



MINUTES OF THE 118th NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY ASSOCIATION – HELD ON WEDNESDAY 16th MARCH 2022
IN NEWCOME HALL, LARKHILL AT 1000HRS

ITEM 1 Welcome

The meeting opened at 10.00hrs and the Chairman welcomed all those present, both in person and via video link. He went on to say a special welcome to: Maj Willie Nicol (who was standing in for Col Jim Kinloch and representing Scotland Region) and: Mr Jerry Mistry who was attending his first NEC meeting as the Regional Representative for the North West. The Chairman introduced Maj Richard Davies who is Allan Solly's successor. Finally, the Chairman said farewell to WO1 (RASM) Richard Mealand who was shortly to take up a commissioned appointment. He thanked him on behalf of the RAA for all his work over the years and wished him well for the future.

ITEM 2 Attendance and Apologies

In attendance:

Brig MN Pountain CBE	Chairman
Col MGJ Carter	Regimental Secretary
Lt Col Mark Vye	Wessex & South West Region
Dr John fox	Northern Ireland Region
Mr Mark Harding	South Region
Mr John Bishop	South East Region
Mr Jerry Mistry	North West Region
Mr Allan Solly	Secretary

Via video link;

Col S J Shepherd MBE ADC	Regimental Col
Maj Willie Nicol	Scotland Region
Mr David Thomas	Midland Region
Mr Thomas Wilson	North Region
Mr Michael Bridgeman	Germany Region

In Attendance:

Maj Richard Davies	RAA Secretary designate
Mrs Caroline (Cas) Thoburn	Assistant RAA Secretary

Apologies:

Col Jim Kinloch TD DL	Scotland Region	Work commitments
Lt Col Grant Ingleton MC	RHA Association	Work Commitments
Mr Stuart Wilson	Anglia Region	Delayed in traffic

ITEM 3 Commemoration

The Chairman read the Commemoration.

ITEM4 Minutes of the 117th Meeting

The Chairman asked the meeting to confirm that the minutes represented a true record of the meeting.

Proposed: Mr Michael Bridgeman

Second: Mr Mark Harding

Carried

ITEM 5 Matters Arising not dealt with elsewhere in the agenda:

1. Branch Closures since last meeting

Allan Solly informed the members that Newark Branch was closing, and that Peterborough Branch had closed. For both Branches the reason was the lack of suitable members coming forward to fill committee positions. He reported that York Branch had joined Thirsk Branch.

Col Carter asked Regional representatives to monitor branches that were struggling and to contact the RAA Office for advice and support rather than just simply allowing them to “go under”.

Action: Regional reps

2. Update on RAA website/social media

Cas Thoburn gave a very clear and positive report on the Association’s social media and its website. She began by saying that numbers of members joining the website have increased to 10.8K followers. Facebook page had increased to 3,189 followers.

She went on to mention that 3 noticeable posts on the website were the Master Gunner’s Update and the Regt’l Col’s Address. In addition the article showing 5th Regt RA engaged in its Public Duties at Windsor Castle received in excess of 7,000 hits.

Mrs Thoburn told the meeting that she is now posting the RAA Newsletter on the website as well as sending it out electronically and is now publishing the RA Museum monthly newsletter.

She briefly mentioned coverage of Gunner Sunday, the RA Assembly and the RA Service at the NMA.

She moved on to tell the meeting about Falklands 40. This was an RBL event being held at the NMA on 14 June 2022. She added that anyone wishing to attend must apply through their Association. This applies to those who served in the conflict. This has been widely advertised throughout the Association and the deadline for applications is end of April. After this date the event will be open to the public and warned that places will fill very quickly. The Association has currently received 14 applications.

Action: All by 27 Apr

Mrs Thoburn continued with the RACF Lottery. Latest figures show that the RACF received £9,448 in 2020 and £22,224 in 2021. The figures represent 50% of all money donated the remainder is split between the Lottery company prize fund and their fees.

