

LIONESSES

THE SERVICEWOMEN'S CHARITY

GUILTY



Extra! Extra!
Read all about it!

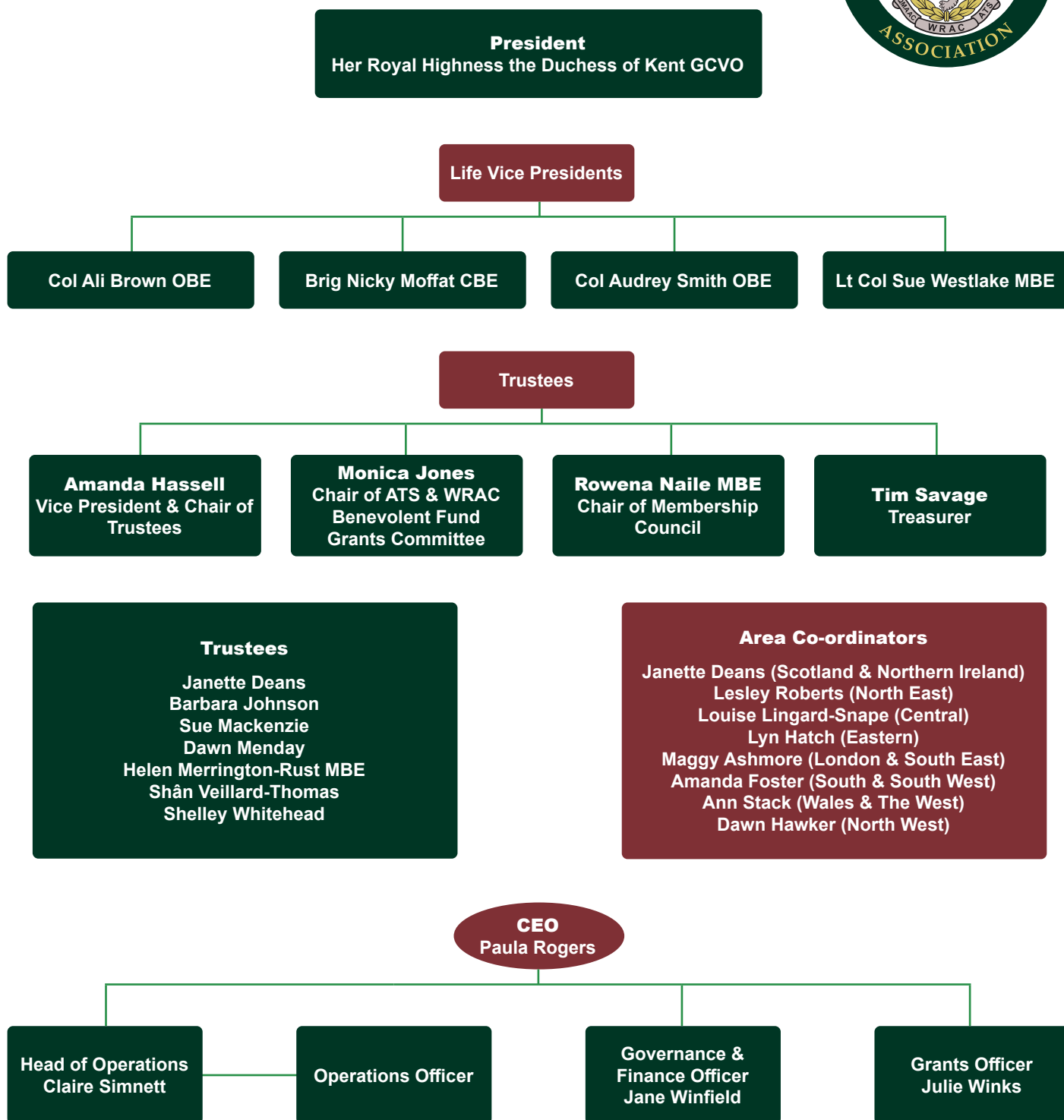
350 women found enjoying a 'Grand Reunion'

DOZENS of ex-soldiers discovered infiltrating war-time code-breaking facility

ONE miscreant sent to the county gaol



WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION



Message from the Vice President



I joined the board of trustees in 2017 and am delighted to step up into the role of Vice President this year. I must thank Fiona Gardner for her dedication and commitment in leading this charity for the last four years. Fiona was the driving force in developing our influence campaign. She has used her service network to ensure we are embedded in a number of key organisations where we can exert our influence and ensure our voice is heard. To quote Fiona "we are now in the room for the discussions that count." At our July trustee meeting I welcomed Janette Deans to join our board, I know the board will benefit from Janette's experience and skills. I hope that together with the trustees I can continue to promote the inclusion of women and female issues in policy development, championing better outcomes for women and better recognition for female veterans.

The Grand Reunion in Cardiff was a fitting occasion to say thank you and farewell not only to Fiona but also to Reverend Susan Wing who stood down as our Association Chaplain and we welcomed Trudy Hobson CF as our new Padre. Alongside all the singing, dancing and reminiscing the highlight of the weekend for many, myself included, was to witness the restoration of berets and cap badges to six brave and courageous women. None of us will forget the guard of honour provided by the ladies who had previously received their berets at our event in Guildford, nor the extraordinary and heartfelt speech from Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE who so candidly relayed her personal experiences and empathised with those women who were unable to be their true selves and follow their chosen career path. You can read her full address on page 18. I must thank the membership council, volunteers, and our staff team who worked so hard to make the Grand Reunion weekend such a success.



Since the Grand Reunion, the Association has been busy supporting a number of events which I was delighted to attend. I joined many of our members taking part in the King's Lynn 10K and who all completed the event in under 2 hours on that windy and somewhat chilly Sunday morning (see p40). I was honoured to attend the VE Day Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey alongside fellow trustee Barbara Johnson (see p37), and that evening joined a number of our members at the VE80 Concert at Horse Guards Parade witnessing a Lancaster bomber flying low directly above our heads and seeing such joy on the faces of the WWII veterans tucked up in their warm blankets (see p38). I also met some of the inspirational women who contributed to the Legasee project at the AGC Museum launch event (see p13), whilst the Summer Event at Bletchley Park (see p58) and cheering on our Lionesses at the Chatsworth cricket (see p46) were other memorable events this summer!

I am so looking forward to meeting many more of you at our future events, do please come and chat to me as I'd love to hear your fabulous memories of service, friendship and camaraderie.

Amanda Hassell

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Message from the Chair of the Membership Council



We certainly had a great time at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff back in March - the noise level at all the social events and the weary faces in the mornings confirmed that! Thank you to everybody who was involved in the smooth running of the weekend, in particular the staff who worked their socks off. The Wales and West area ladies provided superb support at registration and were a really positive interface with the officer cadets from the Officer Training Corps. It was a full-on weekend and there is no doubt in my mind that Josephine Marchant was the star of the weekend - attending her first event at 82 and meeting someone who she was in training with - summing up exactly what we are about.



Josephine Marchant (seated) with her contemporary Christine Hebburn (left) and Sandy Cawley

This year the WRAC Association was represented at both the 10km in King's Lynn and at the Ride the Night (see p32) I thoroughly enjoyed both events, and had the honour of carrying Mo Bear at the 10km and cycling with a great group of members at Ride the Night.

I have been catching up with Association members at The Governor's Review at the Royal Hospital Chelsea - so much better for Association members than Founder's Day as the In-Pensioners have the time to talk to you (and drink with you!) as their families are not there for the Governor's Review. Even though it was a touch damp it was a great day and wonderful to see so many of our ladies on parade. I have also been to the Wales and West AGM in Bicester where I heard such wonderful reports of what the branches had been doing - at different times of day and the week to include all the differing requirements of their members.

I am delighted to say we now have 4381 members of the Association, of which 2099 are in HQ Branch (there are also some 1699 still recorded as being in now non-active branches). One of the benefits of being a member of a local branch is that the Membership Council gets feedback from the area coordinators as to what their members need or want, and the branches are kept informed by the area coordinators as to the decisions and discussions of the Membership Council. I am concerned as Chair of the Membership Council that almost half of our members are not able to easily put forward their views on matters such as events. It would be great if you could join a local branch (or just let us know that you are in a branch!) so we can support you better. If the events that are organised on a local level do not suit you, there is nothing to stop you organising activities or events at suitable times to you - the more the merrier - and Association HQ can assist with finding members within localities/postcodes.



I would like to welcome 2 new Area Coordinators to the Membership Council, Louise Lingard-Snape for the Central Region and Maggy Ashmore for London and the South East; thank you for volunteering your time and I am sure you will find the role rewarding.

I look forward to seeing lots of you in the next few months - please invite me to your branch meetings.



The View from HQ

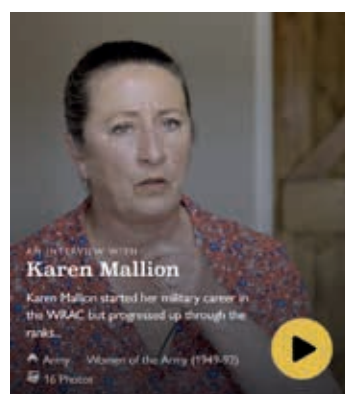
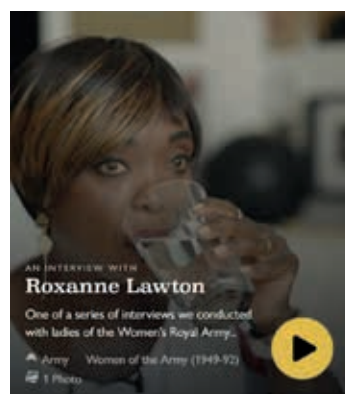
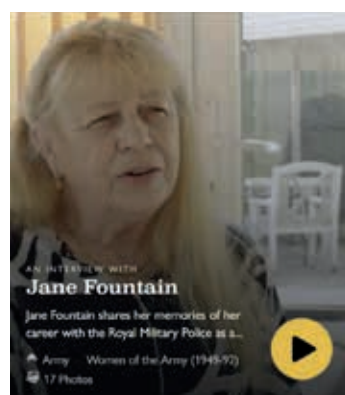
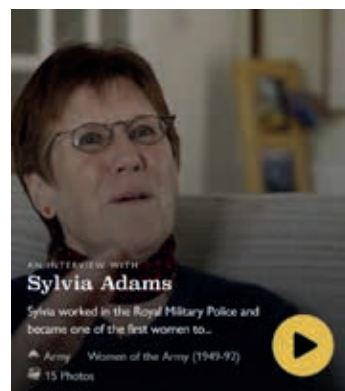


What a summer! We've been in celebration mode for the majority of the year, and no-one at HQ is complaining about that! From pulling off an amazing Grand Reunion to welcoming members to Bletchley Park, it has been all go. You can see photos from events big and small throughout the magazine - we really do scrub up well!

Thanks to all those who came forward after seeing the request in the Lioness, 30 Association members were interviewed for Legasee's project to film WRAC veterans. The interviews are available online, as featured on our Facebook page, and the launch was a great success - read more about it on page 13.

On the subject of social media, here's a poser: when is a Facebook page not a Facebook page? When it's a Facebook group! We are often asked why non-members are able to comment on our posts, and the answer is that we are not a closed group, we are a public page. We use Facebook to reach as wide an audience as possible, to encourage other female veterans to engage with us, and to let the rest of the world know about the fabulous sisterhood that is the WRAC Association. And yes, the downside is that sometimes we find a troll on there, but we delete their comment as soon as we see it, and appreciate people letting us know if they see inappropriate content. We also need to keep our own comments appropriate and kind, so please keep negativity away from our socials so we can ensure our online community is happy and healthy. If you have an issue, please email us directly and we will do our best to deal with it, and if you see content you love, please share it widely so more people get to appreciate the wonderful world of the WRAC.

With this issue you will have received our latest Annual Report. I hope you enjoy reading about the charity's achievements and plans for the future. We've had a bit of a switcharound at HQ. Nikki Shepherd joined at the start of the year but was unfortunately unable to continue in the role, meaning we have been one staff member down for a while now. All the HQ staff have stepped up to make sure that we still provide our members with an amazing experience, and none more so than Claire Simnett (photo below) who worked tirelessly in her role as Membership and Volunteering Officer. Many of you will have met Claire at the Grand Reunion really making sure she got the party started! I am pleased to announce that Claire has accepted the position of Head of Operations as she continues to oversee all matters of membership, events and the Lioness. We will bring you news of our new Operations Officer in the next issue.



Finally for this issue, I would like to add my thanks, alongside Amanda's, to Fiona Gardner. Fiona employed me as her CEO as soon as she began her tenure as VP, and at a time when many expected the role needed a WRAC veteran to run the show. Her faith in me and her unwavering support has allowed us to take some of our brave and transformational decisions, including joining the Cobseo Executive Board, merging our funding streams and working for the inclusion of women in the OVA's Veterans Strategy. Fiona's strong guidance and tolerance of my civvie notions have been pivotal in delivering the vibrant and influential Association we have today. Thank you Fiona, and here's to continued success with Amanda.

Hailing: Amanda Hassell Vice President and Chair of the Board of Trustees



Since joining the Board of Trustees in 2017 much has happened in my personal life. I left the regular army, bought a house near Winchester and embedded myself into village and community life after a 32-year mobile Army career. I continued to serve in the Reserves and latterly on Full Time Reserve Service until 2022. Since then, I have taken on several new appointments and managed to fill my diary - how did I ever find the time for a full-time job? I have been appointed as a tribunal member for the War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation scheme (thanks to Isabel McCord for telling me about this wonderful opportunity to serve the Armed Forces community). I run my local branch of the Royal British Legion, sit on the Joint Audit Committee for Hampshire Constabulary and the Police and Crime Commissioner, and I've been appointed to the Independent Monitoring Board for Winchester prison. My hobbies are important to me and include watching cricket as a member of the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lords, walking our lovely Labrador Casper with my husband Michael, and fulfilling my destiny of becoming as obsessed with gardening as my mother!



Over the last eight years I've enjoyed attending WRAC Association social events and getting to know many of our members. My first experience was the Southampton Grand Reunion where I couldn't quite believe the exuberant singing and dancing at the dinner! Joining Cycle Fest 2021 was memorable - I turned up a bit late, no tent or van, not knowing anyone except Rowena, but was found a bed, fish and chips and a beer, and was made to feel so welcome and amongst friends. This year I've completed my second 10K with the Lionesses, and whilst in York I completed the race in under 1 hour, this year (having badly broken my leg in 2022) I was content to walk/jog with Pip and the wheelchair team; what a fabulous group of determined women I witnessed completing the King's Lynn 10K.

I am very proud of the reach and influence that has been achieved by the evolving WRAC Association in the last few years. I can honestly say that we are a well-run charity, the envy of many in the sector. We are incredibly fortunate to have such dedicated and loyal staff working to support our trustees, area coordinators and membership. Being local to the office, I am able to pop in regularly and see the staff team in Sir John Moore Barracks – and enjoy lunch together in the soldiers canteen! They work incredibly hard to arrange interesting, inclusive and professionally run membership events, to support all our members with their queries, to facilitate inclusivity and participation, and to keep everyone informed. There is a lot to do and there never seems to be a 'quiet' period, but that is because we all want to do as much as we can collectively to support our valued members. I am particularly looking forward to the launch of the Female Veterans Transformation Programme Toolkit later this year and of course to further cap badge and beret presentations. I hope I will meet many more of you this year and look forward to serving the Association as your Vice President.



Hailing: The Revd Trudy Hobson CF WRAC Association Honorary Padre

Originally from Birmingham, I joined the Royal Air Force as a musician (Trumpet, Cornet, Flugel, Fanfare Trumpet, and Post Horn) aged 18, performing in concert halls across the UK and worldwide, including on various occasions for Queen Elizabeth II. I was privileged to be part of the procession for the Queen Mum's Funeral, and the Festival of Remembrance followed by the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph. I also provided a Battle of Britain Parade and entertainment for soldiers in Iraq, and many times performed at the Royal Edinburgh Tattoo and Tattoos worldwide.

Whilst in the RAF, I gained various Musical Diplomas and a Diploma in Criminology, as well as a BA degree in History and Religious Studies. I was the Coxswain for the RAF in many national and international competitions and events. I regularly run half marathons although these days, these have made way for the much-preferred Mud Obstacle Races.



After serving in the RAF for 13 years, I followed my calling to ordained ministry in the Church of England studying Theology at The College of the Resurrection, Mirfield. I went on to be a Curate in Brigg, North Lincolnshire and then followed God's call to move to Wiltshire to serve as Team Rector of 10 churches in the Upper Wylde Valley Benefice. Serving in the Salisbury Diocese and with my previous military experience, it was clear that God wanted me to explore Army Chaplaincy, which I duly did and rejoined the military, this time in the British Army in January 2023.

I have now been part of RACHD for a few of years and enjoying a full and fulfilling ministry serving firstly the Royal Lancers (Queen Elizabeth's Own), and then posting to 5th Regiment Royal Artillery with whom I deployed on Op TOSCA. I am excited to be deployable anywhere that God and the RACHD need me to serve the soldiers and families of the Army.



Coming to the WRAC Grand Reunion in March 2025 was rather an adventure. For a start I was on Op TOSCA and was flying back to arrive at Cardiff for the Gala Dinner. But as they say "no plan survives first contact". I was sitting on the plane which would get me back to the UK with plenty of time to slowly make my way to the Gala Dinner so that I could arrive, rested, refreshed and looking fabulous. Then as we tried to take off the pilot slammed on the brakes, not once, but twice! At around 0100 we were then told that we could not fly and that the next flight would be the next day, late evening which would have resulted in me missing everything! Luckily, I was able to get a flight at 1030 the next morning, and being military, I was well acquainted with "hurry up and wait" as I sat in the airport all night waiting to check in for my flight. Unfortunately this did result in me missing the Gala Dinner and arriving, a little less than rested, refreshed and fabulous, at 0130 and was hugely impressed to see the party still going strong! I managed to get a few hours sleep and a good breakfast so that I could take part in the Sunday morning service and parade. I loved every minute with you all. Everyone is so welcoming and I just know I am going to fit right in.



Well, 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.....)

I look forward to seeing you all again soon and serving you for many years to come.

Hailing: Stacey Denyer FVTP Communication & Engagement Officer



I served 19 years in the Royal Air Force Police, with multiple tours of the Middle East under my belt. I always had a passion for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and was a Defence DEI Advisor, Comms Lead for the RAF Disability & Carers Network, and member of the RAF's LGBTQ+ and Gender Networks, with my last posting being on Air Command's DEI

Team. Aside from DEI, my career portfolio has included law enforcement, instructing, air platform security, recruiting, and counterintelligence.

I was working as the Royal British Legion's DEI Officer before this fresh challenge as the Comms & Engagement Officer for the Female Veterans Transformation Programme, and also set up my own freelance DEI consultancy.

I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in 2010, which, paired with arthritic knees, led to medical discharge in 2023. I competed in the Invictus Games Dusseldorf in 2023, earning a bronze medal in indoor rowing. I now hold multiple British records in para indoor rowing, and advocate for adaptive and inclusive sports. I have recently started playing wheelchair basketball for Police UK Disability Sport where I am an ambassador and indoor rowing coach.



Being a part of the Every Body Moves Lived Experience Advisory Board meant that I was involved with ParalympicsGB behind the scenes and selected as a torchbearer for the Paris 2024 Paralympic Torch Relay. I was recently selected to form part of the newly created ParalympicsGB Social Impact Lived Experience Advisory Board.

I'm hopeful that my years of being an extrovert - constantly networking and building connections - will help spread the word about the Female Veterans Toolkit and ensure that our team's work on this programme continues to make an impact long after the project ends.

Hailing: Louise Lingard-Snape Central Area Coordinator



Enlisting in 1987, I won a cornet place in the unique WRAC Staff Band. Imagine my excitement, trepidation and delight as an 18-year-old. I had wanted to join the band since I was around 12 years old as a professional music career appeared to be both my ambition and destiny.

I thoroughly enjoyed all my service including a period of service at The Royal Military School of Music and then a posting to The Royal Logistic Corps Staff Band at Deepcut.

Touring Hong Kong, Canada, The Falklands, BAOR, Berlin, Cyprus, Australia, Norway, Poland, Europe and Uruguay, amongst playing for Senior Royals at Buckingham Palace Garden Parties, concerts, parades and investitures, I fulfilled all of my dreams in playing my way around the world and of course, partying around all the continents.

Having left the Army and gained a degree in Criminal Psychology, I worked in IT and got married to Linsey. Now a Judge in the Family Court in South Yorkshire, I balance my time between my two adopted daughters and being Director of Music of The Yorkshire Military Band.



I was proud to be approached to become an area coordinator and am very happy to become more involved in the WRAC Association in this role. I hope to catch up with you all soon and look forward to getting round to branch meetings in due course. If anyone wishes to contact me, please do not hesitate.

Hailing: Janette Deans Trustee

I am delighted and honoured to become a Trustee. I had thought about it for a while and it became a case of 'if you don't apply, you will never know!' I hope that my experience of working as Area Coordinator of Scotland and Northern Ireland will prove to be valuable as a trustee. At the same time, I am sorry to be standing down as Area Coordinator, it is such a privilege to work and meet up with fabulous veterans. That said, I still need to find a replacement! Something else for my to do list!



Commissioning course WRAC 6 was the first course to do all of their training at Sandhurst and wow did some of the men complain about women living in Old College! Perhaps they are still complaining! It is 40 years since my passing out of Sandhurst and it was truly a Sovereign's parade with our late Queen Elizabeth II (I of Scotland!) as the inspecting officer. I followed a very familiar path on commissioning: Assistant Adjutant, Troop Commander, Admin Officer, recruiting, Falklands and finally to Guildford (I still have the sweatshirt!). My tour at Guildford as 2IC of Training Company must have been too much for me because I left shortly afterwards. My career since then has been varied; freelance cook, training coordinator/consultant, administrator within the regulatory world and currently I work in the financial sector as an Office Manager. It is fair to say that I like change... to retirement?!

Hailing: Maggy Ashmore London and South East Area Coordinator



I joined the WRAC in 1972 as a driver and during this time I did two tours in Northern Ireland in Londonderry and two and a half years at 68 Squadron RCT in Germany - in total nearly seven years. I was also a Prison Officer for thirteen years until I was badly assaulted and retired from the service. I then got a degree in Art, Design and Media and went on to work at many schools working with teenagers with special needs. I was a foster carer for eight years before becoming a Chelsea Pensioner.

At the moment I have been the chairperson for the Greater London Branch for about eleven months and in that time I have secured a venue for our meetings and run the meetings on time, and enjoyed sending in articles for the Lioness magazine.

After being voted-in as the coordinator for the London and South East I am looking forward to recruiting more members and setting up more groups in this area as the membership rises. I am also looking forward to getting to know the group members already in the area and providing assistance where needed. I will activate online meetings to enable a more cohesive region. This will also enable ideas to flow between the groups. I plan to visit each of the groups to introduce myself personally to allow for a more interactive approach in my new role and liaise between the region and Headquarters.



Farewell to: Brig Fiona Gardner CBE WRAC Association Vice President

It has been a privilege to be your Vice President for the last four years, the time has passed quickly and yet we seem to have packed in rather a lot. I look back at some of the highlights of which we should all be rightly proud; such as our Guildford weekend last October, the unveiling of our statue at the National Memorial Arboretum, the annual march past at the Cenotaph, the 'We Will Remember Her' campaign and the Etherton restorations. At local level the branch structure is expanding and membership has surged. There has also been significant progress on governance; a clear strategy, an identified natural end date for the Association, and achieving financial security through amalgamating our funds. The most far reaching work is still ongoing; our key role in the Female Veterans Transformation Programme.

There have also been some significant events that brought home the passing of time. The loss of our Patron, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, was particularly poignant for us. It was an honour to represent the Association at her funeral. More recently we held our first Grand Reunion at which there were no former ATS ladies in attendance. And in my time we said farewell to Life VP Lady Bruce, and to a number of WRAC characters who were well known to many, including Betty Webb.



Everything we have done, all we have achieved, has only been possible with our amazing staff and volunteers. We are very lucky to have an engaged Board of Trustees, some wise owls as Life Vice Presidents, and an incredibly committed HQ team led by Paula Rogers, our CEO. I am enormously grateful to everyone who runs the branches, to the area coords, the Lionesses who raise funds, and every member who shows up at events. My thanks to Rowena, Tim, Barbara, Monica and Isabel who have filled the Association Officer roles and without whose support I could not have done this role. To Paula, Claire, Jane and Julie; you are fantastic and it was wonderful to see you all being truly appreciated by members in Cardiff.



I have thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to be your VP and I know you will support Amanda as she leads the Association from strength to strength. I wish you all well and look forward to meeting up in the future.



As our WRAC and ATS membership gets older it is exciting to welcome veterans from other capbadges, but I do believe we must remember that our ATS and WRAC members are and always will be the core focus of the Association and this was really apparent at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff. The camaraderie, the sense of belonging, the connections renewed and made, the kindness and warmth with which every individual was welcomed, all speak to the power and importance of Association events and structures. There was also a tangible sense of pride in the Association and our contribution to the interests of female veterans.



Farewell to: The Revd Sue Wing WRAC Association Honorary Padre



Farewell seems to be a bit of a false heading as I am going nowhere, however I might just become a back seat rabble rouser! It is nearly 27 years since the late Brig Helen Meechie put my arm behind my back and suggested that I become the Association's Honorary Chaplain. With no real idea of what I should be doing I accepted. My first big service was at the Reunion in Cardiff and so 25 years later Cardiff was the same city, though different venue, for my last service as your Chaplain. Through the years we have shared many types of services and many locations from Perth to Southampton, Great Yarmouth to Cardiff, with the occasional stop in Yorkshire, Lancashire, the Midland Counties and even London.

Contrary to some people's impressions, we clergy do not rush out of Training College (mine was Durham) fully tooled up and I have had to scratch my head, take a deep breath and hope that the services will achieve what is needed, whether a funeral, a Reunion or a Dedication, sharing in the Cathedral services, being at the National Memorial Arboretum and so on. The list seems lengthy, and I was amazed when a list was read out at my last service at how much I had been allowed to do. The trouble with long lists is that you realise just how much time has passed and, just maybe, I am not as young as I used to be (banish the thought). Some have been on a big stage many more just simple funerals for members of my branch, but I have attempted to do my very best, with God's help, to get it right. Most of all without the support of you all and your help down the years, I could not have done any of it. It has been a great privilege to forge a path for this role and I am very sure that my successor, Padre Trudy Hobson, will come with brilliant and up-to-date ideas. It is very exciting to have a serving Padre as our Hon Chaplain.

Individual thanks are impossible to record but I have been supported, challenged, humbled by your kindnesses and achievements, and laughter has often been not far away. I have worked with several Vice Presidents, General Secretaries and CEO's and each has put something new into the pot to shape whatever we were doing. I was very touched and embarrassed by the farewell in the service in Cardiff and thrilled to be invited to conduct the Band at the end; no music training but I thought I might know the piece of music (Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill). Thankfully I was not driving home after the service as I was exhausted and emotionally overcome – yes really! My great thanks for the gifts of the framed photos and the lovely Selangor pewter goblets.

No one achieves anything on their own and certainly I needed all the support I received, and the hard work invested by others into the services and events that I just led. Thank you all for helping me to do the job and at the next Reunion I can relax and let Trudy take the strain.

*Just simply,
thank you all for
joining me in the
journey.*



Features

My name is Molly Pauper.

I am a widow and grandmother with 7 grandchildren, 6 of whom are in the workhouse and the 7th, a baby girl called Kaziah with me in prison. The years have been hard on me and my family. My daughter has passed away with the plague and my son-in-law is lost at sea, hence my imprisonment for getting into awful debt.

On the 17th of July I was arrested and incarcerated in Lancaster Castle Prison's A-Wing as a debtor. My head was shaved into what they call a "prison crop" - at least there is no chance of catching nits! Then I was given the worst news - if I could not pay my way out of debt I would be deported to Botany Bay, never again to see my grandchildren.

So I appealed for help hoping that someone, anyone, would come to my aid. Who would take pity on a poor, wretched woman such as me? Who would come to my rescue?



Well you can imagine how my heart sang when I heard the news! My debt was more than paid! Hearing about my plight, support had come in from some very surprising quarters including many soldiers and the Duchy of Lancaster - imagine little Molly Pauper receiving the support of The King!

By the 20th of July it was decided I was to be released from prison and not deported to Botany Bay so now I am free once more. But my story does not end there...

By luck I have managed to obtain every penny of the money that was given to pay my debt, and so now, as a thank you to all those who supported me, I am giving it to three charities who need it more than I do - The WRAC Association, Macmillan Nurses and The Not Forgotten. What will happen to me when I am found out? I know that I risk another arrest but you see I have a cunning plan. I shall change my name to "Pip Flegel" and live amongst those brave soldiers who helped secure my release. If there is one thing I know - they will always be there for me.

Thank you to you all - Molly xx



A Wonderful Legacy from Legasee

Back in 2023 we asked whether any members would like to be involved in an exciting new project with The Legasee Educational Trust – the UK's largest veterans video archive.

The charity records the experiences and observations of veterans of conflict from WWII until the present day with the aim 'to create the largest online film archive of this aspect of our social history that can be used for education, learning and better understanding for today's generation and many generations to come'. We were already aware of the great work they have been doing, and several veteran ATS and WRAC had already been recorded as part of their on-going work. But an opportunity to have a whole section of their archive dedicated to the WRAC? Too good to pass up!

Thanks to a grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project to capture and preserve the unique experiences of WRAC veterans was underway. Thirty of our members signed up and the process began to record their stories. With a diverse array of interviews committed to video, Legasee designed and built a beautiful four-sided display stand which went on a mini-tour beginning in Cardiff at the Grand Reunion where you may have seen it in the lobby, and on to the Holy Sepulchre in Holborn, London where Legasee CEO Martin Bisiker gave a talk to the assembled crowd attended by our Vice President Amanda Hassell.

Fast forward to May and the display had made its way to the AGC Museum at Peninsula Barracks, Winchester which will be its permanent home. This was cause for a celebration so what better excuse for a party? Many of the interviewees attended from all across the country alongside the Legasee team, staff from the WRAC Association, our Vice President Amanda Hassell, AG Corps Colonel Stuart Allen and Wildern School history teacher Mike Morrison who had welcomed Lt Col Sue Westlake to speak to their pupils as part of the project.



Following speeches from Martin Bisiker, Col Stuart and our CEO Paula, thank you flowers were presented, and everyone had an opportunity to chat, wander around the rest of the museum and have a good look at the new WRAC display which includes a video montage of clips from the interviewees.

As the attendees headed for home there was a strong sense of our voices being heard and our stories preserved for the future. Martin said "It was an honour to mark the handover of the WRAC oral history interviews at the AGC Museum. The exhibition now on display brings these stories to life, showcasing the voices of women who served during a time of profound change, both in the military and in society more widely.

"The WRAC's contribution has too often been overlooked. I hope that capturing their stories through the Trailblazers project has ensured that their experiences are preserved and shared with future generations.

