

Letchworth, Hitchin & District
Branch



AUTUMN
2016



 **ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

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RAFAGEN



*The official newsletter of the
Letchworth & District Branch of
the Royal Air Forces' Association*

The charity that supports the RAF family

ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS

President: Gordon Collinson

Vice President : Dennis Dawson

Chairman: Ernie Brown

Vice Chairman: Roy Newbury

Hon. Secretary: Ken Needham

Hon. Treasurer: Ken Needham

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*Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at
the Conservative Club, Birds Hill, Letchworth Garden City,
Hertfordshire, at 20.00 hrs Guests are welcome*

Supporting something special

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



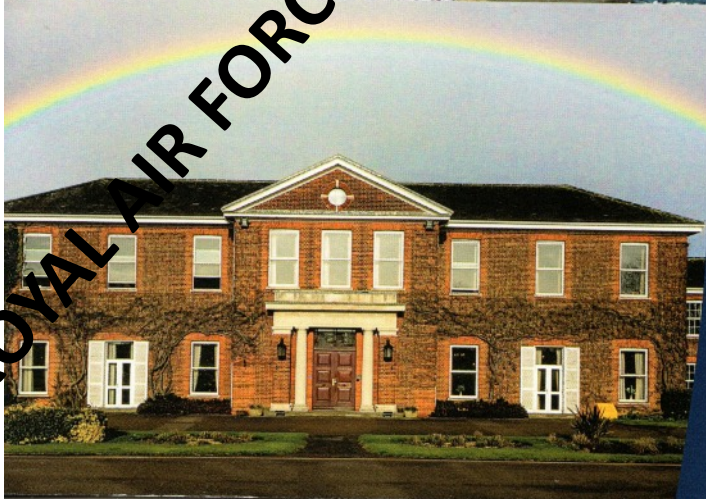
It is with regret that the Association report the death on 15th July 2016 of Air Marshall Sir Charles Soutar, President of the Aldeburgh Branch. Sir Charles was a life Vice President of the Association. He was a past President of Eastern Area and past Chairman of Central Council.

Dare I say that I am not a 'lottery' man myself. I don't go in for these lotteries, The National Lottery, Postcode Lottery or any other lottery. That includes, I am sorry to say the RAFA lottery. But I know someone who is a regular subscriber to the RAFA lottery. I know this because I was reading the list of winners in the South Eastern Area Newsletter, and there was our Branch President's name along side the winning amount. Congratulations Gordon, has Pauline spent it all yet? They do say you have to be in it to win it, so get your tickets today, I'll be watching out for more winners from this Branch in future.



The prize of a bottle of Champagne was offered to any member who sold the most tickets to the Military Proms Concerts. This was won by Marie Mahoney, who sold by far more tickets than everyone else, except the Box Office, who was exempt from the competition. The prize was presented by the Branch Secretary and Treasurer, Ken Needham.

ROYAL AIR FORCE HENLOW



ROYAL AIR FORCE HENLOW TO CLOSE



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We must have all heard by now the sad news that Royal Air Force Henlow is to close to help the coffers of the Government and to build houses for future generations. The reasons may be good, but to us it is very sad to hear.

Our Branch will miss this establishment, mainly because it is our only way of hanging on to our memories with the functions we have attended there. Henlow is the only base in our area for us to be proudly associated with.

The following is taken from the booklet produced by the previous Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Henlow, Wing Commander Steve Smith.

The Royal Air Force was only six weeks old when Lt Col Robert Francis Stapleton-Cotton and a party of forty airmen arrived at Henlow from R.A.F. Farnborough on 10th May 1918.

The Lt Col was to become the first Commanding Officer of R.A.F. Henlow in August 1918. Although still under construction, the depot had achieved a limited output of Bristol Fighters and De Havilland aircraft.

In the list of original R.A.F. Stations for 1918, Henlow counts among only five other stations which remain open as R.A.F. Stations today. Halton; Leuchars; Northolt; Waddington and Wittering.

During the war years, R.A.F. Henlow became one of the largest R.A.F. Maintenance Units in the country and made an invaluable contribution to the war effort. It is a proud part of our history that R.A.F. Henlow contributed (albeit indirectly) to the Battle of Britain, repairing Hurricanes that were damaged during the battle.

After the second world war, a new role developed for the station, that of radio equipment calibration and signals development.

Through the years R.A.F. Henlow has been home to :-

The Parachute Test Unit The Royal Air Force Technical College; The R.A.F. Officer Cadet Training Unit Officer's Command School & Intermediate Command & Staff Course; Royal Air Force Police Headquarters

Today it supports :-

616 VGS ADEWS Aquila DCSU DHU Eng. Ops JACIG R.A.F. Cam R.A.F. Police SCIS and The band of The Queens Division

Royal Air Force Henlow will be sadly missed by so many, none more than the members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District Branch of the Royal Air Forces socation. We have had some good times there.

