

Letchworth, Hitchin & District
Branch

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RAFA GEN

SPRING
2018

 ROYAL
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Association

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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: 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

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

Supporting something special

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



We wish the Royal Air Force a very happy One Hundredth Birthday

A local author and retired fighter pilot has given me the opportunity to adapt the notes he made for a talk to a group of businessmen, into a serialised story for this publication. The first part of this very interesting story starts in this issue, where he explains how he came to pilot a Vampire jet at the age of 19, from starting life as a farmer's son in Cornwall. I hope you will enjoy reading the story as much as I have.

This is the issue that we have to remind you that the Annual General Meeting takes place on Thursday 8th March 2018. As always we are asking for members who would like to sit on the Committee, or even take on one of the senior positions. There are always vacancies on the Committee and I am sure that not one of the senior post holders would mind losing their posts. According to Head Office we have one of the more successful Branches, and we have a base of good members, so the jobs are not that difficult. New faces, new ideas that is what we are after. If you are interested and would like to know what is involved, just contact the Branch secretary and ask away.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

THURSDAY 8th MARCH 2018 AT THE LETCHWORTH CONSERVATIVE CLUB, BIRDS HILL LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY. AT 20.00 hrs

EVENING'S PROGRAMME & AGENDA

Dedication given by the Chairman

The formal part of the evening

1. Welcome by the Chairman
2. Apologises for absence
3. Minutes of the last A.G.M.
4. Matters Arising from the minutes
 5. Officers Reports
 6. Election of Officers
 7. Any other business

Annual Presentation of the John Stoddard Trophy

Speaker

Mark Pardoe on Hitchin Pubs and their names

Branch Raffle

Notices

Close of Business

Hard copies of the Annual Reports and Accounts will be available for members on the night. Should any member not attending the A.G.M. And requires a copy should contact the Secretary, and it will be dispatched after the meeting.



IN THE POST BAG

Dear Ken.

This is just a long lost voice of Peter Kay, a life member of the branch since 1977. You may remember me as I have attended once or twice in the last few years, latterly to hear the talk by Air Vice Marshall Allan Merriman, a hero of mine from my A&AEE Boscombe Down days when I worked with him on the development of the Lightening Air Interception radar in the 1960's.

The reason I am writing is to congratulate you on the latest branch magazine, which you write and send by e-mail. I thought it particularly good this quarter, showing off and describing the branch functions perfectly. You do a great job.

I am sometimes tempted to again attend a meeting or two, but I am at the age were mind and body are in conflict! I find myself very cynical regarding today's politics and military policies, and cannot embrace many aspects of modern Britain. In addition, socializing is not my 'thing' in life.

I was particularly upset by the Royal British Legion (and others) decision to 'priorities' tickets for the November Remembrance Parade, which resulted in an argument with Head Quarters over a very poor response to my e-mail on the matter. This resulted in a phone call from R.A.F. Henlow, from a person representing South East area (I think). It was all a 'storm in a teacup' but to me, showed how poorly represented and unprofessional the Association has become when many such matters are discussed.

A small error I did notice in RAFAGEN, was an incorrect caption date attributed to Air Commodore Peter Ayee. He was commandant of RAFSEE Henlow in the 80's not the 50's and I was very sad to hear of his death. We met several times when I was Treasurer of the branch, and the fact that he was very junior to me (Entry

wise) as an Aircraft Apprentice just makes me feel vulnerable – it shouldn't as I am very fortunate in life, with adequate finances and a caring family which now includes three Great Granddaughters.

Keep up the good work and convey my appreciation of their work to all the committee.

Regards

Peter H Kay.

I was immediately made aware of the error in the piece about the late Air Commodore Peter Ayee. I took the piece straight from the Internet, and published without checking. I have learnt my lesson and will certainly check next time. How do newspapers get away with it. Perhaps they don't have the knowledgeable readers that the RAFAGEN has.

-Editor



Sir,

I am writing to you and your members for providing your R.A.F. Drape for the casket of Mrs Jo Dellar, an ex Royal Air Force telephonist in the late nineteen forties.

I also thank Roy, (Branch Standard Bearer) for leading the cortege in his usual smart and decorous style.

W.E. Cusack Royal Naval Association



OUR MEMBERSHIP IS ROCKETING

The Branch Membership Secretary reports that our annual membership has increased by some 37½% over 2016. The numbers over the past twelve months has shot from 120 to 165. We are getting a number of serving Air Force personnel joining us, but our membership drive in various local towns during the summer has brought a number of ex airmen and women as well.

