

The Royal Air Forces Association
Wales, Midland & South West
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Wales, Midland & South Western Area

Newsletter

February 2017

Don't forget to return your Branch Delegate form for the Area Annual Conference and Reunion in Torquay

WITH GREAT SADNESS

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of Mr Fred Owen of Tamworth Branch. A great friend and servant of our Area, Fred was an Area Councillor for the Old Midland Area and Welfare Officer for many years. Our thoughts are with Fred's family and friends at this time.

NEW YEAR HONOURS LIST 2017 – NATIONAL PRESIDENTIAL CERTIFICATE RECIPIENTS

We offer our congratulations to all National Presidential Certificate recipients, notified in conjunction with the Queen's New Year Honours List 2017, but especially to those in our Area.

Bill Paterson	Ormskirk Branch	Northern Area
Mr & Mrs Kelsey	Littlehampton Branch	South East & Eastern Area
Mike Davis	Poole Branch	Wales, Midland & South West Area
Gordon Watson	Cranwell Branch	South East & Eastern Area
Mr & Mrs Latin	Morecambe & Lancs Branch	Northern Area
Mike Facey	Neath Branch	Wales, Midland & South West Area
Terry Dennett & Beryl Dennett Stannard	Sud-Ouest Branch	Overseas Area
Mr & Mrs Sach	Colchester Branch	South East & Eastern Area
Mrs Pauline Skellon	RAFA Concert Band	Wales, Midland & South West Area
Mr James (Jim) Brandon	Bodmin Branch	Wales, Midland & South West Area



AREA MEMBERSHIP IN 2016

In respect of our Area and despite several close shaves, it is very heartening to report no formal branch closures during 2016 (something the Area hasn't achieved since its 'super-size' amalgamation 13 years ago). Work is needed to prop up one or two branches but in general terms, we started and finished the year with 87 formed branches. It's not an easy task to turn around the fortunes of an ailing branch but time and again the Area Staff came together with Area Council and dedicated members and pulled it off. Thank you one and all!

Area membership in 2016 was well above the national picture with net growth of 7.5%. 1,835 new members were recruited into our Area and we recorded the lowest lapsing rate for many years at 511. In every respect 2016 was a banner year for Area membership recruitment; thank you for your dedication. The challenge, of course, remains, to get as many new members as possible actively involved within our branches.



BRANCH LAPSED MEMBERS

You may recall that the grace period for the lapsing of a membership has changed from 90 days to 30 days (as described in the latest Byelaws). Membership will now cease if a renewal subscription is not paid within 30 days of the end of the membership period. For all members to date, the end of the 30 day period was 30 January 2017. If a member renews after that time, their membership will run to the end of the 2017 calendar year, even if they renew in December 2017. If a member does not renew until 2018, they will transfer from calendar membership to anniversary membership and will retain their original membership number.

So – please take a good look at your Branch membership lapsing list which Debbie will happily provide to the designated Branch official and do all you can to get those renewals coming in. Debbie can also now provide lists of any changes to the Branch (deaths, changes of address, transfer and so on). Thank you!

LAST CALL FOR AREA CONFERENCE – THE DERWENT HOTEL, TORQUAY – 17-19 MARCH 2017

Have you booked your accommodation? Have you returned your Branch Delegate forms to Debbie in the Exeter Office? If not, please crack on! We already have 45 Branches who have confirmed their attendance and it would be brilliant if we could get over the 50 mark. Area Council hopes to offer you a very worthwhile weekend with the usual mix of relaxed business and reunion/socialising – and no dodgy comedians anywhere in sight!

Importantly, the BSOs will be running a Branch Workshop on the Friday afternoon at 2.30pm for around one hour, so please do all you can to join in, hear the messages, swap good practice and take it all back to your Branch. Here's a re-run of the hotel accommodation details:

- Two night's accommodation (Friday and Saturday), dinner, bed and breakfast and Sunday lunch - £122 per person.
- An option to stay Sunday night is available at an additional £35 per person, dinner, bed and breakfast.
- There are a few single rooms available, when they've gone a £10 per night supplement will apply.
- **Please make your booking direct with TLH Leisure Group on 01803-400500 for the 'RAF Association Weekend'. They will request a 25% deposit.**

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. Debbie Byam - 01392-462088 option 4 or debbie.byam@rafa.org.uk.

THE HELICOPTER MUSEUM – ‘WORLD AT WAR’ WEEKEND – 8-9 APRIL 2017

Building on the success of the museum's WW2 Living History Day last April, the Helicopter Museum at Weston-super-Mare are planning a larger event this year inviting a variety of military societies and associations from all military branches. Their aim is to put on an event spanning various time periods and conflicts for the public to enjoy whether that be through living history, vehicles, attending veterans or charity information stands. Weston Airport's original control tower and pilot's block is soon to be open to the public.

The Helicopter Museum is a registered charity and home to the world's largest collection of rotorcraft including two of the Queen's Royal Flight, the speed record holder G-Lynx and the Vietnam Veterans. Our chosen military charity for this year's event is SSAFA – the Armed Forces Charity. They have invited SSAFA to organise a signing lounge during the weekend with all proceeds of this going to their charity. They will, of course, welcome all attending charities to promote their cause and collect their own donations from their pitch.

