

Unless people have actually seen or touched Braille it is likely that they do not know how it looks or feels, let alone how it works. So for those who have no inkling we thought the following information might prove interesting.

Braille letters are made of raised dots (arranged like a domino) and 64 permutations of these dots are used in Braille. Numbers are made using a 'number sign' followed by letters A-I to represent 1-9 and J=O.

Braille was invented in 1829 by, Frenchman, Louis Braille, who was born in Coupvray, France in 1809. [It was to Louis' family home and birthplace that Colin Dowling and Steve Rogers cycled in 2011 to raise funds for Compass Braille].

At the age of 3 Louis had an accident in his father's workshop when he damaged his eye and soon after he became blind. His parents found ways in which to teach Louis the basics of reading and writing and when he was 7 they sent him to school. Louis soon decided that the methods used in teaching people with visual disabilities was unnecessarily difficult, so at the age of 13 he set about devising a new system using raised dots - at 15 he had completed the alphabet. By 1829 he completed this and added music to his system as well as writing a booklet explaining how to read words and music by touch. It took many years before Louis' raised dot system was officially adopted.

For speed and to save space English Braille and a few other languages utilise "contractions" that substitute shorter sequences for the full spelling of commonly-occurring letter groups. For example, "the" is usually just one character in English Braille, not only in the definite article but also in words such as 'further'. However, the same contraction is not used in words such as 'sweetheart' and this is because of the way in which certain words are constructed or pronounced. When contractions are used the Braille is called 'Grade II/contracted' in contrast to 'Grade I/uncontracted' where every word is spelled out letter-by-letter.

Most of the languages we produce use Grade I Braille and because Braille is not an international language, each language has its own official Braille code.

We tend only to transcribe a new language for which a request for Bible portions has been made. However, when our new transcription program is fully developed the process will be more streamlined and less costly which will allow us to transcribe more languages. After transcription and proofing are satisfactorily completed the Bible portions concerned can go into production. We can produce in large or small quantities so there are no limitations.

All of this is computerised and there is a good back-up system in place. The embossers (printers) are specialised pieces of equipment and therefore expensive. We now have three Braille embossers; the two Braillos were purchased in the 90s and the Impacto in 2013.

Over the years there have been those who speculate about the relevance of Braille in this day and age. But if you consider that it is not only the means by which a person with visual disabilities can read for themselves but more importantly Braille is (in whatever form it comes) the only way for them to gain literacy. Spelling, grammar, page and book layout are all part of learning to read and write in Braille. It is also a fact that those who learn Braille are more likely to go on to further education and or gain employment and social standing than those who do not. There are a plethora of other reasons why Braille is important and if you want to know more the RNIB website cites many aspects of what makes Braille more relevant today than ever.

If you would like to know more about Braille or its transcription and production then you are welcome to visit us here at the Press. So please feel free to phone and arrange a visit.

Bertha Gyndykes Dkhar

Bertha Dkhar is our Khasi proof reader. The following article from the Indian publication 'The North East Today' tells about some of Bertha's achievements: 'On the occasion of International Women's Day, let us take a look at some of the women from Meghalaya who despite all odds managed to rise above all challenges....who serve as an inspiration for the youth.

Bertha G Dkhar is indeed a pride of Meghalaya, a woman who inspired many to live up to their dreams despite the odds. Dkhar is a visually impaired Indian educationist, best known as the inventor of the Braille code in Khasi. She was honoured by the Government of India in 2010, with the fourth highest civilian award of Padma Shri. She was born in Shillong as a visually challenged child suffering from retinitis pigmentosa, a disease which causes degeneration of the retina, and lost her eyesight completely while she was in college. Continuing with efforts to overcome the disability, Dkhar researched in Braille code and designed the code in Khasi, the local language in Meghalaya. Her undying love for knowledge made her one of the most aspiring women leaders of the state.'

Bertha herself has kindly provided the following information:

'From 1999-2003 I was the headmistress of the Jyoti Sroat School, a school run by the Bethany Society for visually impaired children. Nowadays I function as senior coordinator of the Main-streaming Disability Unit, Education of Bethany Society, looking into all educational programs of the organisation and also support- ing the promotion of inclusive education in the North Eastern Part of India.

Jyoti Sroat School started as a special school for visually impaired children but by 2006 it moved into inclusive education where ALL children now study together and take part in all activities. My present passion is for ensuring children their educational right and working with the organisation I am into various projects trying to improve on the educational system, specially the classroom transaction aspect in all schools.'

Founding of Holy Etchmiadzin

We are currently working on the transcription of the Armenian 'Etchmiadzin' Bible which prompted investigations into the history and this is what we found. The Etchmiadzin Cathedral is one of many tourist attractions and is a UNESCO-listed site:

'Etchmiadzin Cathedral is the mother church of the Armenian Apostolic Church, located in the city of Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin), Armenia. According to scholars it was the first cathedral built in ancient Armenia, and is considered the oldest cathedral in the world.

The original church was built in the early fourth century between 301 and 303 according to tradition by Armenia's patron saint Gregory the Illuminator following the adoption of Christianity as a state religion by King Tiridates III. It replaced a pre-existing temple, symbolizing the conversion from paganism to Christianity. The core of the current building was built in 483/4 by Vahan Mamikonian after the cathedral was severely damaged in a Persian invasion. From its foundation until the second half of the fifth century, Etchmiadzin was the seat of the Catholicos, the supreme head of the Armenian Church.

