

May 2018

Review

Blind Veterans UK | St Dunstan's since 1915



On the cover: Billy Drinkwater and Blind Veterans UK President Colin Williamson. Billy was the winner of the Special Achievement Award at Founder's Day 2018.



Back page: Hugh Megarry, winner of The Ted Higgs Trophy at Founder's Day, with Valerie, Pam and Olwen, the daughters of the late Ted Higgs who established the award in his memory.

May 2018 | No 1092

Contact: Review Editor, Catherine Goodier by phone 020 7616 8367

Email: revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk

Post: Blind Veterans UK 12 - 14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD

Contact telephone numbers.

The Brighton centre 01273 307811. **Harcourt Street** 020 7723 5021.

The Llandudno centre 01492 868700.

The Booking Office for the Brighton centre: To book accommodation at the Brighton centre telephone the Booking Office on 01273 391500. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or Community Support Worker (CSW).

The Booking Office for the Llandudno centre: To book accommodation at the Llandudno centre please telephone 01492 868700 bookings and ask for the Booking Office. If you have care needs please first contact your Team Leader or CSW.

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: 0800 389 7979.

Review Editor: You can telephone Catherine Goodier, Review Editor, on 020 7616 8367 or email revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk or write to her at Review Editor, Blind Veterans UK, 12 - 14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD.

Blind Veterans UK Calendar

Activities from the Brighton centre in 2018.

May.

Women's Military Week 6th to 12th.

Walking Week 13th to 19th.

Photography Week 27th May to 2nd June.

June.

Archery Club 3rd to 9th.

GOAL Group 11th to 15th.

Homes & Gardens Week 24th to 30th.

July.

Paddle Around The Pier 7th & 8th.

Race Week 15th to 21st.

Music Week 22nd to 28th.

Fishing Week 29th to 4th August.

August.

Widows' Week 12th to 18th.

Activities Week 12th to 18th.

Archery Club 19th to 25th.

Adrenaline Weekend 31st to 3rd September.

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. If you have care needs please first speak with your Team Leader or Community Support Worker.

Activities from the Llandudno centre in 2018.

May.

Driving Week 6th.

History Week 14th.

June.

Shooting & Archery Week 10th. Potting and Planting Week 25th.

July.

Adventure Week 1st.

Technology Week 8th.

Hill Walking Week 29th.

August.

Strolling Week 6th. Creative Crafts 13th. Water Week 19th.

To book Themed and Club Weeks at the Llandudno centre.

For further information or to book your place please telephone: 01492 868700. If you have care needs please first speak with your Team Leader or Community Support Worker.

From the Chairman.

Your message from Air Vice Marshal Paul Luker CB OBE AFC DL.

I can well imagine that many in the charity sector might be feeling particularly bruised in the early part of 2018. Hot on the heels of a number of nationwide scandals about such things as the moral standards of some charitable fundraising and examples of poor governance, the alleged bad behaviour of some senior figures in the international aid community hit the headlines. It cannot be pleasant for the majority of charity professionals and volunteer workers to be so comprehensively tarred by the misdeeds of a few, but we live in a world where too often perception fuelled by the media very quickly becomes the new reality — a reality that can just as quickly impact on reputation and fundraising.

Nevertheless, exposure of even a few bad apples elsewhere should cause all governing bodies to undertake some deep self-examination of their own organisations — and it certainly does at Blind Veterans UK. Operating in a heavily regulated area of the charity sector, we can draw some confidence from the frequent and routine inspections to which we are subjected and, more importantly, the consistently good reports that they elicit. However, a great deal of what they report on is about the adequacy of the processes that we put in place and our adherence to them. They don't really tell us much about whether we are doing the right thing — providing appropriate services that are relevant and effective for our members, rather than merely meeting regulatory standards. This is something that does concern Trustees, especially so while recent changes to how we run the charity bed in. To my mind the best observations on this aspect of our work will come from inside (our members, our staff and our volunteers) and by comparison with what other similar charities say and do.

Equally and unsurprisingly, we keep a very wary eye on our finances. It is too early to judge whether the public has become disaffected generally about charitable giving, but I ought to forewarn you that our income this year is likely to be slightly lower than in previous years. The simple reason for this is due to a slow-down in fundraising campaigns while we undergo a major overhaul of how we promote ourselves, by combining all the departments that do so under one lead, called Engagement. This exciting new initiative is probably long overdue but its purpose is absolutely timely now. Essentially the initial aim is to ensure that many more people get to know about Blind Veterans UK:

what we do; why and how we do it; and where our ambitions are taking us. The ultimate goal though is to ensure that we reach and inform the right people: those whom we can help and those who can help us — by volunteering, by partnering, by lobbying, by donating and by championing the Blind Veterans UK cause.

Addressing both of these concerns — the confidence that as a charity we are doing the right thing in the right way, and success in reaching the right people — hinges heavily on better communication. That will lie at the heart of what the Engagement team does. The Trustees have given them some pretty challenging targets and early signs from our largely new team is that they are raring to meet them. But improving communications goes much further than that. As we enter this year's round of Reunion lunches, it crossed my mind that this is one of the few occasions when a large cross-section of our members and Trustees have the opportunity to meet. So, on that basis, when you attend I would wholeheartedly encourage you to let presiding Trustees and the senior leadership team know how things are going. What is working well? What could we do better? How is Blind Veterans UK affecting you? Who are the individuals in Blind Veterans UK who have most impact on you and how are they performing? Do you have ideas which we haven't thought of, especially any which would help the new Engagement team in your own community? I know that many of you will have your own thoughts, so don't hold back.

Having said all that, communications in the Services can be a tricky blighter, the more so when military humour rears its head. When I was a young officer I had to take my share of Duty Operations Officer duties. On one occasion one of our flight commanders was scheduled to fly a helicopter training sortie. He was a thoroughly nice man, but was well known to have a very mild speech impediment when under stress: he had a little difficulty with words starting with the letter 'F'. Unkindly, I allocated him his callsign for the sortie — Foxtrot Four Five. More unkindly I booked an airborne diversion for him — to our neighbouring airfield Farnborough.

Later that day the Farnborough Tower Controller played me back the air traffic tapes: Flight Commander: "F-Farnborough Tower, this is F-F-Foxtrot F-F-F-Four F-F-F-Five, joining to land". Tower: "Roger Foxtrot Four Five. One ahead, clear to join in turn. Call Finals." Flight Commander: "F-Foxtrot F-F-Four F-F-F-Five, roger." The stress level had now risen considerably, as his aircraft was now closing quickly with the runway threshold; he had much to do and still needed landing clearance following the Finals call he had yet to make. Flight Commander: "F-F-F-Foxtrot F-F-F-F-Four F-F-Fi-Fi-Fi-Five, F-F-Fi-Fi-Fi-Fi-Forget it, I've landed!"

Bale out, or go down with the plane. By Colin Williamson.

Jim Petre, a sprightly ninety seven year old from Billingham, Cleveland, had the dubious pleasure of sitting next to yours truly at the Middlesbrough Reunion lunch held at the city's Jury's Inn in March. During the course of the lunch Jim and I chatted about his service and he informed me that he served in the R.A.F. during the war and was a rear-gunner on-board a Halifax bomber with 10 Squadron, which were based at RAF Melbourne, five miles south-west of Pocklington, Yorkshire and that he had completed seventeen (and a half!) missions before being shot down over Denmark. Jim takes up the story.

"On the night of the 14th of February 1945 the main force of our squadron were sent out to bomb Chemnitz in Germany, which was designated Operation Thunderclap, whilst a smaller force flew to Kiel Bay to lay mines. Out of 54 aircraft on the mine laying operation, six were lost. I was part of the smaller force sent on the mine-laying operation. I remember it was a miserable, filthy night and whilst we were waiting to board our aircraft, sat in the ground crew hut, the usual spirited light banter was missing. Perhaps this had something to do with the awful weather that evening or perhaps some of us had a premonition. This was to be our third mine-laying operation, the previous two having gone off without incident. After a short wait we boarded the Halifax and headed across the North Sea at a height of five hundred feet. As we approached the coast of Jutland we climbed up to fifteen thousand. As we flew low over the sea I asked the skipper, Johnny, if I could test fire the guns and both Jim Mills, my fellow gunner, and I fired off a short burst. This was the first and only time on operational duty that I had test fired the guns.

"Shortly after crossing the coast on a heading to Zealand, Andy, our wireless operator, picked up an enemy aircraft on his set. As he was closing in fast, I instructed the skipper to take evasive action and corkscrew to port, which he did with a violent manoeuvre. At this stage, with no incoming fire, I thought that we had shook the enemy aircraft off, but unfortunately for us he was still on our tail and let rip from below with his guns, hitting our port engines and setting them on fire. The Halifax went into a steep dive and was in immediate danger of exploding.

"Before I go any further I'd like to make you aware of two important factors in my survival. I found that I could wear my parachute quite comfortably and safely in my cramped turret, instead of having to open the turret door leading to the fuselage, gather my parachute from its pocket, clip it on and make my escape. The second factor was that because of the extreme cold at altitude we wore a heated suit with a slipper that fitted inside your flying boots. As a result of having to wear this heated slipper, we had to wear boots that were two sizes bigger than we would normally wear. This meant that it was very cramped in the turret if you had to force both legs in. I chose to sort of 'hang' upside down in the turret, with one leg in and one leg out, which made it easier to escape in an emergency. And this was an emergency! I had to bale out quick or else not at all.

"I pulled the ripcord and hoped for the best. Fortunately, I was literally yanked out of the turret when the chute opened and found myself falling to the ground. I immediately noticed that only one of the two clips that attached me to the parachute was connected. I tried reconnecting the clip to the harness but it was impossible so I held on to it as best I could. After a short while I became exhausted so I let go and put my faith in the remaining clip. Fortunately for me it held. Then came the most unreal feeling that I've ever experienced; swinging to and fro almost like hanging from a chandelier, without any feeling of falling. Am I dead or alive, or is this Heaven, I thought to myself.

"My Mae West (personal flotation device) had on it a catch for automatic inflation but I decided to manually blow it up, if only for something to do during my nine minute descent from 15,000 feet. My next concern was that I might fall into the freezing sea, and would probably only last a few minutes due to the extreme cold. Suddenly, I was in cloud, everything was white and I prepared myself to land, be it sea or land. As I broke through the cloud, I spotted three pinpricks of light which formed the pattern of a triangle and what could have been lighthouses. This is it, I thought to myself, I'm going to land up in the drink! My survival instinct kicked in and I remembered my training, it was drummed into us that if we ever had to bale out, relax completely before hitting the ground. This I did and much to my relief I found myself landing in a small meadow, without injury!

"I estimated the time to be about 19:50 hours, and as the Germans would be sending out a search party to look for survivors I had to move fast. I quickly

gathered in my chute and lay on it for about thirty minutes or so, watching and listening for any German activity. I remembered my training and was planning in my mind my next move, which was to dispose of my parachute. I quickly walked to the edge of the field, crossed a small stream and walked twenty or so yards into a wood, where I buried my chute with the aid of my standard issue knife. This took around an hour and I must have made a good job of it, as when I revisited Denmark some years later, Count Scheel, who you will read about later, told me that it remained hidden until several years later!

"I hatched a plan of escape; with the aid of my compass I'd travel east and cross over into Sweden. I had to get away from the scene of the crash as quickly as possible so began walking. After walking for a couple of hours I came across a small clump of cottages. I knocked on the door of the end cottage and whispered "l'anglaise" and "R.A.F.". The occupants refused to open the door and I imagined that they were telling me to go away. I moved away from the house as quickly as possible in case they decided to contact the Germans. There was snow in the bottom of the dykes and I swallowed handfuls to quench my thirst. Walking throughout the night I realised that I must make contact with someone before dawn, as I was getting increasingly hungry and tired.

"I eventually came across a farmhouse without any lights showing and pondered my next move. Suddenly I spotted a chink of light in a farmhouse some three hundred yards away. This is it, I thought to myself, I must make my move before daylight.

"Danish farms appear to have barns attached to the houses and as I approached the light I could see through the window the farmer busily milking the cows. I quickly moved around to the house and could see the farmer's wife, who appeared to be the only other occupant. I knocked on the door and waited; the lady opened the door, screamed, and then ran off to the barn! I decided, in my weary condition, to take my chances and to his credit, and my great relief, he pulled me into the living room and gave me the opportunity to explain myself.

