

Letchworth, Hitchin & District
Branch



SUMMER
2018

RAFAGEN 'E'



RAFAGEN is the winner of the SE
Area Newsletter competition 2018

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 LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT

BRANCH OFFICIALS

Life President: Gordon Collinson

Vice President : Dennis Dawson

Chairman: Lisa Berry

Vice Chairman: Roy Newbury

Hon. Secretary: Ken Needham

Hon. Treasurer: Ken Needham

Committee:

John Airey: Ernie Brown: Rev. Lindsay Dew:

Marie Mahoney:

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

RAFAGEN Edited by Ken Needham

Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant Position

All correspondence regarding the RAFAGEN to
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Telephone: 01462 671534

E-mail 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

WHAT YOUR BRANCH DID TO CELEBRATE THE 100 th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE



On 12 April the Letchworth Hitchin and Dist Branch celebrated the 100 th anniversary since the formation of the Royal Air Force. Bringing together many generations in one place, the Branch enjoyed the company of Serving R.A.F .personnel from R.A.F. Henlow, R.A.F. Honington and J.F.C. Chicksands. Branch Members enjoyed hearing about the next generation of the Air Force. VIP Guests included Wg Cdr Mark Clulo (Stn Cdr RAF Henlow), Sir Oliver Heald QC MP, Ken Needham, Lord Hugh Trenchard (Honorary Air Commodore of 600 Sqn), Air Vice Marshall Alan Merriman and Alan Millard (NH Dist Council Chairman). Pictured are members of the Branch Committee including newly ap-

pointed Branch Chair Lisa Berry.

Wg Cdr Clulo reflected on the 100 th anniversary of both the R.A.F. and R.A.F Henlow, and how important the local community is to an R.A.F. Station. Over 50 or so people gathered on the evening, which saw each Branch Member bring an item to display that signified their R.A.F Service, some brought photos, others a badge or a cap. All in all the evening was a huge success and one which will be remembered for a long time to come.

We also had a cake especially made for the occasion by a future contestant of 'Bake Off', our own R.A.F.A.L.O., Shaun Griffin, who was also responsible for organising this splendid event.



EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



We are starting off a New Year for the Branch with the new Committee. Ernie Brown wished to stand down from the post of Chairman and become a 'back-bencher' He tells me that he didn't want to continue as Chairman, for health reasons, but wished to continue to be part of the workings of the Branch.

Ernie's place has been taken by Lisa Berry. Lisa started as the Branch RAFALO until she left the Force, and decided to remain living in the area and stay with the Branch, when she became a Committee member.

For a long time now we have been asking for new faces on the Committee, and this year, like a London Bus, two come along together. Marie Mahoney, who has been a long time member, and has helped the Committee on a number of occasions but did not want to sit on the Committee. Now she has decided to come aboard. Welcome Marie, and welcome to Rev Lindsay Dew. Lindsay is the appointed Branch Padre, but earlier this year retired as the Rector is of Dunton, Eyeworth and Wrestlingworth, and the Rural Dean of Biggleswade, and with all that free time has decided to join the Committee

A full list of the Committee is on the inside cover of this issue.

In memory of John Stoddard we started last year to present "The John Stoddard Trophy" to the member who you thought had done a good service to the Branch during the preceding year. In 2016 the late Cyril Gray was presented the trophy for his work on collecting for our Wings Appeal. For 2017 the trophy went to our RAFALO Shaun Griffin for the work he has done on the social and welfare side of the Branch. Shaun was unable to be at the AGM when the award was made, so the award was collected on his behalf by Marie Mahoney, who thanked the members on behalf of Shaun.

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My National Service Journey In the Royal Air Force 1957-1959

By member Ewen Kennedy



I was a 22 year old when I received my call up papers, (differed call up due to an apprenticeship normally the call up was 18 yrs) and told to report to R.A.F. Cardington 2RU on the 7 October 1957 Which I travelled by rail from Letchworth via Hitchin ,Henlow, Shefford and then Cardington. I got kitted out and was due to leave there five day later, but it turned out ten days later due to Asian flu.

