

Letchworth, Hitchin & District  
Branch



# RAFA GEN 'E'

SPRING  
2017

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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 LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS**

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*Hon. Treasurer: 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



Welcome to all members who are reading RAFAGEN for the first time. The 'on line' version of the newsletter has been available continuously, but the hard copy was suspended until a few problems had been sorted out with Data Protection. This has now been solved and we are back keeping the members of the Letchworth Hitchin and District Branch fully in the picture.

A lot has happened in the past 12 months, and those wishing to 'catch up' can do so by visiting our web site, [rafa-leitchworth.org.uk](http://rafa-leitchworth.org.uk) where you are able to call up past copies RAFAGEN.

One of the main things that has happened in 12 months is that our Branch membership has increased by a fantastic 26%. And from what I hear is due to happen in the next 12 we could get the same again this year. Let us hope so.

That was last year, now we are looking forward to 2017. Our first major event is the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March. You will find full details in the booklet enclosed with this issue. We feel that our Branch is not only growing in membership but becoming more active than ever. We have always been a strong Branch, but now we are aiming for "THE BEST BRANCH" No mean feat as all Branches are trying to achieve that goal, but not impossible. To do this we would like to see your involvement. We would like to see fresh faces on the Committee with fresh ideas. It is not too late to put your name forward, just contact

the Branch secretary and have a few words with him. His details are inside the front cover.

If you would rather come down and see what we do on our Social Evenings, just come down to the Letchworth Conservative Club on the second Thursday of each month, at 20.00 hrs. We have first class speakers as you can see by the list on page 8, and the Conservative Club put on a first class buffet for us each meeting. I have a feeling that the food is all some members come for. Quests may join you if you are too shy to

## THEY'RE ON THE RUN



Our Branch R.A.F.A.L.O., Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin completed the Bedford Run together with his two daughters, Daisy (16) (left) and Lily (24) (Right), in the latter months of last year. The money that Shaun raised in sponsorship he handed over to the Branch Treasurer for Branch funds. A very kind gesture, Shaun.

## THANK YOU JOHN



The Branch Treasurer learnt at the beginning of the year that former member and Branch Padre, John Stoddard M.B.E., who sadly passed away last year, left a legacy of £100 *'for the benefit of the Branch'*. This was brought before the Branch Committee in January, who have yet to decide to what use this legacy should be put. This magazine will keep you informed of the decision of the Committee as soon as it is made. We thank John for remembering the Branch in this way, and we won't forget you and all that you did for the Branch.



Anyone with stories of this Basic Training Station? Like to hear from you if you have

# BRANCH VISIT



**THURSDAY 27<sup>th</sup> APRIL 2017**

**Coach will leave from the building previously known as**

**THE PLINSTON HALL at 09.15 hrs**

**COST**

**R.A.F.A. Members £11.00**

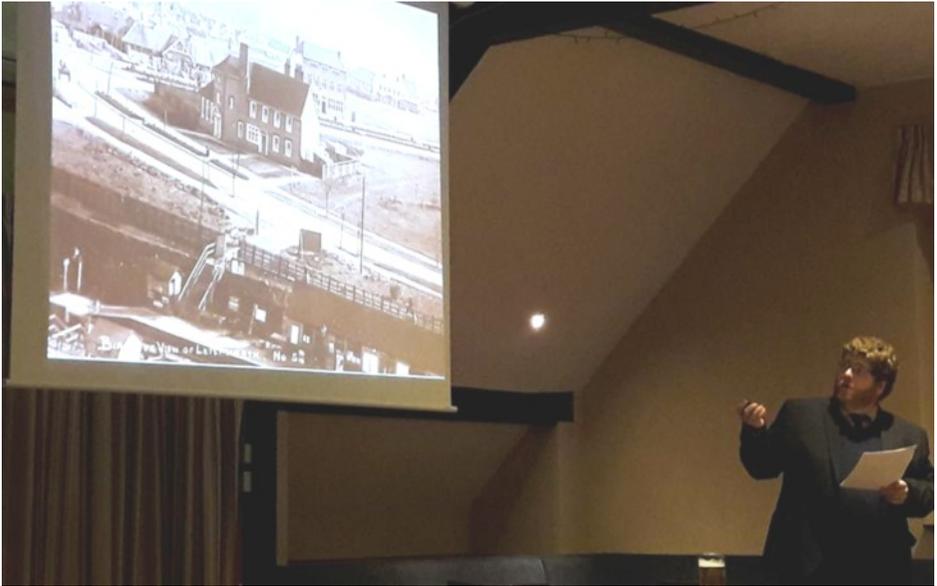
**Non Members £15.00**

The centre hosts or is responsible for:

R.A.F. Wyton historical timeline - The Pathfinder Collection - a long-standing tribute to the work of No 8 Group R.A.F. - UK Imagery Intelligence - a combination of the JARIC collection and elements from the Medmenham Archive - Canberra XH-170 'gate guardian' - acknowledging Wyton as the historic 'Home of the Canberra' - Wyton Rose Garden - commemorating those associated with R.A.F. Wyton/JFIG who have made the ultimate sacrifice

Medmenham Collection Archive - the definitive collection of material relating to UK aerial reconnaissance and imagery intelligence - Providing a Force Development facility for the use of Service personnel, MOD civilians and external interested parties - through provision of a conference room, research facilities and an events programme

**To book your place contact the Branch secretary, Ken Needham on 01462 671534 or by e mail [secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk) or 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire, SG6 3HJ**



Our first speaker in the New Year was Letchworth Garden City's Historian, Josh Tidy, with a talk on the movie business in the town. We learnt about the three cinemas the town had in the early days. Now left with only one, but now a four screen complex with facilities for holding live shows. Also showing live performances transmitted live from theatres in the Capital. His talk went through the years of film influence in the town, and residents who were involved in the film world. to the latest film to be shot here "Worlds End". We understand that this was not the only film about 'zombies' to be shot in the town. Everyone except me, seemed to know about some of the Star Wars vehicles being designed in Letchworth at David Ogle Design. Great talk, very entertaining.

