

THE WIPERS TIMES

Newsletter of The Royal British Legion Brussels Branch

Welcome to this Spring edition of the Royal British Legion Brussels Branch newsletter.



Hello and my warmest wishes to you all. There is a sense of renewal and hope at this time of year and the recent bright blue skies and flashes of colour breaking through in the garden has done wonders for lifting my spirits.

I remain relentlessly positive that with the deployment of the vaccine we should start to slowly see a lifting of restrictions that will allow us to safely gather with family and friends again in the near future. As soon as conditions allow, I look forward to us rebooting the branch with

three initiatives for 2021. First, we plan to run half-day battlefield tours for members and potential members to support our continued commitment to Remembrance and education. Second, after this long period without meeting I want to focus on the social aspect of the branch and set up monthly gatherings at a bar / restaurant for a relaxed beer, glass of wine or cup of tea! We would like to identify a couple of locations to use regularly as our quasi-club. If you have any preferences (good beer or great beer garden :)), recommendations are welcome. More to follow on this plan..... Looking to the 2021 Poppy Appeal, in 2020 we had to quickly change how we fundraised to adapt to COVID-19 and some of those changes are here to stay. In 2021 we would like to broaden how and where we fundraise in Belgium and I would love to hear your good ideas as to how we could reach more people in 2022. If you would like to be involved in this year's Poppy Appeal, please get in contact with me. Volunteers very much welcomed!

Patron: Her Majesty
the Queen

National President:
Lt Gen James
Bashall CB, CBE

The Royal British Legion formed on 15 May 1921 bringing together four organisations of the Armed Forces that had established themselves after the First World War.

By 1921, the tradition of a Two Minute Silence had been established. The first Poppy Appeal was held that year, raising over £106,000 to help WW1 veterans with employment and housing.

The Legion was established to care for those who suffered as a result of service during the First World War. It has been helping the Armed Forces community and their families ever since.

1

**JOIN US ON
FACEBOOK**

Keep up to date with
the latest news

2

**FOLLOW US ON
TWITTER**

@RoyalBrussels
Your daily dose of RBL

3

**BOOKMARK OUR
WEBSITE!**

Packed full of your
history and stories

In this newsletter we pay our respects to two great veterans. Alain Brogniez has the honour of being the custodian of Gunner Stanley Burditt's military records and battledress and has taken a close look at his unit - a rarely told history. Dennis Abbott's account of the life and times of Lt Col François Roberti-Lintermans, one of our WW2 veterans who sadly passed away on 17 November 2020 brings the life a story of sacrifice and determination.

We will remember them both.

Wishing you all the very best of health and happiness.

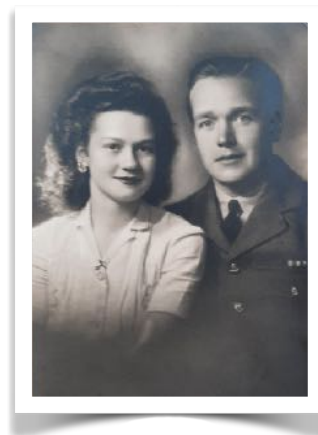
Yours Zoe

Welcome to our new members

A very warm welcome to the following new members to our Brussels Branch family!

- Ricky Rose
- Michael Magan
- Keith Picton
- David Bradley

We look forward to meeting you and gathering together as soon as the COVID-19 restrictions lift.



Claire and Stanley Whitfield who met after the Liberation of Brussels in 1944

Branch condolences

Brussels Branch would like to extend heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of two enormous characters from the branch.

Lieutenant-Colonel François Roberti-Lintermans passed away on 17 November 2020.

Claire Whitfield passed away on 27 February 2021.

Both central figures within the Branch they will be remembered for their life of service, their warm hearts and generous natures.

We will remember them.

