

The Bugle

Spring 2021



**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together

sightscotlandveterans.org.uk

Welcome to the spring edition of The Bugle, the quarterly magazine from Sight Scotland Veterans, the new name for Scottish War Blinded.

In this edition, a member tells a few tales from his years with the Royal Canadian Air Force, such as a suspicious B-50 bomber and the use of stars to navigate the Arctic. We also have stories about a member's search for his relative's war grave in France, an SAS training mishap and a rock star hairstyle.

The Tips and Tricks section in this edition has some smart tips for watching birds in the garden, advice for voting in the Scottish Parliament election, and the latest technology for remote controls, which can improve the usability of your television. Tips and Tricks starts on page 18.

Poetry, paintings and entertaining short stories feature in the Creative Corner, which starts on page 24. The featured creative pieces are the winners and runner ups of the Creative Competition, which members submitted entries into in December. Thanks to all those who submitted entries. We hope you enjoy!

Finally, we have a few updates about our services, such as a new telephone group for veterans who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome, on page 31.

This edition of The Bugle is written and edited by Robert Steven, who joined Sight Scotland Veterans and Sight Scotland after working as a journalist. Robert is carrying on from Eilidh McCartney, the previous editor, who is on maternity leave.

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A message from Clair Bryan, Director of Services

I hope you are all keeping well. It's been a difficult last few months with the dark nights and the ongoing restrictions placed on our movements. With the lighter days and good news about the COVID-19 vaccine roll out though, we all hope some sort of normality will return soon. The last few months have been busy and there's plenty of news to share with you.

We were delighted to see our first ever TV ad in February. We managed to get a prime spot in the advert break during Coronation Street. After this advertising, we saw an increase in families contacting us to find out more about our services and an increase in referrals of new members.

In December, our trustees agreed that Sight Scotland Veterans could start to support more people by extending our services to help all veterans with sight loss, not just those with significant sight loss, and to also provide more support to family members. I am currently working with colleagues to explore the different types of services that we could provide to veterans at different stages of sight loss. In particular, we are looking at how we can support people who have just been diagnosed, as these veterans are likely to need a different type of

service than those with significant sight loss developed some time ago. We are also keen to hear from you, our members, about your own experiences, so if you are keen to talk to us about the kind of support that would have made a difference for you soon after you were diagnosed with sight loss, please do get in touch.

Our services are still continuing, even if a bit differently. The Outreach Service continues to provide support remotely. The Rehabilitation Team are also providing assessments by phone or online. Our low vision assessments are helping members to read items such as mail, medication, magazines and the sell-by dates on food. The team have distributed new equipment to veterans and provided training on its use.

The Sight Scotland Veterans Centres remain closed for now. But we are working on plans to open the Linburn and Hawkhead centres and are awaiting sign off from the Care Inspectorate and Health Protection Scotland as to a date when it will be safe to do so. As soon as we are given a date to reopen, we will get in contact with veterans who attended the Centres before March 2020, and let them know what to expect.

Many of you will be aware that Jim Thomson, the Centre Manager for Linburn, retired in March after seven years with us. He will be hugely missed by the staff team and members who attend the Centre. I am really pleased that Gillian McDonald, currently Hawkhead Centre Manager, has agreed to take on the interim role of Activities Centre Manager for both Centres. Gillian will oversee the safe reopening of the two centres.

Over the past few months, we've been able to roll out phone comradeship circles and activity groups Scotland wide. As well as social chat groups, we are also running group activities, such as quizzes, crossword sessions and reminiscence groups. We are currently trialling a sketching group with Michael McAllister, Hawkhead Centre's Art Volunteer. If you would like to know more, please speak to your Centre Officer or Outreach Worker.

Over the Christmas period our volunteers kept in touch with 38 members who said they would value a call over the Christmas period. Volunteers included board members, existing staff from both charities and from our existing volunteers. The feedback from members has been very positive and we plan

to repeat the Festive check-in this year.

And finally, a recent success has been our Charles Bonnet Support Group. Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) is a syndrome that affects people with deteriorating sight, and can cause visions and hallucinations. The Rehabilitation Team trialled a four-week Charles Bonnet Support Group in February and received very positive feedback from participants. Read more about the support group in this edition of The Bugle on page 31. If you suffer from Charles Bonnet Syndrome and would like to join the next group, please get in touch via your Outreach Worker or Centre Officer.

We'll continue to keep a close eye on government guidance on the ways our services can be offered. The most important thing, however, is ensuring that both members and staff remain safe at all times. Hope is on the horizon though, with the vaccination programmes now well underway. We'll be in contact about any changes, as we are able to make them.

Best wishes,

Clair Bryan
Director of Services
Sight Scotland Veterans

Members' Stories

The search for a hero of the heavens

Sometimes, one clue unlocks a whole mystery. For John Carder, that clue was a World War Two book published in 2008.

