

**RANCH
MEMBERSHIP
200**

ROYAL AIR FORCES Association

The charity that supports the RAF family

RAFAGEN

THE NEWSLETTER & MAGAZINE OF THE LETCHWORTH, HITCHIN &
DISTRICT BRANCH (including Stevenage)

AUTUMN 2025



On location at the “Battle of Britain” film

Branch Registered Charity No. 1071536

Association Registered Charity No. England 226686 Scotland SC37673

Patron His Majesty King Charles III



RAFAGEN

The official newsletter and magazine of the
ROYAL AIR FORCES' ASSOCIATION
LETCWORTH , HITCHIN & DISTRICT
BRANCH OFFICIALS FOR 2025/6



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NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



First of all may I congratulate Martin (Taff) Turner on being elected to the post of Chairman South East and Eastern Area of R.A.F.A.,

And on behalf of all members of the Letchworth, Hitchin and District branch we wish him all the best on the appointment. He has already sent out an email to all branches (See page 6) on what he would like to achieve during his time in office. I know your committee would like to see closer ties with the Council, so I know he will have this branch's backing. Please read his letter, and let us have your comments.



Whilst on the subject of Council, may I say a few words about the outgoing chairman John Gilmore. I first met John at regular meetings of Branch Officers, RAFALOs and Area Support Officer, and Council representative, (which was John) at R.A.F. Henlow. Here we discussed problems, ideas and activities of Head Office and all branches in the area. (There was quite a few of us then). I found the meetings very useful as we knew what was happening. With the potential closing of R.A.F. Henlow, and I suppose the fewer branches in the area, these meeting ceased. John did attend one of our branch meetings and

met members. I think he was checking up on us, as by this time he was Chairman of the council.

John - I hope you enjoy your retirement from high office, and should you be in our area on NAAFI Break morning, you are more than welcome to join us.



Over the past few months your senior members of the Committee have been in contact with Jenna Middlemass our Area Wellbeing Officer. At the beginning of July she informed us that she would be on holiday. Nothing wrong with that, we all need a holiday, even Head Office staff.



A couple of weeks later we had another Email saying that she was back with a new address. She had only changed her name from Middlemass to Walters in those few weeks. Yes, she had married with a honeymoon in Sicily.

May I, on behalf of the members of the Branch, congratulate Jenna and her husband, and wish them both Health and Happiness for the future.



On Wednesday 30th July the Committee held an emergency Committee meeting mainly to ensure with the loss of Eric we were ready for our Wings Appeal in Hitchin next month. We had no need to worry as Eric being Eric had everything organised. All we had to do was get the merchandise, and collecting buckets to Hitchin and we are ready to go. This Wings Appeal event is the last of the year.

At the meeting Ushmel was Co-opted on to the Committee as an extra hand. As a Co-opted member of the Committee, Umesh Sachania cannot vote, but can add his comments to the running of the Branch. He remains in this position until the next A.G.M. When he can decide to put his name forward to be voted on to the Committee, or walk away.

Between now and the AGM we need to look for a new Wings Appeal Officer. Any ideas?



A new page has been introduced this month with news from R.A.F. Henlow. (Page 18) make sure you have a read as I believe it with squash a few local rumours.

YOUR CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Branch Members,

Good day to you all.

For my sins, I have recently been elected as the South East and Eastern Area (SE&E) Chairman, and I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Martin (Taff) Turner. I have been married to my wife, a dedicated Biomedical Scientist in the NHS, for 35 years, and we are proud parents to two sons who are both successful in their own right.



I have been actively involved with the Armourers Virtual Branch since its inception in 2014. Over the years, I have served as Welfare Officer, Deputy Chairman, and for the past seven years, as Branch Chairman. In addition to this, I have had the privilege of serving as an Area Councillor for the last six years.

I am looking forward to continuing to support our community in this new role and working closely with you all.

Now that the election process is complete, I can confirm that John Gilmore has stepped down as Area Chairman after a significant period of dedicated service. I would like to pay tribute to John for his unwavering commitment to the Area Council and the wider Association. John has guided the Area Council through what can only be described as a challenging period of change for the Association. His steady leadership, thoughtful counsel, and understanding of our community have been invaluable throughout.

On behalf of us all, I extend our heartfelt thanks and wish John and his family all the very best for the future. His contribution will not be forgotten.

I can also confirm that Allan Vaughan has stepped down as President of the SE&E Area. Allan served with distinction for many years and was often the voice of reason during difficult times. His calm presence and

wise counsel have been a constant source of reassurance and stability. We also wish Allan and his loved ones a quiet and peaceful retirement and thank him sincerely for his contribution.