The photo on the left shows Branch members enjoying one of the many events we have attended. This one was in 2008.



LETTERS

A review of some of the letters and e mails received over the past three months

Thank you for a very interesting RAFAGEN. Great to hear of previous RAFALOs involved in the Branch. Might I request that on page 2 that my current rank be amended from Flight Sergeant. Thank you, don't wish to appear pretentious, but for accuracy in years to come.

Shaun (Branch RAFALO)

Sorry Shaun - I didn't think that anyone read page 2, that, it appears includes me. Error rectified for this issue. - Editor.

Thank you for a first class news letter. Quite brilliant.

George Quick (Branch Member)

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AREA H.Q. HAS MOVED

Central Headquarters and Area Headquarters moved into new premises on

Tuesday 23rd August 2016.

The new postal address is :-
Royal Air Forces Association Headquarters, Atlas House, 41 Wembley Road, Leicester LE3 1UT.

All telephone numbers and e mail addresses remain the same.



Pictured here is Branch member Derek Larkins on leave from the R.A.F. circa mid to late 1940s' helping out his father on agricultural leave. He was telling our R.A.F.A.L.O at one of our meetings the story of being sent on leave with his rifle and kit, to return after leave to a new R.A.F. Station, but was picked up by military police at the train station. They wanted to know why he was wearing an R.A.F. Beret but no R.A.F. Regiment slides. Derek was attached to the R.A.F. Regiment and made to wear a beret as apposed to the normal chip bag hat. Great story Derek thank you.



Get your diaries out, because our R.A.F.A.L.O. W/O Shaun Griffin has been busy ensuring that our Branch Social evenings are entertaining.

OCTOBER 2016

6th - Branch visit to RAF Museum Hendon - organised guided tour . Note the guided part. For more details go to www.rafmuseum.org.uk Numbers are limited to 35, and half the seats are booked already so book your place with Ken Needham as

soon as possible. Tickets £15 (lunch not included)

13th - Major David Squibb - Salvation Army - "I was only putting out the chamber pot" (David's experiences in the Salvation Army) David's father served in the RAF.

NOVEMBER 2016

10th - Warrant Officer Pete Hall - Medics during the Great War.

DECEMBER 2016

8th - Branch Christmas Bash.

JANUARY 2017

12th - Josh Tidy - L.G.C.H.F. Curator - provisional

FEBRUARY 2017

9th - Flight Sergeant Emily Campbell from 1066 Hitchin Sqn ATC.

MARCH 2017

9th- Branch AGM and social evening.

APRIL 2017

13th - W/O Shaun Griffin - The R.A.F. Regiment a short history and recent operations.

20th - Branch visit to R.A.F. Uxbridge WWII Bunker. Details nearer the date.

MAY 2017

11th - Sgt Sarah Ward 248 Letchworth Sqn ATC - flying scholarships and Air Experience Flights.

JUNE 2017

8th - Gary Fisher - The Magna Carter.

JULY 2017

13th - Josh Tidy - L.G.C.H.F. Curator - provisional

AUGUST 2017

10 th - David Taylor - Amy Johnson - provisional.

SEPTEMBER 2017

14th - To be confirmed

OCTOBER 2017

13th - To be confirmed

17 th - *Branch visit to R.A.F. Regiment Heritage Centre at R.A.F. Honington.*

NOVEMBER 2017

10th - To be confirmed

DECEMBER 2017

14th - *Branch Christmas Bash.*



Air Vice Marshal Merryman giving his excellent talk on the English Electric Lighting at our August Meeting.



Here's how Wings Grand Draw makes a difference.

R.A.F. personnel and their families dedicate their lives to their country. The R.A.F. Association exists to ensure that such a sacrifice does not result in suffering, poverty or loneliness.

Thanks to the generosity of our fantastic supporters, the R.A.F. Association is able to carry out over 100,000 welfare visits and calls every year to those in need. It also means that last year we provided around 2,200 short welfare breaks, and on average gave out over 40 welfare grants every week. Your support really does make a big difference to people in need.

So when you buy your draw tickets, you are making a significant difference to people's lives. And of course you've got a chance to win some top prizes.