We finally left by train bound for R.A.F. Bridgnorth on the 29 October 1957

On arrival we all allocated our billets and squadron in my case 'C squadron Hut 162' where we spent the next 8 weeks. We now started to receive our induction into the R.A.F. after we were all sworn in, we then learnt how to become Airmen Drill ,fire arms, keeping the billet smart and yourself. We then 'passed out' after which I had to report to R.A.F. Compton Bassett for trade training on the 1 January 1958 I my case Signals (Tape relay operator), after which I was posted to R.A.F. Watnall ATC Nottingham on 14th March 1958 Then an exchange posting to R.A.F. Hillingdon SE coms center (Next to the bomb hole) . During this time there we were sent



on emergence detachment to Cyprus for just under three months on return to Hillingdon we were moved over into the Uxbridge camp in the transit block In January SE coms Centre was shut down and six of us were posted to R.A.F. Newmarket Eastern & Northern Coms Centre where I completed my National (active) Service on 30th October 1959



IN THE POST BAG

Dear Ken

I have just received through the letter box a copy of the Spring 2018 edition of RARAGEN in addition to the email copy I received earlier. To save the Branch paying postal charges I will be happy to receive just the on-line copy and therefore ask that you delete my name from the "addressee list" for the hard copy. I enjoy reading each edition and seeing how active and thriving the Branch is.

I noted Peter Kay's comment about attending a meeting or two and I have much the same problem in having difficulty with walking and standing even with two replacement knees. Loss of hearing like many our age is also for me a hindrance to socialising.

I made contact with you last year concerning the incorrect date for when Air Commodore Peter Ayee became Commandant of RAFSEE and Peter Kay's statement that this was in the 80s is still not correct. Peter Ayee succeeded me as Commandant in October 1993 when I formally handed over the role to him on my retirement. As Group Captain he had been Officer Commanding R.A.F. Henlow for a couple of years up to March 1991 when he was posted to the MOD and then returned to Henlow on promotion in October 1993 to become Commandant RAFSEE. I hope this resolves any confusion.

My very best wishes to all the members of the Branch.

Phillip Miller
Air Cdre Rtd

The reason why you have had both an e mail version and a hard copy of RAFAGEN this quarter, is because RAFAGEN is the official invitation to our AGM, and therefore the Branch Secretary has to ensure that all members receive the invitation .To put the invitation in RAFAGEN saves on postage in the long run. With the 'E' version we are never sure if they are received, due to members changing e mail addresses and not informing us. You will be back to only receiving the 'E' version for this and the next three issues.

Editor

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Dear Ken,

Thank you for sending a copy of RAFAGEN. It brought back many happy memories of my time as your RAFALO during the early nineties. I was very sad to see that Peter Ayee had passed away, as on a few occasions I escorted him to the Rugby Club for a convivial meeting. Margaret and I also remember the very enjoyable times we had with the club and going on trips. I recall particularly hosting a club visit to R.A.F. Henlow where members looked round the R.A.F. Signals Engineering Establishment and other sections before having lunch in the Sergeants' Mess.

I retired from the R.A.F. back in 1998, working initially for Cambridgeshire Constabulary, before moving down to Bournemouth as a IT Manager for a Pharmaceutical Company. After retiring in 2014, I have been working on a military history MA at the University of Birmingham (one of my bucket list options!) – with a dissertation subject area of the Norwegian Campaign of 1940.

It is really encouraging that the club is so healthy with membership rising. I would appreciate receiving future copies of RAFAGEN

Finally, please give my best wishes to Gordon Collinson and anyone else who remembers Margaret and I from the 1990s. The copy of RAFAGEN has brought back so many happy memories to us both.

Yours sincerely Mike Brackpool Life Member

CIVIC AWARD FOR LETCHWORTH AIR CADET



At the North Herts District Council Civic Reception on 2nd February 2018, a civic award was presented to Air Cadet Maggie Read of Letchworth 248 squadron. The Young Star Award was presented by the Chairman of the North Herts District Council, Alan Millard, and is awarded to recognise a young person or young people who make a difference in their local community.

The citation for Maggie said " Maggie is a member of the Explorer Unit, joining in with all activities. Each week she dedicates her time at Beaver units and a scout group as a young leader, helping others. Maggie is also a member of the Letchworth Air Cadets, which she attends two evenings a week. Maggie has worked hard to complete her Duke of Edinburgh silver award for her school, and also helps her school by tutoring the years 7's with their reading."

When asked whilst being presented with her award, ' What was she doing with the Air Cadets?' she answered "Going to Germany for Easter".

Well done Maggie.



BRANCH VISIT TO BENTLEY PRIORY



It was a glorious day when 22 Branch members and friends spent a wonderful day at Bentley Priory, learning all about the part that the Priory played in World War 2, and a little bit of the history of the house.





