

Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

September 2021

Leading by example

Care Manager
Blanche is awarded a
British Empire Medal

Inside:

Q&A with
photographer Rankin
Battlefield archaeology
Inventor Magnus Volk
Last call for Creative
Book Project



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

It's the heart that counts

Welcome to your September issue of *Review*. As I write, I realise that I've been in post now for exactly a month and, while I'm still struggling to remember names and faces, what's already abundantly clear to me is the genuine spirit of care amongst the Blind Veterans UK family.

One notable example of this is Brighton Care Manager, Blanche Back, who features on the cover of this edition. Blanche was presented with a British Empire Medal last month for her outstanding work at the centre during the pandemic. You can read all about this on page 11.

Meanwhile, a memorable experience for me personally was attending the Member Photography Group Q&A with celebrity photographer, John Rankin (known professionally as simply 'Rankin'). The group, run by Member Representative, Mark Pile, meets weekly and, on occasion, invites professional photographers along. Getting Rankin there is quite something as he's world famous, having photographed the likes of Madonna,

David Bowie and even the Queen.

Mark is a photographer himself and set up the group during lockdown to help Members stay "busy and sane" while they've been stuck at home. As I watched Rankin chat with the Members, I couldn't help but notice just how friendly, relaxed and supportive the group felt.

You can read an extract of the Q&A in this issue, as well as Mark's story of how he came to make a connection with Rankin in the first place. I know the group are keen to encourage more Members to join, so if you're at all interested don't hesitate to contact Mark via his email address on page 18.

You may never reach the heady heights of photographing popstars and royalty, but you're sure to be made to feel very welcome. 🌈

Liz Millar
Editor



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On the cover

Brighton Care Manager, Blanche Back, is presented with a British Empire Medal by Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, Sir Peter Field.



Respect for those who served in Afghanistan

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

I write this on 1st September. The date is memorable to some for being the birthday of the Army Air Corps. The date also marks the start of the Second World War when the Nazis invaded Poland, as well as the end of the Battle of Kandahar and, with it, the end of the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1880. I wonder how 1st September

2021 might be remembered? Screens and papers have been full of the human tragedy associated with the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the fears that this excites about what is to come. There have been notable speeches in the House, some by veterans with a personal perspective and story to tell, that highlight the depth of concern and feeling of helplessness.

Although not a popular war, our Services have committed themselves magnificently and at considerable cost over the last 20 years to improving security by defeating the terrorist base and to creating a safe environment to enable Afghanistan to make progress. This is particularly the case for many of our own blind veterans who I know will be feeling these events keenly. Although I didn't serve in Afghanistan personally, at one stage I had responsibility for training the regiments and brigades that did deploy and I gained an important insight into the complexity of the operating



Caption: Nick Caplin



Caption: The mission was complex and challenging

environment and just how challenging a mission this was. I have the greatest respect for each and every one of our veterans who served their country in Afghanistan, service that was demanding and seriously important. If any of our veterans would find a chat helpful, please do get in touch with me.

COVID has been another issue that will have excited concerns and feelings of helplessness, and we will all have had days when we felt weighed down by worry and a lack of answers. Yet this is an area where together we can make a difference. By working together – staff,

Members and volunteers – we have been able to weather the Covid storm and make the most of the world that we now face. Blanche Back's story provides a lovely vignette of the Blind Veterans UK approach, and there are numerous other examples across the charity. When the going gets tough, the good get going: as Paul so aptly says in his message, in the end it is the people, and what they do, that matter. The response of you all – staff, Members and volunteers – has been magnificent.

With COVID restrictions easing across the UK, we are now entering a →

“Armistice 2021 will be a fabulous opportunity for Blind Veterans UK to take its place in local ceremonies, alongside other veterans across the country”

transitional phase as we await the outcomes of the service reviews. We continue to support Members through a blended offer of services, online and telephone contact as well as increasing our face-to-face contact with Members either by visiting at home, within the local community or through our dedicated volunteers. We plan to gradually increase face-to-face contact further over the coming months where needed. To enable us to expand our face-to-face Member support, the recruitment for new volunteers is now underway. Llandudno is now busy and vibrant again, providing much needed holiday respite for Members. Small steps, but we are inching our way back to a more normal world.

We are keen to learn from our experiences and use this knowledge to help shape our charity for the future. I have written earlier about the service reviews that we have launched. These are now well underway and we are on course to consider the outcomes of

these in the next few weeks. Our newly established Member Engagement Team play a critical part in this process, ensuring that the Members' voice is at the heart of our consideration and decision-making.

Although August is traditionally a quiet time as people take holidays, last month was anything but for many in the charity. In particular, there is much work underway in the property area as we look for our new home and begin to consider the sale of the Brighton Centre. I am very grateful for the offer of support from Members on this quest and we will look to engage with you further when the time is right. There is no white smoke currently, but the teams are making solid and promising progress.

Colin has written in this *Review* of our plans to support local Remembrance events. Armistice 2021 will be a fabulous opportunity for Blind Veterans UK to take its place in local ceremonies, alongside other veterans and community organisations across the country, and we would like to build a platform for greater community representation into the future. This initiative is firmly Member-led and we are keen to support as appropriate. Armistice is always a poignant occasion for veterans: 2021 perhaps particularly so. 🇬🇧



Caption: Blanche Back (centre) received a British Empire Medal at our Brighton Centre

The mark of a true leader

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

My one regular reader will know that I frequently struggle for inspiration on what to write for the *Review*. This month I have had absolutely no problems in that regard.

On 9 August, I was amongst those privileged to attend the presentation of the British Empire Medal to Blanche

Back by the Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex. The ceremony at Ovingdean pretty much encapsulated all the values for which I know Blind Veterans UK stands. On the one hand, it reflected the military tradition and standards from which we all come; on the other, it captured the family atmosphere of a tight-knit band of like-minded →

people who value comradeship, friendship, dedication, duty, compassion, care and sacrifice.

For the benefit of those who were not there, Blanche Back is the Care Manager at Ovingdean. When Covid-19 hit the UK, she shouldered the immediate responsibility of throwing up a defensive ring around our centre and ensuring the safety of our permanent residents at Brighton. While much of the nation struggled to understand and respond to this new pandemic, Blanche stepped forward. When others shrank from the prospect of battle, she advanced towards the fray. It is no exaggeration to say that without her engagement, leadership and example we might have faced disastrous outcomes at Brighton – but with her dedicated application we did not.



Caption: Paul Luker

Blanche, of course, dismisses this as hyperbole. She will say that she did what anyone else would have done. She will also tell you that we faced the same problems as any other care home. Most importantly, as she said at the presentation, she had the support and help of all the other departments at Brighton to make her plans work.

It's true, we needed everyone to pull their weight - and they did so magnificently – but it takes a special person to lead this effort and carry everyone with them. It also takes a very gifted person to lead by example. As her colleague, Lesley Garven, illustrated when she shared Blanche's reaction to delivering intimate personal care to a Covid-positive resident, "How can I ask anyone to do this if I don't do it myself?"

Blanche – and, by extension, her family - have been on the frontline for the last 18 months. She has lived Covid-19 in a way that few of us can understand but all can applaud. On 9 August, some of us had the chance to applaud and we did – loud and long.

There is something really special about an organisation which has no difficulty in setting up an event like this. I hope he will forgive me for saying so, but the Lord Lieutenant, Sir Peter Field, carried off that perfect balance of



Caption: Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, Sir Peter Field, presented Blanche with the award

ceremony and informality which only comes from comfortable familiarity. Nowhere was this more apparent than when Ovingdean resident, Betty, talked about how much Blanche and all the staff meant to them, stealing the show as only Betty can. Sir Peter told us that he was "commanded by Her Majesty" to make the presentation. That he did it especially at our centre for just one person tells us much more.

For obvious reasons, it has been some time since I was last able to visit Brighton. I confess I was somewhat daunted by what I might encounter. I should not have been concerned. Despite all the problems that we have dealt with recently and all the uncertainties we have yet to confront,

I might never have been away. We are truly blessed with staff and volunteers who have not faltered in their commitment to what we do. We are even more blessed with a number of Members whose resilience has not shifted one iota since they confronted D-Day. I am humbled in their presence – but not in the least inhibited by their banter. This was a joyous day and I am so pleased to have been part of it.

Which takes me to the future. Several of our visiting VIPs, to whom I had written previously about our plans to relocate, asked me about progress at the event. Whilst I had nothing concrete to report, I was able to comment on how we had not just survived but excelled in other



moves in our history. Building Brighton was clearly a major physical, moral and presentational achievement for its day. Conceived in the early 1930s, it certainly hit three targets. First, it put St Dunstan's on the map. Second, it was seen as a bespoke establishment for young, war-blinded men. And, third, it responded to an absence of any other form of state support for our war blind.

Even then, the plan did not withstand contact with the enemy – in this case literally - as the outbreak of WWII forced the evacuation of St Dunstan's to Church Stretton when the Brighton Centre was commandeered by the Royal Navy for training. Although Church Stretton is little known to us today, it was almost certainly perceived as our spiritual home during the 1940s.

I think that tells us something important. Much as we hold dear physical things - in today's case the emotional connection most of us have with the iconic building of our Brighton Centre - it is invariably something less tangible that really makes the difference. In our case, I think it is the spirit which comes from our people. I can't imagine what it means to lose one's sight, but the last 10 years as a Trustee have taught me much about how you all respond to that challenge. It might sound strange, especially to an outsider, but I sense that it is the feeling

of belonging, of common tribulation and purpose, of comradeship and empathy, of small triumphs and sustained effort that carry the day.

