

Letchworth, Hitchin & District  
Branch



**RAFA GEN 'E'**

**SUMMER  
2016**

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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**

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*Hon. Treasurer: Ken Needham*

*Committee:*

*John Airey, Keith Ellis*

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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



What a three months. No time to chat, so here is a joke :-

A young R.A.F. Policeman is on the gate at Buckingham palace. His Flt Sgt walks up to him and says "Right lad, the Queen is out on public duties I want to know the minute she gets back here, do you understand? The minute she's back you let me know".

"Yes sir " says the young Snowdrop.

So 10 minutes later a big limo pulls in through the gates, the Snowdrop stops the car, pops his head in and says " scuse me ma'am are you the Queen? "

"No I'm princess Ann"

"ok sorry to delay you, proceed".

The next limo pulls in and he sticks his head in the window " scuse me ma'am are you the Queen? "

"No I'm princess Margaret".

" Ok sorry to delay you ma'am, proceed.

Next limo pulls in and same again, he sticks his head in the window, "Scuse me ma'am, are you the Queen?."

"Yes I'm the Queen".

"Right" he says. "Well make yourself scarce love cos my Flt Sgt is lookin for you".



# Volunteer spotlight

## Susan Dempster, Storybook Wings Volunteer Editor



Storybook Wings is the R.A.F. Association's initiative for serving R.A.F. parents who have to spend time away from their children – whether they are away on deployment or working away during the week. We provide recorders and a list of approved stories that parents can record, along with a personal message. Sound effects and music are added to create a really special keepsake.

We asked some of our Storybook Wings Volunteer Editors about their experiences. Here's what Susan had to say:

I was a serving member of the R.A.F. for 26 years and became an R.A.F. Association Liaison Officer (RAFALO) to the Letchworth, Hitchin & District Branch, three years before I left. As a RAFALO I realised just how much good the R.A.F. Association was doing and I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of it.

When I left the R.A.F. and settled at home in rural SW Scotland I was nearly 100 miles away from the nearest R.A.F. Association Branch and felt quite sad that I was unable to continue to help the Association. It was at Christmas when I saw the notice for volunteer editors for Storybook Wings and saw that I finally had a chance to do my bit again.

I spent a long time on 90SU/TCW (Tactical Communications Wing), being deployed on numerous occasions and although I didn't have any children, lots of my colleagues did and I could see what they were going through, as they were preparing to leave and during the deployment. I had already heard about Storybook Wings and how wonderful they were for both the children and their parents and it was good to know that even in such a remote place I could do my little bit for those still serving and their families. They are great fun to do and I get a lot of enjoyment out of trying to match up sounds and music to all the different narrations.

Become a Storybook Wings Editor

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## News of the Branch Pardre

I hope you are well.

I just wanted to let you know that I have started to make a stage return to ministry. My first service was on May 1st.

The past year has been a long and challenging journey of treatment leading to a life changing outcome. My final chemotherapy was on January 25th and I stopped taking the tablets in early February. Since then the side effects have continued - they are manageable but beginning to get a bit tiresome now.

I'm pacing myself not to do too much because tiredness becomes quite an issue. I've got what's called chemo legs (very wobbly when I walk), chemo brain (I easily forget) along with other side effects.

I have enjoyed getting updates from the Region and I hope things at the Branch are continuing in a good way. I have missed coming over to Branch meetings, but I'm not sure when I will be able to begin attending once again. I just wanted to update you on how things are for me. - Cannon Lindsay Dew

### More news from the Parishes of Dunton, Eyeworth & Wrestlingworth

The Bishop of St Albans has invited Lindsay to become an Honorary Canon of The Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban.

The Installation was held on Saturday 7th May 2016 at 4pm at The Cathedral.

Below is a photo with the Bishop and others who were also made a Canon. (Rev. Drew is on the right., Sorry Cannon Drew is on the right.)



# Helping Mrs S at home and at large

15th June 2016

When a leaflet dropped through the door of an R.A.F. widow's home, she didn't realise how much the contents of it would change her life.

Married in 1952, Mrs S\* never met her husband's family. But he often spoke of his brother, who was killed in action over Berlin during World War II. She believes that it was his brother's actions that saved her husband's life – he pleaded with him not to take the gunnery course, as too many of his friends had not come back from operations. Mr S became a wireless operator instead of a gunner.

