

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Times

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HM The Queen was sadly unable to be present for the State Opening of Parliament this week. Prince Charles carried out the duties admirably to open the new parliamentary session. I was pleased to follow party leaders, as Father of the House, with Harriet Harman, the unofficial Mother of the House, as we were summoned by Black Rod to hear the Gracious Speech in the House of Lords.

The ceremony is an important reminder of the separation of powers, which has helped maintain our steady and longstanding parliamentary democracy. There are many around the world currently fighting for their own democratic rights, freedom of speech and safety for oppression.

Our own local elections are a reflection of local democracy in action. Election outcomes can be an opportunity to review and carefully consider what is important locally. I thank all those candidates who were not successful but who worked hard for us all in the past and I look forward to working with the newly elected councillors across the political divide for the benefit of all. Together we work to promote the priorities of local people. Goring Gap is under threat and I took the opportunity after the Queen's speech to again ask that the Minister for Housing and Levelling Up to review the Inspectorate's bad decision before any costly court proceedings are needed.

Europe is facing the terrible destruction and killing in Ukraine. It takes us back over 100 years to the disasters of the Great War that did not end all war, and it revives the 1939 challenge to the Nazi domination of so much of Europe.

I was pleased to attend the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) reception on Parliament this week. CWGC honours and cares for the 1.7 million men and women of the Commonwealth forces who died in the First and Second World Wars, ensuring they will never be forgotten. There are cemeteries at 23,000 locations around the world.

War Graves Week this year is 21st to 28 May. Constituents in Worthing and Arun can learn the stories of those commemorated by the CWGC and join me in admiring the skills, dedication and expertise of the staff working to keep memories alive. In Worthing, CWGC care for over 20 war graves or memorials. There are eight commemorations in Heene at the St Botolph's Churchyard extension.

Major Tom Wye earned my respect and friendship decades ago when, with young volunteers, he began clearing war graves in civilian cemeteries. Later, he contributed fascinating articles on many of the fallen. At Remembrance Services by the Worthing Town Hall memorial, he has read the lives of individual servicemen.

This year, alongside the front-line armed forces, CWGC will celebrate the value of those who served in key sectors including healthcare, logistics, infrastructure and communications. In my early years as local member of parliament, at the Royal Air Force Benevolent Funds' Princess Marina Holiday Home in Rustington, I was honoured to meet a woman holding the George Cross for staying at her post in a munitions factory while it was bombed.

Blind Veterans UK agreed to buy Princess Marina, continuing the wonderful legacy of care for veterans in our very supportive local community. Unlike the 1930s when many of the blinded were in middle age, the average age now is 87.

Whilst remembering our countrymen who have lost their lives in the past, and those fighting for their country now, this year's State Opening of Parliament felt especially poignant.

Do please think each of those whose lives were lost and who are risking their lives now. We shall remember them.