



THE NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2017

BR0753



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'Walking the Walk' for Henley RBL Poppy appeal

On July 18-21 this year, Stan Ainsley and David Lees both members from the Henley Branch of the Royal British Legion together with Branch Chairman John Green, took part in the Nijmegen marches in the Netherlands. Nijmegen is the largest walking event in the world, with 50,000 military and civilian personnel taking part, and last year was the centenary.

They walked 40 kilometres (25 miles) a day for 4 consecutive days, raising a substantial amount for the Henley Poppy Appeal.

"Well done guys - you've done the Branch proud"

Dates for Your Diary

Meetings are held on 3rd Monday of the month unless otherwise advised.

Venue – The Christ Church Centre
Talk 11.30 (please be seated by 11.20)
Lunch 12 for 12.30

Please book for lunch by the Thursday before by email or phone to Colin Davies
Email c.w.davies70@btinternet - phone 01189 722527

Autumn Meeting Dates

18 September - Helen Barnett - 'Henley Town Manager' A Varied Role'

16 October - John Green 'Further letters from the Front'

12 November – Remembrance Sunday Lunch - 1pm (booking essential)

8 December - Christmas lunch

Previous Meetings

- **On April 24, David Lees**, a member of this branch, gave a well informed and interesting talk on 'The Fall of Singapore' and by all accounts stimulated a lively discussion around the table afterward! Thank you David and we hope we will hear from you again soon.
- **On 15 May, Milton Gordon** spoke on Military Service as a force for social engineering and about his personal experience on coming to the UK and joining the RAF. He put forward his view that military service was a force for social engineering and that it levelled the playing fields and opened up incredible opportunities in terms of training for the future. Milton, thank you also for the lively and interesting discussion which followed us to the dining table! Please come again.
- **On 19 June - David MacLeod 'The Toastmaster'** the talk by David of the history, traditions lived up to all expectations. Thank you David for also sharing some of your amusing encounters in your role over the years!
- **On 17 July - Tony Boffin** from the **National Trust** spoke to the assembly about **'William Morris (Lord Nuffield)** We had all heard of Morris the car manufacturer, but to be given an intimate look of his life's work and to follow his path from humble beginnings as bicycle maker, through his work for the war efforts of both wwi and wwii to his Knighthood and beyond, using his immense wealth to the benefit of so many. The name Nuffield can be found all over the world, in trusts, organisations, colleges and foundations.
- * **On 21 August - Alex Manning** - In keeping with WW1's centenary commemorations, Alex Manning, a branch member, gave an illustrated talk in which he described and examined the 1915 operation against the Turks that was meant to promise everything but delivered nothing. Thank you Alex for a very informative and detailed talk. It was much appreciated by us all.

Invitation to attend a lunchtime talk

The Henley & Peppard branch meets once a month for an informal talk on a wide range of topics followed by lunch with wine and coffee.

What underpins the organisation nationally is the financial, moral and emotional support it offers to anyone who has been in the forces and their families who might be glad of a point of contact or are in need of practical help in a number of ways.

Next year, 100 years on from 1918, there will be major events nationwide to commemorate the end of the First World War.

Plans are taking shape for functions in Henley. These include a special concert by the Aliquando Chamber Choir at St Mary's Church in Henley on November 10, 2018 in aid of the Legion's Poppy Appeal.

Why not come along to one of our meetings and enjoy a couple of hours of relaxing diversion and a tasty lunch? The meetings start at 11am with a glass of wine, followed by a talk at 11.30 and lunch at 12.

If you would like to take us up on our invitation to attend a luncheon meeting please contact our Branch Secretary by email c.w.davies70@btinternet or phone 01189 722527

For further information please contact Mollie Jeffrey our Membership Secretary on 07768851615 or email mollie@billjeffrey.com.

Monday 18 September - Helen Barnett - 'Henley Town Manager' A Varied Role'
Monday 16 October - John Green 'Further letters from the Front'

Introducing Branch Secretary - Colin Davies

Hello everyone my name is Colin Davies, your new Branch Secretary.

I have met & spoken briefly with most of you at Branch meetings, but here are a few words about myself.

I have been a member of the Henley & Peppard Branch for 5 years, serving on the Committee as the Peppard Standard Bearer; in that role I have represented the Branch at the repatriation of military casualties (brought to John Radcliffe Hospital), & local funerals of members & veterans.

