

**RANCH
MEMBERSHIP
196**

**ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (now with Stevenage)

AUTUMN 2023



Branch formed 15th October 1946

Association Registered Charity: 226686 (England & Wales) SC037673 (Scotland)

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RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2022

Now including Stevenage



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Chairman:- Jim Box

Vice Chairman:- Ken Needham

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Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant

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John Airey: John Tunesi

Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Flt. Lt. Liam Obiston

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WEBSITE**

rafa-leitchworth.org.uk



NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

You may recall that when reporting on the Branch Committee meeting, in the last issue, I said that we were having trouble in securing a RAFA Gazebo for the Letchworth Armed Forces Day.

Our RAFALO, Flt. Lt. Liam Obiston, came up trumps, and not only organised one from R.A.F. Brize Norton, but delivered it to Letchworth in time for the big day. Thank you Liam, much appreciated.

For those of you who weren't present at the June NAAFI Break when we had a very welcome visit by the Station Warrant Officer (Warrant Officer Steve King) from R.A.F. Henlow together with Wing Commander Chris Brooke, you missed the invitation to the R.A.F. Henlow's Christmas party on December 20th 2023.

Just put it your your diary for now and we will give you details nearer the day.

A few years ago I had a telephone call from an ex Stevenage member now living in Turkey. At that time he was coming over to England for a holiday and would like to attend our NAAFI BREAK to see if any of his old friends attended.

Due to circumstances his trip to England didn't happen.

I had forgotten all about the call, until the other day when this ex member called again. He was no longer in Turkey, but now back in England, living in the Coningsbury area of Lincolnshire. He was making sure that we were still in existence as he and his wife would like to still come and see us.

Until that day comes, if there are any ex Stevenage members who like to contact him I have his contact details.

He is a member of the Stevenage, now this branch, and has been for 42 years. His name Francis Neal.

On Sunday, October 8th 2023 we are holding our second Battle of Britain service, and invite you to join us at 15.00 hrs

Last year we had a very good attendance, but we would like to see the church full.

After the service we ask that you join us for refreshments in the church hall.

The next issue of RAFAGEN will be too late to tell you about our Christmas Bash, but if you are interested in receiving details would you please contact me, and I will keep you informed.

You are invited to a second Christmas function. This one is at RAF Henlow, and is put on by the RAF personnel stationed there. This is not an Association function, and is restricted to veterans. If you are interested please let me have your details and I will forward all details as they are received from RAF Henlow.

A farewell message to his RAF service life from our previous branch R.A.F.A.L.O.

Today (Tuesday 12th September 2023) is my last full day wearing a uniform after over 37 years of loyal service to the crown.

The Royal Air Force and more specifically its fine Regiment “The Corps” has given me so many fantastic opportunities, with adversity and personal challenges along the way too.

Ultimately, it’s made me the person I am today. I fear nothing, I have developed immense reserves of personal fortitude and resilience, I have a deep unwavering sense of loyalty and service. These qualities I take with me into civvy street after a lifetime of learning from the supreme professional example of people around me.



There are too many people to mention here, but I hope they know who they are ! These amazing people have shaped the Corps, it’s their character, humility, bravery, and humour that defines our Corps. These are rare qualities, usually displayed during the darkest and toughest moments in war or on deployed operations, and they will live with me forever.

I will be forever grateful to those amazing people and my beloved Corps
– Per Ardua.

My next chapter begins tomorrow

The Chairman, his committee and branch members wish you, Shaun, all the best in your life outside of the force, and hope that you never forget the RAFA Branch you kept going through and after Covid-19 leading to what it is today.



Dear Ken,

RAF HENLOW FAMILY FUN DAY

Steve and the lady Warrant Officer made us very welcome and we thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon. It was a pity that others from the Association could not attend, but then it was short notice.

Thanks for telling us about the afternoon and for arranging for us to go.

Yesterday, something which may interest you. We went to IWM Duxford flying day. An aerobatic display was given by Diane Britten. It was fantastic. I don't know how she managed to twistle the aircraft inside out with at least a dozen 360 degree turns in one go. Obviously a party piece which she enjoys doing. There is quite a bit on the Internet about her. It seems she is the number one aerobatic pilot world wide. Her display must have gone on for at least half an hour.

Regards Linda & Malcolm Menzies



IWM DUXFORD



COMMITTEE NEWS

July 2023

It was confirmed at the meeting that due to commitments and the distance now living from Letchworth, Lesley Starr has resigned from the Committee she will still be a member and will attend as many NAAFI BREAKS as possible. Thank you Lesley for all the work you have done with the Committee.

All the day to day items dealt with, more important things were discussed.

