

**RANCH
MEMBERSHIP
196**

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

Autumn 2024

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &



Branch Registered Charity No. 1071536

Association Registered Charity No. England 226686 Scotland SC37673

Patron His Majesty King Charles III

RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2023/4

Now including Stevenage



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NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



 I was asked by some cheeky RAFAGEN reader the other day, when are all these doggy tails (tales) going to stop? Well my friend in answer to your question, not in this issue. Keep reading and you will find another story about the life of a RAF Police Dog Handler. This one is a true story, I know that because it is my story from the mid 1950's

 On Sunday 30th June 2024 (The day following **NATIONAL ARMED FORCES DAY**), Tesco offered all military veterans a free breakfast to thank them all they have done for this country. One big “Thank you, Tesco” from all of us. I would be interested to know if you saw Tesco’s publicity on this event and if you took up their kind offer.

 In two years time this Branch will 80 years old, and it is only right that we celebrate, if only to say a big thank you to all those members who have kept the Branch going all that time. Plus to entertain our current members. We could have various events over the year finishing up with a big event. I know we are still two years away,

but time flies when you are organising. The committee want to put on a show for all of us, so what I am asking for, is your ideas. Don't leave it all to the Committee, because they might get it wrong. All suggestions please to Marie our Secretary. (Contact details on page 2).



Some of you may recall that a few years ago our then Chairman, Shaun Griffin, introduced the branch to the Alzimers Society and we had talks on the subject. I learnt at Area Conference that the Royal Air Forces Association are themselves getting involved. As I would like the branch to help any members with the illness I have asked that we be involved.

We know that navigating dementia can sometimes be difficult, but you're not on your own. We're here to support you through caring for a loved one with dementia, to help you identify how and where you can access addition and specialist support, and to provide you with up-to-date information about dementia and dementia care.

If you are interested in knowing more about what the Association can offer please contact Ken Needham,



I have a number of Tee Shirts bearing the crests of the R.A.F. Police, R.A.F. Association and Military Veterans, which I usually wear during Wings Appeal events and NAAFI Breaks.

During the recent spell of warm weather I wore my Veterans Tee Shirt, and had need to go into Letchworth Town Centre whilst wearing it, and called into the Sainsburys Local to make a small purchase.

I had gone to the counter, paid for my goods, and then the young girl on the till suddenly held out her hand wanting me to shake it, which I did, and she said “Thank you”. I thought at first this was a new service Sainsburys were offering. I was speechless. Then she pointed to the crest on my Tee Shirt. I must admit I was a little humble, but proud that this young lady just wanted to say “Thank you”, not just to me but to all my fellow veterans. It certainly took the wind out of my sales.

I wonder if I would have received the same reaction had I had been wearing one of my other military Tee Shirts?



Note} Little did this young lady know that I spent most of my military life on a tropical island, being looked after by an Alsatian dog. Never seeing enemy action.



SEE PAGE 7 FOR NEWS OF THIS YEARS CHRISTMAS BASH





Since being stationed at RAF Scampton during my service life, I have taken an interest in the life of the station and it's stories.

At a recent NAAFI Break, our Chairman brought in some "Fly past" magazines for members to take away and read. I noticed one bearing the headlines 'DAM BUSTERS'. That's one for me, and I must admit I thought I knew a lot about the Dam busters, but I now know a lot more.

I did know that Guy Gibson's 'Upkeep' (the name of the bouncing bomb), missed the target, exploding short of the Mohne Dam. By the way, he was flying in G-George.

Something I did learn was that our own Letchworth barber, was flying in C-Charlie as rear gunner. They took off at 00.21hrs as a spare, later diverted to the secondary target of the Lister Dam. The plane itself failed to return as it was shot down by anti-aircraft fire near Hamm in Germany on the outward leg.

I did know that Freddie Tees managed to escape from the rear turret and was found unconscious and badly burnt on the ground and was taken prisoner of war. He was the sole survivor from the crew of seven. He required extensive treatment and was imprisoned at Heydekrug POW Camp L6 for most of the war.



In 1967 he took part in the Dam Busters reunion held on the 24th anniversary of the raid at Scampton in Lincolnshire.

