

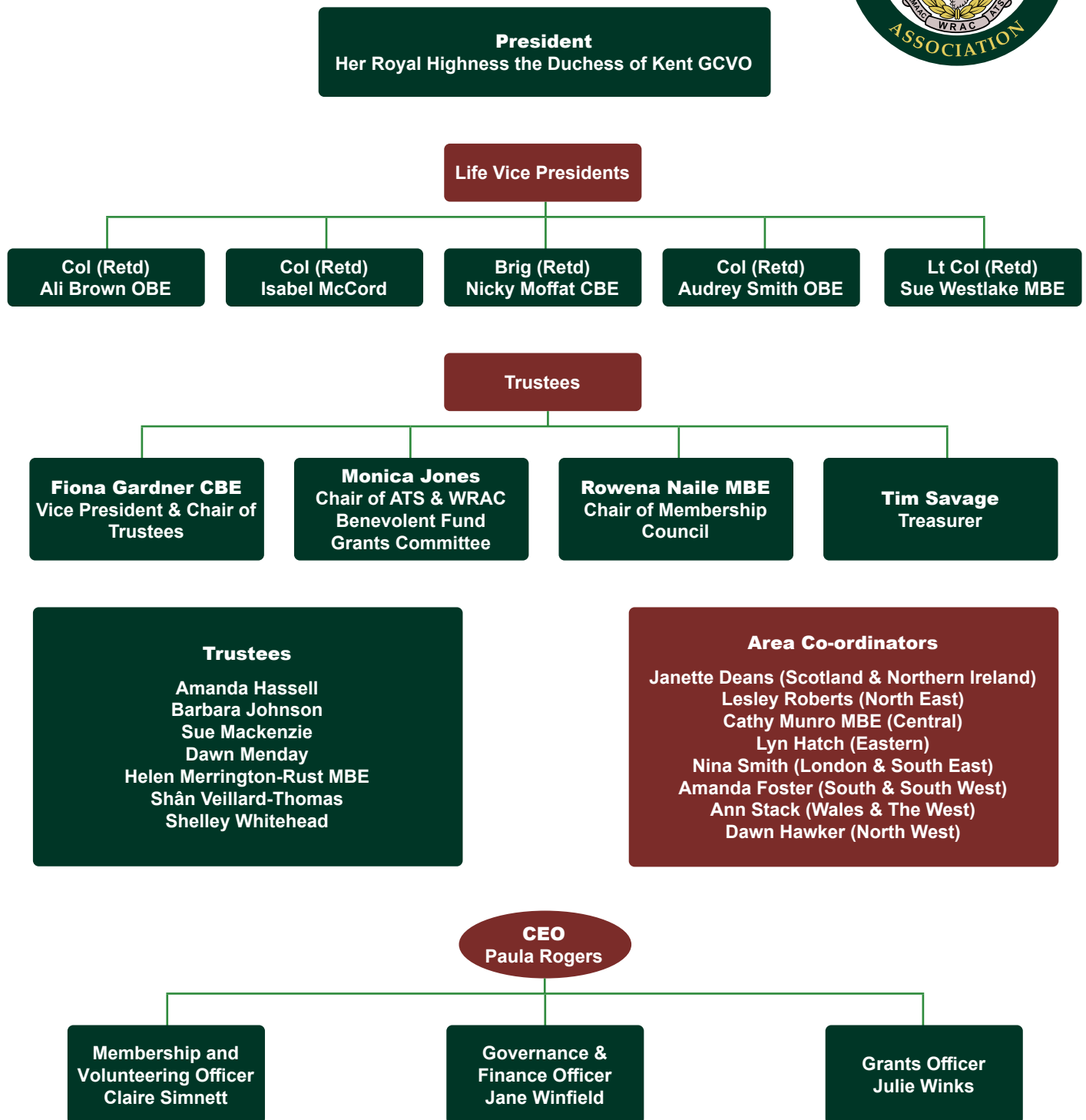
LIONESSE

SUPPORTING FEMALE VETERANS

IN A HIDDEN BUNKER SOMEWHERE BENEATH GUILDFORD, WO1NDERWOMAN AND HER BATWOMAN COME FACE TO FACE WITH AN INTRUDER...



WOMEN'S ROYAL ARMY CORPS ASSOCIATION



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Message from the Vice President



In the last year our membership has grown by over a third, a phenomenal achievement, and I wanted to welcome all our new members; we are here to provide camaraderie and mutual support, and for former members of the ATS and WRAC, benevolence for those in need. The last six months has seen some major national events including Remembrance, on which there are articles in this edition, and local events organised by the branches. As an Association we also aim to exert influence within the charity sector, and within government, to broaden support to female veterans. Our efforts to be visible and respected representatives of female veterans have, I believe, been successful.

In November we were invited to send representatives to a veterans event at No. 10 Downing Street hosted by Sir Keir Starmer. My thanks to Rowena Naile, Pat Rosewell, Caroline McEwan-Smith and Sandy Warne who attended. I was delighted to see Pat appear in the select group talking with the Prime Minister; there were few 'smaller' charities there, but you were represented.

We were also asked by the Army to lead the restoration of berets and cap badges to former members of the WRAC affected by the ban on LGBT personnel, as recommended by the Independent Review under Lord Etherton. I am very grateful to Brigadier Clare Phillips, together with Dawn Menday, who made the first presentation at the Scotland and NI Area AGM to Luise Tait and it was marvellous to see the warm response from everyone there. At our Guildford weekend, in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, the Mayor of Guildford and so many of our members, I was honoured to be part of the presentation ceremony to 13 ladies affected by the ban. It was wonderful to be joined by Brigadier Mel Emmett from Army Headquarters who delivered a very personal and heartfelt apology on behalf of the Army. But it was the response from the recipients that will always stay in my mind; some trepidation, a lot of emotion, but overwhelmingly a celebration that they had been recognised and welcomed into the fold of the Association and the military family. And Brigadier Mel had such a wonderful time she has joined the Association! I do hope many more ladies affected by the ban will come forward and take part in future presentations; they will be warmly welcomed.

We remain the leading partner within the Cobseo Female Veterans Cluster in the delivery of the Female Veterans Transformation Programme which has completed a review of research, conducted focus groups and collated questionnaires in its first year and is now developing a female veterans toolkit to improve access to charitable and local government services. Please look out for updates through normal channels.

As the magazine went to press I was informed of the death of Col Anne Clissitt. A former Commandant of the WRAC Centre, Anne was well known, respected and liked by many of our members and news of her death has been received with much sadness and many fond memories. Please email your reminiscences of Col Anne to the magazine editor ahead of the next issue which will feature a special tribute.

Finally, this will be my final Lioness piece as your Vice President. After 4 years in post I will be standing down after the AGM and Grand Reunion events are concluded. It has been an enormous honour to be your Vice President but as ever there is a time for change and I am delighted that the trustees have unanimously selected Amanda Hassell to replace me, and this will be voted on at the AGM. I hope to see very many of you in Cardiff in March.

Fiona Gardner

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

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Message from the Chair of the Membership Council



Welcome to our first edition of the Lioness for 2025 – a big one for the Association with the Grand Reunion taking place in Cardiff in March. Also, a special welcome to all our new members, as in the last year we have almost increased our membership by 30%.

It was very special to be involved with the weekend in Guildford, and it was wonderful to see so many members there. We managed to incorporate several different occasions into the 2 days. On the Saturday, in addition to the beret and cap badge presentations, we unveiled a new plaque at the Obelisk to commemorate the fact it was 60 years since HM Queen Elizabeth II opened Queen Elizabeth Park. Col Audrey Smith OBE and Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE unveiled the plaque. The Saturday was definitely the day for celebrations, as we finished off the day with a superb dinner at Guildford Cathedral where we fully welcomed the beret recipients back into the fold.

On the Sunday we were in a very different mood when almost 100 of us gathered, with our 13 recipients resplendent in their new berets and badges, specifically to honour and remember the two members of the WRAC Ann Hamilton and Caroline Slater but also the 2 Scots Guardsmen William Forsythe and John Hunter, plus the civilian Paul Craig who were all killed in the bombing of the Horse and Groom pub 50 years before. The commemorations began at the Memorial at Quaker's Acre with the family members and a few members of the Association where wreaths and flowers were laid as part of a short service led by Canon Simon Butler. The members of the WRAC Assn and the Scots Guards Assn proudly marched up the High Street to Holy Trinity Church for the formal civic service led by the Bishop of Guildford to commemorate the five. The salute was taken by the Lord Lieutenant who was accompanied by the Mayor, one of our very own members, Cllr Sallie Barker which made it special. It was a very moving day talking to the siblings of those killed by the IRA, and I know that both Ann and Caroline's families appreciated the attendance of so many members of the WRAC.

In November I was honoured to represent the Association at the Field of Remembrance where I managed to catch the attention of HRH Duchess of Gloucester, and she commented how smart the Assn members attending were. The Association was very fortunate to be invited to a Remembrance Coffee Morning at No10 Downing Street, and I accompanied three of our members each with very different stories of how the Association was part of their lives. Read more on page 26.

I would like to thank Salisbury branch who kindly put all those wonderful Association Christmas cards into the envelopes for us. I know having done it last time it seems a never ending task - and this year there it was a 30% bigger task. Any branches who would like to do it next year please let us know.

I have only visited one Branch in this period, I have been asked to visit others, but my diary gets a bit full! It was the Birmingham Christmas Jumper Lunch and it was wonderful to see so many of the Birmingham Branch plus ladies from Shropshire, Tamworth, and Hereford Branches. I hope I did not cause too much offence when judging the table decorations – it was so hard to decide between Tables 1 and 2!

I look forward to seeing many of you throughout 2025 and in particular in Cardiff.



The View from HQ



Well, the 'view from HQ' certainly has changed since the last issue. From a first floor window looking out over the industrial end of Winchester we have made the move back into Army accommodation and are now happily ensconced in our new offices at Sir John Moore Barracks. Generously hosted by the Army Training Regiment Winchester, we are delighted to

be back 'behind the wire' and working in a military environment - and not just because of the mess prices (although these are making a difference to both our pockets and our waistlines!).

Being amongst serving personnel is a constant reminder of who our members are and what our community continues to be, and we are proud to be a part of the civilian staff here. In fact we quickly discovered that one of our members already works here in a civvie role - Debs Wilde who is a welfare officer with the WRVS - and we were proud to stand alongside her as the HQ staff attended Sir John Moore Barracks for Remembrance.

You can see more Remembrance photos from around the UK on page 34.



That said, the relocation wasn't all plain sailing. Not long after we moved in, a hot water pipe in the loft burst, and before it seeped through the ceiling into the room below, managed to stew in the rat excretions above us and create exactly the strong smelling soup you would imagine! Having decamped to a windowless storeroom to continue working whilst the repairs and cleanup operation took place, I am pleased to report that we are back in our designated space and fresh as a daisy once more - as long as you ignore that tide mark on the carpet!

All of this happened as we put the finishing touches to our Guildford weekend about which you can read more on page 12. Having discovered early last year that the existing plaque which remembers those killed in the bombing at the Horse and Groom pub was badly damaged and more importantly had mis-spelled the name of Ann Hamilton, we had been assured that it would be replaced in time for the 50th anniversary. Six weeks before the planned commemorations we discovered that this would not be done, so a call to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission saw a swift site visit from a senior surveyor and the proclamation that in the time left a new memorial simply would not be possible. 'Not possible' is not a phrase anyone should say to the WRAC Association! With persistence and persuasion a new bronze plaque was designed, made and set in place, and dedicated as part of the memorial service with representatives of the families present.



Now bearing the cap badge of the WRAC as well as the cap star of the Scots Guards who shared the cost with us, the staff at HQ are proud to have achieved this for our members, for the Borough of Guildford, and for Ann Hamilton and Caroline Slater.

We are delighted to be bringing another bumper edition of the Lioness to you, and hope you enjoy our front cover. With the theme of 'Superheroes' being chosen for this year's Grand Reunion, we couldn't resist the temptation to do something a bit different which evokes not only the comic book heroes of the past, but also reminded us of all the amusing cartoons drawn by military personnel over the years - usually at the expense of more senior ranks! The red dragon makes more than one appearance in this issue as you will see he makes up part of our Grand Reunion shield, especially designed for this year's proceedings and standing rampant with our own Lioness. How many of us will be standing rampant by the end of the Grand Reunion weekend only time will tell, but we are sincerely looking forward to the weekend and to seeing so many female veterans gathered in one place once more.

All work and no play makes Jackie a very dull girl, and although it has been all-go for months now, we did manage to get a little staff outing to the Winchester Christmas market. As you can see from the photos, Claire and I enjoyed a nice cup of mint tea whilst Jane and Julie... well let's just say you'll need to keep an eye on those two at the Grand Reunion! From our new home in Sir John Moore Barracks to yours, we hope you enjoy this edition of the Lioness.



Hailing: Heather Bradbury National Standard Bearer

I enlisted into the WRAC in 1979 at the Manchester recruiting office having already been in the TA for a couple of years as a combat driver, gaining my HGV licence with the Royal Signals. After basic training and assessment at ASMT Leconfield my first posting was with the Army Air Corps at Middle Wallop, other posting included Chattendeau, Guildford as a training NCO, Sandhurst, Sutton Coldfield back to Guildford as a Sgt Tester in PSO then Kineton and a short posting in Rhinetalen.



At my 12 year point which coincided with the disbandment of the WRAC I left the Army and became a driving instructor based in Guildford, but I didn't completely leave the Army behind and joined the TA once again with an Infantry unit as an MT Sgt.

Less than 11 months later I was invited to apply for recruiting duties and was offered a place in the Gloucester office, so I enlisted again for the 4th time into the AGC which is where I spent the next 12 years enjoying the variety of opportunities which recruiting offered, including becoming a service steward at the Tennis Championships in Wimbledon looking after guests in The Royal Box.



When I eventually left the Army after 24 years of service I joined a training company in the Stroud area delivering HGV driver training, First Aid and Health and Safety courses, eventually retiring in 2020.

Whilst working in the recruiting world I met Sharon Baker Joyce who was also a recruiter in the Worcester Office, we also caught up with each other socially at the monthly WRAC

Association Branch meetings in Hereford. Sharon became the Branch Standard Bearer and, when Maureen Deely sadly passed away, Sharon took on the role of National Standard Bearer. I've carried the Hereford Branch Standard for several years and stood in for Sharon on occasions.



When Sharon announced her retirement from the role I was honoured to be asked to become the National Standard Bearer to follow in the footsteps of Sharon, she has set such a high standard (no pun intended) that she will be a hard act to follow. It was on the 1st February this year at Guildford Cathedral that Sharon was to hand over the role of National Standard Bearer, but unfortunately, due to a pre-booked commitment, I was unable to be present so Elaine 'Ozzy' Osborne accepted the Standard on my behalf.

I completed my first official engagements in October this year covering the restitution of berets and cap badges to 13 of our ladies who were discharged cutting short their careers, followed by the 50th anniversary of the Guildford pub bombings in which 5 people lost their lives including 2 of our own WRAC. It was a very emotional weekend which was extremely well organised from start to finish. I look forward to representing the WRAC Association as your National Standard Bearer.



Hailing: Nicci Shepherd Head of Operations and Engagement

I come to the WRAC Association after five years as the Participation and Engagement Manager for Hampshire Library Service. Before joining libraries I worked in arts, culture and heritage settings - providing marketing and communications expertise.

My parents both served in the RAF, in fact they met at the base in Sopley in the 1960s when my mother was working with the radar systems. Although her active service was relatively short, her training and experience led to a long career working in air traffic control and later in flight operations with the Navy.



As you can see from my photo I am a passionate cyclist, who enjoys nothing more than a ride around the beautiful lanes and byways of East Hampshire. I'm a slow cyclist, I like to see the sights and immerse myself in nature when I ride. In 2021 I cycled solo from Glastonbury to Lands End, raising over £3,000 for Cancer Research. The solo ride was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life, and is definitely something I'd like to do again.

I also swim regularly and am the marketing/operations Trustee for a charity-run open air pool in Petersfield. When I'm not exercising I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. My husband is a live music promoter, so I often spend my evenings and summer weekends experiencing a huge range of musical genres at gigs and festivals.

Farewell to: Hannah West

Over the last year, as Communications and Engagement Officer for the Female Veterans Transformation Programme (FVTP) we have achieved a significant amount, including the creation of an evidence review, bringing together all the research conducted in the UK on female veterans. My background in research really helped to make this a more accessible document so that more people and services can better understand the needs and what they should be doing to improve support for women. Putting female veterans at the heart of this programme is essential and we wanted to make sure we heard from as many people as possible about 'what good looks like' and how we can improve services. I co-created the 2 elements of this work, the online questionnaire and the focus groups, and I was lucky enough to meet many WRAC Association members face to face from all four nations of the UK. Overall we have spoken to over 800 female veterans and the results will be published in the New Year. I'm very proud of the work I have achieved with the programme and am looking forward to staying involved where I can.



I have now taken on a new position as a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Military Women's Research and the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Uniformed Public Services at Anglia Ruskin University. This is an excellent opportunity for me to return to my research on gender, war and the military and I am planning research projects exploring military cultures and behaviours, the experiences of female veterans in contemporary Northern Ireland and women's military history.

Are you up to the Standard?

We are looking for Association members across the UK who would like to carry the area or branch standards. Full training will be provided by the RBL and expenses can be claimed if you are asked to represent the Association.

The more standard bearers we have, the more we are able to represent the Association at Remembrance events up and down the country, and give veterans the send off they would like when they have requested this for their funeral.

We are also looking to track down the standards which are not being used. Do you have one in your loft? Do you know of one which is gathering dust in someone else's house? Maybe your branch has one which is in need of some repair. Please get in touch with us so that we can arrange to bring these standards back into use again.

Please email our Membership and Volunteering Officer:
membership@wraca.org.uk.



Features

Lucky for us, Friday the 13th of December was the day to visit the Royal Hospital Chelsea for lunch with some of our 17 ATS and WRAC in-pensioners and to give them a Christmas grant, card and gift from the Benevolent Fund. The new Chair of the Benevolent Fund Monica Jones went along for the first time, along with members of the Major Grants Committee Babs Anderson, Lyn Hatch and Rowena Naile - also Chair of the Membership Council. Monica tells us about her first Christmas visit.



We met at the In-Pensioners club bar for a winter warming drink before distributing the cards, presents and a WRAC Association Diary for 2025 to our veteran residents. As this was my first Christmas grant-giving event I had lots of questions to ask. In particular, Carol Knight provided many answers about forms of dress, daily routine, special

events and much more. A new in-pensioner Anne Lloyd was there although she hasn't got all her uniform yet. Apparently it can take some time for all of the kit to be adjusted as they reuse as much as possible to be sustainable.

We then headed off for lunch in the Grand Hall which is magnificent. As it was a Friday, fish and chips was on the menu which was tasty on a cold winter's day. Sadly a few of our ladies were not well enough to join us for lunch in person but Rowena kindly went afterwards to the Infirmary and distributed their gifts. Although it was a ten hour round trip for me from Leeds it was definitely worth it to meet everyone and wish them a Merry Christmas, and a great opportunity to recognise their service and contribution to society.



*Back: Lyn Hatch, Carol Knight, Rowena Naile, Mary Clark, Anne Phipps, Helen Lloyd, Babs Anderson
Front: Margaret Ashmore, Monica Parrott, Anne Lloyd, Bimbo Coleman, Monica Jones*

NEW YEAR'S HONOUR

Many congratulations to our Life Vice President Colonel Audrey Smith who was recognised in the New Year's Honours for her work supporting female veterans. Audrey has been appointed an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE), recognising her tireless devotion to the Association following her retirement from the Army, especially all she did for WRAC and ATS veterans in need as a long standing Chair of the Benevolent Fund, and latterly as a committed Life VP. Audrey has been actively involved in supporting female veterans through the Association for nearly 30 years and is the epitome of lifelong service. Our Vice President Fiona Gardner has expressed her delight that Audrey's contribution has now been formally recognised. We hope to cover her investiture in a future Lioness and look forward to hearing Audrey's own words on the proceedings.



Poppy Appeal

When WRAC Association members volunteer in their local communities, it raises the profile of female veterans, and reminds those who served with us that we are still here with support and camaraderie. At no time of the year are veterans more visible than when poppies are being sold in shops, stations and public buildings across the UK. Our members womanned stalls and collection boxes up and down the country, and some were also proud to be invited to the launch of the Poppy Appeal in their local area.



Ishbel Thomson and Karen Radford were at the Surrey launch where they met Clare Waterworth MBE, Chief of Staff at the Royal British Legion, and chatted with Mr Michael More-Molyneux, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey. Radders said ***"On a foggy drizzly morning I set off to meet up with Ish at the Royal Alexander and Albert School in Reigate. It was lovely to meet some wonderful people and share a sandwich or two after a poignant service which included bagpipes and a small parade. It was a pleasure and an honour to represent the WRAC Association at the event."***

Ruth Birch was in the wonderful surroundings of Cardiff Castle and told us ***"I was honoured to be invited as a VIP to attend the RBL Garden of Remembrance Opening Ceremony, representing Fighting With Pride and the WRAC. The grounds of the castle with the giant wreath at the heart of the ceremony created a fitting tribute to those who made the ultimate sacrifice."***



Lyn Hatch marked her last year as the Poppy Appeal Manager for Norfolk attending the county launch at Norwich Station. Lyn said ***"After 15 years of working for the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal, I have had the privilege of meeting so many wonderful people and listened to some amazing veterans stories. It has been a gratifying journey, one that has given me great job satisfaction"***



We know there are many more members who do their bit to raise money and make sure everyone is wearing their poppy with pride. Thank you to all of our members who volunteer every October and November - you make us pop with pride!

Jane Freebairn: A Farewell Tribute to our former Editor and Association Secretary



Lt Col Sue Westlake,
Jane Freebairn and
Kate McGregor

The Lioness magazine has been enjoyed ever since the first edition in 1950, newly titled from the Comrades Association Gazette. Over the years our magazine has seen many editors, each of whom has made a significant impact on the look and feel of the magazine, but perhaps the editor best known to our members was Jane Freebairn. Jane is remembered in the Obituaries section of this issue by Sheila Johncey, and here, Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE pays her own special tribute as we take a trip down memory lane to revisit some of Jane's great work and memorable editions of the Lioness.

It is with great personal sadness that I write this tribute to Jane - both as a valued colleague for ten years in the WRAC Association and as one of my closest friends for nearly fifty years. She supported me unstintingly throughout my tenure as Vice President and was, without doubt, 'the power behind the throne'.

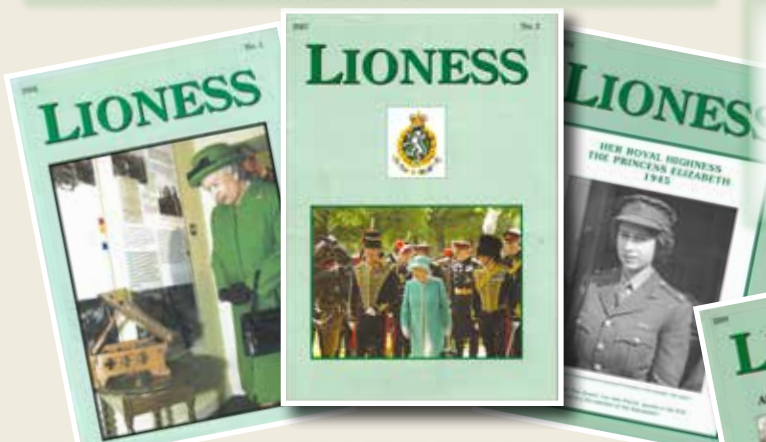
She joined the staff at Association HQ in May 2001 as the Benevolent Fund Case Secretary and moved across to the Regimental Secretary's post in 2004. Over the course of 9 years Jane did all three appointments (there were only three in those days) within Association HQ, even that of Chief Clerk when the post was gapped or the incumbent was on extended sick leave.

Throughout her time in office Jane was administrator, counsellor, social worker, confidante and friend to our veterans. Her phone was constantly busy, her post bag and email inbox full, yet she always had time for the members.

Jane completely turned the WRAC Association around during her tenure and brought it into the 21st Century, firmly putting us 'back on the map' as a veterans agency. She had the vision to see the bigger picture on how it should be taken forward, and produced an inspired strategic plan. She stage-managed and organised three Grand Reunions (each one being 'the best yet!') and 16 Officers' Dining Club functions around the country. 'Lioness' magazine was completely revamped and rejuvenated under her expert editorship - changing it to a stimulating and popular publication. She researched widely and her witty, informative articles and asides throughout the magazine were priceless; it has since become a valuable archive as well as the lifeline to so many of our housebound members. She always received the auditor's highest commendation for her outstanding financial acumen in handling the Association accounts (worth in excess of £5 million). Over 6,500 beneficiaries received grants from her Benevolent Fund casework which she administered with caring generosity and compassion.



