



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch
BR0106



Annual Report

for the year

1st October 2001 to 30th September 2002



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

BR0106



Introduction

This is the third successive year in which Market Harborough Branch has produced a formal Annual Report as part of a submission for the Haig and Lister Cups. Last year the report emphasised the involvement of the branch in its week-long contribution to the town's Millennium Festival Year. The compliments received from Press and public added to the Branch self-esteem, which was enhanced by the award of the runner-up Certificate for the Lister Cup. Such recognition did much to motivate the branch to strive to do well during the whole of 2000/2001 and the Award in May 2002 of the Haig Cup for performance during that year reinforced our belief that success breeds success.

For 2001/2002, the year under review, the strong motivator has been the determination to stay "at the top". This report shows that without any special circumstances such as the Millennium celebrations, the Branch has maintained a high standard of performance and has continued to develop through new initiatives. However we are not complacent and recognise areas of Branch activity which can and must be improved.

As Chairman, I pay tribute to the efforts of all members to achieve another successful year and for the support they have given me during my first year of office.

.....
Mark R Hudson, Chairman

December 2002

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About the Branch

- Formed on 20th March, 1923, the Branch celebrates its 80th Anniversary in 2003.
- Centred on the South Leicestershire market town of Market Harbourough, 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 Harbourough Conservative Club.
- It is still a fairly small branch, with 127 members at year end. Of these 42 were women and 33 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 two websites created and maintained by members.



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Branch General Objectives and Philosophy

General Objectives, based on those set in January 1997, are to,

1. Foster a sense of comradeship amongst all members.
2. Encourage members to participate in Branch activities.
3. Carry out fully Local Welfare responsibilities.
4. Increase still further the Branch's contribution to Legion funds.
5. Work to ensure 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.



The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch BR0106



Highlights of the Year

November New Chairman elected, aged 39, the youngest for many years.
Second Remembrance Concert raised £353 for Poppy Appeal
Garden of Remembrance repeated and again acclaimed



Garden of Remembrance

March First of three monthly Branch At Home events

April New website launched to give newsletter a wider audience



Receiving the Haig Cup

May Chairman presented with Haig Cup at Annual Conference
Branch Secretary and her daughter take part in RBL Poppy Walk and raise £344
Local Poppy Appeal collectors visit Poppy Factory with Branch members

June Branch Standard Bearer in the Queen's Jubilee Parade
Branch hosts County Standard Bearers' Parade & Service



Poppy Factory Workers



August Branch Standard Bearer selected for Queen's visit to National Memorial Arboretum

September Large Print version of Branch newsletter launched
Memories are made of this, a 192 page book of stories mostly by members, published in aid of Branch funds and Poppy Appeal



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Poppy Appeal

The total credited to the Branch Account for the Appeal Year to 31st May, 2002 was £13,846, another record and although only 5% greater than the previous year, was still above the rate of inflation.

A valuable contribution to this total was the £352 profit from the second Remembrance Concert, organised by the Branch and performed by the local but award winning Harborough Band. It was a fitting prelude to the following day's Remembrance Parade and Services and is now firmly fixed to be an annual event.



As part of the November appeal activity, the Branch again occupied a stall in the Market Hall as a display and collecting point. The same two-computer presentation was used as last year, in which one continuously running slide-show illustrates the benevolent work of the Legion, i.e. what Poppy Appeal money is used for and the other the relevance of remembrance. This shows in succes-

sion each of the 326 names of those from this district who lost their lives in the two World Wars.

In May our Branch Secretary and her daughter took part in the Legion Poppy Walk and through sponsorship they raised £344. Smaller sums included £88 from those who went on the outing to the Poppy Factory and £30 from the landlord of the pub where the Anniversary Dinner was held.

A new initiative designed to raise funds to be shared between the Poppy Appeal and the Branch was the publication in September of a collection of stories and articles which have appeared in the Branch newsletter, *In Touch*, since its launch in 1996. This 192 page soft-back book entitled *Memories are made of this* is produced entirely "in house" and is offered "in exchange for a requested minimum donation of £6.50."

At a short ceremony at the February Branch meeting, Certificates of Appreciation were presented to those who, for a number of years, have been responsible for the successful organisation of the Branch's work for the Poppy Appeal.



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Welfare

Most of the case load has been concerned with providing advice and moral support and help in claiming benefits. Social Services are well supported by local charities such that none of the 14 cases dealt with during the year have involved the need for Legion funds.

Changes in procedures and legislation have made the provision of Welfare more complex and demanding and results in each case now taking longer. In the past, one individual, the Welfare Officer, was able to cope with the relatively small number of cases which arose. Although during the past year two other members have attended Caseworker Courses in order to assist the Welfare Officer, there is still concern that this is not entirely satisfactory especially if a more pro-active approach is to be followed.

Ceremonial



It has been another very busy year for our Standard Bearer. Having been runner-up in the County Standard Bearers' Competition he was selected as a representative of the County in the Queen's Golden Jubilee Parade in London, for H.M. the Queen's visit to the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, at Nottinghamshire RBL's Rededication at Southwell Minster and at the launch of the Leicestershire Poppy Appeal. Locally the Branch Standard was carried in public 16 times, including Sun-set Ceremonies in the Garden of Remembrance, Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day Parades and Services. In addition, our Standard Bearer attended events at other Branches in the County and was in the Parade at the Poppy Race Day at Doncaster.

