

HALE BRANCH ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER – Issue 39

February 2026

Happy New Year Everyone, and welcome to the first newsletter of 2026.

For those of you who don't know me, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Marie Fisher and I became the Chair of the Hale Branch Royal British Legion at our last Annual General Meeting, which was held in October 2025. Bill Sergeant, who has been the Chair for many years, decided that he needed to take a slight step back but would still be involved in the Branch. I have big shoes to fill as Bill has been an excellent Chairman. I doubt that I will live up to the standards that he has set, but, with his help, I will do my best. Bill is now Honorary Vice-President of the Branch.



I have been a member of Hale Branch almost since the very beginning. During this time, I have played an active part in the Branch either as a Committee Member or Branch Secretary. I did step down for a brief two years, but during that time I was approached by Speke Branch to act as their Secretary until they could appoint a new one, as their current Secretary had to stand down due to family issues. I did become their Secretary for the two years but returned to Hale Branch as soon as a new Secretary was appointed.

I have been involved in organising our post-Christmas meals and Burn's Night Suppers, which I thoroughly enjoy doing. I even performed the Address To The Haggis at one of the Burn's Suppers, not as good as a real Scot though. I helped to organise the D-Day 80 event, which was held in the former Netherley British Legion, now known as Wood Lane Social Club. It was a great success but would not have been so if other Branch Members had not played their part - Ben and Lesley Jackson, Bill and Sharon Harrison and of course, Peter Jarman for arranging the venue for us. I apologise if I have left anyone out.

This year we have a few events to look forward to, but there will be more about these in the coming weeks.

Thank you for being a Member of Hale Branch, and I sincerely hope that you continue to do so.

Best Wishes

Marie Fisher

Chair - Hale Branch

At our **AGM held in October 2025** the following officers were approved:-

President	Ben Jackson
Honorary Vice-President	Bill Sergeant
Chair	Marie Fisher
Secretary	Lesley Jackson
Treasurer	Jacquie Ross
Membership Secretary	Alex Smith
Welfare Officer	Mike Brown
Standard Bearer/Committee	Peter Jarman
Committee Member	Jim Ryan
Committee Member	Alan Sergeant

Poppy Appeal 2025

Unfortunately, there isn't a final total available at present. However, it is estimated that our total collection the year will be in excess of £60,000 which will be a new record for Hale/Woolton. Thank you to all those that gave their time in this endeavour.

Remembrance Sunday

We had a tremendous turnout, as always, for the parade and service at the War Memorial in Hale Village led by the Clan Wallace Pipe Band. Also with us was a young lad named Otis Frieze who kindly played the Last Post and Reveille. Otis is a very talented young musician and we hope that he can join us again at this year's remembrance service.



Hale Village Post Box top knitted by Hale Knit and Natter Group.

Armadillo Storage Company Supports the RBL Poppy Appeal

Once again we wish to thank Armadillo Storage Ltd, Goodlass Road, Speke, who have kindly provided us with free storage space for our stock and for their continued support to the RBL and its Poppy Appeal.



Trips in 2026

Thursday 23rd to Monday 27th April 2026 we will be visiting the Somme, particularly because of the 110th anniversary of the battle. This trip is fully booked however if you are interested in being added to a reserve list then please let Lesley know.

Annual trip to the **National Memorial Arboretum**. Date to be arranged.

Royal British Legion and Commemorating D-Day and VJ Day in 2025

2025 marked a particularly meaningful year for me, as I joined the Royal British Legion (RBL). Having previously served in the armed forces and been an active member of my own regiment's association, I felt it was the right moment to become involved with the RBL. I have always held deep respect for the organisation, especially for its charitable work and unwavering support for veterans. Since leaving the military, my wife Jacquie and I have consistently supported charities that assist veterans and their families, recognising the vital importance of these support networks.

We officially joined the RBL in 2025, a year that, in my view, was defined by the commemoration of significant milestones such as D-Day and VJ Day.

Commemorating D-Day: Building Camaraderie

To foster camaraderie within our branch, regardless of whether members had served in the armed forces we organised a visit to D-Day Revisited in Hawarden. On a rainy Saturday morning, eight of us boarded the Sea Cadets minibus, which transported us to the museum. The journey itself provided an opportunity for members to bond, sharing stories and laughter as we travelled through the picturesque Cheshire countryside. Spirits remained high despite the weather, and anticipation grew as we approached our destination.

Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by John Phipps, the founder of the charity. Although the museum was modest in size, it housed a remarkable collection of Second World War equipment, creating an immersive experience akin to stepping back in time. Notably, there was a working Spitfire and a restored motor vehicle on display. The exhibits were thoughtfully arranged, allowing us to appreciate not only the technology of the era but also the personal stories behind each artefact. John Phipps's depth of knowledge about the period was truly impressive, and everyone left with a much

greater understanding of D-Day and the Second World War. He shared anecdotes about the veterans whose donations had shaped the museum, making the visit all the more poignant.

