

# Blesma

The magazine for limbless veterans



Special Report

# Members' Weekend 2016

The highlight of the year is back – and bigger than ever!



## Helping Members to help teenagers

Our community programme is teaching Members how to tell their life stories – with staggering results **p36**



## The future is almost here

The company Open Bionics is about to change the world of prosthetics forever **p54**



## What happened to WWI's wounded?

Go behind the scenes of the Science Museum's major new exhibition *Wounded: Conflict, Casualties and Care* **p42**

# Problems with sweating?

## Control it with this advanced method of moisture management

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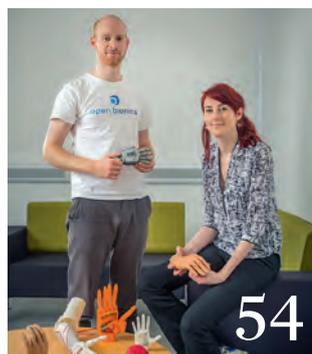
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# NEWS

News, views and opinion from the world of Blesma

## Team GB sets Invictus Games alight

**T**eam GB needed extra baggage allowance on the flight home from America in May, for the 49 gold, 46 silver and 36 bronze medals that they had to carry back with them from the Invictus Games.

The second Paralympic-style multi-sport event took place at Walt Disney World in Orlando, and featured more than 500 competitors from 14 countries. Team GB fielded athletes in all 12 sports, and bagged 131 medals in total throughout the Games.

“I injured my hand in the discus, which meant I couldn’t compete in the swimming, and that was my main event,” said Nerys Pearce, a former Army Combat Paramedic who was paralysed in a motorbike accident in 2008. “But I ended up with 10 medals, so I can’t really complain!

“The Games were hosted and run really well by the Americans, and the atmosphere

was electric. I got medals in powerlifting, discus, shot put, athletics, rowing and basketball. It was nice to be part of team events as well as competing on my own. I had to work hardest at basketball, as I’ve not been playing it as long as other sports, but the team spirit was great. Everyone put in 100 per cent for each other.”

Triple amputee Josh Boggi, 29, picked up two rowing golds and two cycling silvers. “Getting four medals in one day was absolutely crazy,” he said. “It was even more amazing considering I’d never even tried rowing until two days before the event! But I was persuaded to give it a go, and I couldn’t believe it when I won. I was hanging on for dear life at the end of the race, it was horrendous, but the feeling of getting gold was incredible. One of the best things about Invictus is that it gives you the chance to try different sports.”



Josh Boggi on his way to one of four medals





The Americans  
know how to  
put on a party!



**It's good to talk...**  
Members' Weekend (p26)

# welcome

Blesma is in full swing with Members' Weekend having taken place at the start of June, followed by Blesma Week. Lots of events were planned, both big and small, to spread the word on Blesma, and it all helped tremendously. Blesma Week opened with a number of Members and supporters taking part in the Blesma 100 Ride, a 100-mile cycle ride. I anchored a number of Blesma balloons to various London Underground stations to attract attention and support, and climbed the Yorkshire Three Peaks as well. Members' Weekend features in this edition, of course. If what you read on p26 appeals, please make a note to attend next year.

Our latest Annual Report has been published. It is a comprehensive narrative of what Blesma achieved last year. It also flags up what Blesma intends to address in the future. The new Defence (National) Rehabilitation Centre, direct skeletal fixation pilot programme, and Specialist Mobility Fund have all to be assessed for a Blesma contribution. In particular, the Trustees are keen to invest in support for the most infirm and those in later life. The Constitution is being presented for an update at the AGM, as you should be aware. There are important decisions on the horizon and we welcome discussion through conversation, letter or email.

Sadly, we have obituaries and we say a final farewell to David Asdell and Bob Gibbens, who both did so much for the cause in so many ways and will long be remembered.

We are indebted to Chris Middleton and David Skidmore for telling us their personal stories so openly, not an easy thing to do. Some other highlights in this edition are the Blesma Community Programme, which has honed the public speaking skills of some 17 Members and enabled them to outreach to more than 1,800 youths in schools on the subject of resilience. The immediate feedback is highly positive and more schools would already like us to deliver another programme next year.

The Battle of the Somme features in two articles. We hope to have a Member and WWII veteran whose father fought on the Somme represent Blesma at the international commemoration on the continent. Elsewhere, the article on Open Bionics stresses technology. Boundaries are being stretched as the digital age grips prosthetics; we would like the NHS to embrace the advances for the wider public good, too.

I wish you all a most enjoyable Summer and I am sure there will be many exploits to tell in the Autumn edition.

**Barry Le Gry**  
Chief Executive





Team GB (check out Nerys' huge medal haul!)

Hosted in May at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Centre in Walt Disney World, the American crowds were enthusiastic. Invictus Games founder Prince Harry was present, and a number of world-famous faces dropped by, including First Lady Michelle Obama, former US President George W Bush, and Morgan Freeman.

## INVICTUS IS WOW

“All I can say about Invictus is ‘Wow!’” said Luke Delahunty, 44, who served in the RAF Regiment and was paralysed in a road traffic accident in 1996. “I competed in cycling and rowing, and the atmosphere was just brilliant. The way they treat their veterans in the US is fantastic. People were constantly thanking us for our service. It was very un-British, and easy to get embarrassed and not know how to react.

“Competing in Invictus has come 20 years after I was paralysed, and it was a perfect way for me to show people how far you can come after injury. If you’d told me in those early days that one day I’d be competing in this huge event, I’d never have believed you. You can’t help but be inspired in the most direct way by the other competitors. My friend won a tennis gold, and it got me thinking that when I get home, I’m going to give tennis a go!”

Josh, who served with 9 Parachute Squadron, Royal Engineers and was injured in Afghanistan on New Year’s Eve 2010, was equally complimentary about the hosts. “The Americans really got behind the Games,” he said. “Being in the middle of Disney was superb for friends and family, and the events were all in one place, so once you’d competed, you could cheer someone else on. These Games keep amputees at the forefront of people’s minds. Those wars may be over now, but our limbs aren’t going to grow back!”



Prince Harry addresses the athletes

That unique military camaraderie was evident everywhere. “The sense of us all supporting each other was always present,” said Nerys. “I met one woman who’d only been injured a year and a half ago. It was so impressive that she was getting involved and competing so soon after injury.”

Despite the buzz of a big competition, the athletes’ attention has already turned to the next challenge. Invictus 2017 will be held in Toronto, with the likes of Luke already targeting a place on the team. Nerys is practicing her skiing with a view to the Winter Paralympics in 2018, while Josh is looking even further forward.

“I’d love to make it to the Paralympics in 2020,” he said. “Sure, it’s a leap up in standard, but another great thing about Invictus is that it shows you how far you’ve come and how far you have to progress. There were guys here who are going to Rio, and two years ago, they were at my level. My aim is to get to their standard.”

## THE INVICTUS CHOIR

It wasn’t just Blesma’s athletes who got to perform in front of huge crowds in Florida this Summer. As part of Gareth Malone’s Invictus Choir, Members Paul Jacobs, Bernie Bambury, and Andy Mudd (pictured) sang to 12,000 people at the opening ceremony.

“We sang a *One Direction* song for the Invictus athletes at a lunch, but then Gareth told us we’d be writing and recording our own song, and singing it in Florida,” said Andy, who was injured by an IRA bomb in 1989. “It was a huge learning curve, but the song, *Flesh And Blood*, came together well, and the buzz from singing it was phenomenal.”

Andy auditioned for the choir by singing *All Things Bright and Beautiful* into his iPhone (“It was frightening!”), and impressed Gareth Malone with his ability to play the piano and read music. “The choir took part in an eight-week process and we all got on really well,” said Andy. “We were given lessons in how to breathe properly and learned how to project our voices. I thought the BBC documentary at the end presented us in an excellent light.”





## ROLL OF HONOUR

*Congratulations to the following Blesma Members and Invictus Games athletes*

**Ibrar Ali** - Athletics, Swimming

**Ross Austen** - Powerlifting

**Jordan Beecher** - Rowing

**Josh Boggi** - Cycling, Rowing

**Steven Boulton** - Rugby

**Andrew Bracey** - Athletics

**Nathan Cumberland** - Athletics, Cycling

**Luke Delahunty** - Cycling, Rowing

**Sean Gaffney** - Athletics, Powerlifting,  
Rowing

**Gareth Golightly** - Archery, Cycling

**Michael Goody** - Swimming

**Anil Gurung** - Volleyball

**Ashley Hall** - Rugby

**Grant Harvey** - Archery

**David Henson** - Athletics

**Alex Krol** - Archery, Cycling, Rowing, Tennis

**Alan Le Sueur** - Swimming

**Lamin Manneh** - Archery, Athletics,  
Rowing, Volleyball

**Corie Mapp** - Athletics, Volleyball

**Michael Mathews** - Cycling

**Scott Meenagh** - Rowing

**Chris Middleton** - Athletics, Basketball

**Adam Nixon** - Basketball

**Chris Parkes** - Archery, Rowing

**Vicky Parrett** - Athletics

**Nerys Pearce** - Athletics, Basketball,  
Powerlifting, Rowing

**Andy Phillips** - Archery

**Craig Preece** - Athletics, Cycling

**Netra Rana** - Volleyball

**Stu Robinson** - Rugby

**David Sandles** - Cycling

**Ryan Seary** - Swimming

**Luke Sinnott** - Athletics

**Ben Steele** - Rugby

**Mark Stonelake** - Archery

**Jaco Van Gass** - Cycling

**Paul Vice** - Athletics, Cycling, Swimming,  
Volleyball

**Charlie Walker** - Basketball, Rugby,  
Volleyball

**Craig Winspear** - Athletics, Basketball

**Michael Yule** - Powerlifting

**Michael Yule**



Words: Nick Moore Photographs: Crown Copyright 2016, Roger Keller/Help for Heroes, Andy Bate



# Kenevo

## Reclaim your sense of security

The Kenevo is the world's first technologically advanced prosthetic knee designed specifically for people with lower mobility levels. This revolutionary micro-processor knee is ideally suited to help those going through rehabilitation and also provides an increased sense of security for people with decreasing mobility levels. The Kenevo is also available for Veteran's via the Veteran's Prosthetic Panel (VPP).



Veterans can now benefit from the expertise of staff at Headley Court



## Headley Court is now able to treat veterans

**H**eadley Court will now treat veterans who suffer from amputation-related medical issues as a result of recent operations. Eligible injured veterans will be able to receive the supply, maintenance and repair of prosthetics, and will be able to benefit from assessments, physiotherapy, counselling and mental health support.

Blesma has championed the continued use of Headley Court as services are transferred to the new Defence and National Rehabilitation Centre at Stanford Hall, which is due to open in 2018.

A report by triple amputee Jon White highlighted that NHS support was subject to sub-standard performance for wounded veterans. *The White Report* also found that amputees relied on charities to raise money for treatment abroad, and called for the

MoD to allow former Service personnel to receive treatment at Headley Court.

Six amputee veterans have now received care under the new scheme, announced by Defence Secretary Michael Fallon, after being referred by their local NHS.

“This is a win-win situation. The Ministry of Defence maintains expertise, the NHS gains knowledge, and the most injured veterans get the treatment they deserve,” said Blesma’s Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys.

A veteran’s healthcare will still be run by the NHS, but veterans will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and referred if NHS staff believe they will benefit from Headley Court.

“These men and women have made huge sacrifices. This is about making sure they get the best treatment,” said Mr Fallon.

**For more information, turn to p18**

### NEWS BRIEFS

#### MAKING A HOUSE A HOME

Connie Eglon, who began working for Blesma Blackpool Home as a carer in 1990, has been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal for 25 years of service. “I really enjoy my job. I love everything that Blesma stands for, the people here and all the staff – it’s like a big family,” said Connie, who is now the Home’s housekeeper. “The job is very rewarding



and gives me great satisfaction. It’s a very special place, whether you work or live here, and no-one should forget that. I can’t imagine not working here.”

#### GET THE WINNING TICKET!

It’s not too late to enter Blesma’s Grand Prize Draw. Held as part of Blesma Week, prizes include a mountain bike and up to £1,000 in cash. Tickets are £1 each and come in books of five. The closing date for entries is 17 July, with the winners announced on 27 July.



All proceeds raised through Blesma Week and the Grand Prize Draw will go towards funding Blesma’s vital work.

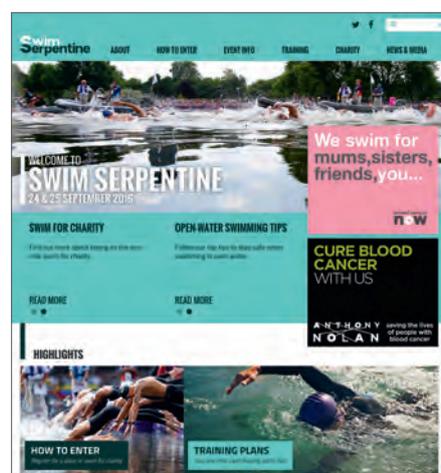
**To buy tickets for the Grand Prize Draw, or for more information about the competition, visit [www.blesma.org/support-us/blesma-week](http://www.blesma.org/support-us/blesma-week). For a full report on the recent action-packed Blesma Week, turn to p12**

## SWIM SERPENTINE!

In September, 6,000 lucky participants will get to swim one mile in the Serpentine in London’s Hyde Park as part of Swim Serpentine.

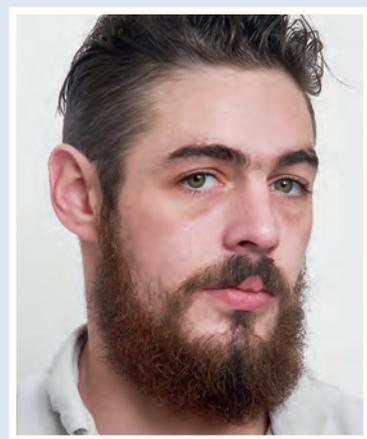
The lake was the venue for the open water swimming competition at the London 2012 Olympics. The ballot entry has closed for the event but Blesma has five spaces available.

**If you would like to be in with the chance of taking part in the two-day swimming festival, which will be held over the weekend of 24-25 September, contact Zanika Fearon, Community and Events Fundraising Manager, on 020 8548 7089, or email her at [events@blesma.org](mailto:events@blesma.org)**



In the spotlight

# Chris Middleton



**C**hris Middleton was serving with the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards when he was injured in Sangin, Afghanistan, in 2011. At the age of 20 he had lost his left leg above the knee and his right leg below the knee. He has since become heavily involved in a number of sports, and was selected to compete in a variety of disciplines at this year's Invictus Games in America (see separate story, p04).

"It was so hot that morning – it must have been getting on for 50°C – and I had a feeling something was going to go wrong," Chris recalls of the routine patrol that ended up being anything but ordinary. "I remember my stomach was turning over. Shortly afterwards, I stood on an IED. Fifteen other lads had walked over it before me – an inch either way and I'd have been fine. I was just unlucky, I guess."

## HOW CAN YOU GET BACK TO A NORMAL LIFE?

Chris has a vivid recollection of the moments that followed. "I was thrown up in the air, but there was no pain," he says. "I called for help, but didn't realise the extent of what had happened at first. It soon started to register that I wasn't getting up from the blast. My left arm was badly injured – the bone was sticking through the skin – I'd lost one leg below the knee and the other one above the knee. The back of one leg was blown off, but my foot was still attached. I remember lifting my leg up and wondering where my boot had gone! I was induced into a coma and I woke up in hospital in Birmingham seven days later."

