

Letchworth, Hitchin & District  
Branch



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 **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

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## **ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT**

### **BRANCH OFFICIALS**

*Life President: Gordon Collinson*

*Vice President : Dennis Dawson*

*Chairman: Ernie Brown*

*Vice Chairman: Roy Newbury*

*Hon. Secretary: Ken Needham*

*Hon. Treasurer: Ken Needham*

*Committee:*

*John Airey, Lisa Berry*

*Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin*

**RAFAGEN** Edited by Ken Needham

*Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant Position*

*Until a replacement is found, all requests in confidence please to the*

*Branch Secretary*

All correspondence regarding the RAFAGEN to

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Hertfordshire, SG6 3HJ.

Telephone: 01462 671534

E-mail [Secretary@rafa-Letchworth.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@rafa-Letchworth.org.uk)

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

**Supporting something special**

# EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



September is over again for another year, which means our Branch Wings Appeal for 2017 comes to an end, you can read on page 5 on how successful we were in Roy, our Wings Appeal Coordinator's report.

Myself and four other Branch members attended the Battle of Britain lunch in the Sergeant's Mess at R.A.F. Henlow the other day. We were a little overwhelmed by members of the Bedfordshire Branches. It would have been nice to see a few more members from the Hertfordshire side of the airfield. At a recent meeting on the camp which I attended it was decided to hold another lunchtime meal at the end of November. Anyone interested please contact me and I will keep you up to date with the info as it is received.

You will see when you get to the end of this newsletter that we are holding our Branch Christmas Bash this year on Broadway. Sorry not New York Broadway, but Letchworth Broadway. Interested members please contact me.

**HOLD EVERYTHING NEWS JUST COMING IN VIA MY E MAIL**

## **Warrant Officer S Griffin is appointed Corps Warrant Officer with effect from 23 October 2017 .**

*The Corps Warrant Officer is the senior enlisted advisor to the R.A.F. Force Protection Force Commander for all matters relating to the R.A.F. Regiment. He is required to support the Air Commodore across the spectrum of the latter's appointments, including as Force Commander, Commandant General R.A.F. Regiment, Air Officer R.A.F. Police, and as Head of Branch and Trade/Employment Field for both R.A.F. Regiment and R.A.F. Police. The Force Commander is also supported by the R.A.F. Provost Marshall's Warrant Officer, who is the senior enlisted advisor to the Force Commander for all matters relating to the R.A.F. Police, and with whom the Corps Warrant Officer works extremely closely in delivering their Commander's intent. Together, they act as the Force Commander's conscience to support his*

*decision making. The Corps Warrant Officer will engage with current, future and past personnel within the Branch and Trade, as well as represent both their and the Force Commander's views to R.A.F. and Defence senior leadership, and also the senior leadership of our allies and partners. He reports to the Force Chief of Staff (who is also Deputy to the Commandant General R.A.F. Regiment). The Corps Warrant Officer will engage frequently and extensively wherever the R.A.F. Regiment is, has or may serve, including to operational theatres. He will also ensure that our core values, ethos and standards, are maintained across the R.A.F. Regiment.*

Congratulations, Shaun from all members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District Branch.

Shaun tells me that his new role will make him based at R.A.F. Honington, but he has no intention of moving away from Letchworth Garden City. This new post will take up more of his time, with trips away, but he is not going to fore sake the Branch and will continue as our R.A.F.A.L.O. (Thank goodness for that)





## IN THE POST BAG

Dear Ken

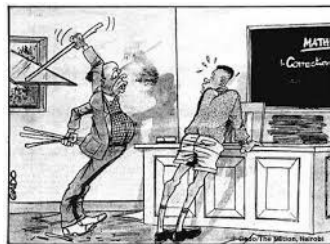
I very much enjoy reading RAFAGEN and applaud the hard work that goes into producing it. The latest edition includes a short paragraph on the sad death of Air Commodore Peter Ayee which regrettably I was already aware of. I note that it states that he was Commandant of RAFSEE in the mid-1950s which might be "a slip of the pen" or more likely a case of hitting the wrong key. Peter replaced me as Commandant in 1993 when I retired and so the mid-1990s would be more correct. Please forgive me for being so nic-picking but thought you might wish to know in order to amend your records.

