

July 2017

Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



On the cover: Peter Oliver, Capt. Francois Jean, the Honorary French Consul, Blind Veterans UK's Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB and Eddie Gaines. Photo by Mark Wheeler.

Back page: Chris Nowell's poppy in a field is included in honour of all who have died in war, especially as Peter and Eddie wanted to honour those who didn't make it through their war.

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Jul 2017 | No 1082

Patron Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex GCMG.

Blind Veterans UK Review is published monthly by Blind Veterans UK, 12-14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD blindveterans.org.uk A company limited by guarantee No. 189648, registered in England. Registered Charity No. 216227 (England & Wales) and SCO39411 (Scotland). ISSN 2050-1404. Printed by Newnorth. All content © copyright Blind Veterans UK. All rights reserved.

Contact telephone numbers.

The Brighton centre 01273 307811.

The Llandudno centre 01492 868700.

Harcourt Street (HQ) 020 7723 3392.

The Booking Office for the Brighton centre: To book accommodation at the Brighton centre telephone the Booking Office on 01273 391500.

The Booking Office for the Llandudno centre: To book accommodation at the Llandudno centre please telephone 01492 868700 and ask for the Booking Office.

ROVI IT Helpline: If you need to speak with the ROVI IT Helpdesk please telephone the staff at the Sheffield centre on 01273 391447 for ROVI and IT enquiries.

New members: If you know someone who could be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK they can phone our Membership Department on freephone number 0800 389 7979.

Blind Veterans UK Calendar

Activities from the Brighton centre.

July.

Ex-PoW Week 2nd to 8th.

Homes & Gardens Week 16th to 22nd.

August.

Transport Week 6th to 12th.

Archery Club (second) 13th to 19th.

Activities Week 20th to 26th.

Widows' Week 27th August to 2nd September.

September.

History Week 10th to 16th.

Fishing Week 17th to 23rd.

Adrenaline Weekend 29th September to 2nd October.

October/November.

Amateur Radio Club 1st to 7th. Technology Week (second) 8th to 14th.

Bowling Fortnight (first) 15th to 28th.

Driving Week 29th October to 4th November.

December.

Turkey & Tinsel Week 10th to 16th December.

Activities from the Llandudno centre.

July/August.

Adventure Week 2nd to 8th.

Recreation Taster Week 16th to 22nd.

Cycling Week 30th July to 5th August.

August.

Water Week 13th to 19th.

September.

Archery Week 3rd to 9th.

Photography Week 17th to 23rd.

Walking Week 24th to 30th.

October.

History Week 22nd to 28th October.

To book Themed and Club Weeks at the Brighton centre.

For further information and to book your place at the Brighton centre please telephone the Booking Office on 01273 391500.

To book Themed and Club Weeks at the Llandudno centre.

For further information or to book your place please telephone: 01492 864590.

From the Chairman.

Your message from Tim Davis.

Despite the awful and continued tragedies that have happened in recent months, in our last edition I wrote of the importance of all communities, especially ours, pulling together to show the character and example that inspires others. Again we have seen how communities support one another in these continuing tragic circumstances.

I'm glad to report that there has been no shortage of initiative across the country by blind veterans, our staff and volunteers. As an organisation we are starting to evolve and make significant steps in developing our field organisation to support you closer to where you live through the new Community teams. We have also developed in the area of research to encourage medical experts, government and private organisations to invest and support us more. Dr Renata Gomes, who has joined our charity as Head of Research & Innovation, organised a medical seminar as part of Project Gemini that brought leading experts from the UK and America together; bringing the challenges of blind veterans to the front of their attention.

The Goal Group has brought together some of the relative youngsters (!) amongst our community as members who range in age from 50 to 76, have formed new friendships and developed confidence as they go about quite independently with their fellow blind veterans. And a Walking Week, just one of many activities organised by our centre in Brighton, in one of my favourite parts of the country, the Jurassic Coast has taken place to help all participants gain fitness, enjoyment and confidence.

On a separate and final note from me, a brief reminder of the tremendous courage, success and sacrifice by so many 35 years ago in the Falklands War. A great demonstration of British character and determination, that I'm sure no one will forget. Blind veteran Terry Bullingham recently attended a Falklands Reunion and Service of Commemoration on-board the Oriana to honour those who lost their lives and were injured and the medical teams that did so much for so many.

I very much hope you all have a very enjoyable summer and take advantage of the longer days and warmer temperatures.

Falklands War Service of Commemoration Saturday May 13th 2017. By Nicci Pugh, event organiser.

In perfect weather conditions, we held the Service at the stern of Oriana, with the ship steaming at 18 knots towards Zeebrugge-Bruges. During the Service, we invited the former patients to scatter red and white flower petals at sea in memory of those who were killed in action during the Falklands War. The Last Post was played by one of our own Royal Marine Bandsmen who had served in their war-time role as stretcher-bearers on board the hospital ship in 1982. It was a unique and memorable experience for us all. The service was taken by Father Noel Mullin RN QHC Rtd, who had been with 3Cdo Bde RMs in 1982. It was followed by a drinks reception for the Hospital Ship Uganda Group, where several decorative cakes donated by P&O were cut by our former surgeon, on board Surgeon Commander Roger Leicester OBE RN with former patients. Terry and Maria Bullingham attended with old friends Paul Burrows MN with his wife Estelle. As we all left the beautiful Oriana, I 'counted everybody out' at the P&O disembarkation gate and the beaming faces said it all. We are all keen to re-group for future events as time permits.



Picture: From left to right Terry Bullingham, P&O Oriana Captain Howarth, event organiser Nicci Pugh, BLESMA Member Bill Belcher and Father Noel Mullin.

Nicci Pugh is a former Nursing Sister. In her book *White Ship Red Crosses* she created an interesting, comprehensive and historically useful account of the efforts of the medical team and crew aboard the British hospital ship SS Uganda, during the Falklands War in 1982.

Simon Rogers's interview with blind veterans who fought in the Falklands War is included in the Talking Review.

D-Day veterans receive the Legion d'honneur for their part in the 1944 liberation of France. By Mark Wheeler, PR Manager.

Two Second World War blind veterans from Dorset were formally presented with the Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion D'Honneur for their part in the liberation of France.

During a special ceremony at our Reunion lunch in Christchurch, Edward (Eddie) Gaines, 92 from Poole, and, Peter Oliver, 89 from Bournemouth were presented with the prestigious honour by Capt. Francois Jean, the Honorary French Consul, on behalf of French President Emmanuel Macron. They were the first D-Day veterans to receive the honour on behalf of France's new President.

Speaking at the Reunion lunch Eddie Gaines said: "I am hugely honoured to be presented with this medal. I feel that we both are receiving it on behalf of all of those who didn't make it back. I was off Omaha Beach on D-Day and 3,000 men died there before noon alone."

