

# British Journal of Visual Impairment

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*British Journal of Visual Impairment* 1985; 3; 85

DOI: 10.1177/026461968500300306

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# New Moon

by J.M. Gill

Brunel Research Unit for the Blind

*The very low readership figures for Moon have encouraged the belief that this form of embossed printing will be phased out. The following article outlines new approaches and technological developments which challenge this belief.*

## Introduction

The embossed Moon code was invented by Dr William Moon in Brighton in 1847. The main advantages claimed for Moon include ease of learning and that it does not require a good sense of touch. However Moon readership is estimated to be just over a thousand in the UK, and less than two thousand in the whole world. These very low readership figures have encouraged the belief that Moon will be phased out in the near future; but the Royal National Institute for the Blind has recently stated that this will not happen.

The factors limiting readership appear to be the limited range of material in Moon, the shortage of teachers and the fact that there is no easy way for a blind person to write Moon. A prototype Moon-writer was developed by a school in Sevenoaks and is now being manufactured by Possum Controls Ltd in Slough; it will be marketed by the RNIB.

There may be a large potential demand for Moon for simple applications such as labelling; few elderly blind people seem to be aware that Moon labels (self-adhesive, magnetic or tie-on) are available free of charge from the Moon Branch of the RNIB at Reigate.

## Teaching Kit

With the shortage of trained rehabilitation officers for the blind and the likelihood that local government funding will be tight in the foreseeable future, it was decided to investigate the possibility of using trained volunteers to teach Moon. After consultation with a number of teachers, the Unit put together some prototype kits in collaboration with Tom Brown (Moon Branch, RNIB), Lynda Hodge (Royal Leicestershire, Rutland and Wycliffe Society for the Blind), Allan Leach (National Library for the Blind), Ann Barnett (National Deaf-Blind Helpers' League) and John Mills (Warwickshire Association for the Blind). The kit (see Fig 1) includes over twenty items and a specially written handbook (largely prepared by Lynda Hodge).

The kit was field tested in Warwickshire with the help of the Warwickshire Association for the Blind. The Association advertised for volunteers who had to have their own transport and to be qualified teachers; against all predictions there were more suitably qualified applicants than vacancies. The first five volunteers were given a one-day training course at the George Marshall Centre, the headquarters of the

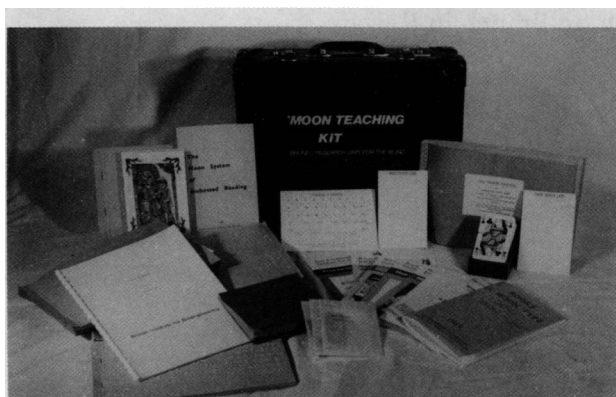


Fig. 1

WAB. Feedback from these volunteers has resulted in some modifications being done to the kit – mainly concerned with duplicating items; the Unilock Moon aid will be incorporated in the kit (see Appendix 1). Moon Branch are prepared to consider stocking the teaching kit if there is sufficient demand.

## Production systems

The present production method has been in use for many years and works well, but it is very labour intensive. The Moon letters are hand typeset from individual lead characters, and copies are pressed on damp paper in a conventional press. This system has severe disadvantages for single copy transcription of correspondence or documents.

Moon is produced in varying quantities – magazines in a few hundred copies, books from 8 to 50 copies, and documents in less than 10 copies. Inserts for greetings cards also make up a significant part of Moon Branch's production. It is unlikely that there will be a single ideal production system to meet these different demands.

Various experiments were done by Tom Brown, the recently retired Manager of Moon Branch, with encapsulated paper (as sold by Minolta and RPH-SYN in Sweden) with very positive reactions from current Moon readers. The problem was to produce a dense visual master of the Moon; a Letraset or typewriter approach did not allow for the fact that Moon is proportionally spaced and justified (but not microjustified). Ideally any new system should not require the operator to know the rules of Grade 2 Moon. The rules are less complex than those of Grade 2 braille except that in Moon it is essential to divide words correctly at the end of lines (most braille programs just move the whole word on to the next line).

