

THE ALDWARE CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Royal Air Forces Association York Branch



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Branch Charity Number 500974

Current membership: 403

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February 2023

YORK BRANCH & CLUB OFFICIAL APPOINTMENTS FOR 2022-23

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 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 | |
| | Mr B R Mennell | |
| | Ms S Richmond | |
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| Branch Vice-Chairman | Mr R Ford | |
| Branch Hon. Secretary | Mr S Pearson | <i>secretary@rafayork.org</i> |
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| Membership Secretary | Mr R Ford | |
| Welfare Officer | Mr R Ford | <i>welfare@rafayork.org</i> |
| Wings Appeal Organiser | Mr I Smith | |
| 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 Administrator & Aldwark Chronicle Editor | Mr A M Bryne | |
| Club Chairman | Mrs D Edgar | |
| Club Deputy Chairman | <i>Vacant</i> | |
| 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 Fundraising Officer | <i>Vacant</i> | |
| Club Social Secretary | Mr J Forrester | |

Please address all general enquiries to the Branch Secretary.

On the Cover: The first UK licence-built Westland Whirlwind helicopter flew in August 1953 and saw good service with both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. This image is of a preserved example in No 22 Sqn colours flying at the Royal International Air Tattoo in 2018.

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DISCLAIMER

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EDITORIAL

This edition of the Chronicle is the first for 2023 and, therefore, it would be appropriate to wish all our members and their families a Happy New Year.

However, the year has commenced in a very sombre way, with no fewer than three of our Branch members' funerals taking place in the month of January alone, with two more taking place in February. The obituaries of our three comrades whose funerals took place in January, Douglas Petty, Ray Ashby and Fred Spencer, may be found within the pages of this newsletter. I represented York Branch at the funerals. Sadly, I have to report that two more of our members, Norman Spence and Donald Leech, both passed away in January. Their obituaries are also included. Branch Associate member Terry Cooper also died in January, but I have no more information about him at this time.

This year, any Branch member who took part in the British nuclear testing programme during the 1950s and 1960s, will be eligible for an official medal. In the past, unofficial medals were available but now the Government has authorised an official medal for recipients. At present, I have not seen an image of the medal but, once one is available, I will post the illustration on our website.

NOTICE OF BRANCH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

Notice is hereby given that the 77th Annual General Meeting of the RAF Association York Branch will take place on **Saturday 11 March 2023** at RAFA House, Aldwark, York, commencing at 12 noon.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, we will have held our Branch Club AGM at RAFA House in Aldwark (Saturday 28 January). This is the first year for some time that the Branch Club AGM was held separately from the Branch AGM (the latter will be held on Saturday 11 March) but RAF Association regulations state that the two AGMs be held separately with the Club AGM being held first (Standard Club Rule 55). To date, I can find no obvious reason why this should be so, but perhaps someone may enlighten me!



The late Douglas Petty in the “office” of the YAM Halifax bomber at Elvington in 2019. (photo YAM)

UNITED KINGDOM NUCLEAR TESTS MEDAL TO BE AWARDED

In November 2022 the Government announced that veterans who took part in the UK's nuclear testing programme in the 1950s and 1960s would receive a new medal after years of campaigning. About 22,000 people will be eligible for the Nuclear Test Medal, introduced to mark 70 years since the first test. The Government said the honour commemorates contributions by members of the armed forces, scientists and local employees from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Kiribati.

A commemoration service was held at the National Memorial Arboretum, Stafford, on Monday 21 November. The Prime Minister joined Veterans' Minister Johnny Mercer and Defence Secretary Ben Wallace with veterans and their families for the commemoration.

The announcement comes after groups, including the Labrats International charity, spent several years campaigning for atomic test survivors to be recognised. Alan Owen, who founded the charity for atomic test survivors, was inspired after his father James, from Cheltenham, took part in the nuclear testing on Christmas Island in 1962 when he was 21. His father died from heart conditions at the age of 52 in 1994, but Mr Owen kept campaigning over the years for veterans to be honoured with a medal for their services.



The UK Combined Services Nuclear Test Veterans' blazer badge.

Those who worked under UK command during tests between 1952 and 1967 will be able to apply for the medal. It can also be awarded posthumously to veterans' families. The first awards will be made in 2023. Until recently, it was UK Government policy that the dangerous work

undertaken by personnel during the nuclear tests fell outside the criteria for medallic recognition, but this has now changed.