Dear Major Freebairn,
Thank you for phoning me - it
was good to hear your cheerful voice!
I will now place all my apologies to



Dear Jane,
I do admire you for taking on the triple
challenge at Association HQ. I'm sure a clear
brain with clerical help will cope & that's you!



Dear Jane & the ladies of the WRAC Association
Council
What a wonderful surprise! The postman
arrived with a huge box and when I
opened it there was this superb arrangement
flowers, Orange gazanias, deep peach

same warm welcome which I received from the Officer, I enjoy talking to you all about the Army today and how it has changed drastically over the years even since I joined (33

Message from the General Secretary

It is a daunting task to be given a blank sheet of paper and asked to write your first letter to the readership of The Lioness! Of course, my first thoughts are to say what a privilege it is to be in such a position. One of the most special moments for me was to open the letter from Buckingham Palace to say that Her Majesty The Queen had agreed to be our Patron. After the AGM, I sent Loyal Greetings and Birthday Greetings to Her Majesty. Subsequently, I had to ask for permission to reprint the photograph on the cover of this edition. I am delighted to tell you that each time I have received a reply from the Palace, Her Majesty has asked that her Best Wishes and thanks be passed on to the whole membership of the Association. I am very proud to be able to do this through the Lioness.

At this time of year, our thoughts begin to focus on Armistice Day and all the ceremonies and services associated with this significant act of remembrance and thanksgiving. The Vice-President and I have the honour of going to the Field Of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey. I would be more than happy to plant a cross on your behalf if you would like. You can obtain a small one from your local Poppy seller, write the name of the person you wish to be remembered on the back and send it to me at Winchester. I will then include it in our plot at the Abbey.

I will be as Editor of the Lioness and I would like to see you on the Editorship until the comfort to

Having been the General Secretary "in waiting" for a year now, I have quite a good idea of the normal turn of events over a twelve-month period. With the arrival of the new Benevolent Fund Case Secretary, I look forward to being more proactive in moving the Association forward.

Jane Freebairn

Editorial



I do hope you like the photograph on the front cover. Of course, our Patron, Her Majesty the Queen is the main focus but those who are sharp eyed will have noticed that she is being accompanied on the right by the Commanding Officer, Major Erica Bridge. I thought you would appreciate the juxtaposition of our Patron, who served in the ATS, with an excellent example of the opportunities available to women in the Army today.

Many of the Branch reports urge WRAC members to take a



The General Secretary does not even go on parade without her Black Book!



A clutch of Commandants: Colonel Viv Fisher, Frankie Cook, Anne Cluett and Nan Robertson remembering all their days on parade at the WRAC Centre, Guildford



12 Col Wintlake AGC (SPS) takes the salute as the AGC Band marches past



Band leads the way



Reverend Susan Wing laughing at her own joke before the Service

You can read more of Jane's work in the Lioness archive, along with decades of other issues at wracassociation.org.uk/lioness-archive.

Jane worked tirelessly and with delightful good humour to deliver an exceptional service to all our veterans. She constantly operated way beyond her extensive portfolio but was always extremely modest about her significant contribution to our Association. Driven and dedicated, Jane willingly forfeited much of her own time and personal life to making a difference to others because she cared passionately about her Association and its members. She was universally respected and well known in the wider arena of service charities with whom she came into daily contact and was singled out by the AG Corps Regimental Colonel as the Association Secretaries' role model.

Jane was a very dear friend who will be remembered with the greatest of respect and affection by so many. Simply the Best!



Jane wrote the wonderful words on our plinth at the NMA

Guildford Remembered

The WRAC Association's much anticipated Guildford Remembered weekend drew members from up and down the country for many reasons. Some came to revisit the place where the WRAC Centre stood, others to pay their respects to those killed in the Guildford pub bombings. Some came to receive their berets and cap badges as part of the LGBT restorations, others to welcome these veterans back into the WRAC family. Whatever the reasons for making the journey to Guildford, the esprit de corps was keenly felt throughout the weekend.

Brig Fiona Gardner CBE welcomed the assembled crowd including His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Surrey Mr Michael More-Molyneux, and The Worshipful The Mayor of Guildford Councillor Major Sallie Barker MBE before moving to the first part of the weekend, the unveiling of a new plaque. The original plaque had fallen from its place earlier in the year, and as 2024 marked 60 Years since the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Barracks, we were delighted to update the wording to reflect this anniversary. We had hoped to be joined by Col Nan Robertson MBE, Commandant of the WRAC Centre from 1987 to 1990, but unfortunately she was unable to attend through illness. Col Audrey Smith, Commandant from 1984 to 1987 was present and unveiled the plaque after Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE gave this wonderful speech.



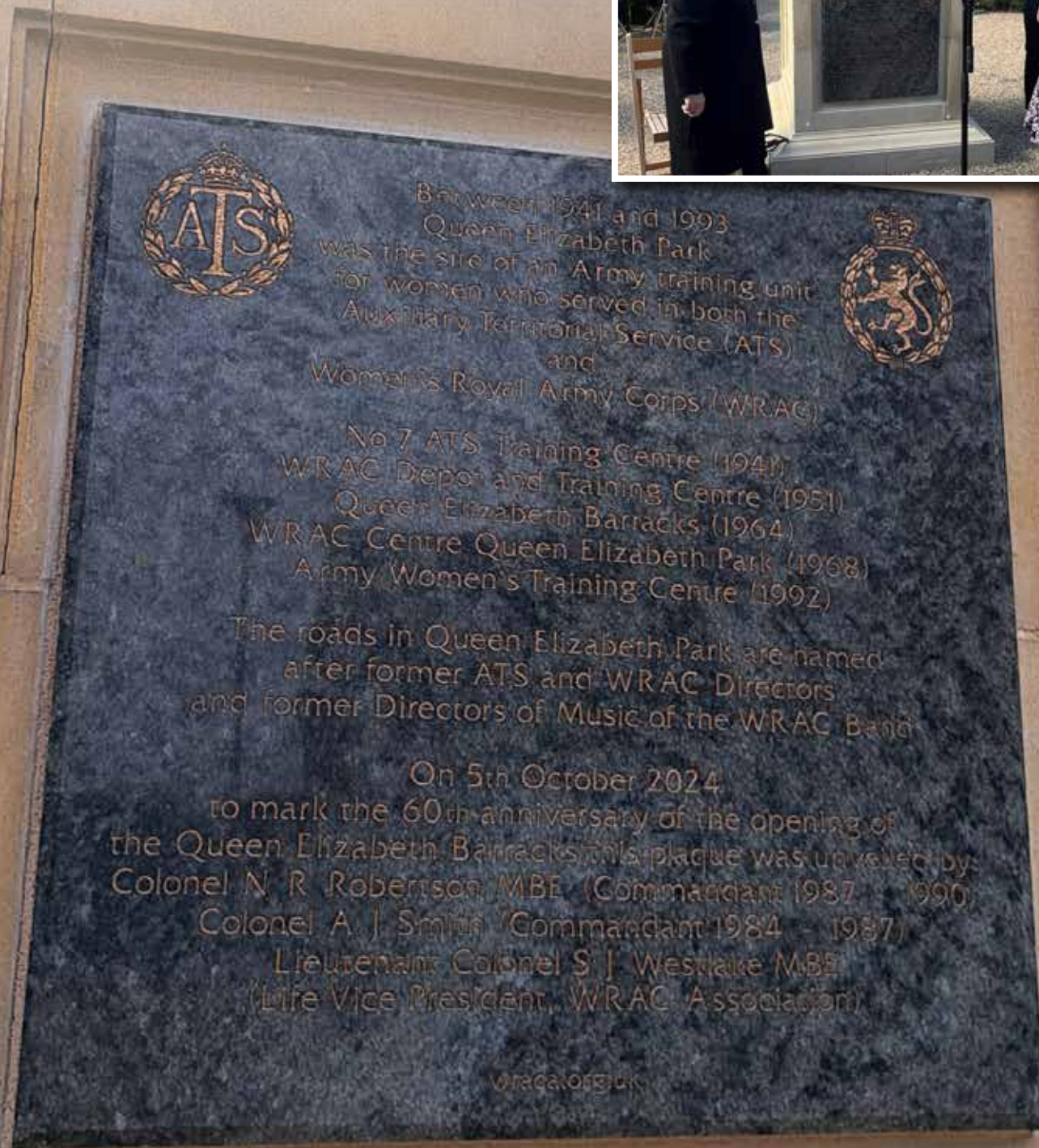
“It is a huge privilege to have been asked to unveil this plaque today alongside Colonel Audrey Smith, former Commandant of the WRAC Centre, Queen Elizabeth Park between 1985 and 1990. Queen Elizabeth Park has been hallowed ground for Army Women for many years. The Auxiliary Territorial Service (The ATS) first opened its Training Centre here in 1941 and the Army Women's Training Centre finally closed its gates in 1993 following the disbandment of the Women's Royal Army Corps. 52 years of Service and Comradeship by literally thousands of women who were proud to serve their country.

After the War, this ATS site served as a base for the newly formed Women's Royal Army Corps and was called the WRAC Depot and Training Centre. It was completely rebuilt and officially opened by HM The Queen in 1964, hence our 60th Anniversary celebrations today. It was christened 'Queen Elizabeth Barracks' and later 'Queen Elizabeth Park' to honour Queen Elizabeth's wartime service in the ATS. The barracks boasted one of the largest parade grounds in the country as those of us who served there will well remember! It was a place where all female soldiers did their basic training and where young subalterns, like myself, cut their teeth as young Officers. After 1984 it was also where Junior and Senior NCOs, Warrant Officers and WRAC TA did their upgrading promotion courses. It was also the home of both the ATS and WRAC Bands throughout their existence. So, it is no wonder that it continues to be a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of female veterans who come here each year to reminisce and remember 'the good times' - and there are plenty of us here today as I am delighted to see.



I was privileged to serve at QE Park on four occasions in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s and I was here when the WRAC disbanded. In later years I became Vice President of our WRAC Association and in March 2014, when the Laing and Linden Homes redevelopment of Queen Elizabeth Park came to fruition, we jointly, with Guildford Borough, unveiled the original plaques on the obelisks both here and in Forster Close. The roads in Queen Elizabeth Park are named after former ATS and WRAC Directors and former Directors of the WRAC Band. Hopkin Close, where we are standing now, was named after Major Lynette Hopkin, who successfully worked her way through the ranks from Bandswoman to Director of Music, a great achievement for those times. She was well known to the both of us who are unveiling this plaque today - and how proud she would have been to know that she has a road named after her. Indeed it is very fitting that Hopkin Close is at the very edge of the old parade square where she marched and directed the Band so many times over so many years.

I will now ask Colonel Audrey to join me in unveiling this plaque which outlines the history of this very special, much loved historic military site.



Restoration of berets and cap badges

A ceremony for WRAC veterans who were dismissed during or who served under the shadow of the pre-2000 'gay ban', offering a sincere apology and the warm welcome of the WRAC Association.

After the unveiling of the plaque, the assembled crowd moved to the main seated area for an extremely moving ceremony. Following speeches by Brig (ret'd) Fiona Gardner CBE and Brig Melissa Emmett MBE, thirteen WRAC veterans came forward one by one to receive their presentation box.

On pages 46 to 49 those recipients explain what the day meant to them, and how their lives have been affected by their experiences. Over 100 WRAC veterans had gathered to witness this watershed moment and show their support for their comrades. All those watching felt privileged to be a part of this special occasion, including Col Stuart Allen MBE representing the Adjutant General's Corps and Lt Col Claire Masters representing Army HQ Arms and Services.

Our Vice President's speech included these words

On the 19th of July 2023, the Independent Review into the service and experience of LGBT veterans who served prior to 2000 was published. At the heart of the review were the testimonies of veterans who had suffered under the 'gay ban'. Lord Etherton writes in his preface to the Review:

Those statements give shocking evidence of a culture of homophobia, and of bullying, blackmail and sexual assaults, abusive investigations into sexual orientation and sexual preference, disgraceful medical examinations including conversion therapy, peremptory discharges, and appalling consequences in terms of mental health and wellbeing, homelessness, employment, personal relationships and financial hardship.

69% of the testimonies were from women which was notably high given the much lower percentage of women serving in the Armed Forces during those years.

The Review made 49 recommendations across a broad range of areas including the making of a National Apology, and the restoration of status and medals. At the heart of this work is the opportunity to recognise those who were lost from our armed forces, isolated from the military family and thus from the WRAC Association. So many have faced decades of issues with health, housing, families, loneliness and isolation.

Today is an acknowledgment of our pride in your service and the reassurance that for those who lost so much and been so greatly affected, that there is a warm welcome and the offer of support both from the WRAC Association and from the broader military family. The WRAC Association is enormously proud to have been nominated by the MOD to carry out the restoration of berets and cap badges to all of you here today. You are warmly welcomed back into the military family and I know that everyone here today will join you in showing that pride that we are all veterans who served.



Brigadier Melissa spoke to the assembled crowd, offering her sincere apology in both English and Welsh. She shares her thoughts about the day for the Lioness

October's gathering of WRAC Association members was extraordinary to witness and be part of. There is promise in the word 'gather': to bring together; to unite. The gathering was glorious – you are a mighty group and it was a strange pleasure to realise I had never been with such a sizeable throng of women. The gathering up of those veterans who were forced to leave under the dreadful, wrongful ban on gay people serving was an act of stunning affection, on both sides. That day you lived your motto, gentle in manner, resolute in deed.

I shall forever feel privileged to witness the evolution of these women through the course of a single day. From that visceral mix of excitement and trepidation on arrival in Guildford, to reliving the anguish of their treatment and loss of belonging, to the unbounded joy of being gathered up again, and the celebrations of the evening. My own musings on how the day might play out would have been as nothing against the bravery it took for many to turn up, but I did not anticipate fully what such a day could do to liberate some of the women from decades of shame – and many of you generously told me just what it meant. Burned in my memory is the sight of the 'Guildford Gang' (as they are now known) bonding over dinner, their elation evident at being fully welcomed back.

It is always great to step away from the office and be part of a vibrant, veteran community for the day, but this was something very special: commemoration done elegantly, and a wonderful event for restitution and gathering up. What a credit you all are to each other and I am so touched to have been invited to become a member of this glorious association of warm, impressive, courageous women.



Afternoon Tea and Evening Supper

With barely a dry eye in the house, some much needed refreshments were the order of the afternoon, and so we walked the few hundred yards to the Army Cadet Force Centre on Railton Road, named after Brigadier Dame Mary 'Molly' Railton, DWRAC 1954-57.

Leaving behind the wonderful music from the HMS Collingwood Volunteer Band we were met by the sounds of cadets drumming in the October sunshine, and the WRAC flag flying from the flagpole. The cadets who had given up their time to support us that weekend handed out teas and coffees before a couple more speeches and the cutting of the cake by The Mayor. As the cake was handed out and the conversation flowed, thoughts turned to the evening's supper and the need to leave a bit of room for the meal ahead.



Left; The Mayor of Guildford chats with Lt Col Claire Masters and Maj Sarah Conway from Army HQ's LGBT Restorative Action team

After a short break we reconvened at the Guildford Cathedral Refectory for our evening supper - and what a meal it was! The 'Tipsy Pig' caterers surpassed themselves, and after Grace was said by The Reverend Susan Wing, we tucked in. Another speech, this time from Lesley Davison with heartfelt thanks from all those who had received their berets, was met with a standing ovation. The rest of the evening passed with the conversation and laughter that can only come from women who have experienced and shared a bond like those of a WRAC veteran.



Sincere thanks to the members of the HMS Collingwood Volunteer Band and the Guildford detachment of the Surrey Army Cadet Force for their support. Donations have been made to both organisations on behalf of our members.

Quakers' Acre

The following morning, WRAC Association members gathered to mark 50 years since a bomb exploded in the Horse and Groom pub in Guildford, claiming the lives of two off-duty WRAC servicewomen, two off duty Scots Guards and one civilian. The loss of Private Ann Hamilton and Private Caroline Slater was felt throughout the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1974 and, 50 years on, continues to impact our veterans. On the day they were so cruelly taken they were robbed of the life they were meant to lead. Many others were also affected: their families whose dignity and resilience brought them to Guildford to remember their loved ones, and servicewomen who were not present but who worked through the aftermath, some of whom made the journey to be in Guildford that weekend.

Senior representatives of the Association met in the Guildhall in the morning to be introduced to dignitaries from the Borough of Guildford and the families of those killed who had gathered for the commemoration. Each of those killed was represented, and the WRAC Association had arranged for bouquets to be made up for the families to lay, including in the colours of the WRAC, the colours of the Scots Guards, and for civilian Paul Craig, a bright mix as requested by his sister Pat who asked for "something cheerful as he was such a happy lad." This small group then walked together to Quakers' Acre, a small garden of contemplation built directly opposite where the Horse and Groom pub once stood, and remembered together as Canon Simon Butler carried out the Act of Remembrance and dedicated the new plaque placed there by the WRAC Association (read more on page 12). Our Vice President Fiona Gardner read the Exhortation and laid the wreath on behalf of our members. Standard Bearer Heather Bradbury lowered the WRAC Standard, with Marian Potter (formerly of the WRAC Staff Band) playing the Last Post and Reveille, and Pipe Major Roger Huth piping the lament Flowers of the Forest.

Additional photos supplied by Michelle Presley and printed with kind permission



Guildford High Street and Holy Trinity Church

From Quakers' Acre, the group returned to the High Street where the WRAC and Scots Guards contingent were formed up. Led by parade commander Rowena Naile, the march past ascended the High Street, saluting the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey outside of the Guildhall before arriving at Holy Trinity Church for the Commemoration Service. Once inside, the WRAC made up a large part of the congregation in the packed church which used to be the cathedral. During the service prayers were offered by the Bishop of Guildford and our Honorary Padre the Rev'd Susan Wing, and Canon Simon Butler, Rector of Holy Trinity addressed those inside the church and joining online saying: "Many still remember the terrible events of 5th October 1974, and especially the families and friends of Paul, Ann, Caroline, William and John, none of them older than 21, all of whom were murdered that evening by the IRA. Sixty-five other people were injured. The memory of that dreadful night is made only more painful by the fact that there have been no safe convictions of those responsible. We gather today to acknowledge the passing of time since that dreadful night and to honour those who both suffered and responded. For those who are left with the scars and wounds we also pray for healing and for justice and, where those things are hard to find, the strength to endure. This service is therefore many things: an act of commemoration and memorial for grieving families, a gathering of military veterans to honour some of their own, especially the Women's Royal Army Corps and the Scots Guards, a town-wide observance of one of Guildford's darkest days, and an opportunity to pray for peace, justice, and reconciliation. I welcome you here today and pray that this occasion will provide consolation, comfort and hope."



Pop Stars!

When we sent out our new table-top pop-ups in the summer we were delighted to receive so much great feedback. The plan is to ask our groups and branches to put the pop-up on display whenever they meet so that people know the WRAC Association is in town. You never know who will see it - a WRAC veteran, a wife, husband or partner, a son, a granddaughter, a friend or carer. Anyone who might know an ex-WRAC and can let them know about us brings another veteran back to their military family, and then we grow and grow and grow...



Plymouth



Stirling



Herts and Beds



Tamworth



Torbay



Gloucester



Wirral and Chester



So a huge thanks to all of these branches who have had their banners out and about, and do send us more photos for the next edition, because when you shout about us, we'll be shouting about you!

WRAC

(That's Wendy's Real Ale & Cider)

Once again our Lionesses turned out for another successful Beer & Cider Festival in Bury St Edmunds last August. Wonderful Wendy Hooton rallied the troops to get Suffolk sozzled, and from the look of the photos a very good time was had by all.

So how well did we do? Well before we reveal that, let's find out how it all went on the day. After all, there are worse places to volunteer than at a beer festival! Here's what some of our fabulous Lionesses had to say:

"On our arrival at the Cathedral we were met by Wendy to be given our passes and Aprons ready for action. Well briefed by the main man, all of us Lionesses headed to the marquee to start our duties. Karen, Val and I were on wiping table tops, clearing glasses and general clean up. Val and Karen did table tops, me being vertically challenged did chairs and table legs (no comments please). The remaining Lionesses were serving the beer from the barrels. Lucky them, they were allowed tasters!" Mary Linnegan



"For the second year in a row Loftly and I made our way from North Norfolk for Bury St Edmunds to do our bit at the Beer Festival, and it didn't disappoint. The weather was fab, volunteers were awesome and the WRAC contingent were on fire! Loftly and I completed a double shift over 8 hours serving anyone who had their beer tokens at the ready! What a brilliant day we had. A few squaddie jokes and banter made some fun conversations to the unexpected beer drinking civvies! A great day and highly recommended for anyone to volunteer and have some fun whilst raising some cash for our Association."

Debbie Sutton



Kym Lofthouse also recalled some of the great conversations she had on the day:

Do I know you from Bury St Edmunds?

No sir I served you last year but as I wasn't drinking it was easier to remember you than you remember me!

What do you recommend?

This one has been very popular Sir. (Same chap several hours later) Can you just pick something for me as they all taste the same now!

What are you girls laughing about?

We are playing spot the looky-likey celebrity to pass the time

Who am I then?

Jack Whitehall. Do you want to join in? (He did - for hours! We even saw George Michael!!!!)



"This is our third time helping at the Beer and Cider Festival. We are both now in our eighties and standing at a bar serving drinks is not something either of us can do anymore, so we were given a seated job checking the volunteers in and out and selling the Beer Cards. We met some really lovely people during our four days there and if we're both up to it we would love to volunteer again. Helping raise funds for the WRAC Association is a great pleasure, as it helps those WRAC veterans in most need. Thank you to Wendy Hooton for organising the volunteers and for her unstinting support for us all during the Fest!"

Chris & Peter Hayman

So back to that all important question - how did we do? Of the 47 charities there, we came... top of the pile! Of course we did! Which means a cheque for £1800 was presented to Angela Bate (ex WRAC Royal Army Veterinary Corps) on Saturday 7th December by her husband and fellow festival organiser Martin Bate. Angela said "I can't thank Wendy enough for all her work and help at the festival, it made my job as volunteer organiser a lot easier. The festival was our most successful ever and we look forward to making next year even better."

A word from Wendy:

"Huge thanks to all my volunteers - you were amazing!! Your enthusiasm, humour and professionalism (well it looked like you knew what you were doing!) really was appreciated.

See you all next time.

Dates for your diary - 20th - 25th August 2025



Additional photographs by Robert Robertson, Bury St Edmunds



Would you like to volunteer at the East Anglian Beer and Cider Festival 2025?

If you can spare any time between the 20th and 25th of August, contact Wendy on 07775505326 wendyhootonski@aol.com

Why volunteer? Lofty says: "It's great way to catch up and have so many laughs with veterans and customers and at the same time raise important funds for our charity."

Come On Irene!

Turn To Starboard (T2S) is a sailing charity which supports veterans who have been affected by their service and seeks to provide an environment where they are empowered, connected and supported. Andrea Ford joined other WRAC Association members on the water and sent us her crewmates log.



Well, if you ever thought military jargon is extensive, try being instructed in a whole new vocabulary! It was truly a privilege to sail upon the very good Tall Ship 'Irene of Bridgwater' - a 100ft ketch built in 1907 that has undergone several refurbishments over the years and is described as a luxury vessel; a perfect match for 10 female Provost Veterans! Not that luxury was needed as it was the journey of self-discovery that proved to be beyond beneficial.

Accompanied by 5 crew, we sailed out of Falmouth for a 4 day voyage along the English south coast.



It didn't take long for the banter, fun and camaraderie to emerge before we even set foot on Irene. We were early of course, the office was closed and a bar opposite was open, no need to say anymore! Joining me were Jayne Archer, Sheila Welland, Chris Mellisi, Jean Butler, Sylvia Adams, Jen Turner, Jeanie Reeve, Sue Johnson and Terry Bradley. Within a short time we were settled on board and had chosen our bunks - not designed for vertically and physically challenged, inexperienced sailors, but we were just thankful they weren't hammocks. Soon, all were gathered in the galley for a briefing by the skipper Alex where he outlined the intended voyage, from Falmouth to Fowey, to Helford River and back home, with overnight stops along the way.

We worked hard as a team, learning various sailing skills under the watchful eye of the skipper and crew. Everyone had a go at every task, some were more able than others, but no-one shied away from the challenges. Sails up, sails down, anchor, ropes, swabbing the deck, food prep, dinghy in/out of the water, so many things but with many hands it did make the chores easier. Sensing Irene transfer from engine power to catching the wind in her sails gave a feeling of serenity, but no one minded when that was interrupted by the shout of "dolphins!", a truly wonderful sight, no matter how many times they had been seen before.



Peacefulness was never an element of the evenings though, and after the business of the evening meal, the eagerness to clear away for the opening of the bar seemed, unsurprisingly, a priority! Then the shenanigans began, and various tipples were consumed amongst laughter, ditties, flamenco guitar playing, singing, pirates, poetry, leprechauns and storytelling.

