



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Branch secretary Arthur Pickup 01963-32952

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Next branch meeting 20th January 2014 at 7 p.m.

Bert Bentley

Bert Bentley passed away suddenly on 21st December, we all extend our sincerest condolences to Joyce and his family. Bert attended most of the monthly meetings and could always be relied upon to support parades and Poppy Appeal. He will be sadly missed.

At the age of 16 Bert volunteered for the Home Guard, he had learnt morse as a boy for a hobby and quickly found himself in demand as a signaller. When he received his call up papers in 1943 Bert was asked what skills he possessed and he admitted he could read the morse code. This found him being sent to the Royal Navy and he reported to HMS Royal Arthur, the basic training camp in Skegness. In the autumn of 1943 he joined his first ship the Destroyer HMS Beagle at Sheerness. HMS Beagle took part in the Normandy Landings, but at that time Bert had been detached for further training and was not aboard. After a support role at the Normandy beaches HMS Beagle returned to the Clyde and in July 1944 was assigned to an escort group with convoys to Russia and through the harsh northern winter of 1944 Bert completed several tours of duty back and forth to Russia. In February 1945 HMS Beagle returned for refit and was then deployed on the Western Approaches. In March upon return to Plymouth Command and during this period because the threat of air attack from French airfields had receded convoys were then travelling through the English Channel. During April HMS Bulldog participated in the Blockade of Biscay and then on 7th May came the German surrender. HMS Beagle along with HMS Bulldog had the distinction of liberating the Channel Islands, the only part of Britain to have been occupied by Nazi Germany during the war. At first the very strong German garrison refused to surrender until they had direct



orders from Berlin and a stand off occurred until on 9th May 1945. Guernsey was liberated first but the main German garrison was on Jersey. Then on the morning of 9th May HMS Beagle arrived off St. Aubin's Bay with Brig. General A.E. Snow onboard accompanied by several large landing craft full of troops. The entire German garrison then surrendered and the Union Flag was unfurled again over the islands. The British garrison was in place and the Germans left in the same landing craft as prisoners of war. HMS Beagle then returned to Dartmouth where the ship paid off. After he was posted to the cruiser HMS Devonshire which was preparing to sail to the Far East just as Japan surrendered in the August of 1945. Bert spent six weeks in Australia on HMS Devonshire before being transferred to the Escort Carrier HMS Chaser which was en-route to Hong Kong. Changing ships again in Hong Kong this time to H.M. Tug Rockwing, clearing wrecks the Japanese had sunk in Kowloon Harbour. At the end of 1945 it was time to head for home and demob. Bert returned to Lancashire where he got a job in the dying and bleaching industry marrying his wife Joyce in 1947. Family circumstances brought them to Horsington and later Holton.

Bert's funeral is at Holton Church on 6th January at 12 o'clock. Full Legion ceremonial has been requested, please make every effort to attend.

Poppy Appeal 2013/14

As of the end of December our Poppy Appeal now stands at £13827 and in addition Castle Cary is at £3803. Our total is nearly £2500 better than at the end of December last year. Several factors have contributed to this excellent amount. This coming year we will continue to fundraise for Poppy Appeal and we do expect that our second Armed Forces Day event (see back page) will add substantially to our total. We also have several Poppy Appeal Year Boxes in circulation, some outstanding monies and of course Gift Aid. We had a good collection at the Wincanton Racecourse this year, coming in at £2186 thanks to a large amount of Air Training Corps Cadets in attendance and several members who turned up to support them. Poppy Appeal Launch was very successful, with the Silver Band concert, our Coffee morning and two raffles the launch day raising just under £700 in total for the day.

Arthur and Ron at the Studio along with Dawn, Sam, Georgina and the ladies



We also had some very kind donations too, Nell Shepherd's Tuesday Club held a Bingo and raised £50 and Dawn Old held a Coffee Morning at The Wincanton Fitness Studio and raised £121 and Sam Scammell crocheted Poppy brooches and raised a further £310. Over in our sub-branch at Castle Cary things went well too where Liz Stokes and her team of volunteers have already raised £3803 which is over £1000 up on this time last year. Liz has resumed street collections again in Castle Cary and we are most grateful to her for a fantastic effort.



Arthur receiving a cheque for £50 from Nell

Arthur would like to thank everyone who helped and he says that it is our fantastic team spirit and very high branch morale that has

made this possible. Rather than single anyone out, which would not be fair, most people are massively up on their collections compared to last year but he would just like to impart a few key facts. The total collections at Morrison's were £4959, the Co-op £242 and Lidl £289. Indeed an excellent effort all round.

Old Faithful Memorial on Remembrance Day

Directly from observing the national Two Minutes Silence at 11 o'clock on 11th November members went to the Old Faithful Memorial on Bayford Hill to lay wreaths where our Rector Rev. Nigel Feaver led the prayers.



Remembrance

This year we had a very strong emphasis of youth involvement, which we have been actively trying to cultivate. We again had students from King Arthur's School joining us with their banners in the Remembrance Sunday parade along with large groups of Brownies, Rainbows and Scouts. The youngsters again, as has now become a tradition, placed a cross for each of our War Dead around the War Memorial and a large contingent of cadets from 2277 Squadron Air Training Corps took part in the parade.



