



**The Royal British Legion  
Northamptonshire County  
Annual County Conference**  
held on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> January 202  
in the Great Hall, Northampton Guildhall

# **MINUTES**

**PRESENT:**

Mr Ian Byrnes, County Chair  
Brigadier David Russell-Parsons OBE DL, Deputy Lieutenant Northamptonshire  
Cllr Alison Eastwood, Chair of West Northamptonshire Council  
Cllr Maurice Eglin, North Northamptonshire Council  
Cllr Leon Gibbs, North Northamptonshire Council  
Cllr Jane Birch, Mayor of Northampton  
Mr John Thornhill MBE, RBL Trustee  
Mr Hugh Ashton-Moore, RBL Membership Council Representative (S E Midlands)  
Mr Martin Pelling, Manager RBL Membership Team  
Ms Lebo Nyoni, RBL Membership Engagement Officer (Northamptonshire & Oxfordshire)  
Ms Charlotte Juleff-Black, RBL Compliance Team

Plus 9 Branch Delegates, 10 Standard Bearers and 31 County Committee Members and Visitors

**The Conference opened at 10.30am**

**1. Welcome: Mr Ian Byrnes, the County Chair:**

- a. Welcomed the invited guests;
- b. Called in the Northamptonshire County and Branch Standards; and
- c. Read the Roll of Honour for RBL Members of the County who have passed away since the last Conference as follows:

RBL Rushden & District Branch:	Leslie "Les" Meakings Thomas "Tom" Milligan David Robinson Michael Wadsworth Joyce "Joy" Youngs
RBL Thrapston & District Branch	Ray Jefferies MBE Tom Love Trevor Pearson

The Chairman then delivered the Homage which was followed by the Last Post.

**2. Civic Welcome to the delegates by the County Chair to:**

- a. Cllr Alison Eastwood, Chair of West Northamptonshire Council
- b. Cllr Maurice Eglin, North Northamptonshire Council
- c. Cllr Leon Gibbs, North Northamptonshire Council
- d. Cllr Jane Birch, Mayor of Northampton

The Mayor of Northampton responded by thanking Conference for their kind invitation and emphasised how much the work of the Royal British Legion is valued.

**3. Biding Prayer.** Prayers were offered during the Act of Remembrance.

**4. Address by Brigadier David Russell-Parsons OBE DL, Deputy Lieutenant Northamptonshire**

*“Chair, ladies and gentlemen.*

*Reflecting on 2025, it has been an exceptionally active year, with the Lord-Lieutenant, Vice Lord-Lieutenant, and Deputy Lieutenants attending over 400 events across the county.*

*While 400 is a significant number, the true value lies in the variety of those engagements—from high-profile Royal visits to the quiet, local commemorations that form the backbone of our community life.*

#### ***Supporting the Armed Forces and Youth***

*Our commitment to the Armed Forces remained a central pillar this year. You will know that cadet and adult volunteer service is one of the things the county takes great pride in. We saw remarkable success within our cadet forces, notably Toby Austen of TS Laforey Sea Cadets, who won Best Armed Guard Commander at the Nationals. This was the first time in a decade the unit secured both the individual and squad gold medals—a testament to the discipline and leadership being fostered in our young people.*

*This year was also one of significant remembrance, marking the 80th anniversaries of VE Day and VJ Day. On a more local level, the "Conversation with Cadets" event attended by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal highlighted a practical goal: connecting the resilience and leadership skills of our cadets with the needs of local employers. It was encouraging to see North Northamptonshire Council and our University Hospitals achieve Employer Recognition Scheme Gold status, proving that the Armed Forces Covenant is being translated into real-world support.*

#### ***Royal Visits and Heritage***

*We were fortunate to host four Royal visits this year, reaching 11 different organizations. These visits were very diverse.*

*In April, The Princess Royal visited Youth Court Solutions in Wellingborough to observe innovative approaches to youth justice. In June, The Duchess of Edinburgh’s visit to Northampton focused on both the future—the 10th anniversary of the Blackthorn Good Neighbours Nursery—and our history.*