Chris is very honest about what turned out to be an incredibly difficult recovery. "Coming round was grim. It broke me. I didn't feel like myself any more. I was conscious during the incident, so there was no need to break the news to me. My mum was in bits. When you first wake up you have to deal with the physical pain – you can't turn without it hurting, you're in constant agony, it's indescribable – but it's the mental pain that you really struggle to deal with. How can you ever get back to a normal life again?"

Chris was at Headley Court for three years. "Learning to walk with one leg amputated higher than the other was hard. I was like Bambi on ice! I tried my hardest but I'd fall over again and again. The inconvenience of little things, like nipping to the toilet in the night, used to frustrate me so much. That's when some people get into a real depression and I just drank

too much. I got to the point where I was looking at the vodka bottle in the morning. That grim stretch lasted 18 months. What I missed most was sport. I used to love playing football and boxing, and even now, when Saturday comes around, I just want to be lacing my boots up. I needed to find a new way to replace that camaraderie."

## ONE POSITIVE LEADS TO ANOTHER

The scuba diving charity Depththerapy was crucial in helping Chris turn his life around. "They offered to take me diving, and at first I thought it was ridiculous – I'd just been blown up! – but I went on a seven-day dive and absolutely loved it. I felt normal again in the water, there were no limitations to what I could do.

"That turned me around because, as I started to get involved in more and more activities, I began to come to terms with my mental difficulties. My BSO, Charley Streather, was with me every step of the way, too. The best therapy is talking to other guys who understand. That's where Blesma is invaluable."

Since he started to think positively, Chris hasn't looked back. He plays wheelchair basketball for his local team, Leicester Cobras, and was picked to represent Team GB at the recent Invictus Games in basketball and athletics. "I've got that team spirit back that I missed so much from the military and from football. Life is much better for me now, and it's all thanks to the support I've received. I'm looking forwards. Blesma is helping me to get a new basketball chair, and I couldn't wait for Invictus from the moment I knew I'd made the team. I wanted to pull on the Team GB jersey so badly!"

Chris was a "fit, very fast" sportsman back in the day, and reckons he is pretty speedy in a wheelchair, too. He has one eye on the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics, but until then he is relishing the chance to meet lots more like-minded people.

"The camaraderie has helped me so much," he says. "I might be having a coffee with a Blesma Member, or a team member, and they'll tell me something that they've never told anyone – not even their wife or kids. There are emotions that you just can't explain to family members or mates, only to people who have been through what you've been through. Now, I look forward to meeting new people and talking to them, trying to help them out."

“

**THERE ARE EMOTIONS THAT YOU JUST CAN'T EXPLAIN TO FAMILY MEMBERS OR MATES, ONLY TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH WHAT YOU HAVE BEEN THROUGH**

”

## Is this the future?

The pioneers of 3D-printed prosthetics (p54)



**“IT’S THE MENTAL PAIN THAT YOU REALLY STRUGGLE TO DEAL WITH. HOW CAN YOU EVER GET BACK TO A NORMAL LIFE AGAIN?”**



Words: Nick Moore Photography: Steve Orino

# Blesma buckets brimming after a wonderful week

Thanks to Blesma Week's main sponsor

*Niche* Communications  
[www.nichecom.co.uk](http://www.nichecom.co.uk)

**F**rom the Underground stations in London to the heights of Ingleborough in the Yorkshire Dales, Members, supporters and volunteers came out in their hundreds to support our injured veterans and get behind Blesma Week. From 06-12 June people walked, baked, cycled and climbed to raise an incredible £60,000 for the Association – and that figure is still rising!

Thanks to the incredible support of Mike Bracken and Robert Varney of Transport For London, the Fundraising Team were able to hold a collection in a different London Underground station every day of the week between 06 and 10 June. The staff at each station supported Blesma incredibly, with regular announcements over the PA systems letting hundreds of thousands of commuters know about Blesma Week, and asking them to donate.

And London's commuters were very generous in their donations! More than 50 volunteers kindly gave up their time to help raise an astounding £16,329, which went a long way towards the total raised from Blesma Week. Here are just a few of the other events that took place....

## CYCLE 100

They came, they saw, they cycled! On Saturday 04 June, a group of 70 veterans



led by Jonathan Bell – including some on hand bikes – took on a 100-mile ride in the South Yorkshire countryside to launch Blesma Week, and raised more than £21,000!

## SOMERSET V SURREY T20

On Friday 10 June, Somerset County Cricket Club welcomed Blesma to County Ground, Taunton for the Somerset v Surrey T20. Blesma Members and volunteers collected at the ground, and Member Simon Harmer did the toss. The Association was given a very warm welcome by the club and managed to raise £1,093 from the day – and has been invited back next year!



Photographs: Brian Chentier, Andy Bate

## Strength through stories

How Blesma is helping the nation's youth (p36)



### THREE PEAKS CHALLENGE

Blesma's Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys, rounded off Blesma Week by taking on the Yorkshire Three Peaks. Setting off at the bottom of Pen-y-ghent, Barry climbed 4,531 feet up Pen-y-ghent, Ingleborough and Wharfedale, walking 23 miles in all, in an incredible 6 hours and 20 minutes.

"It was a fun day in the mist," said Barry. "I must be mad, but I'd be very pleased to take on the Three Peaks in reverse order next year if supporters are keen to join me again. The excellent inn at the end makes it all worthwhile!"

If you would like to show your support, you can donate to Barry's Just Giving page at [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Barry-Le-Grys1](http://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/Barry-Le-Grys1)

### 24-HOUR HAND BIKEATHON

Blesma Member Richard Hunt and friend Tim Snowden took on a gruelling 24-hour hand bike 'ride' on Monday 06 June. The athletic duo took it in turns to ride in 90-minute shifts at Fareham Leisure Centre.

"It was unbelievably gruelling, especially in the night when the gym was closed and Tim and I were the only ones there," said Richard. "What kept us going was knowing we were doing it for Blesma, not only to raise funds but to raise awareness." You can still show Richard and Tim your support by



donating to their Just Giving page at [www.justgiving.com/Richard-hunt18](http://www.justgiving.com/Richard-hunt18)

### FUNDRAISING IN FIFE

Member Ian Smith held a collection in Livingstone Shopping Centre, raising more than £400. "I was impressed by the support and generosity of the public, and very proud of the support I received," Ian said.



### THANK YOU TO OUR SILVER AND GRAND PRIZE DRAW SPONSORS

*The fantastic efforts of Members, supporters, and volunteers were backed by the generous support from a loyal group of sponsors; Centro, BAE Systems, Marbank, Military Mutual, Ottobock, Hampden and Steeper*



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## NEWS BRIEFS

### BLOWN AWAY BY THE SUPPORT

Blown Away, the clothing brand owned by Blesma Member Simon Harmer, is donating 15% of all sales to Blesma.

Blown Away sells a range of clothing as well as items such as teddy bears and flasks. The brand also has a new range featuring the Blesma logo.

"The work Blesma does to highlight amputee issues is amazing, and I wanted to give back to a military charity that helped me when I needed it," said Simon.

*Find out more about Simon and visit the store at [www.blown-away.org](http://www.blown-away.org)*



### AN IMPRESSIVE CUP RUN

Residents of the Blesma Blackpool Home were invited to a charity football match in May. The Wolstencroft Cup has been contested four times in memory of Blesma Member Warren Wolstencroft. This year, former Blackburn Rovers midfielder David Dunn and current Salford City striker Josh Hine played in the match, which raised £5,000 for the Association.

David Dunn also spent some time with Warren during his final weeks before he passed away from cancer in 2013, aged just 39.

"The match went well," said the event's organiser, Ben Wiseman. "Through the game and a gala dinner we raised more than £6,500, with £5,000 going to Blesma and the rest to East Lancashire Hospice. Over the years, we've put on four matches and two dinners, and have taken part in Fall for the Fallen, raising £23,000."

## Blesma headlines Brentwood Festival

Blesma is the charity partner for this year's Brentwood Festival, which will be held at the Brentwood Centre from 15-17 July, and is expected to attract more than 10,000 people. Acts will include Soul II Soul, Level 42, Tony Hadley, and Sir Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats.

Blesma Members and supporters will be collecting each day, and some Members will be on stage telling their stories of overcoming adversity. Tickets start from £22.50 for an adult day pass.

*For more information, and to book your tickets, visit [www.brentwoodfestival.co.uk](http://www.brentwoodfestival.co.uk)*

## FRIEND OF BLESMA RAISING FUNDS FOR HALF A CENTURY

A 90-YEAR-OLD FUNDRAISER HAS BEEN raising money for the Association for more than 47 years.

Mary Drake, who lives in Chelmsford, puts on coffee mornings every Saturday. She also runs two stalls selling jewellery, clothes and books, with all donations going to Blesma.

"I set up Friends of Blesma with my husband, Albert, because we had friends who had lost limbs in WWII and I had two uncles who had been killed in WWI," said Mary. "I was amazed by the men who had come back from war with missing limbs, and we wanted to do something to help."



Unfortunately, there are no records of just how much money Mary has raised over the last five decades, but what is certain is that she has raised more than £5,000 a year for the last 10 years.

Albert, who served in the Armed Forces, sadly passed away two years ago, but the couple were invited to spend a week at the Blesma Blackpool Home as a thank you for their fundraising efforts after Albert had undergone major heart surgery.

"Seeing the residents makes you thankful for the work you do. It's a waste of a life if you don't help others and don't give back to those who need it," said Mary.

## NEWS FEATURE

# Blesma-backed play opens in West End

*Blue on Blue* is a hard-hitting production that focuses on the life of a limbless ex-Service man. Little wonder, then, that Blesma got involved

The atmosphere in the room crackles with tension as Moss, a gnarled amputee veteran, launches an expletive-strewn verbal assault on his nephew, Carver. Those watching shift uncomfortably as the barrack-room dialogue pulsates through the gritty exchange.

Everyone in the audience is glued to Blesma Member Darren Swift, who plays the part of Moss in this darkly comic play. The former soldier, who lost both his legs in a bomb blast in Northern Ireland in 1991, has been hailed for his performance in *Blue on Blue*. The play, written by Chips Hardy, father of Hollywood star Tom, is enjoying a month-long run in London's West End.

Partly funded by Blesma, the play pitches Moss, who was injured by friendly fire in Afghanistan, and small-time crook Carver into a co-dependent life in a small council flat. Both are damaged by their experiences, have been marginalised by society, and argue constantly, but come to depend on each other.

Landing the lead role meant 48-year-old Swift had to learn 80 pages of dialogue in just six weeks.

"It was a huge challenge to learn the lines – my short-term memory is terrible!" said Swift, who has previously performed in the play *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*, and has worked as a film extra. "This was a much bigger role than I've attempted before, made more stressful by the fact that there were only three people on stage throughout the entire play. It was incredibly intense, and I've had to learn an awful lot

as we've gone along, but the cast and team have been so supportive and I'm proud to be part of this play."

Producer Daniel Gentely, an actor and writer who played Carver in this production, first saw the play 10 years ago and resolved to bring it back to the stage.

"It stuck in my mind because the writing was so good and the characters were really vivid," he said. Daniel contacted Blesma for help and Operations Director Ian Waller suggested Swift for the part of Moss.

"Blesma has been so supportive," added Daniel, who runs the Skullcap Collective theatre company. "If ever there was a part for Swift, this was it. It was a big challenge for him, and just before the play opened he told me it was the scariest thing he'd done in his life, but he has grown so much as an artist and performer over the six weeks of rehearsals."

Chips Hardy attended the opening night and explained that the play was driven by his interest in how people deal with tough circumstances.

"When I wrote *Blue on Blue* I thought about people who get the rough end of the stick, and I constructed a story of two men who are challenged in their own right but who make their way despite that," he said.

"As a society, we don't like to see the truth behind combat and war. We find the image of disability, any disability, more accessible now than ever before, but we haven't got as far as we should. We need to pay more attention to it, and charities such as Blesma are opening up people's minds."

“  
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AND WAR  
”



Olympic rower  
Heather Stanning  
talks to Barry Le Grys



The cast took part in a  
Q&A after the performance



Member Darren Swift (and left) steals the show

## BLUE ON BLUE GETS GREEN LIGHT FROM BLESMA CRITICS

The packed audience at the Tristan Bates Theatre, in central London, enjoyed a Q&A session with the cast and crew after the performance. This was their reaction...



**CAROLE KING**  
BLESMA MEMBER

**What did you think of Swift's performance?**

This must have been a major challenge for him because he was alone on stage for much of the performance, but he was amazing. He has a very strong personal story but this was completely different and he had to live in someone else's skin. He did it very well and you just have to sit back and go 'Wow!' at his performance. **Did the play work for you?** At times I struggled with it a bit, but it did all come back together in the end. It was very powerful. I'd like to see it expanded, it could be a longer play or a TV series as there is so much more depth to these issues.



**WILL DIXON**  
BLESMA TRUSTEE

**What did you think of the play?**

It was powerful stuff and it had a lot of Blesma in it. It was well put together and well acted, with that dark military sense of humour.

**How were you left feeling?**

The way the characters are portrayed challenges perceptions about what disability really is. I thought it tackled psychological and physical disability very well.

**Does Swift showcase what Blesma is trying to do?**

Swift has embraced a new challenge and that is inspiring. He's a big character and has done amazingly well. We had lots of Blesma Members in the Invictus Games too [see story on p04] and they all show that life doesn't stop when you are injured.



**PAUL FINDLAY**  
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICER

**What did you think of the play?**

I think it will resonate with many Members. Some struggle to push themselves on in life and that is something we try to help with.

**How realistic is the play?**

I thought Moss was funny and the jokes he made are the ones I probably made at some time. It is a sad reality that anyone who has been to a war zone and had a life-changing injury is not the same person as they were before. I'm certainly a different person – I like to think I'm a better person.

**Can you see other Blesma Members trying acting?**

Swift would welcome contact from anyone interested in getting involved. That's the beauty of Blesma; we're one big family!



**MARTIN HEWITT**  
BLESMA MEMBER

**What did you think of the acting?**

I was genuinely amazed. I met Swift at Headley Court and I know that he has done a lot of physical activities since his injuries. But to learn lines like that, within a short time frame, is genuinely astonishing.

**Do you think the play might help to promote Blesma?**

Swift is a bloke who has been through a lot and has turned his hand to something completely different in a very short space of time. With a little bit of support, he has achieved the extraordinary, and that is what Blesma and its Members are all about. It shows you can achieve things in any area.

## ↘ BLESMA BRIEFING

# We'll help you find the help you need

Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics), offers the latest on prosthetics. This issue; veterans' treatment at Headley Court, working with the SIA, and help with Phantom Limb Pain



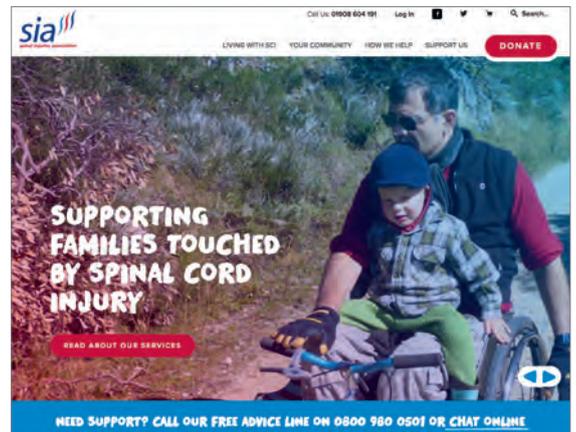
### HEADLEY COURT PROSTHETICS ASSESSMENT CLINIC

Veterans who meet certain criteria can benefit from the specialist prosthetic skills available at Headley Court.

