

August 2013

Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



On the cover: Joe Bennett who received his Arctic Star medal this year for his time on the Russian Convoys during World War II. His son John, featured in the photograph, applied for the medal as a surprise for Joe.

Review



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Key: B for Brighton centre - L for Llandudno centre - S for Sheffield centre

August

Amateur Radio Week 2nd - 10th **B** - Race Week 4th - 10th **B**

Recreation Taster Week 11th - 17th **L** - Writers' Forum 17th **B**

Activities Week 19th - 24th **B** - Archery Club (III) 23rd - 31st **B**

September

South Downs Way walk 6th - 10th **B**

75th Anniversary Pamper Week 9th - 14th **B** - Cycling Week 15th - 21st **L**

Writers' Forum 21st **B** - History Week 22nd - 28th **B**

Walking Week 30th - 5th October **L**

October

Devon activity weekend 4th - 6th **B** - Music Week 6th - 12th **B**

Culture Week 7th - 11th **S** - Writers' Forum 19th **B** - Dance Week 17th - 23rd **B**

Bowling Week 20th - 2nd Nov **B** - Great South Run - 27th **B**

From the Chairman.

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

I am delighted to report that the Trusty Trustees relay team did a good job on the long 100K fundraising walk from London to Brighton. Tim Davis (Vice-Chairman and Trustee) got us off to an excellent start at midday on Saturday with a brisk first leg, and Mike Brooke (Trustee) did equally well on the second leg – the longest of the four legs, as he was keen to point out to the rest of us! My dear wife Woppy completed her 15 miles, nearly all of it cross-country and at night, in a little under three hours, and handed over to me at exactly midnight. With the encouragement of my son Guy, who kindly walked with me, this gave me plenty of time to reach the Brighton Centre by 5.45am, thus beating the 18 hour time target that we had set ourselves. But the really good news is that, thanks to the generosity of a lot of people, we have raised almost exactly £6,500 for the charity, and our very sincere thanks go out to all who supported us.

I would also like to thank the other 90 or so walkers, all of whom went solo, 63 of whom completed the whole distance – a superb effort. The winner, Gary Rathbone, who was the only one to beat the Trusty Trustees, completed the 60 miles in a little over 17 hours – that's an average speed of about 3.5 mph – a remarkable achievement.

And thanks go to all who helped organise this very major event too – staff, volunteers, pace-setters, first aiders, cooks and bottle-washers, drivers and those who supported walkers. It was all most enjoyable and a huge success.

The other day I attended the annual Royal Marines concert at the Brighton centre – an extremely enjoyable feast of music and fun. The sun shone on us all this year – a welcome change from the past two years – and we were treated to a wonderfully varied programme of classical and upbeat numbers. We even found ourselves participating in a completely impromptu sing-along! The afternoon was brought to a wonderful climax when Mary Brett, a resident at the Brighton centre of a certain age, conducted the Band as they stomped their way through the Colonel Bogey March!

Have a good August!



Picture: The Trusty Trustees at the finish line at the Brighton centre, minus Tim Davis who had to shoot off, but with Guy Keeling.



Picture: The Trusty Trustees fly the flag for Blind Veterans UK. The Chairman with Sam, Woppy Keeling, Colonel Mike Brooke OBE and Tim Davis.

Noticeboard.

Dates for your diary and useful information.

Peter Wiltshire's retirement function on 6th September.

Many members will know Peter Wiltshire, who will retire in January 2014, after 40 years of service as a Health Care Assistant with Blind Veterans UK. Unfortunately due to his ill health we will hold Peter's retirement function on Friday 6th September 2013. If any members of the charity or retired colleagues would like to come and toast Peter on the day you are most welcome. A bucks fizz celebration will be held in the lounge at the Brighton centre at 12 noon.

If any members are unable to attend and would like to send a message for Peter, then they can do so through Geraldine Plaw at the lounge desk at the Brighton centre, I am sure that Peter would love to hear from you all. The telephone number for Geraldine is: 01273 391659.

Blind Veterans UK Masonic Group

If you are interested in joining fellow Masons for a great weekend in April each year, why not join us down at the Brighton centre. Please contact W.Bro. Bob Strickland (newly elected Secretary) for more details.

Email: robert.strickland1@btinternet.com or telephone: 01329 841022.

Blind Veterans UK London Christmas concert

The first tickets for our London Christmas concert have been released. The concert will take place at Marylebone Parish Church from 7pm on Thursday 5th December 2013. Tickets, which cost £15, are available online at www.blindveterans.org.uk/carolconcert or you can telephone 020 7616 7927 to request a ticket order form to pay by cheque, or to buy tickets over the phone.

Music will come from PHILSAVONIA - The Savage Club Brass Ensemble directed by Stephen Henderson and soloist Emily Burnett. The readers are: Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO, Actress Jane Asher, Actor Lance Pierson, and Blind Veterans UK Membership Officer, Simon Brown.

Joe Bennett receives his Arctic Star medal for Service on the Russian Convoys.

Joe Bennett isn't a glory seeker. When asked to feature in the Review, his first words were "Just don't make me sound like a hero." Joe had just received his Arctic Star medal for his Service on the Russian Convoys during World War II. His son John, a retired Policeman, applied for the medal as a surprise for his father.

During the Second World War Joe was a Stoker First Class on board the destroyer HMS Keppel. From Edwinstowe, a mining village set on the edge of Sherwood Forest, Joe left school at 14 to work on the surface of Thoresby Colliery. In 1942 he received his calling up papers to the Royal Navy. As Joe was in a reserved occupation one phone call from the pit manager would have meant that he could continue to work at the colliery. Joe chose to go to war, to join the Royal Navy as a member of the engine room staff.

When asked how he felt when he received the medal, with characteristic humility, he said: "I thought about all the mates of mine who should have got it, but it's been that long coming that most of them are now dead. Today I only know four out of the entire ship's company. It should have been sorted out 60 or 70 years ago."

The convoys saw British and allied merchant ships sailing to Archangel and Murmansk to deliver supplies to Stalin's Russia, which was resisting German advances on the Eastern front. Around 3,000 British sailors and airmen died during the convoys, which were a vital part of Sir Winston Churchill's attempts to persuade Stalin to remain part of the alliance against Hitler. The Talking Review features Joe's account of his time on the Arctic convoys, but we bring you extracts here from his journal.

24th February 1944. The first of the U-boats made contact with the convoy. As the ships pitched into the swell, the spray began to freeze. Soon a coating of ice began to festoon the guard rails and guns. HMS Keppel and the other escorts were increasingly involved as the U-boats homed in and the rumble of depth charges became more frequent. By afternoon HMS Keppel was getting strong echoes on yet another contact. A pattern of depth charges shot off the stern and exploded in the wake. Contact with the U-boat was lost. U713 was the

victim. Its resting place is to the northwest of Narvik at 69-27N.

All day long the increasing rumble of depth charges echoed across the Arctic Ocean. When your own ship was not involved, others in the area would be. It was bitterly cold now and the ice was getting ever thicker on the ships. B gun was permanently manned and the crew had to train the gun round every few minutes to prevent it freezing up. There were no gun turrets on HMS Keppel and most of the other escort vessels to give shelter to the gun's crew. They could only huddle at the back of the gun shield as the spray whirled all around them, turning to ice, even on their duffle coats. Snowstorms added to their misery.

25th February 1944. U601 was sunk by aircraft operating from Shetland and at the limit of their endurance. Eight hours of every day was spent on watch. For the stokers this was either the boiler rooms or the engine room. At least eight or nine times a day the alarm bells would ring with a noise to awaken the dead. Sometimes it would last a few minutes only, other times it could be two hours or more. Then as the depth charges shot off from the stern, more would have to be hacked off from their icy racks and dragged along the rolling deck to reload the throwers. Stokers had to help in these tasks. Ropes would be fastened to the depth-charges and four of us would haul it along the spray swept deck. Between watch keeping and action stations we retired to our messdecks in the hope of getting a little sleep. Messdecks - always overcrowded in wartime! The stokers messdeck was below the seamen's, almost on the waterline. Under the stokers messdeck was the forward oil fuel tank and the 4.7 magazine. There was only one entrance to the messdeck, a steel ladder leading from the seamen's mess above. During action stations, the ladder was clamped back to the bulkhead and the shells were hoisted up from the magazine to the guns above. HMS Keppel had 29 stokers and leading stokers aboard. There was room in the mess to sling 16 hammocks 18" apart. Of course not all 29 were in the mess at the same time. At least seven would be on watch, but it was still crowded and some had to sleep on the seat lockers. Two mess tables and one small electric fire completed our home.

When the weather was bad, water, inches deep, sloshed from side to side as we pitched and rolled along. We bailed the water out several times a day, but it soon came back again. When the oil fuel tank below was full, all was well. As the fuel was used up by the boilers, the remaining oil would be slopping back and forth in the tank, adding to the noise of the sea along the side of the ship.

