

Minutes from: Newent and District Branch of The Royal British Legion

Meeting held on 27 May 2021 beside the Peace Tree – Newent Lake

<u>Attendees</u>	<u>Post</u>
Richard Balding Keith Urch Simon Mason Pat Phillips Graham Barton Colin Britt Rick Axon Adrian Dover Elaine Balding Susan Urch Susanne Britt	Chairman BCS Representative, Deputy Chairman, Youth Liaison and Membership Secretary. Padre Deputy Padre Deputy Parade Marshal Bar Member / Deputy BCS Entertainments Member Secretary
<u>Item</u>	<u>Action</u>
<p><u>1. Act of Remembrance</u> The Chairman Opened the Meeting at 1900 hrs and welcomed everyone to the Branches first face to face meeting since the beginning of the Pandemic. He stated that it was good to see so many in such a lovely location at Newent Lake He asked if we could spare a moment of thought for those who could not be with us tonight and those that were feeling under the weather. He read the names of those from the Parish of Newent who had lost their lives during WWI and WWII during the month of June and concluded with the Act of Remembrance.</p>	
<p><u>2. Apologies</u> Apologies had been received from Terry Weaver, Tom Heseltine, Mike Brown, John Celino, David Sass and Colin Calcutt.</p>	
<p><u>3. Chairman's Report</u> <u>Introduction</u> Good evening everybody and welcome to May's branch meeting, I hope I find you all well, a mixed month with a lot of information coming through from the national body which has all been passed on, however I will be highlighting one or two pieces which if you have time gives us a better insight into how the RBL are taking their vision for the future. To start local news: <u>Lead Councillor in support of Armed Forces Covenant - Newent</u> At the beginning of May Newent Town Council at their Annual General Meeting finally decided who would take on the responsibility</p>	

of Lead Councillor supporting the Armed Forces Covenant. I have sent a thank you to Christine Howley who I believe volunteered to take on this role and will now be our first point of contact with regards to any veteran related matters. I personally hope to see a good working relationship with Christine and Newent Town Council going forward.

Branch Fee's for next year

Each year the RBL ask branch's if they want to put up their branch fees for the next year, it is that time again. At the moment our branch fees are set at £2 which coupled with the national fee of £18 gives us a nice round figure of £20, the question is do we as a branch want to put up our fees for the coming year? I will have to give our decision in the next few days. **Decision: Proposed by: RA and Seconded by: CB and carried unanimously to keep the branch fees at £2.**

Annual Conference

As you will all be aware from previous meetings the annual conference took place on the 15 May 2021, both the Deputy Chairman and myself attended and took part in the day's proceedings. As it was last year the Annual Conference was conducted virtually and delivered on a much-improved platform, which gave easier access to on-line documents and a quick and simple voting procedure. Another excellent improvement was how they conducted the Act of Remembrance simultaneously from both the Cenotaph and the National Memorial Arboretum, it was in my opinion a very moving start to the proceedings. There were also 2 excellent video messages from Prince Charles and a very big supporter of TRBL Ross Kemp.

For next year the current hope is to conduct the Annual Conference in the traditional format and with a video link for those members who wish to attend but cannot make it or afford to go, if they manage to make this aspiration happen, I think it will open up the conference to a whole new audience.

The Poppy Appeal has so far raised a brilliant £28 million, which in the current climate is a fantastic result, they also stated that the revamped branch training portal is now up and running, but after looking at the site and the training on offer it very much depends on the individual Counties populating the training calendar with their courses, as yet nothing on the calendar from Gloucestershire County.

Our Deputy Chairman will be giving a brief overview during his report and the full download of the Conference was sent out to Branch Membership last Tuesday, it might be of interest to some of you.

Royal British Legion Strategy going forward

The Royal British Legion have published the next round of updates on what they are calling the 'One Legion Strategy', this strategy was announced at the virtual 'Town hall meeting' event on 20 April 2021

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Treasurer

which a couple of us from the branch attended. The published document is a 4 page synopsis of the Strategy highlighting the relevant points, including proposed changes to the executive board so that some of the different divisions are joined together under single leadership to 'make it easier for people to find what they need', an extra £14 million over the next 3 years will be invested into the welfare services, closing the pop-in centres and area and secondary offices and replacing them with a regional hub model based around six locations, for which our nearest one's would be Birmingham or Cardiff. During the discussion part of the presentation MSOs were discussed and members were assured that MSO would be staying as they were the vital link in this new strategy. If anyone would like a copy of the One Legion Strategy let me know and I will email it out.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme Quarterly Digest

You may remember that at November 2020's meeting we introduced you to the very first AFPS Quarterly Digest, this month the 2nd edition has been produced and includes titbits such as this year's Pension Increase rate, how to claim your pension and using the 'Tell Us Once Service', so some very useful bits and pieces, I will attach a copy of the Digest to the minutes in case you've missed it.

