

Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK

April 2020



A day with Dimbleby

Our new Brighton library opens

Inside:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – what you need to know
Going down to the woods at Llandudno
The handbells of HMS Renown



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

Behind closed doors

Triumph in the face of adversity is a wonderful sentiment, and one which I suspect we are taking to our collective hearts and minds at this present time. For these are curious times indeed – I can never recall a response on the scale of the current one for coronavirus where self-isolation has been so rigorously imposed, and all non-essential social contact has virtually vanished overnight.

What we're experiencing now isn't without precedent. Some of you may recall the 1968 worldwide flu pandemic, and the 1972 so-called 'London flu', which gripped the country for a relatively short period. In this respect, it's worth remembering that we got through it then – without half as much technological assistance – and we will achieve the same result this time round.

However reassuring this may (or may not) be, I have no doubt that there are those of you who are searching for information about how to best protect yourself and those you love, as well as what to do if you think you may have contracted coronavirus. To this extent, this edition features a special section in which we'll be giving you

some advice, so make sure to have a read through and – as always – if you have any additional queries, you can also contact our helpline on **01273 391 447**.

On a lighter note, this has all been a positive boon to my elderly cat Nash. I always have a slightly guilty conscience as he tends to be somewhat alone during my working week, and positively craves the attention when I'm there. Most of our staff, including me, are now following sage advice and are working from home which, as you can imagine, has made the somewhat vocal at the best of times Nash absolutely ecstatic. I'm being clawed, pawed and adored from every angle, although I foresee the honeymoon rapidly wearing off when he realises I am unable to dispense cat treats on demand 24 hours a day.

Until next month stay safe, and my very best wishes to you all. 🍀

Chris Gilson
Editor



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On the cover David Dimbleby tests new technology in Llandudno



Strange times and staying safe

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

Events, dear boy, events. Macmillan may or may not have said these words when asked what is most likely to blow governments off course, but I am aware that there are plenty of current 'events' that are challenges for our charity and that we need to negotiate adroitly. As we manoeuvre through this uncertainty, I have been struck by the quality, resilience, initiative



Caption: Nick Caplin

and determination of our Members, volunteers and staff.

Our most pressing current concern has been navigating Coronavirus in a way that best safeguards Members and staff while allowing us to continue business to the best of our ability. Sadly, but sensibly, we have taken the decision to cease routine stays at the Brighton and Llandudno centres for holidays, training or care, initially for a four-week period but in line with current events, now indefinitely, given that our membership sits squarely in the population most at risk.

In addition we have suspended all other group activities, including our Reunion Lunches. I am conscious that this will be a significant disappointment to many of you, and am grateful for your forbearance and understanding. As a silver lining to this pestilent cloud, we are taking the opportunity to re-



Caption: Llandudno Centre

focus a large number of our staff into the community where appropriate to provide additional support.

In all this we are ensuring that our response is consistent with Public Health England advice and we are testing our response against that of similar organisations. Quite how long this particular crisis will endure is anyone's guess but we are determined to be nimble and agile in finding ways to maintain our service. Your local team will be able to provide the latest information as required.

Finally, I would urge you to read the letter from our Operations Department on page 10, giving you key advice for this enforced period of self-isolation.

We must all stay safe and look out for each other, and above all keep in contact and not fall into the trap of becoming mentally, as well as physically, isolated from the outside world.

Remember, we are always here for you at the end of the telephone and are more than willing to address any concerns or fears that you may have. We are all one family and like all families in a time of crisis we must stick together and support each other.

Finally, mine and my wife Isobel's thoughts are with you all at this most trying of times, and I wish you all well and look forward to seeing you out and about when this crisis passes. 🍷



PHOTO BY MUSEUMS VICTORIA ON UNSPLASH

Caption: Staying in touch during uncertain times is important

Putting pen to paper

Your message from our Chairman, Air Vice-Marshal **Paul Luker** CB OBE AFC DL

At the start of March, one of our daughters took my wife Sue and me to see a show at the Union Chapel in Islington called 'Letters

Live'. We had no real idea what to expect but, in the event, it proved to be a hugely enjoyable experience. We were treated to a miscellany

of correspondence on a disparate range of unconnected subjects, written across several centuries, and read aloud by a stellar and equally diverse cast. Most of the letters were humorous to the point of laugh-out-loud; some were moving to the point of tears. As is often the case now, in the aftermath it set me thinking about the art of writing letters and how things have changed in my lifetime.

Letter-writing – or perhaps I should say correspondence – has played a pretty important part in my life. As a schoolboy, soon after I took the eleven plus, my father was posted overseas. The family, less me, went with him; I was packed off to boarding school as they judged my education would be better pursued in UK. Thus started my relationship with letters. In the '60s we were allowed one annual visit home and so, for the remaining 10 or 11 months each year I relied on a regular stream of letters to keep in touch. It was a bitter-sweet thing. On the one hand, I can still recall the eager anticipation as letters were handed out at breakfast each day with my delight or disappointment hanging on whether one was for me. On the other hand, I can also recall the inconvenience of having to write back and the struggle to find something worthwhile to include in my invariably brief responses.

“Letter-writing – or perhaps I should say correspondence – has played a pretty important part in my life”

A whirlwind romance

Sue and I had a bit of a whirlwind romance when we met in 1972, made all the more difficult by being separated by some 6,000 miles: I was serving in Hong Kong whereas she was back in London. We had met when she came out to visit her parents in the April for three weeks but had then gone back to her job in UK. So, until we married that September, I courted her by airmail. I'm not joking, I absolutely did.

Virtually every day we wrote to each other, often replying to letters that had been written five or six days previously and sometimes in response to a cluster of four or five letters which arrived together. To say that this could be confusing is an understatement: we were constantly writing in the present and reading in the significant past. On the plus side I was always aware that if she had ever dumped me, she might have had up to a week to change her mind before her letter reached me.

Now, I am a bit of a hoarder. I tend to keep this sort of stuff. That's not →

“This gift of communication is precious. Long before I came into Blind Veterans UK, my predecessors knew that well”

to say that I’m always digging it out to read it. But it does surface every time we have a major spring clean, or reorganisation of the study, or a house move or some such upheaval. And I am always under pressure to throw stuff away – but this is the sort of thing that always avoids the purge. When that happens, I can’t resist opening them up and idling a few hours away, leafing through my past. It reminds me why I loved her then and why I still do. I’m pretty sure that Sue still has my letters from those early days and I’m pretty sure she still occasionally has a glance through them as well.

My mother was a prolific letter-writer. She wrote endlessly about the apparently inconsequential things in her life, which for me and my siblings ensured that we were never much removed from home – and also knew every detail of the neighbours’ shenanigans. She was also a great story-teller, especially about her childhood in Tyneside. A few years

ago, before she died, we persuaded her to write down as much as she could remember. I now have her hand-written notebook, so reminiscent of her letters, and I still hear her voice and see her whenever I read it.

Something special

There is something special about writing an old-fashioned letter. I still dread sitting down to set out the first few words but have come to love the finished article. It takes far more premeditation than social media. It was drilled into us that proper letters should be sent in perfect order, without crossing out or amendment, correctly spelt and well laid out. Perhaps without knowing it, many of our efforts had a permanence that we might never have imagined – especially if, like me, the recipient was a hoarder. So the composition needed thought and attention to detail. Unlike a conversation it could be gone over time and again by the reader to reassure or to look for explanation, hidden meaning, nuance, inference.

Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook might suggest those days have gone. True, too much can be consigned to a thoughtless few minutes on a keypad. But proper letters still sneak through, hidden amongst the final demands, the exhortation to fit a smart meter, the stairlift advert or the

notification that our road is about to be dug up. And when they do, they are a delight. A thank you note for a present, a catch-up from an old friend, a condolence, a congratulation – all are able to lift my spirits.

Sometimes the absence of letters has an equal or greater impact. In the first Gulf War, my unit deployed quite late in the day. As a result, for the whole conflict we received no mail at all (it transpired that a postie in London had – wrongly – been instructed to hold it, pending our return, for ‘operational security’ reasons). Our letters got through to home; their letters never reached us, until a week after we



Caption: Paul Luker

got back. I can absolutely testify to how important mail is to morale. One mixed blessing was that we did get ‘any soldier’ letters from home – by the truckload. I wouldn’t let my chaps open them unless they promised to answer each and every one – which they did. A letter received deserves a response. What I hadn’t expected was that many resulted in lasting friendships and even an invitation to a Kent pub.

This gift of communication is precious. Long before I came into Blind Veterans UK, my predecessors knew that well. They were the ones who recognised the importance of providing our members with whatever it took to retain the ability to communicate after sight loss: lessons in Braille; magnifiers; scanners; adapted computers; synaptic apps on tablets; audio readers. And our newly revitalised research work will doubtless take us further. I am simply so proud of belonging to an organisation with such a history of thinking like this.

At the moment, because of the current strange times we are living through, I will be facing self-isolation – a 14 day stretch in the chokey. Assuming the toilet paper lasts out, I think I might use the time profitably. I might write a letter or two. 🇬🇧

An important announcement from our Operations Department – please read carefully

Dear Member,

We want to reassure you that during these challenging times Blind Veterans UK remains committed to supporting you. Following Government advice about coronavirus (COVID-19) we are making some temporary changes to the way we deliver our services and how we support our members and beneficiaries.

As a temporary measure we have suspended centre stays, group activities and routine home visits by staff and volunteers. In replacement, we will be providing a telephone-based service on **01273 391 447** and calling our Members regularly to establish how we can support you; in doing so we will continue to work collaboratively with other voluntary organisations and statutory services and where possible providing practical support. In achieving this, the whole organisation is pulling together so you might receive a call from a member of staff who isn't your regular case worker. Please note that these are temporary measures.

Unfortunately we have had to postpone our Reunions for this year until 2021. If you have already received an invitation to your local Reunion Lunch and have sent back your pro forma we will write to you shortly providing you the option to be refunded your £10.00 contribution. We would ask that you do not travel to the Reunion venues as our Blind Veterans UK Teams will not be there. If you have any questions relating to reunions please contact our Reunions Team on **020 7616 8372**.

Please be reassured that your wellbeing during these times remains of paramount importance to Blind Veterans UK. If you are in need of urgent or immediate support then please contact your Regional Office.

Best wishes.

Your Operations Team



Staying safe

To help you, our Operations team has put together a useful guide on how to stay safe and active while in self-isolation. Please take time to read this and follow its advice

The government has now advised that if you have an underlying health condition(s) or if you are aged 70 or older, you should be social distancing for up to 12 weeks. To some people this can seem quite daunting. Not being able to go about your daily routine or undertake the activities

you normally do, after a while, could become quite stressful.

We know that during this period it's really important that you look after your mental and emotional wellbeing as well as your physical health. →

01 Establish a daily routine. Routines provide structure and purpose.

02 Balance your weekly routine so you have a good mix of work (activities that have to be done), rest and leisure.

03 Think about which regular activities that are most important to you. What are the important elements to these? Can you adapt them to carry out in the home? For example, instead of a class, following an online strength and balance routine.

04 Set daily goals to provide purpose and a sense of achievement. This might include working through that list of the things you keep meaning to do but never get round to?

PHOTO BY KRISTEN KAETHLER ON UNSPLASH



Caption: Eat plenty of fruit and veg

05 Identify the triggers that make you feel low and look for ways to reduce or manage them.

06 Talk with family, friends and neighbours to help them understand how you feel and how they can help. Can they talk you through using apps on your mobile phone, for instance?

07 Take care of yourself. Eat and drink healthily with plenty of fruit, vegetables and water to support your immune function and energy levels. For more information see the BDA website: www.bda.uk.com

08 Avoid staying still for too long. Exercise and regular movement will maintain fitness and strength. If you are working from home, take breaks and eat away from your “desk.”

09 Have a good sleep routine. If you are struggling, try avoiding tea and coffee in the late afternoon and evening, take a bath, using blackout curtains, listening to gentle music or deep breathing exercises.

10 Keep in touch. Arrange to speak to someone most days on the phone, through social media or over the garden fence. Age UK and Silverline have people to speak to.

Chipping away

Our chaplain **Clare Callanan** helps us understand how chipping away at old negative feelings can help reveal the new you



PHOTO JLC / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Caption: David by Michelangelo

I fell in love at 14. Deeply. Irrevocably, and, I now understand, spiritually. Although there was a boyfriend lurking in the background at the same time who is now long gone, this love still lasts. This love was with the work of the artist Michelangelo.

The statue of David was one of his first

pieces that caught me. Michelangelo was not the first man commissioned to do this work. Two men came before him. The first, Agostino di Duccio, inexplicably abandoned the work after shaping some of the legs, feet and torso, and the second artist, Antonio Rossellino, had his contract cancelled. Michelangelo came to the work nearly 25 years later, a young man barely 26 years old.

For more than two years, he never left the side of his David. He worked and slept near the marble, allowing the subject within to call to him. When the 17-foot statue finally emerged, Michelangelo is reputed to have said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free”. Asked how he made it, Michelangelo apparently said, “It is easy. You just chip away all of the stone that doesn’t look like David”.

My son trained as a stonemason and I loved sharing part of that training with him as he explained and demonstrated things to me. I knew well enough →

that it was not easy to ‘just’...chip away all the stone.’

Overcome with awe

I saw this unbelievable work of stone a few years ago. I didn’t anticipate the reaction I’d have when I first entered the room of the David. I was overcome with awe and stood silent and tearful-filled with such a breath-taking feeling that something so beautiful could be created.

Maybe it’s easy to be breathless with awe in the presence of a 17-foot masterpiece. It happened all over again when I saw the Pieta (the sculpture of Mary holding the dead Christ in her arms) in St Peter’s in Rome, which Michelangelo completed when he was



Caption: Clare Callanan

“Asked how he made it, Michelangelo apparently said, “It is easy. You just chip away all of the stone that doesn’t look like David”

only 23. The amazing thing is that, in these moments of intensity, I set aside everything that is negative and self-destructive, and breathe in gratitude and joy, it’s as if I’ve chipped away everything that is not the real me. Then the angel beneath the stone is set free.

So I wonder – what are you holding on to right now? Is there a weight on you – perhaps some old grief, some sadness, a feeling of lack, bitterness, fear; maybe it’s a physical or mental condition of stress. These are the heavy layers of stone, I believe, that we build up around our heart that feel an awful lot like we’re separated—from ourselves, from each other, and from God, as we understand God.

