

January 2013

Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



Her Majesty
QUEEN ELIZABETH II



From the Chairman.

Your message from Major General Andrew Keeling, CB, CBE, RM.

HAPPY NEW YEAR to you all. I hope you have recovered from Christmas and are now all set for 2013.

However, before we leave 2012 behind us forever our Editor has suggested we should break with tradition, have a January Review, and dedicate it to Her Majesty The Queen, our Patron, to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee. What a brilliant idea!

As a direct consequence of my military career over 34 years and my strong connection with military charities, including Blind Veterans UK, over the past 18 years, I have been lucky enough to meet several members of the Royal Family on numerous occasions – the Queen, Prince Philip, Prince Charles, Prince William, Prince Harry, Princess Anne, the Duke of Kent and Prince Michael of Kent.

My first meeting with the Queen was in the autumn of 1978 when, for only the second time ever, the Royal Marines were granted the privilege for a few weeks of providing the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, and as a Company Commander in 41 Commando I was one of only three officers to become, temporarily, the Captain of the Queen's Guard. In the normal course of events this would not have resulted in me meeting Her Majesty, but the first time I was 'on' happened to coincide with an Investiture, and I learned to my surprise that on Investiture days the Queen likes to meet the Guard Commander in the Palace as she makes her way from her quarters to the Ballroom, which is where Investitures take place. I was directed to stand on a particular spot of a very plush carpet in a beautiful gilded room groaning with spectacular furniture, ornaments and pictures to await her arrival. When I first saw her my immediate thoughts were that she was rather small, and that (not surprisingly, with some afterthought) she looked exactly like the Queen! We had a nice little chat, mostly about Prince Edward who, she told me, then wanted to join the Royal Marines Band.

Since then I have been lucky enough to attend three Investitures in my own right. These are splendid and surprisingly nerve-wracking occasions. It's a bit like a very posh school prize-giving with at least 100 people waiting to receive their awards. Proud family members sit in the Ballroom watching as each recipient enters the room, approaches the Sovereign, bows, has a private chat, receives the appropriate medal, bows, walks a few paces backwards, and then leaves the room.

Prince Philip is Captain-General of the Royal Marines, an appointment of which he is very proud and which he takes very seriously. He regularly attends Royal Marines special occasions, often but by no means always ceremonial. There are few things he enjoys more than chatting with the lads, and he always raises a laugh with his keen sense of humour. I have met him a number of times, including calling on him in his Buckingham Palace office which is quite an experience.

I am a Royalist through and through. I think we are very lucky to have a Royal Family, in particular one that is so dedicated to the people of our country, and that stands so clearly for all that is British. I am constantly amazed at the time and effort that they put into their work. We are certainly very lucky as an organisation to have a close link with them.



Picture: Blind Veterans UK President Ray Hazan, Chairman Major General Andrew Keeling CB, CBE, RM. The photo also features Vice Patron General Sir Peter de la Billière KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, DL & Bar and Wallace Burnet-Smith.

From the Chief Executive

Your message from Robert Leader DL.

Her Majesty The Queen is Patron of about 600 charities of which Blind Veterans UK is fortunate to be one and I'm confident that this reflects the long held esteem in which the organisation is held by the Royal Family.

Many longer serving members will have wonderful memories of the amazing reception, in Buckingham Palace, that Her Majesty so generously gave us for our 85th anniversary. I think she spoke to almost everyone present and such was her interest and admiration that she stayed far longer than she usually does at these events.

The Queen has dedicated the past 60 years of her life to the service of her country and it was wonderful to see her people turning out in their thousands to welcome her and to celebrate her continuing devotion to duty in the year of her Diamond Jubilee.

In my capacity as a Deputy Lieutenant (DL) of Greater London and the Representative Deputy Lieutenant for the London Borough of Ealing I was privileged to be involved in two royal events in 2012. The first was on a cloudless and unseasonably warm day in March when the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh visited the North London Boroughs and it was my pleasant duty to present a number of 'Achievers' from the boroughs of Ealing and Harrow. The Queen talked to them all, an experience I know they will treasure for the rest of their lives.

The second occasion was a total climatic contrast, the very wet Sunday of the River Pageant when I was one of ten DLs chosen to accompany the Lord Lieutenant on his launch, two boats behind the Royal Barge. In spite of the weather it was a wonderful experience to be part of this 'once in a lifetime' event and to see the enormous crowds, on and off the water, cheering her Majesty on her way downstream.

We are so lucky in this country to have a Monarch with such high ideals and sense of duty. I feel hugely privileged to have been able to meet her. If I have as much stamina as she has when I am eighty six, I shall feel I'm doing well. She is a truly remarkable Lady.



Picture: Her Majesty The Queen greets Chief Executive, Robert Leader DL, at the reception in 2001.



Picture: Her Majesty The Queen greets former Chairman, Captain Michael Gordon-Lennox OBE RN. HRH The Duke of Edinburgh greets former President, the late Colin Beaumont-Edmonds, and Joyce Beaumont-Edmonds.

From the President

Your message from Ray Hazan OBE.

On 19th July 1985, our Patron, Her Majesty The Queen, accompanied by HRH Prince Philip, travelled to the Brighton centre to open the newly refurbished South Wing. The visit was a year after the IRA terrorist attack on the Conservative party conference at the Grand Hotel in Brighton. As you may imagine, security was at the top of the list! This is a short account of what went on behind the scenes.

About four days before the visit, some 200 uniformed policemen went through the building with a fine tooth comb. Passes were required to have access to each floor. One-way see through cling film covered the windows. On the day, armed police patrolled the Downs behind the building, no doubt complementing an all round protective cordon.

Some 500 veterans and their escorts assembled in the lounge/dining-room. Many others were distributed all round the building; ready to meet Her Majesty to demonstrate our activities.

My role was to sit in the escort office behind the reception desk in the lounge and over the PA system, give a running commentary as to what the Royal party was being shown at any time and who was being presented.

Quite coincidentally, John Hosken, a reporter on BBC Radio 4's Today programme and radio commentator, telephoned me the day before. He gave me some useful tips: speak slowly, lower the pitch of the voice and take breaths after each full-stop.

The Royal party arrived at Brighton station by train, and it became a matter of monitoring Radio Sussex to relay their commentary as to what Her Majesty was wearing and the progress of the party as it made its way to Ovingdean.

It then became a matter of someone on each floor telephoning down to the escort office as the Royal tour progressed. Using Braille notes, which I still have, I was able to describe when people were being presented to our Patron and the activity they were representing. For example, at "11.28 Her Majesty visited the new ladies' wing where she met two members of

staff and seven lady St Dunstaners; Winnie Edwards, Jane Farrant, Thelma Meredith, Dorothy Philippo, Beryl Sleigh, Dorothy Martin and Elsie Tucker".

