**Bishop Martin Seeley writes…**

During my ordained ministry of more than 40 years engagement with annual acts of remembrance seem to have steadily increased.

I think this is in no small part due to the work of the Royal British Legion in the life of our nation, who call on us to remember the sacrifice and service made by our armed forces during the last 100 years.

This year is the centenary of the founding of the Royal British Legion and as this season approaches I urge us all to show our support for their incredible work supporting service and ex-service personnel and their families in need.

In a couple of weeks’ time we will start to see poppies appearing for Remembrance Day.

One hundred years on, it is easy to forget the challenges and risks the original supporters of the British Legion faced. The first poppy appeal was launched in a period of serious economic depression.

This was in 1921, the year the British Legion was founded and raised over £106,000.

This was a vast sum of money at the time, equivalent to more than £5 million today, raised in midst of post-war national financial straits.

The fundraising efforts grew year on year, and the famous Flanders poppy would become an enduring symbol of remembrance, sacrifice and hope.

The success of the poppy appeal and the work of the Royal British Legion was built, as now, upon the determined effort of thousands of these members and volunteers.

Sir Frederick Lister, who was instrumental as one of the founders and served as the first chairman remarked in those early days of 1921 “the part the British Legion will play in the nation will be decided by the branches of the Legion.”

Last Sunday I had the privilege of preaching for the Suffolk service of thanksgiving, at the cathedral in Bury St Edmunds, for the centenary of the Legion.

It was a very moving occasion, with representatives from the branches across our county.

Suffolk had been involved at the start of the Legion and by the end of 1921 there were 12 branches in Suffolk stretching from Newmarket to Lowestoft.

One hundred years onSuffolk has a vast network of branches who remain to this day committed to the original purpose of giving help and support to members of the armed forces community and their families.

It is through those branches, including here in Suffolk, that the care for forces personnel and their families has continued to this day.

Helping in the most practical ways, ensuring that care, equipment, and facilities are there for ex-service personnel and families in need has been the enduring activity of the Royal British Legion.

The organisation has always recognised it has an enduring commitment to all those who seek it’s help and the commitment is lifelong to every member of the armed forces, from the moment they receive a single day’s pay.

It can often be the case that a person may not need to call on the Royal British Legion until well after they leave the armed forces but in any eventuality, the commitment still stands.

The sheer scale of the suffering ex-service personnel had endured and their families suffered had produced a united effort to care for them as a result of service in the armed forces during The Great War.

Unemployment had reached a staggering two million people by 1921 and poverty and hardship were common experiences for many.

Despite the conditions, the founders of the Legion would not be deterred from their commitment to help others.

Through its work with schools and in the quiet dignity of the many Acts of Remembrance that happen across the country, as well as the great Festival of Remembrance in the Albert Hall, the Royal British Legion has passed on to successive generations the ideal expressed in the Royal British Legion’s own motto of ‘Service before self’ – calling all of us, in whatever forms we can, to service and compassion.

We have learned through this pandemic once again that it is our care for one another, our loving our neighbours near and far that really matters, that really does make the world go round, and that reflects the will of the God who made us all.

The Royal British Legion here in Suffolk lives out that commitment to care for others year after year, and I wish them well for the years to come.

Let’s all make sure we give them special support in this their centenary year, and follow their inspirational commitment of caring for those in need.