



Making the Connection



The story of the first 25 years of Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper for the Visually Impaired

The Photographs

Front cover: Mrs Nancy Tatler listens to the latest tape. She says: "I don't know what I would do without the Talking Newspaper. It's a lifeline."

Back cover: Top: Mike Peters, one of six Recorders, in the recording suite.
Below: One of the five-person teams of Readers

Photographs by John Brough

The title of this booklet, 'Making the Connection', is based on the Talking Newspaper's internal newsletter, 'Connection', which comes from the letters C.N.T.N. from the short form of our name: Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper.

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

WHAT were you doing 25 years ago? As far as the Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper was concerned, founding members were getting together to launch a service for people who had difficulty reading the news for themselves.

I wasn't a member of the Talking Newspaper then, although I did become involved shortly afterwards, taking my place as one of the tape copiers. In those days, the machines were nowhere as fast or reliable as today.

Many times, I arrived at Crewe Postal Sorting Office after midnight with a bag of tapes, all of which seemed to be delivered on time thanks to the Royal Mail.

I know from my activities in the Talking Newspaper and Crewe Rotary Club what an excellent job the 100 or so volunteers are doing week in, week out. Wearing my Rotary hat for a second, I must say that we were proud to help financially in the launch of the Talking Newspaper, and we are happy to share our charity income with the group in our annual cash awards.

It is always said that if you want a job done you ask a busy person. This is certainly true of the Talking Newspaper Volunteers. Many, like myself, belong to Rotary. Others are members of organisations like Nantwich Players. But they still find time to do their monthly "stint" in one of the many jobs that go into making up the team of workers – Cuttings Editors, Sub-editors, Tape Rewinders, Recorders, Readers, Tape Copiers, House Visitors, and more.

It takes 25 people every week to fill the necessary posts so that nearly 200 visually impaired residents of Crewe and Nantwich can get their weekly input of the local news provided by The Chronicle newspaper. My thanks to the Chronicle, without whose co-operation the Talking Newspaper would not be possible.

And my thanks to all those involved in producing this booklet, in particular the contributors, Eric Hotine of A4 Media Services and Ian Graham of John Rigby Printers (Crewe) Ltd. for their help.

I recently suggested that we should launch a Friends of the Talking Newspaper organisation to help with the financing of the

TN work. I am pleased to say that the TN Committee readily accepted it. For more details – and ways in which YOU can help – turn to Page 21.

This booklet – which is sponsored by the Friends - tells the story of the first 25 years of Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper for the Visually Impaired. The organisation will be around for many years to come if the volunteers have anything to do with it. I'm sure they will . . .

I hope you enjoy reading our tale. And as you do so, think of the people who cannot read it because of sight problems – the sole reason for our existence. Don't worry, though, a special taped version of the booklet is being produced for our Listeners in addition to their regular news service.

Patrick Grange,
Chairman,
November 2002

The first recorded tapes were sent out by Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper for the Blind (as we were then termed) to reach the first Listeners on Friday, November 18, 1977. They were received by about 70 Listeners aged between 27 and 96. The aim was to increase the circulation to 150 over the following months.

We began with joint editors, Graham Beach and Peter Wilson jnr, of the newly-formed Rotaract group.

In this booklet, three writers recall the early days.

A MESSAGE FROM Dr BILL GRUNDY

(Founder member and first Chairman)

I AM very proud to have had the privilege of being a founder member and first Chairman of the Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper. At the time it seemed a formidable task to get such a bold scheme "up and running". We were very fortunate with the initial enthusiasm of the Community Service Committee of the Crewe Rotary Club, of which I was the Chairman at that time. This was followed by the full support and approval of the entire club.

I was delighted by the public response to the meeting at Crewe Hall. It was obviously a great success, setting us up with a super team. I think that one of the main reasons it became such a successful organisation was the aim that nobody, except very key persons, would be involved more than an hour or two, once a month. So, we started with four teams for each of the activities necessary to produce, distribute and collect the cassettes:

1, Wednesday afternoon, the day of publication of the Crewe and Nantwich Chronicles, the cutting, timing and primary editing. In the evening, the final editing by Graham Beach.

