



"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

June 2011

Next branch meeting 11th July - 7 p.m.

Please note the next branch meeting on 11 July is on the 2nd Monday (not 3rd as is usual) due to several people not available the following week.

Thanks for helping Brian

Volunteers have come forward to help Brian Sweet move his books after his hospital visit, for which we are most grateful. Thanks to Jim Currie, Brian will set up "shop" in Angel Lane after his operation and continue the book stall there for the time being.

Stoke Trister Church

We have received this from Stoke Trister Church :- "Following the erection and blessing of a new plaque at Snag Farm, to commemorate the 67th anniversary of the crash of the U.S. Bomber "Old Faithful" on 25th June 1944, there will be an addition to the Evensong Service at Stoke Trister Church on Sunday 26th June at 6.30 p.m. to commemorate the U.S. airmen who perished in that crash while returning from a wartime operation. A display of parts of the bomber, collected by at the time by Mike Watts who lived on the farm as a child during the war and witnessed the event at a perilously close range, will be on display. The aircraft crashed on the farm. Some surviving relatives of the U.S. crewmen who died have been invited and hopefully will also attend Evensong".



Artefacts from "Old Faithful"

67th Anniversary of "Old Faithful" crash

25th June this year is the 67th anniversary of the crash of "Old Faithful" the USAAF Flying Fortress. The feature last month of the history and very old anniversary ceremonies certainly prompted lots of comment - as I had hoped and it indeed brought back lots of memories. Everything is set in place for events this year which will start with the usual placing of a wreath at the memorial on Bayford Hill. Assembly for this is at 10.45 a.m. and will finish just after 11.00 a.m. As it is a Saturday we do hope as many members as possible will attend. The unveiling of the new memorial at Snag Farm will be at 3 p.m. (assembly 2.45 p.m.) followed by tea and biscuits. John Pennington has had the plaque inscribed and the wording is shown in the block below. I have tentatively reserved the CAT bus, let me know if you need transport to the farm in the afternoon.

*This is the crash site of
The American Flying Fortress
"Old Faithful"
Which crashed here
on the afternoon of
Sunday 25th June 1944*

Michael Watts has arranged for the propeller to be in place as part of the memorial which will be erected by kind permission of the Ostroumoff family who now own Snag Farm. Because of the size of the farm and to enable catering please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to come. I have a list in place and will not be issuing invitations as such but must know numbers.

On 25th June at 10 a.m. we will have a Coffee Morning when we will display photographs and artefacts relevant to "Old Faithful" those wishing to go to Bayford Hill can break off around 10.45 a.m. and the CAT Bus will take us up to the original memorial to pay respects and lay wreaths then return to the Coffee Morning. Those wishing can go direct.

Closing a chapter

I have covered the story of Jean Pipe's father, L/Cpl Humbert Cox last year after Roy Glennister and I visited the small village of Pernes Lez Boulogne where he is buried. It was Liberation Day 2010 when we were there and we made contact with an English family - the Southwoods - who live in the village, they and their sons tend the two British graves in the village cemetery. The other grave is that of L/Cpl George Wilson of the Royal Army Service Corps. After that visit things moved quite fast because last winter completely out of the blue I received an email entitled "war graves at Pernes Lez Boulogne". Someone else had seen my card with the original wreath, it was the son of George Wilson's sister Audrey, Nigel Longstaff who lives near Sunderland. He and his sons had visited his uncle's grave on behalf of his mother. We exchanged lengthy correspondence throughout the winter and along with Jean Pipe all agreed we would try to all visit the graves together - with the aim of Liberation Day 2011.



At the graves

With the Southwood's in Pernes Lez Boulogne involvement we were invited to take part in the French wreath laying at their memorial on Liberation Day this year which was 8th May. Allison is a councillor in the village and she approached the mayor and veterans group for consent. A group of 8 Wincanton Legion members along with the soldier's families, which by good fortune included George Wilson's sister, all travelled to the village to attend the very moving ceremony.

