

Editor's Notes

Welcome to this month's bumper edition which we trust you will find of interest. We have included the main points from the County Chairs' Seminar and a new piece called Tips and Tricks. Please let us have your news and pictures for future editions.



County Chair's Message

- The County Chair reported on the recent County Chairs' Seminar - see the highlights in this Newsletter. Copies of the slides can be provided to branches on request to the County Secretary.
- The NMA is now known as the RBL Gardens of Remembrance.
- Any donations from branches or funerals etc should be clearly identified where the money is to go i.e. Poppy Appeal, RBL Gardens of Remembrance, Care Homes, Battle Back Centre or County funds.
- There will be a second Poppy Appeal happening from next year, centred around Armed Forces Week (21-27th June 2027) concentrating on serving members of the Armed Forces and recent conflicts - more information to follow.
- Committee agreed to fund Armed Forces Week flags for local authorities where required (subject to authority rules for flying flags).
- Committee agree to contribute £211.29 towards the cost of central welfare funding spent in the County during the period Oct-Dec 2025.
- County Vice Chair has agreed to represent the County at Armed Forces Covenant meetings.
- Committee agreed that an annual progress report will now be required for all County Supported Branches.
- The MEO confirmed that all branch accounts had been received by the deadline (except one which is actively being worked on).
- Confirmed that the next County Conference will take place in the Great Hall, Guildhall, Northampton on Saturday 6th February 2027.
- The Poppy Appeal total for 2025/2026 currently stands at £577,864.04, an increase of 3.74% compared to the previous year.
- Poppy Appeal volunteers will be receiving branded closing and new ID badges this year and there will be new items available.

In this issue

- County Chair's Message
- County Committee
- Ceremonial Update
- Diary Notes
- Policies and Guidance Updates
- Highlights from County Chair's Seminar
- Tips and Tricks
- Branch News
- STOP PRESS!!

Editor's Contact: Northamptonshire.Secretary@rbl.community

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR ALL THE LATEST INFORMATION

[HTTPS://COUNTIES.BRITISHLEGION.ORG.UK/COUNTIES/NORTHAMPTONSHIRE/](https://counties.britishlegion.org.uk/counties/northamptonshire/)

COUNTY COMMITTEE

President - Colonel John Royle MBE DL (contact via County Chair)
Chair - Ian Byrnes (Northamptonshire.Chairman@rbl.community)
Vice Chair - Peter Higgs (Northamptonshire.ViceChair@rbl.community)
Secretary - Steve Thatcher (Northamptonshire.Secretary@rbl.community)
Treasurer (interim) - Steve Thatcher (Northamptonshire.Treasurer@rbl.community)
Parade Marshal - Nick Fall (Northamptonshire.ParadeMarshal@rbl.community)
Training Officer - Vacant
Recruitment Officer - Ian Byrnes (Northamptonshire.Chairman@rbl.community)
Community Support Co-ordinator - Vacant
Youth Officer - Peter Armstrong (Northamptonshire.CYO@rbl.community)
Club Liaison Officer - Robbie Paice (GreensNorton.Chair@rbl.community)
Committee Members - Eddie Edmunds (via Secretary)

County Correspondence

Whenever possible, all correspondence should be sent **by email** to the individual above. Any post should be addressed to: The County Secretary, 9 Eastlands Road, Finedon NN9 5DZ. Telephone queries should be made to the Secretary on 07954 160777.

Please note that the County Office is now closed. If you wish to arrange a face to face meeting, please contact the County Secretary who will make the necessary arrangements. This also applies if you wish to borrow any County equipment (gazebos, tables etc).