After initially training on Motor Gun Boats at Portland, Eddie transferred to become a petrol stoker on landing craft. He and the other four crew of his Landing Barge Vehicle set off from Poole on June 4th in preparation for the Allied Invasion of France. The Landing Barge Vehicle was initially transporting 35 tonnes of TNT and a bulldozer and they landed at Omaha Beach on D-Day. They continued to work on Omaha Beach, transporting ammunition, equipment and men, for several months and he served in Normandy until Christmas Eve 1944.

Peter added: "When I found out I was to receive the Légion D'Honneur I was surprised and elated. I want to thank Blind Veterans UK for helping to arrange this presentation and being there with another blind veteran did make it extra special."

Peter Oliver grew up in Southampton and joined the Merchant Navy at just 15. He was on the Admiralty Salvage Vessel 'Help' off Omaha and Utah beaches on 6th June 1944, D-Day. It was their responsibility to maintain clearance to the approaches to the beaches. 'Help' was the first British vessel to enter a French port following the allied invasion. Peter, who had only recently turned 16 before D-Day, landed at Cherbourg and he and the rest of the crew of 'Help' were tasked with clearing the harbour of scuttled German vessels and mines. On leaving the Merchant Navy Peter was called up for his National Service and went on to serve as a Corporal Gunnery Instructor in the Royal Air Force.

Both men started receiving support from Blind Veterans UK last year after losing their sight much later in life due to age-related macular degeneration. Peter was referred to the charity through his local eye clinic whilst Eddie was told about Blind Veterans UK after attending an exhibition at Poole library. Both men have since received support, training and equipment to allow them to continue to live as independently as possible.

Peter says: "I was invited to the Brighton centre for an introduction week and it was hugely appreciated. We were introduced to lots of activities and I won the rifle shooting! Since then the charity has provided me with an adapted telephone and, very recently, an electronic reader, which is a great help. My partner and I also made two great friends there and have stayed in touch with them since."

Edward says: "I am over the moon that the man at the library gave me the card for Blind Veterans UK and told me to get in touch. I came away from my first visit to the Brighton centre a new man. They have given me a special reader that magnifies documents to a huge size that allows me to still look after my own correspondence. I've also recently started learning how to use a tablet computer. The last time I visited the Brighton centre I asked if I could have a Blind Veterans UK flag so that I could literally 'fly the flag' for the organisation outside my house. I have one and fly it for all the world to see!"



Picture: A time for camaraderie and to remember their friends. Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion D'Honneur Peter Oliver and Eddie Gaines.

Chris Nowell's Peak Photography Project. By Catherine Goodier.

"I joined the King's Royal Hussars in 2001 and my first day was the day before 9/11, and not to sound too corny it was then I knew that one day I had to get to Afghan. I went to Northern Ireland first and did six months there. Then went and played around Iraq for five months, and then, in 2007, Afghan, where I lasted for three weeks until I was wounded. It was a lame incident. We had a few incidents that were much more lively. On that morning it was a normal day, woke up, did a bit of exercise, waited for something to kick off, but it didn't. Ended up waiting for a heli to arrive with some mail and any food supplies. The helicopter landed with our letters and stuff. I got a letter from my wife Claire, went into the tent and as one of the other lads hadn't received any mail for three weeks gave him one of my letters and we had a laugh about that. I moved to a bunk to read Claire's letter and the last thing I remember was that we were chatting and someone fired an RPG, or as Billy Drinkwater thinks, a Chinese rocket, as he was also there in FOB Inkerman, although we didn't know each other at the time. The rocket hit the wall behind me, fractured my skull and that was the end of that and now I'm a blind veteran."

That is former Lance Corporal Chris Nowell's understated account of the injury that left him with a massive head injury, took his sight in one eye and left him with only very limited central vision in his other eye. In 2008, after months of intensive rehab, Chris went to Blind Veterans UK's Sheffield centre. At that time he was still learning how to deal with his injuries while he came to terms with the loss of his Army career. Chris has since built a new life with his wife Claire and their three sons. In 2008, encouraged by Dave Hickey, a former IT Instructor at the Sheffield centre, he took up photography and has proved himself to be a talented photographer. In January 2016 Chris launched his Peak Photography Project to show the changing seasons in the Peak District. You can see his photographs at m.facebook.com/PeakPhotographyProject/

Chris continued, "I was coming towards the end of the IT and English training with Dave as he'd pretty much taught me everything that he could. I was struggling a bit, I don't mind admitting it, I think it might have been depression, as I was getting a bit sad and fed up. Breaking easily as I was getting angry. Dave could tell that I was fed up and one day he gave me a camera and said, 'You know that I do photography, take this home and see what you can do with it. Have a bit of fun and show me the results.' I did and those first photos

weren't very good, but there was something about it that got to me. When I showed Dave the photos the next day he gave me some feedback and tips. I fed off that as it was encouraging and his knowledge of photography was just brilliant. Dave was happy to share his knowledge and if I had a question he'd answer it. I've learnt a lot since those early days, but I know that if I need help I can still ask Dave. It can be a bit like the magic circle, as not everyone knows how they achieve certain effects, say for example slow motion, as the manual doesn't always tell you how to do the more creative photos. You have to ask someone or try to work it out for yourself, as not everyone is as generous as Dave and happy to share their knowledge. I chose the camera I use as it has a massive screen that allows me to focus and then properly zoom in, and again it was Dave who taught me that.

"I set up the Peak Photography Project to show the four seasons there. It's almost on my doorstep and I love being outdoors and prefer landscape over portrait photography. The Facebook page went live for the world to see on 5th January 2016, and to be honest I didn't expect anyone to be that bothered and I started with 44 likes from my usual Facebook followers. I then approached Villager Jim, the photographer in the area, and asked if he could look at my page and give any tips. He was really helpful and on the Friday night he put a piece on his page about me and the Peak Photography Project and by Sunday my 44 likes had gone to 4,000. Now I'm up to almost 8,000 and that's way past what I ever imagined.



"Its success has really surprised me as I didn't think that people would be bothered, as it was more of an album for me and something to get me out and find some enthusiasm. The fact that people seem to like the photos and the chance to share them is amazing. I'm contacted by people who can't get out anymore, and I know how that feels. I remember after I was injured not being able to walk on my own and I get private messages from older men and women who say that they can't get out and how much they miss the Peak District. They say that the photos give them a little bit of escapism and it's a lovely feeling to know that as I understand what it's like to not be able to go out. After the injury I didn't move much for a whole year, apart from to walk around Dronfield a bit, but nothing like going about alone in the Peak District. So I get what it feels like to not be able to get out and walk. This has really given me the confidence to be outdoors on my own as there were periods when I didn't want to go out and I was a bit reluctant to leave Claire.

"Something else that changed my life was when Colin Williamson [Blind Veterans UK President] phoned to invite me on Project Gemini. I didn't know who he was and I got a phone call from this guy with a strong Geordie accent. Without even knowing what Project Gemini was I said yes. Then I put the phone down and said to Claire that I didn't think I could do it and when I told her it was a trip to America she pushed me to go. I'm glad that she did as it was life changing. But just before Project Gemini I had been on a younger weekend at the Brighton centre when I was initially a bit nervous, as it was full of quite large characters who all knew one another, but it was great. You met them for the first time and as you're still a bit nervous it was quite scary. I don't mind admitting it, and now I see new members, who nine times out of 10 are older than me, but you meet them and you just think 'I know just what that felt like'. You're just nervous about going out and meeting new members. I still don't like going to London, but I didn't like London before, it's just too much."

