



The Chair's Annual Report 2017

The Finances

Our finances at the end of 2017 amounted to £130,058.26, comprising a bank balance of £68,651.51 and reserves of £61,406.75. However, £21,942.36 of this money is restricted for expenditure on the RFA Memorial, Coull Memorial Award, RFA Summer Ball/BBQ, RFA Golf and Welfare. The balances have increased significantly over the past few years as the RFA Ball and Golf have transferred their entire financial holdings to the RFAA whilst ring fencing amounts for their immediate use; the golf section remains our primary contributor.

In 2017 income, at £24,061.74 was £10,443.71 lower than 2016 largely due to the loss of funding from the RFA Benevolent Fund (-£4500) and reduced membership fees and donations. Very generous donations were received from the Scottish and North East (£1,000) and Solent (£300) branches. A first day issue stamp has also been produced to commemorate the commissioning of RFA Tidespring, sales of which have so far raised over £600 profit for the charity.

In year expenditure continued to fall to £19,769.23, £5300.28 lower than paid out in 2016 although there is a payment of £1,625 outstanding to the membership secretary which should have fallen into the 2017 accounts. £265.31 of this was spent on providing a new RFA memorial in the Lee -on-the Solent Falklands Memorial Garden and for the first time £250 given to each of the six RFAA UK regional branches to support local maritime projects and charity appeals. £500 was spent on welfare payments to needy individuals, £750 down on the previous years payments. AGM costs were £830 higher than 2016 due to the London location and £4,482.72 included in the expenses to reflect the annual Golf tournament costs. Trustees expenses at £2265.58 were the lowest since 2013.

Whilst the capital has increased by £4292 over the past year interest earned on reserves continue to be very poor producing just £142.85 in 2016.

We continue to be constrained by our constitution and the Charities Commission as to where we can deposit funds. This restricts options but better rates of return are continually sought. More accounts information is available on the Charity Commission website (England and Wales) <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk> and the Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) <http://www.oscr.org.uk/>.

The Constitution

No changes to our Constitution were made in 2017 and the Board of Trustees continue to ensure the Association meets our constitutional requirements as required.

The Membership

Membership is currently running at 660 in total, of which 163 are Life Members and 9 are Honorary Members. The RFA no longer gifts membership but gives leavers access to the Ship Mates and Oppos scheme (A support programme for leavers of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and RFA). They issue a leaver with a voucher for one year's membership to the Association. It is hoped that this way we may 'capture' more members from across the whole RFA.

The Trustees

Trustees stand for a period of 6 years but may serve for a maximum of 9 years. They must be re-elected on a year-to-year basis.

Ray Bennett, Chair, Solent. (Completes 9 years at AGM 2021)

Peter Fry, Deputy Chair/Treasurer, Solent. (Completes 9 years at AGM 2020)

Robert Settle, Welfare, Northwest. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2020)

Ian Thompson, Northwest. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2021)

Patrick Molloy, S&N. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2021)

Stan McCabe, London & SE. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2023)

Keith Escott, Plymouth & SW. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2023)

In addition, the following Ex Officio Trustee is appointed by COMRFA

Captain (LS) Martin Jones RFA

The two COMRFA Maritime Trade Union representatives decline to participate.

The Association is always looking for potential candidates to undertake the duties of a trustee. Without trustees the Charity cannot function and members must be prepared to support their Association. You will note that some of the Trustees are getting near to their end date. Anyone who would like to volunteer their services and who is interested in becoming a trustee please contact the Chair or any Trustee. We look for members from across the board, across the

specialisations and ranks and across the country, as it is important that the Board is as representative as it is practically possible to make it.

The Branches

Plymouth and South West

Plymouth and South West (Chair John Halford) continue to be an active branch, with six meetings a year and additionally three lunches plus a Christmas lunch. They staff a stand for Armed Forces Day as well as providing representatives for The Lord Mayor's Choosing. They provide Standards for funerals, civic functions and the Remembrance Service at the Plymouth Pavilions. Usually 25 members attend their bi-monthly meetings. (129 members)

Solent

The Solent branch (Chair Stuart Pearce) have 7/8 functions a year, 4 Committee meetings plus an AGM. Social functions normally attract 40-60 members. A group of members attended the Service of Dedication of Tidespring in November. (147 members)

London and the South East

The London branch (Chair Stan McCabe) continue to meet regularly. The major challenge of their year was to organise the AGM/Dinner, which was quite an undertaking given the London location and the security aspects associated with the attendance of our Patron. BZ! (84 members)

Midlands

Midlands Branch (Chair John Sail) struggle with a membership which is spread over a wide geographical area. They need more support to become a viable branch. (69 members)

Scottish and Newcastle

The branch (Joint-Chair Gill Forth & Andrew Armstrong) held lunch events throughout the region and usually take the form of a sit down Sunday Lunch. They have more members, but again are spread widely. (126 members)

North West

The branch (Chair Ian Thompson) have made good progress in encouraging its small number of members to attend social functions. The small, dedicated team planning the AGM and Dinner for 2018 are now at an advanced stage in organising the Liverpool Reunion. (26 members)

The work of all Branch Chair and their committees is what makes the Association function. Volunteering is often a thankless, though rewarding task and those who undertake any aspect of Branch or National work are recognised here.

