



**"SANDBAG"**  
**WINCANTON AND DISTRICT**  
**ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER**  
 Editor Tony Goddard 01963-824193



**NEWS FROM THE BRANCH**

Volume 15 Issue 5

Branch secretary Steve Lee 01963-34374

August/  
September  
2019

**Next event Poppy Appeal Coffee Morning 26th October 10 am Memorial Hall**

**Can you spare an hour or two to help the local  
Poppy Appeal?**

You don't need to be part of the British Legion or an active service member or a veteran, anybody can help raise money for the annual Poppy Appeal.

The local Appeal is organised and run by myself, Dawn and my mum Georgina. We distribute all the poppies and collecting boxes in Wincanton and the surrounding areas.

Last year we raised a whopping amount with it reaching over £18,000. The exact amount is not yet confirmed but should be known by the beginning of October.

Over the last few years we have lost a few of our volunteers due to ill health and age and so we are getting notably thin on the ground. The thing we need help with is collecting at Morrison's. There is no responsibility to keep hold of the money, at the start of your shift you are issued with a collecting tin which has a unique number, you use that for the duration of the shift however short or long and at the end you hand it into the customer services desk and get a receipt for it. At the end of the Appeal I then give you a card saying how much you personally raised for the Appeal. So if you can spare me an hour or two or more if you want then please get in touch via email, [oldiescottage@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:oldiescottage@hotmail.co.uk) or by telephone Georgina 01963 32874.

It can be very sociable and you get to meet lots of interesting people, hear lots of interesting stories and occasionally you even get given generous gestures.

*Dawn Old*

**Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club**

Many of our members regularly attend the Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club at the Dolphin Hotel at 9.45 am on the **LAST Saturday of every month**, do join us for a fantastic breakfast - all you can eat at £6.95 and lots of likeminded people attend.

On 1st July I had the honour and privilege of becoming the new chairman of Wincanton British Legion. I want to thank Tony for all his hard work and dedication as the previous chairman and I congratulate him for being the new president of our branch. I would also like to thank Rita Jee, our retiring President; for her support over the years to the branch, taking over the reins from her late husband Percy. I had the privilege, as many of you; of hearing Percy's service stories and him showing me his items in the Imperial War Museum. I joined the legion whilst still serving and become a member of the Wincanton Branch in 2005. As you know I have been the deputy chairman for the last year and have been a poppy collector since 2005 and have assisted a previous Poppy Organiser in preparation for the annual appeal during his tenure. I also support the Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club which occurs on the last Saturday of every month at the Dolphin. the only cost is a charge for the breakfast. It is an interesting way of meeting service personnel and veterans who are not part of the RBL, to meet in a relaxed safe social environment.

I recently was made aware of an opportunity from the Shepton Mallet branch to obtain an ambulance to use as a Somerset mobile hub to use as a touch point for service personnel and veterans which may require help of the RBL. We have expressed an interest; I will keep you updated of any progress. The RBL continues to look after ex-serving and serving personnel and their families. We need to attract new members from the veterans who have recently left the services or indeed members currently serving. Potential younger members have a different view of 'clubs' and are looking for an alternative way of remaining part of the veteran family. We need to discover new ways of meeting their expectations. Last year was GP90, this year the anniversary of D-Day and next year is the anniversary of VJ Day so let's look forward for more opportunities to link with veterans and their families. I, the President and the committee are here to work on your behalf. *Rob Dickinson*

## Old Faithful 75 years on

Large numbers of townspeople turned out in Wincanton 23<sup>rd</sup> June to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the crash of an American Flying Fortress bomber. It was on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1944 that a lone American B17 Flying Fortress was struggling back from a bombing raid on Toulouse in France. The badly damaged aircraft had successfully flown 900 nautical miles flying on only three of its four engines and made landfall over Lyme Bay. Things got worse because one of its remaining engines was malfunctioning and as it followed the Blackmore Vale it was losing height and the pilot frantically searched for a diversion airfield quickly. Fate took a hand because he chose RAF Zeals, which is on high ground and the aircraft was rapidly approaching the centre of Wincanton town. Eye witnesses could actually see the crew throwing heavy equipment including radios and machine guns, out of the aircraft in a vain attempt to lighten the load. The B17 was perilously close to Wincanton when the pilot, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Peter Mikonis banked the aircraft away, but sadly it was badly shot up by German anti-aircraft fire over the target. A horrendous explosion occurred and the stricken plane blew up over Snag Farm on the edge of Wincanton, near Bayford.



