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THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION ANTWERP BRANCH
Tweemaandelijks newsletter juli - augustus 2025

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Dear members

Hopefully you are all enjoying your summer, whether it is at home or whether you're spending some time away.

In the meantime, the committee is already hard at work organising this year's Tank Ceremony. Not quite as grand as last year when we had the Band of the Grenadier Guards and the crew of HMS Cattistock, but we are still hoping to make it another beautiful event. Do come along, we'd love to welcome as many of our members as possible. Saturday 6 September, 1 pm at the Cromwell Tank :-)

And after that, things will become busy again for our standard bearers, as we follow the route the Allied forces took when they liberated towns and villages across Antwerp.

We still plan to take a trip to the National Arboretum, so if you are interested in joining us 24-26 April 2026, do let us know. The sooner we can get planning, the better.

Also, feel free to suggest topics for the newsletter, or even activities that you would be interested in. The committee is always open to new ideas and suggestions! But for now, enjoy your newsletter, and we hope to see you all soon!

Best regards

Inge

Newsletter editor ad interim

RBL OPEN EVENING

Every first Thursday of the month, from 8 pm onwards
 Café Highlander, Stadswaag 21, Antwerp
Join us for a chat and a drink!



RBL Antwerp Branch HELPLINE: 0486 646 941
 (Mary Ann Marinus)

If someone is ill, or needs a visit, please DO give us a call.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE & TIME	LOCATION	WHAT
Fri 5 September	Antwerp	Antwerp city ceremony at future Names Monument
Sat 6 September	Antwerp	Liberation of Antwerp <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10:30 am: Police monument • 1 pm: Annual Tank Ceremony • 3 pm: 5de Linierement • 5:30 pm: Naval monument - Dag der Zeelieden
Sat 18 October	Wuustwezel	Polar Bears ceremony - Liberation Wuustwezel
Sat 25 October	Meir	Poppy appeal
Sun 26 October	Basiliek	AGM + poppy lunch
Sat 13 December	Basiliek	Christmas lunch

VJ DAY

To honour the 80th anniversary of VJ Day the UK will be holding a two-minute silence at 12 noon on 15 August 2025

A Service of Remembrance will honour and remember those who fought and died during the Second World War in the Far East at the National Memorial Arboretum which will be broadcast live on BBC1 from midday.

The event will include a guard of honour of Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force and music provided by military bands. The Battle of Britain Memorial Flight will lead a breathtaking flypast featuring the historic Dakota, Hurricane and Spitfire aircrafts. The Red Arrows will join for a flypast over national VJ Day 80 commemorations.



VOLUNTEERS WANTED FOR HOME AND HOSPITAL VISITS

We are looking for volunteers who would be happy to visit Branch Members who are not mobile, well, or in hospital, as part of the Branch Community Support Scheme.

No special training is needed just common sense and a sense of humour.

Interested?
Please contact
Mary Ann: 0486 646 941 (evenings)
or e-mail: Maryann.marinus@hotmail.com

ANNUAL TANK CEREMONY 2025

INVITATION - 81st Tank Ceremony

Saturday 6 September 2025



The Royal British Legion, Antwerp Branch, has the pleasure of inviting you to
the 81st Tank Ceremony
to commemorate the Liberation of Antwerp
on Saturday 6 September 2025 from 1 pm to 2:15 pm
at the Cromwell Tank, on the Jan Van Rijswijcklaan in Antwerp.

For more details, please contact antwerp.secretary@rbl.community or call +32 478 297 687.
Dress code is business attire or military uniform.

NATIONAL ARBORETUM - BRANCH OUTING

Don't forget to let us know if you're interested in joining. Only when we have an idea of numbers can we start making plans and see if it is feasible.

The National Memorial Arboretum is a British site of national remembrance at Alrewas, in Staffordshire. It is designed to help people reflect, celebrate lives lived and commemorate lives lost in service.

A beautiful and inspiring place, the 150 acres of the Arboretum form a living landscape, and is the home to more than 400 memorials nestled amongst lush maturing woodland. Military and civilian associations are represented alongside tributes for individuals. Rich in design and symbolism and sympathetic to the landscape they inhabit the memorials and their stories are waiting to be discovered.

For many it's a wonderful place to stroll and enjoy the trees; for others it's a peaceful and beautiful place to remember loved ones, particularly those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Sounds interesting? It is! **That is why the Antwerp Branch would like to organise a trip to the National Arboretum in April of next year.**

However, before we go off renting mini-buses and finding hotels, *we would first like to check with you whether there is a) interest and b) how many people would want to join. Depending on numbers we can decide whether it would be better to take a couple of cars or rent a mini-bus.*

The plan is to go over the weekend of **24-26 April 2026** - i.e. leave on Friday 24 April, spend the day at the National Arboretum on Saturday 25 April (guided tours and buggy tours are available), return journey on Sunday 26 April.