I have a military background, having served in the Royal Air Force for many years after joining as a boy apprentice at the age of just 15. I specialised in aircraft maintenance & communications, first as a technician then as an electrical engineer.

My career took me to various places, including service overseas at Aden when it was in South Arabia (now Yemen), East Africa on secondment to the then fledgling Kenya Air Force, & Belgium at the NATO Military Headquarters at Mons.

I have lived in the area since retiring. Married with 3 children & 4 grandchildren.
My other interests include: National Trust volunteer, walk leader with Sonning Common Health Walks, beekeeper, amateur archaeologist, & "keep fit" (gym, pilates & yoga).

I look forward to seeing you all at the Branch meetings.

Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum

The Henley PROBUS Club, in the course of organising a visit to the two museums and possibly other venues in Woodstock, found that they had not got enough support and that the event might not be viable.

I asked Anne Evans, as our branch Events Organiser, if she would like to join me to take up two of the vacant spaces, with a view to assessing whether we should organise a Branch visit there. Anne agreed and John Green also joined us. PROBUS were still short of numbers, so I announced the vacancies at the July meeting.

Brian Triptree came forward and so there were four of us from our Branch who met the others at Badgemore Park Golf Club just after 9am on 22 August 2017. It was a dry day, but not as sunny as had been forecast. There was a total of 24 in the group.



Not to be missed was a photo opportunity in front of a 25 pounder field gun with a charming member of staff dressed in WW2 fashion!

The coach ride to Woodstock was comfortable and uneventful and we arrived slightly ahead of schedule. It was a short walk from where the coach dropped us off and we were soon delighted to enter the site, which holds the Oxfordshire Museum and, across a pleasant lawn, the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum housed in a modern, purpose-built, single storey building, spacious and well laid out.

The first item on the agenda was coffee and cake, which was much enjoyed.



The Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum covers all three services and their involvement in the County. As an example, Oxfordshire was, at one stage in WW2, home to as many as thirteen RAF Airfields. We were given a guided tour of the Museum by a well informed and articulate guide, then turned loose to see what exhibits interested us most.

We lunched at the adjacent Star Inn and having ordered our meal in advance took the opportunity to have a drink at the bar before sitting down to dine. It was a comfortable and hospitable venue.

After lunch we had a choice of seeing the town, to visit the excellent Oxfordshire Museum of County Life and Folklore or to return to the 'Soldiers' Museum. Anne and I had a stroll round this charming Cotswold town before sitting on a bench in the Town Square, admiring its splendid flower arrangements, and waiting for our coach. A little over an hour later we were back at Badgemoor Golf Club.

It was a most enjoyable day out and additionally it would seem there is a clear benefit in co-operating with the PROBUS Club to fill a coach if there is not sufficient take-up from the Branch. We hope to share our impressions of this outstanding trip by word of mouth to branch members and their friends in the hope that sufficient interest may be created to organise another visit there and similar trips in the future.

Malcolm Page

A Pilgrimage to Passchendaele a Hundred Years on



Menin Gate
Aerial View of Opening Ceremony
1928 and contemporary combined



It was a great privilege to join the Not Forgotten Association's visit to Ypres to mark the centenary of the Battle of Passchendaele. Over 4,000 had gathered for the special Services at the Menin Gate and Tyne Cot cemetery to pay homage to the Fallen, including Philippe, King of the Belgians and Mathilde Queen of the Belgians, the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and our Prime Minister. Many of our readers will have followed these events as the television coverage was extensive. The occasions unforgettable.

Our pilgrimage, however, also took us to other scenes of battle and behind the lines in Poperinge a town some 10 km West of Ypres to reflect on the human impact of this offensive - it is well worth an extended visit.

We also had the chance to see 4 places of particular interest, the Llyssenhoek Cemetery and Medical Visitor Centre, The Grave of Captain Noel Chevasse, the Town Hall where at least 5 of the 306 executions of British and Commonwealth soldiers took place and Talbot House the home of Toc H. The part played by the RAMC in sustaining British morale and saving lives, whilst under fire, cannot be over stated.

