

Letchworth, Hitchin & District  
Branch

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



AUTUMN  
2015

 ROYAL  
AIR FORCES  
Association



The charity that supports the RAF family

IN THIS ISSUE

*Reports on the Branch speakers  
A message from the Association President*



**ROYAL  
AIR FORCES  
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

# RAFAGEN

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

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## **ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS**

*President: Gordon Collinson*

*Chairman: Ernie Brown*

*Vice Chairman: Roy Newbury*

*Hon. Secretary: Ken Needham*

*Hon. Treasurer: Ken Needham*

*Welfare Officer: Tony Bearpark*

*Committee:*

*John Airey, Dennis Dawson, Jemma Macfarlane*

*Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Flt Sgt Shaun Griffin*

*RAFGEN Edited by Ken Needham*

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*Meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month at  
the Conservative Club, Birds Hill, Letchworth Garden City,  
Hertfordshire, at 20.00 hrs Guests are welcome*

**Supporting something special**

## EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT



Autumn is now with us, soon be Christmas. Talking of Christmas don't forget to put 10<sup>th</sup> December in your diary. That is the day of our Christmas Bash. Numbers are limited this year, so book your place now with the Branch secretary.

It was pointed out to me at a recent meeting that although we say who the Branch Welfare Officer is on page 2 of RAFAGEN, we don't say how to get hold of him if needed. This is true, so I will give out that information now and find it a permanent place in the next issue.

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I had an e mail from a member the other day asking to be put onto the RAFAGEN E list. He did ask if I could make the print larger, as he was in his 90's and has poor eyesight. I was able to tell him that RAFAGEN E is ideal for members with failing eyesight, as in the format it arrives on your computer the pages can be increased or decreased in size to suit the reader. Another thing that was not thought about in the planning, but a good point nevertheless.

Keep up to date by visiting our web site, [www.rafa-lethworth.org.uk](http://www.rafa-lethworth.org.uk)

**You will recall that in the last issue of RAFAGEN, Vice Chairman, Roy Newbury wrote an article on his visit to Mailly this year and why he attends the event annually. One of his aims is to involve local children in hope that they will continue remembering the R.A.F. aircrew who lost their lives over there. In order to thank the children he has arranged that a certificate be given to the children as a “thank you” for what they do. The following is the transcript of an e mail Roy has received. One of the things he didn’t mention in his article is that Roy does all this highly commended work under the banner of The Royal Air Forces Association and this Branch in particular. -Editor**



Hello, Roy,

I was surprised yesterday to find in the newspaper this photo in the newspaper. Translation of the article :

**“Three children rewarded on Bastille day (14<sup>th</sup> July)**

Photo : Nathan, César, Myriam, Maëlle.

The three children rewarded by a certificate of remembrance. The Festivities for the National Feast were opened on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July by a buffet offered by the district council to the inhabitants of Chapelle Vallon

Between cheese and desert, the torchlight tattoo allowed the inhabitants to walk around the village, supervised by the firemen.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, after the display of flowers on the war memorial, three children were rewarded by being presented with a certificate, signed by Roy Newbury from the R.A.F. Association, Roy had asked that each child to be handed "the certificate of remembrance" , in recognition of their participation on the commemoration of victory in Europe day, and had asked Myriam Chailliot to present them on his behalf.

A snack was served before the festive activities : game of bowls by teams, surprise fishing for children, tombola for ladies.

The day ended by the handing over of medals and cups and by an aperitif and a light diner”.



After the press call the three children had their certificates explained just in case Roy's french isn't all it should be.

## HOLIDAYING THE E.U.

*The main holiday season may now be over, but I came across the following the other day which I thought may be of interest.*

- **Your passport.** Please remember children's passports can no longer be renewed on the same day.
- **Your EHIC (European Health Insurance Card).** You can apply or renew a free online. Remember it only entitles you to the country's normal healthcare and won't get you back home in an emergency.
- **Your driving code.** As paper driving licences are no longer valid, if you are hiring a car you need to access your personal code from the DVLA website.
- **The ECC-Net Travel App.** This gives helpful answers to common travel problems in all 28 EU countries.

