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***The Downsman***

**Regular bulletin from The Royal Society of St. George, North Downs Branch, Winter/Spring 2023.**

**A year to remember**

2022 was certainly an extraordinary time: a year in which Russia invaded Ukraine, with twelve months of political instability at home, the anxiety of a growing cost-of-living crisis, and the world standing still to take in the news of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth ll.

The long reign of our late Queen spanned a period of change, sometimes upheaval, in our national life. From Empire to Commonwealth, from the demoralisation resulting from the Suez crisis of 1956, to the restoration of pride in 1982 with victory in the Falklands war, Queen Elizabeth remained a fixed point in the nation’s life; the monarchy acting as an anchorage in stormy waters.

Patron of The Royal Society of St. George, as well as countless other charities and organisations, the Queen inspired so many in the ideals of duty and service; qualities which will live on in the new age of His Majesty King Charles lll. God Save the King!

**Branch activities**

Here at North Downs, we have enjoyed some exciting events: a St. George’s dinner at The Spitfire, Kings Hill, at which we welcomed a new young member, Soham Joshi; and the unveiling of our new stall and gazebo at June’s Picnic in the Park in East Malling, at which we raised a considerable sum for local charities.

We were able to make generous donations to causes, such as the Heart of Kent Hospice, thanks to our friend and fellow member, Jeff Wheeler, who provided us with a substantial number of plants and flowers from his market garden, for sale on the day.

Deputy Chairman, Mike Sutton, has been working hard to build links with the newly-formed East Malling Sea Cadets and we sincerely hope that this growing unit will, in the fullness of time, affiliate to our Society. Mike has also been helping the East Malling and Aylesford Food Banks, important facilities at a time when many families are facing great hardship.

Finally, the Branch (again, thanks to Mike) was involved in local pre-Christmas markets, an excellent opportunity for us to reach out to the community and disseminate our message of ‘loyal, duty and service to England.’

**New National Chairman takes up role**

The Branch offers its congratulations to the Society’s new Chairman, Nick Dutt. Taking over from Joanna Cadman, who gave us determined and tenacious leadership over the years, Nick promises to maintain the Society’s mission, and to build the membership, with a particular emphasis on reaching out to younger people and those from more ‘diverse’ backgrounds. We look forward to working with Nick and welcoming him to North Downs events.

**Battle of Britain Memorial**

At a time when money and funding are in short supply, we are pleased to report that the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust is holding its own and continuing with its essential work of visitor-welcoming and education at the Memorial and Wing at Capel-le-Ferne, near Folkestone.

Our Branch President, Group Captain Patrick Tootal, a leading light in the Trust, encourages all of our supporters to spread the word about the Memorial. If you would like to make a contribution, or offer help in some capacity, please contact us via the Branch address.

**Battle for the Greenbelt**

Key members and supporters of the Branch are campaigning hard on greenbelt and conservation causes across Kent and Surrey.

Andy Smith, Branch Vice-President, continues to play a prominent role in the London Greenbelt Council; Cllr. David Thornewell has spoken out against the proposed development of many green spaces in our local area, calling, too, for an improved Local Plan for the Borough; and film-maker, Daniel Markham has produced some robust films on countryside protection for his YouTube channel. If you would like to join the campaign, get in touch with us via this newsletter.

**Forthcoming events**

Our first meeting for 2023 is an informal branch quiz is planned for Wednesday 8th February, arrive 7 for 7.30pm. Tickets will cost just £10 per person. If you would like to book a place, please send your cheque to the address below, made payable to RSSG North Downs Branch, or contact us on **07956** **035821**. (Dress, informal.)

And on Saturday 22nd April at 6.30pm, the Branch will be celebrating the Feast of St. George with a wreath-laying at the Leybourne War Memorial by the Church, Castle Way, Leybourne near West Malling, Kent ME19 5HE. A buffet supper costing £15 per person will follow at the Old Rectory Pub, Leybourne will follow. Please contact us if you would like to reserve a place!

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