Eligibility is based on being in receipt of either a War Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme award for an amputation attributable to military service. Veterans must also have been a prosthetics patient at Headley Court since 2006, when the facility started its in-house prosthetics service.

Referral to the service must be made by your NHS Limb Centre and will be based on the complexity of your prosthetic care needs and if your current situation is proving problematic. Any intervention will be based on an episode of care, with you staying an NHS patient.

The monthly Complex Prosthetic Assessment Clinic (CPAC) at Headley Court is not intended as a way of bypassing normal NHS provision. It is intended to ensure injured veterans continue to have access to the best possible care, wherever that expertise may be in the country. Lessons learnt through this process, including co-operation between clinicians within the MoD and NHS should, in time, also benefit non-veteran amputees.



### THE SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION (SIA)

Blesma supports a number of Members who live with spinal cord injury. To ensure we can provide effective support, we have been liaising with the SIA, particularly the newly-appointed Nurse Advocates. Below is a summary of the services they offer and how Blesma Members can contact them:

“  
IT IS INTENDED TO ENSURE INJURED VETERANS CONTINUE TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE BEST POSSIBLE CARE, WHEREVER THAT MAY BE IN THE COUNTRY  
”



Veterans can now benefit from Headley's expertise

#### Who we are

Our Nurse Advocate Service combines more than 50 years of specialist clinical expertise in spinal cord injury nursing to offer information and guidance on all aspects of care.

#### What we do

##### For newly spinal cord injured people

Whether a newly injured person is receiving treatment in a district general hospital or rehabilitation setting, SIA Nurse Advocates will work alongside the treating care team to raise awareness of the issues relating to spinal cord injury and provide guidance on appropriate care. To request the support of the Nurse Advocate service, please call 0800 980 0501.

##### Re-admissions

SIA Nurse Advocates offer support with care planning, and by liaising with relevant healthcare professionals who will be involved in your care, will help increase confidence that your spinal cord injured needs will be met during your admission. To request the support of the Nurse Advocate service for either a planned or emergency re-admission, call 0800 980 0501.



Please note this is a member-only service. Membership to SIA is free. To sign up, please go to the SIA website at [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk). To get support from our Nurse Advocates, or to find out more, call the Advice Line on 0800 980 0501  
Taken from the SIA website; [www.spinal.co.uk](http://www.spinal.co.uk)

### PHANTOM LIMB PAIN

It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of amputees suffer from Phantom Limb Pain – sensations of pain from the part of the limb that has been amputated. The condition is more common in women than men, and in upper rather than lower limb amputations.

Brain scans showing how nerve signals are transmitted to the brain have proved that these 'phantom' pains are anything but imaginary. Some sufferers describe flashes of mild pain that last for a few seconds, while others feel constant, severe pain.

The effectiveness of treatment varies from amputee to amputee, and several types of treatment may need to be tried. These are listed below...

### MEDICATION

Anticonvulsants and antidepressants may be prescribed by a doctor to help relieve pain from nerve damage or to attempt to block pain signals. Several non-invasive techniques may help relieve Phantom Limb Pain. These include applying heat or ice packs, rubs and creams; massage to increase circulation and stimulate muscles; and acupuncture, in which needles are inserted into the skin to stimulate the nervous system and relieve pain.

**TRANSCUTANEOUS ELECTRICAL NERVE STIMULATION (TENS)** involves using a small electronic device that delivers electrical impulses to the stump. TENS is believed to work by disrupting the passage of pain signals to the brain and stimulating the release of natural painkilling chemicals known as endorphins.

### MENTAL IMAGERY

Research carried out in 2008 found that if people spent 40 minutes imagining using their phantom limb – stretching out their 'fingers' or bunching up their 'toes', for example, they experienced a reduction in pain symptoms.

This may be related to the theory that the brain is looking to receive feedback from the amputated limb, and these mental exercises may provide an effective substitution for this missing feedback.

One technique that can be used is known as Mirror Visual Feedback. This is where a mirror is used to create a reflection of the remaining limb. Some people find that by doing exercises and moving their remaining limb it can help to relieve pain from a 'phantom' limb.

For more on any of the above, visit the Blesma website ([www.blesma.org](http://www.blesma.org)) or contact Brian at [bsoprosthetics@blesma.org](mailto:bsoprosthetics@blesma.org) or on 020 8548 7080. For more on Phantom Limb Pain visit the Limbless Association website at [www.limbless-association.org](http://www.limbless-association.org)

## Marathon is just a walk in the park for our Para

Stuart Pearson completed the London Marathon in April, raising more than £4,500 for the Association along the way.

Stuart walked the 26.2-mile course in 7 hours, 23 minutes and 58 seconds.



"All I could think was; 'I need to get this done in under eight hours before they close the finishing line!' and so I really pushed myself," said Stuart. "I kept checking my watch but soon realised I was smashing it – I was taking 16 minutes to do each mile!"

Stuart lost his left leg above the knee in 2006 whilst serving in the Parachute Regiment in Afghanistan. The IED blast also caused injuries to his right ankle which restricts the movement he has in his right leg, making running impossible.

As part of his training, Stuart spent an hour a day on a cross trainer to increase his fitness levels and prepare himself for any problems he might have such as ulcers and stump pains.

"The whole day was a great experience, and getting closer and closer to the finish line, knowing that there were people behind me with two legs, was an amazing feeling."

In all, 23 people, including Members Glynn McNary and Stuart Croxford, took on the Marathon for Blesma, raising more than £40,000 for the Association.

Congratulations go to them and also to Stuart for recently winning a *Daily Record* 'Our Heroes' award for his fundraising exploits.

## YOUR CHANCE TO ABSEIL FROM THE EMIRATES SPINNAKER TOWER

How would you like to do something hair-raising and help Blesma at the same time? This Summer, you can have a bird's-eye view of Portsmouth Harbour and the Solent as you abseil 328 feet down the Emirates Spinnaker Tower.

Standing at 170 metres, the spectacular tower is taller than the London Eye and Blackpool Tower. Thrill seekers will get the chance to dangle themselves off the edge of the structure on 21 August to help raise much needed funds to support our Members.

All participants will receive a Blesma T-shirt and fundraising pack, and will be met and greeted on the day by the Blesma team. Register today for the event of a lifetime with just a £50



deposit and a pledge to raise £150 (£200 in total) to support Blesma.

To register your place, or for more information, contact Zanika Fearon, Community and Events Fundraising Manager, on 020 8548 7089 or email [events@blesma.org](mailto:events@blesma.org)

# INBOX

Word from our inbox. Get in touch at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



## Magnets increase cycling's attraction

EVER SINCE I STARTED RIDING A BIKE again after having my right leg amputated I have had trouble getting my feet off the pedals. I have tried using traps and toe clips but half the time I would end up on the floor with my leg still attached to the pedal!

This year, I got a place on the Battlefield Bike Ride, which brought matters to a head. I contacted Get Cycling in York to see if they had any suggestions. They mentioned magnetic pedals and within the hour had contacted the US supplier to find out if they would be suitable for my problem.

The pedals rely on a magnetic force to hold my feet in place. The force is adjustable, which means they can be at different levels to suit the leg power on each side of the body.

I find them easy to use and can safely remove my feet when stopping and starting. I can also place my foot onto the pedal without looking down, and the effort to remove my foot from the pedal is easy. They are a bit heavier than standard pedals but this is a small price to pay for freedom. I hope this helps if you have this type of problem.

**Tom Gowar**



## Widows spend a week in Blackpool

I AM WRITING ON BEHALF OF ALL THE Widows who had a wonderful week at the Widows' Week in Blackpool recently. Our host was Steve Fraser, a man with a great sense of humour and for whom nothing was too much trouble. Everything we did was great fun; from a trip to the Grand Theatre to see a show, to a private trip on a historic tram, to a tea dance at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom and much more.

As always, the staff at the Home were fabulous, especially our driver, Nigel, and Connie, who opened the bar and helped Steve entertain us every evening. Some of us have been widowed very recently and others have had to cope on our own for years. But with an interesting and varied programme, and the support of the Blesma staff, we bonded, shared stories and offered each other support and fellowship.

This is the only holiday many of us get, so we are grateful for the chance to come, and all hope to do so again. Thank you.

**Ros Corfield (Holywell)**

## Life's little disillusionments

WHILST SERVING IN THE RMP IN MALAYA IN THE 1950s, my CO decided to change our unit into the Gurkha Military Police. The photographs of me in the new uniform were for an album of Forces uniforms kept by Prince Charles. I boasted about this for years until I was told there was no such album!

After a motorcycle accident in 1957 I enrolled in Blesma. A group of us from the Richmond Branch were extras for the MGM war film *Invasion Quartet*. My boasts of being in a film were dashed when I realised I had been left on the cutting room floor!

In the 1990s, a nerve stimulator was inserted into my spine to stop the pain in my arm, but it didn't work and I never had any pain relief! In spite of these disillusionments, I have had a fulfilling life. Having married my wife, Elizabeth, in 1957, she has supported me all these years and given me four beautiful daughters.

**[Former] Lance-Corporal John Biggs**



## NEWS BRIEFS



### COMING BACK STRONGER

Blesma Member Mark Smith has been crowned Britain's Strongest Disabled Man after winning a hard-fought Disabled Strongman competition in May.

Mark took up bodybuilding after he lost his right leg above the knee, but switched to Strongman training this year because the strict diet and regime that came with bodybuilding didn't fit in with his family life.

"I also found bodybuilding competitions anti-social. Everyone kept to themselves," said Mark. "Strongman competitions have a completely different feel – everyone talks to each other and gives each other tips. I loved this event and it was great to win it."

Mark will now go on to represent Britain in the World's Strongest Disabled Man competition in August.



### THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Four Blesma Members have won the People's Choice award at the Soldiering on Awards 2016.

Craig Howorth, Jamie Gillespie, Stephen White and Conrad Thorpe became the first all-amputee team to swim across the English Channel in September 2014, completing the challenge in an impressive time of 12 hours and 14 minutes.

Steve, Craig and Jamie attended the awards with their coach, and Channel Swimming Association official, Giovanna Richards. "We trained hard but nothing prepared us for the open sea," Steve told *The Sunday Express*, which sponsored the People's Choice award. "At times, it was a real struggle for all of us, but seeing the lads on the boat and listening to Giovanna, I knew I had to go on."



Blesma Members Mark Allen (left) and Jason Gill

# Race2Recovery gives rallying cry to join in

RACE2RECOVERY IS HOPING FOR another successful season after Blesma Members Grant White and Yanto Evans became the first disabled duo to win a British rally at the British Cross Country Rally Championships last October.

This year, with support from Blesma, the team is pushing the boundaries yet again.

The team is staffed by unpaid volunteers made up of serving soldiers, veterans and civilians. The crew provide a rewarding and supportive environment for wounded, injured and sick service personnel.

This season, a new crew made up of Blesma Members Mark Allen and Jason Gill (pictured) will compete. Mark, a former Royal Marine, is a right leg below-knee amputee, and Jason is ex-RAF and Royal Engineers with a T12 spinal paralysis. Maintaining Race2Recovery's aim of

'going beyond injury and achieving the extraordinary', Jason became the first paralysed driver to compete in an off-road UK rally using only hand controls. This was after the team tirelessly campaigned with the governing bodies to make this happen.

Race2Recovery's welcoming and understanding approach provides an environment in which veterans can experience excitement, camaraderie and teamwork. This year, the team has already touched the lives of many injured soldiers by offering funded rally training and participation in UK rally events.

*To attend a training event or to join the management team, contact Grant White, Head of Operations, at [grant@race2recovery.com](mailto:grant@race2recovery.com). To find out more visit [www.race2recovery.com](http://www.race2recovery.com)*

## MEMBER'S BOOK SALES GO TO BLESMA

A 91-year-old veteran has written a book of his memories of WWII. *Cameos of War* is a personal story from Blesma Member Brian Guy, who served as a Sapper in 246 Field Company, Royal Engineers. Whilst serving in Holland, Brian was caught in a mine blast, suffering a fractured spine and broken leg. He later lost an eye and his lived ever since with a steel ball embedded in his skull.

Brian decided to publish the book, with the proceeds going to Blesma, after the Association requested stories from WWII veterans. "Blesma is close to my heart. I know what the young men who were injured in Afghanistan are going through, and I wanted to do something for them in my own way for when they need help in later life," said Brian. **Brian has already sold 100 copies of his book, raising £150 for Blesma. To order your copy, email him on [brian@raymondguy55.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:brian@raymondguy55.freeserve.co.uk)**



# OBITUARIES

## *Those we have lost*

**Bob Gibbens MBE**



### **Lt Col R A Gibbens MBE**

**10 August 1932 - 27 October 2015**

BOB GIBBENS MBE WAS VERY MUCH a “soldier’s soldier” and was a long-time supporter of Blesma. Sadly, he passed away unexpectedly on 27 October 2015, aged 83.

Born on 10 August 1932, Bob joined the Army as an apprentice tradesman in 1947. He quickly rose through the ranks and, whilst serving in Egypt in the early 1950s, transferred to the REME as an artificer. Various overseas postings followed until, in 1969, he was selected for commissioning whilst serving as Warrant Officer 1 Trade Training in Singapore.

Bob’s commissioned service included postings to Scotland, Bahrain and BAOR, as well as the School of Mechanical Training at Bordon. He was posted to Cyprus in 1975 and was awarded the MBE in 1977 before further tours in Belgium and BAOR.

He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1985 and took command of the REME Workshops in Bridgend. His final role was the Army Careers Officer for Coventry and Warwickshire until his retirement in 1993.

Bob offered his services to Blesma in 1991 and took over as Midlands Area Treasurer after joining the Coventry and District Branch, which he became Chairman of in 1996. Bob and his wife, Reph, committed much of their time to the Association. They were ever-present at Area Meetings, the AGM and, latterly, Members’ Weekend.

His funeral was attended by many whose lives he had enriched. He meant a great deal to those who knew him and will be much missed by all, especially Reph, his children Lorraine and Paul, and his grandchildren Michaela, Laura, Emily and Robbie.

### **David Asdell**

**17 June 1922 - 13 March 2016**

DAVID HAD A LONG AND FULL LIFE. He was born in Hornsey and spent his childhood in Selly Oak in Birmingham.

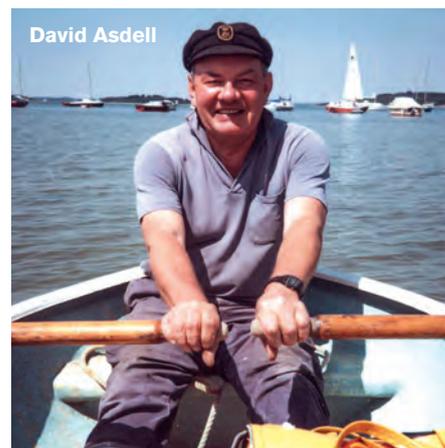
David served in WWII, joining the 13/18th Hussars in 1942 having trained at Sandhurst, and was posted to the 6th US Armoured Division in 1943 as Liaison Officer in their England HQ. He transferred to the 1st Derbyshire Yeomanry and fought as a tank commander in North Africa and Italy. He was badly wounded several times; losing a finger and receiving a bullet wound to his head, and lost his left leg in Italy in October 1944. He did not let his disability hinder him, despite the challenges of using an artificial leg from his early twenties.

After studying engineering and law at St Catharine’s College Cambridge, he had a successful career before starting his own business, Churchill Instrument Company, which he sold before retiring.

In his spare time he enjoyed sailing and was active in many organisations, including Blesma. A Member of the Southampton, Winchester & District Branch he was, at various times, Chairman/Vice Chairman and Honorary Treasurer of the South West Area. Latterly, he was a Trustee and a Life Vice President. His Christian faith was an integral part of his life, and he attended church regularly.

