

# ALL THE VERY BEST TO MIKE SKUDDER – VOLUNTEER, SUPPORTER AND TRUSTEE OF OURS FOR 62 YEARS!

In Christmas 1944, school children were asked to help local charity British Wireless for the Blind Fund's (BWBF) Christmas Day Appeal. Little did one young volunteer, Mike Skudder, know that the charity would become part of his life for years to come.



The charity recruited an army of volunteers to process thousands of donations after the re-launch of the appeal which had been suspended during the war. Mike remembered: "I knew a little about the charity from my teacher, but once I started volunteering I got bitten by the bug. I did the appeal every year after until the final one in 1986."

"We developed a sophisticated system working together as a team. After a few years of envelope opening and counting, I moved across to trouble shooting. I was young and just wanted to help."

Although the BBC Christmas Day Appeal ended in 1986 the British Forces Broadcasting Service continued the support they had been giving since 1945.

After Margaret Grainger, BWBF's current Chief Executive, took over the Fund from John Colligan the charity moved to Chatham. Mike thought his involvement was coming to an end. However he was soon recruited as a trustee, a role he has kept ever since.

After he and his wife moved from North London to Devon for a quieter pace of life, Mike continued as a trustee until the recent restructuring. "I've thoroughly enjoyed being a trustee," said Mike. "I'm getting to an age now where pottering in the garden is very attractive!"

In Devon, Mike and his wife run a B & B, Mike is a lay minister and a treasurer of his local church. So perhaps his garden won't get that much attention after all!

## A Grand gesture from the Met

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund was the chosen charity for the Metropolitan Police Training School's Blue Intake for 2005 and as a result of their fundraising on our behalf we gratefully received a cheque for £1,020 at their Passing Out Parade on 11 November 2005. Fundraiser, Fiona Fountain (pictured) went to Hendon on a bitterly cold November day but the warmth of the hospitality and the enthusiasm of the cadets for the work of the fund more than made up for the outside temperatures!



### Thanks to Concertina and other charitable trusts

Many charitable trusts and foundations support our work and we are grateful to them all. The Concertina Trust invited Fiona Fountain to speak at their reception last year to talk about the work of the Fund. It was a unique opportunity to meet supporters of the charity.

We are grateful to families, friends and colleagues who sent donations in memory of the following people

*Mrs Dorothy Hope  
Fred – Brother of Mrs I. Sheppard  
Victor Rowe Chamberlain MBE  
Mrs Kathleen Doris Taylor  
Mr W Trayner  
Mr Jarvis  
Gerald Saunders  
Mark Reece  
Norah Mahoney  
Grandmother of Dr. H.P. Creegan  
Douglas Curl  
Mrs Phyllis E. Griffiths  
Kenneth Gordon Darrall  
Arthur Henry Freeman  
Robert Cobb  
Mrs Winifred A. Cottrell  
Mrs Rena Beer  
Dorcas Way*



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# TALKABOUT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE

BRITISH WIRELESS FOR THE BLIND FUND

2006



ANNOUNCING A NEW  
BEGINNING FOR  
**BWBF**  
SEE PAGE 2

### BILLY TAKES THE BUS



Full story – Page six



Transmission success



Local Agent Spotlight



The latest BWBF news

TalkAbout is also available on audio cassette. Please ring 01634 832501 for a copy

# A NEW BEGINNING FOR BWBF

Following a review of the trustee board of BWBF in 2005, a unanimous decision was taken by the trustees of the Fund to streamline the large board of 20 down to a more manageable 12. At the same time, the trustees wanted to be more inclusive and work in partnership with a wider range of organisations, including them on the board.

We are now being joined by nominees from Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and from the National Association of Local Voluntary Societies for the Visually Impaired (NALSVI) and we will now have a nomination from Northern Ireland as well.

We are determined not just to have national bodies involved but are keen that each nation and region within the United Kingdom has representation in our decision making. Trustees will serve in rotation and there will be an on-going programme to attract nominations from organisations serving blind and visually impaired people from across the UK.

