



The Royal Ballet company has had to step in to help pay a frozen pensioner's health bills Photo: David

Royal Ballet help to save sight of expat pensioner

The company's benevolent fund paid for eye operations for ex-dancer trying to survive on a frozen pension

By Ava Hubble 12:46PM BST 29 Jul 2015

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The Royal Ballet has come to the aid of expat frozen pensioner, providing him with over £2,000 to cover the cost of his cataract operations. The first operation is scheduled to be carried out this week.

David Harding, 82, was a soloist with the company in the 1950s. He has been living in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, North Borneo for the last 10 years.

“I am so grateful to the company,” he says. “I can’t see much at all at the moment.”

But in between expressing his gratitude to the company, David castigates the British Government. He is among the half million or so expats who are penalised by the government's long-standing policy of not granting the annual pension increase to Britons who retire to certain (mostly non EU nations). Their pensions are frozen at the rate given at the time they leave the UK. David's pension has been frozen for the last 10 years at the 2005 rate of about £82 a week. That is roughly a third less than the current rate.

From Cornwall, David left the UK for a trip through Asia in 2005. It was to finish with a visit to a cousin in New Zealand. But soon after he arrived in Borneo he collapsed and was rushed to hospital. Spinal stenosis was diagnosed. Surgery was ordered and during follow up treatment he decided to remain in Borneo. "I was flat on my back. I couldn't walk, sit or stand," he explains. But by this time the tour guide who had met him at the airport, Danson Kandaung, had become a close friend and carer. "He's highly religious," reports David. "He still does almost everything for me 24/7. He's the son I never had."



David Harding performing (left) with the Royal Ballet in his heyday

During the last 10 years, David, with the help of his carer, has survived nine major operations and two heart attacks. But financial affairs are an increasing worry. His savings are long gone and

because of the frozen pensions policy and inflation, the buying power of his pension dwindles, year by year.

In 1952, after completing his National Service, he joined the Sadler's Wells ballet company and later became a soloist with The Royal Ballet. He went on to become a principal at the London Palladium.

Years later, he and his business partner, Tommy Shaw, produced and presented cabarets at many London clubs, including Edmundo Ros's Club in Regent Street and the Don Juan in Grosvenor Street. They also produced shows at night spots in Marbella and Barcelona and ran a costume-dress business with the help of fashion designer, Norman Hartnell's ex-cutter, Mrs King.

It was following his mother's death in 2005, that he decided to take a trip little suspecting that he would fall ill and become incapacitated. He says that today he is reasonably mobile.

"Things would be okay. I could manage financially if it wasn't for the wretched frozen pension policy. It's wrong. It's unfair. It's discriminatory."

He argues that he paid into the National Insurance Scheme – just like everybody else - yet he and fellow victims of the policy are subject to blatant discrimination. He has complained in letters to both Prince Charles and David Cameron. "I've been reduced to go begging to charities," he says. "I am ashamed."

He admires Jim Tilley, a board member of the International Consortium of British Pensions ([facebook.com/pensionjustice](https://www.facebook.com/pensionjustice)), which has long campaigned against the policy. Tilley has often pointed out that expats are penalised despite the fact that they are arguably saving the UK billions of pounds each year in health and aged care costs. The consortium offered to pay David's fare back to England. He says he was grateful but refused because he fears becoming a burden to his friends.

He doesn't want to leave his devoted carer, Danson. He also cheered up immensely at the prospect that his imminent eye operations will be successful. That will mean he will be even more mobile, he will be able to read and do so many other things. "Wonderful, wonderful," he said.

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