

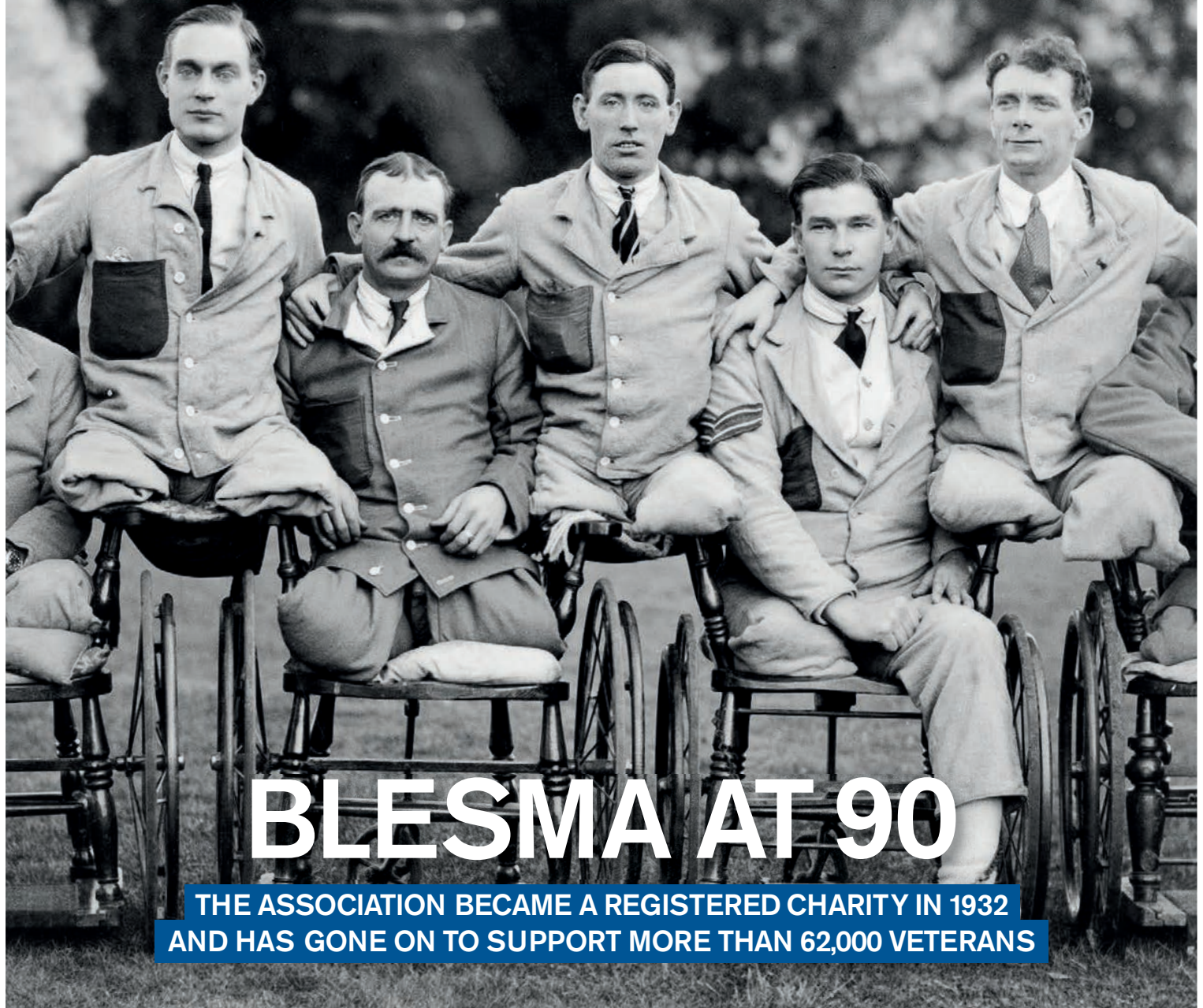
# Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Spring 2022

**PLUS:**  
REMEMBERING  
THE FALKLANDS  
MOROCCO BY BUGGY  
THE CRAFT OF BEER  
ACTIVITIES IN 2022  
MAKING GENERATION R

**NEW-LOOK  
BULLETIN INSIDE**

# 1932-2022



## BLESMA AT 90

THE ASSOCIATION BECAME A REGISTERED CHARITY IN 1932  
AND HAS GONE ON TO SUPPORT MORE THAN 62,000 VETERANS

## Veteran Luke Sinnott balances training, work and family life whilst supported by the Genium X3

**Luke Sinnott, a father of three and a world class Long Jumper from The New Forest, was an army Captain from 2006 and whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2010, was hit by an explosion resulting in him losing both of his legs above the knee as well as having severe damage to his right arm. After what Luke describes as “nine long dark weeks” in the hospital and two weeks in a coma, he moved to Headley Court where he spent three years focusing on his rehabilitation.**

Luke’s recovery focused around sailing after the World Sailing Programme contacted him. “I have always been an active and busy person, there was always sports gear in my car boot from Cricket to Golf”, said Luke. “I did sail semi-professionally from a young age so when the World Sailing Programme got in contact with me I was eager to get involved.” Luke and his wife went to Cowes on the Isle of Wight, to sail for the first time since his amputation. “This will stick in my mind forever”, said Luke; “It was my first taste of freedom and the first time I didn’t feel broken or disabled anymore.” Luke had an obvious talent for sailing and went on to compete in World championships having the opportunity to travel whilst he worked.

In 2014, Luke was fitted with two Ottobock Genium X3 microprocessor knees ; “As soon as I put the Genium X3 on, it felt like I was floating in comparison to my previous knee, it was lighter and felt a lot more natural when I was walking”, said Luke. Wanting to focus more of his time on his young family, Luke made the decision to change his career path from sailing to long jump. After having expressed this to his Prosthetist at Dorset Orthopaedic, Steve Cox, they worked together to perfect Luke’s running. By the end of 2015 Luke was competing and in 2017 was called up by Paralympics GB to compete in the London World Championships.

“I was within the top five in the world consistently; the highlight of my career so far was in 2021 when I received my first Bronze medal in the European Championship in Poland”, explains Luke.



Luke continues to push himself balancing training whilst working as Project Manager. His next goal is to compete in the World Championships in 2023 in Japan, and designing his own brackets to ensure the foundation of his running blades is perfect. “If I was to give advice to anyone who is an early amputee I would say to ensure you always have a realistic goal to work towards”, said Luke. “When recovering, you have to go through a lot of hard work and some discomfort, so it is important to have that goal in mind. There are so many opportunities out there for amputees now. I would also add to focus on getting the right ankle and foot depending on your style of walking. I wear the Ottobock Triton Side Flex and it is great to have the ability to walk on uneven ground and walk at the pace I like”.

6 years on from Luke’s original Genium X3 fitting, he had reached the point where the warranty on his legs had expired. At this stage Luke entered into the refitting process where he upgraded to newer versions of the Genium X3. “One of my favourite updates of the Genium X3 was that I could now use the Cockpit app to change my knee modes”, explains Luke. “I travel around London on my electric scooter and being able to easily lock my knee makes it so much easier to travel up and down slopes.”

If you have your prostheses for 6 years or more, you could be due a refitting. Contact your limb centre to discuss your own personal requirements and start the process for renewed prostheses.

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THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

1932 – 2022



Photography: Andy Bate, imagecomms



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Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

## Making Generation R returns in the flesh after its virtual success

LONDON'S SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE PLAYS HOST TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2022 AS 16 NEW MGR SUCCESS STORIES PREPARE TO TELL THE WORLD ABOUT THEIR INCREDIBLE LIVES

**M**aking Generation R (MGR) graduates took to the stage in February for their in-person rehearsals for the first time since the pandemic forced the project online two years ago. The 16-strong team, who come from across the UK, performed an electrifying and moving medley of their stories at the Sadler's Wells Theatre in London to showcase the inspirational workshops that they will soon be running in schools and for emergency services.

Blesma's unique project, which uses theatre experts and professional storytellers to train Members to develop and deliver 15-minute life stories, is now in its seventh year and has reached more than 125,000 people. It continued during the pandemic, with online and virtual sessions providing vital support to isolated and lonely schoolchildren through the pandemic's bleak months.

"MGR is an uplifting project and it was great that we were able to

**Above: Theatre coach Phil Peacock helps Member Jason Burns finesse his story in the hours leading up to showtime**

stage it in person this year," said Jon Bryant, Blesma's Chief Executive. "It was good to be back together as that mutual support is a key element of the Association.

"Our Members face many tough challenges, but time and again they want to give back to society. Being a part of MGR takes hard work and sacrifice, but it is rewarding for the Members as well as for all the people who hear their stories and take part in the workshops."

# Welcome



**Above: Members share their MGR experiences with family and friends**



**Lisa Johnston: "I hope my story will help children through tough times"**

Alice Driver, founder of innovative training company The Drive Project which delivers MGR, added: "There are a lot of ingredients that go into making MGR such a success. Fundamental to that is the relationship between Blesma and its Members. The programme began in 2016 and has now trained 110 Members, but every Member – and every story – is different. The feedback is always incredible, which is a tribute to all the Members who have taken part."

The latest group of graduates, who represented all services across a wide

age range, collaborated on stage at the Sadler's Wells Theatre as a final rehearsal for their new roles running workshops to build resilience.

Former Army medic Lisa Johnston (above) told how a military training injury left her with agonising pain in her left leg.

"I was in a very dark place. I was a monster mummy and a spectator to life," said Lisa, a mother of three, who served two tours of duty in Iraq during a 15-year career. "I don't know how we managed to get through that period. I eventually had my leg



Welcome to the Spring issue of *Blesma Magazine and Members' Bulletin*; a combined publication that includes the latest news from across the Association as well as information, advice and updates. We intend to publish four editions this year so our news

reaches Members and readers at the same time.

There are other 'firsts' in this issue. With the easing of Covid restrictions, Making Generation R was able to hold its first live theatre event since the start of the pandemic, whilst Blesma's first overseas activity since March 2020 took place recently in La Plagne. We now hope to be able to run a full programme of live and face-to-face activities this year. You will find details of what's on offer in this issue of the magazine and online.

We send our warmest congratulations to Brian Chenier, Shona Brownlee, Stuart Robinson, Jaco van Gass and David Dent on the award of their MBEs in the New Year's Honours List. Congratulations also to Member Martin Hewitt and his expedition partner Louis Rudd who not only reached the South Pole unsupported, but then went on to climb Antarctica's highest peak. Martin is well on his way to conquering the highest mountain on every continent.

In this issue we reflect on 90 years of Blesma history, campaigning and unique support. We also examine the Falklands War and its impact as we approach the 40th anniversary of the campaign. We thank BSO Mike Downes for his outstanding contribution to the Association since 2007, and Blesma Members tell us about the complexities of designing their own beer. We also hear how five Members were able to escape Covid and rally their way across the Moroccan desert with a team from Future Terrain.

In the *Bulletin*, Members and families dealing with the loss of use of a limb are invited to take part in the second of Blesma's groundbreaking research studies. There is updated information on benefits and social care, as well as news from the Branches and Outreach Officers. Enjoy the issue.

**Jon Bryant**  
Chief Executive





Behind the scenes as MGR 2022 takes to the stage

amputated. I'm now in training for the Invictus Games in April – I'll be competing in nine events and am looking forward to crossing the finish line and hugging my children, which I couldn't have imagined doing during the dark moments.

"Getting up on stage was a bit daunting, but it was a great way to finish our training and I can't wait to get into schools. I hope my story will inspire children and help them through tough times."

### **I WANT MY STORY TO INSPIRE**

Former soldier Dan Richards survived a tour of duty in Afghanistan before he was involved in a motorbike accident that led to his right arm being amputated. He was later medically discharged from the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery.

"The carpet of my life was dragged from under me. I'd wanted to be a soldier since

I was eight years old. I had served for 10 years and was used to living life at 100mph, but after the accident I went from being independent to living back at home with my parents," he said. "At my lowest point I had sent off 327 job applications without getting anything back. With just pennies to my name I thought about taking my life."

Dan, from London, recovered by immersing himself in endurance cycling. Social media posts of him riding across France then led to him getting an agent and a role presenting the Channel 4 reality show *Naked Beach*.

"Bad things happen but they don't have to stay bad for a long time. Youngsters face adversity in many ways but I want to show them that the voices that might be telling them they can't do things are lying," he added. "I want my story to help and inspire them."

The nation's schoolchildren have been massively affected by the Covid pandemic, with charities warning that 100,000 have fallen off school registers, whilst research suggests that 95 per cent of school staff have witnessed increased distress across pupils of all school ages.

After the Making Generation R showcase, Members, their families, staff and sponsors were invited to enjoy a reception at the theatre, where 67-year-old RAF veteran and course graduate Ted Hill summed up the team's togetherness after the six-day course: "The Association is a family and Making Generation R is a family within that family. Every Blesma Member has a story to tell."

*For more information on the story of Making Generation R and the spin-off podcast The Resilience Sessions visit [www.blesma.org/making-generation-r](http://www.blesma.org/making-generation-r)*

Luke turns 50 this year and is celebrating with a year of cycling



## Luke takes to the Tarmac to show his appreciation

**R**AF veteran Luke Delahunty, who was paralysed from the chest down in a road traffic accident in 1996, has planned an epic year of cycling in support of Blesma and The Back-Up Trust.

“After my rehabilitation, Blesma helped me in a number of ways – with grants that made my home life easier and activities such as photography, scuba diving and hand cycling,” said the 49 year old. “The Back-Up Trust helped me adjust to life as a paraplegic and showed me it was still possible to be active. This year, I aim to give back to the

two organisations as they have had a hugely positive impact on me physically, mentally, socially and psychologically.”

Luke has planned six cycling events that will clock up 5,000 miles. His first event will be RideLondon in May, followed by the Race Across America with an all-Blesma team in June. Luke will finish the year cycling from Essex to the Menin Gate in Ypres.

To support Luke, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/f/epic-year-of-cycling-for-two-amazing-charities>

## IT'S GAME ON FOR E-SPORTS TEAM

MARCH MARKS THE CREATION OF Blesma's E-sports competitive video gaming team. If you love video games, now is a great time to sign up to Blesma's Discord online gaming community where you can find *Call of Duty* training sessions and matches against gamers representing the RBL, the Wounded Warrior Project and more. Most importantly, it's another way to meet fellow Members.

For more information, get in touch with the Activities Team on 020 8548 7094



## News in brief



### HAMMERS ARE HAPPY TO HELP ONCE AGAIN

West Ham United Football Club has shown its continued support to Blesma by raising funds and awareness for the Association at a Premier League match. During the visit of Newcastle United to the London Stadium on Saturday 19 February, football fans pulled together to raise more than £830 for the Association.



### SHONA SHINES AS FIRST BRIT MEDALLIST

Shona Brownlee has won Britain's first-ever women's alpine sit-ski medals. Competing at the World Para Snowsports Championships in Lillehammer in January, Shona won a silver medal in the Sitting Super-G and bronze in the Sitting Super Combined events.

Elsewhere Shona, along with fellow Blesma Members Alex Slegg, Dan Sheen, Jon-Allan Butterworth, Scott Meenagh, Steve Arnold and Owen Pick were chosen to compete in this year's Winter Paralympic Games in Beijing.



# Mike Downes

**B**lesma Support Officer Mike Downes has been supporting Members in the North West since October 2007. He joined the Army in 1972 as a Signaller before a spell as a police officer on Merseyside. Mike re-joined the Forces in the Royal Army Pay Corps in 1977, commissioned in 1990, and served as a Paymaster until his retirement in 1995. He retires from Blesma in March for a new start in St Lucia.

### **You joined Blesma 14 years ago. What attracted you to the Association back then?**

I was running a ten-pin bowling centre when I saw a job advertised for a Blesma Area Welfare Officer. I had been unhappy at work for a while but didn't think I had enough welfare experience. Friends said I had built the skills as a Paymaster in the Army, so I applied.

### **You must have seen many changes over the years...**

There were only six Area Welfare Officers back then. I was also responsible for Members in North Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Association has expanded every department since then – we didn't have an Activities Team when I started, and that has been great for the Members.

### **What achievement are you most proud of?**

I had a phone call from the BBC looking for Members who would benefit from the *DIY SOS Big Build* project in Manchester. Triple amputee Lamin Manneh, who was one of the first casualties of the war in Afghanistan, didn't live in a particularly nice area. He told me how his wife would be sweeping the pathway and youths would throw eggs at her. I put him forward for the programme and he was accepted.

### **What other memories will you look back on fondly?**

As a Support Officer, you can get a little blasé about all the life-changing grants and awards you are involved in. The Association helps someone every day, but to individual Members that grant or award can be the first time someone has helped them directly.

### **Can you think of a specific example?**

I remember visiting one Widow in Liverpool. She was huddled up with a coat and blanket wrapped around her. She was freezing and couldn't turn her electric fireplace on as the switch was underneath, so if she tried to do it herself she would get stuck on the floor. She would have to wait for a family member to turn it on. I was able to tell her daughter to order a new fireplace with a remote control and Blesma would reimburse her. The family wrote me a letter saying it was life-changing for their mum to no longer worry about being cold.

### **But parts of the role have been difficult...**

It is always difficult to learn of the death of a Member. We build close connections so it can hit you hard, especially when you've recently visited or supported them. The Association is unique in that it continues to support its Widow Members for life.

### **You are retiring in March. What are your plans?**

My partner, Jackie, and I will be moving to St Lucia. It's always been our dream to move to a beautiful house on a paradise island where the cost of living is half that of the UK. I'm fit and healthy, so I'm not retiring because I can't do the job but because it's the right time. All the stars are aligned.

