

Branch  
Membership

**222**

As at 1<sup>st</sup> March 2022



The charity that supports the RAF family

**RAFAGEN**

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &  
DISTRICT BRANCH

**SPRING 2022**



ROYAL AIR FORCE HENLOW

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen



Association Registered Charity: 226686 (England & Wales) SC037673 (Scotland)

Branch Registered Charity No. 1071536

# RAFAGEN

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



## ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION LETCHWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2022

*Chairman:- W.O. Shaun Griffin*

*Vice Chairman:- Ken Needham*

*Secretary:- Marie Mahoney*

*(Contact:- [secretary@rafa-leitchworth.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rafa-leitchworth.org.uk))*

*Treasurer:- Ken Needham*

*Wings Appeal Officer:-Eric Daglass*

*Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant*

*For Welfare Contact:-Branch Secretary email :-  
[Secretary@rafa-leitchworth.org.uk](mailto:Secretary@rafa-leitchworth.org.uk)*

*Membership Secretaries:- Shaun Griffin*

*Branch Padre:- Rev. Canon Lindsay Dew*

*Contact details :- Tel :- 01462742165*

*Email :- [lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com](mailto:lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com)*

*General Committee:*

*Jim Box: John Airey: Lesley Starr*

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

**NAAFI BREAK** is held at The Par 3 Golf Centre, Willian Way,  
Letchworth Garden City SG6 2HJ on the last Wednesday of  
each month 10.00 hrs 'til 12.00 hrs



## NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Well that is another Annual General Meeting over, and a new Committee has been selected, and pleased to see two new faces on board.

Welcome to Eric Dagless who has taken on the duties of our Wings Appeal Officer. A job we all want to help with, to see if we can make this a financial record year for our branch. I am sure he would welcome any ideas you may have to make money.

Our second new member to the committee is Jim Box. Jim and his wife , Brenda, are regulars at our monthly NAAFI Break. He now joins us as a General Committee member, and I know he will bring many good ideas to the branch. He and his wife have many ideas to bring talking points to NAAFI Breaks.

The rest of the Committee you have already heard of, if not met.

Warrant Officer Shaun Griffin remains Chairman, as well as our R.A.F.A.L.O.

Ken Needham (is he still around)? Remains Vice Chairman and Treasurer. This will be his nineteenth year on the Committee.

Marie Mahoney, who became Secretary at the last year AGM, and has certainly earnt her stripes over the past year. She has certainly realised that being the Secretary of a RAFA Branch, is not just organising meetings and taking minutes. She must have enjoyed it as she put her name forward to continue for another year.

Lindsay Dew and John Airey join Jim Box as General Committee members. Lindsay has the extra duty of being our Branch Padre.

That is a brief note of the Committee. Perhaps over the next few issues we can get to know them better through the pages of this magazine. We start with Eric, who has given us a write up latter in this issue.



At the AGM Marie reminded those present that she is now the Secretary, and requested that all contact should be made direct to her. At the moment members are contacting the previous secretary, and although he passes on all messages, it could cause problems in delays in getting things resolved.



At the February NAAFI Break, member Michael Weeks, presented me with several AIR MAIL magazines, dating from around the late 1940's and 1950s. I am still reading through them, and I am finding many articles which I am sure you will find interesting. These will be reproduced in this and future issues. The articles include notes from local branches. For example. In the November 1945 issue, details of a Hitchin & Henlow branch. The President was Air Commander E.J.D. Townsend; Chairman Flying Officer J.F. Mobley; and the secretary J Worsley who lived in

Ickleford. They met on the third Wednesday of each month at The Red Hart in Bucklesbury, Hitchin fairly late in the evening. Probally making sure that that could have a couple of brinks first.



From the notes that our late President, Gorden Collinson gave to me, Baldock was formed a year later in 1946, and later still Letchworth. All these branches were later to be amalgamated with our Branch, along with the latest addition, Stevenage.





## Padre 's Hour

### Revd. Cannon Lindsay Dew

Hello again,

I hope you are well and safe.

With the lifting of Covid restrictions we are hopefully beginning to emerge from what has been a long period of restraint and for some fear. There will inevitably be many who are still cautious about beginning to feel safe to mix again but I think that generally there are many ready to embrace the new freedoms. It has been a long time of restrictions and limitations on what we have been able to achieve in our daily lives and all of us will have our own stories to tell. One which I know has been appreciated by many in our Branch is thankfulness for the support given through regular contact from those who have volunteered to keep in touch with members who would have been very much on their own. Thank you to all who have done this.

