



FLEETWOOD TOWN COUNCIL  
ARMED FORCES CHAMPION'S



# NEWSLETTER

1 FEBRUARY, 2026



**"THE NOT FORGOTTEN  
REPRESENTATIVES  
MEETS ROYALTY"**



**Lest we forget**



# **Fleetwood Town council**

## **Armed Forces Champion**

### **Cllr Jimilai Kuruvakadua**

Hello,

As your Armed Forces Champion, it is my great honour to introduce this newsletter, which aims to raise awareness of the many activities and events taking place across our local area.

Since being elected to this role, I have had the privilege of working closely with many of you, and I would like to sincerely acknowledge and thank you for everything you do to support our local veterans and their families. Like many who have recently left the Armed Forces after completing full service, I found my way into local associations and groups that do so much positive work for our veteran community.

Along the way, there have of course been challenges. However, I want to be clear that this is a voluntary role and not a paid position. I was raised in a military family, served a full 24 years in the Armed Forces, and have always had a strong passion for giving something back to our local community.

This journey is not always an easy one, as I have experienced firsthand. My main aim is to encourage all veterans to work together, despite any challenges, to raise awareness of positive wellbeing and mental health. Most importantly, it is about building trust, putting differences aside, and supporting one another.

As your Armed Forces Champion, my role is to support and refer where appropriate. However, I remain fully committed to advocating on your behalf and supporting the veteran community wherever possible.

Thank you for your continued dedication and commitment.

Kind regards,  
Armed Forces Champion

## THE NOT FORGOTTEN REPRESENTATIVES MEETS ROYALTY



On Thursday 27th November 2025 The Princess Royal hosted a Christmas tea party at St James's Palace for the veteran charity, 'The Not Forgotten'. Representing the Northwest veterans were John & Joanne Bradshaw and Mike & Alison Kelly.

In June 2025 both couples ran a fundraising lunch and entertainment for one hundred and two veterans from three veteran groups situated on the Fylde Coast.

It was a great honour to have been sent an invitation from The Not Forgotten Association which is a tri-service military charity, of which Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal is Patron.



THE NOT FORGOTTEN

The Not Forgotten Association runs respite breaks to Royal parties, skiing and canoeing to concerts and fun days, day trips to sporting venues, afternoon teas and festive lunches.

The Not Forgotten run a year-round calendar of activities, breaks, days out and concerts and would love to welcome you to an event near you soon.

Not a member of The Not Forgotten - find out more - it's free to join and request attendance at a function.

Find out more at [thenotforgotten.org](http://thenotforgotten.org).



# UNDERSTANDING WHERE TO FIND YOUR LOCAL CONNECTIONS!



## FLEETWOOD VETERAN'S & FAMILIES



Fleetwood Town Council has always been proud to support the Armed Forces Community. Many members of the team have friends and family currently serving or who have previously served in the Armed Forces, and we hold great respect for our veterans and their families.

We have consistently supported Armed Forces events over the years and remain fully committed to continuing this support. Fleetwood Town Council has also signed the Armed Forces Covenant and is proud to have achieved the Bronze Award in recognition of our ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces Community.

If you require further information or support, please do not hesitate to contact the Town Council office on 01253 872444 or via email at [admin@fleetwoodtowncouncil.org.uk](mailto:admin@fleetwoodtowncouncil.org.uk).



The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment Association Fleetwood Branch continues to support veterans and their families across Fleetwood and the surrounding areas.

Meetings are held on the third Sunday of every month at The King's Own Comrades, FY7 6AB. These meetings provide an opportunity to share updates within the local veterans' community and to support regular fundraising activities for the association.



**Veterans & Families – Support Message**

If you are a veteran or a family member struggling with medical or mental health concerns, please reach out for support. Contact your local GP or call NHS 111 for advice.

Never struggle alone — there is always support available, and asking for help is a sign of strength.



Fleetwood Men's Shed supports men's mental health and provides help to those struggling with mental health challenges. Over the years, they have supported many individuals within the community and continue to play a vital role in improving wellbeing.

