

**Minutes for the Meeting of the Royal British Legion Newent and District  
Branch:  
Cobblers Ale House- 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023**

**In attendance:**

Keith Urch: Vice Chairman/Branch Community Support Officer/Youth Liaison Officer

Helen Axon: Treasurer

Mary Curtis

Pat Phillips: Deputy Padre

Graham Barton: Parade Marshal

Rick Axon: Entertainments and Bar Member

Dave Pollock: Raffle Coordinator

Susan Urch

Colin Calcutt

Jan Sologub

Gordon Thorogood

1. **Act of Remembrance.** The Deputy Chairman opened the meeting at 1900 hours. He read the names of the fallen from the Parish of Newent during WWI and II for the months of December and January followed by the exhortation.
2. **Apologies for Absence.** Apologies received from Richard and Elaine Balding, Simon Mason, Pat and John Price, Adrian Dover, Colin and Susanne Britt, Viv and Jon Miles.
3. **Chairman's Report.**

**Introduction**

First of all, sorry I can't be there tonight as Elaine and I are sunning ourselves in Lanzarote, but I know you are in the capable hands of the Vice Chairman and Treasurer for this evening's entertainment. So, without further ado herewith my report:

**Health and Wellbeing Event – 3 November 2023**

David and Graham joined me at the Health and Wellbeing event which took place in the Newent Community Centre next to the Kings Arms. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time the event has been run and, in my opinion, moving it away from the town centre did not work. Unfortunately, very few people ventured up the hill from town and therefore the event had very little impact on the local community. My thanks go to David and Graham for persevering and of course to the NHS ladies that arranged it. I did however 'refresh' my stock of leaflets denoting local Health & Wellbeing organisations in order to keep our current knowledge up to date.

### **Newent Community School Remembrance Service – 10 November 2023**

Thanks go to Newent Community School for hosting another excellent Service, this has become an annual event I look forward to attending. As usual praise goes to the young people of Newent Community School for their total respect during the Service, to the head boy and girl for their parts in the service, the 2 'Buglers' who played the Last Post and Reveille flawlessly and to the School Principal for the invite to attend this moving ceremony. The School this year had several VIPs including the Lord Lieutenant, NTC Mayor, NTC Veterans Representative and the FoDDC representative as well as Annie Reid OBE from the RBL Board of Trustees.

### **St Mary's Church Remembrance Service – 11 November 2023**

My thanks go to our Branch Padre Simon for yet again reminding us of one of the Royal British Legion's main aims: Remembrance. The brief but perfectly formed service was both well executed and very poignant. It was so nice to see quite a few people in attendance including several from the Branch and the newly formed Veterans Coffee Morning.

### **Newent Remembrance Parade and Service – 12 November 2023**

My thanks start with the local community who again surprised me with their numbers even in the inclement weather, to Newent Air Training Corp for supplying not only the Standard Bearer (Elsa) but the Bugler (Cpl Green) who were both excellent and didn't put a foot or note wrong. The Parade Marshal also deserves mention for the thankless task of herding the Parade in to some semblance of order. I would also like to thank those dignitaries for attending and to Newent Town Council for again organising an excellent event. It would, of course, be remiss of me if I didn't mention our Branch Padre for his commitment to Remembrance in this superb Remembrancetide Weekend.

### **Veteran's Coffee Morning – 28 November 2023**

Unfortunately due to holidays, I am unavailable to attend the next Veteran's Coffee morning at Manna Coffee House on the 28 November 2023 at 10am, but I'm pleased to say that Graham our Parade Marshal has volunteered to take any names and pass on any queries that might arise. I hope you enjoy the Coffee & Cake; I know I always do.

### **Branch Membership 2023**

Membership continues to be stable, but with such a low number of members if anyone has any ideas on how to attract or recruit new members I would love the opportunity to discuss any proposals.

### **Finally**

Don't forget that as normal if anyone needs help in any way at all please do not hesitate to get in contact, and if we can help, we will.

### **4. Matters Arising from the previous minutes.**

Corrections to the minutes of the last meeting.

Page 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> line, read name(s)

Page 2, County briefing

Page 5, Thursday(s)  
Page 7, Branch's each paragraph  
Next meeting 26<sup>th</sup> October

Action from the last meeting for Simon and Graham: small display board given to the Chairman on 10 November. Leaflets distributed to all businesses by Keith.

Manna Craft and Coffee given £40 for the publicity expenses and launch of the newly formed Veteran's coffee mornings.

## **5. Reports by Officers**

### **Branch Community Support (BCS) Report for November 2023**

Here we are in November with few changes since my last report at our Branch AGM although as you all recognise, November is indeed a very busy month of memorial activities within our community.

