

***You don't have to
be ex-Service to
join....***



Barely a day goes by that doesn't coincide with the anniversary of a conflict that cost the lives of British and Commonwealth Servicemen and women. The momentous struggles of 1914-1918 and those of 1939-1945 helped shape Britain, and define who and what we are today. The fact that the countries of Western Europe now coexist in peace and relative harmony with little prospect of future armed conflict within our borders is testament to the huge sacrifices made by past generations. British forces continue to serve in harm's way to protect our freedom and prosperity worldwide. The Royal British Legion (RBL) aims to ensure that their sacrifices are never forgotten, and that members of the British armed forces, veterans and their families receive the support and care they need.

The Droxford and District Branch predates the formation of the British Legion (as it was first known in November 1921), holding our first meeting in March 1920 as 'The Droxford Branch of the Comrades of the Great War'. We now meet four times a year, usually at Droxford Village Hall, with a speaker on a range of interesting subjects. Supper is available up to a maximum of 20 places. There's also an annual general meeting, an annual dinner, a summer drinks party, a Grand National draw and a pub-style quiz night. Apart from selling poppies in support of the annual appeal, we are not otherwise actively engaged in RBL fundraising activity. We observe the annual Remembrance Sunday service at one of the local parish churches; although normally that's the limit of any formal ceremonial, last year we sent 2 delegates to the Menin Gate for RBL's Great Pilgrimage 90. A copy of their subsequent report is included in this website. As you would expect, being so close to Portsmouth and other military centres, many of our members are ex-Service but an increasing number are civilian. All are equally welcome.

As a member of the RBL (Droxford and District Branch) you would not only be able to 'do your bit' to support the British armed forces but also help keep remembrance alive. This is not glorification of war - far from it; anyone who has witnessed the ravages of armed conflict will be quick to dispel this myth. It is however through remembrance that we can truly appreciate nearly 75 years of peace that has existed in Western Europe and ensure that 1½ million British and Commonwealth subjects who gave their lives in two world wars and other conflicts are never forgotten. The Roll of Honour for Soberton and Newtown is also included in this website.

For more information or to join RBL (Droxford & District Branch), please contact the Membership Secretary – Phil Burton at pjb585@btinternet.com or 01329 836215.



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2019 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS AND EVENTS

All meetings will take place in Droxford Village Hall, commencing at 7.00 pm and followed by supper. A limited bar will be provided from 6.30 pm. Details for supper bookings will be e-mailed one week prior to the meeting.

January

Monday 14th “*The Maritime and Coastguard Agency*” presented by Vice-Admiral Sir Alan Massey, KCB, CBE, formerly Chief Executive MCA.

March

Monday 11th “*With Nelson Mandela on Robben Island*” presented by The Revd Colin Chambers, former Lt Cdr, South African Navy and chaplain to Nelson Mandela and others on Robben Island, RSA for 8 years.

April

Thursday 4th Grand National Draw organised by Mrs Elizabeth Parker.

Friday 26th

7.30pm Pub-style Quiz

May

Monday 13th “*Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*” presented by Giles Milton (international historian and best-selling author of *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg* and *Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare*).

June

Thursday 20th Summer Drinks Party at Exton Cottage, Allen’s Farm Lane, Exton SO32 3NW
6.30pm by kind permission of Mr and Mrs David Frere-Cook.

September

Monday 9th “*Building on Bazalgette – the Thames Tideway Tunnel Project*” (as featured in “The 5 Billion Pound Sewer” on BBC TV) presented by Philip Stride, FICE, FRICS, Strategic Projects Director, Tideway.

October

Monday 14th Annual Dinner (venue to be confirmed).
7.00pm for 7.30pm

November

Sunday 10th **REMEMBRANCE DAY SERVICE**
10.50 am at St Mary and All Saints, Droxford.

Monday 11th Annual General Meeting.

Non-members are always welcome when we have a speaker. Please aim to arrive at Droxford Village Hall by 6.50pm. There’s no charge but donations are always appreciated.



RBL DROXFORD & DISTRICT BRANCH – THE GREAT PILGRIMAGE 90



The Great Pilgrimage 90 (GP90) followed a similar pattern to the first pilgrimage to the battlefields of the Western Front conducted by the British Legion in 1928. The 8th August was chosen as the date of commemoration as it marked the launch on the final 100 days offensive (aka Battle of Amiens) that would finally defeat the German Army and bring about the Armistice on 11th November 1918.