### **What are you going to miss the most?**

My beloved Liverpool as well as my children and grandchildren, but they will come over to visit us and we will have better quality time together in St Lucia.

### **Any last thoughts on your time with the Association?**

The nature of the BSO role has given me countless sleepless nights as well as the most rewarding moments of my career. Making decisions that can change people's lives is a wonderful feeling, and the nature of Blesma's work means this can happen almost daily. I know this sentiment is shared amongst my colleagues and long may it continue. It has been a pleasure working for such a fantastic organisation. I wish everyone at Blesma the very best for the future.



MAKING DECISIONS THAT CAN CHANGE PEOPLE'S LIVES IS A WONDERFUL FEELING, AND THE NATURE OF BLESMA'S WORK MEANS THIS CAN HAPPEN DAILY





## Charities team up to fund a prosthetic in Portugal

**T**hanks to a collaboration between Blesma and the Royal Marines Charity, veteran David Pither has a new prosthetic which has enabled him to get back to doing what he loves – running a dog rescue centre in Portugal.

David left the Royal Marines in 1987 for a 26-year career in the Avon and Somerset Police. During the latter part of his time in the police, he suffered from several medical problems, including deep vein thrombosis.

David moved to Portugal in 2016, where he underwent two unsuccessful operations before his left leg was amputated below the knee in 2019.

“It took two years to get a prosthetic due to the pandemic,” said David, “and when it finally came I really struggled with it because it was so heavy. I’d use knee pads to scoot around on my hands and knees.”

In the end, David reached out to the Royal Marines Charity who, in turn, reached out to Blesma. It was agreed that the two charities would fund the new prosthetic. Now David is back to running a dog rescue centre in Portugal where he looks after up to 25 dogs at any one time.

“The prosthetic has allowed me to be independent again with the dogs. Thanks to both charities I have my life back.”

## BLESMA CELEBRATES 90 YEARS AS A CHARITY

THIS YEAR MARKS NINE decades since Blesma first gained national charitable status back in 1932. The Association will commemorate its anniversary year with a wide range of celebrations in the coming months, and there are plenty of ways to get involved.

Whether you are a star baker, an avid runner, or are looking for some inspiration to try something new, there are all sorts of opportunities for you to join Team Blesma.

If you would like to take on a new challenge for 2022,



have some fun, and raise some funds for Blesma at the same time, why not check out the Association’s 2022 Fundraising Calendar?

You can find it under the Publications section of the Blesma website at [www.blesma.org/news-media/publications](http://www.blesma.org/news-media/publications)



## OWEN VOWS TO ENJOY SECOND PARALYMPICS

AMPUTEE AFGHANISTAN VETERAN Owen Pick is representing Great Britain at the Winter Paralympics once again. The 30 year old was set to compete in the Banked Slalom and Boardercross events at the Beijing Games as this issue of the magazine went to press.

“After my results in South Korea in 2018 I went into the following season half-hearted,” said the former Royal Anglian Regiment soldier, who had his right leg amputated 18 months after being blown up in Afghanistan. “I worked on my mental game after that and in 2019 my results went through the roof.”

“Going into the Beijing Games, I feel calm. I’ve experienced the Games before and know how it feels to not do so well. This time my aim is to enjoy it. When I do, the results speak for themselves.”

Owen first stepped on a snowboard 10 years ago on a Blesma trip to Colorado. The Association has supported his snowboarding endeavours ever since, most recently funding his recent season as he trained for the Games.

“I wouldn’t be snowboarding if I didn’t have funding from Blesma. There have been seasons when the Association has pretty much funded everything. When the pandemic hit, I couldn’t work my summer job, which is how I pay for the following season. When the travel ban was lifted and training restarted, Blesma stepped in to support me. Without the funding, I wouldn’t have been able to get the points necessary to go to the Games.”

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# BLESMA'S MEMBERS

IT TAKES DEDICATION AND SELFLESS SERVICE TO BE RECOGNISED IN THE QUEEN'S HONOURS LIST. TIME FOR BLESMA'S NEW MBEs TO TAKE A BOW

**N**ew Year's Eve was a very special celebration for Blesma's Support Officer (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier (pictured below) who was able to count down to 2022 with three new letters to his name. The Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) accolade came in recognition of his service to Blesma Members and the wider amputee veterans community, and for his efforts to improve provision and facilities for them.

"It was a wonderful surprise and a very big shock to be nominated," says Brian. "I am incredibly proud of the work I do at Blesma, but for someone to take the time to recognise it and recommend me is very special."

Brian and his wife, Sonja, had kept the nomination a secret ever since a bulky white envelope bearing a parliamentary crest landed on their doormat in late November. "I had no idea what it was, but it looked very official!" says Brian, who has been the charity's Prosthetics Support Officer for almost nine years. "I didn't think it was genuine at first and thought someone was having a laugh. Even after Sonja read and confirmed it I was still a bit stunned! You have to reply to say you are happy to be put forward and then you are sworn to secrecy even though you hear nothing further and only find out when the list is announced on New Year's Eve."

Brian and his family were at a New Year's Eve party with close friends when the Queen's New Year Honours List was released at 10.30pm. "I scrolled down to the MBEs and there was Ashley Banjo, the dancer, at the top. A few down from him was my name which meant that I could share the news with friends and family," he says.

### FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

Brian, who was in the Army for 27 years, plays an integral role in the full sweep of Blesma's prosthetics service; from handling individual grants and equipment funding through to shaping NHS policy and keeping pace with new technology that might potentially be beneficial to Members.

"My first exposure to Blesma was actually through my dad. Before I started working for the Association I was aware of the fantastic support it provided as my dad benefited because he was a veteran. When he became a Member I witnessed the help that he and my mum received from the charity as they navigated an often difficult landscape," says Brian. "When he had his leg amputated in 2007 he needed a lot of advice and support with things like moving house and claiming the right benefits. Blesma also enabled him and my mother to take respite breaks.

"I've always been mindful that becoming an amputee must be daunting and scary for veterans



**I AM VERY PROUD OF THE WORK I DO, BUT FOR SOMEONE TO TAKE THE TIME TO RECOGNISE IT AND RECOMMEND ME IS VERY SPECIAL**



and their families. They have no experience of what to do, so part of my job is to reduce some of the stress and anxiety of living with limb loss. That includes helping them understand the various NHS processes, what's available, what to ask for and what is within the realms of possibility. I see my role as being almost a translator for them as they deal with a completely new healthcare system. But my job also involves helping NHS providers, through the Limb Centres, understand what new technology might be available and why it might be relevant to some of our Members through enhanced prosthetic funding," he says.

Brian, along with the BSOs and other Blesma staff, works through the often complex processes involved in

NHS prosthetic provision, representing Members' needs and advocating for them. The value of his work on the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel – assessing new technology and researching evidence of its benefit to Members – was highlighted by the adoption of microprocessor controlled knees, which have proved transformative for many. Blesma was part of a lobby group that built the evidence-based case that opened up access for non-Service attributable veterans and civilians.

#### OFFERING AN OBJECTIVE STANDPOINT

Brian's latest investigations focus on advanced socket technology – the development of new materials and techniques to improve the comfort and function between the socket and the residual limb.

"I am always looking at ways to get the right policies in place with the right funding streams so that we can enhance the system for our Members. But our work doesn't stop with the veterans' community as it leads to better services for people with limb loss throughout society. For the vast majority of our Members, the service they get from the NHS is perfectly acceptable, but as with any industry things can break down. Policies or procedures don't always meet the expectations of the patient – that's where I get involved. I advocate for our Members but also help NHS staff communicate back to our Members. I have an objective standpoint.

Far left and above: a miniature medal is to be worn with civilian clothing when attending events such as formal dinners. Brian will receive his 'real' medal in a formal ceremony later in the year

# Newsfeed



## SHONA BROWNLEE

"I feel incredibly humbled and honoured to be awarded an MBE," said Shona. "It was an incredible way to end an amazing year."



## STUART ROBINSON

Stuart was recognised for his services to wheelchair rugby after GB won gold at the 2020 Paralympic Games in Tokyo.



## JACO VAN GASS

Jaco van Gass, who competed at the 2020 Paralympic Games, received his award for services to cycling.



## DAVID DENT

David has been recognised with an MBE for services to veterans, students and people with disabilities.



**I AM VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING DISABLED VETERANS LIVE THEIR BEST LIFE. WORKING FOR BLESMA ALLOWS ME TO ACHIEVE THAT**

"Blesma was born out of campaigning and that legacy lives on in what we do today. I am passionate about helping our disabled veterans live their best life, and working for Blesma allows me to achieve that."

Brian is currently contributing to the NHS England Prosthetics Review and is liaising with policy makers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"We achieve a lot in Blesma and we should be proud of that," he adds, "but my inspiration comes from the veterans and Service personnel I meet through my work. Their resilience and determination – and often their humour – is amazing. I also work with a great team at Blesma and many others in the NHS, MoD and other charities. This award is as much for them as it is for me."

### THE ASSOCIATION'S AWESOME FOURSOME

Brian wasn't the only person affiliated with Blesma who was recognised in the Queen's New Year Honours List. Four Members; Paralympians Stu Robinson and Jaco van Gass, alongside Scottish veteran David Dent and skiing para-athlete Shona Brownlee were awarded the MBE.

Jaco van Gass, who competed at the 2020 Paralympic Games, received the award for services to cycling, having won two golds and one bronze at the 2020 Games.

"Having represented Great Britain on the battlefield during my time in service then having the opportunity

once more on the sporting field was truly an honour. To receive an MBE is more than I could have dreamed of," says Jaco. Stuart Robinson, who also competed at the 2020 Games, was recognised for services to wheelchair rugby after he and his teammates returned home with the gold medal. "The whole team can't quite comprehend what we have all achieved. It's put a massive smile on all our faces," says Stuart.

David Dent became the third generation in his family to receive an MBE as he was recognised for services to veterans, students and people with disabilities. Since leaving the Army in 2000 due to injury, David has been an advocate for people with disability, making sure they aren't left behind and can be included in sports. He is an ambassador and spokesperson for Help for Heroes and is an Honorary Professor at Stirling University where he lectures and delivers classes on management and gives talks on diversity and inclusion.

Senior Aircraftwoman Shona Brownlee was nominated while serving as a musician in the Central Band of the RAF. Shona is now involved with the Armed Forces Para Snowsport Team through the Government's Battle Back programme after suffering an injury during a military exercise which resulted in a below-knee amputation.

She is now the number one ranked female mono-skier in Great Britain and is ranked ninth in the world.



Blesma man and Team BRIT driver Paul Fullick

# Blesma newcomer Paul is Team BRIT's latest signing

**P**aul Fullick is the latest driver to sign for Team BRIT, which aims to be the first all-disabled team to race in the 24 Hours of Le Mans. Paul was injured nine months ago in a road traffic accident which led to the amputation of his right leg below the knee.

When doctors gave Paul the devastating news that he wouldn't ride his beloved motorbike again, Paul vowed not to let his life-changing injury stop his passion for motorsport.

"I was lying in my hospital bed sketching engineering solutions to adapt my bike when Blesma Support Officer Pat Donnachie came to visit me," said the 40 year old from Southampton. "He shared with me all the different things Blesma Members were achieving post-injury and told me all about Team Brit."

Paul contacted the racing outfit thinking they might be able to answer his engineering questions. But having completed the Taffy Dakar motorcycle race in 2018, as well as gaining several safety qualifications, and

teaching track and road skills, Paul already had the perfect résumé to join Team Brit.

Now he is preparing for his first racing season in the Britcar Championships as part of Team BRIT's rookie development programme. He will be driving the team's BMW 118i, which is fitted with innovative hand controls.



"It feels fantastic to be part of the team. It's brilliant to be back in a team environment where there is a job to do and there is risk and reward. Motorsport is the only thing that has come close to the military lifestyle that I miss.

"I'm back to driving a regular manual car and was back on a road bike in just one week, but racing is a different league. You need that fine motor control, so I've been practising to race with my prosthetic and the hand controls.

"I'm also taking the surgeon's advice that I need to let my leg heal first before I go flying around a track. I'm excited to see where this season goes and am looking forward to building up to the next challenge."



## GROOM STARED AT "FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS"

An Army veteran whose leg was shattered after he was blown up in Afghanistan was able to walk his bride down the aisle in emotional scenes.

Ben Bainbridge was serving with The 2nd Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment in Afghanistan in 2010 when a hidden bomb was detonated by a remote device. Ben's injuries (he was 18 at the time) were so extensive that when he was treated by specialist medics, he had only two pints of blood left in his body. He survived against the odds, but the severe nerve damage to his left leg meant Ben's foot was paralysed.

A customised leg brace enabled him to begin enjoying life back on both feet and in January Ben, now 30, fulfilled a very special wish – to be able to walk his fiancée Steph Dunn down the aisle.

The couple married at St Michael's Church, Skidby, with their daughters Ellie and Ariel as bridesmaids.

"Usually, my ankle is hypersensitive but this leg brace feels comfortable as it fits on the outside of my shoes and goes up to my calf so stops my foot from flopping," said Ben, who also said he had been looking forward to walking up the aisle on his wedding day and having people stare at him "for all the right reasons".

Steph said: "When Ben stood up and walked for the first time in the new leg brace, I cried, it felt so amazing. It was overwhelming because just being able to walk has been a daily struggle for him for 11 years."

# Obituaries

## *Those we have lost*

### Those who have passed away

*May they rest in peace*

<b>BARBER M</b>	Army (REME)	HQ	Not Known
<b>BLOOD I I</b>		HQ	19/10/2021
<b>BROWN A</b>	Army (RE)	HQ	23/01/2022
<b>CALLIS R</b>		HQ	18/10/2021
<b>CHAMPKEN G</b>	Army (Grenadier Guards)	HQ	14/01/2022
<b>CLARK M</b>	Army (RE)	HQ	Not Known
<b>COLLINS B</b>	Army	HQ	09/12/21
<b>COTTLE D</b>	RAF	HQ	01/12/21
<b>COWAN J K</b>	RN	Portsmouth	12/10/2021
<b>EASTER S</b>	Army (RM)	HQ	02/06/2021
<b>EVANS E</b>	Royal Navy	HQ	08/01/2022
<b>FOX F</b>	Army	HQ	Not Known
<b>FRAZER S</b>	Army (SAS and QOR)	HQ	July 2021
<b>FROST B</b>	Army	HQ	01/12/21
<b>GASTON I</b>		HQ	02/01/2022
<b>GIBBS F</b>	Army	HQ	Not Known
<b>GREEN I R</b>	RN	HQ	17/10/2021
<b>GREEN T</b>		HQ	12/09/2021
<b>HOPKINSON J</b>	Army (PoW Reg)	HQ	15/12/21
<b>HOPKINSON W R</b>	Army (Somerset LI)	HQ (Hastings)	19/10/2021
<b>HUDSON R</b>	Army (RA)	HQ	April 2021
<b>LEE M</b>		Notts	09/01/2022
<b>LINCOLN J</b>	Army REME	HQ	16/02/2022
<b>LLOYD J B</b>	Army (RCT)	HQ	02/10/2021
<b>MORE E</b>		HQ	14/01/2022
<b>MORRIS M</b>	Land Army	HQ	September 2021
<b>MYERS L J</b>		HQ	11/10/2021
<b>PENFOLD R</b>	Army (Royal Hussars)	HQ	Not Known
<b>POTTER E</b>		HQ	Not Known
<b>RAWLINS L</b>		HQ	17/01/2021
<b>RIVENBERG T A</b>	RM	HQ	23/10/2021
<b>ROBYNSON</b>	L&SE		Not Known
<b>ROTHWELL M J</b>	Army (Sherwood Foresters)	HQ	Not Known
<b>SCORGIE M</b>		HQ	September/October 2021
<b>SMITHERS R P</b>	Army (Grenadier Guards)	HQ	22/10/2021
<b>STONES R</b>	Army (Scots Guards)	HQ	11/01/2022
<b>THOMAS G</b>	RN	HQ	28/09/2021
<b>THOMSON M</b>		HQ	19/10/2021
<b>TOWNSEND N</b>	Army (REME)	HQ	22/10/2021
<b>VICKER B</b>	Army	HQ	01/12/2021
<b>WILSON M</b>	Army (WRAC)	HQ	21/06/2021
<b>WOOD A</b>		HQ	17/01/2022

*Not, how did they die, but how did they live?  
Not, what did they gain, but what did they give?*



## Double success puts first-ever Grand Slam one challenge away

**B**lesma Member Martin Hewitt (above right) got his year off to the best possible start with an epic double adventure. The former paratrooper battled extreme conditions on an unsupported trek to the South Pole before summiting Mount Vinson as part of his attempt to become the first disabled person to conquer the tallest peaks on all seven continents and reach both the North and South Pole.

Martin is now just one mountain summit – Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia – away from achieving his goal of becoming the first person in history to complete the Adaptive Grand Slam – an adaptation of the infamous Explorers Grand Slam.

Martin unfurled a Blesma banner at the South Pole and thanked the Association, his family and supporters. He then waited for a weather window before tackling the 4,892m Mt Vinson on the Antarctic Peninsula with expedition partner Louis Rudd.

“It has been an incredible effort and the support of Louis, the team and our families

has been fantastic,” said Martin, whose right arm was paralysed while on his third tour of duty in Afghanistan with the Parachute Regiment in 2007. “I felt overwhelming gratitude and, if I’m honest, relief when the South Pole was in sight. Expeditions down here are hard and uncomfortable.”

Martin, 39, battled through vicious headwinds and -43°C wind chill to ski 650km over 50 days and became the first disabled person to trek from the edge of



Martin en route to the South Pole

Antarctica to the South Pole unsupported and unassisted. But the attempt was almost derailed when Martin suffered an Achilles tendon injury and had to pause the expedition before recovering.

