



100 YEARS OF
SERVICE

From our President, Ray Hazan OBE.

The Review, first published in 1915, in both its spellings (Revue, Review), has been witness to many events throughout its more than 1,000 editions. This month, it marks a landmark in the existence of our organisation — its 100th anniversary.

On 29th January 1915, our charity was set up as the Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee in Bayswater Road, London. It soon became over crowded.

Meanwhile, Sir Arthur Pearson had managed to persuade an American banker, Otto Kahn, to lend him his house in Regent's Park. That house, St Dunstan's Lodge, took in its first 16 blind soldiers and sailors on the 26th March 1915 and was to give us our name. The organisation was to go on and have global influence.

It was Sir Arthur's vision that blind people should have the dignity of regaining employment and becoming useful and able members of their local communities. Though seemingly now old fashioned, the jobs the newly blinded took up were novel for their day. Once trained, his new 'army' returned to their home areas and, by example, showed both blind and sighted alike, just what could be achieved. A Canadian, Colonel Baker, took his experiences from Regent's Park back to the other side of the Atlantic and formed the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind) and the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded in 1922.

Thus, these World War I blind veterans were the real pioneers of this new organisation and they laid down the standards, objectives and skills that could be achieved by visually handicapped people, without technology and the example of others to go on.

The men and women of the Second World War took up both the torch and the challenge and pushed those abilities to further heights. There existed an even greater spirit of camaraderie since they had all fought in the one conflict. They have left even higher objectives for their successors to attain.

Our third generation veterans, those who have lost their sight since 1945, have taken up that challenge willingly, but have enormous advantages over the World War I St Dunstaners.

We can look back with pride at our history and be amazed that the themes of independence, care, skills, and leisure activities have hardly changed over the century as they cannot be bettered.

Blind Veterans UK has developed, and is still developing, all the time as we expand and adapt to modern expectations and standards. There will always be a need for our services and we are here to support those who continue to give their sight for their country or have suffered poor sight in later life.

May the next 100 years be as fruitful, maintaining the excellence and reputation earned over the past century.



Picture: Chief Executive Nick Caplin CB, President Ray Hazan OBE, television presenter Johnny Ball and blind veteran Norman Perry.

Celebrating 100 years of service.

Throughout this year, we will be celebrating 100 years of charitable service and support to blind and vision-impaired veterans with a wealth of national and local activities.

It's been 100 years since Sir Arthur Pearson decided that no one who has served our country should battle blindness alone, and began the life-changing work that Blind Veterans UK continues to this very day. To mark the charity's 100th birthday, we have a wealth of activities and events planned that will not only highlight our history and many achievements, but will also propel our charity into its second century of service.

Our centenary celebration began at the start of the year, with the launch of our centenary logo. This enhances the existing Blind Veterans UK logo and uses our '100 years of service' message. You should receive your own centenary logo badge with this Special Edition of the Review — please wear it with pride!

The centenary logo will also feature on a range of special new merchandise that includes clothing, umbrellas, paperweights, tie and lapel badges, passport holders and a centenary cup and saucer. This, and more centenary merchandise, will be available to buy via our online shop at www.blindveterans.org.uk or call 0300 1110440.

Other celebratory activities already underway include the online project, 'The story of Blind Veterans UK in 100 objects'. This charts our history through various St Dunstan's and Blind Veterans UK objects, from the first minute-book of The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee, right through to today's Blind Veterans UK centenary badge!

We are also running a series of special 'happy birthday messages' sent from celebrities. The first celebrities to send us messages include Barbara Windsor, Richard E Grant, Gregg Wallace, Johnny Ball and Martin Bell, and we've also received messages from Prime Minister David Cameron, Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Labour leader Ed Miliband. Both our centenary messages and The Story of Blind Veterans UK in 100 Objects will run through 2015.

On 29th January, we will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of our charity's foundation with several special activities. These will include the unveiling of a plaque at Bayswater Road Hotel, the site of the meeting which founded our charity. We will also be running a major advert across the national press. And at Sheffield, the centre will mark both our 100th birthday and the centre's own 10th birthday with a special event which will also include a new plaque unveiling.

As the year progresses, there will be many more national events to mark our centenary. We plan to mark our move to and time at St Dunstan's Lodge with two special events in March and June. We also plan to mark our time at Church Stretton (our World War II base) with a local event there.

On 4th June, by kind permission of Her Majesty The Queen, we have our Buckingham Palace Garden Party. This promises to be a real highlight of our centenary year and we hope that as many of our members and beneficiaries as possible will be able to attend.

Later in the year, on 6th October, we also have a special Service of Thanksgiving at Westminster Abbey. This will be a wonderful opportunity for us to share our celebration with various groups, including the military community.

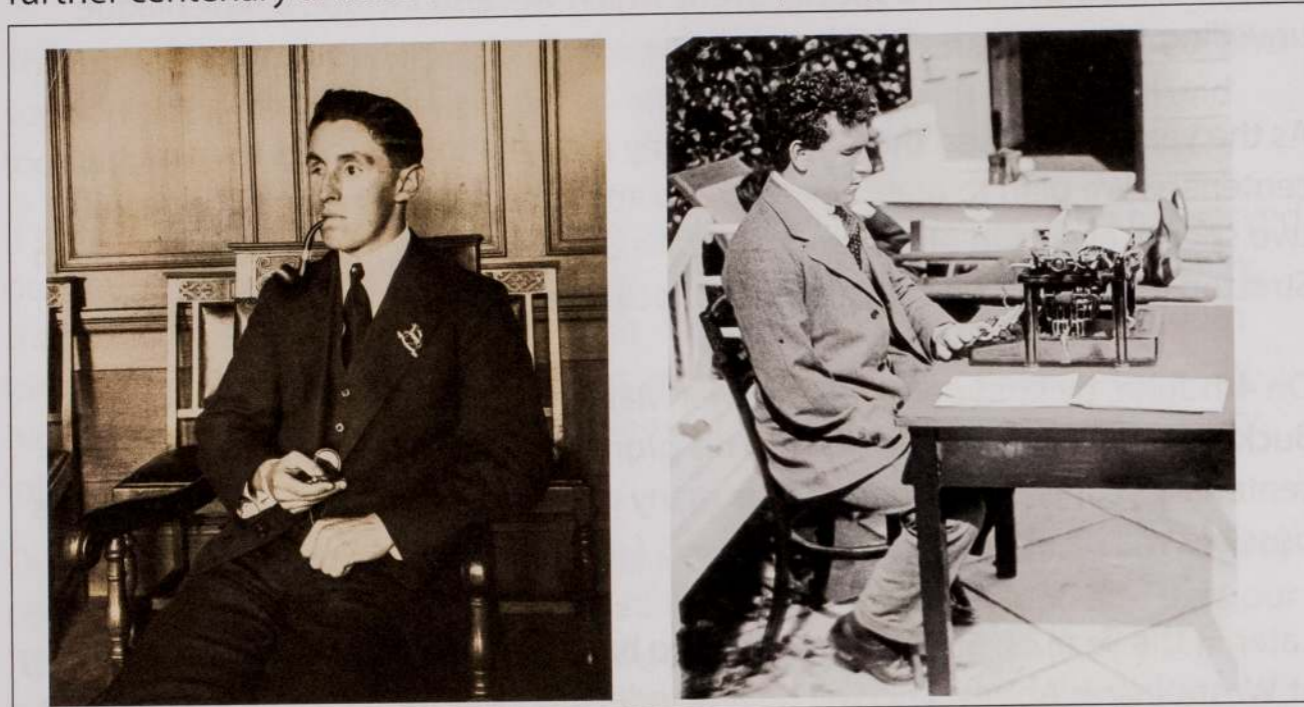
October will also mark the launch of our oral history project, '100 Years, 100 Voices'. This will bring together the thoughts, musings and recollections of 100 veterans, staff members, volunteers and supporters, all representing different parts of our history.

Our centenary celebrations won't be confined to national events, though. On a local level, our centres at Brighton, Llandudno and Sheffield also have a range of activities planned to mark our centenary. Sheffield and Llandudno got the ball rolling at the start of the year, with a special centenary lunch for members and Llandudno's 100-day positive change challenge. Upcoming events at the centres include the burial of time capsules at Brighton and Llandudno, a big balloon launch and photo booth shoot at Brighton, and 1915-themed events at Llandudno.

We won't just be looking back during Blind Veterans UK's centenary year, though. We want our centenary celebrations to help us continue to grow the

number of veterans we are helping, and also help us grow awareness and support of the charity. We want our centenary to celebrate our first 100 years of service and propel us into our next 100 years of service.

Watch out for regular centenary updates in the Review as 2015 progresses. And further centenary articles as we couldn't fit everything into this Special edition!



Pictures: Sir Arthur Pearson always presented the newly blinded veteran with a Braille watch. Now when for the first time he held in his hand a watch by which he could tell the hour he was delighted, and he was still more delighted to find that he was able to do something like other people which blindness had seemed to prevent. It was a little discovery that, like a spark, set alight all kinds of hopes. He took an extraordinary pleasure in letting his fingers succeed in this way where before he had only trusted his eyes. He began to realise that his hands were going to be of amazing use to him; what he had heard of the accomplishments of blind men seemed suddenly much more possible.

Nathaniel Downs (above right) was a blinded soldier known as Drummer as he played in the band. He is shown learning to touch type using an adapted typewriter as he lost a hand and the fingers on his remaining hand. It is impossible to overstate the importance of typewriting to the newly blinded man. When Nathaniel wrote the first letter home he passed the second of the two main milestones on his way back into the world; the first was to tell the time with a Braille watch. The effects of these two things are symbolic as well as practical, for they mark two distinct stages in his recovery. With the watch and the typewriter the world is never so dark again.

Our 100 year timeline.

1915 — Sir Arthur Pearson, our founder, establishes Blind Veterans UK on 29th January as The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee.

Work begins at a house in Bayswater Road and the first war blinded soldier entered its doors on 10th February.

On 26th March we move to St Dunstan's Lodge in London's Regent's Park with 16 war blinded soldiers. People start referring to us as 'St Dunstan's'.

It was there that they learnt to be blind and trained in a trade. The eight trades (shown in photos below) that provided the most practical openings for the blind veteran who desired profitable work were joinery, boot repairing, shorthand writing, massage, telephone operating, poultry farming, mat making and basketry. They also learnt to touch type to do their own correspondence and Braille.



Picture: The Carpentry Workshop.



Picture: The Boot Repair Workshop.



Pictures: Basket and net making. Basketry is the oldest trade for the blind and net making the second oldest trade.



Picture: Masseurs training.



Picture: A First World War veteran in the poultry farm.

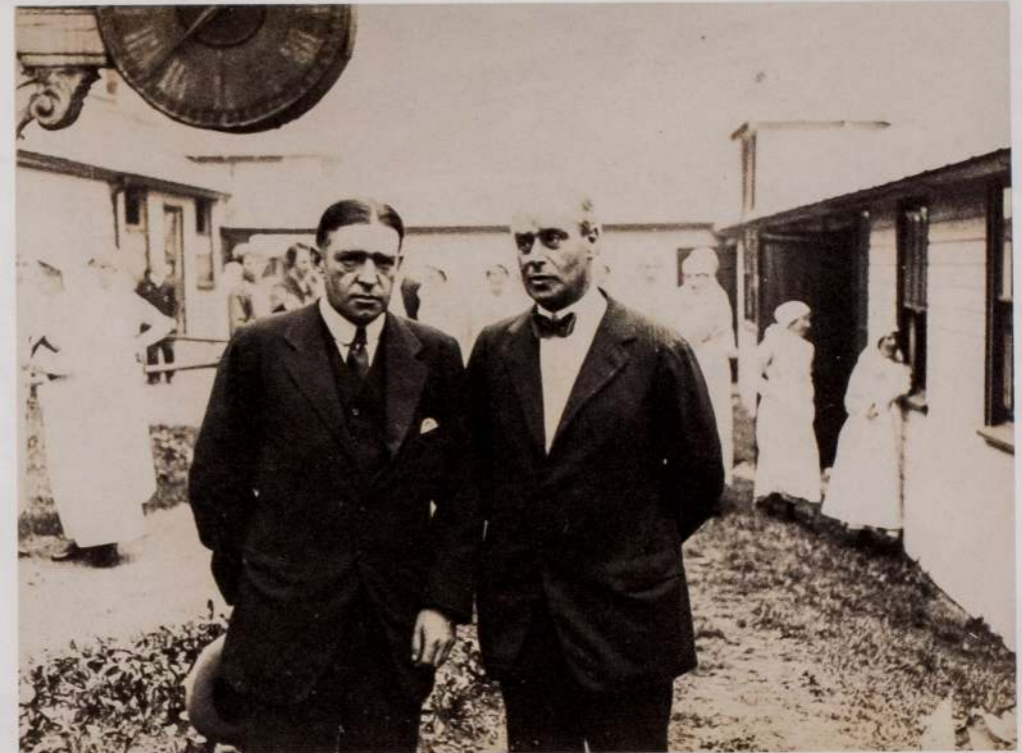


Picture: The men trained as telephone operators. At first the blind operator would hear that a shutter or doll's eye had dropped and discover which one it was by touch. Before long, however, he would be able to tell that as well merely by sound, although in theory all the shutters or doll's eyes were identical.

1915 — Her Majesty Queen Alexandra becomes our Patron.

1916 — Lieutenant Ian Fraser of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry is blinded on The Somme on 23rd July, while seconded to the Gloucesters, and joins our charity.

1917 — Polar explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton visits and gives a talk at our training centre at Regent's Park. He is one of the first of many famous visitors.



Picture: Sir Ernest Shackleton and Sir Arthur Pearson Bt, GBE with VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachment) in the background beneath the famous clock.

1917 — Captain Fraser sets up the After Care Department that became the Welfare Department.

1918 — The First World War ends.

1918 — Before the end of 1918 over 600 men had already been trained and had returned to their homes. Nearly 700 were still in training at Regent's Park and at the various annexes, and nearly 200 were still in hospital. Fifteen hundred men and more than eight hundred people engaged, in one way or another, in contributing to their happiness and welfare. Post War attributable blindness would eventually nearly double our numbers.

Between 80 and 95 per cent of those who passed through our charity for training could — and did — earn a living, or at any rate add substantially to

their pensions, after they had left. Of the others some were debarred from work because of the severity of their injuries, physical or mental.

Sir Arthur Pearson said: "In days when I could see I had the direction of some big enterprises, but St Dunstan's became the biggest individual business that I have ever conducted."



Picture: Celebrating Armistice Day on 11th November 1918 at St Dunstan's Lodge.

1921 — We move headquarters from St Dunstan's Lodge to St John's Lodge, also in Regent's Park.

1921 — Tragedy befalls our charity when our founder Sir Arthur Pearson dies in an accident at the age of just 55.

1921 — Captain Ian Fraser, pictured opposite is appointed as our second Chairman, a role he stayed in for 53 years.



Picture: Captain Ian Fraser. Our Chairman from 1921 to 1974.

1923 — We adopt the name of our Regent's Park training centre — officially becoming St Dunstan's.

1934 — Together with the Royal National Institute of Blind People, we produce the UK's first talking books.

1935 — We hold a series of 20th Anniversary reunions, culminating with a meeting in the Royal Albert Hall that was attended by over 500 members and HRH the Prince of Wales.

1937 — On 6th September the Foundation stone of the Brighton centre is put into place by Lady Pearson.