Tellingly, very little of this is directly delivered by anything physical, notwithstanding the developments that keep emerging from science and technology and the innovations seized on by our ROVIs. All of it is carried through by human application - the essence of rehabilitation.

Blanche's British Empire Medal absolutely captures that notion. At a very personal level, it is deservedly hers because she made superhuman efforts to make sure we were as good as we could be. At a team level, as she takes pains to explain, it was the myriad staff around her who rallied to her leadership that did the heavy lifting – but it was still leadership which also earned her their respect and the gratitude of our Brighton residents. I know Blanche won't mind me saying so, but her example at Brighton has been mirrored extensively across the whole charity, with our supporters, volunteers and staff showing equal grit in getting stuck in and sorting stuff. That may not get national recognition, but it is not missed by me.

In the end it is the people – and what they do - that matter. 🇬🇧

Blanche awarded British Empire Medal

Our Care Manager at Ovingdean is recognised for outstanding work during the pandemic

Blanche Back, our Brighton Care Manager, was presented with the British Empire Medal on 9 August at the centre by Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex. Blanche received the award for her outstanding work leading the care at the centre during the pandemic.

Blanche says: "It's an absolute honour to be presented with this award. Just to be nominated was amazing so I couldn't believe it! Everyone has worked so hard to provide the best care for the veterans who are residents here."



Caption: Blanche Back

Blanche joined the charity six years ago as a nurse and became a care manager four years ago. She says: "When I was a student nurse, I did a placement at the centre and I absolutely loved it. I always knew that I wanted to come back. It's great to hear the veterans' stories. All the staff are amazing as well."

Nick Caplin says: "This is wonderful recognition of the role that Blanche has played, of her leadership and compassion and of the example that she has set, day in, day out over the last 16 months. Blanche would be the first person to say, and believe, that it should be an award to all the Brighton staff who have stepped up to the plate magnificently during this difficult time of lockdown."

As a result of the pandemic, we adapted our services to support our Members, 90% of whom are over 70 and were advised by the Government to self-isolate. Our National Support Service has helped many Members through this period of social isolation. 🇬🇧

Remembering the fallen

Our President, **Colin Williamson**, gives an update about the Remembrance Day Parade on 14 November 2021

I'm sorry to share that our annual pilgrimage to the Cenotaph in London has, once again, been subject to change. We have been informed by the Royal British Legion that a reduced number of 50 places will now be allocated to Blind Veterans UK for the event on 14 November. I'm afraid this will mean that some of our Members who were looking forward to attending will be disappointed. However, whilst we feel extremely proud of being part of the parade at Whitehall, this does provide us with an opportunity.

Now that we have such a strong presence in our communities, I feel the time is right for Blind Veterans UK to be seen to be flying the flag more locally. What better way to promote

our charity than to be seen marching under its banner in our towns and cities across the UK? Therefore, in my role as President, I have passed on the honour of marching at the Cenotaph to one of our Vice Presidents, Billy Baxter, who will now represent the membership at the head of the column in Whitehall. Meanwhile, I will be joining my local parade at the Newcastle Remembrance event in my native North East.

I urge those of you who aren't taking part in the Cenotaph commemorations to think about participating in your own local areas. You can get in touch with your council if your local parade is a civic affair, or contact your local Royal British Legion branch, if they facilitate the parade, to ask about the possibility of joining their ranks. We are looking at how we can help make Members identifiable and we'll be in touch with more about this nearer the time.

Whatever you choose to do to show your respect to those who have made the supreme sacrifice, I wish you well. 🇬🇧

Colin Williamson
President



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In Your Community

Steve takes silver at national bowls competition

Member Steve Gill from Stowmarket in Suffolk was awarded runner-up in a national bowls competition for those with a visual impairment. He finished second in the B2 category of the National Visually Impaired Bowls England Pairs competition, alongside partner Lynne Bourne. Steve says: "It was very tight. We were only one game away from being champions, but I'm delighted with Runner-up. I'll enter again next year and go for the gold."

Steve first tried bowls at our Brighton centre. He says: "Before sight-loss I was always a competitive sportsman and played rugby to quite a high standard. When I started to lose my sight, I thought that aspect of my life was gone. But at my Intro Week in Brighton I got into bowls and the charity has supported me with it ever since."

"I'd like to thank Keith at Rookery Bowls Club, as I wouldn't have been able to do this without him. And also my fellow members at the club who have embraced my visual needs."



Caption: Steve Gill

Gary and Mary's tech sessions

Member and IT volunteer Gary has been teaching fellow Member, Mary, how to use her Synaptic tablet during lockdown. Mary was hoping to visit the Brighton Centre last year for a technology training week but it was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Mary says: "The charity provided me with the tablet, but I was quite scared to use it in the beginning in case I pressed the wrong button, or I'd end up doing something that I didn't want to. Thanks to Gary, I have now sent my first ever email, I can use YouTube and access my calendar. Being able to be connected to family and friends has given me a lot more confidence." 🇬🇧

In the know about our services and centres

As we cautiously navigate our way out of lockdown restrictions, we share an update about the support we are currently able to provide. Please be reassured that we intend to increase face-to-face support once we have completed a review of our services

Support in the community

As of 19 July 2021, all lockdown restrictions in England were lifted, although some restrictions still remain in other parts of the UK. Taking this into account, Blind Veterans UK can now safely provide the following:

- A blended service of remote telephone support and face-to-face support.
- Staff and volunteer face-to-face visits to Members unable to receive support over the telephone.
- Maintenance and delivery of equipment.

Social and 'special interest' groups

We will continue offering telephone and online groups for Members. Get in touch with your caseworker to find out what's on. And do let us know if you fancy starting a group yourself.

Although general face-to-face social groups will remain on hold while we review our services, we're setting up small, temporary face-to-face groups where there is a specific need. Members will be identified as part of their assessment and invited to join. We will always call prior to visits and wear masks when in close proximity.

Member Support Hub

Our hub continues to run as usual and our recycling team are back on the road delivering and collecting equipment. Although we continue to provide support remotely wherever possible, we're now offering face-to-face support again where there's an essential need and it's deemed safe.

Members can get in touch with us on **01273 391 447**, Monday to Friday, 9am-4pm.

Centre respite and holiday bookings

When a respite or holiday booking is made, it's essential that all health, mobility and care information is up to date as this will ensure the correct level of support is available. Members/escorts are required to undertake a Covid-19 test 72 hours prior to arrival.

Llandudno Centre 20 September-18 October

The centre will only offer residential and nursing respite stays for Members/escorts who require assistance from our care team.

19 October-end of March 2022

The centre will only offer respite stays for fully independent Members/escorts who don't need care support. Booking is limited to one week every three months, excluding Christmas.

- **The Llandudno Booking Office is open 8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday. Call 01492 868700.**

Brighton Centre

As we have permanent residents at Brighton, bookings will depend on the guidelines for care homes. Please call for up-to-date information.

- **The Brighton Booking Office is open 8.30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Call 01273 391500.**

Christmas and New Year stays

Requests for stays over the Christmas period should be made via your Community Support Worker by the end of October. Due to restrictions, stays at the Llandudno Centre will be limited to fully independent Members/escorts, while the Brighton Centre hopes to be able to welcome all Member/escort stays. The centre booking teams are not able to take requests for these dates.

Site move update Brighton Centre

Our site search is based on an extensive set of criteria, particularly assessing whether each site is likely to offer a great Member experience. We've already visited a number of prospective new sites and we'll be looking at more over the coming weeks. Our team is committed to ensuring a new building provides what Members need and, as we narrow down our search, we'll be looking at how to further engage Members in any new site.

Harcourt Street

As many of you will know, we are considering what to do with our Harcourt Street building in London. After exploring all the options, the Property Working Group will be making a recommendation to Council in the very near future. More information will be shared once Council has made the final decision. 🌍

Meeting Rankin

Member Representative, **Mark Pile**, on his weekly photography group and bringing along his hero, the celebrity photographer known simply as 'Rankin'

I first met Rankin a couple of years ago when I was asked by the RNIB to take behind-the-scenes photos for a campaign he was shooting for them. I'd actually dropped my camera that morning, so he ended up giving me a go on his – 50 grand's worth of camera. It was an amazing experience.

I was born with strabismus which developed into amblyopia, whereby my



Caption: Mark at work at a match

brain doesn't compute what my eyes see. When I was 16, I was told I'd lose my sight by age 30. I'm 56 now and have about 15% vision left – light and dark perception in my right eye and tunnel vision with a blurry end in my left. Everything's a bonus, as far as I'm concerned.

Ironically, I didn't get serious about photography until I was blind. Thanks



Caption: 'Gurkhas at Brighton' by Mark Pile



Caption: 'Partnership' by Mark Pile

to the encouragement of Blind Veterans UK staff, I've now got a workshop with all my own kit and regularly take on voluntary photography jobs. I've done weddings, football matches, all sorts.

I think having a visual impairment means you have to work a bit harder than others to take decent photos. You have to know your camera and know where the buttons are and what they do. I can't use the back digital screen, but I can use the view finder, and I use sound as well. I might take 1,000 photos in a 90-minute football match. It's just practise, practise, practise. You have to find your own way.

