

**RANCH  
MEMBERSHIP  
198**

**ROYAL  
AIR FORCES  
Association**

The charity that supports the RAF family

NEW YEAR 2025

**RAFAGEN**

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

Branch formed 15<sup>th</sup> October 1946



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 2023/4**



**Hon. President Viscount Lord Trenchard**

**Chairman:- Jim Box**

**Vice Chairman:- Rev, Lindsay Dew**

**Secretary:- Marie Mahoney**

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

**Treasurer:- Ken Needham**

**Wings Appeal Officer:-Eric Dagless**

**Branch Welfare Officer: Vacant**

For Welfare Contact:-Branch Secretary

Email :-[secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk](mailto:secretary@rafa-lethworth.org.uk)

**Membership Secretary:- Ken Needham**

**Branch Padre:- Rev. Canon Lindsay Dew**

Contact details :- Tel :- 07545878082

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

**General Committee:**

**John Airey: John Tunesi: Elliot Needham**

**Branch R.A.F.A.L.O. Vacant**

**RAFAGEN is compiled and edited by Ken Needham**

(email [kwn056@btinternet.com](mailto:kwn056@btinternet.com) Telephone 01462671534)



**VISIT OUR  
WEBSITE**

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

# **BRANCH**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 26<sup>th</sup> 2025

10.00 hrs followed by NAAFI BREAK

**DIMPLES @PAR 3 GOLF CENTRE  
WILLIAN WAY,  
LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 2 HJ**

### AGENDA

Opening by Jim Box (Chairman)

Chairman's Report

Minutes of 2024 minutes (tabled)

Accounts for 2024 (tabled)

Election of Officers

Chairman; Vice Chairman; Secretary; Treasurer; Wings Appeal Officer;  
General Committee Members:

Closing of Meeting (Newly Elected Chairman)

Any members not attending the AGM and requires a hard copy of the reports, please contact the Branch secretary.



**Following the Annual General Meeting we continue with the  
monthly NAAFI BREAK**

## NEWS FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



There are many things that our Branch is proud of, and one of them is that our Royal Air Forces Association Liaison Officer. (RAFALO) Mainly because we are proud of him, because of the work that he carries out for the R.A.F., and for his work in safeguarding of our shores, but it is because of the work that he is doing that he has had to resign from the post.

Here is an excerpt of his letter to the Branch for the reason for his action.

*“Due to the nature of flying a frontline aircraft such as the C17, it means I’m in a state of constant deployment which effectively has me abroad for at least 5 months of the year. This has been in support of many of the main headlines you have probably seen in the news” “During this time, I have been accelerated and have completed my command course meaning I’m now a C17 captain leading these trips across the globe”.*

*“That being said, it is quite apparent I cannot fulfil my duties as the Branch Liaison properly and no where near as attentively as Shaun did*

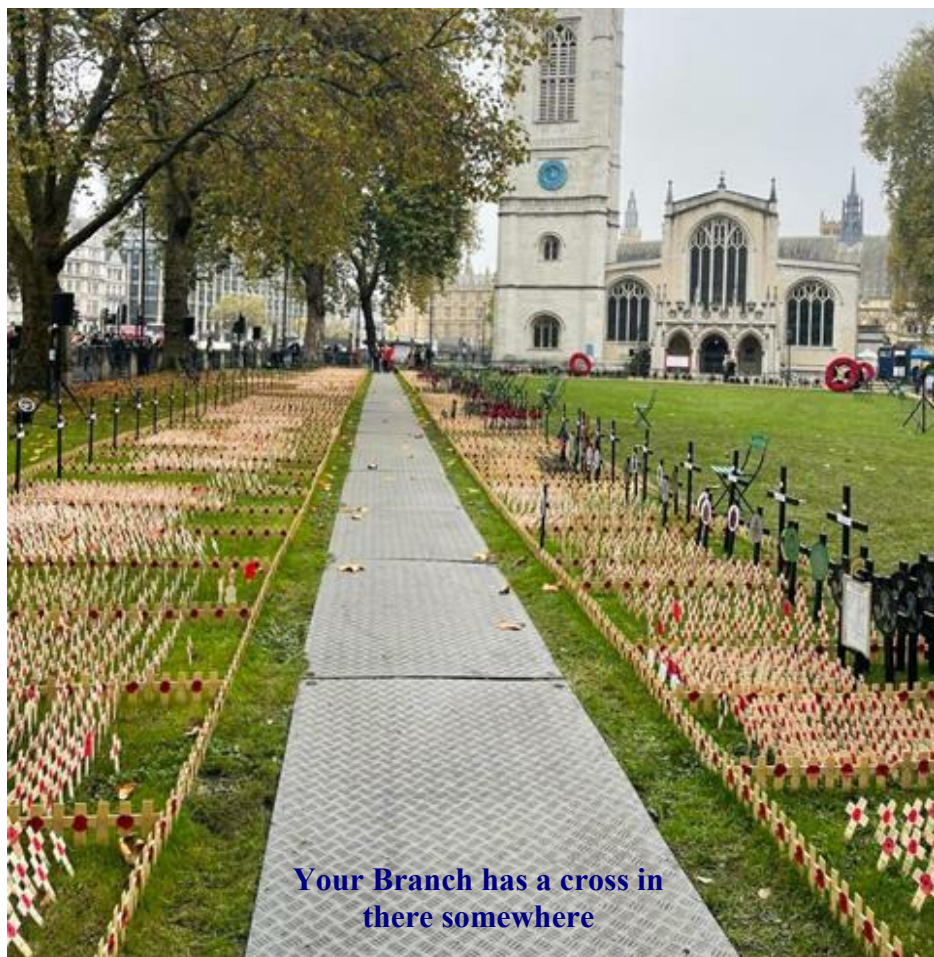
*previously”. “Therefore I think it is in both the Branch and my best interests if I stand down from the position of Liaison officer”.*

