128

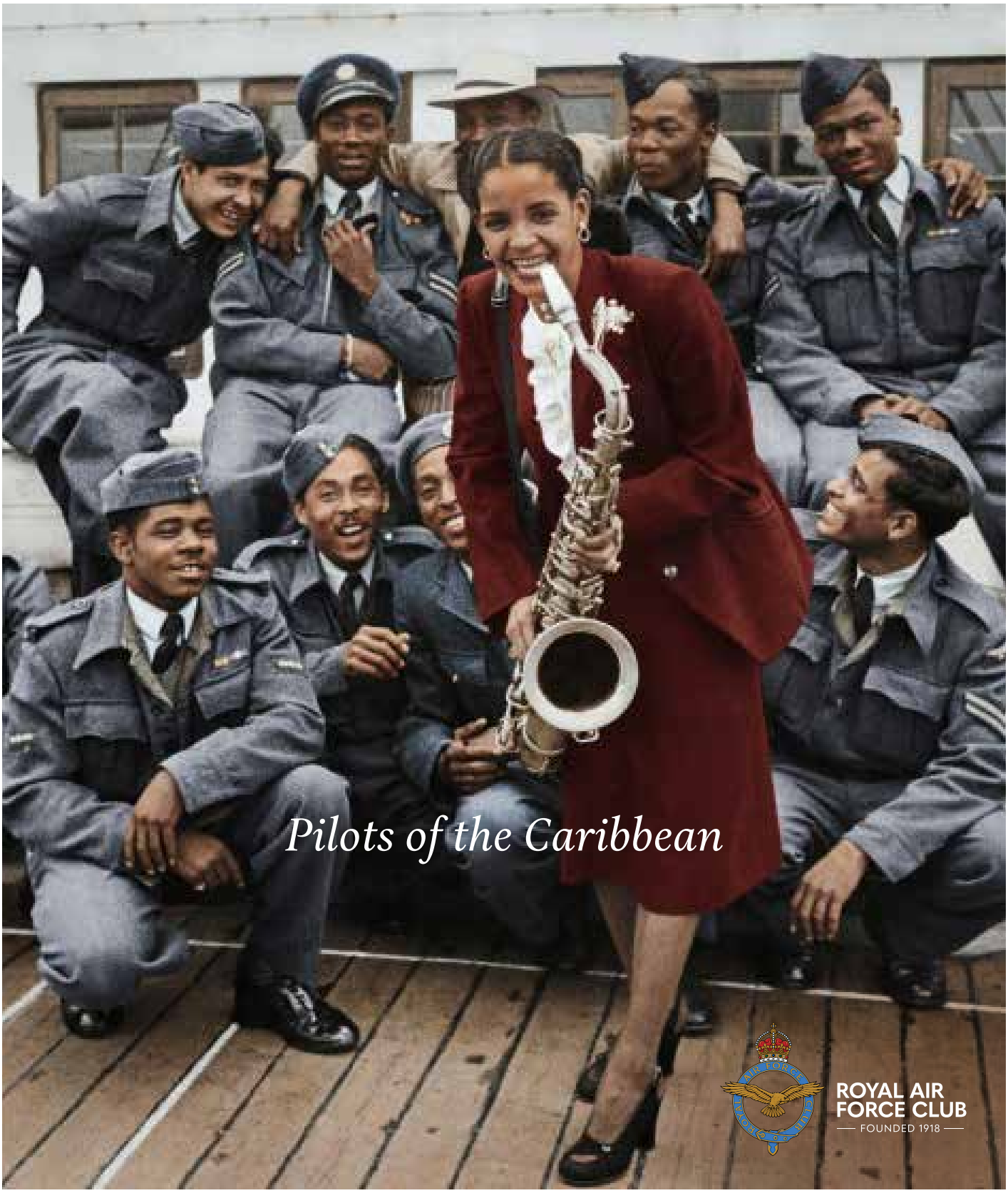
THE MAGAZINE OF THE RAF CLUB SUMMER 2026

THE RUNNING HORSE TAVERN
The Club's pub undergoes stunning transformation

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD!
Executive Chef Elliot Plimmer looks to tantalise taste buds

"A BLOODY GOOD NAVIGATOR"
Pushing aircraft and endurance to their limits

RECOGNISING LOYALTY
Honouring our long-standing Members



Pilots of the Caribbean

ROYAL AIR FORCE CLUB
FOUNDED 1918

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The Royal Air Force Club,
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THIS ISSUE

4 FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE
A year of progress and continued investment

6 PILOTS OF THE CARIBBEAN
New coin collection honours airmen and women of the Caribbean, United States and Africa

9 SUMMER BEDROOM OFFER
Book a two-night stay with breakfast and afternoon tea

10 THE RUNNING HORSE TAVERN
The Club's pub undergoes stunning transformation

12 ALL THINGS FOOD!
Executive Chef Elliot Plimmer on what's being plated from the Club's new kitchen

14 CELEBRATING LOYALTY
The Club announces additional Member Recognition events in August

16 IN PICTURES
Capturing some of the highlights of the past year

20 CLUB EVENTS
A look at what's coming up for your social calendars

22 MEMBER STORIES
Including Flt Lt Colin Bell DFC BEM flying high at 105!

25 ST CLEMENT DANES
The end of the building work is in sight for the Central Church of the RAF

26 FRIENDS OF THE RAF CLUB
Generous donations sustaining the Club's future

30 VALOUR IN PENCIL
New artwork unveiled commemorating the Airmen of the Victoria Cross

33 CLUB SHOP
Introducing our new Apple & Cucumber Gin

34 CLUB STAFF
Dave Holland retires after more than 10 years as the Club's Security Manager

36 GLOBAL CONNECTIONS
Reciprocal Clubs offering a warm welcome to RAF Club Members

38 FLYING GREENER
The Club's journey towards a sustainable future

KEEP UP TO DATE

Follow us on our social media accounts and be the first to know about latest Club updates and offers.

ROYAL AIR FORCE CLUB
FOUNDED 1918

Welcome to your annual 128 Magazine

Some 40 years after becoming a Member and having seen so much positive change in what the Royal Air Force Club provides and represents in recent years, I am both proud and humbled to be in the position to 'lead off' this edition about our Club.

I must start with a 'thank you' or two, to my predecessor, David Murray, who ably set a new trajectory for the Club's governance and development; my fellow Trustees, whose responsibility it is to balance the desires of five generations of member with modern relevance, the right resources and innovation, and our CEO, Miles Pooley, executives and the brilliant team who look after and support us all.

Our staff make our Club distinctive, welcoming, safe, familiar and yet modern; their good humour, patience and commitment this past year, in the face of severe disruption during the extensive upgrade of facilities, has resulted in remarkably little disruption to service: A brilliant effort. I am lucky enough to see what is happening behind the scenes and spend time with the staff. A highlight this past year, amongst many varied opportunities to meet Members and represent the Club, must be the privilege of attending the staff Christmas Party and Awards, to recognise excellence and say a proper thank you, on behalf of all of us.

For my first 128 Magazine foreword, it also seems worth re-affirming the Board's focus on the charity, first and foremost, for our core beneficiaries: serving and former-serving RAF Officers. The hospitality business and wider membership that you see is, therefore, the provision of the private member's club that, in turn, supports the charitable purpose, through a deliberate air and space lens. While all Members matter, it remains a source of pride that the Club retains a variety of discounted opportunities for those 'on duty' and returning from operations. In addition, and new this past year, are welfare breaks for nominated serving Officers and families in need of support; something I would like to see expand in future years.

Our finances remain stable, though you won't be surprised to learn that paying off our loans and creating a surplus last year did not result in an ability to exercise largesse! But, it did enable us to plan and commence the critical facilities upgrades and infrastructure work that was long overdue.

The recent addition of the amazing, new Victoria Cross artwork of WWI / WWII aviators is something special

The complete rebuild of the Running Horse Tavern (covered on pages 10-11), and particularly the improved accessibility, embodies a tangible, sympathetic modernisation. When you next visit, do look out for the 1970's graffiti that was uncovered and preserved! The recent addition of the amazing, new Victoria Cross artwork of WWI / WWII aviators is something special: Two unique, contemporary pieces that channel historic inspiration.

Although less visible to Members, I have no doubt that we will all benefit from the most recent total refit of the ground floor kitchens and its systems. Significant enhancements in safety, sustainability, waste-reduction and future-proofing have been embedded, which in turn supports the quality of service as well as our efforts to attract and retain the right staff.

The Friends of the RAF Club have continued to provide generous support for key enhancement projects this past year, to all of our benefit: from art to heritage to the quality of building improvements. We also benefitted from a couple of generous legacy donations, enabling better/quicker infrastructure solutions and the beginnings of an essential, sensible reserve against future shocks. The combination of smart use of credit facilities, improved insurance, the start of a dedicated legacies programme and a more strategic approach to upgrades and replacements, aims to deliver a Club that provides this generation with as much opportunity and benefit as the next.

A summary of the Board's focus currently looks like: Sustainability (of people, facilities, membership, environment and financial coherence) with a keen eye on our charity objectives, modern relevance, quality and becoming future-fit. A new Club Strategy is in development, and I am excited that we are planning to take the Board 'on the road' in the coming months and years, towards our Members, as we know that London isn't easily accessible to all.

Your support and use of the Club is, as ever, much appreciated, as we continue to evolve a special offer for our people ... past, present and future. Do enjoy this 128 Magazine as it peeks into the array of daily activities, events, people and services that are your Royal Air Force Club.

AIR VICE-MARSHAL WARREN 'BUNNY' JAMES CB CBE DL (RET'D)
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

A year of progress and continued investment

It has been another busy and productive year for the Club, with a continued focus on enhancing our facilities, strengthening our operations, and delivering the high standards our Members expect.

One of the most significant developments has been the completion of the refurbishment of the Running Horse Tavern. This project has transformed the space, increasing capacity by about 25% and enhancing both its ambience and overall design, alongside improvements to the service and food offering. A key objective of the project was to improve accessibility and, for the first time in over 100 years since the Club's opening, to provide step-free access to the Running Horse Tavern. This has made the space more inclusive and significantly easier to access for all Members. The additional space is already being well utilised, and the Running Horse Tavern has enjoyed some of its busiest days in recent years. Early feedback from Members has been extremely positive, alongside encouraging growth in both numbers and revenue. There are further features in this edition showcasing the transformation, and I hope you will enjoy revisiting the space.

Alongside this, we continue to make important progress across our wider infrastructure. Our IT programme remains a key priority, particularly in the area of cyber security, ensuring the Club remains resilient and well-protected. We are also progressing plans for a new Club Website, and a digital membership card which will enhance how we engage with Members and improve overall efficiency.

For the first time in over 100 years since the Club's opening, we are able to provide step-free access to the Running Horse Tavern.

The ground-floor kitchen refurbishment project was completed at the end of April, alongside the reopening of the Dining Room. While much of the work has taken place behind the scenes, the project represents a significant investment in improving our operational capability and the consistency of the dining experience. We are pleased to have reopened the Dining Room and to see it performing strongly.

Looking ahead, we have a number of exciting projects in development, including plans for the improvements to a number of bedrooms. We are also exploring opportunities to extend the main lift to the fifth floor of the original building, as well as the creation of a new walkway linking the Centenary Wing with the original building at fourth floor bedroom level. As always, these initiatives are being carefully considered to balance investment in the Club's future with respect for its heritage.

We also hope to share further updates in due course regarding the Patron's portrait and a potential Royal Visit, which remains an exciting prospect for the Club.

Our people continue to be at the heart of everything we do. I am delighted to highlight Executive Chef Elliot's recognition as Mentor of the Year, awarded by the Craft Guild of Chefs, which is an achievement that reflects the strength of our culture and commitment to development.

Elliot leads a team of seven Apprentice Chefs, who are developing their craft in a professional kitchen, mastering fundamental cooking techniques, food safety standards, kitchen organisation, and service preparation. Here at the Club, they are building the practical skills, discipline, and confidence required of aspiring culinary professionals.

In addition, we are very proud of our Chefs Matthew Crane and Kai-le Tran, who have won The Kitchen Graduate Awards in September 2025, securing spots to compete in the semi-finals of the Young National Chef of the Year this year. We wish them the best of luck!

From far left: Chef Apprentices; Miles; Members of our Leadership team pictured after the successful completion of our Ground Floor Kitchen Project; Graduate Awards, Kai and Matthew; Mentor of the year

At the same time, we have continued to invest in staff facilities and wider initiatives to support and celebrate our team.

We also continue to benefit from the strength and experience of our Board. In July last year, we said farewell to our former Chair, Air Vice-Marshal David Murray CVO OBE DL (Ret'd). I would like to personally thank David for his leadership and guidance during his time as Chair, which I have greatly valued. I am pleased that he continues to be a regular user of the Club.

Following his appointment as Chair, I have very much enjoyed working closely with Air Vice-Marshal Warren 'Bunny' James CB CBE DL (Ret'd) in recent months, and I look forward to continuing this as we work together to shape and deliver the future direction of the Club.

As ever, my thanks go to our Members, whose continued support and engagement underpin everything we do, and to our staff, whose dedication ensures the Club continues to thrive.

We look forward to building on this momentum in the months ahead.

