

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am most grateful to you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. You have asked me to cover two very different subjects. One is the work of the all-party war heritage group 2018 – 2019, and the other is “Brexit – what next?”.

As far as the second of these is concerned, I am reminded of the story of the fortune-teller who operated out of a booth at one of our country fairs in Worcestershire. Arriving customers keen to find out what was in store for them in the future were baffled to find on arrival one day a note on the door saying “All sessions cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.”

You might perhaps get a better answer to the question “Brexit – what next?” from Mystic Meg, rather than from me, but here goes. My feeling is that in the absence of any government plan to replace the one that was defeated in the Commons on Tuesday parliament may decide to postpone the 29 March leaving date. A second referendum on whether we remain as members of the EU has to be a possibility now, and we’ll know more about that next week.

But there’s also a chance that we’ll leave as planned in March – or possibly later in the year – without any agreement. You will be aware that there is a general consensus – though it’s not one that’s shared by the more extreme Brexiteers – that a no deal exit would be the worst outcome. That’s the view the government takes, it represents the view of the majority in the House of Commons, and it was also reflected in the vote we had in the Lords on Monday this week when leaving without an agreement with the EU was rejected by 321 votes to 152.

Clearly there would be loads of consequences for the British economy, particularly in financial services and manufacturing, which I don't intend to go into this afternoon, but I thought you might find it helpful if I shared with you ABTA's advice on European holidays post Brexit.

To answer the question "will flights still operate?", they say that UK citizens can be reassured that regardless of the Brexit outcome planes will still fly between the UK and the EU: if a deal is agreed then we will be in a transition period, meaning everything will stay the same until the end of December 2020 and flights will continue as normal. Even if we are in a no-deal scenario, the European Commission has said that UK airlines will still be able to operate flights between the UK and the EU. The UK government has offered similar assurances for EU airlines.

Will we need visas to travel to the EU after Brexit?

British nationals shouldn't need a visa to travel to the EU after Brexit. The European Commission announced in November 2018 that, even in a no-deal scenario, UK travellers can still visit the EU without a visa, providing the same is offered to European citizens visiting the UK. The European Commission has said that from 2021, UK citizens will need to pay a fee (of around 7 Euros) for this visa exemption. This is part of a new electronic travel authorisation system applying to all third country visitors to the EU, similar to the US ESTA regime.

What about passports?

The advice here is to check the date your passport expires. When travelling to the EU after 29 March 2019, the UK government recommends that you have six months left on your passport on the date

of your arrival to an EU country.

Turning now to the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), this allows any EU citizen to access state medical care when they are travelling in another EU country. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, UK registered EHICs will no longer be valid.

It has always been advisable for holidaymakers and business travellers to make sure they have appropriate travel insurance, whether they have an EHIC card or not, as there are limitations to EHIC.

When travelling in the EU and beyond, it is important you take out travel insurance and check that it covers your current circumstances, including any medical conditions. If you have an annual policy, make sure you check the Terms and Conditions and contact your insurance provider if you're not sure.

Next driving licences: as long as you have a full UK driving licence, you don't currently need an additional licence to drive in the EU. This is likely to change in a no-deal scenario. UK travellers looking to drive in the EU on or after 29 March 2019 may need to apply for the relevant International Driving Permit.

These cost £5.50 and are available directly from the AA, the RAC or the Post Office. The Government is working to extend the network of Post Offices where you can apply for an International Driving Permit

and has plans to roll these out in more branches across the UK from 1 February 2019.

Check carefully which permit is required for each country you intend to drive within, as you may need more than one permit to comply with the law.

If the UK leaves without a deal, UK citizens driving their vehicle within the EU would be required to obtain and carry a physical Green Card in order for your UK car insurance to be applicable in the EU. These cards would be issued by insurers and you may be charged a fee to cover administration costs.

Probably of rather less relevance for battlefield guides is the advice on taking pets abroad.

In the event of a no-deal, pets would continue to be able to travel from the UK to the EU, but the requirements for documents and health checks would change. If you wish to take your pet to the EU on or after 29 March 2019 pet owners would need to discuss preparations for their pet's travel with an official veterinarian at least four months in advance of the date they wish to travel. Pet owners should keep an eye out for any further instructions issued by the UK Government.

