

St Dunstan's Review

March 2001



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Cover picture:

*Norman Wagstaff of East
Cowes, Isle of Wight tried
his hand at something
different during a stay at
St Dunstan's Ovingdean.
He used the potter's wheel
to craft a number of items
from clay.*

From the Chairman



I would like to congratulate Mrs Lauraine Jones on her appointment as Chair of the Board of Directors, St Dunstan's South Africa. She succeeds the Rev Michael Norman who retires as Chairman after 15 years in office. Lauraine joined St Dunstan's in 1980 and finished as Chief Executive in 1998. We wish her and her colleagues good fortune.

*** **

The replacement of the Annexe roof at Ovingdean has proved a difficult job and is still not quite complete. I want to pay tribute, above all, to everyone in the Training and Rehabilitation department for their patience and co-operation. They have been 'dispossessed' of their offices and for several months have had to cope with alternative premises. Hopefully, they will be 'back home' by the end of March and the swimming pool will be back in commission by the end of April.

Captain Michael Gordon-Lennox, RN



NOTICE BOARD



EX-GRATIA PAYMENTS TO BRITISH GROUPS HELD PRISONER BY THE JAPANESE

This is to pass on some good news recently announced on inheritance tax issues, which should be of interest to those St Dunstaners, widows and widowers concerned.

The Government announcement of November 7th made it clear that the ex gratia lump sum payments would be free of tax in the hands of the individual claimants and would not count for benefit purposes. There is no income or capital gains tax on such payments nor will the capital sum be taken into account for the purposes of assessing entitlement to Working Families' Tax Credit or Disabled Person's Tax Credit. We know that some claimants and their families are starting to ask what this might mean in due course for inheritance tax purposes (IHT).

In the ordinary way, the inheritance tax consequences of these payments would depend on what claimants choose to do with the money. But if they save it, their eventual estate on death is going to be that much higher than it otherwise would have been; and if their total assets are large enough there would be that much more tax to pay. In other cases, where a person's estate receives the actual cash payment for one reason or another, the award would form part of the taxable total in a more direct way.

The Government decided that this would be wrong in the very exceptional circumstances and have therefore announced a special extra-statutory concession to protect these awards from IHT. The effect of the concession is to give an extra £10,000 relief from IHT for every eligible claimant, whether or not the payment has been received by them and whatever they choose to do with it. No special action is called for except to claim the relief as and when inheritance tax forms have to be filled in. It would be helpful at that stage, if you preserve the

award letter from the War Pensions Agency, as proof of the claim should it be needed.

Separate arrangements are being made to see that professional people dealing with inheritance tax know about this relief.

If you have any queries, then the contact point for general IHT helpline enquiries is 0115 974 2400.

FUEL PRIORITIES

The following priorities have been laid down and are extracted from a letter sent by the Department of Trade and Industry about the status of disabled people in the event of a fuel disruption.

Disabled people will need to provide verification as follows:

- for those of working age, a Vehicle Excise Duty exemption disc on the car or an employer's letter certifying that private car is the only way the person can continue to travel to work.
- for those beyond working age, a blue or orange badge plus proof of being in receipt of a state pension, but only where the person identified on the badge is in the vehicle as driver or passenger.

You might also wish to be aware that the priority purpose health and social services now includes personal assistants to severely disabled people as well as use of a car for patients who need essential treatment or care.

MOBILE PHONE CODES GAIN 7

Changes to telephone codes continue with mobile phone codes. All mobile codes will gain a 7 after the initial 0, for example 0941 becomes 07941. This change will be permanent from April 28th.

DEADLINES FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The final date for submitting items for publication in the May Review is March 29th.

The final date for submitting items for publication in the June Review is April 30th.

URGENT HELP REQUIRED

We have recently, successfully, completed an application to join the International Festival of the Sea, which is being held in Portsmouth on August 24th-27th.

Now, we urgently need some products to sell. These must be of a maritime or marine connection such as sea creatures, pirates, boats/ships, Naval personnel (knitted preferably) and anything you can think of which would enhance the St Dunstan's stand.

If you can manage to send something we would be very grateful. We need to have all items in by the end of July.

Please send them to Robbie Hazan, Public Relations Department, St Dunstan's, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London, W1H 4HD. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me on 020 7723 5021.

Thank you.