I am very conscious of not ever attending any of your Branch meetings or social occasions since I left Henlow due mainly to having both knees and one shoulder joint replaced. More recently a severe loss of hearing in both ears makes it most difficult to communicate in a crowded room even with wearing hearing aids. Your 12th April meeting next year could be an occasion - a very important one - for me to make a real effort to attend.

May I take this opportunity to express my very Best Wishes to yourself and other Committee members and to the Branch as a whole.

Sincerely Phillip Miller (life member)

Ed:- Sorry Phillip, next time I will check the facts obtained from local sources, not just take them for granted. Whilst on errors in the last issue, I have been advised by Ewin Kennedy that my piece on the future of R.A.F. Henlow was incorrect, I stated that Mid Beds District Council had not received any planning permission. As Ewin pointed out Mid Beds District Council will never give permission, as Mid Beds District council does not exist. It should be Central Beds Council. That one is 100% my error. At least I know that at least two members read the newsletter.





## WINGS APPEAL 2017

A REPORT BY Roy Newbury - Wings Coordinator

We have been holding events for our Wings Appeal all over the summer, we started in earnest by spending four days at the Co-op store in Stotfold. This was Cyril Gray's area, who sadly passed away earlier this year. Last year Cyril collected almost £900, this year we dropped to £620. Cyril was a lot more thought of than me, a mere stranger to the town, and even with help from other members we couldn't top Cyril's score.

The Letchworth Town Centre added £211 and Sainsbury's of Letchworth saw the pot increased by £284. A two day event at Letchworth Morrisons increased the appeal by £ 618.98

Ken Needham decided to 'go it alone' and hold (with a couple of members) a Brew For The Few party at the Par 3 Golf Centre. Ken was a little disappointed on numbers, but came away with £200.

Other collection points during the year were :- Armed Forces Day £311; Hitchin Market Place £265(a very wet day); Lions Fun Day £76 (another very wet day); and a collection box at the Par 3 Golf Course brought in £144:

My thanks to all who helped in making this total and to the general public of the area who gave so generously. GRAND TOTAL FOR 2017

**£2731**



**LET US NOT FORGET OUR MEMBERS WHO HAVE PASSED AWAY**

**DENIS MAHONEY of Letchworth Garden City**

**KEITH ELLIS of Letchworth Garden City**

**Phillip Haven Card of Hitchin**

Our condolences to the families of the above, and we are thinking of them in their time of sorrow. If we can help in anyway, then we are here to do just that.

The Branch would like to thank Marie, the wife of the late Denis Mahoney for the kind thought of arranging part of the donations made by family and friends at Denis's funeral go to our Branch Welfare Fund, which is there to help members of our Branch in a small way. It was greatly appreciated by us all.



Left - Members of the Letchworth A.T.C. Giving a helping hand at the Letchworth Morrison's Wings Appeal Collection. The A.T.C. Contribution was £270 plus. Thanks for your help.

**COMING IN RAFAGEN IN THE YEAR.**

The first instalment of the life and times of a Royal Air Force pilot during the latter part of the last century, and later becoming a pilot for Britannia Airways.

More news on the 100 year celebrations for the Royal Air Force.

And plans on how to make our Wings Appeal 2018 the best ever.



*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.*

*Please note that speakers may change at short notice due to circumstances, especially those members of the Armed Forces.*

9 Nov 17 R.A.F. Henlow Station Commander and Station Warrant Officer

14 Dec 17 Branch Christmas Bash. See back cover

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

11 Jan 18 T.B.A.

8 Feb 18 Alistair Hodgson - The de Havilland Mosquito production at Salisbury Hall London Colney Herts.

8 Mar 18 **AGM with speaker Mark Pardoe on Hitchin Pubs and Pub names..**

## **1 April 18 - 100 Year Anniversary of the Royal Air Force.**

12 Apr 18 **THE BRANCH IS TO CELEBRATE THE CENTENARY OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE**

19 Apr 18 **Branch Visit TBC.**

10 May 18 Amy Packard - Dementia Friends Update

14 Jun 18 Sam Mason on the History of British Schools

12 Jul 18 Ken Griffin - Letchworth Convicts and Gallows Hill

9 Aug 18 Paul Jiggins - Welwyn Brewery

13 Sept 18 Stephen Barnard - WWI propaganda in music.

11 Oct 18 Nikki Harvey - Fire Investigation Dog Handler.

18 Oct 18 **Branch visit TBC**

8 Nov 18 - Dr Rudi Newman - Imperial Airship Scheme 1924 -30

13 Dec 18 Branch Christmas Bash. Venue to be confirmed



## A message from Joanna Parker JFC Chicksands R.A.F. Association Liaison Officer:

I have few announcements for you all.

