

90th Anniversary of the Royal British Legion

Queen Mary bought one of the very first poppies

The Royal British Legion celebrates its 90th anniversary this year, which is something to be proud of. As we remember our fine history, we are also laying the groundwork for our next 90 years and beyond, ensuring we're just as relevant to our Armed Forces community as we were in 1921.

The very first poppies went on sale in London in 1921 and that first appeal raised £106,000 (nearly £30 million in today's money). The poppies were then sold, as opposed to distributed for donations as today, for three pence each and were in high demand, such that even before breakfast, single petals were selling at Smithfield Market for £5. All day long motor cars would fetch poppies and crate after crate was emptied until supplies ran out. A message from Queen Mary took sellers to Buckingham Palace, but, upon hearing that poppies were in short supply, she bought only two. A basket of poppies auctioned at Christie's raised nearly £500.

RBL Brussels Branch alone raised over €10,000 in 2010 and our challenge for 2011 is to beat this! Monies donated here in Belgium, stay in Belgium and go to supporting a number of protégés who are ex-servicemen or women and their families who need varying levels of support.

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RBL/RNA Belgian Branch Spring Lunch

Saturday 19th March 2011

RBL/RNA Branch's Spring Lunch will be held on Saturday 19th March from 12:30 at the Bruxelles Royal Yacht Club (BRYC), Chaussée de Vilvorde (Pont Van Praet), 1020 Brussels.

€ €40 Menu €

includes wine, water and port

Salad de Néron (scampis, crevettes, crabe)

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Filet de Bar sur peau aux marrons et bolets

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Tiramisù au speculoos

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Coffee/Tea



Royal Naval Association

Guest speaker: Mr Alan Hardcastle, RN ret. on the theme "The Falklands".

Payment by bank transfer please to RNA, Belgium Branch, bank account IBAN BE29 3101 6890 3964 BIC BBRUBEBB. For more information and reservations please call Amanda Borbouse-Ellis on 02 639 2600 or email amanda.ellis@cepiprint.com



Reg Whitburn MBE 1923-2010

Reg Whitburn MBE

By Michael Whitburn

My father, Reginald Whitburn, passed away in December 2010, and these last few months have been a time for remembering and realising how much my father meant to me, how much I owe him, and, sadly also, for being sorry not to have spent more time with him after the passing of my mother.

Photographs carefully arranged in albums by my mother have brought back to me, in black and white, impressions of my father as a boy, a young man, a husband and father. I have one of him wearing a wide-brimmed hat and heavy overcoat as he crouches down behind a little boy, who looks strangely familiar; the photo was taken in the *Parc du Cinquantenaire* in 1950 on what must have been a very cold winter's day.

There are also many mementos which have been carefully preserved in boxes labelled "weddings", "births", "funerals", etc. One, labelled "R Whitburn", contains a typewritten slip of paper stamped Royal Horse Guards "A" Company dated 18th June 1946:

"Continental Leave Pass -Type A. No 306720 Rank TPR Name WHITBURN has been granted short leave to BRUSSELS from 1400hrs 17th JUNE 1946 to 1400hrs 21st JUNE 1946."

Little did trooper Whitburn know then that his life was about to change forever. It was during this leave that he met my mother at the 21 Club in Brussels. Less than a year later they were married, in May 1947, and in November dad was demobbed with the rank of Corporal. The Officer who signed dad's Release Certificate had these comments to make about LCPL Reginald Whitburn:

"This NCO is employed as an instructor in the Education Dept. He has a good manner, with plenty of confidence in himself, which, combined with his knowledge, makes him able to teach other people. An excellent driver of armoured vehicles and able to carry out repairs on most vehicles. Clean, honest and reliable. Military Conduct Exemplary (Germany, 27 November 1947)."

'Honest', 'reliable', with 'a good manner', and 'plenty of confidence': well spotted, Sir!

When mum and dad were first married they talked of living in England, but then dad got a job at Remington Typewriters, and then at the Bell Telephone Company in Antwerp. He learnt French and Dutch and managed to blend in quite nicely: dad had now become *Monsieur Whitburn* ("non, pas WITHBURN: WHITBURN - avec le h devant le i").

In 2003 he celebrated his 80th birthday, and we all went to London - mum, dad, my wife Filo and myself, to collect his MBE, "for services rendered to ex-servicemen in Belgium" (first with ToCh and later with the Brussels branch of the RBL). It was a great day and certainly one of the highlights of dad's later years. Mum and dad's 60th wedding anniversary in 2007 was celebrated with many friends and relatives. It was a happy occasion and the last big event in his life.