METRO GAMES 2001

The Metro Games Visually Impaired Athletics and Pool Tournament will be held in London on Saturday, June 30th. The athletics will be held in Walthamstow E17 and the pool in Kentish Town NW5. A dinner and disco will round off the event. Accommodation will be available for June 29th and 30th. For details contact Derek Mileman at Flat 29, Gilda Court, Watford Way, Mill Hill, London NW7 2QN. Tel: 020 8203 1286. Fax: 020 8202 6196.

EXETER REUNION DATE CHANGE

Would those concerned please note that the date of the Exeter reunion has been changed from May 23rd to September 5th.

CAMP AT HMS SULTAN

The camp at HMS *Sultan* will take place from Friday, July 27th until the morning of Saturday, August 4th. Those wishing to book should contact Elspeth Grant no later than May 9th. Write to her at High Acre, Catmere End, Saffron Walden CB11 4XG or telephone 01799 522874.

ROYAL MAIL CODE OF PRACTICE

The Royal Mail's Code of Practice, which includes information on Articles for the Blind, is available on audio cassette and CD from Master Transcriptions on 01892 516157.

BUILDING WORK AT OIVINGDEAN

Work started on Monday, February 12th to convert the 4th floor North wing and part of the fuselage into additional bedrooms. On the 4th floor North wing, formerly known as the Training wing, six new bedrooms will be created, together with en-suite facilities, to include either Apollo type baths, Closomat toilets and, in two cases, walk-in level shower units. Five bedrooms with similar facilities will be created in the fuselage.

Trainees will still be able to access their accommodation on the South wing, which will not be affected.

This work is due to be completed by June 1st. We apologise for any noise or inconvenience.

MG Hordell
Facilities Manager

TROOPING THE COLOUR

Trooping the Colour will take place on June 16th. It is possible that St Dunstan's will be allocated tickets. Any St Dunstaner or Gubbay Trust Beneficiary wishing to go should send their name and address to Carole Woodgate, Welfare Department, St Dunstan's 12-14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD by May 15th.

A draw will determine the final allocation of tickets. Those attending will be responsible for their own travel and accommodation expenses.

CONSUMER PROTECTION TAPE

New regulations protecting the rights of consumers shopping by phone, mail order, via the internet or digital TV are outlined on a tape from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Under the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000, introduced on October 31st last year, consumers have the right to receive clear information about goods and services before deciding to buy. They are also entitled to confirmation of this information in writing and a cooling off period of seven working days in which the consumer can withdraw from the contract. The new regulations also include protection from credit card fraud.

More information can be found on the tape which is available from the DTI Publications Orderline on 0870 1502 500.

DERBY SWEEPSTAKE 2001

Anyone with a taste for the sport of kings, in particular the Epsom Derby, might like to try their hand at *St Dunstan's Review* Derby Sweepstake. The draw is open to St Dunstaners, beneficiaries of the Diana Gubbay Trust, widows and widowers.

This year the race is being run on June 9th. Tickets are 30p each and issued consecutively to a maximum of 25 (costing £7.50). Cheques should be made payable to St Dunstan's and crossed. Loose money should not be sent unless it is registered. The closing date is June 4th.

Each applicant should send their name and address, the number of tickets required, and a stamped addressed envelope, to The Editor, DSS Department, *St Dunstan's Review*, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD.

Of the total money received, distribution amongst the winners will be as follows:

50 per cent to the holder of the ticket drawing the winning horse.

20 per cent to the holder of the ticket drawing the second horse.

10 per cent to the holder of the ticket drawing the third horse.

20 per cent to be divided equally among those drawing a horse which actually starts the race.

No prize won in the sweepstake will be paid to any person other than the person to whom the winning ticket was sold.

The draw will take place in London on June 5th.

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

The new English Touring Opera production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* will be enhanced by VocalEyes audio description during three upcoming performances. The performances will be at Brighton on March 17th (020 7820 1131), Truro on March 31st (01872 262 466) and Ulverston on May 19th (01229 587 140).

Other audio described shows include the London comedy productions *Mouth to Mouth* on March 10th (020 7565 5044) and *Boston Marriage* on April 7th (020 7845 5813). Watford theatregoers have a choice of *Neville's Island* on March 29th and *Barefoot in the Park* on June 2nd (01923 225671).