I wonder if our truth lives in the full and deep exhale of release and forgiveness, where we chip away all of the hard, unnecessary stone encasing the beautifully connected and expansive space within us. And maybe it’s never too late to learn a new skill with a chisel and bolster? 🍷



Caption: Spaghetti - A quick and easy summer lunch

Spaghetti with Asparagus and Mustard

Your latest recipe from our resident chef and Member, **Penny Melville-Brown**

This is a quick and easy summer lunch or supper dish full of bright, fresh flavours. See my neighbour Roger cooking this meal at bit.ly/3dnVdmT.

Method

■ Heat a large pan of salted water until it boils.

- Meanwhile, make the dressing by whisking the oil, vinegar and mustard until creamy then season and set aside.
- When the water is boiling, add the spaghetti and cook for 10-12 minutes until tender.
- Heat the oil in a large frying pan

PHOTO BY FOTO66 / ADOBE STOCK



Caption: Asparagus - The main ingredient

and start cooking the bacon.

- After three minutes, add the mushrooms to the bacon.
- After a further three minutes, add the asparagus pieces.
- After a further four minutes, add the tomato pieces and continue to cook for a further two minutes.
- Drain the pasta and add to the frying pan and mix with the other ingredients.
- Pour over the dressing and stir through, adding black pepper and possibly some salt to taste.
- Serve in four warmed bowls topped with the parmesan shavings alongside a simple salad. 🍷

Ingredients	
6 tablespoons	olive oil
1.5 tablespoon	white wine vinegar
2 teaspoons	Dijon mustard
9 ounces/250g	spaghetti, broken in to lengths of 7.5cm
10 ounces/300g	unsmoked lean back bacon, rind removed and cut in to 1 cm strips
9 ounces/250g	mushrooms, cleaned and sliced
9 ounces/250g	asparagus, cut into 2.5cm/1 inch pieces
9 ounces/250g	cherry tomatoes, halved
2 ounces/50g	parmesan shavings

My tips:

Roger recommended a teaspoon of oil in the water when cooking the spaghetti. A potato peeler will produce shavings from a block of Parmesan cheese. Getting all the ingredients weighed out and prepared before starting makes this dish very easy.

Dimbleby returns to open our new Brighton library

Broadcaster **David Dimbleby**'s family has been associated with our charity for many years. We look at his recent opening of our library, and his connection to us



Caption: David inside the new library

It was a special day on 4 March at our Brighton Centre, when our new interactive library was opened by journalist and television presenter David Dimbleby, whose family has been connected to our charity for many years. The new resource will now exist to offer literature and other media options for both residents of the Centre and their visitors.

The books, films and music the library offers will be available in a number of accessible formats to make sure that all blind veterans, even those with no sight at all, are able to make the most of what is on offer.

Speaking at the opening, David Dimbleby said: "I spoke at the





Caption: David Dimbleby joins staff, volunteers and blind veterans to open the new library

centenary celebration for Blind Veterans UK in 2015, and found out that the charity doesn't only support those who lost their sight in Service but at any point in their life.

"They helped my friend after he lost his sight many years after his Service and I saw the difference the equipment and training made to him. The tools to allow him to read again were particularly helpful.

"That is why I'm so pleased to be here today and opening this very special library."

Easier to navigate

The project of creating this new library has been led by two volunteers – Claire Brewer and Jo Cornish – who, as well as working to increase what was available and the accessibility of the formats, also worked to reorganise the library to make it easier for those with a vision impairment to navigate.

Jo says: "We have tried to make it as easy as possible for everyone to use this new library. For those with some usable vision, the various sections are separated by big block colours – red for crime, blue for non-fiction



Caption: David being shown some of the new equipment

for example. These sections are then separated with tactile dividers that allow those to feel their way around."

Claire added: "Obviously our audio books are very popular for people to borrow, particularly the military histories and crime fiction but we also have people who borrow DVDs. There is even a record player with over 200 78rpm records to enjoy that were donated by a very kind resident.

"We want to make it a space for people to do lots of things and be sociable. This is not a quiet library!"

"Obviously our audio books are very popular for people to borrow, particularly the military histories and crime fiction but we also have people who borrow DVDs"

One resident of the Blind Veterans UK centre in Brighton who is a regular library user is 97-year-old veteran Jim Hooper.

Jim says: "When you lose your sight there are lots of things that are hard but I found not being able to read particularly devastating. That's why this new library is such a godsend to blind veterans like me."

Talking to Len

The inspiration for the new library stemmed from Claire Brewer's initial involvement volunteering with Blind Veterans UK. Claire started volunteering as a home visitor and began regularly visiting a local veteran called Len.

She says: "One of the things that he talked to me about was how he'd signed up to receive talking books from the county library but was getting sent lots that he had no →

interest in reading. It was a lot of romances and he really enjoyed his military history.

“It made me want to help Len, which I did, but also made me realise the difference that being able to have access to simple things like the books you want to read makes. He was really down when I first started visiting and

I saw the change in him. A good book that you’re really engaged in can make a small world a bit bigger.”

■ **The new library is supported by volunteers, and the audiobooks have all been donated. Those who wish to make an audiobook donation can contact the Brighton Centre on 01273 307 811.** 🇬🇧



Caption: The Estates team - ready for action

A family connection

David Dimpleby’s father Richard was also an eminent broadcaster. Richard met a number of our blind veterans, and we have in our archives photographs of him with several of them at a race walking event we held in London.

In addition, in 1956 Richard visited the home of our then Chairman, blind veteran Ian Fraser (then Sir Ian and later Lord Fraser of Lonsdale). This was for a popular BBC TV programme, ‘At Home’ which featured famous people of the time being interviewed in their own homes.

Together with producer Humphrey Fisher and a small crew, Richard paid two visits, a preparatory meeting in July and then the filming

itself, which was broadcast live in the autumn of that year.

Photographs show Ian and Richard chatting together in a relaxed manner and what by modern standards are some remarkably large BBC cameras



A wild wood no longer

Since June 2015, our Llandudno Centre has had a Centenary Woodland Garden for Members to enjoy and relax in.

Joanna Tann explains how it all came about.

Our Centre in Llandudno is located within large open grounds bordered by old overgrown woodland and it was quickly recognised that this sheltered area could be reclaimed as a relaxing

and therapeutic environment for our veterans to enjoy.

The vision to transform the area involved opening up a two-



acre woodland walk with roped, guiding handrails that Members could safely access to enjoy the outdoor environment. The woodland environment supports abundant wildlife and birdlife and lends itself to areas where veterans can walk, sit and relax or engage in wood work, willow craft, bush craft and other outdoor activity as part of their training and rehabilitation programmes.

In 2012 we embarked on a programme of volunteer involvement to clear dense bramble thickets, reduce the overhanging canopy and develop large areas of colourful and fragrant plants.

A little daunted by the size of this project, our first source of support and encouragement came from Business Supporting Communities in Conwy. We drew up a case study surrounding our vision and the encouragement it would give our veterans to get out of doors, raising their confidence and promoting their independence. Very quickly, local and national businesses took up the opportunity to battle our brambles, and so began a series of offers from a range of employers to become involved as part of their employee volunteering schemes and community supporting initiatives.



