

THE ALDWARCK CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Royal Air Forces Association York Branch



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Club opening hours: Thu: 7.30 pm to 10.30 pm Sat: 11.30 am to 3 pm.

Branch Charity Number 500974

Current membership: 452

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February 2022

YORK BRANCH & CLUB OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS FOR 2021-22

President:	Mr R W Gray
President Emeritus	Air Commodore W G Gambold RAF (Retd)
Life Vice-Presidents:	Mr H R Kidd OBE Mr J J Mawson
Vice-Presidents:	Mr J Allison BEM Ms S Richmond
Branch Chairman	Mr B R Mennell <i>chairman@rafayork.org</i>
Branch Vice-Chairman	Mr R Ford
Branch Hon. Secretary	Mr A M Bryne <i>secretary@rafayork.org</i>
Branch Hon. Treasurer	Mr D Pollard <i>treasurer@rafayork.org</i>
Membership Secretary	Mr R Woods
Welfare Officer	Mr R Ford <i>welfare@rafayork.org</i>
Wings Appeal Organiser	Mr I Smith <i>wings@rafayork.org</i>
N. Area & Annual Conf. Rep.	Mr R Ford
Branch Standard Bearer	Mr G Murden
Deputy Standard Bearer	Mr A Gunn
Public Relations Officer	Mr A M Bryne
Buildings Officer	Mr R Webster
Website Manager	Mrs M Barter <i>webmaster@rafayork.org</i>
Club Chairman	Mrs D Edgar
Club Deputy Chairman	<i>Vacant</i>
Club Hon Secretary	Mr S Edgar
Club Hon. Treasurer	Mr A Ramsbottom
Club Bar Manager	Mrs J Snelling
Club Deputy Bar Manager	Mr S Edgar
Club Fundraising Officer	<i>Vacant</i>
Club Social Secretary	Mr J Forrester
Club Tea Bar Manager	Mrs D Mennell
Club Trustees:	Ms S Richmond, Mrs K Woods , Mr R Webster
Aldwark Chronicle Editor	Mr A M Bryne

Please address all general enquiries to the Branch Secretary.

On the Cover: *The RAF Association Memorial seen during an evening visit to the National Memorial Arboretum in December 2021. (Photo Ian Johnson)*

CONTENTS

Branch & Club Officials	2	RAFA Council News	15
Editorial	3	Burns Night Supper	16
Branch Chairman's Musings	4	Platinum Jubilee Medal	18
RAF Linton site to be sold off	5	Finally	19
Dining in Night - 9 Dec 21	6	Forthcoming events	20
Christmas Draw - 11 Dec 21	8		
Turning of the Page - 31 Dec 21	10		
Sgt John King - Air Gunner	12		

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EDITORIAL

I want to start by wishing all York Branch members and their families a happy and trouble-free New Year. The last couple of years have been, shall we say, difficult at times, but I hope we can all look forward to a better 2022. We managed to re-open the Club again in July 2021 and, since then, we have remained open and have also been able to undertake some social events. Some of the more recent ones are covered in this edition of the Chronicle.

This time of year also marks the start of preparations for our Annual General Meeting (and more admin for me!). Last year we held the AGM on Zoom as restrictions did not permit us to meet up in person. If all goes well, we will be holding our **AGM at the Club in Aldwark on Saturday 26 March**, starting at 12 noon and I hope to see a good turnout on the day. There will be a few changes to some of the Committee posts and I'm very grateful to those members who have "answered the call" to take up some of the positions that will fall vacant at the AGM. However, we still need the support of our members if we are to survive, so come and support your Branch and Club.

Finally, this year marks the 40th anniversary of the 1982 Falklands conflict. If any member has experiences of that conflict and would like to share them with us, please contact me and I will do my best to publish them.

