

ANNUAL REPORT

THE ROYAL ENGINEERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

16 OCTOBER 2026

1. **Bridging the Past to the Present for the Future.** The REHS continues to deliver on its motto of *Bridging the Past to the Present for the Future* as a thought leader in military engineering; exploring Corps history, offering reflections, stimulating ideas and making observations from the study of our rich history. It has participated in three conferences and symposia with the Corps this year, with one further symposium in November; these have brought historical insights on military engineering themes to assist the Corps in planning for the future. In addition, a new wargame has been developed to enhance training and develop tactics in armoured close support engineering with current and planned equipment. The Burgoyne Lecture was restored this year on the subject of fortifications, with an associated Study Day held at Chatham and Dover. The REHS 2026 Battlefield Study covered the closing stages of the Second World War on the Eastern Front and into Berlin, with particular emphasis on the military engineering operations in defence and offence. The Great Sappers project was launched at the RE Museum in June; this anthology records those past sappers that achieved “greatness”. This provides both a reference and an inspiration for future generations. The extensive programme of webinars, along with our broader historical support to events and Battlefield Studies, completes a busy year. At a time of increased global uncertainty, the REHS has again fostered professional development and “*the acquisition of historical and scientific knowledge ... in the art and science of engineering in its application to military purposes*”.
2. **AGM 25.** The 2025 AGM was held as a hybrid event on 17 October 2025 at Chatham, with 18 attending in person and 8 online.
3. **REHS Joint Conferences 2026.** The REHS has participated in several military engineering conferences with 8 Engr Bde and the Corps in 2026, bringing historical analysis of military engineering in previous conflicts to inform the further evolution of military engineering today.
 - a. Minewarfare Symposium - 12 (CS) Engr Gp 3 Mar 26. Maj Gen Carew Wilks and Col Don Bigger delivered a presentation on Minewarfare in the Cold War, providing observations and lessons from the experience of 1 (BR) Corps in the 1980s to support the discussions on future mine and explosive obstacle capabilities.
 - b. Lt Role Engrs - 12 (CS) Engr Gp 15 Apr 26. Col Don Bigger delivered historical presentations on Lt Role Engrs in Korea, Burma and Italy with lessons for current operations.
 - c. Camouflage, Concealment, Deception, Dispersion (C2D2) – 8 Engr Bde 21 Apr 26. Col Don Bigger, Col Glyn Taylor and WO1 Oldham delivered presentations and led discussions on historical examples of military engineering contributions to C2D2, with case studies from Vietnam and the First World War.
 - d. Technical Symposium 17/18 Nov 26. The REHS is providing two speakers to present historical analysis from the Second World War (Col Don Bigger) and the First Gulf War (Maj Gen Carew Wilks) in support of the theme of *Infrastructure Support to the Corps Engineer Brigade in a Warfighting Context*. This will be supported by a panel session chaired by the Sec REHS, WO1 Oldham.
4. **Close Support Wargame.** Following final development and testing, the Armoured Close Support Wargame has now been produced with four complete sets delivered to 25 (CS) Engr Gp.

The Wargame, developed by Maj Gen John Drewienkiewicz with 22 Engr Regt, provides an excellent simulation of close support operations with current and planned military engineering equipment and has been nicknamed (by those who are old enough) as “BATUS in a Box”. RSME is seeking funding to procure additional sets for the training base.

5. **Burgoyne Lecture, REHS Dinner and Fortifications Study Period 26/27 Jun 26.** The Burgoyne Lecture has been reinstated as an annual event and was delivered by Professor David Betz, author of *The Guarded Age: Fortifications in the 21st Century* and Professor of War in the Modern World at Kings College London. His presentation reviewed the history of fortifications and considered the current resurgence of this ancient art, with implications for the military engineer today and in the future. The Lecture is available to view on the REHS website and was published in full in the RE Journal Aug 26. This was followed by the REHS Dinner, held under the V2 rocket in the RE Museum. The theme for the concurrent Study Day was *The Evolution of English Fortifications*, commencing at Fort Amherst in Chatham and moving to Dover Castle, with excellent access and guides at both sites, including a focus on the use of tunnels within fortifications.

5. **REHS Battlefield Study to Berlin 1-6 Oct 26 - Road to the Reichstag 1945.** The REHS annual Battlefield Study visited the important battlefields which featured during the closing stages of the Second World War on the Eastern Front from January to May 1945, with a focus on military engineering: fortifications and bridging operations stretching from Meseritz through the Vistula/Oder, the Seelow Heights and into Berlin. The Study concluded with a first-hand account of the fall of the Berlin Wall with Col Glyn Taylor. The Study was well attended with 48 REHS members and led by Col Don Bigger with background material provided by Maj Gen Mungo Melvin. The Study was financed through individual contributions of attendees, with one Sapper receiving a bursary of £250.

