

THE ALDWARE CHRONICLE

Newsletter of the Royal Air Forces Association York Branch



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Branch Charity Number 500974

Current membership: 398

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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-Presidents:	Mr H R Kidd OBE	
	Mr J J Mawson	
Vice-Presidents:	Mr J Allison BEM	
	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 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	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: An RAF Phenom T1 training aircraft pictured on a foggy day at RAF Cranwell. These aircraft will be amongst 60 or so which will take part in the Coronation Flypast on 6 May. See page 12 for more details on the Phenom.

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DISCLAIMER

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EDITORIAL

By the time this edition appears, we will be very close to, or may even have witnessed, the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. As might be expected, there will be a significant Service involvement, not just from the Household regiments and the Guards regiments but from military personnel from all branches and trades. For many people, including myself, this will be the first Coronation we have witnessed, and it will be a very significant historical event as well as a social get-together. That said, our Branch Club will be closed on Coronation Day (Saturday 6 May) as most of our regulars and the Branch Club Committee, felt that this spectacle would be better watched at home. Please see page 17 for more on Coronation flypasts.

Our armed forces, in particular the RAF, are currently putting themselves in harm's way once more, this time on an humanitarian mission to rescue UK passport holders from the dangerous and chaotic environment in Sudan, particularly in Khartoum. As ever, we hope that the mission will be successful, with no loss of life or injury.

We have made a very good start with our 2023 Wings Appeal and we should equal or better last year's total. Well done to everyone involved.

Andy Bryne

ARMED FORCES COVENANT TRUST APPLICATION.

Last Autumn, the Branch Committee applied to the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust with a request for funding under the "Reaching and Supporting Armed Forces Communities (RSAFC)" scheme. We have been aware for some time that the ground floor of RAFA House has not been used to its full potential and that the toilet facilities required improvement (there is no dedicated disabled toilet for example). After our Branch President had put in considerable time and effort to draw up plans for the alterations, we crafted a bid and submitted it to the Trust in November 2022.

Unfortunately, our bid for £80500.00 of funding was not accepted by the Trust on this occasion and we received notification to that effect on 16 February this year. We knew competition would be fierce and we also received some positive feedback from the Trust with guidance on how to improve our bid in future, including restricting the project to one year instead of two. The plans for full use of the ground floor area and improved toilet facilities would benefit York Branch members and also the other veterans' organisations that currently use our building. We would also be able to open up our building ground floor to other veterans' groups. In any event, we have already done the "spade work" and so we fully intend to apply for any "pot of funds" that presents itself in future!

WINGS APPEAL UPDATE MAY 2023.



At the end of April 2023, the total collected for this year's Wings Appeal stood at **£8867.49**. This is an excellent result so far and there are still several collection opportunities to come, including a Wings collection at York Race Course on Wednesday 23 August.

RAFA YORK BRANCH CLUB AGM - 28 JANUARY 2023.

The York Branch Club Annual General Meeting took place at RAFA House, Aldwark on Saturday 28 January. The meeting was well-attended with 32 members present. The proceedings commenced at 12 noon when the Club Chairman, Denise Edgar, welcomed members to the meeting. The financial statement for the Club was given by the Treasurer, Steve Edgar and Jean Snelling then gave her report as Bar Manager. Sue Richmond was the Secretary. All Club Committee members were re-elected and the vacant post of Vice-Chairman was filled by Dick Gray.

RAFA YORK BRANCH AGM -11 MARCH 2023.

The York Branch Annual General Meeting took place at RAFA House Aldwark on Saturday 11 March at 12 noon. In total, twenty Branch members attended, including nine Branch Committee members. All members who had volunteered for Branch committee posts were re-elected and the new Branch committee for 2023-24 remains the same as last year. Attendance at the AGM this year was somewhat disappointing compared to 2022, but this was due, in part, to the very chilly weather experienced at the time and also the unavailability of some of the usual “stalwarts” due to illness.

At the end of the meeting, the Branch President, Dick Gray, awarded Presidential certificates to Ron Ford and Ian Smith for their outstanding work for the Branch as Branch Welfare Officer and Wings Appeal Officer respectively. (see photos below.)



TURNING OF THE PAGE CEREMONY - 31 MARCH 2023

The first page-turning ceremony in York Minster for 2023 took place on Friday 31 March at Noon. The event was well-attended by Branch members, including several on parade.

