

Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter – Summer 2016



Your views on the Activities Programme

The results of the Activities Survey make interesting reading [p10](#)



Blesma offers more support to Members

The Association plans to broaden its range of grants and support [p32](#)



Your BSO is there for you. Get in touch!

Wherever you live, your local BSO is ready with help and advice [p28](#)



To bling or not to bling

Why more amputees are deciding to stand out as well as stand up

Inside: The winners of the Blesma Awards 2015



Army Officer turned novelist
Harry Parker talks about his life in the
next issue of Blesma Magazine

Out September 2016

Blesma Bulletin

Summer 2016



Photography (right and cover): Omkaar Kotedia



2016 is moving at pace. Members' Weekend was a sell out and the feedback full of praise. The date for 2017 is in this Bulletin so please book in the Autumn.

Blesma Week raised our profile considerably – thanks to all for your great support. Blesma Week also brought many new volunteers, for whom Frank Garside is responsible, and Members' Weekend encouraged some to step forward as welfare volunteers (representatives).

In this issue, Liz Watling, Membership Services Support Assistant, has written a piece on state benefits, Brian Chenier gives us his regular prosthetics update, and there is a piece on the Veterans Medical Funds with which Blesma is involved and eligible Members are entitled to access. If you have concerns or queries, please do get in touch with your BSO or the Chadwell Heath team directly. Being connected is vital to an association, so please make sure we have the right home and email address for you.

It is with great sadness that we learned my predecessor, Jerome Church, passed away while visiting family in the US. The memorial service was held on 22 July at the Brompton Oratory. Jerome did so much for the injured veteran and serving community, and his legacy is appreciated enormously.

At the Members' Weekend, our Chairman told us; 'It's your Association, our Association, it will be as effective and as strong as you care to make it'. I would like to reinforce this message. We welcome all ideas to make it so, and support Member initiatives whenever possible.

Barry Le Grys, Chief Executive

IN THIS ISSUE

VETERANS MEDICAL FUNDS	04
PROSTHETICS UPDATE	08
ACTIVITIES SURVEY RESULTS	10
BLESMA AWARDS	14
SPOTLIGHT ON BENEFITS	16
BRANCH NEWS	20
MEMBERSHIP CHANGES	26

Veterans Medical Funds

VETERANS MEDICAL FUNDS

The Royal British Legion is managing a new Veterans Medical Funds programme, that provides support for veterans with hearing loss and serious physical injury.

The programme is funded through a five-year, £13m commitment from HM Treasury using income generated from the Libor rate-fixing fines. It has two elements; support for veterans with hearing loss, and support for veterans with serious physical injury.

Each element of the programme has been designed in consultation with the MoD, the NHS, the Department of Health, and representatives from subject matter experts in the medical and Armed Forces charity communities, including Blesma.

Both funds are available to veterans across the UK and are open for applications.

VETERANS HEARING FUND

The Veterans Hearing Fund (VHF) provides support to veterans who acquired hearing loss during Service where there is a well-being need that cannot be met through statutory services (such as the NHS).

There are two stages to the application process; the first stage assesses eligibility and will require applicants to submit a copy of Service medical records which must include audiometry data. If the applicant is in receipt of a War Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award, and this was awarded due to hearing loss, they can submit a copy of their documentation confirming this in lieu of Service medical records.

The second stage will be completed and submitted by an audiologist who will agree what equipment or treatments would help improve the applicant's quality of life.

The Veterans Hearing Fund will not replace statutory support, but instead will add to it.

VHF may fund hearing aids, peripherals or therapies (such as lip reading). To apply, please download and complete a VHF eligibility application form from the Royal British Legion website (www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-support/finances/grants/veterans-medical-funds).

To request a form to be sent to you by post, please call the Contact Centre for free on 0808 802 8080 or send an email to medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk

Please contact your local Blesma Support Officer if you would like assistance in completing the application form.

VETERANS MOBILITY FUND

The Ministry of Defence has put in place measures to ensure that Service personnel discharged with Service-attributable serious physical injury will have access to any clinically prescribed specialist wheelchair or orthotic equipment by discharge date, together with a five-year warranty.

The Veterans Mobility Fund (VMF) will support those veterans who have Service-related serious physical injury who fall outside this provision or whose warranty has expired. To be eligible for VMF, an individual will normally be in receipt of a War Pension or have received an award under the Armed



Forces Compensation Scheme. If you have not applied for a War Pension or AFCS award, please contact your local Blesma Support Officer for assistance in submitting your application.

There are two stages to the application process; the first assesses eligibility, which will require you to submit evidence of your War Pension or award under the AFCS. The second stage will be completed and submitted by clinicians – typically through Disablement Services Centres in England, or the equivalents in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

To apply to the Veterans Mobility Fund, please download and complete a VMF eligibility application form from the Royal British Legion website (www.britishlegion.org.uk/get-support/finances/grants/veterans-medical-funds).

To request a form to be sent to you by post, please call the Contact Centre for free on 0808 802 8080 or send an email to medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk

Please contact your local Blesma Support Officer if you would like assistance in completing the application form.

REQUESTING MEDICAL, WAR PENSION, AND AFCS RECORDS

To request a copy of your Service medical records or confirmation of War Pension/ Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award, you will need to submit a completed Subject Access Request form to the relevant Service Records Office.

The Subject Access Request form can be downloaded from the government's website; www.gov.uk/guidance/requests-for-

“The Royal British Legion is managing a new Veterans Medical Funds programme that offers support for veterans with hearing loss and serious physical injury”

personal-data-and-service-records.

To ask for a Subject Access Request form to be sent to you by post, please call the Contact Centre on 0808 802 8080 or email [**medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk**](mailto:medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk)

You will need to include a copy of a form of personal identification, such as a passport, driving licence or utility bill in order for the Ministry of Defence to process your request.

