

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF  
THE OXTED & DISTRICT OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION  
HELD AT THE OXTED RBL CLUB  
ON SUNDAY, 24<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2024 AT 12.00**

**WEBSITE VERSION**

1. The meeting opened with the entering of the Branch Standard.
2. **Exhortation.** The Chairman gave the Exhortation.
3. **President's Address.** The Right Honourable the Lord Astor of Hever PC DL gave this address:

May I welcome you all to this AGM, my first as your President.

I have always had a strong connection with the RBL. My grandfather, Earl Haig was the main founder of the RBL and both of my parents were staunch supporters, so the RBL has always been an important part of my life. I was lucky to have been the President of the Westerham Branch for many years and spent three years as the Kent County President.

Previously I have been an Army Officer, serving in the Life Guards, part of the Household Cavalry, where I served in Malaysia, Hong Kong and Northern Ireland. I have also spent five years as the Honorary Colonel of a Sapper Regiment.

The RBL, and all of us, are here for one reason – supporting the beneficiaries that this great charity was set up for. The RBL's Casework Services team operates 7 days a week and last year supported well over 10,000 beneficiaries and issued well over 22,000 individual financial grants. There are the RBL's Care Homes, Admiral Nurses, and the Battle Back Centre as well as supporting the Invictus Games. The money for all of this comes from the Poppy Appeal which raises some £50M nationally and, in addition to the things that I have just mentioned, donates money to specialist charities such as Combat Stress (which has been given £6M). Doing what we can to support the Legions beneficiaries locally should be our primary purpose.

We are the custodians of Remembrance and this year saw some significant milestones, probably most notably the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day landings in World War Two. It is important that we do our bit locally to commemorate those who fought for the freedoms that we all enjoy today; whether marking these milestone events or on Remembrance Sunday.

The Legion is looking at how it frames its membership offer as the generations that experienced a World War sadly pass away. The Legion must change to become more relevant today, attracting and retaining a younger membership and pass the message on to the generations to come.

For all three of these things, we must to what we can here in Oxted to support the RBL.

Finally, and more on this from the Chairman, I am pleased to see that the Branch Committee is growing and I'm sure that you will all do well in taking the Branch forwards. That said, it cannot all solely be down to the Committee and I ask all of you to consider whether you have any time to give to help, when and where you can. Thank you.

4. **Apologies for Absence.** Received from Matt Calderwood, Ray Wilkinson, Jill & Pat Cannon and Jean & David Bines.
5. **Minutes of 2023 Annual General Meeting – Approval and Matters Arising.** The minutes were agreed by vote of the members present.
6. **Chairman's Annual Report (including vision to take Branch forward).** The Chairman gave this report:

This year has been good but challenging at the same time.

We started with a full committee but lost two through resignations, taking us again down to the minimum required to be a viable branch. More later on your new committee – but I'm really pleased to be going up to full strength. Despite that, any additional help that you can provide would be most welcome. It doesn't have to be much, and if you think you can help us in any way please get in touch – today or later by email.

On being elected last year, I promised to deliver change:

- Change the way the branch was run (bring it into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)
- Change what we do for you, our members
- And most importantly, re-focus the branch towards the Legion's Beneficiaries – the Armed Forces community and our Veterans.

Picking up on what our President said, we are here for three things – supporting the Legions' beneficiaries, Remembrance and you, our Members.

#### On the Legion's Beneficiaries

**The purpose of the RBL states that “Membership exists so our Armed Forces family has friends and allies standing by them in every community”.**

This is what we are here for.

Helen will give you a full report on this year's Poppy Appeal shortly and can I just say a personal thank you to all those who volunteered to help sell poppies this year.

But supporting the Legion's beneficiaries – who are current members of the Armed Forces, Veterans and their direct families – is not just about the Poppy Appeal.

We must be doing more to directly support them here in the community and we can do that in one of two ways:

Firstly, by being the local point of contact for the provision of individual support - think welfare – to them. This might just be friendship (in person or on the phone) or by home & hospital visits. Then we can refer them to the Head Office Caseworkers

where necessary – and our President talked a little about the work they do earlier. We are doing this in Oxted.

But, equally as important, is making our Branch and this Club a focal point for them – and not just in Oxted but throughout East Surrey as a whole.

