A brief history of Migraine Action
Introduction

To celebrate the first 50 years of Migraine Action (formerly the British Migraine Association) this leaflet has been produced to give a brief history of the Association to date. It is an acknowledgement of the work of the founder, Peter Wilson, and all who followed - both paid staff and volunteers - who have worked tirelessly to carry out the aims and purposes of the Association in raising awareness of migraine and its effects on work and family life through a period of great change.

This condensed “social history” shows the highs and lows of the growth of an influential and articulate group, “a charity run by migraine sufferers for migraine sufferers”. The amount of information contained in the first twenty years of newsletters is astounding: Peter Wilson was extremely well informed and kept close contact with all the members, pursuing his dream of improving the quality of life for sufferers. His successors learned from his work and made their own impact as the guardians of his legacy. What follows here is a swift gallop through those fifty years.

The idea of an association representing the five million or more migraine sufferers in Britain came about after Peter Wilson suffered a very close brush with sudden death in a 152 mph hurricane. When on Russian Convoy during World War Two, and while trying to cope with the worst migraine attack of his life, he flouted orders and went out on deck in search of fresh air. Swept overboard by a mountainous wave he was fortuitously swept back again. He vowed revenge on “the hammering devil” that had nearly taken his life, but it was not until fourteen years later that he felt fit enough to take up the challenge.
In 1958, on the advice of George Bell, his local pharmacist, he placed an advertisement in the Bournemouth Evening Echo inviting fellow migraineurs to attend a meeting at the San Remo Hotel in Bournemouth. Ten people attended and everyone donated £10 (a considerable amount of money at the time). The British Migraine Association was formed, acknowledged to be the world’s first organization to represent millions of sufferers. With his total savings of £8, Peter advertised in The Daily Telegraph for more fellow sufferers to join him in forming an association with the aim of encouraging greater research and treatment facilities.

By the end of 1959 the membership had risen to more than 1000, the first Annual General Meeting had been held and the first single-page newsletter circulated. In 1960 publicity in Woman’s Own led to an additional 2,000 members. The first edition of Migraine the Facts was published in 1960 and the publication of a regular newsletter began. It was two years before a newspaper article triggered an avalanche of enquiries and supporters that enabled the Association to donate its first £500 to the Royal College of General Practitioners towards a special Migraine Symposium in London. And so the work of the British Migraine Association (renamed the Migraine Action Association in 1997) continued for the next 50 years fulfilling the aims and purposes set out by its founders. This, then, is the brief story of Migraine Action during its first fifty years.
HIGHLIGHTS: FIFTY YEARS OF “FIGHTING ON”

Early years 1958-1970:
Peter Wilson, with a full time job at Bournemouth City Council, worked tirelessly in his spare time “from a broom cupboard with a 60 year-old typewriter”. Well qualified to guide the new organization, he suffered migraines from the age of 12 and his mother was a sufferer. His migraines plagued him until his sixties. With the invaluable support of his wife, Peggy, Peter worked voluntarily for the Association until his retirement in 1981.

1959:
First annual general meeting, 1000 members enrol.
Subscription: 5/- per annum. Bank balance - £500
Single page newsletter circulates, listing free migraine clinics at four major hospitals. Committee of 17 highly motivated people formed. First President: Nobel Peace Prize winner, Sir Norman Angell.
Association pledges to establish a national migraine research trust.

1961:
Lady Snow (writer Pamela Hansford Johnson) becomes President. First 8 page newsletter published. Appeal for “anything to raise cash”.
Huge response enables Association to grant £500 to Royal College of General Practitioners for migraine research.
Regular meetings for the medical profession are held in London and Bournemouth, frequently more than 250 UK doctors attending. Medical weekend discussions for migraine specialists lead to build-up of what is now The Migraine Trust (registered as a charitable trust in 1965).

1962-70:
Registration as Charity No. 207783. Formal Constitution registered.
Pilot trial of Stemetil set up by Association’s Medical Panel.
The Migraine Trust launched in 1965 followed by prestigious Foundation Dinner on 18 January 1966 at the Apothecaries Hall in the City of London. H.R.H. The Princess Margaret agrees to become Patron. Association contributes £2,000 towards start up costs and continues to make substantial annual donations until the mid 1980s.
A Migraine clinic and institute established by Association in Bournemouth.


