

England and St George

Yesterday I was invited to give a short talk at a St George's Day reception in Parliament. Present were representatives of the Royal Society of St George.

I began by commenting that England to many in Parliament is the forgotten country. England is so often unassuming and quiet. It was perhaps fitting that this particular event should take place the day after St George's day as if an afterthought, however much it was uppermost in the minds of its keenest supporters. Events and bookings had conspired to let England take her place a day late.

April 23rd is memorable not just as England's special day, but also as Shakespeare's birthday. The conjunction reminds us of some of the richness of drama and literature that England has shared with the world. Our ancestors have been bold and enterprising, innovative and entertaining. We have given many sports, cultural events and technologies to the world, and have been greatly engaged in exploring and bringing together the trading empires and outposts of our globe.

In recent years Labour did its best to fracture the United Kingdom with its lop sided devolution. England has accepted this settlement, where Scotland has a Parliament, Wales and Northern Ireland have Assemblies, and England has no such recognition. The last government went half way to tackling the injustice in Parliament by preventing the Union Parliament from forcing onto England a law its MPs do not want, but fell short of giving us the complementary power to propose and advance legislation that England wants without needing the consent of the rest of the Union Parliament.

I did not renew my vows on a new English constitutional settlement in the 2017 election, because the priority is Brexit. That is constitutional change enough for one Parliament. The people of England voted for Brexit by a larger majority than the people of the whole Union. England now expects their Union government to deliver.