When the tank was empty, it was akin to living over a big drum when the ship was beset by stormy weather and, in the Arctic Ocean, that was usually the case in the winter months. The fact that the magazine also occupied half the space below the mess didn't worry us. Anything hitting the ship there and our journey into the next world would be pretty swift.

When the ship left harbour, deadlights were clamped over the portholes. These could not be removed until the ship was again in harbour. After several days of going on and off different watches, and the numerous dashes to action stations, the body would become disorientated due to the lack of sleep and constant arousals from catnaps. The alarm bells would ring out, off the lockers and out of the hammocks at the double, fully clothed at all times. Being undressed could bring 14 days punishment if caught. Splash! As feet landed in the messdeck pond. Up the ladder we scrambled, still half asleep as we went to our various action stations. Unshaven, red eyed, dog tired, cursing the Germans for ruining our sleep. Sleep! What sleep? Some of the messdeck comedians suggested that we were turning into zombies, and by the look of us they were probably right. They were forward damage control and supply party. After boiler room and engine room stokers were not so lucky. Their place was aft, helping to hack the frozen depth charges from the racks ready to reload. However, back to the messdeck. Above the seat lockers was a track along the ship's side. Small attaché cases etc could be fitted into it. Above the rack were the steel plates of the ship's side, now coated in a sheet of glittering ice over an inch thick, the frozen condensation of the stokers' breath. There it would remain until the ship reached warmer latitudes. When it would melt and join the pond on the messdeck. This, then, was our home or 'igloo'.

We had to prepare all our own meals during our time off watch. Prepare all the vegetables, potatoes, carrots, swedes etc make pies and puddings all ready for the cook. His job was to cook the food, not prepare it. Each mess prepared their own. Small ships were allocated 1/10d per day, per man to cater for themselves. Each month, it was totted up for each mess. If you had overspent your allowance the Admiralty stopped the money from your pay. Stoker Tout was peeling the potatoes when a very large grass sod came out of the sack. Here we were, hundreds of miles out to sea and finding that some lousy farmer had put it in to make up the weight. He should have been put on the next destroyer to Russia! Stoker Tout planted the sod in the corner of the messdeck with the comment "Nice to see a bit of land ain't it?"

The U-boats continued with their attempts to get through to the convoy. ing the 26th and 27th February the rumble of exploding depth-charges from HMS Kepple and the other escorts seemed never ending. Watch keeping! For Stokers this meant two places - boiler room or engine room. Before the ship sailed, the Chief Stoker would pin up the watch bill on the messdeck. It told you your place on duty for the forthcoming voyage. For this trip I was engine room watch keeping. "Thank God for that" I thought as the unlucky ones got the boiler rooms.

11th December. The weather continued to deteriorate with snowstorms, and then a particularly savage gale battered the ships. Destroyers had the worst of it. Corvettes, frigates and even the old trawlers rode the huge seas better, being shorter and broader in the beam. Destroyers, long and lean, merely smashed their way into the giant waves. Imagine the room you are in suddenly pitching up and down every few seconds between 50 and 60 feet and rolling at the same time like a giant roller coaster, only this ride didn't stop after five minutes to let you get off. Hour after hour it went on - pitch black and with the wind shrieking through the radio aerials and signal lines. God knows what the noise on the old windjammers sounded like with all their rigging. On a later convoy the storm was classed as a hurricane. We were up near Iceland and the ships were receiving such a hammering from the giant waves that the signal was made - each ship to proceed independently, set course for the Faroe Islands. The convoy just blew apart. The seas were tremendous and HMS Keppel, like the other destroyers, was taking a frightful battering. No-one was allowed on the upper deck and all who were on watch had to stay there until it was safe to relieve them. Anyone trying to get forward or aft would have been swept over the side as the mountainous waves crashed over the ship. Even trying to get across the mess deck was difficult as the ship corkscrewed its way into the waves. The tannoy crackled into life. "The ship must turn onto a new course to head for the Faroes. You must cling to something during this manoeuvre as the ship will roll heavily. The Captain will take the wheel personally - stand by." I, along with some of my messmates wrapped my arms round the rack above the seat lockers. You could feel the ship begin to climb up the wave. Suddenly there was a huge crash as tons of water hit the ship's side - a din like thunder. Over we went to starboard. I was hanging on to the port side rack. Over we kept going, and we were so far pitched to starboard now that my feet left the deck. God we're going I thought and the ship swayed back a little only for another giant wave to hit us. Feet swung up into open space as we clung to the rack. Our mates on the other side of the messdeck could only look up at us hanging there

above them.

New Year's Eve 1944. As we went down the River Clyde I wondered - will the good luck we've had during the past 12 months continue? Only time would tell. Collision with HMS Vivacious, near miss bombs, faulty torpedoes, sunk U713 and U360 ourselves, and U354 and U394 with help from friends. Normandy four times, Russia five times, now we were off on our sixth run there. The Atlantic, Iceland, what would the New Year hold? In spite of everything, HMS Keppel was a happy ship and it was on her that I enjoyed the company of the best shipmates one could have wished for. In a few hours 1944 would be past. We had been lucky - hope it keeps that way. One thing was absolutely certain. Ahead of us lay a month of misery, if nothing worse. The bleak, sunless, icy Arctic Ocean with its ferocious storms would ensure that, God willing, we would be sampling the delights of downtown Polyarno or the equally breathtaking Vaenga!

Speaking of his father John Bennett said: "Like his father before him who Served in the Grenadier Guards throughout the Great War, dad's life has been dominated by his war service in the Royal Navy, and particularly to his attachment to HMS Keppel, a destroyer mainly employed on the Arctic Convoys. It is clear that it was a happy ship, as no-one wants to remember a bad one. Several years ago I spoke on the telephone to the daughter of one of dad's shipmates. We had never met before, and we are much the same age, but it was like speaking to a member of the family. Her childhood, like mine, had been full of stories about HMS Keppel.

"His war Service was only for a few years, but he has the satisfaction, not given to all men, of having Served his country in a great and noble cause, the defence of the nation and the possible destruction of our way of life. Dad's life has not been all plain sailing. He spent a lifetime down the pit at Thoresby Colliery (still a working mine) and suffered all the ailments and injuries that go with it. We suffered the tragic loss of our mother shortly after his retirement, which blighted his later years. Now he is dealing with the loss of his sight which means many adjustments for him.

"However, dad is made of stern stuff. The word stoic was invented for him. Never once have we heard him whinge or feel sorry for himself. His philosophy is to 'just get on with it.' He expects the same attitude from his children, and it has held us in good stead. I will shortly be a pensioner myself but while the old boy is around and keeps his marbles I will still feel like a young man.

"Taking care of his family is always dad's reason to get up in the morning, but we are slowly persuading him to take a back seat, although he will keep sticking his oar in! We recently went to France and Belgium by Eurostar to visit the site of his uncle's death near Arras in 1917, and other places where his father fought and was finally captured. I think he took great satisfaction from it.

"We, the family, became very concerned when his eyesight deteriorated as he seemed at a bit of a loss what to do with himself. His, and our, salvation was the involvement of Blind Veterans UK. The attention and care given to him has been magnificent and provided him with a whole new interest. He really looks forward to his visits to the Sheffield centre. I still can't believe that my father, a complete anti-techno ex-collier, now uses a computer. He spends his day in what we call the 'command centre' surrounded by his TV, PC, printer and telephone while sat in his executive chair. It is a great comfort to us to know that he is receiving the best help from the very best people."



Picture: Proud Patriarch. Joe Bennett with his family from left to right: Adam with granddaughter Rachel, daughter in law Carolynne, Joe, daughter Jenny, son John and (front) son-in-law Russell with Gypsy.

Incidents on Horse Guards Parade, by Constance Halford-Thompson.

VC Parade, 5th August 2005.

The day started badly. Fleurette arrived with the long suffering Jill, who had to drive us around to find a taxi as the one ordered to take us to the Parade never arrived! With some encouragement the taxi drove us as near as possible despite the increased security as a result of the recent terrorist attacks. We were finally stopped by a convoy of policemen somewhere behind Westminster Hall who assured us this was the nearest we could get and that there were no wheelchairs available, as the only access was by steps to the park. So, having told the taxi to wait, I persuaded Fleurette to walk.

We must have looked a comic couple - I was wearing a pretty hat that my mother bought from Fortnum's to wear at my wedding 60 years ago (but she had decided it was too young for her so gave it to me), and Fleurette was wearing a borrowed hat rather like a fez, covered in drooping ostrich feathers.

We were dressed in our best with medals clanking. After a few yards Fleurette developed a bad asthma attack and announced that she was going home.

Suddenly I felt I was mad, I did not know where I was and could not see much. However Fleurette had disappeared and I stopped a passing couple and asked if I could accompany them. The woman was perfectly sweet but the husband, with whom she must have quarrelled, shot off with a scowl. We managed to reach the park but she was so agitated by her furious husband that I suggested she run after him whilst I find a policeman.

