



# FLASHPOINT

ROYAL AIR FORCE & DEFENCE FIRE SERVICES ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE



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SPRING 2023  
[www.rafanddfs.co.uk](http://www.rafanddfs.co.uk)

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## Front Cover Picture

RAF Stanley "Trumpton" Fire Section from Steve Harrison



# Spring 2023 Editorial

Welcome to the spring 2023 edition of flashpoint. I would like to start as always by thanking my deputy editor Stevey Harrison for his ongoing support and encouragement in producing your magazine. Dave Kirk has inherently become our deputy, deputy editor so a big thanks to you as well. Couldn't do this without you both.

I feel I need to mention the work we as a committee do all the time in the background. We meet via zoom officially once a month but converse with each other on a very regular basis. Don Pape and Mike Clapton have been busy sorting out the AGM weekend, along with the rest of us trying to push forward the association to bring it up to date and attract new members. This by no means an easy task, in fact it's quite the opposite. My way of thinking is that all the members must know more than one person that isn't a member so if each of us were to recruit one new member each we could double the size of the association overnight. The most difficult task is how do we get the young RAF Firefighters of today interested in joining and contributing to our great association. If any of the membership have any ideas, please approach one of us as we would be glad of your input.

One thing, and I think it is a big thing that I am passionate about is the location of the AGM/Reunion weekends. These weekends are mainly located in the midlands each year. We have a massive amount of the membership in the North of England and in Scotland. I feel we are dis-cluding these members from being able to afford the travel costs. We have one member, Bob Ewing and his lovely wife that travel from Northern Ireland to the AGM each year, to whom I take my hat off to. Now I'm not suggesting that we have an AGM in northern Ireland but what I am and have suggested as a point of interest to the committee is that we should look at maybe one year have the AGM in the Midlands and the next year have one up North or yes even over the border. All ideas that need looking at.

All members can contact any of the committee members at anytime with suggestions or ideas that they have so please if you think of something then please do ask.

The next AGM weekend is as follows. Price not set in stone as yet but it will give the readership an idea of what to expect:

Friday 3rd November Sunday 5th of November

Sketchley Grange Hotel and Spa  
Sketchley Lane  
Hinkley  
Leicestershire  
LE10 3HU

2 x nights @ £226 per person  
1 x night @ £117 per person (Saturday night only)  
Gala Dinner only @£64 per person (Saturday night only)

This Hotel is four star and has a Pool, Spa and Wellness suite. There will be a 10% bar discount for the weekend. It would be fantastic to see you all there this year. Who knows I may even buy you a pint. I have enjoyed everyone that I have been to and met up with many friends from the past and made so many new ones.

I would like to ask the membership to dig deep for content for future editions of Flashpoint, it is after all your magazine. Not every piece of content can be put in to each magazine but it is always kept for future editions.

Well, I hope 2023 is a good year for all and I wish you all well. Stay safe and look out for each other.

*Cheers*

*Reg Metcalfe (Editor)*

## Chairmans Address

I cannot believe a year has gone by since I took up the Chairmans role. It's been a steep learning curve. We have all had to get to used to the new normal and I must admit, COVID has certainly taught us new ways of doing business! Using the Museum's unlimited Zoom meeting facility, my first task was to get the Committee online so that we could take advantage of this excellent piece of technology. Despite their misgivings they were all tasked with finding a suitably qualified grandchild to teach them how to use their computers over the Christmas and New Year period. With trepidation, the first online committee meeting was scheduled for a Wednesday evening in January. To their credit, we had a 100% attendance on that first meeting and apart from the odd absence to sickness and holiday it's pretty much been that way for every meeting that we've had since. We've met every month this year apart from August and generally

the meetings have lasted several hours and covered a multitude of issues. The odd sandbag is pulled up and occasionally the lamp is swung but we normally stick to the business of taking the Association forward. All of this has been done at zero cost to the association and saved all the Committee members the wear and tear, not to mention fuel costs, of using their own cars to travel to meetings. The time is certainly spent more productively.

As this is the 40th Anniversary of the Falklands Conflict, we decided to publish a special souvenir edition of the Flashpoint Magazine. I must congratulate Dave, Steve, and Reg for their efforts in producing a first-class publication that was very well received by the membership. Particularly pleasing was the fact that contributions were received from the old and bold right up to reports from personnel currently deployed. We also updated the

distribution list for the magazine that considered the many fire station closures and the redistribution of certain staff positions throughout the RAF and DFS. We also included USAFE Stations, those run by CAPITA and other Contractors. We decided to do a mail drop to those units not normally covered by the previous mailing list to try and generate interest from fellow firefighters who may not have been aware of the Association. I'm pleased to say that this initiative has resulted in several new members joining. Clearly, we cannot keep sending out magazines for nothing as this would upset the treasurer, so we'll continue our recruitment campaign using social media including facebook and the web site from now on.

During this reporting period I was made aware that the existing memorial plaque

*Continued over*

## Chairmans Address - cont.

at the National Arboretum was looking decide ably worse for wear and I'm pleased to report that this has now received a complete overhaul paid for by the Association to return it to its former glory.

There has been a considerable amount of work that has gone on to organise and execute this AGM. The pressures on the Committee are huge and it's only when you're embedded with the project do you understand the pressures that we are all under to produce the goods. I want to say a big thank you to Don, Mike and Sarah of SF Events for arranging our annual get together.

Taking the Association forward next year

it is my intention to review and update our constitution and governing documents to bring us in line with today's diverse and inclusive society. We need to look at the way we operate and see how we can make the Association more attractive to the current and future generations of RAF and military firefighters following in our footsteps.

I have only been retired from the regular forces for a little over 3 and a half years and already if I walked back onto a fire station, I would barely recognise the way that it operates now! I'm lucky in a way that after I left, I became a reservist and now work as a civil servant at an RAF base. This has enabled me to at least stay in contact

with serving firefighters and see some of the changes that are coming into effect. The Air Force has changed, the RAF Fire Service has changed, and I really do feel that we need to change in order not only to survive but to thrive in today's modern, slightly unpredictable world.

In closing, I would like to thank all my fellow committee members for sticking with me, for putting up with my moans and demands on their time, and for being there for me and you as we try to uphold the ethos and heritage of the profession that so many of us devoted our time in service to. Thank You.

## Memories of a Firefighters Son



**K**eith Dawes, son of Alan Dawes sent this story in memory of his dad who passed away in July 2022 Alan was a great contributor to the Flashpoint and an avid supporter of the Museum.

What was it like to be a firefighter's son? In a nutshell – Great! Who else could clamber all over a Mk6 and be driven around the airfield in it? As a kid it was brilliant.

My earliest recollections of Dad's job began around 1967 or thereabouts. Dad had been away for a year on an unaccompanied posting to Salalah and on his return was posted to the fire section at RAF Stradishall

in Suffolk. At that time "Strad" was the home to the Domini aircraft, training navigators to do their thing. The Domini was based on the HS125 business jet, with two engines mounted at the rear with beautiful swept back wings. I recall Dad taking me over to the fire section and being enthralled with the array of toys for a 7-year-old to clamber over. From the land rover-based crash 1, a 6 wheeled MK6 and what may have been a Mk5A. Not sure it was strictly legal, but Dad would take me around the airfield in the Mk6!

We lived on the married quarter patch, 34 Hawthorn Way, a mid-terrace house with hideous lime green paint work. It was the days of coal fires, and our next-door neighbour must have had a fire going. I was in my bedroom, where the upstairs fireplace had been blocked off with a piece of hideous lime green boarding. Well, the board started to smell a bit and slowly turned a funny shade very horrible lime green. Yes, we had a chimney fire, and I was able to see Dad's skills at first hand. I was a bit disappointed as there was a general lack of fire hoses and shiny suited fire fighters rushing around. The other recollection I have from "Strad" was the green stringed vests and long johns on the washing line. Many years later one was placed on a very hung-over member of the Fenland gliding club. He was topless, sound asleep, it was a sunny day, and he was not amused!

Unfortunately, just as I was beginning to enjoy playing with fire trucks Dad changed

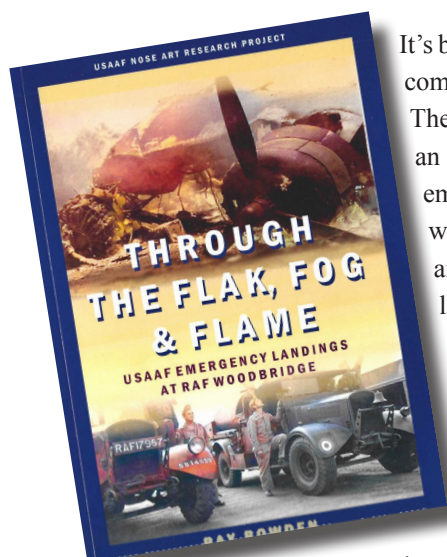
jobs. It was not until much later that I found out the reason. Dad never discussed being a firefighter and it wasn't until around 2015, when we visited the RAF Museum of Fire Fighting, that I fully appreciated exactly what he did, nor the awful scenes he and his colleagues must have witnessed. Dad had attended two very bad accidents in Cyprus and although he never showed it, these incidents had affected him badly, thus he re-mustered. I joined the RAF in 1980 and spent my 6 weeks at Swinderby square bashing. Whilst there I ended up in the fire section and one of the crews recognized me as Alan's lad. Unfortunately, Dad died unexpectedly on July 9th, 2022, and I spoke with several of his colleagues from days gone by, one of them being Tony Hillier. Tony reminded me of this meeting from so long ago.