David was married to Elisabeth (Tiz), whom he met studying at Cambridge, for 57 years. Tiz sadly died in September 2007.

David is survived by three children (Jayne, Tricia and John), eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.



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## Wilmer Gordon Clayson

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**23 October 1924 - 07 March 2016**

WILMER GORDON CLAYSON WAS BORN in London in 1924. He joined an auctioneers firm in Dover in 1940 before volunteering for the Army, lying about his age. He had to leave eight months later when asked to produce a birth certificate, but was called up in 1942 when he joined the Rifle Brigade.

On 04 June 1944 Gordon left from Tilbury with the D-Day forces. His brigade was heavily involved in the battle for Caen, before his division was withdrawn and proceeded to the area around Villers-Bocage and Tilly-sur-Seulles to cut off German supplies.

Gordon was an anti-tank gunner in the 7th Armoured Division of the Rifle Brigade during the Battle of Villers-Bocage on 13 June. Forced to take cover in a ditch, he sustained numerous injuries from a blast from a Tiger tank round. Shrapnel broke his jaw before exiting through his cheek, and a piece lodged in his head where it remained for the rest of his life. He received numerous other injuries

to his upper body and his right foot lay at an impossible angle. Gordon was picked up by German medics, loaded onto a stretcher and taken to a field operating theatre, where his right leg was removed below the knee without anaesthetic as none was available.

He remained a prisoner for 10 weeks before being liberated by American soldiers.

Gordon was repatriated and had two further operations before being transferred to Childwall Military Hospital in Liverpool. He returned to his job at the auctioneers where he met Rosemary Peacock who became his wife in 1950. In 1954, he took his industry exams and got the highest marks in the country. In 1955, he moved from Kent to Hampshire and became the principle auctioneer for Pearson and Sons. He was a consultant for Philips of London, and later Bonhams, before retiring in 1993.

He endured his disability and increasing mobility difficulties with great fortitude, supported always by his devoted wife, Rosemary. Latterly, he was also supported by Blesma, particularly by Steve Fraser, BSO for the South West. Gordon died

peacefully at home at the age of 91. He is survived by Rosemary, his children Alan, Richard, Kate and the late Mary, 13 grandchildren, (one deceased) and 11 great-grandchildren.

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## David Jefferies

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**26 December 1933 - 19 March 2016**

DAVID GEORGE JEFFERIES CBE served on Blesma's Executive Council as Clerk to the Council for 10 years from January 1991.

Away from Blesma, he was President of the Institute of Electrical Engineers and served as Non-Executive Chairman of Costain Group PLC from June 2001 to December 2007.

David led the expansion of National Grid Group in the United States and South America, and served as Chairman of National Grid plc and London Electricity. He was a Board Member of the Royal Institution and a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

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## Those who have passed away

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**March 2016 - May 2016. May they rest in peace.**

<b>Asdell D</b>	Derbyshire Yeomanry	Southampton	13/03/2016
<b>Badger-Smith J</b>	RN	HQ	08/05/2016
<b>Bowles Mrs E</b>	ATS	HQ	24/04/2016
<b>Bradley N</b>	RAF	HQ (SW Wales)	15/03/2016
<b>Chandler R</b>	RAF	HQ	28/04/2016
<b>Clayson W G</b>	Rifle Brigade	HQ (Aldershot)	07/03/2016
<b>Cockings J</b>	RA	HQ	28/05/2016
<b>Comerford I</b>	RA	HQ	13/05/2016
<b>Davies T</b>	Life Guards	HQ (Southport)	April 2016
<b>Ducille-Irons J</b>	RAC	HQ	17/04/2016
<b>Durant L</b>	RASC	HQ (Chelmsford)	26/03/2016
<b>Harrison R</b>	RN	HQ	10/03/2016
<b>Holmes P</b>	RM	HQ	03/03/2016
<b>Hopkins W</b>	RN	HQ	06/04/2016
<b>Keehner Mrs G</b>	RAF WAAF	Ancaster House, Crieff (Chelmsford)	01/03/2016
<b>Lamb P</b>	RA	HQ	12/03/2016
<b>Lewis M</b>	Army Air Corps	HQ	17/05/2016
<b>Mansfield B</b>	RAF	HQ	13/03/2016
<b>McCabe R</b>	The Gordon Highlanders	HQ (Edinburgh)	07/05/2016
<b>Prince E</b>	RN	HQ (Barnsley)	21/05/2016
<b>Reedy J</b>	RAC	HQ (Earby)	18/04/2016
<b>Reid J</b>	RAF	HQ (Glasgow)	05/04/2016
<b>Reynolds F</b>	Royal Leicestershire	HQ (Leicester)	04/04/2016
<b>Ritchie J</b>	RAF	HQ (Fife)	09/05/2016
<b>Stevenson C V</b>	RAF	Walsall	17/03/2016
<b>Turner M</b>	RA	HQ (Bradford)	27/05/2016
<b>Vickery A</b>	REME	HQ	10/04/2016
<b>Welburn R</b>	RAF	HQ (Scarborough, Bridlington & District)	04/05/2016
<b>Welham T</b>	RAF	HQ	16/04/2016
<b>Wilkin A</b>	Grenadier Guards	HQ	21/04/2016
<b>Wilkinson A</b>	Dragoons	HQ (Derby)	06/04/2016

## Thank you to our sponsors

*Blesma would like to thank the following supporters for their hard work and dedication to our cause*

### NICHE COMMUNICATIONS

Niche Communications is the country's largest provider of floorplan and professional photography to estate agents. With more than 120 employees in the UK and 80 in South Africa, we work with more than 2,000 estate agency offices.

Each year, we work with a charity that we believe can make a profound difference to the people they are helping. We are delighted to have adopted Blesma as our chosen charity for 2016, and we will also be the Gold Sponsor of Blesma Week. We'll run a number of events this year to increase our contributions, starting with a donation of 10p for every property photograph we took during Blesma Week.



### OTTOBOCK

Ottobock is a world-leading supplier of high quality, innovative and practical solutions that help people rediscover their independence. We are committed to helping raise money for those causes which support those whose lives have been changed by disease or trauma.

Due to the synergy between the work Blesma does and the rehab solutions Ottobock offers, such as the Kenevo, C-Leg 4, Genium and Genium X3 prosthetic knee joints which are available on the VPP, Ottobock has chosen Blesma as its military charity for 2016.

"We chose Blesma because of the amazing and important work they do helping, advising and motivating veterans and their families," said Phil Yates, Managing Director at Ottobock.

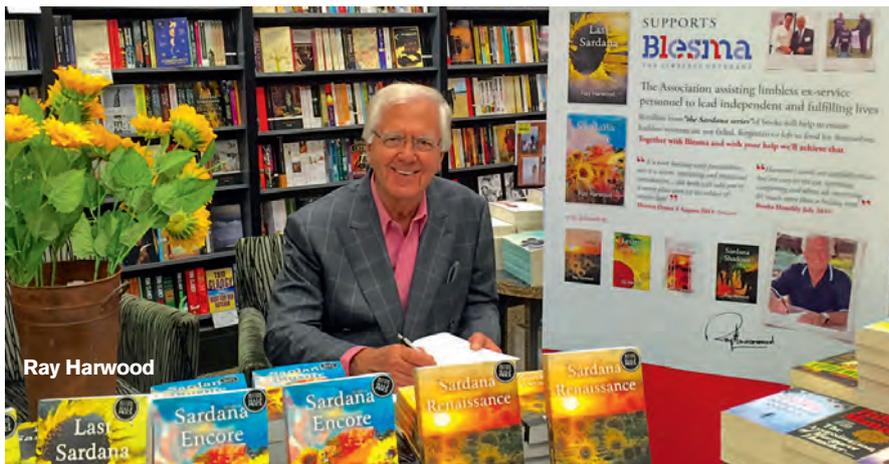


**Phil Yates, Managing Director at Ottobock**



### CENTRO PLC

Why does Ray Harwood support Blesma through his Sardana series of books? Not untypically, Ray, like many others, always had an idea for a book in his mind. He needed the right motivation for outing that and decided that his satisfaction would be for royalties from sales of the book to go to a charity. He found that Blesma fitted into his ideal cause for support thanks to the charity's relatively low commercial profile and excellent conversion from income to expenditure for Members. He has involved Centro Plc, as their chairman and managing director, to add support from their activities within the property world.



**Ray Harwood**



# Jerome Church

Former Blesma Chief Executive Jerome Church OBE, who was much loved by Members, staff, volunteers and supporters alike, has sadly passed away. Jerome had been staying with family in America when he fell whilst playing with his grandchildren. Despite a quick response from the emergency services, and the intensive care team's best efforts to save him, he passed away on the morning of Saturday 11 June, with his family by his side.

In 1966, at the age of 18, Jerome started his military career at Sandhurst and was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in 1968. He joined Blesma as a Member after losing his right leg below the knee in Northern Ireland in 1972, but continued to serve in the military. He was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in 1990, and served for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe until his retirement. Jerome became Blesma's Chief Executive in 2000 and held the position for 13 years, during which time he was instrumental in fighting for veterans' war pensions and wider needs.

Jerome's successor, Barry Le Grys said; "Jerome was passionate about the Blesma cause. He made a very real difference at the highest levels, and the injured veteran community of today is tremendously grateful for what he has delivered on their behalf."

A private funeral service was held in Ridgewood, New Jersey, in America, and a memorial service will be held in London at a later date. A full obituary will appear in the Autumn issue.



# AXIS

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**Move More**



REVIEW

# Members' Weekend 2016

Every year, more and more activities are crammed into the Blesma calendar. We all have our favourites, but few are more enjoyable than Members' Weekend

**T**he sun shone, the drinks flowed, the laughter rang out and everyone's enthusiasm levels were turned up to the max as Members' Weekend 2016 was hailed the most successful ever.

Repeating 2015's two-night format, a record number of participants checked in to the Chesford Grange Hotel in Warwickshire for a whirlwind programme of activities and stimulating talks, as well as some much deserved relaxation, great food and even better company.

Whether they were shooting arrows on the archery range or simply shooting the breeze over a cup of tea, remembering the fallen at a touching memorial service or being regaled by the derring-do of Blesma's hardy athletes, Atlantic rowers and cyclists, there was something for everyone. Most of all though, it was the Blesma spirit, that was evident regardless of age or gender, that united everyone.

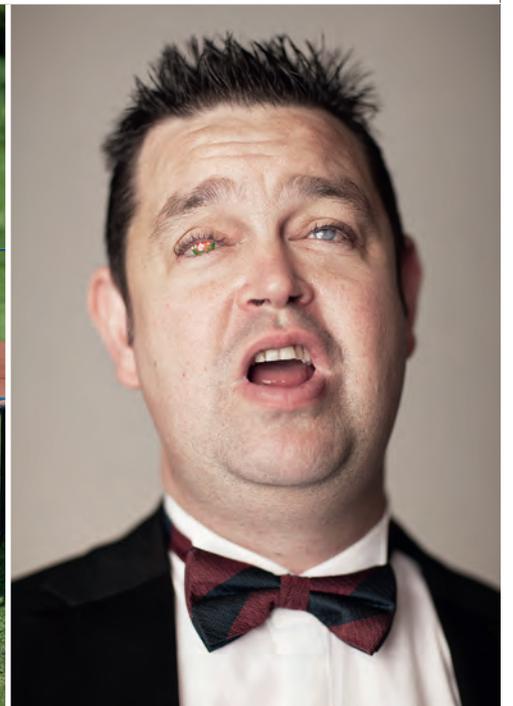
"I only knew two Members when I arrived, but I'll be leaving with at least 30 new friends – it's just been wonderful," said Vicky Parrett about her first Members' Weekend. "It's the military thing, isn't it? As soon as you get together, you just click, and you feel part of the gang. I've had so much fun, and I'm so glad I came."

Blesma's Chairman Lt Gen Sir Cedric Delves praised the fantastic gathering, saying its numbers were "something of a record" in terms of recent Blesma

events. Held from Saturday 04 to Monday 06 June in a rural setting close to Warwick, the event kicked off with a presentation by Ross Wadey from St Mary's University in Twickenham. He has been working with Members to study the impact of taking part in Blesma activities. The full results won't be published until the Winter, but his preliminary findings are hugely positive when it comes to the increased levels of physical, psychological and social wellbeing in Members who take the plunge and get involved. "Opening up to new experiences is giving people a fresh purpose in life," he told the audience.

A lively debate followed as Activities Manager Jess March hosted a forum about the recent activities survey. Several things shone through – including a desire for more family-friendly and partner-friendly events, single-day activities, and more Members mentoring other Members. "This was a very useful session," said Chief Executive Barry Le Grys afterwards. "The survey was very well received and responded to, and we can feed all this back into the programme for the membership."

Respects were then paid to absent colleagues, friends and family as The Reverend Philip McCormack led a service of dedication and remembrance. Later, during the black tie dinner, Carole King was presented with the Frankland Moore Trophy for her welfare work. "I was really shocked, but I'm very happy," she said afterwards.



"I always try to go that little bit further with my work, so it's lovely to be recognised." Afterwards, many Members retired to the bar to swap war stories, old and new.

### EDUCATION AND ACTIVITIES

Sunday was a day of education and activities. Chairman Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves and Chief Executive Barry Le Grys opened the Members' seminar by outlining the current state of the Association. Several Members then gave inspiring talks about their exploits over the last 12 months (see panel below). Afterwards, Matt Fossey, Director of the Veterans and Families Institute at Anglia Ruskin University, gave the audience an insight into the research he's undertaking on the effects of traumatic limb loss on families.

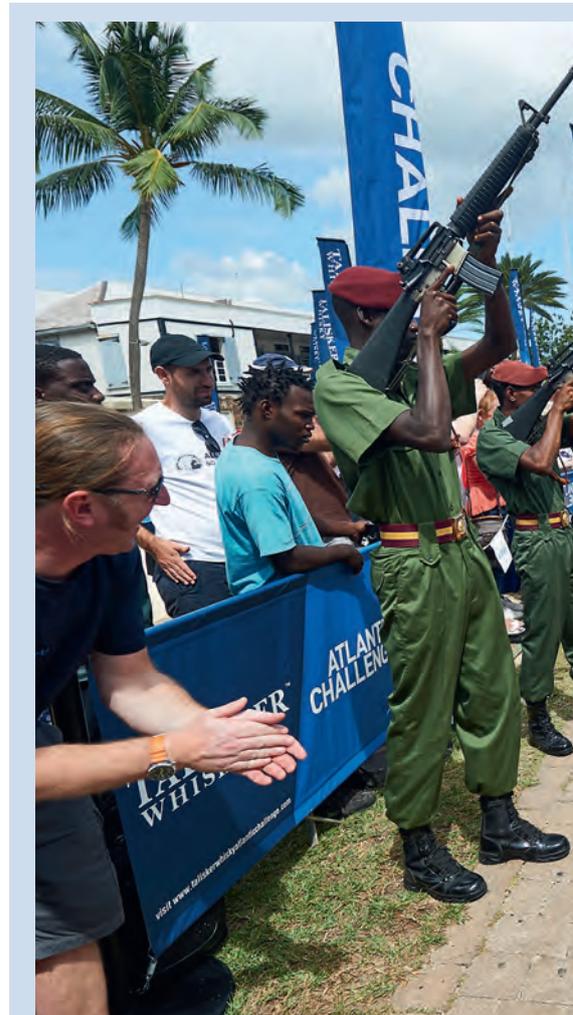
Next up were the taster activities (see p31). In glorious weather in the hotel grounds, Members put their sharp-shooting skills in archery and laser clay to the test. In the pool, a group of novice scuba divers were put through their paces – and some overcame their fears – with Blesma's experienced instructors. Inside, meanwhile, Blesma's ever-growing band of photography enthusiasts learned all about macro-photography, and shared the galleries they'd put together over the last year. A coach trip also ran to the Lord Leicester Hospital, where Members enjoyed a guided tour.