Legion Staff

Membership Engagement Manager (MEM) - Chris Jones (Central.MEM@rbl.community)
Membership Engagement Officer (MEO) - Lebo Nyoni
(Northamptonshire.MEO@rbl.community)
Membership Engagement Administrator (MEA) - Ruby Duce (Central.MEA@rbl.community)

Poppy Appeal Manager - Giles Coleman (GColeman@britishlegion.org.uk)

County Committee Meeting 1st October 2026 - Key Points

- The County Chair reported on the recent County Chairs' Seminar - see the highlights in this Newsletter.
- The NMA is now known as the RBL Gardens of Remembrance.
- Any donations from branches or funerals etc should be clearly identified where the money is to go i.e. Poppy Appeal, RBL Gardens of Remembrance, Care Homes, Battle Back Centre or County funds.
- There will be a second Poppy Appeal happening from next year, centred around Armed Forces Week (21-27th June 2027) concentrating on serving members of the Armed Forces and recent conflicts - more information to follow.
- Committee agreed to fund Armed Forces Week flags for local authorities where required (subject to authority rules for flying flags).
- Committee agree to contribute £211.29 towards the cpost of central welfare funding spent in the County during the period Oct-Dec 2025.
- County Vice Chair has agreed to represent the County at Armed Forces Covenant meetings.
- Committee agreed that an annual progress report will now be required for all County Supported Branches.
- The MEO confirmed that all branch accounts had been received by the deadline (except one which is actively being worked on).

- Confirmed that the next County Conference will take place in the Great Hall, Guildhall, Northampton on Saturday 6th February 2027.
- The County Poppy Appeal total for 2025/2026 currently stands at £577.864.04, an increase of 3.74% compared to the previous year.
- Poppy Appeal volunteers will be receiving branded clothing and new ID badges this year and there will be new items available.

We now have **five vacancies** on the County Committee. If you feel you might like to contribute to the running of the County, please get in touch with the County Secretary asap to discuss further. Training and support will be provided for all posts where necessary. Furthermore, we need to appoint a replacement County Treasurer (currently being filled by the County Secretary). Please get in touch if you are interested.

CEREMONIAL UPDATE

The County Standard Bearers Competition 2026 planned for 11th October has been cancelled due to a lack of entrants.

However, there will be a County Youth Standard Bearers' Competition which will take place on Sunday 22nd November 2026 at the Army Reserve Centre Clare St, Northampton NN1 3JQ.
Full details to follow.

Standard Bearer Training Dates

Army Reserve Centre, Clare Street, Northampton NN1 3JQ:

Thursdays 22nd October and 5th November

The Hall, off Thorpe St, Raunds, Wellingborough NN9 6LT:

Mondays 5th October and 2nd November

Times are 1900 till 2030 - refreshments will be available

Any queries to:

Northamptonshire.ParadeMarshal@rbl.community

DIARY NOTES

- October/November - Branch AGMs held (**updated guidance issued to all branches**).
- 2nd November 2026 - Convening Notice, delegate application form, motion submission form and roll of honour information return issued to all branches.
- 18th December 2026 - Provision agenda issued to all branches.
- 30th December 2026 - Closing date for submission of MS1/MS1CSB and MS1B to MEO copy to County Secretary (**see latest MS1 version on Branch Guidance page of County website**).
- 5pm on Friday 8th January 2027 - Closing date for branches to submit nominations for County Committee and all Motions to the County Secretary.
- 5pm on Friday 22nd January 2027 - Closing date for branches to submit any motion amendments to the County Secretary.
- 5pm Friday 22nd January 2027 - Closing date for branches to submit delegate and visit returns and Roll of Honour information to the County Secretary.
- **Saturday 6th February 2027 - County Conference in the Great Hall, Northampton.**

RBL POLICIES AND GUIDANCE UPDATES

We have been advised that there will be no update to the Membership Handbook this year and branches should continue to refer to the 2025 version (except where policy changes have been announced via Central News).

An updated MS1 has just been published - a copy is on the Branch Guidance page of our website.

Gizzit Ordering Process for Branches 2026/2027

All branches can order free recruitment materials – Gizzits – to support membership recruitment and engagement activity. Ordering windows for 2026/2027 that aim to provide Gizzits at the most useful times of the year are shown below. Please note, Gizzits are for membership recruitment and engagement activity outside the Poppy Appeal period and should not be used during the Poppy Appeal.