The UK Nuclear Tests Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Anyone who has a claim to the award of the UK Nuclear Tests Medal should apply via the Ministry of Defence using the link below:

[Ministry of Defence medal form - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/forms/ministry-of-defence-uk-nuclear-tests-medal-form)

As this medal will also be awarded posthumously, families of deceased veterans who served on nuclear testing duties may also apply.

WINGS APPEAL 2023 - UPDATE.

At the time of publication (end of January) the Wings Appeal total stood at £2197.34. This is an excellent start to the year's collection programme and our Wings Appeal Officer, Ian Smith, thanks all those who have helped him so far. However, there are several collections booked for the rest of 2023, so please contact Ian if you are able to assist, even if it is only for an hour or two.

RAFA YORK BRANCH RAF LEEMING VISIT - 12 DECEMBER 2022.

On the 12th of December, a group of 9 members of RAFA York Branch took part in the RAFA North of England Branch Visit to RAF Leeming. The visit was organised by Flight Sergeant Si Milner, the senior RAFALO for the North of England, Scotland and NI.

Si, with the able assistance of his organising committee, put together an interesting and varied itinerary. Having split into 4 groups we were ferried around 5 locations which I will cover in more detail below.

The first port of call for the group I was with was the Tactical Communications Wing (TCW) museum. Here we were shown a very detailed history of TCW from its inception in the Second World War through to operations carried out in support of Operation Herrick in Afghanistan. Of particular interest was Operation Biting, which involved Flight Sergeant Cox, a radio mechanic, making a parachute descent with a company of the 2nd Parachute Battalion into occupied France near Bruneval in 1942. The aim of the mission was to dismantle a Wurzburg Radar and return essential parts of it to the UK for analysis. This is where FS Cox came in as he had much experience of working on Radar and could recognise the important components. The raid was entirely successful and Cox was awarded a MM for his part in the raid. This essentially was the seed from which TCW developed as they became closely involved in working with combat units to provide the technical support that modern warfare now required.



Ray Doherty at TCW



Brian Tanner at HTF

Following our visit to the TCW museum we moved on to the Historical Training Facility (HTF). The HTF plays a vital role in nurturing the ethos and core values of the RAF by remembering those who have served in the RAF and at RAF Leeming in particular. A moving exhibit at the HTF is the story of Flight Lieutenant John Quinton. He was flying on a training sortie in August 1951, when his aircraft, a Wellington MKXVIII, was involved in a collision with a Miles Martinet. The Wellington broke up and Flt Lt Quinton found himself in the tail section with Derek Coates, an ATC Cadet. Flt Lt Quinton picked up the only parachute available, clipped it on the cadet's harness, explained how to pull the ripcord and ordered him to jump. The cadet landed safely and was the only survivor. For this act of selfless courage Quinton was awarded the George Cross. Whilst at the HTF we met 3 members of 34 Sqn RAF Regt. They showed us the weapons they are equipped with, SA80 personal weapon, L115A3 sniper rifle and the GPMG.

After visiting the HTF we returned to the Sgt and WOs' mess where we were treated to a buffet lunch and met the Stn Cdr, Gp Capt Prendergast. After lunch we visited 11 Sqn Qatari Air Force. The Sqn provides advanced training for future RAF and QAF Typhoon pilots and is manned jointly by British Aerospace and QAF flying instructors. They are equipped with the Hawk T2 Mk167, an advanced trainer with a glass cockpit and state of the art electronics.



BAE Hawk T2-167 of No 11 Sqn.

Our final port of call was the RAFA Kidz nursery. The Nursery is funded by RAFA and situated on the base. It is designed to provide affordable childcare to both military and civilian families living on or close to the base. The facility is modern and well equipped with a large outdoor space, a sensory room and other rooms equipped to deal with children at various levels of development including those with special educational needs.

At the end of our tour of RAFA Kidz we returned to the mess where we had a group photograph said cheerio to our new found friends thanked our hosts and departed.



The visit was extremely interesting and provided a good insight into life and work at RAF Leeming and I would encourage our members to take advantage of the opportunity to visit if we are lucky enough to be invited back.