**"I have loved meeting lots of different people. The weekend has given me a new lease of life"**

Jess March was delighted with the Members' response to the afternoon. "We wanted to put on a variety of activities that would appeal to as many people as possible, and I think we've done that," she said. "For anyone who hasn't experienced a Blesma event before, the Members' Weekend is just such a great way to integrate yourself into the Association, and find out what goes on. It breaks down barriers."

Members like Wayne Rostron are living proof. "This is my first Members' Weekend and I've loved meeting lots and lots of people from Blesma. The weekend has given me a new lease of life, and has helped me discover things I never thought I'd be able to do! I've signed up for the hand cycling and photography courses already. My wife will be happy, because it will get me out of the house! It's been wonderful."

We'll second that: see you next year!



## "Every trip recharges those invisible batteries"

### STUART ELLIS

CLIMBING, TREKKING AND SAILING



If there's one Member whose enthusiasm for Blesma activities shines through, it's Stuart Ellis. "Every time I go on a trip, it recharges those invisible batteries inside me and that just makes me feel

great for a few months afterwards," he said. Stuart gave a presentation about the many challenges he's undertaken in the last 12 months with Blesma.

"You get set a challenge, and you have absolutely no idea whether you can do it or not, but being ex-Forces, you just always have to give it a go," he said. "I've seen Pat Provis climbing up rocks in Colorado with one arm, I've white-water rafted with a boat full of amputees, I've trekked up to 13,000 feet as an amputee, and I've taken part in a sailing competition with a boatload of novice amputees – and beaten half the field! It's just great, and that's why I'd encourage more people to try a Blesma activity."

### JOHN WILLIAMS

SOUTH AFRICA EXPEDITION



Neil Palmer, who lives in South Africa, hosts fellow Blesma Members every year, and the trip, which includes fishing, a safari, a light aircraft trip and shark diving, is a transformative experience.

"I'd like to thank Neil and Blesma, but more importantly, my family would like to thank them, because the John Williams who came home from the trip was a different man to the one who left," John told the packed audience.

"I was so nervous beforehand, but I enjoyed every minute. On the deep sea fishing, I was worried that I'd fall over on deck, or be seasick, but we landed several tuna. On the quad safari, I drove around with a grin bigger than a Cheshire cat – it was one of the best days of my life! The bit I feared the most, flying in a light aircraft, was just heaven. I panicked on the way up, but then I didn't want to come down. The trip has changed me completely. I'm so much more confident."

### CORIE MAPP

MONOBOB



Sport plays a big role in rehab for many Members, and Corie Mapp's journey is more spectacular than most. The Barbados-born former Household Cavalry soldier has dealt with

double amputation by becoming one of the world's best disabled bobsleigh competitors.

"I first tried it in Canada in 2013, and the coaches thought I had potential. Then I crashed and got concussion, which is best avoided at 100mph!" said Corie.

"But I gave it another go in Austria, and I won my first competitive race. Since then, I've managed to climb up the world rankings and now I'm number two in the world!"

"I came tenth in the World Championships, and I was disappointed with that, but it's my ambition to go to the Paralympics and get a medal. Blesma have sponsored me and kept me going all season. They've helped me keep my ranking and I'm very grateful for that."



## *Bobsleighs, exploding gearboxes and record-breaking rowers... Members share their passions*

### GRANT WHITE RALLY DRIVING



The Race2Recovery off-road team have made headlines having become the first (and only) team with combat injured members to enter and complete the Dakar Rally. The team now plans

to give more and more amputees the chance to experience the thrills of motorsport.

"I was quickly thrown in at the deep end when I joined the team," Grant said. "I spent seven hours under the car at one race helping to replace a gearbox, even though I'm like a chimp in boxing gloves when it comes to mechanics. But we won that event and it was good to feel part of the team, despite not driving. Now we're pushing forward."

"We've got a car with full hand controls so lower limb amputees can drive, and we're looking to get more people involved. Next year, we're planning to take part in an event in the Pyrenees with three cars of wounded and injured ex-Service men and women."

### NIGEL ROGOFF ROW2RECOVERY



The Row2Recovery Atlantic mission finished in February, with its crew of four (all Blesma Members) setting a world record as the first British all-amputee crew to row across an ocean.

Leaving La Gomera in the Canary Islands in December, Cayle Royce, Lee Spencer, Paddy Gallagher and Nigel Rogoff took 46 days to row across the Atlantic Ocean before they finally reached Antigua.

"It was an incredible experience," says Nigel. "We rowed two hours on, two hours off, non-stop, for 46 days. We were constantly soaking wet, and would get so tired that sometimes we wouldn't speak for hours. Trying to rest was very difficult, but it was an incredible experience. The reception we got at the finish line was unbelievable. I've never seen so many people and there was so much noise. My wife and children were there too – it was just wonderful."

### JONATHAN BELL CYCLING



As well as taking part in all the great cycling events that the Activities Programme has to offer, including Soldier Ride, the introduction to cycling course, a mountain biking trip to Morocco, a bike maintenance course and two trips to Belgium, the lycra-clad men and women of Blesma decided to put on their own fundraising event this year, in the shape of a 100-mile challenge.

"We get so much out of Blesma's cycling, I thought it was time for us to put something back," says Jonathan Bell. "So we decided to ride 100 miles, a landmark for any rider. Ten Members took part and we all did some fundraising. Lots of guys from my Regiment joined in, and it was a great day."

"The best thing about cycling is that anyone can do it. Our rides in Belgium are gentle, for example. When I first started, I couldn't cycle 20 miles. Now I can do 100, so I'd encourage anyone to give it a go."

## What did you think of Members' Weekend 2016?

Views, thoughts and opinion from across the Association. Come along next year and have your say



### ROY BLANCHARD

"I've very much enjoyed this weekend. It's been out of this world. Everyone is so friendly, I've never had an experience like it. I'm almost speechless! There has been great food, great company and marvellous entertainment. I've made a lot of new friends. Now I feel I've got to do something to make a contribution to Blesma!"



### JONATHAN BELL

"Last year's weekend was brilliant, so I decided to come here again. It's a good chance to catch up with other Members, and it's a great way to share information. I'm very involved with Blesma cycling, so being able to give a talk about that, and hopefully spread awareness of the activity, will get more people involved. Hearing about what other people have done is inspiring. Members talking to Members is what the weekend is all about."



### VICKY PARRETT

"The best part was being able to have a drink and some fun with other Members. The dinner was fantastic. I came here knowing only two other Blesma people, but by the end of the weekend I had about 30 new friends! I was in the bar with them and now feel part of the gang. If you're in the military, as soon as you get together you just click."



### RICK BERRY

"It's absolutely marvellous how Blesma does this for the Members and their partners. I'm absolutely overwhelmed. It's a great venue and we've had so much fun. The photography side of Blesma is fantastic. I've just bought myself a new camera, so I'm very happy there's been someone here who could show me how to use it. It's superb how well they welcome partners on Members' Weekend."



### CORIE MAPP

"It's been wonderful – a real eye-opener for me because it's my first event. I plan to do more, be hands on, and help people after this. That's my goal and focus. A lot of people think; 'There's nothing out there for me,' and they just stay at home. They need to see people like us, up and about, being positive about life. Just because you have an injury or setback, it doesn't mean life is over."



### BRENDA MARISON

"This is my first Members' Weekend and it's been very enjoyable. I particularly loved Ross Wadey's talk about how the amputees feel. My husband is no longer here, but Ross hit the nail on the head. He described exactly how my husband and I felt – it made me quite emotional. Hearing the other Members' stories has been enlightening, too. My husband would have loved to tell his story here. Blesma helped me through my darkest days."



### PRADIPKUMAR RAI

"Some of the friends I have met through Blesma photography recommended the Members' Weekend to me, and I have loved it. My wife and daughter have had an absolutely brilliant time, too – they've been made to feel very welcome. I've met great people this weekend, and I've loved the photography meet up. It has become a great passion for me, and the course is really helping me to take better photographs. Archery was great fun, too."



### ANGUS 'JESSIE' JAMES

"Last year was my first Members' Weekend and this year is just as good – I take my hat off to the organisers! I've met people I've never met before, and there's been so much banter. But there's a serious side, too. You can talk to people about your adaptations and so on, which is very helpful. I've only been an amputee for two years, so when you meet people who've been amputees for 20 or 30 years, you can learn so much from them."



## Put yourself in the frame for a great time

*Learning a new skill with new friends has made photography one of Blesma's most popular and fastest growing activities*

I lost my leg in 1990, and have been a Blesma Member for almost as long, but it wasn't until I was sitting in my Limb Centre in Exeter, reading about Charley Streater's photography course in *Blesma Magazine*, that I've ever wanted to get involved in an activity," says Mike Williams. "I rang him up there and then, and got onto the basic course. Since then, I've done the wildlife photography course in Anglesey,

the London city course, and a couple of weekends in the Blackpool Home. It's taken me from not being engaged with Blesma at all, to being very involved. I check the Blesma photography Facebook page every day, I've been skiing, and now here I am on the Members' Weekend. It's wonderful."

Mike's story is typical of how photography has opened Blesma up to Members who don't want to try anything too active.

"It's been a runaway success, and I knew it would work from the first course we ran," says Charley, who spent Members' Weekend running a macro-photography workshop, and recruiting attendees to try the activity.

"This weekend has helped us show a lot of people who thought they couldn't do photography that they can. We've had guys like Wayne Rostron sign up. He's in a wheelchair and thought it wasn't for him, but now he's excited about getting involved. You've just got to look at someone like Prad (Pradipkumar Rai), who has a spinal injury but is taking phenomenal images."

Elsewhere, experienced Members taught others how to make best use of their cameras. Big plans are coming, too. "We're linking up well with other charities," says Charley. "One charity is going to build us a studio and give us access to some land for our wildlife photography. The activity is really expanding, and that's very exciting."

Mike agrees. "I've met fabulous people from being involved in Blesma photography and I want to keep improving. My wife has won a few courses, so my ambition is to get better than she is!"



*For more information on Blesma activities, email Jess March on [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org) or call her on 020 8548 3519*



## Ready, aim...

*Most military men and women reckon they know their way around a rifle. It's time to put their skills to the test*

**A** clay arcs in the air and five Blesma Members with adapted shotguns react like lightning, peppering it with rapid fire. The competition is fierce even if this is a twist on clay pigeon shooting, with lasers replacing cartridges.

“My wife beat me, which isn’t good, because I’m ex-Infantry and she’s ex-RMP!” laughs Kirk Bowett (right) afterwards. He can be forgiven, though, having lost part of his left arm in Iraq in a vehicle blast. “I had to try a few techniques to hold the gun, and archery was even harder, as it’s difficult to grip the bow, but activities like this are perfect because the camaraderie comes back. This is a fun event that everyone can join in with, and the atmosphere has been great.



“This network of people is vital for my wife and I, as we live in a rural community. I suffer from PTSD, and that can be tough for my wife, so it’s great for her to get away and have a change of scene. This is her break just as much as it is mine, and she can meet like-minded people.”

Instructor Shane Bartram is suitably impressed. “These guys and girls are remarkable,” he says. “You can tell they’re military and have got good experience working with firearms. They’re adapting brilliantly around their disabilities and

**"I suffer from PTSD and it can be tough for my wife. It's great for her to get away and have a change of scene"**



amputations, and are some of the best shots I've seen. Missing arms and legs certainly aren't holding them back. I've never seen anything like it, to be honest!

"Laser clay is a great activity, because it's completely safe and very simple to get started with. There's no recoil from the adapted shotguns, so it works well for the older Members, too."

And anyone interested in taking it more seriously can get involved in clay shooting competitions. "I'm involved in adaptive shooting and compete with other disabled people around the UK," says Kirk.

"Amputation shouldn't hold you back. In fact, in some ways, I'm a better shot since I lost my left arm because I've got more stability in the arm that's holding the gun."

That maybe true, but it wasn't enough to beat Mrs Bowett today, though!

**For more information on Blesma activities, email Jess March on [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org) or call her on 020 8548 3519**



## Take the plunge

***Submerge yourself in a small hotel swimming pool and you never know which of the world's glamorous dive spots you'll surface in***

One small step often leads to one giant leap, and for some of the Members being initiated into the world of scuba diving, getting into a hotel swimming pool one metre deep and 20 metres long was a daunting prospect.

"We've had a completely blind Member as well as triple amputees coming into the water today, and there's always going to be a degree of nervousness when you're trying something you've never done before," explains Matt Goodwin, one of Blesma's most experienced divers, who was helping with the try-dives. "But the great thing is that they've all come out of the pool smiling, having absolutely loved it and wanting to do it again."

Lamin Manneh was among the debutants. The triple amputee, who lives in Manchester, admitted to being "pretty scared" about getting in, "but now I don't want it to stop!" he said. "Taking part in Blesma activities is about overcoming your fears, and I did that today. It was great fun. The instructors taught me to relax and breathe properly, and then I loved the sensation of floating. It's freedom, and you're the same as anyone else when you're floating in the water. I am definitely going to dive again. I will do a course and then, hopefully, go on a trip."

Blesma diving, and its expeditions, are open to almost all Members: a basic training course is followed by fully immersive weeks in places like Egypt. This year, a Maldives trip is on the cards. "Blesma's expeditions are always to beautiful places where you can connect with nature, and that's healthy and healing," says Matt. "I love the feeling of weightlessness, and the peace and quiet you get when diving."

"It fits with the Blesma philosophy of leading an independent and fulfilling life. And it gets people to really focus on something unrelated to their injury – you have to concentrate when you're diving! You get away with the guys and girls, and share great experiences."

Activities Manager Jess March added; "We've put on the introduction to diving course today because it's one of our key activities. Lots of Members go on to become dive instructors, so it's all about Members leading Members and becoming friends, which fits our ethos perfectly."

***For more information on Blesma activities, email Jess March on [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org) or call her on 020 8548 3519***





## The perfect distraction

*A more genteel alternative to shooting, the world of arrows and bullseyes is a great way to take aim and zone out*

Could you just stand behind the target and catch any of my arrows that fly over the top?" asks one Blesma Member to another – a typical exchange that activities like archery bring out in a bunch of military folk. The Warwickshire heat, without a wisp of wind, make for the perfect conditions for archery and, thankfully, it's being professionally run, so there's nobody actually trying to grab hold of wayward shots!

Instructor Sarah Wood carefully explains the set up of the targets, how to operate the bows, and how to safely pull an arrow out of the target. "Archery is an easy sport to get started with, and it can really suck you in," she says. "I love the romantic Robin Hood element to it, but it's also a great physical and mental test. You've got to work out your

technique and practice a lot to get really good. Minimising your movement is the key. A centimetre here can translate to missing by a few inches on the target."

Regularly nailing the bullseye is long-serving Blesma supporter Jim Keating, demonstrating that age is no barrier to sporting excellence. "I've done a bit of archery before, just casually, and it's very enjoyable," says the former Black Watch and Royal Army Ordnance Corps man.

"I didn't do too badly today, but the main thing was to have a good time with the group. I was a pretty decent shot with small arms back in the day, but this is very different. It's a while since we've had bows and arrows in the British military – although we still have the Royal Company of Archers in Scotland.

"I think the activities are a very big part of what makes these Members' Weekends a real success. They help strengthen and renew friendships, and get the wives, partners and Members all interacting and bonding. It's ideal."

