

FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE 2010

Three branch members attended this year at the Royal Albert Hall, despite the London underground being virtually at a standstill with only three lines operating – on the weekend of Remembrance, of the Lord Mayor's parade, of the rugby international at Twickenham, and assorted other events! It would appear that London is all set for the Olympics then... Terry and I went at the invitation of branch secretary John Crisford, who was on 'hosting' duties, the subject of his attentions being the newly elected Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband.

I had attended the Festival of Remembrance once before, representing the RAF Volunteer Reserve, marching in the company of another female officer, from the Air Training Corps part of the RAFVR. After three days of drill at RAF Uxbridge, the event held no fears for us – apart from those mountainous steps, and the equally mountainous sergeant major at the top, shouting "GO"! Since then I had always harboured a wish to attend as a spectator, and Terry had never attended, so it was a totally new experience for him. John, I discovered, is a seasoned participant in the Festival of Remembrance, having been, on several occasions, one of the lucky trumpeters who sounds the fanfares: certainly not a task for the faint hearted!

Terry and I were in a box three away from the Royal party, so as you can imagine, we had an excellent view of the proceedings, being seated as we were almost directly opposite the stage. As Terry pointed out, we could have launched paper darts into Her Majesty's lap from our seats!

The massed bands of the Guards Division, and the precision marching of the Queen's Colour Squadron gave the familiar and stirring displays. The entry of the Legion and ex-Service Associations' standards was received as enthusiastically as usual, the Chelsea Pensioners' and the War Widows' appearances provoked as much emotion as ever, the delight of those watching was very obvious when it was announced that the Army Physical Training Corps was with immediate effect granted the title "Royal", and a very warm reception was given both to the Battle of Britain pilots, and after the muster parade, to the arrival of the Book of Remembrance, carried by the Lance Corporal who had master minded the March for Honour to the Royal Albert Hall, aiming to raise £1m for the Poppy Appeal.

After the performance, we were invited to join with the great and good of the Legion (and the odd politician, archbishop, and so on) for a delicious buffet, before making our way back to our accommodation. The afternoon performance would be easier to visit from Norfolk, and would not necessitate an overnight stay. Do look out for the information about it, which I always reproduce in abridged form in the newsletter, and consider making an application: it is well worth attending, and far better than watching it on television.