The yew chair, used by Her Majesty is now in the Blue Room. It was made from a piece of yew some 2,000 years old, which was recovered from the Thames. A plaque outside the escort office records the day. A Braille plaque beneath has been read by so many fingers, that the raised dots are no longer legible!

Only the natural elements conspired to try and spoil the day. A marquee had been set up on the lawn at the front of the building, as one of the several dining-rooms. A stiff breeze that day blew it down just before it was about to be occupied. Somehow, all were found alternative places and no one went hungry! Truly, 'a day to remember'.



Picture: Ray Hazan receives his OBE from Her Majesty The Queen.



Picture: HM The Queen opening the new South Wing in 1985.



Picture: HM The Queen and HRH Prince Philip The Duke of Edinburgh at the Brighton centre in 1985 with the late Matron Penny Goodwin in blue.



Picture: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh addresses members, staff and guests.



Picture: Ken Revis OBE and his wife Muriel were among the members and family to meet the Queen and Prince Philip. They are to the Queen's left.

Joan Osborne.

Born into the family of St Dunstan's, now Blind Veterans UK, Joan Osborne and her late husband Bob had the honour of meeting Her Majesty The Queen and HRH Prince Philip The Duke of Edinburgh on two occasions.

The first meeting was in 1981 at a garden party at Buckingham Palace, just one week before the wedding of HRH Prince Charles to Lady Diana Spencer. Joan told the Review: "There had been thunderstorms that morning and as Bob and I were standing in line to meet the Queen it was overcast with the threat of more rain. As the Queen walked along speaking with everyone, she spotted Bob's badge and said 'You're a St Dunstaner' and asked how long he had been a member. She walked on to meet other people, then turned back to us and said: 'I'm so sorry I can't do anything about the weather'. Bob and I both laughed with her and were thrilled that she'd turned back to speak with us.

"Lady Diana then came to speak with us. She was carrying some flowers and when she noticed Bob's St Dunstan's badge she asked if he would like one to pin behind his 'brooch'. She immediately corrected herself and with good humour said 'I do apologise, it's a badge, I must remember that'. She removed a flower and placed it behind Bob's badge. We spoke for some time before she had to go and speak with other guests. She was utterly charming.

"Later that day Bob and I met her again in the most unexpected of circumstances. As Bob and I were walking from the cloakroom he realised that he'd lost the flower. He shouted 'Someone's taken my flower!' What he didn't realise was that he was standing in front of Prince Philip and Lady Diana. They roared with laughter, as did Bob and I."

As many of you reading this will know, Joan has known Blind Veterans UK her entire life. Her late father, Joe Walch, was blinded at the age of 20 in 1917 at Ypres. He was one of the First World War members to receive training at Regent's Park, gaining employment with the then St Dunstan's as a Braille teacher. He was also the only one to teach Moon Braille. With the advent of the Second World War our work relocated to Church Stretton in Shropshire, our wartime home. Joe moved there with his family and it was during the war years that Joan also joined the staff at the age of 16.

A skilled pianist she worked in the Music Department and it was there she met her late husband Bob. Like her father, Bob was blinded at the age of 20, and like her father, he too sustained other injuries, losing a leg and part of one arm. Bob was blinded in Normandy on 11th July 1944. Following treatment on our ward at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, he arrived at Church Stretton in September 1945.

Speaking of that time, Joan said: "I worked at Church Stretton as a music therapist. My father was a keen musician and I grew up with a love of music. Through my work I saw just how effective a form of therapy it was, as many of the young men were shell shocked and it gave them a focus and helped them to come to terms with the terrible trauma they had experienced. Bob was one of the young men I taught. They were great to work with and we put on lots of productions. I have so many wonderful memories of the people there. Young men like Tommy Gaygan who was blinded in WWII, when he also lost both hands. I taught him to play the trombone and he joined the brass section. Before we started classes I had to remove his gauntlets and as he was a real joker he used to pick me up and sit me on top of the piano.



Picture: The Brass Band at Church Stretton. From left to right Collis Walters, Joe Walch (Joan's father), David Bell, Tommy Gaygan, John Simpson and Edgar Harrison, one of the teachers.



Picture: Putting on a musical at Church Stretton with Joan seated in the front row left.

"We also went on outings and I first met Bob when I was 18, as I was asked to take a young lad to the pictures in Shrewsbury. It was Bob and I remember thinking how handsome he was. After that he started coming to the music classes. He learnt to play the guitar as he had a gadget he could fit to his artificial arm and he would play Hawaiian style."

However it was Joan and Bob's bowling skills that grabbed the attention of the Queen and Prince Philip when they visited the Brighton centre in 1985.

Sitting with Joan in her 'office' at the Brighton centre, she told the Review: "We took up indoor bowling in the 1970s. Bob didn't think he would be able to do it, but he proved to be a very good bowler and he went on to become Chairman of the Bowling Club for many years.

"When the Queen and Prince Philip visited the centre we arranged a match in their honour. I had to stand beside each bowler and tell them the distance to the jack. I stood beside Bob, he bowled and he got so close to the jack I couldn't have done better. I tapped Bob on the shoulder to tell him he'd done well. We were both thrilled and when I looked up The Queen smiled at me to say well done. That was a very special day, one of many special days."



Picture: Joan and Bob bowling at the Brighton centre.

Pamela Woodford MBE.

Pamela Woodford still remembers the cream dress the Queen wore the day she was awarded an MBE for Services to the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service.

It was 1991 and Pamela travelled to Buckingham Palace with her husband, their daughter Jane and son Robin. "Meeting the Queen and being presented with the MBE was one of the best days of my life. The Queen was wonderful and it was all the more impressive as the Ghurkhas were guarding the Queen, as I have a great fondness for them."

Pamela from Long Benton in Newcastle upon Tyne joined Blind Veterans UK in 2010. During the Second World War she Served with the Wrens from 1941 to 1946. She trained as a plotter at HMS Calliope in Newcastle and after 18 months was posted to HMS Victory in Portsmouth where she was on duty on D-Day.

Speaking of D-Day Pamela said: "I was on duty on the night of D-Day. We knew it was serious, but we had to treat it as just another night and just another job. When our little ships set off we used dead reckoning to plot their location and they landed just as our main ships landed.

"I left the Wrens in 1946 and joined the Royal Naval Auxiliary Service (RNXS) in 1974 after I saw it advertised. I Served until 1991 and was the first female Officer in the Northern Command. We would meet once a week and as a former plotter I was responsible for training people on dead reckoning. Computers were coming to the fore then, but I preferred to work from charts. There were about 70 units around the coast, including the coast of Scotland. It was the time of the Cold War and the RNXS was set up as there was an increased threat of nuclear war. Each year we would take part in an exercise that would last for two weeks."

