delegates attended a Unity Conference, and a new united organisation, the British Legion, was formed to care for those who had suffered as result of service in the

Armed Forces in the Great War, whether through their own service or through that of a husband, father or son. Suffering took many forms: wounds physical or mental [PTSD was unrecognised though many suffered] affected a man's ability to earn a living or a war widow's struggle to give her children an education. The Legion set out to remind the nation of the human cost of war, and to raise funds the Legion adopted the poppy, made famous by John Mcrae's poem 'In Flanders Fields' as their symbol.. The first Poppy Appeal on 11 November 1921, raised £106,000 – nearly £30m in today's terms, and the Legion continues to raise money each year for the benefit of ex servicemen and their dependents.

In conclusion, what is the legacy for us? There had been profound political, technical, and social changes to the world order that affect us today. Four empires were dismembered – Germany lost all her overseas possessions; the Austro-Hungarian empire split into its component nations, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia; shorn of its empire it would fall under Germany's dominance in 1938. Russia was in the in the midst of a bloody revolution that would continue until the mid thirties, Allied intervention in that civil war meant that the Bolshevik Government played no part in the peace negotiations, and in the confusion and instability Poland, the Baltic States and Finland declared their independence from Russia. Turkey's middle east empire was carved up – ruthlessly and carelessly by Great Britain and France, using a ruler on a small scale map, and we see the results and endure the consequences today.

At the 1919 Peace Conference the German delegation was forced to acknowledge, formally, that they were entirely responsible for starting the war and to accept that their nation was to pay reparations to the victors. How a bankrupt nation was to do this was never discussed, but the humiliating terms of this Treaty had serious consequences – Marechal Ferdinand Foch said with considerable foresight 'This is not peace – is a truce for 20 years'. The perceptive recognised that the British Empire was in decline – the cost of the war was ruinous, and although it took another thirty years the end of Empire was inevitable.

In England, perhaps the most significant development was the enlargement of the franchise. Two separate Acts of Parliament in 1918 and 1928 finally gave women equality at the ballot box. Perhaps rather than protest it was that Women had taken on responsible employment roles that had been exclusively male before the war, and that convinced the establishment that women deserved the vote. *Not all were totally satisfactory – my Great Aunt Winnifred was summarily dismissed from a post as a nursing assistant at an officers convalescent hospital at no notice at all: the family tradition is that she was probably anticipating marriage rather indiscreetly.* No longer could the Government ignore or oppose women's responsible contribution to society and it was their deeds not words that spoke the loudest. The Representation of the People Act of 1918 resolved the issue of ex servicemen who were not entitled to the vote, as they did not meet existing property qualifications. This act gave the vote to men over the age of 21 and women over 30 – but only if they met minimum property qualifications or were married to a man who did. A second act in 1928 extended the franchise to all over the age of 21.

Lastly, there were the technical developments. I want to mention inventions and developments that had an obvious civilian application, like wireless the internal combustion engine and aviation rather than parade a multitude of purely military items; we are an

ingenious species, and many incremental improvements designed for the benefit of the BEF were adapted and found useful in a much wider sphere.

Surgery and especially the plastic surgery pioneered by Howard Gillies improved techniques and skills.

In 1909 Bleriot flew a single engined aeroplane 20 miles from Calais to Dover, and won a £1000 prize; but in 1919 two ex RAF Officers flew a modified bomber, a Vickers Vimy 2000 miles across the Atlantic, and paved the way for commercial aviation. Aerial photography and it's twin, mapmaking found commercial uses worldwide.

The BBC was granted a charter in October 1922 and the first broadcast from London [station 2LO] was on 14 November 1922, though the main aerial farm was at Daventry, the geographic centre of this country, in order to have the maximum broadcast coverage.

I am one of a lucky generation; my grandparents and parents generations both fought in world wars and endured the inevitable hardships, anxieties of separation, and grief at the death of close relatives or friends. My family is probably luckier than many – four brothers fought in WW 1 three were wounded, Jack discharged in 1916 unfit for further service and Austen died four years after the Armistice from pneumonia, weakened by gas. Maurice recovered fully from his wounds and Reginald survived unwounded. My wife, Annabelle's Grandfather died of wounds on 2 October 1918. In contrast, I have never fought in a war, and it seems likely that my children will not have to fight a major war either – they are now too old. Although there have been ups and downs in my life, I have had a better quality of life than either my father or grandfather and live freely in our crowded society. I recognise and acknowledge the debt that I owe to those who fought from 1914 to 1918 to make it so. I wonder if I could have endured the hardships that they took in their stride. Lest we forget.