

MU Visit to Compass Braille

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Few people realise that most Braille Bibles for use worldwide are produced in Ware by the charity, Compass Braille Press. For our September meeting, we visited Colin & Glennis Dowling at the Press in Crane Mead & spent an informative & inspiring evening with them.

Since 1990, Compass Braille has transcribed & produced Braille Bibles, The Lion Children's Bible & other Christian materials such as lifestyle booklets on HIV/Aids. They were the first organisation to develop & use computer programmes to print Braille & so far Bibles & booklets have been produced in 43 languages for 120 destinations worldwide. Most orders come from United Bible Societies who have fund raised via churches & identified a particular need. Compass Braille also fundraises to support its own projects where there is a need identified.

After browsing some Braille publications in numerous languages, we were shown how computer programmes run the "tractor" printers to produce the Bible sheets on special high quality paper. This can be embossed with the Braille dots on both sides & we watched several "books" being produced. Each language has its own Braille code using 64 permutations of the 6 dot cell pattern. Colin gave us each a Braille alphabet sheet to read by touch & explained how numbers were differentiated from letters. It is more difficult than it looks & ideally should be learnt at an early age.

Compass Braille has a small team who administer the charity, develop new projects, transcribe into new languages & bind the volumes. Many of these are ex missionaries with the language skills required and volunteers from local churches who form "binding" teams producing 100 volumes in 2 hours. The volumes are produced in a robust lie flat spiral bound form which assists the readers to access the Braille easily. We were amazed at how large the volumes were due to the thickness

of paper. A full Bible occupied 2 metres of shelf space!

Colin gave us a fascinating slide show featuring users of the Bibles & explaining why even in this computer age, the Blind feel it is a basic human right to be able to personally access the text themselves rather than being read to. They can learn & proceed at their own pace, pausing to reflect when they wish. They are also able to partake equally in Bible study groups. Braille skills aid progress with reading & spelling, which is vital to go on to learn to use computers. Compass regularly visit India, where the majority of their volumes are used & in 2007 they set up a micro unit in India to enable a group of locals to be employed producing their own Braille publications. They hope to replicate this elsewhere. Colin also gave an entertaining account of his recent fund raising cycle ride to Louis Braille's house in France, which raised £8,000.



In 2011, Compass produced an amazing 18,831 Braille volumes in 17 languages for 30 destinations. So far this year, 10,003 Bible volumes & books have been made with many orders still to complete. Spanish has been transcribed for the first time. They have also been able to give books to Kenya & Bangladesh using their "Special Bible Fund" which welcomes donations from churches & individuals.

Compass Braille are happy to visit groups to speak or welcome visitors or volunteers to the Press. They gave us some bookmarks to distribute, so please take one from the stand at the back of Church.

Also see www.compassbraille.org or mail glennis@compassbraille.org