



## THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION BANWELL

Patron: His Majesty The King

### Newsletter – February 2025



#### Chair's Foreword

I hope everyone enjoyed the festive season. With the first snowdrops appearing, and daffodils starting to bloom, it seems Spring might be on its way—despite the current weather suggesting otherwise.

I recently attended the Branch Chairs' seminar, where I learned that the RBL continues to campaign against the government treating military compensation as "income" for means-testing veterans' benefits. The RBL believes this compensation should be treated like other forms of compensation.

Mark your calendars for Saturday, 1st November 2025, when an 80th Anniversary of VE Day event will be held at Wells Cathedral. Tickets will be available on [Eventbrite](#) starting in May. This promises to be a popular event, and I'll provide updates as I receive more information.

Helen Owen, from the RBL Board of Trustees, updated us on efforts to enhance the RBL's effectiveness. There's an ongoing campaign to make the Armed Forces Covenant law rather than merely advisory. She also discussed what the RBL does well and areas needing improvement.

We were also given an update on how our fundraising efforts are being utilised across the region.

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Registered Charity Number: 219279

### Grants Summary for Somerset for the Period 1 Oct 23 – 30 Sep 24

Category	Volume of Grants	Value of Grants	Average (mean) of Age
Annuity	16	£9,325	78
Brown goods	56	£43,644	51
Crisis	97	£14,989	46
Debt	9	£6,093	48
Energy	61	£18,246	53
Funeral	8	£12,957	59
Housing	17	£12,675	61
Medical	2	£3,455	52
Misc	14	£2,936	46
Mobility	50	£52,729	62
White goods	37	£18,049	56
Grand Total	367	£195,096	54

As we enter our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Branch and emerge from the cold dark evenings I look forward to seeing many of you at our Branch meetings and social events during the year.

**Penny Mottram**  
Chair

### From the Secretary

It seems a long time since the Remembrance Day Parade last November but I thought you might like a reminder of the event. In the end the weather was kind and allowed the parade to happen.



The original venue for the October dinner had to be cancelled because The Full Quart was being sold. We therefore postponed the dinner to February and venue – Puxton Park. However, sadly, we have had to cancel because we did not have enough people to make it worthwhile. The dinner for 2025 will be 18<sup>th</sup> October so please mark this in your diaries.

There are problems with venues and, currently, two other possible ones are being assessed. The committee is open to suggestions from members so please do not be shy about letting us your ideas and recommendations.

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It has also been suggested that we replace the dinner with a lunch and therefore have two lunches instead of a dinner and a lunch. Again I would welcome comments.

The Committee are now looking at 11th May as a provisional date for the next lunch, and don't forget that in June, we are hoping to have an event such as a BBQ as detailed in the dates section.

The numbers using our Facebook are slowly increasing and I know Lizzie has some plans for the website as well as Facebook so watch this space. However those who have no access to the internet will still receive hard copy notifications and the usual paperwork.

There are a number of '80 year' Anniversaries in 2025 not least the end of WW2. Any help with organising just one event would be most welcome. There are some speakers planned but again if you have any ideas for speakers then please let the committee know.

Hopefully this will be an interesting year.

**Gill Fawcitt**  
**Secretary**

### **From the Membership Secretary**

Whilst our Branch membership remains static at 47 there are many who are no longer able to attend Branch Meetings. Below is a short list of the benefits of being a member:

- 15% off a range of products available through the RBL Poppy shop including badges, clothing and accessories.
- Exclusive travel and season offers
- The chance to get priority tickets for the Festival of Remembrance

Once again I am asking you to reach out to friends and family to encourage joining us – they do not have to have served to become a member. It is their opportunity to support not only this Branch but also veterans of the past and most recent conflicts.

**Penny Mottram**  
**Membership Secretary**

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## Private Arthur Reuben Thomas - Remembered

Arthur Reuben Thomas was born in Banwell Somerset, on 27th September 1899. The older of two children, his parents were blacksmith Edwin Thomas and his wife, Mary (née Gibbs).

Little information about Arthur's life is documented. At the time of the 1911 census, he was still a schoolboy, and it is likely that he helped his father out in the smithy when he finished his education.



By this point war was raging across Europe, and it is likely that young Arthur was keen not to miss out. Details of any military service are lost to time but it seems possible that he joined up as soon as his age allowed.