The skipper very kindly arranged some 'run ashore' trips, and one morning after being anchored out at sea just west of Charlestown, we donned our swimsuits and were ferried to a secluded beach called 'Silver Mines'. The sea was absolutely freezing! Of course the wild water swimmers were amused by the reluctance of the others to take the plunge quickly, but the sun shone and the little bit of paradise was there just for us. Irene looked serene as she sat magnificently on the water with the horizon as her backdrop. Other trips were made into Fowey for a wander, cream tea and to replenish bar supplies and a very lovely pub at Mawnan on the Helford Estuary. Of course all of these required the use of the dinghy, no easy task to put it on the water and retrieve back into Irene. The indescribable positions those inflexible limbs approached this mean obstacle with gave much concern to the crew and other observers through very contorted faces doing incredibly well to mask their laughter.



Being a veteran is complex. Military life is ended by choice or concluded unwillingly in some form or another. Length of service, rank, or role do not matter other than the fact service was given; there is an intangible bond that can tie veterans together. Being part of this voyage was special and will be remembered for the rest of our lives; we have our own bond, name and support group that we will cherish forever. Reasons for taking part were varied; a childhood dream to sail a tall ship, a new challenge, adventure, acceptance, fear of doing new things, overcoming health issues, shared memories old and new, be with like minded ladies and most of all because T2S gave us the opportunity and we stepped up to take it. We were part of a team again, achieving a dream, able to 'unburden' in a safe environment, finding peace, self-discovery, fulfilment, acceptance, renewed confidence and most of all new friendships. We all took the oath, 'what occurs on board stays on board' and it will. Some things are just not for sharing!

To end this epic tale then, whatever life has thrown at you, good, bad or all things in between, being joined together in a team such as this is the most enlightening, moving and fun thing anyone can ever experience. What Irene presented was extraordinary; thank you for the laughter, tears, conversations, understanding, togetherness, and unique memories. To all of my shipmates, Irene and her crews, 'fair winds and following seas'.



Wife Of - A Sartorial Editorial

Imogen Corrigan turns the tables on a traditional 'plus one' rule for a role reversal which might resonate with any woman who was married to a serving officer or soldier in the 1970s, '80s and even the '90s, and who may well have found her name on a list as W/O: Wife Of...

I realise that some people reading this are probably already shuddering but I never especially minded. I'm not sure that I even thought much about it since I was (and still am) a wife of and am not ashamed of it. I made a conscious decision to get married and think I was more-or-less in my right mind and sound judgement at the time, although it's not always easy to tell.



If I was on my husband's turf, I was the 'Wife Of'; if I was on my own I was an officer in my own right. It's many years since I was amongst the first women to be an Assistant Adjutant, the only serving woman amongst perhaps 500 men and I remember a vague discussion about what I should wear for a dinner night: a mess kit or a civilian gown? In effect, was I an officer or a lady? Looking back, I think the men were rather at a loss and were leaving the decision to me (I chose to be an officer).

If these conversations took place today, they would sound out-of-place and – sadly – some would choose to take offence which I'm certain was never what was intended. That said, when I married in Hong Kong in 1984 I stayed in the army for another decade and I could hardly resist ... it was easy to get

jewellery made in Hong Kong so my first stop was Tony Ko's in Kowloon armed with my WRAC cap badge which he copied and made into cufflinks. My husband, Gordon, was delighted by them and still faithfully wears them to every WRAC occasion.



A few years later I was posted to what was then the WRAC Centre in Guildford. Here the roles were reversed; I think that there may have been half a dozen male soldiers amongst goodness knows how many servicewomen. If there was a social event where names might be on a list, I thought it might be helpful if those who had had the wisdom to marry a WRAC officer should be identified, just as we sometimes were.



The colours of the WRAC were beech brown and bottle green so I got some silk, cut it on the bias and tussled with it until I had made a striped tie. Then I carefully embroidered h/o on it: Husband Of. This is also still worn and why not? I have heard other husbands say that they wouldn't be seen dead wearing WRAC insignia; more of a comment on them than on the Corps, I think.

I am all for equality but also tradition and I can scarcely count the number of times I have been at a regimental dinner when the women were expected to leave the table so that the men could carry on the conversation

on their own. To this end when I was President of the Mess Committee at Guildford I once banged the gavel and invited the men to leave. They didn't seem to mind although, interestingly, some of the women did.

REMEMBRANCE

Those who served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service and the Women's Royal Army Corps never forget those who went before, and those who paid the ultimate price. Some fall silent in their own homes, and some in their local communities; many represent our association in towns and cities across the UK, including those who travel to London to march past the Cenotaph.

Our Lioness coverage begins at the Field of Remembrance in London, taking in five days of services and events across the UK and the world. We hope you remember with us as we remembered them.

Thursday 7th: Westminster Abbey



As HRH The Duchess of Gloucester opened the 96th Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey, the WRAC plot was attended by a small group of Association members for this special event before the general public are allowed in to see the masses of crosses and poppies that cover St Margaret's churchyard in the Abbey grounds. Jane Ricketts was one of those fortunate to be successful in the ballot to attend, and told us about her experience.

I travelled up to London by train the day before and checked into the Union Jack Club, where I met up with two more WRAC veterans for dinner and a catch up. On Thursday morning, dressed with my medals on, I chatted to some people at the reception area to ask whether anyone was going to the Abbey and, if so, how they were getting there. A lovely lady said she was going to the Houses of Parliament, and then on to the Field of Remembrance and I was welcome to share her taxi. She told me her name, but I didn't think much of it until I looked her up. She was Baroness Janet Fookes DBE, DL - life peer and a deputy speaker of the House of Lords, and former deputy speaker of the House of Commons!



Once I got to the Abbey I met up with the five other women also representing the WRAC and we had a look around before the service, and then waited at the WRAC plot for HRH The Duchess of Gloucester to walk around. When she stopped at our plot Rowena spoke to her and introduced us all to her, explaining that we were representing the Women's Royal Army Corps.

Afterwards we all went for some lunch which was a good opportunity to catch up with everyone. It was a great start to the Remembrance weekend, which saw me back in London again on the Sunday, marching at the Cenotaph..

The Field of Remembrance was a lovely service and place to visit, and a great honour to pay our respects to the fallen. I felt very privileged to be invited.

Friday 8th: 10 Downing Street



Four Lionesses meet Larry the Cat (oh, and the Prime Minister was there too)

An email from the Office for Veterans' Affairs asked your Association to nominate four representatives to attend a coffee morning at No. 10 Downing Street; so bright and early, Caroline McEwan-Smith, Rowena Naile, Patricia 'Budgie' Rosewell and Sandy Warne headed into central London for a very special start to the day as Budgie reports:

To be selected was a real surprise and of course that was a yes from me! We all arranged to meet up at the security gates, and as we walked towards the big front door, it opened and out popped little Larry the cat! We all stopped and had our photos taken together outside the front door and I had to pinch myself - I couldn't believe I was entering No 10. Once inside we had to hand over our mobile phones together with our handbags before ascending the famous staircase. Slowly walking up it was overwhelming to see all the past PM's staring down at you - I stopped a while and gazed at Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher's portraits and gave them a big smile. We were then shown into the Terracotta Room for breakfast: croissants, fruit, dainty toasted bacon and sausage sandwiches and even cake. There were about 50 people in attendance from various veteran organisations, and after enjoying my breakfast I was approached by Gemma from the Cabinet Office who had come to collect me and take me into the White Room. I was amazed by the interior and the bright furnishings, and having been told to take a seat I chose a nice single chair that was really comfortable, next to a lovely old Para veteran and a Navy veteran in a wheelchair. We had started to chat when Gemma came back into the room and started laughing "Sorry Patricia, that's the Prime Minister's chair!" Well that caused a laugh, but at least I warmed it up for him! A few minutes later, in came the PM with his secretary of state for Defence John Healy. The PM shook hands and welcomed us to the White Room. We talked about Remembrance and the importance of keeping the memories alive of those who gave their lives. We also talked about veteran mental health before returning to the Terracotta Room so the PM could chat with the other guests.



It was such an honour to have a look around No. 10, and I made sure I used the powder room - just to say, "I've been"!



Saturday 9th: Royal Albert Hall

The Festival of Remembrance held at the Royal Albert Hall is a wonderful occasion which WRAC veterans attend each year. Although your Association does not have a ticket allocation for this event, we are always pleased to receive your photos so that we can see who has attended and share with our Lioness readers.



Sunday 10th: Guildford

From 1949 to 1992 there was a great bond between the WRAC Centre and the Borough of Guildford, and in 1988 we were given the Freedom of the Borough. This bond continues to this day as we return each November for Remembrance. Col Audrey Smith OBE reports on last year's proceedings



The weekend started on Saturday afternoon with tea at the Fire Station where there were seven WRAC veterans present. After the delicious spread we all went downstairs where wreaths were laid. This year we were asked to lay a wreath in memory of Ann Hamilton and Caroline Slater. There was then a short service before we all went our separate ways.

The following morning our small contingent arrived at Holy Trinity Church on the High Street, nearly filling the row of seats immediately behind the VIPs with Col Nan Robertson MBE joining us in the pew at the side. Following the service, the parade formed up outside led again by the female Parade Commander Lt Lily Forward. Seven people marched this year and it is hoped that we might get our squad into double figures next year. Suzette Bond who travelled from Kent was brought by a relative who was also a veteran and so he marched with the male contingent.

The wreath laying at the World War One and World War Memorial was led by The Worshipful The Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Sallie Barker MBE, a WRAC reserve officer who was proudly wearing her Reserve Medal. Our wreath was laid by Col Alison Brown OBE who we were all delighted could be with us this year. Unusually there is a second modern memorial for those who lost their lives in subsequent conflicts and the wreath was laid by Maj Rowena Patrick MBE who has lived in the borough for 50 years.

A small contingent returned to the Guildhall for refreshments and to chat with the Mayor of Guildford and other local dignitaries. Suzette was also able to chat to her former Commanding Officer COL Nan Robertson MBE. When we left the Guildhall, we went to the Keep where the rest of our WRAC group were already established with drinks. Shortly after that Lily Forward arrived and then the Mayor. An hour of recollections and laughter followed before we were served with a delicious lunch.



Every WRAC recruit has spent time at the WRAC Centre and in October we celebrated 60 years since Queen Elizabeth II opened the rebuilt camp which the press renamed the Powder Puff Barracks! Please consider attending next year particularly if you live locally. It is only a short march which I can still manage but for how much longer? It would be comforting for me to see more WRAC veterans as I have to watch the parade when I am unable to march.

Sunday 10th: London

With well over 100 WRAC veterans marching at the Cenotaph last year, and more standing in the crowds to watch on and pay their respects, two of our contingent who were first-timers sent us their report from the day. Julie Barber flew over from Spain.



For years, like so many others, I've sat in front of my TV, watching the Cenotaph Remembrance Parade and wondering what it would be like to take part. This year, I finally decided to stop wondering and act. I submitted my application.

When I received confirmation of my place, there was no hesitation. Living in Spain now, I quickly booked my return flight for the Remembrance weekend, and then, on a rather dreary and overcast Remembrance Sunday, I embarked on a train journey from southwest London to Waterloo. During the journey, there were a number of other veterans from different eras and regiments. The number of veterans grew as we approached Trafalgar Square and made our way onto an awe-inspiring Horse Guards Parade full of veterans forming up into their old regiments. As I made my way towards the WRAC contingent, easily identifiable with many wearing their distinctive bottle green fleeces, I felt a sense of pride in being reunited with the lovely ladies of my former Corps after a long 37 years.

The WRAC contingent comprised both veterans who had participated in previous years and quite a few, like myself, who were making their first Cenotaph parade. There was opportunity for camaraderie and reconnection with old acquaintances, although unfortunately I was unable to catch up with any of my former colleagues. Nevertheless, I had the pleasure of meeting numerous new individuals. Once assembled, we proceeded to Whitehall, where we awaited the solemn march past. While we were waiting we were able to watch the events at the Cenotaph on the big screen.

Both I and the lady beside me expressed a momentary sense of trepidation, albeit a fleeting one, as nerves were replaced by pride. We embarked on the march, and the memories of my time in Guildford flooded back. As we marched past the Cenotaph, I was filled with a profound sense of remembrance for my grandad and all the valiant service men and women who have dedicated their lives to our nation. The procession concluded with our march past William, Prince of Wales who was taking the salute from the dais, before returning to Horse Guards.

The most significant memories of the day were the overwhelming sense of pride I experienced, not only for myself but also for those I marched alongside. From the lady behind me, who had participated in approximately 20 parades to the ladies who had marched for the first time, we all shared a similar feeling of accomplishment. For those of us who were on our first parade, the experience was truly unforgettable.

After the parade concluded, I reunited with my husband who had also participated, as we gathered to celebrate the occasion with my husband's comrades of the RAF Regiment. I proudly flew the flag for the WRAC wearing my WRAC scarf and brooch. It was a great end to a truly wonderful day.









Babs Burnett recalls her experience of joining our contingent

My first time on parade since 1973 and I was feeling really nervous. I joined the WRAC when I was just 17 and two days old and after training was posted to COD

Donnington where I shared a room with 4 other girls with whom I'm still in contact and we still have yearly get togethers. I went on to marry a soldier who was posted to Northern Ireland and that's where I joined the Ulster Defence Regiment and became a Greenfinch.

As I approached Horse Guards all I could see was hundreds of different uniforms so I headed over to where I could see the girls in green. The first ladies I recognised were Sandy Warne and Alison Cairns so I headed in their direction. I knew them from the monthly breakfast meetings at Meadowhall that Sandy runs, so actually having them there eased my nerves. I also saw a couple of faces that I'd seen on official WRAC Association pages so said hello to Wendy Hooton and Babs Anderson.

I must say there's a lot of waiting around, but everyone was chatty and it didn't bother anyone. There was tea and coffee if anyone wanted but I refrained from having a drink as I wasn't sure my bladder would appreciate it.

We were then called to form up in rows of 6 and we began the march through the archway. This is where the excitement grew. I felt as though I'd never left the army, I could feel the pride inside my very being welling up and I felt 10 feet tall.

As we marched we were met with applause from everyone we passed (and we applauded the other contingents that we passed in return), it was a lovely feeling to say the least. It was also very emotional passing the Cenotaph and knowing that all eyes were on you as you paid your respects to those who had paid the ultimate price.

The march past seemed to pass very quickly and before I knew it we were heading back towards Horse Guards where William, Prince of Wales took the salute. He was sporting his new facial hair which I must say suited him.

We entered Horse Guards and waited for the National Anthem and it was only after this I dared to have a coffee. This is one event I'll never forget and will certainly be applying for again. The camaraderie was second to none and brought back loads of lovely memories.







Around the UK

General Dame Sharon Nesmith, DCB, ADC Gen
with Salisbury Branch



Gloucester Branch



Gloucester Branch with The Worshipful Mayor of Gloucester and The Sherriff of Gloucester

Salisbury Branch



Edinburgh Branch



Wirral and Chester Branch



Wirral and Chester Branch pay their respects
Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast Branch

Tamworth Branch
laying a wreath at
the WRAC garden in
the NMA





Manchester Branch



Wendy Summerell-Wheeldon and Heather Bradbury in Manchester



Jules Anderson and Caroline Addison in Cardiff



Yvonne Allen in Perth representing Fife and Tayside Branch



Ju and Ruth attending the Festival of Remembrance Cymru in Newport



Ulster Branch

Torbay Branch



Jo Foster in Hereford



Preparations at Hereford Cathedral



Hereford Cathedral Memorial Garden

Around The World

Not all of our members find themselves in the UK for Remembrance, nonetheless Remembrance is observed wherever ATS and WRAC veterans are, and last year Deserie Mansfield made the journey to Jersey.

As veterans, we honour our fallen comrades, friends, and Brothers and Sisters in Arms in diverse ways and places. For me, Remembrance Sunday is particularly challenging so I chose to leave the homeland and travel to Jersey. There with Julie Cook (Ex-WRAC – R SIGS) we visited another friend, Angie Maughan (WRAC), who lives on the island. (Certo Cito, ladies, if you're reading this).

Angie is a dedicated volunteer for the RBL Poppy Appeal. Barely had Julie and I stepped off the plane before we were "volunteered" to assist with collecting, packing, and boxing poppies and other fundraising items until next year. It was a privilege to meet the Jersey veterans and volunteers, and to listen to how the funding has helped Veterans in need.

Meanwhile, back in Wales, the ladies of the South Wales Branch commemorated the fallen across their hometowns: from Carmarthen, Pembrokeshire, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Bridgend, Neath/Port Talbot, Torfaen, Newport, and Blaenau Gwent. Each paid tribute in their own meaningful way.



Jules Anderson (South Wales Branch) participated in the Cardiff Parade. She shared: "as we did the march past everyone clapped and I felt so humbled and proud"

That sentiment captures it perfectly: however and wherever we choose to remember those who have gone before, we are humbled by the sacrifices made and proud of those who came before us—and of the part we have played remembering the fallen.

Thank you to everyone who represented the ATS and WRAC across the country, especially those who sent in photos and allowed us to share these in the Lioness.

If you would like to join the Association at a local service, please get in touch with your local branch organiser or area coordinator - details can be found on pages 88 to 91.

If you would like to register to be considered for a 2025 place in Guildford, or in London at the Field of Remembrance or Cenotaph parade, please email info@wraca.org.uk or call 0300 400 1992.

The best things in life are free!

Like the first signs of spring

Or the smell of freshly mown grass

Or membership of the WRAC Association!

Yes, the Association has reduced subscriptions to **zero, so if you know any female who served or is currently serving in any branch of HM Forces (yes, that includes the blues) tell them to register today **FOR FREE** wraca.org.uk/join**



Ride to the Wall, Pose with the Statue

Whilst so many of our members, trustees and staff were in Guildford, Saturday 5th October saw our Grants Officer Julie Winks travel to the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire for the 17th year of the annual Ride to the Wall (RTTW). Having got over her saddle sores, she sat down to write about her day.



We set off from home at 0630, cold and dark. Five minutes in I wondered, as I always do, why I was doing this, but of course I know why, and the reason I will continue to return year after year. The Ride brings together motorcyclists, families and friends from the UK, as well as a number of European countries, for a Service of Remembrance, and this year was just as special as always.

There were live performances by Gari Glaysher - 'All Gave Some, Some Gave All' and 'Bring Him Home' and Cadet Sgt White (RMC) - 'The Kohima Epitaph'. Large screens fed stories of families and their losses, before addresses from Air Commodore Simon Richardson - RTTW Patron, and Philippa Rawlinson - NMA Managing Director. The day wouldn't have been complete without the buglers, and the British Army Band Catterick, and culminated with a service led by the Padre, Reverend Huw Evans, which ended with a wreath-laying ceremony and a minute's silence. Of course the ascent and descent of the families of the fallen to the wall always brings a tear to the eye, even the most hardened of bikers can be seen reaching for a hankie.

With over 5,600 bikers registered for the event, not including those that registered on the day, it was a very busy day, however, some of the WRAC bikers managed to meet me at the WRAC statue for a photo and a quick chat before undertaking their journeys home.



O.A.T.S From Biggleswade to Barbados

Ena Collymore Woodstock held the title of oldest ATS until the beginning of this year and has been featured in several issues of the Lioness magazine. Ena was one of the first women to leave the West Indies to serve in WWII and went on to become a judge.



Whilst on a visit to Barbados, Christine Hayman and her husband Peter were invited to visit Ena and her family, and Christine told us about her visit:

"We presented Ena with a photographic collage of the female statue that will form part of our Caribbean Monument, it seemed very appropriate as the statue is dressed in the uniform that Ena would have worn during her service in the British Army.

Ena is very frail, but she was smiling as I thanked her for her service and for being one of the many ladies who paved the way for people like me to be able to join the WRAC.

Originally from Jamaica, Ena now lives in Barbados with one of her daughters and it was a very great honour and privilege to be given the opportunity to meet this inspirational lady. I will never forget that day for the rest of my time on this planet.

Photos show me talking to Ena and her youngest daughter."



Read our latest OATS news on page 102.

Merry 'cross the Mersey

The 2024 WRAC Dinner Club took itself back to the city of Strawberry Fields, Yellow Submarines and Octopus's Gardens for a Banquet fit for a Beatle. Attended by 221 of our own Long-haired Lovers (or some would say Grey-haired Groovers) we received this report not from Sergeant Pepper, but from Sergeant Belinda Matthewman.



I met a small contingent of Lionesses in Wetherspoons at Liverpool Lime Street Station on Friday and walked to the venue after a bevy or three. When I rocked up at the hotel, I saw people that I hadn't seen in some years. It was a little overwhelming at first, but I soon felt welcomed. I met so many people and heard that even more would arrive on Saturday.

I had made the journey on my own from Worcester and with the help and advice of the

ladies at both Worcester and Hereford Branches, I felt I was equipped with the information that I needed. I arrived at the venue on Friday afternoon when 'Alternative' Bingo was about to commence. As a 'newbie' I thought it was a good distraction to ease us into the spirit of things.

After Bingo there was a wonderful performance by The Not Forgotten Association entertainers, Annie and Lloyd. They entertained us for free, but a whip round raised over £800 for the NFA, which was amazing.



When I registered with our reception on Saturday, the room was set up to give everyone as much information as possible, with all the Committee members welcoming us. The main raffle prizes were displayed, there were items to buy and DC Teddy's to win in the tombola. Top Tip: Bring plenty of cash!



The Call to Dinner was 1815 hrs. Our food choices were on a card in the middle of the table, so you didn't need to remember what you ordered 6 months prior. The Raffle Prize Draw followed dinner then dancing and entertainment commenced and went on into the wee early hours of the morning.

Sunday at 1030 hrs was the Farewell Gathering, where all the 'Thank You's' were said and the Committee entertained us with some comical thoughts.



This only leaves me to say a huge THANK YOU to the Committee and volunteers for making me, and the other newbies, feel welcome and other Dinner Clubbers for showing us how to have a good time.

Karen Radford - Chair

The Liner Hotel, Liverpool has been our DC venue for two years and there is no doubt that it has been one of the best venues we have ever had. The staff at the Liner Hotel have bent over backwards to help the Committee provide the best for our wonderful ladies and it will be a tough one to beat, that's for sure.

As usual, the Committee were in fine fettle, as they greeted the would-be partygoers in our reception room. Of course, cash passed hands from the ladies who were desperate to win the current year's teddy and also to buy raffle tickets. This was the last opportunity to win the handmade poppy throw and cushions made by Jane Baldwin, my sister-in-law, so there was a mad dash by many to buy a lottery number. The lucky winner was Jan Foster, one of our very own QARANC members.

Friday night saw some of the Committee dressing up to provide a fun Alternative Bingo session, to raise funds for the Not Forgotten Association, whose performance was to come. The lovely Annie Riley and Lloyd Ellery performed for us again. To say that the evening was full of fun, singing and laughter is an understatement. Lloyd stayed overnight and was able to share the evening with us. I'm not sure he will ever be the same again after that! We raised a staggering £830 for the NFA! So, a huge thank you to all who donated. The NFA were very grateful indeed.

Our Gala Dinner took place on Saturday night and as we all marched in, to the sound of the traditional tune 'The Lass of Richmond Hill', the room started to come alive. Once the formalities and raffle were over, the dancing commenced. As usual the dance floor was full and our 6-piece band, including a wonderful saxophonist, kept everyone up and strutting their stuff until the early hours.

The weekend, which used to consist of two or three days, appears to have stretched to four or five now, so Sunday was yet another day of sightseeing, lunches out, pubs visited and local live bands providing entertainment for those who wanted to dance even more!

Yet another successful weekend was had by everyone, so if you'd like to find out more about membership, contact heather.bradbury@icloud.com. Now it's 'Guess the next venue for 2025 time!'



And if that's not enough food for one helping, turn over for seconds



Not to be outdone, and barely a month later, the Officers' Dining Club sent us the photos of their 2024 gathering along with this report from Col Ali Brown OBE.

This year we were at full capacity with 117 officers, serving and retired, and their guests returning to the Union Jack Club for a wonderful evening. If you can judge an event by the level of noise, then this was a fabulous dinner with old friends meeting up through course reunions and new friendships being made. Those present had been commissioned in the 1950's all the way through to the current day and many stories were swapped and re-told. After an excellent dinner, we listened to Lucy Lewis explaining how she wrote and published *Lighting the Fuse*, detailing her Army Service. Lucy commissioned from Sandhurst in 1988 and was the first female bomb disposal officer in the Army with service in Germany, Northern Ireland, Jordan and the MOD. Lucy's talk was very entertaining and gave a brief insight into the world of publishing; not for the faint hearted.





Huge thanks to Frances West and Anna Green for all their hard work in getting the dinner organised. Why don't you come and join us in 2025 for a wonderful evening.

