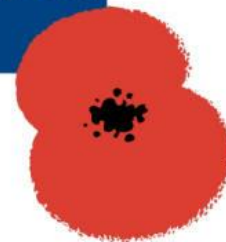


November 2019

HALE BRANCH ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER – Issue 24

THE ROYAL BRITISH
LEGION



KSA M.A.D.D. Cycle Ride November 2019 - Operation Pegasus



As some of you may be aware, Terry Courtney organises an annual cycle ride out in Bahrain having raised £20,000 over the past three years for charity, and very kindly donated £1,000 to our Poppy Appeal in 2018. This year he has chosen RBL Hale Branch Poppy Appeal as the recipient of monies raised with 26+ riders taking part.

Terry says *"The branch I have selected will be Hale branch in Liverpool, whose chairman at present is Bill Sergeant MBE. He received this honour due to his extensive and tireless work in the community regarding fund raising for the RBL and associated historical research on military history. On a personal note, my son (whilst on tour in Afghanistan) and his Squadron were on the receiving end of his branch's generosity in the way of parcels, which were gratefully received."*

The MADD riders planned bike ride will take place on the 8th November 2019, with the 100km ride being completed in approximately 4½ hours.

Good luck Terry and Co!

For those who are interested, there are two short films of previous rides on You Tube: 100km Charity Bike Ride Bahrain 2017 or 2018

Julia McGorry 09.03.1937 – 31.07.2019



Since our last Newsletter, we have sadly seen the passing of Julia, the wife of our standard bearer. Julia had been a stalwart member and supporter of both the Branch and the Royal British Legion itself for some 12 years during which time she attended most of our social events, including our trips abroad. In fact, I can't remember ever seeing Julia without her RBL badge or a poppy pin. She gave Joe, her husband and our Branch Standard Bearer, unstinting support not only with his duties for the Branch but also his role as Town Crier for the Freemen of Hale. Both she and Joe shared a passion for flowers as is witnessed by their beautiful garden – I recall Julia telling me once when our conversation turned to one of the recent funerals in the village that she didn't want flowers at her funeral as they were to be enjoyed by the living. Both she and Joe had had several accidents, ironically in their back garden recently, but Julia seemed to have recovered from these very well. Sadly, she was found to be suffering from cancer and her passing was mercifully quick. We will miss Julia and offer Joe, Tony and Carl our best wishes and help in their sad loss.

We have also recently lost a former member of the Branch – **Peter Churchis**. Born in Wales on 15th March 1933, Peter did his National Service in Korea and came to live in Hale Village after his marriage to Beryl. He was one of the founder members of Hale Branch and remained a member until his health prevented him from attending branch meetings about 2 years ago. Peter served with St John Ambulance for many years and was a qualified nurse. He retained his "Welshness" throughout his life and this was reflected in the beautiful music chosen for his funeral

service. We send our condolences to Peter's family. Peter passed away on 20th September aged 86 years.

2019 Poppy Appeal

Although this year's Poppy Appeal is already underway, please get in touch with our Chairman, Bill Sergeant, if you would like to join our band of volunteers. You will be made very welcome and do not need to be an RBL member to assist us with this very important annual task to raise as much money as we possibly can for the Poppy Appeal.

Armadillo Storage Company Supports the RBL Poppy Appeal

Once again we wish to thank Armadillo Storage Ltd, Goodlass Road, Speke, who have kindly provided us with free storage space for the past four years as a token of their support for the RBL and the Poppy Appeal.



The manager and his staff at the depot have been extremely helpful, as well as very patient with us, accepting bulky deliveries on our behalf, and are proud and pleased to show their support in such a tangible way. We, in turn, are really grateful for their help. THANK YOU ARMADILLO!

Remembrance Day Parade

This will be held on Sunday 10th November 2018 and all are welcome to take part either by parading from Aran Close to the War Memorial and then to St. Mary's Church, or by attending at the War Memorial. The parade from Aran Close will leave just after 10.30am. The service will be led by our new Chaplain, Reverend Roland Harvey.

Note – this was written before Remembrance Sunday!