MILES POOLEY FIH MI
CHIEF EXECUTIVE & CLUB SECRETARY

Welcome to the new Vice-Chair Serving

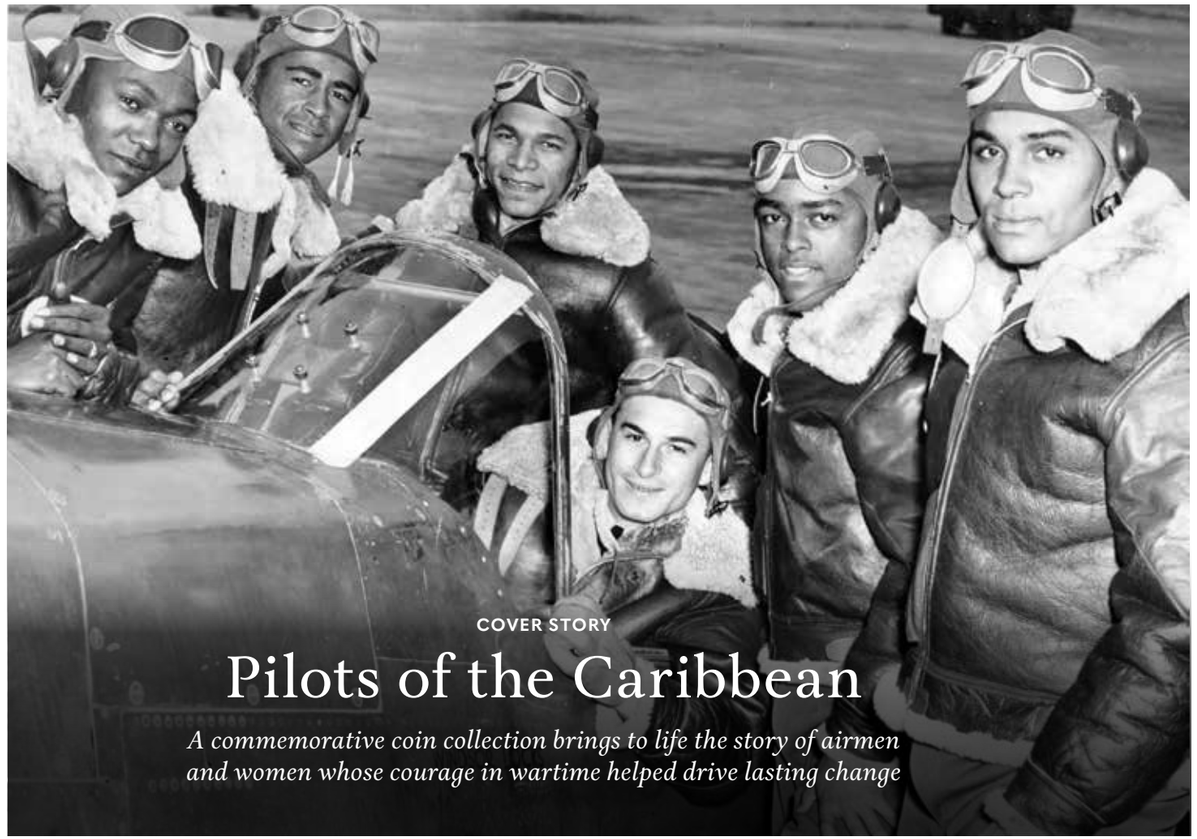
Following the AGM on 13th May, the Royal Air Force Club is delighted to announce the appointment of Air Commodore Toria McPhaden CBE as Trustee and Vice-Chair Serving. She succeeded Air Commodore Phil Wadlow who recently retired from the RAF and remains a Club Trustee.

Air Commodore McPhaden will be serving alongside the Club Vice-Chair (Business) Flight Lieutenant Haig Tyler (Ret'd), maintaining the absolutely vital link between the Club and the RAF.

Air Commodore McPhaden currently serves as Head of People Services for the Royal Air Force, where she leads on discipline, culture, inclusion and workforce engagement across the Service. Her distinguished career has encompassed leadership, infrastructure delivery, policy development and major programme management, alongside senior staff appointments, including the Head of Rewards for the RAF and leadership of the Chief of the Air Staff's Headquarters office.

In command, she has served as Officer Commanding Base Support Wing at RAF Benson and as Station Commander RAF Northolt (2021–23), overseeing the Station's significant contribution to national events surrounding the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III.

The Club warmly welcomes Air Commodore McPhaden to the Board and looks forward to benefiting from her extensive leadership experience and insight in her role as Trustee and Vice-Chair Serving.



COVER STORY

Pilots of the Caribbean

A commemorative coin collection brings to life the story of airmen and women whose courage in wartime helped drive lasting change

When Jesse Owens sprinted and leapt to four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, he did more than humiliate Hitler on his own stage. A Black American athlete, cheered by ordinary Germans, he overturned Nazi myths of racial superiority in a matter of seconds. He inspired comic-book heroes like Superman, helped with recruitment when war came, and became a living symbol that courage and excellence know no colour.

The new "Pilots of the Caribbean, Tuskegee Airmen and Heroes of African Heritage" collector coin-set takes that same spirit of defiance into the skies. Struck in a 24ct gold finish and incorporating an original piece of a 1941 Rolls-Royce Merlin engine – the heart of the Spitfire, Lancaster, Mosquito and later North American Mustang P51D – the coins honour the Black men and women of the Caribbean, the United States and Africa who fought fascism abroad and racism at home. It was they who came back from war to campaign for civil rights for all in Britain with the Race Relations Act, and in America with the Civil Rights Voting Act, both in 1965.

The RAF's Caribbean story stretches back to the First World War with men like Sergeant William Robinson Clarke of Jamaica

These men and women (through their training and duty) tell a story that is still too little known in RAF history.

The RAF's Caribbean story stretches back to the First World War with men like Sergeant William Robinson Clarke of Jamaica, Britain's first Black pilot who had defied the 'colour bar' and flew with the Royal Flying Corps. one year before the official creation of the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918. By the time of the Second World War, 10,270 Jamaicans, 800 Trinidadians, 417 British Guianese, and over 1,000 other men from Barbados, Bermuda, the Bahamas, the British Virgin Islands and more had enlisted in the British forces. Around 6,000 of them joined the RAF directly.

They came from islands that were already crucial to the war effort: Jamaica and British Guiana supplying bauxite; Trinidad & Tobago, oil; British Honduras (Belize), timber; all the islands provided food and raw materials.

War was raging in the Caribbean Sea from the very start, with German U-boats sinking a huge amount of British ships that were crucial to the war supply chain. Caribbean newspapers such as the Jamaican Gleaner even launched the "Spitfire Fund", complete with a wartime comic to rally donations across the Empire. Much of the money raised went to the Rolls-Royce and Bentley factory in Crewe that built the legendary Merlin. Companies like PA Consulting started by helping the British government fill the employment gap and getting women trained and into the work place making munitions and aircraft. The war accelerated change and increased efficiency for the better.

From Left: Tuskegee Airmen; Sqn Ldr Ulric Cross, DSO DFC; Mona Baptiste onboard HMT Empire Windrush in 1948

From these much needed social changes emerged figures such as Squadron Leader Ulric Cross, DSO DFC, of 139 (Jamaica) Squadron, one of the most highly decorated Caribbean airmen, flying over 80 operations from RAF Marham in the elite Pathfinder role. Other Caribbean and African RAF personnel – Flight Lieutenants Billy Strachan (Jamaica), Arthur Wint (Jamaica), Cy Grant (Guyana), Emanuel Adeniyi Thomas (Nigeria) and Johnny Smythe (Sierra Leone) – endured combat, captivity and discrimination, then spent peacetime campaigning for equality and justice. Grant, shot down and paraded by the Nazis as a "prisoner of indeterminate race", and Smythe (also captured), later a leading figure in the Windrush story, exemplify the courage that continued long after the last combat mission.

America was reluctant to join the war until the bombing of Pearl Harbour (Hawaii) on 7th December 1941. A day later, the USA officially entered the war and started to disburse their troops to Europe.

Tuskegee Airmen

Across the Atlantic, Black Americans faced the full force of segregation and 'Jim Crow' laws. The US Army Air Force confined them to a separate unit – the now legendary Tuskegee Airmen of the 99th Fighter Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group. Flying P51D Mustangs (and other types) in Europe and North Africa, they escorted bombers, including B17 Flying Fortresses, and built a combat record so strong that it helped puncture the logic of segregation in the US military. Their story later inspired George Lucas's film *Red Tails*. Terry Jervis (TV producer and former RAF commercial agent) created the Pilots of the Caribbean exhibition with the RAF Museum and Black Cultural Archives, and also worked on the promotion of that film and met many of the surviving Tuskegee veterans. He also created this magnificent coin collection box-set.

Across the Atlantic, Black Americans faced the full force of segregation and 'Jim Crow' laws

Between 150,000 and 240,000 African American servicemen were stationed in Britain between 1942 and 1945. They encountered Black British, Caribbean and African RAF personnel for the first time, often discovering they faced the same barriers in different uniforms. The RAF had, by contrast, formally abolished its colour bar in 1939; by June 1944, an Air Ministry order stated:

"All ranks should clearly understand that there is no colour bar in the Royal Air Force... any instance of discrimination on the grounds of colour... should be immediately and severely checked."

The US military's segregation remained in force on American bases in Britain – and Caribbean aircrew did not hesitate to challenge it, particularly when Black American GIs were harassed for speaking to or dancing with white women, which was accepted by British norms in the many pubs and dancehalls around the country.

Women on the Front Line

Women feature prominently on the coins, as they did in the war itself. They stepped into factories, fields, civil defence, transport and special operations. Many more offered another vital service that is often overlooked: morale.

Women in uniform

Black women in Britain volunteered in civil defence as firewatchers, factory workers and nurses. After the colour bar in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) was lifted in 1943, Caribbean women, including Nadia Cattouse, Norma Best and Connie Mark enlisted. Lilian Bader, born in Liverpool to a Barbadian father who had served in the First World War, joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in 1941 and trained as an aircraft technician – a rare and demanding role for any woman, let alone a Black woman navigating prejudice (see Stephen Bourne's book "War to Windrush" for reference).

Forces sweethearts beyond Vera Lynn

Most readers will know singer Vera Lynn, *We'll Meet Again* and *The White Cliffs of Dover*, and the famous Hollywood American stars – Rita Hayworth, Judy Garland, Doris Day and the Andrews Sisters. Their voices carried across the wireless and into Nissen huts, messes and dugouts. Less remembered are the Black women whose songs and performances lifted spirits from the Americas to London and Lagos:

- **Lena Horne** – Hollywood actress and singer of *Stormy Weather*, who toured US bases and became a glamorous symbol of hope for many African American servicemen. »

Above: Tuskegee Airmen with Lena Horne in the cockpit
Below: Commemorative coins
@Copyright National Congress

- **Ella Fitzgerald** – jazz icon whose voice was as effective as any medicine against fear and fatigue.
- **Josephine Baker** – not only a celebrated dancer and singer in France, but also a member of the Resistance and an Allied intelligence asset.
- **Adelaide Hall** and **Elisabeth Welch** – Black entertainers based in Britain, constantly on stage for troops and civilians alike.
- **Una Marson** – Jamaican feminist and writer, who from 1941 presented and produced the BBC radio programme *Calling the West Indies*, keeping Caribbean audiences informed and connected to the war effort.

These women were not simply "sweethearts". They were professionals deliberately deployed to steady nerves, brighten lives and remind men and women in uniform what they were fighting for.

One of the coins captures that spirit directly: it shows RAF and Caribbean aircrew on the deck of HMT Empire Windrush in 1948, being entertained by singer Mona Baptiste, alongside Johnny Smythe and Terry Jervis's uncle, Oscar Gardner. The war was over, but the work of building new lives – and a new Britain – was only beginning.

Honouring a shared heritage

The official title of the coin set – *Pilots of the Caribbean, Tuskegee Airmen and Heroes of African Heritage* – is derived from the acclaimed exhibition created by Terry Jervis with the Royal Air Force Museum and the Black Cultural Archives in 2013. That exhibition brought the RAF Caribbean and African story out of the shadows, tracing it from the First World War through the Second, and on into the Windrush era.

Jervis' RAF connection goes back to 2000, when Club President Air Marshal Sir David Walker, then Director of Corporate Communications, brought him in to support the Service's rebranding and public profile following his role as a senior executive in charge of the BBC's Millennium Day global broadcast. Jervis grew up in postwar Britain, listening to first-hand accounts from veterans and hearing of his uncle's journey from Jamaica to RAF service in 1943. Jervis' media career has since taken him around the world (having produced and directed shows such as *Top Gear*, TV specials with HM Queen Elizabeth II/Buckingham Palace and the Olympic Games 2012). His BBC career and role with the RAF led to him documenting many of the wartime heroes and events, which led to the creation of these coins.

The Bentley Car and Rolls-Royce

Bentley pioneered the use of the aluminium in piston engines and high-performance luxury racing cars. It was this feature which helped the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine and aircraft performance. Along with these coins, Legacy & Heritage Limited and Bentley – Jack Barclay are working with the Mulliner division to create 10 unique special edition cars based on the history of the RAF Pilots of the Caribbean and Tuskegee Airmen. The car will feature a unique 50mm gold Spitfire and Mustang P-51D medallion with the Rolls-Royce marque inside the vehicle (representing the history of the two companies) making it the only vehicle in the two companies entire history to do so. These cars will only be made on request and feature many art-enriched pieces to the cock-pit styled facia, seating and foot plates.

History you can hold

The coin set brings together commemorative coins, artefacts and stories celebrating the people and aircraft that shaped the air war. Produced under Royal Warrant, the set includes gold finished coins honouring the Tuskegee Airmen and Pilots of the Caribbean, aviation inspired artwork, and a rare authenticated fragment of a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine. Together, the collection recognises the shared courage, skill and innovation of men and women from across the Commonwealth, the United States and Allied nations.

In the spirit of Jesse Owens, they did not simply take part. They changed the race perspective and the fight for justice, freedom and democracy.

TERRY JERVIS
CLUB MEMBER
TERRYJERVISOFFICIAL.COM
SPECIAL THANKS TO PA CONSULTING AND GETTY IMAGES

MEMBER OFFER

Return of the popular Summer Bedroom Offer!

