



Annual Welfare Review 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, HMA MARTIN SHEARMAN

I wrote in the last annual review that we were seven weeks into lockdown. That seemed then a long time to live with restrictions. Twelve months on, the toll extorted by Coronavirus has been heavy.

An accelerating vaccination campaign now holds out hope of better times ahead, in Belgium as in the UK though sadly not yet in many parts of the world.

But come what may, living through the last year has shown us how much kindness, selflessness and concern for others matter. The British Charitable Fund embodies those virtues. Thank you for all you do.

OUR HISTORY

The British Charitable Fund was founded in 1815, at the request of the Duke of Wellington, to help injured soldiers and their dependants who remained in Belgium after the Battle of Waterloo. Over 200 years later, we continue this work to help British nationals and their dependants in times of need.

PART OF OUR HISTORY

BCF lost one of its longest-serving and greatly cherished members in 2020 and so we share with you this message from her son, Martin:

"We are sad to announce that Barbara Blackwell died peacefully at her home on October 21 after a short illness – she was 94 years young.

She was born in May 1926 in London but moved to Brussels with her parents early on in life, going to school here but returning to London for the duration of World War 2, surviving the Battle of Britain in Finchley. She returned to Brussels shortly after the war with her parents and in 1948 met and married Blackie Blackwell, Chairman of the English Comedy Club and later of the Brussels British Community Association for many years. She was widowed at the age of 64 and never remarried.

Barbara was on the Board of the British Charitable Fund for some 40 years, making weekly visits to beneficiaries who needed support. For this work she was awarded an MBE 30 years ago for services to the British Community in Brussels. When in her nineties, she was still tirelessly volunteering in the Oxfam shop near Place Jourdan and having finally given up driving she would go there and back on the bus. She was a regular at the Brussels Women's Club bridge days where she was known for her good humour, warm personality, and exemplary bridge etiquette.

She lost her younger son Simon when he was 33, a huge blow that she always carried with her but learned to accept with characteristic courage. She is survived by her two children, Martin, and Sue, and her four grandchildren. She

regretted she was unable to "hang around" (her words) for the birth of her first great grandchild, Isabella, who arrived mid-November."

Barbara was the longest serving member of the Committee having joined in 1967 and retired in 2010. Her 43 years of service was marked by making her a life member of the Fund and a member of the Committee of Patronage. However, even after retiring she continued to maintain contact with some of the Fund's beneficiaries.

Her contribution to BCF was immense. An encyclopaedic memory and attention to detail put our new-fangled computer skills to shame, and her wise and courteous advice was given the appreciation she deserved in providing the appropriate help to people. She would have described her input as modest – it was anything but!

WHOM DO WE HELP

People come to the BCF in times of personal crisis. The people we help are young and old, long-term residents in Belgium and new arrivals, some just passing through, and come from all walks of life. The BCF is non-denominational and non-judgemental, and simply does what it takes to get lives back on track.

The problems people encounter are many and varied and can turn lives upside down. For instance, coping with administrative requirements upon the loss of a spouse can often be daunting, and loneliness and isolation (often coupled with poverty) can be longer-term problems for many people, not necessarily the elderly. Language barriers only add to the difficulties for many and continued uncertainty following Brexit adds yet another layer of anxiety for many people, often the most vulnerable amongst us. The following are some examples of the kind of work we do and the wide variety of people we help. Names have been changed to protect identities.

Margaret's Story

The BCF was asked to help Margaret who was widowed in February 2019. It soon became clear that she needed more than just immediate help with administrative procedures. Several members of the BCF stepped forward to keep Margaret safe as she became increasingly vulnerable, confused and disorientated and began to suffer from the onset of dementia. Margaret was always cheerful, bright and grateful for the help she received but was quite alone in Belgium. The BCF managed her administrative affairs and helped with medical and hospital visits. BCF facilitated her return to the UK in September 2020 where she will live out her retirement in safe accommodation. Her family solicitor remarked that BCF had quite probably saved Margaret's life.

George's Story

George has been living happily in Brussels for 10 years and seemed to be in good physical health. He regularly visited his family in the UK but their concerns were raised the last time they saw him because of slight changes in his behaviour. At their request, the BCF met George following a call from the owner of the Brussels café he frequented because he had lost both his wallet and his passport. Working closely with the British Consulate, George's situation was stabilised and he was, eventually, found a place in a care home where he now lives both happily and safely. George's sister is certain that the BCF's intervention and assistance saved George's life.

The West Family Story

The West family consisted of a young couple and their new-born baby. They had come to Belgium for work but their situation was seriously impacted by the Covid pandemic and they found themselves with no income and a new baby to care for. The British Consulate was able to make contact with local social care providers who could help the couple and the BCF was able to relieve some of their financial pressures, not least the threat of eviction from their rented apartment.

The Long-term Support Story

Terrorist attacks do not distinguish between nationality and several British victims were amongst the people killed or injured by the terrorist attack of 22 March 2016 in Belgium. Foreign victims in particular required support from their own countries. The BCF mobilised help very quickly in conjunction with the British Embassy, Consulate and UK Police. More than five years after the attack the BCF continues to give much needed logistical and moral support to British people who were injured or lost a spouse at the time.

