

www.lancmag.com

January 2016

Lancashire

& North West magazine



BUTTERMERE • CHORLEY • SALFORD

The battles of Preston

Ring in the New year

A weekend on the canal

The last flight of the Vulcan

Charlotte Brontë Bicentenary

Hanging around clocks for 25 years

A Manchester charity making the world safe

£2.45



THE MINES ADVISORY GROUP

– Making people safe

Andrew Harris reports
on a Manchester-
based charity which
is helping the world



Landmines are the lethal legacy of conflict. Those who leave them are intoxicated by their cause and careless of what they can later do to innocent children and their innocent mums and dads. They are a curse.

From the safety and security of England's north west it is difficult to realise how people and communities are affected by explosive devices which can be anywhere. Just try and imagine how it would be if the good people of Carlisle, Chorley or Crewe couldn't let their children out to play for fear that they would stand on a landmine that could kill or maim them; or if farmers in the Ribble Valley were frightened to plough their fields which might contain devices that could explode beneath them. Yet these are the risks that whole communities in many countries have to live with. Landmines kill and maim people and stifle the livelihoods on which such communities depend to exist. Lives and livelihoods are all at risk.

The Mines Advisory Group is a Manchester-based international charity that was founded in 1989. Since then MAG – as it is better known – has worked in 41 countries on 4 continents as shown on the map. By 2014 it had made safe more than 80,000 landmines, cluster bombs and other deadly unexploded devices; 45,000 weapons had been destroyed plus 34 secure armouries and munitions stores had been built or refurbished to safely store what could not be destroyed. MAG also gave more than 16,000 'Risk Education Sessions' to help people stay safe until local land had been cleared of landmines and other devices. These activities benefitted 2.4 million people directly or otherwise and cleared more than 20 million square metres of land so that it was made safe for schools, agriculture, water sources, healthcare and the provision of shelters for refugees.

The need for MAG doesn't end here. It is currently working in Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Lebanon, Laos, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, ▶







Picture two



Picture three

South Sudan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam. Prompted by Princess Diana, industrialised countries are banning or restricting the supply of new landmines, cluster bombs and other explosive devices but older munitions remain available worldwide. The need to clear up the detritus of conflict will continue for as long as these devices remain available.

Lives and limbs matter more than economies but all the countries affected by the aftermath of conflict are in poorer parts of the world where economic survival is marginal. The existence of unexploded landmines and bombs affects the economies of these less developed countries. The combined population of the 13 countries where MAG is currently active is nearly 400 million people. The sheer scale of the resulting disadvantage is enormous so there is even a business case for clearing explosive devices as quickly as possible so that those affected can earn a living for themselves and their families.

MAG helps local economies in another way. With just 45 people based in Manchester it provides about 100 experts to train and advise 2,300 staff employed within the countries where it is active. Picture one shows deminers at work in Lebanon where local people are employed and trained in mine clearance. In picture two Vinitha is seen dealing with an anti-personnel mine. "I am proud to be a Team Leader at MAG" she says. "I look after my staff, treat everyone equally and encourage them to work together like brothers and sisters. I am so happy to be part of MAG because we are carrying out life-saving work for the people".



Picture four

MAG gives people the opportunity to rebuild their lives. "We have been here for two months and are progressing well with building our new house" says Pratheba seen in picture three. She continued "The MAG teams are saving our lives; not just from explosives but because we can now safely farm our land. We want to live happily with our children and grow coconuts, peanuts and seasonal vegetables".

It is not fair nor right that millions of people are trapped in danger and poverty for years after wars are over. Rathika and her son Dilakson – see picture four - have been back home for three years. She says "The land is safe and we are safe. We grow vegetables and have chickens. We have had help from the government and NGOs to rebuild our house but we could not be here at all if the landmines were still here".

Nothing is more worthwhile and encouraging than children being able to attend school and be educated because the landmines have been cleared. It

is good for them and is an investment in their future and the future of their community – and their country. Picture five is amazing for its normality; children at school in Sri Lanka who are safe and able to learn thanks to the clearance of landmines in their village.

Angola is an interesting case study. More than 10 years after the end of the civil war the threat of mines and other deadly weapons means that entire communities are still living in constant fear. MAG Chief Executive Nick Roseveare says "In Moxico, one of the poorest regions of Angola, mines and unexploded bombs continue to stop people from using their land to grow enough food to eat – or to sell in order to make a living. Such is the desperate need for land that many of the refugees continuing to return home after the civil war – which is long since ended – are building houses and farming on unsafe soil."

MAG is a product of our region which, through MAG, engages with some of the most threatened parts



Picture five

of the world and brings it hope. The north west can do much more to help and support the wonderful work of MAG by simple fundraising activities. For help with ideas like going on an adventure, hosting a social event, organising an event at work and collecting sponsorship – or to donate – contact Louise Wells or Sally Wilson on 0161 236 4311 or fundraising@maginternational.org. Although much funding is from governments and multi-national organisations, private donations are disproportionately helpful. Nick Roseveare adds “The tragic truth is that much more still needs to be done to make life safe for the thousands of communities still living with these tragic killers.” MAG is working from our region to remove these remnants of war; hopefully our region can help them to do this vital work.

Andrew Harris (aeharris@live.co.uk) is a former chairman of Ambulances for Africa and currently chairs the charity Kanaama Interactive Uganda. He has witnessed the fear of those affected by landmines.

Past and Present Operations of The Mines Advisory Group