Men and women of the RNXS, or Auxiliarymen as they were known (regardless of gender), were to be readily available to assist in the tasks of evacuating major ports and dispatching larger and faster merchant vessels overseas in case of an attack on the UK. They were uniformed and trained part-time. Training covered such areas as 'afloat' (ship manning), communications, map plotting and mine watching.



Picture: Pamela Woodford MBE at Buckingham Palace.

John Gilbert

John and Daphne Gilbert, from Wimborne in Dorset, had a wonderful and wholly unexpected meeting with Her Majesty The Queen when they attended the 85th anniversary reception at Buckingham Palace in 2001.

Recounting the momentous day John recalls: "We somehow managed to lose our party and decided to sit in a very long hallway in the Palace to take time to collect ourselves before heading off in search of our group. While we were sitting there a member of the Palace staff came to tell us that the Queen would shortly walk through the hallway from our left.

"As soon as we were told the Queen was coming Daphne and I stood up. Afterwards Daphne told me that the Queen spotted my white cane and crossed the hallway to speak with us. She asked if I had trained at St Dunstan's, I told her I had for 11 months in 1970/71 and that my training had proved very successful, as I worked at Barclays head office in Poole doing word processing. She placed her hand on my shoulder and said that she thought St Dunstan's was a wonderful place. It was a wonderful day and that was the pinnacle of the day for Daphne and I, meeting the Queen.

"We felt a bit shell shocked afterwards. Firstly, that we'd met the Queen and also that she had crossed the hallway to come and say hello to us. Daphne and I have been married for 41 years and we have been blessed to have some very happy times together, but we both cherish the memory of those precious few minutes speaking with the Queen. It is an honour to be a member of Blind Veterans UK and to have the Queen as our Patron."



Picture: Daphne and John Gilbert on holiday in Sandbanks in Dorset.

Dave Stuttard MBE

Dave Stuttard was awarded an MBE by Her Majesty The Queen at Buckingham Palace on 12th October 2011. It was in recognition of his charitable work with St Dunstan's, now Blind Veterans UK, and his own charity MyUbique, which he set up in 2005.

Through MyUbique, Dave uses the skills he learnt as a Royal Engineer to improve water sanitation in the Tolon-Kumbungu District of Northern Ghana in sub-Saharan Africa. To date 71,000 people have been given access to clean drinking water through the work. An outstanding testimony to the success of the programme came from the District Assembly, as reports show the work has eradicated guinea worm and trachoma in the villages where clean water and sanitation were introduced. Trachoma is the world's leading cause of infectious blindness from waterborne parasites.

Speaking of meeting the Queen, Dave said: "I was accompanied to Buckingham Palace by my wife Dot, our son Steven and sister-in-law Eleanor. On arrival at the Palace we went through the Choirmaster's Door where we were escorted by an Equerry to the Ballroom. I asked if it would be possible for my family to be seated where they could see the ceremony and we were thrilled when they were placed in the middle of the front row.

"I've always been a Royalist and it was an honour to be awarded my MBE by the Queen. When she heard it was partly in recognition of my work with St Dunstan's, Her Majesty said 'Oh you're a St Dunstaner'. After she had placed the MBE on the hook on my lapel, she held out her hand, which I shook, took a step back, turned to the right and left the Ballroom. My medal was then removed, put in a box and presented to me. It was a lovely day and the MBE now takes pride of place with my Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal and Military Service Medals. I wear it with pride at the Remembrance Sunday ceremony and all suitable ceremonies that Dot and I attend."

Dave reported that work in Ghana is going well and in November 2012, in recognition of the work of MyUbique, he was made Chief of the Village of Fahini and presented with a chicken and three precious cocoa beans by the villagers. He and Dot were also given traditional robes.

He is presently working to raise money to bring clean water to further villages in 2013. The cost is approximately £20,000 per village for the materials only. Dave plots the route of the pipes to bring lifesaving water to the villages. The labour is carried out by the village women, who dig the trenches to house the pipes, which are then put in place by the water board. Two former Air Force Cadets who worked on the project in 2010 are working to raise £20,000 to bring water to one village, work they will undertake in Ghana in September and October.

Dave said: "After my rehab and training at the Brighton centre in 2003 I realised I had to do something to regain my independence, as I had always been a proactive person and initially I found it difficult to adjust when life as I had known it came to a sudden stop. Inspired by the St Dunstaners, now members of Blind Veterans UK, I met, and encouraged by family and friends, I turned to my military skills to help me regain my independence. I did research to find out how I could utilise my skills as a Royal Engineer to help myself and others. Eventually I came up with the idea to do a water supply and sanitisation project in Africa and that's how MyUbique came about. I always tell people that I don't do it for purely altruistic reasons as I enjoy the work and it gives me a focus. It's great meeting the people in Ghana and I get immense satisfaction from a job well done."

For further information on MyUbique visit: www.Myubique.info



Picture: Dave Stuttard receives his MBE from Her Majesty The Queen in the Ballroom at Buckingham Palace.

David Castleton.

As you have already read in Ray Hazan's report, in 1985 HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh came to the Brighton centre to ceremonially open the newly refurbished South Wing. Introduced by Lord Fraser, both the Queen and the Duke addressed a large gathering of our members and staff in the lounge and the Queen unveiled a commemorative plaque. Afterwards the Royal couple stepped down from the platform and relaxed among members and staff, talking and laughing.

The visit ended in the main entrance where Her Majesty moved along the presentation line with a word or two for everyone. Asking my role when I was introduced, the Queen said: "I expect you have been very busy then."

The best was yet to come. Reaching the end of the line she turned to see the Duke, having signed the visitors' book, in animated conversation with Commandant Lawrie Fawcett. They were two Naval men, heads together, getting on well. "There", said the Queen turning to us and smiling. "It's always the same. We're on a tight schedule and when it's time to leave he's always chatting away with someone." The Duke soon joined her and they left, concluding a day to remember for all who had the good fortune to be there.

David Castleton is a former member of staff who gives up his time each month to record the Talking Review with Valerie Tomalin.



Picture: David Castleton reads the Review.

Colin Williamson.