For my RAF career, I was safely tucked away in the Victor flight simulator at RAF Marham. I can remember we lost a Tornado up on the Norfolk coast and I was part of the search party collecting wreckage early one morning. I was dreading finding the crew. Fortunately for me I only found bits of airframe.

I have also chatted to many other of Dad's colleagues, Dutchy Holland and Doug Fontaine just to name a few. Having listened to the anecdotes related by these gents, I was left with a sense of great camaraderie that existed between the crews. I know my dad missed it, and I take my hat off to all of you.



# Book Recommendations

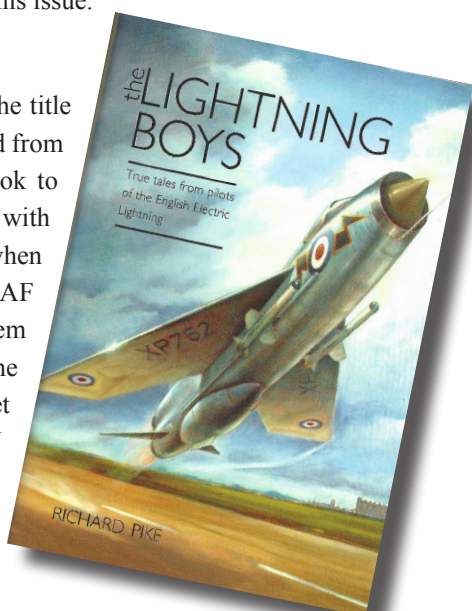


It's been a while since I delved into the books, but I've come across some which may be of interest to some. The first one is **"Through the Flak, Fog & Flame"** an account through American aircrew eyes of their emergency landings at RAF Woodbridge (Suffolk) which was one of three especially constructed airfields during the war to provide an emergency landing option for aircrews returning suffering from low fuel, under carriage problems or any other problems which may result in a crash. The other airfields were RAF Carnaby (Yorkshire) and RAF Manston (Kent) All these airfield were equipped with FIDO. Although the book is about USSAF aircraft nose art the stories of the retuning aircrew mention FIDO a great deal. **The**

**book is by Ray Bowden ISBN No 9798549767973**

There is an article about RAF Carnaby in this issue.

The 2nd book is **"The Lightning Boys"** the title says it all, individual stories from pilots and from places all over the world. Its an easy book to dip in and out of. Although I never served with Lightnings, I was at RAF Masirah in 1967 when 74 (Tiger) Squadron transited going to RAF Tengah. that's when I stood in awe of them when I lost one in a clear blue sky after the pilot stood it on its tail and went into "Rocket Mode" **The book is by Richard Pike ISBN No 9781908117151**



The 3rd and last one is **"City on Fire" Kingston Upon Hull 1939-45**. This may have a limited appeal to some of the members but some of you may have visited Hull when at RAF Sutton on Hull during your courses at the Fire School. For me it's a bit more personal. I grew up in war torn Hull until I joined up in 1965. My mum and dad were bombed out of 5 houses and my dad was a Firefighter during the war. Hull spent more than 1,000 hours under air raid alerts.

It was the target of the first daylight raid of the war and the last piloted air raid on Britain.

Hull was the most severely damaged town or city country during the war, 95 per cent of its houses being damaged or destroyed. **The book is by Nick Cooper ISBN No 9781445672045**

**There is also eBook version ISBN 978144567205 2.**

*From "The Silverfox"*

## Obituaries

Yet more of our fire- fighting comrades who we have shared our lives with have passed on.

*"We will remember them, for as long as we live, they will live on as well"*

Those lost to us are listed below and this includes both association members and non-members. Our thoughts and prayers are with their loved one. Rest in Peace Bothers.



Leslie Williams, member 676,  
26th August 2022

John Morton August 2022

Terry Robinson September 2022

Anselmo Alecio September 2022

Jack (John) Ashurst, member 1156,  
October 2022

Richard C Parker, member 268,  
October 2022

Ray Carlton November 2022

Allen Price, member 257,  
6th December 22

Carl Mills

Ray Preston member 804

Jeffery Gardner

Dave Jowett member 433,  
30th January 22

# JOINING THE CLAN

This is a story about the naivety of youth. It took place at a time just two years into my career, having joined the RAF at the tender age of 17. I was stationed at the sleepy hollow that was RAF Buchan, a strange world of radars, bunkers and scopies; when I received the news that I was to be detached to the USAF base at RAF Sculthorpe. The purpose of the deployment was to provide fire cover for the Jaguar Squadrons that were flying out of there whilst boltholed from RAF Coltishall, which was having its runway resurfaced.

Working with live aircraft was a bit of a steep learning curve for me and involved getting acquainted with terms such as "Expedite!" whilst working on the runway; but one of the greatest lessons I learned was more to do with the social side of cohabiting with US Forces than anything else.

We were living and working with American Firemen on the base, and one Friday evening Terry Ablett and myself, having first imbibed a few drinks in the barrack block, ventured out to an American style 'Bop'. On arrival at the venue, we were told by the Yank on the door that it was a fancy dress event, and would cost £1 to enter, or alternatively 50p if we were to get into costume.

As a hard-up teenager from Paisley, and being true to my Scottish roots, I suggested to Terry that we should go back to the block and improvise with whatever we could find. And there it was; dirty white sheets, we could rip a hole in middle and go as ghosts! ... and better still pillow slips for our heads.

Clad in our freshly donned outfits, we ran back to the bop with 50p coins in hand and demanded entry. The Yank lad kinda looked at us now, unsmiling, but took our cash anyway. On entry, we also noticed that as we went to bar and walked around in our ghostly gear, people weren't their usual friendly selves. In fact three American firemen (lads of colour and muscle) came up to us as if they wanted to do us untold harm! I continued to make ghostly noises and raise my arms to frighten my yank pals, but they weren't laughing.

Now what saved us was that I was carrying a Fire Department Baseball Cap and the biggest lad of colour (his name was Free) noticed it and shouted,

"Is that you Scottish Kenny???"



"Yes" I replied, giving him a ghostly "Boooo!" for added effect.

Well, they ripped off our hoods and when they recognised us they shouted:

**"WHAT THE F\*CK ARE YOU DOING?!?!?"**

I explained, "I'm a ghost you fools..."

**"NO YOU'RE NOT... YOU'RE KKK!!!"**

So by now I'm genuinely puzzled as to what the fuss is all about, and as I surveyed my surroundings it appeared that most people in bop were looking on with open mouths.

While nervously laughing I asked "What's KKK?"

Up until then I'd never heard of it, and these yank lads of colour were the first non-white guys I had met in my life. They duly explained what the KKK was all about, and we conceded we were dicks.

So all I could do was get my belt on outside of the sheet and turn it into a toga. I announced in a loud voice to all and sundry....

**"I AM NOW A ROMAN!!!"**

The yanks duly forgave us, and we had plenty laughs about it for months afterwards.

... and that folks is a true story.

*Kenny McLaughlin*



## A WARM WELCOME TO NEW AND RETURNING MEMBERS

Its pleasing to see new members joining and re- joining we would like to see you at future reunions and please contribute to the Flashpoint as this is your magazine. Thank you.

277 W. A. M. Davies. Re- joining

986 Kenneth Godfrey. Re-joining

677 Terry Smallman Re-joining

737 John Armson Re-joining

New Members;

1178 Andrew Naylor

1179 Martin Turner

1180 Alan James Winters.

1181 Andy Phipps

1182 Dave Pearson

1183 Simon Wilson

1184 John Baines.

1185 Christopher James Rickard

## ATTENTION TO ALL PRESENT MEMBERS

Brian Jones the Membership Secretary has asked if you could forward to him any change in contact details i.e., Change of address, phone numbers and email. This will ensure the prompt distribution of Flashpoint and maintain his records. Thank you.



# Restoration of RAF & DFS Plaque Memorial

Restoration of RAF & DFS Plaque at the National Memorial Arboretum.

In 2008 the Association organized and funded the planting of a tree at the National Memorial Arboretum. I believe it is a Silver Birch and is in the first row and faces the National Memorial. At the base of the tree an Association plaque was placed, and it reads:-

“Dedicated to the Firefighters of the RAF and DFS Fire and Rescue Service who gave their lives whilst serving their country in War and Peace. RAF& DFSA 2008”.

The tree and the plaque have been admired by me and many of our members who have made the time to visit the National Memorial Arboretum over the years since 2008.

In March 2022 a member visiting the National Memorial Arboretum noticed that our plaque was looking a little worse for wear and felt that the years had not been kind to the plaque while our tree looked healthy. He informed our Chairman, Steve Shirley, who in turn informed the rest of the committee.

Following this, Steve Shirley requested at



*Plaque restored to its former glory.*

the next committee meeting that I made some inquiries to the NMA as to what was the procedure to take the plaque away and have it restored.

After a number of reminders to the NMA I was informed that only they were authorised to remove and restore any of the plaques and the cost would be £150. I received an application form a few days later.

Not wishing to proceed at such a cost to what to me seemed a simple exercise, I brought up the refurbishment update at

our next zoom meeting on the 27 April 2022. While the £150 was also a surprise to the committee, there was no other option. So on the 29th April 2022 a cheque accompanied by a completed plaque refurbishment application was forwarded to the NMA.