The Committee have been investigating possible trips for the Branch, and three were proposed. RAF Henlow ; JITG Chicksands and Shuttleworth. To get some idea of interest these possible events will be brought up at the next NAAFI BREAK.

The Branch has already been invited by the Letchworth Branch of the Royal British Legion to join them on 23rd September 2023 on a visit to the National Arboretum. Cost £15.

12th December 2023 was selected for the Christmas Bash (Lunch).. Now that a date had been selected further enquiries can be made,

Preparations for the Battle of Britain Service on 8th October 2023 was well in hand. Our previous Standard Bearer has agreed to return to Letchworth and carry the Standard for us on the day. It was suggested that we ask for other Standards to attend.

Coffee all drunk the Chairman thought it a good time to close the meeting.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

Mrs Revola Salter of Lower Stondon



Battle of Britain merchandise available from RAFATRAD

RAFATRAD

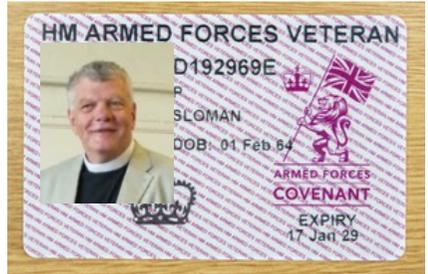
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Upon checking to see if there have been any updates on applying for the Veteran's ID Card.

Update 21 July 2023 Continued progress has been made towards the new digital verification service to apply for a HM Armed Forces Veteran Card.



FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE HM ARMED FORCES VETERAN CARD WILL OFFER WHEN ISSUED TO ALL VETERANS PLEASE READ BELOW

The Veterans' Recognition Scheme has a two-phase rollout. Phase 1 is complete; with Service leavers receiving a recognition card as part of the discharge process.

Phase 2 is to extend the scheme to existing veterans so that they can more quickly, easily and securely prove they served in the UK Armed Forces so they can access the services they need.

There is a need to future-proof the roll-out and ensure that we are giving ID cards only to those with verified service to guard against fraudulent use as veterans become able to access a wider range of benefits.

In the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-2024) the government committed to exploring the secure, digital verification of veterans' status. This work is underway, and we are currently working with veterans and other stakeholders to ensure any solution meets the needs of all veterans. This will support delivery of the Phase 2 roll out of ID cards. The government is still committed to delivering ID cards but cannot give a timescale for final delivery as this work is in progress.

A new ID card for armed forces veterans, which will help them access specialist support and services, has started to be issued to service leavers.

From today, any personnel who have left the military since December 2018 will automatically be given one of the new ID cards, which will allow them to maintain a tangible link to their career in the forces.

The cards allow veterans to easily verify their service to the NHS, their local authority, and charities, helping them to access support and services where needed.

All other veterans will be able to apply for a new ID card by the end of this year, to mark their time in the armed forces.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to the ex-forces community, and we are working hard to ensure they receive the support they deserve.

These new cards celebrate the great commitment and dedication of those who have served this country, and I hope they can provide a further link to ex-personnel and the incredible community around them.

Veterans UK - which manages pensions and compensation payments for the armed forces - local authorities, service charities, NHS and GPs will also benefit from the change, as they will not have to conduct time-consuming checks to identify individual veterans.

The new ID card is one of three that are available to service leavers. Personnel leaving the armed forces are also able to keep their military IDs, known as the MOD Form 90, allowing them to maintain their emotional connection with their service. Additionally, veterans can access a range of discounts through the Defence Discount Service, the official MOD-endorsed service for the armed forces.

Last year saw the launch of the Strategy for our Veterans, published jointly by the UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments, which sets out the key areas of support for those who have left the armed forces. The consultation closed on Thursday 21 February.

All relevant government departments have a responsibility to ensure that the military community is treated fairly, and not disadvantaged by their

service, as part of the Armed Forces Covenant. The new ID cards will ensure the process of validating service is as straightforward as possible, so that ex-forces personnel can access support for issues related to their service quickly, where needed.

The cards will complement the NHS' commitment to providing specialist health support for veterans in every part of the health service, enabling ex-service personnel in England, Scotland and Wales to access treatment where they have been affected by their service. Last year, NHS England announced that dedicated mental healthcare services are up and running in every part of the country, backed by £10 million of investment, with increasing numbers of GPs and hospitals becoming 'Veteran Aware', in order to fully address the needs of those who have served.



The Last Post

A chance to pause for a moment in quiet contemplation for our friends and colleagues who have passed away

Sqd Ldr David Bridger of Langford. Aged 93 Member for 24 years

Mr P. Ariss of Codicote. Aged 96 Member for 36 years

NAAFI BREAK GALLERY June 2023

Station Warrant R.A.F. Henlow, W.O. Steve King and talking to members on the future of R.A.F. Henlow.



BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ASSOCIATION AND BRANCH



INTRODUCTION

At the end of the First World War (1914 – 18) a number of Squadron and Unit Associations were formed to allow those who had served together to maintain contact with each other. It was not, however, until 1930 that an organisation known as the Comrades of the Royal Air Force was formed with membership open, irrespective of rank, to those serving, or who had served, in the Royal Air Force, Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service and Dominion Air Forces. The Father of the Royal Air Force, Marshall of the Royal Air Force Lord Trenchard, was the first President. Now this Branch has the honour of his Grandson being our Hon. President.

The women who had served with the R.A.F. in the First World War had, in 1919, formed an Old Comrades Association to which members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force were admitted. Both organisations had worked in close co-operation and after the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 agreed to amalgamate.

In 1943, the name of the organisation was changed to The Royal Air Forces Association with membership open to all who were serving or had served in the Royal Air Force of the crown.

No. 623 LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN and DISTRICT BRANCH

In the early 1930's a Henlow and Hitchin Branch of the Comrades of the R.A.F. was formed with R.A.F. Henlow providing the inspiration.

This Branch carried the work of the Association locally throughout World War II. Two new local Branches emerged in 1946 – Letchworth and Baldock.

The immediate post war enthusiasm waned however. Baldock

disbanded and, sadly, so did the Henlow and Hitchin Branch.

In 1962 Letchworth was re-designated Letchworth, Hitchin and District Branch and since then it has become the best known branch in Hertfordshire.

In 2021 a further North Hertfordshire Branch closed, Stevenage, with it's membership being continued in this Branch.

Happily, despite all the changes, the strong bonds with R.A.F. Henlow continued, until it's pending closure in 2020.

Although R.A.F. Henlow had its stay of closure extended, the number of serving members have been greatly reduced, and therefore unfortunately so as our connection with the camp.

Over the past few months we have learnt that the camp's life has been extended to 2026., And with that good news the bonds that we had in the past are now being regenerated.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ASSOCIATION

We exist to help those less fortunate than ourselves, Extracts from our Royal Charter describe our objectives thus:-

- To promote the welfare, by charitable means, of those who are serving or have served in our Air Forces, their wives and dependants and the widows and dependants of those who died whilst serving or thereafter.
- To preserve the memory and honour the example set by comrades or members of the Association who have died in our service.

ORGANISATION OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Association is governed by its Annual Conference where principles and policies are formulated. The business of the Association is carried out by the Central Council and discharged through the network of

nine areas in the UK which are further divided into Regions, Letchworth, Hitchin and District Branch is part of the South Eastern Area. The Area H.Q. is in Leicester.

The Branch Committee is elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. The Committee meets regularly to spearhead the work of the Branch and to ensure that there is a social programme within which our objectives can meet in a happy manner.

We have adopted two local ATC Squadrons, No. 248 (Letchworth) and No. 1066 (Hitchin) who work closely with us in our fund raising activities.

R.A.F.A. NEWS

The Association sends a first class quarterly journal *Air Mail* to each full and life member, and the Associate member who request it, to keep us in touch with major events affecting our work. It also tells us about R.A.F. matters and reminds us of service life in the past.

Our Branch produces a regular newsletter, **RAFAGEN** which is sent to requesting members by email, informing them of our programme of events, with news and stories of our members. This newsletter was voted the best in the South & Eastern Area of the Association in 2018.

BRANCH MEETINGS

Our Branch meets on the last Wednesday of each month at the Letchworth Par 3 Golf Family Centre, Willian Way, Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH

These monthly meeting known to us as **NAAFI BREAK** and is in the form of a coffee morning, for members and anyone who is part of the Royal Air Force family, and their dependants, who come for a coffee, chat, and meet friends.

There is ample parking and disabled facilities. We are grateful to the management of the Letchworth Par 3 Golf Family Centre for their generosity and co-operation in helping us to achieve our objectives.

The Committee meet on the first Wednesday of every alternate month at the Par 3 Family Golf Centre.



DIMPLES Bar & Cafe.

Willian Way,

Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH

Open Tuesday - Sunday

The home of the Branch NAAFI BREAK

**Last Wednesday morning of each
month 10.00 hrs til noon**

NAAFI BREAK July 2023

No photos of the July NAAFI Break due to a busy time, and VIPs' to look after.

Warrant Officer Steve King returned again this month, but this time he brought the Commanding Officer, Chris Brooke with him. They came along with an invitation for member to attend the RAF Henlow Family Fun Day.

Because of the Fun Day, neither of our guests stayed for the full duration of the Break. Nevertheless our members thought it was great for them to give us their time, as we like to feel part of the Royal Air Force, and such visits help.