Mum passed away in 2008 and dad was never the same again. He tried to put a brave face on it and did his best, as he would say, "not to think of mum all the time", but it was no use: it was all too obvious that he had lost his *joie de vivre* and will to live.

And so life goes on without him. It goes on without this "quiet, thoroughly nice gentleman of the 'old school', who would help anyone, at any time"; without this wonderful person who was also my father.

Duchess of Richmond's Ball Saturday 11th June

With the bicentennial of the Battle of Waterloo approaching, the Brussels British Community Association (BBCA) has decided to revive the tradition of holding an Embassy Ball on the anniversary of the event, and to give the proceeds to charity. It promises to be an enjoyable evening in the elegant surroundings of the British Residence, Brussels.

For more information see www.britishlegion.be of our facebook page "Royal British Legion Brussels"



Mrs Knight receiving her hamper

A Christmas Gift of Hampers to RBL protégés

By Colin and Brenda Puplett

One of the great pleasures of being engaged in the welfare activities of the Branch is delivering some of the Christmas hampers to a number of our elderly members. The hampers contain a carefully selected collection of British goodies and are generously prepared for us by Stonemanor.

Some members of the Welfare Committee volunteer each year to deliver the hampers. They know they will receive a very warm welcome and, most often, a hot cup of tea and a welcome smile.

Many of the protégés are now in homes or receive prepared meals from a local Commune delivery service. Thus, we now have special hampers for persons that do not cook themselves or have no cooking facilities in their rooms. The goodies are packed in festive boxes and are often kept well after the contents have been eaten; often we find they have been used to keep special items in as they look so nice.

Seeing the reaction to receiving the hampers shows that, even if we are in our eighties, we are still children at heart when it comes to receiving a gift nicely wrapped and full of good things.

This year, due to the bad weather, the distribution was somewhat disrupted and we had many challenges getting them out to Mechelen, Ghent, Waterloo and Lessines, as well as to various parts of Brussels.

All our protégés were very grateful to the RBL for the hampers and for remembering them. They were all very happy to tell us the news of themselves and their families, and were very pleased to have a visitor.

We give our thanks to the Welfare Committee members who distributed the hampers and to Stonemanor for their kind support in providing them.



Mrs House, Mrs Worthington and Mrs Ellis, happy with their hampers

Torpedo Recovered at Eastbourne

Royal Navy Bomb Squad recovered a 1954 Torpedo

A team of explosives experts from the Royal Navy recovered a 1954 Mark 9 torpedo off the coast of Beachy Head, Eastbourne, earlier this year, after a fishing boat spotted it floating in the sea.

Southern Diving Unit 2 (SDU2) responded to an urgent call by Dover coastguard after the 5 metre long section of a torpedo was seen by the crew of the Royal Sovereign boat on February 8th.

Photographs sent by the sailors to SDU2 in Portsmouth confirmed that the section did not contain any explosives and was, in fact the pressure vessel and engine part with the warhead and propeller completely rotted away.

Once the Portsmouth-based squad arrived, the divers made a further inspection of the torpedo, which had

been tied to a buoy by the Royal Sovereign fishermen, and at 6am the following morning they towed it to the beach.

“There are lots of old ordnance found along our coastal areas so it is not that unusual to find this type of thing,” said Lieutenant Commander Alan Nekrews, Officer-in-Charge of SDU2.

“The important thing is that there was no warhead attached so it didn’t have any explosive elements - we certified the fact that it was safe when we made an inspection.”

SDU2 would normally dispose of a torpedo such as this, but the coastguard decided they wanted to keep it. It is now on display at the marina at Sovereign Harbour Marina, Eastbourne.

The Wednesday Club

The fortnightly activity club is proving very popular

“The Wednesday Club” is an English speaking social club that welcomes all senior men and women. The Club provides a caring and secure environment within which members can play bridge and scrabble or simply have a chat over a cup of tea and enjoy each other’s company. There are also plans for book swaps, talks, and movement classes.

The Club is run by a team of volunteers and has no religious affiliations.

The Club’s organiser, Deborah Whittingham, is delighted with the success the Club has enjoyed since it opened in April last year. *“We have certainly uncovered a need among the older members of the English-speaking community. The biggest challenge is to meet that need and especially to ensure we have enough drivers to transport people to and from the fortnightly meetings”*.

