



Although we were still in lockdown the branch observed a scaled back commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Royal British Legion along with most other branches at the designated time of 9 a.m. on 15th May and this coincided with the national service at that time in Westminster Abbey. We were very fortunate that the rain had stopped by then and prayers and wreath laying could commence. Our chaplain The Revd. Alison Way led us in prayers of thanksgiving and chairman Rob Dickinson laid a special 100th anniversary wreath. As the ceremony had to be a private

event I thought you would like me to quote the prayer which Alison gave, which in my opinion sums up why we felt it important that we continue the work of the RBL in Wincanton.

Loving God We give thanks for this 100th anniversary of the Royal British legion. We pray that, as custodian of the nation's remembrance, we may never forget those who in world wars and conflicts, both past and present, have made the supreme sacrifice, in the pursuit of justice, freedom, and peace

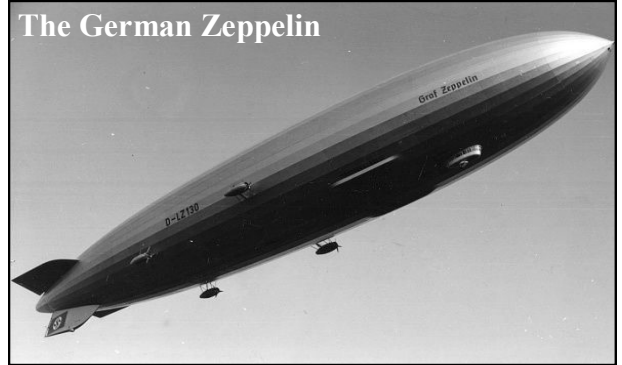
We give thanks for the work done through the Wincanton Branch – amongst the first to come into being over these 100 years. We pray for the gifts of wisdom, discernment, and grace to continue the work of support and advocacy for families and veterans, young and old, who through bereavement, disability, and pain continue to suffer the consequences of warfare and the wounds of battle.

We continue also to pray for the men and women of Her Majesty's Armed Forces serving at sea, on land, and in the air; that, strengthened and sustained, they may meet danger with bravery, discipline, and loyalty.

In your mercy, Loving God, give us the perseverance to be true to our calling, that, standing shoulder to shoulder with all who serve and have served, and following the example of Jesus Christ, we may ever seek to put service before self; through him who is the servant of all, the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Wincanton during the Second World War

Over the last 20 years I have had the good fortune to have met many of our Legion members and back in 2010 I decided I should put pen to paper to record some of their memories of the Second World War and encouraged by Monty Eddington I did take notes from him and others. As a youngster in Wincanton during the 1930s life was simple in Wincanton and was very much a sleepy Somerset small town. In 1938 there was great excitement when a swastika covered Zeppelin flew over town following the railway line towards Bruton. It seems obvious now that the Germans were photographing landmarks and infrastructure in preparation for the coming war. Then in 1939 the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry came to town and



encamped at the racecourse. The regiment still had their horses and most days the CO would come to town on his white horse greatly impressing the locals. When war broke out they then moved to Palestine and in 1941 formed part of the Tobruk garrison. In 1940 as the war turned bad for Britain Wincanton saw first hand the state of the British Army when a large group of soldiers encamped at Aldermeads (now part of the Wincanton Transport yard, Morrison's and Lidl). The troops were brought by train on the old Somerset and Dorset Railway and marched from the station to a tented area with duckboards at Aldermeads. The weather at the time was awful with the area flooded and covered in mud. Monty told how they all were very dishevelled, covered in oil and grime having no kit but the clothes they were wearing. One soldier offered Monty a pistol for 2/6d (twelve and a half pence now) and said "your Dad may need this when the Germans come!". At this time Victor Crocker, who was an Able Seaman on HMS Jaguar came home on leave, he too was at Dunkirk with his ship which was badly damaged and taken out of service. Victor was in a very sorry state, with his uniform dirty and he was very drained from stress. Sadly he did not return home again as the ship was bombed by Italian aircraft of North Africa in 1942 and he did not survive. We now have Crocker Way named after him.

