



The Editor Writes

The fabulous Poppy Appeal total as announced by Bob England is a wonderful achievement and all concerned are to be congratulated. That alone should be reason for you to attend the Branch Annual Dinner so, if you haven't already, contact Joan Mc-Millin as soon as possible and join in the celebration!

Another great achievement to report is the winning, yet again, of the Jack Quain Trophy. This reflects the continued recognition by the judges of the efficiency and work of the Market Harborough Branch. As ever, we must thank Tom Ashmore for the excellent presentation document he produced.

I am sure most Members will recall reading the fascinating account of his wartime experiences by Sid Read. Recorded as he sat in his beloved summer house, Sid proved to be a gripping storyteller with an amazing memory.

On one of my regular *In Touch* delivery visits to Station Cottages, Hallaton, I asked Sid if he would consider recording his reminiscences of working on the railway. Much to my delight, he agreed and a first installment, kindly transcribed by his daughter Pauline, appears in this edition. As always, his often forthright opinions are strongly expressed; for that, Sid, many thanks.

Still on the subject of railways, I was fortunate to see at the Theatre Royal, Northampton, a performance of the National Theatre production of 'The Permanent Way'. It dealt scathingly with the rail privatisation fiasco and the accidents at Paddington, Hatfield and Potters Bar. It was brilliantly done and I wish I could have taken Sid - he would have loved it!

Finally, I look forward to seeing you at the Annual Branch Dinner on March 18th, I hope you will be able to make it.

A Most Welcome Guest Speaker

We were honoured when Mr Anthony Hignett came along to the February meeting. His father, Lieut.Col Derrick Hignett, was a past President of the Branch, and a very well-known, and much-loved, local personality. Mr Hignett gave an interesting talk about the ill-conceived World War 2 raid on Dieppe, in which his father was involved as leader of the elite commandos known as Phantom Force. We are indebted to Mr Hignett, who travelled from Derbyshire for the evening.

It Happened in February

- 1st 1901 Clark Gable born
- 2nd 1852 First public gents WC opened in London
- 1914 First Cub Scout pack formed in Sussex
- 3rd 1877 "Chopsticks" music first registered
- 1969 Boris Karloff died
- 4th 1987 Liberace died
- 5th 1958 Parking meters introduced in London
- 1989 Sky TV satellite launched
- 6th 1917 British women over 30 get the vote
- 1920 Zsa Zsa Gabor born
- 1958 Busby Babes killed in Munich air disaster
- 10th 1889 Use of revised bible authorised by C of E
- 11th 1976 John Curry first figure skating British Gold
- 12th 1870 Marie Lloyd born
- 13th 1941 Penicillin first used on human at Oxford
- 14th 1852 Great Ormond Street hospital opened
- 15th 1971 Britain changed to decimal coinage
- 17th 1909 Apache warrior chief Geronimo died aged 80
- 19th 1906 Corn Flakes went on sale in United States
- 20th 1940 Jimmy Greaves born
- 21st 1991 Margot Fonteyn died aged 73
- 22nd 1870 Woolworth's first 5 & 10 Cent store in USA
- 25th 1989 Frank Bruno defeated by Mike Tyson
- 26th 1935 Radar demonstrated for first time at Daventry
- 1936 Volkswagen (People's Car) launched
- 27th 1932 Elizabeth Taylor born
- 1991 Golf War ended

County Review

Items of Interest from the Leicestershire & Rutland RBL County Circular

Veterans' Badges If you have applied and are still waiting for your badge, please be patient for a bit longer. The County has had nearly two hundred applications, but the supply has been woefully poor with only thirty received last month. Assurances have been given that all orders will be met as soon as possible.

Women at War Memorial There will be an unveiling ceremony of the memorial plaque to commemorate the wartime role of women in Whitehall on July 9th. Notification came from Baroness Boothroyd, who is acting on behalf of the RBL Women's Section.

