

# LIONESS



# WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION

THE SERVICEWOMEN'S CHARITY



## Life Vice Presidents

Col Ali Brown OBE

Brig Nicky Moffat CBE

Col Audrey Smith OBE

Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE

## Trustees

**Amanda Hassell**  
Vice President & Chair of  
Trustees

**Monica Jones**  
Chair of ATS & WRAC  
Benevolent Fund  
Grants Committee

**Rowena Naile MBE**  
Chair of Membership  
Council

**Tim Savage**  
Treasurer

## Trustees

Vivienne Buck CBE  
Janette Deans  
Barbara Johnson  
Sue Mackenzie  
Dawn Menday  
Helen Merrington-Rust MBE  
Shân Veillard-Thomas  
Shelley Whitehead

## Area Co-ordinators

Tracey MacPherson (Scotland & Northern Ireland)  
Lyn Hatch (Eastern)  
Maggy Ashmore (London & South East)  
Amanda Foster (South & South West)  
Ann Stack (Wales & The West)  
Dawn Hawker (North West)  
Currently recruiting (North East)  
Currently recruiting (Central)

**CEO**  
Paula Rogers

**Head of Operations**  
Claire Simnett

**Governance &  
Finance Officer**  
Jane Winfield

**Admin &  
Grants Officer**  
Sam King

Published by the WRAC Association [wraca.org.uk](http://wraca.org.uk)

Printed in Great Britain and distributed worldwide by Tiger Ink Ltd, Eastleigh, SO50 9FD

If you would like us to consider including an article in the next edition of Lioness please contact the editorial team to discuss -  
[editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)

# Message from the Vice President



As spring approaches, I've been reflecting on a busy ten months since becoming Vice President. The Association HQ has been energetic, coordinating our participation in numerous events and expanding our influence across the veterans' space, particularly through the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP). The launch at the Royal Chelsea Hospital was a notable success, with the Veterans' Minister Louise Sander-Jones addressing a packed audience (read more on p48). The event coincided with the publication of the Veterans' Strategy, which included the FVTP and plans for a female forum. The FVTP team, led so ably by Col Ali Brown OBE and supported by the tri-service steering group, delivered an engaging and informative toolkit. I look forward to promoting this project and embedding the toolkit across veteran-facing providers. Our success will be evident when providers better understand the challenges faced by female veterans and more women recognise their own service and identify as a veteran.

In August, at the National Memorial Arboretum, we acknowledged the trauma experienced by women who served under the "gay ban". Through the restoration process, these women received their cap badge and berets. I am grateful once again to Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE who delivered a personal and heartfelt apology on behalf of the Army. We gathered over lunch to mark the event and welcome 20 more women into our association (p26). The formal restoration programme will close in December 2026, and time is running out for us to publicise the government programme. We want to ensure that this important news reaches female veterans far and wide, specifically those not yet known to the Association. If you can help to promote this project, please do get in touch with the office so that we can provide further information and publicity material. The charity Fighting With Pride, is ready to support any individual veterans who come forward and require assistance in navigating the process.

Early in my appointment, I brought together trustees and area coordinators to discuss how we can improve our skills and collaboration to run this fantastic association and deliver for our members and potential beneficiaries. It was a great opportunity for us to gather in person and my thanks go to the Association staff for organising a memorable away day at the Tower of London (p59).

In November, I was honoured to represent the Association in Guildford on Remembrance Sunday, witnessing the WRAC contingent leading the parade through the city to the castle grounds for the Act of Remembrance (p30). Afterwards, we met for lunch at The Keep pub, where I enjoyed conversations with many members, including newcomers. For those seeking a less strenuous outing than the Cenotaph in London, I thoroughly recommend a trip back to Guildford - you will be amongst friends and comrades, and welcomed warmly.

Last year also brought sadness with the passing of Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Kent. I was privileged to attend her funeral at Westminster Cathedral alongside Life Vice President, Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE, who has paid tribute to our late president in this issue. Many members have shared memories of meeting Her Royal Highness, especially during visits to WRAC women in Germany, Guildford and elsewhere. This issue will reflect on the life, dedication, and support for the women who served during her tenure.

**Amanda Hassell**



## CONTENTS

|                                      |            |
|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Hail and Farewell                    | <b>6</b>   |
| Tribute To Duchess of Kent           | <b>10</b>  |
| Restoration of Berets and Cap Badges | <b>26</b>  |
| Remembrance                          | <b>29</b>  |
| Showers in the Gower                 | <b>38</b>  |
| VJ 80                                | <b>40</b>  |
| LGBT+ Community Memorial Dedication  | <b>44</b>  |
| FVTP Launch                          | <b>48</b>  |
| Summer Event Book your place!        | <b>51</b>  |
| WRAC Dinner Club                     | <b>64</b>  |
| Officers Dining Club                 | <b>66</b>  |
| Branch News                          | <b>74</b>  |
| Letters to the Editor                | <b>104</b> |
| Obituaries                           | <b>106</b> |

### Cover:

Duchess of Kent images  
copyright David Cooper/Fleet  
Street Photo Archive

**Disclaimer:** The contents of Lioness are strictly copyright and all rights are expressly reserved. The views expressed herein are not necessarily the views of the Editor or the WRAC Association, and accordingly no responsibility for these will be accepted. The Editor reserves the right to amend or omit articles and photos. Photos will only be returned if a SAE is provided.

*Thanks to your  
Lioness editorial team:  
Babs Anderson, Barbara Johnson,  
Maggie Purkis, Paula Rogers,  
Claire Simnett, Vicki West,  
Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE*



# Message from the Chair of the Membership Council



The Membership Council is always a changing group of members and in the last few months we said goodbye to Leslie Roberts as Area Coordinator for the North East and to Louise Lingard-Snape for the Central Area. On behalf of the Association, I thank them for their work. It was really good for the Area Coordinators to take part in the Away Day with the Trustees in October and help provide excellent input into the work to help progress the Association. We are currently looking for area coordinators for the eastern side of England, so if you live anywhere from Berwick-upon-Tweed down to Bury St Edmunds please get in touch with HQ to find out more about the role, and if you know someone who has an interest in supporting female veterans, please mention it to them - it really is a very rewarding position.

I am delighted to say our membership continues to grow, as at the end of January we had 4596 members, up from 4381 in June. Please keep encouraging your contemporaries who are not members to join the Association; it will enable them to have a voice on female veteran matters. As an association we put on at least two events a year: one that incorporates our AGM (21 March 2026 at the VSC in London) and the Summer Event (this year we are heading to Edinburgh on 14 June), and of course every three years we have the Grand Reunion – and as I do not know where it is going to be next time I cannot drop any hints!!

I have visited two branches recently – Shropshire, and Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. It was wonderful to see so many members gathering together to enjoy the camaraderie of fellow WRAC veterans. While I was visiting Shropshire Branch I presented the first Certificate of Appreciation to a branch, and it was wonderful to see the surprise and appreciation on the faces of the branch members. The branch has been meeting for 45 years and actively seeks out new members offering friendship and camaraderie with a wide variety of social events to ensure the social calendar is inclusive. My visit to Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight Branch was also timed to present a Certificate of Appreciation to Sally Watson. Sally is a very worthy recipient having contributed so much to the branch, including the merging of the two branches to ensure our members in that area still have meetings arranged. The joy that the Certificates of Appreciation bring to the recipients clearly shows us how important these are, so please do make sure that you submit nominations for those members who have contributed so much to the Association. You can read more about my visits to present these certificates on page 102.



Remembrance time is always busy for our members, and it was with great pride that so many of our members attended Remembrance Day services and parades the length and breadth of the country looking so smart in all the various photos submitted to the Association. I was again honoured to be at the Field of Remembrance and then to lead the contingent at the Cenotaph in London (p29).

This will be my last foreword as Chair of the Membership Council as I am stepping down at the AGM in March. It has been a great honour to be a trustee, and recently the Chair of the Membership Council and I salute all our members and members of staff who make the Association such a great association.



# The View from HQ



I'm looking at a brave few daffodils poking their heads out as I write this so hopefully spring is very much here, but what a busy six months we've just had. In September I returned to the executive board table of Cobseo having been reelected to serve for a further three-year term. Seeing off some very strong contenders from veterans charities large and small, it was a real compliment to know that so many other organisations and regimental associations are voting for us to represent their views. Across four meetings every year we share our concerns and best practices, and receive regular updates from senior members of the MOD and Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA). It is an honour to serve the wider veteran community in this way.

I was able to catch up with the senior women running the OVA again later in the year, having a good chat with newly appointed Minister of Veterans and People Louise Sandher-Jones and Director of the OVA Anisha Worbs at the NMA in October where we attended

the unveiling of the beautiful new memorial (see page 44). Then in November they were both our guests as we hosted veterans and influential people within the veteran sector at the Royal Hospital Chelsea for the launch of the Female Veterans Transformation Programme Toolkit (p48). As Louise is an army veteran of the Intelligence Corps she expressed genuine enjoyment at chatting with so many of our members, including Vic Wales.



An invitation from the WRAC Dinner Club meant an October trip to Solihull and a warm welcome from the Lionesses, not to mention a good grilling at their AGM! (p64). Thanks again to all those who made me feel so at home, and apologies to those who had to listen to my singing at the impromptu karaoke - I am sure I sang all the right notes, but not necessarily in the correct order!

November meant that our staff were proudly remembering those who gave their lives

at the service held at our HQ Sir John Moore Barracks. I was honoured to be invited to lay the ATS and WRAC wreath both here and at the Bank of England (p36). Where we will be based when this year's Remembrance takes place is not yet confirmed, but I hope to continue this proud tradition wherever the WRAC Association is gratefully housed by the Army.

Our padre Trudy Hobson has agreed to write a regular article for us - a fascinating insight into her work as a modern padre. It was either write an article for each issue of the Lioness or have me send nagging emails for news which was clearly Hobson's choice, so she plumped for the first option and called her section 'Hobson's Voice' - we hope you enjoy hearing about her exploits on page 63.

As Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE put together her tribute to the Duchess of Kent, I spent many hours working alongside Sue, looking through old copies of the Lioness magazine dating back to 1967, and was reminded at every turn of the page of the wonderful contribution of those who served in the ATS and WRAC. The informative, poignant and funny articles which have been featured over the years make for such wonderful reading - I could have been lost in those issues for weeks! Don't forget you can always read our back issues for yourselves on our website in the 'Lioness Archive' section, but I should warn you - you'll need to clear your diary, turn off the phone and get plenty of supplies in!





### Hailing: Brig Vivienne Buck CBE Trustee



I am delighted to have been selected to join the WRAC Association Board of Trustees. As a female veteran of 32 years' service in the Army, I am looking forward to using my experience to help deliver the mission and purpose of the Association, and support and engage with the members.

I started my military career as WRAC when I enlisted at Sandhurst in January 1992. Following the disbandment of the Corps later that year, I Commissioned directly into the Royal Military Police and went on to experience an amazing career spanning the world. My final tour was as Provost Marshal Army (Head of the Royal Military Police) where I had the pleasure to lead over 5,000 personnel globally, driving transformation, cultural change,

and professional development across the organisation. I was also Chair of Trustees for three registered charities, and two Regimental Associations, covering benevolence, grant giving, the preservation and promotion of regimental heritage, and promoting a lasting bond of friendship between veterans. I believe this aligns perfectly with the ethos of the WRAC Association.

Since October 2023 I have been the Chief Executive Officer of Blesma, a national charity supporting limbless veterans and their families, advocating for their rights and ensuring their needs are met with compassion and purpose. Blesma also delivers a varied and fun outreach activity programme that brings 'old comrades' and their families together, providing an integrated, safe and enjoyable environment. In addition, I am on the Executive Committee of Cobseo and Veterans' Scotland and believe this collaborative and inclusive approach will help me do my bit to further the ambitions of the WRAC Association.

I am looking forward to working with the Board, getting to know my fellow Trustees, and meeting members of the Association.



### Hailing: Tracey MacPherson Scotland & Northern Ireland Area Co-ordinator



I am delighted to have been appointed to the role of Scotland & NI Area Co-ordinator. I did not envisage this when I picked up my first copy of the Lioness. Since that time, I have greatly enjoyed meeting with fellow veterans, setting up the Moray & Highlands branch, highlighting our presence and making connections with other organisations.

I enlisted in 1989, getting on a train from Inverness to

Guildford with never a backward glance. Next was trade training in Ashford, where a small group of us joined with the lads for the last 4 weeks of their basic training. This allowed us to prove we could go toe to toe with them in the hardest parts of their basic training. My last posting included supporting on a winter exercise in Norway with 29 Commando. I would say the cold in Norway is preferable to the cold in Scotland!



My career path after leaving the Army has been varied from butchers assistant to environmental regulator, with time on the way spent in various local authority roles in Revenues, Environmental Health and Education, including a proud time as a families military support liaison officer.

Going forward, I will endeavour to meet with all members across the area, representing and highlighting the WRAC Association and getting involved with all aspects of the role.

## Hailing: Ria Luke Female Veterans Transformation Programme Project Officer

I'm delighted to introduce myself as the new Project Officer for the Female Veterans Transformation Programme. With over 15 years of experience working alongside the military in various capacities, including significant contributions to the military charity sector, I bring a wealth of knowledge and dedication to this important role. My experience includes working directly with serving females across various military bases in admin roles, medical centres, and as a sports therapist, giving me invaluable insight into the challenges faced by women in the armed forces.

I hit the ground running as soon as I started in the run-up to the launch of the Female Veterans Toolkit last November, and I will continue to play a vital role in supporting the team throughout the coming year. Alongside my work with the FVTP, I run my own therapy practice where I support veterans and serving personnel through retreats, one-to-one therapy sessions, and workshops across various locations.

My passion for learning drives me to regularly attend CPD workshops, continually adding to my skill set of alternative therapies to better support the military community. I maintain my own wellbeing through off-road running, CrossFit, and yoga.

My connection to military life runs deep—I'm part of an active military family with my RSM husband serving in the Royal Marines. Weekends often find us yomping across Dartmoor as a family, horse riding with my daughter, or attending military functions. Even our horse is a veteran from RM Bickleigh! I am excited to bring my personal understanding, combined with my professional expertise to the role and team.



## Three Area Coordinators Needed

**Do you live in East Anglia, the East Midlands,  
the North East, the Ridings of Yorkshire  
or anywhere on the Eastern side of England?**

**Do you want to support your fellow female veterans?**

Area coordinators offer support to branches in their region, contribute to the direction of Association membership, and sit on the Major Grants Committee of the Benevolent Fund. We have vacancies for coordinators in our Eastern, Central and North Eastern areas. We would welcome applications from enthusiastic members and friends or family who would like to show their appreciation for the service of our veterans.

Contact HQ for more information: [membership@wraca.org.uk](mailto:membership@wraca.org.uk)



## Farewell to: Lesley Roberts Area Coordinator North East



I have enjoyed my time as North East Area Coordinator - in fact when I first started in 2019 we didn't have a separate area for the North West, so I was the coordinator for the whole of northern England until 2022, from coast to coast, and from the Scottish borders down to Chester and the Lincolnshire Wolds.

My first Grand Reunion was in Southampton and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I didn't know at the

time but the next GR would come to my area and I would be really involved, so it was great to see this one in action. Holding the event in Leeds meant a lot of hard work finding volunteers, especially to marshal people across the busy streets to Beating Retreat. The wonderful members of Leeds branch really stepped up and pitched in and I'm very grateful to them for making the event such a success.

The branches have been great to work with, and the fun times with the girls have made it worth my while to sacrifice my annual leave allowance for the weekday meetings. I could be visiting Manchester for breakfast (6am start!), joining Leeds in a lovely teahouse, or enjoying cocktails with the Newcastle gang, it was always a joy.

Alongside the fun were the serious responsibilities. When we remembered the 26 ATS servicewomen killed in 1943 I was touched at how the local congregation in Gosforth joined us to remember Pte Louisa Maxwell. For the past seven years I have been the lone female Army veteran representative at the Remembrance Day service in Newcastle, proudly laying the wreath. The one time I marched at Cenotaph was when the late Betty Hershel asked if I would lay the ATS wreath. I had told my family not to bother looking for me on TV as we were never featured. Of course it turned out to be the first year that we were, and there I was, right in the centre of the TV screen - my grandchildren screamed!



So it's thanks and goodbye to all my branches (except Newcastle where I'll still be coming for the cocktails) and I'll see you all at the next Grand Reunion.

## Farewell to: Nina Smith Area Coordinator London and the South East



My time as area coordinator has included many memorable events and visits. The fabulous branches in my area have always made me very welcome: from afternoon tea with Canterbury branch and evening meals and drinks with Invicta group, to catching up with the Greater London girls at Horse Guards, the Royal Hospital Chelsea and the National Army Museum, and the unforgettable unveiling of the wonderful stained glass window at

Lancing Pier, installed by the wonderful women of Worthing. I thank all of these members past and present for their time and energy, and for making me feel a part of their community.

Sitting as a member of the Benevolent Fund Major Grants Committee I am proud to have been firm but sympathetic and fair in all of my deliberations. Grants are such an important part of what we do, and my approach of listening before I open my mouth and considering all sides before giving my opinion has ensured I look back over my time on the committee with a strong sense of having made a real difference to the lives of my fellow female veterans. As part of the Membership Council it has been a privilege to join the consensus of minds from across the UK to mould the direction of membership. I was pleased to be able to step up for particular tasks including supporting the chair in writing parts of the Association constitution and writing the new job description for the area coordinators.

But the thing I will most take away is the people I have met. Being an Area Coordinator means meeting many people, getting different perspectives and sharing ideas, and knowing you're not alone means that I have benefitted as much from the company of the members in my area as they have from having me in post. The wonderful characters I have met and the hard work I have seen really demonstrates how the branches keep our community going.

My 50th birthday fell on Remembrance Sunday 6 years ago. The pride I felt in being able to celebrate this golden occasion whilst representing my Corps and marching with my comrades as we passed the Cenotaph will stay in my heart. Thank you to everyone I have worked alongside - I look forward to seeing you at future events - just participating this time!





## Farewell to: Julie Winks Grants Officer



After seven and a half incredible years, the time has come for me to say a fond farewell, goodbye and auf wiedersehen. I am retiring from the Association to begin a new chapter of my life enjoying our first grandchild and spending time with my elderly parents. It's hard to put into words just how much this journey has meant to me - both professionally and personally. During my time as the Grants Officer, I have processed 1,547 requests for assistance with over £1.6 million awarded to our beneficiaries.

When I first joined the WRAC Association, I couldn't have imagined the depth of purpose and pride that would come with being part of an organisation dedicated to supporting female veterans. Over the years, I have attended three Grand Reunions which gave me just a snippet of the resilience,

courage, and community spirit that define both the women we serve and the team that works tirelessly on their behalf to ensure that all events and the Association run smoothly. Event highlights for me personally were the Centenary event at Guildford Cathedral where I was fortunate to meet the Duchess of Edinburgh (Countess of Wessex at the time), the WRAC statue unveiling at the NMA (and visiting the plot numerous times in the Ride to the Wall and various Association events) and attending cap badge restorations as part of the Etherton review.

It's been a privilege to help award grants to provide real opportunities and support for those who have given so much in service. From small one-off grants to awarding Annual Maintenance Grants to make a difference on a regular basis. Grants awarded through the Chair and Major Grants Committees have been a collective effort, built on teamwork and a shared belief in making a difference.

I am proud to have been a part of the introduction of two new partnerships with The Veterans Charity and Lightning Reach, strengthening our ability to support female veterans quickly and effectively. Female veterans often face unique challenges, including financial hardship, housing insecurity, and delays in accessing appropriate support. These partnerships represent a vital step toward ensuring that no woman who has served is left waiting for help when she needs it most.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Trustees and Council Members for their dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment not only to the Association but especially the Benevolent Fund. They all give their time, expertise, and guidance so generously.

Of course, I cannot go without thanking my colleagues at HQ for their support but especially their humour, which brings warmth, perspective, and positivity to our work, even on the most challenging days. Their hard work ensures that the charity remains focused on its mission and able to serve those who rely on the Association's support.

And to the Lionesses - you are the reason we do what we do, and your stories will continue to inspire me wherever I go. Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re.





# Katharine, Duchess of Kent

## *A tribute to our Association President*



Throughout my career as a WRAC Officer and then as a member of the WRAC Association Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Kent was a constant. She became our Colonel Commandant in the rank of Honorary Major General in 1967 (I joined in 1971) until our disbandment in 1992 and was President of the WRAC Association from 1970 until her death in September 2025 (I was her Vice President from 2003 - 2014). In total, 58 years of loyal duty, service and dedication to our Corps. This special Lioness tribute endeavours to capture and celebrate some of the many occasions and events when we were privileged to enjoy her company and where she confirmed her unswerving commitment to both the serving Corps and Association veterans.

The Corps and Association always sent 'Loyal Greetings' to the Duchess for her birthday and before Annual General Meetings and Grand Reunions. She most graciously responded to these messages, and occasionally even attended Grand Reunions, Association AGM's and DWRAC's Senior Officers Conferences. She always took a great interest in the proceedings and often participated displaying her trademark warmth, compassion and empathy.

This edition recalls some of the many occasions the Duchess generously gave her time to visit the WRAC across the UK and the world, through memories from our members and editorial from past copies of the Lioness. We hope it will evoke many happy recollections for you all.

*Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE,  
Association Life Vice President*



A lighter moment during DWRAC's Conference at the WRAC College on June 3rd 1982. The Duchess of Kent, Controller Commandant WRAC. Brigadier Nolan CB, Deputy Controller Commandant WRAC and Brigadier Meechie Hon ADC MA. Director WRAC.



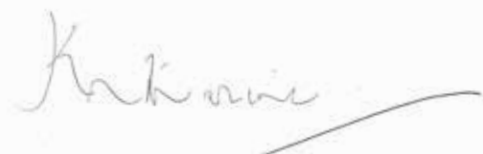
  
THE OFFICE OF HRH THE DUCHESS OF KENT  
ST. JAMES'S PALACE  
LONDON SW1A 1BQ  
TELEPHONE: (020) 7534 1961

21<sup>st</sup> March 2019

Please convey my warm congratulations to the Trustees and Members of the Women's Royal Army Corps Association as they celebrate the Association's Centenary at this weekend's Grand Reunion in Southampton.

I was interested to learn that attendees will include those who served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and those who both served, and serve, more recently.

As your President, I send my best wishes to all those who are gathered at the Grand Reunion for a most memorable and enjoyable weekend of celebrations.



HRH The Duchess of Kent GCVO

In May 1967 The Lioness carried the following announcement:

We are very pleased to welcome Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Kent on her appointment as Controller Commandant W.R.A.C. As the wife of a serving officer, and the mother of a young family, Her Royal Highness will inherit a legacy of respect, deep affection and goodwill. We have already been told that "Yorkshire is delighted" and, in this, they speak for all of us. The following message was sent to Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Kent on her appointment:

*"The Acting Controller Commandant, Director and All Ranks, Women's Royal Army Corps, send loyal greetings. They are honoured and delighted to welcome Your Royal Highness as their Controller Commandant." The following reply was received from Her Royal Highness's Private Secretary: "The Duchess of Kent has asked me to write and express her very sincere thanks for the kind telegram which you sent on behalf of the Director and All Ranks on Her Royal Highness's appointment as Controller Commandant of the W.R.A.C. The Duchess greatly appreciated your message."*

KENSINGTON PALACE,  
LONDON, W.8

May 16<sup>th</sup> 1967

Dear Jane Jean

The Duchess of Kent has asked me to write, and thank you very much indeed for your letter.

Her Royal Highness is delighted to become President of the A.R.S. and W.R.A.C. Benevolent funds, and much appreciated your kindness in writing.

Yours sincerely

John Pilkington

Lady in waiting

The Duchess' first appearance in the uniform of the WRAC was on August 9th 1967 at the WRAC College for the Commissioning Ceremony of the Forty Third Course of Officer Cadets where she gave the address, took the Royal Salute, inspected the Guard of Honour, presented the prizes and delighted a number of girls by speaking to them. After the ceremony many people had an opportunity to talk with Her Royal Highness when sherry was taken on the lawn in front of the Assembly Hall. The Lioness remarked at the time "Her Royal Highness with her charm and interest has won the admiration and devotion of us all."



12 Company WRAC, Millhill had the honour to be the first working unit of the WRAC to be visited by our Controller Commandant, on 15th May 1968. The Duchess inspected a lining party including clerks and shorthand writers and went on to meet Courier and Postal Operators. The Duchess had personal experience of receiving mail through the BFPO when, as the wife of a serving officer, she lived in Germany and Hong Kong and expressed particular interest in seeing the Sorting Office. She then toured the Junior Ranks accommodation, meeting Privates and Corporals in their sitting rooms and bedrooms and some of the many teddy bears they owned. In the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess. The Duchess was introduced to Joey the Mess budgerigar. During her visit the Duchess had spoken to and shaken hands with more than a hundred members of the unit and had impressed them all by the lively and real interest she showed in meeting them.



The Duchess' first overseas visit to the WRAC took place in October 1968 to BAOR. The rain was pouring down as the Duchess arrived in Rheindahlen but the umbrella drill was excellent. The Oberbürgermeisters of Monchengladbach and Krefeld gave welcome speeches to which the Duchess replied in faultless German. When congratulated on this and asked if she had learned it at school, the Duchess to everyone's amusement, replied "No, yesterday!"

Teams from all units in BAOR took part in "potted sports" in the Army Gymnasium. The Duchess spoke to nearly everyone in the class, and it seemed that all of the girls were either married already, or about to be married, which amused her very much. From the gymnasium to the Training Wing, the Duchess was most interested in the Teleprinting class, although the clatter of twenty-odd students all typing at top speed was deafening! She then walked through the Barracks to the Tape Relay Centre, where she spent a lot of time talking to the operators and questioning them about their work.



The following year in May, the Duchess visited Central Ordnance Depot (COD) Donnington. It was the first time she had been to an Ordnance Depot and it was planned that she should see as many of the women as possible actually on the job. The Commandant, Brigadier Barclay initiated her into the mysteries of Ordnance during an informal briefing over a cup of coffee. The afternoon was devoted to a tour of the Depot to see the Technical Clerks and Storewomen at work. Her Royal Highness was full of questions and delighted everyone by the obviously genuine interest she showed in what they were doing.

In July 1969, Her Royal Highness opened the new one million pound "The Duchess of Kent Barracks" in Aldershot. The Duchess first inspected a lining party drawn from the four units living in the barracks before unveiling the commemorative plaque and declaring the barracks open. The architects of the barracks had a rose bowl specially designed for the occasion which the Duchess accepted on behalf of the WRAC. For two patients in sick bay it was, for once, worthwhile being ill, as the Duchess spoke to them on her way round the barracks. In the gymnasium the Duchess seemed particularly interested in the trampoline display and hearing that some of the girls taking part in the demonstration were to go to America with The British Tournament and Tattoo.



A matter of weeks later, the Duchess visited the WRAC Centre in Guildford as Maggie Purkis recalls: *To the members of the WRAC, our Controller Commandant, HRH the Duchess of Kent was gracious, amazingly attractive, svelte, delightfully unpretentious and a credit to our Corps. The Duchess was invited to inspect the WRAC Recruit Training Centre at Guildford where I was the most junior subaltern in the Unit. We were honoured and delighted, but soon learned the amount of spit, polish and nervous energy needed to prepare for such an event.*

*One week before, the Unit was inspected by the Commandant, Colonel Betty Metcalf. Col Metcalf actually bore a striking resemblance to Her Royal Highness, and we were able to take advantage of this pre-inspection, pretending that our Controller Commandant was present with us. As Col Metcalf turned into the Company Admin Office a young Private rose to her feet. Captain Taylor introduced her to the CO, who asked, "How long have you been in the WRAC?" The Private froze. She was just not used to being addressed by the CO. Her mouth opened and closed a couple of times, but no sound came out - her imitation of a goldfish lasting for a very long five seconds. Col Metcalf tried to gloss over the situation by glancing out of the window at the flowerbed beyond saying "Aren't the roses pretty at this time of year", and looked pointedly at our OC. Eventually, in fine military tradition, the unspoken message reached me, the Junior Subaltern, where the buck stopped. It would be my job on the day to ensure that the young Private was not present during the inspection of 2 Company Offices by our Controller Commandant.*

*The day of the inspection arrived and a very large, smart car drove in through the gateway and past the assembled guard, which had been turned out for the visit. About 5 minutes after the Duchess had arrived at RHQ, I went towards the Admin Office to send the young Private off on a wild goose chase. To my horror, I heard voices getting closer to our offices, and out of the corner of my eye, caught sight of the inspecting party approaching. Her Royal Highness advanced into the admin office, smiled at our young Private and remarked that it was a lovely day. Everyone held their breath and willed a suitable response from the previously tongue-tied servicewoman.*

*"Aw yeys Ma'am, and aren't the rawsis pri-ee!" replied our star! Her Royal Highness agreed, smiled, nodded and resumed her tour of inspection. Whew!*



Moving to 1970 and Her Royal Highness was overseas with us once more as she visited Singapore and Hong Kong during February. Almost 100 members of 4 Company W.R.A.C. had the privilege of being presented to the Duchess when she visited the Unit Lines and also went to some of the places where the W.R.A.C. are employed in Singapore. On arrival in Hong Kong the Duchess spent the day at Victoria Barracks where she visited the Communications Centre, the Camp Headquarters and Colvin House where the W.R.A.C. lived. During the visit she also took in a netball match, enjoyed afternoon tea with the W.R.A.C. Senior Ranks in the WO's' and Sergeants' Mess and then a cocktail party followed by a dinner party at which the W.R.A.C. Junior Officers were present.

The Duchess of Kent visited the WRAC in Catterick that October. She was shown the WRAC Driving Cup and then crossed to the Officers' Mess where she saw some very red faces as frantic yankings by a R. Signals Corporal failed to break the Royal Standard on the Mess flag pole, (the newspapers were quick to notice this one!). Every girl that she spoke to was impressed by her extremely pleasant and relaxing manner.



On the 2nd of October 1969, the then President of the WRAC Association Dame Regina Evans DBE died. At the Association AGM on the 7th March 1970 it was announced the Colonel Commandant of the serving Corps would take over this duty. The Lioness carried the following editorial:

The gracious presence of our new President H.R.H. The Duchess of Kent, made our Golden Jubilee Annual General Meeting a very special occasion. The announcement that Her Royal Highness is expecting an addition to the family later this summer has naturally delighted all members, more especially so as this is the first time in the history of the Association, that our President has been young enough to anticipate such a happy event and we send Her Royal Highness our congratulations and very best wishes.

