



## March / April 2025



My thanks (I think) to John L. for suggesting I update our logo to reflect that all service badges and crests have been changed after King Charles III was crowned with the Tudor crown rather than the St Edward's crown used by the late Queen. I have done my best with the new army logo, but if anyone can find a better image, please let me know! My thanks to Helen for her delightful piece about her partner Rick's postal mission in Afghanistan, a reminder of how important mail and contact with family and friends is to all those on active service in hostile environments. And a reminder too, that **all** supporting troops, including territorials, many part of the Royal Logistics Corps, provide vital support to our frontline troops, wherever they are in the world. And as always, thanks to Norman for his Chuckle Corner.

### Ray Hubbard

We were sad to hear of the recent death of Ray Hubbard, aged 91, the last man to farm with the Suffolk Horse, more usually known as the Suffolk Punch, and a very good friend of the Dickleburgh RBL branches and, of course, of Bun, Cuppa and Chat.

Born in 1933, in Langmere, Ray came from a family that had worked with horses for generations, in both farming and transport. He started as a Saturday boy on Mr Saunders' farm at Langmere during the war when he was eight, while attending Dickleburgh School (in what is now the Church Rooms) where he learned singing and folk dancing. He went on to Diss Grammar School, but his hopes of becoming a vet were dashed as the family could not afford the fees, so became a full-time horseman at the farm. He was head horseman at 17 and was running the farm aged 21. He retired from farming in 1966 when Mr Saunders died and tractors came to the farm, and worked in the building trade for the rest of his career. Ray was a fount of knowledge about working horses, country lore and farm implements. He gave numerous talks and exhibited items from his collection of horse and farming artefacts, only giving up when he reached ninety.

Music was a big part of Ray's life, and many will remember him as a traditional entertainer, both as a one-man band and leading his concert party ('Norfolk Bred') - singing, playing the accordion, traditional step dancing and telling stories and jokes, many of them tongue twisters and with a play on words to rival the two Ronnies. Some members of Bun, Cuppa and Chat not only went to school with Ray but also performed with him in his concert party. He raised thousands of pounds for charity through his performances, never taking any money for himself.

Ray was a one-off, keeping alive the history of Norfolk and Suffolk, its dialect, humour and farming traditions and he was involved in many aspects of village life including the church and the Scouts. Our thoughts are with Ray's sister, Jillian, and her family. Ray is now reunited with his beloved wife Pamela, with whom he performed for many years. I do hope there is an accordion waiting for him up there in Heaven! We will miss you, Ray.



Ray with Britain and Boxer in the 1950s



An entertainer for many decades



## How WO2 Ruddom (Rick) fought a battle for a Post Box and became an honorary member of the Letter Box Appreciation Society - whilst on active duty - *By Helen King*

The postman with his key unlocks  
What seems to common eyes a letterbox,  
But 'tis a treasure-trove of hopes and fears,  
Of truths and joys and sweethearts' smiles and tears.

For Rick, employed by Royal Mail and with 30 years of proud territorial service in the Army's Postal and Courier Service, there were more than a few tours of duty in hostile environments to destinations for which Tripadvisor offers zero ratings and the *Lonely Planet Guide* is significantly short of fun facts and places to explore. So, it was inevitable at some point that call-up papers would arrive for Afghanistan and in 2007 and again in 2010, Rick was deployed to support Operation Herrick.

For much of the 19th century, the British Army depended upon the civilian postal services but in 1882, a Royal Warrant authorised the first British military postal service – the Army Post Office Corps. Two years later, the 24th Middlesex Rifle Volunteer Corps (The Post Office Rifles) provided the manpower to form the Army Telegraph Corps, and 1913, both services became part of the Royal Engineers. In the 1950s, the unit was renamed the Postal and Courier Service, and in 1993 the service transferred to the newly-formed Royal Logistics Corps.

The life of a civilian rural postman was very hard in the late 1800s: he worked long hours, seven days a week for an average wage of 16/- per week. If his route were more than 14 miles a day he was entitled to every other Sunday off. He had to agree to 57 rules laying down his duties and conduct, including: No calling ' by ' while working; no smoking on duty; to have no connection directly or indirectly to the ownership or management of a public house; uniform to be worn at all times when on duty; and not to agitate for the discontinuance of a Sunday delivery. [*I think I remember Sunday collections, not sure about deliveries! Ed*] I got the impression that the conditions and expectations of Postal and Courier Service personnel in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century were not dissimilar.