Because a number of our members have either moved out of the area or are serving members of the Royal Air Force, a large number are listed as living (or stationed) out of the area. This represents 34%, which means that 66% are within striking distance of the attention of the Branch, and if any assistance is required we are here to help. This assistance can come in the form of welfare or just befriending, which means that someone pops in for a chat occasionally. If you would like to speak to someone regarding your needs please contact in the first instance the Branch Secretary who will make any arrangements.

You also know when our social evenings are, (see inside cover for details) so pop down and see us, you and your guests are always welcome.



REMEMBRANCE DAY 2017

The wreath at Hitchin was laid on the Saturday, 11th of the 11th jointly the by Vice President of the Branch, Dennis Dawson, and member John Airey.



At Letchworth, the wreath was laid by member Marie Mahoney on behalf of the Branch



Below - The Baldock wreath was laid by Life President of the Branch, Gordon Colinson



BRANCH VISIT TO R.A.F. HONINGTON R.A.F. REGIMENT HERITAGE MUSEUM

You weren't on the trip? Then you missed a great day out, and make sure you add it to your bucket list.

The museum may be small, but there is so much to see, and most of it is 'hands on' as you can see from the photo below, when our Vice Chairman (Roy Newbury) and Secretary (Ken Needham) decided that they would like to 'have a go' at the enemy.



The museum tells the story of the R.A.F. Regiment, from early days up to present day. The beauty of this military museum is that you do not have to have a military to enjoy it. No matter what your age, you will find items that you can identify with.

The curators, a very friendly bunch, are willing to listen to stories relating to the exhibits. This was evident when Roy Newbury saw an exhibit about the time he was in Palestine, and was able to add a piece of information. So grateful were the staff, they had Roy sign the exhibit to authenticate it.

We, who have been in the Royal Air Force a years ago will remember the NAFFI wagon, and the pleasure it brought to us during the morning and afternoon breaks. Well the museum have one of those too, fully functional, only no jam doughnuts.

In the early years section of the museum on display is an armed vehicle used in the desert. This was used as the lead vehicle in the Lord Mayor's Show last November.

GALLERY



Members of the party

Roy adds his signature to prove authenticity.



What makes you think it is a Rolls Royce?





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.

ANNUAL MEETING

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 8 Mar 18 | AGM with speaker Mark Pardoe on Hitchin Pubs and Pub names.. |
| <u>1 April 2018</u> | <u>100 Year Anniversary of the Royal Air Force.</u> |
| 12 Apr 18 | THE BRANCH IS TO CELEBRATE THE CENTENARY OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE |
| 18 Apr 18 | Branch Visit BENTLEY PRIORY |
| 10 May 18 | Amy Packard - Dementia Friends Update |
| 14 Jun 18 | Andy Gibbs on the Life & Legacy of second World War WAAF, Jill Grey. |
| 30 Jun 18 | Letchworth Armed Forces Day |
| 12 Jul 18 | Ken Griffin - Letchworth Convicts and Gallows Hill |
| 9 Aug 18 | Paul Jiggins - Welwyn Brewery |
| 13 Sept 18 | Stephen Barnard - WWI propaganda in music. |
| 11 Oct 18 | Nikki Harvey - Fire Investigation Dog Handler. |
| 18 Oct 18 | Branch visit to the Shuttleworth Collection |
| 8 Nov 18 - | Hitchin ATC Sqn Update - Sgt Sarah Ward |
| 13 Dec 18 | Branch Christmas Bash. Venue to be confirmed |

**TO ALL MEMBERS OF
THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH
OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION**

**YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE BRANCH
*ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

**ON
THURSDAY 8TH MARCH 2018
AT 20.00 hrs
VENUE
LETCWORTH CONSERVATIVE CLUB
BIRDS HILL
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY**

R.S.V.P.



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
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Email: info@letchworthfamilygolf.co.uk

PROFILE ON :- Mike Strange Branch Web Master



It is quite a few years ago now, when at a Branch meeting, member Mike Strange suggested that the Branch ought to move into the modern world and have a web site so that news about us could get out into the big wide world. The Committee agreed, although if truth was known, they didn't know much about the World Wide Web at the time.

The site was set up and ran for a couple of years, when Mike announced that he was moving to Dersingham in Norfolk, but, and it was a very important 'but' he would continue to be our Web Master from his new home. He has done just that, improving the site on a regular basis., with our IT officer giving him all the news.

