

# Review

The journal of  
Blind Veterans UK

**December 2020**



## Merry Christmas

Season's greetings  
from us all at  
Blind Veterans UK

### **Inside:**

A creative Christmas

Your Remembrance  
commemorations

100 years of Reunions



Rebuilding  
lives after  
sight loss

# Doom and gloom?

Hello, and a warm welcome to your December edition of *Review* magazine. So, another year passes – and what a year it's been, although it's certainly not been the year we hoped or expected it would be. For many of us, it's been a time of frustration and restriction and at times has felt like an upward struggle, indeed as I write this, the nation is about to emerge from a second lockdown and has already reverted to the 'tier system' when geographically discussing the impact of the virus. So, once again it's all doom and gloom... isn't it?

Well actually, I'd argue it isn't. Despite everything that's been happening, we've all managed to pull together and accomplish a lot since the virus bedded in. We've still managed to commemorate such events as VE and VJ Day, while on Remembrance Sunday, many of you joined together virtually to remember the fallen. Despite being miles apart, our Members still came together on what is probably the most important day in our yearly calendar.

Then there's our Introduction Weeks, which are so very important for any new Member of Blind Veterans UK. Normally these involve days of social interaction and activity and getting

to know one another in one of our wonderful Centres and you would think that Covid-19 would put an end to that, but that's not been the case. The virtual Introduction Weeks have proved to be very successful so far, and while they lack the element of being there in person, they have provided our new veterans with a taste of what we do.

There's been other successes as well – our National Creative Project has been keeping many of you occupied, while others have been enjoying getting to grips with Alexa. And that's not to mention the plethora of hobbies and activities that we've seen emerging.

Two things before I go... please don't forget there's no January issue, we restart again in February, and the story of Harry Garthwaite will recommence in February as well, when we find out more about his exciting flying career.

Until then, have a safe and happy Christmas from all of us here, and I wish you the very best of New Year's. 🎉

**Chris Gilson**  
Editor



## Contents

- 3** Editorial welcome
- 4** Your welcome from our Chief Executive
- 9** Your welcome from our Chairman
- 13** A Christmas message from our President
- 15** In your community
- 17** A very different Remembrance
- 21** The blind chippy
- 23** Joining the team
- 26** Sheer joy
- 28** Our Well-Connected section
- 34** Vitamin D – what it can do for you
- 36** What's been happening
- 38** Archive – 100 years of Reunions
- 40** Getting the best out of Alexa
- 44** Family news
- 45** In memory
- 51** National Creative Project
- 55** Contacts

# “When I were a lad...”

Your message from your Chief Executive,  
Major General (rtd) **Nick Caplin** CB

When I were a lad, Christmas was especially important to me. This had to do with focused family time, the giving and receiving of presents and the opportunity for more food and drink than could possibly be good for me. It also had to do with the Church and



**Caption: Nick Caplin**

Christmas music, for I was a choirboy (difficult to imagine I know!) and then a church organist. Christmas was a very special time of year.

Preparations started some way out. I can remember the weekly cycle to the church for choir rehearsals throughout the autumn as the nights drew in. We focused increasingly on the Christmas music programme, learning new carols and refreshing the old favourites, and building up to the choir’s showpiece of the year, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. Always held on the Sunday evening closest to Christmas Day, this was a magical experience. Tradition dictated that the service opened with a young treble singing the first verse of Once in Royal David’s City, unaccompanied and to a congregation sitting silently in the darkened building.

Faces glowed in the candlelight as we processed in a line through the



ADOBE STOCK / ISARA

**Caption: Christmas Day services are always a special occasion to attend**

church, singing the rest of the carol to organ accompaniment and blissfully oblivious to the risk of holding naked candle flames close to the boy in front. We then delighted in a service of Christmas music and familiar readings, culminating in the final procession back to the vestry as Bach’s ‘In Dulci Jubilo’ roared from the organ. It was a team experience of course, for a choir is all about teamwork where you listen to each other and work hard to produce the best possible music together. And collectively we felt good.

## **Midnight mass**

Midnight Mass would be the next

musical appointment, which was always a particular and exciting challenge for a youngster. I can well remember being packed off to bed early, and then woken in time for the drive to the church, invariably risking the critical eye of the choirmaster as I arrived at the last safe moment before kick-off. This service always had the feeling of being important and long, but contained that magical moment, when choirboys would whisper ‘Happy Christmas’ to each other as the clock struck Midnight. Back again for the Christmas Day service, by which time the carols were sounding a little tired, and then home for food, →

“Each regiment would hold its own carol service where the old familiars would be sung with remarkable gusto”

fun and festivities. It is no wonder that choirboys invariably get struck down by colds and coughs around Boxing Day and spend a significant amount of their remaining Christmas holiday recovering!

As I grew from short trousers into long, and as my voice changed from treble to tenor, this Christmas tradition endured. Elements of old and new music combined, and new choristers joined the ranks of established and experienced choir members who knew the ropes and notes, all combining to share the joy and magic of the Christmas story through music. Eventually I became a ‘returner’, having left home for University and returning each Christmas for the Christmas choir experience either singing or playing the organ and, yes, for the food, fun and festivities.

For me, the Army followed university. This new military world involved moving every two to three years into a new unit and a new Army family. While many aspects of life changed, much was constant. The Christmas season

in the Army started early, continuing the theme of food, fun and festivities and with much to fit in before the unit broke up for Christmas leave (assuming of course that they weren’t committed to operations over the festive period).

Each regiment would hold its own carol service where the old familiars would be sung with remarkable gusto. Soldiers can be reluctant church-goers but always enjoy the opportunity to out-sing another company or squadron. On the patch, which is where the families lived, the keen and eager would meet on a designated evening in December and sing their way through the houses, using torches and candles, children to the fore and invariably accompanied by assorted tinsel-dressed animals, wishing good cheer to families at their front doors as they went. Happy days indeed.

### An important time

Christmas has always been an important time within our Blind Veterans UK family, and we have enjoyed finding new and imaginative ways to enjoy camaraderie. On 12 December, 1918 we held a Christmas entertainment at St Dunstan’s Lodge, our headquarters of the time in Regent’s Park. It was given by the Members, dressed as pantomime characters. Watching were guests including our then Patron, Queen Alexandra and her daughter Princess

Victoria, Grand Duchess Olga of Russia and the Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden. There were suitable songs with fine accompaniment from our very own Ragtime Band.

For Christmas 1939, the VADs gave a performance of ‘Cinderella’ ... with a gas mask replacing the dainty shoe. This was in Church Stretton, our temporary training base during the Second World War. The trainees were away for Christmas itself and the centre hosted blind veterans from bombed areas of the country instead. Christmas dinner included games such as blowing up balloons and bursting them by sitting on them... an early prototype of the whoopee cushion perhaps?

For Christmas 1941, and before the trainees left for their family homes, there was a visit from George Formby, who provided entertainment for an hour and also presented a donation of £50 from the George Formby Fan Club, equivalent to around £1,500 today.

And so, the Christmas celebrations have continued through the years. Across the Charity we have always found ways to meet, to share, to enjoy and to support at Christmas time. A particular highlight for me has been our Carol Concert held in St Marylebone Church. This glorious church has played an important role in our charity

since our creation in 1915 when St Dunstaners would make the weekly trip from St Dunstan’s Lodge to the church for the regular Sunday service.

In recent years our Carol Concert has been a fabulous occasion for Members of our Blind Veterans family to meet in this fine church and to share Christmas joy. We have been richly entertained by professional choirs and school choirs, and we have appreciated the opportunity to slow down for an evening and to enjoy quiet



WIKIMEDIA / IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUMS

**Caption: Formby in France during the Second World War**

“The community teams will be in touch with you all individually, sending their very own Christmas wishes”

reflection and private thoughts as well as carols robustly sung in a special setting and among special people, rewarded at the end by a glass of mulled wine and a mince pie before the journey home.

Christmas this year I suspect is going to be rather different for us all and we will understandably have less opportunity to get out and to meet family and friends. Safety will be our biggest interest, ensuring that we remain safe and sound throughout, in the knowledge that there are brighter times ahead. Our permanent residents will be looked after royally at the Ovingdean Centre I am sure, and we will have a handful of Members receiving critical care at Llandudno as well. And for all our veterans, the National Support Service will continue and the community teams are but a phone call away through the MeSH support line.

### Connecting at Christmas

But we still hope to be able to share something of Christmas with you

this year, through the theme of ‘connections’. We are recording a Christmas message for Members from our very own Rev George Butterworth, from Colin Williamson (in his role as President) and with a choir singing Christmas carols. This audio will be available throughout the Christmas period for members to listen to via our dedicated telephone line which will be shared with you all (similar to the phone line of VE Day) and the audio will also be played throughout December on Member group calls.

