

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**OXTED & DISTRICT BRANCH of the ROYAL BRITISH LEGION**  
**SUNDAY, 23<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2025 AT 11.00**

There were 29 members present, in addition to nine members of the Branch Committee.

1. March in the Branch Standard

The Chairman invited all present to stand to receive the Branch Standard and to remain standing for the Exhortation.

2. Act of Remembrance (Exhortation)

Members stood for a 2-minute silence.

3. President's Address

The Royal British Legion, including all of us here, has one purpose – supporting the beneficiaries that this great charity was set up for.

For those of you who heard the RBL's radio advert during the Poppy Appeal, you will know that there are over 2 million Veterans in the UK.

However, as the National milestone events of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversaries of Victory in Europe and Victory over Japan showed us, the number of World War Two Veterans is ever reducing, with the vast majority now over 100 years old.

But as that wonderful wartime generation depart this world, let us not forget those who have served their Country since, including in the conflicts of Korea, the Falklands, Iraq and Afghanistan to name but a few. In fact, there are over 150,000 Veterans of the campaign in Afghanistan, many of whom have suffered life-changing injuries or the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The 2021 Census gave us data on how many serving members of the Armed Forces and Veterans there are in the Tandridge District Council area. It may surprise some of you to hear that there are over 2,500 – and that is only those that ticked the box on the form, so there may well be more.

This year, in realising that it needed to change tack a little, the Royal British Legion issued a new 10-year Strategy; focussing on bringing society together to recognise, remember and support the Armed Forces community through three main outcomes – Connect, Remember and Support. It will do this by:

- Connecting across the Armed Forces family of serving personnel and Veterans – with their families too, bringing them together; as well as connecting across the wider community to provide a supportive network for them.
- Remembering those who have served in the Armed Forces so that their service and sacrifice is valued by people who then feel that they want to participate in Remembrance. This will include evolving Remembrance and widening participation in it.

and

- Ensuring that the Armed Forces community gets the support that it needs; responding to changing needs and modernising where necessary.

The Royal British Legion in Oxted is well placed to provide a focal point for all of these strategic outcomes – and there is a role for both this Branch and this Club House. We must do all that we can to deliver on this Strategy in Oxted and the surrounding area.

The Chairman thanked Lord Astor for his address and played a short video about the RBL's strategy for Members to watch. The video is posted on the Branch's Facebook page.

#### 4. Apologies for Absence

From the Branch Committee, Mr Matt Calderwood, Branch Secretary and Ms Jean Inker.

Additionally, two branch members submitted their apologies.

#### 5. Minutes of 2024 Annual General Meeting

Last year's minutes were all circulated three weeks ago and again last week. The Chairman asked Members if there were any questions or issues with them. There were none.

The following proposed and seconded the minutes:

Proposer: Mike Hurman

Secunder: Jacky Delooze

In a show of hands, the minutes were passed.

#### 6. Chairman's Annual Report

This year has been busy on the Remembrance front, but very challenging in other ways.

At a Special General Meeting in September, I discussed at great length all of the information and work we have done in our role as Managing Trustees for this wonderfully historic property. I do not intend reviewing any of that in this meeting. However, I will reiterate what I said in that meeting that this aspect of our business has taken up an inordinate amount of time, mine in particular, which has been to the detriment of our primary work. I will again apologise to the Veterans for seemingly neglecting you this year.

I will now review what we have achieved this year before setting out some of our priorities for next year.

First up this year was the funeral of Gordon Pointer, previous Branch Chairman, latterly Club President and very well-known as being ex-King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery. It was an honour for us Veterans to say goodbye to one of the founding members of our monthly military meet-up group. Supporting us were the Branch Standards, who preceded the hearse, and a King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery trumpeter to play the last post. Thank you to Laura Hayworth for supporting us with the Women's Section Branch's Standard.

On this, funeral support for Veterans is one of our obligations, if it is the family's wishes.

Next came the St David's Day concert of the London Welsh Male Voice Choir that we hosted in partnership with St Mary's Church, where we very quickly (much more so than anticipated) sold out all 240 tickets. It was great, though, to see the Front Bar so full for the obligatory 'after party'. The profit that we raised was shared and the St Mary's Church Heritage Trust benefitted. For us, it has given our Veterans' Hub a fantastic start-up fund with which to move forward.