Later in life Tees lived at 12 Wilbury Hills Road Caravan Site and ran a gentlemen's barber shop in Station Road in Letchworth, Hertfordshire. He committed suicide on 15 March 1982.

For information J-Johnny was attacking the Mohne Dam and the report in "Fly past" states "*Upkeep accurately dropped at 01.39hrs causing larger breach, followed by dam collapse. Returned 03.11hrs*".

STOP THE PRESSES
NEWS JUST IN FROM YOUR COMMITTEE
ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS BASH

I am just hearing that your committee have agreed that this year's Branch Christmas Bash will be held on **5th December**. Why so early? It's because they didn't want it to clash with any other Christmas party you may get an invite to nearer the day. The venue is the same as last year, **The British Garden Centre Hitchin**. (I know it as the Garden Centre on Harkness Hill.) Time **12.00 hrs for 12.30 hrs**. There is ample parking, with excellent disability access. What are you getting for your money? It is a two course meal and is in the Christmas Tradition.

Main Course

Tradition Roast Crown of **Turkey** served with sage, cranberry & onion stuffing & pig in a blanket. OR Slow roasted **Beef** with Sea Salt & Cracked Black Pepper. OR **Cod** in Bearnaise Sauce OR **Carrot Wellington** (V) with Spiced Marmalade, with Carrots, mushrooms & Spinach with orange & ginger spiced marmalade encased in puffed pastry. All the main courses are served with creamed mash potatoes, rosemary roast potatoes, honey roasted parsnips, tarragon buttered carrots, winter spiced red cabbage, Brussels sprouts (of course) tossed in butter, cauliflower cheese, and Chef's roast gravy or vegetarian gravy.

Dessert

Traditional **Christmas Pudding** served with a warm vanilla & brandy sauce. OR **Black Forest Trifle**, chocolate fudge pieces & chocolate flake. OR **Spiced Pear, Toffee and Cranberry Tart** (V), Chocolate biscuit crumb base topped with chocolate & raspberry filling finished with a raspberry swirl & whipped cream.

Finishing up with a tea or coffee.

I need to know numbers and meal requirements as soon as possible, so that we can get it all ordered. Oh you don't know the cost yet do you. Well to you it is £11.95 per member. Be hearing from you.



The Branch's annual [Battle of Britain](#) memorial service this year will take place on Sunday 29th September 2024 at the Central Methodist Church, Pixmore Way, Letchworth Garden City at 15.00 hrs.

There is ample parking.

We would like to see as members present as possible, and stay afterwards for a cuppa and meet our special guests.

Pixmore Way runs from Broadway Gardens to the A505 roundabout. There is a Church at each end of the road, and one in the middle. The Central Methodist Church is the one in the middle. For information, St Hugh's church is at the Gardens end and St Paul's, the roundabout end.



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A TRAINEE RAF POLICE DOG HANDLER

THE YEAR 1956

Story by Ken Needham

We had already been taught what to look for before accepting a donated dog from a family, and woe betide you if the dog was found to be unsuitable, or diseased when you arrived back at Netheravon. This exercise was not only to pick up a donated dog, but this would be the first time you would oversee a dog amongst the civilian population, who would not know that the dog was untrained. You also had to realise that this animal may have no discipline and could be hard to handle. Before you ventured out you heard all sorts of terrifying stories about dog collections. Would mine turn out to be one of them?

The pickup could be anywhere in the British Isles. You could only travel on public transport, and if you had to cross London via Underground, you had to ensure that the escalators must be stopped. (Dogs must not be carried) All this was part of the test. You would be given a warrant to travel on public transport, and a temporary certificate showing that you were competent to travel with a dog. Because we were R.A.F. police officers we could wear the red and black arm band, but no white webbing. Some who had already done their task thought it was a good idea to wear it, others said otherwise.

The day of my task came, and I reported to the office. I was told that my pick-up was in Brighton. I was given the address and all the necessary paperwork. This wasn't a too bad a consignment. Bus from Netheravon to Salisbury. Train from Salisbury to Havant. Train from Havant to Brighton.