Available for Members only, between Monday 3rd August and Monday 31st August 2026

Book one of our exclusive Summer Packages. Each package includes a two-night stay, daily breakfast, and one traditional Afternoon Tea in the Club with Prosecco.

Our Summer Packages:

- **Classic Double/Twin Package price** £419.00
  (Saving £109.50 per stay)
  Includes two nights in a Classic Double/Twin Room, inclusive of breakfast for two people on both days and a Prosecco Afternoon Tea for two people in the Cowdray Lounge

- **Superior Double/Twin Package price** £467.00
  (Saving £125.00 per stay)
  Includes two nights in a Superior Double/Twin Room, inclusive of breakfast for two people on both days and a Prosecco Afternoon Tea for two people in the Cowdray Lounge

Whether you're planning a family trip with your children & grandchildren or you'd like to sample the art and culture London has to offer, our Summer Bedroom Offer is tailored to elevate your experience.

Please note these offers are not available online. To book please email **reservations@rafclub.org.uk** or call us on **020 7399 1019/21.**

Terms & Conditions: This offer is subject to availability and cannot be combined with any other offer. Packages for other room types are also available. Applicable dates: 3rd – 31st August 2026. For Afternoon Tea we require a 48 hour advance bookings.

CLUBHOUSE

The Running Horse
A Legacy Renewed

At the heart of the Club's evolution lies a careful balance between tradition and progress. Research into historical archives revealed a wealth of material about the remarkable evolution of the premises, its landlords, and its clientele.

The site on which the Club now stands was originally two entirely separate buildings. No. 6 housed carriage stables, house stables, jobmasters, and a livery from the early 1800s until 1920. At No.18 (subsequently renumbered No.128) Piccadilly we found a tavern named The Running Horse existed from at least the eighteenth century.

Delahay transformed the Running Horse into a thriving gambling venue, hosting pedestrian races and later horse race betting

The earliest documented reference to the Running Horse appeared in *The Times* on Saturday 21st January 1797, when a chariot and horses were advertised for sale, with interested parties instructed to apply "to the Coachman, at the Running Horse Livery Stables, Piccadilly." By 1805, following the death of Edward Fawill, the estate was advertised for auction. Charles Mason acquired the leasehold, renaming the stables Mason's Yard. Mason remained the tenant until 1840, when the leasehold, owned by Sir Richard Sutton at the time, was once again offered at auction.

The Running Horse bore witness to several crimes during this period. In 1809, landlord Mr Willies was robbed of various spirits, wine and beers as well as £4 from the till. In 1827, George Humphries took £18 from a lost pocketbook, despite a reward being offered for its return. Ignoring the advice to hand it in, he kept the money, was arrested, and found guilty. One of Morris' pewter tankards was among three rediscovered during the 1920 renovations and is now proudly displayed in the Club today.

By the 1840s, both buildings had changed hands. The livery yard became Mason's Livery Stables, while the pub was taken over by James Thomas Delahay. Delahay transformed the Running Horse into a thriving gambling venue, hosting pedestrian races and later horse race betting, eventually opening shops in Tottenham Court Road and Haymarket. Following his death in 1856, the pub's popularity declined.

The Running Horse remained a modest neighbourhood establishment until 1872, when the building was taken over by the lockmakers J.T. Needs & Co. After redevelopment in 1893, the site went on to house several successful institutions, including the Piccadilly Club, the Imperial Services Club, and the Ladies' Lyceum Club. In 1920, Lord Cowdray acquired the lease and generously established a newly refurbished Officers' Club for the Royal Air Force. The original RAF Club, formerly at 13 Bruton Street, relocated to 128 Piccadilly in January 1922, with the new premises formally opened by HRH the Duke of York, later King George VI, on 22nd February 1922.

In the late twentieth century, the Club entered a new chapter when it was granted charitable status, supported by the Royal Air Force Central Fund. The subsequent purchase of the freehold secured Lord Cowdray's long-term vision, with the Central Fund contributing half the cost. Thereafter, the Club continued to invest in and adapt the building, ensuring it met the evolving needs of its Members while upholding its founding aim: to provide a welcoming home away from home for serving and retired RAF officers.

Far left: Historical picture of Piccadilly; official opening; the new Running Horse Tavern; pewter tankards uncovered in the 1920s during the development of the site for the present Club; graffiti uncovered during the 2025 refurbishment

Part of this evolution included the transformation of the basement, once the site of the original pub. Initially used for storage, it was converted in 1967 into a brasserie-style restaurant known as The Buttery, followed by the addition of a lively disco space in 1970. In 1977, a £25,000 investment saw the basement reimagined as the Running Horse Tavern, carefully designed to reflect the character of a traditional English pub. Intended as a more relaxed, sociable counterpart to the Club's formal spaces, the Tavern paid homage to the building's eighteenth-century origins and reconnected it with an earlier chapter of London's history.

Over the decades, the Tavern has become a familiar and cherished part of Club life. Today, it continues to serve as gathering place where Members can enjoy conversation, camaraderie, and continuity with the past, preserving a living link to the rich history of 128 Piccadilly and the enduring heritage of the RAF Club.

The Running Horse Now

With this key legacy in mind, it was time for the Running Horse Tavern to see one of its biggest resurgences, and in the Club's history to date, one of our biggest refurbishment projects.

In June 2025, it entered a new era, with the extensive three-month refurbishment that has not only revitalised but also redefined its territory in the basement space. Carefully planned and expertly delivered, the project sought not only to modernise the facilities but also to preserve the distinctive character that has long made it so special.

Great care was taken to retain, uncover and celebrate the Tavern's heritage, and several original features have been preserved

Throughout the refurbishment, great care was taken to retain, uncover and celebrate the Tavern's heritage, and several original features have been preserved, while a timeless new design enhances the space without diminishing its identity. Notably, an original arch, which had long been hidden during previous renovations, was uncovered and now stands as a proud architectural feature. As part of this moment in the Tavern's history, the Club has also sealed a special time capsule within the Running Horse, filled with memories and mementoes, which will now remain hidden for many years to come.

Perhaps most evocative of all was the discovery of a small but powerful piece of personal history on its walls. During the early stages of the works, uncovered graffiti was discovered, having been left behind during a 1970s renovation. The inscription reads:

"A.F. Shaw / Carpenter Ex RAF Rear Gunner 10 Sqn worked here April 1972"

His words, preserved in situ near the bar, offer a poignant and direct connection to the lived experience of those who served. This discovery now forms an integral part of the Running Horse's story, linking the past and present in a uniquely human way.

The refurbishment was a collaborative effort, led by the House Committee with close oversight from the Club's senior management team. The Arts & Heritage Committee worked alongside designers to curate a thoughtful collection of artwork, blending newly commissioned pieces with treasured originals. Support from the Club's Friends of the Club further enriched the project, ensuring that the finished space reflected both tradition and renewal.

The official reopening took place on Tuesday 9th September 2025, when our Club President, Air Marshal Sir David Walker KCVO OBE, formally inaugurated the Tavern and unveiled the commemorative plaque. Joined by our Club Chair, Air Vice-Marshal Warren James CB CBE DL (Ret'd), along with the Club's Trustees, committee members, staff, and contractors, the occasion marked the successful completion of a complex and ambitious undertaking.

The following day, we reopened the doors to Members once again. Today, the Running Horse Tavern stands as both a continuation of tradition and a confident step forward. With thoughtful investment, careful stewardship, and a deep respect for its history, it remains an integral part of the Royal Air Force Club and is here to continue to serve Members for many years to come.

We'd like to sincerely thank Club Member Simon Anthony for his research and investigation into the British Library Newspaper Archive and the Times Digital Archive, whose help contributed greatly to making this feature possible.

The Running Horse Tavern Opening Hours
Mon - Thu: 1200hrs - 2300hrs
Fri - Sat: 1200hrs - 0000hrs
Sun & Bank Holidays: 1200hrs - 2230hrs
Food Service:
Lunch: 1200hrs - 1600hrs
Dinner: 1700hrs - 2100hrs
Dress Code: Informal
Advance bookings are not required.

From left: Roasted Beetroot and Orange salad; Chef Elliot; Sea Bass Served En Papillote; Bavette Steak.

Below: Smoked Eel Potato Croquette; Club Sandwich; The Dining Room.

DINING AT 128

All Things Food!

With the Ground Floor Kitchen project now complete and a renewed vision guiding the Club's culinary direction, there's never been a more exciting time to dine at the Club. We sat down with our Executive Chef Elliot Plimmer to discuss the thinking behind these changes, and, more importantly, what Members can look forward to enjoying in the months ahead.

Are there any exciting updates Members can look forward to?
Absolutely. The much-loved Club menu has remained, but we've also introduced a brand new à la carte menu to give Members greater choice and flexibility. The grill section has also expanded, with premium cuts such as Chateaubriand, fillet steaks, and lamb cutlets. It's all about offering a broader, more refined dining experience while keeping the Club's identity at heart.

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Will the Club menu continue to change monthly?
Yes, the Club menu will continue to evolve monthly, and the à la carte menu will follow the same rhythm. These updates focus on seasonal ingredients, supporting both flavour and sustainability. Member feedback has and will be key to these changes, and we've been listening closely and adapting accordingly.

Are there any upcoming changes to the breakfast menu and will grab and go still be available?
Grab and go isn't going anywhere, it will remain a convenient option for Members. As will the Club's favourite breakfast menu, with dishes and accompaniments remaining available to order from the kitchen.

The Running Horse has seen significant changes following its refurbishment and reopening. How would you say the menu evolved?
The aim was to strike a balance between tradition and progression. We've kept classic dishes that Members know and love, such as the Club sandwich, and fish and chips, but we've also introduced updated, more contemporary options such as the black pudding Scotch egg, bavette steak with bone marrow, and a pastrami 'New Yorker' sandwich, which have proven to be very popular already. Behind the scenes, the kitchen transformation has been just as impactful. By relocating the kitchen, we've created a more efficient and dedicated space specifically for the pub. This has not only improved service but also provided a safer and more efficient working conditions for the chefs.

Looking ahead, how do you feel about the changes so far, and what excites you most about what's to come?
Changing a menu is never simple, but the feedback so far has been incredibly positive. We'll always continue to listen and make thoughtful adjustments where needed.

The Ground Floor Kitchen project has been a real highlight. It's now an exciting space that allows us to do so much more, from being able to cater for more functions to enhancing the Dining Room experience. Ultimately, it means better menus and more variety for Members to enjoy. Just as importantly, it's created a far more efficient and enjoyable working environment for the chefs, which always translates into better food and service.

SET DINING ROOM MENU

Two Courses £34.00 Three Courses £39.50

These are just a few highlights from the beautiful dishes on offer. For the complete and current menu, head to the Club website.

STARTERS

Guinea Fowl and Pork Terrine
Pistachios, shimeji mushroom à la grecque, sauce gribiche, sourdough toast

Cep Tart (v)
Rocket, frisée, truffle mayonnaise, balsamic glaze

MAINS

Sea Bass Served En Papillote
New potato, samphire, sun-dried tomato, black olive & saffron velouté

Roast Aubergine and Tahini Brik Pastry Parcel (ve)
Baba ghanoush, rocket salad

Steak and Ale Mushroom Pudding
Tenderstem broccoli, mashed potato, veal jus

Pumpkin, Spinach and Feta Pie (v)
Onion gravy & your choice of side dish

CELEBRATING LOYALTY

Honouring Our Long-Standing Members

At the Royal Air Force Club, our strength has always been rooted in the loyalty, camaraderie, and shared history of our Members. For generations, the Club has served not only as a place of connection and comfort, but as a living testament to enduring service and friendship. It is this spirit that inspires us to place renewed focus on recognising and celebrating those Members whose commitment to the Club spans decades.

This August, we are proud to introduce a reinvigorated series of complimentary Member Recognition Events, thoughtfully curated to honour milestone anniversaries within our community. These occasions are designed not only to celebrate remarkable longevity, but to foster deeper engagement and strengthen the bonds that make the Club so special.

The 2026 programme will include four dedicated complimentary events (see box-out). Each event has been carefully designed to reflect the significance of these milestones, offering Members the opportunity to gather, reminisce, and celebrate alongside peers who share a similar journey with the Club. From relaxed drinks receptions to elegant afternoon teas, these occasions promise to be both memorable and meaningful.

Members reaching these milestone anniversaries in 2026 will have received their personalised invitation in May. These invitations mark not only an acknowledgement of years of membership, but a sincere expression of our gratitude for the continued support, loyalty, and engagement that our Members bring to the Club year after year.

Beyond the celebrations themselves, this initiative represents a broader commitment to cultivating stronger, more enduring relationships with our membership. By recognising and rewarding loyalty through a thoughtful programme of events and experiences, we aim to reinforce the sense of belonging that sits at the heart of the Club.

The 2026 programme will include four dedicated complimentary events

This renewed focus on recognition is also part of a longer-term vision. By consistently celebrating loyalty and reinforcing connection, we wish to shape a meaningful Member journey – one that evolves over time and reflects the depth of each individual's relationship with the Club, helping to establish a lasting sense of pride and belonging.

For those Members who may not be celebrating a significant milestone this year, we hope this initiative highlights the value we place on long-standing commitment and offers a glimpse into what lies ahead. The Club is, and always will be, defined by its people – and it is through initiatives such as these that we honour the contributions of every individual who has played a part in its story.

As we look forward to August, we are delighted to share a selection of photographs from past events, capturing the warmth, elegance, and camaraderie that define these occasions. From shared laughter over drinks receptions and lunches, to heartfelt conversations among friends old and new, these images serve as a reminder of what makes our community so unique.

