

Summer 2015



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elects
visually
impaired
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Contents

Contents	3
Editorial	5
News from Warwickshire Vision Support.....	6
Living the Dream.....	6
General Meeting - 6th May	7
Fundraising.....	8
Collections.....	10
The Good Companions Club.....	10
Blindfold Walk in Atherstone	11
There's an Advocacy Group Coming to You	12
Health and Wellbeing	14
Cataracts.....	14
Age related Macular Degeneration	14
The Cost of AMD.....	16
Hallucinations - Macular Degeneration	16
Pet Alert for Glaucoma	17
New NHS Standard Coming	17
You Are What You Eat.....	18
Features and Finance	19
Ian Foulds.....	19
Mags Runs a Marathon	21
Blind Veterans UK.....	23
New £1 Coin.....	23
Tax and Allowances	24
My New Guide Dog - Ice	24

Equipment	26
Eyeshields	26
BT Big Button 200 Telephone	26
Liquid Level Indicator	26
Sight Village 2015.....	26
Leisure	27
Board Games for VIPs.....	27
Walking for Pleasure	27
British Blind Sport 40th Anniversary	28
Get Fit For Summer!	29
The Optimists	30
The Theory of Everything.....	31
Sensory Garden	31
Scam - Be Aware	31
Letters to the Editor	33
Classifieds	33
Acknowledgements	34



Rosemary Went, Editor



Rosalie Visick, Co-editor

Editorial

Spring has been starting a little earlier each year and has been travelling up the country a little faster. However, it was not as warm as hoped for on the first day of 'flaming June', when people expected summer to start, but a temperature rise was due. We can only wait to see what kind of summer we'll have this year.

The 80th anniversary of V.E. (Victory in Europe) Day on 8th May 1945 has recently been commemorated. The number of survivors from that conflict continues to diminish and for the next major anniversary they may not be around.

In the UK there are 2 million people living with sight loss and less than 5,000 of them have guide dogs, a tiny proportion of the total. However, in this issue we feature four guide dog owners - one who was training,

two working to eliminate the difficulties that can be experienced when walking and one running (but without her dog). There is also news from Warwickshire Vision Support, including a new member of staff, plus information on eye conditions, healthy living and equipment.

Learn about and experience new equipment at Sight Village, being held in Birmingham on 14th and 15th July.

Are you keen on books? If so, have you thought of joining a book club to discuss what you read? Do let us know if you would be interested, so that arrangements can be made.

We would appreciate any items for inclusion in the Christmas edition by 18th September, and look forward to hearing from you.

Enjoy your summer.

News from Warwickshire Vision Support

Living the Dream



My name is Kelly Sowter and I am the new Rehabilitation Officer for Warwickshire Vision Support.

In my previous life I worked with children and adults with physical and learning disabilities. Various roles included supporting people to live in the community, taking people on holidays - always good fun - and supporting people to be advocates for their peers, for example on the Warwickshire Learning Disability Partnership Board.

My most recent job was in Coventry City Council's Visual and Hearing Impairment Team, supporting people with both visual and hearing impairments to retain their independence. I love working as a Rehabilitation Officer; it is a

constantly challenging area of work, as you try to find solutions to a variety of issues and help people to help themselves to have a more independent life.

On a more personal level I have a few chosen hobbies. I have two dogs and like to do lots of walks, in particular I love going to the seaside. One of my favourite places is Pembrokeshire - south west Wales - beautiful beaches and friendly people too. I also take the dogs to agility classes for fun, they love to run and jump; the black lab barks with excitement the whole way round, while the collie just likes to make up his own course, but he has fun. I also have an allotment and try to grow a variety of fruit and vegetables. I like to try new things and this year I am trying to grow Electric Daisies, supposedly they taste a bit like sherbert.

I am originally from Warrington, a Cheshire town between Manchester and Liverpool. I have one brother and he, along with the rest of my family, is still up there. I have lived in Coventry for over 10 years now with my husband, as well as the two dogs.

I look forward to meeting the many members of Warwickshire Vision Support and travelling around this lovely county.

General Meeting - 6th May

The meeting took place at the Vision Support Centre at Rugby Baptist Church. Peter Soles and Howard Burgess were both unwell so Rob Ballinger chaired the meeting.

Seventeen Members attended. Also present were Directors/Trustees Philip Austin, Kath Phelps, Steve Plumpton and Rosemary Went and Staff John Davis, Phil Arkell, Imke Carruthers, Sue Morris and Mel Pritchard. Everyone introduced themselves.

John Davis, Manager, spoke of the reasons for the Association's name change, in particular that the word 'blind' had discouraged people from approaching the Association, when they did not consider themselves to be blind. He also talked about the change to membership, with no subscription and that all members would receive Warwickshire Vision.

The Community Worker team had been restructured so that responsibilities were shared. There was an aim to have a greater presence at hospital eye clinics. Certification by Consultants had dropped to 187 last year from 360 people 10 years ago. IT services had been expanded with the employment of Andrew Harris and there was a new Rehabilitation Officer, Kelly Sowter.

A new Care Act had come into force in April, which required local authorities to keep a Register of

visually impaired people in the county. The Association already did this. The law now states Local Authorities must provide visual impairment rehabilitation by trained staff. We are already providing this service as well.

Steve Plumpton explained that the Advocacy Group in Nuneaton was engaged with the national campaigns of the RNIB. New Advocacy Groups were to be set up in Rugby and Stratford; a few people were needed from Rugby. Better hospital access could be campaigned for.

Mel Pritchard said that she and Andrew Harris had a lot of IT equipment to demonstrate so people could try before purchase. They had a small band of volunteers doing occasional home visits, complementing the RNIB's service, which did not include training.

There were questions and comments from the floor

- Hospitals did not make provision for the needs of visually impaired people
- The difficulties of filling in the forms for benefits - professional help advisable, perhaps Advocacy
- How to obtain a disability rail card - from your local station
- Learning Braille - Henley College

General Meetings would be held every 6 months, around the county.

