

Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Autumn 2022

PLUS:
WHEELCHAIR
RUGBY LEAGUE
MEMBERS' WEEKEND
TALKING ABOUT PAIN
THE TOUGHEST BIKE
RACE ON EARTH

**NEW-LOOK
BULLETIN INSIDE**

“Blesma
has helped
me a lot.
It has been
a very big
part of
my life”

BLESMA AT 90

THREE MEMBERS SHARE THEIR STORIES
AS THE ASSOCIATION HITS A MAJOR MILESTONE





44

On set with Lamin, Ali and Vinod at the Blesma 90th anniversary video shoot

Contents

Inside the Autumn 2022 issue

Blesma
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

1932 – 2022



NEWS

- HAVE YOUR SAY** 04
Complete the Blesma Member Survey and help shape the future of your Association
- PAINTING A PICTURE OF PAIN** 08
Describing your pain to a health professional isn't always as straightforward as it sounds
- THE ASSOCIATION'S PRIORITY** 10
From grants and will writing to respite care and outreach activities, your wellbeing matters
- HEAD OF WELFARE SUPPORT** 16
Colin Branch has been a Member since 2015 and is Blesma's first Head of Welfare Support

FEATURES

- UP FOR THE CUP** 20
This year, Michael Mellon will captain Scotland in the Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup
- A WEEKEND TO REMEMBER** 28
The biggest event in Blesma's calendar is back to its best after pandemic disruption
- LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION** 44
Go behind the scenes at the filming of Blesma's 90th anniversary commemorative video
- CLIP IN AND DIG DEEP** 52
Members faced injury and misfortune when they took on the toughest bicycle race on Earth

BULLETIN

- NEWS AND VIEWS** 61
All the latest support and advice. Plus, what some of the areas and Branches are up to
- THE LOWDOWN ON BENEFITS** 82
The Association's useful guide to the latest information regarding the benefits system
- GET IN TOUCH** 84
All the key contact details for your Support and Outreach Officers as well as Chelmsford staff

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Words: Jessica Mackinnon

Member survey will help ‘shape the strategy of the Association’

AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCH ORGANISATION HAS BEEN COMMISSIONED TO FIND OUT WHAT MEMBERS NEED TODAY, TOMORROW, AND OVER THE COMING YEARS FROM THE CHARITY

Members are invited to take part in a survey which will have a direct impact on the Association’s future. This anonymous survey will form the first part of a wider research piece, conducted by the independent organisation nfpResearch, a leading market research agency that has worked with charity and not-for-profit organisations for more than two decades.

“This survey will be an important opportunity for every Member to

have their say on the services and support that Blesma provides. The research will help our Board of Trustees shape the strategy of our Association for the next five years,” said Jon Bryant, Blesma’s Chief Executive.

A copy of the survey is included with this issue of the magazine. Questions in the survey are centred on Blesma’s activities, the support that Members receive from the Association and other organisations,

Above right: “The survey will help Blesma understand more about what Members need,” said Joe Saxton

communication with the Association, and general questions about Blesma’s provision.

After completion of the survey, the nfpResearch team plans to conduct interviews and focus groups later in the year to look at the issues raised in more detail.

“The questionnaire is a structured way for the membership to tell the Trustees and the Senior Management Team what it is they need today, tomorrow, and over the coming

Welcome



Joe Saxton from the independent agency nfpResearch

years from the charity to make sure they are supported,” said Blesma Member and Trustee Steve White (pictured below).

“We know that the membership is ageing, that the number of new



Member and Trustee Steve White

Members is reducing, and that their needs change as they age. So the questionnaire will tell Blesma what Members think it needs to do differently, if anything, to make sure that it continues to support its Members to live independent and fulfilling lives based upon their needs and requirements.”

Joe Saxton from nfpResearch added: “The team at nfpResearch are delighted to be working with Blesma. The Blesma Member Survey will help the Association understand more about what its Members need, so that Blesma can plan the activities and services that it provides for the years ahead. We would be hugely grateful if as many Members as possible are able to complete the survey. We are careful to protect people’s privacy and we will not share people’s information with any other organisations.”



There is a huge amount of information in this issue. The report on Members’ Weekend and the AGM reflects on a successful and enjoyable event, while we have also included information on gardening

grants and offers for Christmas. The other important document is the Member Survey, which will help us to shape the future of the charity over the next five years. Please take some time to send us your feedback, thoughts and suggestions so that we can continue to deliver what our Members want from their association.