LCFC Poppy Collection The total sum raised at the Leicester City match at the Walkers Stadium last November was £2843.96. This amount is shared by the fourteen participating branches, including Market Harborough, and each received £203.14.

Rugger at Twickers There will be a feast of rugby football on May 7th at Twickenham with a number of events beginning at 10am and culminating in the Army v. Navy match for the Babcock Trophy, which kicks off at 3pm. Tickets cost £18 for adults and £7 for juniors and the booking hotline number is 01252 334415.

'We'll Meet Again'

Have you lost touch with old friends and service colleagues? Would you like to fill gaps in your family history? To tie in with 60th anniversary of VE Day, the BBC is looking for people who are interested in tracing wartime friends, comrades and relations. If you would like to be involved, please get in touch in the following way as soon as possible, leaving your name and contact number with a brief outline of your story. Telephone: 08705 12 22 30 (national call rate) Email: wma@bbc.co.uk



Poppy Appeal With four months still to go in the current appeal year, Bob England reports that the Harborough and District total had passed last year's final figure of £18,023, and to date stood at £18,874. He thanks everyone who helped in any way to achieve this magnificent result.

Renie Fulford A cheque for £535 was donated to the Poppy Appeal by way of donations in lieu of flowers in memory of Renie. Dick writes: This was a splendid response from some 40 or so of Renie's family, friends and organisations with which she was involved and I thank each one of you on behalf of the Fulford family.

Coffee Morning Your donations of raffle and tombola prizes and items for the bric-a-brac stall will be most welcome. Those who are able are requested to bring their contributions to the Branch meeting on March 9th. Items will be collected if required from members living in rural areas when the March *In Touch* delivery is made.

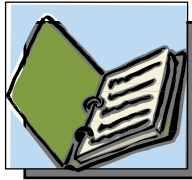
Birthday Celebration One of life's notable milestones has been reached by our esteemed Secretary, who thoughtfully chose to mark the occasion by providing a tasty buffet, prepared by Joan and Mary, at the February meeting. Thank you, Betty, for a kind and generous gesture, which was greatly appreciated. Many, many happy returns - and here's to the next time!

Royal Navy Association If the Navy is putting on a show you can be sure of a good time. So don't miss the Association's coffee morning at the Harborough Theatre on 16 March and a dance at the Conservative Club on 16 April. Details from Mike Middleton on MH 445827.

Youth Affiliation A programme of activities in conjunction with the ATC and ACF is under discussion and Brian Marshall will be reporting next month.

Membership Directory Please note the following change of address:

Ryan Mr K (Keith) 35 Parkside, Wilnecote,
Tamworth B77 2JU



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

- 18 Mar Branch Anniversary Dinner at MH Golf Club
- 19 Mar Royal Navy Assn Coffee Morning MH Theatre
- 2 Apr Branch Coffee Morning MH Theatre
- 16 Apr RNA Dance at Conservative Club
- 7 May Army v Navy Rugger (Details see page 9)
- 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 March 9th

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

Issue 77

February 2005

In Touch on-line

www.in-touch.ukvet.net

Editor

George Seward : 01858 433873

18 Charles Street,

Market Harborough, LE16 9AB

e-mail : g.seward@btinternet.com

Branch Contact Numbers

Welfare

Vida Edwards : 0116 279 3729

Hon. Secretary

Betty Ramsay : 01858 434923





As I sit here alone in my summerhouse I think of so many things. I have been asked to record my railway memories so I will talk, for as long as I can, about my first experiences of life on the railway and the places that I lived.

Where it all began

As a boy in the 1920s and '30s I lived in a house by the side of the railway at Welham sidings and I can remember hearing the trains going by through the day and night. We had shutters at the windows that my mother used to put up at night. There were two indicators in the house, because it was a gatehouse by the side of the railway line.

At the bottom of the garden there was a great big lake. The reason we were there was because it was the only place my father could get a job. He was offered a job working on the railway at the Wigston shops on the provision that he took the gatehouse and my mother had to look after the gates. She was employed 24 hours a day, two hours off a week for shopping. She was paid 7/6d a week and the rent was half a crown a week. I often think nowadays when I hear of people getting thousands of pounds compensation for stress. My mother could have told them a lot about stress. Five children living beside a railway line with a lake at the bottom of the garden!