Fundraising

Phil Arkell

This year the Board changed the membership structure of the Association and removed the £12 annual Subscribing Member fee. This decision was taken after much careful consideration to ensure that you receive a service based on your needs, rather than your ability to pay the membership fee.

Of course, as a charity we cannot afford to write off the income that Subscribing Members contributed each year. Instead we want to create a system whereby those who are able and willing to make a contribution can do so.

We will write to you asking for your help. If you are willing and able to make a donation, then please do so. You can donate in a number of ways:

Standing Orders

You can make a monthly donation to help cover the costs of your Home Visitor, IT Trainer or local VIP Club. If just 40 people set up a standing order for £10 per month and signed the gift aid form, we would raise £6,000 every year! Of course, how much you give is your choice.

If you want to make a donation to support the services you receive, here are some examples of where your money could be spent:

- £12 pays for a volunteer to visit your home to help with your correspondence
- £20 pays for the venue hire for a club or Vision Support Centre
- £30 pays for an IT training session at your local Vision Support Centre

Regular donations really help us to plan for the future, so if you can make a regular gift it would be especially welcome.

Of course what you give, and if you give, is entirely your choice - we just want you to continue to enjoy the services we have been able to offer for so many years.

Cheque

If you are unable to set up a standing order, you could send us a cheque in the post. We will gratefully receive any donation you wish to make - it all helps improve our services for local people living with sight loss.

Just make the cheque payable to Warwickshire Vision Support or Warwickshire Association for the Blind.

Cash Donations

If you are unable to write a cheque or set up a standing order, then you can still make a cash donation at your club or Vision Support Centre. But please do not send cash in the post.

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Legacies

Sometimes we want to give but do not have the free reserves available. An alternative may be to leave a legacy gift in your will. If you want to make a legacy gift then please contact us and we will send you an information pack.

We believe that the decision to remove subscribing membership fees will really help those most in need. If you want to help us to help others less fortunate, then please consider making a donation in any of the ways suggested above.

We will of course be in contact with you over the coming months with more details. Thank you for your kind support.

Collections

We have booked collections that started in the Spring and these have brought in a good level of support for our charitable activities:

Rugby Sainsbury's	£202.12
Kenilworth Sainsbury's	£241.31
Shipston street collection	£286.73
Coleshill street collection	£57.29

Here is the list of confirmed collections for the rest of the year:

Nuneaton Asda	27 th June
Rugby Asda	3 rd July
Leamington Morrisons	18 th July
Leamington Asda	8 th August
Kenilworth Sainsbury's	3 rd October
Leamington Morrisons	17 th October
Coleshill Morrisons	17 th October

In each case the funds raised will help to sustain our local clubs.

If you are interested in supporting our collections please get in contact.

The Good Companions Club

Rosalie Visick

Members of the Good Companions Club meet at Chandos Court in Leamington Spa from 10 a.m. to 11.45 a.m. on alternate Wednesdays. On arrival we pay for our lottery numbers and raffle tickets then have tea or coffee and biscuits and there is usually time for a chat before the lottery and raffle winners are announced and the guest speaker

arrives. On other occasions we have musical entertainment. I enjoy both, and find the talks very interesting.

The money from the lottery tickets is divided between club funds and the winner. The prize for the raffle is organised by the Club Leaders.

The talks by guest speakers can be on subjects ranging from the History of Warwick Racecourse to Tales from a Retired Policeman. The musical

entertainment has ranged from a singer playing a keyboard to the Spa Strummers Ukulele Band, when we are encouraged to join in the singing of well-known songs.

Recently we were due to be entertained by a husband and wife singing duo. The lady was unable to attend, however her husband gave us a talk. Since he was a child, he had dreamed of going into space. He had undergone extensive training in the USA, including the experience of weightlessness in a zero gravity environment. His flight will be in a Lynx Mark II shuttle. He has received the contract to secure his moment in space history and is now waiting for his dream to become a reality.

We all look forward to our club meetings.

Editor

Good Companions is Warwickshire Vision Support's club for VIPs in Leamington Spa. There is a VIP social club in your area and if you are interested in attending, phone Warwickshire Vision Support for details.

Don't forget there are also Vision Support Centres in towns over the county where you can just drop in.

Blindfold Walk in Atherstone

Steve Plumpton, Nuneaton

The General Election gave visually impaired people around the country opportunities to engage with candidates, to make prospective MPs aware of the issues that people with sight loss experience. In association with their streets campaign, RNIB encouraged groups to take candidates on blindfold walks and we in Warwickshire joined in.

Warwickshire Vision Support invited the Labour and Conservative candidates in north Warwickshire to take part. Craig Tracey (the Conservative candidate) accepted the invitation and so we met him in Atherstone on 15th April.

John Davis, our Manager, was joined by Steve Plumpton (of the north Warwickshire Advocacy Group), by Paul Bowler (a service user from the north Warwickshire constituency) and by Jessica Ford (an RNIB campaign co-ordinator). We assembled in Long Street, blindfolded Mr. Tracey and gave him a white stick and then John led him along the road.

The first thing Mr. Tracey noticed was the unevenness of the pavement. I have to say it was particularly poor with the kind of paving one can easily catch the tip of a cane on. We progressed down the street, showing him the kind of obstacles a blind

person will find, that a sighted person wanders past without noticing.

The walk lasted only 5 minutes or so and covered around 100 metres, but we were able to make our point in that time. Once we removed the blindfold we were able to discuss the streets campaign, talking about wheelie bins, parked cars, street furniture and A-boards. Having taken the walk, Mr. Tracey was much clearer in his own mind what our problems are and how difficult it can be for those of us with sight loss.

We were also able to talk about other issues, such as the new Social Care Act and much more.

