



# The Torch



Edition 21

## Advocate RW Bowen – the 'St Dunstan's effect'

Advocate RW (Mike) Bowen was widely known in South Africa during the years between 1922 and 1948 as the most prominent 'St Dunstaner'. He often featured in the news for his tireless work on behalf of blind people, his work as a defence lawyer and his political work as the Member of Parliament for a Cape Town constituency.

What did it take to transform a disfigured and blinded war veteran, Mike Bowen, into a persuasive defence advocate and politician, renowned for his powerful condemnation of racial discrimination and the promotion of the rights of disabled people? There are several factors which brought about this transformation. Perhaps the most important factor was the rehabilitation facilities for blinded soldiers provided by St Dunstan's in London. Not only did St Dunstan's provide the skills to enable him to deal with his disability but it also brought him into contact with Eleanor Gillies who became his wife. Eleanor provided him with constant support and encouragement throughout their married life. Another factor was the medical skills on the battlefield and in reconstructive surgery. With his face repaired and skills learned at St Dunstan's, Mike was able to begin his legal education at Cambridge University and the London law society of Gray's Inn. St Dunstan's also took care of all his university fees and his qualifications allowed him to flourish as a powerful advocate in the legal courts of South Africa. His legal knowledge played a vital role in his parliamentary career in drafting the legal framework of the Blind Act of 1936 as well as the drafting of the constitutions of the South African National Council for the Blind and the Athlone School for the Blind.

The story of Mike Bowen's journey from the battlefield to parliamentarian is told in the biography of Advocate RW Bowen, 'Blindness and the Power of Inner Vision'.

Mike was born in Durban and after leaving school began employment in administration but, finding this rather boring, decided to try his hand at diamond prospecting in the alluvial diggings near Kimberley. When war broke out in 1914, Mike volunteered for service in the South African army which had joined the British Empire forces. After seeing action against forces loyal to the Kaiser in German South West Africa and in North Africa, Mike found himself in trenches in the Somme battlefield, Vimy Ridge, Flers and Arras before being ordered to Flanders in 1917 for the Battle of Passchendaele. As Mike and his platoon were in the front line, ready to attack the German force, a high explosive shell detonated close to the soldiers. A piece of flying shrapnel shot across Mike's head, slicing off the bone structures beneath his eyebrows, orbital cavities and upper nose. He was grievously wounded and blinded. First aid was administered in the muddy first aid posts and base hospital before Mike was transported by ship to Dover and then London. He eventually came under the care of surgeons trained by Dr Harold Gillies to reconstruct his facial structures.

Mike Bowen's new life and his integration back into society really began at the St Dunstan's Institute for Blinded Soldiers where he met his tutor of Braille. Mike had the good fortune to have Eleanor Gillies assigned as his Braille tutor. She was the sister of Harold and the relationship between tutor and blind pupil blossomed into love. Mike and Eleanor, known to friends as Lil, were married in Cambridge in March 1919. It was Harold and Lil who recognised that Mike was an intelligent character with great cognitive abilities. They persuaded him to apply for a place at Cambridge to study law. Eleanor acted as Mike's 'eyes' taking notes in lectures and tutorials which he transcribed into Braille. Mike graduated from Cambridge in 1921 and then qualified as a barrister in London.

Mike and Lil returned to South Africa in 1922, settling in Cape Town where Mike set up his chambers. He soon became known as a formidable defence advocate and often acted in a *pro bono* capacity for poor people especially for those of the underprivileged mixed-race community. Using the example of her father, Robert Gillies, who had become a Member of the New Zealand parliament, Eleanor influenced Mike Bowen to enter politics. He was elected by an overwhelming majority in 1929 to represent a Cape Town constituency under the banner of the South African Party led by General Jan Smuts.

His parliamentary career was noteworthy for his interventions on two issues, racial discrimination and rights for disabled people, especially the blind. Discrimination against those who were not classified as 'white European' blighted South African society. Since the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging following the defeat of the Afrikaner republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the Afrikaner population took an increasingly dominant role and diminished the influence of the English-speaking South Africans. Much of Bowen's parliamentary career was spent in opposition to the ruling Afrikaner National Party which was laying the foundations of the infamous post-war *apartheid* legislation. As legislation ensuring the suppression of the black and mixed-race population was introduced, Mike Bowen was forthright in condemning the proposals in the most trenchant language.