Associated Organisations

The Association has links to the RFA Association of Malta and John Caruana of the London Branch provides liaison.

We have an affiliation with Seychelles, Mr Guy Govinden is leader and there are currently 12 Affiliates and several retired RFA Seychellois seamen.

There is a very unofficial “branch” (The Far Flung) in Thailand with John Littlechild and David Palin providing the necessary liaison.

We also have members in: Falkland Islands, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Croatia, Singapore, Oman, Spain, South Africa, Japan, Bahamas and Jersey.

The Management

The Association rents rooms 212 & 214 in Semaphore Tower, Portsmouth Naval Base. Our offices house the entire collection of RFA artefacts, pictures, battle honours belonging to ships no longer in service and a substantial collection of literature. Access to the Naval Base is very difficult and possible alternate options continue to be investigated.

The Association continues to have trustees from all areas of UK and our management has become more diverse and widespread. The trustees continue to meet approximately 3 times a year, but all the day-to-day work continues to be done at home. The Chairman is assisted by Dawn Reay who is our part-time Membership Secretary and Bookkeeper. Pat Thompson runs the website and manages ceremonial duties. Trustee Peter Fry is our Treasurer/Deputy Chairman. Robin Lock handles Corporate Fundraising for the time being, but we are actively looking for his relief, whilst Trustee Bob Settle deals with Welfare in coordination with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

The Website (www.rfa-association.org.uk)

The website continues to provide news to the membership on an ad hoc basis.

Most branches have their own area on the websites to publish, providing local flavour and information to members. Similarly, each branch has its own area in the RFAA photo gallery.

In addition to the website we operate a Facebook and Twitter page, members should just search the Facebook and Twitter sites to find our entries.

The Members Handbook

The 2017/2018 Member's Handbook and Yearbook was distributed in February 2017. The Year Book continues to be printed at no cost to the Association by kind courtesy of Method Publishing. However, the related distribution costs are ever increasing and everything is done to be as cost effective as possible e.g. stamps purchased from discounted website at less than face value.

Gunline

Gunline is no longer published. Our own Force 4 is held in abeyance at present and I do not apologise for repeating last year's appeal.

"Whatever means of news communications we use, none of the content is possible unless all the branches and members, contribute articles and photos. Without your input we cannot produce Year Book and Force 4. This is an important part of our remit, so please help us to help you."

The RFAA Emergency Welfare Fund.

In the last year there were 4 applications for assistance. In three cases initial contact was established, but eventually the application failed through lack of response to further communications or not providing proof of eligibility. One case was successful and the recipient was extremely grateful for our assistance. We involve other agencies SSAFA, Royal British Legion, etc. where appropriate as they have greater resources, including qualified case-workers who can accurately assessment of an individual's need.

The RFA National Memorial / Graves.

Keeping the memorial alive and relevant is not easy. A small group is planning to visit in May 2018. We are currently negotiating a contract for repair, maintenance and cleaning of the RFA Memorial. Money is ring fenced for this purpose.

The grave of an ex RFA seaman in Limassol, Cyprus who was killed in a RAS accident, lacks a headstone and this has been an ongoing issue for a number of years. Sadly, we have now exhausted all avenues to precisely locate the grave, which may have previously been removed as is the local custom. Should new information come to light then further efforts will be made. The Association is extremely grateful to all those who assist us to do this important and very difficult work.

Annual Meeting with the Commodore.

The Annual meeting with the Commodore took place on 17th December 2017. At this meeting we were able to better understand the challenges the RFA is facing and the Commodore also got a better feel for what we do for the RFA community, serving and retired. Cdre Lamb affirmed his commitment to the Association though we still lack a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Serving organisation.

The Coull Memorial Award

In 2017, the Coull Memorial Award was awarded CPO Martin Crawford for his work on the first of class RFA Tidespring. For operational reasons it has not been possible to arrange a mutually convenient date to make the award and we now plan to present last and this year's awards together. The 2018 award will be announced at the AGM and will be presented by the Association at the RFA Awards Ceremony in July.

General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

A lot of work has been undertaken in the year to prepare the charity to meet the requirements of the GDPR in May 2018. A Privacy Statement, Cybersecurity policy, contact consent and data audit are all in course of preparation to meet the deadline.

Looking Ahead

The Association continues to meet its aims. Primarily, that of social contact, pastoral care and welfare. The future still holds challenges to be met, not least our aging demographic. The Trustees investigated future possible options for support by association with other Charities. The consensus was to continue as we are. However, the status quo cannot be maintained forever and without willing and active members to perpetuate the Association we shall eventually fail, at the very least at a National level.

On a brighter note, I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our next AGM and Dinner!



Ray Bennett
Chair
RFA Association.

28th April 2018