Colin Williamson, Blind Veterans UK Cadet Challenge Project Officer, is pictured with his daughter Claire, as she hands a bouquet of flowers to HM Queen Elizabeth II in Newcastle in April 1990. His daughter Lindsey is looking up at the Queen and Colin's late mother Joyce is standing to his left and Brenda is just out of shot. Colin recalls: "It was a lovely sunny day and the girls still talk about the time they met Her Majesty. On the day they were very excited and slightly in awe I think! We bought the flowers from a stall on the way up to Newcastle and it didn't take us long to find a great spot to stand. The atmosphere was tremendous, a lot of schoolchildren were there and they cheered and waved their Union flags. An unforgettable day!"



Picture: The Queen accepts flowers from Claire Williamson as dad Colin holds her and sister Lindsey, mum Brenda and grandmother Joyce look on.

Tony Eldridge DSC, Submariner and Charioteer.

"My wife Dorothy and I had the great honour to meet HM The Queen in March 1995 at the Port Elizabeth Club in South Africa. We were invited to a reception in her honour by the British High Commissioner, as I was Chairman of the East London branch of the South African Legion, and Chairman of the East Cape Region of the South African Legion.

"We were driven down to Port Elizabeth by Colonel Bailey MC & Bar. We still remember standing in line to meet the Queen. Dorothy and I had retired from Rhodesia to live in East London. In Rhodesia I had worked for ICL and I was a Reservist in the British South Africa Police. I was occasionally called up for duty to go tramping about the bush, for which I was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal."

As many of you will know Tony is a former Submariner, whose lifelong motto is: 'He who volunteers gets the best job'. An inveterate volunteer, while Serving with the Royal Navy during World War II, Sub Lieutenant Eldridge signed up for Special and Hazardous Service and became a member of the elite Submariner group of charioteers — or human torpedo drivers. Initial training took place in the cold waters around Scotland.

Fifty one years before Tony met the Queen, he was presented to His Majesty King George VI in 1944. It was onboard HMS Bonaventure in Scapa Flow when the King inspected the Home Fleet ahead of D-Day. Tony's fellow charioteer, Petty Officer Bill Smith, was also presented to the King.

As you can see from the Daily Mirror lead story on the following pages, the charioteers were hot news and the press were keen to find out the identity of the men they named 'human torpedoes'. During a spell of leave at his parents' home in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Tony hand washed the silk combinations (combs) he wore when diving and hung them on the line to dry in the breeze.

As he spent many hours in a seated position on the chariot, the combs took up the same position when driving the Mk I Jeep. His father noticed the combs, but nothing was said, and the secret was kept.

On 9th November 1944 Tony and Petty Officer Butch Woollcott, his number two, took part in the successful Ceylon Secret Operation 51, launching the new Mk II Chariot from Submarine HMS Trenchant to attack a target in Phuket Harbour in Siam, a Japanese controlled ship. To reach their target they travelled on HMS Trenchant from Trincomalee in Ceylon to Phuket in Siam, now Thailand, a distance of some 1,240 miles, which the submarine covered in seven days.

On the night of the attack as Tony and Butch dressed they included their personal weapons, 25 gold sovereigns, silk maps, button compasses sewn into their clothing — and a cyanide capsule.

Tony said: "As part of our training Butch and I did a survival course in the jungles of Ceylon when we were told of the terrible things that men captured by the Japanese had been subjected to. Butch and I decided that no way would we get captured, and that was going through our minds as we set off. When we launched from Trenchant it was into lovely clear warm water, so different from the freezing murky cold waters of the UK that we had trained in. We left the submarine at around 2200 hours and we were under the ship at 0030.

"When you're piloting a chariot underwater you can't see far ahead and we stayed above the water until we saw the mast of the Volpi, the Japanese controlled ship. That's when we dived and kept going underwater until we came up against the bottom of our target, which was covered in barnacles."

To get to the target Tony had to pilot the chariot for 6.5 miles underwater with Butch sitting behind. Reaching the target at 0030 they started work to attach the 1,100 lb warhead to the ship's bottom. As the bottom was covered with large barnacles the magnets would not stick. Butch put a clamp onto the bilge keel and tied the warhead with rope to the clamp. Once attached, Butch set the timer clock to 0630. Tony and Butch turned to face one another, shook hands, boarded their Mk II chariot and headed back to HMS Trenchant.

On reaching Trenchant they were surprised to be told by Lt. Cmdr Hezlet to sink their chariot and it has lain, for the past 68 years, on the bottom of the Andaman Sea. Tony and Butch had hoped that they could bring the chariot back to the UK, rather than scuttle it.

At 0630 the following morning as the skipper looked through the periscope he said "There she goes!" Tony witnessed the explosion and saw the debris fly into the air at twice the height of the mast and watched as the ship quickly sank.

Theirs was the final chariot operation of World War II.

Tony Eldridge was awarded the DSC and Butch Woollcott the DSM. Their Awards were sent to them through the post.

The front page of the Daily Mirror set out below is just one of many front pages that grabbed the attention of a nation at war, as everyone tried to find out more about the incredible charioteers. Today, Tony keeps the original newspapers at the house he shares with Dorothy in Hertfordshire.



Picture: Two charioteers on a MK 1 chariot who were photographed by the press in 1944 as they submerged below the waters.



Picture: His late Majesty King George VI inspects S/Lt Eldridge (left) and PO Smith, wearing their Sladen diving suits, onboard HMS Bonaventure at Scapa Flow in May 1944.

Eddie O'Brien.

Eddie O'Brien's first memory of the Queen was when he was six or seven years old. He remembers peering over his mother's shoulder as she read a newspaper. He looked at a photo of a man and a woman and two young ladies. He asked his mum who they were and she said: 'That's the King and Queen visiting a bomb site in the East End'. An inquisitive boy, he then asked who the two young ladies were and his mum told him they were Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret. Impressed with the Princesses he then asked his mum if he could marry them when he grew up. Being a loving mum he was told "Maybe son, maybe."

Speaking of his visit to Buckingham Palace in 2001, Eddie said: "It was an honour to meet the Queen and one that I shall never forget. We are blessed to have a Monarchy and the Queen is an example of a wonderful Monarch, one who is blessed with intelligence, humanity and grace, a person the rest of the world can learn from and respect."

Many of you reading this will know Eddie for his work in the Art & Craft Workshop at the Brighton centre. Eddie first went into the workshop after he lost his sight 13 years ago, while he was still in shock and adjusting to a life of blindness.

In his words: "All the staff at Blind Veterans UK are smashing, and right from day one my fellow St Dunstaners, now members of Blind Veterans UK, and the staff in the Art & Craft Workshop helped me to learn to live with my sight loss. The first time I went into the workshop I met Wallace Burnet-Smith and the late Dave Humphreys and they both encouraged me to attend the workshop on a regular basis. I am truly grateful to them as I have found something I love. Initially I learnt basket making and it would take me about 1½ hours to make a basket. As I became more competent it took just 20 minutes.