Please let us know by completing this form: <https://forms.gle/fFLFaVZLZrdveTRM6> or mail/call Inge at Antwerp.secretary@rbl.community / 0478 297 687.

More information: <https://www.thenma.org.uk/>

Please note: for this trip you will need a valid passport and an ETA.



POPPY LUNCH

Join us on **Sunday 26 October** for our annual poppy lunch! Lunch will be served at 1 pm, but remember that first we will have our AGM at 11 am, so we expect to see you all there first!

Menu

Pumpkin cream soup with bacon

Pork tenderloin (varkenshaasje)

with hunter's sauce

Winter vegetables

'Potatoe pie' (aardappeltaartje)

Ice cream with eggnog

Coffee and biscuits

Drinks are not included.

Please book your places before 17 October at the latest by letting Martje Dequinze know.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

- **Date:** Sunday 26 October 2025, 1 pm
- **Location:** Restaurant De Basiliek, Trooststraat 20-22, 2650 Edegem
- **Price:** €35 per person, drinks not included
- **Bookings:** Mail Martje (martjed54@gmail.com) or call 0486 101 484
- **Payment:** Pay into the RBL account before 17 October. Account number: BE53 9730 0871 2553. Please include 'name + number of participants + Poppy lunch'

A NEW CHAPLAIN FOR THE ANTWERP BRANCH

On 22 June, we officially welcomed Father Stephen Graham as the new Chaplain of the Antwerp Branch, followed by a loyal toast to King Charles, and a celebratory barbecue.

Thank you to St Boniface Anglican Church for hosting us, Urbain De Groof for being our bbq master in the summer heat and everyone else that helped out or joined us.



NEW NATIONAL PRESIDENT

The RBL's new National President Vice Admiral Paul Bennett CB OBE will be joining us in Antwerp for the Liberation ceremonies.

Vice Admiral Bennett joined the Royal Navy in 1985. Following an extensive career at sea, including several roles ashore, he was recognised with an OBE for his work in Navy Command for Above Water Capability and Maritime Security. His final role before retiring from service in 2021 was as Chief of Staff for Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, Virginia, after which he assumed a role as a NATO Senior Mentor.

Vice Admiral Bennett's appointment follows the passing of Sir Clive Johnstone in May 2024.

We are very happy to welcome the National President and his wife to Antwerp as they join us for the Liberation weekend.



CEREMONY LANCASTER CRASH EKEREN

On 15 June 1943, around half past one in the morning, a German night fighter shot down a British Lancaster bomber above Ekeren. The seven English crew members were killed. Every year, the crew of the Lancaster is commemorated at the monument on the Laar in Ekeren-Donk.

'The crew of this Lancaster sacrificed their lives for our freedom,' said district mayor Koen Palinckx at the commemoration ceremony at Laar: Albert Victor Crawford, Lieutenant Arthur Ernest Davey, Joseph Brown McHendry, William George Reed, Leslie Toal, Charles Joseph Buckle and Kenneth Ivor Bowerman.

Thank you Donald for carrying the RBL standard at this commemoration.

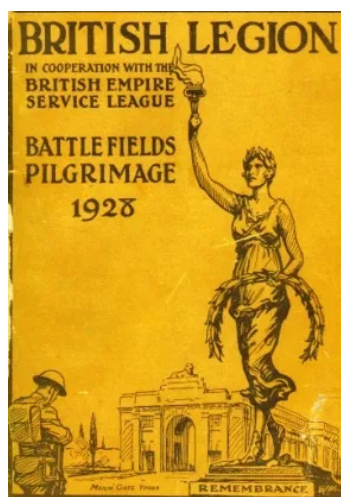


THE GREAT PILGRIMAGE (from: *We are the Legion*)

Remembrance is not only about 11 November. Over the years there have been Acts of Remembrance and pilgrimages all over the world. The largest ever was the Great Pilgrimage to France and Belgium in August 2028.

At the invitation of the French, the National Executive Committee began to consider how a major event might be organised. The Great Pilgrimage was planned to take place on the tenth anniversary of the so-called '100 days' that marked the battles which led to the end of WW1. Earl Haig was behind the idea of this huge undertaking and wished that the climax of the visit, the ceremony at the Menin Gate Memorial should take place on 8 August, the date of the first of those defining battles. Haig had made it clear that he wanted to keep the cost of the pilgrimage within the means of the working man or war widow, so he asked those tasked with the organisation to get as much help in kind as possible from the French and the Belgians. In the end the cost per head was £4 6s (£250). Train companies in Britain, France and Belgium offered discounted fares and the accommodation on the continent was provided by the hosts in a variety of hotels and private houses. (...)