Life and Times of Ovingdean

by Lyn Neville

After all the hustle and bustle of the New Year, things have been considerably quieter during February. The rain keeps on falling and our outing to Fontwell Park Racecourse has been cancelled for the second time now. Maybe we will make it third time lucky!

However, we have managed to have some good outings. On January 11th we went to the Royal Marines Concert at the Winter Garden, Eastbourne. They played beautifully as always and everybody enjoyed themselves. We are very lucky in that the Royal Marines band will be coming to play at St Dunstan's again this summer. A date has been set for Thursday, July 26th – so watch this space!

We have also been on a tactile tour of one of Brighton's most famous landmarks, the Royal Pavilion. This was a most interesting afternoon.

CONSIDER IT A CHALLENGE

At the end of January, the trainees in house braved the winds to walk the length of the Palace Pier to sing karaoke at Horatio's Bar! Various friends and members of staff joined them and everybody had a good sing-song. In fact, Queen's *We are the Champions* is fast becoming the St Dunstan's song amongst the trainees.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Another event for your diaries is the "Not Forgotten" Association Concert on Friday, March 30th at 2.30pm. All are welcome but please ring Lyn Neville on 01273 307811 ext 3212 to let me know numbers for catering.

Plans are underway for the first of the Widows' Weeks. The dates for this year are:

April 5th-12th
June 28th-July 5th
October 11th-18th

Please remember to send back your booking forms when you receive them if you want to join us for one of the weeks.

Through the Hole in My Head

This is St Dunstaner Tom Taylor's story; his wartime experiences, from being left for dead in Burma to achieving a Master's Degree.

The autobiography entitled, *Through the Hole in My Head*, was launched on February 21st at the Leyland Lane Methodist Church.

The book costs £8.95 plus £1.35 for postage and packing and is available from: Methodist Publishing House, 20 Ivatt Way, Peterborough PE3 7PG.

Credit or debit card orders can be made by telephone on 01733 331201 or via e-mail on chief.exec@mph.org.uk.

Neil Swan, Head of Fund Raising

Neil joined the staff of St Dunstan's on July 3rd 1995. He was tasked with setting up a fund raising department virtually from scratch in terms of office space, personnel, strategy, appeals and computerisation.

Over the period of his time with St Dunstan's, Neil has been responsible for the distribution of millions of appeal letters around the country and has contributed greatly to the financial fortune of St Dunstan's, including legacies. He was the driving force behind Ken Moss's world record and the St Dunstan's video *Night or Day*.

Neil leaves St Dunstan's to take up the appointment of Chief Executive with a children's charity and we wish him continued success.



Well done Peggy!

Peggy Blockley has been a volunteer and secretary of the Quorn/ Charnwood Visually Handicapped Gardening Group for 15 years. Last year her dedication was feted with a Millennium award from the Royal Leicestershire, Rutland and Wycliffe Society for the Blind. Peggy, who is the wife of our St Dunstaner Charles Blockley of Sileby, nr Loughborough, Leicestershire, received her award from David Cope, the Mayor of Hinkley.

ST DUNSTANER TELLS THE REAL DANGER OF UXBS

St Dunstaner Ken Revis was featured in a Channel 4 television documentary about bomb disposal in February. The two-part programme *Danger! Unexploded Bomb* highlighted the lives of soldiers working in this perilous field, disposing of both enemy devices and those used by our own forces.

Ken, who served as a Captain in 12th Bomb Disposal Company, Royal Engineers, spoke of his own experience defusing bombs. In particular he told of his fateful attempt in 1943 to dismantle anti-invasion defences placed around West Pier in Brighton.



Mrs Nicky Heard recently visited St Dunstan's Headquarters to present a donation of £1,580, which was accepted by Ray Hazan. She and her husband raised the money with an event in their local Italian restaurant. Mrs Heard has made similar donations to St Dunstan's in the past and we are most grateful for her splendid support.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

From: Maurice Aldridge, Bayeux, France

Thinking of surprises, there was quite a buzz going round Bayeux today. This morning, a foreign body appeared in the sky above the town where it stayed a full forty minutes. Those who have memories going back all the way to Louis 14th claim it was the sun but they're too old to be taken seriously.