# RIDE FOR THE FEW

6th Sept 2015.

Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin (Ride for the Few - event organiser)

To mark the significant 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain I had a mind to plan a large charity event to mark the occasion and to honour the “few” in addition to this I wanted to support a charity that is close to my heart. I have been involved in the Royal Air Forces Association for 16 years now, as Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. and Station R.A.F.A.L.O., I am currently the R.A.F.A.L.O. for the Letchworth Hitchin and District Branch in Hertfordshire. The enduring passion in my life has been motorcycles for as long as I can remember, it seemed the natural conclusion of all these ideas and thoughts would be to plan a motorcycle ride to include somehow the Battle of Britain and raise cash for the Royal Air Forces Association. So it was that a plan was hatched from a small acorn that flourished to be a large oak tree, culminating in 75 motorcyclists riding around the most significant Battle of Britain heritage sites a total distance of 544 km which represented one km for each pilot or aircrew killed during the Battle of Britain period. At the time of writing R.A.F. Halton Motorcycle Club had raised £2029.80 for the R.A.F. Association Wings Appeal.

So to planning the event, which very quickly became known as Ride for the Few, a small team of volunteers at R.A.F. Halton Motorcycle Club developed my original plan. We decided that as a small R.A.F. Station motorcycle club we wouldn't be able to muster more than perhaps 20 bikers for the ride, so we quickly spread the net wide across the R.A.F. biking community, the ‘whole force’ you might say to coin a currently much used phrase. It seemed that there was a huge appetite for Ride for the Few and soon we had bikers registering to ride from R.A.F. Stations as diverse as Brize Norton and Northolt to Henlow, from Honington and Wyton to High Wycombe, eventually 10 R.A.F. Stations were represented including PJHQ and Wittering and Shawbury. Many Ex R.A.F. bikers became involved as the word spread; the biking community is very esoteric in its nature, this was the catalysis for the Ride for the Few's eventual success. An interesting query came from the Vindis Car group based around Cambridgeshire, who wished to become involved. Frank Vindis was a Czechoslovak WWII spitfire pilot who stayed in the UK after the war and set up a company selling cars. His family are rightly very proud of that heritage, so it was that 4 members from the Vindis Group who are honorary members of the Pathfinders Motorcycle Club at R.A.F. Wyton decided to joined us on the day.

So as the money stacked up on the giving website, so the riders registering increased week on week, when finally the no shows and last minute riders turned up, we met our

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target of 75 riders riding the 544 km on the day. The weather played heavily towards the success of the day, as we were blessed with a stunning sunny September morning at the assembly area at Kermode Hall R.A.F. Halton. The Sunday morning tranquillity was broken by a cacophony of exhaust noise from a huge variety of bikes from across the whole R.A.F. Family.

After much planning, the lead Spitfire & Mosquito Groups of 20 riders each (lead by Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin and FS Pete Fletcher) started out on the route in to North West London and our first destination R.A.F. Museum Hendon and the fantastic heritage site at the old Fighter H.Q. at Bentley Priory. Hurricane & Blenheim Groups (lead by MACR Steve Barker & Sqn Ldr Dave Roe) headed off to the Polish War Memorial at Northolt and the Battle of Britain Bunker at Uxbridge. Groups then converged on the M25 with groups becoming joined at stages to work our way round to a very well organised Kenley airfield. Here we assembled at the Kenley Airfield Tribute for a group photograph and joining the Kenley Branch of R.A.F.A at their Portcullis Club House. An entertaining distraction at Kenley was a 1940s themed event including custom cars and motorbikes and 1940's music, our arrival



just added to the flavour of the event. The Royal Air Forces Bikers Branch, also at Kenley, recruited a very healthy number of new members to the Association and added a great amount of R.A.F. colour to a great event. Branch Chairman Mike Roach at the Kenley Branch was a welcoming gracious host, the hot mugs of tea and fruit cake was an instant hit with all who sam-

