



CIO Number: 1174797

Honorary President: Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP
Honorary Vice-President: Sunethra Goonewardene

VIEWPOINT | A Quarterly Newsletter | OCTOBER 2021
Tel 020 8200 5462 | Email barnetbsi@yahoo.co.uk
Website www.barnetbsi.org.uk | Facebook [@BarnetBSI](https://www.facebook.com/BarnetBSI)

Dear member

WELCOME to your autumn newsletter!

Things are feeling a bit odd this month. It's the first time we've been back to St Mary's for our meetings since the start of lockdown 18 months ago. And it also feels odd because some members are no longer with us. Ellinor Biswas, a cherished friend and stalwart of our charity, sadly passed away on 10th September and is much missed. As well as serving on the BBSI committee for several years until 2017, she also represented us so well at meetings of the Pocklington Trust and the RNIB. A full tribute to Ellinor will be published in the next edition of Viewpoint.

During our enforced separation over the past 18 months we had to adapt to meeting on Zoom, and our normal trips to the theatre, along with summer outings, had to be cancelled. The changes to our usual modus operandi have made your committee think very hard about our future direction. With all that modern technology has to offer VIs via smartphones, tablets and computers, and voice-activated smart speakers that tell you whatever you want to know, set alarms or play your favourite music - is there then still a need for a group such as ours to provide additional support?

2

Committee member Paul Ashby recently set up a sub-committee to identify a 'way forward' for BBSI. One of the recommendations from the group was to conduct a survey to find out what members wanted from BBSI. By now you should have received your copy of the survey and, if you haven't already done so, we'd be really grateful if you could let us have your completed questionnaire as soon as possible so that we can provide you with the services you need. Another suggestion was to create a Google Calendar with details of all future activities from BBSI, as well as events from some of the other VI groups in London. This is now live on our website at www.barnetbsi.org.uk so that you can keep up to date with what's going on. Anyone who doesn't have access to the internet can contact us for a monthly printout or ask us to read out the listed events over the phone.

Some time ago we received a bequest from the late Peggy Dowling, a BBSI volunteer and loyal supporter of our cause, and decided that a sensory garden would be a fitting tribute to her. This is now being planned at Victoria Park in Finchley Central, and we're working together with Barnet Council to make this happen. We're also looking for members to become involved in the design and planning of the garden. If you're interested, please call our Secretary Lis Vandyk on 020 8349 4705.

So, in returning to St Mary's this month, in a way, we're back where we started - but in another way we've also moved on and developed.

I look forward to meeting you in person again and hearing YOUR views - perhaps at one of the general meetings, at our popular lunch club or over Christmas lunch: you'll find all the relevant dates along with further information on page 12. And I hope that many of you, along with your family and friends, will also be able to join us on Zoom for our annual **Quiz Night on Saturday 27th November**. Please see the flyer enclosed with this newsletter for further details.

With best wishes, along with my early season's greetings to you all!
Nigel Vandyk (Acting Chairman)



Picture: Our Secretary Lis with BBSI members Sunethra, Ollie, and Melvyn in Victoria Park discussing the sensory garden project with Nicola Cross, LBB Development Manager, and Matthew Gunyon, LBB Greenspaces Service Manager.

GENERAL MEETINGS REPORT

- In August Wendy Smith from Project Oriel updated us on the relocation of Moorfields Eye Hospital to a purpose-built shared facility with the UCL Institute of Ophthalmology near King's Cross.** Scheduled to open in 2026, the centre will include A&E and outpatients departments, operating theatres, offices, a cafe and retail outlets, along with spaces for research and educational purposes. BBSI members took the opportunity to suggest suitable internal lighting and colour schemes that would make it easier for VIPs to navigate the building. Transport to the site, however, remained a major concern. The primary pedestrian route from King's Cross station would be difficult, and the route from Mornington Crescent, a secondary option, was judged to be equally unsatisfactory. Ideally, BBSI members would wish to see a shuttle service in operation, or a re-routing of an existing bus service, to take them to the entrance of the new hospital. If you have any comments or concerns of your own and would like to have your say, please email moorfields.oriel@nhs.net.