The community teams will be in touch with you all individually, sending their very own Christmas wishes. Most importantly, I know that Members will be calling Members, offering each other company and support, sharing memories together and having a laugh. During these challenging times, the comradeship offered by our veterans has been nothing short of remarkable. You are very special people, as indeed are the wonderful staff and volunteers of Blind Veterans UK who work tirelessly to make lives better. As CEO of this great organisation I count my blessings on a daily basis.

Wherever you are this Christmas, Isobel joins me in wishing you and your loved ones a very happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year. I very much look forward to seeing you in 2021 🇬🇧



WIKIMEDIA / CREATIVE COMMONS

**Caption: A Westland Wessex HC2 (WS-58) at RAF Aldergrove**

# No hollow promises

Your message from your Chairman, Air Vice-Marshal **Paul Luker** CB OBE AFC DL (rtd)

As I write this month’s piece for *Review* it is no great surprise that the most recent lockdown sits prominently on my mind. At the time of writing we are exactly halfway into the second national lockdown in England and the daily news is almost exclusively devoted to whether or not we are to be allowed even the semblance of a normal Christmas. It is desperately hard not to be extremely depressed about the whole malarkey.

That said, I can’t help wondering why I am personally so concerned about it. I say that not because I secretly harbour the wish for a quiet festive season. I most assuredly do not. We have four grandchildren who are now at that delightful age between the innocence of infancy and the terror of teenage tantrums. We made a deal with our daughters as they were leaving home that we would share every other Christmas with them and their



**“We worked hard but we played hard as well – and the powers that be seemed more inclined to turn a blind eye to our high jinks”**

families, in the understanding that their other halves would probably want to spend the intervening years with the outlaws. This is supposed to be our year. I was fully expecting to spend Christmas being as excited as my grandkids would be and setting them an extremely poor example with my childish misbehaviour. So, I have every reason to be disappointed if festivities are curtailed.

No, my confliction this year is more to do with an ease of acceptance that more often than not Christmas was disrupted throughout my childhood and my RAF service. I was sent to boarding school during my father’s overseas postings and, because we were then only allowed one holiday flight each year, I was farmed out to relatives for the Christmas holidays. Skimming through my flying logbook it is clear that I frequently spent Christmas away from my own family on operational tours: Northern Ireland throughout the ‘70s and early ‘80s, and then tours in the Balkans, the Gulf and Afghanistan.

And even when home-based for the holiday season, command tours tended to mean that there was always the responsibility of visiting the lads and lasses who were on duty over Christmas.

### **Rallying round**

The family and I managed all that separation reasonably well, so I have to ask myself why this year feels so different. I think the principle reason was that we always felt we belonged to a bigger family that rallied round in these sorts of circumstance. For nearly all my RAF time, we lived on base so there was a well-established network that tried to keep tabs on households where a family member was away on operations. And when I was away, our own families opened their doors to Sue and the girls.

For those of us who were away, we also managed to look after ourselves pretty well. We worked hard but we played hard as well – and the powers that be seemed more inclined to turn a blind eye to our high jinks at that time of year. Flying the Westland Wessex helicopter in Northern Ireland over Christmas in the ‘70s, despite the seriousness of the Troubles, there were always sorties where we strapped a couple of barrels of beer inside the cabin door and flew round the patrol and security bases near the

border dispensing pints to the lads. One year, during my exchange tour flying the Westland Lynx with the Army Air Corps, a fellow officer and I were tasked to bring in the Close Observation Platoons (known as the COP) from along the border so that they could get a proper Christmas dinner. At the time soldiers in the COP fancied themselves to be the real hard men of the Battalion. On the ground at the pick-up point we gave them Christmas crackers and wouldn’t get airborne until they had pulled them and put their paper hats on. Their CO was most amused.



**Caption: Paul Luker**

If it was fun in the air, it was pretty lively back in the mess as well. On one occasion, we had been experiencing a rash of improvised explosive devices in Northern Ireland and we had spent hour upon hour working in support of the bomb disposal teams. We decided to kidnap Felix, the callsign given to the team leader, to make sure he got a decent 24-hour break with good food, lots of booze and a warm bed in our Mess. It turned out that he was more of a party animal than we were.

The same year one of our number with a bit of a wild boy reputation – I will call him Lex (because that was his name) – got more out of hand than usual. The rest of us quickly decided he needed subduing, chained him up in the passageway to the bar and left him there for about eight hours. We weren’t completely heartless; we also put a bucket of Guinness by his feet for the more compassionate mess members to give him the odd drink as they passed by. It all seems a little foolish now but looking back I can also see that it was an important part of how we compensated for being away from home. It was also a key element of belonging to a bigger family – and that is what many of us might sense is missing this year.

### **Your wider family**

As the readership of *Review*, I



want you to know that this charity is most definitely part of your wider family. It has been a really challenging year for many of us, and it may well be that facing Christmas now seems especially daunting. I want to reassure you that having got through some exceptionally testing times earlier in the year, Blind Veterans UK remains here for you now, across the Christmas period and into the future. Clearly, we are having to operate under difficult restrictions and we cannot deliver everything that we would want to. But we have shown that we can innovate and quickly adopt new practices. We will continue to do that with just one



ADOBE STOCK / JULIA KISELEVA

**Caption: We'll be here for you this Christmas**

**“As the readership of Review, I want you to know that this charity is most definitely part of your wider family”**

purpose in mind - to do the best we possibly can for our membership.

This is not a hollow promise. It is based on what many of you kindly tell me personally. I have been tremendously moved to read the emails you have sent me, expressing your appreciation for what the charity has been able to do this year. These messages give me the confidence to know we are doing something right and the strength to keep on doing it. I have also been touched by the willingness and energy of our Members to muck in, not least in pressing on with some of our research work. And so, on your behalf, I would also like to express my thanks to the people who make it possible: our staff, our volunteers, our benefactors and my fellow trustees. Thank you most sincerely for all that you have done to keep us going through this year – your efforts have been magnificent.

As much as you are able, please have an enjoyable Christmas, while looking forward to a much-improved New Year. 🎄



ADOBE STOCK / WAVEBREAK3

# A COVID Christmas message

A seasonal message to you from our President, **Colin Williamson**

Whatever the history books will say about the year 2020, it has without doubt been a very different and difficult time for everyone. But rather than dwell on the negatives, of which there are many and which I'm sure we're all fed up with, I'd like to concentrate on the positives that we can take into 2021.

For me, 2020 has actually forced me to sit up and take stock of my life and I eventually came around to the realisation that when all of this is over I will have a much better understanding of what very little I actually need, how very much I actually have and the true value of →

friendship, family and companionship.

This is not the year to get everything you want; this is the year to appreciate everything you have. This year has compelled us to see things in a different perspective and to really value things that we have, in the past, been found guilty of taking for granted.

Things like family gatherings, or having friends around, or simply chatting with someone on the telephone, which sometimes some of us tend to avoid because we are too busy getting on with our own lives and that we find it difficult to make time for these important and necessary social interactions.

Friends and family are there not only to help us celebrate the good times, they are also there to support us in the not-so-good times. Having a strong social support network, especially in times of crisis or turbulence such as we are experiencing now, can help us get through the hard times and have a positive impact on our wellbeing. That is why I find that the support that is currently being given to our more isolated Members within Blind Veterans UK is so critical and so vitally important.

When we finally get back to some sort of 'normality', and we will, we must try

not to look back at the disappointments of 2020 but to look forward to the dreams that we made in that horrible year and to ensure that we try our hardest to make those dreams become a reality. We must learn from yesterday, live for today but continue to dream of tomorrow.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy and optimistic New Year and I'd like to leave you with this thought. The Christmas spirit is all about caring and showing kindness to others; wouldn't it be fantastic if we could continue with this all year round? 🍷



**Caption: Colin Williamson**

# In Your Community

## Exhibition Fundraiser 2020 success - thank you to our Member artists

In spite of restrictions this year, we went ahead with our annual Exhibition Fundraiser, receiving 24 entries on the theme of 'landscape'.

This year the exhibition was 'virtual' on the Blind Veterans UK website and the auction was held, for the first time, on eBay. In total, 22 artworks were sold raising £1011.66 after postage and eBay fees for the charity.



**Caption: Norwegian-inspired art by Mike Godley**



**Caption: Kenneth Moorhouse's Austrian scene**

It was also a great showcase for our talented Members' work and stories of our veteran participants made it into both regional and national press. A massive thank you to everyone who took up the challenge and created an artwork for this event.