"I saw that my face was covered in dried blood, it must have been when the parachute caught my face when I exited the plane; no wonder the farmer's wife screamed when she caught sight of me! The farmer, L.P. Larson, couldn't speak any English so with the help of my silk map I explained, as much as possible, my predicament and my intention to get to Sweden and acquire a boat to get me,

eventually, to England. He smiled and probably thought I was quite mad! I then asked him for a drink and was promptly handed a jug of milk, which I demolished rather quickly and this was followed by a huge breakfast of bacon and eggs. Farmer Larson produced a suit, boots, a coat and a cap. I was then taken up to the hayloft, covered up and prepared myself for a good few hours sleep. Unfortunately my sleep was interrupted by the farmer shouting, 'Help has komm! Help has komm!'. What kind of help I thought, hopefully not the Germans!

"My concerns were soon put to rest when I was introduced to a most elegant and imposing figure who turned out to be Count F.C.R. Scheel, who assured me that my worries were over and that I'd be returned to England to carry on the fight. Events moved quickly after that and at around midday a taxi appeared driven by Carl Peterson who took me to Roskilde, where I met Mogens Scheel, the Count's brother.

"I stayed one night with Mogens and then I was driven to the Hafnia Hotel in Copenhagen, where I met two more members of the underground. After a coffee and a schnapps, I was taken for a look around the city. After my tour, we went back to the hotel where to my surprise a dinner had been laid on in my honour. The dining room was portioned, one half was occupied by the Germans and our party occupied the other! It lasted until late afternoon and the noise from both sides of the room was quite boisterous! I ventured out a couple of times during my stay in Copenhagen and on one occasion we heard the drone of RAF bombers flying over the city on their way to bomb the enemy. After eleven or so days, during which I moved around a couple of houses, I travelled by bus and taxi to the Tuborg Brewery where I was introduced to three leading actors who had to escape from Denmark after the Gestapo discovered they were giving most of their earnings to the resistance.

"At about four in the morning we were taken to the harbour and placed aboard a small fishing boat where we hid in a small compartment. Before clearing the docks either the customs officers or Germans boarded the boat and flashed their torches around but luckily for us they didn't seem too concerned. We soon arrived at the small port of Helsingborg in Sweden where my travel companions disembarked whilst I remained in the cabin. I was then told that the Swedish police intended to inter me for the duration of the war, but fortunately the Vice Consul was in town and after a quick phone call he told me to 'Stand by,

I'll be there in a matter of minutes' and he was true to his word. I stayed two nights with the Vice Consul and then I was put on a train to Stockholm. Upon reporting to the Air Legation at Stockholm I was placed on stand-by for a flight back to England. I reported to Stockholm airport on five successive nights only to be told that the flight was cancelled. On the sixth night I received a telephone call at the airport from one of my crew, Jim Mills, who hoped to meet up with me at the airport. Luck was with me as this time I did manage to catch a flight back to Britain and eventually landed at RAF Leuchers in Scotland.

"Having no passport, I received 'VIP treatment' and whisked through customs. I was then allocated a bed in a huge building, full to the brim with bunk beds. On the next evening I was accompanied to Edinburgh Rail Station by a Warrant Officer and handed over to two Army Sergeants, armed with rifles. These two never left my side, and we were given a compartment to ourselves. On the journey south I dozed off to sleep occasionally and every time I woke up they were watching me like hawks! Upon arrival at Kings Cross Station we all had a wash and brush up and took the underground to St. John's Wood and the offices of M.I.9, British Military Intelligence.

"When we entered the building, the corporal on desk duty said to me 'Welcome home sir' which obviously puzzled the army boys. After breakfast we marched in to see the adjutant, where one of my escorts presented him with some papers to sign. Apparently, their papers stated that they were escorting a deserter from the RAF but the adjutant told them that they were delivering a R.A.F. flyer, shot down over enemy territory and who had made it back to England with the help of the Danish Underground. My two escorts then shook my hand and apologised profusely, but I told them that they were only doing their duty and that the main point of escorting me was to ensure that I didn't divulge any information about my escape and who had assisted me in Denmark.

"After a thorough debrief, I was returned to my base R.A.F. Melbourne in Yorkshire where I was warmly welcomed back with a few cans of beer! I was soon transferred to R.A.F. Leconfield and re-crewed. We were scheduled to go on a bombing raid and as we lay on the grass waiting to be called forward a red very light was sent up from the flying control and we were informed over the radio that the flight had been cancelled. More than that, the war was in fact over, the Germans had surrendered! The bar was immediately thrown open and boy did we celebrate!

"Afterwards, I was posted to R.A.F. Scampton in Lincolnshire and placed in charge of flying control, which I enjoyed. I was also pleased to be taking up sport again, which we were deprived of during the war years, especially football, rugby and cricket, which I loved.

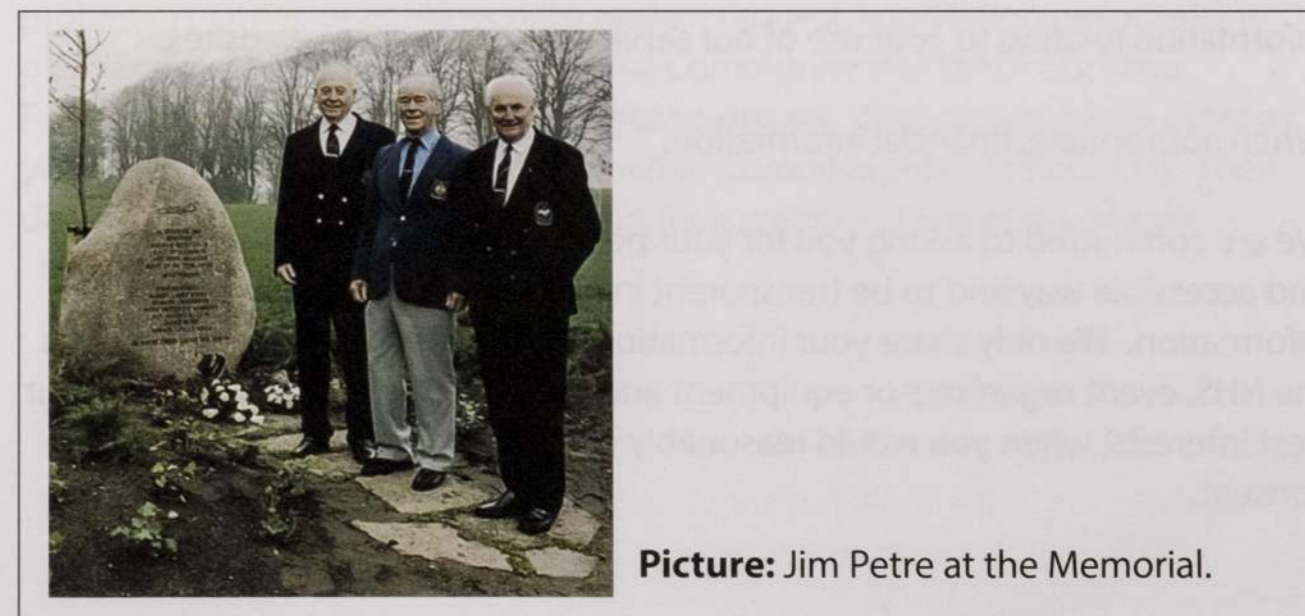
"I was finally demobbed on the fifteenth of July 1946, and returned home to my family; my son James and my two daughters Patricia and Pauline. My wife Olive gave birth to our daughter, Elaine, in 1952.

"I returned to Copenhagen on five occasions after the war and met up with all of my Danish rescuers, including farmer Larson and his wife, Carl Peterson the taxi driver, Count Scheel and his wife and many others. Our last visit was to lay wreaths on the graves of our two comrades who sadly made the supreme sacrifice. I shall always remember them the way they were when I last saw them; young, bright, full of fun and devoted to their country. We were as close as brothers could ever be."

Jim worked in the engineering field after demob and then the roofing trade, eventually owning a factory which manufactured products used in construction work.

Every Friday evening Jim telephones his great pal, Andy Andrews, who was shot down with Jim over Denmark on that last fateful mission, and they both raise a glass to the boys who never made it home."

A great story, and a wonderful man. Thanks for sharing Jim.



Picture: Jim Petre at the Memorial.

The biggest change to UK data privacy law in 20 years comes into effect on 25th May 2018.

Why? On 25th May 2018 the new General Data Protection Regulation, known as GDPR, comes into effect. In the UK, GDPR will replace the existing Data Protection Act of 1998 and it will be covered by a new Data Protection Bill, which has been published by the government.

What is it? GDPR is a major new piece of European regulation that addresses how EU citizens' personal information can be used by organisations, introducing strict new rules around gaining people's consent to process their data, when appropriate, and to protect their rights. The GDPR, is a really positive step towards you having more control over how your data is used and will also help ensure that we are better placed to protect your personal data.

What does this mean? In order to administer your membership of Blind Veterans UK and to provide you with the services we do, we need to use (known as 'processing') some of your personal information. Examples of personal data that we might process include:

Names and contact details.

Images and biographical details.

Certain health information.

Information relating to your use of our services, equipment or websites.

When appropriate, financial information.

We are committed to asking you for your personal information in a clear and accessible way and to be transparent in how we subsequently use your information. We only share your information with trusted third parties, such as the NHS, event organisers or equipment and service providers when it is in your best interests, when you would reasonably expect us to or with your explicit consent.

What do you need to do? You simply need to be aware that the changes are happening and be confident that we will continue to take the privacy and protection of your personal information very seriously. You have very specific rights in relation to your personal data. These rights will be clearly outlined in our revised Privacy Policy from 25th May. You can request a copy through your Community Worker if you require it.

What are we doing to comply? We are reviewing all of our policies and processes to ensure that we can comply with the new regulations. This will give you greater transparency and control regarding your personal data. At Blind Veterans UK we are committed to ensuring:

We and our trusted third party service providers will process your information in a lawful, fair and transparent manner.

We will limit the personal information used and use it only for a specific purpose.

Data will be accurate, protected at all times and retained only for as long as it is required for its original purpose.

We will make it simple for you to understand our Privacy Policy, to control your information, exercise your rights and easy to contact our staff about your information.

If you'd like to know more. If you would like to know more about data protection, GDPR, your rights or to make a request, suggestion or complaint please contact us through your normal Community Worker or our Data Protection Officer at dpo@blindveterans.org.uk If we are unable to assist as you wish, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Their details and processes can be found on their website at www.ico.org.uk

If you enjoyed photography before sight loss you don't have to give up, says picture perfect Mark Pile.



The photographer responsible for the professional photography on the cover and back page of this month's issue of Review and that are woven through the Founder's Day article is Mark Pile. A member of Blind Veterans UK since 2012 Mark spoke about his love of photography, his first solo exhibition, a touring exhibition that will open at the Brighton centre for two months on 25th May.

"Before I lost my sight, I took photographs for pretty much most of my life, although not seriously. The irony is that when my eye sight started to deteriorate I became more and more serious about photography and really pushed myself as it was a case of 'you can do something'. That was before I joined Blind Veterans UK, but then it got hard, and to be honest I was going to pack it all in, but as many people know, Blind Veterans UK encourages you to carry on with what you know you can do and enjoy. After that I did the Photography Weeks at the Brighton and Llandudno centres and now also help to run those weeks, which is really good for me. As I teach Photoshop I also teach post processing of the images to members. I now go to the Photography Weeks purely to help people, as I like to see how happy they are when they get a decent photo.

"From going to the Photography Weeks and going out to take photos on my own I became more and more passionate about it. I then heard that you could get distinctions within photography from The Disabled Photographers Society. When someone told me I wouldn't get one because of my sight, well that was a red rag to a bull, so I went out and got one and that felt great! So now I can use the letters LDPS after my name as I gained a Licentiate ship. There are several blind veterans who have this, as there are talented photographers in the charity.

"I really enjoy event work and studio work as I like to have a subject in front of me that I can see as clearly as is possible. I can do landscapes, but I choose not to because it's all too far away for me, if that makes any sense at all. It's one of those things that although I have really poor vision and can't see clearly, I like to see the people I'm photographing as best I can, as later I can crop and recompose the photos using Photoshop. The composition issue is always a problem as you never know how much you have on your left and how much you have on your right. Believe it or not I also do sports photography for the local paper in Somerset, and that is hard. I mostly photograph games for Welton Rovers, which is great as my son Christopher plays for them, so I usually have three or four photos in the paper every week. My younger son Ben is ex

Royal Military Police and he is my escort on Remembrance Day.”