Activities Manager Jess sees archery as a perfect distraction, too. "It's a great event for our Members because although it's quite sedate, it gets everyone out in the fresh air and it requires concentration. It's addictive, too. Archery gets you out of your normal thinking and into a different zone. It's all about breathing, focusing and pacing yourself, and that's always a healthy thing."

*For more information on Blesma activities, email Jess March on [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org) or call her on 020 8548 3519*



# Photo Booth

*We grabbed you for a picture – now it's your turn to grab one back off us!*

There were lots of great photographs taken over the course of Members' Weekend – way too many to show off here, unfortunately. So, if you had your picture taken in the *Blesma Magazine* studio over the weekend and would like a digital copy to share with friends and family, please send an email to [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org) and we'll be happy to send one on to you!

*If we didn't get around to speaking to you at the Members' Weekend you can still have your say. Let us know what you thought of the event by dropping us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)*



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# THIS IS NOT ACTING

A new community programme aims to inspire and motivate  
1,000 pupils across the UK through engaging workshops.  
Enter Blesma, stage left...

# THIS IS REAL LIFE

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Storyteller Clare Murphy and Luke Delahunty (back)



(L-R) Andy Reid, Clare Murphy, Jez Scarratt, Martin Kettrick, Richard Shorney and Al Nedjari



Mark Ormrod



(L-R) Stu Pearson, Archie Naughton, Pat Provis, Mark Ormrod



**Professional theatre directors give acting tips on a West End stage, but the end result is anything but a work of fiction**

**A**rchie Naughton is standing centre stage in one of the most impressive theatres in London's West End. The Blesma Member is in full flow as he stands under the Noel Coward Theatre's main spotlight. "In 1976, I was injured in a car crash when the vehicle I was travelling in careered into a ditch," he begins. "I recovered but then, later that Summer, a military helicopter I was flying in came off the flight deck, completely out of control, and crashed into the sea. I was underwater, strapped into the seat, but somehow managed to get out. Then, something bad happened..."

Archie smiles and the audience laughs right on cue.

It's a great piece of drama, typical of the humour and storytelling verve that many Blesma Members already have. But Archie is taking talking to the next level, learning to hone his story as part of the Blesma Community Programme; an ambitious new scheme that teaches Members to tell their personal stories of disaster and triumph in the most engaging way possible.

Over a six-day training course, participants learn how to narrate a gripping monologue from professional theatre directors. Once their training is complete, the Members will go out into the community to deliver their story of overcoming adversity to teenagers. The students will then explore any themes and issues that come up in a workshop designed to tie in with the Personal, Social and Health Education elements of the national curriculum. It is a great example of Blesma reaching out to communities and making a very real difference to the lives of others.

The Association has partnered with The Drive Project to target pupils on the verge of exclusion,

and even though the programme is just starting out, results suggest that the impact could be enormous.

"This group of 15 Members is the second to take part in the training course, and we've already been into a number of schools with graduates from the first course," explains Programme Director Alice Driver. "The response has been amazing; one Member, Andy Reid, was told by a teacher he'd get 10 minutes out of the class before they'd get bored. He was still talking to them two hours later! Our aim is to motivate 1,000 pupils, and we already have 40 schools lined up. The impact could be huge – it could inspire a generation!"

#### **MAKING INDIVIDUAL STORIES INCREDIBLE**

Theatre directors Kate Beales and Al Nedjari, along with professional storyteller Clare Murphy, work with the Members to develop their communication skills. First, there are warm-up exercises; stretching and shouting is followed by some invisible ribbon twirling!

Then it's time for the work to begin. Stu Pearson, part of the group of soldiers whose story inspired the film *Kajaki*, steps forward and recounts the events that led to him being blown up and losing a leg. He tells of his anger as a request for a helicopter is denied. It's a moving moment, but Al makes it even more effective.

"You've got a great professional detachment from the events you're describing," he says, "but you need to pause more, and draw us into certain moments so we live the story." Kate stands next to Stu, showing him some moves that will help improve his body language. The second run-through is much more striking.

Darren Swift was involved in this scheme's pilot programme early last year. He is now a professional



**Take a bow: Some of the Members who have taken part in the Blesma Community Programme. Now to inspire a generation...**

actor who has starred in a number of plays, including *Blue On Blue*, which has recently finished a run on the West End (see page 16). He tells the audience about the moment he first saw himself in the mirror after both his legs were amputated. “I thought; ‘You’re a mess!’ But I knew I had a choice. I could put my chin on my chest and go into a black hole, or hold my chin up and get on with life.” He’s clearly good, but the directors get him to slow down to reinforce the drama.

The same is true of Archie Naughton, whose delivery is brilliantly comic despite the “something bad” turning out to be the shredding of his right leg by a car.

“A nurse told me I was going into shock,” he says. “I thought that was nonsense, but all I could say was ‘NRRRGH!’ That’s when I realised she was probably right.” Again, Kate feels he needs more pauses, but this time it’s so that people can enjoy the laughs.

Triple amputee Mark Ormrod’s narration is perfectly pitched. “Those 45 minutes were the most frightening I’ve ever experienced,” he says of kneeling on an IED. “They involved me picking my own foot off the floor, falling out of a vehicle as I was being evacuated, and being declared clinically dead in the back of a helicopter – only to be revived three minutes later.”

The directors can’t believe how much his delivery has progressed since the first time he told the story, and they work on his breathing between sentences.

Carole King tells the story of her tough childhood growing up in a Hull orphanage. Her harrowing delivery affects everyone, but the tutors help her intensify her story even more by telling her to make more eye contact with the audience. Last up is Pat Provis, who has lost an arm, as well as three fingers and a thumb on the other hand. He delivers a great turn about being given a book called *The Soldier* as a boy and thinking; ‘I’m having some of that.’ The directors get him to speak louder and move less.

### **THE CRITICS GIVE FIVE STAR REVIEWS**

“It’s going really well,” says Programme Director Alice halfway through the performances. “The Members are learning great skills including public speaking, how to deliver a workshop, class management and storytelling techniques. This scheme will also give them paid employment and will really enhance their CVs. Running this part of the course in the West End (the Young Vic and Theatre Royal Haymarket theatres have also been kind enough to host similar sessions)

gives a real sense of excitement, and the performances get better because of the theatres’ atmosphere.”

The Members themselves, meanwhile, are amazed at how much they’ve learned. “This has been the best thing I’ve ever done with Blesma,” says Pat. “I spoke to the Welsh Assembly earlier this year about prosthetics, but I did it from an A4 sheet. This is much better. What I’ve been taught has been incredible. I’m really looking forward to engaging with the teenagers. If we can inspire them, it’ll be so worthwhile. It’s also helped me learn how to tell a story better, which is fantastic, because I’m currently writing a book.”

Archie Naughton agrees. “My story has changed so much since I started the course; it has expanded and developed. The techniques we’ve learned, the breathing and dramatic pauses, have really made a huge difference. You make vast improvements every day and feel much more confident... and standing on a London stage was a simply wonderful experience.”

Mark Ormrod can’t wait to use his new-found skills in a practical way. “I think we all feel the same – the end result should be incredible,” he says. “It’s about contributing and giving back. It becomes important to do some good with a bad situation. I’ve developed so much over the week. I’ve done some public speaking and you get into a routine, thinking; ‘If it isn’t broken, don’t fix it.’ But these guys have definitely fixed it!”

Carole King adds; “What I find interesting is the way the tutors have helped us all realise that we have a story to tell. Blesma Members don’t like to big themselves up, but the tutors have shown us that what we might think is rambling can actually be incredibly striking. I don’t think I’ll be nervous doing the real thing. I’ll be able to address a group of teenagers and hopefully help them out.”

Even the tutors, who are all well used to working with professional thespians, have been blown away by the Members and their commitment. “They have great poise, posture and readiness, but what impresses me most is their compassion,” says Kate. “Those qualities may not be immediately obvious, but under the surface it holds them together. And, of course, they have great material.” Five star reviews all round, then. Teenagers across the UK will soon be reaping the benefits.

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*If you are interested in taking part in a future training course, or know an organisation that could benefit from the workshop, contact [bcp@blesma.org](mailto:bcp@blesma.org)*



Pat Provis



Darren Swift

### LIFE LESSONS FROM THE REAL DEAL

When Members complete the course they will take their story out into the community. Then, they'll follow their talk up with a workshop that explores the theme of overcoming adversity. "Pupils will learn from the struggles the Members have gone through, and apply them to their own lives," says Programme Director Alice Driver. "In Personal, Social and Health Education, there is a focus on overcoming adversity to achieve goals.

We are delivering the real deal by asking these guys to talk." Theatre director Kate Beales sees other benefits, too. "The workshops will help to show students the complexity of life. They are often taught in terms of black and white, right and wrong. Blesma Members show that you can be scared and vulnerable, but also brave and dynamic at the same time. It's a complexity that kids often don't get taught, and I think it will be really useful for them."



**"THEY HAVE GREAT POISE, POSTURE AND READINESS, BUT WHAT IMPRESSES ME MOST IS THEIR COMPASSION"**

Theatre director Kate Beales gives Darren Swift some tips

# WOUL



# WOUNDED



Words: Nick Moore, Pictures: Science Museum/SSPL

1916 - 2016

*The centenary of the Battle of the Somme*

*A new exhibition at London's Science Museum shows the battlefield injuries, and the groundbreaking treatments, that soldiers experienced during WWI*

**T**en million soldiers were killed during WWI. Perhaps even more incredible is the fact that twice that number were wounded. On 01 July 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 57,000 casualties were sustained by the British alone. After the war, tens of thousands returned home disabled, disfigured or traumatised by their experiences.

A new exhibition at London's Science Museum commemorates the 100th anniversary of the Somme. The exhibits on display in *Wounded: Conflict, Casualties and Care* showcase the pioneering medical innovations of WWI, and highlight the similarities in the treatment today's soldiers receive. The curator, Stewart Emmens, talks us through this extraordinary exhibition...

**Firstly, how and why did the exhibition come about?**

Several years ago, when our troops were still involved in Afghanistan, I suggested an exhibition that would look at modern battlefield equipment. The starting point was to be the moment of injury, after which we'd examine what happened in the minutes and hours afterwards. That exhibition didn't happen for one reason or another, but we're using a similar idea in relation to WWI. We're examining what happened from the moment a soldier was wounded on the Western Front, and what could have saved his life in those first minutes. The second part of the exhibition looks at how injured troops were repatriated, what they had to deal with, and the technologies that helped them. This year marks the centenary of the Somme, so it felt like the perfect opportunity to display our WWI medical collection, which is large and eclectic.

## 1916 - 2016

### *The centenary of the Battle of the Somme*

#### **The exhibition focuses on WWI but shows how similar wounds are treated today...**

Yes. A lot of time has passed between WWI and Afghanistan, but in terms of wounding, blood loss and infection have always posed the biggest threats to life, although the way they are dealt with has obviously changed. Blood transfusions came of age in WWI, so as well as exploring how medics tried to stop the bleeding we also look at how they attempted to replace blood that was lost. We also examine infection and how it was treated. The Somme took place 30 years before penicillin, so it was a hideous environment to be injured in. WWI was a new kind of war. It saw the introduction of industrialised weapons that wounded with unprecedented severity and scale.

#### **And there are a number of parallels with today's battlefields that are striking...**

Things are obviously very different in all sorts of ways – a helicopter can be on the ground minutes after injury now. In WWI, soldiers could be stranded for hours before any help arrived, if it came at all. But there are similarities with the modern battlefield, and a small number of the exhibits are contemporary, to give a contrast with the old methods. Medics from the Afghanistan

conflict say that the wounds they treated were similar to the blast injuries soldiers received 100 years ago. We've also made a short film with a group of veterans who suffer from PTSD which is being shown as part of the exhibition. They feel that their condition is still deeply misunderstood.

#### **Blesma Members will certainly be able to relate to the exhibition...**

I would hope so. I met Mark Ormrod, who's a Blesma Member, and he told me he'd tried a sophisticated prosthetic arm, but the one he likes best is his split hook arm – which was patented in 1912! Simpler is often better, lots of amputees certainly found that after WWI. The more expensive 'Officer's Arm' [see p46] was actually not as good as the cheaper ones the troops got.

#### **After the idea for an exhibition is approved, what does it take to actually pull something like this together?**

Firstly, it's a question of funding – the Heritage Lottery Fund certainly helped. We're living in difficult financial times, so we needed to attract external investment and then work out how big the exhibition could be. At one point, we were envisaging a considerably larger exhibition that would

have included more on disease and public health. You look at your collection and what you can borrow, and decide what story to tell. We have a lot of exhibits, but we could only pick certain aspects of the story to tell, so we decided to focus on the Western Front.

#### **How tough was it to source the exhibits?**

We already had a huge amount in our archives that hadn't been displayed before. About 50 per cent of the Science Museum's objects are medical because we have access to the Wellcome Collection, which is huge. Most of the exhibits in *Wounded* have come from our collections, but the Royal College of Surgeons has loaned us Henry Tonk's striking pastels of facial injuries, we've got Harold Gillies's surgical instruments, and Blind Veterans UK has also loaned us some pieces. It's given us the chance to put on an exhibition that isn't typical for the Science Museum.

#### **Is it a challenge to preserve the exhibits?**

Yes. Some of the objects are clearly used and damaged because they've come from the Front Line. We have a German battlefield stretcher, which was captured by the 9th King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.



It certainly looks like it's been in a battle! There are also items such as medical chests, which contain chemicals in rusting containers that probably shouldn't still be around after 100 years! It has been a year-long project for our conservator to make the necessary repairs and prevent deterioration to the display items.

**Are you showing anything specifically about amputation?**

When I began working on this collection 20 years ago, we were given 250 objects from Queen Mary's in Roehampton. We've chosen a number of the most interesting prosthetics from those. A lot of assistive technology was developed around this time, so it was an interesting period for prosthetics. But there are items that should fascinate anyone interested in military history. I particularly like a group of lucky charms that were carried by WWI soldiers. This seems to have been their protection against mechanised weaponry: luck!

**How harrowing an exhibition is this?**

It's been a difficult balancing act. I've seen some things related to injury, in the name of research for this exhibition, that I'd quite like to un-see! Some museums have made a policy of not showing anything graphic, but we decided not to shy away from reality. You can't go too far, though, and put people off with a total horror show. Hopefully, people will appreciate that this is a serious exhibition that looks at a nuanced story.

**What would you like people to think when they come away from the exhibition?**

We think of WWI as a time of huge medical advances – and we show some of those – but this will hopefully remind people that there was a lot of trial and error, not to mention repurposing of existing ideas. Medics remembered old treatments like the Thomas splint; a Victorian invention that was popularised in WWI. There's also the contrast between then and now. The scale of WWI is hard to comprehend. On the first day of the Somme, 20,000 British soldiers were killed and 40,000 wounded. And there were many other days when nearly as much damage was done. The wounded were often forgotten then, as they are today.

*Wounded: Conflict, Casualties and Care is free and runs at the Science Museum in London until early 2018. For more visit [www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/wounded](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/wounded)*



## LIGHT METAL LIMB

One of the fundamental shifts for amputees after WWI came with the move from wooden to metal limbs. Having been issued with wooden limbs during the wartime rush, amputees clamoured for the lighter metal designs, which were issued throughout the 1920s. This example was made by Hanger, an American company that had originally set up workshops in the Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, during the war.