St Dunstan's Ski Trip January 2001

by Gerry Jones

Eleven of the twelve members of the St Dunstan's group joined the party of St Agnes skiers at Gatwick early on Sunday, January 7th. St Dunstaners Charlie Daly, Gerry Jones, Peter Walker, Dave Powell and Gary Ogden plus Peter's daughter Helen and Charlie's grandson Danny met up with four of our guides and old friends Martin Blank, Vince Stone, Mick Shepley and Bill McDougal. Peter Zamudio our long serving guide of every ski trip was to meet us at the Hotel Posta in Alleghe the Italian Dolomites, after travelling there from his home in Sorenberg, Switzerland.

Gary and Dave were immediately brought into the fold in the traditional way by our guides. Once through check-in and customs we made straight for the only bar and at 6am we were pouring the initiation drink into them. Both being ex-Parachute Regiment, they immediately linked up with Charlie who welcomed them by calling them Baby and Pet Paras! This humour was to continue throughout the week and after a couple of days, Gary and Dave were giving as good as they received.

The Italian Dolomites have provided us in the past with wide slopes of varying degrees of difficulty and Alleghe was no exception. Two excellent novice slopes were available immediately after getting out of the gondola lift. Two handy restaurants were the meeting place for the first two days so that we could all meet up and discuss the slopes and how we were getting on. Once Gary and Dave had found their ski legs, we moved further up the mountain where we could sit outside a restaurant on its marvellous veranda and catch the sun.

There were some wonderful shorter runs in this top area and right at the very highest point 6,500 feet, there was a marvellous "ice bar" where 36 flavours of grappa were sold. Many of these were sampled over the final four days and jolly nice they were too. Alongside the bar was a full size igloo, approximately 6 feet wide at its base of the walls and 20 feet across with ice seats all around the inside walls.

Luckily we had the team photo taken on Thursday lunchtime when we all met at our favourite restaurant near the top of the chairlift. It was to be the last time we all met on the mountain for later that day Gary had a low speed fall which damaged his knee

ligaments and thigh muscle. He experienced the delight of being whisked down the mountain on a stretcher carried by two of the mountain medics. He was then moved on to hospital, accompanied by Vince Stone and Doctor Tom from the St Agnes party. Dr Tom visited him to ensure that all was well with the treatment. After some concern Gary returned to us late on Saturday, a great relief for at one stage we thought he might be left behind. At the time of publication, Gary is well on the way to a full recovery.

By the end of the week Peter and Gerry were back to their old selves on the slopes and not embarrassing their guides on too many occasions. Charlie had an amazing two days when he did not fall over once. However, Vince soon got him back to his former glories, when on the last day Charlie decided to alter a couple of fences doing himself no damage in the process. Dave skied well, remembering old skills and gaining confidence with Mick leading the way. What a pairing that turned out to be. Gary progressed well and under Vince's watchful eye improved each day. It was such a shame that his fall came when he was stopping to join the remainder of the group at the bottom of a slope. Helen and Danny cruised around confidently between our group and the main party.

The large group of 53 people, of all ages, had a superb holiday, plenty of good skiing, a lot of fun and laughter and many nominations for our daily "Stavely" award. This is given to the person saying or doing the most ridiculous thing during the day. Even your best friend will creep off and inform the committee of your misdemeanour. Our guides featured well in the nominations and quite frankly they all deserved to wear the laughing elephant hat. PZ was crying with laughter when he led Charlie, the latter wearing only his socks on his feet across a slushy road. Peter knew he would be wearing the hat next day, but he just could not resist the look on Charlie's face. Bill too collected the hat by forgetting that Peter had brought his own ski boots and did not require alternative footwear, on the handing in of kit, plus he left his own ski poles behind at the hire shop.

Vince is the keeper of the hat after taking Charlie on his off piste excursions. Mick had made a pact with Dave and therefore kept out of the running. However, Martin 'Hoo Hoo' Houdini only escaped

his falling off the chairlift whilst ensuring that Gerry was safe, by one of the St Agnes crowd getting up from dinner and walking nose first into a glass door leading from the restaurant. This act witnessed by 40 of the party gave Martin the escape he was crying out for. The imprint of the nose was still there on the glass when we left on Sunday morning.

This was a wonderful week for the five of us, which

would have been impossible without our guides. We cannot praise them enough and all we can say at the end is Thank You and hopefully we shall see them all next year. Gary and Dave are now hooked on the sport and are on a recruiting drive. Anyone interested in this physically active holiday please contact Ray Hazan at HQ on 020 7723 5021 who will put you in touch with Gerry Jones. A £100 deposit will be required by June 1st for those wishing to attend.