On Election Day Mr. Tracey was elected, increasing the majority from 54 to over 2,000. So, having met with us already, I'm sure Warwickshire Vision Support now has another friend at Westminster and I'm sure we can call on him again.

There's an Advocacy Group Coming to You

Around eighteen months ago we set up an Advocacy Group, based at the Nuneaton Drop-in Centre.

The purpose of the group is to take up issues and campaign on behalf of our service users. Thus far, we have based what we do around the national campaigns run by RNIB, Guide Dogs and others.

Twelve months ago we took an MP on a blindfold bus ride. This was in



close association with the RNIB 'stop for me, speak to me' campaign and also in association with the Guide Dogs 'talking buses' campaign.

Most recently, we have taken an election candidate on a blindfold walk in Atherstone in association with the RNIB 'Cluttered streets' campaign. You can read about that elsewhere in this magazine.

We are now taking the Advocacy Group to other parts of the county. In addition to Nuneaton, we will now expand to Rugby and Stratford. And,



Craig Tracey (recently elected MP for Nuneaton) experiencing a blindfold walk

it is our plan to expand further to Leamington and Coventry next year. By the time you read this, we will have had our first meetings in Rugby (10th June) and Stratford (16th June). We want to encourage people at those Vision Support Centres to take up the baton and be part of the Advocacy Group in their area. As well as joining in national campaigns, those groups may wish to take up more local issues and lead on those themselves. This, we will do our best to facilitate.

Initially, the group from Nuneaton will come along to Rugby and Stratford to help kick things off, but in time they will withdraw and leave Rugby and Stratford to run their own groups. All the groups will be visited by John Davis, Manager, also by Steve Plumpton and Philip Austin (the two Directors with responsibility for advocacy).

We look forward to meeting you and to helping you take up this work.

Health and Wellbeing

Cataracts

Cataracts can be quite disconcerting for the sufferer. Sometimes they develop gradually so that they are not noticed. Everything can appear fuzzy, as if spectacles have not been cleaned. The sufferer may think that they're 'just getting older' and yes, that is the biggest cause. The lens of the eye becomes cloudy and vision continues to become mistier.

Other symptoms are glare from bright light - sunlight or car headlights - or colour vision may be affected, with things looking more yellow.

Causes for cataracts can be diabetes, an accident to the eye or eye surgery, medication such as steroids and other conditions such as Retinitis Pigmentosa.

Treatment is surgery. The operation usually takes 30 to 40 minutes and most people go home from hospital a few hours later. It normally takes place under local anaesthetic so the patient is awake and feels no pain. A patch will have to be worn over the eye for the first day and at night for a week.

Treatment continues for about 2 weeks, using eye drops. There are two types of drop, an antibiotic and a steroid (anti inflammatory).

A good recovery also includes the avoidance of

- rubbing your eye
- swimming
- strenuous exercise
- contact sports and heavy lifting
- wearing eye makeup

but these are only necessary for a week to 10 days. In addition, care should be taken if it is windy or dusty outside and when washing your hair - all to avoid getting anything in your eye.

It is quite normal to develop cataracts in both eyes. Surgery is usually carried out on the worst eye first, then 6 to 8 weeks later the other eye can be treated. If spectacles are worn it is best to wait until both eyes have been treated before getting a new pair.

While a patient has cataracts they may drive, as long as the level of vision is within the legal driving limit. This should be checked with an optometrist.

Age related

Macular Degeneration

AMD is an eye condition that affects the retina as a person ages. The specific part affected is the macula, the central part of the retina. This area is used for detailed vision, such as reading and watching TV.

The people most at risk of developing AMD are likely to be over 65 and more frequently female. Other risk factors are

- smoking
- prolonged exposure to high levels of sunlight throughout life
- diet

Symptoms of the condition can begin with a distortion of vision - straight lines can appear wavy and it will no longer be possible to read very small print - this is the beginning of the loss of central vision. The distortion progresses to become a small blank spot; then later there is a blank patch in the centre of vision.

There are two main types of AMD, wet and dry, with dry the most common.

Dry AMD is caused by cells in the macula failing to work, leading to a gradual loss of sight. Although the sight loss can be quite serious, progress to this point can take years. Unfortunately, there is no treatment at present.

Wet AMD starts when the cells in the macula stop working properly, they react by providing greater nutrition and growing new blood vessels. Unfortunately, the new cells grow in the wrong place and leak. The sight loss develops within weeks or months, but only about 10-15 per cent of the people who develop AMD have wet AMD. Wet AMD can be treated to prevent further sight loss.

The treatment for wet AMD is by the injection of anti-VEGF (anti-vascular endothelial growth factor) drugs. There are three main treatment drugs that can be used. They are injected into the eye monthly for a course of treatment.

There are three main tests for AMD

- an examination by a hospital ophthalmologist to see what the surface of the retina looks like
- a fluorescein angiogram takes a picture of the blood vessels underneath the retina
- an optical coherence tomography (OCT), gives a picture of the macula area showing whether it is flat or swollen

People with AMD usually retain their peripheral vision, and there is a range of ways in which this remaining vision can be used to best advantage.

It has been estimated that in 2010 there were 414,000 people in the UK with wet AMD and 194,000 people with dry AMD in one or both eyes. An additional 1.49 million people were living with the early stage of the disease.

To find out more about AMD call the Macular Society helpline on **0300 3030 111** or email **info@macularsociety.org**

The Cost of AMD

For some time it has been suggested that Bevacizumab, marketed as Avastin, should be used to treat wet Age-related Macular Degeneration instead of Ranibizumab, marketed as Lucentis. Avastin has been licenced as a drug to treat some cancers, but trials have shown it is effective at treating AMD.

Each injection of Lucentis costs about £700 and it has been calculated that if 17,295 eyes are injected each year with Avastin instead of Lucentis, there could be a saving of £84.5 million a year by the NHS.