pled the their generous hospitality. After much chat about differences in fuel capacity and range of the different bikes taking part, a couple of minor break downs and at least one minor blue on blue bike coming together, we arrived at St Georges Chapel Biggin Hill for a brief break, before pushing on to the National Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel Le Ferne near Folkstone. Here Sqn Ldr Dave Roe poignantly reflected on the Battle and the sacrifice of the 'few' with all the riders looking on, before laying a wreath on behalf of the riders. With almost 300 km covered already, a nice sunny ride along the south coast of the garden of England in Kent was a welcome break from cruising along the motorways, as impressive a site as it was having 70 plus riders together, an occasional difference in scenery was a welcome change at this stage. As we headed out past Dover on route to the former R.A.F. WWII Airfield at Manston, riders joints were starting to ache, the planned stops for breaks were a welcomed opportunity to stretch weary legs and muscles. Manston was the last Battle of Britain heritage site we visited on the day but the ride up to it was perhaps the most enjoyable of the whole day with cliffs and coast off to our right hand side, the sun still beating down. As per the ride plan, riders assembled at the motorway services on the M2 for a final dispersal brief and thank you, with some 144 km still to ride, for the first time that day the four group leaders joined together for the final stretch round the M25 and back to R.A.F. Halton. Tired and weary but with an immense sense of pride and achievement and a welcome soak in the bath and pint of beer saw us complete a ride which had been 6 months in the planning. The event organisers would like to thank all who have donated, and who hosted the ride at the various venues, to the general public we met on the day. Perhaps for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary we might attempt an even bigger ride.

## Message from our President, Air Marshal Sir Dusty Miller

*"I wanted to write to you about the tragedy at the Shoreham Airshow on 22<sup>nd</sup> August. I start by sending condolences to the family and friends of those who sadly died or were injured as a result of the Hunter crashing onto the A27, including the family of the pilot who are also going through a most difficult time. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all those affected in any way, and that includes our own volunteers and staff who were there on the day or are in some way involved.*

*As a mark of respect to those involved in the incident, we will NOT publish the October issue of AIR MAIL. I hope that you will support me in this decision as we felt that it would be inappropriate to send our membership magazine out at this time. We will publish the January - March issue as usual in the new year when we hope to be able to provide an update on the incident.*

*There are many videos and photographs available in the public domain and there has been much uninformed and very unhelpful speculation in the press as to the exact cause. In the fullness of time the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) will deliver its final report, based on the evidence gathered from photographs, videos and, most of all forensic inspection of the wreckage. Until that time I encourage you to resist speculation yourselves, I ask you to discourage others from doing so and finally, please do not pay heed to anything you might see or hear in the press that purports to be fact prior to the official publication of the AAIB's findings.*

*I would like to conclude by saying how proud I am to be part of the Association and express my heartfelt thanks at the way everyone, whether they're Branch members, air show staff or volunteers, or Association staff, have pulled together at this difficult time. The messages of support and sympathy from within the charity have been passed on to those involved.*



Cont over

## EVENTS OF THE YEAR SO FAR



Jemma & John at the Letchworth Lions Fun day



Armed Forces Day Letchworth



Armed Forces Day Letchworth



Armed Forces Day Letchworth



At Armed Forces Day Letchworth we involved the general public along with cadets to do a bit of Square Bashing



Buster the RAF Police Dog who saved 1000 lives came to visit us. Buster is no longer with us but the memory of that evening will remain with members for a long time.



A small group of members were guests of a 'Passing Out' parade at RAF Halton.



Nostalgia Day in Letchworth and we were there.



The Branch secretary went along to the RAF Henlow Families Day and inspected the prototype of the Mars Land vehicle made in Stevenage.