The online photography group was

borne out of a discussion with other Member Representatives about how to help Members through the lockdown. It's helped keep us all busy and sane while we've been stuck indoors, and there's usually a bit of friendly banter which is all good fun.

We often get guest speakers to come along to the group. David Bailey joined the last Photography Week we had at the Brighton Centre, so I was really chuffed when Rankin said he'd like to come along to our online group. About 20 Members attended and their questions were brilliant. He was so open and honest. It was really inspiring.

I'd encourage anyone with an





Caption: 'Christopher's back flip' by Mark Pile

interest in photography to come along to the group. We meet every Wednesday at 3.30pm on Teams. Just get in touch with me at mark.pile@blindveterans.org.uk and I'll send you the link.

What the group said about the Q&A with Rankin

Keith Harness: "Talking with photographers at the top of their trade can be daunting, but also a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Rankin we met was completely different to the Rankin I've seen on TV."

Mike Scholes: "It was great to have a well-known photographer join our

meeting. We met the real Rankin rather than the one portrayed by the media."

Brian Julian: "The opportunity to come face to face with a professional photographer was immensely satisfying. To question him was even better. He came across as a positive and truthful character."

Will Phillips: "I found it very informative and entertaining."

Colin Adamson: "It was absolutely fantastic to hear Rankin's story. He's such an inspiration and hopefully he'll be able to work with some of our Members again in the future." 🍷

"I have so much empathy for people with sight loss"

On 5 August, world famous photographer, **Rankin**, took part in a Q&A with our Member Photography Group. Here are a few extracts from the event



Caption: Rankin talked openly and honestly with the group

Q What first drew you to photography?

A I was studying accountancy at college and could see what an amazing time the art students were having so I thought, "How can I get out of my world and into theirs?" I asked a mate if I could learn photography from him. I remember taking this photo and it was a eureka moment. I knew it was what I wanted to do with my life.

Q Have you ever tried to take photographs with a simulated visual impairment?

A I did a shoot for RNIB and they got me to try a piece of equipment like a kaleidoscope, which was extraordinary. Losing my eyesight is my biggest fear, to be honest. When I was 23, I was shot with an air rifle in my right eye and I couldn't see →

out of it for two or three days and now I can't focus with it. I think this is why I have so much empathy for people with sight-loss.

Q I do admire your photography, but I'm afraid I hadn't heard of you before I saw you on TV. Isn't that awful?!

A No - everyone thinks I'm an author! They think I write crime novels! I've got a T-shirt that says: "I'm not Ian." I like it when people don't know who I am. I don't really want to be famous.

Q What's the most memorable moment of your career to date?

A Probably photographing the Queen.

Q Do you have any embarrassing moments?

A Loads, especially when I was younger and used to party more. There was one shoot where my assistant had to literally hold me up, I was so hungover. I can't believe what I was like.

Q I've watched you on Germany's Next Top Model. Where do your crazy ideas for shoots come from?

A They come from Heidi Klum (model and presenter of the show). She likes to give me the nuttiest

commissions. The thing about that show is that it's entertainment first and foremost. Another show I did this year, The Great British Photography Challenge, was about how to be a professional photographer so it's more interesting for photographers.

Q What's the most unexpected situation that's arisen through your work?

A I got the chance to photograph Gordon Brown when he was Prime Minister and we really got on. We talked about work I'd done for NGOs and I ended up sending it to him. To my surprise, he presented it to NGO changemakers at Downing Street, which was incredible. Another amazing moment was when I met the Rolling Stones. I'd been obsessed with them when I was young. Not only did I get to photograph them, but I was invited to watch their rehearsal afterwards. I really felt like I'd arrived.

Q Have you thought of doing a TV programme with visually impaired people?

A I think disability in general would be interesting to talk about through photography because it empowers the photographer and the subject, so it can be transformative. If a production company came to me with the idea, I'd jump at it. 🌍



ADOBE STOCK / JÉRÔME ROMMÉ

You said, we did

Our President and Member Engagement Lead, **Colin Williamson**, launches a new series in which we share your suggestions, concerns and feedback

"Your service, your say" is a phrase that we are going to get very familiar with over the next few years as the charity continues its journey of transition. But how do we ensure that our Members' voices are heard, are listened to and acted upon?

One solution is to be committed to

inclusion. We have a strong leadership team which leads on policy and strategy, but we need to include our Members in the decision-making process.

"Nothing about us without us" is a slogan used to communicate the concept that no policy or strategy →

should be decided upon by those in power without the full backing, support and participation of those Members whose lives will be directly affected by the decisions made at the very top.

We need to ensure that Members' voices are not only heard but can have an influence on the future direction of the charity and its policies and strategies. This is why Member panels are so important, necessary, and extremely relevant as we strive together to take this charity forward.



Caption: Should we hold a flag day?

As a direct result of these Member panels, the Member Engagement Team has received some excellent feedback, suggestions and ideas on how we can work together to resolve any issues or concerns that the membership have.

Here are just a few examples:

Flag Day

Member Mike Hunter asked whether we held an annual Blind Veterans UK Flag Day and if not, why not?

We received the following response from Rebecca Owen, Marketing Manager, Community Partnerships, who says: "We are adding this to our planning agenda and we would like to thank Mike for his suggestion."

Centre Intro Weeks

Lots of Members have asked about the prospect of Intro weeks being re-introduced at our Brighton and Llandudno centres.

This feedback has been forwarded to the Centre Offer Working Group and the Intro Working Group for deliberation and clarification.

Letters from the charity to Members

A Member was concerned that letters he has received from the charity over the recent months have a printed 'header' on each page. The Member

"We need to ensure that Members' voices are not only heard but can have an influence of the future direction of the charity"

stated that this meant it took longer for the letter to be read via his screen reader. His other concern was that having the header on each page was a waste of printer ink.

Winnie Wilkie, our Customer Care Manager, has pointed out that, for legal purposes, letters from the charity need to be on letterheaded paper as it identifies us as a charity and confirms that the letter is legitimate. However, Alice Tow, Internal Communications Executive, agreed to see if it's possible to change the standard letter so the header only appears on the front page.

Donation envelopes

A Member from Community 5 asked if there could be donation envelopes left in the rooms at both the Brighton and Llandudno Centres for Members to donate if they choose to do so.

Kathy Boardman, Llandudno Centre Manager, forwarded this request to the Customer Service Working Group and seems certain that this suggestion will be approved and adopted.



Caption: Your feedback is important to us

Happy hour

A Member from Community 7 has asked if the centres could introduce a Happy Hour at the lounge bars at certain times and reduce the price of drinks that our Members purchase. This has really got my support!

Feedback from Kathy Boardman is positive and she has passed this on to the relevant working group for consideration. 🍷

Colin Williamson

Member Engagement Lead

Battlefield Archaeology

Member and Trustee **Chris Cardwell** shares his passion for digs, dragon's teeth and hedgehogs

The technology that enables us to access the *Review* is marvellous stuff but having a visual impairment means we still need to make a little effort to read or listen to it. Like me, you may have trudged through an item only to conclude it wasn't quite what you expected, so let me say at the outset that the purpose of this article is to see if I might encourage some of you to share my interest in archaeology. If this is an unappealing prospect, then please do break away and do something more pleasurable, like make a cup of tea!

Why should you even contemplate becoming enthusiastic about landscape and artefacts that lie under the ground? Well, I know from experience this is a pastime that can be accessed from the comfort of your armchair or, for the more adventurous, there are opportunities to contribute to digs as they open up, now that we are getting

this dreadful pandemic under control. It's a chance to, as our GOAL group would say, 'Get out there and live.'

Finding buried silver or gold may be unlikely but treasure can come in different forms, including everyday objects that were dropped, broken, lost or disregarded, and which may provide insight into past lives and activities. I find this captivating.

Visual impairment isn't a barrier to engaging. You simply need to be more selective about your activities. While I may be a serious hazard in a trench or wielding a mattock, I'm a dab hand with a toothbrush and washing up bowl, or a sieve. Cleaning up pottery and other finds is a satisfying activity and, like several archaeological tasks, can be done from a seated position so if, like me, your mobility isn't too good, that's no reason to hold back.



Caption: Top left: Chris Cardwell and Lee Eans visit a dig. Bottom left: Excavating a trench. Right: Chris and Sue Cardwell

The word 'battlefield' tends to conjure up images of deeply historic and important locations such as Waterloo, Agincourt, Hastings or the Somme. In fact, our landscape is peppered with hundreds of battlefields - perhaps 500 in England alone - some recorded and some not.

How many have heard of the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 AD? This was a significant engagement between

Athelstan, King of England, and an alliance led by Olaf Guthfrithson, King of Dublin, at which it is recorded "never yet so many people killed before this with sword's edge". So where was Brunanburh? Some 50 different locations throughout England have been proposed but, the truth is, there is no conclusive evidence for any site and no one knows for sure. For all we know, it may be beneath the ground a mile or two from where you live. →



Caption: Top left: Digging a trench. Bottom left: Sue and Chris Cardwell inspect a find. Right: The finds table

Would it surprise you to learn that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) owns some 1% of mainland UK, with the right of access to a further 1%. This amounts to a huge area, some of which contains significant archaeology, which is why the Defence Infrastructure Organisation employs a team of professional archaeologists. I wonder how many MOD locations we have enjoyed between us?

Some will have memories of Otterburn

Ranges in the wilds of beautiful Northumberland. Did you know that the Roman legions arrived there long before us? There is firm evidence of a Roman Road and marching camps plus Bronze Age burials, ancient earthworks and abandoned medieval villages.