The address for the relevant Service Records Office can be found on Page 01 of the Subject Access Request form.

Veterans Hearing Fund: To request the audiometry records required as part of your Veterans Hearing Fund application, ensure you include ‘Service Audiometry Records’ in ‘Part 3 – Information Requested’ of the Subject Access Request form. You will need to submit the completed Subject Access Request form to the appropriate service. The address for the relevant Service Records Office is on Page 01 of the Subject Access Request form.

Should Service audiometry records not be available, you will receive confirmation from

the MoD that states this. In such cases, send a completed VHF eligibility application form to the address below, including a copy of confirmation from the MoD that audiometry records are unavailable.

Veterans Mobility Fund: To request a copy of your War Pension/Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award, please ensure you include ‘Confirmation of Receipt of War Pension/Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award’ in ‘Part 3 – Information Requested’ of the Subject Access Request form. You will need to submit the completed Subject Access Request form to the address stated for ‘Serv Pers/Vets’. The address for ‘Serv Pers/Vets’ request is on Page 01 of the Subject Access Request form.

Once you have received a copy of your Service medical records or confirmation of War Pension/Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award, send a copy of the records with the appropriate eligibility application form to: ***Veterans Medical Funds, The Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High Street, London SE1 1AA***

Receipt of application will be acknowledged within five working days. Applicants will be notified of the process for the second stage of their application once eligibility has been confirmed.

If you have any questions, please contact your local Blesma Support Officer or the British Legion’s Grants Department at medicalfunds@britishlegion.org.uk, or call their Contact Centre on 0808 802 8080

Families Project

Blesma's main concern is always to meet the needs of its Members, but we know from our detailed work over the years that living with limb loss greatly affects Members' families, too.

You may be surprised to hear that in the UK there is no research into the impact on the families of veterans living with limb loss. But we do know from international research that the active participation of families in the recovery process of people with injuries or health conditions leads to real improvements in their lives.

Blesma is working with the Veterans and Families Institute (VFI) at Anglia Ruskin University on a research project to gather evidence from Members and their families about their experiences of living with limb loss. This evidence will not only improve our understanding of the challenges you face, and therefore help us to provide the support you need, but it will also help us influence other charities and statutory bodies that provide health and social care services.

Over the next few weeks Blesma will be looking to invite 15 families to participate in the project. In particular, we are interested in hearing from you if your:

- Limb loss is attributable to your military service but NOT associated with Operation Telic or Herrick; OR
- Limb loss occurred during service but NOT as a result of a combat injury; OR
- Limb loss occurred after transition out of the military



If you are interested in taking part in this project, we will invite you to identify four members of your family who would each be willing to be interviewed for approximately one hour. Interviews will then be held in either October or November at a venue of your choosing. Blesma will be happy to meet travel and overnight accommodation costs.

If you would like additional information on the project, please contact Dr Hilary Engward, the Co-Lead Researcher at the Veterans and Families Institute, on hilary.engward@gmail.com

Prosthetics Update

TO BLING OR NOT TO BLING?

In recent years there seems to have been a noticeable shift in the perception of prosthetics amongst both the amputee population and the wider public. Many artificial limb wearers now openly display the hardware that is essential for their mobility. In part, this is due to increased exposure in the media around events such as the Paralympics and The Invictus Games, as well as stories about amputees from recent conflicts in which the photographer seems to focus on the visual impact of the prosthetic limb. It is also a consequence of the increased technology in running blades, electronic hands and such like.

Other amputees have gone to extreme lengths to ‘bling’ their prosthetics by buying bespoke covers or commissioning artwork on the sockets. All of which goes to show, yet again, that when it comes to prosthetics it really is about being an individual. There is no right or wrong in this. Of course, there are many factors which an amputee and their prosthetist have to consider in making the decision of the cosmetic appearance of the finished limb. In some cases, a cosmetic covering might limit the functionality of the prosthesis, while in other cases damage to clothing without a protective and cosmetic cover might be a major factor.

The starting point should be what you, the patient, wants. Your prosthetist should be able to provide you with advice on what is possible. When it comes to practicability and cost, something you want might be cost

prohibitive with the NHS provision. It is, however, entirely possible for a favourite logo – a football team’s badge, for example – to be laminated onto a standard socket. There are a number of ways an NHS Limb Centre can ‘bling’ your socket. The cosmetic appearance of your limb should certainly not be viewed as secondary to its function. If the way it looks is important to you, be sure to tell your prosthetist.

HEALTH TRAVEL COSTS UPDATE

As previously reported in *Blesma Magazine* and this *Bulletin*, Blesma continues to seek clarity regarding the payment of travel costs for Members when they travel to an NHS Limb Centre for repair or maintenance of their prosthetics.

The current system allows for those in receipt of a War Pension for an amputation to claim reimbursement of travel costs when attending a Limb Centre under the NHS Health Travel Costs Scheme. A lack of standardisation still exists across the NHS Centres, and as and when we are made aware of individual problems we bring this to the attention of the NHS and Department of Health, who are taking this issue seriously. We have intervened on behalf of individuals and have also provided advice to those Limb Centres that were ‘confused’ by their own systems.

As it stands, the NHS is responsible for payment of legitimate claims by War Pensioner amputee patients. Where there is a need to confirm eligibility, the claim form



Photography: Omkaar Kotedia

(HC5(T)) should be sent to Veterans UK. Having confirmed eligibility for this benefit, Veterans UK will then return the form to the originating hospital or Limb Centre for payment. Veterans UK does not pay the claim directly.

Blesma is seeking parity between those with War Pension entitlement and those who have received an Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Award – who are currently unable to claim their travel costs under this scheme.

If you are having difficulty with this issue, or would benefit from advice or information, please get in touch with Brian Chenier, BSO (Prosthetics) on bsoprosthetics@blesma.org or call him on 020 8548 7080

MICROPROCESSOR KNEES POLICY

Earlier this year NHS England confirmed that, despite supporting a national policy for prescribing microprocessor knees to suitable amputees, it would not be commissioning this on grounds of cost.

