

## THE RAF 100 CELEBRATIONS ...observations of the day by Ann Maasz



London  
10th July 2018



During this country's longest heatwave, on the 10th of July I had the privilege of attending the RAF 100 Celebrations.

When it was first announced, ROCA members were invited to put their names in a ballot, winners to be chosen based on applications received from the Areas across the whole



country, and with a balance between men and women. Margaret Baynton (6 Group Midland), Keith Cronin (22 Group Western), Terry Nunn (4 Group Met), James Mackie (25 Group Scottish), Jenny Morris (12 Group Southern), John Shere (7 Group Bedford), Rosalind Sheppard (8 Group Midland), Tony and Ann Maasz (14 Group Met) and Terry Giles (1 Group Met) were the fortunate recipients. Unfortunately, Terry underwent a knee operation only a few days before so was unable to take up his invitation.

Tuesday morning at 0930 I presented myself at Westminster Abbey for security screening (passport, numbered ticket, handbag check, airport-type screen to walk through) then stern warning given that no cameras or mobiles to be used. Our group of ten were seated in the Nave, third row back but with a good view of anyone walking towards the Quire stalls and High Altar. All had to be seated by 1030 so the hour between passed with neighbourly conversations and toilet visits! There is an explosion of colour and sound: Gothic columns, a magnificent choir screen, tall organ pipes, church adornments, gleaming instruments of the Royal trumpeters and Band of the Royal Air Force College musicians high above us in the gallery. Men and women in gold-braded or other rank uniforms, resplendent with medals and decorations, and civilian guests showing off their finest attire. Heels and hats to die for!!

The Rt.Hon. Theresa May MP walked past us. At the main door of the Abbey, the Dean and Chapter of Westminster welcomed the Lord Mayor and Deputy High Steward, and then greeted 16 adult members of the Royal Family (all eyes looked forward to seeing our newest member, The Duchess of Sussex). Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall, then took their seats. A fanfare, all stand, Her Majesty The Queen had arrived.

The Service was celebratory, respectful and uplifting with the Address given by The Most Reverend and Rt.Hon. Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury from the 17th century hexagonal pulpit. Anthems, hymns, prayers and all too soon it was over. Passing the poppy-strewn Tomb of The Unknown Warrior, we went out into the sunlight to the sound of pealing Abbey bells. Lower ranking RAF personnel had been ordered to become golf buggy drivers to take us through the closed-off streets from the Abbey to Horse Guards Parade. Our driver told me he was a cook and "despite the long working hours today he would still have to report back to his station by 0600 to get the breakfasts out"!

On arrival at Horse Guards Parade, having gone through more security searches, we saw tables and chairs interspersed between replica aircraft: F35-B Lightning II, Typhoon. Chinook, Tornado, Meteor, Dakota, Spitfire and a First World War bomber biplane,



all of which we were invited to climb into or chat with the uniformed RAF personnel protecting them. Two large screens had been erected to show activities at Buckingham Palace, and crowds on The Mall. We could see that those outside Buckingham Palace were treated to a balcony appearance by our Royal Family. Inside the Palace railings, on the 100th Birthday Parade commanded by Group Captain Anne-Marie Houghton, a new Queen's Colour was presented by Her Majesty, The Parade concluded with a drill display in which the airmen melted into a shape saying "RAF 100". What choreography!



On Horse Guards, drinking cups of tea, coffee, juices or wine, accompanied by a tempting finger buffet, we settled down to watch the Flypast. Gasps, cheers, applause in equal measure as 17 types of aircraft flew overhead, including helicopters, the ever popular Memorial Flight, massive Hercules and gigantic Globemaster transporters, Typhoons, and the Tornado jets in '100' formation. The Red Arrows concluded the programme in spectacular fashion. I will never forget the noise as those aircraft sped over the London skyline.

The afternoon concluded with visits to Horse Guards by The Princess Royal and her husband, The Countess of Wessex, Princess Alexandra and the Duke of Kent. They chatted with us, cut the six foot high 4-tiered 100th Birthday Cake and welcomed home the 100-Day Challenge Baton Relay members.

Very warm, weary but animated, and feeling special to have witnessed history in the making. Just a few words to sum up the day. Thank you, Royal Observer Corps Association for allowing me, along with my colleagues, to represent you on this special occasion. I felt so proud.



Ann Maasz  
14 Group Winchester