



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 – May 2020

Dear FONFA Member,

Welcome to the second FONFA Newsletter of 2020. This is following on from the March 2020 Newsletter, to keep you up to date. In normal times, we send out 2 or 3 Newsletters annually, but the present situation is changing so rapidly, that an update is now timely. There will be many small Charities that will not survive into 2021. Our Trustees and Board Members are determined that FONFA should not be one of them.

As noted in the March Newsletter, we started the year on a positive note, after a successful first season with the three new interactive electronic display screens in 2019, one of which gives our Heritage Centre museum visitors an introduction to the New Forest airfields and the other two display much more detailed information about the individual airfields, their squadrons, aircraft and history. In particular, the video information has proved very popular. In late January, several of the Board Members attended the New Forest Volunteer Fair at Lyndhurst and received many enquiries and much interest, as in former years. Henry Goodall was able to give four PowerPoint presentations to local groups, between January and March, and a visit to New Milton School was also carried out, as in previous years, when John Brooks and Henry spoke to 100 plus students in Year Six about the WWII airfields and their history. John spoke about his personal experience of the V-1 flying bombs falling on London, in June 1944 and later.

However, the Covid-19 crisis could not have occurred at a worse time for FONFA. Many 2019 FONFA Members were due to renew their membership and failed to do so, in the first quarter, so our membership numbers have fallen significantly this year. The first two Open Days in early March were already overshadowed by the emerging Covid-19 virus crisis and it was obvious that the public were not going 'out and about' in their usual numbers. Attendance on the second Open Day on 15th March was very poor and, because we take a responsible stance towards safety and health of our visitors and volunteers, we decided to close the museum to visitors before the Government lock down came into effect. When we will re-open the museum to visitors is unknown at this time.

The reasons are (a) the risk to visitors and volunteers, given that 'social distancing' is impracticable in the museum, due to the small overall size of the ground floor area and the narrowness of the upstairs gallery and (b) the fact that most of our regular volunteers and trained Fire Wardens are in the 'Over 70 – At Risk' group. This is due both to recent serious illness and pre-existing chronic disease, which applies to many of us 'oldies'. If we had more regular volunteers, in the younger age groups, then the situation might be different, but we must 'cut our coat according to our cloth'.

From mid-March and probably for the rest of this year's Open Day season, our footfall income has been reduced to nil. One promising sign for the future was the organisation of a presentation to the Southampton Rotary West group, who arranged this to be done via 'Zoom', on the Internet, with eighteen members logging in to see and hear a presentation on 'We Landed by Moonlight', about the SOE 'Taxi Service' for agents being transported to and from France and other countries, between 1942 and 1944. This was a shortened thirty minute presentation, and proved to be very well received. However, not every group that we speak to has the technological expertise and experience to mount this type of meeting. One group museum visit planned for May has already been postponed to an unknown future date and we await developments, to see whether future planned events will go ahead.



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As I reported in the April 2019 and March 2020 Newsletters, we still need a Volunteer Member to take over as Minutes Secretary, when Board meetings recommence. In addition we will need a new Membership Secretary this summer. The work can be done from home, so is possible for anyone owning a personal computer and having a few hours per month, to spare.

After several unsuccessful attempts to source and obtain national and local grant funding to see us through the Covid-19 crisis, which initially threatened the future existence of FONFA, we set up an Emergency Donation Fund through the on-line website, "GiveAsYouLive". For those of you are unfamiliar with this organisation and who have not accessed their website, they are a portal to many on-line and mainstream shopping organisations, including eBay, Argos and high street retailers, who have an on-line presence. You can choose from a number of retailers and travel companies, as your 'favourites' and every time that you make a purchase, or buy a holiday (less likely at present!), a small percentage (usually 0.75 to 2%) goes automatically to your chosen Charity, payable monthly, which we hope will be on your list as "Friends of New Forest Airfields". This becomes a significant amount, if you are buying white goods or a new television.

We have been immensely grateful for the superb and generous response of FONFA Members and others, who have donated a total approaching £3000 (including Gift Aid) in just a few weeks. This will help us greatly to survive the crisis and prepare for next year's Open Day season. However, it is still not enough to see us safe into 2021. In addition, after some initial confusion related to the fact that we are a 'not for profit' Registered Charity and not a 'Business', and have no employees, which excluded us from many grant sources, we have now received a generous grant from New Forest District Council's 'Retail, Leisure & Hospitality Business Fund'. This will underpin our efforts to stay solvent and enable us to prepare for the 2021 Open Day season, even if the rest of this year is voided, by the combined effects of the Covid-19 virus and the Government restrictions of 'Social Distancing'. This is an immense relief to the Trustees and the whole Board and we are pleased now to be able to share with you our immense relief that FONFA will carry on into 2021.

However, we will need to use this money carefully, and when we re-start the Open Day programme later this year, or next, some of it will need to be spent on a targeted advertising campaign. This will aim to increase museum footfall by the public, understandably reticent about social interactions and spending money on leisure activities. One benefit of the crisis and the 'lock down' has been having the time to produce more models for display in the museum, later in the year. As well as three of 'Hobart's Funnies', modified tanks used in France in the D-Day Invasion in June 1944, the flail tank, to destroy mines and barbed wire defences, the Churchill bridge layer and 'Crocodile' flame thrower, built to support the PowerPoint presentation to community groups, several aircraft models have been built, for display in the museum. They include anti-submarine Wellington and Liberator aircraft, which operated from Beaulieu, with 311 (Czech) Squadron, and a small Beech Expeditor communications and training aircraft. In addition, a C-47 (Dakota) with parachutists exiting the aircraft in a 'stick' will be suspended in the museum, together with a large scale Airspeed Horsa.

We have purchased more bespoke shelves to be installed in the vertical floor mounted cabinets, which will use the available space more effectively, allowing us to 'show more' and our visitors to 'see more' of the history that we can display. These were made to order by DisplaysUK, who are based on the former Christchurch Airfield site and have supplied display cabinets to us in the past. They were completed just prior to the Government 'lock down' and will be installed, just as soon as the restrictions are ended.



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Meanwhile, the website will be expanded, with more 'Aircraft of the New Forest Airfields' due to be added through the summer months, starting with the 'forgotten bomber' of WWII, the Martin B-26 Marauder. This much maligned high performance aircraft had the lowest loss rate in operational bombing missions of any Allied bomber in the whole of WWII, but is almost unknown to the general population, outside of the small collection of aviation enthusiasts.

Martin Baily, our landlord, has offered and kindly installed a shipping container at the rear of the Heritage Centre museum building, in which we will be able to store additional chairs and also items for eventual sale in the museum. Once we are able to open up again for Open Days, we will be able to use this facility and see how it will best contribute to our activities in the future. We are investigating the installation of roller doors to improve the security of the museum building, with the help of the owners, Martin Baily and Sue Hounsell. The external doors have given the Board cause for concern recently, as they are wearing, and subject to adverse weather, due to their facing south. There will be more information about this addition in the next Newsletter. In the meantime, stay safe and healthy; enjoy and tell your friends about our website. If you have a contribution for the website that you think would be appreciated by a wider audience, please let us know.

Lastly, if you know of any group, who would like to receive a 'Zoom' presentation from our list of PowerPoint presentations listed on the website, please let the Board members know via fonfa2012@gmail.com. If any members have 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. May 2020