

HALE BRANCH ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER – Issue 37

June 2025

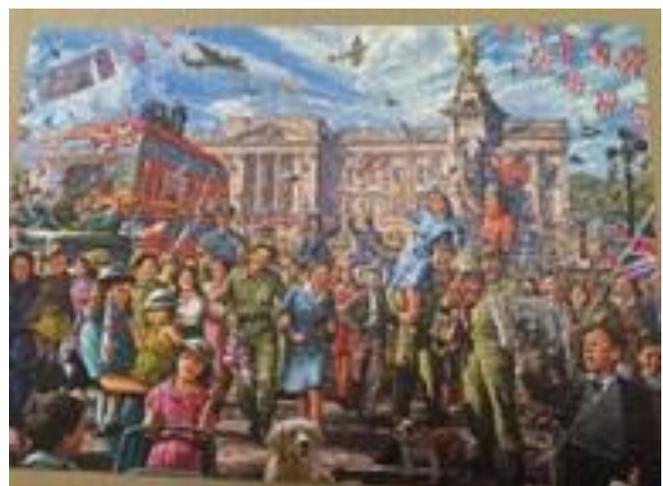
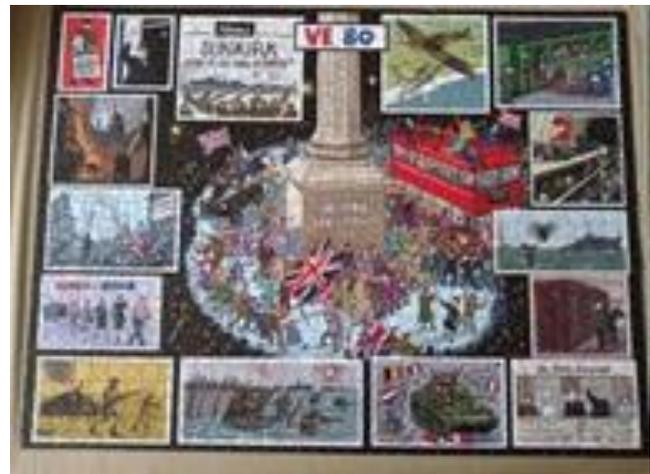
Hello to you all!

As most of you know, I have decided to stand down as Branch Chairman at the end of this year, when my place will be taken by Marie Fisher. I've done my stint – about 20 years! – and it's time for me to have a rest and you to have a fresh approach to the Legion. I will be remaining as a Branch member and will continue to support the Branch and the RBL in general as well as I can. I've enjoyed (almost) every minute of my term in office – the odd problem was inevitable! I will hand over to Marie at our Annual General Meeting, which this year will be held on **Wednesday 8th October 2025**. Put it in your diaries now! There will be reminders nearer to the date. This means that this could be the last time I will contribute to the Newsletter as Chairman so forgive me if I go on a bit!

Over the past years we have grown from a brand new inexperienced Branch to become one of the best attended and most highly regarded in this County. While other branches have been declining or even closing down, we have kept a steady membership of more than 90 – in fact 100 at present! We have been represented on the County Committee; supported many County events and projects; and have raised more than £500,000 for the Poppy Appeal! We have had a social life which would be the envy of many – trips to WW1 and WW2 sites in France, Belgium and Holland; regular visits to the National Memorial Arboretum; helped organise an annual Remembrance Sunday service; taken our place in the Hale Carnival each year; organised celebratory evenings for many anniversaries, Burns Night Suppers, St George's Day Dinners and many other events. In short, we have put the RBL on the map in Hale Village while making significant contributions to the life of the village itself. I know we can do a lot more and will do my best to help Marie, her Committee and our members to do just that.

What will I do with the many hours of leisure (!!) I can now look forward to? Well, I'd like to think that I will relax (not much hope!) and have managed to do a couple of jigsaws over the last couple of weeks (see

below) so I have good intentions. I suspect, however, that I will not be able to keep my nose out of RBL matters and will expect Marie and the Committee to tell me to mind my own business from time to time. In truth, my health is not too good and I have mobility problems which might force me to take it easy – I'll do my best!



