



# ..... AND THE BAD

Whilst the BBA is financially in the strongest position it has been for many years and is month by month continuing to increase the assistance it provides British citizens living and visiting our region of Catalonia, there are some serious problems endangering the charity's continuing operation.

At last spring's AGM a robust BBA Management Committee was voted in and confirmed by the full membership. First there was the President and Volunteer Co-ordinator, Veronica Wheeler; the Secretary, Alan Wallace and Treasurer, Christine Dearnley. Thankfully, Veronica and Christine are still toiling productively in their crucial roles, but last September Alan very suddenly announced his resignation due to an urgent relocation to the UK.

Of the other three named roles on the BBA Committee, Deputy Volunteer Co-ordinator continues to be filled by the increasingly busy Diana Buckley, but the Fundraising Manager, Carol Knights and her husband, Patrick, the Membership Secretary have since Christmas had to take a temporary break from their roles due to Patrick's current ill health. From the remaining

## THE GOOD NEWS .....

At the 2017 AGM there was some nervousness amongst the BBA members when our Treasurer reported that nearly €1,000 more had been spent during 2016 than the €715 that had been raised. So it was not surprising that at the Committee's first post-AGM meeting an optimistic 2017 fundraising target was set for the newly appointed Fundraising Manager, Carol Knights, of €3,000. This year our Treasurer will happily be able to report that the 2017 target has not only been met, but well surpassed, with an income of nearly €4,500 giving a surplus of over €2,700 to be carried forward into 2018.

As predicted in the last News Letter, client referrals have indeed increased over the last few months. What hadn't been expected was that many of these new clients would have much more complex needs than previously. This equates to these cases being much more volunteer time consuming than usual. But the BBA's considerable efforts and success in networking with other organisations has been of invaluable help with this burgeoning caseload. For example: our working partnership with the British Consulate in Barcelona is much stronger – more and more of our referrals are coming from them; we are now able to consult Citizen's Advice for guidance on various issues; and are increasingly being recognised by numbers of local health and social agencies.

**Minimum of 5 for meetings to be quorate**  
**Must have named individual for Secretary role**

four incumbents, Anne Collier is the only one who remains steadfast! David McMurdie and David Moran have both resigned for personal reasons, whilst Griff James has been unable to attend meetings due to his mobility problems.

So from a very robust Management Committee last summer with ten members, we are down to four this February. Not only do the BBA statutes require a minimum of five Committee members to be present for a meeting to be quorate and decisions made, but also that a named individual holds the post of Secretary, plus that that named individual is also recorded as a signatory at our bank along with the President and Treasurer.

What can be done? In the short-term the remaining Committee members are sharing /..

../ the work and responsibilities around, but this cannot be sustained in the long run. Which means the BBA is in a very vulnerable position, despite the increasing workload coming our way and healthy financial position.

Veronica Wheeler, as President, has already written to all BBA members asking for potential candidates and there has been some limited response. But the problems of rebuilding the Committee to a sustainable level have not been solved yet.

- **Have you, or someone you know, got the skills and knowledge to help manage the BBA's activities?**
- **Have you, or they, got the time to dedicate to helping the continued growth of this increasingly valuable local charity?**

If you can help in our search please do not hesitate in contacting Veronica Wheeler on [britbengirona@gmail.com](mailto:britbengirona@gmail.com)

## **British Benevolent Association (BBA)**

**Annual General Meeting  
Wednesday April 11<sup>th</sup> 2018  
At 3.30pm  
In Hotel Entitats,  
Carrer de la Rutlla, 22.  
Girona**

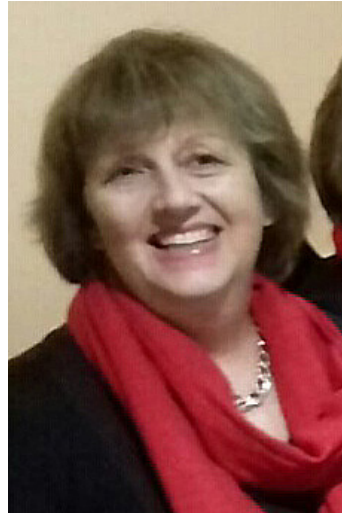
Guest Speaker - Lloyd Milen, British Consul General, Catalonia & the Balearic Islands.

Afternoon tea will be available at the end of the meeting.

If you are a member of the BBA full information will be sent to you in March.