Martin, from Cheshire, is the founder of the Adaptive Grand Slam, which organises and runs physical challenges for members of the disabled community. “I was slightly disappointed with my injury but happy that I still managed more than 400 miles pulling my own kit with one arm,” he said. “We had many tough moments in the first 12 days. The weather was horrendous, the sleds heavy, and there was a lot of uphill climbing. We kept breaking our goals down into small chunks, such as getting to the next degree on the map.

“But after 14 days or so, I started to get used to the environment and everything began to improve – although it was still incredibly hard. There’s no such thing as an easy day on an unsupported expedition in Antarctica!”

Martin used up in the region of 8,000 calories a day as he took on the gruelling challenge, and was fuelled by a diet of porridge, chocolate, nuts, raisins, energy bars and cheese. Former Royal Marine Commando and SAS soldier Louis revealed that the pair had to constantly check for frostbite as they covered up to 12 miles each day. He had to help check Martin’s paralysed arm as the pain would not have registered on his team-mate.

“Louis has a wealth of experience in Antarctica and I’ve learned an enormous amount from him,” said Martin. “We are delighted to have completed the challenge. Blesma has played an instrumental role in the challenge and has been fantastic from the start. The Association has contributed towards some of my big expeditions over the years.”



It’s all smiles for Martin (left) and Louis

# Activities

THE ASSOCIATION IS OFFERING THE CHANCE TO TRY ALL SORTS OF ACTIVITIES THIS YEAR AFTER COVID RAVAGED THE CALENDAR FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS. WHAT DO YOU FANCY?

**F**rom fishing to photography, from cycling to watercolour painting, from York to New York, Blesma is giving Members the chance to try lots of activities this year – all for free! **Apply now on the Blesma Connects app, via the website at [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities) or by emailing [eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org)**

## NRA ADAPTIVE SHOOTING

**Location:** Bisley, Surrey

**Date:** 23 June

**Application deadline:** 01 April



This great competition is open to any disabled ex-Service personnel. A fantastic chance to re-live and redefine the skills learnt on those fun days on the ranges.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member.

## CYCLING, COFFEE, CAKE AND CASTLES

**Location:** South Wales

**Date:** 07-11 July

**Application deadline:** 01 April

This tour is for hand cycles and recumbents only. It will run from Thursday evening until Monday morning and will include three rides. The rides will allow time for coffee (and cake!) as well as a good chance to visit some notable landmarks of South Wales. You should be able to cycle 20 miles comfortably and should be aware that the longest ride on the last day will be close

to 30 miles. This is a great opportunity to ride with other members on hand cycles.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member with a hand cycle or recumbent who is comfortable cycling 20+ miles a day.

## COASTAL CYCLING CHALLENGE

**Location:** South Wales

**Date:** 14-18 July

**Application deadline:** 01 April

The challenge will run from Thursday evening to Monday morning and will include three rides, which will stick predominately to the coastline and use traffic free or quiet roads where possible. It will be suitable for touring bicycles. You should be comfortable cycling 40-plus miles a day. The route takes in a mix of land and seascapes, from stunningly beautiful coastlines to industrial areas.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member with a touring bicycle and who is comfortable cycling 40-plus miles a day.

## SOLDIER RIDE NYC (SRNYC)

**Location:** New York, USA

**Date:** 11-18 July

**Application deadline:** 01 April

A prestigious event in the cycling calendar and a privilege to be invited back year after year. Cycle with the Wounded Warriors in New York for three days, ending with a huge celebration. A must for any keen cyclist.

**Who can apply?**

Anyone who can use an adaptive bike. These will be supplied by the Wounded Warriors. Be aware that temperatures will be hot, and you will cycle 70-plus miles in three days.

**Requirements:**

You must be able to enter the USA (ESTA). Your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel. Members must be triple vaccinated.

## Watercolour Painting Course

**Location:** Somerset

**Date:** 08-13 July

**Application deadline:** 01 April

A five-day course for beginners and improvers. Members will take part in studio-based and fieldwork. You will visit a number of outdoor locations before returning to the studio. A great course for Members looking to take up a new hobby or improve their artistic skills in a relaxed and sociable environment.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member. Equipment is supplied, or you can bring your own. Experienced artists are welcome to hone their skills.







From York to New York, Blesma offers cycling to suit everyone – whether you're a complete novice or a real rouleur

You can apply now on the **Blesma Connects** app, via the website, or by emailing [eventscal@blesma.org](mailto:eventscal@blesma.org)

# Activities



## Members' Weekend

**Location:** Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

**Date:** 18-20 June

**Application deadline:** 04 April  
Members' Weekend 2022 will take place at the Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth once again this year. Applications will close on 04 April and

Members should have already received further instructions and an application form via the post and online. If you would like to come along to meet old friends and make some new ones, find out what Blesma Members are up to, and to have your say on what Blesma should be focusing on to support its Members, please put the date in your diary now. Blesma covers the cost of Ordinary and Associate Members and their partners or carers.

**Who can apply?** Open to all Members and their partners.



## BATTLEFIELD TOUR

**Location:** Ypres, Belgium

**Date:** 28 July-02 August

**Application deadline:** 01 April

Flanders has been a place of pilgrimage since The Great War took the lives of more than three quarters of a million British men more than a century ago. This guided tour provides a poignant opportunity for the Association's Members to visit a variety of memorial sites – from Tyne Cot Cemetery to the Somme and beyond – to pay their respects while gaining a richer and more detailed understanding of the history and events surrounding World War I.

**Who can apply?**

Open to all Members and their partners.

**Requirements:**

Members must be triple vaccinated and must have a passport with six months' validity during the time of travel.



## Shetland Islands Photography

**Location:** Shetland Islands

**Date:** 22-30 July

**Application deadline:** 15 April

A chance to get an insider's view of photography on Shetland. Led by a Blesma Member, photographer and Shetland resident, Members will get a chance to explore Shetland's rugged landscape and wildlife.

**Who can apply?**

Anyone with a camera. Please note that wheelchair access is sometimes limited.



The Shetland Islands offer picture-perfect photo opps



## INTRO TO CYCLING

**Location:** York

**Date:** 23 July

**Application deadline:** 15 April

This one-day event is aimed at introducing Members to all different forms of adaptive cycling, all under expert guidance. By the end of the event you will be fully informed about the bike that best suits you and how to take your cycling to the next level.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member – the bikes are supplied.

## AUTUMN WIDOWS AND SENIORS WEEKS

**Location:** Cricket St. Thomas, Somerset

**Date:** Widows Week: 19-23 September

Seniors Week: 26-30 September

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Based at one of the prestigious Warner hotels, the week focuses on relaxing and socialising with gentle activities and sightseeing in and around Somerset.

**Who can apply?**

Seniors Week is open to Members and their spouses, and Widow(er)s over the age of 60. Widows Week is for Widows only.

## FITNESS AND LIFESTYLE COURSE

**Location:** Fuerteventura, Canary Islands

**Date:** 18-26 November

**Application deadline:** 01 August

Enjoy a reset on your diet and learn tips on how to balance your lifestyle. Experience the beauty Fuerteventura has to offer whilst being active. This week will have a possible variety of activities from yoga, pilates and cycling to paddleboarding and golf.

**Who can apply?**

Suitable for any Member.

**Requirements:**

Members must be triple vaccinated and must have a passport with six months' validity during the time of travel.

## COUPLES WEEKEND

**Location:** London

**Date:** 19-22 August

**Application deadline:** 01 May

A weekend break for Members and their spouse/partner to explore the capital city and enjoy the hospitality of the Victory Services Club. Members will have the opportunity to meet other couples within the Association, taking part in group outings such as afternoon tea and a show as well

# Activities

as being able to spend some quality time together as a couple.

### Who can apply?

Any Member and their spouse/partner.

## DAVE LEWAN MEMORIAL FISHING MATCH

**Location:** Newcastle-under-Lyme

**Date:** 19-21 August

**Application deadline:** 01 May

The focus will be on relaxing, socialising, and taking part in a bit of friendly competition, set in the beautiful Whitmore Estate in the heart of Staffordshire.

### Who can apply?

Both beginners and seasoned anglers alike are welcome.

## RIDE TO THE WALL

**Location:** Burton-on-Trent

**Date:** 30 September-01 October

**Application deadline:** 01 July

Join the Blesma crew on this poignant annual ride in memory of the fallen which finishes at the National Memorial Arboretum.

### Who can apply?

Any Member who owns a motorcycle.

## TURN TO STARBOARD

**Location:** Falmouth

**Date:** 03-07 October

**Application deadline:** 01 July

A chance to sail on the Cornish coast. You will get an introduction to sailing, learn to work in a team, be taught important skills such as navigation, and experience life on the seas.

### Who can apply?

Any Member. Please be aware that there are steps and ladders on board the boat.

## DORSET FISHING COMPETITION

**Location:** Dorset

**Date:** 09-11 September

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Beginners and seasoned anglers alike are welcome to take part. The focus will be on relaxing, socialising and taking part in a bit of friendly competition at Revels Fishery which is a still water fishery located in Dorset. Most noted for carp/specimen, coarse and fly/game fishing, carp, roach and perch are among the key species on offer at the venue.

### Who can apply?

Any Member is welcome to take part.



## Family Glamping Weekend

**Location:** Brampton, Cumbria

**Date:** 14-18 August

**Application deadline:** 01 May

The aim of the weekend is to engage with other Members and their families, and to allow you to share in some of the friendships our Members enjoy whilst being in the great outdoors. Spouses, partners, carers, children and grandchildren are all welcome.

### Who can apply?

Any Member with a family of between two and five individuals (i.e. Member and up to four others). Please note, the pods and surrounding areas are not wheelchair accessible. For a wheelchair accessible event please see the Accessible Glamping Weekend (p22).



## Remembrance Weekend

**Location:** London

**Date:** 12-13 November

**Application deadline:** 01 August

The annual Blesma Remembrance Parade at The Cenotaph over Remembrance Weekend. One of the most poignant events in the Blesma Calendar.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member.



You can apply now on the **Blesma Connects** app, via the website, or by emailing [eventscal@blesma.org](mailto:eventscal@blesma.org)

## TREESCAPE, SEASCAPE AND LANDSCAPE ART COURSE

**Location:** Mapledurham, Oxfordshire

**Date:** 16-19 May

**Application deadline:** 01 April

Bring out your inner artist whilst focusing on mindfulness. Each Member will be encouraged to 'let go' and allow their imagination to take over. Cat Croxford, the resident professional artist, will motivate, inspire and teach each Member throughout the course to ensure that everyone understands and is able to get the most out of the experience. Cat will ensure each Member is given plenty of guidance and help whenever necessary. Every Member will be encouraged to develop their own style.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member.



## EGX LONDON

**Location:** Excel Centre, London

**Date:** September (TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Blesma is offering Members the opportunity to attend the EGX video game convention at the Excel Centre in London. EGX is the UK's premier video game show and is a celebration of all things gaming. This will be a one-day event and may include gaming on the day.

**Who can apply?**

Any Member.

## CHRISTMAS MARKETS COUPLES WEEKEND

**Location:** Cologne, Germany

**Date:** 01-05 December

**Application deadline:** 01 September

A weekend break to get into the Christmas spirit. A chance to enjoy the historic city of Cologne and its world-famous Christmas

# Activities

Markets. You will be able to explore Angel Market, the oldest Christmas Market in Cologne, as well as soak up the festivities, relax with your partner and enjoy the company of other Blesma couples.

## Who can apply?

Any Member.

## Requirements:

Members must be triple vaccinated and must have a passport with six months' validity during the time of travel.

## ACCESSIBLE GLAMPING WEEKEND

**Location:** Somerset

**Date:** 21-24 October

**Application deadline:** 01 July

A new addition to the Activities Calendar and the first of its kind. Based at Wall Eden Farm in Somerset, this accessible glamping site can be enjoyed by the whole family. Members will stay in accessible lodges that can sleep up to six, from where they will be able to enjoy the beautiful surroundings as well as take part in a range of on-site activities from axe throwing to canoeing.

## Who can apply?

Any Member with a family of between two and six people (i.e. Member and up to five others). Please note that whilst there is no minimum age to attend, some activities will be restricted to an age limit.



## Blesma Golf UK

**Location:** Shropshire

**Date:** 12-16 September

**Application deadline:** 01 June

Members will enjoy three rounds of golf spread across three days at Macdonald Hill Valley Hotel in Shropshire. The hotel boasts 18-hole emerald and sapphire golf courses, making it one of the top 10 golf venues in the UK. Accommodation will be provided at the hotel. These will be friendly matches, making them open to all.

## Who can apply?

Any Member with a set of golf clubs. Please state your golf handicap when you apply (if you have one).

## BOOK YOUR ACTIVITIES ON THE BLESMA CONNECTS APP

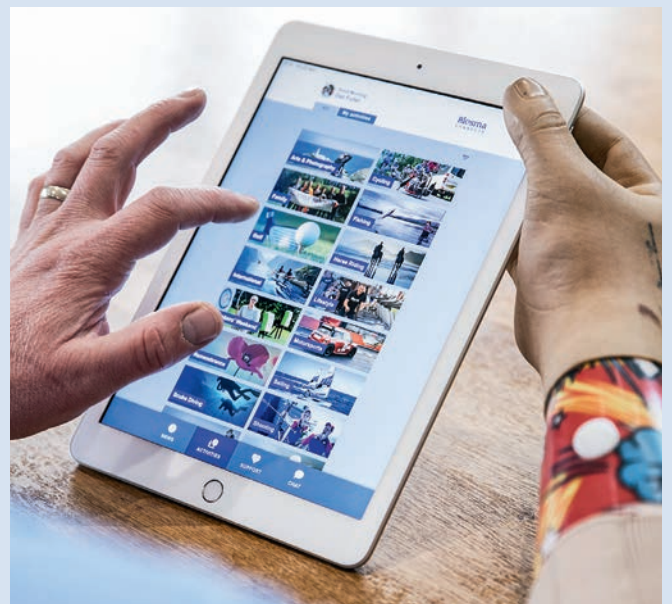
You can book your place on a Blesma activity by using the Blesma Connects app. The Activities tab lets you view the Activities Calendar, filter out options that aren't of interest, and apply for those that are. You can even have information and reminders sent directly to your smartphone or tablet.

Rather than having to fill out forms for each event, the app saves your details and sends them straight to the Activities Team. You can then track the progress of your applications. As soon as the participants

have been selected, they will be added to a group so everyone gets to know each other, receives updates, and shares information such as accessibility, timings and planning beforehand.

Activities will still be publicised in the magazine, on the website, and via BSOs and Outreach Officers. And you can still apply by calling the Activities Team on 020 8548 7094 or by emailing them on [eventscal@blesma.org](mailto:eventscal@blesma.org)

**Download the Blesma Connects app today from the App Store or Google Play**



## Colorado Ski Spectacular

**Location:** Breckenridge

**Date:** December (TBC)

**Application deadline:** 01 August

This annual event run by Disabled Sports USA, is one of the world's biggest and best ski spectaculars for all adaptive Winter sports. The perfect week to have fun on the slopes and enjoy all that the ski spectacular has to offer. Mono ski, snow-boarding, stand-up skiing and three-track will all be available.

### **Who can apply?**

Most injury types can be catered for on the slopes. Hotel rooms are not adapted however, and you must be able to use a bath.

### **Requirements:**

You must be able to enter the USA. Your passport must have at least six months' validity during the time of travel and you must be triple vaccinated.



You can apply now on the **Blesma Connects** app, via the website, or by emailing [eventscal@blesma.org](mailto:eventscal@blesma.org)







# ARE WE NEARLY THERE YET?

IF THE MORNING COMMUTE IS GETTING YOU DOWN YOU NEED TO SET YOUR SIGHTS ON SOMETHING ALTOGETHER MORE SPECTACULAR. TIME TO SWAP THE SCHOOL RUN FOR THE SAND DUNES AND SUNSETS OF MOROCCO

It could be a scene from one of the *Mad Max* films. Thundering through the Moroccan desert on motorbikes and in dune buggies, a convoy blasts sand sky high, careens through dry riverbeds, and weaves its way over spectacular mountains. Covering hundreds of kilometres each day, it is a carnival of noise, speed, dust and fun.

At the heart of it all is a group of Blesma Members. “You’re out in the middle of nowhere, it feels like you’re in the Dakar Rally!” says Graeme ‘Billy’ Billington, a former member of the Royal Tank Regiment, who rides motorbikes despite his right arm being paralysed. Somewhere close by, Lamin Manneh – a triple amputee – is at the wheel of a lightning quick, specially-adapted dune buggy. His co-driver, Spencer Bull, who has multiple sclerosis, is operating the accelerator and brake with hand controls. Everywhere

you look there is cooperation, teamwork, driving excellence – and adrenaline. This is Fennec Endeavour, a September 2021 mission run by the charity Future Terrain, that saw five Blesma Members embark on a vehicle-based challenge across the deserts of southern Morocco. Blesma gave the charity funding for the expedition, and the results were spectacular.

### PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Future Terrain was co-founded by Blesma Member Grant White in 2016 to inspire and support ex-military personnel through off-road driving expeditions and engineering related activities. Grant, 56, joined the Royal Marines at the age of 19 to travel the world. He loved every minute of his service, but while he was on leave in 1997, he was hurt in a motorbike accident that left him with multiple lower limb injuries. He returned to full Marine fitness, but the problems exacerbated to the point where he elected to have a below-knee amputation in 2007. Soon afterwards, he learned about Blesma.



“My rehab was good,” says Grant. “I did ‘prehabilitation’, and went to Headley Court with a big smile on my face – and I knew that I was lucky to a certain degree.”

