



"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

October
2011

Next branch meeting AGM 7th November 7 p.m.

New Union Flag

I am very please to say the new Union Flag arrived in time for the Annual Dinner (see centre pages) and was shown to the branch at the October branch meeting. I think everyone would agree it is excellent and the fact that it comes with a stand we can display the flag at appropriate times. It will be on display at the branch AGM on 7th November. Our Chaplain Rev. Nigel Feaver will dedicate the new standard at the Remembrance Sunday church service. We are most grateful to those members whose donations made the purchase possible, THANK YOU.

Gala Concert 29th October

Our good friends, the Wincanton Silver Band will be launching our Poppy Appeal this year with a blockbusting Gala Concert at the Memorial Hall on 29th October at 7.30 p.m. The band have kindly donated their services free and all proceeds go to Poppy Appeal 2011/12. The band have promised an array of popular music especially appropriate for the 90 years of the RBL including nostalgic, patriotic songs and wartime favourites. The band has a new director, David Bertie who served as an Army musician so I know it will be a night to remember. Tickets are available priced £7.50 from the Town Hall and Divine Wines in the High Street or from branch officials.



Branch AGM

As you see above the next branch meeting is the AGM and is on 7th November at 7 p.m. Please note the date is the first Monday (not the 3rd as is usual) of the month and is on this date due to Remembrance activities being the following weeks. Please make every effort to attend this important meeting. All the present officers are offering to stand again and if there any other persons wishing to stand please give your name and nominee's name to Arthur by 1st November. Our branch remains strong and vibrant with both membership and Poppy Appeal exceeded previous years. After the meeting we will again have drinks available for donations.

Poppy Appeal

Arthur is in the process of contacting all those who helped with Poppy Appeal collections last year. If you have not helped previously and wish to do so this year please let Arthur know. We are making a maximum effort in the coming year to assist the Legion nationally achieving the £M90 target in the 90th Anniversary Year. Throughout the coming year we will holding several fundraising events in an attempt to boost our Poppy Appeal total. Watch Sandbag for periodic updates.

29th October and a Coffee Morning too !

As well as the Gala Concert on 29th October we will be holding a Coffee Morning at 10 a.m. in the Sun Lounge of the Memorial Hall. We will also be holding an exhibition in tribute to those who fought in both World Wars and have a connection with epic actions. Steve Lee will be assisting - so it should be good !

Don't forget, please support the Bingo on 2nd November "Eyes Down" 7 p.m. In aid of Wincanton Supports our Troops. Please note it is at the METHODIST HALL not as shown last month.

Annual Dinner 2011

Our Annual Dinner took place on 14th October at the Sparkford Inn and 65 members and guests attended.

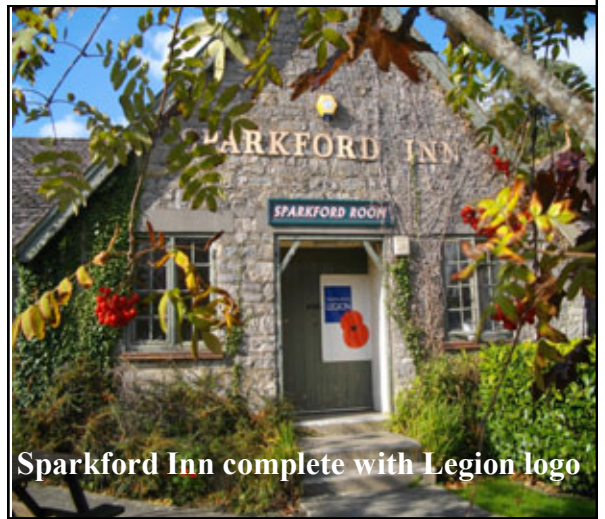
This year we experimented with a carvery meal which in general was a success although we did have a few issues during the evening. It was very nice to see previous chairman Trevor Mills-Smith and his wife Jean at the Dinner, Trevor and Jean came over from Ireland to be with us. It was also a pleasure as always to have Chelsea Pensioner Paddy Fox with us, Paddy did come equipped with a few of his music discs which some members bought signed copies in aid of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Unfortunately he was unable to carry in his luggage the Gold Disc awarded to the Men in Scarlet for coming Number One in the music charts last Christmas. Our Chaplain Rev. Nigel Feaver and Christine were with us and Nigel said Grace.