Both drugs are owned by Roche, but in the UK Lucentis is marketed by Novartis.

Public funds were found for trials, but investigations appear to show that Primary Care Trusts were urged to pull out of a trial.

Hallucinations - Macular Degeneration

Brian, Shipston

About 2 years ago my wife Barbara was experiencing difficulty in reading fine print (thank God for a Kindle!). The eye Consultant at the nearby hospital diagnosed that as well as cataracts, Macular Denegation had set in. Moreover, an operation on the cataracts might result in more damage than relief. The best option was to soldier on and keep a close

watch on the situation with our local optician.

Barbara began to experience hallucinations. These experiences could be seeing a red rug stretched across the bedroom floor, the room filled with flowers or on occasion a cat curled up in the toilet bowl. The images usually occurred at night or in poor lighting. They were very disconcerting and seemed real, but fortunately we realised that they were apparitions - hallucinations. Our optician immediately recognised the experience as Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Charles Bonnet was a Swiss philosopher and writer who wrote about the syndrome in around 1760 when his blind grandfather started to have hallucinations after losing his sight to cataracts.

It is now thought that as many as 15 per cent of people with significant visual loss experience the effect. An episode might last for a few minutes or much longer. (Blinking can sometimes make the image disappear, provided that it is recognized as an apparition.) Although well-informed opticians recognise the condition, perhaps GPs need to become more aware.

The hallucinations are not related to dementia or any psychiatric condition. They are the result of misinterpretation of the signals (or lack of them) from the eye by the brain. It may be that the brain creates

a fantasy based on some previous experience when it cannot rely on the evidence being sent out by the eyes.

Knowledge of the reason for the apparitions can give the patient great comfort from what are deeply distressing events.

Pet Alert for Glaucoma

Several recent studies including one published in the Journal of the British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology have found that exposing a baby to a pet may protect the child from developing allergies as they grow older. The most recent research, published in the American Journal of Ophthalmology was carried out to see which allergens might have a role in the development of glaucoma.

The levels of immunoglobulin E (IgE), a type of allergen antibody, were measured in 1,678 men and women in their fifties and sixties. They were tested for allergens to dogs, cats, cockroaches, dust mites and rodents. Of the patients with glaucoma, 14 per cent had elevated IgE levels to cats and 19 per cent to cockroaches but only 6 per cent to dogs. Cat and cockroach allergens are associated with the development of glaucoma.

It was already known that exposure to dogs, with the germs and bacteria they carry, can be good for the immune system. Now it seems to be the case for eyes too.

Editor

The widespread placement of hand cleansing gels in doctors' surgeries reminds us of the importance of hygiene. How easily germs are spread by a simple touch (and they linger on hard surfaces). How often do we touch our face, lips or eyes without thinking about it? And were our hands clean when we did it? Hygiene is a major subject; perhaps we should remember the spread of Ebola.

New NHS Standard Coming

Are you able to access information provided by the National Health Service? Your NHS health service providers are your GP, hospital and eye clinic.

Information given to you could be medical appointments, instructions for a hospital visit or test results - all very important information. Has this information been provided in a format accessible to you? If it is given to you in regular print and you cannot read it - it is not accessible.

Have you told your health service providers the format in which you need your information? This should be recorded in their file of information about you.

The NHS is due to introduce a new information standard that will cover health and local authority social care services. The Care Quality Commission will carry out inspections that will include provision of accessible information.

If your requirements are already recorded, the provider should then make information accessible to you.

The NHS information standard will set out rules for health service providers to:

- Ask you in what format you need to receive information
- Keep that information on your health record
- Make sure your information is provided in the relevant format.

You Are What You Eat

Water and food are man's first requirements for survival - a primitive instinct that causes some people to overeat. Water is most important to keep us hydrated - a large proportion of our bodies is made up from water.

Food, while not cheap to buy, costs a far smaller proportion of our budgets than it used to do. So there is no excuse for us not to eat as well as we can afford. Eating well is not about quantity, but quality.

Snacking foods such as crisps and sweet fizzy drinks are not healthy, as they contain a large proportion of our daily diet of sugars, fats and salts. But, as with most things, a 'little of what you fancy' - little being the operative word - and for most people should do no harm.

The healthiest food has generally not been processed, fresh food usually being best. Fresh food that has been frozen is also good.

A balanced diet is important, which means a varied range of foods. Protein, which can be in the form of meat, fish, cheese, eggs, nuts and pulses, is one part. Fruit and vegetables are another part. Advice has been to have at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. A portion is about a handful and the fruit and vegetables should be different - a wide range of their colours indicates the different vitamins and minerals they contain. One of these portions can be consumed as juice. Vegetables also contain fibre.

Potatoes are not one of the 'five a day', but we do need carbohydrates as part of our diet.

The main things to remember about our diet are

- eat (and drink) regularly
- eat in moderation
- make your diet as varied as you can - food must surely do us more good if we enjoy it.

Eating healthily is part of keeping our bodies as healthy as they can be.



Features and Finance

Ian Foulds

Congratulations to Ian Foulds on winning a seat on the Royal Leamington Spa Town Council. Ian became one of the two Labour Councillors who will represent the Sydenham area of Leamington for the next 4 years. He believes there will be a lot of learning to do but is looking forward to making a contribution to town life. He expects to find it interesting and challenging.

This is the first time that Ian has been a Councillor. He gained experience by standing once before, in Warwick, where he had not been expected to win. For this election he was asked to be a candidate in this traditional Labour ward.

Ian was born in Lancashire in 1961 with a genetic disorder that affects his general health, including his sight. He was registered blind at the age of 17, as the only sight he had was 10 per cent vision in his right eye. He attended a comprehensive school, and when he left he was the only one from his year of 200 pupils to go on to University.