POPPY APPEAL 2020

The impact of COVID-19 was always going to make the 2020 Poppy Appeal a challenge. The majority of our shops and offices that would normally gladly take a collection tin were closed for business and face to face collections were out of the question. Undaunted, the team got their thinking caps on to consider different ways to both raise money for the Legion and ensure that the population in Belgium could get hold of a Poppy in time for 11 November. Led by Ann Morley, the branch managed to raise an incredible 8774.16 euros through a variety of online and traditional methods. A brilliant sum which is testament to the hard work of the team, great leadership from Ann and the generosity of the people in Belgium. 2020 was Ann's last year as the Poppy Appeal Organiser after nine years of dedication, hard work and finding the most bizarre objects able to be squeezed into a collecting tin! We offer our warmest and most sincere thanks to Ann and Dave for setting such a high standard of excellence for the branch.

RBL 100th anniversary

15th May 2021 is an historic milestone - 100 years of the Legion and also, just over 99 years of your Brussels Branch. We would love to celebrate both in style and want to hear your ideas and thoughts as to how to mark this occasion together. Closely watching the COVID-19 restrictions, we would like to reflect the enduring themes of Remembrance, Fundraising and Comradeship we have in the Branch. When we have collated all inputs we will send out a programme to all branch members. We may need to focus a little more on the virtual for the 2021 events, but remain hopeful that we can get together in the future.



The Poppy Factory opened in 1922 - Bill Williams is pictured with the largest poppy ever made

Remembering Gunner Stanley Burditt by Alain Brogniez

Born on 26 July 1922, Stanley John Burditt, an electrician (accumulator assembler) by trade, enlisted in the British Army for the duration of war at Writtle, Essex on 15 January 1942. He joined the Royal Artillery with the number 1136064. After his training Gnr Burditt was sent to North Africa with an unknown unit of First Army, but was later transferred to the 52nd (6th London) Anti-Tank Regiment and fought with them in Sicily, Italy and NW Europe. After occupational duties in Germany, he was finally demobbed on 23 February 1947 and was awarded the 1939-45 Star, Africa Star with 1st Army Clasp, Italy Star, France & Germany Star,



Gunner Stanley Burditt's battledress

Defence Medal and War Medal 1939-45. But, like many Veterans, Stanley never wore his decorations; they were still in the box of issue as when delivered by the Post Office. His release certificate says: 'Very good military conduct' and 'good at his job, hard worker, honest and sober'. I am very honoured to be the custodian of Gnr Burditt's battledress blouse, medals, service & pay book, release book, and record of service card.

We will remember Stanley Burditt



*

The 52nd (6th London) ATk Regt was formed on 28 November 1938 by conversion of 63rd (6th London) Field Regt and equipped with 2-pounder (40mm) guns. On 17 November 1939 it sailed to France to join the British Expeditionary Force (BEF).

It was attached to 5th Division and stayed with this formation for the remainder of the war.

required to bolster the defences. And on 1st June, their job well done, the men destroyed the last guns and were evacuated.

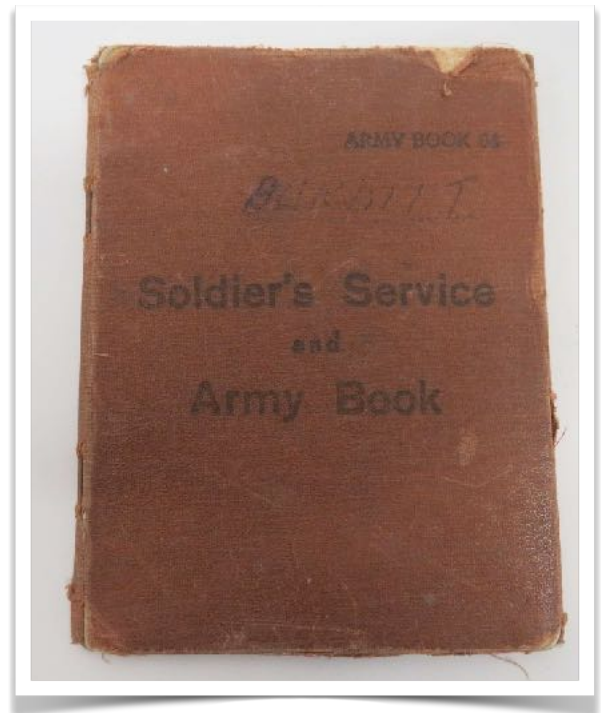


The 52nd was then attached to the Home Forces and served with Scottish Command until October 1940, and then with III Corps in Western Comd. In March 1942 it was sent to India and, after less than three months, joined the PAIForce (Persia And Iraq Force) near Teheran, via Basra and Baghdad.