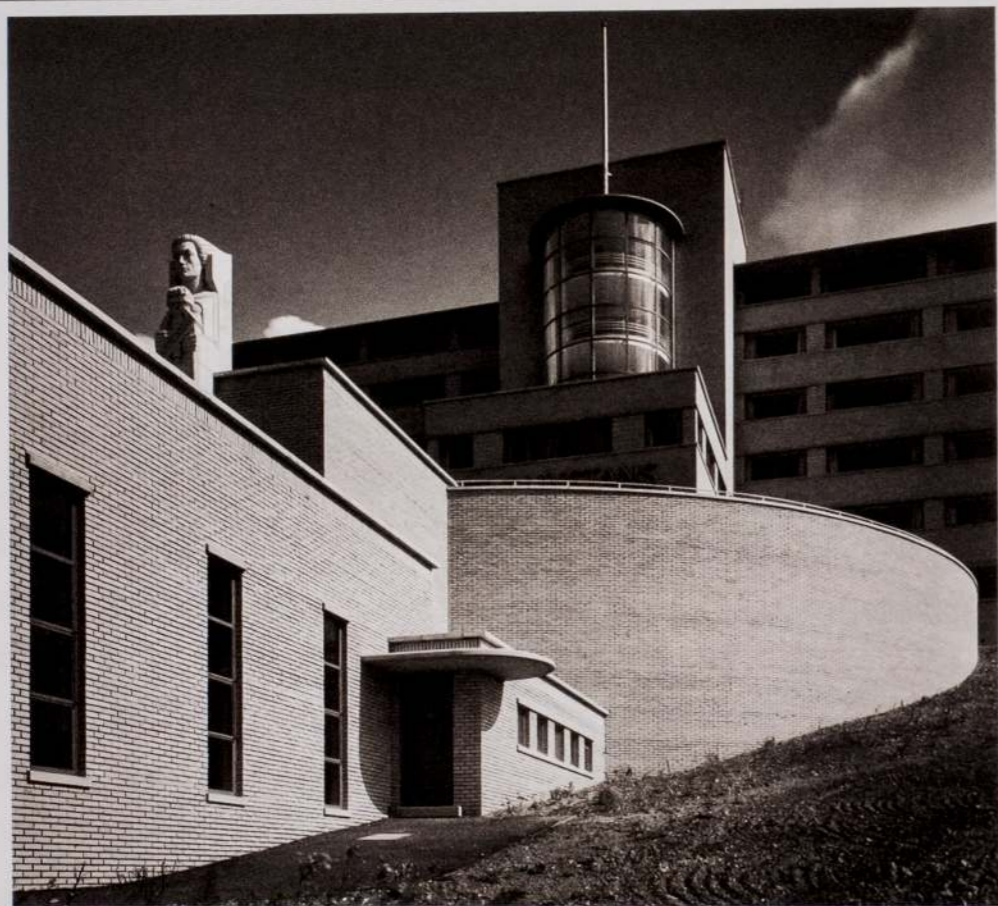


Picture: Lady Pearson and Sir Ian Fraser at the laying of the Brighton centre's foundation stone.

1938: The Brighton centre was opened on 10th October and by the end of the year, more than 300 members had taken a holiday or spent a period of convalescence there.

The building is shaped very loosely like an aeroplane pointing in a south-westerly direction, and it could quite possibly be the first building to have been designed specifically to meet the needs of its blind occupants. The architect was Francis Lorne of Sir John Burnet Tait and Lorne. St Dunstan's Chapel to the front of the building has a 20 foot statue of the Winged Victory by Julian Phelps Allan, originally Eva Dorothy.

Joan Osborne (nee Walch) with her father Joe Walch, a First World War veteran who was blinded at Ypres, and her mother Ellen spent Christmas 1938 at the centre. As women weren't allowed to stay there they had to stay in alternative accommodation. They also visited the centre for Christmas 1939.



Picture: The Brighton centre with the side view of St Dunstan's Chapel and the Winged Victory.

1938: The Corps of Good Companions was formed. This was an appeal to the citizens of Brighton and Hove to provide guides, philosophers and friends to the men. The response was wonderful and years later volunteering at the Brighton centre remains popular with more than 100 dedicated volunteers.

1939 — The Second World War is declared.

1939 — Thomas Williams becomes our first member to qualify as an Air Raid Warden.

1939 — The new Brighton centre is used as a war hospital for eye injuries.



Picture: The Eye Hospital at the Brighton centre.

1939: In the November edition of the Review Sir Ian Fraser wrote that the first patient from WWII had come into the Hospital at the Brighton centre. He wrote: 'He was not wounded, but one of his eyes had been very seriously damaged in an accident. This has been operated on and it is hoped that, in a few weeks time, he will be fit to leave without any serious impairment of his vision. I am afraid that the majority of cases that come to us will not be so fortunate, but it is at any rate a satisfaction to feel that we can do this splendid remedial and healing work. The young man concerned was a Telegraphist in the Navy.'

1940 — Members and staff were evacuated from the Brighton centre to Church Stretton in Shropshire, our main wartime home. During WWII the centre was taken over by the Admiralty and it became HMS Vernon.

1942 — Over 100 of our members are working in factories.

1942 — The first women to be blinded during the Second World War arrive at Church Stretton.

1943 — A number of repatriated POWs who were blinded overseas join our charity at Church Stretton.

1944 — We set up a Scientific Advisory Committee to study the use of the remaining senses — hearing, touch and smell — in particular for reading and walking.

1945 — World War II ends. Our youngest member, Michael Oliver aged just 13, is blinded whilst on manoeuvres with the Air Training Corps.

1946 — We return to the Brighton centre from Church Stretton.

1948 — On 26th February 1948, the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother paid her first visit to the Brighton centre. In his speech, Sir Ian Fraser said the Queen's visit not only honoured those present but more than 5,000 St Dunstaners throughout the Empire.



1948 — Our London office moves to Old Marylebone Road.

1952 — Men from the First World War are still joining our charity as a result of the delayed effects of mustard gas.

1954 — HM The Queen visits the Brighton centre where she meets Dickie Brett. Dickie who was a member of the blind and handless group was highly skilled in woodwork.



Picture: HM The Queen speaks with Dickie Brett who has his back to the camera.

1960 — Members use their first talking books on tape.



1961 — Tommy Gaygan became the only handless man to pass the official Braille writing test using a machine adapted by Norman French, our research engineer.

1962 — HM The Queen and HRH Prince Philip The Duke of Edinburgh visit the Brighton centre.



Picture: Our President Neville Pearson speaks during a visit by HM The Queen and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh to the Brighton centre. Copyright The Argus.

Over the years a variety of clubs have been set up that are still extremely popular. These include skiing, walking, writing, golfing, computing, archery, shooting, fishing, the amateur radio club and of course the Brighton Club.

1965 — We celebrate our 50th anniversary at St James' Palace with our Patron HM The Queen.

1965 — Members took part in an experimental long cane course at the Brighton centre. This was introduced from America by a beneficiary who specialised in mobility. By 1967 instruction on the use of the long cane was available to all of our members and it remains an integral part of today's mobility training.

1968 — In June the first International Sports meeting for blind veterans was held at our centre in Brighton. Competing alongside our members were athletes from other war blinded organisations in Austria, France and West Germany.

1969 — Bill Griffiths MBE wins the Disabled Sports Personality of the Year Award.

Bill was taken prisoner in Java in 1942. He was forced by his guards to remove some camouflage netting that they believed was booby trapped. In the resulting explosion Bill lost his sight and both hands. Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, who was the Commander of the improvised Allied General Hospital, treated Bill, despite the opinion of a nurse that it would be kinder to let him die.

While still a prisoner of the Japanese Bill received a telegram from David Bell, a World War II man at Church Stretton. It was sent at the suggestion of Ian Fraser. 'I lost my sight and hands while serving with the 8th Army in North Africa. Having a wonderful time at St Dunstan's, learning to type and play the trombone, listening to radio etc. Lots of friends here. Look forward to meeting. David Bell.' Bill went on to run his own haulage company before he became a speaker for St Dunstan's with his wife Alice — and a singer as they were both great singers.



Picture: Bill Griffiths MBE (far right) with Gwen Obern and friends.

1973 — We send a team to the International Games for the Blind in Austria.

1976 — Ray Peart and Tony Parkinson compete in the Paralympic Games (then known as the Olympiad for the Physically Disabled) in Toronto, Canada.

1979 — Blind Veterans UK and the RNIB evaluate the Kurzweil: the first reading machine to instantly convert print into speech.



Picture: Blind Veterans UK President Ray Hazan OBE evaluates the Kurzweil.

1982 — Terry Bullingham is the first person to join who was blinded in the Falklands war.

1984 — Our headquarters move to its current location in Harcourt Street, London.

1985 — HM The Queen visits our Brighton centre to open the new South Wing that was specifically used for accommodation for members and their spouses.

1990 — Temperatures soar into the nineties at our 75th anniversary garden party at Buckingham Palace. Dame Vera Lynn sings with our band.

1990 — The St Dunstan's rose is officially launched for our 75th anniversary **(Photo opposite page)**.

1991 — Three members are admitted as a result of the Gulf War.

1999 — In October General Sir Peter de la Billière KCB, KBE, DSO, MC & Bar opens the McKinley Sports Hall. It was built using the £40,000 that was raised by former Royal Marine Reg Perrin, Edward de la Billière and Dominic Marshall when they climbed Mount McKinley in Alaska **(Photo opposite page)**.



Picture: Tom Hart with the St Dunstan's rose.



Picture: Artist Harvey Parkes, Dominic Marshall, Alan 'Reg' Perrin and General Sir Peter de la Billière KCB, KBE, DSO, MC & Bar

2000 — Our constitution is amended to permit the membership of veterans who lost their sight after their service ended.

2004 — First British Blind Sport International Visually Impaired Archery competitions; our members win seven medals.

2005 — The Sheffield centre opens its doors in January.

2005 — We celebrate our 90th Anniversary.

2005 — Henry Allingham, a veteran of the First World War, becomes a member at the age of 108 years old and moves into the Brighton centre. He is the oldest entrant ever to our charity.

2006 — Henry Allingham is given the Freedom of Eastbourne.



Picture: Henry Allingham with the scroll granting him the Honorary Freedom of the Borough of Eastbourne.

2009 — The Younger Group is established.

2010 — HRH Prince William visits the Llandudno centre. **Photo opposite.**

2011 — The first Project Gemini, an exchange programme between Blind Veterans UK and the USA based Blinded Veterans Association, takes place.

2011 — The Llandudno centre opens its doors in September. **Photo opposite.**

2012 — We change our name to Blind Veterans UK and launch the No One Alone campaign to recruit new members.



2010: HRH Prince William with Simon Brown at the Llandudno centre. Prince William wears simu specs as he uses the CCTV to read a document.



2011: The Llandudno centre opens.

2012 — We change our name to Blind Veterans UK and launch the No One Alone campaign to recruit new members. Events took place at our three centres. Marines abseiled down the Brighton centre, a Sea King helicopter delivered the Blind Veterans UK flag to the Llandudno centre and a bomb disposal robot unveiled our new name at the Sheffield centre.



Picture: Sheffield centre manager Terry Heaton (far right) at the Sheffield centre on the day that our charity was renamed. The plaque was unveiled by a bomb disposal robot, pictured.

2013 — The Brighton centre celebrates its 75th Anniversary and the building is illuminated with the Blind Veterans UK logo and Brighton's 75th Anniversary message and search lights that can be seen for miles. The lights are turned on by Joan Osborne, who taught at Church Stretton. Her father Joe Walch was a WWI veteran and her husband Bob a WWII veteran. She is introduced by centre manager Lesley Garven and three generations of Joan's family are with her. The centre is packed with members of Blind Veterans UK, staff and locals. As soon as Joan turned the lights on people driving by stopped to watch the display.



Picture opposite : The 75th Anniversary lights at the Brighton centre.

2014 — We commemorate 100 years since the start of the First World War.

2014 — The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, Anna Soubry MP, visits the Brighton centre in February. We were awarded £1 million by the Armed Forces Covenant (Libor) Fund, to refurbish accommodation facilities at the Brighton centre.



Picture: The Minister speaks with Norman Perry in the Art & Craft Workshop. Norman is a WWII veteran and highly successful physiotherapist who first went to Tembani in South Africa after he was wounded.

2015 — We celebrate our centenary and 100 years of proud service.



Picture: Joan Osborne raises a glass with her family and centre manager Lesley Garven (right). Joan is our bond across the last 100 years of our charity.

Victory Over Blindness — Our Glorious Founder. Sir Arthur Pearson Bt, GBE.

"Appalling as the deprivation of sight may be, it is not without some remarkable compensations."

Those words were written by a lad of 24 who did not know what it meant to be blind. They were the first sentence of an article called 'Curiosities of Blindness' that appeared in the first number of Pearson's Weekly. What makes the sentence almost eerily curious now is that it was written by the proprietor and editor in his maiden publication; and he was writing much the same when he was twice as old and totally blind. The author was our founder Sir Arthur Pearson Bt, GBE.

Sir Arthur Pearson (he was created a Baronet in 1916) was a self made man. That is not to say that he began life like the newspaper proprietor of legend, a ragged urchin selling papers on a street corner. Far from it. He followed his father to Winchester and received a classical education; which he always considered a waste of time and money.

Although extremely short sighted even as a boy, he was good at games, especially cricket. He might have followed further in his father's footsteps and played for his school at Lord's, if his father had not taken Holy Orders. The Rev. Cyril Pearson was a country parson, and when Arthur was 16 the struggle to pay his school fees proved too much. He had to leave Winchester, and was promised a job as a clerk in a City bank.

The prospect appalled him, but he was still at home, waiting for the vacancy, two years later, when a competition in Tit Bits caught his eye. Tit Bits was a new weekly magazine founded by Sir George Newnes, and it was famous for its bright ideas. This competition was in general knowledge, and it was a forerunner of the modern radio and television quiz; only the questions were harder and the prize was more original. In every issue for 13 weeks readers were asked 10 questions on subjects ranging from the payment of archbishops to the Seven Wonders of Korea. The first prize was a job on the staff of Tit Bits with a commencing salary of £100 a year.

For 13 weeks Arthur Pearson cycled three times a week to the nearest reference

library, which was 30 miles away; a total of 2,340 miles on one of the old high bicycles with solid tyres. For this alone he deserved to win. He won easily, and that was the end of the threatened clerkship in the City bank.

He was 18½ when he joined Tit Bits. At 19 he was manager of the paper with his own private secretary, the proprietor's right hand man. He did freelance journalism in his spare time. Unwilling to waste a minute, he worked on the train to and from the office, and because his eyes troubled him he travelled with a homemade lighting unit with a bulb fixed in his coat buttonhole.

Before he was 24 he was married and he and his wife had two daughters and he was earning over £500 a year. When he was refused a pay rise he set up Pearson's Weekly with a £3,000 investment from someone he played tennis with and the publishing house of Pearson's was born.

He followed up his Weekly with other periodicals, and in 1900 he founded the Daily Express. He bought the Evening Standard four years later, and he wanted to buy The Times. Before he was 40 he was rich, famous, and powerful.

His first venture into philanthropy was to provide a Christmas dinner for hundreds of children in the East End of London. The next year he began the Fresh Air Fund, which gave East End children a day's outing in Epping Forest and 20,000 children had a picnic the first year. The next year the figure was doubled.

At 40 he was on top of the world, but already the darkness was beginning to fall. Two years later he was operated on for glaucoma. The operation was technically successful, but he was never again able to see well enough to read or write. His sight became steadily worse, until in 1913 he was told that before long he would be totally blind.

He will be the blind man

"I shall soon be blind," he said to his wife, "but I will never be a blind man. I am going to be the blind man."

It was hardly modest, but characteristic. He never pretended, to be self-effacing; there would have been no Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee and we would not be celebrating our centenary had it not been for Sir Arthur.

Sir Arthur Pearson. One blind man to another.

Before the newly blinded veterans came to our training centre in Regent's Park Sir Arthur Pearson would visit each man in hospital on their arrival when he would present them with a Braille watch and speak to them as one blind man to another. When they heard his message they realised that there was hope and that they were not alone.

The 2nd London General Hospital.

It was, of course, entirely optional with the men whether they came to us or not, and at first there was a difficulty of getting in touch with them, since they were sent to hospitals in all parts of the country. Sir Arthur asked the Surgeon General Sir Alfred Keogh to use his influence in this matter, and as a result every effort was made to send all the blinded men when they reached England to the 2nd London General Hospital.

An exceptional group at the beginning of life's adventures

The blind veterans with whom Sir Arthur was to come in contact represented an exceptional group in the blind world. They were young and healthy, keen and ambitious; they were just the people to respond to the ideas that he had formed. The majority of the blind veterans were quite young men, still at the beginning of life's adventure, and it requires no imagination to realise their horror of helplessness and their terror at the thought of an existence shut off from ordinary activities and enjoyments. They responded at once to the encouraging prospect that, in spite of all, they would be able to play a man's part in the world. And with that new outlook everything was changed for them.