### **JFC Chicksands Christmas Carol Service**

Date is TBC but I am hoping that I will be able to secure some seats in this year's festive Carol Service for some members of your Branch, This will be an invitation to members only because of the nature of our site events it won't be open to the general public.

I will also arrange for post-singsong mince pies and mulled wine to be made available to association members attending and invite the Gp Capt or a representative of his to join us. I will your Branch secretary up to date on details of this as soon as I have them, so if you are interested please keep in contact with him.

### **JFC Chicksands RAF 100 Celebrations**

Plans are underway for a busy 2018 with us seeing in our 100th year! There will be a number of R.A.F.100 events taking place at Chicksands to celebrate the occasion over the course of the year. Events range from celebratory concerts, family fun days and special cinema screenings of historical classics such as 'The Dambusters' and 'Battle of Britain'. Stand-by for a calendar of events to be forwarded out to all in the near future.

### **RAF 100 Birthday Service**

One of the first events we are running is a commemorative service in our Church here at Chicksands on 1st April 2018. The POC who is organising this has asked me to scope interest from surrounding veteran branches. Therefore, if you could please ask your committee members and senior branch members\* if they would be interested in attending and let me know. The event will be something along the lines of a service led by our Padre followed by a meal or buffet in our WO & Sgt's Mess. Cost TBC but likely free or very minimal.

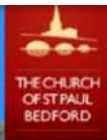
All the best to you all,

Cpl Joanna Parker JFC Chicksands R.A.F. Association Liaison Officer:

Anyone interested in any of the above please pass on your name and contact details to the Branch Secretary who will keep you informed with developed.



THE BAND OF THE QUEEN'S DIVISION  
& THE CHURCH OF ST PAUL PRESENT:



# Civic Concert in Celebration of RAF Henlow 100

Date: Sat 21 Oct 2017 7pm

Location: St. Paul's Church, Bedford, MK40 1SQ



ARMY



RAF Henlow  
100 years

Free tickets available  
for all on the door  
(Doors open at 6:30pm)



Queens\_Div\_Band



bandofthequeensdivision

Website: [www.army.mod.uk/music](http://www.army.mod.uk/music)

# LETCWORTH PAR 3 FAMILY GOLF CENTRE

Whether you are young or old, our course provides a wonderful golf venue for you to enjoy a round of golf with family or friends. The course is set in a beautiful location and enables you to experience all aspects of the game of golf, except for driving. We also have a pétanque piste on which you can play the traditional French game of pétanque (also known as boules). Our prices are very reasonable and include the free use of clubs, balls and pétanque boules.



## DIMPLES Coffee Lounge & Cafe

Enjoy panoramic views over the golf course in Dimples, the coffee lounge & cafe located in our clubhouse. We offer a wide range of coffees, teas, milkshakes, soft drinks, cakes, hot & cold food and snacks. We also have a fully licensed bar. You don't need to play golf or be a member in order to enjoy our clubhouse.

**We support the R.A.F. Association and Wings Appeal.**

William Way  
Letchworth Garden City  
Hertfordshire SG6 2HJ  
Tel: 01462 483863  
Email: [info@letchworthfamilygolf.co.uk](mailto:info@letchworthfamilygolf.co.uk)

# **R.A.F.A. Befriending**

By

Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin

Branch R.A.F.A.L.O.

Ex R.A.F. Flight Lieutenant and WWII veteran Eric Michel was born Christmas Day 1920 and is 96 and half (his words) at the time of writing, he shares a birth date with myself, though admittedly I was born some 48 years later.

