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Further Thoughts on Remembrance

November is the month in which Christians traditionally remember the dead. Some years ago, when living in Belgium, I discovered that in late October the florists and supermarkets were full of beautiful pots of chrysanthemums. It was explained to me that these were ready for 'La Toussaint' or All Saints Day which is a public holiday in France and Belgium. It struck me as comforting that such warm autumn colours were to be placed on the graves of lovingly remembered family members.



The tradition of placing chrysanthemums on graves dates from 1919 when the French President, Raymond Poincaré, declared that all war memorials should be decorated with flowers and, as chrysanthemums were still in bloom in November, war widows laid blooms at their husbands' memorials. Surviving winter frosts and needing little care chrysanthemums are also considered a symbol of immortality.

Death is the ultimate unknown and the many euphemisms employed to describe it underline the fear many of us experience. We will not all believe in a life after death, but many non-believers have told me that it is this lack of belief which inspires them to do what good they can in this life and to die knowing that they have benefited the world.

On 11th November each year we particularly remember those who have died in war, fighting for what they believed to be the greater good. During this month we can also remember our own deceased family members, good friends and the many who during their lives have contributed so much, so selflessly to the community here in Petersfield. The collective custom in France of placing pots of chrysanthemums on the graves of family members illustrates how we live on in the hearts and minds of those still here.