We look forward to welcoming our milestone Members this summer and to celebrating the remarkable journeys that have shaped the Royal Air Force Club across generations.

Because loyalty deserves to be recognised, celebrated, and remembered.

MEMBER RECOGNITION EVENTS

25-Year Drinks Reception
3rd August

50-Year Anniversary Lunch
10th August

60-Year Afternoon Tea
17th August

70-Year Afternoon Tea
24th August

Learn more about our recognition events through our website: https://www.rafclub.org.uk/whats-on and for any questions on your length of membership, please get in touch with our Membership Team: membership@rafclub.org.uk.

RAF BENEVOLENT FUND

One Day's Service, a Lifetime of Support

Jacqui Thompson

Battle of Britain pilots. Credit: AHB

For many people in the RAF community, service is not neatly contained within a set number of years. Its impact – physical, emotional and practical – often stretches far beyond the day someone hangs up their uniform. That understanding sits at the heart of the RAF Benevolent Fund's long-standing mission: to support the RAF Family for life, whatever shape that need may take, and whenever it arises.

Founded in 1919 by Lord Trenchard, the Fund emerged alongside a fledgling Royal Air Force, created initially to assist injured airmen and the families of those who did not return from the First World War. The first assistance recorded was a single shilling for a night's lodging, offering someone the chance to regroup and find work.

The scale of that need became clear during the Second World War. Between 1943 and 1945 alone, the Fund awarded 67,500 grants to almost 29,000 individuals. Welfare expenditure during the conflict reached £326,697 – a considerable sum at the time – directed towards families coping with injury, loss and prolonged separation.

Between 1943 and 1945 alone, the Fund awarded 67,500 grants to almost 29,000 individuals

While the statistics are striking, individual stories illustrate how that support has evolved. In the 1960s, former Search and Rescue pilot Ian Christie-Miller survived a forced landing in a Gnat and was left with serious injuries requiring multiple operations. The Fund assisted his family with housing costs and helped fund his children's education. Decades later, Falklands veteran Andrew Harrop, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis shortly before leaving the RAF in 1988, continues to receive support – from mobility equipment to welfare holidays – that he credits with preserving his independence and quality of life.

More recent cases demonstrate how the Fund responds urgently. Jacqui Thompson lost her husband Gary, a reservist with the RAF Regiment, in Afghanistan after his vehicle was hit by a landmine. Immediate financial assistance ensured stability for Jacqui and their five daughters during an overwhelming period, followed by longer-term help with housing and education.

Today, the Fund's remit is wide, reflecting the complexity of modern service life. Support now spans financial assistance, wellbeing and counselling services, mobility aids and home adaptations, relationship and family support, youth programmes on RAF stations, welfare breaks, and friendship groups designed to tackle isolation. What has not changed is the emphasis on long term care: help lasting for as long as it is needed, whether for days, months or a lifetime.

For RAF Club and their Members, the Fund's presence is often felt rather than noticed. It sits in the background, ready to act if circumstances change. As service anniversaries and historic milestones are marked, it is worth remembering that behind the pageantry and pride is a support network built on experience, compassion and an unwavering promise.

One day's service, after all, can echo for a lifetime – and ensuring no one has to face life's challenges alone, remains the Fund's enduring role. Find out more at rafbf.org

In pictures

For photo galleries featuring the following events and more visit **www.rafclub.org.uk/news**

13TH MAY 2025

Club Dinner with Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton KCB FREng

The Club had the privilege of welcoming Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton KCB FREng, who has since been appointed Chief of the Defence Staff.

Sir Richard reflected on his remarkable career in the Royal Air Force: from his early days as a University Cadet in 1988 while studying Engineering at Clare College, Cambridge, to his leadership in frontline roles across the Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft, Tornado, and Harrier Force, his journey offered a compelling perspective on service and command.

12TH SEPTEMBER 2025

Club Dinner - 85th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain

Lord Dowding delivered a captivating talk, *"The Spirit of Stuffy Dowding"*, sharing personal anecdotes and reflections on his grandfather's leadership, offering a moving tribute to the bravery of The Few.

Hosted by Club Trustee Squadron Leader John Peters, the fully booked evening featured a Champagne reception and a three-course dinner with wines in the elegant Sovereigns' Room.

23RD SEPTEMBER 2025 AND 3RD MARCH 2026

New Members' Evenings

Two New Members' evenings brought a warm welcome to the latest additions to the Royal Air Force Club, celebrating the start of their membership journey.

Members gathered alongside their Proposers, Seconders, and guests for a drinks reception, offering a relaxed opportunity to connect before enjoying guided tours of the Club led by the Membership Team, with wines, conversations, and camaraderie, marking the beginning of many happy years of membership ahead.

30TH NOVEMBER 2025

Club Dinner Celebrating Sir Winston Churchill

The Club marked what would have been Sir Winston Churchill's birthday with a memorable celebration, hosted by Club Trustee Group Captain Jim Beldon MBE. Guest of honour, Seb Cox OBE, provided insights and anecdotes illuminating Churchill's enduring legacy and deep connection to the Royal Air Force.

The Club-owned Churchill violin, crafted from his original cigar boxes, serenaded guests during dinner. The celebration began with a Pol Roger Champagne reception, Churchill's favourite aperitif, followed by a four-course dinner inspired by his preferred dishes, complete with wine pairings and a final brandy toast.

24TH JANUARY 2026

Burns Night

A memorable celebration of Scottish heritage, fine dining, and fellowship. The night embraced all the pageantry of a traditional Burns supper, from stirring speeches and heartfelt toasts to lively music and the warm camaraderie that makes this event a standout in the Club's calendar.

4TH FEBRUARY 2026

Quiz Night

The Club was delighted to host its inaugural Members' Quiz Night, hosted by George McMenemy. Rounds included general knowledge, music spanning the 1960s to current day and a thrilling double-or-nothing finale designed to test even the sharpest minds. Everyone competed enthusiastically for prizes and bragging rights, making the evening a memorable addition to the Club's social calendar.

19TH FEBRUARY 2026

Sip and Paint – Pets of Piccadilly

The Club hosted its very first Sip & Paint event, bringing Members and their guests together for a creative evening, hosted by Club Trustee Wing Commander Paula Willmot.

Everyone arrived with a photograph of a much-loved pet and were welcomed with a cocktail reception before being guided step by step by talented artist Shelley Cassidy in transforming their chosen image into a finished pet portrait.

16TH APRIL 2026

Cabaret Dinner

The Club welcomed Members and their guests for an evening of cabaret, celebrating the Golden Age of song. From Noël Coward to Jerome Kern, Torch & Tyne transported guests on a nostalgic musical journey, filled with charm, warmth, and a touch of theatrical flair.

Gourmet Dinners Showcase

Celebrating the creativity, precision, and passion of our talented chefs — fine dining elevated.

17TH JUNE 2025

Champagne and Truffle Dinner

Members and their guests gathered for a dinner with Christophe Prieux of Gardet Champagne, the Club's house supplier. The evening showcased a refined truffle-led menu, each course expertly paired to enhance both dish and drink.

Highlights included poached native lobster with truffle and pappardelle, paired with a crisp Blanc de Blancs, and a rich beef fillet Rossini matched with a structured Blanc de Noirs. The experience concluded with a trio of truffle cheeses, perfectly complemented by a rounded Brut Réserve.

11TH NOVEMBER 2025

Winter Gourmet Dinner – Open Flame Cooking

Members and their guests were served a refined four-course menu showcasing bold flavours and careful craftsmanship, each dish elevated by perfectly paired wines. Highlights included a BBQ celeriac shawarma, vadouvan spiced monkfish with smoked mussels, and a flame grilled aged fillet of beef with rich and smoky accompaniments. The courses ended on a tropical note of grilled pineapple with coconut sorbet and rum salted caramel.

21ST APRIL 2026

Spring Gourmet Dinner – Chinese Fine Dining

Members and their guests were immersed in rich, authentic flavours, thoughtfully elevated by Executive Chef Elliot Plimmer and his talented kitchen brigade through a specially curated four-course dining experience.

Highlights included Sichuan chicken steamed dumplings with a citrus soy dressing, followed by a bold black pepper fillet of beef served with eight treasure sticky lotus rice, sautéed shiitake mushrooms, and tenderstem broccoli.

CLUB EVENTS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON

Jack Boskett

Solo Dining Society Dinner

Matthew Pottage

Club Talk with Matthew Pottage – 'The Royal Parks: Gardening for People and Planet'

Tuesday 7th July
1830hrs – 2100hrs
Members: £30.00 / Guests: £40.00
Dress Code: Business Casual (formerly known as Smart Casual)

A changing climate presents growing challenges for gardeners, but how can we keep our green spaces thriving sustainably? Join Matthew Pottage, *Gardeners' Question Time* panellist and Head of Horticulture and Landscape Strategy for The Royal Parks, as he explores how we can help our parks and landscapes flourish for years to come.

Zero Waste Gourmet Dinner

Tuesday 1st September
1830hrs – 2230hrs
Members: £70.00 / Guests: £80.00
Dress Code: Business Casual (formerly known as Smart Casual)

Celebrate Zero Waste Week with a refined gourmet dining experience showcasing sustainability and seasonal creativity.

Executive Chef Elliot Plimmer and his team will present a beautifully crafted three-course menu, transforming locally sourced, surplus, and imperfect ingredients into exceptional dishes.

Enjoy a sparkling reception, a paired wine dinner, and an insightful talk from the Club's Director of Operations, Katariina Reissaar, on the Club's journey toward sustainability accreditation.

Club Talk with Jack Boskett – 'Through the Lens of a Royal Photographer'

Thursday 10th September
1830hrs – 2030hrs
Members: £35.00 / Guests: £45.00
Dress Code: Business Formal (formerly known as Jacket & Tie)

Join award-winning photographer Jack Boskett, for an evening full of stories behind his most striking images, from Queen Elizabeth II's funeral to King Charles III's Coronation.

RAF Club Solo Dining Society Dinner

Thursday 8th October
1830hrs – 2230hrs
Members: £65.00 / Guests: £75.00
Dress Code: Business Casual (formerly known as Smart Casual)

Following the success of the RAF Club Solo Dining Society Dining Room lunches, Club Trustees, Amanda Wolfe and Paula Willmot, are delighted to invite you to an RAF Club Solo Dining Society Dinner, where solo Members are warmly invited to join fellow solo diners for an informal, sociable dinner.

Join like-minded Members and experience the chance to meet and make new friends amongst our Club membership community. Members are welcome to bring solo non-members as guests for this dinner.

Children's Christmas Story Workshop with Author Dr Adam Baron – 'The Very Last Christmas Present'

Saturday 5th December
1000hrs – 1200hrs
Members: £25.00 / Guests: £30.00 / Children £10.00
Dress Code: Business Casual (formerly known as Smart Casual)

Dr Adam Baron, best-selling author and Club Member, returns to share his festive story *The Very Last Christmas Present* with our young members.

When Santa realises he's forgotten one last gift, a broken sleigh and exhausted reindeer leave him in trouble, until his faithful dog Kado steps in, leading to a magical journey around the world. But who is the final present for?

Enjoy a live reading from Adam, along with festive treats. Each young guest will also receive a signed copy of the book.

Members' Christmas Lunch

Monday 14th December
1200hrs - 1530hrs
Members: £70.00 / Guests: £80.00
Dress Code: Business Formal (formerly known as Jacket & Tie)

Indulge in a traditional Christmas lunch (turkey with all the trimmings!) amongst fellow Members and friends at the annual Members' Christmas Lunch. Enjoy mulled wine followed by a traditional festive three-course lunch with all the trimmings. A marvellous occasion, not to be missed!

Guests will have the chance to get into the festive spirit by enjoying a sing-along with the Canticum Choir during lunch.

FULL EVENT LISTING 2026

Details of events taking place at the Club this year. Keep up to date via the Club website or by following the Club on our social media channels.