After a number of reminders over a couple months I was finally informed that the RAF&DFSA plaque had been restored and returned to the base of our tree.

As the Association has a member, Tony La Planche (1157), who lives in the local village of Alrewas, I asked him if he would take a look at our newly refurbished plaque, and he agreed.

Tony confirmed the next day that our plaque looked like new and sent me a photograph, see attached.

Tony has also agreed to keep an eye on our new Memorial after it has been erected, which should be by late spring this year. The application is currently in the hands of the NMA. management.

*Trevor Hayes  
Treasurer*



*Position of the plaque next to the tree*



# FIDO - ANOTHER STORY



**R**OYAL AIR FORCE CARNABY is a former Royal Air Force emergency landing strip that offered crippled bombers a safe place to land near the English coast during the Second World War. It was situated 2 miles (3.2km) south-west of Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire.

Carnaby was one of three special airfields created during World War Two as an Emergency Landing Ground for aircraft, especially heavy bombers. They quickly landed if they were either damaged through enemy action, suffered technical malfunctions or had to divert for weather reasons. Key to this idea was a huge runway in terms of both length and breadth. At 9,000 feet (not including grass extensions at either end) it was half as long again as a standard bomber runway, while the width of 750 feet was five times the norm. Apart from the runway, there were few other facilities available, but this did not detract from the airfield's significance; the runway was also equipped with the FIDO fog-clearing device.

Over the next year and a half, after first opening in March 1944, Carnaby enabled more than 1,500 aircraft to land safely, thereby saving thousands of lives in the process. The airfield was soon quickly run down but this was far from the end of its life. For a while, immediately after the war, the place, then known officially in RAF circles as Bridlington, became a Relief Landing Ground for various training units. No 203 Advanced Flying School went a stage further by being temporarily based there in the summer of 1950 owing to runway resurfacing at Driffield.

Later on, in 1959 the airfield switched

roles again to become one of Britain's Thor intermediate range ballistic missile bases and served as home to No 150 Squadron. Somewhat unusually, these nuclear devices were joined the following year by defensive Bloodhound surface-to-air missiles of No 247 Squadron, but the decreasing immediate global threat resulted in both of these units disbanding by the end of 1963.

By 1969 Carnaby had closed altogether, yet this was still not the end for this remarkable place as two local authorities purchased the site in 1972 for it to become an industrial estate. Motor sport lasted for a number of years too, but the former activity gradually predominated to the extent that company premises cover most of the runway today; a distinctive dispersal loop on the south-west side has since disappeared. Even so, when driving along what is now Lancaster Road, it is still relatively easy to imagine the sheer scale of this place in its flying days.

The illustration, titled 'Hell, Fire, FIDO and a Halifax – RAF Carnaby' is by Bridlington artist and sculptor, Stephen Carvill, and shows a Halifax bomber coming into land guided by the famed flaming guidance system known as FIDO - Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation.

Even more remarkable is the story behind the illustration; the Halifax- a Coastal Command aircraft- was returning from an anti-shipping patrol and had diverted from its Shetland base after being damaged in a self-inflicted accident. The mid upper gunner was thought lost in the incident, but after landing safely at Carnaby, the crew discovered and bruised crewmate had been

dangling underneath the plane all the time, his parachute harness having caught up in the fuselage. In 2014, a group of local residents formed a committee and charity, Carnaby Airfield Memorial, to raise funds for a memorial to mark the existence of RAF Carnaby and to commemorate the contribution and sacrifices that were made by aircrews during World War Two.

Local artist and sculptor, Stephen Carvill, was commissioned to design the memorial, which is entitled "Hell, Fire, FIDO and a Halifax – RAF Carnaby". The artwork was inspired by a true story that occurred at RAF Carnaby in April 1945. It is a truly remarkable story of bravery, endurance, and stoicism. The artwork depicts a Halifax III bomber coming into land during foggy weather, FIDO was needed for a safe landing and hanging perilously beneath the aircraft is a crew member who was thought to have been lost at sea following a bomber mission off the Norwegian coast.

The glass panels are fitted with LED lights to light up the memorial at night. When lit, the flames are illuminated; bringing the artwork to life and giving the viewer an insight as to how FIDO was used to guide aircraft during poor visibility.

The memorial was erected in May 2019 and was officially opened on the 7th of July 2019 by Dr Ian Bell. The memorial is part-funded from grants from the Fraisthorpe Wind Farm and Two Ridings Community Fund.



# Aircraft incident PR 9 XH 130 Malta 25/03/1969

The day for me started right enough “singley” living in the block on 2 site. Got up scrubbed up and over to the airman’s mess for breakfast, just the usual group of us Eddie Wigg, John Townend myself and a couple more, we had Breakfast and then made our way down to the “Shell gate” which would be unlocked for us to gain access to the Airfield and the Crash Bays (Fire Section).

I was a newly posted in airman in 1969, to a plum posting RAF Luqa Malta. I had been there about a month, the airfield was closed for Runway repairs, so therefore all aircraft were using RAF Hal Far, Luqa was on domestic cover so the Fire section was on a fairly relaxed state of readiness.

On the morning of the 25th March 1969 we were just standing around at the front of the Crash Bays having a bit of banter etc waiting I think for Naafi wagon too arrive, waiting also for Sergeant Wilf Longmire to let us know which part of the front of the Fire section we were going to sweep next (you know the drill).

We heard an aircraft approaching from our right and heading for Hal Far, suddenly there was a roar of engine noise the aircraft banked to port and dived into the ground, as this was happening Wilf “Barked” out his orders for us to man any vehicle we could and turn out, just as Wilf was having us man up the crash alarm sounded, and so from a nothing just a load of Firemen standing around having idle chat he had us organised and onto the vehicles and with full Crash combine turning out to Safi village where the Canberra had crashed into the ground, all of this happened easily within the space of a minute.

Eddie Wigg, John Townend and myself we took the Mk 5A, Eddie driving, John on the monitor, Chris Brock was stood in the foot well by the concertina door, I sat in the front passenger seat with the crash map, luckily someone had reopened the Shell Gate.

Turning right out of the gate we proceeded to Safi village, some readers of this may know that in 1969 the roads in Malta were not as they are now and

a Mk5A is not what you might say “blessed” with the best suspension in the world and so as we were going along the road we hit a huge boulder which hadn’t been removed from the road surface it had been mearley tarmacked round, Eddie( God only knows how he kept control) hung on with one hand to the steering wheel, Chris was almost thrown out of the vehicle, John shot up through the monitor hatch and was only saved by his foot catching the monitor hand control, myself I shot up banged my head on the roof came down ended up hanging half out of the vehicle through the passenger side window and all this being witnessed by people at the side of the road, we regained our composure ( like the professionals we “Err” were) and carried on.

We couldn’t actually get right down to the crash site our only way down was to leg it with what ever equipment we could carry, I just grabbed a Co2 extinguisher, so it was now over a succession of dry stone walls and across ploughed fields, my running partner was our Fire Officer Flt Lt Ray Fell, we reached the remains of the A/C Flt Lt Fell said “there’s not much we can do here son” I just put the extinguisher down we then began to scan the area, the farmer shouted over to us and pointing, we went over and on the other side of the wall was one of the aircrew still in his ejection seat and partially embedded into the dry stone wall with obviously fatal injuries, as this was happening the pyrotechnics began to cook off and explode Ray Fell said just ignore them lad and we carried on our search of the area, John came down a bit of a track to tell Flt Lt Fell that Eddie had found the other crew member Ray Fell and I had found what turned out to be the Pilot and Eddie found the Navigator .

The way of the sequence of ejection occurred was Pilot then Navigator which explained their position on the ground in relation to the aircraft. The Pilot was in a pretty bad state, however, the scene Eddie was to be met with was a whole lot worse, the navigator had been ejected and still in his seat went through the top the concrete roof of a farm building, inside the building the farmer stabled his

horse, the navigator still in the ejection seat had struck the horse, I’m not sure if the horse died instantly or not but given the condition of the navigator I don’t think it did.

This A/C was returning to Malta after having been on exercise in Cyprus the aircrew will have had a flight across the Med , blue skies etc. And then just a matter of a couple of miles from the Runway at Hal Far “disaster”. No cause was found for this A/C incident, but it was the second crash involving Canberra’s at Luqa in just a few months , the first was in a previous edition of Flashpoint written and sent in by Bob Ewing, following the second crash Canberra’s were grounded for several months in order to discover a cause, but as I say no cause could ever be found.

I was nineteen the day this happened, when Sgt Wilf Longmire shouted out his order to man up and turn out that’s exactly what we did. On our return to the Crash Bays not a lot was said we just cleaned our gear and ourselves up, as said I was nineteen that day but I had grown up a lot in that day.

By the day was over the airman’s mess was closed, we were told to go down to the transit mess, the cooks laid on a knock together supper of Braised Beef and mashed potatoes.....I remember all this in detail because this had been my first proper crash, I wonder how many more of you reading this will say “ I remember my first too”.....Don Pape.... Thank you for taking the time to read this.



The project has been managed by myself, Trevor Hayes, Association Treasurer and his wife Pat since we picked it up. I'm extremely pleased to write this newsletter as the project hits a definitive milestone, one in which we have been working toward for many years now since taking on the project some 10 years ago.