John is a Sight Scotland Veterans member who lives with his wife in Anstruther, Fife. For years, John searched for the war grave of his cousin, Frank. John knew that his cousin had flown a Hurricane and died in France in 1940. But he had little information about his relative beyond that. As a former RAF Officer, John said he felt it was his duty to find his cousin's final resting place.



"I knew all the stories of the Battle of Britain. In the RAF, there are traditions of visiting war graves. Being from the airforce, it was my job to find him."

John first learned of his cousin's military service in 1944, when the Nazis' V1 'flying bomb' missiles threatened London from over the Channel. Aged 14 years, John was evacuated to Newcastle to stay with his aunty.

John said: "My aunty had an RAF cap and a pair of gloves in her hallway. She said, 'Those belonged to my son. He was shot down in France, but we don't know where he was buried'."

Image shows a black and white photo of Pilot Officer Frank Sydenham wearing his formal RAF uniform.

In his adult years, John searched the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's records for "Frank Hansen" but had no success.

However, his discovery of Robert D Cornwell's book "The Battle of France: Then and Now", in 2008 presented him with a clue.

"I knew my cousin had flown with a man named Cobber Kain [Flying Officer Edgar Kain, DFC]. He was one of the first RAF heroes and was credited with shooting down 14 enemy aircraft. This book had a picture of Cobber Kain and gave his squadron: the No. 73 Squadron.

"I asked the War Graves Commission if anyone in the 73 Squadron named Frank had died in 1940. The commission came back with the name of Frank Sydenham."

John discovered that his aunty had had a first marriage with a Mr Sydenham, who was Frank's father. The War Graves Commission told him Pilot Officer Frank Sydenham had been buried in a civilian cemetery in the village of Chuffilly-Roche, in the north of France.

"I was in my 70s then, so I was fairly old. But I thought, if I didn't find him, no-one would have found him and no-one would know about him," John said.

John wrote to the mayor of Chuffilly-Roche and soon received an invitation to visit.

"We travelled to France and went to the little village, which has a population of 200 people. We met the mayor and his wife, and they put us up in the town," John said.

"My cousin's grave was the only war grave in the cemetery. Below his name on the headstone was written 'A hero of the heavens'," John said.

A small service was arranged. Six French veterans attended the ceremony and a moment of silence was shared.

"The mayor said, he fought for us and he's going to stay with us," John said.

"He said someone in the village had been putting flowers on the grave every year. We think that might have been a family that lived near to where Frank's aircraft crashed."

John gave his RAF lapel badge to one of the French veterans. John has received Christmas cards from the mayor of Chuffilly-Roche ever since his trip.

John's grandchildren have a booklet about Pilot Officer Frank Sydenham and the town of Chuffilly-Roche, ensuring memory of the pilot lives on.

"Finding my cousin's grave was one of the best things in my life," John said.

"We had looked for it for a long time, but we never made any headway.

"It was finding the World War Two book that did it. It's one the things I'm really proud of."



Image shows the group of people who held a memorial service for Pilot Officer Frank Sydenham, who was Sight Scotland Veterans member John Carder's cousin. The mayor of Chuffilly-Roche is the second person on the left.



Image shows Sight Scotland Veterans member John Carder on the left and a French veteran, who is holding a French flag.

Rock star mop gets the chop

Ian Graham only had one thought when he got his first haircut in 12 months.

“I wish I had taken a hat to the barbers with me because it was bloody freezing,” he said.

Ian is a Sight Scotland Veterans member who lives in Larbert, north of Falkirk.

The army veteran had worn his hair trimmed short for decades. Ian was planning to get his regular cut in March 2020, but his local barbers was closed due to Coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

“I thought, I’ll just let it grow for a few months. But the barbers stayed closed, so it just kept growing,” Ian said.

By November 2020, Ian’s thick and frizzy grey hair starting to cascade down his back.

“People started saying I looked like Bryan May, from Queen. I’d gone from an army veteran to a glam rock star,” Ian said.

“Then, people started calling me Worzel Gummidge, because it’s so springy.”

Ian was starting to love his long locks, but he was keen to raise some funds for Sight Scotland Veterans. With help from Linburn Centre Officer Matt Scarcliff, Ian asked his friends, family and blind bowling team mates if they would make a donation to Sight Scotland Veterans if he chopped his grey mane. His network obliged and donated £45.

Next came the clippers.

“My hair came off in December 2020. I wore a woolly hat after my haircut and stayed indoors because it was so cold.”

Ian said he looked forward to meeting with his blind bowling team mates and other Sight Scotland Veterans members in person, once the lockdown restrictions permitted it.