Every grave has a story to tell and that of Captain Chavassee RAMC, VC and Bar, MC. is an inspiring one:

"In 1916, Chavassee was hit by shell splinters while rescuing men in no man's land. It is said he got as close as 25 yards to the German line, where he found three men and continued throughout the night under a constant rain of sniper bullets and bombing. He performed similar heroics in the early stages of Passchendaele Offensive in August 1917 to gain a second VC and become the most highly decorated British officer of the First World War. Although operated upon, he was to die of his wounds two days later in 1917." He is buried at Brandhoek New Military Cemetery.

The Town Hall is impressive and the dark and dingy mini 'Death Row' a depressing reminder of the perceived need to maintain discipline by the imposition of the harshest punishment on boys who were barely men. The British were more lenient than other nations, there were over 3,000 convictions and 306 executions, only 4 or perhaps 5 in Poperinge.



Our visit to Talbot House, the first home of 'Toc H', was especially welcome after the sadness we all felt at the Town Hall. The history of Toc H is as follows:

"In 1915 the Revd Phillip (Tubby) Clayton was posted as an Army Chaplain to the busy Divisional HQ at Poperinge, (nicknamed 'Pops'). The Senior Chaplain, The Revd Neville Talbot, instructed Tubby to set up a rest and recuperation centre for the troops before they returned to the front. Tubby rented a hop merchant's house and set up an 'Everyman's house, open to all ranks with plenty of fun!

Continued.....

A Pilgrimage to Passchendaele a Hundred Years on

.....Continued

This was a bold initiative and the first time that officers were able to meet their men socially. It was named Talbot House in honour of Gilbert Talbot (Neville's brother) who had been killed earlier in the year. Of course, soldiers being soldiers, Talbot House soon became known by its initials TH, and then, in the radio signallers' parlance of the day as Toc H. It opened on 11 Dec 1915." The House is still in the hands of Toc H, a worldwide Christian Charity. It has a wonderful garden and a simple Chapel at the very top of the house well worth a visit.

Back to the front we must go. To 'Hill 60' and the 'Caterpillar Crater'. This vital ground is SE of Ypres. It is a ridge with a commanding view, now limited by woods and dwellings. It has proved to be easy to take but costly to hold. The WW1 memorials are scarred by the rounds fired in WW2. The hill is like a giant rabbit warren with tunnels and pill boxes everywhere.

The Caterpillar Crater is now a circular pool. A giant landmine inserted under the hill by military miners (Sappers) and detonated in the battle before Passchendaele. Hundreds of Germans were killed by the explosion. The birds do not sing on Hill 60.

Finally, to Tyne Cot, the name "Tyne Cot" is said to come from the Northumberland Fusiliers seeing a resemblance between the many German concrete pill boxes on this site and typical Tyneside workers' cottages (Tyne cots).

A hundred years ago this salient was a sea of mud. Casualties were high, 275,000 men were killed or missing, overall to the armies under British command at Passchendaele. The Germans suffered another 220,000 killed and wounded. Many of those buried are only 'Known unto God'. At the end, the point of it all was unclear. In 1918, all the ground gained there by the Allies was evacuated in the face of a looming German assault. Approximately 54,000 bodies have been recovered to date. Nevertheless, Ypres did not fall in WW1 and holding on to just a snippet of Belgian territory was important for the Allies.

"There is a great deal to reflect upon. If you are planning a tour of the battlefields, it is helpful to research your family names on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's web site. It is good to be prepared with a Poppy Cross or Wreath when you find a relative's resting place. "

Nick Lauanders

Great Pilgrimage 90

**Sunday 5 August 2018 - Thursday 9 August 2018
France and Belgium**

The Royal British Legion is recreating its 1928 pilgrimage to World War One battlefields for thousands of Legion members in August 2018.

Great Pilgrimage 90 (GP90) will be the Legion's biggest membership event in our history. A tour to WW1 battlefields and cemeteries will mark 90 years since the Great Pilgrimage.

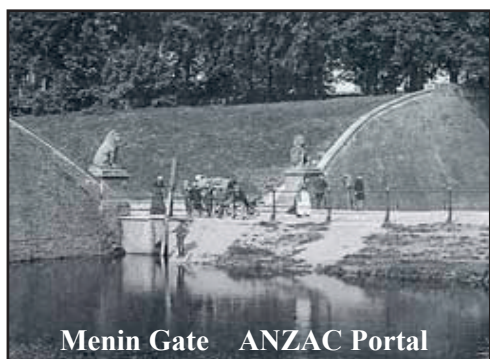
A decade after the end of WW1, veterans and war widows visited the battlefields of the Somme and Ypres before marching to the Menin Gate in Ypres on 8 August 1928.