- 1st – BMW 1 series or a cash alternative of £13,000
- 2nd – A Fred Olsen cruise for two people
- 3rd – A breath taking wing walking experience for one person
- 4th – Spa Break for two people
- 5th – A Toshiba laptop supplied by ICARIS

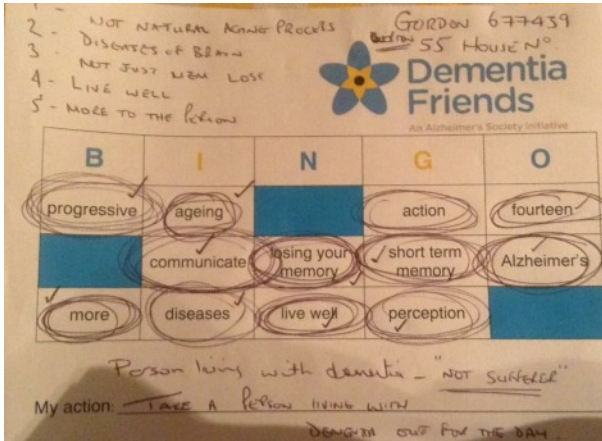


To be drawn on Friday 21st October 2016.



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SPEAKERS OF THE MONTH



We were all invited to play a different type of BINGO game at our July meeting, when Annette Oliver, a Dementia Friends Champion, came to speak to us.

There were no prizes, but Shaun (Branch RAFALO) was the first to call a line. (On the left is Shaun's completed card) By the time the card was completed by everyone, we had learnt a lot more about Dementia, and how to

help suffers of this ailment.

► VE Day 8th May 2016 Commemorations

Branch Vice Chairman and Wings Appeal Coordinator Roy Newbury writes: I enlisted the assistance of young children from Chapelle Vallon, France to lay a wreath on VE Day 8th May 2016 commemorations which are held every year in France. This also takes place in a second village called St Remy Sous Barbuise. To date, commencing in 2014,



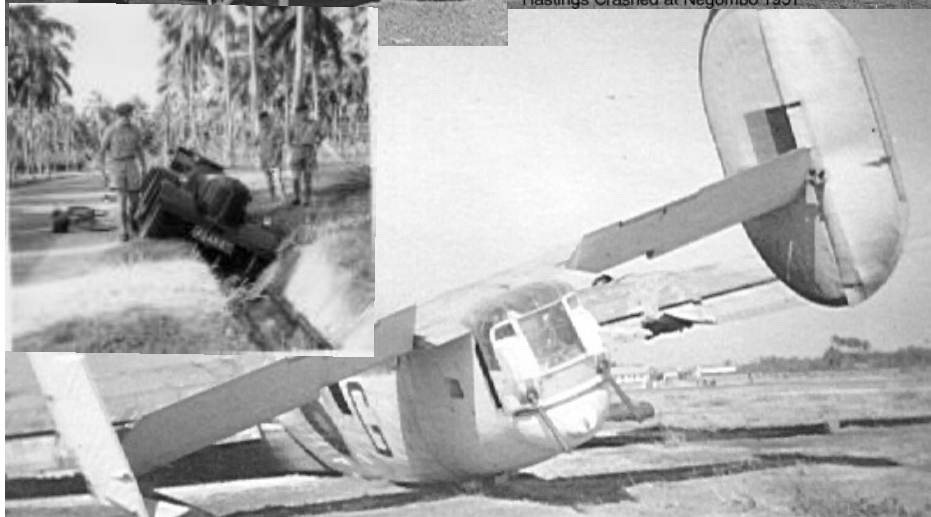
2015 & 2016, I have enlisted the young children to lay wreaths in memory of the R.A.F. and Commonwealth Air Forces who made the final sacrifice to free their country from Nazi oppression on Victory in Europe Day 1945. On that day at the "Vin du Honor" in the village hall I personally thank them on behalf of the R.A.F. Association and pin on a Royal British Legion lapel badge. The production of the Certificate's (ten to date) which is laminated is, I hope, a life long artefact for them to continue

their commemorations at the airman's graves.

Oops!!! Sorry



Hastings Crashed at Negombo 1951



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Members of the Branch Speak About Their R.A.F. History

Gordon Collinson R.A.F. 1939-46 and 1952-59

Number	Rank	Dates
1323613	AC2	16.2.42 - 29.06.42
	LAC	30.06.42 - 05.08.43
153065	Pilot Officer	06.08.43 - 06.02.44
	Flying Officer	07.02.44 - 17.06.45
	Sub. Lt. RNAS	18.06.45 - 08.02.46
	Lt. RNAS	08.02.46 - 18.06.46

Flt Lt 248 Squadron A.T.C 1952-1959



1939

On 7th September I began work as an apprentice at the British Tabulating Machine Company (later ICL) in Letchworth. In 1940 the Company became involved in producing BOMBEs; the machines for decoding the German Enigma Machines. It was Top Secret and very few employees knew what they were working on. Later, whilst in the RAF and on leave, I visited the factory and saw a strange machine; thirty years later I realised I had seen a BOMBE.