It is shaping up to be a fantastic weekend with various military vehicles, living-history groups and associations set to take part and they would love for you to be involved. Please let them know if your organisation would be interested in attending so that we can discuss your involvement further. Similarly if you are part of any other related organisation do feel free to pass along this invitation.

Please do not hesitate to contact Peter Michallat, Marketing Assistant, via helimuseum@btconnect.com should you have any questions, or feel free to call the museum on 01934 635227 Wednesday-Sunday.

ADOPTION OF 2189 (CALNE) SQUADRON OF AIR TRAINING CORPS



A Certificate of Adoption was recently presented to Sqn Ldr Mike Webster OC of 2189(Calne) Squadron Air Training Corps, at their Annual Formal Dinner on the 20 December 2016. The Squadron has a close relationship with the Calne and District Branch and has carried out fundraising over many years. A member of the Branch attends the Sqn committee and the Branch is supporting Sqn projects with financial aid.

The Sqn has a strong attendance and is very proud to have a female Flight Sergeant who is currently the Lord Lieutenant's Cadet for Wiltshire.

The photograph shows Air Cdre B Poulton, President Calne and District Branch, with Sqn Ldr Webster.

BRANCH AND CLUB AGMS – FORM 1056/A

Please don't forget we need your Branch F1056/Club F1056A as soon as possible following your respective AGMs. It's vital we are holding the correct information on who is doing what including those filling extended Branch and Club roles. Enclosed with this Newsletter is a copy of F1056/A.

ANNUAL SERVICE ST CLEMENT DANES – SUNDAY 2 APRIL 2017

The Annual Service to commemorate the formation of the Royal Air Force will be held at St Clement Dane's Church, The Strand, London on Sunday 2 April 2017.

Royal Air Forces Association Standard Bearers have been invited to attend the Service. The format is the same as previous years with Standard Bearers marching from Lincoln's Inn Field to St Clement Danes Church headed by the RAF Halton Pipe Band. Any Standard Bearers wishing to attend should contact the South East & Eastern Area Headquarters, Tel: 0116 464 5052 or by e-mail to eastern@rafa.org.uk no later than Friday 3 February 2017. Ticket allocation for the Service as in previous years is on a first come first served basis but unfortunately, only invited guests will be allowed to attend the

reception after the Service. Any members wishing to obtain tickets for the Service only should contact the Area Headquarters no later than **Friday 3 February 2017**.

The Service will commence at 11.00 hrs.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a reminder of how your Branch can register for this year's Annual Conference at Yarnfield in Staffordshire. Please take a moment to consider the detail. Thank you.

MARKETING RESOURCES

A number of resources have been created to assist branches with their marketing requirements. Full details can be found at www.rafa.org.uk/promotion but briefly these include:

PRINT ON DEMAND

We have created a number of editable templates for posters, business cards, banners and postcards. You can edit your chosen template and have it printed by our printers (branches can download items to print themselves if they wish).

WINGS APPEAL ITEMS

There is a link to the RAFATRAD site where you can order collection tins, pin badges, leaflets and other fundraising materials.

CLOTHING

Branches can use the new service to order and pay for polo shirts, fleeces, tablecloths and shirts. Staff clothing requests (excluding hotel uniforms) will follow the procedure outlined in the attached email.

SIGNAGE

Sometimes you need to order professional signs. Let us know what you need and we can work with our national signage supplier.

FREE BRANCH WEBSITES

We can now create a branch website for free. Sixty-six branches have signed up to have websites already, so this is proving a popular service.

LOGOS AND BRANDING

All of the logos, our identity handbook and the latest text we use to describe the Association are here for you to download.

PR TOOLKIT

The toolkit contains tips on taking good photographs, how to approach your local media and some template press releases for you to tailor. We also have a press cuttings service, so we will be able to share the media coverage you generate. More details will follow on this soon.

The above-mentioned Marketing Resources will be discussed at the Workshop on Friday 17 March 2017 at 1445hrs in the Starlight Lounge of the Derwent Hotel.

THE DEATH OF RAF HOSPITAL, TORQUAY

You may be interested in the following article, provided by Grahame Holloway. A piece of interesting history since we are holding this year's Area Conference in Torquay!

Seventy-five years ago, at 1110 hours on Sunday, 25th October 1942, an infamous chapter in WWII history was written when the RAF Hospital at Torquay was bombed by a flight of four FW-190's flying from their base at Carpiquet near Caen, a mere 170 miles away across the Channel.. Nineteen aircrew and medical staff were immediately killed although this number was to rise after survivors were evacuated to other hospitals. One source later put the figure at thirty-seven.

The history of the Hospital is interesting for with the outbreak of war imminent, the RAF realised there would be many casualties giving rise to the need for additional medical facilities. Ideally these should be away from areas of likely conflict and one of the areas chosen was Torbay where eyes fell on Torquay's luxurious 5* Palace Hotel. A month after war started, in October 1939, the Palace Hotel became RAF Hospital Torquay. However, it was not to be just 'any hospital' for, surveying its opulence, a decision was made that this was to be a hospital for 'officer aircrew only' and operated as such until that fateful October morning.