Chris' Peak Photography Project has also aroused interest in the media. "It was great to be in the Derbyshire Times and Peak District newspapers and websites and to feature in the Daily Mail. The aim was to show the changing seasons of the Peak District and to that end the Facebook page has photos of the Peak District and short videos as I describe the location and what I'm photographing. My personal opinion is that from a photographic perspective autumn and spring are the best as you can see a massive difference in the landscape. In September the heather is brilliantly dark purple. Some people would say that being in the Peak District in December is horrible, but to me it's stunning,

as you have cloud cover, and although that makes it a bit gloomy, to me it's beautiful. Cities are gloomy. I disagree when people say that if there are clouds it's a bad day as I think it's brilliant. When it's clear you can see for miles, but on days when it's cloudy and slightly grey people won't come out to take photos because they think it's not worth it. It's a case of waiting and also pure luck that you're set up in the right place when the light breaks through. Again, I call it luck, but it becomes in part instinct. You have to be patient and when you get the right photograph it's priceless. Although of course some days you come out and don't take any good photos. I find the whole process of being in the Peak District really chilled out and calming. Knowing that I have to be in a built up area kills me, it drives me mad. When I have to be in a city I can look back on the photos and find that feeling of calm.

"There are birds of prey here and they take patience to photograph and sometimes I miss them. There was an incident when I was with some mates and as we drove back from Bamford Edge on the other side of the Peak District a bird of prey just hovered overhead. My mates stopped and told me to get my camera, but I didn't as I just wanted to remember it hovering. Sometimes it feels that once you've shared a photograph with the world it's almost not as special anymore."



Asked about his favourite photographs Chris said: "As I still have so much more to learn I'm always critical about my work, but when you get a photograph that you're genuinely happy with that's priceless. One of my favourite photos is an early one that was taken in Dronfield just across from the bypass. There is a line of trees and I saw that the light was going and that it would be a stunning sunset so I set the camera up and waited. The whole sky lit up all blue and red and I was ready with the camera and was really lucky. I aimed the camera to put the sun through the top branches of the trees so that it wasn't too much in the light and it was just perfect. A guy came past on his bike and even he had to stop as it was so stunning. Although I've been photographing the landscape here for over a year there's still so much more to photograph. In particular it would be great to shoot the stars using a time lapse setting to get a star trail and eventually I'd like to get to Crome Hill, the highest peak. It's really rough to get up to and because of my balance I'd have to climb it on my knees. People go up there all the time, but you have to ask permission, as technically its farmer land.

"People get hurt out here if they're not dressed properly or you can easily break your leg and as there's no mobile phone signal you can't call anyone if you get stuck. One of the first times I went out on my own Claire wasn't happy at all as she thought I'd have an accident. She was really panicking and I said I'll be fine you just leave me. So, she did, and she went to one of her friend's houses and I walked along on my own, fell and twisted my ankle. All I could think of was that I would never hear the end of it! I sat in the entrance to this small cave to rest my ankle and let it calm down and when I stood up it still hurt but it was alright and I could walk back."

So does Chris see himself as a blind photographer or a photographer? "That's a tricky one. I'd say photographer, but people tell me to jump on the blind bit as there's so much competition, but I'm uncomfortable with that so prefer to be thought of as a photographer."

So what's next for Chris? "I'll obviously keep taking landscape photographs of the Peak District as I'm nowhere near as good as I want to be and the photos can only improve with experience. Perhaps in the future our sons might like to take up photography, who knows. I really want to go back to Afghan, but this time to photograph it, as it's a beautiful country and the mountains are incredible. But as we know plans change. I'm not supposed to be here now.

Claire says that I didn't die in the incident because I'm so stubborn. It wasn't much fun to have just half a head for a year and my memory was just ridiculous, forgetting everything every day and I didn't really know where I was, but that's in the past now. When I left the Army the plan was for Claire and I to get a nice little pub and do that for the rest of our lives. Obviously, that's not the plan now, but we've got over that and we're doing something else with our lives. We live in Dronfield and that wasn't in the plan, but Claire's parents live here and at first I wasn't keen, but now it's the best place for us. We've made friends and it's a great place for the kids. Things happen and plans change. I hate the fact that some people just want to sit around all of their lives and not do anything. Give me a hill to fall over any day, as that's better than just sitting around. When you sit around and give up that's when you're dead and I don't want to be dead yet."

A self portrait of Chris Nowell as he looks onto the Peak District is set out below. To see Chris' Peak Photography Project go to [m.facebook.com/PeakPhotographyProject/](https://www.facebook.com/PeakPhotographyProject/)



Podcast in the Talking Review.



Picture: An interview by Paul Jacobs GM with the actor Julian Kostov, the star of *Another Mother's Son*, features in the Talking Review. A true account of the occupation of Jersey there were several similarities between Julian's character, Fidor, and Paul's story after his injury in Afghanistan.

Based on the true story of Louisa Gould, the drama is set during World War II on the Nazi occupied island of Jersey. Louisa took in an escaped Russian POW, Fidor, and hid him. The tension mounts as it becomes clear that Churchill will not risk an assault to recapture the British soil, and the island community spirit begins to fray under pressures of hunger, occupation and divided loyalty. Against this backdrop, Lou fights to preserve her family's sense of humanity and to protect the Russian boy as if he was her own.

Written by Jenny Lecoat, Louisa Gould's great niece, this is a captivating story of life, love, joy, kindness, friendship, division, tyranny and heartbreak.

Ron Russell's Piscean Quiz.

This is one for the Anglers/Fishermen.

1. Which fish young include Alevins & Smelts?
2. What is the world's largest freshwater fish?
3. What is the biggest freshwater fish on record?
4. What is the smallest fish in the world?
5. Its latin name is *rutialis rutiau*. By what name is it more commonly known?
6. True or False. It is illegal to fish at night in Italy.
7. Which is England's deepest lake?
8. It's an Australian bass like fish.
9. What is the fastest fish in the world?
10. Many kinds of shark will drown if they stop swimming. True or False?
11. What kind of fish does the fisherman in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* catch?
12. A sprat is a baby what?
13. What type of animal comes in edible robber & spider?
14. To which order of fish do plaice belong?
15. Which sea creature changes its sex annually?

Answers on page 15.

G.O.A.L. Group adventures from York. By Dave Hazelgrove.

Eight GOAL group members — Carol Davies, Lindy Elliott, Peter King, John Brice, William (Billy) Aspinall, Gary Tomlinson (with guide dog Klint), Chris Humphrey, and me, Dave Hazelgrove, met in York on Monday 22nd May.

We were staying at the Travelodge, York Central Micklegate as our base of operations for the week. We all arrived from our various homes during the early afternoon, settled into our rooms and were ready to go. After our evening meal beside the river, we embarked on an early evening cruise along the river. This included a running commentary from our helmsman, pointing out certain places of interest and their histories.