Sue's School Report



Following on from Lyn Hatch's school project featured in the last edition, we sent Sue Westlake back to school to brush up on the three R's: Recruiting, Rheindahlen and Russians!

When I was asked to visit Wildern School in Hampshire I was delighted – how hard could it be for an ex WRAC Women's Schools Liaison Officer (WSLO) to talk to a classroom of teenagers? Well, as it turned out, they really put me through my paces – but I loved it! Facilitated

and supported by Legasee Educational Trust and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, my visit was part of the wider project to capture the stories of WRAC veterans. By sharing veterans' stories and guiding schools in oral history projects, Legasee aims to inspire students across the country to engage with history in a hands-on, personal way, and my visit to the school was designed to bring history to life, allowing students to interview me as part of their own oral history project.



The students were well prepared for the interview having read The Women's Royal Army Corps 1949-1992 booklet which is available to buy in the Association shop. They had also had some training from Bianca Taubert, the curator at the AGC Museum in Winchester, so the students approached the interview with thoughtful questions aimed at uncovering the real stories behind military service. "What memories do you have of your training, and how did this compare to when you were training others?" one student asked, leading to a discussion about how the WRAC had evolved over the 21 years that I served in it and how service continued to change after the Corps disbanded (I went on to serve for a further 17 years in the AG Corps).



The pupils were genuinely interested in everything I had to say as I recalled the IRA bomb blast in Rheindahlen that destroyed my accommodation and left my car up a tree. My experiences in Germany also offered the young students a unique, personal glimpse into the Cold War era, and they were especially interested when I recounted my time as one of the first female officers in charge of the British Military Train which travelled daily through East Germany connecting West Berlin with West Germany. I described the tense meeting with a Soviet officer on the platform at Marienborn before being ushered into a dingy, smoky station waiting room whilst all the train passengers' documents were checked, a process that the students had only read about or seen in films!

I told them of my experience of 'guarding' Rudolf Hess on one occasion whilst he was a patient in the British Military Hospital in Berlin, and I felt that my personal anecdotes gave students an unforgettable, first-hand insight into a turbulent period of history, allowing them to really understand some of the extraordinary roles undertaken by the WRAC.

The students were also keen to talk about the diversity of the WRAC units. They asked questions like, "We've seen photos of units of the WRAC such as the Jamaican Caribbean Company, in what ways has your career brought you into contact with women from diverse backgrounds?" I was proud to tell them about the diverse groups of women I had trained at the WRAC College and later worked alongside, recalling the camaraderie and resilience that united women in the Army from all over the world.

The disbandment of the WRAC was also interesting to them, with students eager to know how that transition was managed, especially for those serving abroad. "How smoothly were girls in Germany integrated into their different Corps after the WRAC disbanded?" they asked, revealing their curiosity about how significant institutional changes affected individuals on the ground. As the SO1 Female Focus in BAOR and Berlin between 1992- 1994 I was able to share my first hand experience about this transition period for Army women, touching on the adjustments, challenges, and resilience shown by servicewomen as they navigated new Corps identities.

Then the students asked the toughest question of the day: "What do you see as your greatest achievement over your years of service?" I was (almost!) stumped for words, but after reflection I told them that maybe my greatest achievement was the impact I had made on the lives of the servicewomen and officers that I had recruited, selected and trained in the WRAC, and hoped that my mentorship and guidance had helped them thrive in their own careers.





The pupils I met that day were absolutely brilliant, and their questions really got me thinking – they had clearly put so much thought into them. They were so knowledgeable and personable – it was a real pleasure to meet and chat with them all.

Thanks Sue – you're such an inspiration to this new generation of young people, and who knows how many of them will have been inspired by your words to consider a military career? Wildern School's history teacher Mike Morrison was delighted by your visit and said: "I was really excited to be part of the filming with Colonel Sue. That session was fantastic – everything I would have wanted it to be and more. I haven't stopped smiling since we did it and I'm so proud of the work the pupils put in; their feedback on the session was awesome. They're going to remember this opportunity for a long, long time and it's going to inspire many of them for potential future careers. What an amazing experience for them to hang on to, build on and take forward."

If you would like to volunteer to talk to local schools, or if you have already done a talk that you would like to tell us about, please email the editor.

Our Guildford Rose

For years Mrs Joyce Russell tended to the rose garden at the WRAC Centre in Guildford, and after she died in March of this year her son Paul Russell kindly brought us a box of wonderful photographs and memories from her time looking after the famed blooms. How we wish we had seen these before we went to the Worthy Down Rose Garden for our summer event in 2023! Here we share some photos which we are sure will bring smiles and memories to many, as Paul shares the pride his mother had in her work.

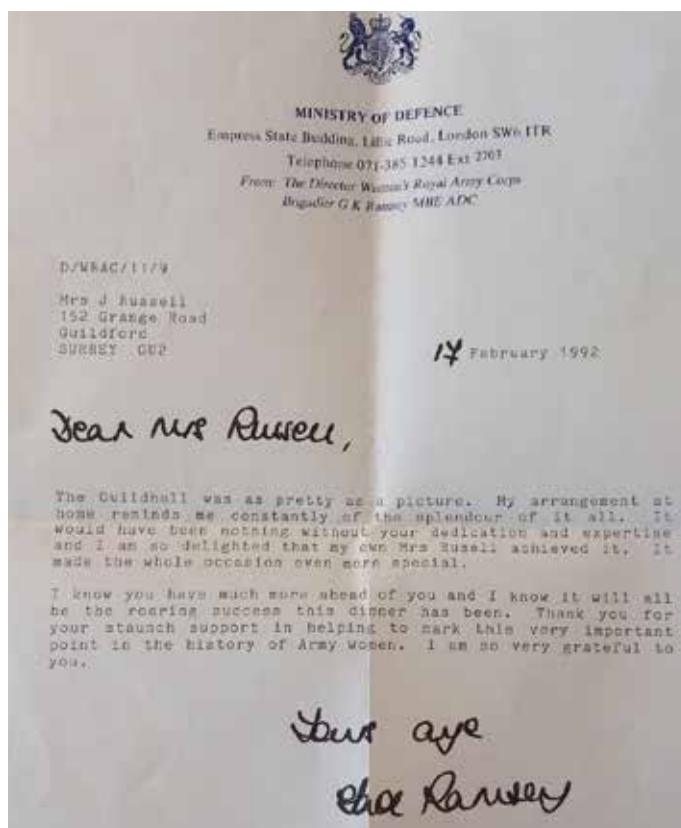
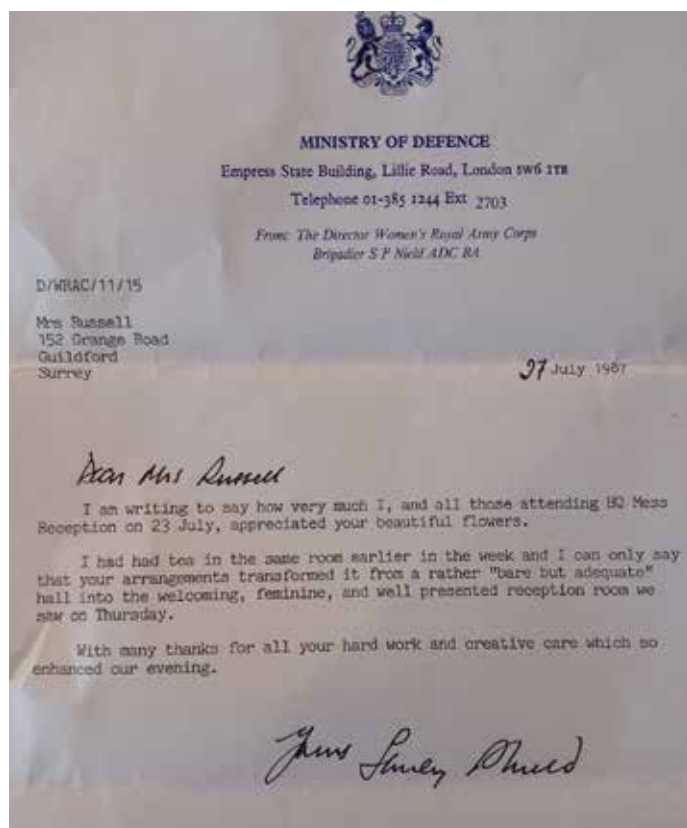
My late mother was always a very passionate horticulturist, gardener and florist. She joined the WRAC Centre Guildford on the 18th May 1981 as a part time gardener. The position was ideal for her as she lived opposite on Grange Road. She loved working in the gardens and I would often see her in her greenhouse as I walked home from school.

Unfortunately my mother was made redundant from her job as gardener in 1986 but she continued to maintain the Princess Royal's Memorial Rose Garden until 1989, where her roses from the rose garden won numerous accolades and prizes from the Royal Horticultural Society.

Joyce also produced many floral decorations for the WRAC until 1992, including the WRAC Guildhall dinner, HQ mess receptions, Harvest Festivals, church decorations. She was also very proud to create displays for the visits from Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother and HRH The Duchess of Kent where she was proud to be presented.



I know my mother was extremely proud of all the floral arrangement she produced for the WRAC and she kept all the letters of appreciation from the WRAC for her wonderful arrangements as well as many souvenirs of her time working there.



My mother adored working for the WRAC at Guildford and made many lifelong friends over her time working there. She created some wonderful floral arrangements as well as some amazing gardens during her time there.

Throughout her retirement Mrs. Russell corresponded with Col Nan Robertson MBE who shares her memories.



Although I had known that Mrs Russell had been employed as Gardener at The WRAC Centre for some years, it was not until I became Commandant that I became aware of just how much work she did to ensure that our gardens were always well cared for and full of flowers for every season. Her particular favourites were roses, and as they are mine, we often discussed the various varieties and colours. She looked after my courtyard garden at The Centre, and introduced many different blooms for my enjoyment. She researched various garden centres, and found many charming garden sculptures, that she knew I would appreciate.

At the Grand Reunion, held at Birmingham, in 2003, I met her on the coach and she told me, with pride, that she had been made an honorary member of the WRAC Association. I was delighted to hear it, and could not think of a better way of rewarding her, not only for all her hard work, but for her constant devotion to the WRAC.

She lived in Grange Road, Guildford, and after the disbandment of the Corps, she was aware of the development of the housing estate, which she witnessed from her windows over a very long period. She was very distressed, but very happy that a Princess Royal's Rose Garden would be established at Worthy Down.

After her retirement, and mine, we continued to keep in touch, usually by correspondence, and many a beautiful card, featuring roses, came my way. She became a very good friend, who loved the gardens at the Centre, and the Corps. We had much in common and Joyce is sorely missed.



In their own words

Beret and Cap Badge Recipients

After the events of our Guildford Remembered weekend had passed, those who received their berets had a chance to reflect on the occasion and the impact of their experience. Each of them expressed their hope that more former WRAC will come forward to receive their presentation and apology, and shared their thoughts for the Lioness.



Victoria Tate

At first I had reservations about attending the presentation ceremony at Guildford as it would mean visiting painful memories. Having spoken to some of the Guildford Gang (as we now call ourselves), some of whom I served with, I put my fears aside. The whole weekend was a thoroughly enjoyable experience from start to finish. The WRAC Association put a humongous effort into making it a fine success. Brigadier Mel Emmett's speech was heartfelt and warming. We were welcomed back to the pride where we always belonged. I feel that I can begin to live my life again. No longer an outcast. Life was on hold. Once again I can wear my beret and medal with pride.



Allison Smitham

Receiving my beret back was such an important part of repatriation to me personally. When I lost my beret, I lost so much. My job, home, income, friends and so much more. I had no plan B. I felt like a nobody. My trust in the Army was destroyed. Putting my beret back on gave me a sense of belonging again. Meeting new friends, the camaraderie was instant. The chance to pay my respects to our fallen sisters, wearing my beret, was an honour and privilege. I never thought I'd ever get the chance to do that. It was truly amazing. The whole weekend is something I will never forget.

Pamela Chapman-Pollard

I left home at 17 to join the WRAC. I would have stayed to do the full 22 years - to me it was the best part of my life until I was dishonorably discharged, services no longer required. Civi Street was hard because I only knew military life. I couldn't go back home, so if it hadn't been for my friend's mum offering me a home I would have been homeless. I met my lovely wife on Civi Street and have been happily married for 11 years. Now I feel part of the military again and am proud to be a Lioness again. After 30+ years of being not wanted, I can finally say I am a veteran.





Jean MacDonald

Coming from a military family I always aspired to join the WRAC. I was proud to serve and planned a 22-year career, firstly as a PTI and then to apply for a commission to the Intelligence Corps. However, after 3yrs 240 days I was thrown out for being gay. The trauma caused not only mental scars but also physical ones due to the shame and self-hatred I felt. I could not accept myself for being 'me' for many years. Today with the help and support of Fighting With Pride and the WRAC Association I am no longer shameful. Thank you so much for welcoming us back, it feels very special. I have hope for the future.

Jo MacDonald

I was filled with pride to receive my beret at such an amazing and emotional presentation. Thank you to the WRAC Association for making the occasion so very special, a day firmly etched in my memory. To be welcomed back as a Lioness means more than words can say. I'm reconnecting with long lost friends, and making new ones along the way. If I was young enough, I would jump at the chance of re-enlisting with the ban lifted (maybe in another lifetime!). I'm looking forward to reunions and events feeling truly accepted and belonging.



Thelma Lewis

Power Cut

At a flick of a switch a career is over. Where do I go? What do I say? Anguish, Hurt, Pride in distort, bullying and low esteem, your name's on the list - you must be gay. What job could I do? How do I know? Where will I live and what do I know? Loneliness, still to this day, is with me every single day. Pride, hang your head up high, be proud, I served my country and I am proud. Beret and cap badge now in hand, it's taken 49 years to smile again, now flick up that switch and smile with me. Power's back on.

Caroline McEwan-Smith

The beret and cap badge presentation were really special to me. I enjoyed my times at Guildford immensely, basic training, Corporals Course etc. The presentation was special as I really felt welcomed back into the Corps with heartfelt apologies by Brigadier Gardner (Retd) who read out the State apology and Brigadier Emmett for the Army for treatment my fellow recipients and I received due to the LGBT ban in H.M. Forces pre year 2000. A truly memorable day, finished off with a lovely meal and great company.



Lesley Davison

When I served in the WRAC, it was illegal to be gay. I didn't know I was gay when I joined. Like so very many of us, our lives were impacted immensely by this illegal ban. I am grateful that PM Rishi Sunak gave a full apology but it was too little too late for many. Our lives were changed forever. My biggest regret was the cutting short of my sporting career; it was what I lived for. I chose to leave before I was 'pushed' by SIB. I was one of the lucky ones but still, to this day, have survivor's guilt. Thank you for the presentation and all that it represents. I feel proud again.

Carol Morgan

It was a fantastic weekend for all of us. I was overwhelmed by the reception we received from all in the WRAC, having lost my career so long ago due to my sexuality which was heartbreaking for myself and my late partner. I never thought in a million years I'd be welcomed back. It has given me my self-respect back and the feeling I'm worth something. So thank you from the bottom of my heart it will remain with me for the rest of my life. Once a lioness, always a lioness.



Julia Currey

My first view of QE Park was a bittersweet moment thinking that when I was last standing in this spot it was 1987 - I was a young woman, so happy on the parade ground thinking "I have done it, I am in the Army" but unfortunately for just falling in love with another human being my career was cut very very short. I salute all my WRAC sisters over the years who fought for Queen and Country. No one can ever take that away from us now. I want to say from my heart and soul thank you.



Ruth Birch

To share this special day with everyone has been a massive part of my personal journey home to the Army. I am very proud not only to have served as WRAC but also in the Intelligence Corps. Having my WRAC beret presented by Brigadier Mel Emmett from Intelligence was just so special to me on so many levels. Although I can never forget I have now, with the support of all my WRAC sisters, been able to move forward. Diolch yn fawr.



Karen Davies

The events of the 'Restoration' weekend will stay strong in my memory forever. It was everything I'd hoped for and more. It was filled with mixed emotions, but most of all I felt such an immense feeling of pride and 'coming home' and finally being back where I always belonged. Proud now to be a true British Army Veteran. The weekend brought together a group of very special veterans with shared experiences who have developed a great bond never to be broken (I hope!). We can move forward now, together, stronger.



Emma Fry

I realised my dream of serving in the WRAC at 17, but when I was dishonourably discharged because of my sexuality, my world crumbled around me and the shame was unbearable. This feeling has never gone away, but I eventually forgave myself and felt happy with who I am. When I first heard about the reparation scheme I wasn't sure I wanted to go back to a time that caused me so much pain. I have never thought of myself as an Army veteran and had never been treated as such, so to be re-presented with my WRAC beret and cap badge was an honour and privilege. The ceremony and the whole weekend at Guildford was amazing, I and my partner Deb felt so welcome and it was an honour to march to the church on the Sunday. Thanks to all those present for making it an occasion that will remain in our memories for a lifetime.



One month before Guildford we were privileged to begin our journey of restoration at the WRAC Association Scotland and Northern Ireland AGM. Luise Tait and her partner Jacqui joined us in Perth for a warm welcome from our branch members and Area Coordinator Janette Deans. The apology on behalf of the State and the WRAC was given by trustee Dawn Menday, and representing the Army we were joined by Brig Clare Phillips CBE. Brig Clare spoke of being unable to serve as her authentic self for the first five years of her career until the lifting of the ban as part of a very personal speech, after which Lu explained to those present just how much the day meant to her.



Luise Tait

In 1972, after meeting my father who was REME, my mother fell pregnant with me and was promptly kicked out of the Army so I have effectively been kicked out of the Army twice. In the Army I did my job and I loved my job, but my life ended that day, or so I thought. I'm still here and people can now see me for who I am, but that day is always with me. What happened to me was an abomination, but something inside me makes me strong. Thank you for inviting me back 34 years after I left the Army.

Dr. Joan Heggie served in both the WRAC (Provost) and RMP, and chose to have her ceremony at Worthy Down Barracks in November, overseen by the Adjutant General's Corps. The WRAC Association was represented by Rowena Naile with the presentation given by Col Stuart Allen MBE who had joined us in Guildford the previous month. The presentation in the Prestige Room of the AGC HQ was followed by lunch in the Officers' Mess.

Dr. Joan Heggie

Being presented with my beret and cap badge was a very emotional experience. Like many others it was something that I never dreamed would happen, but it is so important that it has, even forty years later! Such reparations might seem trivial to some, but for me the apology is an acknowledgement that the policy itself was fundamentally unjust and that being thrown out of the Army had a very real and negative impact on my life. The beret and cap badge restores my rightful place within the WRAC/ RMP family, and I was delighted that my partner, Jan, and dear friend Andie Ford were there to celebrate with me.



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.

Crumbs! That's quite a journey!



One of the smaller but no less enjoyable highlights of our Guildford weekend was the rather grand three tiered cake we designed and ordered for the occasion. Made and decorated by a small bakery outside Guildford, we were delighted by the look and even more so by the taste!

We were honoured when WRAC veteran and Association member The Worshipful, The Mayor of Guildford, Councillor Major Sallie Barker MBE cut the cake on the day.



Of course there was plenty to go around and plenty left over, so we left a tier with the cadets in Guildford to show our appreciation - apparently it went down a treat. The rest we brought back to Winchester HQ with a grand plan. Firstly, we shared some of the leftovers with our new WRVS colleagues at Sir John Moore Barracks, including WRAC veteran and Association member Debs Wilde. We had just missed their monthly coffee morning, but they still came over to pose with the top tier and eat some of the other leftovers.

Then the real mission began. Having contacted Karen Radford, we set about getting the cake up to Liverpool for the Dinner Club! We contacted everyone we knew who lived down south and was planning to head north, but frustratingly most were travelling by train. Then we had a breakthrough! Gina Spacey, fresh off an international flight, offered to collect the cake if it could come part way north. So off set Paula, precious cake in the passenger footwell, to meet Gina in a pub car park to make one of the strangest exchanges either of them has ever experienced. When the cake arrived at its

final destination, Gina was able to hand it over to Radders, Babs Anderson, and Sandy Cawley who did the cutting as the attendees of this year's WRAC Dinner Club (page 38) tucked in and finished off the final mouthfuls of a great bake.



We're very grateful we could sponge a lift from Gina.

We doughnut know what we would have done without you - a genoan thanks from us all!

A Posting from Cyprus

On a recent trip to the Island of Aphrodite, Wendy Hooton made a visit to some very special graves in Dhekelia Military Cemetery which she shares with us now.

I had read about the Dhekelia Cemetery Bear Lady on Facebook. Annie Macmillan-Davies has made it her mission to place a soft toy on each of the 521 children's graves there. Most of the children died in the late 50's and early 60's, amounting to 40% of the graves at Dhekelia. There was an investigation in 2010 but the full report was never released to the public. I took over 20 teddies with me and left them at the Dhekelia Thrift Shop for Annie.



There are also 3 ex WRAC women buried there:

W401485 SGT J M HARRY 2nd July 1961 Age 31

W429050 PTE S R PILLING 29th July 1967 Age 18

W429287 SGT M J MARSHALL 1st January 1972 Age 23

LEST WE FORGET



After I was back in the UK a Bear Memorial was unveiled at the cemetery. Meet "Winston".



I also had the chance to go to the East Cyprus Veterans Breakfast Club with Catherine Prewer. We met up with 2 ex WRAC ladies who live there, Joy Ozanne and Gail Pollitt. We were made very welcome by the founder member Bob Beer and Jim West. We look forward to visiting again!



Goodbye Maidstone, Hello Mallorca



As the WRAC cyclists took to the Kent Countryside for one last time, Jules Portlock shares her first CycleFest experience - 150 miles of lunch, lycra and laughter

As a first-timer at CycleFest24, I wasn't quite sure what to expect as I didn't know anyone before arriving. But from the moment I arrived, I was embraced with open arms and felt an instant sense of warmth and belonging.

The setting was magical, with everyone all buzzing with energy and excitement. The stunning views added to the enchantment, while laughter and jokes filled the air from the very start. Straight away I was made to feel at home and loved the camaraderie.

Liz's focus, skill, and tips throughout the week were so inspiring. I loved the sprint session and learned so much from her expertise and from the other more experienced riders. One particular gem - "heels down, toes up" - made all the difference when I was struggling up a hill. I might even owe my time trial success to that advice!

CycleFest wasn't just about the rides, the time trials, or the paddleboarding. It was about the friendships formed, the encouragement shared, and the memories made. For me, as a first-timer, it was more than a cycling event—it was a celebration of friendship, fun, and fierce determination and an experience I'll never forget.





Moving to Mallorca! Liz King says...

Liz & Ali are extremely proud of the success CycleFest has had over the past five years - coming out of the Covid lockdown and, over the years, building it from a weekend of cycling to now a week of events.

Thank you everyone who has attended and made Cyclefest such a memorable experience. CycleFest25 will be a week of cycling Mallorca! Details available very soon - watch this space!

Anyone who is interested in finding out more can contact liz@trispiritevents.com.



A big “thank you” to HQ



Karen (Radders) Radford tells us why she has nothing but praise for our dedicated head office team.

They are unsung heroes working tirelessly in the background for us WRAC Veterans and I feel it is about time we acknowledge them. I am of course talking about Paula Rogers - our Association CEO and her team based in Winchester.

For those who are totally unaware, Paula works three days a week, yes three (officially!), yet she manages to support our branches, individuals, the trustees and her team, plus organises large events for us all to enjoy. You may ask why, (and how!) so I will tell you; it is because she is passionate about our association, and in particular, us WRAC veterans.

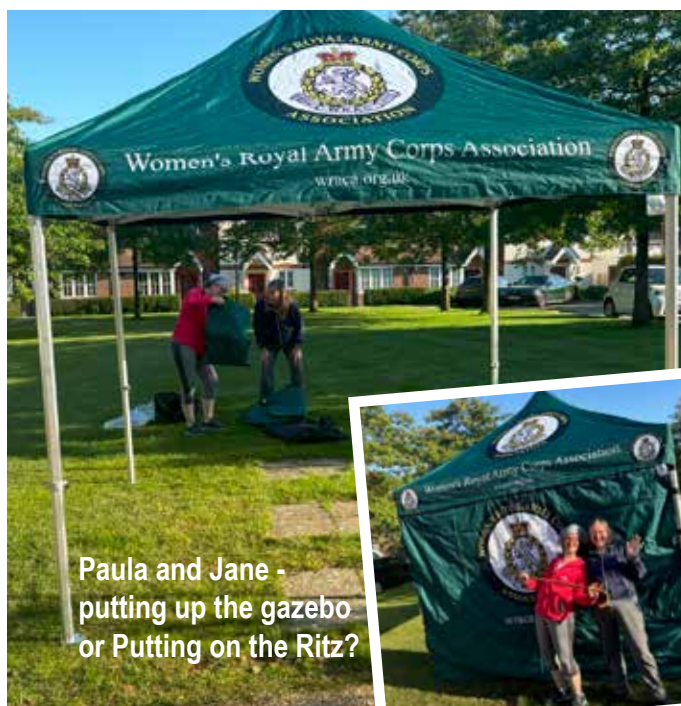
Although Paula is from a military family she has never served, yet she feels so strongly about making sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible, she works outside of her paid hours to support us and that means all of us. Through overseeing the planning and preparation of our yearly WRAC Dinner Club event, I know from personal experience how tough the job can be, but Paula and the rest of the team, Claire, Jane and Julie, continue to do this throughout the year with humour, understanding and a huge smile.

