

Beenham Wind orchestra remembers 1918

I attended the Beenham Wind Orchestra to hear their Poppies and Peace concert on Saturday. They were magnificent. After two years in the planning, they delivered a moving and well orchestrated programme of music.

The concert began with the powerful and threatening music from Holst's Mars, reminding us of the terrors of war and the sounds of the violence. Dartmoor 1912 evoked the happy relations between man and horse before they went to war with suffering for both. Music from Noel Coward's Cavalcade sent us trying to identify the popular songs of the First World War. I think I heard Tipperary, Keep the Home Fires burning, Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and Take me back to dear old Blighty. David Tredici's alarming Wartime told us how the sounds of the bugle and the intense fighting that ensued swamped the strains of Abide with Me that the soldiers sang before battle.

Later in the concert we were lulled by the softer tones of Holst's Venus. The haunting strains of the Benedictus from the Armed Man by Karl Jenkins were memorably played. A newer piece, Sunset, by Richard Saucedo served to remind us that conflict and death carries through to our own era. The evening was finished off with the much happier and optimistic English country garden. Chris Guy our compere kept us well informed of what we were to hear. Robert Roscoe conducted it all in good humour and with great skill.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the musicians for a wonderful concert, and to the organisers for making us welcome.

Getting out of the EU is not mainly about trade – which has been doing badly with the EU anyway

The Remain media seem to think EU membership was just about trading arrangements, and that you cannot trade successfully outside the EU. Both these assumptions are completely wrong.

Leave voters voted to take back control of our money, our borders and our laws. We want the government to set out the enhanced spending plans, the tax cuts we can afford, the better migration policy and the improved laws that being independent will bring. We are the optimists. We think the UK can be better making her own decisions. We want to abolish VAT on domestic fuel and green products, we want to rebuild our fishing industry, and we want a fair migration system which controls numbers without giving preferences to some countries over others.

Remain seem to think sacrificing any of these freedoms is just fine if they can help us recreate the current trading and customs arrangements we have with the EU. Why are they so keen on the high tariff barriers the EU makes us impose on non EU imports? Why so keen on having to give away much of our fishery to foreign vessels? Why so keen to value EU trade more than non EU trade?

I have been sent an extract from official figures to remind me that our trade with the rest of the world, largely conducted under WTO rules with no special Agreements or FTAs, has been growing far faster than trade to the EU. Since 1998 our exports of goods to the EU have grown at just 0.2% a year, whereas our goods export to non EU has grown sixteen times faster at 3.3%. Our services exports have also grown faster to non EU than to EU. Last year we ran an overall deficit of £72 billion with the EU, but a surplus of £42 bn with the rest of the world.

If this single market and customs union is such a great boon to us, how come our goods trade has scarcely grown with it for almost twenty years? And if trading under WTO rules is difficult, how come our non EU trade is bigger than our EU trade and growing much faster?

It isn't worth paying £39bn to stay in this customs union.

100 years ago today the mass slaughter of the First War ended

Every family in the UK must have slept so much easier this night one hundred years ago. The terrors of warfare in an industrial age had been great. Life in the trenches was dreadful. It drove some men mad and left many more maimed for life. All too many never returned from their brief lives in battle. Most of those who died were too young to leave children. They left behind grieving parents, brothers and sisters. Today most of us are grandchildren and great grandchildren of the survivors. We are doubly grateful that their generation sacrificed their young lives to resist tyranny, and that our own relatives lived through the trials of war.

Most of the soldiers just accepted their duty, and did not think much in public about the justice or wisdom of it all. Now they have all died we can both remember their bravery and ask ourselves what have nations and statesmen learned from that bitter experience?

The war was about the imperial expansion of Germany. The superior forces of the allies once the USA entered the conflict finally forced an unconditional surrender on the Germans after nearly four years of stalemate on the western front. The power of artillery, the machine gun and barbed wire to defend positions was so much stronger than the ability of forces to attack and

overwhelm. As a result much of the war in the West was fought over a few miles each way in Belgium. It led to work on even more fearsome weapons that allowed more mobile warfare with greater chances of success for attackers in the subsequent world conflict. By 1939 planes used for reconnaissance and modest bombing in 1914-18 became terror weapons, with new generations of tanks and faster moving military vehicles. The Second World War ended with the massive explosions of Atom bombs.

The failure of the peace after 1918 to settle the German question should give us pause for thought. A comprehensive victory won at such cost did not give rise to a lasting peace. Far from resolving German aggression and militarism it led to a more fanatical and more heavily armed Germany. We need to remember in future that winning the peace matters as much as winning the war. It entails settling the defeated country in a way which allows it to be stable and successful in future without reverting to invasion and threats to neighbours.

Why did 1945 work when 1918 did not? The allies succeeded in helping Germany and Japan establish working democracies. Clauses against militarism and against re-armament were placed in their constitutions. American power was there as a guarantor of their peace and as a guarantor of the general peace. The Treaty of 1919 left Germany with anger over reparations and a sense they had been exploited in defeat. This led to a dictatorship born of violence and adopted through a sense of grievance pushing Germans to assert new claims over European lands and peoples. After the Second World the allies learned more about how diplomacy and the post war settlement needed to be wiser and more effective than the 1918 one. As a result they helped create a peace loving democratic Germany (and Japan) that have not threatened others with force since 1945. The formation of NATO and an allied troop presence for many years in Germany established a new pattern of mutual security.

When I first read of the tragedy on the Somme I was angry that men were led in such a way. The more I have read the more saddened I have been by the excessive slaughter, the failure to find tactics that could shorten the war and lessen the death rates, and the ultimate failure to resolve the underlying problems at the heart of the war.

There is much to remember, and much to learn from as we reflect on a much needed peace in 1918. All too often men were sent over the top to repeat the mistakes of past battles, in the false hope that this time enough damage had been done to the enemy to warrant the risk of walking towards a hail of machine gun and rifle fire. All too often they repeated the same slaughter as the previous time frontal assault by foot soldiers was tried. Why didn't they learn? Why weren't they told to shelter or turn back when they realised that their bombardment had not paved the way for success? Could their commanders not see that the defending forces were still too strong for infantry advancing on machine guns? Why were the politicians and Generals well away from the danger so unable to think of new tactics and so careless of such a huge slaughter? Why could they not trust the junior officers to vary the orders as not only led the futile attacks, but were often the first to die?

Some port statistics for Mr Raab

In 2017 UK ports handled 482 million tonnes of cargo. 62% was imports. Dover accounted for just 5.4% of this. EU trade accounted for 43% of the tonnage handled.

Dover Calais should work fine, but there are plenty of other options if the French change their mind and don't want to keep the business.

David Gauke attends Wokingham Conservatives dinner

Last night there was a good attendance at the Wokingham Conservatives annual dinner, with the Lord Chancellor as our speaker and guest of honour. He talked about prison reform, explaining how we was seeking to get drugs and organised crime rings out of our jails. He is considering what to do about the large number of short sentences for prison now given by the courts, which is adding greatly to the pressure on prison places. He explained that there is no evidence that many of these short sentences do any good. There might be more effective alternatives.

He was asked about a range of issues, from why the probate fees went up to the need to draw a line under investigations into soldiers actions in Northern Ireland many years ago. I raised with him the need to move on from the Chequers proposals which have found so little favour on either side of the Channel, in the wake of the news that they annoy a Remain MP like Jo Johnson as much as the many Leave MPs who find them unacceptable.

I would like to thank David Lee for hosting the event at St Anne's Manor, the organisers and all who attended.