Headlines in the local newspaper the following day read "*Bombs on South West Hospital*" and the narrative continued, "*Flying low over the coast yesterday morning four FW-190's swerved over a South West seaside town, dropping bombs and firing canon before turning out to sea again, but not at least before one of them was seen leaving a trail of smoke. The leading plane dived to tree-top height to make a direct hit on a hospital. It is feared that casualties amongst both men and women are high.*"

Censorship at the time prevented naming the town or identifying the hospital as being used by the RAF. However, perhaps the most graphic account of events came from Kay Lawrence, nee Harte, a VAD nurse stationed there at the time and whom I had the great pleasure of meeting at her Exeter home in 2005. She was joined by her husband, Keith, a former patient at the hospital after sustaining serious injuries during the Battle of Britain when his Spitfire was shot down. Fortunately he had left the hospital before it was bombed and in the February of that year had found himself in Malta where he was to command 0185 Squadron and be awarded the DFC.

Kay's recollection of events was remarkable and my research was greatly aided by the fact she had kept a diary which she produced and allowed me to read and copy. She maintained that recuperating aircrew casualties would have been very much higher had it not been for the fact that the hospital's physiotherapist, Dan Maskell, had taken a large party away for the day. He will be remembered by many as a pre-war tennis professional who later became a very popular sports commentator for the BBC. Kay also recalled how she would have been amongst those killed that day had she been in her office rather than assisting in the operating theatre. Her diary read:

"In the theatre when we were bombed at 1110 -,one direct hit & one v. near miss- 19 killed, not all found – ghastly thing – rain fell all day – we evacuated patients, injured (40) to sick quarters at the Torbay and ours to Wroughton – just a few of the ill ones. It was an amazing thing – no panic. Little Tinker-Bell was killed and also G/C Whittle, W/C Burke, Luddington and many others,- we, the VADS, were sent to a nursing home for the night ."

Kay's entry for the following day continued-

"Hectic day disposing of patients – sick leave or Wroughton for most of them. More bits of bodies found – awful....."

The raid had caused damage to such an extent that the hospital was decommissioned and remained in a ruined state until the end of the war. Fortunately after much reconstruction it reopened in March 1948, once again as the splendid Palace Hotel.

Fortunately the Hotel has not forgotten its role in RAF history and in October 2007 hosted a commemorative luncheon organised by the East Devon Aircrew Association. Over sixty members and their wives, including ex-patients of the hospital, attended a service of remembrance followed by an excellent buffet courtesy of the hotel. In return members presented the hotel with a commemorative Air Force plaque which simply reads 'RAF Hospital, Torquay. 1939-1942. Today it is proudly displayed in the hotel's entrance foyer. (N.B. Grahame is a Life Member of the RAFA and an account of this raid was first published in '*Final Touchdown*' (2005) and also in '*Runway's End*' (2011). Both books were written by him for the East Devon Aircrew Association. (They are no longer in print).



The Palace Hotel in 1937



After the bombing

WINGS APPEAL COLLECTIONS AT SAINSBURY'S

Any Wings Appeal collections at Sainsbury's should not take place if the Store insisted on counting the collection and taking a percentage for their own charitable purpose – unless the latter was agreed with the branch prior to the collection and the split of donations (including exact percentage) was made clear to the public during the collection.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- Devon Region Meeting AGM – Saturday 4 February 2017, 14.30hrs at Dawlish Branch Club HQ.
- Area Council Meeting - Atlas House, Headquarters – 10.45hrs, Saturday 11 February 2017.
- The RAF Central Band & Squadronaires Big Band Charity Concert in support of Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund at The Hall For Cornwall, Truro on Saturday, 25 February 2017 at 19.30hrs – tickets from £11.00 – you may buy tickets on Tel No: 01872 262466.
- East Glamorgan & Gwent Regional meeting and AGM will be held at Treorchy RAFA Branch on Saturday 25 February 2017, starting at 14.00hrs.
- Area Conference and Reunion, Derwent Hotel, Torquay – 17 to 19 March 2017.
- Royal Air Forces Association, Sherborne Branch and RAFA Slessor Club AGMs. Wednesday, 22 March, at 20.00hrs in the Slessor Club, Long Street, Sherborne. Tel 01935 812621.
- Northern Counties (Wales) Region – Llangollen Branch Club - Saturday, 8 April 2017.
- Trebah Military Day - Trebah Gardens, Mawnan Smith, Saturday 27 May, gates open at 10.00hrs.
- Royal Cornwall Show, Wadebridge, Thursday 8, Friday 9 & Saturday 10 June.
- RAF & Allied Air Forces Monument Service, Plymouth Hoe Saturday 24 June.
- RNAS Culdrose Air Day, Thursday 27 July.
- Red Arrows Display, Falmouth, Wednesday 9 August.

Debbie Byam – Area Administrator

'Everyone has been made for some particular work, and the desire for that work has been put in every heart'.

Enclosures:

1. Form 1056A and B.
2. Annual Conference 2017.