
A Report from the Royal British Legion Belmont Branch Remembrance 2019



THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION
POPPY APPEAL



The Launch - Remember Together

The Belmont Branch was represented when The East Surrey Branch of the Royal British Legion launched the 2019 Poppy Appeal on 25 October, 2019.

It proved to be an historic occasion. The launch was hosted by the Baitul Futah Mosque at its large complex in Morden. This was the first time that a Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal had been launched in a mosque. It was also the first time that the Last Post and Reveille had been sounded in a mosque. The event was presided over by the RBL County President and the Senior Vice President of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Elders Association UK in association with Charity Walk for Peace. Both made short presentations.

We also heard a talk about the role hundreds of thousands of Muslims had played fighting in the British Army in World War 1. In another first, we had the chance to take Khadi Poppies. When troops from what was then the Indian Empire were deployed to the Western Front, they were sent wearing their thin tropical uniforms and sandals. This year, the Royal British Legion has issued the Khadi Poppy in which the red paper is replaced by a material similar to that of the tropical uniforms. The material is noticeably less substantial than the paper. One can only imagine how cold those men must have been.

“Love for all, hatred for none” may sound like an injunction taken from Saint Paul’s epistles. We learned that it is the overriding tenet of the Ahmadiyya faith. The generosity and hospitality that we experienced from the members of the mosque was outstanding. We were warmly welcomed by everybody we met and enjoyed some excellent catering.

In recent times, members of the mosque have raised very large sums of money for the Royal British Legion Poppy Appeals. One such person received a certificate recognising his extraordinary achievement of raising some £34,000 single-handedly. He volunteers as a collector and collects all day and every day throughout the Poppy Appeal period.

Our visit included a guided visit to the men’s Prayer Hall. It was vast but there were two more equally large Prayer Halls for women and children. Children were much in evidence at the event. There was a group of children from a local school as well as children from the mosque. Some of the latter were in colourful traditional garments whilst others wore “poppy-themed” clothes. For example, one little girl wore a charming outfit with a blue skirt patterned with red poppies.

The theme of the launch was “Remember Together”. It was a privilege to have been part such an engaging event.

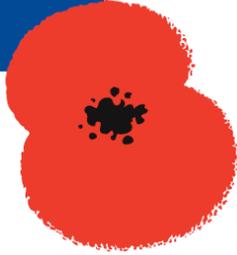
The Poppy Appeal Collection

Following the launch of the national Appeal, the Belmont Branch Poppy Appeal Organiser (John Footitt) assembled his team of Collectors. He distributed the collecting kits and arranged a rota. Braving the weather, the Collectors were to be seen around the area raising the profile of Remembrance and raising money for the work of the Royal British Legion.



In addition to the street collections, collection boxes, together with trays of Poppy Appeal merchandise, were distributed around the Belmont area to shops, churches, pubs, clubs, halls, care homes, hospitals and other medical establishment. Particular attention has been paid this year to schools and nurseries. A total of 75 boxes were distributed.

Thanks to the efforts of the street collectors and to those locations who championed the causes of the charity with their trays of Poppy Appeal merchandise, John was able to report that the Belmont Branch had raised a total of £14,024 for the 2019 Appeal. This exceeds the amount that was raised in the 2018 Appeal.



Remembrance Sunday 2019

Belmont Branch again organised a major event consisting of a parade through the village a Remembrance ceremony and wreath laying at the village War Memorial followed by a service in St John's Church and an informal gathering hosted by the Belmont Conservative Club.

The parade and War Memorial ceremony attracted a record number of participants. Over 400 people attended, of whom about 150 paraded.



