



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

29th February Coffee Morning at the Dolphin

February/
March
2020



**WINCANTON
VE DAY**

75TH ANNIVERSARY

A SHARED MOMENT OF CELEBRATION

8 - 10 MAY 2020

Early notification !!

We do not have much firm information of the events associated with the 75th anniversary of VE Day but we will be actively supporting the organisers. What is known so far is that the Last Post will be played at the Memorial Hall at 2.30 pm on 8th May followed by a lone piper.

Once more is known we will update everyone in Sandbag.

Please note the dates in your diary.

There is a facebook page entitled Wincanton VE75 which will be updated as events unfold.



Margaret Chamberlain

I am very sorry to have to report that our dear friend and popular member Margaret Chamberlain passed away on 20th January after a long illness. Margaret is remembered so fondly as she was always full of fun and her witty personality was enjoyed at many of our social events. When I look back and think of Margaret it is always with a smile thinking of the good times we all had with her. So many occasions spring to mind that they are too numerous to mention but every coach trip Margaret took part in was memorable for having everyone enjoying her banter. For those who took part, I am sure they will remember the Portsmouth trip when Margaret encountered that "unusual" bicycle riding group ! Then there was the Christmas Dinner when Margaret said she was eloping with Chelsea Pensioner Paddy Fox and turned up with a suitcase, to Paddy's amazement and embarrassment. I could go on forever but we will always remember Margaret for the fun she brought into peoples lives and she is sadly missed .Tony

I was very pleased to receive this article from Rosemary Keep as it reminded me of the many British cemeteries I have seen overseas. A poignant fact is that each one is immaculately looked after and respected throughout the world. Tony

REMEMBRANCE DAY IN THE GAMBIA

By Rosemary Keep

Being on holiday in the Gambia, West Africa, in November 2018, we were disappointed to be missing the Remembrance Day events both nationally and locally particularly as it was the 100th Anniversary of the Armistice for the end of the 1st World War.

As a military family – John served in the Royal Anglian Regiment for 25 years, his father was in the RAF in India and he lost an uncle in the 2nd World War. My grandfather was killed on the 1st October 1916 on the Somme and my father joined the HAC (Honourable Artillery Company) in the late 1930s so was immediately called up into the Royal Artillery at the outbreak of the 2nd World War. He was involved in the conflict in the desert in North Africa, landed in Normandy on D Day+2 and fought across northern France. So Remembrance Day means a lot to us.



Fajara Commonwealth Cemetery

We holiday in the Gambia regularly and we had driven passed the Fajara Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery on a number of occasions, saying “We really should stop and look around”. Therefore, 11th November 2018 seemed an ideal time to do so.

We really didn’t know what to expect – a handful of people, maybe, gathered around the war memorial in the centre of the cemetery with the British High Commissioner and a few local notables. When our taxi driver dropped us off, we were pleasantly surprised to see quite a crowd moving through the arch into the cemetery grounds. We were greeted by the British liaison officer at the High Commission and a resident member of the Royal British Legion – in spite of the heat - smart in his RBL blazer, tie and beret. We were delighted to see that there was a large marquee set up to shade us from the fierce African sun. We took our seats in the marquee surrounded by British ex-pats, holidaymakers, many Gambians – the ladies resplendent in their colourful outfits and headdresses – elderly Gambian soldiers, representatives from the Gambian Army, Navy and Police, members of the local Diplomatic Corps, Red Cross, Scouts – in all about 300 people.

The service started on time – an achievement in the Gambia where GMT stands for Gambian Maybe Time. After an introduction by Ms Sharon Wardle, the High Commissioner, the service followed the standard Remembrance Day pattern. The 2 minutes’ silence was observed with only the twittering of the birds in nearby trees. The Gambians are usually a very chatty lot so their dignified observance was much appreciated. We were particularly impressed by the two buglers from the Gambian Army who were note perfect for the Last Post and Reveille. The High Commissioner laid the first wreath on behalf of HM The Queen, followed by the heavily bemedalled heads of the Gambian Army, Navy and Police, then the Senegalese Ambassador, as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in the Gambia, three elderly Gambian veterans, a representative of RBL and finally members of the public were invited to lay their personal wreaths and crosses.

