

A Journey of Remembrance: Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of s'Hertogenbosch

Reflections from a visit to honour the 53rd Welsh Division October 2024

I was invited to attend the 80th anniversary of the liberation of s'Hertogenbosch, alongside Darren Millar MS, to represent the Senedd as co-chairs of the cross-party group on the armed forces. Together we joined Huw Irranca-Davies representing the Welsh Govt, Dame Nia Griffith representing the UK Govt and the UK Ambassador to The Netherlands alongside veterans, representatives of the 160th Brigade, the Dutch Army and thousands of citizens of the city to remember the events of 80 years ago.

A full weekend of activities were hosted by the Dutch Government and the City Council which involved choirs and schoolchildren from Wales and s'Hertogenbosch alongside the military and political leaders.

The city of S'Hertogenbosch has never forgotten the sacrifice of the Welsh Division as they fought their way into the city. Today the city remembers the links with Wales through its architecture, memorials and regular events to remember the liberation.

The weekend's commemorative events began with a concert featuring Welsh and Dutch performers on the Friday evening at the theatre in the city's main square.

On the Saturday morning the main memorial events began with an event in the same theatre, listening to speeches delivered by the mayor, visiting Welsh dignitaries, and descendants of those who had fought, I was reminded of the extraordinary bravery displayed here in October 1944. The stories recounted—of soldiers far from home, advancing street by street against fierce opposition, and of local families enduring the terror and deprivation of occupation — were all brought vividly to life.



The main remembrance service then followed at the city's cathedral which featured contributions from both Wales and The Netherlands. Candles were lit by the children of s'Hertogenbosch and Wales to remember each one of the soldiers who died liberating the city. The emotional resonance of remembrance, from the silence to the hymns renewed the collective bonds between generations and nations.

This was followed by a military parade again involving the 160th Brigade marching alongside the Dutch army and representatives of the local authorities and communities of the region.



The parade was followed by an Act of Remembrance at the memorial to the 53rd Division in the City. Here myself and Darren Millar laid a wreath on behalf of the Senedd. The memorial has become a focal point for collective memory. I watched as both Dutch and Welsh representatives laid flowers together, their gestures a silent testimony to the enduring bonds forged in conflict. The moment was deeply moving: a reminder that the cost of freedom is measured not only in military victory, but in the resilience and hope of those who survived.

In conclusion, the events of the weekend, from the Welsh flags flying from bars, restaurants as well as the city hall and civic buildings to the educational exhibits which told the story of the liberation and offered further insight painting a portrait of s'Hertogenbosch during, and after the war. I was struck by the city's commitment to preserving its history, ensuring that future generations understand the sacrifices made for the freedom they now enjoy.

My visit to s'Hertogenbosch was more than a journey into the past; it was a powerful reminder of the enduring importance of remembrance. The city's tribute to its liberators honours not just the sacrifices of the 53rd Welsh Division, but also the resilience of its own people, and the enduring hope for peace. As I left, the memory of those solemn ceremonies and the warmth of a grateful city lingered on—proof that the legacy of liberation endures, shaping future generations.