Mike was also responsible for drafting legislation to safeguard the rights of blind people and steered the 1936 Blind Act through the parliamentary processes. Working with others, he was instrumental in founding the first school in South Africa for blind mixed-race and black children in 1927. The Athlone School for the Blind started with only six pupils but is still educating blind children today with a roll exceeding four hundred. Mike's legal knowledge was also used in the efforts to establish the first national body to work on behalf of blind people in South Africa and his contribution was recognised in him being appointed as the first Chairman of the South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) in 1929. Mike recognised the unstinting support provided by Eleanor throughout their married life and in parliamentary debates spoke up for women's rights. Mike was a keen supporter of the South African branch of St Dunstan's.

Mike Bowen was elected unopposed in the May 1948 General Election but his death two months later deprived the parliament of one of its most able members. Mike left the enduring legacy of the school for blind children, the Blind Act and the continuing work of the SANCB. St Dunstan's can be proud of the transformation which it produced in Mike Bowen's life.

Written for St Dunstan's by Hilary Marlow

[Veteran's Maintenance Day 28 August 2021](#)

## **Saturday 28th August 2021 - Article by Maj Gen RC Andersen (Rtd)**

On Saturday 28th August 2021 some forty military veterans supported by ten learners from Pretoria Boy's High, descended on the Ditsong SA National Museum of Military History for a maintenance day.

After coffee and sandwiches sponsored by the Museum's Building and Development Trust the volunteers were welcomed by Roy Andersen, the organiser. Allan Sinclair then introduced his team from the Museum lead by Richard Henry who provided a briefing on COVID-19 safety measures and the procedures to be followed when cleaning exhibits. Reinol distributed 50 litres of cleaning fluid to the cleaning teams.

Members of the Gunners' Association (Johannesburg, Pretoria, East Rand and Vereeniging Branches) commenced with cleaning the GV5 and GV6 guns as well as all the guns in the Gen Dan Pienaar Gun Park. By the end of the morning, they had cleaned all the guns on external display.

### ***MEMBERS FROM JOBURG BRANCH AND VEREENIGING BRANCH BUSY WITH CLEANING GUNS IN THE GEN DAN PIENAAR GUN PARK***





***MEMBERS FROM JOBURG BRANCH AND VEREENIGING BRANCH BUSY WITH CLEANING GUNS IN THE GEN DAN PIENAAR GUN PARK***



***MEMBERS FROM THE JOBURG BRANCH CONCENTRATED ON CLEANING THE MAXIM POM POMS AND THE GV6 AND GV5 EXHIBITS.***

Members of the SAAF Association focused on the Impala, Mirage, Buccaneer, Dakota and Alouette. They were ably supported by the boys from Pretoria Boys High School who belong to an aeronautical society at their school. Aerokin kindly provided a team and the necessary chemicals for cleaning and polishing the Spitfire.



***MEMBERS OF THE SAAF ASSOCIATION CLEANING THE MIRAGE AND THE IMPALA.***

The Naval Officers' Association focused on the Naval exhibits whilst the Armour Association put their energies into the tanks and the armoured cars.



***CLEANING THE NAVAL GUNS AND THE MINI SUBMARINE***



***ARMOUR ASSOCIATION MEMBERS HARD AT WORK ON THE ARMOUR EXHIBITS.***

The MOTH, the Legion of Associated Airborne of RSA as well as civilian volunteers were given an opportunity to choose the equipment of most interest to them.

MOTH Doggie Jansen announced that Parkhurst Hardware will provide the Museum with a stock of light bulbs for the exhibits

The Director of the Museum, Ms Sandi Mackenzie arrived to inspect the work and expressed her appreciation for a job well done. The external exhibits, after their bubble baths, are looking magnificent.

After a hard morning's work many of the volunteers adjourned to Steel Helmet Shellhole for well earned refreshments and boerie rolls. Thanks go to the Old Bill Derek Wood.

Well done everyone!

## Absa, Hein Wagner Academy to launch first cybersecurity academy for visually impaired



BY: SCHALK BURGER  
CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Financial services firm Absa Group and visual impaired economic empowerment organisation Hein Wagner Academy will launch South Africa's first cybersecurity academy for the visually impaired.

It will represent the next evolution of the Absa Cybersecurity Academy, which is focused on providing training to marginalised, unemployed youths in a globally scarce skill.