1940 saw lots of evacuees being brought to Wincanton, mainly from London and Southampton, they too arrived by train and assembled at the Primary School gates with their suitcases and gas masks where they were allocated homes to stay. The school headmaster Mr. Shapley (affectionately known as Doc Shapley) became CO of the Wincanton Home Guard with the rank of Captain. Peter Sherry who was only 16 years old in 1939 told me of an amusing incident when the Home Guard were called out to guard a crashed Hawker Hurricane aircraft. The pilot had accomplished an emergency landing on the old A303 west of Wincanton with no engine power and glided in to land on the road, when locals arrived the pilot was just getting out of the aircraft looking every bit like a character out of Biggles comics with a handle bar moustache and silk neck scarf. Checking if he was OK he was asked if he wanted anything, as he leapt out he exclaimed "just a whiskey and cup of tea—in that order!" which they gave him. A short while later military police arrived and the pilot said "leave the aircraft where it is and we will pick it up later"!

Lots of people in Wincanton worked at the Cow & Gate factory which produced baby milk powder, one of the packers was Tony Fraser who lived on West Hill, his father was the factory carpenter and his sister Sheila also worked there. Tony was in the Dorset Regiment of the Territorial Army at Gillingham, when he was called up when war broke out he was actually working, the sergeant cycled over from Gillingham and told him "get your kit, you are in the Army now!". Tony was killed in action at Kohima in Burma during the ferocious battle that took place there in May 1944. Tony's sister Sheila moved to Weybridge and was working at the Vickers Armstrong factory was killed during a bombing raid in 1940. Another worker at Cow & Gate was Fred Hobbs, he was also a packer, Fred joined up too and served with the Wiltshire Regiment. During the Sicily Landings Fred was severely wounded and evacuated to a hospital in Malta where he died of his wounds in October 1943.

Most nights during the early part of the war people in Wincanton could hear German bombers flying overhead enroute to Bristol or Bath and often a glow of fires could be seen in the distance after the raids. It was a time of great excitement for young lads, they would often go down to Rickhayes recreation ground, lay on the grass and see the aircraft vapour trails and watch the RAF fighters doing battle with the German bombers. Monty remembered getting a clip round the ear from the cemetery keeper Henry Dove who told the boys in no uncertain terms to get off the field and lay in the trenches at the side of the cricket pavilion as it was not safe.

Aircraft wreckage often fell out of the sky and it was a great sport for the boys to cycle off and pick up bits of aircraft - especially German ones ! A prized item would be aircraft windscreen Perspex which could be turned into rings and brooches. Templecombe was an important railway junction and sustained a heavy bombing raid on Saturday 5th September 1942 which badly damaged the church along with the school and several houses in the village. Nineteen people were killed during the attack. Some of the incendiary bombs drifted towards Wincanton and burnt out in the fields, the bomb fins were a good find for the youngsters. On Whit Monday - 15th May 1944, Wincanton experienced German bombing when a lone bomber with bombs onboard after a raid on Bristol, jettisoned them over Wincanton. The bombs fell directly on the Westminster Bank in South Street (opposite the Nog) killing the bank manager's daughter Daphne Spencer who was sleeping. The blast blew her body out of the building and she was found dead outside. The bank safe was found lodged against the Temperance Hotel in Church Street, near the Post Office. There was debris, bank notes and bank papers laying in South Street and surrounding areas, school children going to school helped pick up the money. The German aircraft was shot down over Templecombe by a Mosquito aircraft of the Royal New Zealand Air Force from RAF Zeals. Sherborne was also bombed at this time prompting "Lord Haw Haw" to mention it on the German propaganda radio station. It was during September 1943 that Wincanton experienced a "friendly invasion" when the United States 3rd Armoured Division arrived. The Divisional Headquarters was in Bruton whilst elements of the



