



Listen here

At the Drumhead

A poem to remember

We watch soldiers dressed in residential splendour
Solemnly carry drums to a raised area, placing them
one on top of the other for all to see.

The ceremonial history the battle honours won
the horrors of war fallen heroes their duty done.

While remembering the ceremony of building a temporary altar
in the mud on the battlefield of the Somme.

No cries of joy, or laughter or cheers
as the Union Jack flies at half mast whilst battle honours are draped.

And a book of Remembrance is held high for all to see,
Then placed atop the drums as standard bearers lower flags
and a lone bugler sounds the last post salute.

Muffled drums beat, church bells ring and a choir softly sings
As veterans and serving soldiers stand to attention
Proud and respectful as poppies fall as if from the sky.
Every poppy a story, a person, a home, a family,
A photograph, a memory, a place, a name in stone,
As tears fall from our eyes we watch, and pray, and say.

“We will, remember them”
“We will, remember them”

Bob Welch, 2018

Quiz answers from page 32 1. Rome 2. 3 3. 5 4. Vatican City 5. 28
6. Time 7. Gemini 8. 500 9. Birds 10. Old Kent Road



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Review

The journal of
Blind Veterans UK
February 2026



Giving back and growing stronger

Becoming a Member Volunteer

Inside:

Welcome Giles, our new Chairman
Living with Charles Bonnet Syndrome
Smartwatches for people with sight loss



Rebuilding
lives after
sight loss

The New Year Raffle is now open!



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You could WIN

£15,000

Tickets cost £1
and help to rebuild blind veterans' lives



Phone 0300 111 2233

Play online raffle.blindveterans.org.uk/review

Raffle closes 20 March. Draw takes place 27 March.

No under 18 allowed to enter. No prizes will be paid to anyone under 18 years of age. Full terms and conditions apply, please visit raffle.blindveterans.org.uk/rules for more details.



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Person responsible for the raffle and lottery: Claire Rowcliffe, Blind Veterans UK, 3 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AR. Blind Veterans UK is a registered charity no. 216227 (England & Wales) and SC039411 (Scotland). Licensed by the Gambling Commission under the 2005 Gambling Act. Registered license number 008297.



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Member
Tony enjoys his
highlight of 2025

On the cover

Member Jerry Bradley with Volunteer Coordinator, Anne, completing 90km at the South Coast Ultra.





Thank you to Barry and welcome Giles

A message from your CEO **Adrian Bell**

A belated happy 2026 to you all. By now you will have hopefully received a letter from our Chair of Trustees, Barry Coupe, explaining that he will be standing down from his role in March.

On behalf of everyone at Blind Veterans UK I want to thank Barry for all he has done. As I'm sure many of you will know, his connection to



Adrian Bell

our charity is profoundly personal. His father, Des, was cared for by St Dunstan's after losing his sight in the Second World War.

Barry has served the charity for 10 years as a Trustee, and Chair for the last four of those years. He has brought personal passion to the role, as well as professional acumen and unwavering commitment to our mission. His pivotal role in the successful move to our new Rustington Centre will be particularly remembered. I'm sure you will join me in thanking him wholeheartedly and wishing him all the best for the future.

As Barry explains in the letter, the charity has appointed his successor, Giles Peel. In March, he will become our 10th Chair of Trustees in our 111-year history.

Giles brings a wealth of leadership experience from the veterans' support sector. He previously served as Chair of Combat Stress, stepping down last

“Giles brings a wealth of leadership experience from the veterans' support sector”

year after six years at the helm. He has extensive governance expertise in both the public and charitable sectors. He manages his own company advising on risk, regulatory and strategic governance, and has held non-executive roles across national health, financial services, and veterans' organisations. He also served for 20 years in the Royal Navy, which I know will please my fellow Matelots!

I know you will join me in welcoming Giles. His outstanding leadership of Combat Stress, coupled with his governance expertise and passion for veteran welfare, means he is exceptionally well-placed to guide our charity during this exciting next phase. He will be writing to introduce himself to you all in the pages of Review very soon.

I would also like to thank those of you who were able to attend the various Member conferences. Your time, insight, challenges and observations were extremely valuable. And I'd also like to thank those who weren't able to attend but submitted their responses to our proposed changes to the Charity



Barry Coupe attending Remembrance Day in London, 2021

Objects and to the proposal for a Membership Association. As we take this work forward, I will continue to keep you all informed.

I end by offering my personal congratulations to two members of the Blind Veterans UK family who are well known to many. Our Working Age Case Manager, Glynis Gillam, and Member Clive Jones both received awards in the King's New Year's Honours, recognising their work with this charity.

Congratulations to them both. 🇬🇧



Contact details

Contact address Blind Veterans UK,
York House, Wetherby Road,
York, YO26 7NH
0300 111 22 33

Member Support Hub (MeSH):
01273 391 447

New Members: Anyone who may be eligible to join Blind Veterans UK, can phone our Membership Department on freephone **0800 389 7979**.



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Rustington Centre: 01903 945 300

Review Editor: 0300 111 22 33 or
revieweditor@blindveterans.org.uk

Feedback: To give us feedback on any of our services, please email us at supporter.services@blindveterans.org.uk or call **0300 111 22 33**.

Donations: To make a donation, simply call **0300 111 22 33** or visit blindveterans.org.uk/donate.

To listen to Review on Alexa, the command is: **“Alexa, ask TuneIn to play Blind Veterans UK Review.”** If you have any problems getting it to work, please contact the MeSH helpline on **01273 391 447**.

A different format?

