

# In Touch

The monthly newsletter founded in 1996

With thanks to Prime Life Ltd, parent company of Peaker Park Care Village Market Harborough, for printing this issue.

Issue 180  
September 2013



## The Royal British Legion

Registered Charity No. 219279

Shoulder to Shoulder with all who Serve

### Market Harborough Branch

Founded in 1923



years of caring in the local community



His historic words are on Page 6

### Next Monthly Branch Meeting

7.30 pm Wednesday 9 October  
Committee 3 October

Function Room, Conservative Club,  
Fairfield Rd. Market Harborough

## Branch News

### REMINDER

The Subscription for the coming year is £16 and due on 1st October. If you do not pay by Direct Debit please do so at next meeting or to address on page 8.

We regret to report the death of two members; Eric Gilbert and John Walker.

During his National Service in the Army, Eric served in Germany and later in Korea, of whose Veterans' Association he became a member. He died on 18<sup>th</sup> August after suffering from cancer for several years.

Five Branch members attended his funeral on 3<sup>rd</sup> September.

John served for three years in the Coldstream Guards with spells of Royal protection and ceremonial duties. Well known in the Branch, John attended meetings and activities quite regularly. He died suddenly after a recent diagnosis of Motor Neurone Disease on 1<sup>st</sup> September. The Standard was carried at his funeral on 10<sup>th</sup> September by his life-long friend, John Cox. and Legion colleagues were amongst the large number of his family and friends..

We extend our condolences to the widows and families of Eric and John.

**AGM & Nominations for Office and committee.** All positions must be filled if the branch is to continue. Don't be shy; accept being nominated or offer yourself. Return the form to the Secretary by 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

### Peaker Park

The invitation to attend another social event was accepted by about a dozen members who enjoyed being part of the residents' imaginative and very mouth-watering 'Picnic in the Garden'.



### September Lunch

It was good to see the best turn out for several months, with twenty-one members and our 'mascot', Christopher, enjoying the fare and atmosphere of the Angel Hotel.

### Archives

Much of the history of the branch has been lost over the years but to safeguard what exists, a project is on hand to produce computerised versions of documents and photographs. Claire

Continued on Page 7

### Cover Photo

The local Territorial Army unit, 'E' Company of the 1st 5th Battalion, Leicestershire Regiment, assemble on The Square on 6th August 1914 prior to marching to Oadby for an overnight stop and thence to Loughborough.

## Enlistment by Hotspur

In March 1939 I reached my 18th birthday. War seemed inevitable, and as I had done some time with the local Cadets, I decided to try to join the city T. A. Regiment, which was affiliated to the glamorous Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, kilts and all!

So I reported to the local recruiting office, and after a few questions and answers with the Sergeant I was given a questionnaire to complete. This form was a good foolscap in size, and seemed to reflect in some way the size of my problem of

getting into this T. A. Regiment. But I was able eventually to complete all my answers - except one.

"Have you any property in Scotland?"

The truthful answer would be, "No", of course. I had no property anywhere, let alone in the Highlands. Would this prejudice my chances? Should I put down a false answer? Was I destined to be a Bevin Boy? The prospect of marching through the city centre to the railway station, en route to T.A. camp, with fixed bayonets and wearing the kilt, seemed to be fading.

After a sleepless night I decided I would offer my honesty against my lack of property and, armed with my application form reported to the CSM at the Drill Hall the following night.

The CSM (he was a tram driver during the day) carefully scrutinised my application form, put it down on the table,

looked straight at me for a second or two and asked, "Have you any property in Scotland, boy?". "No Sir", I replied. He looked hard at me again. "Have you got another pair of trousers?". "I have, Sir", I answered, completely perplexed. "Right boy", the CSM pronounced.

"You take those trousers, tomorrow morning, for cleaning at Pullars of Perth in Castle Street. Now boy, put yes to question 15". I was in!!

2nd Bn. Liverpool Scottish, Queens Own Cameron Highlanders. No. 2930957.

[This was one of the many contributions to *InTouch* by Bernard Halsall who tended to use the pseudonym 'Hotspur'. He was Editor from November 1998 to November 1



## The Lancastria

by John Black

On the 31<sup>st</sup> June 1922 the Cunard Liner Tyrrenhia made her maiden voyage from Glasgow to Canada. Her name was not liked, and after two years she went for a refit and changed her name to Lancastria.



The Lancastria in her heyday

At the outbreak of war, Lancastria was soon commandeered to become a troop ship, and for the first few months transported cargo in the North Atlantic.

When the Norwegian campaign began Lancastria was needed to evacuate troops from Harstaad. On her way back to England she was spotted by high flying German aircraft and although they attacked their bombs missed and she arrived safely home.

