

BRANCH MEMBERS AT RAF MARHAM – 26th October 2016

17 branch members, spouses and friends enjoyed a most interesting guided tour of some of the facilities at RAF Marham.

The itinerary for the day began with a welcome hot drink in the Sandringham Centre, where, against an audible backdrop of children playing in the facility next door, we were told some history of the station, and details of the extensive plans for refurbishment of the largely 1930s infrastructure, to embrace the introduction of the new RAF jet, the American F-35 Lightning II, a short take-off and vertical landing bomber due to arrive in 2018. The plans include new hangers, operations accommodation, ground training facilities and landing pads, along with refurbishment of other areas and runway resurfacing.

We continued by military transport, with our bus driver from Peelings Coaches joining the party, and were first taken to the Officers' Mess for a light lunch, and coffees in the anteroom. Re-embarking onto the bus, the next stop was No 12 (B) Squadron HQ on the eastern side of the station. Here we were seated in the briefing room – very familiar to some of us – and treated to an illustrated talk about the Tornado GR4, its capabilities, functions, armament and reconnaissance fit, and the operations in which it has been involved in the recent past. It was noticeable that those of us who participated in Operation Telic (2003) have now been consigned to history!

There was a lovely moment when a member of our party asked about ground crew, and whether they still existed, because no mention had been made of their work engineering and equipping the aircraft: the reply was “Yes, we do still have ground crew, but why would I talk about them? I'm a pilot!”

The undoubted highlight of the day for many followed, when we walked through warm sunshine to look at the beast which had just been described to us, in a HAS (hardened aircraft shelter), during which the inevitable photograph was taken by the pilot from No 12 (B) Squadron who hosted our day.



The party was then transported to Air Traffic Control, just across the taxiway from the Squadron HAS site, to the sound of jets overhead making the most of the weather, which had cleared during lunch to release us from the foggy start that we had encountered. ATC was therefore very busy, and one part of the tour was conducted in almost a whisper in order not to distract the controllers in duty, but we were also able to watch the progress of the aircraft on the visual displays; the two halves of the party then alternated and those of us in the second group on the top floor had our talk outside on the balcony, enabling a few decent shots with assorted cameras to be captured in the process.



Back on the bus for the last part of the tour, and taken back 'outside the wire', we entered the station Heritage Centre, opened in 2013 in what had previously been the Roman Catholic church for RAF Marham, closed due to a lack of RC padres. A lovely light airy space was a perfect backdrop to the memorabilia now covering 100 years of operations at Marham in the station's centenary year, and visitor numbers have soared – this centre is open to the public, and can be accessed at specific times for viewing*. Unfortunately, we had time for only a fairly brief taster before closing time, and no-one was in any hurry to leave, but leave we had to. Everyone had enjoyed a very informative day, and had learned a great deal about the station and the operation of it.