2, Thursday afternoon, collection of the returned cassettes, rewinding, degaussing and re-labelling. (The packets were returned to Eric Preston's Chemist Shop, by courtesy of the G.P.O.).

3, Thursday evening, the Readers team with a Recorder technician made the master copy. Later on Thursday evening, the Copiers and Dispatchers did their work – with the recorded tapes, in special packets, taken to the G.P.O. – enabling the Listeners to have their copies by Friday morning.

It all worked, with a few hitches and a few modifications, and is still a great success 25 years on. I would like to thank everyone concerned. It was for me an exciting and worthwhile project.

By RAY GLADDEN, JP, MBE

Secretary, Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper

I WELL remember the meeting at Crewe Rotary Club in 1976 when the speaker was a gentleman who was not only Editor of the Macclesfield Chronicle but also the Editor and one of the leading lights of the Macclesfield Talking Newspaper. This had just been formed at Macclesfield and they were justly proud of their achievements.

It was a fascinating talk and enthused a number of people in the club, from Harry Bamford, who was then Borough Treasurer and President of the Rotary Club, down to a lowly new Rotarian (who had joined in January 1975), Ray Gladden.

Rotary Clubs have three basic Aims and Objects Committees – Vocational, Community and International. The Community lot, with Bill Grundy as their Chairman, was tasked with forming a Talking Newspaper (TN) at Crewe.

I was not on the original committee, but I had the entrée to Wellcome Foundation resources at Crewe Hall in my job as Site Administrator, so it was natural that I should have offered facilities for meetings in prestigious surroundings. I was at the first meeting in Crewe Hall Library more or less as a “facilitator” but not becoming involved at that stage in the organising of the proposed TN early in 1976.

I recall the frenzied fund-raising activity at Rotary to raise the £3,500 that we reckoned would be needed to buy the first set of copying machines. One of the major fund-raisers was the sponsorship of Rotary Club drivers who were loaned a sports car for 24 hours.

Each Rotarian who volunteered got to drive the car for a two-hour stint before handing over to the next driver. It was a very successful venture and although the first car had an engine blowout on the M6 on the way to Blackpool, nobody mentioned the replacement car that was readily made available as it would have been poor publicity for the garage car sales.

One recording deck would cost only £100 or so but the two (or was it three?) Pentagon copying machines were very expensive.

Ken Jones and Neil Palmer from the Rotary Club became our first Trustees. Along with Dr Bill Grundy as Chairman there was Joan Cooper who for seven years was a most efficient and effective Secretary. She was a school secretary and her husband, Malcolm, was a manager with Manweb. His advice helped a lot when it came to improving the wiring of the studio. The Coopers left the district when Malcolm's job moved to Chester in 1984.

The question of where to locate our activities took a bit of time to sort out. They used to do provisional test runs of recording and copying at Bill Grundy's house, but obviously that could not go on for too long.

Two of our Rotarians in Crewe Club at that time were Stanley Jackson (the optician) and Colin Farmer (the Crewe Parks Superintendent). They were on the Board of Trustees of the Mossford Powell Institute in Chapel Street.

This was where an ex-Mayor of Crewe, Councillor Mrs Mossford Powell, had founded a ladies club for disadvantaged local people. When the housing pattern and social habits (e.g., television, etc) changed, the club members fell away and the premises were under-utilised. The Mossford Powell trustees offered us the use of the first floor in 1977.

The house in Chapel Street had been part of an early Crewe Police Station complex built in 1899 and demolished about 1950. The land on which the police station stood is now the car park and the house was built for the Sergeant of Police. He was the top policeman in 1899. A few years later he became an Inspector.