Mark's first solo exhibition is a celebration of life and tenacity. "The exhibition is of 25 photos of members who are all shown enjoying life after sight loss. So, the theme is to celebrate everything that members do, whether it's climbing a rockface, abseiling from a building, working in the craft shop, driving a go cart or shooting a 12 bore shotgun. All the things that people who don't know anyone who is vision impaired or blind would say we can't do. I may have taken the photos but it's a celebration of the life of members and the life changing work of Blind Veterans UK. I do an awful lot of event photography for Blind Veterans UK and I love doing it, as you are there when amazing things happen, and that's fantastic. Pardon the pun, but you do see amazing things happen. I really enjoyed taking the zip wire photos from the Brighton centre as Tony Harbour and others launched from the top of the building. I have Lou Partridge to thank for making the exhibition a reality as we had a conversation and she has been the driving force for this exhibition. I get on very well with the Art & Craft team at the Brighton centre, and went in there with a suggestion and they made it a reality, and I'm rather proud of that. I also enter photos into exhibitions, and with other members have photos in an exhibition for The Soldier's Charity that's presently touring, but this is my first solo exhibition. There are some very talented photographers in Blind Veterans UK.

"The exhibition will start on Friday 25th May at the Brighton centre where it will stay for two months, before transferring to the Llandudno centre where it will stay for another two months. It will then be on display at Harcourt Street HQ, before moving to the Thomas Pocklington Trust in Tavistock Square. Then I'm trying to arrange a location in Somerset.

"My advice for anyone who has always enjoyed photography, but who think they have to give up now that they can't see so well, is to stick with it, go along to the Photography Weeks and just stick with it. I sometimes do talks for groups, Action for the Blind etc, about photography from a vision impaired person's point of view. At one talk the guy who'd asked me along said how much he'd always enjoyed taking photos and how much he missed it. I asked why he thought he could no longer enjoy photography and he said because of the vision problem. I asked if he could wait until after my talk and then see how he felt. After the talk I showed him the equipment I use to help me see what's on the camera, as I use glasses and a monocular. About three months

later I had an email from him from Pakistan, as he had moved there, and he said he was back taking photos. That's why I do those talks and that's why no one should give up photography. I've sat talking with people in the dining hall at Brighton and it's always 'I used to love it' and I say well why don't you come along and do it. The key is to know where the buttons are, as once you've mastered that you can really begin. You mustn't be scared of the camera as you can't break it, unless you chuck it on the floor! You can press a button and do something wrong, but you can get back to where it was before quite easily. It's a case of practice, practice, practice, as with anything the more you practice the better you become. As I can't read the settings on the back of the camera Blind Veterans UK very kindly loaned me a pair of glasses with a strong monocular in one eye. It looks like I'm kissing the camera, but it means I can read what I need to.

"We now also take photographs using tablets, as several of us went to Canterbury with Fran McSweeney, Regional Manager, where we did a three day course on photography using tablets, iPhones and Samsung tablets. It was a great few days and before it I was always against taking photos on tablets and phones, but for people who struggle with a camera they are so easy to use. So there really is no reason for people not to do it. It really is a case of 'don't give up on your dreams' as that's what this charity has always been about, as that was Sir Arthur Pearson's goal to show what can be achieved and to ensure people do achieve."

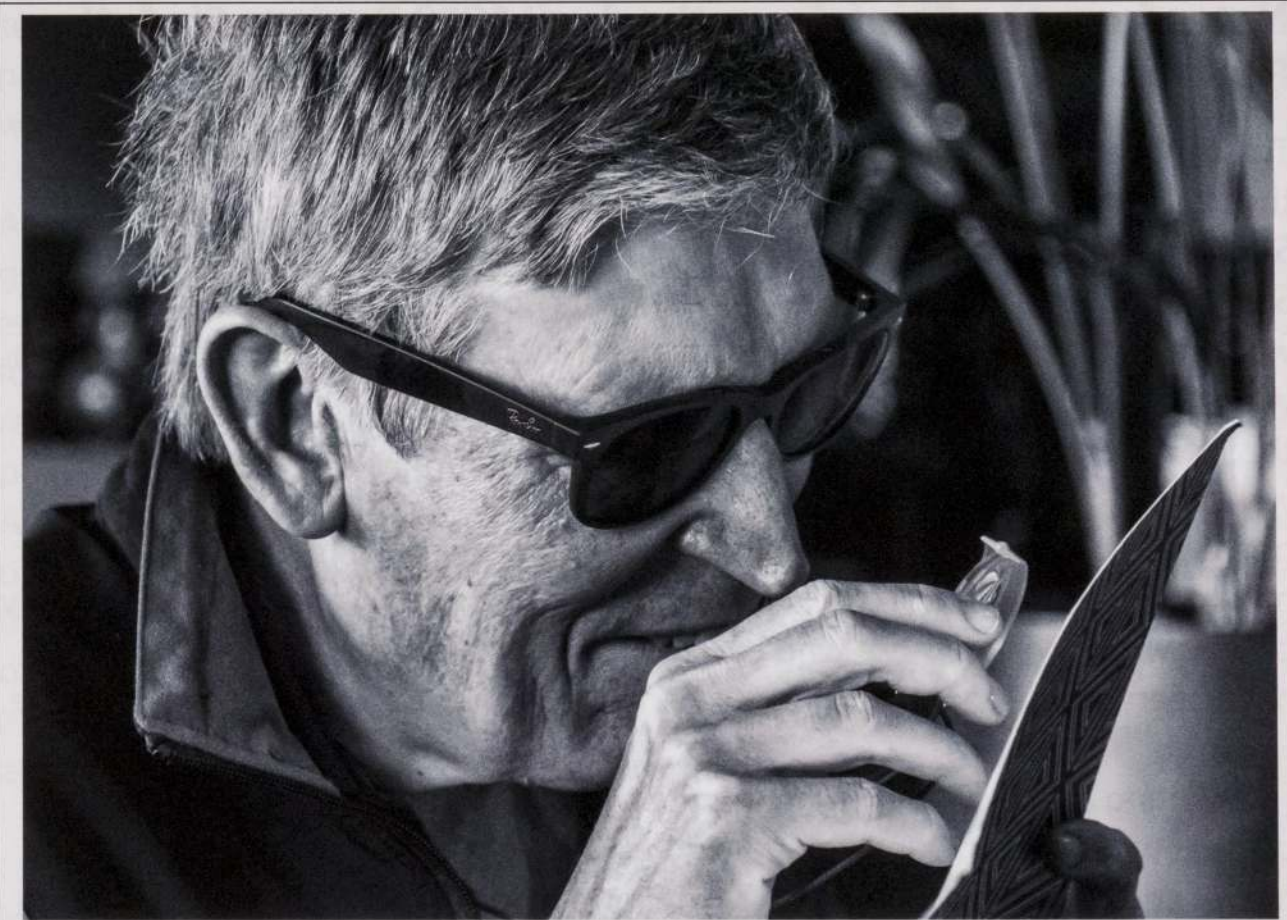
When asked who first inspired him when he came to Blind Veterans UK, Mark uttered a very familiar name. "It was Martin Shail. He's an absolutely wonderful man. He sat me down on the Wednesday of Induction Week and he spoke to me like a normal person and I became a normal person, as for the first time in years in my mind I thought of myself as a normal person. From that moment on we moved on one step at a time. It took a long time, but every six months, or a year I did something to push myself. Getting on a bus to go to the Brighton centre on my own, travelling on the underground, which was the worst experience, but I did it. I built up over the years and now I'm quite pleased with myself. Like I said, anyone who is reading or listening to this, don't give up on your dreams, you can do anything if you put your mind to it. Blind Veterans UK is not only a life changing charity, it's life saving."

Mark is also the Regional Rep for Working Age Members in the South West area.

“When the role was advertised I didn’t apply until right at the very last minute and thankfully Glynis Gillam and Kev Alderton accepted me. We have meetings when we discuss what we can do for working age members. If working age members want to speak with a member rather than staff we’re the point of contact for them and we can either deal with it or connect them with the right person, rather than them going through five or six different people. Basically, we’re always on the other end of an email for people to get in touch with us. There are working age member regional reps across the country, and any working age members can get in touch with us as we’re here for them. When we launched a working age member contacted me about an employment issue, I put him in touch with the right people and I believe he’s now in work. So, if people want to talk about volunteering, returning to work, courses, joining the social media groups that are available to them, then they should contact us. Again, this continues what the charity was founded for as people shouldn’t sit at home not doing anything. After my sight loss I did that for ten years and it didn’t get me anywhere. Like so many other members of the charity we are adverts to show what can be achieved when you get on and do things. I probably go over the top trying to make up for that lost time. If I can stop just one person losing ten years of their life through speaking today then it’s worth it.”

Asked how his wife Trudy and sons feel now that Mark is once again engaged in life he said, “They’re over the moon because what they went through mustn’t be understated. I was a very different person as I hadn’t accepted sight loss. When I went to Blind Veterans UK I was struggling but when I got there I wasn’t the odd one anymore. About a year into going to Blind Veterans UK I was still struggling, but you learn to work with what you have and every time I went to the centre something else improved. It took about three years to get me to the Brighton centre on my own, but now it’s second nature to go on my own, especially as I have to travel to take photographs.”

Mark’s exhibition will open at the Brighton centre on Friday 25th May.



Picture: Will Phillips reading. Photo by Mark Pile.



Picture: The photographer in action. Lou Partridge’s photograph of Mark Pile that was taken during a Photography Week at the Brighton centre.

Notes from the Chief. From the April 1918 Review, Sir Arthur Pearson Bt GBE writes of the charity he founded.

The conception of St Dunstan's came in the later days of 1914. I well remember the visits which I then paid to the Belgian Daumont, at Queen Mary's Hospital, Southend, who was blinded at Liège in the earliest moments of the war, and to Sergt. Selby at St. Mark's, to Pte. Harman, who, poor fellow, died of his injuries. It was the fact that these two blinded soldiers reached St. Mark's Hospital, Chelsea, which induced me to approach the War Office Authorities with the request that this Hospital might be recognised as the one to which all men blinded in the war should be sent. Though in the bustle of disembarkation this regulation has not always been followed, by far the greater number of the men of St Dunstan's have passed through St. Mark's Hospital, the 2nd London General as it is officially called, which most of those who have accidentally been sent to other hospitals have been transferred to St. Mark's when their injuries permitted this to be done.

I am writing at some little length about St. Mark's Hospital for I regard it as the place at which the St Dunstan's training really begins. The constant visits of myself and of members of the staff to fellows who are laid up there, the starting of Braille and simple industries among them, the visits which those who are well enough to go out pay to St. Dunstan's and the spirit of comradeship which grows up amongst them are all preliminaries to the more serious business of training and re-education at the St Dunstan's Hostel itself.

In the earliest days of 1915 St Dunstan's, then just a very fine house, surrounded by sixteen acres of ground, was most generously placed at our disposal by the American financier, Mr Otto Kahn, a man who did as much as anyone to bring his fellow countrymen to the side of the Allies. While the necessary alterations were being effected, a start was made at No 6 Bayswater Hill, which was very kindly lent to us by Mrs Lewis Hall. Here we began in the early days of February, 1915, with two blinded soldiers. Braille and typewriting were taught and carpentry. No. 6, Bayswater Hill, was very suitably situated, as it is just opposite one of the main entrances to Kensington Gardens. The number of men slowly grew until, on March 26th, 1915, sixteen men and the comparatively small staff which was then necessary moved to St. Dunstan's.

How big the great house seemed in those early days! The workshops were first situated in some outbuildings which are now used for stores, and later on were transferred to the very large conservatory which has since been built up into

secretarial offices, while Braille and typewriting were taught in a room which is now one of the dining halls, and the poultry farm was installed in the position which it still occupies.

All too soon the accommodation which at first had seemed so ample began to grow and grow more restricted. The original workshops and class rooms were erected, and were built on a scale which was thought to be more than sufficient for all probable requirements. The Torquay Annexe, which has just been removed to Hastings owing to the great convenience of the latter place from the point of view of distance from Headquarters, started work, and the Convalescent Annexe lent by the National Institute for the Blind, at Queen's Road, Brighton was opened. The House as we now call the parent mansion of St Dunstan's, became the centre of a group of out-buildings in which the rapidly increasing number of men slept and had their meals, but it soon was evident that the facilities at disposal would be insufficient and steps had to be taken to find further accommodation.

