

# THE ALDWARD CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Royal Air Forces Association York Branch



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Branch Charity Number 500974

Current membership: 392

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## YORK BRANCH & CLUB OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS FOR 2023-24

President:	Mr R W Gray	
President Emeritus	Air Commodore W G Gambold RAF (Retd)	
Life Vice-President:	Mr J J Mawson	
Vice-Presidents:	Mr B R Mennell	
	Ms S Richmond	
Branch Chairman	Mr A M Bryne	<i>chairman@rafayork.org</i>
Branch Vice-Chairman	Mr R Ford	
Branch Hon. Secretary	Mr S Pearson	<i>secretary@rafayork.org</i>
Branch Hon. Treasurer	Mr C Thorpe	<i>treasurer@rafayork.org</i>
Membership Secretary	Mr R Ford	
Welfare Officer	Mr R Ford	<i>welfare@rafayork.org</i>
Wings Appeal Organiser	Mr I Smith	<i>wings@rafayork.org</i>
Area & Annual Conf. Rep.	Mr R Ford	
Branch Standard Bearer	Mr G Murden	
Deputy Standard Bearer	Mr O Mennell	
Public Relations Officer	Mr A M Bryne	
Buildings Officer	Mr R Webster	
Website Administrator & Aldwark Chronicle Editor	Mr A M Bryne	
Club Chairman	Mrs D Edgar	
Club Deputy Chairman	Mr R W Gray	
Club Hon Secretary	Ms S Richmond	
Club Hon. Treasurer	Mr S Edgar	
Club Bar Manager	Mrs J Snelling	
Club Deputy Bar Manager	Mr S Edgar	
Club Social Secretary	Mr J Forrester	

**Please address all general enquiries to the Branch Secretary.**

***On the Cover: Seen at Coventry Airport in December 2023, dismantling starts on Shackleton AEW2 WR963 in preparation for its move to the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington, scheduled for early 2024.***

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### DISCLAIMER

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### EDITORIAL

It's normally polite to wish people a Happy New Year at this time but, by the time this newsletter reaches you, time will have moved on a little. However, I sincerely hope that the year is a happy one. Currently (early January) there is flooding in some parts of the UK and a cold snap is forecast. Who knows?

Last year proved to be a busy and productive one for both the Branch and the Club. I hope that this continues into 2024, but I am conscious of the increasing burden that seems to fall on fewer and fewer members who volunteer to help at events and Wings collections. Our social scene is also declining in some areas too, which is sad. We are not alone in feeling the pinch, as the statistics on page 6 illustrate, and some of the information received at National Conference does not inspire tremendous confidence in the future. However, last year showed what our Branch and Club can do, both in terms of collecting for the Wings Appeal and in providing wellbeing for our members.

To finish on an aviation note, I'm sure I'm not the only one awaiting the arrival of a Shackleton aircraft to Elvington, albeit not flying!

## **AVRO SHACKLETON WR963 MR 2/AEW.2**

Featured on the cover of this newsletter, this remarkable survivor was first flown on 11 March 1954. It was then flown to No 38MU at RAF Llandow on 8 April 1954 for storage. Allocated to No 224 Sqn, it was delivered to Gibraltar on 5 October 1954 and issued to No 224 Sqn the following day and painted with the codes B-M. The aircraft arrived at No 49MU Colerne in September 1956 for modifications, which were completed on 11 October, when WR963 returned to Gibraltar. WR963 was flown to Avro at Woodford on 9 March 1959 for Phase I modernization, completed on 18 February 1960. The aircraft was then allocated to 210 Sqn at RAF Ballykelly later that month and coded Z. Phase II update was carried out at DH Chester (Hawarden) between March and November 1961. The aircraft served with No 38 (Malta) and No 205 (Singapore) sqns in Malta prior to delivery to HSA Langar in July 1966 for Phase III modification. It returned to 205 Sqn on 1 August 1967 which was its last RAF service role as an MR2.