Private Thomas was assigned to the 53rd (Young Soldier) Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, and sent to Rollestone Camp on Salisbury Plain, Wiltshire, for training.

Sadly Arthur's time in the army seems to have been a short one. He was admitted to a camp hospital in nearby Tidworth, suffering simply from 'disease', and it was from this that he passed away on 6th January 1918. He was just eighteen years of age.

The body of Arthur Reuben Thomas was brought back to Somerset for burial. He was laid to rest in the quiet graveyard of St Andrew's Church.

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## Campaign launched to ensure WWI Royal Naval Air Service aviators are remembered

The heroism of the naval aviators of the First World War is being honoured through a campaign to create a new memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. While many associate the memory of World War One with the horrors of the trenches it is easy to forget that many Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) pilots and aviators fought in the air and at sea.

In August 1914, the RNAS had fewer than 100 aircraft and airships, but it would later grow to include around 55,000 personnel and 3,000 aircraft including airships. While the RNAS was a relatively small branch of the Armed Forces, the first Zeppelin was shot down by a naval pilot. Furthermore, the first landing on a moving aircraft carrier at sea was accomplished by RNAS pilot Edwin Dunning.

<b>Edwin Harris Dunning</b>	
	
Dunning is congratulated after landing on HMS <i>Furious</i> in his Sopwith Pup on 2 August 1917	
<b>Born</b>	17 July 1892 <a href="#">South Africa</a>
<b>Died</b>	7 August 1917 (aged 25) <a href="#">Scapa Flow, Orkney</a>
<b>Buried</b>	<a href="#">Bradfield, Essex</a>
<b>Allegiance</b>	 <a href="#">United Kingdom</a>
<b>Service / branch</b>	<a href="#">Royal Naval Air Service</a>
<b>Years of service</b>	<a href="#">at least 1916–1917</a>
<b>Rank</b>	<a href="#">Squadron Commander</a>
<b>Battles / wars</b>	<a href="#">World War I</a>
<b>Awards</b>	<a href="#">Distinguished Service Cross</a>

As envisaged at present the monument – titled ‘In the teeth of the wind’ – are bronze figures of a pilot, his mechanic and the airman’s dog (a frequent companion at WW1 airfields). They stand in front of a stone and bronze representation of a biplane, with the RNAS cap badge, a short description and an artist’s impression of Great War naval air operations on the rear.

It is believed the memorial “captures the spirit” of those early aviators, their bravery, often ‘devil-may-care’ attitude – one in three pilots was aged 21 or under, their life at the front counted in days, perhaps weeks – and above all, their accomplishments.

It will cost upwards of £325,000 to install and dedicate the monument at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

“There really has to be a memorial to the Royal Naval Air Service – our forebears deserve this much”.

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“Our aim is to have a memorial designed and constructed which is affordable, catches the eye, and which above all else captures the spirit of Naval flying in WW1, particularly the early years, when air operations were truly pioneering, stunningly dangerous, and delivered with extraordinary aplomb by the pilots.”

The memorial plan has the backing of the RAF and the National Museum of the Royal Navy, but the major challenge is finding the cash as well as looking to the Heritage Lottery Fund, trusts and philanthropists who support military causes, Maj Gen Rutherford-Jones welcomes support/donations from individuals. He can be contacted at:

[davidrj19@outlook.com](mailto:davidrj19@outlook.com).

## **Contact Us**



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## 2025 Branch Meetings and Events Diary

Please note that guests are welcome at all meetings but if there is to be food the Secretary would appreciate advance notice so that sufficient food can be ordered.

<b>Dates for 2025</b>	<b>Meeting type</b>
20 February	Poppy Supper – branch members and Poppy sellers altogether with a light buffet supper provided
20 March	Branch Meeting
8 May	80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VE Day
11 May (Provisional)	RBL Lunch
15 May	Branch Meeting
June	BBQ to celebrate end of WW2 and 25 years of the current Banwell RBL etc date to be decided
19 June	Branch Meeting
15 August	80 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary of VJ Day
18 September	Branch Meeting
16 October	RBL AGM
18 October	RBL Dinner
9 November	Remembrance Sunday
11 November	Remembrance Day
20 November	Branch Meeting

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