If you would like to receive your copy of Review in a different format, please contact your Community Support Worker or ROVI for more information.



News

Giles Peel appointed as new Chair of Blind Veterans UK Board of Trustees

We are delighted to announce the appointment of Giles Peel as our new Chair of Trustees.

Giles contributes significant leadership expertise gained within the veterans' support sector. This includes having served as Chair of Combat Stress, Britain's leading charity for veterans' mental health, from 2019 until last



Giles Peel

year. Before that he chaired RFEA Ltd, The Forces Employment Charity. In March 2026 he will become the 10th Chair of Trustees in the charity's 111-year history.

As well as leading Combat Stress, Giles has built extensive governance expertise in all the major UK sectors. He manages his own company advising on risk, regulatory and strategic governance, and has held executive and non-executive roles across, financial services, legal, NHS and veterans' organisations. He also currently chairs ABTA's Appeals Board. In his first career, Giles served for 20 years in the Royal Navy.

Giles will begin his tenure following the decision of our current Chair, Barry Coupe, to step down. Barry, whose father was cared for by the charity after losing his sight in the Second World War, has served as a Trustee for 10 years and Chair for the last four.

Barry says: "I have known my entire life the amazing difference this charity makes to those it supports. My father, and subsequently me, are living proof of that. It has been a privilege →

to serve Blind Veterans UK for the past 10 years. As I step down, I wish Giles and his fellow Trustees nothing but the best and have every confidence that they will continue to maintain the work in making the charity sustainable and delivering life-changing support to blind veterans across the UK”

Giles says: “I’m deeply honoured to be appointed Chair of Blind Veterans UK. Supporting those who have given so much for our country is a privilege. I look forward to working with the Board, leadership team, staff, volunteers, and the veterans themselves, to support this charity to improve the lives of blind veterans.”

CEO of Blind Veterans UK, Adrian Bell says: “On behalf of everyone at Blind Veterans UK I want to thank Barry for all he has done. To the role he has brought personal passion, professional acumen, and unwavering commitment to our mission. His influence on ensuring the success of our move to our new Rustington Centre will be particularly remembered. We thank him wholeheartedly and wish him all the best.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Giles Peel as our new Chair. His outstanding leadership of Combat Stress, coupled with his governance expertise and passion for veteran welfare, means

he is exceptionally well-placed to guide our charity during this exciting next phase as we look to grow and transform how we work to best support our current and future veterans.”

Portrait of a Second World War Veteran

An artist on the Isle of Wight has painted a portrait of one of our Second World War veterans, Alec Penstone. Alec was onboard the aircraft carrier HMS Campania on D-Day, sweeping mines and detecting U-boats. During the war, he also completed 11 Arctic Convoy missions.



Francesca, Alec and the portrait

Alec lost his sight later in life and we have supported him since 2020. Artist Francesca Adami, who also lives on the Isle of Wight, first found out about his extraordinary wartime experiences while sorting through a pile of newspaper clippings after her mother had passed away.

Francesca says: “I noticed that one person had repeatedly featured. He looked extraordinarily like my mother’s brother, my Uncle John. Like John, the man in the paper had signed up to the Royal Navy at 16 and was even sent off on the same missions: D-Day, the Arctic Convoys and the Far East. Sadly, my uncle had gone long before. But this man was still very much alive!”

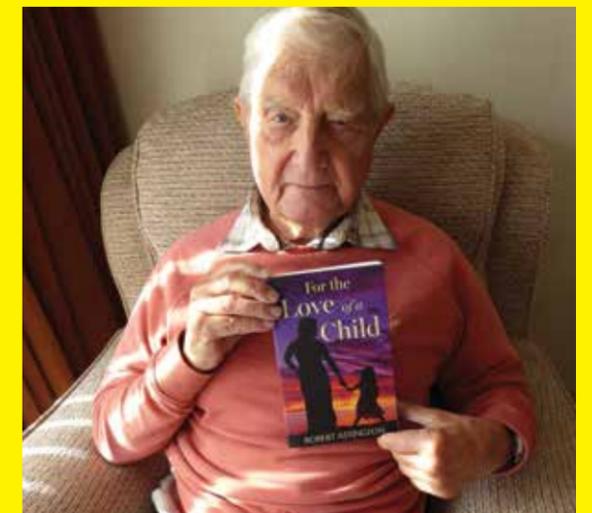
Over the next four months, Francesca met with Alec to embark on the project. “It seemed extra personal to me,” she says, “as my father was an optician and dedicated his life to helping people see.”

■ **A limited edition run of 80 signed prints – to celebrate 80 years since the end of the Second World War – are now available to purchase, signed by Francesca and Alec. Eighty per cent of the proceeds from the sales will be donated to our charity. To request a print, please email Francesca at francescaadamiart.com**

Robert Astington’s novel available on audio for free

A couple of months ago, we shared the wonderful news that Member Robert Astington had published his novel, *For the love of a Child*. We are delighted to let you know that Robert’s book is now available to borrow for free from Calibre Audio, which is a charity offering free audio versions of books for blind or vision impaired people. The book can be borrowed in various formats for up to eight weeks.

■ **Find out more about how to use Calibre Audio and Robert’s novel at calibreaudio.org.uk/services/how-to-listen**



Robert with his published novel



In your community

Just some of the social gatherings which have taken place in recent weeks across the country...

In Milton Keynes

Members of the Milton Keynes Member support group got together at Shenley Wood Retirement Home to listen to Mike and Matt, father and son guitarists.