## Powys woman goes RED for veterans this December

A woman from Llansantffraid, Powys will be running every day (RED) in December and taking on a series of increasingly challenging targets to raise money for Blind Veterans UK. →



On top of running every day, Sam Bunning will complete a 5k on the first Sunday in December before progressing to a 10k, 15k and half marathon on the Sundays that follow. Sam decided to go RED after seeing the support her grandfather received from us and wanted to give something back to the charity.

She was due to take on the Cardiff Half in March, but it has now been postponed. Sam said, "I want to do something positive to end what has been a pretty negative year. I love running so I'm excited for it. I've never run every day so I'm also a little bit apprehensive. But I know it will all be worth it to raise money for a cause that I've seen change my grandfather's life."



**Caption: Sam Bunning**



**Caption: Grandad Bunning and grandson**

Sam has set a £250 fundraising goal. To help Sam hit her target and support blind veterans who are struggling this winter, visit her Just Giving page: [justgiving.com/fundraising/samantha-bunning](https://justgiving.com/fundraising/samantha-bunning) 🇬🇧

## Diaries

If you wish to order one of our 2021 diaries, then they're now in stock. Please contact your community support worker, or the Member Support Hub on 01273 391 447 to find out more. The prices are as follows,

- 2021 A6 pocket diary £6.25
- 2021 A5 midi diary £8.25
- 2021 A4 desk diary £10.25
- A4 telephone book £11.00
- A4 address book £11.00
- 2021 A3 calendar £7.50

# A very different Remembrance

This year saw a very different Remembrance Sunday because of the ongoing Covid pandemic. The lockdown rules, together with other safeguards meant that most of the well-known ceremonies were unable to be held, or were sparsely attended – including the National Memorial Service that we traditionally take part in with many of our Members.

Despite the restrictions, many

of you joined our virtual services of Remembrance, or held your own moment of reflection, and *Review* presents a selection of your commemorations at what is always a special time for our charity.

If you are not featured here, and would like to be included in the next edition, then please send your images to the editor at [revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk) →



**Caption: Steve Lees' commemorative garden in Blyth**



**Caption: Steve Lees**

## Steve Lees' commemorative garden

Member Steve Lees has spent the last six months creating a beautiful commemorative garden in the grounds of St Cuthbert's church in Blyth, Northumberland so that other veterans will have somewhere to go and reflect.

Steve had the garden ready in time for Remembrance Sunday, and it will be a permanent fixture in the local area. Steve is hoping that the local community will be able to get involved once it is safe to do so. He says:



**Caption: Jennie Fuller's soldier**

"There's always something new to add to the garden and it would be great to arrange some local school projects. I've had some great feedback from those who have used it already – it's great to be able to give something back".

## Jennie Fuller

Northampton-based Working Age Member Jennie Fuller displayed a 5ft 10in soldier made by her husband Steven on her front gate for Remembrance. The carefully-crafted figure is made from fibreboard, and was accompanied on the gate by several hand-made and decorated poppies.

## Our Llandudno Centre's Remembrance

Our lovely staff members and volunteers at our Llandudno Centre commemorated Remembrance very differently to how they have previously.

A poppy wreath was placed on a bench outside the Centre, and a moving service under the flags of Wales, the United Kingdom and Blind Veterans UK was attended by our staff and volunteers at the front of the building. All who were there were socially distanced and wore masks.



**Caption: Llandudno Remembrance**

## Our Brighton Centre's Remembrance

For the first time in its long history, our Brighton Centre commemorated Remembrance Day in its corridors and bedrooms due to all its permanent residents being currently isolated because of lockdown.

Centre Manager Lesley Garven, together with Blind Veterans UK chaplain Rev George Butterworth laid a selection of wreaths and crosses on behalf of our Members while the Act of Remembrance was read through the Centre's tannoy system. →



**Caption: Brighton Remembrance**



**Caption: Alan Walker**

## Alan Walker

Member and Royal Corps of Transport veteran Alan Walker from Hassocks, Mid Sussex laid a Blind Veterans UK wreath in the grounds of the nearby St Cosmas and St Damian church at Keymer.

## Colin Adamson

Also in Llandudno, Member Colin Adamson – accompanied by his guide dog Diamond – placed a wreath at his local war memorial during our live broadcast. He said afterwards, “Thank you for the group telephone call you did this morning for us, it was fantastic. I was very pleased to have the honour



**Caption: Colin Adamson**

of placing the Blind Veterans UK wreath at our local war memorial, and to be able to do this while our veterans were on the telephone call”.

### Our virtual service

The virtual service of Remembrance, including messages from our President Colin Williamson, Chief Executive Nick Caplin and our new Chaplain, Rev George Butterworth can all be heard by calling free on **0800 160 1178**. These messages will be available until 15 December, when they will be replaced by Christmas messages for Members to enjoy on the same phone number.



**Caption: Chris Clarry**

# The blind chippy

Member Chris Clarry from Carlisle is putting his woodworking skills to good use and crafting some Christmas inspired ornaments. **William Witt** found out more

Chris Clarry initially learnt his woodworking skills at school before going into the Army. It was during a woodworking week at our Llandudno Centre that he rediscovered his passion for the art. He says: “It really was a fantastic week and I thoroughly

enjoyed getting back into woodwork. And I have to thank Philip in Llandudno who gave me lots of encouragement along the way.”

Chris is currently working on his Christmas stock which includes





**Captions: From left, Chris at work in his workshop, and some of his creations**

Remembrance soldiers, Christmas scenes, trees and candle holders. Following the festive period he will be moving onto Easter designs.

Chris lost his sight to rapid glaucoma and has 5% vision in one eye, being completely blind in the other. He says: "I use the limited sight that I have to get up close to the blade. And I wear a cap to make sure that if anything is going to hit the blade, it will be the cap before anything else. I've still got all my fingers so I must be doing something right!" He's sold around 10 units to date and

will announce his fundraising total on Christmas Eve on his Facebook page, where you can also browse the designs which are for sale. "Woodwork is a fantastic hobby which has helped keep me sane while living with sight loss. I thank Blind Veterans UK for getting me back into it and if it wasn't for them, I honestly don't think I would still be here."

Chris joined the Army in 1980 and served for six years in the Royal Logistics Core as a Driver. Search 'The Blind Chippy' on Facebook to find out more. 🇬🇧

# Joining the team

**Greg Swaysland** is a working-age Member of Blind Veterans UK and recently took on the role of Research Assistant in the Social and Welfare division of the Research and Innovation Department. We hear from Greg on his outlook on life and research, and his plans for the future

Dear fellow Members, I hope that you are all well.

For those of you that have no idea who I am, my name is Greg Swaysland and I am a Blind Veterans UK Member currently working within our Research and Innovation Team. I appreciate that research might seem like a very niche area and to some extent it is, however, it is also an inclusive activity here at our charity and at the heart of developing meaningful solutions to challenges we might face.

To our readers who may be cynical about the purpose of research and what it can do, I'd like to highlight that cynicism is a good thing. Cynicism implies discontent with the status quo and means that you are probably critically minded; this is an important part of being a researcher.

During the early days of my journey

with sight loss, I was frustrated not so much by the condition itself, but the assumptions made by society. As these are informed by the sciences, which often appear inaccessible to those on the outside, this resulted in me having a poor attitude towards research. I remember one occasion, at the start of my master's degree, when I flippantly said to a lecturer 'what's the point of some of this research if it never sees the light of day?'

A few years down the line, this person encouraged me to undertake a PhD, is now my supervisor, and is someone who allows me to channel my energies into developing evidence-based solutions through research. Through this work, I hope to allow the voices of others to be heard, in a way that will have a meaningful impact on their lives, and the lives of any person with sight loss. While in everyday life, individual voices of a marginalised →



**Caption: Innovation in action: one of the driverless pods in action at our Brighton Centre**

group rarely get heard, research has the power to bring them together and amplify them, so that others have no choice but to listen. People experience the world in different ways (and I think sight loss is a great example, because we all see the world differently) and research helps to highlight this individuality, as well as those experiences which are common to us all.

### Changing perceptions

I believe that societal perceptions of sight loss need to change. However,

I recognise that this will not occur overnight; it will take a monumental effort over a prolonged period of time to make these changes. I believe that we have a duty to inform how society views sight loss, while developing solutions that work for us through research. I also believe that the membership of Blind Veterans UK is in a unique position to contribute to making this change, with direct contact to our Research and Innovation team, who carry out research with, and for the benefit of, our Members and the wider sight loss community.

