



## Battle of Britain Commemorations - Kent 2021

The **Observer Corps** earned the title **Royal** for the efforts of those Observers who served during the Battle of Britain, for those of us who followed in their footsteps it is our opportunity to reflect. Following the absence of events last year (the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary) trying to support commemorations in 2021 was particularly important.

### Chart Sutton

After a very gloomy and cloudy August, the 5<sup>th</sup> September saw the sun for the Service at the Memorial Garden and in St Michaels & All Angels Church. Standing in the warm sunshine waiting for the service was one of those pleasures of an English Summer that have been all too elusive.

There has been some turmoil in the RAFA Headcorn Branch with the death of the Chairman and Garden Co-ordinator. There were only three Standards, including No 1 Group ROCA carried by Jacqui and no Air Cadets present. Jacqui and I were pleased to represent No 1 Group ROCA and lay the wreath that Bryan McCarthy would have laid last year at the site where Pilot Officer Robert Shaw was killed when his Hurricane crashed in September 1940. The garden looked magnificent and in view of the weather during the preceding weeks and it was a great credit to the Gardening Team. The Air Scout buglers rendition of the Last Post and Reveille was perfect and always adds a moment of reflection. The Spitfire was spot on time did a splendid job of entertaining the attendees with three low passes and adds a moment of poignancy to the service at the Memorial Garden. Making our way slowly back up the hill to the Church Service the road seemed longer than I remembered!

It was sad not to see at least one of Bobby Shaw's relatives attend as that always brings home the personal as well as the wider implications of the sacrifices that were made. A point made by the **Rev Fiona Hackett** in her address at the Service in St Michaels and All Angels Church that followed to a good-sized congregation although not as many compared to when we used to attend in uniform.



We then adjourned to the adjacent School Hall for a welcome cup of tea and refreshments. Short speeches from the Acting RAFA Chairman **Tim Hines** and the Mayor of Maidstone, **Cllr Fay Gooch** who seemed delighted to be out and about, she obviously was moved by the occasion and setting concluded the day.

## Medway

Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> September saw a different Thanksgiving Service for Deliverance in The Battle of Britain as the Air Cadets and their band were not allowed to parade in public. **Jacqui Giles** carried the No 1 Group Standard and, together with the RBL Gillingham Branch Standard, were the only senior Standards at the service. The seven Squadron Banners made a good show of colour though. Unfortunately, the RAFA Medway Branch Standard was absent. With the RBL Standard Bearer new to the service and limited co-ordination with the Air Cadets, Jacqui was thrust into directing the Standards and Banners.

The service was organised by **Paul Collins** the RAFA & RBL Chairman. The Deputy Mayor of Medway, **Cllr Kirstine Carr**, the RBL Secretary and **Terry Giles** led the congregation that consisted mainly of the 100 Air Cadets and their dutiful parents who had driven them to St Barbara's Garrison Church in Brompton. The service followed the usual format but with no band the Last Post and Reveille were played (note perfect) by a member of the choir.

Due to Covid restrictions on Air Cadets, there was no reception after the service but there was a chance to talk to the Deputy Mayor as we waited to go into Church, She reiterated the story of many of the Civic Dignitaries this year in that it was good to be back amongst members of the Public in person and not communicating by Zoom or MS Teams

## Capel le Ferne

It was a warm, sunny day that greeted us at the Battle of Britain Memorial on the 15<sup>th</sup> September. Jacqui and the RAFA Dover were the only light blue Standards amongst the ten on parade who faced Terry Giles acting as Standards Marshall. A short but poignant service was held around the Memorial with a good number of members of the public present swelled by a coach party on a tour, most of whom did not know what it was all about and probably thought it was laid on for them.

Although a beautiful day, a strong blustery wind made handling Standards very difficult. I was grateful I didn't have to write condolence letters to next of kin of Standard Bearers last seen being blown off the cliff top or explaining illegal immigrants paragliding into France! And the French coast was clearly visible which reinforced how close the invasion was in 1940 and why the Battle of Britain should be forever commemorated.





The original **ROYAL OBSERVER CORPS** crest - with the **KING GEORGE VI** Crown - can be seen set in the floor of the RAF Church of St Clement Danes in London.

**Terry Giles** - **ROCA Vice President**