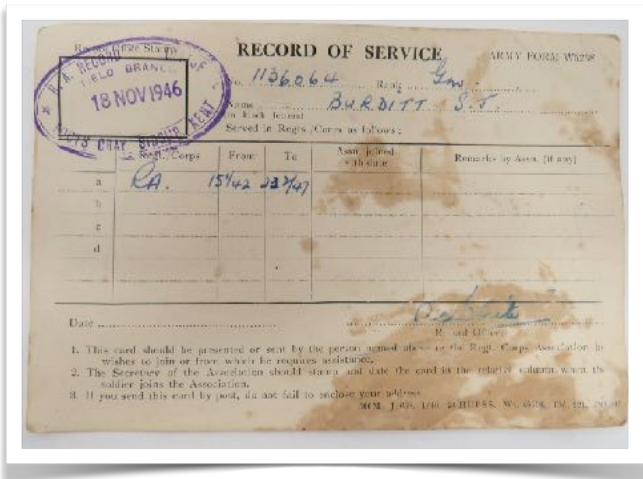
Earmarked for the Allied invasion of Sicily, 52nd ATk, now equipped with the new 17-pdr (76.2mm - 3-inch) gun, landed on 10 July 1943 with 5th Division. They advanced to the plain of Catania where they met stiffer opposition. But the Division was rapidly withdrawn to prepare the invasion of mainland Italy (Operation Baytown).

Gunner Burditt's war records and medals

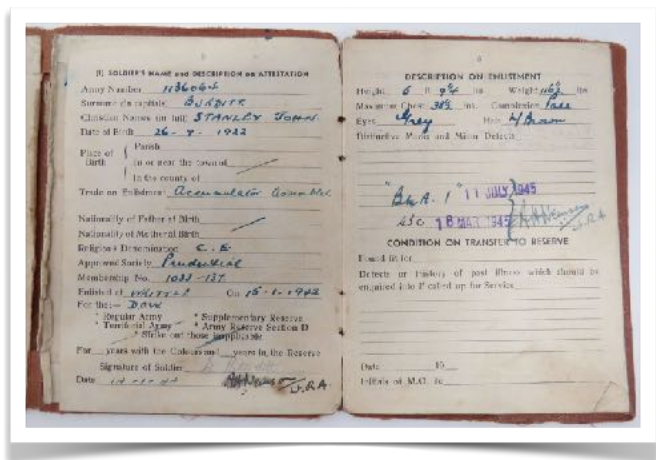
On 10 May 1940 5th Division was in reserve as it was due to reinforce the troops in Norway. But new orders arrived and it was sent to Brussels. Following the new threat coming through the Ardennes, 52nd ATk formed part of the rearguards and by 16 May was covering the Halle-Leerbeek road. On 21 May it was involved in the counter-attack at Arras. It was a serious blow for the Germans and, even if the British had to withdraw at nightfall, it seriously delayed their advance. On 26 May the Commander in Chief, General (later Field Marshal) the Lord Gort, VC, GCB, CB, CBE, DSO, MVO, MC made the decision to evacuate the BEF from Dunkirk (Operation Dynamo). The 52nd continued to delay the enemy and arrived at Dunkirk on 31 May, where their guns were



The 5th Division landed at Reggio di Calabria on 3 September 1943. There was little opposition apart from demolitions and rearguard actions. During the winter stalemate they transferred to the east coast at Ortona and Orsogna to help the Canadians and New Zealanders. These attacks were moderately successful and they switched again to the west coast to cross the mouth of the Garigliano on the night of 17/18 January 1944. A firm bridgehead was established but without further troops it was impossible to advance. In March the Division was sent to Anzio and held a



section of the line in a trench warfare stalemate that matched WW1. After the capture of Cassino in May 1944 they advanced at last, as far as the Tiber before being withdrawn for rest.



Then the Division handed over its guns and equipment and embarked for Egypt. After a period of rest and reorganisation, followed by internal security duties in Palestine between July 1944 and February 1945, the Division was transferred to NW Europe to reinforce 21st Army Group (Operation Goldflake). They missed the Rhine crossing in March but advanced to the Elbe and made an assault crossing of that river on 29 April. After that there was only scattered resistance and thousands of prisoners were collected until VE Day.