*By commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Great Fire of Northampton and the regeneration of the Market Square, we linked our county’s heritage with its modern development. These moments, including the celebration of 50 years of service by the Wellingborough District Hindu Association, allow the Lieutenancy to shine a light on organizations that often work away from the spotlight.*

## **Honours**

*Despite a national decline in King's Awards for Enterprise nominations, Northamptonshire bucked the trend with a 50% increase. This speaks to the health of our local economy. The three winners—Enovation Consulting, Sol Retail, and Ziggurat XYZ—showcase the breadth of our expertise in international trade.*

*To sustain this momentum, the Lieutenancy has been proactive. Through our Honours Forums and the Ninth Lord-Lieutenant's Leaders Forum at the University, we are addressing the skills gap and demystifying the process of recognizing excellence. We want to ensure that those doing extraordinary work in this county are properly acknowledged.*

## **Strengthening the Community**

*Perhaps the most critical initiative launched this year was our Volunteer Project. We are all aware of the national recruitment crisis in volunteering. Our approach has been to act as a bridge, connecting skilled individuals with charities in need of trustees and advisors.*

*We saw the fruits of this spirit in the King's Awards for Voluntary Service announced in November. Organizations like Volunteer Action Oundle, Off the Streets, and the Northampton Guardians are providing essential services—from elder care to knife crime prevention—that make our towns safer and more connected.*

## **Conclusion: A Record of Service**

*As we concluded the year with a record 36 Remembrance services, it was heartening to see such strong participation from the Guides, Scouts, and Cadets. It reminds us that while the Lieutenancy represents the Crown, its work is rooted in the people of Northamptonshire.*

*Looking ahead to 2026, we will build on this momentum. We will continue to champion the Armed Forces, promote sustainability through initiatives like our Climate Walk, and work to make the Honours system accessible to all. Our goal remains simple: to support, celebrate and strengthen the County of Northamptonshire.*

*Thank you."*

## **5. Loyal Greeting and Reply**

The County Chair announced that he had received a message from the RBL National President, which conveyed a greeting from His Majesty the King as follows:

*"Please convey my warmest thanks to the Members of The Royal British Legion for their loyal greetings, sent on the occasion of their Annual General Meetings which are being held throughout January and February 2026.*

*As your Patron, I much appreciate your message, and I am always interested to be reminded of the ever-important work you do for those who are serving and have served in our Armed Forces,*

*and their dependants. In return, I send my warmest good wishes to you all for a successful series of meetings. CHARLES R"*

## **6. Apologies for Absence**

The County Secretary, Mr Stephen Thatcher, confirmed that apologies had been received from Colonel John Royle MBE DL (RBL County President), Father Oliver Coss (RBL County Chaplain), Mr David Hawker (President of RBL Rushden & District Branch), Mr Robbie Paice (RBL Greens Norton Branch) and Mr Giles Coleman (RBL Poppy Appeal Manager).

**7. Appointment of Scrutineers.** Mrs Sue Broughton (RBL Duston & District Branch) and Mr Peter Higgs (County Committee Member, RBL Mears Ashby & District Branch) were duly appointed.

## **8. Minutes of the RBL County Conference held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2025**

Proposed by Mr Ian Byrnes (County Chair), Seconded by Mr Alan Short (RBL Finedon, Irthlingborough & District Branch). **CARRIED.**

**9. Matters Arising.** No points were raised.

## **10. County Plan 2025-2028**

The County Chair thanked RBL Rushden & District Branch for the effort and thought that went into their feedback report on the latest plan.

The County Chairman then presented the new County Plan for 2025-2028, the key points of which were:

### **a. Branch Community Support:**

- Increasing awareness and number of branches signed up.
- County Community Support Co-ordinator monitoring and reporting to the County Committee on BCS activities being delivered across the County.
- Safeguarding training being undertaken by County Committee members.

### **b. Fundraising:**

- Increasing Poppy Appeal income and number of volunteers.
- Organising fundraising events for County funds.

### **c. Remembrance and Ceremonial:**

- Increasing the number of standard bearers including youth.
- Supporting all commemorative events.
- Running standard bearer competitions.