'We Will Remember Them'

He Died with Kitchener! *By Bill Sergeant*

While doing some research into the names on a school memorial board, I came across a young local man who lost his life in WW1 while serving with the Royal Navy. Percy Keeler Stokes was born in Folkestone, Kent on 8th July 1899, the son of Kate Stokes, who at that time was unmarried and living with her widowed mother in Folkestone, where Percy was baptised on 22nd August 1890. On 27th March 1904, Kate Elizabeth Stokes married William Molyneux Colbeck at Cheriton in Kent. William was a native of Liverpool, born in July 1878 and lived at 51 Claremont Road, off Smithdown Road. William went to sea and in 1895 joined the militia with

Liverpool Regiment and then served with the South Lancashire Regiment for a total of 16 years including service in India before being discharged in 1911. There is no record of William Colbeck in the 1901 Census.

The 1911 Census shows him living at 8 Basing Street, Garston, with his wife Kate and their two children – Percy Colbeck, aged 11 years and born in Folkestone, and Kate, 4 years, born in Liverpool. There can be no doubt that Percy Keeler Stokes and Percy Colbeck are one and the same but the Census shows Percy as William's son. William Colbeck had a brother named Percy and it seems likely that William was the natural father of Percy Keeler Stokes/Colbeck.



In 1915, Percy Colbeck, now an office boy in Liverpool, joined the Royal Navy as a Ship's Boy and trained on HMS Powerful at Devonport. In May 1916 he was serving aboard "HMS Hampshire" of 2nd Cruiser Squadron at the Battle of Jutland, although "Hampshire" is said to have fired only four salvos, all of which fell short of her target. She was then selected to carry Lord Kitchener, the Secretary for War and Boer War hero, to Archangel in Russia for secret talks with the Czar aimed at ensuring that Russia kept up their pressure against Germany on the Eastern Front. There are conflicting theories about what happened next or rather how it happened – for on 7th June 1916 the "Hampshire" struck a German mine laid by a U-Boat off the Orkneys and sank very quickly. Accounts have it that Lord Kitchener was last seen on deck with one or two senior officers while the ship went down. Percy Colbeck was elsewhere aboard ship with no witness accounts of what happened to him other than that he was drowned along with 736 others, including a Field Marshall (Lord Kitchener), 2 Brigadier Generals and a Lieutenant Colonel. There were only 12 survivors. Percy was one of the many whose body was never recovered and his name is one of 7200 men from WW1 and 16000 from WW2 on the Plymouth Naval Memorial. Lord Kitchener is commemorated on the Holybrook Memorial.

At the time of Percy's death and for many years afterwards, his family lived at 8 Basing Street, Garston, and Percy is also commemorated in St Michael's Church and Victoria School, Aigburth.

the King's

Branch News

Our Annual General Meeting will take place on Wednesday 11th December at 7.30pm, upstairs in the Childe of Hale public house, Hale Village.

We will soon be planning our 2020's trips and events. In addition to our regular trips to The National Arboretum and a possible trip in the Spring to Europe, we have advance notice of a second 1940s event being held at the Llangollen Railway this time on 19th and 20th September entitled 'Llangollen Railway at War'. Look out for more information about all our planned trips and events in the March and July Newsletters, as well as on our website:

<http://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/hale>

Our Pickering 1940s Weekend visit on Saturday 13th October went extremely well with an excellent journey getting us there in plenty of time to see the parade. Weather-wise it turned out to be a beautiful blue-sky day. Plenty of us wandered around the town and even bought various items of vintage clothing etc., with some managing a ride on the steam railway to see further exhibits and re-enactors. Below are a few photographs from the day with more available to view on our website:-



Liverpool Pals Battalions Memorial Fund Service **September 2019** by Ben Jackson

In August 1914, the Earl of Derby came up with the idea of creating "Pals" battalions, encouraging those who worked together or lived in the same communities to enlist together, as part of the drive to increase the strength of the British Army. The first Pals battalion to be formed was the 1st Service Battalion or 17th Battalion Kings (Liverpool) Regiment. Altogether enough men volunteered to form four battalions with two more in reserve. They trained initially in Knowsley Park and later had their major baptism under fire on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, seeing action from then on in many of the great battles on the Western Front. By the summer of 1918, having suffered many casualties over the preceding years, they were transported back to England for what they felt was a well-deserved rest.