The blessings were given in English by a Methodist pastor and in Arabic by a local Imam and a reading was conducted by a German resident – truly international. The service was concluded by the High Commissioner thanking the Gambian people for their support.

After the service we wandered around the cemetery kept, like all Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries, in immaculate condition. Every grave stone spotlessly clean, each plot neatly tended with a small shrub or plant at its front. Remembered there were Gambians who had fought with the West African Regiment together with men from the RAF, the British Army as well as Canadian and Australian servicemen and members of both the Royal and Merchant Navy.



In complete contrast

Many members realise our branch association too with a Commonwealth Regiment, that of the 48th Highlanders of Canada. Each year Wincanton branch obtains the special wreaths for the Regiment which are taken to France and Belgium and the Regiment support our Poppy Appeal in consequence. The 48th Highlanders fought with distinction alongside the British Army in its long history including is the Boer War, Flanders and the Somme in World War One, Italy in the Second World War and service in both Korea and Afghanistan. I was sent a very interesting photo showing Remembrance Sunday 2019 when the Regiment paraded to Old City Toronto with an Honour Guard wearing their period uniforms. As you see from the photo snow was falling, adding to the atmosphere. We have the privilege again to take the wreaths for Remembrance 2020 for the memorials to them in France and Belgium.



Trip to Cardiff 18th April

I don't want to "give up" totally on our trips this year but as I have said on numerous occasions I can only do them if it is financially viable. I believe there is enough support for a CAT Bus trip to Cardiff which requires 16 people to firmly commit. I have booked the CAT Bus on 18th April to depart at 8.30 a.m. from the Memorial Hall and leave Cardiff at 4 pm. As the journey should last about two hours and we will schedule a stop half way at Gordano Services for 30 minutes and should arrive in Cardiff about 11 a.m. The cost is £15.

We will stop in the centre of Cardiff near the castle and I will discuss with those going if they wish to go on to the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagan's instead of getting off in central Cardiff. The museum is free and requires all day there. Those staying in the city centre would be picked up on the way home.

The visit will be on a first come first served basis and the first 16 people who confirm and pay will be guaranteed a place if we reach 16 people. So please contact me as soon as possible.

If this works I will continue throughout the year as we have done in the past.

It seems a pity to stop if we can achieve 16 people every time.

Tony

New style Coffee Morning 29th February

As you know we have developed a very good relationship with Wincanton Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club (AFVBC) and many members of both organisations have interacted in the past. We also have an excellent relationship with the Dolphin Hotel which hosts the breakfasts and indeed we had a very successful pre-Christmas dinner there in December.

As the new committee have been "thinking outside the box" in an effort to rejuvenate the branch we have decided to hold our regular Coffee Morning immediately after the next Breakfast Club meeting on **29th February at the Dolphin. The start of the Coffee Morning will be 11 a.m. in the Stables of the Dolphin Hotel** but if members turn up earlier there is an opportunity to meet up with the breakfast club attendees too. The breakfast club starts at 9.45 a.m. with a full English breakfast and costs £6.95 so if any of our members would like to attend the breakfast beforehand please let me know and I will coordinate. This joint venture is an excellent opportunity to expand on our contact with the AFVBC who have very similar aspirations and commitments as ourselves.

Social evening with Sturminster Newton

Rob Dickinson has been in contact with Sturminster Newton RBL Branch and we are awaiting a date for a skittles and a social evening with them. Sturminster Newton branch has a club with full bar and club facilities and once a date is found we will attend and will be providing transport at a cost of around £5 each.

All members, partners and friends will be invited. There are two other branches in the area with club facilities which we will visit during the next few months and we will be hosting a similar event ourselves very soon.



Jean Mills-Smith

I was saddened to hear from our previous chairman Trevor Mills-Smith at Christmastime that his dear wife Jean passed away in the autumn of last year. Trevor and Jean moved to Ireland when Trevor retired his chairmanship of the branch. Jean always supported Trevor and is fondly remembered in the branch and we offer our sincere condolences to Trevor and his family. *Tony*

Somerset Legion House

You may have read in the national press that the Royal British Legion will be closing their respite centres and ceasing Veterans Breaks, we do not wish to comment on this but as we were in the process of donating £750 to Somerset Legion House we have cancelled our donation and the committee will vote on an appropriate RBL charity to receive this donation.