



"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

**May
2014**

Next branch meeting 16th June at 7 p.m.

A message from the Director General - One Hundredth Anniversary of the Great War

On 4th August 2014, commemorative events will be held in Glasgow, London and Belgium to mark Britain's entry into the First World War a century earlier – the night Sir Edward Grey famously remarked: "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time."

While these large scale national events are taking place, we will also see smaller but equally important ceremonies in towns, villages, and households as we commemorate a terrible conflict which affected every thread in the fabric of the nation. The Centenary is a particularly poignant time for The Royal British Legion. Our charity was born out of the aftermath of WW1, as veterans' organisations joined ranks to provide mutual support during the difficult transitional years that followed the Armistice. The red poppy of Flanders, the national symbol of Remembrance and hope for a better world, was also born from that conflict. The act of Remembrance itself, the Cenotaph, and the Two Minute Silence – all are closely associated with our charity as the custodian of Remembrance, and all were brought into being as the nation struggled to come to terms with its WW1 losses. Neither is the Centenary only about the past. As we recall the events of a century ago, we are reminded of the service and sacrifices of the Armed Forces of today. The work of the Legion in helping Armed Forces families and veterans is as vital today as it was when the Legion was formed, in the aftermath of WW1. The Legion will be using the Centenary to engage with a new generation of supporters and to reach out to a broader community of comradeship. We expect that the Centenary will present fresh prospects for our existing supporters and we're excited that they will be taking the Centenary journey with us. Together, we'll be taking the opportunity to engage with our families, friends, and communities to remind ourselves, and others, that our mission is just as vital today as it was in the 1920s. Above all, we want to be at the heart of fitting and just commemorations of the events of 1914-1918. A guide containing information of the Legion's Centenary plans, including our position and key messages on the Centenary along with some of the dates of planned large-scale commemorations can be found at www.britishlegion.org.uk/ww1centenary. There is also a section on how you can apply for funds for your own Centenary projects, and a few success stories.

We will be making this guide available in printed form, although a modest press run is planned because we will want to update it from time to time. We hope you find it helpful. If you have any comments, I would welcome them. *Robert Lee - On behalf of the DG*

Key dates observed by the government are as follows :-

4th August 2014 National and International services will take place at London, Glasgow, Cardiff and Belfast to mark the commencement of war.

25th April 2015 Events to commemorate Gallipoli at which 44,000 Allied soldiers were killed.

31st May - 1st June 2016 commemorating the Battle of Jutland the only naval engagement of battleships.

1st July 2016 observing the first day of the Battle of the Somme in which there were 420,000 British and Commonwealth during the following four months.

June to November 2017 during which events will take place marking the anniversary of the Battle of Passchendaele also known as the Third Battle of Ypres.

11th November 2018 the anniversary of signing of the Armistice and ceasing of hostilities.

Whitsun 1944 - The bombing of Wincanton.

During the Second World War Wincanton as a town fared rather well compared to many other places. There were odd incidents and several near misses, but no real bombing or casualties occurred until Whit Monday of 1944. The Whit weekend was 13th - 15th May and on Whit Monday a lone German bomber believed to have been returning from a bombing mission to Bristol and still had bombs on board, released them onto Wincanton during the night. Most people were in shelters but the daughter of the manager of the Westminster Bank in South Street had decided to sleep in her own bed in the flat above the bank.

She was Daphne Spencer aged 29 years and her father Robert was the bank manager.

Two of the bombs exploded without damage, one in Spring Close and the other at Brains Farm, but the third completely destroyed the offices of solicitors, Dyne, Hughes and Archer at 3 South Street. This same bomb badly damaged the adjoining Westminster Bank, the time was 1.55 a.m. and Daphne Spencer was asleep. The blast from the bomb blew Daphne out of bed, killing her outright and the force sending her body onto land at the rear of the White Horse Hotel. Her body was not discovered until four hours later. The explosion blew out part of the bank and money and legal documents were scattered