1941

In April I became Cadet No 16 in No 248 (Letchworth) Squadron Air Training Corps. Had my first flight in a Whitley at R.A.F. Henlow. On 15th August I was attested into the R.A.F. on my 18th birthday with the ambition, like most young men, to fly Spitfires!

1942

In the February I was called up to the Aircrew Receiving Centre at St Johns Wood with the Selection Centre at Lord's Cricket Ground. I joined the Initial Training Wing in Paignton, Devon in the Spring where we were 'visited' by ME109s on tip and run raids. Whilst on a drill parade I was inspected by King George VI. By the autumn I had passed the grading course to determine suitability for aircrew as a pilot and transferred to R.A.F. Heaton Park, Manchester, awaiting posting for training.

1943

In January I joined SS 'Andes' and set sail for Canada in full gale that persisted for the six day voyage that included various course changes to avoid U-boats. The ship was covered in ice when we reached Halifax. My flying started in No 4 Training Command at No 32 Elementary Flying Training School, Bowden, Alberta on Tiger Moths before completing Service Flying Training at No 34 Service Flying Training School at Medicine Hat, Alberta. I was awarded my pilot wings in August just before my 20th birthday I progressed to No 32 Navigation Training School, No 3 Training Command, at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island from September to October after which I returned to England aboard SS 'Aquitania' on a dead-calm sea all the way. Then to R.A.F. Harrogate waiting for posting.

1944

I didn't have to wait long and in March I was posted to R.A.F. Dyce (now Aberdeen Airport) on flying control duties. I did get a trip in an Auster into the Cairngorms with an Army pilot to watch Commandos training for D-day although we did not know it at the time. From April to June I was at RAF Croughton, Oxfordshire for a conversion course onto twin-engined Airspeed Oxfords. Got lost on my first solo flight and made a precautionary landing at what turned out to be Steeple Morden where the USAF had a Mustang squadron. They were very generous - fed me and took me in a jeep back home to Letchworth. In June I was posted to R.A.F. Killadeas on Lough Erne, Northern Ireland for Catalina Operational Training until September. Whilst home on leave in the August I joined RAFA with a life membership which was a princely sum of £5 in those days. On completion of training my posting came in and I was off to Gibraltar on SS 'Orduna' in convoy to join No 202 Squadron flying Catalinas - no Spitfires! After just a month in Gibraltar 202 Squadron returned to Lough Erne and were based at R.A.F. Castle Archdale.

1945

There were nine regular members on our Catalina and we undertook many operations on anti U-boat patrols and convoy escorts without a single U-boat sighting until the end of March when we attacked a periscope and schnorkel tube but, due to a technical fault, the depth charges hung up; we had no more chances. With the end of WWII in Europe No 202 Squadron were quickly disbanded at Castle Archdale on 12 June 1945. Meanwhile there was an opportunity for me to transfer to the Royal Navy (Fleet Air Arm) and I thought that flying single engined aircraft might be a possibility for me. So I transferred and lo and behold I was posted, via Greenwich Naval College,

to Lee on Solent to fly Seafires after a Harvard conversion course at Atcham. That proved to me that if you really want to do something you can find a way.

1946

From October 1945 I attended various courses on Seafire III at Yeovilton, Eglinton (N. Ireland) until April 1946; later at Easthaven in Scotland my demob came through. This was just two weeks before I was due to do Carrier deck landings! In the June I left the Navy to become a civilian again after my demob.

1952-1959

I joined the R.A.F. VR (Training) to become the C.O. of No 248 (Letchworth) Sqdn, Air Training Corps where I had been a cadet in 1941. Gordon Overton, R.A.F. Association Branch member, was a Warrant Officer in the squadron.

Postscript

Several outstanding members of the R.A.F. Association have been awarded National Presidential Certificates with the Queen's birthday honours list 2012. The award, the highest the Association can possibly bestow, is recognition of ongoing support and dedication to the Association. Our Branch President, Mr Gordon Collinson, is one of those so honoured. Those receiving the award have a wealth of experience and have made a range of invaluable contributions to the R.A.F. Association and its work. The Letchworth, Hitchin & District Branch Committee and members congratulate Gordon on this achievement.



Gordon Overton (left) with Gordon Collinson at the Letchworth ATC



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Late news

We are sad to report that Frank Ogden died on Monday 5th. September 2016.

He was in Gosmore Care Home, and he was there for a fortnight, as Respite Care for Mary his wife. He was due to go home on Tuesday 6th. September. However he collapsed on the previous Friday, Mary was with him when he died on Monday.

Frank had requested a “private family only cremation service”, he does not wish any cards or messages sent to his family. The family were asked if they wished for donations to be made to a charity and were told, “no”.

Frank was 88,