



The Royal British Legion
Market Harborough Branch
AB031

Annual Report

for the year

1st October, 1999 to 30th September, 2000.



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch



About the Branch

- Formed on 20th March, 1923, the Branch celebrated its 75th Anniversary in 1998.
- Centred on the South Leicestershire market town of Market Harborough, it serves some 20 villages in a rural area of about 45 square miles, west and north of the Northamptonshire border. The population of the town is about 18,300 and of the villages, about 4600 (1997 figures).
- The nearest RBL Branches are in Northants.
- There are local branches of R N A and R A F A. Some of our Members belong to these associations.
- There are no nearby military units and so no likely source of younger members.
- There is no associated RBL Club.
- The branch now has no premises, having sold a building acquired just after WW2, in 1991. The proceeds of the sale are held in a Trust a/c at RBL HQ.
- It is still a fairly small branch, with 107 members at 30th September, 2000, but after a period of decline it has established an enviable reputation both within the RBL and in the local community.
- Meetings are held in hired rooms at the Market Harborough Conservative Club, Branch meetings on the second Wednesday of each month, with an average attendance in 1999/2000 of 32 (31% of total membership)
Branch Committee meetings on the last Wednesday of each month (except December), with an average attendance of 10 (out of 12).
- The Branch produces two different newsletters, published in alternate months - appreciated particularly by those members who are unable to attend meetings.
- The Branch has its own website (www.mktharbrorbl.ukvet.net). Created and maintained by a member, it was one of the first in the RBL and has re-



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Objectives and Philosophy

General Objectives, as set in January 1997, still are,

1. A greater sense of comradeship amongst all members.
2. More members participating in Branch activities.
3. Local Welfare responsibilities to be carried out fully.
4. Increase still further the Branch's contribution to Legion funds.
5. Improve the prospects for the Branch's long term survival.

Our Philosophy

We believe that success with the first objective leads to success with the others, but that this in turn reinforces the sense of comradeship, interest and members' pride in their Branch. The more we do with and for our members, the more they benefit from their membership and the more the Branch prospers.

Our efforts during the year have been largely motivated by an ambitious commitment to produce one of the Market Harborough Millennium Festival Weeks. There has also been a determination to be worthy recipients of the Royal British Legion, Leicestershire and Rutland County Award, the Jack Quain Trophy for Endeavour, for a third successive year.

We consider that a branch of the Royal British Legion should be,

Active, Caring, Friendly, Innovative, Outward Looking

These are the criteria which have continued to guide the direction of Market Harborough Branch and we believe lead to a high standard of service to our members, the Legion and the community for which the Legion exists.

The following pages show Objectives the Branch set itself for 1999/2000, our assessment of how well they have been achieved, and new Objectives set for 2000/2001.



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Activities with and for Members

Objectives for 1999/2000

Better forward planning and publicity of social events.

Social Committee appointed. Programme of events produced, based on a questionnaire sent to all members. Forthcoming events announced at meetings & in monthly newsletters. *Dinners and most Lunches popular. Poor support for outings. All events enjoyed by those who have attended.*

Co-operation with other Branches and local groups especially for outings.

Local RNA & RAFA and neighbouring RBL branches receive our newsletters and have been sent specific invitations to some events.

A limited but welcome response. We have been invited to, and a few members have attended some of their activities.

Some of the year's activities

Working together	Three Coffee mornings, helping with Half-year Conference, Poppy Appeal activities, Millennium preparations.
After meetings	A good mix of fun and more serious events - well attended.
Eating out	A semi-formal Annual Dinner, informal "Birthday" Dinner & four pub lunches, provided a popular mix of formats.
Minority interests	A pub quiz and two "beer and skittles" fun evenings, two canal outings, and visits to Duxford and Winchester (including the Museum of Army Flying) and a five day holiday in Normandy were all of limited appeal but much enjoyed by those who took part.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Continue to seek activities that attract more members.



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Recruiting & Subscriptions

Objectives for 1999/2000

To attract more younger members through better, more direct publicity.

Encourage Poppy Appeal collectors to join the Legion.

No actions taken specifically to attract these categories but the high profile maintained by the branch during the year may have prompted one Poppy Collector, and two younger (than average) people to join.