"Divisional Rear" made camp on West Hill around what is now King Arthur's School. Cucklington was then to be the home of the 103rd Armoured Signal Company and all around neighbouring villages of Somerset and Wiltshire encamped the remainder of the Division. During the Winter of 1943 their training was hard as they practiced for the forthcoming invasion of Europe. At Christmastime 1943 many families in Wincanton had American soldiers as their Christmas guests and lifelong friendships were started, with many soldiers returning to visit Wincanton over the years. The youngsters at the time greatly admired the Americans and they in turn showered them with sweets and goodies. What struck most people was the massive amount of soldiers everywhere, the High Street always seemed full and they were so generous in offering children their gum and chocolates which they had never seen before. One thing that stuck in some peoples mind was that of seeing black American soldiers for the first time. They drove jeeps and ammunition trucks and were based in the Horsington area, Margaret Chamberlain's father was licensee at the Half Moon and she said they were such great fun and so happy and friendly. The 3rd Armoured Division were not destined to be in at the beginning of the Normandy invasion and heard news of it in their camps in and near Wincanton. As quickly as they arrived they were gone during the 18th and 19th June 1944 and to everyone's surprise suddenly all was quiet again. By the time they landed on Omaha Beach, Normandy, the German resistance had evaporated but the scene that greeted them was one of utter devastation after the earlier bitter fighting. The Americans immediately went into the fight around St. Lo and were heavily committed in the breakout at the Falaise Gap finally entering Germany through the Ruhr. Wincanton also has another American connection when sadly a stricken American B17 bomber crashed at Snag Farm on 25th June 1944. "Old Faithful", the aircraft's nose name are



magic words in Wincanton as they depict the selfless sacrifice of nine young Americans who realising their aircraft was about to crash pulled it away from the town to save lives on ground. Many people still remember that Sunday afternoon and the awful scene of burning wreckage. Children were leaving Sunday School upon hearing noise of the engines of an aircraft flying low and the dreadful explosion. Many people went towards Bayford to try to help but were turned back—some children did get through by going through the fields but probably regretted what they saw of the dreadful scene of carnage.

Dunkirk Memorial House

The committee have unanimously agreed to a donation of £1000 to our favourite RBL charity - Dunkirk Memorial House at Bishop's Lydeard, David Roberts our vice president personally delivered our cheque recently. Dunkirk Memorial House is one of six Royal British Legion care homes across the UK with a specialist dementia care unit. Set in 30 acres of landscaped gardens near Taunton, Somerset, Dunkirk Memorial House has been designed to ensure residents and visitors feel as comfortable as possible, including spacious bedrooms plus relaxing lounge areas to sit and chat or enjoy the countryside views. Branch members have visited there on numerous occasions.

“Old Faithful” commemoration 25th June

As with every other year the Branch will observe the Anniversary of the crash of the American B17 Flying Fortress “Old Faithful” which crashed near Bayford Hill on 25th June 1944. Assembly is 2.55 pm for 3 pm, Revd. Alison Way will say prayers and Last Post will be played. If you are able to attend we will meet up at the memorial on Bayford Hill.

Weekly RBL County of Somerset newsletter

During lockdown Steve has been regularly contributing to the RBL Somerset County newsletter with interesting articles about our Somerset Victoria Cross heroes. The County magazine is now available online so Steve has supplied the link below. If you have problems accessing it please email Steve at :- stevelee@memorialstovalour.co.uk

<http://counties.britishlegion.org.uk/counties/somerset/newsletters/county-newsletter>

The County magazine contains lots of interesting articles of what is going on in the RBL locally.

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club

Neil Anderson has told us that the Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club will resume again on 26th June at 0945 hours at the Dolphin Hotel. As a reminder the get together is always on the last Saturday of each month at this time and place.
Big breakfast £6.99



Passchendaele tree

During lockdown most of us have not been out and about as much as we used to but we noticed at the 100th anniversary commemoration how much the Passchendaele oak tree has grown so I asked Rob & Alison to stand in front of it to give you an idea. The tree was formally blessed on Passchendaele Day 2017 to commemorate the five soldiers from Wincanton who lost their lives during that awful battle in 1917 and was grown from acorns collected at the top of Passchendaele Ridge. We sincerely thank Brian Sales for his work tidying up the surrounds of the tree. We also thank Neil Anderson for making the 100th anniversary signs. As part of our commemorating the 100 years of the RBL the committee are in the process of sourcing quotes for a wrought iron wreath frame from local blacksmiths. The memorial has long needed a place for us to secure wreaths to the war memorial and this anniversary is a good time to do it.

