



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

Volume 12 Issue 2

Branch secretary Arthur Pickup 01963-32952

Next is Coffee Morning 23 April at the Memorial Hall 10 a.m. until noon

March/
April
2016

Poppy Appeal Organiser and branch officials.

The most pressing issue we have at the moment is to find a new Poppy Appeal Organiser. I believe that this role is the most important one we have as it generates the much needed funds to support the welfare work of the Legion. Last November we achieved wonders, in spite of the fact that many of our regular poppy sellers are getting older and cannot do so much as they did. We also have had several key people either having moved from the district or even died. The idea of a working group to handle poppy sorting and distribution worked very well and the group helpers were most enthusiastic and helpful. I believe all of those on that group have now indicated that they are will to do similar work again this coming year. The only problem we have and was pointed out by the RBL was that we need a named person to be "Poppy Appeal Organiser" who must order the (which is not really a problem) and close off the accounts - this too is not a problem as accounts are completed exactly from monies collected from poppy selling and wreaths. The working group all helped count the money and bank it. Also this year Morrison's (from where a large amount of money is collected) advised us that they wished to bank the money they collected direct to the bank and they cooperated greatly by supplying the individual amount collected in the tins by poppy sellers. Although money is still coming in (the Poppy Appeal year lasts until the end of July) it is obvious that we will well exceed the total collected in previous years and it would be a great pity not to build on this. My wife Sandra stepped in as an emergency for last year only and did say that she really did not want to do the role but felt we must keep the Poppy Appeal going in Wincanton. We must get a person to take on the role officially for next year. Both I and Sandra will assist and cooperate with a new person as will many if not all of the working group. Please contact me if you can take this on or would like information. A session with the County Poppy Appeal rep would be arranged to explain the role without obligation.

At the January meeting we elected branch officials for the period up to the AGM now set for June - the new accounting year of the RBL. In January Peter Cox, our treasurer tendered his resignation but agreed to accept the role of elected treasurer until the next AGM. Arthur Pickup our secretary too, said he wished to stand down at the AGM and I wish to retire too or at least cut back drastically.

Steve Lee our vice president and I are actively seeking replacements and options but I will say now that I will not just walk away and I will ensure that continuity is achieved.

Focus must be on Poppy Appeal and Remembrance. As I said at the January meeting, in any event Remembrance in Wincanton will continue to be handled in the traditional way and I am discussing all the options for this. I will also seek advice from County and local contacts before I make any decisions.

I cannot continue the monthly meetings and will rely on Sandbag (published bi-monthly) to pass on important information. I will also continue to organise the monthly trips throughout the year and social events as and when occurring. Please watch Sandbag for information, rather than having a meeting for what has been just a handful of people attending. Meetings do take organising and the benefits do not justify the time and workload it places on me.

Lastly, the branch will fully function and I will ensure continuity but I personally cannot go on as before.

There are people who have been very helpful to me over the last few months and I am confident I can find a solution to the gaps in officials. Support has been indicated for Poppy Appeal but as yet no "named person" for the role of Poppy Appeal Organiser. *Tony*

The end of an era

It is with great sadness that I must report that our member and Chelsea Pensioner Paddy Fox passed away 9th January. Paddy had been suffering from cancer for over a year and there was a time when I thought he may be in regression. It was difficult to know because Paddy never moaned about his illness and was always positive, in fact a “true soldier” and I told him so when I last saw him in Chelsea two days before he died. That day I was full of trepidation as I knew by then that Paddy was very ill but I am so glad I saw him. I shall have a lasting memory of him as he was, still the “old Paddy” to me. Several years ago when Paddy was with us on one of his regular visits a group of us went to the Mill Street Club and saw “The Mangled Wurzels”, the Somerset music group. Paddy being in his Pensioners uniform was immediately recognised by them and they said out of respect they would sing for him the “Somerset Anthem” - “I can drive a tractor”:- “I can’t read and I can’t write, but that don’t really matter, I comes from Somerset and I can drive a tractor” !!