Our guests of honour Lt. Col. Lucy Giles and Lt. Cdr Rob Stephens were in great form. Lucy said in deference to the "Senior Service" Rob should open their individual presentations and Rob gave us an update on our adopted unit, the Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) both at home and on active service in Afghanistan. He repeated the gratitude of the unit for the support they have received from Wincanton over the past year and pledged to continue our very close links. Rob reminded us that Declan Farrell our local baker will be baking them special Christmas cakes again which this year will be split between a supply to be sent the War Zone and the remainder for the base Christmas parties. Declan will be handing them over on our behalf during November along with a £1000 cheque from the "Wincanton Supports Our Troops" group. The CHF are being re-equipped with the new Merlin helicopter (much to the chagrin of the RAF) and this state of the art aircraft will have a great effect on their capabilities. Rob said he appreciated seeing the White Ensign being displayed at our dinner which demonstrated our very close links.

We were very pleased Lucy Giles was able to accept our invitation and it was much appreciated by all knowing how busy she is at this time. Lucy reflected on our visit to Thorney Island Royal Artillery garrison earlier this year and how pleased she was that we were all able to establish the link we now have. She also reminded us of the wonderful day members had when we visited her at Lynham and hoped to contact continue. Since we last saw her Lucy had been promoted from Major to Lt. Colonel and Tony congratulated her to the applause of the members. With her new rank Lucy has been transferred to the Army Staff College at Shrivenham where she is just commencing an officer instructor role. Lucy's husband Nick is on active service in Afghanistan and she told us how he is distributing the winter hats, worn inside helmets, which were knitted

by the Legion ladies of South Somerset. Lucy said the hats are being well received and Nick will take the further supply held by Tony when he returns to Afghanistan from Christmas leave. Lucy told us how the children in Afghanistan like to receive pens, pencils and school supplies - so if you have any you wish to give to Nick please contact Tony who will coordinate.

The new branch standard was displayed at the dinner and our raffle raised £167 which meant that the evening benefitted branch funds.



Sparkford Inn complete with Legion logo

Lt. Col. Lucy Giles





90 years on

Following on with our reflection of the last 90 years of the Royal British Legion Steve Lee has prompted me to let you know a bit about Col. John McCrae who wrote the poignant poem "In Flanders Fields" which now forms part of our heritage.

The Flanders Poppy was first described as the 'Flower of Remembrance', by Colonel John McCrae, who before the War was a well known Professor of medicine at McGill University, in Montreal, Canada. He had previously served as a gunner in the South Africa War and at the outbreak of the First World War decided to join the fighting ranks. However, the powers that be decided that his abilities could be used to better advantage, and so he landed in France as a Medical Officer with the first Canadian Army contingent. At the second battle of Ypres in 1915, when in charge of a small first aid post and during a lull in the fighting, he wrote, in pencil, on a page torn from his dispatch book, the following verses;

*In Flanders' fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place: and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders' fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch: be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders' fields.*

It is believed that the inspiration for the poem came from the burial of McCrae's friend and former student Lt. Alexis Helmer who had been killed in battle and that it was written at the site, of what is today, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery at Essex Farm in Belgium.



John McCrae



John McCrae's grave at Wimereux last May

The verses were sent anonymously to 'Punch', magazine and published under the title 'In Flanders' Fields'.

In January 1918 Colonel McCrae was brought as a stretcher case to one of the large hospitals on the channel coast of France. On the third evening he was wheeled to the balcony of his room to look out over the sea towards the cliffs of Dover. The verses were obviously in his mind, for he told the doctor who was in charge of his case:

Tell them this,

If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep'.