We fully understand, and we all wish you the best for the future.



## Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey

Representatives of the RAF Association attended the official opening of the Fields of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 7th November where the Duchess of Gloucester laid a personal tribute and met with veterans who attended on behalf of military charities. Around 70,000 tributes were planted by volunteers in the grounds of the Abbey. Amongst them were over 50 Association crosses, representing 35 branches who chose to take part this year. Our thanks go to all of those who represented the Association during the events of the weekend, whether locally or nationally.



**Your Branch has a cross in there somewhere**



## What you have been saying about RAFAGEN.



Hi Ken,

It seems your life times work is keeping RAFAGEN going, well done to you and all of the Committee.

I remember that Demo at RAF Negombo (Katunayake) I don't know about the crowd being scared, I think we all were. Mutterings of "He's lost control of the b----y Dog" were heard from where the Families were standing.... All's well that ends well.

I'd like to know where that Lancaster took off from, as I have a few contacts around the Lincolnshire Countryside and they would be interested about the crew and their ultimate end....

Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year to You, and Members of RAFA Letchworth ...

John Smallwood, (Ex Snowdrop from Ceylon)

*Editor : You are as usual correct to say that RAF Negombo had changed it's name to Katunayake when our disaster took place. For those who want to know, the Royal Ceylon Air Force took over the base on 1<sup>st</sup> November 1957. Only the name changed at the time, the Royal Air Force staying until 1960. With regard to your question about the Lancaster's base, I will have to ask the author.*

We would like to hear from you.





# COMMITTEE NEWS

**November 2024  
& January 2025**

## **NOVEMBER MEETING**

All the usual admin stuff over, Marie confirmed that all was in hand for the Remembrance Sunday Services. Wreaths will be laid at Hitchin, Letchworth, Baldock and Stevenage by members of the Branch. R.A.F. Henlow would also be in attendance at the Letchworth service and will be laying a wreath. It was unknown if the Station would be attending any other local services.

With Christmas getting closer the Committee discussed two forthcoming Christmas lunches. The first being the Branch Christmas lunch on 5<sup>th</sup> December. Jim confirmed that 18 members had put their names forward, and all was in hand, whilst Ken confirmed that all attendees had paid. The second lunch, which is organised by R.A.F. Henlow for all R.A.F. Veterans in the area, is on 10<sup>th</sup> December. Members names who were interested in this wonderful event had been passed to the SWO.

Ken raised the point that he thought the Branch Web site was out of date, and needs to be updated. He admitted that it was partly his fault in not supplying the Web Master with information. After a discussion it was agreed that Jim would take on the job of keeping the Web Master updated.

Acting on a suggestion from a member, hard copies of the RAFAGEN would be made available at NAAFI Breaks. Each copy would cost £1.50% towards the cost of printing and 50% into Branch funds.

Fairly longer meeting this month, but it did end in time for all those Christmas lunches.



## JANUARY MEETING

Here we are again at Dimples. Coffee ordered and ready to start the New Years' meeting.