Secretary Position

The Lack of a Branch Secretary has now become a critical issue, as most of you will already know our Deputy Secretary has also resigned this month due to health reasons, I did put out an urgent message to all our members explaining this and to also ask for a volunteer to take the minutes for this meeting, but as you will be able to tell during the rest of this meeting I will have most of my concentration on taking notes to compile the minutes for the official record, so please excuse me for not looking as much at you as I would normally do. So again this month I ask; if anyone would like to take on this worthwhile role or has any idea's in recruiting a new Secretary please let me know, the thing to remember is if we do not have a full compliment of Secretary, Treasurer and Chairman by October's AGM the branch will have no option but to inform county of our predicament.

Finally

Some good news, after some discussions with the Memorial Hall Committee, it has been decided that as at ***June's meeting we will be able to resume our meetings in the Memorial Hall***. Don't forget that as normal if anyone needs help in any way at all please do not hesitate to get in contact, and if we can help, we will.

4. Minutes of the Last Meeting and Matters Arising

The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true record. Proposed by SU and Seconded by SM and agreed unanimously. There were no Matters Arising.

5. Reports by Officers

Deputy Chairman/Membership/Youth Liaison/Branch Community Support

BRANCH REPORT FOR APRIL 2021

This month's report sees us looking forward to actually holding a meeting of members, not via Zoom, but either outside or socially distanced in The Memorial Hall.

Membership, Branch Community Support Representative and Youth Liaison Officer

Your Representatives continue to attend virtual meetings on your behalf. The RBL BCS Steering Group are continuing to develop services and it is anticipated that as a registered BCS Branch, we will benefit in the months to come.

For those of you wishing to discover more, please contact either The Branch Chairman or your BCS Representatives: the new BCS Handbook is now readily available to those members with a particular interest.

More information regarding on-line face to face training, on-line GDPR, Safeguarding, DBS Processes, and Lone Working courses are scheduled to be available in the near future. Upon completion of training, those involved will require a specific RBL Basic DBS Check and I.D Card prior to conducting BCS activities.

Welfare and Membership

RBL HQ are continuing with its Strategic Review and we anticipate that more Branch related information will become available in the coming months.

Welfare

As in the past, we shall continue to aid and support our members and veterans, in the first instant, by signposting them to the National RBL Helpline.

The National RBL Helpline is: 0808 802 8080

The Veteran's Gateway:

https://support.veteransgateway.org.uk/app/answers/detail/a_id/127/~/the-royal-british-legion

[The Royal British Legion - Veterans' Gateway](#)



The Royal British Legion is a charity that provides life-long support to members and veterans of the British Armed Forces and their families. They are the national custodian of Remembrance, they organise the annual Poppy Appeal, and campaign to improve the lives of the Armed Forces community.

support.veteransgateway.org.uk

Branch Membership

The Branch Membership currently stands at 38 members. We recognise that this number is at variance with our true membership listing but expect issues to be resolved as RBL HQ systems improve.

Branch Statistics

We are blessed at this time that The Branch has not been presented with any new cases, albeit that one of our elderly members, Victor, has spent a couple of weeks in hospital but is now home recuperating: we wish him well.

However, in the event that members identify a comrade in need, they are encouraged to contact their BCS Representatives.

Branch Statistics for this period are therefore as follows:

Total Number of Distancing Welfare visits	NIL
How many beneficiaries "visited"	NIL
How many visitors (Branch Community Supporters)	NIL
Total Welfare Expenditure	NIL
Telephone Buddies:	
Total Number of Calls made by Branch Executive]	NIL
Telephone – How many beneficiaries called	NIL
Telephone – How many telephone buddies	NIL

As such, no other telephone or email communications were made during this period.

Youth Liaison

All initiatives continue to remain on hold in accordance with RBL Guidelines.

Community Liaison

In accordance with current RBL and HMG Guidelines and restrictions on public gatherings, The Branch aims to continue to conduct its general business via social media and telephone.

Other Branch Information

BCS (Branch Community Support) Training

Having attended basic BCS training sessions, County Officers are now rolling out these sessions as part of the greater RBL Initiative.

The Annual Conference

Your Chairman and BCS representative(s) recently attended the Virtual RBL Annual Conference> A brief summary of the salient points of specific interest to aspects of membership and welfare are summarised below:

An average of circa 508 members attended The Conference.

Motions to Conference (ref previous Branch communications)

Motion No	For	Against	Abstain.
1.	210	32	2
2.	187	52	4
3.	132	111	1
4.	142	98	3
5.	148	93	4

This year, as opposed to previous years, a 50% majority was not required, just a majority of the votes cast.

A total review of RBL costs has been conducted this past year. The closure of the Rest-bite Homes and the Handyman Service was considered vital to reduce costs as these services were being underused and appeared restricted to a small number of clients only. Care Homes currently cost £5m pa but continue to provide much valued and specialised support to that group of veterans in most need. There was a 300% increase for crisis grants, all at the time during which income reduced by £10m to £143m. Members to note that 76p in every £ donated (circa £120m) is being spent on the provision of support and services to veterans.

Area Offices in London were closed saving £0.5m together with all other Area Pop-In Offices throughout the country. Furthermore, it is extremely likely that County Offices will also be closed and we shall move forward on the basis of Regional Hubs.

