

Branch
Membership

221

As at 24-09-21

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH

AUTUMN 2021



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

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RAFAGEN

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

ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2021



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Wings Appeal Officer:- Ken Needham

Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant

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RAFAGEN is compiled and edited by Ken Needham

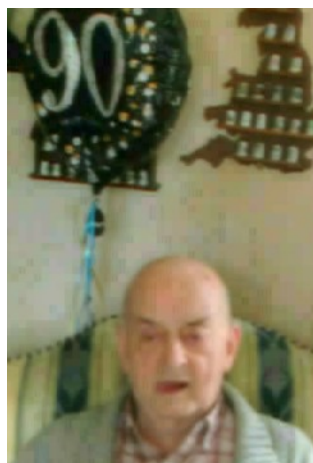
(email kwn056@btinternet.com Telephone 01462671534)

NAAFI BREAK is held at The Par 3 Golf Centre, Willian Way,
Letchworth Garden City SG6 2HJ on the last Wednesday of
each month 10.00 hrs 'til 12.00 hrs



NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It has been brought to my attention that on Saturday 28th June it was the 90th birthday of member Bill O'Donnovan. May we wish Bill a belated "Happy Birthday", and try to remember the next one. Bill didn't miss us not sending him a card, because he was presented with something a little better, a Spitfire fly past. Bill and his wife Elizabeth live just a short distance from the Broadway Gardens, so when the planes flew over the Armed Forces Day celebrations, they flew low over his home.



Bill O'Donnovan at 90

Neither Bill nor Elizabeth was aware that a fly past had been arranged for Armed Forces Day so it came as a big surprise on a special day. Pleased that it made your day. When the three runs were complete, the trailing Spitfire did a little wobble, to say 'goodbye'. Bill's family disagree with this, they say that the pilot was saying "HAPPY BIRTHDAY BILL".

Bill. It was all down to the Letchworth & Hitchin branch of the Royal Naval Association. Well done RNA, say all of us, especially Bill O'Donnovan. It made the day a great one for him.

oooOOOooo



Editorial Continued

People are still talking about the fly past, long after the event. A question that I have been asked several times since Armed Forces Day was, “two Spitfires or One Spitfire and one Hurricane”. I am no expert even though they were planes from my youth. I say ‘Two Spitfires’ The one with the squared wing tips was a later model. But then you may know differently.

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September is the month in which we remember “The Battle of Britain” and the main push for the R.A.F.A. “Wings Appear”.

To acknowledge the former, your branch in cooperation with the North Herts District Council, fly the Royal Air Force Ensigns in Letchworth and Baldock at the respective War Memorials, and in Hitchin at the Town Hall. These will be flying during the month of September.



oooOOOooo



Editorial Continued

With effect from 1st October 2021 we are having to say “Goodbye” to a very good friend of many of our members. Mark Howell. Mark who has been our Welfare Officer and Standard Bearer for many years now is moving out of the area to take up new employment.



Mark, as Standard Bearer has represented the branch at a number of occasions, even, funerals, when the law allowed, through the Covid-19 restrictions. During my time as branch Secretary, I received many notes from the families of the deceased, saying how proud they felt to see the smart figure with the Standard helping to say farewell to their loved one. So popular was Mark with the local undertakers, they would ask the families of ex Royal Air Force personell if they would like Mark

and the Standard to attend. They would then contact the branch to see if Mark was available.

When the Covid epidemic broke out the branch asked for volunteers to make telephone calls to our over 70 members to ensure that they were alright and if they needed anything. Each volunteer had approximately 6 members to contact. Mark was one of the first on the list, and I know the work he did for his six, like so many of our volunteers he went far beyond what his brief was.

As our Welfare Officer, he was not called upon very often, but when he was he carried out his duties first class.

With Mark’s departure it will mean that we will be without a Welfare Officer until a new one can be sort. This does not mean that if we have a Welfare need we cannot respond. Our Secretary will be your contact for now.



Editorial Continued

With regard to a replacement Standard Bearer, we have someone in the frame, but more of that next month.

