

The Legion in West Felton

In 1922, ex-Servicemen of West Felton formed a sub-branch of what was then called the "British Legion" under the jurisdiction of Oswestry Branch. The branch at Oswestry supplied the main officials.

After WWII many ex-Service men and women joined the Legion and by 1948 West Felton membership was between 60 and 70, the average in all subsequent years.

In 1947 a committee was formed and it was decided that West Felton would form its own branch, this was finalised in March 1948. The first officers of the new West Felton Branch were, President: Brig. D Richards of Twyford; Chairman: Richard (Dick) Hamlett of Haughton; Treasurer: Thomas (Tom) Davies of Rednal, and Secretary: Glyn Jones of Queens Head. All the founding members served the Legion enthusiastically for the rest of their lives.

GLYN JONES served in the RAF from 1942-1946. Upon his return home he worked tirelessly for the branch until his death in 2007, having occupied with distinction every office in the branch including President. His work was rewarded at national level by the award of the gold badge in the 1980s followed by the Legion's highest honour, Life Membership in the 1990s. Glyn's daughter Doreen continues as an active member of the branch.

Other branch members honoured with life membership were Mick Mullins, Jim Pearce and his wife Betty.

J H 'MICK' MULLINS served in the RAF from 1939-1946. He took part in the evacuation of France and Belgium and was evacuated from St. Nazaire. Luckily for him he just failed to get on the doomed LANCASTRIA. He also served with the flying boats on interception of German shipping and U Boats from Iceland and West Africa. Mick lived in Oswestry and made sure that no member or dependent unfortunate enough fall ill or be admitted to hospital would go unvisited.

JIM and BETTY PEARCE - Betty was born in Patagonia of Scottish parents. During WWII she was training as a nurse in Edinburgh when she answered an advertisement for nurses to go abroad; she was interviewed by Lady Mountbatten and posted to Ahmadnagar, an Indian town with two hospitals, one Indian, the other British Army for sick and wounded troops from the Far East. There was a lot of troop training activity in Ahmadnagar and it was here Betty met **Major Jim Pearce**; they had just five days together before he was posted to the North West Frontier, and she was posted to Burma. Jim and Betty were married in 1946 at Abbottabad where Betty took over the Ghurkha family hospital.

At the 1947 partition of India Betty and Jim were still in Abbottabad and should have gone with the Ghurkha regiments to India but the birth of their first child was imminent and it was not safe to travel. The baby was born the day after the last official train left. Six weeks later with things getting very dangerous, Betty, Jim and their new daughter, the only white people on board, made the four-day journey on a refugee train to Dehra Dun.

In December 1947, the Pearce family came home to Shropshire where his family had live since 1826. Jim was joined West Felton branch at its inception. He was President of West Felton Branch for 35 years and was Chairman of Shropshire County for 15 years. With Betty he arranged a paper recycling depot at their home and this, together with the Annual Party at Lane End, produced around £4,000 per annum for the Poppy Appeal.

Betty served as Poppy Appeal Organiser for many, many years as well as serving her community in numerous other ways. With Jim, she set up The Feltonians, a weekly club for retired people which is still going strong; she brought Meals on Wheels to the village; wheeled trolleys around the local hospital and served on the committee of the WI. She made her regular house-to-house Poppy collection in the November before her death at the age of 83. Jim and Betty went to their well deserved rest in September 2003 and February 2004, within six months of each other. Though scattered far and wide, their extended family are all enthusiastic supporters of the branch. Their son **R J A (Jim) PEARCE** Major (Retd.), followed his father into the Ghurkhas. Jim Jnr. was Chairman for several years until he retired to France in 2010 and Sally was his secretary despite having moved out of the village. Sally served in the RAF which she represented in sports. Her Poppy fundraising included two London marathons and numerous other hearty escapades.

COLONEL JOHN F KENYON, OBE, MC, of Pradoc was another faithful servant of the Legion in West Felton. He was commissioned in 1942 and, following in his father's footsteps, joined the 25th Indian Mountain Regiment based in Quetta. The following year he proceeded to the war front in Burma. In June 1944 at Kohima he brought down neutralising fire followed by support fire over nine hours, while under constant attack, thus enabling advancing troops to overrun enemy positions. For this action he was awarded the Military Cross. After the war he again saw active service in Egypt during the Suez crisis. He continued to serve at various postings, including the investigation of the use of hovercraft in the armed services and, finally, as Defence and Military Attaché to the British Embassy in Brussels. He was awarded the OBE in 1970 at Buckingham Palace.