"Today my real passion is the sculptures I create working with Phil Rawson, who is himself a very talented sculptor and instructor. In fact Esther Freeman, the Art & Craft Manager, Dave Bryant, Leigh Gibbins, Adrian Tilford and Kathryn Jones-Romain are all wonderful instructors. Each of them is a gifted artist and they each share their skills to open a new world to me and my fellow Blind Veterans UK members.

"I hadn't done anything artistic before, but right from the start being there helped to rebuild my confidence. At the moment I'm working on a clay sculpture of a British Bulldog that has my head. I got the idea for it from the writing of Jack London and Robert Service, as I love their tales of life in the untamed wilderness of the Yukon Territory. I chose to make a bulldog in homage to Cherokee, the bulldog that fights and beats White Fang in London's book of the same name. My bulldog should be ready in 2013."



Picture: HM The Queen speaks with Eddie O'Brien, left.



Picture: One of Eddie's soapstone carvings.

Bob Treasure MBE.

Bob Treasure met the Queen in 1968, when he was awarded an MBE for Services to the RAF, housing people who had returned from Aden in 1967.

Bob recalls: "My wife Muriel and I drove up from RAF Gaydon with our daughter Sally in our Ford Anglia estate car. I drove to the gates of Buckingham Palace only to be told by a Policeman to move further back in the queue, which I had somehow managed to miss. We joined the queue and I remember we were between two very impressive Rolls Royce cars in our humble Ford Anglia. As I had only just returned from Aden, and was at the time newly stationed at RAF Gaydon in Warwickshire, I got confused with Aden and Gaydon, which caused a bit of a laugh. It was a very special occasion, especially me being a boy from Wiltshire.

"I joined the RAF on 10th January 1938 and had the honour and good fortune to Serve for 35 years, leaving as a Warrant Officer. Today Muriel and I live in Exeter, but I'm originally from Westbury in Wiltshire, born and bred in the shadow of the white horse. I was encouraged to sign up by two elderly gentlemen I worked with, as they would say to me in their broad Wiltshire dialect: 'I tellee what Bob you want to join the Service, there's to be a war'. Nine months later one of them went to the Post Office and brought back a pamphlet for me to sign up. I remember it had a portrait of Lord Kitchener on the front. I completed it, sent it off, and was given a date to go to Bristol where I joined up and Served right through the war.

"My career took me to Aden, Yemen, Cyprus and Singapore and I am grateful to those two gentlemen for their words of encouragement. Especially as I met Muriel and we have been blessed with a long and happy marriage and three children, Sally, Robert and Jennifer. During the war, Muriel was a driver in the WRAF, and we met in Newport in Curleon when her CO, a Flight Lieutenant, invited her to meet his new Corporal – I was that Corporal and that's how we met. Initially we were friends, but we fell in love and married in 1944."



Picture: Muriel and Bob Treasure MBE at the wedding of their granddaughter Lyndsey to Matthew Cahill.

Jean Threlfall.

Here Jean Threlfall, from Stockport in Cheshire, speaks of the time she and her late husband Sam, a veteran of El Alamein, met HM The Queen and HRH Prince Philip The Duke of Edinburgh.

"Sam and I were blessed to attend a St Dunstan's garden party and the 85th anniversary reception at Buckingham Palace. We also attended a garden party with the Not Forgotten Association, as I'd written to the Queen to tell her we'd missed one and she contacted the Lord Lieutenant of Cheshire, asking him to invite us.

"At the 85th anniversary reception in 2001, Sam and I had the great honour to meet Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

"Before we went to the reception we were told that we would have to climb 45 steps at the Palace and Sam was adamant he could do it. He did, but we needed to sit down and rest at the top of the stairs. We walked into a hallway where we found the most beautiful brocade sofas with small tables beside them. We didn't like to sit down and stood there until a member of the Palace staff spotted us and invited us to sit and rest. They also brought food and drink for us and I ended up holding my plate of food and wine glass and Sam's. I didn't want to put them on the beautiful table and as I looked down for somewhere to place them I saw a pair of feet in front of me and a gentleman's disembodied voice said: 'Please place them on the table Mrs Threlfall'. I did, and as I looked up to thank him for his kindness, I saw that the gentleman was the Duke of Edinburgh.

"I blushed bright red I was so embarrassed and I was just about to stand with Sam when Prince Philip, noticing Sam's badge, sat down beside him and asked how he was. He sat speaking with Sam for some time. I cannot praise the Royal Family highly enough and I am thankful we have a Monarchy.

"When I attended the Not Forgotten Association garden party I met Princess Alexandra. We were dressed almost identically and when we met again she remembered and remarked on it, saying: 'I remember you. You were dressed like me'. She said it with such great humour and we both laughed.

"Sadly Sam passed away in 2004, but we had a wonderful marriage and we have a lot to thank Blind Veterans UK for. They helped us rebuild our lives, as they do with everyone. I think part of their success is that we were treated as normal; blindness was something to adjust to. We were given the skills to once again go on to lead a full normal life, doing the things we loved. Sam never made a big deal of his blindness; in fact we had the way we walked around town together down to a fine art. Today when I'm out walking with family and friends I have to stop myself telling people there are stairs coming up!

"We made so many friends at Blind Veterans UK and we had some great holidays at the Brighton centre. I've already enjoyed two holidays at the Llandudno centre, the last coincided with Remembrance Sunday and I went to the service with members and staff. I plan to go back again as I may be a widow now, but I'm still part of the Blind Veterans UK family."



Picture: Stunning in peach - Jean and her late husband Sam outside Blind Veterans UK HQ as they set off for Buckingham Palace.

Dorothy Du Boisson MBE.

Here Dorothy Du Boisson recalls the time she met our Patron, Her Majesty The Queen.