From one blind man to another.

At least once a week it was Sir Arthur's practice to visit the hospital, to see especially the men who had newly arrived. He felt that as he too was blind that he might speak to them of their future more convincingly than if he had not shared the same experience and faced the same problems. He knew too, what others had gone through before them — their fears, their uncertainties, their varying moods, and to give examples of how these had been overcome. To relate the history of men — perhaps from their own regiments, who had the same feelings of despondency, the same doubts, and were now capable, happy and prosperous — was to find a way that seldom failed to establish at once a brighter outlook. He would do the same in the letter inviting them to St Dunstan's.



Picture: Victory over Blindness from a 1925 Review cover.

Our early centres.

The work of the Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Care Committee started on 29th January 1915, but the house it started in was at Bayswater Hill that was leant by Mrs Lewis Hall, a continuous benefactor to the blinded men, while necessary alterations were carried out at St Dunstan's Lodge in Regent's Park.

We began there in the early days of February 1915, with two blinded soldiers, both Belgian. The first blinded soldier to be brought to this country was Oscar Daumont; a rifle bullet pierced his eyes on the first day of the siege of Liege, and he was almost certainly the first soldier blinded in the War. As were nearly all wounded Belgians in those early days of War, he was sent to an English hospital and eventually came to St Dunstan's Lodge, as did seven other Belgians who lost their sight before the Belgian authorities had been able to make adequate arrangements for the care of their wounded.



Picture: Bayswater Hill. The house was loaned to us by Mrs Lewis Hall.

It was where our work began when the first war blinded soldier entered its doors on 10th February 1915.

The house in Bayswater Hill where Sir Arthur Pearson began his work with six blinded soldiers.

When the move was made on 26th March to St Dunstan's Lodge there were 16 war blinded men and before the end of 1918 there were over 1,500 names on our books, and five large establishments, with the original house of St Dunstan's Lodge as the centre in London. There were several annexes in the provinces that barely provided the accommodation we required during those First World War years.

St Dunstan's Lodge was put at Sir Arthur's disposal by Mr Otto Kahn, the well known American financier, as it was his London residence set in Regent's Park. It was a spacious and splendid house with grounds extending over fifteen acres, where you might well believe yourself in the heart of the country. But he did not only place St Dunstan's at the service of the blinded soldiers — free of any charges whatever, he maintained the grounds and to some extent the house itself; and he gave Sir Arthur absolute carte blanche to erect any buildings and effect any alterations that he thought fit to make. Workshops, classrooms, offices, storehouses, chapels and recreation rooms sprang up over the once beautiful gardens while additions to the house extended on all sides, and the vast building that was referred to as the Bungalow Annexe covered one of the fields.

Like most people at that time, Sir Arthur Pearson imagined that the War would be of short duration. But it was certain that among the wounded would be many blinded, and he was naturally concerned that everything possible should be done for them after medical science had performed its work.

In his 1919 autobiography *Victory Over Blindness* Sir Arthur Pearson wrote 'With practically no exceptions all the soldiers and sailors of the British Imperial Forces blinded in the war came under my care, in order that they might learn to be blind. The main idea that animated me in establishing this hostel for the blinded soldiers was that the sightless men, after being discharged from hospital, might come into a little world where the things which blind men cannot do were forgotten and where everyone was concerned with what blind men can do. A world where they could learn to be blind.'

As a result of a long conference and some rather revolutionary ideas of Sir Arthur's, it was decided to teach eight trades and occupations. They were massage, shorthand writing, telephone operating, poultry farming, joinery, mat making, boot repairing and basketry as they provided the most practical openings for the sightless man who desired profitable work.

Next to St Dunstan's in the outer circle of Regent's Park stood a mansion in spacious grounds that was ordinarily used as a college of the Baptist Church. It was lent to us and for a time the College Annexe seemed likely to provide all requirements, but all too soon more room was needed and the Bungalow Annexe was erected on the field between the two properties.



Picture: The men of the First World War and VADs walk in the grounds at St Dunstan's Lodge beneath the imposing clock of St Dunstan's in the West with its Gog and Magog figures.

Then three large houses nearby, in Cornwall Terrace, were joined together. In nearby Titchfield Terrace 10 smaller houses were taken one after the other for the extra accommodation of the VADs and for the entertainment of the relatives of the blinded soldiers who came to London.

It then became necessary to establish centres away from London where special cases could be treated. Pleasant homes where men could be sent for periods of convalescence or for holidays.

A property in two acres of grounds, close to the sea in Brighton, was presented by the Federation of Grocers' Association and it was used as a convalescent and holiday home as long as the First World War men lived. There was a smaller establishment in Queen's Road in Brighton, which was placed at our disposal by the National Institute for the Blind. This was a convalescent home for men just discharged from hospital, and for others who needed a change or a rest. For those in need of longer convalescence — for those who had lost limbs as well as sight, for the shell-shocked and paralysed, the more sorely hurt in body and mind — an annexe was opened at Torquay, with local financial support. It was later transferred to St Leonard's on Sea.

A convalescent home at Ilkley in Yorkshire was a generous gift of Mrs Grove Grady, and a large house in Blackheath was given by Mr AN Kilby, which provided the retreat for men nearer to London. There was Bannow House in St Leonard's on Sea, which was purchased and largely endowed by the Dickens

Fellowships and Suffolk Hall in Cheltenham, which had been given by its liberal owner Mr WA Bankier.

The blind officers occupied two large establishments in London's Portland Place. One of them was placed at their disposal by Sir John and Lady Stirling-Maxwell. Two properties at Hove served as convalescent and holiday resorts, while a place on the river at Bourne End afforded a weekend residence in the summer for Officers.



Picture: The Ilkley Annexe.



Picture: The Torquay Annexe.



Picture: VADs and men read their letters in St John's Lodge.

St Dunstan's Lodge — The Home of Happiness.

In Victory Over Blindness Sir Arthur Pearson wrote:

'St Dunstan's had been called many names by writers who have visited it; some have called it the Palace of Hope; it has been called the House of Good Comfort; it has been called the Home of Happiness — and the last name is the one I like the best, for happiness has always meant so much at St Dunstan's. It meant that the men there were content with the lot that the Fates had dealt out to them.

'It meant that they had conquered a foe who threatened to destroy spirit as well as sight. It meant that these determined men had dragged themselves from the dark morass in which they were plunged, that they had set their feet on the velvety, flower spangled lawns which lead through the garden of Endeavour out on to the broad highway of Normal Life.'



Picture: Carter, Barfield, Craigie and Joynes at Regent's Park.

Life at Regent's Park.



Picture: A First World War blind veteran studies Braille.

Sir Arthur introduced training in the eight trades and sporting and social activities at Regent's Park as he wanted the WWI veterans of our charity to learn to be blind as it involved a change in their mental outlook. He knew there would be no time for depression while they learnt a trade and Braille and typewriting so that they may return home and reclaim their position in society.

The Braille teaching was organised by Miss E.W. Austin, head of the National Library for the Blind. Each pupil had his own individual teacher, at first over a hundred of them came to St Dunstan's Lodge every day. Later this number was greatly increased. Only a few were blind themselves, but most had experience of making books for the National Library by hand. They were all women, and nearly all unpaid volunteers. They came in all weathers, and despite every difficulty.

The female staff numbered 595 women. They included matrons, VADs, nurses, teachers of Braille, typewriting and music, regular visitors, and those who came to read to the men and go for walks with them, and secretaries. The male staff numbered 293 — there were the adjutants, the oculists, the doctors, the chaplains, the workshop teachers, poultry farm instructors, accountants, orderlies, walkers, masseurs, chauffeurs, porters, gardeners, scouts and those engaged in the Pension, the Settlement, and the After Care Departments.

The workshops.

All the workshops at Regent's Park were under the control of the Superintendent, Charles Rose. He had a sighted foreman in each, but the instructors were mostly pupil teachers. They had not quite finished their own training, but were paid salaries for passing on what they had learnt. Only the brightest were chosen for this work, which had much psychological value. A beginner who might be feeling disheartened by his difficulties took fresh heart when he learnt that his expert instructor had been blinded on the battlefield only a few months before.

Sir Arthur broke with traditional timetables as he did not believe in the men working long hours, and drew up a schedule allowing two and a half hours of instruction in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, with the option of an extra hour. The workshops were all in one building that was designed by Sir Arthur in the shape of a letter E.

The Poultry Farm.

The poultry farm was under the supervision of Captain Webber, and this was another new occupation for the blind. Captain Webber had lost his sight some years before the War, and he took up poultry farming as a hobby. Practice made him an expert, and at Sir Arthur's request he started a poultry class. He had sighted instructors to help him. Pupils also learnt rough carpentry, so that they could make hen coops, sitting boxes and gates.

Never before had so many learnt so fast.

As a rule in six to eight months a man's training in the simpler occupations was completed. Massage and shorthand writing took rather longer to acquire. The speed at which the men learnt was quite uncanny, and they were mastering Braille, typewriting and many other things in that time. It is a literal fact that the men at St Dunstan's Lodge became proficient in their industries in a mere fraction of the time that was considered necessary in ordinary institutions for the blind, at that time.

Sir Arthur said: "In days when I could see I had the direction of some big enterprises, but St Dunstan's became the biggest individual business that I have ever conducted."

Lord Fraser of Lonsdale, our Chairman from 1921 to 1974.

We bring you an account by Lord Fraser of Lonsdale, written in 1939. As Lieutenant William Jocelyn Ian Fraser of the King's Shropshire Light Infantry he was blinded on 23rd July 1916 during the Battle of the Somme when he was just 18 years of age. He was Chairman of our charity for 53 years.

"I am moved to write this now when I am only 45 because the outbreak of this war (World War Two) is already bringing some scores of young men, and women too, into this world of the blind in which I have lived so long. Their journey into the valley of the shadows, their quiet patient courage, their adaptability and their resurrection — for it is nothing less — into the world of men and women moves me strongly, reminds me of my own experience, and makes me want to set it down, partly, I think, to ease my own mind and partly because I hope it will be helpful to them.

"I have not discovered a new continent, or a new way of living; I have not the aptitude nor the desire to write sketches of the great men I have met; my life has simply been very interesting to me — the more so because I have had to find my own way of doing many commonplace things that seem easy enough to be taken for granted.

"And one is so thankful to be alive and well, to be taking part in the making of such momentous history, and to see our cause slowly but inevitably holding its own, and perhaps even beginning to prevail, that the importance which one used to attach to personal fortunes has receded to a better proportion.

"Now I look back over 25 years of blindness and find myself writing a book, and I begin to wonder why. And I begin to ask myself questions about things that I have rather taken for granted. Am I happy? Are my blinded soldier comrades of the Great War happy? If so, how is that? And what is happiness? We overcame our fear of solitude, which at the beginning seemed like a dark prison from which there was no escape. Never before had there been so many newly blinded persons of our age and sort before.

Back to the beginning

'The day I was struck I had spent that morning in charge of a burial party,

finding a last resting place for some of those who would not grow old as we that were left have grown old. We had fought in the afternoon, when I was knocked out by a bullet in the head. I am not sure if I lost consciousness, but I remember being bandaged up.

'I recalled my first experience under artillery bombardment. I had been frightened — frightened on two accounts: first of all for my own life and limb; and secondly, frightened lest I should let the show down; but I got over this as we all did, and though I continued to be frightened from time to time I got used to shell fire, and to crawling about and being sniped at, and to all the other hazards of that war, and even though later on shell splinters and bullets may have come very near to me, I was never so frightened again as I had been at first.

'When I was hit I remember being wheeled along on a stretcher — one of those flat things on a pair of wheels, rather like the barrows from which hawkers sell fruit. We seemed to go for miles down the Pozières-Bapaume road — a shell-swept road. I remember an injection of anti-tetanus serum, and the doctor marking a cross upon my forehead with indelible pencil. He told me about this; it was a sign that I had been inoculated, so that the next doctor wouldn't do it again. I remember thinking that was rather funny.

'Looking back now, after twenty-five years, I can only think of odd things that happened during these weeks — my cousin Lilia Howard who came out to see me, brought out by the Red Cross, because I was on the danger list, and who read to me for hours while I lay in the Casino at Le Touquet, which had been converted into a hospital.

'They cabled my parents in South Africa to tell them that I was dangerously ill. The danger was infection with the germs of meningitis or septicaemia. Once it was clear that I was not going to fall to either of these diseases my recovery was not in doubt. Medically I was a simple, straightforward case. I was not the subject of prolonged consultations and treatment, because there was nothing to consult about, nothing much to treat. The bullet had caused no serious harm to anything except my sight, and it had damaged that beyond repair. I was completely blind, but otherwise sound.

'I made the journey home in a hospital ship, across that fateful stretch of water: the English Channel, which six of us young subalterns from Sandhurst had crossed in the other direction only a few weeks before: the agent from Cox's

Bank, who came and spoke to me as I lay in my bunk on the hospital ship, and asked me if I would like to send a telegram and if I wanted some money. He sent the telegram and gave me a few shillings. I could not sign a cheque, but I promised to pay, and I did pay. (I have banked with Cox's now merged in Lloyd's ever since). The cheerful bustle of Victoria Station as people met the train and gave the wounded men chocolate and tea; the hush and the drawing aside of the cheerful crowd as they saw my stretcher lifted out, my face and head completely bandaged up. Then I was in an ambulance being driven through London in the early hours of the morning by a girl. Another girl sat in the back and held my hand.

'In England I initially spent about two weeks in St Mark's Chelsea, the 2nd London General Hospital, where most of the eye cases were concentrated, before they sent me out for convalescence. But I was more used to the idea that I might never see again, and much less doleful about my future now that I had heard the message of St Dunstan's. After convalescing in Dorset I went back to hospital. It was now well on to September 1916, and I had been blind since the 23rd of July, when a bullet had knocked me over and I had last seen the world.

Meeting Irene Mace.

'Pearson was continually in and out of the hospital, and usually he himself was the first to visit a new arrival. But I had come in August, when St Dunstan's was closed for the annual holiday and Pearson was away in Harrogate. So he wrote me a letter and sent it with his personal assistant and guide, a V.A.D. named Irene Mace (Chips). She also brought me a Braille watch. I held the watch in my hand and felt the face with my thumb. For the first time since I was wounded I was able to tell the time.

'The value of the watch to me exceeded its usefulness. That is itself was considerable, for you tend to want to know the time often when you are in permanent darkness, and have no means of distinguishing even night from day. Of course, in hospital one could always ask. But that was the whole point. With this watch I did not have to ask anyone. I would never have to ask again. I was able to do it myself — do something that had before always been a visual act. It was an extraordinary pleasure to find that it was just as easy to do with the hands as with the eyes. Perhaps there were other things.

Pearson's letter assured me there were. Miss Irene Mace had read it before. But as she read it then, as I heard Pearson's message of encouragement and cheer

— man to man, blind to blind — I was astonished that someone who had never met me could know so exactly how I felt. The letter caught my mood, and I felt a great surge of new life. Pearson was not entirely responsible for that. Three things began my recovery. The first was the watch he had sent, and the second was his message; and every newly blinded soldier received these. The third factor was personal, but so important that I cannot imagine how all the others recovered without it. She had the softest kid gloves I had ever felt. I fell in love with Irene Mace.

At Regent's Park

"I accepted the invitation, and in 1916 entered a new world. So I went to St Dunstan's and a marvellous change came over me. It was partly that I was getting stronger; partly the example and invigorating personality of Sir Arthur Pearson himself; partly the example of other officers and men who had preceded me, and had settled down to a regular routine.

"The blinded soldiers, sailors and airmen at our Regent's Park training centre were 18 or 19 years of age or in their early 20s when they were blinded. They were fresh from the fields of France and Flanders, the deserts of the Near East, or the blue waters. Everything their young lives held out before them seemed to have gone. A curtain seemed to have fallen and blotted out all the brightness of the future. St Dunstan's was a haven of rest after the battlefield. It stretched a helping hand out to the blinded soldier, sailor or airman in pain, in need, in success or failure, in all the trials and tribulations of the day to day life, St Dunstan's sustains him materially and the spirit of St Dunstan's sustains him. I can testify from personal experience."