HMT Lancastria was later required to take part in Operation Aerial, and was given orders to sail for Western France, anchoring about 10 miles off St Nazaire at about 06.00 hrs Monday 17<sup>th</sup> June 1940. Very quickly exhausted troops and some civilians began to come on board. Some found spaces in the huge holds and were quickly asleep. Throughout the morning more and more troops arrived and

started to fill the ship up. There were units from the 7<sup>th</sup> Army and RAF plus civilians, men, women and children

At approx 13.00 hrs a red alert was sounded and a dive bomber was seen attacking another

ship in the distance. Those on the Lancastria felt they would return. By this time the ship had taken on board some 6000 people and more were still coming. At around 15.00 hrs the Captain, Captain Sharp, decided that was enough but would await for an escort before sailing.

Later, at about 15.50, the bombers returned. Bombs soon straddled the ship one exploding very close to the port side rupturing her nearly full fuel tanks and thick black oil seeped into the sea. More bombs hit the ship, one penetrating the holds crammed with troops. Of those RAF personnel from 73 and 98 Squadron, very few survived, and those who were able took to the water to fly and swim through the oil, which in places was on fire.

Some lifeboats were got away, but many of the davits could not be operated. Those who could not swim took to the water with whatever could

keep them afloat. Those still on board were on the up turned hull and watched as the aircraft returned to strafe those on the hull and in the water. They sang Roll out the Barrel and There'll always be an England. By 16.10 hrs, just 20 minutes after the attack, Lancastria was gone along with thousands of men, women and children. An estimate of between 7,000 and 9,000 souls were on board, Only 2,447 survived to arrive home.

The Lancastria was sunk by aircraft from Kampfgeschwader 30, the unit was know as the Umbrella Geshwader because of its crest

The disaster was immediately hushed up, as Winston Churchill felt it would be detrimental to the morale of the British People. It was against orders for anyone to talk about it.

rescued by some friendly French people, he was covered in thick stinking oil and wounded, but thankfully got back to England to take part in other operations.

After the war he took a job with the



Southern Electricity Board in Oxford, and was Conservative city councillor from 1960 to 1983. He became Lord Mayor of Oxford from 1960 to 1981. Gordon died

in 2002, and as a tribute to him a street on a new housing development



One of those who did survive was my Father in Law, Gordon Woodward, serving with the Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry, he had managed to swim through oil laden water and was

has been named after him.

*This account has been extracted from various sources, including those of the BBC and survivors accounts.*

## Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel Le Ferne

A striking memorial to those who flew and those who gave their lives in the Battle of Britain stands on the White Cliffs between Dover and Folkestone at Capel le Ferne. It is an ideal location and one which was all too familiar to both the RAF and the Luftwaffe during that desperate summer of 1940.

The Memorial consists of a pilot in a thoughtful mood, gazing out across the Channel, thinking of his friends long overdue on their return, and of his next sortie. He is seated on a sandstone plinth on which are carved all the crests of the squadrons which participated in the Battle.



The stone figure is located at the centre of three propellers, each 38 metres long, cut into the chalk cliff.

## Miscellany

### Chamberlain's Broadcast 3rd September 1939

'I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room at 10 Downing Street.

This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final note stating that, unless we hear from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.'



A wall decoration in the Bull's Head, Clipston.  
**Which scoundrel has stolen the cork from my lunch?** W C Fields

Continued from Page 2

Watling is currently dealing with old Minute Books and other papers.

### August Issue

We apologise for the lateness with the production and distribution which was due to holidays.

### After Meeting Event

Thanks are due to members of Market Harborough Railways Association for the illustrated talk based on their interest in this means of transport. For ex-railway workers present, no doubt it will have stirred many memories.

## RBL News

from [www.britishlegion.org.uk](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk)

The Legion hosted a reception for London MPs in Parliament on Wednesday 4 September. The event was sponsored by The Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, who is the local MP of the Legion's London HQ. The event gave London MPs the chance to meet with their local Legion Area team to discuss any constituency related welfare issues, whilst the Legion's Public Affairs and Public Policy team was on hand to raise awareness about the Legion's broader work across the UK.

At 8am on 5<sup>th</sup> September 200 cyclists set off from Greenwich Park on the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Pedal to Paris fund-raising event. They arrived at the Arc de triumph on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> for a memorial service

## LUNCH AT THE ANGEL



for good food and good company

**1 OCTOBER**

**MEET IN THE  
BAR AT NOON**

### Menu

Lion of British pork  
with stuffing, Yorkshire pudding, roast  
potatoes and gravy

Oven baked white fish  
resting on mashed potatoes with a  
parsley sauce (gf)

Braised faggots  
in a rich root vegetable gravy  
presented on mashed potatoes

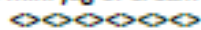
Both served with seasonal vegetables



Jam roly poly  
with creamy custard (v)

Rich Belgian chocolate praline tort  
with vanilla ice-cream

Fresh fruit Salad  
With a mini jug of cream (v) (gf)



Coffee and mints

(V)= Vegetarian (GF)= Gluten free

£8.50 Pay on the day

To book, ring Les Moore (01858 463112) before **24 Sept.** To cancel a booking you must phone The Angel (01858 462702) before 10 am on the day or you will be charged.

