

Branch History

(Scroll Down to view further details)

The Tilehurst Branch was formed on the 16th April 1934

The Royal British Legion

The Legion is the major voice for Service and ex-Service people throughout the year. We campaign and lobby on a wide range of issues, including mental and physical health, housing and homelessness, employment, community and adult care, disability, skills development and debt. Our aim is to continuously improve the welfare and support provided for veterans, serving personnel and their dependants of all ages.

The Royal British Legion commenced with its formation on Sunday 15 May 1921 by the amalgamation of four associations:

- 1. National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers (1916)**
- 2. British National Federation of Discharged and Demobilized Sailors and Soldiers (1917)**
- 3. Comrades of The Great War (1917)**
- 4. Officers' Association (1920)**

Tilehurst Branch

During 1939-45 war remained active; Branch has always carried out primary function Legion i.e. to look after welfare of the ex-service men women and their dependants.

During the 1930's the Branch adopted the Cumberland depressed area, sending over 2,000 gifts of clothing and other articles. The Service Committee during this time was very active and members such as the late Dicky Dormer and John Hall well known Officers of the Committee.

The first President was Lt. Col. J. F. Hawiring and the committee used the Tilehurst Village Hall for its meetings.

From the beginning the Branch planned to have a Club of their own where members could meet in comfort for Legion business and relaxation. With that end in view a separate fund was started, but then came the war, after which it was decided to press forward with the plan. By this time an anonymous donor had given over £100.00 specifically for the Building

Fund. A plot of land was bought in Downing Road and through the good offices of Mr Dormer and Hill & Sherwin a Building Committee was formed, and with assistance from the builder Mr A Francis an early start was made on the original building (which is now the Park Lane School Annex) which was based on a Ministry of Works "24" Hut from plans prepared and adapted by the Chairman to provide the accommodation required. This building had the usual offices for committee meetings and the club facilities for billiards etc. The cost of this project was £3,000.



Gen. Sir. Miles Christopher Dempsey KGB KBE DSO MC opened the building in July 1952. (He was also the Col. of The Royal Berkshire Regt.)

[*Further details of the General can be found by clicking on his photo.*](#)

It soon became evident that the Club Room and Bar Servery were not big enough, so they were enlarged and a cooled cellar constructed, this gave the Club the distinction of providing some of the best conditioned beers in the Town and the membership grew and became a popular centre for Royal British Legion Games Tournaments, and the committee room had to double as an overflow store. So with problem of space it was decided to look into enlarging the property, possibly by building upwards on stilts to give parking at ground floor level, but the parking requirements set by the Planning Authority could not be met on the site.

An approach was made to the Reading Borough Council to use their land at the west end of Downing Road and it was agreed that they would let the Branch have it in exchange for the original site and buildings which were required for Educational purposes to expand Park Lane Schools nearby. The Local Education Committee was extremely helpful in the matter. The Branch and Club Officers put plans as to the type of accommodation that was required, sketch plans were prepared by the Chairman and sent to Reema Construction to develop, as their prefab system would allow.

After a lot of meetings, some until the small hours, between the Contractors and Building committee headed by the Branch Chairman the problems of detail design were to give the premises an improvement on the old club. Many of these were to get over the extra work over the cost of the original estimated figure. Money came from the loans from Barclays Bank, Brewers and the Building Fund. The new building on the ground floor consisted of

Lounge Bar, Club Room, Snooker Room and an entrance foyer together with toilets. The first floor consisted of the Secretary's and Committee rooms, a large Assembly Hall and a flat for the Club Steward.

Over the years the club has been enlarged with the Billiard Room moving up to the area of the flat, we had purchased the bungalow next to the club allowing the Steward to move. The improvements included a pitched roof, the original roof was flat and was prone to leak, double-glazing improving the soundproofing and later air conditioning. The membership has increased from a few hundred till now when it is over 2,000 in 2008. The Legion changed the class of membership to one class i.e. Member where in the early years it was Ex-service 60% and Associate 40%.

The new building was opened on the 15th November 1974 by the then Royal British Legion National President General Sir Charles Jones GCB CBE MC.

Compiled by M J Potten 1 May 2008