Grant was keen to get back to ‘normal’ life as quickly as possible – and that, for him, meant riding a motorbike again. He was soon back on two wheels, and quickly became involved in rallying. “I got involved with a disability rallying charity that was

the first team to race the Dakar Rally with a disabled crew,” says Grant. “Bikes are really my thing, but the lure of doing something like Dakar stuck in my mind, so I got involved and did some off-road racing. We did pretty well in the British Cross Country Championships, and were pushing the boundaries of disability in terms of participation.

“There were other positive aspects to taking part. We’d get Blesma Members to come along, and we’d invite veterans who had PTSD to have a go in the passenger seat of the car. We noticed that people were helping each other and working out their problems around the fireside at night, and we realised that the social side of the activities – like-minded people having a laugh – became almost more important than the driving.

“But at the same time, the charity was winding down – motorsport is very expensive. Also, in racing, the driver is really the main person, and everyone else takes something of a back seat. We started looking at the bigger picture, and that led to Future Terrain.”



## LAMIN MANNEH

*Lamin was blown up by an IED in Afghanistan while serving with the Irish Guards in 2010. He lost both legs above the knee and his left arm*

### How did you find the experience?

It was so much fun; we would drive a few hundred kilometres in a day and then stop and have food. There was a great atmosphere between us all, and it was great to travel again after Covid.

### You did some training beforehand?

We all met up before Morocco to make sure we had the right qualifications for the trip. It was all very well organised.

### As a triple amputee, what challenges did you face driving the buggy?

I was paired with Spencer, who operated the hand controls which made us go fast and stop, while I took the wheel. It worked really well.

### How was Morocco?

I loved it. It gave me an idea to drive from my old home in The Gambia, up the coast to Morocco. I'm going to look into it, it would be a great adventure!

## SPENCER BULL

*Spencer served with the Royal Green Jackets from 1989 to 2017. He was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2005 and now uses a wheelchair*

### How did you feel about the exped?

I was honoured to be invited, but quite anxious. You wouldn't naturally put a wheelchair and the desert together, but I wanted to push myself and see what I was capable of. Living with MS, I always think about what I can do, rather than what I can't.

### How did it work out?

Travelling in the buggies was fantastic – great fun even though it could get a bit hairy! The vehicles took everything we could throw at them, and all the training beforehand was excellent.

### What was the best bit?

Beyond the driving, I'd say being with like-minded veterans who were willing to give it a go. It was a challenge, an endeavour we did together, but I had no worries for the whole trip.



**“EVERYONE WAS PART OF THE TEAM, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR LEVEL OF INJURY. NOBODY CAME ALONG JUST FOR THE RIDE!”**



## **JASON GILL**

*Jason served with the RAF and Royal Engineers from 1990 until 1997, when an accident resulted in a spinal injury. He has been on previous Future Terrain events and was an instructor during the Morocco exped*

### **How was the expedition for you?**

It was great. I'd taken part in the race using Dacia Dusters back in 2019, and I was very keen to come back. This time we were using buggies and my main aim was to see how hard we could push the vehicles. It was a lot of fun.

### **Was it interesting to work with the new drivers?**

Yes, they were very inspiring and all did incredibly well. It's really interesting to see what's possible with hand controls now – at one point we had a driver steering while the other person operated the accelerator and brake, so it was a true team effort.

### **What were your personal highlights?**

Seeing the really remote parts of the Moroccan countryside, experiencing the villages, driving through all the different types of terrain... it really was an amazing experience. At one point I had to stop for a short while to adjust my goggles. That meant we fell behind a bit, so I had to absolutely rag it up a river to catch up. My passenger was clinging on the whole way!





**The team worked in pairs, even with one person driving and the other operating the accelerator and brake via hand controls**

Grant's vision for Future Terrain was to do expeditionary work, with vocational training offered as a key part of the package. "We provide courses in off-road driving that can come in useful for people, and we don't charge anything," says Grant. "And then we put on trips where we provide the training and the car, and take people on a journey. If people are struggling with their mental health, it can be extremely beneficial to have some time away and have an adventure – but at the same time they're getting a genuine qualification from a proper awarding body."

Before Covid, the charity ran expeditions to destinations such as the Pyrenees, and it adapted during the pandemic while foreign travel was not allowed, running a British adventure from Dorset to North Wales. The desert, however, has always been top of the charity's destination list. An initial trip with 15 disabled veterans taking three vehicles out to Morocco was a great success.

"We really immersed them because they also had to build the cars," says Grant. "The whole thing was a proper adventure, with people coming back exhausted but knowing they had done something worthwhile. We quickly developed a reputation for being able to deliver in high-risk environments."

Following this, Grant was approached by former Army officer Ben Farrell, who had previously led a group of veterans on trans-Saharan motorcycle expeditions.

Recognising the life-affirming benefits of such adventures, Ben had been wondering how to make these expeditions more inclusive, widening their scope to include wounded, injured and sick Service personnel. Ben joined forces with Grant and another former officer, Charles Sincock, to create the current set-up.

"It works well because as a charity we can generate money, but we've also got a very detailed risk management process," says Grant, who works in risk management for Marriott Hotels in his day job. "So we became partners and set our sights on Morocco – it is the best place in the world for bikers and drivers; a big playground."

### **TEAMWORK IN THE DESERT**

The Fennec Endeavour exped essentially followed the Moroccan stages of the Dakar Rally. Two-person vehicles were provided by a company called Polaris and were operated by special hand controls, allowing those without the use of their legs to drive. Others chose to ride motorbikes, but everyone was equipped with new helmets and neck braces.

"We were able to combine the controls so Lamin, for example, who has one arm could partner up with someone else," says Grant. "We needed to keep things simple in the desert, because while the situation wasn't inherently dangerous, there were risks, and it's not easy to evacuate people."





The need to be self-sufficient meant that everyone on the course was trained in first aid before travelling out. “Every member had a role to play,” says Grant, “and we did plenty of driver training before leaving the UK, too. We had proper preparatory stages. Everyone was part of the team, no matter what their level of injury. Nobody came along just for the ride on this trip!”

With everything taken care of and organised by the time the Members got to the start of the adventure, it was then just a case of enjoying the immense environment. “The outcome is always really positive. We are providing an opportunity for people to push their boundaries,” says Grant. “Looking back, the trip was a huge success. Everyone who took part said they had an amazing time, learned a lot about themselves and felt properly looked after. That sort of feedback makes it all worthwhile.”

To find out more about Future Terrain and the services they are able to offer visit [www.futureterrain.co.uk](http://www.futureterrain.co.uk)

**Bikes, buggies and a bit of kip: the group took their rest when they could (left), then it was on to the next breathtaking bit of landscape**



### GRAEME 'BILLY' BILLINGTON

*Billy served with the Royal Tank Regiment from 2000 to 2011. He was injured in Afghanistan when his Warthog armoured vehicle was hit by an IED. He is an experienced motorcyclist*

You're a keen biker, co-presenting TV show *The Speedshop*. What was it like incorporating this Blesma trip into the show? Great! We filmed a one-off episode of *The Speedshop* a while back, but to have a series on the BBC is great. And being a Blesma Member, this was the perfect trip to feature on it. The Association has done a lot for me over the years, so hopefully this episode of the programme can help Blesma out.

**You joined the convoy on a bike, how was that?**

It was phenomenal – and just what we needed after all the Covid confinement. I arrived a day early to help adapt my bike because my right arm is paralysed so I only have use of one hand. The riding was hard, but so much fun – I was blasting up sand dunes, through dried out riverbeds, climbing and descending mountains...

**The Moroccan scenery looks unbelievable...**

It really was. It was hard to take it all in as we were blasting through the landscape. I wanted to keep stopping to look at the view but it felt like a race at times. The company was great, too. I went through rehab with Lamin, so it was lovely to see him again.







IN 1982, THE UK BECAME INVOLVED IN AN UNDECLARED WAR 8,000 MILES FROM HOME. THE FALKLANDS WAR WAS AN INTENSE PERIOD OF VALOUR AND SACRIFICE THAT TOOK THE LIVES OF 255 BRITISH FORCES AND INJURED MANY MORE

# Remembering the Falklands 40 years on

**S**immering diplomatic tensions reached boiling point in 1982 when a group of salvage workers hoisted the Argentinian flag over an abandoned whaling station on the remote island of South Georgia in the South Atlantic. Within two weeks, Argentinian troops landed on the Falkland Islands and, on 02 April 1982, the UK became involved in an undeclared war with Argentina in a battle arena 8,000 miles from home.

The 74-day Falklands War would test the endurance and tolerance of British Forces and result in 255 British military personnel, 649 Argentine troops and three Islanders losing their lives.

It was an intense period of valour, sacrifice, endeavour and tragedy on a small cluster of islands inhabited by 1,820 people and 400,000 sheep. The ruling military junta in Buenos Aires believed Britain would not attempt to regain the islands, but a Task Force of 20,000 troops was hastily assembled

with warships and refitted merchant ships bearing south from British ports.

The P&O cruise liner SS Canberra was swiftly re-purposed and set sail from Southampton on 09 April loaded with supplies, ammunition, and the 2,000 troops who formed 3 Commando Brigade.

The QEII liner cast off three days later with 5th Infantry Brigade on board to complete a Task Force of 127 ships – 62 of them merchant vessels – that powered towards Ascension Island, a British overseas territory 1,000 miles east of Africa, just south of the Equator, and an RAF base, roughly halfway on the journey.

With Argentinian troops digging in across the Falklands and surrounding its capital, Stanley, with defensive positions, the first blow was struck in Operation Black Buck. RAF Vulcan bombers flew 16-hour, 6,000-mile missions from Ascension Island, with airborne refuelling en route, to bomb Stanley's airport and strategic positions.

Then came the controversial maritime intervention of the Royal Navy submarine HMS Conqueror sinking the cruiser ARA General Belgrano on 02 May with the loss of 323 lives.

## THE GROUND WAR BEGINS

The ground war finally began on 21 May when British Forces landed at San Carlos Water after advance SAS units – including former Blesma chairman Sir Cedric Delves, who was then a 35-year-old Major in command of D Squadron 22 SAS – retook South Georgia and led raids and diversionary tactics in support of Infantry units.

As the Royal Marines and Paratroopers advanced from the San Carlos beachhead, the Task Force vessels came under sustained attack from the Argentine Air Force with devastating consequences, including the loss of HMS Sheffield, HMS Antelope, HMS Ardent and HMS Coventry, as well as a container ship and a Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) vessel.

## Denzil Connick

*Former Paratrooper Denzil was a 25-year-old Lance Corporal in an anti-tank platoon during the Falklands War. He lost his left leg at the hip and severely damaged his right leg when he was hit by a mortar round on 13 June 1982*

Images and reports of the attacks shocked the public, and the RFA logistics ship Sir Galahad was pictured wreathed in smoke from the explosions and fires that killed 48 personnel – 32 of them from the Welsh Guards – at Bluff Cove.

The ground troops had to contend with high winds, rain and sleet as temperatures plummeted to -12°C at night as they fought a series of skirmishes to cross the islands and reach the range of mountains guarding Stanley. After much fierce fighting, which sometimes included hand-to-hand combat, a Brigade-sized operation captured Mount Harriet, Two Sisters Mountain, Wireless Ridge and Mount Longdon over 11 and 12 June to secure dominance over the Argentine garrison in Stanley. The last line of Argentine defence was overcome the following night with the capture of Wireless Ridge and Mount Tumbledown.

On 14 June 1982, General Mario Menendez surrendered to Major General Jeremy Moore. A total of 71 gallantry awards were made, including two posthumous Victoria Crosses. The honour remains bright but the pain of loss of family members, friends and comrades endures 40 years on.

For a number of Blesma Members, the memories of sacrifice and camaraderie never fade. Denzil Connick, then a 25-year-old Paratrooper, and Bomb Disposal Officer John Phillips, then 39, were both on board the SS Canberra as it headed for the Falklands. They recall their emotions and experiences 40 years on...

**“YOU EXPERIENCE LIFE-CHANGING INJURIES THAT BRING HUGE IMPLICATIONS TO YOUR FUTURE. IT TAKES SOME TIME TO MOVE ON”**

**D**enzil grew up in Chepstow the eldest of four brothers. He joined the Army as a Junior Leader at the age of 15 and went on to serve for 12 years with 3 Parachute Regiment. He was a 25-year-old Lance Corporal in an anti-tank platoon in the Falklands War where he lost his left leg at the hip. At the age of 65, he is now Life Vice President and founding secretary of the South Atlantic Medal Association, a charity that campaigns for Falklands veterans and helps them and their families return to the islands on pilgrimage.

### **Were you always destined to be a soldier?**

I was initially interested in joining the RAF, but they wanted me to stay at school so I joined the closest Army unit that would keep me near aircraft: The Parachute Regiment. My mum was horrified; none of my three brothers showed any inclination to join up. Mum and dad worked hard all their lives and instilled that same ethic in us – that’s what made me accept the Army way. You get what you work for! I was lucky to travel to places like Sudan, Malaysia, Canada and across Europe, and I had lots of adventures.

### **Was the Falklands War expected?**

3 Para was the spearhead battalion at the time – the Infantry regiment earmarked to go first to any flare-up around the world. I remember we were called for a briefing and thought it would be Northern Ireland or some Cold War stuff. We had no idea where the Falklands were! In just a matter of days we were ready to get on the luxury liner SS Canberra. It was a beautiful ship, and it was a bit surreal. It had a swimming pool and bars for drinks after dinner. It didn’t feel like we were going to war!

### **What was the mood like on board?**

There were about 1,800 troops from the Paras and the Commandos plus the Royal Navy and merchant crews. We trained and kept fit during the day, and checked and

re-checked our equipment. The mood was determined yet relaxed until we got to Ascension Island where we could train on land. We were there a week or so then the Task Force sailed on and it was obvious diplomatic moves were failing. The mood changed distinctively with the sinking of ARA General Belgrano. A lot of people thought this was all just sabre-rattling and that we’d turn back for home before even getting there. But there was no going back after that – we were fully committed.

### **What was the military approach when you got to the Falklands?**

By then, HMS Sheffield had been lost and there was a sombre realisation that this was the real deal. The nature of war is that people die and it was what we signed up for. On 21 May we went ashore at Port San Carlos and established positions overlooking the bay. We had a grandstand view of the Argentine Air Force playing havoc with our ships as we tried to get personnel and stores ashore. Just about every ship was attacked in that first week; it was horrendous.

### **What happened next?**

We were about 70 miles from Stanley, with some inhospitable terrain between us and with worsening winter weather for company. It was the hardest physical challenge I’d endured in my life. Mount Longdon, our objective, was a daunting natural fortress. The enemy was dug in well with machine guns, mortars and 106mm recoil-less anti-tank rifles. We got ready for a silent assault to take them by surprise and advanced into contact with rifle, bayonet and grenade. I was one of the oldest at 25 – we had lads who were 17 and 18. I was a Lance Corporal so the younger ones were looking up to me. I was no less scared than they were but I had to crack on. A point in our favour was our training in the Brecon Beacons so we were used to that type of ground and conditions, and we’d been out in the open in atrocious conditions for a few weeks already.



Words: Danny Buckland Images: Andy Bate, Shutterstock

Blesma has helped Denzil with a few things over the years – including fixing his driveway



## “ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE; EXPLOSIONS, FLASHES, SCREAMING, FRIENDS GOING DOWN AND ENEMY BEING KILLED – IT WAS A FRIGHTENING EXPERIENCE”

### How did the battle unfold?

One of our guys stood on a mine which gave the Argentinians vital moments to get out of their sleeping bags and man their positions. Then all hell broke loose. It was dark and it was bedlam; there were explosions, flashes, screaming... You had friends going down and enemy being killed – it was a weird, frightening, out-of-this-world experience. We advanced behind B Company 3 Para, providing them with supporting fire from GPMG machine guns and Milan missiles (bunker busters) firing just 50 metres ahead. It was all very close-up stuff. In a matter of hours, we had lost 23 comrades and more than 50 had been injured, many seriously. None of us had seen anything like it, but we had to keep going as the battle rolled on for a good 12 hours from the night of 11 June into the next day.

### What happened on 13 June?

Although Mount Longdon had been taken, we were being constantly shelled from Stanley as they knew exactly where we were. I was going along a sheep track when I was hit by a 120mm mortar. It took my left leg clean off and shredded my right leg. The other soldier I was with died of his wounds. I had life-saving attention at the scene and was taken to a field hospital at Fitzroy Cove, where I suffered a heart attack because I had lost so much blood. But the surgeons saved me and transferred me to the hospital ship SS Uganda, where I stayed for four weeks before I was repatriated to the UK.

### What were conditions like on SS Uganda?

I was in a morphine haze for the first part and was there with guys who had sustained some terrible injuries, but the spirit was second to none and the medical staff and crew were amazing. There was a great deal of British Forces humour and that helped many of us get through those days. Regardless of age, background or rank we just bounced off each other, and that ‘brothers-in-arms’ attitude definitely helped our recovery.

### You have another very important anniversary on 11 June...

Yes, exactly one year after the Battle of Mount Longdon, I walked down the aisle of St. Mary’s Church in Chepstow using just a wooden walking cane to get married to Theresa. I was determined to celebrate something good on that day, but you never forget what happened and the friends you lost. We have two sons; Matthew is a Royal Navy submariner and Stephen is a Royal Welsh Fusilier who has served in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have a wonderful family; a brilliant wife, children and grandchildren – what more could you ask for?