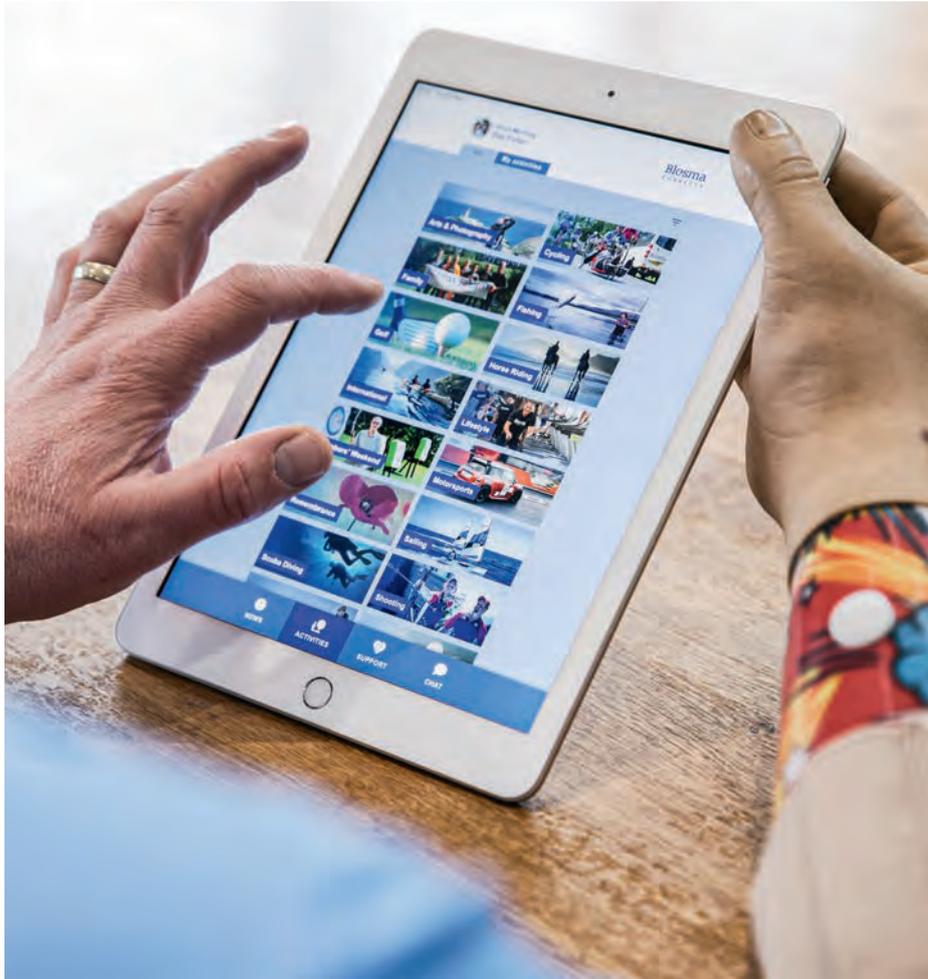
Members will have seen the invitation to apply for Blesma’s first ever hardship grant. As we read of inflation and rising energy bills, Blesma has offered £200 to every Member to support them at this challenging time. More than half of our Members have submitted their replies, along with some touching messages of support for this initiative and several donations to help others. If you have yet to respond to the grant return please do so, even if you do not wish to receive the funds, so that we can be sure that we are delivering this support where it is needed.

In this issue Ian Harper describes the forms of support that his Independence and Wellbeing team delivers, and we welcome Member Colin Branch as our new Head of Welfare Support. There are accounts of some incredible fundraising efforts, reports covering a huge variety of Member activities, advice on pain management, and some timely news on benefits and social care.

Enjoy the issue.

Jon Bryant
Chief Executive





Association takes decision to stop Blesma Connects

The Association's app, Blesma Connects, is being withdrawn. The app was launched just over two years ago with the goal of enabling Members to better connect with each other, book onto activities, and receive news and information from the Association.

Unfortunately, the app has not achieved its ambition, and take-up amongst Members has been low. Meanwhile, some updates to functionality which were due to be developed have not taken place, and cheaper and better web-based alternatives are now widely available.

Blesma Connects was launched shortly prior to the pandemic which saw a pause in all Blesma activities. Whilst the app

struggled to find its purpose during the pandemic, Members continued to use freely available platforms such as Facebook to connect and communicate with each other and with staff.

With Blesma recently appointing a new UK-based digital agency, the Board of Trustees along with management have decided the best option available was to withdraw the app.