WR963 was sent to No 5 MU at RAF Kemble in December 1970 for storage until delivered to HSA Bitteswell in June 1971 for AEW.2 conversion. It flew to RAF Lossiemouth on 18 July 1972 for radar installation and allocated to No 8 Sqn the following day. It was then based at RAF Kinloss from 1 August 1972 until returning to RAF Lossiemouth on 16 August 1973. The aircraft arrived at HSA Bitteswell on 1 March 1976 for major servicing and wing re-spar. It was returned to No 8 Sqn on 13 May 1977. WR963 was finally withdrawn from RAF service in 1991 after 15,483 hours flown, and saved from scrap by the Shackleton Preservation Trust based at Coventry airport.

The Trust intended to fly WR693 at UK airshows, unfortunately with little progress WR693 and her sister aircraft WL790 were handed over to Air Atlantique to find a way to return one to flight in civilian ownership. WL790 was prepared and flown to the USA in 1994 and flew on for another 14 years with WR963 becoming a source of parts for her more able sister. In 1997 the Shackleton Preservation Trust was reformed to restore WR963 at Coventry, with the ultimate aim to make her airworthy again. In 2012 WR963 was registered as G-SKTN and restored to ground running and taxable condition.

In February 2021, a partnership between Coventry City Council and The Rigby Group proposed to build a gigafactory producing batteries for electric cars on the current Coventry Airport site. The project would create around 4,000 jobs in the factory. If the project attracts an investor and government funding, the airport would close, and the gigafactory could be operational by 2025. Therefore, given the uncertainty of the future of the airport, it was decided to dismantle and rehome WR963. Dismantling began in December 2023 and relocation to the Yorkshire Air Museum was imminent at the time of writing.

## WINGS APPEAL UPDATE 2024



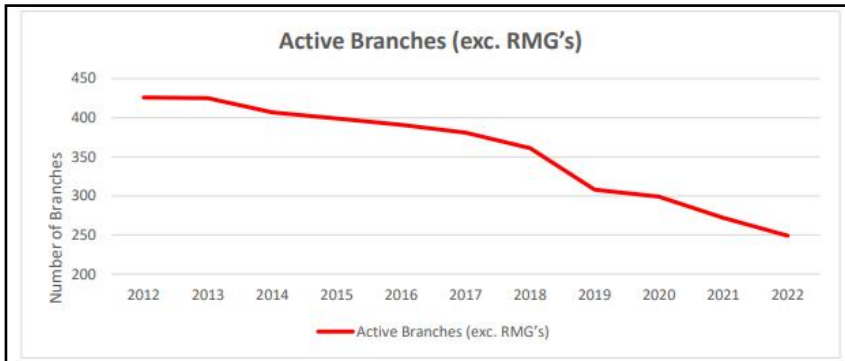
At the time of writing, the Wings Appeal total for 2024 stood at **£2927.08**, This is a great start to our 2024 collection programme, but we need your support as collectors to ensure that we achieve another excellent total for this year.

### WINGS APPEAL 2023 - HARRY COWAN TROPHY WINNER

On Saturday 28 October 2023, I was privileged to be able to present Branch member Barry Snaith with the Harry Cowan Trophy, which is awarded annually by the Branch to the member who collects the most funds for the annual Wings Appeal. Barry has done an outstanding job and this was the sixth time in a row that he has collected the trophy. Very well done!



## EXTINCTION LEVEL EVENT?



The graph shown above shows the steady decline in the number of RAF Association branches since 2012. This excludes the Regional Members' Groups. The data was provided as part of the 2023 post-Annual Conference report on "A voice for all" which examines the future of how members may vote at future conferences. There are a number of reasons for this decline in branches, not least the reduction in the size of the Royal Air Force itself, but also the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the passing of the "wartime generation" and the fact that National Service ceased in 1963. Several of the latter generation are sadly also no longer with us.



Consequently, to prevent our Branch and Club going the same way as many others, we need YOUR support now more than ever. Please help us to keep the Branch and Club moving forward in the years ahead.