Finishing her report she went on to RAA Christmas cards. She explained that in 2020 we received £1694 in sales and in 2021 we received £1351. The prominent reason for the reduced sales was put down to Covid restrictions.

Col Carter then introduced other matters arising and began by asking Mrs Thoburn to report on the RAA Workshop.

She said that the Workshop was held on 11 Jan in the early evening. It was intended to attract Branch Welfare officers, Treasurers and Secretaries. In all, 25 members dialled in. The first part of programme covered communication during lockdown including the sharing of best practice within Branches. Allan Solly covered how the Association managed our national events throughout the various stages of lockdown and that the only event completely unavailable to us was the RA Assembly.

The workshop went on to cover the how, why and when to complete the Annual Summary of Accounts and Branch Annual Returns. Mrs Thoburn added that we have since seen more positive and accurate returns being completed on time.

She finished by saying that some positive feedback showed that it was well received, and requests had been made for future workshops that Branches could request or that RHQ would find beneficial.

The Chairman asked the meeting to think about identifying the need for additional workshops and suggested that it would be useful to run a refresher workshop annually on key reporting issues, particularly on accounts, to help key Branch members and strengthen our compliance. The Regimental Secretary agreed.

Action: All

Michael Bridgeman responded by saying on behalf of Germany Region he thought the running of workshops was a good idea.

Col Carter then covered other Matters Arising from his previous report.

He began by saying that the Trustee had agreed to fund the Sexton belonging to the museum now that the museum had a viable strategy in place for its maintenance.

Then he informed the meeting that Elswick All Arms Branch had re-joined the Association having disassociated themselves for 18 months.

He continued by saying that the RA Board of Management had agreed to fund the capitation rate for the museum Archivist post for 5 years. The breakdown of funding was proposed as follows:

RAI £30,000
RACF £35,000
RAA £5,000

The Chairman asked for a show of support that the RAA fund £5,000 of the Archivist's overall costs. This was supported unanimously.

Col Carter then addressed his next point to Mr Dave Thomas regarding the proposed RAA Bikers' Branch. Mr Thomas agreed to send his proposal plus a copy the Biker's Badge to RHQ for approval.

Action: Mr Thomas by 20 May

Col Carter said that this was still a work in progress and could be subject to a future work group.

The final item covered here was a point brought up previously by Lt Col Vye. That future AGMs were conducted entirely online or utilising hybrid format. Col Carter explained that the matter was raised with the hotel during our recce in February. He reported that the hotel does not have the facilities to support such an arrangement. To enable this to happen would involve the costly hire of a private company with all the associated paraphernalia and is not a cost worth taking on. It was also the general feeling that such meetings were better held in person wherever possible.

ITEM 6 Regimental Col's Report

The Regt Col began by saying that she had completed 2 years in post and will hand over at the end of June. She added that she was looking forward to attending the RA Assembly this year.

She presented the meeting with a very detailed and upbeat report covering manning, overseas operations, support to Covid-19 and the fuel crisis. On the Integrated Review, the Regt Col said that the profile of the Gunners will be enhanced, particularly within the Deep Recce Strike Brigade Combat Team and the Gunners would receive extra equipment. But added that a lot of work was needed to achieve the end state.

Since Covid restrictions had been lifted sports events and social and extra-curricular activities had recommenced.

She concluded by thanking the RAA for its ongoing support.

The Chairman thanked the Regt'l Col for her interesting, detailed and helpful report.

ITEM 7 Finance

Draft Accounts 2021

All members had received a copy of the accounts beforehand and had a chance to read them.

Col Carter's first comment was to note that they were a 1st Draft of the 2021 Accounts and were awaiting the auditor's inspection.

Col Carter asked for the members' approval that the accounts be put to the trustee at the Board of Management, subject to any auditor's advice.

His next key point was to explain that the accounts were influenced by Covid causing a reduction in activities and also by income from the Burgess Bequest of £674,000.

Overall the net surplus £38.7K mainly due to interest on investments.