The Board of Trustees have developed a new Governance Model and a new strategy placing "People First".

New Youth, Training and Finance Policies are being instigated together with a review of IT to enable improvements in Branch websites and communications. This has arisen as a direct result of creating a new Change Management Office following an extensive review of the structure of RBL's activities and HQ.

Some £14m is being allocated for improvements to services, possibly as a result of a 41% reduction in membership (39000 members), determined by HQ as being due to poor links with the Branches. Demands on the Legion's welfare system has increased significantly, requests for support being far more complex than in the past. The Membership Team are being more proactive than in the past albeit aspects such as training, safeguarding and communication networks continue to be under review (as they have done for the past two to three years). Branches should see the benefit of these changes in the coming year.

Branches were reminded that in line with National Policy, the local Civic Authority is responsible for all public RBL Branch activities, in particular for organising events such as The Parade on Remembrance Sunday or requests to attend at other local events. The Branch is not insured in the event of an incident or accident occurring.

In summary, The Legion are seeking to strengthen Case Working by commissioning specialist services, focusing more on the person in need in line with its ethos. One hopes that given its past record, such proposals will in time improve relationships within The Legion and provide our much-valued veterans with the support they so justly deserve.

Treasurer

I received last Bank Statement from Susan Urch covering 30 December 2020 to 29 March 21. We only receive a Bank Statement every 3 Months. However, I can keep up with on screen recent transaction reports and the latest movement is: 2 Payments received of 0.45 pence each from HM Courts as repayment for Stolen Poppy Box!

The current balance at the Bank is now £1136.20

I also would like to send belated congratulations to Colin (PAO) for raising significant amounts for the Poppy Appeal despite the current situation. However, these amounts do not pass through my system as such so do not affect my Bank Balance.

There will be more Bank reconciliations detailing transactions through LOMAS the RBL accounting system as soon as they finish website maintenance.

The Chairman also read out a reply he had received from the RBL Branch Finance Team:

'I apologise for the confusion caused at conference. Unfortunately, we do not allow internet banking at this moment. Internet banking removes all of the internal control's we have in

place. We are working with Lloyds for a suitable alternative, but this is taking a bit of time. We have trialled a few alternatives so far, and none have been successful. We will keep branches updated as soon as we have an alternative.'

Padre

The Branch Padre stated that he was awaiting a favourable time in which to dedicate the Peace Tree, current thinking is during the summer months, this will be a good opportunity to engage with the wider community and raise the branch profile.

The padre also mentioned that 4 July is the National Day of Thanksgiving, for which he has some ideas to involve both the local Schools and the Branch, possibly utilising a symbolic 'wall of thanksgiving' where people can attach cards for someone who has helped during the last year.

The padre also mentioned that detailed planning continues for the RBL commemorations of 100 years of remembrance which will be linked to Remembrance weekend, he will be liaising with relevant parties in due course.

Deputy Padre

The Tyler family have expressed their thanks to those lining the streets of Newent prior to the funeral service for Ken Tyler at Oxenhall Church.

Deputy BCS and Bar Member

CB handed over the mantel of Bar Member to RA, a vote of thanks was giving to CB providing an excellent service over the past few years which made our monthly meetings an even better experience. Everyone wished RA every success in taking on such a vital role in the branch.

There were no other officer reports.

6. Any Other Business

Remembrance Special Circular 2021

The Chairman read out the Remembrance Special Circular which included information about the Festival of Remembrance and the Cenotaph Ceremony, a copy of which will be sent out with these minutes. He also stated that anyone wishing to attend the Cenotaph Ceremony needed to let the Chairman know by 10 June 2021 so that he could get names to our MSOs in time for the 14 June 2021 deadline.

SU – Wanted to remind our Treasurer that the End of Financial Year is the 30 June 2021. The Chairman promised to pass this on.

All

Treasurer

<p>KU - Highlighted the planned RBL event at National Memorial Arboretum on 6th June to commemorate D Day anniversary and 100 yrs of The Legion. After meeting: Information on event here: https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/remembrance-events/d-day</p> <p>Booking tickets here:</p> <p>https://www.thenma.org.uk/visit-us/plan-your-visit/book-tickets</p> <p>GB – Asked what the Armed Forces Day arrangements were this year. The Chairman promised to find out and let the members know. After Meeting: The nearest event to Newent would appear to be in Ross-on-Wye the following is the official link: https://www.armedforcesday.org.uk/event/ross-on-wye-armed-forces-day/</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">All</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Chairman All</p>
<p><u>7. Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>The next Meeting will be held on 24 June 2021 at 19:00 hrs in the Memorial Hall. The Chairman thanked everyone for coming and closed the meeting at 20:00 hrs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">All</p>

**Agenda for Meeting of Newent and District Royal British Legion
Branch on 24 June 2021**

1. Act of Remembrance.
2. Apologies for Absence.
3. Chairman’s Report.
4. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising.
5. Reports by Officers.
6. Any Other Business.
7. Date of Next Meeting.