The duo performed a mixture of well-known classical and modern pieces, finishing off with Christmas Carols including O Little Town of Bethlehem and Silent Night which everyone sang along to. During the interval Members enjoyed coffee and mince pies and



Family duo Mike and Matt

said their goodbyes and thank yous to CSW Sue Sims, who is leaving Blind Veterans UK this month.

In Tidworth

Staff, Members and volunteers manned a Blind Veterans UK stall at Tesco Superstore in Tidworth. Despite the awful rain, some people were still out and about and it was a great opportunity for the public to speak with our Members, find out about volunteering opportunities and showcase some of the fantastic woodwork and craft pieces made by our Members. And we raised over £100 in the process!

In Cosham

Our regular Cosham group were joined by local chocolatier Kerry for a workshop. Kerry, who runs The Crafty Chocolatier in Cowplain, Hampshire, took Members through a sensory experience of chocolate tasting, showing them how to tell if chocolate



Members running their Blind Veterans UK stall in rainy Tidworth

has been tempered by looking, listening for a snap, smelling, feeling and tasting.

After trying the chocolate, everyone was able to help with tempering the chocolate before creating their own bars - and having to make the difficult decision about how to top them, with many saying there were too many choices, from caramel pieces to jellybeans and candied ginger.

While the bars were setting, Kerry gave a talk on the process of making chocolate. Members were able to feel a

Do you want to know what's going on in your local area? Contact your local community team who can tell you everything you need to know.



Members enjoying a night at the theatre in Cheltenham

dried cacao pod and try dark chocolate from Africa and South America.

In Cheltenham

Our Members and volunteers recently enjoyed a behind-the-scenes tour of the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham. After being shown the costumes and scenery, they enjoyed a delicious meal. Then they all settled down to watch a pantomime, where - sat just three rows back in the stalls - they experienced first-hand water pistol spray and snow fall.

A great time was had by all, with lots of laughter and singing. And the theatre staff helpfully organised audio description, making the show accessible to all. 🎧



Listen here

The little-known syndrome, CBS

Member and acclaimed author **Simon Mahoney** shares his experience of Charles Bonnet syndrome

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a condition related to sight loss that is often misunderstood, if known about at all. Anyone with a sight loss can experience these hallucinations, for a short period or indefinitely.

The images are often patterns, people or animals. The patterns might look like brick walls, fences or geometric shapes, whereas the people are often in distinctive clothing or period dress.

In this article, a Member shares their experience of this condition, which can be confusing, scary and frustrating. Ultimately, CBS is not harmful or a sign of anything concerning, although it can make using any functional vision difficult. It's rare for images to be unpleasant or disturbing and once understood, they become part of living with a sight-loss.

For more information, there's a very good charity called Esme's Umbrella.

Simon's experience

Charles Bonnet syndrome is sometimes referred to as waking nightmares. It was known to the Swiss back in 1764, but news of it didn't reach the UK until 1983. This may account for why so many people look blank when you talk about it.

The cause of the hallucinations, as I understand it, owes more to sensory deprivation rather than any mental aberration. When you lose your sight by damage to the eyes or optic nerves, the visual part of the brain is left alive and kicking. I like to think that, used to high levels of activity when suddenly there is none or very little, it gets bored and makes stuff up. In this way, we have the real twist in the tail of sight loss - we can't see and so we are allowed to see things that aren't there!

No one warns you about CBS

The hallucinations are perfectly harmless, provided you understand



Member Simon sailing at Carsington Water

CBS. If you don't, you have another layer of stress added onto the stress of losing your sight as you start to think you are going crackers.

Unfortunately, eye clinics don't generally tell us about CBS. After all, they're concerned with eyes, not sight loss. When I asked my consultant why he hadn't informed me of CBS, he replied that there were leaflets about it. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, he admitted that perhaps that wasn't appropriate. This, in my opinion, is criminal as it condemns thousands to misery as they think they are losing their mind and dare not tell anyone!

CBS is surprisingly common

We're told that between 17-40 per

cent of people with sight loss have CBS. But this figure tells me that, like so much of the information out there about sight loss, it's complete rubbish. Personally, I feel that - barring those who lose their sight through brain damage - most people with sight loss will experience CBS. After all, we can only know about CBS through self-report and how many of us want to own up to seeing things?

In fact, seeing things that aren't there is far more common than you might think. How many of us saw things when on stag on a very dark night? A lot more than will admit, I should think. The Chairman of our local RBL branch told me about seeing a full marching band one night when on stag at Sandhurst.





It's harmless (if you recognise it for what it is)

My view is that, as I have sight loss, it's quite nice to see something every now and again, though it can be, on occasion, difficult to distinguish hallucinations from reality. I have a cat called Spitfire who lives up to her name. One morning I awoke to see a rat on my chest. I touched it to dismiss the image, but on that occasion it was a rat on my chest and not CBS - a little gift from my ever-loving cat!

If you find the images disturbing or unpleasant then there are ways of dealing with them called distraction techniques. Simply standing up and going to make a cup of tea will dismiss most hallucinations, though the more persistent ones may need a little more than that. Flicking your eyes from left to right and up and down rapidly for a few seconds should shift them.



Illustration by a person who lives with Charles Bonnet syndrome

It's good to talk about it

There's no shame in admitting to CBS. It's a real condition, not a mental one. You are not going crackers, so it can be better to just be open and tell people it's something you experience. At least then, if you start behaving in an odd way, they know why.

In conclusion, I have lost count of the number of people I've talked to about CBS, changing their experience of sight loss forever. If you have found this article useful, or even reassuring, please share its contents with anyone who claims to have waking nightmares.