First City Migraine Clinic (attached to St. Bartholomew’s Hospital) opened by H.R.H. Princess Margaret. Dr. Marcia Wilkinson appointed Chief Physician.

Royal Surrey County Hospital and Hull Royal Infirmary open migraine clinics.

Research milestone is award of more than £21,000 from The Wellcome Trust to Dr. Murray Harper and Dr. Edda Hannington for work on cerebral blood flow research and possible role of tyramine in the aetiology of migraine.

Medication: Dixarit launched.

Association honoured in 1970 by award of M.B.E. to Peter Wilson, Founder.

- Throughout these early years, research and surveys bring valuable information to the attention of the medical profession. Development of new medication continues. Members and families volunteer willingly to raise funds, always itemized in the Newsletters. Every effort receives personal thanks and encouragement from the Founder. Annual General Meetings are well attended and important researchers present keynote lectures.

Finance: for the year ended 31 March 1970: total income: subscriptions £477.0s.0d, donations £3220.10s.4d. plus deposit account interest = income £3761 (excess over expenditure = £435 4s.5d).
The Seventies

1971:

Deep Recession gives cause for concern – Peter Wilson assures membership that Association will not close but “Fight On”. This slogan is used for years to come by Peter and by his successors, Jo Liddell and Ann Turner.

Association makes generous donations and grants to researchers.

Medication: Midrid and Migraleve launched.

1973:

City of London Migraine Clinic re-opens at 22 Charterhouse Square. St. Bartholomew’s Hospital migraine clinic closes, having seen 6,000 patients in three years.

Association sponsors Dr. Katharina Dalton’s research into hormonal migraine. Hundreds of new members enrol as a result.

1974:

Fifteenth Anniversary. More than 20 different countries send greetings. Tree planting ceremony in Bournemouth marks the occasion.

Association presents Gold Medals to Dr. Edda Hannington, Professor Merton Sandler and Dr. Moussa Youdim for their work on amines. These researchers receive publicity on television in the UK and Iran.

W.B. Pharmaceuticals gives generous support to various events including essay competition for medical profession on headache in children.

Medication: Cafergot Q tablets - discontinued, Phenacetin – prescription only.

1975:

Subscription rises from 35p to 50p. World Recession continues. Peter Wilson notifies members in the newsletter of belt tightening, i.e. not sending Christmas cards this year.

London Symposium on Migraine in Childhood, sponsored jointly by Association and W.B. Pharmaceuticals, is oversubscribed.
1976-79:
Generous legacies mean more money for grants and lecture costs.
EEG machine donated to Tindal Green Hospital for research into childhood migraine.
Association funds new laboratory in Children’s Research Unit, Musgrave Park Hospital, Taunton.
Migraine in Childhood Symposium in London sponsored by Association.
Fundraising continues successfully, including memorable poetry reading in 1976 by Dylan Thomas’s daughter (Aeronwy Thomas-Ellis) who presents her first poem about her own migraine.
City of London Migraine Clinic faces closure.

Medication: soluble aspirins arrive. Inderal, Syndol and Effergot launched; Dolobid and Paramax launched. First trials of feverfew.

Finance: £7,575 given in grants (see above). At the end of year 1979, for instance, the accounts give £15,254 income, after expenditure an excess of £2,201. (Assets including investments at cost = £38,814.

The Eighties
1980-81:
Subscription: £2. Membership: 8,000.
Purchase of small office in West Byfleet, thanks to generous legacy. Mrs. Brenda Jones appointed office administrator, staying in post for next 20 years.
City of London Migraine Clinic “rescued” from possible closure, opens as a registered charity at 22 Charterhouse Square, London thanks to efforts of Dr. J.N. Blau and Dr. Marcia Wilkinson.
Dr. Blau appointed Hon. Medical Adviser to the Association, holding this post until 1997.
Largest ever migraine survey, conducted by Wander Pharmaceuticals, establishes that at that time more than 6 million people in the UK suffer from migraine.
Association funds volunteers’ travel expenses for the City of London Migraine Clinic’s investigation into feverfew. Within a year the Lancet reports that feverfew appears to have an action on the body comparable to that of aspirin.
Peter Wilson retires at age 72 in 1981. Mrs. Jo Liddell (Chairman of the Bournemouth Group) appointed Hon. Secretary, Jo makes a significant and influential contribution to the work of the Association and the world of migraine until her retirement in 1995.