“The camaraderie between the members is the life blood of Sight Scotland Veterans. I’m looking forward to meeting everyone face to face again,” Ian said.



Image shows Ian, a Sight Scotland Veterans member, with long white hair.



Image shows Ian with short trimmed hair, sitting in the barber's chair.

The solid metal Gordon Highlander

A set of metal soldier figurines and a miniature Fort George have recently been reminding Jim Bogan of his army days. Given the injuries Jim sustained in his service, many might wonder if Jim is made of metal himself.

The Elgin resident served in the Cameronians rifle regiment and the Gordon Highlanders regiment in the late 1960s and the 1970s. He served in Libya, Cyprus and Germany, and did four tours of Northern Ireland.

During one tour of Northern Ireland, Jim was ambushed by the IRA. His assailants tore open his flak jacket and knifed him in the stomach. But Jim wasn't done. Thanks to his fellow soldiers, the Gordon Highlander survived. He spent three months in hospital, and lived to march another day.

Over the years, Jim has collected scores of diecast metal Gordon Highlander toy soldiers. Jim now has 24 Gordon Highlander figurines, six Black Watch figurines, four canons and 16 other figurines made by the renowned W. Britain toy company. Jim kept the soldiers in their boxes for years, but during the lockdown, the 73-year-old decided

to bring them out.

Mick Hilton, Jim's Outreach Worker at Sight Scotland Veterans, offered to build a display fort out of reclaimed wood for Jim. Mick dropped it off in December 2020, to Jim's delight.

"It's absolutely splendid," Jim said.

"It's very real looking and the whole set up is my pride and joy."

Jim's wife, Julie, said the couple were very grateful for Mick's efforts.

"His weekly calls have been a godsend for us and have kept Jim going. Mick is such a lovely man and a true asset to Sight Scotland Veterans."

Jim's figures are now lined up on display on the fort, parading for a 2-inch tall Queen Victoria. The fort display reminds Jim of his training in the 1960s where he was based out of Fort George. As Julie tells, Mr Bogan gained the nickname "Toboggan Bogan" while on an SAS training exercise in the west coast.

"While out on a training manoeuvre with the SAS, Jim slipped down a 3,000 ft tall mountain in his sleeping bag," Julie said.

“One chilly night, Jim had snuggled into his sleeping bag on a grassy hill near the top. Suddenly, he found himself slipping and sliding down the mountain, as gravity overcame the minimal friction between the bag and the grass.

“Gorse and bracken eventually brought Jim’s slide down the mountain to a stop. The officers thought they would find his dead body at the bottom, but Jim survived it.

“He just had no sleeping bag, or backside, and very raw feet.”

Julie said Jim “Toboggan” Bogan took adventures like these in his stride.

“He’s had a tough, tough life but he has always got a smile.”

A metal soldier indeed!



Image shows Jim Bogan leaning over his collection of painted Gordon Highlander metal toy soldiers.



Image shows metal W. Britain soldiers lined up around a square fort.

Navigating the airways of the Arctic

When technology doesn't cut the mustard, the old ways can prove reliable.

Robert Macdonald certainly found this to be the case when he flew to the Arctic Circle with the Canadian Armed Forces' Search and Rescue.

Robert is a Sight Scotland Veterans member who lives in Kirkcaldy. Robert, who goes by Bob, did National Service in the 1950s and trained as a navigator. Bob then transferred to the Royal Canadian

Air Force (RCAF), where he trained further to navigate on all-weather fighter planes.

As a navigator on fighters, Bob would sit behind the pilot and work with ground control radar to intercept unknown or unfriendly aircraft.

"In those days, we didn't have GPS or satellites or anything. We used a compass, a sextant and maps to navigate," Bob said.

Bob served on several two-seater RCAF aircraft. These included the CF-100 twinjet interceptor fighter, which was similar to the Royal Air Force's Gloster Meteor Mk 14, and the McDonnell CF-101 Voodoo all-weather interceptor, which could fly at supersonic speeds.



Image shows Bob Macdonald as a young man standing beside one of the Royal Canadian Air Force's CF-100 twinjet interceptor fighters.

"Originally, the ground control radar's radio call sign was 'Yellow Jack'. But when I did a tour as a Ground Controller, I soon became 'Yellow Jock', on account of my Scottish accent," Bob said.

In the CF-100, Bob's aircraft was tasked with monitoring the airspace above France and Western Europe to intercept Russian bombers.

"The CF-100 was armed with eight 50 Calibre machine guns and 58 air-to-air rockets," Bob said.

"I was the navigator and radar operator, sitting behind the pilot. I'd be guided by the ground control to a target. Then, about 30 miles out, we'd pick the target up on the plane's radar. Anything above 30,000 feet was military in those days," Bob said.

