



Friends of the New Forest Airfields

Registered charity 1063648

Patron: **The Lady Montagu of Beaulieu**

<http://fonfasite.wordpress.com/>

Location references for the Memorial are:

Map OS reference **SZ 208 987** Post Code **BH23 8EB**

Museum & Education Centre Post Code: **BH23 8HE**

FONFA Members' Newsletter – November 2021

Dear FONFA Member,

Welcome to the third FONFA Newsletter of 2021. The Trustee Board met by Zoom, early this month, to take stock of the year's activity at the Heritage Centre Museum and to look forward to 2022. Next year will be the 20th Anniversary of the inauguration of the New Forest Airfields Memorial at Holmsley South, so this will be a highlight, next summer.

In anticipation of our activities in the coming year, the Board has agreed to send out a Membership Survey to all current Members, to gather new ideas and suggestions (see details later in this newsletter). We need more part time volunteers for the Centre and because of changes in personal circumstances, both our Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer are intending to step down, in the coming months. I have written about this situation, several times before, but now the need is immediate.

This is an existential crisis. The Honorary roles of Secretary and Treasurer are legally essential, under the Charity Commission's rules, and, without named persons carrying out both roles, our Charity is not permitted to function and all activities will have to be suspended indefinitely.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that most of our activity, outside of the 'hands on' management of the Heritage Centre Museum and the Memorial, can be carried out remotely, so whether the Treasurer lives in Hampshire or a thousand miles away, this does not matter, with modern communications.

Please consider whether YOU have the time or skills to take on one of these roles.

This year, because of the uncertainty surrounding government restrictions, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board decided to postpone the Annual Service from June until the late August Bank Holiday weekend. This proved to be a good decision and a near normal Service was held at the Memorial on Sunday 29th August, with attendance matching recent years. The service was led by Padre Charles Lewis, FCCA, MAAT, RAFAC, RAF Air Cadets Wing Chaplain for Dorset and Wiltshire and Thames Valley Wings RAFAC. It was attended by representatives of The Royal Air Force, The Royal Canadian Air Force, The Royal Australian Air Force. This year, we were especially pleased to welcome a representative of the United States Air Force, after several years during which they were unable to send a representative. The Service was also attended by our Parton, Lady Montagu and The Right Honourable Julian Lewis, MP for New Forest East.



Standard Bearers marching in to the Memorial



Major Adam Thomson USAF, speaking to attendees



Friends of the New Forest Airfields

Registered charity 1063648

Patron: **The Lady Montagu of Beaulieu**

<http://fonfasite.wordpress.com/>

Location references for the Memorial are:

Map OS reference **SZ 208 987** Post Code **BH23 8EB**

Museum & Education Centre Post Code: **BH23 8HE**



Left to right above: Dr Julian Lewis MP, Sqn Ldr Cameron Robottom RAAF, Padre Lewis, Col James Hawthorne RCAF, Sqn Ldr Lorraine Hawthorn RAF, Dr Henry Goodall and Major Adam Thomson USAF.

Philip Benstead has decided to step down as manager of the Facebook page, after several successful years, in which his professional approach has added several hundred new contributors. This is a great achievement and the Board thanks him for his success, during his tenure. Temporary stewardship of the page is kindly being provided by Corrina Ruddy over the next few months whilst a permanent operator is sought.

Our Website, however, has attracted almost as many visitors and views, by mid-November, as in the whole of last year, in spite of the continuing disruption of normal activity, due to Covid-19. We expect the website 'views' will pass the 2020 total later this month, and hope to increase this back to 2019 levels, next year. The brief 'BBC South Today' TV broadcast about the Memorial at Holmsley South, on Armistice Day, resulted in 420 'views' on 11th November, the highest ever daily total. Although a small group attended the ceremony on 11th November, over fifty motorcyclists attended on Remembrance Sunday, which is very gratifying. This has been a regular feature of our Remembrance Sunday ceremony, in recent years, and shows that there is both respect and recognition for what we do, to maintain the Memorial and the memory of the New Forest Airfields. Photos of the eventS are posted below.



Friends of the New Forest Airfields

Registered charity 1063648

Patron: **The Lady Montagu of Beaulieu**

<http://fonfasite.wordpress.com/>

Location references for the Memorial are:

Map OS reference **SZ 208 987** Post Code **BH23 8EB**

Museum & Education Centre Post Code: **BH23 8HE**



Prayers and Crosses and Wreath laying on Armistice Day



Remembrance Sunday Motorcycle parade at the Memorial with two vintage machines on display.