The Club meets on the first and third Wednesday of each month from 14:00 to 16:30 at All Saints’ Church, Chaussée de Charleroi 2, Braine l’Alleud (just by the roundabout, on the right, heading south towards the Butte du Lion. McDonalds and Carrefour are opposite, on the left).

For more information call Deborah Whittingham on: 02 657 7117 or email info@the-wednesday-club.org

Volunteers to help with transport and club activities are welcome, especially volunteer drivers. Contact: vols@the-wednesday-club.org



Wednesday Club Christmas Lunch.

Happy Birthday

RBL Brussels branch would like to wish Mrs Brenda Knight belated birthday wishes for her 94th birthday in January 2011.

At 94, Mrs Knight is our oldest member and we wish her many happy returns.

RBL Branch Christmas Lunch

RBL Brussels members and friends enjoy Christmas lunch together

More than 20 friends and members joined together on Monday 13th December for their monthly lunch at Les Brasseries Rustiques, Ave du Cimetière de Bruxelles. Although not planned as a formal Christmas lunch, the atmosphere was decidedly festive and we all enjoyed good food, good wine and friendship with lots of laughs. Harry More gave the exhortation and said Grace and our Chairman, Ed Cutting, said a few words of thanks and welcome and then we all settled down to enjoy a delicious lunch.

All members and friends are welcome to join the RBL lunch which is held on the 2nd Monday of each month at Les Brasseries Rustiques at 12:00. Our next lunch will be held on Monday 14th March.



Members enjoying lunch, friendship and a pint at Les Brasseries Rustiques

The “Red Coats” Society, 145 Bld de Smet Naeyer, 1090 Brussels:
Conference on a British Military theme 1st Tuesday of each month (ex. July & August) - 19:45

Major Freddie Townsend OBE

Pat Wiegele-Dajani pays tribute to her father

Major Freddie Townsend, OBE, died last May aged 87. Most of you in Belgium, however, 'lost' your old comrade in 2006, when he was admitted to hospital with kidney problems and he had already been diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease some years earlier. I decided the best option was to bring Dad to Cairo to live with me and my husband, Omar. Here he would be at the centre of a loving family and would not suffer loneliness or neglect as might happen in an old people's home in Belgium or the UK. We could even afford a nurse to pamper him and take him out for a daily walk. The only hitch: he had to teach her some English!

For a man who had always been attached to his 'Service' background, it was strange to live in Cairo. There is very little British connection, despite the history. His first visit had been in 1943 when he had won a draw on board the battleship KG V: a weekend R & R on a Thomas Cook houseboat on the Nile. The next visit was in early 1995, just after I had come to live and work here.

However, Freddie had always been adaptable and he became fascinated by Cairo. The chaos and, to us, weird ways of doing things, are a source of endless wonder. In the beginning, he read and wrote a lot, but over the years, as his eyesight deteriorated and his memory declined, he rather felt the need for some old buddies to talk to and these we could not supply.

The annual Remembrance Sunday services at the Heliopolis Commonwealth Cemetery were a high point in his year. He stole the show with his green beret and medals; the only veteran in Cairo. School children came up to interview him and he felt greatly honoured by the interest of the various ambassadors present.

As long as he was able he travelled with us: to Jordan and the Dead Sea, so he could see Omar's native Palestine, to Aswan and Luxor, to Alexandria, to Ismailia and the Suez Canal. As his health failed, however, he started to fear the 'new' and preferred to stay in his familiar surroundings at home or close by. We did our best to keep him comfortable and 'busy'.

His end was precipitated by a bad fall in February. He was independent to the end. His final days were spent in St Peter's Hospital, a Christian institution; his staff nurse was a young man named Gabriel. I'm sure Dad would have seen the funny side of that; he told Omar the angels were coming to take him.

In a Muslim country cremation is not permitted, so Dad knew his wish to have his ashes strewn at sea could not come to pass. Instead he chose a plot in the beautifully maintained peaceful oasis of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Old Cairo. My husband has reserved our places next to him! The mother of a close old friend from our Singapore days is also buried there. How small our world is.



*Major Freddie Townsend OBE
1924-2010*



Janet Morley accepts a cheque from John Houston, Chairman BBCA and Jonathan Brenton, British Ambassador to Belgium

RBL Accepts Generous Donation from Brussels British Community Association

Janet Morley, Poppy Appeal Co-ordinator for the RBL Brussels Branch, was happy to accept a generous cheque for €2000 from the Brussels British Community Association (BBCA) at the joint Britcham/BBCA Christmas Party on 9th December 2010.