They also provide regular support for the Veterans' Breakfast, held every Wednesday from 10:00am to 12:00pm at St David's Church, Larkholme Lane, bringing veterans together in a welcoming and supportive environment.

For more information, or if you would like to visit and experience the support they provide, please contact them via email at [mensshedfleetwood@gmail.com](mailto:mensshedfleetwood@gmail.com) or by mobile on 07864 065764.



The Remembrance Committee has long served the town of Fleetwood with great pride, organising the annual Military Parades held on Remembrance Sunday. In addition to this, the Committee carries the standards representing local associations and the Colours of the Armed Forces.

Chaired by Mr Paul Roberts, the Committee members work tirelessly each year to deliver a dignified and honourable parade in recognition of those who have served and sacrificed. For more information and updates, please follow their Facebook page: "Fleetwood Remembrance Sunday Committee."



The Royal British Legion, Fleetwood Branch was formed in 2025 and is currently awaiting further administrative updates. A small but dedicated committee has been established to support veterans in the local area and to help raise the profile and standards of the Royal British Legion in Fleetwood.

The branch is chaired by myself, and our committee members are passionate about supporting all veterans. At present, we are holding committee meetings while we await our official registration number. Once this is completed, we will be able to invite both current and new members to join.

For more information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

# TESTIMONY FROM SARAH TAYLOR WHO ALSO RAISED FUNDS FOR FEMALES VETERAN ALLIANCE

Finding My Way Back — Later Than I Thought

I'll be honest — for a long time, I didn't really think of myself as part of the veteran world. I was one of the last all female division to go through HMS Raleigh in July 1990 and left at the 12 year mark.

I served, I left, and I got on with life. Work, family, training, paying the bills. Veteran groups, charities, events — they felt like they were for other people. People who'd done more, seen more, or needed them more than I did. So I kept that part of my life quietly in the background and cracked on. It's only in the last few years that I've found my way back into that space — and not in the way I expected.

It started with training.

Training has always been my way of keeping myself straight. It gives me routine, discipline, and somewhere for my head to go when life gets noisy. That's what pulled me towards long distance triathlons also known as 'Ironman'. Long sessions, early mornings, horrible weather, and a lot of time alone with your thoughts. There's nowhere to hide with it. You can't blag an Ironman. You either do the work or you don't. As the training built, I wanted it to mean something more than just ticking a box or chasing a medal. That's when I decided to raise money for the Female Veterans Alliance.

Female veterans often don't shout about who they are. Many of us don't even call ourselves veterans at all. We disappear into civilian life, stay capable, stay busy, and quietly deal with whatever we're carrying. The Female Veterans Alliance offers something genuinely needed — a safe space for women who've served, support without judgement, and retreats where you don't have to explain yourself or prove anything. Around the same time, I also became part of another female veteran safe space — one that focuses on giving women a voice and a presence, not just support behind closed doors. Through that, I took part in a photo shoot and a spoken word project. The spoken word pieces are being turned into a book — real stories, in our own words, from women who've served.

One thing that really stuck with me came up during those conversations. For a long time, if you typed "female veteran" into Google, what came up most often was Michelle Keegan — because she played a soldier in Our Girl. Nothing against her at all, but that says everything about how invisible actual female veterans have been.

The hope with projects like this — the photos, the spoken word, the book — is to change that. So that when people search for "female veteran", they don't just see a character from a TV show. They see real women. Veterans like myself. Ordinary women who served, moved on, and are now reclaiming that part of who they are. Ironman training became part of that too. It wasn't just about fitness. It was about visibility. About quietly standing up and saying, "we're here too", even if we've come back into the veteran space later than expected. I also became an associate member of the Royal Navy triathlon team and wore my RN tri suit with great pride. And then, before I ever got to finish that Ironman, everything stopped.