On 8 August 2018, two representatives from every branch and county or their local community will carry their standards along the same route in Ypres to the Menin Gate, representing an entire generation that served while defending their country.

For further information please visit our webpage www.rbl-henley.org

The Menin Gate - Ypres

The history of Menin Gate goes back to Louis XIV (1638-1715). He was responsible for the erection of ramparts around the city of Ypres. The walls around the city were pierced by two gates, one on the road to Lille being named the Lille Gate, the other the Menin Gate.

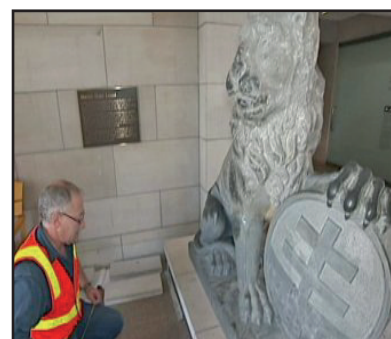


The lions had originally stood on plinths on either side of the Menin Gate at Ypres, Belgium. This gate was one of only two entries into the medieval fortified city. It was through this gate that Allied soldiers marched to the battlefields of the Ypres salient between 1914 and 1918.



In 1936, the Burgomaster of Ypres presented them to the Australian Government as a token of friendship and to acknowledge Australia's sacrifice on the western front. They have been on display at the entrance to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra for many years, however the War Memorial carefully packed up the stone lions to return to Belgium in memory of the 100th anniversary of the battle of Passchendaele.

From April 2017 until further notice, the lions can be seen again on display on the bridge by the Menin Gate. The lions will go back on display in Canberra in 2018.



The Last Post

Every evening at exactly 8 o'clock, the police halt the traffic passing under the Menin Gate to allow the buglers to play their simple but moving tribute to the memory of the soldiers who fought and died here so many years ago.



The Last Post Association is an independent, voluntary, non-profit-making organisation. It was the Association that first founded the Last Post Ceremony back in 1928, and it is the Association that is still responsible for the day-to-day organisation of this unique act of homage. It also administers the Last Post Fund, which provides the financial resources necessary to support the ceremony. It is a tradition that the Buglers of the Association should wear the uniform of the local volunteer Fire Brigade, of which they are all required to become members.

The Last Post was a bugle call played in the British Army (and in the armies of many other lands) to mark the end of the day's labours and the onset of the night's rest. In the context of the Last Post ceremony (and in the broader context of remembrance), it has come to represent a final farewell to the fallen at the end of their earthly labours and at the onset of their eternal rest.

Similarly, the Reveille was a bugle call played at the beginning of the day, to rouse the troops from slumber and to call them to their duties. In the context of the Last Post ceremony (and in the broader context of remembrance), the Reveille symbolises not only a return to daily life at the end of the act of homage, but also the ultimate resurrection of the fallen on the Day of Judgement.

Community Support

There are people living in the avenues, streets and roads near us who need our help.

How can we help?

Please Contact Nick Launders <mailto:nicklaunders@gmail.com> (ctrl and click to follow link if viewed online) or phone 01491 628 243) for more information on the following:

Home and Hospital Visiting

As a Home & Hospital Visitor, you can give individuals an opportunity to talk to someone, experience companionship and be part of the community.

Become a Telephone Buddy

Your friendship could be their lifeline.

Bereavement Support

Speaking to someone who has been through the same experience can be a great help.

Women at war 100



The role of women in the Armed Forces has developed since the British Army's first all female unit was established 100 years ago.

The Women's Army Auxillary Corps (WAAC) was formally instituted by Army Council Instruction Number 1069 on 7 July 1917, enabling the enrolment of women into the British Army for the first time, taking on roles as cooks, clerks, drivers, mechanics, telephonists, and telegraphers.

This followed on from contributions of women on the home front, as Britain faced a severe shortage of manpower due to conscription. 58,000 women served in the Corps before it was disbanded in 1921, with 82 women dying in service, and five being awarded the Military Medal.

