



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch
BR0106



Annual Report

for the year

1st October 2000 to 30th September 2001



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Introduction

This is the second formal Annual Report produced in Market Harborough Branch. Last year it adopted the format used in two previous years for our successful entry for the Leicestershire and Rutland County Jack Quain Trophy for Endeavour. This report more clearly distinguishes between matters that are unique to the year under review from steady progress towards ongoing general objectives. Chief amongst the former are those concerned with the Millennium Festival Week from 6th to 12th November. Market Harborough celebrated the new millennium with a year-long series of Festival Weeks, each undertaken by an organisation or group in the town. Ours was one of the very few Weeks in which there was some event on each of the seven days, quite a commitment for a small voluntary unit. Preparations for these events were described in last year's report but it is the implementation that is covered here.

What is common to these two different aspects of the development of this Branch is the involvement and dedication of many members led by a very able chairman, my predecessor, Mrs Constance Halsall.

.....
Mark R Hudson, Chairman

December 2001

Contents					
General		Special to this Year		Steady progress	
Introduction	p 2	Millennium Festival Week	p 5	Newsletters	p 10
About the Branch	p 3	Garden of Remembrance	p 6	IT	p 10
Our Objectives	p 4	Books of Remembrance	p 7	Social Events	p 11
		Branch Exhibition	p 8	Fundraising Events	p 11
		Poppy Appeal Stall	p 8	Poppy Appeal	p 11
		Remembrance Concert	p 8	Welfare	p 12
		War Memorial Campaign	p 9	Ceremonial	p 12
Awards & Rewards	p 9			Teams	p 12
				Recruitment & Retention	p 13
				Attendance at Meetings	p 13



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



Founded in 1923

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 Northamptonshire.
- 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 from which to recruit younger members.
- There is no associated RBL Club and no local Women's Section Branch.
- The branch now has no premises, having sold a building acquired just after WW2, in 1991. The proceeds of the sale are in a Trust a/c at RBL HQ.
- Meetings are held in hired rooms at the Market Harborough Conservative Club.
- It is still a fairly small branch, with 114 members at year end. Of these 36 were women and 29 Associate members.
- The Branch has an enviable reputation both within the RBL and in the local community.
- The Branch produces a monthly newsletter- 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 received awards and commendation from this country and abroad.



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Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



Branch General 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.

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.



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Millennium Festival Week - Programme of Events

All events are open to the public (except those shown as by invitation only).

<p>Monday, 6 Nov</p> <p>7.30pm Short Concert by the Army Cadet Force Band at the Parish Church (no charge)</p> <p>8.15pm Band marches to the Memorial Gardens for An Act of Remembrance in the newly created Garden of Remembrance" which will be floodlit.</p>	<p>Tuesday, 7 Nov</p> <p>Poppy Appeal Stall in Market Hall.</p> <p>4.00pm Sunset ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance</p>
<p>Wednesday, 8 Nov</p> <p>4.00pm Sunset ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance</p> <p>7.15 pm Branch Meeting</p> <p>8.00pm by invitation Presentation of the six volumes</p>	<p>Thursday, 9 Nov</p> <p>2.30pm by invitation. Official opening of the Royal British Legion Millennium Week Exhibition at the Harborough Museum.</p> <p>4.00pm Sunset ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance</p>
<p>Friday, 10 Nov</p> <p>Poppy Appeal Stall in Market Hall.</p> <p>Royal British Legion Millennium Week Exhibition at the Harborough Museum opens to the public.</p> <p>4.00pm Sunset ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance</p>	<p>Saturday, 11 Nov</p> <p>Poppy Appeal Stall in Market Hall</p> <p>10.15am Remembrance – Welland Park</p> <p>10.55am Remembrance and 2 Minutes Silence on The Square</p> <p>4.00pm Sunset ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance</p> <p>7.30pm Concert by Harborough Band at the Baptist Church</p>
<p>Sunday, 12 Nov</p> <p>Remembrance Sunday Parade, Service at the Parish Church & Wreath laying at the War Memorial</p> <p>10.00am Parades assembles</p> <p>10.45am Service begins - please be seated by 10.30am</p> <p>Poppy Appeal Stall at Sunday Antiques Market.</p>	



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



Garden of Remembrance

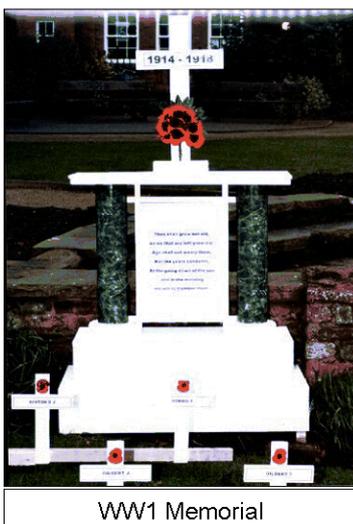
In Market Harborough, with access from The Square in the centre of the town, is a tranquil area of lawns and flower beds leading down to the river bank. This is the Memorial Garden built to commemorate those who lost their lives in WW2 and an ideal location for the Garden of Remembrance which the Branch had decided to create as one of its projects for the town's Millennium celebrations.