On Remembrance, we then hit a regular drumbeat of events:

- In May, we accompanied the Parish Council in laying three wreaths to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of Victory in Europe – just over the road here in Oxted, but also in Old Oxted and Hurst Green.
- And I was privileged to be invited to be one of the RBL's representatives at the VE80 Service of Thanksgiving in Westminster Abbey.
- June saw our Standard Bearer and three Committee Members travel to Ypres to help the Ypres Branch celebrate its centenary. Ypres is, of course, where the Menin Gate is – that great memorial to the dead of the First World War.
- As usual, July saw the annual event where we commemorate the Yangtze Incident, where probably our most well-known Veteran was in Command of HMS AMETHYST. As a previous member of the Royal Navy, it is a privilege to commemorate him in partnership with the Reigate Branch of the Royal Naval Association.
- August was the 80th Anniversary of Victory over Japan when we again accompanied the Parish Council in laying three wreaths at our war memorials.
- On the Sunday after VJ Day we held a wonderful Service of Thanksgiving in St Mary's Church.

Sadly, on the eve of VJ Day, Neil Burke passed away. Neil is well-known to many of you and he was a Veteran of the Far East Campaign in the Second World War. Somewhat ironically, he passed away on the eve of VJ Day itself. In September, we supported Neil's family at his funeral – again the Branch Standard preceded the hearse and we had a trumpeter from the Irish Guards to play the last post.

May Neil, and Gordon, Rest in Peace. We will Remember Them.

In November, we again had a great turnout for Remembrance Sunday. Over 150 members of the youth organisations marched with us to Church. And at the War Memorial we procured a twin-speaker PA System so that a crowd of over 300 could hear. There is some more we can do to finesse what we do on the day. I am grateful to Oxted Parish Council and Titsey Rotary for arranging and executing the road closures needed for our parade.

And, of course, we laid a wreath on Armistice Day, for which I again thank Laura Hayworth for supporting us with the Women's Section Branch's Standard.

We will hear shortly from Andrea about this year's Poppy Appeal. This was very challenging as we lost our previous Poppy Appeal Organiser, Helen Burton in late September. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Helen, even though she is not here today, for her many years of service to this Branch and for her 8 or 9

years as Poppy Appeal Organiser. But I would also like to thank Andrea for stepping in and taking it on. I've now seen at first hand the administrative load that it takes to run a successful appeal and am extremely grateful to Andrea for what she has achieved in such a short time from a standing start.

On our Poppy Volunteers. There were 16 Veterans who supported our efforts – and they know that I would say that it is quite frankly their duty to help. But what was striking is that there was twice as many members of the general public, who responded from adverts, than there were members of this Branch who stepped forward. Taking out the Veterans and my Committee, only eleven members of this Branch volunteered, which is only 2% of our membership – and yes, that was only 2%. I don't know whether to be disappointed, shocked or appalled by this statistic.

We did very well this year, but can easily do better. **I ask all of you to consider volunteering next year.**

So, for two of our primary purposes – Remembrance and fundraising – this Branch has been very successful this year.

And to give you a break from my voice, this little showreel tells our year's story in pictures. Zara please.

Where we need to regain next year is in supporting our Veterans.

I am now beginning to build a network of Branch Community Support supporters – Jenny here is one of them – delivering the first-hand, local support that some of our Veterans need. And we have successfully referred some to Head Office who have helped financially.

I am grateful that Creenagh and Ashley are getting our message out into the Tandridge Health and Wellbeing networks – advertising what the Legion offers to Veterans through the social prescribers and especially those GP Practices that are registered as veteran enabled.

Now, it is all about you, our Members.

Today we have 548 Branch Members. This year we have had 117 new joiners, but we have also had 105 leavers, with only four being deceased. So, we still have a retention problem and it is beholden on both the Branch and the Club to recognize this and work at reversing that trend.

I wonder what else you, the Members, want from this Branch – be they events or activities, in the Club or externally. So, we will shortly email you a brief questionnaire asking for your opinions – or you can scan the QR Code over there and have a go today. Please let us know what you would like to see.

At the SGM in September, there was a degree of not really understanding what we do. I hope that I've gone some way to explain that today. But in the New Year I will start a series of 'meet your committee' sessions, where you can just come along and have a chat. Tell us what bothers you, ask us any questions or bring new ideas to us on where to improve or do more.