Often when I phoned or saw Paddy he would burst into song with the “Anthem” and I am told he often sang it at Chelsea. When I last saw him he was very weak but responsive and trying to make conversation, I told the nurse about Paddy’s Somerset connection. To my absolute astonishment Paddy, in a very weak voice, sang the “Anthem” and he grasped my hand and winked - what an amazing man !

We first met Paddy when I arranged a group visit to the Royal Hospital Chelsea in April 2007 and Paddy was our tour guide. We had a wonderful time and I kept in touch with Paddy and invited him to stay with Sandra and I. He visited us many times and in fact joined our branch during 2007. He made it a regular date every year to attend our annual dinners and we were all entertained by his wit and sense of fun. I think he only missed one annual dinner and that was when he was recording the Chelsea Pensioners Christmas CD hit “The Men in Scarlet” for which the group were awarded a golden disc.

William Fox BEM was a regular soldier and served with 15th/19th King’s Royal Hussars most of the time in Germany as part of the British Army of the Rhine. They were equipped with armoured cars and as a Staff Sergeant, Paddy spent some time as an observer in their Skeeter helicopters. He was awarded the British Empire Medal for his services to Army recruiting and also was awarded the Long Service Good Conduct Medal - for as he said “35 years of undetected crime” ! Paddy’s wish was to have his funeral service in the chapel of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, where he worshipped every Sunday and was sides-man. This was not to be as it is under extensive renovation work this winter BUT he was held in such high regard that it was decided the funeral service would be in the Great Hall at Chelsea. This was the same hall that the Duke of Wellington laid in state prior to his funeral. His Regiment now called The Light Dragoons supplied a guard of honour of serving soldiers in full No. 1 uniform (with swords). The hall was so full that the 300 Order of Service sheets ran out and the estimated 425 people had to share. One of the tributes to Paddy was read by Major General David Rutherford - Jones CB Colonel of the Light Dragoons. The service ended appropriately with the music “The Boys of the Old Brigade” and the organist played “The Bold King’s Hussars” the regimental march of his Regiment. The coffin was draped with the Union Flag, with his tricorne hat on top. The Guard of Honour presented sabres as the hearse left the chapel with Chelsea Pensioners lining the exit. Paddy was cremated and his ashes buried in the Royal Hospital grounds not far from Margaret Thatcher’s grave. Paddy used to attend Sunday service at the chapel as she did and he would have been very proud to have known. One Sunday morning she broke a shoe heel on a metal grill and Paddy was “delighted” to make temporary repairs.

Sadly I could not make it to the funeral as I was on holiday but his friend Les Crompton (whom Paddy recruited also as a Wincanton member) represented me and gave respects from Wincanton RBL branch. Thanks to Les for passing on the details of the funeral.

I am proud and privileged to say I knew Paddy and that he was my friend. I will miss him. *Tony*



Donation to Somerset Legion House

Last Autumn we agreed to donate £500 to the Somerset Legion House in Weston Super Mare (pictured on the right). The Legion House offers much needed breaks for ex-Service and serving personnel and their families. The breaks are offered when the person is recovering from an illness, bereavement or life threatening event and is very popular. There are 47 en-suite bedrooms, all equipped with televisions, tea and coffee facilities with heating and air conditioning. The stay includes all meals in the lovely dining room overlooking the sea and Somerset Legion House boasts lots of features and was



drastically modernised only a few years ago. It is located right on the seafront near the pier and town at Weston Super Mare. Whilst the Legion provides finance to enable the breaks and running costs, donations go towards additional comforts such as entertainment, the on site mini bus and weekly excursions etc. Over the years several of our members have benefitted from the break and feedback from them was that they all without exception had a marvellous time.

