



The Editor Writes

Although we don't get proper, old fashioned winters these days, it's heartening, nevertheless, to know that we are well into March and Springtime is beckoning.

The disappearance of the really cold weather we used to get seems to suit the germs and bugs that thrive in the mild temperatures and we are suffering more severe colds and coughs. Older folk are more vulnerable, of course, so don't forget about casting clouts and wrapping up well. Oh, yes, and treat yourself to the occasional hot toddy, purely for medicinal purposes, naturally.

(That was a public service announcement on behalf of the Royal British Legion in the interests of maintaining membership figures. *Just joking!*)

On this same general subject, I heard Sarah Kennedy on the wireless waxing most indignantly about patronising treatment of the elderly. Apparently one of her listeners had been asked to provide a certificate of existence to prove she was still in the land of the living!

"Legion's stalwarts are lined up for honours", said the Leicester Mercury's headline. And how nice it is to have the chance to say thanks to Betty, Charles and Tom. (Sorry the picture is not very good; I copied it from the Mercury as I wasn't there on the night with my camera.)

Betty is not just a very efficient Branch Secretary but she is also a most delightful lady, who undertakes many behind the scenes Legion activities. After an amazing fifty-year membership, Charles, who is hampered these days by painfully troublesome legs, still serves on the Committee and regularly attends meetings. Last but not least, Tom is well-known to all readers of *In Touch* for his many Branch activities. They range from handling the purchase and fitting out of the Portakabin to his professionally-produced - and frequently successful - Jack Quain Cup presentations.

Seaton

The signal box at Seaton was the most complicated one that I ever worked in because there were four different block workings. There was what we used to call the staff and ticket, electric token, permissive and absolute. I don't think most people would understand this unless they know a lot about the railways because all those things have probably gone by the board now. I don't think there is anywhere where boxes are worked like this because of electrification.

At Seaton the station master's name was Bradford, the Grade 2 Porter was Jack Marshall, Georgie Gardiner was the Guard and my own brother was a Guard who used to travel with the 'motors' up to Uppingham and from Seaton to Luffenham. There were four crossovers in that signal box and two single lines as well as a double line to Peterborough. The single line went to Luffenham and up to Uppingham. They were double lines when I first went there but for some unknown reason they were done away with.

There were some funny things that happened at this station. There was a comedy side to working life there as well as a serious side. When a train came that had to go up to Rugby or come down from Market Harborough to go to Peterborough, there was a crossing at the bottom of the hill with gates to protect the railway. In the signal box there was a handle that had to be pulled to ring a bell when you wanted the gates opening to let a train through. It was two rings on the up-line and three on the down-line.

There were some real comedy acts over that bell. On one occasion a young woman got off the train for a connection to go up to Rugby and she had to wait quite a while so Jack Marshall asked her into the Porter's room. Well Jack was a "bit of a boyo" and was obviously making the most of the opportunity with the young lady when I had to ring the bell. Later Jack called me everything for ringing the bell causing him to quickly bring to a halt his "portering duties"!



Another episode at this station involved my brother working on the one passenger coach and one engine to Luffenham and Uppingham. Now they weren't supposed to do what they call "loose shunt" with it. When the train came back and wasn't in use it would stand in the up-bay at Seaton. This was a line that ran down by the side of the platform and there were stop blocks where you put the coach when it wasn't in use. This particular day when it came back from Uppingham, my brother the guard decided to unhook it and give it a nudge instead of taking it onto the stop blocks with the engine. We used to call that loose shunting. Jack Marshall was in the coach to put the brake on to stop it hitting the stop blocks. They unhooked the coach and it went into the up-bay but Jack didn't put the brake on properly and the coach hit the stop blocks and between them they damn near knocked the station down!

It made a mess of the coach and with the noise out came the station master, a great big fellow called Bradford, to see what was going on. Jack had just got out of the coach and was standing looking at the damage. Needless to say both my brother and Jack got a right going over. This was the comedy side of working on the railway. Things that shouldn't happen did and they made your day.

Another amusing episode. One of the signalmen was named Smith, we used to call him Smithy. He came from Barrowden and he used to keep a lot of poultry. One day a van came into the yard full of sacks of corn and Smithy decided, as food was scarce just after the War, to nick one of these sacks of corn.

Somebody must have reported it and Smithy saw a railway "tec" coming, so he put the bag of corn in the soft water tank at the bottom of the steps - and he got away with it! It would have been very serious if they had found it, but it made us laugh.

To be continued.



Certificate Presentation Congratulations to three Branch Members whose services have been recognised. Further details are on page 2.

St George's Day The District Commissioner of the Scouts invites Members to attend a parade and service at St Dionysius Church, Market Harborough on Sunday, 17th April. The RBL is the chosen charity for 2005 and will share the collection.

Memorial Wreaths George Fleming will remove the wreaths from the memorial in The Square at the appropriate time.