It's also the site of the Battle of Otterburn in 1388 between the Scots and the English. According to the Scots it took place on the 5 August, whilst

The word 'battlefield' tends to conjure up images of deeply historic and important locations such as Waterloo

the English say it was on the 19th. Anyhow, the Scots won, so perhaps we should go with their date.

In contrast, I live in a pleasant location on the Suffolk coast. It's a place where people come for a tranquil seaside break and appears about as un-military a settlement as you can get. That said, you only need to scratch beneath the surface for the past to emerge. The pier is now two thirds of its original length because the Royal Engineers blew a hole in it to prevent its use as a landing stage in the Second World War. The school was requisitioned to become the HQ of Eastern Command for the D-day landings, as visited by Winston Churchill and Field Marshal Montgomery.

Dozens of anti-tank cubes (made by a local builder with the fitting name, Mr Block) are now hidden by gorse, and the numerous pillboxes covered by foliage. There are remnants of trench systems which look like grass covered natural dips and bumps and even a 'hedgehog', an elaborate system of

pillboxes, shelters, weapon pits and communication trenches. Uninspiring bits of concrete and unremarkable foundations prove to be evidence of gunhouses, battery observation posts and searchlight locations.

Meanwhile, most of the 'dragon's teeth' – steel spikes or girders set into the beaches to rip the bottom out of invading craft – were eventually removed in the 1950s (perhaps by some of our Members), along with the minefields, barbed wire and other coastal defences. But a few occasionally come to light.

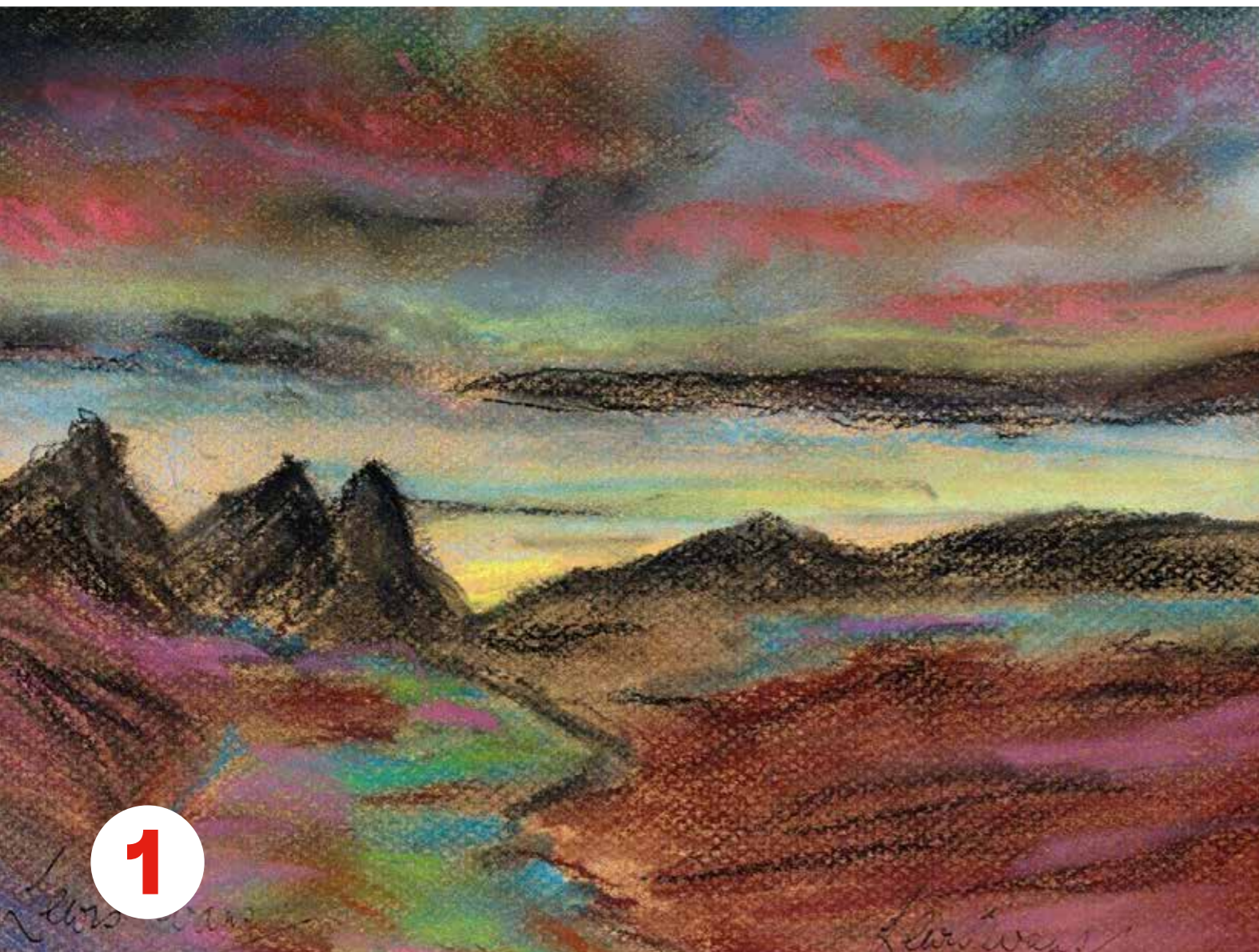
If this doesn't excite you then archaeology is probably not a topic that will appeal, but if you do wish to dig deeper (sorry!) then start by contacting the Defence Archaeology Group at dag.org.uk. They facilitate projects for sick and injured military personnel who are still serving and veterans. There's no phone number I'm afraid but their website has links to other relevant organisations, including Operation Nightingale and Waterloo Uncovered. 🇬🇧

■ **For more general information including details of digs around the UK, try the Council for British Archaeology, 92 Micklegate, York YO1 6JX, telephone 01904 671 417 or email info@archaeologyuk.org**

The gallery

We present a selection of original artworks produced by our veterans for the National Creative Project

Captions: 1. Lewis Evans - Fantasy Landscape 2. Carole Sharpe - Still Life Drawing 3. Eddie Eldrich - Landscape 4. Matthew McGowan - Pattern 5. Michael Godley - Seascape with Yacht 6. Michael Hammerton - Self Portrait



National Creative Project Programme

Creative Activities. Creative Book. Creative Circles.

The National Creative Project is one year old and we've been blown away by your contributions over the past year! It's also been lovely to hear how the activities have helped you feel part of the Blind Veterans UK family. Here's your September programme of VI-friendly activities to get involved in - all from the comfort of your own home.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

Please call our bookings team on **01273 391455** for more information or to request an activity pack for the following creative activities. Kits and instructions will be posted out to you and there's the opportunity to take part in a telephone or video chat with other Members if you would like to.

Gardening: Summer Herbs

This is the final month to sign up for a wicker basket for indoors or out, with aromatic basil, chives, oregano and parsley. Your kit will include everything you need, plus a set of Second World War-inspired recipe cards with cooking ideas for your herbs.

During the project there will be the opportunity to join a phone chat group with other Members and our project team to discuss your herbs and all other things garden-related.

Art and craft:

Summer flowers tea towel

You will be sent pack of materials with everything you need to create your collaged flower, or you can use materials you have at home like magazine cuttings, paints or pastels.

When you've finished your flower, just pop it into the prepaid envelope to return it. Your work will then be photographed and included in an amazing collaborative tea towel design and we'll send you a tea towel featuring your flower design.



Caption: Flowers for the tea towel project

As part of this activity, there's a opportunity to take part in a group telephone chat with other Members to exchange ideas, support and encouragement if you would like to.

Art:

Drawing for beginners and improvers (September, October and November)

This group gives you the chance to learn or improve your drawing skills. We will provide four themes - two to encourage charcoal pencil techniques and two that lend themselves to coloured pencils.

You'll receive a project kit containing charcoal pencils, a sharpener, blending sticks and an eraser, a pack of coloured pencils and two softback sketchbooks, along with written guidance. If you'd



Caption: We'll send you all the materials

like to, you can return your sketchbooks to us so that we can share your work with other Members, as well as our supporters. We'll then send them back to you.

There will be an opportunity to join a group call by phone or video to discuss the project with your peers, along with two of our Art & Craft instructors.

Craft:

Racing cars - a woodwork project

We'll send you everything you need to sand and paint these two easy-to-assemble model racing cars from Baker Ross, plus our VI-friendly instructions. These are very simple kits with pre-cut wooden pieces and the assembled cars are about 6 ½ inches long. Once complete, have fun racing them! →



Caption: Christmas bauble cards

Suitable for children from five years old or keep them for yourself.

The project comes with a group call opportunity where you can join up to six other Members, along with our craft instructors, for a chat and share tips and advice.

Art & Craft: **Christmas bauble cards - design for printed Christmas cards**

We know it seems early to be talking about Christmas, but we're thinking ahead and invite you to join us in crafting a design of a Christmas tree bauble for this collaborative project.

We will send you a pack containing

everything you need to create a flat image of a bauble. Once complete, you just send back your design in the prepaid envelope. The card designs will feature a mix of baubles designed by Members and we will send you a pack of cards with your bauble in the design in time to post out to family and friends for the big day.

Again, there's the opportunity to take part in a group telephone chat with other Members to exchange ideas, support and encouragement if you would like to.

