



The Chair's Annual Report 2019

Finances

Our finances at the end of 2019 amounted to £138,637 comprising a bank balance of £76,600 and reserves of £62,036. Of this total £13,410 is restricted for expenditure on the Coull Memorial award and RFA Memorial and a further £13,700 ring fenced for the RFA Summer Ball/BBQ, RFA Golf and Welfare. The unrestricted balance is only £223 higher than the 2018 figure.

In 2019 income, at £22,169 was £42 lower than the previous year largely due to a reduction in Golf Event income whilst subscriptions and branch fundraising was slightly increased. Expenditure increased by £4805 due to £2842 of bills carried over from 2018 (MoD office rent and staff costs), an additional £1538 of welfare related payments and increased Trustees meeting expenses.

Accounts information and this report will shortly 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/>.

Governance

The charity is a charitable unincorporated association and is registered with both the England and Wales Charity commission (Reg No 1093950) and the Office for the Scottish Charity Regulator (reg No SCO39054). It has a three-tier structure consisting of the Members, 6 Regional Branches and the Board of Trustees.

Trustees are appointed in accordance with the constitution and are voted into office annually at a members' AGM. They can serve for a maximum of 9 years continuously.

The duties of Treasurer and bookkeeper are separated and 2 signatures required for all payments. A reserves policy has been implemented and the balance of unrestricted funds will be enough to carry on the current level of activities for a minimum of 6 years.

In accordance with Charity Commission requirements and to improve governance the following Policy Documents have been introduced or updated during the year and can be found on our website:

Reserves Policy, Safeguarding Vulnerable People Policy, Whistle Blowing Policy, Harassment and Bullying Policy, Equality Policy, Cyber Security Policy and Welfare Policy.

The Constitution

No changes to our Constitution were made in 2019 and the Board of Trustees continue to ensure the Association meets our constitutional requirements as required. However, the Board has been investigating an update to the Constitution to bring it into line with current Charity Act requirements. It is proposed to introduce them for approval before the 2020 AGM.

The Membership

Membership is currently running at 662 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) with the associated issues that presents us as a group.

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 2021)

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

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

Patrick Molloy, S&N. (Stood down in August 2019)

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

Martin Troman, London & SE. (Completes 6 years at AGM 2025)

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 should 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 in name only. Should it become viable, it will be most welcome and will be supported by the Board.

The work of all Branch Chair and their committees is vital to help keep the Association running providing regional 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 a very loose 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 now rents a room in Stony Lane, Portsmouth Naval Base. It houses the entire collection of RFA artefacts, pictures, some battle honours belonging to ships no longer in service and a substantial collection of literature. We moved from our Semaphore Tower office in April as MOD required that space for service use. The assistance of Solent Branch members who helped pack and unpack was invaluable and to whom I'm extremely grateful. Access issues will still be the same, but it is safe and secure location for our collection.

The Association has trustees from all across the UK and our management has become more diverse and widespread. The trustees continue to meet approximately 4 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. Peter Fry is our Treasurer/Deputy Chairman. Robin Lock handles Corporate Fundraising for which I am most grateful. Without his work we would be

around £10k a year poorer. 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.

Other means of communication are being investigated.

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, who make their profit through the advertising contained in the book. 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 now defunct. 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 the Year Book and Force 4. This is an important part of our remit, so please help us to help you."

The RFAA Welfare Fund.

In the last year there were 9 applications for assistance. Not all cases have resulted in a successful conclusion but we paid out £1550 in personal grants. Any help we give is always gratefully accepted. We involve other agencies SSAFA, Royal British Legion, etc. where appropriate as they have greater resources and full time qualified case-workers who can accurately assess an individual's need. Our Welfare Policy has been updated and re-issued to increase and extend payments.

The Welfare Director's report summary is attached at Annex A.

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 still waiting to place the outline agreed contract for repair, maintenance and cleaning and money is ring fenced for this purpose.

Annual Meeting with the Commodore.

The Annual meeting with the Commodore took place in January 2020 (unable to match dates in December). A broad range of issues were discussed, including welfare and the MOU. He also committed to provide a permanent (non-voting) representative to the Board of Trustees. His Chief of Staff, currently Chief Officer (LS) Jane Struthers, will attend future meetings.

The Coull Memorial Award

In 2019 the award was not awarded due to the lack of suitable candidates. We look forward to making the award in 2020.

Looking Ahead

The Association continues to meet its aims. Primarily, that of social contact, pastoral care and welfare. As ever, the future holds challenges to be met, not least our aging demographic. But you, the members, are the Association and it is you that makes the Association what it is.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our next AGM and Dinner!