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson, O.B.E. becomes Hon. Treasurer. A high ranking member of the Magic Circle, and former Clerk to the Governors of the National Hospital, he continues to assist the Association until 1997, unpaid.

1983:

Silver Jubilee: Dr. Marcia Wilkinson, receives an Association award in appreciation of her contribution to migraine research.

First National Migraine Art Competition sponsored by Association and W.B. Pharmaceuticals. Vera Lynn (one of the original British Migraine Association members) presents the prizes at City of London Migraine Clinic. The regular competitions produce works of art about migraine by migraineurs now used as an effective teaching tool as well as a source of revenue for this Association.

News of Dr. Stewart Johnson’s research into feverfew as a long-term preventative treatment for migraine; massive media coverage boosts membership to a new high. Association supports the research financially; members volunteer to give blood samples. Results of clinical trials announced, new feverfew tablet marketed; due to huge demand the herbalists Culpeper run out of feverfew plants.

1984:

Association’s film “Art of Migraine” wins Silver Award at the British Medical Association’s Annual Film Competition.

1986:

Association donates £50,000 towards purchase of a scanner for the Princess Margaret Migraine Clinic, Charing Cross Hospital.

1987:

Death of Peter Wilson, aged 78. Service of thanksgiving is held at All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, attended by family, friends and many members, paying tribute to Peter’s life and work.
1988:  
**Thirtieth Anniversary.**  
Art Collection (200 paintings) taken to USA by Curator Derek Robinson accompanying Dr. Marcia Wilkinson on a lecture tour.  
• AGM topics include Childhood Migraine, Food Allergy, Meditation and Migraine.  

**Finance:** 12% increase in income from subscriptions and donations.  

**The Nineties 1990-91:**  
Glaxo sponsors first “Making Headway” meeting at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London followed by equally successful events in many major UK cities.  
Members volunteer for City of London Migraine Clinic’s investigations on hormonal migraine.  
Computerised at last; the office staff transfer all 8,700 membership records to the new system – a major learning curve, navigated successfully.  

**Medication:** launch of Imigran (sumatriptan) for use in the UK. Members had been deeply involved in all trials of this medication.  

1992:  
Jo Liddell appointed Director.  
Membership rises to 10,000.  
First Migraine Action Week - a big success and to be an annual event up to the present date, changing in 1997 to Migraine Awareness Week. Second National Art Competition, sponsored by W.B. Pharmaceuticals.  

1993:  
Association hosts first successful Cluster Headache Meeting in London, sponsored by Glaxo.  
Publication of “The Migraine Handbook”, edited by Jenny Lewis (Assistant Editor), gains publicity in the media; sales boost finances.  
Irish Migraine Association formed, Mrs. Audrey Craven as Director. Within the next two years 1,000 members enrol.
1995-96
MiPCA (Migraine in Primary Care Advisers) launched. Mrs. Iris Lewiston, Chair of the Bournemouth Group since 1975, retires. Jo Liddell retires after a stroke. The Byfleet office continues to operate without interruption, thanks to Brenda Jones and the staff and with the help of the Treasurer and trustees, until the appointment of new Director, Ann Turner.

Leaflets produced in Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, Bengali and Punjabi, with sponsorship from Glaxo Wellcome.

**Medication:** Midrid relaunched.

1997:
Mrs. Ann Turner appointed Director. Jo Liddell elected Hon. President; Geoffrey Robinson, O.B.E. retires at the age 84 after 16 years with the Association (he never accepted any payment for his hard work). He is succeeded by Mrs. Jackie Bonella.

Change of name and new logo approved by membership. Constitution revised, complying with Charity Commission regulations.

AstraZeneca sponsors Association events at Edinburgh Science Festival. Virtual Reality reconstruction is a highlight. Capacity audiences at the Edinburgh Museum theatre and much publicity.

1998:
**Fortieth anniversary**
Subscription rises to £5. New website launched.

AstraZeneca sponsors Migraine Road Shows in major UK shopping malls, with willing volunteers from the committee. The Virtual Reality experience raises awareness of problems faced by sufferers; the biggest ever UK survey on migraine is undertaken during the shows.

5-year patient survey begins; 50 members, chosen at random, to participate.

AstraZeneca sponsors project MIDAS (Migraine Disability Assessment Score).