If you are not a member you will be very welcome to attend, to learn more about the BBA. Please contact us at [britbengirona@gmail.com](mailto:britbengirona@gmail.com) for full details

## **MEET THE COMMITTEE**



**Diana Buckley,  
Deputy Volunteer  
Co-ordinator**

Born in London, Diana arrived in Spain way back in 1971 with a plan to teach English in Bilbao for two years. Her plans changed after she not only fell in love with the country, but also a

husband, Adrian.

In 1974 the pair moved to a medieval hill village and modern seaside resort, Calonge, on the Costa Brava. There they built and opened a restaurant in Torre Valentina, first called Meson Don Sancho, now the very well known, El Horreo. After working in the restaurant for five years she became the first and only native English teacher in Calonge. Demand was high and she was obviously an excellent teacher as her early generations of students went on to send many of their own offspring to learn English with her.

Diana's own children were both born and schooled in Calonge. In fact the Buckley family has become a valued part of their village community. Diana served on the school PTA, helps at the annual St Martin's day cookery competitions and in the 80's and 90's the whole family participated in the village's Carnivals. Her children are now grown; a daughter married and living in Madrid; a son who has taken over the running of the family business so Diana has much more time for travel, even if it's just a week in the UK or a visit to discover other parts of Spain. With local girlfriends, many met at the school gates, she can now relax and enjoy a glass of wine and a "tapa".

**"I feel very fortunate to have spent the past 47 years in this wonderful country."**

Diana may be retired, but it is not all leisure time. Not only a member of the BBA Committee - her fluent Catalan and Spanish is particularly invaluable - she is also a mentor for the Josep Pallach Foundation helping young local children to read Catalan.

## “A VERY BRAVE MAN”

Whilst the British government continues to struggle with communicating to its public exactly what is really meant by Brexit and how it is going to effect their lives, the British Ambassador came to Toroella de Montgrí to host a second open meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October to provide an update for local British nationals.



Simon Manley, British Ambassador to Spain

Many of the audience had become even more frustrated than they were at the first public meeting last year – mainly driven by a seemingly lack of detail as to how their lives might change. But, Simon Manley was able to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook on what was to come, especially in transferring his belief that the Spanish government had no desire for their thousands of British residents to leave the country or to make things difficult if they stay. There were no absolutes of ‘life after Brexit’ provided, but before dashing back to Madrid for an evening engagement Manley made time for audience questions and suggested various links to sites where accurate information could be accessed rather than just relying on the print media.

The audience were generally very appreciative of the time he had taken to meet them and despite not feeling much better informed as one said, *“He is a very brave man to face this audience with little concrete to say and with the BBC filming! There are a lot of very unhappy people here thinking no one is interested in our anxieties. At least I now feel like they still know we are here.”*

## Brass Band Concert could become a bi-annual event

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of August more than sixty people enjoyed a BBA fundraising brass band concert performed by the Shirland Welfare Brass Band in the garden of BBA members Patrick and Carol Knights.



The twenty-four member band from the Derbyshire ex-colliery village of Shirland have taken to bi-annual holiday trips to the Mediterranean sun. Travelling by coach they also have room to bring their families and instruments so they can organise at least one concert whilst holidaying. For their 2017 event they chose the perfect evening to showcase their music, with a spectacular sunset framing music which had everyone up on their feet and dancing round the pool - nobody fell in thank goodness.



The evening raised an exceptional €870 for BBA funds and the band was the first to be presented with the new BBA Certificate of Appreciation now being awarded to individuals and organisations that help in BBA fund raising efforts. The Shirland certificate is now on display in the band’s headquarters in Derbyshire.



# What do they do down there in Barcelona?

As part of a new documentary on the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office a team from the BBC shadowed our Ambassador and his staff – which on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October meant a trip to Torroella de Montgrí, Girona.

The aim of the exercise was to get footage that explained the work of the FCO, including how they support British nationals in Spain. As part of this representatives of the BBA and other local groups were invited to a meeting hosted by Lloyd Milen, Consul General and Annabelle Sproate Wilkinson, Vice Consul in Barcelona, which shared information on the type of assistance Barcelona’s consulate has provided on our patch in the last year.



Lloyd Milen, British Consul General, Barcelona

There are nine British consulates in Spain, but one of the busiest is here in Barcelona. Their customer workload is recorded for the FCO annually and last year’s Barcelona data report was shared and discussed at the meeting. Consular activity (as opposed to inter-governmental or commercial activity) can be divided into three categories.