It was a solid, brick-built house but time had taken its toll. The entrance we used was the back door, approached via a yard through a side door. The downstairs was only used on two afternoons a week for bingo and other little entertainments. It was cold, dingy and very shabby. I remember that I had taken upon myself the task of brushing and swilling the paved yard to make it less slippery; it grew a lot of moss and algae stuff on it.

There were two old brick sheds at the side opposite the back door; full of old furniture and rubbish. It became rat infested and we had to call in the council and then clear the sheds out. Not a pleasant memory.

Another time, at a Christmas holiday - possibly 1978 - I arrived at the premises to find Colin Farmer sweeping out about three inches of water from the whole of the ground floor after a pipe had burst. With no heating in the building, it became damper still! I was delighted, in later years, when IRIS (the Vision Resource Centre) built an extension to the side, leaving me with memories that I prefer to forget!

EVENTUALLY, the ladies club left and we inherited the whole building. It was officially leased to the Mossford Powell Institute for £25 a year from the Cheshire County Council. We paid the rent for them because they had no income. Eventually, when Colin Farmer had seen us safely through to the stage where we were going to buy the premises, he folded the Mossford Powell Trust and gave us the £300 or so that was left in their funds.

In the early 1980s, the ground floor was used by another Rotarian, Peter Andrews, who was Chairman of the Leighton Hospital League of Friends. They used the undivided large front room for storage until Social Services decided to start a self-help group. This became IRIS - and you know the story from there on.

THERE were various people involved in the early days. I can think of Helena Dzisiewska, a Polish lady who became a lynch pin in the tape copying department.

Doug Fearn did valiant service for many years as Treasurer and general helper. I remember he and I doing one of the early redecoration jobs in the studio because, bless him, he always used to get as much paint on his pullover as he put on the ceiling. Doug also used to give talks to ladies' groups in the district on TN. Doug carried his own selection of demonstration tapes and he particularly prized a number of school interview tapes with children that I had made over the years. He seemed to get as much pleasure in replaying them over and over again as apparently his audiences did!

Another constant supporter was Eric Robinson who never failed to pass the proceeds of his talks on mountains and long-distance walks over to the TN Treasurer, Peter Cable. Peter had a heart of gold when it came to the administration, which he did very quietly and effectively. His wife, Hazel, did a similar loyal service over

very many years – contacting the Listeners and week-by-week involvement in the general running of the studio for many years afterwards.

I suppose the Cables and the Griffiths (Ken and Betty on the technical side), who came in loyally every week, winter and summer, really became so involved that they found difficulty in disentangling themselves.

Dave Wallace was another name that springs to mind. A pharmacist with P. Williams, he was a regular Recorder.

As Graham Beach says in his article, John Densem worked very hard setting it all up in the earliest times but I was only on the fringe for the first two years.

I used to do a slot on a copying team and that was all I found time for – until I volunteered that I was interested in events of years ago and asked what TN would think of having a regular item recorded from the old Chronicles. That was in 1978 and the “50 Years Ago” feature of the weekly tapes caught on.

I got the bound versions of the newspaper from the High Street office, which went on year after year until the files were moved to Crewe Library. It was still possible for me to borrow them from the Librarian for a week at Christmas and my Christmas holidays were always interspersed with the reading and recording of 26 six-minute talks for use the following year. Then, my eyesight got too bad to read the very small and difficult print and Elsie Mower took over.

Once I had started inputting the 50YA items, I began to take more interest and I think at that stage I was doing a Recorder slot.

I remember that Bill Grundy had been the first Chairman and his term ran for six years so that must have been until 1983 when I was voted in as Chairman. Then I retired from work in April 1984 and that was when I began to put more effort into the place. As Graham Beach says, it was a shambolic situation. Always cold and damp. An uninviting place to get people to come and work in. The remarkable thing is that they came at all. Heating was by a paraffin convector (out of Bill Grundy’s caravan) and that was only on the recording night. The place was dirty and the Reading Room was piled with boxes and stores that nobody dared throw away!