**Medication:** launch of Maxalt by Merck Sharp Dohme; Domperamol launched by Servier.
1999:

New Director represents the Association at preliminary committee of World Headache Alliance.

City of London Migraine Clinic ask for volunteers for research on menstrual migraine. Association hosts another successful Cluster Headache conference.

Novartis launch nasal spray. Cool Cap developed and distributed by ScanMed Ltd. Mediview call for volunteers for trial of glasses with blue bloc filter.

Finance: Research grants total more than £50,000; Association income tops £156,000, of which £25,000 is legacy money

- In the late nineties there are many comments from members about incapacity benefit, perfumed advertisements, halogen car headlights and brake lights. Media takes up the matter of car headlights, with questions in the House of Commons and with car manufacturers

- Humour: Many light hearted comments enliven the early newsletters. Peter Wilson thought migraineurs needed cheering up with the occasional joke or cartoon, for instance:

  Teacher: what is migraine?
  Schoolboy: it’s what happens when birds fly south in the winter.

  Doctor to patient: have your eyes ever been checked? No, they’ve always been green.

Into the 21st Century

2000:

The World Health Organization announces formal recognition of the burden of headache worldwide.

First Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Award for work by women in the field of migraine (sponsored by Glaxo) presented to Dr. Marcia Wilkinson for her translation of Elizabeth Garrett Anderson’s doctoral thesis on migraine.

Headache World 2000 Symposium at Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre London, first Patient Meeting day a success.

Association cooperates with Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry on production of Target Migraine, one of a series of booklets on long term medical conditions.

Medication: Migramax launched by Elan Pharma.
2001: 

Relocation from West Byfleet to Great Oakley, Corby, Northamptonshire. Subscription rises to £7.

Jo Liddell receives the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Award. Prize money is generously offered to the Bournemouth Group (£1000) and to the MAA Children’s Project (£4000).

4th Cluster headache meeting; MAA takes on the administration of the oxygen regulator bank for cluster headache sufferers. OUCH (UK) launched officially as a registered charity.

World Headache Alliance meetings in Europe and the United States – Director attends and is elected to WHA Council. She is reappointed as WHA Hon. Treasurer.

First mention of hole in the heart (PFO) in New Scientist prompts further research.

**Medication:** Lundbeck launch Almogran (almotriptan); AstraZeneca launch rapimelt formulation of Zomig (zolmitriptan).

2002: 

World Health Organization reports migraine as one of the top 20 most disabling conditions.

Subscription rises to £8.50.

Dr. Anne MacGregor (City of London Migraine Clinic) receives the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Award.

Research and surveys undertaken on: Cooling gel strips, Botox, Bowen technique, hemiplegic migraine.

Launch of Headache UK; Inaugural meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Primary Headache Disorders in October at the House of Commons.

**Finance:** More than £65,000 granted to various worthy hospitals and clinics: City of London, MiPCA, Action Against Allergy, Kings College Hospital, Surrey Headache Clinic and the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh.

- Keeping fit and raising money for charity at the same time becomes popular and many members raise much needed funds at various events, from full marathons to local fun runs.
2003:

WHO agrees to endorse Global Campaign to Reduce the Burden of Headache World Wide.

Well attended meetings in the UK include the Annual General Meeting in Birmingham, regional meeting in Edinburgh at the Western General Hospital.

**Medication:** Imigran nasal spray licensed for use in the 12-17 age group; Zomig available in nasal spray form; Migard, from Menarini, available from April 2003.

2004-2005:

Launch of Migraine in Children (Young Migraineurs) Project with new website.

Manchester Headache Clinic closes; Leicester Self Help group closes, residual funds are donated to MAA for future research.

Association makes successful bid for funding from Department of Health to develop and implement a specialist patient programme for sufferers. First meetings are held.

Tackling Migraine Together meetings held jointly with the Migraine Trust.

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Award presented to Audrey Craven, Director Irish Migraine Association and Vice Chairman of the European Federation of Neurological Associations.

Disability Discrimination Act now lists migraine as a disability.

5-year Headache UK Survey completed, results of impact of disabling headache on working life published.

Migraine and the heart (PFO) MIST trials call for volunteers. More than 3,000 telephone calls give the office a bit of a headache.

Subscription restructured to allow access to level 2 of the website. £10, or £15.