Overall income was down by £723K mainly due to having received the Burgess bequest the previous year but also reduced income on various events not taking place throughout the year

The figure for Branch income £61K reflects today's figure and will change as late entries arrive.

Expenditure was up £47.7K on the previous year. £32,000 of that was agreed to fund an "in-perpetuity" maintenance contract for the RA Garden at the NMA and coming from the Burgess legacy. It was agreed that a suitable plaque/inscription be sourced and displayed at the garden commemorating Mr Burgess's legacy. The balance of that increase was additional uptake of Battery Grants.

Final highlighted point was that investments during 2021 gained £110K.

Lt Col Vye asked because a large portion of income came from Branches, had any thought been given to how that money can be generated in the future? (Noting Branch closures and discussions during the Work Group).

Col Carter noted this as a very valid and important point especially as the RAA broadens its structure over future years and will be discussed at a future work group.

The Chairman then received the Committee's approval to recommend the accounts to the Trustee, noting that they would be formally recommended at the AGM.

Forecast of Income and Expenditure for 2022

Col Carter reminded the committee that he had already briefed the NEC on this year's Budget and that there were no significant changes. Net expenditure was expected to be around £132,000. £32,000 was for the lifetime maintenance of the RA Garden at the NMA.

The full amount of the Burgess legacy had now been received (Total £674K) of which the majority will go into investments. Approximately £74K would cover the grant towards the restoration of the 'Burgess Sexton' and the NMA maintenance donation.

Turning to the RACF, Col Carter said that this year the budget for individual grants was £661K and as of 15th March 2022, £126K had been spent on 144 individual cases and of that £12K went to serving soldiers (15 cases).

There being no questions on finance the meeting moved on.

ITEM 8 RA Assembly

Programme

Allan Solly handed Committee members the draft running order for the RA Assembly and announced that at last we are going back to Blackpool. He continued by saying that all details had been sent to Branches and widely advertised on social media and the website. He briefly ran through the weekend which was broadly the same as previous years. He noted that 32 Regt RA was giving the operational presentation on their deployment to Mali.

Col Carter asked members to look at the running order and report back with any comments.

Resolutions

Col Carter noted that there were two resolutions at the AGM: confirmation of Regional and District Representatives; and to agree to recommend the accounts to the Trustee.

The Chairman asked about the sending of Loyal Greetings to HM The Queen, our Captain General. Regt Sec stated that would be done 6 weeks prior to the Assembly.

Action: Regt Sec by 8 Apr

The Chairman emphasised that the RAA AGM would follow the Royal Artillery Assembly meeting on the Saturday morning. The sequencing meant that there was usually a large reduction in the audience following the RA Assembly, given that it only required one Branch representative to vote at the AGM. While respecting and understanding that not all would necessarily wish to stay for the RAA AGM, he asked NEC members to encourage members to stay for the whole event.

The Chairman thanked those who had already put a lot of effort into the weekend and who still had a lot more to do to make the weekend an enjoyable and successful event.

ITEM 9 Forecast of Events (FOE)

Allan Solly handed round the up-to-date FOE and then briefly went through each event.

- a. Gunner Sunday 24th April 2022
- b. NMA Service 2nd July 2022
- c. Ceremony of Remembrance 13th November 2022
- d. St Barbara's Day 4th December 2022

He explained that all events had been confirmed right through until the end of 2023 as shown on the FOE.

Col Carter mentioned that the attendance at the RA Ceremony of Remembrance in Hyde Park was disappointingly low in 2021.

Mr Mark Harding suggested that it is because of the membership ageing and reluctant to travel.

Col Carter suggested it may be because during Covid members may have got out of the habit of going to Hyde Park to attend local parades.

Allan Solly said he felt that many Branches preferred to attend locally where they do not have to depart early in the morning. Given the lack of facilities at Hyde Park the elderly find that arrangements for refreshments, toilets and lunch were easier to manage locally.

The Chairman summed up by saying that regiments also hold local services and posed the question "What should be the central representation"?