For two years now we have had a Member-get-Member initiative running offering a prize of £100 to the member who recruits the most newbees. Up until the other day we have had no interest in anyone claiming the money, but I now have had someone make a claim, which we still need to validate.

Now to look towards the future and next year.

Picking up on what Lord Astor said earlier, we need to refocus our efforts to support the RBL's new strategy.

And I will send the strategy out to you all within a week or so of this meeting, but a copy is in the noticeboard in the entrance.

But how are we going to play our part:

- Connecting with our Armed Forces Community. The RBL has now given us access to the members data field on service in the Armed Forces, so I now know how many we have – there are more than I would have thought. And we found many, many more through our presence selling poppies. My challenge now is in converting them all to regular members here. We'll connect more widely across the general community starting with the Great Tommy Sleep-Out in March. Watch this space for how to volunteer to spend a night camping on the Club's front lawn and help raise money to keep Veterans from being homeless.
- On Remembering those who have served. We are doing well here, as I have just described, but there is more we can do. Next year, I will get us into the local schools and youth organisations to talk about Remembrance. Keeping Remembrance alive as we lose the great wartime generation, like Neil Burke, is a challenge that the RBL recognises and is seeking to address.
- And on supporting our Veterans. We are doing this but again there is more to do with them.

What I will also say about the strategy and its aims and outcomes is that it is beholden on all RBL members to do what they can to support the RBL's charitable aims. That is, or should be, why we join the RBL first and foremost.

And finally, coming back closer to home. The property, in which we sit today, was donated to this Branch in 1926 to enable us to deliver on the RBL's charitable purpose. Next year, therefore, sees the 100th anniversary of this wonderful building. We have some ideas about how we will celebrate this milestone – more to follow.

Thank you.

## 7. Treasurer's Annual Report – Annual Accounts Summary to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025

The Treasurer presented the summary of the annual counts, highlighting:

- The items of routine expenditure – printing, advertising, ceremonial.
- Then costs associated with the refurbishment of the Mil & V, taken from the Branch Property Trust Fund.
- He explained what the Branch Property Trust Fund and Branch Funds Initiative balances were and the restrictive nature of their use.
- The monies raised for the Mil & V from the London Welsh Male Voice Choir event and a generous donation.
- The large amounts of money spent on Managing Trustee expenses, namely legal fees and the building survey/schedule of dilapidations/specialist

inspections required. On this he stated that the Branch was entitled to claim the cost of the Schedule of Dilapidations (£1,995 plus VAT) from the Club, the tenant of the property, but has chosen not to do so in the spirit of working together to get the property back to a sound material state.

On completion, the Chairman stated that the accounts have already been approved and agreed by Head Office, so there is no need to approve them at this AGM. But he invited any questions or challenges on the accounts, but there were none.

The Chairman then stated that the closing balances look healthy. But we have had some more Managing Trustee expenses, purchased a portrait of His Majesty the King that hangs near the entrance and paid for a lot of wreaths this year. Today, our balance is effectively just under £1,000. Our annual routine expenditure is £500-800, so we need to think about how we generate Branch Funds. As a Branch Committee, we have discussed three options – introducing a Branch Fee (which would be in addition to your RBL Annual Membership fee and your Club Fees), a Branch Fundraiser or drawing down on our Branch Property Trust Funds. For next year, we will draw on the Branch Property Trust Fund but discuss as a Committee the pros and cons of all of these methods next year, before coming back to the Members at the next AGM with a proposal.

## 8. Poppy Appeal Organiser's Report

This year as the new Poppy Appeal Organiser I set us a challenge with our fundraising during the Poppy Appeal, but more of that a bit later.

The Branch advertised, as in previous years, in Oxted Local, Tandridge Independent and RH8 for volunteers to help on our table in Morrisons and to cover both Oxted and Hurst Green stations and, additionally, for the first time, to cover Waitrose too. New volunteers stepped forward both from our local advertising and from our membership to join volunteers from previous years to help. We were therefore able to cover every slot on our table at Morrisons, a total of 162 hours plus 30 hours at both stations and 53 hours at Waitrose.

This year, we had a friendly, positive vibe on our table at Morrisons with our volunteers engaging with the public. Of course, this also had the knock-on effect of gaining some new branch members, including veterans, which is fantastic.