The Association is soon set to launch a smart online form that will allow Members to book onto activities quickly and easily. Information about how to use the new Jotform will be shared with Members in the coming months

RALLYING THE TROOPS FOR THE LATEST BLESMA 100

BLESMA MEMBER AND AMBASSADOR Jonathan Bell has rallied the troops once more to complete the Blesma 100. Now in its eighth year, 60 riders including members of Jonathan's former regiment The Green Howards, as well as friends, family, Blesma Members and supporters tackled a 100-mile bike ride through the Vale of York in June.

"It went really well. There was a good turnout, and we had a fairly flat course," said Jonathan, 58, who was paralysed below the upper chest, with severe head and leg injuries, and had to have a foot amputated following an accident on a pre-deployment training exercise in 1993. "The challenge started in the Vale of York and headed towards Lincoln before turning around in Skegness. We did have headwinds all the way there and back though!"

Previous rides have raised thousands of pounds for the Association, but this year's event had a different objective.

"We alternate between raising money and raising the profile of the charity. We try to get everyone to post their rides on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. We wanted to get the Blesma logo out there so everybody knew who we were doing this for," said Jonathan. "I want to give something back to Blesma so that other veterans have the opportunities I did when they are at their lowest. Blesma helps people get out there."



Photograph: Patrick Walsh Photography

On the road to raising Blesma's profile



Couple put on mini festival to raise funds for Blesma

Mick and Sue Foulds have held a summer garden party that has raised £3,100 for the Association. On Saturday 02 July, they transformed their garden into a mini festival with live bands, bouncy castles, food and bar stalls. They held a raffle and an auction, kids (and adults!) could have their faces painted, and there was even a stall selling Blesma merchandise.

“This was our third attempt to hold the party,” said Mick, who lost both his legs when he was struck by a train while working on the railways. “We had originally



planned for it to coincide with Sue’s 60th birthday in 2020, but our plans were dashed by Covid. In July, we were finally able to celebrate Sue’s delayed 60th birthday, my 70th, which was in May, 10 years of living in Suffolk, and 15 years of me being legless. Plus, it was Blesma’s 90th anniversary! “We wanted to raise money for the Association as it has been very good to me. I was in a bad place when Blesma came along, but the charity changed my whole outlook on life.” Throughout the day some 200 people dropped in to the garden party.

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP PUTS ITS PICS ON SHOW

A PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION at the University of Plymouth has showcased the work of some of the Association’s photographers. The South West Photography Group was founded by Members Neil Owen and Darran Thompson during lockdown. Now, some of the pictures taken during lockdown have been included in the 250 photographs on display.

“It’s been wonderful to watch the group grow and support each other,” said South West Outreach Officer Sarah Payne. “It’s amazing to see their beautiful photographs come together for their own exhibition. I’m so proud of all their enthusiasm.”



THUNDERCAT RECORD FOR AMPUTEE DUO

MARK SIDWELLS AND DAVID Gardiner have become the first amputee team to compete in the ThunderCat Racing championship; a national powerboating competition. The duo were competing for Team Endeavour Racing, which receives funding from Blesma’s Venture Fund, at The Poole Harbour Classic on 13 June.

“It was cool to be the first amputee team to race in the competition,” said Royal Air Force veteran Mark, who lost both his legs in 2015. “This was our first competitive race, so it was quite an achievement to even finish the event considering some teams didn’t complete the five-lap circuit.”



Mark tried out for the team two years ago after seeing a Blesma advert for a try-out day and enjoyed it so much that he recruited Royal Engineer veteran Dave at last year’s Members’ Weekend.

“In races, we reach speeds of up to 55mph and we hit a wave every six seconds, so we are constantly bouncing. We have to race without prosthetics whilst making sure we hit the waves correctly so we skip across the surface like a pebble,” said Mark.

The pair will next race at the season finale, which will take place in Cornwall on 01-02 October

↳ BLESMA BRIEFING

How to talk about pain

BEING ABLE TO CLEARLY DESCRIBE WHAT YOU ARE FEELING IS VITAL TO GETTING THE RIGHT SUPPORT, BUT IT'S NOT ALWAYS AS EASY AS IT SOUNDS



Pain is increasingly becoming an issue that is being talked about amongst the veteran community, and the charities and services that are trying to help. Almost all of the referrals made into the Veterans Trauma Network in England have a significant 'pain element'. Pain has been a key driver in veterans seeking advice and information about elective amputation. The issue of pain is also causing some discussion around Armed Forces Compensation Scheme awards where chronic (long lasting) pain is not currently classed as an accepted disability.