Welcome to St Dunstan's

January 23rd

Gerard Grant of Thornton Cleveleys, nr Blackpool, Lancashire served in the Royal Navy from 1940 to 1948. His initial posting was on HMS *Valiant*, which was blown up by frogmen in Alexandria, followed by a tour in Malta during the blitz period. Transferring to HMS *Jamaica*, he sailed on the Arctic convoys to Russia before being posted on loan to the Indian Navy. While he was with them, he served in Bombay and on their flagship HMS *Glasgow*. After leaving the service he joined a textile company in Lancashire before moving to join Phillips. Mr Grant enjoys football and talking books. He has a son, daughter and three grandchildren.

Arthur Halestrap of Kings Sutton, Banbury, Oxfordshire served in both World Wars. He served from 1916 to 1919 in the Signals Section of the Royal Engineers providing communications between the front line infantry and Headquarters. After the war he worked for Marconi, developing communication links across the world, including India, Australia, Canada and the Falkland Islands. Later he ran a small farm producing tomatoes and a variety of vegetables. In 1942 he was commissioned into the Royal Signals, working in the intelligence field as trainer and chief signals officer. After the war he remained in Germany for five years before returning to the UK and transferring to the Foreign Office until retiring in 1963. He has three grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Violet Nairn of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire served in the Women's Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1944. She was posted to RAF Mildenhall where she maintained spark plugs in aero engines. After the war she raised her family and worked for Image Arts

and was very active making wedding cakes and other baking. Mrs Nairn and her husband have two daughters, one son, seven grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

Stephen Robinson of Alverstone, Gosport, Hampshire served in the Merchant Navy during the Korean War from 1949 to 1952. An apprentice marine engineer, he served as 4th engineer in South America and the Far East. In civilian life he became a maintenance engineer on the shipyards and then sailed oil rigs around the world to locations such as the North Sea, Nigeria, Gulf of Mexico, Turkey, Norway, Italy and Trinidad. In 1986 he bought a hotel in Gosport which he ran until retiring in 1996 at the age of 68. He is married to Denise.

February 7th

William Bodilly of Plymouth, Devon served in the Fleet Air Arm from 1940 to 1949. Now aged 76, he joined the Fleet Air Arm as an apprentice, but this was shortened due to the war. Posted to Arbroath in late 1942, he then served on HMS *Unicorn* maintaining aircraft. He left the Service with the rank of Petty Officer. In civilian life he worked for aircraft and engineering companies, spending four years in Canada as an aircraft fitter. Returning to the UK, he established his own mobile steam cleaning business and later supervised the nightshift in a tool making and welding workshop. Mr Bodilly collects snakes, tarantulas, parrots and other bird species. He has four children.

William Parry of Tremadog, Gwynedd served in the Royal Marines from 1940 to 1946. Now aged 79, he initially served in Iceland and Norway. En route to

Singapore, his ship was diverted to Egypt, then Greece. He was wounded during the Battle of Crete and spent ten days without food or water. Only 38 people from a 600 strong unit survived. After a period patrolling the Suez Canal, he joined a raid on Tobruk. His unit then moved to Scotland and trained with the Commandos to form 3rd Group who were deployed to Europe after D-Day. Mr Parry was then sent on to Australia where his unit linked up with US Rangers in the South Pacific. After leaving the Royal Marines he joined his father's painting business. He later worked as a consultant to Shell USA and the Pipeline Agency. His interests have included football and golf and he now enjoys military history. Mr Parry and his wife Maureen have a son and a daughter.

Arthur Porter of Bognor Regis, West Sussex served in the Royal Army Ordnance and then the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1941 to 1946. After training at Woolwich his unit deployed to North Africa with the 1st Army, salvaging and repairing tanks. The unit then moved to Italy with the 8th Army and from there to France and Germany. After the war he returned to his previous employment as a barber before turning to shop work. His interests include brass bands and bowling. He and his wife Mabel have a son and daughter.