Although no longer a member of our Branch, he is a very active worker for us, so that is why we have decided to profile his life in the Royal Air Force.

Mike joined the R.A.F. In 1963 as a Ground Radar Apprentice at R.A.F. Locking, near Weston Super Mere. He was to be an Airfield Navigation Radar Technician where he learnt the niceties of Cossor 787, Plessey PAR, British Tacan to major level and went to minor level on FSPS-6 and Type 80 kit.

After three years apprenticeship, he was posted to RAF Labuan, North Borneo, to be the only radar fitter on the island. Here he maintained ACR7 and Eureka (wasn't trained on either of course. Typical).

In 1967 he was posted back to England and R.A.F. West Raynham in Norfolk. Although now living in Norfolk, he tells me that at the time he thought West Raynham could be a bitterly cold place to be working at. Let's gloss over that station and go on to 1969 and R.A.F. Newton in Nottinghamshire. This is where Mike went on a Bloodhound training course, and no doubt where Mike's passion for the Bloodhound must have started, for today he is one of the Management Team of the Bloodhound preservation society.

1973 saw him posted to R.A.F. Swanton Morley, Norfolk but was parented by R.A.F. Stanmore Park, Middlesex, and working at Hawker Siddeley Dynamics,

Hatfield, Hertfordshire, on a CSDE project team supporting the introduction of Skyflash into service.

Mike was demobbed in 1977, and went to work for the then BAC in Stevenage.

On behalf of the members of the Branch, may I say a big thank to Mike for bringing the Branch into the 21st Century, I think we would have got there in the end, but with your help we got there a lot sooner.



Above - The Bloodhound missile ready for action.



Left - Mike Strange - 1963. First leave after his first twelve weeks in the service.

I can remember when on my regular visits 'Up North' passing a group of missiles just off the A1 just north of Stamford. They were all facing one way. They looked similar to the photo above, could they have been the famous Bloodhounds? Someone did tell me that they were false, just to impress the British public at the time of the Cold War. All I can say is if they were false, they were pretty impressive.

Editor

AN INVISIBLE WORKPLACE

Norman Jasper describes some of his aviation experiences

Part One - Early Years

My workplace was in a medium which cannot be seen, but a medium whose varying temperaments are readily seen and felt by everyone. The air we breathe and take for granted - an invisible workplace! It was a thrilling and exciting workplace but one which commanded total respect for it could bite back with great ferocity if abused.

Combining these two thought chains, exuberance and an invisible workplace, serves to illustrate that the degree of determination required for a successful fighter pilot grows out of a desire to probe into the unknown with some persistence, but persistence tempered by caution! In other words, get to know your aircraft by proving its limits and determine your own capabilities and limits. Hopefully thereby maximum advantage over a potential attacker is gained rather than the other way round. This can only grow out of natural attributes of the individual, it cannot be forced. At least that is how it was. Nowadays with advances in technology a sort of airborne armchair Play station or X-Box situation has come about, but I'll steer clear of that! Flying then, and I will try to skim through some of my background experiences for general interest to you. If there are any former pilots or aircrew members reading this, I may need you to assist! I've got a bit of a scatterbrained mind so I am prepared to be corrected.

I was born on 28th February 1933, a farmer's son in Cornwall. Our mixed farm, arable and animals, was 7 miles from the nearest town, Launceston, and 2 miles from the nearest village, Lewannick. The last part of the narrow lane led only to our farm. This was a wonderful situation to grow up in. I recall it with many fond memories though I took it for granted at the time. My father was the determined and unquestioned boss and my mother the hard working and accomplished home creator. My sisters Mary and Margaret and I did our own things but we were always constrained within the strict limits of opportunity available to us. Self-dependence grew naturally! The farming background allowed my interest in mechanical rather than animal matters to develop. My first memories are of paraffin lamps and candles and of our farm workers, effectively an extended family living in cottages across the orchard, milking the cows and working the farm with four horses. During the winter the steam traction engine and threshing set came for a few days to thresh wheat, barley and oat crops which had been harvested and stacked in ricks, for there were few combine harvesters in those days. The driver and his mate stayed with us in the farmhouse. After work each evening they sat around the open fire with us. They chewed tobacco, drank our home made cider out of quart jugs, sometimes lifted shakily, roasted chestnuts in the hearth and told, what was to me, the most fascinating tales. In those days steam power was supreme. Later my father was the first farmers in the area to get a tractor.

