



# THE BEVIN BOYS ASSOCIATION

FOUNDED 1989

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## NEWSLETTER FOR AUTUMN 2025.

### Chairman's Message.

**Welcome to Autumn 2025.** Unfortunately we had to postpone our AGM this year as I was in hospital with a broken hip!! Now at home but not moving as well as I hoped, still not driving, which is a real nuisance!!

The AGM will now be at 3pm on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2026 on Zoom, so please notify me if you would like to join and require the log-in details.

I wish you all a Happy and Healthy 2026,

**Anne. (Lane)**

### MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY.

After some very hot summer days, we have settled into typical Autumn golden leaves and dark nights.

There is very little to report, fewer enquiries regarding past contacts with Bevin boys. One of note was Lesley Kirkman, who wrote asking for any information we had, which is being dealt with. Information was requested by John Avery who is publishing a book called "Lest we Forget"

Best Wishes to everyone. I hope it is an easy Winter.

Best wishes,  
Liz Todd.

### MESSAGE from the TREASURER.

As might be expected, movement on our account is diminishing. Over the time that I have been treasurer we have planned for a small deficit budget each year so that we use our funds, where we can, to support meetings of Bevin Boys and to make sure that the story of the Bevin Boys lives on rather than sit with too much money in the bank account.

I am pleased to say that we have achieved some of those aims. Our main items of expenditure having been firstly the printing of the Bevin Boy Leaflets, a kind donation from a Bevin Boy Grandson covered most of this. Secondly the copying of a unique album of Bevin Boy photos for our use in the leaflet, the website and for when photos are requested by the media.

The donation for the leaflets had been received last year but owing to delays both at our end and in the printing the cost appears this year. Therefore, we did have a credit last year but a deficit this year. Had the leaflets been printed sooner the deficit this year would actually have been less.

We continue to pay for Zoom so that we can use it socially and to achieve an AGM where accounts can be presented. The other main item of expenditure was to send one Bevin

Boy to Westminster Abbey to represent the Bevin Boy veterans at the recent VE Day service. Despite all of this we still maintain a very healthy balance which enables us to continue as your Association.

Barbara McElroy.

### ARCHIVIST

This has proved to be a busy year. Last Autumn saw a flurry of activity as we received a very significant album of Bevin Boy photos which we decided to copy before sending on to Caphouse Museum. We were able to use a couple of the photos in our new information Leaflet. You should all have received copies of these, but should you require more please contact me. We have been able to put the leaflets in all the English and Welsh Mining Museums (I did try Scotland but received no response) and consequently we have had quite a few phone calls and emails from Bevin Boy relatives. Sadly, the Imperial War Museum couldn't take them as they have a policy only to display their own. I do also take the leaflets to talks on the Bevin Boys (I am still doing some) and they are always well received. There was more activity around VE Day. We were so pleased that a couple of Bevin Boys were able to be involved in the services at Westminster Abbey and in Wales.

After my last Archivist report in March where I hadn't had a response from the British Legion I am pleased to report that they did come up trumps and issued an invitation to veteran members of the Bevin Boys Association to Westminster Abbey. It is sad that only one was able to take up that invitation- an account of which will appear in the newsletter. I hope you were all able to watch the event on television- it was very moving and so good that the Royal family took time to talk to all veterans including our Bevin Boy who hasn't washed his hand since shaking hands with the King. We also had good representation on TV during the VE Day week- 3 or 4 Bevin Boys were interviewed so our thanks to all for keeping the Bevin Boys in the public eye.

Currently we are working with a lady that is hoping to make a TV programme about the Bevin Boys and we are also supporting some research into football and miners (Pit to Pitch) Thank you to our loyal members – as always if you have any photos or memories we are always pleased to share them.

My very best wishes to you all,  
Barbara McElroy

### MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S REPORT.

Sadly we now have 1934 names in the Book of Remembrance and 20 BB's who still receive the twice yearly Newsletter, as well as other friends and family. Please would you write, telephone or e-mail me, to notify me of Change of Address and/or Telephone numbers and if you hear of any Bevin Boys, members or not, who have sadly passed away. See above for my address and Telephone number.

Anne.

### Sales.

For sales please apply to Mrs Anne Lane, Snipelands, Bourton Combe, Flax Bourton, Bristol. BS48 3QL. Tel: 01275 463703. for details of how to pay. We are thinking of changing our Bank, because of charges being made by HSBC.

**Please add £1-50 for the lighter items & £3 for the book, as it is expensive to post.**

Bevin Boy Lapel Badge      @ £5.00      Digging Up the Past      @ £10.00

Bevin Boy Banner Postcard, 1 Black & White postcard & 2 colour & 1 black & white prints of A4 size all from A Bevin Boy Remembers. **ALL POSTCARDS & A4 PRINTS @ £0.20 each.**

*Many Thanks to all our 'customers', as always!*

**Anne Lane.**

***Some Thoughts from Margaret Rose.***

How lovely to be able to contact so many people this way. (Thank you Anne!)  
I hope that despite the ageing clock, you are keeping warm and comfortable.

