

Walthew House News

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Welcome to Walthew House News. Our cover photograph was taken at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester and shows a very imposing full sized model of a Roman soldier on horseback. Sitting with his back to him is yellow Labrador retriever cross, guide dog puppy Max, age nine months, in his blue puppy coat. Max is looking over his shoulder at the soldier with a rather surprised expression as if to say, 'who on earth are you?' Max is being puppy walked by Walthew House manager Kay Kelly, and was on holiday with the family when they decided to visit the museum. Puppy walkers can only take their pups into museums, or shops and cafes, where pet dogs aren't allowed if they have permission, and rely on the goodwill of such places to enable the pups to experience the things they will encounter as qualified working guide dogs. A quick call to the museum ensured that Max was welcome – and we can now be fully confident that if he qualifies as a working guide dog he will have no concerns about meeting Roman soldiers on horseback when he and his owner are going about their daily business! Max is the latest in a line of guide dog puppies to go to work with Kay, starting with Tanya, a black Labrador, in 2010. Guide Dogs breed their own puppies, and Tanya joined their breeding programme. Next came Titan, a yellow Labrador retriever who is now a qualified guide dog working in Yorkshire. Titan was sponsored by the goalies at Manchester United and had his photograph taken with Sir Alex Ferguson. He also appeared on the BBC's Songs of Praise programme filmed at a service for animals at a local church. Then came another Max, a black Labrador retriever cross, who was one of 11 puppies from Tanya's first litter. Guide Dogs' breeding stock live with families, just like the pups do as they are growing up, and the brood holders can choose the pups' names from a list supplied by the charity. Max was named after Tanya's brood holder's grandson. Max is now a qualified working guide dog in Manchester. Like the other puppies, Max went wherever Kay went, even joining her when she went to renew her first aid training. The trainers at St John Ambulance were very impressed with his behaviour – and presented him with his own certificate of attendance at the end of the course! Next came Taylor, a black Labrador from Tanya's

second litter who didn't qualify as a guide dog and was rehomed with a family in the Lake District, and then came Ike, a huge black Labrador, now qualified and working in Yorkshire.

Young Max is from Tanya's third litter. This was an 'M' litter – all the litters are assigned a letter – so Max's siblings mostly have names beginning with M including Millie, Morris and Mary. Some of his litter mates have been sponsored, so have names chosen by the people who donated or raised money for Guide Dogs, including his brother Romeo who was named by fundraisers in Stratford upon Avon.

The Corinium Museum asked to use Max's photo with the Roman soldier as their entry in a museums' competition for 'best visitor experience'. We were delighted to hear that the photo had won the competition and is going to be used on publicity material for the museums' service in the Cotwolds area, so Max is going to be famous!

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Walthew House Cup

Twelve teams of visually impaired and sighted, but blindfolded, ten pin bowlers took part in this year's Walthew House Cup Blind Bowling Tournament. Thanks to Ten Pin Parris Wood for once again hosting the

event, to our sponsors and to everyone who volunteered or took part on the day.

The photo right shows the Mayor of Stockport Councillor Andrew Verdeille presenting the trophy to the winning team.



Go to our website:

www.walthewhouse.org.uk for more photos and a full report on the day.

Tuesday 1st March – A Day in the Life of Walthew House

In a typical week, over 25 different groups and organisations use Walthew House – we've picked out just one day to give an idea of the sorts of things that go on here...

8.15am: Early start today as we have several groups using Walthew House, so Teresa is busy getting tea trolleys ready and checking the building is tidy and safe. Mary comes in to clean for an hour every morning before the building is open and is just finishing off.

8.30am: Builders arrive on-site. They are starting to tarmac the new path today.

9.15am: the first member arrives for social group and luncheon club. The group doesn't start until 10am, but Ring and Ride could only give him an early slot, so he gets settled in the hall to wait.

9.20am: we have three outside organisations using the building today – the trainer for one of the groups arrives and is directed to the Deaf Centre games room to start setting up. The first customer for today's hearing aid drop in clinic also arrives. It doesn't start till 10, but people like to get in the queue early

9.30am: David, the help desk volunteer arrives. Thank goodness – some help directing the traffic as the next hour will be chaos – the other two outside groups start to arrive and are directed to the Deaf Centre Hall and the JB room; volunteers and club members start to arrive for social group; Michael the audiologist from Stepping Hill Hospital arrives and starts early as a queue of people is building up, and Anne from Adult Social Care arrives to chat to people whilst they wait about the services they provide. Judy, today's volunteer in the equipment resource centre arrives and gets ready to open up and Sue the volunteer who teaches Braille arrives with guide dog Tetley. By half past ten there are over 100 people in the building.