Caption: Arts and crafts activities for children are very popular

With each volunteering offer we were blown away by the fact that volunteers were thoroughly enjoying grafting alongside their colleagues in a new environment, doing something different from their normal day-to-day tasks, and were thanking us profusely at the end of their day. Indeed, we sometimes had to persuade them to take a break for lunch...

We are indebted to the volunteers from HSBC, Nationwide, Lloyds Bank, Augusta Westland, Thea Pharmaceuticals and SP Energy Networks. As a result of building relationships locally and maximising



Caption: Woodland craft lessons

“We drew up a case study surrounding our vision and the encouragement it would give our veterans to get out of doors”

networking opportunities within the voluntary sector; further offers to volunteer came in from St David's College, Coleg Cambria and CAIS.

Large groups or individuals

With our volunteer involvement, whether large groups or individuals, we are always keen to ensure that volunteers understand the services provided by our charity, how we deliver those services and how their help will enhance this.

Photographic displays provide our helpers with updates on the project's progress. On those days, safety briefings and risk assessment are essential as is providing sufficient food and drink if you want serious hard graft out of doors. Raising our profile amongst these many different groups is also key for the charity – who knows how many of these volunteers have an uncle, a parent, a grandparent who did National Service and are now suffering sight loss and are unaware of the existence of Blind Veterans UK? →

Back in our fledgling woodland garden, we had vast cleared areas that needed preparation for planting...with farmyard manure.

How do you get a large number of staff and volunteers in, not only on a Saturday, but on St Valentine's Day, to barrow and spread 72,000 litres of manure? Easy... you appeal to them and their loved ones to spread their Valentine's love (and our aromatic manure) in our woodland while we lay on sausage and bacon baps and tomato soup, plus arts and crafts activities for accompanying children not big enough to wield a shovel. Not



Caption: Before work started...

everyone felt this was the romance they were looking for, but we had a fantastic turnout and the job was done in record time.

A huge and daunting task

There followed a delivery of over 3,000 plants which all needed to go in the ground – another huge and daunting task. A few sleepless nights later, the answer was obvious, we just needed to ask. All those corporates who'd helped us in the early days clear brambles and undergrowth were invited back to be creative and do the fun stuff – the planting and mulching.



...and after

“The culmination of this project was the opening of our Centenary Woodland Garden in Volunteers' Week in June 2015”

They jumped at it and Big Planting Week blossomed, with a schedule of volunteers from schools, colleges and local and national employers. Our volunteers were joined by Change Step and Recovery Coaching, plus our own staff and helpers. Each group was able to take ownership of an area of woodland, and within five days the bulk of the plants were in the ground. Once again, hospitality was provided in the form of hot drinks, filled baps and soup and cakes. Volunteers do enjoy being fed well.

We were reminded of the power of volunteering; the enormous capacity of a group of people to pull together to achieve a goal; the camaraderie that develops within teams and between people who've never met before. The time, effort and tremendous enthusiasm of volunteers to get stuck in and help us achieve our wonderful woodland garden was a privilege to receive.

The culmination of this project was the

opening of our Centenary Woodland Garden in Volunteers' Week in June 2015 as part of our celebrations marking 100 years of the charity's foundation. We chose Volunteers' Week as we were so keen to celebrate the spirit of volunteering in all its forms and to recognise and thank all those without who we simply would not have a blooming lovely woodland garden.

For the past five years the woodland garden has continued to blossom, develop and grow with the amazing efforts of a small and very dedicated band of volunteers. It has become a part of Wales in Bloom and latterly Britain in Bloom, helping Llandudno town to win RHS Gold awards.

Every year since its opening, the garden has won the RHS 'It's Your Neighbourhood Award' with the highest category of 'Outstanding'. Corporate volunteers continue to support the project, and the woodland is being used by our local primary school for 'forest' education.

We have added chain saw art work, willow sculptures, an outdoor wood work cabin and canopy, bee hives, bug hotels, stumperies, a block paved memorial footpath and a rare Welsh fruit trees memorial orchard. More developments are planned this year, so watch this green space! 🌳

Firmly on-piste - part two

Our concluding part of Member **Jan Price**'s account of the Blind Veterans UK ski trip earlier this year

I woke that Wednesday morning feeling awful with a stomach bug and, although we went to the slopes, I was soon back in the hotel fast asleep trying to shift the lurgy.

Thursday started with me feeling a bit better, so off to the Bowl we went and another of the guides (Vicky) came with us too. A fresh set of eyes enabled Sam to further assess my 'left' issue (I have a habit of turning left on my skis) and I had had time to think about it and analyse it too.

From day one you're told to lean forward into your boots – which I did turning right, but not left – I leant back. So Sam got me to play 'basketball' while skiing – effectively as I make the turn I stand up, lean forward and try to shoot an imaginary hoop, then slide my hand down the outside of my downhill leg forcing me

to lean outwards too, and hey presto I could turn left.

Sam and Vicki decided to take me on a short 'red' run and I absolutely nailed every turn – I was giddy on life (well for a short time). We had a go at a longer 'red' and although I got the turns, I kept falling over and the confidence went (as did the teddies out of the pram again). Sam put me back on the 'blue' run to get my confidence back and we went back to the hotel with my confidence restored.

Fancy dress night

Thursday is fancy dress night with this year's letter being I (the letter theme is determined by the letters in 'Blind Veterans UK'). I had spent several days prior to the ski trip planning what to wear, and settled on Poison Ivy (well it is sort of I). There were Indians,

“Sam and Vicki decided to take me on a short 'red' run and I absolutely nailed every turn – I was giddy on life (well for a short time)”

Indiana Jones, Incredible Hulks, Iron Man, inmates, Irish rugby players and Irish leprechauns present that night.

Still not feeling my best I dressed and

went down stairs for the gala dinner. I'd love to be able to tell you all about that night, but can't as still not feeling anywhere near well I was soon tucked up in bed.

The next day, with the ski sun gods still smiling, it was back to the Bowl in glorious sunshine and to be honest all I wanted to do was cement the technique for turning (even though I was being told I was good enough to ski off the mountain). We had another guide with us – DJ – who →



Caption: Jan Price on the slopes

was providing top cover whilst also videoing my runs. As such he caught the moment when I got taken out by a skier totally out of control.

One minute I was skiing, the next a blur and then wallop I hit the snow. Sam came straight to me and DJ went straight to the other skier. Although my shoulder was painful, it wasn't painful enough to be broken (I've broken collar bones and arms falling off horses). Sam quickly established nothing was broken and the lady who ran into me was so apologetic and no harm had been done. I donned my



Caption: Surveying the slopes

skis, carried on with the run and did another prior to stopping for a tea.

On viewing the video, it is evident it was more of a fast glancing blow and a split second later and it could have been a different story entirely. We did a few more confidence runs post lunch, and then headed back to JP's to hand in our gear and head back to the hotel to pack.

Heading home

A 7.00am start on the Saturday saw us heading back to Marco Polo airport, where once we'd checked in our bags,



Caption: Don't turn left!

“On viewing the video, it is evident it was more of a fast glancing blow and a split second later and it could have been a different story entirely”

we were provided with access to the lounge – well everyone apart from Arf Bloomfield who having gone through passport control wasn't allowed back (next year's Staveley nomination I think!!).