The Chairman suggested that we ought to revisit this during our future discussions and see how we can best balance what we like to and what we ought to do.

Action: Regt Sec, Regt Col, RASM by Autumn NEC

The Chairman then spoke about the RA Gold Cup at Sandown Park and how attendance could be increased. The RASM said that this year great efforts had been made to enhance the RA profile with each regiment providing their own displays and decoration, also selling the RA Reunion aspect of the day.

The Regt Col supported the RASM's comments and emphasised what great effort had been applied to marketing the event. She noted that facilities were good and overnight accommodation was within easy reach. She added that her vision was to market the day as "The Annual RA Reunion".

Col Carter said that Charles Lane, former CO of The King's Troop, along with his brother Col Paul Lane, were now the lead for Sandown Steeplechase Committee and were seeking ways to make the event more appealing to families and the wider RA community.

The Chairman emphasised the need to run a series of annual events that provide appeal and opportunity for everybody.

ITEM 10 RAA Awards 2021

The Chairman asked Allan Solly to brief the meeting on the annual awards.

Allan began by saying that the only nomination requiring NEC approval was sent in by Mr Tug Wilson, Northern Region. It was for 101 Regt RA for the Royal Artillery Association Cup. Awarded to the major RA unit that has been judged to give the most support during the previous year to the RAA. The nomination was supported by Mr Wilson's citation.

The NEC unanimously supported this nomination.

Cas Thoburn then went on to brief the meeting on those awards for financial contributions.

- The Royal Artillery House Cup Awarded to Central Lancashire Branch.
- The Caterham Cup Awarded to Norwich Branch.
- The Burton Cup Awarded to Norwich Branch.

Allan said he would write to Regional Reps formally announcing the winners and ask them to inform the successful Branches confirming whether they would send a representative to the RA Assembly to collect their awards.

ITEM 11

Review of GAIs

Col Carter started by saying there were two aspects to the review. Firstly, to propose the amendments that had already been circulated. This included the addition of the welfare aide memoire which received universal approval at the workshop and will simply be added as an annex to GAIs. The second is to approve an addition to Part 5 of GAIs (Administration of Branches). This was prompted by an issue raised at the NW Regional Assembly where Branches asked what the possibility was for using on-line banking and card transactions. With input from Cas Thoburn, Becky Hoblyn (Finance Secretary) and Allan Solly, a draft amendment has been produced dealing with electronic banking and bank cards.

Col Carter said the plan was to run a pilot with two Branches which might highlight any hidden snags not previously considered.

He added that electronic banking would only be available to Branches with a good record of account keeping and timely submission of annual accounts and returns.

A short discussion followed during which major points raised were:

Mr Mark Harding said he favoured debit cards over credit cards to alleviate the chance of Branches going into debt. Col Carter agreed to re-look at this point.

Action: Col Carter by 20 May 22

The subject of asking Branches to change their accounts to Lloyds Bank so the charity was dealing only with one main bank. Col Carter felt that while this would be ideal if starting afresh but would probably be resisted by branches.

Mr Jerry Mistry asked Col Carter to consider Bolton Branch and/or 1 Branch per region to conduct the pilot scheme.

The Chairman favoured the plan to run a pilot scheme and with so many points raised this is still a work in progress and that RHQ should place a time limit on when it saw electronic banking being up-and-running.

Finally, Col Carter stated that GAIs had been reviewed in 2019 and were due a review in 2022. He asked members for their approval that we were heading in the right direction and asked that all members carry out their own review send in any comments by **Friday 15th April 2022**.

A further discussion took place, raised by Mr Jerry Mistry asking why the Secretary and Treasurer of Branches couldn't be non-Gunners. This in fact has been an option available to Branches for many years. Only President and Chairman posts are reserved for full members. However, it did provoke other members explaining how they have managed to adapt to GAIs where they have a mix of arms and corps among their members.

The Chairman noted that the discussions were useful and those who contribute and emphasised that all comments be sent to RHQ by **Friday 15th April 2022**.