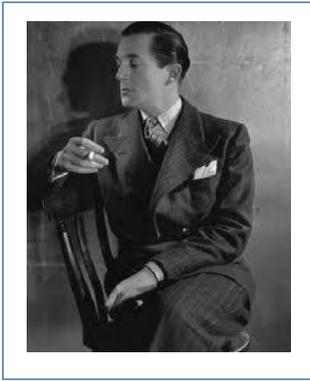
The Legion is extremely grateful for this generous donation, which will go towards supporting the few remaining veterans from WWII in Belgium or their widows.

Cercle Georges Lecointe (Belgian Navy):

Conference on a Naval theme 2nd Wednesday of each month (ex. July & August) - 20:00 at BRYC

The Savile Row Spy

Sir Hardy Amies's secret life as Head of SOE Belgium



Hardy Amies KCVO 1909-2003
Fashion designer and spy

Sir Hardy Amies is perhaps best known as dress designer to the Queen, but during the war he had an entirely different career. The son of a court dressmaker, he started his fashion career in 1930 and by 1934 he was the managing designer at Lachasse fashion house in London's West End. Things changed dramatically for Hardy, when in 1939, due to his fluency in French and German, he was called up to serve in the Intelligence Corps.

So capable was he at this brave work that, in 1943, he became acting head of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) for Belgium and was appointed head of SOE Belgium in 1944. He had the responsibility for seeing that men and women were parachuted behind enemy lines as part of Winston Churchill's secret army to help the local partisans.

The SOE, which had its headquarters in Baker Street in London, on the site now occupied by Marks & Spencer, was set up by Churchill on 19th July 1940, the same day Hitler told the Reichstag that Britain's defeat was at hand. The historian Ted Cookridge wrote: "A few strokes of a pen, and a body was created to co-ordinate all action by way of subversion and sabotage against the enemy overseas". Or, as the Prime Minister put it, "to set Europe ablaze".

With his fluent French and German, Hardy was well equipped to operate in Belgium and he parachuted behind the lines five times, and recruited a murderous trio of agents codenamed the Rat, the Goat and the Vole. He was a key figure in the 1944 plan aptly known as Operation Ratweek, plotting a week long purge of Nazi politicians and collaborators. Yet, for all his military prowess, Hardy never gave up his love of frocks and he used fashion accessories as code names.

However, in 1944, he did outrage his superiors by setting up a Vogue photo-shoot while on a secret mission to Belgium. A senior officer had to be sent to the magazine's London office to censor the article after Amies posed with Resistance heroes in a recently-liberated Brussels.

After the war, he founded his own fashion house in Savile Row after buying the building at number 14 at a knock-down price because of bomb damage. His business took off in the postwar years when customers, who had been deprived of new dresses for the preceding years, snapped up his elegant, traditional, very English style designs.

Remarkably, Hardy never spoke about his wartime work, refusing to explain how he came to be decorated with the Belgian Cross for his undercover activities and the extent of his involvement in SOE only came to light after his death in 2003.

"...to set Europe
ablaze"

Winston Churchill

Hotton Remembrance Day Sunday 8th May 2011

At 08:00, a coach will leave Kraainem Metro car park for Hotton, Luxembourg Province, for a Day of Remembrance. Firstly, there will be a Church Service in Hotton town for the Belgian fallen, followed by a Service at Hotton War Cemetery, where 666 Commonwealth men lay interred; members of the British Expeditionary Force, aircrew and men from the battle of the Ardennes, among them one Belgian, Robert Nott, who fought with the 53rd Welsh Division, who died aged 18 on 5th January 1945.

We will be guests of the Town for refreshments then go on to lunch in Hotton. At 14:30 we will move on to Roche-en-Ardenne for a Remembrance Service at the 51st Highland Division Memorial which commemorates the 54 men who gave their lives to liberate this particular part of Belgium.

More details on the www.britishlegion.be and in the next newsletter.



