



The Independence

Autumn 2026

The Thalidomide Society Newsletter



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Welcome to our autumn newsletter!



65th Anniversary Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Conference

In 2027, the Thalidomide Society will mark its 65th anniversary. This will be a special opportunity to reflect, remember shared experiences, and come together as a community.

To mark this milestone, our AGM and Conference will be held at the Hilton Metropole, Birmingham, on Saturday 17 April 2027.



Hilton Birmingham Metropole

I hope you have all enjoyed the summer. As autumn begins, I wanted to share a few Society updates and some important dates for your diary.

Booking information will follow later this year, but for now please save the date. We hope to see many of you there.

Could you be a Trustee?

We currently have nine trustees on the Board, which means there are three vacancies. We know becoming a trustee is a big decision, so we want members to have plenty of time to consider whether it might be right for them.

We have listened to feedback that vacancies may not always have been publicised widely or early enough before the AGM. If you are interested or simply curious about what is involved, we would be very happy to hear from you.

Members are welcome to arrange an informal chat or ask about attending our next Board

meeting in early December as an observer.

We are especially keen to hear from proactive people who would like to help shape the Society's strategic work and support the next stage of our journey.

Project and website news

Our projects continue to move forward, with some now nearing completion. A heartfelt thank you goes to everyone involved for their creativity, commitment, and hard work.

We have also launched our new-look Thalidomide Society website. Please do visit it from time to time for news, project updates, and information for members.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support. I look forward to sharing more updates as our plans develop.

Mandy De La Mare – Chair

Board of Trustees

At present, we have nine trustees on the Board, which means we currently have three vacancies.

It has been brought to my attention that we may not publicise trustee vacancies widely enough, and that sharing a notice only a few months before the Annual General Meeting (AGM) may not give members sufficient time to consider applying.

Following our last AGM, one member attended a Board meeting as an observer. We would be pleased to welcome anyone who is interested in finding out more about the role. Please contact Julie or Heather (details below) if you would like to attend as an observer at our next Board meeting.

The Board meets four times a year: three meetings are held online via Zoom, and one takes place in person on the Sunday immediately after the AGM. There may be the odd short meeting between the main meetings to discuss an urgent item.

There are also three subcommittees: Finance, Governance, and Events. Trustees are expected to take part in one of these subcommittees, which may involve additional online meetings.

We are looking for people who are willing to be proactive in the strategic work of the Charity and help us consider and plan the next stages of the Thalidomide Society.

If you have specific skills, you believe will help and move the Society forward, please get in touch.

If you are interested, please get in touch with Julie Dixon or Heather Trueman (Joint Operations Manager). They will arrange for you to attend our next Board meeting at the beginning of December as an observer.

Julie Dixon email: julie@thalidomidesociety.org
 Heather Trueman email: heather@thalidomidesociety.org

Mandy De La Mare – Chair

Trustees – 2026

- ▶ Chair – Mandy de la Mare
- ▶ Vice Chair – Ed Freeman
- ▶ Line Manager – Geraldine Freeman
- ▶ Temp Treasurer – Darren Mansell
- ▶ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Roz Hepple
- ▶ David Tickell
- ▶ ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~  Eddie Freeman
- ▶ Margaret Hogg
- ▶ Co-opted Trustees – Neil Spooner

Date for your diary

AGM and Conference *Hilton Metropole, Birmingham.*
Saturday 17 April 2027.



A bucket list weekend at the Belgian Grand Prix

One of the things on my bucket list has always been to go to a Formula 1 race.

So, during a rather boozy family Christmas gathering, my brother-in-law Steve and son-in-law Brett suggested we should make it happen properly and go to the Belgian Grand Prix at Spa.

Before long, the wheels were in motion. We booked a Gulliver's Travel package and set off from London St Pancras on Thursday morning, having already started the trip in style by watching England in a nearby pub the night before.

The Eurostar to Brussels was quick and surprisingly easy, including the 35-minute trip through the Channel Tunnel. From Brussels, it was onto the coach to our budget-friendly hotel in Bruges, where the lack of air conditioning made for a very warm stay.

Friday started early as we headed to the circuit for the first runs on track. Our seats were at Eau Rouge, one of Spa's most famous sections, where the cars drop after the first bend before charging full pelt up the hill past the grandstand. Seeing Formula 1 cars fly past at up to 200mph is something television simply cannot do justice to.