The decision is very disappointing and Blesma continues to push for this policy to be reviewed at the earliest opportunity. Working with others, Blesma continues to ensure that this policy, and its benefits, does not slip off the agenda. Many Associate Members would benefit from this technology and we are uniquely placed to offer real insight into the difference such prosthetics offer. We will continue to campaign for this policy on behalf of the amputee population.

Your thoughts and opinions on Blesma's Activities Programme

Blesma is always striving to provide activities that interest and engage as many Members as possible. To that end, a recent survey asked Members who have never participated in Blesma Activities, as well as those who have taken part, what they think about the programme. The survey specifically asked for feedback between 2014 and 2016. The Association took advice from

Dr. Ross Wade who has been working with Activities Manager Jess March on assessing the 2015 Activities Programme. His insight was incredibly helpful and the Activities team are very grateful to him for his advice on the survey's content and layout.

“The number of responses far exceeded expectations,” said Activities Manager Jess March. “In total, 383 Members responded



Of the Members who currently do not participate...

25% stated that a lack of confidence caused non-participation

37% want more partner-friendly activities

22% want more family-friendly activities



to the survey, which might not sound like a lot but was actually much higher than the accepted return rate for surveys. Of those who responded, 70 per cent had never taken part in a Blesma activity – either since 2014 or at all – and we are delighted that so many Members took the time to tell us what they think,” said Jess.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FUTURE ACTIVITIES PROGRAMMES?

“The intention is to introduce more family-friendly activities into the programme, starting with family activity weekends and separate events for couples,” said Jess. “We are also planning a mentoring scheme in which we will ask those Members already engaged with the Activities Programme to support those who are getting involved for the first time and who may lack the confidence to try something new.

“By doing this, we hope to break down the barriers to participation – a lack of confidence or an assumption that medical issues or limited mobility automatically prevents you from joining in, for example.

“And, of course, we will continue to involve the BSOs who play a key role in the selection process,” said Jess. “Emily [Mizon] and I will be working with National Volunteer Officer Frank Garside and the Branches to increase the number of local social events, so if you are interested in getting involved, please contact Frank on 020 8548 3510 or nvo@blesma.org.”

Jess would like to know how you think activities can be improved, and would like to learn more about the impact activities have on Members. Get in touch with her on 020 8548 3519 or on activities@blesma.org

Calling all Winter Sports fans...

We are expanding the Winter Sports activities to include mono-skiing, ski-boarding, stand up skiing and three track skiing in addition to ski-biking.

The decision to broaden the range of skiing opportunities will mean that more Members will have the chance to apply for an activity and try something new.

From 2017, Winter Sports and ski-biking events will be held in La Plagne, France.

Blesma Member and Winter Sports leader Colin Rouse has been instrumental in the

planning of the new activities and searching for the best adapted location for Members.

“Ski-biking at Solden has always been more suitable for more mobile Members, whereas La Plagne is more inclusive for all Members,” said Colin. “The increase in the number of activities on offer gives Members the chance to try different skiing sports, so they can realise what they can and can’t do depending on injury. It also adds an additional ski sports aspect on top of the already well-established ski-biking.”



Widows' Week a big success



In April, 10 Blesma Widows gathered at the Blesma Blackpool Home for what was to become another successful Widows' Week.

BSO (South West) Steve Fraser organised the week, and those who joined him were thrilled with his abilities as a "holiday rep" – and as a dance partner!

The group of ladies included some who were attending the Week for the first time, as well as those who were returning to meet up with old friends. They all enjoyed a week full of activities that included a show at the Grand Theatre, a private trip on a historic tram, and a tea dance at the Blackpool Tower Ballroom, where Steve got to impress the ladies with his dancing skills.

For some ladies, Widows' Week marks the only chance they get to relax and socialise with others who have shared similar life experiences. Because of that, the event is

a great way to make new friends. Helen Mackenzie took part in Widows' Week for the first time, having not been on holiday alone for the last 15 years.

"Everything was done with the absolute determination that we had a good time," said Helen. "It was a thoroughly lovely week and it was a privilege to be chosen to take part. It was a great recovery week with a lovely atmosphere, and it was great to be looked after and cared for so well."

Helen strongly encourages all Members to take up the opportunity of activities, as after her week-long trip she is definitely going to apply for more!

If you have any questions about Widows' Week, or would like to apply for a future activity, please contact Emily Mizon on 020 8548 7094 or email mea@blesma.org

The Best of the Best: Blesma Awards 2015



THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD

for 2015 is awarded to the Row2Recovery Team. The Chief Executive, Barry Le Grys, presented the award to crew member Nigel Rogoff during the Members' Weekend. The citation reads as follows:

“This award, awarded to high achievers, was established in memory of Member Jack Trigg who served in the Welsh Guards in WWII and lost an arm in Normandy in 1944.

“On 04 February 2016 four Blesma Members set a world record as the first British all-amputee crew to row across an ocean. Skipper Cayle Royce, along with Lee Spencer, Paddy Gallagher and Nigel Rogoff set off from the Canary Islands on 20 December and, 46 days, six hours and 49 minutes later, arrived in Antigua.

“The crew faced huge obstacles, supporting one another to overcome the challenges, which epitomises the Blesma ethos of Member helping Member. The team showed true grit and fighting spirit in achieving their record-breaking row and they are truly deserving of the Jack Trigg Memorial Award.”



THE HAMBRO AWARD for 2015 is awarded to Jon White. The citation reads:

“This award recognises personal endeavour and was established in memory of Blesma Member Major J O Hambro MC, a former Chairman and Treasurer of Blesma who served with the Coldstream Guards and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944.

