

Ninety years on

John & Fiona Earle

"On this bank and shoal of time"

We recently said farewell to Heidi, a graduate of Hamburg University. She will soon take up a position as a teacher. During the last few years she learnt enough Finnish to go to Finland and study the educational system there.

She came to England and worked on organic farms and improved her English. She got an insight into our educational system by observing classes at Hertford Technical College, Turnford and at Haileybury. While here she sang with the All Saints choir, knitted us each a pair of warm socks and taught us the basics of using a computer, as well as picking apples.

A few hours ago we welcomed a couple of cheerful French girls from Annecy in the French Alps. They will help in the garden and luckily they are both Art students and they have designed and made some decorations for our multi-faith Christmas tree.

Only a few years ago, these three girls' grandfathers or great-grandfathers could have been shooting at each other with machine guns. In Europe at least, things are better.

The Service at Queens' College, Cambridge

On 9th November we attended a Service of Remembrance at Queens' College, Cambridge. This was within two days of the 90th Anniversary of the signing of the Armistice to end the First World War

During the Service, Diana Henderson, one of the lecturers spoke the famous lines from Lawrence Binyon's poem:

*"They shall not grow old as we who
are left grow old
Age shall not wither them nor the
years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in
the morning,
We will remember them."*

She spoke it with great feeling and tragic intensity. She had served in the Army. These are lines not to relish, but at least to ponder.

Following that, the Chaplain read out the Roll of Honour of those who had attended Queens'. At a quick count, five young men under the age of twenty died. About sixty men died between the ages of twenty and thirty. Ten more died between thirty and forty, and four or five in their early forties. Many were junior officers and all were just from this one College.

World wide, about 25 million people died in the Second World War on the battlefield, and another six million in concentration camps. (The figures were derived from an article in The Times.) Some specific figures are, about fifty-five thousand who died in the Bomber Command, and thirty thousand who died in the German submarine fleet.

Although we remember the dead, no one seems to think of the genetic loss in war of the genes that are in the soldiers, pilots, and commanders - brave men. Now, double that for there must be a similar number of women who could not marry and raise a family, for so many potential husbands were dead and the genes in these women cannot be expressed in the next generations.

Speaking afterwards, the President of Queens' said it was right that we should remember the past but also evaluate the things in our lives that really matter. After all, we are here and we are free and it could so easily have been otherwise.

Early in the Second World War, the Luftwaffe bombed the south coast airfields that the RAF was using. They did this so effectively that they damaged the airfields more quickly than they could be repaired. Had they gone on for only a few more days, these airfields might have become unusable and the Luftwaffe could control the air space above the Channel. There were 200 divisions of German soldiers available to cross.

However the RAF bombed Berlin and this drove Hitler wild. Goering had told Hitler that such a thing could never happen and it did. Hitler ordered an attack on London. From a German point of view, this was a disaster. Their fighter cover for the bombers had a very limited range, so as they neared London, the fighter pilots must have been looking anxiously at their fuel gauges and turning for home. They had to. The bomber crews flew on and being shorn of their fighter protection, they were targets for the RAF fighters.

The Germans never got another chance of controlling the Channel.

Discussion time.

After the Service the undergraduate choir joined the visitors for drinks and then lunch. What fine people we met. A music student was being coached in piano playing, singing and conducting. A Natural Sciences student hopes she can become a vet. Tom, studying the History of Art hoped to get a job in an auction house in London, Paris or New York. He had a great feeling for painting, but to John's surprise, he had little knowledge of mediaeval stained glass in churches and cathedrals. We met two English students and a girl reading theology.

They felt the job market was crowded and that a degree was important, if not essential. They knew the debt incurred would be between £10,000 and £20,000 for a course lasting three years.

We talked about their interviews. Tom said he had never had to think so fast in his life. The theologian was asked to comment on passages from the Bible and was asked about current affairs.

One of the English students said she was asked to comment on some poems. She said her course ran from early English writers to the present. Early on, she had to read a lot and write a lot of essays. It helped that she could touch-type.

The common factor to all these interviews was that if a candidate is widely read, then

he/she will develop a store of knowledge that can be drawn on at interview.

John met a man whose mother had been at Cambridge. She had read English, and then got a job at the B.B.C.

When we spoke about the written word, his eyes lit up. He said *"There's nothing like the written word for changing things. Does your granddaughter want to change things for the better?"*

"Well, she's a bit of a rebel"

"There you are then. The world would be a dull place without rebels."

Cartoon Corner