- The Branch leaflet, aimed at attracting new members, was updated, and has been displayed in the Library, the Information Centre, on the Poppy Appeal stall and at any suitable branch function.
- The Legion recruiting display stand was used at Coffee Mornings, Branch leaflets were on each table, the Membership Secretary was on duty and members present spoke to potential recruits.
- Members are still encouraged to “spread the word” in their everyday contacts with other people. As the branch becomes more active and attractive it becomes easier to explain the advantages of membership. The newsletters provide a constant reminder to members of what the branch is doing. “Blowing our own trumpet” is still encouraged!!

During the year 17 new members joined the branch.

- Retention of members is the purpose of much of the Branch’s activities. If members do not wish to leave, they are more likely to encourage others to join.
Only one member left through dissatisfaction.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Continue to make the branch attractive.
Get maximum publicity for branch activities & achievements.



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Publicity & Public Awareness

Objectives for 1999/2000

Produce a new leaflet publicising the Legion and Branch and distribute especially on new housing estates.

Previous leaflet updated but not distributed door-to-door.

Maximise Branch publicity during our Millennium Week.

Much press publicity given to the preparations with good text and photographs.

- An exceptional year for press publicity. The Harborough Mail has encouraged, supported and publicised our proposals for the Millennium Festival Week, especially the Book of Remembrance. Their archives have been made available for our research and the work has been well reported in text and photographs.
- The Remembrance Day Parade and Service and Armistice Day ceremonies organised by the Branch, were well supported by the public and received good press coverage, including photographs.
- The local press reported with pictures, the Annual Dinner, the Coffee Mornings, the Half-year Conference, and the Jack Quain Standard Bearer Awards.
- The Branch Website was further developed and by the end of the year had achieved about 2000 hits. There are now many other sites which provide links to ours.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Maintain close contact with local papers to ensure regular mention of the Branch and Legion.

Maintain a presence on the developing ComKnet initiative.



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Public Relations - External Contacts and Communication

Objectives for 1999/2000

To produce imaginative and worthwhile events during our Millennium Week.

See page 12 - Millennium Festival Week.

Closer contact with other local Branches and with youth groups.

2 Northants & 3 Leics. RBL and local RNA & RAFA branches now receive our newsletters. Firmer links are being developed through social events and meetings.

The ACF provided space in their building for the Poppy Appeal distribution and storage. Some of their cadets help at our Coffee Mornings.

- The branch has continued to be involved with the local community, e.g. through membership of South Leicestershire Council of Voluntary Service, which has recently received a large government grant to administer the ICT community network scheme mentioned on page 7.
- Informal contact is maintained with a number of local organisations through Branch members who also belong to them.
- Presentations about our Millennium projects were given to two such groups.
- Through our Website and the Legion Electronic mailing list, new contacts continue to be made in this country and abroad.
- The usual Civic, Community, Ex-services and Youth group leaders and members were invited to the Remembrance Day Parade and Service.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Strengthen contacts already made in other branches and organisations.

Take as active a part as possible in the ComKnet development.



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Fund-raising (other than Poppy Appeal)

Objectives for 1999/2000

- Run the two Coffee mornings booked for February and June.
Both run by the Social Committee and both very successful.
- Have a stall at the Carnival perhaps with a different theme.
No stall this year. Late publication of the date of the Carnival led to a clash with our pre-arranged Coffee Morning.

Other fund-raising

- Raffles were held at the Anniversary & Birthday Dinners, the Half-year Conference and the outings.
- Local traders paid for advertising space in our newsletter, ***In Touch***.
- Unsolicited small donations were received from members.
- 50p is sought from each member at a branch meeting for a “mess fund” towards buffet and other costs of “after meeting” social activity.

The Millennium projects were funded entirely separately & came from,

- A Donation from a Local Charity.
- A Grant from the District Council.
- Generous donations from members and private individuals.
- Contributions in kind.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Run the booked Coffee Mornings.



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Poppy Appeal

Objectives for 1999/2000

Recruitment of more house to House Collectors, especially for new Estates.
A few more Collectors recruited but only one for new estates.
More contact with, & encouragement of, non-member collectors.
Not achieved.

Collection activity in October/November, 1999 followed the general pattern of previous years, but with one innovation,

The display on the Market Stall used two computers, with continuously running Power Point "slide shows" illustrating,

- Legion Welfare provision - what the Appeal is for, and
- The Conflicts which have given rise to the need for Welfare.

