

Letchworth, Hitchin & District  
Branch



THIS QUARTER A BUMPER ISSUE

# RAFA GEN E

AUTUMN  
2017



**ROYAL  
AIR FORCES  
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

[www.rafa-leitchworth.org.uk](http://www.rafa-leitchworth.org.uk)



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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

Ken Needham, 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City,

Hertfordshire, SG6 3HJ.

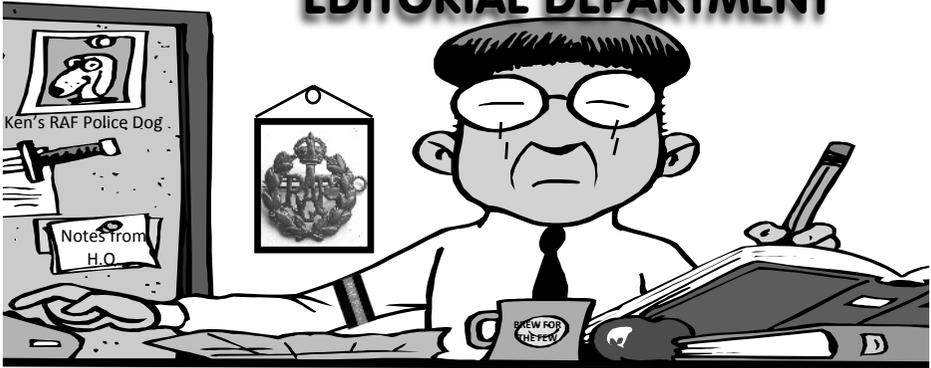
Telephone: 01462 671534

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



For Farther's Day I was bought a book entitled 'A Dictionary of R.A.F. Slang' by Eric Partridge, published in 1945. Most of the book is taken up with Slang that was used during the Second World War, by pilots. I joined the R.A.F. In the mid 1950's so I remember many still being used. Such as :- '**A.C. Plonk**' - '**A Queen Mary**', '**Chiefy**', '**A piece of homework**' and many others. Many seem to have come into regular civvy speak. Do the members of the present Air Force have their own language which you won't find in the Oxford English dictionary? Before I change the subject I will leave you with a final entry, this time with the description for those readers who have never been in the R.A.F. **Passion-killers** = Airwomen's service knickers, whether twilights (the lighter summer-weight variety) or black-outs (navy-blue winter weights). A wise directive has purposely made them as unromantic in colour and design as a wise directive could imagine.

We have a very generous person, here in Letchworth Garden City, who has taken it upon himself to sell the Wings Appeal lapel badges on E Bay, and he is doing very nicely. 75% of the price of the badge is sent directly by E Bay to H.Q. In Leicester, the other 25% covers out of pocket expenses. If you see the advert on E Bay you will see that it mentions our Branch as the recipient, not quite correct as the money goes straight to Leicester, but who cares as long as the money goes into the big Wings pot. Thank you Keith for your work, from all at R.A.F.A., both locally and up in Leicester.

As you already know it is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Air Force next year, and to mark the occasion the Committee are intending to make the April 2018 meeting, an open event. Not quite sure of the format yet, but it is the intention to invite local dignitaries from the public and military arena, plus one or two more to make it a good evening. It is a long way away, but if you have any ideas please let the Committee know, which will mean that they don't have to do all the thinking.

## BRANCH MEMBERSHIP

Roy Newbury Membership Secretary

First of all may I welcome Mr Muir of Lower Stondon to our list of members, and hope to see him at one of our Social Evenings or any event in which we are involved. If you see the light blue R.A.F.A. gazebo at a local event, please come up and introduce yourself, we are the ones in light blue Tee Shirts. That invitation is open to all members, not just Mr Muir.

The Branch membership currently stands at 130, a good increase on last year. The problem is, every time **RAFAGEN** is mailed out to Branch members, a few come back as 'gone away'. We don't want to loose you, so please if you are moving, please let me or our Branch Secretary know of your new location. You may wish to join a Branch nearer to your new home, no problems, the Association rules say you can now belong to more than one Branch. Remember, if we loose contact you will not receive your copy of **RAFAGEN**, unless of course you subscribe to **RAFAGEN 'E'**, the electronic version. But again, if you change your e mail address without telling us, you will loose that too, as well as any correspondence from Head Quarters.

**The 2017 flying ducks are now on sale at  
RAFATRAD or most local events where your  
local Branch is involved**



Collect the full squadron

# LETCWORTH & BALDOCK LIONS FUN DAY

## A REPORT ON WHAT HAPPENED

What a wash-out!!!! One thing that we can confirm is that the R.A.F.A. Gazebo does not leak, which was more than could be said for one or two other stalls. When the weather is against you it is just as disappointing to the organisers as it was to us. It should have been good for the 'Flying Ducks' but the public was not around to purchase them.