JUNE

Sip and Paint - 'What I See in You' - Paint Your Partner or a Friend
Thursday 4th June, 1830hrs
£65/£75

FULLY BOOKED
Sons and Daughters Dinner II
Friday 19th June, 1830hrs
£85/£95

FULLY BOOKED
Wine Tasting Series with Hayward Bros - Loire Valley
Tuesday 23rd June, 1830hrs
£45/£55

FULLY BOOKED
Club Safari Dinner
Wednesday 24th June, 1830hrs
£98.50

JULY

FULLY BOOKED
Summer Gourmet Dinner - 'Botanicals'
Thursday 2nd July, 1830hrs
£80/£90

Club Talk with Matthew Pottage – 'The Royal Parks: Gardening for People and Planet'
Tuesday 7th July, 1830hrs
£30/£40

AUGUST

25 Year Reception
Monday 3rd August, 1730hrs
'By Invitation Only'

50 Year Lunch
Monday 10th August, 1200hrs
'By Invitation Only'

USAF Dinner
Thursday 13th August, 1800hrs
£90/£95

60 Year Afternoon Tea
Monday 17th August, 1500hrs
'By Invitation Only'

70 Year Afternoon Tea
Monday 24th August, 1500hrs
'By Invitation Only'

SEPTEMBER

Zero Waste Gourmet Dinner
Tuesday 1st September, 1830hrs
£70/£80

New Members' Reception and Dinner
Thursday 3rd September, 1800hrs
£60/£65

Club Talk with Jack Boskett – 'Through the Lens of a Royal Photographer'
Thursday 10th September, 1830hrs
£35/£45

FULLY BOOKED
Battle of Britain Dinner with Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Harv Smyth CB OBE DFC MA
Tuesday 15th September, 1830hrs
£80/£90

Club Talk with Adrian Rycroft – 'Cold War Aviation and Life Beyond the Iron Curtain'
Thursday 24th September, 1830hrs
£35/£45

OCTOBER

Port and Wine Tasting with the Symington Family Estates
Thursday 1st October, 1830hrs
£40/£50

RAF Club Solo Dining Society Dinner
Thursday 8th October, 1830hrs
£65/£75

FULLY BOOKED
Autumn Gourmet Dinner - 'Glorious Grouse'
Tuesday 13th October, 1830hrs
£90/£95

FULLY BOOKED
An Evening with Garrison Sergeant Major Andrew "Vern" Stokes OBE, MVO, DL, Organiser of National & State Ceremonial Events
Tuesday 20th October, 1830hrs
£90/£95

NOVEMBER

Wine Tasting Series with Hayward Bros - South America
Tuesday 3rd November, 1830hrs
£45/£55

FULLY BOOKED
Winter Gourmet Dinner - 'Five Senses of Flavour: Sweet • Sour • Salty • Bitter • Umami'
Wednesday 11th November, 1830hrs
£90/£95

FULLY BOOKED
Club Talk with Paul Smiddy – 'Moonlight Crusaders: Special Duties Pilots over Occupied Europe'
Wednesday 18th November, 1830hrs
£35/£45

DECEMBER

Children's Christmas Story Workshop with Author Adam Baron – 'The Very Last Christmas Present'
Saturday 5th December, 1000hrs
£10/£25/£30

FULLY BOOKED
Festive Afternoon Tea and RAFBF Carol Concert
Wednesday 9th December, 1615hrs
£65/£75

Members' Christmas Lunch
Monday 14th December, 1200hrs
£70/£80

Members' Christmas Dinner
Thursday 17th December, 1830hrs
£75/£85

Zero Waste Gourmet Dinner

To book for any Club Social event, visit: https://www.rafclub.org.uk/whats-on, email events@rafclub.org.uk or call 020 7399 1081

MEMBER STORIES

"A bloody good navigator"

Flying Officer Gordon Drain and Wing Commander James Blackburn

Sharing notes at a reunion of 159 Squadron, my father remarked that he had flown for two squadrons, with a total of twelve pilots. His friend replied "You must have been either a bloody awful navigator, or a bloody good one!" "Good enough to fly more operations with my CO", was his response.

That commanding officer was Wing Commander James Blackburn, DSO DFC, (1916-1993). He confessed to my father that, having been a pre-war direct entry into the Reserve of Air Force Officers, he had flown the entire war without taking a "wings" exam, and was therefore not technically entitled to wear the brevet. That was not the only unusual aspect of his career: he had lost his logbooks, his freedom and nearly his life in the sinking of the *Laconia* in September 1942, but escaped from a Moroccan prisoner-of-war camp two months later. His work in Bomber Command was carried out from North Africa and from India, which is where my father met him. Their first op together was Blackburn's 200th, my father's 20th. They flew seven more, Blackburn's last with 159.

"*Quo non, quando non*" is the motto of 159 Squadron. The words say "not whither, not when," but we are to supply the word "Ask." It seems to suit Blackburn, who did not shrink from sorties that others were sure were impossible. Chief among them was his more than 19-hour flight to mine the harbour of Penang, a place considered to be so far out of range, according to my father, that the Japanese still had their lights on.

Flights like that were possible because Blackburn pushed the capability of his Liberators. Removing the middle turret, stripping down the armour, tinkering with fuel consumption, he loaded more bombs and enough fuel to reach his unreachable targets. My father said that when Blackburn thought they were ready, he took off alone to make sure the plane could get off the ground and land again with the load. No one else could try until he proved it possible.

Portrait of Flying Officer Gordon S. Drain, December, 1943

Flights like that were possible because Blackburn pushed the capability of his Liberators

My father was a methodical, cautious man – which is probably why he washed out of his pilot training. Split-second decisions were not his way; meticulous plotting was his strength. Chance sometimes played a part anyway: blown off course in one storm, he looked out of his window and recognised the shape of an island through a break in the clouds, and found their way again. He probably prayed. As they approached targets, he said, and the searchlights sprang up and the flak began to burst, he would utter a silent prayer. And though survival was uppermost in his mind, he confessed, he also prayed that he not fail those who depended on him. He didn't then, or in the rest of his life. He joined BOAC after the war, and, having married a woman he met during his training in Canada, emigrated there with his young family, rising to become personnel manager first of Canada and then of the USA.

Until close to the end of his life, Blackburn resisted any suggestion that he write a memoir. That it would have been fascinating is attested in the stories he told in a letter to my father not very long before his death. They were very different, those two: one an Oxford man, the other a grammar-school scholarship boy from Deptford; one daring, the other methodical.

In 1992, Blackburn wrote to him: "Your letters started a train of thought which has been buried for years. I have never either written or spoken to anyone else like this. ... We are now much of an age so please don't stand on ceremony. Yours, Jimmy."

Dad would have been very pleased to know that, eighty years after they last flew together, his log books and those letters became part of the Imperial War Museum's collections, linked to Blackburn's.

Fg Off Gordon Drain was an RAF Club Member from 1991, until his passing in 2017. His wife Laurie Drain then took over his membership and his two daughters, Susan and Hilary, joined the Club as Family Members. His grandson Duncan is also a Family Member.

Author: Susan Drain, PhD, Professor of English and Writing Studies, Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Canada.

Sinking of Laconia Sep 1942

MEMBER STORIES

Flt Lt Colin Bell DFC BEM

Still flying high at 105

One of the Club's oldest and most frequent Members, Flt Lt Colin Bell kicked off the celebrations for his 105th birthday by hosting drinks in the Churchill Bar and lunch in the Sovereign's Room for over 100 family and friends.

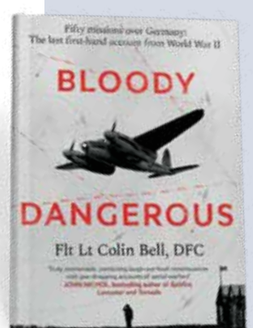
It was poignant that Colin's good friend Randolph Churchill was among those attending. Another close friend, Madame Danielle Pol Roger kindly arranged for pre-lunch champagne to be provided by Churchill's favourite champagne house, Pol Roger.

The party was vintage 'Colin' - cheeky, fun and mischievous good humour in abundance, with a wide range of friends drawn from a long life that shows no signs of slowing. Many friends from the United States made the journey over but the 'outstanding determination and resilience award' unquestionably goes to Club Member David Roach who set off from Sydney to come to the party only to be held up for several days in Dubai, following the outbreak of the US-Iran war, and despite his very best efforts, missed the party.

Among many tributes to Colin were those from his daughter Vivienne and son Martin, as well as Mark Vickers, Randolph Churchill, Sir Gerald Howarth, Keith Knowles and Alexander Norman, who greatly assisted Colin with the writing of his new autobiography.

Colin was thrilled by the whole occasion: "It has been wonderful to have so much fun. I would like to express my immense gratitude to my wingman Mark Vickers and to Emily Moss in the Meetings & Events team who together organised such a fabulous party. The staff at the Club are amazing all year round. Specifically for my party, I would like to thank in particular Mohammad, Adalberto, Cajetan, Janice, Elliot, Emma and Michael. You are not only fantastic at what you do but you are among my good friends too. Not surprisingly having had such a good time, I've already booked my party for next year. So here's for "106 not out!!"

On the actual date of his birthday, Colin's autobiography 'Bloody Dangerous' *was officially launched and sold out on Amazon within four hours. There's no doubt life as a 105-year-old continues to be busy and huge fun.*



BLOODY DANGEROUS

Colin Bell's *Bloody Dangerous* is a powerful and inspiring portrait of bravery in action, full of touching admiration for his RAF comrades, one in three of whom were killed. He paints an extraordinarily vivid picture of what it was like to fly a Mosquito, the 'wooden wonder' in 50 raids over Germany, 13 of them to Berlin itself.

There, coned by searchlights, he experienced the terror of being tracked by devastatingly effective 88mm radar-controlled anti-aircraft guns when he wasn't being chased by night-fighting Messerschmitt 262s, the only aircraft in the German armoury capable of outrunning the Mosquito. Colin suffered engine failures, fuel starvation, near-fatal ice, numerous hits to his plane and, on one occasion, an explosion so close there was shrapnel in his parachute and burn marks on his navigator's flying suit.

Colin takes us from pre-war London, where he wooed his girlfriend with tickets to a new film opening in Leicester Square, to the terrifying scenes of the Blitz, and joining the RAF after witnessing a bomb fall on the opposite side of the street where he was walking. He goes on to recount his life in the RAF, serving in 608 Squadron with the Light Night Striking Force, where he became part of the force that helped bring about Germany's surrender.

Scan the QR code to order your copy from Amazon

MEMBER STORIES

From Ypres to Piccadilly

A reunion 109 years on

In the summer of 1917, amid the grinding stalemate of trench warfare on the Western Front during the Third Battle of Ypres, the skies became an extension of the battlefield. Fragile aircraft – wooden frames and fabric wings - flew dangerous reconnaissance missions, guiding artillery by observing where shells fell and relaying messages back to ground batteries.

Among these were the RE8 aircraft of No. 21 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, operating from La Lovie aerodrome near Poperinge. Each aircraft carried a pilot and an observer, flying long, exposed patrols over no-man's-land, vulnerable to enemy fire and with no armour or parachutes for protection.

Into this environment arrived a young pilot, Lieutenant John Kingsbury, in August 1917. Shortly after, a newly qualified observer, Clifford Vandyck, joined the same squadron. The two flew together repeatedly on demanding reconnaissance sorties over areas such as Zonnebeke and Ypres, spending hours at a time in the air, locating enemy positions and directing artillery fire.

Soon after, Vandyck was shot down on a later mission and evacuated to London, while Kingsbury remained with the squadron before returning to England in 1918 to train new pilots.

Decades passed, and each man's family grew in parallel. Kingsbury's daughter, Alex, and Vandyck's daughter, Jackie, were born years apart, unaware of the connection between their fathers.

Then, on 21st January 2026, more than a century after their fathers first flew together, Alex and Jackie met for the first time over lunch at the RAF Club in Piccadilly, London.

It was a quiet, remarkable meeting - two women in their seventies discovering not only a shared history, but a direct human link to two young men who once shared a cockpit over the battlefields of the Great War.

Clockwise from left: Jackie and Alex, at the RAF Club; RE 8 Aircraft - 1917; Lt John Kingsbury (left), Alex Johnson's father with who is thought to be his Observer, Lt H V Dorey; Lt H A Blundell (left) and Lt C G Vandyck;

Ocean Endurance

RAF Club supported team rows the Atlantic

Team Per Ardua survived their Atlantic rowing crossing, departing from La Gomera on 25th December 2025 and arriving into English Harbour, Antigua in a respectable 44 days, with the team still friends and the boat intact. A key lesson was that an ocean reminds you – every hour – how small you are, and how much success depends not only on physical endurance but on psychological adaptability, emotional steadiness, and the ability to rebuild routine and perspective once you return home.

Fantastic support from the RAF Club helped as well as wider RAF support including four fabulous messages from the Chief of the Air Staff. Raising funds for good causes helped to keep the crew motivated.

Some statistics:

- total time at sea: 1,062h 43m
- 354 three-hour rowing shifts per team member
- 2,125 rowing hours (with 531 hours per personrowing)
- 2.3 million oar strokes
- nearly 1 million calories burnt and an average weight loss of 10kg per person.

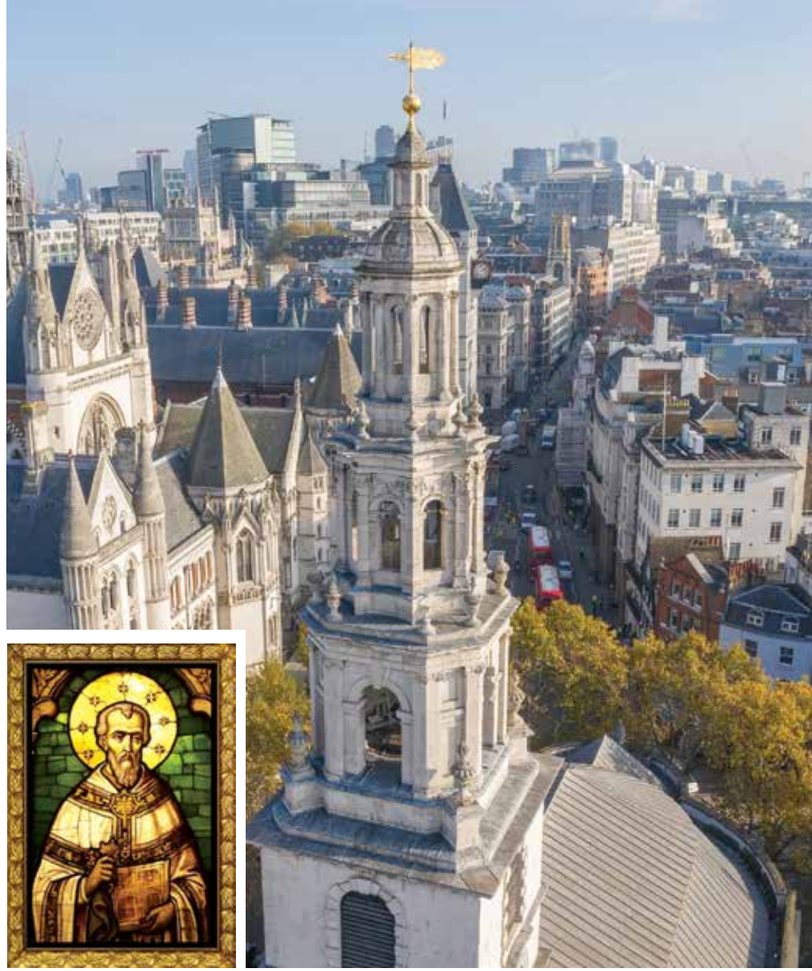
We experienced some amazing sun rises and sunsets, saw whales, dolphins, sharks, tuna and very annoying flying fish (mostly at 0300hrs into your face), and some waves that made us consider our life choices.

