

We Will Remember Them

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald Article

04th October 2021

This week The Queen attended the Westminster Abbey service marking the centenary of the Royal British Legion, the largest armed forces charity that organises the annual poppy appeal. Join me in thanking our local organisers who do so much within our community.

They help grow hope, health and happiness – words I heard from a Holocaust survivor who also said that happiness grows when it is shared.

Michael Hargrave's diary 'Bergen-Belsen 1945: A Medical Student's Journal' describes the activities of young doctors-in-training who were diverted from helping starving children in the Netherlands to saving lives in the concentration camp.

Raw figures illustrate the scale of the issues. At the start, 500 ex-prisoners a day died. Within two weeks, the number fell to 100 a day. Just one camp among many. The conditions included malnutrition, starvation, tuberculosis, typhus, gangrenous infection of the face, encephalopathy and pellagra (caused by deficiency of vitamin B3).

This was in my mind on Tuesday when I attended the reopening of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Galleries. Do not take a child below the age of 14. I was that age when first aware of the reasons for the Nuremberg war trials. During the next two years I read about the Nazis and their collaborators who murdered two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. I now know over 100 of my grandfather's cousins were amongst them.

Ronnie Poulton features in Hugh Salmon's new play 'Into Battle' about events leading to the death of England's rugby captain in the Great War. His team won the grand slam. His chaplain at Balliol had been Neville Talbot who founded Toc H. Members sought to ease the burdens of others through acts of service.

The play runs at Greenwich theatre until the end of the month. When we saw it this week, we were sitting with the Harlequins in their team kit. Their behaviour was impeccable, so different from some of the crowd at the Wembley soccer game with Hungary.

I remember possible consequences of pushing and shoving or fighting in a crowd, having been present in the Heysel stadium in 1985 where 39 people died. My firm advice in any such circumstances is to try to stand still, avoid joining a crush and try quietly to discourage others from bad behaviour.

The cause of the problems appears to have been racial abuse of a steward by Hungarian supporters. It does not matter much whether the instigators live here or elsewhere. What matters is that people within their social group should be actively discouraging abuse, while accepting directions by stewards or police.

Let us return to consider the origins of Hitler's extreme racism and the steps that led him to power. The Imperial War Museum has published James Bulgin's book on The Holocaust. He explains Hitler's claims for Germany's future depended on the destruction of his enemies, real and imagined. He conflated communists and Jews.

In the 1920s moderate democratic parties were bring stability. The New York 1929 stock market crash toppled Germany into disaster and deprivation. Hitler's party came back from the political fringe towards the centre of power. 'Established politicians worried that Hitler could be dangerous . . . recognising that his levels of support would need to be acknowledged, they began to think that if he was Chancellor he would be easier to control ...'

A catastrophic mistake.

Most years, as parliamentary warden I am at the Poppy Factory Field of Remembrance by St Margaret's church and Westminster Abbey. As in Worthing and West Sussex, We WILL remember them.