Col C.E. Hammond CBE, the Chairman of Council's welcoming address stated:

"It is very fitting that Her Royal Highness should have honoured us, by both becoming our president, and presiding at the first Annual General Meeting during our 50th Birthday year. We, particularly the older ones, are proud to continue the link with our Royal Family, and have such happy memories of the Princess Royal who became such a great friend and advisor, to us all. I see the future as a great challenge to the younger generation, to continue the good work of the Association and to introduce new ideas. With Her Royal Highness, who has already shown such keen interest, at the helm, I feel sure we can look to the future with confidence."

Her Royal Highness, The Duchess of Kent's opening remarks were.

"First I would like to thank our Chairman and everyone here for the kind way you have welcomed me to my first meeting of the Women's Royal Army Corps Association. While I very much enjoyed being able to meet quite a few members of the Association at the Reception, at St. James's Palace last December, this is the first opportunity I have had of saying, as it were in public, how very honoured and proud I am to be your President and how greatly I am looking forward to learning as much as I can about all you do. There have only been three Presidents before me in the fifty years since the Association was formed. Dame Florence Simpson, who herself served in Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, and is still remembered I am sure by many members; she gave tremendous support, encouragement and guidance during the many years in which she held this office. She was followed by the Princess Royal who took a close personal interest in the affairs of the Association and, as you have said Colonel Hammond, will always be held in great affection by many people. Then my immediate predecessor, Dame Regina Evans, who achieved so much in her life and whose energy, experience and understanding was of immense value to the Association. You will see therefore that I am extremely conscious of how much the Presidents in the past have done for the Association, and I can assure you that I will do all I can to live up to their traditions of service.

Being a very new member, I have recently read the Rules of the Association and Item 9 in the Standing Orders for General Meetings is headed Length of Speeches and goes on to say that the Chairman shall have the power to limit the length of speeches; so to be certain to avoid being curtailed at my first very meeting, I am going to conclude, and to say how sorry I am that I am not able to join you at the Reunion later today but I wish you all a very happy evening.

Lord Nicholas Windsor was born 4 months later



In May 1971 the Duchess visited the WRAC Battery at Larkhill. A display of the girls' cooking had been arranged and the Duchess was introduced to each girl by the Messing Officer, shaking hands with them all while discussing their work and showing a keen interest in their day to day employment. Outside the Mess, six girls who were members of the Royal Artillery Saddle Club lined up on their mounts waiting to be presented, with Cpl. Mangan looking on as the Duchess had a brief word with her mount. Later she watched a rounders match in full swing between W.R.A.C. Battery, Royal School of Artillery and W.R.A.C. Element, Manorbie.



Kym Lofthouse met the Duchess in 1972 long before she joined the Corps: *My Dad was the Station Officer at a fire station that she opened in Lowestoft and we were invited along as family. The Duchess came over and talked to us and offered me (aged 5) and my sister (18 months older) one of the flowers out of the bouquet that she had been presented. Being very polite we both said no thank you. Our family has never let us forget about it and the story comes up often!*

The Duchess paid a visit to 16 Battalion, Bicester late in 1972 as Babs Anderson recalls: *Despite my hating badminton, our PTI Cpl Sally Doxey had picked me to be one of the team 'practising' in the gym. We dutifully lined up to be presented and HRH came to each of us for a little chat. My Platoon Officer, 2Lt Margaret Burns introduced me and it all went downhill from there. I was asked a simple question "What do you like about being in the Army?" My brain went to mush and I blurted out "They let me live out." What I wanted to tell her was that I had recently got married. Susan 'Bunny' Goldsmith was standing next to me and I could feel her shoulders shaking. In fact, I think you can see her smirking on the photo which was sent to my mother and father.*



*At the end of the visit, the Duchess of Kent was escorted back to her helicopter by our OC, Major Mundy, who was on an exchange from Australia. The rotor blades started to turn, sending the air spinning, which whipped off Major Mundy's hat and sent it flying across the parade square. We were all in hysterics and we could see our lovely visitor's face at a window, trying not to laugh.*

*I called home two weeks later and said to Mom "I've got something to tell you." "You're pregnant." she said. "How did you know?" "It's the way you're standing in the photo with the Duchess of Kent."*

WRAC members of 39 Signal Regiment from Dundee, Tunbridge Wells and Banbury travelled to London on May 22nd 1973 to be present when the Duchess of Kent came to the TA Centre at Worship Street. This was the first time that she had been to a TAVR Regiment and everyone was very proud. During the journey, the MTO became so engrossed in conversation with Lt Col Ruth Engel, he neglected to follow the adjutant, and took an incorrect turning, thus separating our two guests. Lt Col Engel eventually arrived at the destination some 20 minutes after Brig Nolan! On the return journey the same thing happened again! Some three days prior to these events a compass had "disappeared" causing a furore. A Board of Inquiry was hastily set up to investigate its loss. On being asked to comment on his inability to follow the adjutant, the MTO was heard to remark that the 'lost' item of equipment (which had in fact never left his possession) came in very handy when he lost his way!



Jean Davies spent a brief time at WRAC1, Lansdowne House, Berkeley Square and recalls a very special visit for all the wrong reasons: *Brigadier Eileen Nolan hosted her annual conference there in November 1973, which was attended by all the WRAC top brass from what seemed like all over the world, in full uniform for the event, including us minions who were detailed to serve tea! I had never seen so much gold in the shape of medals, braid, pips, crowns etc in my life, nor since, and the guest of honour was the Duchess of Kent. The tea arrived in an enormous urn, steered into position down the gloomy corridor by a rather unsavoury fellow, cups rattling all over the place into a small room close to the main event. When everyone was in position and the guest of honour - the Pride of us Lionesses - had taken her seat we were signalled to start serving refreshments. That was my cue to knock a lot of cups over spilling plenty of tea and invoking a cry of horror, 'Oh PRIVATE DAVIES!!!' Well, I wasn't used to mass catering and needless to say after that I wasn't allowed to serve anywhere even close to the Duchess.*





As we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the formation of the WRAC at the Grand Reunion in March 1974, we were honoured by the presence of our two Royal Ladies, Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, and The Duchess of Kent. The Duchess, as President of the WRAC Association, received The Queen Mother, and as Controller Commandant WRAC, spoke with knowledge and great interest of the work of the Corps and the various stations she had visited. After refreshments had been served, the Royal Ladies circulated among members and representatives from all areas were presented.



A couple of months later the Duchess of Kent travelled to Cyprus where DWRAC Brig Nolan Hon ADC met her at Nicosia airport. The Duchess travelled to Episkopi where she visited the WRAC members of HQ NEARELF in their offices.

Early the next day the Duchess set off in a car procession from Episkopi to Dhekelia. Within the Sovereign Base Areas the procession was led by a landrover of WRAC Provost. At her destination she unveiled a plaque naming the new junior ranks accommodation 'Kent House', and met all ranks WRAC in the junior ranks accommodation and on the Netball Court. During her four-day visit the Duchess impressed everyone she met with her wide ranging knowledge of the Corps, her charm, and her unflagging zeal throughout a very packed programme in a temperature that rose into the 90s.



Over the weekend of 7/8 June 1974 the WRAC in Catterick moved to their new accommodation "Katharine House" named after the Duchess. Katharine House was set within easy reach of WRAC Squadron HQ, the Trade Training School and the cookhouse. It was built three stories high with excellent facilities within which were described at the time in the Lioness: "The bedrooms accommodate four girls each and NCOs have their own single rooms. All bedroom furniture is fully fitted in an attractive beige and white finish and provides ample storage space; the wall space above the bedhead is "pin-board" so that service women may pin up their favourite photographs and posters without damaging any wall surfaces. Bathroom facilities are ample and very attractive, with excellent lighting and an abundance of mirrors. There is a laundry complex on each floor which consists of a washing area, a drying room and an ironing area. There is also a washing machine in each of these complexes, with separate spin dryers, and sinks for those who just want to wash "smalls". There is a sitting room on each floor with a separate one for NCOs on the ground floor, three out of four of these rooms having colour TV. The sitting rooms are very attractive with bright yellow and green chair covers and yellow curtains, and the house is fully carpeted throughout with the exception of bathrooms and washing rooms which are tiled.





Later that year the Duchess arrived on the Isle of Benbecula to open the newly completed Officers' Mess at the RA Range Hebrides. Lunch was followed by visits to the Junior Ranks dining hall, the Junior Ranks Club, and the WRAC accommodation where the Duchess met members of the WRAC Detachment.

The Duchess was then driven the 16 miles to the new Range Control building on the Island of South Uist, where she was able to meet the rest of the WRAC Detachment and talk to them about their work. As Glinys Horton (pictured shaking the Duchess's hand) remembers:

I had the honour of escorting the Duchess round the ranges and introducing her to all the WRAC girls. She was so lovely. She asked all of them how they liked it there, and to the girls who said they didn't like it, she replied "yes, it is a bit remote", but to the girls who said they loved it she replied "yes, it is beautiful".



Also in 1975 the WRAC commissioned a sketch by the artist Alejo Vidal-Quadras, which hung in the Officer's Mess in Guildford and was replicated through prints hanging in other locations where the WRAC served. Admired by some, many others felt it lacked the warmth of the real woman so beloved by those serving in the Corps.

On the morning of 6 October 1976, the Duchess opened the new Catterick Military Hospital which bore her name. She also requested a visit in the afternoon to Katharine House, which was also named after her. Here she met and talked to WRAC members of 8 Signal Regiment, 40 Squadron RCT and 150 Provost Company. It was a relaxed and happy occasion

and everybody was greatly impressed by her close identification with the WRAC.



1977 saw the 60th Anniversary of the formation of the Women's Services of the Crown, with more than 2,000 women congregated at Westminster Abbey to commemorate with a Service of Thanksgiving. We were honoured by the presence of Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother, attending as Commandant-in-Chief of the three Services, and accompanied by Her Royal Highness The Princess Anne, Chief Commandant WRNS, The Duchess of Kent, Controller Commandant WRAC, and The Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, Air Chief Commandant WRAF. The photo of all three has hung proudly in the WRAC Association HQ through every move.

Among our own Corps were more than 800 members of the QMAAC, ATS and WRAC, including our Deputy Controller Commandant and six ex-Directors, each one remembering her own part of the 60 years which we were commemorating. Outside the Abbey young women of the three Services formed a Guard of Honour while inside young officers, officer cadets and NCOs conducted the congregation to their seats. The music was provided by the WRAC Staff Band, conducted by Captain L A E Hopkin, MBE, LRAM, WRAC Director of Music.



Ten years on from the Duchess' first appearance in the uniform of the WRAC in 1967, she returned to officiate at a Commissioning Ceremony at the WRAC College in December 1977. The Duchess presented Commissions to the six successful Officer Cadets, and recalled the Commissioning Ceremony in 1967 saying that she would follow the careers of the six newly commissioned Officers with equal interest. Later the Duchess met and chatted to the families of the Officer Cadets being commissioned and posed for photographs. As she departed from the WRAC College, the route was lined by all members of the Permanent Staff, Officer Cadets and guests, after what had been a truly successful day.



Norma Berendt remembers: *I was serving at Woolwich Barracks as a stewardess and quite often we were asked to work on private functions. In 1978 we were picked to serve HRH Duchess of Kent at a lunch in Whitehall - that really excited us as she was very special to us WRAC. They were also showing the new uniforms for the WRAC that day so that was a bonus in our eyes.*

*We set everything up and waited for the ladies to arrive. I can't remember how many senior WRAC officers there were but at least 8 plus the Duchess and two senior Guards officers. I had never seen so many high ranking officers in one room - I was star struck. The ladies sat for lunch and it was going well: we removed starters and served the main course, and after 20 minutes I, in my wisdom, put my eye to the key hole to see how it was going - big mistake! One of the other privates Scotty Hunter and Alison Mills thought it would be funny to pretend to push me forward but being so light I did go forward and the doors opened and there I was bent over in the position of peeking through the key hole and two very shocked friends standing behind me. I smiled, stood up, and took the door handles in my hands saying "Sorry Ma'am, I tripped" and blushed. I was still blushing when clearing lunch, and a male officer asked if I was ok. I just said "embarrassed but fine sir". He smiled and looked to the person sitting next to him and that's when I realised it was the Duchess. After that I never peaked through key holes, ever!*

The parade and service of dedication to mark the incorporation of the WRAC College as the fourth college of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst took place on Sunday 18th October 1981. The Duchess took the salute and inspected the front rank of those on parade to the tune of 'Thank Heaven for Little Girls' later addressing the Parade, saying "As Controller Commandant of the Women's Royal Army Corps I am delighted to be present at this joint parade on the Old College Square which is traditionally the heart of Sandhurst and later at the Dedication Service in the Royal Memorial Chapel which is the spiritual home of generations of British Army officers. This important step of incorporation has been taken as part of a deep and careful study to improve Army officer training and to fit WRAC officers for their newly defined role as an integral part of the Army. It recognises the invaluable service of thousands of women who, in war and peace, have willingly accepted the concept of loyalty, service and duty for so long an essential part of the Sandhurst tradition. It acknowledges that the future of the WRAC is inseparable from the rest of the Army, which places the same demands on both male and female officers and expects the same professional knowledge and adaptability. All cadets feel the same pride and sense of achievement when they receive their Commission from The Queen. Thus it makes good military and human sense that all basic army training should be under the professional guidance of one Academy and both the College and the Academy will be the stronger from the union.

So, officer cadets and student officers of Old, New and Victory Colleges, I ask you to welcome the WRAC College and include them in your military, extra mural and social activities so that they become full members of the Sandhurst family. And, members of the WRAC College I would wish you to participate fully in the life of the Academy bearing in mind that observing our Corps motto "Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed" will help you to live up to the Sandhurst motto of "Serve to Lead". All of us are involved in a unique and historic event which was hardly considered possible in 1949 when our Corps was founded but which is now an accepted fact, commemorated here today. I am sure that it will achieve the success it undoubtedly deserves".



Sue Donovan recalls: *The Duchess of Kent was the Inspecting Officer for the Founder's Day Review at the Royal Hospital Chelsea in 1981, and although it was a long time ago, I clearly remember the considerable excitement I experienced at the honour of being selected to be the Aide-de-Camp (ADC) to Her Royal Highness. On that beautiful summer's day when I was introduced to the Duchess, she was very charming and smiled warmly at me to put me at my ease, remarking graciously how smart I looked wearing the gold aiguillette for my role as her ADC. The Review went seamlessly and it marked one of the most special and unique days of my Army career.*

October 1982 saw the Duchess return to Hong Kong to visit the WRAC twelve years after her last visit to the territory.



Thirty busy months after she marked the incorporation of the WRAC College as the fourth college of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the Duchess of Kent returned to take the Sovereign's Parade when WRAC Officer Cadets were on parade for the first time. This historic first appearance of the WRAC students and officer cadets of WRAC 4 took place on the 6th of April 1984, and the presence of the Duchess as the Sovereign's Representative on that day made it even more "our" day.



The Duchess's first visit to the WRAC in Northern Ireland was naturally kept secret until the last moment, with the whole programme arranged on the pretext of the OC's birthday. When the identity of our visitor was revealed on the morning of 4th April 1984 the effect on morale was noticeable. Everyone who could possibly be released from operational duties in Aldegrove had the opportunity to participate, and on hearing the short brief on the role and deployment throughout the Province of the WRAC Provost and volunteer searchers, the Duchess expressed great interest in the variety of operational tasks and was very sympathetic about the added problems of security for those who were off duty and keen to indulge in normal recreational activities. She was introduced to some of the detailed aspects of searching operations with a demonstration on the use of "plasticuffs" and truncheons. There was a practical demonstration of a female body search and a handbag search using LCpl Hagen as the suspect terrorist!



One month later the Duchess visited Caernarvon Barracks in Dusseldorf. Greeted at Dusseldorf Airport by Col Audrey Smith, Comd WRAC BAOR she went on to meet several WRAC servicewomen on her visit to the British Forces Post Office (BFPO) Sorting Office who explained the various aspects of their job.



In the summer, the Duchess was present at a dinner at the Guildhall in the City of London to mark the 35th anniversary of the WRAC. Lord Trefgarne, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Armed Forces and Sir Ronald Gardner-Thorpe were also present whilst Brig Eileen Nolan, Deputy Controller Commandant, presided, and Brig Helen Meechie, Director WRAC presented past and present officers of the Corps to the Duchess. Over 300 serving and veteran WRAC were present.





In November 1984, the Duchess visited the WRAC Centre, as a young Lt A S Hatherell recalled at the time: "An air of expectation hung over the camp as people busied themselves in preparation for the day ahead; and a day that had been long-awaited and well-rehearsed. Although we had been asked not to hang out of windows waving Union Jacks as she drove past, throughout the day her progress was followed by many pairs of curious eyes, discreetly hidden behind windows misted up by the breath of these would-be spectators. Carefully briefed Officers executed well-rehearsed curtsies (which for many had proved to be the greatest problem of the visit!)."

Pat 'Budgie' Rosewell, who was the Senior PT Instructor WO2 (QMSI) in the Gymnasium now takes up the story: *"After lunch the Duchess would be driven along the road up to the sports Pavillion where I would be waiting on the roadside for her. I would then brief her on the sporting activities on the Netball court. A match was in progress between two teams of recruits and was being umpired by two of my PTI'S. It was a very cold breezy day and we had all been out in the cold for at least an hour. The recruits were fine as they were all running around keeping warm but to keep myself warm I was jumping up and down, running on the spot and even doing a few funny walks - anyone watching me must have thought I had gone totally mad! In my brief for the visit I was told that when the car arrives the car window will open so you can talk to HRH who will be sitting on the backseat. Whatever you do, don't let the door open because of security. The car stopped, I stepped right up to the car door window expecting the window to lower, but to my horror the car door opened instead, nearly knocking me backwards down the slope towards the netball courts! Quickly I flew into action to stop the Duchess from getting out of the car. I tried to push the door shut but didn't want to squash her. I could see the concern on the face of our Commandant Col Audrey Smith as she realised that the Duchess had opened the door! At this point her close protection officer jumped out of the front seat to help me shield the Duchess. Thankfully HRH realised and sat back down in the car and the window was lowered. The Duchess took my hand and apologised to me. She then said, "My dear, you are so cold". I said yes "Ma'am I'm ok, I have a warm heart". She gave me a lovely warm smile which I will always remember. HRH acknowledged the recruits on the Netball courts who, with the wait, had just played in the longest ever netball match played in the history of the WRAC Centre."*

On arrival at the Education Centre, Lt Hatherell recalled the Duchess being shown recruits being instructed in practical first aid and map reading. "This was followed by an insight into the fieldcraft training of the TA recruits where she sampled the camouflage cream, and discovered, as all soldiers do, that it is easier to put on than to take off! Passing the square where a drill lesson was taking place, the Duchess arrived at the Gym where she watched the students struggling with benches, planks and the principles of cantilever, before moving on to the Corps Museum where she planted a commemorative tree. It was a good day, not just because it was the climax to a great deal of work by all members of the camp, but because the obvious interest, enthusiasm and sense of humour of our guest had made all that preparation worthwhile."



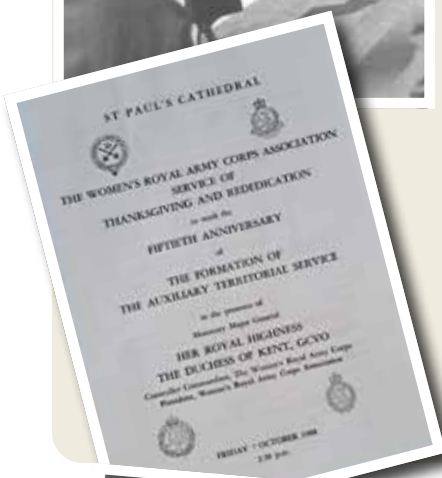
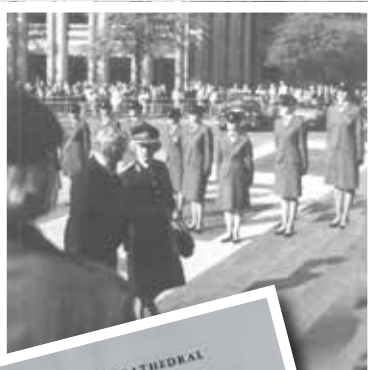
Moving on to 1986, the Duchess paid a spring visit to the WRAC officers stationed at the Joint Air Reconnaissance Intelligence Centre at RAF Brampton where the WRAC Photographic Interpreters gave detailed presentations on their work, and the Duchess remarked how impressed she was by the level of knowledge and professionalism displayed. The Duchess was presented with a beautiful model of Anmer House, her family home, which had been made with the aid of aerial photography by JARIC's Model Section. She was delighted with this memento and at having spent a whole day seeing for herself the fascinating work being undertaken by WRAC PI Officers.

In a visit designed to show the Duchess how WRAC Provost are employed within the RMP, the Duchess visited London District Provost Company in the November and met WRAC employed on General Police Duties as well as those with more specialised employment as Chief Clerk, collator of Police Reports, Platoon Commander and Dog Handler. She went on to Marlborough House where security search techniques and equipment were demonstrated to her, and where a WRAC Provost Drugs Dog Handler put her dog through his paces.

The Duchess was presented with a basket of flowers by Lance Corporal Samantha Fabb.



The Duchess travelled to Rheindahlen in the summer of 1987 to visit 29 Coy WRAC and HQ BAOR. The German press were particularly keen to cover this visit, and especially interested in the military training area as women did not play any part in their armed forces at that time. Several girls had just completed their NBC training, and were very thankful to be clad in their protective clothing, as they avoided becoming a substantial feast for the resident mosquitoes in the area! This was followed by a garden party, with representatives from all departments employing WRAC - strawberries and cream, Earl Grey tea and background music by the Band of the 4th/7th Dragoon Guards.



To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the formation of the ATS, the WRAC Association held a Grand Reunion in October 1988. Over 2,000 members attended a memorable Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication in St Paul's Cathedral. The service was attended by the Duchess, alongside the Lord Mayor of London, the Lord Lieutenant of Greater London, the President of the Army Benevolent Fund and 20 Colonels and Colonels Commandant of Corps and Regiments with whom the ATS served.



To celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the formation of the WRAC in 1989, the Duke and Duchess of Kent attended a Regimental Dinner at the WRAC HQ Mess, Guildhall, together with many distinguished civilian and military guests and over 300 members of Headquarter Mess.





In July 1990, the Duchess was greeted on arrival at 10 Company in Aldershot by two mounted policewomen who escorted her car to the Guardroom. Later, she formally opened the newly refurbished NAAFI "Cats Whiskers" and took tea with junior ranks from 10 Coy and 251 Sig Sqn.



February 1992 brought the disbandment of the WRAC, with the first of the farewell functions taking place at London's Guildhall. Five hundred serving and retired WRAC officers and their guests dined in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Kent. The function began with a reception in the Old Library and Print room when several of those present were presented to Their Royal Highnesses. Three trumpeters from the WRAC Staff Band provided a fanfare to announce the arrival of our guests in the banqueting hall, and the Band played throughout the meal. Brigadiers Field and Ramsey presented the Duchess with a bronze statuette of a servicewoman.



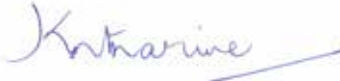
  
 YORK HOUSE  
 ST. JAMES'S PALACE  
 LONDON S.W.1

12th February, 1992

As your Controller Commandant for the past twenty five years it gives me pleasure to be able to send you a message of thanks for the tremendous contribution that you have made to the work of the British Army and to wish you well for the future.

The Women's Royal Army Corps has set high standards of achievement. It has shown that women have a vital role to play in a modern Army. Members of the Corps have shown dedication and courage in all the roles of the Army worldwide and especially in operations in Northern Ireland and the Gulf.

I am deeply proud of my association with the Corps and I wish all of you who will now be joining other Corps my very good wishes. I have faith that you will take with you the same high standards which the WRAC have always set.

  
 KATHARINE



Disbandment ceremonies followed with the Duchess in attendance. Wednesday 25 March saw the WRAC on parade en masse for the last time. Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother (our outgoing Commandant-in-Chief) had graciously accepted an invitation to be reviewing officer at the parade and the Duchess of Kent (our outgoing Controller Commandant) was present also. The day began with a service of Thanksgiving and Farewell at Guildford Cathedral, where a fanfare was played by three trumpeters of the WRAC Staff Band followed by the first hymn "O worship the king all glorious above" during which the Royal Procession made its way towards the altar and each took up their position.

The Standard Bearers (WRAC - WOI Barclay, ATS - Edith Francis and QMAAC - Norah Kendall) presented their Standards to the Dean. During the only brief rehearsal possible that morning, Sandy Barclay had been roundly taken to task by the other Standard Bearers, but persuaded her companions that by following her example, the Royal Party would be able to read the Standards as opposed to their reverse sides. Canon Richard Fenwick who had witnessed the discussion, was overheard to remark of our veteran ladies, "Hitler didn't stand a chance, did he".



On the formation of the Adjutant General's Corps, the consequent incorporation of WRAC into the newly formed Corps and the closure of the WRAC Centre at Guildford it was decided that the Memorial Rose Garden should be moved to the new Centre at Worthy Down. The relocated garden was formally opened by Queen Elizabeth II on the 4th June 1993 with the Duchess of Kent and the Duchess of Gloucester both chatting with members of the Association who had been given special viewing facilities for the ceremony.



The Grand Reunion 1994 also celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the formation of the Comrades Association in 1919, beginning at Guildford Cathedral on Saturday 16 April 1994. During the service the Duchess, preceded by the three Association standards, went to the new commemorative window as the Dean led the Act of Dedication, the Chaplain General led the Act of Remembrance, and a lone trumpeter played the Last Post and Reveille. The Duchess uncovered the plaque. In a letter from her lady-in-waiting to the Vice President, she said:



*"The Duchess of Kent so enjoyed joining you and members of the WRAC Association at the Service of Thanksgiving in Guildford Cathedral yesterday and she would like to thank you again for the warm welcome given to her. The Duchess has asked me particularly to say how moved she was by the service and how proud and honoured she felt for the Association that it should have had its 75th anniversary marked by the unveiling of the splendid new window. She sensed too an atmosphere of pride and comradeship amongst the members as they joined together for the March Past. It was a very striking scene to watch as they marched past and then away on down the square. Her Royal Highness congratulates and thanks you all for bringing to fruition such a memorable occasion and she hopes that the rest of the day was equally as successful."*





*The Duchess of Kent died on the 4th of September 2025, and the WRAC Association received many messages of condolence and cherished memories from our members who held her in high regard and recalled her visits with such fondness. The Association was honoured to receive two invitations to The Duchess' Requiem Mass and Funeral in Westminster Cathedral on 16 September - Colonel Amanda Hassell, our Association Vice President, and Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE were privileged to represent the WRAC at this Service.*

What a memorable and emotional day the 16th September turned out to be. I felt hugely honoured to have been selected to be one of the two WRAC Association representatives to attend the Requiem Mass for The Duchess of Kent along with our Vice President, Colonel Amanda Hassell. We joined a long but orderly queue and slowly shuffled our way towards the cathedral. We went through two security checks before being allowed access, and on entering the cathedral we made our way towards the front - there were no allocated seats, and as we were there in plenty of time we were able to select seats on the end of a row on the main aisle. The service was due to start at 2pm and we were seated by 12.30pm. At the end of the aisle, in front of the altar, was the catafalque on which the Duchess' coffin was resting, covered by her own personal Standard. A very poignant and touching sight.



We were able to watch the rest of the congregation arriving - Sir Jackie Stewart, the F1 racing driver, sat right behind us and Dame Maureen Lipman and Rula Lenska were seated opposite! From 1.30pm the members of the Royal Family started to arrive, in strict order of precedence. Immediately before the arrival of His Majesty The King (he was on his own as HM The Queen was indisposed), the Duchess' family filed in, led by her husband, HRH The Duke of Kent, supported on both sides by their son, George, The Earl of St Andrews and their daughter, Lady Helen Taylor.

The Requiem Mass was one of the most beautiful services I have ever attended, made more so because it took place within such a wonderful setting - just imagine the magnificent back drop of stunning architecture inside the cathedral, the ethereal voices of the choir, the smell of incense and flowers and a wonderful Latin Mass. A touching message from His Holiness Pope Leo XIV was delivered by Archbishop Buendia, Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain and The Homily (Eulogy) was given by The Bishop of Westminster who so beautifully summed up the Duchess' life and qualities. Her children and grandchildren read lessons and prayers making it very much a family affair. Our seats on the aisle meant that we were so close to all the members of the Royal family as they passed by. The most poignant moment was as the Duchess' coffin was borne down the cathedral aisle by eight Royal Dragoon Guards, led by the Pipe Major of The Royal Dragoon Guards playing 'Sleep, Dearie, Sleep' which was also played at the late Queen Elizabeth's funeral. For me, these were such a moving few moments and I felt absolutely honoured and privileged to be there. I found the whole experience extremely emotional and when Lady Helen Taylor read the lesson it was like looking at and listening to her dear late Mother. It was an extremely fitting and special farewell to a greatly respected, revered and admired royal lady who was also a beloved wife, mother and grandmother. The memory of that day will stay with me forever.



# Features

## Sweet Freedom



*Sheila Pantin is known to regular readers from previous Lioness articles detailing her service in the ATS, and in particular how she became one of the first British servicewomen to enter the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in June 1945. As she approached her 102nd birthday, word reached HQ of a very special occasion planned in her honour as Sheila was to receive the Freedom of Harrogate in a special ceremony. Not wanting to miss out on the occasion we sent Dorothy Mitchelmore along to share Sheila's birthday and report for the Lioness.*



When I received the call asking if I could attend I really didn't know what to expect. Here I was, not only attending this special occasion but actually on Sheila's 102nd birthday.

There were speeches from dignitaries including the Mayor of Harrogate Chris Aldred who said the council was granting the highest honour it could offer in recognition of Sheila's service, and for her "impossibly difficult work" at Bergen-Belsen where she looked after women and children who had been liberated from the camp. "We loudly applaud and commend your service to the many you have helped and thank you most sincerely," the Mayor said, and some of the councillors who spoke became very emotional as they recalled Sheila's wartime service.

This veteran has certainly had a very interesting life. Her service to the military is only a fraction of what she has accomplished as she went on to have a career as a PE teacher, and later became involved with the WRVS looking after service personnel and their families in Northern Ireland, Germany, Belize and Hong Kong.

Today Sheila is very involved with her local church where she recently told them of her time in the ATS and her work as an ambulance staff car driver during WWII. I was told the venue was packed out and you could hear a pin drop as she recalled the time she entered Bergen Belsen.