Picture: Dave, John, Gary (& Klint), Pete, Chris, Carol, Lindy & Billy.

Tuesday started with a walk to the National Rail Museum (NRM), where we were met by our guides Phil and Rose. We were taken around the exhibits very carefully, and the talks we were given by our very knowledgeable guides did seem to bring them back to life. We were also permitted to go where few of the public are ever allowed, including on the footplate of the Mallard. Gary had his picture taken sitting on the driver's seat and holding the regulator throttle, as his Uncle did the same for real.

After lunch at the NRM, we walked around to the other side of the main railway station where we caught a local bus to the York Cold War Bunker. This is an actual relic of the Cold War, originally staffed by the Royal Observer Corps, but in layout and features not dissimilar to certain places I spent many years. Where's my "Mushroom" t-shirt?



Picture: At the Bunker. From the left Gary, Billy, John, Carol, Pete, Chris, Lindy, Anna and Steve.

Anyway, we were met by Steve and Anna from English Heritage, who had very kindly opened the place just for us (it's normally open to the public three days a week). We were given a very extensive explanation of the purposes of the place and a fully guided tour by Anna, who managed to breathe life into the place again just for us. After our evening meal, it was back to base for our traditional quiz night.

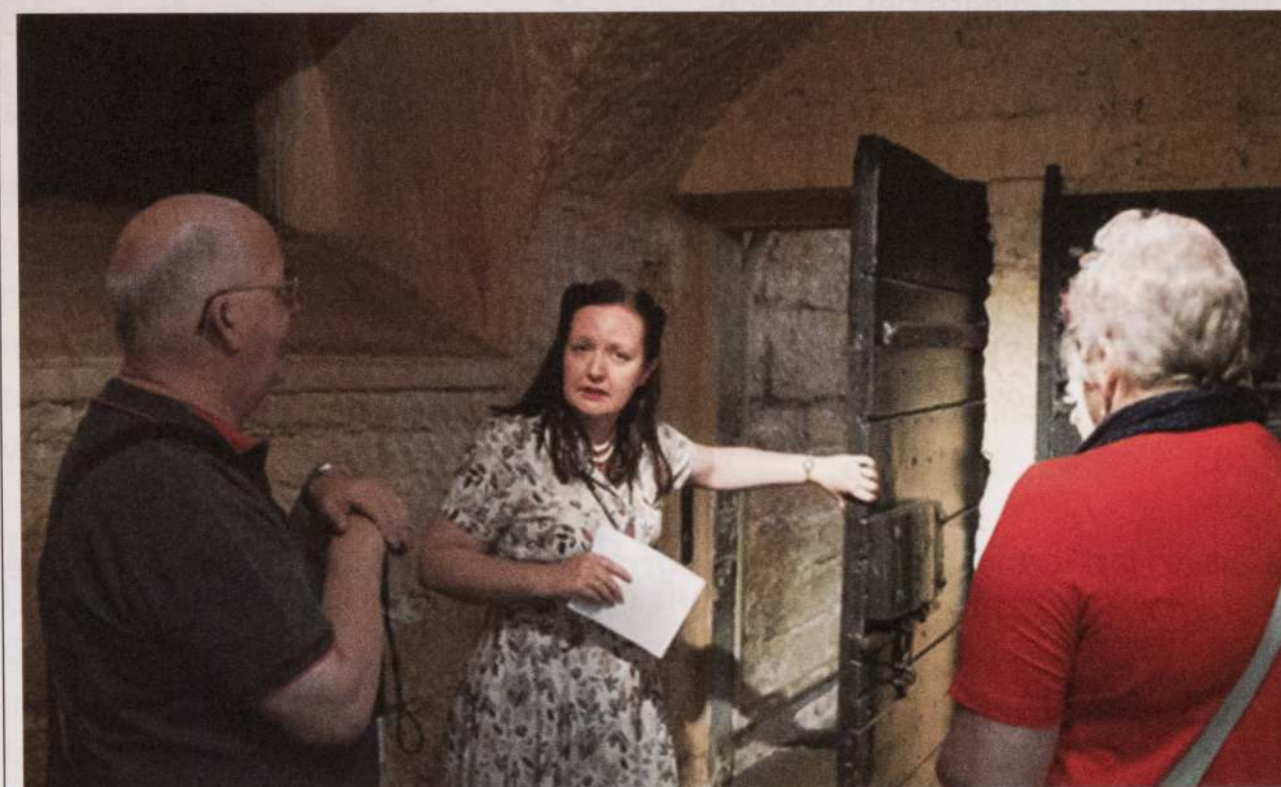
Wednesday started with another walk, this time to the York Army Museum, where we were met by Graeme Green. Graeme took us around the exhibits and really brought them to life with his tales of how and where they were used.



Picture: Chris Humphrey.

After lunch, we were joined by John May who took us on a walk around the centre of the lovely City of York, including the famous Shambles and the environs of The Minster. Our walk finished at the York Brewery, so it seemed only fair that we availed ourselves of a tour of the premises. Product sampling was completed purely in the interests of science, you understand.

Thursday, and another walk took us to the York Castle Museum. We were met there by Sarah, who showed us around and kept us safe in the dimly-lit scenarios. Part of the museum is a recreation of a Victorian (or older) street with shop windows full of the sort of things they would have sold. Fans of 'Flog It!' would have been in raptures. The second part of the tour was through a section of the old prison where Dick Turpin was held. Life was indeed harsh back then. After lunch, we walked through The Shambles once more to York Minster. We were met there by Christine, a member of the Minster staff who had been organised to give us a guided tour. What we expected was a tour. What we got was a masterclass on how The Minster should be presented. Christine spoke with a deep knowledge and love of her subject, and we were all left feeling privileged to have been there. A deeply moving experience, and one highly recommended to everyone.



Picture: Sarah shows the group around York Castle Museum where the Highwayman Dick Turpin was held.

Friday morning had us packed early. We then walked to "York's Chocolate Story" (down, girls!), where the history behind York's love affair with the Little Brown Bean was explained by Lee and illustrated with samples — well, someone's got to do it! We left with a white chocolate lolly each that we'd made ourselves and some 'extras'. It's a vile calumny to suggest that certain members left with half the stock — Billy!

After a quick walk back to base to collect our luggage, we all walked back to the railway station and boarded our various trains home. Our thanks go to the City and people of York for making us so welcome and for being so helpful.

The next GOAL visits planned are on Monday 24th to Friday 28th July at Blind Veterans UK in Brighton when we will stay at the nearby Port Hall. Then on Monday 11th to Saturday 16th September 2017 when we will stay at Blind Veterans UK in Llandudno.

G.O.A.L. stands for "Get Out And Live". The group has been formed for active male and female members of Blind Veterans UK - from the age of 50 to 76 - who want to join a group that strongly advocates independence within their day to day lives.

Is this you? If so, please get in touch.

For more information about the group, or the events, please contact any of the following committee members:

Chris Humphrey on email chrisandhazel3@gmail.com or telephone him on 01603 701402.