### What was your first contact with Blesma?

The Association was in touch almost straight away after I was injured. I spent months in the Queen Elizabeth Military Hospital in Woolwich when I came home, and I remember someone coming to see me and the other amputees there. I wasn’t mentally geared up to ask for help back then, but it was good to know Blesma was there. It takes a while to sort out how you react to these things and everyone is different. You’ve experienced life-changing

injuries that bring huge implications to your future, and it takes some time to move on. Blesma is very good at understanding that and being there when needed.

### How has Blesma helped you?

Over time, the Association has helped with decorating and gardening grants which have been much appreciated, and Blesma helped with a big project to sort out my driveway which was basically a farm track that made access to my house difficult. It meant so much to get that done. But a really important hallmark of Blesma is knowing that support and camaraderie are always there. The help goes way beyond simply offering financial support.

### What does Blesma contribute to the amputee and veteran community?

It is a shining example of encouraging amputees of all ages to get involved with activities, whether they are adventures or something more modest. Camaraderie and friendship are vital aspects of recovery. Blesma offers a life-long relationship. For myself and many others, it has been a lifesaver and a brilliant support.



Denzil and Theresa were married one year after the Battle of Mount Longdon

# John Phillips

*John was a Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal Officer, having joined up as an engineering technician after leaving school. His left arm was amputated after a bomb he was defusing on HMS Antelope exploded, killing his comrade Staff Sergeant Jim Prescott*

In 1982, John was on Easter leave when he received a call from his officer commanding to say he had managed to get two bomb disposal men onto the Task Force. John was 39 at the time and volunteered immediately. He was initially told he couldn't deploy because he was the Sergeant Major by then, but he managed to persuade his superior otherwise. "I told him I'd had been waiting for this for 20 years and that this was my chance," says John, who received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on HMS Antelope while his partner, Staff Sergeant Jim Prescott, was posthumously awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. John is now 79 years old and has since worked for Blesma, SSAFA and various local charities.

## Had you always wanted to join the Army?

I was a very keen Boy Scout and loved the weekends in the woods and mountains, so the Army seemed the best way to continue that. You could just walk away from school at 15 in those days, but you could get a trade through the Army Apprentice Scheme, so I did a three-year apprenticeship as an engine fitter before joining the Royal Engineers.

## What were some of your early postings?

I had a variety, including postings to Canada and Australia, where I worked on the generators at the atomic weapons testing grounds at Maralinga, and on the beaches of Norfolk clearing World War II sea defences and mines. I wasn't trained in bomb disposal then and was basically the shovel man – and I must admit that I would take a couple of steps back whenever we uncovered a mine. I had further postings to Germany and in Belgium at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).

## When did you first start on bomb disposal?

After SHAPE, I was posted to bomb disposal as a Sergeant and had further training. We were regularly called out to unexploded bombs around the country and to clear military training areas after live ammunition

had been used. We dealt with a huge range of bombs and mines, and they all had a genuine threat level. Then we increasingly started to get called out to deal with IRA improvised devices.

## Tell us about the journey to the Falklands...

We travelled on board SS Canberra down to Ascension Island and there was a real holiday atmosphere at first. The bars were still open and there were waiters with silver service every night, so it was hardly conducive to going to war. We had several days to sort our kit out at Ascension Island and then we transferred to the Sir Lancelot, where we came under the command of 59 Commando Royal Engineers so we were back with our own. No-one knew what air-dropped weapons the Argentines had, so we took two tonnes of equipment with us to meet every contingency.

## What greeted you at San Carlos Bay?

I remember it was a beautiful day, but within a few hours Argentine aircraft attacked and hit most of their targets. Their pilots were brave and skilled – they had to approach at sea level, go over the tops of surrounding

hills and then pick their targets instantly. Because they came in low their bombs had little time to arm before hitting the target. That's why many of them didn't detonate – it might have been a different story had they all gone off!

## What was your first assignment?

We were tasked to HMS Argonaut, which had been hit by two bombs that hadn't gone off. The next day, Sunday 23 May, we were tasked to HMS Antelope. As we approached, we could see a hole in its side that had been made by the same type of bomb as Argonaut's. The ship had been crippled by two bombs which, although they hadn't exploded, had ripped through the communications and controls units.

## Can you talk us through what happened?

We approached the first bomb and deployed the same techniques that we had used on HMS Argonaut, but when we fired the means to disrupt the bomb, it didn't work. We tried again, nothing. After the third time, it exploded as we went to inspect it.

Jim was standing right next to me and we had enough time to look each other in







**HMS Antelope sank  
in San Carlos Water  
on 24 May 1982**

**Watch John talk about his Falklands  
experiences at [www.blesma.org/falklands](http://www.blesma.org/falklands)**



## “I THOUGHT I WAS DYING, I WAS CALM AND WAS GOING DOWN THIS TUNNEL WITH A BRIGHT LIGHT AT THE END. NO THOUGHTS OF FAMILY, NO REGRETS, JUST SERENITY”

the eye. That was the last time I saw Jim alive. I remember a bang and a blast, the ship rattled and shook and, *Boom!* suddenly I was flying through the air, like in a cartoon.

In my mind, it was in slow motion, and I thought I had died because I was floating through the air with no pain. I was calm and was going down a tunnel with a bright light at the end. No thoughts of family, no regrets, just serenity. I remember thinking: *‘If this is death, it isn’t so bad.’* Then I hit the metal bulkhead which very quickly brought me back to my senses!

### What were the extent of your injuries?

I now know Jim and I were both hit by one of the hatchway doors being blown off. It killed Jim instantly and severed my left arm. Another six inches to the left and I’d have gone as well. I could see my arm flailing around out of control, and I started to check myself for other injuries. Then I started to look for Jim through all the fire and smoke. That was when one of the crew put his hand on my shoulder, told me that Jim was dead and said to follow him. Just as bluntly as that. I put my hand on his shoulder and followed him to the escape hatch.

### How did you get off the ship?

When I came out of the escape hatch and onto the flight deck I was treated by a doctor, who gave me morphine and put a tourniquet on me. The crew were trying to put out the fires, which were raging by now. I was put on a stretcher from where I just watched the metal burning like paper – I’d never seen anything like it and I knew there would be secondary explosions.

Within 300 metres of us pulling away from HMS Antelope on the landing craft, the ship exploded from the fire and the heat, and went down. I was in the field hospital for a day and a half, during which time they took my arm off higher up but saved my life. As I was coming round, a surgeon whispered in my ear that I had lost my arm and I just nodded that I understood. I already knew.



### Was that the end of your Army career?

Because I had lost my arm my fear was that I would not be allowed to take up the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major that I’d just been selected for. I thought I’d lost my career and started to worry about the future. I spent time in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich when I was cleared to fly back to the UK, but I discharged myself because I wanted to get back to duty as soon as possible. I had a prosthetic arm made at Roehampton and I did make RSM. I stayed

on until 1989 after being commissioned, leaving with the rank of Captain.

### How did your family react to your injury?

It was an incredibly fraught time for them. When I got home my eldest daughter didn’t want to visit me in hospital. She was a young teenager and I don’t think she knew what to expect. I understand that. But my kids got used to it and my son later joined the Royal Engineers and served in Afghanistan, which I’m hugely proud of.

### What did you do after service?

I joined Blesma in 1985 and shortly after that I joined the Gravesend Branch. I was asked to be on the Executive Council which then became a Trustee’s role, and I held that for nearly 20 years. Being a Member of Blesma is great because you are amongst people who’ve had similar experiences, whatever their limb loss. I felt comfortable with Blesma because I knew the Association had the skills to deal with any problem I might have. There is such a strong camaraderie and it is an association that always gives you support. Although I’m not as active in Blesma as I once was, I still feel part of a special association.





1932 – 2022

# NINE DECADES OF DEDICATION

BLESMA BECAME A REGISTERED CHARITY IN 1932. IN THE 90 YEARS SINCE, THE ASSOCIATION – AND THE 62,000 IT HAS HELPED – HAVE ACHIEVED MUCH

**B**ack in 1932 a new house would set you back in the region of £750, while some properties in central London were on the market for £95. At that time you'd have to pay three pence for a pint of bitter and about the same for a loaf of bread – it's fair to say that life was very different in 1932. But one element has remained constant: the need for an association to champion the welfare of limbless veterans.

The origins of Blesma stretch back to the aftermath of WWI, when more than 40,000 British Service personnel returned home with lost or damaged limbs. With pinned-up trouser legs or jacket sleeves, opportunities for employment, housing, grants and pensions

became yet another minefield to negotiate. They didn't retreat though. They fought again, supporting each other as Branches of limbless ex-Servicemen formed to offer campaigning muscle and camaraderie. This loose alliance, meeting in church and village halls or in rooms above pubs, stood up to bureaucracy, official indifference and injustice to make veterans' lives more equitable and to further the rights of all people living with disabilities.

## MAKING IT OFFICIAL

But a national voice was needed and, in 1932, Blesma was granted charity status and held its first conference in Manchester. These were tough times: the nation was

grinding through an economic depression that saw trade fall by 50 per cent and, in the summer of 1932, unemployment hit 3.5 million. The suffering was acute for limbless veterans who, 14 years after the end of WWI, were still struggling to receive full war pensions or access aids that would make it easier for them to live and work.

"It is important that the Association recognises the significance of 1932. It is not the only date in our history, as the seeds were sewn immediately after WWI, but it is a critical point when the movement became a national association," says Jon Bryant, Blesma's Chief Executive.

"Blesma began life as a collection of local Branches where Members provided mutual

## Blesma: 90 years in the making

### 1914-1918

#### WORLD WAR I

40,000 British men lose limbs in The Great War's four years of trench warfare



### 1932

#### NATIONAL STATUS

Branches of the Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association come together to gain national charitable status, becoming the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, or BLESMA for short



### 1939-1945

#### WORLD WAR II

475,000 British Service men are injured, 12,000 of whom lose limbs. Blesma is determined that this new generation of war limbless will not suffer neglect as their predecessors had

### 1944

#### BLESMA'S MAGAZINE

BLESMAG, edited and published by the General Secretary, is welcomed for its useful information. It also attracts new Members and supporters

### 1948

#### ROYAL PATRONAGE

HRH Princess Alice The Duchess of Gloucester becomes Blesma's Royal Patron in the same year that the National Health Service is launched





support. We do that now but on a national level, working for and campaigning on behalf of Members. There have been huge changes in society since Blesma's early days but our efforts on behalf of Members continue, along with our mission to keep them in touch with each other for mutual support."

Blesma has scored notable success, both in helping individual Members and leading campaigns to improve a range of advances from war pensions to prosthetics provision.

"Our advocacy is results based and there will be occasions when we campaign on a large scale and other times when we engage more quietly," adds Jon. "But we always perform this as an association respected for its expertise and judgement, and for its understanding of Members' needs.

"No one size fits all and the Board of Trustees considers very carefully what we should do and when so we can make the best case for Members."

A landmark example was in 1955 when former Corporal Jim Toft, who lost both hands and damaged his legs when his tank was hit during WWII in Italy, raised the door knocker of No. 10 Downing Street with his split hook prosthetic to deliver a proposition supporting better war disability pensions.

Fast forward to more recent times and Blesma led the evidence-based campaign that made microprocessor knees available

Continued overleaf

**1949**  
**CARE HOMES FOR THE WOUNDED**

Blackpool Home is opened. Over the years, it cares for many veterans and Widows, providing them with accommodation and support



**1951**  
**REPRESENTATION**

Blesma has always campaigned on behalf of its Members. The early 1950s see Blesma oppose the Government's refusal to increase disability pensions for limb loss

**1954**  
**PORTSMOUTH HOME OPENS**

Catering for Members in the South, the first resident moves in on 16 September. The Home is officially opened by Blesma's Patron, HRH The Duchess of Gloucester, on 30 October

**1955**  
**MAKING A STAND**

Members march on Downing Street with a proposition for steps to increase the rates of pensions for all disabled pensioners



**1960**  
**STAYING MOBILE**

Member HF Ball, who was injured on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, is given the first Mini Minor to come off the production line. This is the precursor of the modern day Motability scheme which helps disabled people remain mobile

for Members which, subsequently, created wider access to the technology for the general public. Much of Blesma's work takes place away from the spotlight with its expertise deployed to improve benefits, pensions and grants, challenge unfair decisions, secure the latest technology and to shape future policy.

"The input of our Members is critical to everything we do," says Jon. "They range in age from 20 to 100, so our Members have a wide variety of needs and it is a joy to interact with them, understand their experiences and to help them.

"The great thing about Blesma is that it brings people together and all the Members support each other. We have octogenarians sharing advice and experiences with veterans who are 40 years their junior.

"Blesma has been through an evolution since 1932 – indeed, it is evolving all the time. Despite significant advances, disabled people still face major challenges in society. But nothing has changed in regard to our steadfast commitment to them. Blesma is here for life.

"We can be proud of what Blesma and its Members have achieved over the past 90 years, but we are now focusing on the challenges and needs of the present and the future."

Member Tony Whitaker shares his birth year with the Association. He was a youngster when World War II began and he went on to serve in the RAF – losing a leg following a plane crash. He took time to tell us about his life, service, and how the Association has been there for him...

## TONY WHITAKER

*Tony, an ex-pilot, lives in a Derbyshire village. He has two daughters and a son*

### What was life like growing up in the 1930s and through WWII?

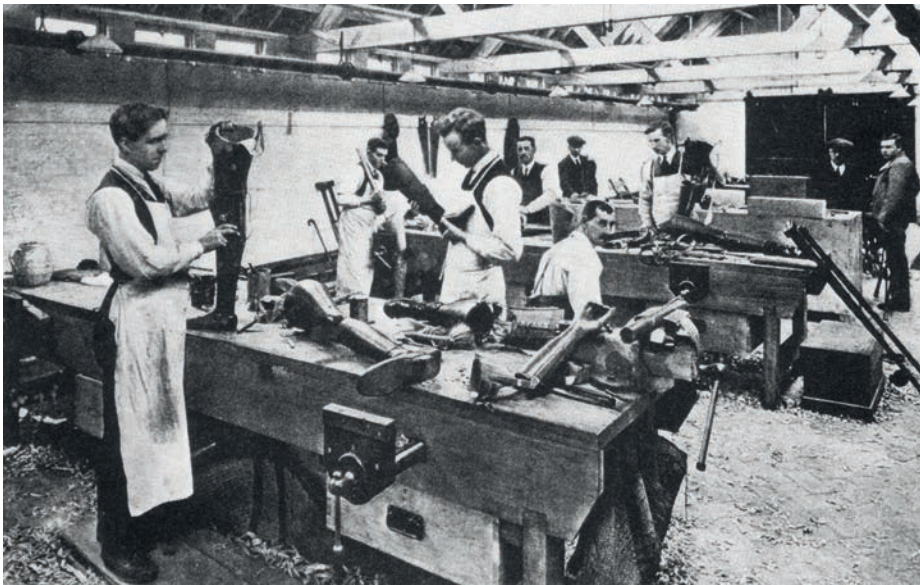
It was very different from nowadays! We had electricity but only for lights. We had no power points, we only had cold running water, heating came from a coal-fed range, and we had a tin bath on the wall for a weekly wash. There were hardly any cars around so, when it was snowy, you could sledge down the main street from one end of the village to the other. My father was killed in a work accident when I was 14 months old and we lost our sister in a motorbike accident, so mum had it tough.

### You were seven years old when World War II was declared...

I clearly remember listening to the announcement on the wireless. We had just sat down for Sunday lunch. I was quite excited about it because I'd seen war films at the pictures and thought it would be a great adventure. At that age I had no concept of what it would actually involve. I do remember, though, that men from the village went to war but didn't return.

### When did you sign up?

It was after I left school. I'd always been interested in the Navy and went to the recruiting office in Sheffield to sign up. They turned me away so I joined the RAF instead and did six months ground training on the Isle of Man. My service was almost cut short after my first leave when a train accident

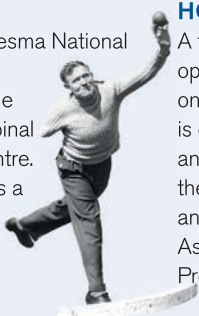


Photograph: Erskine

## Blesma: 90 years in the making

### 1961 A SPORTING CHANCE

The first Blesma National Sports Day is held at the National Spinal Injuries Centre. The event is a forerunner of today's Paralympic Games



### 1963 THIRD BLESMA HOME OPENS

A third Blesma Home opens in Crieff, Scotland, on 24 August. The land is donated by Earl and Lady Ancaster; the Earl is a Member and becomes the Association's National President

### 1964 DRAMATIC GROWTH

The Association has grown dramatically over the last 20 years, from 24 to 120 Branches



### 1968-1998 NORTHERN IRELAND

British troops like Darren Swift (right) deploy to Northern Ireland in response to The Troubles



### 1969 PETER SPENCER

Member Peter Nelson Spencer, an ex-RAF pilot who, after a crash, had one arm amputated and lost the use of the other through paralysis, paints Blesma's armorial bearings by holding the brush in his teeth





Words: Danny Buckland | Photography: Andy Bate

Continued overleaf

**1973**  
**IMPROVEMENTS TO PENSIONS**

Blesma helps to bring change to the War Widows' Pensions. The bar is removed for Widows whose marriage took place after their husbands left the Services following WWI and died before 03 September 1939

**1975**  
**NORA PEACOCK**

Nora Peacock is the first limbless ex-Service woman to be elected onto the Executive Council. She served as a WREN in Egypt in WWII, losing her right leg above the knee



**1982**  
**MARKING BLESMA'S GOLDEN JUBILEE**

500 limbless Members and partners parade down Whitehall to the Cenotaph following a service in Westminster Abbey. It is during the ceremony that Margaret Thatcher declares the country is at war with Argentina

**1982**  
**FALKLANDS WAR**

Britain loses 255 personnel, six ships and 34 aircraft during the conflict to take back the British territory that had been invaded by the Argentine military under the Junta Generals. As a result of the conflict, Blesma gets 32 new Members

**1989**  
**FIGHTING FOR WIDOWS**

Following campaigning from Blesma, the Government introduces a weekly payment for pre-1973 War Widows





## Blesma: 90 years in the making

### 1992 NEW NATIONAL PRESIDENT

The Duke of Westminster becomes Blesma's National President in the charity's Diamond Jubilee Year. Rosemary Cornwall becomes the first Area Welfare Officer; her job is to ensure veterans receive their correct entitlements

### 1996 PARALYMPIC GAMES, ATLANTA, USA

Three Blesma Members are part of Team GB. Tony Downs becomes the first Blesma Member to win a gold medal – for sailing



### 1998 WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES, NAGANO, JAPAN

Blesma Member Chris Moon (left) completes the final part of the Olympic Torch Journey and lights the Olympic Flame

### 2001-2014 AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ WARS

Operations HERRICK (Afghanistan) and TELIC (Iraq) mark the beginning of a new generation of military amputees. Blesma receives 339 new Members, including 97 double and 19 triple amputees, from both conflicts

### 2001 CONSTITUTION AMENDED

The Blesma Constitution is rewritten to include membership for those who lost the use of limbs whilst in Service or as a result of Service. Meanwhile, the National Memorial Arboretum opens in Staffordshire on 10 June

## “I MUST HAVE GOT DRAGGED ALONG THE AIRCRAFT AFTER CATCHING MY FOOT AS I WENT OUT OF THE COCKPIT. I LANDED IN A TREE”

meant I missed the ferry from Liverpool. You daren't be late back from leave so I had no option but to get a plane across. It cost me every penny I had, but I got back in time!