Fifty per cent of the members of the new Board are visually impaired and many of them will be sitting on the technical committee. We are confident therefore that sets we provide to our recipients or alternatively suggest people should buy for themselves will have been "road tested" thoroughly by someone with a visual impairment.

Peter McDonagh, Chairman said, "I am very much looking forward to working with this new board. The interest and commitment shown by all the nominees has been exemplary and the decision as to who to chose has not been easy but I believe we have a group of people committed to working in the best interest of the Fund. And thus, committed to serving in the best interests of all our recipients"

## From the Chair

Having taken over the chair from Sir John Wall last year, I quickly discovered that the Fund was embarking upon a period of considerable change in order to become better equipped to face the challenges of the years ahead. It was felt that a Board of twelve trustees, instead of twenty, would have significant advantages – although this was going to mean a complete change to our Articles of Association.

After a great deal of thought and discussion with the current officers, our Chief Executive and an external consultant, we agreed on a formula for the recruitment and retention of a Board of Trustees who will be much more heavily involved and who will steer the Fund successfully into the future.

We have therefore tried to build a Board in which:

- a) Trustees from major and minor charities for blind people are included
- b) Trustees from all four United Kingdom countries are represented
- c) All members of the Board will bring with them a portfolio of required skills for the direct benefit of the Fund.

We have also had several long discussions concerning the formulation of various committees and have put concrete proposals to Trustees once the new Board has been formed.

I am therefore pleased to announce that from June 16 2006 the new trustees of the British Wireless for the Blind Fund aside from myself will be; **Ray Hazan, Wally Kinder, Charlie Lucas, Jim Moran, Deane Houston, Richard Mazur, Terry Ottewell, Peter Westwood, Steven Derrick, Jonathan Hewat and Jason Mowe.**

I am also delighted to report that BWBF has undergone a sound and thorough review by the Charity Commissioners, who have not only given us a clean bill of health, but have endorsed our initiatives throughout.

**Peter McDonagh Chairman. British Wireless for the Blind Fund**



## A fond farewell...

Following the restructuring of the Board we have had to say goodbye to a number of people who have been with us a long time.

**Roger Bower** joined the Board in 1993. Although he's resigned from the Board, he still wishes to remain active assessing our technical equipment for us.

**Charles Foster** who joined in 2000. Charles, too, will remain involved as he will be helping to raise money on our behalf in the BFBS annual fundraising event.

**Dave Kelly** who has served on the Board on two separate occasions due to ill health.

**Dennis Gillgallon** who joined in 1994 and who acted as our Treasurer and Sub Treasurer keeping our finances safe and secure to ensure we had enough money to provide our essential service.

Finally, last but by no means least, **Mike Skudder** who originally joined the Board in 1991 after being involved with the Annual Christmas Appeal since 1944! His story appears on page 8 of this newsletter.

**We would like to extend our grateful thanks and appreciation for all their hard work to them all.**

## ...and a warm hello

**Over the past year, BWBF has joined forces with a number of other organisations to support initiatives for people with a visual impairment.**

We have become a member of Vision 2020, an umbrella organisation which facilitates greater collaboration and co-operation between organisations within the UK that focus on visual impairment.

We're continuing to work together with RNIB Scotland in supporting VIP ON AIR – the new online radio station for Scotland's blind and partially sighted community. We've committed ourselves to supporting the work of this innovative and creative radio station for the next three years. If you have internet access you can listen to VIP ON AIR at [www.viponair.com](http://www.viponair.com)

We joined forces with Action for Blind People for World Sight Day (see story on page 6) and we have supplied their three information buses with our information leaflets and sets so that as they travel the country, they can ensure lots of people see the sets we have available.

In addition, our telephone system has been adapted so we now have a direct access link to a range of other organisations for blind people through a system called "Infopoint". This means if someone needs to be referred on elsewhere we can do so quickly and speedily.

All in all, our determination to collaborate with a wider range of organisations is, we believe, a positive step forward in informing and raising awareness about our work and the services we provide.

## "NO BIRTHDAY PRESENTS – PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TO BWBF" SAYS SYBIL, AGED 100



Generous grandmother Sybil Orr from Ayr, celebrated her 100th birthday by saying: "No presents for me!" Instead

the kind-hearted pensioner, who lost her sight 10 years ago, asked birthday party guests to make a donation to BWBF.