All I can say is that now having met this remarkable woman, I feel so privileged to have been present when she was awarded the Freedom of Harrogate. For a lady of 102 she showed a wonderful sense of wit, and though she can't be more than five feet tall, don't be fooled by her size... she is a giant in all she does. I salute you Sheila.



*Sheila said "It was lovely that Dorothy came to represent the WRAC Association on my special day. People came from across Yorkshire - men in marvellous uniforms, the Head of Police and the Mayor. My cousin who is 95 came up from Chesterfield, and my niece who was on holiday in Scotland came down for the day because she didn't want to miss it.*

*"They said I would get a scroll but in fact it was presented to me in a frame which is lovely and I made space for it on the wall in the living room so I can see it all the time. After the presentation we moved to a different room for a party. There was a buffet and a lovely birthday cake. I gave a speech to thank everyone for coming.*

*"People ask me what the secret is to my long life and I always say swimming and deep breathing - I'm still doing both of these, although the swimming is not as regular these days. I have no idea what I'll do with the Freedom of Harrogate now that I have it. I hear I'm allowed to drive five sheep across a bridge. We have plenty of bridges but I don't own any sheep so I don't think I'll be doing that!"*



# Presentations at our plot

*On a beautiful sunny day in August, a large group of WRAC veterans and VIP guests assembled alongside family and friends at the WRAC Association plot within the National Memorial Arboretum to carry out our latest beret and cap-badge presentations.*

This was the fourth beret presentation event which we have held and our biggest yet, as we were privileged to welcome back twenty former WRAC servicewomen into the fold. As everyone assembled in the sunshine, Association Vice President Amanda Hassell and Brig Clare Phillips CBE gave moving speeches and the veterans came forward one by one to receive their presentation box before passing the guard of honour for salutes, hugs and high fives. Seventeen of the veterans who had received their berets at our previous presentation events lined up to form the guard of honour, and the assembled crowd included senior representatives from the Office for Veteran Affairs, Fighting With Pride and the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust.



*Find out how those who received their presentations felt about the day on p54*







After the presentations everybody gathered for a celebratory lunch and enjoyed chatting with friends old and new. So many people were moved by the occasion - from the recipients who let us know how much the day meant to them, to all those who took the time to join us and support these veterans. There is still time to apply for financial reparations, as well as beret and cap-badge restoration. Applications must be made by December 12th this year, so visit [gov.uk/government/collections/lgbt-veterans-support-and-next-steps](https://gov.uk/government/collections/lgbt-veterans-support-and-next-steps) and share this link with anyone you know who may have been affected.





# They fought them on the beaches

## A WRAC trip to the battle sites of Normandy



*Five members of the WRAC journeyed to Normandy last summer for a two-day visit that proved both moving and memorable. Writing about the experience, Heather Bradbury captures the group's reflections as they walked the beaches, cemeteries, and quiet villages where history still lingers.*

**B**arbara Davies, Issy Hamilton-Conboy, Kryshna Lawton, Dawn Fleming and I joined other veterans and families for a two-day guided tour of the D-Day landing sites in Normandy. The trip was led by battlefield guide and army veteran Jim Aitchison, whose knowledge and enthusiasm brought the history of the invasion vividly to life.

After an early start from Wigan and a smooth journey to Caen, our first full day began at Pegasus Bridge where Major John Howard and his men landed by glider just after midnight on 6 June 1944. Seeing the bridge and hearing the story of the assault gave us a real sense of the courage and precision involved. Nearby, the Café Gondrée, still run by the same family, was the first house liberated in France. We also visited the Ranville church and cemetery, final resting place for many of the airborne troops who secured the area.

The afternoon took us to Sword Beach and the Piper Bill Millin Statue, before continuing to Ver-sur-Mer and the British Normandy Memorial, overlooking Gold Beach. From there we viewed what remains of the Mulberry Harbour before finishing the day at Arromanches-les-Bains, where the artificial harbour still lies visible offshore. It was a moving and memorable introduction to the scale of the D-Day landings.



Day Two began at Omaha Beach, where low tide revealed the wide sands and German defences. Standing there with Jim's commentary, it was easy to imagine the chaos of that morning. At Vierville-sur-Mer, the signs call it "the sacrifice of the American soldier," a message that hit home as we walked the shoreline. We then visited the American Museum and the Normandy American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, where 9,386 graves overlook the beach including that of Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt Jr., a Medal of Honor recipient.

Later stops included Sainte-Mère-Église, famous for the paratrooper caught on the church steeple, and Utah Beach, before continuing to Angoville-au-Plain, where two American medics treated wounded from both sides inside the small village church. We ended the day at the Bayeux War Cemetery, the largest Commonwealth cemetery in Normandy, where the graves of two nurses, Sister Dorothy Field and Sister Mollie Evershed, are listed on the memorial to the missing. Both lost their lives on 7 August 1944 when the Hospital Carrier Amsterdam struck a mine while evacuating the wounded from France.

The following morning we began our journey home, tired but thoughtful. The visit left us with a deeper appreciation of the courage, sacrifice, and teamwork that made D-Day possible and a renewed understanding that history's greatest events are built on the quiet bravery of ordinary men and women.





# REMEMBRANCE

*Eagle-eyed Winchester branch coordinator Lisa Aven spotted an amazing servicewomen post-box topper on Facebook. She contacted the knitter who had made it, and she was happy to send it to Lisa in return for a donation to the RBL.*

Lisa surprised her branch with it at their October meeting and once they had enjoyed it, Lisa kindly took it to the WRAC Association HQ at Sir John Moore Barracks to be displayed on the post box there. Where will it turn up next year? Watch this space to find out, and thank you Lisa - what a great spot!



## Field Of Remembrance



On Thursday, 6th November, a happy band of WRAC veterans met to represent the WRAC Association at the Field of Remembrance adjacent to Westminster Abbey. Fi Cusick was amongst them and reflected on the day.

As numbers gathered there was an air of respectful anticipation for what was to come. At 1040hrs Her Majesty The Queen arrived and silence descended as she laid her poppy of Remembrance. The clergy then took us for prayers and at 1100hrs a Scots Guard bugler sounded the Last Post, followed by a two minute silence, then Reveille.

The Queen then walked around the grounds taking time to talk with the representatives of past and present regiments and corps. It was a more informal event than Remembrance Sunday but no less poignant or meaningful.



Thank you to Rowena, Amanda, Roxanne, Lisa, Sandra and Steph for their camaraderie.





# Guildford

*The WRAC enjoys the Freedom of the Borough of Guildford, and once again this year we returned for Remembrance. Sixteen members attended including Chris Whitehead who shares her thoughts about the events on the Saturday.*

I returned to Guildford to take part in Remembrance events this year, bringing back memories of being in training at Guildford this time of year, 50 years ago, where does the time go?

After a 3 hour trip from the Midlands on Saturday 8 November and a tour of Guildford to find the railway station to collect Sandy Cawley, we arrived at the fire station Guildford to be warmly welcomed into the veterans' hub along with quite a few other WRAC veterans.

A very kind invitation to join some local veterans for afternoon tea followed, what a lovely spread it was with some very moreish cake and a very welcome mug of coffee after my journey. What an emotional couple of hours, chatting to other veterans and a war widow as well as people from the fire authority and other invited guests. To finish our time together before the short remembrance service, Pat Sheridan the leader of the Veterans Hub had arranged for a few speakers.

Heather Bradbury, the WRAC Association National Standard Bearer, gave us a potted history of her service. What a fascinating, varied and interesting career she had. She was followed by two serving personnel: a captain from the Intelligence Corps and a corporal from the Royal Engineers who were both stationed at Pirbright, training a range of new recruits for various roles within the Army. As they were both men we asked about young women joining today and wished them all the best for their future careers.

We all proceeded to the back of the Fire Station where wreaths were laid in a small Remembrance garden and we observed a two minute silence. Finally we gathered for a photo opportunity alongside a fire tender, although it was called out just as we were finishing! Our thoughts were with those dedicated fire officers.



Later that weekend, Sandy, Lisa and I went to Quakers Acre. We left poppy crosses in remembrance of Ann, Caroline and the others lost in the Guildford pub bombs in 1974 and spent a quiet moment of reflection.

If you ever get a chance to get to Guildford for Remembrance then I recommend you try to go to the Fire Station as well. I am so pleased to have made it this year.



The next morning, members including Deborah Smith and Clare McDonnell gathered at Holy Trinity Church on Guildford High Street for the service of Remembrance. Deborah said "The welcoming church service and message of hope, loss and Remembrance was not to be underestimated. Voices that would normally be quiet were raised in song To Those in Peril on the Sea and Fight the Good Fight With All Their Might. Veterans standing tall with backs straight showed the proud presence that this day held for them. I think what I will remember, is the fact that we, as women, were in the front - not mixed in with the men, not as a second thought, but in the pride of place, as though here we were recognised and regarded as worthy of having a place."



After the service our WRAC contingent formed up to march towards the Castle grounds for the wreath laying. Clare McDonnell recalls "As we waited for the parade to start, two ladies approached and expressed how lovely it was to see so many female veterans and thanked us for our service. They thanked us all for also showing their girls (who are cadets) that as women we lead the way. They told us there are few women role models for them to follow within the cadets but with us being in pride of place, smart, and as female veterans on this prestigious parade, it gave them the idea that they can succeed in whatever they wanted to achieve."

After the two-minute silence the poppy wreath laying began at the war memorials in the Castle grounds. Col Ali Brown OBE was asked to lay the WRAC Association wreath at the memorial for the fallen of WWI and Col Amanda Hassell, Association Vice President, to carry out the same honour at the WWII memorial.



*Additional photos supplied by Michelle Presley and printed with kind permission*



After the event Clare and Deborah reflected on the additional significance of this occasion for them, Clare begins: "In August 1983, I boarded a train from London for my three day assessment at the WRAC Centre in Guildford. Sitting nearby was another young woman, Deborah, and we quickly realised we were heading to the same place." Deborah continues "During training we were inseparable. Clare always polished my shoes - something I never mastered - and I ironed her shirts. We laughed through the exhaustion and leaned on each other when drills felt endless. Our passing out parade ended up being a wet weather affair in the old sheds, disappointing at the time but unforgettable. Over the next two years we visited each other, until an accident led to my medical discharge. With the move I lost Clare's address, and we lost touch. This was the first time in 41 years we had marched together and we felt so much pride to be part of WRAC community again in the home of the WRAC." Clare sums up their feelings "Reuniting after 41 years felt like picking up a conversation we'd never really finished. There were tears and laughter, memories of training, and endless stories of the lives we'd led since. The last time we had marched together was at our passing out parade; now, as veterans, we stood side by side once more. The sound of boots on the road carried echoes of our training days, but now it was layered with pride and remembrance. Looking across at Deborah, I felt very emotional. We can't tell you how special it was. We now chat regularly and when we're together we're just like those young girls again - full of laughter, with a friendship that has never faded."





# London

*Our contingent of over 100 women proudly paraded at the Cenotaph in London, with Jo Young bearing the Association poppy wreath.*







*Once again BBC presenter Sophie Raworth had a chat with our members and posed for a photo*



*Whilst there, Josephine Marchant, Emma Hughes and Jayne Goldsmith took the opportunity to visit the Old War Office.*



*This year the BBC presentation team successfully pronounced 'WRAC' correctly for the first time. We are grateful to those of our members who contacted the BBC to reinforce how inappropriate their previous pronunciation was, and to presenter Petroc Trelawny and Executive Producer Michael Cole for their understanding and diligence.*



# Around the UK

*Members from our branches across the UK attended their local Remembrance service, remembering the fallen and ensuring female veterans are represented in our cities, towns and villages.*



*Ulster branch at the Belfast Field of Remembrance*



*Suzanne Allan paraded up Linthorpe Road to Albert Park to lay the wreath at the Middlesbrough Cenotaph*



*Heather Savin and Jenni Pizzuto from Colchester branch at their local town hall*



*Lincs Wolds and Coast branch were well represented with Betty Gash attending the service in Holton-le-Clay at St Peter's Church and War Memorial, and Sylvia Stubbs and Marion King laying the wreath at Mabelthorpe*



*Kathleen Kirtley and Debbie Davies from Oldham branch laying flags and crosses in the cemetery*



*In Hereford, Jo Foster bore the standard whilst Joy Harvey laid the wreath*



*St Marys church in Torquay*





*Randie, Chris, Pat, and Nicola from Tamworth branch paid their respects at the WRAC Association garden, whilst other branch members paraded in Swadlincote*



*Dorset branch were invited by the Mayor of Poole to attend their Remembrance service including Caroline Hearne who laid the poppy wreath*



*Wirral branch visited graves and memorials of servicewomen who fell including 15 ladies they have researched, ranging from 17 to 45 years old who died between 1916 and 1945. They laid a kindness rock and a poppy cross with their details on at each location within a short ceremony, playing the Last Post*



*Lynda Armstrong and Kath Smith attended The Wales Festival of Remembrance held in Newport, and saw fellow WRAC Leona Barr-Jones doing a wonderful job of talking on stage about Fighting With Pride and the work that the charity does.*



*Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE marched alongside Mel Thomson before laying the wreath in Dorchester*



*At Sir John Moore Barracks, Women's Royal Army Corps Association headquarters staff were joined by member Debs Wilde to mark the last Remembrance service to be held there ahead of the closure this year. CEO Paula Rogers laid the wreath on behalf of our members*



# Bank of England

*On Armistice Day, the Bank of England held its Remembrance service with members of the WRAC Association taking an active part in the proceedings. Pauline Milnes read the Kohima whilst CEO Paula Rogers laid the wreath and Maggy Ashmore carried the WRAC Standard - the only standard which was present on the day. The Act of Remembrance took place at the Bank of England War Memorial in the internal Garden Court which includes a bronze sculpture portraying Saint Christopher carrying the Christ Child.*

After the Act of Remembrance, those present returned to the grand entrance hall where the names of the fallen are inscribed on the magnificent marble wall cladding, including those who served in the ATS. The area sits below two galleries on the floors above, and after the Governor spoke, poppy petals fell from the galleries, scattered by those standing above the invited guests as a mark of respect. Before leaving there was a chance to read the four displays, each featuring a Bank of England employee who fell in Service. Enid Line ATS was one of those featured, and Lioness readers will recall the support from the Bank of England when we marked 80 years since she was killed in a bombing in Great Yarmouth back in 1923. We were honoured that the Bank recognised Enid again this year, and pleased to be joined by new members bank employee Karen Price and Brigadier Thammy Evans QVRM.





# Around the World

*WRAC Association members from several branches attended Remembrance services in Malta. It was a warm day, a short route to march and a memorable service provided by the Royal British Legion Malta, as Michelle Patterson tells us*

Remembrance Sunday was a beautiful day and there was an impressive fly over with an aircraft dropping a cargo of falling poppies all over those attending. Her Excellency Myriam Spiteri Debono, President of Malta took the salute and laid a poppy wreath. Chris Powell from WRAC Shropshire branch laid a wreath on behalf of the WRAC Association. Shropshire branch member Sheila Johnson who is 85 years young marched without even a wobble.

On Tuesday the 11th in the Barrack Gardens, veteran WRAC, WRNS and WRAF stood alongside our male counterparts of the Royal Marines and Paras who had come from far and wide, holding a 2 minute silence to the Maltese Last Post. Ann Stack laid a poppy wreath on behalf of the WRAC Association.



## Sunny Sandhurst

*In August, 40 of our ladies gathered at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst to watch the Commandant's Summer Parade and enjoy a picnic. Members from the Isle of Wight, Wiltshire, Oxfordshire and London were in attendance and were pleased to hear a notable mention for the WRAC in Major General Nick Cowley's Commandant's speech.*

The cadets marched past with the band playing, and the parade was followed by a lovely picnic in the sunshine at the Round House Pavilion, allowing ladies to catch up, reunite and mingle.

The sun shone and a wonderful time was had by all, including two ladies who hadn't seen each other for 50 years and were delighted to have an unexpected reunion!





# Marg, Ali and Amy

## Suaviter in mud-o, fortiter in rain

*Marg Davies first began her walking adventures in 2014, after finishing her first breast cancer treatment. What began as a personal way to help heal turned into an annual tradition. Planning, fundraising, and the walking itself did wonders for her mental wellbeing, and she's been at it ever since. Marg reflects on this year's fundraising walk*

A message from Ali Brown - Life Vice President of the WRAC Association inspired this year's route. She'd found a 48-mile pilgrimage route around medieval churches on the Gower Peninsula and suggested I use it for my next 100-mile walk. I laughed and said, "I will if you will" and to my surprise, she accepted! The Gower has three named public pathways: The Gower Pilgrimage Way, the Wales Coast Path, and the Gower Way. Other rights of way are not so well defined and without a recce, it's pot luck so I found a route to join the start to the finish and then planned a series of three circular walks and one linear coastal walk taking in Langland Bay.

The first two days were bright and breezy. Spirits were high as we began collecting unique ink stamps at each church along the Gower Pilgrimage Way with Ali naturally, appointed "i/c Stamps" (I had to give her something to do!). We ticked off St Andrew's (Scottish Saltire), St Illtyd's (Celtic Cross over waves), and St Cattwg's (a teacup). Lunch was eaten in the church porch where we'd taken shelter from the torrential rain. It was sunny and dry when we set off so I was wearing my old, comfy but holey boots. The rain didn't stop, so we carried on up pathways that became streams, visiting St David's and finishing at St Mary's in Rhossili. Back at the farmhouse, we discovered our saving grace: a laundry/drying room which became very well used.



The next day held five more stamps, though the last stop, St Gwynour's, was locked with no stamp in sight. Reality began to hit as we climbed from sea level to 50 metres up a near vertical road, followed by a further climb up another 50 metres before we reached the end. My highlight was day 3, when we swapped boots for bikes (loaned by Elaine Smith and Phyl Mattinson) and peddled from near Gowerton to Mumbles along an excellent cycle path. The last time I rode a bike seriously was about 60 years ago!!

On day 5 our luck ran out. Midway through an 11-mile loop which started in sunshine and rapidly turned to torrential rain, the signed path disappeared. A gate and clear footpath signage led to a nightmare of brambles, thorns, and tangled trees. We fought through to what looked like open land, only to find ourselves in a marshy swamp bounded by thick hedging. We headed on the correct bearing, tripping over reedy tussocks, fighting waist-high through the grass, brambles and scrub until we came to a 2 metre wide torrent tumbling over rocks and fallen trees. Either side of us was impenetrable, the only choices were to fight our way back the way we'd come or to ford the stream. Neither of us were retreating so forward it was. Most sensible walkers carry walking poles for just such an eventuality, but we were not sensible! We managed to forage a couple of poles each from the saplings around us and we set off. Ali (my hero!) led the way as we waded across almost knee-deep. After slithering up a 30ft bank, we emerged weary and relieved that we were alive to tell the tale!







My low point came on day 7: a sleepless night worrying about a storm and pure exhaustion led to uncontrollable, slightly maniacal laughter when I couldn't open a kissing gate on the coastal path. The weather worsened as the week went on with a mixture of sunny intervals and monsoonal downpours. The wind also strengthened as the week progressed with Storm Amy cutting short what should have been the final day's walk so we had to do another few miles on Day 9.

Looking back I think I speak for us both when I say it was certainly a challenge and, for Ali, one that she is in no hurry to repeat. The location was stunning, the weather went from fabulous right through to scary; it was invigorating, knacker, hilarious, frustrating and, at the end of the day, we're still friends and we've had a good laugh. Thanks Ali and thank you to all the wonderful family, friends and strangers who have donated to my two amazing charities.





# VJ Day 80

*Across the UK and the world, the 80th anniversary of Victory over Japan was celebrated through numerous events and our members were proud to be in attendance. Often considered to be the forgotten war, WRAC veterans felt the significance of the occasion and the importance of giving thanks and paying respects to those soldiers of the Far East campaigns, those who served, those who were imprisoned and those who were lost. Families too were remembered in services large and small including at Guildford, in Edinburgh and at the NMA where the Association had representation, as well as at local services in villages and towns from where our branch members sent photos.*

## Guildford

*Sharon Broderick attended this years VJ Day service at Guildford Cathedral to bear the WRAC Standard with pride and told us about the day.*

A lovely group of WRAC veterans attended VJ Day commemorations at Guildford Cathedral, including many who I hadn't met before - new connections were made and friendships have since blossomed. As a direct result of connections formed during the event, the Wirral & Chester and Manchester branches have recently arranged to meet up - further strengthening the bonds between members. It's things like that which make these events so remarkable at bringing members together.

The WRAC Association standard was one of only two corps standards present and I paraded it proudly as we remembered those who bravely fought for our freedom.

After the service the ladies attracted interest from various dignitaries, including a Member of Parliament, who spoke with us about the Association and expressed admiration for their work supporting female veterans.

This was also a lovely day for Kath Harrison who attended with me, having recently been seriously unwell. It was wonderful for her to be out of hospital, attending this event meant the world to her. Meanwhile, other members who couldn't attend in person for various reasons were able to watch via a live stream and felt included in the experience.





# Edinburgh

*June Christie and Janette Deans attended Edinburgh Castle Esplanade for the service at The Scottish National War Memorial within the castle grounds. June shares why VJ Day 80 has such personal significance.*

**M**y husband's father, Isadore (George) Holding RASC arrived in Singapore in 1942 and, as he would say, "went straight to jail". Incarcerated at Changi Prison for more than three and a half years, he lived on meagre portions of rice and chillies, but he was one of the lucky ones - he survived.

The service in the War Memorial was attended by the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and led by RBL Scotland's national chaplain Rev Karen Campbell. It included screenings of memories from Far East veterans local to Edinburgh who, even whilst recounting their horrendous stories, were able to show their sense of humour and make us smile - typical squaddies!

Jenny Martin, in utero when her mother was imprisoned in Singapore, relayed her memories of being 3 years old when at the end of the war allied planes dropped leaflets on their camp reading 'We are coming to get you soon. Do not overeat' - after years of underfeeding a normal sized meal on being freed would have made them ill.

The daughter of Eric Lomax (author of The Railway Man - his story of life as a Japanese POW working on the Burma Railway) spoke of his experiences, his night terrors and flashbacks throughout his life, and how in 1993 he was able to meet and forgive one of his torturers who had written about his remorse. The two became friends - a real testimony of man's ability to overcome his demons - and time for the tissues.

Wreaths were then laid, starting with The Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and including local dignitaries as well as representatives from the CWGC, Children of Far East Prisoners of War and Children of Chindits. Finally, the Book of Remembrance and CWGC Torch for Peace were returned to their places.

As Janette and I left the Memorial we were surprised to find ourselves the centre of attention with the crowds of people who had gathered outside taking photographs of us! Janette says they were there waiting for Edward and Sophie, but me, I'm not so sure...

All in all, a morning full of sadness, respect and hope for the future.



# Glasgow

*Moira Thom, along with Janette Deans and Joyce Steele attended Knightswood Cross Veterans Memorial in Glasgow.*

A short service was held to honour those who served, including Moira's father, a POW in Japan from 1942-1945 who endured harsh punishments and gruelling labour working on the Burma Railway and in a mineral mine. He also witnessed one of the first bombs to fall on Nagasaki. Locals lined the streets as veterans paraded alongside the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Balaklava Pipe Band.





# National Memorial Arboretum

*Isabella Hamilton-Conboy joined four other WRAC veterans at the National Memorial Arboretum to mark the 80th Anniversary of VJ Day. Issy told us about the day.*

**M**y father served in Burma but rarely spoke of it. My mother had served in the ATS and as Army Brats we grew up going to Burma Star and RBL events, and Remembrance was always part of our lives. That background shaped why I wanted to be at VJ Day 80.

I was joined by Amanda Hassell, Kryshna Lawton, Judith Stinchcombe and Sue Dolphin. Friends who were meeting for the first time, and that is one of the best parts of these occasions. The Guard of Honour was yards from where we were seating. The Royal Party arrived, the Drumhead Ceremony followed, and wreaths were placed by the King, Queen and Prime Minister, along with senior military figures. At the same time, wreaths were also laid at Far East memorials across the Arboretum, with the images shown live on the big screen.

Burma veteran Ronald Gumbley gave the Exhortation – a deeply moving moment. The Last Post was sounded, followed by two minutes of silence and a Red Arrows flypast. Reveille sounded, and the Kohima Epitaph was read by Owen Filer a 105-year-old Burma veteran. The stories shared by veterans afterwards brought home the range of service in the Far East – sailors on destroyers, submarines and minesweepers, Army and RAF troops in Burma, and those who survived internment camps in Japan and Hong Kong.

Equally sobering were the reminders of the families who were taken prisoner at the fall of Hong Kong, Singapore and other territories. Women and children spent years in camps, many did not make it out, and those who did carried the scars with them. The most moving contributions of the day came from women who were children when their families were interned in a Japanese camp. They spoke about how the lack of proper food and living conditions affected them, and how the experience shaped the rest of their lives. Hearing their words underlined that suffering was endured not only by those in uniform but also by the families caught in the conflict. I was reminded once again of the silence many of them carried home. My father never spoke of Burma. They had been told not to, and most kept that silence for life.

VJ Day 80 was not simply a commemoration. It was a powerful reminder of those who fought in the Far East, those who were captured, and those who never returned. As veterans, it is our responsibility to ensure their memory is kept alive, to share the stories that could not be told, and to make sure the words spoken at Kohima remain true. When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today.





# Around the UK



Jane Griffin-Ash, Sharon Baker-Joyce, Marg Davies and Sharon Chappell attended the Guildhall in Worcester. After the ceremony we were invited into the Guildhall for refreshments with the Mayor, Councillor Dr Matt Lamb, and other veterans and dignitaries.



Veteran WRAC PTI Sheila Lloyd-Graham and re-enactor friends of hers attended the commemorations held at The Tavern Inn by Kemble railway station in Gloucestershire.

Lyn Hatch was part of a large congregation at Norwich Cathedral. It was an emotional service, attended by over 1,000 people including civilian internees and family members of the Far East prisoners of war and representatives of the National FEPOW Fellowship Welfare Remembrance Association.

During the service wreaths were laid by His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, General the Lord Dannatt, and a representative of NFFWRA.

Earlier, Lyn was joined by Association member Ann Rogerson at the National Memorial Church of Far East Prisoners of War in Wymondham, where the WRAC Association wreath was laid alongside an ATS wreath in memory of a Norfolk branch member whose husband had returned from the Far East after being forced to work on the Burma Railway.



Shropshire branch members took part in VJ Day commemorations in a Wolverhampton care home and enjoyed some songs from The Bluebird Belles. The Mayor of Wolverhampton attended and thanked them all for coming as they waited on the residents with drinks, danced and sang the old songs. A great time was had by all!





# Returning to the NMA

## Dedication of the LGBT+ Community Memorial

*On Monday, 27th October the dedication of the LGBT+ Armed Forces Community Memorial took place at the National Memorial Arboretum in the presence of His Majesty The King. This was His Majesty's first formal appearance at an LGBTQ+ event, with guests comprising veterans, serving personnel and VIPs including Anisha Worbs, Director of the Office for Veterans Affairs and the Minister for Veterans and People, Louise Sandher-Jones MP.*

The King laid flowers on the memorial base and spoke with veterans including our own Julie Holvey-Williams and Jean Macdonald. Jean recalls "The King asked about my service and I told him I had joined with my twin sister. His Majesty asked whether she was with me that day and I said she was. He was interested to learn that I was a PTI and we shared a chuckle together when he asked me if I still exercise. Being presented was deeply emotional - a moment of pride, grief and long-overdue recognition."



Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE has spoken from the heart at our beret and cap-badge restoration ceremonies in the past, and it was wonderful to hear her speaking to a larger audience and reflecting on her own experiences and the changes within the UK Armed Forces. Brig Clare also chatted to many of our members during the reception and poured out a cuppa for Caz Morgan



Association CEO Paula Rogers attended having sat as a member of the Memorial Steering Group, alongside many WRAC Association members - female veterans who had been directly affected by the UK Armed Forces LGBT ban and who had been successful in the ballot for tickets.



The design of the memorial came after a long period of consultation and competition managed by Fighting With Pride. The Abraxas Academy, a Norfolk-based sculpture studio, came up with the winning design entitled 'An Opened Letter', and Anne Patterson and Wendy Hooton went to visit the studio and see the piece in production ahead of its transfer to the NMA.





Janice Maciver who had traveled from the Isle of Lewis was introduced to Scottish Veterans Commissioner, Lieutenant Commander Susie Hamilton and posed for photos with her at the memorial. Janice said "it was an honour to meet the Commissioner who was really generous with her time and thoroughly lovely".



*We hope our members who travel to the National Memorial Arboretum to visit the WRAC plot will also stop to reflect at the LGBT+ Armed Forces Community Memorial*



# Hoppy days are here again!

*Once again the Lionesses legged it over to Bury St Edmunds to help others get legless. Whilst the patrons were getting sozzled the temperatures were sizzling and Debs Sutton put down her pint and picked up a pen to tell us all about it.*



**W**ell, another Beer & Cider festival in the bag and 17% up on entrants from 2024 making a whopping 6,568 festival goers over the duration.

A special festival ale was brewed this year called the Canon's Cassock - very apt as the festival is held in St. Edmundsbury Cathedral, along with over 70 gins. The World Beer Bar was also a winner with constant queues of thirsty punters wishing to try a variety of worldly tipples.

It was lovely to have some new faces volunteering this year - Trudie Yule, Elaine Bloor and Myra Tustain. Everyone wore WRACA T-shirts or polo shirts and got stuck in straight away serving the punters with beer and banter, helping on admissions or clearing tables and tidying up.

A great time was had by all - free entrance for the whole festival, free beer whilst working... what's not to like?!! Over the course of the festival there was entertainment by the Marrakesh Swing Band, Haverhill Silver Band, Bury St Edmunds Male Voice Choir, an Open Mic Session, The High Points and the Honington Military Wives Choir who kept everyone in good spirits whilst drink was downed in abundance with a range of food stalls readily available which made for a very lively event.

Volunteers across many organisations were in high spirits serving drinks, collecting glasses, tidying up and guiding festival goers throughout each day and night, including for the first time a blind volunteer pulling pints for Suffolk Sight.

The WRAC contingent gave up their time to serve and look after the local people of Bury St. Edmunds and those that travelled from afar; great job everyone, even though the punters nearly drank the barrels dry this year!

Wendy Hooton ensured we were all behaving, having fun and being well looked after. £1500 was raised for the WRAC Association and Wendy Hooton picked up the cheque in November. An amazing effort everyone!