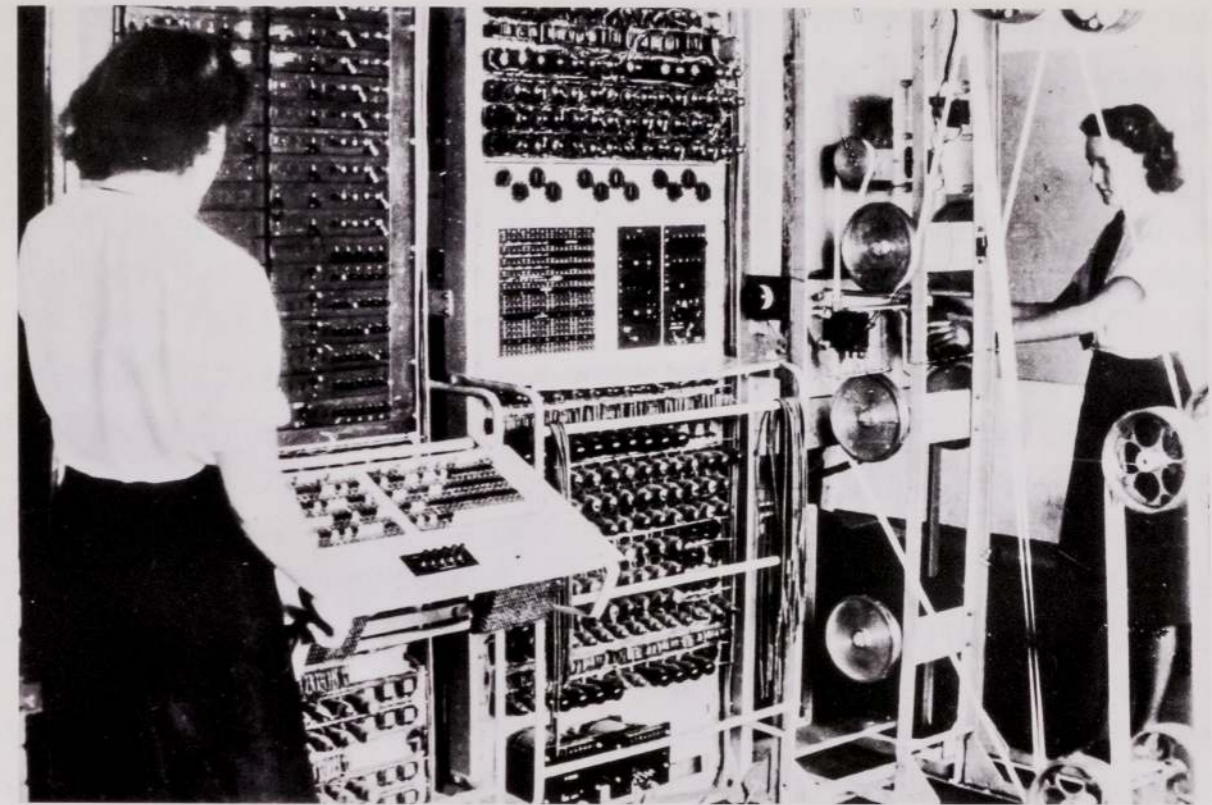
"I met the Queen in 1980 when I was awarded an MBE at Buckingham Palace, for Service to the Ministry of Defence. I worked for the MOD for 30 years, where I ran the typing services at Whitehall for the Army, Navy and Air Force.

"I joined the Wrens in 1943, initially posted to Stanmore; I was recruited to Bletchley Park after I read a notice on the board advertising a job in the country. It asked if we needed the bright lights of London, or could we amuse ourselves in the country. I knew I could and signed up to work in the country. I'm from Ruislip, which was too close to Stanmore, so this gave me an opportunity to see another part of England.

"My responsibility was to register the messages when they came from Knockholt, the signal station that picked up our messages. I initially operated Tunny and then Heath Robertson, and later moved to the prototype Colossus, and then the Mark II Colossus. I was one of the Wrens who were responsible for ensuring the ticker tape fed through the giant Colossus computer. As you can imagine a lot of messages would arrive at the same time. I tracked their progress until they were passed to the code breakers.

"I was based in the Ops Room in the Newmanry, named after Max Newman who was the mentor to Alan Turing. We worked a shift system as the Park was manned 24 hours a day and we were bussed in daily from Woburn Abbey, where we were billeted. It was very crowded at the gates as shifts changed, as there could be 1,000 people leaving at the same time, but it was effectively managed and we all left very quickly. There was no hanging about, you just handed over and you went.

"When the war ended I went into the Air Ministry as a typist, and progressed to Controller of Typists. When I return to Bletchley Park for the regular reunions they hold I never mention my MBE, as so many of the brilliant people who worked there have never been recognised for their incredible work during WWII."



Picture: Colossus and two operators from the Women's Royal Naval Service, Dorothy Du Boisson (left) and Elsie Booker. **Photo:** Reproduced with the kind permission of The National Archives, ref. FO850/234.



Picture: Wren Dorothy Du Boisson in uniform during WWII.

Bernard Hammond OBE

It was at an Investiture at Buckingham Palace on 11th June 1988 that Bernard Hammond met our Patron, HM The Queen, when she presented him with his OBE. Nominated by the Southern Electricity Board he received the OBE in recognition of 'Service to the customer.' In particular it was for his work following the great storm of 1987.

Bernard, who became a member of Blind Veterans UK in April 2012, completed his National Service with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1955 to 1957, Serving in the UK and Hong Kong.

Bernard said: "Listening to reports on the radio today of the flooding across the UK, I recall October 1987 and the days following the great storm. Although I received the OBE for 'Service to the customer', it was, I believe, in connection with work associated with the great storm. The area for which I had responsibilities was probably the worst hit in the UK, as it covered a large area of Southern England.

"Extensive damage was done to the electrical networks, particularly to the overhead lines. The operation to repair them was carried out by more than 1,000 men who were drafted in from all areas of the country.

"One part of the logistics that people may not immediately think of was that accommodation, food and beds had to be provided for the workforce. As we also had to provide clothing it was said that when members of the team went to buy underwear in bulk from Marks & Spencer in Basingstoke the store ran out of supplies! It was quite an operation, but power was eventually restored and it was an example of everyone working together. A great team effort.

"I worked for the Southern Electrical Board from 1948, completing my apprenticeship to become a meter mechanic, which meant I had to postpone National Service.

"When I started National Service they asked what I did in Civvy Street and I told them I was a meter mechanic. They said, 'You will be an instrument mechanic and we will train you accordingly'. I started the training and it wasn't as an

instrument mechanic, but an optical mechanic. So I duly became an optical mechanic and when I arrived in Hong Kong they once again asked me: 'Say what do you do son?' I replied that I was an optical mechanic, only to be told: 'Never worry about that son, what did you do in Civvy Street?' I told them and then I got the job I was meant to do!

"I Served for one year in Hong Kong. We travelled there by ship and the journey took almost five weeks. The return journey was even longer as it was at the time of the Suez Canal Crisis, which meant the ship had to reroute via Cape Town. It became an eight week journey, but it was pretty eventful, as we were the first troop ship to dock in Cape Town since the cessation of hostilities in WWII.

"We enjoyed four glorious days of shore leave in Cape Town. They were so delighted to see us and went out of their way to make us welcome; in fact we were even featured in the newspapers there."

After National Service, Bernard returned to the Southern Electricity Board where he became an Engineer and progressed through the ranks until he retired as a Divisional Manager after a full, varied and extremely rewarding career.