My life evolved from this wonderful, but somewhat sheltered background and naturally my father hoped I would take up farming. Deep down I longed to be independent, to break out and do my own thing. National Service perhaps? To be fair to my father he must have felt the same at that age for he went to the States and operated steam hammers creating crankshafts for model "T" Fords and did similar work for Dodge Motors and others. Hard piecework by him and his helper but I imagine very satisfying!. Going further back it is understood my grandfather had worked on a construction of one of the Trans Canada railroads west of Winnipeg but detail is unknown. However you can see that the urge to get away, not to be trapped into a life of predictability, was in my genes.

My parents were surprised to learn I was joining the Royal Air Force to fly and that I had signed on for 8 years rather than 2 years for National Service. After the initial shock they were always fully supportive throughout my flying career and I had felt compelled to grab the opportunity! My 8 years service was extended to 12 and finally 20 years. I then flew for Britannia Airways for 22 years. I was very lucky, in employment from school to retirement without a break and without a world war. Even better , for I started work with Britannia Airways on the first day of my month's terminal leave from

the Royal Air Force, pay from two sources!!



Chipmunk



Harvard

Firstly the Royal Air Force days - I collected my uniform from Cardington, did my officer training at R.A.F. Jurby in the Isle of Man and my flying training at Heany in Southern Rhodesia. Heany was one of the overseas R.A.F. flying training schools still in operation after the war. Tiger Moths were then being phased out of service and although existing courses were still flying them, I was placed on the second Chipmunk course. The Chipmunk was then a shiny new aircraft. Advanced training was on the Northern American Harvard, a friendly beast, difficult to tame but great for aerobatics.

Flying over the bush country was great fun with plenty of opportunity to express individuality, a necessary quality for a hopeful fighter pilot. I did my first roll when I deliberately wandered out of the circuit on my second solo flight, well before any aerobatic training, hoping no one was watching me! I learned that the nose of the aircraft fell rapidly earthwards when upside down! Temptations to chase giraffes, particularly on low flying exercises, had to be repressed.

In a Harvard one day I saw two African gentlemen carrying buckets and standing on the earth wall of a little dam creating a small water reservoir. On the spur of the moment I decided to do a steep dive on them, whilst putting the propeller of the Harvard into a screaming fine pitch. One tried to throw his bucket of water at me, but the other was less confident - he dived into the reservoir. I soon realised this had been a pointless act carried out by an immature juvenile! I mention these examples of youthful impetuosity which required shaping. Whilst rapid reaction is a necessary quality, the total value of any instant action is an instant action is an essential part of such reactions. Will the consequences of acting on a spontaneous thought be productive? I regretted this act and thoughts of it remain with me, for they were kindly people, friendly and with a natural generous outlook. the appalling situation which later befell them is poignant to me for I was fortunate to have memorable dealings with them then and in later years.

A number of other experiences were linked to my flying training and they will always remain with me. I gained my pilot's wings and won the end of course spot landing competition, but came second in the final aerobatic fly off. Somehow, coming second had a deep sub-conscious impact. It created in me constant nagging inner desire to do



Meteor



Vampire

better!

I was selected for fighter pilot training and jet conversion came next. This was completed at R.A.F. Valley in Anglesey. Dual flying training in Gloster Meteor T7s, the only two seat jets then available, and solo in De Havilland Vampire FB 5/9s, quite difficult aircraft.

Now jet fighter qualified, I was posted direct to 266 (Rhodesia) Squadron at Wunstorf in Germany. This Squadron was supported by Rhodesia during the war and a strong spirit of affinity was maintained. At the time there was a shortage of fighter pilots and I did my operational training on the Squadron, bypassing the normal Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) course. Operational conversion consisted of learning gun and

rocket firing skills and day fighter and ground attack flying procedures and tactics. I was now a 19 year old fully operational jet fighter pilot.

We were still flying Vampires, a cleverly designed fighter/bomber aircraft, though not nearly as evocative as the Spitfire, which it replaced. The Vampire had greatly enhanced performance and it provided a very stable gun platform. It was designed from a clean sheet around the new jet engine. These early jet engines with centrifugal compressors were relatively wide, but short in length and long jet pipes tend to reduce propulsive efficiency. The solution was to fit the engine close up behind the small wooden cockpit and attach the tail plane assembly via two booms extending rearward from the wings. The result was a very compact and lightweight design.

Our role in those cold war days was that of day fighter (air to air combat) and ground attack as mention above. In rotation we and other fighter squadrons were constantly on various degrees of readiness, depending on the perceived day to day situation. At this time Wunstorf was about to be re-equipped with the first Venoms coming into service. Vampires and Venoms may look similar, but Venoms have much greater performance capability.