NAAFI Break is now back up and running and Branch members are using this once again as a chance to get out and about as well as place to meet with others.

In our headlines is the invasion by Russia into Ukraine – the sights and sounds of explosions and the screams and tears of those who are caught in the middle of the fighting have been daily shown on our TV screens as well as the papers. Our hearts go out to the Ukrainian people who endure so much hardship and danger, grief and sadness. We support the neighbouring countries who respond to the 10s of thousands of refugees who flee to them for

safety and shelter. There have been many places in the UK who have set up collections of items needed by the families who flee with nothing but one bag and the clothes they are wearing. I know that we will do all we can to bring relief to all who have lost their homes and feel they have lost or are losing their homeland to foreign power. There have been remarkable acts of bravery and defiance in the face of overwhelming odds. The daily broadcasts by the Ukrainian President have been powerful in their opposition to Russia as well as calling people to oppose the invading army. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been resolute in facing the threat with words of defiance and encouragement to his fellow countrymen and women. It has been heart breaking to see the effect that this cruel and unjust invasion has had on the ordinary people of Ukraine. For me one of the most heart breaking reports on the TV has been the sad farewell of a father to his child through the window of a train. Their hands pressed against each other through the window of the train as he said good bye and stayed in his country to fight for freedom.

For many in the Ukraine reading Psalm 31 has become and unifying activity as they pray for freedom and an end to war and violence. Indeed it has become the key scripture as Ukrainians face the terror of war.

Do check out this web site

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/latest/news/ukraine-crisis-how-psalm-31-is-bringing-comfort/>

Psalm 31 begins

In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed:  
deliver me in thy righteousness.

<sup>2</sup> Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me.

<sup>3</sup> For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

<sup>4</sup> Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.

<sup>5</sup> Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me,  
O LORD God of truth.

And ends:

<sup>24</sup> Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye  
that hope in the LORD.

Do read it for yourselves and watch the video link too.

Prayer for Ukraine.

God of peace and justice, we pray for the people of Ukraine today. We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow, that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them. We pray for those with power over war or peace, for wisdom, discernment and compassion to guide their decisions. Above all we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear that you would hold and protect them. In the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.

Whether you are someone with a faith or not, I am more than happy to be contacted if you think I can offer support and friendship, help or advice. I will usually be at the monthly Branch meetings, and the NAAFI Break, as well as serving on the Committee. You can also ring me on 07545878082 or email me at [lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com](mailto:lindsaycharlesdew@gmail.com)

Kind regards & blessings

Lindsay

Revd Canon Lindsay Dew

# **MEMORIES**



## **DIMPLES Bar & Cafe. Willian Way, Letchworth Garden City.**

**Open Tuesday - Sunday**

**The home of the Branch NAAFI BREAK**

**Last Wednesday morning of each month 10.00 hrs til noon**

**ALL MEMBERS OF THE RAF FAMILY WELCOME**

## Seeing the unbelievable

At a recent NAAFI BREAK I was chatting to Lesley about her trade, and the conversation got around to Christmas and what would come over the teleprinter network. I will

*..... I was showing these pics to Ken today. When I was in the commcens at Christmas, these would come through. Who ever originally produced these pictures was so clever.*

*I was at Upavon, Brize Norton and then Changi (CCS, Commcen Singapore). Upavon and Brize Norton were minor relay stations, and CCS the biggest relay station in the world.*

*At Upavon and Brize Norton we would first receive a phone call, warning us that a long message was coming through for passing on to various tributaries. CCS similar, but they came through in banks of machines.*

*In the case of Upavon and Brize Norton, we had to make sure that the teleprinter (a 7BRp) had plenty of tape on the spool. It would then receive the message, what seemed like miles and miles of it.*

*We had to carefully wind the tape, hoping it didn't get torn. Then it was down to us to transmit on.*

*What fun that was. We could have four printers transmitting this message onwards at any one time. Any torn tape had to be reproduce, using the Murray code, or 5 unit code. Once learned, what seemed like a series of holes were so easy to read.*