## YORK FESTIVAL OF REMEMBRANCE 2023

The 2023 York Festival of Remembrance was held at St Peter's School (St Olave's) on Sunday 5 November at 2pm. Performers included Chris and Holly Marsden and Emily Webster. The excellent York Railway Institute Band provided most of the music and the compere was Sandie Dunleavy. The pastoral service was led by the Revd. David Hobman and a number of Standards were on parade, including our RAFA Branch Standard carried by Gordon Murden.

The choir was made up entirely of young people and a number of children gave a short description of family members who they would remember specifically when wearing their poppies. Denise Edgar gave the exhortation and also the farewell thanks. Regrettably, Sandie Dunleavy felt unwell at the interval so was unable to continue. However, the second half went ahead seamlessly as planned. (Photos via Dave Ruddock RBL York)



## **DINING IN NIGHT – 9 NOVEMBER 2023.**

A full house of Branch members enjoyed an excellent dining-in night at the Club on Thursday 9 November. The theme was “Autumn” and the dining tables were suitably decorated. Our thanks go to Dick and Gill Gray for a lovely evening once more.



## **HANGING UP THEIR APRONS.**

After many years of providing Saturday lunches and brilliantly-themed dining-in nights, such as the one in the photo above, our stalwart husband and wife team of Dick and Gill Gray retired from their volunteer catering duties on 31 January 2024.

Consequently, RAFA York Branch Club has vacancies for volunteers from the Branch membership to provide lunches and/or dining – in nights from 31 January 2024. The Branch Club has a fully equipped kitchen with all the necessary facilities and a dining room capable of seating about 25 people. Dining-in nights take place around 4 times a year, on Thursday evenings. Catering may also be provided at certain Branch events, such as after the Remembrance Sunday parade. If you are interested, please contact the Branch Club Committee in the first instance.



## **ACT OF REMEMBRANCE AT RAILWAY WAR MEMORIAL.**

A number of RAFA York Branch members attended the annual Act of Remembrance at the North Eastern Railway (NER) War Memorial at Station Rise on Friday 10 November at 1100 hrs. The service was led by Railway Chaplain Revd. Angela Levitt-Harwood and attended by railway staff, members of the public and serving and veteran members of the Armed Forces and Security services. Our Standard was carried by Gordon Murden and Denise Edgar read the exhortation. After the service, we were invited to the nearby Grand Hotel of coffee and to warm up! Fortunately, the weather was sunny.

The York NER memorial is a prominent feature, close to the city walls. It was unveiled on 14 June 1924 by Field Marshal Lord Plumer. It consists of a 54-foot (16-metre) high obelisk which rises from the rear portion of a three-sided screen wall. Built from Portland stone, the memorial is sited against the ramparts of the city walls. The Stone of Remembrance in front of the obelisk is a monolith in the shape of an altar, 12 feet (3.7 metres) long and curved so slightly as to barely be visible to the naked eye; it is deliberately devoid of any decoration besides the inscription "THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE".



The dedication is inscribed in the centre of the rear part of the screen wall:  
"IN REMEMBRANCE OF THOSE MEN OF THE NORTH EASTERN

RAILWAY WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY THE COMPANY PLACES THIS MONUMENT"; the dates of the First World War are inscribed to either side. The 2,236 names were inscribed on panels affixed to the wall. Behind the Stone of Remembrance are 15 slates set into the floor of the memorial in 1984, bearing the names of the LNER's 551 dead from the Second World War.

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## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY – YORK MEMORIAL GARDENS

The annual City of York Remembrance Sunday parade and service took place on 12<sup>th</sup> of November, with the veterans' parade forming up in Stonegate around 1015 hrs. The weather stayed dry and bright throughout the event, although it was somewhat chilly at the start. The RAFA York contingent included Ian Smith, who laid the RAFA York wreath, and the Standard Bearer was Oliver Mennell, escorted by Dick Gray and Mike Birchall.