Another VIP was ex Branch Chairman, Lisa Berry. Lisa came to say "Farewell" to the Branch, as she had taken a new job which meant that she would be moving "Up North", or in her case, back home.

We are all very sorry to hear that Lisa is leaving the area, and we will not be seeing her bubbly character so often, but she has promised that if she is in the area, she will pop in to see us.

All members wish Lisa all the best in her new appointment, and new life in the north.



**ROYAL
AIR FORCES**
Association
Friendship | Help | Support

NAAFI BREAK GALLERY August 2023



Not the most members we have had for a NAAFI BREAK, but it is the holiday season, and a few left before our cameraman got round to taking the picture.

We had a new NAAFI BREAKer this month. Bernie Drummond. Bernie was a Stevenage member, and now one of us. We hope you enjoyed your visit Bernie. and look forward to seeing you at future meetings.

Hope to see a few more of you at the September NAAFI BREAK



AS THIS YEAR IS THE BRANCHE'S 77th BIRTHDAY I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE AN IDEA TO LIST THE MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OVER 50 YEARS.

Mr D. Raikes	76 years	(1947)
Mr L. Hutchins	70 years	(1953)
Mr P. Card	67 years	(1956)
Mr E Brown	63 years	(1960)
Mr F. Eskriett	61 years	(1962)
Mr R. Dell	61 years	(1962)
Mr E. Howell	59 years	(1964)
Mr A. Dep	57 years	(1966)
Mr D. Bols	57 years	(1966)
Mr S. Dutfield	57 years	(1966)
Mr L. Davis	56 years	(1967)
Mr M. Brackpool	56 years	(1967)
Mr J, Speirs	55 years	(1968)
Mr C. Rock	54 years	(1969)
Mr E. Gates	50 years	(1973)



HEADLINES IN 1947

Britons struggle against big freeze.

Belts tighten as food crisis deepens.

School leaving age is raised to fifteen.

Coal Industry Nationalised.

Princess Elizabeth and Philip marry.

Compton sweeps into cricket record books.

Edinburgh plays host to new arts festival.

The country's first atomic reactor starts up at Harwell.

111 miners are trapped after a pit blast at Whitehaven.

Midweek sport is banned to try and increase productivity.

R.A.F.A. Form a branch in Letchworth.

Caughoo, a 100 - 1 outsider wins the Grand National.

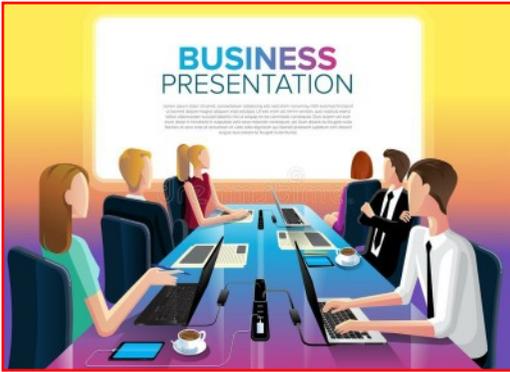
Private medical company - BUPA is formed.

Budget increases 20 cigarettes from 2/4d to 3/4d

Henry Ford dies.

Derby County sign Liverpool's Billy Steel for a record £15,000.

Eros returns to Piccadilly Circus.



COMMITTEE NEWS September 2023

After the general points the Committee have to report on, those present discussed the following points.

Hitchin Wings Appeal Collection. Eric Dagless reminded everyone that he and his Wings Appeal team will be in the centre of Hitchin under a gazebo collecting for our Wings Appeal.

Battle of Britain service. This is to be held at St Thomas' Church in Bedford road. Lindsay Dew reported that all was in hand. A list of guests to invite was agreed. Ken Needham to organise the invites going out.

Christmas Bash. It was agreed that we are to get names of members wishing to attend this event. Jim Box who is the organiser of this meal says as yet he couldn't give a date, but a suggestion of numbers would help in booking.

Jim and Marie will be attending a meeting at RAF Henlow at the end of the month. This meeting was held on a quarterly basis until it was thought that the station was due to close, and many unformed personnel were moved out. As the camp has been reprieved for a few years, the Station Commander and the Station Warrant Officer have brought it back for all branches in the area. The idea is for the camp and the branches to discuss how they can help each other and their member.

The Chairman's coffee cup became empty, so he called the meeting to an end.

The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.

If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to kwn056@btinternet.com

The next issue will be published in December 2023

NAAFI BREAKS for the next few months are as follows :-

27th September 2023

25th October 2023

29th November 2023

Our December Christmas Bash date is yet to be confirmed

Should you wish not to receive the regular issues of RAFAGEN, would you please advise the branch secretary on secretary@rafa-letchworth.org.uk, who will arrange for your address to be deleted from our list.