BRANCH CHAIRMAN'S MUSINGS

Now that Christmas is over and we are in the early throes of 2022, may I firstly wish all our members a very happy and prosperous New Year. For myself, it will be a different 2022. Those of you in the know will be aware that in late 2021 I suffered a stroke – a not delightful experience for either myself or my wife who was passenger in our car, which I was driving at the time to get our Covid booster jabs in York. We arrived at the vaccination centre after a few bumps and grinds with the car and straight into the hands of a doctor who saw that I was unwell and summoned an ambulance which took me to York Hospital where I was well cared for and allowed home a few days later. I was not allowed to drive after being carted away in the ambulance and I still await a test to see if I can soon. In the meantime, Dorothy and I have been able to visit the Club and see friends most Thursday evenings and Saturday lunchtimes and it's been with much thanks to Streamline Taxis* who I strongly recommend to all who need an efficient and reliable taxi company.

Anyway, I must now move onto the present time and formerly announce that I will not be able to continue as Chairman of the Branch after the next AGM (26 March 2022). I am standing down to avoid the pressures involved in leading such a dynamic organisation as RAFA York Branch and hand over, I hope, to Andy Bryne as your new Branch Chairman. Andy has proved himself in more ways than one, but in particular as Secretary and PRO in the past few years. I hope you will all vote for him at the AGM should a vote be required. Another stalwart is Ron Ford who is standing again, not only as the Branch Welfare Officer, but as the Deputy Chairman. He has stood in as Acting Chairman since my illness came about and done an excellent job. New Branch and Club Treasurers and a new Branch Secretary will also be standing at the AGM, and you can be assured we have discussed the roles with these people and are satisfied that they have the talents and expertise for the posts. Although Andy Bryne has volunteered to carry on, albeit in the role of Branch Chairman, two other stalwarts of many years, Alan Ramsbottom and David Pollard are leaving the Committee roles of Club Treasurer and Branch Treasurer respectively. Both have given excellent service over many years and will be hard acts to follow. Thank you very much gentlemen for your service. May you enjoy your well-earned retirement.

I know not what is coming my way in the future, but I do hope I can take on a role without a lot of pressure which I intend to carry out to the best of my abilities. The next Musings will be penned by your new Chairman after the AGM. God bless one and all in the York RAFA and my sincere thanks for all your support over the past five years whilst I have been your Branch Chairman.
*(Streamline Taxis Tel: 01204 656565)

Brian Mennell (Branch Chairman)

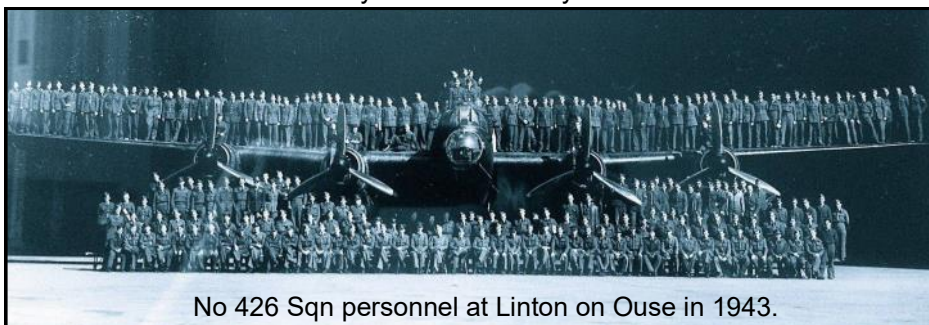
RAF LINTON ON OUSE SITE TO BE SOLD OFF

RAF Linton on Ouse, near York, is set to be sold by the end of 2023 after no alternative military use for it could be identified. This was confirmed by defence procurement minister Jeremy Quin in November 2021. A last ditch bid to save RAF Linton on Ouse from closure failed earlier in 2021 but a decision on the future of the site had not been made at that time. Under Ministry of Defence regulations, the site has to be offered to the former owners, in this case University College Oxford. The Station has had very close links with our RAFA York Branch for many years and it was a sad day when it closed as an active station in December 2020.



Linton on Ouse Airfield and one of the vacant Families' Quarters - 1 Jan 22.