In 2007, after 20 years of retirement living in the Yorkshire countryside, a life altering flood occurred in their village, submerging the couple's marital home and making it completely uninhabitable. To add to the desperation of the situation, her husband had had a stroke and was living with dementia.

Living in temporary accommodation was frustrating for both of them and incredibly upsetting for her husband, who felt that his home and all his belongings had been taken from him. Mr S died without ever returning to the marital home, and Mrs S couldn't bear to return when it became habitable. Instead, she moved to Bradford to be closer to her daughter and granddaughter.

The housing association accommodation that she moved into was quite adequate, however 18 months ago she suffered a stroke and had to move to a ground floor apartment. It was around this time that a leaflet came through the door advertising the help she could receive as a member of the R.A.F. family. She said that, although she was aware of the Association, she didn't know that this could be used to help people like her.

After calling the North East office and speaking to the friendly and helpful welfare team, she received a visit from her local volunteer welfare officer and an occupational therapist. Both her financial and physical needs were assessed and as a result she received a reclining chair and a three-legged wheel walker. The home aids have helped enormously to keep Mrs S active, as she can now walk to the shops and go out on day trips with her family. The recliner helps her to be much

more mobile within her home, as she thoroughly enjoys entertaining the neighbours with cups of tea and showing off her new chair!

Mrs S reminisces that, had she known about the Association when her home got flooded and after all of the stress and worry she went through, she would have called for our help much sooner. But the welfare support she received when she did know about us was invaluable. From her welfare officer to the whole of the area welfare team, she says they were a great comfort during the application and after, when they checked if she was ok.

Now we're in touch with Mrs S, we'll be there for her whenever she needs us. That's the way the R.A.F. Association works. If you or someone you know could benefit from some support contact [welfare@rafa.org.uk](mailto:welfare@rafa.org.uk) or call 0800 018 2361.

*\*Names have been changed to protect identity.*





*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.*

**JULY 2016**

**14<sup>th</sup>** - Annette Oliver - Dementia Friends Champion

**AUGUST 2016**

**11<sup>th</sup>** - Air Vice Marshall Alan Merriman - The design and development of the English Electric Light-

ning.

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

**8<sup>th</sup>** - Sqn Ldr Alan Huyton from R.A.F. Henlow - Open sky's.

**OCTOBER 2016**

**6<sup>th</sup>** - *Branch visit to RAF Museum Hendon - organised guided tour . Note the guided part. For more details go to [www.rafmuseum.org.uk](http://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)*

**13<sup>th</sup>** - 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**

**10<sup>th</sup>** - Warrant Officer Pete Hall - Medics during the Great War.

**DECEMBER 2016**

**8<sup>th</sup>** - ***Branch Christmas Bash.***

**JANUARY 2017**

**12<sup>th</sup>** - Josh Tidy - L.G.C.H.F. Curator - provisional

**FEBRUARY 2017**

**9<sup>th</sup>** - 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.*



# NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2016

## Another marvellous Conference in Blackpool...

17th May 2016

This year's Annual Conference was held at the Hilton Hotel in Blackpool from 13-15 May.

Around 350 members came by the sunny seaside to hear about the progress being made to revitalise the organisation and ensure we continue to support the R.A.F. family well into the future.

As in previous years, Friday afternoon was dedicated to our serving members, our R.A.F. Association Liaison Officers (RAFALOs). Their seminar included updates from all parts of the Association and gave them the opportunity to share ideas on how we, as a charity, can help them in their role as the link between the central organisation and the serving R.A.F. family.

Conference began on the Friday evening with an informal 'meet and greet' where attendees had the chance to catch up with old friends and colleagues in a relaxed setting.

Conference was officially opened on the Saturday morning with the traditional parade of standards, a welcome address from the Mayor of Blackpool, Cllr Peter Callow and a reply from our President Sir Dusty Miller.

After the ceremonial element came the business of Conference and a presentation by Secretary General Nick Bunting on performance in 2015 and what the future holds for the Association. The Association was delighted to welcome Sir Andrew Pulford, Chief of the Air Staff, to address Conference. He gave a comprehensive update on today's R.A.F., covering its people, operations and aircraft updates. After his address, he presented the Flying Scholarships to the successful cadets. Sir Dusty Miller then presented the National Presidential Certificates. The list of the recipients can be found [here](#). During Conference, the Chief of the Air Staff and Chairman

of the Central Council, AVM Nigel Bairsto were both made Life Vice-Presidents with Nigel Bairsto also receiving a National Presidential Certificate.