He took a degree in Accounting and Business Finance at Manchester University and worked in banking in London. When his health forced him to give up work in 1998, he decided to leave London. He looked at a number of different towns, and



**Councillor Ian Foulds
and his guide dog Grace
outside Leamington
Town Hall**

chose to live in Warwickshire, in Leamington Spa.

Ian joined the Labour Party when he was a student and has remained a member ever since, except when membership of any political party was not permitted by his employer. Soon after election the successful candidates had to go to the Town Hall to sign to confirm their acceptance of their appointment as Councillors.

The General Meeting of the Town Council, which is a meeting open to the public, was held in May and Councillors were 'summoned' to attend.

Inevitably, papers detailing the business of meetings are provided to all Councillors. Ian's preferred format is large print, and when he explained his requirements, the appropriate papers were quickly produced.

Ian can often be seen in Leamington's town centre with Grace, his golden retriever guide dog. She is his third dog but the first female and first golden retriever. If he does not have Grace with him he uses a long cane with a roller-ball to enable him to walk around safely.

Safety is important and pavements, while obviously having other people on them, can be obstructed by a range of stationary objects as well. When insufficient width has been allowed for pedestrians accompanied by dogs, they are forced to walk in

the road. Ian campaigns for safety by reporting obstructions.

For example, his successes in Leamington Spa include the removal of approximately 500 vehicles obstructing pavements, 50 abandoned vehicles and 50 untaxed vehicles plus thousands of illegal fly posters.

He feels that his campaigning success arises from building up good relationships with appropriate staff at both the County Council and District Council. He is looking forward to building up similar good relationships with the Town Council staff and other Councillors.

He has a 'no retreat' attitude: obstacles are seen not as barriers but to be gone over, round or under. He says

'Obstacles in life are inevitable but I have never and will never allow them to become barriers to what I want to achieve.'

He is looking forward to improving the knowledge of the general public about the issues that affect visually impaired people. This new role provides Ian with the opportunity to take up issues for VIPs.

Ian's other interests include rock concerts, crime drama movies, fun and comedy plays. He has not yet been to an Audio Described performance. However, he is looking forward to the AD performance of Mamma Mia in July - 2016.

Town Councillors have responsibility for a limited range of briefs in their area:

- Planning
- Community
- Local town policy

Other matters, such as refuse removal, are the responsibility of the local District or County Council.

If any reader has any issue concerning town council matters, and in particular in Sydenham ward, please do not hesitate to get in touch and Ian will see what he can do to resolve the problem.

Mags Runs a Marathon

Maggie Bowes, Warwick
(Race Number 39640)

We all have dreams that we would like to fulfil. Things that we would like to achieve. Some of us thrive on challenges. I am one of those people. I have always wanted to run a marathon. I have watched the London Marathon on TV many times - cried over the human-interest stories and the trauma that people suffered.

One day last year I decided to apply for a place in the London Marathon. I tried to enter the free ballot but it had closed - so I applied to Guide Dogs for the Blind and bought my place. This meant I would have to raise their target - which this year was set at £2,000. It was some considerable time after my

application that I heard I'd got a place in one of the biggest events in the world.

I knew it would be tough, but I'm an ex tri-athlete (triathlon competitor) and have always enjoyed exercise and hard work. I knew that the training programme would be long and that it would require a high level of commitment. I would be spending many hours building up the miles by pounding the streets in all weathers.

I didn't appreciate that it would take over my life for many months. It was quite an emotional journey. I had to believe in myself and there were times when I questioned my decision to take on this challenge.

I should explain that I am 64 years old. Although there are no age barriers to entering a marathon, I was running against medical advice as I have knee problems.

I have no vision and, like most blind runners, would need a guide to take me round. I chose Tess, an experienced marathon runner. We had been running together for 3 years and I knew that she would be up for it. We used a piece of webbing, slightly thinner than a car seat belt with a loop round my wrist while Tess held the other end.

At last the great day arrived. We received our race numbers and timing chips. Thanks to modern technology, wearing timing chips on our trainers enables every athlete



Maggie Bowes and Tess

to receive their individual time. The chips are activated when the runner goes over the start line and over mats, which are at every 5K (5 kilometres is just over 3 miles). Standing on the start line on a cold wet morning at Blackheath was exciting. There was a degree of nerves and there was a real buzz in the air. Everyone was talking together. Thirty-eight thousand runners were ready to take on this challenge. We crossed the start line and began our journey, taking in many of the famous London sights. Tess skilfully navigated me past some of the slower runners and also described the sights and fancy dress worn by many of the other athletes. Steel bands and noisy crowds made a great atmosphere and you could feel their enthusiasm. Often, the noise

was so loud that I couldn't hear Tess and I was relying on feeling tension on the strap.

We took 6 hours, 15 minutes and 40 seconds to complete the race and finish at Birdcage Walk.

Thirty-five years ago at the first London Marathon, the first two athletes to cross the finishing line linked hands. It was suggested that at the end of our race, we should try to join hands with someone and extend the hand of friendship. As we came to the finishing line Tess took my linked hand, then another runner took my free hand and we crossed the line together, greeted by enthusiastic crowds, to receive our medals. It was a very special moment.

Blind Veterans UK

Blind Veterans UK, the national charity for blind and vision impaired ex-Service men and women and their families, believes that no one who has served our country should battle blindness alone.

For 100 years, Blind Veterans UK has been providing specialist services and support to help veterans overcome the challenges of sight loss and live full, independent lives.

Blind Veterans UK provides specialist training, rehabilitation, equipment and emotional support as well as recreational activities at the charity's centres in Brighton, Sheffield and Llandudno, North Wales and through a network of welfare officers, ensuring that veterans and their families can discover life beyond sight loss.

The charity's 'No One Alone' campaign is reaching out to the estimated tens of thousands of veterans with severe sight loss in the UK, who could be eligible for the charity's support, but are not currently receiving it or are not aware of it. It doesn't matter when or where they served or how they lost their sight, Blind Veterans UK can help.