Stanley Rickard of Southwick, Trowbridge, Wiltshire served in the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry from 1937 to 1941 and then the Royal Armoured Corps from 1941 to 1946. A butcher in civilian life, he was a groom with the TA and deployed to Palestine in 1940 with 600 horses before transferring to armoured cars. He was with the 8th Army from El Alamein until they reached Florence, Italy. After being demobbed, he worked as a groom on two stud farms before joining a local market trading company in Westbury. Later, he joined Bowyers where he worked for nearly 20 years. Mr Rickard kept and showed Bantams, winning three "best of show" awards. He and his wife Florence have a son, daughter and five grandchildren.

Edith Robinson of Newport Pagnell, Buckinghamshire served in the ATS from 1939 to 1943. Initially, she was based at Tidworth with the Royal Armoured Corps where she was the batwoman to the Commandant. When the American Forces arrived in the UK her unit deployed to Barnard Castle where she spent two years on general duties. After leaving the service she worked in a factory making parts for Spitfires and Hurricanes.

After the war she joined a factory making electrical parts. Her interests included gardening and she currently does craftworks. She has one daughter, three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Henry Wakeford of Brighton served in the Royal Artillery from 1939 to 1946 and the TA from 1952 to 1954. After training at Woolwich he joined an anti-aircraft unit serving in the Western Desert, Greece, Egypt and Italy. After the war he returned to his job as a bus driver. He enjoys walking and swimming. He is married to Marjorie.

Frederick Witherspoon of Bilbrook nr Wolverhampton served in the Royal Air Force from 1940 to 1945. Now aged 88 he served in a balloon unit before becoming a ground fitter with 83 Maintenance Unit. A mobile team, they deployed where needed in the UK to repair engines on Spitfires, Typhoons and Hurricanes. After the war, he initially returned to work as a bus driver but then joined the National Coal Board as a lorry driver. He later worked as a traffic weighman and was with the Caterpillar Tractor Company when he retired. Mr Witherspoon enjoyed greenhouse work. He has a daughter and grandson.

NEW PADRE

Father Tony Otterwell is now taking the Chapel services on Thursday mornings and every 4th Sunday each month. He takes over from Rev David Williams, who has recently moved. Father Tony Otterwell is a retired non-stipendiary priest of the Church of England. He now lives in Rottingdean, and several people may remember him when he assisted Father Martin at St Margaret's Church in Rottingdean. Father Otterwell served in the Royal Air Force, and is a member of the Royal British Legion (Rottingdean).

50 YEARS AGO

Sir Ian Fraser feted Dr Helen Keller during a flying visit to St Dunstan's. Blind and deaf since birth, she conversed with her secretary on her fingers.

St Dunstaner John Mudge got the chance to explore Spurs football ground, examining the baths, locker room and gymnasium. He reckoned the medical room was the envy of many a physio.

Down Under for World Blind Union Conference

by Penny Melville-Brown

I was proud to represent St Dunstan's in Melbourne at this gathering of representatives of blind and visually impaired people from across the world – over 130 countries had sent delegations. I was prouder still when the Governor of Australia specifically emphasised his support for St Dunstan's during his welcoming address to the assembly.

The conference had a strong theme of promoting the independence of blind and visually impaired people with the outgoing President, Dr Euclid Herie, reminding us that "No one will give us our freedom; we must take it for ourselves." Sir Ronald Wilson, President of the Australian Council on Overseas Aid spoke of "changing what it means to be blind."

The World Health Organisation estimated that there are some 45 million blind and 135 million visually impaired people worldwide yet, staggeringly, 80 per cent of these sight conditions could be avoided. There is a huge risk of these figures being doubled in the next 20 years because people are living longer.

Within the developing world, the causes of blindness (smallpox, venereal disease, cataracts and diabetes) have been progressively overcome during the last 200 years. Yet blindness is still increasing as our ageing populations are experiencing conditions such as macular degeneration that only become more common after the age of 70. Developing countries face even more significant problems: they already have 90 per cent of the world's blind and visually impaired people and are also facing a potential doubling. Yet prevention of four key diseases would be possible and relatively low cost. Vision 2020 covers a range of global activities aimed at reducing the number of people who become sight impaired. They are active in developing organisations and infrastructures to secure resources and develop local health care initiatives. But we also had a timely reminder from the Sierra Leone delegate that war is a major cause of blindness when he described the atrocities occurring in his country. It was rather humbling to hear of the scale of problems encountered elsewhere in the world – people struggling with blindness alongside poverty, isolation and little support.

