

Branch
Membership

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 **ROYAL
AIR FORCES
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH



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RAFAGEN

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



ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2020

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Chairman:- W.O. Shaun Griffin

Vice Chairman:- Lisa Berry

Secretary:- Ken Needham (contact 01462671534)

Assistant Secretary:- Marie Mahoney

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Dean Meek ; Donna Cook ; John Airey ; Lesley Starr ;

Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin

RAFAGEN Edited by *Ken Needham (contact 01462671534)*

Monthly Meetings are held at the Letchworth Rugby Club, Baldock Road, Letchworth Garden City Herts (Behind the Letchworth Leisure Centre) on the 3rd Monday of each month at 19.45 hrs. Licensed Bar & Ample Parking

NAAFI BREAK is held at the Par 3 Golf Centre, William Way, Letchworth Garden City on the 1st Tuesday of each month 10.00 hrs 'til 12.00 hrs



A NEW YEAR MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION

Dear friends,

There is no doubt that 2020 was a challenging year for us all, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions changing the very way of life that we are all accustomed to.

For the RAF Association, 2020 was an incredibly difficult year too. However, I am very proud that our research – the first into the impact of the virus on the RAF community – found that those surveyed are more concerned for the

physical and mental wellbeing of others than for themselves, despite significant pressures in their own lives.

Looking back, perhaps the greatest achievement of 2020 was the Association's incredible response to the pandemic, Operation CONNECT. The Association acted immediately, launching: a telephone outreach service and friendship help line, arranging bag drops of vital provisions to the most vulnerable, and keeping us all in good spirits with an RAF-themed online entertainment programme. These services had a remarkable impact on the lives of thousands of people in some of their darkest days.

This work couldn't have been possible without funding. If you donated to an appeal, or took part in fundraising on our behalf in 2020 – thank you so much.

There were moments of celebration in 2020 too. We commemorated the 75th anniversary of VE Day with a special programme of entertainment and a poem featuring some very special guests. You can revisit the poem [here](#). Our Greatest Salute campaign marked the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Britain, with over 6,000 of you sending in your tributes to ‘the many’ to be buried in our time capsule at the National Memorial Arboretum. If you missed our video of the burial, you can watch it [here](#).

Looking forward, we see no reduction in the challenges ahead. It will take the ongoing efforts of thousands of our members, branches, supporters and volunteers to face them. We are as committed as ever to reducing isolation and loneliness, relieving key elements of everyday life which can cause pressure, and empowering all members of our RAF community to proudly keep their freedom, dignity and independence.

Although we still face restrictions as we move into 2021, we do so knowing that, by working together with kindness, we will continue to help all those in need of our support. By joining together we will resolutely face the challenges of this New Year.

With my sincerest wishes of good luck and good health for the year ahead.

Air Marshal Sir Baz North KCB OBE MA FRAeS

President of the RAF Association

**Wishing you a happy
and healthy New Year**



A New Year Message from our Chairman Shaun Griffin

I know we will all look to 2021 to return our lives back to us, where family and friendships once more are tangible things we can hug and embrace. I hope you will join me and the Branch Committee in trying to kick start our Branch back into action too. This won't be easy, it will take a collective

effort, it will take time re-establish some of the old traditions we enjoyed, as well as introducing some new ones to gain Branch Members trust that we are operating safely and in our communities best interests. Please play your part, bring ideas, energy and most of all bring yourselves, as without Members participation, a tough 2020, will become a dismal 2021. So a Happy New Year to you all, I hope you have a prosperous 2021.

So vaccinate, stay safe and we will, god willing, see you all very soon.

Shaun Branch Chairman.



A New Year Message from our Vice Chairman Lisa Berry

Happy new year to all our members!

I'm sure we're all hoping that 2021 will be much better than 2020, we have all been affected in one way or another by the pandemic. We as a branch have lost a few of our beloved members not necessarily by Covid-19 but the Covid had an impact on how we were able to

deal with those losses, say our goodbyes and grieve. We hope that we can all get together this year and remember and celebrate the lives of those that we have lost in our own way.

I have to say that 2020 wasn't ALL bad, I enjoyed the first lock down, the skies were crystal clear, no planes, cars and less pollution. I could (for once) hear the birds sing! The weather was wonderful, I had quality time with my teenage kids, played games, and even fostered a dog from Romania. However, I quickly got bored and volunteered for the NHS responders and RAFA befriending service and from this I was run off my little feet but I felt I was doing something positive. I thoroughly enjoyed my chats with our RAFA members, I struggled with not being allowed to hug anyone!!