We decided that it was not going to stop raining so we called it a day just after lunch. One problem was that the gazebo that had kept us dry all morning was now going to get us soaked as we took it down. It was now so wet that it could not be stored away for the next event, so it was decided to re-assemble it on the lawn at the rear of Ken Needham's home. Goodness knows what his neighbours thought. It stood there for a few days because it didn't stop raining long enough for the gazebo to dry out. Oh the English summer!!!

Below John Airey waiting for the crowds before the rain came down



# ARMED FORCES DAY 2017

## A PICTORIAL REPORT ON WHAT HAPPENED



The local Air Cadets completing one of the challenges of the day. Picture by the Letchworth Town Warden.



The N.H.D.C. Chairman and his wife visit the local R.A.F.A. Branch stall to show his support.

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# RECRUITMENT DAY HITCHIN



“And the raindrops kept falling .....

## A PICTORIAL REPORT ON WHAT HAPPENED



Lisa joins up with the Hitchin Town Crier, before the rains came.

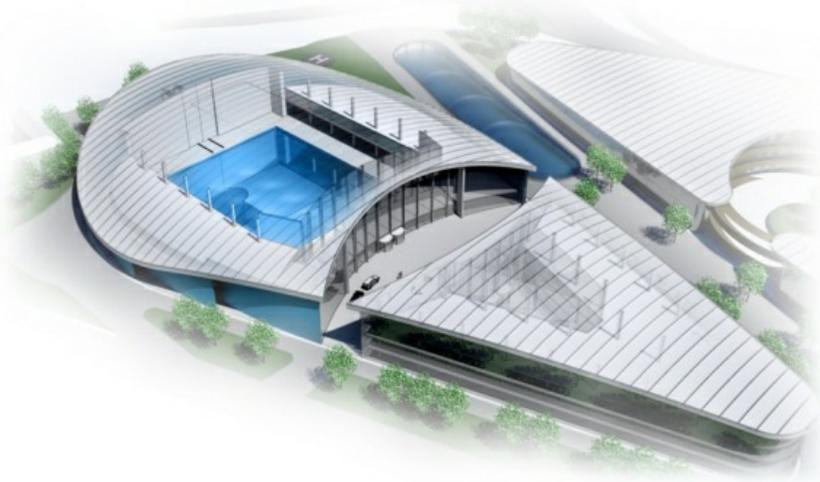


Go to our web page if you want to hear what we had to put up with, as well as the rain



It didn't rain the whole day, just most of it. Left RAFALO W.O Shaun Griffin gives the photographer a wave, whilst right other members of the team talk to possible new members.

# THE FUTURE OF HENLOW???



Royal Air Force Henlow has always looked to the future of flying, and if plans go ahead when the station closes in 2020, it will continue looking into the future of flying. This time training astronauts for the future.

A private company, Blue Abyss, has announced plans to open a commercial space and deep-sea centre on the site. The cost of building this training centre of the future will be expected to be in the region of £120 m.

The above building has been designed by the architect who designed the London Gherkin. Robin Partington. It will house a 50m deep pool, (which could be the world's deepest ), with parabolic flight capability, hypobaric chambers. All this and a 120 bed hotel. Could be ideal for future Area Conferences if they have such facilities.

We must point out that these plans are at the moment in early stages as we understand the MOD have not yet agreed a sale of the land, and the Mid Beds District Council have not received any request for planning permission.

We will keep you informed of development.

## SPEAKER AT BRANCH SOCIAL EVENINGS SINCE WE LAST MET

### June - Speaker Gary Fisher on The Magna Carta.

I was never into history at school, maths and geography were my specialist subjects, so when I saw the subject of the June meeting's speaker I wasn't looking forward to it. They say "never judge a book by its cover" and that was the case in this instance. I was fascinated from start to finish. I learnt more on how the country was run before the Magna Carta was published in 1215, and then afterwards, on the difference it made. Dates and names couldn't be absorbed, as there was too many to take in over the short period of the talk, but the general overall picture came over very clear. I wish that Mr Fisher had been my history teacher at Spondon House School, I might have taken more of an interest in the subject. If you are interested in history, or even if you aren't, and see Gary Fisher's name come up on Shaun's list of speakers in future, make sure you don't miss it.



If you are visiting Hatfield House or Hampton Court Palace, you may bump into Gary dressed and acting as a gentleman of the period.