"On one mission, we were committed to an aircraft heading to Paris that was dropping chaff, which are little bits of tinsel to block out radar monitoring.

"We flew past at 300 knots overtake and then drew alongside them. It was a big black B-50 bomber. It had no markings on it at all which was very suspicious.

"We reported it and contacted the Ground Control who, after a short

time, told us to abort and break off. We tried: 'Authenticate authenticate, romeo romeo...', but soon came the rude reply to break off at once. We trailed them for some time... They were dodging into the clouds, trying to get away, but we stuck with the B-50 in close formation. I got a rap over the knuckles for that. I suspect it was a CIA plane," he said.

Search and rescue

Bob also served as a navigator on search and rescue missions run by the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Scotsman's navigation skills were put to the test while flying to the Arctic Circle in a Grumman CSR-110 Albatross flying boat.

"In January 1964, we flew 2000 miles from Winnipeg to a small settlement on Ellesmere Island to rescue an Inuit woman who had given birth and had serious complications," Bob said.

"Because we were so far north, at the 80th parallel north, there were 24 hours of darkness every day. The Albatross was a slow plane, going just 110 knots (127 mph), so it was a 15-hour flight in the dark."

The darkness made it impossible to see the landscape and the proximity to the North Pole rendered the magnetic compass useless.

"A compass is of no value close to the magnetic pole, so we steered by giro. It's quite a complicated business. All the longitude lines get closer and closer together. Eventually, though, there's no point in using the North pole as a guiding point."

When the compass failed to be useful, Bob relied on a much older method of navigation.

"In the Arctic Circle, all you have for guidance are the stars," Bob said.

"You knew where the stars would be at a certain time, and so you'd navigate with them and a periscopic sextant. We also used an astrocompass. Using three star fixes, we got there."

The mother and baby to be rescued were at a small settlement called Grise Fiord. At first, the rescue plane's pilot struggled to find a landing spot in the darkness.

"All of a sudden, there were all these lights lighting up on the ice. They had taken out oil lamps so we knew where to land," Bob said.

"All the inhabitants came out to greet us, including a bunch of kids. The kids were clad in fur-rimmed parkas and enormous eyes poked out of their lovely faces."

Bob and the crew shared their extra food supplies with the Inuit children.

"I got the kids all lined up and they all got their banana and their apple. They were beautiful kids with big brown eyes," Bob said.

"I've since received an email from one of those kids, now grown up, telling me he remembers that visit. He said that was the first time he'd seen a banana, and he didn't know he was supposed to peel it. Incomplete briefing on my part."

The rescue crew stayed at Grise Fiord for several hours so the Search and Rescue doctor and nurse could stabilise the mother, Annie, and baby Sula.

Next, Annie and Sula were taken to an American military hospital at Thule Air Base in Greenland. After two days the newborn was strong enough, so the rescue crew flew the mother and baby to Winnipeg for specialist treatment.

"We intended to fly directly back to Winnipeg but had to stop at Fort Churchill at the south of Hudson's Bay to evacuate a very ill young girl," Bob said.

"We set off at Buster (max continuous speed) and the aircraft was vibrating like I had never known.

Tips and Tricks

“We took fuel readings every 10 minutes and the consumption was huge. I was concerned that we were going to run out and the doctor was working feverishly, trying to keep the little girl alive.

“An hour out of base, the little girl from Fort Churchill died. There was not a dry eye on board, even the doctor wept. Her name was Helen Kataloogok. I still feel a tear when I think of that time.”

At the Thule base, Bob recalls buying a bottle of so-called “Scotch” distilled in New Jersey.

“When my father came to visit me in Canada, I said, ‘I’ve got this New Jersey whisky, it’s very special stuff’, and offered him a glass,” Bob said.

“I could see the tears in his eyes when tasted it and he said, ‘You liar, that’s the worst possible whisky you could drink’.

“It’s true: it was bad. I could have used it as jet engine fuel.”

These days, Bob is a member of an aircrew association and he keeps in touch with members over the phone. He’s looking forward to meeting up with fellow Sight Scotland Veterans members once the Coronavirus restrictions lift.

Four tips for better bird watching

Birdwatching is a popular activity with several Sight Scotland Veteran members. Veterans use simple equipment to increase the visibility of birds in their gardens, making the activity more enjoyable.

Walter Grey, of Renfrewshire, uses a Clover Book electronic magnifier.

Walter said the magnifier was a brilliant piece of equipment.

“You just point the camera at the target and it focuses automatically. You can increase the magnification of it and all I have to do is look at the screen.”

Walter listens to and watches for wood pigeons, robins, blackbirds, blue tits and goldfinches in his garden.

“My bird feeder is yellow coloured, which makes it easier to see the birds.” Walter said.

“If you’ve an interest in birds, it’s a very calming and very relaxing activity.”