In July 2025, I had a ruptured brain aneurysm and a subsequent bleed on the brain. This has involved three invasive brain surgeries. My brain surgeon has said that I'm very lucky to have survived and if I wasn't as fit as I was with all my training it would be a very different story. There's no build-up to it. No warning. One minute you're planning training blocks and future races, the next you're being told things that don't quite sink in — words like brain, bleed, risk. Suddenly, the body you trust doesn't feel so reliable anymore, and your world gets very small, very quickly. I'm used to pushing through discomfort. Used to grinding it out. This was different. You can't out-train your brain. You can't just toughen up and carry on. You're forced to stop — and that's not easy when your identity is wrapped up in being capable. What surprised me was how much that experience connected back to being a veteran.

Because underneath it all, what many of us share is resilience — and also the discomfort of vulnerability. Knowing when you have to slow down. When you have to accept help. When strength looks different to how you imagined it would. I didn't cross the Ironman finish line that year. Although I was only 20 days away from the start line and my brain surgeon had to have very strong words with me that there was no way on this earth I could even think about competing as I was. I was not going to let seven months of training go down the pan! But I didn't fail either.

The fundraising still mattered. The conversations still mattered. The visibility still mattered. And the pause — frustrating as it was — gave me space to reflect. You don't have to be broken to belong in the veteran community. You don't have to earn your place by suffering. And you don't have to have been involved from day one.

Sometimes you find your way back later on — through sport, through creativity, through recovery, or through suddenly realising how much being seen actually matters.

Endurance sport is a big no go area and if I'm honest I don't think I will be able to enter that arena ever again. However, I'm still moving forward. Still supporting female veterans in whatever way I can. And now I'm more comfortable standing in that space and saying, "this is part of who I am too." If you're a veteran — especially a female veteran — who's never quite felt like you fitted in, you're not on your own. There's no deadline on reconnecting, and no right way to do it. Sometimes the path back isn't about looking behind you at all.

Sometimes it starts with putting yourself back into the picture — and seeing what changes.

Fleetwood has been my home now for the last three years. It's full of veterans who've done their service and quietly blended back into civilian life. This isn't about looking backwards or reliving the past. It's about recognising that service doesn't disappear just because time has passed. If sharing my story helps even one veteran in Fleetwood feel seen, or less alone, then it's been worth telling.



# MEMORIES





## Fylde Ex-Service Liaison Committee (F.Ex.S.L.C)

The Fylde Ex-Service Liaison Committee (F.Ex.S.L.C) continues to play an important role in supporting the veteran community across the Fylde Coast. Established to bring together military and ex-service associations from the area, the committee was formed with a clear aim: to encourage cooperation, improve communication, and ensure that information and support are shared effectively between organisations.

By working collectively, member associations are better placed to support serving personnel, veterans, and their families, while also strengthening links with local authorities and partner organisations.

The committee is now under new leadership, with Sharon Hobson-Woodhead taking on the role of Chair. Sharon is keen to acknowledge the ongoing work of F.Ex.S.L.C and its member associations, and to build on the strong foundations already in place. Under her chairmanship, the focus will remain on collaboration, mutual support, and ensuring that the needs of the ex-service community across the Fylde Coast continue to be heard and addressed.

F.Ex.S.L.C remains committed to bringing people together, sharing knowledge, and working as one voice in support of those who have served.

In addition to its ongoing liaison work, F.Ex.S.L.C was instrumental in initiating the Fylde Memorial Arboretum. While the Arboretum continues to provide regular reports to the committee, it is now operated by a separate, dedicated management committee. The Arboretum is currently working towards achieving charitable status, reflecting its continued growth and long-term commitment to remembrance and community engagement.



# Gregg Norton

## The Day I Took My Socks Off the Battlefield

I spent years serving as a soldier in the Royal Engineers. I deployed on multiple tours, including the Balkans and Iraq. Like many who have worn a uniform, I left the Army changed in ways that aren't always visible. Alongside an ankle reconstruction that left me bone on bone, I carried something far heavier - severe PTSD. When I first left the service, I didn't recognise myself... I was angry... Bitter... Exhausted... I hated life... and if I'm being honest... I hated myself.

I became a professional victim, blaming everyone and everything else for how I felt... The Army... The system... My injuries... Other people... The world... Blame can feel comforting at first. It gives you somewhere to aim the anger. But over time, it traps you. If everyone else is responsible for your life, then you have no power to change it.

