

# Celebrating 40 years of talking newspapers

**O**xtalk, the Oxford and District Talking Newspaper, will be celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

This seamless and free service provides a vital service for visually impaired people in Oxford and the surrounding areas. It provides its listeners with a recorded, weekly digest of local news. The service is free and is available on memory stick or direct from their website.

However, the service has come a long way since its early days, the original services was based at Radio Cherwell, the hospital radio service. After much searching Oxtalk found a new home with Oxfordshire Association for the Blind at their offices in Bradbury Lodge.

The format of the service has also changed, to reflect the changes in technology, from cassettes to MP3's and recordings have also been uploaded on to the group's website. They now send out between 150 and 200 USB flash drives per week to listeners.

## **VOLUNTARY VOICE**

**So many visually impaired people would not be aware of what is available to them in Oxford and what is happening in the city they live in**

For some it was a difficult transition as listeners had to learn how to use audio players and Oxtalk volunteers were vital in helping them to transition to the new format.

Each week teams from their 50-strong band of volunteers prepare items for recording, read them onto a master copy and then each listener receives a memory stick which are sent out via Royal Mail.

Oxtalk aim to provide visually impaired people in the Oxford area with a weekly digest of news compiled from local newspapers including the Oxford Times and link them up with the outside world. They also provide information about services for the visually impaired such as touch tours at the various Oxford Museums and theatres, audio descriptions of plays as well as information about special sports events for people with a visual impairment.

Without this weekly service, says Margaret Simpson, chair of Oxtalk, "so many visually impaired people would not be aware of what

is available to them in Oxford and what is happening in the city they live in."

One of their regular and long-standing listeners, Brenda, says "I have been a listener for over 30 years. Throughout those years Oxtalk has provided me with interesting, informative and at times amusing articles. The service is extremely helpful in many ways as it gives news you would not normally hear, for example, lighting-up times which tells us when to draw the curtains and switch on the lights

Margaret Hurst, listener and Trustee goes on to say "Oxtalk gives much pleasure to those of us who cannot read the local news. Thank you to all volunteers."

Oxtalk wants to hear from anyone who might like to join them as a volunteer, whether to help with newsgathering, providing technical help, reading, copying or fundraising.

Email mail@oxtalk.org.uk or visit their website www.oxtalk.org.uk