The Service of Remembrance was led by the Revd. (Colonel) Antony Feltham-White OBE KHC and Canon Tim Goode of York Minster. The veterans' contingent was well-attended, with about the same number of people on parade as last year. Several Service and Cadet organisations were also on parade. After the parade, the veterans returned to Stonegate. We attended the Branch Club, where refreshments were provided and we were pleased to be joined by several members of the Yorkshire Universities Air Squadron, who kindly made a donation to Branch Club funds.





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### 2023 BRANCH CHRISTMAS LUNCH AT THE CLUB

On Saturday 2 December, a good number of York Branch members sat down to an excellent Christmas lunch, prepared and served by Dick and Gill Gray. The weather outside was well below freezing but the heating system worked fine and we all had a very convivial time. We are very grateful for Dick and Gill's hard work in providing a great lunch and also to Dick for putting up the beautiful Christmas decorations again.



## 2023 CHRISTMAS DRAW AT THE CLUB

The last Branch Club social event of the year took place on Saturday 16 December, when we gathered at the Club for the annual Christmas Draw. There were a good many prizes, including wine, chocolates and biscuits (always welcome!). A buffet was provided by Denise and Steve Edgar. Although there weren't quite as many members as in some previous years, it was still a busy afternoon and a great way to end this year's social calendar.



## LANOE HAWKER VC DSO



*Captain Hawker VC in 1915.*

This is the story of one of Britain's almost forgotten heroes of the air. Despite their heroism, Britain's First World War pilots tend to be less celebrated than their Second World War counterparts. The Battle of Britain and the Dambusters are mythologised rather more than their forebears.

On 25 July 1915, Captain Lanoe Hawker, a young pilot of the Royal Flying Corps, took off on patrol over Passchendaele. He was flying a Bristol Scout, onto which he had attached his trusty Lewis machine gun. Soon he met with a German fighter. He emptied a whole drum of ammunition into the plane, which fell to earth. Then he downed another. Finally, a third, an Albatross, which he engaged at 10,000 feet. It was the first time a British pilot had shot down three aircraft in a single sortie. Hawker was awarded the VC for his actions, which made him Britain's first ace fighter pilot.

Daniel Arbon, a film director and actor, wanted to tell Hawker's story. Over the past four years he has been working on Hawker, a short film that dramatizes the events which led to the pilot's VC, using CGI and models as well as a full working Bristol Scout aircraft. Daniel explained, "It was not a story I had heard before, but I came across it on another project. It captivated me because I hadn't realised that at the beginning of the First World War there weren't fighter pilots. It was something that evolved through it. I thought 'if it fascinates me and there's no films that cover it...'. That was a lightbulb moment for me. It was a golden opportunity – why not try it?" Daniel Arbon

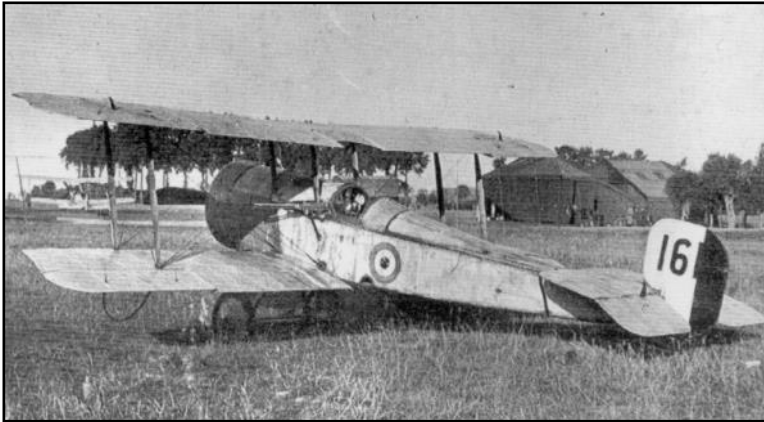
set about trying to get a shoestring budget together, with the help of crowdfunding and grants from the Great War Aviation Society. In the end he made the 23-minute film on just £20,000, shooting most of it in his garden. He built many of the sets, including the cockpits, himself, and also appears in it as Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Burke. Hawker's great-great-great-nephew, Lanoe Ertl, has a cameo as a plane-obsessed boy.