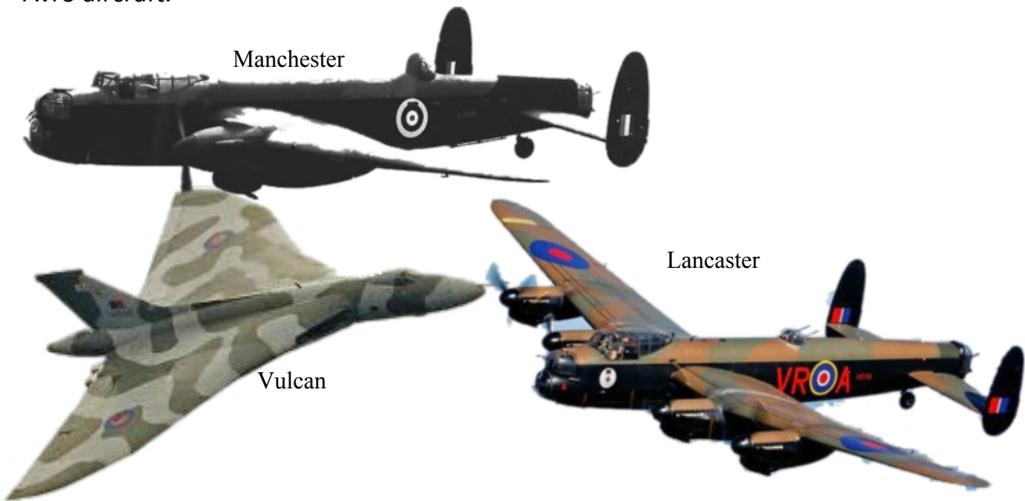


RAFALOs and other personnel from RAF Henlow put the RAFA gazebo up in Hitchin Market place to raise awareness of the Association and to raise money for the Wings Appeal. They were assisted by cadets from 1066 squadron Hitchin and a few members of the Branch. A good day it was too.

## OUR SPEAKERS (1)

The talk started by the meeting being told of the life of Alliott Verdon Roe, or better known to all of us as the founder of the AVRO Aircraft. Then followed a very interesting talk from David Taylor at our July meeting. After being told of Alliott's early life we went on to learn about the 'MANCHESTER' and the way it morphed, after putting right all the faults, into the plane we all know, the 'LANCASTER'. From the Lancaster the AVRO aircraft company went on to build, everyone's favourite aircraft, the VULCAN.

David also brought with him a number of items from his collection of parts from Avro aircraft.



## OUR SPEAKERS (2)

David Taylor returned to talk to us at our August meeting. This time his talk was about women in the Royal Air Force during WW11, and weren't those ladies busy little bees. What would we have done without them?

All those present at our August meeting listened intently, as David explained how the women kept the country running during those dark days. Not just in the Royal Air Force, but in industry, on the farms, on the buses, and all other work were the men were not available,

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My memorable part was when David explained how the women drove the tractors which manoeuvred the aircraft when on the ground. It would appear that the women were much more capable than the men at this job due to "their light and gentle touch on the controls of the tractor, which meant that they could put the planes in the spot where they should be without all the tooting and froing that the men would do. If that was the case why do women find it difficult to reverse a car into a small space today?

## OUR SPEAKERS (3)



Air Vice-Marshal Alan Merriman came to the Branch meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September to tell members how 'Hawker' aircraft contributed to his flying career.

After four years of flying Meteors the Hunter was about to enter service. It had had its problems: buffet and rudder vibration at high Mach numbers, heavy ailerons and elevator, the latter also being ineffective at high Mach numbers, the flaps were ineffective as air brakes, pitch-up using manoeuvre flap, and engine surge when manoeuvring, throttle slamming and gun firing.

His talk continued through all the aircraft he was involved with telling us of their good and bad points and in some cases how the bad points were corrected.

When it came time to retire Alan chose a Hunter TMk7 for his last flight, a fine tribute to 'Hawkers'. Of his career Alan said that he had "enjoyed every minute of it."

Alan will be returning to give us another one of his talks in August of next year, so if





## October

**8<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Speaker Josh Tidy (Curator of the Letchworth Heritage Museum) on The History of the Spirella Building.

15<sup>th</sup> Visit to R.A.F. Scampton and the R.A.F. Fire Service museum. If you are interested please pass your name on to the secretary

## November

11<sup>th</sup> Remembrance Day Service Baldock War

Memorial: 11.00 hrs

11<sup>th</sup> Remembrance Day Service Hitchin War Memorial 15.00 hrs.