**Wendy says:** *Thank you so much for doing such a sterling job, you were fantastic! Our volunteers all said they would be back, so I look forward to seeing you all again. This year's dates are 26th - 31st Aug 2026. Join us as a volunteer or as a punter!*





# Christmas Presence

*On Monday 8th December the WRAC Association made the annual trip to the Royal Hospital Chelsea to visit our in-pensioners and give seasonal gifts. Chair of the Membership Council Rowena Naile MBE and Grants Officer Julie Winks were joined by Julie White, who sent us this report.*

I was pleased to accept the lovely invitation from the WRAC Association to attend The Royal Hospital Chelsea for Christmas Lunch. After arriving at the bar we then shared some quality time being entertained by several of our in-pensioners who were only too happy to regale life-long memories and stories of times well spent with their military friends. It was such a delightful experience, followed by Rowena handing out a selection of Christmas gifts.

Then it was time for lunch, and we were led into a magnificent dining-hall, resplendent with large wooden tables and chairs (not unlike a scene from Harry Potter. I thought!). Every wall was emblazoned with large wooden frames, depicting numerous battles and campaigns that had taken place over time. Such a magnificent sight to behold!! After selecting our lunch choices - we were then served home-made beef broth, salmon fishcakes or chicken royale, followed by ice-cream - delicious! Once finished, we were given a privileged tour of the residents' private living spaces, otherwise known as wards. It was quite liberating to know that these areas are 'shared' and that male and female residents now reside next door to each other, along the corridor. This was further complemented by the respective well-stocked 'Gin' and 'Port' bars spotted at either end!! Before we took our leave, we were shown around the Margaret Thatcher Infirmary - a splendid end to our visit where I felt very fortunate to hear the angelic voices of children and pensioners alike, singing Christmas carols together, in preparation for an evening performance at the local Cadogan Arms, later on that day. All in all, what a thoroughly enjoyable day spent with a fine bunch of Chelsea Pensioners.





# Female Veterans Transformation Programme: National Toolkit Launch

*In November the WRAC Association officially launched the Female Veterans Toolkit at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Designed to support and empower service providers in the commercial, statutory and charitable sectors to transform service provision for female veterans living within the UK, it is the culmination of years of work by the Association, the tri-service Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster, and our externally funded Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP) team of Liza, Stacey, Hannah and Ria.*

The toolkit is centred on the lived experience of female veterans and has been co-designed and produced using the views and opinions of over 800 former servicewomen. It offers guidance, case studies, and signposting to aid service providers in giving female veterans support so they can thrive after service and also draws from extensive academic research, which was reviewed and condensed for accessibility as part of FVTP's Evidence Review.

The launch brought together veterans, government, service providers and supporters to spotlight the often-overlooked experiences of female service leavers and celebrate the strength, resilience, and diversity of women who served in the UK Armed Forces. WRAC Association Life Vice President Ali Brown hosted the event, saying ***"The programme aims to build a legacy where female veterans feel confident to access the right support, at the right time, and in the right way for them."***

Ali introduced keynote speakers including Anna Wright, CEO of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust; Anisha Worbs, Director of the Office for Veterans Affairs; and the Minister for Veterans and People, Louise Sandher-Jones MP. An army veteran herself, Louise said ***"This much-needed toolkit will not only help service providers to better cater to the unique needs and experiences of women veterans, but will also help to banish stereotypes and celebrate the growing female proportion of the veteran community. The Government's new Veterans Strategy will build on FVTP's work through the development of a women's forum that will help shape future policies, and an oral history project to raise public awareness of the experiences and contributions of female veterans"***.





As part of our wider mission to shift perceptions, raise awareness and celebrate the service and skills of the UK's female veteran community, we have also launched three creative initiatives:

- Professional Photographs. We have captured portraits of 79 female veterans, showcasing them in their post-service lives. These have been developed into a poster campaign highlighting the diversity of women who served and normalising the idea that women of any age and background can have served.
- Short Films. We filmed a variety of service providers and female veterans capturing 'what good looks like' when supporting women who served. These are available within the toolkit and are being shared on social media and online.
- Theatre Production. A short production with 18 female veterans representing their experience in-service and beyond was filmed with the aim of springboarding conversations about what service providers can do to encourage and welcome female veterans.

We have now entered the 'education' phase of the programme, aiming to further equip and enhance service providers with the Toolkit. This will include online and face to face sessions across the country throughout 2026 to really embed the learning from the programme so far.

To find out more about the project and view the Female Veterans Toolkit, visit [wraca.org.uk](http://wraca.org.uk)





# Back in the Saddle

## From Kent to Cardiff and all the counties in between



*Karen Radford has never knowingly backed out of a challenge, and last year was no exception as she took on the mammoth task of cycling almost 300 miles as she went "Off Her Head for Ed"*

On 13 July 2025, my dear friend Edward Smith sadly lost his battle with Glioblastoma, an aggressive and terminal form of brain cancer. In the weeks leading up to his passing, I came across a Facebook advertisement for a 274-mile charity cycle in support of Brain Tumour Research. Inspired to make a difference, I shared my intention with Ed. Both he and his wife, Kath - a fellow Women's Royal Army Corps veteran medic - thought I was barmy, especially when I proposed completing the distance over just a few days rather than spreading it across the month of August, as the challenge originally suggested.

Determined to honour Ed's memory, I planned a route from my home in Kent to his in South Wales. To meet the mileage target, I created a journey through Kent, Surrey, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire, and South Wales, ultimately covering 287 miles over four days (a little over the target, I know!).

On 28 August, I set off from Maidstone accompanied by my good friend Jess Weedon and her trusty converted camper van "Shirley." It was an incredible adventure over hill and dale, through tail-end hurricane winds and rain, and even including a moment at the end of day one when I was nearly knocked off my bike by Pat Rosewell's (Budgie's) wing mirror! Well, not quite - but it's a fitting story.

We completed the journey on Sunday, 31 August. This achievement would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my wonderful friends, who encouraged me at every stage, welcoming me at each campsite and celebrating with me at the finish line. The ride concluded at Llandaff Rowing Club, and for the final 10 miles I was joined by two of Ed and Kath's children, Emma and Gareth.

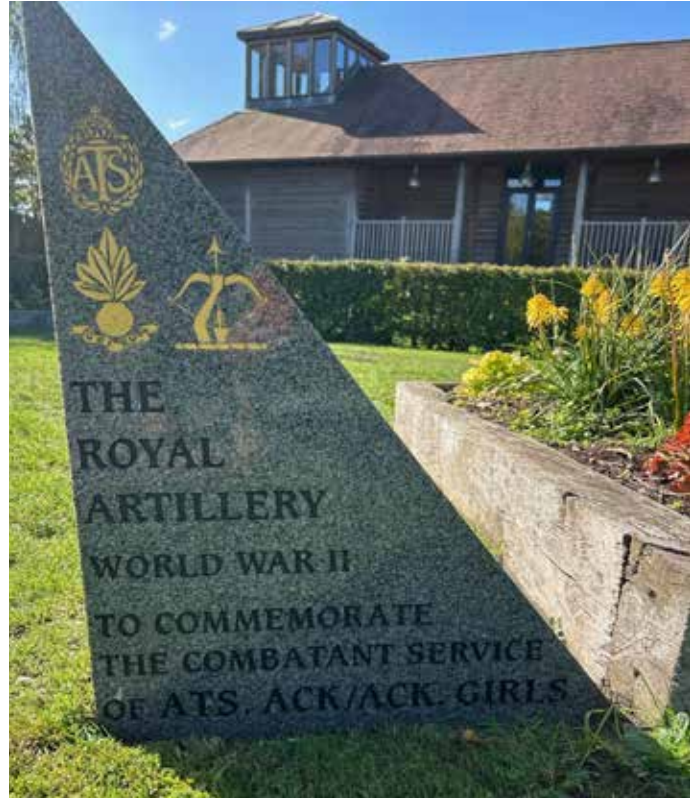
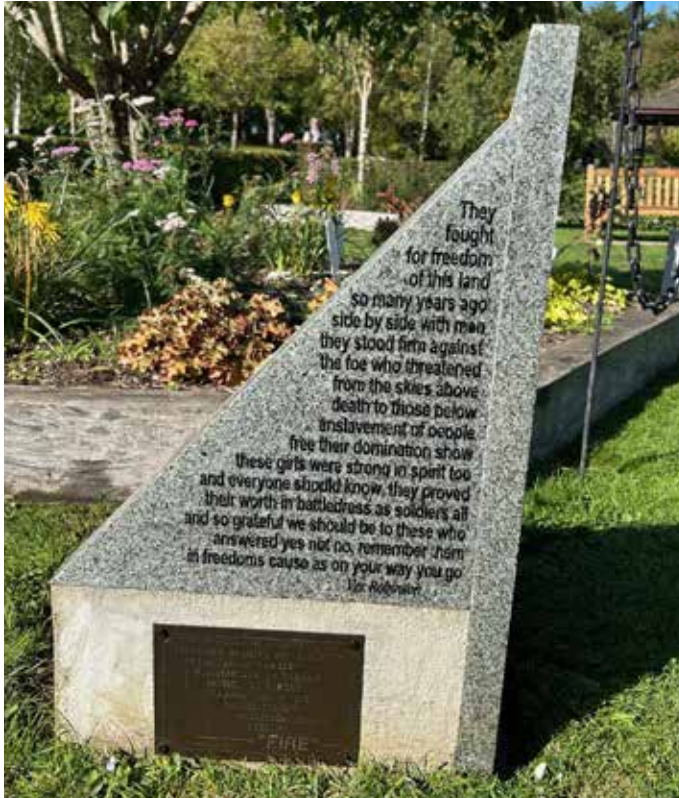
I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who sponsored and supported me throughout this journey. Together we raised an outstanding total of £6,310. This experience was truly remarkable, and I hope it serves as a fitting tribute to a wonderful friend. I am confident that these funds will make a meaningful difference through the family's three chosen charities: Brain Tumour Research, The Not Forgotten, and St David's Hospice, Newport.





# Ack Ack Memorial

After the August visit to the WRAC Association plot at the National Memorial Arboretum, we saw that the Ack Ack memorial was looking rather tired and neglected. Much of the lettering had faded and the plaque had fallen clean off, although fortunately the NMA staff had kept it safely in storage. We arranged for it to be professionally restored to its best, giving it a thorough clean, refreshing lettering, brightening emblems, and reattaching the plaque. We hope those of you who visit throughout the year can enjoy this important memorial fully once more.



## WRAC Association Summer Event 2026

### Dining with Dunediners

Our 2026 Summer Event will be in Edinburgh on Sunday 14th June when we will be gathering for a delicious afternoon tea and we'd love you to join us for scones near Scone.

We always move our events around the UK as much as possible to make sure everyone gets a chance to attend an event nearer them so if this is the nearest the event has been to your neck of the woods, why not come along?

There are lots of other fabulous things you could do while you're in Edinburgh so if you decide to make a weekend of it, why not book to explore Edinburgh Castle, have a yomp up Arthur's Seat or visit one of the many historic pubs?

**The details are as follows:**

**Date:** Sunday 14th June 2026, 12:30 for 13:00 serving

**Venue:** Greyfriars Hall, Virgin Hotel Edinburgh, 1 India Buildings, Victoria St, Edinburgh, EH1 2EX

**Activity:** Afternoon tea – a delicious selection of sweet and savoury treats plus endless cups of tea and coffee.

**Cost:** The Association is subsidising the cost of the tea so that it is available to Association members for the reduced price of £20 per person

**How to book a place:** Visit our website - [wraca.org.uk](http://wraca.org.uk) or call the office - 0300 400 1992





# Signalling a Change - From one set of old comrades to another

*We are always extremely grateful when one of our members makes a donation to the Association, or remembers us in their will. Occasionally a donation arrives from an unexpected source, so when we received £1208 from Col Chris Laurence OBE we wanted to find out more. Col Chris told us:*

SC(TA) was established as an 'old comrades' association for those who had served in 39 (City of London) Signal Regiment (Special Communications) (Volunteers) and its predecessor units. At the last AGM it was decided that the Association would be closed as the majority of members were increasingly infirm and had difficulty attending meetings. The Association had a few thousand pounds in the bank and it was resolved to donate half to the R Sigs Charity and half to the WRAC Association - the latter because such a high proportion of those who served were originally WRAC badged.

*We were delighted to receive the money and thank Col Chris and his trustees. We were also intrigued to find out about some of their WRAC members and invite them to join the WRAC Association, so we reached out and received these memories from Gwen Cutmore.*

Soon after my 17th birthday in 1961 I joined the WRAC part of the 65th Special Communications Signal Regiment TA at a recruiting stand at the Earls Court Radio Show. The regiment was based in Worship Street, City of London and was a unique regiment tasked by the Foreign Office with no connection to any other Army unit. The girls could practice every trade in the regiment except for parachuting.



My objective was to learn how to drive. The vehicles available were surplus WW2 - a mix of 3-ton lorries, Land Rovers and Rolls Royce engined Champs. The 3 tonners had to be started by hand with a handle and had crash gear boxes that needed to be "double-declutched". You had to pass your test on these. Driver training included the streets around London and weekend map reading in the countryside. On Tingewick airfield the girls were allowed to drive 10-ton Thornycroft HGV's. Sometimes we were involved with our REME detachment in practicing recovering ditched vehicles. Practicing night driving just by moonlight was scary!

The 3-tonners did not have fixed seats so metal tubular stacking chairs had to be taken from the drill hall and placed in the back of the trucks. Cornering or braking too fast caused the passengers' chairs to slide around the back of the truck! Some weekends and during annual camp I drove mobile radio stations, assisting the "stick" to rig aerials in trees and message coding using the One Time Letter Pad, and on one occasion I was part of an eleven Champ convoy returning vehicles from Poundon, Buckinghamshire, via Bath, to the depot at Taunton.

I married my husband, who was one of the Paras, in 1965. Surprisingly, there were nine other inter-Regiment weddings that year! I was obliged to resign from the Army in December 1966 when I became pregnant with my first daughter. I kept in contact with many comrades until our Regimental Association closed in 2025, some 64 years after joining the TA.



*This generous donation will help us to support female veterans and increase cameraderie, thank you*



# Can you afford to make a regular donation?

## Be more Belle!

*In 2024 the WRAC Association announced that we were reducing the membership subs to zero. This decision has led to an increase in members of over 50 per cent - a brilliant result for our community. It also means that we immediately lost a significant source of income, and whilst we are delighted that our members can enjoy being part of our wonderful community, we are working extra hard to deliver the same level of service with reduced income.*

**W**e are often overlooked in fundraisers in favour of bigger, louder and more popular charities, but we are still supporting female veterans, increasing camaraderie and providing benevolent support for former ATS and WRAC servicewomen. A small number of people chose to keep their subscriptions, including Belle Jenkinson who explained:

If you appreciate the work our charity does, and would like to make a regular donation of any amount you can call our office on 0300 400 1992 or visit [wraca.org.uk/donate](http://wraca.org.uk/donate) where you can choose to make a one-off donation, or give on a monthly or yearly basis.

Every donation we receive, no matter how big or small, reminds us that our work is valuable and appreciated. If you think you are already paying on a regular basis, please check your account to make sure the direct debit or standing order is still in place.

Have you written your will? If you would like to leave a legacy to the WRAC Association, please contact your legal representative and let your family know your wishes. We publish all legacies received in the *Lioness* each issue, and are always touched by the generosity of those who have gone leaving future support for those who remain.

The WRAC Association is a registered charity, 206184

*I thought I would like to continue to contribute every year because I enjoy the camaraderie and meeting new people every time I come to a WRAC Association event.*



## Paying our respects

*It is always an honour to be able to pay our respects at the funerals of former ATS and WRAC servicewomen. Often our members attend, sometimes we are asked to provide Regimental March music, and increasingly we are able to send a coffin drape.*

**W**e have two styles of coffin drape, one for those who served in the ATS and another for the WRAC. They are loaned free-of-charge and we send these directly to the funeral director, not via family or any third party, asking only that they be returned swiftly as others may need them. If at any time you would like to make enquiries about the loan of a coffin drape, please contact the HQ office on 0300 400 1992 and we will be pleased to help.

Both styles of drape have been used at many funerals since we first began providing them in 2024. Our own Pauline Milnes recently attended a funeral where the WRAC drape was used and told us about the difference it made to her:

*"As the hearse drew up outside the crematorium, we got our first glimpse of the drape. I felt so proud when I saw our Corps colours, and even more so when the coffin was placed on the catafalque, and our cap badge was prominently visible for all to see. Normally at a funeral for a Lioness, as we depart we salute the coffin, but to salute our badge too made it very special."*





# In their own words

## Beret and Cap Badge Recipients

*After the wonderful ceremony held at the National Memorial Arboretum, many of those who received their presentations reflected on their experience, and shared their thoughts in the hope that others might be inspired by their words and come forward.*

### Maggie Carter

I set off from my home in Hertfordshire with my partner Christine at 8am with trepidation & excitement for the day I was going to have. Not knowing whether I would know anyone added to my fears. But WOW, I needn't have worried, I soon made friends, talking about my time in the WRAC in the 70s & sharing the same experiences that we all went through. Brigadier Clare's speech, full of passion and empathy was amazing. Thank you for making my day so special. I am a Lioness once again.



### Bev Crawford

Joining the Army at 19 I thought it would be a wonderful experience for the next 22 years working, learning, travelling, and meeting wonderful people, but this ended only 3 years later. Everything was abruptly taken away from me when I fell in love with a female, no longer having a job, money or home. Receiving my beret and cap badge after so many years was incredible, and the support I received from everyone was just amazing. Brigadier Clare gave the speech of her life which blew me away: we were not forgotten, our service did matter. This means so much to me, and will be the start of my healing process from the loss I have felt for decades.

### Linda Garnham

Nerves, doubts, very emotional, angry and much more, almost turned away, but remembered I've survived worse than this and I can do again. I arrived at the Arboretum head high and shoulders back, still not easy but telling myself I'm not the one that's done wrong. Once with other veterans, drinking coffee and sharing stories gave me strength, confidence and such a sense of belonging at long last. The acknowledgment of wrongdoing by Brigadier Clare on behalf of the British Army was delivered with genuine heartfelt sorrow. The Brigadier made a promise that by the end of the day every veteran there would feel they were back in the Army family. She fulfilled that promise tenfold. What an excellent day.



### Karen Gonella

At 17 years and 3 months I joined the WRAC at 17, signing up for 22 years to serve Queen and country, but at 20 years and 12 days I was dishonourably discharged for being gay. Aged 64 years and 30 days, I was reunited with my WRAC beret and cap badge after 44 years and 29 days that I had so proudly worn as a 17 year old. The day was emotional, but I want to thank the WRAC Association for making this possible for us veterans and send a huge thank you to Brigadier Clare Phillips for calming my nerves and for her emotive and inspirational speech on the day. The day will live with me forever.

*Thank you to every WRAC veteran affected by the ban who has connected with our Association. Whether you have been a member for many years or have only recently returned to the fold we are proud to count you in our number. We are grateful to those who have allowed us to share their photos and words and hope, as they do, that this will inspire more veterans to come forward.*

*If you know anyone who has been affected, please visit [gov.uk/guidance/getting-support-as-an-lgbt-veteran](https://gov.uk/guidance/getting-support-as-an-lgbt-veteran) or contact WRAC Association HQ.*





## Julie Gray

I re-connected with an old friend after 38 years and she persuaded me to attend the presentation at the National Arboretum, and I was so pleased that she did. I was made to feel welcome by everyone and realised that I did not need to be so nervous. I was welcomed back into the WRAC and it was amazing. Brigadier Clare Phillips' speech was so sincere, heartfelt and moving. I felt proud again, something that I had not felt for a long time. Thank you to everyone for welcoming me back, I have even signed up for a 10K run/walk next year alongside other veterans, and I don't even run!

## Mary Harney

As I sat among 20 former WRAC soldiers waiting for our berets and badges to be restored to us I listened to Brigadier Clare Phillips honouring our service and was transported to a day in August 1967. Then, I stood on a parade square in Guildford for my 'passing out' parade. I remember how proud I was to be a member of the WRAC. I dreamed of having a long career in the service. Little did I realise that my dreams and hopes would never materialise because of one simple truth: I am lesbian. The restoration day was bittersweet: bitter because of the reason we were there and sweet to see justice served for so many WRAC lesbians.



## Margaret Henderson

Any misgivings I had about attending the ceremony at the NMA, soon disappeared. Thank you for the genuine warm welcome from the Association, fellow veterans and others. The emotional heartfelt words spoken by Col (ret'd) Hassell and Brigadier Phillips still ring in my ears - 'we didn't do wrong, we were wronged, we should feel proud of our service'. It was a wonderful welcome back. After 57 years of living with the loss and sense of shame, I now feel able to hold my head up and be a proud veteran. Thanks also to the guard of honour who came solely to show support and camaraderie. A day I never could have dreamt would happen.

## Tina Jennings

What a truly amazing day! The WRAC Team couldn't do enough for us, their smiles and hugs when I walked in were much appreciated! What was really special was they warmly acknowledged my partner Loz who was there to support me. I felt I was 'part of a team, something special again'. I haven't felt part of something for so long, always looking for that special tribe and now I might just have found what I was looking for. I really want to get involved from now on and support other veterans on their journey. The speeches given by both Brigadier Clare Phillips and Colonel Amanda Hassell were genuine and heartfelt. It really touched my heart. A truly special experience.



## Susan Lacey

The presentation of my beret and cap badge was everything to me, an overwhelming sense of pride and some degree of closure, I felt that I was given back that piece of me that the Army had taken. The WRAC Association made this day truly wonderful and amazing. This event enabled me to meet my friends from over 38 years ago which was special in itself, and the words from Brigadier Clare Phillips were very thought provoking and emotional which summed up the essence of the day. Thank you

*Continued overleaf*



## Louise Lingard-Snape

The day of reparations was perfect in an imperfect way. The weather, the company of fellow WRAC ladies welcomed me. As I took it all in, I was left in no doubt that I was home and that this was my day. Comrades and friends were united by emotions that were palpable even after so many years had passed. Ultimately, no matter how worried and emotional we all were, we found, encouraged by the WRAC Association, by Brig Phillips' powerful testimony and the Vice President's warm words, compassion, grace, humanity and unity. The event had all been respectfully curated by the WRAC Association who managed the event with propriety, decorum and the welcoming spirit of our Corps.



## Jacqueline May

Spending the day with women who truly understood the loss of leaving behind a much-loved army career was both humbling and uplifting. In 1980, at just 19, I arrived at WRAC Guildford full of pride and ready for a lifelong career in service. But in 1982, my journey ended abruptly, leaving a gap I thought could never be filled. At the NMA, I met 19 extraordinary women whose stories mirrored my own. The conversations were heartfelt, the understanding unspoken, and the sense of connection overwhelming. My sincere thanks go to the previous recipients for their unwavering support. While my time in uniform was cut short, my place within this community remains - rooted in shared service, resilience, and enduring friendship.

## Karen O'Grady

The receiving of my beret and badges was an extremely rewarding and very emotional experience. The words spoken by Brigadier Clare Phillips touched the heart of every recipient and prompted many tears as we all remembered our experiences. "Welcome home lioness" said by a previous recipient in the guard of honour will stay with me always. Thanks to the WRAC association for such a lovely day.



## Chris Root

I cannot fully explain just how grateful I am that the staff at the WRAC Association encouraged me to attend. There was no pressure but I am glad I agreed. It was an amazing experience and the next day I felt as if a large weight had been lifted off me. For over 50 years, I have felt it was somehow my fault - this young, stupid, naïve woman deserved all she got. I now know this is not true, and the ceremony, WRAC Association staff and Brigadier Clare Phillips helped me understand that. Thank you.

## Jackie Simmons

I was truly humbled to be presented my beret and badge at the NMA. I was nervous at first but we were all made to feel so welcome and it felt like coming home. I had never truly lost touch with friends that I made during my service and was so glad that some of them were able to attend. Even nicer was that my partner and my older (but shorter) sister were there to receive her beret and badge too. It was a day for reflection and seeing all the support from friends, partners and the WRAC Association made it so worth it. It was great to be back with the pride and to belong once again.







## Megan Stewart

The ceremony's openness and the impressive guard of honour by the WRAC Lionesses showed me that they were genuinely apologising for the past and welcoming us back. I almost didn't apply because I still felt betrayed. However, the warmth I felt during this event was truly special. It reminded me of the strength found in community and healing. I encourage all women who were affected to come forward. Our experiences matter, and together, we can find support and understanding as we move forward.

## Sally Venn

When I joined the WRAC I wasn't sure I'd made the right decision, however, within a couple of weeks I knew that I wanted to serve for at least the next 22 years. After 5 years and 278 days my world came crashing down, the powers-that-be decided that because I was "different" i.e. gay, they no longer wanted me to do the job I had come to love. "Services no longer required" they said and I was discharged. My pride in serving my Queen and Country was replaced with embarrassment. Now thanks to the WRAC Association and Brigadier Clare, after receiving my beret and cap badge I can once again be proud to say I served with the WRAC.



## Debbie Walker

Getting my beret presented back to me was such an honour. It was a very moving and emotional day which I was so pleased to share with fellow veterans but also my family. The setting was perfect at the Arboretum. I truly now feel like a Lioness again and proud of my military service that was cut cruelly short. Thank you to the WRAC Association for making our day special.

## Joanna Watkins

I was still a child, only just 18, when I joined up. I had dreams of working my way up in the Army and making it my lifelong career. With no inkling of my sexuality, I had no reason to fear as I knew I was up to the job. Discovering your true self should be elating but, because of the ban, it was tinged with apprehension. When the time came to choose between love and my career, with no chance of having both, I chose love and a life free from hiding. Receiving my beret, surrounded by acceptance and with real accountability from the Army was liberating and brought the two parts of my life together.



## Rose Watson

I stayed at the same hotel as a veteran I served with and we shared many memories, laughing at some and close to tears at others. The following day I was shaking thinking about standing to receive a beret and badge that should never have been taken from me. It was only as Brigadier Clare touched on the experiences familiar to all the investigations that I believed that she and others actually knew how bad it was. The brigadier acknowledged the wrongdoing and with a heartfelt apology promised we would go home with the feeling of belonging to a family that I had missed for so long. This has helped me feel that I belong and can start to heal.

*Continued overleaf*



*Janice Maciver completed her basic training at Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Guildford in 1992, and went on to Kent for trade training with the Intelligence Corps. An Association member since 2010 Janice was officially welcomed back to the Intelligence Corps by the Corps Colonel, Col Fairweather and other senior members of the Corps in the Priory Officers Mess, Chicksands, Bedfordshire - quite some journey from her home on the Isle of Lewis, and for her sister who flew over from Australia to be with her.*

## Janice Maciver

I was serving in Hong Kong when I was detained and subsequently discharged. I later found a home with the WRAC Association where I could be myself without any questions, and marched at the Cenotaph in London for the first time in 2012 - a very emotional and proud day, given my past. At my presentation, Col Fairweather gave a heartfelt and moving speech and there wasn't a dry eye to be seen. Later, I joined Intelligence Corps Colonel Commandant General Sir Jim Hockenhull KBE ADC Gen, HQ staff and LGBT Network personnel for a formal dinner in the Sergeants' Mess marking the 25th anniversary of the lifting of the ban and the rest of my life began at that point.





# Locked Away in The Tower!

*In October, the WRAC Association staff, trustees and members of our Membership Council came together for our annual away day, this year held at the historic Tower of London.*

The morning session, led by an external facilitator, focused on the skills we bring to the Association - natural ability, those learnt during military careers and those gathered through a myriad of other life experiences. We explored a range of thought-provoking and proactive ideas to help us better fulfil our commitments to association members. The session provided valuable insight into our strengths and highlighted wonderful opportunities for growth and improvement.

In the afternoon, we were treated to an engaging and inspiring talk by Yeoman Serjeant Amanda Jayne (AJ) Clark – only the second female Yeoman Warder in history, and the first in ten years since Moira Cameron broke the tradition. AJ shared her remarkable journey to becoming a Yeoman Warder, describing life within the Tower's walls and the unique responsibilities that come with the role.



A WRAC veteran herself, AJ served 25 years, before retiring from the Royal Logistic Corps in 2017. Her pride in her service and current role shone through, and her storytelling was captivating.

The day concluded with a self-guided tour of the Tower including the Crown Jewels and a photo shoot with Jubilee the Raven!



## Caption competition



We had some brilliant captions suggestions for the photo of Wendy Staden on a fundraising mission, so it was a really hard decision, but the worthy winner was Debbie Walker with ***"Can someone make a trunk call to HQ and tell them about the elephant in the room."***

Thanks Debbie - you really made us chuckle.

Have you got a caption for the photo opposite? Funny, clever, silly - all suggestions are welcome! Email [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk) and we will print the best one in the next issue.



For this issue we delved into the archive for this wonderful picture of some of our ATS sisters, so please get your thinking caps on - can you think of a great caption, or perhaps imagine what is being heard or said?



# Lionesses having a roaring good time

*Here are some other exciting things our members have been up to in the last few months.*

Kerry Warnes and Heather Savin from Colchester branch represented the WRAC Association by attending the 99th birthday of a local ATS veteran Peggy Peters. Peggy served in the ATS during the war and as she said "I cooked everything for everybody". Kerry and Heather reported that she is an amazing lady with an excellent sense of humour and they thought it was lovely

to be able to join the party along with three generations of her family. They hope to be there for her 100th birthday party next year.



Association member Pamela Wood turned 94 recently and some local WRAC veterans took Pamela out for lunch for a celebratory at Kenwick Park Hotel. Pamela was thrilled! Betty Gash who organises our Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast branch has been visiting Pamela regularly and shared this photo with us. Age is but a number!



Three ladies from our Bristol Branch traveled to Belgium on the Royal British Legion tour to Ypres. At the Menin Gate Parade they met Lt Gen Sir Ian Cave KCB and his wife Caroline who also served in the WRAC. Pictured are Caroline Cave, Belle Jenkinson, Angie Forsyth, Judith Stinchcombe and Lt Gen Sir Ian Cave KCB.



Helen White took part in a charity sky dive to help raise money for Walking with the Wounded. She made a connection with the charity through Op Courage who helped her with her career, mental health, and well-being.

Helen decided to complete the sky dive to challenge herself - back in 2004 she had vowed never to jump out of a plane when a close friend sadly lost his life competing in a skydiving competition. Helen was able to overcome her fear of the sport and pushed herself to beyond her limits and successfully completed the tandem jump, enjoying it more than she thought she would! Even more so, she was able to secure some funds for the charity which she hopes will enable another veteran in need to access help and support that will help them with their life.



In October Lisa Aven from Winchester branch, and 6 other members went to Thruxton Circuit in Hampshire. Lisa said "It was a bit rainy but that didn't put a damper on the day. There was a driving simulator of the Thruxton track so we were able to experience what it is like at the wheel. I did crash it though, so it's just as well we were being driven by experts on the real track!