Pain is something we all experience. Usually, pain is a biological defence mechanism to let us know that something might be wrong or that we should stop doing something that causes the pain. Sometimes though, the system goes wrong and we experience pain that is not related to further damage. Pain is a personal, unique, and subjective experience. What might be mildly irritating and short lived for one person may be experienced by someone else as debilitating, excruciating, and long lasting. We often hear this referred to as 'pain tolerance'.

When talking about pain to a healthcare provider, they may ask you about four aspects of your pain: site, severity, character and impact.

SITE

The site of the pain is important and yet is not always clearly defined. An amputee will very often be assumed to have Phantom Limb Pain even if the pain is actually stump pain or coming from a completely different site altogether. Make sure you clearly describe where you feel the pain. Other important details are whether the pain moves or is always in one place, as well as what brings it on and what reduces it.

SEVERITY

There are many ways to determine how severe pain is but they all need questions to be asked of the patient. Regardless of the scale used, any pain in the lower third of a scale is thought to be mild and often does not need medical treatment. However, pain in the middle and upper thirds of a scale indicates a significant problem that needs support. The important point is that when you are asked about your pain, you give the correct answer. Sometimes, pain is worse at certain times or after particular activities, and these need to be determined.

CHARACTER

Being able to describe the character of the pain can give clues as to what is causing it. This is important as some pain types respond to certain treatments better than others.

Typical words used to describe pain are:

- Aching ▪ Cramping ▪ Gnawing ▪ Heavy ▪ Hot / Burning
- Punishing / Cruel ▪ Sharp ▪ Shooting ▪ Sickening ▪ Splitting
- Stabbing ▪ Tender ▪ Throbbing ▪ Tiring / Exhausting

The most common pain types are:

- Sharp, stabbing pain ▪ Extreme heat or burning sensation
- Extreme cold ▪ Throbbing, swollen, inflamed tissue
- Sensitivity to contact / touch ▪ Itching ▪ Numbness, tingling, pins and needles.

Using examples of commonly known painful scenarios may also be helpful to give a sense of your pain in comparison to a generally understood threshold. For example:

- It feels like a bee sting, but 10 times worse. ▪ It's like the worst toothache I've ever had. ▪ It feels like I've been burnt, but under my skin.



TRY TO GET THE MESSAGE OF HOW THE PAIN INTERFERES WITH YOUR LIFE ACROSS TO THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDER



IMPACT

It is important, especially with long-term chronic pain, that the impact of the pain on your life is assessed. There are several questionnaires available that can provide different views of the pain and its impact on you. Try to get the message of how the pain interferes with your life across to the healthcare provider.

WHERE TO GET HELP AND SUPPORT

In the first instance, you should consult your GP. You can also find information online; a good place to start is NHS Choices or the NHS website. If you are a military veteran you may be entitled to access the Veterans' Pain Clinic at King Edward VII Hospital. The clinic offers a 45-minute appointment with a specialist in pain medicine who can provide an insight into pain, and offers a medication review, advice and guidance, as well as liaising directly with the veteran's GP. You can be referred by your GP, your consultant, a veterans' charity or a regimental association. You can also self-refer by calling 020 7467 4370.

The charity Supporting Wounded Veterans also offers a 45-minute consultation with a leading pain consultant, and if appropriate you may be referred to their pain management programme. This service is only available to veterans for pain related to an in-service injury or condition. For more information email martinb@supportingwoundedveterans.com or call 07990 552718.

It is important to tell your healthcare provider how your pain interferes with your life

“**KNOWING WHAT YOU CAN DO TO REGAIN SOME QUALITY OF LIFE DESPITE DEALING WITH PAIN HELPS A GREAT DEAL**”



MY PAIN STORY NICK RICHARDSON

I joined the Royal Navy in the late 1980s and picked up a serious ankle injury early in training. There was little in the way of rehabilitation at the time, and as a result I have lived with ankle pain ever since. I was diagnosed with degenerative arthritis in my right ankle in 2007, which was made significantly worse in 2009 when I permanently damaged a nerve in my pelvis. By 2011, I was experiencing significant pain which had a detrimental effect on all aspects of my life.

I was medically discharged from the Royal Navy in 2012 and was given a diagnosis of chronic neuropathic pain in 2013. Essentially, my body reacts adversely to any kind of painful stimuli, making even the most minor injuries far more painful than normal. This is a condition that can't be cured or controlled by medication, intervention or surgical procedure. My pain levels remain high and my mobility remains poor. Nevertheless, I now know that if I pace activity and take steps to manage pain and fatigue I am better able to do more of the things that I enjoy.