The last three months have seen a number of anniversaries which we have marked, most of which will be referred to in this newsletter. The most recent was the "Black-tie Dinner", organised by Formby Branch at Formby Spa and Golf Club and I am proud to say that this branch was represented by some 20 members.

We also kept up our association with South Liverpool Sea Cadets by attending their Open Evening and in return asking them to help with transport to Formby for the Dinner! I also attended, with our County President, an evening with 90 Squadron, RAFA Cadets, to support them when they were inspected in connection with the Lees Trophy. Although they were given an excellent report, our support was not enough to get them past the post in first place! I'm sure their turn will come.

I said this could be my last welcome in the Newsletter – on the other hand, it's possible that there will be another in the October Issue, so I'd better keep one or two issues under my hat in case I get another chance. In the meantime, thank you for all the support you have given me over the years and enjoy the next few months until Marie, Lesley and their Committee take over the reins!

Bill

Here are a couple of photographs from the VE80 & VJ80 Black-tie Dinner organised by the Formby Branch that Bill referred to.



Hale Village Parish Council also held two events to celebrate VE80, the first of which took part on Sunday 4th May when the Clan Wallace Pipe Band paraded along the High Street and into the Village Hall. They also entertained us along with Sarah Lowe and The Mersey Wave Choir.



At the war memorial on Thursday 8th May at Noon a two minute silence took place and a wreath was laid.



More dates for your diary

Sunday 6th July

Coach trip to the National Memorial Arboretum leaving the Childe of Hale at 8.30am returning at approx. 7pm.

Saturday 14th June

The annual Hale Carnival where we will have our gazebo. Come and say hello and look at our display.

Saturday 28th June

Armed Forces Day when some of our members will be at Morrisons, Speke. Please tell your friends and neighbours to come along and support us.

Saturday 20th September

Proposed trip to Grassington's 1940s event.

My Grandads

Grandad Brooking



Lewis Alfred Brooking, (originally from Berkshire, moved to Walton-on-Thames, Surrey)

My Grandfather Lewis Alfred Brooking served with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. My Grandfather was a sergeant and along with his comrades was ordered by his captain to fix bayonets and go over the top, he and the others refused to, a pistol was put against his head by the captain who said do it or I'll blow your f*ing brains out, so they all went over the top.

A mortar went off near him blowing him and a corporal (MacAllister) off their feet into a deep pit, they both suffered shrapnel wounds, in addition to this my Grandad fell onto a bayonet held by a dead German Soldier, the bayonet pierced his ear causing hearing damage. The pit they fell into was too deep to climb out of. It also turned out to be a store for the Germans containing brandy and other supplies. So they decided to sit tight and have a bevy or two until they were rescued. This was the end of my Grandads ward and was given a discharge on medical grounds, he was the only one to survive out of all his comrades. He never spoke about it to me, my Dad told me about this.

Grandad Webster



John Webster (from Wick, Caithness)

Unfortunately, I don't have any earlier photos of my Grandad.

My Grandad John Webster had active service in the Royal Navy, (I'm not sure what rank he held). He was stationed, along with his father and cousin in Portsmouth. His father was on a patrol boat when it was torpedoed by a German Submarine. John and his cousin immediately launched a rescue boat to see if there were any survivors.

Unfortunately, the submarine surfaced and they were captured and became prisoners of war. They were both treated very poorly in the POW camp. They were also made to push heavy artillery. On one occasion My Grandads cousin collapsed and died it was believed he had a heart attack. As my Grandad tried to help his cousin, he was hit with a butt of a German rifle on the chin and told to leave his cousin. Sadly, my Grandad died when I was six, but my Mum told me of his POW experiences.

In memory of my Grandads Lewis, Alfred Brooking and John Webster who both served for their country and survived the Great War (1914 – 18) also to their brave Friends, Comrades and Allies, who fought so bravely that survived and to the ones that gave their lives.



