

ROYAL AIR FORCES ASSOCIATION

SHREWSBURY AND DISTRICT BRANCH (No 250) 2020 NEWSLETTER

Dear Member

PRESIDENT'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Dear Members,

In the absence of our monthly meetings we have now been without personal contact for over nine months whilst living under the threat of Corona Virus. At last, however, as we approach Christmas, there seems to be a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel and I pray that this improvement continues.

Peggy and I have missed meeting you but I am sure you will appreciate that the work of our Chairman, our Secretary and the other members of our Committee have ensured that the aims of our Association continue to be maintained during these difficult times. I wish to thank them on your behalf.

On behalf of Peggy and myself, as we look forward to the resumption of our normal life, may I take this opportunity of wishing you all a Very Happy and Healthy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

JJB

ANNUAL ROUND-UP

1. In putting together the Annual Roundup of the activities of your branch I normally trawl through the Minutes of the Committee Meetings which highlights all the things that we did during the year. Thin pickings this year, as we have all spent a lot of time at home, or if out and about, socially distanced. I do hope that you have all followed the Covid avoidance guidance, taken care of yourselves and your loved ones, and that you are presently fit and well. I do hope that the promised vaccines do the trick and that we are soon back together at our monthly meetings, I certainly look forward to getting together with you all again. But what did we do in 2020?

2. As the Chairman mentions below he laid, on our behalf, wreaths at the War Memorial to mark the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain and on 11 November to mark Remembrance Day. Interestingly your committee members just happened to be taking their permitted exercise and happened to be passing by at that very moment (socially distanced of course)! The Chairman also laid our annual wreath at the war graves on 1 April. As you will all be aware our Association was very quick to react to the pandemic and swiftly introduced OpConnect to provide assistance to those in need. OpConnect relies on participation by branches in the delivery of the identified increased welfare need and our Hon Welfare Officer has been very busy, assisted by the chairman, in providing that help and authoring information notes out where required. I place on record our thanks to both for their efforts. Although we have not been physically meeting your committee has been active electronically discussing issues and responding when required to papers from the Area Office and HQ. One of the main issues has been how branches will carry out their Annual General Meetings (a legal requirement as we are a registered charity) if we are still unable to get together in March; advice has been received and your committee have decided that we will finalise arrangements in the New Year, but we could arrange an on-line event where all members of the branch could 'attend' virtually. However if that is not possible we could send out the necessary reports and accounts detail for comment, and indicate any votes that are required in good time to allow your responses to be returned. We could then send out the



Minutes of the 'virtual' or 'remote' meeting to keep you all informed. Whatever process we decide to follow will be in accordance with the Charity Commission requirements and we will make every effort to ensure that as many of you as possible have the opportunity to participate. We will also publish all the necessary documents on our web-site so keep checking for updates.

3. Finally, if you received this newsletter by post it indicates that we do not know your email address. Sending things out electronically significantly reduces our costs and makes communication much easier; so if you have an email address we would be very grateful if you would let our Membership Secretary, Paul Martin (paulmartin@orpheusmail.co.uk) know. Thank you.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

4. The Chairman writes:

Dear fellow Members of Shrewsbury & District Branch Royal Air Forces Association

I normally fill my Christmas Message with anecdotes about events and people who have joined us at our meetings and activities during the year. This year is somewhat different as the Covid Pandemic has meant that we have not been able to hold any meetings since March. None of us could predict how this horrible virus was going to impact our lives and activities for such a long period of time. Our core branch membership is largely in the "at risk group" and your Committee and I made plans to assist with any requests we received for assistance. As it is you have proved that you are a remarkably resilient lot, we were only asked to assist in a very small number of specific cases and the support for those was readily provided by volunteers including our RAFALO, Sqn Ldr Gary James, and one of his pals. Thank you to all who have so readily provided assistance without question.

Although unable to meet physically your Committee and I remain committed to running the Branch in accordance with all the rules and regulations that surround a charitable organisation. Contact has been maintained via telephone and email with the next significant activity trying to satisfy the requirement to hold an AGM early next year, our Hon Secretary will undoubtedly touch on this in his section. Whilst movement and activities have been constrained our Branch has been able to lay wreathes to recognise our 1st Of April Act of Remembrance, The Battle of Britain and more recently the National Act of Remembrance.

As our President has already noted there are some glimmers of hope on the horizon and I assure you that I will try to reintroduce our monthly social meetings as soon as it is safe and practicable to do so with safe being the operative word. For those of you that are contactable by email this will be the primary form of communication; for others we will continue to send information in the post. If you are able to access the Internet the latest information will be provided on our Branch website that can be found at: www.rafashrewsbury.org.uk.