"As we commemorate 80 years since the end of WWII, it feels especially important to recognise the women who walked the long road towards equality in the armed forces. The WRAC veterans we interviewed continue to inspire, reminding us of the courage it takes to break new ground and serve with distinction."

The interviews are all available to watch in full at legasee.org.uk/project/women-of-the-army-1949-92, and the AGC Museum is free of charge and open to the public Tuesday - Saturday or you can visit agcmuseum.org.uk



WRAC Grand Reunion Cardiff

WO1derwoman and my batwoman here - back for one issue to round up an amazing Grand Reunion. What a weekend - you girls certainly know how to party! We've seen some amazing photos and received some great reports from the 350 members who attended. So let's relive it together, starting with our Friday night welcome party. The fancy dress theme this year was 'Superheroes' and you ladies really put our costumes to shame! Such clever costumes and so many types of hero. The food and entertainment were excellent, with a fantastic live performance from DJ Nathan who turned out to have the most amazing operatic voice. Conga lines and costumes collided as our very own Supergirl Karin Spencer reports



Capes, Camo & Cake!

Let me tell you, Marvel and DC didn't have anything on the WRAC Cardiff Grand Reunion. From Supergirl to Chocolate Heroes, Cardiff had it all... and then some!

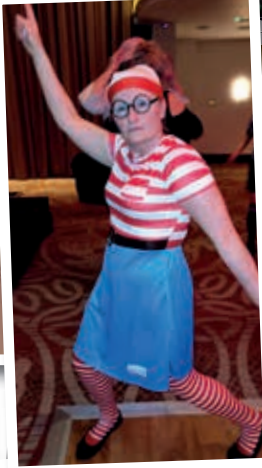
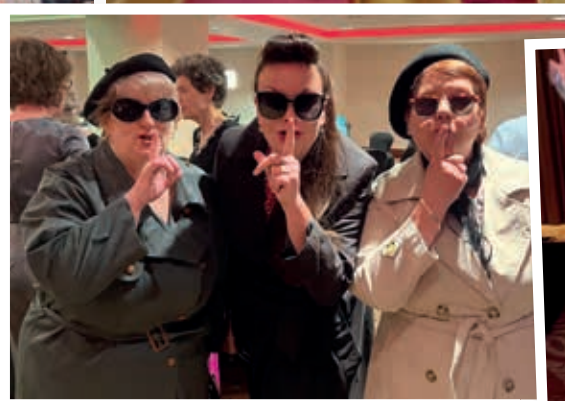
The excitement had been building for months. Group chats were buzzing, outfits were prepped, and glitter was applied liberally. When the day finally arrived, the atmosphere was electric.

We gathered at the beautiful venue, a sea of proud faces and shared history. Laughter echoed down hotel hallways as we reunited with our sisters in arms, reminiscing about field kitchens, foot drills, and friendships forged in fire. From the very first hug, it was clear: time may pass, but this bond is unbreakable. Even Paddington Bear made an appearance (rumour had it he heard about the dessert table and wasn't taking chances) and just when we thought the night couldn't get any better - a tribute to our beloved old boss, the late Queen Elizabeth. Okay, it was a cardboard mask and a rather regal impersonation, but the love, humour, and royal wave were spot-on. Her Majesty would've been proud. We certainly were.

As the sun set, the dance floor lit up, and so did we. Generations of veterans and serving soldiers danced the night away, some with just the right amount of orthopaedic-friendly twerking. One squad even pulled off the Electric Slide with sciatica. Heroes.

From Motown classics to disco divas, the tunes had us throwing shapes not seen since basic training — but with more prosecco, and far fewer shouted commands.





As the glitter settled and the last dance played, one thing was clear: we didn't just reunite — we recharged. Thank you, Cardiff. Roll on the next one!

An AGM to remember

Saturday afternoon came around and now out of fancy dress our members arrived for our Annual General Meeting - an annual event made all the more special by being part of our Grand Reunion and including some very important people and presentations.

Major General (Ret'd) Tim Hyams CB OBE, Chief Executive of the Army Benevolent Fund was our guest speaker, sharing a little of his own military career before giving a real insight into the work of the Soldiers' Charity.



With our trustees assembled on the stage, a comprehensive review of our year was given, and you can read the minutes and accounts from the meeting on page 96. Our AGM marked the end of Fiona Gardner's tenure as our Vice President and Chair of Trustees and you can read her farewell on page 10. After updates on Benevolence, Finance, Influence and Membership questions came from the floor on a wide variety of subjects before we headed for a comfort break and reassembled for the afternoon's presentations.





After the AGM the results of the Grand Draw and Silent Auction were announced. Huge thanks to Wendy Hooton and her amazing team of Lionesses for their hard work.



Beret and cap badge presentations

Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE joined us for this important ceremony, and has given us permission to print, in full, the words she spoke to the recipients and to all affected veterans as her heartfelt address moved everyone present.

I must admit to feeling more like a 2Lt than a Brigadier to be stood in front of this incredible audience of women. Most importantly though, and with absolutely sincerity, I know that we are all here amongst friends. It is truly an honour to join you in Cardiff as part of the WRAC Grand Reunion and to have the privilege of re-presenting six members of the Association with their Women's Royal Army Corps beret and cap badge. It is with great pride that we are pleased to welcome Lynne Armstrong, Cathy Cherry, Teresa Divers Lynn Downey, Claire Pridgeon, and Jan Tulloch. Before I make those presentations, I'd like to share a few reflections.

When I joined the Army in 1995, the ban on LGBT service personnel was still in place. I remember the anxiety, lies and fear that came with living a double life—concealing who I was, hiding my true self, feeling vulnerable and at risk. For years, the reality for all of our LGBT veterans was the need to edit our lives to protect our careers due to the blanket ban on LGBT personnel serving in the UK Armed Forces.

One day, a friend asked me, "Did you have a good weekend with your girlfriend?" He had learned to listen not just to what people say, but also to what they don't. That small moment changed everything, allowing me to live more authentically - in trusted company, at least.

When the ban on LGBT service personnel was lifted in 2000, that glimpse of authenticity became reality for me. Today, I am fortunate to have served for nearly 30 years in an Army that embraces diversity and inclusivity. This progress is due to the relentless bravery and determination of those who fought for change—those who stood up for my rights and for a better, more inclusive British Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy. But for hundreds of LGBT veterans, the lifting of the ban was too late, their experiences had been catastrophic: raids, investigations, blackmail, discharges; their lives shattered through profound trauma, brutality and betrayal. The ban contradicted the very peace, respect, and freedom our Armed Forces uphold, with LGBT service personnel treated as criminals; despite serving with the same courage, commitment, and sacrifice as everyone else.

So, while I acknowledge the progress made, we must recognise the incalculable suffering inflicted by the discriminatory ban on LGBT military personnel. As Lord Etherton highlighted in his review, the ban and the manner of its execution was a stark embodiment of "incomprehensible homophobic bigotry" that was enforced with severe and brutal consequences. The scars of this policy continue to affect many lives today. The heart of Lord Etherton's review of the ban lies in the lives of those who were victimised. Reading the report and speaking with our veterans, it is painfully clear how careers were ruined, families torn apart and lives were shattered, some tragically ending in suicide or attempts to take their own lives.

After decades of waiting, affected veterans like Lynne, Cathy, Teresa, Lynn, Claire and Jan and others in this room are finally receiving recognition for their suffering. However, no acknowledgment can undo the years lost, the lives devastated and the careers destroyed. I deeply admire the courage and dignity it has taken for Lynne, Cathy, Teresa, Lynn, Claire and Jan to consider reconnecting with the Army. For me, the opportunity to re-present these berets is about remembering that I stand on the shoulders of giants - those who suffered and fought discrimination and persecution so I can now serve openly and proudly. It is about being able to say to those veterans whose voices have been unheard for so long, "Thank you for my service." Most importantly, it is about recognising the service of our veterans and seeking to reconnect with these incredible women.



Lynne, Cathy, Teresa, Lynn, Claire and Jan, let me speak directly to you now. I feel deeply privileged that you have bravely shared a little of your journeys with me, and I would like to provide a few insights on your behalf to those gathered today. For some, the words that I will now say will evoke very painful memories. Whilst I do not wish to upset anyone, I think it is important that we seek to better understand our shared history so that we can all stand together in support of these wonderful women. Whilst learning about your lives, I was particularly struck by:

- Your commitment to your Queen and your country and intention to have a lifelong career
- Your excitement to have a career of challenge, purpose, travel and adventure
- Your pride felt when you joined the WRAC - heading off to see the world with job security and a full career ahead of you.

BUT THEN

- Your fear of being found out - secrecy of where you were going and who with; the fear of losing your treasured careers, friends and livelihoods.
- The pressure felt to conform whilst in service - even to the extent of not being able to report sexual assault or rape for fear of being accused of being gay
- The difficulty of socialising under the fear of surveillance and discovery - the constant secrecy of friendships and partners
- The shock and terror of being detained and the deeply unpleasant questioning and allegations from colleagues when you were unable to defend your true selves
- The betrayal by apparent friends who sacrificed their friendship with you for their own benefit or through their own fear
- The horror of interrogations - stood to attention, without explanation or representation, incessant questioning for days and weeks.
- The indignity of horrifically unpleasant questions about deeply personal matters
- The demands placed upon you to betray your friends and lovers
- The terrible invasion of privacy of personal items being searched and letters read and taken as evidence
- Being held as prisoners in your own units
- Being subject to psychiatric assessment to diagnose reasons for being gay - being made to feel sub-human, insignificant and worthless.
- The devastation of being thrown out of the Army with no plan, no homes, no money, no job and so often then being forced to come out to families.
- Becoming homeless and feeling utterly abandoned
- The feeling of disgrace of having a dishonourable discharge.
- The loss of the teamwork, friendship and camaraderie you had enjoyed in the Army
- The stress and despair of trying to find a new life, often as very vulnerable young adults, without being able to explain your departure from the Army and struggling to make ends meet.
- The loss of careers and loved partners - the sense of isolation sometimes leading to ill health, depression, self-harm and suicidal thoughts and actions.

It is clear that the impact of your inhumane and disgraceful treatment discharges has remained with you throughout your lives due to the catastrophic impact of the best days of your lives becoming your worst. You were proud, dedicated, enthusiastic and hard working women who wanted to serve your country - that you were so devastatingly treated was, and will always be, unforgivable.

On behalf of the Women's Royal Army Corps, the British Army, and our nation, I extend my heartfelt apologies for the distress and trauma your treatment and discharge caused. Thank you for your honourable service, your bravery and your dedication. Thank you for allowing us to reconnect with you. To those of us in the serving LGBT community today, your courage and contributions are our inspiration. We are privileged to say that we are not defined by our sexual orientation or gender identity, but by our service to our country. The progress that has been achieved is significant, but it can never repair the damage done to you and to all those veterans and their families affected by the ban.

As we reflect on the devastation caused by your discharge from the Army, we would like to recognise the resilience, determination and courage that you have shown every day and that you are showing by reconnecting with the WRAC Association. I hope you each find strength in knowing that we recognise your terrible experiences and that we are proud to welcome you back into our veteran community, where you belong and where your service will be recognised in the way that it always should have been. We see you, we hear you and we love you.

From the ashes of your Army career, perhaps together we can forge a future of renewed friendship, resilience and hope. It is my privilege to present you with your beret and cap badge as a symbol of your rightful place in our history and our hearts. Thank you for your service.

*More wonderful words were shared with us from those who received their presentations.
Read those and see more photos on page 48.*

A re-treat for the eyes and ears



Nestled in the northern sector of Cardiff city centre, Queen Alexandra Gardens in Cathays Park was the venue for the WRAC Association Reunion's Beating of the Retreat from where Christina Tosi was inspired to write this report.

Many gathered around the National War Memorial of Wales at the centre of the gardens in good time, and the public onlookers also took a keen interest in what was going on. This Memorial was erected in 1928 by the Prince of Wales and commemorates the servicemen who died during the First World War and has a commemorative plaque for all who died during the Second World War, added in 1949.

As well as fellow WRAC Association members, this event was also supported by ladies from Cardiff University Officers Training Corps, who had been helping at the Reunion throughout the whole day and continued to do so in their marshalling duties at this venue. It was a great pleasure to see their joy in participating, and I have no doubt that it reinforced their grateful faith in the significant positions and actions that their forebears have taken in the British Army which trailblazed and paved the way to give all ladies the greatest of opportunities in today's Army.

What a grand entrance the Yorkshire Military Band made! This was their fifth Grand Reunion with us and they did not disappoint. With a beat of the drums and the rhythm of the brass section, the Drum Major took the first stride and was followed by the rest of the Band onto centre stage. Such ornate clothing, and a variety of incredible uniform; historical tradition shone through. We all cheered with the first marching tune that was played, and we all watched with great respect and amazement as the Band then set off with synchronizing movements and great discipline to the many familiar marches, and characterised by a strong, regular rhythm and choreographed formations. We applauded throughout with great gusto.





Before we knew it, the Drum Major was in position and marched forward to salute Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE, the respectful gesture to the Officer in charge. The sun then started to set, so to speak, and the Bugle Major heralded a fanfare that provided particularly remarkable instrumental precision, and the bugler received a most deserved applause from her audience.

All good things must come to an end, and the Band brought a few tears to our eyes with a finale consisting of the WRAC Association's Regimental Marches 'Lass of Richmond Hill', 'Greensleeves' and 'Early One Morning' before exiting with a dignified departure.

Bravo to the Yorkshire Military Band for an outstanding performance. May this Beating of the Retreat tradition continue for as long as we shall gather.



Gala? Bingo!



The strains of the WRAC Quick March helped propel us back from Alexandra Park to change into our finery for the Gala Dinner. As a first-time attendee, Helen Cresswell looks back over Saturday night's events.

As soon as I read the advert for The Grand Reunion in The Lioness, I knew with absolute certainty that I would be attending, even though it meant travelling 11,800 miles from New Zealand! I contacted the South Wales branch and their support and friendship was wonderful throughout my stay and I was thrilled to be made an honorary branch member!

I was truly nervous about meeting so many people I didn't know after such a long time but found that in some way, we all knew each other; we had shared experiences which created a sense of camaraderie from the onset.

Coming downstairs for the Gala Dinner on Saturday night my first thought was "Crikey! What a lot of people!". We were all buzzing, having a drink and chatting as we waited for admission to the Grand Reunion Dinner, dressed in our finery, most of us grey haired, hoping we still bore some resemblance to our Guildford basic training selves.

The doors opened and we walked into the dining room to the sound of the Yorkshire Military Band who played for us throughout the meal. The room put the Sergeant's Mess in Dhekelia to shame! Thirty-five tables, beautifully dressed with tablecloths, floral arrangements, bottles of wine and of water and place settings. Each table was allocated to groups of friends. There was no table of one for the sole member present from New Zealand (me!) but I'd already been 'adopted' by the South Wales branch so joined, and enjoyed, their table.

The whole evening was memorable. There was so much laughter, sharing of stories, enjoying the food and the company and underneath it all, a deep appreciation of the planning and organisation that had gone on behind the scenes for months beforehand.

As the evening progressed, tables vied with each other, singing and moving to the music, the waiting staff did an impressive job dodging around us all 'flying' to Dambusters! Think 'WRACs Got Talent' and you'll get the picture! The table next to us got up and were dancing and singing so of course, we weren't going to be outdone! After dinner we were entertained by Annie and Lloyd from The Not Forgotten, who sang all of our favourite tunes and it wasn't long before the dancefloor was full.

It was a magical evening and I made so many new friends and learnt so much that weekend about how attitudes and policies have changed over the last 40 years since I left the WRAC. Thank goodness! There was a sense of belonging and mutual understanding, easy conversation and lots and lots of laughs! A big thank you to the WRAC Association office for making the Grand Reunion the experience that it was.





'Til We Meet Again



Sunday marked the third and final day of the Grand Reunion, the day we gather one last time before parting ways for another three years. Isabella Hamilton-Conboy looks back on the day

The day began with the Drumhead Service in the hotel ballroom, a room packed to bursting, with everyone from the main hotel and the overflow hotels joining together. Despite the sheer number of people, the atmosphere felt deeply personal. This was a moment of reflection, of shared purpose, and of honouring both the past and the present.

This year's service marked an important transition, as we said goodbye to Reverend Susan Wing, stepping down from her role as Corps Padre after years of dedicated service to the WRAC Association. Fiona Gardner gave a heartfelt tribute to Susan, a thank you filled with warmth, respect, and genuine appreciation, and Susan's successor, Reverend Trudy Hobson, opened her time in the role by demonstrating her understanding of the weight of the responsibility she's stepping into, as she delivered her words with a quiet, steady confidence.

A particularly emotional highlight came when the Cardiff Military Wives Choir Caerdydd performed as a surprise for Susan. Their rendition of Bring Him Home was both beautiful and devastating, it brought many of us to tears, and the standing ovation they received spoke volumes about the power of their performance. It was a moment that will stay with many of us.

The service continued with the Standard Bearers taking their places, and the congregation standing in a one-minute silence, a tradition that always carries a quiet, heavy significance.

After the service, we mustered outside for the March Past. I didn't march this year, the knees wouldn't allow it, so I watched from the sidelines, taking photos and soaking in the moment.

The ladies marching looked incredibly smart, their precision and pride shining through as they kept in step under the steady guidance of Lt Col Rowena Naile. There were plenty of wet eyes among those watching too, a reminder that for many of us, this was a deeply personal experience. Even passersby, tourists and students from the nearby Halls, paused to watch, some snapping photos of a moment they may not fully understand, but could sense was important.

By the end of the weekend, everyone was emotionally drained. Friday's welcome event, Saturday's full day of meetings, the Gala Dinner, it all added up. But what stayed with us was the camaraderie. That unspoken bond shared by military personnel, no matter how many years have passed, it's like no time has gone at all. People who hadn't seen each other in decades were chatting and laughing like they'd only seen each other yesterday. That's the military way and it's what makes these weekends so special.

The next location remains a secret for now, but what's certain is that wherever we meet next, the sense of connection and tradition will carry through. Until the next time we will carry these memories with us.





CHARLOTTE (BETTY) WEBB MBE

The death of Betty Webb at the age of 101 has left a hole in the Association's membership which can never be filled. Many of our members attended Betty's funeral and two people who knew her particularly well, Col Ali Brown OBE and Babs Anderson spoke to her friends and family gathered there. They shared their eulogies with the Lioness as we share some of our favourite photos from Betty's years within the WRAC Association.



I first met Betty whilst I was Chair of Trustees at the WRAC Association. I am delighted to say that what started as a professional interest soon turned into a friendship.

At the age of 18, Betty joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service because she felt she should be "serving our country rather than just making sausage rolls". The ATS quickly picked up on her language skills and, after initial training in Wrexham, Betty was posted to Bletchley Park. Betty clearly remembered signing the Official Secrets Act and, like many of her colleagues, she did not breathe a word until after 1975 when those restrictions were lifted. One of Betty's regrets was that her parents died without knowing what her wartime role had been for those 4 years.



Betty was de-mobbed in 1946 but in 1955 she returned to her Army career and joined the Reserves as a Lieutenant whilst also working at a school in Shropshire as a Secretary. Her career in the Women's Royal Army Corps included posts as the Adjutant of a Battalion and a Careers Officer for the Midlands, holding the rank of Captain, responsible for recruiting women into the WRAC and the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps.

Betty's contribution at Bletchley Park is well documented and it was her delight to be a walking talking testimony of all that was achieved there. I marvelled at her stamina in delivering talks at schools, literary festivals and at national events of remembrance. Betty was the star turn at events such as commemorating 100 years of women in the Army in 2017 and again celebrating the Centenary of the WRACA in 2019. Whether it was meeting the late Queen and HRH Princess Anne or giving a presentation on her role at Bletchley Park at the National Memorial Arboretum, Betty could be relied upon to have a twinkle in her eye. Betty was hugely interested in the women who came after her in the Army and was amazed to learn that women could now join the Infantry. She did think that it would not have been for her! Betty was never prouder than when she was wearing her WWII Medals and her Bletchley Brooch, which were joined by her MBE and the Award of the Knight of the Legion d'Honneur.

Onto Betty as my friend. I was fascinated by her experience of visiting Nazi Germany on an exchange programme and would often bombard Betty with demands for memories and her feelings from those times. When I visited Betty at her home, I often commented on the growing archive collection as each event that she was part of resulted in photos and official programmes, and which, by 2023, contained an invitation for the Coronation of King Charles III. All of these were shown to me with the humility and sheer enjoyment that I had come to expect of Betty.

I was just as much in awe of Betty the last time I saw her as I was when I met her for the first time. I was honoured to celebrate Betty's 100th birthday at The Mansion House in Bletchley Park, surrounded by her family and friends. Betty witnessed the flypast of the Lancaster bomber with sheer delight.

Within the Armed Forces veteran community we have a saying which reflects the enormous contribution made by people like Betty. It is "We Stand on the Shoulders of Giants", and Betty was the very best of these Giants.





When Charlotte "call me Betty" Webb first walked into the Newt and Cucumber in 2009 for her first Birmingham Branch meeting, we had no idea what a media star we had on our hands. She soon pulled up a sandbag with our other ATS ladies to discuss their service days and swing a lamp or two. She and I became firm friends that day, when we discovered that she had been my Recruiting Officer.

Betty became our Branch President, having already been Chairman for a few years. It was a role she took very seriously, and whenever we held our world-famous Christmas Jumper Bash or Birthday Bash, she would hold out her hand and expect to receive a list of all our guests, so she could welcome them on our behalf. Her favourite weapon was the microphone, and she wasn't afraid to use it! I didn't manage to persuade her to wear a christmas jumper, but she once sported a fetching pair of glittery deeley-boppers and christmas glasses. She looked ridiculous! Many of our friends from other branches will remember the time they joined us for a raucous tournament of beetle drive... and Betty cheated! I know!! It was shocking, but I'll say no more on that.

Brum Branch led the charge to have a WRAC statue installed at the National Memorial Arboretum. Betty was very encouraging, and a useful sounding board during the process. But it's only recently I've discovered she actually didn't like it! She said it was 'rather big, but the WRAC were always more robust than us ATS'.

When Covid came along, Betty declared it to be 'a damned nuisance', because it affected her whirlwind life of interviews. However, she got someone to help her with the wonderful new world of Zoom meetings, and she was back in business. It was an interesting time for us both, as we filled our address book/contacts with household names. Live television appearances or chatting with schoolchildren filled our Covid times.

Betty was the first to volunteer to phone people on a regular basis when our branch set up a Buddy Buddy scheme at the beginning of lockdown. She was keen to make sure the members weren't left lonely, and she continued to call some until very recently. A commitment is a commitment. We should all be more Betty.

When Betty was able to attend our monthly meetings, before she became 'floppy' (that was her word for not feeling very well), she would try to chat with everyone to make sure they felt included. I would always stand right next to Betty during our meetings because I knew she was a bit hard of hearing. She would sit there, smiling through my waffle, though I was never quite sure if her smile meant "I can't hear you, but that's ok" or "You're an idiot". I suspect the latter.

It will be very strange for us as we hold our first Branch Birthday Bash since she marched off to the big parade square in the sky, but we'll do what she would want us to do. We'll celebrate her incredible life, enjoy our unique camaraderie and laugh till we ache. Stand down Betty, your duty is done.



Colonel Anne Clissitt

As many of our members got in touch to express their sadness at the death of Col Anne Clissitt, and to share their fond memories of her, we were honoured to be represented at her funeral and to be in touch with her family including her nephew Brig Nick Clissitt. Nick and his brothers Ben, Chris, David and Philip share their memories of their aunt, after Col Audrey Smith OBE pays tribute with contributions from Col Frances Hutley, Maj Helen Merrington Rust MBE, Maj Liz Saxon, the Rev Susan Wing, and the late Lt Col Jill Tait.



Anne's father had been in the TA so it was natural her service should start there. Although becoming an Officer in the TA in 1952 she relinquished her Commission in 1955 to complete her training as a Cadet at the WRAC School of Instruction in Liphook. She obtained her Regular Commission in October 1956 at the age of 27. Her early service was in Independent Companies in Donnington and Kidderminster before being posted to 12 Battalion in Kingston. Her first overseas posting followed to 27 Independent Company in Cyprus. She spent two years in the WRAC Centre in Queen Elizabeth Park and two young officers who were starting their careers remember her kindness. Susan and Anne plus Anne's Dulux dog Yogi Bear were squeezed into a small office where Anne gave Susan the confidence which helped her along her career path. Frances recalls returning from a party and getting her car jammed in the Commandant's garage. Seeing a light on in Anne's room she roused her to help extricate the car and park it correctly before returning to bed.

She became the Second in Command of 10 Company WRAC in Aldershot where Liz, a newly commissioned officer, recalls how kind and patient Anne had been. In 1968 she was posted to Singapore as Officer Commanding 4 Company WRAC. There I got to know her well as we lived in the same blocks of accommodation. Anne was nearly 10 years older than most of us but fitted in extremely well and always played her full part in everything.

Returning to the WRAC College in Camberley she met Jill Tait who died in 2023. Jill and Anne were educated together in a Convent in Wales in the early 1930s and found themselves serving together at the WRAC College 40 years later. They both had a love of dogs: Yogi Bear was known by everyone and Anne helped Jill with the training of her first puppy.

In 1975 she was sent as the DADWRAC to Northern Ireland for which she was Mentioned in Despatches. In 1975 she joined me in the WRAC Directorate in very exciting times as the paper setting out the future of women in the Army was being written. In these times of high pressure she was always a calming influence. In 1977 she was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel to be the ADWRAC of South East District in Aldershot and was relieved that she was no longer expected to ride side saddle at the Queen's Birthday Parade.

On promotion to Colonel, her final posting as Commandant of the WRAC Centre was for 4 years where she was held in high regard and had retained her sense of humour. Helen recalls an early morning parade when her dog Judd chewed through his lead and ran on to the Parade Square. Anne who was watching with some amusement stepped forward and brought Judd to heel and on a lead. When I took over from her, she told me that lightning had struck the C of E Church when she started and wondered if the Catholic Church would suffer the same fate now as I was an Anglican.



We were members of the WRAC Association Council together for two periods. The first was when we were serving and the other when we were retired afterward. I recall that her contributions were always sensible, practical and carefully thought through. She had to represent the Chairman on many occasions which she did with her usual dedication and sensitivity.

We were all aware that Anne's faith was the foundation of her life and we respected that but it was because of her strong belief that she was a positive influence on the lives of all of us. Her approach was always gentle and caring. We all feel that she enriched our lives and that it was a privilege to have known her. Although the Corps Motto was not written when she was commissioned it describes Anne perfectly Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed.

Anne Clissitt - Auntie Anne to some of us and Colonel Clissitt to others – was born in Liverpool on 24 September 1929. She had an elder brother, Adrian, and ten years later a younger sister, Gaie. Through them she also became a much-loved sister-in-law and aunt.

Anne absolutely loved animals and growing up wanted to become a farmer so when she left school she went to study at the Cheshire School of Agriculture. However, the work proved too heavy for her physically and she decided that if she wouldn't be able to farm in her own right, she would pursue another career. So she took up chiropody, first qualifying in Manchester and then practicing it for four years in Liverpool in the 1950s until she joined the Women's Royal Army Corps. In all Anne did over 28 years of regular service. She was a WRAC officer not only for most of her working life but also for most of the life of the regiment itself. After her retirement Anne became a stalwart of the WRAC Association.



But Anne had far too much energy to retire at the age of 55. She took up podiatry again, working for the NHS and doing home visits for the next 10 to 15 years. She was a very active parishioner in St Joseph's, Grayshott, where she was sacristan and a catechist for many years, and, among other things, she was a keen golfer and gardener. From her base in Grayshot, she maintained a close network of friends, providing support to many.



In 2016, following a long spell in hospital, Anne was unable to return to her home, even with the fantastic support that her neighbours there gave her. She chose to move all of the 200 yards or so to Green Gables Nursing Home, which she knew well from her visits as a podiatrist, and where she spent the final 8 years of her life.

My brothers and I, and our families, all benefited greatly from Anne's love and care over the years - and many others did too. She was a steadfast and caring friend and relative; and above all she had a great sense of humour and fun. When Anne was only a toddler, at almost two years old, her mother wrote to a friend that an already very active Anne was always happy, and that it took hardly anything to make her laugh. Those characteristics stayed with her throughout her life.



While there is no doubt that a major part of Anne Clissitt's professional life was dedicated to her service with the WRAC, and that she played a crucial role in the formation and professionalism of the role of women in the Army, this was accomplished through her personal approach which, put people at the centre of all that she did.

Anne was a very devout Christian and - as she would always say - "Roman". She led by example and, as in other aspects of her life, she was gentle in manner and resolute in deed. We are privileged to have had her in our lives, and to have known her, and to love her.



Memories of Colonel Clissitt

I remember one Christmas when the staff from the WRAC Centre (I was a training Sgt at the time) visited a local school for children with special and additional needs. One young girl promptly sat on Col Clissitt's knee and started to unravel her plaits. Col Clissitt didn't bat an eye lid and you could see the delight on the young girl's face. Such a fond memory. Such a wonderful lady.

Rest in Peace Ma'am.

Sue Sharkey



*There once was a girl from Toxteth
Who faced all life's various shocks with
A great sense of fun -
There was no better one
To drink tonic and gin on the rocks with!*

by David Clissitt, nephew

So much is obvious from the range of people, associations and societies that she supported. However, reading her private papers, I have been struck time and again by the depth of care and concern she provided to colleagues of all ranks who had reached out for advice. All given in complete confidence and with sincere affection. This love of others was manifest not only in private advice, but also in her everyday approach to life.

Nick Clissitt, nephew



*Such a lovely lady. Then Maj Clissitt always took time to speak and chat when in the block. I Always remember her bed check routines phrase:
"Good night, God Bless Ladies".
RIP and Good night God Bless Ma'am.*

Chris Buxton-Barrett

AGC Commemoration Service

Imagine my surprise, I was on a train holiday in Italy in June and I received an email from the WRAC Association asking if I was free on 8th July. It was to represent the WRAC Association and lay a wreath at the AGC plot at the National Memorial Arboretum for their annual service of remembrance.

I was very honoured to be asked, and after checking my diary, yes, I would be very pleased and honoured to do so. I received details from the AGC with instructions of where to meet, timings and so forth.

On the day I duly arrived and after checking in, I met Heather Bradbury who was parading the WRAC Association standard. We made our way to the meeting room for coffee and biscuits and met other wreath layers and standard bearers. Everyone was most welcoming. I then made my way with other wreath layers to our seats at the plot and watched Heather marching very smartly with our standard to the plot for the service. It was a very moving service where the AGC remember service personnel who have passed away in the last 12 months with some of their family members in attendance. I duly laid our wreath when it was my turn, I felt very proud to do so.

After the service we made our way back for a very enjoyable lunch and tea.



Everyone was lovely and it was a great day. If ever the Association asks you to do something like this, and if you're free, don't hesitate. It was a wonderful, and very moving experience.

Ride with the Pride



LYCRA (Ladies You Cycle Really Amazingly) was the word of the night as members from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland came together to raise £3800 for Breast Cancer Now and Ovarian Cancer.

Wendy Jones got off the saddle and onto her computer to send this report.

