

## Mike's message .....

What's your opinion about it? The Sainsbury's Christmas advert I mean. Have you seen it?

It's based on the true events of 100 years ago, when the hostilities of the early months of the 'Great War' ceased for what has become known as 'The Christmas Truce'.

Documentary evidence is clear that at Christmas, at some points along the front, hostilities ceased, and soldiers from both sides advanced over 'No Man's Land' to greet each other, share photos of family and exchange simple gifts such as chocolate bars. Sainsbury's have produced a bar similar to those sold in 1914 and profits are going to the Royal British Legion.

Despite this worthy cause, a quick look at social media (Facebook, Twitter etc) shows that opinion is very mixed about the advert. Some see it as an intrusion into a sensitive point in history but most of the objections concern the details of the advert, or rather what's lacking.

There's no doubt the cinematography is as stunning as Hollywood's finest productions. There's High Definition, great acting and worthy dialogue. Some of the events of the time are represented, as recalled in many letters home from troops on both sides. The singing, by both British and German lines, of the German Christmas carol 'Silent Night' starts things off and the famous events of the impromptu football games in 'No Man's Land', are depicted. But what about the setting? There's snow (it did snow, in some places on the front, on Boxing Day 1914), there's a robin sitting on barbed wire, all great cinema, but there's an absence of something. There's no blood or gore and no bodies lying in 'No Man's Land'. Does this matter? After all, the presence of these would hardly make for the Christmas 'feel good' factor of, for example, the John Lewis advert with the penguin. Sainsbury's have omitted those horrors and have indeed produced a masterpiece, but in the year we've started observing the centenary of the 'Great War', is it worthy of those commemorations? It looks back with nostalgia at moving, beautiful events, but should there be more recognition of the horrific butchery of trench warfare. In many places the slaughter continued throughout Christmas, there was no truce, and thousands died.

Many of the letters written at the time record a situation far removed from the images of the Sainsbury's advert. In many places the contact that opposing forces had came when they ventured into 'No Man's Land' to retrieve bodies and body parts. Maybe some recognition of this should have been included. But let's not dismiss it out of hand. There were encounters along the front of young men, similar in age and background, from different nations who were able to share what was important to them in acts of goodwill. Then they returned to killing each other! That highlights the futility of war and, at this time of year, that's always a message worthy of sharing.

Let's celebrate again the gift of Christ, the Prince of Peace!