*Complete tapes were jealously guarded, believe me.*

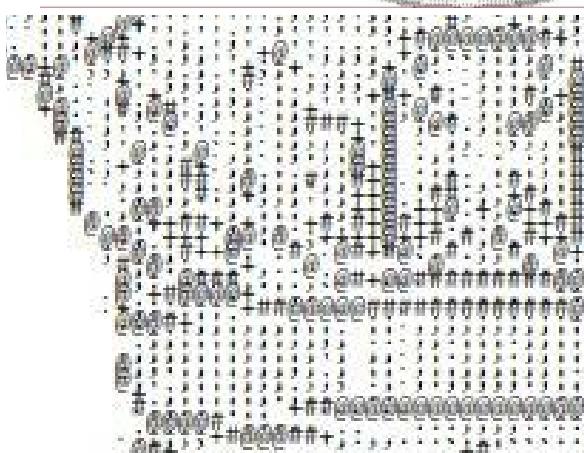


Properly not the type Lesley used, but you get the idea.

*I hope you all appreciate the skill in these pics.*

*P.s. I am a proud member of Trade Group 11.*

All of these pictures were produced by typing a letter, figure or symbol in the correct place to form the image, It must have take hours to produce



On the right is a close up of part of the crown. The picture is produced from @ + , # . They are five of what I recognise

More on the next page.



Many thanks to Bob Gair for these pictures.





# The Royal British Legion Letchworth Branch



Presents

## The Armed Forces Day Saturday 25th June 2022

10am - 6pm

### Broadway Gardens

**Letchworth  
Chasestead sponsors  
of the**

### Cadets Challenge Shield

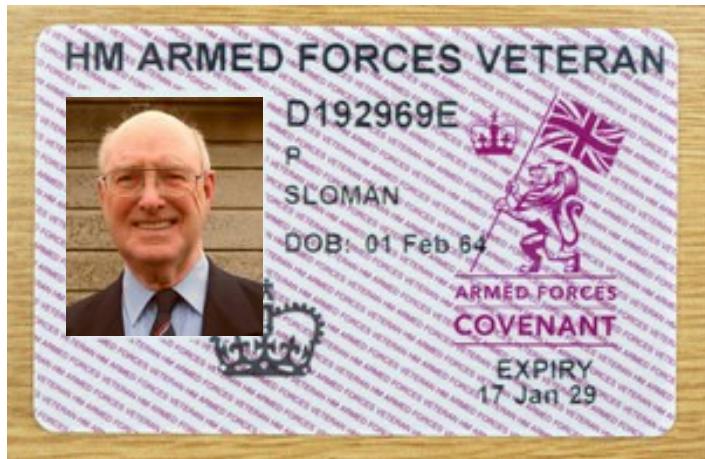
**Thank You**

**to all our Sponsors and  
Supporters**

**Jamie Harris Funfair**

**Fun for all the family**





Updated 15 February 2022

The Veterans' recognition scheme has a 2 phase rollout. Phase 1 is complete; with Service leavers receiving a recognition card as part of the discharge process.

Phase 2 is to extend the scheme to existing veterans so that they can more quickly, easily and securely prove they served in the UK Armed Forces so they can gain access to the services they need.

There is a need to future-proof the roll-out and ensure that we are giving ID cards only to those with verified service to guard against fraudulent use as veterans become able to access a wider range of benefits.

In the Veterans' Strategy Action Plan (2022-2024) the government committed to exploring the secure, digital verification of veterans' status. This work is underway, and we are currently working with veterans and other stakeholders to ensure any solution meets the needs of all veterans. This will support delivery of the Phase 2 roll out of ID cards. The government is still committed to delivering ID cards but cannot give a timescale for final delivery as this work is in progress.

Information on how to apply will be released closer to the launch date.

From: Ministry of Defence

Source: GOV.UK – Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

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**MEMORIES**

## **The Last Post**

A chance to pause for a moment in quiet contemplation for our friends and colleagues who have passed away

**Mr A.J. Bracey of Stevenage.**

**Member for 30 years.**

**Mr Michael Parrish of Letchworth.**

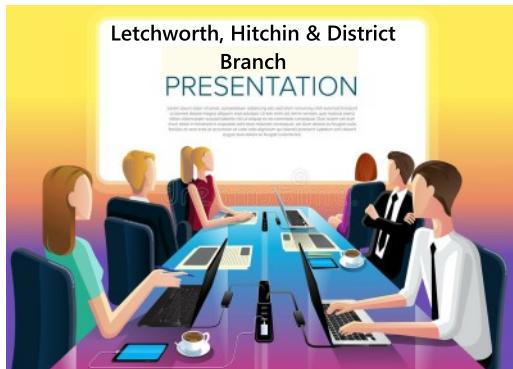
**Member 2 years**



## **WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS**

Mr Willem Hepson of Welwyn

Mr Kevin Rodgers of Shefford



# COMMITTEE NEWS

Your Committee met for the first time after they were appointed at the AGM, on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March.