Based on an annual event at the South Australia State War Memorial in Adelaide, large (18" tall) crosses were set out in rows 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 a Legion Poppy.



A replica of the London Cenotaph and two special memorials were constructed. One of these flanked the WW1 plot, bearing the words of the Legion Exhortation and the

other by the area of the WW2 crosses, with the Kohima Epitaph. A high quality flagpole was installed and floodlighting provided.



WW1 Memorial

The Garden was opened on Monday, 6th November with due ceremony and was on public display throughout Remembrance Week.

Each afternoon a Sunset Ceremony was enacted.

After about 10 days the display was dismantled but the flagpole remains as a permanent enhancement to the area.

There was good press coverage and much public acclaim for the project. It is to become an annual event.



Cenotaph & flagpole



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



R B L Exhibition

In collaboration with the branch, the Harborough Museum mounted a 'Royal British Legion Millennium Week Exhibition' at which the six volumes of "A Book of Remembrance" were on display together with display material and artefacts illustrating the planning & research for our Millennium projects.

Poppy Appeal Stall

On each of the four days that the Market hall was open during our Millennium Week (6th to 12th November) the branch occupied a stall as a display and collecting point for the Poppy Appeal. It also acted as a 'Control Centre' for the Street Collectors.



Two computers showed continuously running 'slide shows'. One illustrated the benevolent work of the Legion, i.e. what Poppy Appeal money is used for. The theme of the other was Remembrance and showed in succession each of the 326 name pages from the Books of Remembrance, a poignant and graphic reminder of the sacrifice made by this small town in two world wars.

The first slide show has also been adapted as a basis for talks about the Legion and a copy of the software given to our County Field Officer. The other show is now included on the Branch website.

Remembrance Concert

In no way comparable with the Legion's Festival of Remembrance held on the same evening, the concert organised by the Branch and performed by the local but award winning Harborough Band, was a fitting end to Armistice Day and a prelude to the following day's Remembrance Parade and Services. The programme of popular music represented each decade of the life of the Legion. Last Post and Reveille were sounded by two musicians placed with our Standard Bearer high up at the front of the church, in a moving act of "Remembrance".



The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch BR0106



The Hospital War Memorial Campaign

At the Market Harborough ‘Cottage Hospital’ is a War Memorial which forms the entrance to the ‘Memorial Wing’ opened in 1924. It is unusual in that the four long engraved tablets record the names of all the nearly 1700 men from the urban district who served in the Great War, with those who died being marked with a red cross.



When it became known that hospital might close, members of the Branch, the other ex-service organisations and the public were afraid that the memorial might be lost in any redevelopment. This Branch launched a campaign to ensure the satisfactory preservation of the memorial. Support for our approach to the NHS Trust was sought and received from influential local individuals and a national organisation.

Assurance has now been received that the Trust will fully fund the repositioning of the Memorial and will seek our advice on its movement and location. We regard this as a satisfactory outcome of the campaign—so far!

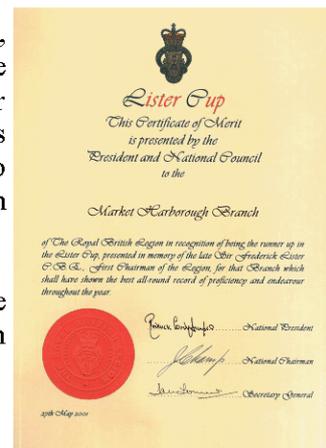
Awards and Rewards

It was a very proud Branch Chairman, Mrs Constance Halsall, attending her first Annual Conference, who received the **Certificate of Merit** for Market Harborough Branch as runner up in the Lister Cup for all round efficiency and endeavour. It is a great reward for the Officers, Committee and all members to receive recognition for their efforts to make this Branch one in which we all take pride.

In October, George Fleming again achieved second place in the County Standard Bearers’ competition and retained his position as Deputy County Standard Bearer.

Three members successfully attended Legion Training Courses: Welfare Officer, John Liddell, a caseworkers’ course; Branch Secretary, Betty Ramsay, a Branch Management course; Branch Treasurer, George Fleming, an Independent Examiners’ course.

The Branch website won an international award as “A Best Military Website”.





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Newsletters

Launched on a trial basis in June, 1996, ***In Touch*** reached issue No. 36 in September 2001. Its primary purpose was to keep those members who were unable to attend meetings in touch with what was happening in the Branch. It was published in alternate months until March 2001 since when it appears each month. From its early days it contained short articles of general interest and became a mini magazine. Its format is convenient in size and visually attractive and it is printed on good quality paper. Circulation was initially to our members only but copies are now sent to County Office, local RBL, RNA & RAFA branches, to the local newspaper and a few interested individuals.