Conference business got underway before lunch, with presentations of the Annual Conference Committee's report by the Chairman of the Committee, Taff Rees. Nigel Bairsto followed with his Chairman of Central Council's report and Philip Tagg, Honorary Treasurer, gave a financial and auditor's report for 2016.

After lunch, a number of resolutions were discussed and voted on before Conference was closed for the day. Details of resolutions carried and those that were lost can be found in the members portal of the website. The National Standard Bearer Competition was held straight after and the results can be found here.

Saturday evening was a glamorous affair where everyone put on their smart outfits for the Gala Awards Evening. The evening received an overwhelming positive response with entertainment provided by the R.A.F. College Band which carried out a fantastic marching display followed by music by Lizzy Rushby. The list of trophy winners from this year's conference can be found here.

The final day of Conference started, as ever, with a time to reflect and commemorate at the Service of Dedication. Many of our standards were proudly paraded ahead of current and former members of the R.A.F. and other services in the bright sunshine. Everyone was then treated to a spectacular fly past by a Hurricane from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Many passers-by stopped to pay tribute to the many men and women of the Royal Air Force who have given their lives in defence of our country.

Conference was then concluded with the presentation of parade trophies, the final resolutions carried over from Saturday, a vote of thanks and the closing ceremony.

We had a very successful and enjoyable conference and look forward to seeing many members and guests next year.

# SPEAKERS OF THE MONTH



In April we learnt all about the Path Finder Force (1942 to 1945) . Before the meeting we may have thought our knowledge on this subject was quite good, but after the talk given by Squadron Leader Kevin Dalley (R.A.F. Rtd) we realised we knew nothing, but we do now.

At our May meeting, David Taylor came back again to talk to us again this time on The “Dambusters’ myth”. R.A.F. Scampton and the 617 Squadron are dear to my heart, as I spent part of my service life at Scampton, guarding the then 617 Squadron of Vulcans, with my police dog, so this was a talk that was of great interest to me and it seemed to the rest of the members present on that evening.



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JUNE



June brought a little disappointment to our Vice Chairman, Roy, for he thought the subject “5 Ways to attract new birds into your Garden” meant the female variety, but of course, Simon Jones of the British Trust for Ornithology came to talk about the feathered variety. Those present learnt how to look after the birds in our gardens, and attract more, as well as how to try and keep away that pesky cat from next door.. I took heed of all he said and went home and set to work with great results. I am a little worried, however, about that Bald Eagle which comes and sits on the fence eyeing the neighbours cats though.



**YOUR CLUB  
NEEDS YOU**

# MEMORY LANE

## FOR THOSE OF US WHO REMEMBER THE GOOD OLD DAYS



Bed Packs. I think that more Bed Packs were thrown across the billets at Square Bashing than any other article, for not being constructed correctly. The one on the left is constructed correctly, and I am afraid to say that it is not one of mine. Mine tended to sag in the middle.

Let us now take this memory one stage further. For those of you not

in the R.A.F., beds were not just for sleeping in. Can you remember the kit inspections? Another target for those dreaded D.I's at Square Bashing. The picture on the right is not just your standard kit laid out for inspection. This is one was laid out at the R.A.F. Police Training camp. Hence the white hat and white webbing. Look at the soles of those boots and shoes. Worn everyday, but not a speck of dirt in sight. That razor, I'll bet has never been used.

I go all cold when I see this picture, remembering the times I stood by my bed waiting for that D.I. to come and find something that wasn't quite up to HIS standard.

Do you have a story about R.A.F. beds?



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# TOTAL COLLECTION ON THE DAY FOR THE WINGS APPEAL 2016 WAS £279



# MILITARY PROMS AT SPIRELLA



**SATURDAY 25th JUNE 2016**

with the

**THE BAND OF 3RD BATTALION ROYAL ANGLIANS**



One of the biggest problems we get is, that after such an event as Military Proms at Spirella, is that it was so successful, people are asking "When are we going to have another music evening, this one was so good?" If the audience had been as big as they have been in the past, then the Committee would have said "next week", but as there was a lot of empty seats we will have to wait and see. Nevertheless it was a great evening.

