



The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity No. 219279

Market Harborough Branch

BR0106

Founded in 1923



Annual Report

for the year

1st October 2002 to 30th September 2003



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Introduction

This, our fourth formal Annual Report, adopts the same format as in previous years when used as part of the submission for the Haig or Lister Cups. The background information about the Branch, the area in which it operates and its overall objectives and philosophy, remain unchanged but are again included so that the document does not require prior knowledge of the branch or reference to earlier reports.

It is a privilege to lead such a successful branch as Market Harborough but it is a great challenge to maintain the momentum which has resulted in three County and two National awards in the last five years. However gratifying it is to be “best”, what is more important is having a branch whose members collectively strive hard to achieve the objectives of the Legion. When this is rewarded with some accolade, motivation for further endeavour follows. Pride in the branch is an important ingredient of success and can derive from the work of specific individuals as well as from overall performance and we are proud of those members who through their achievements during the year have brought credit to the Branch .

As Chairman, I pay tribute to the efforts of all members in achieving another successful year and for the support they have given me. Together we will endeavour to maintain the high standard of performance the Branch has established whilst at the same time recognising areas of activity which can and must be improved.

.....
Mark R Hudson, Chairman

December 2003

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About the Branch

- Formed on 20th March, 1923, the 80th Anniversary was celebrated this year.
- 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 125 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

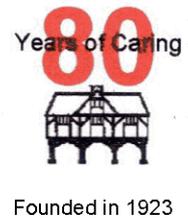
These are the criteria which have continued to guide the direction of Market Harborough Branch and we believe lead to a high standard of service to our members, the Legion and the community for which the Legion exists.



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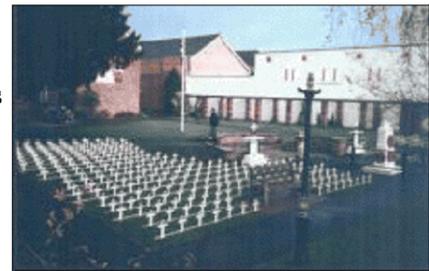
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Highlights of the Year

November Garden of Remembrance repeated and enhanced. Note 11-11-11 & large poppies high on the wall.
Third Remembrance Concert raised over £300 for Poppy Appeal.



Garden of Remembrance 2002

December Member George Fleming appointed County Recruiting Officer



Jack Quain Trophy displayed in District Council Offices

January Awarded Jack Quain Trophy for Endeavour at County Conference

February Member Brian Marshall appointed Branch Youth Officer.

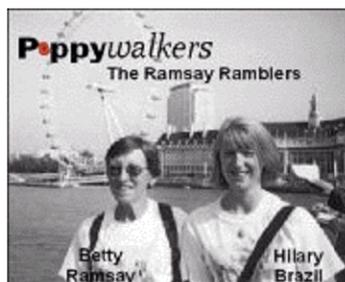
March Chairman, Mark Hudson, co-opted to County Executive and elected Vice Chairman of newly formed S.E. Leicestershire Group.
80th Anniversary Dinner and formation re-enactment.

May Chairman, Secretary and Standard Bearer attend National Annual Conference.
Welfare Support Group formed.
Year-end Poppy Appeal total £14,228 — a record.



Carnival Day Stand on The Square

June Stand in Town Centre on Carnival Day to publicise the work of the Legion and Branch



August Social outing to Poppy Race Day at Newmarket.
Branch Standard Bearer in the Parade.

September Branch Secretary and her (member) daughter take part in RBL London Poppy Walk and raise over £550.



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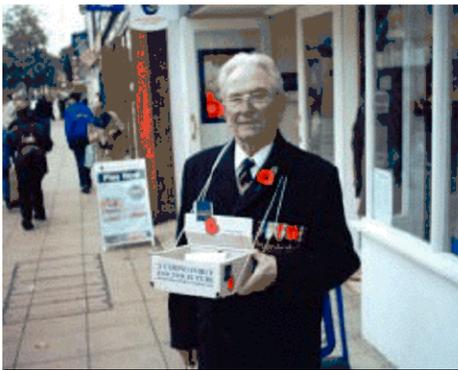
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Poppy Appeal

At the end of the Appeal year on 31st May 2003, £14,228 had been credited to the Branch, a modest increase on the previous year's figure. The third Remembrance Concert, held in November, 2002 contributed over £300, somewhat less than in 2001. The 2003/4 Appeal Year was given a good start with a generous "donation in lieu of flowers" following a funeral, a transfer of £250 from the Social Committee Account and over £550 from sponsorship secured by our Secretary, Betty Ramsay and her daughter for completing the London Poppy Walk in September.