It was a gradual transition really.

The way we operated was to talk to as many people as possible about the problems and see what offers came along. For example, one of our Rotarians was local dentist, Ken Baguley. In the early 1980s he was installing a central heating system. As I was a long-standing patient of his I knew very well that he had a complete surgery full of electric Dimplex heaters. These worked very well for us (and some still do!) until we bought a storage heater for each of the main rooms (Editing and Recording) in another year or two.

While I was still working, I remember getting Wellcome Purchase Dept to work on sourcing good, cheap chairs for the Recorders and Readers. I was in charge of surplus furniture at Crewe Hall so it was a simple matter to divert redundant filing cabinets, tables, and notice boards, etc., to Chapel Street. The dim lighting at the studio was very depressing in the early days. Sixty-watt bulbs do little to enthuse folk! Again it was not too difficult to persuade Wellcome Engineering Dept at Crewe Hall to lend us an electrician for an hour or two, or three, from time to time. The fluorescents transformed the picture!

However, perhaps most of the transformation was the restructuring of the rooms. We had inherited a 'hole-in-the-wall' from the Mossford Powell Ladies' Club. They used it for serving tea and refreshments to their big front room when they were having functions. (They had a small stage at the end of the room with a piano, too). We had already converted the hole-in-the-wall to a double glazed panel between the Reading Room and the Recording Room and, as Graham describes, John Densem had acoustically insulated the Reading Room walls by putting in studding and nailing on the expanded plastic panels.

However, the operation lacked a degree of sophistication and a re-planning exercise was put in train. It was largely due to Allan Stubbs, Ken Griffiths and myself that the large room was restructured with partitioning and the benching and shelving installed. But if we were the architects, then Richard Merrill (Training Supervisor) and his teams of probationers from the Camm Street Probation Service After Care organisation were the

building contractors. It was a very protracted job, taking almost a year to complete. But it was well worth the wait. Co-incident with this and during the first year of my retirement, I spent many happy hours at Chapel Street completely rewiring the recording bench and devising some basic technology to help our teams perform their jobs more effectively.

Another big step forward was 'The Carpet'. This did as much as anything to make the studios look as though they were in the 20th and not the 19th century. Elsie Mower and Hazel Cable were the pattern choosers and a very good job they made of it. Other improvements were the fitting of plastic windows to replace the filthy old non-working wooden sashes. We had help here from Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council's factory at Pyms Lane. Coupled with this was the fitting of the vertical venetian blinds, engineered by Reader and Sub-Editor Muriel Forster before she retired to the Isle of Man.

MY WIFE, Brenda, recalls that before we introduced the 'no-smoking' ban, it was pretty uncomfortable to sit in the reading room for nearly two hours with inveterate smokers coughing and spluttering! After a ban was brought in we actually lost one of the Readers who could not stand to be without his "fix". A nice chap really; but nobody said anything and all were quietly grateful for his departure.

Brenda was a Copier on one of the early teams. She worked with Peter Langley who was another Wellcome chap. She thinks they always worked in twos at that time, which is OK unless you need holiday and sickness cover. She remembers they always used to take a long time to complete the job and it was often a struggle to make the 11pm deadline at the Post Office at Weston Lane (Road they say now, don't they?)

THE history of the equipment is, I suppose, a story in itself. The original 1977 recording machine was a basic wooden boxed machine, the name of which I forget. This was superseded by the Superscope (now kept for rare outside recording jobs).

The first copying machines were a "bad buy" really. They were less than satisfactory and gave many problems. The technology of those times was still being developed and I do not think they

could stand up to the job. We blamed some of the problems on the dampness and cold in the Studio but I think the machines were sub-standard. They lasted only four years and then were superseded by the Wollensaks around 1982. These were replaced gradually by Telex in 1994. The copying machines were not all bought at once but on a gradual replacement basis.