John Brice on email john.brice@tesco.net or telephone him on 01934 261783.

Me, Dave Hazelgrove, on email dhazelgrove@hotmail.com or telephone me on 01754 896617.

John Cantwell on email john.cantwell1947@gmail.com or telephone 01295 273105.

Answers to Ron Russell's Piscean Quiz from page 15.

1. The Salmon.
2. The Beluga Sturgeon in Russia.
3. The Pangasius Gigas or the Giant Mekong Catfish caught in May 2005 weighing 646lbs and measuring nine foot in length.
4. The Paldocypris. It has a transparent body and is 7.9 millimetres or 0.31 inches long.
5. Roach.
6. Its True.
7. Lake Windemere.
8. The Snapper.
9. The Wahoo.
10. True.
11. The Marlin.
12. Baby Oyster.
13. The Crab.
14. Flatfishes.
15. The Oyster.

Blinded veterans from three continents gather together at the Brighton centre. By Colin Williamson.

Blind veterans from the UK, South Africa and the United States gathered together at the Brighton centre in May under the umbrella of Project Gemini, the annual exchange programme which sees members of Blind Veterans UK, the Blinded Veterans Association (USA) and St. Dunstan's South Africa come together for a week of learning, camaraderie and activities, which has become a very popular event in the Blind Veterans UK calendar.

The veterans were joined by former U.S. Army colonel Rob Mazzoli, retired U.S. air force colonel Glenn Cockerham and former U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Kimberley Cockerham who were all due to speak at the Research and Innovation Seminar which was to be held in conjunction with Project Gemini later in the week. Also speaking at the seminar was retired U.S. Army Flight Surgeon, Major Tom Zampieri, an old friend of Blind Veterans UK and the coordinator of Project Gemini over in the United States. We were also pleased to welcome Gareth Morgan, the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer for St. Dunstan's Association for South African war blinded.

The Blind Veterans UK members attending the week were Kelly Ganfield, Chris Strudwick, Darren Blanks and Mark Heaume and our U.S. guests included Kathy Champion, Dan Standage, Russ Nelson and Kevin (Sir, can I ask you a question?) Jackson. Our South African contingent consisted of Anton 'Archie' Roberts and George de Nobrega. We also welcomed two members of staff from the Llandudno centre, Tim Bagnall and Andrew Tredrea, who came along to support us during part of the week and a great help they turned out to be. Tim and Andy swapped duties mid-week with Charmaine Stalker and Lisa Jones, also from the Llandudno centre and once again they proved invaluable. Well done to all.

After a surprisingly straight forward pick up at Heathrow airport the group headed for Port Hall and the Brighton centre to unpack and get to know their surroundings before making a visit to a lovely English country pub, The Plough at Pyebourne, for a traditional Sunday lunch and an opportunity for everyone to get to know one another over a pint of good old British ale. In the evening we all gathered at the bar at the centre and chatted until the jet lag kicked in and everyone slowly drifted off to bed for a much needed rest.

Monday morning started with a tour of the Brighton centre and a chance for us to showcase our fantastic facilities. We were given a very interesting talk on I.T. by senior I.T. instructor David Dent and ROVI Stuart Penfold kept us up to speed with the latest technology. After a superb lunch in the Winter Garden with some members of staff we then split into teams and tried our hand at Goalball in the sports hall. It was a great afternoon and very competitive! We then departed for a game of ten pin bowling down at the marina.

The sun was splitting the trees on Tuesday morning when we boarded the coach to take us to Burgess Hill where we were to be guests of CAE Aviation who specialise in training pilots on state-of-the-art flight simulators. We were met at the door by a delightful member of the CAE team, Samantha Rowley, who kindly offered us coffee and cookies before we were taken to the board room for a couple of very interesting talks by various members of her team. After the talks we were given the opportunity to test the weapons systems of an armoured fighting vehicle on a simulator. A few of the former 'tankies' amongst the group proved pretty deadly when it came to laying down accurate effective fire onto the targets!

After a lovely lunch courtesy of CAE we were then split into small groups and tried our hands at flying executive jets, helicopters, passenger jets and other rotary and fixed wing aircraft on the amazing simulators housed in the huge hangars. Tom Zampieri, a former U.S. army helicopter pilot proved to be very adept at flying the machine and our instructor on the day told him that he performed as well as any sighted pilot had done on this particular simulator, much to Tom's delight! Gareth Morgan was also very good at flying the executive jet and managed to get us down in one piece. It was a great afternoon and CAE were tremendous hosts. Thanks to Samantha Rowley for making it possible.

Wednesday was the big day and a much looked forward visit to the capital. It was an early start for us all as we had to catch the 08:15 train from Brighton to London Victoria and a few were nursing sore heads after a night at the Brighton centre bar. We were all suited and booted and arrived at the station early so that we could meet some of the Southern Rail staff who very kindly provided us all with complimentary rail tickets for our journey and a group photograph was taken for their weekly magazine. Thank you Southern, much appreciated!

Once we arrived at Victoria station we took the underground to Gloucester Road and after a short walk found our first venue for the day, the residence of the Deputy Ambassador for the United States, Wychwood House in nearby Kensington. A beautiful old building with its delightful gardens, this elegant Georgian mansion house is currently occupied by the U.S. Charge D'Affaires (and interim deputy ambassador) Mr. Lew Lukens whilst President Trump deliberates on who to appoint as the new U.S. ambassador for the United Kingdom. We were met at the entrance to this magnificent house by Louise Thomas, who works alongside the U.S. embassy's cultural attaché Annaliese Reinemeyer (who very kindly invited Project Gemini to visit the embassy) and were escorted upstairs to the balcony which overlooks the colourful gardens which looked magnificent in the morning sunshine. We were then introduced to Lew Lukens and members of his staff and after a few brief speeches we presented Mr. Lukens with a Blind Veterans UK plaque to hang on the wall of the official U.S. ambassador's residence, Winfield House in Regents Park, which stands on the grounds of St Dunstan's Lodge where our charity had its roots. (Winfield House is currently closed for refurbishment).

After the meeting we headed off to our next venue, the Victory Services Club near Marble Arch where we were guests at the inaugural Research and Innovation series seminar, organised by our Head of Research, Dr. Renata Gomes. It was one the most interesting and engaging events that I have attended in a long time and credit to Renata and her team for putting it all together. Credit also to the speakers who delivered some really interesting, informative and well researched presentations and thanks to our M.C. for the day, Major General Nick Caplin who did a superb job in keeping things on course and on time.

After the seminar some of us were fortunate enough to be introduced to Caprice Bourret, an American businesswoman, model, actress and TV personality who seems genuinely interested in helping to raise awareness of what we do at Blind Veterans UK for our blind veterans. More hopefully to follow.

On the train journey back to Brighton we were serenaded by a slightly 'tired and emotional' Archie Roberts who entertained us all with songs of yesteryear. Never before have I ever had to physically restrain so many people from jumping off a moving train.