The turning point for me came when I learned something called the discipline model. At its core is a simple but confronting idea - take 100% responsibility for everything in your life. Not some responsibility... Not shared responsibility... One hundred percent!

That doesn't mean bad things didn't happen. They did. War happened... Injury happened... Trauma happened... But what I realised was this - while I couldn't control what happened to me, I was responsible for what I did next. That shift changed everything.

When you stop blaming everyone else, something unexpected happens... The anger has nowhere to go. And who wants to stay angry at themselves forever? Responsibility, strangely, brought me freedom... It gave me peace... It gave me choice...!

From there, I started investing in myself. Not financially at first, but intentionally... I listened to audiobooks... I learned from people who had already walked the road I was trying to find. I found a mentor - someone who held me accountable, challenged me, and pushed me further and faster than I could have gone alone. We don't need to do life solo. In fact, trying to is often what keeps us stuck.

And then there are the socks. Every morning, without fail, I put on odd socks.

To most people, it's nothing. To me, it's a daily reminder of who I used to be - and who I choose to be now.

I used to sweat the small stuff relentlessly. If I was late... If I missed a deadline... If my clothes weren't right... If my hair was a mess... If something had a hole in it... All tiny things that, in the grand scheme of life, mean very little. Yet they made me stressed, reactive, and angry.

The odd socks remind me not to sweat the small stuff.

People notice them... Some laugh... Some judge... And that's fine. That's their opinion. They don't know what's going on inside me, or why I do it... I know me... I know I'm good... And I know my reasons. I also wear my socks inside out. Not as a fashion statement, but as a metaphor. I don't want the rough, uncomfortable bits next to my skin. I want the smooth, comfortable side on the inside. Just like life. I don't want negativity... resentment... and self loathing on the inside. I'd rather deal with the rough edges on the outside and protect what's within.

Small habits matter... Symbols matter... They ground us. Another habit that changed my life was smiling.

It sounds almost too simple, especially when you're dealing with trauma... depression... or PTSD. But there's science behind it. Smiling releases endorphins, dopamine, and serotonin - chemicals that lift mood, reduce stress, and help the body heal.

Here's the fascinating part - even a fake smile works. Your body doesn't know the difference.

If you're having a bad day, take yourself somewhere quiet and force a smile or a laugh for 20 seconds. It might feel ridiculous at first. But something happens. The chemicals start flowing. The tension eases. Often, that fake smile turns into a real one. Over time, you find yourself smiling and laughing more naturally, even when life throws its punches. Smiling is healing. That's why I end every video I make with the same message, and it's how I try to live my life now - do one thing today that makes you smile... Just one.

It doesn't have to be big... maybe a walk... A song... A coffee with a friend... A memory... Even odd socks. Those small moments add up. They build momentum. And momentum builds a life. I'm not "fixed." I don't think any of us ever are. But I'm disciplined. I'm responsible. And I'm grateful.

If you're struggling, especially if you're a veteran, you're not weak and you're not broken... You're human. Take responsibility, not as a punishment, but as a gift. Invest in yourself. Find people who will walk beside you. And don't sweat the small stuff.

And today, whatever else happens....

Do one thing that makes you smile.

Do one thing everyday that makes you smile...

Because smiling is healing baby ..



## Talented & Proud to be a Daughter of a Veteran



I grew up in a family where service was just part of the story. My dad served with the REME before I was born, so I didn't grow up in the military world, but the values that came with it shaped who I am. We've always talked about mindset, resilience, and staying positive, and that's something I carry with me in everything I do, especially my music.

Music is how I express myself and make sense of things. Writing songs helps me turn real experiences into something honest, and that's always what I want my music to feel like. In 2025 I released my debut single "Fate", and then later my second single "Haunt Me" which is a bit darker and more cinematic. Seeing people stream my songs on Spotify and message me about what they mean to them honestly makes it all feel worth it.

I also love performing live. Gigs are where everything feels the most real, getting to share the songs in a room with people, seeing their reactions, and growing in confidence every time I step on stage. It's a big part of my journey and it pushes me to keep going.