In 1928, the Branch was represented by Mr A V Carter - Vice-Chairman and Honorary Treasurer; 90 years later, Stuart Attrill and I were privileged to represent the Branch, parade our standard and lay a wreath at the Menin Gate on 8th August 2018.

The main parade in Ypres was preceded by a two-day battlefield tour – three full 12-hour days in temperatures of up to 35°C in case you think we were loafing! Day one concentrated on the Somme whilst Day two focused on the Ypres Salient. Our first stop on the Somme took us to Longueval and Delville Wood which contains the South African memorial. This reminded us of the enormous contribution made by Britain's Dominions and Colonies which was a theme that would recur regularly over the next 2 days. Walking through the woods, the scars left by trenches and shell holes are still very visible unlike open farmland where they have largely been erased. Delville Wood, as one might expect, now has a thick canopy of foliage but seems strangely quiet, without even birds singing; photos from the Great War depict a desolate place with splintered stumps instead of trees.



No visit to the Somme is complete without visiting the Thiepval Memorial. Designed by Sir Edward Lutyens and built between 1929 and 1932, and rising to 45m, this is the largest war memorial in the world and its sides are covered in the names of 72,000 British Empire soldiers with no known graves – the so-called 'Missing of the Somme'. After Thiepval Woods and its reconstructed trench system, we passed Ulster Tower – a replica of Helen's Tower in County Down – where troops of the 36th Ulster Division lost a quarter of their strength and won 9 VCs. After a brief visit to the New Zealand memorial, we headed North away from the Somme towards Vimy Ridge and Arras.

The magnificent Vimy Ridge memorial commemorates not only the Canadian Corps victory at Vimy Ridge on 12th April 1917 but also 66,000 Canadians killed during the Great War. On a sunny day the magnificent memorial was dazzlingly white, including the poignant figure "Canada Bereft". Although now part of Canada, there's a separate memorial to the Newfoundland Division at Beaumont-Hamel; we didn't see it on this



occasion but, from a previous visit, I recall the imposing statue of a Caribou looking out towards the German lines, crying for its young. The day concluded with a visit to Arras and the Arras cemetery. There I spotted a German and British grave together: Gefreiter (Lance-Corporal) Lachmann and Private Bell – enemies reconciled in death.



Arras itself had been raised to the ground during the Great War but the town centre had been restored in its 17th/18th Century style - and presumably spared major damage during the Nazi occupation of 1940.

Day two focussed on the Ypres Salient. Notwithstanding the huge losses on the Somme with 57,000 casualties on the first day

alone and 100,000 killed during the campaign, the Ypres Salient was the main area of operations for the British Expeditionary Force throughout the Great War. We



started off in Ypres itself, visiting the famous Menin Gate that would be the focus of our pilgrimage the following day. We then toured the impressive Flanders Fields museum in the Lakenhalle (Cloth Hall) in Ypres town centre. The Menin Gate is another masterpiece, designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield and contains the names of nearly 55,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers killed during the Great War who have no known graves. It forms one of the main gateways into Ypres but the road is closed at 2000 daily for the Last Post ceremony, sounded by the local fire brigade. One couldn't help but be touched by the gratitude and affection shown by the Belgian people 100 years later - although we still had to pay for our beer! – but it looked as though Brits had taken over the place.

After Ypres we proceeded to Messines which commemorates the Christmas truce of 1914. Messines was destroyed to such an extent that even its rubble was pulverized into dust, giving the earth a distinctive reddish hue. Messines has since been rebuilt and claims to be the smallest town in Belgium. We then went to Hill 60 – a small mound created when the adjacent railway line was cut and formerly known as Lovers' Knoll. This was the scene of intense fighting with ground frequently changing hands between German and British forces. Finally, the breakthrough came during the Battle of Messines on 7 June 1917 when British tunnellers detonated 53,000lbs of explosive under the German lines, causing huge craters that can still be seen today; the largest at Hill 60 is known as Caterpillar Crater. Those of you who have read the novel *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks will not be surprised at the extent of these mining operations and by the amount of fighting conducted underground. Interestingly, British tunnellers could dig 8 metres a day whereas the Germans only managed 2m.