83 year-old member, Les Sewell in his favourite spot in the High Street

The October/November 2002 collection period produced better results than had been feared when it was found that inadequate preparations had been made and a replacement Appeal Organiser had to be found at short notice. Thanks to the enthusiasm and energy of a member newly transferred to the Branch and the willingness of other members to rally round, the collection started on time and a creditable result achieved.

We must learn from this experience and ensure that the organisation does not depend on any one individual. Although in the Legion structure the

Poppy Appeal has an autonomy, the Branch must work closely with the local organiser and provide adequate support. And the organiser must use that support. Some progress in this regard has been made during 2002/3 and this augers well for 2003/4.

In preparation for the October / November, 2003 collection period, more effort has been put in to finding new collectors and improving communication with existing ones, both members and non-members. Plans were also put in place for a prestigious ceremony to be held in mid-October 2003 for the presentation of Long Service Awards and publicly to launch the Appeal in Market Harborough. This will feature in next year's Annual report.



Part of the display in the Market Hall, now an annual feature.



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Welfare

Of the eleven cases dealt with during the year only one has involved the need for Legion funds, this for help in acquiring an “Electric Propelled Vehicle”. Most of the other cases have been concerned with providing advice, support and help in claiming benefits or other forms of assistance. Help was given to two widows wishing to claim from the Dunkirk Veterans Benevolent Fund. A new situation arose from the Iraq conflict and to allay possible concerns a statement was made to the local press assuring families of the availability of RBL help.

To rectify what was seen as a weakness in welfare provision by the Branch, a small Welfare Support Group has been set up to give non-specialist help such as home or hospital visits, lifts to the doctor, to meetings or social events or relieving loneliness with a friendly chat. It is too early to judge how effectively those who have volunteered can be used to meet, what in an ageing ex-service community, must be an increasing demand.

Ceremonial



Our Standard Bearer George Fleming, achieved second place in the County Standard Bearers' Competition and was elected Deputy County Standard Bearer. He took part in the Parades at National Annual Conference and the Newmarket Poppy Race Day and was present at the County Poppy Appeal Launch, County Festival of Remembrance and County Annual Conference. As a member of the County Standard Bearers' Association, George was in five ceremonies during their visit to Holland and six training and Display events in the County. He also attended events at other branches.

Locally the Branch Standard was carried in public 19 times, including Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday Parades and Services, and daily Sun-set Ceremonies in the Garden of Remembrance. The Standard has been carried at Branch functions, and when requested, at funerals. In total there were 47 occasions on which our Standard Bearer was on duty.



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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. Placing two prominent name boards attributing the Garden to the Branch. Holding a daily Sun-set Ceremony.

- At Coffee Mornings, having illustrated leaflets about the Branch and Legion are placed on each table and members speak to visitors about our work.



George Fleming and Display Stand greet visitors to each Coffee Morning

- Holding another Remembrance Concert, advertised in the local press and with posters. The Concert Programmes gave information about the Branch and the Legion.

- Appointing as Branch Press Officer, a member with professional newspaper and publicity experience who has made effective contacts with the media.

- Inviting local freelance press photographer to branch functions which results in newspaper pictures several times a year.



Member Gary Farnsworth rode his wheelchair round the town on Carnival Day publicising the Poppy Appeal

- Publicly acknowledging support given to Legion or Branch through "Letters to the Editor" of local papers, e.g. Poppy Appeal collection.

- Having the Haig Cup and later the Jack Quain Trophy on permanent public display (in a secure cabinet!) in the reception area of the District Council Offices.

- Having a Publicity Stand in the Town Centre on Carnival day.



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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 are made aware of outward communications, receive reports from those responsible for the various functions of the Branch, hear and have an opportunity to discuss matters outside the Branch. At the May meeting, discussion on several of the Motions on the agenda of the National Annual Conference allowed our delegate to vote according to members’ known wishes.