■ **Don't forget to call our bookings team on 01273 391455 for more information or to request an activity pack. For more information about the projects and groups, please visit our web page at blindveterans.org.uk/ncp**

CREATIVE BOOK **Last call for entries!**

This is your last chance to contribute to our creative book project which gives Members, volunteers and staff the opportunity to document their experiences of the pandemic through creative writing, art, craft and photography. The deadline for entries is 31 October.

Your contribution could be a photograph you have taken, a painting,

drawing or doodle, poetry or spoken word. It could be a letter, a list, a diagram or a photo of a memento of Covid times. Things ordinary to us might be interesting to someone in 100 years' time and your contribution doesn't need to be a creative endeavour - it could be something practical.

See page 46 for examples of some of the contributions so far.

You can send your contribution in either of the following ways: **Email it to creativebook@blindveterans.org.uk. Or post it to:** Creative Book Entries, Blind Veterans UK, Greenways, Ovingdean, Brighton. BN2 7BS

To submit a spoken word piece, please telephone **01454 617920** or contact your Community Support Worker.

CREATIVE HOBBY CIRCLES

We'd love to hear from anyone interested in joining a monthly telephone or video call chat group in one of the subjects below. Our groups have up to six fellow Members with a shared interest, plus two of our staff.

Call **01273 391455** to join one of the following groups:

Gardening. Knitting. Woodturning. Mosaic. Painting. Woodwork.

New: Creative Writing

For those who would like to chat with fellow writers about poetry or prose.

New: Papercraft Hobby Circle

For those interested in crafts using paper, such as handmade card making, collage, decoupage, quilling etc.

New: Clay Work Hobby Circle

For those interested in working with clay, kiln, oven or air drying and making pots, sculptures, jewellery, tiles etc.

Photography

We have a Facebook page (Blind Veterans UK Photography) and a weekly Photography chat group (see page 16). Anyone with an interest in photography is welcome.

You can find more about these creative circles, plus read Members' stories and view galleries of their work at blindveterans.org.uk/ncp

Thank you to all those who have supported your fellow Members through our creative circles over the past year. For anyone who hasn't got involved yet, no matter if you're a beginner or a creative activities veteran, please do give us a call.

Best wishes to you all,
Lou Kirk-Partridge and the National Creative Project Team. 🌍



Caption: Clockwise, from top left: Rita - Tree 4, Stained Glass window, Shaun - Ink Work, Will - Final Piece, Will - Abstract Final

Mystery Art Box

Members take part in research team project

Following a call out in your March Review, six Members volunteered to take part in our Mystery Art Box Project – a collaboration between Blind Veterans UK's National Creative Project and the research department.

This groundbreaking study was led by Dr Claire Castle with the aim of

exploring the impact and benefit of a remotely delivered and meaningful creative activity for blind veterans.

The Members were given a box of art materials - most of which they had not previously used before – as well as a sketchbook and written or audio journaling equipment. →



Caption: Brian - Cat amongst the offcuts

"I got into it, I really enjoyed it. It was a different way of doing things, but it was good."
Brian, Member

"The two items in the box that I really like was the corrugated paper because you could cut shapes out and things like that, and also the bamboo straws. I thought they were handy and I didn't have any trouble sticking them down, so I was quite happy with that. One thing was that they were tactile. That was the main thing with it. When I wanted to cut a shape, I could actually feel the shape I wanted to cut. I'm not saying it worked every time, but mostly it came out roughly where I wanted it to come out."
David, Member

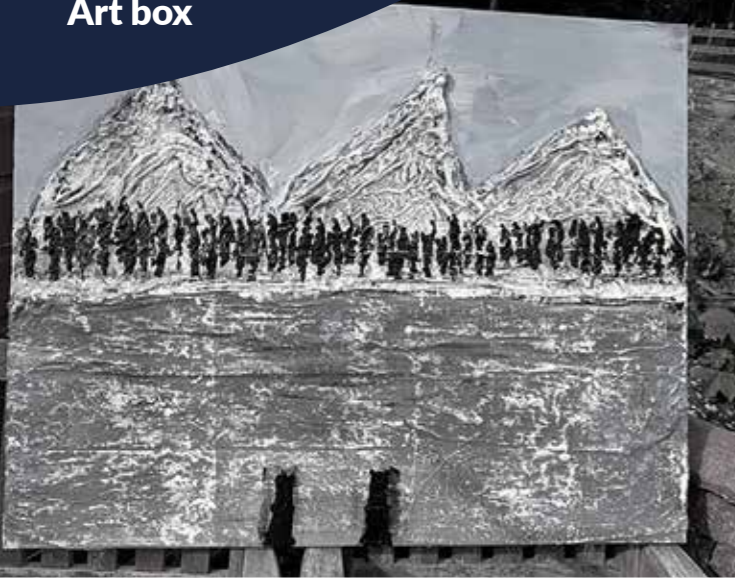
"Well, basically all of it was enjoyable. It actually got me thinking. One thing was leading to another and it also worked well with my photography as well. I was getting ideas from doing this for photographs and stuff like that as well."
Will, Member

"Well, of course, it was a bit like Christmas... The first thing that struck me was there was no paint. I thought, 'What I'm going to do with this?'"
Brian, Member

"Let's say I'm somebody that's always used just paint. So it's a big change for me and it feels OK."
Davie, Member



Caption: Davie - Starry Night



Caption: Davie - Lakes, trees and mountain

Lou Kirk-Partridge, Rehab Lead Art & Craft, said: "We especially didn't send paint in the Mystery Art Box as most of our Member artists are painters and we wanted them to have the challenge of trying out materials they were mostly unfamiliar with for this project"

Over the course of three months, and with regular support from the team, the group created pieces with the materials and journaled their experience. They also joined online discussions to show their work and reflect on their creative process.

The Members incorporated the materials, newly trialled techniques, and their own artistic experiences into their artwork to create final pieces which they then discussed during an end-of-project interview with Claire. The research is currently being evaluated



Caption: Davie - 122 Balloons

and this is one of the first projects to be taken forward by our new sister research charity, Bravo Victor.

Dr Claire Castle, Senior Scientist (Social & Welfare Research), said: "The Mystery Arts Box project has been an absolute pleasure to run. We'd originally hoped to run a project with the arts team that would involve face-to-face interactions with Members, but the pandemic meant we really needed to think outside the box - or rather, inside it! The point of the project was for Members to not worry too much about the end product, and it's been a joy to see them taking the opportunity to create pieces of work that they wouldn't usually think to make and trying out new materials and techniques. A huge well done and thank you to everyone who took part, and to the arts team for helping to bring the project to life." 🍷

Magnus Volk and his amazing electric railway

Volunteer **Lynette Denzey** has delved into our archives searching for once-famous people with a link to the charity. She kicks off her series with Brighton's most eccentric inventor

Magnus Volk was born in 1851 at the Volk family home in Western Road, Brighton. The son of a German clockmaker, he was a very eccentric inventor and pioneer of the early use of electricity. He brought the first

telephone service to Brighton in 1879 when he was just 29.

Volk had the idea of a seafront electric railway for Brighton and, on 4 August 1883, the first part of →



Caption: Volk (inset) and his railway at Brighton



Caption: Daddy Long Legs at low tide

the line was opened, running just 440 yards. The carriage was powered by a 50v DC supply taken from a gas engine located in the Royal Humane Society Arch under the Promenade. This makes Volk's railway the oldest operating electric railway in the world.

In 1884, the line was extended to Banjo Groyne, making it 1400 yards long. The electricity supply was changed to 160v from a more powerful gas engine and dynamo located in Paston Place Arch, the site of today's railway office and workshops. At the front of the office, Volk installed a balcony so he could keep an eye on his railway. This balcony still exists today.

In 1892, Volk wanted to extend the line east to Rottingdean, but the steep cliffs were in the way. Undeterred, he built

the line to run through the sea. The train carriage sat on stilts above the water, about 24 feet above the seabed. It became known as the Daddy Long Legs Line and actually ran for the first time on 28 November 1896.

The rails were under the seabed (the concrete supports can still be seen today at low tide) and around 50 to 100 yards offshore, running from where his existing railway finished right through to Rottingdean where it connected to a pier.

The train was quite luxurious with a single carriage, called the Pioneer, which was an open deck with an inside car and leather upholstered seats. The outside deck had slatted seating like an ocean liner. As it was travelling over the sea, the licence required that it be operated by a trained sea captain. It also had a lifeboat on the back and life belts, just like a ship.

The line did not last long. Unfortunately, just one week after opening, a storm caused extensive damage and it looked like the end for Daddy Long Legs. However, the remains were salvaged and carefully repaired, and the line was back up and running by July 1897.

In 1900, Volk was told the railway needed to be moved to allow for new sea defences. This would have meant

moving Daddy Long Legs into deeper water, which was not viable, so the line was closed and abandoned.

Volk and his wife, Anna, came to the charity's centre in Kemp Town, Brighton, in 1923, together with fellow members of the Brighton and Hove Radio Society. They presented us with a wireless radio set which the Society had themselves made. Anna is quoted in the October 1923 Review as saying: "It is very little we can do, but I hope this instrument will give you a great deal of pleasure, and will interest you for many days."

At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Brighton beach was fortified and the railway was closed. By 1947, the line was a virtual wreck through neglect and corrosion, so Brighton Corporation took it over and set about restoring it, laying heavier



Caption: Lynette's oil painting of Volk's Railway by David Grigor

track, putting in a new electricity supply and restoring the best carriages. It reopened to much fanfare in May 1948.