However, acceptance that my pain will never go away will always be a difficult and distressing issue to manage, and there are still many days when I am overwhelmed by pain, tremors and fatigue. Although I cannot remember my last pain-free day, an understanding of what I can do to regain some quality of life despite dealing with pain and other issues helps a great deal.

A longer interview with Nick, along with a number of resources for help and advice on managing pain, will feature in the winter issue

NEWS ANALYSIS

Independence and wellbeing

LAST YEAR, BLESMA AWARDED MORE THAN 1,000 GRANTS AND OFFERED SUPPORT IN ALL SORTS OF OTHER WAYS. ARE YOU IN NEED OF ANYTHING?

From gardening and home improvement grants to complex pension wrangles, and from repairing mobility scooters to vital academic research, wellbeing is at the beating heart of Blesma. Responding to a vast range and number of requests for help forms the hefty to-do list that hits the desk of Ian Harper, Director Independence and Wellbeing (right), every day.

The 30-year military veteran, who served in the Infantry and Royal Army Medical Corps, needs all his experience in planning, strategy and business efficiency for a role that delivers on Blesma's core commitment of enabling limbless veterans to lead independent and fulfilling lives. The tasks and challenges fly thick and fast, with Support and Outreach Officers feeding back from the 13,617 visits they made last year, and Head Office staff firing into action to cut through red tape on behalf of Members.

"My role is to manage the complete portfolio of membership services, delivering independence and wellbeing support to the whole of the membership. It is about targeting support and intervention so Members feel empowered and confident, whether they use a wheelchair or prosthetics, to take full ownership of their life, knowing we are there to help them and back them up. There is a high degree of complexity but it is very rewarding," says Ian. "As a veteran myself it is a great privilege to be supporting veterans who have given their all for their country. I don't consider it a job;

it is a vocation, a calling. It is a complex role because of the nature of the injuries and disabilities that Members have, and how things like healthcare and pensions are delivered. But a week never goes by when I don't look back and think the team has done something incredible."

Ian has a clear focus on the main choke points ahead for the Association, its Members and their families.

"It is the economy, particularly fuel and food," he says. "The reality is that we will still be experiencing this next year. Everyone, not just our Members, is being challenged, and the Association has to be sure it can respond in a dynamic and proportionate way."

Blesma is making individual grants available which will be awarded on a case-by-case basis. "This is where Blesma comes into its own. We can help smooth out temporary issues so that Members can better manage their lives going forward," says Ian. "It is a very important provision and for some it will be a lifeline. The values of Blesma that were established 90 years ago have stood the test of time and still burn as bright today as they did then."

The nuts and bolts of the independence piece involve grants, practical advice and signposting – sometimes to other agencies – to enable Members to go to work, start businesses, or have consistent mobility to visit friends and family, as well as pursue sports and hobbies. The wellbeing element includes connecting Members with statutory and voluntary services, advocating on their

“

IT IS A PRIVILEGE TO SUPPORT VETERANS WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR ALL FOR THEIR COUNTRY. I DO NOT CONSIDER THIS TO BE A JOB; IT IS A CALLING





**Ian Harper, Blesma's
Director Independence
and Wellbeing**

behalf, and ensuring they have dedicated professional support – as well as informal support – through access to other Members and activities.

“It is a wide and diverse sector and includes anything from access to counselling to grants for home adaptations,” adds Ian. “It covers anything that improves a Member’s quality of life and personal dignity – and that matters deeply to me and everyone in the team.

“Providing something like a stair lift can be life changing. It could be making sure there are no trip hazards so Members can get into their car for days out or get out into their garden to tend the flower beds. Having that support replaces frustrations with a sense of calm and relaxation.”

Ian has plans to build up the volunteer section of the Association to provide extra contact and support for Members and assist the BSOs and Outreach teams.

“We face lots of challenges, but there are always solutions. We exist to support the Members and that is a simple, golden thread that runs through what we do. We are focused on supporting them to live fulfilling, independent and rewarding lives within the constraints of their circumstances.

“There are incredible and inspiring people in Blesma and it is a privilege to help all Members. I am only a cog in a bigger machine, but everything we do has an impact and that is the wow factor for all of us.”

THE MAIN TOUCH POINTS GRANTS SUPPORT

Blesma awarded 1,083 grants to 771 recipients last year and gave advice on countless more applications for support. Grants are available for a spectrum of help from spare parts and repairs to wheelchairs, to upgrades and grants for tools and adaptations that make work and leisure more fulfilling. Each request is assessed on an individual basis. Disability grants are available for scooters, wheelchairs and walking frames alongside specialist equipment, whilst grants are also considered for home decorations and garden maintenance.