Claire and Paula marshalling the summer event



We are a tough crowd at times and relentless in wanting perfection. For those who organise branch events, fundraising ventures and other WRACA frivolities, can you remember the frustrating times when a last-minute spanner is thrown into the mix and how difficult it can be to right? When you read this, please take a moment to reflect on the scale of our events and the preparation and planning that goes into it. Sometimes perfection is out of our control, but we can only do the best that we can. Have a thought for Paula and the rest of our association team and let's appreciate all they do.

I officially record my sincere thanks to Claire, Jane, Julie and Paula. Thank you for everything you do, you are wonderful.



Paula and Jane - putting up the gazebo or Putting on the Ritz?

Paula says “Wow, thank you Radders, your kind words are very much appreciated (and the cheque is in the post!). We really do have a great team at your HQ, with everyone putting in the extra hours to make sure your service is rewarded with ours. We work hard to get things right with so many veterans to look after and such a variety of needs and requests, and, as you can see from the photos, rolling up our sleeves whenever there are gazebos to be pitched and memories to be made! Even though we are all part-time, we work hard every day for every one of our fabulous veterans, and we sincerely hope that we are bringing you an association which continues the ethos of camaraderie. There is always a friendly voice at the end of the phone and a can-do attitude to requests from our members. By the time you read this article, we will have another pair of hands to the pump as we welcome our new permanent Head of Operations and Engagement into the fold, bringing the team back to full strength. We are all proud to serve you all, and blushing at the compliments, Thanks again Radders, and thank you to every single member who has adopted us into the Association.”



Julie (bottom right) attending the Major Grants Committee Meeting

Model Behaviour

With the WRAC Association shop reopening and new stock available, we wanted top models to really show off the goods. Having considered Moss and Brinkley, Klum, Campbell and Crawford, we realised that no supermodels would ever hold a candle to our members - it's the pride of being a Lioness that shines through when our veterans are wearing their cap badge making these pictures so special.



Military, She Wrote

Author Jane Ripley's career as an Army Officer began in 1980 when she joined the WRAC, but her literary career started decades later when she had moved to another continent. Nonetheless, searching for inspiration for her newly released novel, she returned to her military roots. Now Jane has taken on another writing task: telling the Lioness about her career and what led to her exciting new novel inspired by the Etherton report.



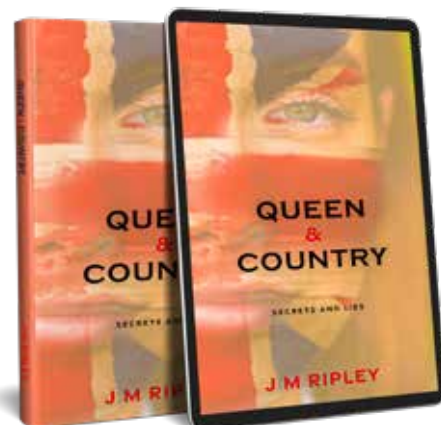
I enjoyed a six-year career, including postings to Cyprus with 1 Glosters and London with 12 Company WRAC. My last posting was probably my most enjoyable at the ASPTC. I served with some fabulously talented people, including the late Sue Taylor, Sue Westlake and Pat Swailes.

The Army taught me excellent problem-solving and people skills, especially for a 26-year-old. Over the next 27 years, mainly on Executive Boards, I worked with corporate leadership and training companies, managing acquisitions, start-ups, and turnarounds. That led to me co-writing a book titled 'Collaboration Begins with You'.

I joined a local writers' group when I moved to Bear Valley Springs, California and penned my first novel, which is not published—yet. I had the idea for 'Queen and Country, Secrets and Lies' from the LGBT veterans independent review. I felt I had something to say about that particular social injustice. I also read some research that showed LGBTQ+ youngsters who grow up in a supportive home environment are less likely to die by suicide so I wanted to include that too.

The novel tells the story of Jo Clark, a member of the Royal Military Police with The London Provost Company, who faces an assignment that tests her limits. Jo is tasked with investigating the death of a young female soldier who died by suicide. Her long-time forbidden lover, Terry White, serves in the same unit, which poses a significant risk to their secret relationship. Any inkling of a lesbian relationship could lead to a dishonourable discharge, and Jo would do anything to prevent this from happening. Jo's career and reputation hang in the balance as she juggles her duty to her Queen and Country, her sexuality, career, family and relationship while in fear of being discovered.

Queen and Country by J M Ripley is available in e-book and paperback.



Hold the Front Page

Twice a year the Lioness is sent out to our 4000+ members - most by post, some by email. Our journal is also shared with other regimental associations and interested parties. This means the people who already know about us get to hear more about what we've been up to, and find out what we have planned. But when it comes to reaching further afield, it is always great to make it into other publications. That way we hopefully reach female veterans who are no longer connected to their military family, but who might get in touch when they read about the great things the Association and our members are up to. Here are some of the publications we have appeared in recently, with huge thanks to those who got us into print, and took the time to let us know about it:

Sandra Davies secured this wonderful coverage in Shropshire Magazine



Sharon Baker-Joyce gave an interview to WI Life magazine



Ruth Birch in Coming Home

The Sunday Times Magazine focussed on one of our beret and cap badge recipients...



...whilst the December issue of Soldier magazine ran coverage of all the recipients who attended Guildford



Please be sure to let us know when our veterans are featured in other publications, and take some good photos so we can share them.

Caption competition

We love your photos, but we can never print them all, so we needed a good excuse to post another and remind ourselves what witty women you are. Here's Pauline Marr looking... fabulous?

But what would you write? What's the headline? What is Pauline thinking or saying? What has just been said to her? Let us know your silly suggestions so we can share the fun. Thanks to Pauline for being game for a laugh - we'll find something just as crazy for the next issue.

Email editor@wrca.org.uk and we will print the best suggestions in the next issue.



EVENTS

Grand Reunion 2025

Cardiff here we come!
Caerdydd, dyma ni'n dod!

It doesn't seem that long since we bid a fond farewell to Leeds as the host of the 2022 Grand Reunion, and here we are ready to head to Cardiff for this year's event.

The Grand Reunion was last held in the beautiful Welsh capital back in 2000 back when we all worried whether the dreaded (but ultimately fabled) 'millennium bug' threatened to derail all our plans. Would it have stopped us? Not a chance! What better way to celebrate the silver anniversary of this great event than to return in style.

How do you like our Grand Reunion Heraldic Shield? When we thought about the Welsh dragon, we immediately thought of heraldry, and how fine our lioness would look with the dragon in a shield formation. Astute readers will have noticed that the dragon is usually sinister - facing the west with its back to England - however this is also the attitude of our Lioness, and we wouldn't move her! So the dragon has switched sides and is welcoming from a dexter position. We think these two magnificent beasts look rather fine.



If you haven't got your ticket yet, there may still be time if you get your skates on. Please check the website or call the office.



FAQ's

Is there a seating plan for the Gala Dinner?

Yes, if you haven't already told us who you would like to sit with, please check your inbox as we will probably have emailed you. Please make sure you coordinate with the people you want to sit with so just one person submits the list for your group.



Beating Retreat at Alexandra Gardens is a bit of a walk from the hotel, can we get transport there?

It is a 10-15 minute walk, but it will be well worth it, and if you're already in the city centre seeing the sights then you'll already be close by. We won't be able to arrange transport but if you would like to book a taxi to take a group of you along then you can be dropped off at the park gates.

What is the dress code for dinner?

Be clothed and comfortable! As a general rule, we get dolled up for the Saturday night Gala Dinner, and as for the Friday night - well there will be some ready for a disco and quite a few heroes! Wear whatever you feel comfortable in.

What about dress for the parade?

Again, please be comfortable. Some people will want to wear their berets and some their fleeces, but many people will be wearing whatever they are heading home in, so please don't worry too much. You probably want to take the weather into account.



Can I bring a guest?

This is the Grand Reunion of the ATS and WRAC, therefore only those who served in these cap badges are eligible to attend this reunion.

Will there be a Grand Draw?

Yes, but this year we are selling the tickets at the venue instead of ahead of time. Wendy Hooton and her volunteers will be manning the ticket desk when you check in, and you can also enter the silent auction to win some amazing sets of WRAC memorabilia.



Holding out for a Hero... or 400 of them!



If you've been following us on social media you will know that we held a membership vote for this year's theme for Friday night and the clear winner was 'Superheroes'. You will have met our two 'superheroes' on the front cover of this edition of the Lioness - WO1derwoman and her batwoman... but who will you come as? Maybe one of the many fictional superheroes to have graced our screens or comic books down the years, or perhaps your superhero is someone from history, or someone you know. We hope you interpret this theme as widely as possible and have fun dressing up, and if fancy dress isn't your thing, don't worry - it certainly isn't mandatory and there will be plenty of folks in regular mufti.

Who's that behind the mask?



Of course there will be plenty of chances to sing 'Simply The Best' - but as we're in Wales get ready for that Welsh diva Bonnie Tyler - because we won't be able to resist a few choruses of 'Holding Out for a Hero'!



Timetable for the weekend

(timings subject to change, details confirmed on registration)

Friday 21 March

1000 WRAC registration desk opens. (please note this is to register for the event and not check-in to the hotel which is from 15.00)

1700 WRAC registration desk closes until Saturday am.

1930 Evening buffet dinner and disco. Optional 'superhero' fancy dress theme

Saturday 22 March

1000 WRAC registration desk opens. (please note this is to register for the event and not check-in to the hotel which is from 15.00)

1100 Branch Organisers meeting

1245 WRAC registration desk closes.

1300 AGM including beret and cap badge presentations

1700 Beating Retreat

1930 Gather for Gala Dinner

2000 Gala dinner and guest speaker Brig Clare Phillips CBE followed by dancing.

Sunday 23 March

1030 Drumhead Service followed by parade

1230 Departure

AGM AGENDA

1. Chairman's Opening Remarks
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Confirmation of 2024 Minutes
4. Business Arising
5. Governance Report
6. Membership Report
7. Benevolent Fund Report
8. Influence Report
9. Annual Report and Accounts
10. Resolutions
 - a. Trustee/Membership Council
 - b. Branch
11. Guest Speaker – Major General (Retd) Tim Hyams CB OBE
12. Any Other Business*



*Please note that items proposed for 'Any Other Business' must have been received by HQ by March 7th.



Photos

Were you one of the many people who had their formal photographs taken in Leeds and then forgot to order a copy? If so, we still have them here, but more importantly we will have a professional photographer once more on the Saturday evening. So grab your friends and pose in small groups or large. We will post the photos on the website after the event so make sure to visit wraca.org.uk a week or two after the event has finished.

Everyone say "W.R.A.Ceeeeeeeeee!"

Berets and cap badge presentations

We are delighted that, as a result of our successful Guildford weekend, more WRAC veterans who were affected by the pre-2000 'gay ban' have come forward to receive a formal apology and request the presentation of their beret and cap badge. With so many comrades gathering in Cardiff it is fitting that we carry out these presentations at the Grand Reunion and welcome these veterans back to the Corps surrounded by hundreds of their peers. This will take place immediately after the AGM and we hope as many people as possible will join us for this ceremony.



Announcing special guests Annie and Lloyd!

By popular demand the WRAC Dinner Club favourites will be performing after the Grand Reunion Gala Dinner on Saturday night. Get ready to sing along and enjoy the fabulous entertainment. Plus, as ever, the wonderful Yorkshire Military Band will be playing too.

Get your glad rags on - it's going to be a fabulous night of music and merriment!



Summer Event 2025

This summer we intend to organise a visit to Bletchley Park - home of the WWII decoders, including our own Betty Webb. Once a date has been confirmed we will send an email to all of our members and post on our Facebook page, with bookings on a first come first served basis. If you do not receive email or use social media, please write to us at the address on the back of the Lioness and we will post the details to you. We promise you won't need an enigma machine to decode the message!



Travel News

Travelling in London

Every year WRAC veterans travel to London. Some come for Remembrance Sunday, some for other events throughout the year, and some live in and around the capital.

Here's a handy guide to free or discounted travel

London Underground

If you already have a Veterans Railcard, you can get 1/3 off Anytime Day Travelcard when bought as part of your journey to London from outside London Zones 1-9.

If you have an Oyster card, you can get your Veterans Railcard discount loaded onto your Oyster card to save 1/3 on single off-peak pay-as-you-go fares on London Underground and Docklands Light Railway services. Take your Oyster card along with your Railcard to a tube station and ask a member of staff to permanently load the discount onto it.

Some veterans are entitled to free travel with a Veterans Oyster photocard.

If you receive ongoing payments under the War Pensions Scheme in your name, or Guaranteed Income Payment under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme you can apply by calling 0343 222 1234

Travelling to London

Travel for Remembrance Sunday is FREE

This applies to the National Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph (arriving on the Saturday or Sunday and leaving on the Sunday), and all other Services of Remembrance taking place nationwide (Remembrance Sunday travel only).

Veterans travelling on these dates will need to show a Veterans Railcard, Veterans Oyster card, MOD-issued Veterans ID or other appropriate proof of service. Serving military personnel should be in uniform or in possession of a current MOD90 Ministry of Defence-issued identity card.

**DATE:
SUNDAY
4TH MAY 2025**

WRAC LIONESSES 13TH ANNUAL FUNDRAISING 10K

**START TIME:
0930hrs**

**COME AND JOIN US
FOR A DAY OR WEEKEND OF FUN AND LAUGHTER**

**RUNNERS, WALKERS AND SUPPORTERS ALL WELCOME (WALKERS MUST COMPLETE WITHIN 2 HOURS)
POST RUN SUPPER & RAFFLE PROCEEDS TO THE WRAC ASSOCIATION**



**PLACE: KINGS LYNN, NORFOLK
FACEBOOK: WRAC LIONESSES FUNDRAISING GROUP
CONTACT WENDY : 07775 505326**

**DATE:
SATURDAY
28th JUNE 2025**

CHARITY CRICKET FIXTURE (Friendly!) WRAC LIONESSES v CHATSWORTH LADIES

**START TIME:
1100hrs**

VENUE: CHATSWORTH HOUSE CRICKET GROUND, DERBYSHIRE

**EVENING SOCIAL: CAVENDISH HALL CHATSWORTH @1900hrs.
Buffet Meal to cost no more than £30 per head**

ACCOMMODATION: Chatsworth Park Caravan and Camping, Baslow DE45 1PN. Bakewell and Matlock are the nearest towns and have several hotels and B&B's

ARE YOU A CRICKET PLAYER? COME ALONG AND JOIN US AS A PLAYER OR SUPPORTER.

Please contact one of the people below if you are interested as we need names and numbers.

POC - Elaine Smith 07921 062777 (Players) Jan TC Rees 07976 834969 (Players)

Lynn Hines 07885 168229 (Venue queries)

Wendy Hooton 07775 505326 (Supporters/Fundraising)

All are contactable on Messenger and WhatsApp

**HUGE THANKS AGAIN TO LYNN HINES FOR ORGANISING THE EVENT
AND JAN TC REES/ELAINE SMITH FOR ORGANISING OUR TEAM**



100th BIRTHDAYS

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

- Mrs Alice Alexander
- Mrs Mary Johnson
- Mrs Sheila Powell
- Mrs Isobel Stark
- Mrs Gwen Alderman

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!



Marjorie Marsh



Grace Taylor



Emily Rason



Dorothy Oldham



Patricia Norma Rogers



Emily Rason

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

ATS & WRAC Association Benevolent Fund

Making A Difference



It's been another busy six months for our Grants Officer Julie Winks as we continue to support those who served in the ATS or WRAC, but she took time away from case work to update the Lioness on all that has been achieved. As an example of the work of the Association one of our beneficiaries, Jayne Tait, agreed to share her story of her service and how the Benevolent Fund has helped her.

I always wanted to join the army as far back as I can remember, my stepdad was Army and had fought bravely in WW2. He had seven medals including a Military Medal for bravery. He also was a Chelsea Pensioner and came to my passing out in his scarlets. His name was Sidney Tweeddale and was also key in me being one of the first female army cadets in the UK in Manchester.



I actually joined from the Acton Army Careers Office in London and went to Guildford for basic training at the end of October 1985.

After finishing with basic training, I then went onto Leconfield for my trade training as a driver. I remember that walk on the first day past rows of cars and land Rovers to the row of 4 Tonners. I couldn't believe that I was going to learn to drive in a truck and not a car!

After passing trade training I was posted to 37 SQN RCT at Blackdown Barracks. I only spent six months or so here doing routine driving jobs mainly troop moving in and around Aldershot and Pirbright. We were all asked if we would like to volunteer to be posted to Germany as there was a shortage and of course I said yes.

Who is eligible for help?

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

Are there any other criteria?

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

So I went to 68 SQN Rheindahlen in Germany. I spent 2 wonderful years there doing lots of great things all over Germany. I then took a compassionate posting to 20 Sqn Regents Park London, as my stepdad had cancer and I needed to be close to him. Whilst at 20 Sqn I was lucky enough to be chosen to take part in Royal Duties.

I left in October 1988 due to my Dad's illness and I had been offered a very good job in London as a Chauffeur.

A few years ago I had got myself into debt following a divorce and ill health and contacted SSAFA to see if they could help me with advice. They did and managed to fast track me through the Citizens Advice Programme and was helped to sort out that issue. At the time of the visit the Volunteer from SSAFA asked me if there was anything he could do in the home to make my life easier. We talked and he asked for funding for carpets to make the home warmer and this was approved with awards from the RBL and the WRAC Benevolent Fund.

A few years on and my health had deteriorated meaning walking was difficult, I receive Personal Independence Payments and have a mobility car which are invaluable for getting around but found that I would need help to get round the places I wanted to visit. I was especially worried about an upcoming trip to Italy for my eldest Son's wedding. My Son is also ex Army having served for 7 years with the Royal Artillery in Iraq, Afghanistan and the UK. He suggested I ask if it was possible to get help with a scooter.

Benevolent Fund Expenditure – The Last Six months

- 92 applications for assistance were considered by grant committees
- 66 awards were granted across 18 categories
- Total spend for this period totalled £106,453.26

SSAFA then approached The Royal British Legion and the WRAC Benevolent Fund and a grant was awarded to purchase a mobility scooter that folds like magic and is the size of a suitcase but has enough power to get me around easily wherever I need to go. It is suitable to go on flights folded and allowed me to get around a very hilly part of Italy. My Son married in Sorrento in October this year and I was delighted to be able to take part in four days of wedding happiness including the wedding itself. The whole trip was amazing and easy because I didn't have to worry about getting from place to place to enjoy the celebrations.



Since returning it has allowed me to do shopping that I previously wouldn't be able to do. Ikea is a nightmare for people who find it difficult to walk far but it is a shop in which I love to browse. I am also looking forward to the spring to start visiting gardens and gardening shows like the BBC gardener's world shows that are fairly large.

I also help the RBL each year with collecting in a local supermarket during the lead up to armistice day. As part of this I also sew and embroider items to sell and the money from the sales goes to the Poppy appeal as I believe even a small amount helps.

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 grants below cannot be accepted directly by the Benevolent Fund Secretary.

One Off Grants: The fund has helped with one-off grants in a wide range of categories:

funeral costs	stair-lifts	house repairs	white goods
bathroom adaptations	disability aids including electric beds	central heating/boilers	removal expenses
house adaptations	respite breaks	carpets and flooring	rent, deposits and bonds
electric wheelchairs/mobility scooters	travel and transport	clothing	food vouchers
riser-recliner chairs	priority debt	furniture	general needs

Remember that the Veterans Charity can help

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

I never ever felt judged for the situation we are in and this makes this charity all the better for those they help. People from the services are proud and asking for help is a last resort. You are amazing. (BW)

I cannot thank you enough. We have just had our food shop arrive and are amazed by the support and help. This has alleviated a lot of worries for us. Thank you! (TP)

Thank you for the help and support you gave yesterday. Coal and food shop received this morning. I also realise that I am not the only one asking for help. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. (VS)

Membership Support Grant

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 apply.

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

Want to know more?

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

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.

Those who do not possess WRAC Association clothing are still very welcome to parade, if they are dressed 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 and the Veterans badge 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 (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.

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

Grand Reunion & AGM	Friday 21- Sunday 23 March 2025, Mercure Holland House, Cardiff
10k Run	Sunday 4 May 2025
VE Day celebration	Sunday 11 May 2025, Guildford Cathedral, 15.00
RHC Founders Day Governor's Review	Tuesday 3 June 2025
Armed Forces Day	Saturday 28 June 2025 – Across the UK
Summer Event	Date to be announced
WRAC Dinner Club	Saturday 11 October 2025
Officers' Dining Club	Saturday 22 November 2025
Field of Remembrance Opening Ceremony	Thursday 6 November 2025
Remembrance Sunday Cenotaph Parade	Sunday 9 November 2025

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

Aberdeen - Sandra Lemmon



In June, Janette Deans and Moira Thom went to Northern Ireland for the Armed Forces Day at Newtownabbey, where the drumhead service was followed by a military parade. The main event was a brilliant display by The Red Arrows. It was very exciting. Although no branch members actually took part in the Aberdeen parade, Sandra Lemmon, Joan Bartlett and Jane Mills watched and cheered as the parade passed them.

The branch welcomed visitors who travelled from Motherwell and Ayr in August to surprise Sandra. They hadn't seen each other since the Fort William group folded.

Sylvia Connachan travelled from Belfast to join Joan, Margaret Irvine, Jane, Sandra and Moira at our Area AGM in Perth. It was lovely to spend time with Sylvia. Also joining us was Lu Tait, who had her beret and cap badge presented to her by Brigadier Clare Phillips CBE.



We have gained two new members, Wendy Lyle and Katy, who will hopefully meet us at our meetings soon.

Sandra also went to Liverpool for the WRAC Dinner Club in October where she had a brilliant time.

Our Christmas lunch was great fun, but didn't the year pass quickly?

Aberdeen Branch wishes everyone fun and friendship in the coming months.

Fife and Tayside - Debbie Coupland

Although there are usually only 6 or 7 of us at our monthly meetings, we always have a great time, chatting and enjoying a lovely lunch. We meet in Perth at the Salutation Hotel, which is said to be the oldest established hotel in Scotland. It is thought that the name Salutation came about from the meeting and shaking hands between John Burt (the proprietor) and Bonnie Prince Charlie. Perth also witnessed the Jacobite Rebellion in 1715, leading to the formation of the Black Watch, which still recruits locally, in Perth and Kinross, Fife, Dundee, and Angus. Coincidentally, we recruit for our branch within the same catchment area, if you'd like to join us.

Late in November 2024, 15 of us gathered, along with our Area Co-ordinator, Janette Deans, at our usual meeting place, the Salutation Hotel for our pre-Christmas get together. The 3-course meal was excellent, and we were also treated to a free glass of prosecco, which went down very well with all members. We ran what you would call 'a proper raffle' which included a couple of bottles of whisky. We know how to live life in Fife and Tayside Branch.

We send best wishes to all our friends in and around the WRAC Association.



Edinburgh - Robbie Knox

We have continued to meet up every month at the Scots Guards Club, where we have all become members. It's very nice to get NAAFI prices at the bar but we do try to be out of the place if there is a rugby match at Murrayfield, because it gets pretty noisy.

A few of us travelled to Perth for our Area AGM and Reunion in September. It was a lovely day with friends, where we were privileged to witness Lu Tait being presented with her beret and cap badge. It was a very emotional ceremony.

We had a visit from Wendy Hooton early in October, so we went out for a lovely lunch with her. Later in the month, the WRAC Dinner Club drew a couple of our members to Liverpool, where they enjoyed a weekend of singing, dancing and laughing.



Some of our ladies marched with other veterans over the cobbles of the Royal Mile on Remembrance Sunday, from Edinburgh Castle Esplanade to the Stone of Remembrance at the City Chambers. Other members paraded locally as it was awkward to get into the city on public transport.

A fabulous time was had by all eleven of us at our Christmas dinner in a great Italian restaurant called 'Amarone'. The food was delicious and there was lots of fun and laughter.

We hope to meet up with members of Stirling Branch for lunch over the coming months and possibly take a trip up to Aberdeen Branch.

Moray & Highland - Tracey MacPherson

NEW



Hello fellow veterans from Tracey MacPherson in the Frozen North (more commonly known as Moray).