It was also encouraging to see the large amount of townspeople who observed the Two Minutes Silence at the War Memorial on 11th November. In spite of the drizzle and the day being a Monday. Along with our wreaths again patron of the Unicorn Inn at Bayford placed a wreath and branch officials laid wreaths for the town War Dead along with Cllr. Deryck Lemon our mayor.

Christmas 72 years ago

On Bayford Hill near what is now the Old Faithful memorial is Hill House, which during the Second World War was the home of Herbert and Eva Chancellor. They had two sons both of whom were serving with the Royal Air Force, it was quite a bleak time and Great Britain had been at war for over two years by then, although we were not then alone as Germany had just declared war on the United States of America in support of Japan who had just attacked the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbour. One of the Chancellor sons, Niall, had just been commissioned Pilot Officer and was serving with No. 15 Squadron RAF. In the early days of the war bombing concentrated on Northern Germany and the French coast because of the range of the aircraft, but with the emergence of heavier long range aircraft other targets farther away soon became possible. After the Fall of France in May 1940 French ports were in the hands of the Germans and with them their valuable repair facilities. In an attempt to disrupt British shipping in the North Atlantic the German battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gniesenau* operated out of the French port of Brest. By the winter of 1941 the British were experimenting with a new type of radar called OBOE which gave bearings to enable more accurate bombing. No. 15 Squadron, part of 3 Group RAF, were given the task on 18th December 1941 to attempt a bombing raid using this new type of radar. The chosen target Brest and the battleships in the dock at the time. Niall Chancellor, 24 years old was with his squadron as part of an eight man crew of Stirling bomber W7428 which took off at 9.50 a.m. on 18th December 1941. It was a daylight raid and as the aircraft came in over the sea approaching Brest it was surrounded by German Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters. Other RAF aircraft saw the Stirling dropping towards the sea with port engine on fire, it finally crashed into the sea. Four Stirlings and one Manchester bomber were lost in the operation. The German battleship *Gniesenau* was damaged in the raid although the *Scharnhorst* was unscathed, later being sunk by the Royal Navy on Boxing Day 1943. News of Niall's death got to his parents just before Christmas 1941, he has no known grave and is commemorated on the Royal Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, near Windsor.

Important diary dates for 2014

Saturday & Sunday 14th & 15th June.

South Somerset Armed Forces Gathering and Classic Vehicle Show at Henstridge in the show ground near the Virginia Ash off A30. This will be a big event updates will follow.

Sunday 22nd June. Wincanton Silver Band Concert commemorating the 70th anniversary of the fatal crash of the Flying Fortress "Old Faithful", Memorial Hall.

Wednesday 25th June. 70th anniversary of "Old Faithful", parade and commemorations. Many events will be taking place, full details will follow.

Saturday 28th June. Wincanton's 2nd Armed Forces Day family get together at the Miller's Inn. Will include barbecue, marquees, music, sideshows etc.

First coach trip of 2014

It is hoped that our first coach trip of the new year will be to **Cardiff on 12th April**. We will stop in central Cardiff for the castle and the shops. Some people would like to go back to St. Fagan's Museum and there is a shuttle bus from Cardiff centre. This will be a full day trip departing at 8.30 a.m. and cost £12 (under 16's £6). As we know, Cardiff has lots of things to do and is not weather dependant.

Christmas lunch as popular as ever !

We had our Christmas lunch at the Miller's Inn again this year and it was as popular as ever. So much so that Arthur had to arrange for two sittings due to the number of people wishing to attend. The meals were absolutely faultless and all agreed it was great success.



Mazargues British Cemetery

I mentioned in Sandbag last month how our former chaplain Rev. Stafford Low told me of a British



Cemetery not to far from where he is living now in France. Stafford said that a friend visited the cemetery recently and was sad to find that only six people had visited it in a year and thought it very sad as it was a beautiful place. The cemetery, Mazargues, is in the south eastern part of Marseilles.

Marseilles was the Base of the Indian troops in France during the Great War; and throughout the War the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, British troops and Labour units worked in the port or passed through it.

Four of the town cemeteries were used, in the main, for the burial of officers and men of the Commonwealth forces who died at Marseilles. At St. Pierre, on the East side of the town, the bodies of Hindu soldiers and labourers were cremated in 1914-16. Le Canet Old Cemetery and Le Canet New Cemetery, on the North side, were in 1917-19 the places of burial of Indian soldiers and Indian, Egyptian and Chinese labourers.

Mazargues Cemetery, on the South-East side, was used less in the War; but before the Armistice an Extension was made, to which were removed, a little later, the bodies or ashes from the four Town cemeteries and from Port St. Louis Du Rhone Communal Cemetery.

There are now 1,487, 1914-18 and 267, 1939-45 war casualties commemorated in this site. The cemetery covers an of 9,021 square metres.

Stafford hopes that if anyone is passing through the south of France they may think of breaking their journey at the cemetery and pay their respects. The cemetery is located 200 metres south of the 'Rond-Point de Mazargues' on the main road (the D559) to Toulon via Cassis. The address of the cemetery is No.24 Avenue General de Lattre de Tassigny.

Although possible change of location has been discussed for the monthly branch meetings, there seemed little enthusiasm for change of venue. We will therefore continue to hold monthly meetings in the Sun Lounge of the Memorial Hall. These will be held on the 3rd Monday of the month at 7 p.m. as always.