### **d. Membership, Recruiting and Legion in the Community:**

- Increasing branch membership through recruitment training and support.
- Assisting struggling branches.
- Improving the recognition of the RBL brand across the County.

e. **Training:**

- Ensuring all County and Branch officers have completed training according to their role.
- Increased awareness of their responsibilities.

f. **Administration and Finance:**

- Monitoring branch compliance and following up where necessary.
- Visiting branches to provide support.

g. **Youth Participation:**

- Encouraging links with youth organisations across the County.
- Closer liaison with youth leaders.
- Running youth standard bearer competitions.

The County Chair concluded by saying that the Plan was a living document, which would be reviewed by the County Committee on a regular basis, and which branches could also refer to when formulating their own plans.

Proposed by Mr Ian Byrnes (County Chair), Seconded by Mr Alan Short (RBL Finedon, Irthlingborough & District Branch). **CARRIED.**

## **11. County Chair's Report 2025 by Mr Ian Byrnes**

*"In beginning my review of 2025, I must take a few moments to dwell upon my own health, having had a traumatic mid-year that included a total of 4 "blue light" admissions to hospital, the first of which led to my diagnosis of active kidney disease, with a 5% remaining kidney function.*

*My thanks go to the health professionals at Kettering and Northampton General Hospitals who were involved in my diagnosis and subsequent treatment and the staff of the Kettering Renal Unit where I undergo dialysis three times a week now vital in keeping me alive and to the support I have received from my colleagues within RBL Northamptonshire particularly on the County Committee and from my own branch, Thrapston & District; with your support I intend to see out the remaining two years of this my second three year term.*

*My thanks go to my long-suffering wife and to our brilliant County Secretary Steve Thatcher who bore the brunt of the county administration during my prolonged stay in "Finedon Ward" the renal facility of NGH, including visiting me in hospital and our weekly phone and latterly MS Teams calls. By a sheer fluke of the calendar, my principal hospital admission took place between the 2 summer meetings of the County Committee.*

*In a year of significant anniversaries, I note that they have been well observed across the county to judge from the press and photo coverage. Our county decision to hold a service of Commemoration at Holy Sepulchre Church in Northampton for VJ Day was rewarded by a good attendance, down a little on the VE Day service, but the lateness of the event in the summer*

*precluded some youth groups attendance and the issue of the summer holidays, but support was sufficient to justify the decision, thanks to the organisers and all who attended the event.*

*The level of Standard Bearer attendance at Conference 2025 and VJ Day ceremonies was excellent; our thanks must go to the Standard Bearers and the County Parade Marshal (CPM) Nick Fall and his enhanced standard bearer training programme.*

*Standard Bearer training was stepped up by the CPM ahead of this conference and it is a great pleasure to welcome three Youth Standard Bearers here today to their first County Conference, it was my honour earlier this week at the request of Raunds Branch to "Charge the Standard" and induct one of Youth Standard Bearers as the Branch Standard Bearer. Congratulations to Archie and the other Youth Standard Bearers have already been on Remembrance duties for their respective branches - congratulations Owen and Theo!*

*An issue that the County Parade Marshal has brought to my attention post Remembrance tide is the display of Royal British Legion or British Legion standards which, according to information provided to the County Committee, should have been laid up.*

*I had reports of a British Legion standard being displayed by a locality where the 'branch' closed in the early 1950's! Why is this important? No branch = No training given = No MS1B completed = No cover provided by RBL Public Liability insurance. I ask for the support of all branches for their assistance in bringing this state of affairs to a close.*

*I will be writing to all branches and second tier local authorities pointing out that if they allow this to happen then their civic public liability insurance will have to pay up in the event of an incident, not Royal British Legion public liability insurance.*

*It is worth reiterating that all RBL and British Legion standards in current use, laid up or in use for training, remain the legal property of The Royal British Legion and the National Parade Marshal or his deputy can demand be handed over to the national organisation, and they ensure that former branch standards do not find their way onto sites such as eBay, Facebook Market place or local auctions. To all branch chairs I present a question "Do you know where your branch standard is at this moment?"*