### **BRANCH CHRISTMAS BASH**

For the first time for many a year, our Christmas Bash was not a 'home-grown' event. This year we went to a local restaurant for the occasion, and found it to be a great success. The venue was The Wilbury, in Letchworth. The food was great and there was plenty of it. Will we do the same again next year? That is up to the next Committee, but if you want your say, then I am sure they will listen.



*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.*

- 9 Mar 17      **Branch AGM and social evening.** With a talk by Tony Smith, a Fire Prevention officer on Home Fire Safety
- 13 Apr 17      Ex R.A.F. Engineering Officer Robin Webb - Aircraft Design wind tunnels.
- 27 Apr 17      **Branch visit to R.A.F. Wyton Heritage Centre.**
- 11 May 17      Sgt Sarah Ward 248 Letchworth Sqn ATC - flying scholarships and Air Experience Flights.
- 8 Jun 17      Gary Fisher - The Magna Carter.
- 13 July 17      Vicky from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation with a talk about "Our Town".
- 10 Aug 17      David Taylor - Amy Johnson - provisional.
- 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 produc  
tion 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      Ex R.A.F Engineering Officer Robin Webb - Cromer the last  
of Hertfordshire's windmills.
- 19 Apr 18      **Branch Visit TBC.**
- 10 May 18      Amy Packard - Dementia Friends Update
- 14 Jun 18      Sam Smith on the History of British Schools
- 12 Jul 18      Ken Griffin - Letchworth Convicts and Gallows Hill
- 9 Aug 18      TBC
- 13 Sept 18     Stephen Barnard - WWI propaganda in music.

A man and his wife were awakened at 3:00 am by a loud pounding on the door. The man gets up and goes to the door where a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, is asking for a push.

"Not a chance," says the husband, "it is 3:00 in the morning!"

He slams the door and returns to bed.

"Who was that?" asked his wife.. "Just some drunk guy asking for a push," he answers.

"Did you help him?" she asks.

"No, I did not, it's 3 am in the morning and it's pouring with rain out there!"

"Well, you have a short memory," says his wife. "Can't you remember about three months ago when we broke down, and those two guys helped us to push start the car?"

I think you should help him, and you should be ashamed of yourself ! "God loves drunk people too you know."

The man does as he is told, gets dressed, and goes out into the pounding rain.

He calls out into the dark, "Hello, are you still there?"

"Yes," comes back the answer.

"Do you still need a push?" calls out the husband.

"Yes, please!" comes the reply from the dark.

"Where are you?" asks the husband.

"Over here on the swing," replied the drunk....!!!! ; )

# A 60 YEAR OLD MYTH RESOLVED

My first posting after Trade Training, was to the Isle of Wight, exact location, Ventnor. The camp was on two sites, the domestic site was on the higher part of the town, whilst the working part of the camp was a subterranean radar station on St Boniface Down. My job was, with the help of a couple of other dog handlers, to patrol the ground level of the site, which contained aerials and state of the art radar equipment. Whilst we patrolled the top, all the work was being done underground.

One day a rumour went around the camp that “an object” had been tracked by the radar operators crossing the south of England from east to west, at speeds of over 1000 mph. This was soon dismissed as a ‘bit of a lark’ put out by some duty operators with nothing to do. This story was to become one of those myths you tell your grand children, when you want to embroider your military life.

The other evening I was ‘surfing the net’ looking for a story for this magazine when I can across a story headed “Analysis of Radar & Radar-visual sightings R.A.F. Ventnor, Isle of Wight. This is a report on the events of some 60 years ago.

## Fact or Fiction?

The report told of the event of the tale we had been told all that time ago In the report the speed of over 1000 mph is quashed. Well that was a bit of an exaggeration.

The report gives 860 - 920 mph. The report concludes in summary, *if the intercepted object really did achieve radar-tracked speed approaching 800 knots (920 mph) then it was not a Hunter, neither was it any operational jet in R.A.F. Service at this time. From the requirement that winds were slight or zero up to around 30,000 ft to account for the ‘balloons’ near stationary around that time it can also be inferred that there was probably no significant component of tail wind. And remember that this recorded ground speed is a minimum since the PPI only shows the lateral component of the target speed minus any vertical component*

*due to climb or drive. If the Ventnor radar report is wrong then the object could have been a Hunter, but evidence that the radar report is wrong is lacking. It is also of interest that according to the Odiham report Mission 48 did not acquire AI radar contact on the object even though its range was four miles inside the pickup range for a fighter proven during PI exercises immediately beforehand.*

*In short it isn't possible to be confident about what the object(s) may or may not have been.*

I now know that the tales that went around the camp that day some 60 years ago were true, but what was that “THING” they followed across the skies of southern England? I'll leave that one to you and your imagination.

I have now learnt that it did hit the press later, but by that time I was on my way to the Far East, so wasn't aware that the incident was in the open.

- Ken Needham RAFP DH



The picture shows the Main Guardroom at the radar site (Long gone). This was the main entrance to the depths below, where at the change of shifts a coach load of Airmen would disappear into this small building and other load come out a few minutes later.

The photo is grey and misty, but this is how it was most of the time. A very eery place in the middle of the night. Thank goodness for my dog to talk to.

# LETCHWORTH 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.

Our prices are very reasonable and include the hire of both clubs and balls.



## 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 Letchworth Hitchin & District Branch



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