**Address To The Congregation**

We are here today in friendship to pay witness to the presentation and dedication of the Central Brittany Branch Standard.

The Royal British Legion was created in 1923 by the soldiers who had fought in the ‘war to end wars’ and were unanimous in their decision to have Field Marshal the Earl Haig, their wartime commander, as its head. The Legion rapidly grew in status and membership as the First World War veterans turned to it for comfort and support. Earl Haig was keen that the Legion should have some form of martial rallying point – a point well supported by the hundreds of thousands of former servicemen. And so the concept of having a Legion Standard grew with each branch having its own unique variation; but all to a common and unifying ‘military’ design; from the outset, these Standards were carried on parades involving the British Legion.

In this address, I shall be referring to Regiments. But to all those who were in Her Majesty’s Armed Forces in the Royal Navy, Battalions of the army, or Squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and we have representatives of all those here with us today, I ask for your indulgence in using army language. What I have to say about Regimental Colours is equally true of Guidons, Banners and Ensigns.

Well, at last, the day has come and here we are; gathered for this very special occasion – and it is a very special occasion, an achievement. We have grown up; we have come of age. A few here today will remember the small number, I think eight of us, that met for the first time in June 2006. With some perseverance and hard work that eight has become eighty.

But why make all this fuss about a piece of coloured cloth stuck on a pole?

Well, there was this Australian blond at home in the kitchen and she called out to her husband, “Bruce, I’m trying to do this large jigsaw and I’m having a difficulty”. “Yeah, OK Sheila” shouts back Bruce, who wonders into the kitchen to see his wife avidly looking at a familiar looking box and the breakfast table littered with coloured bits.

"What seems to be the problem?” he asks. “Well,” she begins. “I’ve got this picture of a lovely brightly coloured cheerful cockerel on the box, and I’ve put all the pieces out on the table, but I don’t seem to be able to get anything to fit together”.

Bruce looks at the table, then at the box in Sheila’s hand before placing his arms, in a supportive manner, around her shoulders. “Sheila”, he begins. “I don’t think either of us will be able to complete that jigsaw - so let’s put all the pieces back in the box and then see what’s on the tele.” He then turns and begins to scoop up hundreds of corn flakes from off the table and back into their box.

There can be no doubt that those who eat cereal for their breakfast will have any difficulty in recognising the Kellogg’s Cockerel logo for their Corn Flakes. But it is just such recognition that is one of the justifications for having a Standard, which is a glorious title for a flag, Quite simply, those who have a recognisable logo or Standard, will stand out and apart from those that don’t. We don’t need to see the name Mercedes to identify their encircled logo. If we see the figures 57 written down, we’ll quickly think Heinz. Think of Heinz and we think of Beanz! Such is the power of advertising.

And so we have an example of the justification for having a smart logo, badge or, in our case, a Standard; it is an easily recognised symbol that helps identify the product – or identify the group around it.

During Her Majesty the Queen’s Golden jubilee Celebrations, there was a parade through London past Horse Guards and down the Mall to Buckingham Palace involving every Association of former Servicemen and Women. Chosen to lead all the Associations were the massed Standards of The Royal British Legion and a grand sight it was. To participate in the Parade, marching past streets lined with tens of thousands of cheering members of the public was an experience never to be forgotten.

And the thousands of former members of Her Majesty’s Armed Forces, of whatever rank or arms or service, felt a tremendous pride in Marching behind their Standards. The Public recognised the Standards as representing former servicemen and women and their constant applause showed their appreciation for the work done in the past and being done by those who currently serve.

Although The Royal British Legion is relatively new, man, particularly military man, has throughout history looked for symbols of identification and unification, or in modern parlance, bonding. Jesus Christ would certainly have been aware of the Standards carried by the Roman Legions occupying Palestine throughout his lifetime. But today, in this Chapel, we see the extension of such identification through the Cross of Christ that has come to symbolise all that is Christian.

Of course, that symbolism differed according to how it was seen: to the Roman Legionary his Eagle Standard was the focus of his life whilst to those occupied by the Romans it would have been a symbol of hate. Similarly, during the Crusades of the twelfth century the Cross of the Christian armies would have been to the Muslim as the proverbial red flag is to a bull.

We have all seen the dramatic paintings of European armies struggling to defeat the armies of their enemies during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and, whoever the artist and whatever nation was being represented, the Regimental and National Standards were all held heroically and the focus of attention by friend and foe alike. For the soldiers, their ‘Colours’ were a rallying point in the fog of war and represented all that was good about their Regiment; it was a focal point for their pride and honour.

I am sure that many of us here have seen the annual ceremony from Horse Guards of Trooping the Colour. Well that ceremony used to be regularly performed by all British Army Regiments who would Troop their Regimental Colour before all ranks so that everyone could identify it and feel part of a special team because each Regiment has its own distinctive design; although following an established pattern, each Colour is unique.

So, we have a flag that can easily be used to identify those around it. But why is it held in such veneration? The answer perhaps lies in what is actually on the flag – and certainly differentiates one Regiment from another. Each Regimental Colour carries the names of its Battle Honours carefully woven into the material. The inscriptions carry the names and date of each battle in which that Regiment has fought.

In other words, the Colour actually records the campaign history of each Regiment. This is why the Colours are accorded salutes and are under armed guard when away from their usual place of lodging. When Trooping the Colour, every member of the Regiment therefore has the opportunity to remind himself of his Regiment’s history and to remember those that have been wounded or killed whilst serving in the same regiment in earlier times; a timely reminder that “we will remember them”!

The Royal British Legion primarily serves to help those that have been injured whilst serving as a Member of the Armed Forces. Through its annual Poppy Appeal, it raises millions of pounds each year to provide succour and support to ex-servicemen, or their dependent families, who have fallen on difficult times. The Legion helps to foster a unifying bond for all ex-servicemen of whatever service and the Legion’s Branches help to spread the word and work of The Royal British Legion throughout the cities, towns and regions in which they are to be found.

A Branch Standard helps to provide a focus on the Royal British Legion within its local, or regional, community. Because a Branch Standard carries the name of its town, or locality, a successful Branch will want to see its Standard being paraded and representing them, whilst the community can rightly admire the Standard and its Bearer and say, “they are from my town – aren’t they good!”.

So, the Standard of The Royal British Legion has inherited a rich tradition from the different formations that make up today’s Armed Forces. The Standard is deliberately military in appearance and it represents a link with the Members’ military past; allowing each Legion Member the opportunity to remember his own service and the sacrifices made by fallen comrades.

I say again: at last we are here to pay witness to the presentation and dedication of the Central Brittany Branch Standard. It is right that it should be treated with dignity and it is proper that we should pay our respects to the Standard; may those who carry it, and those who look upon it, do so with pride and the knowledge that it represents a force for good.