From Hill 60 to Zonnebeke and the Passchendaele Museum with its fascinating collection of military artefacts, dugouts and trench systems. The third Battle of Ypres



– also known as Passchendaele – took place in the summer of 1917 and was one of the bloodiest battles of the Great War. The battlefield was also turned into a quagmire by torrential rain, immobilizing tanks, artillery and vehicles, and drowning men and horses. 325,000 Allied and 260,000 German soldiers had lost their lives by the time Allied forces secured the high ground at Passchendaele, a gain of 5 miles; 435 men dying for every square metre gained. Misspelt by British troops, as many of the names of towns and villages were, the small Belgium village became known as ‘Passion Dale’ – appropriately “the Valley of Suffering”.

We visited several cemeteries and monuments but the most poignant (and largest) is Tyne Cot Cemetery where many of the Passchendaele dead now lie. If 12,000 graves in a single cemetery is not enough to illustrate the tragedy of war, a further 35,000 names of those missing are engraved on the stone tablets surrounding the site. All these graves and memorials are lovingly maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and new stones are manufactured when further remains are recovered – some now identifiable through DNA testing. The theme of each cemetery is an English country garden.

Our final day, 8th August, started with the arrival in Ypres of some 50 coaches bearing members of the RBL, their wreaths and standards. The route to the Menin Gate was based on the route taken by Allied soldiers from the railway station to the front line. It is estimated that some 5 million soldiers followed this route while the town itself was gradually reduced to rubble.



Initially we were herded into a holding compound where the organisers had thoughtfully provided copious quantities of bottled water and, given the age of many of the legionnaires, numerous banks of portaloos! The parade formed up at 1100 and finally marched off 4-deep at 1200 with 1,100 standards leading and 1,100 wreath layers following. At first there were numerous steps in play, so I observed the time-honoured principle that only I was in step and everyone else was out! At last, when the familiar beat of the Band of Her Majesty’s Royal Marines took hold, the column settled into a more rhythmic step. In Ypres main square, there was supposed to be an ‘eyes left’ to acknowledge the reviewing officer - General Lord Richards - but it certainly didn’t happen in my vicinity; I did raise my Panama though - none of this beret or bowler and broly stuff



beloved of Pongoes! Then on to the Menin Gate.



It was claimed that the largest number of standards ever paraded were at the Menin Gate that day and it certainly looked impressive. Sheer numbers, however, prevented a good view of the 100 days ceremony itself, other than via large CCTV screens. HM's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium led the readings and she was followed by General Richards, the Chairman of the RBL and representatives from various Commonwealth embassies, the German Embassy and the Mayor of Ypres. The National Chaplain of the RBL led the prayers and the Archbishop of York gave a reading. After the Exhortation, the Last Post and Reveille were sounded by the Ypres fire brigade, and wreaths were laid including those from the 1,100 or so RBL branches represented.



The Droxford & District branch wreath included a short verse written by a member of the branch following an in-house competition. This read as follows:

*The legions of the present send the legions of the past
A message of remembrance that will for ever last:
A message of assurance that while the flag of freedom waves,
You will never be forgotten, and honoured are your graves.*

*With respect and admiration from members of Droxford and District Royal
British Legion (formerly Comrades of the Great War)*

The parade then reformed and marched back through Ypres where we enjoyed some well-earned beer and listened to the Royal Marines band, the Central Band of the RBL and the London Welsh Male Voice Choir. This also provided another opportunity to admire the architecture of Ypres which, like Arras and numerous other Belgium and French towns, had been recreated following the devastation of the Great War.

So, it was back to our billet in Roubaix near Lille (parts of which might have benefited from bombardment) and back to Blighty the following day.

Rob Scott



THE SOBERTON POPPY WAVE



The “Stitch and Chatter” Group in Soberton, Hampshire knitted over 2,000 poppies to create this impressive poppy ‘wave’ at the local war memorial to mark the centenary of the Armistice in 2018. Although over a mile from St Peter’s Church, visitors were left in no doubt as to its location as the route was lined with poppies. The memorial commemorates the names of 15 parishioners who died for King and Country during the Great War, four of these from the Twynam family who also lost a son-in-law. There are a further four names from the 2nd World War. Details of these are recorded in the Roll of Honour that follows.

The ‘Silent Soldier’ silhouette was doing his rounds of the various villages that comprise the Droxford & District Branch and ended up at St Peter’s on 11th November. Another ‘Silent Soldier’ is on permanent duty in St Peter’s Church.