The Great Pilgrimage was planned to the last detail by Major James Harter. Month after month instructions were published in the *Journal* informing would-be pilgrims of setting-off points, train timetables, accommodation, cemetery visits and battlefield tours as well as advising on suitable footwear. (...)



In all, 11,000 veterans and widows, including 2,000 standard bearers, crossed the Channel on 5 August and made their way by train and coach to the battlefields of the Somme. Many veterans recognised features in the landscape as they moved through the countryside. For some it was overwhelming: 'When the British cemeteries

came into sight, and were saluted as we passed, men stared hard and gulped and furtively wiped away tears which could not be checked.' Others brought the familiar black humour of the British soldier to the fore. 'A stalwart on crutches gazed thoughtfully towards Beaumont Hamel and said: 'I wonder if my blinkin' leg is still up there?'

From there they moved to Vimy Ridge, which the Canadians had captured from the Germans in April 1917. There too the trench systems were visible and the pilgrims were able to get a view of the landscape and imagine for themselves the chaos of the battlefields of almost a dozen years earlier. And then to Ypres for the magnificent ceremony at the Menin Gate Memorial. The Ypres Salient is the resting place of some 250,000 British and Commonwealth Servicemen. It is estimated that one in four of those fell in the war is buried or commemorated in or around Ypres.

On that fine, sunny day in August 1928, those who were there were only too aware of the sacrifice those men



had made. It was a solemn but beautiful, colourful occasion held under a clear sky and watched by thousands of French and Belgian well-wishers following the pilgrims' progress around the battlefields.

As the bugler sounded Last Post, 2,000 standards dipped for the Two Minute Silence and as Reveille sent out its challenging call of optimism, the standards raised again. (...) For the 1,600 widows, mothers and daughters and sisters who had joined the pilgrimage it was especially poignant to see the battlefields where their men had died and to visit the exquisitely tended cemeteries where they lay.

The Great Pilgrimage exceeded all expectations and everyone who wrote of it spoke of exceptional comradeship and cooperation that had been evident from the minute the pilgrims set off from home.

EVACUATING LONDON (from: *Amazing and extraordinary facts - London at war*)

The safest way to escape London's bombs was to leave the capital for safer locations in villages and small towns around the country. On 1 September 1939, as the Nazis attacked Poland, the Vice Chairman of London Transport, Frank Pick, travelled from his home in Hampstead Garden Suburb to Oakland Station on the Piccadilly line in order to supervise his plan for the evacuation of London's children from the city.

Pick had arranged for about half a million children to be taken by underground trains to outlying mainline stations in order to avoid overcrowding the London Terminus stations. In addition, about a quarter of a million were conveyed to stations on buses, some drivers working continuously for 36 hours. The evacuation of school-age children, accompanied by teachers, was organised by the London County Council; younger children were accompanied by volunteers from the Women's Voluntary Service.

Each child bore a name badge and clutched a gas mask and a package of belongings, including teddy bears and other favourite toys. On the day,

two babies were observed tied by a strap to a large suitcase, as their parents went in search of information. Meanwhile children from Dagenham were evacuated by boat to East Anglia.

At Oakland station, Pick surveyed a portion of the children transferring to several of the 2,000 mainline trains that would carry them away from London and danger. Then he journeyed to his office at 55 Broadway to check that the plan was running smoothly elsewhere - it was. He never doubted that the war would be won, writing to one of his young assistants: 'The war may shake our stability and daunt our ambition but a good peace will, with time, restore us and London to a better, finer and decenter basis'. This was a widely held among the population of London as a whole, and it would remain unshaken, despite setbacks, in the years ahead.

In addition to the population, many organisations were also evacuated from London. By December 1939, a total of 3,500 firms had left London in this way, together with schools and universities.