Lots of different cars were available, we went round the circuit three times hitting 100 MPH which was a thrilling ride! Then I had a go on the dual control car - I was the passenger with the pedals and gear stick but someone else turned the steering wheel whilst blindfolded - that was great fun.

A chinook helicopter did a brilliant demonstration of tricks for us and landed at the track, and one of the cars was decorated with poppies so we had our photo taken in front of it."





On the 1st November, Diane Pratt, Wendy Brimicombe and Caroline McEwan-Smith from our Dorset Branch attended the Poole Town v Gosport football match to take part in the Act of Remembrance alongside other local veterans. Caroline's father also attended at the grand age of 86 looking very smart.

They formed a guard of honour as the players ran onto the pitch led by the Royal British Legion Flag, then all the players and fans observed the two minutes silence.

Following this they all marched off pitchside and were stood down. The weather was pretty grim but it was an honour to be asked by the club to attend.



Wendy Hooton was honoured to be asked by the Chairman of 19 Signal Regiment (AF) to be the Guest Speaker for their Annual Reunion.

The Regiment moved to Singapore in 1946, and had a squadron in Hong Kong in 1947 as well as a Signal Troop on Gan Island from 1959. Many WRAC will remember passing through Gan Island in the Indian Ocean on the way to Hong Kong.

Wendy was delighted to be presented with a book, '100 years of the Royal Corps of Signals'.

She spoke about her army career, her postings to Hong Kong, Cyprus and Germany as well as Aldershot, Catterick, Edinburgh and London and told them about her Exercise Long Look exchange programme with the Australian Army.

Wendy said - 'I'm glad I made them laugh and have been asked if I would come back as an Associate member. I would be delighted'.



Four of our members, Grace, Kate, Vic and Jean (pictured with her sister Jo and Brigadier Clare Phillips) were nominated at this years LGBTQ+ defence awards this year – congratulations to you all!



Lisa Aven and Sandy Cawley took a trip to the Tower of London, care of the Not Forgotten.

Lisa told us - 'It was a bright and clear day, so rather good to walk around and see all that was at there, including the Crown Jewels (which I lent them from my own collection ha-ha!) Not really, but they were magnificent.

We met some lovely people today, the Yeoman of Guard, one of the Lady Yeoman, who was such a lovely person and took the time to speak to us about living in the Tower, and a raven or two!

The poppy display was just fantastic and certainly very emotional seeing them displayed across the buildings and grounds.

A great big thank you to all concerned'.



In late August four of our members - Sandy Warne, Alison Cairns, Rebecca Weatherstone and Tracy Hook - drove down to Newquay to surprise one of their friends Annie Swan who was having her marriage blessed following her small wedding earlier on in the summer.

Some of them had not seen each other since they all passed out in May 1987 so it was also a mini reunion. The blessing took place in one of Annie and Phil's favorite places and was really well attended by their families and friends and everyone was made to feel really welcome. Annie and Phil are bikers so their marriage was blessed by a fellow biker who is also a vicar!

Sandy told us that they all had such a fantastic weekend together and that it was lovely meeting up after so many years and seeing Annie so happy was the icing on the cake.

Congratulations Annie and Phil, we wish you all the happiness in the world.





Dot Mitchellmore of East Riding & North Lincolnshire Branch received a call from a lady who was looking to reconnect with the WRAC. Dot and branch member Wendy Corkerill grabbed some posh biscuits and set off to visit her, and what a lovely interesting visit they had!

Marjorie Booker gave them a warm welcome and they sat and chatted as if they were old friends. Marjorie talked about her 22 year career with the WRAC attached as an RMP and her memories as a training instructor at Guildford.

Marjorie enjoyed her role as a recruiter and she was responsible for recruiting the most female WRAC and QARANC into the army in two successive years thus earning her the British Empire Medal. One of her recruits was a young girl called Trina Abidi. She told Marjorie that she would one day come back and do her job and nine years later Tina achieved that and took over the role from Marjorie! Trina continued in the role for another 17 years and was awarded the Meritorious Medal for her contribution and her charity work.

A date was agreed to have our first NAAFI break of the year and Marjorie was our guest of honour. Three of her original recruits were able to come and surprise her - Trina Abidi, Jayne Ezard and Janet Loftus with a combined 60 years service were delighted to meet Marjorie again! Marjorie said she was thrilled to be with her "old girls" as she affectionately called them and equally pleased to meet other branch members too.

When we entered the venue all the ladies gave Marjorie a standing ovation. It was a very memorable emotional moment. Marjorie thoroughly enjoyed meeting all the ladies and we all enjoyed looking through her portfolio she brought along with all her wonderful photos and mementos of her service with the WRAC.

WELCOME HOME MARJORIE x



### **Our members look like the back end of a bus! (Well three of them do - and we're very proud of it!)**

Last year Pauline Milnes joined a group of in-pensioners from the Royal Hospital Chelsea for a mystery promotional photo-shoot. Not knowing what they had let themselves in for, Pauline, Helen Lloyd and Mary Ann Clarke happily posed and waited to find out where they were going to end up.

Just before Christmas, Mary Ann went out to the RHC car park to see the brilliant new Outreach minibus with all of their faces adorning the sides!

The Royal Hospital Chelsea operates an Outreach programme for veterans from the three services who are aged 65 and over. Meeting every Thursday morning for tea, coffee biscuits, it is a chance to meet up with other veterans and the in-pensioners who volunteer to assist the Outreach team. Additionally, agencies such as Help for Heroes, DWP, RBL, SSAFA, Samaritans, Blesma and more pop in to provide assistance or guidance, and there are numerous activities, including boxing training, line dancing, gardening projects, games sessions.

The minibus is used to transport RHC in-pensioners and tri-service veterans as ambassadors to various locations and events in their effort to expand the programme in the South East, and of course with three WRAC veterans plastered over the sides it is great publicity for female veterans.



The call came out - we must, we must, improve this bus - so we did - great work ladies!



# Hobson's Voice

*In my last introduction in Lioness Magazine, I cheekily declared, "Roll on the next big national event because next time I will be there, and nothing will get in my way (except for cancelled flights if I am deployed again...)." Well, as it turns out, the latter has come true! This year, I'll be deployed on a different operation, and I promise to share all the details in the next issue.*



Since we last connected I've been blessed with some truly memorable experiences. From leading Sub-Unit, Regimental, and Garrison Remembrance Services, to our Regimental Carol Service (and all the festive chaos that comes with Christmas preparations—many of you will know exactly what I mean!), it's been a whirlwind. One of the most profound moments was baptising several children and adults, including one of our soldiers from Fifth Regiment Royal Artillery. Surrounded by friends and his Chain of Command, it was a Spirit-filled service that reminded me of the deep privilege of this calling.

In October, I was fortunate to take a much-needed retreat. As chaplains, we pour so much of ourselves into caring for the Army's people, so these times of spiritual renewal are essential. My retreat took me to the stunning Peak District with a faithful friend, where we delved into Brené Brown's *The Gifts of Imperfection* (highly recommend all her books!), walked amidst God's glorious creation, and reflected at the Derwent Dam, where 617 Dambusters Squadron once practised with the bouncing bomb, a humbling experience. It was a wonderful time to "draw near to God," as James 4:8 reminds us, and to let Him renew my spirit.

Now, if you know me—or are starting to get a sense of who I am—you'll know I'm not one to sit still for long! This past year, I've been pushing myself out of my comfort zone, not just for the thrill of new experiences but to build my mental resilience. Over the summer, I tried paragliding (terrifying but exhilarating!) and joined a Christian adventure group in Austria. There, I tackled canyoning, including a heart-stopping 27m abseil down a waterfall, white-water rafting, climbing the Via Ferrata, and even exploring the Dachstein glacier. Each challenge reminded me of the truth in Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Speaking of challenges, I've also discovered a passion for Obstacle Course Races (OCRs) and am now completely hooked on Spartan Races—a global series that challenges you to run, climb, crawl, and conquer a variety of obstacles designed to push both your physical and mental limits. This year, I took on the Spartan Ultra: 36 gruelling miles and over 60 obstacles. I won't sugar-coat it—this was one of the toughest tests of my mental resilience. There was a moment halfway through when I seriously considered throwing in the towel. But with determination (and many prayers!), I kept going and crossed the finish line in 1st place, earning the title of British OCR Ultra Champion. It was an incredible experience, and I am looking forward to future Spartan and other OCR events.

Please do keep me in your thoughts over the coming months, and I would be deeply grateful for your prayers as I prepare for my six-month deployment. I'm looking forward to the journey ahead and can't wait to share those adventures with you in the next issue!

With my prayers and blessings  
Padre Trudy Hobson CF





# Hokey-cokey Karaoke

## Old and Bold at the WRAC Dinner Club



*In October the WRAC Dinner Club returned to Solihull for a weekend of food, fun and friendship - and some fabulous frocks! Founder DC member Janet Watkins took some time to recover from the weekend and wrote down her memories of the weekend.*

The busy registration desk was the first chance to see old friends and feel the excitement of the weekend building as we all checked in, bought our raffle tickets and felt the warm welcome that Dinner Club always brings.

Instead of the usual Friday night entertainment we enjoyed an impromptu karaoke session. This was arranged at the last minute when the planned entertainment had to pull out, but when the WRAC gets

lemons, you can guarantee we make limoncello! This turned into a fantastic night with some wonderful singers, and a few who made up for their lack of pitch with fervent gusto! From Loveslack to Jerusalem, Valerie to Delilah we belted out the classics, danced along and formed the obligatory conga. We certainly know how to amuse ourselves.



Saturday's AGM was certainly informative, but it was that night's Gala Dinner that we really looked forward to. We got all dressed up in our gladrags (and a few pieces of comedy headwear) and headed for the beautifully decorated dining room. The live band was brilliant and Karen Radford was a wonderful MC, rousing us in celebration and leading the solemnity of remembering those we have lost throughout the year. A number of presentations took place, including a group of our members who were celebrating their golden anniversary of joining up at Guildford 50 years ago. We also marked a couple of 80th birthdays - Jean Mills and Cherry Harbon who received a lovely bouquet. We had such fun, eating, drinking, singing and dancing the night away - until the small hours for the younger diehards!!







Sunday morning came, and many looked hungover, but it would not be WRAC Dinner Club if we were all sober now, would it?! All too soon, it was time for our farewell gathering until the next time. Our committee, who work so very hard all year round on our behalf, really surpassed themselves with their panto starring a collection of appropriately named characters, with the headwear to go with it. They were fabulous and had us all laughing at the brilliant script penned by Babs Anderson. It was a wonderful finish to our WRAC Dinner Club weekend.



Again, this year we had more new members attend. I hope those ladies enjoyed their weekend and felt like they had "come home", making this their yearly event to go to. Every meal we had in the hotel, especially the Gala Dinner on Saturday evening was excellent. As always, many thanks to our hard-working committee.





# A Night of Reunion and Celebration: The Women's Army Officers Dining Club

*A cherished tradition since its inception in 1992, the Women's Army Officers Dining Club dinner was held at the Victory Services Club on Saturday, 22 November and welcomed a significant number of WRAC veterans. Organised by Frances West and Anna Loder, this year's event marked a joyful return to the VSC, and Frances told us about the evening.*

This year's dinner brought together 100 serving and retired officers, accompanied by a handful of their guests, for an evening filled with laughter, reflection, and celebration. The event commenced with a welcoming glass of fizz—a fitting start to an evening devoted to rekindling friendships and forging new connections. As tradition dictates, the night was rounded off in true style with a glass of port, raised in toasts to the King and, with heartfelt remembrance, to 'absent friends'.

The club's tables were abuzz with conversation, many of them organised as course reunions, allowing old comrades to reminisce and catch up. A particularly special moment was the celebration of Col Nan Robertson MBE's 90th birthday, a remarkable milestone that was acknowledged with warmth and admiration by all in attendance. The atmosphere was one of shared memories and anticipation for what lies ahead, as the dinner welcomed both newcomers and regular attendees, each contributing to the tapestry of stories that make this gathering so unique.

A highlight of the evening was the address by the guest speaker, Captain Jess Hunter AGC (ETS). Captain Hunter captivated the audience with tales from her extraordinary adventure as part of the four-woman 'Oarsome Educators' team, who rowed across the Atlantic earlier this year. The team's incredible feat was not only a testament to determination and teamwork but also served a noble cause, raising funds for the Army Benevolent Fund and the AGC. Her words inspired all present, reminding everyone of the strength and resilience that defines the Corps.

As the night drew to a close, it was clear that the Women's Army Officers Dining Club remains a vital and vibrant part of our community, offering a space to celebrate achievements, honour the past, and look forward to the future. The next dinner is already eagerly anticipated and will once again take place at the Victory Services Club on Saturday, 21 November 2026. Whether you are a seasoned attendee or considering joining for the first time, all are welcome to come together for what promises to be another memorable evening.



*Here's to another year of friendship, celebration,  
and the enduring bonds that unite us all.*







**DATE:**  
**Sunday**  
**3rd May 2026**

**WRAC LIONESSES 14th 10k RUN 2026**  
**COME AND JOIN US**  
**FOR A DAY OR WEEKEND OF FUN AND LAUGHTER**

**START TIME:**  
**0830hrs**

Runners, walkers and supporters ALL WELCOME. Walkers must complete the 10k within 2 hours.  
Post-run supper. Proceeds to be split between the WRAC Association and Fighting With Pride.

Sign up using the below link - please leave the charity question blank as we will have our own fundraising link and sponsor form should you require one.

[greatrun.org/events/great-birmingham-run/](https://greatrun.org/events/great-birmingham-run/)



**PLACE:** Birmingham - Start Centenary Square - Finish Smithfield

**FACEBOOK:** WRAC LIONESSES FUNDRAISING GROUP

**CONTACT WENDY :** 07775 505326 [wendyhootonski@aol.com](mailto:wendyhootonski@aol.com)

Please let Wendy know if you have entered or need any more information.

## Three Area Coordinators Needed

**Do you live in East Anglia, the East Midlands,  
the North East, the Ridings of Yorkshire  
or anywhere on the Eastern side of England?**

**Do you want to support your fellow female veterans?**

Area coordinators offer support to branches in their region, contribute to the direction of Association membership, and sit on the Major Grants Committee of the Benevolent Fund. We have vacancies for coordinators in our Eastern, Central and North Eastern areas. We would welcome applications from enthusiastic members and friends or family who would like to show their appreciation for the service of our veterans.

Contact HQ for more information: [membership@wraca.org.uk](mailto:membership@wraca.org.uk)



# 100<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAYS

Birthday wishes go out to these members who will be marking their centenary soon.

- Mrs Valerie Trueman
- Ms Margaret Westley
- Mrs Georgina Shadrack
- Mrs Joyce Gough
- Mrs Margaret Croft
- Mrs Doreen Walker
- Mrs Mabel Williams



Congratulations to all of our members who have had birthdays since the last issue of the Lioness, especially to our new centenarians. We hope you all enjoyed the cards and flowers we sent. Here are some photos from our recent recipients!

**Barbara Hurman** turned 100 on 6 August 2025. She served with the Royal Signals, having joined the ATS when she was just 17 years of age. She was involved in the D-Day operations in Portsmouth before heading for Italy, where she was when VE Day was declared.



Having raised a family with her husband Gordon, who she had met in Egypt after the war, Barbara became an archaeologist and pottery specialist, working at the Bucks County Museum in Aylesbury, the Museum of London, and in Bulgaria with a team from Nottingham University. Barbara met His Majesty King Charles at Buckingham Palace in her centenary year, at the D-Day 80th anniversary celebrations.

*Barbara Hurman has since passed away. Her family have asked that we celebrate her birthday on this page, and you can read her obituary on page 108.*



**Lorna White** celebrated her 100th birthday on 23rd October 2025. She had a very busy day with The Mayor of Redditch visiting her in the morning, then celebrating with family and friends throughout the day. Lorna received over a thousand cards from local school children, as well as flowers and a card from the WRAC Association which were greatly appreciated. Lorna was also interviewed on her local BBC radio station.



We love to see photos of our members with the flowers we send, so please send them to us here: [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)



# ATS & WRAC Association Benevolent Fund



## Making A Difference

### BENEVOLENT FUND GRANTS

#### Benevolent Fund Expenditure

The last six months covers the second half of the calendar year from July 1 to December 31 2025.

- ▶ **74** applications for assistance were considered by grant committees
- ▶ **53** awards granted to beneficiaries
- ▶ The total spend for this period totalled **£62,523**

#### Top Five Categories



**Mobility aids  
including  
scooters**  
**£18,181**



**Household  
goods e.g.  
furniture**  
**£13,182**



**£7,187  
spent on  
funerals**



**White goods  
inc. washing  
machine**  
**£3,163**



**Household  
adaptations  
inc. stairlift**  
**£4000**

#### Remember that The Veterans Charity Can Help

The Veterans Charity and the WRAC Association have a partnership where those that served in the ATS or WRAC can apply for help which is funded by the Benevolent Fund. Applicants can apply for an immediate grant to assist with urgent items such as food, utilities (such as meter top ups), clothing and household items. Visit their website to find out more - [veteranscharity.org.uk](http://veteranscharity.org.uk). Requests for non urgent assistance should still be directed through SSAFA or The Royal British Legion.

**“Many, many thanks from Ms A and myself for renewing the annuity. She is overwhelmed yet again with the support she has received and the WRAC.” From a caseworker, Annual Maintenance Grant awarded at £50 per week.**

**“I would like to thank the WRAC Association for the finance to change my ancient night storage heater, which has been completed today. I am extremely grateful and thank you once again”. £1,194.00 awarded for housing repairs.**

#### Who is eligible for help?

Any former ATS or WRAC servicewoman, including TA, with one day's paid service or more, is eligible for assistance.

#### Are there any other criteria?

Yes, you must be in need of financial help. There's also a limit on the amount of savings that you can have above which the Benevolent Fund is unable to make an award.



## SO HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR HELP?

If you are a former ATS or WRAC regular or TA servicewoman who needs assistance, or if you know someone who does, then your first port of call is your local branch of SSAFA or regional Royal British Legion (RBL) office. SSAFA or the RBL will arrange for a trained caseworker to interview you in your home to establish the full range of assistance that you need. The caseworker will complete a report that includes details of your household income. This ensures that our Benevolent Fund's charitable money goes to those in financial need. When the report is complete it is sent to the WRAC Association. Once received, applications are considered at the appropriate grants committee meeting and a decision is taken.

**RBL: 0808 802 8080**

[britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/contact-us](http://britishlegion.org.uk/about-us/contact-us)



**SSAFA: 0800 260 6767**

[ssafa.org.uk/help-you/do-you-need-our-help-or-support](http://ssafa.org.uk/help-you/do-you-need-our-help-or-support)



## Need some support with your bills and household costs?



Lightning Reach is a free online portal that simplifies finding and applying for financial aid, connecting people to over 2,500 grants, benefits, and support schemes for things like energy bills, housing, and essential supplies from charities and local authorities, allowing users to create one profile and apply for multiple resources in one place. It saves time and reduces stress by centralising applications for grants, council funding, and utility help, making it easier for people to get support quickly. The WRAC Association has a partnership with Lightning Reach which will allow WRAC and ATS veterans to seek our help for essentials when money is tight. Get your application started today at: [lightningreach.org/support](http://lightningreach.org/support)

***"Mrs G has asked that I thank you for your kind and generous support, which has helped at a difficult time in her life". From a caseworker. £1,987.45 contribution to her husband's funeral costs along with the RBL and the Royal Engineers.***

***"Once again you have gone above and beyond for the continued support. It has made a positive impact on my life. Your generosity has been amazing. Your continued support has influenced my path forward. I thank you for your generosity and kindness. Your integrity and empathy is amazing. Kind regards"***  
***£350 awarded for essential clothing and an Annual Maintenance Grant at £50 per week.***

## MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT GRANT

### **Are you unable to attend events due to finances?**

**Worried about the cost to attend  
branch meetings or trips?**

The Membership Support Grant may be able to assist. This grant was introduced to assist members to attend either Branch or Association social events where, without financial assistance, they would be unable to do so. Grants can be awarded up to £100 per event but must not exceed £200 per year per member. Eligibility criteria applies.

Grants can be used for: Travel costs (public transport or petrol costs), taxi fares, tickets for events, minibus fare, overnight accommodation, cost of a meal.

### **Want to know more?**

Contact the Admin and Grants Officer on 0300 400 1992  
or email: [benfund@wraca.org.uk](mailto:benfund@wraca.org.uk).



# WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2026

**Saturday 21 March 2026, 12:30, The Victory Services Club, London**  
**Please visit our website to register your place.**

**If you cannot join us in person, you can still watch and take part (including voting) online.**  
**Full details of how to join will be available on our website – [wraca.org.uk](http://wraca.org.uk)**

## AGENDA:

1. Chair's opening remarks
2. Apologies for absence
3. Confirmation of 2025 minutes
4. Business arising
5. Governance report
6. Membership Council report
7. Benevolent fund report
8. Influence report
9. Annual report and accounts
10. Resolutions
  - a. Trustee/Membership Council
  - b. Branch
11. Any other business
12. Date of next meeting: Saturday 20 March 2027

The AGM will be preceded by a meeting for Branch / Group Organisers. This is an opportunity to share ideas between branches, ask questions and raise suggestions. This meeting is for Branch Organisers or their nominated representatives only.

## TIMINGS:

- 11:00** Branch Organisers meeting - for Branch Organisers or their nominated representatives only
- 12:30** AGM
- 14:00** Etherton beret and cap badge restorations
- 15:00** Afternoon tea (subsidised £14 cost, pre-booked only)

**DATE:**  
Saturday  
27th June 2026

**WRAC LIONESSES v CHATSWORTH LADIES**  
  
**VENUE:** Chatsworth Cricket Club,  
Chatsworth Park, Bakewell DE45 1PN  
  
**EVENING SOCIAL: TBC**

**START TIME:**  
1000hrs



**Contacts:** Elaine Smith 07921 062777 (Players)   Lynn Hines 07885 168229 (Venue queries)  
Wendy Hooton 07775505326 (Supporters/Fundraising)  
All are contactable on Messenger and WhatsApp.

**HUGE THANKS TO LYNN HINES FOR ORGANISING THE EVENT  
AND ELAINE SMITH FOR ORGANISING OUR TEAM**



# CALL TO ACTION

## Dress on Parade

In line with the Royal British Legion and other Regimental Associations, parade dress is to be smart and appropriate; the norm is for dark colours.

WRAC Association clothing including a scarf and pin are available from our Association shop.

There is no need to wear Association clothing but please dress smartly and appropriately. (See Medals & Badges etiquette below for further information).

Since the Association is no longer an active Corps stable belts and forage caps should NOT be worn.

## Medals and Badges Etiquette

Etiquette rules for wearing medals only allow the wearing of official awards.

- The WRAC Association brooch, Veterans badge and Etherton Pin may be worn on the left lapel by the position of the buttonhole.
- The medals awarded to a deceased Service person may be worn on the right breast by a near relative who is not wearing their own medals (no more than one group should be worn by any individual).
- Unofficial medals, or badges, other than the WRAC Association brooch, Veterans badge, and Etherton Pin should **not** be worn when representing the WRAC Association.
- Unofficial purchased medals and foreign medals which do not have the Sovereign's permission to be worn are **not** allowed.

## Wreaths

Only one Association wreath is permitted to be laid at The Cenotaph. We are happy to provide one wreath per area to be laid locally, please speak to your Area Coordinator about this.

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2026

|                                                                                         |                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AGM</b>                                                                              | Saturday 21 March 2026, Victory Services Club, London |
| <b>10K Run</b>                                                                          | Sunday 3 May 2026, Birmingham                         |
| <b>RHC Founders Day Governor's Review</b>                                               | Tuesday 2 June 2026, Royal Hospital Chelsea           |
| <b>Summer Event</b>                                                                     | Sunday 14 June 2026, Virgin Hotel, Edinburgh          |
| <b>Armed Forces Day</b>                                                                 | Saturday 27 June 2026, Across the UK                  |
| <b>WRAC Dinner Club</b>                                                                 | Saturday 10 October 2026                              |
| <b>Officers' Dining Club</b>                                                            | Saturday 21 November 2026                             |
| <b>Field of Remembrance Opening Ceremony</b>                                            | Thursday 5 November 2026                              |
| <b>Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph Parade</b><br><b>Remembrance Sunday Guildford Parade</b> | Sunday 8 November 2026                                |

If you would like to be put on the list of applicants for any of the above events please email [events@wraca.org.uk](mailto:events@wraca.org.uk)



# BRANCH NEWS

## Scotland & Northern Ireland

## Tracey MacPherson

It's been a busy time in Scotland and Northern Ireland Area since our AGM in September 2025, as I took on the mantle of Area Co-ordinator from Janette Deans.

Looking ahead, branch meetings and visits have been planned, but our piece de resistance will be the opportunity to host you all at the WRAC Summer Event in Edinburgh in June. I really hope to meet lots of you there and show off our hospitality. See page 51.

I was very grateful to get the opportunity to attend a Trustee & Membership Council Away Day at the Tower of London in October 2025. A key pillar of the WRAC is camaraderie, and this was shown in abundance. A great day of learning and sharing.

Being geographically spread, a phone call with a member can be just as important as getting together. Sharing information through our Facebook page is quick and easy. If you have the time, please reach out and spread the word that we exist to support all females who have served. You never know what might brighten someone's day.

If you would like to be linked in with a branch local to you, please contact the Association. Should it be there isn't a branch local to you, I guarantee the Association will know where there is a Lioness in the vicinity.



## Ayrshire - Arlene Reid

Ayrshire Branch has not been busy since the last Lioness, but Eileen Kelly, Marian Lamberton, Margaret Wagner, and I attended the Scotland and NI Area AGM, where it was announced that I have volunteered to be Standard Bearer for Scotland. Happily, Eileen met up with Moira Thom at the AGM. They hadn't seen each other since basic training.

We have been involved in collecting for the Scottish Poppy Appeal, I am the Area Organiser for our local Tesco in Ayr and have had the pleasure of having Lionesses Eileen, Margaret, and Marian Lamberton and WRNS Valerie Brown assisting with collecting. Then Margaret Wagner and I attended the local Remembrance parade held in Ayr and laid a Branch wreath and a cross on behalf of our Breakfast Club.

We managed to 'bring home' a couple of girls to the branch and look forward to meeting them at our next meeting. Welcome aboard Angela M Hughes WRAC, Moyra Turner QARANC and Valerie Brown WRNS. This brings us up to 13 Branch members now.

Coming up, we intend to hold a few meetings. We are spread out over Ayrshire, so the potential for a decent turnout is good. We would also like to persuade the local council to try to arrange something for the next Remembrance. Ayr was a garrison town, so maybe more female veterans can get involved. There is also a networking event in March, where we hope to talk about the WRAC Association and our AF&VBC.





## Aberdeen - Moira Thom

The Tall Ships Race is always a great attraction for our ladies when they come to Aberdeen. We had a good look at the ships whilst in the harbour and watched as they left with hundreds of square yards of snowy white sails unfurled. It is a truly uplifting sight.

As a Branch, we were saddened to learn that Janette Deans was stepping down as our Area Co-ordinator but wish her all the best in her new trustee role with the WRAC Association. We send a warm welcome to Tracey MacPherson, who was voted on at the Area AGM as our new co-ordinator.

Jane Mills, Joan Bartlett, Margaret Irvine, Mhairi Irvin, Moira Thom and Sandra Lemmon won a few raffle prizes and learned a few interesting facts, when taking part in the quiz at the Area AGM in Perth.

On one very wet day, Tracey and Moira enjoyed travelling on a vintage train from Keith to Dufftown and back, getting involved in 1940's military and Home Front re-enactments, finishing off with a spam sandwich bought from the NAAFI van. It's easy to forget how delicious a spam sandwich can be.

Several of our ladies proudly took part in Victory in Japan 80th Anniversary services and parades in and around Aberdeen, and in November, many of our members attended Remembrances Services in their local communities.



## Edinburgh - Robbie Knox

We had a bit of excitement when we met at the Scots Guards Club in August, as the Red Arrows flew over. They were on their way to Murrayfield, which was hosting the sell-out Oasis concert. It was a wonderful sight.

The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo 2025 took place as usual for most of August, and my house was full of visitors. I live in a wonderful city.

June Christie, Janice Aubeeluck and Lin Clark-Patterson attended The Not Forgotten's Garden Party at Preston Fields House Hotel. They had a lovely time and really enjoyed meeting a 100-year-old veteran but sadly, didn't catch his name.



June, Janice, and I went to the Area AGM in Perth in September. It was exceptionally good, with lots of dates for our diaries and a lovely sit-down meal. It was also an opportunity to thank Janette Deans, who has been our Area Co-ordinator for a while, and welcome Tracey Macpherson to the role.

In October, some of our members joined in with the fun and frolics of the WRAC Dinner Club in Solihull. They came back full of stories and still smiling.

Our Christmas lunch was yet another joyful event. We had a slap-up meal, with paper hats and accompanying beverages, before venturing out onto the streets of Edinburgh city centre on what can only be described as 'a pub crawl'. Needless to say, we enjoyed ourselves enormously. We managed to carefully avoid the Christmas Market though, thereby avoiding unnecessary expense.





## Fife and Tayside - Debbie Coupland

I know that the photo of our empty chairs and table suggests something other than the usual fun and joy one would hope to experience at any annual gathering and especially the one that counts as the Christmas celebration? But, on finding myself the last person in the room I was struck by the 'happy' mess of our table once everyone had left and around which the echo of some very loud and joyous laughter swirled at the end of another very successful event. Also, if I am honest, I was glad that I wasn't going to have to be doing the clearing up! That particular task was left to the wonderful staff of Perth's Salutation Hotel where some 14 branch members had been served an absolute feast to celebrate the festive season.

As ever, we also enjoyed our usual 'one in, one out' raffle which raises a bit of money for branch funds, all the while ensuring that everyone goes home with something different in their handbag. This time we also ran a second raffle to the benefit of the 'Cash for Kids' Charity, dedicated to providing gifts under the tree for local children for whom there might otherwise be nothing. Also pictured therefore are some of the piles of presents bought with that money (£60+) which was distributed on behalf of the Fife & Tayside Branch of the WRAC Association ensuring that some lucky local children will enjoy a far from empty Christmas.



---

## Moray & Highland - Tracey MacPherson

Moray & Highland have been making good use of email and WhatsApp to keep in touch.

Moira Thom from Aberdeen branch and I got drenched at a 1940's re-enactment at Keith & Dufftown railway. The displays and re-enactors were well informed and enthusiastic, and we didn't take them up on their offer of joining their ranks (this time).

