



The Chair's Annual Report 2018

The Finances

Our finances at the end of 2018 amounted to £137,693.82, comprising a bank balance of £76,008.11 and reserves of £61,685.71. There are £2842 of outgoings from 2018 yet to be paid which would have reduced this balance. Of this total £24,970.55 is restricted for expenditure on the RFA Memorial, Coull Memorial Award, RFA Summer Ball/BBQ, RFA Golf and Welfare. The unrestricted balance continued to increase over the last year with the golf annual competition, sponsored by the maritime industry, remaining our primary contributor.

In 2018 income, at £24,056.14, was £994 higher than 2017 due to a slight increase in golf receipts and branch donations; these being from the Scottish and North East (£526.50) and Plymouth and District branches (£1250). Membership fees income continues to decline (-£279), a worrying trend reflecting the age profile of our members.

In year expenditure continued to fall to £16,420.58 but in reality, would have remained fairly static had the outstanding payments for Semaphore Tower office rental, Membership Secretary costs and some expenses due to be paid in 2018 been included in the accounts. Semaphore Tower bills were not issued by our MOD landlord until early 2019 when lease negotiations were concluded. £250 was again given to each of the six RFAA UK regional branches to support local maritime projects and charity appeals. £2962 was spent on welfare payments to needy individuals, including the costs of providing welfare support, £2462 up on the previous year's payments. Golf tournament costs rose by £260, postage by £507, office supplies by £647 (including a replacement laptop computer) and ceremonial expenses by £276 whilst Trustees expenses fell by £469 to £1796.

Whilst the capital has increased by £7635.56 over the past year, interest earned on reserves continue to be very poor producing just £278.96 in 2018. A decision was taken by the Trustees during the year to invest £10k of reserves into an appropriate equity fund but this has been delayed due to current market turbulence and the uncertainty caused by BREXIT arrangements.

A Reserves Policy has been agreed by the Trustees, published and implemented to provide early warning of any financial pressure emerging on the RFAA Charity and allow time for appropriate action to address this.

Accounts information and this report will be 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/> when the accounts have completed independent examination.

The Constitution

No changes to our Constitution were made in 2018 and the Board of Trustees continue to ensure the Association meets our constitutional requirements as required.

The Membership

Membership is currently running at 661 in total, of which 160 are Life Members and 9 are Honorary Members. Membership has effectively remained static over the last year. Which is good news for now, but the average age is increasing (not corroborated by data). The Ship Mates and Oppos scheme (A support programme for leavers of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and RFA) was introduced in 2017. It issues a leaver with a voucher for one year's membership to the Association. It is hoped that this way we may have 'captured' more members from across the whole RFA. However, to date, not one member has joined via this scheme.

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 2022)

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. (Stood down November 2018)

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

Martin Troman, London & SE. (Co-opted and standing at AGM 2019)

COMRFA has not appointed any Ex Officio Trustees.

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

All branches (except the Midland Branch) continue to meet regularly. Most events are of a social nature (lunches, BBQ etc). They also provide representatives for memorial days, Remembrance Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Merchant Navy Day. Importantly, members have also attended funerals of former RFA personnel and we have supplied coffin drapes (RFA Ensign) as required.

The Midland branch remains a fragmented membership and rationalisation of where some members have been allocated is required. Anyone who is to be invited to change Branch they will, of course, be contacted first. The Midland Branch funds are to be returned to Central Funds, with a view to providing those monies back to the branch should it reinvigorate.

The work of all Branch Chair and their committees is vital to help keep the Association running, provide social, pastoral, welfare care and just plain friendship. 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. We have not had any contact with this group for some time.

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, some battle honours belonging to ships no longer in service and a substantial collection of literature. We have been invited by our landlord to relocate to a new building in the Naval base as our floor in the tower is being redeveloped for a new role. Once lease issues, insurance and rent had been settled and the move taken place, our new Charity address will be announced. Access issues will still be the same, but it is safe and secure location for our collection.

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. All information posted on whatever media platform is there because someone has taken to the time to supply it. We do not have the resources to hunt for or create content. If anyone has something of interest, please pass it to the Webmaster or Chair. 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 2019/2020 Member's Handbook and Yearbook was distributed in February 2019. 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 Welfare Fund.

By their very nature welfare cases are very sensitive, 'Personnel in Confidence' to use a service phrase so this report will be very general and heavy on statistics.

Since the last AGM 9 welfare cases have been brought to the attention of the welfare committee.

Of these, only 3 were member related. 3 of the 9 can be considered resolved. Payments were made in these 3 cases, of which 2 benefitted members. Incidentally all three of these cases were brought to our attention by Andy August, the Solent Branch almoner whose efforts were invaluable. I wish to acknowledge both Andy's and Bob Settle's diligent work in achieving the Association's welfare aims.

Maximum benefit in accordance with the welfare rules were made in these cases and £1250 was paid out in all successful cases.

Of the other 6 cases, one claim did not meet our criteria being unable to provide proof of dependence. This case remains open awaiting such proof.

A further case was referred to us via another service charity. The welfare committee approved maximum benefit, but was asked by the originating charity to hold fast on payment until they have fully investigated the claim with SSAFA.

Another case was brought to our attention by SSAFA Merseyside, but no proof of RFA service has been provided so the case is marked as pending.

Of the remaining cases one involved a friend seeking advice for a former seaman which was provided.

There was a similar with no financial help sought but just requiring signposting to organisations providing guidance and advice.

The final case was from a charity dealing with military veterans in custody or on probation seeking information on assistance available.

As shown above our 'success' rate has been 1 in 3 of the cases that came to our attention.

Once a case has been inactive for a year, they become dormant, but remain on file.

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. Our Welfare Policy has been updated and re-issued to increase and extend payments

The RFA National Memorial / Graves.

Keeping the memorial at the National Arboretum in the Midlands alive and relevant is not easy. A small group visited 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.

Sadly, the search for a resolution to the marking the grave of an ex RFA seaman in Limassol, Cyprus who was killed during a RAS accident has come to a halt. 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 in December 2018. 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 and we no longer receive any income from the Benevolent fund.

The Coull Memorial Award

In 2018, the Coull Memorial Award was awarded 1/O(X) Jamie Finlay and was presented to him at the RFA Awards Ceremony in July. (NB one submission was made for the 2019 award, but the Trustees considered that it did not meet the criteria and the award is in abeyance until next year.)

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.

31th March 2019