Recently I was looking back over photographs of our meetings and travel. Together, we certainly covered some ground. There is no doubt that you too have memory jogging sessions? I think of the time when some of our group were moved to tears as they were reminded of the period of their life taken from them in a totally unfair way.

One could go on and some memories are worth a repeat performance such as when Geoff and I were given an opportunity to meet the elderly lady whose task was to pull the ticket number out of Ernest Bevin's hat! Her daughter told me that her mother still recalls the sadness because she felt that it was her action that sealed the fate for so many young lads. Her mother said that (right up to her death) she felt sorrow and sadness for being so involved in the course of her duty.

Meeting this lady reminded us that so many people had affected lives and families destroyed. It also gave an opportunity to make new friendships for which we are very proud. Our memories reflected with pain and happiness, left a new beginning to our lives. Those who are left with stories to tell, should see that they are treasured - just reflect as you read this and give thanks to God for all those men who played their part at such a demanding time.

We shall remember the joys as each year gathering gave us the opportunity to forgive though not to forget.

Our numbers are declining but I am always thrilled to hear about those members still able to move about, travel or communicate with others.

As you will know, my dear Geoff died seven years ago and I still have a hole in my heart filled with warmth and love.

Life goes on; it was said that covid etc. denied us of a final meeting - cheated to the end you may say!

I hope that, with others you have some happy memories recalling our meetings. Although I am housebound - and still living in north Norfolk where the motto is 'Do different.' I think that I qualify for having achieved that! I thank good friends and all around, who help to keep me going!

Despite occasional falls etc.- visiting hospitals and spending too long a time in a care home where I shared my room with furry coated 'lodgers' with long tails. I survived to spread the story of the Bevin Boys!

My love to all and keep you a- atroshing my boy! (keep you agoing on)  
I wish you all a Healthy and Happy Christmas with New Year Blessings!

Margaret Rose.

[Bevin Boys Association Website.](http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk)

Just to remind you all that we have an **Official** Bevin Boys Association website.  
Please go to:- <http://www.bevinboysassociation.co.uk> or to email [bevinboys1943@gmail.com](mailto:bevinboys1943@gmail.com)

Thank you to everyone who has submitted items for the Newsletter.

Any other memories and experiences of your time as Bevin Boys I am happy to print.

If you have any input or news items for publication please contact me on Tel: 01275 463703 or  
e-mail: [alananne2749@gmail.com](mailto:alananne2749@gmail.com) Anne.

## **A Day to Remember: Grandad Leslie's VE80 Adventure at Westminster Abbey.**

**By Megan McElroy.**

I can still feel the echo of Westminster Abbey's great organ vibrating in my chest, but before the first fanfare sounded, our adventure began far from the Abbey's ancient stones - at Grandad Leslie Raymond's front door in Colchester.

### **The Logistical Jigsaw**

Moving a 98-year-old Bevin Boy across London in the middle of a state occasion is not for the faint-hearted. Step one was 'the exchange' a hop down the A12 by my parents to rendezvous with her cousin David at an M25 service station to make the special transfer of Grandad into his nephew's car. Then onto David's house in North London, where Grandad was warmly welcomed and could rest and reminisce over dinner with four generations of the family. David even gave up his moment in limelight (his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday!) to make sure Grandad was the guest of honour. Step two was threading our way into central London on the morning of the service, slap-bang in the middle of security road-closures. Enter our hero, Gary the black-cab driver (and thankfully one of David's good friends!). With a grin and a knowledge of back-streets that would shame the Knowledge exam, Gary somehow kept Buckingham Palace on our left, police barriers on our right, and deposited us within metres of the Abbey. If black cabs gave out medals, Gary would now be wearing one!

### **Red-Carpet Moments**

Once inside, the veterans' reception area ran with military precision, thanks to the ever-capable volunteers of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY). They whisked wheelchairs into neat rows, offered cups of tea, and chatted warmly with veterans and their families. It was here a fellow veteran spotted the Bevin Boys medal on Grandad's blazer. "I've never met a Bevin Boy," he said, eyes wide. "I must shake your hand." The handshake seemed to carry all 21,800 conscripted miners with it. Soon, we were guided round to the West Door of the Abbey, flanked by a wall of media cameras. Myself, and Grandad's nephews David and Raymond sense of pride was palpable. For a moment, the flashguns had us feeling like A-listers. Grandad leaned toward me and whispered, "Well this is a bit different, isn't it?!"

### **Front-Row Anticipation**

Then, with a mix of nerves and pride, we were escorted to our reserved seats -front row - just as the great nave began to fill. First ministers entered: the Prime Minister, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Deputy Prime Minister. Party leaders followed, then former PMs- John Major tiptoeing past Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak and David Cameron like a reunion of history textbooks.

A rustle of programmes signalled the arrival of the aristocracy: the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, then the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh. Raising the excitement a clear notch - the Prince and Princess of Wales closely followed. Yet the hush that fell moments later was almost physical. A trumpeted fanfare, the doors flung wide, and Their Majesties the King

and Queen processed beneath the Abbey's rainbow of regimental standards. You could hear hearts beating.