BUMPS (Brunel University Moon Production System) was developed to Mr Brown's specification for the production of documents and inserts for greetings cards. The system utilises a micro-computer and a desk-top laser printer to produce a visual master of the Moon (see Fig 2). The software permits the operator to choose Grade 1 or Grade 2 Moon and normal or wide line spacing. A laser printer is used since it can produce a very dense well defined image; it has other advantages such as quietness and speed (about six pages of Moon per minute). This system is now in use at Moon Branch in Reigate.

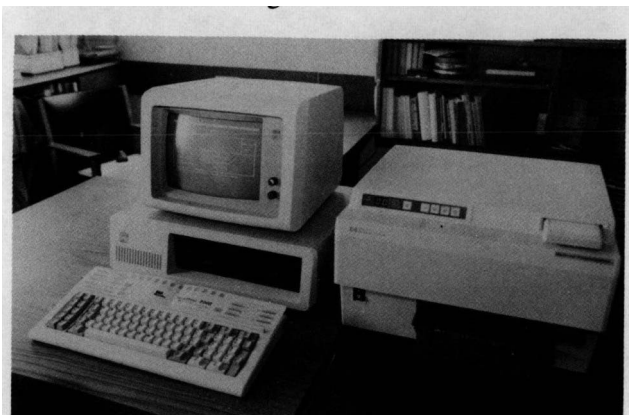


Fig. 2

BUMBLE is a further development of this system to permit a typist to produce documents in Moon (uncontracted and contracted), braille (uncontracted and contracted), large print and ordinary print. The system is based on the Hewlett Packard Touch-Screen computer, but versions have been made for other computers. A special version has been developed which can accept digital data from the National Library for the Blind and the Scottish Braille Press; this means that it is technically possible to produce Moon and large print editions of books which have been transcribed into braille on the computer systems used by these two organisations.

#### Future of Moon

These developments, plus the Possum Moon-writer, may encourage more people to use Moon. However the greatest hindrance to greater utilisation is likely to be its image; only when Moon acquires a new image will professional workers be likely to encourage the use of the system to its full potential.

*See also:* Inter-Regional Review No. 67, Summer 1980, pp 34-35.  
British Journal of Visual Impairment Vol. III No. 1, Spring 1985, pp 11-13.

## Appendix 1 Available Aids

**Electronic Printing Systems Ltd**, Newgate Lane, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 1BP. Tel: 0329-221121.

*Model:* BUMBLE

*Description:* Computer-based Moon production system using a laser printer.

*Price:* from £7000

**Moon Branch**, RNIB, Holmesdale Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0BA. Tel: 07372-46333.

*Model:* Kitchen labels

*Description:* Self-adhesive plastic, magnetic tape or tie-on for freezer use are made up to order.

*Price:* Free

*Model:* Playing cards

*Description:* Conventional playing cards with embossed Moon characters.

*Price:* £1.09 (concession price: £0.73)

*Model:* Moon Unilock

*Description:* An educational device primarily intended for teaching blind persons the Moon characters. The plastic pieces are designed so that they can be joined together by pressing the projection on one piece into the slot on another.

**Possum Controls Ltd**, Middlegreen Trading Estate, Langley, Berkshire SL3 6BX. Tel: 0753-79234.

*Model:* Moon-writer

*Description:* Mechanical Moon-writer. See Tobin, M.J. & Hill, E., *A Moon-writer*, New Beacon, July 1984.

*Price:* circa £300

**Royal National Institute for the Blind**, 224 Great Portland Street, London W1N 6AA. Tel: 01-388 1266.

*Model:* Talking disc

*Description:* A plastic device to enable a sighted person to communicate with a deaf-blind person. The disc is embossed with braille and Moon characters, and the ordinary letters are printed in black. Numbers and punctuation are not included. The Moon characters are embossed much lower than normal Moon. Size 140 mm in diameter.

*Price:* £1.96 (concession price: free)

## Appendix 2 Suppliers of Moon Literature

**Moon Branch**, RNIB, Holmesdale Road, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0BA. Tel: 07372-46333. Produces about 22 new books and 12 magazine titles per year. Also offers transcription service for personal letters and knitting patterns.

**National Library for the Blind**, Cromwell Road, Bredbury, Stockport SK6 2SG. Tel: 061-494 0217. Free loan from a stock of 2500 Moon book titles and lends about 14,000 volumes per year.

**National Deaf-Blind Helpers' League**, 18 Rainbow Court, Paston Ridings, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire PE4 6UP. Tel: 0733-73511. 'Moon Rainbow' published quarterly.

**Torch Trust for the Blind**, Torch House, Hallaton, Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 8UJ. Tel: 085889 301. 'The Torch' (an evangelical magazine) published bi-monthly, and 'Our Mag' (a devotional magazine for the deaf-blind) published quarterly.