

British Ambassador attends unveiling of memorial for Omi Prisoners of War in Niigata prefecture.



Unveiling the memorial for Omi Prisoners of War

On Friday 5 September, Ambassador Tim Hitchens and representatives from the British Embassy Tokyo travelled to Omi in Itoigawa City, Niigata Prefecture to attend the unveiling of a special memorial constructed by Japanese chemical manufacturing company Denka on their factory land, once the site of a World War II prison camp.

Also in attendance were representatives from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DENKA, alongside families and representatives of the former Omi prisoners. Speaking at the unveiling, Ambassador Hitchens said:

Today we are celebrating the spirit of reconciliation between two sides in a conflict that finished almost 70 years ago. We meet to remember those, on both sides, who lost their lives in that conflict; to remember the fortitude and endurance of the Omi Prisoners of War; as well as to celebrate the generosity of spirit that has made today's act of

reconciliation so moving and meaningful.

We should respect the open handedness of the former Prisoners of War, and their families, in reaching out to heal old wounds and set aside the bitterness of the past. And we should salute the generosity of Denka in not only financing this memorial, in providing the land on which it is built, but also for undertaking to make it accessible to those who wish to visit to remember the relatives and comrades. It is a fine thing, and a most fitting tribute to all the nations represented here today.

We should also remember the animosities of that war did represent the usual relationship between our various nations. Far from it – it was an aberration which we must never repeat. Part of the value of today's act of remembrance and reconciliation is to remind us that we are stronger and better when we work together.

In the spirit of learning from history for a more stable future, the ceremony was held in the year that marks the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and ahead of next year's 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, with a series of commemorations planned in the United Kingdom and around the world.