With a similar weight to the Vampire, the Venom has a much thinner wing (10% thickness, Vampire 14%). The Venom's wing also has swept back leading edge and a straight trailing edge. This new design delayed the onset of shock wave effects and allowed a cruising speed of about point 8 mach, like current airliners. Mach 9 could be exceeded in a steep dive. The Venom was fitted with the DH Ghost engine as fitted

in the first Comets. It produced 56% more thrust than the Goblin in the Vampire and propelled the early single seat Venom, without the added weight of ejection seats, to 40,000 feet in under 9 minutes outstripping everything at that time, 1953. Whilst not supersonic in a dive like the Sabre, soon to come into R.A.F. service in Germany, the Venom could out-climb and turn-out any who ventured to approach us. If they thought we were flying Vampires, they were in for a shock! Wing tip fuel tanks gave considerably greater range capability than other current jet fighters.

Story continued in the next issue



CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT R.A.F. HENLOW



Each year as Christmas approaches the R.A.F.A.L.O. Team from Royal Air Force Henlow invite members from local R.A.F.A. Branches to an informal Christmas lunch in the W.O. & Sergeant's Mess.

With the closure of the station looming, we thought we were going to miss out this year as the organisers of previous functions have already been posted out, but thanks to Sgt Laura Jones, Cpl Nicky Bell and Sgt David Brisko who have bravely stepped into the breach, a first class lunch was held at the end of November.



Let us hope that Laura, Nicky and David can continue to arrange these events for us until the station finally closes, it really is appreciated by the Branches in the area.



WHAT ELSE DID THE BRANCH ARRANGE FOR CHRISTMAS?

The Branch Christmas Bash this year was held on Broadway, no not that one, the one in Letchworth Garden City. Although that was the excuse that Vice Chairman, Roy Newbury gave for being late. He says he went to the one across the 'pond'. Found we weren't there so came back to Letchworth. Don't believe him somehow.



Lisa had a plastic moustache in her cracker





In the beginning of this New Year, let us spend a few moments in 'an atmosphere of peace and quiet' reflect on those members of our Branch who are no longer with us, especially those who left us during 2017.

Our Branch Standard has attended a number of funerals of ex Royal Air Force personnel from our area who were not members of our Branch, but requested our attendance in memory of the time they spent in the Force. Let us include them in our our thoughts.

Left:- The Alter of Royal Air Force Church, St Clement Danes

The following members have passed away since our last issue. We send our condolences to all of the Families and friends.

Mr John Channel of Stotfold
Mr Eddie Smith of Letchworth Garden City.
Mr Peter Botley of Letchworth Garden City



RAFAGEN is the official newsletter of the Letchworth Hitchin & District branch of The Royal Air Forces Association

New members of 2017

MS. H. Baker of Baldock

Mr D. Benton of Kings Lynn

Mr J. Coleman of Tamworth

Mr K. Edwards of Wrexham

Mr c. Gould of Hitchin

Mr M. Guadagnini of Market Harborough

Mr S. Hague of Henlow

Air Vice Marshall Howell of Letchworth Garden City

MS. G. Mcelhinney of Londonderry

Mr c. Mead of Bedford

Mr J. Muir of Henlow

Mr A. Perry of Letchworth Garden City

Ms J. Raymond of Saxmondham

Mr G. Spicer of Shefford

Welcome to you all



We are off to visit the Aircraft Collection at Shuttleworth on Thursday 18th October 2018.

To cost will £20 including minibus transport from Letchworth Garden City. (Less if you have you own transport)

More information will be in the next issue of RAFAGEN or keep an eye on our Web Site or Facebook page.

BOOK YOUR PLACE NOW FOR THE FIRST TRIP OF 2018

BENTLEY PRIORY

Bentley Priory and the Battle of Britain

As Headquarters Fighter Command, Bentley Priory played a pivotal role during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Discover how the Battle of Britain was won.

Bentley Priory Museum tells the fascinating story of the beautiful Grade II* listed country house, focusing on its role as Headquarters Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain.

Explore the important stories of 'The One' – Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, 'The Few' who took to the air to defend our skies and 'The Many' without whose tireless work on the ground victory would not have been possible and discover how technology, leadership and courage forged victory allowing Britain's darkest hour to also be her Finest Hour.



Wednesday 18th April 2018 Price £15 pp. Interested parties please contact the Branch secretary as soon as possible as the Priory limited us to a party of 30.

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