Last Year’s Barcelona Consul Activity				
	ETDS	New Assistance	Notarial	TOTAL
Barcelona	1591	291	191	2073
TOTAL SPAIN	6436	3960	948	11344

Barcelona received 18% of all British consular customers in Spain. This is mainly

attributed to the volume of Emergency Travel Documents (ETDS) issued there, which represented 25% of all ETDs issued across Spain last year. A huge 94% of these were either the result of the passport holder having it stolen or lost.

These figures of course include not just British residents but also visitors - the volume of British tourists to Catalonia has increased to over two million per year, but even so the need for 6% more ETDS than the previous year is a worrying trend.

There was not so much in our local papers about tourists being robbed last summer, but it seems pick pocketing and bag snatching are still very prevalent here. And where these thefts happen hasn’t changed much either, its still the places where large groups of people can be found; city centres, tourist attractions and of course the airports. The one cheering statistic that comes from the *Balance de Criminalidad Segundo Trimestre 2017*, is that even if overall thefts in the municipality of Barcelona have risen by 7%, burglaries are down by 6% which makes your home safer we hope.

The strand of consular work the BBA is most interested in falls under the New Assistance category. This is where British citizens approach the Consul to get help for problems both serious and more mundane. But the FCO’s falling budgets do not allow for Lloyd Milen’s staff to rush around Catalonia helping out, instead here in Girona they often rely on referring their cases to the BBA. Lloyd Milen was very keen to discuss one particularly complicated case in Girona last summer when BBA volunteers provided support with a medical emergency at the Consul’s request.

The 2017 data set shows that both British residents here and visiting tourists can get in to trouble in numbers of ways: from transgressing the local laws to being admitted to hospital, injured or seriously unwell. In fact cases of the latter rose significantly last year, but this may be because of better communications between the Consul and local hospitals. The BBA have experienced a similar increase as we have become more accessible to hospitals and health centres here in the Girona province.

Similarly, just as the BBA have noted that our referrals are becoming not just .../

/... more numerous, but also more complex, the Consul data shows big increases in cases in their classification of 'Medium Complex' cases. Additionally, the number of their cases involving vulnerable people rose by 100% last year, repeating similar rises reported in the two previous years. This could be a reflection of the aging resident British population here or perhaps just better reporting.

When it comes to the Consul's notarial activities there was not just an increase last year, but also a likely upward trend developing due to Brexit issues around local marriages. There were five British Citizenship ceremonies held in Barcelona last year, but more are being planned for this year.

The meeting attendees were pleased that Lloyd Milen shared that his strategy for 2018 focuses on strengthening the Consul's links to local charitable organisations, like the BBA, that can augment the support they give to troubled British citizens both living in and visiting Catalonia.

The BBC turned off their cameras and microphones – the meeting was over. But you are going to have to wait a while to check if you can spot any friends in the broadcast programme. It is not due to appear until late summer.

\* If you would like a full .pdf copy of the Barcelona Consul Insights Report, August 2017, please contact [britbengirona@gmail.com](mailto:britbengirona@gmail.com)

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- ✚ **Friday 13<sup>th</sup> April** By popular demand there will be a repeat Quiz Night at 8pm at the Club House, Can Carbonell .(between Llagostera and Vidreras)
- ✚ **Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April** Volunteer Coffee Morning at 11 am at Café Diem, Avinguda de la Gola de l'Estany, Sta. Margarita, Roses
- ✚ **March and April** There are two Craft Days, with quiche and salad lunch, planned for the Lloret de Mar area.

**Look out for full details of venues and timings on our website**

## It's nice to know our volunteers are appreciated!



Last summer a mother and daughter came to the Costa Brava to share a holiday. The last thing they expected was that, for different reasons, they would both end up in hospital here. How nice it was to receive this card thanking our volunteers for organising daily visits to them – bringing along English magazines and flasks of tea - and then when they were well enough, accompanying them to the airport for a flight back to Scotland.

## Not just time but also their money!

Looking at the BBA annual accounts you might be forgiven for thinking our Volunteers can't be doing much as their expenses claimed are so low. But you would be wrong, rather it is that so many of these generous people not only give up their time, but also forgo claiming expenses, as is their right.

But now we are going to ask them to claim – to provide a better picture of our costs for other agencies and grant awarding bodies – and then to indicate on the claim forward if they would like to donate the amount back to the BBA, rather than be reimbursed.

A little more work for our volunteers unfortunately, but it will help the BBA and we will at least in future be able to give full credit for the not inconsiderable donations many of these people are actually making over a year.