Eric's daughter Jackie had approached the Branch stall at Letchworth Armed Forces Day in 2017 to speak about her father Eric who was already known to the Branch, but he had drifted away over the years. She was interested about exploring the R.A.F.A. befriending scheme to see if Eric could become one of the schemes recipients. So a link was made and a friendship begun, Eric now has a close link with today's Air Force and R.A.F.A. and talks about his time in Burma and India and Canada frequently. As more information began to come to light I decided to write down some of Eric's memories and recollections. With the help of some notes that he himself had made in 2010. I then asked his permission to make them public and for prosperity and to mark this gentleman's Service I'll attempt to summarize nearly a whole century, a life time almost.

Born in Hackney in December 1920 the third of four boys to parents William Henry & Elen Louise , he lived in a London slum for the first 10 years of his life, the location of those former slums now house the grand Olympic Stadium. His recollections are of a fun childhood making soapboxes on wheels and and school trips to Chingford. A move to Walthamstow after ten years still didn't see their house having a bathroom, but it did have an inside loo.

War broke out 3 September 1939 and Eric cycled a week later from Walthamstow to Romford to join up, he was then aged 19. His first attempt to join the Royal Air Force failed when the recruiting Sergeant turned him away, Eric was fully employed at the time and the full horrible effects of the war were yet to be felt by the Armed Forces. The following year and about 6 months after his first try, he was successful and was accepted as a trainee pilot. He reported to R.A.F. Uxbridge and was on 3 bob a day (15p). He had to improve his mathematics to continue his training and enrolled in college proving Pythagoras Theory to prove his academia. Finally he was sent to Fair Oaks Flying School near Woking in Surrey, where an unfortunate incident in a Tiger Moth while still on the ground saw Eric removed

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Luton Hoo

from flying training. After considering Navigator and Bomb Aimer training, he decided that he lacked "air sense" and opted to become an R.A.F. Dispatch Rider instead. After training at Weeton and Pocklington which were Wellington Bomber and Lysander flying stations, he eventually ended up at Luton Hoo an English Country House just outside Luton, and was billeted with the Army. After promotion through AC2 to

Corporal (on pay of four schillings and sixpence (22½p)) he finally decided that during the winter of 1941, it was too cold on a motorcycle, so applied and was accepted for R.A.F. Navigator training and reported to Regents Park to begin the next phase of his R.A.F. career, one of becoming R.A.F. Aircrew.

His journey took him to Canada to complete his training, where eventually and after another failed attempt to become a pilot he undertook Bomb Aimer training in Dafoe Canada, and was now commissioned as a Pilot Officer.

*(Dafoe is a village in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. It is located southwest of Big Quill Lake. Dafoe marks the far west end of the area known to Icelandic settlers in Saskatchewan as the Lakes Settlement),*

On or around D Day he moved back to 'Blighty' via New York and Scotland ready for embarkation to Bombay in India via the sea. Landing at Worli near Mumbai then via train he arrived at Salbani part of West Bengal. Here he joined Number 355 Sqn who were flying Liberator Aircraft. After receiving more training on American bomb sights they were sent on operations. Given targets on the Burma - Siam railway. Here Eric

recalls very clearly a raid in which he was the third of four Liberators, the designated target was obscured by cloud so the lead aircraft opted for the secondary target of the railway, as the leader closed in at low level to bomb a train stationary at a station a Japanese Ground Gunner hit the liberator and it shot it down, there were no survivors. The remaining formation also pressed home their attack, Another met with a similar fate, but slightly luckier escaping with just two engines working.