“The basic mantra is don’t spend your money before having a word with your BSO,” says Ian. “Once you have done that, it shouldn’t take more than a few days for the paperwork to get submitted. We have an agile system and can get things done responsively. When required, we can change pace to get things through if they are urgently needed.”

CARE PACKAGES AND EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Care packages or pensions that involve local authorities and government departments can be daunting, but staff working in Blesma’s Independence and Wellbeing Department are skilled at navigating the twists and turns of bureaucracy. Policies and procedures vary whether pensions are war pensions or government

“It covers anything that improves a Member’s quality of life and personal dignity – and that matters deeply to me and everyone in the team,” says Ian

Newsfeed



GARDENING GRANTS

Roy is one of many Members who benefits from Blesma's popular Gardening Grant



granted, with Members' requirements differing from one devolved nation to another, making every claim or query an individual case.

Dealing with agencies and authorities that are increasingly online with limited access to face-to-face contact or personal helplines is a huge issue. Blesma has built up strong connections with government departments and has decades of experience liaising over war pensions and the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, as well as providing guidance on applications for entitlements.

"It can be very complicated and there is a lot of paperwork to wade through," says Ian. "The pandemic has changed how organisations communicate, which impacts on the opportunities to speak to someone to set out your case. This is where Blesma comes into its own, advocating on Members' behalf, often across multiple agencies and pulling the threads together.

"The Support Officers are the first contact point as they have great experience and success advocating with the appropriate people. They are also a great sounding board and can signpost Members to various other charities and help.

"It can be very frustrating trying to deal with issues that are personal but our Support Officers are very skilled at making cases and focusing on getting the best outcome for their Members."

RESPIRE CARE

Blesma has a 'whole life' approach and sees respite care as a vital element in how Members and their families can get breaks.

"The term 'respite care' does not sing to the complexity and emotion of what it underpins," says Ian. "Having the ability to take a real break from where you are, getting a breath of fresh air, trying something new and recharging your batteries are important aspects of wellbeing.

"These, in turn, feed into independence and help Members sustain their personal drive towards living independent and fulfilling lives."

In the first instance, Members should contact their Support Officers for details about respite care for both themselves and their families.

WILL WRITING

The Association provides a professional will writing service that helps give Members peace of mind. The Association is a member of the National Free Wills Network which can help Members write or amend wills free of charge. The service gives Members access to qualified solicitors throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. More information can be obtained from your Support or Outreach Officer. Their contact details can be found on p84.



SUPPORT OFFICERS ARE VERY SKILLED AT MAKING CASES AND FOCUSING ON GETTING THE BEST OUTCOME FOR THEIR MEMBERS



HOME IMPROVEMENTS
 A grant helped Denzil to fund a new driveway to allow him safer access to his home

OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Blesma’s Outreach Officers fulfil a vital role within the Association, organising a wide range of events and keeping Members connected to each other and the Association. The 10 officers – one for each area – encourage engagement in community groups and were instrumental in bringing not just Members but also their families together during lockdown with a range of online events that have resulted in lasting friendships.

They also visit Members in their homes, hospitals or in residential care, and can provide vital contact for Members in isolated areas.

“The Outreach Officers do an incredible job, which was highlighted during the pandemic when they helped keep people together and provided lifelines with calls and online get-togethers. They build social networks which feed back into our ethos of Member helping Member – this is part of the fabric of the Association,” says Ian. “They understand our Members and are very good at connecting people with similar backgrounds and circumstances; it is very important that Members know they are not alone.

“The events Outreach Officers organise are great fun. These visits, events and contacts – even a phone call – all help with wellbeing and being in each other’s company really lifts and energises Members.”

RESEARCH

Blesma is at the forefront of research in a number of areas that impact Members. BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier attends numerous meetings that look at research topics, allowing Blesma to understand the direction of policy and to influence proceedings for Members’ benefit.

Research projects such as assessing the impact of traumatic limb loss on families and the performance of microprocessor knees have informed policy and created greater opportunity for Members and their families.

“Engaging in highly-validated research that has a direct bearing on Members is part of what differentiates us and makes us a highly respected charity,” says Ian. “It improves knowledge, understanding and provision for Members and for the wider limbless community.

“This year, we are finishing off a piece of work that deals with families living with loss of use of limb with a view to building a practitioner’s guide to better manage and support veterans and foster realistic expectations.

“We are also keen to advance understanding of the implications of injury and illness for our female Members. This is not an area that we understand well enough and Blesma is looking to change that.”