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 speakers who are serving members of the Armed Forces.

- 14 Jun 18 - Andy Gibbs - Life and Legacy WWII WRAF Jill Grey.
- 30 Jun 18 - **Letchworth Armed Forces Day** Visit our stall please
- 12 July 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 to the Shuttleworth Collection**
- 8 Nov 18 - Hitchin ATC Sqn Update - FS Emily Campbell.
- 13 Dec 18 - **Branch Christmas Bash.**
- 10 Jan 19 - Letchworth Sqn ATC Update Sgt Sarah Ward.
- 14 Feb 19 - Martin Johnson - Hertfordshire wildlife.
- 14 Mar 19 - **AGM & Social Evening**
- 11 Apr 19 - Chris Balmforth - Letchworth Model Aeronautical Society
- 18 Apr 19 - Branch Visit - **Bletchley Park** -
- 9 May 19 - Dr Rudi Newman R101 Imperial Airship scheme 1924-30.
- 13 Jun 19 - Paul Jiggins The History of measurement.
- 11 July 19 - Gary Fisher BA The History of Hatfield House.
- 8 Aug 19 - David Davis - Letchworth Garden City cottages TBC.
- 12 Sep 19 - **Battle of Britain dinner night.**
- 10 Oct 19 - Shaun Griffin - History of The RAF Armoured Car Companies in Transjordan and Mesopotamia.
- 17 Oct 19 - **Branch Visit - de Havilland museum**
- 14 Nov 19 - Ian Waller - Family history and genealogy.
- 12 Dec 19 - **Christmas Bash**

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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

AND THE WINNER IS
THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH



John Airey accepts on behalf of the Branch, the certificate for being winner of the Branch newsletter competition for 2018.

The award was made at the South and Eastern Area Conference.

The South and Eastern Area Council selecting RAFAGEN as the best newsletter in the South East for 2018

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AN INVISIBLE WORKPLACE

Norman Jasper describes some of his aviation experiences

Part Two - Celebrations in Rhodesia

1953 was the centenary of the birth of Cecil Rhodes. Our Squadron Commander, Colin Coulthard, was a very go-ahead person, as I discovered when I was his adjutant. He felt 266 (Rhodesian) Sqn should fly to Rhodesia in the new Venoms to take part in the Air Rally on 13th and 14th June which formed part of the Rhodes Centenary Celebrations. We all thought it was a splendid idea, but Air Ministry was not co-operative. Undaunted, our C.O. contacted the Rhodesian authorities who put it in an official request for us to visit. He was a wonder to watch when exercising his persuasive powers. He would often do this on the telephone in the crew room with his feet up on the adjacent chair and his coffee mug nearby. No matter who he was talking to our C.O. invariably got his way, for he gave the other person little or no room for manoeuvre. We just sat frozen with our eyes popping out of our heads at his performance! He was a great leader who commanded respect by example and he made a great impact on this young lad. Sadly he died in 2004 having retired from the Royal Air Force in February 1975 as an Air Vice Marshall.



So, No. 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron was tasked to fly the flag over some isolated parts of Africa and over some of the more developed colonies around the time of the Queen's coronation celebrations in June 1953. The venture to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia (now Harare in Zimbabwe) posed routing and navigation problems in addition to the necessity to position supplies. A major task was the supply of jet aircraft fuel to the smallish enroute airstrips in Africa. This was provisioned by means of 45 gallon drums for refuelling by portable pumps. It was a considerable logistic exercise to get the jet engine fuel to each isolated airfield by ship, rail and road in time for our arrival, together with servicing and other matters to be addressed. Our supporting ground crew and spares were carried in a Handley Page Hastings transport aircraft.

Navigation – The Venom was fitted with no navigation aid whatsoever other than a gyro stabilised magnetic compass. It had no radio compass. It had no radio compass to pick up directional signals from ground beacons. In normal operation we were dependent on ground controller assistance via military radar or direction finding systems with information relayed to us by radio.



This help was either not available or certainly not reliable over Africa. Indeed radio communication itself was not assured, even assuming the correct frequency crystals had been fitted to each aircraft VHF radio before each flight! This was before the days of dial-up VHF & UHF radios.