Shaun was due to take the Chair, but due to unforeseen circumstances, at the last minute he was unable to attend, so his place was taken by the Vice Chairman Ken Needham.

The first agenda item was to appoint Lesley Starr as a co-opted member of the Committee, as a General Member. Duly proposed, seconded, and unanimously agreed, Lesley's name was put on the list of Committee Members., Bringing our number up to eight.

A number of points were raised, and discussed, but in the main it was the day to day running of your Branch. Items which may be of interest to you are as follows :-

1 Armed Forces Day - Letchworth will be held on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> June, and the Branch will be having an Association Gazebo, collecting for Wings Appeal 2022. We will be looking for volunteers help man the stall nearer the date.

2 We will be holding a Battle of Britain service at St Thomas's Church, Bedford Road, Letchworth. The date is 2<sup>nd</sup> October at 15.00 hrs. Please put in your diary now, so that you don't forget.

3 We already have Lesley earning her keep, as she is to be the coordinator between the Branch and the two ATC Squadrons we are affiliated to. We have also given the task to Lesley to enquire about Stevenage ATC, and the possibilities of making that Squadron affiliated to the Branch.

4 In order that we can have 'Days Out' as a Branch, it has been agreed that we join forces with the Letchworth RBL and the Letchworth RNA, to arrange various trips to interesting places. By joining with the three town veteran groups, we can keep costs down to a more affordable price for all.

5 We are recruiting for a new Welfare Officer. This person must be Association trained and approved, but if you know of anyone who fits the requirements, or would like to be trained by RAFA, please have a word with Marie, the Branch Secretary.

6 We are hoping to hold a stall in Hitchin Market Place/High Street for our Wings Appeal collection. We have penciled in Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> September. I give a tentative date here, as there is permission to be obtained, and licenses to be granted. Again volunteers to help man the stall will be called for nearer the time.

7 Many of you will remember the Service that Ken and Roy arranged with the help of the Letchworth Heritage Foundation, at the memorial in Willian Road, to mark 100 years since the air crash which the memorial denotes. This has been made into a short 20 minute film by Richard Whitmore of BBC News fame. Over the next few months this film will be able to be viewed at our NAAFI Breaks. The film not only shows our contribution, but the history leading up to the crash, and how it happened.



# The Imprest

By  
Jim Box

*The dictionary definition of Imprest is “money given by Government”*

This story is about an Imprest given by the RAF to aircrews to purchase food, accommodation and other necessities, when away from home base and no other service facilities were available.

Coastal Command Shackleton crews often roamed the Norwegian Sea looking for trouble and would be based in Norway for a few days at Bodo, a Norwegian base within the Arctic Circle.

Food at Bodo was not the usual fare that the RAF were used to. It consisted mostly of fish in various forms of stew, pickled herring, salt cod etc. The Norwegian personnel also had only two mealtimes per day instead of the three in RAF messes. Shackleton crews also had to buy the air rations, eggs, bacon, sausages, various tins etc, locally for meals on the aircraft on the return flight. Crews were therefore issued with an Imprest, a substantial sum of local currency to pay for meals off base in the local town.



A crew member was usually delegated to draw the money, pay for the meals and do the accounts reconciliation before handing it back to the Station Accounts Section back home. The rule was that no alcohol could be purchased with the Imprest.

One crew, however, decided that beer was a necessity and persuaded the restaurant staff to substitute beer for soup on the final receipt. All went well and a jolly meal was had by the crew. On return to home base the Imprest holder returned the remaining currency, which balanced with the meal purchases made whilst on their detachment.

A day later the Imprest holder was asked to report to the Station Accountant to explain an item on the receipt. The local restaurant staff had listed 10 bottles of soup! The holder had some explaining to do and was lucky not to be Court Marshalled.

The lesson here is, check the receipt before parting with cash.

## MEMORIES



A bunch of Snowdrops on Salisbury Plain 1956



# ROYAL AIR FORCE HENLOW

## A BRIEF HISTORY

Henlow was chosen as a military aircraft repair depot in 1917 and was built by MacAlpine during 1918. Four Belfast Hangars were built and are now listed buildings. Henlow Camp, a civilian settlement, grew up around the base at that time.