So what is Charles Bonnet syndrome (CBS)?

It's a condition characterised by visual hallucinations experienced by people with sight loss. It occurs when the brain fills in visual gaps caused by vision loss, leading to the perception of images that are not present in reality. This phenomenon is not related to mental illness; rather it's a neurological response to the lack of visual input. The syndrome is named after the Swiss philosopher Charles Bonnet, who first identified it in the 18th century. 🇨🇭

- The illustration featured with this article is from a person living with CBS, used courtesy of the CBS support charity Esme's Umbrella at www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk

Have your say

Do you have ideas of how we might improve our communication with you? We'd love to hear from you

We are currently looking at how we can improve the way we communicate with you, and invite you to complete a short survey to let us know your thoughts.

This is an overview of how we currently let you know about our news, events and activities:

- We send letters about local events directly to you. We may send information about other interesting events by partner agencies.
- We have in the past sent a quarterly newsletter which covers national, regional and community news and events.
- We send information via 10 issues of Review magazine per year. However, this is expensive - the current cost of producing, printing and posting Review is around £10,000 per issue and, by its nature, any information shared is often out of date by the time you read it.
- We also share information online on the Veteran's Area of our website and send a monthly e-newsletter to those who have signed up.

- And we share information at both local events, such as lunch clubs, and national events, such as military dinners.

Completing the survey

- To complete the survey, go to www.blindveterans.org.uk/comms-survey

If you require any assistance with submitting your response, or would prefer to feedback in another way, you can call **01273 391447** or contact your community team. We aim to get all your feedback by **1 March** and, based on what you tell us, will then suggest some improvements. 🇨🇭





Jan and Poppy tackling the South Coast Ultra

2025 highlights in numbers

A round-up of some of our fantastic achievements from last year...

- We hand-sorted **128,660** mosaic tiles into labelled bags to help make our NCP mosaic kits more accessible. Laid out, that's the same length as the Golden Gate Bridge!
- Over **£370,000** saved by recycling equipment.
- **148** pieces of recycled equipment delivered to Members by hand.
- **27,047** miles travelled delivering and collecting recycled equipment: which is further than the distance from London to Australia!
- Over **1,000** miles ran, raising

- money for us at the London Marathon.
- **563** miles on a bus completed by Blind Veteran Tony - who before our support was too afraid to leave the house let alone use public transport!
- **460km** walked by 10 Blind Veterans taking part in the South Coast Ultra, raising £9,000 for Blind Veterans UK.
- **25,485** hours volunteered in 2025 - that's almost three years of 24/7 support for our veterans.
- **155** new volunteers took up **29** different volunteering roles.
- **388** Members supported through befriending roles.
- **1,739** calls made to our Member Support Hub from Members.
- **550** Member Support Hub Assessments made.
- **50** Founder's Day Awards given to carers, Members and volunteers
- **594** Members attended our Military events and dinners.
- **5** regional and **1** national Member conferences.
- Military Sight Loss Champions Scheme launched with **12** military units.
- **1,647** media appearances, which equates to 4.5 pieces of coverage a day.
- **23** BBC News Online appearances
- **6,658** calls dealt with by Customer Care since April. That's more than one an hour.

- **14.3** million views on Facebook and Instagram - more than the entire population of Burundi!
- **65 per cent** increase in views and interactions on Facebook and Instagram.
- Our final year of our Lords partnership raised over **£36k**.
- Average raised by our ad hoc challenge fundraisers increased by **38.5 per cent**.
- **10** issues of Review published in **5** different formats, reaching on average **3,300** people per month.
- **70+** contributors to the Review magazine over the year. 🇬🇧



We had more than 70 contributors to Review magazine in 2025

From being helped to helping others

After becoming a Member in 2024, last year Jerry Bradley, 62, signed up to become a Member volunteer

I served in the RAF for 13 years but it was only when I left, in 1996, that problems with my sight first surfaced. It wasn't until 2003 that I was diagnosed with Stargardt disease, which is a genetic eye condition.

Everyone has one blind spot in each eye, but with Stargardt disease you have three - and mine are growing. I've lost my central vision and I also have Charles Bonnet syndrome, so I see things that aren't there.

When I first lost my sight, I was the only blind person I knew. I was in a really dark place emotionally at times. But since finding Blind Veterans UK, my whole life has changed. I've taken part in a whole host of activities including go-karting, paddleboarding and axe throwing. And I completed 100km in the South Coast Ultra in September, proving to myself that my sight loss doesn't define me.

In April last year, I was asked if I could be a sort of crash test dummy for training volunteers to safely guide Members. I was blindfolded - so completely black blind - and guided into a café. This was the moment that started my journey into becoming a volunteer myself.

The trainee volunteer had taken a huge amount of care ensuring I got into the café safely, but then I found myself standing in a room and felt incredibly vulnerable and confused. In that moment I was able to put myself in the shoes of someone who has no sight at all and knew I wanted

“I've always helped others, but my volunteer training has definitely given me the confidence to do more”

to do more to be able to help train volunteers and to support other Members myself.

So, I sort of learnt how to guide others by accident. I've always helped others, but my volunteer training has definitely given me the confidence to do more.

I'd actually say that a lot of my volunteering is soft touch rather than what others may consider volunteering. I largely see my role as 'being on hand' when I'm at the Rustington Centre to look out for others and to notice when they may

need a bit of support, or offering extra support at community coffee mornings.