Today the Volk Line is one mile and 90 yards long. There are three permanent employees and during the summer season the staff numbers are increased by eight. In 2015, Heritage Lottery funding of £1.65m paid for restoration to the carriages and an upgrade of the facilities. It runs each summer season, usually between Easter and the first Sunday in November, to coincide with Veteran Car Run day, Wednesday to Sunday, 11am to 4pm.

Volk died in May 1937 and is buried in St Wulfran's Churchyard in Ovingdean.

As a footnote, I was fortunate enough to purchase a wonderful oil painting of Volk's Railway by David Grigor at the annual Blind Veterans art auction in 2018. It captures all the fun of this remarkable piece of Brighton's history. The artist grew up in Kemp Town and remembers going on Volk's Railway when young. He went on to attend art college in Brighton and now offers specialist art tuition for the partially sighted. Over the years, he has shared ideas with our Arts and Crafts team in Brighton.

If any of you have a special memory of Volk's Railway, please do let us know. 🇬🇧

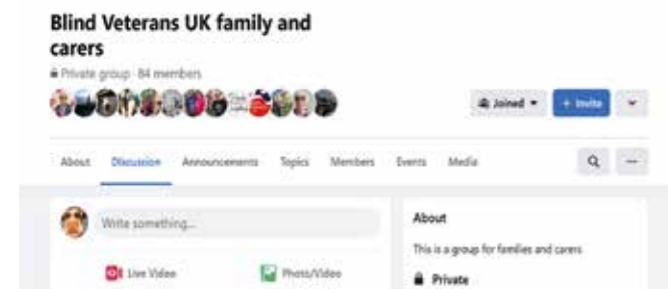
Carers Review

September 2021

The place to find out about the latest information and opportunities for the family, partners and carers of our Members, and a space to share experiences with each other

Working Age Members Carers Group

We know that getting together with our peers can be hugely beneficial, so we wanted to let you know about a monthly session we run remotely for the partners, carers and family of our Working Age Members (WAM).



Caption: Our family and carers Facebook page has all the latest information about the group and our monthly meetings

The group takes place on the second Wednesday of the month at 4pm, so the next one will be on Wednesday, 13 October.

The group is very friendly and supportive. During the sessions, the group members share how they are and how they're managing in these strange times. We also discuss resources that may be useful, or we just enjoy a good natter. The group manages to put a smile on my face every month, so I am sure it will do the same for you.

How to join the group

We've set up a Facebook page, which is called 'Blind Veterans UK Family and Carers', where we promote the group. This is a closed Facebook group, but you can request to join via a link. You will be asked about your connection to the group before being accepted.



Caption: The Working Age Members Carers Group on Teams

We also email out an invitation with the Teams app link to the WAM membership and would be happy to add you to the list. If you're unable to use the Teams app, you can phone in to the sessions or we can dial you in.

Get in touch

If you would like to hear more before coming along to an online session, or you would like help accessing Teams,

please do get in touch and I will be happy to help you. My details are: Glynis Gillam, WAM case manager at Glynis.Gillam@blindveterans.org.uk. Tel number: **07715 607483**

■ **What would you like to see on a Carers page? Contact Stacey Barham on 01273 391483 or at Stacey.Barham@blindveterans.org.uk for more information and to share your ideas.** 🗣️

Adapting gardening to suit your needs

If you're finding the garden increasingly difficult to manage, then read on...

Gardening is a great way to keep our minds and bodies active, but people often worry that it's too physically demanding or may require a steady hand and an eye for detail. This doesn't have to be the case. There are many ways to enjoy and maintain a beautiful garden with less effort and precision.

Difficulty keeping your garden tidy

Wildlife gardening is becoming increasingly popular and requires far less input than tending to neat and ordered beds. Mowing the lawn less, and strimming it just once or twice a year, helps plants such as clover to flower, which provide nectar and pollen for bees.

To keep the garden looking a little neater, you could reduce your mowing to monthly, or just mow around the edges. Letting leaves rot where they land will help the soil to regenerate and provide a home to beetles and insects,

which are declining. Leaving fruit on trees and bushes will feed the birds.

Difficulty using gardening tools

If you prefer a tidier approach to gardening, there are plenty of adapted tools available online to help with planting, hoeing, pruning and digging your flower beds. Some have adapted handles for people with reduced grip strength or painful joints, while others have been designed to be used with your feet to reduce the need for bending and crouching. It's worth having a look to see if any look useful.

Difficulty maintaining beds and borders

Planting mostly perennial shrubs, rather than lots of flowers or annuals, will reduce the need to bend and dig. Also, pots and containers can be raised onto outdoor shelving so they're easier to reach. And sitting at an outdoor table is a far more comfortable way to pot and plant things.

ADOBE STOCK / BUDIMIR JEVTIC



Caption: There are many ways to make gardening easier

While it's common to raise vegetable patches, there's no reason why you couldn't raise all of your beds and borders around the garden.

Difficulty sowing seeds

When sowing plants from seed, it can be easier to fill a tray with compost and scatter the seed all over, rather than sowing into individual plugs. Once the seedlings grow they may be easier to see, so you can prick them out.

An alternative method, which works well for annual flowers, is to use a tray of plugs filled with compost and scatter the seeds over the whole tray. You'll end up with a few seedlings per plug, but these can be re-potted together into a small clump and planted out together. Their roots will soon spread out once re-potted.

Some seeds can be bought as a 'seed tape', which means they are attached to a roll of paper that will rot down once the seed germinates. This is a great option if you prefer to sow directly outdoors, but they can also be used in a seed tray to start off your veggies indoors.

A great hobby for health and wellbeing

Gardening is a brilliant hobby with benefits to both physical and mental health, even if you just have a small container garden or a few naturalising bulbs scattered in a wild lawn. If you're still not sure how to take part in gardening, speak to a member of staff. There are many local gardening projects and charities, or our National Creative Project may have a garden activity you'll enjoy. 🌱

Stoptober: The 28-day stop smoking challenge

It's never too late to quit smoking - and it's one of the best things you will ever do for your health...

Stoptober is a major annual event to encourage smokers to quit for 28 days in October - with the aim of stopping smoking permanently. This is because research has shown that if you quit smoking for 28 days, you're five times more likely to quit for good.



Caption: It's thought to take 28 days to quit

Health improvements:

- After 20 minutes - check your pulse rate, it will already be starting to return to normal.
- After eight hours - your oxygen levels are recovering, and the harmful carbon monoxide level in your blood will have reduced by half.
- After 48 hours - all carbon monoxide is flushed out. Your lungs are clearing out mucus and your senses of taste and smell are improving.
- After 72 hours - if you notice that breathing feels easier, it's because your bronchial tubes have started to relax. Also, your energy will be increasing.
- After two to 12 weeks - blood will be pumping through to your heart and muscles much better because your circulation will have improved.
- After three to nine months - any coughs, wheezing or breathing problems will be improving as your lung function increases by up to 10%.

- After one year - your risk of heart attack will have halved, compared to that of a smoker's.
- After 10 years - your risk of death from lung cancer will have halved compared to that of a smoker's.

We all know that quitting smoking improves physical health. But it's also proven to boost your mental health and wellbeing too. In fact, it can improve your mood and help relieve stress, anxiety and depression.

Available help:

- If you want to stop smoking, contact your local stop smoking service, which provides the best

chance of stopping completely and forever.

- See an NHS stop smoking expert. It's free and will increase your chances of quitting for good. You can talk about which stop smoking aids will work best for you, and they can provide additional support such as advice on coping with cravings.

- Download the free NHS Smokefree app to help you quit smoking and start breathing easier.

The app allows you to:

- track your progress
- see how much you're saving
- get daily support 🍷

Quitting tips

Here are some tips to help you succeed. Once you've picked your quit date, remember to add it to your calendar.

- List your reasons to quit
- Tell people you're quitting
- If you have tried to quit before, remember what worked
- Use stop smoking aids
- Have a plan if you are tempted to smoke
- List your smoking triggers and how to avoid them

- Keep cravings at bay by keeping busy
- Exercise away the urge

Throw away all your cigarettes before you start. Remember, there is never "just one cigarette". You can do it - good luck!

For more information, please contact your local stop smoking service, or visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/>

Creative Book - last call for contributions!

We've received wonderful contributions for our pandemic Creative Book Project, which will come to a close at the end of October

Over the last year, we've collected stories, thoughts and feelings from Members, staff and volunteers about their experiences of Covid-19 for our Creative Book Project.

The project has provided an amazing archive for future generations in



Caption: What has kept me going through Lockdown? My Buddy by Stacey Barham

the form of a physical book and an online resource. Our three themes, 'Reflection', 'Hope' and 'New Normal', attracted a whole range of photos, poems, essays, artworks and audio, and Members told us they gained a great deal from the project and felt it was a great opportunity to be heard.

If you haven't already contributed, you still have time. We welcome contributions from everyone in the Blind Veterans community, and you don't need to be an expert in anything to get involved. A doodle, a photo taken on your phone, a verbal or written description of life during the pandemic, a poem or a photo of something you have made... You can contribute anything that may be of interest to someone in 100 years' time when they look back in history.

We've included two contributions on these pages to inspire you. The deadline for contributions is 31st October 2021.