The recording desk has been updated on a gradual basis but has not changed radically since the mid-1980s. When I was rewiring the equipment I was pleased to be able to connect up the 'Alice' eight-channel mixer and put it into service. It had been purchased at John Densem's suggestion but then he found life at the shop became too hectic and he had insufficient time to install it. After over a year on the shelf, it finally went into service in 1984. At the same time, the various benching and trunking of wires through to the Reading Room with signalling facilities for both Readers and Recorder were developed and installed.

CASSETTE players of the "shoe-box" type were issued on a free and permanent loan basis to our first Listeners. In the early days, not many people owned a tape recorder. They were expensive to buy. I remember David Bushell having a Grundig reel-to-reel recorder that cost him three weeks pay in the mid-1960s. I know I did not possess a tape deck and when I first started copying at Chapel Street I was very nervous of the machines. The cassette decks for Listeners were taken out by TN Volunteers and Rotarians in order to help our first 60 Listeners get to know how to use them. Nowadays, almost everyone has a tape recorder in the house and we need far fewer machines for loan than we used to have.

The tapes have become less expensive than when we first started. The Economy of Scale has had its effect. However, in our case we have had the benefit of the generosity of Cheshire County Police who, since 1990, have given Crewe TN and the other 10 Cheshire TNs a free supply of their redundant tapes. A gift equivalent to a couple of hundred pounds each year, which has been most welcome.

AN annual social event at a pub was a welcome feature of past years. There was a feeling that it provided an opportunity for

members to meet people from other teams and it was popular. Elsie Mower organised them for some years but they seemed to become less popular and lapsed.

We had local celebrities to entertain us following a meal. Once we had Fred Tressider, an undertaker from Nantwich who had a good singing voice and acting abilities. This led him to fairly regular parts in Granada Television's "Coronation Street." On other occasions we had slide shows by Eric Robinson on his travels and mountain scenery.

IN the 25 years we have been in operation, I suppose we have done a lot more than just provide a weekly news tape service to the local community. We have also provided a good deal of camaraderie and friendship between several hundred of the members. That is, if you take the many that have come and gone over the years.

Also, we have given quite a bit of service in other directions. I can remember two occasions when we helped Leighton Hospital Psychiatric Department make "relaxation" tapes. Then there was the Safety in the Home tape that we helped Crewe Borough Environmental Health Department script, produce, record and copy.

Currently, we are producing tapes of church services for housebound parishioners of St Andrew's Church, Crewe, and I am sure there are probably others that I do not remember.

But I think the best service we have given overall is the opportunity and assistance for the IRIS Vision Resource Centre to expand into the thriving and effective operation that it has become. We were their springboard I suppose, providing them with the opportunity to become the new freeholder and landlord of the Chapel Street premises.

I am only too pleased to applaud their success story and I well recall Eric Robinson and myself walking the Coast-to-Coast route for the cost of their kitchen fittings. We regretted nothing of the effort it took us at the time – and none now.

MY other memories of TN merge into a kaleidoscope of activities involving a whole lot of "lovely people". Constant movement of

Volunteers leaving and new ones joining; the need to always be on the lookout for new recruits; the seasonal goodwill of the Rotary Christmas Float and its need for a team of our collectors on Talking Newspaper Night; the routine maintenance of equipment and materials to ensure that all is where it's needed, week on week.

None of these things can be regarded as a chore when balanced against the gratitude constantly revealed in appreciative letters from Listeners.

By GRAHAM BEACH

former Editor of the Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper

MY 17 years with the paper all started when I was the Community Officer of Nantwich Round Table No.198. I was invited to a meeting called by Rotary at Crewe Hall. There I met with several people, among whom was Dr. Bill Grundy (who, I think, was my opposite number in Rotary).

It was explained to me that the purpose of the meeting was to start a Talking Newspaper for the Visually Impaired in a similar manner to the one that was running in Macclesfield. Rotary needed financial and manpower assistance.