*No Parade Marshal is recognised as an RBL Parade Marshal unless they have attended an RBL training course for which 12 places are allocated annually in the presence of the former National Parade Marshal I state we need more training sessions - can the Trustees and the Membership Council please increase the Ceremonial Working Group budget to make this possible. Dress for a person who represents the RBL as a Parade Marshal is identical to that of a Standard Bearer, black beret with RBL cap (King's Crown) badge, black suit, white shirt, multi-motif (King's crown) RBL tie, black polished shoes, RBL (King's Crown) member badge, veteran badge and Crown awarded medals if earned - no other badges, chains of office or extraneous items.*

*I must return to the issue that has featured in all my Chair's addresses - Succession Planning. Colleagues this of necessity must drive many of our decisions, "Who comes next?" Two branches*

*this year have had to request they be granted County Supported Status because they could not form a branch committee. So please give really serious consideration to who follows you not just this year but a minimum of three years in advance. One of those branches has successfully transitioned from CSB back to a full-service branch; welcome back Duston & District.*

*Succession planning applies just as well to the County Committee. This year marks two years to the end of this my second three-year term - who will take my place? The County Committee is only kept functioning either by not filling roles or people filling two roles, and let's remember if you are on the County Committee you are 95% likely to be a branch officer. I would like to lessen the load of my colleagues on the County Committee by filling the vacancies that exist to ease the workload of others. We hold most meetings on-line via MS Teams to obviate a drive to Northampton in poor weather.*

*I would like to place on record my thanks to those branches assisted by their Branch Link who completed the "Beacon Branch" assessment proforma. The document allows us to judge branches against a common set of criteria. The Gold award winner with the highest score will be that year's winner of the Bill Rose Award and other branches who participate received certificates accordingly. The Beacon Branch Scheme is an excellent tool for branch committees to monitor their standards and make improvements where necessary throughout the year.*

*All branches should by now be utilising the RBL.community accounts as more and more information is channelled through the dedicated email address and via MAP (the Membership Administrative Portal), which enhances members' internet security by not using their private emails and provides a safe place for all branch documents, which can then be handed over to the next post holder.*

*I wish to extend my thanks to all members of the County Committee, Branch Committees throughout the County for all your efforts during this year.*

*In conclusion delegates, standard bearers and visitors we need to **RECRUIT!***

**Recruit Branch Members, Recruit Standard Bearers, Recruit County and Branch Committee Members** - *if we are deficient in these tasks who is to continue our great organisation for another 25 years let alone the target of the Bicentenary in 2121. If we are to continue the work of this great organisation in its support for veterans and beneficiaries, which despite the continued slimming down of our armed forces still produces case work on an increasingly complex nature year on year, and those complex issues will need the resources of the Royal British Legion family of charities, the support of the full time staff, case workers and the most important element within the Royal British Legion, the members!*

*Thank You"*

## **12. Presentation of Accounts for 2024-2025 by Mr Stephen Thatcher, RBL County Treasurer**

*"Good Morning Everyone,*

*A copy of the County Accounts as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025 is in your Conference Pack.*

*Firstly, I would like to provide some background on how the accounts have been operated during the year and the decisions which have been made by the County Committee and the work undertaken to make the County funds more sustainable.*

*In the middle of last year, it became increasingly apparent that the current spending of County funds was not sustainable and without some changes the County could run out of funds in the next three years. We therefore formed a County sub-committee to look at all aspects of income and expenditure which met in September.*

*I would say from the outset that this was quite an onerous task, not just because the County does not receive any funding or grants, other than interest on its BFI General and Welfare Grants (with welfare monies only being spent on almonisation (i.e. an agreed contribution towards the Central Welfare spend in the County each quarter) but the only general income we currently get is from donations from individuals (such as from funerals), a few community organisations and from branches, although there are minimal. We also receive a small rental income.*

*Obviously, we have to be very careful how this money is allocated and have to make it quite clear to donors what the options are (i.e. Poppy Appeal, RBL Care Homes, the NMA, Central Welfare, County running costs and, more recently, sponsorship of the Invictus Games) - they make the choice where this money goes.*

*In terms of expenditure, the majority of spend was being spent on County administrative costs such as travel costs for County Officers and Committee members and office expenses such as printing and broadband/telephone.*