## HEAVILY REPAIRED ARTIFICIAL LEG

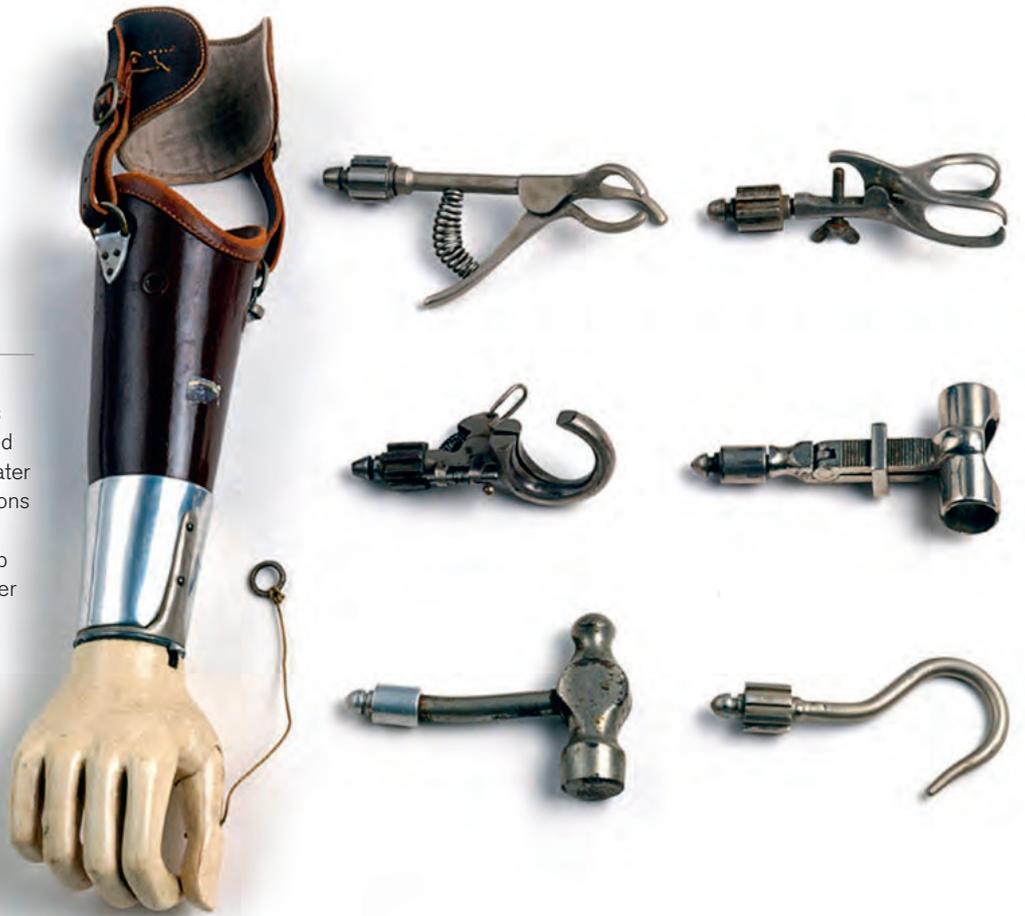
Artificial limbs were inevitably subject to wear and tear. Some veterans could be very reluctant to part with prostheses that had become a major part of their lives. They were fearful of losing a comfortable fit, or even that the time off work needed for a new fitting could cost them their jobs.

1916 - 2016

## *The centenary of the Battle of the Somme*

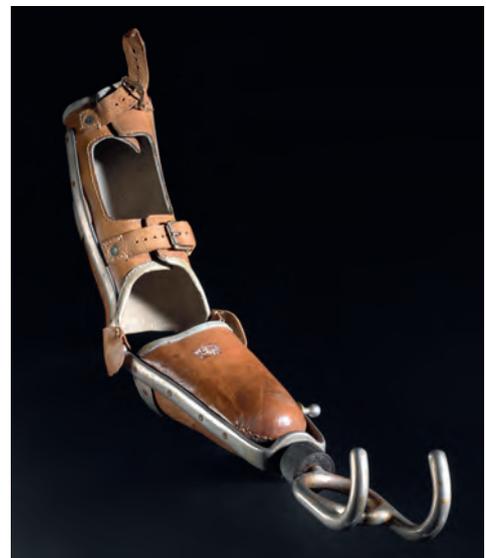
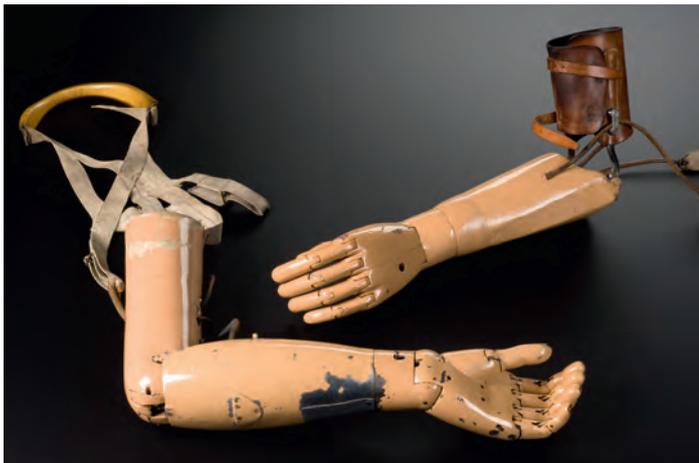
### THE MCKAY ARM

Retraining was a primary objective at Queen Mary's and other limb hospitals after WWI. This hand could be replaced by a series of practical tools, allowing for a greater range of practical skills and more options for employment. The system was pioneered by the McKay Artificial Limb Company. McKay was a New Zealander who'd lost an arm during the war.



### CARNES ARTIFICIAL ARM

Over 10,000 British Servicemen lost at least one of their arms during WWI and all were entitled to a good-quality replacement. Made to measure in the USA, the Carnes Arm was expensive and so became known as the 'Officer's Arm'. In practice, wearers found the Carnes Arm heavy and difficult to master and many ended up in the backs of cupboards, never to be worn again.



### ANDERSON & WHITELAW ARM

Most amputees were working-class men. This prosthetic was intended for agricultural work. Devoid of complexities and armed with a double-hook-like appliance, it was designed specifically for manual labour.

## FIELD SURGICAL PANNIER

Surgical panniers were supplied to units close to the front. They contained an extensive array of surgical instruments and equipment for wound care, anaesthetising and sterilising. The '1905 pattern' label indicates that the contents were based on the experiences of earlier wars.



**1916 - 2016**

*The centenary of the Battle of the Somme*



**ARTIFICIAL EYES**

Thousands of soldiers returned to Britain having lost one or both eyes. Glass eyes were much in demand and quickly became in short supply as production had traditionally centred on Germany. All existing stock in Britain was put under the control of the Army Spectacle Depot. Between December 1916 and August 1919, it supplied more than 22,000 eyes.



**SPLATTER MASK**

Soldiers dreaded serious facial wounds, and this so-called 'splatter' mask was specially designed to protect British tank crews. Although tanks were encased in thick armour plating, the impact from high explosives could cause a deadly spray of ricocheting hot metal fragments within the vehicles.



## NARROW STRETCHER

British surgeon George Herbert Colt proposed one solution to moving wounded men through the twists and turns of WWI's narrow, muddy trenches with this bendable stretcher. Carried on the bearers' shoulders, the wounded soldier lay semi-upright in the canvas sling suspended underneath.



## NERVE TONIC

As the scale of mental health wounding became clear, existing 'over the counter' medicines that claimed to heal shattered nerves found a new market amongst war veterans. Despite little positive clinical evidence, these nerve tonics, sedatives and supplements were often the last resort of desperate men.

1916 - 2016

*The centenary of the Battle of the Somme*

# Wilf Whitfield and WWI

*The British Army suffered 420,000 casualties during the Battle of the Somme.  
But for those injured, the fighting didn't stop when they arrived back home...*

**W**ilfred Whitfield was an unlikely war hero. At 5ft 2in tall, and weighing just 8 stones, he volunteered to fight in WWI every week from the start of the conflict, but was sent home each time (the minimum height for a soldier was 5ft 3in). The huge loss of life as Germany swept through Europe eventually gave him his chance and he was allowed to sign up. Wilf lost his left arm at the Battle of the Somme, which began 100 years ago on 01 July 1916, and marked the worst day in British military history as 57,000 troops were either killed or wounded.

But like so many other amputees who returned to 'normal' life, Wilf's war didn't end with the Armistice. There was no hero's welcome and Wilf was refused jobs for three years. Along with other amputee Service men, he found his benefits cut and doors shut as the nation struggled through the Depression of the 1920s.

The terrible conditions facing a generation of young men who returned with life-changing injuries was the catalyst for the formation of Blesma. Wilf, who died in 1958 aged 62, and fellow amputees seldom spoke of their experiences in war but were prepared to go into battle again and again to improve employment opportunities, medical techniques, social support and public awareness of the struggles of wounded veterans.

Wilf was instrumental in setting up the Teesside branch of Blesma, then the Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association, to campaign for the 40,000 soldiers who lost limbs or eyes during the war, only to find just one in 10 of them could regain employment.

Wilf recorded his military and civilian campaigns in a diary that spent years in the loft of his daughter's home in Middlesbrough. His family has edited his diary into a valuable testimony of one man's war experience, and his fight against injustice and discrimination.

The book, *Wasted Effort*, follows the lethal rhythm of life in the trenches; the bravery of ordinary soldiers and the rigidity of orders – Wilf was fined for returning to his post without his Army-issue greatcoat despite having survived four days in No Man's Land shell holes.

"He went through a horrible time but he didn't moan, criticise, or complain at any point," says grandson Paul Fellows. His granddaughter Alison Care, adds; "It's amazing to think Blesma is still going, still needed. Yes, things have moved on and we have the welfare state, but soldiers are still coming back from conflict zones like Afghanistan having lost limbs.

"As grandchildren, we never met Wilf, which is sad, but we are extremely privileged to have his diaries. Though we have been told Wilf never spoke of the war, he managed to leave us this legacy so we can understand a bit more about it and him."

Wilf's diaries, extracts of which appear here, are a rich piece of military and social history that tell of one man's bravery and refusal to give up despite facing mountainous odds as an amputee at the end of WWI. The determination of men like Wilf to fight for a better deal for their comrades is one of the reasons why Blesma was established, and why the Association is still helping wounded Service personnel today.



Words: Danny Buckland and Jessica Mackinnon

**Bottom left: Wilf Whitfield, Lieutenant Signaller 201117/3838, 3rd Line, 4th Yorks Battalion, Green Howards, 1896-1958**

# 1916 - 2016

## The centenary of the Battle of the Somme

### Wilf's War

From an eager teenager to a seasoned soldier, Wilf grew up very quickly in WWI

#### NOVEMBER 1914

At age 18, in 1914, I was a healthy member of society, but not very prepossessing. I had only reached 5ft 2in and, for a few weeks after that fateful bugle call, watched Regulars and Territorials depart for the front. I watched, not envious of their heroics, but envious of their chance of seeing life. The posters were out asking for volunteers and I commenced a weekly trip to the recruiting office and strenuous exercises to put on inches.

#### MARCH 1915

Early in 1915, I presented myself as usual on the Friday evening. The sergeant in charge, an old friend by now, said; 'You know the local Territorial Battalion, the 4th Yorks? Well, they've been practically wiped out at Ypres. For a limited period recruiting standards have been lowered and, if you're serious enough, then you can keep your shoes on while I take your height.'

Wilf was passed fit for military service by the doctor and started his training as a signaller at Northallerton.

#### 12 MARCH, 1916

Moving off in small sections at 10-minute intervals, across country that might have been just outside Middlesbrough, but was

just outside Loere, Belgium... Out of the blue came a sound. A cloud of smoke and dust mushroomed about a hundred yards away... We were off again with our hearts pounding and tongues dry. We were not soldiers now, merely frightened boys.

Wilf's unit took up station at Kemmel Chateau, near Ypres.

I had become accustomed to daily casualties, waiting my turn with that fatalism of the trenches but quite nimbly dodging mortars where possible, and had lost all curiosity about No Man's Land except when on look out officially.

The raiding party made ready at dusk, leaving letters and sentimental oddments with pals to post home – their blackened faces and dulled bayonets grotesquely emphasising the whites of their eyes...

Acrid smoke filled the air and I felt the earth moving. Sandbags slithered down onto me or knocked the breath out and I pressed to the trench wall trying to identify myself completely with the earth. My feet were becoming trapped and I shook them clear. It was dark no longer. Survival, that's the thing. I saw in the flashing brilliance a face in a hole that had been dug out, and I dived in – crawled further then a terrific bump and some of the top fell on me. I was to be buried and yelled to be out.

I saw Sergeant Johnstone. He was smoking... a crash above the rest and I saw the earth lift along the trench. Crawling away I overtook the sergeant. He was leaning back. No, God, he was only half there. I scrambled away. Slowly the

nightmare ended. There were 10 fresh mounds in the chateau grounds that night. Two who came out with our bunch; Gibson with a piece of metal replacing half his face and White with something in his back.

Wilf's job was to establish communication wires between units and then repeatedly sneak into No Man's Land to repair breakages. On one trip, he and a comrade rescued a shell-shocked officer who had spent four days sheltering in a crater, an act that saved them from a reprimand for leaving their post even though it was directly shelled and to stay would have been suicide.

The 4th Yorks Battalion was marched 75 miles from Loere to Albert, in France, and the Battle of the Somme.

#### SEPTEMBER 1916

Only stumps of trees, the ground soft, loose and churned up. Not one single inch had escaped and the dead – hundreds of British and Germans in positions which each told a story – lying as they fell, just part of the soil, except where pals had scraped a cover over and stuck the rifle on its bayonet to identify the spot. For miles, these upside down rifles replaced the gone vegetation. I estimated my chances of survival from now on as 100-1 against.

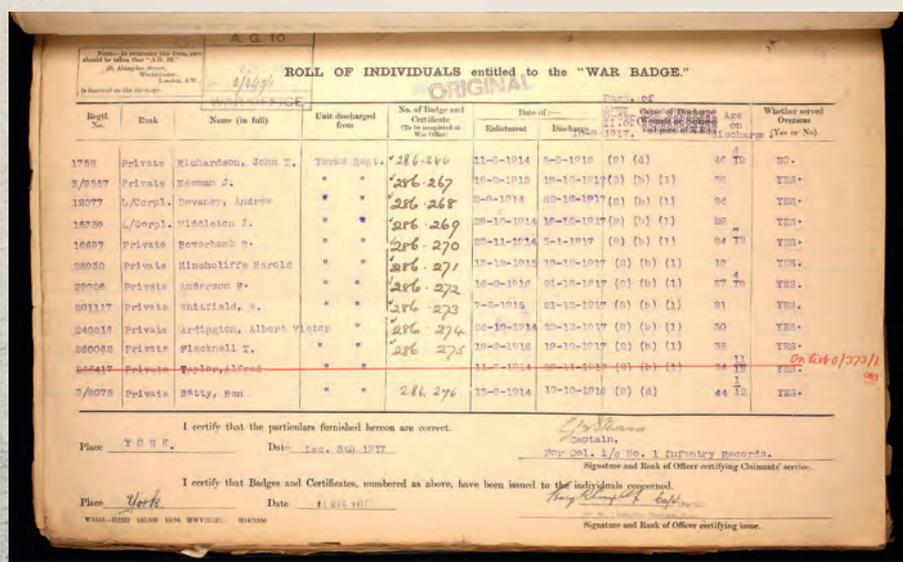
#### 15 SEPTEMBER, 1916

Another push into the unyielding German lines and the Battalion was joined by the first tanks seen on the battlefields.

As the whistles sounded, our barrage came. The sky dropped with a roar and crash just in front. An officer jumped out and waved. We were out. Running. Machine gun bullets were zipping now. One heard them over the roar... As we stepped over those who fell, I realised the high ground was reached and enemy machine guns were taking their toll, and another change in the type of inferno told us we were among enemy shells.