Air Vice-Marshal Peter Dye, President of Great War Aviation Society said, "As a lockdown project, it's one of the most impressive I've heard of. Having served in the Air Force for 35 years, I'm aware of the debt we owe to those early aviators, and yet the story is still not well known. Lanoe Walker relates so much to today. He was an outstanding engineer, tactician, commanded the first fighter squadron. But he was also an outstanding leader. The more we understand those early pioneers I think we understand some of their sacrifices. It perfectly matches what the RAF Benevolent Fund does in terms of reminding us how much we owe to those who serve."

Lanoe Hawker was born in Hampshire in December 1890, into a military family. His father, Henry, was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, while his mother Julia was the daughter of an infantryman with the 74<sup>th</sup> Highlanders. The young Hawker was deemed to have too weak a constitution for the Navy, but developed an interest in aviation and got his licence in 1913. He was attached to the Royal Flying Corps in August 1914, days before Britain entered the war and went to France with No 6 Squadron RFC in October 1914. In early 1915 he was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for a grenade attack on a Zeppelin airship shed.

During the Second Battle of Ypres, in April and May 1915, he was wounded by ground fire but carried on fighting, being carried to and from his aircraft between sorties. It was on his return to his squadron that he came up with the idea of mounting the machine gun in such a way that he could fire without interfering with the propeller. They weren't his only innovation. He also came up with "fug" boots, the fleece-lined, thigh-high boots that would become standard issue, and also a method for doubling the capacity of the Lewis's ammunition drum.

The following year, led by Hawker's simple mantra of "Attack everything!", the RFC was able to counter German air superiority, which was known as the Fokker Scourge. During the battle of the Somme, in July, he personally led two missions. AVM Dye remarked, "We're in an increasingly confusing, rapidly changing world, and the First World War in terms of everything they faced in terms of technologies was not too dissimilar," says Dye. "The fighter pilots were coping with a world that was changing rapidly. I don't think anyone would deny that's a challenge we face today."



*RFC Bristol Scout Biplane No 1611 flown by Hawker on 25 July 1915.*

Promoted to major early in 1916. Hawker was placed in command of the RFC's first (single seater) fighter squadron, No 24 based at Hounslow Heath Aerodrome and flying the Airco DH.2 pusher. After two fatalities in recent flying accidents, the new fighter, which featured a forward-mounted Lewis machine gun, soon earned a reputation for spinning; its rear mounted rotary engine and sensitive controls made it very responsive. Hawker countered this worry by taking a DH.2 up over the squadron base and, in front of the squadron pilots, put the aircraft through a series of spins, each time recovering safely. After landing, he carefully described to all pilots the correct procedures to recover from a spin. Once the pilots became used to the DH.2's characteristics, confidence in the aircraft rose quickly, as they came to appreciate its manoeuvrability.



*An Airco DH2 "Pusher" biplane.*

On 23 November 1916, Hawker took off on what was to be his last sortie. He and two other pilots soon encountered a group of persistent enemy aircraft. Hawker was separated from the others in a fierce battle with another Albatross, a newer model, which could outpace, outmanoeuvre and – with two IMG 08 machine guns – outgun Hawker’s Aircro DH.2. After a lengthy dogfight, Hawker tried to make it back to Allied lines. But with a final burst before his guns jammed, the German pilot shot Hawker in the back of the head. Hawker’s plane crashed outside Bapaume, northern France. He was only 25 years old.

Such was Hawker’s reputation that the enemy pilot collected his Lewis gun to hang as a trophy, and later wrote: “I discovered that I was not meeting a beginner. He had not the slightest intention of breaking off the fight.” The victorious pilot’s name was none other than Manfred von Richthofen: the “Red Baron.”

A window (designed by Francis Skeat) commemorating Lanoe Hawker was installed in St Nicholas church, Longparish, Hampshire in 1967. The design features St Michael above an airfield with two pilots in the foreground. A copy of the window is in the Army Flying Museum at Middle Wallop.