*The report by the sub-committee recommended that there needed to be a fundamental change in how the County carries out its functions and, where necessary, some aspect of our work would have to be phased out.*

*In particular:*

- Officers and committee members were required to scale back on their travel expenses and to assist with that, the majority of County Committee meeting would take place using MS Teams.*
- The telephone and broadband contract for the County Officer was cancelled and a low-cost option for broadband was introduced.*
- Other cost-saving options for running the County office were also implemented.*
- Visits to branches by officers and committee members (our Branch Link system) would be restricted to two per branch each year.*
- Attendance at national events would only be permitted if central funding was available to cover the costs.*
- Attendance at the National Conference for the County delegate would be as an on-line delegate.*

- *The work of the County Community Support Coordinator (at the time the costliest appointment) would be scaled back – where branches requested BCS presentations or BCS support was requested, branches would be required to pay any expenses.*
- *All face-to-face training would be delivered on-line.*
- *Participation in national standard bearer events and competitions is to be agreed with the County Chair and reclaimed from the host organisation wherever possible.*
- *A suggestion was made that the County might run some fundraising events, but to date these have not come to fruition.*

*The task of improving the visibility of the accounts also proved to be a problem, as we are required to hold funds for County Supported Branches (CSBs) and at the time of the review it was quite difficult to identify exactly the total amount involved.*

*With the assistance and guidance of both the RBL Branch Accounts and Audit teams, a great deal of work has been carried out to tidy up the accounts and, in particular, to move the CSB monies out of the County account and identify any which had not been properly allocated to the account.*

*I have to say that this has been a big learning curve for me, in particular using LOMAS and the technical nature of moving funds into CSB BFIs, but I am pretty confident that we are now on track and we know exactly where all our monies are and what is available to County.*

*Our accounts are currently being inspected by the RBL Audit Team, and I know they will pick up on some of the issues with the accounts which I have described above; I look forward to receiving their report.*

*So, moving to the report for 2024-2025, you will note that there was a large amount shown as “Income from other parts of the Legion” and these are the CSB monies being received in the County Account with this plus what we were holding already being transferred out of the bank account shown under Expenditure as “Payments to other parts of the Legion”.*

*You will note that we only had just over £3,700 in our bank account as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025, but we had £28,000 available which can be drawn down if needed.*

*The sustainability of County funds is somewhat better than it was at the moment, not just because of the cost reductions which have been implemented since last year, but also events which have affected the situation such as the cancellation of the County Standard Bearers Competition (due to a lack of entries), the resignation of the County Community Support Co-ordinator (with its associated costs) and a reduction in the work being undertaken by the County Chair (due to non-availability of course).*

*Although these have helped to improve the financial situation in the short-term, our current levels of expenditure do not reflect the true cost of running the County.*

*If you have any questions about my report, please contact me via my County Secretary’s email address.*

*In the meantime, we would be most grateful for any donation for County funds from branches and – we are still looking for a County Treasurer!!!!*

**Addendum:** A donation of £100 from RBL Roade & District Branch was gratefully received.

### **13. National Guest Speaker: Mr John Thornhill MBE, RBL Trustee**

*“Thank you for the opportunity to be here and to talk through our highlights from 2025, and what’s coming up in 2026.*

*This year, we launched Our Strategy to 2035, which sets out our vision, mission, values, and the outcomes we aim to deliver for the Armed Forces community over the next decade. The strategy responds to ongoing changes both in the external landscape and within our own community.*

*Changes including a marked decrease in the Second World War generation, uncertainty around how the UK Armed Forces might be deployed over the next decade, and the increasing number of working-age veterans and their families coming to us for support. These shifts require us to adapt so that we can remain relevant and fit for purpose.*

*We engaged widely across a variety of groups as we developed our strategy including with members through surveys, with County Chairs at their conferences, and with Membership Council and Trustees as well as bringing in an external challenge panel who were able to challenge some of our thinking as the strategy evolved.*

*As you can see on Our Strategy to 2035 one pager, available here today, our vision is to bring together society to recognise, remember, and support the Armed Forces community. This is supported by our mission, strategic outcomes, enablers and values.*