WG CDR ANDY CALAME, MVO MBE MA PICTURED ON THE RIGHT WEARING A SHIRT AND A TIE.

ST CLEMENT DANES

Scaffolding and Twanky Dillo

St Clement Danes, the Central Church of the RAF, has been undergoing repairs for nearly two years, its lovely tower covered in hoardings and scaffolding. Now, thanks to the generosity of hundreds of individuals and the vital support of the Royal Air Force, the end of the work is in sight. The Reverend (Wg Cdr) Ashley Mitchell, Resident Chaplain, the regular congregation and the thousands of tourists look forward to the day the scaffolding goes. While the Civil Service recruitment freeze has delayed the appointment of a new Church Manager, we continue to open the church whenever possible.



Who was St Clement?

One question that is frequently asked by visitors to the church is who was St Clement? Fact and myth combine to create a story with both religious and historical interest. Clement was a real person, an early Bishop of Rome who fell foul of the Emperor Trajan and was exiled to the Crimea to work in the mines. While working in the mines on a hot day, he allegedly performed a miracle by opening a spring of water for his thirsty fellow miners, who promptly converted to Christianity. Performing miracles was dangerous and the Romans tied an anchor to Clement's neck and threw him in the sea. Following his martyrdom, angels built a tomb on the sea-bed which was annually revealed at low tide, on St Clementstide.

Clement is the patron saint of, among others, blacksmiths who celebrated St Clementstide with a holiday and feast. The blacksmiths had a particularly dramatic way of celebrating the feast, beginning with 'firing the anvil.' A small hole in the surface of an anvil was filled with gunpowder and a smith brought his hammer down, creating a splendid explosion. Then an apprentice smith led blacksmiths through the locality, going from pub to pub. Inn keepers were not only expected to provide free beer, but also donate money for the feast of St Clement. The revellers rounded off their dinner with the blacksmiths' anthem, known by the delightful name of 'Twanky Dillo,' the words of which are sadly lost. Inevitably, children got in on St Clementstide and would call on houses to ask for fruit or sweetmeats, a custom known as 'clementing.'

St Clementstide was traditionally during the last week of November, which is why the Friends of St Clement Danes hold their annual concert during this month.

Annual Concert

The 2025 Friends of St. Clement Danes Concert was held on Thursday 27th November, and it was deemed to be the best ever with record attendance. It was also RAF musicians' favourite event of the year. The Central Band of the Royal Air Force, directed by Wg Cdr Richard Murray, and the Choir of St Clement Danes, directed by Simon Over, put on a simply wonderful performance of a varied and hugely enjoyable programme of music. Comments received from the packed audience included, *"It was a wonderful performance, an eclectic programme, brilliant musicianship, in fact nothing short of tremendous. We were privileged indeed to have been there."*

The 2026 concert will be held on **Thursday 26th November**, starting at 1830hrs. Club Members that attend the concert will not be singing Twanky Dillo, but they are assured of an excellent musical evening. Tickets for the concert are free and can be applied for by emailing the concert organiser at concert@fscd.org.uk.

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising & Friends of the RAF Club

Accessibility at the Fore

Legacies and Friends of the RAF Club have been an important part of the Club's fundraising efforts in recent years with Gifts and donations enabling us to complete special projects that would otherwise have not been possible or fully funded through Membership income, rooms revenue or food and beverage income streams.

Our new, fully accessible Running Horse Tavern, and in previous years projects such as the sympathetic refurbishment of the main entrance, have been supported by the Friends along with occasional legacies, enabling us to maintain the Grade II Listed clubhouse at a level fitting for a prestigious central London club.

Future Aspirations

For 2026, as noted in the Chief Executive's Introduction on page 4, discussion is now underway to progress with the construction of a new accessible walkway between our original 4th floor building and the newer Centenary Wing. Not only will this enable us to take pressure off the Club's busy lifts, but it is also essential to enable us to replace the main passenger lift, which is now reaching the end of its lifespan.

The Chief Executive and the Chair of the Board will keep Members abreast of plans as the project progresses, and to all those Members who have spent an age waiting for the lift to arrive or the unlucky handful of you who have been stuck in recent years, there will be a welcome sigh of relief once the work is complete!

128 Piccadilly in Numbers

As a bustling hospitality business based in our splendid but occasionally creaky one hundred and four year old Piccadilly setting, the Club's Chief Engineer Jorge Martins and his team always have their work cut out maintaining and repairing over 7,000 square metres of primarily Victorian-built architecture and infrastructure.

Unsurprisingly, the cost of keeping this huge space warm, well-lit and welcoming is substantial, with the Club's heating, ventilation, water and electricity approaching £1,500 per day. The Club's Finance and Purchasing team work hard to negotiate the best pricing across areas as disparate as Bone China to window cleaning, wine suppliers to laundry, all without compromising on quality and standards.

The Club in 2025

WINING & DINING
Over £1.5 million invested in food and beverage across Member dining, events, and hospitality

UTILITY BILLS
Water, heating, and lighting costs exceeded £475,000 across the Club's operations

SERVICE
Tableware, laundry, and staff uniforms accounted for £275,000 in essential service costs

THE CLUBHOUSE
£500,000 spent on essential repairs and maintenance, including major back of house refurbishments

STAFF WELFARE
Paying a London Living Wage, staff costs represented around half of annual income

Support from the Friends of the RAF Club, along with Gift in Wills makes a huge difference in making up any shortfall and allowing the Club to remain well kept, secure and a pleasant place for Members to enjoy and Staff to work.

Investing in the Future

With Generous Intent

This time last year, the Club launched a new partnership with the National Free Wills Network. Members benefit from a complimentary Will Writing or Amendment service through a registered Solicitor close to home with the cost to the Club £100 per standard will. Unlike many other Charity Will Writing Services, the Club was keen to ensure a face-to-face appointment was possible, alongside a standard online appointment. So far over twenty Members have taken us up on the service, with the majority very kindly choosing to support the Club through a Gift in their Will. Whilst these Gifts will hopefully not be realised for many decades to come, the service does enable us to begin to plan for the future, aiding capital projects and special commissions such as the Club's now iconic stained glass window.

A poignant reminder of this was a generous Gift in Will by much loved ex-Head of the WRAF and Club Member, Ruth Montague. Ruth's specific intent was that we continued to ensure the clubhouse was fit for purpose through capital enhancements beyond her lifetime.

Even more remarkable, the Club was unaware of Ruth's intentions until we were first notified of the Gift in early 2025. We would have loved the opportunity to personally thank Ruth in her lifetime, so we would ask if you are very generously proposing to leave the Club a Gift in future years, please do let us know, we'd love to recognise your gesture now.

NATIONAL FREE WILLS NETWORK

Did You Know?

Gifts to UK-registered charities such as the RAF Club are also exempt from inheritance tax (IHT), and by gifting 10% of your estate or more to charity, it can reduce the IHT rate on the remainder.

To learn more or benefit from the Club's National Free Wills Network partnership scan the QR code or visit www.rafclub.org.uk/supporting-club or contact fundraising@rafclub.org.uk. Always seek advice from trusted financial and legal professionals when dealing with tax or inheritance matters.

Family First

As a Club we are often lucky enough to be told that the Staff and Members feel like an RAF Family and the Club itself feels like home. Often, entire families from grandparents to parents and then their own children are growing up with the Club as a backdrop to major celebrations and life events. This is a huge motivation behind what we do each and every day, with Club's hospitality a million miles away from the average London hotel.

If you or a family member may be considering supporting the Club for future generations, remember your family could benefit from 99% of your estate, with as little as 1% helping to support the Club and the next generation of Members.

To include the Club as a future beneficiary in your Will, all your Solicitor needs to do is add our Charity Number (1108295) and Name. Nothing could be simpler.

Fundraising Focus

SHARING IS CARING
Respite breaks with the RAF Club

Alongside our capital projects and refurbishments, the Club launched our fully funded Care & Compassion Breaks in summer 2025 – an initiative designed to assist serving Officers within our membership who have recently experienced or are currently facing welfare or health challenges. Aligning with the RAF Club's core charitable aims, this scheme enables us to support these Officers and their families with a few days complimentary respite and relaxation.

Feedback from families to date highlights the powerful impact some time away from it all can have on wellbeing and we hope to be able to grow the number of breaks moving forward.

"Thank you so much for a lovely stay, it was hugely welcomed and appreciated. We really enjoyed the delicious meals and the whole dining in experience of which we wouldn't have been able to afford had it not been for the care and compassion break offered by the Club. We haven't stopped thinking and talking about it since we returned."

For our Friends of the Club, helping fund these breaks is also a way of supporting both the Club and Serving Members in need directly.

"I had been seeking a cause that aligned with my own values and desire to assist others through welfare-based Club support. This new initiative has ticked that box and enabled me to make a personal impact on the wellbeing of another Member and their family at their specific time of need."
Susanne Parsons, WRAF

AVIATION AND THE VICTORIA CROSS
A fitting tribute

We were delighted that last year's Fundraising campaign, a commemorative artwork to honour RAF recipients of the Victoria Cross, met its £15,000 target by the end of 2025 through a combination of Tankard sales and general donations.

In recognition, donors and Friends were welcomed to the unveiling of the new Victoria Cross-inspired artwork by Club Member Mandy Shepherd back in March. The evening was a wonderful opportunity for supporters to meet the artist Mandy and learn some of the remarkable tales of bravery behind the Victoria Cross itself. Particular thanks go to the medal makers Hancocks, who brought a replica VC for those to admire on the evening.

The distinctive work, over two beautifully detailed panels, is now available for all to view in the Running Horse Tavern. For the full story, see pages 30 & 31.

SIR FRANK WHITTLE - A GENIUS IN THE FAMILY
Screening & Friends' Dinner

On 9th April, Club President, Sir David Walker welcomed over fifty Members and Friends to a private screening of a new documentary focusing on the life and achievements of Sir Frank Whittle, the inventor of the Jet Engine, and a Club Member. We were privileged to be joined by Sir Frank's son, and fellow Club Friend and Member Ian Whittle, along with the Co-Directors, Nick Horrell and Nicholas Jones (pictured).

At a dinner later that evening, Club Friends were given the opportunity to pose questions to Ian, Nick and Nicholas. As a quirk of the seating plan we were also delighted that Nick Horrell was unexpectedly reacquainted with his former OC at Cambridge UAS 1987-88, Club Member and Gold Friend, Sqn Ldr Geoff Day. A reminder that you never know who you will bump into when attending a Club event!

'Frank Whittle: A Genius In The Family' is now on general release on Amazon Prime Video. Further details at www.frankwhittlegenius.com.

UP ON THE ROOF
Happy, healthy hives

The Club's resident rooftop bees, one of the very few colonies with a W1 postcode, have had a warm and cosy autumn and winter, with both of the Club's colonies surviving through the colder months. Last year we sadly lost one of the colonies, although these quickly repopulated, so this year we took no chances and installed cork insulation along with preventative treatment for Varroa, a notorious honeybee pest.

As the weather warms up, both colonies will continue to increase in size, hopefully leading to a bumper harvest of Club Honey in the autumn.

Last year, for the first year, we sold around 80 jars of this fragrant, floral, hand produced runny honey, and we look forward to doing the same in 2026. All profits will go towards the upkeep of the Bees and our wonderful Beekeeper Paul, who visits regularly for health checks and to ensure the rooftop planting is at its best.

Acknowledgements

The Trustees, Management, and Staff thank all Bronze, Silver, and Gold Friends of the RAF Club. Special thanks to those who wish to remain anonymous.

Note: Due to the high number of Bronze Friends, we will reach out separately to express our gratitude.