Sadly, this was not to be. In October, 1918, they were shipped off to north Russia to the port of Murmansk and then on to Archangel. Here they were to guard, along with other troops, many thousands of tons of military supplies shipped to the Czar's Imperial army but not used and now in danger of being taken over by the Bolsheviks who had deposed the Czar. The supplies had not even been paid for. Subsequently, the 1st Liverpool Pals were attacked by

communist forces and suffered casualties as a result. After many trials and tribulations, not least of which were caused by the extreme weather conditions, the Pals arrived back in Liverpool in September, 1919 to be demobilised.



To commemorate this return one hundred years on, a service of remembrance was held in St Nicholas' Parish Church at the Pier Head. The guests attending the ceremony were welcomed by a band of bagpipes and drums from the Liverpool Scottish Battalion. The service was attended by the Lord Lieutenant of Merseyside, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool together with other Mayors from adjacent boroughs together with serving and former military personnel mainly from the Duke of Lancaster's Regiment, the successor to the King's Liverpool. During the service, stories relating to the experiences of the Pals during their time in Russia were read out by committee members of the Pals Memorial Fund including our own Bill Sergeant.

At the end of the service, the assembly moved outside for the unveiling of a commemorative plaque fixed to the wall of the churchyard recording the service of the 1st Pals in Russia and the sounding of the Last Post. The 17th Battalion of pals can be said to be the first to volunteer to serve King and country and the last to be stood down.

Book Review by Joe McGorry

'Midsummer Madness' by Nickolas Jellicoe adapted from 'The Last Days of The High Seas Fleet'

In June 1919, the German High Seas Fleet lay interned in Scapa Flow. The Grand Fleet, under Rear Admiral Freemantle, warders of the captured German ships, had left for a torpedo exercise leaving the German Fleet under the command of Rear Admiral Von Reuter virtually unguarded except for a motley collection of ships e.g. trawlers, tugs, the old clapped out battleship 'Victorious' and the focus of our story, a water tender 'Flying Kestrel', actually a converted tug, skippered by Captain Davies. Saturday 21st June was a perfect Orkney day and the 'Flying Kestrel' was picking up a group of Stromness schoolchildren for an outing on the Flow.

At around 10.00hrs Von-Reuter appeared on the quarterdeck of the 'Emden' wearing his dress uniform

and all his medals, giving the British fleet time to get further away, he hoisted the final signal on the 'Emden'. To all commanding officers and leaders of torpedo boats, 'Paragraph eleven confirm', this innocent sounding hoist actually meant execute the scuttle. The German fleet scattered about were fully aware of the signal and all ships replied 'Paragraph Eleven is confirmed'. The British fleet was completely unaware of the forthcoming events. At 09.30hrs the 'Flying Kestrel' with about 400 children from Stromness Public School left the harbour to tour the rusting hulls, the children naturally excited as a day out was a rare event. Some children expressed disappointment at the absence of the Grand fleet but once among the towering German ships, they forgot about that. "They were absolutely massive alongside us" one of the children said. The teachers warned the children not to make any noise or cheer, but as Kitty Tait said "I thought it was rather hard not to wave to the men". Naturally children, being children, waved to the German soldiers who in return thumbed their noses.

As 'Flying Kestrel' passed by the larger ships an older boy, George Maitland, shouted in a loud voice the name, tonnage and gun power of each ship, because of a competition the children scribbled down as much information as they could. Katie Watt did not notice anything peculiar on the outward journey, ships were still taking supplies on board, though she did notice "one or two flags going up on the destroyers".

On the German ships the scuttling plan was put into operation and it ran like clockwork. Well oiled sea cocks were opened, hammers to smash the valves were distributed to accelerate the spread of water. Rods used on destroyers to open the main valves, were then thrown overboard, likewise keys and handles used on other valves and sea cocks. Additional holes were bored through bulkheads, internal doors left opened and portholes unscrewed, while scuttles and ventilators were loosened or opened. Valve spindles were bent once the valves had been opened to prevent their closure and the actuating spanners thrown overboard. The anchor chain shackle pin ends had been hammered over so they could not be unscrewed, preventing any sinking ships from being beached on the shoreline. Condenser doors were removed, auxiliary valves, sea connections in boiler rooms and magazine valves had been opened, even the toilet plumbing was tampered with and all instrument panels and instruction plates referring to the operating of valves had been removed. All in all, ensuring the ships sank as quickly as possible.