National Commemoration Day See details on page 3 of how you can apply for tickets for the ceremony in London on Sunday July 10th.

The Jack Quain Trophy Hopefully, the award, which has been awarded to our Branch once again, will be displayed at the Council Offices.

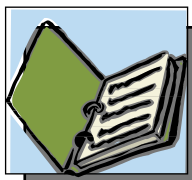
60th Anniversary Members may wish to attend events at Beaumanor Hall on July 19th or at the National Arboretum and it is suggested that transport could be arranged. If you are interested, please contact our Secretary.

Welcome Back! After a spell in hospital followed by convalescence, Vida Edwards is back in form and once again undertaking welfare activities.

Poppy Appeal Bob England announces the latest figure for the current period - £19,071.

Youth Activities Shields and certificates will be presented to the local Air Training Corps Squadron and Army Cadet Force Detachment to officially mark their affiliation to the Branch.

Harborough Carnival It is hoped that the ACF Detachment and the ATC Squadron will join the Branch in manning a float in the Carnival procession.



The Diary

Details of all Social Events are available from Joan McMillin on MH 462143. Joan welcomes your ideas for events, outings, etc.

SOME DATES TO KEEP FREE

- 2 Apr Branch Coffee Morning MH Theatre
- 16 Apr RNA Dance at Conservative Club
- 17 Apr St George's Day Service & Parade, Mkt Harboro'
- 7 May Army v Navy Rugger
- 11 Jun Harborough Carnival
- 17/19 Jun Railways at War, Gt Central Railway, Loughboro'
- 9 Jul Musical Extravaganza, Beaumanor Hall
- 10 Jul Concert & Thanksgiving Service, Beaumanor Hall
- 27 Aug Poppy Race Day at Newmarket
- 5 Nov Branch Coffee Morning
- 19 Nov Remembrance Concert, Baptist Church

The date of the next meeting is April 13th

Branch meetings are held on the Second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm in the downstairs Function Room at the Conservative Club, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough.

The Committee meets in the same room on the Thursday preceding the Branch Meeting at 7.00 pm



The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

Reg. Charity 219279

www.mktharborobl.ukvet.net

In Touch

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Order the signal to be sent, Hardy.

Aye aye, sir.

Hold on, that's not what I dictated to the signal officer. What's the meaning of this?

Sorry, sir.

England expects every person to do his duty, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious persuasion or disability. What gobbledegook is this?

Admiralty policy, sir, we're an equal opportunity employer now. We had the devil's own job getting England passed the censors, lest it be considered racist.

Gadzooks Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco.

Sorry, sir. All naval vessels have been designated smoke-free working environments.

In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle.

The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral, because of Government policy on binge drinking.

Good heavens, Hardy, I suppose we'd better get on with it. Full speed ahead.

I think you'll find that there's a four-knot speed limit in this stretch of water.

Damn it, man. We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crows nest, please.

That won't be possible sir. Health and safety have closed the crows nest, sir, no harness. And they said that rope ladder does not meet regulations. They won't let anyone up there until proper scaffolding is erected.

Then get me the ships carpenter without delay, Hardy.

Politically Correct Britannia Rules the Waves Contributed by Dick Fulford

It is almost 200 years since Lord Nelson's famous naval victory in the Battle of Trafalgar.

To kick-start the anniversary celebrations, an actor dressed as Nelson posed for pictures on the River Thames at Greenwich.

But before he was allowed on board an RNLI Lifeboat he was told to wear a lifejacket over his 19th century admiral's uniform.

How would Nelson have coped with modern health and safety regulations?

He's busy knocking up wheelchair access to the fo'c'sle, Admiral.

Wheelchair access? I've never heard anything so absurd. Health and safety again, sir, We have to provide a barrier-free environment for the differently abled.

Differently abled? I've only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn't rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card.

Actually sir, you did, the Royal Navy is under-represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiently.

Whatever next? Give me full sail. The salt spray beckons. A couple of problems there, too, sir. Health and safety wont let the crew up the rigging without crash helmets. And they don't want anyone breathing in to much salt.

In the afternoon there will be a staged event on Horse Guards Parade. It will transport the audience back in time with a mixture of commemoration, reflection and entertainment. In attendance will be the Queen, members of the Royal Family, the Prime Minister and celebrities.

A limited number of tickets are available for the Horse Guards Parade event and demand is sure to be high. Successful applicants will be notified nearer the date. More details are available by contacting 0800 169 2277.

If you are interested, please apply for an application form as soon as possible to Tom Ashmore on 01858 433108 .

I've never heard such infamy. Break out the cannon and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy.

The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral.

What? this is Mutiny!

It's not that, sir, its just that they're afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There's a couple of lawyers on board watching everyone like hawks.

Then how are we to sink Frenchie and the Spanish?