Saturday brought another early start for qualifying. We decided to walk part of the circuit to see more of it, a brave and slightly foolish choice that ended with around 20,000 steps before we made it back to our seats. Between the racing, a Disc Jockey (DJ) kept the crowd entertained, and although Heineken was very much the beer of the day, circuit prices persuaded us to save our drinks for Bruges.

Sunday was race day, which meant an even earlier departure to beat the traffic into the circuit. After a wander through the fan zone, we climbed to the grandstand and watched Hamilton, Antonelli, and Verstappen, boo! and Norris fly past with millimetres to spare. My prediction, George Russell, went past once and then not again!

Antonelli eventually edged out Verstappen to win, rounding off a brilliant day of motorsport. Spa is incredibly hilly, so being able to walk on the track after the race saved us a long trek through the forest back to the coach.

After a delayed journey back, we returned to Bruges and found a pub in the centre for some much better cider. Thanks to our techie son-in-law, we watched the World Cup final on his phone, chatted to a local couple, and ended up in a Spanish bar just in time for the trophy presentation. We were clearly not Spanish; I had taken my knotted hankie off by then — but we were made very welcome as the beers continued to flow.

Monday morning somehow arrived, and it was back on the coach to Brussels, then the Eurostar to London and a brisk walk to Marylebone for the train home. Sadly, there was not even time for the usual quick one in the Baker Street ‘Spoons.

Four exhausting days — but absolutely worth it.

Darren



Fraud and scam awareness: how to protect yourself

Most of us do more online than ever before, whether that is banking, shopping, managing accounts or keeping in touch.

Unfortunately, criminals know this too.

Their methods are becoming more convincing, and scams such as phishing, Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) swap fraud, deepfakes and Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud can affect anyone.

Common scams to watch for

Phishing scams usually arrive by email, text or through a fake website. The message may look as though it has come from a bank, delivery company or official organisation, and it will often try to rush you into clicking a link or sharing personal information.

SIM swap fraud is where a criminal takes control of your mobile number by moving it to another SIM card. Once they have access to your texts and calls, they may be able to intercept security codes and get into your accounts.

Deepfake scams are becoming harder to spot. Criminals can use artificial intelligence to copy someone's voice or image, then use it to make a request seem genuine. If something feels unexpected or out of character, it is worth checking another way before acting.

Authorised Push Payment fraud happens when someone is tricked into sending money to a fraudster. These scams often rely on pressure, urgency or a story that sounds believable, especially if the criminal already has some information about you.

How to reduce your risk

- ▶ Use multi-factor authentication where you can, ideally through an authenticator app rather than text message codes.
- ▶ Choose strong, unique passwords and keep them in a password manager.
- ▶ Be wary of unexpected links or attachments, even if the message looks familiar.
- ▶ If a payment or information request feels urgent, pause and check it through a trusted contact route.
- ▶ Take notice of bank warnings, including Confirmation of Payee checks.
- ▶ Ask your mobile provider about adding extra security to your account.
- ▶ Consider agreeing a simple safe phrase with family or trusted contacts, especially for unusual voice or video requests.



What to do if you are targeted

If you receive a call claiming to be from your bank and something does not feel right, end the call and contact the bank using a trusted number. In the UK, calling 159 can connect you securely to many major banks. You can also report suspected fraud to Report Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or at www.reportfraud.police.uk. In Scotland, contact Police Scotland on 101. Take Five also provides useful guidance at www.takefive-stopfraud.org.uk.

Making payments safely

When sending money, take a moment to check the details carefully. Avoid sending cheques or important payment documents through the post if there is a safer option. Use secure payment routes, make sure the account details match the person or organisation you expect, and if anything feels uncertain, stop and check before going ahead.



Boiled egg topper



- ▶ Easy to use boiled egg cutter
- ▶ Neatly cuts around the top of your boiled egg
- ▶ No more bits of shell in your dippy egg
- ▶ Uses a simple clacking motion on the shell with a perfect cut all round.

Where to buy

- ✿ Amazon www.amazon.co.uk
- ✿ Dunelm Mill www.dunelm.com

Retail price from £6. Price correct at time of printing.

Smart touch automatic can opener



- ▶ Hands-free, automatic can opener
- ▶ Ideal for those who struggle with traditional can openers
- ▶ Opens cans, jars, bottles and tab cans
- ▶ Leaves no jagged edges.