I immediately became interested and we held more meetings at Bill Grundy's house and gradually began to develop the project.

The people who were interested in becoming involved met in the Macclesfield Talking Newspaper's recording room, which was situated over the shop run for visually impaired people, for a demonstration. They timed the articles by using a piece of string. This may sound strange but they had a fair idea, on seeing the length of the string, as to how long an article would take to read. As it was looking likely that I should be responsible for this part of the operation in Crewe, I was a little doubtful that this method would work as we were looking at both the Crewe and Nantwich Chronicles and each was larger than Macclesfield's paper but I appreciated the import of the exercise.

We still had a long way to go before starting. Bill Grundy and John Densem got busy building our recording apparatus - both being amateur enthusiasts and John having been trained as an electrician. The rest of us started weekly practices, cutting up the papers, reading the articles and comparing how long we thought an article would take to read with the actual time taken.

The timings became very accurate as it was soon realised that four inches took a minute to read. In those days the Chronicle did not have the technology to produce work other than in two standard-sized column widths. It only needed two rulers and we could time the articles accurately.

However, it is not easy to keep converting minutes and seconds and although most of us became adept at dividing by 60, one headmistress who came along to help (only for a short while!) could not master the mathematics. I seem to remember checking an article which would have taken a little over half a minute to read, which was marked up by the lady as taking 114 minutes.

The mathematical side made us have another think as to how measuring could take place. It suddenly occurred to me that four inches equated to almost exactly 10 centimetres. This decimalisation suddenly made the maths easy - especially at the end when all the timed articles had to be totalled to ascertain the length of the paper.

We started practising in August and between then and November, when the first real edition was produced, we ironed out any possible difficulties. One problem that showed up quickly was that the recording equipment was very sensitive and picked up a bad echo in the studio as each reader spoke. I managed to get a laundry in Whitchurch to let us have some old sheets to hang around the walls to dull the echo. This worked for a while but one day when John Densem was driving past a building which was being demolished he noticed some baffle boards were being thrown away. He quickly persuaded the demolition team to load them in his car and they were duly installed in the studio in place of the sheets.

ALTHOUGH we could have started before November, we had one big problem. We had insufficient cash to buy the final pieces of equipment. Rotary had put up £1,200. I had persuaded Round Table to give the whole of their community funds amounting to £800 bringing the total to £2,000 but we still needed a further £500.

I worked for Barclays Bank and asked Head Office if they had any spare community money, only to be told that that year's allocation had already been distributed but that they would willingly earmark some from next year's funds. We were raring to get started and so this was very disappointing and it did not look as if it was going to be possible to start the paper that year.

Fortunately, late one evening. I received a phone call from Head Office telling me that some other project had withdrawn and they had £500 for me. I was delighted and immediately phoned Bill Grundy to tell him to order the equipment as a cheque was on the way.

Bill was equally delighted and told me that they had a Rotary Meeting that night so he would be able to give the Rotarians the good news. As I put the phone down it dawned on me that as I was working in a regional office and quite apart from the branches, the Manager of Barclays Bank in Nantwich (who was a Rotarian) would not know of the generosity of Head Office. I immediately phoned him to explain everything but by then he had left for home and nobody was willing to let me know his home telephone number. The inevitable happened - he turned up late for the meeting and by that time everyone knew that Barclays had come up trumps - except, that is, for the Manager of Barclays Bank.

Bill phoned me later that night to say how delighted everyone was and that the Manager had received quite a ribbing for not knowing what his bank was doing. I phoned the Manager first thing the next morning to apologise and explain the circumstances. Although he said that it was all right I could feel the telephone cord being strangled as we spoke.

VERY few listeners who were being signed up to receive the paper had their own equipment and we had to provide all the cassette players, deliver them and ensure that they had a power point where needed. Fortunately, later I had a contact with Philips so we were able to obtain our cassette players at a reasonable price.