After an uneventful flight we collected our baggage and then spent the next 30 minutes saying our good byes before all going our separate ways to head home.

This week is so much more to me than just a ski trip; it challenges me mentally (overcoming a lack of confidence) and physically (leg muscles), it allows me to overcome, by talking to other members, guides, family and friends, the daily challenges of dealing with a deteriorating sight condition. It also allows me to mix with likeminded (and slightly bonkers) Members for peer to peer support and to laugh and joke away from daily life.

I can feel alive and giddy with life - after all I was once told that moving is

living and you move a lot, and fast, on ski slopes. You can't pay me enough money to keep me away from this week and I've already told anyone who will listen; and especially work the dates for next year's trip.

However, without the tireless organising from our committee, this trip simply would not happen. The communication, the organisation, the negotiating with carriers, hotels and resort are seamless, and this would not be possible without their drive and determination to provide not just a ski trip but a brilliantly positive experience.

A massive thank you to each and every one of you for everything that you do – it is hugely appreciated. To the guides – a huge thank you. Your enthusiasm and drive to get the absolute best out of each one of us is infectious.

Through your guidance, support, determination and belief in us every member achieves more than they ever thought possible and we take that positivity back with us into our 'normal' lives post the ski trip. To our friends and family – it gives us such pleasure to share our achievements with you and to show you just what we can achieve in the challenging environment of sight loss. 🇬🇧

All in tune

Member **John Russell** talks about how he came to be a part of our famous Vision in Song choir

I have been a Member of Blind Veterans UK for some years now, and have always looked forward to our Annual Dinner which was one of the highlights of the year.

At first I went to the Cambridge reunions, as they were the nearest to my home village of Tilbury Juxta Clare in Essex. However after our charity's reorganisation I was allocated to the Essex area as I lived just two miles south of the border with Suffolk in Essex.

So in September 2017, I went along looking forward to making some new friends at The Lawns country house in Rochford, Essex where the reunion dinner was held. After the speeches and a wonderful meal there were various announcements made about general matters.

One that was raised was about a conversation our Community Team Leader Jennie Hammond had when she visited Member Danny Williams.

He told her that one thing he really missed since becoming sight impaired was singing with a group, and he would appreciate it if Jennie could facilitate the formation of such a group or Choir.

True to her word, Jennie immediately set about by asking the Members present if they would be interested in forming a choral group, and if so would they please give her their names.

An initial meeting

After the reunion, all went quiet for a few weeks but soon afterwards a message arrived at my home saying that an initial meeting was to be held at Kelvedon Church Hall to see what the response would be. As many of the attendees do not drive due to their sight loss, transport was being arranged and so we all waited for the day to finally arrive.

So on a bright April morning in 2018, we all set off from various places not quite sure of what to expect. We all arrived at the due time, and were



Caption: Our Vision in Song Choir

immediately met by a friendly group of volunteers who provided copious cups of tea and coffee, together with cakes and biscuits. This was an immediate ice breaker, and all the veterans starting talking to each other as though they had known everybody for years.

The organisation that had been put into this first meeting was excellent - a choir mistress, Jane Gould together with accordion player Margaret Hunter, were there to make our first efforts gel together. We started to sing as a group, having been told to warm up our

voices, and start to sing some songs that all of us already knew, although some of the words had to be amended as the variations that we knew were somewhat risqué.

A general discussion took place, and all of us agreed that they had all really enjoyed the experience and wished it to continue. So a series of rehearsals was arranged, and we all went home feeling a lot better than when we first arrived and having found something that we all looked forward to. When we were chatting after singing, →

we also learned that one chap, Ted Cruse, was a Chorister at the Queen's Coronation in Westminster Abbey.

In the next few months we learned more songs, until eventually we were asked if we would like to give our first public performance at the 2018 Essex Group Reunion Dinner. We all immediately said 'yes', as we had no fears of failing because we would be singing to a group of veterans who were just like us.

As 2018 was the centenary of the ending of the First World War, we



Caption: In rehearsals

concentrated of songs from that era. The event was well received and all those who attended joined in with the songs they knew well. We then went on from strength to strength, singing at care homes and other locations giving pleasure to many people. This gives us a great feeling of community when we see the responses of the audience, in fact it has become a monthly visit to various homes and I believe we do bring something to cheer up their day when we visit.

We were also invited to sing at St. Marylebone Parish church, the



Caption: At the Reunion dinner

“Jennie immediately set about by asking the Members present if they would be interested in forming a choral group, and if so would they please give her their names”

nominated church of Blind Veterans UK in London, where we sang alongside the choir from the sponsored school.

United in our quest

In 2019 we continued our rehearsing but this time it was Second World War songs. We continued our association with care homes in the Essex area, but with the addition of other events.

In March 2019, some of the Choir members marched in Colchester - we were preceded by a pipe band to help publicise our March for Veterans event. I had just had a foot operation and walking was not easy, while others also found it a challenge but we were all united in our quest to complete the route. We were also present to sing carols as the Colchester Christmas Lights were turned on and we were the star attraction, with an audience of several hundred excited children and

parents.

Once again we sang at the 2019 Essex reunion, which seems to have become a regular engagement together with our visit to St. Marylebone Parish Church Christmas service.

This year we have sadly had a few deaths in our ranks, and this has brought home to us the average age of the 'choirboys'. Our oldest member is 97, and our average age is at least 86, so you should never be told that you cannot do something because you are too old - we are proving that is rubbish.

Our youngest member is me at a mere 78, so why not give it a go? We would like to bring our average age down, or else in a very few years there will be no one left.

So, if you want to come and join us, we are a friendly lot from all branches of the Armed Forces. When circumstances return to normal we will meet once a week in Kelvedon St. Mary's Anglican Church from 1030 to 1230 and we donate £5 a week towards the costs... but tea and biscuits are free. 🍵

■ **For the future, we aim to have a go at The Voice television talent show or even Britain's Got Talent... after all, the world is our oyster.**



Family News

Birthdays

Henry Bracewell who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 1.

Eric Foster who celebrates his 104th on April 4.

Walter Roberts who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 6.

Douglas Forester who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 16.

William Wilson who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 22.

Cecil Morris who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 24.

Pamela Mortimer who celebrates her 100th birthday on April 26.

Phillip Broomhead who celebrates his 100th birthday on April 30.

Joyce Poolman who celebrates her 100th birthday on April 30.

Condolences

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

Patricia Mary Blunsden who died on 17 February 2020. She was the wife of Charles Payne.

Elsie Brooks who died on 1 March 2020. She was the wife of the late William Brooks.

Noreen Yvonne Coppard who died on 20 February 2020. She was the wife of Charles Coppard.

Ada Corns who died on 17 February 2020. She was the wife of William Corns.

Ron Cray who died on 1 January 2020. He was the husband of the late Irene Cray.

Janet E Dunn who died on 1 January 2020. She was the wife of the late Jack Dunn.

Violet May Jarman who died on 23 February 2020. She was the wife of the late Malcolm Jarman.

Jean Joyce who died on 1 March 2020. She was the wife of Harry Joyce.

Beryl Juchua who died on 1 November 2019. She was the wife of the late Ronald Juchua.