“Jon is a former Royal Marines Captain who was injured by an IED whilst serving in Afghanistan in 2010. He lost both legs above the knee and his right arm at his elbow.

“Inner strength, discipline, determination and corps camaraderie are in his DNA. They have aided his recovery and are now part of his campaign to improve clinical care for his fellow Service amputees.

“Despite the life-changing injuries that Jon suffered and the challenges that he faced, he is determined to help build a rehabilitation pathway that provides more lasting therapy, freedom of choice and, above all, creates the conditions that allow injured Service personnel to shine. Blesma recognises his commitment with the Hambro Award.”



THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY

was awarded to Carole King at the Members’ Weekend. The citation reads as follows:

“This award recognises the work of Blesma’s Welfare Volunteers, and this year is awarded to Carole King, Welfare Rep South Devon.

“Carole served in the Women’s Royal Army Corps and became a Blesma Member in 2006, following the amputation of her left leg above the knee. Carole has thrown herself wholeheartedly into supporting her ‘flock’, and works tirelessly on behalf of fellow Members. She takes a keen interest in their welfare and it is only fitting that such a positive contribution to Members should receive recognition. Carole is a most worthy recipient of the Frankland Moore Trophy.”

THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD

is awarded to Mary Drake. The citation reads:

“This award recognises the work of Blesma supporters and this year is awarded to Mary Drake of the Friends of Chelmsford Branch.

“Mary has been involved with Blesma for 47 years and she stills runs the Friends of Chelmsford Branch, despite the Branch itself closing a number of years ago. Her tireless support for the Association has involved organising social events for Branch Members and fundraising events which have resulted in more than £100,000 of donations.

“Mary is an inspiration; it is her warmth, kindness and generosity that have drawn



a whole community together to support Blesma. It is only fitting that we recognise Mary’s dedicated service to our charity over so many years, and she is a most worthy recipient of the Cyril Stephens Award.”



THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD

is awarded to Brian Hogg. The citation reads:

“This award recognises the work of a Blesma volunteer. Brian’s involvement with Blesma’s ski-biking activity began in 2009 when he attended as a ‘helper’ nominated by the then Service Personnel & Veterans Agency. He then took on the responsibility for equipment storage and maintenance, and his sterling work played a vital role in ensuring the activity continues to benefit Members.

“It is only fitting that we recognise Brian’s dedicated service to our charity, and he is a most worthy recipient of the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award.”

Spotlight on... Benefits

THE NATIONAL LIVING WAGE AND THE EFFECT ON BENEFITS

From 01 April 2016, the government introduced a new mandatory National Living Wage for workers aged 25 and above. This was set at £7.20 – a rise of 50p relative to the previous National Minimum Wage rate. The rate should change each April.

Anyone affected by this who is receiving Carer's Allowance could see a change to their entitlement. Claimants whose earnings increase to more than £110 per week will see their entitlement to Carer's Allowance stop. If they receive a carer premium on means tested benefits this will also stop.

Anyone receiving a means tested benefit, such as Housing Benefit, Income Support, or Income Related Employment and Support Allowance may see a reduction in payment of benefit or loss of entitlement, either due to an increase in their earnings or as a result of any carer premium received stopping.

It is the claimant's responsibility to inform each section they receive a benefit from of any change in their income in order to reduce any possible benefit overpayment.

CHANGES TO EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

Employment and Support Allowance is a benefit paid to those whose ability to work is limited by either ill health or disability. Ongoing eligibility is tested under a Work Capability Assessment. If the assessment is satisfied a higher payment is received either as a Work Related Activity Component or

Support Component. From April 2017 the government has announced plans to change the extra payment received for those in the Work Related Activity group. There will be no extra payment for those in this group. This will affect new claimants only. Current claimants will be unaffected by this change.

BENEFITS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

The Welfare Reform Act 2012, which outlined a number of future benefit changes in Great Britain, has only recently been accepted in Northern Ireland. This now results in some changes and implementation of new benefits. The most likely to impact Members are changes to Employment and Support Allowance, and the introduction of Personal Independence Payment.

Employment and Support Allowance

This is awarded to claimants whose ability to work is limited by ill health or disability. Entitlement also depends on either the level of National Insurance contributions paid or the level of income and capital a claimant (and partner, if relevant) has.

If you live in Northern Ireland and have been receiving contributory Employment and Support Allowance for 365 days or more, your benefit payment will stop on 31 October 2016 if you are in the Work Related Activity group. If you have not received the benefit for 365 days at this point it will stop once you reach this new limit. You will still be able to receive National Insurance contributions which will count towards your State Pension, as long

as you continue to show you have limited capability for work. You may be able to receive income related Employment and Support Allowance if you have a low income (at a level set by the government) and capital.

If you receive contributory Employment and Support Allowance and are in the Support Group, you will be unaffected by this change.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

PIP is for those aged 16-64 who have difficulty with daily living or mobility. It was introduced for new claimants on 20 June 2016. DLA is being phased out and current claimants will be invited to claim PIP if any of these apply:

- you report a change in your condition
- your DLA is due to come to an end
- you are approaching your sixteenth birthday

At a later date, the Social Security Agency will start to contact everyone else getting DLA to invite them to claim PIP. If you get DLA and were aged 65 or over when PIP was introduced on 20 June 2016 you will not be affected by this change and can continue to receive DLA as long as you continue to meet the conditions.

BENEFITS IN SCOTLAND

The Scottish Parliament has gained new powers over the benefits system with the passing of the Scotland Act in March. The Act is the first stage in transferring responsibility to Scotland. While still deliberating over when and how to use these powers, the Scottish government has committed to some changes...