“Through participating in other people’s research, I feel assured that someone is actively listening to what it is that I have to say”

As a new member of the team, one of the things I’m most looking forward to is hearing from fellow Members. If you have an idea or a question, why not send it in to the Research team? You may not be the only one thinking the same thing, and the team could transform your idea into something meaningful. I believe that our membership could be a huge source of inspiration, knowledge, and experience, so I’d encourage anyone interested in being involved in research to speak up, and let your ideas and experiences be heard.

You might feel apprehensive about talking to the team and, rest assured, I understand what it feels like to be self-conscious about sharing your experiences of sight loss, or to feel exasperated when explaining something to others for the umpteenth time. It has taken me years to develop the confidence and patience to discuss my impairment in public, and to inform others of the challenges I experience in daily life. However, what I have

found over the years is that speaking out is a cathartic process. Through participating in other people’s research, I feel assured that someone is actively listening to what it is that I have to say, and I have been offered a safe and confidential space to express my feelings in relation to sight loss with someone who is genuinely interested to hear about them.

### Helping others understand

It’s up to us to help others understand our experiences, and where there is room for development and improvement in support, whether this be in relation to experiences with employment, health and eye-care, staying active, or the services that are delivered by Blind Veterans UK itself.

The research team is always on the look-out for Members who might be interested in taking part in research and are in the process of putting together a participant database. If you would like to register your interest in being included in the database, or have a question to ask the team, please don’t hesitate to get in touch using [research@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:research@blindveterans.org.uk). One of the team will get back to you as soon as possible.

I can’t wait to hear from many of you soon, and I look forward to playing my part in helping your voices to be heard. 🌍

# Sheer joy

A letter from Member **Noeline Charlesworth** about her first year with Blind Veterans UK, and what it means to her

My name is Noeline Charlesworth, 68, a former member of the Women's Royal Army Corps. My sight has deteriorated over many years with Macular Degeneration and I was eventually registered as Visually Impaired in 2017, becoming a member of the Caerphilly Macular Degeneration Group. The assessment of my registration took place in my home by a social worker who studied the level of my disability. Following the white cane training given to me, my confidence was boosted, and I am now able to go out of my home alone on limited journeys, hence retaining a level of independence which is so important to me.

I have regularly attended meetings of the Macular Group and towards the end of 2019 for the first time in my life I heard of the Blind Veterans UK Family Group when your local Community Officer was invited to our Caerphilly group to give a talk, when the subject of Blind Veterans UK was brought up. I expressed at that meeting my great interest in what was said and I was asked if I would like to join a group in

telephone meetings, and further asked if I would like to be a 'guinea pig' to take part in an Induction Course over the telephone with other blind veterans accompanied by six community support workers and one volunteer. This course would take place by way of a choice of taking part in one or two telephone calls each day over a period of five days. I agreed immediately, limited by family issues to only taking part in the morning calls, which proved to be a complete



**Caption: Noeline Charlesworth**

pleasure and were totally stress free.

Since becoming a Member, I have been utterly overwhelmed by the generosity, kindness and care that Blind Veterans UK offer people like myself. Just unbelievable. I have received wonderful gifts from your society, namely a talking weighing scales and also a pair of clamps which grips onto a table at one end, with the other end providing a clamp which holds my magnifying glass enabling me to continue my hobby of making home-made items such as birthday and Christmas cards which I so enjoy doing, albeit taking longer than it used to years ago when my sight was better!

All this thoughtfulness was then followed by a phone call asking me if I would like to join your Knitting Group, all done over the telephone, where blind veterans are taught and encouraged to knit poppies for the charity.

Again, my enthusiastic nature was delighted that something new could be introduced to enlighten my day-to-day life, but as it was lockdown in our area, I could not buy red wool as it was considered a non-essential item. I duly mentioned this at the next meeting I took part in, and my community support worker apparently went online, and I received 100 grams of red wool delivered in the post within a couple

of days. Such a special surprise that it actually reduced me to tears - tears of sheer joy and appreciation of the work that you have done for me and obviously for others. Now I am slowly but surely following the poppy pattern you gave me, and hopefully my efforts will speed up with continued practice.

I do hope you will choose to print this letter in your magazine. I have had a friend type this for me, because I want you and all who read it to know what a remarkably helpful and encouraging group Blind Veterans UK are, bringing encouragement and light into our dark days. I have felt 'renewed' by your ability to bring back a sense of normality into what had become a very difficult type of lifestyle for me.

My deepest thanks to every one of you involved. 🌸

## Editor's note

I normally edit the articles for *Review* magazine into a 'house' style to make them more suitable for you – my readers. In this case, I felt that editing would lose some of the emotion of Noeline's words, so I have left them as untouched as possible. I hope you agree with me that this is a wonderful letter to have received.

# Make your own Christmas smoothie

Our Well-Connected team asks whether smoothies are good for you, and shows you how to make your own seasonal treats

## Are smoothies good for you?

### Smoothies are popular but are they too high in sugar?

Smoothies are quick to make and often tempt people into consuming more fruit and vegetables that they may not usually eat. When we blend or juice fruit, we are breaking down the plant cell walls and exposing the natural sugars within. This effectively turns the



sugars into 'free sugars', the type we are advised to cut back on.

Free sugars may lead to dental decay, provide excess calories and cause a rapid rise in blood sugar levels. For these reasons it's best to enjoy your smoothie with other food, ideally at mealtimes, and to limit the number of glasses you consume. Smoothies and juices only count as one of your five-a-day, regardless of the number of different fruit or vegetables used or the number of glasses you drink. It's important to remember that whole fruit and vegetables should always be offered, as part of a balanced diet.

### Homemade or Shop bought?

Many shop-bought smoothies include cheaper, more processed



## Recipes

### Snowman smoothies

#### Ingredients:

- 1 banana
- 250ml milk
- 50g Greek yogurt
- 25g oats
- 30g desiccated coconut
- a few drops of vanilla extract
- maple syrup or honey to taste

#### To decorate (optional):

- Squirry cream
- snowflake sprinkles
- clear plastic cups or glasses
- black & orange marker pens

#### Method:

- First prepare the banana – peel and slice it into rounds, then lay them out on lined baking tray and freeze for a couple of hours or overnight\*.
- Before making the smoothie, prepare the cup or glass that you are serving it in by drawing on a fun snowman design with the marker pens.
- To make the smoothie, add the milk, Greek yogurt, oats, desiccated coconut and vanilla extract to a blender. Remove the banana pieces from the freezer and add them to the blender too.

- Whizz together until completely smooth, then taste and add a little maple syrup or honey to sweeten if needed.
- Pour into the prepared cup or glass and, just before serving, top with squirry cream and snowflake sprinkles.

\*NOTE: If you're short on time you can skip freezing the banana, but the milkshake won't be quite as thick or cold.

Recipe Sourced from: [eatsamazing.co.uk/family-friendly-recipes/drinks/easy-snowman-smoothies-recipe](https://eatsamazing.co.uk/family-friendly-recipes/drinks/easy-snowman-smoothies-recipe)

### Christmas spiced cranberry smoothie

#### Ingredients:

- 1 large banana
- 20 fresh cranberries
- 6 strawberries
- 400 ml cranberry juice
- 0.5 tsp ground cinnamon
- 0.5 tsp ground ginger

#### Method:

- Put all ingredients in a blender.
- Blend until smooth.

**Extra Tips:**

- You can make this a super cooling smoothie by using frozen cranberries instead.
- Add a little extra sweetness by adding a little honey or maple syrup if you want it to be vegan.
- Too much cranberry for you? Swap the cranberry juice for milk and just use fresh cranberries.

Recipe Sourced from:  
[hungryhealthyhappy.com/christmas-spiced-cranberry-smoothie/](http://hungryhealthyhappy.com/christmas-spiced-cranberry-smoothie/)

**Spiced clementine smoothie**

This tastes amazing - spicy and fruity without adding much sugar. Frozen blueberries are cheap and you can use those left over clementines.

**Ingredients**

- 180ml clementine juice
- 40g porridge oats
- 320g frozen blueberries
- 2 ripe pears, peeled
- 1 tbsp honey
- ½ tsp mixed spice

**Method:**

- Put all the ingredients in a food mixer and blend together. (If you have time, soak the oats in the clementine juice for 10 minutes to soften them for a super smooth smoothie.)
- Preparation time: less than 30 mins
- Cooking time: no cooking required
- Serves: Serves 4-6

Recipe Sourced from: [bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/spiced\\_clementine\\_29601](http://bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/spiced_clementine_29601)

ingredients such as fruit purées and juices. These purées concentrate sugars while removing many of the nutritional benefits of the natural whole fruit such as the fibre, phyto-nutrients, vitamins and minerals. Some shop-bought smoothies are also sold in sizes larger than the recommended 150ml portion size and have added nutrients such as B vitamins as well as vitamins C and E.