Although never losing its significance, the cathedral subsequently suffered centuries of virtual neglect. In 1441 it was restored as catholicosate and remains as such to this day. Since then the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin has been the administrative headquarters of the Armenian Church. Etchmiadzin was plundered by the Safavids in 1604, when relics and stones were taken out of the cathedral to New Julfa in an effort to undermine Armenians' attachment to their land. Since then the cathedral has undergone a number of renovations. Belfries were added in the latter half of the seventeenth century and in 1868 a sacristy was constructed at the cathedral's east end. Today, it incorporates styles of different periods of Armenian architecture. Diminished during the early Soviet period, Etchmiadzin revived again in the second half of the twentieth century, and under independent Armenia.

As the main shrine of religious Christian Armenians worldwide, Etchmiadzin has been an important location in Armenia not only religiously, but also politically and culturally. A major pilgrimage site, it is one of the most visited places in the country. Along with several important early medieval churches located nearby, the cathedral was listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2000.' *source: Wikipedia.*

This will be the first time that this Bible version has been made available in Braille.

Transcription

Khasi Bible portions for North East India: We received some very helpful feedback from the proof reader (Bertha Gyndykes Dkhar -page 2) on Matthew vol.1 and we have since sent a revised copy along with the first proof of Matthew vol.2 and Psalms vols.1,2 and 3.

Malayalam: This had to be re-transcribed as there were mistakes in the original which are now archived. Our current software (both Unibraille and the new Liblouis-based program) will not work with the original 'old format' text files - they now need to be in Unicode. Although possible, converting them to unicode would have been a tricky and error prone process - not knowing if some of the errors existed in the original files or even in the braille conversion table - it was more accurate to start afresh with the Unicode files from BSI. The work has started and we have sent 2 vols., prepared using our new transcription program and the latest text files, to MTB for proof reading. So it will be a double test!

Armenian: In June we sent proof copies of Genesis to Armenia and we now await the proof readers' comments.

Luganda: On 18th August we received a link to download the source files for the Luganda Revised Bible and we hope to produce the first proofs soon. We will use our new program for this as the text files are in USX format. This will be a good test. We expect to start with Mark and then possibly vol.1 of Psalms which will also enable the proof readers to make comments on poetry layout style.

Projects on hold: We are waiting to find proof readers, additional information, or updates to source text, etc. for the: English Good News Catholic Bible and 2 South Asian languages.

There is also continual ongoing work with the new transcription program development.

Giant Print

Initial samples of the German Luther Bible are being tested for clarity by a VIP group in Germany.

Production

Since January the following Braille Bible and Booklet portions were produced/are in the pipeline for Bible Societies/Mission Groups:

Germany - Giant Print - in progress - transcription only.

India - Bible portions: Hindi - 2224. Kannada - 71. Malayalam - 20 (awaiting proof reading). Tamil - 307. Telugu - 1544.

Rwanda - Kinyarwanda - 3750 Bible portions, these were recently transcribed and are now in production.

Uganda - English - 2400 Books comprising: Healing, Hope, Lion Children's Bible Stories and Women, Love + Crime Stories of the Bible. 1100 = 20 Complete Bibles; 30 x 4 Gospels; 30 Proverbs; 30 Psalms.

Special Bible Fund:

Hindi - School in Dehradun - 135 consisting: 4 Gospels, Proverbs, Psalms and a book.

English: Dehradun - 15 copies of the Gospel of Mark. 1 NT - individual request. Malawi - 1 complete Bible. OT - GNV for Peter Lim in Singapore

Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi and Malayalam: MTB, Chennai - Galatians to Philemon in totalling 310 volumes, plus 50 copies of Hindi-Gospel of Luke.

Nepali - 4 Gospels for UMN worker in Nepal. Complete Bible for Solomon in N.India.

Languages of Compass Braille

We have transcribed the languages below into Braille. We have not necessarily worked on the entire Bible in every case but once initial transcription work is complete, it is then simpler to do further work in each language.

Africa: English (various destinations); Kinyarwanda; Kirundi; Kiswahili; *Luganda
Americas: Purepecha (Mexico); French (Haiti); English (Jamaica); Spanish (Costa Rica)
Central Asia: Armenian; Azeri (Azerbaijan); Kazakh; Mongolian; Uzbek
Europe: Bulgarian; French; Georgian; **German; Latvian; Maltese; Macedonian; Russian
Oceania: **Bislama (Vanuatu); English (Papua New Guinea)
South Asia: Burmese; Bangla; (Bangla-Mussalmani-booklet); Sinhala (Sri Lanka) plus *2 Others;
South Asia - India: Garo; Gujarati; Hindi; Kannada; *Khasi; Malayalam; Manipuri; Marathi;
Mizo; Nepali; Oriya; Tamil; Telugu
South East Asia: Cebuano; Hiligaynon; Ilocano; Indonesian; Malay; Tagalog; Thai
* in progress, **Giant Print only.

Other Publications

If this Annual Newscast is the only publication you receive from us but you would like more regular updates then please feel free to contact us so that we can also send you mini-Newscast which includes Prayer Pointers. All of our publications are available in Text, Braille or Giant Print as well digitally via email. You are also free to contact us if you no longer wish to remain on the mailing list.

Abbreviations

UBS=United Bible Societies; BS= Bible Society; CB=Compass Braille; MTB=Mission to the Blind; BSI= Bible Society of India; SBF=Special Bible Fund; UMN=United Mission to Nepal
Compass Braille, 16 Crane Mead Business Park, Crane Mead, Ware, SG12 9PZ, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1920 413572 - website: www.compassbraille.org; email: enquiries@compassbraille.org; registered charity no: 292625. Produced by Glennis Dowling - 01920 413572