It is taking a little longer this meeting to get through the admin items, as the forth coming needs to be discussed, which is at the end of next month. The forms that are required are ready to be completed, and the accounts are being examined, so we are as close as we can be until the AGM. One thing I am pleased to report is that all the present committee are willing to be re-elected, (that's if you lot want them) but not necessarily in their current post. That's got you guessing.

Future branch events were discussed, amongst them the De Havilland museum at South Mimms. Locally know as the Mosquito museum. More information being sort. Battle of Britain service will again be held in September at the Letchworth Methodist church. Dates to be confirmed. We will of course be collecting for the Wings Appeal over the area. Again dates to be confirmed, when licenses are approved. It is too earlier to talk Christmas 2025. Let us get over 2024 first.

John A was very disappointed to learn that the Association were not producing a diary this year. Without his diary I can see that John could miss future meetings. As long as I have known John he has used an Association diary so I know he will miss it greatly. I can also understand why they weren't published this year, as most people use their mobile phones. John doesn't have a phone

Chairman calling order to get back to the meeting matters.

Jim confirmed that he had began send branch information on to the Web Master in order to bring our Web Site up to date. All the committee would like to see some new names on the nomination forms especially an old Stevenage branch member. Then we would have a representative on the committee from all areas.

The Dimples staff are asking if we want any coffee refills, which could mean that it is time to call it a day. See you at the AGM.



RAF HENLOW

*Veterans Christmas  
Lunch*

10<sup>th</sup> December



# BRANCH CHRISTMAS BASH HELD AT THE BRITISH GARDEN CENTRE HITCHIN



# 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 3JH 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.....**



# WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Information supplied by Membership Department of The Royal Air Forces Association

**NONE THIS QUARTER**



**WE NEED MORE NEW MEMBERS**



**DIMPLES Bar & Cafe.**

**Willian Way,**

**Letchworth Garden City. SG6 3JH**

**Open Tuesday - Sunday**

**The home of the Branch NAAFI**

**BREAK**

## **NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION**

The RAF Association is incredibly lucky to be supported by a strong network of members and volunteers. We know there are countless individuals who deserve recognition for the outstanding contributions they make to the Association, and we encourage you to nominate them for Area and National Presidential Certificates to acknowledge and celebrate their achievements.

As a reminder, Area Presidential Certificate (APC) applications should be submitted directly to your Branch Member and Wellbeing Officer (BWMO) to take forward for consideration by the Area President. For those individuals who have made a particular difference nationally, a National Presidential Certificate (NPC) nomination can also be submitted to BWMOs for review.

These applications require a recommendation from the Area President before they can be submitted to the Honours and Awards Committee for consideration.

The nomination form and a guide to completing applications is available in the Branch Resources/Trophies and Awards Folder in the Community Portal library. APCs can be submitted throughout the year for consideration and are usually conferred to recipients during Area Conferences. NPCs can also be submitted throughout the year and are reviewed in April and October.

They are conferred during the Gala Dinner at Annual Conference.

## **MORE NEWS FROM THE ASSOCIATION**

In 2025 the South East and Eastern Region which covers this Branch, will get a new Branch and Wellbeing Officer. The current Officer Kevin O'Neill, will be moving over to the Western side of the country to take on the same position for that area..

Our new officer will be Jenna Middlemass. We look forward to meeting Jenna as she gets to know her new area.



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 FEW DOGGIE QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO CHEW OVER.

### ANSWERS

- 1 Name of Dorothy's dog in "The Wizard of OZ." **TOTO**
- 2 An Alsatian dog who was found War revenged in France during WW1 and adopted by an American soldier named Lee Duncan. The dog as later to become a film star. **RIN-TIN-TIN**
- 3 A famous long-coated Collie and a film star of the 40s and 50s. **LASSIE**
- 4 Name of the R.A.F. Police Dog who visited our branch after publishing a book entitled "The Dog Who Saved a Thousand Lives." **BUSTER**
- 5 Bart Simpson's Greyhound dog adopted from a Grey hound racetrack **SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER**
- 6 Mickey Mouse's dog from the 1930's **PLUTO**
- 7 The dog who appears in the Peanuts Cartoon. **SNOOPY**
- 8 "----- ----- WHERE ARE YOU?" Cartoon film and TV character from the late 1960's. **SCOOBY -DOO**
- 9 THE FILM CARTOON DOG WHO SHARED THE TITLE ROLL WITH A LADY. **TRAMP**
- 10 TOM HANK'S PARTNER IN A 1969 COMEDY FILM WHEN HE WAS THE ONLY WITNESS TO A CRIME AND LIKES TO DRINK BEER. **HOCH**
- 11 THIS DOG TAKES ON THE JOB OF SURROGATE MOTHER TO A PIGLET NAMED BABE. **FLY**
- 12 DR WHO'S MECHANICAL PET DOG. **K9**

If you managed to score 100 % give yourself a Doggy Treat.