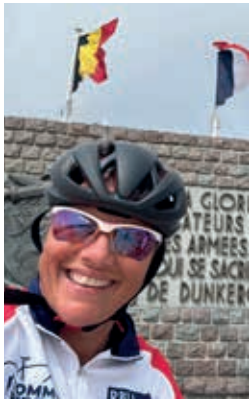
Being a keen cyclist, I managed to convince 14 WRAC veterans to take part in this year's Women Vs Cancer Ride the Night 100km (66-ish mile) event. Pedalling under the team name "Pride of Lionesses" our cyclists arrived at our starting and finishing point of Windsor Race course. There was some nervous anticipation amongst our group, as this was to be their first long endurance ride - let alone a night event.

Like many of the 700 women taking part in the event, some of us adapted our cycle hats, and decorated our bikes with fairy lights. The Pride of Lionesses started cycling just after 9pm in three groups of four, pedalling our way up into central London and proudly wearing our custom-made jerseys, under pink hi-viz tabards. We had three refreshment stations at 25km intervals where we were spoilt with hot drinks and delicious cakes. The half-way station was at the Imperial War Museum, more food and hot drinks to fuel our bodies as we continued our adventure.

Central London never sleeps, and as we negotiated busy roads and were confronted with endless red traffic lights we managed to take some photos of illuminated landmarks, including the London Eye which was lit up in pink. The dry weather was kind to us, though temperatures plummeted in the early hours, but that did not deter our riders. Each and every one of us made it across the finish line, receiving a well deserved medal.



Radders Rode On



She'd barely got her shorts through the quick wash before she was setting off again! This time Karen "Radders" Radford was taking part in the Tommy Ride from the Royal British Legion Village, Aylesford to the Menin Gate, Ypres

Last November I spotted a Facebook advert for the Royal British Legion Industries (RBLI) Tommy ride setting off from the RBLI Village in Aylesford, Kent to the Menin Gate in Ypres. As the village is only a few miles away from home I was interested, and then I opened it... "158 miles? Crumbs! How far?!"

And so in June I found myself with 40 others cycling the route across three countries. Collectively, we have raised nearly £80,000 for the RBLI charity who support veterans' needs including careers, training, employment and care, and providing accommodation at the RBLI Village.

Cyclists came from around the country and from all walks of life including many veterans, each person having their own stories and reasons for taking part. I was a little apprehensive as I have never cycled this far before and I didn't know anybody, but at the start, I hit it off with a guy called Bruce; a Kent coach driver, and he became my cycle hubby for the trip.

Our 64-mile route took us through the beautiful villages of Kent from Maidstone to Dover, stopping off for a refuel and to visit the Battle of Britain War memorial at Capel-Le-Ferne, before getting on a ferry to Calais and an overnight stop.



The following morning, we were off again with staggered leaving times all meticulously planned by the logistic and events team RBLI. Only 88 miles to go! The route took us out from Calais up the coast to Dunkirk. We had an historian travelling with who gave us an insight into various historical locations on the way, all cementing our reasons for taking part in the first place - Dunkirk and the mass evacuations of 1940, the German War Cemetery at Langemark, and Tyne Cot Cemetery near Passchendaele, before slowly descending into Ypres and riding through the breathtaking Menin Gate. Hundreds of thousands of names and unknown graves of soldiers. A terrible reminder of the travesties of war. What an amazing achievement by all and very emotional.



Every evening at 8 o'clock the Last Post sounds at the Menin Gate, and it was my honour to be asked to lay a wreath at the end of our trip alongside four Gurkas, three of whom lost legs in Afghanistan and cycled the route with us. Also stepping forward alongside Maj Govinda Rana and me was Helen Hurst, a Devon-based nurse nominated for her work supporting veterans. The experience has been very emotional, the people I met, the stories they told, the bravery and pure determination to get to the finish line. What an honour to have shared this with them.

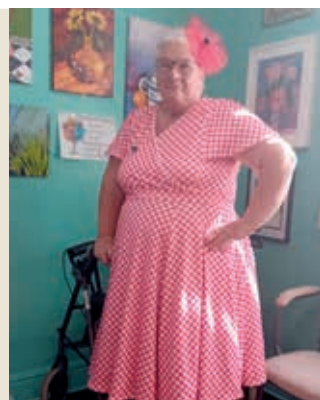


VE Day 80

Across the UK and the world, the 80th Anniversary of Victory in Europe was celebrated through numerous events, and our members were out in force. From organised events in London to street and garden parties in towns and villages, WRAC veterans remembered those who were lost and celebrated the freedoms we enjoy today which every WRAC servicewomen served to uphold.

Photos and reports have come in from many of our members and we are delighted to share the celebrations and memories, beginning with Dorothy Mitchelmore's VE Day Party.

"I organised the VE Day celebrations in my street with all my neighbours attending despite the weather turning cold. We had lots of 1940's music played out of a loudspeaker. At 15.00 we listened to Sir Winston Churchill give his victory speech. Everyone brought out lots of delicious food and drink and shared with everyone. It was such a lovely community feeling. On Thursday 8th our village tearooms held a VE Day celebration in the afternoon and we were entertained by a lovely singer. Lots of flag waving and singing by all who attended. We ended the day at home tuned into the VE Day concert broadcast from London. What a fantastic week celebrating our freedom and remembering those who gave so much to ensure we could."



In the North East, June Gattenby attended a party in Tanfield Lea Community Centre in Stanley. June enjoyed the jollity and food, and invited fellow veteran Brian to lead the singing.

Moir Thom sent photos from the Aberdeen City Council open air service and lighting of the beacon of peace at Marshall Square, Aberdeen.



Caroline Hearne organised a VE Day garden party at The Potteries Care home in Poole, where she works. "There were over 100 in attendance with a good 25 local veterans joining us, including a couple of local WRAC. We enjoyed a BBQ and cake stall alongside military vehicles, a vintage singer, dancing, and flag waving.

With a wreath laid and having listened to Churchill's speech from 1945, there was a raffle in aid of The Stronghold, a local veteran social enterprise group, raising £200 on the day. We interviewed a couple of the veterans who shared with everyone their experiences. Including Arthur, pictured, who served for 4 years in the war with the Merchant Navy."



The Ladies from Liverpool had fun celebrating



Joyce Nichols attended a VE Day 80 event in Hereford, and was interviewed on the radio about her Mum who served in the ATS, and her own service in the WRAC and the Royal Signals.



Ulster branch attended a number of different VE Day 80 celebrations, including at Belfast City Hall where they had a Spitfire displayed outside, and Clonaver Territorial Camp where everyone really got into the spirit with some amazing outfits!



In Brinsworth, Rotherham an indoor VE 80 Tea Party was hosted for 120 guests, organised by the Brinsworth Parish Council and the Royal British Legion. The venue was adorned with Union Flag decorations, including tablecloths, cups, plates, and a grand balloon display featuring red, white, and blue balloons.

Throughout the evening, a brass band provided musical entertainment, and various games were enjoyed, including a raffle, a quiz, Irish Bingo, and Tombola Bingo at a pound per game. Guests were treated to rations midway through the event, which included sandwiches, savoury snacks, and buns.



The Mayor of Wirral, Councillor Cherry Povall, invited the Wirral branch to be VIP guests at the VE Day celebrations for the borough in the Hamilton Square, Birkenhead.

Sharon Broderick MBE proudly paraded their standard: "the Wirral Pipe Band entertained the crowd and the children of The Birkenhead School recited The Peace Prayer. Following the ceremony we all headed to New Brighton for a lovely afternoon in a seaside café."

It is only about 5 years ago that the WRAC branch was placed last in the parades on Wirral, now we are invited to all events as VIP's. The ladies always put on a good show and I am very proud to be part of such a fabulous branch."



Helen Merrington-Rust MBE represented the WRAC Association at a commemorative service hosted by the RBL at the National Memorial Arboretum to mark 80 years since VE Day



At Association HQ in Sir John Moore Barracks, Claire and Jane enjoy a scone and a cup of tea, whilst Paula heads back for seconds (of course!) and gets chatting to ATR Commanding Officer Lt Col James Phipps.



VE Day 80



In Guildford, where we enjoy the freedom of the Borough, we fittingly enjoyed the freedoms defended by the World War Two generation of servicemen and women. Invited by the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey to attend a special service at the Cathedral, a glorious day saw military vehicles and standards on display at the cathedral as people came together to celebrate and remember, and our members were there to ensure the WRAC was represented, including Cathy Cherry who sent us this report.

On arrival at the cathedral grounds my first impression of the structure was that it looked like a large modern-day church. Little did I know what was in store.

Lots of service men and women were milling around in the bright sunshine chatting with veterans and cadets strutting their stuff. Veteran flag bearers were standing on the steps of the entrance to the cathedral including one bearing an RCT flag. Whilst serving in the WRAC as a driver I was stationed at Cavalry Barracks in London and worked for 419 troop Royal Corps of Transport. I gravitated toward David, and as we chatted the friendly veteran advised how I could join the RCT Veterans' Association.

I then wandered over to the WW2 Land Rover and motorbike on display and was invited to sit on the bike by the chap in charge - an offer I couldn't refuse. Unfortunately, he wouldn't allow me to do wheelies around the grounds!

When it was time to enter the cathedral for the service, I was invited to sit with other WRAC Association members and took a pew next to Ishbel Thomson, who I had met previously at the Cardiff Gala Dinner.



After the service Ishbel gave me a tour of the cathedral pointing out the Book of Remembrance for serving women and the beautiful stained-glass window with its insignia of the WAAC, QMAAC, ATS and WRAC.

There was a military band playing outside and many flocked to the refreshment area. Not the WRAC Association women though - we just had to have a picture of us huddling around the WW2 motorbike!

A truly memorable day.



The cathedral was amazing architecturally, with vaulted ceilings, columns, and pillars - a feast for my eyes; the choir was delightful - their singing, which took full advantage of the acoustics of the cathedral, blew me away with raw emotion. The service was beautiful with various speakers including one who talked about the oldest female veteran - 107 year-old Joan Harrison, who was an ambulance driver (see p62). I was an ambulance driver too, detached to the Millbank Military Hospital.



At Westminster Abbey, Barb Johnson attended the beautiful and moving Service of Thanksgiving alongside Vice President Amanda Hassell and tells us about the experience.



What a privilege it was for Amanda Hassell and me to represent the WRAC Association at Westminster Abbey on the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe day on the 8th May 1945.

Due to tight security that morning, the walk from Westminster Bridge was much longer than usual with crowds held at length from the Abbey and traffic diverted. On route I had the pleasure of bumping into Mark Smith, the Military Historian and medals expert. The warmth, genuine interest and empathy that we see on our screens when he listens to the many untold accounts of brave veterans who sacrificed so much for us all, was clear to see in person. Mark was concerned about and had been keeping a look out for his friend Colin who was also making his

way through the crowds. At 104 years old the WW2 veteran, Retd Flt Lt Colin Bell (DFC) who had served in the RAF on operations as a Mosquito Bomber Pilot during the war, was then spotted being whisked through a security cordon further down the road in front of us, arriving in style!



Amanda and I met inside the Abbey and as there was a while to wait until proceedings got underway, we asked an usher to take a quick snap of us near our seats before the guests were all assembled. A chap nearby saw this going on and offered to escort us further into a main area to take our picture in a more prominent part of the Abbey. After positioning a VE80 programme between us and instructing us where to place our feet, he set about taking a number of shots on Amanda's phone camera. A pretty good set of photos resulted, and we agreed "he seems to know his stuff". It was a while into the service before we clocked him again, climbing onto a photographer's step with a huge zoom lens camera to capture those far more interesting in the Royal enclosure!

Our view wasn't the best although we did have a side angled view of the pulpit. I later found out when I rewatched the service at home that one half of the choir was seated the other side of the partition we were facing! We were in the right place however to observe behind the scenes the ushers going back and forth guiding the various 'actors' who were participating, each of them stopping right in front of us whilst awaiting their cue to step forward.

In particular, the collection of young scouts, guides and St John's ambulance representatives with their individual baskets of white roses to hand to the WW2 veterans were excited and nervous in equal measures while they waited, one seemingly stage struck youngster was obviously tilting his basket upwards and losing his flowers until the usher stepped in and saved the day!

VE Day 80 Concert at Horse Guards

Many of our members donned their party hats and braved the rain to attend the VE80 Concert at Horse Guards Parade. From Vice President Amanda Hassell to 101 year-old ATS veteran Sheila Pantin, our members had a wonderful time watching stars of song, stage, and screen including Sir Willard White, Joan Collins, Mary Berry, Sheila Hancock, Derek Jacobi and Nigel Havers as well as Strictly dancers Amy Dowden, Carlos Gu, Karen Hauer, Neil Jones, Lauren Oakley and Kai Widdrington. Sheila found herself with the best seat in the house and was keen to share her experience and her brush with royalty.

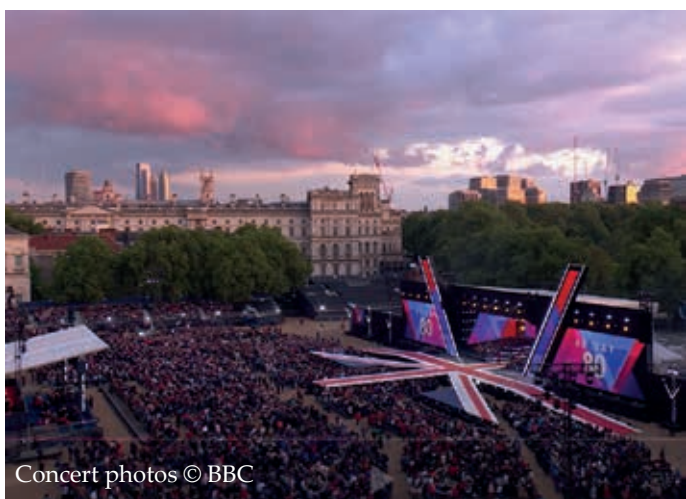


© Soroptimist International of Harrogate & District

I left Harrogate at 10am and arrived in Hammersmith at 5pm with just enough time to change as the taxi arrived at 5:15 to take us to Horse Guards Parade. A frantic ride along the Thames (everyone else was headed in the same direction) ensured we made it to Whitehall to join the first of many groups to be taken over by the FANYs, which I knew in 1942. I've never heard my name called out so many times! We were finally at the museum for a drinks party which was packed with people and apparently I was the only ATS member there. Other elderly white-haired ladies turned out to be WRNS, WAAFS and other ladies who had worked during the war. Finally, having had nibbles from trays and hot and cold drinks, a FANY found us and said 'Come along - you're in the Royal Box!'. I was taken to the box and saw the steps up the side and managed those no problem, and then discovered there was a lift! We moved to the middle where a Colonel was sitting - I was beside him with two empty seats in front. Eventually the King and Queen came along from the left and we all stood to welcome them before the concert started.



Sheila Pantin sits with The King at the VE80 concert



Concert photos © BBC



Audrey's OBE

Investiture of the OBE to Colonel (Retired) Audrey Smith for Services to Female Veterans.

From the moment the letter arrived and I realised that all my work over the years had been recognised, followed by champagne and celebrations on New Years Eve and then waiting to be invited to attend the Investiture, I was in a warm bubble of anticipation but then practicalities began to surface.

Rowena, one of my guests writes: The Invitations had arrived with all the information about the ceremony and the guests had been invited. It was all very exciting, but still no dress, hat, or shoes with less than a month to go. The dress and jacket were purchased during the Reunion weekend in Cardiff with an audience of Welsh ladies sitting outside the changing rooms in the shop applauding the chosen ensemble. The hat and shoes were obtained locally and with days to go, she was ready!

Attending the investiture in Windsor Castle on a beautiful, very windy Wednesday morning in April was both daunting and exciting in equal measure. On arrival Audrey, together with her guests, were ushered into the Waterloo Chamber to sit nervously on elegant chairs surrounded by magnificent portraits of the winners and losers at the Battle of Waterloo. We were very early and had the room almost to ourselves. Eventually the room was filled by 30 other people and their guests including Kevin Whately, the actor, and his family.

Audrey was ushered into the Ballroom with her guests and we moved to stand one side of the dais with a clear view of the proceedings. Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, wearing Naval uniform, invested Audrey with her OBE and then they talked about female veterans. It was all over too quickly and we left the castle for the Aviator Hotel in Farnborough, for a splendid lunch in the restaurant. The staff were very excited by it all and at the end Audrey was presented with their own chocolate contribution to the occasion.



Off to the Tower!

Isabella Hamilton-Conboy recalls a night to remember at the Tower of London



On a beautifully sunny April evening in London, four former WRAC veterans found themselves reunited in the most unexpected of ways. Invited by the Not Forgotten Association we gathered at the historic Tower of London to witness the iconic Ceremony of the Keys without knowing in advance that we'd all be there together! The group included myself, Heather Bradbury, Jane Griffin-Ash, and Janet Edwards — a surprise reunion that added even more joy to an already special evening.

The Ceremony of the Keys is a 700-year-old tradition that takes place every night at the Tower of London. The formal locking of the Tower is one of the oldest continuous military ceremonies in the world, steeped in tradition and history. To this day, it's carried out with military precision and solemnity — a powerful reminder of Britain's rich heritage.

Yeoman Warder Matt was our guide for the evening. His deep knowledge and clear passion for the Tower's history brought every stone and story to life, explaining the significance behind the rituals, the architecture, and the longstanding traditions that are still practiced to this day.

Before the ceremony began, we enjoyed a quick drink and catch-up in the exclusive Yeoman Warders' Bar — a rare treat in itself! At precisely 20:30, we assembled and walked together to observe the Ceremony of the Keys. It was moving, memorable, and truly unforgettable.

Afterwards, we returned to the bar for a final chat and a few more laughs before heading our separate ways. On the walk back to our hotel, Heather and I even spotted a curious urban fox on the prowl — a fittingly quirky end to a magical evening.

Huge thanks to Anne McGinley of the Not Forgotten Association, Darren Williams and Matt for their hospitality and for making the night so special. It was an evening of camaraderie, tradition, and unexpected reunions — and one we'll treasure for a long time to come.



Queens Win in King's Lynn



Wendy Hooton was once more the driving force behind the Lionesses taking part in the annual 10k run - this time in Norfolk, and afterwards Helen Davies sat down, popped her feet into a bowl of ice, and wrote up her account of the day.

This event seems to come round quicker each year; it doesn't seem that long ago that we were pounding the streets of Bristol in what must have been the hottest day of the year.

The Lionesses arrived in Kings Lynn (known locally as Lynn) throughout Friday and Saturday, most of whom stayed at The Duke's Head Hotel, its location in Tuesday Market Square favoured as it was at the start and finish of the run.

Our runners and supporters were able to collect their T-shirts during the Saturday afternoon from The Bridge of Heroes Veterans Hub. The Hub which is normally closed at the weekend was kindly opened for us by Gregg Baker and Dorothy Blake, a WRAC veteran who made an extra journey into Lynn to make teas/coffees. Tickets were on sale for the raffle to be held at the Post Run Supper.

Sunday morning arrived, the skies were grey and there was a bitter fenland wind which sent some of our runners scurrying back into the hotel for long sleeves to put on underneath their T-shirts. This was a first, but the Lionesses maintained their smiles, energy, camaraderie and non-stop banter ready to take on another run. Another first was the course being flat with no surprise hills.

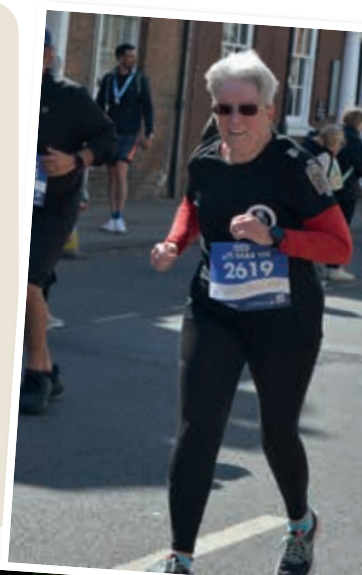
There were around 3,000 participants gathered in the Market Square at the start, so it took a while before we got over the start line. Once out on the course and into your pace whether running, jogging, walking or being pushed it was a great route, and the sun did come out, albeit the wind still had a bite to it. Additionally, the support around the course, not only from the locals but our ladies too, was much appreciated, especially near the finish line where our WRACA Lioness Banners were proudly displayed on either side of the road, with more of our supporters and Chelsea Bear.

Our first Lioness home was Rowena Naile who had the honour of carrying Mo Bear, who was promoted to Lt Col after the post run photograph. There were several individual PB's which are all commendable and, of note in the Masters By Age Gap Category:

F80 1st
Sandy Crawley in
1 hour 46 mins 14
secs

F70 2nd
Pauline Marr in
1 hour 3 mins 11
secs (PB)

F60 2nd
Rowena Naile in
45 mins 28 secs





A word from Wendy

None of this could have happened without my loyal team of helpers for whom I am most grateful. Thank you to...

Anne Patterson whose local knowledge was invaluable, Helen Davies for helping distribute the T-shirts, organising the raffle prize table and helping me lug the trolley around, Budgie the raffle Queen raising an incredible £306, Diane Walsh, Lyn Hatch for the generous donation of a bottle of Sandringham Celebration Gin raising an amazing £174, Sally Beadle for putting on her Crazy Bananas costume and ballooning in the market square to raise £60, Annette Jackson for bringing her beautiful painted stones which raised a brilliant £31.20, Gregg Baker, Dorothy Blake, Heather Gaughran and Rosie Garrison, and to you all for continually supporting this event which I have the honour of organising each year.

Join us for the penultimate 10k in Birmingham on SUNDAY 3RD MAY 2026 Runners, walkers and supporters welcome. Contact wendyhootonski@aol.com THE FINAL 10k WILL BE IN MANCHESTER IN MAY 2027 WHERE IT ALL BEGAN.....Book that month in your diary, date to follow!!



Just one cornet-o (and piccolo and oboe...)

Ever fancied having a bang on a drum? Do you already play an instrument and fancy joining a band? Is there a youngster in your family who would like to have a go?

Louise Lingard-Snape has the opportunity for you!



The Yorkshire Military Band has felt a strong affiliation to the WRAC Association since the very first invitation to provide musical support in Harrogate, many years ago. Since then, we have played the Corps march more times than I can recall but always with the same enthusiasm, tradition and pride as when I served with the WRAC Staff Band, back in the 80's. However, as with many musical organisations, the band is

struggling for personnel in key areas and there is always a fear that we will be defeated and one day must reluctantly close the bandroom doors for the last time.

We have three distinct organisations rehearsing every Monday in our well equipped band room at 16 Doncaster Road, Barnsley S70 1TH:



🎵 **A youth academy** where professional musicians tutor absolute beginner 8-15-year-olds in an instrument of their choosing including theory and marching. Instruments are free to loan, tuition is free and so is the uniform. The academy meets from 1800 until 1900 and joins the main military band on occasions for parades etc.

🎵 **The Military band** is the one that you see at WRAC Association events and is a 25 piece concert band made up of Brass, Woodwind and Percussion. We have vacancies in all areas of the band but you must be of a reasonable level to join although extra tuition can be made available. Apart from subs of £5 per month, everything else is free and includes playing at major events like Windsor Castle, charity concerts and parades. The band meets from 1915 until 2115. Rehearsals often include cake and tea - what's not to like?

🎵 Lastly, but by no means least, is the **Corps of Drums** who play the lead part in every parade and take part in every concert. This is for age 15 upwards (there is no upper age limit) and tuition, uniform and instrument is given freely. There is absolutely no need for prior experience of drumming, music or marching to join the corps as everything is taught from 1815 to 1915. This is such good fun and means that as an adult with no experience, you can get into military music and once again 'get on parade'. The band does not do many parades so please don't let mobility put you off.



How can you help us? Well, tell everyone about the band, the academy, and the Corps of Drums and, as we have people come from as far afield as York, Lincoln and Manchester, why not consider coming and having a go yourself? This could be just the hobby that you have been looking for and wouldn't you feel incredibly proud to be at the next Grand Reunion, marching in front of your friends and colleagues?

The band really needs your support right now and if you want to see us at the next Grand Reunion, we need to grow. Please do consider joining us and email me for further information. Directorofmusic@tymb.co.uk

Day of Reconciliation

On 4 February 1974, Jenny McMahon was among 50 people injured in the bomb blast on a coach travelling on the M62. Twelve people, including eight off-duty soldiers and two young children were killed. In June this year Jenny was invited to Belfast by the charity WAVE Trauma for their Annual Day of Reconciliation event and tells us about her visit.

I met up with another sixteen invited guests at the WAVE Centre in Belfast for tea and an introduction to the charity and weekend events. All of the guests had either been affected or involved in the NI Troubles. Later we gathered at the hotel for the evening meal. I already knew the M62 families, and I met a female survivor of the 1974 Birmingham bomb. It was lovely to catch up with everyone socially as opposed to the Annual Memorial Service which is always a solemn occasion.

The next afternoon 150 people attended the WAVE Centre for a BBQ and time of reflection with the food, company and hospitality. There was a small choir and harpist, and several guests were invited to speak with poems and stories read with grace and compassion. A mother spoke of the loss of her husband and being left to cope with two young children. A gentleman who was shot in the head and subsequently suffered a brain injury told us how WAVE has helped him turn his life around.

Candles were lit for each decade of the troubles in memory of those who have died, a poignant moment for all. It was an uplifting and inspirational afternoon and an amazing weekend in a calm and reflective atmosphere. WAVE does a fantastic job helping and supporting those affected by the troubles.



Jenny on the right, with other guests



WRAC Association represented at the Memorial Service for General Sir Mike Jackson GCB CBE DSO

Michelle Patterson from Shropshire Branch had the privilege to receive an invitation to the Memorial Service for General Sir Mike Jackson, and sent us this report

During the troubles in N Ireland (Op Banner) my mother was employed as a civil servant as the Batwoman to 39th Infantry Brigade Command, 20 Nugent Road, Thiepval Barracks and in 1990 Brig Jackson was 39th Brigade Command. I was drafted in to babysit his youngest son Thomas and it was Lady Jackson who gave me a reference to join the Army in 1991.

On Mon 17 Mar 25 at the Memorial Chapel of Remembrance, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, 300 distinguished guests were invited to attend the service in the presence of HRH King Charles III. Guests arriving at the chapel were greeted by LCpl Jamie Richards 1 Para the handler of 'Pegasus 5' the Black New Forest Pony named after the Mythical Winged Horse which was first presented to 1 Para as far back as 1950.

Although I was WRAC 1991-1992, RMP (Pro) 1992-2013, and FTRS 2013 to date, I wore my WRAC greens out of respect to Lady Sarah and was proud to represent the WRAC Association as the only female soldier (less the Band of the Coldstream Guards) to attend the service.



Don't Rain on our Parade

Josephine Marchant recounts her experience of The Governor's Review of the Chelsea Pensioners as she watched our in-pensioners proudly parade.



I was privileged to be invited to attend this historic ceremony, one of the highlights of the Royal Hospital Chelsea's calendar, where the Chelsea Pensioners parade in advance of Founders Day – celebrating King Charles II who established this unique community in 1692.

What a lovely start to the special day, as soon as we got into the venue, spotting WRAC members who I had met in Cardiff earlier in

the year. Smiling, welcoming faces, even though the rain was doing its utmost to dampen things, those smiles shone through.



The Band cheered us up too as they commenced proceedings by playing Walking on Sunshine and Mr Blue Sky.

The music lifted Sir Christopher Wren's building into life. At the heart of the site is the oldest part of the Royal Hospital. The Monarch's promise, to care for veterans who had played their part in restoring him to the throne, can be seen inscribed in Latin above the colonnade.

The Chelsea Pensioners formed into four Guards and paraded under the command of the Regimental Sergeant Major. Those unable to march were seated on the parade ground. For me, seeing the Sovereign's Mace being presented on Parade always gives me a tinge of pride and makes me stand two feet taller. It was presented to the Royal Hospital by Her Late Majesty the Queen in 2002. On this occasion it was carried by one of the Chelsea Pensioners, escorted by two others carrying halberds.

The Governor's address, by General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCB OBE DL, really sent the message out of the important work and involvement by so many people to keep the establishment running smoothly and shipshape. Then we had the Chelsea Pensioners being inspected - how their minds must have been taken back to earlier days of military service to our country, the pride showing in their faces as they marched past the saluting dais.

I'm sure saluting with their left hand (so that Queen Victoria could see their faces) instead of the usual right-hand salute (which we all were brought up to do) would not have come naturally and taken some getting used to, I bet!



The hospitality afterwards was so warm. Chatting to In-Pensioner Margaret Ashmore, I learnt about the involvement they share with so many regimental events and functions including their Tuesday Wellbeing sessions, which connect them with forces families and the local community.



The curry lunch went down very well with everyone who partook of it, plus the tea rooms did a roaring trade.

Memories and comrades to keep our minds fully occupied for days and months to come. Thank you, I am sure I speak for everyone: a good day had by all.

Here we are pictured in front of Grinling Gibbons' gilded statue of King Charles II dressed as a Roman general.



Thanks for this wonderful article Josephine, and to all those who went for representing the Association so well despite the rain! If you would like to be considered for a place at next year's Governor's Review, please email events@wraca.org.uk. It's the same address to register to march at the Cenotaph or in Guildford, or to attend partner events including the Not Forgotten and Mission Motorsport. Don't think you stand a chance of getting a ticket? You might be surprised! Get in touch today

And staying in SW3...

Sandy Cawley and Jane Griffin-Ash attended the Chelsea Flower Show in May. Sandy is a member of the Governors Circle of the Royal Hospital and invited Jane to join her, including a special visit to the Pensioners Garden.



Maiden, over



As our ladies in green were setting up stalls for Armed Forces Day across the UK, our bowlers in black were stepping up to the crease to take on the Chatsworth Ladies once more, and with a score to settle after last year's performance, stepping up is exactly what they did, as Kaz Smith reports.

The word spectacular does not do justice to the second annual cricket match between The Lionesses and Chatsworth Ladies. It was pure class in every respect. No article can capture the splendour of the day in full, but I will do my best.

The pitch is set within the beautiful grounds of Chatsworth House, with the House as a backdrop. It's stunning. With the teams amassed at the start, Chatsworth in White and Lionesses in Black it was time for the coin toss. This was the first challenge – did anybody have a coin in this digital age? When one was eventually found, Elaine won the toss and opted for the Lionesses to field first. There was then a presentation of the ball, as this was not any ball. It was a brand-new lady's ball donated by Lords Cricket Ground. Massive thanks to Anet Marsh who is a MCC Lords member and offered up the ball. Anet knew about the match through Debbie Sutton so thanks to Debbie also.

As the match got underway, each batswoman was given a glass of port, Elaine made the final tweaks to the fielders and the amassing supporters looked eagerly on. It was everything you would want and expect; balls being smashed to the boundary as the fielders chased – wishing they were 30 years younger. Balls being caught, wickets being annihilated, runs being amassed and enthusiasm and good humour in abundance. With Chatsworth Ladies all out for 167 we stopped for a delicious lunch. Many thanks to all who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure such a feast.