Parade Assembling at California Pub



RBL Standard
carried by 219 Sqn ATC



Over 150 people of all ages in



the parade including Guides,



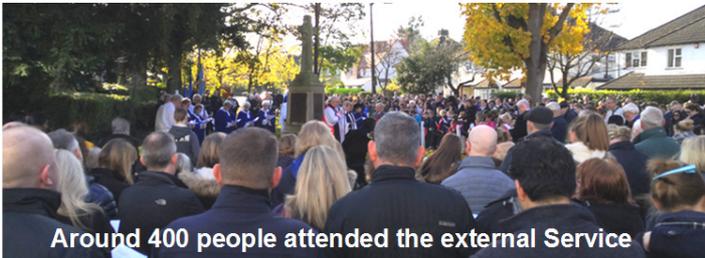
Scouts, Air Cadets and local schools

The parade was led by the Crystal Place Band and included a contingent from 219 Squadron RAF Air Cadets. The Air Cadets paraded the Branch standard and provide the parade commander.

We were particularly pleased to see the high number of the younger generation (estimated at about 150) who took part in the parade and gave their respects at the service. We have always had a good showing from the Scouts, Guides and Air Cadets, and this year there was also a significant presence (and wreaths being laid) by local schools including Avenue Primary Academy, Harris Academy Sutton and (new for this year) Overton Grange secondary school. Peter Matthey had met in advance with all of the teachers involved and given them links to the Remembrance Pack for schools on the Royal British Legion website.



The Standard Bearers



Around 400 people attended the external Service



The Crystal Palace Brass Band

The service at the War Memorial was conducted by the Bishop of Croydon, The Right Reverend Jonathan Clark. Exhortations were said on behalf of the Royal British Legion and the Burma Star Association.

Prayers were said by Paul Soloman on behalf of AJEX (The Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women).



Service led by the



Bishop of Croydon



Supported by the Emergency Services: LFB and



The Royal Engineers



26 Poppy Wreaths laid



Belmont Safer Neighbourhood Team

After the Silence, twenty-seven wreaths were laid at the Memorial, again a record number.

Following the ceremony, Bishop Jonathan conducted a Remembrance Service in St John's Church. This was well attended across the generations. The Air Cadets assisted with the collection in aid of the British Legion and made an excellent contribution to the service by reading the lesson and the prayers.

The success of this year's Remembrance was thanks to the efforts of members of the Branch Committee in working with various organisations to prepare for it and make it happen. Close liaison took place with the Church, the Air Cadets, the Belmont Village Club, the Belmont and South Cheam Residents Association ("BSCRA"), the Crystal Palace Band and the London Borough of Sutton. All of these organisations made significant contributions to the event. For the necessary road closures alone members of the BSCRA Committee delivered over 500 leaflets to local residents notifying them of the road closures and deployed over twenty road closure signs and barriers so that the event was both respectful and safe.

Particular thanks are due to the Metropolitan Police who allocated us 5 officers for the duration of the service and without whom the event would be difficult to run.

A Busy Year

The Belmont Branch has had a busy year. The number of youngsters in the Remembrance parade this year makes keeping the parade running all the more important and is a great incentive for us all to keep our Branch vibrant.

New members have joined the Committee and membership of the Branch has more than doubled. Further potential new members have expressed interest. A positive relationship has been established with the Belmont Village Club, allowing access to its facilities for Branch members and providing a venue for indoor events.

Events organised by the branch during the year have included:



1. An Open Day in May supported by the Royal Fusiliers and the Royal Engineers. This was well attended (including the local MP) and attracted more new members.

We were delighted to be joined by County Membership Support Officer, Eloise Blake.



2. The 75th Anniversary of D-Day was marked with a ceremony at the War Memorial. The Harris Academy history club attended and were given a short lecture on D-Day.

This was followed by the screening of a film about the D-Day landings.



3. In November, a presentation titled “Project Management Under Fire” was given by an Afghanistan Royal Engineers veteran to an appreciative audience of members and guests.

Since October, the Branch has given its support to a weekly gathering of the “Belmont Seniors”, which arranges informal events for older members of the local community.



There has been live music, quizzes and chair based exercises. Attendance at these themed meetings is steadily growing.

Keith White, CBE VR

December 2019