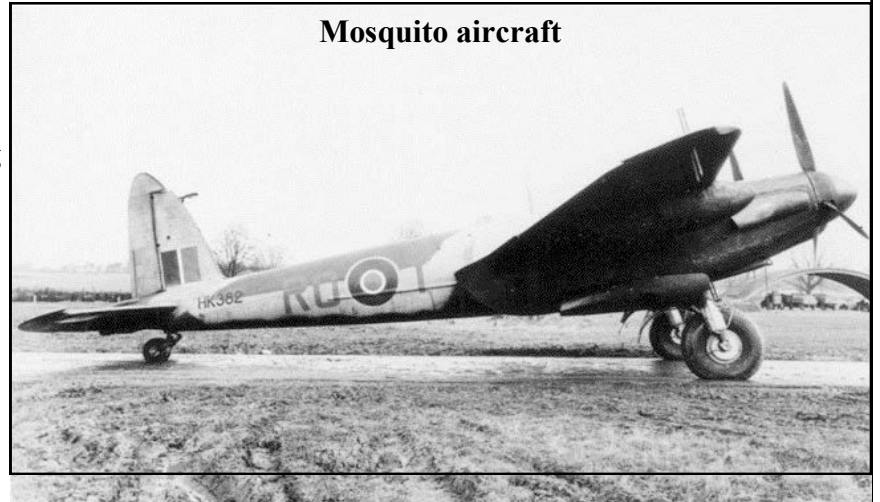


far around the town. Many legal documents including wills and deeds were destroyed but to the credit of the townspeople most of the money not destroyed was actually handed in to the police. The German bomber had been spotted on the radar at RAF Zeals and they had sent a Mosquito aircraft up to intercept, shooting it down over Templecombe, sadly too late to stop the bombing of Wincanton. The bodies of two German airmen, Hilman Korf and Gerhard Buttner both aged 21 years old were recovered in the crashed aircraft and are buried at the Haycombe Cemetery, Bath. The third body, that of 20 year old Johannes Domschke was recovered in the countryside later and is buried at Quantock Road Cemetery Bridgewater. Daphne Spencer is buried in Wincanton Cemetery.

The pictures below show the bank before the bombing with the solicitors next door, the picture on the right shows the bomb damaged building afterwards.

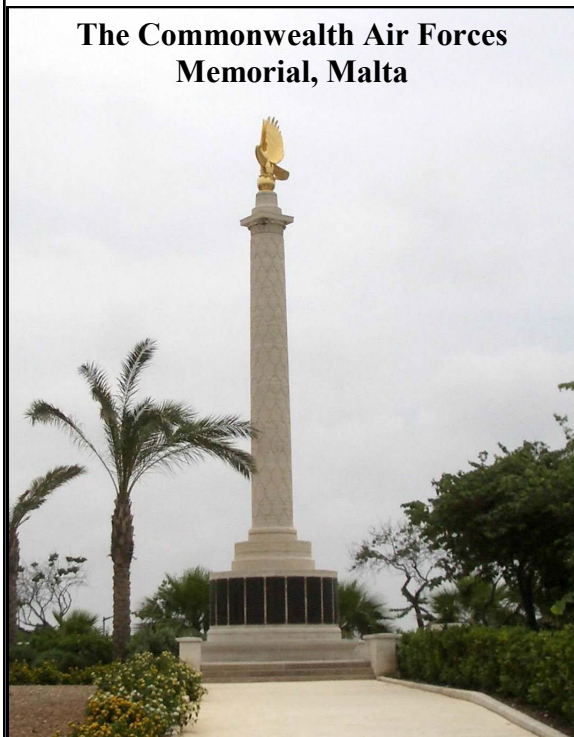


A sad sequel to this unhappy event was that just two months later on 17th July 1944 Daphne's brother Kenneth Spencer was killed in action. He was married and his wife Jean lived in Edinburgh. Kenneth enlisted in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at the height of the Battle of Britain in August 1940. By August 1943 he had gained the rank of Sergeant, flying Bristol Beaufighter aircraft as Navigator/ Radio operator and was transferred to 108 Squadron RAF along with his flying partner Flight Sergeant M.H. Gill. The squadron were at the time operating out of Hal Far Airfield and Luqa, Malta, flying missions all over the Mediterranean. A small amount of better equipped Mosquito aircraft were later sent to the squadron. Kenneth along with F/Sgt Max Gill began flying intruder missions into German occupied territory all over the Mediterranean quickly seeing action over Sicily which had had been invaded by the Allies a few weeks earlier. During the Autumn of 1943 he carried out extensive missions patrolling convoys around Malta. On 12th May 1944 whilst flying Beaufighter KV.962. Gill and Spencer encountered a German Heinkel HE.111 aircraft South of Montpellier and quickly got on its tail, opening fire at a range of between 50 and 100 yards. Several hits were received on the Heinkel and it went down in a ball of flames. On 7th June flying Beaufighter ND.279. the pair were over Southern France again, between Montpellier and Nimes where they attacked a German Stuka on the ground damaging it. They then sighted a goods train and dived to strafe the train head on. Strikes were seen hitting the engine presumably destroying the train. Missions were flown from Malta often landing at Alghero, Corsica which was now in the hands of the Allies, enabling attacks to be made deep into France from the south as had happened on the previous two missions. Then again on 8th June another train was encountered near Montpellier and shot up. On 16th July 1944 Kenneth was detailed along with his pilot Flight Sergeant Maxwell H.Gill to take part in an intruder operation over the sea in the Toulouse-Narbonne area of Southern France in Mosquito aircraft MM441. The aircraft left Malta at 2010 hours GMT but then nothing more was heard and it failed to return to Malta. There was no trace ever found of the aircraft or its crew. Kenneth Spencer and Max Gill were presumed killed. Unknown to both of them they had been promoted to Pilot Officer on 17th May 1944 but their promotion had not filtered through to them. During that fateful two months parents Robert and Grace Spencer had lost both their children.