ROLL OF HONOUR (SOBERTON & NEWTOWN)

S/N	Surname	First names	Rank	Unit	Age	Date of death	Where fell or memorial	Local connection
THE GREAT WAR (1914-1918)								
N	BEVIS	Jack	Private	21st Infantry Battalion, 2nd Canadian Division	33	28/08/1918	Haucourt	Chiphall, Wickham
N	BEVIS	William	Private	Leicestershire Regiment	36	13/04/1917	Arras	Chiphall, Wickham
N&S	BROWN	Frederick Robert (a)	Private	1st Battalion Hampshire Regiment		26/04/1914	Ypres	
S	BUCKSEY	John W	Private	2nd Battalion Hampshire Regiment		06/05/1918	Hazebrouck	East Hoe Cottages
S	DEADMAN	Harry	Boy 1st Class	Royal Navy	16	26/11/1914	HMS Bulwark Sheerness	(g) West Street Soberton
N	DOREY	Frederick George(b)	Stoker Petty Officer	Royal Navy	44	26/11/1914	HMS Bulwark Sheerness	(g) Soberton
N	FIELDER	Arthur Bertram	Sergeant	6th Field Artillery Brigade, Australian Imperial Force	24	04/04/1918	Bailleul	Laurels, Soberton Heath
N (p)	FISHER	James	Private	1st Battalion Wiltshire Regiment	29	24/03/1918	Arras	Bunns Lane
(q)	FOWLER	F W	Stoker Petty Officer	Royal Navy (HMS Vernon) (r)	48	20/03/1918	Soberton Churchyard	West Street Soberton
N	HILLYER	Dennis Claude	Private	King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry	21	28/10/1918	Tezze, Italy	St Martin's Corner
S	LONGMAN	Thomas	Private	15th Battalion Hampshire Regiment	17	15/10/1916	Seine Maritime	Soberton Heath
N	LUTMAN	Emanuel James (c)	Private	15th Battalion Hampshire Regiment	36	13/08/1917	Ypres, Menin Gate	Boarhunt
N	MELLISH	Sydney Alfred	Private	8th Battalion Hampshire Regiment		14/10/1917	Bagdad, Iraq	Soberton Heath
S	MESSAM	Alfred Walter	Private	15th Battalion Hampshire Regiment	25	24/03/1918	Demancourt	Soberton Heath
N&S	MESSAM	Oliver Nehemiah	Private	Royal Army Service Corps	24	20/01/1918	Dar Es Salaam	Ingenook, Soberton
S	MESSAM	William Oliver	Private	2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment	31	16/12/1918	Kalamaria, Greece	Soberton Heath
S	NEWELL	Leslie	2nd Lieutenant	1st Battalion London Regiment	23	02/09/1915	Pas de Calais	
N	PYLE	George Wallace (d)	Gunner	Royal Marine Artillery	23	12/10/1918	Vadencourt	Hoe Gate Farm
S	RYE	Robert William	Private	Royal Marine Light Infantry, Royal Naval Division		23/04/1917	Pas de Calais	Ingoldfield Cottage
N	SCARDIFIELD	Wilfred Withers	Corporal	1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry	27	04/10/1917	West Flanders	Newtown
S	SEARLE	Alfred John	Private	Royal Marine Light Infantry		04/06/1918	Soberton Churchyard	Cold Hill Soberton
S	SEARLE	William John	Private	2nd Battalion Essex Regiment	31	12/05/1915	Ypres	Liberty Road
(q)	SETFORD	James	Shipwright 1st Class	Royal Navy (HMS Vernon) (r)	58	14/07/1918	Soberton Churchyard	h/o Eiley Setford
S	TWYNAM	Godfrey	2nd Lieutenant	11th Battalion Border Regiment	25	18/11/1916	Beaumont-Hamel	Soberton House
S	TWYNAM	Hugh	Lieutenant	Royal Naval Reserve	29	19/01/1917	HM S/M E36 North Sea	(h) Soberton House
S	TWYNAM	John	Staff Sergeant	1st South African Mounted Rifles	32	30/11/1914	Bethlehem, Free State Africa	(i) Soberton House
S	TWYNAM	William H	Corporal	7th Infantry Battalion, Canadian Division	33	24/04/1915	Ypres	Soberton House
SECOND WORLD WAR (1939-1945)								
N	CROOK	John	Able Seaman	Royal Navy	18	07/01/1944	HMS Tweed North Atlantic	(j) Wickham
N	EMERY	Frank Chandler	Chief Petty Officer	Royal Navy	38	14/09/1939	HMS Royal Oak Scapa Flow	(k) Newtown
