

SIX-NINETY NEWS

*The newsletter of Sedgford & District Branch – formed in 1926
Royal British Legion: Branch 0690*

Issue 110 – February 2023



Branch number 690 includes the villages of Brancaster, Brancaster Staithe, Choseley, Docking, Fring, Great Bircham, North and South Creake, Sedgford, Stanhoe, Thornham and Titchwell. *We also have many members from beyond these boundaries – keep coming!*

LUNCH INFORMATION

Recently, I did some long overdue calculations, as I had wondered now and then how many Legion lunches I had organised since I started in 2007, and I discovered that the answer was 175! It had occurred to me that if we were close to a significant figure, we could perhaps have a 'celebratory' one.

This year will already have a celebration coming up, with the King's coronation 6th May, but I thought that as, by my calculation, we will reach 180 lunches in June (along with 114 newsletters!) that it would be as good a time as any to 'celebrate' at our lunch! I'm not really proposing anything spectacular, but it would be good to mark the occasion, I think.

Forthcoming lunch dates and venues are now all confirmed:

3rd March – The Aviator, Sculthorpe

14th April – The Ostrich, South Creake

5th May – **The Anvil Inn, Congham to be confirmed.**

2nd June – The White Horse, Holme next the sea

7th July - The Rose & Crown, Harpley

4th August – The Feathers, Dersingham TBC



POTENTIAL SUMMER OUTINGS

The favoured suggestions last year when I circulated a list of ideas were Burn Valley Vineyard, Watatunga wildlife reserve, King's Lynn, and Langham Dome. I also thought perhaps another boat trip on "Lucy Lavers" at Wells; Terry and I missed out last time as it was full, and more members may now also be interested. Other outings for consideration are the annual Household Cavalry open day at Bodney, which is well worth a visit, and the annual Beating the Retreat at Thursford. No dates for 2023 have been published yet for the last two mentioned. I'll do some more research, and report back, to make plans for the summer. Watch this space!



BRANCH POPPY APPEAL INTERIM TOTALS 2022

In early January, the branch total amounted to £3,949. Thank you to everyone within the branch who assisted or contributed to this total, which will, as ever, be used for the benefit of Armed Forces personnel who are in need.



COMEDY CORNER

These two items were found when looking for more information on Deryk Maddox (see below), in the newsletters which I produced from 2005 until 2011 for members of the II(AC) Squadron Association.

"From a highly amusing spoof article on the Strategic Defence and Security Review, which appeared in the RAF newsletter in September 2010:

The SDSR is amongst us and leaks to the media have already had a disastrous effect on markets. Last week RAF Fast Jet Pilots were trading at £17.99 and now we are as low as £8.99.

The RAF Newsletter has found out that Tornado GR4 aircraft are soon to be used for IED (Improvised Explosive Device) clearance, as it appears that they clear a section of ground about a mile long each time they crash. Troops are thankful for the 14 miles of cleared ground to date, but have asked for it to be somewhere more useful; not all around Kandahar."

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR NIGEL WICKENS

A memorial service is to be held on Saturday 18th February at 2pm, at All Saints Church, Stanhoe, to remember Nigel. There is a car park adjacent to the churchyard, in Church Lane.



DERYK MADDOX R.I.P.

Readers may remember that last August, I published some memoirs from Gp Capt Maddox, regarding his wartime training in the USA. I also took two of his RAF uniforms to the Bircham Newton Heritage Centre, at his request, as it is always sad when these items end up in the bin. They were in perfect condition, and we hope that they will be put on display there.

A week before Christmas, I received a phone call from his wife, Pat, to say that Deryk had died on 11th December. They had very recently sold their house in Docking, and moved to a care home nearer to their family.

Deryk's burial, which Terry and I had hoped to attend, took place on 7th January at Docking, and was followed by Mass at Hunstanton. I have exchanged several emails since with Deryk and Pat's son, Jeremy, as, unfortunately, it appears that Deryk's widow was not in the best state of mind when we spoke, and had given me the date of 9th January - two other former members of No II(AC) Sqn had also hoped to be present, including Gary Walker, our branch secretary, but were unable to make the revised date. Fortunately we did find out the day after the funeral had taken place. I have no information as to whether Deryk was a Legion member: I wouldn't be surprised if he were, but obviously not of this branch.