THAT IMPECCABLE BUSMAN

Besides his work in organising the evacuation of children from London and finding a mode for WVS recruitment, Frank Pick was moved to the Ministry of Information. Here he expressed misgivings about the Minister's plan to drop leaflets over Germany to spread false information. In late 1940, Pick was summoned to see the great man at a meeting of the Political Warfare Executive where the following brief conversation took place:

Churchill: *Now Mr Pick I understand that you have been objecting to the dropping of leaflets.*
 Pick: *Yes, Prime Minister, what is written on the leaflets is not wholly true and that is bad propaganda.*
 Churchill: *There is no time to be concerned with the niceties.*
 Pick: *Prime Minister, I have never told a lie in my life.*
 Churchill: *Mr Pick, yesterday the Germans shelled Dover with their long-range guns at Cape Griz-Nez. This afternoon I shall be visiting Dover. I may be killed by a German shell. If so, it will be great comfort to know that on the last day of my life I spoke with a man who had never told a lie in his life. Get out!*

As Pick left the room, Churchill turned to his secretary John Colvill. In a deafening whisper, he instructed 'Never let that impeccable busman darken my door again.' Pick left the Ministry and died the following year of a brain haemorrhage.

NOT FINE DINING (from: *Amazing and extraordinary facts - London at war*)

EATING OUT IN LONDON DURING THE WAR

London restaurants remained open during WWII, although their menus were limited: they were only permitted to serve three courses plus beverages, the price being limited to 5 shillings per head (around £5 at today's value). This situation did not satisfy everyone; indeed, there were reports of diners storming out of smart London restaurants complaining that the portions of cream were inadequate. Among the most popular restaurants at the time were those run by Lyons, notably their Corner Houses on the Strand, Coventry Street and Oxford Street. Each of these had a brasserie, a grillroom and later an egg and bacon room that was popular with students. The Oxford Street Corner House remained open throughout the Blitz, apart from just three days in September 1940 during the Battle of Britain when it had no water supply. A menu has survived from the war time days of this establishment: customers were offered a three course meal for 1 shilling and 6 pence (around £1.50 at today's value) with a choice of 2 starters, 7 main courses, 3 desserts, and a small cup of coffee.

Meanwhile, early in the war the Ministry of Food announced that Community Feeding Centres, run by the local authorities, would provide simple nourishing meals at low prices. In Kilburn, the formidable Flora Solomon started one of the first of these. Born Flora Benenson in Tsarist Russia, she berated Siming Marks, her fellow Jew and son of the founder of Marks and Spencer, for the fact that his staff could not afford to eat in



WHAT DID THEY LIVE ON?

On what did Londoners subsist during World War II? Here are some examples of weekly allowances per person in April 1945, as the war in Europe was drawing to a close:

- Bacon and ham: 113g
- Sugar 227g
- Tea: 57g
- Meat: to the value of 6p (around £2 at today's value)
- Cheese: 85g
- Jam or marmalade: 113g
- Butter: 57g
- Margarine: 113g
- Lard: 57g
- Sweets: 85g

Try measuring out those amounts and living on them! You might manage a day or so, but not much longer.

However, citizens with special needs, such as a pregnant woman and those in physically demanding occupations, received more generous allowances than those shown. Also bread, fruit and vegetables, including potatoes, were not rationed, although sometimes they were in short supply.

The whole system was administered through ration books: one was issued to each citizen, with mothers being responsible for their children's. Each book contained a number of weekly coupons for each of the commodities listed, and for many others besides. People living in London and other British cities had fewer opportunities to supplement their diets than country dwellers, where deals could be done with farmers in exchange for unwanted cigarette or petrol coupons.

Petrol too was much in demand, despite the price being increased to 1 shilling and 9 pence a gallon - this is the equivalent to about 45p a litre at today's value!

NOT FINE DINING (from: *Amazing and extraordinary facts - London at war*)

the firm's staff canteens. Marks subsequently hired her as the company's welfare officer, and when the war began she applied her energy and skill to feeding the population of Kilburn from its Community Feeding Centre.

When Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, he changed the rather grim name of the Community Feeding Centres to British Restaurants and these flourished from 1940 to the end of the war. Some of them were run by the Salvation Army, some by Quakers and many by local authorities. By 1943, approximately 2,160 British restaurants - 200 of them in London - were serving 600,000 meals a day. Smaller towns that could not support their own restaurants had what were called Cash and Carries instead. Here, the meals were prepared at the larger British Restaurants and then delivered to these smaller units, ready to eat.

Primarily in London but also across the rest of Britain, mobile canteens in vans that could visit shelters and serve heated food supplemented both the Community Feeding Centres and the Cash and Carries. On 14 November 1940, Coventry was devastated by an air raid, leaving much of the city without power or water. Therefore, the following day 40 mobile canteens were despatched from London to Coventry to feed the victims.

The meals in a British Restaurants during the war cost around 9 pence each (a little less than £1 at today's value), although this could be cheaper in some areas. They would typically consist of two or three courses - a main course, and a dessert, plus



a cup of tea, sometimes with soup as starter - and were often prepared in schools, whose kitchens were well suited to this kind of mass food preparation.