Kate Bell was a key part of the Invergordon Royal British Legion VJ day celebration in August. They were joined by the Lord Lieutenant for Ross, Cromarty & Skye, Joanie Whiteford. It sounds to me like Kate was a bit like Dennis Waterman from Minder but instead of singing the theme, writing the theme tune, she was decorating, baking, sandwich making, serving etc. Well done Kate.

The Glassworks café in Dufftown was our meeting place in October. Nine of us came together, taking over the back of the café. It was a joyous meeting where the conversation flowed and laughs were shared.



Now that I have become our Area Coordinator for Scotland and N Ireland we need to find someone to run the Moray and Highland branch. Of course I'll be around to support whoever takes over and dropping in for the occasional brew, but I'd love to find someone fabulous to take the reins. The branch has a great bunch of members and it's a pleasure to organise fun things to do, so if you're interested please drop me a line at [scotland.ni.area@wraca.org.uk](mailto:scotland.ni.area@wraca.org.uk)





## Stirling- Liz Dixon

Hello to all association members from Stirling branch and hope everyone is keeping well.

Stirling branch enjoyed The Scottish Area annual yearly meet up, which was held in Perth in September. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend myself as I had a previously arranged meeting with a surgeon. Everyone that did attend reported back that it was a very enjoyable afternoon, good food, great talk given and loads of raffle prizes!

We all loved watching the Association on Parade at the Cenotaph, good telly coverage showing off your cracking marching this year. It was also great to spot our very own Lynn Connelly (on telly) marching, flying the flag for Stirling branch.

We were so excited about our Christmas get together and it didn't disappoint! We went to the 'The Dome' a posh restaurant in Edinburgh, for afternoon tea. It's such a popular venue that we had to get it booked up back in March to make sure we got a table, but it was well worth the wait!



---

## Ulster- Sylvia Connachan

Another year over, and I can report that all is well with Ulster Branch. Here are a few of the things that our group has been doing.

In August, I attended a VJ Day 80th Anniversary Service at my home town memorial, in Dromore, Co Down.

Also in August, Jill Hope, Pat Baker, and I attended a VJ Day afternoon tea, at Rathfriland Ladies Legion. There was lots of fun, music, singing, and quite a bit of dancing, which we all declared to be a good afternoon.

In the summer I attended the Edinburgh Tattoo and had a great weekend with some members of my local Royal British Legion.

Marie Jenkins, Montgomery, Sarah Cairns, Pat Baker, and I attended the Annual Parade for the Royal Irish Regiment at Clonaver Barracks, Belfast in September. The weather was great, and we had a lovely lunch after the parade.

Jill Hope and I attended the Garden of Remembrance to lay our crosses for our ATS and WRAC Veterans in November and we had two new members, Elizabeth Adams and Alexandra Jay come along to watch the parade. It was nice to have them join us and we hope to see them at more of our meet-ups.

There was also a Memorial Service at Dromore High School, to which I was privileged to be invited.

To round off the year, we had our fabulous Christmas Lunch at the Beechlaw's Hotel in Dunmurry, Belfast, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.





### Cleveland - Suzanne Allen

There might only be five of us in Cleveland Branch, but we still manage to meet up for lunch and a giggle every month. Having a more informal approach enables me to be Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. Well, it keeps me off the streets.

In August, some of us got on the train in Middlesbrough, whilst others piled on at Thornaby, as we made our way to York to visit the Jorvik Viking Centre. We were pleased with ourselves for having got a nice discount on the tickets through the Blue Light Card. But before we presented ourselves at the entrance, we treated ourselves to a bit of lunch in Wetherspoons. There's always something for everyone and it's reasonably priced. Once we got into the Jorvik Viking Centre, we were impressed by the animatronic characters and realistic sights, sounds and smells. It's fair to say that we had a lovely time, despite the rain, which caused us to break out our brollies and raincoats. We highly recommend this place.



We decided to have our Christmas lunch at a Toby Carvery. There was turkey on the carvery hot plate, so we feel that we had done it properly.

I attended the Remembrance service at Middlesbrough Cenotaph and marched in the parade with other veterans, as I have for the last 10 years or so. I laid a wreath on behalf of the WRAC Association.

We're still trying to decide where we will go for our exciting summer outing in August so watch this space.

---

### East Riding & North Lincolnshire - Dorothy Mitchelmore

It's been a good year for us as a branch. We have seen our membership grow and it has been lovely meeting new people who then become friends.

Lots of members have been busy meeting up for impromptu coffee mornings and we have enjoyed our usual long lunches every month.

The Grand Reunion in Cardiff was a great success as was this year's Dinner Club. Both events are widely reported on in the Lioness, so I won't cover our participation here. Needless to say that both events were absolutely brilliant.

We have enjoyed our overnight coach trips that are always such fun. Our mystery coach trip to Durham and Whitby was brilliant. Our second trip was to Beamish open air museum near the town of Stanley, in County Durham. What an absolutely amazing place.

Our third and final overnight trip for 2025 took us to the Christmas market at Chatsworth House in Derbyshire.

In December we all enjoyed our annual Secret Santa lunch at the Clubhouse at Beverley Golf Club. Given that each gift has a maximum of £5 in value, it is amazing what you can find with a little imagination!

I'm sure we will be enjoying lots more fun in the very near future. Watch this space!





## Grimsby - Gail Davy

Grimsby branch got together for our annual Christmas lunch at our favourite place - the Cleethorpes Golf Club. A great time was had by all - it's getting tricky for us to meet up now as many of us now have health issues and are less mobile so it was lovely for so many of the branch to gather together to celebrate.



---

## Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast - Betty Gash

Our branch now has thirteen WRAC members, and we have been joined by our first QARANC, Vanessa Longstaff.

Pamela Wood was thrilled to celebrate her 94th birthday in August at Kenwick Park Hotel in Louth with her veteran friends. A delicious lunch and tasty mocktail was enjoyed by all (see p60). Pamela has recently been registered with Lincoln & Lindsey Blind Society and Blind Veterans UK.

Lesley Lewis and I attended The Not Forgotten event at Grimsthorpe Castle, where we were joined by Dame Andrea Jenkyns DBE, who is the first Mayor of Greater Lincolnshire. We had a brilliant afternoon in glorious sunshine.

Karen Dixon did the Ride to the Wall at the NMA in October and placed a cross at the WRAC memorial. Sharon McNicol and I attended the unveiling ceremony in Skegness, where the RBL were attempting to set the new Guinness World Record for the largest handmade poppy display, with an installation of 84,673 poppies.

Also, Lesley, Vanessa, Karen, and Ruth Catlett from Billingham attended the Annual Lincolnshire Poppy Appeal Launch at Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre in East Kirkby.

Several members met at the Corn Exchange Alford for tea and coffee followed by lunch at The Willow Restaurant in October. Lots of chat, reminiscing Army days and discussing current topics and life events.

Marion and Sylvia volunteered on Poppy selling stalls in Mablethorpe, whilst Karen did the same in Grimsby.

In November Lorna Jackson, Kerry Culley, Lesley, Sylvia, Sharon, Marion, and I met in Chapel St Leonards for lunch at the Trafalgar Inn and a visit to the North Sea Observatory.



### Setting up a new branch is easy!

We need more branch organisers for areas of the south-east which currently do not have a branch, including Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. If you live in these areas, or anywhere where you feel there isn't a branch local to you, and would like to find out just how easy and rewarding running a branch can be, contact HQ to find out how to get started.



## Leeds - Michelle Gibbs

Leeds Branch has been quite busy since our last report. After everyone had had their summer holidays in August, we were invited to Chris Parris and Anne Bailey's place for a BBQ. It's always a good turnout, with plenty of food and chat about what everyone had been up to over the summer. Then we went to support the WRAC Lionesses, when they took on Chatsworth Ladies in a cricket match. What a day! The weather was scorching hot and a few of us got very sunburnt. We noisily cheered the girls on and were happy to celebrate the WRAC winning in the end.

Some of the ladies went to the WRAC Dinner Club in October, which was held in Solihull. They all reported having had a fantastic time.

Our next trip out was a ghost hunt at Temple Newsham in Leeds. Unfortunately, no ghosts were out and about that day. Apparently, Irene Jones spooked them all, according to, Trish Knight, Ruth Kerry, Krysia Asher and Julie Loudon.

To end the year 2025, our Christmas brunch was held in the Hidden Tea Rooms. What a great time we had, with lovely food and great company, in the shape of Chris, Irene, Julie, Louise Fittall, Ruth, Juliet Bradley, Krysia and me, Michelle. Our thanks to Irene for sorting out the games, making us all laugh, and encouraging us to walk away with prizes, even if some of them were rubbish!!

We'd like to welcome our new members Trish, Louise, Emily Stokes, and Tina Palmer.



## Central

## Leicester & Nottingham - Ann (Monty) Montgomery

Here's a flavour of the events and meetings that have been taking place at our branch in the last few months.

We meet together monthly at various venues around Leicester for breakfast on a Saturday. We were really pleased recently, to meet a former Leicester lass, Ann Woodward and her husband, Derek, when they were visiting Leicestershire. Ann is a member of the new Dorset branch.

Our annual lunch at Eye Kettleby Lakes was a very well attended, fun and happy event. There was a lot of reminiscing during a showing of the WRAC film 'Women Who Served.' Thank you Dot.

Peter Cousins, Chair of the Greater Wigston Historical Society, joined us twice this year to give fascinating talks about the WWI Christmas Truce in 1914 and also the life of Captain Noel Chavasse and his family. He was a British Army Medical Officer and the only person to win two Victoria Crosses in WWI.

Sandra set us a quiz which was taken very seriously and gave our brains a bit of a work out at one of our meetings.

We held a Harvest Festival meeting which was very well supported. The home-grown vegetables and home-made cakes are always appreciated and extremely popular.

Having finalised arrangements for our Branch Christmas Lunch after our AGM, the event itself turned out to be well worth waiting for. We had plenty of festive fun and food.

Our branch has been in existence since 1955! We will have a special celebration this year and all are most welcome to join us.





## Lincoln - Sue Smith

We've been meeting regularly at the garden centre in North Hykeham which is a great location - partly because it is really central and convenient, but mostly because of the wonderful food. We always go for a proper lunch and the savoury selection is fantastic. Do we leave room for pudding? Let's just say that for a few of us it would be rude not to!

The chat around the table can get very lively and I was recently reminded of a time serving in Yeovil when we went to the pub. Suddenly the shout of "red caps!" went up and we sneaked out the back way, making it back to camp undiscovered! Sharing this memory with my fellow branch members was lovely and we had a good chuckle - it's always great to remember those serving days.

A good laugh is certainly important as a few of our branch members are caring for poorly partners and spouses, and especially for those who have a loved one with dementia we know how much it means to them to have a break and a laugh. It's a great reminder to all of us branch organisers just how important it is to keep the groups running and the camaraderie going strong.

Our Christmas get-together was postponed until the new year when we exchanged gifts including smellies and toiletries and then went for a mooch around the garden centre where we all picked up a few bargains in the sales - I'll certainly be well decorated for the festive season this year! Why not join us this year - you'd be very welcome.



## Sheffield - Sandy Warne

Where has 2025 gone to? Time has absolutely flown by. We welcomed back our fabulous Marion Sayles who earlier on in the year was diagnosed with aggressive breast cancer. Following a mastectomy and chemo she returned to our regular monthly meet up the same week she left hospital following surgery. The message ladies is that if you find a lump get it checked out immediately, it could have been a very different story for Marion but because of how she dealt with it she has now been given the all clear and is rocking a very flattering pixie look!



We continue to welcome new ladies, a few new faces are Alex Fawcett, Pauline Naylor, Bernie Robinson, Samantha Grundy and Caroline Sharich. We welcome all ladies to come along and meet up, we are a very friendly group and welcome all newcomers. Cheryl Jones and now Barbara Burnett continue to clear up pretty much all the raffle prizes each month, and a few of us attended the National Arboretum in August to support the ladies who had their cap badges restored which was very emotional.

Finally I would like to say a big thank you for all of you that have joined our group, we have just celebrated our 2nd birthday, a group that initially started with just 3 people has grown, if anyone out there is in any doubt about setting up a local group of branch, do it, it is so easy to do but it does take the

dedication of you all to come along to keep the groups going, without you all there would be no group so please make space in your diary, pull up the big girls pants and come along, you don't know, you may actually enjoy it and come back into contact with old friends but more importantly meet new ones.





## Kings Lynn – Audrey Pearce



Having moved to Wisbech last year, I have started a new branch in the Kings Lynn area. I liaised with some local ladies, and we met in January for the first time.

After joining the WRAC in 1975, I trained as a postie in Mill Hill and then COMCEN Op before being posted to 32 Squadron BFPO 40. I returned to Guildford in 1980

as a training sergeant, which I loved. I finished my service in Düsseldorf, having served just shy of 9 years. I went back to Mill Hill a few years later as a reserve.

As a civilian I have worked in B&Q as an office manager and then everyone's favourite, Woolies. My husband and I lived in the Midlands, where I was a member of both Birmingham and Tamworth Branches and I loved spending time with the girls.

So if you'd like to join us, please get in touch, we'd love to see you. Exciting times lay ahead for Kings Lynn branch!

**NEW**

## Colchester - Heather Savin

Several members of the branch met up for afternoon tea in the Moot Hall, Colchester arranged by The Not Forgotten. It was the first time the NFA had been able to add Colchester to their busy schedule and great to be able to catch up with members that have not attended recent branch events. A good time was had by all and needless to say our table was the loudest!

In September Kerry Warnes and I had the honour of representing the Association by joining local ATS veteran Peggy Peters to celebrate her 99th birthday (see p60)

A fundraising Remembrance dinner was held in November arranged by the Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club where Kerry and I represented the branch. It was a successful evening with funds raised for the RBL Poppy Appeal, The NFA and local veteran's choir 'Veterans Sing'. Several members continue to attend the monthly breakfast and had a brilliant time at the Christmas lunch in December - wearing appropriate jumpers!

The act of Remembrance was observed in Colchester and Clacton on Remembrance Sunday, and on Armistice Day at Colchester Town Hall, where we were all proud to represent the WRAC on such a poignant occasion.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Lynn for the support she has given us during her tenure as Eastern Area Coordinator and wish her well for the future.



## Norfolk- Lyn Hatch

In August the branch was invited by Maria Power to an afternoon tea at her new home on the Norfolk/Suffolk boarder. It was a windy but sunny day as we sat around the table out in the garden catching up and planning the next meal, with the occasional dash to save the plate coverings flying off with the wind. At the end of the afternoon, with so many lovely home baked cakes and scones left over each of us left with food parcels.

September saw a few of us meeting for lunch at the aptly named Recruiting Sergeant. The conversation quickly turned to a trip to the theatre, next October Operation Mincemeat will be coming to the Theatre Royal in Norwich, a few days later the tickets were booked, and another lunch had been arranged.

Our Christmas lunch saw us back at the Imperial Hotel in Great Yarmouth. Between courses the volume increased as we took the opportunity to catch up. Time went so quickly, and with festive greetings exchanged we slowly headed home.





## Greater London - Mary Ann Clark

Greater London branch has had a fairly busy time lately with many of our ladies also attending Veterans Outreach which is on weekly at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. It is open to all veterans throughout the country and has a monthly breakfast club, line dancing, quizzes and so much more! Their veterans carol service this Christmas was very well attended.

Myself, Helen Lloyd, Pauline Milnes, Maggy Ashmore and Diane Peele took part in a Halloween fancy dress competition, Helen (Can you tell which one she is?! Far left of the photo!) came first and won a bottle of wine!

We also have welcomes and goodbyes. Firstly, a big welcome to Diane Peele and Edith Canty. Sadly we said goodbye to Christine Hayman, a much loved member of our branch who bore her illness bravely, her funeral was well attended by members of our branch and the WRAC Association coffin drape was used. Maggy Ashmore was standard bearer. Rest in Peace Christine.

We held our AGM in September which was well attended by all and our Chair Maggy Ashmore is also now our new area coordinator, congratulations Maggy.

On the 13th December we held our Christmas lunch at The Civil Service Club London, we had a wonderful time. Having a room to ourselves we played a few games of pass the parcel, heads and tails and shared crackers and jokes! The food was pretty amazing too.



## Invicta Branch - Wendy Staden

The ladies of the WRAC Invicta Group in Kent have been busy over these last few months.

Margaret Ahmed Mohammed fulfilled a lifelong dream when she got to fly a Spitfire from Headcorn. The flight was a present from her family and friends for her 70th birthday, but it had previously been postponed due to Covid and then severe weather. She was beyond excited when the flight was cleared to take place. Margaret was cheered on and supported by the Invicta ladies and her family. It was an incredible experience for her, and one which she will never forget.

The ladies have been enjoying our monthly Saturday lunches in Maidstone and the surrounding areas. They have also enjoyed seeing new faces join their lunches.

Several Invicta members have been supporting the Royal British Legion, Ashford with their many events; The VE Day Ball, the VJ Day Ball, the Summer BBQ and also collecting for this year's Poppy Appeal.

Quite a few Invicta ladies have joined The Not Forgotten Choir, which is open to all veterans of all services and is run from Tonbridge School on Tuesday evenings. The choir is currently being piloted in Kent. We have sung at our first performance which was held at St James' Palace in November 2025.





## Worthing - Carol Hill

Since our last report, we've been delighted to welcome a new member to our group—an ex-WRAF—bringing our total to two from that service, along with one member who proudly served in both the WRAF and QARANC.



In August, we celebrated a very special occasion: Heather's 80th birthday! Twelve of us gathered for a lovely meal, complete with a balloon and a tiara for the star of the show.

On August 15th, we commemorated VJ Day at Lancing Parish Hall with a meaningful service and the raising of the flag. Afterwards, we enjoyed tea, cakes, and some wartime favourites performed by a singer in the Hub—a truly uplifting afternoon.

Our September meeting was a fantastic day out to Chichester and Goodwood. We started with a peaceful trip along the Chichester Canal, followed by a delicious lunch at Goodwood Aerodrome. The weather was glorious, and all 12 of us returned home tired but very happy.



### South & South West

### Amanda Foster

The South West Area has remained steady, with encouraging developments across various branches. Regardless of size—whether comprising three, fifteen, or thirty members—each group should confidently identify as a branch and share relevant updates.

To ensure inclusivity and engagement, I strongly encourage all branches and emerging groups to post information on the Area Facebook page ('South & South West WRAC Association'). This will enable wider participation and foster a sense of community. We are part of a network united by the WRAC cap badge, and it is important that we continue to welcome and support our fellow members at every opportunity.

Looking ahead, I am in the process of scheduling branch visits and remain committed to visiting all branches by the end of the year. Why not visit our Facebook page to join, share or view events.

Our Exeter Branch is still in need of a volunteer to help organise their get togethers! I visited them recently (see pic!) so if you're in the area and would like to find out more please email [info@wraca.org.uk](mailto:info@wraca.org.uk)





## Bristol - Judith Stinchcombe

In September, five WRAC members from the Bristol branch joined the Gloucester City Royal British Legion on their Battle Tour to Ypres.

Angie Matthews, a WRAC Branch member and former driver, shared that she had a family relative buried in Dadizele Cemetery, Ypres. Our tour guide, Michael Orr—a Sandhurst lecturer—arranged for us to visit the grave during our trip. Private Abraham Matthews, Angie's relative, served with the 2nd Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in WWI and won the Military Medal. At only 19 years old, he was killed in Gullegem, seven miles from Ypres, during intense fighting to liberate the town. Initially, he was laid to rest in the local chapel alongside his comrades, but in 1920, he was reburied at the CWGC Dadizele New Cemetery. It was a privilege to stand by Angie as she paid heartfelt respects to her relative who made such a sacrifice.

Ladies laid a WRAC Wreath at the Menin Gate and had the privilege of meeting Lieutenant General Sir Ian Cave, KCB who serves in Nato in Europe and his wife Caroline, who to our delight, also served in the WRAC, it was a real treat.



---

## Dorset - Caroline Hearne

The Stronghold Veterans Group in Poole have hosted some of Dorset Branch's get-togethers, and we found them to be very welcoming. We have realised that we can keep the costs down for members by taking our own favourite tipples to the meetings there and at Club Hub, also in Poole.

We now hold raffles at our meetings, which adds to the fun and adds to the kitty behind the bar at Christmas!

In September we pootled over to Dorchester in West Dorset for a change. The Vivo Lounge allowed us to use a separate room and even donated a raffle prize. We were thrilled to be joined on that occasion by two Navy ladies and hope they will continue to attend meetings.

On 1 November we were pleased to have been invited to form a guard of honour at the Poole Town FC versus Gosport FC Remembrance match. Last Post was played, and we held a 2-minute silence, which was beautifully observed. Tickets on the day were free for all veterans. See p35.

Also in November, we had a reflexology session as it was National Reflexology Week. We all enjoyed learning about the many benefits of the ancient practice, and we are feeling much more relaxed now.

Our Christmas get-together on 2 December was a rip-roaring success, with a sneaky quiz and fun games and a tasty Christmas meal. We all had a merry time, dressed in our Christmas clobber.





## Plymouth - Debby Cox

Plymouth Branch continues to meet monthly on the fourth Tuesday at the Moments Cafe, Plymouth. We are pleased to be welcoming new members into the branch too.

We have had an active few months, with our ladies and partners meeting up for lunches at Leandra's, St Elizabeth House, Tamar View Complex and The Hunting Lodge. We always get to share great food in fantastic company. What more could we ask for?

Many of our members turned out, as Remembrance Day was commemorated at several services across the city of Plymouth, and also in London. Lori Dearing and her husband had a memorable afternoon at the Royal Albert Hall watching the Royal British Legion's Festival of Remembrance, whilst Di Faulkner attended both the Festival of Remembrance and paraded at the Cenotaph on Whitehall. Both ladies reported that they had enjoyed themselves very much, despite the serious nature of each event.

The Plymouth Branch Christmas Lunch was held at The Memory Café. We all had a lovely festive meal, complete with paper hats and crackers. Then, some of our members attended The Not Forgotten Christmas Lunch in Truro. What a laugh they had, playing silly games, singing, and dancing. TNF certainly know how to throw a party. Fingers crossed we can do it again next year.



---

## Portsmouth and Isle of Wight - Val Duke

We were pleased to welcome our Area Co-ordinator, Amanda Foster and WRAC Association's Chair of Membership, Rowena Naile MBE to our October meeting. Having the opportunity to interact on a local level proved a worthwhile and encouraging experience.

Pleasant surprises are always welcome and our Branch Secretary, Sally Watson, certainly had a surprise when she was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation. You can see her surprised face featured in the awards section on p102.

Meanwhile, some of our members have been out and about on various interesting excursions.



On a recent visit to Poland, Rose Crilly visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she saw original human remains, the gas chambers and heard many personal stories of people who had lived and died there, in horrific circumstances. Seeing all the children's shoes was truly heart-breaking and a reminder to all of us why we served. She then flew to Berlin and visited Charlottenburg War Cemetery where her grandad is buried. He was in the Royal Artillery and was killed as a POW on 14 February 1945.

Linda Batcheldor met up with fellow veterans on a trip to Bletchley Park and thoroughly enjoyed herself. And ... not to be left out, I took a trip to the Isle of Wight for coffee and a tour of Quarr Abbey with Tracy Biddlecombe, which I had missed when a Branch outing had been arranged.

In December we met at Keppels Head Hotel for our Christmas luncheon, it was delightful and all set up for celebrating the festive season!

We are looking forward to another year of little adventures.





## Salisbury - Amanda Foster

With the work of Lisa, Jackie and Linda a great Christmas lunch was organised, and fun was definitely had by all. A lovely presentation was made to them by Jane and the branch and the bags of goodies looked fabulous.

Our recent meetings have included a demonstration of Reflexology – where members even got a test drive of treatment. For once everyone's eyes are actually meant to be shut in the photo!



The next few months will include Bingo from our amazing Janice, a trip to Amesbury History Centre, hopefully doing some painting in a pub (pictures not walls!), and a trip to our local theatre. We don't just meet on a regular 4th Wednesday of the month but to accommodate our membership and travel etc we have Saturday coffees and some day time meetings as well. Follow us for more info - find us on Facebook 'WRAC Salisbury Branch' and request to join our WhatsApp group for updates.

---

## West Surrey - Stephanie Kolvik

This August it was my pleasure as a serving member to invite WRACA ladies from across the South of England to attend the Summer RMAS Commandant's Parade (see more on p37).

Our autumn gatherings commenced with a culinary delight at the award-winning Mullan's Café in Camberley where we were joined again, by another new attendee. It is so great to see the group grow month on month.

We then had the pleasure to spend time with Susan Wing (our recently retired Chaplain) at Login Lounge Café brunch and Jill Catt who shared with us information from the 1950's Officer's Long Course at Liphook bringing documents and photos from the time.

To round off the year, we enjoyed a December coffee morning at Sandhurst's Robertson House. A beautiful historic setting for some festive coffees and mince pies. We had Lt Col Claire Masters RLC in attendance who currently works in Robertson House, she gave the group some history of the building. These shared moments—big and small—continue to knit the military community together, across time served. Here's to many more in the months to come.





## Winchester - Lisa Aven

I took over from Herme in the late summer so I'm still trying to find my feet, and at the lunch where I took over, everyone in the branch attended to welcome me which was just lovely.

In November Winchester branch visited Fort Nelson to see the exhibition 'Standing with Giants'. It was a very British day weather wise, very cold but thankfully not raining. Being there and reading their stories, letters sent home and poems written by our personnel was very emotional and we all shed those tears. It was extremely heartfelt and brought into focus just how much we owe to all our forces for their sacrifice.

We have been making plans for future events and outings, and we are hoping to continue regular visits to the Tri-Service Veteran's Breakfast Club for a bacon buttie and a brew - I always make sure I'm in a coloured t-shirt in case of egg-squirt! They're a wonderful group of people and we have been so welcomed and are making some friends. This is exactly what I hoped for when I took over this branch, to make new friends and join other veterans in the locality and surrounding areas. Why not come and join us!

In December we went on the Steam Illuminations on the Watercress Line, it was a really lovely ride, all decorated inside and they played Christmas music!



## Wales & the West

## Ann Stack

It's busy and so are all of the branches in our area! Social events include lunches, dinners, and outings that benefit so many and are tailored to the individual branches and their members. It works and gives so much pleasure to many. Thank you to those who organise and do so much to encourage membership locally as well as promoting The WRAC Association in our area. It was a first for a few members in our area attending Dinner Club and for some, joining a branch for the first time. Coventry is our newest branch and is fully up and running and a great compliment to the established nine branches in our Area.

I was very lucky to join fellow WRAC, Royal Marine, Para, Royal Signals, RCT and fellow veterans in Malta this year. What a privilege it was to parade in Valletta on Remembrance Sunday and to join the Armistice Service on Tuesday the 11th November at the 16th Century Saluting Battery, overlooking Valletta Harbour. The 2 minute silence was marked by the firing of the cannons after which I felt privileged in laying a WRAC Association Wreath at the memorial.

There is an open invitation to all WRAC veterans to attend Remembrance Events in Malta and our hosts were The Royal Marines. We were made to feel very welcome and included in all social events and they are very keen for as many veterans as possible to attend next year.

We are certainly reaching out to our veteran communities and spreading the word about The WRAC Association!





## Birmingham - Heather Gaughran

Birmingham Branch has seen a couple of changes to the committee, with Doreen Cox having replaced Chris Fretwell as Treasurer, and then Rosie Garrison took over from Babs Anderson as Branch Secretary. We thank Chris and Babs for their dedicated service over more than 15 years.

We are enormously proud of Elaine (Wolfie) Smith, who tried out for the England Ladies Walking Football team. Although she wasn't selected, we've heard it was a close-run thing. We expect a different outcome next time Wolfie.

Our 4-monthly ten-pin bowling events at Acocks Green Bowl remain popular. The latest event featured a strike by branch friend, Helen and was enjoyed by members and guests alike. Babs won the trophy, whilst Tracey Neale fought everyone off for the wooden spoon - again.

Brum branch turned out in force at the WRAC Dinner Club in Solihull to enjoy food, drink, dance, and the surprise karaoke session, which highlighted members' hidden talents. The branch was well represented at the Cenotaph in London yet again. It was a first for Sheila Keeling and Lynne Armstrong, who looked as if they thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Our world-famous Christmas Jumper Bash drew a large crowd for festive food, silly games, Christmas songs, and lots of fun. Our very informal choir has to be seen to be believed.

In January, branch members attended our annual outing to the pantomime - 'Robin Hood'. Oh yes we did!!! We were paragons of good behaviour and I'm not kidding when I say we cried laughing. The running joke throughout the panto was Christopher Biggins appearing on stage and each time other characters would say "Not Yet Biggins!" you had to be there!



---

## Coventry - Caroline Gadsby

The Coventry WRAC Association Branch had our second meeting at the beginning of October.

Our first meeting in July had just 6 veterans there and by October we had 13 attendees! We came from Bicester, Northampton, Warwick, Nuneaton and Coventry. The span of trades was also amazing with provost, drivers, posties, nursing, dental and signals. It was a great meeting and we all had so much fun.



Jan from Bicester branch came to join us as she was on her canal boat and stuck at Leamington so she was a welcomed addition. Our January meeting was our 'not-Christmas-dinner' – delicious and great fun! In 2026 other activities and meetings are being planned to include a quiz night, a spring walk and an afternoon tea.

Whilst we are in our infancy we have a great membership and a wonderful bunch of ladies that love to share their stories and have the WRAC sense of humour.

Besides our meetings we have also met with one of our members at home as she is unable to come to our meeting. We are always looking for new members so if you live in the area around Coventry, Warwickshire please come along to our meetings - you will be really welcomed.





## Gloucestershire - Ann Stack

Our recent branch activities have been arty, historical and musical and it started with Downtown Abbey: The Finale, on a drizzly Friday evening. We enjoyed popcorn, illicit sweets and a 'cuppa' in the back row (we behaved) of a local independent cinema, decorated art deco style. We completed the evening with a curry afterwards - both film and food were rated 5 star.

Waterloo, Dancing Queen, Fernando and many more songs were calling out to us and we finally made it to ABBA Voyage and London for an overnight stay! What an absolutely fabulous night it was complete with glitter, sparkly tops, avatars, light shows and songs - we joined in and danced along!



The morning after was a more sedate affair but no less interesting as we visited The Household Cavalry Museum and Stables. We had a very informative tour and our guide patiently answered our questions and allowed us to dress up in the very heavy and cumbersome uniform of The Guards. We were then escorted to Horse Guards Stables. What a privilege it was and a definite wow moment when we met Zambeze, a black Irish mare and her rider. Two of our ladies were smitten, as both are keen horsewomen.

