

# HALE BRANCH ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER – Issue 35

October 2024

Hello everybody!

Whoever first said that time flies hit the nail on the head – it doesn't seem like 4 months since our last newsletter. Quite honestly, many of us are at that stage where we are more concerned about how many days we have left and how we are going to fit in everything we would like to do while there is time. I'm certainly in that category but thankfully I can still remember what I have done in recent days! I remember the two ceremonies at the grave of Blackie, the WW1 warhorse buried in Higher Road – attended by the Mayor of Halewood, representatives from Halton and Knowsley Councils and not least the eight standard bearers, bugler and piper who made our services so poignant. Then there was our Branch trip to the National Memorial Arboretum when we presented a donation of £1000. That was a fantastic day as usual – with fine weather and great service from Carver Coaches. From my point of view, it was especially memorable as I hired a mobility scooter for the day and was able to see a lot more than I would otherwise have done. Even so, I don't think I am yet ready to use one in everyday life – that would be another acceptance that the years are passing quickly and I don't need reminding of that! I'm still able to think ahead, even if only a few days at a time!



In this context, despite all my previous promises to myself, I am again trying to arrange a trip to Arnhem next year – with some difficulty because the hotel prices I have been quoted seem exorbitant. I haven't given up though and am waiting for more information about ferry services from Hull to Holland – at Steve Clark's suggestion I am trying to price a trip overnight by ferry which would mean us only having to spend two nights in a hotel which would hopefully make the cost more reasonable. I'll let you all know, if and when I sort things out. Before then, we are heading for Welshpool on 28<sup>th</sup> of this month for their annual 1940s weekend. Hopefully the weather will be a lot better than last year when we had to take shelter in a pub! On 26<sup>th</sup> October we start this year's Poppy Appeal collection and I am still hoping to get a few more offers to help – please do your best, if only for a few hours in one of the supermarkets. During that Appeal, our County President, Roy Gladden, a former Lord Mayor of Liverpool, with the County Committee, is organising a Gala Dinner to promote the image of the RBL and the Poppy Appeal. This will be in St George's Hall on Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2024 and we are hoping to have more than 300 attending including the Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Lord Mayor, representatives of local industry and our armed services. All things being equal, we should have the Captain and some crew members of HMAC "Prince of Wales" as well. It is important that the RBL is well represented and to date we have 22 from Hale Branch booked. Tickets for members of the RBL and serving/former armed forces will cost £75 each – a discount of £25 on the actual cost. If you would like to attend and haven't yet told me, please do so as quickly as possible as the list closes on 15<sup>th</sup> October. We have two tables of 10 already plus a couple more individuals and would like to fill that third table if possible.

I should also let you know that for personal reasons I have stood down from my position as County Vice-Chairman but hope to remain on the County Committee, where we are also represented by Marie Fisher. So, you see, my mutterings about handing over the reins to somebody else are not all hollow promises! You have been warned!

In fact, our Branch AGM is coming up on Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, when I hope we can appoint a Vice-Chairman who can take over from me in 12 months as Branch Chairman. I hope that doesn't upset our present Vice-Chairman (Joe McGorry) but with the greatest respect I think it is a job for a younger person and Joe's even older than me! That night we will also be appointing all our Officers and Committee Members – I know that all our current Officers are happy to remain in post and will do so by default unless we have other nominations. So, if you wish to take office or become a member of the Branch Committee, have yourself nominated or nominate another Branch member – it's your chance to make your contribution to the running of the branch. A word of caution – don't listen to our Treasurer if he tells you he wants to give up his job! He's too good to lose!

That's enough from me for the time being – enjoy the newsletter!

*Bill Sergeant*

**Blackie Memorial**

*Photos from the ceremonies at the grave of Blackie, the WW1 war horse referred to in Bill's introduction.*



In 1942, "Blackie", a WW1 war horse died and was buried in the grounds of the RSPCA Horses Rest in Higher Road, Halewood. Blackie was the mount of Lieutenant Leonard Comer Wall, a young man born in 1896 in West Kirby, the son of a Liverpool-based grocery provision merchant. Leonard volunteered in 1914 when a student at Clifton College and eventually found himself in France in September 1915 as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery with the 55<sup>th</sup> (West Lancashire) Division. He saw some action on the Somme and at Arras before being moved, with Blackie, to Ypres in preparation for the Battle of Messines in 1916 and was Mentioned in Despatches. At the end of May 1917, Leonard was promoted to Lieutenant and a week later took part in the opening salvos of the Battle of 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres (or Passchendaele).

During the night of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1917, whilst riding Blackie, he was hit by shrapnel during a German artillery counter-barrage. Leonard was badly wounded and taken to a Casualty Clearing Station where he died that same day, aged only 20 years. Blackie was badly injured in the same blast but survived and saw out the rest of WW1. Leonard's mother bought Blackie, in accordance with Leonard's request in his Will that Blackie should be cared for and brought him back to Liverpool for the use of the West Lancashire Territorial Riding School in Spekeland Street, Liverpool.

