

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION WOMEN'S SECTION

In July 1921 when The Royal British Legion was formed, servicewomen were presumably decreed not eligible for membership, so on the same day, the Women's Section came into being, since when its members have worked tirelessly to help improve the lives of ex-servicemen and women, the widows, children and dependants of ex-service personnel. Over the years there have been many schemes, some of which still continue, while some have evolved into new schemes, but always ensuring that the Women's Section is able to meet the needs of those requiring their assistance.

The first annual conference was held in 1923, and the central committee established, and the following year HRH the Duchess of York (later HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother) became President. By 1937, the charitable efforts of the Women's Section were bearing fruit, and 2,000 children were given holidays in the country.

The next year saw the Widows' Allowance Scheme start. During the war, work continued, landmarks being the presentation of a mobile canteen to London County Council; 47,949 articles of clothing distributed to bombed ex-service families; part time work carried out including caring for children, staffing hospitals, 'digging for victory', and sending parcels to isolated service families.

The Women's Section opened their first rest home in 1944, followed by a children's home in 1946. In 1956 members undertook visiting war widows pensioners at the request of the Ministry of Pensions, and in 1962 branches began to form youth sections for girls under 16 as a route towards full membership. Schemes to provide flatlets and bungalows were established in the late 1960s, which included the refurbishment of some older purpose built properties.

In 1971, the year of the Queen's golden jubilee, The Royal British Legion was granted the Royal title, as was the Women's Section, and in 1972 their crown badge received the approval of the Garter Principal King of Arms.

Various fundraising schemes continue; a scheme was extended in 1984 to provide assistance to all needy ex-servicewomen; the Children's Welfare Scheme provides allowances and equipment for needy children of service and ex-service families, young and mature students can benefit from an award for educational sponsorship, and rest and convalescence breaks are provided for those in need. Branch members work closely in their own communities, seeking out and caring for both elderly and younger ex-service people, many of whom are not members of the organisation, and members often represent the Women's Section on local community committees. During the month from 14th October to 14th November each year, all proceeds raised by branches organising events to which the public has been invited must be donated to the Poppy Appeal.

Two books have been published tracing the history of the Women's Section: "With Grateful Thanks" by Muriel Sandiforth MBE in 1980, and "The Story of The Royal British Legion Women's Section" by Betty Underhill OBE in 2000.

*Information extracted from "Focus on Facts 1921-2005" by
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