Your new elected Area Council is made up of the following members:

Area President: Alan Opie

Area Chairman: Martin Taff Turner

Deputy Chairman: Tony Wood

Councillor: Les Lloyd

Councillor: Paul Newton

Area Elected Trustee: Ray Blundon

BMWO: Jenna Walters (nee Middlemass)

RAFLO: Kevin Ferrell

The big question now is: where do we go from here?

This is my first big statement - If we change nothing, nothing will change.

For me, the answer is clear. I passionately believe we need to go back to our roots. At the heart of everything we do must be camaraderie. It is the foundation upon which our Association was built. Without camaraderie, we cannot truly achieve wellbeing or deliver meaningful welfare support. It is that shared bond, the mutual respect and connection between us, that makes everything else possible.

As we move forward, my baseline for operation will be just that; rebuilding and reinforcing our sense of camaraderie. Together, we can continue to support one another, grow stronger as a community and ensure the Association remains a place where every member feels valued and connected.

Branches are the lifeblood of the Association, without them, we are nothing. They are where the real work happens, where connections are forged, and where our values are lived out day to day. Branches should be celebrated, supported, and given the recognition they so rightly deserve.



With that in mind, I have set a clear challenge for myself and for the Area Council over the next year: to bring the South East & Eastern Area closer together.

This means better communication, stronger collaboration, and a renewed focus on unity and mutual support. By strengthening our ties and championing the work of our branches, we can ensure the Association not only endures but thrives. We all know that communication is often perceived as poor across the Association and that is the first issue I want to address.

There are 49 branches and 9 RMGs in the South East & Eastern Area, and I want us all talking to each other — whether individually or collectively. We cannot build camaraderie or community without regular conversation.

To get things moving, I am setting up a monthly, informal Area "Bring Your Own Coffee" morning. These will be held virtually via Zoom, at least to begin with. You will not need a subscription; you just click on the link provided each month. I know that technology can be a barrier for some but we will do everything we can to make it as simple and accessible as possible.

And yes, I did say informal and I mean it. There will be no fixed agenda, you will lead the topics of conversation, so it is a chance to reconnect, share stories, and enjoy some banter over a brew. I have got more than a few tales of my own to share, and I am sure you do too.

The Coffee morning is just the starting point, but I believe it is a small step in the right direction. More details will follow in the near future.

Let's get talking.

This has been a longer than anticipated introduction, apologises for that. I hope you get a sense of where my thoughts are and what I want to achieve. Please help me to help you make our SE&E Area, Branches, RMGs somewhere where everyone wants to be.



Kind regards

Martin Taff Turner

Chairman South East and Eastern Area

As noted in RAFAGEN July '25, my condolences to all concerned on the passing of a most charitable soul, Eric Dagless. Eric was a gentleman who consciously helped maintain the very fabric of our society. May he rest in peace.

Michael McDonough



Waiting for Eric's final journey

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

Carl Gee of Letchworth Garden City

Bishmi Limbu of Chicksands

Rachael Howes of Henlow

Mr Prakish Lathia of Stevenage

Mr Terence Salter of Stevenage

Miss Debbie Anderson of Stevenage



**WE STILL NEED MORE
NEW MEMBERS**

A collage of various images related to the Royal Air Forces Association. It includes a portrait of a man in a military uniform, a group of people in a field, a woman in a pink shirt, and a man in a military uniform. The text "Protect the RAF community by leaving a gift in your Will" is prominently displayed in the center. Below this, a red button contains the text "Request your free Will guide". The Royal Air Forces Association logo is visible in the top right corner of the collage.



COMMITTEE NEWS

September 2025

EMERGENCY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 30th JULY 2025.

5 members in attendance. It was unanimously agreed that Umesh Sachamia be co-opted onto the Committee until the next A.G.M.

Before the September Committee meeting got down to the matters of the Branch, the Chairman called for a moments silence to remember a colleague and Committee member, Eric, who has sadly passed away.

After we had paid our respects, the Chairman called the meeting to order and the meeting began. There seemed be a little more general Branch matters to deal with this meeting, but as soon as those items on the agenda had been completed the members put their minds to more important matters.

The Chairman announced that due to a change in circumstances John Tunesi wishes to stand down as the Branch representative to the local Air Training Corps. John Will continue as a General Committee Member.

Next up was Branch events. The Hitchin Wings Appeal collection had taken place the previous Saturday, and the takings were up on the event last year. The Chairman thanked all those who helped with this event.

The Battle of Britain service on 21st September was going according to plan, and it was hoped that we would have a good congregation.