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

The page was turned by RAFA Branch member and RAF veteran Mike Birchall. After the reading of the Dedication and the minute's silence, a closing prayer was said by a member of the Minster clergy.

Upon completion of the ceremony, most attendees made their way to the Branch Club in Aldwark for light refreshments provided by the Branch Club Chairman, Denise Edgar.



WINGS APPEAL STREET COLLECTION - 1 APRIL 2023

Despite the chilly weather, the first Wings Appeal street collection for 2023 went extremely well, with a total of £2376.58 being raised, plus £5 through the Justgiving system. Gordon Murden looked after the roster at the Branch Club whilst 11 Branch members and some Air Cadets from No 2487 Easingwold Sqn stood out in the cold wind and collected a significant amount for this year's appeal.

Barry Snaith collected £413 whilst Richie Micklethwaite collected £395 (the RAF uniform definitely helps!) and Dick Gray collected £353. Ian Smith collected £240 and organised the whole event as usual. The air cadets did very well, collecting over £290, so well done to all.

EASTER BONNETS & RAFFLE – SATURDAY 8 APRIL

An Easter Bonnet competition and the draw for the Easter hamper took place at the Branch Club on Easter Saturday 8 April. Attendance was very good, and the Club was very busy. The ladies' Easter Bonnet competition was won by Patricia Harrington and the gentlemen's by John Mawson. The bonnets were judged by the Club Chairman's grandchildren.



The ladies' Easter bonnets before judging commenced.



The Ladies' Bonnet winner, Pat Harrington.



The winning Gents' Bonnet, John Mawson.

The raffle prize hamper was won by Jean Ellis and the raffle made over £150 for Club funds.

ELMS COMMEMORATION SERVICE & PARADE - EDEN CAMP

On Saturday 29 April, several RAFA York Branch members joined members of the Escape Lines Memorial Society and other invited guests for their annual reunion and service of remembrance at the Escape Lines Memorial at Eden Camp Museum. Gordon Murden carried our York Branch Standard, whilst Branch Chairman Andy Bryne laid a RAFA wreath at the ELMS Memorial and Branch Club Chairman Denise Edgar laid a wreath in her role as the President of York RBL.

Parade music was provided by the Corps of Drums & Bugles of the Yorkshire Volunteers and two pipers, and the Address was given by the Revd Canon John Manchester, the ELMS Padre. The main focus of this year's event was the unveiling and dedication of a second ELMS memorial; this one in memory of all the escapees and helpers in the Italian theatre during the Second World War.



Sir Nicholas Young gives his address with Standards on parade.

The Memorial was unveiled by Rear Admiral Angelo Viridis, the Italian Defence Attaché in London and Sir Nicholas Young of ELMS. Students from the Augusto Capriotti School in San Benedetto del Tronto in Italy and the Hernani BHI Instituta in Hernani, Spain, were also present and laid wreaths on behalf of their people. Whilst it was a somewhat chilly day, the rain held off much to everyone's relief!



Some of the York Branch members at the ELMS parade and service.

LAST TRAIN FROM ROTHBURY

Many RAFA Branch members will be familiar with Rothbury in Northumberland. It is a small market town and civil parish on the River Coquet. It is 26 miles (42 km) northwest of Newcastle upon Tyne. There has been a RAFA respite care and residential home at Rothbury for several years, but, more recently, the building has been converted to purely a residential home for ex-RAF veterans.



With the growth of railways during the Victorian era, it is not surprising that Rothbury was also served by the expanding network. Rothbury's Victorian development was assisted by the arrival of the railway. Rothbury Station opened in 1870, bringing tourists on walking holidays to the surrounding hill country. However, the railway line only lasted until around the middle of the Twentieth Century and closed in 1952. The photo opposite shows the last train ready to depart from Rothbury Station in September 1952, hauled by an ex-North Eastern Railway Class G5, No 67341. The sign on the locomotive reads, "Cheerio Rothbury, good luck."

A NEW SIGN FOR RAFA HOUSE



The new external & window signs for RAFA House.

Until a few years ago, a hanging sign was an external feature of our Branch Club building in Aldwark. Indeed the bracket and spotlights for a sign still remain. However, the original sign, which was very heavy, was taken down partly for safety reasons.