**How often should you drink smoothies?**

Smoothies may form part of a balanced diet, but be sure to focus on lower sugar fruits, emphasising fresh or frozen produce. Include one or more sources of protein like yogurt as well as healthy fats from nuts, seeds or avocado. **Information sourced from:** [bit.ly/2KJppiD](http://bit.ly/2KJppiD)

# New Year's resolutions

Do you make a New Year's resolution, only to let it slide? Our Well-Connected team gives you some tips



How do you stick to a new year's resolution? Typically, only 8% of people are continuing their resolutions by the end of the year. Try to bear in mind your habits have taken years to develop, so trying to change them in days/weeks/months is ambitious. Don't be too hard on yourself if things take longer to progress than you had in mind. There's no race to meet your end goals, it's about doing this for yourself.

**Plan** - what do you want to achieve? How are you going to do this? Why do you want this? Have contingency plans in place for times when you might need a bit more motivation.

**Start small** - if losing weight is your goal, why not start with eating a piece of fruit whenever you feel hungry (research has shown that higher fruit consumption is linked to healthier

weight). If you want to start exercising more, why not start by taking a walk to the end of your path every day or doing a press up/squat once a day. This starts to create mini healthy habits, which you can easily build on.

**Buddy system** - know anyone else that has created a resolution? Or perhaps you can join a group that is wanting to achieve similar things. Having people you can contact, talk to and motivate each other means you're much more likely to stay on track.

**Monitor progress** - record everything you do towards your goal. Whether it's doing a tick on a calendar each day, or printing off a goal sheet, marking it on a computer document etc. It really helps to track how you're doing, meaning you can look back and see the progress you've made.

■ **Join our Well-Connected Facebook page for more hints, tips, stories and training advice as well as weekly challenges. You can find it at [bit.ly/3pZZ3ce](http://bit.ly/3pZZ3ce) or contact us at [sportsandwellbeing@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:sportsandwellbeing@blindveterans.org.uk)**



# A creative Christmas...

How to make a home made gift for a loved one with help from Nadia Wazeera of our Well-Connected team

On the approach to Christmas, with limited access to shops, you may be stuck for Christmas preparation ideas. Look no further, this article invites you to unleash your creativity and re-investigate the everyday materials around you. From the excess packaging, and junk mail to jars and boxes, around your home there will be limitless opportunities to keep you busy during

the winter months. Positively recycling and reducing waste while making thoughtful items for loved ones, is a win-win conclusion. You may enjoy the activities so much you will carry this momentum into the New Year.

## Christmas wrapping, tags and cards

**1. Keep it simple** and use every day rubbish as stencils and stamps. For example, a wine cork to create a polka dot repeat design on brown paper can be really effective.

**2. Experiment** with ways to attach. By using ribbon and minimal tape, you may encourage the person receiving the gift to re-use your paper and keep the circle moving. Use a stapler or folding techniques to bunch materials together. The materials you may need to support creativity at home include sellotape,

scissors, a stapler and a hole punch.

**3. Collect and collate** your resources. Enjoy flattening out the ruffled papers you find and cutting out sections of colour from magazines, for example. This 'bank' of materials is unique to you and your own tastes. Store your collection in a way that inspires you, in a folder or box, so it can also be stored easily.

## A Gift for a loved one

You will need: A kitchen/bathroom

tile, watered down PVA, paint brush or sponge, old greeting cards/papers, scissors and an image of a loved one.

Celebrate with this simple but effective Christmas gift idea. Firstly create a background, try weaving together old greetings cards or cutting interesting shapes from papers you find around the house. Stick them on the tile with watered down PVA glue, using a brush or sponge. Wait for this to dry and then stick the photo on, including a layer of watered-down glue on the top. 🎁



**Caption: A tile with woven paper and a photo of a loved one rests upon remnants of old greeting cards**

## Square breathing exercises

If you're finding the winter period difficult or you just need a moment's break from the Christmas chaos, we invite you to practice a breathing exercise.

There are hundreds of different breathing exercises out there, but 'Square Breathing' feels poignant given that we're surrounded by square boxes of biscuits, chocolates and presents.

Start by picturing a square and visualising the shape. You could even hold a square box if you have one nearby. Now imagine your breath drawing up one side of the square

as you breath in for the count of four. Hold your breath for the count of four as your mind draws along the top of the square. Breathe out for the count of four, imagining the breath flowing down the other side of the square. Then hold for the count of four as you draw your attention to the bottom of the square.

The exercise uses four counts of breath for four sides of a square, but you can count as fast as you like to suit your breathing or change the number you count to. After all, this is your moment and your chance to unwind.

Well connected

A wellbeing space for  
Blind Veterans UK members

Rebuilding  
lives after  
sight loss



**Caption: Food with vitamin D help your bones to stay healthy**

# Healthy bones

Vitamin D is vital in helping to stay healthy. **Cath Klaces** explains what it is and how you can find it

In these strange times of not going out we should all try and ensure that we think about a vitamin that our body needs to stay healthy. Vitamin D is essential for healthy bones, and in the UK we get most of it from sunlight exposure from around March to the end of September - this is why vitamin D is often referred to as “the sunshine vitamin” because the sun is one of the

best sources of this nutrient.

The clocks have changed and due to COVID and local lockdowns, many of us are not receiving the sunshine we require. In the UK, sunlight doesn't contain enough ultraviolet radiation in winter (October-March) for our skin to be able to make vitamin D. During these months, we rely on getting it

from food sources (including fortified foods) and supplements. Your body can't make vitamin D if you're sitting indoors by a sunny window, because ultraviolet B (UVB) rays (the ones your body needs to make vitamin D) can't get through the glass.

We need vitamin D to help the body absorb calcium and phosphate from our diet and it is these minerals that are important for healthy bones, teeth and muscles. So, vitamin D and Calcium are very much brothers in arms. Lack of vitamin D can cause bones to become soft and this might contribute to a fall.

## Food sources

We get some vitamin D from certain foods such as fatty fish as well as red meat and eggs. Vitamin D is also added to some breakfast cereals, fat spreads and non-dairy milk alternatives - the amounts added to these products can vary and may only be added in small amounts. Another source of vitamin D is dietary supplements.

If you choose to take vitamin D supplements, 10 to 20 micrograms (mcg) (800 IU) a day will be enough for most people, take it with a meal to enhance its absorption and increase blood levels more efficiently. Current guidelines say adults shouldn't take more than the equivalent of 100 mcg a day. But vitamin D is a 'fat-soluble'

vitamin, so your body can store it for months and you don't need it daily.

That means you could equally safely take a supplement of 20 micrograms a day or 500 micrograms once a month. However, some people have medical conditions that mean they may not be able to take vitamin D safely.

Something else to bear in mind is recent research that suggests that vitamin D deficiency can lead to a host of sleep issues, including sleep disruption, insomnia, and overall poor sleep quality. A deficiency in vitamin D has been associated with many changes in sleep such as fewer sleeping hours, and sleep that is less restful, also good levels of vitamin D have been found to improve your mood. In conclusion you might find that vitamin D will keep you out of the 'falls clinic', give you good skin, and keep you happy. 🍷

**You will find that the following are good sources of vitamin D if you are not spending a time in sunlight**

- **Fatty fish - salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines**
- **Mushrooms**
- **Food that includes egg yolks**

# What's been happening

Due to the ever-changing situation across the UK, we are having to operate differently in different areas due to the local lockdowns in place. But we can keep you informed about how we've been supporting Members recently. We'll do this by providing you with a 'status update' every month about what's been happening in our communities and Centres

## Our communities

Since the summer, we have continued to safely provide the following services to our Members:

- Provide telephone support through the National Support Service including regular phone calls if wanted.
- Maintenance and delivery of equipment to urgent Member cases
- As an exception, face-to-face support for Members with an urgent need
- Local support to Members for essentials, such as shopping and medication.

Where local restrictions are in place across the UK, community teams will adapt services to Members in that area based on these. If you are unsure of the

services in your area, please speak with your caseworker.

In addition, we have provided many Members with the opportunity to receive rehabilitation support remotely as part of our National Remote Rehab Service. This includes a range of services to help with independence and safety at home; for example, assistance with technology, low vision assessments and support with health and wellbeing. Since August, we have received 824 referrals for remote rehabilitation, with 85 per cent of Members stating an improvement in their ability to overcome or manage the difficulty or problem following this support. If you would like to access this service, please speak to your caseworker.