When I was staying at Rustington in the summer, a group of 16 of us went on a trip out to play skittles. I was one of two Members with enough sight to stand up the skittles and I also used my new guiding skills to help the others on and off the bus and through the pub. At the Centre, I help people get around if they're looking a bit lost. The training has helped me to recognise situations where other Members may need help. →



Jerry reaches The Seven Sisters, Sussex, during the South Coast Ultra



I also stay in regular contact with others I've met at the Centre and take on a sort of telephone befriending role. Any of us can do this without the need for official volunteering training. You get to know other Members at the Centre and find things you have in common and this leads on to making those regular calls to check in on others who may be on their own or more housebound than you. It's a huge learning curve; I learn more about myself and the Members I'm helping all the time.



Jerry with Anne during the South Coast Ultra

“To be honest, I get as much out of volunteering as the Member I am helping gets from my support”

Myself and another volunteer recently took a Member – a wheelchair user – to the pub. I learnt about transferring the Member into a car, choosing venues that are wheelchair accessible and also to check with the Member around whether they want to stay in the wheelchair or be in a seat at the table.

To be honest, I get as much out of volunteering as the Member I am helping gets from my support. I make new friends; we chat; I learn about their story and background. And then a feeling of trust builds between us, which is a lovely thing.

Volunteering isn't just about having specific tasks. To me, it's about having the confidence to help someone when they need it. But it's also about understanding your own limits and what you can and can't do safely. For example, I would only guide someone on a route that I feel confident with myself and would never do it at nighttime. For me, it's about doing little bits here and there to help others. 🇬🇧

Blind Veterans UK Masonic Group

Our freemason group will meet on 24 April at the Rustington Centre for its annual weekend

This weekend will take place from Friday 24 to Monday 27 April 2026. If you're a Freemason, then you are more than welcome to attend.

Age and rank are no barrier, all that is required is that you are independent and have good mobility, regalia and a smile.

Places are limited so if you are a Freemason and would like to learn more about the weekend, please ring the Chairman/Secretary Clive Jones on 07854 800256 or email him on dragoneye67@sky.com for more details.





Preparing for a digital future

How people with vision impairment can stay confident using smartphones, tablets and computers

Technology has become one of the most powerful tools for independence, connection and productivity. For people with a vision impairment, smartphones, tablets and computers are not just conveniences—they are lifelines. Yet many worry about what will happen if their sight deteriorates further. The good news is that modern devices are designed with accessibility at their core, and with some preparation, it's entirely possible to continue using them effectively even as vision changes.

Start by building familiarity with accessibility features

Every major operating system — iOS, Android, Windows and macOS — includes a rich set of built in accessibility tools. The earlier you become comfortable with them, the easier the transition will be if your vision declines.

Some of the most valuable features include:

- **Screen readers** such as VoiceOver (Apple), TalkBack (Android) and Narrator (Windows). These tools read aloud everything on the screen and allow full navigation using gestures or keyboard shortcuts.
- **Magnification tools**, including Zoom on Apple devices and Magnifier on Windows, which enlarge text and images.
- **Highcontrast modes**, colour filters and dark mode, which reduce visual strain.
- **Text size adjustments**, which can dramatically improve readability.

Exploring these features while your vision is still relatively stable helps you build confidence and muscle memory. Think of it as learning a new language gradually rather than all at once.



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A smartphone with a Siri, the virtual assistant application

Embrace audio

As vision changes, audio becomes an increasingly powerful way to interact with technology. Voice assistants such as Siri, Google Assistant and Alexa can handle tasks like sending messages, making calls, setting reminders, searching the web and controlling smart home devices.

Screen readers also open up a world of audiobased navigation. Many people with little or no sight use their phones entirely through speech feedback. Practising this early - perhaps by

spending a few minutes each day using only audio - can make the transition feel natural rather than daunting. Audio feedback also helps reduce the strain and fatigue that can come from reading long passages of text with magnification. Listening instead of visually tracking enlarged text allows people to conserve energy and stay engaged for longer periods.

Learn keyboard shortcuts, touchscreen gestures and alternative input methods

Touchscreens, keyboards and assistive devices all offer different strengths, and becoming comfortable with several input methods will give you far more flexibility as vision changes. Keyboard shortcuts on computers — and even on tablets paired with Bluetooth keyboards — can make navigation faster and more predictable, especially when used alongside screen readers.

At the same time, learning touchscreen gestures is equally important. Modern screen readers like VoiceOver and TalkBack rely heavily on gestures for exploring the screen, activating controls and moving through content.

These gestures are designed to be precise, repeatable and completely independent of visual cues, which means they remain reliable even if your sight deteriorates. Building





familiarity with them early helps you develop the muscle memory that makes nonvisual navigation feel natural and efficient.

Learn to touch type

Learning to touch type is also a valuable skill for anyone using a keyboard with reduced vision. Because touch typing relies on muscle memory rather than visual cues, it allows you to write quickly, accurately and comfortably without needing to look at the keys or screen. Developing this skill early means that if your vision changes, you'll already have a reliable, efficient way to enter text and navigate many commands purely through your hands.

Customise your digital environment

Small adjustments can make a huge difference. Increasing default text size, choosing bold fonts, rearranging home screens, or using widgets for quick access can reduce visual effort. Many apps also offer their own accessibility settings - e-readers, email clients and browsers often allow custom fonts, spacing and themes.

Creating a personalised setup now means you won't need to overhaul your digital life later.

Keep your skills up to date

Technology evolves quickly, and

accessibility tools improve every year. Following tutorials, joining online communities, or attending rehabilitation training sessions with Blind Veterans UK and other organisations supporting people with vision impairments can help you stay ahead of the curve.

Even small habits - like exploring new settings after a software update - can build long-term confidence.