Where to buy

- ✿ Argos www.argos.co.uk
- ✿ Amazon www.amazon.co.uk
- ✿ Dunelm Mill www.dunelm.com

Retail price £15. Price correct at time of printing.

Tell us what your 'Star Gadget' is and we may feature it in the next issue! Email with your

suggestions; heather@thalidomidesociety.org or julie@thalidomidesociety.org



Travelling with ease: a proven success

After previous trips made challenging by awkward luggage, Geraldine was delighted to share that this summer she was able to travel with ease. Her stylish suitcase, paired with a matching vanity case that sat neatly on top, made the journey much more manageable and stress-free.

The short handle made the case easy to control, while the wheels moved smoothly alongside her wheelchair. Travelling between trains became far less difficult, helping to make the overall journey feel more comfortable and unproblematic.



The smaller vanity case also proved very useful, offering enough space to hold a range of items and making it ideal for storing chargers and travel essentials close at hand.

Geraldine



The Thalidomide Society – website relaunch

The new-look website is now live. The Members' Area will be updated regularly with news, project developments, and useful information.

To access the Members' Area for the first time, please select "Forgotten password" and create a new login.

If you experience any issues logging in, please get in touch with us at info@thalidomidesociety.org

Access the members' area

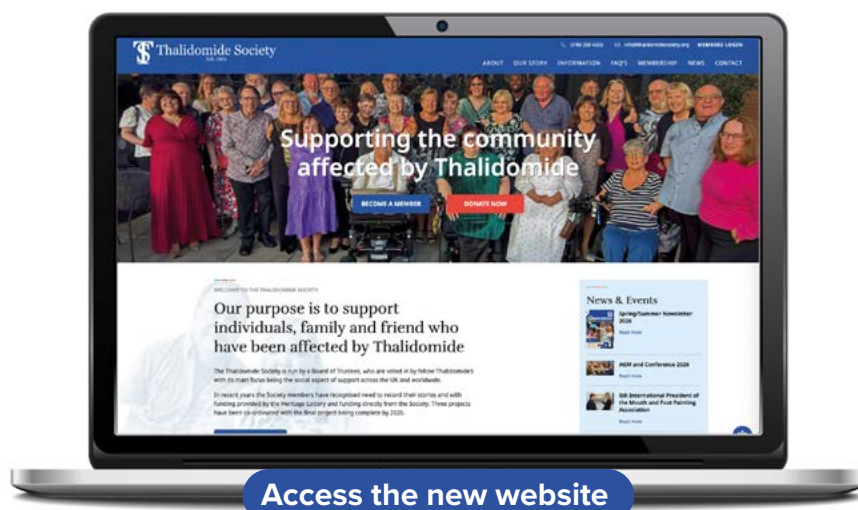
Login to Your Account

Email

Password

LOGIN **REGISTER**

[Forgot your password?](#)



Access the new website

Free bus travel 24/7 for disabled people



Eligible disabled people across England will get free bus travel all day, every day, after the Prime Minister announced on Tuesday 18 August 2026 that the government will lift time restrictions on concessionary passes.

From 1 April 2027, people who hold a disabled bus pass can travel on buses for free, no matter the time of day. This extra support will help to open up access to workplaces, education, training, and other opportunities, as well as giving people breathing space on the cost of living.

Currently, disabled bus passes are only valid for travel between 9.30am and 11pm during weekdays, unless local authorities choose to fund an extension. For example, Greater Manchester Combined Authority permanently lifted the time restrictions from March 2026 this year.

Backed by £60 million of funding, the Government is now stepping in to remove these time restrictions across the whole of England, so that from next year, disabled bus pass holders can always travel for free on the most popular form of public transport, regardless of their postcode.

This is part of the government's wider commitment to better, affordable, reliable buses, including the £2 bus fare cap.

Additional information:

The £60 million funding comes from existing Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Transport (DfT) budgets. It is made up of a £40 million contribution from DWP, and a £20 million contribution from DfT.

Eligibility for a disabled person's bus pass is set out in the Transport Act 2000, which defines seven statutory categories of disability.

These include people who are:

- ▶ Blind or partially sighted;
- ▶ Profoundly or severely deaf;
- ▶ Without speech;
- ▶ Unable or virtually unable to walk because of a disability;
- ▶ Without arms, or unable to use both arms;
- ▶ People with a learning disability; and
- ▶ People who would be refused a driving licence on medical grounds (other than because of drug or alcohol misuse).