After lunch, the 30 Over Innings for the Lionesses began. Wendy and Andie took to the crease first. Steadfast and calm the runs began to amass. There was some cracking fielding by Chatsworth but our training on Friday must have paid off as the runs kept on coming. It was a scorching hot day so standing out there for any length of time was tough, but Resolute in Deed we were. When we reached 168 with 7 wickets remaining, we were elated, and Chatsworth were magnanimous in defeat.

Following the presentations we enjoyed an evening at the golf club with delicious food, a fundraising raffle, 'play your cards right', some good and some 'needs improvement' karaoke and of course a few drinks! And if all that was not enough, on Sunday we enjoyed a Round Robin of Softball Cricket which was great fun.

No event like this happens without a massive amount of work. Huge thanks to Lynn Hines for all her work in bringing the event together, and to all the Chatsworth Ladies who were so supportive and encouraging. To our Manager Jan TC Rees whose efforts make it all so easy for the players. To Elaine Smith our Captain, who gave us no option but to win and to Wendy Hooton who headed up some great fundraising.

With the score now standing at 1-1 we are already looking forward the match next year.





A word from Wendy

We raised an amazing £532.35 from the raffle and donations. Thanks to everyone who generously donated raffle prizes.

My thanks to Lynn Hines and her Chatsworth Ladies Cricket Team, superb venue and camaraderie! Also to volunteers Jan TC Rees, Elaine Smith, Cheryl Jones, Helen Davies, Mary Blake, Leona Goffin, Sandy Saxton Warne, Diane & Barry Johnson, and Angie Summerell-Wheeldon.

SEE YOU NEXT YEAR FOR THE DECIDER!!!



In their own words

Beret and Cap Badge Recipients

After the events of our Cardiff weekend had passed, those who received their presentations had a chance to reflect on the occasion and the impact of their experience, and share their thoughts here.

Lynne Armstrong

It was with some trepidation that I decided to receive my cap badge and beret at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff. I need not have worried. The kindness and goodwill that I was shown on that memorable weekend was just so much more than I could ever have expected. Everything was made very easy by the Association staff who were stars of the weekend. The speeches were heartfelt and moving. I felt truly welcomed back into the fold. Having the other recipients and past recipients was the icing on what was a very emotional cake. Thank you to everyone involved for making it such a wonderful and memorable occasion. I would urge anyone who is thinking about having a presentation but maybe apprehensive, to put your worries aside and go for it! You'll not regret it.



Cathy Cherry

I am eternally grateful to Lord Etherton and the campaigning groups for making the army realise that they needed to fix their unnecessary devastation of people's lives, and to the WRAC Association team for their expertise, support and tenderness. I had no hesitation in becoming a member of the Association and look forward to proudly wearing my beret and badges. I still hold an amount of resentment toward the army for my treatment and cutting my exemplary service so short, however, now that I am 'forgiven' for being me, this has helped close the wound near to healing. We cannot turn the clock back, so perhaps it is time to forgive and close the wound completely? What an amazing experience when presented with my Etherton badge by Brig (Retd) Fiona Gardner and my beret by Brig Clare Phillips with a beaming smile and a hug whilst cheered on by 350 women, including a guard of honour and my beloved Leonie looking on. This joyful time will remain with me forever.



Lynn Downey

It's hard to say exactly how I felt because so much damage was caused 36 years ago. Being part of the Army is like having a second family and when that family chooses to abandon you for being yourself, it hurts... a lot! Receiving a new beret, cap badge, new Certificate of Service, a copy of the apology made by the Prime Minister in 2023 and also the Etherton Ribbon was symbolic but, being welcomed back by 350 female veterans, made me feel proud and wanted again. Thank you ladies.





Teresa Divers

I cannot put into enough words what the Grand Reunion weekend meant to me. For the 1st time in a very, very long time I felt proud again. Completing and filling in the Lord Etherton Review was very hard for me, bringing back the memories of my horrendous time under the interrogation and room searches from the SIB, being sent to a doctor and a psychiatrist only to be thrown out of the career that I loved, all because my 'name was on a list'. I chose to have my ribbon, beret and letter of apology presented to me, as I was not going to be 'yet again' just 'a name on a list' but a real person holding my head up high again as a proud member of the WRAC Association again. I would like to thank Fighting With Pride for helping me get this far, the WRAC Association for welcoming me back into The Pride, and Brig Clare Phillips whose powerful, emotional and personal speech blew everyone away!

Claire Pridgeon

Wow! Cardiff was a great experience. To be with so many brave women in one place, strong and resolute indeed, receiving berets but more importantly an apology. The reconnection with dear old WRAC friends and the wider service family was emotional and healing. It was also a day of great celebration of how the service has shifted towards a positive culture where people feel safer to be their authentic selves. Although I joined the police after leaving the WRAC, and served for over 28 years, I was an army officer in a blue uniform and still consider myself ex-military before anything else. It was a sad day that I signed off and that has never changed. Many of us are still left with feelings of deep loss, but there is renewed hope that the matter is being addressed. Those serving now will be free to choose a wonderful career without the constant fear of being disgraced for just being themselves.



Jan Tulloch

At sixteen, I knew my path—a life in the Army. A summer at Fort George ignited a passion that never faded. By seventeen, I was knocking on the careers office door, determined to serve. I trained as a PTI before retraining in the RCT, believing I had a long career ahead. At twenty, I deployed to Northern Ireland, ready to serve with pride. But at twenty-one, my career was cut short—not for lack of ability or commitment, but because of who I was. The ban ended my service before I had the chance to reach my full potential. The Army's loss was not my end. I built a life, excelled in sport, managed hundreds, and created a successful business with my wife of 24 years. At fifty-nine, my beret was returned. A symbol of recognition—too late to change the past, but a step toward a better future.

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 or contact WRAC Association HQ.



Bloomin' Marvellous

The WRAC garden at the National Memorial Arboretum has been the focus of many gatherings for many Association events. Celebrating an anniversary, unveiling our statues or presenting berets and cap badges, this beautiful setting has been a focal point for large gatherings as well as a draw for individual WRAC veterans and branches who wish to spend a little time in the wonderful surroundings.

The Association pays an annual fee for the upkeep of the plot, but every now and then, just like our own gardens, the beds need a little extra attention. So towards the end of last year we invested in some new plants to ensure the plot remains attractive and uplifting.



Planting begins



NMA Grounds and Landscape Manager Paul Johnson kept us updated on the planting. They have put in plenty of perennials including geranium 'Wargrave Pink', helleborus argutifolius, aquilegia 'McKana Hybrids', heuchera 'Marmalade', astilbe 'Deutschland', kniphofia 'Bees Lemon', tiarella 'Jeepers Creepers', asarum europaeum, caryopteris 'Heavenly Blue', aster 'White Ladies', azalea 'Gibraltar', digitalis, geum 'Borisii', penstemon 'Apple Blossom', heuchera 'Tapestry', trollius 'Golden Queen', veronica 'Royal Candles', cornus 'Rainbow', lavatera rosea, cotinus 'Golden Spirit', kerria japonica, viburnum burkwoodii, leucothoe 'Scarletta', potentilla 'Elizabeth', sarcococca 'Winter Gem', lupin, gypsophila 'Bristol Fairy', senecio 'Angel Wings', hydrangea Vanille Fraise, red skimmia japonica, meconopsis 'Baileyi', hydrangea paniculata 'Limelight', achillea millefolium 'Red Velvet', and convallaria majalis.

They also planted bounteous bulbs including agapanthus africanus 'Albus' and 'Queen Mum', allium 'Kings and Queens', gladioli 'Sea shore', lily 'Stargazer', alcea 'Charters Yellow', and anemone blanda.

By the time we got to the summer our plot was looking much more colourful. We hope our members and the visiting public continue to enjoy the beauty of the WRAC garden for years to come.



Army Servicewomen's Network

The WRAC Association is always keen to increase and strengthen our connection with current servicewomen. When we were invited to attend one of the Army Servicewomen's Network events it was a great opportunity to 'woman' a stand and share more with the wider Armed Forces community about the work that we do.



Our Head of Operations Claire went along to the event in Bristol which was attended by around 700 servicewomen, accompanied by our currently serving West Surrey branch organiser Sgt Stephanie Kolvik. It was brilliant to have Steph there as someone who is involved in the Association and meeting regularly with the ladies in her branch but also having the perspective of someone who is still serving. The women we met that day could relate to her which really helped build connections and demonstrate why what the Association does is so important.

We chatted to so many ladies throughout the course of the day – several of whom who didn't know about the WRAC and had lots of questions. Many were interested to find out more about the Association and enjoyed flicking through the *Lioness* – they loved hearing more about our events and what we've been up to as they had no idea we were such an active, crazy bunch! We even met a couple of ladies whose mothers had served in the WRAC - hopefully they will be joining our membership soon.

We were really pleased to gain some new members on the day, but most importantly to continue our strong bonds to the women who followed on as we maintained the bonds with the ATS before us.



Caption competition

Thanks to everyone who entered the last issue's caption competition, and to Pauline Marr for being such a good sport in the photo. Our winning caption came from Victoria Wade (née Smith-Myatt) who said "Could you not afford to go to Turkey?"

For this issue, Wendy Staden's costume at Haver Castle for the Not Forgotten Association jumped out at us - well not so much 'jumped out' as 'lumbered slowly into view'. We couldn't think of a good caption but we know a few thousand members who can!

Have you got a caption for the photo? Funny, clever, silly - all suggestions are welcome!

Email editor@wraca.org.uk and we will print the best one in the next issue.



100 Miles for Marg



Marg Davies' is lacing up her walking boots again, this time headed for Gower. She describes how much the support of our members means to her.

In September 2025 I'll be completing my 12th annual 100 mile charity walk over an 8 day period between Monday 8th and Wednesday 17th. I'll be walking in Wales again, this time to complete the Gower Pilgrimage Way plus 2 linear walks and 3 circular walks which add up to my 100 Mile target. The pilgrimage, linking all 17 historic churches in

Gower and including several chapels and other Christian sacred sites along the way, is only 50 miles so I've also added five shorter extension walks.

My supporters amaze and humble me with their generosity as I once again raise funds for the same two charities as last year. The WRAC Association, and the Pembrokeshire based charity, V C Gallery. Its CEO Barry John MBE, who served 20 years as a soldier, set up the charity to combat loneliness and social isolation for veterans and the local community. As a veteran myself I am only too aware of how fortunate I am and how difficult and lonely it can be to transition from military to civilian life. Last year I visited Steph and Kevin at the facility they run in my home town, Pembroke Dock. They have turned an abandoned school building into a hive of activity, innovation and support for all those in the local community who need their help to enrich their lives.



You can support me and my two charities by visiting the page below which will take you to my fundraising page at Give as you Live

donate.giveasyoulive.com/fundraising/margs-gower-100-mile-walk-2025

You can also follow this year's walk (and most of my previous ones) on my Blog at: margdaviesswalks.blogspot.co.uk

LGBT+ Ground-breakers

This year sees another new statue with which the WRAC Association are involved go into the NMA. Led by Fighting With Pride, and funded by the Office for Veterans' Affairs, the design for the LGBT+ Armed Forces Community Memorial due to be unveiled this autumn was announced at the beginning of the year at a reception on HQS Wellington.

The winning design is entitled "An Opened Letter" and designed by the Abraxas Academy who describe their piece as "a pierced bronze free-standing sculpture on a dedicated landscaped base. The written words and page are a symbol of the struggle and fight for the LGBT+ contribution to the nation's armed forces. The letter is a combination of words taken from evidence collected from personnel who have experienced exclusion, discrimination and in some cases have died as a direct result of exposure of their true selves. Evidence responsible for ending many careers, and in some instances prosecution, written in the accused's own words. Tragically, in some cases, the words of endearment expressed by a loved one. You can walk around the letter, be drawn to it from a distance and engage by being inside its darker surface, read the words both negative and positive, from inside, shadowed and hidden, or choose to come out of the page and reflect on the bright reflective surface of the future."

Our CEO Paula, who is a member of the LGBT+ Memorial Steering Group, was at the ground-breaking for the memorial in July along with a few of our members, Fighting With Pride and LGBT+ veterans and serving personnel from across the Armed Forces. We look forward to attending the official unveiling and reporting for the Lioness.



Babs Gabs

When Babs Anderson was asked by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to chat with a serving female soldier on camera for an Armed Forces Week piece she jumped at the chance to enjoy a good natter and make a new friend. Now available for weddings, bat mitzvahs and autograph signings, Babs took a break from her new found fame to tell us more about it.

Arriving at Birmingham's Cannon Hill Park, I was met by the filming team, who explained the process and introduced me to Major Charlotte Robertson. Charlotte is currently serving with the Royal Signals in Blandford and was wearing her PCS (Personal Clothing System), or combats to us old girls. It was as if we had always known each other. The first thing I noticed about Charlotte was the fact that she wore her hair in a plait. She informed me that it was allowed in today's Armed Forces but parades still required hair to be put up in a neat bun.

As we sat on a park bench, discussing our service, separated by 50 years, we found that there were many similarities. However, things have moved on and it's now absolutely normal for women to serve on when they become parents, married or not. I was amongst those who had to leave 'on family grounds' once I became pregnant. When I first joined, married women had to leave, but that had changed by the time I got married. Nowadays, in-service couples are posted together whenever possible. Charlotte was surprised to hear that it was different for us.

Happily, I have been able to encourage Charlotte to join the WRAC Association and WRAC Dinner Club, so that she can enjoy the camaraderie that we all share.



Huge thanks to Babs for making the time for the interview and for recruiting a new member - we are delighted by the number of serving women now joining our association. So as a new member, we put Maj Charlotte to work to reflect on the impact made by talking part in the interview.



It was a privilege to speak with Babs about life in the military as a woman, then and now. It was a conversation that left me both inspired and reflective.

Babs shared her experiences serving in the WRAC, offering a glimpse into the challenges and triumphs of her time. Despite the decades between us, our motivations for joining the Army were strikingly similar; a shared sense of purpose and a desire to serve. Yet, our experiences differed significantly. Babs and her peers faced barriers and attitudes that, thankfully, I have not had to endure to the same extent.

Listening to her stories, I felt immense gratitude for the women who came before me. Their courage and determination to challenge the status quo have paved the way for the progress we see today. However, our

conversation also reminded me that the journey is far from over. While the military has become more inclusive, there is still work to be done to ensure all women feel valued and empowered. I am committed to continuing this progress, not just for my peers, but for the generations to come.

To Babs, and to all the trailblazing women who served before me - thank you. I hope to honour your legacy by striving for a better future and making you proud. Together, we will continue to shape a military that reflects the strength and potential of all who serve.

From, your newest member, Charlotte



You can watch their full interview at this link [youtube.com/watch?v=Y_KYINYWws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_KYINYWws) or by searching within YouTube for "The evolution of women's experiences in Defence".

Lionesses having a roaring good time

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

Several of our members attended the Not Forgotten Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. Belinda Matthewman sent in these pictures of her, Lesley Louth and Jacqueline Garnett. Belinda told us: ***We all had a wonderful time and we were joined for afternoon tea at our table by television presenters Ruth Langsford and Lucy Alexander. They chatted to us for over an hour and we felt really special that the celebrities were chatting to veterans and were genuinely interested in our stories.***



Jane Ricketts and Elizabeth Abbot-Myerscough had an adventurous day out - they joined a group of veterans for a 13 mile hike on Dartmoor and finished it off with an exciting abseil in the rain!



East Riding and North Lincs branch had a day out at the Defence School of Transport in Leconfield, along with 150 members of other local Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs. ***Lynn Watson told us – we were treated to a wonderful brunch with copious amounts of tea and coffee (nothing like it was in our day!) Then we viewed the static display of Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical equipment and new vehicles. We then did a tour of the camp, noting that many things had changed over the past seven years, particularly the conservation area. We were all quite surprised to hear that male soldiers are now allowed to grow beards, and female soldiers may wear ponytails!***

DST brought back lots of memories for two of our ladies as they'd completed their Driver Training there, and also for me, having served there in the WRAC, and then returning as a civilian driver before taking over as Transport Co-ordinator until finally retiring in 2018. It was a lovely day!



Three ladies from the Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast branch also attended - Lesley Lewis, Betty Gash and Karen Dixon who shared this photo. Lesley said: ***We had the absolute honour to attend the Not Forgotten Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, it was one of the best days of my life and I was buzzing for weeks after!***



Dorset branch coordinator Caroline Hearne told us about a local veterans group called The Stronghold, who she has been supporting. She is now their Female Veterans Ambassador and has raised £670 for them so far through events she has planned at her job at a Poole care home, and the local Tesco flagship store. Thanks to Caroline's involvement, this plaque of the WRAC cap badge is now on display, proudly representing us at The Stronghold.

Advocating for All

The WRAC Association continues to work hard to ensure our voices are amplified externally through our presence on the committees of the Confederation of Service Charities (Cobseo) and Single Capbadge Associations network (SCAN), as well as our bonds with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, and initiatives such as the Female Veterans Transformation Programme:

Well into our second year of delivery, the Female Veterans Transformation Programme - a tri-service project led by the WRAC Association - is delivering beyond expectation. Primarily funded by the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, with additional funding from the OVA, NHS England and the Veterans Foundation, we are on track to launch the end product "The Female Veterans Toolkit" in November. Workshops to help design the toolkit were held in the spring with representation across all sectors.

Throughout the summer and across Great Britain, photography sessions took place to create a bank of images to be used to raise awareness of the diversity of women veterans and the skills and attributes they bring to civilian society. At Plymouth, Cardiff, Cannock, Edinburgh and Winchester many of you gave your time to be captured on camera, and we hope to share the results with you in the next issue.



In July, our CEO Paula was re-elected to the Cobseo Executive Board having reached the end of our original three-year term and coming up for mandatory re-election. During those three years Paula has created strong relationships across the wider Armed Forces community which has ensured that the voice of female veterans is represented in the design and delivery of services including housing, care and justice. We fought off strong competition for the prestigious place at the Cobseo Executive Board table including from The Sandhurst Trust, Mission Motorsport, The Naval Children's Charity, Scotty's Little Soldiers and the RAF Association. We are proud to have received such strong support from our peers across the military charity sector who voted for us, and to continue to ensure female veterans remain in focus in the design and delivery of services.



Out in Force for Armed Forces Day

June 28th saw our veterans across the UK taking part in Armed Forces Day. From coast to coast and the Chatsworth cricket in-between, we were out spreading the word as the general public, serving personnel and fellow veterans came to celebrate the successes and sacrifices of the Armed Forces community. Thank you to everyone who represented the WRAC Association and sent in photos.

Shropshire



Lincolnshire, Wolds and Coast



Moray and Highland





Salisbury

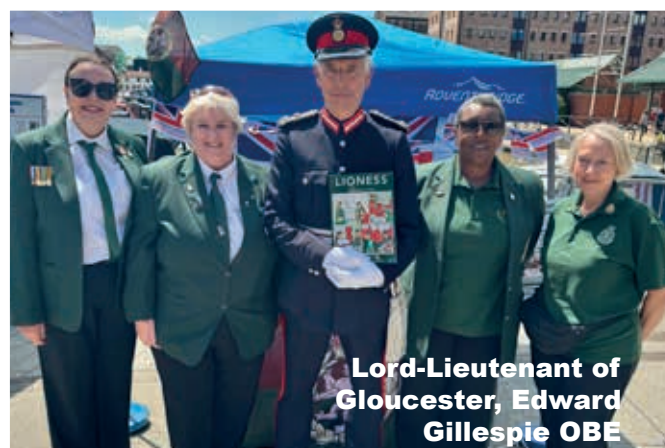


Plymouth



S. Wales with the Armed Forces Commissioner for Wales and the Armed Forces Champion for Monmouthshire

Gloucester Branch managed to get a photo with all the great and good who passed by our display including:



Lord-Lieutenant of Gloucester, Edward Gillespie OBE



Local MP Alex McIntyre



High Sheriff, Julie Kent MBE



...and a couple of rather lofty Beefeaters!

Bletchley Girls



On a blisteringly hot Saturday, when the South of England was hotter than most European destinations, Hayley Thompson joined a group of WRAC veterans at Bletchley Park and reports for us on her day there.

I had recently joined the WRAC Association and visiting Bletchley Park seemed the ideal place for my first event, as more than two thirds of the workforce based there during the war were women. As an ex-Army Clerk, I was really looking forward to hearing about their clerking and intelligence work.

The magic of this place starts from the moment you step inside, and continues all of the way around the stately home, its grounds, and huts that were built to house the code breakers from 1939 to 1946. They built their team by looking for mathematicians, linguists, analysts, grand chess players, and intelligent people with attention to detail who were able to problem solve.

Our friendly and knowledgeable volunteer guide, led us into the Chauffeurs Hut, and gave us a brief history with some fascinating facts and figures. Intelligence that was received by Bletchley Park was the centre of the web of information. Wireless operators carefully logged all German messages before sending them to code breakers by teleprinter or motorcycle courier.



He explained that Bletchley Park had a workforce of 9000 staff, working on split shifts, being transported in and out of the site daily. Everyone working at Bletchley had to sign the Official Secrets Act and never speak about their work there. To do so would be considered High Treason.

Our tour took us to the original main entrance and on to the Assembly Hall that was built in 1943. We then walked over to the Mansion House, and onto the stables, and cottages, where Alan Turing, the most famous of code breakers, started to break through into the daily changing of the German Enigma machine. Decoding and analysing the encrypted messages, even though the chances were impossible, at 158 quintillion possible solutions. Machines were soon designed to filter codes and support the work of analysts.

Then over to the tennis court, and finally we ended our guided tour outside the Intelligence Factory, which is the ideal starting point for viewing the huts (which have been preserved in their original state) and buildings that housed the majority of the code breakers, and support staff during the war.

After our tour there was ample time to talk to everyone which was really interesting. I walked around the huts and blocks, meeting and chatting with other WRAC veterans, and taking in the atmosphere of the rooms that have been perfectly preserved.

1940s clothes are still hanging on doors, typewriters and paperwork ready to be dealt with, and telephones ready for calls just waiting on the desks. The rooms are small, and the corridors very narrow. The smell of old paint, and books is overwhelming, just like an old library, you instantly feel goose bumps, as if you have been transported back in time, it is incredibly immersive. The original doors, windows and light fittings are fantastic to see, the archivists have done a great job to preserve it all. Some presentations are projected onto the walls from old filing cabinets, although they are re-enactments, it doesn't feel like the rooms have been modernised.





My favourite exhibits were the statue of Alan Turing, made entirely of slate, and so realistic. The tribute to the heroic crew of HMS Petard and their 'pinch' retrieval of documents from a sinking German U-Boat that were sent to Bletchley Park and enabled analysts to break the Enigma machine's latest coding system in 1942 which started to use 4 rotor machines. The extra rotor was preventing Bletchley Park from breaking the German Naval ciphers, and leaving the British fleet vulnerable to attack.

But finally, the tribute to pigeons in the war who were used to carry vital messages quickly, often carried by RAF bombers and dropped by parachute to resistance workers in Europe. The amazing story of GI Joe, the pigeon who flew 20 miles in 20 minutes to tell American bombers to abort a bombing raid as the Germans had retreated from the town they were heading to, and saved countless lives. I will be more accepting of those annoying pigeons on my roof from now on, who knew they were so intelligent and brave!

Thank you to the organisers of our Bletchley Park visit, our tickets are valid all year so I can't wait to return; it was a fantastic tour, a day to remember, and great to meet up with other WRAC Association members.

Financial Support, Fast as Lightning



As the WRAC Association continues to develop ways of connecting with those who most need our support, we have embarked on a new partnership which will allow WRAC and ATS veterans to seek our help for essentials when money is tight.

Lightning Reach is a platform that connects individuals in financial hardship with grants, support schemes, and other financial assistance - all in one place. It simplifies the process of finding and applying for help by matching users with relevant support based on their circumstances. Former WRAC have been using the service for a while as they already offer support to veterans in general, but our new partnership will ensure there is a dedicated route to allow the Association to provide swift and targeted financial aid where needed.

Kim was forced to give up her military career because of the pre-2000 ban on gay serving personnel in the Armed Forces. She found help through Lightning Reach and shares her story



"A lot of us have not been too well off after having our careers quite badly damaged. I live with a long-term disability where I fractured my back so I need heat and I've got a lot of mobility aids, a scooter, a trike, things like that that I need charging up just to get me out and about.

On receiving the grant it had a huge impact on my life. I had started to cut back on things: I wasn't charging my bike up which gave me the freedom to go out, I was being really careful when I used my mobility scooter, I had all the accessories that provide heat for my back. I have been able to continue using those, so it's had a huge impact on my life.

I was a bit dubious at first because I thought there was nothing veteran about it... but then I saw that it was fully affiliated to RBL so I felt confident to seek support on it. The best thing about the Lightning Reach portal is that it was simple and easy to use, it's flooded with things specifically for you. I put my details in and I was amazed at the amount of other opportunities that I hadn't even thought that I needed support in or could get support in.

The platform is user friendly – it's not difficult to know where to put your answers because the fields are there, it's quite straightforward, there's nothing complicated about it which is good for some who aren't so user friendly with the technology.

It has helped me think clearer, and it's been great to see what help is out there and to share this with my fellow veterans who may also be struggling. It has really helped me in reducing my stress, both mentally and physically."

Need some support with your bills and household costs?

Lightning Reach is a free online portal where you can find & apply for support with your finances

Get started today at:

www.lightningreach.org/support



"I was in debt with my electric and was worried to heat my home in the winter. Now I can heat my home this winter"

Lynn received over £200 towards her energy bills from British Gas Energy Trust

If you, or someone you know could benefit from support from our Benevolent Fund in this way, please visit the portal at lightningreach.org/support. Our strong relationships with SSAFA and the RBL continue and you can find details of how to contact them for support from our Benevolent Fund on page 67.

At the time of going to press with the Lioness, your HQ team were working hard with the team at Lightning Reach to get the new service up and running. You can visit the portal now and keep an eye on our Facebook page for updates.

100th BIRTHDAYS

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

- Ms Pamela Barton
- Mrs Violet Moll
- Mrs Lorna White
- Mrs Elizabeth Caley
- Mrs Helen Andrews
- Mrs Alice Lancaster
- Mrs Sheila Prior
- Mrs Doreen Allen



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!

Winnie Rice

British born ATS Winnie Rice, who now lives in Canada celebrated her 100th birthday on the 20th December 2024. At her one hundredth birthday party Winnie was presented with a Quilt of Valour for her wartime service and many years of community volunteering. Her friends sent us this image from Winnie's birthday scrapbook.



Sheila Powell

Sheila Powell celebrated her 100th birthday on the 20th April 2025. She is a proud member of the WRAC Association. She had a fantastic day and celebrated in style with friends and family, sharing her fond memories of her time in the ATS.



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

At 108 years old, we have found our Oldest ATS, Joan Harrison



Three months older than our previously known 'OATS', Joan Harrison née Brown enlisted on 14th July 1942.

Our CEO Paula travelled to Penzance to meet Joan alongside Martin Bisiker from Legasee, arranged by Joan's nephew and wife John and Pippa Stilwell who generously hosted the visit. Paula presented Joan with her OATS certificate and some Association goodies before settling down for a good chat with Joan who's clear memories were a joy to hear. Over the next few pages we have written up her words as Joan shares her memories of her time in the ATS, starting in the build up to the war when she was 22 years old and working as a civilian ambulance driver.

I lived with my parents in Newcastle upon Tyne a couple of miles from the beach at Whitley Bay. I remember when we knew the war was imminent, we had air raid shelters and some sacks outside to stop any bombing damage. We went down in our cars to the beach with a few neighbours and everything we could find at home, sacks and bags and that, and filled them with sand from the beach. It was illegal to remove sands from the beach but we kept bringing them home to put all around the Anderson shelter because they only gave us two or three and we wanted to bag ourselves much more safely.

When the announcement came that we were at war, it was a Sunday lunchtime. The Prime Minister came on the radio saying that he had asked Hitler to sign something and given them the last six months but he couldn't extend the time any longer so now war had been declared. My mother was just taking the Sunday joint out of the oven and she nearly dropped it! We were hoping at the very last-minute Hitler would sign, but it didn't happen.

I remember we went out shopping. Dairy produce had been getting a bit short and my Mum said to me, 'pop down to the corner shop and get half a pound of butter'. I went into the shop and she said, 'oh, I'm sorry' and just gave us two ounces because that was the ration for the civilians. After about six months there was no petrol and everybody had to put their cars up for about five years. My father propped up the wheels off the floor, putting it on bricks to keep the tyres. The first time the air raid siren went, we all grabbed our gas masks and rushed down to the air raid shelter. It was about five minutes and the all-clear was sounded. One of our planes was flying around, searching, keeping guard, trying to spot Germans coming over, and we thought it was a German plane. They gave out the signal and of course it wasn't an attack at all. That was the only time I ever went into an Anderson air raid shelter as a civilian. We'd heard about bombs but didn't know anything about them. We had a gas mask in one hand and a rattle in the other, like they had at football matches. The gas mask was in a little box which you carried on your shoulder. Why they expected a gas attack from Hitler nobody can work that one out - it was the first thing we were all fitted with before the war started and I don't think my Mum and Dad ever took theirs out of the box.

I had two years when the war first broke out being in what they called the Civil Defence and because I could drive, I was made an ambulance driver. We worked just the same as the army really. We did eight hours a day, three shifts with a night shift every third week, but it wasn't quite so bad as being in the army because you did get nights at home. I did that for two years until they said my age group had come up and I had to report for a medical examination. They told me I would be going into the ATS because they needed ambulance drivers badly.



I got the letter, with the train fare to go, which said I'd be met in London and not to take anything at all, just the clothes we stood in, and something for overnight. Mum said goodbye to me, and I sat on the train which was full of soldiers. When I reached Waterloo, I stood on the platform looking around. I saw two or three more women who had been on the train, and all of a sudden this lady came up. She was called a red cap - a policewoman in the army. We got our documents and she gathered me and these other two or three that were wandering about, and put us on the coach saying, "we're now going to Camberley".

I was there for six weeks for Initial Training but I never even saw the town. We had two great big houses that had been commandeered - the officers were in the smaller one and we were in the bigger one called Beaufront House. To get our uniforms we all went into the storeroom and took off our clothes. I got a blouse and a skirt, and a hat of course, and also trousers and a special cap that you pulled the flap down over your ears. I had to hand in my gas mask - you couldn't do drill with a gas mask on your shoulder! Then they directed us to the hut that we were going in and there was a bed made up with three big cushions. We were busy every evening cleaning buttons and shoes - spit and polish. I was the best shoe polisher in the country!

