

# "SANDBAG"

## WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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### NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Branch secretary Steve Lee 01963-34374

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Next meeting is Poppy Appeal Coffee Morning 27th October

#### 2nd Lt. Joseph Sullivan Navigator - Flying Fort4ress "Old Faithful"

I had a very pleasant surprise during the last few weeks when through "Wincanton Window" I had a contact from a relative of Joseph Sullivan who was navigator on board "Old Faithful" on the day of the tragic crash of the aircraft. She had read our last Sandbag magazine online on the Window and as well as asking whether we were doing anything to commemorate the 75th anniversary of



the crash she was seeking any information we had about him. I was able to send her a copy of the book I compiled in 2004 and tell her we are definitely commemorating the anniversary next June. I also have been in touch with the relatives of the pilot, Peter Mikonis, who

also have been asking so as I said last month we do not have the final plans yet but it now looks like we will have relatives of two of the crew's relatives from the USA who will attend. We hope to make the event something special.

#### Jim Currie

Just as we are going into print I have heard of the sad loss of Jim Currie. Jim passed away after a long illness on 6th September.

We remember Jim with great affection, he was a staunch member who regularly attended our events until recently. Jim's career in the Army was long and distinguished and I hope to cover it in more detail in the next Sandbag.

Jim's funeral is at Yeovil Crematorium on 28th September at 11.20 a.m. If you have a problem getting there please let Steve or I know and we will try to get transport.



### Remembrance 2018

I just want to remind everyone of an important change to our Remembrance Sunday Parade and Church Service on Sunday 11th November. As it is the 100th anniversary of the Armistice which ended the Great War we have decided to come in line with the Country and hold our commemorations at the traditional time in the morning of Remembrance Sunday. The parade will assemble at the Memorial at 9.45 a.m. with a march off at 10 a.m. We are very pleased that Wincanton Silver Band will lead us to the Parish Church and take part in the service. We will now be able to conform with the National Two Minutes Silence at 11 a.m. We have had discussions with the band and they confirm they will be able to continue with a morning ceremony in future so in effect every year from now on the Wincanton Royal British Legion ceremony will be in the morning. As it is a very important anniversary this year after the church service we have booked the Memorial Hall and there will be an informal reception there. I will ensure Sandbag is published in good time to give you all further information so please bear in mind everything takes place in the **morning** of Remembrance Sunday !

## Boy sailor of the Royal Navy

*Having now written two small books about our War Dead in Wincanton I have come across many poignant stories. Some are accounts of acts of extreme bravery and patriotism, some are also very sad. I was fortunate to have known people who can remember some of those from Wincanton who died in the Second World War and I was able to piece together a sad story of a boy who was raised in the Rodber House Orphanage in Wincanton. Strangely there were several unanswered questions which to this day I cannot answer.*

David Morse was born on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1922 in Monmouth the son of James and Catherine Morse. David found his way into Rodber House Orphanage, Wincanton, it is not known why he was there as his parents were shown as living in Boscombe near Bournemouth at the time. The orphanage building still stands in Shadwell Lane and is currently sheltered housing. David went to Wincanton Council School (now the Primary School) in South Street. The only surviving known photo of David to be found was taken in 1935 in his class photo taken at the school to commemorate King George V Jubilee. He had a part time job as an errand boy.

Two years after the photo was taken David joined the boys service of the Royal Navy, joining HMS Ganges the training establishment for boys near Ipswich on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1937 as Boy 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. At the time entry age for boys was 15 years old. It was common practice then to transfer after a year to ships of the Royal Navy for sea training. His Navy record shows him as only 5 foot 1 inch tall upon joining the Navy. After a year on becoming Boy 1<sup>st</sup> Class he was posted to the light cruiser HMS Dunedin. Then in June 1939 David was transferred to HMS Royal Oak and was serving on her at the outbreak of war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939.

The Royal Oak was a Dreadnought Class battleship, the last ship to be built in the Devonport Naval Dockyards at Plymouth. It had an impressive array of firepower and equipped with the largest guns in the Royal Navy, eight 15 inch guns, which could hurl a 17 cwt (876 kgs) shell 18 miles away. It was 29,000 tons and was 600

feet long, a truly formidable war machine with a crew of 909 officers and men, which included 160 boy sailors in 1939. During the First World War HMS Royal Oak fought at the Battle of Jutland but by 1939 she had difficulty keeping up with the newer faster ships built between the wars and was deployed at the Royal Navy Home Fleet main anchorage Scapa Flow on Orkney to provide anti aircraft cover.

Shortly after midnight on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> October 1939 the German U Boat U47 commanded by Gunther Prien was lying off the east coast of Orkney. Scapa Flow had four narrow channels between the islands and had block ships sunk. Prien found a channel, known as Kirk Sound, which he was able to navigate through and entered main anchorage. By a quirk of fate all of the Navy's capital ships were at sea, with the exception of HMS Royal Oak. Had they not been at sea, Prien may well have drastically altered the course of the Second World War. Prien fired his first salvo of torpedoes at the Royal Oak which did only minor damage to the bows. Those on board thought there must have been a small internal explosion and no alarm was raised. As the ship appeared to be in a secure anchorage it did not occur to anyone that there had been

a submarine attack. Prien reloaded his torpedoes and after 20 minutes went in for a second attack. This time three torpedoes hit the Royal Oak amidships causing massive explosions and a fireball of cordite which killed most of her crew. The ship turned over and sank, the U47 escaped without being detected. Only 76 of her total crew survived and of the 160 boy sailors onboard only 37 survived, sadly David Morse was not amongst them. David has no grave and he is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial panel 34 column 2 on Southsea Common.