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**July - Speaker** Vicky Axell from Letchworth Heritage Foundation gave an excellent talk this evening about Women in Letchworth covering key personalities from the town during the Suffragette movement. Vicky explained that the town was ahead of the rest of the country in women's rights, being backed from the start by the



town founder. In those early days women held senior posts in the town, and one designed, and had built, (left) a house showing a women's point of view.



## AIR COMMADORE PETER AYEE CBE DL CEng FIEE FRACs RAF (Retired)

Branch member Peter Ayee passed away in July of this year was a lifetime member of the Association. Peter was Commandant RAFSEE RAF Henlow in the mid 1950s.



Peter seen here with a former Officer Commanding R.A.F. Henlow. Peter Marshall. In 2014.

On the left is peter laying a wreath at the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the R101

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*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.*

- 14 Sept 17 Stephen Barnard - WWI recruitment posters.
- 12 Oct 17 Station Commander R.A.F. Henlow and Wing Commander Mark Cluic will visit the Branch along with the Station Warrant Officer.
- 17 Oct 17 **Branch visit to R.A.F. Regiment Heritage Centre at R.A.F. Honington.**
- 9 Nov 17 R.A.F. Warrant Officer Michelle Smith talks about her career and her current role as a Wing Warrant Officer specialising in foreign languages.
- 14 Dec 17 Branch Christmas Bash. Venue to be confirmed.

## HAPPY NEW YEAR

- 11 Jan 18 Sqn Ldr Eddie Wynn "Chaplaincy in the R.A.F. of today"
- 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	<b>Branch visit TBC</b>
8 Nov 18 -	Dr Rudi Newman - Imperial Airship Scheme 1924 -30
13 Dec 18	Branch Christmas Bash. Venue to be confirmed

There must be something there that has wetted your appetite.  
2018 Diaries will be on sale from October 2017.

## WINGS APPEAL 2017

### COLLECTING VENUES & DATES



Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> August to Friday 1<sup>st</sup> September 10.00 hrs onwards - Co-operative Store Stotfold.

Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> September 10.00 hrs until 16.00 hrs - Letchworth Garden Square Shopping Centre.

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October and Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> October 10.00 hrs until 16.00 hrs - Morrisons Superstore Letchworth Garden City.

If you have a hour to spare at any of the above venues, please come along and give a hand to make this year the best year ever for the Letchworth Hitchin & District Wings Appeal. Your assistance would be invaluable.

# 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)



# 248 SQUADRON LETCHWORTH AIR TRAINING CORPS NEWS

Sgt. Sarah Ward Reporting

We Were at the Letchworth Armed Forces Day event as well as your Branch.



Letchworth Armed Forces Day 2017  
Group Photograph.

Based in Icknield Way, Letchworth Garden City, 248 Squadron is part of the R.A.F. Air Cadet Organisation and is for air minded 13 - 20 year olds. Come see us any Monday or Thursday! 1900 - 2130.

Message from the Editor

I think Sarah Ward (Right) may be a little shy in telling you that she has been presented with an award for the work she does for the Letchworth ATC and for the Community which includes the association with R.A.F.A. Congratulation Sandra,

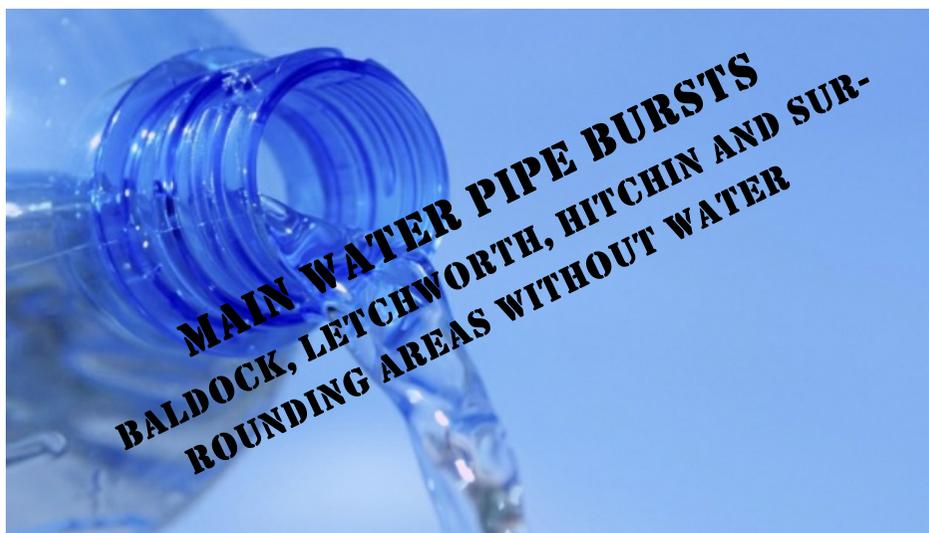


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# 1066 SQUADRON HITCHIN AIR TRAINING CORPS NEWS

News from 1066 Squadron in the next issue.