Four tips:

1. Choose the best bird feeder or bird table

Can you see your bird table? Consider what size and colour would work best for you. Also, consider where your bird table is located in the garden - could it be closer to your window? You could even purchase a bird feeder that attaches to your window. Some people use bright coloured mountain clips (Carabiner) to hang their bird feeder. This highlights the bird feeder's location.

2. Magnifiers and Binoculars

It may be worth considering talking to one of our Rehabilitation Officers about getting a suitable device to help you see the birds on your bird table in more detail.

A monocular or pair of binoculars may help. Perhaps an electronic magnifier with a good distance camera, like Walter Grey's, would work for you.

Another option may be to use a smartphone or tablet camera to zoom in on the bird table. You may also want put the camera on video mode and record the birds on the bird table, allowing you to watch it later. By doing this, you can pause the video and zoom in at particular points of interest.

3. Anti-glare glasses

Glare can often be problematic and it may help to wear anti-glare glasses when looking at your bird table. There are different sizes and colours of anti-glare glasses available. Please speak to your Outreach Worker if you would like to discuss this further.

4. Bird Song

Many birds can be identified by their song and call. You can learn to identify these sounds from the various CDs available from the RSPB's shop or you can listen to some clips on their website. The RSPB produce an audio version of their member's magazine. The BBC Radio 4 website also has a "Tweet of the Day" page, with a catalogue of bird songs and images. Visit bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s6xyk

Voting in the Scottish Parliament Elections on Thursday 6 May 2021

The Scottish Parliament election is taking place on Thursday 6 May. The election decides which MSPs (Members of Scottish Parliament) will make up the Scottish Parliament for the next four years.

There are three ways to vote. You can vote in person at a polling station, by post, or by proxy, which means you've appointed someone

you trust to vote on your behalf.

Registrations to vote in the Scottish Parliament election closed on Monday 19 April. Call the Election Commission for information about registrations on 0800 3280 280 or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/voter

Applications to vote by post closed on Tuesday 6 April. If you are registered to vote by post, you should have received correspondence already. Applications for proxy votes must have been submitted by 5pm on 27 April.

Voting in person

Polling stations will be open from 7am to 10pm on Thursday 6 May. Contact your local authority to find your nearest polling station.

Special hygiene measures are being put in place because of the Coronavirus pandemic. All attendants will be wearing face masks and there will be a limit on the number of people allowed inside the polling station at one time.

You can keep yourself and others safe by:

- wearing a face mask
- bringing your own pen or pencil
- cleaning your hands when you enter and when you leave
- keeping a safe distance from others.

Accessible formats and assistance

Large print options and tactile voting devices will be available at polling stations on Thursday 6 May. You can also take a companion with you to assist you at the polling booth. More details are provided below.

People who can read large print can request large print sample versions of the ballot papers at their polling station. You can take these large print sample ballot papers into the polling booth as a reference to help you read and mark your own ballot papers.

People with more advanced sight loss can request a tactile voting device. The tactile voting device is a template that is fixed onto the ballot paper to assist you with marking the paper. A polling station staff member will read out the candidates' names on the ballot papers.

You can also take a companion with you to help you at the voting station, or you can request help from a member of polling station staff. Your companion can guide you between the entrance, the polling desk, the polling booth and the ballot box. Your companion can also mark the ballot papers for you in accordance with your instructions.

Your companion must be 16 years or over. A member of polling station staff could also assist in the ways described above.

More information for blind and partially sighted voters is available at electoralcommission.org.uk/media/8258. Alternatively, you can call the Election Commission on 0800 3280 280 or visit electoralcommission.org.uk/vote

How to improve the usability of your TV remote

By Katrina Campbell, Rehabilitation Officer

Our televisions are clever things these days, allowing us to access terrestrial television, cable TV, DVDs, Netflix and even the radio. Never mind that we might be able to pause live television to answer the phone, or make a cuppa and then fast-forward through the adverts. Whilst all these options are great, it means we are faced with busy remote controls with lots of buttons that most of us never use. Add a visual impairment to the mix and television remotes become fiddly things with too many small, dark buttons, which are impossible to see.

So how do we make our remote controls more accessible again?

First off, ask for assistance from a family member, a friend or your outreach worker to see if anything can be done to highlight buttons on the remote control. Our television remotes are high-use items so are designed to be non-stick. This can make them difficult to mark up with bump-ons or high marks, however, it is possible. Another option is to use a bit of electrical tape to cover up any buttons that are not needed. This will simplify the remote, so only the essential buttons are more easily accessible.