There was some local media interest in RAF Linton on Ouse again at the end of 2021, particularly regarding the significant reduction in the numbers of children at the local primary school and the fact that many of the, now empty, families' quarters were located "outside the wire" of the RAF station's security perimeter and so could be sold off or rented out relatively quickly. It is expected that these houses would be made available in Summer 2022. The main site itself is currently set to be sold by the end of 2023.



DINING-IN NIGHT - 9 DECEMBER 2021

Due to the restrictions imposed by the Pandemic, we had been unable to hold a dining-in night at the Club for 2 years (the last one being on 5 December 2019, although we did have a Burns Night Supper on 24 January 2020). It was therefore a very great pleasure for around 25 of us to gather together again at the Club dining room to enjoy a lovely meal prepared and served by Gill and Dick Gray.



Pre-dinner drinks at the Club.

The dedication was given by John Mawson and grace was said by Brian Mennell. After the dinner, Gill was presented with a bottle of spirits by our Branch Chairman, Brian Mennell. We then made our way down to the lounge bar to complete the evening. It was good to be able to get together in familiar surroundings again, especially with Christmas approaching.



Members gather for an excellent meal.



Brian Mennell gives his speech of thanks to Dick and Gill Gray.

CHRISTMAS DRAW - 11 DECEMBER 2021

Shortly after our Dining-in Night on 9 December at the Club, we gathered together again on Saturday 11 December to enjoy a festive Christmas Draw. Planning had started at the end of September when our President, Dick Gray, and Club Bar Manager, Jean Snelling, took on the job of preparing for the Draw. Tickets sold very quickly and there must have been around 100 prizes to wrap! Some prizes were also donated to the Draw by members.



The Club had been decorated beautifully with Christmas trees and tinsel and there were some excellent jumpers on display. The winner of the best Christmas jumper award was Gordon Murden. Dick Gray ensured that the Draw was undertaken fairly and swiftly, whilst Club Chairman Denise Edgar worked tirelessly to produce the prizes, which were given to the winners in the usual way by some of our lady members. An excellent buffet style meal was provided by Gill Gray. It was really good to be able to have a Christmas get-together again at the Club and our thanks go to all members who helped to make it happen. There was even a brief visit from Santa Claus, who had a somewhat familiar voice and height and who reminded us of Ron Ford.

Gordon with his winning jumper.

After the Draw, Dick Gray presented the Harry Cowan Trophy for the highest amount of money collected for the 2021 Wings Appeal to Barry Snaith. Barry has won this trophy several times and invariably manages to collect the highest amount! The previous day, our Wings Appeal Officer, Ian Smith, together with Barry Snaith, Ron Ford and Graeme Robertson, collected over £1000.00 at Tesco Askham Bar for the 2022 Wings Appeal.



The Harry Cowan trophy which was won by Barry Snaith.

WINGS APPEAL 2022 UPDATE

Our Wings Appeal Officer, Ian Smith, reports that the Branch Wings Appeal total stood at **£4336.54** at the end of January. Well done to all involved in raising this total so early in the year!

TURNING OF THE PAGE CEREMONY - 31 DEC 21

The final Turning of the Page ceremony in York Minster for 2021 took place at 12 noon on Friday 31 December. The Parade Steward was Branch President, Dick Gray and Gordon Murden carried the Standard. The RAFA York Branch Page Turner was Rob Woods and the Raison d'être was read by Branch Chairman, Brian Mennell, who also read the dedication. The ceremony concluded with prayers by Canon Michael Smith of York Minster.

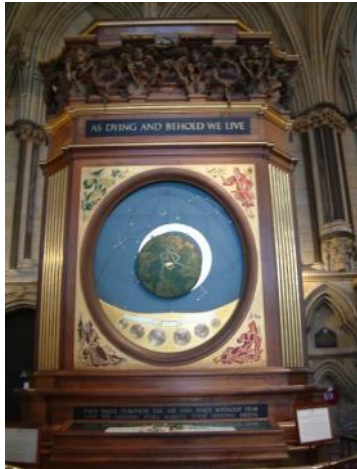


Rob Woods turns the page for the last ceremony for 2021

There were 11 Branch members on parade and around 6 or so Branch members in attendance. This ceremony also marked the end of Branch events for the year. After the ceremony, the Branch Club was opened for members to relax and mark the end of the old year.