Finding the most charming young special constable there was no more problem as he handed me over to the Army who helped me up the steep steps of the VIP stand. Thank goodness I had brought two straw hats as there was no shade, everyone looked roasted!

By this time I was wilting, it was so hot and I thought that I'd had it.

If Fleurette had come she would have died climbing the stand. I chatted to others near me and decided to eat my sandwiches. It was no good keeping Fleurette's sandwiches as they would have gone bad so I ate them as well.

Luckily I had brought a second straw hat so I proceeded to put it over my other one to try and keep cool.

The stand began to fill up with high ranking officers in the thickest of uniforms and women in huge hats making me feel like a field mouse. Rather wishing that I was not there and as the heat was intense I decided to leave after the very good reading of some wartime speeches. Suddenly there was a commotion and looking down I saw the indomitable little figure of Fleurette, hat askew on her curly white hair, feathers flying, stomping up the stand with a look of triumph in her Irish eyes, gasping 'I've made it, I've made it'. She fell into her seat saying that she could not speak. I remarked "How amazing, well done, this is the spirit of Frobisher and Drake" and felt like unfurling the Standard. "But I've eaten your sandwiches!"

Apparently she had recovered in the taxi and got him to drive her to Trafalgar Square where she got a wheelchair. The taxi driver refused any payment as he was so amazed by the spirited veteran! So we sat through all the excellent martial music, painfully singing watching the marching VCs and finally it ended. Fleurette passed me a flask of brandy saying that it was all she had and did not like it.

By rushing down the stand we managed to get two wheelchairs and asked to be taken to Westminster but argued to no avail and ended up in Trafalgar Square. Hundreds of others had the same idea and there was no chance of finding a taxi. It was now six o'clock and after much phoning a cab said he would fetch us in half an hour in a gold Mercedes. In the meantime Fleurette was kissed by a Frenchman and I had a young tourist kneeling beside me asking all about our medals and kissing us both. Fleurette then spied the taxi and sent me off to investigate. I opened the door and was preparing to climb in when a surprised voice from inside asked if he could be of assistance - it was a police car. Feeling rather foolish I sat down in a cafe and thought that a coffee might be in order. I saw what I thought was a waiter and called him over. He was most surprised but came over with a charming smile - he was a tourist. After a lot of persuasion with Fleurette, we started off to catch a bus, her swinging around every lamppost for support and I just hoped for the best. With the help of three policemen I got her across the road and sat down at a cafe next to the bus stop. A bus arrived and I hammered on the door with my white stick and then held the door ajar with my foot whilst I shouted at Fleurette who was drooping at the table with hat askew, unable to move. Luckily the barman heard me shouting and heaved Fleurette up into the bus. Poor Fleur, I do not think that

she had ever been in a bus before and she got very agitated about how to stop it and get off. Calming down I managed to call Jill who rescued us once more from Sloane Square. By now it was nearly ten at night.

Lt Fleurette Pelly, elderly asthmatic.

Constance Halford-Thompson (Spratt Lovett-Tayleur) pretty blind former W.A.S.(B)s, Women's Auxiliary Service of Burma.



Picture: Constance (right) on a W.A.S.(B)s mobile canteen in Burma with a fellow W.A.S.(B)s and an unidentified friend.

Constance Served with the Women's Auxiliary Service of Burma during World War II when she manned a mobile canteen, usually with three other girls, attached to a division retaking Burma. She went on to become a highly successful and much sought after artist and her work was collected worldwide.

Harry Beevers's 10 questions on the subject of Birthplaces.

1. In which town in the region of Tuscany in Italy was the artist Leonardo da Vinci born?
2. Which future member of the British royal family was born in June 1921 on the Greek island of Corfu?
3. In which county is the village of Hambledon, said to be the birthplace of English cricket?
4. The Bee Gees were a musical group founded by the brothers Barry, Robin and Maurice Gibb, who were born in which part of the British Isles?
5. On which ship was Oceanus Hopkins born in the year 1620?
6. The King of Thailand born in December 1927 is the only monarch to have been born in which country?
7. The singers Cliff Richard and Engelbert Humperdink, the England cricket captain M.C. Cowdrey, the authors George Orwell and William Makepeace Thackeray, the comedian Spike Milligan and the film actresses Vivien Leigh and Merle Oberon were all born in which country?
8. Moira Lister, Sid James and Bill Kerr who co-starred with Tony Hancock in radio's Hancock's Half Hour, were all born in which country?
9. The prophet Mohammed was born in which of the three holy cities of Islam: Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem?
10. Yellowbellies, Moonrakers, Salopians and Tykes are terms for natives of which four English counties?

Answers on page 37.

Hallucination and its effects on a writer, by Roy Ramsay.

In last month's Review Hilary Brown, Welfare Officer, wrote of the strange visions that are caused by Charles Bonnet Syndrome. It seems self-evident to me that hallucination is also the product of an imaginative mind; a great aid to the fiction writer. I am hoping to keep this article factual.

I was registered blind in March 2002, having lost the sight in my shooting eye overnight in 1983. The second eye failed in December 2001. The estimated 1.5% vision I retained has continued to deteriorate ever since. Without the help of Blind Veterans UK I would have had to give up writing there and then.

I soon became aware that I was hallucinating quite a lot, but a friend who worked for the RNIB told me not to worry as this affects many blind and partially sighted people. As Hilary Brown so eloquently explained in her article.

My eyes also play unfunny tricks on me. Under my watchful, unmoving eye, inanimate objects move about, while much of the time I don't see things that obstruct me, and clearly see things that aren't there at all. I had also seen much intricate machinery assemble itself, and seen a row of Toby jugs turn into gargoyles long before I heard of Charles Bonnet Syndrome!

Oddly, I have not experienced it since I first read of it in Hilary's article in the September 2009 Review. Perhaps it relates to the Parachute School motto - 'Knowledge dispels fear,' though I'd found the experience too interesting to be frightening.

For a reason I have yet to fathom, my wife, Nette, has equipped the garden with a realistic, plastic, half-grown spotted pig. In the half light of dawn and dusk, Cedric the pig appears to be at least twice his actual size, and this large white blob glides to left and right and up and down for as long as I care to stare at it. Perhaps my next book should be called, 'Plastic Pigs "Can" Fly.'

I have just made an interesting observation. I was sitting at the table after dinner gazing at the huge green area which is all I can see of the willow tree and most of the garden. About 20 feet from me two Chihuahua dogs toddled

toward me nose to tail. At the step onto the patio they drew up two abreast and came up shoulder to shoulder. Need I say, we only have one Chihuahua. I often see double but never like that before. I wondered if it was my eyes or my mind that was at fault. I concluded that it was my mind causing the hallucination, because the image of the little dogs was clear and sharply defined, whereas one of the cats, sitting close to me, was fuzzy, like everything else.

As some of us have found, there is little fun to be had from becoming almost completely blind, or from the hallucinations that accompany it. Perhaps a masochist, swerving at the last moment to avoid the stool that isn't there, only to skin his shins and bruise his knees on the chair that is, might take some pleasure from the experience. I am not a masochist and my injuries hadn't healed from the last time I did it. Ironically the phonecall I was rushing to answer was a wrong number. I dwelt on other possible pleasures to be had from near blindness.

The proverbial Fates, whoever or whatever they were, probably got a giggle from letting me work for nearly 40 years then blinding me when it was time for Nette and I to enjoy our sports car.

I cursed my handicap again at midnight, when I missed the Gentleman's Relish pot I keep my change in, and poured about £15 worth of rattling coins onto granddad's chair and the floor between my chest of drawers and my wardrobe. It was far too late to risk waking Nette by putting a light on. 'Sod it,' I muttered to myself. 'Do it in the morning.'

After my ablutions next day, I punished my knees again by scrabbling about on all fours retrieving my change. Then, behind my wardrobe, I found it, 'The painting.' Nette must have hidden it years before, thinking it would remind me of an extended stay in hospital. I'd thought she must have destroyed it because it reminded her of managing everything alone.

I had been reading Tolkien's Lord of the Rings in the hospital. At 4am one Sunday morning, near the end of my first fortnight there, I'd endured yet another sleepless night; I put down my book and approached the Mr Nasty staff nurse. I wasn't hopeful as I asked him if I could use the art room as a picture had come into my head that I wanted to record. He thought about it, told me the art room was for use at weekends only and that I wasn't allowed in unsupervised.

He then rummaged in a drawer and handed me a key and told me to be back at 6am as he had to help some of the oldies take their medication. I was surprised and pleased and thanked him.

Using one of the 18" x 24" white emulsioned hardboard sheets my youngest brother had cut for me, I finished the picture to my own satisfaction in exactly two hours. Ignoring the permanent hand tremor, I'd applied paint with a determination and confidence I'd not known before at the paintbox. Now I recognise that the picture in my mind was a form of hallucination, but one from before I started to lose my sight.