"The thing I found difficult to believe was that the men at Regent's Park were all as blind as myself. I was meant to find that difficult. All newcomers were — it was part of the treatment. It stopped me from saying or even thinking it was too difficult when I began learning myself."

Ian Fraser celebrated the second anniversary of his injury when he married Irene Mace. It was the beginning of a great and lasting happiness. In 1920 their only child, Jean, was born. In 1917 he started work as Sir Arthur's assistant and he established the After Care Department. By 1921 he had become his second-in-command, and when Sir Arthur died at the end of that year he became Chairman. He became an MP, a Governor of the BBC and a leading advocate for the wireless and talking books and newspapers.

100 Years of Sport.

Rowing on the lake.

Sport has always played an important part in the life of our charity. The First World War veterans took part in an exciting range of sport and today that remains unchanged — whether in your 20s or your 90s.

As the First World War veterans walked to the lake at Regent's Park, which adjoined the grounds, they would have heard the splash of oars as blinded men rowed on the lake. It was a piece of extraordinarily good luck that there was a lake right on their doorstep. All a man needed was a cox, and there was never any difficulty about that as friendly VADs came from all over London, and especially from Bedford College, and there were often 50 boats on the lake by 6.30pm.

One of the pleasures of rowing was that it reversed the usual order of things as the men were taking somebody about, instead of being taken. Perhaps that was why there was no great enthusiasm for male coxes, in spite of their expert knowledge and advice on such technicalities as feathering, most men preferred a female cox.



Picture: Captain Ian Fraser rowing on the lake at Regent's Park as Irene Mace (Chips) coxes.

Tug of war.

Captain Ian Fraser wrote: 'Tug of war of course presents no difficulties, and because it involves teams and team work, coaching and practice, and sweating and contest, it is an admirable sport. Healthy rivalry between individuals to make a record, competition between various teams representing the Hospital or the Training Centre or the men in a certain department, the exercise, the fresh air, the companionship — all these are part of the life here, and a most important part of the art of learning to be blind.'



Picture: Sgt John McAulay VC, Athletic Sports coach at St Dunstan's 1918.

Tandem bicycles

Riding tandem bicycles was another popular exercise. At first there were only two or three, so they were greatly in demand.

Sports Day.

At the Sport Days the men could take part in any number of activities. There was putting the weight and throwing the cricket ball. They also devised their own hop, skip and jump, to take the place of long jump and high jump. There was goal kicking — a pair of goal posts, a sighted goalkeeper who clapped his hands to indicate the direction of the middle of the goal. A number of goalkeepers from leading football clubs came to Regent's Park. And there was the blind man kicks; sack races, egg and spoon, wheel barrow races, and a number of other races which involved pairs of people.



Picture above: 1968 —Shooting by sound at the Brighton centre. Cmdr Fawcett left and Jock Carnochan centre. **Picture right:** Success at the London Triathlon for Brighton Sports & Rec Instructor Russell Scullion, Steve Parnell, Brighton Sports & Rec Manager Steve Mills, David Cranson and Bob Hind Sports & Rec volunteer at the Llandudno centre.

Sport has remained important. Walk into the gym at the Brighton or Llandudno centres and you will find veterans in their 90s exercising alongside members in their 20s. For gentler workouts the instructors have provided advice on strengthening exercises that can be done at home to enable walking to the shops or getting out of a chair. At all three centres there are the themed and activities weeks that range from skiing, tandem cycling, rock climbing, mountain trekking, white water rafting, canoeing and gliding on the longest zip wire in the northern hemisphere, to the more sedate: walking, photography, potting-and-planting and recreation taster week. If you want to do a 10K run, a marathon or a triathlon, the Sports & Rec Instructors are there to advise you and they have a great success rate.



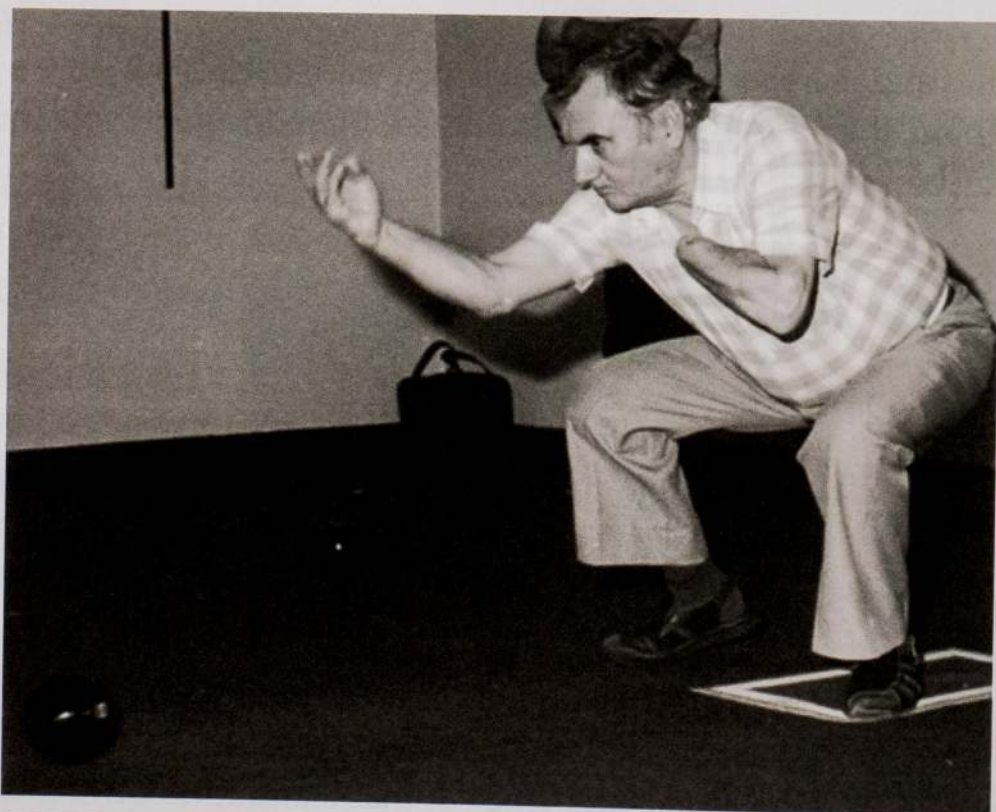
Picture left: Dewi Roberts and Steve Shepherd in the Great South Run. **Above:** Paula Sartain leads a recreation taster week at that Llandudno centre.

There are of course the clubs that provide sporting and social activity. The Bowls Club and Brighton Club are run by Joan Osborne and Blind Veterans UK Bowmen, formerly St Dunstan's was established in 1977 and continues to thrive under the direction of David Poyner. There is the Amateur Radio Club, The Computer Club, the Shooting Club, the Writers' Forum and The Ski Club.



Picture: Norman Perry takes aim during Archery Week at the Brighton centre.

On the retirement of Lawrie Austin, who set up archery at our charity, Norman Perry wrote in the November 1991 Review. 'As long as there is a St Dunstaner on the shooting line you will not be forgotten.'



Picture: Bob Osborne bowling.

Gerry Jones, a former helicopter pilot and Captain in the Royal Corps of Transport, who joined Blind Veterans UK in 1973, speaks of the importance of the Ski Club and their annual ski trip. "I joined my first ski trip in 1979 and that was organised by Ray Hazan. He used ski guides from his former Regiment, The Royal Anglians, to show us the ropes as they were at their Snow Queen hut in Bavaria. It was a turning point in my life. I was working by this time and using the tricks I had been taught by Jock Carnochan in my mobility, but like most, I had got into a day to day humdrum way of life. On this trip I met some memorable people. From memory they were Ray Sheriff, Tiny Pointon, David Clark, Alan Wortley, Jack Fulling, and of course Ray himself.

"I don't think that I have ever laughed so much in one week before. Needless to say that on my return my mobility improved, due mainly to the confidence I had acquired during that week. What hazards could there possibly be in a busy city main street that could possibly be compared to an icy Bavarian slope with barbed wire to mark the fringes? During that week I had passed under, over and through the latter, no Health and Safety in those days!

"Ray then organised each year's ski trip, visiting resorts in Austria, France and Switzerland. Gradually I took over the organising from Ray, although he was always there to call upon, inspire and work miracles with his European contacts. Many years ago we started skiing in Canazei in Italy and each year when we return in January we are welcomed as family. A couple of years ago I handed the reins over to Mark Brewin, Carl Williams and Jamie Weller which means I can enjoy the week without all the worry as they do a great job!"



Picture: Gerry Jones, right, with his skiing guide Martin Blank.

100 years of volunteers.

Before the war of 1914 a girl belonging to the genteel middle class was normally very severely protected. It was not considered nice for her to go out alone — her mother or a maid would go with her.

The First World War was a defining moment in women's history. As thousands of men headed off to war, women replaced them at work as bus conductors, factory workers, farm labourers — roles previously thought beyond their strength. Women wore trousers, earned their own wages and eventually gained the vote, but above all they learned what they were capable of.

Women became a vital part of the workforce and they shook off their subordinate roles and started to sample the freedom and financial independence normally open to men at the time. Between 1914 and 1918 approximately 1.6 million women joined the workforce. Women left poorly paid jobs in service and increasingly substituted for men working in business, as land workers, and in the hazardous munitions factories.

They joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment in absolute droves and nursed the men in this country and overseas, sometimes right at the front line. VADs were mostly from well to do families as the work was voluntary and therefore unpaid and they needed to be able to support themselves financially.

Hundreds of young women from good families became VADs at our Regent's Park training centre and they would have witnessed at first hand the devastating effects of war as they nursed the men back to good health.

Each house had its Matron, Adjutant and its staff of VADs. Above all, they devoted themselves to see that the men were contented and happy.

VADs would sit and read to the men, they would go for walks, to the theatre and they would act as the lady coxswain as the men rowed on Regent's Park lake.

The newspapers would be read in the lounge each day at 9am and just before that a VAD would appear in the lounge with the letters for the men. There were a certain number of men who spent no time on letter writing and expected nothing when the morning post arrived. But there were others who were always anxious; delighted when their names were called, distressed and even a little distrustful of the distributing VAD if for them nothing came.

Once the letters were distributed there would be a cry of "Sister!" as the VADs were addressed and the VADs hastened to the men to read their letters — not omitting the xxs (kisses) at the end. Quite frequently the VADs would find themselves embarrassed by the private nature of the letter, but the soldier was stoic and thought of the VAD as only a mouthpiece.

Every Friday there would be a dance. Gaily the men and VADs would whirl round the room, waltzing or foxtrotting, while the band played "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag." And troubles were indeed packed away, and with increasing skill they avoided collisions and treading on one another's feet.



Picture: The men and VADs dancing in Regent's Park.



Other volunteers at Regent's Park included the members of the Guards and Police who would take part in the race walks with the First World War men.

Volunteers remain at the heart of our work. For many years volunteers have made such events as HMS Daedalus and now HMS Sultan possible. And each year an army of volunteers give up their time to act as escorts at the Cenotaph over Remembrance weekend. There are the ski guides, the callers at the Bowling Club, and the spotters for the Archery team, to name just a few. And there are the volunteers at our centres and those who help our members at home or in their community.

And for the Review, the most important volunteer is of course David Castleton. David worked for Blind Veterans UK for 33 years when he was editor of the Review and in charge of PR. He has volunteered to read the Review for the last 22 years. He is the author of *In the Mind's Eye: The Blinded Veterans of St Dunstan's*.



Pictures: VADs and the First World War men at our training centre in London's Regent's Park.



Picture: David Castleton reads the Talking Review.

Church Stretton: Our Second World War home.

More than a year before the start of the Second World War, Sir Ian Fraser planned with the Ministry of Pensions St Dunstan's function in the new war. We were appointed by the Ministry to be their official agents for the re-education, training, settlement, and after-care of soldiers, sailors and airmen who might be blinded.

The first nine months of the war were spent at our Brighton centre, and that is where the first casualties came to as they were treated in the hospital and remained for training at the centre. Casualties came from all the actions where our troops were engaged in on the continent, and those who were blinded by accident as they served at home. Some of those first casualties were from the Scottish Division, the one that remained in France and was cut off at Dunkirk. A Private of the Black Watch was blinded by fragmentation from a hand grenade when holding the line on the Franco-Belgian frontier. He was a coal miner in a Scottish pit and was one of the first Militiamen to go to France.

In early August it was recognised that the Germans on the French coast brought the enemy within 80 miles of our hospital and centre in Brighton. It soon became apparent that the area was vulnerable and it would not be possible to remain in Brighton for the long and painful re-education of the young war blinded people. The area changed as troops came into hotels and buildings; barbed wire and other defences began to appear along the sea coast; guns began to take up their places, and many peaceful seaside resorts became part of the fortress line of England, guarding the Channel.

Sir Ian and Lady Fraser, with William G Askew, St Dunstan's Secretary, toured the country seeking a suitable location.

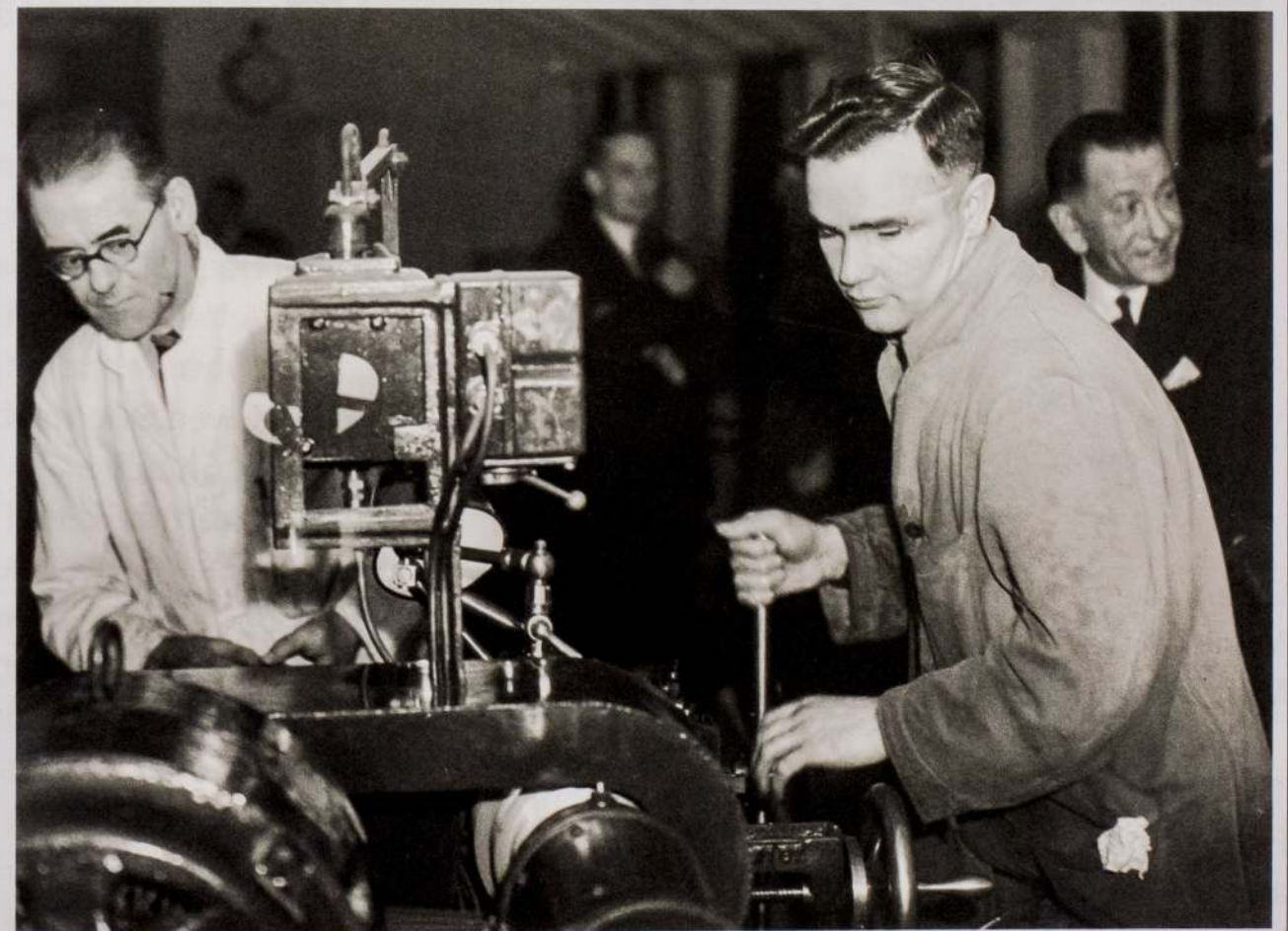
In 1940, when we should have been celebrating our 25th anniversary, we moved from the Brighton centre to the market town of Church Stretton where the next generation of men — and women — entered our charity. Set in the Shropshire Hills, Church Stretton was felt to be the perfect location for them to regain their peace of mind, of which the enemy had robbed them. We took over a big hotel, the Longmynd, with buildings that became our hospital and training centres.