Muriel Kirkup who died on 1 November 2019. She was the wife of James Kirkup.

Florence Joyce Morgan who died on 21 December 2019. She was the wife of the late Frederick Morgan.

Grahame Morris who died on 31 December 2019. He was the partner of Rebecca Urwin-Smith.

Jean Parkin who died on 10 December 2019. She was the wife of the late Colin Parkin.

Marion Parkinson who died on 16 December 2019. She was the wife of Richard Parkinson.

Bernice Parsons who died on 1 March 2020. She was the wife of the late Keith Parsons.

Bernard Ray Ponting who died on 1 March 2020. He was the husband of June Ponting.

Betty Porter who died on 31 December 2019. She was the wife of Maurice Porter.

Beryl Price who died on 1 December 2019. She was the wife of the late Wilfred Price.

Winifred Ramsbottom who died on 1 December 2019. She was the wife of the late Clifford Ramsbottom.

Alice Stevens who died on 11 November 2019. She was the wife of the late Leslie Stevens.

Caroline Taylor who died on 30 December 2019. She was the wife of the late Robert Taylor.

Joyce O Thomas who died on 15 December 2019. She was the wife of the late George Hudson.

Margaret Mary Tolan who died on 13 January 2020. She was the wife of the late Edward Tolan.

Winifred Wheatley who died on 15 December 2020. She was the wife of Stuart Wheatley.

Sylvia Wilson who died on 1 March 2020. She was the wife of Gordon Wilson.

Elizabeth Worden who died on 1 December. She was the wife of the late George Worden.



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

Winifred Norma Adlam of Swansea, West Glamorgan died on 3 February 2020 aged 93. She served as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Ronald Ambrose of Bournemouth, Dorset died on 1 January 2020 aged 60. He served as a Private in the Royal Pioneer Corps.

Peter Ashby of Colchester died on 3 March 2020 aged 88. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

William Ashurst of Prescot, Merseyside died on 10 March 2020 aged 90. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Military Police.

Harold Anthony Baker of Rhyl, Clwyd died on 28 February 2020 aged 88. He served as an Aircraftman 1st Class in the Royal Air Force.

Eleanor Mary Baldwin of Thurso, Caithness died on 20 January 2020 aged 95. She served as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

John Bateman of Ashington, Northumberland died on 16 February 2020 aged 93. He served as a Corporal in the 12th Lancers.

John William Benn of Beverley, East Riding Of Yorkshire died on 3 January 2020 aged 92. He served as a Gunner in the East Yorkshire Regiment (The Duke Of York's Own).

Michael Albert Bevan of Salisbury died on 24 January 2020 aged 87. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Conor Patrick Byrne of Chester died on 25 February 2020 aged 98. He served as a Chief Technician in the Royal Air Force.

William Herbert Childs of Par, Cornwall died on 4 March 2020 aged 96. He served as a Private in the Duke Of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

Robert Stanley Chilton of Brighton died on 10 February 2020 aged 88. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Thomas Kenneth Clarke of Llandudno, Gwynedd died on 27 February 2020 aged 90. He served as a Sick Berth Attendant in the Royal Navy.

Theresa Mary Comerford of Swindon died on 20 January 2020 aged 96. She served as a Flight Sergeant in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Thomas Cook of Leeds, West Yorkshire died on 10 February 2020 aged 88. He served as a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Kenneth Cook of Watlington, Oxfordshire died on 21 February 2020 aged 95. He served as a Temporary Acting Leading Seaman in the Royal Navy.

John Edward Copeman of Norwich, Norfolk died on 5 March 2020 aged 84. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Signals.

John Kenneth Cross of Exmouth, Devon died on 16 February 2020 aged 95. He served as a Sergeant Pilot in the Royal Air Force.

Michael John Matthew Crowley of Wolverhampton, West Midlands died on 13 March 2020 aged 81. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Walter James Scott Davidson of Exeter died on 18 February 2020 aged 77. He served as a Marine in the Royal Marines.

Percy Wardle Davison of Eastbourne, East Sussex died on 11 March 2020 aged 97. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Margaret Doreen Day of Bristol died on 4 March 2020 aged 88. She served as a Petty Officer in the Women's Royal Naval Service.



Bernard James Dean of Stroud, Gloucestershire died on 25 February 2020 aged 91. He served as a Private in the Gloucestershire Regiment.

Albert Doran of Ashley Green, Widnes died on 21 February 2020 aged 90. He served in the Lancashire Fusiliers.

Danny Michael Dyche of Derby, Derbyshire died on 20 February 2020 aged 54. He served as a Signaller in the Royal Signals.

John Elliott of Dereham, Norfolk died on 9 March 2020 aged 96. He served as a Flying Officer in the Royal Air Force.

Peter Ewins of Launceston, Cornwall died on 22 February 2020 aged 85. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

Joseph Farquharson of Stowmarket, Suffolk died on 29 January 2020 aged 95. He served as a Flight Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force.

Daphne Hylda Farrow of Crowborough, East Sussex died on 1 March 2020 aged 98. She served as a Section Officer in the Women's Royal Naval Service.

Harry Field of Glasgow died on 14 March 2020 aged 95. He served as a Chief Cook in the Merchant Navy.

Diana Firmston-Williams of Godalming, Surrey died on 24 February 2020 aged 95. She served as a Wren in the Women's Royal Naval Reserve.

Ronald Frederick Ford of Markfield, Leicestershire died on 1 March 2020 aged 98. He served as a Private in the Royal Signals.

Keith Goodger of Brighton, East Sussex died on 8 March 2020 aged 89. He served as an Aircraftman 2nd Class in the Royal Air Force.

Donald Victor Hancock of Hove, East Sussex died on 13 February 2020 aged 94. He served as an Ordinary Seaman in the Royal Navy.

George Ernest Hardwick of Swansea, West Glamorgan died on 4 March 2020 aged 101. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Artillery.

Joseph Hardy of Pitlochry, Perthshire died on 7 March 2020 aged 97. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Corps Of Military Police.

Robert Henry Hewson of Newcastle Upon Tyne, Tyne And Wear died on 23 February 2020 aged 84. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

Peter Geoffrey Hicks of Crewe died on 12 March 2020 aged 81. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

Trevor Hills of Haverfordwest, Dyfed died on 19 January 2020 aged 99. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

John Alexander Jefferson of Gateshead, Tyne And Wear died on 28 February 2020 aged 94. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Petain Verdun Jenkins of Alresford, Hampshire died on 13 February 2020 aged 104. He served as a Driver in the Army Catering Corps.

Alan Rothwell Johnson of Cockermouth, Cumbria died on 25 February 2020 aged 99. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals.

Patrick Kelly of Durham died on 1 January 2020 aged 81. He served as a Rifleman in the Royal Green Jackets.

Terence Anthony Kelly of Hove, East Sussex died on 8 March 2020 aged 89. He served in the Royal Engineers.

James Kendall of Blackburn, Lancashire died on 29 February 2020 aged 98. He served as a Private in the Home Guard.

Kenneth Lamb of Birkenhead, Merseyside died on 11 March 2020 aged 91. He served as a Corporal in the General Service Corps.