If you need any help, advice or information you should contact your Support or Outreach Officer in the first instance. Their contact details can be found on p84

Clockwise from far left: Blesma can help with hobbies, gardening grants, home improvements and adaptations. It also offers plenty of opportunities to get together with other Members in your local area





Making Generation R is to be restructured

Following a year-long consultation with a specialist charity consultancy, the Making Generation R (MGR) programme is to be changed. MGR will come to an end in its current form in May 2023 when it will transition into a storytelling programme for Members.

Initially, the workshop will run for two years so that its success can be monitored before a decision is made about its future.

MGR has been a tremendous success over the past six years, having trained more than 100 Members to tell their unique stories. These stories of resilience have been shared with tens of thousands of people. However, after six years delivering the programme, it has become increasingly challenging to recruit Members to take part, with spaces on some courses left unfilled.

The programme will be delivered as normal for the next year, and will end with a celebration event in May 2023. From June, Blesma will trial a new storytelling programme that will train Members to

tell their personal stories to friends, family members, colleagues and potentially larger audiences. While Blesma expects that external audiences will still want to hear Members' stories, the Association will no longer commit resources to actively generating audiences.

Enrolment is now open for MGR 2022/23. If you would like to be involved in the final year of the programme, please express your interest by emailing Nicole Findlay at aelocal@blesma.org



MAC BACK ON THE ATTACK TO DEFEND STRONGMAN TITLE

FORMER ROYAL HIGHLAND FUSILIER Mac McLaren has defended his title as World's Strongest Disabled Man just 20 months after he first started competing.

Mac, 45, from Gillingham retained his seated category 2 crown in Ottawa, Canada in June winning four of the six events; the 280kg axle deadlift, the 125kg farmers hold, the 3.5-ton truck pull, and the 90kg log press.



Mac only took up the sport in October 2020 and began competing the same month. In his short career, he has already been runner-up at the 2021 Britain's Strongest Disabled Man competition and at the Arnolds, before going on to be crowned World's Strongest Disabled Man in Iceland in 2021.

"I went into Bulk's Gym in Gravesend and saw a strongman poster on the wall and the rest is history – I was hooked instantly," said Mac, who suffered a twisted leg injury while serving in Iraq which led to him having immense pain. "The coaches there have been fantastic, and together we investigated how we could adapt the training for a seated athlete.

"Britain's Strongest Disabled Man in September 2021 was my first competition. I just went into it thinking: 'Don't come last!' So I was happy to come second – I was only one point off winning!"

"Strongman gives my mind something else to think about. It keeps the demons away and keeps me challenged. There are tactics involved in how you lift as well as what you lift – there's always another challenge, so I'm constantly having to get better."

Mac will now compete for the Arnolds at the Birmingham NEC on 23 September



Blesma Members visit Blind Veterans UK for R&R

Blind Veterans UK has opened its Llandudno centre to Blesma Members and Widows for respite breaks and holidays. The centre was first opened to the Blesma membership last year on a self-catering basis, but Blind Veterans UK can now offer a full-board holiday that includes trips, as well as access to the gym, and arts and crafts studios. The cost will be funded by Blesma. While Blind Veterans UK cannot currently offer support with transport, the charity might be able to help with pick-ups from the local train station.

“We’ve built a nice relationship with the centre to allow our Members to really get involved and mix with Blind Veterans UK beneficiaries at the centre,” said Blesma Support Officer Tom Hall, who is the Blesma lead for liaison at the centre. “It’s a beautiful old building that’s had a lot of refurbishment recently. It’s got huge grounds, it’s all wheelchair accessible so everyone can use it comfortably, and the facilities and staff are brilliant!”

The intention is for Blesma to have a full offer, with use of the main building for accommodation, by March 2023.



“There is an intention for Blesma to hold activity weeks at the centre, organised through our Outreach programme, with access to gym and therapy support. Within this offer we are hoping to host a week of activities that will include paddleboarding and outdoor crafts, which may eventually be opened up to Widows and families.”

Several Blesma Members have already visited the centre, and the feedback has been very positive. “One Member absolutely

loved it. He went out paddleboarding and kayaking, and the staff at the centre made sure his stump was covered and kept dry. He was supervised on events and trips, with the staff making sure everything was

wheelchair accessible,” said Tom. “He told me he absolutely loved the whole experience and that it was the first time in a long time that he didn’t feel isolated as he was around people for two weeks.”