The 100th anniversary of the Women's Royal Naval Service is this year, as they were formed in November 1917.

The Women's Royal Air Force was created in April 1918.

Members of these organisations were the first of many thousands to serve on military operations over the past 100 years up to the present day.

Explore our timeline (link below) to discover how the role of women in the Armed Forces has developed over the last 100 years, from the creation of the British Army's first all-female unit to the lifting of the ban on women in close combat roles.

<http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/ww1-centenary/women-at-war-100/>

Henley Cadets News

Henley Army Cadet Force

“The start of our new year means that anyone moving into Year 8 at school can now join our detachment, I eagerly await their arrival to continue growing Henley’s premier Cadet Force!”

Henley Army Cadet Force have returned from their Annual Camp which was held at St Martin’s Plain in Folkestone, Kent. The 10 day camp consisted of the Cadets military training including, shooting, fieldcraft, and first-aid amongst many other activities.



Henley Detachment also have good reason to celebrate, with the two Senior Cadets returning from the National Cadet Training Centre having successfully completed the Master Cadet course – the first Henley Cadets to do so since 2012.

Cadet Colour Serjeant Matthew Case was awarded the most outstanding Cadet in Oxfordshire Battalion; Detachment Commander 2nd Lieutenant Thomas Fearn was awarded Best Junior Officer in the County and Best Detachment Commander in Nivelle Company. The Detachment was awarded the Draper

Bugle, awarded to the Detachment in Oxfordshire which participates in the most activities.

Additionally Henley Army Cadet Force Collect Over £1,000 for Royal British

Detachment Commander 2nd Lieutenant Thomas Fearn commented: “2016/2017 has been a great year for the detachment; I’m incredibly proud of all of the cadets in Henley, without them there would be no Henley Detachment and we wouldn’t have achieved everything we had done this year”



447 Henley Squadron Air Training Corp

The Squadron passed their inspection by Wing Commander Chris Fisher OBE recently at the Squadron’s headquarters in Friday Street.

Wing Commander Chris said, “It is good to see so many of you here today and for turning out so well.” The Wing Commander was joined by Jon Payne, Wing Committee Chairman and Wing Warrant Officer, Scott Anderson.

The Mayor, Councillor Kellie Hinton and her consort Councillor David Eggleton joined the officers on the inspection and talked to the cadets. Families of the cadets had been invited to watch the inspection and afterwards they were taken on a tour of the headquarters to see the facilities and to watch demonstrations which included first aid and a flight simulator. Corporal Joe Day said, “The best recent activity was when we went flying at RAF Benson – at a certain height we got to take control of the plane and afterwards we did a loop the loop.”



After the tour and presentation, Cadet Harry Ellis who is the Mayor’s cadet was presented with the award for Best Air Cadet. Squadron Officer Tim Keating then thanked his deputy officer, the parents and the civilian committee for all their support and encouragement and said, “I’m very proud of you all tonight. I will continue to work hard, recruit more cadets and give these guys the best experience they can have and to offer things that you can only do as an air cadet.”

If you are interested in joining the air cadets, or would like to know more about the Air Training Corps, please call 07817 774682 or email oc.447@aircadets.org. You can also visit www.aircadets.tv for more information on Air Cadet Squadrons in your area.

Henley Sea Cadets & Royal Marine Cadets



Earlier this year Henley Sea Cadets and Royal Marine Cadets were recognised for their hard work and achievement at the annual prize giving event at their Training Ship Guardian based at the Eyot Boat Centre. The then Mayor, Councillor Julian Brookes, a former engineering officer in the Royal Navy said, "Congratulations to all the prize winners this evening. It's been a few years since I was Sea Cadet and am very happy to see the traditions continue and from what I am hearing there is more opportunities to learn more boat, river and sea skills".