The school children were not the only witnesses to the German sinkings. The marine artist B. F. Gribble (1872-1962) was aboard the Admiralty trawler 'Sochosin' noticed the number of flags and remarked to Sub-Lieutenant

Leech, who promptly said, "I see them, I think they are sinking their ships" and flashed a message to Rear Admiral Freemantle at 12.05hrs. Freemantle cancelled the torpedo exercise at 12.35hrs ordering a return to the Flow as fast as possible, the sight greeting their return was quoted as "is absolutely indescribable", ships sinking all around them. The noise of the sinking ships was captured by schoolgirl Katie Watt. "Out of the vents rushed steam and oil and air with a dreadful roaring hiss and vast clouds of white vapour rolled up from the sides of the ships". Sullen rumblings and dashing of chains increased the uproar as the great hulls capsized giddily over and slid with a horrible sucking and gurgling noises under the water. Ivy Scott remembered "one of the biggest ships shuddered and suddenly toppled over". The children's day out was turning into one they would not forget. On the 'Baden' a lone sailor dressed in summer whites danced the hornpipe on one of its turrets. On the Derfflinger's deck a ship's band played an old hunting song meanwhile battleships were sinking right, left and centre. The 'Moltke', 'Kronprinz Wilhelm', 'Kaiser', 'Grosse Kurfürst' and 'Prince Regent Luitpold' were upending, turning over and sliding down like some monstrous whales. Despite the chaos around there, the children were quite observant. Peggy Gibson was aware of one fact that was universal, "every one of these had a flag at the top of the mast". Other children were taking down ships names as part of a game. Peggy Gibson gave up after twelve, "just too many going down". The children were aware of the number of German sailors in the water. 11 year old Len Sutherland witnessed "at least one sailor shot". Many of the children were affected by the struggling sailors and were in tears. Others like 9 year old John Knarston were able to "thoroughly enjoy themselves". One of the students Henrietta Groundwater later said "We didn't understand that it was a piece of history we were seeing enacted". William Groundwater recalled "each passing second like a slow-motion picture, the activity was just tremendous". Henrietta also mentioned "I saw one man shot and he dropped off the stern of the boat, others were standing with their arms up". It must have been quite a traumatic experience for the children, though many of them were quite excited that even when things were starting to look dangerous, ships sinking about them etc., the Headmaster Major Hepburn ordered them below decks. George Mainland and John Knarston joined by two girls hid behind some towing hawser coils so that they could keep watching. The scuttling was the greatest act of naval self immolation ever known, truly Wagnerian in its magnitude. To some like the Rev. W. B. Matthews it was a "thrilling experience" but T. I. David saw the futility and sadness of the whole affair. All in all, fifty

under the eyes of the British Fleet. Some 500,000 tons in a few hours, leaving a once crowded Flow deserted and silent. By the time the 'Flying Kestrel' made her way back, the piers were packed with anxious parents, no doubt relieved that all was well. I'll leave the last word with Peggy Gibson who could not help herself in admiring the Germans scuttle "every ship had its flag flying, when they were scuttled. I think that was a wonderful action for them. After all it was their fleet". Though they had been defeated they were to go down with flags flying.

Anniversaries by Ben Jackson

May 1919 - Third Afghan war

Following and invasion of British India by an Afghan army, the third Afghan War commenced in May 1919. The Afghan nation had remained neutral during the Great War in spite of pressure from Turkey and Germany to join the central powers side. However, discontent with British interference in the governance of Afghanistan caused a change of policy. After initial success the Afghan forces were eventually driven out of India with help of the nascent Royal Air Force using its newly established bombing capabilities, the war brought to a finish in August. The second battalion of the Kings Liverpool Regiment was involved with the conflict.

June 1919 - Treaty of Versailles

The Great War was finally drawn to a close with the formal signing of the Treaty on 28th June, 1919, exactly five years to the day after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, the act which effectively precipitated Europe into war. The basis of the treaty was that Germany had to accept the fact she was responsible for the conflict and would undertake to pay financial reparations to some the countries comprising the Entente powers. The current cost of the payments in today's terms would have been £284 Billion.