Benefits to be devolved to Scotland

The Act devolves power over:

- Disability and carers' benefits (Attendance Allowance, PIP, DLA, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance)

- Regulated Social Fund (Sure Start maternity grant, funeral payment, cold weather payment, winter fuel payment)
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Welfare Foods (Healthy Start vouchers)

Universal Credit stays with the UK but Scotland will be able to:

- Change the frequency of payments
- Split payments between couples
- Pay housing costs directly to landlords
- Vary the housing costs element for renters

Means tested benefits, tax credits and all other benefits remain reserved to the UK, although Scotland will be able to top them up and even create new benefits that relate to other devolved policy areas such as health and social care.

Use of new powers

The Act sets a broad outline for the scope of the various powers. Within that, the Scottish Parliament is free to shape devolved benefits as it sees fit. In time, we may see new names, new rules and new ways of delivery. There is no decision on when each benefit will be transferred or how this would be managed.

As things stand, there is no national benefit delivery infrastructure in Scotland ready to take on new responsibilities. An important step is that a new Scottish Social Security Agency in Scotland is to be established to oversee devolved benefits. More details on the use of new powers will emerge over the Summer as a consultation is launched on a Social Security Bill to implement changes.

A benefits section will soon feature on the Blesma website. For more on benefits and how to fill in claim forms, contact your BSO, or Liz in the Membership Services team on 020 8548 3516 or email membersupport@blesma.org

Volunteering for Blesma

WELFARE VOLUNTEERS – “WELFARE REPS”

One of the ways in which we can improve Blesma connectivity is by recruiting more volunteers – known as “Welfare Reps” – who visit Members. Over the years, we have been fortunate to benefit from the support of a willing band of Members and friends who work with the Blesma Support Officers, visiting Members in their homes or in hospital, having a chat over a cup of coffee and, when necessary, asking the BSO to follow up on any issues that are affecting Members’ health or well-being.

One of the consequences of the recently undertaken Area Review is that BSOs have

reduced geographical areas of responsibility which allow them to be better-connected to their Members. All BSOs are using this opportunity to review their team of Welfare Reps and we have drawn up a Code of Conduct for Welfare Volunteers which explains the requirements of the role.

Current Welfare Reps will be contacted by their BSO to discuss this document and to ask you to confirm that you understand the boundaries of the role and that tasking and line of communication is through your BSO.

If you would like to learn more about the role of Welfare Rep, please contact your local BSO. See p28 for contact details



Keeping Connected

HELP US TO KEEP YOU CONNECTED!

If you are moving home, or have recently changed your telephone number or email address, please let us know. This will help us to keep our records as up to date as possible, ensuring your Blesma Support Officer can contact you, and that you receive not only *Blesma Magazine* and Members' *Bulletins*, but also any email updates about forthcoming activities and events.

To update your contact details, please email Elaine in Membership Services on memberadmin@blesma.org or call her on 020 8548 7093

WHY NOT NOMINATE AN EMAIL BUDDY?

We are very conscious that in this world of emails, the internet and social media, there are still many Members who are unable to access emails easily or who do not wish to make use of these digital methods of communication.

Please be assured that we will always provide hard copies of our publications to Members who rely on receiving information through their letter boxes. However, for those of you who have family members or friends who could receive emails on your behalf, please let us know by emailing the Membership Services team at memberadmin@blesma.org so that we can update our records and add your details to our electronic mailing lists.

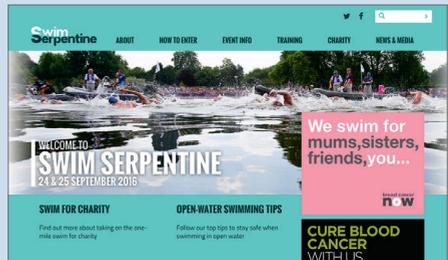
DATES FOR YOUR DIARY



SPINNAKER TOWER ABSEIL

DATE: 21 AUGUST

This Summer, you could have a bird's-eye view of Portsmouth Harbour and the Solent as you abseil 328 feet down the Emirates Spinnaker Tower to raise money for Blesma. Sponsored by Ottobock, thrill seekers will get the chance to dangle themselves off the edge of the structure on 21 August. *To register your place, contact Zanika Fearon on 020 8548 7089 or email her at events@blesma.org*



SWIM SERPENTINE

DATE: 24-25 SEPTEMBER

In September, 6,000 people will get to swim one mile in London's Hyde Park as part of Swim Serpentine. Blesma has five spaces available. *If you would like to be in with a chance of taking part, contact Zanika Fearon on 020 8548 7089 or email her at events@blesma.org*

Branch News

WALSALL AND DISTRICT BRANCH

Out of necessity, the Branch Committee had a shake-up at the AGM in March following the death of our President and Treasurer, Bill Madeley. Jim Keating was promoted from Vice President, and Martin Kettrick put himself forward to fill the Treasurer post. Another new appointment is the recent recruitment of Mal James as Area Secretary – well done Mal for volunteering!

We were delighted to learn that Martin has been awarded the British Empire Medal in HM The Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to charitable fundraising. Needless to say, we are extremely proud, and congratulate both Martin and Christine for all they do for Blesma!

We have just enjoyed an excellent Summer lunch at our usual venue, the Shropshire Golf Centre. Numbers were down a little due to holidays and illness. Our guests were Barbara Warner, the Associate Director Fundraising and Charley Streather, BSO (Midlands). It was Barbara's first visit to a Branch and we hope she enjoyed the experience. She gave us an excellent insight into the work of the Fundraising Team and we were all impressed with their dedication, hard work, and excellent results.

We all enjoyed the Members' Weekend at Kenilworth, followed very quickly by Armed Forces Day. The Branch manned a gazebo at the National Memorial Arboretum again this year and there was an added attraction as our very own Martin Kettrick was selected to present the annual Spotlight Talk on behalf



of Blesma. This took place in the NMA chapel and we – very quietly – cheered Martin on! Martin has only very recently undergone an operation on his shoulder, so we were all keeping our fingers crossed that he was fit enough to go ahead – although he, typically, insisted that he would've been there whatever!