We put more poppy boxes and collecting tins around town than ever before, all of them had QR codes, enabling a “scan to donate” approach.

The Women's Section Branch hosted a fabulous night with Wayne Woodward here in the Club – he was great – with the proceeds going to this year's Appeal raising the fantastic amount of £1,100.

But back to the challenge I set.

I can confirm that last year we raised £26,200 which included £2,700 from Branch held Poppy events which made it £23,500 from collecting at Morrisons and the High Street. Although a fantastic amount, we were down £6,000 on like for like collecting in 2023, when we raised £29,500.

Although, it would have been a good start to equal last year's total and, even better to get us back to 2023's total of £29,500, me being me, I set the bar higher and I wanted to reach something with a '3' in front of it. Well, we did it! I can confirm

that, to date, even with some counting left to do, we raised £32,900 on like for like collecting, that is just shy of £10,000 more than last year and, as I said, we still have some counting left to do.

With the Women's Section fundraising night added to that total, we have so far raised £34,000.

Obviously, this would not have been possible without our volunteers, many of whom gave up many hours of their time to help and, just as importantly, they assure me they had a thoroughly enjoyable time. My thanks to all our volunteers. We have received a very kind donation (from the Astor of Hever Trust) to enable us to host a Poppy Volunteer Thank You Afternoon Tea in the front bar, with the date yet to be decided. This, though, enables us to show how much we value our volunteers.

My thanks also to the Women's Section for their hard work putting together the Wayne Woodward evening.

And, lastly, but by no means least, my thanks to my fellow committee members for their help and support. Be warned though, I have lots of ideas for next year.

Thank you.

## 9. Presentation and adoption of the Branch 5-Year Plan for 2023-2027

The Chairman stated that the updated version of the Plan was circulated to all Members a week ago. He then said:

When I joined this Committee, its administration was not where it needed to be in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This plan, in its current format, was right for that time as it set out how we needed to evolve to become a modern, fully complaint branch. It has been a good handrail to get our internal organisation and administration squared away. But it now needs to evolve to reflect the RBL's new strategy. I will create this early next year and share it with you all.

When I first created this plan, in 2023, I wrote it as both a Branch and a Club Plan, identifying areas where both the Branch and the Club could work together to take the Legion here in Oxted forward. Unfortunately, the Club chose not to work with the Branch on this and did not adopt the Plan as I wrote it initially. What you have seen is an iteration of a Branch-specific plan.

I stand here today and make the same offer to the Club. This Branch wants to work with the Club going forward and make the RBL in Oxted, as I initially described it, as:

- a thriving and proactive Branch;
- with a growing membership;
- secure in an energized and financially viable Club;
- providing events and activities for its Members;
- whilst positively supporting its community.

If the Club wants to go forward in partnership with us, then I will work with them to re-write the plan for our joint, mutual benefit.

## 10. Election of Branch Officers & Committee Members

The Chairman stated that no Branch elections are required at this AGM.

## 11. Charge of the Branch Standard

- a. Primary Standard Bearer – Ryan Williamson
- b. Secondary Standard Bearer – Mark Wren

The Chairman invited Members to stand for the charging of the Branch Standard. He then said:

Ryan – the Standard which you are now privileged to carry, having been solemnly dedicated in a sacred place, represents the ideals of service to God and to our King and country. The Union Flag, in the top left hand corner, is symbolic of our unity and our loyalty to the crown, community and nation. The royal blue signifies fidelity, and the gold band recalls all those who have died in the service of our country, and reminds us who remain that we must ever be true to “Service not Self”.

I exhort you to remember always that this Standard is a sacred emblem, and it is now placed in your charge to be cared for in the name of the Royal British Legion. Do you accept this Charge?

The Standard Bearer accepted the charge.

## 12. Presentations and Awards (if any)

The Chairman stated that the Branch has this silver salver, the Ralph Browne Award for Meritorious Service, presented when the Branch Committee feels that there is a deserving recipient. He went on to say:

For those not aware, Ralph Browne was a RAF Veteran and longtime policeman in Oxted. He, his wife Pat and his daughter Jackie were big supporters of the Legion and he was well known for escorting the Remembrance Sunday parade.

It is not awarded every year but today I would like to award it.