Branch members on parade in front of the Astral Clock.



The front face of the Astral Clock.

SERGEANT JOHN KING – AIR GUNNER

In October last year, I received a request, via our York Branch Website, from a Mr Matthew King, regarding his late uncle, John King. Matthew and his family planned to visit York on the 100th anniversary of his uncle's birth. John King's name is listed in the Book of Remembrance in York Minster and the family hoped to be able to view John King's name when they visited the Minster. Thanks to a Branch member who is also involved with the Minster (Graeme Robertson), Matthew and his family were able to view John's name in the Book of Remembrance at the Astral Clock. After reading about John King's untimely death (sadly, like so many others in RAF Bomber Command at the time), I decided to undertake some research on the subject.

Sergeant John King was from Poplar, London. He is buried in the East London Cemetery, Plaistow, Essex. This is the story of his tragic death.

On Monday 29 March 1943, Halifax B.II JB848 ("DY-G") of 102 Squadron RAF, took off for a mission to Berlin in Germany from RAF Pocklington, near York, North Yorkshire at 21:58 hrs. The aircraft came down near Thirsk's Mill and Pocklington School at West Green, Pocklington, near York, North Yorkshire. All seven occupants died in the crash.

The crew of JB848 were:

F/S. William (Bill) Phelps Comrie - Pilot - Aged 27 - KIA RCAF R/95452
F/O Douglas William Francis Harper - Navigator - Aged 22 - KIA 127313
(NCO:1431010)

Sgt. Frank W Dorrington - Wireless Operator - Aged 23 - KIA 1330802

P/O William Hugh Jenkins - Bomb Aimer - Aged 34 - KIA 129161

(NCO:1437043)

Sgt. William J McGraith - Flight Engineer - Aged 23 - KIA - (Name is wrongly spelled, as "McGrath") 1365664

Sgt. John King - Air Gunner - Aged 21 - KIA 1609738

Sgt. Myles Christian Cambell Squiers - Air Gunner - Aged 20 – KIA

Families of 102 Sqn aircrew killed in Britain had the choice of having the burial locally or at their home town. Bill Comrie, Douglas Harper and Myles Squiers are buried at Barmby Moor. The funerals of the other four took place in the week following 29 March 1943 in their home areas, namely: Birmingham, Brighton, London and Glasgow.

Halifax BII No JB848 was built to contract ACFT/1808/C4 by English Electric Co. Ltd. at Samlesbury, Lancashire and was taken on charge by 102 Squadron at Pocklington on 5th March 1943. As a result of sustaining flak damage on 27th March 1943 and then on 28th March

1943 Cat.A/FB damage, the aircraft was repaired on site very quickly after both incidents. On 29th March 1943 it crashed at Pocklington immediately after take-off for an operational flight to bomb Berlin. Cat.E2 (Burnt damage) was the damage assessment. It was struck off charge on 8th April 1943 having flown just over 28 hours total flying time. The crash site was excavated during building work in 2014-2015 and a Merlin engine and other parts were found. Simon Kularatne, secretary of the 102 (Ceylon) Squadron Association, wrote: "A new doctor's surgery is being constructed at West Green, Pocklington. Earlier this year, during the excavation work on the surgery, a Merlin engine and other aircraft parts were unearthed on the site. The Ministry of Defence were informed, and the excavation was carried out in accordance with their procedures and no human remains were found. The Bomb Disposal Unit cleared the site of incendiary casings, no live bombs were found but a couple of incendiaries were discovered and safely removed."