Looking further ahead, the Midlands Area is planning a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum on Wednesday 14 September. Most of the renovation work should be completed by then and so it will be interesting to explore the new building. If you live in the Midlands and would like to come along please contact Mike Gallagher on 01543 263041 or send an email to michaelgallagher3@sky.com for further details.



Branch Welfare Officer, Gerry Crossland, recently reported that our senior Member, Sam Cox, has had to move into a care home. However, the home is close to Sam's family and they visit daily. Sam is in his 90s but remains as bright as a button – he follows all sporting events closely. He can no longer attend Branch gatherings but wishes to be remembered to all his Blesma friends.

Sadly, we lost another of our widows, Barbara Craddock, in April. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family and friends. Have a lovely, warm Summer.

Mike Gallagher, Secretary

KEEPING THE BRANCHES ALIVE

Blesma is fortunate to benefit from the support of willing volunteers, and in the vanguard have been those who run the

“Blesma is fortunate to benefit from the support of willing volunteers, and in the vanguard have been those who run the Branches”

Branches. Finding volunteers who are prepared to take on the commitment of being an office bearer remains one of the Association's greatest challenges and, regrettably, Branches are unable to function without the positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. Chadwell Heath can support Branches by distributing newsletters or other correspondence, for example, or by providing grants to enable Members to get together for social events. So, if you need any support, please contact Membership Services.

CHADWELL HEATH (HQ) BRANCH

Don't worry if there isn't a Branch in your area. Chadwell Heath can provide financial support to enable groups of Members to get together periodically for coffee, lunch, or even afternoon tea!

All that is needed is someone to organise the social gathering. If you would be willing to do this, please contact **Frank Garside, National Volunteer Officer on 020 8548 3510 or by email at nvo@blesma.org**

Maintaining Independence

A pilot study into the health and social well-being of older limbless veterans

Blesma is working with Northumbria University on a research project to look at the life-long impact on health and well-being of living with limb loss. The study is being funded by the Aged Veterans Fund and looks at veterans aged 40 and over.

By considering the life course of older veterans, the project should provide evidence of the concerns and the need for services at various stages in life. It will also present an opportunity to shape future health and social care policy and provision across the public and third sectors. We are looking for 32 Members to participate in the project and are interested in hearing from you if you are:

Aged 40-49

Aged 50-59

Aged 60-69

Aged 70+

You will have a maximum of three face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. The researchers want to explore your life experiences and let you tell your stories in conversation.

Interviews will take place either at your home or at a venue of your choosing between December 2016 and November 2017. The interviews will cover three key stages of your life; looking at experiences pre-Service, during Service, and after Service. The research will be anonymous at the point of publication to prevent you being identified.

If you are interested in taking part in the project, contact Helen Cullen on 07766 982904. Helen is a Blesma Welfare Rep and is supporting this project by assisting with the recruitment and consent process





Members' Weekend 2017

10-12 June, 2017

Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

The 2017 Members' Weekend will take place at the same venue as this year, the Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth.

If you would like to come along to meet old friends and make some new ones, find out what Blesma Members are up

to, and to have your say on what Blesma should be doing to support Members now and in the future, please put the date in your diaries and look out for the application form in the next *Bulletin*. Blesma covers the cost of Ordinary and Associate Members and their partners or carers, and there are no formalities. We hope to see you there!

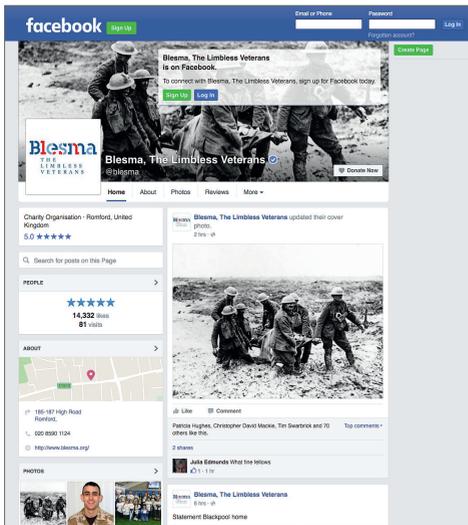
Policies, Princes and Pounding Pavements

JOIN OUR FACEBOOK GROUP

Have you joined the Blesma Members' Facebook group yet? With more than 300 Members in one place, the group is a great forum for discussing the issues, questions and topics that matter to you with fellow Members and like-minded people.

To join, just add "Blesma Chadwell Heath" on Facebook and send us a message asking to join the group. We will do the rest.

You can also find out all the latest news from Blesma on the Association's public Facebook page. We look forward to seeing you there!



BLESMA SMOKING POLICY

Blesma is required by the Health and Safety at Work Act to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees whilst at work.

This includes the provision of a working environment that is safe and without risk to health. Passive smoking is a known cause of disease: people who do not smoke tobacco products have a 10-30% increased risk of dying from lung cancer if they are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke.

Thus, tobacco smoke is classified as a Group A carcinogen, a substance known to cause cancer in humans. There is no recognised safe level of exposure to Group A carcinogens. So everyone breathing air contaminated with tobacco smoke is being placed at an unacceptable level of risk of dying from lung cancer.

With this in mind, Blesma requests that Members do not smoke for at least an hour before they invite their Blesma Support Officer into their home. Failure to adhere to this polite request may result in a meeting being postponed. Thank you for your understanding.



Photography: Beaumont Photography

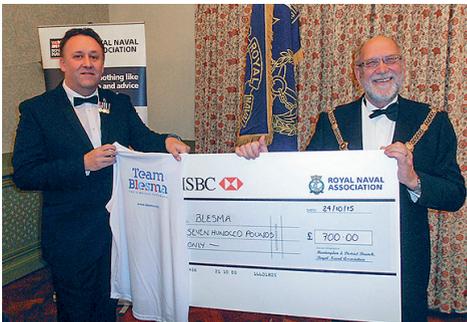
RON BRIGHT MEETS PRINCE PHILIP

Blesma Member, 85-year-old Royal Army Ordnance Corps veteran Ronald Bright met HRH Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh at the Air League Annual Reception earlier this year.