Mark, we wish you all the best in your new appointment, and remember, the branch will always be pleased to see you.

oooOOOooo

I, my wife and a few other members, had the opportunity to join a coach party, organised by the Letchworth Branch of The Royal British Legion, to visit the National Memorial Arboretum. A place we have never visited, but always wanted to.

If you have never been, I certainly recommend a visit. I must admit I thought it was a memorial to our military and civil forces (eg Fire, police and ambulance), but I was wrong. It remembers all those who have lost their lives in helping our islands maintain their freedom.

We first of all took a ride on the road train. This enabled to see quick glimpses of most of the sites, and to see the areas we wanted to see, as you would never see it all in a day, your legs won't allow it.

Our first call was to the RAFA site. You walk up a miniature runway to what else but a large silver eagle standing on a globe. I learnt that the eagle's name is Winston. We visited many other sites like the RAF, RAF Police, RAF Regiment Royal Navy, and many others.

We finished up at the civil police avenue. No, it is not call "letsbe Avenue", it is a long avenue of trees, know as "The Beat". Each tree representing a police force in the UK. At one end of the avenue stands a memorial which means a lot to North Hertfordshire in particular.

Looking down the avenue stands a lamp post with a "Blue Police Light". Not just any old "Blue Lamp", but the lamp from the old Hitchin Police station which stood in Bancroft. The lamp is there to remember WPC Mandy Rayner, the youngest policewomen (18) to be killed on duty.



Editorial Continued

I have later found that Hitchin-based police officer Mandy Rayner died in October 1982 when a drunk driver deliberately crashed his vehicle into the patrol car she was in at Royston.



CHAIRMAN'S CHAT

FROM WARRANT OFFICER SHAUN GRIFFIN

As Autumn fast approaches, and a barmy September relents, we will all likely be reflecting on recovery from the pandemic and I hope that you and your families have renewed confidence enough to travel on holiday, and enjoy time with family in a socially and COVID safe environment.

So our branch has started to get itself back to being amongst the community. We had a great presence at Letchworth Armed Forces day. back end of June, and depending on when you read this, we will have collected on Hitchin High Street for Royal Air Forces Association's **Wings Appeal** in mid September. It felt really good seeing people again in that setting, and having our Branch engaging with the local community, raising a few bob into the bargain. Ken Needham, our driving force has been absolutely central to getting NAAFI Break up and running again at the Par 3 Family Golf Course. I hope, if you haven't already, and live local enough, can join in with the social gathering, and swell the healthy numbers and enjoy the thing that I believe RAFA is all about, that is people, friendship and support.

Chairman Shaun Griffin



“Join the Royal Air Force”

British Recruitment Poster, First World War. 1918

© IWM (Atr IWM PST 5277)

**JOIN
THE ROYAL AIR FORCE**

**AND SHARE THEIR
HONOUR & GLORY.**

AGE 18 to 50
RATES OF PAY from 1/6 to 12/- Per Day
If you join the ROYAL AIR FORCE voluntarily, you
cannot be transferred to the Army or Navy without
your own consent.

Note the pay for 1918

LETCWORTH ARMED FORCES DAY 2021



After missing last year because of some pesky virus, we were back on Broadway Gardens, Letchworth Garden City with our Wings Appeal stall.

Due to Covid restrictions, many of the events in which the local military cadets entertained the public were cancelled, and they were missed. We were entertained by a troupe of Majorettes, and by a non marching band.

The highlight of the day was a fly past by a couple of Spitfires. The organisers had been told to expect a fly past by one plane, but it turned out to be 'book one get two'. The planes gave three passes over the Broadway Gardens, much to the delight of the adults and the excitement of the children. Let's hope we see them again next year.

Our stall was manned, not only by our own branch volunteers, but by serving men and women from the Royal Air Force contingent at Chicksands. They were a great asset to the day, and we hope that they enjoyed meeting the public .and answering questions about the modern Royal Air Force.