Picture: Bernard and Brenda Hammond.

Tom Markie OBE.

Tom Markie met the Queen in 1972 at Buckingham Palace, when he was awarded an OBE in recognition of his Service with the Army Cadet Force. His wife Winifred and their son Derek were with him at the Investiture.

Originally from Coventry he joined the Cadet Force in 1939 as a boy. As he was in a reserved occupation he was not immediately called up, but in May 1942 he volunteered for and joined the North Staffordshire Regiment and served in Northern Ireland and the UK. On 9th August 1943 he transferred to the Intelligence Corps where he served in India and the Cocos Keeling Islands until 1946. Based in Bangalore he undertook work on enemy radio transmissions in preparation for the invasion of Malaya.

Discharged as a Sergeant on 3rd February 1947, he returned to Coventry and from 1947 to 1975 Served with the Army Cadet Force. He became Commandant of Warwickshire and Birmingham. He moved from Coventry to Kent, to Serve with the South East London Cadets, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1976.

Speaking of his Service he said: "Before I joined the Army I was in a reserved occupation and a messenger for the Air Raid precautions and I was in Coventry during the Blitz. I had to carry messages between the wardens' posts. I remember the planes coming over and watching the bombs as they dropped. It was pretty terrifying hearing it and watching it. Over 500 people perished in the Blitz, which lasted for a week. The worst night was the first night, 14th November. They came again after that, but not as bad. There were ack-ack batteries in place as Coventry was an engineering centre making aircrafts for the war effort, which meant it was well armed, but they didn't shoot anything down.

"I was living at home with my parents who were bombed out and they went to my mother's parents in Northampton. I went to stay with my girlfriend, who later became my wife. I shared with her parents, sleeping under the table."



Picture: Lieutenant Colonel Tom Markie and Mrs Markie in 1972 ahead of the Investiture.

Paul Francis

Paul Francis, a former RAF navigator and founder of racing website Racing Sight, met Her Majesty The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at the 85th anniversary reception at Buckingham Palace in 2001. Surprisingly his conversation with Her Majesty was about football rather than horses.

Recalling the momentous meeting Paul said: "Due to traffic problems we were late getting to our hotel and it was a quick turnaround as we only had about 15 minutes to eat, and then we had to quickly get ready. I think it applied to quite a few of us who were there, but it certainly didn't mar the enjoyment of a wonderful evening. I had quite a chat with the Queen, as it was the same night that Liverpool were playing in the European Cup. We spoke about Michael Owen, as two weeks prior to the reception the Queen and Prince Philip had visited Wrexham in North Wales, where my family were living at that time. With the help of my wife Beverley, and my four children, we went down to join the big crowd in Wrexham waiting to see the Queen, and she kindly shook my hand that day, and Prince Philip asked the children why they weren't in school. They replied that they'd taken the day off to see him and the Queen, and I reminded the Queen of that at the reception. She remarked that the Liverpool footballer Michael Owen was from the Wrexham area. I said that he was from nearby Hawarden and we spoke for a couple of minutes and I greatly enjoyed our conversation.

"My wife Beverley couldn't attend the reception as she was to be presented with an Adult Student of the Year Award in Wrexham that night. She has since gained a First Class Degree from the University of Liverpool in Archaeology and Art History. She's a very gifted student as in her youth; she was awarded a scholarship to study at the prestigious Music College in Salzburg, Austria, but a serious illness at that time prevented her from taking up the position."

Since that meeting Paul has proved himself to be a successful businessman, as his website, Racing Sight, now receives 30,000 to 40,000 hits a month. He credits the training he has received at the Sheffield and Brighton centres as a key ingredient to his success.

"Thanks to Welfare Officer, Carol Henderson, I became a member of Blind

Veterans UK in 1998 and did my initial computer training at the Brighton centre. Since then I've continued to update my skills and regularly attend the Sheffield centre. One day it hit me that I'd learnt all these computer skills and I couldn't think of a blind person who had set up their own website. I'm sure they exist but I didn't know of any at the time. That's when I decided to set up Racing Sight. I developed the current design over the last few years with artistic input from my son Philip, who now works for Apple. We made it yellow on black, with accessible text to make it suitable for people with a vision impairment.

"At the beginning of December, I updated my software and computer equipment following training at the Sheffield centre with Gaye Atkins – part of the superb team at that particular centre."

The website is located at: www.racingsight.co.uk

The website publishes daily updates on the latest news in horseracing throughout Britain, Ireland and the rest of the world. It includes a whole host of information on racecourses, conditions at the race tracks and notifications of cancelled meetings and the status of races. And of course betting forecasts. From 2013 members of Racing Sight can bet online for a monthly fee of £1.

Paul also runs a racing service organising every aspect of a trip to race meetings throughout the world. "Working in partnership with hotels I'm able to custom-build racing holidays for people who want to go to race meetings around Britain, Ireland, Europe and the rest of the world.

"I have a good relationship with the hotels in the areas and I will arrange accommodation, transport and entry to the race meeting. As I'm blind I appreciate the demands of disability and we make sure vision impaired or disabled guests get the right rooms. It is also worth noting; at most racecourses in Britain and Ireland, carers get into the race meetings for free, which I think is something lots of people don't realise.

"We can organise anything from a limousine to train travel. It's a service we've been running for the last four years and people just need to tell us what they want and we'll create a bespoke package for them. In 2012 we arranged for a large party to travel from a pub in London to Aintree for the Grand National. We arranged their travel and tickets to the Grandstand. As they wanted to stay in

Blackpool we arranged that too. They were very happy with everything.”

From 1st January 2013 people will be able to set up an account for £1 per month and place their bets online through Paul who will find the best odds. He thinks the opportunity to bet by email will appeal to people with no, or limited sight, who are able to use computers and don't want to go into their local high street bookmaker.

Paul said: “I love horse racing and I've always been interested in horses as my father would take me to race meetings. As he would visit the trainers I got to know the racing set. I was about nine when I named my first horse — Nemi Kilo. A friend asked my father what he thought the horse should be called. I said to take the first two letters from the sire horse's name and the first two letters from the mare's name. I've been interested in horses ever since.

“Over the last five years the website has developed from a very basic website to a very attractive format, as I've learnt more and more tricks of the trade. I feel it's grown into a very a professional website. One of the advantages is that it includes an archive of news from previous years, and information that is easily accessed. It's an easy to use website, and being blind myself I have included such items as a written description of track layouts, as I work on the principle that blind or disabled people can use it very easily, and if they are using talking software, they can obtain information in the same way as listening to audio visual descriptions on the television.”

I think you will agree that Paul's philosophy shines through: “Make the best of what you have. Don't spend all your time panicking and worrying, as that will just shorten your life. In short 'just get on with it'.”