In our group was our treasurer Ron Peet, who served with the Royal Navy and was on a Landing Craft (Gun) at the Normandy Landings. Ron gave the Exhortation at both the British graves and at the village war memorial. Alison Southwood had obtained a French translation of the Exhortation and a villager read this at the war memorial. I carried the Union Flag along with our French veteran counterpart carrying the Tricolour at both places. It is tradition in France, similar to that in Britain, the names of the War Dead are read aloud, this year at Pernes Lez Boulogne they included our two soldiers names. For each person the French say "Gave their life for France", so I was deeply moved when the local villagers - who had turned up in great numbers - said after each British name "Gave their life for our Liberty".

The great respect and gratitude expressed to our group and especially the soldier's families was overwhelming. The villagers pledged to always take care of our two graves and the teacher of village school asked Ron and myself to go to the village school next day to talk about the poppy and the joint British/French involvement in the two World Wars (with Allison Southwood interpreting). The children wanted to know more about L/Cpls. Cox and Wilson and I showed them photos, which gave them more significance to actually see the soldiers photos. The children were in awe when Ron, who is very modest, produced his medals from his pocket. These also included the town Liberation medal from Arromanches, Normandy, given to him a few years ago.

I know our graves are in safe hands and we were all very grateful for the respect shown and the regard they have for Britain.



Visit to the village school

Visit to Thorney Island 19th May 2011

One of our most popular recent trips took place on 19th May when a coach load of branch members visited the 12th Regiment Royal Artillery at Thorney Island Hampshire. We were invited there by Lt. Col. Nick Pond commanding officer of the unit. Nick is the husband of Major Lucy Giles whom many (if not all) know personally, as Lucy was born and raised in Wincanton. Lucy's mother, Maggie, is a member of the branch and her father Marcus was the town vet for many years. It was in April 2007 that Lucy also arranged a visit to her unit, which was then Air Dispatch, Royal Logistic Corps, attached to RAF Lyham. That trip too was a resounding success.

We were greeted at Thorney Island by Nick and Lucy and were welcomed with tea and biscuits followed by a presentation on the 12th Regiment RA by Nick. 12th Regiment RA (Lancashire & Cumbria Gunners) has an air defence role and is equipped with starstreak missiles. As its title infers the regiment has a traditional recruiting area and close ties with Lancashire and Cumbria.

Thorney Island is a Peninsula in Chichester Harbour, West Sussex. As well as having a large area of sandy beach; the Island also has various sites of Special Scientific Interest. The harbour is a bird sanctuary, and as you drive on to Thorney Island there are two small lakes which are home to many different varieties of birds. The population of the Island is made up entirely of soldiers from 47 Regt RA & 12 Regt RA, and their families. 47 Regt comprises of 4 Batteries, 31HQ, 10, 21 and 25/170, a REME Workshops and 63 Sigs Sqn (V) TA. 12 Regt is made up of 12 (Minden) Bty, 9 (Plassey) Bty, 58 (Eyres) Bty and T(HQ) Bty. Around 250 families are quartered on the Island. The nearest village is

Emsworth (1 mile), and Havant (3 miles), the nearest cities being Chichester and Portsmouth (both 9 miles in opposite directions).

The impressive amenities on Thorney Island include a Community Centre, Crèche, Kindergarten, Primary School, Stables and Saddle Club, St Nicholas Church, JNCO Bar, Beauty Salon, Youth Cadets, RA Yacht Club and water sports centre, Army Learning Centre, and a Gymnasium with various facilities.

Our tour took us to what were once RAF hangars as the island started its military life as an RAF base, almost by accident when a wartime aircraft crash landed on the island. Sadly the pilot did not survive and there is a memorial to him at the site, but because of this the location was found to be ideal as an airfield. After wartime

service with the RAF it was turned over to the Army. After a splendid buffet lunch at the yacht club there was time to tour the garrison church where along with several RAF graves are those of German airmen who died after being shot down in the area. The beautiful weather certainly added to a most wonderful day and we are all very grateful to Lucy and Nick for their kind hospitality and for finding time for us. Lucy presented the branch with a splendid plaque from 12th Regt. RA which we hope to hang up in the Memorial Hall sun lounge. With us on

the trip was Hannah Robinson RBL Somerset Community Fundraiser who handed over 250 woolly hats to 12th Regt. RA. The hats were knitted by the ladies of Somerset and will be welcome during the coming cold Afghan winter. After leaving Thorney Island the group then visited Chichester - another wonderful day !

