



THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION.

In 1921, following the end of the First World War, it became apparent to Earl Haig that many of the returning veterans were finding it difficult to adjust and provide for their families and dependants in a world blighted by shortages of work and gainful employment and times were really difficult.

Earl Haig decided to try and do something about this situation and created the Earl Haig Fund by encouraging veterans to become gainfully employed in making Poppies, as a symbol from the battlefields and selling them, in order to generate funds towards his appeal.

The organisation became known as the British Legion and was instrumental in helping ANY serving or ex serving personnel and their dependants, providing they had received the minimum of 7 days' pay from HM Forces.

In 1960, Her majesty the Queen became our Patron and, with the introduction of a Royal Charter, the charity became known as the Royal British Legion and still exists today, continuing to help serving and ex serving Members of our Armed Forces.

Many people, to this day, believe that the Royal British Legion exists purely for the benefit of WW1 & 2 veterans.

Since the end of the Second World War, there is only ONE YEAR, in the sixties, where British Forces were not actively engaged in military operations somewhere in the world.

When Members of the Armed Forces are injured during these operations, they are actively supported by their Branch of the Army, Navy or Air Force, to overcome those injuries and attempt to return to a normal life.

Once discharged, unfortunately, they and their dependants are on their own struggling to make ends meet and make some form of sense of their lives.

This is where the Royal British Legion attempts to assist in various ways to help those individuals and their dependants.

Current (confidential) Welfare cases are brought to the Legion's attention and may only require somebody to visit an elderly veteran who has nobody to talk to. Some may need help in setting up a viable business and need assistance onto the first rung of the ladder. Some veterans have carers, but who considers whether the carer may need a little respite?

The Royal British Legion is currently dealing with cases emanating from veterans who have been affected by the Falklands Conflict back in 1982. We still need to be there when the need arises, as people from more recent Theatres of operations will inevitably be requiring our assistance. Hopefully, we will still be here to provide that assistance.

Away from the limelight, whilst the charity continues to spend over £75 million per year on welfare, the Board of Trustees are actively engaging our M.P's on such subjects as the Military Covenant, war Widow's Pensions and the effects of our troops over the years of being subjected to the adverse effects of asbestos.

What does this have to do with Felsham & Gedding ? I hear you ask.

Just about seventy years ago, to the day, on 30th May 1946, 18 local ex-servicemen met in Felsham Six Bells (the cost of the meeting room for the evening was 5/-) to discuss the possibility of forming a British Legion Branch. The meeting was enthusiastic and succeeded in forming a Committee. Members subscriptions were set at 4/- per year. Since then, every committee and welfare meeting has been recorded, over the past 15 or so years by me. Although the minutes are now produced by a word processor, they are still, to this day, also handwritten into the minute books. They make very interesting reading.

Some local people benefitted by having a bag of coal donated, some had assistance with meeting their electricity bills. Some needed clothing assistance for themselves and their school aged children. A very local affair.

Funds needed to be generated and these took the form of various coffee mornings, tombolas and prize draws. One prize draw recorded in these minutes states that 10 Woodbines would be donated as the first prize and a bottle of Babycham the second.

Over those years, Felsham & Gedding Branch has been actively engaged in supporting the four pillars of Comradeship, Remembrance, Welfare and Support, as the structure of the Royal British Legion has formulated over those years to move with the times.

Nevertheless, we remain an active Branch in all areas and now support the Drinkstone Branch, as a sub Branch, following their demise and lack of numbers around five years ago.

The Branch is active in supporting C Group and annually assists in the organising of the Festival of Remembrance, held at the Apex in Bury St. Edmunds each November.

As a Branch member and C Group Secretary, I also sit regularly on the County Committee.

Each year, for the last five years, a number of our Members has attended the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall and still been in attendance the following morning, for the Remembrance Day Service in our local St. Peter's church.

Our Branch Standard also makes an appearance at many of these events over the Legion year.

Two years ago, the Branch instigated a Motion of Urgency regarding proposed changes within the Membership. This was heard at County Conference and was scheduled to be tabled at the National Conference, before the Board of Trustees realised the error of their ways and rescinded their proposals.

Over the past few years, a number of Felsham & Gedding Members have been awarded Gold Badge status, which recognises not length of service, but Members going above and beyond their call of duty, for the benefit of the Legion.

As stated in my previous reports to this Committee, the Branch can only be successful with the support of the local community from our two villages and, we are grateful to the Parishioners of Felsham & Gedding for their unstinted support.

As also previously stated, we are always willing to offer a warm welcome to anybody wishing to join us. You do not have to be a Member or Ex Member of H.M. Forces, I am not.

I would like, on behalf of the Branch, to thank the Parish Council for affording me the time this evening to explain a little about the Royal British Legion and trust that we will continue to receive the support of the Parishioners in order to continue our work into the foreseeable future.

THANK YOU.

Norman Plumpton,
Branch Secretary,
Felsham & Gedding Royal British Legion.