Action: All by 15 Apr

ITEM 12

RAA Way Ahead Working Group Update

Colonel Carter explained the purpose of the Working Group (WG) was to determine what the Association might need to do to develop over the coming years. He went on to say the WG was well attended, and all participants were well-motivated and engaged.

He highlighted some key points:

- We need to recognise and protect all the good features and business we currently do
- Change is necessary but has to be “evolutionary” not “revolutionary”
- There is a need to make the Association more relevant and attractive to the broader RA Family; further work was necessary to understand and define this more clearly
- The current membership is seen to be of a certain age and not in tune with younger Gunners
- There is a need to clearly understand what the various groups would be looking for
- It was important to engage with Gunners at an early stage ie. You join the Association on joining the Gunners, not on leaving
- Once needs are established, identification to identify more targeted events must take place
- More active participation from the Serving Regiment in supporting events
- The Association is probably heading towards a hybrid model

In terms of further work, engagement with families and the more junior level within the serving Regiment is necessary and specific thought needs to be given to Reserves.

The Chairman asked for:

- a fuller exploration of the Welfare Need – could/should the RAA do more?
- Consideration in future workshops of the development of links with foreign artillery associations, particularly Commonwealth and key NATO partners and allies.

Putting the review into wider context, Col Carter said that similar work was going on with RM, RE and RAF associations, adding that he had gained some useful ideas from the RM Association. He added that military associations were now engaged with COBSEO and the Office of Veterans’ Affairs to ensure that both organisations acknowledged the views of the associations and their members.

Col Carter then asked if there were any questions or comments.

Lt Col Vye stated that as Branches close, we lose their Standards and the visibility they provide at parades and funerals etc. He asked whether the serving Regiment should be approached to carry standards, as laying them up is a negative outcome? There was general agreement that this should be investigated.

Action: RAA Sec with RASM

Mr Jerry Mistry mentioned that he was giving a presentation on the Association to the local cadets in his area and then would do the same to serving batteries of 103 Regt RA.

The Chairman thanked Jerry Mistry for his initiative and ambition.

Cadets. The RASM said he was currently identifying the national laydown of Gunner cadets to identify how they could become more closely linked with the Regiment. Cas Thoburn mentioned

that the SO1 Cadet Training is to visit Larkhill soon and would make contact. She is currently monitoring the Cadet website. The Chairman emphasised the following points:

- The Affiliations Matrix has been circulated to Branches and regiments and is a clear document laying down our affiliations. We must work hard to make it work and strengthen our links.
- It was a good move to create strong links with cadets, but it must be managed very carefully as they are minors and subject to strict safeguarding regulations.

The Chairman thanked Col Carter for his report and summed up by saying:

- Future WGs need to be fully representative to capture the wider need.
- There was clear recognition of the good things offered by the Association and those things need to be protected.
- At the same time. Ongoing work had clearly identified development opportunities and the need to ensure that the Association is further developed in support of the Master Gunner's Strategic Plan
- Additional WGs are necessary and should be scheduled for this summer and autumn.
- He asked if any 'quick wins' had been identified – none had.
- He requested that a report with recommendations be produced by the end of the year. Our aspiration must be to produce an agreed 'Way Forward' for the AGM in 2023.

Action: Regt Sec & RAA Sec

ITEM 13 Regional Reports

Each Regional Representative, present and online, gave a brief report on their Branches' activities over the previous year. The following points to note were reported:

Maj Willie Nicol reported that there was a group of veterans in Lanarkshire who wish to start a Branch. He finished by informing members that Col Donald Cameron (a previous NEC member) has moved address. The Chairman asked that Col Cameron's new address be sent to the NEC. *(Afternote: with Col Cameron's permission this has now been done).*

Mr Jerry Mistry reported four Branches of concern:

1. Stockport Branch currently only had one signatory on their account which is being resolved with help of Bolton Branch.
2. South Lancs Branch had been on the verge of closing because of lack of committee members but had now been rescued with new members arriving from 103 Regt RA (V).
3. Carlisle Branch was very low on members.
4. Central Lancs Branch were proving difficult to contact.