Back home at Pradoc, he was an enthusiastic member of West Felton branch, holding many of the offices of the branch and regularly organising Poppy fundraising and social events on his estate. In May 1977 he was elected to Salop County Council as an Independent member representing Ruyton XI Towns and during his term in office campaigned vigorously to have the county name changed from what he considered "derogatory French 'Salop'" and in 1980 was successful in restoring the name to Shropshire.

Among his many titles he was a Freeman of the City of London and a Freeman of Shrewsbury where he was President of the Association of Freemen, a President of the League of Friends of Oswestry & District Hospital, President of the Shropshire branch the Burma Star Association and President of the Shropshire Scouts. At an International Scouts' Jamboree hosted at Pradoc he allowed the Japanese flag to be raised, as long as it was out of sight of the house. Colonel John Frederick Kenyon was laid to rest at Pradoc following the funeral service on Friday 20th October 2006. A Memorial Service for him was held at Shrewsbury Abbey on the 14th November 2006. He was a descendant of Sir Frederic George Kenyon – see *WAR MEMORIALS and the connection with West Felton*.

- **Whilst the branch has been in existence formally for 65 years, there has been a Legion presence in West Felton almost since the inception of the Legion itself in 1921.**
- **Many of the members who sustained the branch for all that time have been succeeded by their sons/daughters, the names Jones, Evans, Coles, Pearce echo down the years.**
- **They have been joined by ex-servicemen and by men and women who have absolutely no connection at all with the armed forces, inspired by those who went before.**

WEST FELTON BRANCH TODAY

The present membership may not have led such exciting lives but they are dedicated to continuing the work of The Royal British Legion in the modern era. No more bags of coal being delivered to pensioners, no more food parcels for widows and dependants, the last of our WWII veterans remain reasonably hale and hearty and are more likely to be contributors to the Poppy Appeal than beneficiaries. The Legion has changed, the needs are different but the purpose is the same, providing welfare, comradeship, representation and Remembrance for the Armed Forces community.

WAR MEMORIALS

and the connection with West Felton

by Canon Edge, November 2007

(Former Rector of West Felton and Padre of the Branch)

“Some months ago I attended a meeting of the Manchester Branch of the Classical Association not expecting that I would hear some fascinating information about West Felton.

In 1918 there was concern at the highest level about war cemeteries and what was to be done when the war ended. A high powered committee was appointed following the Imperial Conference of 1918 with the power to co-opt. Among those who were co-opted was the President of the British Academy, who had previously been President of the Classical Association, a distinguished scholar, especially interested in coinage, papyri and monuments.

One of the concerns of the Committee was that after the War cemeteries might look like English churchyards where the wealthy often have large monuments and the poor have nothing. The President of the British Academy told them that in Athens in the 5th century BC the war dead of each year were listed together very simply. The names were carved each year on stone just with the name of the Tribe, or Regiment, to which they belonged. Normally on an Athenian grave the names of the deceased's father and of the 'village' he came from were added after his name; but for the war only the Regiment mattered. There was a place in the city where the dead were buried after a procession through the city in which each tribe carried a coffin containing the bones or the ashes of their dead. There were ten Tribes, ten Regiments, but there were eleven coffins. The eleventh coffin was empty. It was for those men whose bodies had not been recovered after a battle for normally the victorious army would grant a truce during which the remaining dead might be gathered, the victors having already taken away their own. Even so, some bodies might not be discovered. It was quite possible for the wealthy to erect a monument for their own dead but it had to be at some distance from the place where the State buried its own.

The Committee was very happy to accept that what the Athenians had done in the 5th century BC should be the model for what we should do in the 20th. And so we have our war graves and cemeteries, and the places where all those whose bodies were never found are remembered.”

The President of the British Academy was Sir Frederic George Kenyon, the great grandson of Lord Lloyd Kenyon, the first Kenyon of Pradoc and Lord Chief Justice of England. This shows how much the Nation and the Commonwealth owes to Sir Frederic George Kenyon.