Friends of the New Forest Airfields

Registered charity 1063648

Patron: **The Lady Montagu of Beaulieu**

<http://fonfasite.wordpress.com/>

Location references for the Memorial are:

Map OS reference **SZ 208 987** Post Code **BH23 8EB**

Museum & Education Centre Post Code: **BH23 8HE**

In September, we welcomed five former Vietnamese refugee residents of the Sopley Reception Centre, the former RAF Sopley Camp, who lived at the Camp between 1979 and 1982. They became known internationally as “The Vietnamese Boat People”. They unveiled a plaque, commemorating their escape from the communist regime in their homeland. The plaque marks the fact on May 21 1979, the crew of a British cargo ship, SS Sibonga, led by Captain Healey Martin, rescued 1,003 'Boat People' from two small, overcrowded, sinking craft, who subsequently travelled to Britain, via Hong Kong. They were reunited with some of the field workers who ran the Sopley Reception Centre and who looked after them, as bewildered young refugees, 42 years ago.



The five refugees with Field Workers who worked at the Reception Centre, Dr Hickish (their GP at the time) and their family members, who supported the creation and unveiling of the plaque are pictured above.



The plaque, now permanently fixed on the wall, records their rescue and their stay at Sopley Reception Centre.



Friends of the New Forest Airfields

Registered charity 1063648

Patron: **The Lady Montagu of Beaulieu**

<http://fonfasite.wordpress.com/>

Location references for the Memorial are:

Map OS reference **SZ 208 987** Post Code **BH23 8EB**

Museum & Education Centre Post Code: **BH23 8HE**

We now have nine active trained Fire Wardens, who can operate in pairs, so we could manage more frequent Open Days, next year, with additional FONFA Member volunteers. The Wardens need refresher Fire Training every two years, by law, so the next session will be in February. The date will be announced in the New Year and any new volunteers will be welcome. The training takes a morning, with a short practical demonstration and extinguisher handling exercise at the end for all attendees. More volunteers will mean that we could consider having Open Days at the Centre on three days a month, rather than just two. This would be a strong boost to our profile and availability.

In order to open from 10 am to 4 pm, **we need four volunteers to operate the Centre smoothly**, from 0930 hrs to 1630 hrs, two of whom must be trained Fire Wardens. Two are needed at the reception desk, one (at least) in the tea room. We hope that, by March, the need for masks, social distancing and for frequent cleaning of the interactive display screens, with disinfectant, will no longer be required. The Trustee Board Members would like to know of any Members who will volunteer. Please let the Board know via the e-mail fonfa2010@gmail.com.

If you are able to cover a half day (09.30am-1pm, or 1pm – 4.30 pm), even only 2 or 3 times this year, this would be a great help.

As advised in the April Newsletter, we have been most fortunate to have secured an additional 'Restart Grant' from the New Forest District Council, under their 'Covid-19 support for the leisure industry' scheme. Our finances have never been in better shape, thanks to this and the expertise of our Honorary Treasurer. We have advertised the Centre more widely, on a two year contract, so hope that we will reap the benefit, next Spring. In addition, our Remembrance Commemorations have received national television recognition, which generated over 400 views on our website on November 11th, Armistice Day.

Although the funds granted by New Forest District Council, have meant the difference between survival and closure of our Charity, this year, we cannot be complacent about the future, We need to find new ways to grow our resources and visitor numbers next year. If you know of any organisation that might sponsor us or specific activities, which we undertake, please put us in touch with them.

We commenced the 2021 Open Day programme at the end of May, on eleven alternate Sundays, and added five Thursdays in August, hoping to attract visitors to the New Forest area, who holiday here for a week or two, during the school holidays. However, restrictions on movements, face coverings and social distancing continued into June and beyond. Numbers of visitors have been disappointing overall and the Thursdays produced only single figure numbers, questioning whether it was worth repeating this experiment, next year. The overall impression gathered is that people were not going out, throughout the summer, in anything like normal numbers, so we suffered poor footfall, as did many other leisure venues in the New Forest area, in spite of the move to 'staycations'. Payments by visitors to the Heritage Centre have been facilitated this year by the introduction of a Zettle electronic payment system, allowing credit card payment (without cash). We hope that this will encourage more visitors in the future.

To gather ideas and suggestions for our activities next year, the Board has agreed to send out a Membership Survey, to review progress during the pandemic and to prepare for the 2022 Open Day programme.

All of your ideas and suggestions are welcome and the Membership Survey is sent out with this Newsletter. Please ensure that you fill this in, scan and return it, attached to an e-mail, or printed, via the postal service.

In the meantime, stay safe and healthy; enjoy and tell your friends about our organisation and our website. If you know of any organisation or school which would like a PowerPoint presentation on our WWII topic list (see the website for details), we can provide this via Zoom, or 'face to face', as you wish.

If you have a contribution for the website that you think would be appreciated by a wider audience, please let us know. If any Members have any ideas for income generation and are willing to spend time to work on them, please let the Board know, via fonfa2010@gmail.com.

Henry Goodall, Chair of Trustees. November 2021.

(Photo credits: Andy Martin, Edwin Levett, Sam & Corrina Ruddy and Henry Goodall)