52nd ATk Regt RA served then in Germany with BAOR (British Army Of the Rhine) until placed in suspended animation in November 1946.

Alain Brogniez

François Roberti-Lintermans

A Belgian patriot - from head to toe by Dennis Abbott

Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel François Roberti-Lintermans, one of the most distinguished members of the Brussels branch, passed away on Tuesday, 17 November 2020, a week before his 96th birthday.

We will remember him.

Until the end of his life, his memory was as sharp as ever. François could remember what happened nearly 80 years earlier just as if it were yesterday.



A young François, image from Het Laeste Nieuws.

In recent years, he gave interviews to [Het Laeste Nieuws](#), [Le Soir](#) and [La Libre Belgique](#), as well as a 2019 [video interview](#) with students from IHECS (l'Institut des Hautes Études des Communications Sociales) in Brussels, in which François recalled his wartime experiences with Belgium's "Marathon"

network and the 4th Battalion of the Belgian Fusiliers.

The content of this article is based on these interviews as well as information and anecdotes shared by François with branch members and his family.

François was born on 25 November 1924, the son of Emery Roberti-Lintermans and his British wife, Liliane Mills.

He was 18 and studying in Enghien, a small town 40 kilometres south west of Brussels, when he first became involved with Comète, the resistance network founded in Brussels by [Andrée de Jongh](#). Comète hid Allied airmen who had been shot down over occupied Belgium and helped them evade capture and return to Britain. With D-Day looming, Comète evolved into Operation Marathon which involved hiding downed airmen in secret forest camps until the arrival of Allied troops.

Joining the Belgian resistance wasn't something François necessarily planned to do, but when he saw one of his classmates getting roughly questioned by a German soldier, he decided to intervene. His mother's sister, Helen Westhofen, had married a German before the First World War and François had picked up some of the language.

I'm related to von Ribbentrop!

His mediation was to no avail - the two teenagers were arrested and thrown into a Gestapo cell in Lessines. "The next day we were transferred to Mons and, believe it or not, I still regard the fact that I was arrested as the opportunity of a lifetime," he later recalled.

His widowed aunt was furious and, after arriving at the jail in Mons, promptly informed the guards that she was (somewhat distantly) related to Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister. François was immediately freed.

His father urged him to return to his studies, but François refused, saying he wanted to do something for his country.

Despite having zero contacts in the resistance, armed only with address of a former reservist pilot, the teenager made his way to a village called Villance in the Ardennes. The man let him stay the night and, the next day, introduced François to some "tourists" whom he quickly realised were not who they purported to be.

After persuading them he was committed to the cause, François was told to wait for a car that would collect him the same evening. He was then taken to Beffe, 50 kilometres to the north, and left outside a large building surrounded by forest. A couple made François welcome and he discovered the place usually hosted children during holidays when their parents were at work.

Hello, how are you?

The next morning, two men he hadn't seen before came downstairs. They both greeted François in English: "Hello, how are you?"

"My God, foreign pilots! It was as if the sky had opened up. I was a boy whose most beloved possession was a piece of plexiglass from a downed British plane, which I cherished like a relic. My legs were trembling," he recalled.

It turned out there were around 30 British and Polish pilots hidden in the building. When the coast was clear, they would keep in shape by swimming in the Ourthe river which flowed close by.

One day, a new pilot turned up, still in his flight gear. The other airmen were suspicious and quickly unmasked him as a German spy. "He was courageous to go into the lion's den but there was no choice but to shoot him," said François, who was by now known as "Bob" after receiving false identity papers from the village mayor in the name of Robert Desrameaux.

German attack

A bigger problem turned out to be local resistance fighters who had drawn attention to themselves by killing another German - and were anything but discreet about it. François tried to reason with their

chief, who threatened to kill him. The same group were also blackmailing local farmers into handing over large quantities of meat, or face being denounced as collaborators.