December 2026 – April 2027 stock:

- Order window: Last two weeks of November 2026
- Delivery: Early December 2026

May – August 2027 stock

- Order window: Last two weeks of April 2027
- Delivery: Mid-May 2027

How to order:

An online request form will be made available in November's Central News. The MEO will review all requests and branch requirements. Please note, whilst the Legion will do their best to fulfil all requests, quantities may need to be adjusted based on stock availability and demand.

2026 Teaching Resources for Remembrance

All branches are kindly asked to notify their local schools and youth groups of the excellent teaching resources for 2026 which are now available via the RBL website at:

https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-involved/remembrance/teaching-remembrance?utm_source=The%20Royal%20British%20Legion%20Charity&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=15634724_September%202026&dm_i=1LKB,9B3TW,Q3FNW4,134L46,1,0,0,0

An updated AGM Guidance document (September 2026) has been issued to all branches (copy on the County website).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE COUNTY CHAIR'S SEMINAR

Leadership Key Points:

1. Stronger County and Branch Relationships:

- County committees should engage more regularly with branches.
- Each county committee member becomes the named contact for a group of branches which enables:
 - Builds relationships.
 - Creates accountability.
 - Gives branches a known contact.
 - Helps information flow both ways.
 - Encourage two-way communication rather than information flowing only one way.
 - Branches should be involved in county decision-making.
 - Provide the opportunity for sharing good practice between branches.
 - Hold informal introductory meetings between county and branch representatives.

2. Training and Development:

- Ensure all committee members and officers complete required training.
- Increase use of technology and digital tools.
- Encourage Microsoft 365 usage.
- Consider county-wide training targets and regular reviews.

3. Community Engagement:

- Building links with:
 - Schools
 - Cadet forces
 - Local councils
 - Youth organisations
 - Veteran groups
 - Community groups
 - Samaritans
 - Faith groups
 - Local businesses
- Hold open days to bring organisations together.
- Better mapping of local community contacts.
- Use local knowledge held by branches.

4. Youth Engagement:

- Youth representation and involvement.
- Contacting schools, cadets and youth organisations.
- Encouraging participation in remembrance activities.
- Creating links with youth-focused stakeholders.

Director General Mark Atkinson reaffirmed RBL's important role as a trusted, independent and evidence-led voice for the Armed Forces community. He highlighted recent engagement with the new Secretary of State for Defence on issues including:

- the Armed Forces Covenant,
- the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill
- nuclear test veterans
- VALOUR recognised centres
- the role charities may be asked to play in the event of future conflict

He emphasised the importance of preparing for whatever demands may lie ahead.

Sarah Pittaway, Director: Membership & Communities, shared her early thoughts, reflections and ideas as an expansion of the ongoing conversation and feedback from members.

Many membership benefits are intangible, to which the sense of connection and belonging is key. Sarah will be looking to understand how we can make membership more relevant, compelling and appealing, and how it can better stack up against the competition. We want potential members to fully understand and experience the reasons to join and the reasons to stay. The principle of Gain and Retain to Sustain has been devised to do exactly that.

When we gain new, engaged members, they make us stronger. We will be working alongside our current membership to retain them as well as our longer-serving, loyal members. It is that membership base that will ultimately sustain the future of the RBL and allow us to continue with our core activities of connect, remember and support.

Many exciting and innovative options are being explored to enhance the membership offer. The directorate will work closely with counties to roll out the options that work best locally, helping to ensure that RBL membership is compelling, relevant and attractive. Together, these activities are focused on securing the long-term future of RBL through its greatest asset: **its members**.

Olivia Brown, Head of Membership Acquisition, shared that the membership growth strategy aims for 5% year-on-year growth. The focus is on attracting active, passionate and engaged members who share a common goal and can work together. With gain, retain and sustain in mind, we want to connect with new demographics, both nationally and regionally.

Several exciting new initiatives are underway:

- New recruitment packs for branches, including pull-up banners, new leaflets and contact centre cards with information for members to share.
- National and regional events and community activities.
- Bespoke membership activities around driving engagement and awareness.
- We are currently working with a membership consultancy to review the membership value proposition and explore how we can enhance the offer so it is more engaging and relevant, both now and for the future.