When Malcolm saw the picture he smiled and said: "I see you've quoted Tolkien. Did the huge Priest get you reading him?" I replied that he had. "Thought so," said Malcolm, "He's done that before."

The Priest had worn the biggest shiny black shoes I'd ever seen, not excluding 12 years of military service. I gave the painting a title and inscription. I could only read the title but the inscription was branded on my memory.

Real and Unreal.

"Where did you go to, if I may ask?" said Thorin to Gandalf as they rode along.

"To look ahead," said he. "And what brought you back in the nick of time?"

"Looking behind." said he.

The fore and aft aspect of the quotation had inspired me to produce the painting and its title. The picture illustrates what appears to be two houses, but is in fact, front and rear views of my own house, with my wife and three children, two of whom appear twice, and dogs, cats and cars. Hanging over my bed in the hospital, it made me terribly homesick. It has a hold on me still. It made a daydream hallucination into something real and substantial, turned imagination into reality.

Surely the work of the fiction writer, to paraphrase Barbara Hepworth the great sculptor, writers write because they must.

My belief is that we want to leave our mark on the world, produce a successful book, for example. Hallucinations may help me to do it.



Picture: The painting Roy Ramsay writes of.

Another great experience with Blind Veterans UK, this time a Water Sports Day in Cardiff, by Carl Adamson.

When we arrived we were treated to cups of tea and plenty of bacon sandwiches and briefed on the safety aspects for the day and the events we could take part in. That's when the fun really started! There was wakeboarding and waterskiing as well as numerous chances to sail, and even a fantastic opportunity to get behind the wheel of a 21ft speedboat, which could reach 70mph.

Waterskiing? I had never seen anyone water-ski, never mind doing it myself. Then we were off to the jetty to begin.

The first person to undertake the waterskiing was 'Sparky', Stephen Sparkes, a former Royal Marine and Falklands veteran. As Sparky excels at everything he does, I probably don't need to tell you that he went round the bay just like James Bond - he didn't fall in once. I thought to myself "This can't be hard, he's making it look easy." How very wrong I was.

Then it was my turn. I put the skis on, jumped in the freezing cold water and was told of the best ways to grip the boom at the side of the speed boat as that would help to keep me upright. With that off the boat went.

Whack! Straight in headfirst. Again and again I tried and apart from once when I managed just 10 seconds upright it was the same old result. I'm probably never going to make the Olympic waterskiing team, but falling in was just as much fun.

I then had a great time speeding up and down the bay in RNLI RIB boats, and finally the chance to drive the 21ft speedboat at 70mph. What a fantastic day.

I would like to thank Craig Brindley, Sports and Recreation Instructor at Brighton, and everyone at Blind Veterans UK who made it possible. What an unforgettable day.



Picture: Waterskiing legend Carl Adamson.



Picture: The next James Bond? Sparky demonstrates his waterskiing skills in Cardiff.

Kenneth Hill speaks on the eve of the 68th anniversary of VJ Day, by Catherine Goodier.

Sitting with Kenneth and Brenda Hill in their charming canal side cottage it is difficult to imagine a more perfect setting, as canal boats chug past in the sun, and the only sound comes from birds as they fly overhead and the gentle bleat of sheep in the neighbouring fields. It is a perfect pastoral scene, one that brings to mind the words of Keats and Wordsworth.

I am there to ask Kenneth about a time that is far removed from the life he and Brenda have built over 66 years of married life. Before we start, Kenneth removes a smooth metal strip from his back trouser pocket. Just three inches in length and two inches in width, carved into it are seven numbers below Japanese writing. It is Kenneth's name, rank and number. Although it weighs almost nothing, it is a heavy reminder of the years from 1942 to 1945 when he was a prisoner of war of the Japanese. As part of F Force, who with H Force were the last parties to leave Singapore, he has carried it in the back pocket of his trousers for more than 70 years.

An apprentice electrician before the war, he joined the TA 8th Army Field Workshop with his eldest brother Geoffrey in June 1939. Both received their call up papers in August that year. As Kenneth was only 18 at the time he was sent to The Royal Army Ordnance Corps's 4th Division Anti Aircraft Workshop to work on ack-ack guns in Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Dudley. He then moved to a heavy ack-ack unit as an electrician. His brother went to France, to Dunkirk. Kenneth later moved to the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Kenneth said: "At the end of 1941 my unit left England to go to Basra to protect engineers who were building a railway up into Russia. As we sailed towards Basra our ship was rerouted to Singapore to look after the guns that were already there. In Singapore we set up a workshop in an engineering factory. We had to search for food as it was in short supply and there wasn't any clean water as the Japanese had turned the water supply off. Looking for food one day I found a wet box, I looked inside and it was full of tins of bully beef. The tins were rusty but the meat inside was perfect. I took the whole lot back to the workshop and we had a great meal. Although we were at war and we had

little food and water, before we were made prisoners of war (PoWs) I had a lovely life in Singapore. I was a Corporal and I had my own servant who would bring me a cup of tea and shave me in the morning, and do my washing.

"When Lieutenant General Arthur Percival surrendered on 15th February 1942 we were given instructions to smash the machines in the workshop. There was a crane in one bay and we had to take the stops off and run the crane along the track. We also had to get rid of our rifles. There was a canal near the workshop that we drove the lorries into and then set fire to them. They burnt for ages, but it meant the Japanese couldn't use them.

"On the day we were made PoWs we had to parade and line the main road while the Japanese marched in. We were then moved up to Changi Gaol. Some went into Barracks, and some like me were initially under canvas before they moved us into some old shops that we slept in; the shops were made of sheets of corrugated iron. My first working party at Changi Goal was to level the runway there. I was then sent back to Singapore with a different working party.

"I remember that back in Singapore one canal was full of bodies of Chinese men and women and horses and pigs - all slain and thrown into the canal. The Australians were given the job to clean the canal and remove the bodies. The Japanese showed us a shelf with five severed heads on it - they told us that is what happened to looters. There was a severed head on a pole on every street corner to deter looters.

"One of the first jobs we were given by the Japanese was to collect the cars, which took us up into Malaya. That was before working on the Railway. Everything was easier than working on the Railway. I would drive a lorry and tow five cars at a time. We would take them on to a field and the Japanese would have them done up. We would always search the cars and one day one of our chaps found a Bakelite hand grenade, I don't think he realised what it was. At the time I was at the back of a lorry and he threw the grenade and it landed beside me and went off. It caught my eye and the Japanese took me to the Japanese doctor who treated my eye and told me it would be OK. We were in a working party of three with one Japanese guard. Our guard had fought in China for 10 years and he suffered from terrible rheumatism and would seize up. When that happened we would have to push his joints back into place. If the Japanese had seen us doing that to him, even though we were helping him, they would have shot us. Some of the Japanese were good to us though.

"My next working party was on the Railway. I was a lucky man really as we had to march from Changi Goal to Kamburi, which was the base camp for the railway. When my friend, Vic Morrell, and I reached Kamburi we were taken sick. We were given a day to recover. We went back the next morning and they gave me a further day to recover, but not my friend. He had to walk for 250 miles to the Burma border. I stayed at Kamburi for another week as I had to wait for a working party. When I did get up to the railway it was to a little place called Nike. I asked about my friend and they told me that he had died after he contracted cholera. That was a terrible blow.

"Our working party was responsible for keeping the road open. As it was the monsoon season the lorries would get stuck in the mud and we would use elephants to pull the lorries up. We would cut trees down and place them in the road for the lorries to drive over. That was when I lost the hearing in one ear as we had to carry the tree trunks and lay them in the road. I was holding one end of a tree trunk when the man holding the other end dropped it. The trunk bounced and whacked me in the ear, perforating my ear drum.

"It's well documented that there was a lot of cholera in the camps and that we had to burn the bodies of those who had died as the Japanese were scared that if they buried the bodies the infection would seep into the water supply."

There was one time when Kenneth could have been shot for escaping from the camp, but his life was saved by a Japanese guard.

"I had to drive the ration wagon to pick up supplies for the camp. There was a Japanese guard with me and when the truck wouldn't start after we had loaded the supplies he told me to go and fetch a mechanic while he guarded the truck. As I walked in search of a mechanic an MP cycled by. He thought I had escaped from the camp and took me to the MP station where I was questioned for almost a day. I told them what had happened but they wouldn't believe me. I really thought they were going to shoot me. Thankfully the Japanese guard found me and told them what had happened. They released me and I went back to the camp. That guard saved my life.

"The brutality of the Japanese guards is well known and they would use the dreaded speedo, a bamboo stick that they would hit people with as they yelled speedo, speedo to make them work faster. I was lucky as I was young

and fit and although I was quite skeletal at the end, I remained healthy and that kept me safe from the speedo.