I arrived in Brighton without incident. Not knowing where the street was, I was looking for, I sort out a policeman. (There was a lot around in those days) He pointed me in the right direction so off I set. It didn't sound too far to walk and wasn't. I don't recall too much about the pickup, only that I checked the dog all over as taught, and the dog was quite calm about the whole thing, which I thought was a good thing. All the documentation

complete, I left with the dog, muzzled and on a short lead. The family were a little upset on loosing their pet, but I was expecting that.

I had decided not to wear my arm band on the journey to Brighton, but for the return I would wear it. I was proud to be in the R.A.F. Police with a dog by my side. The public didn't know that the dog was not a trained Police Dog. The dog was quite placid and walked at my side easily. I felt good

When I arrived at the railway station, I was immediately approached by a porter. "Which train are you looking for sir?" I told him that I wanted the next train to Havant. "Right sir, this way", and off we went to find the train. We had been told that when we were travelling with a dog, we had to travel in the Guards Van. As the train drew into the platform, the guard left his van and saw us approaching, he shouted, "That bloody vicious thing is not coming in my Van" and stepped back into his van. Great I thought what do I do now? The guard returned with a piece of paper which he passed to the porter. "This way sir". Said the porter, and we walked back towards the front of the train. We stopped at the first carriage, compartment, and the porter stuck the paper that was given to him by the guard, across the window. The word RESERVED appeared on the window. "There you are sir, a compartment all to yourself". I thanked him and got into the carriage. He went off on his way. And that is the way we travelled to Havant.

The train from Havant to Salisbury had two guards' vans so we used the vacant one. The bus journey from Salisbury to the camp we were told to go upstairs. During the whole journey no one came to join us, I wonder why. We were at the front of the bus, and as it approached Netheravon, the dog was sick. I left the bus without saying a word to the conductor. I felt awful afterwards, but for me my dog collection task had gone so well. I didn't want complications. I took the dog along to quarantine, and never heard another word, so I assume I had passed.

One thing I did learn on that, and subsequence railway journeys with my dog, was that the Railway Porters in those days were very obliging. Something to do with having a police dog was the draw, not my charm.



COMMITTEE NEWS

July 2024

The committee only just made a quorum at this month's meeting due to illness and holidays, but we were able to continue with a couple of points going unanswered, which could be left until the next meeting.

The usual housekeeping out of the way, the meeting went on to other items.

Armed Forces Day was discussed, and it was agreed that this was not the best as regards collecting for Wings Appeal. It was thought that bringing the event a week forward may be a reason for the poor show, but it was not a general feeling. The meeting was told that the RBL are looking at a different venue for next year, but as there are still many problems to solve, it is not yet finalised.

It was agreed that two weights be purchased for the Gazebo we hire for events. Two are already supplied. The proceeds will come out of the Gazebo Fund which is especially raised for such purchases, by having special raffles.

All is going well for the Battle of Britain service in September. A list of VIP attendees to be produced, and invitations sent out. It was suggested that we invite the Standards of the local ATC to attend.

Our Wings Officer (Eric) said that our next big collection had been booked with the Hitchin Town Centre management and will be in on 14th September (Subject to the NHC issuing a licence). Eric did show his disappointment in the lack of volunteers in helping at these events. It appeared to only be those around the table (plus spouses). If we could get

WHAT AM I USED FOR?

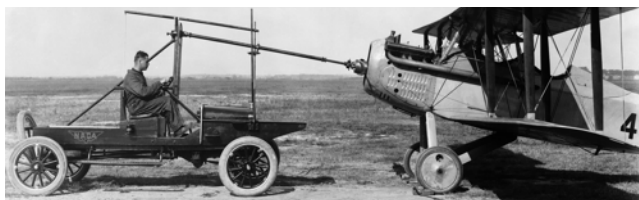
Last month you saw the photograph of the vehicle below, which was taken during the visit by the branch to Shuttleworth Aircraft Museum, and we asked what was it used for?