*The strategy is built on three core pillars, or ‘outcomes’: Connect, Remember and Support, which each have long-term goals and shorter one-to-three-year goals to help us plan and deliver work against them. The long terms goals are set out on the one pager. Together, they focus on strengthening the connections we make across communities and wider society, evolving Remembrance to continue to bring society together in recognising the contribution of the Armed Forces community, and modernising our services to meet people’s needs today and into the future.*

*But none of that work will be achievable without the people and things to make it happen, what we refer to as our ‘enablers’, and these are categorised into three areas – people, assets, and capabilities. Our people are all of us in this room, our members, our volunteers, and our employees, all of whom will make a valuable contribution to achieving the strategic outcomes. Our assets include our properties, data and technology, finances, and of course our trusted and well-known brand. And our capabilities are our funds, skills and processes, and our resources, all of which are needed to make sure we operate effectively and efficiently in delivering the outcomes we all want for our Armed Forces community.*

*It's also important we have a shared understanding in how we want to go about this work and behave towards one another, and that's where our values come in. We built on existing work that had already taken place across the Legion to develop our values and we also engaged widely on their development. We wanted to ensure we had values that were recognisable and relevant for all our people. We have four values that we ask all our people to be guided by, and these are stand together, be respectful, take pride, and embrace change. Combined, these values focus us on comradeship and connections, ensure we act with empathy, fairness, and integrity, help us focus our passion in the right way, and ask us to look ahead and be adaptable to change. Since May, we have introduced the strategy across the organisation and beyond, building understanding among members, colleagues, volunteers and external partners about what it means and how it will shape our work in the years ahead. In other activity this year, we strengthened the leadership of the Membership by launching the Aspire Leadership Programme, which I'm pleased to say has been extremely well received, with a strong uptake.*

*At Annual Conference, we introduced the Sir Clive Johnstone Award, created in memory of our former National President who sadly passed away in 2024. The award celebrates individuals who demonstrate unity and bring people together, and the first recipient was Lieutenant Commander Steve Cass of the Royal Navy, from the Cosham Branch.*

*And, to support Our Strategy to 2035, we have been assessing our branch property assets to explore how we can best use our spaces. We are also improving online access, making it easier for members to connect with what they need.*

*In the last year, the RBL provided direct support to nearly 20 thousand (19,857) households across the Armed Forces community.*

*Our members continued to make a real difference. Branch Community Support volunteers carried out more than a thousand home visits, over 160 hospital visits, and almost three and a half thousand check-in calls.*

*Our Benefits, Debt and Money Advice team achieved its strongest results to date, securing more than 11 million pounds for households.*

*We also expanded our War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme service to include 'first-stage' applicants. This meant people were able to access compensation more quickly, and the number of households we supported doubled to more than fourteen hundred. Through this work, we've helped beneficiaries to claim nearly 14 million pounds.*

*Our campaigning made important progress too. We helped secure the extension of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty, which will be expanded to cover a wide range of public services. This will form part of the Armed Forces Bill in 2026.*

*More than 50 councils have now changed policy following our 'Credit Their Service' campaign, calling for military compensation to no longer be counted in means-tested benefit assessments. Our Care Homes continue to lead the sector, with customer satisfaction at 97%, and across all our services, satisfaction remains strong, with 85% of households saying they would recommend RBL to a loved one.*

*In February, our Recovery Service proudly led and supported Team UK at the 2025 Invictus Games in Vancouver and Whistler. 62 competitors took part in everything from alpine skiing to wheelchair rugby, bringing home 38 medals.*

*We are already preparing for the 2027 Invictus Games in Birmingham. Counties, districts, and branches can play a direct part by sponsoring competitors for £26,500 each. These funds will help our Recovery Team support that individual and their family as they train for and attend the Games. County Chairs now have a full information pack available.*

*2025 was also a significant year for Remembrance, as we marked the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. In May, we supported 30 veterans to attend Victory in Europe celebrations in central London, and we hosted our own tea party and service of Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum for 40 veterans. We marked Victory over Japan in August, by holding a commemorative event at the Arboretum, which was broadcast live on BBC One, and where we hosted 33 Second World War veterans, alongside our Patron His Majesty The King, and Her Majesty The Queen.*