4

- **In September we were joined by Banos Alexandrou, Policy and Research Manager at [Inclusion Barnet](#)**, who is leading a [two year research study looking into what people think of the help and support they get from social care services](#), with a view to embedding lived experience in decision making on future improvements. BBSI members highlighted the need for a direct phone number to the Sensory Impairment Team (instead of having to phone Social Care Direct), along with the importance of continuity of support from the same caregiver/s to help build trust and empathy. Members also identified loneliness amongst the elderly and infirm as an area of concern, and a need for improved signposting to services - the latter, we were pleased to discover, is available from Inclusion Barnet's [Touchpoint service](#). To participate in the study, call Banos on 07719 105247 or email banos@inclusionbarnet.org.uk
- **In October, at our first live meeting since 2020, we were pleased to welcome back VI singer-storyteller Kate Portal** who entertained us with engaging stories and songs. She began with the story of King Midas and the Golden Touch and the traditional folk song 'Hopping Down in Kent'. And to follow, she sang a number of songs from the repertoires of folk music luminaries Ewan MacColl, Martin Carthy and his daughter Eliza Carthy, including 'Maid on the Shore' and 'John Blunt'. Her finale, from the tradition of English music hall, 'Don't Dilly Dally' (aka My Old Man Said Follow the Van), had everyone joining in with great gusto!

2021 HEALTHWATCH BARNET PRIORITIES SURVEY

There's still time to let [Healthwatch Barnet](#) know about your health and social care priorities. What are the sticking points for you, what would help you? You can give your feedback online at www.research.net/r/BarnetPriorities or call Yasmin Rahman on 07402834108 between 10am and 6pm, Tuesdays to Thursdays, or email yasmin@healthwatchbarnet.co.uk for a callback.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

“Hi, I'm Paul, and I'm a Barnet boy born and bred. I attended primary school in Whetstone, secondary and sixth form up in the town of Barnet itself at QEBS. But then various factors - university, drama school, marriage, work, child one, followed by child two - led me to other parts of London. Coming back to Barnet 10 years ago felt slightly surreal because so very little seemed to have changed. My work life was like a game of football - two halves: after drama school I became a professional actor for nine years, ending up at the National Theatre. But when my missus had our second child, we decided that I needed to find a more stable and lucrative profession. So after quite a bit of retraining, I moved into film and television production. I initially became a first assistant director on drama shoots, then moved up to production manager and, finally, line producer.

Then in June 2014 it all came crashing down. I suffered an extremely rare adverse drug reaction (ADR) to prescription medication, and I ended up being treated for toxic epidermal necrolysis (TEN). As the name suggests, lots of skin blisters up and either falls off the body or has to be removed by specialist burns surgeons. Skin around the eye orbit, including the eye lids, contain the tear glands and, unfortunately, when that skin disappears so also do the glands, and without the tears to lubricate the eyes the eyelids scratch the surface of the eyes and eventually, in severe cases like mine, leads to blindness. My vision became so blurred that I was declared clinically blind in April 2016. [Moorfields Eye Hospital](#) threw everything they could at the problem but, unfortunately, in my case they weren't successful at saving my eyesight. If you're interested, you can find out more about this condition at www.sjsawareness.org.uk

I joined BBSI quite soon after I became blind, and then a couple of years later I was extremely honoured to be invited to join the committee. I am also involved in a weekly [talk and support group run by the RNIB](#). There is a lot of technology available to help blind

6

people and I am slowly learning how to use some of it. Luckily, there is also a lot of support from many organisations, not least of course from BBSI itself. Finally, in closing, I'd like to take this early opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a much happier new year than the last two."

REVIEW OF A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - by Ollie Natelson

On 25th July a group of 12 BBSI members gathered at St Mary's Church Hall car park from where we were driven to the open air theatre, aka the Ladies Bowling Green, in Mill Hill Park.

Apparently, some 17th century bard called Bill Shakespeare had written a play about a dream in the middle of summer. So, with chairs "borrowed" from the nearby café we sat in front of a raised stage to witness an admirable performance by **Quantum Theatre of A Midsummer Night's Dream**. Many strange things beset the various characters who find themselves in a forest inhabited by fairies. The fun really starts when mischievous sprites Oberon and Puck turn the world topsy-turvy with their magic spells and love potions!

There's a lot going on in the play, and it can sometimes get a bit confusing as we shift between the worlds of reality and fantasy. Is it simply a romantic comedy with a happy ending or an allegory about the vagaries of love? The cheeky prankster Puck pointedly observes: "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"

Back in the real world of our north London park it started to drizzle. Umbrellas all around me went up, and I pulled my hat down over my head and pulled up my jacket collar to keep out the rain. As every actor knows, "the show must go on." And so it did despite the ever-increasing rain. But Ollie without a broly was getting really soaked and very cold! I could see even less than usual owing to rain-spattered specs and the sea of umbrellas.