I can't remember now how I came about the Lioness and the WRAC Association but I am ever so glad I did.

On 14 September this year I went to my first event, the Scotland & Northern Ireland Annual Meeting in Perth. Janette Deans the Area Co-ordinator had reached out to me when I first joined and it was fabulous to meet her in person and to have a connection with at least one soul as I arrived.

It was the easiest event I have ever attended on my own. I felt welcomed from the first moment. There was no lack of conversation and the feeling of friendship and camaraderie was evident from the off.

Because of that experience, and without a branch near me, I've decided to create a brand new branch - Moray and Highland! I am keen to reach out to other female veterans in an IV, PH or AB postcode who want to meet in person or virtually, for a coffee and a chat. I think we have such a shared common experience, that hasn't changed too much over the generations, that conversation comes easily and free flowing.

I enlisted in 1989 and had 4 very enjoyable years as a soldier. I am in the fortunate position to remain in touch with 3 dear friends who I met in trade training. No matter how much time passes in between us seeing each other, we get right back to feeling in our late teens again, even though our bodies may not agree.

So with that in mind, if you perhaps live in Moray, Highlands & Islands, Badenoch & Strathspey area and fancy a coffee and a chat, I'd be more than happy to meet up (as long as the Frozen North has defrosted).



Stirling - Liz Dixon

Hello from all up here in Stirling. The branch has been fairly quiet lately with no great expeditions or boozy nights. We are really pleased to have welcomed a few new members to the branch Facebook page, Jackie Hull, Dianne Stevenson and Jacky Edwards. They have not yet been able to come along to our monthly get togethers, but we are looking forward to seeing them very soon.

We have been displaying our new WRAC Association banner at branch meetings, hoping it may catch the eye of WRAC veterans. As of yet no one has approached requesting information so we are looking to move it to a more prominent place.

Mhairi Turner, a member of Stirling Branch took up the Cancer Research challenge to walk 30 miles in November. Mhairi completed a total of 206 miles! What a champion, well done Mhairi!

Friday the 13th of Dec was our DD Day (dinner and drinks day!) for our Christmas get together. Best frocks or trousers were put on, and then it was party time! Our Christmas do started with a three course meal, washed down with a few glasses of prosecco or beers. It wasn't long before there were plenty of us on the dance floor flinging out some shapes.

We also had a lovely December monthly meeting at Fletchers restaurant on the 28th of December which was a bit more of an upmarket restaurant.

Hope everyone had a brilliant time at Christmas and are well on their way to a great New Year.



Ulster- Sylvia Connachan



Last year, as always, we travelled south to the Irish National War Memorial at Islandbridge Dublin, where we laid a wreath in memory of our WRAC sisters. This ceremony is a shared-island event arranged and led by the Royal British Legion in Ireland with the cooperation and assistance of the Irish State. This year three of our members came along with me: Sarah Cairns, Elizabeth Montgomery, and Jill Hope.

We attended the dedication of the WRAC/ATS bench at Palace Barracks, Belfast - the bench which featured on the front cover of the Lioness 2021 issue 21. Four of us also enjoyed a couple of delicious three-course lunches last year with the Not Forgotten Association in Omagh. Over 100 people came from all over to attend including Wrens and QA's.

In September, The Royal Irish Regiment invited us to their parades at Clonaver Barracks in Belfast which was a wonderful day, and then four of us watched the Belfast Tattoo featuring a band from Canada, a dance school from Dromore, and four men singing comic songs. Eight of us attended the Festival of Remembrance at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast, where we were treated to the Royal Irish Pipes and Drums and an opera singer.

When they played the 1940s songs we all sang along, and as the Legion standards, association standards, cadets and war widows all marched into the hall it was very moving.



Bradford - Lee Guthrie



The WRAC Bradford Branch is a very small informal group which started when three members realised that we lived close to each other following a chat in a Facebook group. We arranged to meet for a coffee, and it pretty much grew from that.

We now meet once a month on a Wednesday evening at the Bobbin Carrier pub and join in the quiz. Happily, we quite often win the £50 bar voucher!

A particular recent highlight for me was representing the WRAC alongside my husband (ex 2 Para) and having a lovely lunch with the Lord Mayor of Bradford.

I have been the Branch Coordinator for some time but am now relocating from West Yorkshire to Hampshire so that I can spend more time with my family. I'm sorry to be leaving the

group but am looking forward to relocating and hope to catch up with WRAC friends in the Aldershot and Farnborough area. Meeting and making new friends has been the highlight of the Bradford group as we have helped and supported each other through life's little difficulties.

Angie Sillett who is now taking over as the Branch Coordinator said - "Lee Guthrie was one of the founding members of Bradford Branch and has been a strong supporter of the branch and its members. We will be very sorry to lose her but offer her our thanks and wish her all the best as she moves down south".



East Riding & North Lincolnshire - Dorothy Mitchelmore

The Branch have been busy during the last few months, plenty of Sunday lunches have been enjoyed in various locations in and around Beverley, as well as many impromptu occasions of meeting up for coffee during the week!

A number of our members attended the WRAC Dinner Club in October, and some were present at Remembrance parades held both locally and in London during November.

December was extremely busy as we kicked started the month in style with cocktails and a lunch at our annual Secret Santa event held at the Rose & Crown in Beverley.

By the 7th of December we were ready to party again, and although storm Darragh was raging its way across the UK, we were determined it would not put us off our stride, we kept calm and carried on (armed with brollies and sturdy shoes of course!) braving our way to the Village Hotel in Hull for our Christmas party. A great time was had by all, and we danced the night away.

The following weekend, a coach trip to Piece Hall in Halifax was in the offing and saw some of our members heading off to the Christmas Market there. By the time you read this update, our New Year plans will be well underway as we don't sit still for long!

As you can tell, we are a very active group and if you're interested in joining us for any of our events please contact me. We would love to see you.



Grimsby - Gail Davy

Grimsby Branch still meet every month, although our numbers have been fluctuating recently. If you live in our area, please join us some time.

In April we all had a lovely lunch at our favourite pub, the Jug and Bottle. It was so good we decided to go back again in June!

Some of our members were busy in early November, manning stalls for the Poppy Appeal. Also, two of us attended the Lincolnshire County Poppy Appeal launch at East Kirkby in a plane hangar. It was a very moving service on an ex-RAF station, which has turned into a museum. After the service we looked at the assembled motorcycles from the RBL Riders Branch and old vehicles from the museum. It was very interesting.

We all looked forward to our Christmas lunch at Cleethorpes Golf Club, because they always serve one of the best lunches in the area and we weren't disappointed. We had a lovely time and enjoyed our meal very much. We have discovered that at our age, eating seems to be the most popular option, as we don't go on coach outings at the moment, like we used to.

Best wishes to all from Grimsby Branch members.



Leeds - Krysia Asher

On a balmy summer's evening in August the barbecue was fired up in Chris Parris and Anne Bailey's back garden, for a fabulous evening full of laughter and good food. Quite a number of our sociable members arrived with some goodies, and everyone seemed to enjoy the evening. Hopefully, it will be an annual event. Chris and Anne don't know it yet, but I'm sure they can be convinced.

In October, Michelle Gibbs, Jayne Maitland, Chris Parris, Irene Jones and Krysia Asher attended the WRAC Dinner Club weekend in a very cold Liverpool. Liverpool is a wonderful city, with much to see and enjoy, however, an open top bus tour on a chilly October day, was pushing it a little far. The entertainment on Friday and Saturday evenings was wonderful. November saw Melanie Southcombe and Krysia attending the Remembrance parade in London, marching with pride alongside thousands of veterans, followed by our Christmas outing in an old, converted flour mill in a local town for a festive afternoon tea.



Lincolnshire Wolds and Coast - Betty Gash



The late summer presented a couple of lovely occasions including the Not Forgotten Association's 'Fun Fest' at Normandy Hall, and the chance for Lesley Lewis, Lorna Jackson and I to meet in Alford for a lovely pub lunch.

In October Karen Dixon joined the 'Ride to the Wall' event at the NMA and I attended 'Guildford Remembered' - a memorable weekend for us both. Also that month I took part in The Brigg Poppy 10K Military Challenge and was my age category winner. Meanwhile, Marea Fowler, a Reservist with 3 Royal Anglian, competed in the Military Challenge with a weighted pack finishing 1st female.

November was, as always, a month for reflection. Karen was one of the Standard bearers at the military funeral of 18-year-old Signaller Charlotte-Ann Powner, 30 Signal Regiment at Grimsby Crematorium. Sharon McNicol marched at Skegness and contributed to the 37,082 handmade poppies which were made and donated from around the world for the town's Clock Tower Display, whilst Betty and Karen marched at Cleethorpes, and Lesley at Alford, with Karen and Lesley both laying wreaths. Lesley was extremely honoured and immensely proud to be taking the salute with the mayor and laying a wreath on behalf of all women who have served past and present. We were very pleased to welcome new member Kerry Culley to the branch, and Kerry joined our contingent at the Cenotaph.

Our branch finished off last year with a fantastic visit to Donna Nook National Nature Reserve.

Newcastle - Tanya Hall

It is wonderful that we have more members since the Association's membership fee was abolished, with lots of interest from new ladies in our area - but many of our branches new members cannot make our scheduled monthly meeting which always used to be on a Thursday - it is such a shame - but work commitments must come first. We are looking to find new dates going forward to make sure that everyone can join us at some point!

On Saturday 30 November eight of our ladies enjoyed an afternoon out in Newcastle. We arranged to meet in front of the Monument until Lesley pointed out that there would be a Christmas Market there and we'd never find each other! We stayed in Eldon Square and enjoyed a few pre-dinner drinks together before retiring for some dinner at Umai Mi Oriental Kitchen, a pan-Asian restaurant which serves lots of food including some delicious Korean dishes. It was great to try so many new things, two of us tried using chopsticks for a while which was good fun but it was much easier with the spoon and forks!

Afterwards we headed to the pub for some post-dinner drinks at the Keel Row Wetherspoons in The Gate. Later on we also had a few drinks in The Northumberland Arms. It was 8pm by the time some of us headed home which is not bad going as we met at 12.30pm - just us Lionesses having a fun afternoon!

We will be holding other informal meetings through 2025 - details will be posted on our Branch Facebook page - 'Newcastle Branch WRAC Association'.



Doncaster - Veronica Hanson



We have been meeting for coffee and cake on a monthly basis, but December was a good excuse to try something new. One of the members discovered an all you can eat Chinese buffet in the centre of Doncaster, and we decided to try it. It might not have been a traditional Christmas meal, but it was very enjoyable, nonetheless.

I try to keep in touch with our ATS lady, Joan Evans who lives not far from me, so my son drives me over to visit her occasionally. She is 103, but still looks after herself and gets out as often as she can, including attending the Yorkshire Light Infantry Christmas Dinner. She enjoys dancing, especially the jive, which is from her era, there must

be something about being in the ATS that keeps you young at heart.

Despite there only being 3 of us members here in Doncaster Branch, we have tried to meet up once a month. Two of us live close to each other whilst our third member has to travel a bit further, but we have always enjoyed each other's company. As we get older there are many considerations when it comes to attending a meeting. Maybe our partner needs our attention, or our chosen mode of transport has taken a day off. But it has become too difficult now, so we have decided to disband our little group for the time being. We will stay in touch though, and report if anything interesting happens.

The nearest branch to Doncaster is now Sheffield.

Leicester & Nottingham - Ann (Monty) Montgomery

We have had a very interesting summer beginning with a visit to the NMA in June, followed by four of our branch on parade at Leicester Armed Forces Day.



In July we were invited to a Garden Party where we admired the beautiful garden and enjoyed a delicious lunch with our hosts Angela and Grahame Reed. We had a most successful Collection and Recruiting day at a local Asda store where we handed out leaflets to prospective recruits to our branch and added a useful sum to our branch funds. We have also enjoyed taking part in local Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club events and have had several breakfasts, a cream tea and a roast lunch!

The annual Bowls Club Lunch at Syston took place in glorious sunshine and we were very happy to host the daughters of one of our ATS ladies who passed away this year. The photo includes 'Gus' our loyal Honorary Member.

Other events included our Harvest Festival Lunch at Eye Kettleby Lakes and another at Melton Mowbray Bowls Club. Our Branch AGM was followed by a quiz. Some members took part in the Poppy Collection at King Power Stadium, and the speaker at our November Mince Pies and Drinks meeting spoke about the WW1 Christmas 'Truce'.

We are always happy to welcome new members, visiting the area, or permanently. If you live in Leicestershire or Nottinghamshire or any adjoining counties, please do contact Sue Slattery on 07803 198113 who will be happy to give full details.

Sheffield- Sandy Warne

Another brilliant 6 months has passed here in Sheffield. The group is growing, with 81 members, and we have seen many new faces at our breakfast meet ups each month.

A few of us attended the National Act of Remembrance at the Cenotaph in November. Gina Spacey, Sandy Warne, Alison Cairns, Barbara Burnett and Jane Dennison were all first timers, proudly marching with the WRAC Association contingent. It proved to be a full-on week with visits to the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey, a trip down memory lane visiting Mill Hill – home of the Posties and 12 MoD Platoon where a few of us had been posted over the years. Breakfast at No 10 for a Remembrance coffee morning was special ... and yes, Larry the cat is gorgeous. Saturday was very emotional at the Royal Albert Hall, which seemed to be more focused on campaigns that we had experienced ourselves in our lifetime, then finally the Cenotaph on Sunday.

A group of us also drove over to Germany to the Christmas Markets in the Dusseldorf area for a few days, which got us all in the Christmas mood and yes, the bratties, garlic mushrooms, schnitzel and glühwein all taste so much better on a crisp, chilly, German evening, out in the fresh air.

Cheryl Jones still pretty much always wins the raffle each month. It has raised a fantastic amount which we used to offset the cost of our first Christmas lunch. It was attended by 24 of the Branch with 2 honorary members at a local pub.



Eastern

Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire - Chris Barratt

Our Branch doesn't get to meet up very often, due to the rural nature of our catchment area. However, early in December a jolly group of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire members traveled from far and wide, to meet up and enjoy a Festive Christmas meal together. We enjoyed a delicious Christmas lunch at the Three Horseshoes Pub on Norton Road in Letchworth, which was relatively central for us all.

We were joined by some of the ex-military husbands of members, who added to the laughter and banter, making it a jolly time for all. There is nothing quite like the interaction between ex-services folk and you can see from the photo that we had a great time.

We hope to meet up more often in the coming months and would be pleased to have any of you join us.



Colchester - Heather Savin

It has been a quiet few months for the Branch. Sadly, we weren't able to hold our annual "seaside havoc" last year. But we hope it returns in 2025. No doubt, the general public in Clacton would like to see our antics again!

I had time off work to help with the local Poppy Appeal last year. It was great to be able to chat with some mature veterans, who were happy to reminisce and tell tales of their service. It would be nice to be able to march at the Remembrance Parade in Colchester in November, if we can gather enough people.

A small group of Branch members continue to support the monthly meeting of the Armed Forces Veterans Breakfast Club in Colchester. It is great to meet up over a tasty, cooked breakfast, washed down with gallons of tea. Three of us were happy to attend the first AFVBC Remembrance Dinner and Dance. It was an amazing evening. Everyone that attended was very generous and money was raised for three charities: the RBL, the Not Forgotten and the local Blind Veterans Choir. Some members of the choir gave us all lumps in our throats when they got up on stage and sang for us.

The AFVBC Christmas Lunch was a huge success. We had a three-course meal and there were plenty of not-so-subtle Christmas jumpers on display.

Going forward, we hope that the Branch will become more active, with members getting involved with organising.



Norfolk- Lyn Hatch

What a great time we had in July, when Rebecca Bailey and her partner, Peter hosted a garden party at their home. Happily, the invitation also extended to the Lionesses of Suffolk. Wet weather plans were put in place, but on the day, the sun shone, and we were all grateful for some shade, it was so hot. We wore hats, sunglasses and suncream, and the games we had planned were forgotten. The afternoon went by so quickly. It was great to catch up with everyone and plan our next meeting.

In September, The Not Forgotten Association held a Drive-in Event at Helmingham Hall Gardens and four of us headed up the A140 into Suffolk to join them. What a fabulous day it was, with excellent performances by all the artists and the weather also played its part. Before the show started, we took the opportunity to wander around the beautifully manicured gardens. The hall, which is surrounded by a moat made a wonderful background for the event.

A few days later, a few of us met up for lunch at The Recruiting Sergeant in Horstead. There is never a lot of talking once lunch is served, as we get on with enjoying our meal.

Our first meeting in 2025 was held in Fakenham. If you live in the county, come and join us any time. The venue and time will be posted on our Facebook page.



Greater London - Maggie Ashmore

Here in the Greater London Branch, we are lucky enough to have a social secretary, Helen Lloyd, who organised a picnic in St James' Park for us in the summer. Everyone came along with a fold-up chair and a packed lunch, ready to have a lovely time. Christine Hayman had decided that she would like to celebrate her 80th birthday with us, so she brought along Prosecco and glasses. We were all happy to partake of a little tippie. We must have made an impression on other park users because a passing WRAC girl, Gina Spacey saw our green tops and came over to join us.

Pauline Milnes arranged for us to have a look round the Household Cavalry Museum and we all found it very interesting. In fact, Pauline has had quite a busy year all round. She had an amazing adventure when she travelled over to Jamaica, but back at home she and others have taken up boxing training with The Fighting Chance Boxing, who support veterans with health and wellbeing.

In September, we had a fabulous boat trip along the Thames from Battersea to Greenwich. We had a look at the Cutty Sark and then wandered around Greenwich Market, where the highlight of the day was having Pie, Mash and Liquor at the specialist shop. The liquor is actually parsley sauce nowadays – who knew?

18 of us gathered at the Union Jack Club for our Christmas Dinner and we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.



Invicta Branch – Karen “Radders” Radford

Our lovely Invicta Branch ladies have been busy as usual. They continue to meet on the last Saturday of the month for lunch and at every other opportunity that presents itself! In June a few of our ladies attended the RBL Ashford Branch Summer BBQ where Kay Styles was given the BBQ tongs. As far as I am aware there were no reports of food poisoning, so it appears all was well, ha ha! Then we were back at the Ashford Railway Club in August for the RBL D-Day 80 Summer Ball. The ladies had a fabulous night and danced the night away!

Our very own Margaret Ahmed Mohamed had a rather big birthday recently and decided that it was her time to take a flight over Kent in a Spitfire flying from Headcorn Aerodrome. Unfortunately, due to bad weather the flight was cancelled a couple of times and now she must wait until July 2025. We are all certainly looking forward to watching this fabulous experience with her from the ground when the day arrives.

However, our biggest news is reserved for one of our Branch lady's, Lavender Mary Ann Clark who has finally arrived in her bunk at The Royal Hospital Chelsea. We all want to wish her well and can't wait to visit and see her there in her Scarlets. Well done Lavender.



Worthing - Carol Hill

Hello from Worthing Branch, where we're still alive and kicking, and having fun. We are so lucky that Lancing Parish Council allows us to use a large room which is a Community Hub to meet in, free of charge.

Our BIG news is that Janet Goldsborough-Jones, who was responsible for setting up our branch in 2008, was awarded the MBE in the Birthday Honours List and attended the investiture at Windsor Castle in October, where she received her medal from HRH Anne, The Princess Royal. The award was for services in the Worthing community over many years.

The branch had 13 members attend our Christmas lunch after our November meeting. We were sporting our Christmas jumpers as we celebrated at the Harvester in Lancing, where we all had a great time. A rather large elf was there, as Santa Sacks were given out for presents. Joan Pearson, who is rather frail at the moment, was treated to a lovely takeaway Christmas dinner.

Recently, we have welcomed 2 new members, Denise and Martina, to the branch. It's great to find new people to share the fun with us.



South & South West

Bristol - Judith Stinchcombe

Six beauties from Bristol Branch visited the House of Chocolate over the summer. Dressed to impress, the look was just perfect. The handmade, 'melt in your mouth' luxury treat, with a hint of banter and giggles was delicious. In fact, a real treat that tasted like velvet but didn't last very long once started.



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.

Exeter - Julia Crockett

NEW

We're lucky in the South West of England to have so many amazing groups who support and encourage currently serving, and veteran, members of HM Armed Forces. I have felt very welcomed by the Plymouth branch of the WRAC Association at their monthly meetings and also at the occasional lunch events throughout the year.

On the Armed Forces Day WRAC Association stand in Plymouth this summer I met with women veterans who live in Exeter, which got me thinking that we needed to be more visible locally. So I decided to give running my own branch a go and here we are, with a brand new Exeter Branch! I thought the Devon and Exeter Institution on the Cathedral Green would make a great venue for our inaugural gathering, and timed our meeting to include a free tour and a special book display from the Arts, Science, and Local History archive just for us! To keep the history theme going, all attendees were asked to bring photos, berets, and other memorabilia of their current and veteran military service to share and discuss. Of course I'd love to welcome new members from around and about so please get in touch and join our new group.

I look forward to seeing you in Exeter!



Plymouth - Ann Williams

The ladies of Plymouth Branch have had an interesting summer.

12 volunteers supported our stand at Armed Forces Day and Association provided us with pencils and things to give to the children. The ladies enjoyed it very much.

Since then we have continued with our monthly meetings at Moments Memory Cafe in New George street and have had lunches out at The Windmill, Leandras, St Elizabeth's House, which is one of our favourites giving us a taste of good living and The house of Marbles.



On the admin front, Sarah has very kindly done a lot of work in contacting members of the Branch who are not able to attend meetings or events and we have been able to update contact details, which can only be a good thing.

Lori and Ann are both looking forward to attending the AGM in Cardiff.

Portsmouth & Isle Of Wight - Val Duke

As you can see from the photos, Marjorie reached her centenary and what a celebration it was! The local news captured the story of the celebration which was held with family and friends, and she kindly invited some of our branch to come along. Marjorie said: "It was a lovely occasion, enjoyed by all who attended". We then repaid the compliment with a special tea as we sat round a large table reminiscing on the past whilst being served sandwiches, scones and cakes.



Chris Kennedy attended Guildford Remembered and recalls -

"Guildford was amazing. I couldn't remember the layout of QE Barracks once I saw the housing now on it, but I remember the day I left for the wilds of Catterick. My mother, who lived in Aldershot, came to see me off with sandwiches at Guildford station. It was embarrassing as she had made enough to feed an army (no pun intended!)."

We were lucky with the weather on Saturday for the outdoor ceremony which was very illuminating. The meal at the cathedral was well-catered and in such a brilliant setting, we had a ball! Sunday was memorable for the church service and parade through town. I met lots of interesting people, one who had been in Guildford at the time of the bombings - it's hard to believe it's been 50 years. Of course, we ended the day with tea and biccies to say our goodbyes. WRAC tradition observed, we parted ways. Looking forward to Cardiff."

Torbay - Pauline Marr

Torbay is an informal group which has been somewhat quiet for a while now, but I'm hoping that will change over the coming year. We have a Facebook page, Torbay & Area WRAC Group with over 30 members, who are far flung. Come and join us if you are down our way.

September saw me traveling with Lisa Lynch and Diana Keenan to the "Female Veterans Stand Easy Coffee Morning" held at Woodland Fort Community Centre in Plymouth.

In October, Diana and I had lunch at the House of Marbles with Plymouth Branch. We had a lovely time together, with lots of chat and laughs.

Lisa and I attended a local Veterans lunch in November. It is held once a month in Torre Conservative Club. The meal was excellent and enjoyed by all. Several of us joined them for a Christmas lunch in December too and enjoyed a happy festive celebration.

Helen Hill, Terri Laws, June Bourn and her carer Tanya joined me at our local Remembrance parade, where I had the honour to lay our wreath.

Terri Laws and I have decided that we will sea swim together regularly and follow it up with breakfast. Sadly, our first attempt had been aborted due to bad weather, but Lisa and Diana met us to practice having breakfast. We enjoy a good breakfast.



Salisbury - Amanda Foster

First of all, a big thank you to Jackie and Linda Clark, who have been keeping everyone up to date with emails, WhatsApp and Facebook. It's been a busy time, with many members joining in at our local AFVBC, which is a source of some cracking events and a bit of recruiting for us. We have welcomed some new faces and hope to encourage a few more to join in with the fun and sort out their Association membership.

Our Summer BBQ at Salisbury Rugby Club was very well attended in July with some new members joining us. We were blessed with lovely weather in August for our Punting Trip, with 14 ladies NOT falling in! Thanks, Sally Willoughby, for arranging the day.

In September, Linda Cooper supervised some great flower arranging, so standards were set high for Christmas table decorations! October saw a hilarious Oktoberfest, with lots of laughter, but no pictures in order to protect the innocent.

Our members helped with Poppy Collections, which were very successful. Some members also attended the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall, the Field of Remembrance and the Cenotaph in London. It was great to bump into General Dame Sharon Nesmith at our local parade and she obliged us with a photo (see page 34).