David at school in 1935



HMS Royal Oak



## RBL Pedal to Paris 2018

A huge 'Well done', to Wincanton Branch member Lt. Col. Colin Thomas, who successfully completed this year's RBL 'Pedal to Paris', a 284 mile cycle ride from London to Paris from 30 August 2018.

Setting off from London, the four-day event took the riders through beautiful English and French countryside covering a total of 460km/284miles. Once in France, coordinated rolling road closures were put in place so those taking part could cycle from Calais to the very heart of Paris without having to think about traffic, junctions or red lights. This is the only cycling event apart from the Tour de France that the Arc de Triomphe closes for.

All participants received a warm welcome as they passed through France, many locals came out to cheer them along! They passed the distinctive landmarks of Paris before the final leg, cycling towards the Arc de Triomphe in a peloton of cyclists. The ride culminated with a moving ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe followed by a celebration dinner at a Paris Hotel.

The cycle is a challenging ride and participants were encouraged to train for the ride to make the most of the experience, the Legion's specialist support team and riders accompanied those that took part every step of the way. Riders were also given the choice of different speed groups and they were able to switch between the groups over the event.

### DAY 1

London to Calais (136km): Left the capital bright and early and headed south through some of Kent's finest scenery to Dover, the keyhole to France as the major embarkation Port 100 years ago. Ferry to Calais

### DAY 2

Calais to Abbeville (120.9km): Befitting that the peloton departed from Calais heading to Abbeville which for much of the First World War was headquarters of the Commonwealth lines of communication and No.3 BRCS, No.5 and No.2 Stationary Hospitals were stationed there at various points from October 1914 to January 1920. There was a large military hospital in the town to which many injured soldiers from the Somme area were evacuated. Those that made it were sent home or back to the front line; those that did not were buried in the town's communal cemetery. The communal cemetery was used for burials from November 1914 to September 1916.

### DAY 3

Abbeville to Beauvais (106.9km): From the town of Abbeville the 'Pedal to Paris', riders passed through the Somme and Oise regions of Picardie. Between July and November 1916, the Battle of the Somme was one of the defining events of the First World War. It is often remembered for the huge losses on the first day (1 July 1916) but the Somme offensive continued over the following months - a total of 141 days - and men from every part of Britain and across the Empire took part. When it was halted in November, more than 1,000,000 Commonwealth, French and German soldiers had been wounded, captured, or killed. Some 150,000 Commonwealth servicemen lie buried in 250 military and 150 civilian cemeteries on the Somme. Six memorials to the missing commemorate by name more than 100,000 whose graves are not known. The cemeteries and memorials built and cared for by the CWGC across the Somme, stand as a lasting reminder of the human cost of the fighting in this region throughout the First World War.



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#### DAY 4

Beauvais to Paris (100.8km): The final stage of the cycle departed from Beauvais and arrived in Paris and the Arc de Triomphe where the riders attended a special service.

DAY 5 Paris to London: Returned home by Eurostar.

All participants raised sponsorship for the RBL and Colin raised a staggering £2180, this was helped by Colin having both legs and his back waxed which, if not tough enough, was streamed live on social media! I spoke with Colin after he returned home and he told me; ***'Personally, I thought it was a fantastic event for an excellent cause. The RBL is a true whole life charity that looks after the serving, veterans and their families. Over the four days I cycled alongside folk from all walks of life but with two common goals - getting to Paris and raising money for the RBL. The event has run for over 20 years and the support you get throughout is superb; mechanics, physios, admin and outriders'.***

#### Poppy of Honour 2018

Our member and former standard bearer Terry Williams has been working on a project for the last few years which involves a memorial into which is sealed an individual named poppy for each person from Britain and the Commonwealth who lost their lives in the Great War of 1914 - 18. The memorial, which is not a Wincanton RBL event is being unveiled on 6th October at a ceremony in Cale Park (Rickhayes Recreation Ground). Terry has just given me some details and we do hope you can attend. It entails a parade which musters at 10 a.m. at the Memorial Hall and marches off to Cale Park. Present will be many bands and organisations. The actual unveiling takes place at the park at 11 a.m. As there are many road closures between 10 a.m. and 10.45 a.m. that day provision should be made to get to the area in good time.

Watch the local press for final details and if you have any questions or need more information either phone Terry on 07821 303120 or check the website [poppyofhonour@gmail.com](mailto:poppyofhonour@gmail.com)



#### Bristol 13th October

We did hope to hold a trip to Bristol earlier in the year but so many of our members who normally would have gone had previous commitments. So we are attempting to make the trip on 13th October departing from the Memorial Hall at 9 a.m.. Cost remains at £15 each.

It should be a good time to go to Bristol as we all need a break as the evenings begin to shorten. We will unload at the city centre with opportunities for shopping, harbour trips and all the points of interest (ferry boat to S.S. Great Britain is also possible).

As I mentioned before that with our inconsistent numbers I need to have the option of either CAT Bus or South West Coaches so please bear this in mind and advise me at the time of booking if you have a problem with the arrangement.

#### Quiz night 3rd November at the Balsam Centre

We had such a good time at the quiz evening last winter that I was asked to have another quiz in the autumn, so I have booked to Balsam Centre for 3rd November with the quiz commencing at 7 p.m. Cost is £5 per person and it is suggested that you "bring your own drinks and nibbles".

#### Poppy Launch 2018 is 27th October

To launch Poppy Appeal this year we will be having a joint event with Wincanton Historical Society in the Memorial Hall from 10 a.m. We will have lots of iconic photos of Wincanton during the Great War and battle-field artefacts.