So far, no academic thrust, parry, in, out of bayonets – just simple mass slaughter had been the rule... I sat and dozed. Tommy was pushing me out of a soldier's half sleep. 'Look what you've sat on, fathead, come on further away.' I looked and the decomposed face of a Jerry gazed back. Much trampling over him had integrated him with the earth and he was merely the bump in the ground I had found convenient.

Jerry scattered and went to ground. Instinctively, and against all tradition,



The Silver War Badge was given to all personnel discharged due to wounds or illness

**Wilf and Elsie were married in June 1923. They had a daughter, Sylvia, in 1932**



we didn't wait for it. Caution went bust and we were off. A healthy instinct regarding my lack of weight and muscle stopped me about 10 yards short of the general melee and, dropping on one knee, (I hadn't been the best shot on the Northallerton ranges for nothing) I picked off grey figures from khaki wherever I got a clear sight. One Jerry came at me but tripped and I bashed his face with a rifle butt.

A German counter-attack. I was looking down into an inferno and our fellows hadn't a chance. Shouting, screaming they were climbing out. I grabbed an outstretched hand and pulled. Another and another.... it would have been suicide to count on my 8st 2lbs with a bayonet. I used a rifle butt, either swung at their ankles or knees full force, or rammed in the face.

Ripping roars overhead, above the crack of whizz-bangs, told of vicious shrapnel but the mind refused even fear; smoke, flash, one's aching eyes almost shut, in nostrils that acrid smoke, of powder and newly disintegrated bodies long dead. An instinctive dive for breathing time into a deep dug out in a clump of tree stumps, full of bodies – and out again, and on.

## NOVEMBER 1916

*Wilf volunteered for a working party that came under fire.*

On the way back a trench too wide saved my life. As I clambered out of the other side, I heard the shell coming. Instinctively freezing, the crash came. My arm, reaching up to the trench top, jerked and something happened to my shoulder and then the arm went numb.

*Wilf was taken to hospital at Abbeville, the arm was amputated and he was sent back to England. The Battle of the Somme ended on 18 November 1916 with more than one million dead or wounded in four months.*

## Post War

*The England that Wilf returned to was very different from the one he left to fight for...*

*For Wilf, another battle loomed – adjusting to life without a limb. He was given his old job as an engineering draughtsman but was vulnerable as the Depression took hold. The majority of limbless veterans didn't have a job, were given limited benefits and had to cope with rudimentary prosthetics in a world completely unprepared for this type of injury.*

## 1923

*Wilf and two other amputee veterans were sacked on the same day. Wilf then endured three years without work and had to sign on three times a week.*

The manager told me; 'You ex-Service men are a nuisance, filled with your own importance. You have come back thinking the world was made for you. You are behind in your experience, we have to economise, and there are better men for less money.'

Dole ceased at 16 weeks and receipt of an odd period of extended benefit meant inspection of one's home to look for lodgers or working relatives. If one earned a few shillings sweeping snow without disclosing the fact, it meant gaol. The local magistrates got marvellous publicity in this way. Men were sent in bundles of 50 for one job and had to explain to the committee why they had had no success.

*Wilf was branded 'incurably unemployable' because of his missing arm and was rarely sent for jobs.*

In three years, I received 16 weeks of 16 shillings' support. My confidence in myself went. I got used to the glance at the empty sleeve if I asked for a draughtsman's job.

*Wilf used his time to study employment law, using it to fight for better conditions for his fellow jobless war wounded. He was instrumental in establishing one of the first branches of Blesma and, even when he got a draughtsman's job, he continued campaigning. Wilf, now married to Elsie, and with daughter Sylvia born in 1932, used his post war diaries to record his anger at the treatment of workers.*

It was all very good for industry to have half the workers unemployed while the other half worked like hell for the lowest possible wages.

*Wilf served in the Home Guard in World War II, but resumed his quest for wounded*

*Service men, recording that the government planned pay deductions to stop veterans 'malingering'.*

Is there much difference between the disabled soldier and the injured bus driver or miner injured in our service? Why have different systems of compensation and treatment?

## 1945

*Wilf welcomed the birth of the welfare state in 1945 and countered Conservative Party propaganda with a vigorous letter writing campaign, becoming a passionate advocate of independence for wounded ex-Service men.*

Disabled soldiers can do better than make poppies. They can take part in the vital production drive of the moment.

## 1951

*The Conservative Party won the General Election but Wilf was not impressed.*

The Tories are in and I write as many old age pensioners and housewives who voted for them are finding the promises piecrust.

*His final judgement on the plight of injured ex-Service men rings true today:*

Fundamentally wrong ideas still hinder disabled people more than their own handicap.



*Wilf's diary entries and journals have been edited into a book. Wasted Effort: A Journal of the First World War 1915-1916 and Diaries 1917-1951 is currently available from Amazon, priced just £4.99.*

# Our future is in their hands

*A small team of dynamic, young engineers are about to change the world of prosthetics forever.*

*Meet the brains behind Open Bionics*

*Words: Danny Buckland Pictures: Robert Whitrow*





## TECHNOLOGY

If you were given some Lego and a couple of basic motors could you design and build a makeshift floor cleaner? Joel Gibbard could. When he was seven years old!

Impressive though the rudimentary machine was, it was merely Joel's first step on a journey that, 18 years later, has brought him to the brink of manufacturing a bionic hand that can be 3-D printed in a fraction of the time – and at a fraction of the cost – of current prosthetic devices.

Open Bionics, the company that he set up with business partner Samantha Payne just a few years ago, has successfully engineered a fully-functioning prototype that could be on sale by the end of the year for as little as £2,000. Quick to make, easy to use, and with the ability to replicate movement in all 24 joints of a human hand, the prosthetic could prove revolutionary for amputees and people born without hands.

### PUNCHING ABOVE THEIR WEIGHT

The prosthetic is made from a flexible but incredibly hard-wearing plastic. Shark-strength fishing wire runs through the finger joints to motor modulators. Sensors in the forearm, meanwhile, are connected to a circuit board the size of two postage stamps, which transforms muscle impulses into six different movements including full grip, a finger and thumb pinch, a three-finger tripod grip, and a point.

“There have been big jumps along the way,” says Joel, who attracted £40,000 start-up funding after leaving university to create low cost prosthetics. “Everything worked on our first model but it only lasted a few hours. Later versions broke down for one reason or another, but now the hand will move how the amputee wants it to. The latest iteration has been used as a demonstration model all around the world for the last six months, so has taken more than its fair share of knocks, and it's still going strong.”

Tests have proved the latest model can easily hold 5kg shopping bags, while the joints have gone through 200,000 cycles of movement without an issue. But perhaps the most exciting aspect of this project is the fact that it takes less than a week to scan a socket fitting and print a new hand (compared to current waiting times of several months), while the cost will be in the region of £2,000 rather than the eye-watering £50,000 price tag of some of the market-leading prosthetics.

And despite the cutting edge nature of Open Bionics' product, the company has

**High five:**  
the company's  
five staff hope to  
change the world  
of prosthetics



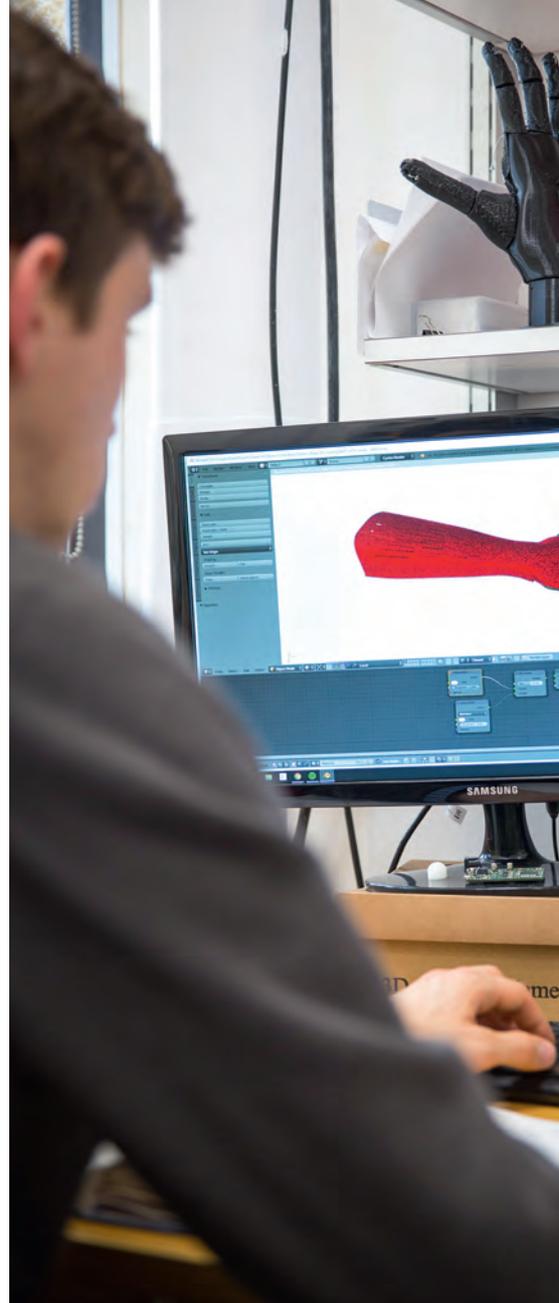
made its design and technology ‘open source’ which means anyone can share and use the technology without fear of facing a hefty lawsuit.

It is an incredibly bold and inspiring attitude, and one that will accelerate development and ensure that amputees will not be priced out of the new device.

“We want it to be as accessible as possible,” says Joel, a 25 year old who built his first robot out of scrap parts as a teenager before creating a robotic hand for his final year project at Plymouth University. “We are obviously driven by making this happen as an engineering and technological challenge, but we also want as many people as possible to benefit from it as quickly as possible.

“Some incredible technology already exists that could change lives completely, but it is often prohibitively expensive. We see our job as making this technology accessible to everyone. We are starting with hands but see this progressing into legs and even exoskeletons in the future.”

Development starts with a sketched design, which becomes increasingly

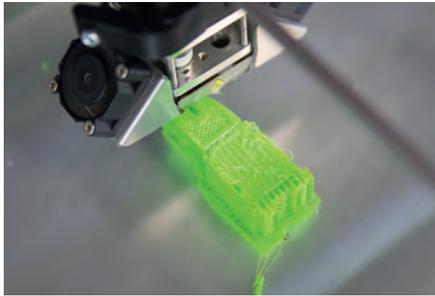


detailed and intricate as each new component and interaction is tested on the way to finding the most efficient mechanisms that can be easily replicated on the company's six 3-D printers.

Open Bionics' expansion has been fuelled by a series of grants, including support from the Disney Accelerator Programme and the James Dyson Award for innovation, as well as by a £125,000 sum from an Intel-organised Dragon's Den-style competition in San Francisco.

“We had to pitch to a panel of seven people in front of an audience of about 200 while the event was streamed live, so it was incredibly nerve-wracking,” says Samantha Payne, Open Bionics' 24-year-old co-founder and Chief Operating Officer (pictured right). “I think everyone saw the business opportunity but also appreciated that this has the potential to impact on millions of people and do real social good.

“Investors can see the opportunity but some ask why we're going to sell the hand so cheaply when we could bump the price up to £25,000 and it would still cost less than the competition. But we don't think



**The prosthetic (final model not shown) is made from a tough but flexible plastic. Shark-strength fishing wire runs through the fingers**

**Samantha Payne**



like that. We have spoken to lots of trauma patients, many of whom have experienced deep depression after losing a hand. One amputee even said he felt suicidal after experiencing what he described as ‘the shame of not being able to do the everyday activities’ he once did with ease. He told us

his life changed when he was given a fully-articulated hand. Suddenly, he had a device that enabled him to tie his shoelaces again.

“That was obviously very useful, but because it was shaped like a human hand, and the fingers moved like the fingers he had lost, he said he felt whole again. Having a bionic hand that looks human can make a big difference. Until now, the issue has been being able to afford one.”

#### **FROM HOME TO HOPE**

Open Bionics is now based at the Bristol Robotics Laboratory, an incubator project at the University of the West of England, where groundbreaking developers are perfecting advanced drones and medical robots. But the journey started at the Gibbard family home where Joel and his brother were inspired by their architect father’s ability to engineer complex models from Meccano.

“Dad would build rockets that were bigger than me, and I remember him once creating a model of the Space Shuttle and launch pad without any drawings or instructions,” says Joel. “I was brought

up with an interest in robotics and started messing about with bits and piece around the house, building robotic hands for fun way before I went to university. What’s not to love about robotics? It’s a combination of all engineering disciplines; mechanical, electronic and software all rolled into one, with everything having to work at the same time. I find that fascinating.”

That fascination has obviously paid off as Open Bionics approaches product registration and clinical trials.

“We’re not sure how long that will all take because we have never been through the process before and we’re a small team of five, but we’re aiming for a product launch at the end of this year,” says Samantha. “Our engineering team could be earning a lot more money working for huge multi-national companies, but they are all here because they’re dedicated to making this happen. Our approach is fresh, and the potential to help many, many people is driving us all forward.”

*For more information on the company’s work visit [www.openbionics.com](http://www.openbionics.com)*



## DAVID SKIDMORE

*David became a double arm amputee when he was 20 years old. Now 77, he explains why he's refused to let his injuries define his life*

**I joined the Royal Army Pay Corps when I was 19 years old.** I was stationed in Cyprus when I was 20, and was injured six months later.

**I was travelling in a lorry, with my rifle on my lap,** when another vehicle smashed into us. My rifle hit my right arm, I was knocked over the top of the lorry, and one of the vehicles ran over my left arm. My right arm was severed in the collision and they tried to save the other one, but it was smashed to bits.

**The only recollection I have of the incident** is the surgeon asking if I knew what had happened. I said that I thought I'd lost an arm. That's when he told me I'd lost both!

**Mentally, my injuries haven't affected** me at all. I quickly came to realise that if this was the situation I had to face, then I'd just have to deal with it.

**Six months after the incident, I was working as** a solicitor's clerk. I married Sylvia three months after that, and the following year I passed my driving test and we had our first of three children.

**When I lost my arms, I had to relearn everything –** from tying my shoelaces to buttoning up my shirt. It took a lot of getting used to because I had to adapt everything. People had to adapt, too – they needed to accept that I was not just my hands!

**I've worked as a senior partner in a law firm, helped** open and run several charities, I even qualified as a solo light aircraft pilot when I was 59! Now, I'm involved in financing a block of flats for disabled people.

**Blesma has helped me greatly. The charity was even** there for me when I needed to get my son, who has learning difficulties, onto a course.

**I still wear the WWI-style prosthetic arms rather than** the modern electric ones because they are operated by my muscles, and I can rely on them. If I used electric arms and a fuse blew while I was flying... well, that wouldn't be good news!

**I have made adjustments to my** prosthetics with materials I've bought from fishing tackle shops. That's the only development I can do as I can't get through to the people who actually made the arms.

**Amputees from as far as Japan and China have stayed** with me for a week or so to see how I get on with life as a double arm amputee. I'm happy to help anyone – space permitting, of course!

**My attitude has always been that I could accept** my situation or sit in an armchair and die. I've run companies, I've had a good marriage, I've got three kids, I can drive a car and fly an aeroplane. OK, so I don't play the piano, but there's still time to learn!

**“I CAN EITHER  
ACCEPT THE  
SITUATION I'M  
IN, OR I CAN SIT  
IN AN ARMCHAIR  
AND DIE”**



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