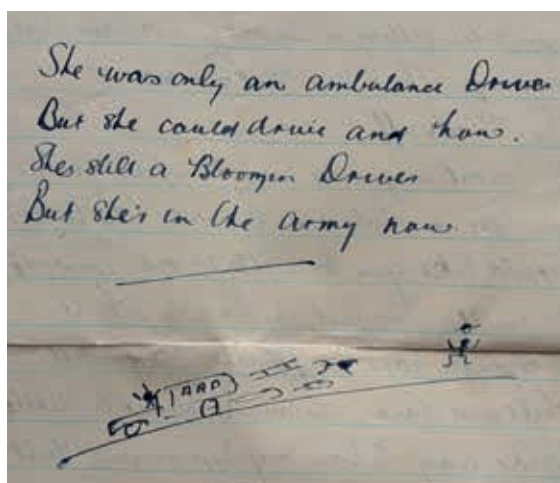
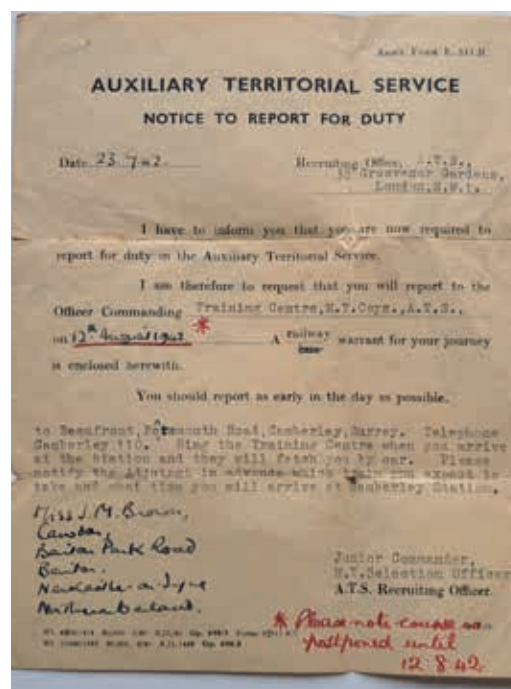
We got our jabs, but things like drill hadn't started. After the smallpox inoculation I was taken very ill, and for two or three days I didn't know a thing. I saw people wandering around, you know, just shadows of people, and the pain in my arm was terrible. Oh how I wanted to go home when I started to feel better but I still had a load of bandages on my arm. I missed about two weeks of training but I picked it up afterwards. They said if I hadn't had that inoculation and had actually caught the disease, I wouldn't have lived.

We all had nicknames. I was called Brownie and Peggy Bartlett was called Pears after Bartlett Pears. We had another one called Mincy - her real name was Ermintrude, and there was Fiona and her surname was S-I-M-S-O-N without a 'P'. Everywhere you went you had to sign for anything you wanted like a new pair of shoes, and she always said "Private Simson, no P", so she got the nickname 'Nopey'. We went out every day and were taught how to drive ambulances although every one of us could drive - that's why we were there! The ambulances were Austens, Morris and Bedfords. We were made what they called DIs - Driving Instructors so I was "Private Brown, Driving Instructor" and I had a little badge on my arm to say that I had a job to do, and I wasn't just a Private, because I was teaching others how to drive, and soon afterwards I was given my Lance Corporal stripe.

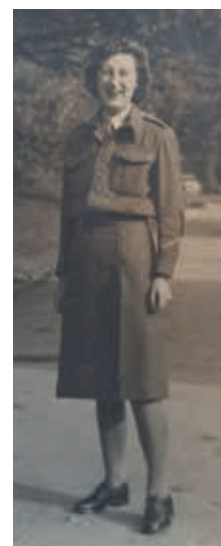
Next, all the DIs went to Edinburgh. Oh it was cold because there was no coal or anything. They would shut the doors at night and turn the lights out but we'd only got one blanket. Our greatcoats were hanging up - we didn't wear them when we were driving as we had little leather jerkins which sort of kept you warm while you were driving - well, as warm as you could be. So we started spreading the greatcoats over the bed like a blanket after lights out. And then a few girls got the idea to put the coats on and sleep in them. It was so cold that nobody could work properly, and you had to drain the ambulance every night into a bucket because of the frost and fill it up again the next morning, but it was closed down shortly after we all left because the men refused to sleep there!

After 18 months we were told there were no DIs anymore as men were coming back, semi-walking wounded, so we were going out not as instructors but as just ordinary ambulance drivers. If there wasn't much doing with the ambulance we drove anything at all: lorries, open trucks, the Rattle Truck, and I liked that - I hadn't liked instruction, it was very, very boring. So we all went from Edinburgh to Gresford in Wales, where they had a very big mining disaster in the 1930s and they took us on a little trip to see the plaque. We were only there about three months and then we were all broken up and I went back down to Camberley and that's when I started driving everything but not staff cars - thank goodness for that! I was at Aldershot, at Boyce Barracks, for the last 18 months.

There was a big hospital in Aldershot. During peacetime it had been a soldiers' married quarters, and there was a hospital there where I took the men. There was a maternity hospital for the soldiers' wives which was named after Princess Louise Margaret of Prussia - the soldiers always called it 'The Lousy Mag'. When I took people to have treatment at the hospital from the camp, I had to wait for them if they were going to come back again. I saw lots of cases coming in, stretchers of people without arms and legs, all recuperating.



A letter from Joan's friend in Newcastle

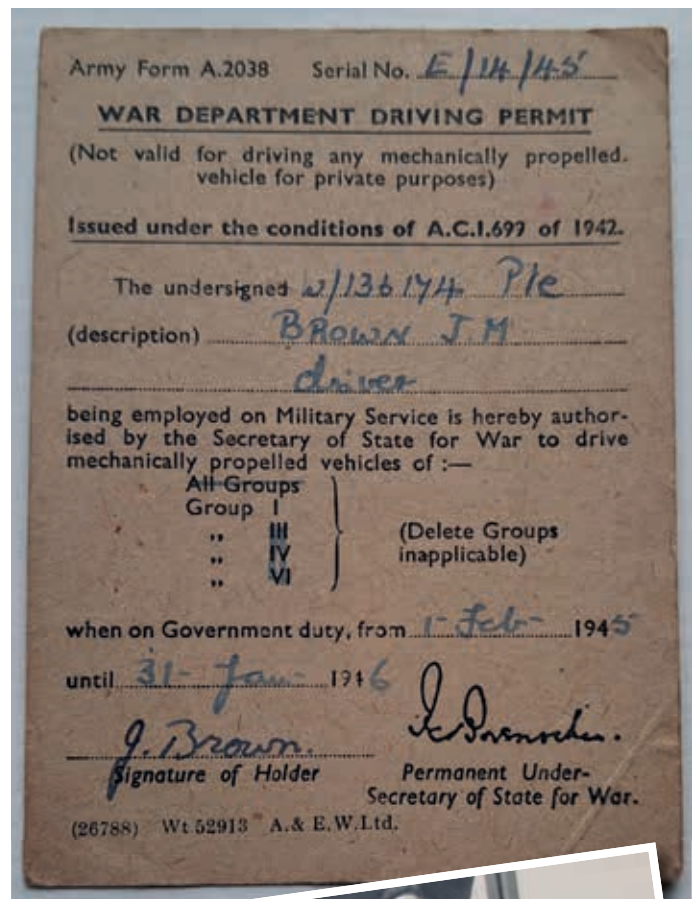


Driving the ambulances I saw many things. I remember a Scottish officer from a Highland Regiment who I drove into London and he was put on a train on a stretcher. He wasn't conscious and on his tummy they placed his hat. Tom, my orderly from the Royal Army Medical Corps, was pushed out of the way and the officer's own Scottish troops carried him off on the stretcher. They said he wanted to spend his remaining days with his troops in his barracks in the Highlands and die with his regiment. They were playing the bagpipes, and when my orderly came back he said 'I can't understand what half of them are saying, but all I know is that he wants to go back to the Highlands, he knows he's passing away'. I said, 'who on earth do you think he was?' 'I think he was much more than a Captain' he replied 'he could have been a Field Marshal to have all this bother.' I shall never really know the story.

Another time when I was at Gresford, I had to go to Chester to do a pick up with a lorry and I said "why a lorry?" I went to the station and the train came in and it turned out to be a military band with all their drums and instruments. We loaded them up on my truck so they could go round to every barracks in turn for two or three nights all around the country cheering up the troops.

I remember when Princess Elizabeth came to our barracks. They put on a display for her, so she could watch women's marching. We all lined up to see her but I was in the distance so I never really saw her face, but I could just see she was in khaki, and they said it was her 18th birthday and she'd now got to join the forces so she was coming into the ATS.

Rations were different in the army to civilians. Every three weeks I had a cigarette ration coupon and every fortnight we had a sweet ration. I had an arrangement with one of the orderlies that came with me in the ambulance - he was desperate for cigarettes, and I didn't smoke so I gave him my cigarette ration and he gave me his sweet ration, so I'd always got a few boiled sweets or a bar of chocolate, whatever was in the NAAFI. We had a soap ration, that was about every three months - there was no soap anywhere. The first thing I did when I went on shore leave was to wash my hair and sit in the bath. Because I was always in the men's barracks the men ate with the ATS. We had a knife, fork and spoon and an enamel mug and we kept those guarded. If we lost a fork we didn't eat, and when lunchtime came they said 'come on Brownie, grub's up'. I thought "oh dear, there's a bit of a distance from my Mum calling me saying 'Joan dinner's ready'". In some ways it was hard, we were hungry, but it was war and everybody suffered, everybody had troubles of one sort or another.



We had two slices of bread, no butter, and something they called jam that was made from marrows. People grew plenty of marrows in their gardens, they were cheap to grow and buy. We had what we were given, just a bit of meat. We all looked at each other in the hut, nobody said anything much, we all knew we were eating horse meat.



The only army issued tool Joan received



As D-Day approached I drove past miles and miles of tanks and lorries all lined up and no soldiers about anywhere, just hundreds of vehicles, all sorts - trucks and engines. We knew something was going on but I didn't see a soul. I had taken my ambulance for repair to Ascot Racecourse which had been taken over and I was waiting and eating my packed lunch when this dark cloud came over and I thought "goodness what's on earth?" I looked up and there were hundreds and hundreds of our fighters all flying over in a great big group getting ready to go. A soldier came and told me "Your ambulance is not quite finished but it's good enough to get you back. You'll have to come again in another couple of weeks' time and get it finished off. They want you back at barracks, can you get back as quickly as you can". Another surge of planes came over and the soldier that I was talking to said "I've got to go". I drove back and they were all standing there from my hut and said, "Oh Brownie, you're back, get your kit packed quick, we're all ready and waiting, we're off". I asked where and they said "We don't know, down to the sea or somethin'". Then suddenly a sergeant came over and said, 'It's cancelled, you're not going anywhere. You can get back to your beds and take your kit out'. And that was that.

I remember VE-Day. It was round about six o'clock in the evening, I was sitting in the driver's seat and everything was quiet. I ought to have known really that something was going on. All of a sudden someone came running down and said, "Brownie, the war's over". "You're kidding" I replied, "No, the war's over". I jumped out of the vehicle, I don't think I even locked it, which was a crime to leave it unattended, and went running down with him into the NAAFI where everyone was congregating, throwing hats into the air. It got a bit boisterous and some officers came down and called "order, you're still in the army - get to your beds".

After the end of the war there weren't many casualties coming in, just the sick. I think we could have been demobbed long before war stopped. I left the Army after four years in total and I got married a year later. My husband-to-be, Charlie, lived in the Midlands, and I was still with my parents at Newcastle on Tyne. We were in touch every day - all the arrangements were done by post, and finally we got everything settled. I saved clothing coupons, enough to buy a skirt and a blouse. Eventually cars were allowed on the road and I helped Dad get ours back to normal again. I was so busy getting ready for my wedding that it was a strange time really. You miss the company somehow, you suddenly wake up in the morning and go to touch somebody, get ready for breakfast and that, and there's nobody there to speak to, just Mum and Dad. I didn't ever see anybody again that I was with in the Army. I wrote for a short while to a girl from Middlesbrough who'd been in, but she was getting married the same as I was. There was so much to do with Charlie living so far away. We got through it alright, and the one remaining fact was, I have to be fair, if there hadn't been the war, I wouldn't have met my husband-to-be. No chance of me living in Newcastle on Tyne, meeting someone in the Midlands. So that was just the one good thing.



RELEASE LEAVE CERTIFICATE

Army No. W/136174 Present Rank: A/SP4

Surname (Block Letters) BROWN

Christian Name/s JOAN HABEL

Coy. and Group/Unit 356 Coy. RASC (H) DRAIDERSHOT S/D GP00R

Date of Last enrolment 14 AUG 1942 * Calling up for military service

(a) Trade on enlistment (b) Trade courses and trade tests passed (c) Service Trade DRIVER I.C. (d) Any other qualifications for civilian employment

Military Conduct: EXEMPLARY

Testimonial: A very good Driver, who has been reliable and done very well in the Service.

Place DRAIDERSHOT Date 6/3/46

Signature of Officer [Signature] Signature of Auxiliary [Signature]

Coy. and Group/Unit Overseas or United Kingdom Stamp: RASC

ATS & WRAC Association Benevolent Fund

Making A Difference



BENEVOLENT FUND GRANTS

Key Facts – FY2025 Q2 & Q3

- ▶ **81** applications for assistance were considered by grant committees
- ▶ **55** awards granted to beneficiaries
- ▶ The total spend for this period totalled **£92,380.51**.

Top Five Categories

Our Benevolent Fund awards one-off grants to purchase specific goods, services or facilities for eligible former servicewomen, or their dependents, in need. These span 26 different categories with the top 5 highest spending categories as follows:



Assistance to purchase a mobility scooter
£16,435.09



Housing adaptations including bathrooms
£12,059.13



£9,680.80 spent on funerals



Household goods inc. furniture & carpets
£10,791.40



Housing repairs and maintenance
£11,450.00

The Benevolent Fund awarded a grant to provide Glenda with an EPV.

“I use it most days as I like going out most days. We have a Motability car and it fits in the back so my husband can take me out on it as I cannot get about without it through being disabled with my spine. It is great. Thank you very much.”



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 www.veteranscharity.org.uk. Requests for non urgent assistance should still be directed through SSAFA or The Royal British Legion.

What are recurring grants? These are regular charitable payments awarded to help with day-to-day living expenses (known as annual maintenance grants) or nursing home care fees.

Princess Memorial Fund Annual Maintenance Grant (PRMF AMG) – These are for those who are over the current pension age.

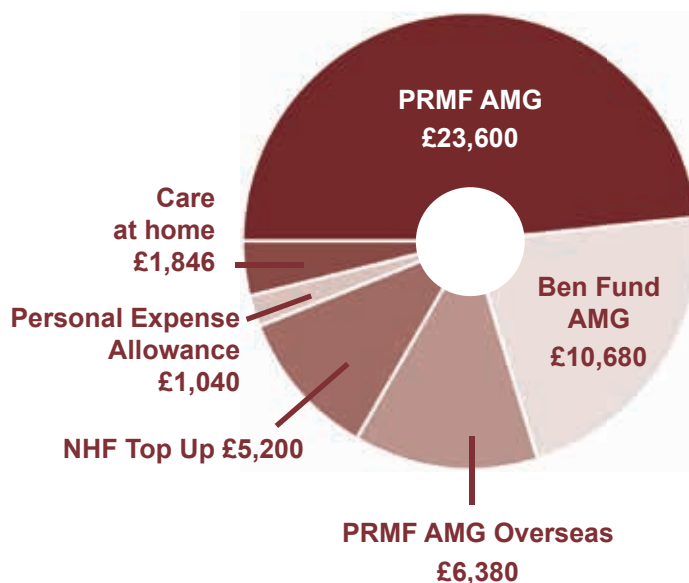
Princess Memorial Fund Annual Maintenance Grant Overseas (PRMF AMG Overseas) – As above but for those beneficiaries living overseas.

Benevolent Fund Annual Maintenance Grant (Ben Fund AMGs) – For those under the pension age but living on low income or benefits.

Nursing Home Top Up Fees – To assist with third party top up fees for nursing care.

Personal Expense Allowance – To top up the personal expense allowance allowed by the government for those living in care homes.

Recurring Grants Awarded



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 your Benevolent Fund's charitable money goes to those in financial need. When the report is complete it is sent to the Grants Officer. 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



SSAFA: 0800 260 6767

ssafa.org.uk/help-you/do-you-need-our-help-or-support



Applications for the above grants cannot be accepted directly by the Grants Officer.

Are you unable to attend events due to finances? Worried about the cost to attend branch meetings or trips?

Then 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

In some circumstances the grant can be used for essential items for members taken into hospital at short notice.

Want to know more?

Contact Julie Winks on 0300 400 1992
or email: benfund@wraca.org.uk

**MEMBERSHIP
SUPPORT GRANT**

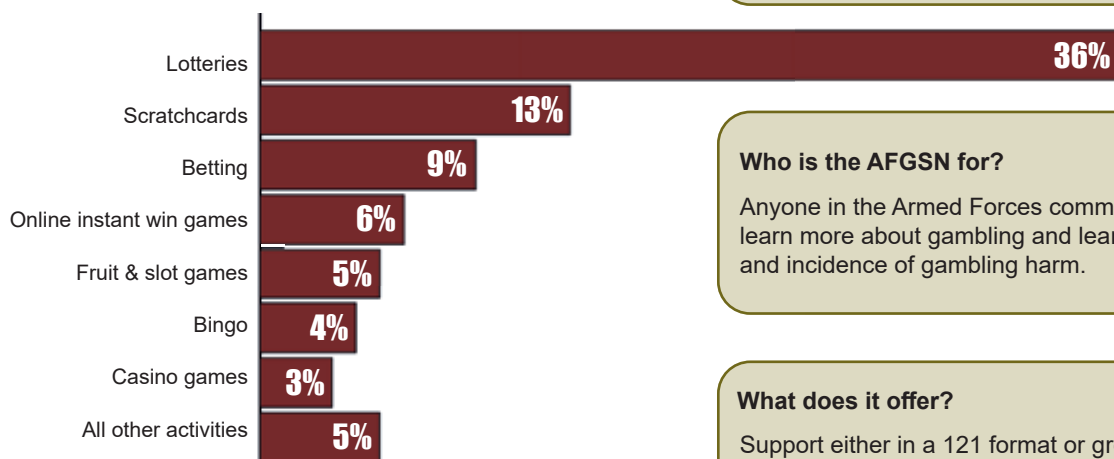


Are you worried about gambling? Maybe your own or a person close to you. Maybe you don't think there's anything wrong, but please read on...



Gambling harms can affect anyone, tearing apart families, straining finances, and taking a devastating toll on mental health. The WRAC Association is working with Betknowmore UK who are part of the Armed Forces Gambling Support Network (AFGSN) to address gambling related harm in our community.

How do women gamble?



Why does the AFGSN exist?

New research from Swansea University shows veterans are ten times more likely to have gambling issues adversely impacting them.

Who is the AFGSN for?

Anyone in the Armed Forces community who would like to learn more about gambling and learn how to reduce the risk and incidence of gambling harm.

What does it offer?

Support either in a 121 format or groups for those suffering gambling harms. Free accredited specialised training for anyone interested in gaining greater understanding..

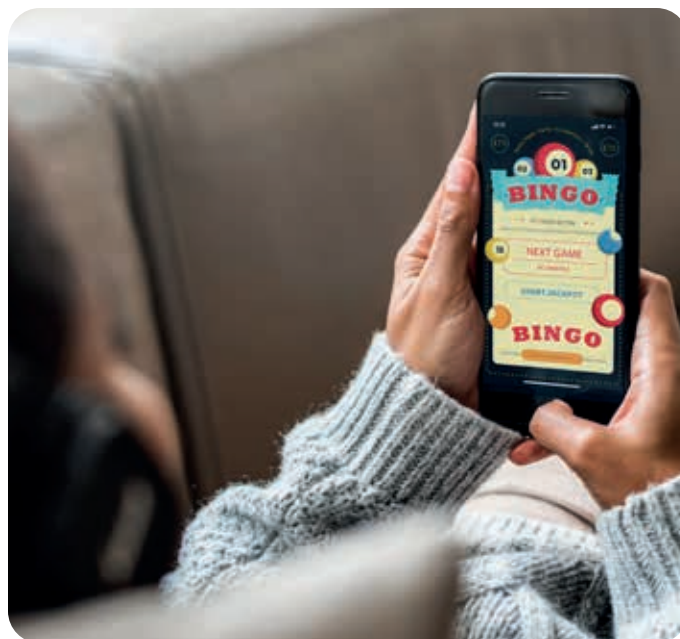
Betknowmore has a women-only service called 'New Beginnings'. This is Ann's story

Ann is a 78-year-old lady who was seeking help for her daughter's gambling behaviours. This had been going on for several years but her daughter had recently told her about the gambling as it was becoming more and more problematic, and she felt she needed help to get out of the situation in which she found herself. Ann offered support both emotionally and financially and wanted to do anything she could to help her daughter, but didn't really understand the addiction as it was something she had never experienced. Although she had already loaned her money, her daughter continued to ask for more, always having a non-gambling related reason as to why she needed it, but Ann was suspicious of her intent and of what she was doing with the money.

Ann was dropping off her daughter at the local weekly GA meeting, but it became apparent that she was not staying, and Ann suspected that she had instead been going to a bookmaker. The frustration of this situation coupled with the fact that she felt unable to trust her own daughter was causing Ann a significant amount of distress and she felt powerless to help. Once she had reached out to New Beginnings, she was offered a place on a group where she was the only member who was classed as an 'affected other', the rest of the group being made up of women who had been experiencing harm as a result of their own gambling behaviours. Having the opportunity to share in others' experiences and ask questions helped Ann to gain an understanding of what was driving her daughter's behaviours, which had seemed completely nonsensical to her.

Having gained a greater understanding of her daughter's addiction and behaviour patterns, Ann felt far better equipped to support her daughter's recovery and set her own boundaries. Her daughter was finally able to get into sustained recovery and is now doing well. She has settled her debts and opened a savings account with continued support and supervision from Ann. Both understand that continued support is required to make sure that recovery is sustained and relapse avoided. The New Beginnings service will continue to check in at intervals to make sure they're doing ok.

Betknowmore UK is a leading provider of gambling support and training services and work to raise awareness, deliver support services and create more understanding about gambling related harm. If you are interested in finding out more about gambling harms, visit betknowmoreuk.org for a confidential discussion.



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 an 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.

Founders Day

The RHC have made a change to their Founders Day Celebrations this year. Only In-Pensioners' families will be invited to attend the main parade. All Regimental Associations are now invited to attend the Governor's Review instead.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2025-2026

WRAC Dinner Club	Saturday 11 October 2025
Field of Remembrance Opening Ceremony	Thursday 6 November 2025
Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph Parade Remembrance Sunday Guildford Parade	Sunday 9 November 2025
Officers' Dining Club	Saturday 22 November 2025
AGM	Saturday 21 March Victory Services Club
Summer Event	Sunday 14th June Edinburgh
RHC Founders Day Governor's Review	Early June - Date TBC
If you would like to be put on the list of applicants for any of the above events please email events@wraca.org.uk	

BRANCH NEWS

Scotland & Northern Ireland

Janette Deans

Our family has increased by one since last year with Tracey MacPherson setting up the Moray and Highland branch. If you follow the Association on Facebook you may have noticed that their first meeting involved cold water swimming in February at Rosemarkie. Yes really: they will have to be known as our Hardy Highlanders!

Scotland and Northern Ireland Area continues to be busy with branch meetings, and one branch is so good they have already organised their Christmas event! We are organising our Area's annual meeting in Perth – all are welcome to attend.

This spring was dominated by the Grand Reunion and was a first for me. Before attending I did wonder if survival training was needed or should I press the self-destruct button... would it all be too much for me? I did neither but in retrospect wondered if the former would have been a smart move; it was a busy weekend and stamina was essential! It makes me wonder how exhausted the HQ team were when they finished – an example of great organisation. It was a wonderful opportunity to catch up with friends from across the country as well as to explore Cardiff.

My big news this year is that I have joined the Association Board of Trustees; I am honoured and delighted. Sadly it does mean that I will have to step down as Area Coordinator. It really is a wonderful role; meeting fabulous veterans, travelling around Scotland and Northern Ireland and helping to develop the network of female veterans. Are you interested?

Best wishes from Auld Reekie

Ayrshire - Arlene Reid

NEW

Hello from Ayrshire on the West coast of Scotland.

I've been reading Branch News and enjoying seeing all of you ladies writing about the events happening over the country so I decided to take the bull by the horns and create an Ayrshire Branch! Hopefully on seeing this more ladies will come and join us!

I joined the WRAC in October 1989 and did trade training as a Postal and Courier Operative. I had a short service but have thrown myself into volunteering for Poppyscotland and was the RBLS Area Standard Bearer for Glasgow, Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway for three years. It took me to some very important places with the most poignant being the King's Coronation!

I run an Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club in Ayr and have come across some fellow Lionesses, we have become very good friends and have joined events that have happened in Ayr. We attended the VE Day parade and saw the Standing With Giants silhouettes but sadly I never got a picture with them as we were busy laying a wreath from the branch.

On Armed Forces day I was volunteering for Poppyscotland. Tesco were giving a free breakfast to serving armed forces personnel and veterans so we (as hungry Lionesses!) decided to go along with other fellow veterans - it would have been rude not to!

We hope to swell the ranks and organise some meetings soon, so if you are in Ayrshire we would love to hear from you, either via our Facebook page – 'WRAC Ayrshire Branch' or email: arlenereid@hotmail.co.uk



Aberdeen - Sandra Lemmon

We still meet on the second Monday of each month, apart from January and May, in the Snug at Ma Cameron's on Little Belmont Street.

As a Branch, we have been discussing how best we can be flexible and allow more people to attend meetings, so we are considering one Saturday a month, to encourage new, younger members who have commitments during the week. We have 2 new members and are hoping they will be able to attend our more flexible meetings soon.

Our summer lunch was well attended at Molly's Bistro, where we had delicious food and first-class service, finishing off with a slice of my birthday cake. An interesting topic of conversation during the meal was the Typhoid Epidemic in 1963. I was in the TA with Joan Bartlett as my corporal in the Royal Signals at the time, having signed up for the regulars in August 1964, having been delayed because of the epidemic. Her Majesty the Late Queen Elizabeth came to our city to let everyone outside know that we were safe to visit. I was lucky enough to meet her face to face the following November. I was a very nervous 18yr old. I also joined hundreds of troops who lined the route of Sir Winston Churchill's Funeral in 1965.



Margaret Irvine, Moira Thom and I went to the lighting of the nearby beacon for VE Day. It was good to be a part of the occasion.



Edinburgh - Robbie Knox

Edinburgh branch members met up in March for a lovely Indian meal, only days before 3 of our members flew down to Cardiff for the Grand Reunion. Janette Deans, Dawn Menday and Sharon McQuade reported that they had had a fabulous time in South Wales.



Only Liz Dixon and I were able to make the April meeting, so we had a nice relaxed lunch, before doing a recce of a couple of local pubs. It's hard work, but somebody has to do it!

In May, Liz and Janette decided that one of the ATS ladies' headstones could do with a good spruce up. Jeannie Scougall's grave looks very much better for the clean, as you can see from the photo. It was only right and proper that the good work was rewarded with a drink in the Scots Guards Club. The prices are excellent in the SG Club, so we like to support them whenever we can and whatever the excuse.

The next excuse, sorry, 'occasion' was Jo McQue's leaving 'do' in June. She was relocating to the Lake District, so a Mediterranean Tapas meal was in order, followed by a drink or three in the Scots Guards Club.

Please feel free to join us if ever you find yourself in Edinburgh.



Fife and Tayside - Debbie Coupland

It is amazing how much noise a small group of ladies can make, sitting in Reid's Bar in The Salutation Hotel in Perth, where they meet on the last Thursday of every month. Sometimes there are only 4, at other times 10, and on one occasion even a disinterested toddler.

A casual observer would not be able to tell that this was a group of Army Veterans, nor the wealth of lived experience sitting in the corner. One was an Army Lawyer, one worked with the RAPC, two wore the red caps of the RMP, whilst another the tartan skirt of a Black Watch unit. All were proud members of the WRAC. Some are married with grown up families and still look after them when called upon. Some enjoy travel, including on the high seas; both cruising and tall ship sailing, driving around Australia, whilst another enjoys sea swimming. Yet another has walked up hill and down dale in all weathers around Scotland and her next challenge is to ride an electric bike a ridiculous distance whilst raising funds for charity.

Several ladies also meet monthly with the Perth Association of Veterans whilst another runs a Breakfast Club for Veterans. This noisy group could appear a little intimidating, but they have all served under the banner of the WRAC, so the warmest of welcomes is waiting for anyone who would like to share food and fun with them. As someone once said, "Come on down", we'd love to meet you!



Moray & Highland - Tracey MacPherson

NEW

It's been a busy time in Moray & Highlands since the last Lioness. Earlier this year we had a cold water dip in the North Sea at Rosemarkie and lunch afterwards in a local cafe to warm up. We were ably encouraged by friends and family.

We were delighted that Janette Deans, our Scotland & NI Area Co-ordinator was able to join us, and had the opportunity to celebrate our branch member Kate Bell. Kate was presented with a Certificate of Appreciation by Janette, for her sterling work in researching the life of ATS Pte Elizabeth Taylor MacKay, who died as result of a bombing raid in Great Yarmouth on 11th May 1943 (see p101). Kate was pivotal in the organisation of the commemorative memorial service in Nigg in 2023, for our local girl Pte MacKay, and attended by her living relatives, locals and area dignitaries.



The branch virtually attended the WRAC Association AGM in Cardiff in March. A small but important contingent met in Inverness for coffee in April. In May, two of the group did a recce of the Erskine Veterans Activity Centre North in Forres with a view to holding meetings there.

A recce of Fort George was completed in early June with a mind to meeting there on Armed Forces Day (see p56). In between this, our members have been spreading the word of our existence and attending Big Breakfasts in Inverness and Elgin.



Ulster- Sylvia Connachan

Well, that's another 6 months gone! Where does the time go?

The start of the year was a quiet month for Ulster Branch overall, but I attended an evening at Stormont, with the Dromore Royal British Legion. We were given a history tour, and I enjoyed it so much that I picked up a menu, so we can book a lunch and tour for our group.

Some of us joined an enjoyable online catch-up meeting with other members of the Scotland and Northern Ireland Area in March.

Although most of us were unable to get to the Grand Reunion in Cardiff, one of our new members, Jill Hope attended and loved it. She particularly enjoyed meeting the Plymouth ladies, as that is her home town.

Sarah Cairns, Elizabeth Montgomery and I attended the Anzac service in April at Ballance House, Lisburn, as we do every year. It was a lovely service.

I went to a Veteran's advice morning at the end of May, where I met many folk I had never come across before. It was very informative and ideal for networking. They were also handing out free children's books.

Early in June, several of us attended the VE Day street party in Dromore and then I attended the Royal Irish Association's annual D-Day Service in St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast. Armed Forces Day was held at Newtownards Airfield and proved to be a good day out yet again.

Ulster Branch members send you all a very big hello.



North East

Lesley Roberts

In May I was proud to represent the WRAC Association at the VE80 service and event in Newcastle. I gathered alongside veterans old and young in Old Eldon Square where wreaths were laid and the proclamation read with pipers playing and the Standard lowered. It was a wonderful day, although I was disappointed to find I was one of only two female veterans present as I was joined by a local Wren. After the gathering, all veterans on parade were given a real treat - fish and chips - a tribute to the fact that this great British staple was never rationed during World War Two. The only tarnish on the day was when the Toast to the King began with "Gentlemen!" - "What am I?" I thought, "Chopped liver?".