The Merlin engine was formally unveiled at noon on 10th May 2015 as a memorial to the crew. A service was held at Pocklington's new doctors' surgery to dedicate a new war memorial to seven aircrew from 102 (Ceylon) Squadron who crashed there on 29 March 1943. The service was attended by former RAF Pocklington veterans, local civic leaders, representatives of the services and the Royal British Legion, doctors and staff from the new surgery, 'The Becksid Centre'. Relatives of four of the airmen killed in the West Green crash also attended. The 102 (Ceylon) Squadron veterans were Tom Sayer and Joe Wilson, then in their 90's.

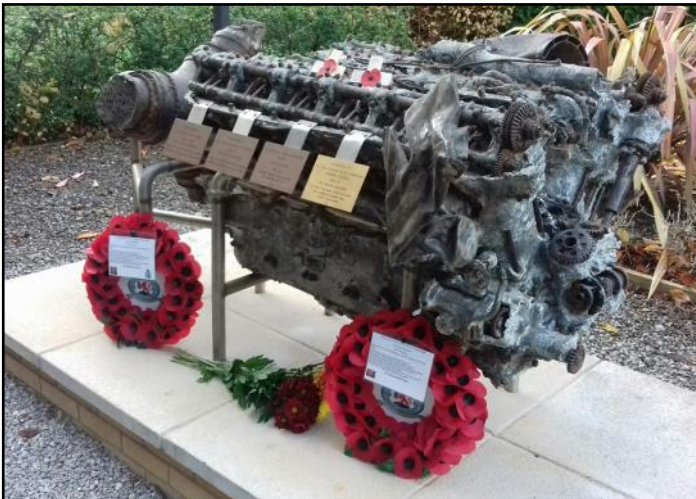


A Halifax BII, similar to the aircraft that crashed at Pocklington.

The sudden nature of the crash was, at first, somewhat mystifying. Both the pilot and navigator had shown such outstanding attainments in training and had survived the flak of the Ruhr Valley earlier that month, flying in an aircraft only a month old and which had flown to Berlin successfully two nights before. RAF records only state: "Attempting to avoid another aircraft, stalled and crashed soon after take-off." It is very likely that the aircraft crashed after trying to avoid another bomber in the circuit.

The aircraft crash landed in an open field opposite Pocklington School. The explosion was heard not only all over Pocklington, but an eyewitness, Tom Thackray, remembered hearing it from as far away as Melbourne. With its load of high explosives and incendiary bombs as well as about 2000 gallons of high-octane petrol in its wings G-George was soon ablaze. The fire brigade was on the scene within five minutes and fought the blaze for 32 minutes. The road was blocked and Pocklington's leading fireman at the time, (the late) Raymond Slaughter recalled:

"It was a very sad night. The seven were laid up dead and the atmosphere was heavy with the smell of aircraft fuel. The inferno and roaring noise could be seen and heard all over Pocklington and we had to work quickly because it was well after black out time and there was the danger of attracting enemy planes."



On 17th November last year, Pat and I visited the site of the crash, now the location of a medical centre. The staff were very accommodating and permitted us to lay flowers at the Merlin engine memorial (which is at the

rear of the medical centre behind a locked gate). It was a moving experience, but I was glad to be able to know more about what had happened and that these young men are remembered.

Editor.

RAFA COUNCIL NEWS

The minutes of the RAFA Council Meeting on 8 September 2021 have been published on the RAFA Portal site. Some snippets of news from HQ included:

1. The voluntary closure of Sudbury, and Ely Branches.
2. The voluntary closure of Hertford and District Branch and its establishment as a Registered Members Group.
3. The closure of the East London Branch (South Africa).
4. The renaming of RAFA Clubs Limited to RAFA Events Limited. RAFA Clubs had been established when the Association was looking at the concept of One Charity and that RAFA Clubs Limited had never traded. A change of use was being proposed to ring-fence risk from a planned 2022 event and it was proposed to change the name to RAFA Events Limited and to make some minor board changes. The Council approved the change of name of RAFA Clubs Limited to RAFA Events Limited at their meeting.
5. There was a 40% decrease in the number of Branches undertaking street collections in 2021. (However, York Branch still managed to do very well despite the restrictions.)
6. The Annual Conference Committee recommended that Annual Conference 2023 should be held at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole over a 24-hour period on 21-22 October 2023, to include one night only, for the purpose of conducting Conference business and Branch training, with a Saturday night dinner/event primarily as a social event.