These were the headlines that hit North Hertfordshire on August 1<sup>st</sup>. I found myself checking on elderly friends and neighbours making sure they had water. Whilst on this exercise I suddenly thought, "What about our Branch members?" Other than trying to contact everyone, we have no way of knowing of their position.

So through the pages of this magazine I would like to put the following into operation.

If such emergency happens in the North Hertfordshire area again, and help is required by members, please telephone **Ken Needham on 01462 671534**. Who will do everything possible to ensure that you are given the help you require.

National headlines the following day

**"TERRIBLE AIR FATALITY AT THE MANOEUVRES: TWO  
BRITISH OFFICERS DASHED TO DEATH YESTERDAY".  
(DAILY MIRROR).**

The centenary of the 1912 Letchworth air crash

By John Birch

Tucked into the hedge by the road out of Willian towards Great Wymondley there is a small military memorial. Like many similar memorials across the country it is decorated with red poppies every year.

But a close inspection reveals that the simple stone cross has nothing to do with the Great War but, in fact, commemorates the death of two brave English airmen two years before in an accident that happened mere months after the formation of the then Royal Flying Corps, when the very idea of using aircraft in war was at best an interesting idea and the action of getting into these flimsy machines was an act of immense bravery.

On 6th Sep 1912 two early "heavier than air machines" took off from Wallingford Berkshire. This operational flight was part of the 75,000-troop manoeuvres taking place in East Anglia at that time. General Haig was leading the "RED Force" invaders with the object of taking London, and "BLUE Force" under General Greigson was defending the Capital. No 3 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, formed on 13th May 1912 at Larkhill, was under the command of Capt Brooke Popham, who was flying a biplane (and was accompanied by a Mr de Havilland, who would achieve some fame in the future with his own aircraft company).

The second aircraft, a monoplane built by Depudussin at Bethany near Rheims had previously won second place in the Military Aircraft Trails held the previous month. This 100 hp Gnome-engine aircraft had been modified by inserting an observer wicker seat in front of the Pilot. This was flown by Capt Patrick Hamilton, Lt Atholl Wyness Stuart acting as Observer.

Just after 06:00 hrs on a gusty morning Captain Hamilton took his aeroplane into the air from a field near Wallingford in Berkshire. Flying conditions were not ideal but they were not the worst Captain Hamilton had encountered – he had already survived two crashes in his short flying career, including a narrow escape from

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death while flying in America, when his aircraft crashed after being sucked into an air pocket.

In fact, the three men were flying at a time when there was still much to be learned about aviation and when many still held doubts about its potential. Since there was as yet no aeronautical language, motoring terms were frequently applied to these new vehicles of the air. The control column was 'the steering wheel', the metal engine casing or cowling was 'the bonnet' and airfields were known, daintily, as 'alighting grounds'. Aviators of this time had no standard flying kit beyond an assortment of leather coats and jerkins, breeches and leather caps which had been designed originally for the pioneer motorists and motor-cyclists.

The two aircraft parted company on the borders of Herts/Bucks aiming to meet up later that morning. Their mission was to fly as reconnaissance for the "defenders" in the manoeuvres, thus demonstrating the potential usefulness of this new invention. Capt Popham accelerated away in his faster biplane and waved farewell to his colleagues. It was the last time he was to see them alive.

A few minutes later the Deperdussin was approaching the 'alighting' area, which was part of a 100 acre field in Willian (owned by Mr Walter Brett, then landlord of the George and Dragon public house in Graveley) which had been prepared for its arrival. There was some excitement locally – these astonishing machines still created a stir everywhere just by flying over a town or village, and now one was going to actually land here on the edge of the new Garden City. As a result, when Capt Hamilton passed over Stevenage and began his descent, hundreds of eyes were upon him. There were many, therefore, who witnessed with horror what happened next.

Nearly all estimated that the aircraft was at about six hundred feet when the trouble began. Some claimed to have seen one of the aviators fall from the aircraft to his death some time before the machine began its final dive. One said it 'plummeted to earth like a dart', another that it 'fluttered to the ground like a bird shot on the wing'. However, most agreed that the 60hp Gnôme rotary engine, capable of producing speeds of 70 knots, was giving the pilot trouble well before the crash dive. It was clear, too, that the port wing folded and collapsed while the pilot, his engine having cut out, was desperately trying to reduce height for an emergency landing.