Whilst at the parade I was able to raise the profile of female veterans even more by appearing in the media. I was interviewed on BBC Look North TV about the day's events and the Newcastle Chronicle covered the event - I was amazed to see myself in the main photo. I'm sure Hollywood must be calling soon.

Not long after the pub landlord thinking all veterans are male, it happened again! I went to a Joint Ex services Association meeting in June and was the only female veteran. The speaker began with "Right guys" and then told the chaps they could bring their wives - a lot of assumptions being made there! Not one to leave it alone I assembled members of our Newcastle branch and off we went to the same social club to make the point - a whole contingent of female veterans? They won't forget that in a hurry!



Veterans mark the 80th anniversary of VE Day (Image: Newcastle Chronicle)
Lesley is front row, second from right

After 6 years I have decided that it is time to step down as Area Coordinator NE and let someone else take the helm. I have enjoyed meeting our members and have made some great friends. I thank all my branches for their support and hope that someone will step up and take the baton onwards. Please let HQ know if you are interested in the role.

East Riding & North Lincolnshire - Dorothy Mitchelmore

East Riding & North Lincolnshire branch have been out and about once again.

I am pleased to announce that Lynn Watson has officially become our 'unofficial booking agent' for all of the trips we take by coach - she made such a great job of organising our first trip that the title and the job just naturally stuck! (sorry Lynn ha ha)

Lynn's first booking was a Mystery trip, so we were all excited to find out where we were off to when we boarded the coach on day one. We were delighted when we arrived in Durham, what a beautiful city it is. We were so lucky with the weather too and enjoyed sitting in the sunshine sipping cocktails.

We rejoined our coach to be driven to our overnight stop at the Holiday Inn in Middlesbrough. A nice meal and a relaxing evening spent enjoying each other's company.

After a hearty breakfast we were on the road again with lots of guessing as to where. It soon became clear as we headed towards Whitby. Day two was spent perusing the many shops that were selling their beautiful wares. Of course, I couldn't return home without buying my other half a pie from the Humble Pie Shop. It's such a unique shop that transports you back in time and has seen the reign of three King Charles's since opening.

We all agreed it was a fabulous couple of days and have already booked our next branch adventure. Watch this space!



Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast - Betty Gash

Our first get-together of 2025 was in February, with Lesley Lewis, Sharon McNicol, Kerry Cullen, Lorna Jackson and Betty Gash at Eastfield Farm, Tearoom and Farm Shop in Maltby le Marsh for a light lunch and an opportunity to purchase plants, gifts and food produce.

We welcomed Pamela Wood, a 93-year-old, partially sighted WRAC TA Veteran, who served 1950-52, and had reached out to HQ. Lesley kindly gave Pamela a WRAC Association fleece with which she appeared chuffed, and also excited about being part of the Veterans family.

7 members visited Mablethorpe in March. Pamela, Lesley, Kerry and Betty had a short walk along the Promenade and wonderful beach and viewed the North Sea wind farms. Our walk was followed by a delicious lunch at 'The Beck' where we were joined by Lorna Jackson, Sylvia Stubbs and Marion King.

Sarah Hagnell went to the International Bomber Command Centre (IBCC) in Lincoln to see an installation honouring the service of women in WW2 unveiled. The installation consists of 10 women, with 4 of them being striking steel silhouettes, chosen by the IBCC to represent their contribution, courage and leadership.

Lesley took part in the 'My Great Tommy Sleep Out Fundraiser for RBLI' in Alford in March and raised £245.

Betty attended the Grand Reunion in Cardiff and also ran in the Kings Lynn 10K with other WRAC Lionesses. Karen Dixon, Lesley and Betty attended The Not forgotten Garden Party at Buckingham Palace which was an honour and such a memorable occasion.



Newcastle - Tanya Hall

Four members of Newcastle Branch were lucky enough to be invited to the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace by The Not Forgotten Association, so dresses were purchased, then train tickets and accommodation were booked. Names had been picked out of a hat, to make everything as fair as possible.

Two members, Sharron Nixon and Ann Ford had not attended previously, so they were in for a treat, and a treat they got! They were both like kids in a sweet shop, looking at and taking photographs with all the wonderful celebrities.

The Branch has also held an informal meet up in Newcastle. We went to the same restaurant as we usually go, Umai Mi, which is a fusion of Chinese and Korean food. We figured 'if it ain't broke don't fix it', so we knew it was a safe bet for us. We have decided to hold informal meet ups in Newcastle on an ad hoc basis from now on. All details will be posted on our Branch Facebook page, as and when we have plans. Our next informal meet up will be held in October as many of our members have prior commitments. All details will be on our Branch Facebook page as usual.



Central

Louise Lingard-Snape



Louise-Lingard Snape has recently joined us as the new Central Area Coordinator. You can read more about Louise in the Hail and Farewell section on page 8. If you're in this area and thinking about setting up a new branch please get in touch!

Setting up a new branch or group is easy!
Contact Louise to find out how she can help you get started.

Leicester & Nottingham - Ann (Monty) Montgomery

Our regular monthly meetings are held in the centre of Leicester. We have our own monthly branch breakfast get-togethers and attend the Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs in our area. We also have a programme of extra events during the summer months.

Some hardy members attended the Veterans Race Day at Leicester Race course early in the year. We all love a garden centre! Combine it with a restaurant and we are in heaven. We have plenty to choose from where we can have a great shop followed by long and chatty lunches. Our lunch at Melton Indoor Bowls Club ended with chatting over drinks outside in the sunshine.

We held a delightful VE80 Day celebration lunch with members, guests and friends of the branch. Our hilarious and chaotic Beetle Drive and Bingo sessions feature regularly. This years' trip to the National Memorial Arboretum was on a very hot day and we were very happy to be able to use the Land Train facility, which gives an informative and respectful commentary around the beautiful Arboretum.

We are well placed for canal trips and our accessible boat trip along the picturesque Grand Union Canal is a lovely day out with a stop for lunch at a waterside inn. We are also proud and grateful that our impeccable Standard Bearer, Lyn Wenham, continues to parade our Standard at events in our area.

Please contact Sue Slattery if you are visiting this area and would like to join us at our meetups. Everyone is welcome.



Peterborough - Vivien Hamilton

Peterborough Branch met for the first time in ages in February for afternoon tea at a local garden centre, but there were only three of us, Pam Sussex, Jean Legg and me, Vivien Hamilton. We had a lovely time, drinking tea and eating far too much, before ending up taking lots of leftovers back home with us.

We didn't arrange a meeting in March due to some of us attending the Grand Reunion in Cardiff. However, five of us met up in April, so our numbers are growing. We have also gained a new member, Margaret Newmarch and hope to meet up with her at one of our get-togethers very soon.

For our meeting in May, we were very naughty and visited a fish and chip shop in Peterborough. The food was really yummy, and we will definitely do it again. We went the whole hog that day and followed the fish and chips with coffee and cake at the coffee shop over the road.

As you can see from our photos we take the WRAC Association banner with us wherever we go, it's a real talking point! Our next escapades are in the planning stages, so watch this space.



Sheffield- Sandy Warne

Here we are again! We have carried on with our monthly meetings welcoming new members. We meet the 3rd Saturday of each month at the Travelodge at Meadowhall and all are welcome to attend (including our honorary other halves Kev and Ray who loves to remind us he was RE! Cheryl Jones now has rivals when it comes to the raffle with Karen Baxter and Barbara Burnett chomping at her heels for wins. Thank you all ladies for bringing items to raffle each month, the Christmas lunch fund is growing.

A group of us attended the Grand Reunion in Cardiff in March, what an excellent weekend that was, catching up with old friends and making lots of new. Karen Baxter enjoyed it so much she decided to keep all the deserts under guard for herself!

Barbara and Sandy also visited London in the spring and a must see place to visit was Bridget Jones front door by Borough Market. We were there to volunteer for The Not Forgotten at the Ideal Home Show at Olympia. We had a great day and one of the highlights was a lady who came to speak to us who was WRAC and didn't know about the Association! We got her to join there and then.



As the warmer days approached, the members and groups across the Eastern Area have been meeting for walks, lunches, coffees and catch ups.

In late May I joined my own branch for lunch at the Imperial Hotel in Great Yarmouth for our first meeting this year with plenty of catching up and planning for the next few meetings. Norfolk County Council Library Services are running a display about how the events in Great Yarmouth during WW2 shaped the town and the freedom the people have today. I will be joining them for an afternoon to talk about the history of the 26 ATS women named on the plaque at the Imperial Hotel.

In June I joined Colchester Branch at Clacton for their annual Seaside Havoc. It was a very hot sunny day, and we were all happy to sit around the beach hut with cold drinks just reminiscing. An invitation to join the Armed Forces Week Coffee Morning at the James Paget Hospital was extended to the Norfolk Branch, with music, coffee and a buffet. Alongside a few other members, I really enjoyed supporting their event.

The Lionesses of Suffolk continue to stay in touch on Messenger, I hope to be able to join them in the summer.

I will be standing down as the Eastern Area Coordinator in February 2026. Six years have flown by, and it has been a privilege to have joined you at your meetings, lunches and events but most of all the amazing camaraderie. If you are interested in this role, for further information please contact HQ.

Colchester - Heather Savin

Once again it has been a quiet time for the branch. Unfortunately, there has been a poor response to requests for volunteers to step up and help organise events.

On a positive note, we were able to hold our annual 'Seaside Havoc' in Clacton. Huge thanks must go to Vinnie Vincent for organising the beach hut for us. Although numbers were low, we had a good time. Sadly, we were not able to entertain the public with a tug of war competition because a risk assessment was carried out, which concluded it was best not to attempt it. We appreciated that Lyn Hatch was able to make the journey and join us on the sea front. The weather was perfect, and we were able to have a good catch up. Then a select few re-located to a local hostelry to continue reminiscing. I was not able to join them, but I believe a couple of shandies were consumed and no bushes were harmed (Kerry and Vinnie!).

Moving forward, it has been decided that this will be the last 'Seaside Havoc' due to diminishing numbers. An alternative event is in the planning stage, but a lot will depend upon numbers.

A core of regular branch members will continue to meet up at the Colchester Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club. We will attempt to arrange branch specific gatherings, but that will rely upon members coming forward with suitable suggestions and offers of help. We really would like to keep the branch as active as possible.



Norfolk- Lyn Hatch

For the Norfolk branch's May meeting the sun was shining and Great Yarmouth was buzzing. With beautiful views of the beach, The Imperial Hotel is always our destination in May to commemorate the loss of the twenty six ATS women killed when their accommodation here was destroyed by a German bomber on the 11 May 1943. Their plaque is still firmly on the wall in the car park which was where their accommodation block once stood.

With conversations flowing, we were happy to welcome two new members to the group, who quickly blended in. Our lunch was excellent so the conversation quickly turned to Christmas! Not a word about it is usually mentioned in May, but we all agreed that this would be the venue; excellent food and great service.



In July our summer lunch was held in the little village of Hethersett, another good choice with brilliant food, well recommended. Thank you to Rebecca Bailey for arranging and booking our table.

With the summer season in full flow, at the beginning of August we headed to Hopton for a garden party at the invitation of one of our new members. Thank you for having us Maria and Alan and welcome to Norfolk.



Maggy Ashmore has recently joined us as the new Area Coordinator for London and the South East. You can read more about Maggy in the Hail and Farewell section on page 9. If you're in this area and thinking about setting up a new branch please get in touch!

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 Maggy or HQ

Invicta Branch – Karen “Radders” Radford

It has been an eventful few months for Invicta Branch, with a number of events attended by many of us.

Our monthly 'ladies what lunch' social, organised by the lovely Kay Styles has been very well attended. The May lunch was entertaining, when the power went off at the Miller and Carter, just as we had all arrived and we had to make quick plans to find another venue. They must have heard we were coming!

Several of us were lucky enough to attend the NFA Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May, and what a day it was. Dresses and fascinators adorned, nails painted, handbags at the ready and off we all went. A marvellous day was had by us all. Some members attended the VE Day 80 Ball in May with the RBL, the NFA and others at the 1940 re-enactment at Hever Castle, where they helped to raise funds for the NFA.

A few Invicta ladies are now regularly attending a local NFA choir, which is held in a beautiful chapel at Tonbridge Boys' School. I have heard their dulcet tones, and they sound pretty good to me. Watch out, Wendy Staden, Margaret Mohamed, Kay Styles and Sonia Prince, because we will have you singing at Dinner Club before you know it.

There was so much for us to do in July and August, with the VJ-Day 80 Celebrations, Ashford Mayor's Ball and the Ashford RBL BBQ. We're always busy in Invicta Branch.

Bristol's Air Raid Shelter Walking Tour was a fascinating way to spend a couple of hours. Listening to the history in the tunnels under St Nicholas' Market was time well spent and gave us an insight into what it felt like for those surviving the blitz in WW2.

It's been a great summer for us, with the ladies meeting for lunch once a month, and the occasional coffee break in between. Remembrance was supported in several locations last year and our branch wreath was laid at Staple Hill by Belle, Margaret, and Pauline. We looked forward to our Christmas lunch at Redwood Farm in Cribbs and thoroughly enjoyed it when it rolled around. Our branch family grew last year, and we look forward to experiencing Bristol life in unusual ways together in the coming months. Well I reckon by now that most people have recovered from the Grand Reunion 2025!



Greater London - Mary Ann Clark & Heather Parkhouse

Greater London branch has had a few wonderful days out this year. Seven ladies from the Royal Hospital Chelsea attended an event for International Women's Day where we were given a talk by two remarkable ladies from the Women's Royal Naval Service. Ruth Bourne, who told us all about her time at Bletchley Park - she couldn't even tell her own mother what she was doing, and Dorothea Barron who lied about her age and height to get into the WRNS, they were both amazing.

In July the branch took a riverboat trip to Kew. Six of us arrived at Westminster Pier early (as you would expect!). Our boat was a traditional River Thames passenger boat built in 1976 called Cockney Sparrow. The cockney Captain said he wasn't an official tour guide but told us about points of interest along the route. He mentioned Chelsea Hospital and the Chelsea pensioners, and we pointed at Helen but I don't think the other passengers realised the significance.

His commentary was amusing and interesting and full of information that you wouldn't get with an official tour guide. Where Holly Willoughby lives or Michael Caine's penthouse! That the green arrow on Hammersmith bridge means that it is safe to go under because the cracks in the bridge haven't got bigger. The Harrods furniture depository building was mostly built before the outbreak of the first world war and the reason the other part of the building looks different is because a lot of the specialist tradesmen didn't come back from that war.

We had decided when we got to Kew we would go to a local pub for lunch. Two people in our party recommended The Express Tavern. I would, now, thoroughly recommend it.

The return boat was delayed but the weather was good, and we sat and chatted and watched the rowers up and down the Thames and the many water birds on the shores.

Our return trip was on an Edwardian River cruiser, the Connaught. It was a relaxing, informative and enjoyable day. Our thanks to Helen for doing the recces and organising us.



Canterbury - Susan Wing

Since our last article, we have had a time of mixed emotions. We have said our goodbyes to Cherry Buchanan, whose funeral I was privileged to take. Then sadly, we lost another of our WRNS contingent with the death of Jan Pitcher. Both had been active members of our branch until ill health kept them away latterly. They are missed.

We welcomed new members Lorna Clark, Susan Conde and Niki Conlan to our ranks, which keeps our membership steady. Another goodbye was for a joyous reason as Mary-Ann Clark left to join the ranks of the In-Pensioners of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. Following her Facebook page has shown how much she has integrated into her new home and community. Thank you, Mary-Ann for your commitment to us and you might yet be invaded by visitors!

We greatly enjoyed our Fish and Chip lunch in Deal. The shop is on the Sea Front, and we had a very good turnout. Not only is the location special but the fish and chips are always great.

The village of Wingham is home to one of our members and the pub provides a great venue for our celebrations.

We meet on the first Wednesday of the month, except for January to March, although the Grand Reunion proved to be a high point in March, but more will be said elsewhere about it, I am sure.



Well I reckon by now that most people have recovered from the Grand Reunion 2025 in Cardiff. Mind some of us came home with coughs and colds – but I rather think that is a sign of a cracking weekend. It was fabulous to see so many faces from our area at GR25 and it's fair to say the dancing shoes were worn by everyone that weekend! It was a great opportunity to try and catch up with lots of laughs, chatter and make lots of plans for the next gathering.

This was an ideal opportunity to allow new people to connect and discuss how we can move forward as branches and wider as an area. Thank you to those of you that attended the AGM as this was very informative and the presentation of the Beret & Cap Badges at the end was highly charged and the whole room welcomed the ladies back into the fold.

A reminder to everyone in our area – we are looking for more locations to open branches - this really isn't complicated or difficult and doesn't have to be a chore! Allowing other female veterans to connect and come back to the fold is so important on many levels – I know that many meet via the Armed Forces Breakfast Clubs, RBL and other veterans breakfasts – so why not use this as your base or meeting ground? Give the chaps a run for their money! Just give a shout out on our area facebook page, 'South and South West WRAC Association' about where, when and what time – SIMPLES! If there are three of you – it's a meeting – that's enough and a great start.

Thank you to those who do run the branches in our area – you are making a difference that is so welcome for many members.

Bristol - Judith Stinchcombe

It was a memorable afternoon when the Bristol ladies joined the Boys in Air Force Blue at the RAFA Club in Westbury-On-Trym. It promised to be a day of shared stories, warm connections, and delightful fare - a promise it fulfilled in every way. The club was still festooned with union flags and bunting from VE Day 80 celebrations. There was a cheap bar, a hearty lunch, and an atmosphere of camaraderie, where over thirty RAF veterans and their wives gathered to celebrate their shared experiences.

As we entered, the club had reserved a table for us 'Green Jobs', which is their affectionate nickname for us. They welcomed us with open arms, treating us to corned beef hash and bread and butter pudding - a culinary homage to simpler times. Nostalgia was served, not only on the plates, but also in the stories that flowed freely. The laughter, the banter, and the swapping of anecdotes filled the room with an energy only such gatherings can create.

A highlight of the afternoon was the raffle. The room buzzed with excitement, and when the tally reached over £70 for the club's pot, cheers erupted. The cherry on top was our very own Eddy claiming the first prize, which was a bottle of gin. It was a playful and heartwarming moment that encapsulated the spirit of the day.



Dorset - Caroline Hearne

NEW

The Dorset branch of the WRAC Association had their first meeting in April this year with an amazing 20 people attending! We met in the Club Hub in Poole which has a brilliant selection of cakes, snacks and drinks available. Our oldest member is 88 years young!

Some of us attended a 1940s themed garden party for VE Day with live singers, dancing, a barbeque and a raffle which raised money for a local veterans charity and was a really brilliant day. See photos on page 34.

We've had many other meetings since, including a gathering at Rob's Filling Station where the owner Rob shared his passion for starting The Stronghold, a local support group for veterans, and served us delicious fresh pizzas from their pizza oven. We've decided to start doing a raffle too!

We've been holding our meetings in Poole so far and have been really impressed by how far people are travelling to join us – if you're thinking about it but are a bit unsure please come along! We're all still getting to know each other and everyone will be given a warm welcome and we have a good natter! There's no set agenda, just come along, meet up with fellow comrades and reminisce. It is a safe and comfortable place for all to enjoy. We hope to see more of you at our next meeting very soon – check out our Facebook group 'Women's Royal Army Corps Dorset Branch' for details of all of our meet-ups!



Exeter - New Branch Coordinator Needed

NEW

Exeter branch had a successful launch event earlier this year, but our Branch Coordinator has had to relocate for work and so we are looking for someone new to step in and run the group for us! If you would be interested in finding out more please get in touch – membership@wraca.org.uk. In the meantime if you have any questions about the branch please contact our Area Coordinator Amanda Foster.



Plymouth - Debby Cox

Plymouth Branch still meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month at the Moments Memory Café in Plymouth and we have welcomed four new members since our last report.

Debby Cox has taken on the secretary role, whilst our new treasurer, Sarah Rochester has worked hard to migrate our branch bank account to electronic banking. Our grateful thanks go to our previous treasurer, Evon Roberts for all her hard work over many years and also Ann Williams, who looked after the secretary's job alongside being Chairman.

Three of our branch members travelled up to Cardiff for the AGM and Grand Reunion, where they met Jill Hope and Geraldine Bowman, who both expressed a desire to join us in Plymouth periodically and Jill has already been welcomed at a meeting.

Four of our branch attended the Not Forgotten garden party at Pentillie Castle in Cornwall which was a brilliant day!

Friends and family have been able to join us for meals out, when we enjoyed fantastic food (some of which had amazing views) at Jolly Jacks, The Rifle Volunteer, Windy Ridge Cafe and the Dartbridge Inn, where we also met up with a few South Devon ladies.

Once again, we attended Plymouth Armed Forces Day where we spread the word of both the WRAC Association and our Branch to anyone who looked remotely interested. We enjoyed the day with fellow veterans.



Portsmouth & Isle Of Wight - Val Duke

We have been pleased to welcome four new members to our Branch, including Cherie Thurston and Linda Bacheldor and hope they will all join us for our various events soon.

For communication purposes, we have set up a 'WhatsApp' for branch members. It is proving to be a useful tool and everyone seems to be finding it helpful.

Although it has been fairly quiet, our members have still been present at a number of significant events. Local communities have held various events to commemorate VE day, which our members were able to attend on an individual basis, whilst I attended the church service in Havant. We were represented at and paraded the Standard for the D-Day commemoration in Southsea, and again for the Armed Forces Day in June. It was a free event, laid on by the council, where there was live music and entertainment, military parades, Royal Navy parachute jumps, and various other arena displays throughout the day, ending with a wonderful aerial display by the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight of Spitfires.



Salisbury - Amanda Foster

Salisbury Branch were pleased to have some new branch members attend the Grand Reunion this year. I'm not sure how prepared they were for all the fun and games that followed – but the smiles and the croaky voices appear to be part of the appreciation! Coming back and relaying the adventures has created interest in some that were not too sure – so hopefully we will have an even bigger group next time!

Our year has unfolded with many going on holiday but a steadfast number have attended meals out, bowls, a Summer BBQ, punting, a Quiz Night and a theatre trip! We are hoping to catch up with Dorset branch for a joint trip to the seaside sometime but everyone is so busy.

Thanks to the West Surrey Branch some members took a trip to Sandhurst to witness the RMAS Summer Commandant's Parade and had a picnic afterwards.

We had a small presence at our local Armed Forces Day and many attend the local Armed Forces Breakfast Club which has allowed us to connect with other female veterans over a bacon sandwich and brew!



Torbay - Shirley Taper

Torbay Branch is a small group, so we use our Facebook page (Torbay & Area WRAC Group) to post our meeting details and other information.

'Marvellous' Pauline Marr does her best to join us but has a busy time with her volunteering and general day to day life. However, she was able to attend the Grand Reunion in March and reported back with lots of information.

Sue Simmonds, Lorraine Rowels, and I joined Plymouth Branch for lunch at the Dartbridge Inn. We were very pleased to have been invited and had a lovely time.

Di Keenan, Sue Simmonds, Lisa Lynch, and I attended VE celebrations at Torbay Central Club early in June. It was lovely to welcome Di Faulkner from Plymouth. We all had a great time, with many laughs along the way and topped it off by winning the General Knowledge Quiz on a tie breaker question. Good guesses all round!

Marvellous Marr attended the Kings Lynn WRAC 10k run with her fellow WRAC Lionesses in May and also took part in Ride the Night, Women v Cancer bike ride. A huge well done from us all.

Some of our ladies attended the local Armed Forces Day in Paignton this year.

We hope to see some new faces at one of our meet ups. The usual suspects will be there to welcome you. Don't be shy! It's just a chance for a chat and a giggle.



West Surrey - Stephanie Kolvik

NEW

The newly established West Surrey branch of the WRAC Association launched on Saturday 22 February 2025 with a memorable guided tour of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (RMAS), starting a strong foundation for this dynamic group of female veterans.

Following the launch, the group has enjoyed a vibrant calendar of social gatherings and commemorative events. On Saturday 29 March, members connected over a relaxed brunch at Login Lounge, Camberley followed by a sunny spring lunch on 10 May at Kingfisher on the Quay. In early summer, the camaraderie continued with a lunch at Wildwood, Camberley in June and followed by a scenic walk at Virginia Water & Cafe in some July sunshine.



A special highlight was the RMAS Summer Commandant's Parade and picnic on Wednesday 6 August, where members were invited to enjoy the traditional ceremony in the heart of the military community.

In addition to these regular meetups, members of the West Surrey group proudly represented the WRAC Association at several national events. These included the VE 80th Celebration Concert in London, the Governor's Review at Royal Hospital Chelsea, and a poignant group visit to Bletchley Park, once the wartime HQ of the WRAC.

The group's inaugural season has been marked by connection, celebration, and shared pride in service—setting the tone for a bright future of fellowship and remembrance.

Wales & the West

Ann Stack

Another busy time for our area! Our branches have organised a total of 44 social events since January 2025 ranging from Meet, Greet & Eats to Rugby to VE Day celebrations and much, much more.

The Grand Reunion in Cardiff was a big success and to the 13 (a very lucky number for us) WRAC Veterans who volunteered their time over the weekend, thank you. It was very much appreciated and I felt very proud as your Area Coordinator that so many of you were able to help.

Wales & The West Area AGM in June was hosted by Oxfordshire Branch and each of our branches was represented. It was a great afternoon of sharing ideas, meeting up with friends and reporting back what works best for our diverse and interesting membership in our 10 Branches. Rowena Naile, WRAC Association Membership Trustee was our Guest Speaker and gave an informative and interesting talk and a very open Q&A afterwards. The room was filled with volunteers who do so much to be inclusive, kind and helpful alongside arranging the most interesting and excellent get togethers. 2026 Wales & The West Area AGM will be held in Gloucester and the date is to be confirmed.

A few fun facts:

Our oldest branch is celebrating its 45th birthday this year and our youngest is about to be delivered (watch out for the announcement which is imminent).

The average age of our Membership is...Somewhere over 21 and in the prime of mischief!

I look forward to visiting more branches this year and representing your views and ideas to The Membership Council and of course enjoying the many events held locally and nationally by our branches and The WRAC Association.

Birmingham - Babs Anderson

It won't surprise you to read that Birmingham Branch has been as busy as ever since we last spoke.

Sadly, we have had to say our goodbyes to two of our members; Sue Pearce and Betty Webb MBE. Branch members attended both funerals and they could not have been more different if they tried. Sue's celebration was a pagan funeral, which none of us had experienced before. It was joyful but understated and we were pleased to have witnessed it. Betty's, on the other hand, had all the bells and whistles, with many famous faces standing in the aisles. There was a HUGE turnout of WRAC Association members from far and wide, which Betty's family found totally overwhelming. We did both ladies proud.

We had a big Brum turnout for the Grand Reunion, and everyone said how much they had enjoyed themselves. Bring on the next one!



We are continuing to pretend that we know what we're doing at tenpin bowling every couple of months and enjoying the tournament.

Half a dozen of us managed to drag ourselves round the Kings Lynn 10k with all the other WRAC Lionesses. We are all winners! We combined our Birthday Bash with VE Day celebrations in May and managed to turn our venue red, white and blue, with a good dollop of camaraderie. We're looking forward to more joyous get-togethers.

Coventry - Caroline Gadsby

NEW



About a year and a half ago, I started looking into my WRAC life back in the mid 70's. Up to now, I hadn't really looked into getting into contact with anyone or even being part of the 'family', mainly due to work, but I am now semi-retired. I had also met a dear friend, who is sadly no longer with us, WO1 Jean Mowe. Jean put me onto the WRAC Association and so my new journey of discovery began.

With encouragement from colleagues in Wales and the West Area Branches, I jumped at the chance to start the new Coventry Branch. Everyone has been supporting me, which I find very reassuring. I am keen to reach out to any female veterans in the Coventry area or indeed anywhere in Warwickshire, who would like to meet up, either in person or virtually to share stories, support each other and generally have a bit of fun.

I joined back in 1974 and became a military policewoman. I had a brilliant time serving in Berlin, Northern Ireland and Cyprus. I had lost contact with those I served with, but since I have started reaching out, I have found old friends, and I hope to make some new friends with the Coventry Branch and the WRAC Association as a whole. So, if you fancy a chat and a coffee, I would be more than happy to meet up and please feel free to join our group on Facebook - 'Coventry WRAC Association Branch'.



We had our first branch meeting in July which was a great success!



Gloucestershire - Ann Stack

Our first outing of 2025 saw us visiting Tewkesbury Abbey for the Peace Doves installation. It was a thoughtful and interesting evening and in these days of conflict, very relevant. Paper Doves were strung from the ceiling with messages of hope, peace and love and were accompanied by beautiful sounds, and images across the Abbey walls. We were all struck by the serenity and beauty of the installation.

The Grand Reunion heralded a first for two of our members. Super Heroes was the Friday night theme, so sssshhhh! ... Secret Agents from The Shire made themselves known complete with code books, a morse key and lots of subterfuge. One of our wonderful veterans who attended for the first time at 82 years of age found a fellow veteran she served with over 60 years ago - see page 4.

Our next jaunt was a much anticipated 'Six go to SING The Musicals'. We had a fabulous evening beginning with dinner and then a sing-along to our favourite musicals. We certainly belted out some notes and The Cast of Sing met The Cast of Veterans in the foyer afterwards. Suffice to say, they were thrilled to meet us! The Army v RAF Rugby Game in Gloucester was superb. The women's match was the best and our Army girls were brilliant, winning by 47-12. We all cheered heartily from the stands and then introduced ourselves to the team.

We were blown away by their knowledge of our history and they were very thankful for the legacy we left them to build on. Finally, we have recruited a veteran WREN and WRAF, so we are now officially a Tri-Service Group. We look forward to many more outings so please do join us!



Herefordshire - Lynda Armstrong

We had a great start to the year with our Post Christmas Lunch at The Greenman, Christmas might have been long-gone but we still managed to find crackers and party hats! We had a really good turnout, with a mix of 38 members, friends and family attending.

We have had some very sad news in Hereford Branch. Our last ATS member, Joan Lloyd, passed away on 14 May. The funeral was attended by family members only.

A few of our members have had stints in hospital with various ailments, so we send our best wishes for a full and speedy recovery to Liz Starbuck, Janet Knight, Alice Matthews and Tracey Loftus.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Melody Baker-Joyce for bringing a little bit of joy to members of the branch by sending out birthday cards.

An amazing time was had by all at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff. Everything appeared to go off perfectly.

Belinda Matthewman, Lesley Louth and their guests were invited to this year's Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, and they had an amazing day (see p54).

On Sunday 15 July, 12 members of the Branch attended a service and parade to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the death of Violette Szabo GC, Lillian Rolfe MBE, Denise Bloch and Cecily LeFort. All the ladies were Special Operations Executive and were executed at Ravensbrück concentration camp. Jo Foster paraded our Branch Standard.

Also in July, we were once again at The Greenman in Fownhope, for our Veterans BBQ Lunch, organised by Mary Woollard. Everyone had a wonderful time, as expected, and we celebrated Janet Knight's 84th birthday.