Mosquito aircraft

The Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial, Malta



Kenneth Spencer's memorial is at the Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Floriana, Malta for those who lost their lives in the Mediterranean area and have no known graves. He was 23 years old.



Festival of Remembrance 8th November 2014

I am sure you can imagine that this year, being a very poignant anniversary, the Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall will be more popular than ever. I know I have mentioned other years that the branch is strictly allocated only four seats. It is very important to advise me as soon as possible if you wish to go, using a pair of our tickets. If there are too many members wishing to go we will draw names out of a hat. The cost is £10 each and the seats could be in either the stalls or circle - depending on availability.

It is also possible to obtain tickets to take part in the Cenotaph Ceremony on 9th November. The ticket will enable members to march in the parade past the Cenotaph.

Old Faithful 70th anniversary Sunday 22nd June

Confirmations have been coming in from those attending and the event will prominently the town's youth. **There will no longer be a parade on 22nd June** due to many complications. Instead the commemoration will take the form of a Thanksgiving Service around the War Memorial at the Memorial Hall. Hymns will be played by Wincanton Silver Band and members of the Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps will escort the standards. King Arthur's School will be sending a large group and it is hoped they will provide a trumpeter for the Last Post around the memorial. Also present will be a group from St. George's Primary School Bourton and Guides, Brownies and Scouts.

On 22nd June Assembly will still be at 1.45 p.m. but now **at the Memorial Hall**. Service around the War Memorial at 2 p.m. and Wincanton Silver Band Concert 3 p.m. (tickets on the door).

On 25th June we will meet informally as usual around the Memorial at Bayford Hill at 11 a.m. and have prayers said by Rev. Nigel Feaver.

Then at 3 p.m. we will gather at the new memorial at Snag Farm where again prayers will be said and Last Post played. Afterwards there is a buffet for Legion members only at the Unicorn Inn Bayford, places are limited but there are still a few left. Contact me as soon as possible if you wish to come to the buffet.

Future trips

For many reasons, we are now struggling with numbers attending our trips. Our trip to Cardiff made a loss but we were able to make up the coach cost from our trips float. My idea of a combined coach, boat and steam train trip cannot take place because I cannot risk what is likely to be another large loss. No one factor is causing the drop in numbers and I believe it is not lack of interest. I will continue the trips in the hope that we can at least break even but I may be forced to increase the price to £14 later.

Our June trip will be to **Bournemouth on 14th June** and all of us attending feel happy with the start time being at **8.30 a.m.** from the Memorial Hall which enables a full day out.

May trip to Chichester - 24th May

The trip to **Chichester** is again not full and there are seats so if you have not confirmed and would like to go, please let me know straightway. Tickets cost £12 (half for youngsters).

We will depart at 8.30 a.m. from the Memorial Hall and the trip takes about one hour forty minutes plus a comfort stop so we should be in Chichester around 11 a.m.

As Chichester is only 8 miles from the nearest coast at Bognor it is a good centre as well as being a very interesting town in its own right. There are local buses to lots of places too.

Don't forget the books please ! Armed Forces Day - 28nd June

We are still looking for used books for our stall at the Armed Forces Day event, if you have any please contact me.

The Armed Forces Day event takes place on 28th June at the Millers Arms commencing at noon. There will be a barbecue and licensed bar all day with lots of attractions for all the family. There will be a marquee with craft and bric a brac stalls, Wincanton Silver Band playing in the afternoon supported by other music. Those who came last year will remember an excellent day out which we hope to repeat again this year.

All proceeds will go to Wincanton Poppy Appeal.