

We do not forget

Remembrance brings together so many families in a common grief. The two great wars of the last century touched most families with wounds and death. Eventually victorious against the enemies of freedom and self determination, the UK with her allies can be proud of all those who withstood the struggle.

Both my grandfathers fought in the trenches in France and Belgium as very young men. One was badly injured at Mons. They spoke little of the horrors that we have all seen through film and reconstruction. I used to think I was lucky that both my grandfathers survived. Then I realised most of our grandfathers and great grandfathers survived. Many of those who died were too young to have married and had children. My son was taken on a trip when at Reading School to be shown the short walk between the opposing trenches. He was very moved when told of the massacre in the great offensives across No Mans land by teenagers little older than he was at time of his visit.

My father left school at 16 and enrolled in the Royal Navy as soon as he could during the second world war. He sailed in the cruiser Royalist in Northern waters and in support of the Italian campaign. He described to me the fear of the U boats stalking the ship. He did meet my mother who served in the Wrens in Portsmouth when his ship put in for supplies. She told me of her time fire watching on the roof of Huntley and Palmers in Reading where she lived before joining the navy. One night of a raid she had to walk home knowing a bomb had hit her own street, only to discover it had missed her parents and her bedroom. I could understand that feeling more when I stepped out from the rubble of the Grand Hotel at Brighton after the IRA bombing. You are profoundly shocked by the impact of the senseless violence on those neighbours and friends who did die.

Today is time to remember the suffering and bravery of family members called upon to do extraordinary things owing to the times they lived in. They put with many dangers and restrictions on their lives. The vast scale of world war is difficult to grasp because it is so horrific. Recalling what we know of those close to us and to our grandparents and great grandparents is easier to understand. It is fitting that we do remember them.