By June, I was back in work as my role is operational and reactive. Despite the restricted movement I was classed as a key worker for defence and found myself going all over the place, we found it difficult to find places to eat in the evenings (we travel up and down the country and

usually have to stay in hotels) I was sent to France in December - this shocked me as despite all the strict distancing rules, there was none on the Eurostar! Every seat was taken, no social distancing whatsoever.

Christmas was quiet despite having our kids home from University, my partner was given Covid positive results on Christmas Day, followed by me on Boxing Day. However, our symptoms were completely different, Dixie was quite poorly with loss of taste and smell, tight chest, flu like symptoms. I had and haven't had any!! I'm grateful that I had not been out doing shopping for any of my veterans.

All in all, personally, it has done me good. I needed the break. I'm very fortunate that I have my family here with me. I know some of you have not and this is where we step in. We have a small group of branch members that are here for you, we are here for you to chat to, to help you get to appointments, get your shopping or even just odd jobs. You are not alone, you are part of our RAFA family and the Chairman is passionate that the branch is about our members. We care, we will help you, all you need to do is let us know.

If you need us to call you then please do not hesitate to contact one of the committee members.

We cannot wait to catch up with you all. We do hope we can resume the meetings and coffee mornings soon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we wish you and yours a happy new year!

Lisa x

Just after Christmas we were contacted by Crouch Funeral Directors of Baldock, to see if we could supply a coffin drape and have our Branch Standard Bearer attend a funeral early in the New Year, for an ex member of the Royal Air Force. Although not a member of the Association, this is a service we try and offer to all families of ex R.A.F. personnel. In this instance we were able to offer both, and our Standard Bearer, Mark, duly attended.

This is a service that the we have offered for a number of years now, but this one has turned out to be a little different. Usually we have no contact with the family, all negotiations being done through the funeral directors, but in this case, the family asked if they could speak to me. This was agreed and I had a very interesting conversation with the son, learning a lot about his father. We agreed with the information given, we would compile a story for our magazine about this airman, who belonged to a very special



The connection between flying and the Royal Family stretches back almost to the dawn of aviation. In 1909, during a visit to Paris, King Edward VII met the Wright brothers and watched them demonstrate their Flyer aircraft.

King George V established an early Interest In aviation in the years immediately before the First World War, and The Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) made his first flight in 1916.

In 1919 the King learned of an earlier flight by the Prince with Major William Barker VC in Italy during 1918. Barker had flown the aircraft with one arm in a sling! When the King heard of this he immediately prohibited his son from flying. Prince Albert (George VI) transferred to the RAF in 1919 and immediately began flying lessons.

he Prince of Wales (Edward VIII) resumed his flying in the 1920's and took delivery of Gipsy Moth G-AALG In 1929.

In 1936 The King's Flight was established at Royal Air Force Hendon, a few hundred metres from this Museum. During the Second World War The Flight was disbanded.

However, King George VI and members of the Royal Family continued to fly in RAF VIP aircraft throughout the war and in 1946 The King's Flight was reformed.

Although helicopters were attached to The King's Flight from as early as 1947, it was not until 1953 that Prince Philip made the first royal flight in a helicopter. Six years later Whirlwinds joined The Queen's Flight. These in turn were replaced by Wessex in 1969.

During the 1990s radical changes were made in royal flying arrangements. On 1 April 1995 The Queen's Flight was absorbed into No.32 (The Royal) Squadron at Royal Air Force Northolt. In 1998 the unit gave up the task of providing helicopters for the Royal Family when the Wessex were retired. The Royal Household awarded a ten year contract to Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation and Hanson Helicopters to provide the Queen with an S-76 and crew.

No.32 (The Royal) Squadron retained two BAe 146 aircraft for fixed wing operations.

From The Royal Air Force Museum web site.



A young Reg Deal is back row left third in

Reginald Albert Deal

1027 - 2020

Albert was born just outside Dover in July 1927, where he spent his youth. He watched the Battle of Britain aircraft flying over Kent. What he saw at that time inspired him at the age of 19 to enlist in the Royal Air Force.

With the rank of Aircraftsman and the service number 4003469 he went off to RAF Hendon for initial training. His trade training as an Electrical Engineer was at RAF Henlow.

His postings over the 30 years service was :- RAF Benson, Oxfordshire, where he joined the Kings/Queens Flight: RAF Chivenor, Devon: R.A.F. Tangah, Singapore: RAF Kinloss Scotland: RAF Swanton Morley, Norfolk, where he was demobbed in 1972.

He was selected for ceremonial duties for Remembrance Day Services at the Royal Albert Hall and The Cenotaph.

He represented his station and command at cricket and badminton.

Most of all he enjoyed his time with the Kings/Queens flight. He admitted to his family that his favourite Royal, was the Queen Mother, who he met personally during a visit to Kinloss.

Reg lived his later years in Baldock.



Bit of spit and polish to one of the aircraft.