Marches & Mid Wales - Elaine D Smith

Yes, we at the Marches and Mid-Wales Branch do still exist!

Our previous (noisy) Secretary, Michelle Boyden has escaped to pastures new in Scotland. We miss you, Michelle. She left behind a library of correspondence which was handed over, in ceremonial fashion to our new Secretary Bernie Dolan, who tried her best to leave it behind when we all went for a meeting and lunch at The Raven in Welshpool. We wish Michelle all the best and thank her for her dedication and long, long, long Secretary's reports.

We had a fantastic Games afternoon in June at Gill and Elaine's place, where we were very fortunate with the weather. There were eight games to play, if we wanted to and lots of food to eat, of course we wanted to. Everyone had brought something tasty for the 'bring and share' table. There were fourteen of us present, which included two non-WRAC members, and we were honoured to welcome three members of the Shrewsbury Branch, Michelle, Rosie and Kim, who joined in the fun. We really enjoyed their company. Having lost our previous secretary Michelle Boyden to Scotland, we thought our gatherings would be less, 'electrified'. However, it seems that the mere name 'Michelle' carries with it a certain energy. Unfortunately, by the time the photo was taken, some had already left. It's hard to take action shots with a still camera but we tried our best. Let's just say, it was a lot more fun than it looks.



Oxfordshire - Karen Smith

We start this with the sad news that we have lost our oldest member, Helen Mackay at the beginning of the year. 6 of us were able to attend her funeral, where her WRAC beret was laid on top of her coffin, alongside her Salvation Army Cap. Helen will be sadly missed at our meetings, ordering her decaffeinated tea.

In June, we hosted the Wales and the West Area Reunion and AGM at Bicester, where we had an attendance of 30 members. The Littlebury Hotel did us proud, with a lovely buffet, containing plenty of cake. We had begun the day by joining hundreds of people lining the route of firefighter Jennie Logan's cortege.

We have welcomed two new members, Phyl (Frog) Barton and also Fiona Jackson, who was unable to attend our monthly meeting initially, but we were happy to see her at subsequent gatherings.

One of our members, Angie Bostock was thrilled to attend The Not Forgotten Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and has said that she and her friend had a wonderful day.

As a group we have decided to have days out during the week on an ad-hoc basis, as we have members that work different hours and can't always attend our monthly meetings at the Littlebury Hotel. Our first outing was to Banbury in July.

If you are within a day trip away, then we would love for you to come and visit. Just send a message and we will see what we can arrange.

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

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

Shropshire – Sandra Davies

Hello again from all the troublemakers of the Shropshire Branch!

Now that we are well rested, we have restarted our monthly meetings, where we plot our future manoeuvres!

We have so far terrorised Cardiff twice - for the ladies' rugby and for the Grand Reunion where Chris Powell received her Certificate of Appreciation, and London three times - for the Ceremony of the Keys, the NFA Garden Party at Buckingham Palace and The Governors Review at the RHC. We came away from all with great memories.

We also hosted another NFA fundraising event with entertainment from Annie and Lloyd, a buffet lunch and a cracking raffle. We went to Birmingham for the Military Tattoo and to the military match day at Shrewsbury Town FC, where the tent got an airing. The tent was out again for Armed Forces Day in Shrewsbury and Donnington - thank you to the branch members for manning the stall!

Our thespian, Shirley, was on display in a production of Calendar Girls. I heard bigger buns were needed – can't imagine what was all about! On a sad note, the branch standard had an outing for the funeral of Betty Webb. You will be missed Betty.

Our branch turns 45 over the summer so we'll report more on that in the next edition!

A massive thank you to all those who have supported us, and especially our branch members for giving up their time for our events, we couldn't do it without you.

Til next time, take care everyone.



South Wales - Deserie Mansfield

Earlier this year we visited picturesque Abergavenny. One of our 'ladies who lunch' travelled for 3.5 hours to get there! That's dedication.

We added a little competition into the mix in March, at the Women's Six Nations match - Wales v England. Shropshire Branch joined us at the Principality Stadium in Cardiff, and spirits were high as Wales scored their first try. England followed with eleven more! We drowned our sorrows at the United Services Mess. Let's just say, the 'third half' of the day was the winner, with laughter, and a bit of friendly rivalry.

A sun-soaked May outing to Pontypridd started with a brief walking tour and a lively riverside lunch. Dessert was sacrificed to the buzz of the venue, but the laughter (and misheard conversation) made up for it. We topped off with homemade cake in the award-winning market hall. There was talk of a return. Cake will do that!

With over 600 castles in Wales, it's fair to say we're never far from one and June took us to Caldicot Castle for Armed Forces Day. From our gazebo, we shared information on the WRAC Association and Women Veterans South Wales, whilst raising funds for our Branch and The Not Forgotten. Thanks to all our brilliant volunteers, including two WRAF members and one QA.

Whatever we do, our ladies continue to show up with energy, kindness, and a spirit that's nothing short of inspiring. Who knows where we'll pop up next. Just follow the sound of laughter and the aroma of warm Welsh Cakes.



Tamworth - Chris Whitehead

We start our report with the sad news that one of our founding members, Vee Moore has taken up a posting to the great parade square in the sky. She will be greatly missed by everyone who knew her.

We had a fabulous time early in the year, when 12 of us enjoyed the Chocolate Truffle Making Workshop with the Military Chef in Sutton Coldfield. It got messy but was totally yummy.

In March several of us attended the WRAC Association Grand Reunion and AGM in Cardiff. What a fabulous weekend, with many wonderful superheroes, Beating Retreat, more Beret and Cap Badge presentations, marvellous speeches and great entertainment.

We were very busy in May, with a sad start, when we joined many others to say goodbye to Betty Webb MBE. Special thoughts were with Birmingham Branch that day. The very next day we joined Birmingham Branch again for their Branch Birthday and VE day lunch. Then later in the month we had lunch in Rugeley at a cafe run by a Veteran. Finally, three of us and guests, were honoured to attend The Not Forgotten garden party at Buckingham Palace and had a fabulous day.



Pat Williams and Lesley Wallace celebrated their 80th birthdays by going off on a cruise with fellow veterans, Sylvia Stubbs and Marion King who they met 63 years ago when they all joined the WRAC.

Nicola Scott celebrated her 60th birthday by taking a family trip to Cyprus, to relive their posting there.

Worcester - Jane Griffin-Ash

Whenever there is a gathering of ladies for lunch in Worcester, you could be forgiven for thinking that you have stumbled upon a Worcester-Hereford-Birmingham Branch! It seems to be the centre of the universe once every three or so months, when there are usually about a dozen happy, smiling faces as we meet up to eat, chat and have a thoroughly good time together.

We are still testing out different venues for lunch, but the choice ultimately depends on their ability to cater for a large bunch of 'older' ladies and how well they treat me when I do a recce.

It is relatively easy to get to Worcester by train or car, and there is ample parking around the city, so feel free to join us when you fancy good food, good company and a good giggle.



All of our branches that have been going for some time seem to grow in their own success by word of mouth and the events that they do.

We had two well deserved members from the North West attend the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace with a guest by invitation of The Not Forgotten Society.

With the celebrations of the end of the Second World War, celebrations have been held around the country and we have been represented in many areas with members at Cenotaphs. With Armed Forces Day some areas have held joint commemorations, VE Day, Armed Forces & VJ Day and it has been an honour to represent Cumbria at some of these events.

Whilst in Cumbria a new group has had their first meeting and following on from this a few more meetings will be planned between now and Christmas. As Cumbria is a vast area, locations are being changed and depending on who wants to host so we could see ourselves going between Barrow and Carlisle and areas in between.

Carlisle saw the hosting of the Not Forgotten Society entertainers, Annie and Lloyd attend their Armed Forces Day at Carlisle United Football Club and it was a success.

The North West don't usually hold an AGM but this year with the help of the branch organisers we'll try to hold one later in the year via Zoom. For more information watch this space!

With the Christmas season just around the corner please feel free to contact me if you need anything, either attendance at your event or help to organise a joint venture with another branch so that we can continue to grow and show our strength together moving forward.

Signing off for now but remember you can always send me a message or join our NorthWest Area Facebook Group.

Manchester - Pip Flegel

Earlier this year Manchester Branch were embroiled in a very serious and highly competitive game of Crazy Golf at the Flower Bowl at Barton Grange in Preston. This is a regular, twice a year event, and the competition is fierce, with no prisoners taken!

We had a couple of members from Hereford Branch join us, they were under the misguided illusion they could go home with our highly valuable trophy and beautiful picture that Sarah Hunt and Sue Sharkey made for us, but Ali Brown nor Mary Woolard were amongst the winners. Indeed, the coveted prize was won by our very own Jackie Walton (Mackem)!!! The day was rounded off with an excellent lunch at the Ocean Chippy next door.

The Manchester Branch Crazy Golf Competition is open to any other branch who fancies their chances, or maybe you would like to join us at any of our other events.

The Spitfire Visitor Centre at Blackpool Airport was our next trip out. It gave us a valuable look at the realities of fighting in the air during the dark days of WWII.



Every Monday evening, some of us still meet up for our online quiz. We started our quizzes during the first Covid lockdown and have found no reason to stop. We have a new quiz master each week, which leads to varied subjects and new winners popping their heads above the parapet.

Who doesn't love a canal boat trip? So, we've had a go at that too. It's all go in Manchester Branch.

Wirral and Chester - Sharon Broderick MBE

The first half of 2025 has been extremely busy for our branches. We continue to meet as two separate entities, so that as many ladies as possible can attend.

In March, thirteen of us set off in a self-drive minibus for some shenanigans at the Grand Reunion. We met up with Frog (Phyl Barton), who has been getting me into trouble since 1983. She sat with us at the dinner; however, she identified her local branch and now meets with them, but will always be an honorary Wirral girl. We visited Barry Island whilst in South Wales, which was hilarious.

Thank you to Sheila Brown, who once again hosted our annual Garden Party in May. We welcomed our new member Tina Tosi on the day, and look forward to her getting involved in the future.

VE day 80 was another fabulous occasion. We were invited to attend a ceremony in Birkenhead, where I proudly paraded our Standard. We then went off to a good old greasy-spoon café for fish and chips. We were all in greens, with medals proudly on display and were asked about our service by lots of people.



Three of our ladies have been interviewed by The Legasee Project and we attended the launch event at the AGC museum (see p13).

Elaine Carolan was invited to the garden party at Buckingham Palace by the Not Forgotten, in recognition of her hard work finding our sisters in arms on Wirral who passed away in conflict and are not remembered on any memorials.

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

It's time to reconnect and meet up with old friends. The next PTI's reunion will be held at the Delta Hotel in Peterborough over the weekend of 10/11th July 2026.

On Friday evening there's the opportunity to meet up informally with your own peer groups to catch up and reminisce. Peterborough city centre is just 10 minutes away by car, taxi or bus and offers many dining options. The hotel also offers a good menu in both its restaurant and bar.

You may choose to attend only the Reunion Dinner on Saturday evening at the Delta Hotel. The cost for the 3-course meal £38, payable in full by the 31st December. The hotel requires a non-refundable deposit for bookings. Please note that refunds for cancellations will only be available until 28th February 2026.

To book for the dinner, please email or call Lyn Hatch and let me know of any dietary requirements.

Email – hatchlyn@aol.com
phone – 07929 070665

A room booking link will be available early next year.

Our Facebook page (Women's Royal Army Corps – PTI's) has now been running for nine months and so far, has 47 members. There have been some amazing photos posted and please keep posting, wonderful reminders of our sporting achievements and our Corps history.

It's been some time since the last PTI's Reunion – let's make this one to remember.



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NEW

Setting up a new branch or group is easy!
Contact HQ today
to find out how we can help
you get started.

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From the Branch News Editor: Babs Anderson



What busy bees we have all been since last we spoke and long may it last! It's been particularly heartwarming to see all the smiling faces in your photos. As we gallop headlong towards Lioness 2026 Issue 1, may I suggest that you take lots of photos, whenever you are together and send them straight to the Editor. They can then be kept safe and applied to your Branch report next time, when you know you have a photo somewhere and there's a palaver tracking it down, because you remember laughing with the comical waiter.

Whilst I have been speaking to your branch reporters, I have often heard "We haven't done anything", but when we delve into it, you have actually done some interesting things. How about keeping a list in the notes or a separate calendar on your phone? We know you have events on your horizon, so tell everyone all about it here in the Lioness. Having said that, we know that life comes along and scuppers our plans sometimes. If that happens to you, don't feel that you have to struggle to throw together a report, just for the say so. Take a break – but tell us that there will be no report from you this time. Remember, this is your Lioness.

If essays weren't your best subject at school but you were always being told off for talking, why not give us a call in October and talk to us about your Branch goings-on? We're here to listen.

Happy reading everybody.

Area Coordinators Needed

Are you in the Eastern 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 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

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD AT THE MERCURE HOLLAND HOUSE HOTEL, CARDIFF
SATURDAY 22ND MARCH 2025, 13:00

The following is a precis of the Minutes of the AGM outlining the main points agreed and proposals approved. A full copy of the AGM Minutes can be found at wraca.org.uk

Trustees Present:

Fiona Gardner CBE (FG) Chair and Vice-President
Rowena Naile MBE (RN) Chair of Membership Council
Monica Jones (MJ) Chair of Benevolent Fund Major Grants Committee
Amanda Hassell
Barbara Johnson
Sue Mackenzie
Dawn Menday
Helen Merrington-Rust MBE
Shân Veillard-Thomas

Area Coords Present:

Janette Deans
Amanda Foster
Lyn Hatch
Dawn Hawker
Lesley Roberts
Nina Smith
Ann Stack

Apologies:

Louise Lingard-Snape
Tim Savage (TS) Treasurer

In Attendance:

Paula Rogers (CEO) Chief Executive Officer
Jane Winfield (JW) Finance & Governance Officer (minutes)
Major General (Retd) Tim Hyams CB OBE (Guest Speaker)

Item	Notes
1	Chair's Opening Remarks - FG. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Audrey Smith congratulated on her OBE in the Kings New Years Honours list.
2	Apologies for Absence – FG. Apologies received Tim Savage and Louise Lingard-Snape
3	Confirmation of Minutes of 16th March 2024 AGM Meeting – FG The Minutes of the AGM, 16/03/2024 were published in the “Lioness” 2024/2 Proposal: That the Minutes of the 2024 AGM are agreed as correct. Proposed: Fiona Gardner Seconded: Sue Westlake Approved: All
4	Business Arising – None
5	Governance – FG The Trustees met twice this year. Isabel McCord has stepped down as Life Vice President. A skills audit for the Board of Trustees will take place in summer. FG stepping down as Vice President after this Grand Reunion. Proposal: That Amanda Hassell is elected as the new Vice President of the WRAC Association Proposed: Karen Radford Seconded: Julie White Approved: All Staff were thanked during the tenure of the chair. HQ is now located at Sir John Moore Barracks in Winchester. The postal address remains as Basepoint as it is more efficient.
6	Membership Council Report – RN The reduction of subs to zero at the last AGM resulted in an increase in membership to 4,285. Winchester branch thanked for compiling welcome packs. Salisbury branch thanked for putting Xmas cards in envelopes. Thanks to Cathy Munro who has stepped down, and the new Area Coord for the Central Area after a unanimous vote from the branches on 17th February 2025 is Louise Lingard-Snape. Certificates of Appreciation - FG Certificates of Appreciation presented to: Heather Gaughran – Heather is the Association photographer and her photos demonstrate the camaraderie of the WRAC Association. Christina Powell – Chris epitomises the aims of our Association organising social gatherings, looking after the welfare of others and fostering friendship within the Shropshire branch. Barbara Anderson – Babs' contribution to the WRAC Association, Birmingham WRAC Association branch, Dinner Club and much more over many years has been exemplary.

Item	Notes
7	Benevolent Fund Report – MJ. In the financial year 2023-2024 there were 128 grants awarded. Membership Support Grants were provided to help members attend key events. Cost of living has increased and the grants provide crucial support.
8	Influence report – FG. The charity is engaged and consulted on issues around female veterans. The Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster is chaired by one of our LVPs. Our CEO sits on the Cobseo Executive Committee. VP sits on the ABF Grants Committee & Army Charities Advisory Group VP & CEO sit on the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP) Executive Association has links to the OVA and is a recognised and respected voice in the female veteran's space. Recognition leads to access which leads to influence. Influence allows us to further develop provision for female veterans which is our end game. FVTP is now at the halfway point. Hannah West has left and Stacey Denyer has joined. Resources are available on the FVTP website. Developing our influence within the charitable and political sphere to further the better treatment and provision for female veterans is within our objectives. The formal closure of the Charity was agreed with a target date of 2054. The vision for the Association is to provide camaraderie, benevolence and support to former members of the ATS and WRAC and exert influence within the military charity sector to broaden support for female veterans. The four Strategic objectives are: Governance, Membership, Benevolence and Influence. A light touch strategy review took place by Fiona Gardner, Amanda Hassell, Sue MacKenzie & Paula Rogers. No substantive change required at this time. A Strategy review will be initiated around March 2027 for endorsement at the AGM in March 2028. Implementation of the Etherton report has seen restoration of beret and caps badge presentations in Perth and Guildford. Brig Clare Phillips to conduct a presentation to 6 ladies after this AGM.
9	Annual Report – CEO (For TS as Treasurer was not present) Merger of the Association and Benevolence funds is working well. Investments have had an excellent year and the Association is well placed to continue to support our members. Rothmans the Auditors have found the accounts for 2024 to be in good order and compliant in all respects. Rothmans and Finance & Governance Officer thanked. Donors thanked, including the Lionesses led by Wendy Hooton, Marg Davies and people who left legacies in their wills.
10	Resolutions – FG a Trustee/Membership Council: None received b Branch: None received Question from the floor What are we doing to mark the end of the Second World War? RN VE day event is being held at Guildford Cathedral. We can consider VJ day and take it to an events working group.
11	FG introduced the Guest Speaker – Major General (Retd) Tim Hyams CB OBE 1944 Army's National Charity set up by Winston Churchill to provide a lifetime of support for veterans. There are 75,000 members of the ABF – The Soldiers Charity. Last year the ABF supported 21 WRAC veterans The needs are becoming more complex and 67% of people helped are under 65. Question from floor Are you reaching out to female veterans? 21 female veterans helped doesn't seem representative. TH The 21 beneficiaries mentioned were WRAC not female veterans as a whole. MJ The primary charity for Benevolence for our ladies is us and sometimes there are shared costs with other charities. FG thanked Major General Tim.
12	Any other business – FG No other business tabled or raised. RN Presentation to Fiona Gardner who was thanked for her 4 years as Vice President. The charity has become an influential one and her work has furthered the support for female veterans. FG Thanked everyone.
13	Dates of Next Meeting – FG AGM is on Saturday 21st March 2026 at the Victory Services Club The meeting closed at 14:45
Full minutes and accounts available at wraca.org.uk	

THE WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

	Notes	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds Year Ended 30.09.2024 £	Total Funds Year Ended 30.09.2023 £
INCOME FROM:					
Donations and legacies	1	186,508	96,820	283,328	117,027
Charitable activities	2	763	-	763	-
Investments	3	206,444	29,931	236,375	224,414
Other income	4	5,411	-	5,411	5,915
TOTAL INCOME		399,126	126,751	525,877	347,356
EXPENDITURE ON:					
Raising funds	6	22,410	5,147	27,557	36,590
Charitable activities	7	416,963	208,180	625,143	564,101
Total Expenditure		439,373	213,327	652,700	600,691
Net Gains / (losses) on investments	10	429,169	370,236	799,405	119,621
NET INCOME / (EXPENDITURE)		388,922	283,660	672,582	(133,714)
Transfers between funds	16	6,444,474	(6,444,474)	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS		6,833,396	(6,160,814)	672,582	(133,714)
RECONCILIATION OF FUNDS:					
Total Funds brought forward	19	1,393,451	6,197,018	7,590,469	7,724,183
Total funds carried forward		8,226,847	36,204	8,263,051	7,590,469

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

THE WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

	Notes	2024 £	2023 £
FIXED ASSETS			
Intangible assets	8	6,313	8,206
Tangible assets	9	3,937	2,480
Investments	10	8,158,935	7,494,790
		<u>8,169,185</u>	<u>7,505,476</u>
CURRENT ASSETS			
Stock	11	2,190	4,464
Debtors	12	84,952	32,832
Cash at bank and in hand	13	33,274	59,791
		<u>120,416</u>	<u>97,087</u>
LIABILITIES			
Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year	14	26,550	12,094
		<u>26,550</u>	<u>12,094</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		93,866	84,993
TOTAL NET ASSETS		<u>8,263,051</u>	<u>7,590,469</u>
FUNDS OF THE CHARITY			
Restricted Funds:			
The Benevolent Funds	16	-	6,155,806
The COBSEO Female Cluster Group Fund	17	2,299	5,541
The Female Veterans Transformation Programme	18	33,905	35,671
Unrestricted funds:			
General Funds	19	8,226,847	1,393,451
TOTAL FUNDS	19	<u>8,263,051</u>	<u>7,590,469</u>

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Trustees on 11 Feb 25 and were signed on its behalf by:



 Brigadier (Retired) Fiona Gardner CBE, Chairman

CERTIFICATES OF APPRECIATION

Babs Anderson

Babs is a stalwart and loyal Member of Birmingham Branch in her role of Secretary (amongst the many she has held), listening ear and friend to many. Through her friendship with the late legendary Maureen (Mo) Deeley, Babs became a member of both the WRAC Dinner Club and the WRAC Association, and when Mo died Babs promised that she would "keep an eye" on the WRAC Dinner Club. True to her word she has steered the club to its present guise as one of the most amazing annual social gatherings of female military veterans. Babs has taken on many roles including that of Treasurer, Webmaster, and now as President and general font of knowledge for all things Dinner Club.

Babs took over as Secretary of Birmingham Branch from Margaret Walkeden. Under her leadership and with the assistance of Chris Fretwell and many different Chairs & Presidents, the Branch has gone from strength to strength and is now, arguably, the largest and busiest of all WRAC Association Branches. In 2013 Babs was elected as Secretary of Wales & West Area and when asked to take on the role of Area Coordinator in 2017 she willingly stepped in.

In 2018, when a volunteer was required to coordinate the commission of a memorial to the WRAC at the NMA, Babs was that person. She is part of the Lioness Magazine Working Group, tasked with bringing all of our news and photographs to order before print. She also sits on The Major Grants Committee which is responsible for enhancing and making a difference to many ATS/WRAC veterans' lives.

Babs is a calming influence to many and freely gives advice, camaraderie and benevolence to those seeking it and the act of friendship and a smile to those she meets at the many WRAC Association events she attends. She is a great advocate of The WRAC Association and encourages ATS/WRAC veterans to connect with it and their local branches. For many this has made a huge difference to their lives and reinstated their sense of belonging.

Babs' contribution to The WRAC Association, Birmingham WRAC Association Branch, Dinner Club and much, much more over many years has been and remains consistent and exemplary. Babs is a loyal, positive and hardworking member of The WRAC Association. If anyone needs advice, a friendly ear, someone to be there when going through a difficult time or just a mate to do something fun with, who you gonna call? Babs Anderson.

Nominated by Marg Davies and Ann Stack



Chris Powell

Chris has given generously of her time in building Shropshire Branch to the success it is today. She took on the role of Acting Secretary in April 2011 following the sudden resignation of the previous incumbent and was made full Secretary at the Branch's AGM in the September of that year. As Secretary and with the help of the then Chairman, Sandra Davies, the branch has grown in numbers from 11 to the now 48 members we have today.

Her kindness and organisational skills are legendary and she is somebody that all branches wish to be associated with as what she does is inspirational. Chris extends her skills to mentoring and supporting those outside of her branch and will offer advice and help willingly to those seeking it. Chris had provided fantastic support to all our members but especially to our late ATS Ladies. She visited them either at home or in their care homes when they were no longer able to attend branch meetings, collect them to come along to our functions (especially the cream teas!) and make sure they received a copy of our branch minutes every month. Chris would always make sure that the branch was represented at the funeral of these wonderful women, if the family wanted it.

Chris connects to outside organisations and in doing so, raises the profile of The WRAC Association and her local branch which in turn encourages WRAC veterans to join and benefit from the many opportunities that are on offer nationally and locally.

Chris is a stalwart member of 'The Dinner Club' and for many years was 'Hotel Organiser.' A huge role that she undertook alongside her commitments to Shropshire Branch and one that could be termed 'A full time job,' but undertaken as a volunteer for the benefit of many. Chris' continued loyalty, friendship and hard work within the WRAC Association and Shropshire Branch epitomises the aims of our Association. Shropshire Branch is the success it is down to the hard work, dedication and the passion for having a good time that is Chris Powell.

Nominated by Alison McGowan and Ann Stack



Heather Gaughran

Heather and her trusty camera have attended countless WRAC Association events as our photographer. At every Cenotaph parade, marching or not, Heather is there to document the proceedings. When our patron Queen Elizabeth II died, Heather made the journey to Stirling to capture the WRAC Service of Thanksgiving. For the 10k runs, the WRAC Dinner Club, the 75th anniversary evensong and so many other events, Heather has been there to ensure moments are captured and memories are treasured forever.

For many who cannot attend events, it gives great pleasure to view the pictures offering a sense of inclusion from the comfort of home, and for others it inspires the confidence to join in with future events. Heather is indeed an Influencer!



Heather is also a great ambassador for the WRAC Association and the branches and groups she belongs to. She works tirelessly to provide a catalogue of photographs that is appreciated by all of us and no event is complete without her. Her kindness and thoughtfulness shine through everything she does. At times we have to turn the camera on Heather to ensure she is included in the memory making.

Heather's pictures capture more than just formal group shots. As a WRAC veteran and someone who is known and trusted by our members, she is able to capture candid moments of members interacting in a natural manner. Clicking away, Heather will seek out our members chatting and laughing, dancing and hugging, raising a glass and raising the roof. Heather's photographs have been the backbone of the Lioness for many years, and have been used on numerous publicity materials including the Annual Report, Members' Handbook and our pull-up banners. Whenever we look to demonstrate the camaraderie of the WRAC Association, we turn in the first instance to Heather's photos where, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Nominated by Paula Rogers and Ann Stack

Kate Bell

Kate is a "hands on, doer" and as the organiser of the 'We Will Remember Her' commemoration service in Nigg, quickly spread the word of the memorial service with other ex WRAC veterans and her British Legion and veteran's Breakfast Club contacts. They were very interested in story of the bombing at Great Yarmouth and were particularly interested to hear that one of their own had been killed. Through friends in the local church, Kate contacted a niece of Elizabeth MacKay. The Lord-Lieutenant, Joanie Whiteford attended an event that Kate was working at and so Kate took this opportunity to mention the upcoming memorial service to Joanie. It was quickly confirmed that the Lord-Lieutenant was willing to be involved. This wasn't the end of Kate's involvement and it is best summarised that the following were involved on the day: Lord-Lieutenant, 6 Army Cadets, the local Member of Parliament, Elizabeth MacKay's nieces, WRAC veterans, representatives from the Ross and Cromarty Heritage Society, British Legion and from the communities of Fearn, Nigg, Balintore, Tain and Hilton. The overwhelming success of the event was credit to Kate Bell's hard work, use of local knowledge and willingness to get everyone involved.



From very early on it became very clear that Kate was the perfect person to organise this event. She has a lot of ability when organising events and made good use of this skill during this process. She used her local contacts and knowledge to great effect and generated lots of interest in the event. Her enthusiasm for remembering Elizabeth Mackay was impressive and attention to detail likewise.

Nominated by Moira Thom and Janette Deans

**If you like to nominate
someone for the certificate
of appreciation,
please contact your
area co-ordinator**



Letters...

Dear President and Chairman of the WRAC Association,

As Chairman of The Association of Wrens I am writing to send my deepest condolences to your Association on the sad passing of Betty Webb MBE one of your long standing and highly valued member of your Association. Through her time in the ATS, as a WRAC Veteran, and of course her time as a Bletchley Code Breaker, what an amazing WW2 lady she was and how she was a champion of female veterans to which we can relate with our own Association. It is very poignant that in this important year with the 80th Anniversary of VE and VJ Day that we should lose such a special lady who up until now had been such an inspiration to not only the women in the Army for decades but also in the other female veteran services. Her memory will live on for many years to come. I am sure her name will continue to be remembered in the work of our female veterans throughout this year and beyond.

Kind regards
Carol Gibbon

.....

Grimsby Branch member Carole Tyler is now a great great Nana, shown in the photo from 2024 holding 3 month old great great Grandson Milo. Looking on is mother of the baby Sophie Knight (18), Nana Susan Knight (41) and Great Nana Ruth Evans (63). Carole (85) served with the WRAC Staff Band from 1957 to 59, was a Standard Bearer and was married to her late husband for 60 years and was thrilled to receive a congratulations card from the late Queen on their anniversary. Carole is still active with the branch and association.

Gail Davy, Grimsby Branch



Dear Editor,

I am writing to share some words about Winnie Rice who you are featuring in your 100th birthday section (see p61). Winnie served with the ATS during WWII from 1941-1945.



Winnie started her service at Camp Bulford, and was transferred to Salisbury, where she became part of the RASC. Here Winnie took on the job she still considers her best war-time work. She was responsible for 30 Officers, with a fellow ATS member that she considered her best friend. Her mate was the cook and she was trained as a waitress in mess etiquette and mess functions.

Winnie met the love of her life at Camp Bulford, as the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion was billeted there during the war. After her war-time service ended, Winnie decided to marry and move back to Canada in 1946 and settled in New Brunswick, to raise a wonderful family of four boys, of whom she is extremely proud.

Over her long life here in Saint John, she was and is still very active in her community. She stayed involved with all things military and became the President of the only Women's Legion in her Province. She was instrumental in moving women's issues and their inclusion into the Royal Canadian Legion.

Today Winnie is very active in one of our Veterans Groups. We meet every week and she rarely misses these gatherings, with three members from WWII, two Korea War Vets and two Afghanistan War Vets.

Winnie was recognised at her one hundred birthday with a huge party and was presented with a Quilt of Valour for her service and her many years of community volunteering.

She was extremely humbled to receive Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee Medal, as they both proudly served in the ATS during the war. Winnie is a huge fan and member of the WRAC Association and always looks forward to receiving the latest copy of the Lioness.

All members of her Veterans Group are so proud of not just her service but for all that she has accomplished since her arrival here in Canada. Her devotion to community is monumental. Thank you so much Winnie!

CWO (Ret) Mike Louvelle
3RD Field Regiment Royal Canada Artillery (The Loyal Company)

Dear Editor

I was clearing out my loft ready to emigrate and found this very old copy of *The Citadel* by A. J. Crown.