The same night McCrae died, 28th January 1918 of pneumonia. He was interred in a beautiful cemetery on rising ground above Wimereux, two kilometres from Boulogne, from where the cliffs of Dover are easily visible on sunny days.

Remembrance Period events

We will observe the national Two Minutes Silence around the War Memorial at 11 a.m. On Friday 11th November with assemble at 10.45 a.m.

We are very pleased that the new sword will be in place for the first time on the memorial. The sword is an exact replica of the Excalibur sword on the Cross of Sacrifice at all British War Cemeteries and was the desire of the original committee overseeing the construction of the memorial and made possible now by modern technology. Wreaths will be laid at the Memorial.

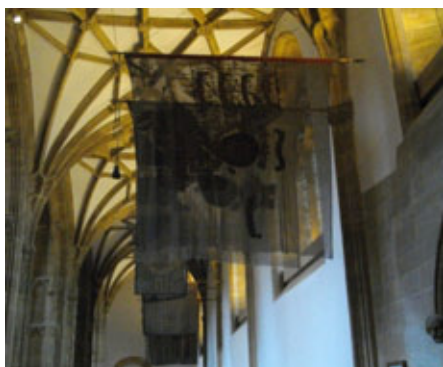
After the Two Minutes Silence and wreath laying all those who wish will go to the Old Faithful Memorial on Bayford Hill where wreaths will be laid and prayers said. A wreath will also be taken to the new memorial at Snag Farm.

On Remembrance Sunday, 13th November the traditional Church Parade will assemble at 2 p.m. when members of the youth organisations will lay crosses for our War Dead around the War Memorial. March off will be at 2.30 p.m. and the Church Service 3 p.m. As is tradition wreaths will be placed at War Graves within our area on 1 Nov.

A moth-eaten rag

I never cease to be moved when visiting Sherborne Abbey and always get drawn to the laid up Colours of the Dorset Regiment. I am sure those of our members who served in the Dorsets and all the others who served in the British Army will know what mean when I share this verse from the Abbey at the site of the Colours.

A moth eaten-rag
On a worm-eaten pole,
It doesn't seem much
To stir a man's soul,
'Tis the deeds that were done
Neath the moth-eaten rag
When the pole was a Staff
And the rag was Flag.



Festival of Remembrance at the Colston Hall Bristol 5th November

Because we have so many events happening all at once I have asked the organisers of the Festival of Remembrance if we could hold on to the sale or return tickets as long as possible. The final date for returning the tickets will be 27th October. Please let me know urgently if you wish to come, the excellent location of the seats in the Colston Hall will make this a memorable evening. I only need payment of the entrance tickets by that date and you can pay the coach before the trip. We will leave the Memorial Hall at 12 noon on 5th November and have the afternoon at leisure in Bristol, then the coach will take us to the Colston Hall in time for the performance at 7 p.m. Entrance tickets cost £10 each and the coach also another £10.

Ottery Garden Centre visit and pre Christmas lunch 19th December

I know many people have been waiting eagerly for this trip to be available to book. Well I am opening the list right now but as places are restricted, previous trips supporters will get first chance !

We will leave Memorial Hall Wincanton at 9 a.m. to enable us to take the behind the scene tour, viewing the poinsettia trail and the Christmas atmosphere. Then we will have a pre Christmas lunch in their excellent restaurant. We will leave around 3 p.m. But it could be later depending on demand on the day.

Cost of the coach is £10 as usual and payment for the dinner will be on the day.

I will handle bookings up to Remembrance Sunday and then Arthur will take over whilst I am indisposed. *Tony*

Legion membership badges

Arthur has obtained a small supply of the Legion lapel badges which are priced at £4, if you would like one please contact Arthur.

Membership subscriptions

Those who pay by bankers standing order will already have been debited their membership subscription and will note that as we mentioned at a recent branch meeting the membership fee for 2011/12 is now £12. If you pay by cash and have not yet paid your collector please urgently contact Rita Jee. The £12 still represents good value as this branch does not levy an additional administration fee as many branches do.