Actually, sir, we're not.

We're not!

No, sir, Frenchie and the Spanish are our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries policy, we shouldn't even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation.

But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil.

I wouldn't let the ship's diversity co-ordinator hear you saying that, sir, you'll be up on a disciplinary.

You must consider every man an enemy who speaks ill of your king.

Not any more, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kelvar vest. it's the rules.

Don't tell me - health and safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash.

As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu. And now there's a ban on corporal punishment.

What about sodomy?

I believe it's to be encouraged, sir.

In that case - kiss me, Hardy.



A National Commemoration Day will take place in London on Sunday July 10th to mark the 60th Anniversary of the end of WWII. The day begins with a Service of Remembrance in Westminster Abbey followed by a lunch for Veterans in the grounds of Buckingham Palace.

Just a Bit of Fun

A Drama at Bedtime

One summer evening during a violent thunderstorm, a mother was tucking her little son into bed. She was about to turn off the light when he asked with a tremor in his voice, "Mummy, will you sleep with me tonight?" His mother smiled and gave him a reassuring hug, "I can't dear," she said, "I have to sleep in Daddy's room." A long silence was broken at last by his shaky little voice. "The big sissy."

Working on the Railway



The Memories of Sidney Read

After the War

I was away five years and seven months. My children and my wife didn't know me when I came back home; we were strangers to one another. I often wonder nowadays if people understand what that did to us. Do they ever stop to think of these things nowadays – I very much doubt it.

When I came back home I was told that the job that I had left would be there waiting for me, but no such thing.

Anyway I was sent to Ashley and Weston as a porter signalman but I 'created a fuss' and was eventually moved from Ashley and Weston station to Welham junction signalbox. I think I was there about 18 months and I knew most of the men in the siding and the drivers on the coal trains that used to run from Colwick to Willesden. There were also passenger trains up and down. There was the 'motor bus' that used to leave Market Harborough and go up to Seaton and back, just one coach and one engine. There was the 'Continental Express' that used to run from Birmingham to Peterborough and to Rugby. We had to regulate the freight trains with the expresses and passenger trains so that you didn't delay any of them.

After I had been there about 18 months a relief signalman's position on the old Great Northern (GN) joint line, as they called it, became vacant. The Inspector from Northampton, Mr Rowley, who had been a signalman all through the war and got a bowler hat job when

*Told in his own chatty style
and, of course,
liberally peppered with
forthright comments,
Sid continues to look back at
his life on the railway.*



the war finished, came to see me, and said, "Now look Sid we know you haven't been treated very fairly. There's a relief signalman's position on the GN line would you like to take it." I said "Yes, I'm quite prepared to do it". But this again annoyed a lot of men who didn't think I should have the position.

Anyway, I now had to learn all the boxes from Welham Junction to Melton Mowbray and I worked in most of those signal boxes, Hallaton, East Norton, Tilton, Marefield, John 'o Gaunt, Great Dalby. I had to know all the jobs, change all the signal lamps, keep the platforms clean wherever I went.

The job on the GN line was only a temporary position although I wasn't told when I took it, and this put me back again. Eventually, another relief signalman's position came up on the Western line between Rugby and Peterborough. I did get this position and I had to learn all the signal boxes from Welford right down to King's Cliffe including Welham Junction, Ashley and Weston, Rockingham, Seaton, Uppingham, Luffenham, Morcott and Wakeley.

Eventually another position came up on the Midland Railway so not only did I learn all the signal boxes on the Western side I now had to learn all the signal boxes in the Harborough yard, Nos. 1, 2 and 3, Little Bowden Junction, Little Bowden Western, Theddingworth, Lamport etc. etc. I knew all the signal boxes from Market Harborough down to Wigston and from Wigston to Hinckley and then I learned all the boxes from Melton right round to Luffenham. Those were the jobs that I did for the railway company.

For Services Rendered

Although they do not seek recognition, it is right that we should say an official, though none-the-less heartfelt, "Thank you" to Members for their voluntary efforts. The fact that the Market Harborough Branch is so successful is due largely to the hard work, often behind-the-scenes, undertaken by dedicated Members.

The opportunity to express such gratitude was taken at the March meeting when three Members were presented with framed certificates by the President, Peter Wilson.



*Charles, Tom and Betty proudly display their Certificates.
(Photograph by Andrew Carpenter. Reproduced from the Leicester Mercury)*

Since 1947, Charles Freer has been an enthusiastic member of the RBL and over the years has given invaluable service to many aspects of Branch activities, but primarily the Poppy Appeal. Charles received a certificate in recognition of his half-century membership.

Certificates of Appreciation for "many and varied valuable services rendered to the great benefit of the Royal British Legion and the Market Harborough Branch" were presented to our long-serving Secretary, Betty Ramsay, and indefatigable Vice President, Tom Ashmore.