GOLD FRIENDS

Lord Beaverbrook, Mr N A Bishop, Captain A D Budagher, Mr G Bunker-James, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Lord Craig of Radley, Mr A A P Davis, Squadron Leader G R Day, Dr V Gupta, Ms D J Guthrie, Mr N Kapur, Squadron Leader M Kelson, Mrs P J Moore, Squadron Leader B S Naidoo, Mr A V Pheasant, Mrs M E Rex, Mrs P Spaight, Mrs G Summers, Flight Lieutenant B A W Thompson, Dr R Williams MD, Wing Commander P Willmot MBE

SILVER FRIENDS

Mr A Ahmed, Mrs B M Aked, Mr M Allen, Mr M L Ashwell MBE, Professor M Bagshaw, Mr W A Baker, Flight Lieutenant C C Baldwin, Mr A W Barnett, Mr S D Bartlett, Mr S P Battley, Mr A W Bellers, Mr R H Belton, Dr T Benke, Lieutenant Colonel S Blair, Group Captain J Brock, Mr C A Brockbank, Mr A D K Campbell, Mr L H Carr, Mr D J P Cattermole, Wing Commander K Claxton, Mrs J H Claxton, Mrs D M Cleaver, Mr J Cockburn, Mr B Cooper, Mr A T Crichton, Mr N A Cuddeford, Group Captain N J Davis, Group Captain K R J De Belder OBE, Wing Commander B Dibb, Mr C E Docker, Wing Commander A T Dolman MBE, Dr P Dyer OBE, Flight Lieutenant D M Embrey OBE, Mrs M A C Foot, Mrs K H Foster, Mr P Golder, Mr P R Gorman, Ms A Graham MBE, Mr M J Green, Mr B Haskins, Mr T R A Hawkins, Mr D Hayler MBE, Mr C J Hill, Mr M J Hollingsworth, Mr J M V Horsman, Mrs H Hoyle, Mr M J Hunter, Mrs M T Joel, Squadron Leader M K Johnson AFC, Mr D G Johnson, Mr S R Johnston, Mr S Kassum, Mrs B Keun, Mr E A Malone, Miss V L Marshall, Mr A P Matthews OBE, Hon Group Captain D P McCullagh, Mr J McGarvey MBE, Mr D T P Milwright, Wing Commander P Morrell OBE MVO, Mr S Morris, Mr G Nigro, Mr F E Parker, Wing Commander R T Popple MBE, Mr N E S Price, Mr T Price, Mr C H Richardson, Mrs E M Ryle, Mr J S Schaefer, Lieutenant Colonel W T Shearer, Mrs A S Sherrington, Squadron Leader M L Sinel, Sir Donald Spiers CB TD, Dr A C E Stacey, Mr R J Street, Dr I F Symes, Mr N G Towler, Lord Tunnicliffe CBE, Lady Tunnicliffe, Wing Commander C Upton , Mr I L Whittle, Wing Commander R C Willis-Fleming, Mr P W Yockney

As ever, thank you for your ongoing support as we strive to ensure the Club is here for future generations of Officers and their families to enjoy. Should you have any questions regarding our Fundraising or wish to support us as a Friend of the Club, please do get in touch at fundraising@rafclub.org.uk

ART

Valour in pencil

Commemorating the Airmen of the Victoria Cross

On Tuesday 10th March 2026, Members, Friends of the Club and invited guests gathered in the Presidents' Room for the unveiling of a remarkable new artwork commemorating the aviators awarded the Victoria Cross during the two World Wars. The commission forms part of the wider refurbishment of the Running Horse Tavern and will now hang there permanently; a fitting setting within the Club where Members and visitors alike may pause to reflect upon the extraordinary courage of those represented.

The evening reception was hosted by Club Chair, Air Vice-Marshal Warren James CB CBE, together with Group Captain Jim Beldon MBE, Chair of the Club's Arts and Heritage Committee. The artwork was formally unveiled by Club Vice President and former Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon GCB CBE, who was accompanied by Lady Graydon.

Created by distinguished aviation artist and longstanding Club Member Mandy Shepherd, the commission takes the form of two complementary pencil montages. Executed entirely in miniature vignette portraits surrounding a coloured image of the medal itself, the artwork depicts the airmen who received the Victoria Cross while serving in the Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service, the Royal Air Force and the air forces of the Commonwealth.

The concept for the work emerged from the Club's desire to recognise collectively the courage of these individuals and to present their stories in a form that is both historically respectful and visually engaging. In total, forty-two portraits are represented across the two panels. Each recipient is depicted alongside the aircraft type most closely associated with his action, creating a striking visual narrative of courage during the formative decades of military aviation.

The first panel depicts the Victoria Cross recipients of the First World War drawn from the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service, as well as those early members of the Royal Air Force following its formation in April 1918. The second panel commemorates the RAF and Commonwealth airmen awarded the Victoria Cross during the Second World War.

Among those represented are William Rhodes-Moorhouse VC, whose gallantry in 1915 earned the first Victoria Cross awarded to a British airman; Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC, leader of the famous Dambusters raid; and Group Captain Leonard Cheshire VC, one of Bomber Command's most distinguished wartime leaders.

The montage also includes Flight Lieutenant John Cruickshank VC, the Coastal Command Catalina pilot whose extraordinary determination in July 1944 saw him press home an attack on a German U-boat despite suffering severe wounds. Refusing to relinquish control of his aircraft, he flew the damaged Catalina safely back to base, ensuring the survival of his crew. Cruickshank remained the last surviving recipient of the Victoria Cross awarded during the Second World War until his death in August 2025 at the age of 105, marking the passing of the final living link to that remarkable generation of wartime VC holders.

The concept for the work emerged from the Club's desire to recognise collectively the courage of these individuals

During the evening, guests were also able to view a museum-quality replica Victoria Cross brought to the Club by Marcus Wackett of Hancocks London.

Hancocks has produced every Victoria Cross since the medal's creation in 1856, and the opportunity to see the decoration at close quarters provided a powerful reminder of the significance of the award.

In his remarks, Group Captain Beldon chose to reflect upon one particularly moving story illustrated within the artwork: that of Pilot Officer Andrew Mynarski VC of 419 (Moose) Squadron, Royal Canadian Air Force.

On the night of 12–13 June 1944, Mynarski's Lancaster was returning from a mission against Cambrai when it was intercepted by one of the Luftwaffe's most feared night fighters, a Junkers Ju 88. The attack set the bomber ablaze and left it fatally damaged. As the crew prepared to abandon the aircraft, Mynarski realised that the rear gunner, Flight Sergeant Pat Brophy, was trapped in his turret.

Ignoring the intense flames engulfing the fuselage, Mynarski fought his way back through the burning aircraft in repeated attempts to free him. His clothing and parachute caught fire as he struggled to reach the turret. Unable to release Brophy and with the fire engulfing his flying gear and parachute, he was eventually persuaded by Brophy to escape. Before leaving the aircraft, however, he paused, stood upright despite the flames, and saluted his fellow crew member.

Mynarski descended by parachute but died shortly afterwards from the burns he had sustained. Remarkably, Miraculously, Brophy survived the crash when his turret broke free on impact, and later recounted Mynarski's extraordinary attempt to save him. Had he not survived, the full story of Mynarski's courage might never have been known.

That reflection formed an important part of the evening's message. Mynarski's story reminds us that many acts of extraordinary bravery in wartime were never witnessed, and even when they were, those who saw them often did not survive to tell the tale. In that sense, the portraits captured in Mandy Shepherd's artwork represent far more than the forty-two men depicted. They stand also for countless others whose courage was no less remarkable but whose deeds passed unrecorded amid the chaos of war.

As was observed during the evening, one might easily imagine the walls of the Running Horse Tavern covered with the portraits of similarly brave airmen whose stories were never fully known. The individuals portrayed in Mandy Shepherd's remarkable work therefore serve not only as men honoured for their gallantry, but also as representatives of a much larger fellowship of courage.

The commission itself was made possible through the generosity of the Friends of the Club, Member donations and proceeds from the sale of the Running Horse commemorative tankards marking the Tavern's re-opening in autumn 2025. Special tribute must also be paid to Wing Commander James Poynton, who oversaw the project on behalf of the Arts and Heritage Committee and guided its development from concept through to completion.

Now installed in the Running Horse Tavern, Mandy Shepherd's work provides a powerful and lasting tribute to the aviators whose courage earned the Victoria Cross. It will stand as a reminder to Members and visitors alike that behind each medal lies a story of »

Unveiling ceremony of the Victoria Cross artwork, hosted by the Chair of the Board of Trustees, Air Vice-Marshal Warren James CB CBE DL

Victoria Cross artwork proudly hanging in the Running Horse

exceptional bravery and sacrifice; and that the forty-two portraits depicted represent not only those whose valour was recorded, but also many others whose courage, though no less great, was never formally known.

From the Artist

This project has been the greatest honour to have been entrusted with creating this depiction of those aircrew who were awarded the Victoria Cross during the First and Second World Wars. For the airmen commemorated in these two panels, their courage was displayed far from safety, often alone, and always under immense pressure. Their actions were not only acts of skill, but of extraordinary resolve, self-sacrifice, and devotion to others. To have been given the responsibility to portray the character and likeness of each and every recipient as well as appreciating their individual stories, has been humbling.

As I have worked on these pieces for many months, I have been continually reminded that behind the 'name', these young men climbed into fragile aircraft and faced a danger that many of us can scarcely imagine today. They flew through darkness, through fire, and through overwhelming odds, often placing the lives of their comrades and the success of their missions before their own safety. Many of them perished and to know that the terrifying majority died in the act of duty between the years of 18 to 23 has been a stark realisation. And the lives of their loved ones they left behind were changed forever. Ultimately the most challenging and yet rewarding part of this work is to have had these extraordinary stories come into sharp focus.

This project has not only been about remembering acts of bravery but honouring the spirit that carried them through — a quiet determination, and the willingness to give everything for something greater than themselves. Undoubtedly the hardest part was the meticulous research and double /triple checking both the detail of the individual and their aircraft.

For every one of the 42 individuals that I have drawn, every one of them made a choice to act with honour when it mattered most. This work has honestly been an overwhelmingly humbling experience and one of the most important works I have taken on and had to live up to. It has been a huge privilege to play a small part in preserving the memory of these remarkable and very courageous people.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

This special commission was awarded to distinguished aviation artist and longstanding Club Member, Mandy Shepherd. Renowned for her detailed wildlife and military paintings, her career has been shaped by extensive field experience alongside armed forces and in remote environments. She has worked extensively on RAF projects and portraiture, travelling to Brunei, Muscat, Iraq and Afghanistan and many UK military bases for commissions including the Tristar, VC10, Hercules, Tornado and Typhoon.

This direct exposure to frontline environments informs her aviation and defence artwork, giving it authenticity and narrative depth. Today, her portfolio uniquely blends aviation, wider military subjects, and wildlife, reflecting a career built on first-hand experience rather than studio observation.

Some of her more recent commissions include the portrait of Air Chief Marshal The Lord Peach KG GBE KCB DL, which is displayed at the Royal Air Force College Cranwell and the USAF's iconic U-2 'Dragon Lady' spy plane based at RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus.

CLUB SHOP

New Additions!

Introducing our new Apple & Cucumber Gin!

This "limited edition" Summer Gin, hand-crafted by Hawkridge Distillers delivers a crisp and refreshing twist on our classic gin range, infused with our Club's rooftop honey for a subtle touch of luxury.

The aroma of freshly sliced green apple and cooling garden cucumber lifts beautifully from our traditional juniper-forward gin base. Bright orchard notes are balanced by delicate botanical complexity, creating a clean, elegant spirit that captures the essence of an English summer.

128 SUMMER GIN FIZZ

- 50ml Apple & Cucumber 128 Gin
- 25ml lemon juice
- 15ml sugar syrup
- 15ml apple juice
- Ice to shake and pour over
- Slice or ribbon of cucumber for garnish

Pour the ingredients into a cocktail shaker with a handful of ice and shake well. Strain into a highball glass over ice and top up with a splash of soda, gently stir and finish off with a slice or a ribbon of cucumber, sit back and enjoy!

128 Piccadilly Apple & Cucumber Gin alongside our range of gins is available for sale in our Club Shop at £55.00

The London Club: Architecture, Interiors, Art

The RAF Club is featured in a beautifully illustrated book by Andrew Jones, exploring London's most distinguished private members' clubs.

Jones portrays the Club as a rare example of complete thematic unity, where aviation shapes architecture, interiors and one of Britain's largest private collections of aviation art.

Lavishly illustrated and rich in insight, *The London Club: Architecture, Interiors, Art* offers a rare opportunity to see the RAF Club through a new lens – celebrating both its physical beauty and its cultural significance.

Price: £50.00

Club Classics!

Return of our favourite mugs

Our much-loved Club Logo and Club Façade fine bone China mugs are back in stock. Perfect for gifting or enjoying your favourite brew in true Club style.

Price: £25.00

Club Bathrobes

Our luxurious 100% cotton bathrobes are some of our best sellers! Embroidered with the Club logo, they make the perfect addition to any bathroom. One size fits all.

Price: £53.00

Please note this item is for collection only.

To order, scan the respective QR codes or visit our Club Shop now at https://shop.rafclub.org.uk. For any Club Shop enquiries, please contact shop@rafclub.org.uk.

THANK YOU

A decade of service

Dave Holland retired in May after more than 10 years as the Club's Security Manager, leaving a legacy of dedication and genuine care for both Members and staff

Born at RAF Wymeswold in Loughborough, Dave grew up immersed in RAF life: his father trained as a Tiger Moth pilot and served 30 years as an engineer, while his mother, a formidable PTI instructor, inspired both respect and a little fear among the airmen she guided. Following his family's military footsteps, Dave served 22 years in the Army before joining the Club.

Dave on the left with the Club CEO Miles Pooley

When you look back at your time at the Club, what's the first thing that comes to mind?

The tradition – I'm from a military background, and I was raised in the area so it comes as second nature – but it's the fact that you come into the Club, and it's like *Doctor Who's* Tardis. It goes on forever and you find all these little avenues in this old building.

What originally brought you here?

I used to work with Miles and he invited me to the Club. I came down and got speaking to some of the guys from the Second World War. I just thought to myself, I could sit here all day and chat with these people. Then a vacancy came up, so I applied, and 10 years later here I am, finishing my working career off.

Any particular changes that have stood out?

Adding bedrooms as part of the Centenary Project has been a big plus, because with 24,000 Members we have a huge demand for bedrooms.

What have you enjoyed most?

The camaraderie with the Members – we're very like-minded, which makes it easy. I also like the variety of staff from different nationalities and how they all fit into one solid unit.

What is the funniest situation you've had to deal with?

I recall one time we had an accidental setting off of a fire alarm, triggered by smoke in one of our kitchens. The usual practice is that everyone should be out within four minutes. I was at the evacuation point, everyone was there, and I was just about to say we could go back in, when I saw Colin Bell coming out. In one hand, a bottle of red wine, and in the other, a glass. It took him nine minutes to get out. He was not going to leave that behind, which tickled me.

Any occasions that stand out?

Obviously, meeting Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 2018. We also had a meeting for those who served with the SOE and in the Burma campaign in the Second World War. I also always enjoyed the annual Taxi Charity events, when the old boys would come in wearing their berets, from infantry to RAF to the Royal Navy, including those on the Arctic convoys. After a few beers, they'd be marching up and down the corridor, which I thought was absolutely brilliant.