Fund-raising apart from normal Collection activity,

- Coffee Morning held in October, 1999 raised £230.
- Sponsorship of our Pedal to Paris Entrant produced £354.

Plans for the Millennium Festival Week, 6th -12th November (see Page 12), and for the Poppy Appeal were closely linked (the branch PAO was also the Festival Team Leader) in order to maximise public awareness of, and support for, the Appeal. There was much useful publicity during the year (see page 7).

New initiatives for November, 2000 for which arrangements were made included,

- Street Collections on four days compared to three in 1999.
- An extra day in the Market Hall - the popular Sunday Antiques Market.
- A new computer display in which each of the 326 pages of the newly produced "Book of Remembrance" would appear in turn.

The 1999/2000 Branch total was £11,758, an 11% increase on the previous year and another record.

Objectives for 2000/2001

Not yet determined.



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Caring and Welfare

Objectives for 1999/2000

Better links between Welfare Committee & Newsletter distributors.
Better arrangements for home and hospital visits.

Not achieved. Arrangements are still ad hoc but with no lack of caring.

- There is a culture of caring within the Branch as evidenced by the number of members who are also involved with other caring organisations, e.g.
 - Macmillan Cancer Relief
 - Imperial Cancer Research
 - Village community “good works”
 - Church welfare work
 - Hospital Volunteer Car Driving
 - Rotary and Lions Clubs
- Temporary loan of the Branch wheelchair enabled, a terminally ill member to visit the shops, the wife of the member of a neighbouring branch to go on our outing to Winchester, a stroke victim to go on a Stroke Club outing.
- An elderly widow was enabled to visit her husband’s war grave, one of the comparatively few Welfare cases during the year.
- Receiving the branch newsletters is regarded by some who cannot attend meetings, as evidence of caring, especially when delivered by hand.

Objectives for 2000/2001

To be agreed with the new Service Committee



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The Millennium Festival Week

To celebrate the year 2000 in Market Harborough, various groups and organisations were each invited to be responsible for a "Festival Week" of activities or projects for the town. This branch chose 6th to 12th November, when the Poppy Appeal would be in full swing.

Eventually, it was agreed that the theme of the whole week would be Remembrance and three projects would be undertaken which would complement the Appeal. They were,

A Garden of Remembrance

Based on an annual event at the South Australia State War Memorial in Adelaide, large (18" tall) crosses would be set out 18" apart in rows 2' apart to resemble a military cemetery. A cross was made for each of the 254 men commemorated on the town's WW1 Memorial and the 71 men and one woman from WW2. It bore the name of the casualty and had a Legion Poppy attached. Two special memorials were also constructed, one to flank the WW1 plot, bearing the words of the Legion Exhortation and the other for the area of the WW2 crosses, with the Kohima Epitaph. A high quality flagpole was ordered, floodlighting arranged, agreement reached on the form of the opening/dedication ceremony, invitations sent, working party volunteers sought, the ACF band rehearsed, arrangements made for the daily Sunset Ceremony, all to be ready by Monday, 6th November. The Garden, created in the Memorial Gardens, would be on public display for 10 days but then dismantled. The flagpole would remain.

A Book of Remembrance

Who were these men and woman to whom these crosses were dedicated? To try to translate those anonymous names into real people, a group of members and others started a research project to gather as much information as possible about each of them. From official sources, old newspapers, the Internet and memorabilia from members of the public, a six-volume work has been produced for the local community. It is both a unique Roll of Honour and a source of local history. It's format allows for new information to be added as it becomes available. A Presentation Ceremony was planned for 8th November, after which "The Book" would be in the keeping of the Museum and perpetually available to all.

A Remembrance Concert.

In the evening of Armistice Day, the accomplished Harborough Band would



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This Report

This is believed to be the first occasion on which a formal Annual Report has been produced in Market Harborough Branch. Previously, the review of the year given by the Chairman at the Annual General Meeting was recorded briefly in the Minutes and more recently a summary of branch activities was given in the first issue of the branch newsletter following the AGM.

In December, 1998, a document was prepared to support the Branch entry for the Leicestershire and Rutland Jack Quain Award for Endeavour. The same format was used for the entry the following year and is again being used in December, 2000. Each document is, in essence, a record of the work and activities of the Branch during the preceding year - an Annual Report.

It is this format which is used here and which it is proposed to use in future - whether or not associated with submissions for awards!!

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Mrs Constance Halsall, Chairman

December, 2000.