If you, or someone you know, served in the Armed Forces or did National Service, and is now battling severe sight loss, Blind Veterans



UK may be able to provide them and their family with a lifetime of free practical and emotional support. For more information, call freephone **0800 389 7979** or visit **www.noonealone.org.uk**

Editor

Blind Veterans UK was previously called St Dunstan's.

New £1 Coin

Do you remember the old threepenny bit? That was pre-decimalization, when there were twelve pennies in a shilling and twenty shillings in a pound. So the value of a threepenny bit in decimal currency is a little over one 'new' pence. The coin was bronze-coloured, small and thick with a ridged twelve sided edge.

The Royal Mint estimates that about 45 million of the £1 coins in circulation are forgeries. There were more than six thousand entrants to a competition to design the 'tails' side of a new £1 coin, which was won by David Pearce, a 15 year old school boy from Walsall. The design of this new coin will be based on the old three penny bit.

The new design features a rose, leek, thistle and shamrock emerging from a royal coronet. It is intended to be as secure as modern banknotes and should save taxpayers millions by cutting down on fraud. It is due to be introduced in 2017.

Tax and Allowances

Most people have to pay tax, but some people are paying too much. From 6th April 2015, most people can earn up to £10,600 a year before paying any income tax and this is your Personal Allowance. If you were born before 6th April 1938 your Personal Allowance is £10,660.

For anyone who is registered as Blind there is a Blind Person's Allowance, which is £2,290 for 2015-16. This is in addition to your Personal Allowance, but must be claimed. It may be backdated for up to 4 years and transferred to your spouse or civil partner from the date you were registered.

For married couples and civil partners who are basic rate taxpayers and born after 5th April 1935, there is a new marriage allowance. From 6th April, a spouse or civil partner who pays no income tax can apply to transfer £1,060 of their unused personal allowance to their spouse or civil partner.

For married couples or those with a civil partner where one of them was born before 6th April 1935 the Married Couples Tax Allowance can be claimed.

For savings held in banks and building societies interest is usually taxed. However, if taxable income is less than £15,600 you can complete an R85 form to get the interest paid gross and you may receive a

tax rebate. Money held in an ISA is tax free.

If you feel that you need advice on tax or benefits you can call **0845 330 4897** or **0151 702 5721** or visit rnib.org.uk/tax

There is also an online benefits calculator to check which benefits you are entitled to at rnib.entitledto.co.uk

My New Guide Dog - Ice **Hayley Barnes, Leamington**

In November 2014 a lady from Guide Dogs came to see me about retiring Esme, my golden Labrador cross retriever guide dog, as she was 10 years old. This is about the age that Guide Dogs like to retire a dog. This is so the dog can enjoy some quality retirement of approximately 5 years.

In January 2015 I was told I was on the waiting list for a new dog, but I could keep working with Esme until they found me a suitable one. On 12th March I got a phone call from a gentleman called Gareth from Guide Dogs asking if he could come and see me, as he thought he had a suitable dog for me to try.

On the following Monday Gareth arrived with a lively black Labrador and said 'This is Ice, shall we go out for a walk with her, and see how you both get on?' We did a route that I would normally do with my dog, and the walk went well.

Gareth came into my house, and we chatted about how I felt the walk with Ice had gone - her speed and handling, etc. As it appeared to be a good match we arranged to start training on 24th March.

Gareth came for 8 days for about 2 hours at a time so that we could do some of the routes that I would normally use. On the last day, Good Friday, I did my walk up to my local shop and back with full control of Ice on my own.

What I was not aware of, was that I was being watched by someone from Guide Dogs along with Gareth, who then tells you whether you are safe to go out and about on your own. I arrived back to my house to be greeted by Gareth and Tony, who told me 'Congratulations, you have passed. You are qualified as a working team.'

We signed a contract, I paid my 50p and Ice became my new guide dog and Esme retired that same day. We will not be parted though, as Esme will continue to live with me.

Editor

50p is part of the Guide Dogs' contract.

Hayley is a petite and slight lady who has been registered blind all her life. A small part of the comprehensive matching process by Guide Dogs includes the life-style and home environment of the owner and temperament of the dog.



Hayley Barnes and Ice

Equipment

Eyeshields

Wearing eyeshields reduces the amount of ultra violet light that enters the eyes, and that can help to reduce glare. There are different coloured filters to suit different eye conditions, grey - medium and dark, amber and yellow. There are two main types - traditional sunglasses with a variety of frame styles, and protective fit-over, unisex to wear over prescription spectacles.

Fit-over eyeshields are available in three sizes, small, medium and large. The sizes are the widths, measured from arm to arm across the front and height from top to bottom of the lens. The widths and heights are respectively 14.5cm x 5cm, 16cm x 5.3cm and 19cm x 5.3cm. They cost £7.07 from RNIB.

BT Big Button 200 Telephone

This white landline telephone can be used hands-free. Its black buttons are 2cm tall and it has three one-touch memory buttons and a dedicated 1571 button to dial your network answering service.

Ten favourite numbers can be stored using the keypad, it also provides three ring volume settings and speech amplification.

Product code DH216X costs £29.99 from RNIB.

Liquid Level Indicator

Clip a Liquid Level Indicator on the side of your cup before you start filling it. As you pour your drink it will emit a series of bleeps and vibrations to let you know when the liquid nears the top. When not in use you can attach it to your fridge as it is magnetised.

The DK127 costs £6.95 ex VAT from RNIB.

To order items from RNIB telephone **0303 123 9999**

Sight Village 2015

Experience the latest products and equipment available for Visually Impaired People at New Bingley Hall, Hockley, Birmingham B18 5BE.

This free annual exhibition will be held on Tuesday 14th and Wednesday 15th July.

Leisure

Board Games for VIPs

Board games are a popular pastime and VIPs do not need to be left out. There is a range of games especially for VIPs.