## Current Situation

Last week, after a huge amount of work the formal application, plans and full design pack was submitted to the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA), application fee paid, and the landscape and Memorials Advisory Committee will review our application at their next meeting on 6 December.

The application has been submitted through the Head of Estates, who we have been working with since he started with the NMA around 4 years ago. He hasn't raised any red flags with the design, which we are told is usually a good sign. The design will either be accepted in full, or accepted with some queries, which as long as satisfied would not need to wait for a further meeting so we are hopeful to have approval by the turn of the year. The proposed area for the build gets quite wet in the winter and coupled with this the builder being unavailable in Jan/Feb 2023, so we are hoping for a build towards Mid Mar-Early April 2023 with a dedication shortly afterwards.

## Proposed Design Features and Location

I'm keen not to completely spoil the surprise by giving you all the details, but the wider details I'd like to share to give

you an idea. The design is a 2 x 4m plot, with a 3 sided Cotswold stone wall laid on a concrete base with a resin floor finish.

The walls will have a dark grey/black granite plaques set within each element of wall with a large colour RAF Fire Service crest in the centre panel and some other images on the side panels (that bit can be the surprise, however rest assured it will represent the Service).

The centre piece of the memorial has turned out to be fantastic. A full size Gallet Fire Helmet, visor down and highly polished, cast in bronze which will be laid underneath the large colour Fire Crest. The Foundry staff were really excited when we came in with the idea, and now finished are proud to say its one of the best pieces they have ever made, which hopefully gives you comfort that it's a fantastic feature for our memorial.

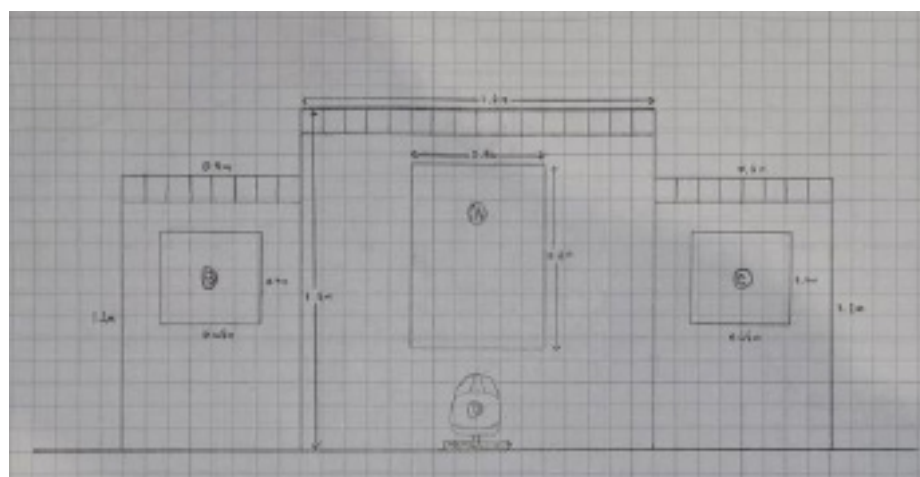
I've added a few images below of the scale drawings to give you an idea of the size

and scale, and some images of the finished helmet, which I am really looking forward to collecting next week and seeing the final version in the flesh.

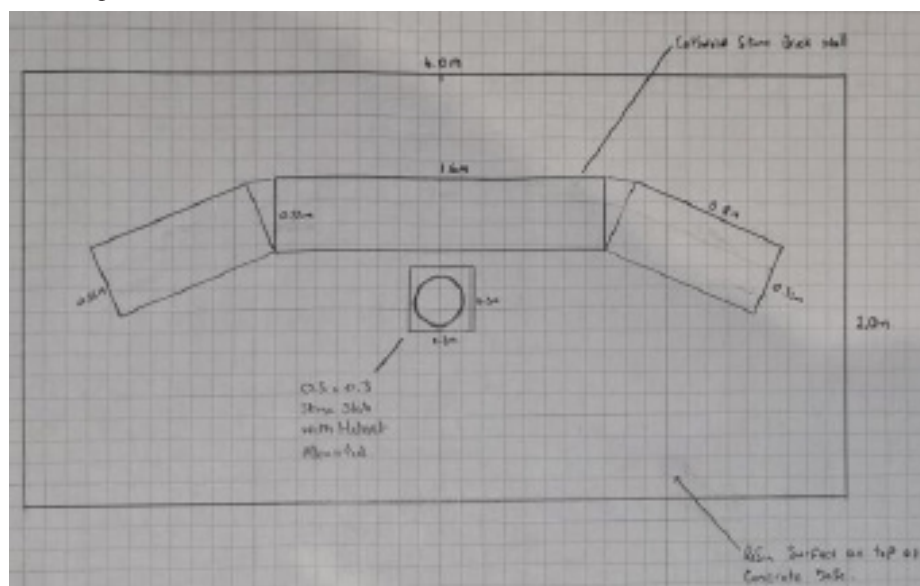
The proposed location for the memorial is within the RAF Garden in the grounds. Through careful negotiation we have a prime position just 1 memorial down from the RAF Police and next to the stunning RAF Association memorial which our memorial will directly face.

## Financial Overview

Since the initial plans were drawn up and costed for the memorial build, Insurance, and perpetuity maintenance, we have been trying to keep the costs updated. Up until the COVID pandemic, we had the funds to cover all 3 elements and have some left over to put towards the dedication ceremony. Unfortunately, due to a recent policy change regarding maintenance and pricing for this, the costs for perpetuity maintenance have essentially doubled



Front Aspect



Aerial Aspect





### Helmet Images

for new memorials, hence Trevor's discussions with committee members to support the shortfall. Initially, the shortfall was thought to be around £6200, however through further negotiation and reworking this has now dropped to a shortfall of just below £4000.

The current financial status is below to support the above:

Current banked funds<sup>1</sup> £21680.59

Current Amount Required<sup>2</sup> £25521.92

Shortfall £3841.33

1 Bronze Helmet and application fee have been paid in full leaving the current banked funds above.

2 Current amount required includes £9296 for outstanding elements of memorial build, £1863.61 for Insurance and £14362.31 for perpetuity maintenance.

The intent would be to agree a maximum of £4000 support, with the intent to drive this down as we are investigating if other donors can be identified to support covering the shortfall to lessen the amount provided by the association.

The above is not including any monies for the dedication ceremony. Further efforts to fund raise for the dedication ceremony between now and the dedication will be made in due course.

### Summary

I have enclosed a FAQs for members who may not be aware of where we have come from and how we have got to where we are now and also to provide further clarity on a few matters to support the contents of the newsletter and answer previous questions.

I am delighted we have reached this milestone and thank you all for your support in raising funds, and none more so than Trevor & Pat who have been critical in moving this project forward, they deserve nothing but credit for their efforts, hard work and commitment.

Id like to think this update is comprehensive but if you have any queries, please direct them to me via email (below) or via social media where I can be found easily.

*Kind Regards*  
*Steve Pickston*

*WO (Retired) TG8 Fire*  
*Steven.pickston@outlook.com*



*Proposed Location Aerial View*

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why has the memorial taken so long?

For some historical context the plans to develop a memorial were started several years ago, maybe 15 or so by a few then serving RAF Firefighters. Trevor, Pat and myself picked it up around 10 years ago after the project had halted with no real ownership. There were no definitive plans, designs and just around £6000 in the bank and there had been no dialogue with the NMA to understand costs or the process.

The NMA was engaged shortly after we took on the project, some ideas designed, and some consultation regards features canvassed for on social media. A concept memorial Cost was developed working with quotes from approved builders and craftsmen and we were well short of any reasonably decent memorial that the trade deserved. Realising that we were a long way from having the funds to build anything of purpose, a large fundraising effort followed over many years supported by serving members and veterans including RAF&DFS association fundraising efforts and in 2019 we looked to have the funds at the time to take the project forward.

Unfortunately, COVID struck in early part of 2020 which put plans to move forward on hold. Coming out of the COVID pandemic efforts were made to re-engage and move forward but inflation caused by both COVID and the current economic situation has led to increases in costs, as well as the stated maintenance costs increasing.

I'd also add that putting a Memorial into place at the NMA is complex and not as straight forward as some may think. There are processes, guidelines, and stringent rules to follow, all of which take time. You can't just use any old contractor to undertake work there so without jumping through significant hoops your pool is limited however approved contractors have produced excellent work there. Ultimately, we are now there but there has been at times unnecessary pressure put on the individuals who have put huge amount of time, effort and finance into taking this project forward so to answer the question that seems to crop up from time to time, this provides an explanation for those who maybe aren't fully in the know regarding the work involved. Any further questions please direct to me personally.



*Images of Location taken from the RAF Association memorial, Memorial will face camera aspect (Bench to be relocated)*

### What is the situation with maintenance and increased costs

The maintenance of the memorial moving forward is important to keep It in good condition for future generations. The NMA provide perpetuity maintenance arrangements for a set one-off fee. This is by far the best way to maintain the memorial with no burden on any individual of organisation to look after the memorial moving forward. The costs are calculated individually depending on the tasks that are needed to keep the memorial in good condition for its life, accounting for its size, location and materials used.

Previous NMA policy was a once a year clean, but those who may have visited the NMA recently may have noted some memorials don't look in the best condition so the stance from the NMA has changed to ensure they are in good condition all the time. So therefore,

any new memorials including ours will have a more regular maintenance regime but this has driven up the cost a fair amount. Meeting these costs now will in the long run be positive as the memorial will be maintained to a much higher standard as and when required to keep it in the best possible condition.