The visit to the Mosquito Museum had to be moved to 8th October due to a request by the Museum, which meant that a few members had cancelled

due to the change. The Committee thought that there was still enough to make an enjoyable day, so the trip is still on.

At the last NAAFI BREAK the Station Warrant Officer of R.A.F. Henlow announced the date of the Veterans Christmas party at Henlow. 16th December. Jim and Ken collecting names for members wishing to attend. If you want your name on the list, let Jim or Ken know as soon as possible.

The Branch Christmas Bash which already had been agreed to hold in January is still being organised.

Most of the meeting this time has been taken up with the general administration of the Branch, so not much for us to talk about here.

If you have any point you would like to put before the Committee at one of our meetings, please have a word with Marie, and she will have it put on the next agenda.

Today's agenda all been discussed and actioned, the Chairman duly closed the meeting.

MEMBERSHIP

As the Membership Secretary, I am pleased to announce that we have had one of the largest intake of new members to the Branch for many years. 6 this quarter.

This now takes the membership of this Branch to "200"

A large number of that 200 are serving men and women, and are therefore unable to attend our monthly get-together. These are the people who, when they leave the Royal Air Force hopefully will come and help run this Branch. I must say that some of the uniforms that attend NAAFI Break have become Branch members.

KWN

ROYAL AIR FORCE KENLEY

Royal Air Force Kenley near Croydon, more commonly known as a station of the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War and the RAF in the Second World War. It played a significant role during the Battle of Britain as one of the three RAF stations specifically tasked with the defence of London. It is located near Kenley on the edge of Greater London. The site remains in use with the Ministry of Defence, as Kenley Airfield.



A 1940 story of the airfield By Bernard Drummond

It was a Sunday morning, 18th August 1940. It was a quiet morning, and 31 year old Mrs Doris Addison, who lived with her family in a small village in Surrey, was in the kitchen preparing lunch, like so many housewives all over England. Men were tending their gardens, and children were playing in the surrounding fields. Sadly, the peace and quiet of this day would shortly come to a violent end.

The Country was at war with Germany, and was going through the period that would become known as The Battle of Britain. The bulk of these hostilities were directed then mainly at the South, and South East of England. There had already been many attacks by the German Luftwaffe, but on this day the Germans had decided to launch the largest air assaults

to date, in an effort to destroy the airfields and defences in an attempt to bring about the defeat and subjugation of our Nation. This was planned as three massive air assaults, and in the following 24 hours, the Royal air Force would face its greatest ever challenge.

The German force then on its way from occupied Europe numbered 495 bombers, Heinkels, Dorniers and Junkers. These were protected by 460 fighters, mainly Messerschmitts. Initially, the Luftwaffe inflicted severe damage upon the airfields of Kenely, in Surrey, and the airfields of Ford, Poling and Gosport on the South East coast.

A formation of Dornier bombers were attacking Kenley airfield, but as the leading bombers released their bombs they were in turn attacked by Spitfires. This caused some of the bombers to swerve away and drop their bombs on the outskirts of the airfield.



Photo taken from a back bedroom window 18/08/1940 - K.G.R.

Doris Addison's children were running into the house shouting about the mass of aircraft passing over their heads when there was a terrifyingly loud bang, the house shuddered, and looking out of the kitchen window, Doris saw the remains of an aircraft

skidding across their smallholding shedding pieces as it went. It was the first Dornier to be shot down a minute earlier. As it crashed, the bomber's wing had struck the house on its way past, wrenching it off and spewing out petrol which immediately caught fire. As flames began to engulf the side of the house Doris ushered the frightened children to the opposite of the house, lifting them one by one out of a window and onto the ground. It had been a lucky escape for them all.

There were however many civilians and servicemen killed there that day, as were at Ford, Poling and Gosport. These were all attacked by the Junkers 88 dive bombers. These were known as Stukas, that made a screaming noise as they dived almost vertically onto their targets. Again,

there was great damage done, and many killed, and carnage and destruction was awful. There were many acts of bravery at Ford that afternoon. Leading Wren Nina Marsh though wounded in the back and elbow, refused attention as she helped others more seriously wounded. Wren Irene Marriot was also wounded, but helped to put out many fires that raged around them. Both of these women received the BEM for bravery and devotion to duty.

The aircrews of the Stukas were to pay a heavy price however. As they turned for home across the English Channel they were hunted down by Hurricanes and Spitfires. Many were destroyed and those few that managed to reach France were riddled with bullets, and with one of their two crew either dead or badly wounded. Hour after hour in the air there was deadly fighting as the R.A.F. Fighters tried to down the German bombers, and with some success, but they also had to contend with the Messerschmitts and many dog fights ended with many being shot down, friend and foe.