Reach out for support

You don't have to navigate this journey alone. Many charities - including Blind Veterans UK, local services and online groups - offer training, peer support and practical advice. Connecting with others who have lived experience can be incredibly reassuring and inspiring.

For further information please speak to one of the Staff at Blind Veterans UK or contact Member Support Hub. At Blind Veterans UK we also have a dedicated Digital Inclusion Team who can support you each step in your journey with technology.

Preparing for future vision changes isn't about expecting the worst - it's about empowering yourself. With the right tools, skills and mindset, smartphones, tablets and computers can remain accessible, intuitive and enjoyable no matter how your vision evolves. 🍌

Smartwatches for people with sight loss

How smartwatches can be used as a supportive tool for people with sight loss to help promote your independence

What is a smartwatch?

A smartwatch is a type of wearable technology which usually acts as an extension of a smartphone. Just as a smartphone is a compact computer that does far more than make phone calls, a smartwatch is an even smaller computer that does far more than simply tell the time. Despite this, a smartwatch is largely the same size and shape of a

normal watch - or a little bigger - and has a touchscreen interface.

What can a smartwatch do?

- Smartwatches can do things like:
- Remind you to do things, like put the bins out or take your medication
- Tell you what's coming up in your calendar
- Provide a map and audible navigation when you're out and about
- Support your health by tracking your heart rate and counting your steps
- Send and receive text messages
- Play music or podcasts
- Make contactless payments, as you would with a bank card

How does it work?

- Most smartwatch brands require you to have a smartphone.
- Most people who use smartwatches use them in addition to their smartphone, rather than replacing the smartphone altogether.
- To use many of the features of a →



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A smartwatch

smartwatch out and about without having a smartphone with you, you may need to buy a more expensive model and may need a contract with a mobile phone provider.

- Smartwatches need to be recharged regularly. With some models, the battery will generally last about a day or so, so you will need to remember to recharge it overnight.

What are the benefits for someone with sight loss?

- The best thing about a smartwatch is that, as you wear it on your wrist, you can't lose it, and you will always have it to hand.
- It's possible to give the watch spoken commands, just like using the voice assistant on a smartphone.
- At the same time, some smartwatches have a voiceover feature which speaks aloud whatever is on the screen, from telling you the name of the person calling to reading out your messages.
- Smartwatches, like smartphones, have an inbuilt zoom function so you can easily zoom in on any screen for better readability.
- You can also adjust the size of text to make it easier to see and, with most brands, change the information on the screen to simplify it.
- Some brands include a 'speak time' or 'hear the time' feature, which means it will tell you the time aloud

whenever you want it to.

- Some models can connect to an external braille display.
- Some even include a feature called 'fall detection', so if it detects that you've had a hard fall, it will give you the option of calling the emergency services.

What should I consider?

- A smartwatch can be a handy gadget for someone with sight loss, providing quick and easy access to many useful built-in features.
- There are various brands and models, so you will need to shop around to make sure you get one that has all the features you need, and you feel comfortable using it day-to-day.
- If possible, we'd always recommend trying to get an in-person demonstration before making a purchase.
- It may take you a little time to get used to this new device and learn how to make the most of its features.

Next steps

For information on how specific smartwatch models can support people with sight loss, Guide Dogs have created a useful resource.

Simply visit their website at www.guidedogs.org.uk and type 'smartwatch' in the search box. 🗎



Standard bearer Alan, with bugler Nick

Member voice

Our national events for 2026/27 and information on becoming a Member Ambassador

National events 2026/27

Military Dinner - 11 April 2026, Manchester, Holiday Inn

Regional Conferences in May 2026 throughout the UK

- 5 May, Leeds, North
- 6 May, Nottingham, Midlands
- 12 May, Cardiff, Wales
- 13 May, Cheltenham, South West
- 14 May, Basingstoke, South East
- 19 May, Belfast, Northern Ireland
- 20 May, Edinburgh, Scotland →



**Military Dinner - 17 July 2026,
HMS Drake, Plymouth**

**Military Dinner - 4 September 2026,
Maindy Bks, Royal Welsh, Cardiff**

National Remembrance 2026

- Edinburgh, Scotland, 7 November
- Manchester, 7-8 November
- London Cenotaph, 7-8 November

**Military Dinner - 4 December 2026,
HMS Calliope, Newcastle**

**Military Dinner - 22 January 2027,
RAF Honington, Bury St Edmunds**

**Corporate Event - 5 March 2027,
RMA Sandhurst, Camberley**

Member Ambassadors

The Member Engagement Team are pleased to announce the launch of the Blind Veterans UK Ambassador Programme, enabling Members to register their interest to share their sight loss journey, support our national events and educate others on the great work we do.

Member Ambassadors will have the opportunities to do just that in a variety of different volunteering roles. Whether you wish to become a public speaker, standard bearer, bugler, or fundraiser, your support will always make a huge difference to us.

The scheme will launch from 1 April 2026.

We are now recruiting a limited number of roles in the following locations:

- Edinburgh, SE of Scotland
- Northern Ireland, NE of Ireland
- Newcastle, NE of England
- Leeds, N of England
- Manchester, NW of England
- Liverpool, NW of England
- Birmingham, West Midlands
- Nottingham, East Midlands
- North Wales
- South Wales
- London, SE of England
- Plymouth, SW of England

Between Friday 10 to Sunday 12 May, training for chosen National Ambassadors responsible for corporate and public speaking activities will be provided at the Holiday Inn, Manchester City Centre.