James Thomas Lawson of Newcastle Upon Tyne died on 25 February 2020 aged 86. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Winifred Leadbeater of Bolton, Greater Manchester died on 14 February 2020 aged 98. She served as a Private in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

Charles Albert Leister of Hatfield, Hertfordshire died on 1 February 2020 aged 91. He served as a Sick Berth Attendant in the Royal Navy.

John Plummer Lister of Harrogate, North Yorkshire died on 16 March 2020 aged 96. He served as a Captain in the Wiltshire Regiment (Duke Of Edinburgh's).

Alan Marshall of Nottingham died on 7 February 2020 aged 84. He served as a Trooper in the Royal Tank Regiment.

William Frederick Mawby of Brighton, East Sussex died on 12 March 2020 aged 95. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force.



Thomas Joseph McCormick of Prescott, Merseyside died on 12 February 2020 aged 93. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

The McCoy of Plymouth died on 18 February 2020 aged 80. He served as a Major in the Royal Signals.

Raymond Murphy of Wigan, Lancashire died on 18 February 2020 aged 94. He served as a Trooper in the 1st King's Dragoon Guards.

Patrick James Northcott of Slough, Berkshire died on 1 February 2020 aged 84. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Air Force.

James Jim O'Hara of Clydebank, Dunbartonshire died on 16 March 2020 aged 65. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Henry James Osborne of Brighton died on 1 February 2020 aged 89. He served as a Rifleman in the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

Keith Ott of Southampton, Hampshire died on 10 March 2020 aged 92. He served as a Sapper in the Royal Engineers.

John Potts of Hassocks, West Sussex died on 1 March 2020 aged 92. He served as a Captain in the Merchant Navy.

Clifford Ramsbottom of Oldham died on 20 February 2020 aged 92. He served as a Private in the Lancashire Fusiliers.

Keith Tarrant Alfred Rand of Hove, East Sussex died on 3 March 2020 aged 98. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Bryan Rawnsley of Wallingford, Oxfordshire died on 3 March 2020 aged 89. He served in the Royal Air Force.

Andrew Lambie Ronald of Lichfield, Staffordshire died on 7 March 2020 aged 95. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Donald Alan Scott of Colchester, Essex died on 17 February 2020 aged 93. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals.

Frederick Simpson of Chorley, Lancashire died on 30 January 2020 aged 96. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Artillery.

Ronald Smith of Ashford, Kent died on 9 March 2020 aged 96. He served as an Acting Lance Corporal in the Northamptonshire Regiment.

Dennis Arnold Smith of Macclesfield, Cheshire died on 2 March 2020 aged 94. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

John Smith of Newton-Le-Willows, Merseyside died on 27 January 2020 aged 81. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

John Travers Spencer of Sleaford, Lincolnshire died on 24 February 2020 aged 89. He served as a Signaller in the Royal Signals.

Jonathan Frederick Staniland of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire died on 1 February 2020 aged 95. He served as a Private in the Royal Artillery.

Derek Stead of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire died on 1 February 2020 aged 93. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Alfred Thomas of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk died on 24 February 2020 aged 80. He served as a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps.

Herbert Thorpe of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire died on 5 February 2020 aged 96. He served as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy.

Stanley George Tomlin of Brighton died on 23 February 2020 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Terence Toomey of Swansea died on 15 March 2020 aged 92. He served as a Lance Bombardier in the Royal Artillery.

Graham Walker of Leeds, West Yorkshire died on 3 March 2020 aged 73. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Corps Of Transport.

George William Wildon of Blandford Forum, Dorset died on 1 February 2020 aged 85. He served as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Engineers.

Cyril Glyndwr Williams of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan died on 22 February 2020 aged 83. He served as a Fusilier in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers.

George Albert Wood of Lingfield, Surrey died on 21 January 2020 aged 98. He served as a Flight Lieutenant in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve.

Arthur John Wopling of Paignton, Devon died on 21 February 2020 aged 86. He served as a Private in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

John Esmond Yates-Earl of Sleaford, Lincolnshire died on 16 March 2020 aged 100. He served as a Squadron Leader in the Royal Air Force.

Graham Yearsley of Gloucester died on 1 March 2020 aged 86. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Pay Corps.

Lifting the sky

In the second part of our learning Qi-gong wellbeing series, **Jinpa Thubten** talks you through your next exercise

This month's exercise is called Lifting the Sky. You can do this exercise seated if you have poor balance, or any issues with standing unsupported.

As long as you have a reasonable sense of balance you can stand. If you cannot lift your arms above your head don't force them, keep the height of

your hands to a comfortable position and it will increase over time.

All the exercises in this series should be done with relaxed muscles and should feel almost too easy.

Standing Stance

- Feet are about hip width apart.



“All the exercises in this series should be done with relaxed muscles and should feel almost too easy”

- Knees relaxed (slightly bent).
- Coccyx (tail bone) pulled forward.
- Back elongated as if pulled gently from the crown of the head.
- Weight evenly spread over the feet.
- Chest open yet soft.

Seated stance

(Use a dining chair if possible).



- Feet are about hip width apart.
- Knees relaxed (slightly bent).
- Keep your coccyx (tail bone) pulled forward.
- Keep your back elongated as if pulled gently from the crown of the head.
- Weight evenly spread over the feet.
- Chest open yet soft. 🌸

Lifting the Sky

- Bring the hands in front of the groin palms facing earth, finger tips facing each other.**
- As you inhale. Raise your hands up and away from you in a sweeping motion until the palms are facing heaven.**
- As you exhale. Lower hands out to the sides, palms facing earth until they return to the side of your body.**
- Repeat exercise moving in time with your breath.**

Remember - aim to do your two minutes every day and feel free to mix it up with last month's exercise Pushing Mountains. This is an uplifting exercise opening the chest particularly good for those moments when you are feeling down or emotionally worn-out

History in a box!

Review tells how the chance discovery of a set of handbells by a Member at our Llandudno Centre uncovered a chapter of naval history



Caption: The handbells in their box

On his first visit to our Llandudno Centre, Member Neville Parkin mentioned to Rehabilitation and Training Liaison Officer Billy Baxter that one of his interests was change ringing on both tower bells and handbells. This immediately prompted Billy to show Neville a beautifully made

wooden box stored in a cupboard. The outside is engraved 'HMS "Renown" 1943', while inside is a set of eight handbells and a brass plaque which reads "'Eight Bells" presented to HMS Renown by Leicester Cathedral Bellringers 1943'.

Neville and his wife Anne ring changes – bellringing in a controlled pattern - on the tower bells at Hexham Abbey, and on handbells. They persuaded Billy to pick up a bell in each hand (five and six) and follow Neville (three and four) who followed Anne (one and two) to ring rounds on six of the bells. Rotate the bells up in turn 123456 and down 123456. The rhythm is key to success and Billy was soon ringing perfect rounds. However, mastering the art of change-ringing takes more time.

The lead ship

On arrival back home, Neville discussed with our President Colin Williamson the idea of researching the history of the box, the bells and HMS Renown. Nicola Clough and Paul

Wynne-Williams searched the files at Llandudno for further information. One of the facts to emerge was that the bells are hired from the Royal Navy Trophy Fund.

HMS Renown was the lead ship of her class of two battle cruisers of the Royal Navy completed at Fairfield's Clyde-based yard during August 1916. She was originally laid down as an improved version of the Revenge-class battleships. Her construction was suspended on the outbreak of war on the grounds she would not be ready in a timely manner.