Lintermans (right) with British Pilot Douglas Lloyd. Image taken from Het Laaste Nieuws

Two days later the inevitable happened and the Germans attacked Beffe, killing two members of the resistance. The pilots were quickly moved to a new location and François made his way by foot back to Villance, sticking as far as possible to paths in the forests and minor roads.

He then helped set up a new underground camp in nearby Maissin, where about 20 Allied airmen were kept in hiding.

On 5 September 1944, two days after the liberation of Brussels, a German soldier approached the camp. Speaking in German, François managed to distract him long enough for the pilots to get away into the forest, where they split into smaller groups.

François linked up with seven pilots and they stayed in the forest for several days, keeping their heads down.

Fighting for Uncle Sam

Their luck was about to change.

Entering a small village, they were overjoyed to meet a US patrol from the 4th Infantry Division, which had recently crossed into Belgium to

prepare for the launch of a major attack on the [Siegfried Line](#).

"I reported to an American officer and said: 'I brought my pilots to you, I am now asking for a *quid pro quo*. I want to liberate my country with you'. An hour later, I was kitted from head to toe like an American soldier. Two bands of ammunition, grenades, rifle, bayonet, helmet, and boots. I never had such good boots! I was given a Jeep, a machine gun and one of his soldiers, because the forest was still full of Germans."



François Roberti-Lintermans (right) with Private Goodie of the US 4th Infantry Division during the liberation of Houffalize, September 1944. Image kindly provided by Margaux Roberti-Lintermans.

After saying farewell to the pilots, François finally learnt that he had been working all along for MI9 IS9, the British military intelligence service responsible for coordinating Marathon.

Still in US uniform, François helped liberate a village. "It was amazing. All the locals applauded, laughed, cheered. The lieutenant wanted an

omelette for breakfast and I asked: 'Where can we find eggs?' A swarm of girls appeared from all directions carrying eggs - so many that we filled all our helmets with them. The days I spent with those Americans were undoubtedly the most beautiful ones of my life."

Russian encounter

François stayed with the American troops as they fought several skirmishes with the enemy en route to Bastogne. At Saint-Vith, they told him they couldn't take him any further, being a volunteer.

François decided to return to Brussels. Hitching rides where he could, but mostly on foot, he headed for Rochefort to pick up a train.

At the station, he was questioned by Russian soldiers (a large émigré community had settled in Brussels and Wallonia). After finally convincing them he wasn't a collaborator, the Russians proudly showed him their haul of heavy weapons, seized from the Germans.

After arriving in the capital on 6 October, François enlisted the very next day as a "war-volunteer" at the Maison du Roi on the Grand Place. Three days later, he was among 800 recruits in the newly formed [4th Battalion of the Belgian Fusiliers](#), under the command of Major Marcel de Posch. "I never knew that the Belgian administration could work so quickly," joked François..

Belgian fusilier

The men received rudimentary training at Tervuren barracks and were issued with what François describes as "derisory equipment". Nevertheless, the battalion was officially attached to the 9th US Army and, on 12 December, deployed close to the German border during what would be one of the coldest winters on record with temperatures sometimes below 28 Celsius at night.

The Belgian fusiliers played an important role during the ensuing Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945), protecting strategic sites such as railway lines, bridges and canals from enemy attack.

"If we had been more exposed at the front it would have been a massacre, but the Allies had the wisdom not to impose this on us. So we carried out less glorious but very useful missions," François later told [La Libre Belgique](#).

The 4th Battalion continued to support the US forces as they advanced into Germany across the Ruhr and Rhine, capturing and holding thousands of PoWs who were taken back to Belgium. In autumn 1945 there were 250,000 German PoWs on Belgian soil.

By the end of the war he battalion had advanced more than 300 kilometres from the Belgian border, with a front line on the River Weser between Minden and Höxter.

Eisenhower tribute

The importance of their role was recognised by General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander and future US President, in a declaration published on 13 July 1945:

"I desire to commend the Fourth Belgian Fusiliers Battalion for meritorious performance of military duty while serving with the Ninth United States Army from 8 December 1944 to 1 June 1945. This

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Thank you to all the members who have paid their annual subscriptions. May we give a gentle reminder to our other members to renew your membership with Jean-Pierre so we can keep this fabulous Branch strong!