S	HUTCHENS	Eric Frank	Lance Corporal	16th Battalion Queen's Royal Regiment	23	30/09/1943	Salerno	Soberton
N	KERLEY	Daisy Mary	civilian	National Fire Service	30	09/02/1943	Winchester/buried Holy Trinity	Kennel Cottage Droxford
S	LEGGETT	Harry Oswald	Sergeant	25th Field Regiment Royal Artillery	25	13/12/1941	Alamein	Soberton
N	LINSELL	Bernard John (e)	galley boy	Merchant Navy	20	26/09/1940	SS Port Denison North Sea	(l)
N	PINK	George Frederick	Driver	Royal Army Service Corps	20	29/05/1940	Dunkirk	Newtown
N	PRATT	Albert Arthur Percy	Private	4th Battalion Hampshire Regiment	23	06/03/1943	Tunisia	Newtown
S	STEEL	Douglas Merson	Instructor Commander	Royal Navy	44	24/05/1941	HMS Hood Denmark Strait	(m) Soberton
S	TANNER	Reginald Percy	Commander DSC	Royal Navy	37	22/05/1941	HMS Gloucester Crete	(n)
N	WARBURTON-LEE	Bernard	Captain VC	Royal Navy	44	10/04/1940	HMS Hardy Narvik	(o) Soberton Mill
N	WHITE	Robert Samuel	Private	Hampshire Regiment	21	02/10/1940	North Africa	Wickham
IRAQ 2007								
(f)	DLUGOSZ	Eleanor	Private	Royal Army Medical Corps	19	05/04/2007	Basra	Swanmore
Notes:-								
(a) Assume 'E R Brown' shown on Newtown memorial is same person as 'F R Brown' on Soberton's as there is no E R Brown listed for Hampshire Regt on CWGC* website								
(b) No trace of Dorey with initials 'F G' on CWGC website. Could only be SPO (not CPO) F W Dorey.								
(c) Although shown as M J Lutman on Newtown's memorial, he was known as Manny which would explain the error.								
(d) Initials shown incorrectly (?) as W G on Newtown memorial.								
(e) The only Linsell recorded on CWGC website is Bernard John who was Merchant Navy not Royal Navy as shown on Newtown's memorial.								
(f) RAMC medic serving with the 2nd Battalion Duke of Lancaster's Battle Group whose Warrior Armoured Vehicle was the victim of a roadside bomb. 4 lives lost. Commemorated at Swanmore War Memorial but mother now lives in Soberton.								
(g) Pre-Dreadnought battleship exploded at anchor off Sheerness when cordite charges stowed against boiler room bulkhead 'cooked off'; 736 lives lost and only 17 survivors.								
(h) Sunk with all hands following collision with HM Submarine E43 near Terschelling, an island off the Northern Netherlands.								
(i) Killed by lightning strike.								
(j) Frigate of 5th Escort Group torpedoed by U305 South West of Ireland; 83 lost from ship's company of 127.								
(k) Battleship torpedoed by U47 whilst at anchor in Scapa Flow with loss of 833 men from ship's company of 1,234								
(l) General cargo ship sunk by German bombers off Aberdeen; 16 lives lost.								
(m) Battle cruiser sunk during opening engagement with <i>Bismarck</i> and <i>Prinz Eugen</i> ; only 3 survivors rescued from a ship's company of 1,418.								
(n) Cruiser sunk by German dive bombers during the Battle of Crete; 722 men lost from a ship's company of 807.								
(o) Destroyer lost during the First Battle of Narvik during which Captain Warburton-Lee (Captain (D) 2nd Destroyer Flotilla) won a posthumous Victoria Cross.								
(p) Also on Denmead War Memorial								
(q) Not recorded on Soberton or Newtown war memorials but in CWGC maintained graves.								
(r) <i>HMS Vernon</i> (hulk) was the Royal Navy's torpedo school moored in Portsmouth. It later became a shore establishment which is now Gunwharf Quays.								
* Commonwealth War Graves Commission.								

