

HOW LONG WILL WE REMEMBER THE DEAD OF THE TWO WORLD WARS?

Charles Phillips

How long will we remember the dead of the Two World Wars? I ask this question deliberately. I will now answer it in a different way. How long do we remember the dead of the Napoleonic Wars? In almost every city, town, village and even some hamlets there were people killed in those wars. Some of them were your ancestors or were related to you. Are you aware of it? Let us now go forward to the year 2150. By that time there will be no one alive who even remembers someone who fought in the Two World Wars. That is the same position as is now the position regarding the Napoleonic Wars. The War Memorials will remain in this country and the War Cemeteries will remain. Bodies of those who will still be uncovered, but things probably won't mean the same thing. There is a difference between knowing someone who knew your great uncle who was killed in Normandy in 1944 or whose grandfather told you about his elder brother who died on the Somme in 1916 and being told that you are related to a Private soldier whose body has been discovered near Ypres and who died 250 years ago.

I mentioned earlier the Napoleonic Wars. These wars were very significant for this country. Had the French won the Napoleonic Wars things would be very different now. The Napoleonic Wars because they were fought all over the world could be held to be the first global wars. The wars did in fact have quite a similarity to the Second World War. Threatened invasion of Britain. North Africa. Invasion of Russia. Naval battles. Invasion of the continent by allied forces. The political outcome was similar to that after the First World. And possibly caused the latter in the same way that latter caused the Second World War. But do we remember from our city, town, village or even hamlet those who fought and died in them? I suspect in most cases the answer is "No".

One could go back much further and ask anyone if they had or were related to someone killed at the Battle of Hastings. I doubt if extremely few people if any could answer that question. Yet the Battle of Hastings was one of the most significant battles in English history.

Obviously we don't know what the future will hold and if by some miracle this piece of writing has survived until 2150 or dare I be as so bold as to suggest 3009 they will no the answer. But what the answer is I do not know now. So the answer is that at present we do not know how we will remember the dead of the Two World Wars in the future.