WRITTEN CONTRIBUTIONS WANTED!

If you would like to send in an article for our next newsletter, please drop me a line on: zoezoew@hotmail.com With thanks to our committee team for their contributions to this edition.

Battalion contributed materially to the successful operations of the Unit with which it served. The High Esprit de Corps and great determination displayed by the officers and men of the Fourth Fusiliers Battalion enabled it to carry through to a successful conclusion each and every assigned mission, thereby contributing immeasurably to the glorious victory of the Allied Nations. The outstanding achievements of this Battalion bring credit not only to itself but also to the Belgian Army."

Freedom is the air you breathe

By August, François's unit was back in Belgium, near Namur, and the soldiers received orders to demob.

Looking back, he described 1940-45 as "a period of patriotism that's hard to understand if you've never been occupied. Freedom is the air that you breathe. It's only when it's taken away that you realise it exists and how important it is".

In recognition of his outstanding service, François was decorated by both the US and British forces.

After the war

His experiences gave him a taste for life in uniform. After the war ended, François enrolled as an officer cadet.

He was later transferred to an armoured regiment in Germany, where he spent the next 10 years, serving at Siegen and Lüdenscheid in North Rhine-Westphalia. In 1959 he was posted back to Belgium, serving in Bourg-Léopold (Leopoldsburg) and Arlon, then back to Brussels in 1967.

He was promoted to chef de corps, responsible for the Belgian Army's cinema service. The role involved the production of instruction films as well as maintaining the archives.

François finished his active military career with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

In addition to being an active member of the Brussels branch of the RBL, François chaired the Fraternelle de 4e Batallion des Fusiliers.

Family and interests

François married Monique Gilson in 1948 and had four children: Patrick, Yves, Geneviève and Thierry, who gave them eight grandchildren: Yves had 3 (Perrine, Camille and Emery), Geneviève also 3 (François-Thibault, Benjamin and Delphine), and Thierry 2 (Arthur and Margaux). They also had five great grand-children: Benjamin's daughters Lucie, Capucine, and Violette, Perrine's son Théo, and Camille's son Robin.

François' chief interests were sport and history. He ran a tennis school and also enjoyed fencing, swimming and sailing.

He organised numerous conferences on military history and wrote two books, *Waterloo, Une page d'Histoire, une page d'Héroïsme* and *Nelson et la Royal Navy, Britannia rules the waves*.



François with Ambassador Alison Rose and Rev'd Canon John Wilkinson at Hotton in 2015

We will remember him.

New Branding for the Royal British Legion

You will have noticed that the RBL has had a facelift! To mark its centenary year the Legion has selected a new brand and symbol to better reflect the future.

Why the change?

As we celebrate our centenary and look to the future, we need one consistent and clear brand that helps people to easily find us, understand who we are and the wide range of things we do.

2020 highlighted the importance of digital channels, for both providing and receiving support. From keeping our community connected through video calls to engaging with new audiences, and delivering a very different Poppy Appeal with lots of new ways to get involved online. The role of digital can't be overstated.

But our existing brand identity - created over 30 years ago - is no longer fit for purpose for a digital world. In the last year alone, over 6.3 million users visited the RBL website, over half of which were using a mobile phone. When used on these channels at a smaller size, our identity is lost and our logo becomes illegible.

The new identity and logo will help us to be fit for the future whilst celebrating our history.

What inspired the new design?

Our new brand identity is inspired by our heritage as we look to our future.

The iconic two-petal poppy is an enduring symbol of Remembrance and hope for a peaceful future. It remains at the heart of our new logo. Our welfare work is vital but less well known, so we need to focus on the Royal British Legion - and all that represents.

The lettering is inspired by the inscription on the Grave of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster

Abbey and as such is designed as a symbol of Remembrance.

The colour palette is also grounded in British heritage with a modern twist. The national colours have been given a slightly more contemporary and warmer hue, with a secondary inspired by British military ribbons. Collectively they create a distinctive and quintessentially British colour palette.

How is it being implemented?

The new brand was due to be launched in 2020 but inevitably, it was delayed due to COVID-19. The launch took place in January however the new change will be phased in as a no-waste strategy. This means using existing materials until they are exhausted to ensure charity money is not wasted.