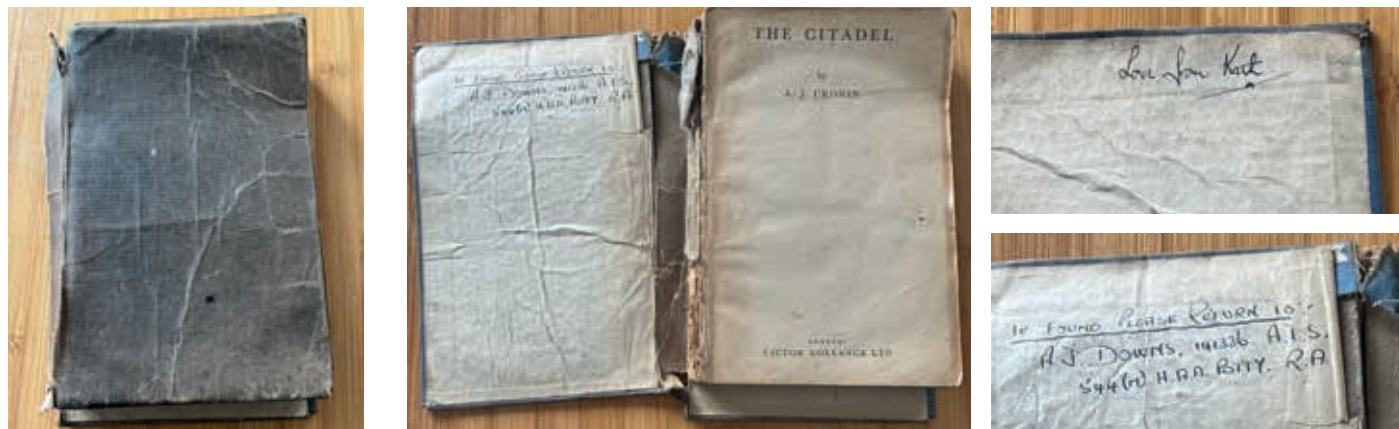
It has a message written inside –

'If found, please return to A. J. Downs, 141336 A.T.S. 544 (M) H.A.A BTTY. RA.'

In the back cover is a message which says 'Love from Kath'

I would love to reunite this book with someone connected to its original owner – if anyone has any ideas who A.J.Downs might be please let me know.

Roy Washington



.....

From Brigadier C P Phillips CBE CEng FIMechE



Head Army Personnel Centre
Army Personnel Centre
Mail Point 585
Kentigern House
65 Brown Street
GLASGOW G2 8EX



Women's Royal Army Corps Association

26 March 2025

To the Chair and Chief Executive of the WRAC Association and all attendees of the WRAC Grand Reunion,

You are Wonderful Women!!

Nicky and I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to join you at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff and for your incredibly kind warm welcome, hospitality and fabulous conversation. We had the most brilliant weekend in your company and we felt so inspired by the camaraderie, friendship and tangible sense of belonging that we could feel throughout the weekend. It was an absolute privilege to join you all and to learn more about the WRAC Association and your wonderful tribe.

Thank you for allowing me to present WRAC berets and capbadges to Lynne, Cathy, Teresa, Lynn, Claire and Jan. Meeting the 'Cardiff 6' and seeing the 'Guildford 13' in such fine form was simply fabulous and then seeing the warmest of welcomes for Lynne, Cathy, Teresa, Lynn, Claire and Jan from the wider Association membership was the most heart-warming experience.

I feel as though I have had a glimpse inside a private members club that I know I can never truly join – your shared experiences and dedication to each other are a tribute to the power and strength of women's networks.

Thank you again for allowing me and Nicky to join you at the weekend. You will forever hold a place in our hearts, and we are deeply proud to have met you all.

With my kindest regards,

Yours
Claire



Obituaries - Their Final Salute



MAJOR WILMA CURRUTHERS ARMSTRONG

8th February 1944 - 7th January 2025



Born in Dumfries during the Second World War, Wilma and her family lived frugally and simply due to the stringent rationing that was in place. Wilma attended college in Castle Douglas where she became highly efficient in all aspects of secretarial work, but with her heart set on an Army career she enlisted into the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1961. Training in Guilford, Wilma hated the fitness tests and would stop dead immediately on the finishing line in order to light up a quick fag! She had a talent for table tennis, and was chosen to represent the Army, winning many trophies and medals.

She rose quickly through the ranks having started in the regular army at the age of 17. Singled out for difficult and sensitive work, she was posted to Germany for a time, and during the Vietnam War, worked with the Foreign Office, stationed in Soigné at the height of the fighting

in the late 1960's. This was a part of her life that she never really spoke about, but Wilma demonstrated great courage and fortitude when the Embassy Offices were stormed, and her colleagues fled for their lives. She calmly gathered up the copious secret files and documents, placed them in a large suitcase and hid with them under the stairs to prevent them falling into enemy hands. Her outstanding bravery was recorded and rewarded, as she had risked her own life to save so many more. For many months, the allied forces were unable to get her out of the danger area of Soigné, yet she diligently worked on and faced the perilous situation with valour.

A tour in Cyprus followed, and Wilma was twice selected to serve in the MOD as PA to the Director WRAC and later offered a post in the Foreign Office. Senior officers repeatedly urged Wilma to accept a commission, but she turned it all down as she wanted to stay as 'one of the girls' with her WRAC comrades.

Wilma did eventually accept a commission and one of her postings as an Officer was to the Army HQ in Chester where she was responsible for the career management of all WRAC clerks. It was here in early 1988 that Wilma met Terri Simpson. Together, the ladies made a formidable pair and were always the 'life and soul' of WRAC dinners and occasions.

In 1991, shortly after being promoted to the rank of Captain, Terri decided to retire from the Army, however Wilma was being pressured to accept a higher rank – or be sent to Benbecula. Her reply to the Brigadier was simple 'Ok fine, I'll retire' - and being a woman of her word, at the age of 49 with the rank of Major, she did! Her timing was impeccable, as she was very unhappy to learn that her proud and distinguished corps was to be disbanded just a year later.

While Wilma and Terri had their own hobbies, their shared passion was to attend the Women's Royal Army Corps reunions and social gatherings. The army had been like a family to both Wilma and Terri, and they retained a deep connection as the years passed.

Obituary extract from family tribute at Wilma's funeral



WO2 CHRISTINE BEEDLES

17 November 1948 - 22 May 2025

Christine was born and brought up in Birmingham. She joined the WRAC, aged just 17, as a driver and her first posting was to COD Donnington, followed by 68 Squadron RCT in Germany. She left the Army as a Sergeant after 5 years in order to join the police service in Sheffield. She really enjoyed this new challenge but felt the pay for the police back in those days was poor so after two years as a policewoman she re-enlisted into the WRAC, as an Acting Sergeant, and was posted to Middle Wallop, where she was responsible for the management/supply of aviation fuels. From there she was posted to CAD Kineton before being selected as a Recruit Training Sergeant (No 2 Company) at the WRAC Centre in Guildford. Shortly after she was posted to Hounslow on promotion to Staff Sergeant at the age of 26. After two years at Hounslow she was promoted to WO2 (becoming the youngest ever CSM at that time) and posted to the WRAC College at Camberley where she stayed for 2 years and completed her 12 years in the service.

Christine left the WRAC to pursue a career in logistics, studying for a degree in transport and policy planning, which she successfully completed. She subsequently was employed as Senior Logistics Manager for some of the largest retail companies: Golden Wonder, Great Universal stores and Wells soft drinks.

Christine finally retired at the age of 51 and moved from the Midlands to live in 'Glorious (North) Devon' pursuing her passion for Yoga and Golf. She had 16 very happy years of retirement before suffering a severe stroke in 2015 which made it impossible for her to play golf again. Fortunately her vision was not affected and, being an avid book worm, she was able to read up to three books a week on her Kindle. The medical profession and Christine herself were baffled as to why someone so fit and healthy could have had such a severe stroke; but the answer came 3 years later when she was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation which at least gave her closure on the issue.

After 10 years of courageously 'living with' the after effects of the stroke, Christine was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in March of this year. Her retirement years in Devon were the happiest days of her life and although she was denied the ability to play golf after her stroke, she still managed two yoga sessions a week with her yoga teacher who came to her house.

Christine was an amazing person in so many ways - kind, generous, talented, funny with a wicked sense of humour; in latter years she was brave and stoical facing her illnesses with courage and fortitude. She epitomised the WRAC Motto, 'Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed' right to the very end of her life. Christine will be sadly missed by all who knew and loved her.

Carol Skrzypczak



JOAN DORA LLOYD

5 October 1923 - 14 May 2025

Hereford Branch's Joan Lloyd died at the grand old age of 101 on 14 May 2025. Joan was born in 1923 in Brockhampton, Herefordshire. Her mother died when Joan was only seven and she had had an unhappy childhood, so she joined the ATS as soon as she could, when she was just short of 18 years old.

Joan trained as a telephonist and was stationed on the Wirral in Merseyside during World War II. Whilst serving in the ATS Joan met her husband, Les, who was a Despatch Rider with the Herefordshire Regiment in Northern Ireland. They married and went on to have six children.

In later life Joan became heavily involved with the Royal British Legion and could still be seen marching in Pershore on Armistice Day when she was well into her 90s. She earned a special certificate from the Royal British Legion in appreciation of her efforts, selling poppies outside her local supermarket for many years.

Although Joan was no longer able to attend meetings, her passing heralds the last Hereford Branch ATS member.

Hereford Branch



CONSTANCE MARY EVANS

18 November 1921 - 20 March 2025

Connie enlisted into the Auxiliary Territorial Service at Hounslow on 23 March 1942. After her initial training at York with No 2 ATS Training Company she was posted to Devizes to join 480 Heavy Anti-Tank Battery RA where she was employed in supporting the Battery's operational duties. She remained with them until 28 December 1944 when she was discharged having served for two years and eight months in the rank of Private soldier.

Following her Army service, she found employment as a clerk with British European Airways for thirteen years between 1946 and 1959 and then from 1961 as a general assistant at a local school for eight years before returning to join BEA in 1969, remaining with them until 1980 when she retired. During her retirement she worked voluntarily as the Chair of her local Residents Association working with the borough council in support of around 3000 residential and commercial units.

Connie joined the Royal Hospital Chelsea as an In Pensioner on 26 February 2018 and was initially posted to Duncan Ward as part of Number 4 Company, moving into Paget Ward shortly after her arrival. Connie was keen to get involved and she very much enjoyed a sponsored week's holiday at the Lord Kitchener's Holiday Home in Lowestoft. She was very proud to have been part of the Royal Hospital's contingent at the Cenotaph in November 2018. Connie died in Paget Ward aged 103.

Obituary provided by the Royal Hospital Chelsea



MANDY FENEMER

17 November 1968 – 06 March 2025



Mandy Fenemer served for 22 years as a Postal & Courier Operator in the WRAC until they disbanded in 1992 and she moved to the RLC. Mandy was extremely proud of her career and reached the rank of WO2. She loved sports, especially diving which she took full advantage of on her posting to the Ascension Islands. The love she had for cycling was very obvious when she had more time after her service. Mandy joined the HSBC Breeze club and took many ladies out on adventures around her home town of Derby.

Mandy's sister Donna said "my sister Mandy sadly lost her very brave battle to Motor Neurone Disease yesterday, age 56, after being diagnosed in Nov 2023. She has shown amazing strength, determination and resilience. MND gradually deprived Mandy of absolutely everything, other than her sense of humour. As a family we have endured this cruel battle with her, trying to be as normal as possible and making more happy memories. Mandy was unbelievably fit

prior to diagnosis, and was a keen cyclist and runner. She had no immediate family so had always been a massive part of my own family, and was an amazing sister, daughter, auntie and sister in law. I feel very proud and privileged to have had Mandy as my big sister. We have many photos of Mandy doing things she loved, and a few of Mandy after diagnosis, and recently in hospital... still laughing. You will always have a special place in my heart Mandy"

Military friends attended Mandy's funeral, and around 40 cyclists followed behind the hearse. The coffin was covered with the WRAC coffin drape and there were two standard bearers representing the WRAC & RBL.

Cheryl Jones and Donna Fenemer Griffiths



HELEN HAMMOND (NÉE MURPHY)

27 February 1943 - 24 December 2024

Helen left her Tipperary home aged 17 for Officer Cadet training at the WRAC School of Instruction. Being too young to start her course at Hindhead she was posted temporarily to Edinburgh as a Clerk. I met Helen in January 1963 as my Cadet Wing "Mum" and when I was posted back there in 1964 she was the senior Subaltern in HQ Company. From Hindhead she was posted to the Army Team of Lecturers.

Helen married Australian Naval Officer Nick Hammond, and after he finished training at Manadon they returned to live in Australia. Having not been to sea for five years, Nick was promptly posted to Vietnam leaving Helen to cope with their ailing E Type Jaguar! A talented couple, Helen and Nick devised several computer programs for the Australian Forces long before most of us had any IT knowledge!

Helen was an active member of the Adelaide branch of the Ionian Society. She was a most talented person both musically and artistically - I recall her happily playing the piano for our cadet singalongs and in her home. Very sadly their son Luke died around the age of 18, just before starting university.

On one of her short UK stays with us we took Helen to a stately home in Northamptonshire where we were surprised to find Jane Austen's 'Mansfield Park' being filmed. She subsequently arranged a showing of that film on her 70th Birthday and on her 80th she showed "her" army recruiting film to friends and residents at the retirement home where she had moved following her Parkinson's diagnosis. She had a beautifully appointed and spacious apartment.

Helen continued her music and painting interests all her life and encouraged young pianists to play in her retirement home as well as holding an annual art exhibition. She produced lovely cards and bookmarks depicting her photograph of a special rose.

In 2000 I went on my first trip to Australia with my husband to visit Helen and Nick. They settled there after Nick left the Service having been the youngest Admiral in the Australian Navy. In 2004 I visited Helen again as both of our husbands had died the previous Autumn. Thereafter, we managed to meet somewhere in Australia or the UK most years. My last visit was with my daughter in 2023 when Helen's health was deteriorating - she moved to permanent residential care shortly before her death.

Helen was a very dear, most generous and special Irish friend.

Helen Jeffries



CYNTHIA MARJORIE HUMBLE (NÉE GROSSMAN)

31 December 1925 - 3 January 2025

Cynthia Marjorie Humble passed away on January 3rd 2025, four days after her 99th birthday. Cynthia joined the ATS in July 1943 and was assigned to Y Service as a Morse Code Interceptor. After her training on the Isle of Man she was sent to Forest Moor Listening Station near Harrogate and subsequently to Bletchley Park. After the war she remained in the ATS (and the WRAC very briefly) until 1950 when she married Sam Humble. They were very happily married for over 66 years.

When they moved to Nottingham in 2000 Cynthia joined the Leicester Branch of the WRAC Association and hugely enjoyed the meetings and gatherings. She was always sad that her father, who was REME, never knew about her Y Service role during the war, and neither did her husband, until the Enigma Machine and Bletchley Park became news. She was moved to tears when they visited Bletchley Park with other veterans and the current staff lined the drive to clap them in. She is commemorated on the Codebreakers' Wall and her memoirs are on the website's Roll of Honour. In recognition and gratitude for her service and her role leading up to D Day and the Liberation of France Cynthia was awarded the Legion d'Honneur in December 2024. Her very proud five year old great grandson presented it to her twelve days before her death.

Cynthia (Mum) was the last surviving ATS member of Leicester Branch and we would like to thank the ladies for always remembering her with a card and flowers on her birthday. Sincere thanks, too, to Sue and Lyn (Standard Bearer) and other Branch members who helped to make Mum's funeral so very memorable.

Belinda Dance (daughter)



PATRICIA NORMA ROGERS (NÉE MAHONEY)

3 October 1924 - 18 December 2024



Pat was born in Poplar, in the East End of London. During the early years of WW2 she worked for part of the Ford company where she learnt to operate a telephone switchboard. At 18 she volunteered to join the ATS being trained as a predictor and working on gun sites in the East and South of England.

As the war progressed Pat's unit moved into Holland and then Belgium. Whilst camping in the snowy fields of Belgium, her childhood asthma caught up with her and she developed pneumonia. She was hospitalised in a monastery commandeered as a field hospital and helped nurse the wounded including one British soldier, Charlie Rogers, who had facial, head and hand injuries, and dressings from his neck to the top of his head. When he was able to speak she found him so polite and thankful, and their romance blossomed.

They both made their separate ways into Germany, Charlie transporting goods and Pat operating a switchboard on the Rhine Telephone Exchange, controlling key telephone lines from Germany to the War Office in London.

For many of this generation, war time was marked with life changing experiences – camaraderie, as well as death of friends and the realities of the concentration camps. Pat and Charlie got engaged as the war ended and married in April 1949. They had many stories of their wartime adventures, and went back to visit their old haunts in 1996, meeting the Dutch family Pat was billeted with and visiting the graves of ATS girls from her unit.

Pat became a stay-at-home Mum before returning to work. She chuckled at her 100th birthday party about the 36 years pension she had enjoyed since her retirement! Charlie died when Pat was 91 - she cared for him at home until his death. They both loved being grandparents and, at the age of 92, Pat was proud to become a great grandmother to 3 children.

Jenny Butler (daughter)



KATHLEEN KERRIDGE (NÉE TOWNSEND)

9 January 1920 - 7 December 2024



Prior to joining the ATS, Kathleen was working for the Emergency Medical Service at Epsom (Sep 1939 – Jan 1942) in a reserve job, so was not conscripted into the ATS. But the job had become routine, and she wanted a change, so Kathleen volunteered to join the ATS in January 1942. She trained at Fulford Barracks in York and was then posted to the Experimental Establishment in Shoeburyness, near Southend-on-Sea.

The work involved the testing of ammunition and weapons, some of which were in regular use, but others were new and highly secret. Kathleen was involved in determining the velocities of weapons. A fair knowledge of mathematics was necessary to correlate the data obtained, and in those days, slide rules and primitive calculating machines were the only aids.

At first the pay was the lowest possible, ten shillings per week, although the Brigadier, who was very proud of his ATS, did get them some "danger money" to supplement their pay (2d per day). The working ATS uniform consisted of navy-blue skirts, white blouses, red and blue forage caps and navy pea jackets. The food was very good and they had a superb cook who fed them very well – there were

no food shortages unlike the situation faced by their families. Shoeburyness was the only station where ATS were employed to do this work and consequently, Kathleen spent the majority of her war service in this one place.

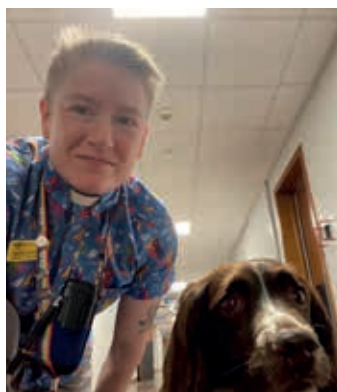
In 1946 Kathleen was demobbed having attained the rank of Staff Sergeant. She was asked to take on a commission and stay in the ATS but declined and returned to London, where she resumed secretarial posts at three pharmaceutical companies.

Janet Calvert (daughter)



THE REVERAND CAPTAIN KATIE WATSON (NÉE HARRIS)

14 June 1974 – 20 September 2024



Katie had two areas of professional excellence, which gave her a combination of titles as 'The Rev'd Capt' that properly reflected her service both in the military and in the Church of England. She began her working life at age 18 at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in Guildford on 22 June 1992 and at the time of her death, having so sadly lost the fight with her demons, she was an NHS Head of Chaplaincy based in Newcastle.

Katie's career in the Army was very successful and over the almost 10 years that she served she progressed from LCpl to Captain in the Royal Military Police, via the commissioning course at Sandhurst. Initially on leaving her specialist general police duties training in Chichester in 1993, Katie served at 156 Provost Company in Colchester, deploying on the first of two operational deployments to Bosnia followed by a lengthy Northern Ireland tour. Over her career she also served on the UK mainland delivering operational policing as a platoon commander and then as a company second in command, where she played a leading role in delivering support to the foot and mouth outbreak.



The motto of the RMP is 'Exemplo Ducemus' and means 'by example we lead'. This was a value that Katie lived to the full. Her leadership was based on service; service to others in so many ways and following her departure from the Army in February 2002 she undertook her ministry degree and a subsequent chaplaincy placement at Newcastle Hospitals. Katie did not ever really leave the NHS placement, securing a full time role and eventually rising to role of the Head of Chaplaincy across the Trust.

Katie's life of service was not just through her work though and it would be easy to lose count of all the voluntary organisations and clubs she supported over the years, from the Hornsea Lifeboat, to running playgroup, to mini rugby, to being a trustee of the charity National Association of Children of Addiction (NACoA), to her city's RMP Association and Royal British Legion, to numerous church roles and so much hidden service. She truly did lead by example.

Katie's ultimate joy was her family and her legacy is the memories she shaped and created with them. She leaves her much loved civil partner Emily, a GP and ordained minister, with whom she had shared and navigated life for 20 plus years and their two wonderful and capable children, Nate and Elsa.

Frances West

Last Post



Bedford, Miss Joanne, of Blackpool, on 8th April 2025 (WRAC)

Beedles, WO2 Christine, of Devon, on 22nd May 2025 (WRAC)

Carson, Mrs Janet (née Hill), of Sturminster Newton, on 24th December 2024 (WRAC)

Cox, Phyl of Croydon, on 2nd July 2025 (WRAC)

De-Vall, Helen (née Moule), of Swansea, on 20th January 2025 (WRAC)

Evans, Mrs Constance Mary Evans of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, on 20th March 2025 (ATS)

Farquhar, Ms Valarie Jean (née Geddie), of Forres, on 4th January 2025 (WRAC)

Fenemer, Miss Mandy of Chesterfield, on 6th March 2025 (WRAC)

Hammond, Mrs Helen (née Murphy) of Co Tipperary and Adelaide Australia, on 24th December 2024 (WRAC)

Hill, Miss Mary of Middlesbrough, on 20th December 2024 (WRAC)

Kerridge, Mrs Kathleen (née Townsend) of Nottingham on 7th December 2024 (ATS)

Lloyd, Mrs Joan of Worcestershire, on 14th May 2025 (ATS)

MacDonald, Mrs Mary Norah (née Marshall) of Eastleigh, on 20th March 2025 (WRAC)

MacKay, Mrs Helen (née Mitchell) on 21st December 2024 (WRAC)

McGregor, Mrs Mary of Glasgow on 28th April 2025 (WRAC)

Moore, Mrs Vee of Tamworth, on 25th June 2025 (WRAC)

Moule, Mrs Judith Ann of Braintree, on 16th January 2025 (WRAC)

Pringle, Mrs Margaret (née Carnie) of Lockerbie on 8th May 2025 (ATS)

Street, Mrs Judith Alison (née Gutkelch) of Ledbury, on 9th December 2024 (WRAC)

Legacies and Donations

In Memoriam Since the last Lioness kind donations were made by individuals and Branches in memory of the following:

- Brigid Archdale
- Joan Awbery
- Rosa Blewitt

Legacies The WRAC Association very much appreciated the legacy received from:

- Violet Isabella Brown
- Susan Penelope Richards
- Agnes Mary Doig
- Monica Mary Ellis



I was called up to training a month after signing up, attending the Guildford camp for three weeks or so to learn drill and other activities. I loved it all! At 18 years old, it was very exciting leaving home and being somewhere new! All of the girls had to take tests to decide on the job we would do, and thus where we would be stationed - girls could be posted anywhere in the country depending on what work we were assigned to.

I was sent to Bicester camp – a large centre covering several different operations - and remained there for the rest of my time in service, about three to four years.

Bicester camp was in the middle of the countryside. I remember a collection of long Nissen huts in each camp – the women's camp was at the far end with the men's camps first. The accommodation was very comfortable – there was a burner in the middle of the huts so it was quite warm and I enjoyed it there. I began work there in the storehouse but was soon moved to the office area.

Getting to work

Initially not many women lived and worked at the camp, and so the girls were transported to work from the Nissen huts to the office buildings in a truck – the tall girls got up first and pulled the rest of us up into the truck! Eventually there were so many women working there that they put on a little train to and from the huts – the girls had to march down to a little field not far away and get on the train – there was no platform so we had to get ourselves in again. Somehow, we got up and in wearing skirts - only the girls working in the warehouse were issued with trousers and I didn't think much of that! The train went all along the camp dropping people off at their various workplaces. There was a huge amount of filing, piles, and piles initially to do but we gradually got through it. The work wasn't difficult so we could talk to people while we were working so it was quite social!

The main office area was very large however there were side rooms and I worked there – I recall there were four in the side room – two men and two girls, including myself, a Welshman called Arthur Thomas, and Ann Cubitt. The men working there were either those returned from war service with injuries (if they were younger) or older men in their 30s and 40s. Ann Cubitt's father was a lecturer at Leeds University. Ann and I got on well and outside of work hours Ann taught me how to crochet – something I had been struggling to learn on my own (my friend had copied and typed up the instructions for me from a book!). The girls often moved roles within the camp but all of the jobs were broken down and made easy, so that they could be learnt quickly; some jobs were worse than others - some were timed!

I was moved to the large office at a later point – this felt quite daunting initially! My role of checking the lists for stores spare parts sometimes meant that I needed to go to the warehouse to check stock – this made for a welcome break, although there was quite a lot going on in the large office and so it was interesting to see the comings and goings. The warehouse was freezing cold!

All the men and ladies working in the building were part of the team compiling the information, parts and parachute packs for D-Day – we didn't know this at the time but leading up to the day it became very busy, with night work required, and so we realised something was happening. The night work was fine other than the difficulty of trying to eat a meal in the middle of the night. The food was always good with 'proper dinners'. I always felt safe, warm, fed, and happy there.

At weekends, the girls all went to Oxford, I went there on VE day to join in with the celebrations in the streets! There was not a lot of time left in the evenings by the time we got back to the Nissen huts – Reveille was at 5am and work started at 7am so we all went to bed early. The men at the Bicester camp were generally a lot older than the girls and I don't recall socialising a lot with them, however just before D-Day the girls were asked to meet and socialise with the soldiers who were about to go away - the men were not aware of D-Day but were very aware that they were about to go somewhere – I recall one youngster, a 17 year-old, speaking with me – he was terrified of what awaited him saying they "were all going to die".

When I came back home in 1946 and I just got on with life again. I remained living in Leyton, getting married to George, an ex-Royal Engineers soldier (that is another story!) and we had one daughter. I moved to Northampton in 2013 to be near to my daughter and her family and I celebrated my 100th birthday on the 10th of January 2025!

I feel that I had a relatively easy war and didn't really do much in it – but my family argue that I definitely did. I was part of a much bigger but totally essential logistics operations team without which success would not have been possible.

I wouldn't have missed my ATS days for the world.

Emily with her daughter, Juliet - taken in Abbots Park, Leyton in 1967.

George and Emily's wedding - March 1955 at Mary Fletcher Methodist Church, Leyton.



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

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

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 2025 are:

Field of Remembrance Opening Ceremony - Thursday 6 November

Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph Parade - Sunday 9 November

Guildford Borough Remembrance - Sunday 9 November

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 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 Membership and Volunteering Officer: membership@wraca.org.uk.

WRAC Dinner Club - The WRAC Dinner Club meets every year on the second Saturday in October (Saturday 11th October 2025)

Women's Army Officers' Dining Club. - Women's Army Officers' Dining Club Dinner will take place on Saturday 22nd November 2025.

For more details email wracofficersdc@gmail.com or visit the Facebook Closed Group 'WRAC Officers' Dining Club'.

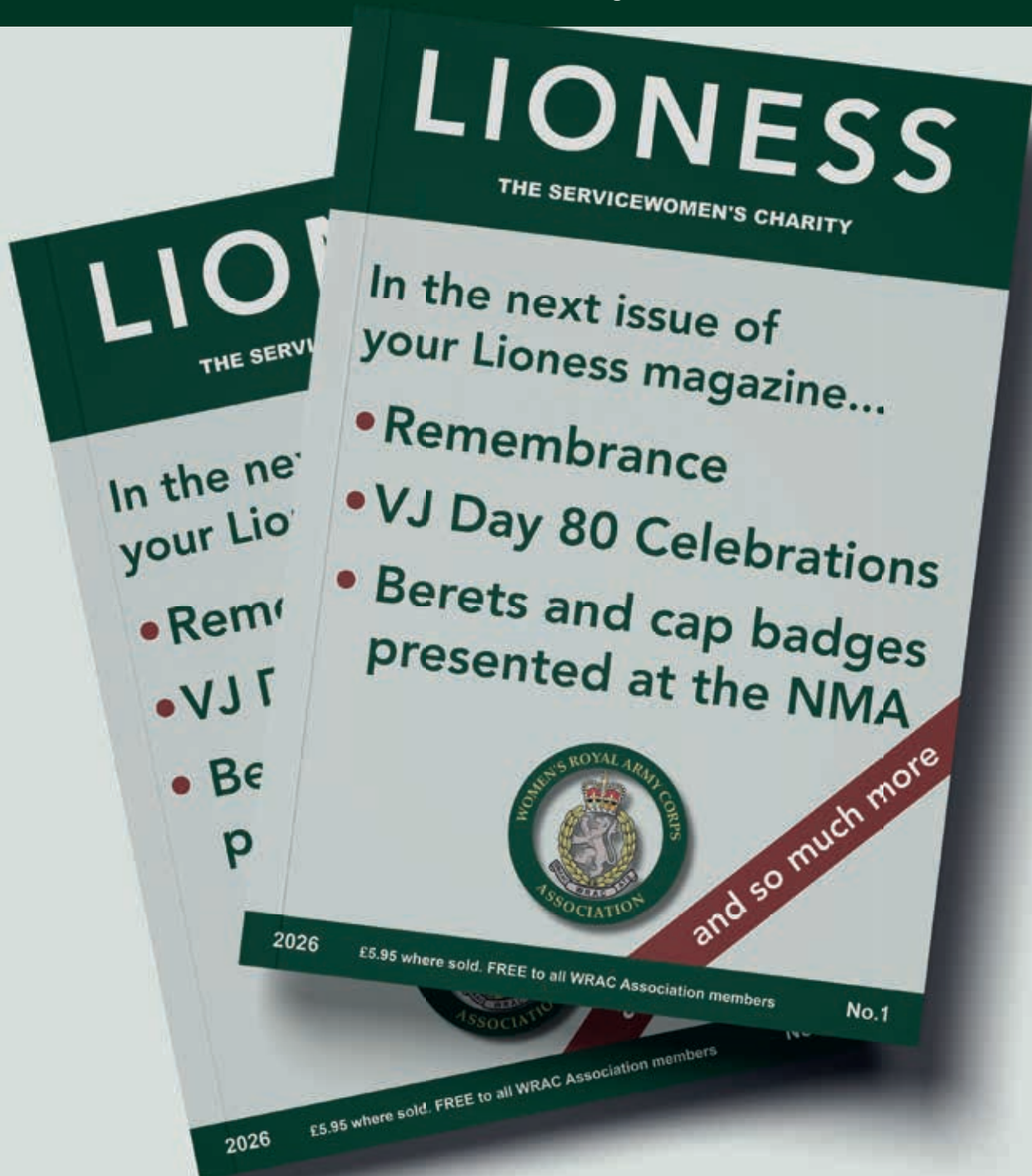
WRAC Association, mailing address - Unit 11, Basepoint Business Centre, 1 Winnall Valley Road,
Winchester, SO23 0LD

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Benevolence: benfund@wraca.org.uk

Lioness: editor@wraca.org.uk

Website: 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**