We are running a growing number of telephone and online social and 'special interest' groups so that Members can meet each other regularly, catch up and share experiences. If you are a passionate football fan, interested in IT, crafts or just fancy a chat, get in touch with your caseworker and they will let you know what's on. If you fancy starting a group yourself, let us know!

## Member Support Hub

Our Member Support Hub continues to run as usual and we're working hard to restore our recycling service. Our drivers are starting to get back out on the road delivering and collecting equipment wherever it is safe to do so. Although we can't provide face to face support with equipment, we are



**Caption: Llandudno Centre**

doing our best to achieve this remotely. Of course, Members can always get in touch with us if they need anything please call us on **01273 391 447**, Monday to Friday 9am-4pm.

## Our Centres

This summer, the Llandudno Centre opened its doors at a reduced capacity for those Members most affected by the pandemic. Isolation and testing measures were introduced in order to make sure we adhered to government guidelines. The Centre continues to offer respite for Members most impacted by the pandemic. It is working closely with Public Health Wales and other relevant public health authorities in the decision-making process for each new Member attending.

Our permanent residents at the Brighton Centre are currently in good spirits, well entertained and are taking it all in their stride. By the time you read this, the Brighton Centre will have a 'Visitors Pod'.

This has been ordered to comply with new Public Health England protection measures in care homes. It has been a struggle for our Members and even though the Centre has done its utmost to maintain contact with their families, this pod will allow residents to meet visitors in the safest way possible during the winter months. 🐼

# Getting together for 100 years - our early reunion meetings

We've been holding reunions for a century - Archives and Information Executive, **Rob Baker** takes a look back to the start

Sadly, one of the many consequences of coronavirus this year was to pause our usually very busy programme of Members' local reunion meetings. These began back in 1920 in Bristol. They have been halted before, but this was for a rather different reason, the Second World War.

The reunion meetings soon became popular in the 1920s and, before

long, attendances of over 100 were seen. They were held around the United Kingdom, with some also in what was then the Irish Free State. The meetings often included music, usually supplied by guest singers, and sometimes dancing. There were other entertainments, such as competitions and games including skittles.

The largest of our early meetings



**Caption: Blind veterans at the Belfast reunion in 1926**



**Caption: Liverpool Reunion including Chairman Ian Fraser (holding lapel) and Major Sir Jack Brunel Cohen (seated in wheelchair)**

were those in 1935, when they also celebrated the Silver Jubilee of King George V. The Home Counties reunion was held in the Royal Albert Hall, with the Prince of Wales attending together with over 500 blind veterans.

## A selection of images

We are fortunate to have in our archives several photographs of reunions from our early years, including some from the Royal Albert Hall. Some show guest visitors, such as that from the Liverpool reunion of 1927 which shows Major Sir Jack Brunel Cohen, MP for Liverpool who among his other achievements was also a member of our Council for over 40 years.

Some images can be frustrating, as we don't always know who is featured in them. The picture from our Belfast reunion almost certainly includes Emily Wilson, who was one of our first women blind veterans, who lost her sight having served with the Women's Royal Naval Service during the war.

We hope that in time we can definitely identify her, although she may well be the lady in the centre of the photo, grouped together with her fellow blind veterans. All the photographs however serve to show how the camaraderie and sense of togetherness provided by the reunions has been in place since our very early days. 🇬🇧

# Getting the best out of Alexa

Our Alexa team gives you more tips on how to get the best out of your Alexa device

Hello, and welcome to the latest edition of our feature on helping you to get the most out of your Amazon Alexa smart speaker.

As always, we are keen to hear from our Members, about their experiences and the many ways of using your Alexa, in our 'Alexa Backchat' section. Please contact the team if you have any questions or suggestions for future articles.

This month, we thought a bit of seasonal cheer may be in order and decided to put together a compendium of Alexa tips and skills, to keep you entertained during this very different Christmas for all of us.

## Fun Things to Ask Alexa this Christmas

*Alexa, sing me a Christmas Carol.*  
*Alexa, sing your new Christmas song*  
*Alexa, sing Jingle Bells*

*Alexa, what are the names of Santa's reindeer.*  
*Alexa, tell me a cracker joke.*  
*Alexa, tell me a reindeer joke.*  
*Alexa, can reindeer's fly.*  
*Alexa, is Santa real.*  
*Alexa, what is Santa's address*  
*Alexa, read 'Twas the Night Before Christmas'.*  
*Alexa, how many sleeps until Christmas*  
*Alexa, tell me a Christmas story*  
*Alexa, what's the best Christmas movie*  
*Alexa, what's the worst Christmas movie*  
*Alexa, how many calories are in a Christmas pudding*  
*Alexa, what's today's Christmas treat*  
*- You can get a Christmas surprise each day until Christmas Eve.*  
*Alexa, open the advent calendar.*

If you're wondering how Christmas traditions came into being or the provenance of a Christmas Carol, then remember to put the word "Wikipedia" before your question, you may be

surprised at what you learn.

*Alexa, Wikipedia "Good King Wenceslas"*  
*Alexa, Wikipedia "Christmas Tree"*  
*Alexa, Wikipedia "The 12 days of Christmas"*  
*Alexa, Wikipedia "Santa Claus"*  
*Alexa, Wikipedia "Christmas pudding"*

## Getting Organised

We often have a lot more to remember at Christmas such as food and other groceries we don't usually buy, presents for the family and friends, remembering who sent you a card or present and so forth. Alexa can create lists that you can



ADOBE STOCK / ERKAN

**Caption: Your Alexa can help liven up Christmas**

add to or delete items from. Here's how to create several different lists and add and delete items from it.

*Alexa, create Christmas card list.*  
*Alexa, add Joe Bloggs to my Christmas card list.*  
*Alexa, add Janet Brown to my Christmas card list.*  
*Alexa, who is on my Christmas card list.*  
*Alexa, remove Joe Bloggs from my Christmas Card list.*  
*Alexa, Create Christmas Present list.*  
*Alexa, add "pyjamas for Libby" to my Christmas present list.*  
*Alexa, add "football for Harry" to my Christmas present list.*  
*Alexa, what is on my Christmas present list.*  
*Alexa, add mince pies to my shopping list.*  
*Alexa, add bread sauce to my shopping list.*  
*Alexa, add sherry to my shopping list.*  
*Alexa, what is on my shopping list.*  
*Alexa, remove mince pies from my shopping list.*

Note, the shopping list is already there by default, so you don't need to create it initially, unless you would like a separate "Christmas shopping list".

Lists are a great way to add something as you are thinking about it, how many times have you said to yourself, "oh what was it I wanted again?"

## Preparing the festive feast

There are many ways that Alexa →

can help you in the kitchen over the festive holidays, such as helping you time the Christmas dinner, find a recipe or convert Fahrenheit to Celsius or millilitres to fluid ounces.

*Alexa, set a turkey timer for five hours and 30 minutes.*

*Alexa, set roast potatoes timer for 40minutes.*

*Alexa, set parsnip timer for 35 minutes.*

*Alexa, add five minutes to my parsnip timer.*

*Alexa how long have my timers got left.*

*Alexa, remind me to put the potatoes in at 12.30pm.*

*Alexa, give me a recipe for roast turkey.*

*Alexa, give me a recipe for Christmas gravy.*

*Alexa, how long should I cook my turkey.*

Just follow the instructions in the recipe to navigate it and get it to repeat steps or ingredients.

*Alexa, convert 390 degrees Fahrenheit to Celsius.*

*Alexa, how many millilitres in five fluid ounces.*

*Alexa, what is 4.5 kilograms in pounds.*

## Entertainment and keeping in-touch

Perhaps some of us will sadly not be with our family and friends this year, so here are some ideas to help keep you entertained and connected.

*Alexa, what is on BBC 1 on Christmas day.*

*Alexa, what films are on over Christmas.*

*Alexa, play some Christmas music.*

*Alexa, play some music from Nat King Cole.*

*Alexa, play Trivial Pursuit.*

*Alexa, I need cheering up.*

*Alexa, play Christmas Trivia*

Remember that you can make calls with your Alexa device. If the number of the person has been stored on the device you set-up your Alexa on, then just say the person's name.

*Alexa, call Sally.*

If you haven't saved the number but know it, then just ask her to call that number.

Alexa, call **01234 567 891**

Note, some calls may be free, but may also be charged as part of the call package you have on the number your Alexa was registered to.

## Alexa ideas for your own Christmas present

If like us, you no doubt will have been asked, "what would you like for Christmas"? We thought you may like to consider these ideas. If you are enjoying using your Alexa, perhaps you may wish to add to or upgrade your Alexa devices.