### What are your memories of your first flights?

I was based at RAF Cottesmore in Rutland and was flying single-engine Harvards, which were very difficult as you had to point the nose up and that restricted your vision. I remember once almost getting wiped out by another Harvard that was coming the other way as we couldn't see each other very well – we must have only missed each other by about 10 feet! There were accidents and we lost three colleagues during training; one was a 22 year old who was married with children. It was tragic. After a while I moved on to fly Gloster Meteor jets. I was enjoying life and couldn't imagine doing anything else.

### What happened in your accident?

I was flying in poor visibility and we couldn't find the landing strip. We were running out of fuel so had to bail out. The navigator got out ok but I must have got dragged along the aircraft after catching my foot as I went out of the cockpit. I landed in a tree and fortunately the parachute harness created a tourniquet which stopped me bleeding out from my injured foot. They had a devil to get me down as I was 70 feet up and the

ground was all boggy so they couldn't get a fire engine close. They eventually managed it by strapping ladders together.

### What happened after that?

I was taken to a hospital in York and it was touch and go for a while. I can't remember anything about the accident. When someone who I thought was my girlfriend visited, I noticed she looked a bit different and so I asked her if she was having a baby. She said yes so I then asked: 'Well, are we going to get married then?' and she said: 'We are

married!' My memory was shocking for a while. Even today, I still can't remember the crash, which resulted in me having a below-knee amputation of my left leg.

### What did you do after service?

I was treated at Headley Court before being invalided out. I then went to work for a brake company, so my time in the RAF was sadly all too brief.

### When did you join Blesma?

It was when I was about 40. I'd not had any need for help but the charity always made sure any monies due to us veterans got through. The Association has since helped me financially and I've been to Mount Snowdon and to Lincolnshire with other Members. It is a very effective association that does amazing things.



### 2005 CORPORAL COLIN HAMILTON

Member Cpl Colin Hamilton (right) is the first British above-knee amputee to go back on operations as he deploys to Iraq with The Black Watch



### 2011 THE MURRISON REPORT

Blesma contributes to Dr Murrison's report *A Better Deal For Military Amputees* in which he outlines 12 recommendations to improve the care of military amputees

### 2016 CHANGES TO ELIGIBILITY

Those who lose the use of their limb(s) through a traumatic incident that is not Service related are now eligible for the Association's support

### 2019 MOVING HOME TO CHELMSFORD

Blesma's offices move from Chadwell Heath – its home since 1965 – to Chelmsford

### 2022 NINE DECADES OF DEDICATION

2022 marks 90 years since Blesma was registered as a national charity

**Blesma**  
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

90

“WE BELIEVE  
BEER IS THE  
SOCIAL GLUE  
THAT BINDS  
COMMUNITIES  
TOGETHER”

# CHEERS!

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CRAFT A CRAFT BEER? A GROUP OF BLESMA MEMBERS WERE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME BREWERS FOR THE DAY AND FIND OUT

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**T**here are few drinks more loved by us Brits than beer. We’ve been drinking the stuff for more than 5,000 years and, according to studies from 2018, we consumed more than 8.5 billion pints in that one year alone, making it the nation’s top tipple. By 2020, there were more than 3,000 breweries in the UK as craft beers and microbreweries tried to grab a slice of the alcoholic action.

Last October, with the help of Ascot Brewing Company, 11 Members were given the chance to carry out many people’s dream: design and brew their own beer. Ascot Brewing Company have been producing beer in Camberley, Surrey

for more than a decade and have recently moved to a new, state-of-the-art premises with the help of crowdfunding support. The multi-award-winning brand has even installed an elevated tap room on a mezzanine overlooking the working brewery so guests can see all the action unfold whilst sampling the outfit’s unique beers. For two days last October, all this was at the Members’ disposal.

“Meeting a Blesma Member and hearing his story made me want to go the extra mile for Blesma,” says Chris Davies, who has the fantastic title of Chief Value Creation Officer and Chief Tasting Officer at the brewery. “I was introduced to the charity by a mutual friend





Mick Foulds:  
"It seemed like a  
unique chance to  
do something that  
not many people  
get to try"



**GOLD CUP** - light, citrus, pallete, etc  
**LITTLE GIDDY** - Sweet, easy drinking, citrus/floral  
**DEVIL** - low abv  
 - easy drinking, not overpowering  
 German hop profile, lager w/ flavor  
**FRONT RUNNER** - Admans bevery anilities  
 - Bitter + fruity, flat, west coast  
 not a winner  
**STARTING GATE** - Liked traditional, entry, easy sell  
 Linking

Top 3  
 1 USPs  
 #11 • Multi-hopped  
 #11 • 4-4.2% ABV  
 • Easy for pub to sell  
 • Durable + seems like  
 ③?



## “IT WAS GREAT TO GET UP CLOSE AND SEE JUST HOW MUCH MANUAL EFFORT GOES INTO THE BREWING PROCESS – I DIDN’T REALISE HOW INVOLVED WE WOULD BE”

who was planning a wheelchair rugby world record event in aid of Blesma. I was intrigued by what they were trying to achieve, so we put some Blesma collection boxes on our bars and raised funds for the charity at a number of beer festivals.

“Post lockdown, Chris Knight [*Blesma’s Corporate and Regional Fundraising Manager*] paid us a visit along with a Blesma Member. We spoke about what the Association is and does, what it stands for and what its Members are all about.

“It was eye opening to find out about their experiences. Getting involved with Blesma gave us a greater understanding of the lives of people who defend our country and live with a disability. They deserve not only our recognition but also our support.”

It was this meeting that laid the foundations for the two-day event at the brewery during which Members could get

to grips with what it takes to be a master brewer. First they were given an insight into the brewing process, which covered everything from the raw ingredients to the equipment. Then they sat down to build a brand and a back story, design some packaging and, ultimately, name their beer.

“We wanted more involvement, not just with the charity but with the membership. We believe beer is the social glue that binds communities together and this was a way we could form a stronger relationship and have a bit of fun,” says the brewery’s Chris.

“I like to use the term ‘earning the right’. Through the event, we would earn the right to work with Blesma and in return the Members would earn the right to brew the beer – by learning how we come up with the ideas, by learning the beers, and by learning the process.”

According to Blesma’s Chris Knight, this idea worked for the Association as well.

“We are always keen to explore partnerships with business and industries, especially when we can engage the Members,” he says. “Ascot Brewing Company was a good fit: they offered lots of opportunities – from using their premises for events to engaging Members in activities. The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst is also close by and military personnel often visit the brewery, so it already had a military connection.”

### HANDS ON WITH THE HOPS

Upon arrival, the Members met Head Brewer John Willatts and other key personnel behind the award-winning beers. But rather than just listening to talks about the brewing process, the group’s senses were put to the test as they were introduced to the different ingredients – barley, yeast, water and hops – that go into making beer. As they were given a tour of the brewery’s fermentation vessels, vats and kegs, John invited the Members to get hands on.

“It was great to get up close and personal, seeing just how much manual effort goes into the brewing process – I didn’t realise how involved we would be,” said Royal Air





Force veteran Mark Sidwells, who lost both his legs in 2015. “Beer and service personal go well together, so this kind of activity suits us. It’s the social element related to beer – it brings people together in a relaxed way rather than being on a conference call.”

After getting an idea of how beer is produced, the group moved on to the all-important tasting session to formulate a recipe for their own brew. That required Members to sample a variety of beers from Ascot Brewing Company and their new innovative craft beer brand, Disruption IS Brewing, to rank their favourite flavours.

“It’s a really sophisticated process,” says Mark. “I was fascinated by the ingredients that are used and how different brewing times produce different strengths. We saw how we could take some of the elements or recipes to produce a beer that is stronger, weaker, maybe more like Guinness or with more fruity flavours. We wanted something that appealed to everybody, so we met in the middle with a bitter.”

Day two saw the Members get creative with their marketing skills as they took part

in a session to come up with their beer’s back story as well as designing a label. The group learned more about the different elements of production and what factors aspects like alcohol content play in customers’ purchase decisions. Then it was time to discuss pack size, debate can versus bottle, design the packaging and come up with a name.

#### THE BUSINESS OF BEER

This is where former Royal Engineer Commando Dan Newbold, who lost his right eye after a road traffic accident in 1982, was able to put years of business experience into action.

“I’m not really a drinker, but I am really interested in the business aspect of the activity,” says Dan. “I own waste recycling companies and employ a lot of people. With my experience of business, marketing, people, and hospitality I thought I could give my views.

“I understand what people want and how they buy. People buy with their eyes, and they eat with their eyes. That’s why

## MICK FOULDS

*Mick served in the Royal Corps of Transport and the Royal Engineers for nine years. After service, he worked on the railways, where he lost both his legs in an accident*

#### Why did you want to take part?

It seemed like a unique event and the chance to do something that not many people get to try. Anything that helps Blesma is good. Plus, I like a beer!

#### Do you have any brewing experience?

None, but my brother is a complete bore when it comes to home brewing. I’ve visited big breweries in Denmark but not one on a reasonably small scale like this one. It was interesting to learn how the different brewing processes produce all sorts of different tastes.

#### How did you find the creative process?

We definitely felt like our input was meaningful. We spent time talking about who would buy a Blesma beer and decided we couldn’t go too quirky with the name as we didn’t think that would appeal to Blesma supporters. Ideally, we would have produced three different beers, but in the end we compromised and went with a bitter.

#### What did you think of the overall experience?

It was great. I went to a couple of my local pubs in the run-up to Christmas and told the staff all about the experience. One of them even phoned the brewery to see if they would sell them the product!



**“THE GROUP ERUPTED INTO HEALTHY DEBATES, BUT THE CAMARADERIE WAS CLEAR TO SEE. EVERYONE HAD THEIR OWN OPINIONS BUT PULLED TOGETHER”**

Blesma's Corporate and  
Regional Fundraising  
Manager Chris Knight





Words: Jessica Mackinnon Photography: Andy Bate

names are important. It had to be quirky – something people would remember. For example, I think people like strange names for craft beers because they make people laugh and are easy to remember.

“Ascot Brewing Company knows what type of advertising works, and advertising is everything. You can make the best beer in the world but if the label looks dreadful then people aren’t going to buy it because they think it’s going to taste dreadful. It was clear they are very good at what they do.”

With an approach that represented *The Apprentice*, the boardroom battle of creation through salesmanship, strategy and feedback commenced.

“The group erupted into some healthy debates,” says Blesma’s Chris. “But the camaraderie was clear to see. Everyone had their opinions about what tasted better, and what might work best for the name, but they all pulled together as one team.

“They really fed into the whole process and were always asking questions, wanting to know the differences between certain

brews, for example. It was nice to see the Members working alongside and engaging with the Ascot Brewing team, too.”

Drawing on the Members’ connections, the beer focused on a very prominent theme.

“We centred our beer on Blesma as that was what brought us together,” explains Mark. “That’s how we came up with the name *Life and Limb*.”

“We suggested lots of names involving the word ‘legless’ or to do with the theme of an explosion, as we wanted something the public would recognise and find a bit quirky. But when we looked at the Blesma logo and talked about the Association a bit more we reflected on the fact that it also cares for Widows. We wondered if we would be projecting the right message. Amputation or loss of use of a limb also impacts on the lives of Widows and family members, so that is why we settled on the name.”

*Blesma is currently working with Ascot Brewing Company to see if the Blesma beer Life and Limb can be brought to life*



## DAN NEWBOLD

*Dan, from Hampshire, served for five years in the Royal Engineers. After returning from the Falklands War, he lost his right eye in a road traffic accident. He now runs waste recycling companies*

### How did you find working with Ascot Brewing Company?

The team were fantastic and very informative. It’s clear that they’re very passionate about what they are making.

### How did you find the activity?

I’m not much of a drinker so found the beer tasting interesting. Some of it was definitely an acquired taste as it was very strong. I liked trying the spirits they made too, as well as meeting the other guys.

### What did you think of your product?

It was great to be involved in the tasting and naming of the beer. Everyone was really friendly and there were lots of healthy, open discussions. I think we ended up with a great name.





# Book your place at Members' Weekend 2022

Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth  
18-20 June

The application deadline for this year's Members' Weekend has been extended to 04 April. If you would like to take part in one of the highlights of the Activities Calendar please apply at [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities) or email [eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org). Turn to p18 for more.

**MEMBERS' WEEKEND IS OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS AND THEIR PARTNERS OR CARERS**



# Bulletin

## Take part in a study and help Blesma

**H**ow veterans with loss of use of limb/s live their everyday lives is poorly understood in the UK. To help Blesma understand this more, the Veterans and Families Institute for Military Social Research (VFI) is looking into how Blesma Members, as well as their families and friends, live with loss of use of limb/s. The Association is using the VFI to ensure an impartial approach and to guarantee that all the information provided by Members is anonymised. The findings will be published as *Caring and Coping 2: the Family Perspective on Living with Loss of Functionality of Limb/s* and will inform how Blesma can best help Members and their families in the future.

So far, the team has interviewed Members who have lost the use of their limb/s either as a result of accidental trauma or because of long-term degenerative conditions. Findings so far include:

1 The injury/diagnosis acts as the 'centre of the storm' for family and friends: *'The first one is realising it's not my illness, it's our illness'. And 'It's not I it's We, because the effect on the family, arguably, was more difficult than it was on me'.*



2 That family and friends act as an 'anchor', but that their needs are seldom spoken of: *'She has six senses and she'll check with me. She's become an expert in paraplegia. That's good because she does understand me and sometimes I take that for granted. I should really appreciate that fact.'*

3 That adapting to physical difference is constant, with ups and downs over many years: *'The centre of the storm is the injury, but it's the winds around it that keep it rolling',* and that *'Nothing is ever static. It's ups and downs. What I can do today might not be tomorrow. Alternatively, I might be able to do more tomorrow, but not again the next week. And that is hard because it never stays the same'.*

4 The role of wider support and help for all is needed, but this support needs to be relevant to the individual: *'I am aware that [name removed] wants to help more and I then don't want them to help more because I want to be Mr Independent',* and *'I could have been much quicker in achieving some goals if I had actually asked for help'.*

This is a brief snapshot of the findings. In reality, it is more complex, and Blesma wants to learn more from Members and the people who help and support them. To do this, the Association is inviting Members to help in three ways:

1 The veteran with loss of use of limb/s to complete an online survey at <https://>

Continued  
from over

[angliaruskin.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/survey-blesma-members](https://angliaruskin.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/survey-blesma-members). This is about general health and wellbeing, and will take a maximum of eight minutes to complete. The survey link will be live from 15 March, and it can be completed on a smartphone, tablet or computer. Please be aware that answers will be anonymised. A BSO can also assist in its completion as needed, and paper copies can be sent as well.

- An online survey for family and friends. This is about their general health and wellbeing, and will take a maximum of five minutes to complete. The survey link will be live on 15 March, and can be completed on a smartphone, tablet or computer. Do be aware that all answers will be anonymised. It would be helpful if Members could share this widely with their family and friendship network – the more information the study collates, the better the Association can develop support to meet Members' needs. The form can be completed online at <https://angliaruskin.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/survey-for-family-members>. Paper copies can also be requested.
- Volunteer to take part in interviews with the research team (the VFI) by contacting [maria.iancu@aru.ac.uk](mailto:maria.iancu@aru.ac.uk). The Association would like to hear from Members about their everyday experiences of living with loss of use of limb/s as well as from family members, close friends and even those who help less often but are still important to Members' lives.

For many, taking part in the interviews has helped in thinking back and understanding, because these life experiences are often not spoken about. One parent of a veteran with loss of use of an arm said: 'It's probably about time [*I spoke of my son's injury*], so thank you, because nobody's ever asked me before.'

For many veterans, it is also important: 'Talk to mum, she'll be able to give you the non-uniform side. I only perceive what I think they've gone through.'