*Over £120,000 was awarded in VE and VJ Day 80 grants to the membership which enabled 194 branches and clubs to organise commemorative activity.*

*In October, the National Memorial Arboretum hosted the unveiling of a new memorial dedicated to the LGBT+ people who have served and continue to serve in the Armed Forces.*

*In November, we hosted our annual Festival of Remembrance, paying tribute to the Second World War generation, bereaved military children, and marking 25 years since the lifting of the service ban for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans personnel. Over 10,000 people took part in the Veterans March Past the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday, and the Armistice Day service at the National Memorial Arboretum was attended by Her Royal Highness The Princess of Wales. Over two hundred and twenty thousand school children tuned into our Remembrance Assembly on Armistice Day, and we were proud to have the support of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, who recorded a special video message.*

*In continued efforts to recognise more contemporary Service, on the 14th of December, we hosted a Ceremony of Remembrance at the Arboretum to remember the 30th anniversary of the end of the Bosnian War, attended by 400 veterans and families.*

*Also this year, we launched the Forgotten Army touring exhibition, honouring the 2.5 million soldiers of the South Asian Army who served in the First and Second World Wars. The exhibition was displayed at Liverpool John Moore's University during Remembrance and will now be at the National Memorial Arboretum until March, before touring across the UK.*

*There have been fantastic efforts once again from our 54,000 members, volunteers, and colleagues for this year's Poppy Appeal.*

*We had an incredibly successful London Poppy Day raising £1.4 million, beating our £1.2 million target and raising 14% more than last year.*

*The total raised for the previous year's Poppy Appeal in 2024 was £51.4 million, providing vital funds for our work. As you know, it takes some time to count the cash and get it banked but*

*thanks to more support from our branches, volunteers, and collectors, early indications for our 2025 Poppy Appeal are looking strong, and we're looking forward to announcing our 2025 total towards the end of March.*

*Please pass on our sincere thanks to all those in your branches and local communities who supported this year's Appeal.*

*As we look ahead to the next year, we're focused on Our Strategy to 2035, and now putting the right plans in place to deliver the strategy's short-term goals over the next one to three years. And in addition, bringing our new values to life in everything we do.*

*One of the commitments in our strategy is to strengthen and grow our membership. Increasing the number of members will boost camaraderie across our Armed Forces community and beyond, help the Membership continue to provide an invaluable contribution to RBL and maintain a strong local presence across the UK and overseas.*

*Collaboration is underway across the charity to develop our Youth Plan. This work is rooted in listening and involving young people in decisions about how they would like to connect with RBL.*

*Branch Community Support will continue to grow, and we want every branch to be part of this. Expanding Branch Community Support will help us reach more people in more places.*

*In May, we will mark the 15th anniversary of the end of Operation Telic, when British forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq, which will be commemorated with an event at the National Memorial Arboretum.*

*Looking ahead to the Poppy Appeal 2026 we are aiming to:*

- continue to improve the volunteer experience through training, communications and streamlined processes*
- review product allocation to get the right merchandise to the right places, and*
- improve our cash handling process, looking at more counting centres and other options for pick-ups from volunteers.*

*Our Annual Conference 2026 will take place in Brighton from 8th-10th May. The event will be available to attend in person and join online, and now with the opportunity for those online to speak as part of conference. This format means more members can take part, and we look forward to seeing you many of you there.*

*Finally, I would like to say a tremendous thank you to all of you for being here today, and for your continued commitment and support to the RBL.*

*Thank you for listening."*

A point was made by Mrs Lynne Baker (RBL Rushden & District Branch) regarding the Invictus Games. It was suggested that the sponsorship target of £26,000 per competitor might be unrealistic for a county and branches. If, however, details of a local competitor were shared across the County as a whole and not just within Legion circles (to schools, youth organisations and local communities etc) this might attract greater sponsorship income.

Mrs Baker also explained that this was a two-way beneficial process as it would inspire young people to support Veterans in their endeavours and Veterans would benefit from interaction with students during the lead up to the Games. Furthermore, trips to the Invictus Games could be arranged so that students could support their adopted Veteran.