In August 1997 to bridge the 2 months gap between issues, a second publication was started, ***In Touch, Too***. This was a simple single A4 sheet of news, announcements and a Diary of forthcoming social and other events. It was discontinued when ***In Touch*** became a monthly publication.

An important aspect of our newsletters is that as far as practicable they are delivered by hand by a team of volunteers who ensure that even those who do not get to meetings do see another branch member occasionally. These calls can provide a valuable link to the branch Welfare Team.

An example of each newsletter is included with this report.

Information Technology

Although most members will say, “I know nothing about computers”, all are exposed to its use in the Branch and an increasing number are computer literate, some having acquired computers during the year. Several members are on line and e-mail communication between them is developing.

The Branch Website, started in May 1998, and still maintained by a member, was the first in the County and one of the first in the RBL. It has received awards and commendation from this country and abroad including the one this year mentioned on page 7. By year-end the site had received over 2700 visits.



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Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



Social Events

Each Branch meeting is followed by a social period. During the year there were 5 Buffets including pre-Christmas 'Mulled Wine & Hot Mince Pies', a 'Birthday' competition, a talk on medals, quizzes and just friendly chat.

Between meetings the most popular events were eating out—3 pub lunches & 3 Dinners. At the semi-formal Annual Dinner in October, 'official' guests and other branches are invited. The 'Birthday' dinner held in March, at the time of the Branch Anniversary and the December Christmas dinner are informal, fun occasions for members and their guests.

Outings were made to a local Covert Warfare Museum, the RAF Museum at Cosford, Blits Hill Victorian Town at Iron bridge and Newmarket for the Poppy Race Day where our Standard Bearer took part in the Parade.



Fundraising Events



3 Coffee Mornings were the main fundraising events of the year. These are a very good way of getting members involved and working together for a serious purpose but in a social way that is fun. Members are generous with their donations of items for the various stalls and of prizes for the raffle.

Raffles were also held at most of the social events mentioned above. Of the £790 these events produced, £250 was donated to the Poppy Appeal. The remainder was allocated for use within the Branch.

The Poppy Appeal

Another success for the year ending 31st May, 2001, with a record total of £13,158, an increase of 12% on the previous year.

Public awareness was heightened by the Branch Millennium Festival week, especially by the Garden of Remembrance (see page 6), but much credit is due to the P A O duo, Tom & Betty Jeacock and the dedicated band of Collectors.





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BR0106



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Welfare

A new Welfare Officer was appointed at the beginning of the year. He was fairly new to the Legion, but had considerable experience in welfare and caring in other organisations. The result has been a healthy questioning of what has been done before, going on a case-workers' course (see page 9), expanding the Welfare Team, establishing good relations with the local DSS and other agencies, and adopting a more proactive approach. He actively encourages all members to be Welfare's "eye and ears" and there have been several examples of how the delivery of the Newsletters (see page 10) has alerted the need for help.

Most of the case load has been concerned with providing advice and moral support.

Ceremonial



The branch is fortunate in having two excellent Standard Bearers, George Fleming and his deputy, John Cox.

At the beginning of the year George was again appointed Deputy County Standard Bearer (see page 9) & carried the County Standard six times.

Our Standard was before the public at the Sunset Ceremony in the Garden of Remembrance (see page 6), the Remembrance day Parade & Service, the Remembrance Concert and the Poppy Race Day. It was at functions of other branches and at six local funerals. (When a local ex-service person dies, the family is asked if they would like the Standard to be present at the funeral.)

John Cox was Branch Standard Bearer for several years and served as County Standard Bearer. Apart from being our Branch deputy, he has "helped out" at other branches.

Teams

To emphasise the idea of working together and to avoid a sense of bureaucracy, 'sub-committees' have become 'teams'. Currently there are three teams:

- Welfare
- Social
- Communications

The Teams set up to deal with the Millennium Festival Week and the Hospital War Memorial Campaign have been disbanded.



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BR0106



Recruitment & Retention

15 new members joined the branch during the year, 5 died, 2 allowed their membership to lapse (health & location reasons) and 1 resigned through dissatisfaction.

There were several younger members amongst the new joiners.

Some factors accounting for the steady inflow of new members are:-

High profile of the Branch due to the Millennium Festival Week and press coverage.

Recommendation by members—this is also a measure of member satisfaction and of the high retention rate.

Recruiting effort: at Coffee Mornings leaflets are on each table and members talk to visitors about the Branch

a talk given for newcomers to the town.

Inviting members of the public to join some of our outings.

The high retention rate is largely due to a sense of pride in being part of a successful branch—“Success breeds Success”.

There is much evidence of comradeship—A friendly branch.

Attendance at Meetings

Branch meetings were held monthly except in January when the room was not available.

The average attendance during the year was 40, i.e. 36% of total membership.

About a quarter of our members find it impossible to attend due to ill health, lack of transport or not living in the area. Others have commitments on the days our meetings are held.

Thus the average attendance of members for whom it is practicable to attend was around 60%.

Most of the new members appear to be attending regularly.

Committee meetings were held monthly except in December. The average attendance was 11, i.e. 73% of total members.