We eventually had people regularly visiting Listeners to clean the cassette heads and to have a chat.

We had negotiations with the Post Office and they agreed to deliver the tapes free of charge although we had to have a special envelope. We already had been granted (and were using) the premises in Chapel Street by the council.

THE reading and recording practices that we had had paid off and the first edition was produced without any hitches whatever. Bill

Grundy chose a catchy little tune - The Shuffle - for the opening and closing music.

In those days, The Chronicles were produced on Wednesday afternoons. The editing teams worked on Wednesday evenings preparing the articles for the readers. The recording and dispatch was carried out on Thursday evenings. The postal sacks were taken to the main GPO office around 11 o'clock and the postman delivered the tapes to the Listeners first thing on Friday morning.

We worked in teams. On the editing side we had four teams. Each had a person who collected the papers from the Chronicle Office during the afternoon (two Crewe and two Nantwich Chronicles) and cut the items from the papers, making sure that the articles were cut from the front and back of each page.

The editing team would then formulate the paper from the masses of cut-up articles. We did not edit in a way that we decided which articles to include and which to reject but rather we tried to get everything on and in order to do that had to eliminate the superfluous paragraphs from each article. We would then sort them into order of solemnity and importance and if we could not get every article on (after slimming the article down) then we would have to start to reject articles. Generally, by using this method, side two had mostly articles of a lighter nature. Sport was always assigned to side two.

Announcements and duty chemists were always at the beginning of each tape so that the Listeners knew where to find them quickly if necessary.

Long before the Chronicles printed a "What's On" we used to obtain the information from the publicity department at Delamere House (Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council). This was a bit of a farce. The council produced a book each month setting out all the events for the month. Charities, etc, used to send in the dates of their events so that they would be advertised. However, in all the years that I used to obtain this information the council only once manage to produce the booklet on time - usually it was a week late, so all events for the first week of each month were advertised too late.

To overcome the problem of What's On for the first week (and sometimes the second) I used to phone the person responsible for producing the booklet and he used to dictate the events to me over the phone. This often took a long time and, of course, I had to type them out so that the Readers could understand them. They could never have deciphered my longhand scribble.

HOWEVER, there were still technical difficulties. We could not easily change from one reader to another so each reader had to read for seven minutes at a time (seven minutes being the maximum time that the experts reckoned attention could be held).

We suddenly had complaints that the recordings were not clear and could not be easily understood. This was a blow after all the work that went into each edition. All electrical equipment was checked but no faults could be found. Eventually, that complaint went away - until the following winter when once again the complaints came flooding in. Our technical people scratched their heads. The equipment was again checked and nothing found wanting.

This was, of course, very disappointing for us until it was realised that the premises at Chapel Street were so cold in winter that the tapes had become brittle and could not, therefore, record properly. In those days the house was very basic and Ray Gladden is responsible for the carpets, heating and present day comfort of the studio.

From the feedback that we received, it was discovered that the Listeners could not hear the first couple of minutes of speech on the tapes as the cassette recorders need some time for the Listener to "get his or her ear in tune". I therefore used to write a little chatty piece which lasted for about one minute which enabled the Listener to settle down and did not matter if they could not hear it properly. This became a regular feature and became known, rather grandly, as "The Editorial" even though it had no bearing on the news.

Another thing which we learned after a while - and after our "house visitors" had discussed the paper with the Listeners - was that the obituary announcements that we used to broadcast were not

popular. We discussed this among ourselves and it turned out that the Readers detested reading them, too.

On thinking it over it became fairly obvious why. In those days the Chronicle published death announcements free. Even then, out of some 200 deaths in the borough each week, only a small proportion were published. Unlike a sighted person who can glance down the names and read any that may interest them, the Listener had to hear the whole list whether they knew the deceased person or not and, although only brief details were given, this sometimes took up quite a lot of time. Many news items could have been read in that time.