This is Wikipedia's answer :- A Hucks starter

Which is an auxiliary power unit, almost always a lorry or truck, that provides initial power to start up piston aircraft engines. Invented by Royal Flying Corps Captain Bentfield Hucks, for whom it is named, the device served as a mechanical replacement for the ground crew members who would have otherwise needed to spin an aircraft's propeller by hand as a part of the starting process, on aircraft engines not fitted with starters. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Hucks starter was in widespread use amongst ground crews, becoming particularly useful as aircraft engines had progressively become too large to be easily started by hand. Some aircraft could be started practically only by using the device. Its popularity quickly waned during the 1930s as new forms of integral starters, such as the Coffman starter, were introduced to service. While many Hucks starters were scrapped, a number have been restored and preserved for display. During the 2010s, one such preserved example, held in the Shuttleworth Collection, was restored to working order and became the first Hucks starter to actually start an aircraft in 70 years.

One original Hucks starter, built during 1920 by de Havilland, survives at the Shuttleworth Collection. During the 2010s, it became the first Hucks Starter to actually start an aircraft in 70 years when it successfully started a preserved Hawker Hind. The Shuttleworth's unit has since been regularly used to start the vintage aircraft based there, while a number of working reproductions have also been built.



WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

A LOT

**WE NEED MORE NEW
MEMBERS**





DIMPLES Bar & Cafe.

Willian Way,

Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH

Open Tuesday - Friday 10.00 hrs to 18.00 hrs Saturday &

Sunday 10.00 hrs to 20.00 hrs

The home of the Branch NAAFI

BREAK

A Haven for Families and Beginners: Letchworth Par 3 Family Golf Centre

In the heart of Letchworth Garden City lies a golfing sanctuary that welcomes enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels, the Letchworth Par 3 Family Golf Centre. Offering a compact yet comprehensive golfing experience, this 9-hole, Par 54 course stretches from 53 to 104 yards, making it an ideal setting for players to refine their game or take their first swing. Surrounded by the serene beauty of a parkland setting, the course stands out not just for its accessibility from Junction 9 of the A1(M) but for its commitment to fostering a welcoming, family-friendly atmosphere.

What sets Letchworth Par 3 apart is its dedication to the essence of golf, providing a well-rounded experience without the need for a driving range. The course layout includes a variety of tees, fairways, roughs, greens, and bunkers, offering seasoned golfers a chance to hone their short game while giving novices a taste of all golf has to offer. The absence of longer drives does not diminish the challenge or enjoyment; rather, it highlights the strategic play and precision that golf demands.



Professional Tuition- Alison Perkins



NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION



Last month, as we prepared to mark Armed Forces Day, hundreds of volunteers, serving personnel and Association employees came together with our branches to make welfare check calls to members of the RAF community as part of our outreach campaign .

More than 2,200 wellbeing calls were made throughout the week leading up to Armed Forces Day, with almost one in five of those contacted referred to one of our welfare services .The campaign culminated with an event at RAFA HQ on Friday 28 June, with serving personnel, corporate partners and Association Ambassadors helping to make calls to RAF veterans and their families.

MISSING

By Bernard Drummond

Forward

About 16 or so years ago a friend of my wife, knowing that I was in the R.A.F.,and very interested in history, asked me to research the details of her father's death in action during WW 2.

Her father, an R.A.F. Bomber Pilot had been killed during operations in Italy in 1944. She had copies of letters sent to her mother. One from the Air Ministry, and the other from the Commander of 18 Squadron. There



was also a photograph of her father, William Worsley. My wife's friend Ruth Mackenzie was only 3 years old when her father died and as her mother had remarried knew little about her father as her mother, whilst alive had never spoke of him. Ruth felt that this was in defence of her Stepfather.

Ruth did however remember a former R.A.F. Friend of her father coming to visit once. Ruth was about 12 at the time and remembered that the man was very kind to her and had sent her a birthday card which bore the name; Charley Watts.

During my research I was fortunate enough to trace the son of Charley Watts. It appeared that Charley had written a small memoir of his service in the R.A.F., which included details of being shot down by a German Fighter, the subsequent death of his pilot and navigator and the time spent with Italian partisans who had rescued him and his friend George Dobson. Sadly, George had also died, but Charlie's son sent me details of his father's memoir.