# Another Fishy Story

By  
Jim Box

After 38 Squadron at RAF Hal Far, Malta, was disbanded in 1967 I left the Shackleton scene but remained in Coastal having been posted to “A” Flight, 22 SAR Squadron, Whirlwind helicopters, at RAF Chivenor. After completing the helicopter conversion course at RAF Valley, I arrived at Chivenor in May. “A” Flight was tasked to provide SAR cover for 229 Hunter OCU, as well as general rescue incidents.

One of my first training trips with the Flight was winching student Hunter pilots from their dinghies as part of their Sea Survival programme. When this exercise was scheduled, the local RNLI lifeboat from Clovelly was in attendance as safety boat, together with a RAF Pinnace. Our part was to winch wet and bedraggled jet jockeys from dinghies and put them on the Pinnace. Whilst this was taking place the lifeboat crew had their fishing lines out. Having completed the winching exercise, the usual low-level fly past was executed on both the Pinnace and lifeboat. On passing the lifeboat the crew held up a bucket. As I was still new to Whirlwind life, I did not immediately realise what this signified. The Pilot called “fish for tea”, and I was lowered onto their deck to collect the bucket of mackerel. Having emptied the fish onto the cabin floor I returned the bucket to the lifeboat deck - another two deck winchings for the monthly stats with goodies as well. In the months to come this was a regular occurrence with either the lifeboat or local fishing boats.

After about six months at Chivenor, an opportunity arose to move to Manston as there was a married quarter available. So, Brenda and I left a small cold first floor privately rented flat in Barnstable, for a centrally heated American designed bungalow married quarter at Manston, within walking distance of the Flight - heaven. “D” Flight at Manston had its own food arrangements, one of which was collecting mushrooms in season. If the helicopter had not flown the previous day, the crew on shift would conduct an air test in the morning about 0800 hrs. Having finished the main air test, the next phase was mushroom hunting on the airfield, especially the old grass runway area. This involved air taxing, with the

cabin crew leaning out doing a very, very, very, low level (about 6 feet) visual search for the big grey things. Alternatively, I would walk in front of the helicopter with the bucket (a very necessary piece of SAR equipment) collecting the mushrooms. Back at the Flight, some of the mushrooms were passed to the ground crew and then we had a very good breakfast. We also let Air Traffic have some occasionally just to keep them happy.

At one point during my Manston tour, I was detached to “C” Flight, back at RAF Valley, for a couple of weeks as that Flight was short of crew. On my first shift we were authorised for a wet winching exercise. Having suited up, I was asked to fetch the bucket that was just inside the hanger door. The bucket contained fish heads and tails. All was revealed shortly as our wet winching exercise consisted of recovering and baiting the Flight’s lobsterpots that were situated just off Trearddur Bay. Having found the lobster pot float, we used the winch with the grapple on the hook to trawl for the pot cable and then winch in the pot. The first few were empty, re-baited and lowered back to the sea bed. We eventually found three pots containing lobsters that morning and had them walking around the cabin floor on the way back. So that was a successful trip, a dozen wets for the stats and three lobsters. The flight had a rota for the lobsters so there were three flight personnel going home with supper that day.

*Editors note:- Who said that we didn't have a good life in the Royal Air Force?*



## IT ALL STARTED IN 1957

BY Ken Needham

My service career started the same as it did for thousands of R.A.F. recruits in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, at R.A.F. Cardington. At that time the recruits consisted of both regular and National Service personnel. I fell into the former of the two categories, although it made no difference, as we were all treated in the same way.

After we had been kitted out, sworn our allegiance to the Queen, and had our haircut, we were off to do our basic training, or as we all know it "Square Bashing". An apt name. I was bound for West Kirby, on the Wirral, although not knowing where it was at the time. We boarded the train at Cardington railway station. Rush hour had nothing on this. Hundreds of Airmen with Kit Bags, all clambering for seats. I was one of the lucky ones. I managed to get myself a window seat, albeit a very tight squeeze with six sitting on a bench designed to seat four, in the compartment of a corridor carriage.