Former grocery store owner Sybil received a Harmony radio set. "Without my radio I would be really lost and life would not have the same meaning," said Sybil who received a birthday telegram from the Queen, presented by Major George Hay, Deputy Lieutenant of Ayr.

"Listening to the radio is like having a constant companion. I've always taken a keen interest in what is happening in the 'outside world' and I rely on my radio to keep up to date and to listen to my favourite music."

"I'm so grateful for the support of the British Wireless for the Blind Fund in supplying and servicing these sets."

Sybil moved to Ayr from Glasgow in 1937. Her husband ran a grocery business, founded by his father in the early 1900's, at 218 Ayr High Street. Sybil carried on the family business, James Orr & Sons for a further 10 years after her husband's death in 1955.

Margaret Grainger, Chief Executive of the British Wireless for the Blind Fund, said: "I'm very touched by Sybil's kind gesture. I can't thank her enough. The more money we raise, the more people we can help."

## NEED A SPECIAL CARD? TRY Dotty Designs

**If you know someone who is blind you might wonder about the best way of sending them a birthday greeting or Christmas card.**

Dotty Designs is a new organisation that aims to fill a gap in the market place by providing tactile cards and they can, if required transcribe greetings into braille as well at no extra charge.

Look at the website – [www.dotty-designs.co.uk](http://www.dotty-designs.co.uk) to see the full range of cards which are individually made and can be personalised if required.

# TRANSMISSION 2005

## This national event goes from strength to strength – to the tune of over £7,600

Transmission 2005 was a great success and we are enormously grateful to 18 clubs and many individuals who took part.

The members of Cray Valley Radio Society have traditionally always been highly supportive and they raised a whopping £1479.64. They swept the board on club prizes to win both cups for Most Funds Raised and for Most Contacts Made.

Speaking at the presentation which was held at the Radio Fair on 13th November, Cray Valley's Club Chairman Bob Treacher said, "We're committed to helping BWBF and supporting the work they do to bring radio into the lives of so many people who might otherwise be isolated and alone."

Kevin Martin from Berkshire won the plate for Most Funds Raised by an individual bringing in £405.50 and Steven Webber from Devon won the plate for Most Contacts Made (270).

We are very grateful to Radio Fairs for allowing us to use their event on November 13 2005 for the presentation of prizes and also for their help with promotion and staging.

We'd also like to say a big thank you to Eugene Scully (Pictured below), winner of Big Brother 2005 who gave up his time to come and present the prizes for us. Eugene made his mark on the show by actively promoting amateur radio and he proved just as enthusiastic about the work of the Fund.

In total the event raised **£7,685.80** – that's an increase of over £2,000 on last year.

Transmission 2006 will take place on September 23rd and 24th. Further details, competition rules and sponsorship forms are available on our website: [www.blind.org.uk/transmission](http://www.blind.org.uk/transmission)



## DUET DOES IT! FOR LISTENERS OF ALL AGES

Launched last year, the Duet digital radio has proved very popular with those who have chosen to replace their existing set with a digital one. We are enormously grateful for a donation from the Wolfson Foundation that has allowed us to assess the interest amongst our recipients in receiving a digital set. The grant totalling £75,000 has funded the cost of the first 1,000 sets and the response has been hugely positive.

34 year old twin brothers Stephen and Paul Vye-Parminter were diagnosed with the progressive condition Retinitis Pigmentosa when they were five. They've each received one of the sets. The music mad twins find their differing tastes are catered for by the range of channels available. Hip hop and reggae fan Stephen said "It's great to be able to tune in to a station and enjoy the music in crystal clear quality without the need to constantly play around with the aerial. It's made a real difference to me."

His brother Paul who enjoys listening to rock music and BBC Radio 4, said, "I'm thrilled with my new radio," he says. "There is no hissing or interference, and it's so simple to use."