Accepted students will receive a full scholarship to the Absa Cybersecurity Academy for the Blind, in Worcester, Cape Town, covering all fees, from tuition, specialised learning technologies, accommodation, to food and travel expenses. Each student will also receive a monthly stipend during the two-year programme.

“This programme is part of our effort to expand the net of socioeconomic inclusion for bursaries, especially to those living with disabilities who are often underserved. It is also aligned with our skills development strategy, which aims to build a scarce and critical capability and we hope that candidates are as excited about the prospects that this programme offers as we are,” says Absa interim chief security officer Manoj Puri.

“This partnership will result in highly trained cybersecurity specialists. In year one, we give them a strong technical foundation with three international



certificates: A+, N+ and S+, over and above a national qualification and a great deal of focus on personal mastery or soft skills,” says Hein Wagner Academy founder Hein Wagner.

“In the second year, students learn to code in Python, which is a gateway to many future opportunities, CCNA DevNet Agile and CCNA Cyber Operations, which qualifies them as cybersecurity analysts. Their learning is steeped in personal mastery, and ready-to-work programmes,” he says.

Bursary recipients will be selected based on academic performance and financial need. Applicants must be previously disadvantaged, sight-impaired, meaning blind or visually impaired, have a matric or matric-equivalent certificate and acquired at least 50% in English, and applicants must be computer literate with typing skills and screen reader experience.

Further, applicants must be aged 18 to 30 and not be part of or have previously been selected for a formal learnership or internship programme. Applicants must be able to relocate to Worcester for the duration of the programme.

Applicants can send their applications, including a cover letter, curriculum vitae and a transcript of their matric results or highest college qualification, to [training@heinwagneracademy.org](mailto:training@heinwagneracademy.org) before September 3.

“We commend Absa for collaborating with us in forwarding our mission to enable those living with visual loss to lead independent lives by providing specialised training that will allow them to integrate into the workforce and reach their full potential,” says Wagner.

EDITED BY: CHANEL DE BRUYN

CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR ONLINE

Source: [ENGINEERING NEWS](#)

Android's new accessibility feature allows you control your phone



Android phones are getting the ability to control your phone using only facial expressions..

Google has long supported “Switch Access” as an accessibility feature that allows accessories to be used over Bluetooth or USB to highlight and select touch targets in Android. With an update to the Android Accessibility Suite, Google has quietly added “Camera Switch” to that list, for Pixel phones only for now, which allows the phone to be controlled by facial expressions.

[What does the new feature do?](#)

This feature, which is live now for Android 12 owners, allows users to pick from one or two switches. The first uses one gesture to “scan” and that same gesture to select that target. The two switch option allows users to set multiple facial expressions to match up with Android actions.

[What facial expressions can be performed?](#)

The facial expressions that can be performed include opening your mouth, smiling, raising your eyebrows, and looking left, right, or up. The feature will, by default, ask for the user to set expressions for next, select, and “pause,” which stops the phone from recognizing other gestures temporarily. Other actions include previous, touch & hold, scroll forward/backward, home, back, notifications, quick settings, and overview/multitasking.

How do we know when the feature is active?

When the feature is active, you'll get a constant notification saying that the camera is in use. Google also adds a notice to the Settings page saying that battery drain will happen when using the feature, so using it while charging is recommended. Google also notes that all processing is done on-device with no images being sent to the company.

Is the new feature available for all Android phones?

As XDA notes, the feature is only available at the moment to Pixel owners on Android 12, but it seems to work on Android 11 when sideloaded as well.

Source: [Cool Blind Tech](#)

## Misconceptions and Myths about Blindness



In our society, there are many misconceptions about blindness and about what a blind person can and cannot do. Many believe a blind person cannot cook a meal, clean their house, take care of their children, manage their finances or work in a competitive job. This is simply not true.

At the Iowa Department for the Blind, we have found the real problem of blindness is not the physical loss of eyesight but the misconceptions society holds about the loss of sight.

### [Overcoming the Misconceptions](#)

With proper blindness skills training and the opportunity to implement those skills independently, the average blind person can accomplish the same tasks as the average sighted person. The Department's programs focus on a positive approach to blindness that reinforces learning how to complete everyday tasks without the use of vision. When our clients put these blindness skills into practice, they gain confidence in their abilities and develop a more positive attitude about blindness. In turn, the blind person makes life choices and career goals no longer based on perceived limitations of blindness, but on his or her interests, skills and abilities.