I am proud to record the fact that we have never been caught napping in this important matter. Additional accommodation has always been provided well in advance of requirements and I trust that this may continue to be the case, if our present resources should prove once more to be inadequate. A large house was rented in Sussex Place, a few minutes' walk from St Dunstan's, and was used from the first, as it still is, for the accommodation of men learning massage. Arrangements were made which enabled twenty men to sleep at Townsend House, also a few minutes' distance from St. Dunstan's. But still the cup filled to overflowing and our next important acquisition was Regent's Park College, a house even larger than St. Dunstan's and situated quite close to it. This, with the spacious grounds was most graciously lent to us by its Committee, and once again it seemed as though adequate allowance had been made for all possible increases.

Another Convalescent Annexe was opened at Blackheath in a house presented by Mr. A. N. Kilby to the National Institute for the Blind, whose Council placed it unreservedly at the disposal of St. Dunstan's. Then came the opening of West House, Brighton, a magnificent establishment with wonderfully spacious gardens, considering its situation in the middle of Kemp Town and its nearness to the sea. This property was acquired by the National Institute for the Blind with the special object of providing for the present and future needs of the men of St. Dunstan's. It is now used as a Convalescent and Holiday Resort.

The terrible warfare of the summer of 1916 led to so great an influx of blinded men to Hospital that it became evident that the apparently superabundant accommodation at disposal would again prove insufficient if the plan of taking in every man directly he was fit to leave Hospital was to be continued. I have always had very clear views as to the necessity for starting the training of a blinded soldier immediately he is fit enough to begin work, and I am glad to say that no one has been kept waiting one day for lack of room.

New and very extensive workshops and classrooms were planned out, additions were made to the poultry farm and work was started on the Bungalow Annexe, which occupies a large field forming the eastern boundary of the St. Dunstan's property. The transfer was made to the new workshops and classrooms in June last, and the Bungalow began to fill up in July. Three large houses were acquired in Cornwall Terrace, just beyond the existing Annexe at Sussex Place; these have been joined together, and will be ready for occupation by the time these notes appear in print. The House, the College, Sussex Place and Townsend House are all full; the addition of a large wing to the Bungalow will permit the adding of sixty five to the original number of its inhabitants, and Cornwall Terrace will accommodate about one hundred more. Mr. Kean, the owner of the house and grounds at Blackheath which adjoin those already occupied by us, has just presented his property to the National Institute for the Blind, which has again handed it over for the use of St. Dunstan's, and work is now proceeding to connect these two houses and form one very fine establishment for the accommodation of about fifty men.

During the last three years we have so often thought that we had provided abundant accommodation and have found ourselves in the wrong that I hesitate to make any definite assertion as to the adequacy of our present arrangements. We are now welcoming a steady stream of men whose sight was injured in the early days of the war, and who were discharged from Hospital apparently able to do without the assistance of St. Dunstan's, but who now find themselves with insufficient sight to enable them to carry on in the ordinary way.

As I write these lines a terrific battle is raging in France, and one can only vaguely guess at the results which it and succeeding operations will have upon our organisation, but I feel confident that just as we have been able to provide for constantly increasing requirement in the past so we shall continue to find the necessary accommodation for all cases of blinded men, should the need for more room unfortunately arise.

So much for the arrangements for housing and training. Now let me say something about the way in which the work developed as we went along. No striking innovations have been introduced in regard to the occupations taught. Before St. Dunstan's started I called together a score of men and women who could be looked upon as those most capable of giving advice in regard to the subjects in which instruction should be given. As the result of a long conference and of some rather revolutionary ideas of my own the eight trades and occupations which our fellows learn were initiated and pursued. Nothing has led me to the belief that any mistake was made in starting to teach blinded soldiers massage, shorthand writing, telephone operating, poultry farming, joinery, mat making, boot repairing and basketry. A very abundant measure of success has followed the teaching of these occupations, and in the Third Annual Report of St. Dunstan's, which will appear at just the same time as this number of the Review is published, there will be found some pages of letters from men who have left and are at work, from their employers, and from their relatives, which bear out the truth of this assertion in a most striking manner. Netting, in a great variety of forms, has been added to our list, but it cannot be held to rank as an occupation. I always regard it as a paying hobby, at which a nice little sum can be made every week in spare time. It has the great advantage of teaching fellows to be handy, while it also provides a much needed interlude in the rather trying task of learning Braille.

I have made two journeys to France since we started work, and have visited a great number of the comparatively small and scattered institutions at which the blinded French soldiers are being trained, but I do not consider that any of the very few things taught there which we do not teach at St. Dunstan's are worthy of taking up. To use an old and homely expression, 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating.' Our fellows are practically all of them making good at the work which they have learnt at St. Dunstan's. This can only be said of a very few of their French comrades, though I think that an entire absence of adequate arrangements in France for settling men and for looking after them when they are settled, such as are embodied in our After Care scheme, is largely accountable for this regrettable state of affairs. A great number of Frenchmen are still being taught brush making, which, though an excellent institutional industry, is quite unsuited to the home worker. It is held by those in authority that the brush industry enables a man to make a few francs now and then, and that this is all the French blinded soldier wants. I find this hard to believe, considering that the French pensions are only about half ours, and that there are no children's allowances, while the innate industry of the Frenchman is too well

known to be insisted upon. Thank Goodness! the ideals which govern St. Dunstan's both as regards staff and men are very far above this.

A fair number of original St. Dunstaners have returned to their original occupations, though it is, of course, in only comparatively few cases that this is possible. The proportion of officers who have done this is noticeably large, and the level of success attained by them is most remarkable.

As St Dunstan's goes on a larger and larger number of men become thoroughly proficient at Braille, and continue to read regularly after they have left. So far to the rule that all learn typewriting, and the number of excellently typed letters which I receive every day from fellows who have left, and which reach me from all parts of the British Empire, is an eloquent testimony to the fact that the typewriter which every man takes away with him is highly appreciated and well used.

The After Care system was quite a new departure, as nothing of the kind was known in the world of the blind before St. Dunstan's came into existence, but the example which we have set is to be followed among the civilian blind population, and here, as in many other ways, St. Dunstan's is proving itself to be the greatest asset which the blind community has ever possessed. I hope that these words do not seem over boastful. I know that my many friends who occupy themselves in the care of people who cannot see will agree with me that the blinded soldier has by his courage, determination and resolution set a new pace in the blind world, and that many hitherto undiscovered possibilities in regard to the re-education of people who lose their sight in adult life have been proved at St. Dunstan's.

It is gratifying to note that an important part in this After Care work is being taken by Captain Ian Fraser, who was blinded on the Somme in the summer of 1916. Captain Fraser, who edits this Review, and has been hitherto known to you as Lieut. Fraser, was a short time ago, at the express desire of His Majesty the King, given the Honorary rank of Captain.

An extremely satisfactory and striking feature of the After Care scheme of St. Dunstan's is to be found in the fact that arrangements have been made for attending to the requirements of Canadian, Australian and New Zealand men when they return to their homes. These arrangements have been largely brought about by St. Dunstaners themselves. Captain Baker and Corporal Viest

in Canada, and Privates Hills and Glew in Australia, have done a great deal to initiate and promote these efforts, and I do not think that any more eloquent testimony of the true significance of the St. Dunstan's training could be found than this.

We learn anew to work at St. Dunstan's and we also learn anew to play. I attach almost as much importance to the one as to the other, for normality is our goal, and to become once more a normal citizen under the handicap of blindness requires that one should be able to do other things than make a satisfactory livelihood.

The large number of men who will be at St. Dunstan's during the coming summer months has necessitated the making of very special arrangements for rowing and sports of all kinds. Unfortunately Regent's Park Lake is not expansible, and I am afraid that we shall have to follow Lord Rhondda's lead and ration rowing. Several new forms of outdoor sport have been planned out, and they will, I am sure, be entered into with the hearty thoroughness so characteristic of the place.

I cannot say there has been any progress in the matter of entertainments given by friendly folk at St. Dunstan's. Progress was impossible, for these have been most plentiful from the first. We are all deeply grateful to the talented amateurs and professionals who for three years have done so much to give us happy hours.

Local talent has developed surprisingly of late. The St. Dunstan's Ragtime Band has won quite a reputation for itself, and the Dramatic and Musical Clubs for the House, the College, and the Bungalow, have given entertainments which have occasioned the greatest surprise to those who have witnessed them. I do not believe that there is any need for me to express the hope that these efforts will continue and increase. They, again, conduct us in a manner which is delightful to others and most helpful to ourselves along the path which leads to our goal — normality through Victory over Blindness.

We celebrate Sir Arthur Pearson at Founder's Day.

On Monday 26th March, 103 years to the day since the first 16 war blinded St. Dunstaners entered St Dunstan's training centre in Regent's Park, today's blind veterans walked into St Dunstan's Chapel at the Brighton centre to celebrate the ninth Founder's Day Awards.

The Founder's Day Awards have become an important day in our charity's calendar as we celebrate the successes of members of the charity, many who still gain inspiration from Sir Arthur Pearson.

Organised by Hannah Barnes, this year's Awards ceremony had an Oscars feel to it as members, their family and friends walked the red carpet into St Dunstan's Chapel. Centre manager Lesley Garven welcomed everyone and Mark Lovatt was an excellent Master of Ceremonies. Nick Caplin presented the awards and Chris Kirk supplied a musical fanfare as each winner walked to the stage. It was an exceptional ceremony that was followed by a meal provided by TnS Catering, as a harpist played throughout. A day to be remembered and celebrated.

Good friends were there as Valerie, Pam and Olwen, the daughters of the late Ted Higgs returned for another year to present the Ted Higgs Trophy to a very worthy winner. They each said how proud their late father would have been.

Winner of The Community Award Eddie Gaines.

Nominated by his Community Support Worker Lorraine Smith, who was unable to attend, Mark Lovatt read her citation, "Eddie celebrated his 91st birthday and if I have the passion and enthusiasm that Eddie shows for life, and for the charity, when I reach that age then I'll feel very lucky indeed. Eddie is a Normandy veteran who survived D-Day on Omaha beach. I met Eddie for the first time in May 2017 when he was awarded the Legion d'honneur at the Reunion. Since joining the charity Eddie has grasped all opportunities he can to live life fully beyond his sight loss. In return he showed enthusiasm and willingness to help others to encourage them to join the charity. He has a Blind Veterans UK flag in his garden and this seems to have started a trend. He's always happy to help community staff by speaking with new members at Lunch Clubs or to invite them to his house for coffee. He remarks on his favourite song and the words from Amazing Grace, 'I once was blind but now I see'. Every time I have a chat with Eddie I can't help but smile."

As he reached the stage and the fanfare stopped Eddie responded, "Thank you very much Blind Veterans UK, as you've made a very big change in my life and I'll keep trying to get more members into the charity so that their lives can be changed. I'm very proud to receive this award today. Thank you."



Picture: Mark Lovatt Director of Operations East), D-Day and blind veteran Eddie Gaines and Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB.

Winner of the Community Award John Nicol.

Mark Lovatt invited Paul Wynne Williams to read the citation for the next winner, John Nichol whom Mark Hollis nominated.

"John Nicol lives local to the Llandudno centre and has been a member of Blind Veterans UK for three years. He's an active member of the community and carries out work to promote Blind Veterans UK. Two years ago, John became a volunteer at the Llandudno centre and became an integral part of the team. His pleasant and helpful demeanour has endeared him to fellow members. John goes to the centre two or three times a week to help guide members on the trips outside the centre. He does this come rain, hail or shine and sometimes at very short notice. He has completed his archery instructor's course and now helps members who are learning archery. He is now involved with the Archery Club which is run by Carl Adamson. His enthusiasm is infectious, and he's been able to help a number of members engage in life at the centre. John is a very humble person and he sees this as giving something back. He asks for nothing in return other than to help the charity and the members."

In response John Nicol said, "I'm not one for speeches. I'd just like to thank everybody for their words this morning. It's an honour to receive this Founder's Day Award and what we do at the Llandudno centre is so much fun and I get so much enjoyment out of it that it's a pleasure to be there. Thank you very much indeed."



Picture: John Nicol is presented with his Community Award by Nick Caplin.

Winner of the Training Achievement Award David Edgar.

Introducing the Training Achievement Award Mark Lovatt said, "Again such is the quality of the submissions for the next award that it was a very difficult decision and it has been given to two very worthy recipients. As our benefactor can't be here to receive it, Paul Wynne Williams will receive the award on behalf of David Edgar, and I'd like to invite Lisa Taylor from the Llandudno centre to tell us why David won this award.

Lisa Taylor, IT Instructor, Llandudno said, "David was nominated by Kate Pierce, as following his ILS training with Vince Godber at the Llandudno centre David came to see us to pass on some great news. Following the course David had successfully hosted a dinner party for his sister and four friends. It was his first dinner party and his sister nominated him as she was so proud of what he had achieved. He also received training on the synapptic phone which he uses to keep in touch with people. David has already planned his next dinner party. He is a very worthy recipient for this award."