We now have a growing group of veterans who meet regularly – drinks in the evening or breakfast. But I want more – greater numbers of Veterans being more regularly involved in a wider range of activities in this Club. There are 2,500 members of the Armed Forces and Veterans in Tandridge – wouldn't it be fantastic if we filled the place from time to time with them?

We have secured funds to transform the TV Room in the corner of the building over there into a Veteran's Hub. Progress has been a bit slow for one reason or another but I look forward to that opening in the New Year – we'll advertise it widely throughout Tandridge and organise some suitably focused events.

### On Remembrance

For the second year running now, we went into church first and had a ceremony at the War Memorial at 1100.

In Church, we revised the Order of Service and printed enough copies for the entire congregation. It was important to me that Veterans and the younger generations played a bigger part in the Service and both readings and all of the prayers were read by either a veteran or a member of the scouts or explorers.

At the War Memorial, there was a crowd as big, if not bigger than last year. Next year, I would like to get some school children involved, either in researching about some of the soldiers commemorated on the memorial itself or doing some readings.

But importantly, we would not have had a parade and ceremony at the Memorial this year without the help of Oxted Parish Council and Titsey Rotary. I am now under orders from Head Office not to apply for the necessary road closure and Branch Members can no longer close the roads. I am extremely grateful that the Parish Council took on this responsibility and for the assistance that Titsey Rotary provided in closing the roads on the day. I have written to both organisations to thank them on the Legion's behalf.

One of the challenges that the Legion faces is how to keep Remembrance alive as the generations who lived through a World War, or heard directly about it from their family, sadly pass away. Next year, I would like to go into the schools and youth organisations and talk to them about the history, importance and relevance today of Remembrance.

### Finally, on you, our Membership

Since last year's AGM, our membership has grown from 430 to 477. We have had 105 new joiners, each of whom gets a personal welcoming letter from the Mem Sec. But we have had 101 leavers, which would have been higher if the Mem Sec had not converted 48 from those of you whose payments had lapsed by writing to you.

We have a retention problem and despite the Mem Sec writing to every leaver, we have not had enough responses to give us a clear picture of why.

On the face of it, people join the Legion because they believe in its purpose. Apart from Committee Members, Veterans and a few older stalwarts; very few of you stepped forward to help us raise money during the Poppy Appeal. Any time that you can give to this is most welcome and I would ask you all to try and find some time to help us next year.

This year, we organised a Day Trip to the D-Day Museum and apart from the Veterans, attendance was very poor – we made a loss on it financially. We'll try another one next year, and move it to a Saturday instead of a weekday. We also organised three evening entertainment events to raise money for the Poppy Appeal – all very different to what the Club usually offers. Although profitable, I will say that attendance from the Branch's members was poor and without non-members attending they would not have made any money at all. So, next year, we will have to think very carefully about what events we hold and where/when to hold them. But a plea to you all – please support our events. If you did not like what we organised, let me know – either here today in a question later, or privately afterwards (in person or by email). We want to organize events that you want to attend.

At last year's AGM, we launched a Member-get-Member initiative and offered a prize of £100 to the member who recruits the most newbies. I personally have done well, recruiting well into double figures, but no one has informed us of new members that they have recruited. I won't claim the £100 but challenge you all to recruit newcomers to this Branch but please let the Mem Sec know so that she can track them. The £100 is up for grabs next year.

And finally, next year we might send a short satisfaction survey to all members covering a variety of topics. Please take the time to respond and be honest and frank in your answers.

Thank you.

#### **7. Treasurer's Annual Report – adoption of Annual Account to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.**

The Treasurer presented the Branch's Annual Financial Report, which is enclosed at the end of these minutes (redacted for website version). The Chairman then added that the branch accounts were agreed by the Committee before submission to Head Office in August; and with a couple of caveats have been approved and recorded as a fair and accurate depiction of the Branch's financial record for the year; therefore, there is no requirement to vote on them.

#### **8. Poppy Appeal Organiser's Report.** The Poppy Appeal Organiser gave the following report:

Firstly, in 2023 Surrey collected £1.4M which contributed to about £50M nationally. Here in Oxted, we raised £29,550 which was fifth overall behind Leatherhead, Guildford, Cobham Services and Worcester Park. Our branch of Morrisons was the top Morrisons store in the country.