Unloading mail at a post office in the Western Desert, July 1941 (not Rick!)



Rick's pet weed and Jess the cat



Most of the current guidance on mental well-being, such as spending time with family and friends, playing with your children, using technology to stay in touch with those further afield, or volunteering in your community, did not apply when serving in a hostile environment. Being away from home and family and the comfort that provides was extremely difficult - no telephones, no social media, no contact - just letters delivered by a Military Snail. Personnel might be billeted in a 600-man tent, with no safe natural environment to enjoy some peace and quiet, and with the only option for a therapeutic 'soap' being a dust bath. While serving in Afghanistan, Rick nurtured a pet weed at Camp Bastion and adopted a cat (not black and white!) named Jess at the Kandahar base.

The British Army built Camp Bastion in the desert in 2005 and, until it was handed over to the control of the Afghan Ministry of Defence in October 2014, it was the logistics hub for the International Security Assistance Force operations in Helmand during the war in Afghanistan, capable of accommodating over 32,000 people. The base was also home to troops from other countries, including the USA and Denmark.

Rick took great exception to the post box at Camp Bastion - a random and dilapidated plywood box for letters and decided that British troops deserved a red Royal Mail cruciform pillar box as a focal point for their contact with home. He started a correspondence with Royal Mail management, which very quickly escalated to the Chairman's office. There was nothing that the Chairman would like to do more than provide a post box - and its long journey started, eventually getting clearance to fly from RAF Brize Norton and landing in Helmand Province in time for Rick to ensure it was settled in using the Postal and Courier Service's motto - Swift and Secure.



The offending post box



**A reminder of home**

Camp Bastion airfield and heliport handled up to 600 fixed and rotary-wing aircraft movements every day in 2011, operating combat, medical and logistics flights so the large red letter box drew a lot of attention. This is when it all went downhill rapidly, Rick was called into his CO, and severely reprimanded, the language being too colourful to print in such a refined newsletter as this. The general content relating to failing to follow the chain of command, inappropriate use of military transport, and making the Corps (read CO) a laughing-stock at Camp Bastion. With his ears ringing, Rick was delighted to depart for an audit visit to the other forward operating bases for a few days.

Royal Mail were not backward in recognising their media opportunities and the need to stay on the right side of the Government given its intention to review their services under the Mergers and Monopolies Commission. Also, Royal Mail was, and still is, a very strong

supporter of Territorial Army reservists (something we should all be grateful for in respect of any UK employer), and so on his return to Camp Bastion, Rick was immediately called into the CO, again. He was given a formal invitation from No.10 Downing Street to meet with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence as well as senior Royal Mail managers and was asked to deliver the PM's mail on his way over the threshold of No. 10 for afternoon tea.

A few weeks' later Rick's formal invitation to join the Letter Box Appreciation Society arrived, delivered by the CO, with no accompanying words! Another organisation, the Letter Box Study Group, exists to 'preserve and celebrate a category of street architecture that we are inclined to take for granted' but it's fun too – 'strolling and seeking unusual, undocumented, or picturesque boxes is a timeless pleasure', its website asserts. If twitcher is the word for someone who collects bird sightings, should there also be a word for letter box spotter? I think Rick's CO had a few choice ones - but doubt there is an appropriate word for the post box in Camp Bastion, Afghanistan and what it symbolised for so many soldiers.



**Personalised delivery to No. 10**

### **Bun Cuppa and Chat News**

Our dear Bun, Cuppa and Chat poster girl, Sylvia Duckett, passed away recently, aged 93, after spending a month in hospital, lovingly cared for by NHS staff and her family, with her five children being with her on a 24/7 rota. I will include some more about Sylvia's life in our next issue.

We continue to keep in our thoughts all those who have lost spouses or other family members in the past few months.

There has been a spate of falls amongst our Bun, Cuppa and Chat ladies in the past couple of months resulting in **three** broken hips and a broken shoulder, plus one extended hospital stay. Not sure what Glenn has been putting in your tea, ladies, or if you just need to take more water with it! We wish, Kathy, Diane, Mary, Daphne and Sheena a quick return to fitness and mobility. John G. is now settling into a local care home.