Ode to Covid

It was 2020
 23rd of March to be precise
 When COVID waltzed past
 And caused a fright
 We've been in a lockdown
 We've shut up shops
 Schools out
 And that's not the lot
 We've learnt how to zoom
 To church school and work
 We've quizzed, dined and wined
 All online
 We've heard bird song
 Like we've not heard before
 We've seen nature
 Recapture its stronghold
 We've breathed fresher air
 The roads still and bare
 Combustion, congestion
 Replaced with calm

We've suffered high temperatures
 We've suffered with floods
 We've had high winds
 And now snow, ice and blasts
 And yet through it all
 Resolve still remains
 That stoic British trait
 As this battle we engage
 So keep up the efforts
 Each and everyone
 Think of other people
 Before you have your fun
 As we all maximise efforts
 To protect all from this virus
 Keep chins up smiles broad wide
 Try to focus on the bright side
 And times when we'll be together.

by J Fuller, December 2020 🇬🇧

Contributions can be emailed to:
creativebook@blindveterans.org.uk

Or you can post your contribution to
 Creative Book, Blind Veterans UK,
 Greenways, Ovingdean, Brighton,
 BN2 7BS

You can check out some of the
 Creative Book contributions we've
 received so far by scanning the QR
 code with your phone.



Training for life

In our April edition, Member **Ron Frost** told his amazing story about meeting King George VI as a Boy Scout. Here, he shares more about his scouting adventures

I was very pleased to receive a response to my article about meeting King George VI at Windsor Castle when I was in the scouts.

The response came from Blind Veterans Member, John Munro. John was certainly in a similar troop to mine and, like him, I grew up in poverty. I was born in 1934 and my parents worked very hard but were paid a pittance, so every penny was spent on rent, coal, milk etc. We grew most of our food and raised rabbits to eat, normally two per week.

We never had a holiday and I worked from seven years of age during school holidays. My uncle would pick me up at about 6.40am and give me a ride on his crossbar to a tree and shrub nursery. There, I would work on my own, alongside German prisoners who worked there as well. I was paid a few shillings for my work that Mother took from me when I got home.

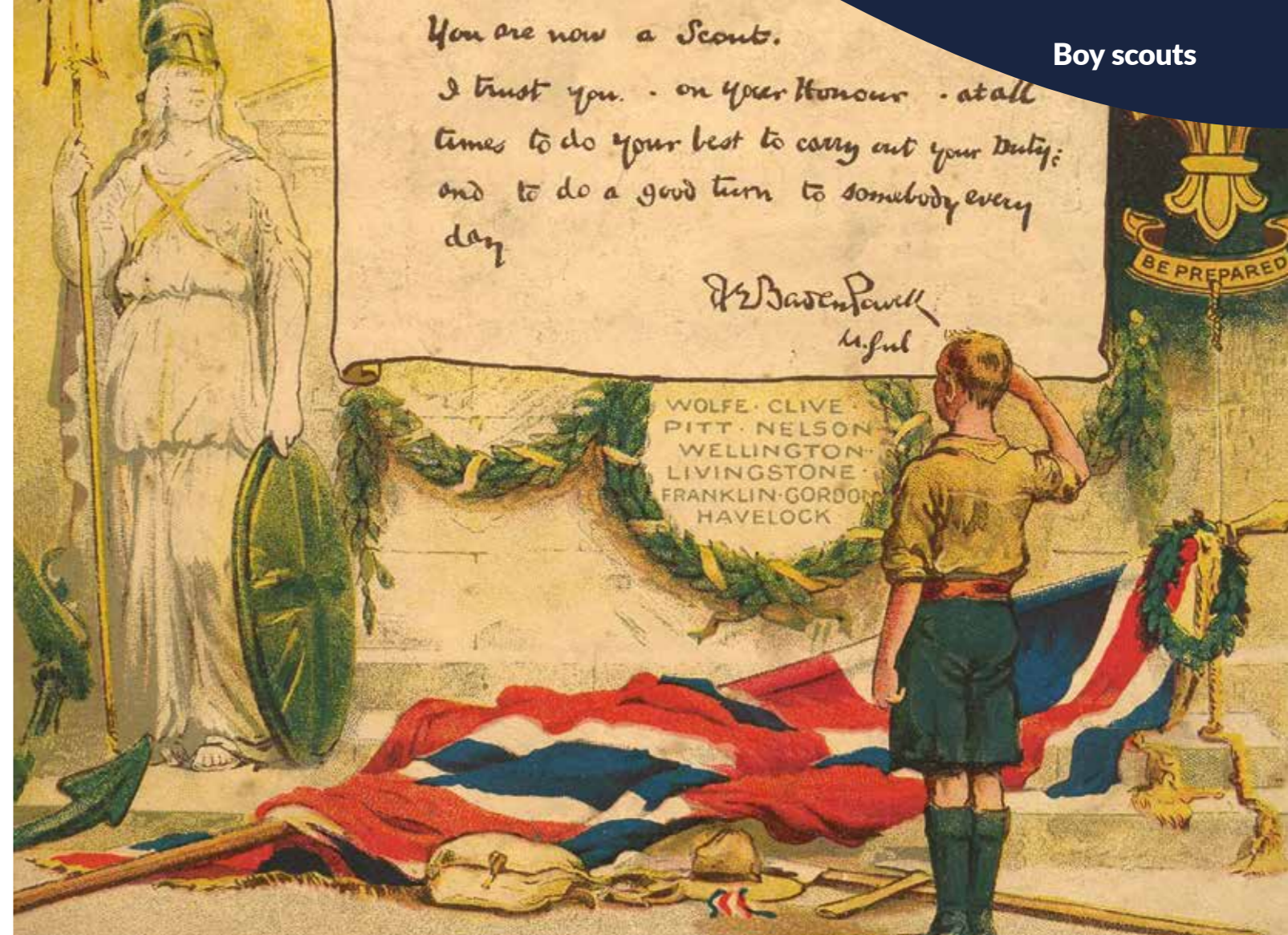
I joined the Boy Scouts at the age of

13, in Bagshot, Surrey. Like John, I had to pass the Tenderfoot Badge before being allowed to go to their Hayling Island camp. One scout's father owned two furniture vans, so with all our gear packed in these, the boys climbed on top of the gear and we were off.

We had four ex-army bell tents in which each patrol slept feet to the pole in blankets. Each patrol roped off an area, maybe four by four yards for our kitchen and dug the turf and stored food for our fire on which we did our cooking. For this, we had to collect wood and cut it to size with an axe.

After breakfast, it was inspection time. Each boy put on his uniform and was inspected by the Scoutmaster and questioned about their toilet. Then more work was done in work clothes,

“We had four ex-army bell tents in which each patrol slept feet to the pole in blankets”



Caption: Scouting certificate

such as kitchen gadgets made to keep cups and plates, “Clean, upside down and off the ground”, work on the tent, a line hung to air our blankets, wet pits and toilet dug. Then it was time to play games.

About three days later we would catch a bus to the coast. Two senior scouts would keep watch while the rest of us went into the sea. Some could already swim but I could not. I told myself that I must learn to swim as it was one of the test pieces that would be needed for

a First Class Badge, not that I was that standard. But I would be.

When I joined the Scouts, I was number eight in the patrol. For every badge you passed more than others above you, you would move up. In about a year I was a second and around a year after that, I was Patrol Leader.

At age 15 I became a Senior. I worked at the badges every spare minute and qualified for the King’s Scout Award... and you know the rest of my story. 🇬🇧

Family News

Birthdays

Alfred Patrick who celebrates his 100th birthday on 25 September

Anne Dickinson who celebrates her 101st birthday on 8 September

Eric Betteson who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 8 September

Frank Harrison who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 4 September

Harold Goodall who celebrates his 101st birthday on 10 September

Joan Awbery who celebrates her 101st birthday on 9 September

Joan Osborne-Walker who celebrates her 100th birthday on 26 September

Joyce Slattery who celebrates her 101st birthday on 21 September

Lawrence McCarthy who celebrates his 102nd birthday on 13 September

Nancy Bowstead who celebrates her 100th birthday on 18 September

Robert Crum who celebrates his 101st birthday on 14 September

Stella Savage who celebrates her 102nd birthday on 4 September

Margaret Spendlove who celebrates her 100th birthday on 15 September

Noreen Lincoln who celebrates her 101st birthday on 7 September

All information was correct at the time of going to press

Condolences

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

Cynthia Baker who died on 14 August 2021. She was the wife of Paul Baker

Thelma Rogers who died on 26 July 2021. She was the wife of John Rogers

Helen Crosby who died on 13 August 2021. She was the wife of Keith Crosby

Margaret Brook who died on 21 May 2021. She was the wife of Gerry Brook

Mae Clegg who died on 1 July 2021. She was the wife of Keith Clegg

Louise Henry who died on 1 July 2021. She was the wife of Arnold Henry

Sheila Collins who died on 11 August 2021. She was the wife of Neville Collins

Maureen Haslem who died on 1 August 2021. She was the wife of Fred Haslem

Pamela Elwell who died on 4 August 2021. She was the wife of Doug Elwell



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

Thomas Allen of Prescot, Merseyside died on 18 June 2021 aged 91. He served as a Private in the R.A.O.C / R.E.M.E.

Frank Graham Austin of Irvine, Ayrshire died on 1 July 2021 aged 87. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Signals.

Sam Batty of Swindon died on 1 July 2021 aged 85. He served as an R.S.M. in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

Samuel Beeston of Brighton, East Sussex died on 16 July 2021 aged 93. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Reginald William Bennett of Fleet, Hampshire died on 23 July 2021 aged 90. He served as a Stoker Mechanic in the Royal Navy.