Local authorities are responsible for administering the scheme and for assessing applications against these statutory criteria.



The Thalidomide Society Lottery

Support our lottery and help fund the Thalidomide Society's vital projects – including our Oral History work, preserving members' stories for future generations.

- ▶ Play for the chance to win up to £25,000 with 1 in 63 odds.
- ▶ At least 50% of every £1 goes straight to our charity.
- ▶ Anyone can join – members, families, friends, supporters, organisations.
- ▶ You have to be in it to win it.
- ▶ Join here: www.unitylottery.co.uk

- ▶ T&Cs: 16+, GB residents.
- ▶ Rules & odds: www.unitylottery.co.uk/rules/
- ▶ How winners are selected: www.unitylottery.co.uk/prizes/

Promoter: Marie Pearse (Member & Promoter)



Play now... www.unitylottery.co.uk/causes/the-thalidomide-society/

Latest draw results and winning numbers

- ▶ Friday, 4 September 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 3, 9, 0, 0, 7, 9

- ▶ Friday, 21 August 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 0, 2, 6, 4, 9, 8

- ▶ Friday, 14 August 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 8, 4, 7, 0, 4, 6

Congratulations Geraldine Freeman won £25.00.

- ▶ Friday, 17 April 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 1, 5, 6, 9, 8, 1

- ▶ Friday, 10 March 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 2, 7, 4, 9, 5, 7

Congratulations Helen Shore won 5 entries in next draw.

- ▶ Friday, 20 March 2026
- ▶ Numbers: 3, 8, 3, 2, 2, 9

Congratulations Yvonne Kavanagh Helen Shore won 5 entries in next draw.

unity

Geraldine to share Personal Support Project at Egmond Circle Conference

Geraldine has been invited to speak at the international Egmond Circle Conference later this year, where she will share progress on an important project focused on dignity moving towards support.

Taking place from 26 October to 2 November 2026 in Egmond aan Zee, the international festival 'Egmond Circle' will bring together around 300 guests from across the world, with attendees expected from countries including the Netherlands and Japan.

Geraldine has been asked to talk about the project she has been leading: *Personal Support, Maintaining Our Dignity and Support*. The conference organiser has shown particular interest in

the project and the way it explores practical support, personal independence and dignity.

During her presentation, Geraldine hopes to share the developments achieved so far and open up a wider discussion with Thalidomiders from around the world. She is especially keen to hear different perspectives on personal support, including the challenges people face and the approaches that help them live with dignity and confidence.

The event promises to be a meaningful opportunity to exchange experiences, strengthen international connections and bring insight as the project reaches its final stages.



Become a volunteer “Living with Thalidomide”

Living with Thalidomide is a new volunteering project to help preserve your legacy in your local community. Join a meaningful initiative with full training and ongoing support provided. A platform for growing awareness. Remember, Educate & Advocate.

The Society will support you to:

- ▶ Create your story
- ▶ Find local groups to speak to
- ▶ Borrow prop's

To find out more or register your interest email info@thalidomidesociety.org



Upcoming Thalidomide Trust events

Staying Steady: Understanding the Medical Issues That Affect Balance	Carolyn's Online Coffee Meet	Weight Loss Support Group	Darren's Online Coffee Event
Tuesday 6 October	12/26 October 9/23 November	Every Monday in October and November	2/16/30 October 13/27 November
Understanding factors affecting balance to help you stay steady and independent going forward.	Take time to catch up with friends over an afternoon cup of coffee!	Help and support to lose weight and get your health in good order!	Join our virtual coffee break to catch up and ponder some interesting questions!
11:00 – 12:00pm	15:30 – 16:30pm	18:30 – 19:30pm	10:30 – 11:30am

To find out more about the events go to thalidomidetrust.org/events/

Do you have a story, tip, or anything else of interest to share with other members? We are always on the lookout for features from

members for the newsletter; please do get in touch with Heather by email at heather@thalidomidesociety.org.

The Thalidomide Society, The Old Doctors House, 74 Grange Road, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 2AW.

www.thalidomidesociety.org
info@thalidomidesociety.org

The Thalidomide Society is a charitable incorporated organisation. Registered Charity in England and Wales (No. 231708).

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 **Thalidomide Society**
Est. 1962

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