Brian Sweet and Ray Judd viewing a starstreak missile



Lucy presents Tony with the plaque



June Poppy Party

Unfortunately we had to cancel the Poppy Party planned for 11th June due to lack of support. The numbers booked made it uneconomical.

Branch Standard & Union Flag

At the May branch meeting I mentioned that the branch Standard and Union Flag may be looking "worse for wear". The Branch Standard is in fact over 50 years old and was donated by Major E.F.C. Parsons MC in September 1964 but both Martin and I agree that it is in remarkable condition and does not need replacing yet. However the Union Flag does need replacing. Next year, being the Legion 90th anniversary year, I believe there will be a commemorative pennant to attach to branch standards, similar to the ones attached already and that we purchase from the RBL one of these. But I believe that we consider seriously purchasing a new Union Flag. I will seek quotations for this and update fully and then we can make a decision if we wish to purchase a new Union Flag. Interestingly I looked at the standard which is laid up in the Parish Church and a small plaque on it states that this was donated by Colonel Ridley on 10th November 1929. I have spoken with Rev. Nigel Feaver, our chaplain and next year we will arrange a thanksgiving service for the Legion 90th anniversary, it would be appropriate if we do decide to purchase a new Union Flag we could lay up the old standard then and also dedicate the new pennant and Union Flag if we decide to purchase this.

Bath & West Show

Several members of the branch attended the County event at the Bath & West Show which culminated in a pageant to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the RBL. Thanks those who helped.



Exciting trips planned for July & August

It is obvious that our monthly trips are a great success and bearing this in mind I have decided to be a bit more adventurous. I will try to maintain the cost for trips at £10 for as long into the future as possible as this is an economical price for everyone.

On **16th July** we will visit Kew Gardens. Hopefully all the summer flowers will be in bloom and it should be a very memorable day. We will depart from the Memorial Hall at 8.30 a.m. to enable a full day there and I will ensure that we have a comfort stop both there and back. We will be home around 6.30 p.m. A list is open for this event so please put your name down as soon as possible. As we did with the Hampton Court trip last year I am very happy to book tickets on the internet against my own credit card and collect payment individually. If we do this the costs are, concessions (seniors etc. £10.15) adults under 65 - £11.85 and children free. As it is an exciting opportunity for children (or grandchildren) of members to come a child coach ticket will be £5 each. Don't forget you can bring sandwiches and a flask of tea/coffee so it need not cost more than the coach cost and entrance ticket.

Then on **20th August** we will visit Lulworth Cove, departing from the Memorial Hall 9 a.m. With a possibility of visiting Swanage too. I know demand for this will be heavy, as will Kew Gardens. **Please !** Let me have your names as soon as possible but don't forget once you commit to going that is firm and I will need you to pay whether you go or not (for any reason unfortunately) as keeping trips at £10 each is very difficult with transport costs rising regularly. I am sorry to say this but I know I can have your cooperation to continue our trips.

The Central Band of the Royal Air Force will be in concert along with Bath Youth Choir at Wells Cathedral on **16th July** at 7 p.m. The event is in aid of the Royal British Legion. Tickets priced at £15, £10 and £5 from Robin Dowdeswell on 01749-673655.

Yeovil RBL branch are holding a Midsummer Ball on 15th July at 7 p.m. In Ivel Barbarians Rugby Club. 3 course dinner, dancing. £20 each phone 01935-478259.

Ilminster RBL branch have just announced they will attend the Royal Albert Hall Festival of Remembrance, afternoon performance, on 12th November seats in centre stalls and costs £34 including coach and entrance ticket. We are welcome to join them. Phone John Goodall on 01460-57564 for information.