Musée Royal de l'Armée, Brussels:

Conference on a military theme 3rd Wednesday of each month (ex. July & August) at 20:00
www.klm-mra.be

Calendar of Events 2011

Mon 14 th Mar	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques, Ave du Cimetière de Bruxelles 155, 1140 Brussels. Tel : 02 736 1648
Sat 19 th Mar	RNA/RBL Spring Lunch 12:30 - Bruxelles Royal Yacht Club (BRYC) Chaussée de Vilvorde (Pont Van Praet), 1020 Brussels
Mon 11 th Apr	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Sun 17 th Apr	HMS Vindictive Commemoration Church service and wreath laying, Zeebrugge
Sun 8 th May	Hotton & 51st Highland Division Memorial 09:30 - Church Service, Hotton
Mon 9 th May	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Sat 11 th Jun	Duchess of Richmond's Charity Ball 19:00 - British Ambassador's Residence, Ave Ducale, Brussels
Sun 12 th Jun	Poppy Party Details to follow
Mon 13 th Jun	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Sat 18 th Jun	RNA/RBL Summer Buffet Lunch 19:00 - Bruxelles Royal Yacht Club
Sat 25 th June	RBL Wreath Laying Memorial Service & Lunch, Evere
Fri 1 st Jul	Battle of the Somme Commemoration 95 th Anniversary of the Battle of the Somme
Sat 2 nd Jul	Joint Service of Commemoration, Ypres
Mon 11 th Jul	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Mon 8 th Aug	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Sun 28 th Aug	Tigelot Remembrance 10:00 - Jalhay/Verviers
Fri 2 nd Sep	Brigade Piron 10:00 - Parc des Muses, Ave Brigade Piron, Molenbeek
Mon 12 th Sep	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Mon 10 th Oct	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Sat 15 th Oct	RNA/RBL Trafalgar Lunch 12:30 - Le Manoir du Lac, Genval
Sun 13 th Nov	Remembrance Service & RBL Church Lunch 12:00 - Holy Trinity Church, Brussels
Mon 14 th Nov	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques
Mon 12 th Dec	RBL Branch Lunch 12:00 - Les Brasseries Rustiques



RNA Informal Monthly meetings are held on the 2nd Saturday of each month (ex. July & August) 11:00 - 14:00 at the BRYC.



Join us on
Facebook - Royal British
Legion Brussels

2010-2011 RBL Brussels Branch Membership subs Reminder to pay

Membership subscriptions of €20 for the year 2010/2011 are now overdue

Please pay €20 stating "Membership 2011" and your name.

To Bank Account: 210-0155524-85 / BIC code: GEBABEBB / IBAN: BE89-2100-1555-2485
RBL Brussels Branch, Ave Tervuren, 262 box 6, 1150 Brussels.

If, for any reason, you do not wish to renew your membership then please contact Michael Rose, the membership secretary on 02 269 7577 or e-mail: Michael.rose60@hotmail.com

Also if you are unable to pay because of illness or mobility then please contact the welfare officers Colin & Brenda Puplett on 02 767 4726 or e-mail: colin.puplett@pandora.be

Remember, your branch is here **to help you!**

If you have not already done so, then please renew your subs as soon as possible.



Lost trails – British Legion Helps You Find Old Comrades

Friendships are forged during times of hardship and service but often comrades lose contact when they return to their civilian lives. Lost Trails is a messageboard service to help locate former companions.

You can place your own entry or search those that have been entered in the past year. Go to

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/lost-trails>

About the British Legion, Brussels Branch

Caring and campaigning for the serving and ex-Service community

The Brussels Branch of the RBL has a mixture of predominantly, but not exclusively, British and Belgian members.

A number served in the last World War and remained in Brussels after its liberation from the occupying forces.

We actively seek Members, both serving and ex-servicemen or women, with a tie to the services, but all are welcome. Annual membership is €20.



The Brussels Branch provides welfare for a number of protégés who are ex-servicemen or women in need of varying levels of support. This includes hospital and home visits as well as financial assistance.

We also provide a social focus for our members which includes trips, lunches and various other activities.

The RBL Brussels Branch, like others in Belgium, also provides military representation at a large number of ceremonies enacted at the various war graves and cemeteries throughout Belgium.

Our main fund-raising activity on an annual basis is the Poppy Appeal, particularly relevant in Belgium as they are representative of the poppies of Flanders and Picardy where some of the bloodiest fighting of the first World War took place.

Main email contact: info@britishlegion.be

Membership Contact: Michael Rose
membership@britishlegion.be

www.britishlegion.be

Newsletter prepared with the kind support of www.EnglishShop.be and FULCRA.

Newsletter contributions or requests to receive future copies by email to Dr Helen Haywood at newsletter@britishlegion.be