The Geemarc Easy TV5 Remote Control

Another option is upgrading to a simplified, universal television remote such as the **Geemarc Easy TV5 Remote Control**. This remote is designed to be as easy as possible, with only eight large buttons (power, mute, AV, volume up/down, channel up/down and profile select), all with large markings, that

have good colour contrast with the black casing. This makes it good for people with sight loss and may aid other issues like limited dexterity in fingers or memory issues. This universal remote is quick and easy to set up using simple point-and-click programming and is suitable for televisions with built-in Freeview digital channels. However, it may not be suitable for all set-top boxes.



The Flipper Remote

The **Flipper Remote** has large colour-coded tactile buttons for easy use. You can easily program up to 25 of your favourite channels. Once it has been set up, there is a slide panel which can cover the non-essential buttons, leaving you with six key buttons: on/off, channel up/down, volume up/down and mute. This makes it easy to cycle through your channels and eliminates the hassle of searching.

The Doro HandleEasy 321rc



The **Doro HandleEasy 321rc** remote is another convenient and easy-to-use remote control. It is comfortable to hold and comes with seven programmable keys. Although it is straightforward to program, you need an existing and fully functional remote control to program the HandleEasy remote control. Once programmed, it should be 100 per cent compatible with infrared devices of any brand, including DVD players, home stereos, amplifiers, ceiling fans, Sky boxes and more.

Sky Q Accessibility remote and the Sky Easy Grip remote



Sky Q Accessibility remote and the Sky Easy Grip remote

If you are a Sky customer, you can register as an "Accessibility customer" and request a free **Sky Q Accessibility remote** or **Sky Easy Grip remote**. These remotes work like their standard remotes but are specifically designed to be easier to use if you have got limited vision or dexterity. They have raised contour buttons with additional tactile points, larger and bolder button graphics/visibility with shortcut buttons to quickly turn on subtitles and audio description. Virgin TV customers with a V6 or TiVo box can also request a more accessible remote.

Technology is moving on at a fast pace. If you have a "Smart" television you may already have a voice-activated remote. To use the voice-activated feature, all you need to do is press the microphone button on the remote control and hold it down until it beeps. This will prompt your television to listen to your command. Next, while still holding the microphone button down, speak your commands into your remote like a microphone. Voice command options include changing channels, adjusting the volume, the picture mode, and screen brightness.

Many people now have an Amazon Alexa which is a virtual assistant AI (artificial intelligence.) Amazon Alexa allows people to check the time, weather, news, listen to music, make to-do lists, set alarms, and play audiobooks, all via voice control. Did you know, though, you may be able to set up your television to allow voice controls via Alexa? You need to pair your Alexa device to your television first. Your Alexa device will pair automatically if you have a Fire television. Certain televisions have their own built-in Alexa support, letting you control volume, power and inputs using voice commands. Finally, some television boxes like TiVo, Frontier and Optic Hub also allow you to control it using Alexa voice commands. You need to open the Alexa app and select "Enable skill," then follow the on-screen instructions to activate.

The main thing is: do not struggle in silence, speak to family, friends or one of our team to get advice and support with your television issues.

Creative Corner

Creative Competition

Sight Scotland Veterans definitely has some creative folk in its midst! We received 42 pieces of creative works from members as entries to the Sight Scotland Veterans' Creative Competition. There were so many entries and so many different formats, we decide to have three categories: art, poetry and short stories.

Outreach Practice Leads Jenny Liddell and Alison Cairns assessed all the entries and judged a winning and a runner-up piece in each category.

Prizes have been sent to the winners and runners-up: new colouring pencils for the winning artists, Scottish poetry books for the poets, and coffee mugs for the short story winners.

Thank you to everyone who entered: we hope you enjoyed painting, drawing, writing and imagining up the creative works. We hope to run the run the competition again next winter, so keep practicing your sketching and writing.



Artwork category winner:
"Robin" by John Nalepa

John Nalepa's artwork is a coloured pencil drawing of a robin with a bright red breast, perched on a flowering branch.



Artwork category runner-up: "Coastal Scene" by Kenneth Hall

Kenneth Hall's artwork is a water-painted landscape, showing a tree in autumn, lush green grass, the rough waters of the sea and a cloudy sky.

The winning poetry

Winner: 'Marching On' by Tony Byrne

MARCHING ON

By Tony Byrne

Seize the day, seize the day, come and take the pay
Carpe Diem, so the posters say
Orders are given along the way
Time to leave home
To the left, to the right, and a chance to fight
Into the ranks, keep it tight and tight
Soldiers and Sailors and Airmen plight
Hope never marches alone.

"Very well, very well", so in we fell
Ev'ryone had a tale to tell
Together we'd advance through hell
Eager to serve the throne
Rapid fire, cease fire, into danger dire
And a sight in the night made us all perspire
Night through, "stand to" round the mess tine fire
So hope never marches alone.

