

NEWS IN BRIEF

Legion's £20,000

THE Copythorne and District branch of the Royal British Legion has raised more than £20,000 for their Poppy Appeal.

The branch announced the news in their newsletter, thanking all those that were generous enough to give to their cause. Last year the branch raised £28,006.94 and hopes to top this with their 2016 efforts.

Festive concert

ROMSEY Methodist Church is holding a Christmas Concert from 7pm on Sunday, December 18 with conductor Jamie W Hall. Tickets can be bought on the door for £8, children under 16 go free. A retiring collection will be held in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support.

Christmas crafts

KING Johns's House and Heritage Centre is to host a day of Christmas crafts later this month.

The centre, on Church Street, will be holding the event on Saturday. It will run from 10am to 2pm. All materials used are included with the entry price, which has not been disclosed.

Mayor enjoys a cuppa with hospital Friends

THE Romsey Hospital League of Friends welcomed town mayor John Parker and his wife to its annual coffee morning in the town hall.

Cllr Parker spoke of the range of services on offer at the outpatients and thought that some, such as podiatry, should be more widely publicised. Romsey residents say they are thankful not to have to trek into Southampton for many services such as X-rays and eye examinations.

The league thanked all those who gave generously for an excellent set of raffle prizes and some delicious festive cakes, pastries and sweets for a cake stall. They took £202.85.

They are always looking for new volunteers and were glad when two ladies came forward. Contact Sylvia Roverato on 01794 518305 or roverato@tiscali.co.uk

Prescriptions reminder over festive break

ROMSEY residents are being reminded that local pharmacies across the area have restricted opening hours over the festive period.

They are being advised to make sure they don't get caught out over the Christmas and new year period.

While some pharmacies are directed by NHS England to open on Christmas Day, others may open voluntarily, and patients are advised to check by phone if the pharmacy is open before travelling.

To find details of the nearest pharmacy to you please go to www.nhs.uk

People can order and renew prescriptions through the GP Online Service provided by NHS England.

You can find out more about this service by visiting www.nhs.uk.

If you value your local paper, help to save it

By Romsey Advertiser editor in chief Ian Murray

IT has been a fairly typical few weeks for the *Romsey Advertiser*.

The paper – in print and online – has reported on a variety of items.

We have told of plans for an £11 million care home for Romsey and how the town's sports facilities are set for a multi-million pound boost.

We also told how trout have started to breed again in the Barge Canal and how Test Valley Borough Council was joining forces with other local councils to form a Heart of Hampshire authority.

We have revealed that a pensioner had to wait more than an hour for an ambulance after collapsing in the town centre and how plans to create hundreds of new jobs at a business park have been thrown out by the High Court.

There have also been plenty of photographs of the winter carnival festive event and of course we ran the first of our popular Nativity school photograph supplements.

In sport we have followed the fortunes of Romsey Town and we showed you all the pictures from the First Classes of local schools.

Last week we also introduced the *Romsey Advertiser's* new full-time reporter William Rimell. In short, just another few weeks in the life of a local newspaper.

And whether you read us every week in paper or online or come to us just occasionally or seek us out just when you need us, I would say that your local paper fulfils its important role in helping to provide the glue that knits together our communities.

You would, I contend, miss us if we were gone.

And that is a very thanks to what is called Section 40.

It sounds very bland, but it is in fact the most dangerous threat to the independence, indeed the very existence of local newspapers in this country for 300 years.

I have written about Section 40 before. It is a clause that could become law if enacted by the government as an addition to the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

Put simply, Section 40 means that if anyone takes a paper to court for libel, breach of confidence, misuse of private information, harassment, malicious falsehood, or slander, even if they lose then the paper will have to pay all of their costs as well as their own.

It means that anyone who bears a grudge against this paper or any other can simply keep taking them to court over spurious matters, even in the knowledge they

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cannot win, and bleed us dry.

Either the paper will have to restrict its reporting to cheque presentations and Nativity photographs – and there are a few politicians who might applaud that – or we would sink under an avalanche of legal fees.

Of course, it is dreadfully, patently unfair and indeed unjust. So why in a free democracy are the press facing such threats?

The answer lies in the fall out from the Leveson Enquiry and the need to create an independent press regulator. The press say we have created such a body in the

Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) which the bulk of newspapers have signed up to. The government has created a Royal Charter and recognised a body called IMPRESS, funded and supported by one man – millionaire Max Mosley.

Section 40 is a bid to force papers to join something we are unlikely ever to do. To come under the Royal Charter means giving power over what can and cannot be published in the press over to politicians at Westminster. Too many people have fought and died over 300 years to prevent that from ever happening for this generation – including myself – to give way to bullyboy tactics now.

But all is not lost. The government is keen to ensure it does not act rashly and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media



Will Rimell is the new reporter for the Romsey Advertiser

and Sport Karen Bradley, and the Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, have announced a public consultation on what should happen next.

Their finger is poised over the button of enacting Section 40, but we can still persuade them that free speech is more important than revenge – with your help.

Which is why I am asking everyone who values their local paper, even if at times you do not always agree with what we say or do, to take the time to visit the consultation website and register your thoughts.

Naturally I hope you will support this paper and the continued freedom of the press in this country, that you will register your belief in the value of the local press in our communities. I thank you in advance for that support.

I can, however, assure you of one thing. No matter what the outcome of the consultation, no matter what the decision by the government over Section 40, I and this paper will not be abandoning our duties in attempting to hold those in positions of authority to account.



How to make your voice heard

Go to 'Consultation on the Leveson Inquiry and its implementation': <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-leveson-inquiry-and-its-implementation>