Steve Pearson



TURNING OF THE PAGE CEREMONY - 30 DECEMBER 2022

The final page-turning ceremony in York Minster took place on Friday 30 December at Noon. The event was well-attended by Branch members, several who are not regular visitors to the Club, so it is always good to see them at these events and appreciate their support.

The ceremony was overseen by the Branch President, Dick Gray and the Raison d'etre and RAFA dedication were read by the Branch Chairman, Andy Bryne. Ian Smith carried the Branch Standard and Tim Kitching the ROC Association Standard.

The page was turned by RAF veteran Graeme Robertson and by RAF serving officer, Gp Capt David Melmoth. Both are RAFA York Branch members. This short, but meaningful ceremony brought our Branch events for 2022 to a close.

The photo below shows the replica statue of Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II displayed in the Minster (the original, unveiled in September 2022, is on a recess by the main entrance to the Minster)



OBITUARY - DOUGLAS PETTY

Douglas Petty, 11 January 1923 - 31 December 2022

Douglas Petty, a former RAF flight engineer, who flew more than 30 bombing missions, passed away at York Hospital on New Year's Eve 2022.

Mr Petty's funeral was held at St Lawrence's Church, York, on January 11 - which would have been his 100th birthday. "We thought that would be a good way to celebrate his life," Nick Beilby, of the York Normandy Veterans Association also said that Mr Petty had been 'an officer and a gentleman' - and, first and foremost, a friend. He was a 'humble, highly intelligent man who, like other veterans, didn't take any credit for himself but would always pass credit to others."



Originally from Shildon, County Durham, Douglas Petty was a 20-year-old apprentice mechanic working on Rolls Royce and Bentley cars at a Darlington garage when he volunteered to join the RAF. His twin brother Alan joined the Army. Called up in June 1943, Douglas was assigned, after training as a flight engineer, to a Canadian crew from No 429 (Bison) Squadron RCAF flying Halifax bombers from RAF Leeming. Between 1944 and 1945, he flew 31 missions. Most were bombing raids over Nazi-controlled areas - including a daring daylight raid over Normandy on June 10, 1944, in support of the D-Day invasion.

Above: A wartime photo of Douglas Petty.

However, he and his crew also flew nine operations laying mines in the Norwegian and Baltic fjords. These were a different kettle of fish to bombing runs, he told an interviewer from the International Bomber Command Centre at the University of Lincoln in 2016 - because the aircraft flew in low, at about 600 feet, which made them tempting targets for German fighter planes.

"You'd be given the target where there was probably.. a German battleship, loitering and hiding, waiting to come out and attack convoys," he told the interviewer. "We did nine of those, and they were, well, exciting ... because it was on one of those that a (Junkers) JU 88 attacked us. "He came in from above because we were obviously...flying so low...and the mid upper gunner got him and shot him down."

Casualty rates in Bomber Command were notoriously high - as much as 50 per cent throughout the course of the war - but Mr Petty insisted he was just 'lucky' to have survived. He had several near misses - 'one or two holes in the fuselage' - and on one occasion some shrapnel embedded itself in the flight engineer's seat where he would normally have been sitting. Fortunately, he was sitting beside the pilot instead. The RCAF trained all their bomber crews except for flight engineers, which is why Douglas was assigned to an RCAF squadron. After the War, he worked as a mechanical engineer at airports in London and Cardiff, before working as an MOT examiner.

He moved to York with his family in 1962, and has lived here ever since - latterly in Stockton Lane. Margaret said he was a man who would never tell you what to do – instead he would show you. He insisted on teaching her car maintenance before she learned to drive, she added. "He said 'there's no point having a car if you don't know what makes it go!'"

Douglas was a member of the York Branch of the RAF Association. The Branch President Dick Gray; the Branch Chairman, Andy Bryne and the Branch Standard bearer Ian Smith represented the York Branch at the funeral. As well as his daughter Margaret, Mr Petty leaves a sister, Helen, and a granddaughter, Samantha.



The photo above is of Douglas Petty's 100th birthday cake, made at RAF Leeming. Sadly, it was not to be, but it was on display after the funeral on 11 January.