The actors, of course, would have been soaked and very cold too - but stoically they carried on. We cheered and clapped in admiration and appreciation. What a wonderful experience, and a brilliant performance of this enchanting tale - however you choose to interpret it! Well done, BBSI, for organising this unforgettable outing. Our grateful thanks also go to Poolin who very kindly provided our transport.



Picture: BBSI members at 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' in Mill Hill Park

TIME FOR A SMILE

A man walks into a pub with a little Chihuahua on a lead. The landlord tells him, "Sorry, sir, no dogs allowed in here." "But", says the man, "I thought you allow guide dogs." "Yes", says the landlord, "but guide dogs tend to be German Shepherds or Labradors."

"Oh no", says the man, "What have they given me this time?"

8

GOOGLE HOME: FRIEND OR FOE? - by Bakul Shah

I am blind and have no useful sight at all. However, I can use a smartphone (in my case it's an iPhone) using its built-in Text to Speech feature called VoiceOver, and as a result can tune in to various radio stations, listen to podcasts or even search Google on the go. I had therefore felt that Amazon Echo or its Google equivalent, Google Home, was not for me. I had also heard that these devices listen in to our conversations all the time and send the data to Amazon or Google - so another reason to stay clear!

A couple of months ago, I listened to a seminar organised by [Sight Village](#) where a representative from Amazon was presenting the features of the Amazon Echo. My concerns about the device listening in were allayed to my satisfaction: it listens to our conversation as it is always monitoring for when it's directly prompted to do something by the wake-up command "Alexa", but normal background conversation is not sent to Amazon computers. Unless it detects the wake-up command, nothing is transferred. It's the same with Google Home, where the wake-up command takes the form of "Hey Google".

I therefore decided to get a secondhand Google Mini. It's the size of half a burger bun. The installation instructions which came with the device required the user to download an app called 'Google Home' and further instructions to get the device working. Step-by-step instructions are also available via YouTube. Given that my Google Home wasn't new, it first needed to be reset to factory settings. My wife looked up the instructions to do this on YouTube and installed the device for me - I think it's probably not that straightforward to install a secondhand device, as resetting to factory settings can be a little fiddly - so I would recommend that you get some help to do this. Given my love of music and podcasts, I signed up to the free version of the music app Spotify, which I've linked to Google Home via the Google Home app. Once set up, the device is really easy to use, and you don't even need a smartphone to use it. Despite the small

size of the device, the sound quality is brilliant. The same goes for the Amazon Echo.

I've found Google Home really easy to use, and it understands instructions spoken naturally. I've used it to play music, podcasts, tune in to radio stations, check the weather and traffic, and get news summaries from the BBC or national papers. I can use it to quickly check facts that I would normally have done via a Google search on my iPhone. More recently, I also discovered that I could ask it to play children's songs and nursery rhymes for my granddaughter - so I now no longer need to get these on CD! The list of uses grows all the time and is only limited by what you ask. I am now a big fan of these voice-assisted devices.

A couple of additional points that I've heard about the Amazon Echo (but not experienced directly): firstly, that the Amazon Echo does not respond as well as Google Home to natural language commands. On the other hand, the Amazon Echo can also be linked to one's Amazon Prime account and allows one to build a shopping list as one goes along throughout the week and then instruct Alexa to place the grocery order via Amazon Prime. And, secondly, the Amazon Echo can also be linked to the [RNIB Talking Books service](#), allowing you to search for and play audio books through the device.

However, whether you get a Google Home device or an Amazon Echo is really a matter of personal choice.

[Editor's Note: Following a rebranding of Google Home devices, the Google Home Mini is now called Google Nest Mini]

THE ANSWER TO OUR QUESTION IN THE SUMMER NEWSLETTER

Who said "I wasted time, and now doth time waste me."

The answer is Richard II in Shakespeare's **Richard II**.