The town of Wincanton has marked the anniversary of the sacrifices made that June day every year since a memorial was erected in 1954. This year being the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary was no exception and a poignant ceremony was held at the Wincanton War Memorial. The Union Flag was paraded by Cpl. Chin Gurung and our branch standard by WO1 Neil Anderson regular Army, with military guests of honour Col. Lucy Giles and Col. Colin Thomas. The service was conducted by the Revd. Alison Handcock and the Mayor of Wincanton, Cllr Susan Shelbourn-Brown laid a wreath along with district councillor Colin Winder. It was so good to see so many young people present and King Arthur's School students laid a wreath, they were aware of the history of the event as they had learnt about it

in a recent local history lesson. Wincanton is fortunate to have such splendid young people, as along with the school was a strong contingent of Wincanton Fire Service cadets – it was Wincanton firefighters who rushed to the crash scene on the day of the crash. The American flag was carried by one of the cadets from the Wincanton platoon, Army Cadet Force along with strong contingent from the cadets on parade. Wincanton Silver Band played the hymns and trumpeter from the band, another young person, Zac Smith, played Last Post and Reveille. Zac has played Last Post for several years now on the anniversary of “Old Faithful” The ceremony concluded with the British National Anthem followed by the American National Anthem sung by Amelia Warren.

It was good that the June national Legion magazine mentioned “Old Faithful” in the article “Remembering our faithful American friends” !





## Another exciting adventure.

In the past Doug and Chris Louth have told us of unusual visits they have made, their son runs a travel agency which specialises in unusual destinations and is their inspiration. You may remember they took a branch wreath to Kohima (India/Burma border area) where Wincanton soldier Tony Fraser is buried and they also visited Auschwitz . Their latest trip was also quite different in as much as they visited Scapa Flow once the anchorage of the Royal Navy Home Fleet in Orkney. It was at Scapa Flow that Wincanton boy sailor David Morse died on board HMS Royal Oak, victim of the German submarine attack in 1939.

I thought you would be interested to hear about this unusual place.

Although the Orkney Islands has a long history stretching back to the Vikings and earlier, perhaps events in the 20th century come to mind when talking of the islands history and especially Scapa Flow links with the Royal Navy. In 1916, ships sailed from Scapa Flow to challenge the German fleet at the Battle of Jutland. Both sides claimed victory from this action, but despite the Royal Navy suffering greater loss of ships and lives, the German Navy never ventured out in numbers again. The Royal Navy at Scapa Flow was left in control of the North Sea, which was pivotal to the outcome of the war.

HMS Vanguard dramatically exploded at anchor off Flotta in 1917, in the heart of Scapa Flow killing all but two of the 845 on board. The likely cause was spontaneous detonation of faulty ordnance in the ship's magazine.

The last naval action before the November 1918 Armistice happened at the Hoy Sound entrance to Scapa Flow. German submarine U - 116 was detected trying to enter the Flow on 28th October 1918. The controlled minefield was triggered, destroying the vessel and killing all 36 crew onboard. The Armistice in November of 1918 led to the German High Seas Fleet being interned in Scapa Flow. There they sat, guarded by the Royal Navy, through the winter and spring, waiting for the final peace terms to be agreed at Versailles. Fearing a peace deal would lead to their ships being divided amongst the victorious allies, the commander of the German fleet, Admiral Ludwig von Reuter, decided to act. He sent a signal to all crews to scuttle their ships at 10.30 am on 21st June 1919. The Royal Navy's First Battle Squadron was at sea at the time undergoing torpedo practice. As the fleet went down, confusion reigned. Panicking and angry British forces killed eight German sailors and wounded another sixteen.. These were the last casualties of the First World War. Most of the 74 strong High Seas Fleet were successfully scuttled. The guarding Royal Navy could just rescue 22 of the ships, with all the capital ships sunk with the exception of the battleship

**HMS Royal Oak marker**



**German ships scuttled in Scapa Flow**



SMS Baden.. A tonnage of 400,000 went to the bottom. Initially it made little economic sense to salvage the ships but a local company bought the salvage rights and over the years all were raised and scrapped. The last six ships only being recovered in 1939 - just in time for the Second World War !