Ruth Mackenzie has been dead many years now but I know she would not mind me relating this story. All the names of the R.A.F. Crew and the friendly Italian Giuseppe (plus his background as related to Charlie) are faithfully recorded in this sad but true story.

The Story

Evelyn sat in a dazed stare. Reading and re-reading the official letter from the Air Ministry. This was the second letter that she had received from them. The first one had arrive in August, stating that her husband William, was missing from Operations' and they would contact her again just as soon as they had more information.

This second letter merely stated that as no official confirmation had been received, that William was recorded as missing in action, but it is always possible that he could be a prisoner of war.

This was only repeating what had been said in the letter that she had received in July from the commanding officer of 18 squadron, where William served as a pilot. She had written to them in a state of anxiety, asking what 'missing in operations meant'. Her husband was a bomber pilot, and she knew it was a dangerous thing to be, and what about the rest of the crew?

William had not been a great letter writer, even when he did write, there was an air of secrecy about what he was actually doing there in Italy. His last letter to her had been dated at the beginning of July 1944, but since then nothing. What had really happened, would only be revealed later.

Flight Sergeant William (Known as Bill) Worsley and his crew took off from their airfield in Southern Italy on the morning of the 20th July 1944. They were flying a Boston, a two engined fight bomber. At their briefing earlier, thy were told it was just a reconaissance of the roads between Florence and Bologna. The war seemed to be going well for the allies, and on the bombing raids they had been making since arriving in Italy, the flack had been fairly light, compared with some they had experienced over Germany. Like himself, all of his three man crew were just Flight Sergeants.



Bill Worsley was an Essex man, grammar school educated, he had gained his wings in Canada like so many other RAF personnel. The navigator was Ted Rowe, acknowledged by the rest as the most intelligent of them all, he came from the Rhonda Valley, and was officer material. George Dobson was the bomb aimer, who also manned the upper gun. He was brought up on a farm somewhere in Bedfordshire, a quiet man with very little to say. His good friend Charlie Watts was the rear gunner. A Londoner with plenty to say, and who usually spoke for the both of them.

They had no bomb load, and the navigator, Ted Rowe was also charged with the camera to take shots of the roads. It was a beautiful morning,

and as they followed the river Tiber to the north east they could see the peaks of the snow capped mountains of the Appennino range.

“Beautiful” said Bill, “We’ll have a closer look at them on the way back,” and Ted nodded in agreement.



As it turned out, this was a fortunate decision, because later, on their return to base when tragedy struck. They were flying over the largely uninhabited valleys of the mountain range, where there was little or no enemy activity.

That is however, apart from a lone fighter of the Luftwaffe, who was on his way back from a routine patrol. Unable to believe his luck, the pilot of the Focke Wulf came down out of the sun firing his cannon at the Boston, and catching the pilot and crew completely by surprise. The attack was virtually ‘head on’ and the navigator and pilot were both wounded, and the aircraft began spiraling as Bill struggled to keep control.



“Bale out, Bale out,” he was shouting, and George Dobson helped the heavily bleeding Ted Rowe to exit the stricken plane, and he and Charlie quickly followed. Charlie was able to say later, that as he had drifted down in comparative safety, he had seen their aircraft, now some distance away diving headlong into the ground. Like his friend George, he thankfully skirted a forest and thumped down on to Terra Firma.

As he struggled out of his parachute he was relieved to see his mate George some fifty yards away, hobbling towards him as he had come down rather heavily spraining an ankle.

“Stay there, I’ll hide the ‘chutes”” said Charlie, running off to retrieve George’s parachute, but as he got back to his mate, he saw two armed men coming towards them from the trees. “Watch out.” He whispered to George, “We’ve got company”.

The two grim looking men, who were holding carbines steadily approached, and stopped a few yards short of them they were having a heated conversation, until one suddenly greeted them, saying “Guten abend, wie gehts?”

“Bugger” muttered Charlie, “they’re Germans.” Then putting his hands up answered; “Sorry mate, don’t speak German, we’re English, RAF in fact.”

At this, the two men, who were Italians, burst out laughing, lowering their guns.

