

## Seend Annual Parish Meeting – Royal British Legion - Chairman's Report

In May 2022 we remembered the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Falklands War and our Annual Lecture was given by ex 22 SAS veteran Mark 'Splash' Aston, recounting his participation in the conflict, being only one of 9 survivors of the Sea King crash into the South Atlantic, the biggest ever single loss of members of the Special Forces. His lecture was in aid of the RBL and, along with a book signing on the night, we raised £1200.

June 2022 saw the Celebration of the Queens Platinum Jubilee. We organised an all-day event with BBQ, stalls and live music in Bishops Cannings in aid of the Poppy Appeal and the Ukraine Disasters Emergency Fund and raised over £1000 for both charities.

That same month a small group of members cycled from Seend, 120 miles to the Falklands Memorial in Pangbourne and back, laying wreaths at the Falklands Cairn and the SAS memorial in their memorial garden. This was as a thank you to the lost friends and colleagues of 'Splash' Aston. This fundraiser event raised a further £1600 for the RBL. Our Annual Drumhead Service at the end of June was cancelled due to planning and other events going on around the time of the Jubilee but will go ahead as planned in 2023.

In September we mourned the passing of our Sovereign and Patron of the RBL for 70 years, HM Queen Elizabeth II. As the Wiltshire County Standard Bearer, I was honoured to be chosen to line the funeral route in the mass tribute of RBL Standards at the Cenotaph in Whitehall. Thereafter, I competed in the County Competition, successfully retaining the post of Wiltshire County Standard Bearer.

At our AGM in October, Robin Heatley handed the Chair over to me and he became Vice Chair. Col Nigel Knocker OBE stepped down as President and this post was taken over by Air Vice Marshal Patrick O'Reilly CB. Dave Beaumont took up the role of Secretary and Wayne Cherry moved to Membership.

On 11 November, a very short ceremony took place around the war memorial for Armistice Day and the following evening we celebrated our Branch Centenary with a fundraising event in the Community Centre. That evening we were represented in Ypres by our branch member Gavin Perry, who completed a 121 mile walk, saving the last mile of his challenge to walk on the beaches at Dunkirk. The majority of the route was around the battlefields of the Ypres Salient and he was invited to lay a wreath on behalf of Seend Branch at the Menin Gate Last Post Ceremony that evening. We were extremely proud to have been asked to take part and Gavin successfully raised £600 for his fundraiser whilst we also raised around £800 that night at our event in Seend. The following day, Remembrance Sunday, wreaths were laid at the war memorial followed by a church service where our Standard was dedicated with the Centenary Pennant.

On 22 November, we lost a long-standing committee member, Air Commodore Joe Hardstaff MBE, and paid our tributes at a fitting send off at the West Wiltshire Crematorium after a very low flypast from a Hercules C130 from RAF Brize Norton.

At our County Conference on 4 February 2023, several of our members were presented with awards for outstanding service to the RBL. Seend Branch was awarded The Stillwell Cup for 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Branch Efficiency category – the second time we have won in the past five years.

On 18 February the Regional Standard Bearers competition was held in Ferndown, Dorset where I came in second place. I also took part in the RBL Facebook "2100 Squats in February Challenge" and raised £300.

On 21 February we mourned the loss of our past President and Chairman for near 20 years Col Nigel Knocker OBE. A Thanksgiving Service was held on 14 March in Seend Church attended, amongst others, by the Omani Military Attaché and Standard Bearers from his old Regiment, The Royal Sussex.

On Easter Saturday a minibus took some members on a day trip to the National Memorial Arboretum where I laid a wreath at the Basra Memorial Wall on behalf of Ken & Sue Holloway in memory of their son Ollie. I also paraded at the Savernake Dedication on 23 April and a wreath was laid from Seend RBL.

On 6 May, I was privileged to have been one of only 100 Standard Bearers to parade at the King's Coronation and I am honoured to have been one of only a few who were on parade at both Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and the coronation.

Kevin Toft, Chairman, Seend RBL

9 May 2023