In September 1939 the Royal Navy returned to Scapa Flow when it became the base for the Home Fleet again. Once again blockships, boom defences, gun batteries and now anti-aircraft gun emplacements were deployed.

However these defences were soon found inadequate. In the early hours of 14th October 1939, the German submarine U - 47 torpedoed HMS Royal Oak at anchor in the Flow, killing 834 men and boys. Amongst the 125 boy sailors killed that day was Boy First Class David Morse, from Wincanton and named on our Roll of Honour. David has no known grave and probably is entombed in the wreck he is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial on Southsea Common. David was just 17 years old.

**Battleship HMS Royal Oak**



## Coffee morning 20th July

At our last Coffee Morning on 20th July former soldier Paul Cleavin brought in a fascinating diorama of a World War One trench system. The model was accurate in every detail and amazing to see. Thanks Paul !

The Coffee Morning raised in total a profit of £79.45 for branch funds.

Our next Coffee Morning on 26th October will launch our Poppy Appeal 2019.



Paul with his exhibit

## Branch AGM 2019

Our branch AGM took place on 17th June at which some changes in the branch committee came about. As was mentioned previously both Tony Goddard and Rita Jee indicated their wish to retire their roles within the branch and following those changes a new committee was formed. Rob Dickinson was nominated to take over as chairman and was approved at the meeting and Tony Goddard was nominated as branch president. The roles of vice chairman, vice president, secretary and treasurer remain as before with Steve Lee as secretary, Andy Chilton treasurer, Dave Roberts vice president and John Pennington vice chairman.

Unfortunately since Martin Holmes accident he is unable to perform the role of standard bearer and that position is vacant. Anyone who may be interested in becoming standard bearer should contact Steve, a full training program is organised by RBL County of Somerset and any interested person would be given advice and training.

The branch funds are healthy and we do intend making a donation to the RBL Dunkirk Memorial House (veterans dementia centre) and the Somerset Legion House (veterans welfare breaks).

The branch trips will now be on an ad-hoc basis and not set every month, due to lack of numbers.

## Looking forward and back

At the Old Faithful commemoration in June, the mayor Cllr. Susan Shelbourn-Brown advised us that next year the Town Council wish to commemorate the 75th anniversary of VJ Day, which marked the end of the Second World War and the surrender of Japan. She asked if we would be interested in joining them in a town commemoration and ceremony, and naturally we confirmed we would be very willing to join them. As plans progress we will keep everyone informed. This reminded me of the last time we had a big VJ Day commemoration on 19th July 2007 when we had veterans who not only remembered VJ Day 1945 but were in the Far East at the time. Sadly from the photo below you will realise many of them are no longer with us.



In the photo - left to right, are Jack Woods RAF, Ron Peet RN, Laurie Carr RAF and Army, Sid Pleasants RAF, Paddy Smyth MM Army and Bill Rumbold RAF. As well as taking part in the Normandy Landings Ron Peet also saw active service in Burma with the Royal Navy and Laurie Carr was in India with the RAF. *Tony*

## The passing of another Legion stalwart.

Since our last Sandbag staunch Legion member Cecil Roberts passed away. Steve and I attended his funeral in Yeovil and Steve paraded the branch standard at the request of Ann his widow, who is also a member of the branch. Upon doing his National Service Cecil served with the Royal Army Ordinance Corps. Over the years Cecil has been very active within the RBL serving as a caseworker and Standard Bearer amongst many other roles. Our sincerest condolences go to Ann on her loss. *Tony*