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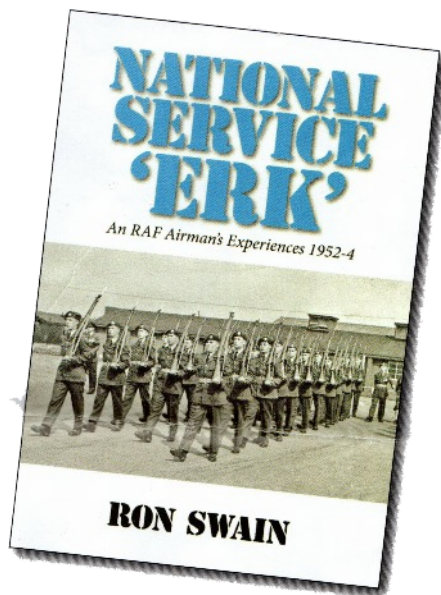
## National Service 'Erk'

An R.A.F. Airman's Experiences 1952 -4

By Branch Member **Ron Swain**

In common with many former National Servicemen, Ron Swain of Letchworth Garden City, and a member of this Branch, has never forgotten the years he spent as a conscript in the UK Armed Forces, his two year stint as an 'erk' in the Royal Air Force in 1952 - 4 having been particularly eventful.

Ron's account of his National Service years, being compiled from a diary kept at the time, contains an enormous amount of historical detail, indeed his recall of names, places and events is so remarkable and his descriptions of them so vivid and evocative that his readers are transported back 60 years to share his experience, as if serving along side him.



First came the weeks of Basic Training that all National Servicemen will recall (in Ron's case at R.A.F. Wilmslow): the "bull", the square-bashing and the hated Corporal Drill Instructors all being depicted with truthfulness and humour. Next came training in a specific trade (in Ron's case as an Airframe Mechanic or 'rigger' at R.A.F. St Athan). And finally a posting to an operational squadron, which for Ron would be 148 Squadron of R.A.F. Bomber Command, based at R.A.F. Upwood, where he would soon find himself responsible for the upkeep of RE347, one of the squadron's Avro Lincoln Bomber aircraft. This was an interesting period in aviation history, witnessing the end of the piston-engined era and the beginning of jet-powered flight. Old war-horses like the Lincoln (successor to the famous WW2 Lancaster) were about to be consigned to the history books, replaced by the jet aircraft such as the English Electric Canberra and the Vickers Valiant, which in due course would themselves be reorganised as 'classic' aircraft. In the course of his National Service Ron would be closely involved with all three of these vintage aircraft and his detailed descriptions of them will be of great interest to aircraft enthusiasts.

Following the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II in June 1953 there was to be a major review of the R.A.F. In July, to which R.A.F. Upwood would be contributing. Lincolns

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from 148 Squadron were to take part in what is now remembered as one of the greatest fly-pasts in British aviation history. Ron's description of the preparations for and execution of, his squadrons part in this major event are once again remarkably detailed and accurate.

As well as his day-to-day duties on the squadron, in the course of which he would become intimately acquainted with the workings of the Lincoln, Ron also attended one of the first training courses for the Vickers Valiant, and as a consequent was sent on detachment to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, where he would play a part in the R.A.F. Team effort to win the 1953 London - Christchurch Air Race (eventually won by an R.A.F. Canberra). Once again Ron's detailed and accurate on the spot reporting does an excellent job in conveying the excitement of participating in this historic aviation event.

All-told, this is a fascinating and evocative memoir, packed with an unusual amount of authentic period detail and delivered with great style and good humour.

The book is available from Amazon priced at £10.98 plus p&p. (ISBN 1-84683-0002-8)



# VOLUNTEERS **NEEDED**

**Could you spare a little time  
to become a friend  
to someone who has no one?**

Right now there are veterans in the RAF family suffering from loneliness. Often, what can help more than anything is a friendly visit from a like-minded person. Could you become an RAF Association volunteer befriender and help make a positive difference to someone's life?

**Please get in touch.**  
with your Branch Secretary if  
you are interested



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**Can you help support someone by offering friendship?  
Contact [volunteers@rafa.org.uk](mailto:volunteers@rafa.org.uk) or 0800 018 2361  
Find out more about our work at [rafa.org.uk](http://rafa.org.uk)**