Although still in trying times I am sure that you will all strive to make things as normal and safe as possible for yourself and those around you. I wish you a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year and I hope to be able to meet with many of you again as soon as we are able to do so.

Paul Sharp

DETAILS OF YOUR BRANCH COMMITTEE

5. Present Committee members are as follows:

- a. President
Air Commodore (Ret'd) John J Burke BSc CEng DipEL FIET
- b. Chairman
Paul Sharp
- c. Vice Chairman
John Tisbury MBE
- d. Secretary
John Tisbury MBE (Phone 01952 201902)

- e. Treasurer
Pam Small
- f. Welfare Officer
Paul Martin
- g. Assistant Welfare Officer
Iain Davison
- h. Membership Secretary
Paul Martin
- i. Wings Appeal Organiser
Paul Sharp
- j. Social Secretary
Mike Bradbury
- k. ATC Liaison Officer
Mike Bradbury
- l. Web Master
Mike Farmer

RAF Shawbury RAFA Liaison Officer – Squadron Leader Gary James

The Branch Standard Bearer is Shawn Marston and his deputy is Eric Blackie.

- 6. The Branch also benefits from the wisdom of our Life Vice Presidents, Mr Roger Fylde and Ms Rose Davies.
- 7. Please contact any of the above if you have any questions or concerns about the Association or your Branch.

DETAILS OF FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- 8. The meeting dates for 2021 are as follows:

2021	4 January	-
	1 February	-
	1 March	- Annual General Meeting (Either in person, virtually or remotely)
	1 April	- Commemorative event Shrewsbury Cemetery
	5 April	
	10 May	
	7 June	
	5 July	
	2 August	
	6 September	
	4 October	
	16/17 October	- Annual Conference
	1 November	
	6 December	- Christmas Social (?)
2022	10 January	New Year Meeting (?)

Our Social Secretary is poised – as always – to fill the above dates with events, once we have defeated Covid and

are all able to get back together again, but for now the dates are indicative for your diaries. As always it should be noted that the programme is subject to change; however we will always arrange a talk or event at each meeting once clearance is given.

MONTHLY MEETINGS

9. Social meetings are held at the **Harlescott Social Club, Roseway, Harlescott, Shrewsbury, SY1 4HW** meetings are held on the first **Monday** of each month commencing at 1230 pm. (If the first Monday is a Bank Holiday, the Branch will meet on the 2nd Monday). One of the principle aims of the Association is comradeship, and we would like to welcome every one of you to our meetings.

MEMBERSHIP

10. The Membership Secretary writes:

*Shrewsbury and District Branch Membership Numbers:
Life 58, Ordinary 96, Associate 29, GAYE 193: Total 376*

The membership of our Branch has increased over the last year, made up from: Life, Ordinary, Associate and Give As You Earn (GAYE) members; however there has been an overall small decrease in our non-GAYE membership. We are fortunate to be so close to RAF Shawbury that we benefit from Serving Members stationed there, which boosts our membership total. However, our active membership is almost entirely made up from retired members, their spouses and friends. We have a very welcome, significant number of Associate Members. We are exceptionally grateful for the regular attendance of our RAFA Liaison Officers from RAF Shawbury who keep us in touch with the news of RAF Shawbury and the wider Service in general.

Please note that, for most of us, our membership fee for 2021 will be due for renewal on 31 December 2020. Paying by Direct Debit automatically renews your membership; alternatively, please pay by sending a cheque directly to HQ RAFA using their pre-addressed envelope; however, if this is not practical, please give your subscription to Paul Martin or Pam Small, our Treasurer, who will forward it to RAFA HQ. The Membership fees from 1 January 2021 are:

*Ordinary: £24.50, Ordinary 4 Year: £92.00,
Associate: £17.00 (Non-Air Mail: £13.00). Associate 4 Year: £66.00 (Non-Air Mail: £52.00)*

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has severely curtailed our social activities. However, this has brought out the best in our membership who have willingly telephone-befriended others and also helped in other ways with social inclusion, such as shopping. Your committee has continued to work during the period of the pandemic, including sending out RAFA and Branch updates by letter and email.