We're redesigning the membership journey to create a meaningful induction to the Legion. By working with Poppy Appeal, Fundraising and volunteers, we can provide one voice and one message, promote the Legion as widely as possible and help people feel welcomed from their first day of membership.

We are working with three NHS trusts to trial washbags for veterans and family members in hospitals, with 50 bags for each county involved in the trial. This is separate from the washbags initiative for new Armed Forces recruits.

Lucy Inskip, Executive Director: Poppy Appeal & Remembrance, delivered updates on the Poppy Appeal. For the 2026 Poppy Appeal, the headline ambition is £59.5 million.

Key priorities include:

- Recruiting 30 District-level Poppy Appeal Organisers and additional collectors.
- Products – e.g. 800,000 new-design pens, more car and lorry poppies and larger school packs.
- Supporting 10,000 Toucan (contactless payment app) users.
- Introducing revised donation values, bespoke QR codes and training videos.
- Improving volunteer equipment and communications through tabards, lanyards, digital forms, portal reordering and thank you pins.
- Testing new initiatives such as different donation values on contactless terminals and Toucan Cash (depositing service).

All 60,000 collectors are expected to receive:

- A new lanyard containing clear identification and key contacts.
- Concise fundraising and safeguarding guidance.
- The volunteer thank-you pin, trialled in 2025, now planned for national rollout.

Action for branches: Thank you for helping to create a strong, coordinated launch by ensuring that no local Poppy Appeal events take place before National Launch Day (22 October).

Philippa Rawlinson, Director: Remembrance, delivered updates ahead of Remembrancetide.

- Local membership decisions (e.g. branch closures, mergers, etc.) may impact the Poppy Appeal. Please reach out to the Poppy Appeal Manager to flag anything that might affect the Poppy Appeal.
- To comply with HMRC guidelines, it's important we do not mix official Poppy Appeal merchandise with other unauthorised merchandise.
- Our Remembrance Key Points document reflects who we are and what Remembrance means; that the Poppy is a universal symbol of Remembrance and hope for a peaceful future that is not aligned to any political or partisan group.

Remembrance forward planning – anniversaries of focus for 2027 and 2028.

2027:

- Falklands 45
- Operation Banner 20
- Festival of Remembrance 100

2028:

- National Service 65 / Nuclear Test Veterans 70
- Windrush 80
- Korea 75
- Armistice 110

The Festival of Remembrance ballot system, which was approved by the Membership Council, is now in its second year. As well as enabling a better occupancy rate for the festival, it is the fairest system because it gives more people the opportunity to attend.

2026 Poppy Appeal - £59.5m!

Volunteer Gaps

Target 30 DWO
+ more collectors

Merchandise

800k pens, more car & lorry
poppies, bigger school packs

Contactless + Gift Aid

10k users Toucan
Donation values change
More bespoke QR codes
Training videos

Volunteer Experience

Tabards, Lanyards, volunteer
pin, digital forms
Re-order on portal

Locations

B&Q, Experiential
Bluewater/ Meadowhall



Martin Pelling, Interim Head of Membership Engagement, updated on the development of an app to make branch reports and membership listings on MAP easier to understand. Following testing, an autumn launch is anticipated, when it will be available to Branch Chairs, Secretaries and Treasurers.

Once opened from MAP, the app will display:

- The reports viewer
- Branch membership report
- Branch overview
- Member payments report

Displayed information will be from the previous week and will not be live data.

Key functions will include:

- Search and filter member records.
- Identify recent joiners.
- Select individuals for email communications.
- Check members' contact preferences.
- Individual records will show key membership and contact details.
- The branch overview will provide headline totals and demographic breakdowns.

John Thornhill, Trustee and Chair of the National Conference Committee (NCC), updated on Annual Conference.

Feedback results of the post-event survey after Annual Conference 2026 were as follows:

- 628 attendees in total
- 560 in person
- 68 virtual
- Only 334 branches sent delegates
- For the first time, 49 residents across five RBL care homes watched Conference proceedings remotely

Feedback from Conference attendees was largely positive, particularly regarding the agenda and speakers, opportunities to engage, the beneficiary speaker and ceremonial events.