### Additional Alexa "Echo Dot"

If you would like an additional device

for the bedroom, office or kitchen, then there are currently great deals on the Amazon Echo Dot 3rd generation. This model is about to be replaced by the Echo Dot 4th generation, but you can pick up the older version for as little as £18.95 currently while stocks last.

### Amazon Studio

This is Amazon's high-quality speaker, if you appreciate Hi Fi quality music, then this may be the speaker for you. It usually retails for around £190 on Amazon, but it may be discounted over the Christmas period to around £160.



Caption: Amazon Echo dot

### Amazon Show

This has all the features of an Amazon Alexa smart speaker, but also includes a 10inch touch screen. It allows you to play and stream video from Amazon Prime, BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All 4 and YouTube, among others.

If you're looking for a recipe, then you may also get a video demonstration along with it.

It will also allow you to video call anyone else with an Amazon Show and even lets you have group video calls, ideal to get the family all together virtually, when we can't be together physically this year.

As always, if you have any questions or suggestions yourself or would like to know more about them, please call the Members Support Helpline on **01273 391 447**, who will be happy to help with any questions you may have.

We hope you have an enjoyable Christmas and our ideas for Alexa helps get you through a potentially very different Christmas this year. We look forward to bringing you more ideas, tips and tricks soon.

Wishing you a very merry Christmas and happy New Year from the Alexa Team. 🎄



# Family News

## Birthdays

**Christine King**, who celebrates her 101st birthday on 21 December

---

**Roy Layzell**, who celebrates his 100th birthday on 30 December

---

**Wilfrid Lindley**, who celebrates his 100th birthday on 12 December

---

**Eric Low**, who celebrates his 101st birthday on 28 December

---

**Stephen Lynn**, who celebrates his 101st birthday on 15 December

---

**Thomas McKenna**, who celebrates his 101st birthday on 1 December

---

**Phyllis Thorn**, who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 6 December

---

**Charles Ward**, who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 16 December

---

**Rita Watson**, who celebrates her 100th birthday on 23 December

---

**Alan Wearn**, who celebrates his 100th birthday on 16 December

---

**David Williams**, who celebrates his 100th birthday on 14 December

---

## Condolences

It is with deep regret that we record the deaths of the following, and we offer our heartfelt condolences

---

**Brenda Hill** of Dudley, who died on 1 November. She was the wife of the late Kenneth Hill

---

**Catharine Pugh** of Colchester, who died on 1 November. She was the wife of the late James Pugh

---

*All information was correct at the time of going to press*

# In Memory

It is with deep regret that we record the deaths of the following members and we offer our heartfelt condolences to their widows, widowers, families and friends

**Robert William Beck** of Leamington Spa, Warwickshire died on 8 November 2020 aged 81. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Walter Henry Blowes** of Farnham, Surrey died on 5 November 2020 aged 84. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

---

**Arthur Box** of Manchester died on 1 November 2020 aged 98. He served as a Marine in the Royal Marines.

---

**Helen Brennan** of Seaham, County Durham died on 29 October 2020 aged 97. She served as an L.A.C.W. in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

---

**Olive Catherine Browning** of Banstead, Surrey died on 15 November 2020 aged 97. She served as a Petty Officer Wren in the Womens' Royal Naval Service.

---

**Colin Bull** of Hungerford, Berkshire died on 10 November 2020 aged 85. He served as a Private in the Royal Berkshire Regiment.

---

**Donald Christopher Percival Bush** of Bognor Regis, West Sussex died on 9 November 2020 aged 99. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

---



**Kenneth Carlisle** of Oldham died on 20 November 2020 aged 86. He served as a Sergeant in the South Lancashire Regiment.

---

**Edward Carr** of Cheshire died on 1 November 2020 aged 86. He served as a Private in the Army Catering Corps.

---

**Barry Cirel** of Cardiff died on 2 November 2020 aged 85. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Norman Clark** of Hove, East Sussex died on 30 October 2020 aged 97. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Eileen Margaret Collins** of Ashbourne, Derbyshire died on 23 October 2020 aged 99. She served as an L.A.C.W. in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

---

**Stanley Derbyshire** of Liverpool died on 27 October 2020 aged 97. He served as a Private in the General Service Corps.

---

**John Francis Dickens** of Barnet, Hertfordshire died on 1 November 2020 aged 91. He served as a Trooper in the Royal Dragoon Guards.

---

**William John Dutton** of Brecon, Powys died on 1 November 2020 aged 95. He served as a Major in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

---

**Donald Francis Evans** of Rhyl, Denbighshire died on 17 November 2020 aged 92. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

---

**William Fearnley** of Wirral, Merseyside died on 26 October 2020 aged 92. He served as a Stoker Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

---

**Peter Gardner** of Bradford-On-Avon, Wiltshire died on 26 October 2020 aged 81. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

---

**Phyllis Goodliffe** of Altrincham died on 10 November 2020 aged 98. She served as a Sergeant in the Army Pay Corps.

---

**Raymond Hallett** of Wellington, Somerset died on 1 November 2020 aged 99. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Christopher Hamnett** of Stockport, Cheshire died on 29 October 2020 aged 88. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

---

**Laurence Carey Hardy** of Pulborough, West Sussex died on 27 October 2020 aged 91. He served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy.

---

**Leonard Harper** of Alcester, Warwickshire died on 29 October 2020 aged 83. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Roy James Harris** of Bourne, Lincolnshire died on 23 October 2020 aged 85. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

---

**Kenneth Leo Harris** of Nottingham died on 14 November 2020 aged 91. He served as an Acting Sergeant in the Primary Training Wing.

---

**Norman Hassall** of Manchester died on 5 November 2020 aged 94. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

---

**Frederick Heath** of Edenbridge, Kent died on 1 November 2020 aged 87. He served as a Signaller in the Royal Signals.

---

**John Horne** of Henley-In-Arden died on 18 November 2020 aged 87. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Signals.

---

**Eileen Mary Howard** of Chorley, Lancashire died on 1 November 2020 aged 97. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

---

**Ian Duffus Kernohan** of Helensburgh, Dunbartonshire died on 21 October 2020 aged 81. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

---

**William Renfield Kitts** of Falmouth, Cornwall died on 23 October 2020 aged 88. He served as a Trooper in the Light Infantry.

---

**Frederick Hugh Knight** of Southsea, Hampshire died on 9 November 2020 aged 98. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

---

**Rhydwyn Harris Lewis** of Swansea, West Glamorgan died on 9 November 2020 aged 98. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals.

---

**Edward John Lloyd** of Birmingham died on 1 November 2020 aged 86. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery. →

---



**Ernest Stanley Lodge** of Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire died on 29 October 2020 aged 86. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force Police.

**Philip Lynch** of Accrington, Lancashire died on 18 November 2020 aged 90. He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

**Michael John Ernest Margetts** of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire died on 11 November 2020 aged 93. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Service Corps.

**Jean Marshall** of Guildford, Surrey died on 1 November 2020 aged 96. She served as a Wren in the Womens' Royal Naval Service.

**John Alfred Edward Mawer** of Windsor, Berkshire died on 15 November 2020 aged 87. He served as a Corporal in the 17th/21st Lancers.

**Terence McCarthy** of Littlehampton, West Sussex died on 18 November 2020 aged 94. He served as a Private in the Queen's Royal Regiment.

**Paul Norbert McDermott** of Abergele, Clwyd died on 7 November 2020 aged 99. He served as a Fitter in the Royal Air Force.

**Neil McDonald** of Downham Market, Norfolk died on 27 October 2020 aged 85. He served as a Corporal in the Cameron Highlanders.

**Eion McEwan** of Glasgow, Lanarkshire died on 1 November 2020 aged 98. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Highland Regiment.

**Donald McKay** of Sheffield died on 21 October 2020 aged 85. He served as a Private in the Parachute Regiment.

**Peter Michell** of Llandudno, Gwynedd died on 1 November 2020 aged 89. He served as a Private in the R.A.O.C / R.E.M.E.

**Victor Mitchell** of Cwmbran, Gwent died on 7 November 2020 aged 96. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

**Howell Wyn Morris** of Llandudno, Gwynedd died on 4 November 2020 aged 88. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force Police.

**Leslie Morris** of Newbury, Berkshire died on 1 November 2020 aged 94. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

**Francis Leo Murphy** of Brighton, East Sussex died on 9 November 2020 aged 100. He served as a Captain in the Queen's Regiment.