You can join the cadets if you are (10-17) **AS A JUNIOR CADETS (10-11)** This is about having fun and making friends. You'll take part in lots of events and activities like cooking, rowing and power boating, plus learn about first aid and communications. **AS A SEA CADETS (12-17)** you will test your talents and stamina and develop new skills to give you a head start in life. You will also get the chance to make new friends and have fun. **AS A ROYAL MARINES CADETS (13-17)** If you thrive on a challenge? Pride yourself on your team work and strive to improve yourself? Then the Royal Marines Cadets could be for you! Field Craft, Weapons Training, Map Reading and Drill are all included in the training and we offer exciting opportunities to take part in challenging training in the UK and abroad. Royal Marines Cadets Detachments are an integral part of the Sea cadets with 114 Detachments in the UK. To find out more visit their website:

<http://www.sea-cadets.org/henley/cadets.aspx>

Poppy Appeal



The Legion provides information, advice and guidance to help people access the support they need, and provides direct support on benefits and money, war pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, independent inquests and employability.

The Legion runs care homes, seaside break centres for families of service personnel, a handy van repair service and an Admiral Nurse service for carers of people with dementia, and funds important research such as that into the effects of and treatment for blast injury at Imperial College, London. The Legion campaigns on a wide range of issues affecting the Armed Forces, including mental and physical health, housing and homelessness, community and adult care.

As custodians of Remembrance, the Legion ensure those who gave their lives are never forgotten. In Henley-on-Thames and Peppard, the annual Poppy Appeal 2016 raised £20,808.72. We would like to improve on that but many volunteers are crucial to this success.

How can we help?

Please contact us if you would like to volunteer to help with house to house collections, street collections or behind the scenes.

Are you planning a personal challenge such as a parachute jump or a bike ride? Please consider taking the opportunity to use that to raise funds for the Poppy Appeal through sponsorship.

Contact our Poppy Appeal Organisers:

Henley-on-Thames
Peppard

Annie Arscott

Lt Col Nick Launder

email: anniearscott51@gmail.com

email: nicklaunder@gmail.com

Canada's Unsung Hero of Dunkirk

Commander James Campbell Clouston

Despite his exceptional service James Campbell Clouston was never awarded a medal and remains virtually unknown, even in his homeland.

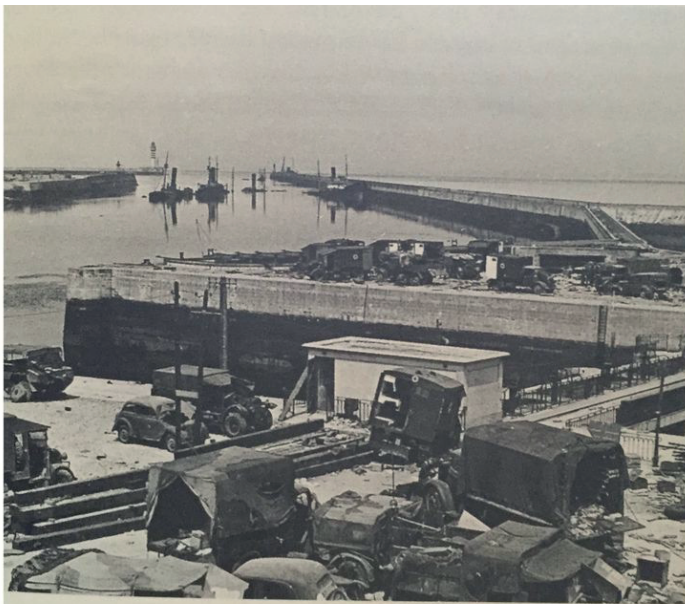
James Campbell Clouston (31 August 1900 - 3 June 1940) was a Canadian officer in the British Royal Navy, who acted as pier-master during the Dunkirk evacuation. While returning to Dunkirk, he died in the water after his motor launch was sunk by enemy aircraft.

Clouston was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, the son of William Stewart Clouston and Evelyn Campbell. He studied at Selwyn House School, Lower Canada College and McGill University. After training at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, he was commissioned as a sub-lieutenant on 15/8/1923, with seniority from 15/5/1921.

He first served aboard the destroyer leader Montrose in the Mediterranean, receiving promotion to lieutenant on 11/3/1924, with seniority from 15/6/1922.

He trained at HMS Excellent, the Naval Gunnery School at Portsmouth, in mid-1927. He then served as Gunnery Officer in the light cruisers Capetown on the America and West Indies Station, and Delhi at Portsmouth, being promoted to lieutenant commander on 18 June 1930. Promoted to Commander on 31 December 1934, Clouston served as a gunnery instructor at Excellent throughout the mid-1930s before being appointed to command the destroyer Isis on 29 May 1937.