Meanwhile the phones are busy... an occupational health trainee wants to know do we sell amplified phones – yes we have a range of phones – she'll need to bring her client to try them out to see which works best for him; a gentleman wants to know if we have any places left on the 'Online Today' computer course that Action for Blind People are running at Walthew in April – yes we have, and a lady is enquiring about a CD radio for her husband –

not a problem, Walthew is an agent for British Wireless for the Blind, so we can probably allocate him one free of charge.

10am: people start arriving for the social group and luncheon Club. Volunteers Michael and Phil produce a main course and pudding for up to 20 people each Tuesday. This week it's sausage and mash with onion gravy and veg, followed by chocolate sponge pudding. Ben, Ann and Rachael the social group volunteers make drinks and toast for people as they arrive.

10.30: Linda, our counsellor arrives to meet the first of three clients today. There is no other specialist counselling service for people with sight loss within Greater Manchester, so this service is very well used. At the same time, Lynn arrives for her braille lesson with her guide dog Polly. Lynn travels in from Derbyshire as there is nowhere closer that teaches braille.

There is a steady stream of visitors throughout the morning – four customers for the resource centre; a volunteer bringing in his money to book a place on a sponsored zip wire challenge and 13 people for the hearing aid clinic.

12 noon: lunch is served!

The photo shows Lynn, Yvette and Joan enjoying their lunch, with volunteer Rachael.



1pm: Reception is busy again as Janice the volunteer who runs the steel band arrives for the afternoon session, with members of the band and volunteers and people start to head home after luncheon club.

2.30pm: Judy is just closing the resource centre when a last minute customer arrives. They only want a large print diary so that's soon sorted.

3pm: Things finally start to quieten down: the last room hire group is packing up, so there are tea trolleys to clear, and the last of the group members are leaving. Usually the last hour before the building closes at 4pm is a bit quieter leaving staff chance to catch up on phone calls, orders for the resource centre, volunteer enquiries and the like.

7pm: Stockport Radio Society arrives for their meeting. Walthew House has over 30 regular external groups coming in to use the building during the evening and at weekends. Room hire fees make a very welcome contribution to the charity's income and it's great to see the building so well used!

Art Competition in Support of Walthew

Turners Art Materials has supported Walthew House for a number of years now, and we're delighted that their latest competition will help raise funds for the charity once again. The Turners/Loxley Painting Challenge 2016 is a community event that will run from Easter until August. The entry fee which includes the canvas is £3, and 50p from every entry will come to Walthew. The challenge is to create a piece of art that fits on a 5"x5" canvas, any medium and any theme. It is open to all ages and abilities and it will be displayed in Stockport Art gallery from 13th September until 9th October.

Access all Areas

Visitors to Walthew House will have noticed that it is much easier to access the front of the building through the car park, following the completion of a major project to clear the overgrown garden area and put in a wheelchair accessible path. The work became a priority after visitors complained that there were often cars and lorries parked on the pavement, forcing them into the road, which could be dangerous. The side of the building is always in shade, so a new seating area has been created on the edge of the car park, where it is sunny from around midday.

It has been suggested that we could put in some new planters to brighten up the area, so we'd be happy to hear both from anyone who would like to make a contribution to the cost of planters and anyone prepared to keep them stocked with plants and well tended.

Visit from the High Sheriff

We were delighted recently to welcome the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester, Sharman Birtles JP DL, to visit. She has very kindly contributed the following article:

“As the current High Sheriff of Greater Manchester I recently visited the very impressive facilities at Walthew House and met with Kay Kelly. Whilst I was with her I mentioned a very old Charitable Trust I am involved with and she thought it may be of interest to some of you.

The Trust is called The Cotton Districts Convalescent Fund and The Barnes Samaritan Trust – a bit of a mouthful I know – but we try and help people living in the North West who have long term illness or disability. Originally they were two separate Trusts but we merged them a few years ago. The Cotton Districts Fund was set up in the mid 1800's by the Cotton Mill Owners who wanted to help their workers if they were suffering from a debilitating illness and were in need of convalescence. Today, the Fund provides for people convalescing from illness or suffering from permanent disability, by subsidising a week's holiday, half board, at the Charity's nominated Hotels in Blackpool or Lytham St Annes or, with a contribution from the Charity of £200, a holiday elsewhere in the UK. Where an applicant is unable to take a holiday without a Carer then similar support will be given to the Carer.