Ron was presented with a certificate and badge for winning the Boeing Disabled Veterans 2015 Flying Scholarship at a reception at St James' Palace on Tuesday 03 May.

The award was presented by Sir Roger Bone, KCMG, MA, President of the Air League, and was made in recognition of Ron's achievement of excellent progress with his flying training.

Congratulations to Ron from everyone at Blesma!



POUNDING THE PAVEMENTS FOR THE ASSOCIATION

Pete Aston (far left) completed a half marathon at the start of the year – and managed to raise £700 in sponsorship for the Association in the process!

The Mayor of Godmanchester, in Cambridgeshire, David Underwood, kindly received the cheque on behalf of the charity and thanked Pete for his efforts.

Well done Pete, much appreciated!

Changes to categories of Membership

The Association's Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 23 June at the Royal Air Force Club in London. The Annual Report and Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2015 were approved, the auditors were reappointed and three Trustees – Lieutenant General Sir Cedric Delves, Will Dixon and Colin Rouse – were re-elected.

There were presentations from Member Martin Hewitt, who is leading the Adaptive Grand Slam world record attempt, Professor Anthony Bull from the Centre for Blast Injury Studies, and Alison Treadgold, the NHS (England) Armed Forces Lead. During the AGM there was also an Extraordinary General Meeting and new Articles of Association were adopted. The charity's Objects remain unchanged but the Rules on membership have been revised.

The major change is that membership will now be open to veterans who lose the use of their limb(s) through a non-Service related traumatic incident. They will now be eligible for Associate Membership, and this provides consistency as the Association previously opened membership to the same while in Service.

THE CHANGES

- Those in civilian employment in direct support of HM Forces who are injured in terrorist action against HM Forces will be eligible for Associate Membership
- Those who lose the use of a limb through a traumatic incident other than through

Service-related causes, will be eligible for Associate Membership

- Civilians and ex-Service men and women who lose a limb or suffer loss of use of limb in exceptional circumstances will be eligible for Associate Membership, subject to approval by the Trustees
- Honorary Members are not entitled to charity
- Definitions have been added to clarify 'permanent' loss of use of speech, hearing, or sight and what constitutes loss of limb

MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the Association shall be open to three categories of Member; namely Ordinary, Associate and Honorary. Ordinary Membership shall be open to all those serving and ex-Service men and women who, whilst serving, or as a result of Service in any Branch of HM Forces or Auxiliary Forces:

- have lost a limb or an eye
- have permanent loss of speech, hearing or sight of an eye, or the use of a limb

Associate Membership shall be open to:

- All men and women of civilian status who lose a limb, or the loss of use of a limb, or an eye as a result of War Service or enemy or terrorist action against HM Forces with which those of civilian status are employed, or volunteer, to provide direct support;
- All ex-Service men and women who served in any Branch of HM Forces or Auxiliary Forces, who have lost a limb or an eye, or the use of a limb through traumatic incident, other than through Service-related causes;



→ All men and women of civilian status, and all ex-Service men and women, who lose a limb or suffer loss of use of limb, in exceptional circumstances, subject to approval of the Trustees

Honorary Membership shall be open by invitation of the Trustees to all who accept and support the Objects of the Association except that such category of Member shall only have the right to vote when holding or occupying a Branch, Area or Trustee appointment, and are not entitled to charity.

Applicants for membership who complete an approved enrolment form and thereafter

conform to the Association’s Articles and Rules shall all be deemed to be Members of the Association for all purposes except those specifically excluded because they hold Honorary status.

Within the context of this Rule, ‘permanent’ shall mean not less than 80% loss of speech, hearing or sight. Meanwhile, ‘limb’ is defined as an arm or leg, or parts thereof, including a significant part of the hand and a significant part of the foot.

For questions regarding the categories of membership, speak to your BSO or call Elaine at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7093

Get in touch with your Blesma Support Officer

If you would like some help, support or advice on any matter, please don't hesitate to get in contact with your BSO. A full list of contact numbers, and the area each BSO is responsible for, can be found here.

BSO (North)

STEVE BURTON

Tel: 0131 226 2910 Mob: 07766 258461

Email: bsonorth@blesma.org

BSO (North West)

MIKE DOWNES

Tel: 01257 795144 Mob: 07825 536362

Email: bsonw@blesma.org

BSO (North East)

PETER SHIELDS MBE OGM

Tel: 01469 532176 Mob: 07908 667219

Email: bsone@blesma.org

BSO (Eastern)

TOM ORMISTON

Tel: 01480 469216 Mob: 07825 536364

Email: bsoeastern@blesma.org

BSO (Midlands)

CHARLEY STREATHER

Tel: 0116 241 5489 Mob: 07825 536363

Email: bsomid@blesma.org

BSO (South East)

BILL GILLET

Tel: 01980 629337 Mob: 07920 092329

Email: bsose@blesma.org



Mike Downes
BSO (North West)

BSO (South West)

STEVE FRASER MBE

Tel: 01278 789393 Mob: 07788 312747

Email: bsosw@blesma.org

BSO (London and Kent)

PAUL FINDLAY

Tel: 01268 415290 Mob: 07469 242277

Email: bsolk@blesma.org

Government Consultations

The government reviews certain benefits to ensure they deliver the required policy intent or when it wishes to make certain changes to the Benefit legislation.

Update on Personal Independence Payment (PIP) consultation

In the Spring *Bulletin* we wrote about the government's public consultation into how the use of aids and appliances is accounted for in assessments for PIP. Blesma and 96 other organisations responded individually to this consultation. Many strongly disagreed with the potential changes, which could have put our Member's awards at risk. Despite this, the government announced that they would be changing the criteria in the future.