**Graham Murrin** of Warminster, Wiltshire died on 28 October 2020 aged 99. He served as a Flight Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

**John Henry Parker** of Spalding, Lincolnshire died on 28 October 2020 aged 86. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps.

**Leonard Pell** of Lincoln died on 3 November 2020 aged 81. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

**Sidney Walter Phipps** of Louth, Lincolnshire died on 27 October 2020 aged 95. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

**Alan Powell** of North Walsham, Norfolk died on 3 November 2020 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

**James Reynolds** of Kirkcaldy, Fife died on 27 October 2020 aged 87. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

**Kenneth Richardson** of Chester died on 31 October 2020 aged 99. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Signals.

**David Robert George Robson** of King's Lynn, Norfolk died on 25 October 2020 aged 84. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

**Elizabeth Ann Sharpe-Nelson** of Brighton, East Sussex died on 31 October 2020 aged 100. She served as a Corporal in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

**Bernard Sharratt** of Coventry died on 7 November 2020 aged 90. He served as a Leading Electrical Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

**Francis James Shelton** of Swadlincote, Derbyshire died on 3 November 2020 aged 88. He served as a Private in the Royal Air Force. →

**Dorothy Shepherd** of Swindon, Wiltshire died on 1 July, 2020 aged 96. She served as a Leading Aircraftwoman in the Royal Air Force

**Kenneth Shuttleworth** of Crewe died on 23 October 2020 aged 92. He served as a Trooper in the Royal Armoured Corps.

**David Sloan** of Andover, Hampshire died on 31 October 2020 aged 82. He served as a Fusilier in the London Irish Rifles.

**David Foster Sloan** of Emsworth, Hampshire died on 1 November 2020 aged 88. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

**Brian Smith** of Hunstanton, Norfolk died on 19 November 2020 aged 86. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

**Anthony Glyn Spencer** of Nottingham died on 30 October 2020 aged 91. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

**Ronald Stephen Stokes** of Bognor Regis, West Sussex died on 1 November 2020 aged 95. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

**George Gordon Stuart** of Edinburgh died on 23 October 2020 aged 89. He served as a Junior Technician in the Royal Air Force.

**Roy Henry Taylor** of Weston-Super-Mare, North Somerset died on 18 November 2020 aged 84. He served as a Craftsman in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

**Norman Leslie Walters** of Burntwood, Staffordshire died on 12 November 2020 aged 92. He served as an A.C. 1 in the Royal Air Force.

**Derrick Warrington** of St. Helens, Merseyside died on 23 October 2020 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Lancashire Fusiliers.

**James White** of Bootle, Merseyside died on 28 October 2020 aged 92. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

**William Wilson** of Prescot, Merseyside died on 27 October 2020 aged 100. He served in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

# National Creative Project

## Creative Activities. Creative Book. Creative Hobby Circles

Welcome to the December programme of activities to get involved with from home. Call our bookings team on **01273 391 500** for more information or to request an activity pack for the **CREATIVE ACTIVITIES** below – kits and instructions will be posted out to you with the chance to take part in telephone or video chat with other Members.

You may also register on our webpage, [blindveterans.org.uk/ncp](http://blindveterans.org.uk/ncp)

### Christmas craft:

Fancy having a go at making your own Christmas cards? We have put together Christmas packs containing all you need to make five handmade cards. Each pack includes an instruction sheet, five blank cards ready to decorate with envelopes, a glue stick and a selection of embellishments to get creative with.

We should have enough packs available for everyone, however there will be a limit on the number of packs put together, so please get in touch as soon as possible to ensure one comes to you.

### Gardening:

A Christmas bulb pack to grow over

the festive season, with the option of chatting to other Members about your thoughts and experiences during your time of watching your bulbs growing.

You will be invited to join our monthly “Time for Gardening” group calls where you can share your thoughts and enjoy discussion, talks and fun quizzes with a green-fingered theme.

### Letter writing:

**‘Key Letters’** This is a project to re-connect, with typed or hand-written letters, using the postal service.

‘E mail is all very well but the thrill of having a letter arrive on your doorstep is a rare gift in these days of technology and fast paced living.’ →



**Caption: Some of the art created during painting for beginners and improvers**

*“But who will I write to?”* We can make suggestions for correspondents and assist with contacts.

*“But what will I say?”* We can make suggestions for content and help with spelling, grammar and punctuation if required.

*“But I’ve forgotten how to use my technology!”* Our IT Instructors can give you a call and talk you through the basics again, (and maybe share some new tips and tricks). Your helpful kit will include paper, a writing guide, envelopes, pens and organisers.

**Art: Painting for beginners and improvers November and December project.**

Painting challenges with support, for you to learn to paint or improve your skills. We will send a painting project kit if you need it (or you may use your own materials). With a new project every two months, you may sign up for just one or each time. There will be the chance to meet other Members and our Art & Craft team for chat and tips by phone, or video call.

■ **Please call our Bookings team on 01273 391 500 for more**

**Caption: Some of the art created during painting for beginners and improvers**

**information, or to request an activity pack for the CREATIVE ACTIVITIES above. You may also register on our webpage, [blindveterans.org.uk/ncp](http://blindveterans.org.uk/ncp)**

**Blind Veterans UK CREATIVE BOOK – open for contributions.**

Prose, poetry, drawing, photos, music, spoken word, art or craft projects.

Blind Veterans UK wish to capture the real-life stories of its Members, staff and volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Creative Book is

a project to express our thoughts and feelings as we live through this challenging time, and also as a way of recording our experience for the future – it will be something to be treasured in the archives for generations to come.

During the life of the project we will be asking for contributions under the following three themes: ‘Reflection’, ‘Hope’ and ‘New Normal’.

**We are now open for contributions under the theme of ‘Reflection’.**

An opportunity to share personal reflections on experiences from the →

start of the pandemic to the present day.

- **If you would like to contribute to this project please get in touch with your community support worker or contact the team directly on: [creativebook@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:creativebook@blindveterans.org.uk)**

### Art & Craft:

**Teacup art project** - 'Where there's tea there's hope'

You'll receive a pack containing a cardboard teacup template, simple instructions and all the materials you need to create a wonderful design for our collaborative tea inspired tea towel. At the end of the project we will send you a tea towel with the designs on.

- **A big thank you to everyone who has taken part already. Please send back your completed teacup as soon as possible.**

Following on from this we will be creating another tea towel design, and this time the theme will be birds - for many the sound of bird song has really helped them during these times. Look out for our new tea towel project in the January NCP programme.

### CREATIVE HOBBY CIRCLES

We would love to hear from you on

**01273 391 500** if you are interested in joining a monthly telephone or video call chat group in one of the subjects below.

*Basketry. Model-making. Knitting. Gardening. Woodturning. Mosaic. Painting. Woodwork.*

For our photographers we have a Facebook page (Blind Veterans UK Photography); and a Photography chat group.

- **For more information on the Photography Group please contact Mark Pile on 07584 056 459 or email him at [mark.pile@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:mark.pile@blindveterans.org.uk)**

Last post out will be Wednesday, 16 December for Christmas project packs. We'll have a new Creative Activities programme for you in January.

Take a look at our new National Creative Project web pages for information about the projects and for stories of Members taking part - [blindveterans.org.uk/ncp](http://blindveterans.org.uk/ncp)

Wishing you all a very happy festive season.

- Lou Kirk-Partridge and the National Creative Project Team. 🍷

## Contact details

**Contact address** Blind Veterans UK, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London, W1H 4HD, **0300 111 22 33**

**Member Support Hub: 01273 391 447**

**New Members:** If you know someone who could be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, they can phone our Membership Department on freephone **0800 389 7979**.

**The Brighton Centre 01273 307 811.**

**The Llandudno Centre 01492 868 700.**

**The Booking Office for the Brighton Centre:** To book accommodation at the Brighton Centre please telephone **01273 391 500**. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or Community Support Worker (CSW).

**The Booking Office for the Llandudno Centre:** To book accommodation at the Llandudno Centre please telephone **01492 868 700** for bookings and ask for the Booking office. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or CSW.

**Review Editor:** You can telephone Chris Gilson on **020 7616 8367** or email him at [revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk).



AGENTURFOTOGRAFIN / ADOBE STOCK

We value your feedback and use it to improve and develop the services we provide. If you would like to provide feedback on the magazine or any aspect of our services then please email us at [feedback@blindveterans.org.uk](mailto:feedback@blindveterans.org.uk) or call **0300 111 22 33**

### A different format?

**If you would like your copy of Review in a different format, then please contact your Community Support Worker or ROVI for more information.**



# Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

from all of us at  
**Blind Veterans UK**



Rebuilding  
lives after  
sight loss