It was a railway very efficiently run in those days. A boss was a boss. If you saw a man with a bowler hat on you knew he was in charge and you had to show him respect and do as you were told.

Off to Work - Market Harborough

When I left school at fourteen in 1933 I started work in Market Harborough No.3 signal box. In those days when you went to a station and wanted to go anywhere you knew

what time the train was leaving the station and what time you would get to your destination. There is no such thing today. Because the government that nationalised the railway pulverised it at the same time and I can see it going down and down and down.

As I said, my first experience of working on the railway was in Market Harborough No.3 signal box and the signalman that I worked with was Mr Blakeman. There were three men in the signal box; Alf Turby, Sid Blakeman and Billy Winters. We used to have a census on the trains every three months and in an eight hour shift we used to average 128 trains by the signal box one way or another.

I knew most of the men in the Harborough yard, the plate-layers – Harry Atkins, Billy Stokes, Jack Almay and many others. Charlie Crane was the man who used to grease the points. They were *real* men most of them and you had respect for these people.

There were two more signal boxes in the Harborough yard, Harborough No.2, I knew all the signal men that worked there, and the same with Harborough No.1.

You could not believe how many trains went by when I started as a Bell-boy, called a Control Reporter. When I got my first uniform there were that many buttons on it my nickname became Buttons. I was only four feet tall and couldn't reach the telephones when I first started so they used to put a heap of block books for me to stand on. There were 9 telephones in the signal box, 55 levers, 3 block bells Western and two block bells Midland, and indicators. The noise at times was horrendous. After I had done an eight hour shift in that signal box I didn't want to talk to anyone.

In those days the railways carried nearly everything. There were parcel trains, horse box trains, cattle trains, everything. The railways were a monopoly in those days and that is why they were so efficient.

Sometimes I just can't believe what is happening with the railways today. The other thing I cannot believe is the way they ripped all the railways out. It seems it's all about money. Efficiency has gone and there's no such thing as a boss anywhere.

In the days when I used to work in the Harborough yard, if you went to a station anywhere in the country you couldn't get on the platform unless you bought a ticket or a platform ticket. Everybody on the station knew what was going on. You couldn't leave a bike or anything at all on the station unless you paid. Nowadays you can walk onto a platform anywhere and get on the train without a ticket. It's unbelievable.

I can remember Market Harborough station when the stationmaster was Mr Gee. When I finished working in the signal box I went onto the platform at Market Harborough as a Grade 2 Porter. You had to be very careful what you did and what you said to the general public. You had to know exactly what you were doing. There was a platform foreman, a parcel porter foreman and many others. The system was very efficient. The chief clerk in the booking office was Mr Wainwright. Mr Marlow was in the Midland Goods, all gentlemen who had your respect and you knew they were in charge.

A Position at Hallaton

When I finished as a Grade 2 porter I moved to a little station at Hallaton where my brother worked as a porter signalman. He left the job at Hallaton and went to Peterborough as a Class C shunter. I took his position at Hallaton. The stationmaster there was a very large man called Mr Gittins. I don't think I should say very much about him but he was a bit full of himself. The other gentleman that was there as a porter signalman was 'Nutty' Smith. A two shift system operated and we used to have to keep the platform clean and tidy as well as look after the general public. We used to sell the tickets and also open the signal box when necessary because that is what a porter signalman's duties were.

I stayed at Hallaton until I was 21. Whilst I was there I had to register as a militia boy and the time came when I was called up and I had to leave my home and my wife and little boy to go in the army.

To be continued.

In Confidence

Anon

As the Official Secrets Act still applies after all these years, please forgive me for remaining anonymous.