Dunkirk. In May 1940 while Isis was in dock for repairs, Clouston was attached to the Naval Shore Party of eight officers and 160 men under the command of Captain William Tennant sent to the port of Dunkirk to help organize the evacuation.



This German photograph shows the base of Dunkirk's eastern mole after the evacuation. In the foreground, there is a large area filled with abandoned British transport. In the centre right, this area is now a car park, and also houses a substantial German box. Sunken ships can be seen near the mole.

The Naval Shore Party embarked on the destroyer Wolfhound at Dover and sailed on 27 May. Three officers cut cards for their assignments. Clouston won the eastern mole, a narrow wooden walkway mounted on a concrete breakwater, not designed to be used by ships, but the only part of the port that had not been heavily bombed by the Luftwaffe.

Clouston organized and regulated the flow of men along the mole into the waiting ships for five days and nights with barely a break.

On 1 June, Clouston returned to Dover to report to Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay. On the afternoon of 2 June, he and a party of 30 men left Dover on two RAF rescue motorboats for the final night of the evacuation.

Off the coast of France, the two boats were strafed and bombed by eight Ju 87 Stukas, and Clouston's boat was sunk, leaving the crew clinging to the wreckage. Clouston ordered the other boat to continue to Dunkirk, and while waiting for rescue he and his men eventually succumbed to exhaustion and hypothermia. Only one man survived.

On 11 July 1940, Clouston posthumously received a Mention in Despatches for his part in the Dunkirk operation.

Clouston is buried in Becklingen War Cemetery, Lower Saxony, Germany.

Ox and Bucks Light Infantry fought bravely at Dunkirk



The Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry was a light infantry regiment of the British Army that existed from 1881 until 1958, serving in the Second Boer War, World War I and World War II.

After service in many conflicts and wars, the Ox and Bucks Light Infantry was, in 1948, reduced to a single Regular Army battalion and on 7 November 1958, following Duncan Sandys' 1957 Defence White Paper, was renamed the 1st Green Jackets (43rd and 52nd), forming part of the Green Jackets Brigade.

Local men of the Ox and Bucks L.I.



With the publicity surrounding the recently released Dunkirk film it is important for us to remember members of our local regiment who fought and died or were wounded or captured defending the perimeter of Dunkirk so that many of our troops could manage to return to England in 1940.

At the outbreak of WW2, the 4th Territorial Army Battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Regiment, based in Henley, formed part of the 400,000 strong British Expeditionary Force sent to assist the French in resisting a likely German invasion.

The German army's advance headed by heavy tanks was however very rapid and as it swept into Belgium and Holland it was inevitable the BEF would be encircled at the French coast.

The difficult decision was taken to evacuate as many men as possible to England. Prime Minister Churchill who had been much involved in the withdrawal from the fated expedition at Gallipoli in WW1 knew it was going to be an almost impossible task and estimated that probably only 30,000 would safely return to England.

Admiral Ramsey with his headquarters at Dover rapidly organised a fleet of destroyers, minesweepers, ferries, and small craft to go across to France to rescue the troops gathering on the miles of shallow beaches surrounding Dunkirk.

Captain Michael Fleming who was adjutant of the 4th (TA) Ox and Bucks Battalion had raised a platoon of volunteers from his Nettlebed estate, Henley town and other local villages. He was ordered to defend the ancient hilltop town of Cassel 20 miles inland from Dunkirk to attempt to delay the German advance on the port. His men, who were not battle trained or equipped with modern Bren guns, the essential infantry weapon, held out for three difficult days. Captain Fleming, although wounded, rode his motor bike around the town constantly encouraging his men to keep their spirits up.

Having successfully held the German advance and with many men killed or wounded they were ordered to make for the coast "every man for himself". Many did not make it including Captain Fleming who was captured and died of his wounds in hospital in Lille in the October.

There is no doubt the delaying tactics of the Ox and Bucks and other regiments bravely defending the Dunkirk perimeter contributed greatly to the remarkable total of 338,000 men getting back to England.

For a more detailed account of the bravery of the men of the Ox and Bucks at Dunkirk go to www.nettlebed.org history section "Nettlebed's Warriors of World War Two".

Malcolm Lewis
Henley and Peppard Branch of The Royal British Legion.