### [Myths About Blindness](#)

The following are some examples of widely-held myths about blindness:

**Myth:** Blind people see only darkness, nothing else.

**Reality:** Only approximately 18 percent of people who are legally blind are classified as being totally blind and the majority of blind people can still differentiate between light and dark.

**Myth:** Blind people have special gifts: a "sixth sense."

**Reality:** People who are blind are not endowed with a sharper sense of touch, hearing, taste, or smell. Blind people just learn to pay more attention to information from their other senses. .

**Myth:** Most blind people are proficient in braille and own a dog guide.

**Reality:** Sadly, only a small percentage of blind people have learned braille. Some teachers and educational professionals discourage blind children from learning braille in favor of using print even when reading print is slow and painful. Some professionals say that braille is slow and hard to learn. This is not true, however, this discouragement often keeps blind people from learning braille. Only a small percentage of blind people use a dog guide. A white cane is a more common travel tool.

**Myth:** People who are blind can't work or hold a job.

**Reality:** With the proper training and opportunity, people who are blind can work competitively. The Iowa Department for the Blind has helped many blind persons go to work in a wide variety of jobs.

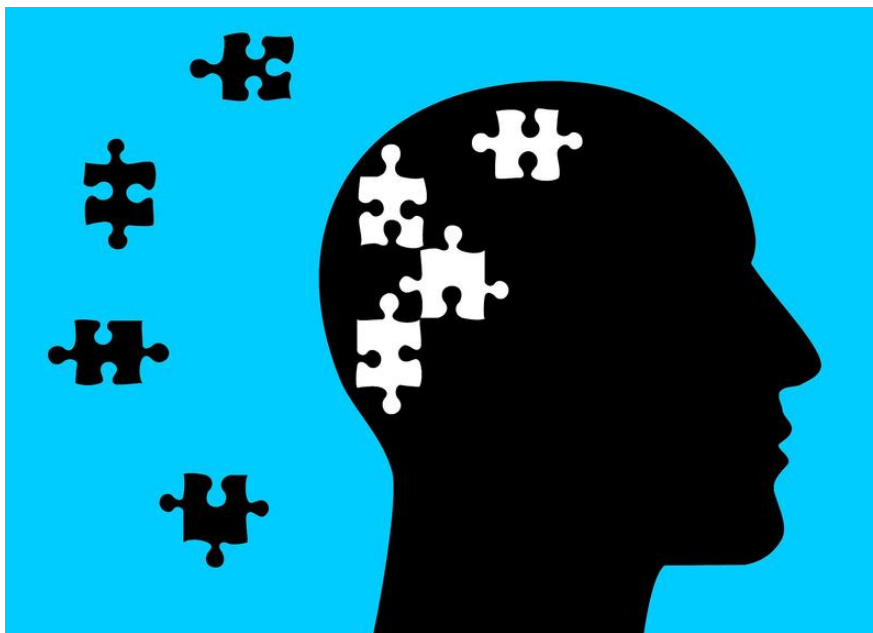
**Myth:** People who are blind cannot access print or handwritten materials.

**Reality:** The advent of computers and technology has made nearly any kind of print accessible to people who are blind. Computer software can translate print into speech, magnify screen images, and enlarge text to a readable size.

Occasionally human readers take care of the rest.

Source: [Iowa Department For the Blind](#)

## 31 Tips To Boost Your Mental Health



**1. Track gratitude and achievement with a journal.** Include 3 things you were grateful for and 3 things you were able to accomplish each day.

**2. Start your day with a cup of coffee.** Coffee consumption is linked to lower rates of depression. If you can't drink coffee because of the caffeine, try another good-for-you drink like green tea.

3. **Set up a getaway.** It could be camping with friends or a trip to the tropics. The act of planning a vacation and having something to look forward to can boost your overall happiness for up to 8 weeks!

4, **Work your strengths.** Do something you're good at to build self-confidence, then tackle a tougher task.

5. **Keep it cool for a good night's sleep.** The optimal temperature for sleep is between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit.

6. **"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."** - Martin Luther King, Jr. Think of something in your life you want to improve, and figure out what you can do to take a step in the right direction.

7. Experiment with a new recipe, write a poem, paint or try a Pinterest project. Creative expression and overall well-being are linked.