"I experienced Japanese brutality when we were wrongly accused of stealing sugar. A Japanese guard slapped my face a number of times with his wet hand. Later they took us out into a field at night and we were told we would have to stay there until we confessed. We didn't as we hadn't taken anything. The Malayan PoWs were also there and one of them said he'd seen one of the Chinese prisoners go into the caravan where the sugar was kept. They found him and they tied him to the back of a lorry and drove him around the field. Of course they got faster and faster and he was dragged around the field until long after his death.

"Much has been said about the diet of those of us who worked on the Railway. We got up in the dark and came back in the dark. On Sunday morning when we didn't go out we couldn't eat our breakfast as we could see that it was full of maggots. We ate them in the dark as we couldn't see what we were eating. They only gave rations for people who went to work, the sick were denied rations. We had to try to get everyone on parade in the morning and then get the sick back to bed before we went out on our working party. Occasionally on a working party in Singapore we had been given shark, it was usually given to us to impress a Japanese General when they came to inspect the camp."

Kenneth and his fellow PoWs found out an Atom bomb had been dropped on Japan when they were told one night by an Officer.

"An officer came to our hut and told us the bomb had been dropped. We were told not to let on that we knew. He came back again to say that the Japanese had surrendered. That bomb saved our lives. We were saluting the Japanese one day and the next morning they were saluting us and the next day they had gone. We didn't see them go, they just left. Although they did leave a few people behind on the aerodrome. On the day freedom was declared I was transferred to a headquarter company who had a hut outside the Gaol. At that time two Australian Officers landed by parachute on the runway, which is now Changi airport and they took over command of the camp. We received a message to put a white cross on the runway for planes to drop supplies for us. We searched to see what we could find to put down and were told by an Australian Officer to make the Japanese do it. It felt good to watch them work as they put a white cross on the runway.

"As I'd somehow managed to keep myself fit, I put it down to the fact I was so young, I was given duties to carry out after our release from Changi Goal. It meant I was one of the last to leave, as I was driving a lorry to ferry people to Singapore to get on board their planes. I was at the airport at the same time as General Slim's plane and his pilot came and asked if I'd sent word home. I hadn't and he took me into General Slim's plane, gave me a postcard, which I filled in, and he made sure that my mother got the notice that I was well.

"At last it was time to return home and we boarded a boat for Southampton. Our first meal on board was rice, the doctors said as we'd eaten rice for three and a half years our stomachs wouldn't initially be able to take rich foods. They gradually built us up to eat properly. On the journey home I sent a telegram at each stop. I sent one from Colombo in Sri Lanka. When we arrived at the bottom of the Suez Canal we were given new uniforms and our stripes and medals were put on them. My cousin was waiting for me when I got off the boat there as he was a Batman to an Officer and he showed me around. We stopped there for two or three days. The next stop was at Gibraltar and then on to Southampton and home and family. We thought once we got to Southampton we could go straight home, but they wouldn't let us and we had to stop overnight. I was feeling a lot healthier by then, as they had really looked after us on the journey back to England, which took three weeks.

"Leaving Southampton I took a train with a chap from Wolverhampton. I was undecided whether to get off at Birmingham or go on to Dudley Port. In the end I decided to get off at Birmingham and he went on to Wolverhampton. There was a 'get you home service' for Servicemen and I thought I would use that, but as I was going up the steps at New Street station who should come down the steps but my dad and my sister Dorothy who was in the WAAF. They didn't know I would be there, they thought I might get off the train there. They had a car to take me home. It was great to see them. We got home and it was great to see my mum after three and a half long years.

"When I'd settled back at home my mum arranged a birthday party for me in a Church Hall, as we didn't get to celebrate my 21st birthday together. By then I was 25. I'd spent my 21st birthday as a PoW. We were captured in February and my birthday was on 6th March. One of my mates, a Staff Sergeant from Liverpool, had given me a bar of Cadbury's chocolate for my 21st. We kept in touch after we were released and he came to our wedding when Brenda and I married on 7th June 1947.

"I found out what my mum had been through during the war. On one day in February 1942 three telegrams had landed on her mat informing her that her three sons were missing in action. I was captured in Singapore; my brother Geoffrey, a Staff Sergeant, was captured in Java. For a short time Geoffrey and I were both in Changi Goal, although in different parts of the camp. I had a gramophone and a few records and I would carry it across the camp to play him some music. He was sent to Borneo and that was the last I saw of him until the war had ended. My other brother Granville, a Sergeant in the RAF, managed to get out of Greece into Crete and hide in the rocks until he could get a boat to Egypt. He made his way back to England and went over to France on D-Day. I was reunited with Granville, but Geoffrey had to go to Australia to recuperate, and it was a while before he was well enough to be repatriated, although he was still a bit of a wreck when he got home. He got better, he married and raised a family and ended up as a works engineer at the steelworks in Brierley Hill.

"Life carried on. I was offered my old apprenticeship, but I was 25 by then, a man, and I told them I couldn't afford to live on the wages they paid. I took a job at Baldwin's steelworks in Swindon, near Dudley. It's where Brenda had worked on the big sheets of metal that she had to catch. We always say that she did proper man's work during the war! It's where we met.

"On VJ Day I mark it in my own way as I think of everyone I knew. I don't feel bitter about my time as a PoW. I felt bitter towards the Government of the time as they sent us to Singapore knowing there was no protection. I keep the steel plate with my name, rank and number in my back pocket to remind me. We also had to wear a bracelet with the information carved into it as we didn't have shirts and I have kept that. For everyone I knew - my pal Vic Morrell, the Cathedral organist in Changi who would practice on a wooden keyboard, and the thousands of men and women who lost their lives - the FEPOW prayer."

THE FEPOW PRAYER by Cpl. Arthur E. Ogden and Victor Merrett.

And we that are left grow old with the years,
Remembering the heartache, the pain and the tears,
Hoping and praying that never again,
Man will sink to such sorrow and shame.
The price that was paid we will always remember,
Every day, every month, not just in November.
We Shall Remember Them.



Picture: Kenneth Hill with the steel plate he has carried in his back pocket since his days as a Far East Prisoner of War and the steel bracelet he had to wear from 1942 to 1945.



Picture: Corporal Kenneth Hill, 7601985, REME, after his release from Singapore.

Ken Barrett MBE.



Ken Barrett MBE with Janis Elliott. Ken, who fought in the Battle of the Atlantic, is shown standing outside St Paul's Cathedral in London before a service to mark the 70th anniversary of the Battle. The service was followed by dinner at the Mansion House, which was hosted by Alderman Sir Robert Finch, who was deputising for the Lord Mayor of London.

Revelries of a solitary walker - 100K Success.

You have already read in the Chairman's letter of the success of the 100K London to Brighton Challenge walk. His team, the Trusty Trustees, finished in second place in a magnificent 17 hours, 44 minutes and 58 seconds.

The first person to cross the finish line was solo walker Gary 'Gaz' Rathbone, who finished in just 17 hours, 11 minutes and 17 seconds. An incredibly impressive time. He walked in memory of his late father Alan, who died on 11th January this year.

We caught up with Gaz, who said: "I did the 100K walk for my dad as he was a great walker who loved going for walks on his own, although nothing like 100K walks! He was never very far from home, but he loved exploring the local trails around his home in Manchester. I think he'd be proud of what I did, and I think he'd understand why I did it solo.

"I felt great all the way round. Once we got out of London the terrain was so varied that my pace and stride kept changing. The farther into the walk I got though, the harder the stiles became! By around 80K it was an effort to lift my legs over! I was spurred on my way as I wanted to get to the finish knowing that I couldn't have tried any harder. So when I hit a section that didn't require any navigation for a while that was the motivation to get my head down and get my pace up. Most of the time I was thinking of the next bit of navigation. Looking for a little glowstick in a corner of a huge field, making sure I didn't speed-hike past a gap in a hedge, especially at night, it kept me really focused.

"By the end I was ready for that finish line! I'm very competitive and when I saw a couple of head lamps coming up behind me at 90K I decided to run the last 10K. I had to work really hard to do that so I was very happy to see the finish!

"The problems all started once I stopped! I stiffened up quite quickly so I did some stretching to help that. Other than that I was pretty much OK. My legs were a bit stiff the day after. I should mention that I did some serious training prior to the event. I downloaded the Advanced Training Plan from the website and had to jump in halfway through it. Two weeks prior to the walk I did a 45 mile, 10 hour hike. So my legs had a decent amount of conditioning.

"My message to others who might consider taking part next year are to get the miles in! And also get the miles in! The more miles you can do prior to the walk, the more fun you'll have. And experiment with your footwear. I tried my trusty hiking boots and trail running shoes that I use a lot, but I was getting sore feet by 30 miles in both of those (I'd never done that distance in them before). My road running shoes on the other hand were brilliant. They have lots of cushioning for the tarmac sections and a very wide toe-box for my feet to swell into. I slipped around on the muddy sections, but my feet felt great all the way round. As they felt so good I just put up with wet feet and kept on walking!

"I may take part next year - at the moment it's a big 'probably'. I made a couple of big navigation errors that cost me some time so I'd like to try again and see if I could do it without any errors. And it was a load of fun, so why not!"