On 13th February our vice president Steve Lee along with Roy Glennister went there with our cheque and to tour the facilities. I know both Roy and Steve came back very impressed. Roy is pictured on the left handing over the cheque to Sally Blackwell, the Duty Manager.

County Conference

Yes we did it yet again !

Steve Lee and I attended the County Conference in January and to our utter delight and surprise Wincanton Branch scooped up the cup again for the “most efficient branch of our size in Somerset”. It is no mean achievement and I personally have lost count of the amount of times we have won this. Steve accepted the cup from our County President Bob Mansergh OBE (pictured below). At the conference we were very pleased to be present when Bob McDonald (at the back of the photo) was formally elected as the new County Chairman. Bob has been very supportive of Wincanton branch and members will remember he was present a short while ago when we formally affiliated to TS Mantle VC Sea Cadets. It was a great honour for me too when I was presented with the Lord Lieutenants Award from Her Majesty’s Lord Lieutenant Mrs. Anne Maw, she signed the certificate - “In sincere appreciation of outstanding service in the cause of ex-service men and women and their dependants in the County of Somerset”.



Exeter on 2nd April

It would appear that many people are ready to start our regular monthly trips again as the first trip of the year to Exeter is rapidly filling up. There are still seats available but please contact me as soon as possible if you would like to go. Departure from the Memorial Hall is 9 a.m. on 2nd April and the cost will be £12 per person, children £6

King Arthur's School boosts Poppy Appeal

Our strong relationship with King Arthur's School was illustrated in January when students from Year 8 held a Focus Day based around the local community and undertook a sponsored walk to the viewing point overlooking Snag Farm. There they learnt about the ill fated flight of Flying Fortress "Old Faithful". Sponsorship for the walk raised a total of £100 for Wincanton Poppy Appeal. Evie Cook led the walk and gained the most sponsorship. As well as the healthy walk all had a very interesting day learning of the historic event.

Fly past by Sea King at RNAS Yeovilton



Farewell to the Sea King

On 21st March our adopted military unit the Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) stood down the Sea King helicopter after 37 years of service in many major conflicts from Borneo and the Falklands to Iraq and Afghanistan. During our close association with the CHF members of the branch have been up close to this iconic helicopter. We have been treated to many events including this wonderful helicopter both in the air and in the hangars - we have a great affection for her. There have been many operational changes at CHF and I am in the process of re-establishing contact with the unit.

May trip Southsea & Portsmouth 14th May

Now this one will be exciting ! The May trip is by popular request and I was asked to organise this to Southsea and Portsmouth as the last time we were there was several years ago. The options are to leave the coach at either destination, Hopefully by mid May the weather will be getting warmer and there are so many options for things to do at both places. To get a full day we will leave the Memorial Hall at 8.30 a.m. on 14th May the cost again is £12 and £6 and I will be able to keep the price of trips for the whole of this year. For this long distance this is very good value.

Coffee Morning 23rd April - 10 a.m. until noon

Please try to attend the Coffee Morning at the Memorial Hall on 23rd April, it will be a chance to catch up on things and ask questions if you wish. There will also be our **used book sale** so if you have books please let me know.

Armed Forces Day 25th June

Our Armed Forces Day commemoration on 25th June has grown bigger each year and we have out grown both the Millers Inn where it first started and the Memorial Hall. With expansion in mind and the prospect of bigger participation we have booked King Arthur's School and its grounds. It is still early days yet but we are actively booking participants. Already we can confirm that HMS Heron Band from RNAS Yeovilton has confirmed they will be definitely there and confirmation from our Cadet Forces too. We are in the process of asking again members of Commando Helicopter Force and Army Air Corps who both attended in strength last year and I am hopeful they will be there again. Make a note in your diary for 25th June !

Planned social events

In the next Sandbag I will give you dates of our social events for the summer, which will include a barbecue evening at the Millers Inn and another event at the Unicorn at Bayford.

Veterans Parade at Weymouth is 19th June this year. March off 10.45 a.m.