## "YOU MAKE NEW FRIENDS EVERY TIME YOU GO ON THE AIR"

Written by Alex Kearns, Editor of RadCom

**For many years BWBF has been supported by radio amateurs in our annual competition, Transmission. We have found that many radio amateurs are themselves blind and so we asked Alex Kearns, editor of the Radio Society of Great Britain's magazine "RadCom" to tell us why he thinks amateur radio is such a great hobby for blind and partially sighted people.**

Radios are many blind people's best friend. They provide blind people with a readily available supply of entertainment and education, and keep them in touch with what is going on in the world. But did you know that radios can also be used to chat with people on the other side of the globe? And did you know that there is a whole hobby dedicated to this form of communication?

The hobby is called amateur radio and it is one of the most popular hobbies around, with more than 50,000 active radios amateurs – or hams, as they are often called – in the UK and many, many more worldwide. Hams use special radios called transceivers to communicate with fellow amateurs across the globe. Transceivers are similar to normal radios except that they can be used to transmit as well as receive.

One of the fun aspects of amateur radio is that you never know who you will end up speaking to when you switch on your transceiver. You might find yourself chatting to someone who lives in the same town as you or you could end up speaking to someone from Australia. You make new friends every time you go on the air.

But amateur radio is not just about talking to people. Radio hams are dedicated to discovering more about the art of radio communications. Some love nothing more than building their own radios, others carry out research into propagation – the method by which radio transmissions travel around the world. So the hobby is not just fun, but highly educational too.

There are also plenty of activities for those of a competitive spirit. Each weekend numerous contests take place where the aim is to contact as many people by radio within a set time limit – Transmission is one such example. There are also competitions for contacting people in other countries or on islands. And the beauty for people who are blind is that it is very easy for them to participate in such activities.

**For further information about amateur radio, contact the Radio Society of Great Britain on 0870 904 7373 or visit [www.rsgb.org.uk](http://www.rsgb.org.uk)**



Mother of two, Lucia Valentine (29) started losing her sight when she was a teenager. "I'm a real music fan, and it's wonderful to be able to listen to my favourite radio stations in crystal clear sound quality."

Recently retired Marilyn Clenaghan (59) is also thrilled with the new set. "I really love horse racing and the wonderful sound quality really helps the ambience of the race track come over. It's so easy to use."

**All in all, Duet has proved to be a great success with people of all ages!**

# WORLD SIGHT DAY 2005

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund is one of a number of organisations that has joined forces with Vision 2020, a global initiative which aims to help eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020.

Vision 2020 established World Sight Day and in 2005 this took place on 13th October. It was a memorable day. Staff of the Fund worked with Action for Blind People, Billy Baxter and a number of celebrities driving double decker buses (blindfold, in the case of the celebrities). Meanwhile, Vice Chairman of BWBF, Ray Hazan, was made a freeman of the City of London.

## Ray Hazan's Day

As part of St Dunstan's contribution to World Sight Day the charity sponsored three of its beneficiaries to be made Freeman of the City of London. The Freedom ceremony is a tradition which goes back to 1237, bestowing certain privileges on citizens. Ray Hazan (President of St Dunstan's) was blinded whilst serving with the Army in Northern Ireland.

Over 100 family members, friends, colleagues, donors, and members of other charities gathered in the Mansion House to witness the granting of the Freedom of the City of London; the oldest surviving traditional ceremony still in existence today. Ray said, "It was a great feeling to be part of such an ancient tradition and core of English life and in such historic surroundings. Of course, we do not achieve by ourselves and it was a real pleasure to have wives, family, friends and colleagues, all of whom support us, to share this happy and momentous day with us."

A number of ancient privileges are associated with the Freedom, although they are more a product of collective memory than of documented evidence. It would be a very unwise Freeman who tried to exert some of these privileges today! They include the right to herd sheep over London Bridge; to go about the City with a drawn sword; if convicted of a capital offence to be hung with a silken rope; and to be drunk and disorderly without fear of arrest.

After warning against the use of certain privileges and to the accompaniment of a fanfare by the buglers of the Kings Troop, Royal Horse Artillery, a toast was proposed to the three new Freeman. Following the ceremony, the three new Freeman and their families adjourned to a nearby hostelry to try out their new privilege of not being convicted for being drunk and disorderly!