Picture: Gaz Rathbone who completed the London to Brighton 100K Challenge in just 17 hours, 11 minutes and 17 seconds.

The first woman to cross the finish line was the magnificent Joey Sharma, who does so much for Blind Veterans UK. She finished the 100K London to Brighton Challenge in just 22 hours, 20 minutes and 13 seconds.

It wasn't the first time Joey had completed a major physical challenge for Blind Veterans UK. Earlier this year she completed the Marathon de Sables, an ultra-marathon that only the ultra-fit complete. It's recognised as the toughest footrace on earth, an extreme six day race that covers a distance of 134 miles through the Sahara desert. Out of 1127 entrants from across the globe only 970 finished.

Speaking about the 100K Joey said: "I really pushed myself during the 100K challenge as I wanted to finish in a respectable time and I was enjoying myself too. I love the work of Blind Veterans UK and I will do all I can to support them."

Joey doesn't consider herself a natural born athlete and would previously have classed herself as the underdog. With determination and a good training routine she has turned herself into an ultra-marathon woman. When asked about the Marathon des Sables (MdS) she said: "I spent nearly two years training for the MdS and on 15th April 2013 I fulfilled the greatest achievement of my life – I completed the 28th Marathon des Sables in the Moroccan Sahara and it was absolutely incredible. The whole journey from 'Underdog to Ultra Marathon Runner' is something I never thought I could achieve, but with a little bit of Spirit, Determination and Neuromol anything is possible, and I even completed the Virgin London Marathon a week later! And now the 100K. Thank you Blind Veterans UK for coming up with such a great challenge!"



Picture: Joey Sharma with Sue Buckler hot on her heels. Sue finished in an impressive 24 hours, 20 minutes and 51 seconds.

Congratulations must go to everyone who took part in the 100K Challenge and special mention must be made of 75 year old Mike Davies, who finished in 18th place in 22 hours, 49 minutes and 33 seconds. His son Nigel is a member of Blind Veterans UK. Nigel, who is also an outstanding athlete, was Sports Person of the Year in the 2012 Founders Day Awards.

Mike said: "In March 2013 I downloaded the Blind Veterans UK intermediate 20 week training programme and found it to be a Godsend, great to work to and it brought me to peak fitness well in time for the event. The team behind the 100K challenge made it a most wonderful experience, an experience that I will hold to my heart as much as I will hold the memory of those tough 100Ks."

You can now register for the 2014 100K London to Brighton Challenge. There is an 'early bird' offer until the end of August, with entry at £75 per person, rather than £99 per person. If you would like to enter as a relay team, early bird entry is £100 instead of £120 per team. You can also register as a two person relay team, when you will each walk for 50K, one to start and one to finish.

For further information go to www.walk100.org.uk or telephone 020 7616 7927. The first people have already signed up for the 2014 Challenge!



Picture: Mike Davies at the finish line after completing the 100K London to Brighton Challenge in just 22 hours, 49 minutes and 33 seconds.

Tarts for Troops.

Ian Swales, the Liberal Democrat MP for Redcar, is a busy man. When he's not campaigning on issues in his constituency and helping organisations in Redcar, he sits on the highly influential Public Accounts Committee, which has recently made headlines with the hearings involving Amazon, Starbucks and Google. One of his main campaigns is to see big business pay their fair share of tax and he is running a campaign to end business tax avoidance.

On Thursday 27th June he added his weight to Blind Veterans UK when he launched our annual Tarts for Troops week, which takes place from 29th June to 5th July each year. He hosted a tea party at the House of Commons, which was attended by 30 MPs. It came from a request by Blind Veterans UK member Chris Lee from Redcar. The event was a great success and it helped to raise the profile of our glorious charity and all the great work it has done for almost 100 years.



Picture: From left to right. Actor Alec Newman, Ian Swales MP, Chris Lee, Simon Brown, Private Ken Facal and legendary television presenter Johnny Ball.

The Tarts for Troops tea party was attended by Blind Veterans UK members Chris Lee, Private Ken Facal of the 1st Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment who was wounded in Afghanistan, David Martin and Simon Brown, Membership Officer, who lost much of his sight after he was shot in Iraq in December 2006.

Adding yet more clout was legendary television presenter Johnny Ball, a recent supporter to Blind Veterans UK, who completed his National Service before becoming one of Britain's best loved television entertainers. Television, stage and screen actor Alec Newman, who does so much for Blind Veterans UK, added his support. Alec will play a soldier who is blinded in Afghanistan in his forthcoming film Greyhawk. He plays Head Teacher Michael Byrne in the BBC's long running drama Waterloo Road and recently starred as Tom Donohue in Melanie Marnich's These Shining Lives at The Park theatre in North London.

Another highly successful Tarts for Troops event took place on top of Blackpool Tower on 29th June when Maria Pikulski took tea with members of Blackpool Air Cadets. Congratulations to Maria and Chris and thanks to everyone who took part. And to Constance Halford-Thompson for her tart recipes.



Picture: Maria Pikulski takes part in a high level Tarts for Troops tea party with members of Blackpool Air Cadets.

The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines enthrall at the Brighton centre.

The sun shone, a cream tea had never tasted better and the music performed by The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines, Collingwood was sublime. It was the perfect summer's day. The concert started with God Save the Queen and was followed by a varied and mixed programme with works by Hugh Nash, Nat King Cole, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Holst. There was Life on an Ocean Wave and concert goers sang along to Edelweiss. An encore was conducted by Blind Veterans UK member Mary Brett.

The concert was led by Bandmaster W.O. Russ Young who passed the baton to Colour Sergeant Anne Miller and Sergeant Greg Norton. The performance by the Corps of Drums meant anyone taking 40 winks in the sun was soon awoken. The Chairman gave another of his rousing speeches at the end of the concert when he reminded people this is the 75th Anniversary year of the Brighton centre and the 350th anniversary of the Royal Marines.



Picture: The Chairman, Major General Andrew Keeling, CB, CBE, RM, addresses the concert goers with Bandmaster W.O. Russ Young and The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines, Collingwood at the Brighton centre.

Colin Williamson's Beer of the Month Admiral's Ale.

Thanks must go to Nigel and Jax Whiteley for presenting me this beer to review; a gesture that must be encouraged! This splendid award winning ale is brewed by the famous St Austell Brewery in Cornwall and it really is an outstanding beer. Voted Champion Bottled Beer at the Great British Beer Festival in 2010, this ale is a fine example of an English Pale Ale. It pours a lovely copper colour with a beautiful white creamy head and the nose is of biscuits, malts and citrus hops. The taste is similar but with a hint of perfume hops and some lemon presence. The mouthfeel is slightly thin but with a nice bitter finish. This comes in at a decent 5% ABV which makes it a good session ale.

It was at St Austell's Brewery Blue Anchor Inn that the King's Messenger stopped off for refreshments whilst carrying news of the victory at Trafalgar on his long journey from Cornwall to London. Two hundred years later, Admiral's Ale was brewed in Cornwall to celebrate the bicentenary of Nelson's famous triumph. The label on the bottle shows the Admiral peering through his telescope accompanied by the words "I see no ships!"

Hard to come by, this delightful ale can be bought online or at one of the many pubs and inns around the beautiful county of Cornwall.

Answers to 10 questions on the subject of Birthplaces from page 15.

1. Vinci.
2. Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh.
3. Hampshire.
4. The Isle of Man.
5. On board the ship the Mayflower, taking the Pilgrim Fathers across the Atlantic to America.
6. The USA; he was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.
7. India.
8. South Africa.
9. Mecca.
10. Lincolnshire, Wiltshire, Shropshire and Yorkshire.

Family News.

Birthdays:

Fred May of Sheffield who celebrated his 100th birthday on 10th July.



Picture: Blind Veterans UK member Clive Huntingford who married Annie on 25th May 2013.

Anniversaries:

Platinum (70th):

Arthur & Peggy Wignall of Llandudno, Gwynedd on 1st July.

David & Norma Smith of Corby, Northamptonshire on 17th July.

Thomas & Janet Geary of Neath, West Glamorgan on 21st July.

Blue Sapphire (65th):

Joseph & Joan Waterman of Christchurch, Dorset on 10th July.

Frank & Joyce Breach of Hailsham, East Sussex on 16th July.

Ronald & Phyllis Lewis of Bridgend, Mid Glamorgan on 24th July.

John & Lyndell Rees of Port Talbot, West Glamorgan on 31st July.

Diamond (60th):

Gerald & June Burridge of Borehamwood, Hertfordshire on 18th July.

Reg & Madge Florence of Worthing, West Sussex on 25th July.

John & June Norton of Stafford, Staffordshire on 25th July.

Golden (50th):

Peter & Helen Carr of Royal Wootton Bassett, Wiltshire on 6th July.

Ruby (40th):

Ruby & Jim Corner of Middlesbrough, Cleveland on 10th July.

