



## They shall grow not old...

Two days ago, a man went mad in California and killed twelve people on a killing spree. It's awful, and a terrible combination of liberal gun laws and people on the edge of sanity. Insanity is not an excuse for the First World War. Intelligent, civilised people in formal government capacities decided on this killing spree.

I once went on a guided tour of the First World War graves. My guide was a man from the Toc H foundation, which exists to perpetuate the Reverend 'Tubby' Clayton's mission for reconciliation. He was a war chaplain so appalled by all he had seen in his ministry in the First World War that he dedicated himself to ensuring it didn't happen again.

My guide had been going to the trenches since the Sixties. By the late Eighties, he said, interest was low and declining still further. At the Menin Gate, where an act of remembrance is held every evening, during winter there would typically be just four or five people present. The sense was that the act of remembering there was in a natural but terminal decline, connected with the fact that the generation of those who had fought in the War was dying off.

So far, so logical.

Since then, the reverse has happened. More and more people want to go to the graves. More and more people want to take part in an act of remembrance. These days, even during the winter months, there will be several hundred at the Menin Gate. In

the summer, it swells to thousands.

There are other factors at work. There is a general rise in income, and the growth of the 'short break' which makes such a trip viable. But that does not explain everything.

For me, Remembrance Sunday's importance lies somewhere in the way human beings showed just how low we could go. Ordinary people, none of whom were in themselves monsters, from countries that were essentially civilised, organised themselves in such a way as to butcher literally millions of their fellow human beings. And at the end of it, we still are not quite sure what was achieved.

Today we rail at Assad for using chemical weapons, but his use has been as nothing compared with the regular gas attacks that were normalised on the Western front. And it went on and on and on and on.

Each year, we remember the victims and we pledge to change the world where war is seen no more. Each year, even as we do this, we see wars around the world, we see (for example) the children starving in Yemen as a result of the war there.

How can we be so brutish? So inhumane? And yet we can. I wonder if there is a popular desire that appreciates this terrible possibility, that means Remembrance Day has more popular support than ever. And so, once more, we will remember them.