Ronald Bingham of Kettering, Northamptonshire died on 1 August 2021 aged 88. He served as a Staff Sergeant in the Royal Anglian Regiment.

James Sayce Buchanan of Colwyn Bay, Clwyd died on 30 June 2021 aged 98. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

Anne Carter of Norwich died on 23 July 2021 aged 97. She served as a Junior Commander in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Vincent Chappell of Rossendale, Lancashire died on 28 July 2021 aged 88. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Donald David Cleeveley of Thatcham, Berkshire died on 3 August 2021 aged 85. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Joseph Codling of Washington, Tyne And Wear died on 23 July 2021 aged 96. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Neville Collins of Thetford, Norfolk died on 3 August 2021 aged 86. He served as a Private in the Army Catering Corps.

Raymond Cooper of Pulborough, West Sussex died on 1 July 2021 aged 89. He served as a Private in the Army Catering Corps.

George Cornthwaite of St. Helens, Merseyside died on 2 August 2021 aged 85. He served as a Lance Bombardier in the Royal Artillery.

Arthur John Coward of Warminster, Wiltshire died on 31 July 2021 aged 87. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Artillery.

David Brian Diver of Sheffield died on 18 July 2021 aged 91. He served as a Private in the Middlesex Regiment (Duke Of Cambridge's Own).

Ronald William Doran of Wigan, Lancashire died on 21 April 2021 aged 83. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Frank Eastwood of Oldham died on 31 July 2021 aged 95. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Joyce Edwards of Reading died on 14 July 2021 aged 98. She served as an L.A.C.W. in the Royal Air Force.

Peter Edward Fearn of Derby died on 29 July 2021 aged 77. He served as a Driver in the Royal Signals.

Brian Grainger of Llanberis, Gwynedd died on 20 July 2021 aged 84. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Colin Hawkins of Stowmarket, Suffolk died on 12 August 2021 aged 85. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Peter Hayden of Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire died on 26 July 2021 aged 94. He served as a Private in the Royal Armoured Corps.

Daisy Hennessy of Southport, Merseyside died on 13 June 2021 aged 97. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Hywel Llewellyn Herbert of Sevenoaks, Kent died on 17 June 2021 aged 97. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.

Ronald Cedric Hill of Exeter died on 2 August 2021 aged 101. He served as an A.C. 2 in the Royal Air Force.

Joseph Howarth of Manchester died on 26 July 2021 aged 93. He served in the Army.

Stanley Irwin of Morecambe, Lancashire died on 2 August 2021 aged 97. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Electrical And Mechanical Engineers.

David Lawrence Jenkins of Lincoln died on 9 August 2021 aged 93. He served as a Warrant Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Howard Rees Jones of Swansea died on 11 August 2021 aged 93. He served as a Naval Airman in the Royal Navy.

Geoffrey Jones of Cheadle, Cheshire died on 1 August 2021 aged 84. He served as a Trooper in the Life Guards Regiment.

Graham Thomas Keeling of Holywell, Clwyd died on 10 August 2021 aged 83. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

John Trevor Lancaster of Sheffield died on 1 August 2021 aged 87. He served as an L.S.B.A. in the Royal Navy.

Malcolm Lloyd of Harrogate, North Yorkshire died on 8 August 2021 aged 90. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Irene Cale Longstaff of Sheffield died on 9 August 2021 aged 86. She served as a Lance Corporal in the Women's Royal Army Corps.

Rita June Lovett of Poole, Dorset died on 30 July 2021 aged 97. She served as an L.A.C.W. in the Royal Air Force.

John Stuart Loxley of Milton Keynes died on 14 July 2021 aged 90. He served as a Chief Technician in the Royal Air Force.

Ronald Kenneth Peter Marchant of West Malling, Kent died on 30 July 2021 aged 85. He served as a Bombardier in the Royal Artillery.

Geoffrey Allan Norton of Nottingham died on 28 June 2021 aged 90. He served as a Private in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.

Gerard Orme of Wigan, Lancashire died on 3 August 2021 aged 89. He served as a Junior Technician in the Royal Air Force.

William Peckett of Sheffield died on 16 July 2021 aged 93. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Maurice Sidney Redgers of Newton Abbot, Devon died on 5 August 2021 aged 98. He served as a Temporary Acting Petty Officer in the Fleet Air Arm.

Anna Maria Roper of Rhyl, Denbighshire died on 22 July 2021 aged 96. She served as an L.A.C.W. in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

Andrew Charles Graham Scott of Plymouth, Devon died on 1 August 2021 aged 93. He served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy.

Dennis Roy Simmons of Lewes, East Sussex died on 3 August 2021 aged 93. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Armoured Corps (12th Lancers).

Douglas Peter Simonite of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire died on 3 August 2021 aged 94. He served as a Temporary Corporal in the Royal Marines.

Thomas Arthur Smart of Cradley Heath, West Midlands died on 23 June 2021 aged 85. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Michael Smith of Baldock, Hertfordshire died on 15 July 2021 aged 91. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Kathleen Snelling of Congleton, Cheshire died on 9 July 2021 aged 97. She served in the Women's Royal Air Force.

Harry Studholme of Colne, Lancashire died on 22 June 2021 aged 90. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals.

Aron Thompson of Lincoln died on 1 August 2021 aged 92. He served as a Seaman in the Royal Navy.

Andrew Thorburn of Fareham, Hampshire died on 4 August 2021 aged 87. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

Tony Tilling of Louth, Lincolnshire died on 1 August 2021 aged 90. He served as a Private in the Royal Army.

Evelyn Mary Turton of Witney, Oxfordshire died on 7 August 2021 aged 98. She served as a Warrant Officer 2nd Class in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Clifford Arthur Wallis of Worcester died on 7 August 2021 aged 96. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Suffolk Regiment.

Eric Albert Edwin Waters of Romford died on 22 July 2021 aged 93. He served as an L.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

John Squire Watkin of Sheffield died on 14 July 2021 aged 95. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Eileen Victoria Martha Webster of Cambridge died on 1 August 2021 aged 99. She served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Kenneth Albert Wilkes of Birmingham died on 28 July 2021 aged 89. He served as an S.A.C. in the Royal Air Force.

Clifford Williams of Pembroke Dock, Dyfed died on 2 August 2021 aged 92. He served as a Private in the South Wales Borderers.

Graham William Wood of Burgess Hill, West Sussex died on 28 July 2021 aged 89. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Artillery.

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Caption: Women salvaging possessions from their bombed house

A lucky find

We continue our story of Member **Bill Skinner's** memories from wartime Hull

On that first Christmas morning in our new house, Brian and I had been looking forward to opening our presents. Marie was still too young to realise the event. Well, it was a pretty miserable day for us two; we hadn't got anything like we had hoped for. We both had a present obviously made by Herbert Matthews. I had a tank made from the end of a railway sleeper (I had

seen him make them) and Brian had a battleship made from a piece of timber from a fence.

We also got a cardboard map of Germany and three darts that you threw at places like Berlin, Dortmund, etc. That game lasted for about ten minutes. The darts were confiscated - they wouldn't stick in the board →

they kept falling out and sticking in the couch. It didn't take Brian and me long to eat our apple and orange, and that was it.

I suppose our mam did better than us, she got a radio. Our old one had been lost in our house in Brighton Terrace. Still we were able to listen to the music and the radio shows at lunch time, like 'Workers' Playtime'. It wasn't long before the German Luftwaffe started their bombing raids on us again and several houses down at the end of Kathleen Road where we had previously lived had been bombed. I don't know if anyone was hurt, our mam wouldn't tell us, and she used to say, "Don't believe what the other children say, they are just scaremongering."

I had now reached my 8th birthday. "How long will it be before I can go and help my dad in the army, I asked my mam?" "You're going nowhere," she said. "You're staying here and helping me with Brian and Marie." I wasn't too pleased, but you did what our mam said. Brian was five that February and at the Easter he started Stoneferry School. I was hoping to offload some of my duties to him, but Mam was having none of it. "You are getting too big for your boots," she said.

After one raid, we were poking about

in a bomb crater when Brian yelled out, "Billy, what is this?" I had never seen one in the flesh before, but I said, "It's a frog." I think Brian thought it was a German one. Don and I caught it and put it in a jam jar. A couple of days later our milkman saw it. "That's a fine frog", he said. "I'll give you sixpence for it," he said. I was delighted, until Brian insisted on having threepence, or he would tell our mam. Well, I suppose that was fair, he did find it after all.

Our milkman had a pony and trap to deliver the milk. He used to carry six milk churns in it. The milk was ladled out and into your jug or basin. A day or two later after the sale of the frog, he asked our mam if she would like to buy a couple of eggs from him. Our mam bought the eggs and for our tea that day we had eggs for the first time for what seemed ages.

That summer our granny Elsie got a job at Benningas. They produced lard and margarine. She used to be able to smuggle a small amount out (only borrowed, of course). During those summer early evenings, our grandad Jack could be seen taking his pomeranian bitch, Billie, for a walk. He looked immaculate in his pin-stripe trousers and black coat with a carnation in his buttonhole, his cane and gloves. People used to say he looked like someone from the War Office. 🇬🇧

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Contact address Blind Veterans UK,
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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**.

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Review Editor: You can telephone the editor on **020 7616 8367** or email her at revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk.

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