Our centre in Brighton was taken over by the Admiralty for a training school and our veterans from the First World War went to a hotel in Blackpool and a country house in Dorset which became convalescent homes.

The hospital was manned by a leading West End Surgeon and nurses from one of the top eye hospitals. The staff comprised long standing members of our staff, who had experience of the First World War and young women who had been trained as VADs for the latest war, who manned the Training Centre. The older members of staff brought experience and knowledge of how the blind should be cared for, and the methods of training them.

Work progressed as it had at Regent's Park with the men and women learning how to be blind as they were taught to see with their fingertips and learnt a trade. They put on plays and the band became a great hit.

The first man to leave Church Stretton to return to work was a 20 year old man who retrained as a telephone operator.



Picture: Church Stretton Training Machinery Department.

The ladies of Church Stretton.



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

Gwen Obern, who is pictured above, was blinded during her work in a Munitions Factory. The following is taken from David Castleton's book *In the Mind's Eye: The Blinded Veterans of St Dunstan's* (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. The majority entered Church Stretton, but some

joined later as a result of service during the war. Eleven served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, two in the Women's Royal Naval Service and three in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Seven were nurses and others served in Civil Defence 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, who paid tribute to Blodwyn Simon. Gwen said that when she went 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 handless.

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. Vi sent me a letter 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 Sleight. 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 Obern and Countess Mountbatten.

Flying glass brought another member of the ATS to Church Stretton. Barbara Bell was a Sergeant serving in a mixed anti-aircraft battery. In December 1942 she was in a train that was attacked from the air.

"I was going on a course on the height finder for anti-aircraft guns when the one track little train was bombed outside Guildford at a place called Bramley [in Surrey]. Unfortunately we didn't know there was an alert in progress and when I heard this rattling on the roof I promptly had a look out to see why it was hailing out of a blue sky. Of course, it was machine gun fire and then he dropped a stick of bombs across the train. That was it — facing the window. If we had known, I would have been on the floor and perfectly OK."

Like Beryl Sleigh, the fragments of glass so damaged both Barbara's eyes that she was blinded. At Church Stretton Barbara soon made up her mind that her future occupation should be physiotherapy. This meant leaving Church Stretton after initial training, to study in London at the Royal National Institute for the Blind's Physiotherapy School. When she qualified Barbara practised in Ilkley, West Yorkshire.

The youngest girl, indeed the youngest person, to come to Church Stretton was only five years old. She was Sylvia Lawson. Of Sylvia and her family Ian Fraser wrote: 'To me nothing could equal the tragedy of the Lawsons. I had never seen such human misery'. In September 1940 the Luftwaffe attacked the British Aluminium rolling mills in Warrington. Bombs intended for that target were instead dropped on the neighbouring Thames Board Mills, where a tea party and social was taking place. Sixty three people were killed and 43 injured. John Lawson, a member of the Home Guard and an employee of Thames Board Mills, had taken his wife, Mary and their daughters, Sylvia and Anne, aged 18 months, to the party. Anne was killed; John, Mary and Sylvia were blinded.

All three came to Church Stretton. John came because, as a member of the Home Guard, he was qualified to become a St Dunstaner, Mary and Sylvia accompanied him because it would have been cruel to separate the shocked family. John went through the normal training. He became a telephonist and went back to Warrington with Mary to work once more for Thames Board Mills. Mary trained with other lady St Dunstaners, concentrating on cookery and other domestic skill.

Zofia Bregula's experience of war began when she was a 19 year old drama student in Warsaw. Working with other young women for the Red Cross, she was fortunate to survive the devastating German air attacks on the capital unscathed. During the occupation the Germans forbade any higher education for the Polish population. All forms of Polish arts — music, literature and theatre — were banned. An underground education system developed, with students being taught secretly in the homes of their professors. Polish musicians, actors and actresses, Zofia among them, gave concerts and recitals in secret venues behind closed doors and drawn curtains.

Zofia graduated in 1944, but she remained in Warsaw and was part of the underground movement. In August of that year the Russian forces were nearing Warsaw and the Polish resistance was urged from London and by the Russians to begin an uprising in the city, which was still occupied by the Germans. It was expected that within a week the Russians would cross the River Vistula and relieve the fighters. They did not come. Abandoned by the Russians, the young Polish patriots were besieged in Warsaw. Zofia was acting as a runner between positions: "We had many wounded boys. Two of them were badly wounded so we were taking them to hospital." This was located in cellars beneath a bank. "I went there and for two days I was bringing water. It was difficult with all the pipes destroyed. I was running and all the street was burning. I went every other day to the other building we were defending to bring them something to eat."

Zofia was in the cellar hospital when it was hit by German shells: "I heard such a terrible noise. When I awoke I was lying on the floor and my first thought was 'my eyes, my eyes'. I wanted to get up but I couldn't." All the Polish wounded, including women and girls, were taken prisoner by the Germans. "They took me on a stretcher. They were gathering the wounded in one place and they put us in cattle trucks." The women prisoners were finally placed in a camp called Oberlagen, near the Dutch border. The treatment Zofia received during this time failed to save her sight. When the camp was liberated by Polish soldiers, she and other wounded women were brought to hospital in Edinburgh. While she was undergoing treatment for her eyes and other injuries Zofia met the man who would become her husband; a young Polish violinist named Wlodek. The surgeons restored some partial vision. As she was no longer completely blind she refused the offer of training at St Dunstan's. On Wlodek's advice she accepted a second offer and in September 1946 she joined the St Dunstaners

who had only recently returned to the Brighton centre from Church Stretton. "There I learned to be independent as much as it was possible in my situation and the belief in my future life."

At the Brighton centre she met Esmond Knight who, although he had been blinded in naval action with the Bismarck, had managed a successful return to his pre-war career as an actor. He and the St Dunstan's authorities encouraged her to continue her studies at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. "Esmond came to Ovingdean and we had a long, serious and absolutely honest talk about my future in the theatre in England." Esmond's advice that, as a nearly blind actress with a foreign accent she would face difficulties without a patron, confirmed her decision to return to her homeland. She lived in Katowice and had a successful career in the theatre and broadcasting.

David Castleton's book is available online and from all good bookshops.



Picture: The ladies of Church Stretton

Our WWII School in a POW Camp.

One person who should not be overlooked in the story of our centenary is Lord Normanby, who set up a Braille School in a POW camp. The late Tom Hart who was blinded in France while serving with the Rifles spoke to David Castleton during our 75th anniversary year in the May 1990 Review about his time as a POW when he was taught Braille by Lord Normanby at Stalag IXC, and his arrival at Church Stretton. We have reproduced an extract from that interview.

Tom Hart said: "In May 1942 I travelled over to Klosta Heina where Lord Normanby and the Braille school had moved to. Lord Normanby, who had been wounded in the leg, had taken an interest in half a dozen blinded prisoners including Duggie Parmenter, Jimmy Shepherd and Freddie Wareham. He had found the Braille alphabet in an old dictionary and he had started to teach them by pushing matchsticks through pieces of paper. It became nothing less than a branch of St Dunstan's in a German prison camp. Lord Normanby assumed the role of headmaster and we also had Major Charters, who was the ophthalmic surgeon from Liverpool Eye Hospital who had been captured in Greece. He had been sent to the camp and bit by bit they were getting all the eye cases in from different areas. We were assessed by Major Charters to be put in the St Dunstan's category. Lord Normanby organised it like a school. You had terms and you had holidays. We didn't go anywhere but we had term holidays. He advertised and got different people in to help him. We had a camp magazine, a camp paper that used to go out. He got a chap called Mountcastle from London to teach typing — another prisoner, they were all prisoners, and an Australian, Alan Williams, who taught us book keeping and economics. We had Brown, a New Zealander, who taught music and Lord Normanby as head of the school.

"The school had the cooperation of the Germans not just in collecting blinded prisoners together but in providing facilities. They gave us a room and they adapted several typewriter machines into the English method and they also allocated a German blinded officer who was sent to us through the Red Cross to help to teach us Braille, Captain Adolf. He'd been blinded in the First World War and he was a lecturer at Heidelberg.

"Eventually through the Swedish Red Cross we started getting paper, magazines, journals and equipment from St Dunstan's and we had a pukka

school fitted out — Braille books, typewriters, Braille writers. Lord Normanby formulated a curriculum we had to follow. We used to have end of term examinations.

“It was marvellous, really, because after a while with the typewriter you were able to do your own letters home and you could also write Braille letters.”

In September 1943 they were repatriated to the UK to Church Stretton.

“When our ship arrived in Liverpool it had been on the radio that we were due there and as we came up the Mersey, there was a convoy going out and they said that all the ships were keeled over because all the troops were on one side giving us a cheer. All the boats and the ferries were sounding their hooters. Actually the St Dunstaners didn't go on deck, we stayed down below and had lunch while everybody else was up on deck getting their first view of England.

“When we got into Liverpool, Sir Ian and Lady Fraser and all those people were there to meet us. Lord Normanby was with us and that was the end of the school. I think that Matron Paine, who was in charge of Church Stretton, was very worried because she didn't know what standard of Braille had been taught by somebody who had never known Braille before. After we had been a few days at Church Stretton we proved that our Braille had reached a high standard and I think she approved of Lord Normanby's course.

“We went to a military hospital at Chester, we were only there for two or three days just having medicals. We went on to Church Stretton by coach, about 22 of us. We arrived at Church Stretton, where we were escorted into the village by a military band. All the flags were out and also the villagers. On the coach one or two of the boys were in tears, I think it was the first time emotion had come out. We felt we were back home. The crowd really welcomed us home.

“St Dunstan's had got a tea party arranged and all the girls, like Gwennie [Obern] and Brenda, were outside Belmont waving little flags as we went past on the hill to the Longmynd Hotel. I met Padre Nugee then, he was about the first person I met because he had been with the Rifle Brigade and Tony Naumann, he was KRR. Then, of course, all the staff came round, interviewing, sending telegrams home, wanting us to meet people and later that same night I met Mabs who later became my wife. Lord Normanby came over with us and

stayed with us overnight and then it was a sad farewell.

“He had done so much in helping everybody to get back on their feet and saved us from a couple of years of just useless waste of time. Otherwise we could have just been sitting around at camp.

“You wondered what the future was and the other thing you worried about was how your friends and people would react to you. I'd had quite a bit of my bone knocked around. Psychologically you feel a bit upset and wonder what are they going to think? How are they going to feel about you now and when they first meet you what are they going to say? This all went through your mind. The school helped you to overcome that in a way, not from the physical point of view but from a mental point of view. You were able to say 'Well, so what?'"



Picture: 'There really might have been a Coronation', wrote the Express and Star reporter to describe the scene as the returning prisoners arrived at Church Stretton. Copyright: Express and Star.

Project Gemini. 100 years of a transatlantic alliance.

When President Obama visited the UK in May 2011, he signed an agreement with Prime Minister David Cameron to create a Task Force for the UK and USA to share best practice in supporting veterans, service personnel and their families.

That same week Blind Veterans UK established its own transatlantic taskforce, Project Gemini, a partnership with our sister organisation based in the US, the Blinded Veterans Association (BVA). Through peer support the British and American veterans meet to share knowledge, insights and friendship. It gives veterans who have recently lost their sight the opportunity to meet and take part in activities with men and women who have led happy and prosperous lives, despite their blindness, and who can serve as role models and mentors.

The Project Gemini transatlantic peer support programme began in May 2011 when members and representatives from the Blinded Veterans Association of America (BVA) came to visit us at our Brighton centre. They enjoyed six days of educational exchange and the sharing of friendship, knowledge and insights with their British comrades. An annual exchange has taken place each year since when they visit our Brighton centre and representatives of our charity visit the BVA in America during August to take part in their National Convention.

Project Gemini was the brain child of Colin Williamson, the Review's Contributing Editor, Louise Timms, Sports & Recreation Manager at the Brighton centre, Simon Brown who was blinded in Iraq and is now the Membership Officer and our President Ray Hazan OBE. Before Project Gemini both Simon Brown and Ray Hazan were honorary members of the BVA as they had been invited to take part in the Operation Peer support programme in America, the BVA's scheme to assist, inspire and encourage the young, new recruits who had been injured predominantly in Afghanistan.

Unlike the UK, the BVA is an organisation 'of' the blind ex-Service rather than 'for'. They do not have their own training or rehabilitation centres and their members go through the civilian network. They have over 11,000 members of whom 70% are non war blind.

Each year a high ranking official travels to England with Project Gemini. The first

year we were joined by Major Johnson, the Executive Officer of the Department of Defence/Department of Veterans Affairs Vision Centre of Excellence in Washington.

Project Gemini also now includes veterans from St Dunstan's South Africa.



Picture: Members of Blind Veterans UK and the Blinded Veterans Association during the first Project Gemini in 2011 at the House of Commons.

Speaking of the peer support programme Dr Tom Zampieri, former Director Government Relations, Blinded Veterans Association, said: "Project Gemini has accomplished improving communications between our Pentagon, Department of Veterans Affairs, vision research organisations, professional organisations, and military eye care specialists here and in the UK. In a very short time we have brought together eye trauma military specialists, vision researchers, and rehabilitation staff and senior leaders to improve care and coordination of services, which is an outstanding accomplishment. Project Gemini and the BVA Operation Peer Support Programme that occurs during our national convention each August will continue to be a great shining example of two veteran organisations being able to assist our membership and future veterans and raise the levels of awareness about what we are doing with this effort."

The first transatlantic alliance was established by Sir Arthur Pearson during the First World War. An early edition of the Review reported that he left England in December 1918 and travelled to Canada and the United States to visit soldiers who had been blinded in the war.

The Review's Editor of the time reported: 'We would like him [Sir Arthur] to take a message from us to the American soldiers who have been blinded fighting shoulder to shoulder with us and our French Allies — a message of hope and

good cheer. May they realise, as we have done, how much there is left for them to do, and how much there is for them to enjoy, and may their victory over blindness be as great and as lasting as the victory our united efforts have achieved.

'We are proud to feel that the people of America have adopted so many of our ideas in the matter of training and after care of blinded soldiers, and feel sure that the hints and tips that Sir Arthur will be able to give them will be of immense service. We look forward to the story he has promised us for the next REVIEW, of his experiences during the trip, and of the description he will no doubt give us of the beautiful estate and country mansion of Evergreen, Baltimore, which has been prepared to accommodate American blinded men.

'The American Federal Board of Vocational Education announced that according to the information furnished by Major Shoemaker, who was in charge of the eye departments of all the American hospitals in England, there were not more than 110 American soldiers who lost their eyesight as a the result of service abroad.'

During the Second World War Sir Ian Fraser opened Church Stretton to American personnel who had been blinded. The following is taken from an article by Roberta Hazan.

'Over the next few years, 17 US Servicemen were transferred to our care at Church Stretton, the majority in the wake of the European invasion. Robert Robinson of Daytona Beach, Florida was one of those men. During a visit to the Brighton centre in 1994 he recalled those days.

'Robert was a 19 year old Sergeant with the 330th Infantry United States Army when he arrived in Newcastle under Lyme in April 1944. "We set out from Southampton to France on D-Day+12," he said. "We were aware that something big was going on, it was 'the invasion'. There was a lot of fear, we were young and there was death and destruction all about — not just people, many of whom had not been buried, but also ships that had been sunk or deliberately scuttled.