John & Congui Biggs of Plymouth, Devon on 21st July.

Pearl (30th):

David & Lindsay Poyner of Sale, Manchester on 30th July.

Silver (25th):

Malcolm & Ann Wilding of Rotherham, South Yorkshire on 2nd July.

Deaths:

Alice Griffiths who died on 12th June 2013. She was the widow of the late Bill Griffiths MBE. There is a tribute to Alice in the Talking Review.

Audrey Andrews who died on 4th March 2013. She was the wife of Christopher Andrews.

Delphia 'Dell' Beer who died on 6th July 2013. She was the wife of Raymond Beer.

Margaret Dibley who died on 6th May 2013. She was the wife of Cyril Dibley.

Florence 'Florrie' Foster who died on 5th May 2013. She was the widow of the late Horace Foster.

Mary Hartley who died on 7th May 2013. She was the widow of the late Hugh Hartley.

Gwyneth Hughes who died on 1st June 2013. She was the wife of David Hughes.

Vivien Jerome who died on 29th June 2013. She was the widow of the late Samuel Jerome.

Jo Rogers who died on 12th June 2013. She was the wife of Douglas Rogers.

Joyce Weatherall who died on 12th June 2013. She was the partner of the late Lt. Col Lawrence Cranenburgh.

Welcome to Blind Veterans UK.

John Bainbridge of Shildon, County Durham Served in the Durham Light Infantry from 1952 to 1954.

Anne Ball of Waterlooville, Hampshire Served in the Women's Royal Naval Service from 1942 to 1945.

Stuart Boyes of Rotherham, South Yorkshire Served in the Yorkshire Brigade, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment and The Prince of Wales Own Regiment from 1962 to 1971.

John Burns of St Helens, Merseyside Served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1966 to 1975.

Hugh Cawthorne of Barnsley, South Yorkshire Served in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

Patrick Clarke of Liverpool Served in the Royal Armoured Corps and the 13th/18th Royal Hussars from 1958 to 1959.

Charles Coppard of Lewes, East Sussex Served in the Royal Air Force from 1955 to 1957.

Richard Cruice of Manchester Served in the Coldstream Guards, the Grenadier Guards and the Duke of Lancaster's Own from 1984 to 1995.

Cedric Evans of Manchester Served in the Royal Air Force from 1949 to 1954.

Leslie Farmer of Wellingborough, Northamptonshire Served in the General Service Corps, the Royal Berkshire Regiment and the Royal Army Pay Corps from 1945 to 1948.

Stanley Fitzsimmons of Hackney, East London Served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947.

George Godfrey of Colchester Served in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

James Grant of Greenwich, South East London Served in the Royal Engineers from 1949 to 1954.

William Haines of Solihull, West Midlands Served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947.

Brian Hallums of Saltdean, East Sussex Served in the Royal Air Force from 1944 to 1948.

Herbert Hawkes of Romford, Essex Served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Army Service Corps from 1946 to 1948.

John Hobden of Lewes, East Sussex Served in the Royal Sussex Regiment, the Middlesex Regiment, the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers from 1949 to 1959.

Thomas Holmes of Lytham St Annes, Lancashire Served in the Army Catering Corps from 1950 to 1957.

John Hook of Petworth, West Sussex Served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

Kenneth Ireland of Whitefield, Manchester Served in the Army Catering Corps from 1957 to 1959.

Peter Johns of Waltham Cross, Hertfordshire Served in the Royal Air Force from 1945 to 1948.

Gordon Johnstone of Coventry Served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1954.

Philip Moffat of Newbridge, Midlothian Served in the Parachute Regiment from 1958 to 1974.

John Plant of King's Lynn, Norfolk Served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1959.

Colin Riley of Worcester Served in the Mercian Regiment from 1974 to 1976.

Ronald Ronaldson of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk Served in the Royal Navy from 1938 to 1950.

Frank Stormont of Great Bromley, Colchester Served in the Royal Air Force from 1940 to 1946.

James Whyte of Felixstowe, Suffolk Served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

In Memory.

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

Margaret Bailey of Brighton, East Sussex died on 5th July 2013, aged 90. She joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Nottingham in 1942 and trained at Bridgnorth. She Served in the Balloon Command in Morecambe, Sheffield and Hull from 1942 to 1943 and later became a radar operator working for 75 Wing Radar. She was demobilised in 1945 as a Leading Aircraftwoman.

Jack Broughton of Ferry Hill, County Durham died on 22nd June 2013, aged 93. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1939 and was deployed to France with the British Expeditionary Force and was involved with railway track repair. He escaped with his unit back to the UK via Brest. He then Served in a variety of locations around the UK on docks and railway projects until discharge in 1946 as a Lance Corporal.

Shelagh Caley of Saundersfoot, Dyfed died on 21st March 2013, aged 88. She joined the WRNS in 1942 and worked on Lord Mountbatten's Combined Operations staff in London. She later Served in Chatham before discharge in 1945.

Gordon Carrington of Clevedon, Avon died on 11th June 2013, aged 91. He joined the Coldstream Guards in 1941. He was granted an emergency commission in December 1942 and Served with the Indian Army, 3rd Ghurkha Rifles in Burma. He was wounded in action in March 1945 and discharged as a Captain in 1946.

Robert 'Bob' Cass MM of Scarborough, North Yorkshire died on 12th June 2013, aged 93. He joined the Green Howards in 1939. He took part in the Battle of Dunkirk. He was posted to North Africa and was awarded the Military Medal during the Western Desert campaign but was taken prisoner by Rommel's Army. A PoW from 1942 with the Italians, he was transferred to German captivity and was liberated in 1945. He was discharged from the Army in 1946 as a Corporal.

Frederick Cattell of Leicester, Leicestershire died on 13th June 2013, aged 89. He joined the RAF in 1941, Serving in the Middle East, Southern Arabia and Egypt as a wireless operator. He was discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1946.

Charles Clarkson of Preston, Lancashire died on 9th May 2013, aged 93. He joined the RAF in 1940 and Served in Iraq, the Persian Gulf, Dubai and later in France. He suffered a head injury during Service and lost his right eye. He spent some time at Church Stretton. He was discharged in 1946 as a Leading Aircraftman and returned to poultry farming.

Francis Colley of Cambridge, Cambridgeshire died on 31st May 2013, aged 98. He joined the Royal Artillery in 1940 and after training at Fort Brockhurst as an anti-aircraft gunner he Served in Litlington, Duxford, France and Tel Aviv. He was discharged in 1946.

Arthur Cowan of Liverpool, Merseyside died on 27th June 2013, aged 96. He joined the Army in 1940 and worked as a clerk for the Royal Pioneer Corps. In 1944 his role changed as he prepared for the D-Day landings in which he took part on Arromanches Beach. He was wounded at the Battle of Caen where his eye was damaged and was discharged a Substantive Corporal in 1945.

Ernest 'Ernie' Crump of York, North Yorkshire died on 6th July 2013, aged 82. He was in the Seaforth Highlanders from September 1949 to September 1951 for National Service and Served in Malaya.

Raymond Davies of Rednal, Birmingham, died on 27th June 2013, aged 91. He Served in the South Staffordshire Regiment from 1942 to 1946. He Served all around the UK in a variety of roles that included assisting training SoE agents with their parachuting skills.

Dennis Elkins of Westbury, Wiltshire died on 9th December 2012, aged 93. He joined the Somerset Light Infantry in 1939 and joined the 6th Bn. In 1942 he Served with the Reconnaissance Corps and was posted to India where he transferred to the Royal Signals in 1943. He was deployed to Burma with the Chindits and was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

Kathleen Evans of Porthcawl, Mid Glamorgan died on 28th March 2013, aged 91. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942 and trained as a strobe operator in a searchlight unit at Talevera Camp, Northampton and later Served in a variety of locations in the UK. She was demobilised in 1945.

Peter Gibson of Marlborough, Wiltshire died on 28th June 2013, aged 88. He joined the Royal Navy in 1943 and trained as a telegraphist. Based in Chatham he served on minesweepers and trawlers in the North Sea and English Channel, later in Malta. He was discharged as a Telegraphist in 1945.

Betty Hallett of Godalming, Surrey died on 29th May 2012, aged 99. At 18 she was working as a ward sister and midwife and joined the Queen Alexandra's Royal Naval Nursing Service in 1941. Initially serving at RNH Haslar, she was later drafted to Durban and Cape Town before discharge in 1946 as a Nursing Sister.

Jean Hamer of Teignmouth, Devon died on 7th December 2012, aged 88. She joined the ATS in 1943 and trained in Warrington before being attached to the Royal Army Service Corps in Dorchester. Declining officer training she was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

Ethel 'Jo' Harvie of Littlehampton, West Sussex died on 11th July 2013, aged 89. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942, trained at Ballymena, Northern Ireland and specialised as a driver in Belfast where she learnt how to drive ambulances, trucks and staff cars. She was then posted to an anti-aircraft battery in Northern Ireland and was discharged in 1946.