Instead, his aircraft virtually disintegrated in mid-air and fell into a thick hedge at the bottom of Mr Brett's meadow. "I saw the aircraft wobbling about," he was to

tell the coroner later. "It dipped and then came a report like a gun: Then the aircraft seemed to collapse altogether. I was too horrified to look any more ... I ran down and found the officers lying with the machine on top of them.' Both had died immediately upon impact.

The official accident report is somewhat more sparing and unemotional in its language. In summary it said that at 0710 hrs as the aircraft passed above Graveley it suffered a fracture of the engine's valve operating gear. This in turn caused the flailing push rods to dislodge the bonnet, which normally protected the aviators from the generous spray of Castor oil. This in turn severed the monoplane wing bracing wires causing the port wing to fold, and the aircraft to plummet to the ground – instantly killing both aviators.

Brooke Popham was notified of his colleagues fate soon afterwards and hurried to the scene to organise the recovery and have the bodies conveyed to the mortuary attached to St Saviours Church in Hitchin. The memorial service was followed by a full military procession escorting the gun carriages carrying the two coffins to Hitchin Railway Station. Capt Hamilton's coffin returned to Hythe, Kent and Lt Wyness Stuart's wife accompanied this coffin to Mells in Somerset. A full Military Burial was carried out at Hythe for Hamilton and for Wyness Stuart in the village of Great Elm near Mells.

The RFC memorial on the Willian to Gt Wymondley road was raised by public subscription and was the first memorial to individual members of the armed services whilst under military orders.

Four days later a Bristol Coanda monoplane, flying as part of the same manoeuvres, crashed at Wolvercote Bridge, Oxford, leading to a ban on the building of further monoplanes in favour of inherent strength of Biplanes. The initial ban remained at least partially effective until the early 30s when the Blenheim, Hurricane and Spitfire came into service

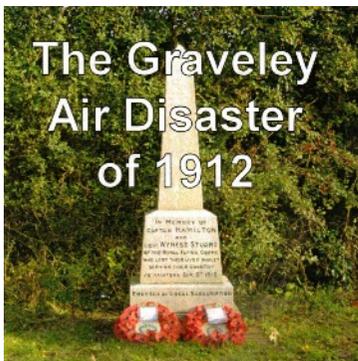
One hundred years later on Sunday 9th September 2012 the R.A.F. Association (Letchworth, Hitchin & District Branch), supported by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation held a centenary commemoration at the Memorial on the Willian Road and the memorial itself was repainted and restored for the event, thanks to grants from the County Council. The guests included The Colour Party of R.A.F. No 3(F) Squadron (which is what No 3 Squadron of the RFC later became);

serving R.A.F. Officers from R.A.F. Coningsby (the home of the squadron) and Henlow; Local Civic dignitaries; the next of Kin of Hamilton and Wyness Stuart; and Members of local veteran Associations with their Standards.

*Source: RAFA (Letchworth) press release, and Frank Cooke's page on the incident (which much more detail). A procession was held to mark the 100th anniversary of a fatal plane crash. If you are walking along The Greenway near the Wymondley Road you will see a plaque relating to the incident.*



The procession of ATC Hitchin, R.A.F. 3 Sqn Colour Party followed by R.A.F. Officers from various stations. Photograph by courtesy of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.



The Hitchin Historical Society made a film of the story which includes the remembrance service organised by Branch members



Colour party of R.A.F. No. 3 (F) Squadron from R.A.F. Coningsby who had only recently received the new colours from Her Majesty.

# R.A.F. REGIMENT CENTRE AT R.A.F. HONINGTON

Celebrating the R.A.F. Regiment's history at the R.A.F.  
Honington Heritage Centre

## **BRANCH VISIT PLANNED FOR 17th OCTOBER 2017**

### **COST**

**£15 - MEMBERS**

**£17.50 - NON MEMBERS**



All members interested in going on this visit should add their name to the list as soon as possible by contacting the Branch Secretary. (Details inside the front cover) Numbers are limited to 12 so be quick.



# Help support the RAF family in times of need

Who. What. When. Where.

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**JOIN US FOR  
A BREW ON  
MONDAY**

**25<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2017**

**10.00 HRS UNTIL 12.00 HRS**

**PAR 3 GOLF COURSE**

**WILLIAN WAY**

**LETCWORTH GARDEN  
CITY**

**HERTFORDSHIRE**

To find out more about fundraising for us contact your local branch

**LETCWORTH HITCHIN & DISTRICT  
BRANCH  
KEN NEEDHAM 01462 671534**

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