Ray Bennett
National Chair
RFA Association.

21st April 2020

ANNEX A: Welfare Report.

By their very nature welfare cases are very sensitive, this report will be very general.

In 2019, 9 welfare cases were brought to the attention of the welfare committee.

2 were member related.

All bar 2, from the Association's point of view can be considered resolved. Payments were made in 6 of these cases.

A total of £3200 was paid.

2 cases remain on going. Once a case has been inactive for a year, they become dormant.

1. At AGM 2019 we reported the then on-going case of the widow of a former RFA seafarer who had fallen on hard times and was unable to seek assistance from the RBL because she had lost the proof of her husband's service in a house move. We had made a grant of £400, and were able to get Nautilus to take on her case and they awarded her £1200. The Association granted her a further £250. In November that the lady sadly died. Her son told us that in the months before her death he had not seen his mother as happy for a long time.

2. Through the Nautilus liaison officer in COMRFA we learnt of a serving officer who had severe financial problems. He had been off sick for a long period, had exhausted his sick pay and subsequently was on no pay so his mortgage, marriage and life were under heavy pressure. We made a grant of £400.

3. We were contacted by the MNWB enquiring whether we could assist an ex-RFA seafarer looking for short-term financial aid until he gets back on his feet. He was in the RFA for 14 years and saw operational service during the Falklands War. In November 2018 he had a fall outside his house that resulted in injuries that prevented him from working. He has not been able to work since. He and his wife were on a low income. SSAFA provided reports supporting eligibility and need. A grant was made of £400.

4. A Welfare Information Officer for Naval Service Family and People Support (formally RNRM Welfare) sought help and support in a case concerning an RFA seafarer whilst serving in the South Atlantic who was suddenly taken ill and passed away. The seafarers NOK was his son and estranged from his grandparents. They were seeking some form of recognition of their son's service to the RFA. Vague details on RFAA website seeking information of any one regarding the circumstances of his death. Through one immensely helpful officer who had been aboard at the time of the incident I was able to direct family to RFA Historical Website where the seafarer was commemorated. Details from the local press were also provided. NSF&PS informed the Association that family were aware of all this but still aggrieved at lack of recognition.

5. The Solent Branch Almoner informed the Welfare committee of a former RFA engineer officer suffering from dementia. His wife, although not actively seeking anything from us was of course concerned about the future. We were able to provide her with application forms for assistance from the Guild of Benevolence of IMarEST. This is a wealthy charity that aids certificated engineers and their dependents ONLY. We later heard that this gentleman died.

6. The MNWB contacted us regarding an applicant with both MN & RFA service. However, he had lost his records and had no proof of his service with either. The MNWB asked for assistance in confirming his service in RFA. RFA Personnel was approached, but archived records had gone missing and were unable to help. The Association gave much help as possible with details of the various organisations who might know.

7. Cornwall SSAFA sought assistance for an ex AB, who was discharged medically unfit, after an accident on an RFA around about 1995. He had recently suffered a stroke which has left him handicapped with severe mobility problems and significant memory loss. Cornwall County Council have provided only basic adaptation to the accommodation, and due to their constraints could not provide further which in SSAFA's opinion and his carers he needed. SSAFA asked the RFAA what we could do to assist. After provision of the full details of the case, the committee awarded him £750.

8. The plight of a former RFA engineer officer who had left the service in 2018 was brought to our attention. He had recently suffered a brain injury, which rendered him unfit for work. He had been treated very well by his employer, but he was exhausting his sick pay entitlement and would be transiting to SSP in the New Year (2020). Although the initial contact was in October, he did not seek help from us until early December, but we were able to grant him with full non-member benefit just before Christmas. SSAFA have been involved and have been able to source additional assistance.

9. A further case was incorrectly referred to the Association by another organisation. The case worker who had been misinformed and thought they were dealing with SSAFA.

		2016	2017	2018	2019	Totals
No. of Cases		1	4	9	9	23
	Pending	0	0	0	2	2
	Dormant	1	3	1	0	5
	Resolved		1	5	6	12
Members		0	1	2	2	5
Non Member		1	3	7	7	18
Status						
	Officer	0	0	2	3	5
	Rating	0	3	4	5	12
	NK	1	1	3	1	6
Completed		0	1	5	7	13
Benefit Awarded		0	1	4	5	10
Total Benefit Awarded			£500.00	£1,550.00	£3,200.00	£5,250.00
Average Benefit			£500.00	£387.50	£640.00	£525.00
Time to Resolve	(days)					
Time to Resolve	Longest		28	21	167	167
	Shortest		28	7	5	5
	Average		28	16	5	16.33