

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR AGM 2019

My report covers the 12 months since the last AGM. The year has been a very eventful one and to list everything that has happened would take a long time. I will therefore confine this report to some of the more significant and satisfying events – the high spots of the year - and just touch on a few low spots.

In April of last year, we held a large exhibition, in partnership with the Jet Age Museum, to commemorate and celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force. I say “we” but, in truth, this was a project conceived, planned, organised and executed almost entirely by AVM Tony Mason – our Life Vice-President. The exhibition was a huge success, bringing pleasure and education to large numbers of school children and the wider public, and raising very substantially the profile and reputation of this Branch.

Something that the Branch Committee worked on for many months was the development of a strategic plan for the Branch and its Club. We went through a number of versions of the plan and arrived at what we think is a good, but not perfect, model ready to roll out on 1 January this year. Every Member with email has been sent a copy and it is also available to download from the Branch web site.

Welfare work is the essence of the Association and, as the RAFA Governance Handbook states: “Branches are the basic unit of the Association and it is through the work of their members that it is possible for the Association to meet its charitable object”. We felt, therefore, that welfare, in its widest sense, should be central to the strategic plan, and so we adopted the following **vision** which I commend to you:

***We will support, value and seek to enhance the lives of the local members of the RAF Family*** (this is one part the dream, and the other, setting out the path for our future activities).

To provide the means with which to reach that vision, we set out the following **strategic aim:**

***Create by the end of 2023 a Branch that is successful and which is prepared for a lasting future.***

If you want to know more, please ask for a copy of the plan.

Our 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary exhibition, like many such projects, lacked the funds in the early stages to buy and rent everything we needed. The Branch therefore gave the exhibition a contingency grant of £3000 in case funds ran out too early. Well, Tony Mason also proved himself to be a fundraiser *extraordinaire* and, by the end of the project, we were far from short of money. In fact, the residual amount in the account was sufficient to pay back £2000 to the Branch. That has now been done..

Let me now mention very briefly some low points because, very sadly, we lost three of the long-serving stalwarts of the Branch. Gil Wakely was for many years the Chairman of the Branch and did much to develop and improve it at a time, some years ago, when its prospects were challenging. That we are here today is very much due to his legacy of leadership and endeavour. Cyril Richardson was the leading founder of the Aviation History Group and a man whose dedication, loyalty and commitment to the Branch were unsurpassed. Bill Leech was another who served this Branch and Club well, and whose enthusiasm and drive were displayed as a Branch Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and Club Chairman and Vice-Chairman. Both Cyril and Bill were conscientious contributors to the well-being of our Members almost to the last and, like Gil, they will be sorely missed.

You will probably have noticed that the development work adjacent to our car park is getting close to its end. While the disruption that this work has caused was still going on, car parking rules were applied flexibly and even gently. However, once the development work has been finished and the car park returned to us, car parking rules will be enforced so please do not get caught out. New permits will be issued, primarily according to need on RAFA business.

I mentioned earlier that the profile of the Branch had been raised by the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary exhibition in April of last year, but the extent to which we are recognised has been growing rapidly over the past few years. Let me give you one small example that illustrates this. We received the following email a few weeks ago:

***My name is Jayne Macdonald ( née Newland ) & I'm trying to locate a long lost friend by the name of Mary Jane Twidale. I emigrated to Australia ( Brisbane ) in 1973. Mary Jane & I met in Boots, Plymouth & became great friends but lost contact many years ago. I came across an old newspaper clipping of Mary Jane & her old English sheepdog called " Fleabag" they were raising funds for the Wings Appeal which has prompted me to write to you to ask if anyone remembers her, I seem to recall she dreamed of joining the R.A.F. The last known address I have is 384, London rd Charlton Kings Cheltenham. I would love to reconnect with her if you can help in anyway I would much appreciate.***

I emailed back to say that there was no-one of that name recorded as a Branch member or was listed in any other sources such as the BT phone book or the people web searcher 192.com. I also said that the lady in question may well have changed her surname on marriage or moved away from the area which would make it very difficult to track her down,

but would ask a couple of ladies in the Branch who might be able to help. I passed her email to Jane Gandy and Moyne Blake, and within a week their detective work had discovered details of the funeral of Mary-Jane's mother, and from these it was very likely that Mary-Jane was still alive. The relevant funeral directors wanted a letter from the lady in Australia which they would then pass on to the immediate family of Mary-Jane. We are now waiting on feedback from the lady but it looks very likely that she will soon be in contact with her old friend. Not only is this an example of how we have wide recognition but it also epitomises the comradeship and commitment to each other that is at the heart of the Association.

We have very recently been advised by Association HQ of three very important developments that are underway and which will have a profound effect on every Branch, not least this one and its Club. The first is the introduction of a major new policy on Welfare. The second is far more comprehensive and is the exploration of options for the Association and its branches to operate as a single organisation – the so-called "One Charity" model. The final development is the possible introduction of a system whereby every single member of the Association will be able to vote on resolutions submitted at Area and National Conferences. This is known as the OMOV concept.

Documents describing these development are available to all members and I urge everyone to study them and make your views known to anyone on the Branch Committee. Please do not think that they are NTDWM – they are!

As I mentioned earlier, development work adjacent to our premises is coming to an end. There is no doubt that, for two years now, it has caused dust, debris, noise and inconvenience. But payments to the Branch for crane oversail and car park access licenses, and penalties for breaking the

terms of those licenses, has made us £55000 better off. On that note, I will end this report.

Mike Bryant  
Branch Chairman