## Billy Baxter's Day

Whilst Ray Hazan enjoyed the lap of luxury in the Mansion House, Billy enjoyed several laps around the Arena Essex Raceway in Thurrock, Essex against fellow blind speed demon, Mike Newman.

The day started with a double decker bus challenge, billed as VIP vs VIP, Visually Impaired People (VIP) raced against a team of Very Important People (celebrities blindfolded) in double decker buses.

Both Billy and Mike Newman stormed down the tracks following verbal instructions from experienced bus drivers who sat in the cabs with them. They left Lord Charles Brocket and his fellow celebrities, Neil Cole and Steven Walpole miles behind.

As the day was wet and cold the speed race, billed for the afternoon was in doubt but, undeterred, Billy, Mike and their sighted navigators got behind the wheels of their customised stock cars. With water spraying everywhere, the cars hurtled around the tracks with first Billy and then Mike winning a heat each. After several more laps, the event was declared a draw – honours were even and everyone gathered for the presentation of awards.



A FREEMAN OF THE CITY! RAY HAZAN (CENTRE)

Photo: Tom Whipps

## STEPHEN MENARY – A truly courageous cadet



Stephen, aged fourteen

Stephen Menary was just fourteen years old when he lost his sight completely. He also lost his left hand and hearing in his left ear. All he'd done was try to return a torch he thought someone had dropped.

You may remember hearing about Stephen Menary some years ago. He was a young army cadet and on his way to his training centre at Shepherd's Bush barracks. He had already lost the sight in his right eye to a rare cancer when he was just four months old.

Whoever packed the torch with explosives has never accepted responsibility and no one has been charged. Furthermore, Stephen has never received any compensation for his injuries!

However his life has moved on and, amazingly, he bears no grudge against the bomber. He is still the same young man who won the hearts of the nation with his comment at the time; "In a way I am glad it was me because if it was someone else smaller it may have been a lot worse."

The British Wireless for the Blind Fund supplied Stephen with his first set, just before Christmas 2001. So what has happened to Stephen in the interim? After he was discharged from hospital he went to St Dunstan's for rehabilitation.

He learned practical skills, had mobility exercises and sport became a big part of his life. He has learned to play golf, to ski and to shoot. Nothing holds him back and in September 2002, Stephen, then 16, performed a parachute jump with the Red Devils. He uses opportunities like these to raise money for a number of charities and he's decided BWBF should be one of them.

He's undergone computer training too and, just short of his twentieth birthday he's now looking for a job – he's going to need one. Currently, he still lives at home with his mother but he and his girlfriend Kelly are house-hunting so they can live independently and start a family! For more information on Stephen Menary go to [www.cadetmenary.co.uk](http://www.cadetmenary.co.uk)



Stephen, today

## LOCAL AGENT SPOTLIGHT

### Colin Perrott – Coventry

Colin Perrott retired early from his job as a production engineer because of serious cataracts on both of his eyes. For him, cataract surgery was a great success and, with Permagas hard lenses that he uses all the time, his eyesight is now superb.

With his sight restored, Colin felt he wanted to give something back so when his local social service visual impairment team suggested that the British Wireless for the Blind needed help locally, Colin took up the challenge. "The service needed to be completely reorganised when I came to it," he remembers. "It's not difficult but you do need a system to make sure everything runs smoothly. The one I set up then has hardly changed so it must be working! I've had no complaints."

Colin is notified by the local Social Services when someone is registered as blind or partially sighted and he rings people up to discuss their needs. Colin explains the service and, if it's appropriate, he arranges to deliver a suitable set at a mutually agreeable time.

"Most people are simply amazed to be getting something for free. They are bowled over when they realise that the Fund are supplying them with a radio and that it will be maintained as well. As the majority of the people I go to see are elderly and on very limited means I know this means a lot to them. It's very worthwhile. The push button radios are the greatest help for the older people I work with but you can't pre-judge. I'm constantly surprised by ninety year olds wanting CD players!"

Colin runs the Coventry service from the offices of Coventry Society for the Blind every Tuesday. He works almost entirely on his own but does have help with the delivery of sets. Other than that he is entirely responsible for the whole of Coventry and district. What would we do without him?