**TWO SPITFIRES OVER LETCHWORTH BROADWAY
GARDENS**

ESPECIALLY FOR THE LOCAL ARMED FORCES DAY

This and the cover photo acknowledged to the Letchworth Armed Forces Day Facebook page



NAAFI BREAK GALLERY



JUNE TO AUGUST



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AUGUST



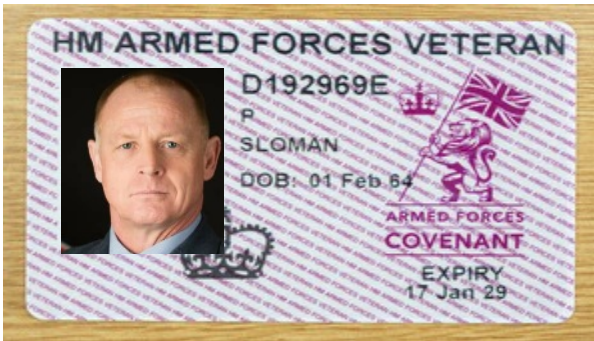
We have learnt of the death of Pam Dawson. Pam was the wife of Dennis, our Vice President, but until bad health came along was an Associate member, and a very active branch member.

In latter years Pam, together with Pauline Collinson made sure that there was always a raffle at branch meetings. Bringing in much appreciated funds.

Pam and Pauline were also responsible for the catering at the Willian Road Memorial event in 2012, and a very good spread it was too.

The Committee and members of the Letchworth Hitchin and District Branch offer condolences to the Dawson family for their loss of a wonderful lady.

NEWS ITEM



Update on the Veterans I.D. Card we have spoken about in previous issues. This is the Government's latest report.

Up dated 11 March 2021

The Veterans' recognition scheme has a 2 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.

We had hoped to have this in place by the end of 2019, but due to the requirement to future-proof the scheme so that veterans can access a wider range of benefits, the need to safeguard against fraudulent use means, this process will take longer.

Information on how to apply will be released closer to the launch date.

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.

*As further news comes through, your **RAFAGEN** will keep you in the picture.*

The Last Post

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

Mr B. Brown of Stevenage.
Member for 20 years.

Mr Leslie Taylor of Biggleswade.
Member for 22 years.

Mr Ian Johnson of Stevenage
Member for 17 years



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Mr Martin Gedge of Shefford

Mr John Fairweather of Hitchin. Re joined.. Already a member for 44 years

Chain of command

During training exercises, the Lieutenant who was driving down a muddy back road encountered another car stuck in the mud with a red-faced Colonel at the wheel.

"Your car stuck, sir?" asked the Lieutenant as he pulled alongside. "Nope," replied the colonel, coming over and handing him the keys. "Yours is."

More on the Willian airfield

The following from member Jim Box (our non jet plane correspondent)

I have been able to obtain a little more information on Willian Airfield. I found in the Cross and Cockade Journal for Spring 2015 a gazetteer of WW 1 airfields, and Willian is mentioned.

As you already know the site had been used as a landing ground for “Blue” force in the 1912 Army Manoeuvres. In August 1916 it was intended that 75 Home defence Squadron, A Flight, would occupy the field, but the plan was abandoned. However, it was re-classified as a Home Defence night landing ground 3rd class. By January 1917 it was up graded to 2nd class, and day only from 30 June 1917 for 75 Squadron until June 1919.



Avro 505

75 Squadron was based at Elmswell in Suffolk, between Stowmarket and Bury St. Edmunds, and had initially BE2c and Fe2b aircraft. It moved to North Weald in May 1918 using Avro 505k, Sopwith Pups, and Bristol F2B aircraft. After the war it had Camels and Snipes on charge before being disbanded in June 1919.



Fe2B

Willian was probably used only occasionally by this Squadron as an alternate landing ground.



The aircraft have certainly changed from the Deperdussin that crashed at the airfield approach only a few years earlier. - Editor

CAPTION COMPETITION

Prize for the best caption received of a £10 Amazon gift card



What is Marie, the newly appointed Branch Secretary saying to our Branch Chairman? Answers please to the editor, Ken Needham by 15th November 2021, and the most amusing will receive a £10 Amazon token card.