Some tasks could have possibly been taken on, but not without significant challenge. For any work on site, there needs to be suitable insurances, risk assessments, approved cleaning products used with relevant COSHH assessments. Also, the NMA have had previous instances where arrangements to maintain have not been fulfilled leaving a burden on the named custodian so they are not keen on this

arrangement. The burden is significant over many years as opposed to putting the responsibility on the NMA to maintain on our behalf.

The cleaning regime we will get is as follows, so hopefully represents good value over the life of the memorial:

- Thermatec ® cleaning inc. hand wash where necessary, of memorial stone and integrated objects (twice per annum)
- Thermatec ® PAVED area (twice per annum)
- Strim perimeter (around memorial footprint and other integrated objects) throughout mowing season.
- Re-painting memorial lettering (Crest/cap badge) as required (max. 1 every 5 years unless specified)
- Re-point brick/blockwork as required (max. 1 in every 5 years unless specified)
- Re wax Bronzes every two years

### Why is the helmet badge not the official fire service crest?

A few reasons for this:

Firstly, a traditional helmet crest/cap badge for UK Police and Fire Services features a Brunswick Star (Also known as a Maltese Cross) usually adorned with a crown at the top and individual logo inside. Although the RAF Fire & Rescue Service never had a formal helmet marking, there had been a few designed used but the cap badge used was likely the closest to be produced with the flaming sword. In general, the crest wasn't used on helmets. We also needed a physical metal badge with detail to replicated for casting which we did not have anything else to use.



Secondly, the RAF Fire & Rescue Service Crest is already within the design so to avoid duplication within the overall design (something the NMA also like to avoid) the use of the cap badge was again favoured. The cap badge is still linked to the trade group and looks good on the finished helmet.

### What happens next?

Once the NMA landscape and Memorials Advisory committee approve the application, we will then formally instruct and book the building contractor and stonemason to undertake the work Early Spring 2023. An update will be provided likely in early 2023. Once the work and dates for building has been confirmed, we will then engage the NMA to see what availability they have to arrange the dedication working with the Fire Trade Group Sponsor and Command WO and members. Dates and arrangements will be publicised in due course.



*Memorial will face the RAF Association memorial*

## Remembrance

At the eleventh hour, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month each year the nation stands in silence for two minutes, as a solemn act of Remembrance for those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for their country. On the Sunday closest to the eleventh of November, on Whitehall, former members of the Armed Forces alongside members of the Royal Family pay thanks to those who gave so much with a short service, the laying of wreathes and a march past by the massed ranks of retired servicemen and members of the civilian services and charitable agencies.

The first national act of Remembrance was carried out in July 1919 when the King, King George the Fifth, laid a wreath along with the French Prime Minister at a plaster and wood Cenotaph located on Whitehall built to a design by the renowned architect Sir Edward Lutyens. The following year's act of Remembrance, in 1920, moved to the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice in November, which ended World War One. The Cenotaph which had been hurriedly built for the previous year's ceremonies had, by now, been replaced by a more permanent example of Lutyens design this time constructed of Portland stone. The Cenotaph today remains identical to the original build, the

only difference, between then and now, being the addition of Roman numerals, to signify the dates of the Second World War. The 1920 Remembrance parade is also remarkable in that after the wreath laying, King George the Fifth led a procession from the Cenotaph to Westminster Abbey. The procession contained a horse drawn carriage bearing a casket containing the body of the Unknown Warrior which was that day interred in the Abbey, in soil taken from the battlefields of France. From 1921 the format of the ceremony was pretty much the same as it is seen today, and has been held annually every year since then, with the exception of the Second World War years and the later Covid Pandemic.

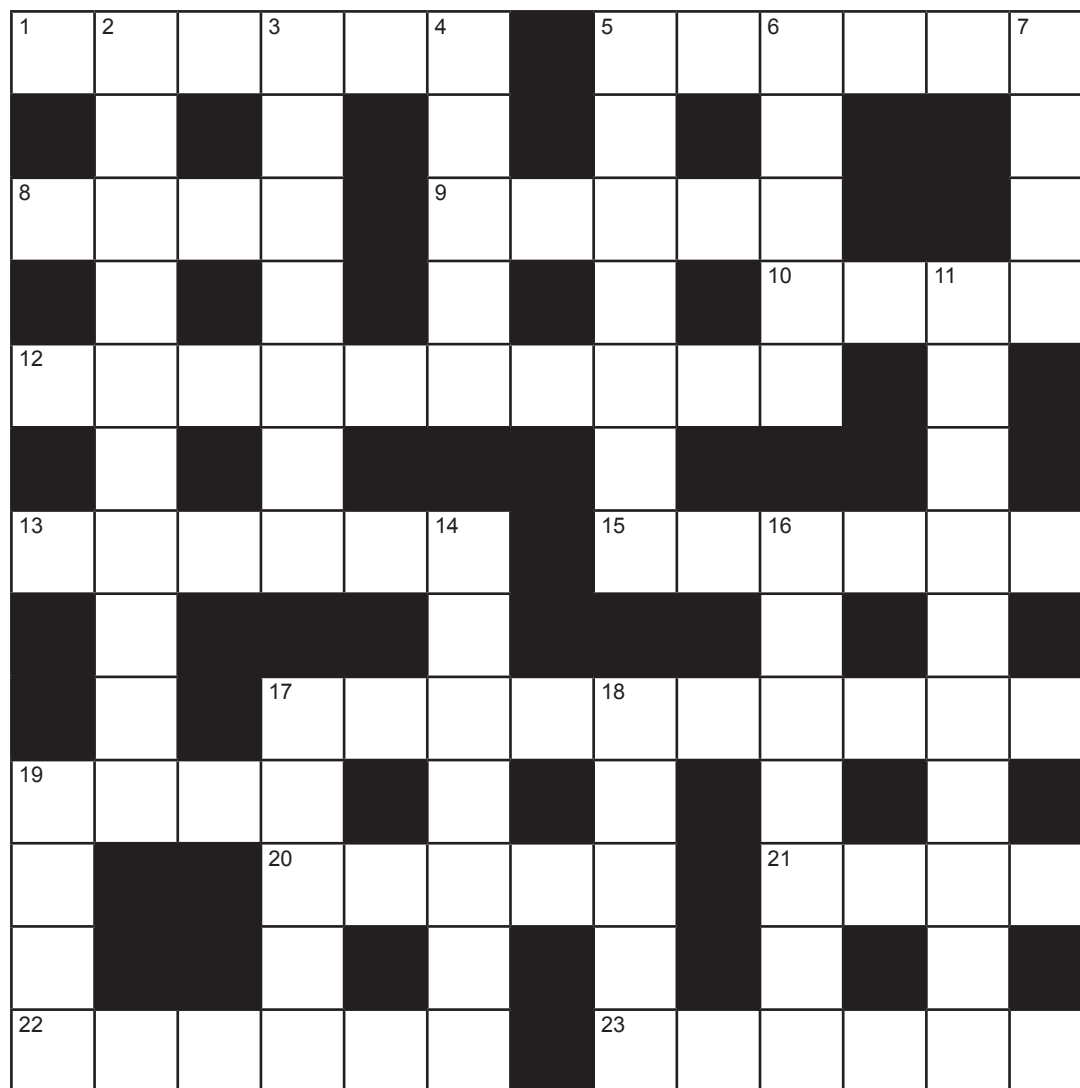
The day of the parade, when taking part, consists of quite a bit of something I'm sure we've all experienced at some time in our service careers 'Hurry up and Wait'. With so many people trying to get on to Horseguards Parade there can be delays, then there's the waiting to form up, and finally having moved on to Whitehall a bit of a wait before the service itself. By the time it's time to move off a march past the Cenotaph is just what's required to loosen the stiffening leg muscles. It was noticeable that this year's rendition of the National Anthem was sung with gusto for our new

monarch, after the loss of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who we almost certainly all swore an Oath of Allegiance in the past. This year's Parade was, as usual, attended by members representing the RAF and Defence Fires Services. This is an excellent opportunity to meet up with others who have served and while the act of remembrance is high on the agenda, the chatting about the past, some banter, a bit of Inter service rivalry, and the odd pint or two to soothe sore feet after being stood so long on Horseguards Parade makes for an enjoyable weekend. The event is organised through the Royal British Legion, and is ably administrated for the Association by Paul Murray. You don't have to be a member of the Royal British Legion to attend only a member of the Association and as he's not psychic it would be a good idea to flag your interest up to Paul who will be happy to explain about the event and answer any questions you might have on attending.

I didn't think I'd ever be part of something that I'd seen so many times on TV, and I'm delighted and honoured to have taken part, on several occasions now, to remember those that went before and gave their today for my tomorrow.