This person is a Veteran. He started the year by volunteering to help clean the kitchen. He’s done other bits around the Club, and was the main driving force behind the refurbishment of the Military & Veterans’ Hub. Latterly, he has volunteered to take on the role of Webmaster for our website – doing such a good job that our County administrator sends other branches over to him to be shown how its done. And he has done all of this without stepping onto the Committee.

In doing so, he exemplifies all that the Legion is about and I cannot think of any better example of volunteering. Major (retired) Mike Hurman, ex-Queen’s Royal Regiment, please come up and receive the Ralph Browne Award for Meritorious Service from Lord Astor. And I have a small token of my appreciation for Linda - please thank her for letting you get on with so much for us. Thank you Mike.

### 13. County Conference 2026 and National Conference 2026

Next year's County Conference will be held in Windlesham on the 24<sup>th</sup> January.

The National Conference will be held in Brighton, 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> May. The Chairman will forward details to Members in the New Year because any Member can attend as a Visitor.

### 14. Date of the Next Annual General Meeting

The date of next year's AGM would be considered and announced in due course.

### 15. Any Other Business and questions

Before opening the floor to any other business or questions; the Chairman stated that he had added one to the amended agenda:

- The RBL's Standards & Values and what it means for all Branch Members.

He went on to say:

A recent incident has led me to discuss this today. The RBL has a 'code of conduct', if you will, with a set of standards, values and guiding principles that apply to all members. Copies were handed out as you came in.

Not all of these apply to all of us all of the time. But some do, and there are some aspects of them that I will not tolerate being breached in this Branch.

There are some obvious ones that impose a duty on us all to call out – and it is incumbent on all of us to call it out when we witness it.

The RBL has a Complaints procedure and Head Office has a Complaints Committee.

Should any of you have any cause whatsoever to question the conduct of any other member in relation to this 'code', whether you call it out at the time or not, then you can raise a complaint to me in confidence.

Any one of you can complain about the conduct of any other member.

If I can deal with the complaint then I will. But if I deem it to be beyond local resolution then I will have no hesitation in forwarding it to the Legion Complaints Committee to investigate.

I can assure you all that I will have the moral courage to act if I hear of any member who breaches this 'code'.

All of the relevant information will go up on our Website and it will be signposted in the noticeboard in the entrance foyer within a few days.

The Chairman then asked if there was any other business or questions. There were two questions:

1. Mr Ian Beagley asked about the Branch Committee's status as Managing Trustees, as it had been indicated at the SGM in September that the Managing Trustees had decided to hand this responsibility to Head Office.

The Chairman agreed that the Managing Trustees had indeed indicated their wish to hand over Managing Trustee responsibility to Head Office. One of the

imminent factors was the pending threat that the building would not be insured. That threat has now passed in that the RBL's Buildings Insurance policy has been renewed on the property. The Chairman then went on to explain that the Managing Trustees have now received the 'resolution' documents from Head Office and had discussed this in Committee on 19 November. The Managing Trustees were unanimous in deciding that:

- We will not sign the resolutions without taking legal advice.
- In taking legal advice on the resolutions, we will review them against both the clauses in the original (1927) documents – the Declaration of Trust and the Conveyance – that they refer to and the letter/email correspondence that we have received from Head Office; in order to fully understand all aspects of our position and that of the property post transfer.

Firstly, we will have to get the Conveyance 'transcribed'. Then seek legal advice and that is unlikely to happen before the New Year. Subsequent discussion might be needed with Head Office before the Managing Trustees discuss it again in Committee. This would more likely be February's meeting (3rd Wednesday) or later.

The Chairman finished by stating that he was sure that the Members would respect our decision to tackle this in a professional, measured manner with all due diligence – just as we have tackled all of our MT responsibilities to date.

2. Mr Ian Beagley then asked about the October 2025 changes to the Branch's Bye-Laws.

The Chairman explained that these were in relation to revised direction from Head Office, in the latest edition of the Membership Management Handbook, about the committee roles/posts and tenure of appointments. Additionally, a section had been added about the Branch Committee's Managing Trustee status.

The Chairman then stated that:

The business of the meeting being concluded, let us, before we leave, remember our duty to our King and country, to our comrades, and to our branch. Let us be ready at all times to foster the spirit of community and mutual helpfulness to which we are dedicated, never forgetting our solemn obligations as members of the Royal British Legion.

He then invited all Members to stand for the Kohima Prayer.

## 16. Kohima Prayer

The meeting concluded at 1205.