Of an equal age, The Barnes Samaritan Charity (a rather quaint title!) provides a regular income for people in financial need suffering from permanent or temporary illness, disease or disability. Monthly payments of no more than £45 per month are paid by standing order to an approved beneficiary. Such grants are subject to review normally every three years. One-off grants may also be made in addition to or instead of regular income payments, usually to assist in the purchase of specific items of equipment related to a disability.

Obviously, in the case of both Cotton Districts & Barnes, details of personal medical and financial circumstances are required, together with a letter from a 'sponsor' who could be a Doctor or Social Worker.

If anyone reading this article feels they may benefit from either Cotton Districts or Barnes they should write to The Secretary, The Cotton Districts Convalescent Fund and The Barnes Samaritan Trust, C/O Cassons Chartered Accountants, Rational House, 64 Bridge Street, Manchester M3 3BN, giving details of their medical and financial circumstances together with a letter which supports the application and confirms the medical and financial circumstances. I can assure anyone who is thinking of applying that their application will be dealt with in total confidence.

As mentioned above I am currently the High Sheriff of Greater Manchester and thought you might like to know a little about the role. The Office of High Sheriff is the oldest secular office after the Crown and can be traced back more than 1,000 years to the reign of the Saxon King 'Ethelred the Unready' (978 – 1016). High Sheriffs are appointed by the Monarch during a ceremony known as 'The Pricking of the Lites' and they are installed for one year from April to April.

Historically, High Sheriffs were appointed to act as the Sovereign's representative in their County, historically referred to as a Bailiwick, where they wielded great power. For example, they sat in judgement at trials and were responsible for general law and order in the County. They could even raise a 'posse' in pursuit of criminals. In fact, this 'posse comitatus' is still on the statute book and therefore (if I knew enough people with horses!) I could even today lead a posse through the streets of Greater Manchester. What a sight that would be!

One of the more unpalatable duties of High Sheriffs was to organise and attend public executions and ensure they were properly performed, which continued until the abolition of the death penalty in 1965.

The Sheriffs' powers also included responsibility for raising and collecting taxes, which they had to account for at the Court of Exchequer in London, a significant and often unpopular task.

Sheriffs are mentioned in 27 of the 63 clauses of Magna Carta (1215) and by the end of the 13th century they were clearly fundamental to the running of the Counties.

However, over the centuries, the role of the High Sheriff has gradually changed and is now essentially symbolic and ceremonial, including supporting the Lord Lieutenant on Royal visits and on other occasions. If you would like to learn more about what I've been up to during my year you can go to my website at:

<http://www.highsheriffs.com/Greater%20Manchester/Index.htm>

Once there, if you click on County News, you will see my diary which is updated at the end of each month.

Other News

Bramhall Hall – Sneaky Peak Tour

Bramhall Hall has been closed for some months, undergoing a major restoration costing £1.6 million. The hall won't open again until September, but we have been invited to a private tour on the morning of Thursday 26th May. The tour will be suitable for people who are visually impaired and will also be BSL interpreted. Transport will be available to the hall and back from Walthew House. If you would like to come along please add your name to the list in the office.

A new arts project, Off the Wall, will also be organising workshops and activities, including music and poetry and we will have the opportunity to get involved in the coming months.

Online Today

Following the success of the recent training session to help people with a sight loss get online, another workshop has been organised by the RNIB for Tuesday 21st June, 10am-12 noon.

The session will look at how to get the most from tablets, smartphones and eReaders. Call the office to book a place.

You can also learn more about Online Today by visiting:

www.rnib.org.uk/onlinetoday

Charles Bonnet Syndrome

In our previous issue we mentioned the charity Esme's Umbrella. Judith Potts, the founder of the charity has been in touch:

'In November of last year, I launched Esme's Umbrella to raise awareness of Charles Bonnet Syndrome. If I had been anxious about whether or not it was a good idea, my anxiety disappeared as the Jubilee Room in the House of Commons filled with people – all of whom supported the idea wholeheartedly and several of whom had travelled long distances. Most were aware of the Syndrome and understood my mission to spread the word to members of the medical profession – too many of whom are not familiar with CBS – and outwards into the community. Those whose first encounter with CBS came that day, were appalled at the lack of awareness and support for a condition which impacts so severely on the quality of life.

Too many people, whose sight begins to diminish, receive no warning from the ophthalmologist, the optometrist or the GP, that CBS might develop. Consequently, when the hallucinations start, so does the fear because the word 'dementia' hangs in the air.