11<sup>th</sup> Remembrance Service Letchworth War Memorial 11.00 hrs

**12<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Note a change to that published in the last issue. Sgt Sarah Ward (Adult Instructor) from 248 Sqd Letchworth ATC to talk to us about the ATC movement and more especially 248 Sqd. We are hoping that some members with grand children etc might be interested.

## December

**10<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting Annual Christmas Bash**



**2016 2016**

**2016 2016**

## January

**14<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Speaker Josh Tidy, a talk about WWII and Letchworth Garden City.

## February

**11<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** Arthur Creighton (Former R.A.F. "V Force" pilot and an old friend of the Branch) on "The Polish Pilot"

## March

**10<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting** - Followed by a talk by our R.A.F.A.L.O. Shaun Griffin on The R.A.F. Regiment and recent operations.

### April

**14<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Sqn Ldr Kevin Dalley R.A.F. (Rtd) on The History of the Pathfinder Force 1942 to 1945.

### May

**12<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Speaker David Taylor on The “Dam Busters myth buster” David has spoken to us on two occasions previously.

### June

**9<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Speaker Simon Jones on “5 ways to attract new birds into your garden” (Sorry gents, they are of the feathered variety)

### July

**14<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Clare Mulley on The Spy who loved me.

### August

**11<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Air Vice Marshall Alan Merriman back again to talk to us this time on The Design and Development of the English Electric Lightening.

### September

**8<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** To be confirmed

### October

**13<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** Major David Squibb of the Salvation Army with a talk entitled “I was only putting out the chamber pot” - David’s experiences in the Salvation Army.

### November

**10<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** To be confirmed

### December

**8<sup>th</sup> Branch Meeting** - Christmas Bash



**A CHANCE TO PAUSE A MINUTE IN QUIET  
CONTEMPLATION FOR OUR FRIENDS AND  
COLLEAGUES WHO HAVE RECENTLY PASSED  
AWAY**

**Mr W.A. Clarke of Henlow**

Dear Secretary

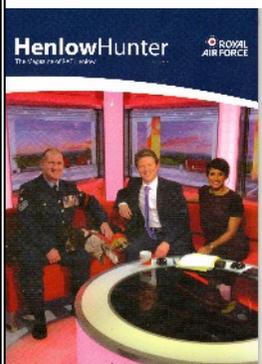
It is with regret that I write to inform you of the passing of my father-in-law, **Wally Clarke**, at home on 25th April 2015, aged 90.

As you may know, Wally served with 51 Squadron at Snaith in Yorkshire. His crew survived over 30 missions, on one occasion getting badly shot up with an engine on fire. Wally's skilful fuel-management starved the burning engine of fuel until it went out, saving the plane so they could limp back to England and crash land at RAF Tangmere near Chichester.

After completing a full tour of duty the crew was disbanded and Wally was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal, before being posted R.A.F. Riccall as an instructor.



**Air Dog Buster**



It is with great sadness that Flight Sergeant Will Barrow from the R.A.F. Police announces the death of his retired Arms and Explosive Search Dog, **Buster** on 17<sup>th</sup> July. **Buster** was our speaker at the May meeting, when a good time was had by all, especially Buster.

**Buster**, a 13 years old Springer Spaniel passed away at the Barrow's home in Lincolnshire where he had been enjoying retirement with Will, plus two canine companions.

It is always sad when your pet dog dies, but for a Police Dog Handler it is a lot harder, as I well know, for that dog has been your partner and companion for many years. He has looked after you and kept you safe, he will have listened to all your problems without being critical.

Our condolences go out to Will and his family.

We have been informed that member **Mr. R.J. Pyman** of Leighton Buzzard passed away in January of this year. Although living in Leighton Buzzard in later life he was a member of our Branch for many years, and we are told enjoyed reading his copy of RAFAGEN.



### **John Stoddard MBE JP**

It is with deep sorry that we learn of the death of **John Stoddard** on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2015. He passed away peacefully at home with his family around him.