Winner of the Training Achievement Award Garry Morrison.

Mark Lovatt introduced Garry Morrison, and invited him to the stage with Jan Alpin his CSW who nominated him.



Picture: Garry Morrison accepts his Founder's Day Award from Nick Caplin, with Jan Alpin who nominated him in the background.

Jan Alpin. "This is Garry Morrison, resplendent in his kilt. Garry joined the charity in September 2016. At 36 Garry is one of our working age members and everyone who meets him is struck by his enthusiasm and love of life. Garry spent nine years in the RAF and was discharged after breaking his spine in two places in a parachute accident in 2003. After numerous operations and years in rehab Garry was able to walk again. In 2015 Garry lost his sight, leaving him totally blind. When I first visited Garry, he told me, 'If I can learn to walk again after my accident I can succeed despite sight loss. Following his Intro Week in June 2017 Garry was encouraged to go rock climbing. He loved it and he excelled at it. He can regularly be found at the gym as he works on his leg and arm strength. He said that climbing is like anything in life — you have good days and bad days — but like anything in life you keep going. Garry hopes to become part of the GB Olympic Rock Climbing team. His other aim is to become an instructor to encourage veterans to achieve their potential. Recently Garry raced up the training wall with no hesitation or fear, his biggest anxiety was that he wouldn't be able to articulate how much Blind Veterans UK has helped and supported him. Garry epitomises the charity's values as he is courageous,

committed, collaborative and resourceful and for that reason I truly believe he deserves this Founder's Day Training Achievement Award."

An initially speechless Garry thanked everyone present.

Winner of the Creative Art Award Will Phillips.

Nominated by Hattie Lockhart-Smith and Lou Partridge of the Brighton centre's Art & Craft Department, Lou spoke for them both when she said, "Will's journey with the charity began in 2013, it was soon apparent that he had a keen interest in art and craft and was placed onto the waiting list for training in pastels, clay work and photography. Will threw himself into the training from the start, continuing and developing at home with all he had learned. He has since returned four more times for further training, always arriving with examples of work he has completed and full of enthusiasm for the next challenge. Will is a keen and pioneering photographer and has attended many Photography Weeks with the charity, sharing his knowledge with other members and staff, and motivating everyone with his enthusiasm and often alternative ways of capturing everyday objects in photography.

"Will has joined many courses around his local area, the latest a pottery group in his local college, where as the only student with a vision impairment he has inspired his fellow students. The course has allowed him to continue to develop techniques learnt at the Brighton Workshop. In 2017 the A&C Team suggested to Will that he join Outside In — an organisation that supports marginalised artists through an online gallery and website, with opportunities to take part in exhibitions. Will jumped at this suggestion that enabled him to showcase his ever expanding portfolio of work, as he created two online galleries on the Outside In website. This took a lot of work, planning and determination.

"Will continues to make the most of everything the charity has to offer, from training to theme weeks, taking everything he has learned and developing it further independently. His enthusiasm is infectious and his work inspiring to members and staff, not to mention people in the public domain. He is an ambassador for the charity and of all that our members can achieve and we feel his contribution and success should be celebrated."

If you would like to see Will's artwork the link is [outsidein.org.uk/William-](https://www.outsidein.org.uk/William-Phillips1)

Phillips1 and [outsidein.org.uk/William-Phillips2](https://www.outsidein.org.uk/William-Phillips2)

Accepting his Creative Art Award Will said, "Thank you very much, it's staggering to hear that. I would like to say the only reason I've come this far is because of the support from everyone in the charity. Before I came here I had come to a halt and at the Brighton centre I found I could still do things. Thank you to Lou and Hattie and to everyone."



Picture: Will Phillips winner of the Creative Art Award with Blind Veterans UK's Chief Executive Major General (Rtd) Nick Caplin CB.

Winner of The Sports Person of the Year Award Andy Leitch.

Introducing the Sports Person of the Year Award Mark Lovatt, said, "As an ex Service PTI this next award is one close to my heart. It's the Sports Person of the Year Award and the winner is Andy Leitch.

Nominated by Catherine Goodier, who said, "I nominated Andy for the Sports Person of the Year Award as his reason to run 1,200 miles in 12 months in 2017 was to help vision impaired veterans who didn't know about the charity and bring them to Blind Veterans UK. When Andy crossed the finish line on 24th December 2017 it was a great day for Andy, his wife Angie, their family and friends. It was the end of an exceptional challenge when during the final few winter months Andy asked himself, 'Why did I decide to do this?' But as someone with a great sense of humour who never gives up he succeeded,

running at times with his wife Angie or members of Andy's Angels, who he says inspired him. Andy said 'If only one person sees my Blind Veterans UK vest during that 12 months and they come to the charity I've achieved what I set out to, as I want people to get the help my family and I do. My life felt as though it was over when I was registered as blind, but that changed when I came to Blind Veterans UK in 2011 and walked into the Brighton centre and met Martin Shail.'

A few months earlier Andy had just 18 months to serve in the Army to complete 22 years and had plans to set up in business as a driving instructor. I interviewed many people over the course of my work on the Review and I was deeply impressed by Andy's commitment, his great sense of humour and his desire to help others and the support from Angie and their family and friends to join in."

In response Andy Leitch said, "Initially I was only going to run 100 miles in January, but that soon escalated. It's amazing what you sign up to after a few drinks! Thank you very much for this Founder's Day Award. It's an honour."

Andy hasn't hung up his running shoes as he continues to be a great Ambassador for Blind Veterans UK as he competed in the 22nd April London Marathon and he and Angie are presently training for the 100K London to Brighton Challenge. In 2017 they completed the 100K Yorkshire Challenge.



Picture: Andy Leitch, Founder's Day 2018 Sports Person of the Year makes his acceptance speech.

Robert Eddison Winner of The Innovator of the Year Award.

Nominated by his sister Deidre, a former Social Worker she said how impressed she was with the charity and how she had watched Robert flourish under the expert tuition of the staff. Deidre said how Robert's first book *Wisdom & Wordplay* had been shortlisted for the People's Book Prize that it was a bestseller on Amazon and that Robert's second book was out in May.

Robert thanked everyone who had helped him during his time with the charity, in particular Anna Brownlie and the IT training staff at the Brighton centre, as he had used the skills learnt there to type his book.



Picture: Above left Robert Eddison receives his Innovator of the Year Award from Nick Caplin and above right his sister Deidre reads her nomination for Robert.

Winner of The Outstanding Achievement Award Jamie Weller

Jamie's citation read: "A former Trustee of Blind Veterans UK who was well known as the pilot of St. Dunstan's hot air balloon, which he raised the funds for, Jamie, has always been a high achiever, whether securing the Raleigh Medal during his service in the Royal Navy or becoming the first vision impaired tax consultant. The list of Jamie's successes is a very long one, but he has received

The Outstanding Achievement Award in recognition of his success in the 2017 Invictus Games in Canada where he won four bronze medals in sprinting and cycling. Just a few short weeks later he completed the trek to Base Camp Everest. He has remained humble as he has did this for himself and to show his fellow members, Blind Veterans UK staff, volunteers and the world what can still be achieved after sight loss. Jamie is always keen to pass on information that will help members to become truly independent and Sir Arthur Pearson, who we celebrate during Founder's Day would approve wholeheartedly of Jamie's passion to help his fellow members and to educate the public. As Sir Arthur wrote in his autobiography, 'I established St. Dunstan's to show what a blind man can do. Not what he can't'.



Picture: Jamie Weller who was recognised for his many outstanding achievements with Chief Executive Nick Caplin.

"To finish Jamie was quoted from the recent interview in the January 2018 Review when he spoke about trekking to Base Camp Everest. "People were amazed at what I could do despite vision loss and that's great to be able to educate people, as to show people there is life beyond sight loss can only be a positive. It's all about pushing boundaries and for anyone in our situation that is what we do, we get the most out of life and push boundaries. It's all about a can do attitude."

Accepting his Award Jamie Weller said, "It's quite poignant being here today as I lost my sight when I was 20 years old when I was in the Royal Navy. I never got

to do my dream job to work on an aircraft carrier, as I was about to be posted when my sight loss happened. That was March 1990, so 28 years ago. My sister drove me here and it's strange to be back. I never thought about what I'd achieved or how my life has unfolded during those 28 years. When I lost my sight everyone said that I wouldn't be able to do anything and I took that as 'I can do anything'. I wouldn't necessarily say I'm an achiever, as I just live life as I want to, and my motto is 'make today better than yesterday'. If you do that you're going to keep winning. I'm humbled to receive this award. Thank you."

Winner of The Special Achievement Award Billy Drinkwater.

In recognition of his many successes a Special Achievement Award was established to honour Billy Drinkwater, who was nominated by Colin Williamson, Blind Veterans UK's President and Catherine Goodier, Review editor.

As a career soldier, a Corporal in the Royal Anglian Regiment, with tours of Iraq and Afghanistan behind him, Billy Drinkwater was used to being in command. When he was wounded in an IED explosion in Afghanistan, it was the start of a new journey, one to once again take command of his life. Losing the career that meant so much to him, and also formed part of his identity, Billy has worked tirelessly to find himself, and he has done this by helping others. He now acts as a mentor for young people who are starting out, and their messages of thanks to him show the positive impact he has on their present lives and the impact he will have on their future.

"Billy is always the first to offer to help in any situation and with his great sense of humour he brings fun to events. He's a great ambassador for the charity, speaking to the media and at events. He doesn't put himself first or focus on his many achievements, he moves straight on to the next one and if he sees someone who is struggling he always helps them as he enables others to achieve. He's a very popular member of the charity who is always ready to laugh, but also to listen to people who are perhaps not as far along their path of recovery as he is. He has worked so hard over so many years to rebuild his life, and if you asked him he'd probably say he has a long way to go, but anyone who knows what he has achieved can only be impressed by his dogged tenacity after losing everything he held dear. He is a great example of courage, care, compassion, dignity and resolve and Sir Arthur Pearson would be proud of him. Just as we are."

In true style Billy Drinkwater delivered a great speech when he said. "Thank you for this Special Achievement Award, I believe that everyone deserves recognition, not just the members, but our families and friends who support us through the good, the bad and the ugly times. The people who fundraise for the charity, the volunteers and last, but by no means least, the staff who make the charity what it is. Thank you very much Blind Veterans UK."



Picture: Standing on the red carpet outside St Dunstan's Chapel Billy Drinkwater and Colin Williamson with the Special Achievement Award that was created for Billy.

Winner of The Ted Higgs Trophy Hugh Megarry.

Lisa Taylor, IT Instructor at the Llandudno centre, who nominated Hugh Megarry for The Ted Higgs Trophy spoke of her colleague saying, "Hugh recently took up the position of IT Instructor at the Llandudno centre. I was aware of some of the work he had done prior to this role ie supporting other members in Northern Ireland with their IT queries and training, but I was not aware of the full extent of Hugh's knowledge and experience with IT. Hugh has brought an enormous amount of experience working with assistive technology that we, as an IT Training Team, have benefited from."

"The new role meant a big move for Hugh, as he was still living in Northern Ireland when he applied for the post. He had made his intention of moving to North Wales clear if he was successful. This he has managed with very limited support from us, as he found a flat and organised the move to Llandudno. He

has integrated himself into the community, learning the route to work and home, with ease. His experiences as a member and his own sight loss journey make him a valuable member of the IT Training Team and I often refer to Hugh when I am struggling with an assessment or a training technique. The members love working with Hugh as he can relate to them on a level most of the IT Instructors simply cannot. Many have said that he is an inspiration to them. I feel very honoured to work with Hugh and am thrilled that he has been awarded The Ted Higgs Trophy and that Ted Higgs' daughters Valerie, Pam and Olwen are here to present it to him as they have said how proud their father would be.

Picking up The Ted Higgs Trophy, and a bottle of champagne, Hugh said, "Thank you for this award. I really enjoy working at the Llandudno centre, they are brilliant people, just as they are here [the Brighton centre]. Everyone at the Llandudno centre has made me feel so welcome and I just want to say thank you very much to everyone and especially to Lisa, Valerie, Pam and Olwen."



Picture: Lisa Taylor, IT Instructor Llandudno and Hugh Megarry winner of The Ted Higgs Trophy that is given to an exceptional war blinded member of the charity. **Photos:** All photos by Mark Pile.

Hugh Megarry. By Colin Williamson.