Our afternoon was spent at Chelsea Hospital where we were given a tour by WRAC veteran and in-pensioner, Maggy. What an interesting place it is and the benefits and opportunities that are offered to residents are of the highest standard. We are all tempted!

Our final curtain call was Sing-a-Long with Gareth Malone at a local theatre. We requested a special meet and greet but alas, it was not to be so we made do with being the backing singers!



---

## Herefordshire - Lynda Armstrong

Hereford branch has been pretty busy over the last few months with our monthly meetings, which have had an add on fun quiz run by Mary Woollard. This has gone down very well, as none of us are competitive ... MUCH!

We once again held our annual picnic in Queenswood Park, which was expertly organised as always by Joyce Nicholls. There was an excellent turn out and we had a great catch up with members of the branch who are not able to attend meetings for various reasons. Thank you for all you do for our branch Joyce.

A few of our members have been on hospital care lately for various reasons, Jo Foster, Tracy Loftus, Liz Starbuck, Linda Malcolm, and Janet Knight. Cards were sent from the branch wishing each member a speedy recovery.

We've had just one new member join us in the past 6 months. Welcome to Hereford branch Emily Stokes. Jo Foster paraded our branch Standard at Hereford Town's Remembrance Sunday Service, with Joy Harvey laying our branch wreath. Thank you to them both for doing this for us. It is very much appreciated.

November's meeting was once again replaced by our annual afternoon tea, which was organised by Miriam Unwin. This annual get together is a really lovely day out and always so well attended.





## Shropshire - Shirley Gladwin

Hello from Shropshire Branch. We have had a very busy and enjoyable time since the last edition and here is a quick rundown of what we have been up to!

During the past year, we were invited to attend The Battleback Centre in Lilleshall near Telford to inform ex-service and serving members of the armed forces on the Multi Activity Courses what we do and what is available as a member of WRACA. These courses are free of charge and encompass lots of interests and activities for 5 days, this included food and accommodation for attendees which is amazing! A lot of the branch members manned a desk at the centre throughout the year and the day Debbie Wilson and I manned it, the information we displayed sparked a lot of interest from the course members and we even managed to recruit one new member for our branch.

We were delighted to host Rowena Naile at our September Meeting; she surprised us by presenting us with the first "Certificate of Appreciation" to be awarded to a branch! See the full story on p102. Thank you WRACA from us all and for all you do. Ali McGowan our Chairman, the Committee and all our members are so proud and grateful for this recognition.

Another little outing taken advantage of was a trip to The Tower of London courtesy of the Not Forgotten Society, a great day was enjoyed by everyone who attended, we all had an enjoyable and interesting day.

Remembrance Day was very different for some of us this year as a large group from our branch and some from other branches travelled to Malta to remember the fallen, what a magnificent occasion it was.

Till next time, keep roaring x



---

## South Wales - Deserie Mansfield

The WRAC Association South Wales Branch continues to thrive, with 111 members and a busy calendar filled with support, connection, and plenty of fun. Throughout the year we've enjoyed a variety of lunches, meet-ups, and opportunities to stay engaged with our wonderful community of ladies.

In June, we proudly hosted a gazebo at National Armed Forces Day at Caldicot Castle — naturally, another castle... we have a few! We often run events alongside Women Veterans South Wales, and this partnership remains an important part of our branch activity. Looking ahead, we will be holding our branch meeting on 28 February at The Fox and Hounds in Whitchurch, Cardiff — the very place where the branch was revitalised 12 years ago. This gathering will give us the chance to reflect on the past year and plan future events and branch management.

Our summer outing was a particular highlight. Members from the Worcester and Herefordshire branches joined us for a sun-soaked day at Barry Island. We began at Barry Museum, sampled the local hostelrys, and made excellent use of factor 30 and 50. The sunshine was matched only by the laughter — especially with so many dressed as Nessa from Gavin and Stacey. The day was such a success that we're making it an annual tradition, so start preparing those Nessa outfits!

For more information or upcoming dates, please feel free to get in touch.





## Tamworth - Chris Whitehead

Tamworth branch have been busy bees! We have met each month in Tamworth, at the National Memorial Arboretum, Barton Marina, in Lichfield and at Trentham shopping village as well as our fabulous Christmas lunch in Lichfield.

A highlight has definitely been a fabulous afternoon tea which eight of us enjoyed at the Tudor tearoom in Tamworth. We have also joined Birmingham and Shropshire branches for their Birthday bashes, much fun and hilarity.

A few of us attended the WRAC Association Beret & Cap Badge presentation event at the NMA, solemn and emotional, and also joined the Association Summer Event at Bletchley Park where we met up with other members and had a fascinating tour.

Pat Williams received an invite to the RBL event at the NMA for the 80th anniversary of VJ day and took me as her guest. His Majesty the King and Queen Camilla attended and it was certainly an honour and a day to remember for a long time.



More recently a group of us enjoyed the WRAC dinner club, my first but definitely not last and poppy stalls have been manned by our members in Tamworth and Burntwood.

Marie, Ann, Pat and Irene attended the Festival of Remembrance in London and others paraded in London, Tamworth, Uttoxeter and Guildford on the 9th and at the NMA on the 11th November.

If anyone would like to join us please get in touch – we have lots more exciting things planned!



---

## Worcester - Jane Griffin-Ash

The good people of Worcester have occasionally been treated to the sight of a dozen or so older ladies gathering together in a pub, to giggle together for a couple of hours. We have met up several times since the last Lioness hit the doormats, but due to this author being somewhat lax, tardy and a bit of a shirker, it hasn't been as often as it might have been, however willing and sometimes able I might be!

We are still in the 'learning what works' stage, despite having been in existence for over a year. For example, how long is too long and how short is too short, when it comes to giving notice of a potential meet-up? We're still looking for the happy medium, but such is the nature of an occasional group.

Despite my haphazard organising skills, we managed to don our best Christmas smiles and gather for great food, lots of laughs and splendid company. What a lovely time we had. If you're in the Worcester area please get in touch and join us for one of our gatherings!





This year has been full of meaningful moments as I've travelled across the North-West, meeting incredible women from the WRAC and Wrens communities. Every visit reminds me of the strength and stories that shaped our history.

One encounter that lingers in my mind was with a remarkable lady in her late 90s, a proud member of the QARANC. She initially sought support but later declined—a missed opportunity to hear her service story, which I'm sure would have been fascinating. These moments highlight why staying connected matters so much.

A true highlight was representing the Royal British Legion as Vice-Chair aboard the Renewed Poppy Train. This special train, adorned with poppies, travels from Glasgow Central to London, stopping at stations along the way—mostly in the Northwest—to collect poppies from local communities. Each poppy is placed into a wreath, which is then laid at the Cenotaph in London on behalf of train services that lost so many during the wars. This tradition, paused during Covid, was revived last year and continues to be a poignant tribute to those who served.

If you know anyone—WRAC or from other services—who would appreciate a chat, please encourage them to reach out. A simple conversation can mean so much, and together we can ensure that no story goes unheard.



## Cumbria - Dawn Hawker

It's been a long time coming, but we now have a small and growing group of ladies from Cumbria and Lancashire who meet whenever they can. With Cumbria being such a vast area, our gatherings take place at different locations—chosen by our members—making each meet-up a little adventure.

The order of the day? Coffee, chat, and maybe a slice of cake (or two!). These simple moments are about more than refreshments—they're about rekindling friendships, sharing stories, and creating new memories.

Our next venues promise something special: sometimes a cosy café in a local town, other times a stunning spot in the Lake District. We're so fortunate to have the Lakes right on our doorstep, and they provide the perfect backdrop for laughter and conversation.

Although we've only been meeting for a short time, the sense of connection is already strong. Our hope is to build on these numbers in the months, and years, ahead, welcoming more ladies who want to share in the warmth of our community.

If you know someone who served - WRAC or other service - and would enjoy a friendly chat, please encourage them to join us. A simple cup of coffee can open the door to wonderful stories and lasting friendships.



**Setting up a new branch or group is easy!**

**Contact HQ today to find out how we can help you get started.**



## Manchester - Pip Flegel

Ten Manchester Branch members have visited The Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker in Nantwich, Cheshire. It was built in the 1950s as a radar station and a civil defence facility during the Cold War. It was interesting and thought provoking in equal measure and proved to be a wonderful day out.

We started our visit with delicious egg banjos and cheese on toast in the NAAFI and spent the day in a very eerie and secret atmosphere, not just observing nuclear weapons and codebreakers, but we also having fun mouse spotting.



We started doing a weekly Zoom quiz in lock-down and it is still going strong. Our level of general knowledge is astounding – we surprise ourselves sometimes.

My next fundraising challenge will be entitled “Dolly and the Dolly Mixtures Sing-a-thon”, raising money for the WRAC Association, Garstang Cancer Care and Macmillan Cancer Support. The event is due to run from 16th to 18th July 2026, with daily sessions lasting eight hours. I will be accompanied by the Manchester Branch Lionesses. Anyone who would like to sing along would be very welcome to join the “Dolly and the Dolly Mixtures” singing group. A full report and crazy photos will appear in the next issue of the Lioness.

---

## Oldham - Kath Kirtley

Nothing much seems to happen in our tiny little branch, but you'd be surprised how much 5 people can squeeze into an apparently small diary. Sue Feeney, Elaine Brookes, Debbie Davies, Rene Berlinson and I have perfected the art of being somewhere without appearing to be anywhere. It's a skill and I'll explain how we did it. We had gathered together to have lunch and had such a nice time, we decided to record it for posterity. We asked our lovely young waiter to take a photo of us, and he was happy to do it. I suspect it is part of the training for waiters nowadays. We all smiled in his direction until he handed the mobile back and then we went back to chatting. It wasn't until I checked the photos later that I discovered – nothing! That lad needs retraining! I apologise for not having a smiley photo of the occasion to share with you.

Debbie Davies and I attended an event laid on by the Royton Branch RBL at the beginning of November. There are several military graves in the cemetery at Royton, where we placed flags and crosses. It was typical Remembrance weekend weather, but we didn't mind.

We have found that our local veterans' breakfast club is a great place to mingle with like-minded ex-military folk. We seem to spend most of our time laughing, which is good for our Lioness souls.





# Wirral and Chester - Sharon Broderick MBE

Although we operate the Wirral and Chester branches separately, we try to come together for events and outings whenever we can. Both branches have female veterans from different arms and different eras.

Wirral branch gathers once a month on a Sunday afternoon for a meeting, then two weeks later, we have a get together which usually involves having a meal and a natter. Meanwhile, Chester branch meets once a month for a chatty lunch.

We have had a busy few months, yet the ladies continue to find humour in some difficult situations, and we are very proud to have supported a number of our members through some serious illnesses. We have seen new members join the group, and they have been made very welcome.

One of our members, Carly Hudson (ex-Royal Artillery) trekked to Everest Base Camp this autumn, along with a number of other female veterans. We are all extremely proud of her, as she has overcome many personal battles.

In the summer, we travelled to visit Shropshire Branch and had a fabulous meal and lots of giggles.

In the late summer I travelled to Lowestoft in Suffolk, to finally meet my Buddy Buddy of more than 5 years. Irene Lock and I have been speaking every Monday evening at 19.00 without fail. We have laughed together and unfortunately, sometimes cried together, but we eventually met in person. It was fabulous and we did nothing but laugh. We won't leave it so long next time.



## Other Groups

### PTI Branch News: Come to our Reunion! - Lyn Hatch

How time flies! It's hard to believe that our first PTI's Reunion since 2018 is just around the corner. Over the last six months our Facebook page has seen some great photos of sporting achievements and events from the past. Can you spot any of your former comrades in this photo from our 1998 reunion?!

We were delighted to see that Lt Col (MAA) L. James MBE RAPTC became the first woman Commanding Officer at the Army School of Physical Training last year.

Our PTI Reunion is planned for the weekend of July 10th-12th in Peterborough. On the Friday night, you'll have the opportunity to catch up with your peer groups, and Saturday evening is the Reunion Dinner, a 3-course meal at a cost of £38. So far, the response has been good but there is still time to book if you're really quick! This is an informal reunion so you are welcome to attend just the dinner or join us for the whole weekend.



Payments need to be made in full by 28th February (please note that there will be no refunds for cancellations after this date).

To book for the dinner, or join the PTI group please email or call me and let me know of any dietary requirements. Email – [hatchlyn@aol.com](mailto:hatchlyn@aol.com) / Phone – 07929 070665



## Spain - Ali Humphrey

We attended the RBL Spain South District Poppy Appeal Launch Parade in La Cala de Mijas, Malaga, Spain. We were supported by many veterans, the RBL riders branch, scouts, a pipe band, and some classic cars. In amongst the veterans were five lovely ladies crossing all three services.

Included in the photo are Claire Jenkinson RN, (me) Alison Humphrey and Debbie Crowley WRAC, Kelly McVitty RAF, RBL Spain South District Treasurer Margery Taylor MBE, and Janet Fox QARANC.

It was a lovely day with a parade through the streets, with a short dedication at the Torreón de la Cala de Mijas by the District Chaplain, Father William. A lot warmer than we wished it was, as we were suited and booted - but we wanted to look smart so shirt sleeve order wasn't really an option!



## Sole Sisters Walking Group - Debbie Walker

NEW

Hi everyone, I'm Debbie and I have recently set up the WRAC Association walking group - WRACA Sole Sisters! My army career was cut short in 1987 because of the gay ban, but I joined the West Midlands Police and served for 30 years, retiring as an Inspector. After I retired, I decided I would love to be a mountain guide and do what I am passionate about - climbing mountains and helping people to access the great outdoors for the therapeutic effects of being out in nature. This decision has resulted in me taking groups to places like the Great Wall of China, Machu Picchu (Peru), Kilimanjaro (twice) and Morocco, as well as many, many UK mountains!

After the Association presented me with my beret at the NMA in August, (a very moving and cathartic service for me), I looked through the Lioness magazine with renewed interest and saw the fabulous work the Association does. I decided I wanted to help, and with my skills of organising walks, I would like to bring more members together for walks.

A Facebook group has been set up for us - 'WRACA Sole Sisters' so please join us if you're interested in meeting other members locally for a walk and a talk! We will also be sharing details on there of some bigger adventures which we are planning and you will be able to get involved with if you wish.

If you're not on Facebook but would like to find out more please get in touch with me! [walker\\_d22@sky.com](mailto:walker_d22@sky.com) or 07946 733932





## Band - Sue Rummery

Four former members of the WRAC Staff Band came together recently - from left to right: Sue on clarinet, who served from December 1978 to April 1991. Frances on trombone, who served from November 1970 to October 1976. Liz on alto saxophone, who served from September 1966 to September 1979, and Lorna on flute, who served from August 1973 to March 1984.

On Saturday 20th September 2025, the four of us travelled to Duke Street Church in Richmond, London, at the request of Major (Rtd) Phil Shannon, former Director of Music of the Irish Guards Band. He had been asked to form an orchestra to play for the annual SASRA 'Our Day' (Soldiers and Aviators Scripture Readers Association). So the four of us played in this small orchestra alongside several other former bandsmen.

The event was in two parts. Firstly we heard reports from some of the Scripture Readers, talking about their role in visiting Army bases and RAF Stations across the UK, sharing their Christian Faith, and giving support to those who need it. Secondly there was a church service giving thanks to God for the work of SASRA.

This proved to be a lovely reunion for the four of us. We were able to show our support for SASRA in providing music for the occasion. Afterwards, whilst enjoying a delicious Afternoon Tea, we were able to reminisce about our time in the 'Band', sharing many happy memories together. We eagerly look forward to the next 'Band' reunion."



---

## From the Branch News Editor: Babs Anderson



Wow! You have all been incredibly busy and happy to share your adventures with us. I feel as though I have been all over the UK and further as I've read your branch reports, and although I only attended the Birmingham Christmas Jumper Bash, I feel like I have been present at many more yuletide parties through the photos and write-ups. I'm sure many readers will feel the same way – what a lovely way to spread the camaraderie.

In my last message to you, I asked that you take more photos and wing them straight in to the editor. Apparently, there is a David Bailey in every branch so thank you for sending them in. Please remember to email your photos directly from the mobile phone that took them. You don't need to crop them because that will be done by the editor so just let us know if you need anything or anybody in particular removed. Please give us a small selection of different photos to choose from and try to include as many members as possible across the photos you submit.

More and more of our branches are welcoming our serving sisters from the Royal Navy and RAF which is brilliant. All women who served are welcome to join our Association as well as our groups and branches, and it's wonderful that we have so many tri-service branches across the UK. So please make sure you sign up all newcomers via [wraca.org.uk/join](http://wraca.org.uk/join) for free, and I look forward to seeing those new faces in future branch news reports.

Keep your pencils sharpened, we're waiting for your next reports.

### Area Coordinators Needed

**Are you in the Eastern, Central or North Eastern regions?  
Do you want to support your fellow female veterans?**

Area coordinators offer support to branches in their region, contribute to the direction of Association membership, and sit on the Major Grants Committee of the Benevolent Fund. We have vacancies for coordinators in our Eastern, Central and North Eastern areas. We would welcome applications from enthusiastic members and friends or family who would like to show their appreciation for the service of our veterans.

Contact HQ for more information: [membership@wraca.org.uk](mailto:membership@wraca.org.uk)



# BRANCH DIRECTORY

## Scotland & Northern Ireland

Area Co-ordinator - Tracey MacPherson  
scotland.ni.area@wraca.org.uk

### Aberdeen

**Contact:** Sandra Lemmon

**Email:** huggles46@btinternet.com

### Ayreshire

**Contact:** Arlene Reid

**Email:** arlenereid@hotmail.co.uk

### Edinburgh

**Contact:** Robbie Knox

**Email:** robbieknox55@gmail.com

### Fife & Tayside

**Contact:** Debbie Coupland

**Email:** debbiecoupland14@gmail.com

### Glasgow

**Contact:** Joyce Steele

**Email:** steele\_joyce@hotmail.com

### Moray & Highland

**Contact:** Tracey MacPherson

**Email:** scotland.ni.area@wraca.org.uk

### Stirling

**Contact:** Liz Dixon

**Email:** liz\_m\_dixon@yahoo.co.uk

**Phone:** 07745 751657

### Ulster

**Contact:** Sylvia Connachan

**Email:** Loughran425@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07847 131568

## North East

Area Co-ordinator - Vacant

### Bradford

**Contact:** Christine Janice Jane

**Email:** janicejaneuk@yahoo.co.uk

**Phone:** 07979 501518

### Cleveland

**Contact:** Suzanne Allan

**Email:** suzanne\_allan416@hotmail.com

**Phone:** 07801 571528

### East Riding & North Lincolnshire

**Contact:** Dorothy Mitchelmore

**Email:** mydeluxe06@icloud.com

**Phone:** 07897 449920

### Grimsby

**Contact:** Gail Davy

**Email:** gaildavy240@gmail.com

**Phone:** 01472 347868

### Leeds

**Contact:** Michelle Gibbs

**Email:** michellegibbs012@aol.com

**Phone:** 07810 686559

### Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast

**Contact:** Betty Gash

**Email:** bettygash1959@gmail.com

### Newcastle

**Contact:** Tanya Hall

**Email:** tanyalouise4472@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07590 323497



## Central

### Area Co-ordinator - Vacant

#### Derby

**Contact:** Judy Smith

**Email:** Judy.smith4529@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07790 848364

#### Leicester and Nottingham

**Contact:** Sue Slattery

**Email:** sue@abbey1941.plus.com

**Phone:** 07434 577010

#### Lincoln

**Contact:** Susan Smith

**Email:** sue.secretary@btinternet.com

#### Peterborough

**Contact:** Vivien Hamilton

**Email:** vivienhamilton1@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07783 412278

#### Sheffield

**Contact:** Sandra Warne

**Email:** sandra.warne@btinternet.com

**Phone:** 07713 252521

## Eastern

### Area Co-ordinator - Vacant

#### Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire

**Contact:** Chris Barrett

**Email:** 78chrisbarrett@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07508 322989

#### Colchester

**Contact:** Kerry Warnes

**Email:** kerrypam@hotmail.com

**Phone:** 07763 122474

#### Kings Lynn

**Contact:** Audrey Pearce

**Email:** audreypearce308@yahoo.co.uk

**Phone:** 07534 648806

**NEW**

#### Norfolk

**Contact:** Lyn Hatch

**Email:** wracnorfolk@aol.com

**Phone:** 07929 070665

#### Suffolk

**Contact:** Liz Ives

**Email:** lizives@hotmail.com

**Phone:** 01473 807099

## London & South East

### Area Co-ordinator - Maggy Ashmore southeast.area@wracassociation.org.uk

#### Canterbury

**Contact:** Susan Wing

**Email:** susanwing14@gmail.com

**Phone:** 01843 836430

#### Greater London

**Contact:** Chrissie Mills

**Email:** chrissie.mills@hotmail.co.uk

**Phone:** 07505 199653

#### Invicta

**Contact:** Karen Radford

**Email:** radders67@gmail.com

**Phone:** 07702 651045

#### Worthing

**Contact:** Carol Hill

**Email:** cazhill6cazhill6@hotmail.com

**Phone:** 07790 922110



## South & South West

Area Co-ordinator - Amanda Foster  
southwest.area@wraca.org.uk

### Bristol

**Contact:** Judith Stinchcombe  
**Email:** wracbristolbranch@mail.com  
**Phone:** 07837 455352

### Dorset

**Contact:** Caroline Hearne  
**Email:** wracdorset@gmail.com

### Exeter

**Contact:** Vacant  
**Email:** southwest.area@wraca.org.uk

### Plymouth

**Contact:** Ann Williams  
**Email:** m\_ann1@blueyonder.co.uk  
**Phone:** 07714 216592

### Portsmouth & Isle of Wight

**Contact:** Sally Watson  
**Email:** sally1882@gmail.com  
**Phone:** 02392 799028

### Salisbury

**Contact:** Amanda Foster  
**Email:** salisburywracvets@gmail.com  
**Phone:** 07788 316596

### Southampton

**Contact:** Stephanie Caws  
**Email:** stephaniecaws@sky.com  
**Phone:** 07599 919762

### Torbay

**Contact:** Pauline Marr  
**Email:** paulinemarr55@gmail.com  
**Phone:** 07787 763779

### West Surrey

**Contact:** Stephanie Kolvik  
**Email:** westsurreywrac@gmail.com

### Winchester

**Contact:** Lisa Aven  
**Email:** nlaven05@proton.me

## Wales & The West

Area Co-ordinator - Ann Stack  
wales.west.area@wraca.org.uk

### Birmingham

**Contact:** Rosie Garrison  
**Email:** rosie-garrison@live.co.uk  
**Phone:** 07791 476343

### Coventry

**Contact:** Caroline Gadsby  
**Email:** caroline.gadsby@hotmail.co.uk

### Gloucestershire

**Contact:** Ann Stack  
**Email:** anndewsnip@hotmail.com  
**Phone:** 07842 831364

### Herefordshire

**Contact:** Lynda Armstrong  
**Email:** lynda.armstrong1960@gmail.com  
**Phone:** 01443 837592

### Marches & Mid Wales

**Contact:** Bernie Dolan  
**Email:** bernie.dolan@live.co.uk  
**Phone:** 07980 841802

### Oxfordshire

**Contact:** Karen Smith  
**Email:** bobandkaren650@btinternet.com  
**Phone:** 01869 321393

### Shropshire

**Contact:** Chris Powell  
**Email:** chris.powell2024@outlook.com  
**Phone:** 07773 264492

### South Wales

**Contact:** Deserie Mansfield  
**Email:** wracswales@outlook.com  
**Phone:** 07940 001866

### Tamworth

**Contact:** Chris Whitehead  
**Email:** chris\_wol@hotmail.com  
**Phone:** 07833 546388

### Worcester

**Contact:** Jane Griffin-Ash  
**Email:** janebgash@icloud.com  
**Phone:** 07880 732245

## North West

**Area Co-ordinator - Dawn Hawker**  
[northwest.area@wraca.org.uk](mailto:northwest.area@wraca.org.uk)

### Cumbria

**Contact:** Dawn Hawker  
**Email:** [northwest.area@wraca.org.uk](mailto:northwest.area@wraca.org.uk)

### Lancashire

**Contact:** Gail Newsham  
**Email:** [gaildki@talktalk.net](mailto:gaildki@talktalk.net)  
**Phone:** 07939 505485

### Liverpool

**Contact:** Pat Brown  
**Email:** [pat-br@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:pat-br@hotmail.co.uk)  
**Phone:** 07896 486171

### Manchester

**Contact:** Pip Flegel  
**Email:** [pipflegel2009@gmail.com](mailto:pipflegel2009@gmail.com)  
**Phone:** 07375 095532

### Oldham

**Contact:** Kath Kirtley  
**Email:** [kathleenkirtley@gmail.com](mailto:kathleenkirtley@gmail.com)  
**Phone:** 07910 925070

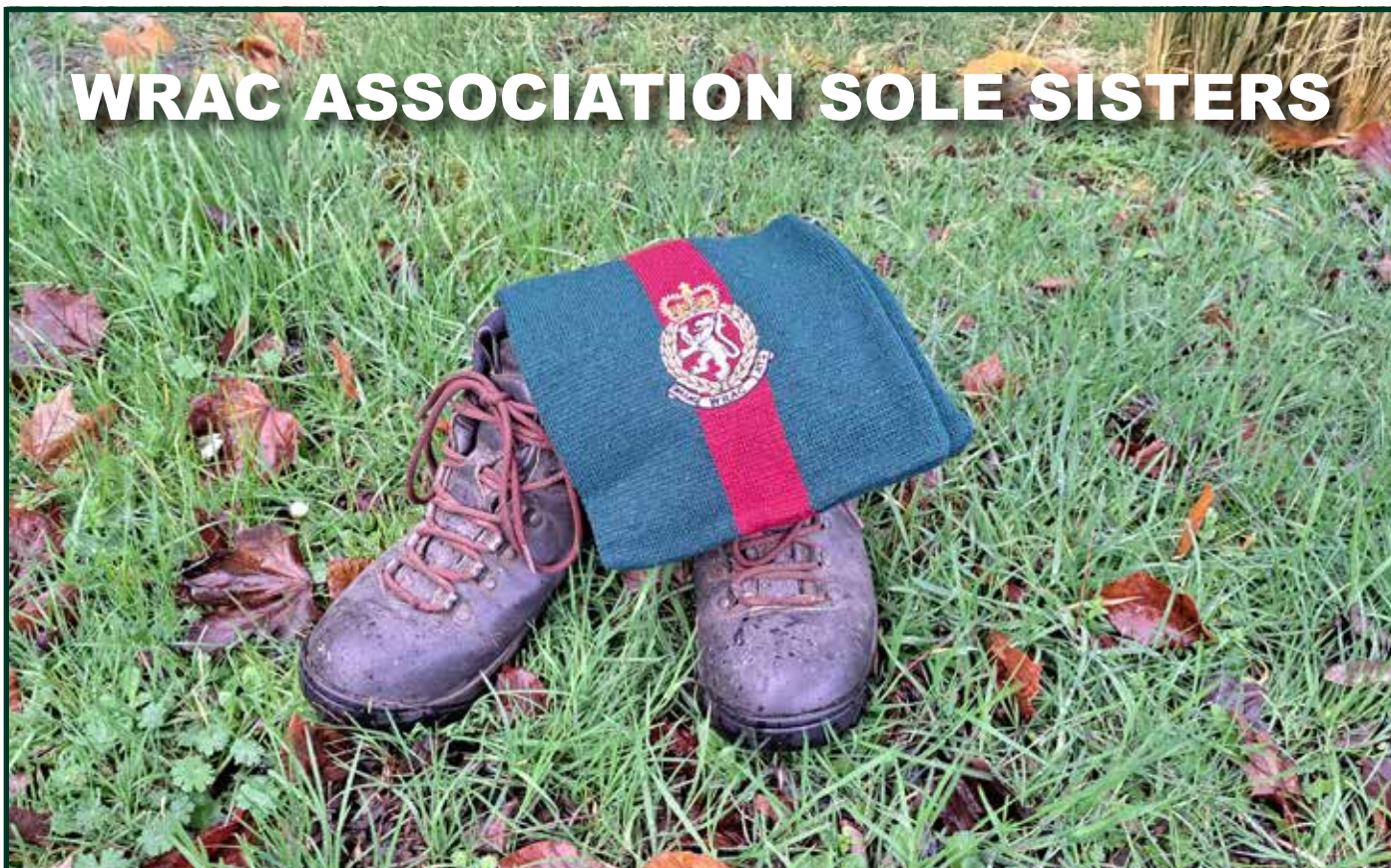
### Wirral & Chester

**Contact:** Sharon Broderick MBE  
**Email:** [sharonbroderick139@sky.com](mailto:sharonbroderick139@sky.com)  
**Phone:** 07784 068826

## Other Groups

**PTI Group** - Lyn Hatch E: [wracnorfolk@aol.com](mailto:wracnorfolk@aol.com) T: 07929 070665  
**BAND** - Sue Rummery [sue.rummery@gmail.com](mailto:sue.rummery@gmail.com)

# WRAC ASSOCIATION SOLE SISTERS



**Welcoming all female veterans of the Royal Navy, British Army and RAF to arrange walks around the UK and beyond. Join us for a walk and a talk!**

**Join our Facebook group to find out more -**  
[facebook.com/groups/wracasolesisters](https://facebook.com/groups/wracasolesisters)



# CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION

## Sally Watson

For the past 25 years, Sally has been an unwavering and vital member of our branch. Her journey began as a member of the WRAC Association, and over the decades, she has taken on countless roles with dedication and enthusiasm — from Standard Bearer to Secretary, and everything in between. Her commitment to promoting the WRAC Association and supporting our members, particularly as many have grown older, has never wavered.

One of Sally's most significant contributions was her instrumental role in the successful merger of the Portsmouth and Isle of Wight branches. As membership numbers began to decline, it was Sally's vision and determination that ensured neither branch had to close. Her sensitive and thoughtful approach brought both communities together, ensuring that every member was contacted, included, and supported throughout the transition. The appreciation for this effort has been felt deeply on both sides of the water.

Sally's dedication goes beyond administrative duties. She has become a lifeline to many, always available as the first point of contact for members. Her care and compassion have made a real difference in their lives. She has tirelessly organised numerous events and trips, including memorable outings to Guildford 75, Westminster Abbey, and various Grand Reunions. One particular highlight was her coordination of the Salisbury Christmas Lunch, which, despite being a long day, brought festive cheer and lasting memories to those who attended.