There are giant print playing cards, product code gc09, at £3.50 and large print Scrabble, gb92, at £29.95.

There are also tactile games: Dominoes, with indented black dots, and easy to see with raised dots also Draughts, Chess and Backgammon. The most expensive is a tactile folding travel Chess and Draughts set, gb96, at £37.95.

Prices can vary, and registered VIPs do not pay VAT. There are no post or packing charges and guarantees apply to faults or delivery damage.

For full details of all the VIP games available from RNIB visit rnib.org.uk/shop

email: helpline@rnib.org.uk or telephone: 0303 123 9999

Walking for Pleasure

My name is Kate Fensome and I live in Nuneaton. I have useful sight in my left eye, and can see a little bit of light and dark with my right eye.

Ever since I was a little girl I used to go walking with my Dad, as walking was a hobby of his. Sadly my Dad is no longer alive, but fortunately, thanks to the Nuneaton Rambling

Club, and Walking for Health, I am able to carry on walking.

I have my own walking boots and rucksack. On Saturday afternoons the Nuneaton Club organises a 5 to 6 mile local walk. People take it in turns to lead walks. We meet somewhere locally, such as the boys club at Attleborough, Nuneaton and cars are filled with people, and the driver takes us to the start of the walk. We all contribute the cost of petrol.

On Sunday mornings, we all meet at Church Street and do a 10 to 12 mile walk. We take a picnic lunch, and stop half-way at a pub for a drink, and to use their conveniences. We walk in fields, on roads and lanes, through woods and by canals. We go through fields where there are horses and cattle. We climb over stiles and go through gates. I can walk by myself, but will be helped across busy roads, or narrow bridges.

I also go on the Walking for Health, which are shorter walks. There are many throughout the week in Nuneaton, including two evening walks, which is great in the summer.

I am pleased that I am able to continue with this hobby, and have made a lot of friends along the way. Thanks go to all the leaders who organise the walks.

British Blind Sport 40th Anniversary

The 11th annual 10k Regency Run in Leamington Spa on 19th April attracted more than 2000 runners and a huge crowd of spectators. If you were among them you probably realised that the charity which the sponsors chose to support this year was British Blind Sport. This was particularly appropriate, for not only is BBS local, based in Tachbrook Park in Leamington, but it is the charity's 40th anniversary.

Established in 1976 as the British Association for Sporting and Recreational Activities for the Blind, it changed its name to British Blind Sport in 1989. One thing that hasn't changed, however, is the charity's aim, which is to enable blind and partially sighted people to have the same opportunities as sighted people to access and enjoy sport and recreational activities in the UK. BBS also plays an important role in creating sport-specific educational resources to assist coaches and volunteers who are delivering sessions, with guidance and support on how to include people with sight loss.

One of its patrons is Tony Larkin, sports coach at the Royal National College for the Blind, who led the British blind football team at the 2012 Summer Paralympics.

The range of sport on offer at different venues includes Archery, Athletics, Cricket, Football, Golf, Target Shooting, Tennis and Ten Pin Bowling. Most of them are played in a similar way to the traditional version but with a few alterations to the rules or equipment to make them more accessible to visually impaired people. With tennis, for example, the ball is larger and has inside it a plastic shell containing ball bearings which makes a sound as the ball hits the ground, and it is allowed to bounce more than once before the player returns it.

Archery and target shooting use adapted sights and, sometimes, a sighted assistant. Ten-pin bowling is one of the most popular sports as it is played by people of all ages and abilities. It can be played with sighted friends and a handicap system provides a fair and equal level of competition regardless of sight level.

Although British Blind Sport has set many Paralympic athletes on their path, most blind and partially sighted people usually take up a sport as a recreational and enjoyable way to keep fit and make friends, but there are opportunities to progress to competitive level. Those who do will need a classification regarding their sight level.

Membership of British Blind Sport is £18 a year for adults £6 for juniors; this includes a copy of their magazine twice a year, a list of sports events sent by email once a month and free classification for those entering international competitions.

If you would like to know more about any of the activities offered by British Blind Sport, check out their website, which is informative and easy to follow if you are visually impaired - britishblindsport.org.uk.

You can phone them on **01926 424247**, but they would prefer an email to **info@britishblindsport.org.uk** You can also follow them on Facebook and Twitter.

N.B.

Did you know that Warwickshire Vision Support has its own bowls club? We need more bowlers so do join us soon! Don't worry if you haven't played before as we can teach you. We bowl on Fridays from 10 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. at Avon Valley Indoor Bowls Club at Lighthorne near Gaydon. If you live in the Leamington or Warwick area transport can be arranged.

For more information contact Warwickshire Vision Support on **01926 411331** or e-mail **enquiries@warwickshire.vision**

Get Fit For Summer!

Do you switch off when you hear the word 'exercise'? Maybe you think it sounds too much like hard work, or a class wouldn't be suitable for you because you are visually impaired or are 'getting on a bit'. But exercise doesn't have to be a sweaty workout in the gym or training for a marathon - there really are lots of ways to enjoy keeping fit. Nor should you allow age or disability to hold you back.

Some classes are especially suitable for older people, and although they are usually taught by demonstration, if you tell the instructor that you have a problem, they will describe movements clearly enough for you to follow audio instruction and also give you any help you need. There's no element of competition or comparison, so you don't have to worry about being the best or worst in the class: you just do what you can to the best of your capability.

Why exercise?

Here are some of the benefits:

- Improves breathing and circulation
- Maintains joint movement and flexibility
- Increases muscle strength and tone (use it or lose it!)
- Improves posture, balance and awareness of how you use your body
- Gives a sense of well-being and achievement, and

- The fun of sharing in a group activity.

Which exercise?