"I was blinded on August 6th 1944, in St Malo. I think it was an artillery explosion. I was flown out of a field hospital to the US 68th Army Hospital in England. An American Red Cross lady, Claire Sweeny from Washington, came to see me with a US ophthalmologist, Charles King from Memphis, Tennessee. As a result, the three of us rode in a box like Red Cross ambulance to Aylesbury."

Robert spent the next few weeks at Stoke Mandeville, near Aylesbury where we had set up a hospital unit for eye casualties and his stay there was a brief prelude to moving to Church Stretton.

"Miss MacAndrews taught history using tactile objects to illustrate things like the Domesday Book. There was a Dr Sobenheim, a German who had been a judge before he left as a refugee before the war, who taught history and law. Many of the people who were at Church Stretton have passed on but I remember Tommy Nicols, Joe Humphrey, Paddy O'Brien and Bill Morris.

"There were five or six other Americans, Buford Nanney from Mississippi who went into the used car business, and we had a meeting in his Cadillac the last time we met. Johnny Wells from Wisconsin, who I have not seen since, but I do keep in touch with a couple of VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachment) girls.

"While I was at Church Stretton a group of US military physicians, med corps people, came to see what was being done at St Dunstan's to care for blind servicemen. During and immediately after World War Two care of severely injured servicemen in America was done by the respective services, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force all had a mobility wing set aside in their hospitals. There was nothing specifically in place for blind servicemen. A centre had been set up after World War One, Evergreen, but it was disbanded."

'Robert returned to the USA on VJ Day. "I was glad to be home." After studying Social Work in New Orleans, he went on to work for the American Federation for the Blind, a research and pressure group and became their Director of Statistical Research. He and his wife, Nancy, have two children, one a teacher, the other a lawyer.'



Picture: Back row fifth from left Sergeant Robert Robertson.



Picture: Little Ruby with an early blind veteran.

Little Ruby and Pauline Haycock.

"I was never indoors. Nobody took any notice of me, I just used to wander round and Mother never knew where to find me, I was always missing. I used to go up to them [the blinded soldiers] and chat to them and we'd walk round just holding hands and walk along together. I used to ask them "Where do you want to go?" If they wanted to go to a certain workshop, I knew them all off by heart and where to find everything and I just used to paddle along with them. Some of the Australian chaps were quite tall, well built men and I always remember how my little hand seemed so small in their big hands.

"They were so pleased to have a child come and talk to them. It was something different away from the monotonous grind of not being able to see things, I think. Sir Arthur Pearson always used to like me to go in and see him because, I suppose, I was the only child around, there were no other children on the estate at all. My two sisters were eight and 10 years older than me."

Those were the words that Ruby Crane (nee Smith), the three year old daughter of William Smith, the head gardener at St Dunstan's Lodge, used when she spoke with David Castleton in an interview to celebrate our 75th anniversary.

Ruby only died a few years ago but she always remembered her time with the First World War blinded men of our charity. Her niece Julia Hunt and Julia's daughter Alison still support our charity.

Ruby was so popular that she featured on the front page of our first Annual Report for 1915/1916 and later Flag Day emblems incorporated a similar design that featured Little Ruby.

"Once a week I would take a bunch of roses in to Sir Arthur. Roses were his favourite flower and he could smell them, although of course he couldn't see them, and he always had to have a bunch once a week. He was a charming man. In his drawing room there was an open fireplace with a guard round and the top was made like a seat. On the mantelpiece he had three ebony elephants, they were not all that large and they fascinated me. I used to love going in there if only to see the elephants."

Pauline Haycock who was born in Church Stretton, recalls the days as a five year old girl during the Second World War when the St Dunstaners would drink in her parents' pub, The Plough. Again this is taken from an interview by David Castleton that featured in the June 1990 75th Anniversary edition of the Review.

"I was born at The Plough and was just five years old when the St Dunstaners first arrived. We used to be packed out with them. We had a piano and they used to like to sing."

Living at The Plough, Pauline and her brother, Glynn, saw more of St Dunstaners than most children in Church Stretton. "Glynn is seven years older than me and we used to have them coming in. They would want, perhaps, something to eat and we used to have to buckle to and try and help, taking things to them — fetching and carrying. My brother also used to sit and read for Danny Pretorius because he was taking his exams for physiotherapy. Danny was from South Africa — we were told his grandfather had founded Pretoria. Glynn used to ask him exam questions and that was quite something that he was able to do.

"From the Longmynd a wire was put across the field so the boys could be independent and one of my jobs was showing them how to use it. I used to take them and put them on the wire and if they were new boys I would have to show them the way up the wire. Lunchtimes they used to wait until I had to go back to school and I would take them. They were going from their workshops which were in the town centre where the fire station is now. They would call in for their lunchtime drink and then when I was ready to go back after my lunch I would take two or three, put them on the wire and they would find their own way back to the Longmynd from there or Tiger Hall whichever they were at.

"On Sunday mornings Glynn and I would go for walks with two boys each. You had to be more careful because, having two or three, paths were narrow, roads weren't as they are now.

"They used to go down through the woods to Ashes Valley and have a cup of tea at Mrs Morris's. Also they liked to walk up Carding Mill Valley, or through the fields of All Stretton. One of their favourites was to the Miss Jones's Chelmik Pooles on an afternoon for tea."

The men enjoyed the company of their youthful guide, just as their predecessors had welcomed Little Ruby at Regent's Park, a generation before.

"I think in a lot of cases they'd left their children and gone to war and they were quite happy to have a little girl that they could make a fuss of. Today I don't think it would be the thing to go and sit on somebody's knee but I did with Paddy Campbell and Peter — I can't remember his name, he was a Scottish lad — they were very early ones in Church Stretton, when I was small. They used to talk to me and sing."

On her side, Pauline accepted her friends' blindness: "I think it was more tragic to see them without a limb. To know that they couldn't see you was a bit worrying but they could talk to you and do things. When they hadn't an arm or leg it was very hard to accept that. Once somebody came in to the pub from the station with one of the St Dunstaners. He went to the toilet and left the young man and two halves of mild on the counter. My mother thought he would be surely dying of thirst so she got hold of his hand to put to the glass and discovered that he had no hands. She came in and was quite upset."

The men helped their hosts to understand disability through their enthusiastic participation in the life of the town and the contributions they made themselves. "My father had a special set of dominoes with Braille so he could have the boys play in the Church Stretton League. Darts were played with a piece of string from the bullseye held in the left hand. Crib was another game my father would play with them."



Picture: Dickie Brett who was at Church Stretton. plays darts.

Tembani: To hope and go on hoping.

Lord Normanby's school at Kloster Haina was not our only overseas branch during the Second World War.

Early in 1941 an arrangement was made between the British and South African governments that casualties from the Near and Middle East should be sent to military hospitals in South Africa. Casualties would almost certainly include men who had been blinded in action. The Committee of the St Dunstan's After Care Fund for South African Blinded Soldiers was chaired by Brigadier General WEC Tanner. He arranged with the Imperial Forces for any blinded casualties to be sent to the Military Hospital at Wynberg, Cape Town.

The responsibility to set up a training centre was given to Ellen Chadwick Bates, who had gone to South Africa in 1930 to take over the organisation of our work there from the Vintcents, who were retiring. She was given the responsibility to set up a training centre near the Military Hospital in Wynberg. The centre was to provide initial rehabilitation and training, as well as recuperation in a peaceful environment for St Dunstaners before their journey back to England and to Church Stretton.

In time honoured fashion in October 1941 Norman Kennedy, the proprietor of a building contracting firm offered the use of his large house — Tembani — that stood in three acres of grounds situated on Hen and Chicken Hill. A building was erected on the tennis courts that housed two wards, a sick ward, a dispensary and four classrooms and workshops. Tembani was officially opened on 18th February 1942.

One of the first to come to Tembani, which means 'to hope and go on hoping', was Max Ash who had been totally blinded in an accidental explosion of a detonator at Suez. By August 1942, 12 men were in training. Two First World War South Africans who had been admitted for short courses had completed their training and been discharged.

Tembani was a home from home and in our great tradition a band was established by Jimmy Ellis who played the trumpet. Dr William Pickerill, leader of the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra taught the band and they would

regularly play for visitors from Cape Town that they invited to Tembani to thank them for their hospitality. One notable family who invited the men to their home for dinner or to events in Cape Town were the Greek Royal family, who had found refuge there. Princess Eugenie even became a VAD at Tembani and she was recognised for her hearty laugh.

It was Tembani that Norman Perry, a resident at the Brighton centre, went to in 1942.

By the beginning of 1943 there was pressure for repatriation from our headquarters in London. With most military action taking place in the Middle East, South Africa was receiving the bulk of newly blinded men and there were places at Church Stretton, while Tembani was becoming full. In 1944, as berths in hospital ships became available the men of Tembani began to return.

Tembani closed its doors in September 1945 but our work in South Africa was not at an end as The St Dunstan's Association for South African War Blinded Veterans was set up and their work continues today.



Picture: Veterans and staff outside Tembani during a visit by dignitaries.

The Research Department.

During the Second World War, Ian Fraser was becoming disturbed by the number of casualties who were both blind and had lost or sustained injury to their hands. In his words he 'wanted a technical man, keen and ingenious and inventive, who could turn his hand to anything.'

That man was Peter Nye who founded the Research and Development Department in 1943. He was later joined by Norman French whose reputation was 'Never saying "it cannot be done".'

Captain Fraser knew that all engineers would be engaged in war work and went to the hospital in Roehampton to find a wounded man. He was taken to a bed where the patient, a Sergeant in the Royal and Mechanical Electrical Engineers, was surrounded by all kinds of articles needing repair that belonged to staff and other patients. Peter Nye was the patient. On his improvised work bench was a number of watches. "Are you a watch maker?" Captain Fraser asked. "No, but I'm getting on all right with them." It was the answer that secured him the job.



Picture: This photograph from 1966 shows an adapted chess set.



Picture: An adapted shaver.



Picture: Tommy Gaygan plays the trombone using gauntlets that have been designed for that purpose.



Picture: Bill Griffiths MBE shown using an adapted typewriter with an adapted telephone in the office of his haulage company.



Picture: Using adapted machinery a man who has lost his fingers is able to successfully return to work in industry.

Could it be magic? Our blind veteran magicians. By Rob Baker, Archivist.

Throughout our 100 year history we have always tried to help our members to achieve their aims in both work and play. However in the late 1940s a number of members developed new and unusual interests: they wanted to make things mysteriously appear and disappear, show that objects could defy the force of gravity, and hold conversations with dolls!

The main impetus for this development came in 1947 when the National Association of Magical Societies and the International Brotherhood of Magicians kindly held their National Day of Magic in our aid. Individual magic societies also sent us funds, and one of them, the Institute of Magicians, also offered to give our members free tuition.

Alf Wiltshire was one of those keenest to take up this offer. Alf had served in the First World War, came to us in 1927 and trained as a telephonist, then going on to a successful career in this occupation. However our records show that by autumn 1947 he was thinking of retiring from his job and becoming a serious magician. We provided him with funds to buy 'magician's articles'. Alf was personally tutored by Zomah, the President of the Institute of Magicians. Zomah, who had at one time been an architect called Alfred Giddings, sadly died only a few months later but he was clearly a considerable influence on Alf and other of our members.

Some members had previous experience in magic activities; another of the First World War veterans, Dannie McLoughlin, had conjured professionally and our Second World War base at Church Stretton had seen a wide variety of entertainment in music and revues involving dozens of members. Before long the numbers being trained once a week at our headquarters were sufficient to justify a St Dunstan's section of the Institute of Magicians being established. Several members of the Institute kindly helped with the training, including the late President's wife Madame Zomah (previously Adelaide Giddings) and Oscar Oswald. Another interesting and by all accounts somewhat eccentric character, Oswald had previously been called Cuthbert Quantrill and worked as a jailer at Marylebone Police Court. He went on to open a shop, The Magical Mart, which is still in existence today.



Picture: Card tricks demonstrated by blind veterans who are also members of the Institute of Magicians.



Picture: Ventriloquist Horace Manning.

In June 1948 two of our members had succeeded in their training to a point where they took part in a public variety show at Benfleet, Essex. Oscar Oswald reported in the Review that 'Smudger' Smith and 'Welsh wizard' Rees Warren both 'gave an excellent performance'. Smith's tricks included one whereby two tumblers were placed on a book and then turned upside down, then adding in silk handkerchiefs which were withdrawn from the upside down glasses. Warren's included drawing handkerchiefs from an apparently empty box and a 'find the lady' card trick, and for these he 'won round after round of applause'.

By late 1948 the enthusiasm for magic had spread to perhaps unexpected quarters. Our then Chairman Ian Fraser, distinguished not only for his involvement with us but as an MP, former BBC Governor and President of the British Legion, mused in his column in the Review that 'Most of us, I feel sure, at some time in our life would like to have been magicians. I should still like to be a magician myself but at fifty-one perhaps I am too old to begin; I must be content to be a politician'.

Further performances by the magicians followed and in January 1950 there was a show for the press. Oscar Oswald acted as MC for the evening. Alf Wiltshire did a telepathy act which reportedly 'completely bewildered' a gentleman from the press who acted as his assistant, and other acts included Jock Brown making playing cards disappear and re-appear and Charles Luker's handkerchiefs, which would mysteriously tie themselves together and then untie themselves. Smudger Smith performed his trick with the tumblers and handkerchiefs. There was also ventriloquism, from Horace Manning and his doll; we had given him £5 to help towards its purchase.

Further public performances at our headquarters and at the Institute of Magicians followed over the next couple of years, and individual members also took their acts to fundraising events for the charity. However after this sadly interest waned and the St Dunstan's section of the Institute of Magicians merged into our London Club, which was a place for members to gather and socialise, and play games and sport. The Institute of Magicians itself came to an end in 1965, although attempts were made to revive it in the 1980s.



Picture: Jock Brown demonstrates a card trick.

The Paralympics and our influence on it. By Mike Tetley MBE.

The Paralympics of 2012 owe their existence to Dr Guttman of Stoke Manderville Hospital and, I believe, our charity. It's my understanding that two wonderful women, Mrs Avis Spurway and Miss Bridget Talbot, together with Bill Harris who worked with St Dunstan's, first put the idea into Guttman's head and he took it from there. He certainly started wheelchair races and games with those suffering from spinal cord injuries.

After the First World War there were some 3,000 men blinded who were very fit having just come out of the Armed Forces, but could not see, and unlike the civilian blind of the time they had been educated before they were blinded. As we know St Dunstan's in Regent's Park had facilities close at hand and the blinded men formed a rowing athletic, cycling and race walking clubs to go round the park.

It was wealthy women like Bridget Talbot who had a kind heart and stood up to authority to get her way to make these ideas a reality. During the Second World War many of the blinded men, together with those who had lost limbs, were hospitalised at Stoke Mandeville, the hospital for spinal cord injuries that was run by Dr Guttman. Mrs Spurway, who was married to a vicar, continued to organise sport for the blinded men at Stoke Mandeville and Guttman caught on to the idea.

Bill Harris who flew Sopworth Camels during the war and was President of the Race Walkers Club of Great Britain would come every month to start and referee the walking races, involving the police from Hendon who acted as our escorts.

In the early 1950s Mrs Spurway, for St Dunstan's and representatives from BLESMA met with Dr Guttman on a regular basis. In about 1954/55 a weekend of sport was organised at Stoke Mandeville and I was one of those from St Dunstan's. We were accommodated in huts in the hospital grounds. Soon after that Mrs Spurway managed to persuade Lord Fraser that it would be a good idea to have an international sports event for all the countries in Europe that rehabilitated blind ex-Servicemen and to allow the event to take place at our Brighton centre.

As it was just after the war and funds were tight only two men from each country could represent their country and they had to participate in every event. This included swimming, running for 60 yards, shot put, discus and shooting. I cannot remember which country won, but in the shooting I was the last to shoot and needed an eight to beat Austria, a nine to beat Germany and a bull to win — and I got my first bullseye.