Being from a veteran family has made me really passionate about supporting the veteran community too. It's something I care about a lot, and I'm proud to use my music and my platform, however small to show support and give something back.

Follow Tegan on any social network using the following tags:

- Facebook: @Tegan Hughes Music
- Instagram: @teganhughesmusic
- TikTok: @teganhughesmusic
- Spotify: Tegan Hughes

## WHERE IS THE SUPPORT FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES?

On 27 July 2025, my worst nightmare became reality. My husband passed away, leaving me alone with two children under the age of 13. I had recently been in hospital myself, and the person who had been my lifeline, my best friend was suddenly gone. Even though the children and I were still there, our home felt empty.

For years, I had battled alone with my husband's worsening nightmares, headaches, and unpredictable moods. There was no support and no one who truly understood what it was like to be part of an Army veteran's family. I made GP appointments, but he would not attend. In his mind, he had to "man up". I had nowhere to turn, no one who genuinely understood Army life.

For 24 years of marriage, 10 years of my own service, and a lifetime as an Army child, I could once pick up the phone to the welfare office. When we left the Army, we left that support behind too.

People say, "There's no support for families," and yet here we were living proof of that reality.

I was incredibly fortunate that my husband was part of the Armed Forces Biker Veterans Charity. They came to see me and gave me the support I desperately needed. My husband served 24 years in the Royal Artillery, completing tours in Kosovo (x2), Iraq (x2), and Afghanistan (x2). Yet after his death, no one contacted me. No one checked on my children.

A friend referred us to Scotty's Little Soldiers, who have been incredible for my children. We were told we were "lucky" because my husband passed away shortly after leaving the Army, otherwise, we may not have been eligible for support at all.

This should not come down to luck.

Families need support, wives, husbands, and children when they leave the Armed Forces. We need someone to turn to who understands military life. Yes, we can go through GPs and civilian agencies, but that often means endless waiting lists and being seen by people who do not understand the unique challenges of service life.

So I ask the question that so many families are asking quietly:

Where is the family support?

**Joanne Mallon**



# Some of the Local Supporters for The Armed Forces Community in Fleetwood



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fleetwoodbeachwheelchairs@outlook.com



Dave Benson founded the business around nine years ago, starting out from the back of a stripped-out Escort car under the name Escorted Deliveries. An exceptional chef who achieved two rosettes, Dave decided to step away from working for others and build something of his own.

Through hard work and determination, Dave grew the business and, after two years, went on to purchase Blackpool Man and Van. Dean has worked within the business on a self-employed basis for over six years, and the two are lifelong friends whose partnership has been key to the company's success.

They continue to provide reliable services while supporting the local community and other local businesses. Let's continue to support them in return. They also have supported our local veterans with affordable removal costs.



fleetwoodandcleveland@btinternet.com



Rossall Tavern



lancfirerescue.org.uk



lancashire.police.uk

Kings Own Old Comrades Club, Fleetwood



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Dolly's Ice Cream and Snack Kiosks at the Fleetwood Boating Lake



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**Fleetwood Armed Forces Champion's Volunteer of the Month  
January 2026**



**Royal Air Force Veteran  
Mr Martin Poole**

Ever since I met Martin, he has consistently shown an unwavering dedication to supporting our local veterans and their families. His selfless commitment across numerous voluntary roles, alongside his full-time employment, truly deserves recognition.

I have been approached by many individuals who have shared positive feedback about Martin's work, expressing how reassuring and meaningful his support has been to them. One of the many voluntary roles carried out by Martin and his team is the laying of crosses at the War Memorial graves. I had the privilege of taking part in this, and it was a deeply moving experience that demonstrated the utmost respect and honour in remembering our fallen comrades.

Martin, on behalf of Fleetwood Town Council, thank you for your service and for everything you do to ensure the memories of Fleetwood's veterans and their families are never forgotten.



**In conclusion of this month's newsletter, I would like to  
thank everyone who has contributed articles for  
publication in this issue. Your continued support and  
involvement are greatly appreciated.**

**Cllr Jimilai Kuruvakadua MCMi FdA**