### **Deputy Chairman/Membership/Youth Liaison/Branch Community Support (BCS)**

We once more remember those veterans, friends and Branch colleagues that are unable to be present this evening: please remember that we are here to assist and support both veterans and their families; you only need to contact one of your Committee Members.

### **Membership, Branch Community Support Representative and Youth Liaison Officer**

There are many planned changes within the RBL BCS sphere, many of which should be in place by the middle of next year.

A further call has been published from TRBL seeking membership of the County Committee and BCS Representatives: see your Branch Chairman or BCS representative for further details.

### **Welfare and Membership**

#### **Welfare**

The Branch continues to aid and support its members and veterans, initially by signposting them to the National RBL Helpline and by interaction with local community and national organisations.

Members are reminded that The National RBL Helpline telephone number is currently: **0808 802 8080**

and The Veteran's Gateway: <https://support.veteransgateway.org.uk>

You may recall that in my previous report that it was proposed to change the way in which the Veteran's Gateway Service would be operated: we now have further information albeit it has yet to be formally publicised.

Welfare services for UK Armed Forces veterans are set to get a 'fresh start' after the Government accepted the findings of an independent review. The majority of

recommendations from the Independent Review of UK Government Welfare Services for Veterans were accepted, according to the Government.

As a result, the Veterans UK brand will be retired, with services and responsibilities clarified across the government.

This is to ensure more clarified and clear communications for the services the Ministry of Defence (MOD) provides military personnel and veterans - although the MOD is yet to announce a replacement.

Additionally, the Veterans' Gateway is set to be improved so every veteran of the British military knows where to turn to access help.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs has been given a central role in coordinating the support for veterans, with the word 'Veterans' being removed from the MOD Ministerial title 'Minister for Defence People Veterans and Service Families'.

*"These changes will help veterans services become more effective, efficient and clear - ultimately benefiting veterans across the UK," he said.*

*Speaking in the House of Commons, Mr Mercer said the move puts the Government "yet another step closer... to make the UK the best country in the world to be a veteran".*

As well as paying tribute to the review team, the minister added that the UK has an "unwavering duty to those who put their life on the line for our freedom".

*"This Government is committed and determined to discharge that duty with the honour and respect our courageous ex-service personnel deserve," he said.*

Additionally, the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committees (VAPC) will be modernised, with work underway to work out how VAPC can better serve the Armed Forces.

The review looked at all aspects of the UK Government's welfare provisions for veterans, including those given by the MOD.

This included services such as the Veterans Welfare Service, the Defence Transition Service, which helps personnel move into civilian life and the Northern Ireland Veterans Support Office, amongst others.

Andrew Murrison, Minister for Defence People and Families, said the review *"builds on the hard work already being undertaken by a lot of people who genuinely care"* about the Armed Forces community.

The Office for Veterans' Affairs has also launched a consultation to better understand veterans, the effectiveness of current policies and how to shape future policy.

Notwithstanding these changes, Branch members are assured that moving forward, we will always continue to utilise our local knowledge and contacts to support our members and veterans.

### **Branch Membership**

In accordance with TRBL records, current Branch Membership now stands at 36 members,

We welcome our new member, Clare Page to the Branch and look forward to seeing her at forthcoming meetings.

## **Branch Statistics**

The Branch has continued to provide support to Members and veterans this period.

In the event that members identify a comrade in need, they are encouraged to contact a Committee Member or BCS Representative at the earliest convenience. All communications are confidential.

Branch Statistics for this period are therefore as follows:

Total Number of Welfare visits 6

How many beneficiaries visited 3

How many visitors (Branch Community Supporters) 4

Total Welfare Expenditure NIL (see Note 1)

Telephone Buddies:

Total Number of Calls made by Branch Executive 12

Telephone – How many beneficiaries called 3

Telephone – How many telephone buddies: 4

Community, Youth and Veteran Liaison Activities

## **1. Services of Remembrance**

November was again a special month for TRBL and especially busy for the Newent Branch.

Newent Community School Remembrance Service, Friday 10 November 2023

Special thanks go to Newent Community School, its Principal, Mrs Dawn Burke and her staff for hosting another excellent Service and the way in which all students showed respect throughout the event. Of particular note was the performance of the two buglers - their rendering of the Last Post and Reveille was exceptional.

VIPs in attendance included the Lord Lieutenant Mr Edward Gillespie, NTC Mayor, NTC Veterans Representative, the Deputy Chair of FoDDC and Ret'd Group Captain, Annie Reid OBE from the RBL Board of Trustees.

St Mary's Church Remembrance Service, Saturday 11 November 2023

Yet another very moving service from our Branch Padre Simon, held as in previous years, around the War Memorial, yet again reminding us of one of the Royal British Legion's main aims: Remembrance.