The badge for the RAF Association changed about 4 years ago and so we recently commissioned a replacement sign (thanks to work undertaken by Dick Gray and Bob Webster, with generous sponsorship from Ian Smith) and we now have a new external sign to place outside the building on the same bracket. It is hoped to fix the sign in place very soon. Bob Webster also arranged for the production and fixing of a sign above our front door.

ON THE COVER

This edition's front page shows an RAF Embraer Phenom 100 (Phenom T1). This type took over the multi-engine aircrew training duties from the King Air B200 and B200GT in 2018. Five aircraft are currently in service with No 45 Sqn, based at RAF Cranwell.

With its touchscreen cockpit and comprehensive navigation, communications and flight safety suite, the Phenom 100 delivers a quantum leap in multi-engine flying training. In capability as well as cockpit layout it will be far closer to the frontline types, the A400 including Atlas, onto which its students will progress.

- Powerplant: two 1,695lb st (7.54kN) Pratt & Whitney Canada PW617F turbofan engines.
 - Length: 42ft 1in (12.82m).
 - Height: 14ft 3in (4.35m).
 - Wingspan: 40ft 4in (12.30m).
 - High speed cruise: 405kt (750km/h).
 - Range with four occupants and reserves: 1,178nm (2,182km)
- Maximum operating altitude: 41,000 feet.

YOUR HELP NEEDED.

We need to be able to maintain our Branch and Branch Club committees in the months and years to come. Therefore we are requesting volunteers to assist in supporting the governance of the Branch and Branch Club. In particular, we need to cover the duties of the Branch Hon. Welfare Officer as soon as possible.

Sadly, in the last few years, the number of RAF Association branches and Branch Clubs have declined and the situation has not been helped by the recent COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-22. In our Scotland, Northern Ireland and Northern England Area, the number of Branches has reduced to around 280 (several of which are Regional Members' Groups) and there are currently only 14 Branch Clubs operating. (In total, only 55 Branch Clubs remain throughout the whole of RAFA).

We do not wish to be in the position to have to struggle to fill our committee posts in future, so **we need volunteers now** to ensure that the York Branch & Club does not end up in the situation which has faced many other RAFA Branches and Clubs.

THE INFANT MORTALITY MYSTERY IN BRITISH FORCES CYPRUS

The following article is sourced from a piece that appeared in the Daily Mail on 8 April 2023. It concerns the somewhat mysterious deaths of an unusually high number of babies born to UK Armed Forces personnel at Dhekelia Garrison in the 1960s. Similar articles have also appeared in both UK and Cypriot media in the recent past.

For anyone visiting the British Military Cemetery at Dhekelia Garrison in the Eastern Sovereign Base area of Cyprus, they will notice several teddy bears placed next to many of the graves. The bears are the initiative of Annie Macmillan Davies, who was inspired to honour the graves in 2022, while visiting her parents' graves in the cemetery. The graves mark the resting place of babies and young children of British families who died while their parents were stationed in Cyprus in the 1960s and early 1970s, with more than 450 infants (159 recorded as having died at only one day old) - buried in Dhekelia.



Dhekelia British Military Cemetery entrance.

Mrs Davies, who now lives in Cyprus, realised that many graves hadn't been visited in decades, a sad reflection of how military families had to leave their deceased loved ones behind when they were re-posted, before repatriation was commonplace. However, the battalion of teddies that she has placed by the infants' graves made such a striking sight that it has served as a reminder of just how many youngsters died during this period, reigniting speculation over what happened here. Now some of the babies' families are demanding a public inquiry into the deaths to end "60 years of torment".

Despite statistical analysis, carried out in 2010, concluded that the seemingly high infant mortality rate was in line with expectations at the time, for many, questions remain unanswered. An absence of medical records, thought to have been lost when a military hospital was demolished, and what has been

seen as a lack of transparency by officials, has fuelled wilder theories of a cover-up.

Others believe the deaths were the result of poor standards at the British Military Hospital (BMH) Dhekelia, where most of the babies died. Any inquiry, it is hoped, would end decades of speculation. The hospital was built in 1958 but demolished in 1978, supposedly due to earthquake damage. Retired RAF wing commander Bob Braban, 84, and his wife Margaret are among those demanding a public inquiry. They lost their son Miles in November 1963, while Bob was stationed at RAF Nicosia, and are certain he would have lived with better medical care. Bob recalled, "We were very young and had infinite trust in the medical personnel there. Looking back now, it's very obvious to us that the expertise that we needed there wasn't there. All the military mothers going into the hospital were young, fit and healthy; they were an exception to the general population in many ways so the death rates should have been lower, not higher." His wife, Margaret said she was shocked to discover so many other babies had died at the same time.