## What's Going On?

### Forthcoming Events

- 14 Sep RAFA Coffee Morning @  
Harboro' Theatre
- 15 Sep Battle of Britain Service  
Little Bowden Church  
@10.45 am
- 2 Oct Last date for AGM  
nominations
- 5 Oct Poppy Appeal Coffee Morning  
Harborough Theatre
- 9 Oct Branch meeting and AGM
- 26 Oct Poppy Appeal launch
- 2 Nov Festival of Remembrance  
de Montfort Hall
- 9 Nov Swing Night -Tickets at AGM
- 9 Nov Sunset Ceremony
- 10 Nov Remembrance Sunday
- 11 Nov Armistice Day Ceremonies
- 16 Nov Annual Band Concert

#### Welfare

If you are aware of any one who qualifies for, and may benefit from The Royal British Legion welfare services please contact

**Betty Ramsay**  
01858 434923

#### ***In Touch*** Next Month News & Miscellany

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#### Branch Website

[www.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/market-harborough](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/market-harborough)

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The newsletter is online at [www.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/market-harborough](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/market-harborough)



## Delville Wood 1916

### The Weeping Cross

In Pietermaritzburg there is a simple wooden cross which "weeps" every year in July, when it oozes a reddish-brown resin. For more than 65 years this inexplicable phenomenon, which borders on the supernatural, has regularly occurred for a week or two around the 14th July, the anniversary of the Delville Wood Battle. A legend has grown to the effect that when the last survivor of the battle fades away, as old soldiers are reputed to do, the cross will cease its mysterious weeping. This wooden cross is made from salvaged timber taken from the ravaged trees of Delville Wood and it was originally

erected shortly after World War I in the Natal Carbineers Garden, next to the City Hall in Pietermaritzburg.

The vertical beam is inscribed "JULY 1916" and the crossbar is inscribed "2nd SAI" which honours the Second Battalion of the South African Infantry Brigade. This Brigade, in carrying out its orders to hold the

front line at all costs, decimated in 6 days of heroic fighting under hellish conditions.

In 1958 the cross was moved to its present site in the MOTH Circular Garden of Remembrance and since then the "weeping" has become particularly noticeable from the knots at either end of the crossbar and the mystery has often

been reported in the press. This "miracle cross" as it has been dubbed, has been the subject of research and found to be constructed of timber from *Pinus Sylvester*, a pine commonly found in Europe and the annual exudation is normal pine resin with a trace of linseed oil, the latter being accounted for by the application of the oil as a preservative when

the cross was moved. The mystery deepens when it is considered that the existing trees in France ooze resin during the heat and moisture in summer, whereas the Pietermaritzburg cross only "weeps" in winter.

*This article was found on the website of The Memorable Order of Tin Hats, (<http://www.moth.org.za/>) a South African ex-service organisation*



## Peaker Park Connections

by Peter Van Herrewege,  
Chairman, Prime Life Ltd.

You are familiar with Peaker Park, but you might be interested in a little more knowledge behind the name; it is that of my wife's family, famously her Grandfather, Bert Peaker who was the huntsman of the Fernie for many years, spanning the war, but he also had two sons, both of whom were involved with the RAF, John and Gordon.

John served as a navigator on Lancaster bombers in Bomber Command and completed successfully over 30 missions.

Following his return he became mushroom grower, living out most of his life with his family on the south coast and later on the borders of Lincolnshire where he passed away recently.

Gordon was initially posted by the RAF to South Wales to train as a flight mechanic, following which he was sent to Kenya, joining the crew of a Sunderland flying boat, and following an accident, the plane flew through cloud into Mount

Kilimanjaro. His remains were buried with the rest of the crew at the foot of the mountain.

60 years later, or there about, coinciding with the construction of Peaker Park, my wife discovered