Technology was a major feature of the conference. It had its own radio channel broadcasting each day's events and the conference could be heard live via a

dedicated web site. The DAISY consortium unveiled a CD based "talking book" prototype – the size of a paperback with long life batteries – just what I needed for the 14-hour flights. It should be available in about 12 months. We also heard of an important Australian legal case: a blind man had sued the creators of the Olympic Games web site under their version of the Disability Discrimination Act. He won and was awarded about £5,000 because the site was inaccessible to him.

A senior executive from Microsoft told us about the huge future developments in technology ranging from cheap pocket-sized computers capable of reading text, street signs and maps by 2010 to neurone transmitters by 2020 that detect and adjust biological activity from within the body. By 2030, we may have "nanobots" in our veins and nervous systems that revolutionise communications between people so that visual and hearing impairment and other disabilities become less limiting. I was not sure whether to hope or apply a large pinch of salt! It was clear that technology offers new opportunities for the blind and visually impaired, that our adaptive hard and software is often the forerunner of IT evolution and that we need to be involved in those developments from design to decision making.

Amidst the long hours of the five-day conference, there was some time for relaxation. Melbourne hosted an Australian night with demonstrations of sheep shearing, aboriginal music and, of course, barbecues. We heard a stunning choir singing vibrant layers of tone, that combined the sounds of electronic synthesisers and didgeridoos – all by voice. The final dinner was a stomping affair with enthusiastic delegates whirling to South American zamponas (pan-pipe) music.

Two lasting memories of the conference. Throughout the city centre, nearly every road junction had a continuously "clicking" traffic light that changed speed when the lights were green. Not only could you cross safely but they are excellent navigation aids. Last, but probably most important, were the thousand volunteers wearing blue surcoats who assisted us in the hotels until late in the night, who stood on street corners ready to help and who guided us throughout the conference. Australian generosity and hospitality at its very best.

PS You can find out more about new talking books at www.daisy.org.



A Dark Corner

Author: Celia Dale

Reader: Hugh Ross

Catalogue number: 5966

Duration: 3 Hours 45 minutes

Let me introduce you to Arthur Didcot, please do, I'd hate you to miss the chance; he's a quiet sort of chap, something of a scholar by all accounts, and he's been married for years to a really nice little lady. Unfortunately however, as your acquaintance deepens, you'll discover that Arthur is not all he seemed to be at the beginning. His sickening condescension to Eroll, a young West Indian man, gives the first clue, I think, and after hearing that it's no great surprise to learn later that he's a racist of the most despicable kind. But that's not the half of it, his unobtrusive manner hides a different creature entirely, a slimy creature, a poisonous one too, whose nature tends toward murder and worse!

What his specific crimes are, and how he carries them out, I'd rather not say here for fear of spoiling a jolly good book. But this I can say, and with perfect honesty too, normal looking Arthur Didcot, in his ordinary little house, is the most loathsome character I've ever met in literature.

A Family Likeness

Author: Mary Lavin

Reader: William Abney

Catalogue number: 6365

Duration: 3 Hours

The noble qualities of Homo sapiens are as difficult to find as rocking horse manure. The more I read of human relationships the more strongly this conclusion is forced upon me. Take this book as an example; its characters, for the most part, are as obnoxious, spiteful, bigoted and petty-minded as anyone you've ever come across. Which I presume was the author's intention in writing it, because I have encountered such people, I meet them every day, from the elderly couples who are slowly nagging each other to death,

to the betrothed lovers who share the same level of trust as the spider and the fly. There are stories in this collection, which indicate how children are steeped in the prejudices of their parents, and blinkered, too, so they see only the faults of outsiders. But there are no stories of adventure here, no tales of daring-do; it's all mundane superficially, but look under the surface and it's rather disturbing, frightening even. As I said at the beginning, Homo erectus has very little excuse to strut and swagger, and that, like it or not, includes all of us!

FAMILY NEWS

BIRTHS

Congratulations on the birth of:

Emilia Louise Iona on September 5th 2000. She is the first great-granddaughter of *Charles and Eva Coston* of Elm, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.

Joshua Sharples on January 7th. He is the third great-grandchild of *Tom and Nancey Taylor* of Leyland, Preston, Lancashire.

Harry Edward on January 13th. He is the grandson of *Ted and Barbara Pepper* of Boston, Lincolnshire.