*Pete Thompson*

# CROSSWORD



## Across

1. Seaman dispatched not here (6)
5. Fruit we hear finds depth (6)
8. Send forth as time goes backwards (4)
9. AI fan may drink here? (5) (Abbreviation)
10. United as knots may be. (4)
12. Gaze we hear, at luggage on flights of risers? (10)
13. Quenched like hose may be laid. (6)
15. Flaw from French iron court (6)
17. US city Mr Livingstone and Ted followed to Suffolk airfield (10)
19. Resound every call he organised at first (4)
- 20 & 21. One of Charles Kingsley's trainee firefighters? ( 5,4)
21. *See 20*
22. Body pump's suit (6)
23. Football team playing in Marvel Event (6)

## Down

2. Audibly purchase copper perhaps, to make strip found in thermostats and heat detectors (10)
3. Play rubber dick in hospital department on haystack (7)
4. Pick-me-up drunk with gin in 9. (5)
5. Quietly lifted and extolled. (7)
6. Stations or Squadrons maybe, found with tens in arithmetic. (5)
7. Extinguishant found in buckets and deserts (4)
11. Let axe cube strangely, but it's doable! (10)
14. Northern States where these iconic planes might fly from? (7)
16. Release buzzer for nothing (7)
17. Humble cow. (5)
18. Audacity found in inner vessel (5)
19. Endless fruit for everyone. (4)



# SPOT THE DIFFERENCE





# REUNION AND AGM 2022

The 2022 annual reunion and AGM for the RAF & Defence Fire Services took place in November at the Old Barn Hotel near to Grantham, and as always, a short journey for some longer for others. Bob Ewing and his good lady came over from Northern Ireland by boat and car, a great commitment.

As is the usual several folks were in the bar before checking in, (no change there then!!!) and as people strayed in it is always a surprise who turns up, as generally only a few know who is going to attend. After the evening meal the chat and the banter continued until late for some others of a certain age went off to their beds.

Saturday morning as always is one of the main events, the AGM. So, after a hearty breakfast the host gathered for what would be a lively meeting and for the first time a Zoom internet connection was used so members not attending in person could join in. A first for the Association, among them Reg Metcalfe our Flashpoint editor. Generally, that went well except for a few minutes' glitch. It is something for members not attending should consider in the future. Zoom meetings are already in use for the monthly Association Committee meetings which has been a great success.

At the gala dinner we were entertained by Sarah Dennis and Lisa Dawson known as 'The Northern Soprano's' a great pair who managed to get some of the male members 'Dad Dancing' not a pretty site!! A special moment came for one of our members Wilf Longmire when he presented an award for his outstanding contribution throughout his career to the RAF & Defence Fire Service.

The next re-union and AGM will be 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> of November at the Sketchley Grange Hotel & Spa near to Nuneaton. More details will be published at a later date.

*Below you will find the minutes of the meeting and a brief summary of the accounts, the Chairmans report you will find on another page within this edition of Flashpoint. Also, a full report from Steve Pickston reference the progress of the memorial is also published elsewhere.*

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, at the Old Barn Hotel Grantham

The meeting was opened by the Chairman, Steve Shirley at 10.00hrs with 41 persons in attendance as per the registration sheet with 3 members on Zoom.

The Secretary asked all to be upstanding for a few moments silence in remembrance of H M The Queen and deceased members since the last AGM, this was followed by the exaltation also done by Mike Clapton the Secretary.

Apologies taken from the floor, Fred Greenwood, Sid Bridges, Steve Brown, Tim Alderman, and Dave Edwards.

Minutes of the last AGM were read and accepted as true record on a proposition from Dave Allen, seconded by Reg Metcalfe with all in favour.

Matter arising, Nil.

## Chairmans Report

*See elsewhere in Flashpoint.*

## Vice Chairmans Report

Don stated nothing to report.



*Ex Warrant Officer Wilf Longmire receiving an award from Chairman Steve Shirley for his outstanding contribution to the RAF & Defence Fire Services over his long career.*

## Secretary's Report

Mike started by thanking Steve Shirley for the Zoom meetings, the Committee met nine times during the year, items that were brought up were dealt with there and then and not left to the quarterly meetings as in the past. Mike ended by thanking the rest of the Committee for their input also the banter at the meetings. Although Brian the Membership Secretary and myself have had some problems with this technology, we are calling it finger trouble. During the year a couple of changes to the membership have been instigated as who is eligible to join the Association.

## Treasurers Report

Trevor gave a brief rundown as to the funds ending on 5<sup>th</sup> November, with a grand total of £35,934.23 and on a proposition of acceptance from D Allen seconded by M Lee with all in favour.

## Memorial Fund

Before Trevor could enlighten the members present Steve Shirley read out a lengthy report from Steve Pixton wanting approximately a further £4,500 to secure the final charges asked for by the National Memorial Arboretum. At this stage Trevor stated that the Committee recommended that £6,000 to be paid to the fund,



this to offset other charges such as the dedication of the memorial etc.

### Membership Report

Brian, the Membership Secretary said he had 402 paid up members on his books with approximately 4 to 6 still to pay their subscription. Trevor is chasing them.

### Museum

At this stage Steve Shirley and Steve Harrison were asked to leave the room, the Chair was taken over by Don the Vice, whereupon Mike read out a minute from the June Committee meeting stating that the Museum was in the red due to having hire 3 containers for the Museum artifacts, the vehicles were out in the open. Mike then read out a proposition from Val Moss seconded by Don Pape that the Association donate £5,000 to the Museum and this to be reviewed each year at the AGM. A paper ballot took place with the resultant vote being 34 for and 1 against, the proposition was carried. The paper was scrutinised by two Association members. The two Steve's re-entered the room were Don told them the result of the ballot. Both Steve's thanked the members present

### Flashpoint

Reg thanked Steve Harrison and Dave Kirk for their help in producing the last edition, he still had stuff re the Falkland's, so part 2 will be coming out. Please keep sending stuff in.

### Cenotaph

Paul Murry said 22 members were on parade this year (a good show) as he is only allocated 30 tickets for the parade. So those wishing to take part could they please email with their details, but please not at the last minute. The Baton Holder for next years (2023) parade is Brian Jones if you can understand him (he is Welsh don't forget.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 11.45.

*Mike Clapton General Secretary*

## RAF & Defence Fire Services Association Statement of Accounts for 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023

Bank Statement 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2023	£12,826.11
Un cleared credits	<u>Nil</u>
Sub total	12,826.11
Un cleared Debits SF Events	<u>1,217.08</u>
Net Total	£11,609.03 -- *£6000 = £5609.03
Barclays Treasury Deposit account 5 <sup>th</sup> Dec 2022	<u>17,463.33</u>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£ 29,072.36 -- *£6000 = £23,072.36</b>

**AGM 2022. A contribution to Memorial fund agreed - due Feb / May 2023 = \*£6000 maximum**

**AGM 2022. A Gift of £5,000 was given the Museum of RAF Fire Fighting to assist storage costs**

Signatories on both RAF&DFSA accounts are:- Trevor Hayes-Treasurer, Steve Shirley-Chairman and Mike Clapton-Secretary.

Association's balances @ end of years 31<sup>st</sup> August

2022	£31,480.70	2021	£30,353.07	
2020	£28,380.37	2019	£25,936.29	
2018	£24,691.48	2017	£26,973.24	2016£23,703.38
2015	£20,104.00	2014	£20,081.95	2013 £17,440.20
2012	£15,719.26	2011	£13,067.83	2010£12,764.00
2009	£14,416.94	2008	£10,347.34	

### Memorial Fund Account

This account is totally independent of the RAF&DFSA and is shown in this way as a courtesy and is for information purposes to all members of the RAF&DFSA, RAF and DFS serving personnel.

#### 30<sup>th</sup> January 2023

Liquidity Manager 35 Day Notice Account	£ 13,020.63
Current account	<u>8,469.01</u>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£ 21,489.64</b>
Cheque paid to foundry 21 <sup>st</sup> Sept 2021	£1,554.00
Cheque paid to foundry 6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2022 (final payment)	£1,905.00
Cheque paid to Arboretum Application 6 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2022	<u>£1,000.00</u>
	£2,905.00 <u>2,905.00</u>

*Trevor Hayes, Treasurer*





# STEVE DAVEY'S MEMORIES

Born in Bridgwater, I am a Somerset man and following a somewhat reckless childhood I was recruited into the RAF at Exeter. After being kitted-out and sworn-in at RAF Cardington in 1953, I did my recruit training at RAF West Kirby on the Wirral, not a million miles from Liverpool. We used to visit the Grafton Rooms Dance Hall in the City, as well as the Tower Ballroom in New Brighton, which was a regular haunt for servicemen of the day. It was the start of the 'Teddy-Boy' era, and because of the bad reputation for trouble they attracted, the door keepers at the Grafton Rooms used to measure the length of their drape jackets to decide whether or not they were a Teddy-Boy and unfit for admission. In any case I suppose the velvet collars, drain-pipe trousers and thick crepe soled shoes (Brothel Creepers) were a dead give away. The other essential was the thick hair slicked back into a centre parting at the back the so called DA (Ducks Arse). We airmen were not allowed to wear civilian clothes anyway, so had no problem gaining entry wearing our Best Blue complete with the regulation short back & sides which was gleefully inflicted upon us during square-bashing.

I remember one particular night when I was heading back to the railway station to catch a train back to camp. It was a cold one, so to keep out the chilly Mersey wind and to keep my ears warm; I turned up the collar on my uniform Great Coat. Minutes later I was accosted by two burley RAF Policemen, and promptly charged with being improperly dressed.