In the early 1970s the first International Winter Sports For The Blind was held at Courcheval and St Dunstan's put in a team. None of us had skied before and the Austrians knocked spots off us as their representative had been a ski instructor for their army.

However a man came into our accommodation and said "Look chaps we are not represented in the curling events so how about going in for fun?" Two professional pianists, Bill Clayton and Bill Phillips and myself represented St Dunstan's and to our surprise we won the gold. I had never seen a curling iron and provided I threw it straight I did not have the strength to get it past the bull where it stayed. The pianists had very powerful fingers and could push the curling iron way past the target. When we had to stand on the dais to get our medal the snow was inches deep round the dais and we Brits stood just in our suits whilst the rest were dressed in thick padded jackets.

Some years later West Germany organised an international sports event for the war blinded in Berlin. This was the first time we had encountered tor or goll ball and the stipulation was that all members of the team must be totally blind. The referee soon discovered that all the teams except ours had members in their team who had some residual vision. He bought cloth goggles which we all had to wear to make certain that no-one could see. Of course we won every match easily as we were used to moving in the dark. I noted at the Paralympics that the tor ball teams were all instructed to wear goggles.

Even as late as 1969 there was opposition to blind folk climbing hills. In the year that Everest was first conquered three blind Africans from the Salvation School for the Blind in Kenya climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and following their success David Scott Blackhall, himself totally blind, the founder of the BBC's In Touch programme, invited any listener to join him and his sighted friend George Male on a climb up Ben Nevis. I joined the party with my guide dog and nine year old daughter, Lynne. He had some guides from the Mountain Rescue team and

informed the Chief Constable of Inverness of the proposed climb. He received a threatening letter from the Chief Constable to call off the fool hardy idea of taking blind folk to the top of the Ben. He stated that if anything went wrong criminal proceedings would be taken against David.

Needless to say nine of us climbed the Ben in July and it snowed. It was the day that Armstrong landed on the moon and David in his speech said "We have made one small step to show what blind folk can do." The BBC featured the climb on Radio 4.

Since then I have flown tandem to Kenya and ridden 500 miles in four days across Kenya — and you can move with an elephant just behind you. I have also climbed to Base Camp on Everest with one of the Policemen who guided me on the race walks.

As the years of austerity after the war faded and money became more plentiful Dr Guttman and others were able to start the Paralympics. I personally think that St Dunstan's and St Dunstaners made an enormous contribution to educating the public when they showed them that disabled folk are normal, but have to overcome additional constraints in their life.

Sixty one years ago when newly blinded in the Mau Mau uprising I shared a taxi from HQ with another St Dunstaner whom I had never met. I asked him his name. Back came the reply William Shakespeare. To which I replied "Pull the other leg."

It turned out that his name was really William Shakespeare. He was blinded when the engine of the small boat he was on failed somewhere off the west coast of Africa. They were wrecked on the rocks and he was trapped on his back for a week and the sun burned his eyes out.

I have never forgotten what he told me. "When you look back over your life in 50 years time you will have done things which now seem impossible." Fifty years ago just after the war St Dunstan's did not have money to spend on the present transport service and other benefits which they now offer as Blind Veterans UK and Lord Fraser said to me that St Dunstan's had taken me from the battlefield, retrained me as a physiotherapist and I would have to stand on my own feet.

This made me think laterally and William Shakespeare was right as looking forward 50 years ago from when I was first blinded I never thought I could hold down a job, get married and then as a widower be able to do the cooking, washing, ironing, go shopping by myself and still run my own physiotherapy practice.

Thanks to St Dunstan's training and supporting me in the first few years we live like kings compared with blind folk in most parts of the world.

I would like to end by thanking our great charity and its staff for everything that they have done over the last 100 years.



Picture: Mike Tetley MBE, centre.

Our Paralympians.

In 1976 Ray Peart and Tony Parkinson competed in the Paralympic Games, then known as the Olympiad for the Physically Disabled, in Toronto, Canada.

The blind team consisted of four women and eight men, including Ray and Tony who had qualified at Stoke Mandeville. Tony came fourth in the javelin, he was just 3cm short of the bronze medal with a distance of 26.23m. It was regarded as a record in the totally blind section. The blind Olympic record was 32.50m for a standing throw. In the shot put his distance was 7.50m, the record was 10.97m and in the discus 16.20m, the record was 20.27m.



Picture: Tony Parkinson diving at the Brighton centre.

Ray Peart competed in the Pentathlon, which comprised shot put, discus, standing long jump, 60m sprint, and 100m freestyle swimming. All had to be completed within 48 hours. Ray came first in the 100m freestyle with a time of 1 minute and 30.81 seconds.

"Since being blinded in 1973 Blind Veterans UK, formerly St Dunstan's, has given me my life back" said Ray. "Having received training and rehabilitation I was able to secure employment, to pursue my sporting interests, including horse riding and skiing, and to compete in the 1976 Olympics for the Disabled in Canada. With my wife Claire I have become Chairman of the Amateur Radio Club for Blind Veterans UK. It is a very special and incredible charity to belong to."



Picture: Ray Peart trains for the Pentathlon throwing the javelin at the Brighton centre.

Our Record Holders.

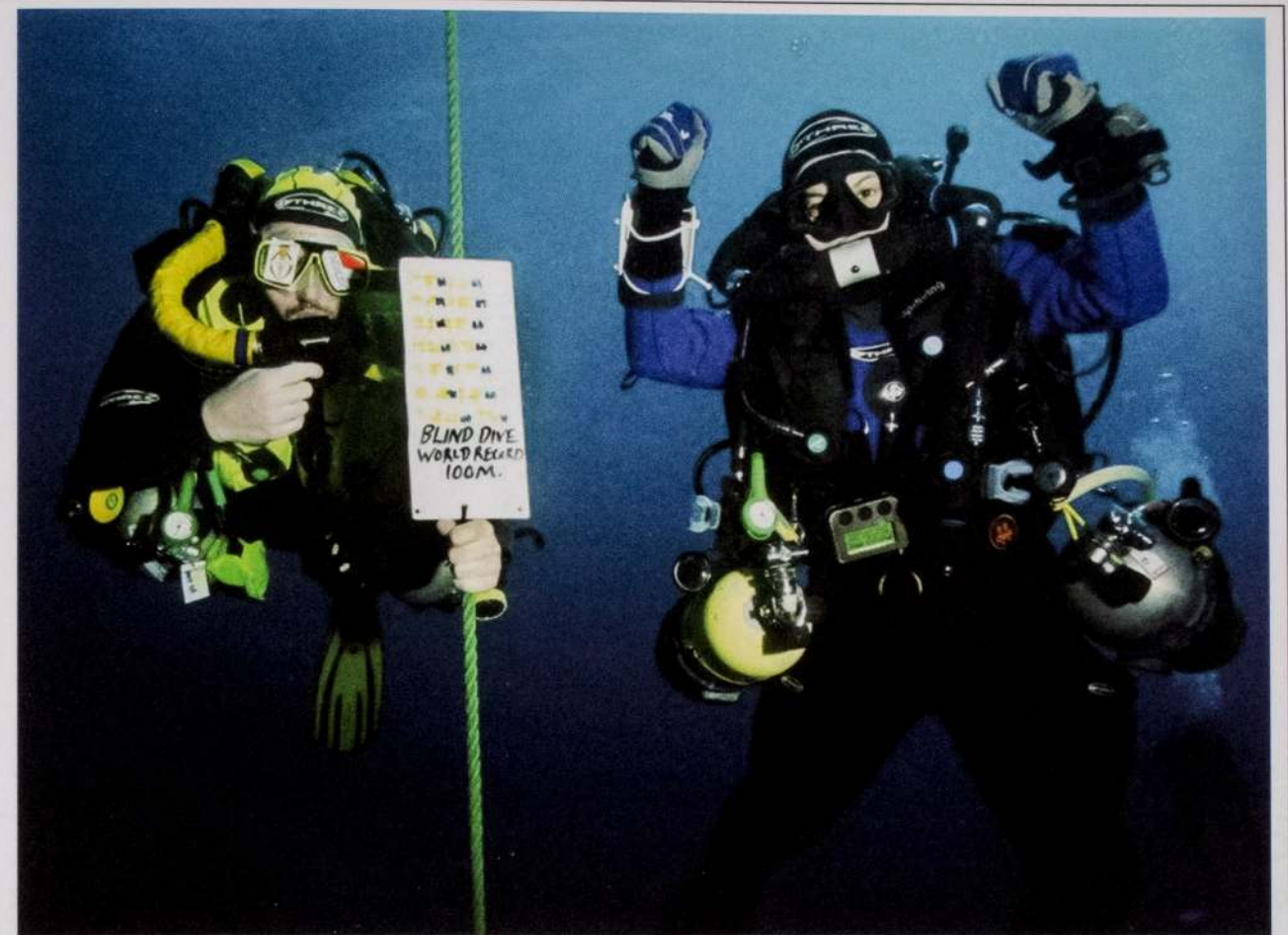
We know that members of this charity have always been super achievers and Mark Threadgold from Saltdean is no exception, as he broke not one but two World Records.

On Sunday 18th August 2002 Mark broke the World Record for the world endurance record for a blind person driving a power boat. He set the record at 57.74 nautical miles in one hour and 50 minutes. Steve Board was Mark's sighted guide and Andy Jones the navigator. Mark circumnavigated the Isle of Wight and the start and finish line was a military landing craft moored in the Solent opposite Cowes.

In June 2006 he secured the Blind Dive World Record when he became the first blind diver to reach 100m. He achieved his World Record in the Red Sea, in Egypt with his co-diver Sally Cartwright diving to 103m. He smashed the previous record, which he also held, by 30 metres following months of intensive training. Mark's philosophy is "Just because I'm blind, it doesn't stop me doing anything that anybody else does. We've still got ambitions — if you can do it, I can do it too."



Picture: Mark Threadgold with Steve Board and Andy Jones.



Picture: Mark Threadgold with co-diver Sally Cartwright at 103m.





On 16th October 1999 Ken Moss, accompanied by racing driver Tony Pond, drove a BMW at 157mph. More significantly he drove a MGF at 131mph without any assistance from a sighted companion. The car was equipped with a special guidance system developed by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

Two years later in 2001 The Guinness Book of Records acknowledged Ken Moss, as the fastest blind man on land. Previously they had documented attempts made in the company of a sighted navigator, a record Ken himself broke on the same day that he made his pioneering solo drive.

Ken, a Class A Police driver, was blinded in November 1992 while following a stolen car. As a beneficiary of the Diana Gubbay Trust for the Blind in January 1993 he joined our charity and underwent rehabilitation training at the Brighton centre.



Picture: Billy 'The Whizz' Baxter as he attempts the World Speed Record on a motorbike, which he breaks with a speed of 164.87.

On 2nd August 2003, Billy Baxter, R&T Liaison Officer at the Llandudno centre, set the blind solo world land speed record on a motorbike with a speed of 164.87 mph (265.33 km/h).

In 2004, he was a guest on the BBC television programme Top Gear and drove a lap of their circuit as the 'Star in a Reasonably Priced Car', credited as the 'Blind Man'. He was guided around the circuit by the slightly nervous host, Jeremy Clarkson, and his official lap time was 2:02 minutes, which was faster than two of the fully sighted contestants (Terry Wogan and Richard Whiteley).

Former Stig Ben Collins however stated in his autobiography that during practice sessions Billy completed the lap in a time of 1:58 minutes and that it was his favourite moment on Top Gear!



Picture: Kevin Alderton, nicknamed The Cannonball, broke the World Record for blind downhill speed skiing in Les Arcs in the French Alps on 14th April 2006 getting up to 100.94mph. He also set the world record for indoor skiing.

Picture: In 2008 Alan Lock, Head of Logistics BT IT Services, who joined Blind Veterans UK in 2005, rowed across the Atlantic with Matt Boreham from La Gomera in the Canaries, to finish in Barbados, where they stepped onto dry land after 85 days at sea and straight into the Guinness World Records hall of fame.



100 years of walking.

In 2011 a London to Brighton 24 hour fundraising walk was introduced. This again followed our tradition of the First World War veterans competing in race and distance walks. Lord Fraser wrote of the inaugural 1922 London to Brighton walk:

‘Someone suggested a competitive walk from London to Brighton, on the same lines as walks held by the big clubs. Padre Williams, our Sports Captain, was sceptical about the probable response, but tremendous keenness was shown. That was all very well, but the Padre rightly decided that would be entrants would have to pass a stiff test before they were allowed to attempt the 52 miles to Brighton. Training for this began at once, and in October a test walk was held. It was three times round the Outer Circle [at Regent’s Park], nearly nine miles — and it had to be completed in 1¾ hours. Fifteen men entered and they all passed the test. The following month the first Brighton Walk was held.

‘The Surrey Walking Club put off a special walk and at 5am the 15 men — followed by a great crowd of supporters — set off from Big Ben. Each walker was accompanied by a cyclist and guide, with whom he maintained contact by a tape tied lightly to the wrist. It was a great event, without precedent in the blind world. People turned out to cheer all along the route.

‘Not all the men finished the course. Some had to retire through foot trouble, others because of their old wounds. One man covered 46 miles before his weak ankle gave way. Yet eight men finished the course, and the winner, F.H. Cassidy, took only a shade over 10¾ hours. My wife and I held the tape when he was cheered home by an immense crowd. That gave our organisation walking fever.’

Grace Hollins (nee Stacey) a VAD at Regent’s Park from 1919 said of the race and London to Brighton walks in the early years of our charity:

‘We had race walks round the Outer Circle [Regent’s Park], which was three miles, and races were so many times round that and they were handicapped. In those days you had to have an escort whom you were attached to. Of course we VADs couldn’t walk fast enough and I phoned the local Guards depot and said I wanted some men to come and help me train.” Grace was also involved in the London to Brighton walks with Avis Spurway and another VAD.

'We ran and walked the whole day. Sometimes the men got cramp and you had to try and get that right or get them a drink or whatever. I had always had quite enough by the end. Archie Brown was one of my special ones. If he's been sighted or hadn't needed an escort, he would have walked for his club overseas. He was the best walker we had.



Picture: The winner of our London to Brighton walk in 1925 was James Ingram. His sighted escort was E Horton then the record holder. Walking with them briefly as they entered Brighton was Sister Stacey.

And that walking fever continues today with our annual London to Brighton 24 hour challenge walk or run. In 2014, 317 walkers took part to walk or run from the start line at Putney to finish at the Brighton centre in 24 hours, or as close to.

The route took them through the streets of London into the fields of Surrey and Sussex, as they trekked through the blistering heat of the day and successfully navigated their way through fields and across ditches in the pitch black night. Taking time to pause only at rest points for food and refreshments and to massage aching limbs and treat sore feet. Their efforts raised over £122,000. This year's event will take place on Saturday 6th and Sunday 7th June.

The first to cross the finish line were team 30 Sig Regt in just 10 hours and 56 minutes. The first solo walkers were Benjamin Mann in 16 hours, 50 minutes and 38 seconds, Prabeen Gurung in 16 hours, 50 minutes and 42 seconds and Kyle Stanwick in 16 hours, 50 minutes and 43 seconds. Members of the charity who took part included Maria Pikulski with Richard Hughes, Kelly Hart with Sarah Garfield, Anthony (Coops) Cooper, Darren Blanks with Ned Borwell and Paul Jacobs GM with Joe Jacobs and Steve 'Sparky' Sparks and Graham 'Kiffy' Kiff. They were joined by our Chairman Tim Davis, Lesley Garven Brighton Centre Manager, Esther Freeman Member Activities Manager at the Brighton centre, and Chris Kirk Transport Manager at the Brighton centre.



Picture left: Ready for the off: Sparky, Ned Borwell, Darren Blanks, Kiffy, Russell Deamer, Coops, Maria Pikulski, and Richard Hughes. Photo by Luke Holroyd. **Picture right:** Brighton Centre Manager Lesley Garven with Kelly Hart and Sarah Garfield.



Picture: Paul Jacobs GM and his brother Joe enjoy a laugh during the 2014 London to Brighton 100K Walk or Run Challenge.



Picture: The First World War men race walking at Regent's Park.

100 years of Art & Craft.