However, Iain Duncan Smith resigned as the Work and Pensions Secretary in March after denouncing £4bn of planned cuts to disability benefits as "indefensible". This resulted in the government announcing it would not proceed with proposed cuts to PIP.

The government also confirmed that it would make no further changes this parliament to disability benefits, other than those already legislated for.

Attendance Allowance Consultation

Attendance Allowance is a benefit for some people whose disability or ill health started after they turned 65. The benefit is a payment to recognise the increased costs a person can incur due to their difficulties. Claiming Attendance Allowance can also help with qualification for other benefits, for example,

a carer may be able to claim Carer's Allowance. In the Spring *Bulletin*, we wrote of the government's intention to consult on devolving Attendance Allowance to local authorities in England and Wales. If approved, this would result in local authorities receiving the budget for Attendance Allowance and using the money as they see fit, with the possibility of it being ring-fenced for social care. At this stage, Attendance Allowance would no longer exist to new claimants. Those already entitled, and those living in Northern Ireland and Scotland, will not be affected by this change.

No decision on the future of Attendance Allowance has been made by the government. The consultation document will have the government's recommendations and the consultation is in order to allow people to make their views known. There is still no date for the consultation, but Blesma understands it is expected over the coming months.

We feel it is crucial that our Members have the chance to input into any proposed changes, and that is why we have contacted some Members in England and Wales who already receive Attendance Allowance, and asked them to take part in a short survey demonstrating how receiving Attendance Allowance makes a difference to their lives.

If you haven't received a letter but you are in receipt of Attendance Allowance and wish to take part in this survey you can register an interest by contacting Liz at membersupport@blesma.org or calling her on 020 8548 3516

Free counselling for Blesma Members

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

Whatever our circumstances, background or role in life, we all face problems from time to time – whether personal, familial, emotional or practical. Talking about what’s worrying us, and sharing our troubles with a sympathetic person, can help us feel better.

You can, of course, talk to your BSO, but there may be times when you need a trained counsellor. If that’s the case, then you may be interested in this counselling service...

HOW DOES IT HELP?

Loneliness Many of us can feel lonely at times. Our family may live a long way away and old friends may have passed away. Talking about our sense of loss can help us to feel better.

Depression can affect anyone at any time. Churchill famously suffered from his ‘black dog’. Counselling can help overcome depression and offers strategies to cope when feeling down.

Bereavement Coping with the loss of loved ones and close friends is never easy. Counselling can help people move beyond a sense of emptiness after losing someone close.

Anxiety Feeling scared, unsure and nervous are all common emotions. Counselling can help rebuild self-confidence.

Relationships need to be nurtured. Counselling can help to improve relationships with a partner, colleagues, family members and friends.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

After the counselling service receives an application they will make contact to arrange counselling. If you find it hard to travel, the

counsellor can visit you in your own home. Alternatively, you can see a counsellor at a location near to where you live.

After an initial appointment, the counsellor will normally offer five additional sessions, usually weekly, at regular times to suit you.

WHO CAN USE THIS SERVICE AND HOW CAN PEOPLE APPLY?

Are you a Blesma Member aged 65 or over?

If you are, you can contact your local Blesma Support Officer and ask him to apply on your behalf. Alternatively, you can complete an online application form at www.agedveteranscounselling.org.uk

You can also complete your application over the phone by calling 0300 0120 247 or, if you prefer, an application form can be posted to you.

This service is funded by a grant from the MoD’s Aged Veterans Fund

Are you a Blesma Member aged under 65 or a Blesma Widow?

If you are, you can contact your local Blesma Support Officer and ask him to apply on your behalf. Alternatively, you can call 0300 0120 369 and your application will be taken over the phone or, if you prefer, an application form can be posted to you.

This service is funded by Blesma

To learn more about the counselling service, contact your local BSO or phone Liz in Membership Services on 020 8548 3516

Increase in support for those living at home

At their meeting on 23 June 2016, the Trustees approved a major investment in the distribution of grants, particularly for the most infirm and those in later life, to increase support with a view to maintaining independence at home.

Currently, Blesma helps Members and Widows maintain health and well-being by paying for lifelines or respite. The Association helps Members manage their disability by installing stairlifts, providing mobility aids or funding home adaptations. Blesma helps to maintain the fabric of your home by giving decorating and garden grants.

The Association is going to direct more focus on the individual nature of need and relieve distress by extending grants to cover a much wider range of support and services, such as paying for Members to have carers come into their home, paying for them to attend lunch clubs or day care and have days out, and help them meet the cost of home maintenance. The process will be driven by need and have the emphasis upon situations where State provision is lacking.

Also, in exceptional circumstances, Blesma may support Members and Widows who require residential care, determined by a failure in the State's provision. This will



be on a case-by-case basis and will not see the charity replacing the State.

If you would like to apply for a grant you should, in the first instance, talk to your local BSO or contact Liz in the Membership Services Team on 020 8548 3516 or at membersupport@blesma.org

The **Members' Bulletin** is published on behalf of the **British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (Blesma)** by **ScratchCreate**. British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association Charity Numbers: England, Wales & N Ireland 1084189, Scotland SC010315; Company Limited Guarantee No. 4102768. Contact ScratchCreate at david@scratchcreate.co.uk Printed by Wyndeham Grange. This publication may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publishers. All prices and addresses are correct at the time of going to press. Every care has been taken in the preparation of this publication to ensure the contents is fully accurate, but neither ScratchCreate nor Blesma can be held responsible for the accuracy of the information herein, any omissions or errors, or any consequence arising from it. The views expressed by contributors, customers and Members might not reflect the views of ScratchCreate or Blesma. Publication date: Summer 2016. © ScratchCreate 2016.