Here are some ideas for classes, whatever your age or visual problem:

- Aquafit - You don't have to be able to swim as you stay in the shallow end of the pool
- Chair Based Exercise - Seated exercises, usually to music
- Dance - There are so many forms, from ballroom to Zumba, including folk and line dancing. They are all great fun to try and you don't always need a partner
- EXTEND – Exercise for the Elderly and Disabled - Chair based movements usually to music, often with a specific health focus, e.g. arthritis or post-stroke
- Pilates - Gentle stretching and toning exercises, usually on a mat on the floor, which focus mainly on core strength
- Tai Chi - Graceful standing flowing movements, much practised by the elderly in China; more suited to those with some sight as you need to follow visual demonstration
- Walking - One of the most popular outdoor forms of exercise, from serious ramblers to informal groups; distances vary from the very short urban walks to 10 mile country hikes so there's bound to be something suitable for you!
- Yoga - Stretching and toning exercises, usually on a mat on

the floor but may also be chair based. Focus is on relaxation and awareness of breathing.

Some classes are run by the local authority or neighbourhood or charity scheme so they are free or low-fee, and others by an independent instructor, who might offer concessions. To find out what's on in your area, check out the websites for the type of class you require, or the local authority website under 'leisure activities'. Local newspapers and magazines will also often have details and contact numbers on their 'listings' page.

So why not try something different for the summer - take a friend with you, but if you do go alone you can be sure you'll be welcomed and assisted by a helpful tutor and new friends - and feel all the better for it!

The Optimists

Four visually impaired friends have recently formed a mixed darts team and called themselves The Optimists. To help them aim at the dartboard they use a length of string. One end is attached to the bullseye while they hold the opposite end close to their nose to act as a guide, which enables them to 'feel' where the dartboard is. They throw with their other hand.

As a visually impaired person have you ever thought of playing darts?

The Theory of Everything

The award winning film of this name gives an account of the life of Stephen Hawking, the Cambridge mathematics professor who was diagnosed with motor neurone disease at the age of 21.

This degenerative condition means that he is totally dependant on carers, his form of mobility is an electric wheelchair and he communicates through equipment that gives him a synthetic American voice.

The film was based on an account written by Jane, Hawking's first wife. There is a biography - Stephen Hawking, My Brief History - which of course gives the story of Hawking's life from his own perspective.

The film is now available on DVD. There is an audio version of the book available on CD or as a digital download. Order it from your local bookseller or visit randomhouse.co.uk for more information.

P.S.

Filmgoers can take a companion with them to the cinema and pay for only one seat if they have a CEA cinema card. A Cinema Exhibitors' Association card costs £6 for 12 months. To get a card contact your local cinema or call **023 9224 8545**

Sensory Garden

Jephson Gardens in Leamington is where a new sensory garden has recently been opened. There are various fragrant, textured and colourful plants to stimulate the senses as well as a xylophone. In addition there are raspberries and blackcurrants that can be picked and eaten.

Scam - Be Aware

A recent scam that we have heard about concerned a lady being telephoned by a 'BT Engineer' saying she had a fault on her line. He asked to key a code into her telephone that he said would fix the fault.

Keying the code in somehow enabled the caller to have access to her bank details. Both her bank card and PIN were intercepted, enabling the scammers to withdraw funds from her account.

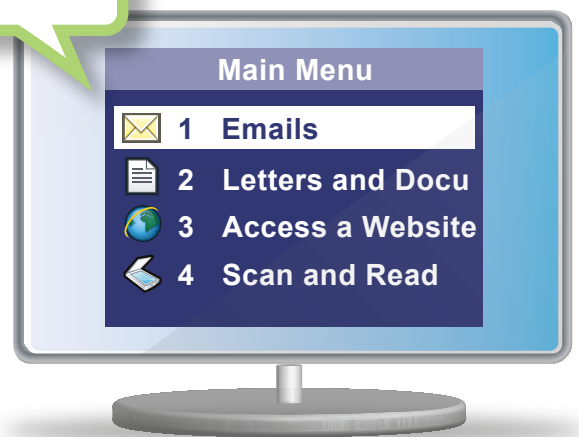
It is always advisable to ask unknown callers for evidence to prove their identify and not give personal information as well as not doing what unknown callers ask.



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Letters to the Editor

Shopping

Oonagh Pettitt, Warwick

I use the Shoppa Hoppa service quite often and find it very helpful, as I am blind and cannot go out to do my shopping on my own, or see the goods on the supermarket shelves.

The minibus picks me up at home, and I am driven to either the Sainsbury's supermarket on the Shires Shopping Centre or Morrisons, where I and the other passengers can shop for an hour. A volunteer driver and passenger assistant are on the minibus to help me board (if needed) and help carry my shopping when we return to my home. There are more volunteers at the supermarkets to help me with my shopping.

The charge is £6, including the return journey. If I want to use this service on a Monday morning I need to telephone during the previous week before Thursday to book my place.

Someone will contact me on Friday to tell me the time they expect to arrive at my home. (I usually phone on Mondays to ensure I get a place on the minibus for the following Monday.) I sometimes wonder why more people don't use the Shoppa Hoppa service as it is very good.

Editor

Warwickshire Vision Support is in partnership with Back and 4th Community Transport to provide this service. It operates in Leamington Spa and Warwick on Monday mornings.

If you can't shop on your own, you can take an escort with you, or ask for a volunteer to help you. If you use a walking aid, wheelchair or guide dog all these are welcome, but must be pre-booked.

If you need to cancel, please give as much notice as possible so the space can be re-allocated and the journey re-arranged. You can call and leave a message at any time.

To book your place on the Shoppa Hoppa telephone any day, Monday to Thursday, between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. stating your requirements. The number is **01789 471595**

Classifieds

If there is some equipment that you no longer use that could be of use to another VIP, you can advertise it in Warwickshire Vision at no cost.

For more information please contact the Editors of Warwickshire Vision at Warwickshire Vision Support.

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For more information, please contact us

 **01926 411331**

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