The Luftwaffe had not finished with Kenley however, as another Group of high flying Dorniers attacked the airfield. They were also harassed by R.A.F. Fighters, and again, many of their bombs missed their target, and civilians living as far away as two miles from the airfield were casualties.

Kathleen Rose, a Post Office telegrapher had just arrived home near Coulsdon from her shift at work when the sirens sounded. Her 64 year old mother was getting lunch ready but Kathleen insisted that they take



War damaged houses

cover under the stairs when there was a tremendous explosion as a bomb fell by the house. Doors and windows blew out and part of the ceiling fell upon the women. Fortunately, men from the local working men's club fought their way through the rubble to get the women out. Kath and her mother were a little shaken but unhurt. After the dust had

settled Kath's mother remarked; "Kath, our home is a mess, but I'm going to have my dinner". The Gas main had been severed, but the oven was still warm and she coolly sat in the cleanest space that she could find, and ate her dinner.

Two miles away, in Godstone Road, Mr and Mrs Prosper climbed out of their back garden Anderson Shelter, still shaking at the experience of bombs that had landed nearby. Fortunately, before the raid they had opened the windows of their house because it had been such a nice day. The glass panes had all survived, even though a hundred tiles had been lifted from the roof by the blasts, that had also neatly scoured the soot out of the chimney and deposited it over everything, including the Sunday lunch that Mrs Prosper had served just before their dash to the shelter.

As the raid appeared to be over, in the garden of his home, 500 yards to the South of Kenley airfield 50 year old Kenneth Graham poked his head out of the Anderson Shelter, and said to his wife, "I'm afraid the house is gone". He, his wife and young son stepped out fearing the worst, and outside where ever they looked, all they could see was a thick black fog, so thick that they could not see their house, which was only ten yards away. As the fog dissipated they saw their home was still there intact. They later learned that a bomb had fallen on a bunker full of coal two doors away. The explosion had pulverised the contents, blasting them high into the air where the particles remained suspended before descending to blanket the whole area around with a fine layer of black coal dust.

Approximately 150 bombs had fallen in the area surrounding Kenley airfield, and although most people had taken cover in good time, six people had been killed and twenty one seriously injured. As expected, the casualties at the airfield were considerable, with many deaths of servicemen. After the raid, one female plotter at Kenley who survived, said, "Before this, men did not know how we girls would cope if we came under fire, but their attitude changed when they saw what we could do, and they were wonderful to us". Two WAAF's received the Military Medal for their bravery under fire that day.

Although the raiders had now left the coast, home was still a long way away for some of the German Bomber crews. They were pursued by R.A.F.

Fighters. The 18th of August 1940 has gone down as The Hardest Day of The Battle of Britain. The Germans lost 69 aircraft, had 94 aircrew killed and 40 taken prisoner. The R.A.F. Had 31 aircraft destroyed, (ten of which were on the ground being serviced or repaired when they were bombed).

The R.A.F. Squadrons had 10 pilots killed, and 19 wounded, some too seriously to continue flying. The Germans had vastly underestimated the strength of the R.A.F. Fighter Command. The Luftwaffe Messerschmitts were a worthy adversary, but like all fighters, they had a smaller fuel capacity than Bombers, and their time in the air was limited, so they were not always able to stay and defend their bombers and had to get back to the bases in Europe before they ran out of fuel. The Hurricanes and Spitfires however were able to land on the many smaller airfields in England that were not under attack, refuel, re-arm and resume the fight. The pilots were exhausted at the end of the battle, but the day was theirs.

The Battle of Britain continued for another two months, but never again with this days intensity.

S.W.O. Katy Miller announced during her visit the details of the R.A.F. Henlow's Veterans Christmas Lunch. This year it is on 16th December starting at 12.00 hrs.

If you would like to attend let Jim Box or Ken Needham have your name(s) as soon as possible, as Katy's team needs to get some idea of those attending, in order that they can make it another Christmas lunch to remember.

NAAFI Breaker Ted, has a laugh with R.A.F. Henlow's Station Warrant Office, W.O. Miller at our August get-together.



SOMETHING A LITTLE DIFFERENT

Member Ewen Kennedy has been looking through his old photos, and came across a school photo taken in 1947 during that year's North Herts Championships.

The school is Pixmore school Letchworth. Head was Mr Foreman, PE Head Teacher was Mr (Pop) Davis and the PE Teacher was Miss Rudd. All in the centre of the photo.

Which one is Ewen, well he tells me he is the third row up on the right and second one in. You now know four of the names, do you know any others?



