

## Chairman's Report

*Fellow Members,*

*To say the last year has been a little turbulent for the RAFA Newark & District Branch is perhaps something of an understatement?*

*Having made a significant return to some normality post-COVID thanks to the concerted efforts of past and present members of the Branch Committee and your support. We were then faced with some not insignificant utility bills (even previously to the current energy and cost-of-living crisis!) and projected building repairs. After much discussion, option reviews, soul-searching and indeed sleepless nights, we reluctantly came to the decision that we could not continue in the same vein if the Branch were to survive and prosper.*

*Fortuitously, we separately and coincidentally received an approach from a local charity interested in acquiring the Branch/Club building to open a social hub for the wider-services community. Whilst this was not perhaps the panacea we were looking for, it did provide a solution to give us the ability to keep the Branch alive and to move forward preventing a real risk of overall and complete closure.*

*With the active support of HQ RAFA (as owners of the Building) the sale of the premises is progressing, but sadly does mean the closing of the Club that as you will be aware was agreed at a SGM in October 2022. You may have noticed that much has already been going on 'behind the scenes' in preparation, with still yet more to come with not least the disposal of 40+ years of collected, donated and loaned pictures, memorabilia etc. Some such items on loan have already been returned to their owners and there is a stall in the Branch where books and smaller items are available for purchase with a charitable donation. The larger and more valuable items no longer required by the Branch are being catalogued and if not bought/transferred to the new charity, will be auctioned / sold at a later date yet to be determined.*

*Clearly, all of this does not just happen and collectively your Branch Committee is to be congratulated for their continuing efforts during such turbulent times. I would especially like to thank **Jerry Flint**, our current Vice Chairman, for his sterling efforts standing in for me as Chairman during my recent extended absence in Australia. At the same time he also found time and is to be*

*congratulated on creating a new website for the Branch to add to our online digital presence.*

*Regrettably due to a variety of business, health, and for personal reasons, some of our Trustees and committee members had to step down during the year, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank **George Campbell, Sarah Rowe** and **Des Saint** for their support and help during their respective tenures in office. Whilst **Paul Watson** has been a stalwart committee member for a number of years, he has advised that he wishes to take break and will not be standing for re-election, however, he has kindly agreed to continue as Branch Standard Bearer.*

*Talking of the Branch Standard and whilst this has all been going on, we have continued to be represented at the seemingly numerous parades, dedications and commemoration services of recent days. **Alan Brooke**, former Branch Chairman, has also represented the Branch with the Standard further afield at events in London and Lincoln. All of these events have enjoyed the support of **Dennis Atkins**, our Honorary Life Vice-President, if not in person then certainly in spirit!*

*Before moving on it would be remiss not to also thank **James Scott** our outgoing RAFALO and stand-in Standard Bearer, on his departure on posting and promotion for his dedicated support to the Branch over the past couple of years. On the subject of RAFALO, I am pleased to advise that FS **Matt Cryer** from RAF Waddington has kindly 'volunteered' to become the new Branch RAFALO.*

*Matt's joining us is due in no short part to the persuasive skills of **Gary 'Gaz' Cresswell** who volunteered to join us during the year and was subsequently co-opted to the Committee. He readily took over the role of Editor of our award winning newsletter, "The Newark Nimrod" and is already proving his worth! In case you weren't aware the 'Nimrod' was voted by RAFA Central Council as the best Branch Newsletter 2021/22. Gaz has also recently started an online 'webinar' for Branch members providing news and points of interest. Whilst still early days these sessions are proving popular with increasing audience numbers. I am also pleased to advise that Gaz has volunteered to stand as the new Chairman in my stead.*

*It would certainly be remiss not to also mention and thank **Robin Docksey** who, as our Branch Secretary, provides the glue that holds everything together and quietly works behind the scenes to ensure the Branch continues to run efficiently and within the bounds of our regulations.*

*I am pleased to further report that we have a cadre of current volunteers for Trustee and Committee Member appointments for the forthcoming year(s)*

including **Elspeth White** who has agreed to take on the vital role of Wings Appeal Co-ordinator for the forthcoming year from **James Scott** who co-ordinated the raising and donating of £954.00 for 2022. You will hear later that this year we already have £699.00 in our Wings Account so hopefully we can exceed our 2021 donated amount of £2011.00 – no pressure Elspeth!!

Thanks to the efforts of **Des Saint** we continued to fulfil our welfare role throughout the year supporting and helping our members both locally and further afield. However, there is still a vacancy for the role of Honorary Branch Welfare Officer if you would like to volunteer? As they say in the adverts “full training will be given” to take on this vital and rewarding appointment.

I believe we should feel blessed to have these willing individuals who I am sure will continue to work unstintingly for the benefit of the Branch and you its members, particularly at this time of great change!

In conclusion, recognising the closure of Club and the handing over of the premises will mark the end of an era and is certainly not a legacy that I would have necessarily wished to preside over, but perhaps more importantly, I do genuinely feel that it presents a most exciting time for the Branch and the opportunity for a new beginning to thrive and prosper. When no longer tied by the administrative diversion to overseeing a Club and without the financial constraints of maintaining a building, I really believe that this is a time that will mark, with your support, the rise and return of the Branch to its former level of success and indeed beyond?!. Thus, we will be able to concentrate our efforts on delivering our charitable aims for the benefit of our members as is our *raison d’etre*.

Any questions?

Before asking the Vice-President to takeover the proceedings and as this will be my last annual report as Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity, if I may, to thank my fellow Trustees and you the members all for your help, support and encouragement during my brief tenure as Branch Chairman and wish you all and the Branch continued success for the future and I leave you with this final thought.....,

**Not so much the end of an era, but the opportunity for a new beginning.....**

Thank you!