8. **Show some love to someone in your life.** Close, quality, relationships are key for a happy, healthy life.

9. **Boost brainpower by treating yourself to a couple pieces of dark chocolate every few days.** The flavanoids, caffeine, and theobromine in chocolate are thought to work together to improve alertness and mental skills.

10. *"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."* - Maya Angelou. If you have personal experience with mental illness or recovery, share on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr with #mentalillnessfeelslike. Check out what other people are saying here.

11. **Sometimes, we don't need to add new activities to get more pleasure.** We just need to soak up the joy in the ones we've already got. Trying to be optimistic doesn't mean ignoring the uglier sides of life. It just means focusing on the positive as much as possible.

12. **Feeling anxious? Take a trip down memory lane and do some coloring** for about 20 minutes to help you clear your mind. Pick a design that's geometric and a little complicated for the best effect. Check out hundreds of free printable coloring pages [here](#).

13. **Take time to laugh.** Hang out with a funny friend, watch a comedy or check out cute videos online. Laughter helps reduce anxiety.

14. **Go off the grid.** Leave your smart phone at home for a day and disconnect from constant emails, alerts, and other interruptions. Spend time doing something fun with someone face-to-face.

15. **Dance around while you do your housework.** Not only will you get chores done, but dancing reduces levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and increases endorphins (the body's "feel-good" chemicals).

16. **Go ahead and yawn.** Studies suggest that yawning helps cool the brain and improves alertness and mental efficiency.

17. **Relax in a warm bath once a week.** Try adding Epsom salts to soothe aches and pains and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress.

18. **Has something been bothering you? Let it all out...on paper.** Writing about upsetting experiences can reduce symptoms of depression.

19. **Spend some time with a furry friend.** Time with animals lowers the stress hormone - cortisol, and boosts oxytocin - which stimulates feelings of happiness. If you don't have a pet, hang out with a friend who does or volunteer at a shelter.

20. **"What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when you bring what is within out into the world, miracles happen."** - Henry David Thoreau. Practice mindfulness by staying "in the present." Try these tips.

21. **Be a tourist in your own town.** Often times people only explore attractions on trips, but you may be surprised what cool things are in your own backyard.

22. **Try prepping your lunches or picking out your clothes for the work week.** You'll save some time in the mornings and have a sense of control about the week ahead.

23. **Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet**—they are linked to decreased rates of depression and schizophrenia among their many benefits. Fish oil supplements work, but eating your omega-3s in foods like wild salmon, flaxseeds or walnuts also helps build healthy gut bacteria.

24. **Practice forgiveness** - even if it's just forgiving that person who cut you off during your commute. People who forgive have better mental health and report being more satisfied with their lives.



25. **"What appear to be calamities are often the sources of fortune."** - Disraeli. Try to find the silver lining in something kind of cruddy that happened recently.

26. **Feeling stressed? Smile.** It may not be the easiest thing to do, but smiling can help to lower your heart rate and calm you down.

27. **Send a thank you note** - not for a material item, but to let someone know why you appreciate them. Written expressions of gratitude are linked to increased happiness.

28. **Do something with friends and family** - have a cookout, go to a park, or play a game. People are 12 times more likely to feel happy on days that they spend 6-7 hours with friends and family.

29. **Take 30 minutes to go for a walk in nature** - it could be a stroll through a park, or a hike in the woods. Research shows that being in nature can increase energy levels, reduce depression and boost well-being.

30. **Do your best to enjoy 15 minutes of sunshine**, and apply sunscreen. Sunlight synthesizes Vitamin D, which experts believe is a mood elevator.

31. **"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."** - Albert Einstein. Try something outside of your comfort zone to make room for adventure and excitement in your life.

Source: [MHAnational](#)

## October is Eye Care Awareness Month



Eye Care Awareness Month is commemorated from 21 September to 18 October to raise awareness about the importance of eye health, specifically around the prevention and treatment of avoidable blindness.

Seventy-five percent of all cases of blindness is avoidable either through prevention or through treatment – which is why it is important to get your eyes tested at least once per year.

Symptoms of eye conditions can include:

vision loss

altered eye movements

eye pain

visual field loss

bulging eye

Source: [SA Government](#)

## Birthday Wishes



Happy Birthday to Gawie who celebrates his 60th Birthday this October. May there be many more happy years ahead.