Born on the 10th April 1952, Hugh Alexander Megarry was brought up in the predominantly loyalist area of West Belfast known as the 'Woodvale'.

As the only boy in the family, Hugh was, by his own admission, 'well looked after' by his four sisters. He had a happy childhood and remembers fondly running around with his many friends in the streets surrounding his home near the Crumlin Road and in particular fishing in the local streams and ponds. Fishing was to become a lifelong passion.

After attending the local St Matthew's primary school Hugh moved on to Somerdale Secondary School on the nearby Ballygomartin Road. Quite gifted academically, Hugh was interested in only one thing, following in his great uncle Hugh Alexander McAteer's footsteps and joining the military. Leaving school in 1967 without any qualifications, Hugh joined the army at the tender age of fifteen and did his basic training at St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena. The barracks, built in 1937, were used by the U.S. Army in the Second World War and were rebuilt and enlarged in 1964 to accommodate the regional centre for infantry training and the North Irish Brigade depot in 1964. Initially enjoying army life, Hugh eventually became disillusioned with soldiering and decided after fourteen months that a change was needed so he switched allegiance to another branch of the services, the R.A.F.

His joining instructions for the Royal Air Force required him to report on the 16th August 1969 but unfortunately fate intervened and it was on the 15th August, one day before he was due to leave for RAF duty, that his life was to change forever.

1969 was the start of a period in Irish history known as 'The Troubles', a political conflict that divided two main communities, the loyalist unionists and the republican nationalists. The Woodvale, situated between the loyalist Shankill Road and the republican Ardoyne, was a sectarian flashpoint. On the morning of the 15th August, due to sustained civil disobedience, the police commissioner for Belfast asked for military aid. His police force had returned to their bases to defend them from being attacked by the rioters.

It wasn't until late afternoon that British troops arrived in the area and by that

time many houses were ablaze and barricades had been set up on the roads leading to and from the Crumlin Road, a main arterial route into and out of Belfast city centre.

Hugh takes up the story.

"We were under attack from paramilitaries from the Ardoyne who had set fire to houses along the Crumlin Road and had hijacked a bus. There were nine of us boys, all aged between sixteen and seventeen who used to hang around together and at that age you thought you were invincible. We had been watching events unfold and decided to chase after the bus to see if we could take it back. It drove into Butler Street in the Ardoyne and as we approached it three men appeared with shotguns and blasted away at us. Seven of us got hit. I had been shot in the lower back but a friend of mine had been fatally injured after being shot in the throat. I managed to run back to the Crumlin Road and seeing a house on fire, went in to try and put it out. When I came back out after extinguishing the fire someone shouted "look out" and when I turned around there was a guy on the roof of a house opposite who took aim and shot me in the face. If he had been any closer, he would have blown my head off. I lost my sight immediately. I know something was seriously wrong straight away but I remained conscious and remember a couple of my friends walking me up the road and putting me in an ambulance which took me straight to the Royal Victoria Hospital. I was examined by an eye surgeon who told me that I would never see again due to the severity of my injuries. My optic nerves had been partially severed and the damage to my eyes was irreparable. It was devastating news for a sixteen year old.

"When I was recovering in hospital there was a republican radio station that used to broadcast and I remember one particular broadcaster that dedicated a Jim Reeves song to me called 'The blue in your pretty brown eyes' and told me not to worry about having lost my sight as the IRA were going to kill me anyway as soon as I got out! As you could imagine, this got my back up something rotten! Good job I hung on to my sense of humour.

"Three days after the shooting I was visited by a lady who introduced herself as a 'technical officer for the blind' and she presented me with a large Braille alarm clock so at least I could tell the time. She returned to the hospital to visit me on a regular basis and eventually began to teach me to read Braille.

"My four younger sisters were all still at school at the time and had to walk past a Catholic school where they were tormented by the children who knew what had happened to their brother so that was a difficult time for all of the family. My mother also used to suffer abuse from some republicans when she shopped on the Crumlin Road but she was made of strong stuff and didn't let them see that they had got to her. The worst thing for me was when I came out of hospital and tried to look for work. I had worked as a boy in a fruit shop and on an evening in my uncle's bar so I was used to working but try as I might nobody wanted to employ a blind person.

"I spent three months at the RNIB College in Torquay learning independent living skills and light engineering but when I returned home I went three years before finding a job. I was eventually hired by a local engineering firm called 'Mackie's who used to make machinery for the textile industry and they started me as a capstan lathe operator. My dad used to work at Mackie's providing security and one night he didn't go into work so a mate of his covered for him and during some localised rioting the factory was attacked and the mob broke the windows of the office where my dad's pal was taking shelter and petrol bombed the place. He was spotted taking cover under a desk so they threw a nail bomb at him killing him outright. I went to his funeral with my dad and it was when I was standing at the graveside that I got chatting with James Mackie, the owner of the factory and he offered me a job there and then.

"It was during my time in Mackie's that I got interested in doing community work to try and improve the lives of blind and vision impaired people in my area so when I saw a job advertised for a community education worker for the blind I applied for it and got the job. I then went on to study at a college in Londonderry for two days a week to get some formal qualifications and at the end of three years as I was awarded my diploma in community work. I then moved on to working for Belfast City Council and spent over nineteen years with them, during which time they graciously allowed me time off to study at university to gain further youth work related diplomas.

"As a family, we had often talked about my great uncle Hugh Alexander McAteer who had lost his sight during the Great War whilst serving with the Royal Irish Rifles and had become a member of a charity called St Dunstan's."

He eventually went on to marry a nurse from St Dunstan's and returned to Belfast where he ran a shop and did a bit of basket weaving so I knew a little bit about the organisation but it wasn't until the year 2007 that I eventually became a member. I visited the Llandudno centre on a few occasions to take part in some fishing and became quite friendly with a few of the boys who had similar interests and so we decided to form a fishing club at the centre and we now meet quite regularly and I really look forward to it. I've also spent some time at the Brighton centre where I met Martin Shail who I thought was a really inspirational guy.

When I look back on my life I consider myself to be very lucky. A lot of the boys I grew up with are either dead or in prison. It's hard for a young man growing up in Northern Ireland, especially Belfast and Londonderry, not to get involved with the paramilitaries and I'm glad that I didn't go down that road. I'm really enjoying life and I can honestly say that I look forward to every day. I'm happy with my lot"

This article was taken from the March 2015 Review.



Picture: Hugh Megarry at the Belfast Lunch Club.

The National Bowling Club report. By Alan Gibson, Chairman.

Once again we were pleased to welcome 24 members to our March National Tournament. We were very pleased to welcome back Janet and Jack Pulfer (especially Janet who looked after us at our coffee and tea breaks). We also welcomed four new members John Kelsall, Barry Mann, Dave Mackenzie and Keith Arblaster, who is also a resident at the Brighton centre.

As usual our ladies worked very hard, Iris, Shirley and Daphne our volunteer on the green. Anne in the 'office' with Joan and also Daphne Pugsley. We also had help from two volunteers and the staff when they could. Although Joan was poorly for the last couple of days she managed to bring the Tournament to a successful end.

The winners and runners up are as follows:

Triples winners.

Barry Mann, Ted Arnold and Pete Rolfe.

Triples runners up.

John Russell, Keith Arblaster and Howard Young.

Pairs winners.

George Wrighton and Alan Gibson.

Pairs runners up.

Barry Mann and Dave Mackenzie.

Singles winner.

Howard Young.

Singles runner up.

Ken Parker.

Group winners.

Alan Gibson and Jack Pulfer.

I would like to thank you all for your support and if you bowl outdoors this summer I wish you good bowling and look forward to meeting you all again at our Bowling Club Fortnight from 14th to 27th October at the Brighton centre.

Review Format changes.

If you would like to change the format in which you receive the Review please telephone 020 7616 8367 stating your name, postcode and preferred format. Or email revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk You can have the Review in both print and audio. It is available as a large print magazine, in MP3CD, USB, email or Braille. It is also on the Sonata National Talking Newspapers website. If you would like to listen on Sonata please email Catherine Goodier the editor and she will email the link to you. The email is revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk

If you opt to receive the Review in USB format please do remember that you must return it each month. A padded wallet is provided for this purpose, and as it is posted as Articles for the Blind, there is no need to add postage. Put the USB in the wallet, reverse the label so that it shows MRA Studios address in Dronfield, and post.

Norman Perry 1919 to 2018.

An obituary for Norman Perry, who died on 16th April, will feature in the June Review.

If you would like to make a tribute to Norman for inclusion in his obituary please do post it to the Review to Catherine Goodier, Review editor, 12 - 14 Harcourt Street, London W1H 4HD. Or email revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk or telephone 020 7616 8367. Thank you.



Picture: Robbie Hazan and Norman Perry hand out medals to the finishers as they reach the Brighton centre at the end of the 100K London to Brighton Challenge in 2014.

Gwenllian 'Gwen' Obern 22nd November 1917 to 7th April 2018.



Picture: Beryl Sleigh, Actress June Sylvaine and Gwen Obern.

Fun, intelligent, brave, a lover of life, a good conversationalist who kept up with current affairs, a caring person who exemplified the best of the human spirit. That is the description of Gwen Obern from Stephen Barnes, who married to Gwen's niece Anne has numerous wonderful memories of Gwen. Her death leaves a hole in the family, as until now Anne and her sister Jean have not known a life without their Gwennie.

Gwen is not someone who will go quietly into the night, as she is a legend. Gwen was a remarkable woman who when she was blinded and wounded went to Church Stretton where she mixed with other remarkable men and women. They were the Second World War St Dunstaners and the First World War St Dunstaners who taught them. It was there she said that St Dunstan's gave her life back after it was taken from her.

Gwen was an important part of St Dunstan's blind and handless group, a remarkable bunch of men and women who dealt so lightly with their double disability. Gwen's passing on 7th April marks the end of that elite group.

Speaking about Gwen and the care she received from the charity for so many years Stephen said, "Gwennie loved to go out and Anne escorted her to many functions and many trips and holidays abroad. She loved singing and when we were together as a family she and her husband Ernie would always do a duet. We were always impressed by the way she dealt with her blindness and being handless. She was a lady to be admired because she was brave and uncomplaining. She suffered the accident just a year after she and Ernie were married and they were happily married for 68 years. We can't speak highly enough about St Dunstan's, as Gwen always said 'They handed my life back to me'. She was always inspiring with the way she dealt with her injuries she would never complain and she loved to go out and she was full of fun and laughter after St Dunstan's had taken her in. The contribution that St Dunstan's made to her life can never be overstated. Going to St Dunstan's with Gwen, Anne and I got to know a lot of the staff and they all thought she was remarkable. I remember when David and Audrey Castleton came to visit Gwen and we all went for lunch in the Vale of Glamorgan. Later in life when she needed carers the carers that St Dunstan's arranged were absolutely exceptional and Gwen was so grateful for all they did for her, as were Anne and myself and Jean.

"Gwennie was awarded the Freedom of the City of London in 1997 for the way

she dealt with her adversity and for the way in which she exemplified the best of the human spirit. She passed away peacefully on 7th April and this is an end of an era because she was always there and we will miss her."

Joan Osborne, who worked in the Music Department at Church Stretton, speaks of her friend with whom she performed with in the Fol de Rols musicals under the instruction of the Director of Music Claude Bampton. "I still remember when Gwen came in as she was so homesick and she kept crying. My father was a Braille teacher there as he was blinded on the first day of Passchendaele on 31st July 1917, and he had trained in Moon Braille at Regent's Park. When Gwen cried he said 'If you cry I'll cry' and he did and he said 'If you go home I'll cry'. There was a dance and I asked Gwen if she wanted to dance and she said she couldn't as she was blind. My dad and I burst out laughing and I said that we'd do the waltz and we'd dance 1, 2, 3, so we did and she was surprised that she could dance. Then we found out she could sing, and she really had a beautiful voice, as did my father and they sang together. We had the music department and when they realised how good she was her mother came and Gwen had lessons in Hereford and studied under a very good teacher. When she started singing her mother took her everywhere. My father kept saying to Gwen that she could do things and when she got to know everyone at Church Stretton she completely changed and she became the Gwennie who was brilliant and joined in with everything. Then she would have her hair done beautifully and she always looked lovely. Gwennie always said she stayed because of dad, as he'd pretended to cry with her."

Recalling his dear friend David Castleton said, "Just before I heard of Gwennie's passing I was reading the poem to my wife Audrey that Gwen wrote on behalf of the ladies of St Dunstan's for my retirement in 1992. Gwennie was great fun and knowing so many wonderful people like her made my life at St Dunstan's an absolute pleasure. She is missed."