We had a bit of a lie in on Thursday morning before boarding the coach once again and a visit to Dorking Brewery, run by former Royal Navy reservist Neel Singh.

Neel bought the brewery after participating on a course run by X-Forces, a business support service for service leavers. X-Forces works closely with military charities including Blind Veterans UK. Neel was keen to produce a new beer once the brewery moves to a new premises later this year and asked if Blind Veterans UK members would be interested in getting involved with the process. Ex-Servicemen and beer, what's not to like?

After a quick tour of the rather cramped but extremely functional brewery we were asked if we'd care to sample some of his beers and it was only fitting that there should be a typically 'English' ale, brewed using local hops and an American beer which used imported hops from the U.S. I must admit to rather liking the more robust and flavoursome American beer to its English counterpart but some of the group preferred the slightly weaker English ale. After a few tastings we came up with an idea which we put to Neel which astonishingly he seemed to like! Why not brew a beer that uses both English and American hops and call it Gemini! Behold, a beer is born! We hope to have an update soon on how our beer is progressing as soon as the new brewery opens its doors and starts producing.

The group returned to Port Hall in the late afternoon and we got ourselves ready for a night out at the dog track in Brighton. I'd like to say that we were all lucky on the night and came away hundreds of pounds richer but that unfortunately wasn't the case. Some punters won a few quid here and there but the rest lost out but a good night was had by all.

Friday loomed bright and hot and we hopped on the coach for the short journey to Albourne and Q Leisure, an outdoor activity centre situated in beautiful countryside just off the A23 west of Hassocks. Our first task was to provide everyone with breakfast and this came in the shape of hot cheese and ham croissants washed down with much needed teas and coffees. The day's activities included axe-throwing (what could possibly go wrong; lots of blind guys throwing potentially lethal weapons around?) bubble football and karting. I'm sure that I can speak for everyone when I say that it was a fantastic day and one that will stay with us for a long time. Just to see the smiles on everyone's

faces was worth every penny! The bubble football turned into a cross between Gladiators and British Bulldog with a hint of 'It's a Knockout' thrown into the mix. It was a game of survival of the fittest and the last two people standing were Blind Veterans UK's Darren 'The Beast' Blanks and Gareth 'Masher' Morgan, our friend from South Africa. It was a tense battle, Gareth taking the first of three knockouts only to be thwarted by 'The Beast' who took 'Masher' out with a neat side-step followed up by a hefty shoulder charge. By this stage Darren was visibly tiring and it wasn't long before Gareth's superior rugby skills came to the fore and he took out 'The Beast' with a full-on tackle. A great performance by both!

The karting proved just as exhilarating and some of the guys reached speeds in excess of 35 miles per hour which is pretty impressive for non-sighted drivers. We left Q Leisure a tired, sweaty bunch but we all thoroughly enjoyed the day. Thanks to all of their staff for making it such an enjoyable experience.

Friday evening is the finale night where we have a BBQ (weather permitting) in the inner garden and I must say that the food was fantastic as we were all ravenous after a hard day so the food went down very well indeed. Great work by the catering staff! We also had a presentation in the Trophy Room where our guests received their Honorary Life Member certificates and the much coveted Project Gemini bespoke coin. Tokens of appreciation were received from our overseas guests which will hang on the Project Gemini wall in the main corridor. Our Blind Veterans UK beneficiaries also received their coins.

Saturday was a 'local' day when everyone went into Brighton to shop for souvenirs to take back to the U.S. and South Africa to remind them of a great week spent in the UK with their peers. On Saturday evening we held our farewell dinner at the Cock Inn in Ringmer and it was a superb way to end what was a fantastic week.

There are too many people to thank individually but everyone who participated in some way in making the week such a success deserves praise. The transport staff in particular were really on top of their game as were all of the staff at the Brighton centre. Thanks to you all for making the week run so smoothly and a special thanks to Louise Timms for all of her hard work in organising the itinerary, great job mate!

Another fantastic week of camaraderie and learning and I look forward immensely to next year when Project Gemini will visit the Llandudno centre.



Picture: Darren Blanks, left, playing Bubble Football.

Congratulations.



Picture: Working age blind veteran Maria Pikulski with fiancée Richard Hughes. Maria won the Eye Health Professional Award at Galloways 'Eyecan Awards' on 16th June. Maria won the award in recognition as her work as an ECLO at St Helens Hospital. Many blind veterans have been referred to our charity by Maria.

It's A Long Way To Lyme Regis, It's a Long Way to Go. Jurassic Walking Week May 2017. By Richard Haynes.

Q. What do you call a blind dinosaur?

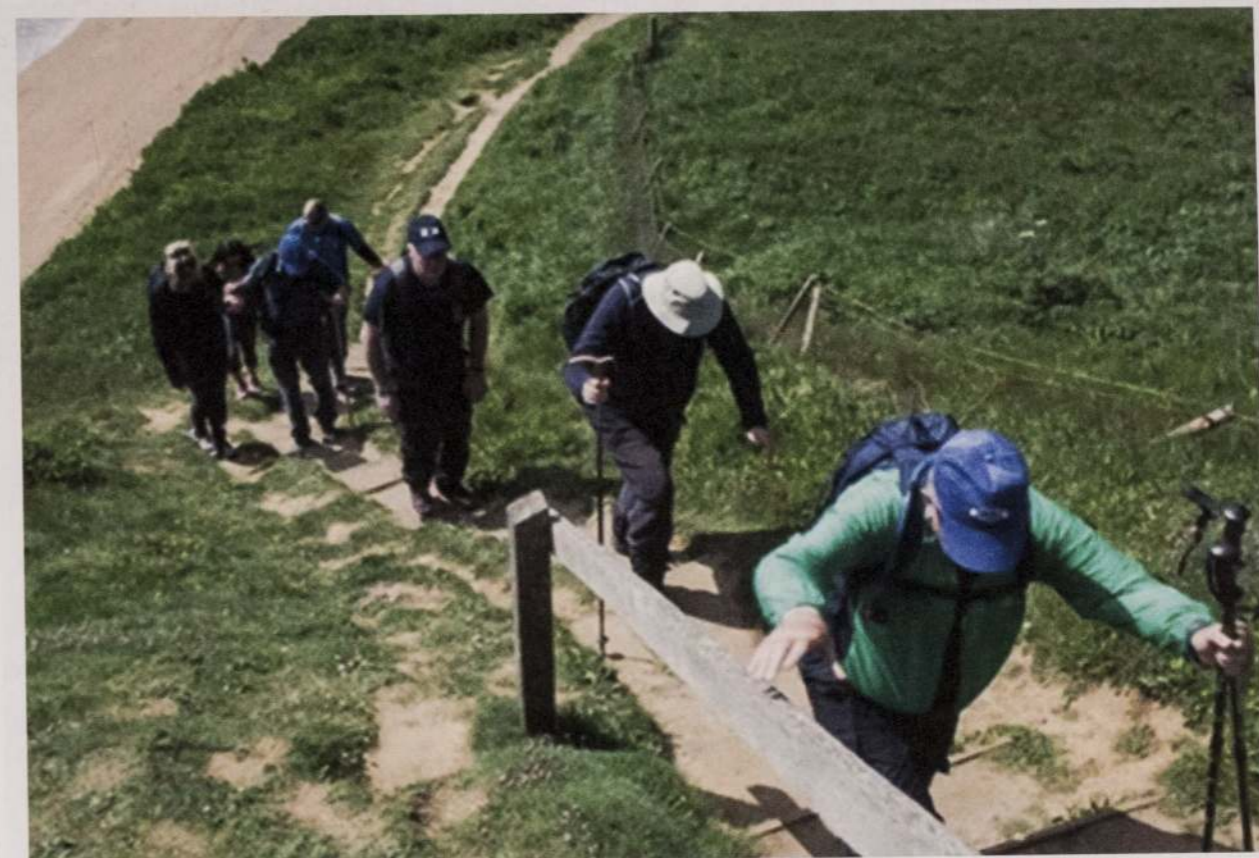
A. Douthinkhesoarus — boom, boom!