### **A Service Steeped in Emotion**

Two minutes' silence - so profound even the BBC cameras seemed to hold their breath - opened the service. The King and Prince of Wales laid floral wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, each petal a whisper of thanks.

Highlights came thick and fast: readings by cadets standing straighter than lampposts, and actors delivering lines from letters from the frontline that sent shivers up every spine. When Zizi Strallen's crystalline voice soared over "The White Cliffs of Dover," accompanied by the Band of the RAF Regiment, I caught Grandad brushing away a discreet tear - followed hastily by myself.

Then young Alexander Churchill, Sir Winston's great-great-grandson, lit the Peace Candle. As the flame steadied, the Abbey's loudspeakers released Winston Churchill's own gravelly declaration: "The war in Europe is over." White roses, symbolising peace, were pressed into every veteran's palm by a small group of young smartly dressed cadets, history spun full circle in that moment.

The prayers that followed were deeply moving, offering space for reflection and remembrance. The Archbishop of York delivered a bold and heartfelt sermon that stirred the entire congregation, reminding us not just of the sacrifices of the past, but of our ongoing responsibility to seek peace in our time. One of the most poignant moments came when the whole congregation stood together to join in a solemn rededication to peace - a unified, powerful gesture in such a historic setting.

And then, of course, came the unmistakable swell of the National Anthem. To sing *God Save the King* with His Majesty standing just metres away was a moment none of us will forget. The voices rose, strong and proud, filling the Abbey with reverence, loyalty, and a sense of occasion that brought a lump to many a throat.

### **Shaking Hands with History**

Just as we thought the day couldn't possibly get any more special and were reflecting on how wonderful it had all been, we began to straighten ties and adjust dresses ready to make our way out - when we noticed a stir nearby. The King and Queen were approaching, and it quickly became clear: we were about to meet them.

As His Majesty leaned in to speak, the Abbey buzzed with chatter and the grand organ still echoed through the air. The King spoke in gentle, hushed tones, which made it tricky for Grandad to catch every word. Before he could ask him to repeat it, Queen Camilla leaned in with a warm smile and said, "I can never hear him either!" The three of them shared a moment of laughter and connection that felt entirely genuine - and utterly unforgettable.

The Duke of Gloucester leaned in next to shake Grandad's hand remarking, "Ah a Bevin Boy! It must have been quite a shock to get that letter." Grandad shot back: "A hell of a shock, yes!" The Duchess of Edinburgh, Sir Keir and Lady Victoria Starmer each paused to shake hands and chat, making us feel that, for a moment, history ran directly through Grandad's weathered hands.

### **Post-Service Pint (With Style)**

Gary reappeared like a genie, threading post-ceremony traffic to a cosy pub near King's Cross. Imagine the lunchtime crowd when a man in blazer, medal flashing, strolls in flanked by two men in suits and a lady in a bright red dress and hat - on a Thursday. Phones popped up, and the waiting staff were keen to shake hands with a veteran and hear all about our day. The pub's manager even posted a picture on their social media capturing the moment!

### **Reflections on a Once-in-a-Lifetime Day**

As plates cleared and pints were finished, Grandad mused that the Bevin Boys had long been "the forgotten conscripts." But on this dazzling May morning, they were front-row, front-of-mind, and firmly in the nation's heart. For me, witnessing those handshakes - veteran to veteran, monarch to miner - was proof that service below ground is finally standing in the light.

To the Bevin Boys Association family: thank you for preserving these stories so days like VE80 can sparkle as brightly as any crown jewel. And if you ever need a London cab, I know a fellow named Gary who'll get you there, roadblocks or not!

*From the depths of the pits to the vaulted heights of Westminster Abbey, Grandad's journey reminded us that every coal seam dug and every back bent helped pave the road to victory. Eighty years on, the nation still remembers - and so will we.*

### **Ralph Eldridge was my dad who sadly died a few years ago. He was a Bevin Boy.**

At approximately 18 years of age he was conscripted to a mine in or near Doncaster. My account will be a little sketchy as both mum and dad both deceased and is my recollection. Dad never spoke a lot about it. All I know is that he lived with a family some 2 or 3 miles from the pit and he had to walk there every day and presumably back again after work and hopefully with a sandwich for lunch. I do know that he said how primitive conditions were underground. No toilets. You went to the loo where you could.

Then after a short time, he was crushed between two coal trucks. His pelvis was shattered and I guess medicine was not so advanced then. He was hospitalised for months and had to lay flat in traction. For many years after he still endured painful hospital procedures which checked that his urinary tract was clear.

Shamefully because he said little and out of sheer ignorance, for some time I thought that Bevin Boys were conscientious objectors. Dad married mum in 1947 and I was born 8 years later. When dad died I thought the least I could do is support The Bevin Boy charity.

**Editors comment.** Please note that we do not edit contributions and as some are based on recollections, there may be alternative views and information.

**PLEASE NOTE!!** Please send your £5 subscription to receive your twice yearly Newsletter in 2026. Please pay by BACS to Anne Lane.

### **EDITORS PLEA!**

I always welcome any contributions for the Newsletter. Please send to Anne Lane at the email address at the top of this Newsletter. Many thanks!