I was reading a book the other day about the history of the Commandos called *By Sea and Land* by Robin Neillands, and one of the incidents mentioned revived memories of events in the Yeman in 1967. Neillands was in 45 Com-mando when it was decided by Whitehall to withdraw from the Yeman after some hundred-odd years occupation, mainly as a coaling station for the Royal Navy at the port of Aden. He describes how they gradually withdrew south, collecting their military equipment and material for shipping back to the UK, and their main problem was pilfering and theft by local tribesmen. However, being Commandos, they managed to ship most of their gear without too much trouble and by November 1967 had proceeded to the UK via the Red Sea and Suez Canal.

Alas, not so for the civilian element! The War Office Works Directorate was responsible for the housing and domestic equipment of the troops as well as the Civil Servants and their families, and this, too, had to be shipped

home. In retrospect it would have been more sensible to have moved the civilians first and then the Commandos, but who knows how the minds of planners work. To load and ship considerable quantities of stores without military protection was a nightmare and more and more of the supplies fell into the hands of thieves and pilferers.

The problem was how to explain the discrepancies and shortages when the ship arrived home. Auditors are not fussy who they blame for shortages, so who would be held responsible? Surely heads would roll with such huge discrepancies. There was nothing to be done, however, but to load the ships and wrack our brains to think up some plausible excuses before the inevitable enquiry.

In the event, the Gods looked kindly upon us! The Six Day War between Egypt and Israel and Colonel Nasser, forced onto the back foot, took the drastic step of blocking the Suez Canal. He did this by sinking the ships which happened to be sailing on the Canal and, wonder of wonders, ours was one of those sunk. The Canal did not reopen until June 1975, by which time all our problems had been forgotten and, much to our relief and peace of mind, all stores had been written off.

It just goes to illustrate the power of prayer!

The County Conference

Betty Ramsay Reports

I joined the thirty delegates and thirty-eight guests who attended the Conference held at Wigston on 29 January 2005. Market Harborough was also represented by Mark Hudson and George Fleming. The Branch can be proud of its attendance record at County Executive Committee meetings last year, with Mark and George attending all twelve and Brian Marshall missing only four because of ill health.

The County Chairman reported that many branches were struggling to exist. Seventy-three percent of members were in clubs and he wondered how many branches were surviving because of Associate Members. He urged branches to communicate with each other and reminded them that George Fleming is the County Recruiting Officer.

The following are items of interest arising from the Conference:

- Events would be organised in Leicester on 14th August to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of VE/VJ Day.
- The 2004 Festival of Remembrance was successful and profitable.
- The County Poppy Appeal total stands at £310,985, which is up on the same time the previous year.
- Mr Robert Constable-Maxwell of Husband's Bosworth and I volunteered to serve on the County Conference Committee.

And last, but most certainly not least, I was proud to accept the Jack Quain Cup on behalf of the Branch.

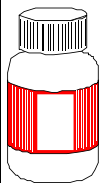
Just a Bit of Fun

Two American tourists were driving through Wales and, at Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwyl-lantysiliogogogh, they stopped for lunch.

"Before we order," one tourist said to the waitress, "we would like you to settle a little argument for us. Would you please pronounce - very, very slowly - just where we are?"

The girl leaned forward and said, "Burrr-gurrr Kiiing".

A Pill for Every Ill



A row of bottles on my shelf
Caused me to analyse myself.
One yellow pill I have to pop
Goes to my heart so it won't stop.
A little white one that I take
Goes to my hands so they won't shake.
The blue ones that I use a lot
Tell me I'm happy when I'm not.
The purple pill goes to my brain
And tells me that I have no pain.
The capsules tell me not to wheeze
Or cough or choke or even sneeze.



The red ones, smallest of them all
Go to my blood so I won't fall.
The orange ones, very big and bright
Prevent my leg cramps in the night.
Such an array of brilliant pills
Helping to cure all kinds of ills.
But what I'd really like to know.....
Is what tells each one where to go!



There's always a lot to be thankful for, if you take time
to look for it. For example I am sitting here
thinking how nice it is that wrinkles don't hurt.