Ethan Cullen on January 19th. He is the grandson of *Iain and Val Millard* of Saltdean, Brighton. Many St Dunstaners will know the proud parents Mel Sayers and Gary Cullen.

GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to:

Richard and Lillian Hooper of Heamoor, Penzance, Cornwall on January 1st.

DIAMOND ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to:

Frank and Kathleen Barsby of Plymouth, Devon on February 15th. Frank also celebrated his 84th birthday.

Charles and Peggy Blockley of Sileby, nr Loughborough, Leicestershire on February 19th.

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARIES

Congratulations to:

Bertie and Eva Williamson of Colchester, Essex who celebrated 61 years of marriage on January 27th.

William and Ivy Hain of Weymouth, Dorset who celebrated 65 years of marriage on February 6th.

William and Gladys Reid of Peterborough, Cambridgeshire who celebrated 61 years of marriage on February 12th.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to:

Sergeant Julie Wiles after becoming the first woman to win a place in a military aerobatics team. She is joining the Army Air Corps' famous Blue Eagles helicopter display squad based at Middle Wallop near Salisbury. Julie is the granddaughter of Kath Wiles of Newquay, Cornwall, widow of *George Wiles*.

Matthew Inness, aged 22 who, after graduating from Hull University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, is due to enter the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth as a Direct Graduate Entrant with the rank of Sub-Lieutenant (ME). He is the grandson of Alice Inness of Batley, Yorkshire, and the late *John Inness*. Keeping up with the family tradition, Matthew's sister Helen, aged 20 is also currently serving with the Royal Navy.

DEATHS

We regret to announce the death of:

Isabella Thomson on January 20th. She was the wife of *Arthur Thomson* of Middlesbrough, Cleveland.

Muriel Edgar on February 5th. She was the wife of *Stanley Edgar* of Peacehaven, East Sussex.

Norah Brown of Liverpool, Merseyside on January 14th. She was the widow of *James Brown*.

Eileen Dudley of Croydon, Surrey on January 23rd. She was the widow of *Edward Dudley*.

Marion White of Stalybridge, Cheshire on January 23rd. She was the widow of *Harry White*.

Moria Barstow of Painswick, Gloucestershire on January 28th. She was the widow of *John Barstow*.

Elizabeth Brown of Welwyn Garden City on February 4th, aged 99. She was the widow of First World War St Dunstaner *George "Archie" Brown*.

Susan Fry on February 15th. She was the daughter of *Stanley and Florence Rickard* of Southwick, Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

Nicola "Nikki" Hallett on August 31st, aged 27. She was the granddaughter of Elizabeth Ward and the late *Ken Ward* of Chandlers Ford, Eastleigh, Hampshire.

Our sympathy goes to their families and friends.

IN MEMORY

It is with deep regret that we have to record the deaths of the following St Dunstaners and we offer our deepest sympathy to their widows, family and friends.

"Ron" Ettridge

King's Royal Regiment

Edgar Rowland "Ron" Ettridge of Croydon, Surrey died on January 20th, aged 85. He had been a St Dunstaner since 1943. Having worked as a travelling salesman, builder and game & poultry manager for Bentalls of Kingston, he enlisted with the King's Royal Regiment in 1940. He was promoted to Sergeant in 1942 but was wounded at El Alamein a month later. After training with St Dunstan's Mr Ettridge set up his own practice as a physiotherapist in Croydon. He retired in 1989. Our sympathy goes to his sons John and Malcolm, daughters Patricia and Sonia, and all other members of the family.

Roger Hingston

Royal Artillery

Captain Roger Charles Hingston of Tenbury, Worcestershire died on January 26th, aged 93. He served in the Royal Artillery (South Notts Hussars) from 1936 to 1945. In civilian life he worked as a farmer. Our sympathy goes to his widow Thelma and all other members of the family.

Douglas Frith

Hampshire Regiment

Douglas Philip Frith of Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire died in February, aged 77. He had been a St Dunstaner since 1943. Originally a grocery assistant he joined the Hampshire Regiment in 1941. He was blinded by an accidental cartridge explosion while on manoeuvres in 1942. After training at St Dunstan's he worked as an upholsterer and cabinetmaker. His interests included gardening, handicrafts, horse racing and wrought iron work. Our sympathy goes to his widow Peggy, daughter Sandra and all other members of the family.