Joyce Hook of Ascot, Berkshire died on 23rd June 2013, aged 91. She joined the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1942, qualifying as a driver. She was posted to Catterick, Yorkshire followed by Bognor Regis in a searchlight battery prior to discharge for family reasons in 1943.

Clifford 'Cliff' Johnson of Ashford, Kent died on 1st June 2013, aged 92. Having worked for the Pacific Steam Navigation Company carrying troops to Norway he officially joined the Merchant Navy in 1941. He later moved troops to Durban and brought troops home from India. He spent some time in Alexandria and Aden. He was discharged from the Merchant Navy in 1946.

George Kelly of Blackpool, Lancashire died on 15th June 2013, aged 90. He joined the Royal Engineers in 1941. He served in North Africa and Italy before being discharged as a Sapper in 1947.

Robert Kirkwood of Maida Vale, London died on 10th May 2013, aged 89. He served in the Royal Air Force in various locations in the UK and Canada from 1941 to 1946, leaving as a Sergeant.

Frederick 'Fred' Layton of Weston Super Mare, Avon died on 21st June 2013, aged 93. He joined the Royal Army Service Corps in 1941. He served in the UK, Egypt, Beirut and Germany and was discharged as a Corporal in 1946.

Francis 'Frank' Macaulay of Grantown-On-Spey, Morayshire died on 10th May 2013, aged 94. He joined the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in 1939. Deployed to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force he was captured and remained a PoW in Germany until repatriation by Allied Forces. He was discharged in 1946.

Colin Maclean of Cupar, Fife died on 27th June 2013, aged 88. He joined the RAF in 1942 and specialised as a wireless mechanic. He was posted overseas and spent some time in Rabat, Morocco and thereafter at Castel Benito in Libya from 1945 to 1947. He was demobilised in 1947 as a Leading Aircraftman.

Ronald Marsh of Preston, Lancashire died on 3rd July 2013, aged 84. Called up for National Service in 1947 he joined the East Yorkshire Regiment and completed his training at Catterick before being posted to Austria. He was discharged in 1949.

Frederick Mills of Yelverton, Devon died on 16th April 2013, aged 98. He was blinded on 21st August 1942 in an accidental explosion when a soldier brought a bomb he had found to his hut while he was on the telephone. He knew nothing about it until after the explosion as he was on the phone and not facing the soldier. He was a Sergeant serving with the Royal Artillery (463 A.A. Ind. Battery). He also sustained injuries to his right forearm and left hand. A winch driver at a stone quarry before the war he went on to train in market gardening and set up his own business. His wife Gwendoline died in 2002.

Jacob Morgan of Swansea, West Glamorgan died on 13th April 2013, aged 87. Born and bred in Swansea, in 1939 he was selected to play soccer as a Welsh International Schoolboy. Shortly after this, he became the youngest outside left to play for Leicester City Football Club. In 1943, though in a reserved occupation, he volunteered for air crew duties in the RAF. He was selected in early 1944 and spent four months in the RAF before he was told he was not fit enough for air crew, but he did play outside left for their team.

When the football season was over he transferred into his local Regiment, the Welch Regiment. He completed his basic and 'special to arm' training in time to join his Battalion for the invasion of Europe and fought in most of the main

battles from Normandy onwards. Whilst in charge of a rifle section on the outskirts of Geldern, just before the Rhine crossing in March 1945, he received gun shot wounds to his left eye and spine. He completed his draughtsman apprenticeship and despite deteriorating eyesight, was employed as a draughtsman until he reached the age of 55. He married Dorothy in 1951 and they had three children. He became a member of Blind Veterans UK in 1991 when the sight in his remaining eye deteriorated.

William Niles of Washington, Tyne and Wear died on 24th June 2013, aged 85. He joined the Lancashire Fusiliers in 1946. He then joined the Border regiment and was posted to India for 12 months. His engagement expired in 1948.

Stephen Page of Liverpool, Merseyside died on 7th July 2013, aged 93. He joined the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders in 1940 and fought in North Africa and Italy, taking part in the Salerno landings and the fighting at Monte Cassino. His regiment moved on to Greece at the time of the Communist uprising before transfer to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in 1945. He was discharged in 1946.

Roy Pollard of Preston, Lancashire died on 17th June 2013, aged 87. He joined the General Service Corps in 1944 and transferred to the Royal Army Ordnance Corps on 15 June 1944, Serving in Bicester as a driver. He suffered an accident whilst on duty as a motorbike despatch rider which damaged his right knee permanently. He was discharged in 1947.

Dennis Rapp of Watford, Hertfordshire died on 24th June 2013, aged 86. He joined the Army Air Corps in 1944 and spent time in the Parachute Regiment Serving in Palestine. He was discharged in 1948.

Dixon Recknell of Newton Abbot, Devon died on 13th June 2013, aged 99. He joined the General Service Corps in 1940, transferring to the Army Catering Corps in 1942. Over a three year period he Served in a variety of locations ranging from Algeria to Italy. He left the Army as a Corporal in 1946.

Hannah Roberts of Barmouth, Gwynedd died on 5th May 2013, aged 90. She enlisted in the Auxiliary Territorial Service in 1941. She Served at Wrexham, Hereford and Durham and was discharged in 1942 after she married a career soldier.

William 'Bill' Smith of Wantage, Oxfordshire died on 7th July 2013, aged 88. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1943 and became a Flight Mechanic, training at RAF Cosford. He worked on Hawker Harts, Halifax Bombers, Ansons and

Spitfires. He remained in the UK until he was demobilised in March 1947.

Gwendoline 'Wendy' Still of Hove, East Sussex died on 12th March 2013, aged 90. She joined the Women's Royal Naval Service in 1943, Serving in Mill Hill, Chatham, HMS Ganges, HMS Shotley and HMS Europa before discharge in 1945 as a Leading Wren.

Thomas Tandy of Banstead, Surrey died on 2nd July 2013, aged 101. He joined the RAF in 1941. After D-Day he Served in France and Holland and was discharged as a Leading Aircraftman in 1945.

Margaret 'Vivian' Vincent of Winchester, Hampshire died on 1st January 2013, aged 92. She joined the WRNS in 1943 and trained as a wireless operator working with the Fleet Air Arm until discharged as a Petty Officer Wren in 1946.

Norman Whicker of Hilgay, Downham Market died on 19th June 2013, aged 80. He joined the Royal Norfolk Regiment in 1951 before transferring to the Suffolk Regiment, where he was posted to Malaya during the time of emergency. He was then demobilised in 1957.

Peter White of St Helen's, Merseyside died on 25th February 2013, aged 81. He joined the Royal Army Ordnance Corps for National Service in 1950 and was posted to the Suez Canal Zone. He was discharged in 1952.

Eric 'Les' Whitley of Chorley, Lancashire died on 5th July 2013, aged 76. He was called up for National Service in 1955 and signed on for a four year engagement, joining the RAF as a Police Dog Handler. He was stationed in the UK, Ireland and Germany. He was discharged in 1959 as a Senior Aircraftman.

Wing Commander Alfred 'David' Woodcock of Wallingford, Oxfordshire died on 23rd April 2013, aged 88. He joined the RAF in 1942 and qualified as a pilot engineer flying in Lancaster and Halifax bombers. He became an instructor in Liberators and later flew Dakotas. After 44 missions he was commissioned whilst in Italy. After 1945 he Served in the UK, Holland and Cyprus. He retired as a Wing Commander in 1978.

Frances Youngs of Great Yarmouth, Norfolk died on 11th June 2013, aged 88. She volunteered for the WRNS in 1943 and specialised as a writer. She was later posted to the wireless station in Scarborough. She was then posted to Lee on Solent working in the Captain's office before discharge as a Wren in 1945.

Paddle Round the Pier.



Now in its 17th year, hundreds flocked to Brighton on Sunday 7th July as 31 teams took part in the 2013 Paddle Round the Pier. Four members of Blind Veterans UK and three members of staff from the Brighton centre entered a craft into the race. The team (pictured above) was: Scott Wall, Karl 'Charlie' Parkinson, Steve Mills, Charlie Eastwood, Steve 'Sparky' Sparkes, Craig Brindley and Keith McLean. In the week leading up to the event Charlie, Sparky, Scott and Charlie built their raft under the supervision of grand designer Adrian Tilford and Leigh Gibbins in the Art & Craft Workshop.

Charlie Eastwood said: "It was absolutely fantastic. It was a boiling hot day and it took us about 30 minutes to paddle round the course at the old pier in Brighton. It was a great team effort. We built the raft under the supervision of the Art & Craft Workshop and we tested it in the pool at the Brighton centre. We worked with Louise Timms, Steve Mills and Craig Brindley from the Sports & Recreation Dept to train for it. The major test came when we hit the sea in Brighton. The raft was magnificent and we came second in the event. Many thanks to all the staff who made this possible and to Lou for our costumes! Here's to next year!"