Mr Mark Harding reported that Winchester Branch will be closing, and Isle of Weight Branch had only 5 members that are active.

Dr John Fox reported that Limavady Branch will merge with Colerain Branch.

Mr John Bishop reported that Capt Leslie Gosling had died. He emphasised how well 3 Regt RHA had supported the funeral arrangements as did the King's Tp RHA's Trumpet Major and the RSM. All were truly amazing. (*Afternote: We have subsequently learned that Mrs Joan Gosling has now also died*).

Sidcup Branch was having membership issues, but this has been resolved with an influx of ex members of 16 Regt RA.

Lt Col Vye had five points to raised:

1. 2021/2 has continued to be as disrupted for Wessex Region's Branches as it has for other regions.
2. Planning for 2022-3 is showing signs of greater positivity. Plymouth Branch reports that live charity collection has restarted resulting in £2,500 being raised in the first month.
3. Succession planning is a concern. There is a general reluctance to assume office. Office bearers in three of five branches are double hatted. Going forward it is suggested that where possible GAIs branch regulations are structured as flexibly as possible without compromising due diligence. Similarly, whilst recruiting has been detrimentally affected by the pandemic, it may pick up.
4. Dorchester Branch is sad to report the death of its President, Lt Col (Ret'd) Rex Goddard, age 102, on 15th February 2022.
5. The regional highlight is President Poole Branch Grace Taylor's noteworthy contribution to the ATS Girls, WRAC and Gunner Oral History projects recorded in book form with a theatre launch attracting wide coverage from national/local radio, television, news and social media.

The RASM reported that a lot of work was being done to encourage the serving Regiment to engage with the Association, however there was a problem over funding. There are absolutely no funds available to regiments to visit Branches. A solution needs to be found.

John Bishop added that the cost of transport to Branches is escalating and could that be borne in mind when reimbursing subsidies.

The Chairman replied this will be considered.

Action: Regt Sec by autumn meeting

The Chairman thanked all representatives for their reports and wished everyone well.

More detailed written reports will be kept on file with a copy of these minutes.

ITEM 14 Regimental Secretary's Report

Col Carter covered the following points:

RAA 100:

1. Church stained glass window. Planning application has been submitted and we await progress.
2. Statue in the RA Garden at the NMA. Col Carter asked members whether they felt that this project was still worth pursuing. Although there had been a lack of progress the majority feeling among members was that this should be followed through to its agreed conclusion. Col Carter agreed as it was linked to the In Perpetuity maintenance grant at the NMA funded by the Burgess legacy.

Action: Regt Sec by autumn meeting

He went on to say that the pond in the garden has been causing concern and a drain on resources for a number of years. Col Carter has requested the NMA look at possibilities of returning it to grass or a "Wild Garden". Col Vye suggested installing a self-powered fountain and outlined the merits of that. Options are being discussed with the NMA.

Finally, Col Carter mentioned his recent attendance at a mental health meeting for a range of service charities. He alerted the meeting to "Op Courage". This is a new veterans' wellbeing and mental health service designed to help veterans and personnel about to leave the Army.

Maj Dickie Davies said he had already referred 3 cases using the new arrangement.

Col Carter finished by saying that if anyone needed such help, SSAFA or the RBL could direct them.

ITEM 15 **AOB** (only items previously submitted)

There was nothing to raise under AOB

ITEM 16 **Chairman's Closing Remarks**

The Chairman thanked everyone for making the time to come together and for their participation and engagement in a useful meeting covering a number of substantial issues, and particularly to the staff for their support and preparations. He wished those travelling home a safe journey.

Their being no further business to discuss the meeting closed at 13.01hrs

DONMs

- May 2022 – Blackpool (Hot wash up following AGM only)
- Wednesday 5th October 2022 - Larkhill