6. **REHS Webinars.** The REHS Webinar Series has continued to run throughout 2026 under the leadership of Capt Mike Owens with attendance averaging 25-30. The monthly webinars have covered a wide variety of topics including historical anniversaries and specific topics and campaigns of interest to the military engineering community. All webinars are available on the REHS website, which is now catalogued back to 2020 with a searchable index for ease of access. The full list of 2026 webinars is as follows:

Month	Topic	Presenter
January	Thunder in the Mountains, Military Engineering on the Alpine Front of WW1	Tom Isitt
February	Op Freshman and the Race for the Atom Bomb	Chris Davies
March	St Helena: South Atlantic Redoubt	Dave Stead
April	Death and Heroes: Army Chaplains in World War 2	Ian Pegg
May	War in the Smartphone Age	Dr Matthew Ford FRHistS
June	Military Engineering Support to Kosovo	Lt Col Mark Teeton
July	Sappers at the Charge at High Woods, Cavalry Gap Crossing in 1916	Lt Col (Retd) Will MacGill
August	Arnhem VCs	Mark Green
September	Jungle Commandos, the Battle for Arakan, Burma 1945	Lucy Betteridge-Dyson
October	Women in Intelligence in two World Wars	Dr Helen Fry
November	COPP in Arakan Campaign	Rob Crane
December	Operation Charnwood, Normandy	Ben Mayne

7. **Great Sappers Anthology.** The Great Sappers Anthology was launched at the REHS Annual Dinner and is now a live project on the Institution's website. The Corps has shaped some extraordinary people who have made a significant impact on our national history. For the first time, the REHS has now collected these Great Sappers in one place. An initial list of 70 past Great Sappers has been identified and they are grouped into historical themes, with short pen pictures on each one, and placed on the REHS website. The launch article with the full list was published in the August 2026 RE Journal. Several full articles have now been written to populate the anthology, and this work will continue over the next 18 months with articles sought from a wide range of contributors.

8. **Support to Battlefield Studies.** The Society and its expert members have continued to provide a range of historical advice and support to the Corps and wider Army, including a variety of Battlefield Studies, providing advice, material and historical guide. A selection is shown in the table below:

Ser	Who for	REHS Lead	Event/Study Description
1	29 Fd Sqn	Col D Bigger	Normandy Battlefield Tour
2	152 Regt RLC	Col D Bigger	Normandy Battlefield Tour
3	JFC(B)	Col D Bigger	Rhine Xings Battlefield Tour
4	RHQ RE	Col D Bigger	Berlin Battlefield Tour
5	75 Engr Regt	Capt P Brazier	Blitzkrieg & Dunkirk
6	Dems Trg Regt	Capt P Brazier	Monte Cassino
7	75 Engr Regt	Capt P Brazier	Rock of Gibraltar defences
8	ARMY HQ Support Unit	Capt P Brazier	Monte Cassino & Rome
9	HQ 8 Engr Bde	Lt Col Whitchurch	Finland Winter War of 1939/40
10	RSME	Lt Col Whitchurch	Vietnam 1945 - 75
11	2 Royal Anglian	Lt Col Whitchurch	Warsaw 1944 and OP BAGRATION
12	HQ LONDON DISTRICT	Lt Col Whitchurch	Warsaw 1944 and OP BAGRATION
13	APC	Lt Col Whitchurch	Sicily 1943
14	ME RST	Lt Col Scullion	Peninsular War (Spain)
15	Air Comd	Lt Col Scullion	Spanish Civil War

9. **REHS Communications and Media.** The REHS has continued to develop the website and expand its reach on social media platforms. This activity engages with a wider audience across the public and maintains a steady interest in the Royal Engineers and our history. Highlights are as follows:

a. **Website.** The REHS website, within the Inst RE website, continues to evolve and improve to provide greater access to historical material from our events, conferences, webinars and battlefield studies. This provides an excellent starting point for those considering a battlefield study, and for research into a range of military engineering topics.

b. **Social Media.** The REHS maintains a strong presence on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and X. Facebook membership is holding steady at 6,500-7,000, with military genealogy enquiries and subsequent debate along with some specific queries on battles, locations and memorabilia which now represent a significant number of posts on the group.

10. **Wider Engagement.** The REHS has continued to engage with the RE Museum, the REA, the Institution and the Corps to collaborate and coordinate on issues of Corps history. The REHS provided a historical tour of Brompton Barracks at the Corps memorial Weekend.

11. **Membership and Finances.** REHS membership grows steadily and has now reached 258 members, an increase of 26 over the last 12 months. The REHS continues to be financially self sustaining this year for its various activities, relying on the generosity of many of its members to speak at conferences and study days at their own cost, and has not drawn on any grant from the

Institution for 2026. The REHS has a small bursary fund to support young sappers attending REHS events, with one allocation made for the 2026 Battlefield Study in Berlin. Full details of membership and finances are enclosed.

12. **Forward Look 2027.** The REHS has developed a 3 year plan (enclosed) for future themes and activities. Looking more closely at 2027, the outline plan has an overarching theme of Great Sappers:

- a. **Burgoyne Lecture, Dinner and Study Day.** It is planned to hold a Burgoyne Lecture, REHS Annual Dinner and Study period in early 2027 on the theme of *the evolution of specialist military engineering vehicles*, located at Bovington.
- b. **DSA Digital Archive.** The DSA is closing in 2027 and the REHS is in discussions concerning the preservation of the DSA digital catalogue and future access for research.
- c. **REHS Battlefield Study.** The REHS Battlefield Study will be in Portugal to study the Peninsular War, specifically the Lines of Torres Vedras. Provisional dates are 10-17 Sep, and the study will be led by Lt Col Sean Scullion.
- d. **Great Sappers.** Work to populate the Great Sappers Anthology will continue throughout 2027, with contributions encouraged from all.
- e. **Conferences .** The REHS will support the Corps for military engineering conferences.
- f. **Webinars.** The monthly webinar programme will continue throughout 2027.
- g. **Wider Support.** The REHS will continue to support wider Corps, Army and other events, including Battlefield Studies and the REA Gathering in July.

Maj Gen (Retd) Carew Wilks CB CBE CEng FIET FInstRE
Chair, RE Historical Society
7 Oct 26

Enclosures:

1. REHS Membership and Financial Report 2026
2. REHS 3 Year Plan 27-29