# Blesma partners with BAE Systems

**B**lesma has been chosen to be the partner charity of BAE Systems, Electronic Systems UK for 2022 and 2023. As the company's charity partner, Blesma will work with BAE Systems to create a calendar of fundraising and volunteering opportunities to engage with all BAE Systems employees, so they become connected to Blesma's cause.

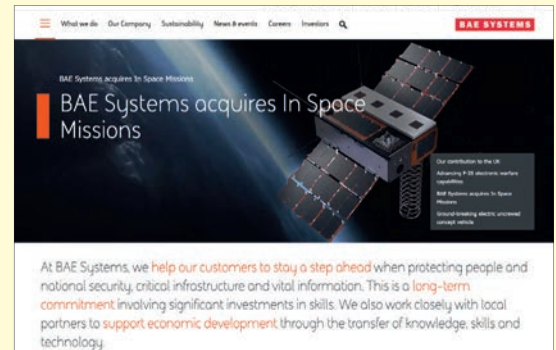
"We are thrilled to have been chosen as the BAE Systems, Electronic Systems UK charity partner," said Jon Bryant, Blesma's Chief Executive. "The partnership presents us with hugely exciting opportunities and we look forward to engaging with their staff to explore these. Supporting our Members is at the heart of everything we do and partnering with BAE Systems during our 90th year is extremely special for us."

BAE's Electronic Systems business produces electronics for flight and engine



**"Supporting Members is at the heart of everything we do, and partnering with BAE Systems is extremely special for us"**

Jon Bryant, Chief Executive



control, electronic warfare, surveillance, communications, geospatial intelligence, and power and energy management.

"It's really exciting for us to work with Blesma. We're looking forward to raising awareness of the amazing work it does within our communities, supporting events and providing fundraising and volunteering opportunities for our employees," said Ian Brimelow, Business Winning Director at BAE Systems, Electronic Systems UK.

## Blesma shows support for injured Afghan Veteran

**B**lesma Members will wish to know that the Board of Trustees has considered an application for Associate Membership from an Afghan serviceman who was seriously injured in combat and evacuated to the UK whilst serving alongside British Forces in the campaign.

After examining the circumstances of the case, the Board decided to accept his

application in the exceptional circumstances of the withdrawal from Afghanistan in accordance with the rules of the Association.

The veteran is now receiving support and advice from Blesma as he is treated for his injuries. He is one of more than 250 Blesma Members who are veterans of the Afghan campaign.

# Northern Ireland Outreach Update

## THE CRAFTERS

For the third year running, a small number of Blesma Widows got their needles and hooks out to knit and crochet 126 hats, scarves and gloves to provide warmth and comfort, and to send a message of kindness and caring. The packs were gifted to the residents of the Somme Nursing Home, a charity providing care for ex-Service personnel since 1914, and to R.U.T.H. – a charity that provides outreach support across Northern Ireland to those who find themselves homeless.

Feedback included comments such as: “Somme residents are absolutely delighted and very thankful for their gifts,” and “These packs have been so lovingly made, your kindness is appreciated – they have been crafted with compassion.”

## THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND NI

Members were given the opportunity to learn a new skill with a two-day beginner’s wood turning course at The Wood Shed, Templepatrick in November. This was the first of three workshops funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. The workshop accommodates lathes for four students, one of which has been adapted for a wheelchair user. With the help of their tutors, who boast 21 years combined turning experience,



Members were introduced to spindle turning and were able to design and turn their own bowl. With a few tools (and a lot of patience) our Members were able to make amazing pieces out of the wood.

## BSO VISIT

Because of the pandemic, it has not been possible for BSO Steve Burton (far left) to conduct his regular home visits with Members in Northern Ireland for some time. He was finally able to set sail across the Irish Sea last September to meet up with Members over a cuppa and attend an outreach activity. He even surprised one of our Widows with a birthday cake! This was alongside a busy visits programme that took him the length and breadth of the country. He visited Members in care homes and enjoyed catching up with our only surviving WWII Member and his wife.

It is heartwarming to see Members reconnecting in person. A record number of Northern Ireland Members attended the Christmas lunch. We want to ensure that we continue to engage with as many Members as possible, so we will maintain a blended outreach programme of virtual workshops, weekly check-ins and chats, at home projects, face-to-face activities and outreach home visits.

*Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer*



# Scotland Outreach update

**J**ohn White, managing director of JWPM, is a Royal Engineers and Intelligence Corps veteran who served for 12 years. He met with Outreach Scotland in May 2021 and, after being told about the services Blesma offers its Members, agreed to commit more than £10,000 to support specialised activities in 2021, including sponsoring a corporate box at Murrayfield Stadium for a rugby match and funding the Christmas lunches. A further commitment to support activities in 2022 was also given, and details of these activities will be released soon.

Emma Gration, Outreach Officer for Scotland, arranged for Members to attend the rugby match against Japan in November and a ballot was held to choose the 12 lucky Members who would get a ticket.

“I just want to say a big thank you to Emma and Blesma, and John from JWPM,” said Andy McQueen after the event. “This was a spectacular event and I feel very lucky to have had my name drawn from the hat to attend. I only recently joined Blesma as a Member and this corporate day at the Scotland vs Japan rugby was one of my top life events to date. Thanks to all the Members who attended the day – it was good to reminisce about Forces life, tours, and some of the things we got up to.”

Over the course of the match Members were provided with welcome drinks, brunch, lunch and a post-match dinner, and were visited by well-known past rugby stars.

“Thanks to Blesma, I was able to watch my first live rugby game, which was brilliant,” said Ann Brown. “The hospitality was great, as was meeting Blesma Members who I had never met before. All in all, a superb day!”

After some introductions the banter flowed, and Members enjoyed socialising with John and each other. The match was made even better as Scotland played well and won the game. Huge thanks must go to JWPM for sponsoring, as this event could not have been held without their support.

“Thanks again for a great day, I really enjoyed it and thanks again to John, what a great guy,” said Geoff Norris. “The day has



**“Thanks to Blesma I was able to experience my first live rugby game, which was brilliant. The hospitality was excellent, as was meeting Blesma Members who I had never met before. All in all, a great day!”**

**Ann Brown**

inspired me to get out and try a few more of the activities that Blesma organises – these events lift the spirits and give you a boost.”

## NEW YEAR

In late January, Members visited the ACVC Hub in Glasgow for a pyrography workshop, whilst elsewhere, thanks to Disability Snowsport Scotland, Members were able to have a beginner’s snowboarding lesson. Online seated yoga returned for the first

quarter of the year after a short break over Christmas, and it was good to see Members relaxing and stretching those aches and pains away. Thanks to Frances Fullarton for acting as the WD-40 to our creaking joints!

Member Lorraine Anderson led an online workshop in ribbon wreath making which will hopefully be the first of many Member-led activities this year.

Meanwhile, the online drama project with Stand Easy Productions has come to an end



and Members created a radio play which was presented in early run-through format to Members and Blesma’s Chief Executive, Jon Bryant. The play was well received, and Members will now tidy up a few loose ends and hopefully progress to improving the delivery of the play. Watch this space.

**COMING UP**

Outreach Officer Emma Gratton is currently looking at future activities in Scotland which will hopefully include visits to the National Museum of Flight and House for an Art Lover, as well as clay pigeon shooting, archery, the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, a Widows’ break and equine therapy visits. All that and the usual book group, make-at-home project and baking competitions.

*Please get in touch with Outreach Officer Scotland Emma Gratton on 07884 695703 or by email at [outreachscotland@blesma.org](mailto:outreachscotland@blesma.org) if you have any ideas for activities you would like to see included this year*



# News from around the Branches and regions

## NOTTINGHAM BRANCH UPDATE

Branch Members were very disappointed that the Christmas Lunch, which had been planned for 14 December, had to be cancelled at short notice. More than 30 Members were due to attend. It was particularly disappointing as we were looking forward to trying a new venue this year; The DoubleTree by Hilton Nottingham – Gateway. However, we remain hopeful that we can hold a Branch function there at some point this year.

We were grateful to be able to hold our meetings/lunches in July, September and November last year but felt it best to cancel February 2022's meeting due to Covid numbers. The Branch normally holds six lunches a year at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham. We were hoping to hold our Branch AGM on Tuesday 08 March.

Our Branch Welfare Officer Jayne Waring has remained busy throughout the pandemic, doing a fantastic job keeping in regular contact with our Members and also assisting the BSO. If you would like to join us at any of our meetings/lunches, it would be great to see new faces and you would be made very welcome.

*David Ledger*

*Hon. Secretary, Nottingham Branch*

## CHRISTMAS PARTY IN SHEFFIELD

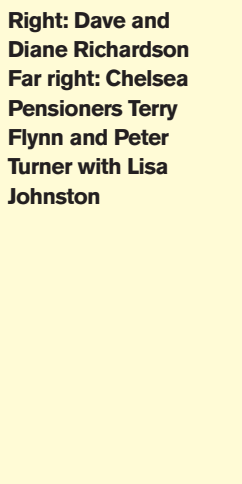
Last December, the Outreach Officers for the North East and North West combined forces to put together a landmark Christmas event. The event was the first overnight activity to have been hosted by the Outreach Officers since they joined Blesma back in 2018.

More than 65 Members met for an overnight Christmas party in Sheffield, including five new Members who had never had the chance to meet up in person before due to coronavirus restrictions. There were two Chelsea Pensioners in attendance, and the youngest attendee was just three months old!

The evening's entertainment consisted of a meal, a Making Generation R (MGR) speaker, a quiz, a raffle and a singer. The local Sea Cadets put on a surprise drum



**Far left: Andy Mudd and Joyce Birch  
Left: Chiara and Johnny Jackson**



**Right: Dave and Diane Richardson  
Far right: Chelsea Pensioners Terry Flynn and Peter Turner with Lisa Johnston**



**Martin Edwards and his carers Anouska Thornton and Evie Griffiths**



demonstration, and a professional photographer was employed to take portraits of Members (left).

“Just in the nick of time before the dreaded virus took hold, we held a first for Blesma; a multi-area Christmas Dinner with an overnight stay,” said Outreach Officer North East Adele Miller. “What joy this gave the attending Members after so many months of isolation!

“An added extra was that one of the Members had recently completed his MGR training so delivered his story to everyone. That really united the group, forming a wonderful bond and Member-to-Member support for the evening. It even led to other Members applying to attend the MGR training,” said Adele.

“Another great aspect of the night was the attendance of two Chelsea Pensioners who have been part of a ‘buddy system’ with Members that was created during lockdown. Having met the Members on Zoom meetings during Covid, they got the chance to meet their new friends face to face. We hope that this is the first of many such events.”

Outreach Officer North West Kirsten Morrissey collaborated with Adele to organise the event.

“Members had enjoyed the multi-area Zoom activities throughout lockdown and suggested the opportunity to meet other Members at a Christmas Dinner,” said Kirsten. “Some expressed concern about driving time impacting on the event, being unable to relax fully, driving home in the dark, and the cost of an overnight stay so close to Christmas.

“So to make the event as accessible as possible for those from both areas, we decided to include the overnight stay as part of the dinner package. Adele worked really closely with the Hilton Hotel in Sheffield, and they offered the Association a substantial discount. Adele also worked with the local Masonic Hall to provide a quality but cost-effective dinner.”

## What Members had to say

“I felt as if my wife and I were welcomed into the fold, we were introduced to other Members and their partners and made to feel very welcome by one and all. We had a fantastic evening and came away feeling very much part of Blesma”

**Mick Skee**

“The highlight for me was seeing Members enjoying each others’ company face to face after almost two years of restrictions. It was lovely to see Blesma Members mingling with the Chelsea Pensioners; a relationship that formed over Zoom during lockdown”

**Adele Miller, Outreach Officer North East**

“Thank you for a fabulous night. Meeting Members from another area, having a few beers and exchanging old stories was fantastic. It also put my mind at rest – it’s not just me who has issues with hands and legs and lack of sleep!”

**Dean Mills**

↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# A pleasure to be back on the road

AS THE NATION'S LIMB CENTRES BEGIN TO OPEN BACK UP, BLESMA'S BSO (PROSTHETICS) BRIAN CHENIER WILL ONCE AGAIN BE RIGHT BY YOUR SIDE



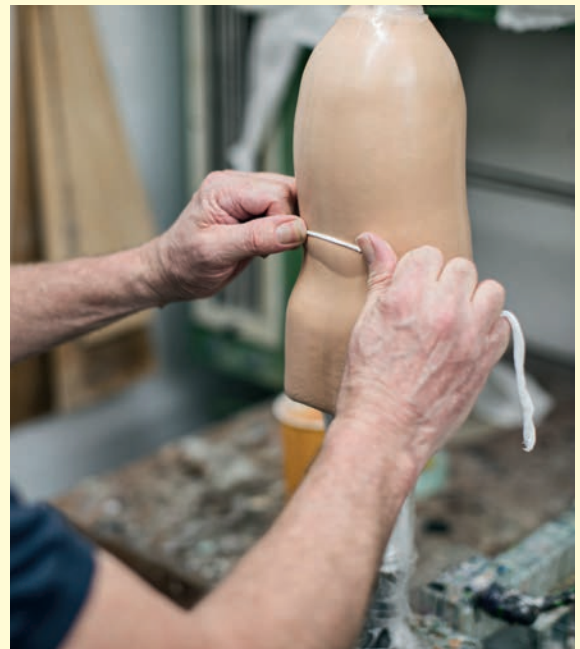
**A**s we seem to be turning the tide of Covid and the resulting restrictions are easing, it has been great to get out of the home office and back on the road. The new year started with a trip to Cambridge to join a Member at his Limb Centre appointment. Before Covid, this was routine business but the legacy of the pandemic was still evident.

On arrival at the Addenbrooke's Hospital site everyone was wearing face coverings, and security guards were posted at all entrances to ensure hands were washed and that fresh, hospital-supplied face coverings were being used. They were also checking the reason for the visit to reduce the number of people on site as far as possible. This did make us feel very safe and comfortable.

The following week I was again at Addenbrooke's Hospital, this time to support two Members who were attending prosthetic appointments. I accompany Members to their appointments for a variety of reasons, but always at the request of the Member. Often it relates to a breakdown in communication between the Limb Centre and the Member to such an extent that the Member feels having someone from Blesma with them to be an advocate is helpful.

I always try to find a way of dealing with individual issues or concerns early, usually without the need to be there in person. This is normally done by sending an email or calling the Member's prosthetist to make them aware of the problem from the Member's perspective. This is often successful and will negate the need for me to attend the next appointment.

On the rare occasion this doesn't work so well, or the Member or I feel it is important for me to be 'in the room', I will endeavour to make the appointment in person. That may require travelling long distances or even an overnight stay, but my priority is to be there when needed and for the appointment to be as soon



as possible so the service to the Member is not delayed. This can require some negotiation but the Limb Centre will usually accommodate this as well as they can. For example, on my last trip to Cambridge the Limb Centre facilitated an 8am appointment for one Member knowing I would be there later that morning for somebody else.

Since returning to work following the festive period I have managed to get to Limb Centres in Cambridge, Sheffield, Preston and Carlisle. The first three were to directly support a number of Members, while the trip to Carlisle was an opportunity to visit while I was in that part of the country. Whilst in Cumbria, I drove out to the Association's Family Glamping (North) activity

“  
**PART OF MY ROLE IS TO HELP EDUCATE NEW STAFF ABOUT BLESMA, OUR WORK, AND THE VARIOUS POLICIES OR FUNDING AVAILABLE**





as the site is under new ownership. The new owners are lovely and welcoming, and are looking forward to hosting Blesma families in August (see p20). It was also good to meet up with Blesma Member Bob Cameron, who volunteers there as a fishing coach.

### PROVIDING TRAINING AS WELL AS SUPPORT

My plan this year is to try to visit as many Limb Centres as possible and I already have several dates booked in to provide training to clinical staff about veterans' issues as part of their continued professional development. This is vital, as over the past two years a number of prosthetists, physiotherapists and centre managers have changed centres or roles, or have left the service altogether. Part of my role is to help educate new staff about Blesma, our work, and the various policies and funding available. I have also started to book in conferences and seminars that will help me keep up to date with new prosthetics products and to network within the prosthetics industry.

Following Covid, many organisations have adopted a hybrid way of working, combining virtual and face-to-face meetings (the Veterans' Prosthetics Panel and Veterans Trauma Network meetings are virtual,

for example). This is set to continue and will provide opportunities for me to have a wider reach without necessarily having to be physically in the room. It would be impractical to attend all of these in person, but 'Zooming in' works really well.

*If you are experiencing problems with your prosthesis or provision of prosthetics, please get in touch with Brian, BSO (Prosthetics), at Blesma Chelmsford on 020 8548 7080 or at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org), or you can visit [www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)*

**Brian visits Limb Centres to support Members and also to provide training to clinical staff on veterans' issues**



# Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

**W**elcome to the Bulletin's regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasions we will be raising awareness of some health and social care matters or other available support. **Blesma Members can either contact their Support Officer for further information about their benefit entitlement or contact Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser Liz Watling on 020 8548 7080 or email iwabenefits@blesma.org Please note: these contact details are for Blesma Members only.**

## SOCIAL SECURITY SCOTLAND

In 2016, as part of The Scotland Act, the Scottish Government was given devolved powers which gave responsibility for some benefits which were being delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions. The Scottish Government has already introduced some benefits, primarily support for children and funeral payments. To find out more about the current benefits available in Scotland, please visit [www.mygov.scot/browse/benefits](http://www.mygov.scot/browse/benefits) or call 0800 182 2222. Blesma Members in Scotland may also contact their Blesma Support Officer.