#### **14. Guest Speaker - Mr Giles Coleman, RBL Poppy Appeal Manager**

In the absence of Mr Coleman, Mr Stephen Thatcher (RBL County Secretary) covered the main points from the Poppy Appeal Report for 2024-2025, a copy of which was provided to all those attending present.

##### **Totals for 2024-2025:**

Regional - £3.4million

National - £42.8million (increase of 5.56%)

Raised in contactless payments - £11.3million

County total - £557,128 (increase of £6.89%)

County contactless payments - £128,000

The County Secretary then outlined some of the areas of work delivered by the Legion (both nationally and locally in the County) which were funded by the Poppy Appeal, as shown in the Service Report to Conference, copies of which were made available to those present. A copy of the report will also be issued to all branches, to be shared with all members.

#### **15. Election of County Committee Members 2026-2029**

The County Chair confirmed that the following had been nominated by branches and were duly appointed to the County Committee for 2026-2029:

- Mr Nick Fall (RBL Thrapston & District Branch)
- Mr Peter Armstrong (RBL Rushden & District Branch)
- Mr Stephen Corcoran (RBL Northampton & District Branch)

The County Chair also explained that there were still vacancies on the County Committee which he encouraged all branches to consider as follows:

- County Vice Chairman (elected)
- County Treasurer (appointed)
- Two County Committee Members (elected)

#### **16. Motions to Conference.** There were no motions submitted by County or branches.

#### **17. Presentation of County Certificates and Trophies**

Mr John Thornhill MBE presented the following:

##### **Poppy Appeal Trophies:**

- **Small Poppy Appeal District.** The Lord Cromwell Trophy for the greatest percentage increase – Middleton Cheney with a 101.63% increase to £3,595.03.
- Honorary mentions were:
  - Gretton with a 92.28% increase to £6,545.
  - Deanshanger with an 81.18% increase to £10,710.
- **Large Poppy Appeal District.** The Albert Franklin Memorial Cup for the greatest percentage increase – Brixworth & District with a 45.58% increase to £21,501.
- Honorary mentions were:
  - Kettering with a 17.12% increase to £39,832.
  - Brackley with a 7.53% increase to £31,934.

#### **Beacon Branches Awards:**

- **Bronze Award Certificates:**  
RBL Deanshanger & Wicken Branch  
RBL Duston & District Branch  
RBL Finedon, Irthlingborough & District Branch  
RBL Northampton & District Branch
- **Silver Award Certificate:**  
RBL Wellingborough & District Branch
- **Gold Award Certificates:**  
RBL Brixworth & District Branch  
RFBL Rushden & District Branch

#### **County Certificates:**

For his outstanding contribution to the work of the Royal British Legion - Mr David Hawker (RBL Rushden & District Branch)

#### **Standard Bearer Award:**

Most Improved Standard Bearer 2025 – Mr Archie Rankin Winner Lion & Crown Trophy.

#### **County Chair's Award:**

Presented to Mr Stephen Thatcher for his outstanding work as County Secretary and County Treasurer.

#### **The Bill Rose Memorial Trophy:**

This was awarded to the branch with the highest Gold Award score on the Beacon Branches Scheme. The 2025 winner was RBL Brixworth & District Branch – presented to Mr Eddie Edmunds (Branch Chair).

**18. County Standard Bearer 2026-2027.** The County Chair presented the County Standard to Ms Faith Cosgrove of RBL Kettering & District Branch.

**19. Homage and Act of Remembrance.** The Homage was read by the County Chair. This was followed by the Act of Remembrance led by Reverend Nicolas Boisson and the Kohima Epitaph.

## **20. Vote of Thanks**

The County Chairman, Mr Ian Byrnes closed the conference by thanking all those who had attended and advised delegates that the date of the next County Conference will be Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2027.

*“The business of the meeting being concluded, let us before we leave, remember our duty to King and Country, to our comrades and our branches. Let us be ready at all times to foster the spirit of brotherhood and mutual helpfulness to which we are dedicated, never forgetting our solemn obligation as members of The Royal British Legion”.*

This was followed by the National Anthem.

## **21. The Conference closed at 1.45pm**