OBITUARY - RAYMOND ASHBY

Ray Ashby, an Associate member of RAFA York Branch for over 6 years and also a stalwart supporter and long-serving member of the Royal British Legion, died on 6 January 2023, aged 95. Ray was also a volunteer at the Yorkshire Air Museum, Elvington until a few years ago.



Ray at the RAFA Christmas Draw 2022 picking a draw ticket with Branch President, Dick Gray.

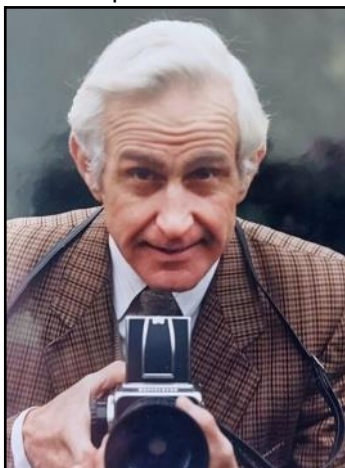
Ray's funeral took place at the York Crematorium on the 18th of January and was attended by significant numbers of comrades from the Royal Naval Association, the Merchant Navy Association, The Royal British Legion and the Royal Air Forces Association York Branch. Members of those organisations formed a guard of honour for Ray's coffin and mourners before entering the Crematorium Chapel.

At the start of the Second World War, Ray was too young to join up but then found that he could join the Merchant Navy, especially if he was economical with the truth regarding his age! Having joined the Merchant Navy, he was unable to transfer to the Armed Forces as the MN was considered a vital role. Ray recounted some hair-raising stories at sea. He was, however, always happy to recount his time on the large Cunard liner, the RMS Aquitania, since this fast vessel, converted to wartime troop carrying, was an oil burner!

Always smartly turned out, with a determined attitude and a joie de vivre which seems so often to be absent in many people, Ray was a regular attendee with partner Jean at the RAFA Club and we will miss him.

OBITUARY - FRED SPENCER

Fred Spencer, who died on 28 December 2022 aged 97, was a RAFA York Branch member until the 2020 COVID Pandemic, which curtailed so many peoples' activities. Born in Bradford, at the outbreak of the Second World War, Fred was too young to join up so he joined the Home Guard when he left school. Fred served at RAF Elsham Wolds during the latter stages of the Second World War and was assigned to No 103 Squadron groundcrew. He was later transferred to the Royal Navy Fleet Air Arm, so wore more than one uniform in his service. Fred later joined the RAF Elsham Wolds Association and became its President. He was the last surviving member of No 103 Squadron when he died.



Fred with Camera (York Press) and the memorial to Nos 103 & 576 Sqns.

Elsham Wolds was the site of an airfield on the Lincolnshire Wolds, north of Barnetby-le-Wold in North Lincolnshire. A landing ground was first established there during the First World War, but it was in the Second World War that it came to prominence as the home of Nos 103 and 576 Squadrons of RAF Bomber Command. Few traces remain of what was one of the first and most important wartime RAF stations in the area. It was also headquarters of No. 13 Base, comprising the Squadrons based there and at nearby Kirmington and North Killingholme. Anyone driving south today along the A15 from the Humber Bridge to the M180 will have passed over the site of the airfield without probably realising it. There is a memorial to RAF personnel at the site today.

In York, Fred became very well-known as the York Press chief photographer, from the 1950s until the 1970s, and his photos featured in

many other publications. He had the ability to convince people, who didn't really want to be photographed, to have their photos taken; always a good skill for a photographer. He was also a skilled joiner and one of those people who was good at everything from building model boats to real boats. He was a well-known and well-loved resident in his home village of Askham Richard, where he and his wife Betty now reside in the churchyard after his funeral on 25 January 2023.

OBITUARY - NORMAN SPENCE

Norman Spence died in York District Hospital on Monday 16 January 2023, aged 92. He was a member of RAFA for 28 years. Norman was also a member of the Royal Observer Corps (Group Officer). Like several of our Branch members, Norman was also a volunteer at the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington.



Norman's funeral was due to take place on Monday 20 February at York Crematorium at 1340 hrs.

Norman was well known to many of our members, especially those of his generation, as he was the Branch Welfare Officer for many years. He was also a Standard Bearer.

In 1999, Norman wrote and published a book on York's old Clifton Airfield, entitled "The Airport That Never Was, The Story of Clifton Airfield."