Admiral Lord Fisher, upon becoming First Sea Lord, gained approval to restart her construction as a battlecruiser that would enter service quickly. The Director of Naval Construction (DNC) Eustace Tennyson-D'Eyncourt, quickly produced an entirely new design to meet Fisher's requirements, and the builders agreed to deliver the ship in just 15 months. They just met that ambitious goal, and the ship was delivered a few months after the Battle of Jutland in 1916. Renown and her sister ship HMS Repulse, were the world's fastest capital ships upon completion, →



Caption: HMS Renown

with an average top speed of 32 knots – impressive for a 32,700 ton ship.

Renown did not see combat in the First World War, and was reconstructed twice – a 1920's reconstruction increased her armour protection and made other more minor improvements, while the 1930's reconstruction was much more thorough. The ship frequently conveyed royalty on its foreign tours and served as flagship of the Battlecruiser Squadron when HMS Hood was refitted.

A busy war

During the Second World War, HMS

Renown was involved in the search for the 'pocket-battleship' Admiral Graf Spee in 1939, participated in the Norwegian Campaign of April-June 1940 and the search for the German battleship Bismarck in 1941.

She spent much of 1940 and 1941 assigned to Force H at Gibraltar escorting convoys and she participated in the inconclusive Battle of Cape Spartivento. The ageing, but still valuable, battlecruiser was then briefly assigned to the Home Fleet and provided cover to several Arctic convoys in early 1942. HMS Renown was transferred back to Force H for

Operation Torch, and spent much of 1943 refitting or transporting Winston Churchill and his staff to and from various conference with various Allied leaders.

In early 1944, Renown was transferred to the Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean, where she supported numerous attacks on Japanese-occupied facilities in Indonesia and various island groups in the Indian Ocean. The ship returned to the Home Fleet in early 1945 and was refitted before being placed in reserve after the end of the war. Finally, after an eventful 32 years service, she was sold for scrap in 1948.

Next steps

Returning to the present day, the next step was for Neville to contact a friend, Gary Mason, who is currently a bellringer at Leicester Cathedral to ask for his help in finding out why the presentation had been made. Gary willingly searched the Cathedral Chapter Meetings Minutes for the period and found the following:

'H.M.S. 'Renown' Gift of Handbells

On Thursday, September 2nd [1943] the ringers of Leicester Cathedral met in the choir vestry to hand to the Bishop of Leicester a set of eight handbells, which are to be presented to



Caption: All present and correct

H.M.S. 'Renown', Leicester's adopted warship. The Bishop had been asked by the chaplain of 'Renown' to aid in obtaining a set of handbells for use in the ship, as there were ringers among the crew.

An appeal to the Cathedral company met with a ready response, and a set of eight, made as good as new by Messrs. John Taylor and Co., is the result. A brass plate on the box is inscribed 'Eight Bells, H.M.S. "Renown."' The bells were handed to the Bishop by Inspector Harold Poole, who said it had been a pleasure to carry out the request, and thanked those who →



Caption: The beautifully carved box

had helped in the various stages of the work. Accepting the bells on behalf of the officers and men of 'Renown', the Bishop said he hoped they, as well as the bells of the Cathedral, would before long be ringing to celebrate peace. He read the letter he proposed to send. A message of good wishes from the ringers was also sent, with the hope that the bells would be prove of good use and give pleasure to those who rang and heard them."

So what happened to the bells when HMS Renown was sold for scrap in 1948?

An article in *Navy News* issue 199009 dated September 1990 was discovered during an internet search. This revealed that the bells were being used aboard the (now-stricken) Type-22 frigate HMS Brave, and a photo of



Caption: The plaque inside the box

"A brass plate on the box is inscribed 'Eight Bells, H.M.S. "Renown." The bells were handed to the Bishop by Inspector Harold Poole"

members of the crew ringing the bells accompanies the article. Issue 199310 of the same magazine has a photo of members of the Royal Naval Guild of Bellringers ringing the bells having drawn them from the trophy store at HMS Nelson. It was reported that the bells had recently been refurbished by Guild Member Bill Skilleter. The box is in a central position in the photograph.

The next chapter of this story could involve you, and you can join the history of these well travelled musical instruments.

Are you a handbell ringer? Have you rung on these bells? Would you be interested in joining other Members at the Llandudno Centre for some ringing? Neville would love to hear from you, and from any other bellringers who are Members. 🇬🇧

■ **Please get in touch with Review Editor Chris Gilson at chris.gilson@blindveterans.org.uk or telephone him on 0207 616 8367.**

PHOTO BY DAVID CLODE ON UNSPLASH



Time to relax

Finally, in this April issue, we provide you with some relaxation techniques from our Llandudno-based Occupational Therapist **Charlotte Hunt**

Find somewhere comfortable to sit, away from noise and distractions. Sit back against the chair with your feet on the floor and arms resting on your lap. Let the chair support you and take your weight. Let all your muscles relax. Close your eyes. This is your time to relax and unwind. You don't need to be anywhere but here, in this moment.

This is your time to relax and unwind.

Take a couple of deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth. Start to imagine all your stress flowing out with each breath. Breathe in calm and breath out stress. This is your time to relax and unwind. You do not need to worry about →

anything right now. All your tasks are on pause as you focus on yourself in this moment. You do not need to be anywhere but here, in this moment. You deserve this moment of calm, this time to relax and unwind.

Now let your breath settle back into its normal rhythm and bring your attention to the top on your head. Notice how your face feels. Your eye lids softly closed. Your cheeks and mouth relaxed. Your muscles are warm and heavy and relaxed. Notice the sensation of relaxation as it glides down your face towards your neck and shoulders.

Notice how your shoulders are feeling. Let the relaxation flow down your neck and into your shoulders as they become heavy and relaxed. Let any tension dissolve with each breath. Breath in calm and breath out stress. This is your time to relax and unwind.

Allow the relaxing sensations to flow down through your arms, through your hands and out through your fingertips. Let your arms hang heavy and relaxed. Notice any discomfort and let it dissolve with each breath out. Your arms are heavy and relaxed. This is your time to unwind.

As you continue to relax, allow your body to sink deeper into the chair. You are safe and supported. Enjoy this

moment of calm as the sensation of relaxation flows down your spine and into your hips. Notice how your back feels. Let any tension and discomfort dissolve with each breath as you continue to breath in calm and breath out stress.

Let your legs sink into the chair. They are heavy and warm, totally relaxed. Notice how your thighs feel against the chair. Notice your calves and feet. Allow your legs to feel heavy and let the relaxing sensation flow deep into your muscles down through your legs, your ankles, your feet and out through your toes. Let any tension dissolve with each breath. Breath in calm and breath out stress. This is your time to relax and unwind.

Take a few moments to enjoy this relaxation. This is your time to relax and unwind. If you notice any remaining tension, focus on that area and allow your breath to carry it away. You do not need to be anywhere else, just here, right now, enjoying this moment for yourself.

Once you're ready to carry on with your day, start to become aware of the noises around you, Wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly open your eyes. When you are ready, stand slowly from the chair, and remember you can return to this relaxation exercise at any point. 🌈

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



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