John was our Branch Padre. It was his family who advised him to slow down and give up some of the local activities he was involved in. So, into his 90's, (93 to be exact) earlier this year he reluctantly handed in his notice, but not before telling Roy Newbury how the D Day and Battle of Britain services should be carried out. That was **John**, always prepared.

He became a member of the Association in 1962 and until the health of his wife was a regular attendee of our monthly meetings.

He was one of the R.A.F. 'boys' who were part of the D Day landings,. Here he was serially wounded with shrapnel wounds, broken ribs and a collapsed lung. The lung being, as John said, "was written off". He gave a talk at a Branch meeting on the subject, which we all found enthralling.

John will be sadly missed . Everyone in Letchworth knew of him even if they didn't know him personally.

From a humble background, reporter on the local newspaper, Royal Air Force ,founding Stoddard Manufacturing Co Ltd, becoming a Justice of the Peace, awarded a M.B.E. Plus much, much more. What a life that man lead.

### **Air Vice Marshall Grahame Jones CBE**

It is with regret that the Association announce the death of our Area Vice President, Air Vice Marshall Grahame Jones CBE, on Monday 27<sup>th</sup> July. He will be sadly missed by all who know him. During his time as Secretary General he played a major part in the design, installation and inauguration of the Association's memorial at the National Arboretum. Our sincere condolences go to his widow Beverley and his children, William and Hannah.

## NEW MEMBERS FOR 2015

Below are the new members who have joined us since January 1st  
2015

Our current Branch membership is **100**



Our membership drive seems to have come to a sharp halt. I haven't heard anything from the Membership Department at Leicester since the end of March. I have checked and they haven't been closed down, so let us give them some work to do, or they may be.

Sqn Ldr A. Bell of Lower Stondon  
Miss D.A. Browne of Hitchin  
Mr S. Daubney of Biggleswade  
Mrs D. Griffin of Letchworth Garden City  
Mr. S. Leach of Henlow  
Rev N Pnematicatos of Hitchin  
W/O. S. Tuckwell of Biggleswade  
Flt Sgt S. Griffin of Letchworth Garden City

*We need this list to be at the bottom of the page by the end of the year*

Membership forms can always be obtained from the Branch Secretary, or from our stall at local events. Failing that you can go on line to the official Royal Air Forces Association web site ([www.rafa.org.uk](http://www.rafa.org.uk)) follow the link to membership and fill a form in on line. What could be easier?

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS



Member Eric Fitton has passed on some photos for the RAFAGEN archive. I have picked a couple out for this issue to show what the Branch used to get up to.

Eric tells me that the photographs selected are of the Branch entertaining residents from the 'Star & Garter' home in 1965. It might be because I am

not from this part of the country, that I do not know about the Star & Garter home, for those of you are like me, I am informed that it was a very famous home for the retired in Richmond. Now back to the story, in the first photo above, we see Eric (in the white cardigan) and his daughter (member Marie) chatting to the guests. The photo below on the right shows members playing games on the lawn with the guests.



These events were an annual occasion, and took place at a Wing Commander's home in London Colney. After he passed away the venue moved to Letchworth, and The Three Horseshoes Norton, Rugby Club. The event finally ended up at R.A.F. Henlow.

*Any other vintage members with memories of time gone by at the Branch?*

*On the left, something else from Mr Fitton. to be reviewed in a later issue. Like the skirt sir. The things the Branch **used** to get up to.*

**WE KNOW IT'S NOT CHRISTMAS BUT...**

JUST TO LET YOU KNOW

**LETCWORTH HITCHIN & DISTRICT  
BRANCH OF R.A.F.A.**



THURSDAY 10TH DECEMBER  
AT  
LETCWORTH CONSERVATIVE CLUB  
20.00 HRS



PRICES NOT YET CONFIRMED BY YOUR COMMITTEE, BUT YOU KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE IT WILL BE VALUE FOR MONEY. WE ARE HAVING TO LIMIT THE NUMBERS THIS YEAR SO IF YOU ARE INTERESTED GET YOUR NAME IN EARLY TO THE BRANCH SECRETARY. ONCE WE HAVE REACHED THE MAXIMUM NUMBER I AM AFRAID WE CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE.

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