## ADULT DISABILITY PAYMENT IN SCOTLAND

The next benefit to roll out in Scotland will be Adult Disability Payment, which is a benefit to help with the extra costs of living with a disability or health condition. It will

replace Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance, which are currently administered by the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of central government. The introduction of Adult Disability Payment will see the benefit gradually rolled out for new applicants across Scotland. New applicants are those who are not already receiving Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance. The delivery timeline for new applications for Adult Disability Payment is shown in the table below.

Existing recipients of either Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance will continue to receive the benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions. From Summer 2022, it is expected that awards will start to move over to Adult Disability Payment. It will take around three years to move everyone.

You will keep getting your Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance until your benefit moves. Claimants will be contacted by letter to advise of the move and there should be no gaps in payment. Social Security Scotland will not reassess or review your award during the move. If you were due a review with the Department for Work and Pensions, Social Security Scotland will review your award after you start getting Adult Disability Payment.

If you lease a car through the Motability Scheme, changing to Adult Disability Payment will not affect your current lease.

Social Security Scotland will advise the company you lease the vehicle from about the transfer and take over the payments from the Department for Work and Pensions. After the end of your lease, you will be able to lease a vehicle from the Accessible Vehicles and Equipment Scheme.

## CONSTANT ATTENDANCE ALLOWANCE AND BENEFITS

Constant Attendance Allowance and War Pensions Mobility Supplement are treated as overlapping benefits when considering payments for Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance. This means that whilst you may qualify for your War Pension supplement and Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance you cannot be paid both in full. Your War Pension supplement will take precedence over Department for Work and Pensions disability benefits.

Personal Independence Payment daily living component and Attendance Allowance will be either reduced by the amount of Constant Attendance Allowance or not payable at all.

Personal Independence Payment mobility component will not be payable at all if there is an entitlement to War Pensioners Mobility Supplement.

The Department for Work and Pensions has informed Blesma that, due to errors, they have discovered a number of claims that should not have been paid due to the overlapping rules. Where the error is on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions it will not be seeking to recover any of the payment of benefit. The department will contact people affected by telephone to explain the situation and a letter will then be issued stating that their entitlement has either ended or been reduced. When contacted, all customers are being advised and reassured that they WILL NOT be asked to repay any overpayment that may have occurred.

**Any Member who has further questions can contact their Blesma Support Officer**

DATE OF APPLICATIONS OPENING	ELIGIBLE AREAS
21 March 2022	Perth and Kinross, Dundee and Western Isles local authorities
20 June 2022	Tayside, Western Isles and Lanarkshire health boards (North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire, Dundee City, Perth and Kinross, Angus and Western Isles)
25 July 2022	Ayrshire and Arran, Fife and Grampian health boards (Fife, North Ayrshire, Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, Moray)
29 August 2022	The rest of Scotland



## ENERGY BILLS REBATE

The Government has announced a package of support to help households with rising energy bills in 2022-23. At the time of writing there remained some further information to follow, particularly around the devolved nations. We shall keep our Members updated in future magazines.

### This package of support includes:

- A £200 discount on energy bills this Autumn for domestic electricity customers in Great Britain. This will be paid back automatically over the next five years
- A £150 non-repayable rebate in Council Tax Bills for all households in Bands A-D in England
- A discretionary fund for Local Authorities to support households who need support but are not eligible for Council Tax Rebate

Where government support does not cover Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the devolved administrations will receive funding from the Government.

### How will the Energy Bill Discount Scheme work?

Domestic energy customers in Great Britain will receive a £200 cash discount on their bills this Autumn. Customers will pay back the discount automatically in equal instalments over five years, starting from the financial year 2023-24, when wholesale gas prices are expected to come down. There will be more detail on the policy in the Spring.

The £200 energy bills discount applies across England, Wales and Scotland. The Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for energy policy in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive will be funded to provide comparable support next year.

### How will the Council Tax Rebate work?

Households in England in Council Tax Bands A-D will be eligible for a £150 rebate in their council tax bill in April this year. This will not have to be repaid. The rebate will not be paid for second homes or empty properties.

For those who need help with their energy bills but are not eligible for the Council Tax Rebate, local authorities have a discretionary fund to help.

Further details will follow from the Government. Please contact your Local Authority for further information.

Council Tax policy is devolved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. As a result, the devolved administrations will receive extra funding which will enable them to provide similar support. They will be able to choose whether to spend the funding this year or next year.

# Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7080 <b>M</b> 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3020 <b>M</b> 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	<b>T</b> 020 7501 3030 <b>M</b> 07469 242277	bsolve@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Sam Wileman	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7095 <b>M</b> 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3027 <b>M</b> 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Mike Downes	<b>T</b> 01257 795144 <b>M</b> 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland, NI & ROI	Steve Burton	<b>M</b> 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	<b>T</b> 020 3954 3026 <b>M</b> 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Steve Fraser	<b>T</b> 01278 789393 <b>M</b> 07788 312747	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO West	Tom Hall	<b>T</b> 020 8548 7098 <b>M</b> 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	<b>T</b> 020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
<b>BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS</b>			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Darren Fuller	<b>M</b> 07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	<b>M</b> 07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	<b>M</b> 07741 845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	<b>M</b> 07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	<b>M</b> 07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Kirsten Morrissey	<b>M</b> 07741 846674	outreachnw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Scotland	Emma Gration	<b>M</b> 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Andy Barlow	<b>M</b> 07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Sarah Payne	<b>M</b> 07741 737563	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer West	Jason Suller	<b>M</b> 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org

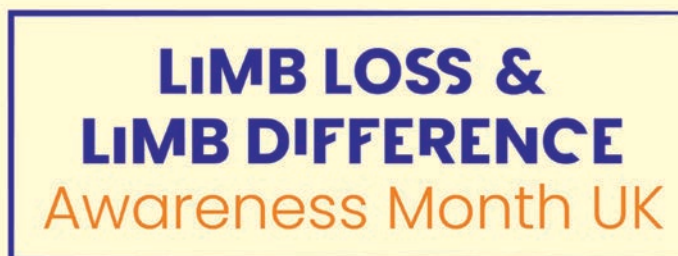
## Joining forces for #LLLDAM

Last year, Blesma marked Limb Loss and Limb Difference Awareness Month for the first time by joining a consortium of other UK charities working to support children, young people and adults with limb loss or limb difference. This April, the Association will again raise awareness about living with limb loss and limb difference through its social media.

“We believe that by working with other charities we can

achieve more and reach more of our collective community members when they need us most,” said Blesma’s Operations Director Tony Bloomfield.

“We hope our shared presence will highlight the impact of living with limb difference on both the individual, and on their family and support network.



By creating a central online hub for amputees and those with limb difference to access the right support and learn more about the various organisations that can help them, we can bring our community closer together.”

You can help recognise and celebrate Limb Loss and Limb Difference Awareness Month by sharing your own story on social media this April using the hashtags #LLLDAM and #LimbLossLimbDifference AwarenessMonth. Don’t forget to tag Blesma so that we can share your story.

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING</b>			
Benefits and Social Care Advisor	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Grants and Outreach Activities Executive	Jackie King	T 020 8548 3516	goaexec@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Grants Admin	Susie Grainger	T 020 3954 3022	grantsadmin@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>			
Activities Manager	Jess March	T 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Membership Engagement Officer	Emily Mizon	T 020 8548 7094	meo@blesma.org
Activities Executive	Clare Wellings	T 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Activities Executive (Local)	Nicole Findlay	T 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
<b>FUNDRAISING</b>			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	T 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Senior Community and Events Officer	Abbie-Louise Mills	T 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	M 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org
Senior Corporate Fundraising Officer	Alana Warwick	T 020 8590 1124	scfo@blesma.org
Database Manager	Julie Hitchcock	T 020 8548 7088	dbmanager@blesma.org
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Stories, Content and Press Officer	Jess Mackinnon	T 020 8548 3514	storiesandpress@blesma.org
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Communications Executive	Izzy Perks	T 020 8548 7092	commsexec@blesma.org
<b>DIRECTORS</b>			
Chief Executive	Jon Bryant	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Ian Harper	T 020 8548 3515	diw@blesma.org
<b>USEFUL CONTACTS</b>			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org
HR and Facilities Manager		T 020 8548 3511	hrf@blesma.org
IT and Admin Support Officer	Ivona Andrejsova	T 020 8548 7091	itas@blesma.org

## Bathroom adaptation is a ‘relief for the family’

**A** Blesma-funded bathroom is helping Craig Styles live more independently after his second leg amputation.

“Going through another amputation 19 years after my right leg was amputated was difficult,” said Craig. “I was alone in hospital due to Covid, and my mental health suffered. I started to worry how I was going to cope – our bathroom wasn’t set up for a wheelchair.”

After Craig had a conversation with BSO Kevin Long, Blesma transformed the bathroom into a fit-for-purpose wet room.

“The Blesma grant was a big relief for the whole family. My wife was diagnosed with womb and ovarian cancer in December, so knowing that Blesma was going to support us helped me relax, focus on my recovery and concentrate on supporting my wife and family.”

## Ever thought about helping research?

**A**s a respected organisation that supports injured Service and ex-Service personnel, Blesma is often asked to support research projects. Every year, BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier attends numerous meetings that look at future and on-going research topics. This offers an opportunity to represent Blesma and the membership at the early or scoping phase

of research projects, as well as influencing the direction of others.

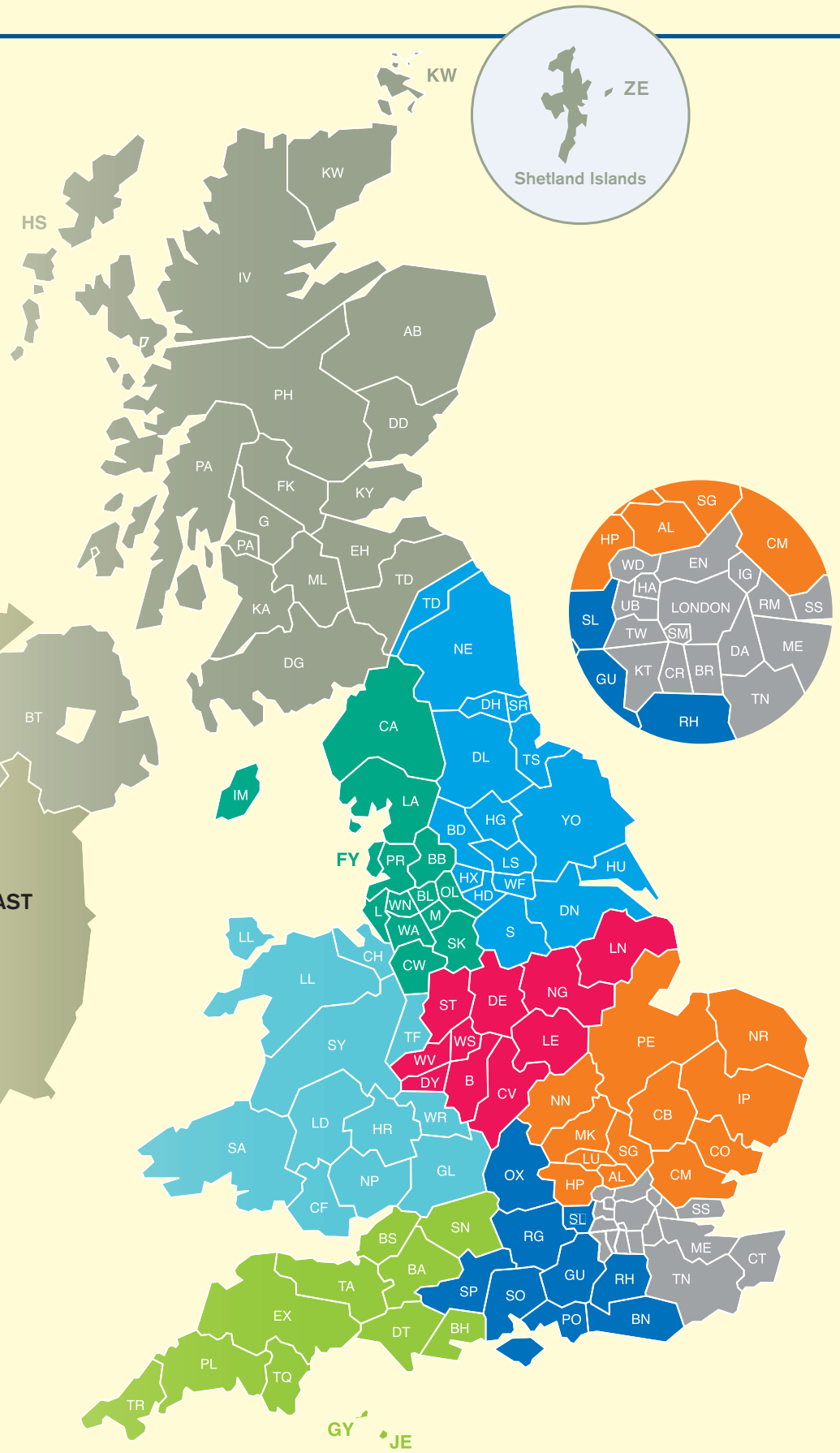
When the Association does support projects, its input ranges from supporting the research concept to identifying potential participants.

**For more on the current research projects that Blesma supports visit [www.blesma.org/research-projects](http://www.blesma.org/research-projects)**

# Blesma by area

*Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area. The contact numbers for all BSOs, Outreach Officers, and relevant members of staff can be found on p68.*

- SCOTLAND, NI AND ROI
- NORTH WEST
- NORTH EAST
- EASTERN
- MIDLANDS
- WEST
- SOUTH
- SOUTH WEST
- LONDON AND SOUTH EAST



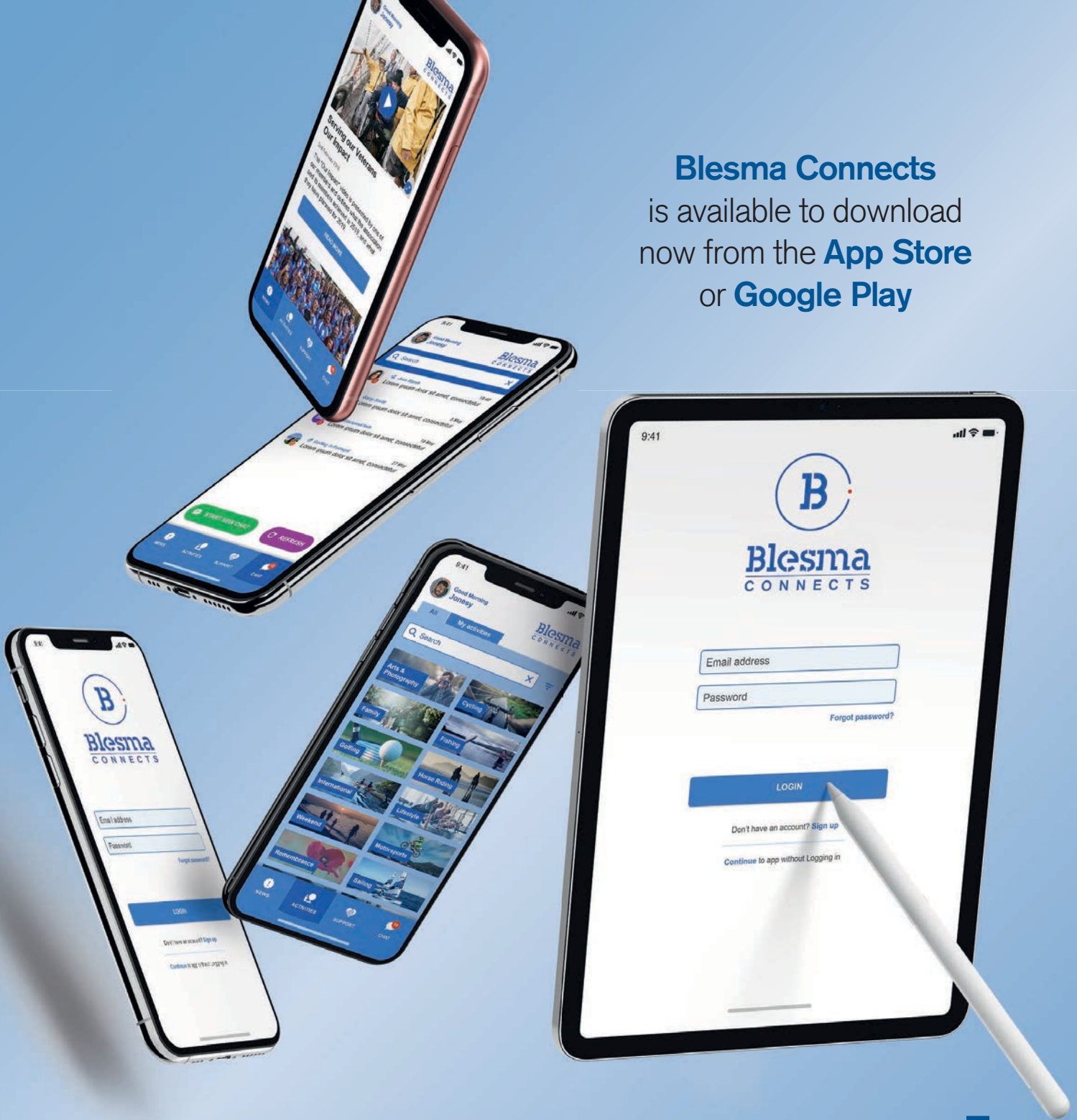
In the Summer issue

# Making Generation R in the spotlight again



Meet the graduating class of 2022  
as they prepare to tell the world about  
their incredible lives

**Blesma Connects**  
is available to download  
now from the **App Store**  
or **Google Play**



# Stay Connected

Wherever you are, whenever you want,  
stay on top of everything Blesma  
with the **Blesma Connects** app