Ray Hazan OBE, former President of Blind Veterans UK who knew Gwen for many years said, "Gwen personified the best in benefactor (St Dunstan's and beneficiary). There could be no-one better to advertise the care and determination to start again. Gwen was blinded and physically injured so shortly after her marriage. She was persuaded to take up a new career and her sweet singing tones could be heard in and around Church Stretton."

With David's blessing we have taken the following extract from David Castleton's book *In the Mind's Eye: The Blinded Veterans of St Dunstan's* (published by Pen & Sword).

The Second World War involved women to a much greater extent than the First. The creation of the women's branches of the Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force meant that the definition 'blinded in the Services' now included women. Those who were called up could opt for Service in munitions and so also qualified. Forty six women came to our charity as a result of Service during the Second World War and 14 women became St Dunstaners through explosions in munitions factories.

In October 1942 it was realised that there was likely to be an increasing number of blinded women entering training. Early in 1943, Belmont, a house in Church Stretton previously used by staff, was converted into a residence for the new women trainees. Among the women who benefited was Gwen (Gwenllian) Obern. Gwen said that when she went home from hospital, after her own injuries, she would not dress or leave the house. She had opted out. At 22, and not long married, she was totally blind and helpless.

Gwen's accident happened on 5th December 1940 and she was conscious through most of it. It was only her third day at the Royal Ordnance Factory in Bridgend and she was late, having missed the special bus from Aberdare:

"So I went on a service one and the driver begged me not to go because there had been a terrific accident the day before. I said I had to go because I had only been there two days and I might get into trouble. I went into the factory and I had to put on this horrible gear. It was a very long white coat and very thick shoes. I think they had wooden soles. Then all our hair was put up under this round cap like a pillbox. I was in training in the department inspecting detonators.

"I can visualise it as plain today as it was all those years ago. This lady had a tray in front of her and there were nine boxes of detonators. She took a box with 500 detonators that she was checking with a gauge. Then she said, 'I am going to do something now that you girls must never, ever do' and she started shaking the tray so that the detonators would fall into the holes in the box. The last thing I remember was a terrific flash."

Gwen was blown off the stool she was sitting on and fell upon the burning detonators and debris. Her face and body were badly burnt. There were 14 women around the table and five of them, including the instructor were killed. As well as Gwen, another trainee was blinded and went on to become a St Dunstaner: Marian Elias, who was also from Aberdare. Gwen regained consciousness to find herself among the dead and injured. "I must have moved as a voice said: 'This one's alive'. I remember them putting me on a stretcher and it was pouring with rain. I could feel them putting something very wet on my face and then a blanket all over me. I was taken to the factory surgery, where they amputated my right hand there and then. I remember them asking me my name and I said Gwen Davis, my maiden name, so they didn't know who I was."

When Gwen was finally identified, her husband, Ernie, and other family members came to see her. When she was discharged from hospital Gwen did not realise that she would never see again, yet the injuries she already knew about were enough to cause her to retreat from life. "I went home and I would not dress at all. I was always in my dressing gown. It wasn't pain, I just didn't want to bother." Representatives from St Dunstan's who visited her were sent away. "I said it's very nice of you to come but there's no way I'm going from my home. I'm not going to any place and wear a grey dress and black stockings and no one there to comb my hair."

It was another St Dunstaner blinded in a munitions accident who finally persuaded Gwen to go to Church Stretton. "What brought me to St Dunstan's was a letter from Vi Delaney telling me all about St Dunstan's."

Gwen's husband and her family advised her to at least go and see. Ernie took Gwen and Marian Elias, who also had needed much persuasion to leave home. Neither of them had travelled from Wales before. "I remember going up to Belmont. The girls were sitting in the lounge. There was Thelma Meredith, Barbara Bell, Sadie Black, Vi Delaney, Emily McClarnan, Elsie Aldred, Brenda Henderson. Sir Ian Fraser, as he was then, was in the lounge with the girls. He welcomed us in and he said, 'I hear you sing' and I got up and sang 'Bless this House'.

At Church Stretton Gwen finally had confirmation that she was totally blind. The shock added to her homesickness and it was some time before she felt the

tonic effect of the presence of the other St Dunstaners around her. As so many others do, she remembers the sense of humour which could only have been shared by those with similar disabilities. "I went to this dance. I was sitting in a corner. Somebody came up to me. It was David Bell, he said, 'How are you?' and I was shaking his hand, his artificial hand, when he walked away leaving his hand in mine. I nearly went through the chair." It was Gwen's first experience of St Dunstaners' jokes and it began her recovery of her real self — ebullient, ready for fun and enjoyment of life. She joined the concert parties and, unable through her injuries to undertake normal training, began the singing lessons that led to her semi-professional career in later life. Gwen became a prominent citizen in her part of Wales through her singing and appearances on television and radio. Later she became a Freeman of the City of London.

On many occasions Gwen sang in concerts with another St Dunstaner, Beryl Sleigh. Beryl had studied singing at the Royal College of Music and had begun her career in London just before the war. In May 1940 she joined the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and was serving at Aldershot when she was drafted to the 1st London Motor Company, ATS, as a driver. Beryl was in quarters in London when a landmine fell opposite her billet. The windows were blown in and fragments of glass injured her face and eyes, blinding her. At Church Stretton Beryl's friendship with Gwen began as they both played their parts in the concerts and entertainments. Later their partnership continued as they sang in concerts in many parts of the country, often fundraising for the charity.



Picture: Gwen seated front row far right in another production at Church Stretton.



Picture: Church Stretton during the Second World War. Actress June Sylvaine, standing, seated Beryl Sleigh and Gwen Obern.



Picture: Church Stretton Gwen seated in the second row fourth from the right with Joan Osborne sitting at the front.



Picture: Gwen Obern sings with the St Dunstan's brass band.



Picture: Gwen Obern with the then Director of Welfare Services Barry Porter at the annual Church Stretton Reunion in 2013.

Noticeboard.

Dates for your diary and useful information.

2018 Exhibition/Fundraiser. Opportunity for artists.

Blind Veterans UK members, staff and volunteers, beginners, hobby painters, experts and have a go painters all welcome!

You are invited to participate in a fundraising exhibition on the theme of 'Buildings & Architecture, to be held at the Brighton Centre from Monday 15th October for two weeks.

Members, volunteers and staff may enter one painting, drawing or 2D relief piece which must have been created especially for the exhibition. The artwork will be offered for sale by auction to benefit the charity. Prizes will be awarded for audience and judges favourites. Please send your artwork to Dave Bryant, Art & Craft Instructor, at the Brighton centre. The deadline for entries is September 28th and entries must be accompanied by an entry form.

If you are interested in taking part please request the terms and conditions and an entry form from Dave Bryant, Art & Craft Instructor at the Brighton Art & Craft Workshop in person, by e-mail, phone or post. You can send your submission by email to david.bryant@blindveterans.org.uk Or telephone Dave on 01273 391466. Or write to Dave Bryant, Art & Craft Workshop, Blind Veterans UK, Greenways, Ovingdean, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 7BS.

The annual concert by The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines at the Brighton centre on Wednesday 11th July.

It is approaching that time when we will soon have the pleasure of the company of The Band of Her Majesty's Royal Marines at our Brighton Centre. We at Blind Veterans UK, are privileged each year to experience the magic of this concert; a day which is always greatly enjoyed by all. This special event is a highlight in our annual programme, for local and visiting members.

The concert will start at 14:00 on Wednesday 11th July. If you would like to book a stay during this event, please call Brighton Bookings on 01273 391500.

Blind Veterans UK's GOAL Group. By Dave Hazelgrove.

GOAL stands for Get Ot And Live. We are a Blind Veterans UK Group, designed and run by and for, active male and female members aged between 50 and 76, who despite their sight loss wish to participate in new challenges, maximise their lifestyle and enjoy the camaraderie of like-minded people. The events we hold include visiting places of interest and trying many kinds of activities; some of which members of the group may not have done, or even considered possible, since losing their sight. Although we work together as a group, one of our objectives is to promote members confidence and independence, and for that reason you cannot be accompanied by partners or carers.

Whilst it is not envisaged that excessive physical activity is needed to participate in these events, participants must be active and fully mobile; as not only will you have to travel to the event by public transport, we often have to walk to, from and around venues and travel around using public transport. The use of the rail assistance scheme is actively encouraged and sometimes members may be able to meet up with and accompany other member's enroute who are participating in the same event.

Although some events take place at external venues, we highly recommend that new participants initially attend an event at one of our centres and, to encourage this, priority is given to new members when allocating places for events at both the Llandudno centre and Port Hall, close to the Brighton centre. This allows the new member and others in the group the opportunity to meet in a safe and predictable environment, encouraging relaxed integration.

Members of Blind Veterans UK who wish to obtain further information about the GOAL Group should email or telephone any of the members below, who will be only too pleased to help:

John Brice john.brice@tesco.net Tel: 01934 261783.

Chris Humphrey chrisandhazel3@gmail.com Tel: 01603 701402.

Dave Hazelgrove dhazelgrove@hotmail.com Tel: 01754 896617.

John Cantwell john.cantwell1947@gmail.com Tel: 01295 273105.

Join us for Armed Forces Day in Llandudno. By Viccie Beech, Regional Fundraiser, Llandudno

As many of you may know, National Armed Forces Day will take place in Llandudno this summer on Saturday 30th June. Visitors to the town will be given the opportunity to find out more about the tri-services and the organisations that support them, including Blind Veterans UK. A variety of colourful and informative displays, activities and demonstrations, including aerial displays, parachute drops, Naval craft manoeuvres, diver tanks, simulation units and much more will be along the Promenade and within the Military Village, which will be located in Bodafon Fields.

The main attraction for many will be the Ceremonial Parade that will start at 11am at the Llandudno War Memorial and finish at Bodafon Fields, with a Military Salute to an as yet unnamed VVIP.

In recognition of the support Blind Veterans UK has given to the town council in the planning and delivery of the event we have been given our own section in the march, which will be led by our Standard Bearer Steven Thomas. It would be fantastic if you intend to attend National Armed Forces Day and were able to march with Steven and other members who are staying at the centre. The march is approximately 1.5 miles long from the Llandudno War Memorial to Bodafon Fields. Transport will be available for registered marchers back to the muster point.

I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you at Armed Forces Day.

Essential Information:

To take part in the march you must pre-register. Although the official website states registration has closed this can still be done until the end of May.

Please visit www.conwy.gov.uk/en/Spotlight/Armed-Forces-Covenant/Calling-all-Veterans.aspx

Printed forms and assistance completing forms can be obtained from Abby Tarrant on 020 7616 8372 or email abby.tarrant@blindveterans.org.uk

Colin Williamson's Beer of the Month.

Shepherd Neame 1698 Strong Kentish Ale.

Bought at my local Asda store, this English strong beer style ale was brewed by Shepherd Neame at their Faversham, Kent brewery in 1998 to celebrate their tercentenary. It pours a nice reddish/brown body with a creamy, white foamy head. Quite malty, you can also detect biscuit, caramel, some nutty flavours and hints of pear and/or apple. As the name suggests, it is quite a strong, robust ale, coming in at 6.5% ABV so be careful not to over indulge! This ale has been thrice-hopped and is bottle conditioned, which basically means that the yeast is still 'live' in the bottle when you buy it and continues to ferment, producing more character, flavour and softer carbonation. It is pleasant to drink, although I prefer a slightly less bitter finish, and I'd probably drink more of it. It is also reasonably priced at £1.84 which is good value for what is a decent beer.

Shepherds Neame draw the water they use for their beers from their own artesian well deep beneath the Faversham brewery. Faversham sits on a layer of chalk which acts as a natural filter for the rainwater that collects in the aquifer beneath the town. They also use 97% of Kentish grown hops in their beers and are the country's oldest brewers.



Family News.

Congratulations to:

Birthdays:

Roy Ludlam who will celebrate his 101st birthday on 13th May.
Gordon Richards will celebrate his 101st birthday on 29th May.
Ian Corsie who will celebrate his 100th birthday on 6th May.
Robert Field who will celebrate his 100th birthday on 18th May.
Douglas Hewitt who will celebrate his 100th birthday on 24th May.

Anniversaries:

Blue Sapphire 65 years married.

Douglas & Pat Stepney of Peacehaven, East Sussex on 9th May.
Jim & Margaret McNally of Liverpool, Merseyside on 22nd May.
Bill & Mary Meadows of Skelmersdale, Lancashire on 23rd May.
John & Patricia Harris of Caversham, Berkshire on 30th May. John was at Church Stretton from 1945.