Jim Ross Senior and I prepared tea and coffee for the group, and Jim proudly shared that he had secured complimentary biscuits and cakes from the local supermarket. As more visitors arrived at the museum, we shared our refreshments with the families present, and the atmosphere soon felt like a gathering of old friends. After spending two hours exploring, we stayed for lunch on the complex before visiting nearby cathedrals and churches in North Wales. The afternoon outing provided a thoughtful balance to the morning's historical immersion, allowing us to reflect on the day's events in tranquil surroundings. Many members remarked on the beauty of the Welsh churches, and several took photographs to remember the occasion. The shared experiences fostered a sense of unity within our group, strengthening the connections that would carry us through the rest of the commemorative year. During the visit to the war graves, Bill Sergeant gave his overview on each grave, with particular attention to the Canadians who were buried at the graveyard.

During our commemorative activities, we were particularly struck by an unusual feature in one of the local churches. The altar there had been tiled using keys from a computer keyboard, creating a striking and memorable display. This creative approach to design was not only visually impressive but also served as a thoughtful symbol, blending tradition with modernity and reminding visitors of the enduring relevance of remembrance in contemporary life.



Commemorating VJ Day: Planning and Celebration

During our June meeting, we discussed plans to honour VJ Day. It was agreed that on 15th August, at midday, we would observe a two-minute silence at the Hale Cenotaph. The Chairman, Bill Sergeant, formed a dedicated team to ensure the day would be memorable. Our first task was to identify residents of Hale Village who had played a role on VJ Day, whether as prisoners of war or active combatants. I was astonished by the number of families whose fathers or grandfathers had been involved, which made the occasion especially poignant for the village. This process uncovered many untold stories, and several members took the initiative to document their relatives' experiences, resulting in a small exhibition at the Village Hall later that month.

We invited the local priest and vicar to lead the ceremony, with the Chairman also playing a central role. The cenotaph, located on a busy village roundabout, presented logistical challenges due to the time of day, so we anticipated a turnout of no more than fifty, which would allow us to avoid closing the road. However, on the day itself, 15th August 2025, the weather was perfect, and our preparations of fifty mass cards proved insufficient as at least two hundred people attended. The sight of so many villagers and guests gathered under clear skies was truly heartening, and I was

left wondering where all these people had come from. The sense of community and shared history was palpable, and many attendees expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to participate in such a meaningful event.

On a national level, HRH King Charles led the service at the Arboretum, laying a wreath on behalf of all who served. At the Hale Branch, we followed suit, with Bill Sergeant laying the first wreath. The service ran smoothly, and the large congregation contributed to a truly memorable experience, one that may never be repeated in quite the same way. Following the ceremony, the Chairman welcomed everyone to the Village Hall for tea and coffee. The hall buzzed with conversation as neighbours and visitors mingled, exchanging memories and reflecting on the importance of remembrance. During the gathering, Bill spoke about VJ veterans from the area, including those who had been prisoners of war or who had served in the conflict and the new regiment called The Chindits. Hearing their stories was profoundly moving. The event concluded with a performance from the Irish Guards singers, who entertained us with songs from the era. Their rousing rendition of wartime classics encouraged a singalong, drawing young and old together in a moment of joyful commemoration.

VJ Day 80th Anniversary Evening Celebration

On 22nd August, we held an evening party to celebrate the 80th anniversary of VJ Day. The venue could accommodate 110 guests, and the room was adorned with Union flags and VJ Day memorabilia, including hats and medals belonging to local soldiers. For just £10 per person, attendees enjoyed entertainment, local stew (Scouse), and speeches from key RBL personnel. The evening began with our local piper, Alex, leading the guests to the main room, followed by the Chairman and guests of honour at the top table. Dominique and Marrieta delighted the audience with a medley of period music, donned in attire befitting the occasion. Their performance set a festive tone, and the sound of laughter and applause filled the hall throughout the evening.

The Chairman opened proceedings by sharing stories of local heroes and other veterans living in Speke, who all served in the Chindits. Each family in attendance received a certificate, listing the regiment from which their relative had served before joining the elite squad. The effort and research that went into preparing these mementoes were greatly appreciated, and many families were visibly moved. They did not realise what their parents had gone through, as fathers and grandfathers would not talk about their experiences and the challenges they faced. The certificates were signed by both the Chairman and the Halton Deputy Lord Mayor, who expressed her gratitude for being included in such a significant event. Halton Deputy Lord Mayor's speech highlighted the importance of honouring those who served and the enduring legacy of their sacrifice, drawing a standing ovation from the audience. Adding to the evening's sense of occasion, our President, Ben, and Secretary, Lesley, donned authentic Second World War attire. Their decision to dress in period costume contributed to the poignancy of the celebration, evoking the spirit of the era and honouring those who had served.



The food selection proved popular and perfectly suited the occasion. Guests lingered over bowls of Scouse, enjoying the camaraderie and sharing conversations about the evening's significance. The evening concluded with words of thanks from the Chairman, and the impact of the celebrations was felt in the village for weeks afterwards, as people continued to talk about the memorable series of events. Many commented on how the anniversary had brought together generations, fostering a renewed sense of pride and belonging within the community. Looking back, it was clear that the commemorations had not only honoured the past but also strengthened the bonds that make our branch and village so special.

