

I feel slightly disappointed that the run up to this year's Remembrance Services has been mired in political controversy. It seems that whereas in previous years political differences are set aside and that there is a respectful silence around remembrance, questions of whether we as a nation have spent too much on the Centenary commemorative events have been an unwelcome distraction.

It is a privilege to be the Minister with responsibility for these commemorative events and I can only say how hard people in the World War 1 team work to ensure that we as a nation never forget the courage and sacrifice that many of our young men made for our freedoms one hundred years ago. The national events, which come on the back of last year's incredible poppy installation at the Tower of London, have been a way of local communities engaging as a whole in how the war affected the lives of their forefathers. I have seen some incredible projects, funded often by the lottery, which have involved young children bringing to life the words in a history book. Communities have discovered heroes that they never knew of and can now celebrate and industries pivotal to our success are revived in history.

Earlier this year I visited war graves in the Somme. I stood at the Menin Gate and scrolled down the list of thousands of names. I saw young poppies flowering among the rows and rows of corn shrouded in an eerie silence as if even nature wants to forget the horror it saw.

I cannot fathom the courage of soldiers then or now, as my colleague but former soldier Tom can do on the page opposite. But this year as I join hundreds of others at services in Chatham and Snodland I can at least be proud of all the acts of commemoration across the nation that we deliver to remember those who died to secure us freedom.