Lewis Stephen John Brooking

Also to my late Father Lewis, Stephen, John, Brooking, his brave comrades and Allies for active service during the 2nd WW (1939 – 45) - For ever grateful

We are all so grateful, God bless, love and thank you John Brooking and all of our families.

Fundraising

Gemma Dixon recently completed the 2025 London Marathon and raised £2,349 for the RBL. Well done Gemma and thank you.

Trip to Metz, Verdun

In April, the Hale branch of the British Legions' annual excursion visited France and in particular the areas around Verdun. My first trip last year set the bar high in anticipation of the trip to France; I wasn't to be disappointed.

The journey to Dover albeit long was event-filled comprising of plenty of storytelling and bountiful treats, we were well looked after. The ferry sailing and journey to our hotel in Metz was pleasant. The hotel was well located within the city with an abundance of bars/sightseeing to be had.

At the heart was Mezt Cathedral, a truly amazing tribute to gothic architecture. Built between the 14th and 15th centuries. It boasts having the third highest nave in France alongside displaying the world's largest expanse of stained glass; truly stunning in the sunlight. We attended Sunday Morning Mass.

During our excursion we had an extensive itinerary with daily visits around the Verdun area visiting:

- Museum of war 1870 and Annexation – an insight into the battle of Verdun and the history around the fixation between France and Germany, how this became a matter of pride and stubbornness of 'must win' regardless of the losses. Control changed several times over the period;



- Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery – Romagnous-Montfaucon – A tribute to the American fallen spreading over 130 acres and 14,000 fallen heroes; the largest number in Europe. The Meuse-Argonne

offensive between 26th Sept and 11th Nov claimed 26,000 lives and a further 100,000 injured – to endure so much loss towards the end of the war, just tragic;



- Meuse-Argonne American War Memorial – the tallest American monument in Europe including Statue of Liberty presiding over the area;



- Fort de Queuleu – This was the highlight for me; Please research further as the history end experience was such an emotive, immersive experience that I cannot do it justice. As part of a protective ring around Metz built in 1867 by the French, it was overtaken by the Germans in 1871 and insignificant during WW1, however between 1941 and 1943 it was used by the SS as

an interrogation center with a link into the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. Having an insight into the daily challenges really brought home the value of freedom. A must see;

- Cemetery du Faubourg Pave. Holding 5,000 WW1 graves to include 7 British Servicemen;
- Fleury Devant Douaumont – during the fighting this village changed hands sixteen times in two months and was destroyed. This is now a monument and to this day littered with unexploded mines and shells. So much so sheep graze around the area with the sole purpose of reducing the number of UXB's;



- Ossuary – memorial to 130,000 French soldiers killed during the battle.



- Tranche des Beyonettes - paying a short visit to the site of a mass grave.

A truly insightful tour, provoking many emotions and utter appreciation of the sacrifices made for us to enjoy the freedom we do today.

A special mention must go to:

Bill, for arranging the visit and itinerary; simply staggering the effort it must have taken,

Dave – our resident driver who always puts himself forward for this tour, I can see why,

the team on the bus: Marie, Alan & Chris for keeping us entertained on the journeys with sweets, alcohol and activities.

Oh I nearly forgot, watching Liverpool win the League title in the bar around the corner from the hotel with you all – great memories and a great bunch of friends.....

.....so here's looking forward to the next one already....

Warmest regards, Nige



To see more photographs from the VE80 events and the trip to Metz, take a look at our website:-

<https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/hale>

If anyone would like to write a short report, an article about yourself, any ex-servicemen/women, book review for inclusion in a Newsletter, please email it to Lesley Jackson lesleyj@huntscross.plus.com

Deadlines for inclusion are 15th 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 trips so if you would like to come along please contact:-
Lesley Jackson lesleyj@huntscross.plus.com or telephone 07891 553810;
Marie Fisher marie.fisher@ymail.com or telephone 07958 399252