“RAF? That’s good, if you were Germans, well you would be two dead Germans now!” This was spoken in perfect English, by the obvious leader of the two Italians, which after a quick burst of Italian to his companion, then said, Let’s get you out of sight, the Bosh fly over these valleys now and again, and I’ll explain who we are when we are safer.”

Helping George along they walked a fair way into the forest before resting and he began to tell them who he and his companion were, and roughly where they are.

“My name is Giuseppi, my friend here, who does not speak English, is Alberto. I am sorry about teasing you in German, but we had no idea who you were, we saw the plane crash, and three parachutes, and well, you are just wearing flying suits, you could have been the enemy, I just had to be sure. You see my friend Alberto here, well, he just wanted to shoot you right away, he just hates Germans, and obviously, if you had answered in German, that would have been that.” Charlie by now had produced some cigarettes, which were thankfully accepted, and as they lit up, he asked, Do you know where our plane crashed?, And if you do,

we would like to go there because there are two other members of our crew that we are worried about, they were both badly injured.”

“I am sorry,” Giuseppe answered, “but it’s out of the question, by now a German or Fascist patrol will be there, but we have contacts, and as soon as we hear anything, we’ll let you know. But now we must get to our headquarters, there you can rest, have some food, then we’ll talk some more.”

They arrived at a hidden encampment deep in the forest. Here they were met by several armed men, and some women. They were fed, and plied with a dark red locally brewed wine, and George’s swollen ankle was attended to. They discovered that this was a small group of anti-fascist fighters who had come together. They learned that Giuseppe had joined them from Avessano, the nearest town, where he had been teaching, having left Rome at the beginning of the war, also it was clear that he was a Communist. In a conversation with Giuseppe, Charlie had been curious about how he came to speak such good English, and probably German as well.

“Well Charlie, answered Giuseppe , “My father was sent to England to work in the Italian Embassy, he was a diplomat. I was 14 years old, went to Harrow, then Oxford University. I studied languages, and that is what I was teaching in Rome when that fool Mussolini got us into this dreadful war.”As they were speaking, someone arrived with news and provisions. There was a lot of excited talk with Giuseppe involved in the middle of it. After a while Giuseppe came back to Charlie and George followed by a group of serious looking partisans. He was clutching a flask of wine. Pouring them each a glass, he broke the sad news.

Their informant had told them that a body had been found close to the burnt out aircraft. It was still attached to a parachute. By the time the Germans had reached the aircraft it just a smouldering pile of debris and it appeared that the remains of someone was detected amongst the ashes, but too badly burnt to identify. It seemed that there had been an

explosion when the plane hit the ground. George and Charlie were quiet for a while, before Charlie spoke.

“We had reserve tanks of fuel, because it was a long trip. They probably still had a lot of high octane fuel in them, that’s why it blew up, and the fire would have been very intense. Our pilot, Bill would have still been strapped in, poor man. But the crash would have killed him. As for Ted, well, he was probably dead before he hit the ground, I know how much he was bleeding when we pushed him out.”

Giuseppi translated this to the group of men, one of them made a small speech, raising his glass as he spoke, which Giuseppi explained to Charlie and George. “He said they had been brave men, freedom fighters, like us.” “Thanks.” Said George, then looking at Charlie they raised their glasses, saying “God Bless ‘em.”

The two survivors stayed with the partisans, and shortly they heard that the allies had entered Rome. It was not long before they also reached the town of Avessano in late August 1944. Escorted to the town by Giuseppi, they were still wearing their RAF uniforms, and were greeted with amazement by a British Officer. They had quite a story to tell, first of all to the intelligence officers then later to the commander of 18 Squadron when they returned to their airfield.

Squadron Leader Passmore was delighted to see two men that he had presumed dead, gave them unconditional leave and sent them back home to Blighty. He then sat down to compose a letter to the wife of William Worsley. He would be careful not to mention the details of her husband's awful death, but at least she would know that he was no longer ‘Missing’, and now she could get on with her life.

B. Drummond 2016

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

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

25th September 2024

30th October 2024

27th November 2024

December Christmas Bash TBA

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.