The journey seemed long and slow. The train repeatedly stopping, possibly to allow the regular trains to keep to their timetable. I was beginning to need the toilet, but I couldn't leave my seat as it wouldn't be vacant when I returned. Lunch time came and the packed meals that we were given at Cardington were opened. Once opened and inspected they were either put back into kit bags or thrown on the floor. Not many were eaten.

When the train eventually drew up at the tiny station of West Kirby, we all piled out as quickly as could to get away from the cramped conditions. Not being used to coping with our large kitbags the sight was not pretty. Immediately the corporals were screaming at us "get fell in", as if we knew what that meant, but we did our best to oblige. Late appearing individuals received special abusive language from the corporals. We were then herded to a fleet of lorries waiting on the road outside the station. With difficulty we climbed aboard with the corporals working like sheep dogs, snarling

and swearing at us. Most of us had to stand as the lorries (3 tonners) were only equipped with narrow benches along each side.

**I was certainly disliking the Royal Air Force increasingly by the minute.**

The convoy of Lorries drove up the hill away from the town of West Kirby and into the camp. Thank goodness it was only a short journey to the camp, the overcrowding in these lorries was worse than the train. The camp consisted of rows and rows of billets, like the ones at Cardington. Our lorry pulled up in a large open area and then all hell broke loose. A horde of screaming, shouting, blaspheming NCO`s chivvied us all off the lorries and introduced us to the niceties of life at a square-bashing camp.

**I was now hating the Royal Air Force even more as each second passed.**

When our names were called, we were given a flight name, (mine being SMUTTS), and we were marched off by our Drill Instructor, (who I can't remember the name of, and don't particularly want to), to a billet which I can't remember the number of either. This billet was to be my home for the next eight weeks, if I lasted that long.

After putting my kit away in the two lockers, we waited for further instructions. We didn't have to wait long, for the shout went up "NCO present", and we all jumped up. This was a rule that we were taught at Cardington. First, we had to collect our bedding from the stores, and then it would be off to the canteen for a meal. Although at this stage we had not been taught how to march correctly, at least not the R.A.F. way, we had to walk, sorry trot, in an orderly fashion from place to place. Bedding collected and returned to our billet, we now collected our "irons" (knife, fork and spoon) and our tin mug and off to get something to eat.

I cannot remember what my first meal was at West Kirby, but I do remember that I ate it all. I was so hungry. One thing you do learn

at West Kirby, is that you eat anything that is put in front of you or go hungry.

During the meal I filled my mug with tea and took it back to the table. Searching the table I couldn't see any sugar, then I saw it on a large open plate. This was a large mug, and I liked my tea sweet, so I put in two spoons full. I should point out at this stage the spoons issued were dessert spoons. I took a sip of tea and realised that it wasn't sugar on the table it was salt. It appears that the sugar is on a table at the side of the tea urns. Another lesson learnt.

### **Why the hell did I join the Royal Air Force?**

One of the first things we had to learn was how to make a 'bed pack'. This consisted of the blankets and sheets being folded in such a way to make a neat rectangle. Your pillows sat on the top. This was how you had to leave your bed each morning before going out. On being shown how to make the bed pack, it had appeared easy, so nobody took that much notice. The problem came when we tried to copy the demonstration the following morning, we had forgotten what we had been shown. But at least we had tried, and they didn't look too bad.



Our training started in earnest that day. One of the first things we had to do was learn to march. To a novice, that is not as easy as it sounds. I must admit though I did find it easy as it was common

sense, but there were those amongst us who didn't know their left foot from their right. One such airman always seemed to get behind me. As I started, correctly with my left foot, he started on his right foot. He would consequentially kick my right foot, which threw me out of step. It always got me into trouble for being out of step. No way was I going to tell the Drill Corporal that it was due to the chap behind me. I would be accused of answering back, or some such reportable offence. It was a good job we wore boots, or my ankles would have been sore. We did all learn to march in the end. Some taking longer than others.

Returning to the billet at the end of that first morning, we found our bedding scattered all over the place. The Corporal, bellowing that the bed packs were a shamble and a disgrace to the Royal Air Force, and that evening he made us spend making and undoing these packs until, in his eyes "would pass for now, but still needed improvement". The problem was, there was still kit to be cleaned, and I wanted my bed. It was tiring work this training. Eight weeks of this, I would never last.

But I did survive, and also my trade training which was just as bad. Then I went to Dog School, and things changed for the better, and I never regretted my life in the Royal Air Force ever again.



*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](mailto:kwn056@btinternet.com)*

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

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2025 (Also AGM)

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2505

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025

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