Make it last, make it fast, stand beside the mast
And swagger a bit as you're marching past
Ready to hear 'Last Post' at last
Command is in the tone
Here they come, hear the drum, and they're on the run
In victory o'er a foe hard won
No more to hear the silent gun
God's hope never marches alone.

Take the strife, take the fife, it cuts like a knife
Out of the Force, time to take a wife
Going back to civilian life
End of the job you've known
To the fun in the sun, and to ev'ryone
Here in this club for the veteran
Each of us here has service done
Real hope never marches alone. Real hope never marches alone.

Runner-Up: 'Nurses' by Irving Parry

NURSES

by Irving Parry

Thou Swell.. Thou Grand
Wouldst hold my hand
And smile away my fears.
Hug away my tears.
Thou hast anointed me
With healing TLC
Thou hast restored me.
Oh Thou Swell. Thou Grand.
Thou hast held my hand.

Winning short stories

Winner: "Donkey" by John Meiklejohn

Runner Up: "Life is a Circle"
by Irving Parry

DONKEY

by John Meiklejohn

We bought the house and so began my journey with a donkey. Don came with the house. Whatever possessed me to agree to that remains a mystery!

We had had pets but a donkey was unknown territory. He rejected all my efforts to make contact. He had a half-acre paddock for grazing, a stable for comfort and shelter, and

a farrier who looked after his feet, but he was still discontented.

If I strayed too near, he tried to kick me. When I planted new trees and bushes, he ate them. We tolerated one another, travelling along paths never to meet in a congenial relationship.

One day, he left it all behind. Our neighbour saw him go.

"The donkey has gone walkabout," she said, pointing eastward.

"Towards Menstrie."

I set off on what seemed a fruitless exercise and grumbled, "Ungrateful animal, he has all that a donkey in the east would desire and yet he wants more".

About half a mile long the road a man stood at a bus stop. I asked him, "Have you seen a donkey?"

With no flicker of bemusement at the question, he pointed to a lane leading to a farm in the Orchil Hills. "Up there," he said.

Following the direction of the pointing digit, I walked up the steep lane, rounded a corner and there Don was. Stopped in his tracks by a cattle grid, he gazed longingly to the hills, dreaming perhaps of what it might have been like to be the Great Donkey of the Orchil Hills.

He ignored me as I stood beside him and he made no objection as I held his bridle, turned, and headed down the lane on the homeward journey.

No one from Law and Order witnessed the excitement we caused. Cars slowed to see the view. Double-decker buses adopted steep angles as passengers moved to see the Clackmannanshire version of "Travels with a Donkey".

Our relationship didn't improve but neither did it deteriorate. I fed and watered Don and he accepted it all and ignored me. I was told the Rudolph Steiner school in Auchterarder needed a companion for a lonely horse. Don was offered and

accepted. His new adventure began in a horse box owned by the mother of a pupil of the school. My journey with a donkey ended without a goodbye from him and a sigh of relief from me.

LIFE IS A CIRCLE

By Irving Parry

"What's it all about then?", he asked, staring out of the office window at the driving rain, and raising his voice above the thunder of the traffic below.

I was busy at the time and didn't give the question the attention it probably deserved. Besides, he'd asked the same question before and I hadn't responded. But I thought I knew what he meant and this time asked in return: "Why don't you get married?"

He snorted: "What, and breed brats who would grow up never knowing what it was all about either? No thanks!"

I got on with my work and left him to his musings about life. But his question stuck in my mind and as I belted down the motorway to Birmingham every morning, I began pondering it as a mental exercise to pass the time. The more I thought about it, the more it assumed the complexity of that classic

philosophical question: How do you know you're not dead? I had read somewhere that to every seemingly impossible question, there is a very simple answer once you have thought it through to finality. Although I had a feeling I knew what it was all about, putting it into words eluded me.

Then, a series of swift happenings drove the question from my mind, and resulted in my giving up the hurrying, scrabbling life for the timeless tranquillity of the Isle of Skye. I, my wife and my newly graduated Son. The first thing I learned was the old Highland saying: when God made time, He made plenty of it; and I used some of it to return to the question posed by my ex-colleague.

I would sit on the shore and stare, overpowered by the grandeur of the mountains, enthralled by the ever-changing face of the sea, mesmerised by the massing, wheeling, spiralling terns, and enchanted by the quiet emergence of a black, shiny football with soft, limpid eyes contemplating me from sea level, before silently slipping back below the surface.

Then, transported to a higher plane by the whole symphony of sight and sound that is the Hebrides, I would go into the cottage and dash

off a lengthy epistle to my former colleague, telling him that here was the answer; but when I read them back they were a mass of emotional drivel, so I dumped them. Even so, I had the feeling that I was getting very close.