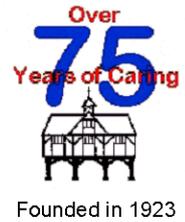
With the Standard at Branch functions, funerals and training sessions, our Standard has been carried 49 times during the year.



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Publicity and Public Awareness

The Branch has kept itself in the public eye during the year, for example by

- Repeating, enhancing and publicising the Garden of Remembrance introduced last year.
- Holding another Remembrance Concert, advertised in the local press and with posters. The Concert Programmes gave information about the Branch and the Legion.
- Arranging three Sunday afternoon “Branch At Home” events advertised in the press and by 500 special leaflets delivered to houses on new housing estates.
- Using special display material at coffee mornings and placing illustrated leaflets about the Branch and Legion on each table.
- Manning a stand at an Exhibition of Local Voluntary Organisations.



- Having the Haig Cup on permanent public display (in a secure cabinet!) in the reception area of the Harborough District Council Offices.
- Publicly acknowledging support given to Legion or Branch through “Letters to the Editor” page of local papers, e.g. Poppy Appeal collection and the Council for displaying the Haig Cup.
- Members, in their personal contacts, showing pride in their Branch —“I’m from the Royal British Legion”
- Ceremonial activity and the presence of the Standard e.g. Hosting the County Standard Bearers’ Parade and Service.
- Through a steady stream of over 800 visits to the Branch web site during the year.



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Communication

The Branch attaches much importance to good communication. Some of the ways branch activities and the Legion message are conveyed to the outside world is described under "Publicity and Public Awareness" on Page 8. This section deals with internal communication: with members and within the RBL.

At **Branch Meetings** those present receive and have an opportunity to discuss information received from outside the Branch as well as reports from those responsible for the various functions of the Branch. They are also made aware of outward communications.

The most relevant of the proceedings of each monthly meeting are reported in the Newsletter, ***In Touch***, which is published 10 days later and is distributed to every member.



By disseminating information throughout the membership it is hoped to create a sense of openness as well as a feeling of belonging. This latter is especially important for those who cannot attend meetings and is why ***In Touch*** was launched in 1996 and why it was so called. To encourage everyone to read it, it is produced in an attractive, easy to read format with pictures, articles and stories as well as news.

In September 2002, a **Large Print Version** was introduced for sight-impaired members. For over a year an **e-mail version** was transmitted to a member living in the USA (to save postage costs), but this was discontinued when www.in-touch.ukvet.net, a **new website** was launched in April 2002. ***In Touch*** is now available to a much wider audience as each issue is added, usually within a few days of the paper version. Also, back numbers are gradually being added in order to build up a complete archive.

Information Technology is being used and encouraged in the Branch. The main website has generated many contacts in this country and abroad which are reported to our members. The use of e-mail for correspondence within and outside the Branch, though still limited, is increasing. Almost all paper communica-

tions, whether internal or external, are computer produced and help to project an image of a competent, professional organisation.

In April a **Membership Directory** of names addresses and phone numbers of all members wishing to be included was circulated to all members to aid and encourage them to contact one another, especially Branch Committee and Team members.



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Founded in 1923

Social Events

Having a social period after each Branch meeting continued to be popular, with about two thirds of those attending staying on for the rest of the evening. A good mix of format has included a presentation about the Air Training Corps, an interactive competition, buffets, an unsuccessful discussion, a talk by the County Field Officer and just friendly chat.



During most months there is at least one “stand alone” event. Eating out remains popular and the three pub lunches and three Dinners have been well attended. The six outings arranged varied in appeal, that to the Poppy Factory being the most successful and much appreciated by the local Poppy Appeal Collectors who had been invited. Doncaster Poppy Race Day was also well supported.

Forthcoming events are announced in the Branch Newsletter which is also circulated to other local branches of RBL, RNA and RAFA. Although it is implicit that their members would be welcome to take part, this very rarely happens. This is particularly disappointing when there are insufficient numbers to justify hiring a coach for an outing.

Fundraising Events

Two 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 £634 these events produced, £250 was allocated to the Poppy Appeal and the remainder for use within the Branch.





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Founded in 1923

Recruitment & Retention

In all the attempts to increase public awareness as outlined on page 8, the Branch has adopted, as in previous years, a “soft-sell” approach to recruitment, rather than mounting any specific event. This, we believe has been quite successful with 17 new members joining during the year, equivalent to 15% of membership at the beginning of the year. The net increase in numbers was 13 (11%), the losses being those of four members who died.

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

- Recommendation by members—this is also a measure of member satisfaction
- 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.

The average attendance during the year was 38, i.e. 31% of average membership, down a little on last year. Taking into account those who find it impossible to attend because of ill health, lack of transport, not living in the area or having commitments on the days our meetings are held, at a typical meeting about half of those for whom it is practicable to attend, were present.

Committee meetings were held monthly, a change of dates having been made to reduce the time to six days before the corresponding Branch meeting. The average attendance was 10, i.e. 67% of total members.

Members’ Achievements

Two more members have qualified as Welfare Caseworkers.

Our Standard Bearer was runner up in the County Competition.

A member was co-opted to the County Executive, attended the training course and qualified as a County Recruiting Officer. (He has been appointed, since the end of the year, CRO for Leicestershire and Rutland)

We are also pleased when members achieve success outside their Legion activities. During the year two members received academic awards, one a PhD for research in Biology and the other a MA in Education. Another member has had his book , “Escape to Freedom” published.