June 1919 – Scuttling of the High Seas Fleet

As part of the Armistice bringing the conflict of the Great War to an end, the German High Seas Fleet was largely to be surrendered and interned in the Royal Navy's anchorage of Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands guarded by the British Grand Fleet. The German ships were left with a skeleton crew until such time as their fate was decided by the Treaty of Versailles. The commander of the German ships received incorrect intelligence that the fleet was to be handed over to the Allies. Rather than let this happen, he decided to scuttle the whole fleet. The first that the patrol ships of the Royal Navy knew of this. plan was when ships suddenly

four ships had gone down the water while crews abandoned their ships and took to their life boats. Attempts were made to salvage vessels but apart from beaching a small number of destroyers, the all of the interned fleet sank to the bottom of Scapa Flow, where some of the ships remain to this day.

April 1939 – Army Modernisation

The British army took a big step forward creating the Royal Armoured Corps. From then on, all the cavalry regiments and Royal Tank Corps battalions would be united under one corp. The British Army was mechanised virtually completely, the age of the horse was finally over.

September 1944 - Operation Market Garden

The Allied armies fought eastwards liberating northern France, Paris was liberated by the Free French Army and Brussels was freed by British forces as they moved through Belgium. The German Army started to seemingly disintegrate and fall back eastwards.

Sensing that one master stroke could shorten the war in Europe, General Montgomery had plans drawn up to strike east from east Belgium through northern Holland into Germany using a mobile column of armoured troops. This would require the capture of a number of bridges over rivers and canals across Holland to the lower Rhine to secure the route chosen into Germany. The ground operation was mounted by 30 Corps while the airborne operation to drop paratroops and glider borne infantry to capture and hold the bridges. American parachute infantry of the 82nd and 101st Divisions were to assault and hold all the bridges up to the last at Arnhem, which was to be attacked by the British First Airborne Division along with the First Polish Independent Parachute Brigade.

The operation had to be planned and executed with great haste which sadly led to a number of problems including the fact that there were just not enough transport aircraft to deliver the huge number of airborne troops required in one day. A further problem was communication, as the temperamental radio sets failed for a number of days

took on strange angles in

leaving troops on the ground unable to communicate with each other. Intelligence had also not realised that two German SS Divisions were resting around Arnhem. Airborne troops were not equipped to take on tanks and armoured vehicles being only equipped with light weapons.

The operation started well but with typical German efficiency, the retreating divisions rallied with the result that resistance along the narrow corridor of attack stiffened, slowing down the whole advance and disrupting the carefully timed operation. The American airborne troops captured nearly all the bridges allotted to them successfully before they were demolished, however the destruction of one over a canal halted the advance required the construction of a Bailey bridge before the operation could continue to relieve American and British forces further to the east. While a small force of British “paras” had captured one end of the mighty bridge at Arnhem across the Rhine, they were unable to hold it and were progressively driven from the bridge foot in savage house to house fighting and finally were forced to surrender to far more heavily armed SS panzer troops, having held the bridge for four days when they should have been relieved after two.

The rest of the British ‘paras’ were driven back to a pocket based on the banks of the Rhine remote from the bridge, even after being reinforced by Polish ‘paras’. The result was that the ground troops of 30 Corps arrived on the south bank of the Rhine in time to help evacuate the survivors of the British and Polish airborne operation but the vital bridge was lost. Of 10,000 men who landed during the operation in Arnhem only 2,000 returned to Allied lines, the rest were killed or captured.

Sadly, east Holland remained under Nazi control until March 1945 and after Dutch railway workers went on strike to aid the Allied cause, the Germans stopped the transport of food resulting in appalling hardship for the Dutch residents, some 20,000 starving to death until such time as they were finally liberated.

Do take a look at our branch website - <http://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/hale> where you will find updated details of events as they become finalised along with photos of various trips.

If anyone would like to write a short report, an article about any ex-servicemen/women, book review or would like an event or activity for inclusion in a Newsletter, please contact Lesley lesleyj@huntscross.plus.com Tel 0151 486 1860

**The RBL Hale Branch meet on the first Wednesday of every month at 8.00pm at The Childe of Hale public house.
Please do come along.**

You don't have to be a member to join us on our organised trips so if you would like to come along please contact:-

Marie Fisher marie.fisher@ymail.com or tel 07958 399252;

Bill Sergeant billtanat8@hotmail.co.uk or telephone 0151 724 3171