BURNS NIGHT SUPPER - FRIDAY 28 JANUARY

We last held a Burns Night Supper at the Club in January 2020, so it was really heartening to be able to celebrate once more in 2022 when 24 Branch members gathered for the first official social event of the year. The supper was arranged, prepared and presented by Geraldine Woodhall, with assistance from Graeme and Jenicia. We were piped into the dining room by piper Mike Pringle.



Pre-Supper drinks in the bar.

After the RAFA dedication and grace, delivered by Life Vice-President John Mawson, we were served the first course, which was cock-a-leekie soup. Then the haggis was piped in and addressed by Ian Smith. Our piper received his well-rewarded whisky and then it was on to the main course, served with "tatties" and "neeps". The dessert was Cranachan and I must admit that I did not know what this was so I took a photo of mine in case any of our readers weren't sure either!





Piping in the Haggis.



Geraldine & her team with Vice-Chairman Ron Ford.

After the Loyal Toast, we had time for coffee and Vice-Chairman Ron Ford gave a vote of thanks to Geraldine and her team. Club Chairman Denise Edgar presented Geraldine with flowers and chocolates. We then adjourned downstairs to the lounge bar. It was a really wonderful evening and a great start to the new year.

H M THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE MEDAL



2022 marks the 70th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's accession to the Throne. As part of the official commemorations, a Platinum Jubilee medal is being awarded to the following:

1. Serving members of the Armed Forces that have completed five full calendar years of service on 6 February 2022.
2. Frontline emergency services personnel that have been in paid service, retained or in a voluntary capacity, dealing with emergencies as part of their conditions of service, and have completed five full calendar years of service on 6 February 2022.
3. Prison services personnel who are publicly employed and are regularly exposed to difficult and sometimes emergency situations that have completed five full calendar years of service on 6 February 2022.
4. Members of the Royal Household with one year of qualifying service.
5. Living individual recipients of the Victoria Cross and George Cross.

The medal (shown above) is made of nickel silver and being produced by Worcestershire Medal Service in Birmingham. This medal should not be confused with a number of other "cornflake packet" Platinum Jubilee medals that are currently on offer. Whilst very collectable, these commemorative medals are not awarded by the Sovereign and are aimed at the collectors' market.

AND FINALLY.....



A warning sign at a zoo in India.



A notice outside a café in Stockport.

Events for RAFA York Branch - 2022

Event dates will be updated on a regular basis on the Branch Website and Club Noticeboards.

Please note: it would be appreciated if you wish to attend any of the events listed below to inform the Chairman or the President so that we know what numbers to seat/cater for.

A limited lunch menu is available at the Club on most Saturdays from 1200-1300 hrs.

Sat 26 Mar	Annual General Meeting - Branch Club - 1200 hrs
Fri 1 Apr	Turning of the Page - York Minster - 1200 hrs.
Fri 27 May	Wings Collection – Monks Cross Shopping Park.
Thu 2 - Sun 5 Jun	Platinum Jubilee Celebrations.
Mon 13 Jun	Turning of the Page - York Minster - 1200 hrs.
Sat 25 Jun	Armed Forces Day Wings Appeal Street Collection.
Sat 16 Jul	City Centre Street Wings Collection.
Sat 17 Sep	Battle of Britain Wings Appeal City Street Collection.
Fri 30 Dec	Turning of the Page - York Minster - 1200 hrs.

Regarding the **Wings Appeal** events listed above, the Wings Appeal Officer will contact those members who regularly volunteer prior to the collection dates.

Please note that themed "dining in nights" may be subject to change/cancellation in order to avoid clashing with other more pressing Branch activities or events so please check the website: www.rafayork.org. For timings etc, contact the Club on 07495 651849 (Thu evenings and Sat lunchtimes only).