“Service Not Self”

James Ross

Burns Night Supper



On Saturday 21st January Marie organised a Burns Night Supper at the Childe of Hale attended by 32 people. Everyone had a great evening with Bill and Tommy sharing the role of Chieftain, Rosalind's superb delivery of the Address to the Haggis, Marie's Immortal Memory, Bill's very amusing (as always) Toast to the Lassies and thanks to Jacquie for taking part with her Response. Huge thanks to Donna and her staff including the chef of course! Take a look at the photos from the evening our branch website:- <https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/hale>

Obituaries

Sadly, since our last Newsletter we have lost 6 of our members, all of whom have recently passed away.

Joyce HUGHES (20.11.1934 – 13.11.2025)

Joyce was one of our founder members and was responsible for recruiting a number of her friends many of whom are still active in our Branch. Joyce had been in poor health for the last couple of years but still managed to support us when she could do so. She had always been active in the community and was responsible for the creation and success of the majorette troupes in Speke. I have a vivid memory of her in Ste Mere Eglise on one of our trips, when she and Justine Shakespeare and their friends demonstrated Tai Chi to the natives of Normandy!

Ernie DUNBAVIN (12.04.1936 – 09.12.2025)

Ernie, again, was a founder member and a firm supporter of everything we did. He, Eileen and their son, Cliff, have been on most of our trips and it was wonderful to see Ernie's family at our Burns Night this year.

Eddy CROOK (04.11.1935 – 10.12.2025)

Eddy was a longstanding member of the RBL Netherley Branch before their closure. He served on their committee and was a regular Poppy Appeal collector. He transferred to our Branch when Netherley closed.

John COURTNEY (08.05.1938 – 22.12.2025)

There's little need for me to say anything about John – though I did a 30 minute tribute to him at his funeral! John was a much larger than life character who made all our trips more enjoyable!

George SILCOCK (19.01.1931 – 20.12.2025)

George had lived in Hale for many years but only learned about our Branch about 3 years ago. He too has been on several of our local coach trips – but I recall one occasion when he missed our trip because he thought it was leaving from the Irish Centre in Liverpool!

Eric FAWCETT (14.05.1938 – 10.01.2026)

Eric had recently returned home from Canada where he had lived for many years during which time he had been an active member of the Canadian Legion. He was a friend of Tommy Savage and lived in sheltered accommodation in Fazakerley. He joined our branch at Tommy's suggestion as Eric wanted to keep up his record of having raised funds both in Canada and in the UK for over 40 years. Although his poor health had prevented him from attending Branch meetings for the past 18 months, he raised almost £2,000 in 2024 by getting permission to collect in his local supermarket by himself.

We were represented at the funerals of Joyce, Ernie, Eddy, John and George by our standard bearers and a number of our members, but Eric had expressed his wish to be cremated without a funeral service or any ceremony. All six will be sadly missed and our thoughts are with their families.

Bill Sergeant

County Conference 2026

This was also held on Saturday 21st January at the Army Barracks on Aigburth Road at which Bill Sergeant was presented with a County Certificate of Appreciation for all his work besides having been our Chairman since 2006.

This is the wording from that Award:-

Bill Sergeant was the Chairman of the Noel Chavasse VC Memorial Association where he helped to set up the charity and raise the £128,000 holding talks and was responsible in writing the four books "Liverpool Heroes" which was about all the VC recipients who came from Liverpool.



He became the Chairman of the RBL Hale Branch in 2006 and like the Noel Chavasse Memorial Association he was a co-founder of the Liverpool PALS and again was the co-author of the book of that name. Bill has been involved in numerous talks on the subject of WW1 and in particular Noel Chavasse VC and other local VC recipients including visits to schools. He has now stepped down as Chairman of the branch and his leadership and knowledge that he brought to that role has been very much appreciated by branch members.

He is currently the Poppy Appeal Organiser, and has been for many years, raising countless of thousands and setting up collecting venues and organising volunteer rotas across the South Liverpool area.

He wrote a book about the Hale War Memorial involving research on each person named upon it. He also wrote a book about the Nurses, researching the lives of each those named on a memorial plaque in the Lady Chapel in the Anglican Cathedral.

Each year he has organised a trip to Belgium or France to visit Commonwealth War Graves, battle sites, museums and cemeteries, including those of the French and Germans so that branch members and friends can pay their respects to the fallen. In addition, he has organised regular visits to the National Memorial Arboretum and other places of interest, also putting on displays every year at the Hale Carnival to promote the branch.

Well done Bill and thank you for all you have done above and beyond for the Branch.

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 – jacksonlesley66@gmail.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 jacksonlesley66@gmail.com or telephone 07891 553810;

Marie Fisher marie.fisher@ymail.com or telephone 07958 399252