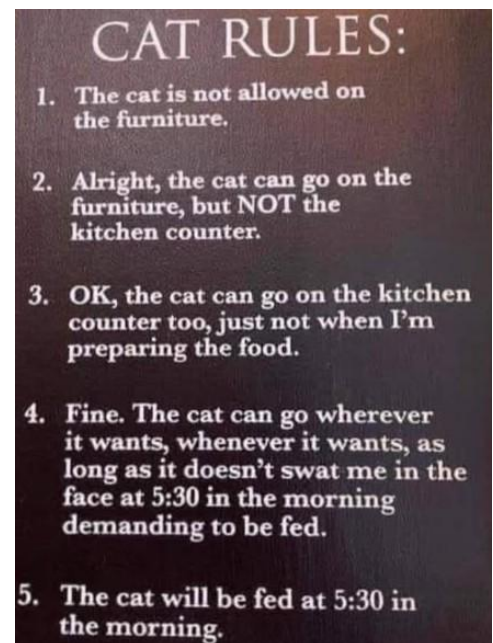
We are sorry we had to cancel the March Bun, Cuppa and Chat but drainage work at the farm behind the café meant that the water supply was off so Glenn took the opportunity to lay a new floor in his galley, so he can whizz around more safely creating his culinary delights. The next events are:

**Thursday 24 April, 2.30-4pm**

**Thursday 22 May, 2.30-4pm**

**Thursday 26 June, 2.30-4pm**

We look forward to welcoming everyone back!



### **VE Day 80 Service**

**8 May, 7pm, Rushall Church**

Everyone is welcome to join us for this service to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Victory in Europe Day.

RBL VE Day 80 pins will be available in return for a donation to the Poppy Appeal at the service and at Bun, Cuppa and Chat events in April and May.

## Norman's Chuckle Corner

- A husband called to his wife to put on her coat. "I'm off to the County Arms Hotel; they serve marvellous food." "Oh, lovely," says his wife. "Are you taking me out for dinner?" "Don't be silly, woman, I'm turning off the heating when I go."
- Teacher gets angry with a pupil, "I told you to go and stand at the end of the line". "I tried", said the boy, "but somebody was already there".
- I went to the doctor to tell her of my dreams about Tom Jones. I said, "Is this common?" The doctor said, "It's not unusual".
- Why did the French football team score so many own goals? Toulouse
- This morning, I saw my neighbour talking to her cat. It was obvious that the poor woman thought the cat understood her. When I got home, I told my dog, and we had a jolly good laugh together.
- I tripped over my wife's bra. It was a booby trap!
- A big moron and a little moron were sitting on a fence. The big moron fell off. Why? The little moron was a little more on,
- I told my girlfriend I had a job in a bowling alley. She said "Tenpin"? "No", I said, "It's permanent."
- A friend of mine tried to annoy me with bird puns but I soon realised that toucan play at that game!
- I said to the waiter, "How long will my spaghetti be?" He said, "I don't know – we never measure it".
- An elderly man was struggling to dig his vegetable patch ready for planting. He had no-one to help as his only son was in prison serving a long sentence. He told his son of his difficulties in his next letter and said he would try to get someone else to help. In his next letter home, his son wrote, "Dad, don't dig there, that's where the bodies are buried!" At 3am the following morning, three police vehicles including an armed response unit, arrived at his Dad's home, and dug up the entire back garden, but found nothing. In his next letter home, the son wrote, "Hope you have got the vegetables in now, Dad – it was the only way I could help, being stuck in prison."

## Musings from the Mutts and the Moggie

Hi, Sugie here. The bedroom window is a great way to sneak in and out of the house via the conservatory roof. I jumped out at midnight when I was supposed to be going to my bed in the back kitchen, refused to come in when called, came in through the window at 5.30am and sat on the Missus's face (see 'Cat Rules' above!), exited again, caught a mouse which I brought in through the cat flap, leaving its innards as a present for the Missus, then out through the cat flap and back in through the window to wake the Missus up at 7.30am to make my breakfast. I think she got off lightly!



Hi, Sahara here, I've got a poorly eye, requiring five visits to the vet so far. Not sure what the Missus means when she talks about taking out a second mortgage? This is me putting my best foot forward on our walk yesterday!

Hi, Nacho here. It is so tiring being an active Toller – I just needed to lie down and have a rest. Not sure what the Missus means when she says that I am taking up an entire three-seater settee. It's a perfect fit for me and I don't need to share it with anyone – whether human, canine or feline, thank you very much!



I'm having an adventure on Saturday, I am going for an introduction to Mantrailing. I'll tell you all about it in the next issue. Missus says it's all about sniffing – I am up for that! Sounds fun.

**The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams**

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**Organisers: The Revd Norman Steer and Rosemary Steer, T. 01379 854245**

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*Please contact Rosemary if you would like your name removed from the mailing list.*