10

HELP WITH HEATING BILLS

• Warm Home Discount Scheme

The scheme offers a one-off payment of £140 towards the cost of your electricity bill between October and March. The discount is applied to your bill and not paid direct to you. If you get both your gas and electricity from the same supplier you may be able to get this applied to your gas bill instead. You can qualify for the discount in one of two ways: **(1)** If you're in receipt of the Guarantee Credit element of Pension Credit and your supplier participates in the scheme. People in this 'core group' receive the benefit automatically via the DWP. If you're eligible but haven't yet received a letter from the DWP, call the Warm Home Discount Scheme helpline on 0800 731 0214. **(2)** You may be eligible direct through your supplier if they participate in the scheme (not all suppliers do) if you're in what's known as the 'broader group', ie on a low income and otherwise meet your supplier's qualifying criteria. In this case, you'll need to apply direct to your energy company. For more info go to

www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount-scheme

• WINTER FUEL PAYMENT

This is a non means-tested and tax-free annual payment of between £100 and £300. You will be eligible if you were born on or before 26th September, 1955 and lived in the UK for at least one day during what is known as the "qualifying week" - in 2021 this is 20th - 26th September. If you're in receipt of the state pension or a qualifying social security benefit, you'll receive the payment automatically. How much you receive will depend on your personal circumstances during the qualifying week. If you were born on or before 26th September 1941 you will usually receive more money, but this will also depend on your living arrangements. If you don't claim the State Pension, but otherwise qualify for the scheme, call the Winter Fuel Payment Centre on 0800 731 0160.

• COLD WEATHER PAYMENT

People on certain benefits could qualify for a cold weather payment, which offers £25 for each 7 day period when temperatures in their area fall to zero or below between 1st November and 31st March. See more info at www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment/eligibility.

BBSI MONTHLY GENERAL MEETINGS

As many of you who joined us on 5th October will already know, we're now back to holding face-to-face meetings at our St Mary's Church Hall venue. We will, of course, take all necessary precautions to ensure everyone's safety. [The meetings will also be live streamed on Zoom for members who prefer to join us remotely.](#)

Our general meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month at **St Mary's Church Hall, Hendon Lane, Finchley N3 1TR, from 1.30pm to 4pm**, and include an audio described exercise class (or a discussion group for those who prefer not to take part), a guest speaker or entertainment, delicious refreshments and a raffle.

NOTE: The August meeting is usually replaced with an outing, and in January we meet on the second Tuesday of the month.

- **Getting to St Mary's Church Hall by Public Transport**

Buses 125, 143, 326, 13 and 460 all stop nearby. Buses 125 & 326 stop outside the church next to our venue when coming **from** Colindale/Brent Cross; going **towards** Colindale/Brent Cross, the nearest stop is on Gravel Hill. The closest underground station is Finchley Central. **Please contact our Secretary on 020 8349 4705 if you need any further help or details of any of our meetings.**

- **To Join our Meetings on Zoom**

To join us by phone, please dial 020 3481 5240 and when requested enter the meeting ID of 656 683 6242 followed by #.

If you have a smartphone, tablet or computer, you can join from this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6566836242>

On Zoom we have two 'breakout rooms' prior to the start of the main meeting: one for the exercise class and another for the discussion group. At the end of the allotted time for these activities we return members to the main room to listen to our guest speaker.

- **BBSI MONTHLY LUNCH CLUB**

Our monthly Friday lunch club meets at different local restaurants on the last Friday of the month (except for December). You'll find all the relevant dates and booking details on page 12.

12

BBSI EVENTS CALENDAR

OCTOBER

Friday 29th BBSI Lunch Club at 12.30pm

Please call Paul on 07831 376 235 to reserve your place

NOVEMBER

- **Tuesday 2nd BBSI General Meeting at 1.30pm**
A Showcase of Assistive Technology from HumanWare
- **Friday 26th BBSI Lunch Club at 12.30pm**
Please call Paul on 07831 376 235 to reserve your place
- ❖ **SATURDAY 27th BBSI QUIZ NIGHT ON ZOOM**
Please see the enclosed leaflet

DECEMBER

- **Tuesday 7th BBSI General Meeting at 1.30pm**
Carol Concert from the choir of St Mary's Junior School
- ❖ **TUESDAY 14th BBSI CHRISTMAS LUNCH**
Contact Nigel on 020 8349 4705 to reserve your place

JANUARY 2022

- **Tuesday 11th BBSI General Meeting at 1.30pm**
A Winter Miscellany of Poetry, Song & Readings
hosted by Lis & Helen
- **Friday 28th BBSI Lunch Club at 12.30pm**
Please call Paul on 07831 376 235 to reserve your place

REMEMBER

The clocks GO BACK at 2am on Sunday 31st October

We need your feedback! Please return your completed membership survey questionnaire as soon as possible in the pre-paid envelope provided. If you have any questions, require a replacement copy or need help with completing the form, please leave a message on 020 8200 5462 and we will get back to you.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of BBSI.

Please send items for inclusion in the January 2022 newsletter to the editor at susanne@barnetbsi.org.uk by: **15th December 2021.**