Diamond Yellow 60 years married.

Thomas & Billie Jones of Bracknell, Berkshire on 31st May.
John & Sheila Sutton of Wallingford, Oxfordshire on 24th May.

Golden 50 Years married.

David & Pauline Cooper of Broadstairs, Kent on 11th May.
Mike & Janice Wilkinson of North Shields, Tyne And Wear on 28th May

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

Annie Allen who died on 1st March 2018. She was the wife of Frederick Allen.

Margaret Bateman who died on 11th April 2018. She was the wife of John Bateman.

Mabel Bell who died on 25th April 2018. She was the widow of the late Henry Bell.

Beryl Coles who died on 15th April 2018. She was the wife of John Coles.

Valerie 'Val' Fryer who died on 15th April 2018. She was the wife of Leslie Fryer.

Elsie Golding who was the widow of Thomas McDermott.

Jean Gregory who died on 15th March 2018. She was the wife of Frederick Gregory.

Joyce Hill who died on 28th March 2018. She was the wife of Ronald Hill.

Alastair Howie who died on 17th January 2018. He was the husband of Jean Howie.

Phyllis Morris who died on 1st April 2018. She was the widow of the late Norman Morris.

Patricia Prior who died on 1st April 2018. She was the widow of the late Eric Prior.

Joan Reeves who died on 27th March 2018. She was the wife of Kenneth Reeves.

Doreen Simcock who died on 1st October 2017. She was the wife of John Simcock.

Phyllis Smith who died on 25th January 2018. She was the wife of Edward Smith.

Audrey Temple who died on 1st April 2018. She was the widow of the late Benjamin Temple, a Second World War blinded St Dunstaner who joined the charity on 22nd March 1945.

Rita White who died on 1st April 2018. She was the widow of the late Michael White.

Patricia 'Pat' Whiteside died on 1st March 2018. She was the wife of Kenneth Whiteside.

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.

William 'Billy' Allison of Hartlepool, Cleveland died on 1st March 2018, aged 89. He served as an Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force from 1946 to 1948.

Joy Balmain née Green of Edgware, Middlesex died on 30th March 2018, aged 91. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service in the UK from 1944 to 1947.

Roy Barker of Bracknell, Berkshire died on 4th March 2018, aged 85. He served in the Royal Engineers from 1951 to 1953.

Cyril Barnett of Weston Super Mare, North Somerset died on 28th March 2018, aged 95. He served as a Sergeant in the Royal Artillery in South East Asia and India from 1944 to 1947.

Kenneth 'Ken' Baxter of Bradford, West Yorkshire died on 31st March 2018, aged 98. He served as a Corporal in Egypt in the Royal Air Force from 1939 to 1946.

Kenneth Beckett of King's Lynn, Norfolk died on 21st February 2018, aged 89. He served in the Royal Sussex Regiment in the UK, Egypt and Palestine from 1947 to 1949.

Frederick 'Harry' Bennett of Gloucester, Gloucestershire died on 19th March 2018, aged 100. He joined the Royal Marines in 1935 and served in the Far East in ships protecting the Atlantic, Malta and Russian convoys from 1935 to 1948, until he discharged as a Sergeant.

Arnold 'Ben Boulton' of Bristol died on 1st December 2017, aged 91. He served in the Royal Navy convoy escort in the North Atlantic and Home Waters from 1944 to 1948.

Patrick Bowker of Wirral, Merseyside died on 6th April 2018, aged 89. From 1947 to 1959 he served in the as a Lance Corporal in the Royal Army Service Corps in England, Malaya, Sri Lanka and Singapore.

Thomas Brennan of Bonnyrigg, Midlothian died on 12th February 2018, aged 96. He served in the Royal Air Force in the UK and India from 1941 to 1946, discharging as a Corporal.

Joseph 'Joe' Bruce of Haywards Heath, West Sussex died on 3rd May 2017, aged 95. He served in the Polish Army Artillery in Italy in 1946.

Brenda Bryon née Mills of Peacehaven, East Sussex died on 12th April 2018, aged 93. She served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service in Bournemouth from 1943 to 1944.

Robert Bullen of South Shields, Tyne And Wear died on 1st March 2018, aged 79. He served in Germany in the Royal Artillery from 1956 to 1960.

Alfred 'John' Burrows of Shrewsbury, Shropshire died on 29th March 2018, aged 98. From 1940 to 1946 he served as a Sergeant throughout Europe in the Intelligence Corps and the King's Own Scottish Borderers.

Simon Clark of Newport, Gwent died on 28th March 2018, aged 51. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Engineers in the UK, Falklands and Germany from 1983 to 1990, discharging as a Corporal.

Clifford 'Cliff' Dainty of Wolverhampton died on 20th March 2018, aged 97. He served in Europe with the Royal Engineers from 1939 to 1946.

Andrew Davis of Mundford, Norfolk died on 23rd March 2018, aged 76. From 1960 to 1973 he served in the Royal Navy in the Far East, Mediterranean, West Indies and Americas.

Melvin 'Mel' Delaney of Barnsley, South Yorkshire died on 25th March 2018, aged 71. He served in the Yorkshire and Lancashire Regiment and the Duke of Wellington's Regiment from 1964 to 1973 in Northern Ireland, UK, Cyprus, South Africa and Hong Kong.

Richard Egglestone of Hendon, Sunderland died on 22nd January 2018, aged 87. He served in the Army Catering Corps from 1949 to 1955 in the UK.

John Eve of Eastbourne, East Sussex died on 19th March 2018, aged 89. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1946 to 1949.

Leslie Fidler of Rotherham, South Yorkshire died on 25th March 2018, aged 91. He served in Sri Lanka in the Royal Navy as a Leading Stores Assistant from 1945 to 1947.

William 'John' Fisher of Lydney, Gloucestershire died on 20th March 2018, aged 80. He served in the Royal Air Force in the UK from 1957 to 1959.

Joyce Fleet née Potts of Brewood, Staffordshire died on 8th April 2018, aged 92. She served in the Women's Royal Naval Service in the UK from 1945 to 1946.

Frederick O'Keefe of Liverpool, Merseyside died on 11th April 2018, aged 88. He served as a Driver in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1947 to 1949.

Isaac 'Ike' Fyfe of Aldershot, Hampshire died on 13th April 2018, aged 73. From 1962 to 1977 he served as a Lance Corporal in the Parachute Regiment in Bahrain, Singapore, Malaysia, Borneo, Yemen and Northern Ireland.

Russell Game of Barham, Ipswich died on 4th April 2018, aged 81. He served in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1955 until 1957.

Ronald Gates of Cockett, Swansea died on 22nd March 2018, aged 92. From 1944 to 1947 he served in the South Staffordshire Regiment and the Sherwood Foresters in Northern Ireland, the UK and Germany, discharging as a Sergeant.

Geoffrey Goodenough of Clitheroe, Lancashire died on 6th March 2018, aged 80. From 1958 to 1960 he served in the Royal Engineers in England and Gibraltar.

Stanley Hall of Stanley, County Durham died on 4th April 2018, aged 99. From 1938 to 1946 he served as a Corporal in the Royal Army Service Corps in Burma and India.

Kenneth 'Ken' Harvey of Ticehurst, East Sussex died on 13th February 2018, aged 96. From 1941 to 1946 he served in the Royal Army Service Corps and the Dorset Regiment, serving in North Africa with the Desert Rats and later landing in Normandy on D Day +1.

Ronald Hill of Bexhill On Sea, East Sussex died in 2018, aged 90. From 1944 to 1948 he served in the Royal Armoured Corps in Austria, Germany, Italy and the UK.

James Hilton of Bolton, Lancashire died on 13th April 2018, aged 88. He served in the UK and Germany in the Royal Army Service Corps from 1948 to 1950.

Jeffrey 'Jeff' Holdgate of Disley, Cheshire died on 29th March 2018, aged 98. From 1940 to 1946 he served as a Lance Corporal in the Border Regiment and the King's Own Scottish Borderers landing on Gold Beach on D-Day and fighting through.

Roy Holloway of Basingstoke, Hampshire died on 1st March 2018, aged 87. He served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the UK and Germany from 1948 to 1950.

John 'Jack' Howell of Merstham, Surrey died in 2018, aged 95. He served in the East Sussex Regiment from 1941 until 1942 until medically discharged.

Robert Kempster of Watford, Hertfordshire died on 14th March 2018, aged 87. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1951 to 1953.

Leonard 'Len' Lee of Chichester, West Sussex died on 9th April 2018, aged 93. A Lieutenant Commander he served in the Royal Navy from 1942 to 1954 in England, North Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

John Legg of Corsham, Wiltshire died on 23rd February 2018, aged 94. From 1944 to 1947 he served in the Royal Engineers in Norway and the Middle East, discharging as a Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant.

James Leith of Norwich, Norfolk died on 3rd April 2018, aged 96. From 1941 to 1946 he served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force in North Africa, Burma and Italy.

William 'Bill' Mackintosh of Invergordon, Ross-Shire died in 2018, aged 93. He served as a Leading Aircraftman in the Royal Air Force from 1943 until 1947 in England, the Isle of Man and India.

Delma Matkin née Bamford of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire died on 1st April 2018, aged 95. She served in Norfolk in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force from 1944 to 1945.

Denis Maycock of Torquay, Devon died on 5th December 2017, aged 94. He served in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1946 in Iceland, Canada, USA, North Africa and Spain.

Philip Moffat of Newbridge, Midlothian died on 15th April 2018, aged 83. A Corporal in the Parachute Regiment he served in Scotland, England and the Suez Canal Zone from 1958 to 1974.

Geoffrey 'Geoff' Norton of Verwood, Dorset died on 12th April 2018, aged 95. A Squadron Leader he served in the Royal Air Force from 1941 to 1958 in the UK, France, Germany and USA.

John Parr of Macclesfield, Cheshire died on 13th February 2018, aged 100. From 1940 to 1946 he served in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in the UK and Middle East.

Trevor Partridge of Bromsgrove, Worcestershire died in 2018, aged 81. He served in the Royal Navy from 1952 in the UK, Africa, France, The West Indies, Indian Ocean, Japan, Australia and the Philippines. Discharging as a Petty Officer in 1978.

George Peters of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire died on 19th April 2018, aged 95. From 1938 to 1946 he served in the Glos. R. Maritime Royal Artillery (DEMS) on merchant ships as a Gunner in the Atlantic and on D-Day. He was awarded the Chevalier de la Legion D'Honneur.

Dennis 'Slim' Ramsden of Faversham, Kent died on 31st March 2018, aged 99. From 1937 to 1946 he served as a Sergeant in the Royal Air Force from in the UK and France. After the war he joined a rep company and became a successful actor starring in many West End shows, specialising in farces with Lord Rix,

Wanda Venthum, June Whitfield and Terry Scott. He acted in many popular television shows that included It Ain't Half Hot Mum, To The Manor Born, Only Fools and Horses — and so many more.

John Relleen of Southampton, Hampshire died on 21st March 2018, aged 97. From 1939 to 1959 he served in the Royal Army Service Corps in Northern Ireland, Burma and Singapore.

William 'Bill' Rose of Crawley, West Sussex died on 28th March 2018, aged 93. He served in the Royal Artillery, North Staffordshire Regiment and Loyal Regiment from 1942 to 1950 in France.

Harold Slater of Poulton Le Fylde, Lancashire died on 21st March 2018, aged 90. He served in the UK with the Army Air Corps and the East Lancashire Regiment from 1946 to 1948.

Eric Stace of Brighton, East Sussex died on 14th April 2018, aged 102. He served in the Devonshire Regiment from 1940 to 1946 in Italy, Greece, Crete the UK and Ireland.

Deryck Wallen of Newport, Gwent died on 9th March 2018, aged 90. He served in Palestine in the Welsh Guards from 1945 to 1948.

David 'Dave' Willis of Blackpool, Lancashire died on 30th March 2018, aged 61. He served as a Corporal in the Royal Signals in England and Germany from 1972 to 1978.

Henry 'Harry' Wood of Leven, Fife died in November 2017, aged 87. He served in England in the Royal Engineers from 1948 to 1949.

James 'Jim' Wood of Newbiggin By The Sea, Northumberland died on 30th March 2018, aged 92. He served as a Corporal Technician in the Royal Air Force from 1947 to 1959 in the UK, Germany and Egypt.

Marjorie Young of Polegate, East Sussex died on 8th March 2018, aged 89. From 1947 to 1949 she served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force as a Leading Aircraftwoman at Bletchley Park and in Germany.