Photo of Ewen (Left) some seventy-eight years later, taken at a NAAFI BREAK with his friend from Biggleswade.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY
OLD PHOTOS YOU
WOULD LIKE THE
RAFAGEN
DETECTIVES TO
INVESTIGATE?**



**Letchworth & District Branch of the
Royal Air Forces Association
Sunday 21st September 2025
Letchworth Methodist Church
A Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication
for victory in The Battle of Britain**



The Branch are grateful to The Revd Emmanuel Onabanjo, the Minister of Letchworth Methodist Church, for allowing us to use the church for this Battle of Britain Service of Commemoration. The was given by Revd Canon Lindsay Dew, Branch Chaplin. The readings were given by Chris Hinchcliffe MP, and Air Cadet Grace Wade .







Rev. Cannon Dew gives the church a final check before the Battle of Britain service begining

THE LETCHWORTH SPITFIRE

Jim Box

During World War 2 funds to pay for the building of various aircraft were raised by towns, companies, Commonwealth Countries and individuals. One of the local collections was for the Spitfire Fund. When the figure of £5000 was raised and passed to Government coffers, the Spitfire was named after the town or company. The Letchworth Spitfire Fund raised the required £5000 and Spitfire Vb W3248 was taken on charge by the RAF at No.9 Maintenance Unit at Cosford on 18 May 1941 and named "Letchworth".

It was allocated to 611 Squadron at Hornchurch on 22 June 1941 and started fighter sweeps and escort missions. On 4 July Wing Commander F.S. Stapleton flying this aircraft damaged a Messerschmitt Bf109E. W3248 was itself damaged two days later and repaired by Air service Training before being issued to 611 Squadron. It continued on operations but with 64 Squadron into 1942.

After being damaged again, it was sent No.1 Civilian Repair Unit and modified to become the first clipped wing Spitfire LFVb. It was passed to RAE Farnborough for aerodynamic trials including external mirror drag trials. It was at Farnborough that it was marked W3248/G. The "G" suffix indicated that the Spitfire was to be under guard due to secret equipment on board. It continued as a trials aircraft and used for cockpit misting at altitude and a clear view windscreen. In 1944 it was used in comparative trials with the Vampire jet fighter then being developed. It spent a few months at The Empire Test Pilots School before being used by Metropolitan Communications Squadron for liaison duties until 1946. In late 1946 it formed part of a number of Spitfires Vbs that were prepared for sale to Portugal, where it arrived at the Ota base in October 1947. It continued to serve with the Portuguese Air force with serial number No.76 until scrapped in 1952 having had a varied career since first being named "Letchworth"

R.A.F. HENLOW CORNER

There has been some speculation in the local media that the Hunter Aircraft which stands at the gate of R.A.F. Henlow (Known as the gate guard) is up for sale. Let RAFAGEN give you the facts.

RAF HENLOW GATE GUARD

An RAF Henlow Spokesperson confirmed:

“The fate of RAF Henlow’s gate guard will be decided by RAF Heritage, the team responsible for policy in this area. RAF Heritage takes aviation history very seriously and will always endeavour to find the best home for retiring aircraft. In the case of Hunter WT612, assuming there is no further service requirement, the RAF would look to gift to an appropriate aviation museum where it can be restored and used to tell the Hunter story”

BACKGROUND

Current regulation prevents the MOD from selling aircraft such as this, so the ideal solution would be to gift to a museum.

It is worth noting that Hunter airframes are probably the most common aircraft exhibit across the museum community, with multiple examples on display throughout the country.

Other than in exceptional circumstances, it is not our policy to gift to a museum that already has an example of this type , thus limiting options.

There are also other limits on gifting which can rule out some museums from the outset.

Your Editor has been speaking to the Station Warrant Officer who said that the aircraft may be disappearing in a few weeks for painting and refurbishment, but it will be back.

R.A.F. HENLOW'S FAMILY DAY





Name that plane



NAAFI Break

Meet fellow members and friends at the Branch's monthly morning coffee break.

We meet on the last Wednesday of each month at the [Letchworth Par 3 Golf Centre](#), William Way, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 2HJ at 10.00 hrs.

£2 will get you a non alcoholic drink of your choice for you to drink over good conversation.

You will also receive news of what is happening in the big world of the R.A.F. Association and, if required, how they can help you.

We look forward to seeing you.....



AUGUST NAAFI BREAK





DIMPLES Bar & Cafe.

Willian Way,

Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH

Open Tuesday - Sunday

The home of the Branch NAAFI

BREAK

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

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

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

Wednesday 24th September

Wednesday 29th October

Wednesday 26th November

No meeting during December

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