And lastly, data roaming.

Under EU rules, the cost of making calls, sending messages or

using the internet on your phone in the EU is the same in the UK. If we leave without a deal these rules will no longer apply – though some UK companies have said they may continue to offer this benefit to their customers. Before we travel, we are advised to check with our mobile phone provider about the costs of using your phone in the EU.

I think that's about as much as I want to say about this, for the moment at least. I suspect that many of you are heartily sick of this already, and may be members of the ungrammatically-named "Bored of Brexit" group. But I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have about where we are. I suggest that the Guild takes good legal advice about travelling to continental Europe if we do leave the EU on 29 March.

I'm now going to say a few words about something much less controversial and divisive – the work of all-party war heritage group. Both my co-chair Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP and I have been members of the government's World War One Centenary Advisory Group, and the emphasis in the past year has been very much on activities leading up to the anniversary of the November 2018 Armistice.

Before I talk about those I want to talk about a couple of the things we've been doing in Parliament. The all-party group met in July and received a fascinating account of the project at Wyttschaete, Belgium. This is an archaeological investigation of the German fortified position that was faced by both the 16th (Irish) and 36th (Ulster) divisions in June 1917.

The dig is a site that will be built on, and as such, represents rescue archaeology. It is supported by the landowners, local government and

the appropriate Flanders Heritage organisations, including the In Flanders Fields Museum and Ghent University. The dig commenced in the early summer and revealed some staggering details and stark incidences of frontline life. By July, 78 bodies of the German defenders of Wytschaete had been found, some of them battle casualties from early war, some from the later war period. Each one of these is being studied in detail by experts from Cranfield University, and the work on the archaeology is being carried out by professionals and a volunteer labour force. Each soldier is being studied in detail to ensure that the details of his death and burial are recorded. The appropriate authorities, including the CWGC and the German Volksbund, are fully informed. It was expected that British soldiers, and more specifically soldiers from the island of Ireland, would be found.

Earlier in the year the APPG received a wonderful presentation from Lady Lucy French, who founded a charity called "Never Such Innocence" in March 2014 to engage children and young people across the world with the centenary of the First World War through poetry, art and song. Her great grandfather was Field Marshall Sir John French who led the BEF at the start of the Great War.

I'd be interested to hear what your impressions have been of the centenary commemorations, through from 2014 to the astonishing Armistice Day service in Westminster Abbey, attended by Her Majesty The Queen and numerous members of the Royal Family. It was a real privilege to be there.

Earlier that week we had a debate in the Lords on the motion "That this House takes note of the centenary of the Armistice at the end of the First World War."

I started my speech by saying how proud I was to have served the government's world war one advisory board, and how impressed I had been by the diversity and dignity of the events that have been taking place in all parts of the United Kingdom, in Ireland, and in France and Belgium too.

I paid a particular tribute to Dr Andrew Murrison MP, the Prime Minister's special representative for the commemoration. It is greatly to his credit that the tone and content of the commemoration programme were correctly nuanced – it would have been so easy to get this wrong, but I don't think we did. The theme of commemoration not celebration was right, as was the determination to combine traditional acts of remembrance with new initiatives to engage as much of the population as possible, especially young people.

In such a fractured and divided world, it's great how the commemoration programme has succeeded in bringing us together – members of all races and ethnic groups, young and old particularly.

I reminded the House that my own involvement in the commemoration came about almost by accident. Towards the end of 2001 I received a letter from a Belgian senator, who warned me the Flanders government planned to extend the A19 motorway across Pilkem Ridge, the scene of some of the fiercest fighting in the Ypres Salient, and to cut the battlefield in two.

During that Christmas recess I met the senator and visited Pilkem Ridge. I found it remained largely untouched by development. Pre-1915 photographs show the same farm buildings, and the same field lay-out. The landscape has acquired more than a dozen Commonwealth War

Graves cemeteries, places of peace and tranquillity, visited by more than 150,000 people from the United Kingdom every year.

It was where John McCrae, sitting in the back of a field ambulance close to what became the Essex Farm cemetery, wrote “In Flanders Fields”. Below the fields of Pilkem Ridge, outside the cemeteries, lie the remains of countless soldiers – perhaps as many as 200,000. The undeveloped farming area provides a peaceful last resting place for them, though fresh remains are found every time the fields are ploughed.