The meeting with the Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother at RAF Kinross.

REQUIRE THE SERVICES OF OUR WELFARE OFFICER?

Here are the contact details of the branch Welfare Officer :-



Mark Howell

Tel :-07874015229

email :- markhowell65@gmail.com

R.A.F. CEYLON

Continuing the story about the perfect time I had whilst posted in Ceylon, and what happened nearly 70 years later by Ken Needham

Before I continue with my story, I would like to produce a couple of photos taken a little way up the road from our hotel, which we found quite amusing.



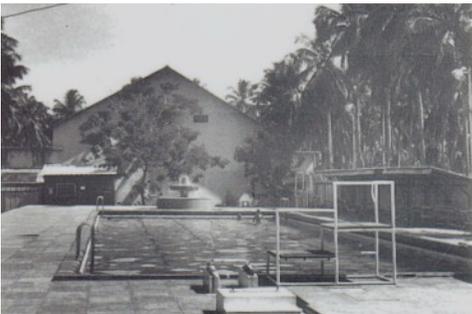
Today was the day that all of us returning Snowdrops were waiting for, the revisiting of our old home. The Sri Lankan Air Force had agreed to send transport to pick us up, and I think that we were hoping that they would send an old 3 tonner. That would really make us feel back home. We were wrong. Along came a gleaming white air condition coach. Well we did have our guests with us.

As we drove towards the camp we were all trying to recognise the scenery, without success. Then the coach turned left, and suddenly we were 'home'. This was the road that ran towards the main gate. Very little had changed. The line of shops was a little more sparse. Perhaps the Sinhalese airman didn't have as much cash as the BOR's of 50 years ago.

As we approached the gate and security checks, a call came from the front of the coach requiring my attention. It appeared that they wanted me to be the first off the coach. The reason was because there was too much high brass waiting to greet us outside of the Guardroom.

After being greeted by these high ranking Officers they disappeared, saying that they would see us later at lunch. Those remaining NCO's and a couple of Commissioned Officers were eager to show us the Guardroom, and asking if they had made any changes in 50 years. The answer was in the main "No". The Dog Section was no longer across the road from the Guardroom, but that was all. As a matter of fact very little had changed to the camp in the 50 years. We boarded the coach again to have a tour of the camp.

We passed the old 33 Police District Head Quarters, now Station HQ. No outward change. Sergeants and Warrant Officers Mess on the left, still the same. On to the swimming pool, where we invited to view a brand new building which was a leisure complex, built on a piece of what was in our time, waste ground at the side of the swimming pool. This complex was something that the Sri Lankan Air Force must be very proud of, for it had everything to keep the airman and women fit, and beside the pool, what could be better. All we had in the mid 50's was the very popular swimming pool and the sports field. But we were still fit.



Inside to pool not one thing had changed. There was still the broken spring board supports. Recently painted.

The building behind the fountain was and still is, the camp cinema. To us it was The Astra, and guess what, it still is. Many evenings I spent here watching the not so up to date film. I even spent the evening with the Dave Brubeck Quartet in this building, so let's go in and see if that has changed. The inside was exactly as we all remembered. Fifty years past and it is still

the same. It must have been re decorated, but they did not change the colour scheme.



Now off to see the billets, if they are still there. Our Police billet was number 217, and there it is. No longer a Police billets, but a transit billet. This is just like stepping back in time. The only difference I can find is that the coconut palms which surround the billets are young smaller ones.



Just one more place to see on our tour of the camp, the police dog section. En route we were told that there was many more dogs than we had, because not only they do the work on the camp, they are also responsible for the civil airport across the runway.

As soon as we approached the dog compound all of us dog handlers, became very envious. If only had facilities like this in the 1950's.

Not all the dogs were GSDs, for like the present RAF police dogs, there are a variety of breeds for a variety of duties.



We could have stayed in the dog section for the rest of the day, talking to the current dog handlers, and comparing notes, but lunch was calling in the Officers Mess with the top brass.

The food was terrific, the entertainment was first class, and the conversations were second to none. The serving officers just wanted to know what it was like when we were on the camp. One officer said to me, "We have liked meeting you, you are walking history of this camp". I felt very old.. It appeared that very little history had been kept from the days of the Royal Ceylon Air Force, whom we shared the camp with.

Our day on the camp was over all too soon, but our hosts had to get back to work.

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The rest of our two weeks were made up with a personal guide around a distillery,(complete with samples) and lunch at the Mount Lavinia Hotel in Columbo. This hotel was way out of our reach financially in our days.



These two weeks had been fantastic. We weren't able to show our wives much of this beautiful island, but we all enjoyed our visit.

My wife and I took another trip a couple of years later. We didn't get quite the red carpet treatment, but we enjoyed it and saw more of the island.