Her enthusiasm and thoughtfulness shine through in everything she does. She researches and plans each event with care, ensuring every detail is tailored for the enjoyment and comfort of our members. Sally is more than a Branch Secretary or Lead — she is a beacon of light in our group, a trusted colleague, and a dear friend to many.

Without Sally's leadership and dedication, we would likely have lost both the Portsmouth and Isle of Wight branches. She continues to ensure that even our older members, including a few ATS on the Island, remain active and feel valued within the Association. Sally's contributions are truly exceptional and deserving of the highest recognition. She is an outstanding example of selfless service, and we are proud to put her forward for this well-earned appreciation.

***Nominated by Val Duke & Phyllis Price***



## Shropshire Branch

**O**n the occasion of their 45th Anniversary, it is with great pride and deep appreciation that we nominate the Shropshire Branch for recognition. As the oldest branch in the Wales & The West area, their journey since July 1980 is a testament to dedication, community spirit, and unwavering commitment to the values of the WRAC Association.

The origins of the Shropshire Branch are rooted in the enthusiasm of a few determined ATS ladies who, under the guidance of Mrs. Mary Beeston and inspired by a simple newspaper notice in The Shropshire Star, brought together like-minded women with shared service and experiences. From those humble beginnings, the Branch grew - driven by passionate volunteers and supported by women such as Lucy Bowyer, Nancy Tipton, Irene Wardrobe, Terri Goff, Hilda Dakin, and Beryl Lane, all of whom gave generously of their time and energy.

Under the steady hand of Chris Powell since 2011, the Branch has gone from strength to strength. Their enduring success lies in their warm welcome to new members, their proactive outreach, and their consistent support - both practical and emotional - offered to all who join. Their commitment to fostering camaraderie and upholding the traditions of the QMAAC, ATS, and WRAC remains steadfast.

What sets Shropshire Branch apart is their forward-thinking and inclusive approach. Their social calendar is vibrant and engaging, ensuring members feel connected and valued. They maintain strong links with military organisations and charities, extending the reach and message of the WRAC Association across Shropshire and beyond.

Current and former members include ATS ladies, WRAC veterans, and women currently serving or having served in the Armed Forces - each welcomed as part of a growing and supportive community.

Happy 45th Birthday, Shropshire Branch. Your dedication over the past four and a half decades is both inspiring and deeply appreciated. Here's to the next 45 years of service, sisterhood, and shared pride.

***Nominated by Ann Stack***



# In My Day...

*Bletchley and Beyond: The Story of Rena Stewart (ATS) - by Victoria Walsh*  
*A new biography tells the terrific tale of a hitherto-unknown ATS girl.*

## *Part 1: Bletchley-bound*

### Career woman in waiting

Linguist Rena Stewart (1923-2023) signed up to serve with the ATS in 1943, but she did so rather reluctantly. She had initially wanted to join the Wrens, preferring black silk stockings to Lisle thread! However, there weren't any openings in the Wrens at the time, and this turned out to be quite lucky: Lisle thread would end up giving her a leg-up in life. Starting as a Bletchley Park Girl, she would go on to translate Hitler's will and to blaze a trail for female journalists at the BBC.

Rena was born in Lundin Links, Fife. She spent an idyllic childhood there but soon realised how limited career options were for women in those days. However, she would never have imagined joining the Army. Her career inspiration was actually poetry, and she was determined to make something of herself – specifically a journalist. This led her to apply to study French and German at university. She believed that this would give her access to “a whole new world” – little did she know!



Rena arrived at St Andrews university in 1940. She had a “fabulous” time there, albeit in the shadow of war. She volunteered to clear up bomb damage, and she joined a female cadet unit. This practised with broomsticks rather than rifles. On graduating, Rena and a friend, Agnes Glynn (née Gardner), decided to “do something about the war,” and so they signed up to take on Hitler.

### Park life: secrecy and socials

The girls completed several courses, signed the Official Secrets Act and arrived at Bletchley Park in early 1944. Rena was assigned to a department called the German Book Room, where 40 women toiled away at their typewriters. There, she worked, in German, on secret German Army and Air Force messages. These came from the Morse code and arrived on strips of paper. The messages would be checked, completed, and later compiled into books for further analysis (hence the name German Book Room). It was often stressful, usually dull work, but important to the outcome of the war.

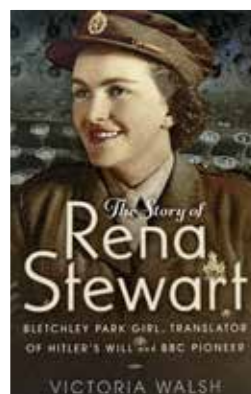
The tedium of the work wasn't helped by the girls' living conditions. They lived at Shenley Road Camp, an “awful”, “spartan” military camp, run by a Senior Commander Kemp. Military discipline in the rest of the Park was lax, but not under Kemp. The rebellious girls made up a poem about her, comically titled Mein Kemp. And this is how they coped: by having as much fun as possible. They sneaked down to the NAAFI during cross-country runs, hitchhiked to London and tried to evade Kemp's “Purity Patrols” when returning from dates of an evening. “The main thing about our stay at Bletchley,” Rena said, “was that we had a great time!”

### What to do with all these women?!

The girls longed for the end of the war, but when it came, they couldn't be demobbed immediately. So, what to do with them? They were all assessed for promotion to officer rank ... but they all failed. Rena explained that “Bletchley Park had ruined us for ordinary Army life!” Instead, they were sent to Germany with the Intelligence Corps, where new challenges and adventures awaited them.

*To come in the next edition of Lioness:  
Part Two: Beyond Bletchley.*

‘The Story of Rena Stewart’, by Victoria Walsh, is out now,  
published by Pen and Sword History.





# Letters...

Dear Editor

Birmingham Branch's long-time member Betty Wood celebrated her 102nd birthday during October at the retirement complex in Knowle where she has lived for the past 25 years.

To help her celebrate was her son Charles and his wife, two granddaughters Louise and Joanna, plus three great granddaughters, members of the RBL and other friends.



Betty was born in Stourbridge in 1923 and joined the ATS in 1942 as a clerk with her main job being responsible for the drafts of service personnel, and was discharged during 1946.

On the morning of her party Betty went to Tesco near where she lives to find that they had put the flags up for her birthday!

From Chris Fretwell

Dear Editor,

Does Christine Greenwood (aka Cherry Tordoff) look 80? I don't think so and yes she is the same skinny 18 years lass I remember from Germany all those years ago!

Thanks to the Dinner Club and the internet we rekindled our WRAC friendship and meet up every year when we can, and send special birthday flowers.

Thank you Radders for presenting this birthday gift and Babs Anderson who was my secret partner in crime!!

So, Cherry, you got your flowers in Solihull this year! Surprise surprise - happy birthday to you and loads of love from Rose Ann, Jenny, Flogger, Lesley, Lin and me, Irene.

From Irene "Stella" Maclean xxxx



Dear Editor,

Many years ago I borrowed £5 from a WRAC soldier who was called as a nickname 'Kipper Munro'. It has worried me ever since. I'm not joking and would dearly like to repay this debt. I'm ex 9 Para RE, the circumstances of this debt of £5 is as follows;

In the autumn of 1974 I met Kipper, I think in Fairford, I was on a rigging course and there was no romantic involvement but we were friends. Days later the Guildford pub bombing took place and two WRAC soldiers were killed. Soon after 9 Squadron R.E. went to Northern Ireland for our fourth tour and at the beginning of that tour I lost a leg to an IED hence my not settling with Kipper at the time.

This is not a sob story, I've had a happy life, and I just have a desire to settle an old outstanding debt. £5 pounds in 1974 is £100 today. If I can't pay Kipper back I will gladly donate the £100 to WRAC Association funds.

Yours sincerely  
Alec Beer

Dear Alec

I hope our readers can track down Kipper for you, and if not, I assure you the Association will put your generous donation to good use.

Thanks, Ed

Dear Editor,

I was wondering if anyone could help me find the owner of an object I found on the beach. Six years ago myself and my husband were beach combing at Minster on Sea on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. We found what looks like a WRAC Army tag, printed with the Army number and name of the person. I would love to return it to its owner, or family if they are no longer around.

Many thanks  
Mrs Caroline Moseley.

Does the name J Frater mean anything to anyone? If so, let us know so we can pass the details to Caroline.  
Thanks, Ed



Dear Editor,

We are hoping to try and find Mair Elizabeth Lewis who lived at 1 Reese Road at Worthy Down in 1968.

Thank you so much,  
Libby Harvey

If anyone has any information or remembers Mair, please contact [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)

Ed

Dear Editor

## Edinburgh Company WSC911 – 35-Year Reunion at Sandhurst

Those of us who commissioned on 6 August 1991 (WSC911) are planning a 35-year reunion at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst on 24 October 2026.

Recently, a few of us reconnected and gathered - and I can honestly say I haven't laughed so much in years! It was incredible to reminisce about our time at the Academy and hear the fascinating stories of how our careers unfolded across different Corps, Regiments, and beyond.

We've managed to track down many of our cohort (and even some of the staff), but we'd love to reconnect with the following:

Michelle Eggers, Deborah Farleigh, Claire Halligan, Tracey-Louise Price Jones, Tanya Worsley (WRAC), Bernice Nicholson (Army Catering Corps), Marilyn Watson (Barbados), Charmaine Smith and Collette McDonough (Jamaica), Asnah, Mai and Noorida (Brunei) ... and of course Lt Col JCA Smith and SSgt KIS Topley (WRAC).

Let's make this reunion one to remember—your help in spreading the word would be hugely appreciated!  
Many thanks for your help

Elly Cooper

If anyone has contact details for the above, or can help Elly to reach them, please contact [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)



.....

**DATES:**  
26th August  
- 31st August 2026

## EAST ANGLIAN BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2026

### VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

**for serving beer, cider  
or at the gin bar.**

**Other jobs: clearing tables,  
washing glasses,  
selling beer cards,  
admissions etc**

**PLACE: St Edmundsbury Cathedral,  
Bury St Edmunds IP33 1LS**

For more details contact Wendy Hooton.  
07775 505326 Messenger or WhatsApp  
or email: [Wendyhootonski@aol.com](mailto:Wendyhootonski@aol.com)

**Starts  
1200hrs 26th  
Finishes 1800hrs 31st**





# Obituaries - Their Final Salute



## MARY NORAH MACDONALD (NÉE MARSHALL)

25 May 1943 - 20 March 2025



Mary enlisted into the Women's Royal Army Corps on 24th February 1964 and completed her basic training at the WRAC Depot in Guildford, before continuing to Worthy Down for Pay Clerk training. On completion of her training, Mary was posted to Edinburgh, where she worked in the Pay Office at Edinburgh Castle and where she met her future husband, Joe. They were married in July 1971 (and July 2025 would have marked their fifty-fourth wedding anniversary).

After Joe left the Army, the couple moved to Eastleigh in Hampshire. Mary initially took on agency work, mainly at 'Mr Kipling's', before securing a permanent role at the local job centre. She worked there loyally for 25 years and 22 days, retiring at the age of 65.

Mary was a proud and active member of the Southampton Branch of the WRAC Association, where she particularly enjoyed the outings, which often turned into opportunities for some well-deserved retail therapy!

Mary sadly passed away on 20 March 2025, aged 81, after a short battle with cancer. She is survived by her husband Joe, daughters Louise and Melanie, and granddaughter Elsie. She was a devoted wife, mother and granny and will be deeply missed.

Special thanks to WRAC Association Southampton Branch for their magnificent turnout at Mary's funeral.

*Joe MacDonald (husband)*

## WINIFRED 'WIN' MARY KENWAY

8 March 2021 – 1 May 2025



Win was born in Dorset, the youngest of 3 children. Her mother sadly died when she was 5 and as their father was in the Royal Navy she and her two brothers were ferried around to various relatives.

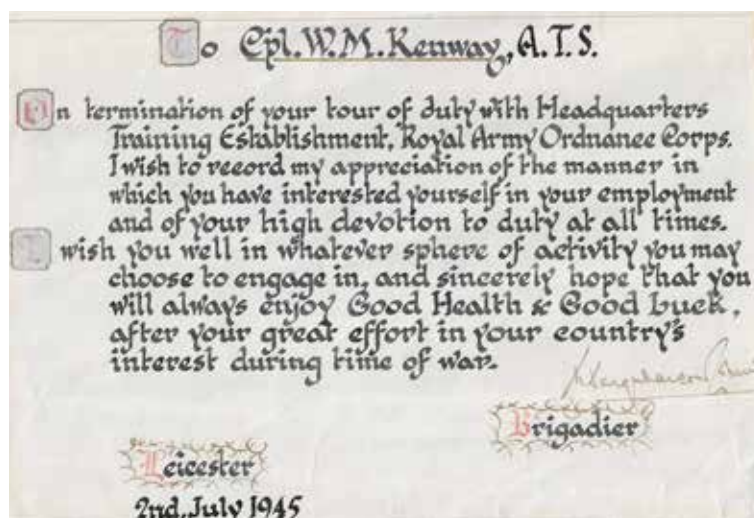
Just before the war her father retired and they moved to a flat in Southsea where Win looked after the family.

At the outbreak of WW2 her father was recalled to the Navy, and both her brothers joined the Navy too, so they put their home in storage (and eventually lost it in the bombing) and Win went to live with a friend. In 1940 she joined the ATS and served in Leicester. She married Henry (nicknamed Bud), whom she had met as a teenager, in 1943. On demob they returned to Southsea for 3 years and their daughter Pam was born (1946) and in 1949 they moved to Woodford Green where John was born (1956). In 1964 Bud's job (Customs & Excise) took him to Harwich so they moved to Lexden where they spent many happy years.

Win led a full life, joining Lexden WI and supporting 6 charities. Her love of swimming took her to Lexden springs to swim with the children. She and Bud loved walking and had wonderful holidays in France, Austria and Germany, as well as in England and Scotland. She lived for her family and friends, and her love of gardening. Sadly Bud died suddenly in 1999 at the age of 79. With the help of two friends, Eileen and Margaret, she returned to Lexden church where she found a warm and friendly welcome and she was supported throughout by her loving family and kind neighbours.

In 2022 Win decided that she could no longer cope with running her home. Her good friend Marie Holt persuaded her to move to Freda Gunton Lodge, where she spent the last few years of her life being waited on 'hand and foot' by Amy and her absolutely brilliant loving carers. It was so good to see her so happy in this loving, safe environment for her final days.

*John Kenway (son)*



## ENA COLLYMORE-WOODSTOCK, MBE OD

### 10 September 1917 - 2 December 2025

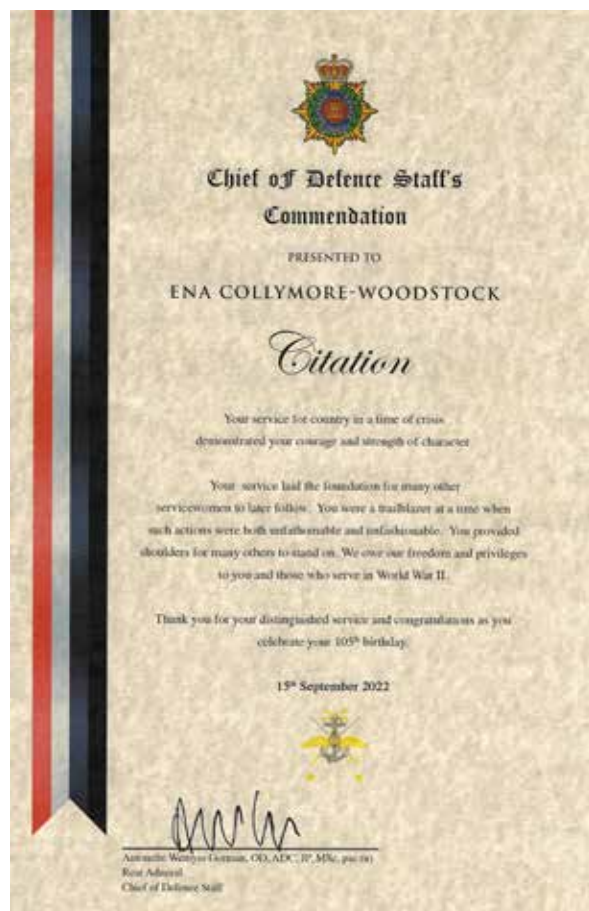
Ena Joyce St Clare Collymore was born in Spanish Town, Jamaica in 1917, which was then one of the colonies of the British West Indies. The daughter of Frank, a stationmaster, and Madeline, a postmistress. Frank died when Ena was young and she moved with her mother, brother and two sisters to Kingston. She attended St Hugh's High School for Girls where she enjoyed being in the Girl Guides and playing netball. Ena wanted to support the war effort and was in the first group of women to volunteer to join the ATS from the West Indies. She enlisted in Bristol on 2 March 1945 and served until 29 June 1948.

Ena did her training at Glen Parva Barracks, South Wigston, Leicestershire and during the two weeks there she underwent intelligence and educational tests, interviews and trade allocation. After initial training, she was posted to Camberley to train as a driver. On her course intake of 42 only 8 of them passed! Queen Elizabeth II, who joined up just before Ena as a Subaltern, also did her driver training at the same time. They were taught to drive 15 cwt trucks and to map read as well as vehicle maintenance. Ena was ambitious and keen for adventure and to see the world so she wrote to the War Office to ask to be moved closer to the fighting and to be given greater responsibility. She was posted to an Ack Ack gun battery, and worked on a radar truck as an operator identifying hostile aircraft and relaying this data to a targeting officer. During air raids she worked under great pressure providing constant updates to ensure that the guns were accurately aimed. Later in the war she served as a radar operator in Belgium, close to the front line.

Before joining the ATS Ena had worked at the courthouse in Spanish Town, Jamaica, so after the war she decided to continue her legal career. She studied Law in London in 1946 at Gray's Inn – the first woman of colour to do so. After she was called to the Bar in 1948 Ena returned home to Jamaica where she became Clerk of Courts and was subsequently appointed Assistant Crown Solicitor.

Ena married Horace Victor Woodstock, a civil servant, in 1951 and they had two daughters and a son. In 1959, she made history as the first woman Resident Magistrate to preside in the Civil Court. "I was the only woman holding judicial office," she recalled. "People came to court just to look at me!"

In 1967 Ena was honoured as a Member of the British Empire for her work, and in 1975 was given the Order of Distinction for her contributions to the justice system of Jamaica. Ena died in December 2025, aged 108.





## DORIS SAGAR

2 May 1922 - 7 October 2025

Doris was born in Oulton Broad near Lowestoft in 1922. She attended Lowestoft Grammar School but missed her 'A' Levels due to the outbreak of WW2 so instead she enlisted into the ATS on 22nd February 1940.

After her enlistment, Doris was sent to the Training Battalion of the Grenadier Guards in Windsor. She felt very lucky to be in Windsor as she regularly saw the young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret riding their horses in the grounds of Windsor Castle. In February 1942 she was posted to Combined Operations HQ at Richmond Terrace, Whitehall under Lord Louis Mountbatten where she was employed as a Drawing Office Assistant. It was there that she met her future husband Ken(yon) Sagar who was a Draughtsman. After they were married they were not allowed to work together so Doris was posted to Ripon and then Perth in Scotland from where she was demobbed at the end of the war.

In 1953, Doris and Ken moved back to Felixstowe where Ken had a position at Fisons. Doris brought up their three children and then worked in a printers in the collating department.

She loved gardening, grew all her own vegetables and was brilliant at knitting and sewing - a real home maker! At the age of 70, she started tap dancing lessons!

Following a short illness Doris decided to move into Foxgrove Care Home, Lowestoft for respite care and ended up spending her final years there as a long-term resident due to the outbreak of the Pandemic. She was very happy at Foxgrove, always smiling yet still keeping the carers on their toes! She reached the grand age of 103 before passing away this year. Doris is survived by her three daughters, five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. She will be greatly missed by them all.

*(Footnote: Doris wrote her reminiscences in an article headed 'In My Day' which featured on Page 82 of Lioness 2/2024.)*

Carol Beaumont (Daughter)



## BARBARA HURMAN (NÉE SANDERS)

6th Aug 1925 - 18th December 2025



Barbara left school aged 16 and learned typing and shorthand at secretarial college in Cumbria. She was assigned war work in the wages department of a local ammunitions factory, a job that she didn't find very fulfilling and so she enlisted in the ATS as a Teleprinter Operator. Following training in Strathpeffer and Edinburgh, she was posted to Combined Ops Signals stationed at A Company, Fort Widley, Portsmouth in April 1944. As she later recalled, she was woken one night to watch the gliders departing to take part in the opening phase of the D-Day landings.

In January 1945, Barbara volunteered to go overseas and took the Troopship RMS Scythia to Naples, Italy with the Central Mediterranean Force where she was attached to 605 company ATS, 54 Area Signals, Bari; 601 Company ATS, 2 District Signals, Milan; and GHQ ATS, Royal Signals Corps, Caserta, Naples and Padua. She was discharged from the ATS in April 1947 as a Sergeant, her military conduct: Exemplary.

Subsequently Barbara worked as a secretary for NAAFI in Egypt where she met and married Gordon who, coincidentally, also took part in the D-Day operations on the landing crafts. The couple returned to the UK to raise a family and twenty years later, with the children grown up, Barbara

finally felt able to study and started her career in Archaeology which she pursued as a Finds Specialist and Illustrator until well into her nineties!

As a nonagenarian she also started voluntary work for the Royal British Legion - giving a reading in Westminster Abbey at the 70th anniversary of VE Day; assisting the Royal Family in their 2019 'Together at Christmas' launch; and then, aged 99, taking part in the celebrations at Buckingham Palace to mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day, during which she was introduced to King Charles.

Barbara was lucky enough to celebrate her 100th birthday in August 2025 surrounded by her family, three children, three grandchildren and four great grandchildren, before passing away peacefully at home four months later.

Andrew Hurman (son)



# Last Post



**Cadlin**, Mrs Margaret, of Kirby Green, Lincoln, on 28th December 2023 (WRAC)  
**Collymore-Woodstock**, Mrs Ena, of Barbados, on 2nd December 2025 (ATS)  
**Connor**, Miss Dawn née Carlisle, of Middlewich, on 24th November 2025 (WRAC)  
**Cundy-Borge**, Mrs Jean née Evans, of Plymouth, on 25th November 2025 (ATS)  
**Doe**, Mrs Jean née Cotter, of Romsey, on 5th November 2025 (Women's Land Army and WRAC (TA) )  
**Fearon**, Captain Liz, of Dorchester, on 29th November 2025 (WRAC)  
**Harper**, Mrs Anne née Pote, of Yelverton, on 29th May 2025 (WRAC)  
**Hayman**, Mrs Christine, of Biggleswade, on 4th October 2025 (WRAC)  
**Hurman**, Mrs Barbara, of Aylesbury, on 18th December 2025 (ATS)  
**Kenway**, Mrs Winifred Mary née Collins, of Colchester, on 1st May 2025 (ATS)  
**Lafferty**, Mrs Muriel, of Sutton Coldfield, on 27th July 2025 (WRAC)  
**Laycock**, WO1 (RSM) Val, of Surrey, in December 2025 (WRAC)  
**Le Vaillant**, Mrs Margaret Jean 'Jeanie', of Southport, on 25th October 2025 (WRAC)  
**McMahon**, Mrs Patricia, of Lutterworth, on 20th December 2025 (WRAC)  
**Page**, Captain Honor née Matthews, of Royal Wootton Bassett, on 18th Jan 2026 (WRAC)  
**Philemon**, Mrs Tracey, of Milton Keynes, on 24th March 2025 (WRAC)  
**Phillips**, Miss Sally née Hayes, of Liverpool, on 23 January 2026 (WRAC)  
**Pollitt**, Miss Margaret, of Romford, on 22nd August 2025 (ATS)  
**Pritchard**, Mrs Myfanwy née Roberts, of Prestatyn, on 27th March 2025 (WRAC)  
**Richardson**, Mrs Maria née Gibbons, of Watford, on 31st December 2025 (WRAC)  
**Roberts**, Mrs Joyce née Looney, of Sompting, on 2nd November 2025 (ATS)  
**Sagar**, Mrs Doris, of Felixstowe, on 7th October 2025 (ATS)  
**Schwartz**, Mrs Karen, of Hingham, on 2nd April 2025 (WRAC)  
**Stedman**, Miss Dorothy, of Kent, on 11th August 2025 (WRAC)  
**Wild**, Mrs Sylvia, née Cook, of Cardiff, on 5 January 2025 (ATS)  
**Woolford**, Mrs Barbara, of Knottingley, on 22nd February 2025 (WRAC)



## Legacies and Donations



### In Memoriam

Since the last Lioness kind donations were made by individuals and branches in memory of the following:

**Maj Wilma Carruthers Armstrong**  
**Col Anne Clissitt**  
**WO1 Jackie Foulds**  
**Nina Keoghane**  
**Marjorie McVittie**

### Legacies

The WRAC Association very much appreciated the legacy bequeathed by:

**Maj Jane Freebairn**  
**WO2 Jean Pauline Gray**  
**Joyce Logan**  
**Maj (QM) Ann Maskens-McIntyre**  
**Sarah Brown Orr**  
**Sylvia Prior**  
**Myfanwy Pritchard**





## The WRAC Association is open to all female veterans.

Whether you served in the Royal Navy, the British Army or the Royal Air Force you'll find a home within our association.

If you have female friends who served in the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force, why not encourage them to join today. It's free, and we can link them up with other female veterans nearby.

Plus serving women are also welcome, so if you have daughters, granddaughters, goddaughters or nieces

currently serving,

tell them about

the WRAC

Association.

It's great to hear

news from them

about the modern

Armed Forces and

to share our proud

history with them.



Let's keep the camaraderie going and the conversation flowing.

[wraca.org.uk/join](http://wraca.org.uk/join)

# Association Notices A-Z

**Change of Address** - Please remember to notify us of any change of address. Every time Lioness is distributed a number of copies are returned as we are unaware that members have moved.

**Donations** - You can donate to the Association at any time. More information can be found in this edition. Donations can also be made online via the Association website or by phone on 0300 400 1992.

**Dress on Parade - In line with the Royal British Legion and other Regimental Associations, parade dress is to be smart and appropriate; the norm is for dark colours.**

Since the Association is no longer an active Corps, Stable belts and forage caps should NOT be worn. However, the Corps beret may be worn. See Medals & Badges etiquette below for further information.

**Event Tickets** - We occasionally receive free tickets for events, or invitations to attend functions organised by The Not Forgotten, Mission Motorsport etc. These will be advertised to members via our official Association social media pages.

**Lioness** - If you would like us to consider including an article in the next edition of Lioness please contact the editorial team to discuss - [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)

Please send photos as attachments to the email; do NOT copy and paste them into a document, as it makes life very difficult this end. Ideally, send just 3 or 4 good quality photos (jpg format only). Additionally, if you can give names to people in a photo that would be helpful, and we will try and include them.

**Medals and Badges Etiquette** - Etiquette rules for wearing medals only allow the wearing of official awards.

- The WRAC Association badge and the Veterans badge may be worn on the left lapel by the position of the buttonhole.
- Medals awarded in service to an individual are to be worn on the left breast of a jacket
- The medals awarded to a deceased Service/ex-service person may be worn on the right breast by a near relative (no more than one group should be worn by any individual).
- Unofficial medals, or badges, other than the WRAC Association badge/pin and Veterans badge, should not be worn when representing the WRAC Association.
- Unofficial purchased medals and foreign medals which do not have the Sovereign's permission to be worn are not allowed.

**Memorabilia** - We have a selection of Association Memorabilia available to purchase online via the website, by post or by phone.

**Overseas Members** - Overseas members are requested to pay £15 to cover additional Lioness postage cost. Only Sterling payment can be accepted. Digital copies of The Lioness are free

**Remembrance** - The Association receives a small number of tickets to the Opening Ceremony of the Field of Remembrance. These will be allocated via a ballot. The Field of Remembrance is then open to the general public so you can visit without a ticket.

We are also allocated a number of places to march at the Cenotaph each year. If you would like to be considered for either, please email [events@wraca.org.uk](mailto:events@wraca.org.uk)

Please note that the RBLs criteria for the Cenotaph parade is that participation is only open to veterans - no carers unless they also served. You will need to provide photo ID.

As one of only two regiments that have the Freedom of the Borough of Guildford this is a very symbolic venue for the Association. We are invited each year to the Service of Remembrance in Guildford. Please consider attending here if you are unable to attend the Cenotaph.

**At time of going to press we confirm that the dates for 2026 are:**

**Field of Remembrance Opening Ceremony - Thursday 5 November 2026**

**Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph Parade - Sunday 8 November 2026**

**Guildford Borough Remembrance - Sunday 8 November 2026**

Only one Association wreath is permitted to be laid at The Cenotaph. We are happy to provide one wreath per area to be laid locally, please speak to your Area Coordinator about this.

**Service Records & Veterans UK** - Veterans UK is your one-stop shop for all queries about Service Records, Medals, Pensions and much more. Go to [www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info) or phone 0808 1914 218.

**Volunteering: join our wonderful group of volunteers** - Do you have time to give to your Association? We're always keen to hear from anyone who would like to volunteer for us and we have a variety of roles and tasks to suit whether you can give a little time or a lot. Maybe you would like to assist HQ in the many areas of running the Association, perhaps you can see yourself as a branch organiser, an area coordinator, or a trustee. Please email our Operations Officer: [membership@wraca.org.uk](mailto:membership@wraca.org.uk).

**WRAC Dinner Club** - The WRAC Dinner Club meets every year on the second Saturday in October (Saturday 10th October 2026)

**Women's Army Officers' Dining Club.** - Women's Army Officers' Dining Club Dinner will take place on Saturday 21st November 2026.

For more details email [wracofficersdc@gmail.com](mailto:wracofficersdc@gmail.com) or visit the Facebook Closed Group 'WRAC Officers' Dining Club'.



WRAC Association, mailing address - Unit 11, Basepoint Business Centre, 1 Winnall Valley Road,  
Winchester, SO23 0LD

Tel: 0300 400 1992 (local rate call, including mobiles) Email: [office.manager@wraca.org.uk](mailto:office.manager@wraca.org.uk)

Benevolence: [benfund@wraca.org.uk](mailto:benfund@wraca.org.uk)

Lioness: [editor@wraca.org.uk](mailto:editor@wraca.org.uk)

Website: [wraca.org.uk](http://wraca.org.uk)



**Membership of the WRAC Association is FREE  
and open to any woman who served or is currently serving in  
the Royal Navy, British Army or Royal Air Force**

**Recommend a friend to keep the sisterhood growing  
and the camaraderie flowing**