Other means of providing information at meetings have included display screens and tables and digital video projection of computer generated text and images or video film. An example of the latter was “Pilgrims’ Progress” about the work of RBL Pilgrimages Department.

Our monthly **Newsletter, *In Touch***, remains the most useful and effective means of communicating with every member. Although introduced primarily for the benefit of those members who could not attend meetings, it is now regarded as an essential part of the operation of the Branch. Its objective is to Inform, Interest and Influence through relevant news, stories and editorial comment.

The news content is based on information passed to the Branch from County and HQ, from proceedings at meetings, social and other events and news of individual members. There is an annual summary of the main items.

Members are encouraged to contribute stories based on their experiences or interests. For those who say, “I can’t write essays”, the Editor offers to “Ghost” or to tidy-up efforts lacking literary style. A development is the use of audio recording and transcription. One member sat alone talking to his tape recorder as he relived his experiences in the Royal Engineers in WW2. Transcribed (and only slightly edited!) by his daughter, it has provided a number of fascinating stories for ***In Touch***. A copy of the tape is to be donated to the East Midlands Oral History Archive at Leicester University. An alternative to solo recording is the recorded interview and the Editor has arranged for several members to relate their experiences in this way. It is hoped to give details of this venture in the next Annual Report.



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Social Events



Branch Secretary Betty Ramsay and daughter Helen West at Newmarket.

We have continued the practice of having a social period after each Branch meeting. These have included talks, buffets, a film and unstructured time for members to view information on display or just to chat.

Between meetings there has usually been at least one occasion on which members have met socially. Eating out remains popular and regular monthly lunches have now been instituted. In addition four dinners were well attended including the special occasion to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the Branch. The four outings varied in appeal. The best attended by members, was that to Newmarket for the Poppy Race Day. The pre-race meeting events and

attractions proved popular, the Parade of Standards in which our Standard Bearer took part produced a sense of pride and the races provided the excitement for a most enjoyable and successful day.

Working with Young People

The Branch has long had good relations and contact with the local Army Cadet Force and Air Training Corps units. The ATC Squadron Commander and Training Officer and the newly appointed ACF Detachment Commander are Branch members. What we have not had is any formal link with either unit. In February 2003, another member, Brian Marshall was appointed Branch Youth Officer, charged with the task of establishing Affiliation with each unit. Having successfully completed the appropriate training courses, Brian is planning the link with the ATC in the New Year. This will be the first in the County but as Brian is now the County Youth Officer, other Branches will be encouraged to follow suit.

Fundraising Events

Coffee Mornings are our main fundraising events but are also a very good way of getting members involved and working together for a serious purpose but in a social way that is fun. Only one was possible during the year under review but thanks to good support by the public and members' generous donations of raffle prizes and items for the stalls, over £260 was raised for Branch funds.

Raffles were also held at most social events.



Well attended Coffee Morning in the Harbourough Theatre Lounge. The main money spinners are the Tombola and Cake stalls and the Raffle



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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. With eight new members joining during the year we have not been as successful as in the previous year. Also losses have been greater with the result that for the first time in about ten years, membership numbers actually fell (by two). We believe that the increase in the Affiliation fee may have been responsible for two or three less active older members not renewing their membership.

During the coming year effort must be made to seek new members, through
Recommendation by members, especially younger, Associate and lady members.
Inviting Poppy Appeal helpers and others to become involved in our activities.
We must ensure that the Branch remains one with which members are satisfied and to which they are proud to belong.

Attendance at Meetings

Branch meetings were held monthly.

The average attendance during the year was 38, i.e. 30% 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 11, i.e. 73% of total members.

Members' Achievements

George Fleming, our Standard Bearer, gained second place in the County Competition and was appointed Deputy County Standard Bearer.
He was also elected to the County Executive, after being co-opted last year and appointed County Recruiting Officer (CRO) for Leicestershire and Rutland.
Chairman, Mark Hudson, was co-opted to the County Executive. He was also elected Vice Chairman of the newly formed South East Leicestershire Group (of Branches).
Brian Marshall was appointed County Youth Officer.

We are also pleased when members achieve success outside the Legion. One such was Bert Thorold who represented the Not Forgotten Association at a Royal Garden Party.