75 YEARS OF BOMB DISPOSAL

In October 2015, a commemorative service took place in St Paul's Cathedral for the 75th anniversary of Armed Forces explosive ordnance units, remembering those who served in the Second World War, and the conflicts of Northern Ireland and Afghanistan. Prince Harry was present, and met families of those

bomb disposal experts killed in action. The original Royal Engineers bomb disposal unit was formed in 1940, and they disposed of bombs simply by surrounding them with sandbags and blowing them up.

The first bombs dropped on the UK were in the Shetland Isles in September 1939 – these four were unexploded, and were recovered by the RAF based there. They weighed 50kg and penetrated to a depth of between six and ten feet, so it was realised that in any urban area, they could not be blown up in situ, so the fuses were researched and it was found that they could be 'immunised', leaking the electrical charge back to the earth to make them safe. However, the Germans soon developed another fuse which negated this system.

Initially, Royal Engineers provided teams of three men who were to dig down to a bomb and either explode it in situ, or use a hammer and chisel to unscrew the locking ring, withdraw the fuse, and then remove the bomb to a dump. They were also directed to train civilian ARP volunteers – but none was forthcoming! On 2nd February 1940 the Army formally took over responsibility for bomb disposal – except for any which landed on Royal Navy or Royal Air Force property, or below the high water mark in estuaries! These were dealt with by RN bomb disposal experts and RAF armourers; the Royal Army Ordnance Corps also became involved later.

In June 1940, 20 UXBs were dealt with; in July 100, and in August 300; by then 2,000 were awaiting disposal, and by September it was 3,500. Between September 1940 and July 1941, 24,108 bombs were made safe and removed.

Later in the war, the Germans developed another bomb filled with an oil mixture which, when the charge exploded, spread over a wide area. Heavy armour piercing bombs were also developed, and were used against shipping and heavily shielded targets.

Over many years, bomb disposal has become increasingly sophisticated and all three services have contributed to this, along with government and civilian agencies. The RAF teams provide specialist knowledge on things like ejection seats and air-delivered weapons to add to the knowledge base. In recent years, bomb disposal in the UK had been divided between the Army, Navy and RAF on largely geographical lines, with the Metropolitan Police providing their own capability in London.

Unexploded Second World War bombs remained, and occasionally continue to appear; the largest of these was a 12,000 lb 'Tallboy' bomb which was found in Germany. The 1974 Turkish attacks provided a considerable amount of work in Cyprus; a team operated in the Falklands in 1982; and teams were again deployed to Kosovo in the late 1990s. More recently, of course, the use of terrorist improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has become a major challenge with their unpredictable nature, variable quality and their range from complex to crude; more recently still has been the challenge of the sophistication of those used in Northern Ireland and the sheer number planted by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

forces.net / bombdisposalclub.org.uk / rafmuseum.org



ELSIE MAC GILL

Elizabeth (known as Elsie) MacGill was born in 1905 in Vancouver. The first woman to receive a master's degree in aeronautical engineering, in 1929, she was the first Canadian woman engineer, becoming the first female aeronautical engineer and aircraft designer, and chief aeronautical engineer of Canadian Car and Foundry, where she later headed the Canadian production of Hawker Hurricane aircraft during the 1939-45 war, overseeing the production of 1,451 Hurricanes. She also designed a 'winter' version of the aircraft with skis and de-icing equipment.

Her mother was also the first woman in the British Empire to achieve a bachelor's degree in music, followed by a BA and an MA in mental and moral philosophy; she later taught herself law, and became the first female judge appointed in British Columbia.

After attending public school, Elsie studied applied science at university from 1921, then moved on to electrical engineering – the first woman admitted to the programme, and graduating in 1927. Completing her master's degree in aeronautical engineering two years later, she effectively became the world's first female aeronautical engineer. In the same year, she was diagnosed with polio, but

following temporary confinement and recovery, she continued postgraduate studies until starting work with Fairchild Aircraft Ltd. Although she never walked without aids again, and drove by lifting her leg with her hands to use the clutch (and presumably the brake!), she insisted on participating in test flights to monitor the performance of her designs.

In 1943, she founded her own successful engineering consultancy company, focusing increasingly on civilian aircraft, and she became the Canadian representative of the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organisation), followed by the first woman to serve as one of their technical advisors on aircraft airworthiness.