After that terrible joke this article, you can but hope, can only improve!

The Activities and Themed Week Review Special for 2017 read 'You'll be walking along the world renowned Jurassic coastline from Exmouth to Dorset' I got out an atlas and measured the distance from Exmouth to Lyme Regis , just over 28 miles. "Great" I thought, "even I can do that sort of distance in a week". Little did I know what was in store for me and the other six members who signed up for a little gentle exercise on the rolling coast line of Dorset and Devon that forms the Jurassic Coastline.

So halfway through May we congregated in a holiday cottage some ten miles from Crewkerne and introduced ourselves; Chris, Danny, Geoff, John, Mark, Peter and Richard. Beds were allocated and it was not long before the largest room acquired the nickname "the Farm Yard" as decibel levels were at dangerous heights between the hours of 2300 and 0500. A meal was prepared and eaten and then we were introduced to our local Sherpa, sorry guide, Martin, who turned out to be incredibly enthusiastic and knowledgeable but who having never dealt with the vision impaired forgot that holding up a picture and asking us if we could all see it was always going to get a ribald reply. Anyway, what we don't know about ticks, cliff falls and sunburn means we can now all apply to compete on Mastermind.

Everything became very serious the next morning as we set out from Lulworth with the avowed intent of reaching Burton Bradstock some 12 miles away to the East. To do so entailed crossing the bottom of the Royal Armoured Corps Ranges at Bovington. Seven Members, plus seven guides were a poor comparison to the Grand old Duke of York's 10,000 men — but Martin "he marched them up to the top of the hill and marched them down again!"



Picture: "He marched them up to the top of the hill."



Picture: "And he marched them down again."

Chests heaved, knees and calves ached and bellies rumbled until we reached the abandoned village of Tynham if the loo block smelt the same in 1942 as it does now the consensus was we would have no qualms about leaving. As the day wore on 12 miles became unrealistic and we detoured to view some recently exposed dinosaur footprints — quite amazing and a memory which will stay with us all for years to come! Even Jeff (I can sleep anywhere) Stockwell and John Evans, who were using the week as preparation for the 100K London to Brighton Challenge fundraising event were somewhat subdued by the end of the day.

For those who served in the Senior Service, Portland will seem eerily silent. For the foot sore, especially Mark Threadgold who was breaking in a new pair of boots for his ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro in October, the relative—ly level walk around the Island was bliss. The day started with 'slip, slap, slop' as suntan lotion was applied and the action boded well for the remainder of the week. Laces re-tied and rucksacks settled we set off to discover the hidden (literally) delights; two prisons/holding centres (both still in use) a Victorian Gun Battery, a Georgian Lighthouse with a short and most informative talk by our resident Lighthouse keeper and author, Chris Cardwell, on Trinity House. We peered into and clambered through disused quarries from where the famous white stone was shipped around the World to adorn civic and ecclesiastical buildings, including St Paul's Cathedral. As we strolled along the western side we came across a peregrine riding the sea breezes some ten feet above us, surveying us with beady eyes before nonchalantly sweeping away on the wind.

Peter Burbery's hidden talents came to the fore and if there was an ornithological query, Peter was the one to turn to. Mind you that was not his only skill as he seemed to have an unerring ability to be paired with one of our lady guides, what a skill Peter! As we came to journey's end we 'discovered' a sculpture park and were swept up into the arms of a very amused octopus to have our photograph taken. Appetites were improving and the arrival of Jackie Greer and a huge chicken curry was much appreciated that evening. Farmyard impressions were even more varied that night.

Our torturer, Martin, had lulled us into a false sense of well-being. The next morning had us climbing again, this time to Golden Cap, which at 191m is the highest point on the South West Coastal Path. Through woods and glades of bluebells before the steeper path appeared and it was here we saw the making



Picture: The Portland Octopus captures 7 'blind mice'; and their guides.

of a new walking style "the egg-bound chicken"; elbows out, walking poles thrashing sideways rather than being used in a forward motion, not many were determined enough to pass 'he who be first'! Molly, the dog and a few intrepid others went the longer way around him and were the first to enjoy the wonderful views from the summit. Then it was back down to Seatown and eastwards to West Bay, where "Broadchurch", the TV serial, was filmed. We stood in the shadows of a renowned fossil cliff, where after a fall the beach is awash with fossil hunters. Then it was back to the undulating cliff walk, with constant reminders not to stray too close to the edge. By now it was not just physical torture but audio torture as well; Craig had discovered a web page dedicated to dinosaur jokes and regurgitated them at every rest stop — "why do you think Craig, we were so eager to move on?"

Past the halfway mark and we were back to heading westward towards the attractively named Budleigh Salterton. Much of the afternoon's walking was on a tightly cropped sward so comforting on one's feet. The sea was our constant companion on our left and the smells of the seashore competed with bluebells, hawthorn and gorse. Our last mile and a half saw us walk along the

gin clear waters of the River Otter, in which trout could be seen maintaining their position in the gentle currents. On the beach front brightly painted huts were being re-painted on the land side of one was painted a palm tree, half closing your eyes in the balmy afternoon and you were transported to a sub-tropical paradise; unfortunately the beauty from the 'Bounty' TV advert was nowhere to be found!

That evening Martin showed us the fossils he had collected on various beaches; there won't be many of us who can say they have handled shark's poo, albeit 150 million years old.

Our final day and another change of guides saw Martin rubbing his hands in glee as the Duke of York's men were pointed at Golden Cap again, ostensibly for the newcomers to see the views but really so we could pose at the top in our Blind Veterans UK and dinosaur logo'd tee-shirts for happy snaps. Then 'left foot forward' and 6 miles towards Lyme Regis with the aim of being able to buy a memento to take home, needless to say it was "Quick March" especially when someone mentioned award winning pasties (damn good they were to). So what did we achieve; some 50 miles across stunning countryside, comradeship and above all huge satisfaction of our achievements. We all agreed that the week was — well I will let the picture say it (the photograph shows a bottle of Proper Job, an authentic IPA brewed with Cornish spring water and a single malt made from Cornish grown Maris Otter Pale barley).