Flying in loose formation, we would be on our own heading for smallish airstrips, with fuel supplies hopefully waiting for us, provided we found the correct airstrips. However, as we know so well, similar situations had been dealt with as routine by many pilots during the war. Detailed pre-flight planning on a pilot navigation basis took place before each sector. Routes were pre-plotted on charts and track directions measured and converted to magnetic values. Adjustments for wind effect was then made using poor or non-existent weather forecasts. This had to be flown accurately with no autopilot and adjusted by a pilot in the restricted cockpit of a



tiny aircraft covering 8 miles a minute at high altitudes. The prime navigation aid was the human eyeball, visual recognition of ground features against a variety of unfamiliar backgrounds. The aim was to stay on track, start about 100 miles before the destination, find and

land at the correct airstrip before running out of fuel. To assist our C.O.'s navigation and to avoid a desperate one handed chart paper chase in a confined cockpit, out of scrap aluminium and Perspex I constructed a roller map mechanism to be strapped to his left thigh, for he was left-handed. The charts were cut into strips 30 miles each side of intended track and stuck together to form continuous rolls, leg by leg. The routing comprised 11 sectors:- Wunstorf – Istres – Luqa - El Adem – Fayid – Wadi Halfa – Khartoum – Juba – Entebbe - -Tabora – Lusaka – Salisbury. (Now Harare in Zimbabwe). This venture, Operation Longtrek, was most successful with 12 aircraft going all the way there and back without a major hitch. Indeed, our C.O. would accept nothing less and he was awarded the AFC in recognition of this considerable achievement. This was the first time so many single seat jet fighters had completed such an undertaking and, as you can imagine, we were well received and entertained enroute and in Southern Rhodesia.

Returning to Wunstorf, after landing at Fayid on 22nd June 1953 in WE303 I was admitted to R.A.F. hospital with what transpired to be a burst appendix and peritonitis. This was only diagnosed after arriving at Wunstorf via Hastings aircraft to Lyneham, boat from Harwich and train to Hanover! By then lit had become serious and I was off flying until 8th October.

The ghost engine was started by a large cartridge to speed up starting for a rapid take-off, or scramble, as an interceptor where we could open the throttle immediately, turn onto the runway and take off within seconds. This eight inch slow burn cartridge was discharged into a turbine assembly which in turn spun the engine. It exhausted in a large plume of black smoke from the top of the aircraft and on light up there were, sometimes, long torches of flame from jet pipes. Asbestos blankets were placed over tail planes to protect them during engine starts.

The curious natives at the murrum airstrip airfields at Juba and Tabora were highly thrilled to see a neat row of bird-like machines with no propellers simultaneously spewing black smoke and belching flames to the chorus of loud cartridge hisses, thumping noises and groaning resonance as engines ignited, whilst our ground crews darted about like busy ants. Sometimes like impromptu war dances broke out amongst the onlookers in celebration of such a strange and spectacular experience. For a finale the aircraft vanished in clouds of dust from the natural earth runways during take-off in close stream!

Part 3 of the story continues in the next issue



ARMED FORCES DAY

Organised By the Royal British Legion Letchworth
Letchworth Garden City



Saturday 30th June 2018

10.00 - 16.00

BROADWAY GARDENS - SG6 3PF

Military Bands-WWII Vintage Military Vehicles

Food - Stalls- Fun Fair - Angel Wings Dove Release

Cadets Challenge Cup - Soap Box Challenge

RBL Riders, Military Boot Camp

CrystalitesMajorettes, Garden City Singers, Lindy Hop

#Armistice100#RAF100

#WomenAtWar100

Proceeds to local Armed Forces charities



heritage
foundation
Letchworth Garden City

SUPPORT YOUR ARMED FORCES

We hope to see you there

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New members of 2018

New names will be added each quarter. Let us see if we can fill the page by the end of the year

Miss S. Ward of Letchworth Garden City
Mr G. Ward of Letchworth Garden City
Mr M. Sawyer of Thetford
Mr D. Briscoe of Henlow
Mr J. Coleman of Tamworth
Mrs L. Higham of Henlow
Mr G. Luxton of Henlow
Mr A. Millard of Hitchin
Mr A. Morgan of Henlow
Mr G. Spicer of Chicksands
Mr D. Watson of Chicksands

PRESENT BRANCH MEMBERSHIP STANDS AT

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If you don't already, but would like to receive your copy of RAFAGEN via e mail, please send a request to secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk, and your wish will be our command. A RAFAGEN via e mail means that you receive a copy in full colour, and you save the Branch approximately £1.00 per issue.