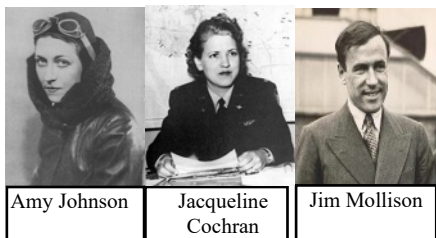
Air transport Auxiliary

By Jim Box

What prompted writing of this article on the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) was finding a copy of the ATA Flight Reference Cards during listing various archive material at Old Warden. More details on these cards later.

The ATA was formed in 1939 as a second line service to ferry mail, personnel and medical supplies using civilian pilots. However, by 1940 the role of the ATA was changed to that of ferrying RAF and Navy aircraft from factories to RAF Maintenance Units (MU), and from MUs to front line Squadrons and training units. Pilots were recruited from civilian pilots who were unfit for RAF service because of age, fitness or gender. Their age and disabilities lead to the ATA being referred to as “Ancient And Tattered”. A number of pilots were also seconded from initially from Imperial Airways.

Pilots from Commonwealth and neutral countries volunteered as well. Also, pilots from the USA volunteered in the early stages of the ATA as the USA had not entered the war. A few later transferred to the RAF Eagle Squadrons formed of USA nationals. From January 1940 women pilots were admitted and continued to ferry aircraft throughout the war flying all types of aircraft from Spitfires to Lancasters and Halifax.



The more famous pilots were Jim Amy Johnson, and American air racer, ine Cochran. Amy Johnson was lost on flight from Prestwick to Kidlington near Oxford in an Oxford twin engine trainer. The weather was bad, but Amy decided to make the flight, became lost

and ended crashing into the Thames Estuary well off course to her destination. Many other pilots were lost due to bad weather, hitting high ground or crashing attempting to land in poor visibility. The admission of

women to the ferry pilots ranks resulted in equal pay with the men, which was the first occasion of equal pay in Government service.

These ferry pilots, both men and women, usually flew the various types of aircraft solo and without navigation aids, resorting to basic map reading and dead reckoning. The pilots often referred to this type of navigation as “Bradshaw”, following railway lines.

There are numerous stories of a woman pilot delivering a Wellington or Lancaster and the ground crew at the destination not believing that she was the only pilot. These large bombers also had a woman Flight Engineer as well. Each pilot was cleared to fly a number of different classes of aircraft, such as single engine trainers, single engine fighters, and multi-engine aircraft. Little or no basic training on each type of aircraft was given. Each pilot had a book of flight reference cards which detailed all the technical information and flying characteristics for a particular type.

The copy that is in the Shuttleworth archive belonged to Capt. P Wills. The book has cards for 67 different aircraft showing how to handle the engines, starting procedures and information on fuel consumption, also operation of brakes, undercarriage and the various emergency procedures. It gives the cruising power settings and those for climbing as used by the ATA. As the aircraft were mainly direct from factories or from MUs after major servicing or repair, it was essential that the engines were not over stressed before being delivered to front line units. Pilots were often given a task to deliver a type that they had not flown before and had to just study the cards and make notes before the flight.



Joy Lofthouse

In 2017 I had the pleasure to host the last two women pilots, Mary Ellis and Joy Lofthouse at Old Warden during a film session for the 100th anniversary of the RAF. I took Mary in my car to the far end of the runway where filming was taking place. Having spent some time talking about her experiences I asked her if I could ask a personal question to which she agreed. I asked her how old she was. Her answer was 100 years and 6 months



Mary Ellis

2 Feb 1917 - 24 July 2018



Photographs from wikipedia and BBC

Join us as a member today.

As a nation, we owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to the RAF and their families. Join the RAF Association as a member today, and stand united in support of everyone in the RAF community who needs our support, now and always. For an Application form go to www.rafa.org.uk



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 at the end of November

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

Wednesday 29th September 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 27th October 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

Wednesday 24th November 2021 10.00 hrs to 12.00 hrs

There will be no December meeting,

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.