Two days later I was arraigned before my Flight Commander. Unusually (because ignorance of Queens Regulations and Air Council Instructions was not considered a defence) he accepted my plea of "I did not know turning up my collar was wrong" but was nevertheless duty-bound to punish me in some way. I was quite a good cross-country runner in those days, so to teach me a lesson he said I would not be allowed to run for my intake against RAF Bridgnorth on the coming Saturday. As previously intimated, this was a cold winter and the punishment turned out to be timely in the extreme. I have fond memories of going to Anfield instead where I watched Liverpool play Blackpool, Stanley Matthew's and all. We were on the opposite end to the Kop and so to be strictly neutral I shouted "Come on the Pool!!"

From there it was on to RAF Sutton on Hull which was a great little station where we had the bonus of learning the Fire Trade; at the end of that training I felt very fit, and ready for anything. The Health & Safety implications of Sutton if applied to present legislation would be horrendous. No cosmetic smoke in the smoke chamber. No smoke chamber in fact, I seem to remember it was a room at the end of the drill shed where smouldering damp straw was used to simulate fire and smoke conditions. We had the wonderful Remote Breathing Apparatus which consisted of a face piece and 38 feet of corrugated rubber hose. Under-running, re-rolling and carrying wet 120 foot single-jacket canvas hose with brass couplings did wonders for the biceps. Practice Crash Fires were tackled with just CO2 as a knock-down agent, a completely useless agent in the open on all but a flat calm day. To add an element of realism, the directing staff used to thunder-flashes in an inverted foam compound drum with complete disregard to the ensuing danger. The explosive effect was extremely effective but the bottoms of the bins were blown some 300 feet into the air before scything back down like lethal Frisbees.

The "Protective Clothing" was a joke too. We wore denims that fit where they touched, welly-boots, a leather jerkin, and asbestos gauntlets. All this was topped by a 1914-18 war helmet fitted with an asbestos cloth face piece incorporating safety-glass visor which most of us wore back to front.

My first operational posting was to A&AEE Boscombe Down, the abbreviation stands for Aeroplane & Armament Experimental Establishment. What could have been better for a new Fireman and a new Airman? Biggles eat your heart out!



Practically every aircraft then in service, or about to enter or leave the RAF were in evidence, plus the Fleet Air Arm machines as an added bonus. I had my taste of flying in an Avro Anson and had to draw a parachute from Safety Equipment before the flight. After landing I went to the door, placed my parachute on the floor, then after jumping out picked it up by the rip cord instead of the carrying strap! It only partly deployed thank goodness, and I managed to stagger back to the Para Packing department with a bundle of silk which cost me two shillings to have repacked.

In addition to our aircraft, the Americans had ten engined B36 bombers on the base (six turning and four burning). Legend had it that one B36 overshot Boscombe's main runway and after crashing through the perimeter fence, crossed the Salisbury Road and demolished a haystack. One of the firemen recalls the comment of the American pilot on leaving the aircraft. "There's a lot of god-damned hay about for the time of the year".

Our WO at Boscombe was Mr Denny. Fresh out of training and accompanied by another new fireman I arrived at the section with my Blue Card. Apparently on his own in the Fire Section, the said WO Denny took us out into the yard and



**10 Engined B36 Peacemaker**

proceeded to question us on the use of fire extinguishers and actions in the event of a fire. Of course our answers were faultless which cheered him up. He then said "What Trades are you?"

"Firemen Sir!" we replied cheerily.

This had the effect of inducing an immediate attack of paranoia in the man.

"Why the blankity blank blank did you not tell me?" he enquired.

Well being new airmen at our first station with our first Blue Chit how were we to know that Fire Section applied to all trades on arrival?

Mr Denny had the last laugh though. When we had completed the arrival procedure and reported back he had some equipment familiarisation training ready for us. Amongst other things we had to polish the solid brass collecting heads, the solid brass and copper Knapsack Tanks and not least the big brass Five Way Selector Wheel on the Austin Domestic.

We had lots of minor incidents but nothing major. I learned to drive on the Bedford water bowser which was reasonably powered and responsive. For foam production we had 45 Monitors, 44 Conversions and WOT1s would you believe? These were supplemented by both Austin and Fordson Gas trucks, an Austin Domestic, and a Karrier Bantam with a 30 Gallon Foam mounted on the flat-bed with boxes either side for extinguishers. We also had three Jeep Crash Rescue vehicles, a Ford, and two Wileys. The Jeeps were great fun, almost indestructible in fact. We turned one over in the snow, heaved together to get it upright, and just carried on without a problem. Driving the 45 monitor was a challenge though. The steering wheel was an enormous wire spoked affair, but any connection between its title and function (turning the wheels) was pure chance. It was woefully under

powered with a 30 HP V8 engine, and the brakes were abysmal. However, with acceleration of 0 to 40 eventually, the need for the brakes was arbitrary. The distributor for the engine spark plugs was placed at the front of the V 8 block behind the radiator, and subject to moisture ingestion (no WD40 in those days).

Boscombe Down was of course on the High Ground of Salisbury Plain and consequently all roads out were down hill to Amesbury and other villages. I only ever did one trip in the 45 Monitor down that hill, it was as a passenger and it frightened me fartless. We received one of those new fangled Mark 5 tenders before I left; a paradigm shift on all the other trucks which had been with us for at least 10 years.

The gas factory at Porton Down was adjacent to Boscombe, and many of the National Servicemen strapped for cash underwent the experiments for a small pecuniary gain. As it has transpired for a penny in for a problem in later life.

I got my kicks from the Hop and it was there that got drunk for the first time in my life. We used to sleep in the section and my rowdy behaviour attracted a passing RAFP patrol. Alas, I spent the night in the cells. It is worthy of note that next morning I saw the first flight from Boscombe Down of the English Electric P1 (Lightning) through the bars of my cell.

Boscombe was part civilian and part service, and when the civvies took over we were all posted out. I went to RAF Innsworth and had the misfortune to arrive on AOC's Inspection day. Walking through the rows of identical wooden huts in FSMO (Full Service Marching Order), that's all the webbing; big pack, small pack, ammunition pouches, water bottle, bayonet, frog, plus great coat and kit bag; I ran slap bang into the path of the advancing AOC's entourage. Not the smartest airmen in appearance or brain

power, I did not have the nous to do an about turn. I tried a salute, which did not please the SWO, then they examined me closely and discovered that I was a scruffy irk. I managed to slink off and tucked away a valuable service lesson.

WO Jones was in charge at Innsworth, though we only ever saw him on Pay Day. After only three months there, I was PWR'd for FEAF/Singapore, but when the posting came it was changed to Hong Kong.

I arrived at Kai Tak in January 1955, after 28 days at sea on Her Majesty's Troopship Asturias. Asturias was one of the bigger and better Troop Ships on the route (28,000 tons), with the RAF accommodated in cabins, and the licentious soldiery on Troop Decks. My wife joined me in Hong Kong after my 21st Birthday, having travelled out on the same boat. We went home in the same vessel with a new daughter and after 56 days at sea each we have never considered a modern cruise holiday since.

The Sunderland Flying boats were ever present, and one of my first duties was manning the Fire Floats (we had two, a broad beam and a narrow beam converted pinnacle/sea plane tenders). Before a Sunderland landed or took off we would 'snore' (Marine Craft Speak) up and down the Kowloon side of the bay to clear the Sampans, Junks and other sundry vessels. Sometimes, as with other fire appliances, the Fire Floats were misused to ferry people (VIPs mainly) across to Hong Kong Island with the fireman performing the "let go for'ard" and Boat Hook Drill (All very RN).

The Americans also operated amphibious aircraft into Kai Tak, notably the Catalina and the Grumman Privateer. 28 Sqn were flying Vampires and latterly Venoms at RAF Sek Kong and had donated their Mk23 Spitfires (5 bladed propeller version) to The Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force.



80 Sqn were resident at Kai Tak flying DH Hornets (A single seat fighter version of the Mosquito). There were a couple of Bristol Beaufighters on Target Towing Flight, and many Commonwealth visitors, principally Avro Lincoln bombers of The RAAF in transit to and from the Malayan confrontation. American F86 Sabres would drop in on their way to Korea with their US giant freighter of the day the Globemaster. All of the National Carriers operated into Kai Tak using Douglas DC 4, DC 6 or latterly 7C, and Lockheed Constellations. The first Bristol Britannia arrived late '56. Cathay Pacific were in their infancy at that time flying Convairs. RAF Transport Command were operating Avro York's for long haul, and we had the odd Vickers Valetta shunting between Hong Kong and Singapore, Ceylon, and Car Nicobar (Bay of Bengal).

We maintained a full Crash Crew in those days attending to all military aircraft, while the Chinese manned airport brigade looked after the civil side. Our FS was Paddy Scullion, the corporals Mick Mooney and Ray Grinstead, and we had a Sgt Labouchardier in transit; he sold me a dodgy watch from that well known jeweller 'Flog It & Scarper'. There was also Sgt Frank Leiberman, a Liverpudlian. Names I remember from the LAC's were Pete Jeffery's, Geordie Warwick, Taffy Chant, Jock Kerr, Jock McCaffery, Jim Greaves, Harry Gorman, Yorkie Paley and Ted Adnams.

I don't remember why but we all seemed to move to RAF Sek Kong in the New Territories adjacent to the Chinese Border; probably when the airport fire service assumed cover for all aircraft. Incidents at Kai Tak were few and far between but there were a few memorable prangs:

A 28 Sqn Vampire veered off the runway and crashed into the Nissan huts next to the Corporals Club. A Gurkha soldier sleeping in his bed was killed along with the pilot.