If anybody has any questions about the new branding, do send me a mail and I'll find out the answers! Zoe

Your Branch History

We need your Brussels Branch member tales!

Brussels Branch is unique because of our members' experiences, stories and connections. We would love to make sure that your individual and collective history is recorded and celebrated.

So what are we doing? Exciting news, Dennis Abbott, our Branch Community Support Representative, has undertaken a wide-ranging piece of research to document the Branch's history as one complete story for our website, and we hope, to publish as a book. The main body of his work has already been added to the website (see our [Branch History](#) pages). If this inspires memories of the Branch, please get in touch so we can share your insights.

What are we looking for? If you have any Legion related records, artefacts, stories, tales of previous Branch events and experiences you are willing to share please get in touch (zoezoew@hotmail.com) and we will help connect your details with both our branch and the wider Legion.

Your thoughts on the future?

First, a huge thank you to our constant and faithful members of the Brussels Branch, your support is greatly appreciated. Without you, our branch would not exist. .

With your support, our branch will focus on the following objectives in 2021-2023:

Fundraising, Remembrance, Supporting people in need, Comradship and Promoting the Legion overseas.

Our priorities for the next three years will be to focus on:

Recruitment - keeping our branch vibrant and strong.

Retention - keeping our members in the branch through an interesting and fun programme of events.

Remembrance - being more visible and raising awareness about commemorations in Belgium including a focus on Belgian WW1 and WW2 battlefield sites.

In 2022, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of our Branch. We want to set the foundations for the next hundred years. To do that, we need your input. What do you think the branch does well? What would you like to see us do more of? What should we do differently?

Please do send any thoughts or comments in to Zoe White and Jean-Pierre Pede. We would love to hear from you.

Dates for the diary

The agenda remains a little 'light' for the foreseeable weeks as we comply with local regulations, however there are a few dates for the diary... As restrictions lift, we will email plans for regular, informal catch-ups and commemorations.

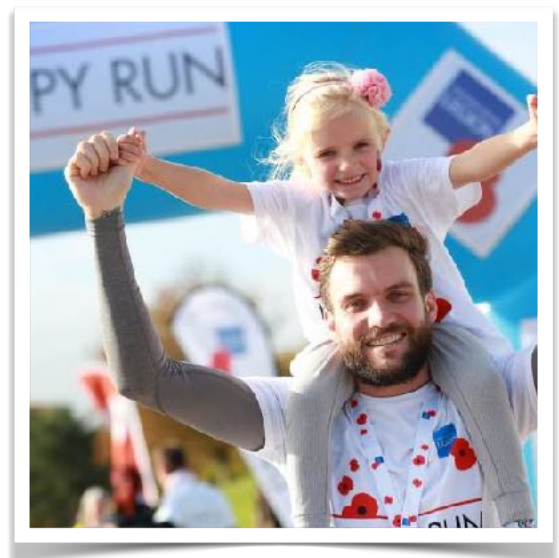
Wednesday 24 March 1900h - Online Quiz with the Brussels British Community Association. 8 euros per head with the potential to win vouchers for Stonemanor.

Saturday 15 May - Online Annual Conference. One of the benefits of the pandemic has been the switch to virtual working. The Legion Annual Conference is going to be held online again. If anybody wishes to watch the event, please contact the Hon Secretary for details.

Saturday 10 July (TBC) - Brussels British Community Association charitable fundraising day at Lasne Cricket Ground. More details to follow, however please keep the date free in your diary for a relaxed gathering in the sunshine (fingers crossed!)

When restrictions lift, we will identify a regular location and date for monthly catchups.

If you have any good ideas or recommendations for other events for the branch please send them to our events coord, Phil Hyde and Steve Grant.



Your Brussels Branch committee

The branch details and contact email addresses are listed below. We would all be delighted to take any ideas you have for the branch or any questions or requests you may have.

If anybody wishes to get more involved in supporting events or COVID19-compliant commemorations, please get in touch.

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Standard Bearer	Freddy Roiseux	

Want to read more?

You can also find us on our website, filled with news and stories relevant to our branch. Previous copies of the newsletters are also shared on the website - take a look! <http://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/brussels>

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