*Adapted from an article in the Daily Telegraph December 2023.*



York Branch Cross of Remembrance in Westminster Abbey Field , November 2023  
*(photo Steve Pearson)*



## TURNING OF THE PAGE CEREMONY – DECEMBER 2023

The final Turning of the Page Ceremony for 2023 took place at the Astral Clock in York Minster on Friday 29 December at 12 noon. The York Branch Page Turner was Gordon Murden and the RAFA York Branch Standard Bearer was Oliver Mennell. Tim Kitching carried the York Area Royal Observer Corps Association Standard. The parade commander was Dick Gray.



*Gordon Murden turns the Page of Remembrance.*

As with previous page-turning events, many attendees gathered at the Branch Club in Aldwark for light refreshments. This was the final Branch event of 2023, which marked a fitting end to a busy year for the Branch and Club.

**Prayer of the Royal Observer Corps Association  
by The Revd. David Simpson  
Hon. Chaplain ROCA York 20 Group and RAFA York Branch**

The Royal Observer Corps (ROC) has been stood down since 1995, nearly thirty years ago, after a long service to the nation during WWII and the Cold War. There was hope that the ROC would be called upon again, to perform some vital new role in the nation's defence. In that time, we continued using the prayer of the ROC. I decided that a new prayer for the Association itself was needed, with the view that there would be no prospect of new members coming in other than ex-observers, the number of which is slowly dwindling with each passing year. After working on various drafts, I finally came up with the finished version.



**THE ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS ASSOCIATION**

*Almighty God in your great love and mercy, we give thanks, for the Association of the Royal Observer Corps. To seek to care for those who gave their time, kept watch for the security of our nation during war and uneasy peace. May we grow old in the passing of time, remembering the comrades who have gone before, until we are no more but a passing shadow of time. That peace which we endeavoured to hold, be in the trust of Jesus Christ who, through him, is the true peace of the world. **Amen.***

I presented this new prayer at our ROCA annual reunion weekend last October and had the privileged to present a framed copy to our national president, Air Marshal Cliff Spink RAF (Retd) at the Reunion Dinner. (see photo opposite)



*Photo: by Dane Murdoch.*



*The winter sun illuminates the rose window after the Turning of the Page Ceremony on 29 December 2023.*

## Events for RAFA York Branch - 2024

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 Club Chairman or the Branch President so that we know what numbers to seat/cater for.

### 2024

Wed 21 Feb 24 Film show at the Club – “The World’s Fastest Indian”  
1230 for 1300 hrs.

Sat 24 Feb 24: Branch Club Annual General Meeting 1130 hrs.

Tue 5 Mar 24: Visit to Branch Club by RAFA HQ Senior Staff. 1700 hrs.

Sat 9 Mar 24: Branch Annual General Meeting 1200 hrs.

Wed 20 Mar 24: Illustrated talk on Antarctica by Geraldine Woodall 1230  
for 1300 hrs.

Sat 30 Mar 24: Wings Appeal City street collection (Easter Saturday).

Tue 2 Apr: 24 Turning of the Page Ceremony 1030 for 1100 hrs.

Sat 27 Apr 24: ELMS Service & Parade – Eden Camp.

Fri 10 May 24: Wings Collection – Morrisons Foss Islands Road.

Sat 18 May 24: RAFA SNINE Area Conference.

Fri 7 Jun 24: Turning of the Page Ceremony 1030 for 1100 hrs.

Sat 29 Jun 24: Armed Forces Day Wings City street collection.

Sun 30 Jun 24: Joint York RBL/RAFA Church Service, All Saints  
Pavement 1030 hrs.

Wed 21 Aug 24: Wings Collection at York Racecourse.

Sun 8 Sep 24: All Services Parade & Service, Eden Camp.

Sat 14 Sep 24: Wings City Street Collection.

Sun 15 Sep 24 Battle of Britain Service & TOTP Ceremony -  
York Minster 1400 hrs.

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