Are you a member of FACEBOOK? If so are you friends of the Letchworth Hitchin and District Royal Air Forces Association? Well you need to be if you want to keep up-to-date with what is happening at Branch level. Your RAFAGEN only comes out every quarter, but our FACEBOOK page is updated almost instantly by our media man. We often get invitations to events by outside groups which we find difficult to get such details out to everyone in time. But our

FACEBOOK page is there giving all the details.

You are also missing out on photos and stories of members like the photo below. This was posted within minutes of being taken, but you have had to wait.



Two members known by all of us is Gordon Overton (left) and Branch Life President Gordon Collinson. Our photograph shows the two veterans enjoying a good cup of tea together, and no doubt a lot of reminiscences of times gone past. Waitress for the day is Donna Griffin. Donna you are slipping - Gordon O's cup is empty.

OUR AUTUMN EVENT A TRIP TO THE SHUTTLEWORTH COLLECTION

We are off to visit the Aircraft Collection at Shuttleworth on

Thursday 18th October
2018.



Anyone wishing to come along with us to view this wonderful collection, please pass on your details to the Branch Secretary or our RAFALO, W.O. Shaun Griffin, and you will be kept

up to date with more information. Alternatively you can keep up to date by visiting our FACEBOOK page or web site.

Picked up from the 'I' newspaper :-

Veterans are to get ID cards to honour their service. Millions of veterans are to be given their own ID cards to show they have served in the Armed Forces.

For the first time, 2.5 million ex-military personnel will be issued with a new type of driving licence stamped with a "V". A separate card will be given to those who do not drive, with the ID's expected to be rolled out from next year.

Speaking of Britain's former servicemen and women, the Prime Minister, Theresa May, said "Those who have served deserve recognition for their sacrifice and we will continue to make sure that they get it".

Tobias Ellwood, the minister responsible for veterans, said "The move provided welcome recognition of service to the country. As a former soldier, I am aware of the personal attachment with service ID. Carried at all times it becomes symbolic of the responsibility and there is a strange sense of loss when, upon departing the armed forces, it is taken from you".

Thanks to the Rushden & District Branch for bringing this article to our notice.



BUCKINGHAM PALACE

On this, the centenary of its formation, I send my heartfelt congratulations to the Royal Air Force at home and overseas, and to all of its families and loved ones.

The anniversary of the world's first independent Air Force is of great significance, and it is fitting to pay tribute to the tenacity, skill and sacrifice of the men and women who have served within its ranks over the last century, and who have defended our freedom so gallantly.

Through its enduring focus on professionalism, excellence and innovation, the Royal Air Force stands as a shining example of inspiration around the World today and for the next generations.

May the glory and honour that all ranks have bestowed on the Royal Air Force light its pathway to the future, guarding our skies and reaching for the stars.

Per Ardua ad Astra.

ELIZABETH R.

RAFAGEN EXTRAS



LETCWORTH ARMED FORCES DAY 30 JUNE 2018

**1000 – Opening Ceremony Flag Raising
(Incl WWII veterans and Dove release)**

1030 – Cadet Inspection and Drill Competition

1100 – Biggleswade Sea Cadet Band

1130 – Harpenden Pipers Band

1200 – Crystalites Majorettes

1230 – Cadet Command Tasks

1300 – Garden City Singers / Lindy Hop

1330 – Harpenden Pipers Band

1400 – Cadet Soapbox Challenge

1430 – Military Boot Camp

1520 - 1600 – Cadet Command Tasks

**Thanks to: Timpson Trophies, VW Lancaster,
Concept Events, Lane Bennetts & Watermill Bears.**



**MESSAGE TO BRANCH
MEMBERS FROM THE
ROYAL BRITISH LEGION -
LETCWORTH**

The Letchworth Branch of the Royal British Legion have arranged a trip to the National Remembrance Arboretum in Staffordshire on the 1st September 2018, and would like to open it up to all members of R.A.F.A. Letchworth Branch.

The price for the trip is £15.00. This includes, the tip for the driver and the cost of the coach. There is no admission cost at the Arboretum.

The pick up points are Plinston Hall that was and Tesco's Baldock. Times are 08.00 hrs Plinston Hall and 08.20 hrs at Baldock.

A deposit of £5.00 is required when booking which is non refundable and the remaining balance to be paid by the end of July.

There is to be a raffle prior to leaving on the Arboretum. Tickets 50p a strip.

If there any members who wish to go could you please forward your name and deposit to

Mrs Joan Langford
17 Denby
Letchworth Garden City
Herts SG6 2LQ

Stating that you are a member of RAFA.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Joan on 01462 627736.