This was exactly what happened to my mother, Esme. She was in her early nineties but completed the Telegraph crossword daily, despite her failing eyesight and enjoyed an entirely independent and fulfilled life. However, I noticed that my Mother's confidence had begun to wane – but we could never have guessed the cause. One day, as I was leaving her flat, she suddenly said: "I do wish these people would get off my sofa. They sit there all day and only go if I tap them on their shoulders." She and I were the only people in the room. I became increasingly alarmed as she went on to describe more of her 'visions' – as she called them. Not only did she see faceless people sitting on her sofa, but her days were peppered with a gargoyle-like creature, who hopped constantly from table to chair and – particularly hard for my Mother, who had spent her life as a children's nurse – a tear-stained Victorian street child. Sometimes the whole room disappeared and she was transported into a different scene, far removed from her home – or, watching from her window, the garden would morph into an Edwardian funeral procession,

complete with plumed horses, carriages and clergy in red cassocks. She was terrified – not, at that point, so much of her ‘visions’ but of what they might mean for her mind – and so she had said nothing until she could bear it no longer.

With an astonishing piece of luck, that very day, I found a short paragraph in a newspaper about a condition called Charles Bonnet Syndrome. It could have been written by Mum. So, the condition had a name and a cause – her loss of sight. I rang her ophthalmologist with my findings, but he refused to speak to me. My questions about warnings and medication went unanswered - and at Mum’s regular eye appointment, low and behold, he sent his junior with instructions not to discuss the problem.

Her optometrist had not heard of the condition – but later became very interested when I showed him what I had discovered – and her GP, for whom the condition was not only unfamiliar but unlikely, was unsure what to suggest and, in fact, quietly forgot about it.

So – onto the internet I went, garnering information from the Macular Society’s website and finding Dr Dominic Ffytche – who is the acknowledged expert on Charles Bonnet in the UK, the only researcher and now Medical Adviser to our Campaign.

With his help, Mum and I worked out some physical coping mechanisms to – as we described it - ‘shunt her brain into the next gear’ and make the hallucinations disappear – but the results were short-lived and they soon returned. They grew in number and she was never to be free of them.

After her death I wrote about Charles Bonnet in my Telegraph Column and each time received so many emails from all over the world – some of relief and some asking for help – but all showing how little knowledge and support is available and how much more is needed. There is only one support group in the UK – run by The Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind – but we need many more to give comfort and camaraderie to sufferers, their families and friends.

There is little funding for research work, yet, with an aging population, there will be more and more people developing CBS. We need new knowledge and understanding to lead to successful

treatments. At the moment, the only general remedy we have is 'reassurance'.

In the meantime, I have a website

www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk which carries Dominic's work, links to other eye health organisations and a platform on which sufferers, their families and friends can exchange experiences, share coping strategies and find that reassurance. The Helpline number (courtesy of The Help and Information Service) is 0345 051 3915, and the email address is esmesumbrella@gmail.com. Esme's Umbrella will shelter all those for whom Charles Bonnet Syndrome is a feature of their lives – and I am going to take the Campaign into GPs' surgeries, to Care Homes, Health Providers, High Street optometrists – and to specialist doctors and nurses who treat conditions, like diabetes, which can lead to sight loss. Not everyone with low vision will develop the condition but, should they do so, I want to make sure that there is a clear pathway for diagnosis and support.

I am a one-woman band who would welcome, with open arms, any ideas, pledges or help. No one should suffer in silence and everyone with CBS deserves support. My 'vision' is to enable people to cope with their 'visions'.

Judith is looking to collate information about people's experience of the syndrome – we have a questionnaire in the office if people would like to contribute.

Technophobe Survives Brush with Academics and Huge Assistance Dog!

Intrigued? Graham Privett, resource centre volunteer, explains: 'Those of you who've met me in the Walthew House resource centre will know that technology isn't really my thing. However, bravely ignoring my raging technophobia, I went to a conference in Sheffield, attended by a host of academics, charity professionals and people working in Adult Social Care (including Janet & Debbie from the Stockport Adult Social Care Team), to hear the recommendations arising from a study commissioned by Sense, the national charity for dual sensory impaired (DSI) people, which focussed on how assistive technology is being used to support older people. The reason I decided to attend the

event was to share my experiences at Walthew House, hoping to positively influence strategic thinkers and policy makers. However, the main thing I took away from the experience was huge pride in what Walthew House already achieves day-in-day-out.

Barriers to using technology were highlighted by the Study: perception and attitudes; awareness of technology; cost; recycling of equipment and accurately meeting people's needs. Walthew House already does lots to break down these barriers. Helping to make people aware of what technology is out there; being able to socialise with others who already make use of it; and being able to try out products in the resource centre, including items that have been kindly donated, which are more affordable.