BMH Dhekelia in 1959.

The high turnover and short postings of personnel in British Forces Cyprus meant it was many years before anyone noticed the high incidence of child deaths. "We thought we were the only ones because nobody talked about it," Margaret said. Burial records imply that deaths peaked in the early to mid-1960s, falling considerably after this time. The last was in 1976. The statistics are disturbing; some 53 babies, almost half of whom were less than a week old, died in 1963 alone – a rate of more than one a week - with at least 11 infants and young children dying in November that year. The records show that, at the height of the deaths, infant graves outnumbered the adults there by almost two to one.

However, it is also important to note that when BMH Dhekelia was opened in 1958, it took over the responsibility of maternity care, including obstetrics and gynaecology from BMH Nicosia and catered for all Service families from the Nicosia, Famagusta (including Ayios Nikolaos) and Larnaca districts. Therefore, there would have been a relatively high number of unfortunate infant deaths at the hospital.

In 2010 the Ministry of Defence commissioned an epidemiologist at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to analyse data for excess deaths. A consistently high number would be a “red flag” that something was amiss. The report, by Professor Stephen Evans, found overall rates at all stages of infancy were generally a little higher than those seen in the UK but lower than Cyprus and broadly as expected for the time. He stated that infant mortality in Britain was around ten times what it was in 2010, mainly due to less sophisticated healthcare.

He suggested the peacekeeping role of UK forces meant there were few servicemen dying, which when combined with no elderly residents on the bases, gave the military cemetery a misleading appearance. However, the report and statistical data used by Professor Evans remains unpublished, and it is unclear exactly what dates were analysed or whether the figures included any repatriated babies or stillbirths.

There have been several theories put forward for the high mortality of infants; that it could have been an outbreak of cholera, meningitis or typhoid that caused such high numbers. Other theories include the high number of young married couples serving in the area at the time. Over 40,000 British forces personnel and their families were based in Cyprus, with camps in Famagusta, Dhekelia, Troodos, Akrotiri and Agios Nikolaos. Dhekelia was the only cemetery and bodies would not have been repatriated during this period.

A book on British military burials in Cyprus, published in 2014, suggested the death rates were almost double the domestic rate over a couple of years, including a neonatal death rate of 29.3 per 1,000 in the British military hospitals in Cyprus in 1964, compared to 16.4 in England and Wales. The following year, the post neonatal death rate (deaths up to a year after birth) was more than twice as high at 15.9 per 1,000 compared to 7.2. However, Professor Evans stood by his findings, suggesting the spike in deaths in this time was “compatible with statistical fluctuation” and likely the result of fewer births being registered that year.

Some relatives believe that mothers were also put at unacceptable risk. Mavis Jeffrey was just 28 when she died of complications from childbirth in

1963, less than a month after giving birth to her son Ian at the British Military Hospital, Dhekelia. Her husband Colin, an RAF corporal, had been posted to Cyprus from Lincolnshire the previous October. Her third pregnancy had been progressing well until the end when she developed high blood pressure. Doctors were also concerned about the position of the placenta, and she was taken into hospital ahead of her due date. Mrs Jeffrey had stated doctors had spoken of operating, but the baby arrived, naturally, the next day. She was kept in hospital with a blood clot before being discharged back to married quarters.

She collapsed 10 days later and was rushed back to hospital where she died on April 24, with her death certificate recording the cause of death as acute peritonitis – an infection of her stomach lining. However, Mavis' daughter Heidi, said her family believe that their mother died of blood poisoning because some of the placenta had been retained inside her. She said, "My nan and auntie have always told us she died as result of an infection from the afterbirth that hadn't come out and a letter she wrote following Ian's birth suggests they knew there was an issue with it. Everybody said that my mum should never have died and that if it had been in England, she wouldn't have. I've also been told she needed a blood transfusion, but they didn't have any of her blood in stock to give her it."