HOW WE HELP

As these case stories demonstrate, the BCF can very often help with advice, financial support, and regular visits to help combat loneliness. There is no limit to the type of help we give which can range from having a weekly meeting over a cup of tea, to arranging legal or financial advice, to providing significant long-term financial support. The BCF works as a committee and is a group of unpaid volunteers. We work in conditions of the strictest confidentiality and, whilst costs are kept to an absolute minimum, we are however an 'agency of last resort' and only step in when applicants have exhausted the normal means of support from family or government sources. Our structure enables us to react very quickly (often the same day), and support can last for as little as a few days, or continue for many years.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER BRITISH ORGANISATIONS

The BCF works closely with other organisations also helping British nationals in Belgium. Many of our beneficiaries come to us via organisations such as the Royal British Legion (RBL), the Community Help Service (CHS), the Anglican churches, and the Wednesday Club.

We liaise regularly with the Consulate and the British Embassy who, when their powers to intervene are limited, have referred a number of cases to the BCF. We are very happy that we are able to work so well together to the benefit of those who need help.



CHS

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PUBLICITY

We are concerned that there may be many needy people who are simply not aware of the help we can offer. The BCF is devoted to increasing awareness of its activities amongst the British community in Belgium and we continue to explore possibilities for extending contact within the community.

Many people come to the BCF because of personal contacts, so please spread the word by making friends and family aware of the work the BCF does. Thank you.

DONORS AND SUPPORTERS IN 2020 – € 19.186 - VERY MANY THANKS TO ALL

Mr Ron Aston
Mrs Brenda Barleycorn
Mrs Ann Barleycorn
Mr Martin Blackwell
Mrs Barbara Blackwell
Mr Ian Boag
Mrs Janet Burke
Mr & Mrs Anthony Caston

Mme Jeanne Durieux
Mr Jonathan Falck
Mrs Barbara Fletcher
Mr & Mrs Geoffrey Goldie
Mme Susannah Haan
Mrs Rita Histed
Mr & Mrs David Humphreys
Mr Adye Kozorowska

Mr Marc Nieuwenhuys
Mr Peter Nolan
Mr Malcolm Pimm
Mrs Mary Pritchard
Mr & Mrs Colin Puplett
Ms Patricia Robins
Ms Ann Robins
Mr Stephen Stabler

Mme Eileen Chiles
Mr Paul Claes
Mr & Mrs Stuart Cummings
Mrs Therese Delplace
Mr & Mrs Stuart Dowsett

Mme Charles Lejeune
Mr & Mrs Richard Lewis
Ms Kerry Lydon
Mr John Morrey
Mme Micheline Nerinckx

Mr Alan Taylor
Miss Christine Taylor
Mrs Elizabeth Taylor
Mme Laure Tikhmenov
Mr Peter Willis

St. Andrew's Church of
Scotland

Brussels British Community
Association

Holy Trinity Church

His Grace the Duke of Wellington
and one anonymous donor

CAN YOU HELP ?

In a world where vulnerable people can easily find themselves in very difficult situations, the calls on the BCF's resources are only increasing. New volunteers are always welcome and, should you have a little time to spare, please join us in helping people less fortunate than ourselves. You can contact us via our web-site www.bcfund.be

LIKE TO DONATE ?

If you don't have time to help us, please consider making a donation. Two hundred years after its inception, this is what allows the BCF to continue its much needed work. As a registered Belgian charity all donations over 40 euros are tax deductible. You can make a bank transfer to our account **British Charitable Fund – IBAN BE37 3101 8900 8428**, with the message 'Donation'. Please leave us your address/email details so that we can stay in touch. Thank you!

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN, JULIE HUCKLE

During 2020 the Covid pandemic threw a very harsh spotlight onto the societies we live in today. The inability of people to go about their normal daily business meant that livelihoods were threatened, income was cut, social contact was virtually eliminated and, unless you were adept at virtual interaction, the risks associated with isolation were very, very real. The coronavirus has affected all of our lives to one degree or another but I am proud to say that BCF volunteers have continued to act and make a difference to people's lives. The tenacity and consistency of some of my BCF colleagues in 2020 has been exemplary and I am so glad to report that, when the test of man's humanity to man comes, BCF volunteers stand ready.

Despite the pandemic, we were able to continue benefiting from our supporters financial assistance and we are and will remain very grateful for this. BCF work basically relies on two major resources. Time, which our volunteers bring in quantity, and money, which you, our supporters; continue to provide. I know that the Beneficiaries of our resources, and their families, are extremely grateful.

We say it a lot but I don't think you can say it enough. Thank you!

PATRON :

H.M. Philippe King of the Belgians

PRESIDENT :

His Excellency Martin Shearman, H.B.M. Ambassador to Belgium

VICE PRESIDENT :

Mr Alan Campbell, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy

COMMITTEE :

Ron Aston, Martin Blackwell, Jonathan Falck, Julie Huckle BEM, , Susan Hudson, David Humphreys, Louise Lang,

Malcolm Pimm, Colin Puplett

COMMITTEE OF PATRONAGE :

His Grace the Duke of Wellington, Madame Jacques Solvay, Mrs Barbara Blackwell MBE