

From: Major General Nicholas Welch OBE, Chairman, RGBW Regimental Charities



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Former Officers and Soldiers of the RGBW  
Forming Regiments

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*Dear All,*

I am writing again to address the concerns that have been expressed over the proposed changes to the RGBW Regimental Charities during the preceding six months. I am conscious that change can create uncertainty but now that the Rifles is fully established, including delivering benevolence, we need to move forward to keep the RGBW Charities relevant. The loss of civil service support and funding to one of our museums make the need for change even more acute. I refer you to my letter of 12 Aug 16, which explains in detail the reasons for the proposed changes which you may wish to reread. This letter is to address some of the more specific concerns that have been raised.

The RGBW Regimental Charities is an amalgam of 56 former Glosters, Royal Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment charities, and now comprises four 'sub-funds' – the Regimental Charity (to maintain our heritage and for the general benefit of bodies connected with RGBW), the Chattels Charity, the Memorials Charity and the Officers Trust Charity. Separately some of the Trustees manage the Rocke Bequest.

For historical reasons, which would now be extremely difficult if not impossible to unravel, the Officers Trust has far more money than it needs, and the Memorials sub-fund has not got enough to do all the things the Trustees wish to do in relation to, for example, First World War memorials throughout the counties. The same applies to a lesser extent to the Chattels sub-fund. Furthermore some of the funds (called "permanent endowment") cannot be spent and only exists for earning income. For example, the Memorials Charity has £19,000 of its total £21,000 restricted in this way. The Officers' Charity (the object of which is to help those "who are in conditions of need, hardship or distress") is worth over £141,000 and apart from a subsidy for the Salisbury Lunch there have been no significant claims (i.e. over a few hundred pounds) on it for the past 15 or 20 years.

Following our amalgamation to form The Rifles, all 'benevolence' is now the responsibility of The Rifles and they are well placed to fulfill this duty. The RGBW Charities main task henceforth is the maintenance of The Golden Thread of RGBW's heritage, history, and museums. The Officer's Charity does not now need £141,000, nor will the Association need £496,000 (of which some £120,000 is permanent endowment) to keep going, whether under the present set-up or the proposed County Committee Structure, and the Trustees wish to use some of the funds to ensure the protection of our heritage.

The Trustees have accordingly resolved, with the full agreement of, and co-operation from, the Charity Commission to amalgamate the Regimental Charity, the Officers Charity, the Chattels Charity and the Memorials Charity into one, under the new title of The Rifles and The [RGBW in full] Regimental Trust. Although the wording of the 'objects' has been marginally updated, there is absolutely no change whatsoever in the scope of those objects, but the Trustees will now be able to use the money in the single 'pot' for any purposes listed in the new Scheme without restriction. Similarly, the Association Constitution at present only allows spending on "Maintaining contact between past and present members" of RGBW and the former regiments, "Fostering esprit de corps in RGBW" and benevolence – and the proposed changes will allow the use of the Association's funds for the most appropriate purposes.

And so the changes to the RGBW Charities have been developed in comprehensive and close consultation with the Charity Commission to ensure not only that the changes are legal but also that they are done within the spirit of the original charities. This duty of prudence, applied by all the Trustees in their deliberations, is to ensure both the short term and long term aims best serve all beneficiaries. I should point out that, as with all charities, there is no entitlement to vote on changes by past contributors; it is the trustees who are charged with ensuring that the deeds and aims of the charities are met.

A concern has been expressed about the impartiality and transparency of the Trustees. Many of you will remember that the RGBW Charities was established with Trustees from the forming regiments to ensure a balance, and this has been continued and is in fact enshrined in the amended deeds. All former commanding officers who now act as trustees commanded RGBW battalions or more latterly Rifles battalions. And of course, as with all Charities, the Trustees ensure that their duty to the charity in no way conflicts with their personal interests or loyalty to any other body. It is sad that I have to spell this out. As for transparency, we will continue to communicate with past members of the regiments to ensure that changes are understood, although this is rapidly becoming more difficult to achieve with the loss of the Rifles Regional secretary from Salisbury.

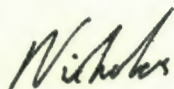
The Trust, having decided that preserving the 'golden thread' was an essential task of the RGBW Charities, agreed to support, for a limited period, the regimental museum that lost government funding. As that must be of equal concern to all ranks, it is only reasonable that substantial grants for that purpose are made from both the new Regimental Trust and the Association. There is no limit on the grant that might be made, provided that the RGBW Charities continue to meet the objects of the charities; this we are able to do - my letter of the 12 Aug refers. There is no requirement for 'documented legal assurance that every possible benefit' will continue. However, all along the Trustees have assured themselves that the RGBW Charities will be able to fund the same level of activities that it supports today, well into the future.

There has been a sensible suggestion that the funding for the Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum (SOGM) is linked to a long-term sustainable plan for the museum. I have asked the Chairman of the SOGM to provide a business plan to the RGBW Trustees to ensure that the charities money is being well spent and matched by the contributions of the RGH. The Trustees hope to review this at their next meeting.

The Regimental Charities and the Association have had the same Trustees since the formation of RGBW in 1994. Although in broad terms both organisations have the same objects - to support the former regiments, their members and regimental activities - they are quite separate charities, under the jurisdiction of the Charity Commission. The Trustees including the Association President and Chairman are determined to set a course for the future and have been working valiantly to that end. With a dwindling membership, the links to The Rifles and a revised constitution and structure is absolutely necessary to sustain our Association branches.

Finally, you will wish to be aware that General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue KCB CBE, as a former Colonel of the RGBW, has offered to provide some senior and impartial arbitration as we, the RGBW Trustees seek to modernize the Trusts and sustain our heritage. I am sure that this will be welcomed by all.

Yours ever



Copy:

General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue GCB CBE