Branches are warmly encouraged to consider joining Annual Conference 2027, either in person or online.

Alison Bunn, Membership Learning and Development Manager updated on the three main priorities for the Membership Training team.

The main priorities are as follows:

- 1) Better align training with membership priorities and the strategy, ensuring the right training is delivered.
- 2) Build and maintain the CTO team – although the role is optional, CTOs play a hugely important role – one-third of counties have no named CTO.
- 3) Plan the implementation of mandatory training, following the motion passed by delegates at Annual Conference. The first two priorities are essential to this.

Branches are encouraged to take the motions training course on Discover, helping us to receive the best possible motions.

All interested members are encouraged to apply for the Aspire 2027 training course when applications open; further information will be shared in the coming months.

Jon Summerson, Director: Armed Forces, Partnership and Youth Engagement, spoke on Armed Forces, youth and partnerships.

The Armed Forces engagement strategy has four priorities:

- Extend engagement to regulars, reserves, military associations, veterans and families.
- Build relationships from Phase 1 training through transition and later life.
- Use partnerships, military sport and events to increase awareness and participation.
- Strengthen local relationships through branch and county activity reflecting local need.

The intended youth approach will combine:

- Meaningful opportunities for young people in serving and veteran families
- Strategic relationships with educational and youth organisations
- A coordinated national youth-engagement strategy.

Future partnerships for youth engagement should demonstrate:

- Strategic fit with RBL's objectives. For example, while there is enthusiasm to go into schools, the purpose of such activities should be clear.
- Clear governance, supported by a consistent assessment process.
- Shared value for beneficiaries, partners and RBL.

Branches and counties are encouraged to work together on partnership activity, so that efforts can be connected.

12 October 2026: Fireside Chats – Episode 4 | The Unseen Toll: What the Medals Don't Show. RBL's Jon Summerson will sit down with Royal Navy veteran Jason Smith for an open conversation about the realities of modern military service and life after the Armed Forces. tter for both serving personnel and veterans alike.

Joining information will appear in eNewsletter and Central News.

17 October 2026, 10:30–11:30: Join us for our Town Hall, which will focus on recruitment. Joining information will appear in the eNewsletter and Central News.

22 October 2026: Poppy Appeal national campaign launch.

TIPS AND TRICKS



1. Complete the Branch Secretaries Course on Discover.
2. Keep all your correspondence (minutes etc) on MAP in the Branch Admin Area. Do not keep on your personal PC.
3. Always use your rbl.community email account for all official RBL communications (please note that County will no longer use your private email address).
4. Keep up to date with all the latest news etc by reading Central News each month as well as County Newsletter and updates.
5. Keep an eye on membership levels and renewals and chase where necessary (date on MAP in the Branch Admin Area). Inform the Chair if you have any new members.

1. Complete the Treasurers Course on Discover.
2. Use the RBL account advanced Excel spreadsheet and keep the original version in the Branch Admin Area on MAP.
3. Do not use your personal PC for accounting records.
4. Always use your rbl.community email account for all official RBL communications (please note that County will no longer use your private email address).
5. Change to the on-line Lloyds bank account - contact the MEO to get started.
6. All payments to individuals must be supported by an official RBL claim form with receipts. Payments to businesses must be supported by an invoice.
7. If you need help with accounts, contact the County Treasurer.



OTHER NEWS

Pictures from the recent Ceremonial Training Day



BRANCH NEWS

RBL Rushden Branch - please visit the Rushden Branch website to view their latest Newsletter which features lots of great information and articles. The link is:
<https://branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/rushden/newsletters/>

if you have any news or events including pictures which you would like to share with other branches, please send them to the County Secretary

STOP PRESS!!

RBL Guilsborough Branch - we are delighted to announce that RBL Guilsborough Branch have just submitted the following requests for donations to be made from their branch funds as follows:

- The Battle Back Centre - £3,000.
- The National Memorial Arboretum - £3,000.
- Galanos House Care Home - £3,000.
- Central Welfare - £3,000.

A huge thank you to the branch.