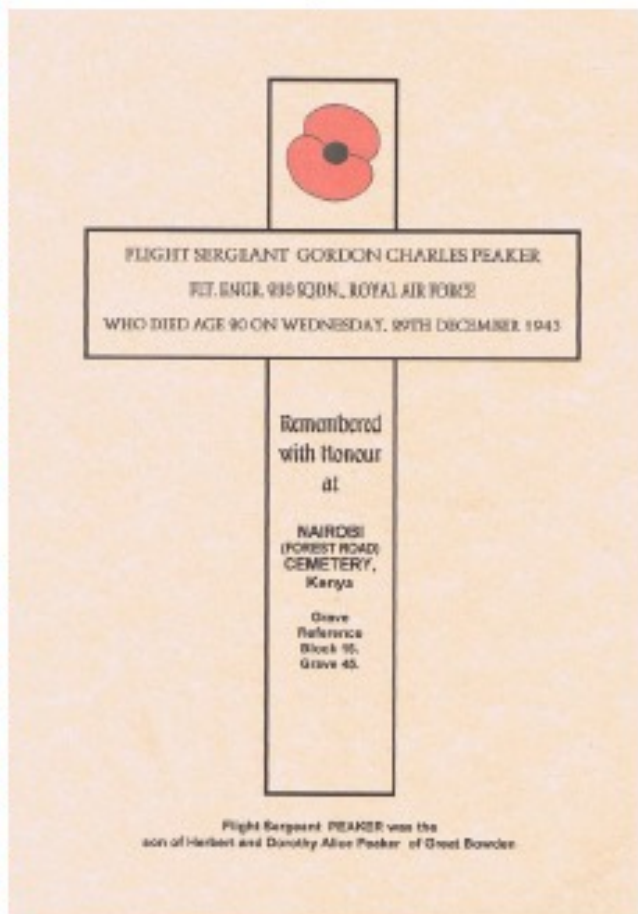
amongst her late mother's papers, the letters home from her 2 brothers; John's of the more positive of his experiences in Bomber Command, and his safe return home, and Gordon's of his initial frustration of being less involved during his training in Wales, but then the excitement of his posting to Kenya, and finally, of course, the original letter from his commanding officer advising of the accident and his subsequent death and the resulting burial.

*Further information about Gordon Peaker by the Editor*

Data on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website shows that Gordon is now buried in the Forest Road cemetery in Nairobi which means that, as was the usual practice when CWGC cemeteries were established, he will have been re-interred from his original grave at Kilimanjaro. Like all their cemeteries this one is beautifully set out and maintained as the CWGC photograph opposite shows. There is no picture of the actual grave but its location is given in Gordon's individual entry on the site.

Having lived at Great Bowden, Gordon's name appears, as Gordon Charles Peaker, on one of the marble panels pillars in the village Parish Church and as C G Peaker on one of the pillars of the gates to the Memorial Gardens on The Square in Market Harborough. Like all those commemorated there, the same name is on one of the crosses erected

each November as part of the Garden of Remembrance. The WWII volume of the Book of Remembrance, produced by Branch Members as a Millennium project, has a page for Flight Sergeant Gordon Charles Peaker (seen here) and the facing page about Nairobi cemetery.



*It is fitting that his Memorial Garden cross, with all the others, is to be stored for the Branch at Peaker Park.*

## In Touch all at Sea

**On the Sea** - In 2001 ex-SAS-man Peter Bray was paddling solo across the Atlantic in a Kayak. Wind and sea conditions were far worse than expected. Confined for days to a coffin-like cabin in Force 10 storms and 8 metre high waves he said felt like "a toad in a tumble drier". Despite being driven far north of his intended course, after 73 days he reached Ireland on 5th September. [Aug & Sept 2001]

**Under the Sea** - Mark Hudson gave an account of the rigorous training he had in the late 80s as a *Fore Ender* (Torpedo compartment) and *Grumpy Corner* (Control Room) crew member and life on board for up to three or four months at a time. [January 2001].

**Off the Coast** - In 1941 Bill Cotton was serving on H.M.S. Hawkins and had a few days to wait at Freetown for a troop convoy to be escorted round the Cape. On a 900 mile sweep to get a bit of breeze, a lookout sighted a small boat in which were several men who had been torpedoed 42 days before. They were on their last legs and one or two of them died before we reached Freetown. [July 2000]

**On the Beach** - Not many people can say that their Christmas day was spent jet skiing and camel rides on white sandy beaches, followed by a barbecue and many cocktails., but for Rachel Pacey, Operator Mechanic on HMS Southampton, this was 2001 at Mombassa. [**In Touch** Dec. 2003.]

## Some Famous WWI ex-servicemen

CLEMENT ATLEE served in Gallipoli, (where he was badly wounded);  
ANTHONY EDEN was an infantry officer on the Somme;  
HAROLD MACMILLAN was an officer in France and Belgium;  
HERMAN GOERING was a fighter pilot;  
ADOLF HITLER, was wounded on the Somme and gassed near Ypres;  
J. R. R. TOLKIEN was a Signals Officer on the Somme;

A. A. MILNE, was commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment;  
ERNEST HEMINGWAY was an officer cadet in the Bavarian Infantry;  
MAURICE CHEVALIER was in the French Army, spent two years as a P.O.W. where he learned English from a British prisoner;  
BASIL RATHBONE was awarded the Military Cross while serving as an Intelligence Officer .

*With thanks to John Duffie of Epping Branch from whose Newsletter this information has been extracted. Editor*