A fully fuelled Venom armed with 8 rockets crashed on take off into the Marine Craft area. Miraculously the airframe remained in tact and no fire resulted; the pilot was the Station Commander. I arrived at his side pretty quickly to aid his escape, and he told me to go away in basic Anglo Saxon. Obviously solicitous of my welfare.

One Vampire ploughed into the top of the Ti-Mo-Shan Mountain inland and behind Sek Kong.



There was the apocryphal tale of an American P2V57 Neptune (Maritime Reconnaissance a/c) landing. On engaging reverse pitch to slow down the starboard engine parted company with the aircraft. The Kai Tak Fire Legend said all the aircrew were out before the thing stopped rolling!

Another Vampire taking off towards Lion Rock over the bomb dump had an engine failure, slid over the public road, and ended up in the large Nullah (monsoon drain).

The old firemen were always relating the horrible details of 'Prangs' they had attended and of mangled and charred human remains. Perversely, it was with some relief to be blooded in this gruesome experience. My first was at a Vampire crash which landed in a Paddy Field on the approach to Sek Kong and caught fire. Our foam tender, the 1945 Monitor, was unserviceable and we had rigged up a replacement. This consisted of a large trailer pump towed behind the 500 gallon water bowser, with the suction hose passed back over the pump into the filling manhole on top of the bowser. We had two knapsack tanks full of foam compound and two Foam Making Branch Pipes. As I'm sure you're all aware the essence of crash fire fighting is speed, and a rapid application of foam in sufficient quantity to suppress the blaze. So without our specialist foam tender we were ponderous in the extreme in getting our equipment to work. Consequently we were unable to

suppress the fire, and soon ran out of water. Sadly the pilot was killed on impact, and in company with another fireman I was asked by the CO if we would recover the body.

The aircraft had been armed with 20mm cannon shells and as the heat reached them, the cases exploded with a soft firework-like bang. The projectiles were lobbed without force, but it was certainly enough to make you duck. Our protective footwear was bog-standard rubber welly boots (polished of course), and as we entered the crash area to retrieve the mortal remains, I felt rather warm in the foot region. I later realised that the Duralumin components making up the airframe had melted and solidified into a large and hot ingot under our feet. We lifted the body part remaining (torso and head) out of what was left of the cockpit, and transferred it to an asbestos blanket. As we rolled the body over the contents of the abdominal cavity fell out, all pink and bubbling, with that unmistakable Rich Roast Pork aroma, the heady steam rising into our faces.

From then on we were able to hold our own in the crew room, but the mental picture of this and subsequent fatalities, lives on. It's a pity we were not allowed to be traumatised in those days; I could have bought a yacht with the compensation.

I don't suppose any RAF fireman ever stopped to consider the possibility of danger to life and limb, and the outcome from our actions, with the possible exception of one erstwhile colleague,

and here I digress wildly. At Khormaksar (Aden) in 1966/67 a Hunter lost his "Donk" late on the take off run and was speeding toward the water between the end of the runway and the Little Aden Causeway. He retracted his gear and slid into the shallow water digging the aircraft into the sand in the process.

When the day's intensive flying had died down, the engineers wanted to recover the aircraft which of course was still fully armed and fuelled. As duty Crew Chief I was in attendance with Crash 1 and a Mk6. The engineers could not deploy any of the standard tracked crash recovery gear into the sea and wanted to make a hole through the wing to secure a cable hook to tow it out of the water. The Sqn Ldr Eng asked if we had any gear that could punch through a Hunter main plane. If we had a road drill at that time we might have had a chance, but the only cutting gear we had was the pneumatic saw designed for cutting the thin skin on passenger aircraft. The Sqn Ldr Eng insisted that we cut into the wing with this (A double layer 18 SWG duralumin!). I told him this would be useless but he persisted and so I donned the air bottle back pack and prepared to saw. Everyone was conscious of the danger of heat/sparks from this operation and cognisant of the fuel in the wing tanks and the 30mm cannon rounds.

Accordingly they all retired a decent distance except one of my crew who would assist, I told him to get clear and was about to start when I looked to my right and saw my colleague kneeling down on the extreme wing tip with his fingers in his ears!!!

The pneumatic air powered saw was apparently used for its intended purpose on one occasion at Khormaksar. An Ace Freighters DC7 had completed its landing run and was taxiing clear when smoke was seen from the nose of the aircraft. The aircraft stopped and the fire crew discharged a CO2 extinguisher upward into the nose wheel bay, the only opening. The smoke continued so it was elected to use the said saw to take a tin opener type cut into the fuselage above the nose wheel. A three-sided cut was completed and the crew were in the process of rolling up the skin like the lid of a sardine can when a furious flight engineer exited the DC7 and came running to the front. He produced a square shanked winding handle, connected it to a spindle/opening in the nose and

wound down the aircraft battery, which was on two cables and a tray; this was the source of the fire. Whoops!!!

\* \* \* \* \*

Meanwhile back at the plot...

On return to UK from FEAF, I was a posted to Maintenance Command at RAF Wellesbourne Mountford, in Shakespeare Country. This station was the home of the RAF Airfield Construction Branch Squadrons 5001 to 5004, with a Plant Training Depot at nearby RAF Claverdon and a storage and repair facility at RAF Church Lawford near Rugby.



As the result of all the practice excavations and earth moving at RAF Claverdon, a large pond had been created. In the middle was a Notice Board saying "Loch Claverdon". Underneath was another board with the wording "Notice!!" "Do not throw stones at this notice!"

Many Polish Officers continued to serve after the war, and often changed their names by deed-pole to an acceptable anglicised title. However, they had not entirely mastered English and its colloquialisms. At Wellesbourne one Polish Officer, Sqn Ldr Beale was the S Ad O (Senior Admin Officer); and he called me at the Fire Section one day to say that the Command Fire Officer was paying me a visit.

"Thank you Sir" Sez I in my best Somerset accent. "What's he on?" (this sounded like WASEON)

"What does zees mean?" He asked, "Waseon?"

I explained that it meant 'why is he coming, what is the nature of his visit?'

"I don't know Waseon" he said and put the phone down.

I never met another Polish Officer until years later at RAF Fairford (1973). I

was the Concorde Flight Sergeant and we occupied the old American Domestic Section while the Airfield was manned by a separate Cat 6 Crash Crew. Our Concorde vehicles would sometimes travel on the Concorde apron/taxi way on our side of the airfield, and having no other station-based aircraft except Concorde this did not present a problem. Well not until we had a new (Polish) Air Traffic Ftl Lt posted in. On his first day on duty he called the Concorde Fire Section to ask what our DP was doing on the airfield.

We explained that this was our normal route and we did not cross or go near the runway. Being a rather irascible fellow, he replied

"I don't care; I want to know every time you encroach onto the airfield manoeuvring area."

This seemed a bit absurd as the time of all aircraft movements were known hours in advance. Bob Plumb was the Sergeant Crew Commander at the time and he and I agreed that the ATC Officer should be informed of all movements.

In no time at all the squawk box was red hot with inconsequential info, on even the slightest vehicle movements. After about two hours of this farcical tirade our Polish ATC colleague lost it.

After a 'nothing' message he exploded and said "I don't want to know you go for Bloody Peeceess!!!"

....So we did not tell him anything else and he did not ask.

Wellesbourne was also home to the RAF School of Photography. I recall one day the Station Warrant Officer (SWO) at Wellesbourne ordering me to bring my ladder to the front of Station Head Quarters.

On arrival he produced a surveyor's tape measure, and told me to pitch the ladder against the flag pole and measure its top-most height from the ground. I politely pointed out that there was a pin/bolt/pivot at the bottom of the pole and it could be lowered gently to the horizontal position to measure it.

He looked at me as though I was out on day release from the "Funny Farm" and said:

"Corporal, I want to know its height, not its bleeding Length!!!"

It was rumoured at the time that the same



SWO was present at a Sergeants Mess Meeting where it was proposed that the Mess purchase an expensive chandelier to enhance the entrance hall in what was a just a large converted Nissan Hut.

“Its all very well spending all this money on a chandelier,” he declared forcefully “but who in the mess can play one?”

Legend had it that some SWOs were not very bright, attributing the trend to the fact that they were predominately ex-Bedding Store Corporals in the Admin Trade Group. I recall the SWO at RAF Kai Tak asking the Fire Section to come and water his newly-planted flowers outside headquarters. The fireman taking the phone call pointed out that it was raining.

To this the SWO replied

“You’ve got a bloody Poncho ‘avent you?”

By 1961 The RAF Regiment had taken us under their wing, and I elected to go for the advance trade of Gunner/Fireman which would be rewarded with the pecuniary gain of two shillings per day. There followed several courses; basic, junior and senior gunner instructor, First Aid, and the NBC (Nuclear, Biological & Chemical Warfare) course at Winterbourne Gunner in Wiltshire. I was then mustered as a Gunner/Fireman qualified to Junior Technician, staying at Wellesbourne for a very pleasant tour.

I remember well the occasion I was summoned to HQ to see the Station Commander and wondered what it could be for. I was the only fireman at the station at this time and when I left the Section I made an occurrence book entry “Cpl Davey to SHQ”

The CO said “Congratulations you are promoted.”

The next Entry in the occurrence book read “Sgt Davey returns to Section.”

*Ed: Readers will remember that Steve sadly died last April, more of his memories will appear in future editions.*

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