Meeting Johnny Johnson, the last of the Dambusters, and Geoffrey 'Boy' Wellum was also very special, as is knowing Colin Bell.

What makes the Club special?

I used to work in hotels, and the atmosphere and experience are so different in how you deal with people. It's not only a home for the Members, but also for the staff. Many have been here for over 30 years, which says a lot about how comfortable they are. It's not often you enjoy coming to work and feel that comfortable, and that's what this place does.

What are you most looking forward to?

I've never been out of work since I left school, so 52 years later, I'm due a rest. I'm not someone who can just sit doing nothing. I've looked at learning sign language at a college, and I also enjoy walking. I'll miss the people, the setup, the regime, and many of the Members, but life goes on. It's time to sit on my chair, on my new patio, and drink my port.

Secret Smokehouse visit

Back to the Floor

Thames Bridges Trek

Doggy De-stress Day

Staff Charity Quiz Night

CLUB STAFF

The Heart of 128

The latest news from the people that make our Club tick

Secret Smokehouse Visit

The Club was delighted to send our chefs to the Secret Smokehouse kitchen in Hackney. As proud supporters of their award-winning smoked salmon, a regular feature on our dining room menu, this visit offered our culinary team an invaluable opportunity to gain first-hand insight into the craft, care, and quality that goes into every fillet.

A fantastic experience for our chefs, deepening their appreciation of the exceptional produce we serve to our Members.

World Mental Health Day

To celebrate the World Mental Health Day we took the time to focus on staff wellbeing with a day dedicated to some relaxation, connection and a bit of fun.

The highlight of the day was our very own 'Doggy De-stress' session, featuring the wonderful Rémy the chocolate labrador, who brought smiles, cuddles and a whole lot of tail wags to brighten everyone's day.

We also put on our walking shoes for a 'Mile with Miles', where members of our team enjoyed a refreshing stroll through Green Park and the beautiful surrounding area with our CEO and Club Secretary, Miles Pooley.

Prioritising mental wellbeing is more important than ever, and we're proud to be supporting of our staff with moments like this at the RAF Club.

Staff Charity Committee

This is the second year of our Staff supporting The Passage, our chosen charity which supports people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in London. The Passage supports more than 200 individuals each day by providing essential services, including meals, showers, clean clothing, and laundry facilities.

Our Staff Charity Quiz Night in July 2025 raised over £1,000 and the Thames Bridges Trek in September 2025, raised £350.00.

A heartfelt thanks go to our Staff Charity and Community Team, a team of dedicated volunteers from the RAF Club staff, for their hard work throughout the year and to all the staff and guests who supported the initiatives by donations. We're also incredibly grateful to our brilliant quiz master, George, for giving up his time to support this great cause.

Back to the Floor

The Club was proud to be part of the incredible 'Back to the Floor' event, held at the London Hilton on Park Lane.

Club Chief Executive, Miles Pooley, joined over 100 senior leaders in returning to their roots, as they stepped back onto the floor as waiters and sommeliers and served their industry colleagues with energy, humility, and a touch of friendly competition along the way. We were delighted to have a fantastic group of our own there to support Miles and the event, including our Club executive team.

The event raised a record-breaking £405,000 for Hospitality Action, a vital charity supporting hospitality professionals in times of crisis.

Left and bottom: The British Club.
Below: The Marines' Memorial Club.
Right: The Stephen's Green Club

RECIPROCITY

Global Connections

Introducing a new reciprocal club in Singapore, alongside highlights from Ireland and America, where RAF Club Members are warmly welcomed when travelling abroad

The British Club, Singapore

We are delighted to announce a new reciprocal arrangement with the British Club in Singapore. This unique hilltop retreat is set within Bukit Timah's lush greenery, welcoming members from over 50 nationalities. Founded in 1988 to provide a modern alternative to traditional city clubs, it offers a diverse and inclusive membership with a strong social and sporting ethos. Spanning more than 5,900 square metres, the Club features four restaurants, seven event spaces, and extensive leisure facilities, including pools, racquet sports, a gym, and dedicated children's areas. Blending British heritage with international appeal, it provides high-quality service, vibrant social life, and a relaxed yet refined environment for members and their families.

The Club does not offer accommodation facilities, but it is certainly worth a visit next time you are in Singapore.

www.britishclub.org.sg

The Marines' Memorial Club, San Francisco, USA

For more than 75 years, the Marines' Memorial Club has honoured the men and women who have served in defence of the United States. Founded in 1946, it is the nation's first Living Memorial - owned and operated by the Marines' Memorial Association, serving as a memorial, hotel, and theatre dedicated to commemorating and supporting Veterans of all eras.

Located just off Union Square and the iconic cable cars, this handsome Beaux Arts-style landmark offers an inviting club atmosphere rich in history, honour, and pride. It also features historic exhibits, a library, and a museum showcasing American military history from all eras. Members can enjoy 138 first-class guestrooms and elegant suites, a rooftop restaurant and bar with spectacular city views, the 564-seat Marines' Memorial Theatre that was once home to the legendary Actors' Workshop, as well as exquisite ballrooms for meetings and special events.

The Marines' Memorial Club is a true San Francisco institution where hospitality meets heritage.

www.marinesmemorial.org

The Stephen's Green Club, Dublin, Ireland

Nestled in the heart of Dublin, The Stephen's Green Club stands as a timeless symbol of elegance, heritage, and hospitality. Founded in 1840, the Club enjoys a prestigious position overlooking the picturesque St Stephen's Green, offering members and visiting guests a refined retreat within one of the city's most iconic settings.

Set within an elegant Georgian building, the Club is rich in history and character, providing a distinguished and welcoming setting for Members and visiting guests alike.

The Club offers a variety of well-appointed spaces, including a welcoming members' bar, an elegant dining room, comfortable bedrooms, snooker rooms, work pods and versatile meeting spaces. Each area is thoughtfully designed to support both relaxation and productivity, whether you are visiting for business or leisure.

Its central location and warm, professional service make it an ideal base when visiting Dublin. With its unique combination of heritage, hospitality and contemporary amenities, it continues to serve as a distinguished hub in the city, offering an inviting and refined experience for all who pass through its doors.

For those seeking a blend of tradition, comfort, and convenience, this reciprocal club is truly a standout destination.

www.stephensgreenclub.ie

For more information, to view our full list of reciprocal clubs, or to obtain automated letters of introduction, visit www.rafclub.org.uk/reciprocal

International Club for Air Force Officers' Wives

ICAFOW continues to offer a warm and welcoming community for women connected to aviation and the Royal Air Force. Meeting seven times a year at the RAF Club, the group combines convivial lunches with engaging talks from a diverse range of speakers.

Membership has recently expanded, alongside the wives and widows of serving and retired Royal Air Force and Royal Auxiliary Air Force officers, the club welcomes wives of international air force officers stationed in the UK, Air Attaché partners, and female officers of the RAF and complementary women's services. Daughters, sisters, divorcees, and indeed any women with a connection to aviation or air-related roles are also encouraged to join.

ICAFOW has already hosted an impressive roster of speakers, including renowned physicist Brian Cox, whose talks have captivated members with insights into science and the universe.

This year's upcoming lunches promise an equally varied programme. Flt Lt Colin Bell DFC BEM will speak on 15th July. Later in the year, members can also look forward to hearing from Ben Sullivan on 7th October, Richie Piper on 4th November, and a festive performance from The David Bednall Quartet on 2nd December.

With its blend of camaraderie, shared experience, and stimulating conversation, ICAFOW remains a vibrant hub for women linked by a passion for aviation and service.

FLYING GREENER

The Club's Journey Towards a Sustainable Future

There is a particular kind of discipline that has always defined the Royal Air Force – not merely the discipline of orders followed and missions completed, but a deeper instinct: to look ahead, to anticipate, and to act before the moment demands it. It is that same instinct that now shapes the way our Club approaches one of the defining challenges of our time.

Sustainability has crept into the vocabulary of almost every institution in recent years, and not always with the conviction it deserves. Here, however, it has found a home in something more enduring than policy documents and good intentions. It has found it in the culture of a Club that has, for over a century, understood that to serve well, one must think well – and to think well means thinking beyond the present moment.

The journey that began in earnest in the autumn of 2024 was not born of obligation. It was born of pride.

Partnering with EarthCheck

In autumn 2024, the Club formally signed up with EarthCheck - the world's leading scientific benchmarking, certification and advisory group for the travel and tourism industry. This partnership gave our efforts structure, credibility and a clear roadmap. It was the moment our sustainability ambitions became a genuine programme of action.

We are delighted to report that in October 2025, the Club achieved EarthCheck Bronze Benchmarking status. This is a significant milestone – one that recognises the concrete steps we have taken across energy, water, waste and supply chain management. We are extremely proud of this achievement, and it belongs to every member of our team who has contributed to it.

But Bronze is not the destination – it is the launchpad. Our next goal is Silver Certification, and everything we do is focused on getting us there.

The Club formally signed up with EarthCheck – the world's leading scientific benchmarking, certification and advisory group for the travel and tourism industry

Introducing the Green Arrows

Driving this work from within is our dedicated sustainability team: the Green Arrows. Named with a nod to the precision and purpose we aspire to, this cross-departmental team meets regularly to review progress, identify opportunities and ensure that sustainability is woven into the fabric of how the Club operates – not treated as an afterthought. The Green Arrows work hand in hand with EarthCheck, using their data and guidance to keep us on course.

What we have already done

Sustainability does not always mean grand gestures. Much of our progress has come from making smart, considered changes to the things we already have.

Water and energy efficiency

Across the Club's bedrooms and bathrooms, we have upgraded to water-saving showerheads and ensured all toilets are fitted with dual-flush systems – simple changes that make a meaningful difference day in, day out. Our Building Management System (BMS) – the central 'brain' that controls heating, cooling and energy use throughout the building – has undergone major work to give us far greater precision and control over how we use energy. Motion-activated lighting has been installed in key areas, switching lights off automatically when spaces are unoccupied, and we are continuing to expand this across the Club. We have also completed a full transition to LED lighting throughout.

Transforming our kitchens

One of our most significant projects has been the transition of our kitchens away from gas to induction cooking. Last year, the Running Horse kitchen completed this move entirely. This year, our main kitchen has undergone the same transformation – a major undertaking that is already significantly reducing both our carbon emissions and our energy consumption.

Alongside this, we replaced the main kitchen's old water-wash canopy - a large ventilation hood above the cooking equipment that previously required a constant flow of water to capture grease and smoke – with a modern canopy that does not use any water to operate. It may not be the most glamorous change, but it is exactly the kind of behind-the-scenes improvement that adds up to real impact.

Waste: nothing goes to landfill

We are proud of the progress we have made on waste management. Our kitchen team separates food waste from all other waste, while housekeeping carefully divides general rubbish into recyclable and non-recyclable streams. We have also introduced a separate collection for textile waste. Our large cardboard compactor means that all cardboard generated by the Club is baled and recycled efficiently.

A major undertaking that is already significantly reducing both our carbon emissions and our energy consumption

Critically, working with Westminster Council and our waste partner Veolia, every category of waste that leaves the Club is properly processed. Nothing we produce goes to landfill – and that is something we are genuinely proud to say.

Looking ahead

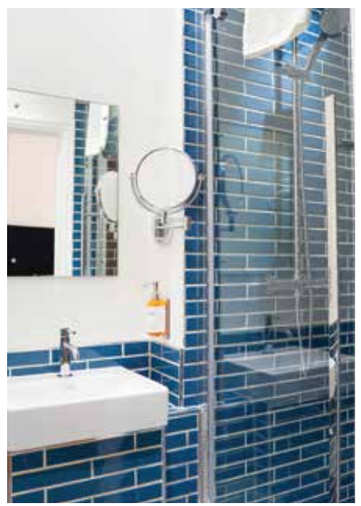
As we set our sights on Silver Certification, our focus turns increasingly to governance and compliance – making sure the Club not only meets current environmental regulations and legislation, but stays ahead of them. We want to future-proof the Club, so that it remains a responsible and admired institution for generations of Members to come. We also recognise that sustainability extends beyond buildings and energy bills. It is about people too. The Club is committed to being a fair and responsible employer – one that values the wellbeing of every member of our team as much as it values reducing its carbon footprint.

A shared endeavour

None of this happens in isolation. Every department, every team member, and in many ways every Club Member is part of this journey. Whether you choose to reuse your towel, turn off a light, or simply take a moment to use the correct waste bin, you are contributing to something that genuinely matters.

The RAF has always looked to the horizon. So do we.

EarthCheck is the world's leading scientific benchmarking and certification programme for the travel and tourism industry, helping organisations measure, manage and reduce their environmental impact.



A modernised kitchen and water saving showerheads are just some of the initiatives aimed at reducing our environmental impact

Celebrate your wedding at the Royal Air Force Club

Steeped in history, this glorious Grade II building in the heart of London offers rooms with striking original features and artwork and provides a unique ambience for your special day. Whether you plan to host a lavish celebration or a more intimate affair, the Royal Air Force Club has a selection of elegant rooms, rich in character, for you to choose from, along with two rooms licensed for marriage ceremonies. Our experienced events team will ensure your wedding day is perfect and support you through every step of the planning process.

Special offer

Book your wedding at the RAF Club between 1st June 2026 and 31st May 2027, select one of our three wedding packages, and enjoy a complimentary glass of fizz for each guest to toast during your wedding breakfast. T&Cs apply.

For more information visit **www.rafclub.org.uk/weddings** and take a look at what we have to offer. Full details on rates, menus and availability can be obtained from the Meetings & Events Team on **020 7399 1003/4/5** or email **meetingsevents@rafclub.org.uk**.

ROYAL AIR FORCE CLUB

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