Newent Civic Remembrance Parade and Service, Sunday 12 November 2023

Despite the inclement weather, the community of Newent again showed its strength and support for its veterans, past and present.

Thanks to Simon our Padre, our Parade Marshal for overseeing the event, Newent Town Council and various dignitaries for attending.

NOTE:

Special thanks are extended to David Pollock and his wife for ensuring that we had photographic records of our various events.

## **2. The Buchanan Trust**

The Charity's Veterans Support Manager, Samantha Brittain has confirmed that she will be visiting the Branch, providing us with an overview of The Trust's activities in the New Year: more information will be published in due course.

<https://www.buchanan-trust.org.uk>

## **3. Other Matters**

### **1. Newent War Memorial**

Activities continue on works to upgrade Newent's War Memorial and incorporate those names originally omitted.

Replies have been received from two tendering organisations out of the four invited and these are currently being assessed.

Following a series of discussions, in support of these works, it has been agreed that as the original memorial was financed by public donations, 50% of monies collected from the Civic Remembrance Day Service would be donated to The War Memorial Fund (the remaining 50% to The Poppy Appeal), together with all donations arising from NLHS's book, "We Will Remember Them".

We await exact details of the monies raised during the Remembrance Service held at St Mary's Church and record our thanks especially to Dood Pearce of the Newent Local History Society for donating copies of "We Will Remember Them" to raise funds in support of works on The Memorial.

Further donations will be welcome as we strive to seek additional grant aid from local and County organisations.

### **2. Veteran Support Grants**

Members are reminded that HMG and Service grants continue to remain available for those suffering hardship.

### **3. Community Liaison**

Liaison continues with Newent's Town Council, its schools, youth and community organisations, the aim of which is to promote TRBL and its specific activities in and around Newent.

The process for TRBL Branch Affiliation remains ongoing by TRBL HQ: further update expected shortly.

### **4. TRBL HQ, County Liaison and Branch Communications (OS365)**

For further matters relating to other specific HQ/County/Branch communications and local activities, please see your Chairman's and other Representative Reports.

### **Forthcoming Dates for TRBL Diary**

The 2024 TRBL Conference will be held at the ICC in Newport, Wales during the 10th/12th May - more information as time progresses.

In the meantime, for those of you planning a pre-festive break, travel safely and we will look forward to seeing you all again at the Branch Christmas Dinner on Thursday, 21st December at The Alma Inn, Linton.

### **Padre's Report**

This was given by Graham Barton on Simon's behalf. Simon is having a "Family Day" to celebrate being made an Honorary Canon of Gloucester Cathedral. He is now "Reverend Canon Simon Mason." We extend our appreciation.

### **Parade Marshal.**

Although the weather almost caused the cancellation of the Remembrance Parade on 12 November, the rain stopped for the crucial thirty minutes and the Parade stepped off at 0935.

After halting at the Church gates, the Standard Bearers were called forward to form a Guard of Honour inside the Church porch.

As the rain returned later in the morning, the decision was taken to hold the Act of Remembrance inside the Church rather than in front of the War Memorial.

Last Post and Reveille were sounded from the Church Balcony and Standards were dipped for the Silence.

Following laying of wreaths, the Standard Bearers marched out to the porch to once again form a Guard of Honour as the congregation left the Church.

Thanks go to all who took part in the Parade – particularly the Standard Bearers and the Musician

### **Raffle Coordinator.**

Dave was thanked for his photography of the Remembrance Day Laying of Wreaths. Dave explained that it had not been possible to capture the best angle on every occasion.

He confirmed that there would be a raffle at the Christmas Dinner at the Alma Inn. Any donations for this will be gratefully received.

### **Treasurer's Report.**

The current account balance stands at £941.91. There have again been difficulties with accessing the account. Barclays now require a signed copy of previous minutes. Keith produced a copy of the AGM minutes to be signed and sent.

Action HA

### **6. Any Other Business.**

Aden Veteran's Lunch: Graham has been contacted with a suggestion that we make a voluntary donation to the staff as the lunch itself is at a lower price than usual.

Another suggestion was to take the Grenadier Guard's Standard, and the Newent RBL Standard to add to the Aden Veteran's Standard on the day. Keith proposed, Mary seconded, regarding the Newent Standard.

Richie will be asked to bring the Newent Branch Standard

Action RB

Meet at Robinswood Country Club at 12noon for 1230 lunch.

Rick will email the Alma Inn Christmas menu out again with date Action RA

Susan expressed a vote of thanks the Parade Marshal for his organisation of the Remembrance Parade.

Pat reiterated those thanks.

**7. Date of Next Meeting.**

25 January at the Memorial Hall at 1900.

The Meeting closed at 2002.