The Art and Craft Workshops are places where magic is made as the talented instructors pass on their knowledge to people who may not have painted for over 70 years and they soon discover their talent as artists, sculptors or woodworkers. Since they first stepped through the doors of the Brighton Art & Craft Workshop Matt Rhodes and Derek O'Rourke are just two blind veterans who have achieved great success and acclaim with their truly original art that adorns the walls of our centres or the homes of collectors.

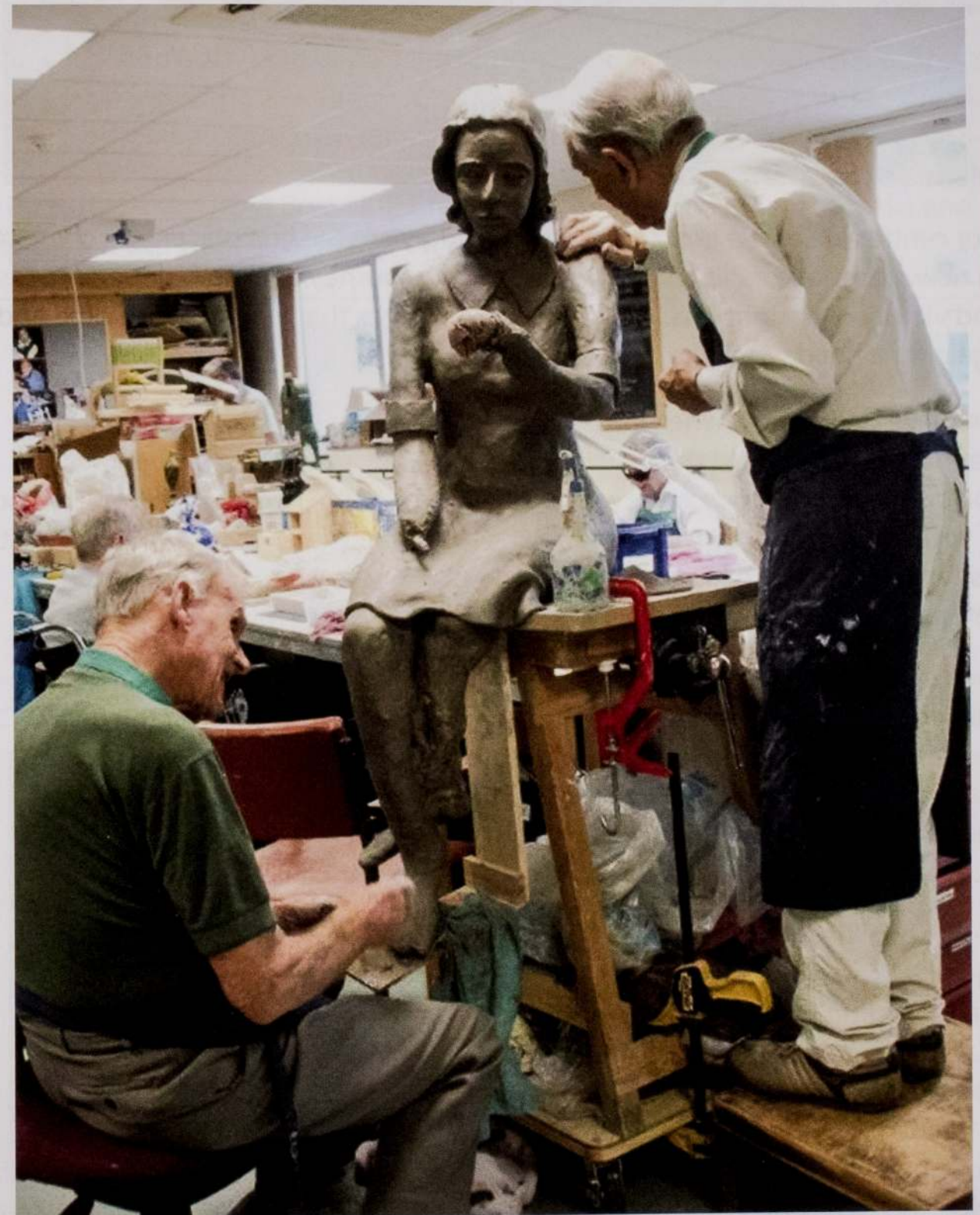
It is an important part of rehabilitation as members learn that they can use their hands where before they relied solely on sight. During the R&T Introduction Week at the Llandudno centre trainees are set the task to make a mosaic coaster that they use to place their drink on during the trainee dinner at the end of the week. When the First World War men first told the time using the Braille watch they found that they were able to do something like other people which blindness had seemed to prevent. It was a little discovery that, like a spark, set alight all kinds of hopes. It is the same when they make the mosaic coasters, paint, sculpt or carve, that spark is ignited and the journey back to independence is well underway.

At the Brighton centre Frank Tinsley is much loved for the rocking horses he makes and Norman Walton's figures are highly recognisable as his creations. The workshop is constantly full and there is a permanent atmosphere of bonhomie as people talk to one another and share a joke as they go about their work.

Just outside the workshop Lily sits on the edge of the pond in the sensory garden. She was the vision of Phil Rawson, Art & Craft Instructor who created her with members in the workshop. It was a labour of love that we can all benefit from. She is so lifelike that people often start talking to her.

The love affair with art and craft doesn't stop when they leave the Brighton, Llandudno or Sheffield centres as studios are set at home or in gardens where they continue to paint, to sculpt or work with mosaics. It is a new hobby as they work towards an exhibition, something to give to their family and friends or choose to sell their creations to raise money for charity.

Activities are not just contained to the workshops as excursions are made to galleries and exhibitions as people immerse themselves in their new found passion for the arts.



Picture: Norman Perry and Wallace Burnet Smith work to create Lily the beautiful statue who sits on the edge of the pond in the sensory garden at the Brighton centre.

The Homes of Happiness: Our three centres.

Sir Arthur Pearson wrote that people often referred to our First World War training centre in Regent's Park as the Home of Happiness. Today we have centres in Brighton, Llandudno and Sheffield and each could equally be referred to as the home of happiness.

Our centres are at the heart of our work as they are the first places you come to as new members of Blind Veterans UK on your journey back to independence and victory over sight loss. And they are the places that you return to time and again for a holiday, respite or further training.

You have told us how when you first walked through the doors at Brighton, Llandudno or Sheffield that you were afraid or didn't know what to expect or you didn't believe there was anything that you would be able to do. By the end of your R&T Introductory Week you had found that there was life beyond sight loss and you were no longer alone as you had entered into the family of Blind Veterans UK.

Each centre is unique but, again as you have often told us, they are filled with staff who are kind and caring. The assessment and training in the centres concentrates on helping you to learn to live independently as you make the emotional and practical adjustments to sight loss. Your sight loss, communication skills, independent living skills, mobility and IT skills are assessed and equipment and training is provided to suit your needs.

Highly qualified instructors put you at ease as you are taught that at the age of 94 you can become a silver surfer and send an email or skype your grandchildren in Australia or use Facebook. They give you the computer skills that many have used to write their memoirs using speech software or large text or to prepare a CV and covering letter if you are in search of employment. In the gym you discover activities you can take part in and in the Art & Craft Workshop you unleash your inner Picasso. The mobility training once again helps you to navigate safely in the streets that you once strode along with such confidence. You learn to prepare food safely and cook with ease and to write a shopping list or notes on the lined paper using the CCTV. Today rather than a Braille watch there are the talking watches and clocks.



Picture: Senior ROVI Bryan Kilburn shows a new member how to make and pour tea without risk of injury. **Picture:** The Brighton centre.



Picture: The Llandudno centre. The historic building was originally built as the Lady Foresters Care Home.



Picture: The Sheffield centre is another historic building that was originally the home of a cutlery manufacturer and his family.

The themed weeks at the centres are incredibly popular, or you might choose to join one of the clubs and the Brighton and Llandudno centres also offer short term nursing and residential care for those in need of rest.

The South West and North East Hubs.

For members who are unable to go to the centres community hubs have been set up in the South West and North East of the country. These offer the welfare and rehabilitation services that are given to all new members at our centres during introductory weeks or on return for further training.

Adrian Hewitt is the Community Project Manager and in the South West Sue King, the Community Senior ROVI, carries out home visits. In December 2014 she ran a community training session over the course of a week at the Action for Blind People Clifton Hotel in Teignmouth, Devon for new members who live in the locality and established members in need of refresher training.

ROVI and IT assessments were carried out and followed by training. Jill James the Community Senior ROVI for the North East hub supported Sue King. Dennis Sarginson, a member of Blind Veterans UK who is a qualified IT Instructor delivered IT training.

There were also Art & Craft and sporting activities at local venues as the week offered everything that that our introductory weeks offer at the three centres.



Picture: An Art & Craft session during the R&T Introductory Week in the South West.

One blind man to another. By Catherine Goodier.

Sir Arthur Pearson spoke of the importance of speaking with the newly blinded soldiers of the First World War as one blind man to another to reassure them that their lives were not over and that they still counted.

Martin Shail of the Brighton centre is a living legend among members of this charity as he leads by example. Everyone who has met him has said how much his encouragement and reassurance and example meant to them when they first stepped through the Brighton centre's doors.

Billy Baxter, R&T Liaison Officer at the Llandudno centre, is another living legend who lives his life by the example set by Sir Arthur Pearson. In October 2014 during the Trainees Dinner I witnessed the power of the work that he does with Steve Boswell, the R&T Manager. Billy has always said that Blind Veterans UK gave him his life back after he lost his sight as a result of his service in Bosnia, as he was given the tools to rebuild and live his life. With Steve Boswell and the staff at the Llandudno centre, under the leadership of Centre Manager Mark Lovatt, Billy now gives new members the tools and courage to rebuild their lives.



Pictures: The new member trainees and their partners. They included: Ron Preston, John Luther, Mark Lucitt, Francis McGreal, Bernard Conlin, Mary Pratt, Colin Davies, Godfrey Finigan, Jim O'Hara, Colin Pickvance, Lawrence Betteridge, Norman Harples and Trefor Owen Selway. Billy is centre kneeling.

At the Trainee Dinner Billy was the President, Mark Lucitt, as Mr Vice, made the loyal toast, and Dewi Roberts said Grace. Billy began the evening when he said "I can't believe how quick time goes here at Blind Veterans UK Llandudno. It seems to swallow up the week and before we know it, Thursday is upon us. I can remember very well Sunday when you came in thinking 'My goodness me, what on earth are we doing here?' It's the startled rabbit syndrome and I know because I've walked in your shoes and it takes a degree of courage to walk through the doors as a couple or as an individual when you come in to a strange place.

"Last week a colleague [Mark Hollis] said something very appropriate and I'd like to steal it. The building is shaped like it has two wings, and they curve inwards like welcoming arms that give you a big cuddle. And that's the feeling we want to give to you guys when you come in here — a big warm cuddle. A place that's safe and secure; a place where you can gain confidence and rebuild your spirits as you learn that there is life beyond sight loss. And more importantly to learn that there's a bigger family of Blind Veterans UK, not just here in Llandudno, but at the Brighton and Sheffield centres and all around the country as we pride ourselves on peer support.

"You've realised now that there is help out there in the form of the rehab officers who look at your eyes and assess the equipment you need. You've realised there are a lot of people who have knowledge of computer training in IT and technology. You've realised again what your drinks are on tonight, the coasters that you made. We want you to take them away as a souvenir. It shows you that you can use your hands. Going back 100 years Sir Arthur Pearson showed his blinded soldiers and sailors that they could still use their hands. That they could still achieve and make things. And you've done that this week.

"You've also realised in Dewi's [Roberts] emporium that there are plenty of sports that you can take part in, archery, acoustic rifle shooting — your families won't believe you will they. Activities you can also take part in at the Brighton and Sheffield centre through the many clubs and activity weeks.

"Those of us who are young enough please do get in touch with the Younger Group. You will find a whole big support network and even bigger open arms that run the length of the United Kingdom, not just in this 18 acres of grounds here in this magnificent building.

"I warned you on Monday morning that you would be touched by the magic

here and you have been every one of you. Do you know it warms my heart to see you all smile, knowing that you can smile and we can laugh at each other's mistakes and things like that. And that's what it's all about; it's that family that you've just joined. It's now a family for life — not let's look after Doreen this week and then forget about her. No, we will look after you for life.

"Make the most of what you do. Go back and tell your families what we do here. Because without their awareness we won't get the funds to enable us to be in these buildings, because it's the general public who gives us the grace to be here. I thank every one of you for coming to our centre this week. May your journeys be fruitful and on behalf of the members I'd like to welcome every one of you and thank you for coming this week."

Each person cited Billy as a role model and there was no-one more vocal than Mark Lucitt who acted as Mr Vice during the dinner who said that Billy was his hero and a shining beacon of hope.

Mary Pratt responded: "I must say that I've never been so impressed in my long life as I have this week with everything here. When you arrive there's the warm welcome, the warmth, the carers and the training. Then there's the food. I thought I'd lose some weight but unfortunately I've gained it! That's my only disappointment. It's been a wonderful week. I've learnt so much and met lots of great people and I can't wait to come again."

And Colin Davies: "I would like to thank all the staff and the catering staff for all the wonderful things they've done. The one to one training this week has been absolutely marvellous. I've lived in Colwyn Bay for the last 12 years and I didn't know anything about this place. It was the consultant who told me to join Blind Veterans UK. I told him I wasn't a veteran that I'd been in the RAF for just a short period of time. He said it didn't matter; all that mattered was that I had a service number. The hospital phoned the Membership Department at Harcourt Street who filled the applications form in and they sent it to me and all I had to do was sign it. I got a letter saying I was a member and it was fantastic. I couldn't believe how efficient the Membership Department were. I thank Blind Veterans UK for everything they've done. Thank you."

As for me I shadowed Billy for two days and spending time with him reinforced why I work for Blind Veterans UK and why it's such a special place. Thank you for the magic of Llandudno. And of course the Brighton and Sheffield centres too.

Billy is a man for all occasions. In 2014 Billy became the Town Crier of Llandudno. He is also Ned Bonnet, the Highwayman, who entertains members at the Llandudno centre with his tales of daylight robbery and at events outside the centre. With his wife Karen, Billy takes people on Ghost Walks through Bodelwyddan Castle speaking of the history of the grand building.



Picture: The crowd watch on Llandudno promenade as Billy, in his role of Town Crier, addresses and calls them to the fireworks display. **Picture:** Billy and Dee lead a Ghost Walk at Bodelwyddan Castle. **Picture:** Billy as Ned Bonnet with Vicci Beech, Llandudno Regional Fundraiser.

Billy was nominated for the position of Town Crier of Llandudno by Cllr Frank Bradfield, the Deputy Mayor: "I first met Billy at the Armed Forces Day in 2013 when he showed us round the Llandudno centre. I thought that he would be an excellent chap to replace the late Town Crier and put his name forward. Once

members of the Town Council spoke to Billy they were as impressed as I was as he just blew them away. He is a star. A star for Blind Veterans UK veterans and for Llandudno Town Council. He's extremely professional and a first class Town Crier. Now when I go to official functions they don't say 'Hello Frank' they ask where Billy is."

To finish Billy said: "When I wear the regalia of the Town Crier I represent the Town Council and the people of Llandudno. I wear the town colours and it's an absolute privilege to be the Town Crier. I also wear the St Dunstan's and Blind Veterans UK badges and carry a Braille watch to tell people of our rich history. When I first lost my sight in 2000 if someone told me that Karen and I wouldn't live in England, that we'd live in Wales and I'd work for Blind Veterans UK I wouldn't have believed them. But I love Llandudno and our life here. It's incredible the way that the town has taken Blind Veterans UK to its heart. Everything I do would not be possible without my wife Karen and Blind Veterans UK. I would also like to thank all of the staff at the Llandudno centre, as they give me the support and strength to do my job and it's a privilege to work with them."

On the cover: The memorial portrait of our founder Sir Arthur Pearson Bt, GBE by Sir William Orpen RA.

Back: Review contributing editor Colin Williamson with Mark Threadgold, Ken Facal and Rob Long at the Brighton centre.



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Patron: Her Majesty the Queen.

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