National Ambassadors chosen for Standard Bearer and Bugler roles will be provided training opportunities in 2026.

- **If you would like more information about these fantastic opportunities to become involved, please email: met@blindveterans.org.uk for further information.** 🇬🇧

National Creative Project

This month's VI-friendly creative activities you can take part in – all from the comfort of your own home

We are delighted to present this month's projects from the NCP. You can take part in as many as you like. To request a kit, just leave a message on **01273 391 447**, email us at ncwt@blindveterans.org.uk or visit

the Members' area of our website at blindveterans.org.uk/member.

Sweet treats mandala

We're pleased that so many of you enjoyed making our seasonal →



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Surprise seeds - a unifying growing activity



Listen here

Your crafting stories

This month we're showcasing the crafting achievements of Member Ron Smith

For the past four years, Ron has taken part in our National Creative Project regularly - and has approached new challenges with enthusiasm.

He adds an individual touch to his models, painting them to add character, and his open-minded approach has meant he is willing to give most crafts a go, from mosaics, to models, to drawing. He's also finessed his skills over time and has even created a special cabinet to display his work.

In November, Ron was presented with a Founder's Award for Creativity by the team in his local area. This was an opportunity to recognise and celebrate his achievements with his fellow Members.

In the words of Henri Matisse, "creativity takes courage". Ron has shown that if you give something a go, you might discover talents you never knew you had! Thank you for sharing your story. 🎨



Deer head wooden model

mandala mosaics last year. We loved picking out the colours. This design has a Valentine's Day theme with tiles representing chocolates, cream, caramel, sugar, roses, and even red wine! Your tiles will be sorted out for you into labelled bags for this step-by-step, mindful pattern. These mosaics make lovely gifts, place mats or wall decorations. **(For confident beginners)**

Surprise seeds 2026

It's time for our annual Surprise Seeds project from the NCP - originally designed by the late Jim Long in 2024. In his memory, we will continue to provide seeds for you to take part in a unifying growing activity. This year,

we'll be sending carrot, spring onion, basil and cornflower seeds - separated into labelled bags. There'll be a fact sheet about each plant in the pack to help you get started. **(This kit includes small seeds but is suitable for all gardening abilities)**

Deer head wooden model

This simple wooden model is made up of 20 large pieces and can be displayed on the wall once finished. This is ideal for beginners as an introduction to model making as it's easier than our usual model kits - and you can always ask for some help from family and friends! A more complex model of a Jeep will be available from March for those who are more confident with the techniques, which can now be pre-ordered. **(Simple - for beginners)**

Holiday landscapes (watercolour painting)

This kit has been created to help you enjoy the calming, expressive nature of watercolour painting, using soft washes of colour inspired by the feeling of summer - from quiet beaches and bright gardens to peaceful countryside paths. You'll receive a palette of 36 watercolour tablets, a variety of brushes, watercolour paper, and some high contrast masking tape to explore this versatile art technique. **(Suitable for all - from beginners to experienced artists).** 🎨



Ron is presented with his Founder's Award for Creativity



Ron proudly shows off his finished NCP tank model



Quiz time

Our quizmaster **Ron Russell** tests your general knowledge

1. Which city is known as 'The Eternal City'?

2. How many bones does the ear have?

3. How many rings appear on the Olympic flag?

4. What is the smallest country in the world by land area?

5. How many Dominoes are there in a complete set?

6. Chronophobia is the fear of what?

7. If you were born on June 1st, what star sign would you be?

8. What number does the letter D represent in roman numerals?

9. What is ornithology the study of?

10. What is the first street you pass on a Monopoly board?

Answers on back cover



ROBERT KNESCHKE / ADOBE STOCK

Caption: How many Dominoes make a set?



Family news

Birthdays

James Broadbent who celebrates his 100th birthday on 11 February 2026.

Davey Harold who celebrates his 100th birthday on 15 February 2026.

Queenie Hall who celebrates her 103rd birthday on 16 February 2026.

Estelle Hannaford who celebrates her 105th birthday on 16 February 2026.

Marjorie Hanson who celebrates her 103rd birthday on 16 February 2026.

Michael Hopkins who celebrates his 101st birthday on 11 February 2026.

Nadine Hounsell who celebrates her 100th birthday on 4 February 2026.

Brenda Jarvis who celebrates her 100th birthday on 10 February 2026.

George Keane who celebrates his 100th birthday on 12 February 2026.

Raymond Moore who celebrates his 100th birthday on 15 February 2026.

Henry Rice who celebrates his 100th birthday on 27 February 2026.

Stuart Sansom who celebrates his 100th birthday on 15 February 2026.

Barbara Seiry who celebrates her 100th birthday on 20 February 2026.

Bernard Williams who celebrates his 101st birthday on 22 February 2026.

Condolences

It is with deep regret that we record the deaths of the following, and we offer our heartfelt condolences.

Janet Buckley who died on 1 November 2025. She was the wife of Ken Buckley.

Sheila Chamber who died on 3 January 2026 aged 93. She was the wife of William Chamber.

Joan Davies who died on 1 November 2025. She was the wife of Daniel Davies.

Jeanette Finley who died on 24 December 2025. She was the wife of Tony Finley.

Myrna Pace who died on 1 November 2025 aged 84. She was the wife of Eddie Pace.

Janet Paton who died on 2 November 2025. She was the wife of John Paton.

Sophie Simpson who died on 22 November 2025. She was the wife of Peter Simpson.

All birthday information was correct at the time of going to press



In memory

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

David Bartlett of Winchester who died on 1 December 2025 aged 89. He served as a Guardsman in The Grenadier Guards.