It's very encouraging that members have some new and exciting ideas for great events, so here's to a busy year. We are looking forward to meeting many of you at the Grand Reunion in Cardiff.



Wales & the West

Birmingham – Babs Anderson

Brum Branch continues to grow, with 3 new members, Kath Whitty (ex-WRAF), Viv Smith and Sheila Keeling. We are also joined at monthly meetings by the newly retired Elaine (Wolfie) Smith.

In July, Doreen Cox and I joined other veterans at Swanshurst Girls School to talk with the pupils about our time in the Armed Forces. It happens every year and we always have a lovely time.

One of our ATS ladies, Betty Wood celebrated her 101st birthday in October with a few friends, family and cake. Also in October, a few of us joined up with serving RAF personnel at the NMA. They were very interested to hear how different our experiences were from theirs. Although it was a bit like herding cats, we had a good day together.

Brum Branch Bowling League is thriving and causing us much amusement, not to mention other bowling alley users. It doesn't matter how many of us there are, we have a ball.

Our world-famous Christmas Jumper Bash was another rip-roaring success, with fun and laughter all around. It is always a joy to have other Branches join us, particularly when they take the annual table decorating competition so seriously. Well done everyone for putting in the effort, especially to Heather and Rosie for providing sweets for everyone again.

Giggling our socks off at the pantomime is always one of our favourite things to do. You'll be pleased to know that the hero won the day again.



Gloucestershire - Ann Stack

Following a sleepy summer, we decided to enjoy the last of the summer wine with a midweek meet up in late August. It was a change to our usual gatherings, as we wanted to be flexible for those wishing to join us. Gloucester Quays was our venue, accompanied by the setting sun, delicious Pizza, plenty of smiles, chatter and a very relaxed evening.

After many months of correspondence, we finally agreed on a date and time to meet with The Right Worshipful Mayor of Gloucester, Lorraine Campbell and The Sheriff of Gloucester, Pam Tracey, for a coffee morning. We were honoured to be invited to an Act of Remembrance to remember Council Workers who lost their lives in The Great War. It was a poignant and moving ceremony, attended by 10 Gloucestershire WRAC veterans, alongside local dignitaries and workers. Afterwards, we adjourned to The Council Chambers and the Mayor's Parlour for coffee, where we took the opportunity to learn about the ceremonial robes, chain and badge and the history behind them. We were invited to join the Royal Society of St George by The Sheriff, who is the President and both Civic Leaders were very interested to learn about our service as soldiers and the WRAC Association. The visit felt very special because the room was filled with Women who are serving their Community and Women who have Served their Country. We presented the Mayor with a copy of The Lioness and ended our visit by saying The WRAC Collect together.



Herefordshire - Lynda Armstrong

First of all, we send our best wishes for a speedy recovery to Janet Knight, Tracy Loftus and Joan Lloyd ATS, who have all been unwell recently.

Some of our ladies were lucky enough to take up an exciting invitation to go on a driving experience in Wigan. We had an amazing time and had loads of laughs, with great company.

A Violette Szabo, D-Day parade was held in July at Hereford Cathedral in aid of SSAFA, with Alice Matthews, Annabelle Massey, Miriam Unwin and Chelsea Pensioner Carol Knight in attendance.

Our annual picnic at Queenswood Park, organised once again by Joyce Nicholls, was very well supported. The weather was dry, and we had a lovely day. Whilst there, a few of our Hereford Branch members took to scrubbing the two benches, which are dedicated to the memory of Peggy Rose. They looked better for the clean up.

Sadly, our 100-year-old ATS lady, Jo Anscombe, passed away in October 2024. Her eulogy can be found at the back of this Lioness.

Since I last wrote to you, we have recruited two new members, Lesley Louth and Jules Portlock. I'd like to welcome them both to our Branch.

We enjoyed our annual afternoon tea in November, which was brilliantly organised again by Miriam Unwin. We always have such a lovely afternoon, which is why it is so very well attended.

Hereford Branch members send everyone best wishes for the year ahead. See you in Cardiff.



Oxfordshire - Karen Smith

Oxfordshire Branch have been busy bees, out and about as a group. We have our regular meetings at the Littlebury Hotel on the second Saturday of each month, but in July we had a joint BBQ with the RAOC. As it was raining, it turned into an indoor event. However, it was still enjoyed by everyone.

In August, we had lunch at the Boat Inn in Trupp. The meal was very well attended, and our thanks go to Jan Dytor, who organised the day.

The WRAC Dinner Club was our weekend away event, with 5 people attending from Oxfordshire Branch and we all had a lovely time. Well, nearly all of us! Jean Mills and I had decided to take in some of the tourist sites, but what we weren't expecting was a trip to Accident and Emergency. Jean had been blinded by sunlight as she turned a corner and tripped over a hire scooter, which had been abandoned and was lying on the footpath.



While we waited for the ambulance people kept asking if they could help. It was very kind of them. The service Jean received at the hospital was very good, with the final diagnosis being a fractured shoulder. There was nothing to be done, other than put her arm in a sturdy sling and send her back to the hotel to prepare for the rest of the DC weekend. There was plenty of sympathy, which Jean appreciated.

Where to next? Grand Reunion of course!

South Wales - Deserie Mansfield

This summer, six of us decided to step out of our comfort zones and try Stand-Up Paddle boarding at the stunning Llandegfedd Reservoir in South Wales. The adventure began with a lot of laughs in the dressing room as we wrestled with wetsuits. One of us managed to wear hers backward, and another hilariously ended up with her legs in the arms – needless to say, the giggles were endless!

Once suited up, we headed to the water, only to be greeted by a brisk 12 mph wind – not exactly ideal for paddleboarding! Despite the challenging conditions, the expert guidance from BlackCrow Paddle Boarding kept us on track and, thankfully, out of France. We couldn't resist placing bets on who would take the first plunge, and Deserie Mansfield earned that honour. Paddle Boarding with a Splash – Literally! Meanwhile, Marg Davies claimed the "Most Relaxed on the Water" award.

Of course, it's not just about falling in or staying afloat – it's about trying something new, sharing laughs, and making memories. While we do love our lunches, this was a refreshing change.

If you're based in South Wales and haven't joined our group yet, we'd love to have you along for our next adventure. There's always room for more fun, friendship, and maybe a few more splashes!



Shropshire – Sandra Davies

Well here we are again with news of Shropshire branch out and about - and trying to cause havoc!

The summer saw us terrorising Chester and yes it's still in one piece, it survived the Romans, but we gave it our best shot to do better! Plus our newly acquired gazebo had more airings for Armed Forces Day in Shrewsbury and Donnington. In July we attended the NFA Fun Fest day at the Ironworks, Oswestry, and in August we went to a SSAFA charity night in Donnington of the Full Monty, and it was indeed the FULL MONTY!!!

As we headed into autumn we had a day trip to Liverpool, and the annual Branch Cream Tea at the Beaconsfield Club which went well with wonderful service from the club staff. October saw our normal monthly gathering and chin wag before a horde of our members headed back off in the direction of Liverpool for the Dinner Club, I'm led to believe that Liverpool is still in one piece, just! After our last monthly gathering for 2024 (where we tried to put the world to rights and failed) we went for our yearly outing to the panto in Shrewsbury to see Sleeping Beauty with the ever popular Brad Pitt - side splittingly funny, Oh Yes It Was! Then over the road to the Turkish - see photo.

Well there you have it. We send best wishes and prayers to all branches, til we meet again.



Tamworth - Chris Whitehead

Our meetings earlier in the year and our trial evening meet in August were a bit quiet. We think it was probably due to members being away on their holidays, but we will try an evening meeting again soon.

In September, we enjoyed a walk and lunch at the lovely National Memorial Arboretum. Then, in early October, three of us attended the Guildford commemorative weekend. It was really enjoyable, but quite emotional at times. Meeting up with old friends and making new ones was great. Later that month we met for a fabulous lunch at the Tame Otter in Hopwas. 14 members were present and a new record set. It was lovely to see everyone.

We had a very busy end to October and start of November as we helped with the RBL Poppy sales in Uttoxeter, Tamworth, Burntwood and several other locations. We met some interesting people, including one lady who said, 'I was WRAC', so I gave her the relevant information about the WRAC Association and we may have gained a new member.

8 members of our branch paraded and laid a wreath in Tamworth on Remembrance Sunday, and laid a second wreath at the WRAC garden at the NMA on Armistice Day. The Duchess of Edinburgh attended the NMA service and some of our ladies were lucky enough to meet her after the service.

We joined other Branches for Birmingham Branch's Christmas Jumper Bash and had a fabulous, fun filled time. Our Tamworth Branch's Christmas Lunch in December was another huge success and of course, we are really looking forward to the Grand Reunion in Cardiff, where we hope to meet up with many of our friends next March.



Worcester - Jane Griffin-Ash

You would be correct in calling us more of a Lunch Club than a Branch. It's our main activity and we are very good at it. And ... for the foreseeable future, we will be keeping on, keeping on, meeting for lunch. Our usual attendance is around 14 to 20, which allows for just the right noise level.

We have met up several times since I last reported and it's fair to say, we have spent the whole time laughing, chatting and having fun. We like to ring the changes with our meeting places, to avoid boredom on our part and complacency by the venues. In fact, we tried out the Anatolian Palace in Worcester, by way of a change for our Christmas lunch and found it to be excellent.

Several of us attended the WRAC Dinner Club in October and had an absolutely fabulous time. We spent the whole time laughing. What more do you need?

I spent a few happy hours collecting for the RBL Poppy Appeal early in November. It was a lovely way to do some good and as a bonus, meet some lovely people.



North West

Liverpool - Pat Brown

Here in Liverpool Branch, we have been meeting regularly for a meal and chat but have also made plans to go on a couple of outings. We were all set to do a boat trip on the Leeds and Liverpool but had to call it off when several members unfortunately reported in sick. Would you believe it, if I told you that the same thing happened when we arranged to do an open top bus tour around the city? Not many of us actually live in Liverpool, so we don't know it well and were really looking forward to the day. However, we are hoping that we can resurrect the trips in the coming months.

We have had three new members join us recently. They are a bit younger than most of us, so we hope they'll have some exciting new ideas about things we can all do together.

Four of our Branch members attended the WRAC Dinner Club. It was a home game for them as it took place here in Liverpool. They're looking forward to finding out the next venue.

Many of our members gave up their time to collect for the RBL's Poppy Appeal last year and then we paraded on Remembrance Day at various locations, such as Ormskirk, Warrington and Wavertree.

We still meet on the first Wednesday of the month if you're in the area and fancy lunch and a chat.



Manchester - Pip Flegel

Manchester Branch members have been doing what they do best ... having a great time.

Jackie Walton, our Events Organiser is always busy, ensuring that we enjoy ourselves, being part of a very special branch.

Our first trip of the year was to Fulwood Military Museum, home of The Queens Lancashire Regiment. We discovered that Lieutenant John Chard (of Zulu War at Rorke's Drift fame) was stationed here and also Corporal McCaffery who was shot at dawn, for killing an officer whilst on duty. You can certainly feel his ghostly presence as you walk the corridors. Jackie also gave us an interesting demonstration of some of the weapons used.

Another adventure was an afternoon cream tea on The Lancaster River Cruise, where we also celebrated the 60th birthday of our own Angie Summerell-Wheeldon.



Many of our members attended the Remembrance Day Parade at the Cenotaph in Manchester, with our Standard Bearers Wendy Summerell-Wheeldon and Heather Bradbury parading the Branch and National Standards. A day of not just remembering, but also of reflection.

All I'm saying is the rivalry and laughter between Hereford and Manchester Branches on the Crazy Golf and Ten Pin Bowling cannot be printed. What a fun day we had though!

We completed a full-on year with the Infamous Manchester Branch Xmas Dooo.

If any Lionesses would like to join us and be part of a very special group of women, we hold a weekly quiz via Zoom and monthly meetings.

Wirral and Chester - Sharon Broderick

Our members are in contact through the WhatsApp group every day, sometimes to sort out issues but mostly for a good giggle. Also, we meet twice a month, once to plan the mischief and second for a meal. We have now incorporated some of our Sisters in Arms, (WRNS/WRAF) to join in with the fun and laughter.

Last summer we held our annual Garden Party in Sheila Brown's garden. There was endless trifle and quite a bit of rain, but we still enjoyed ourselves.

We are lucky in our area that Everton and the Community have taken an interest in female veterans. They invited us to attend a Tea Dance at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom, and we had the best time. I was also honoured to march onto the pitch at Goodison Park with our Branch Standard on 'Stand By Her' day.



One of our new members enjoys researching records and discovered that 15 women from The Wirral died in conflict, but not one of them is mentioned on a war memorial. So, we painted kindness rocks and placed them around the memorial in a closed cemetery.

At the Remembrance parade, I spoke about it with the Deputy Lord Lieutenant and the Mayor, who are both women. They are going to look into it.

3 of us took part in the Legasee Educational Trust interviews which records The Veterans' Voice. We thought it worth being involved.

There's more mischief planned for the coming months. Watch out!



PTI Group - Lesley Davison

NEW

Calling all Ex WRAC PTIs

It was at the Guildford weekend that several of us ex PTIs happened to meet. And, like we do, we found ourselves reminiscing about the 'old' times. Having funny and embarrassing "when I...." chats. We got to some serious talking and thought it would be a great idea to re-start up the PTI group for all of us ex-PTI's across the UK and the world to keep in touch, reminisce and hopefully restart the WRAC PTI reunions. We are currently 'meeting' and talking together on Facebook where we're called "Women's Royal Army Corps PTIs". Please take a look . It's already a great collection of people who've been chatting and sharing some more recent photos of ourselves. We hope as many ex WRAC PTIs as possible will join us and share stories and photos, both past and present.

We are already thinking that we might hold our reunion in September this year, so if as many of us as possible join the Facebook page, we can chat about organising a reunion and you can all add your thoughts on it. If you do not have Facebook but you are interested in being part of the group, please contact Lyn Hatch on 07929 070665 or you can email her on lyn172ha@gmail.com.

We very much look forward to a fabulous natter and catch up on Facebook and working towards making a fabulous reunion together later this year. Three ranks in front of me, Go...



From the Branch News Editor: Babs Anderson



I've had a great time reading all your branch news in this issue. It was almost like being there with you, enjoying your trips out or sitting in the pub, having a good old chat and enjoying a delicious lunch. The camaraderie I have seen in your reports has made my heart sing. Keep it up everybody.

In an ideal world, where time is limitless, we would get a report from every single branch, so in an effort to encourage those who wouldn't normally send anything to the editor, I thought it would be a good idea to confirm what we're looking for in each piece. We'd love to see about 250 words describing your group or branch's adventures, accompanied by 2 or 3 really good quality photos. If writing isn't your thing, just let HQ know and one of us will call you to help. Other members are interested in what you've been up to and might get inspiration from your report to try something exciting with their group or branch, so please give it a go.

One of the most exciting things for me is to see new groups or branches being created, and in this issue we have five! The PTI's have got together to create a new group - it's for any PTI regardless of where you live, on Facebook at first but with plans for meet-ups. Plus Tracey MacPherson has stepped up to fill a void in Scotland Area creating the Moray and Highland Branch, Julia Crockett has formed Exeter Branch, Stephanie Kolvik is setting up West Surrey Branch, and Caroline Herne has started a Dorset Branch. So if you're living in any of these areas, or you're a PTI, find out how you could join their number in the Branch Directory; and if you're living in any area AND you're a PTI, why not join both? The more the merrier!

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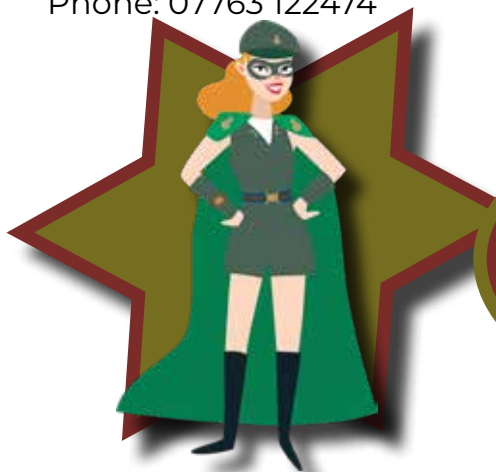
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Setting up a new branch or group is easy! Contact HQ today to find out more about how we can help you get started.

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Can't see your branch featured in the branch news? Why not volunteer to write the report? Contact HQ for tips on writing for the branch news.

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My time in the ATS at Bicester camp - Emily Rason

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

Early days in London

I was born Emily Swainson on the 10th January 1925 in a room above my parents' furniture shop in Lea Bridge Road, Leyton, in outer London. My family later moved to a three bed terraced house close by and I grew up and went to school there. I had one brother, Harry, who was five years older than me, and we had fun at the weekends taking buses and trains down to Bibury in Oxfordshire to go fishing together as a family. Our father also took me to various music and theatre events in London.

I was 14 when the war started and had just left school; at the start of the war my mother and I were evacuated to Oxfordshire – but we didn't stay there long and decided to come back to London. On return to London I initially worked locally and then in an office in the city. My brother, Harry, joined up and was deployed with the London Irish Regiment, my parents were naturally very worried about Harry, having been through the 1st World war already.

I therefore decided to wait until I was 18 years old to sign up – although I wanted to do so earlier as I didn't really like my job at the time. You could sign up before 18 with your parents' permission but I didn't feel like I could ask them – there were hoardings with Mary Churchill's picture on encouraging girls to sign up everywhere. Once I was 18 I quickly signed up at the recruitment centre in Victoria. As it happened, my parents were fine about it - they felt I would be safer away from London as they were always living under the threat of bombs. I remember

the bombardments – when the air raid sirens went off our family had to walk over half a mile to the newly built Leytonstone tube station, where we would stay until it was safe to return home. The bombs came down regularly and very close to our house – an incendiary device hit a house two doors down and destroyed part of it. Sometimes time didn't allow for the walk to the station so we had to get under the stairs or the kitchen table.

On the night of the Blitz I remember my father calling me to "come and look at this" – London was alight and the sky was red and black from the smoke of the city burning - that night everything around St Paul's cathedral was completely flattened and burned and we could see the light of the burning all the way out in Leyton. No one really knew if the Germans deliberately missed St Paul's, if it was divine intervention, or pure good fortune. I had been working in the St Paul's City area – so the damage and scale of it really hit home.



Emily with her parents on a fishing trip



With her mother, grandmother (all Emily's) and her brother Harry

Emily's story will be continued in the next edition of the Lioness!



Letters...

Dear Editor,

I thought you may like to hear this story.

On my way home from London after the Cenotaph march past on Remembrance Sunday, I found myself waiting for the train home at Leeds Railway Station. As I wandered up the platform I saw a gentleman who drew my attention (once a copper always a copper!) medals adorned his jacket.

I spoke to the gentleman about Remembrance Sunday, he had observed it at Leeds City war memorial. He asked where I'd been and I told him the Cenotaph, Whitehall, fortunate to have marched past with the WRAC contingent.

He mentioned that he was posted to Mill Hill where there were WRAC, and in the same sentence mentioned that he was there when the IRA bombed the Barracks in 1988, which had killed his best mate, Mickey Robbins.

I was pretty stunned, as I too had been at Inglis Barracks, Mill Hill when the bomb went off. I told him my friend Sandy (Saxton Warne) and myself had been up to the site of the old barracks only on Thursday for a recce and laid a poppy cross for Mickey on the sign of the road named after him. We had both known Mickey.

I showed him the photos I took. Tears came to his eyes, recalling that fateful day on the 1st August 1988.

The Gentleman's name is Ian Booth M.B.E., still serving, now a Senior Officer.

Mickey Robbins, never forgotten.

Caroline McEwan-Smith



Hello Editor,

This photo was taken by my 'buddy', Vicky. We have been friends since lockdown, when the WRAC Association advertised for serving ladies to be buddies to us veterans. I've been friends with Vicky Armstrong since then, and we chat on messenger. I live in Worcester and she lives in Inverness. Finally this year we got to meet up in Aviemore in Scotland, while I was up there on a campervan tour.



Vicky is still serving, and has a young son. It was great meeting her for lunch.

Best wishes,

Jane Griffin-Ash

Hi ladies

Just a quick note re the parade on Sunday.

I was able to be an attendee at the event for the first time - hopefully not the last. The comprehensive information I received from the Association, along with some from the RBL made my getting to London and back - free train travel with my veterans card, and getting to/from Horse Guards Parade, very easy.

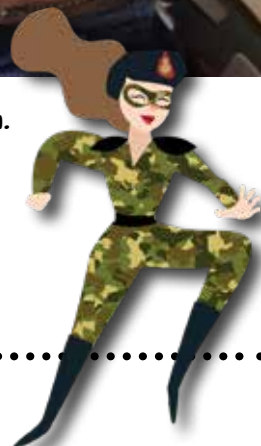
I traveled on the Saturday having booked a hotel in Covent Garden, so within an easy 8 minute walk of the event.

Meeting up with my WRAC 'sisters' was easy, and those of us who were first timers were soon comfortable within the group and chatting about shared experiences during our service.

So this is just a note of thanks, I'm sure allocating places and then ensuring everyone has their joining instructions via the RBL and yourselves is no easy task, but was certainly appreciated by myself.

Thanks again,

Melanie Southcombe-Tate





Dear Editor,

Many of us take inspiration from reading about what other branches are doing and magpie ideas for our own groups. I know I most certainly do!

Our members and groups have attended a variety of events both locally and nationally and more plan to do so, possibly for the first time, and we all know they will be

made to feel very welcome. I thoroughly enjoyed a visit last year with Hereford Branch who held a picnic in Queenswood Arboretum (I took the scenic route...no words) and visited the park bench dedicated to The WRAC Association after a beautiful walk through the forest. A visit to Worcester Branch was next on the cards, and as always a great gathering and thoroughly enjoyable. I met somebody who knew somebody that I knew from many moons ago. That's the joy of visiting branches - along with a very warm welcome, chatting with new and old friends and of course, a delicious lunch.

Wales & The West Area Facebook page is active and updated daily with information from a wide variety of military organisations and our area designated WRAC Association Poppy Wreath was placed by Tamworth Branch at The NMA in Staffordshire. Finally, diaries at the ready! This year's Wales & The West Area AGM will be hosted by Oxfordshire Branch on June 14th. A trip down memory lane for those of us who served in Bicester. Join us if you would like to.

Ann Stack
Wales and The West Area Co-ordinator



Dear Editor

A note from the North West & Cumbria.

Over the past year some of our groups have continued to meet monthly, some meet when they can for a coffee, and others meet less regularly. The Chester, Liverpool and Manchester groups are going from strength to strength and

meet once a month some for catch up lunches but mostly for the camaraderie and friendship. Manchester's Monday Quiz Night is still going strong well after COVID has finished and the numbers are good so it is always worth seeing if you can join them, speak to the Chair Pip Flegel for this. Cumbria is hoping to start a new group this year, we did try to meet last year, but the weather was not on our side, and it had to be postponed at the last minute.

A group of WRENs & WRAFs invited me to meet with them for their monthly get together which was well received and now we hope to meet regularly and hope to invite some other WRAC to attend once a month in Carlisle so watch this space!

With Christmas parties and New Year celebrations out of the way the year ahead turns to the upcoming Grand Reunion and everyone is looking forward to that. With the invites coming in thick and fast from the WRAC for the Three Sisters Racing Circuit I hope that some of our members can attend as it is an amazing event.

Dawn Hawker
North West Area Co-ordinator

Once again the BBC coverage of Remembrance Sunday at the Cenotaph contained a frustrating and disappointing reference to the 'rack' and 'ats'. Every year HQ sends a press release to the BBC and the RBL with details of our contingent and a very clear pronunciation guide. Every year at least one, and this year both, names are mispronounced, and every year we complain to little effect. This year with many rightfully disappointed members expressing their unhappiness on social media we were delighted that some offered to write to the BBC and encouraged as many as possible to get this message across.

Great news! Many people got in touch to say they had heard from the BBC, including Trisha Harris who sent us a copy of the response. Thanks to Trisha and all those who wrote - we hope to hear WRAC and ATS spelled out in full from now on.

Dear Miss Harris,

Thank you for contacting us about Remembrance Sunday: The Cenotaph (2024).

We've shared your comments with the production team and appreciate you taking the time to give your feedback on the script for this year's commemoration.

We note in particular your connection to the Women's Royal Army Corps and we're sorry to hear that the pronunciation of the association in this instance caused upset. The production team have looked into this and would like to apologise to the W.R.A.C for the hurt caused.

We can confirm that the correct pronunciation was shared with the research team in advance of the event, however due to human error in formatting the briefing notes, this information was not put in front of David Dumbleby this year. The team is deeply upset that the error has hurt those in the W.R.A.C and a wider audience. It's something that we take incredibly seriously.

