

A Matter of Respect

By the time you read this, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day will be a distant memory and plans for the festive season will be in full swing. However, you may like to know how the Remembrance Day ceremony at Hythe in Kent compares to its' equivalent in Greenford.

I remember a couple of years ago, standing outside one of the shops near the war memorial in Greenford. The door was wide open, the radio was on loud and the occupants were talking even louder. The service was already well underway. Not very respectful, thought I, as did an elderly gentleman who went into the shop and in no uncertain terms told them what he thought. All went quiet, or should I say quieter, because glancing around at the large crowd gathered on the pavement there were groups of people chatting away as if there was no ceremony underway whatsoever. More disrespect, thought I. Why were these people there at all if they were not going to respect the solemnity of the occasion? It was as if it was just another social gathering, a 'picking the kids up from school and having a bit of a chat at the school gates' occasion.

By contrast, Hythe is a town steeped in military history which continues to this day, with many soldiers using the firing ranges before being deployed abroad, and has a large elderly population. It was very evident that everyone at the Hythe ceremony was there because they wanted to be there, and appreciated why they wanted to be there. There are several observations which can be made. The silence was immaculately observed, except for some very disrespectful seagulls and a toddler who obviously didn't know what was going on. Some of the flag bearers had been invited over the English Channel from France and Belgium and they and their families had been made very welcome. The most poignant memory I have, is of a serving soldier, obviously emotional with tears in his eyes, laying a wreath at the memorial. What recent horrors had he possibly encountered?

To my amazement, the vast majority of the sizeable crowd were actually singing, and singing loudly. Not the embarrassing mumblings that usually greet the ears in Greenford on this day. Why don't they sing? You can bet your bottom dollar that if they were in a football crowd they would be belting the words out at the top of their voices. At the end of the Hythe service the crowds adjourned to the nearby High Street while the parade readied itself. Standard bearers, serving soldiers, local dignitaries, Royal British Legion members, youth groups and others made ready to march.

This also happens in Greenford, as you all know, but there is one difference. The Greenford parade is just that, a parade. When the parade hit Hythe high street, each and every person in the parade was applauded by each and every member of the crowd in a well deserved display of.....

oh yes....

Respect.

Gary Marsh