She was also a prominent Canadian feminist and rejected the label 'woman engineer', although she did not see her profession as discriminatory, and was largely blind to any discrimination that she experienced. She died in 1980. *thecanadianencyclopedia.ca*



WORLD RECORD RAF FLIGHT POWERED BY SYNTHETIC FUEL

The RAF and Zero Petroleum have won a Guinness World Record for the world's first successful flight using only synthetic fuel. In a world-first, an Ikarus C42 microlight aircraft flown by Group Captain Peter "Willy" Hackett (see photo) completed a short flight powered by synthetic gasoline at Cotswold Airport in November 2021.

Zero Petroleum's synthetic UL91 fuel is manufactured by extracting hydrogen from water and carbon from atmospheric carbon dioxide. Using energy generated from renewable sources like wind or solar, these are combined to create the synthetic fuel. This innovation is part of the RAF's Project MARTIN and has the potential to save 80-90% of carbon per flight, supporting the RAF's vision that synthetic fuels will have a major role in powering the fast jets of the future.



This revolutionary breakthrough underscores the MOD's solution-based approach to addressing climate change issues whilst remaining agile in a world of evolving threats. It supports ambitions laid out in the Defence Command Paper and is backed by the £24 billion defence settlement, including a £6.6 billion R&D investment. Working towards the Government's Net Zero by 2050 goal, the RAF plans for their first Net Zero airbase by 2025, and goal of a Net Zero force by 2040.

The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston (*under whom I worked when I was detached to RAF Marham some years ago - Ed*) has declared his intention that the RAF should be a 'net zero' carbon emission service by 2040. *'The Roundel' Nov 2021 / www.aerosociety.com*



QARNNS

The Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service is, as you may imagine, the nursing branch of the Royal Navy Medical Branch. It was founded in 1884, and in 2006, the latest figures that I can find, it had a current requirement of 330 personnel but a total strength of 290.

When the QARNNS was founded, it was staffed by trained nurses who served on shore, at Haslar and Plymouth. It was renamed in 1902 in honour of Queen consort Alexandra, who became its President. On the outbreak of war in 1914, it was expanded significantly, with many volunteers from the British Red Cross and civilian hospitals; during the second world war, many QARNNS nurses were deployed overseas.

In 1949, a nursing branch of the Women's Royal Naval Service was formed, however, unsurprisingly (*in my view – Ed*) these nurses were, in 1960, integrated into QARNNS to create a single nursing service and at the same time, men were admitted to serve as QARNNS nurses. Although fully affiliated to the Royal Navy from 1977, it remained technically a separate service until 31st March 2000 when it became officially part of the Royal Navy.

Members now have the opportunity to serve on land, at sea and in the air, and of course to travel world-wide like any other member of the armed forces.

en.wikipedia.org / www.royalnavy.mod.uk



A CRASHED MOSQUITO IN THE WASH

On 20th March 1945, de Havilland Mosquito NS998 of 85 Sqn, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Gabriel Hitch Ellis RAFVR from Norwich, took off from its base at RAF Swannington (Norfolk) for air-to-air firing practice on the range off the coast. Also on board was navigator Sergeant William Patrick Reidy RAFVR.

However, in a tight turn to line up with the drogue target, the plane stalled and spun into the sea. The aircraft and crew were lost, and no attempt was made to trace and recover it. The names of the crew were subsequently inscribed and immortalised on the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, to those with no known grave.



Then almost sixty years later, in April 2004 during a routine survey of a rarely used shipping channel in The Wash some one and a half miles from the port of King's Lynn, shifting channels exposed a propeller tip sticking out of the sand. Further investigation revealed that this was the wreckage of the missing Mosquito NS998.

The RAF and a Royal Navy diving team from Portsmouth recovered the metal parts of the aircraft which had broken into several pieces in the shallow water, and also located and recovered the remains of both crew members. The relatives of both men were traced, and military funerals were offered, and whilst Flt Lt Ellis' family chose to have a private cremation, Sergeant Reidy was buried, with full military honours, in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and Ministry of Defence section of the parish cemetery at Marham.

The salvage operation recovered many parts including two engines, two propellers and two cannons with many of these relics finding a home at the Fenland and West Norfolk Aviation Museum near Wisbech.