Although there is no excuse, with more than 300 associations taking part in the March Past there is a huge amount of information to distil and process each year; in a fast-paced live environment details do occasionally get missed. And whilst the correct pronunciation has historically been shared with us, the team has never until now been made aware of the hurtful connotation associated with such a mispronunciation. Please rest assured that this will be noted incredibly clearly for future Cenotaph broadcasts, so that such a mistake does not happen again.

Our intention with the Remembrance programming each year is always to reflect the diversity, camaraderie, and spirit inherent in the many branches of veterans with respect and appreciation. It is similarly our desire to treat incredibly seriously any feedback shared with us on a broadcast of such importance to so many.

We thank you for taking the time to get in touch.

Kind regards,

BBC Complaints Team

Where are they now?

It's always great when we can put old friends in touch or solve a little mystery. Can anyone help with any of these enquiries? Please email editor@wraca.org.uk and we will pass your information on.

Dear Editor

I was amongst a small group of WRAC Officer cadets who met at Hindhead on 5th January 1965.

After 4 months of training we were transferred to the brand new Officer training centre in Camberley, Surrey, from where we were commissioned on 11 August 1965.

There are some people with whom I have completely lost touch and am looking for a way to find them - as I would love to organise some sort of reunion in 2025 to celebrate our 60th anniversary!

There are five people I hope to find : Penny AMES, Carolyn PODMORE, Rosemary STUART (or STEWART), Diane RUMSEY, Sandra BOYACK.

I would be very grateful if you could help.

Thank you,
Marianne Ramsey

Dear Editor,

I've been advised to ask for your help in putting a name to a photo of a WRAC soldier. The attached photo was taken in Kuwait on 10th March 1993 immediately after she had given a television interview to Paul Newman (not the actor, but a journalist with TVam!). 7th Armoured Brigade had assembled in the desert to be exfiltrated by Hercules transport aircraft.

I was Paul Newman's cameraman and during my three months in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq I took literally thousands of photos. Only now do I have the time to painstakingly digitise them and get them online as effectively they are a historical record that should be out there for all to see.

Each photo requires as much detail as possible: date, place, etc. and to be able to add the name of the WRAC soldier would be ideal.

Of course, if she can be located, I would be happy to send her the full resolution photos - I'm sure she would be happy to see them.

I appreciate any help you can give,

Kind regards,
Johnny Saunderson



Hello Editor,

I wanted to know the location in the attached photo, and if the building still stands, and any other interesting information.

Thank You
Jeff Bower



Dear Editor

Could you please ask if there is anyone who is in this photo from Queen Elizabeth Park Guildford 1975. My Mam was in there.

Best wishes,
Carri Walters

Hello Editor,

This is a photo taken in July 1948. I was wondering if any readers might know anything more about it please?

Many thanks,
Katie Rowntree





Obituaries - Their Final Salute



JO ANSCOMBE (NÉE STEER)

7th August 1924 - 1st October 2024



Jo Ancombe was one of our Hereford Branch Founder Members and celebrated her 100th birthday in August 2024. Following her death, Jo's daughter sent me a short Eulogy that Jo herself had penned.

Jo joined the ATS aged just 17 years and 6 months and served from 1942-1946, as a Radar Operative, on a mixed Heavy Anti-Aircraft Site, mostly on the East Coast of Norfolk and Suffolk, but also, on occasions, on a site based in the Midlands.

She met and married Dick, a local boy in 1949. They then went on to have 2 lovely daughters in 1950 and 1953. She was laid to rest with her husband and daughter in Sussex. Interestingly, Jo had also been a member of the 'Sussex Bonfire Society' - an organisation of tradition and pageantry dating back to the Gunpowder Plot which was unique to Sussex.

A wartime entry in Jo's autograph book states:

In one, make a pal of Jo,
You make one good and true,
And in her company go,
You will never be blue.

Lynda Armstrong

JUDITH ARNOLD (NÉE ABBOTT)

1st January 1941 - 26th August 2024



Judith was an amazing adventurer, leaving her small village of Batcombe in Somerset to move to London and later moving to Spain and Cambridge.

She served in the Territorial Army as Lance Corporal Judith Abbott in the early 1960s attached to the 54th Anglian Division, Royal Military Police. In her early adventures in the TA, she was the only woman in her section so some of the regulations of the time were overlooked and she took part in all the outdoor exercises

alongside the men, sleeping in frozen shallow scrapes in Thetford Forest in winter, guarding nuclear bunkers and once, while confusing left and right, navigating an army convoy through the middle of Stratford Market only slightly nudging a telephone box with an over-tight corner!

In the 1980s, as an activist for peace and nuclear disarmament, she camped and joined hands around the RAF base at Greenham Common. Through this campaigning, she got to know Michael Eavis and volunteered as one of the treasurers taking the entrance money in the very early days of the Glastonbury Festival. Judith travelled extensively and once, while travelling by train from Madrid to Lisbon, she took a turn at driving the Lusitania Express and then joined her new train driver friends to celebrate Mardi Gras in true local Lisbon style!

Judith loved the speed and excitement of Formula One and ahead of her 70th birthday, she chose to be driven at great speed around Silverstone in a Caterham racing car. More recently she was thrilled to have the opportunity to meet her lifelong hero, Sir David Attenborough.

Judith painted wonderful watercolours, created beautiful gardens and made us all laugh so much with her mischievous sense of humour. She discovered the WRAC Association only last year and would have been so honoured to have joined fellow veterans in the Service of Remembrance at the Cenotaph.

*Pamela Abbott
Daughter*



JANE FREEBAIRN

8th February 1950 - 21st August 2024

Jane was born in Giffnock in Glasgow. Her father was a publican and her mother was a district nurse and midwife and they subsequently ran small hotels in Scotland and County Durham, where Jane grew up with her younger sister, Marlen.

On leaving school, Jane went to The University of St Andrews gaining a Masters Degree in English Language and Literature. Seeking extramural activities whilst at university, she heard that the Tayforth Officer Training Corps had the best bar so she decided to join it! Not only did this lead to a future career in the Army but in November 1971, she became a member of the first team of women to perform Scottish Country Dancing at the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall.

Jane was commissioned into the WRAC in 1972 and opted to specialise in communications. She attended both the WRAC Officers and R Signals Officers Communications Qualifying Courses and served with 16 Signal Regiment and NORTHAG Signal Troop in BAOR, with the Gurkha Signals in Hong Kong and 8 Signal Regiment in Catterick as well as in MOD (PS10). She also worked with the WRAC as Staff Captain AG16 in MOD, at the WRAC College Camberley as both OC Cadet Wing and OC WONCO Wing and in her final appointment as SO2 WRAC1 at the WRAC Directorate. She was one of the few WRAC Officers to attend the Army Staff College in Camberley. She was diagnosed with Ulcerative Colitis in August 1989 and this, combined with the limited opportunities for WRAC officers in the Army at the time, led to Jane's decision to resign her commission in December 1990.

Seeking new challenges, Jane was employed at the Open University in Milton Keynes as Assistant Registrar (Assignments) for nearly 5 years before she decided to pursue her interest in horticulture and attended Merrist Wood College near Guildford. In June 1996, she successfully completed a National Certificate in Nursery Practices and was also awarded the Institute of Horticulture prize for the best horticultural project of the year! She then worked as a gardener in the Heather and Conifer Garden at Windsor Great Park until part-time weekend work in the Savill Garden Shop led to her being offered a full-time job as Deputy Manager of the shop.

She finally left Savill Garden in May 2001 to take up her appointment as the Benevolent Fund Case Secretary at the WRAC Association and in 2004 she became the General Secretary. During her time at the Association she organised the Annual WRAC Officers' Dining Club Dinners and gained a reputation for writing witty graces! Jane finally retired in September 2010, but... she never stopped working!! She and a friend whom she had met at Savill Garden had already started running a small nursery as a paid hobby, selling plants at local plant fairs to raise money for various charities. She also did voluntary work at the local church including serving at the church coffee shop and assisting at church fairs and locally organised events. She helped to set up the Irritable Bowel Disease Patients' Support Group at Frimley Park Hospital and organised quarterly meetings.

Jane loved travelling, gardening and enjoyed making cards for all occasions. She was an accomplished pianist and enjoyed attending concerts and musical events, and her interest in arts and crafts meant she regularly visited exhibitions, galleries and museums. She was intelligent, articulate, curious, kind, compassionate and had a keen and lively sense of humour. Throughout her life Jane made good use of her many talents. She was highly respected by her colleagues and much loved by her friends. She was first diagnosed with cancer of the tongue in October 2023 and endured her battle against the disease stoically, and in a determined manner. She died peacefully on 21 August 2024 in the appropriately named "Duchess of Kent Hospice" in Reading. Jane epitomised the WRAC motto – Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed. She will be greatly missed by her friends and family.

Sheila Johncey

Lt Col Sue Westlake MBE shares her tribute to Jane's work for the Association on pages 10-11.



ANN JONES (NÉE HISCOX)

18th October 1940 - 2nd September 2024

I joined the WRAC in 1957 and Ann joined a few months later. We both played a double E flat bass, the biggest instrument in the Band and became very close friends while serving. We sat next to each other all day long while practicing and performing. We lived in the same billet and we were like sisters.

I left the army to get married in 1959 and Ann left soon after, but we always stayed in touch, visiting each other between Grimsby and Bristol. Ann had three children and four grandchildren. She loved dogs and always had one.

Ann was Secretary of the Band Branch and she always kept us 'in the loop' with what was going on at the WRAC Association. We used to attend the Grand Reunions with a lot of other ex-band members, it was like our own little Band reunion! We always had a marvellous time when we were back together.

Ann will be greatly missed by all of the Band Branch members.

Carole Tyler



WO1 JEAN MOWE

11th September 1940 - 2nd August 2024

Warrant Officer Class 1 Jean Mowe WRAC served for 22 years and had a distinguished career. I first met her at the temporary Depot WRAC Lingfield in 1962 where she was the NCO for 2 platoon 1 Training Company and I was the platoon commander. Corporal Mowe, as she was then, had a talent for putting the recruits at their ease, instilling confidence and raising morale with her guitar playing on 'In Nights'.

Jean was a member of The Militaires fourth from the left. We remained friends from those days and after I left the WRAC on marriage. It was a privilege to have known her and I was proud of her achievements.

Jean was mentioned in dispatches and awarded an oak leaf to add to her Northern Ireland General Service medal. She also served in Berlin and later as a social worker for the army.

My deepest condolences to her family and many friends.

Jackie Skingley-Pearce
(2/Lt WRAC
1961-1963)



MOLLIE HENDRY (NÉE SPARROW)

7th January 1920 - 26th March 2024



Mollie Hendry, a beacon of light and joy, graced this world from January 1920 to March 2024 - an amazing 104 years! Born on January 7th 1920, at St. Pancras Hospital in London to Ernest and Ruth Sparrow, Mollie's journey was one of resilience, adventure, and boundless love. From an early age, Mollie's spirit radiated with mischief and warmth. Losing her father at just eleven months old, she found solace and love in her childhood years with her mother, Aunt Edie, Uncle Bert, and their daughter, Elsie who was like Mollie's sister although there was about 15 years difference in age. Together, they formed an unbreakable bond, weathering life's storms with laughter and unity. Mollie said she was a happy child, with golden ringlets, who used to get up to mischief at every opportunity. She had a happy childhood and often worked in her Uncle's shop serving (and tasting!) ice cream.

Embarking on her professional journey as a shorthand-typist, Mollie began her career at Sharpe Fairbrothers in London, where she met her lifelong friend, Iris. Due to her employment in a non reserved occupation, Mollie was considered eligible for call-up. Presented with the options of working in a munition factory, on agricultural land, or joining the ATS, she found herself recoiling from the notion of factory work and the prospect of winter farming. Consequently, she determined that the ATS was the most fitting path for her.

Mollie's time in the ATS was marked by fulfilment and joy, as evident from both her personal accounts and the published narrative featured in the two recent editions of the Lioness. (Special thanks to Nan Robertson for ensuring the publication of Mollie's story.) Tragically, during this period, at the tender age of 22, she faced the loss of her mother to cancer. Initially assigned to G.Ops, Mollie's independent spirit led to a clash with the Chief Clerk of that division. Consequently, she found herself reassigned, albeit in what she considered a more suitable role within the Home Guard. Here, she flourished, eventually assuming the position of Personal Assistant to Brigadier McCandlish, whom she greatly admired and enjoyed working alongside. Notably, she even had the opportunity to capture a momentous photograph with Field Marshall Montgomery and his faithful canine companion during this time, which featured in a recent edition of Lioness.

Following the conclusion of the war, Mollie transitioned back into civilian life and crossed paths with Norman Hendry, while residing in the same lodgings. Norman, serving as Chief Petty Officer Communications in the Royal Navy at the time, soon became an integral part of her life. Their marriage in December 1949 was swiftly followed by Norman's transfer to Cape Town, where Mollie savoured two and a half years of bliss amidst the serene slopes overlooking Kalk Bay. It was during this idyllic period that their first daughter, Gill was born. Subsequently, Norman's duties led them back to London, yet the allure of England failed to captivate their hearts. Opting for a fresh start, they embarked on a journey to Rhodesia, where they were warmly welcomed by Mollie's dear friend Iris and her family, who would later become cherished lifelong companions. In 1955, daughter Heather entered the world, followed by Anne in 1959, completing their family. Their time in Rhodesia was marked by an unwavering optimism, with Mollie's glass forever half full. Embracing each new adventure with a spirited enthusiasm, they epitomized a life lived to the fullest.

In 1983 they moved to South Africa where they again lived life to the full making many friends and enjoying the beautiful climate of Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. This was to be their forever home until Mollie passed away in March 2024.

Our memories of her are of a truly wonderful, kind, thoughtful, caring, loving, happy woman who brought joy and happiness to all who met her. Her 'glass half-full' attitude to life was a lesson for us all. We love you Mom and miss you every day.

Heather Campbell (Daughter)



In Lioness Issue 2 of 2024, the obituary for Carol Ederle contained a reference researched and written by our editorial team referring to her great Aunt Gertrude by the name of 'Trudy'. We have since been contacted by the main author, Jill Trainor, to inform us that it is not known whether or not she was known as Trudy. We are happy to correct this editorial decision.

JANET BARKER WOOD NÉE CAIRNS (KNOWN AS JENNY)

24th March 1925 - 7th June 2024



My Aunt, Jenny, was born in East Wemyss a small town on the east coast of Scotland in 1925 and passed away in June at the age of 99.

She volunteered to join the ATS in 1944 and served until 1946 reaching the rank of Corporal. She served in both France at Rheims and Luneburg/Neinburg in Germany. She worked in an administrative role and was involved in the preparation of the Second World War surrender documents. She was based in the school house in Rheims, General Eisenhower's advanced headquarters, as part of SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force). This was where the surrender documents were first signed on the 7th May 1945. In common with many others she did not mention her service until many decades later. It came to light when Jenny returned to Rheims, on a very special trip organised by the Veterans Association, to mark the 60th commemoration.

It was while in the ATS that Jenny met Bernard Wood, the love of her life, and they went on to marry in 1950. They began their married life in Huddersfield where Bernard was born, but soon moved to Crossgates near Leeds where Jenny remained for most of her life. It was whilst in Huddersfield that Jenny was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent a mastectomy. It's testament to her determination and resilience that she staged a remarkable recovery that extended to the rest of her life.



After moving to Leeds she used her excellent financial skills to great effect when joining the accounting team in Schofield's, an up market department store in the centre of Leeds. Jenny was always immaculately turned out and outfits were coordinated with carefully chosen accessories. I suspect she spent most of her salary in the ladies section of the same department store!

Jenny and Bernard made full use of Bernard's free railway passes travelling the length and breadth of the UK. Despite them both spending time abroad when in the army they only travelled abroad once after they married and that was to Norway. One thing they always made time for was to return to Scotland at Hogmanay to spend time with Jenny's family and friends as she was particularly close to her Mum. Bernard was a keen photographer and Jenny was more often than not the main focus alongside the gardens they visited on their travels. Both loved attending flower shows and drawing inspiration to craft their own gardens.

Bernard and Jenny were a great team who enjoyed each other's company. They didn't have children themselves, but enjoyed spending time with their 3 nephews, Stephen, Sandy and George and myself, Susan, their niece. They taught us card games as well as taking us on trips and Jenny loved baking so we were never short of a selection of treats, particularly her renowned lemon meringue pie. Sadly Bernard suffered a severe stroke and Jenny gave up her career to care for him and was determined to learn to drive so that they could enjoy outings. As with anything Jenny set her mind to achieve she passed her driving test at the age of 60 and they went on to enjoy many trips with friends. Bernard passed away in 1989 and although his passing impacted on her greatly Jenny, never one to feel sorry for herself, started to craft an independent life, making friends who had similar interests ranging from bridge, theatre trips and a new found love for ballet which saw her travelling to productions in different cities. She loved gardening and at the age of 90 she was still mowing her own, rather extensive lawns! Unfortunately, aged 92, it was apparent Jenny could no longer live independently and she moved into a nearby Care Home. The staff remember her fondly as someone who liked to sing and dance and who was always on the hunt for a biscuit and cup of tea!

I would like to thank Michelle and her colleagues at the Leeds branch of WRAC Association for taking time to attend Jenny's funeral, someone they didn't know but shared the bond of service with. Thanks also to HQ WRAC Association staff for facilitating the use of the ATS drape and wreath. It meant a great deal to us.

Jenny will be remembered as a loving, caring yet strong lady who always wanted to do her best and offer support and help to others - she retained her gentle lilting Scottish accent for all of her 99 years.

*Susan Wood
Jenny's niece*



OLIVE MAY RANDALL (NÉE DADY)

26th February 1922 - 29th August 2024



My Mum, Olive May Dady, was born on the 26th February 1922 in Alexandria, Egypt to Fred and Lily Sarah Dady ; Fred was a saddler in the RAOC. Mum was the second eldest of six children. On leaving the Army, Fred and Lily bought a Fish and Chip shop along the Gosport Road in Fareham, Hants. Mum was expected to work in the fish and chip shop, which she didn't enjoy at all, as she wanted to be a hairdresser!

She therefore decided to answer the call to enlist and joined the ATS on 20th November 1942 becoming W/238107 Pte Dady. She did her basic training at Northampton as a cook/stewardess and had postings to the RAOC Depot at Deepcut Surrey, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, COD Donnington in Shropshire and finally to Watchet in Somerset. During her posting to Watchet she met her future husband, my Dad, Sgt John (Jack) Edward Randall R.A. They were married on the 1st January 1946 at The Trinity Church, Fareham. Mum was then discharged from the ATS on the 29th January 1946. Her discharge record showed that she had displayed Exemplary Military Conduct and she was awarded the Service Chevron on the 1st May 1944 and the WW2 Victory Medal.



Mum and Dad were posted to Dover in Kent, Moascar Egypt, Hamm and Munster in Germany and their final posting was to Gosport, Hampshire in 1954. They had 3 children and moved into their forever home in Fareham in 1956 where Mum was able to be a stay-at-home mother. Family was everything to her and she was the glue that kept the family together. They shared 49 years together bringing up their family and having a fulfilled life.

From the 1960's until 2010, Mum became a member of the Scout Movement. She held the position of Cub Scout Leader to the 9th Gosport Cub pack through to District Cub Scout Leader. She received her Chief Scout's Commendation in January 1973, Long Service award in May 1985 and finally her Bar to her Long Service award in 1992 as well as becoming an Honorary Scouter in 1987.

When Dad retired, they both became members of The Civil Service Club, which took them on many club holidays in the UK and abroad. Mum became the club secretary, a position she held for many years. She was awarded the Certificate of Merit in recognition of long and meritorious service to the Civil Service Pensioner's Alliance.

Mum's family grew over the years - she had 6 grandchildren and 6 great grandchildren. She was always young at heart which made her a great Mum and Nan. She was able to live in her beloved home until April 2024, when she unfortunately needed to move into a nursing home. Mum sadly died in hospital on the 29th August 2024.

Mum truly lived a fulfilling and wonderful life, full of adventure, travel, responsibility and supporting her community. Her family and friends were always at the centre of everything she did and achieved - they had pride of place. She will always be loved and sadly missed by us all.

Jeanette Adams
Daughter

Last Post



Anscombe, Mrs Jo (née Steer), of Hereford, on 1st October 2024 (ATS)
Armstrong, Maj Wilma, of Castle Douglas, on 7th January 2025 (WRAC)
Arnold, Mrs Judith, of Cambridge, on 26th August 2024 (ATS)
Bartlett, Miss Pamela, of Malaga, on 20th February 2024 (WRAC)
Beeby, Mrs Betty (née Jackson), of Grimsby, on 13th December 2024 (WRAC)
Clissitt, Col Anne, of Grayshott, on 30th December 2024 (WRAC)
Davison, Miss Beatrice, of Bognor Regis, on 17th August 2024 (ATS)
Deaney, Mrs Lilian (née Hurst), of Walsall, on 11th September 2024, (WRAC)

Ewing, Mrs Donna (née O'Hara), of Falkirk, on 19th September 2024 (WRAC)
Fairbrother, Miss Jessie, of Leicester, on 8th November 2024 (WRAC)
Fogg, Miss Stella (née Hill), of Bristol, on 26th August 2024 (WRAC)
Foster, Mrs Joyce (née Eveleigh), of Cromer, on 9th June 2024 (ATS)
Freebairn, Maj Jane, of Reading, on 21st August 2024 (WRAC)
Humble, Mrs Cynthia, of Nottingham, on 3rd January 2025 (ATS)
Jones, Mrs Ann (née Hiscox), of Bristol, on 2nd September 2024 (WRAC)
Mitchell, Mrs Moira (née Irwin), of Durham, on 27th January 2025 (WRAC)

Pagan, Mrs Mary (née Hancock), of Godalming, on 8th September 2024 (WRAC)
Pearce, Miss Susan, of Birmingham, on 4th January 2025 (WRAC)
Prior, Mrs Sylvia, of Weymouth, on 21st January 2025 (ATS)
Randall, Mrs Olive May (née Dady), of Fareham, on 29th August 2024 (ATS)
Rogers, Mrs Patricia Norma (née Mahoney), of Bishop's Stortford, on 18th December 2024 (ATS)
Rosie, Ms Margaret, of Caithness, on 13th January 2025 (ATS)
Watson, Ms Katie (née Harris) of Newcastle, on 20th September 2024 (RMP)

Legacies & Donations

The WRAC Association very much appreciates the legacy received from Margaret Grant

OATS - L/Cpl Brown takes the crown!



Our search for our oldest ATS never stops which is why we were delighted to discover that we have an ATS member living in Penzance who is some three and a half months older than Ena Collymore-Woodstock who has held the record up until now.

L/Cpl Joan Mabel Brown was born on the 31st of May 1917, and enlisted on 14th July 1942 as an ambulance driver. Now Joan Harrison, she went on to become a driving instructor in Edinburgh and Aldershot before marrying a soldier in the Parachute Regiment. Her memories of her years in the ATS remain very clear; recalling the barracks at Edinburgh she says: "Our block was freezing cold. It was so cold that the men wouldn't tolerate it, so they put the women in instead."

We are very grateful to Joan's nephew John Stilwell for getting in touch with us and look forward to learning more about Joan in the next edition of the Lioness.



The Lioness Effect

The WRAC Association brings old comrades back together - sometimes many years after their service career. In 2020 Valerie Trueman née Jones wrote an article about her time in the WRAC, detailing the many positions she held and the countries she explored.

One of our readers, Felicité Vosper née Routh, recognized Valerie as her Company Commander from her posting to Donnington, Shropshire as a commissioned officer in 1960. Felicité remembers Valerie as a wonderful 'boss' and enjoyed her time with her until 1962 when she moved onto her next posting and had not seen her since.

As a result of the article, Felicité was able to make contact with Valerie, who was now living in Porthleven, Cornwall. They met in person on 28th September last year, 62 years after the last time she had seen her. Felicité says "I was thrilled to see Valerie in her home and introduce her to my husband, Anthony. At 98 years old she looked amazing- living alone and still managing the steps up to her front door. It was a lovely occasion".

It is great to hear that our magazine was able to connect these two. Keep enjoying your Lioness and make sure you read every last article contained within the covers - you never know who you could reconnect with!



The two Nonogenerians- Valerie on the left

Are you an ordained minister? Maybe you're a licensed reader, or licensed to take services in your faith or denomination.

The WRAC Association Chaplaincy is looking to expand its pool of people who can take a service at events across the UK, and offer ministry to members who take comfort in their faith.

Our pastoral work is small and so we are not looking for a large commitment - just to know there are people available should we need to call on them.

If you can help, or know someone who might be interested, please contact info@wraca.org.uk for an informal chat with our padre and HQ team.

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 - Articles for inclusion in the next edition of *Lioness* must be received by **1st July 2025**.
Please email directly to editor@wraca.org.uk.

Please send photos as attachments to the email; do NOT embed 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'.

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