When I returned to the UK I tabled an oral question in this House which led to many members saying to me that they wanted to support the campaign to stop the motorway and preserve the Pilkem Ridge battlefield. We established the all-party parliamentary war heritage group, with the remit of promoting and supporting the protection, conservation and interpretation of war graves, war memorials and battlefield sites. Two distinguished academics – Peter Barton and Professor Peter Doyle – volunteered to become involved, having heard about my visit to Ypres, and Professor Doyle is still the group’s secretary.

We engaged with the Flanders government, and to their great credit they abandoned the plans for the motorway extension. Each year they organise really impressive commemoration events around 11 November. Last year for example they had as their 15th “Flanders Remembers” event a concert in St Paul’s Cathedral on 8 November.

We in the all-party group claim quite a bit of the credit for getting the government interested in the centenary, back in 2011.

It was then that I was instructed by the group to write to the Prime Minister to express our concern that there seemed to be some lack of preparedness in the UK for the centenary, compared with what was being planned in other Commonwealth countries and in France and Flanders. That letter seemed to have some effect because, very soon after, I got a reply from Mr Cameron and Dr Murrison was appointed, and the World War I centenary advisory board was established.

In my contribution to the 5 November debate I made the point that there had been so much going on that it was impossible in a single speech to cover more than a few examples. I spoke about the Worcestershire World War 100 programme in my own area, saying that the 2011 to 2019 programme included council and independent museums, archives, the University, the Cathedral, regimental associations, army museums trusts, local libraries, charities, Western Front Association, Royal British Legion, and armed services benevolent funds. The project cost was £674,000, towards which attracted a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of £353,000.

Examples of what had been done included a People's Collection – material loaned or deposited and collected by local people in towns all over the county.

The World War One Bell Tent had over 40 outings at shows, weekend events, schools, libraries and community groups, urban and rural, schools in more deprived area and with local ethnic communities with re-enactors and other activities including poetry, and poppy making.

There were displays marking specific centenary events involving Worcestershire regiments, such as the battles of Gheluvelt, Gallipoli, Qatia, Passchendaele, and the Spring Offensive plus longer term exhibitions on 'Back in Blighty', and the paintings of Benjamin Williams Leader.

They organised heritage trails and exhibitions on Worcester's own Vesta Tilley and Studdert Kennedy – Woodbine Willie – as well as a war memorials bike ride.

The Fields of Battle: Lands of Peace outdoor photographic exhibition by Mike Shiel was seen by 400,000 people. The South-Eastern and Chatham railway carriage which brought back the bodies of Edith Cavell and the Unknown Warrior came to the Severn Valley Railway for six weeks last summer.

Worcester is playing its part in the Victoria Cross paving stone programme and organised a military parade of the Mercian Regiment in honour of Fred Dancox VC.

I know the story is the same the length and breadth of the land. There has scarcely been a town or village which has not held its own commemoration.

Thanks to the excellent briefing I received from Mike Peters I was also able in the debate to pay a special tribute to the International Guild of Battlefield Guides. I referred to the 1,800 schools which took part in the battlefield tours programme, and the 6,500 teachers and students who went on a battlefield tour, many guided by Guild members.

I said that Guild guides played a key role in special school tours which commemorated the battles of Neuve Chapelle, Loos, the Somme, Arras

and Vimy Ridge, Third Ypres, the Spring Offensive, and the International Student Programme which was part of the Amiens100 commemorations.

What is particularly interesting – and I finish on this positive note – is that the evidence across the battlefield guiding industry is that bookings for 2019 are higher this year than were evident 12 months ago. This flies in the face of the accepted wisdom that the end of the centenary would mean a huge fall in battlefield tourism, and perhaps in remembrance too.

That's not so and numbers are higher due to a wider percentage of the UK population being aware of the Western Front Battlefields, as a result of the centenary and the really successful way it has been commemorated.

I concluded by saying you all do a fantastic job in bringing the former battlefields to life for teachers and students, and everyone else who goes on a GBG tour. I am delighted to repeat that compliment again this afternoon. You are all playing your part in ensuring that the Centenary has a really positive legacy.