Hopefully we will be able to return to our normal activities during 2021, and we will be most pleased to re-invigorate our monthly meetings at the Harlescott Social Club, [17-43 Roselyn, Shrewsbury SY1 4LP](http://www.rafashrewsbury.org.uk). We plan to continue to meet on the 1st (non-holiday) Monday of every month. Our Monday, lunchtime, meetings have always been a most enjoyable way of spending time with friends over a light meal and a drink in a warm and pleasant environment. The meetings will include a raffle and an interesting talk by a guest speaker. Once the current health restrictions are over, please do make the effort to come our meetings. If you are unable to attend the monthly meetings regularly, please remember that your Branch is always here to help so please keep in touch with your RAFA.

We have been very fortunate to have several new members join us in the past few months. However, information about new members has not always been received by your Branch. Please accept our sincere apologies for not contacting you (new members) directly to welcome you to our Branch. Please be assured of a warm welcome at our monthly meetings, when the re-commence. Please contact the Membership Secretary, or any member of the Committee, if you have any questions about RAFA or the Branch. Please see the Branch's Website: <http://www.rafashrewsbury.org.uk>

*Paul Martin
Membership Secretary*

WINGS APPEAL

11. The Wings Appeal Organiser writes:

The National Lockdown severely impacted on our planned Wings Appeal activities. Store collections could not take place (although I note that The RBL has managed to distribute some boxes in support of Poppy Day, I will investigate if we may be able to do the same?) and of course the Flower Show was cancelled and with it the fundraising activities we had planned. Notwithstanding these setbacks we were able to contribute £632.40 which had been collected before the restrictions were introduced, thank you to all who helped achieve this figure. Our contribution was bolstered by other donations from our Branch which are detailed in our Hon Welfare Officers report.

WELFARE

12. The Welfare Officer writes:

Our Branch's welfare work appeared to have been placed on-hold, from the start of the first Covid-19 "lockdown", because of the Covid-19 restrictions, which prevented any face to face contact with people wishing help from RAFA welfare services. It was not until October that your Branch Welfare Officers were invited again to make telephone meetings to obtain the required personal information for RAFA and RAFBF to assess welfare needs and awards. This method, although not as satisfactory as face to face contact, appeared to have been sufficiently successful. It is believed that, in the quiet months, our RAFA Welfare Region West (WRW) team at Weston-Super-Mare had been busy, working mainly from home, maintaining RAFA's welfare commitments in difficult circumstances.

RAFA's welfare spending had dramatically increased to cover its additional commitments during the Covid-19 lockdowns, including Op-Connect. To assist with maintaining RAFA's additional welfare commitments, we donated £1000.00 to RAFA from our Branch welfare funds; this was supplemented by our Branch electing not to receive its Wings rebate this year. Sadly, both RAFA's and RAFBF's remaining Wings Respite Hotels have been closed permanently; however, once Covid restrictions allow, we are assured that alternative arrangements can be made for those who need welfare breaks.

Making payments from our welfare accounts to welfare beneficiaries had become more difficult as it was not recommended to handle cash and it was difficult for recipients to pay cheques into their bank accounts. Again, WRW was able to help by paying awards directly into recipients' bank accounts by bank transfer.

Normal befriending had been overtaken by telephone befriending. Not only had our Branch Befrienders been kept busy but, additionally, RAFA recruited volunteer Branch members to make regular telephone calls to people who otherwise would have had little or no personal contact. Our grateful thanks go to all who worked hard to ensure that vulnerable and lonely people were kept socially included.

Providing RAFA welfare during these difficult times has been challenging. Your RAFA and Branch welfare teams will continue to work hard to help members of the RAF Family in times of need.

*Paul Martin
Honorary Welfare Officer*

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

13. ***The Annual general Meeting of the Shrewsbury and District Branch will be held in the Harlescott Social Club on Monday 1 March 2021 commencing at 1230 pm. (Covid19 regulations permitting)***

NOMINATION FORM FOR BRANCH OFFICERS

14. Attached to this News Letter is a nomination form for Branch Officers. Branch Officers, who are nominated and elected at the Annual General Meeting in March, organise the various events, and manage the assets of the Branch. Your Committee would be pleased to welcome new members to the Committee.

CONCLUSION

15. In conclusion, and on behalf of your Committee, may I take this opportunity to wish you a very Happy Christmas, and all the best for the New Year. We do hope that Covid restrictions disappear and that you will then feel able to find time to attend our monthly meetings during 2021.

In Friendship One to Another

John Tisbury

Keep up to date with your Branch by visiting our website at www.rafa-shrewsbury.org.uk

Shrewsbury and District Branch of the Royal Air Forces Association is Registered Charity No: 1073201