No British Restaurant main course could have more than one portion of meat, fish, poultry, game, cheese or eggs. Among the foods on offer was the Woolton sandwich, which consisted of ground raw vegetables laced with chutney. More popular was the Blitz Broth, similar to medieval peasant food and made with seasonal vegetables, pulses, cereals and when available, meat. This was both thick and nutritious, and had been devised by Lord Woolton's adviser, the nutritionist Jack Drummond.

Factory workers often used British Restaurants during their lunch breaks, one of the busiest and most successful being located in Woolmore Street, in the much-bombed area of Poplar in East London. In particular, the restaurant was much used by women engaged in wartime work in a nearby engineering works. The public's view of the restaurants varied from the enthusiastic to the disdainful. However, the fact that they were so much used suggests that the food was as good as any available elsewhere at reasonable cost.

Indeed, the Town Clerk of Acton reacted vigorously when it was suggested by an official from the Ministry of Food that the food served in the British Restaurant in Standard Road, Acton, was of poor quality, observing that 800 factory workers used it every day. The official hastily insisted that he had been misunderstood. Moreover, when there was talk of closing the chain of British Restaurant in May 1945, following the celebration of Victory in Europe, there was widespread dismay across the capital. In spite of this, they were closed soon after the General Election of that same year.



BRITISH RESTAURANTS ON WHEELS SERVE COUNTRY VILL

If the British Restaurants are now being set up in villages and hamlets too small to have their own feeding centres, this is being accomplished by the use of Ford Emergency Food Vans, which were previously prepared in Civic Kitchens and are now being used roadside in many parts of rural England. The meals are cooked in special containers which keep them hot for up to three and a half hours. In the past ten months nearly two million meals have been served in these vans in various parts of the country. This is being accomplished by the use of Ford Emergency Food Vans, which were previously prepared in Civic Kitchens and are now being used roadside in many parts of rural England. The meals are cooked in special containers which keep them hot for up to three and a half hours. In the past ten months nearly two million meals have been served in these vans in various parts of the country, making the benefit of rural customers.

ORIGINS OF 007 (from: *Amazing and extraordinary facts - London at war*)

Many current and future authors were attracted to the work of the secret services during WWII. Perhaps the best known of these to later generations is Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels. Descended from a wealthy banking family, Fleming was educated at Eton. With the encouragement of his family, he subsequently joined a finance business in the City of London, where he did not prove to be a success.

In 1939, he was recruited into the naval intelligence service, a role for which he appears to have had no qualifications. In time he became personal assistant to its head, Rear Admiral John Godfrey, working from the Admiralty Building in Whitehall. Fleming was then commissioned into the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and attained the rank of commander - as did his best known progeny, James Bond.



Fleming took to his new role with a zeal later demonstrated by his fictional character 007, devoting much of his time to devising fantastic schemes to outwit the Germans. One of his most outlandish, proposed in September 1940 was to man a German bomber brought down over England during the battle of Britain with RAF crew dressed in Luftwaffe uniforms. In his plan, the bomber would be dropped in the English Channel, where the crew would then overpower the Germans that came to their rescue, seize their boat and Enigma coding machine and bring them back to England. This plan was not followed up, partly on the grounds that the bomber would have

sunk long before the German rescuers arrived - Bletchley Park had to wait until May 1941 for an Enigma machine to be captured from a U-boat by the crew of HMS Bulldog.

Another proposal, which Fleming described as 'not very nice', was to drop a corpse attached to a parachute that failed to open in occupied Europe, accompanied by papers designed to mislead the enemy. It is fascinating to learn that a variation of the idea was eventually adopted for the disinformation plan named Operation Mincemeat that took place towards the end of the war. In the event, a corpse was dropped into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Portugal with documents that convinced the Germans that the allies would invade Greece rather than Italy.

Some of Fleming's ideas did take shape as he intended. He was involved in the recruitment and training of a special intelligence unit, which in 1943 was re-designated 30 Assault Unit, a Commando of the Royal Marines. After rigorous training in skills such as survival and unarmed combat, this unit moved in ahead of advancing troops to work behind enemy lines, gathering intelligence, documents, equipment and captured personnel that could help the Allied forces. Their work was so secret that little of what they did is known even now.

Although Ian Fleming's wartime work was largely completed behind a desk at the Admiralty in Whitehall, there is clearly a link between the schemes he devised and the later outlandish activities of the fictional character 007.



YOUR COMMITTEE CONTACTS

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