The photo shows Norman receiving a Presidential Certificate from the then RAF Association President, Sir Dusty Miller. This was on the occasion of the York Branch 70th Anniversary Dinner at Bettys in York, in May 2016.

OBITUARY - DONALD LEECH

Mr Donald Leech died on 18 January 2023 aged 92. He had been a Life Member of RAFA for 61 years. The funeral will take place at York Crematorium on Friday 24 February 2023 at 1100 hrs Donald lived at Sutton on the Forest.



Donald in the cockpit of an Avro York in 1948 and (right) in 2022.

Donald was involved in the Berlin airlift just after the end of the Second World War. As a Sergeant Pilot, he flew Halifax bombers that were converted for cargo. In the photo above, he is seen in the cockpit of an Avro York. These aircraft, based on a Lancaster bomber but with a wide fuselage for carrying freight and passengers, were used intensively during the airlift.

Throughout his life after leaving the RAF he kept up flying and had part ownership in various aircraft and flew to most places around the country. He was a keen member of Sherburn Aero Club.

In August 2016, Donald and 3 other crew members made a successful exit from a light aircraft that suffered an engine failure after take off.

EFATO - 26 AUGUST 2016



Donald and a rather sad looking Piper PA28 Cherokee.180.

All pilots practice it and they have to be able to demonstrate that they can deal with it before they are allowed to fly solo. However, an engine failure after take off (EFATO) can still come as a nasty surprise. This is what happened to Donald and 3 other crew members in a Piper Cherokee , G-AZDX, on 26 August 2016. That said, a good landing counts as one that you can walk away from and that was the situation in this case!

The plan was to depart from a private airstrip at Brickwall Farm near Hundon, Suffolk to fly to St Omer, Nord Pas-de-Calais for a pleasant bit of flying. However, a gremlin decided otherwise. The engine start and vital checks were uneventful with correct settings, pressures and temperatures throughout. After a normal take off run, the aircraft became airborne and the pilot expected the aircraft to climb away normally. Then, without warning, there was a sudden reduction in power. The pilot kept the wings level and carried out a forced landing through a hedge and into a field at the end of the runway. During the landing the aircraft sustained the loss of the right wing, distortion to the right tail plane and severe damage to the left wing. The pilot and his passengers vacated the aircraft without injury. The cause of the power loss, according to the Air Accident Aviation Board, was unknown. Bravo Zulu to Donald and the crew in walking away unharmed. The Cherokee was written off however!

A prayer for the stressed

Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I cannot accept and the wisdom to hide the bodies of those I killed today because they got on my nerves.

Help me to be careful of the toes I step on today as they may be connected to the feet I have to kiss tomorrow.

Help me to always give 100% at work, 12% Monday, 23% Tuesday, 40% Wednesday, 20% Thursday and 5% on Friday.

Help me to remember when I am having a bad day and it seems everyone is trying to wind me up that it takes 42 muscles to frown, 28 to smile and only 4 to smack someone in the mouth.

Grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked, the good fortune to run into the ones I do, and the eyesight to tell the difference.

Anonymous.

TWO SHOP NAME PUNS. FOR YOU



Events for RAFA York Branch - 2023

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 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.

2023

| | |
|------------|--|
| Fri 10 Mar | Wings Collection - Asda Monks Cross. |
| Sat 11 Mar | Branch AGM at the Club - 1200 hrs. |
| Fri 31 Mar | Turning of the Page Ceremony-York Minster 1200 hrs. |
| Sat 1 Apr | Wings City Street Collection. |
| Sat 6 May | Coronation Day. |
| Fri 2 Jun | Wings Collection - Morrisons Foss Islands Road. |
| Fri 9 Jun | Turning of the Page Ceremony-York Minster 1200 hrs. |
| Sat 24 Jun | Armed Forces Day City Street Collection. |
| Sun 25 Jun | Joint York RBL/RAFA Church Service, All Saints Pavement 1030 hrs. |
| Sat 16 Sep | Wings City Street Collection. |
| Sun 17 Sep | Battle of Britain Service & Turning of the Page Ceremony-York Minster time tbc. |
| Sat 30 Sep | Memorial dedication at Moor Monkton. |
| Fri 29 Dec | Turning of the Page Ceremony-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).