**Medication:** Glaxo launch Imigran RADIS; Topamax licensed for use in migraine prevention; Zomig rapimelt available.
2006:
Successful specialist patient programme continues throughout the UK.
200 MAA members take part in a feverfew study by MedicHerb; results show daily supplement may help reduce frequency of attacks.
Launch of European Headache Alliance in Brussels, attended by Association’s Director.

Medication: Sumatriptan available without prescription, after consultation with the pharmacist. Topamax licensed in the UK; Inflamol, announced by Healthy Direct.

2007:
Death of Jo Liddell, Hon. President, at the age of 81. Generous donations are made in Jo’s memory and at her family’s request allocated to the project on migraine in children.
Janssen Cilag and MAA announce survey of preventative treatments; results analysed and submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.
Meetings continue: specialist patient meetings, Tackling Migraine Together events, public awareness days, health fairs in Wales (leaflets produced in Welsh language for the first time) and West Country. Association joins City of London Migraine Clinic with joint stands at the Primary Care Exhibition, NEC Birmingham.

Medication: Migraherb granted registration by MHRA and licensed as traditional herbal medicine product for prevention of migraine headaches. New nasal spray for cluster headache sufferers (zolmitriptan) proves effective for adolescents with migraine.

Finance: during the decade more than £172,000 awarded in grants for research and surveys.
2008: Golden Jubilee Year: fifty years of “fighting on”

Relocation to new offices in Leicester coincides with the 50th anniversary of the pivotal first meeting of ten supporters in Bournemouth in 1958.

Director, Ms. Lee Tomkins, takes charge of the administration and a new team takes up the challenge of the “Big 50” project: members are urged to raise funds, volunteer for projects and celebrate the year.

After 50 years of magnificent work, the Bournemouth Group closes, but new small groups countrywide emerge and flourish.

New initiative of patient training days meet with approval and positive feedback.

Appointment of the new Medical Advisory Board.

Mary Ayres elected President.

- **Governance:** from the inception of the charity up to the present day (2010) governance has been the duty of the executive committee, now trustees, working in close harmony with the administration and subject to the rules and regulations laid down by the Charity Commission. At the inception of the Association there were 17 committee members, rising eventually to 26; the current Constitution stipulates a total of 12; the importance of trustees’ knowledge and expertise in various fields cannot be underestimated as a valuable asset to the charity’s strategy.

- **Financial policy:** in the early days the treasurer worked from home, assisted by Brenda Jones, in the 80s the invaluable Geoffrey Robinson took on this task, ensuring that the finances were supervised and the cascade of paperwork was understood, accounts audited, and reported in good order to the membership. By the 80s it was decided to pay Mrs. Liddell a small honorarium but over the years it was obvious that a salary was affordable and therefore the staffing structure was regulated within the budget.

- This history does not give details of annual accounts; these are available from the archives in the Leicester office.

- **Members:** From the very first days of the Association, volunteers, sufferers and their families and friends raised thousands of pounds by running, walking, organizing jumble sales, tea parties, raffles and garden parties, always giving their time willingly. Calls for volunteers for trials of new medication never fail to receive a positive response. It is impossible to thank each and every one, but they know who they are! The important link between the Association and the medical and pharmaceutical professions remains strong.
It has always been the policy of the Association that every sufferer should be able to write or speak to a sympathetic and understanding person who knows only too well the many forms of wretchedness experienced by the patient. A cheerful informative service of reassurance continues to be provided by the Association, together with positive encouragement to collaborate in current research. The Association has become a model for many others that have since been formed all over the world, and continues to liaise with headache organisations worldwide.

Once again the Association faces a world Recession: history shows that this Charity can and will survive and continue serving the needs of those who suffer from migraine, wherever they may be.

For further information, advice on migraine management and for updates on the latest migraine research, please contact Migraine Action by calling 0116 275 8317, emailing info@migraine.org.uk, or visiting the charity’s website at www.migraine.org.uk. All of our information resources and more are only made possible through donations and by people becoming members of Migraine Action. Visit www.migraine.org.uk/donate to support one of our projects or visit www.migraine.org.uk/join to become a member.

Source of information: all available copies of the Association newsletters and original notes by the late Peter Wilson. This is a brief synopsis of Migraine Action’s history; please contact the office or visit www.migraine.org.uk/shop for a more detailed version. Mary Ayres.