A questionnaire was sent to all Listeners and the question broadcast in case any Listener did not have a sighted person to help them. Only one person expressed a wish for the obituaries to be broadcast but added that she was usually told by her friends if a close friend had passed away so it did not really matter.

GENERALLY things developed gradually. Technically, it became possible to formulate the paper so that each Reader read just one article at a time instead of having to read for a seven-minute spell. It became possible to insert more music and the quality of the recording equipment improved considerably and this was augmented by more Listeners having their own good quality hi-fi equipment to play it on.

However the Chronicle also developed. Their printing methods changed and they began using many more fonts and styles of print. No longer could we rely on there being only two standard-width columns, nor could we rely on 10 centimetres equating to one minute of reading. If the Editor had a four-inch space, technology allowed him to fill that space with what was the equivalent of three-and-a-half inches of text. Coupled with this the Chronicles had become a lot fatter and not all of that was advertising.

We had one further problem with timings. All the Readers were excellent and whenever I listened to the tapes I admired their diction. However, there was one Reader who read very slowly and, to add to the problem, always commented on the piece that had been read. I listen to several tapes and it became apparent

that if that Reader read in the same way as the others, on average around eight more articles could have been included.

IT became worrying that the Chronicles were expanding but we were not able to broadcast more articles. The slow reading added to the problems. However, many of the articles that could not get included (by design rather than through slow reading) were not really news items and could be broadcast later - if we had the time. I decided to start a magazine-style tape. We had the advantage by then that the Police were donating their discarded (and wiped) tapes so we had several spare cassettes. The only cost would be in labour.

A few people volunteered to help and we developed a very good keen team. We held editorial meetings when we each produced articles such as practical hints from women's magazines, gardening hints for the time of year from the Nantwich Gardening Club, personally-written articles such as the one by an editor who visited the council office that organised the Britain in Bloom event and produced a report from inside the organising body, and so on. We invited the fire officer to give a short talk and likewise the police. One of our number was in a music society and recorded some beautiful light classical pieces.

When we started we wondered whether we could gather enough material to run a magazine tape every other month. After the first month we had too much material. The magazines proved to be very popular, some people actually offering to buy the tape rather than return it.

I understand that the weekly paper - but not the magazine - is still being produced regularly. The visually impaired of Crewe and Nantwich are a great set of people and the effort is well worth it. They deserve it.

To the Volunteers of the Crewe and Nantwich Talking Newspaper, I say: "Keep up the good work."

By ERIC ROBINSON MBE

TN stalwart and fund-raiser

I WORKED as a copier on the Talking Newspaper from its inception in 1977 until 1994. Three memories stand apart from the normal routine of those 17 years.

First, Dr. Bill Grundy's daughter was a member of my copying team. She was a keen motorcyclist and aimed to come to the studio in all weathers on her motorbike, which she parked on the car park adjacent to the newspaper rooms. I considered it not only unusual but very adventurous for a young and petite girl to be riding around on such a high-powered machine.

Second, in the early years, the copying equipment was not as sophisticated or as reliable as the copier used today and we often suffered from irritating breakdowns. Consequently it was sometimes past 11 o'clock when I arrived with the tapes at the Weston Road Post Office to find the gate locked. So I had to ring the bell and wait for someone to come down to unlock the gate.

Third, at 10 minutes past two o'clock one morning I had to get out of bed to answer the door to a policeman who said he had a report about one of my company's cars. He told me the registration number and I said, "That's mine. What's the matter?" He said: "I have been asked to enquire why you were seen loading mail bags into your car tonight in the Edleston Road car park."

The policeman and I knew one another and he was quite pleased when I explained it was the Talking Newspaper night and I was taking the mail bags, which contained that week's tapes, to the Weston Road postal depot.

Some time later I received word that a notice had been put on the board at the police station saying that if a report was received of mail bags being loaded into a car on Thursday evenings in the Edleston Road car park NO ACTION MUST BE TAKEN.



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