355 Sqn motto: Liberamus  
Per Caerula (We liberate  
through tropical sky's).

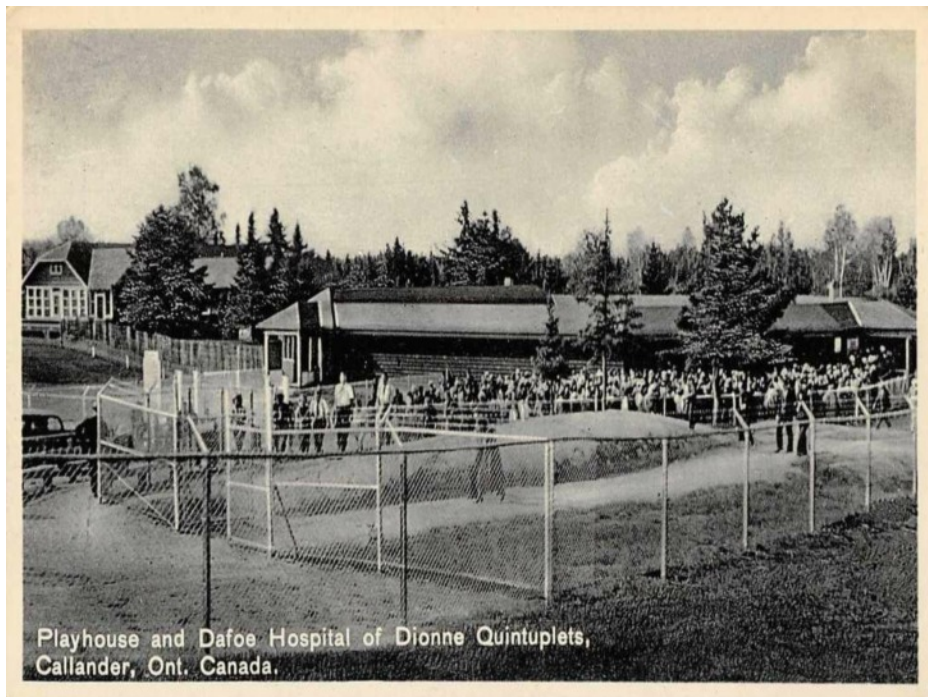
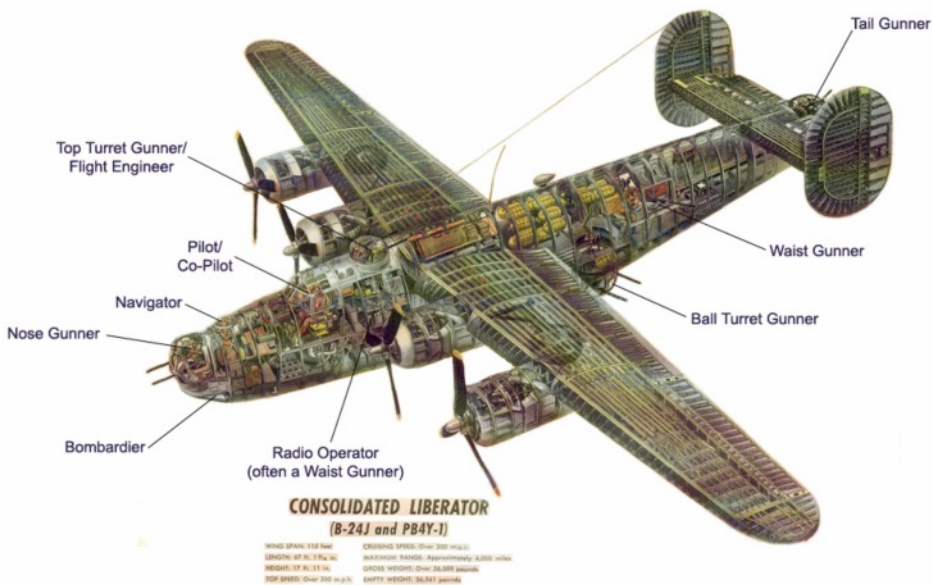


Eric in Canada circa December 1943 middle row third from left.

The plane later landed at Chittagong in Bangladesh. Eric's Liberator was successful in silencing the Japanese Ground Gunner and pressing home their attack. They escorted the second Liberator part of the way to Chittagong before breaking away to land back a Salbani safe. He still recalls the pilot Flying Officer Cyril King and thanks him and God for getting them home on a wing a prayer that day.

Eric was de-mobbed in 1946 and owned two grocery shops in Baldock, he lived

*Note from your Editor :- If there is anyone out there in the big R.A.F.A. World who knows Eric from his active days in the Branch, or even during his military service, and wants to send a note to him, can do so through this newsletter and we will pass it on to Shaun for his next visit.*



**WE'RE GOING**



**FOR THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS BASH**

**THURSDAY 14<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2017**

**£16.95 PER MEMBER**

**BOOK NOW WITH A £5 NON REFUNDABLE DEPOSIT TO THE TREASURER**

**TIMING 19.45 hrs for 20.00 HRS START**

**VENUE**



**Broadway Hotel, Broadway, Letchworth Garden City, Herts**

**INTERESTED MEMBERS CONTACT THE BRANCH SECRETARY**

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