

Darren Millar MS - Visit to 's-Hertogenbosch

25th – 27th October 2024

Purpose of Visit

To attend a series of events as a representative of the Senedd at the invitation of the Lord Mayor of 's-Hertogenbosch to mark the 80th Anniversary of the liberation of the city by the 53rd Welsh Infantry Division.

Meeting with UK Ambassador to the Netherlands

On arrival on Friday, 25th October, I held a meeting Ambassador Joanna Roper CMG, the Undersecretary of State for Wales, Nia Griffith MP, and Deputy First Minister, Huw Irranca-Davies MS. During the meeting we received a briefing on UK-Netherlands relations and Welsh links.

Welsh Cultural Event

Later in the evening I attended a concert with civic dignitaries and military representatives. The concert featured Welsh singers and musicians including students from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, the Noteworthy Choir, and Welsh harpist Dylan Cernyw (from my Clwyd West constituency).

Liberation Day Service and Parade

On Saturday, 26th October, the programme included a reception in the Town Hall followed by a Service of Remembrance in St John's Cathedral for the 146 Welsh troops who lost their lives the Battle for 's-Hertogenbosch.

Following the service, a WWII military parade was held in the town square which featured representatives from 160th (Welsh) Brigade and representatives from local organisations. Brigadier Nick Thomas, of 160th Brigade took the salute.

Memorial Service

We then moved on to the 53rd Welsh Division Memorial in the city where Alun Davies MS and I laid a wreath on behalf of Members of the Senedd at a moving memorial service. The service included local children and a flypast by the Dutch Air Force.

Presentation to the Lord Mayor

Later in the evening a private dinner was held with the Lord Mayor, Jak Mikkers, and civic and military representatives. During the dinner I was invited to speak to guests about the friendship between Wales and the city of 's-Hertogenbosch, and presented the Mayor with Welsh gifts, including a Welsh lovespoon.

Discussion over dinner also afforded the opportunity to share more about the work of the Senedd in supporting veterans and commemorative activity in Wales. I also learned more about relationships between national, regional and local government in the Netherlands, and how commemorative activity is managed and delivered.

Liberation Play

Following the dinner, we attended a play at Theater Aan de Parade which featured local actors. The drama moved back and forth through time from the modern day to wartime 's-Hertogenbosch to tell the story of the liberation of the city.

Conclusion

The visit was enlightening and worthwhile.

It enabled the Senedd to be represented during a key 80th anniversary event in the life of 's-Hertogenbosch, which is regarded as the 'most Welsh city in the Netherlands', and to honour those Welsh troops who lost their lives and sacrificed so much for its liberation.

It also afforded the opportunity to highlight the work of the Welsh Parliament in supporting veterans and commemorative activity at home in Wales.

Darren Millar MS
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