The sacrifice of these two men has further meaning for those who are involved with 42F (King's Lynn) Squadron of the Air Training Corps: in 2008, at the Squadron HQ, a memorial was dedicated to their known 14 wartime cadets who never made it home. This memorial was constructed with one of the propeller blades from Mosquito NS998, donated to the Air Cadets from the Fenland museum. It is therefore fitting that it has been dedicated to Flt Lt Ellis and Sgt Reidy. *No 42F Sqn ATC*



CIVIL DEFENCE CORPS

The Civil Defence Corps was a civilian volunteer organisation in Britain during the Second World War, having been established by the War Office in 1935 as the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) – the name was officially changed in 1941. It included the ARP wardens service, as well as the Auxiliary Fire Service and latterly the National Fire Service. Over 1.9 million people served within the CD, nearly 2,400 of whom lost their lives due to enemy action. The CD organisation was the responsibility of local authorities, and each local force was divided into a number of sections:

Wardens were responsible for local reconnaissance and reporting, and the leadership, organisation, guidance and control of the general public.

Rescue Parties were required to assess and then access damaged buildings during air raids, and retrieve injured or dead people, as well as turning off gas, electricity and water supplies, and either repair or demolish unsteady damaged buildings.

Medical services included first aid parties; more serious injuries were passed by stretcher parties or ambulances to local hospitals. If necessary, bodies could also be transported to emergency mortuaries.

Gas Decontamination Teams were kitted with protective clothing, both gas-tight and waterproof, to deal with gas attacks. They were trained in decontamination of buildings, roads, rail and other materials contaminated by liquid or jelly gases.

Report and Control dealt with all the information which would be generated during an air raid. A local headquarters controller would direct rescue, first aid, and decontamination teams to reported bombed sites. Assistance would be requested from surrounding boroughs if local services proved insufficient for the incident.

Fire Guards (Initially Fire Watchers Order and then Fire Watcher Service) were responsible for a designated area or building, to monitor the fall of incendiary bombs, and pass on reports of any fires to the National Fire Service. They were able to deal with individual magnesium incendiary bombs by dousing them in buckets of sand or water, or by smothering them.



Welfare would support people injured, or bombed out of their homes, finding suitable accommodation, issuing documentation like ID cards and ration books, and providing money to buy food.

Messengers would convey information from the site of bombing incidents back to ARP HQ. Many messengers were Scouts and teenagers, equipped with no more than a bicycle.

The Corps was stood down in 1945, reformed with the same name in 1948, and finally disbanded in 1968. en.wikipedia.org

The photograph is of my mother in her Civil Defence uniform; she was a volunteer ambulance driver - Ed



NOTHING TO DO WITH THE LEGION....

....but are you as irritated as I am by the constant use in the media (well, the BBC, actually, in its interminable coverage of sport) of the terms 'hat trick' and 'grand slam'?

The term 'hat trick' first appeared in 1858 in cricket, to describe H. H. Stephenson taking three wickets with three consecutive deliveries. Fans held a collection for Stephenson, and presented him with a hat bought with the proceeds. The term was used in print for the first time in 1865 in the Chelmsford Chronicle.

The term 'grand slam', although not confirmed, is thought to have originated in the card game of bridge, in which a grand slam involves taking all the possible tricks. That, of course, means nothing to me, as I have never played bridge! The word slam, obviously relating to a loud sound particularly of a door being closed with excess force, could indicate *slamming the door* on one's opponent(s).

In baseball, of which I also know nothing, a grand slam is a home run hit with all three bases occupied by baserunners, apparently, thereby scoring four runs—the most possible in one play, in addition to the bat slamming the ball into a home run. (According to *The Dickson Baseball Dictionary*) None of the above, of course, relates the terms to other sports, for example tennis or football, in the reporting of which both are frequently used! *en.wikipedia.org*



SUPPLEMENT

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of us are apparently worried about our homes being broken into, yet there are simple, proven measures which we can all take to halve our chances of being burgled.

The burglary prevention campaign highlights the simple, evidence-based 'WIDE' measures which can be taken in any home on a variety of budgets.

At Neighbourhood Watch, we also believe neighbours keeping an eye out for each other is key to reducing burglary, so we've extended the WIDE acronym to WIDE(N):

- **W: WINDOWS:** Keep your windows locked
- **I: INTERIOR:** Put inside lights on a timer/smart bulb
- **D: DOORS:** Double or deadlock your doors
- **E: EXTERIOR:** Put outside lights on a sensor
- **(N): NEIGHBOURS:** Keep an eye out for your neighbours

Leaving home? Keep your home safe and secure.

From Hampshire Neighbourhood Watch Network