James Biggins of Calne who died on 17 November 2025 aged 95. He served as an S.A.C in The Royal Air Force.

Nolan Basford-Ward of Atherstone who died on 25 December 2025 aged 92. He served in The Royal Army Ordnance Corps.

John Boyd of Kilwinning who died on 1 December 2025 aged 87. He served as a Gunner in The Royal Artillery.

Arthur Bell of Dunfermline who died on 1 November 2025 aged 87. He served as a Private in the Royal Highland Regiment.

Edward Broome of Newport who died on 1 November 2025 aged 89. He served as a Chief Technician in The Royal Air Force. →

Philip Brophy of Poole who died on 17 October 2025 aged 96. He served as a Gunner in the Royal Army.

Pauline Cole of Hailsham who died on 30 November 2023 aged 79, She served as a Sergeant in The Royal Signals.

William Coleridge of Devon who died on 19 November 2025 aged 88. He served as a Major in The Coldstream Guards.

Kevin Crowter of Blackburn who died on 25 December 2025 aged 63. He served as a Private in The Queens Regiment.

Robin Delderfield of Hemel Hempstead who died on 1 December 2025 aged 73. He served as a Lieutenant in The Royal Navy.

Clifford Donald of London who died on 17 December 2025 aged 91. He served as a Private in the Seaforth Highlanders.

James Drew of Pontypool who died on 24 December 2025 aged 91. He served as an L.A.C in the Royal Air Force.

Denis Dyer of Sutton who died on 29 December 2025 aged 99. He served as a Seaman in The Royal Navy.

Arthur Eggett of London who died on 11 December 2025 aged 91. He served as a Lance Corporal in The Royal Army.

Leslie Fisk of Enfield who died on 4 December 2025 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Army.

Thomas Godfrey of Lincoln who died on 29 November 2025 aged 94. He served as a Chief Petty Officer in The Royal Navy.

Colin Green of Barnsley who died on 1 December 2025 aged 88. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Army.

Alex Harwood of Morecambe who died on 12 December 2025 aged 98. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Army.

Terence Hastie of Preston who died on 21 December 2025 aged 88. He served as a Private in The Kings Own Royal Regiment.

Brian Haynes of Crawley who died on 13 November 2025 aged 98. He served as a Wireman in The Royal Navy.

James Headrick of Cowdenbeath who died on 1 November 2025 aged 90. He served as an Acting Corporal in The Royal Army Catering Corps.

Albert Hinde of Wellingborough who died on 1 December 2025 aged 95. He served as an L.A.C in The Royal Air Force.

Dennis Hodgson of Consett who died on 1 December 2025 aged 97. He served as a Stoker Mechanic in The Royal Navy.

John Hodgkinson of Braintree who died on 18 November 2025 aged 62. He served as a Senior Aircraftman in The Royal Air Force.

Robert Holmes of Sheffield who died on 25 November 2025 aged 86. He served as a Sapper in The Royal Engineers.

Donald Howard of Neston who died on 1 December 2025 aged 89. He served as a Private in The Royal Signals.

Tony Huckle of Dunmow who died on 12 December 2025 aged 88. He served as a Private in The Royal Army Pay Corps.

Fredrick Jones of Swansea who died on 1 December 2025 aged 86. He served in The Royal Artillery.

Douglas Jones of Luton who died on 11 December 2025 aged 93. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Army Medical Corps. →

Ernest Jordan of Gerrards Cross who died on 27 November 2025 aged 97. He served as a Lance Bombardier in The Royal Artillery.

Terence Knight of Rotherham who died on 20 December 2025 aged 91. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Air Force.

Roger Mooring of Wincanton who died on 9 December 2025 aged 84. He served as a Staff Sergeant in The Royal Army Service Corps.

Anthony Morris of Chichester who died on 1 December 2025 aged 97. He served as a Leading Writer in The Royal Navy.

Robert Murray of Faringdon who died on 1 December 2025 aged 91. He served as a Sergeant in The Royal Air Force.

Michael Potter of Westbury who died on 16 December 2025 aged 86. He served as an S.A.C in The Royal Air Force.

Robert Reed of Abingdon who died on 21 November 2025 aged 96. He served as a Second Lieutenant in The Royal Artillery.

Gilmore Richardson of Blyth who died on 1 December 2025 aged 92. He served in The Royal Artillery.

Clarice Rowley of Yelverton who died on 29 November 2025 aged 98. He served as an ACW1 in The Royal Air Force.

John Scott of Bath who died on 14 October 2025 aged 92. He served as a Trooper in The Royal Armoured Corps.

Terence Smart of Skegness who died on 13 November 2025 aged 89. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Army Pay Corps.

Peter Smith of Coventry who died on 11 December 2025 aged 91. He served as an S.A.C in The Royal Air Force.

Paul Southard of Plymouth who died on 1 December 2025 aged 81. He served in The Royal Navy.

William Stevens of Dunfermline who died on 21 November 2025 aged 89. He served as a Trooper in The Royal Armoured Corps.

John Thorburn of Maryport who died on 11 December 2025 aged 92. He served as a Private in The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Andrew Tibbits of Winchester who died on 1 December 2025 aged 87. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Air Force.

Peter Tinson of Luton who died on 27 November 2025 aged 83. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Air Force.

Howard Young of Lewes who died on 19 November 2025 aged 96. He served as a Corporal in The Royal Marines.

Did you know that we can set up online Tribute Pages for the loved ones of staff, Members and Supporters? Find out more about setting up a Tribute Page here: blindveteransuk.muchloved.org