Originally a repair depot for aircraft from the Western Front, the Station officially opened on 18 May 1918 when Lt Col Robert Francis Stapleton-Cotton arrived with a party of 40 airmen from Farnborough. In May 1920, RAF Henlow became the first parachute testing centre and was later joined by another parachute unit from RAF Northolt. Parachute testing was undertaken with Vimy aircraft and parachutists hanging off the wings and allowing the chute to deploy and enable them to drift back to the ground. The Officers Engineering School moved there in 1924 from Farnborough.

After the First World War, Henlow was home to four aircraft squadrons; No. 19 Squadron RAF, No. 23 Squadron RAF, No. 43 Squadron RAF and No. 80 Squadron RAF. Between 1932 and 1933, Sir Frank Whittle was a student at the RAF technical College on the base. He later spent some time in charge of aero engine testing on the base before being sent to Cambridge. An additional hangar was added to the inventory in the 1930s and this too is now listed.

During the Second World War Henlow was used to assemble the Hawker Hurricanes which had been built at the Hurricane factory operated by Canadian Car and Foundry in Fort William, Ontario, Canada, under the leadership of Elsie MacGill. After test flying in Fort William, they were disassembled and sent to Henlow in shipping containers and reassembled.

During Operation Quickforce in 1941, 100 fitters from the base were deployed onto carriers which were shipping Hurricane fighters to Malta. The finished Hurricanes were completed on the decks of the carriers and flown out to Malta. Over 1,000 Hurricanes (about 10% of the total) were built by Canadian Car and Foundry and shipped to Henlow. Henlow was also used as a repair base for many aircraft types under the direction of No. 13 Maintenance Unit.



The empty packing crates that the Hurricane aircraft were shipped in were used to make the original control tower (which has now been replaced by a more modern two-storey Portakabin type). The original tower and parts of the airfield were seen in several scenes in the 1969 war film 'The Battle of Britain'.

A major RAF technical training college was also formed at Henlow in 1947. This was formed from the RAF School of Aeronautical Engineering, formerly at RAF Farnborough, and its purpose was to train cadets and engineering officers. The college was amalgamated with RAF College Cranwell in 1965. The RAF Officer Cadet Training Unit then moved in, but this also moved to Cranwell in 1980.

Henlow then hosted the RAF Signals Engineering Establishment and the Radio Engineering Unit, established in 1980. In 1983, the Land Registry took over part of the site.



In December 2011, RAF Henlow along with 14 other Ministry of Defence sites in the United Kingdom were designated as being dangerously radioactive. The 15 bases were believed to be poisoned as a consequence of undetermined War Planes cards, as a

activity during the Second World War.

Administratively, RAF Henlow was part of a combined base, RAF Brampton, Wyton, and Henlow, until RAF Brampton was closed in 2013.

On 6 September 2016, UK Defence Secretary Michael Fallon announced the planned closure of RAF Henlow along with 12 other military sites owned by the MoD. The land will be used for housing to help meet the government's target of 160,000 homes by 2020. The closure date was later extended to 2023. - Wikipedia



**RAF Henlow. MU 13 under enemy air attack 1940**

Maintenance Unit (MU) 13 was bombed by a Dornier DO17 on 26th September 1940. It is recorded that a Hurricane Mk I, serial number 2604 (QO of 3 Squadron RAF) took off to engage the enemy aircraft.

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Artist. David Rowlands - Military Artist.

Printed image size(s): B2 only (58 x 38 cm)

Owner: Officers Mess, RAF Henlow

*The RAFAGEN is produced every quarter and sent to members of the Letchworth, Hitchin & District branch of the Royal Air Forces Association.*

*If you would like to tell your story in RAFAGEN or have any comments about the magazine, the branch or the Association, we would like to hear from you. It can either be by hard copy through the mail, (any photographs will be returned immediately) to Ken Needham 68 Broadwater Avenue, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3HJ, or via email to [kwn056@btinternet.com](mailto:kwn056@btinternet.com)*

*The next issue will be published in June 2022*

**NAAFI BREAKS** for the next few months are as follows :-

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022

Should you wish not to receive the regular issues of RAFAGEN, would you please advise the branch secretary on [secretary@rafa-leetchworth.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rafa-leetchworth.org.uk), who will arrange for your address to be deleted from our list.