This year, we are also doing well, with another £22,500 at Morrisons (card and cash). Knitted poppies kindly donated by the Tandridge Needlecraft Club again proved popular, with over 250 being 'sold'. The Branch held a number of fundraising events

for the Poppy Appeal this year, which in total raised just over £2,700. With some other donations and some cash tins yet to be counted, we are on our way to having another successful year.

In addition to our Veterans and Members, we had a reasonable response from our adverts in the local print media.

9. **Presentation and adoption of the Branch 5-Year Plan for 2023-2027.** The Chairman stated that despite making some progress in many areas, we need to do more on communications (be it enhancing our public presence – as a Branch we need our own Facebook page – or maintaining the website or advertising our events), developing ties with youth organisations, attracting more younger members, getting more people involved in the work of the Legion and, most importantly, boosting the number of active veterans that we have in the Branch & Club.

Some of this is detailed in a Plan that the Branch Committee has been using as a handrail, which has been distributed to Members by email, and is based on a template used across the whole of the British Legion. It shows work in five main areas: membership; community support – or supporting our Veterans; finances; events, activities & fundraising; and administration

It shows our vision; we want this to be:

a thriving and proactive Branch with a growing membership;  
secure in an energised and financially secure Club;  
providing events and activities for its Members;  
whilst positively supporting its Veterans and the wider Oxted community.

The Committee will continue to evolve it and share it as it becomes significantly revised. The Chairman did not ask the Members to adopt it, but was prepared to take any questions or comments on it; of which there were none.

10. **Election of Branch Officers and Committee Members.**

- a. Members Present. The Membership Secretary confirmed that there were 41 Members present in total, including both the Branch and Club Committees.
- b. Appointment of voting scrutineers. Not required as all positions are unopposed.

Before proceeding with the next part of the agenda, the Chairman thanked the outgoing Secretary, Patricia Grant, for her many years of service to the Branch and for the service given by her family.

He then stated that there were eight positions up for consideration this year, being either vacant or up for re-election after a two-year term. All positions are unopposed but he gave the Members an opportunity to object to each on grounds of procedural error only.

- c. Election of Branch Officers.
  - i. Branch Secretary – Matt Calderwood (unopposed).
- d. Election of Branch Committee Members.

- i. Community Support Officer – Ryan Williamson (unopposed).
- ii. Recruiting Officer – Alex Starr (unopposed).
- iii. Membership Secretary – Andrea Cogan (unopposed)
- iv. General Committee Members – all unopposed:
  - a) Helen Burton.
  - b) Jenny Law.
  - c) Zara Nelson.
  - d) Ashley Williamson.

As there were no objections from the Members, the Chairman welcomed all new members of the Committee and thanked them for volunteering. He stated that the Committee is now up to full strength, with the exception of the Vice-Chairman's post; which the Committee decided not to seek to fill this year. As an aside, he stated that when he joined the committee, the average age lowered to 69. Today it is 53.

e. Chairman's Note on Treasurer's position. The Chairman informed the meeting that the current Treasurer, Robert Sayer, had indicated his wish to resign his position. He thanked Robert for his service over the last two years, particularly as he stepped in at short notice when the position suddenly became vacant. As this is a Branch Committee appointment, not elected by the Members, the Chairman stated that the Committee would seek to recruit a new Treasurer in 2025.

11. **Charge of the Branch Standard.** The Chairman confirmed the following Branch Committee appointments:

- a. Primary Standard Bearer – Ryan Williamson.
- b. Secondary Standard Bearer – Mark Wren.

12. **Presentations.** There were no presentations this year.

13. **County Conference 2025.** The Chairman announced that this was to be held here in Oxted, at the Club, on Saturday 25 January 2025.

14. **Date of the Next Annual General Meeting.** This would be confirmed to Members in due course.

16. **Any Other Business and Questions.**

Dave Witcombe (a Veteran) thanked the Committee and the RBL for the support given to him in assisting with his mobility issues.

Derek Stevens asked about what support the RBL would provide to a Veteran currently in hospital. The Chairman replied that the RBL cannot support Veterans whilst they are in hospital but is standing by to provide suitable support once the Veteran is discharged.

17. **Kohima Prayer.** The meeting closed with the Kohima Prayer.