There is also too much focus on technology being used to address just basic needs. Listening to people's aspirations is important too. When I started volunteering in the resource centre, I was encouraged to listen to the person who needs help. We're very lucky to have Walthew House here in Stockport. It may even be considered to be a model for other areas across the UK?

The highlight was meeting the guest speaker, Lord "David is fine" Blunkett, and his guide dog Cosby (the largest assistance dog I've ever met!). David said that people need the opportunity to decide for themselves what works for them. We need to listen, not preach, and not make assumptions, i.e. ask. This was almost word-for-word what Linda told me on my first day in the resource centre!

After hearing comments about the "useful insights from people working at a local level" during the wrap-up session (that was me that was!), a challenge was made - "having heard our report, think about what you can do locally".

The only thought I had was for Walthew House to keep up the good work! The photo right shows black Labrador Cosby.



Deaf Diabetes X-Pert Session

Stockport Foundation NHS Trust has held the first ever diabetes education session, BSL interpreted for Deaf patients. It was run at Walthew House by Tracy Hancock, Dietitian from the Patient Education Service. It was a one-off session comprising parts of the full six week Diabetes X-pert Course, including information about, foods, physical activity, and how to prevent complications. As it was a small group the tutor was able to answer more individual questions and at the end the patients felt they understood more about their diabetes and how to manage it. The picture below shows the group at Walthew House:



New Video Relay Service

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is introducing a new video relay service to help BSL users easily access government services. The video relay service (VRS) allows users to make BSL interpreted video calls via their tablet, smartphone, computer or laptop. A professional interpreter then relays the call in English to a member of DWP staff. VRS is being trialled through the call-centres for Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Access to Work, as well as by the Access to Work advisers in the Hearing Loss Team.

Welcome to Debbie Carmichael

Stockport Council has appointed a new Rehabilitation Officer for Visual Impairment (ROVI), Debbie Carmichael. We invited Debbie to introduce herself:

'My name is Debbie Carmichael; I started working with the sensory team in Stockport in January as a ROVI. I have a little girl named Fern who is nine months old who keeps me very busy when I am not working!

I have previously worked in Oldham College supporting visually impaired students age 16-19, Rochdale eye clinic as an eye clinic liaison officer and in Salford Sensory Team as a Rehabilitation Officer for visual Impairment.

I am enjoying working with a new team, who are all very nice, and enjoy meeting the clients in Stockport and helping to solve any issues they may have

to make life that bit easier where sight loss is concerned. It is a job that I really enjoy as you can make a positive difference to a person's life by providing a small piece of equipment or advice.

The photo right shows Debbie Carmichael at the Walthew House Cup.



Supporting Walthew House

Walthew House receives no support from the local council or any other statutory body and we continue to be very grateful for the funds donated by the many local people, businesses and other organisations that recognise the need for specialist support to people with a sight or hearing loss and support our work.

Upcoming fundraising events include; our annual Race Night on Saturday 25th June; a zip slide challenge in Wales – on the longest and fastest zip slide in Europe on 23rd July, and supermarket and street collections. For more information contact David at the office.

Just a few thank yous: to Booth Ainsworth LLP for their continued support and most recent generous donation of £1,570; John

Lewis Cheadle, for their donation of £1,000 through their Community Matters Scheme and Vantage Hyundai Stockport for making us their charity of the year. We are also grateful for the generous support of the Beatrice Laing Charitable Trust; Cheadle and Gatley WI; Edgeley Community and Offerton Methodist Churches, the Equity Foundation; Davenport branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland; Happy Days Children's Charity; Rise and Shine Romiley; the Rotary Clubs of Bramhall and Woodford, Hazel Grove, Stockport and Stockport Lamplighter and Stockport Carnival Committee.

We are also grateful for donations in memory of; Henry Barker, Leslie Clarke, Charlie Clinton, Elsie Dyke, Robert Keenan and Jack Scott.

And finally: did you know that whenever you buy anything online - from your weekly shop to your annual holiday – you could be raising a free donation for Walthew House? There are nearly 3,000 retailers on board ready to make a donation, including Amazon, John Lewis, Argos, and Sainsbury's – and it doesn't cost you a penny extra! To start, just head to:

www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/walthewhouse and sign up for free. Then, every time you shop online, go to easyfundraising first, pick the retailer you want and start shopping. After you've checked out, that retailer will make a donation to your good cause for no extra cost whatsoever!

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Walthew House Supports People in Stockport who are Blind, Visually Impaired, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, or who have Dual Sensory Loss. Registered Charity Number 215469

Walthew House News is produced in large print and is available on request in Braille, on audio CD, by email and as a British Sign Language DVD. The next issue will be available in September 2016.