We had one real concern; that our Son would not meet a suitable girl and be lonely. But we didn't know about the lovely girls on Skye and were delighted when one of them emerged from wherever beautiful girls keep themselves and knocked him off his feet. He married her, and I had the daughter I always wanted. I got very emotional about it and perhaps too soon after the reception dashed off a magnum opus to my wondering former colleague, proving that now, I had the answer and this really was what it was all about. Fortunately, I delayed sending it and when I read it back in the cold light of sobriety, it too was drivel and suffered the same fate as its predecessors. Strangely, the feeling that I was getting closer to the secret grew stronger.

Then it happened. I was presented with a Grandson. When my own Son had been born, I leapt a five-barred gate in ecstasy. Now I was too stiff to do that, but I had to almost be physically restrained from screaming at the Universe from

atop Castle Moil: "Do you hear me Universe? I'm a Granddad." When I saw him, smelt him, touched him, held him, something starting low in my feet welled up invading my stomach, gripping my heart and bursting in my head, blurring my vision with streaming tears. For want of a better word, it was Joy. Here was a Grandson who looked like my Son, who looked like me who looked like my Grandson. My instinct was immediately to write a Great Revelation to my erstwhile colleague; but being wiser now, I refrained. When I had calmed down the short answer emerged, crystal clear. And so I sent him a simple message: "The answer is a Circle. Become a Granddad."

I never heard back directly, but news reached me that when he got my message, he shook his head sadly, declared that I'd gone off my rocker "up there in Scotland" and returned to staring out of the window and asking anyone who would listen: "What's it all about then? That's what I would like to know".

Sight Scotland Veterans' Service Updates

New telephone group for people who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome

A new telephone group is being offered to veterans who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) can cause visions and hallucinations and affects people who have deteriorating sight. These visions can be benign, such as simple patterns or flowers, but the visions can sometimes appear more sinister. People suffering from CBS have reported visions of unknown people in Victorian outfits, bedraggled children, or worse. Visions can be terrifying, while others can be mildly annoying.

Six veterans who experience Charles Bonnet Syndrome took part in a trial support group in February, which involved weekly group telephone calls.

Our Rehabilitation Team set up the support group after receiving guidance from a charity called Esme's Umbrella, which specialises in supporting people with Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

The support group took place over four weeks, with veterans taking part in telephone calls on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.

During the support group calls, veterans shared their experiences of the syndrome. Participants discussed coping strategies that had worked for them in the past when they experienced the visions. On one call, the founder of Esme's Umbrella, Judith Potts, spoke with participants about the syndrome.

All participants in the support group said they had benefited from the group and were keen to continue taking part in scheduled calls.

Are you experiencing Charles Bonnet Syndrome?

If you suffer from Charles Bonnet Syndrome and would like to join the next group, please let your Outreach Worker or your Centre Officer know, and they can provide details of when the next sessions are available.



Linburn Centre manager retires

The former manager of the Linburn Centre, Jim Thomson, is looking forward to gardening and travelling in his retirement.

Jim Thomson retired at the end of March. He worked at the Linburn Centre in West Lothian, 9 miles from Edinburgh, for the past seven years.

Jim said he was looking forward to "going for long walks or cycles on nice warm days".

"If it happens that I go for a nice long walk and there happens to be a pub at the end of it, I might just have to settle in for a pint," he said.

Jim said he planned to head out travelling once pandemic re-

strictions were lifted.

"Before all this, we were planning to go to Cambodia and Vietnam. We've travelled extensively through Europe, Africa, Asia, North and South America, but there are parts of Europe we'd like to explore in more detail and we'll certainly be heading back to India and other places in the East."

Jim said it had been his privilege to work with veterans for the past seven years.

"I've learned much more about the Armed Forces and the people who have been part of the Armed Forces - as well as various conflicts and the impact those conflicts have had on individuals."

Jim said he was proud of his staff team and wished Sight Scotland Veterans all the best for the future.

Further Opportunities

University of Stirling researchers seek survey participants

Researchers from the University of Stirling are looking for people aged over 60 years who would like to speak with them about their experience of the past 12 months.

The researchers are interested in how older peoples' social connections with friends and family have been affected during the lockdowns and restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Taking part would involve an online discussion group with other older people in Scotland to share experiences.

If you are interested in taking part, please call Alhena Curreri on 07491-828-735 or email n.a.curreri1@stir.ac.uk

Thanks for reading!

We hope you have enjoyed this edition of the Bugle.

We are currently running a survey on our communications – if you'd like to contribute your views, please ask a member of our team to assist or visit: surveymonkey.co.uk/r/The-Bugle-survey

You can complete a short online survey at this website page.

If you have any questions or comments, or suggestions for the next edition please contact Robert.
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**Thank you for reading the latest edition of
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**Sight Scotland
Veterans**

Tackling vision loss together