When Blackie was retired in 1930, he was housed with the RSPCA at their horses' rest in Higher Road, Halewood, where he eventually died in 1942. He was buried there, with Leonard's WW1 medals and since then his grave has been marked by an impressive yet plain headstone.



Some time ago, the RSPCA decided to sell their land in Higher Road and it was bought by a developer who has since built a residential estate on the site. As Blackie's grave had been granted Grade 2 listing by English Heritage, the grave has been preserved. Lieutenant Comer was buried in Ljissenthoek Cemetery in Belgium.

On 9<sup>th</sup> July this year a new memorial to “Blackie” by Simon O’Rourke was unveiled close to his grave, the memorial being commissioned by the development company, Miller Homes.



With the support of Miller Homes and the War Horse Memorial Organisation, it was agreed that Hale Branch RBL should take the lead in organising a public ceremony which took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> August.

*Bill Sergeant*

**National Memorial Arboretum Visit**



*£1000 donation being presented by Vice-President Ben Jackson*



*Group photograph taken at the NMA*

**Ode To The Dingle “Conscripts” 1955/56**

As those born in ‘38  
 Battled through the blitz!  
 Went to school in gas-masks  
 To eliminate the risks

Some of us went to the Vale,  
 A secondary modern school.  
 At fifteen years, called it a day!  
 As work was the golden rule.

Many worked in the bottleworks,  
 Garston, Window Lane.  
 Then through our letter boxes  
 Our call-up papers came.

We were off! To join the Army,  
 Pownall Square is where we went  
 To sign those call-up papers  
 The Queen’s shilling stamped consent.

Aldershot was our destination,  
 Wherever that place were?  
 To board a train at Lime Street  
 And find our own way there.

We look back now and realise,  
 This way it had to be.  
 To fight for your Queen & country  
 Made us proud, with dignity!!

*Billy Lybert*

As promised in our last edition below is a report on our trip in April supplied by Nigel Vine.

Dear reader,

In April, I was fortunate to join the Hale branch of the British Legion in paying homage to our fallen heroes of the First World War with a visit to the battle of the Somme and surrounding memorials.

The visit was extremely well organised and from the outset I was made to feel very welcome, quickly getting to know the fellow travelers. The journey to Dover albeit long was event filled comprising of plenty storytelling and bountiful treats, we were well looked after.

The ferry sailing and journey to our hotel was pleasant. The hotel was well located for the town center.

During our excursion we had an extensive itinerary with daily visits around the Somme area paying our respects, in particular to the Liverpool & Manchester Pals. There was mindful consideration in ensuring everyone was involved, to include:

- a wreath laying by Paddy at the monument commemorating the 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Division victories at Guillemont & Ginchy
- Visit to the Montauban museum
- Thiepval war memorial
- Canadian National War Memorial (seeing firsthand the trenches still visible today)
- Brandhoek Cemetery paying respects to Captain Chavasse – Victoria Cross recipient
- Visiting a German war memorial in Rancourt
- The last post at Menin Gate, Ypres, Belgium where members of our party participated in the ceremony
- .... to name but a few.

The visit was emotional and thought provoking, made especially memorable by the people who accompanied us on the visit.

A special mention must go to:

Bill, for arranging the visit and itinerary; simply staggering the effort it must have taken (although you could tell he loved it)

Dave Moore – our resident tour guide joining us out of the sheer pleasure he gets from re-enacting the tales of the war. I've never met such a well-informed passionate person, whose single aim is to keep all the memories; acts of bravery, sacrifice of war, enjoying the freedom we do today is never forgotten.

Dave – our driver who managed to get a bus down roads and into areas that seemed impossible. The team on the bus: Marie & Alan for keeping us entertained on the journeys with sweets, whisky and activities: my liver and blood sugar levels took a beating..... but worth it... .. and to everyone else; I joined the excursion knowing one person but left knowing many friends and humbled by the experience. Hoping to see them all again soon on another venture.

Warmest regards,  
Nigel

#### **Poppy Appeal**

Please do let Bill know if you are able to help for just a couple of hours on the odd day during the week or at a weekend between 26<sup>th</sup> October and 9<sup>th</sup> November. We are a friendly bunch and will make you most welcome.

#### **What to look forward to in our next edition:-**

Reports on the AGM, Trip to 1940s Welshpool, the Gala Dinner and Poppy Appeal update.

---

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

**Deadlines for inclusion are 15<sup>th</sup> January, May and September**

**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](mailto:marie.fisher@ymail.com) or tel 07958 399252;  
Bill Sergeant [billtanat8@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:billtanat8@hotmail.co.uk) or telephone 0151 724 3171