Picture: Paul Francis, Blind Veterans UK member, and founder of website Racing Sight in his office.

Queen Alexandra and the early Royal connections of Blind Veterans UK, by Rob Baker, Collections and Archives.

Blind Veterans UK has been fortunate to have a Royal Patron for a considerable part of our existence. The first was Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, who became associated with us soon after we were founded in 1915. By the time of our first annual report, for the year ended 26th March 1916, she was listed as Patroness and the report explained that 'Queen Alexandra has made several visits and has graciously signified her desire to become its Patroness'.

Her Majesty Queen Alexandra was at this time the Queen Mother, having been the wife of Edward VII, who died in 1910. She is a great-grandmother of our present Queen. The daughter of Christian IX of Denmark, she was connected to other European Royal families including that of Russia; the last Tsar, Nicholas II, was her nephew. Alexandra also provides a link to one of our current Vice-Patrons, Prince Pavlos of Greece. Her brother George, who became George I of Greece, is a great-great-grandfather of Prince Pavlos. George I is also the grandfather of the Duke of Edinburgh.

Alexandra was very interested in photography and a collection of her family photos was published as Queen Alexandra's Christmas Gift Book: Photographs from my Camera to raise money for charity. She also painted and sketched and we are fortunate to have in our archives a work by her, reproduced here. The signature on the painting itself is 'Alix', the name her family knew her by. Writing on the back of the frame identifies it as having been painted 'In aid of Blinded Soldiers and Sailors at St Dunstons' and gives a date of September 1916. We are currently undertaking research to try and find out more about the painting and identify the figure it depicts.

Queen Alexandra and many other members of the Royal family, including her son King George V, visited us and also gave considerable assistance to our fundraising activities. There is a notable example of the latter from May 1917 when we held a Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Bazaar over four days at the Royal Albert Hall.

This spectacular event was opened by Alexandra, with the National Anthem sung initially by the famous contralto Clara Butt and then for the final verse by one hundred of our members.

There were many stalls, at which all kinds of items, including toys, clothes, sporting items and beauty products, could be purchased, and also auctions and numerous special events. Some of the stalls were presided over by Royal Princesses — there were eight of them there, including Alexandra's daughters Princess Louise and Princess Victoria, Louise's daughter Princess Maud, and Princess Helena (also known by her husband's name, Christian) and Princess Beatrice who were daughters of Queen Victoria. The involvement of so many members of the Royal family, and of other public figures including Margaret Lloyd George, the wife of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and celebrities such as actresses Irene Vanbrugh and Mabel Russell, made the bazaar a huge success. It raised £20,000 — equivalent to around £900,000 today.

Alexandra's involvement with us continued on beyond the end of the First World War itself. One of her most interesting visits must have been that on 12th December 1918 when she visited together with Princess Victoria, Grand Duchess Marie of Russia and the Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden. They were treated to Christmas entertainment by our members, who were dressed as Pierrots and sang with accompaniment provided by our own ragtime band.

Alexandra, together with her daughter Victoria, visited again in March 1920 but after this she suffered increasingly from ill-health and she died on 20th November 1925. The Review and our annual report paid warm tribute to her, saying we had lost not only our Patron but a "loyal friend" and one whose visits "were many, and often of that unheralded and informal character which means so much more than the ceremonial occasions."

Alexandra left a rich legacy of Royal support for Blind Veterans UK, which continues through to the present day. Her grandson the Prince of Wales in particular provided much support and he succeeded her as our Patron during his brief reign as Edward VIII in 1936. He was succeeded as Patron by the present Queen's father, George VI, until his death in 1952, and the Queen herself became our Patron soon after her accession to the throne.



Picture: The painting by HM Queen Alexandra, which she gifted to us in 1916.



HER MAJESTY QUEEN ALEXANDRA

Photo by W. S. D. Devony

Patroness
Blinded Soldiers' and Sailors' Bazaar

Picture: A portrait of HM Queen Alexandra, for the bazaar, which was held at the Royal Albert Hall.



Picture: Sir Arthur Pearson with HM Queen Alexandra and assembled dignitaries.



Picture: Standing beside our founder Sir Arthur Pearson, on 12th December 1918, HM Queen Alexandra was presented with a mahogany table made by Thomas W. Stratfull and the basket by Paddy Moore, who were both blinded in the First World War.

Queen Alexandra presented both men with a special Braille watch with her monogram of crossed As on the front.

The photo also features Princess Victoria, Sir Robert Borden, former Prime Minister of Canada and the Matron of the Bungalow, where the presentation was made.

As the newspapers of the day reported, it was during their visit to watch the Pierrot Troupe of Blinded Heroes.

From the Archives.



Picture: HM The Queen's visit in 1954, when she met the late Dickie Brett (back to camera). Dickie was wounded in Italy during WWII, when he also lost both hands and sustained damage to his hearing. He became a keen carpenter and is seen in the photograph in the carpentry workshop.



Picture: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II greets members, their families and staff at the Brighton centre in 1962. **Photo:** Reproduced with the kind permission of The Argus.



Picture: HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at the Brighton centre in 1962. Sir Neville Pearson (standing left) is speaking and Commandant Lawrie Fawcett stands behind him. Lord Fraser and Matron Ramshaw are standing to the right of the Royal party. **Photo:** Reproduced with the kind permission of The Argus, Brighton.

Barbara Bell

On the opposite page is a photograph of the Queen with the late Barbara Bell. Barbara had just received her second stripe in the ATS when she lost her sight in the December of 1942, aged 21.

Caught in an air raid on the way to Horsham, Barbara was one of few survivors as a small aircraft rained bombs on the train she travelled on. She described the raid in a past Review: "At that time, when a raid was in progress, places like stations had notices to say raid in progress. Apparently, they didn't put this up in the station we'd just left – we weren't warned."



Picture: HM The Queen with the late Barbara Bell.

"When we heard a little plane overhead, we didn't think anything of it, until it started machine gunning us. I looked out of the window then, and thought it was hail!

"We should have been warned that there was a raid in progress – if we had been, we would have been down on the floor, and we would have escaped any injuries I think."

Barbara trained as a physiotherapist and enjoyed a very successful career.

On the cover: A portrait of our Patron HM Queen Elizabeth II by Dorothy Wilding.

Credit: Reproduced with the kind permission of the National Portrait Gallery - not for reproduction outside the Review.

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Patron: Her Majesty the Queen

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Picture: Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II with Ian Fraser, the second Chairman of St Dunstan's, now Blind Veterans UK, who aged 19 was blinded by a German bullet on 23rd July 1916 during the Battle of the Somme.