

Mike's message

1914 - 2014

We approach this year's season of Remembrance with more than the normal poignancy. This year we have been observing the Centenary of the outbreak of "The Great War", the conflict that would later be called the First World War.

There have been many events to commemorate the Centenary, and many more to come during the next four years. There will, for example, be events to commemorate the four individuals from Sandwell that received the Victoria Cross during the conflict. The citation on that medal is simply "For Valour" but they were only the most prominent of many acts of bravery and courage in the appalling slaughter of that conflict. Let's not forget that courage and sacrifice was present on both "sides" of the conflict. Indeed many in our community had ancestors on "the other side". A time for poignant remembrance indeed.



My Grandfather, Private Harry Claridge who served in the Tank Corps towards the end of WW1 and in the ARP during WW2.



One of 888,246 ceramic poppies being placed at the Tower of London.

There have been things going on nationally too. One of the most striking is the art work that has been in the process of construction in the moat of the Tower of London. The artist Paul Cummins has made and placed 888,246 ceramic poppies in the moat that encircles the Tower of London. Each poppy represents one of the British casualties in WW1. Don't forget that doesn't even include casualties of the British Empire forces and other Allied Powers, such as Italy and France, let alone those of the Central Powers of the German Empire. Those ceramic poppies are now on sale (£25 each plus p&p) with the proceeds to six service charities. Details are at www.poppies.hrc.org.uk

It's easy to forget, as we concentrate on the members of the armed forces that have paid the ultimate sacrifice in wars past and present, that many others have paid and continue to pay, that cost too. Recently we've been shocked by the death of Alan Hemming, murdered by a group that have perverted the image, and misrepresented the message, of the noble religion of Islam. Alan Hemming was captured by his murderers while undertaking his fourth mercy mission to Syria, a mission that was motivated by his love and compassion for all people affected by the current, appalling conflict in that region. Rightly and movingly his sacrifice has been acknowledged by people of many faiths and none. "There was more about the true values of Islam in Alan Hemming than there are in all the members of IS put together" a Manchester Imam tellingly remarked.

Remembrance Sunday is a remembrance of lives lost and of other lives destroyed by injuries, recollections and bereavement. But as well as remembering the past let us pledge ourselves to working for a just peace and compassion for all people, especially those affected by wars.