Walking weeks could not happen without the forward planning of the Rehabilitation Teams at both the Brighton and Llandudno centres, thank you on this occasion to both Steve Mills and Craig Brindley. But it is out walking where the support and guidance is so important, to Craig, Curstie, Ellie, Jackie, Kirsty, Richard, Robin, Russell, Stan, Steve and Theresa, a huge vote of thanks for guiding us and to Des for driving us to and from your days' walks and finally discovering where Morrisons was. Without you all it would not have happened. Finally, on behalf of us all, members and guides I cannot thank enough Martin, whose knowledge of the coast, geography and its history, combined with his enthusiasm made this a week to remember.



Picture: The 7 'Blind Mice' on Golden Cap (191m) left to right Chris Cardwell, Jeff Stockwell, Peter Burbery, Danny Lee, Richard Haynes, Mark Threadgold, John Evans.

So, what are you waiting for? Look out your waterproofs, dust off your boots, tighten your belts and get out and start stretching those legs, you really will enjoy yourself.

Harold 'Hal' Jackson of Middlesbrough, Cleveland served in the Royal Air Force from 1949 to 1950.

Ralph Jepson of Mapperley, Nottingham served in the Army Catering Corps from 1960 to 1962.

John Jones of Liverpool, Merseyside served in the Royal Engineers, Parachute Regiment and the Royal Army Service Corps from 1948 to 1980.

Brian Julian of Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk served in the Royal Armoured Corps, Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and the Army Air Corps from 1956 to 1993.

Irene Longstaff née Woods of Sheffield, South Yorkshire served in the Women's Royal Army Corps from 1952 to 1955.

Susan McDonald née Pearce of Pontypridd, Mid Glamorgan served in the Women's Royal Army Corps from 1970 to 1972.

Douglas Marsh of Spalding, Lincolnshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1946.

Leslie Moate of Norwich, Norfolk served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1954.

Henry Moss of Liverpool, Merseyside served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1950 to 1952.

Dilys Moy née Grinsted of Ipswich, Suffolk served in the Auxilliary Territorial Service from 1941 to 1949.

John Neill of Littlehampton, West Sussex served in the Royal Artillery from 1945 to 1948.

Albert Newman of Hunstanton, Norfolk served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1947.

David Nind of Metheringham, Lincoln served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1976.

Elsie 'Kathleen' Oglesby née Ambler of Great Preston, Leeds served in the Auxilliary Territorial Service from 1943 to 1945.

James Parris of Dawlish, Devon served in the Royal Navy from 1943 to 1946.

John Payne of Evesham, Worcestershire served in the Royal Air Force from 1946 to 1947.

Valerie Peckham née Jordan of Salisbury, Wiltshire served in the Auxilliary Territorial Services from 1944 to 1948.

Robin Pierce of Slough, Berkshire served in the Royal Navy from 1971 to 1982.

Kenneth Plaistowe of Rotherhithe, London served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1958 to 1960.

Kenneth 'Ken' Potter of Coventry served in the Royal Air Force from 1953 to 1962.

Reginald 'Reg' Reed of Middlesbrough, Cleveland served in the Royal Signals from 1942 to 1946.

David Reid of Marlborough, Wiltshire served in the Royal Engineers from 1965 to 1989.

James Reilly of Coventry, West Midlands served in the Irish Fusiliers from 1955 to 1957.

Dennis Ridge of Stoke On Trent, Staffordshire served in the General Service Corps and the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) from 1946 to 1948.

Robert 'Bob' Rogers of Ilkley, West Yorkshire served in the Royal Artillery from 1956 to 1961.

Douglas 'Doug' Sheldrick of Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

Alan Short of Sheffield, South Yorkshire served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1959 to 1961.

Leslie Simmons of Watford, Hertfordshire served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

Eric Smith of Eccles, Manchester served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1942 to 1947.

Hilda Smith née Pettitt of Thetford, Norfolk served in the Home Guard from 1942 to 1946.

Henry 'Jeff' Sparks of Wincanton, Somerset served in the Royal Marines from 1941 to 1945.

John Stokes of Clevedon, Avon served in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps from 1948 to 1950.

William 'Bill' Tate of Jarrow, Tyne And Wear served in the Royal Signals from 1959 to 1976.

Michael Taylor of Scunthorpe, South Humberside served in the Royal Anglian Regiment from 1967 to 1976.

John Teeling of Widnes, Cheshire served in the King's Own Regiment from 1956 to 1958.

Brian Thurgood of Darlington, County Durham served in the Royal Air Force from 1949 to 1952.

John Venn of Clyst St. Mary, Exeter served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers from 1945 to 1961.

Alec Ward of Derby, Derbyshire served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Engineers from 1946 to 1983.

John Watkin of Sheffield served in the Royal Air Force from 1944 to 1947.

Sidney 'Bernard' Whitehouse of Ammanford, Dyfed served in the Worcestershire Regiment and the South Staffordshire Regiment from 1940 to 1946.

Jack Wild of Kettering, Northamptonshire served in the Army Catering Corps from 1952 to 1961.

Leonard 'Len' Williams of Fleet, Hampshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

Maurice Williams of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire served in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1949.

Walter Williams of Ellesmere Port, Cheshire served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946.

Milton Womersley of Ilkley, West Yorkshire served in the General Service Corps and the West Yorkshire Regiment from 1947 to 1949.

In Memory.

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

Edwin Abbott of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire died on 24th May 2017, aged 97. He served in the Royal Navy from 1940 to 1946 in Northern Ireland, the North Atlantic and Australia, discharging as a Petty Officer Radio Mechanic.

Frederick Abley of Upminster, Essex died on 23rd May 2017, aged 93. He served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1946 in the Atlantic, Sicily, Italy and France.

John Barry of Exeter, Devon died on 13th May 2017, aged 97. He served in the Royal Engineers from 1940 to 1946 in Egypt, Libya, Italy, Sicily and Austria.

Frederick 'Fred' Clark of Hailsham, East Sussex died on 25th May 2017, aged 95. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1946 in England and India until demobbed as a Corporal.

Alexander 'Sandy' Donnelly of Dunfermline, Fife died on 24th May 2017, aged 60. He served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in Northern Ireland, Gibraltar and Germany from 1972 to 1987, leaving as a Corporal.

George 'Dick' Gregory of Bourne, Lincolnshire died on 14th May 2017, aged 93. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1952 to 1953 in Rhodesia, Egypt and Cyprus, discharging as a Flight Lieutenant.

Desmond Dowding of Ruislip, Middlesex died on 12th May 2017, aged 95. He served in the Royal Air Force in the UK from 1940 to 1946.

Dennis Farbrother of Hailsham, East Sussex died on 23rd May 2017, aged 90. He served in the Royal Engineers from 1944 to 1948 in Palestine, Kenya, Egypt, Europe and Germany.

Alan Fellowes of Ashford, Kent died on 14th April 2017, aged 90. He served in the General Service Corps and the Royal Engineers from 1945 to 1948, leaving as a Lance Corporal.