In a letter to her sister-in-law a week before she died, Mrs Jeffrey said she had spent three weeks in hospital prior to Ian's birth. She wrote, "They thought they would have to operate because the afterbirth (placenta) was in the way of the birth canal, but they left it too late and he was born on Tuesday 26th March." She goes on to say she spent a further week in hospital after he was born and was subsequently unwell at home. "I've only been home for a week and I've had to go to bed as I've not been feeling well because of some blood clots the hospital hadn't discovered." Heidi believed that the report did not go into sufficient detail. "What they should have done is looked at who was qualified in that hospital, what facilities did they have and what was available? What expertise was available?"

An MOD spokesperson stated, "We have investigated the number of infant deaths at the Dhekelia military base during the 1960s and an independent expert advised that the figures are in line with national mortality rates at the time."

Whether another inquiry is commissioned in future or not, Annie Macmillan Davies remains committed to making sure each grave has a teddy bear. There are 452 graves for children aged two and under and around 500 including older children. Since then, a Facebook group has amassed followers – many of whom are mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters of

those they are remembering - and they help replace teddies that are lost or damaged. As expected at a military garrison, medical facilities are still available at the Medical Reception Station (MRS) Dhekelia, which is on a smaller scale compared to the large hospital that was built in 1958. Medical care has also improved considerably since the 1960s.

CORONATION FLYPASTS

Aircraft from across the UK Armed Forces flew over RAF College Cranwell on 25 April in a rehearsal for Their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla's Coronation Flypast that will take place over Buckingham Palace on Saturday 6 May 2023. Royal Navy, British Army and the Royal Air Force were all represented as over 30 aircraft took to the skies to practice the formations which will form part of the Coronation celebrations. The full flypast will see over 60 aircraft, including the RAF Red Arrows and historic RAF Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, taking part in a spectacular show over London.



An RAF C17 overflies RAF College Hall on 25 April 2023.

The practice formation flew over RAF Cranwell's College Hall, which stood in for Buckingham Palace. The first aircraft to fly over College Hall, a Juno HT1 helicopter from RAF Shawbury, did so at 14:30 BST and the full display was reviewed by Air Vice-Marshal Mark Flewin, the Air Officer Commanding Royal Air Force No.1 Group.

Watching on from the ground was 93-year-old RAF veteran Squadron Leader (retd) Terrance Devey Smith who flew in Her Late Majesty the Queen's Coronation 70 years ago. At the time, Terrance was a 23-year-old RAF Flying Officer flying the Meteor 8 jet fighter with No 56 Squadron.

The Armed Forces coronation flypast will take place over The Mall and Buckingham Palace at 14:30 BST on Saturday 6 May 2022 subject, as usual, to weather, serviceability, and operational commitments. At the time of writing, the Ministry of Defence is also very busy with the evacuation of British passport holders from the rapidly deteriorating situation in Sudan.



Six F35 Lightnings forming part of the practice flypast on 25 April 2023.

Seventy years ago, on 15 July 1953, the situation was somewhat different, with Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh also attending a Royal Review of the RAF. The number of aircraft taking part in the Coronation Review at RAF Odiham, Hampshire, was somewhat larger.



Meteor F8s from RAF Biggin Hill prepare to depart for the 1953 Coronation Review Flypast.



RAF Canberra B2 bombers forming part of the 1953 Flypast.

The flypast itself took 25 minutes and consisted of 640 aircraft, including 440 jet aircraft operating from forty different airfields (yes, forty!) in the UK. In addition, there were over 300 aircraft lined up on the airfield as part of the Review.

The Coronation itself had taken place on 2 June 1953 (my late parents recalled that it was an exceptionally chilly day!) and the flypast over Buckingham Palace was nearly cancelled due to the weather, but went ahead in the end.



The line-up at RAF Odiham on 15 July 1953 for the Coronation Review.

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

Sat 13 May	RAF East Moor Commemoration Service 1430 hrs.
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.
Wed 23 Aug	Wings Collection - York Racecourse Ebor Meeting.
Sun 3 Sep 23	Allied Air Forces Memorial Day - YAM from 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 23 Sep	Memorial dedication at Moor Monkton 1500 hrs.
Fri 8 Dec	Wings Collection - Tesco Clifton Moor.
Fri 15 Dec	Wings Collection - Tesco Askham Bar.
Sat 16 Dec	Christmas Draw at the Club.
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).