Turn to p81 to read about one Member’s recent experience at the centre. Those interested in a break at the Llandudno centre should contact their Support Officer in the first instance

DAUGHTER OF WWI MEMBER WRITES MEMOIR

THE DAUGHTER OF A MEMBER who fought in World War I has turned her father’s story into a book. Dorothy Murfin, 88, was inspired to write Tom Fox’s story after a family member asked what the initials ‘MM’ were next to his name.

“My nephew was intrigued by the Military Medal initials and his sons will be the last to carry the Fox name, so I thought it was more important than ever to record the story,” said Dorothy. “My dad didn’t talk about his service, but I do know that he was injured in October 1918 during the Battle of the Menin Road, which led to a below-knee amputation of his left leg.”

Dorothy began writing the book last September and attended lectures by the Western Front Association to research battles such as The Somme that Tom had been involved in. She has printed 40 copies of the book, and although she is not selling it, she has asked that donations be given to Blesma.

REMEMBRANCE 11K RETURNS FOR THIRD YEAR

THIS NOVEMBER WILL MARK THE third year of Blesma’s Remembrance 11K. Launched in 2020, the event sees supporters and Members walking, running or cycling a distance of 11km to remember those who have served.

“So far, more than 300 participants, have raised £34,000,” said Community and Events Manager Abbie-Louise Mills. “This year, we’re asking supporters to complete their Remembrance 11K by 11am on Sunday 13 November. We’ll introduce a few options to enable participants to complete their 11K over a number of days at a level that suits them, or they can join the virtual mass start at 9am on Remembrance Sunday.”

For more, call 020 8548 7089 or email fundraising@blesma.org



Colin Branch is Blesma's first Head of Welfare Support

Blesma appoints first ever Head of Welfare Support

Following a restructure of Blesma's Independence and Wellbeing Team in June, Member Colin Branch has become the Association's first ever Head of Welfare Support. The role was established as a response to the increased complexity in casework due to changing regulations, safeguarding requirements, complex health cases and an aging membership.

As the Association's Head of Welfare Support, Colin is Blesma's designated safeguarding lead, making sure the necessary policies and practices are in place for staff to follow. This increased attention to detail will ensure Blesma remains in line with changes in legislation and the responsibilities placed upon it by the Charities Commission.

Colin will also help manage the delivery of the welfare and membership support function through the team based in the Chelmsford office. This includes helping approve grants and talking with Members to understand their concerns so Blesma can better support them. His role also includes assisting the Benefits and Wellbeing Advisor to resolve War Pension queries as well as overseeing the support to the Association's volunteers, the Branch network and the Outreach activities programme.

"The Outreach programme has proven incredibly successful for Blesma over the last few years, so it was time for the Independence and Wellbeing team to expand its internal infrastructure to meet the additional manning that was brought into place," said Colin, a Royal Anglian Regiment veteran, who brings with him 15 years of experience and high-level qualifications in this specific role.

"Part of the reason for me being appointed was to bring additional managerial capacity to the team and to work alongside the Director Independence and Wellbeing to help manage the outreach activities, as well as the increase and changes in welfare demands that are being presented by the Support Officers," Colin said about his new role.

"BSOs have found that casework is getting more complex and there is more demand, so it is very time intensive, particularly where Members require a multi-agency approach. I will be helping to deliver on that demand, but with the more complex demands comes greater responsibilities from the Association, so I will also be ensuring we make the right decisions in line with Charity Commission rules and Blesma's own policies."

POSITIVE RESPONSE FOR ASSOCIATION'S HARDSHIP GRANT

BLESMA'S RECENT HARDSHIP GRANT has been very well received amongst the membership. Blesma is supporting Members through the cost-of-living crisis by providing a grant to all. With the rise of food, fuel, bills and other expenses, Blesma wants to help its Members with ongoing hardships and unexpected expenditures through this period of uncertainty.

A grant of £200 is therefore being awarded to all those who wish to apply, and can be used how they see fit.

At the time of writing, more than 50 per cent of the membership has responded to the invitation to apply. Blesma has received some wonderful thank you letters, phone calls and emails.

Grant applications for those living in the UK closed on 31 August while applications for those living overseas closed on 15 September. Payments are expected to start being made in October.



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FALKLANDS VETS TO SCALE MOUNT BLANC

At the time of going to press, former soldiers from the Argentinian forces, the Gurkhas, Welsh Guards, Royal Engineers, SAS, and the Royal Marines were getting ready to attempt to scale Mont Blanc in an 'act of reconciliation' to mark the 40th anniversary of the Falklands War.

The six-day expedition to climb the 15,774ft mountain is being led by former Welsh Guardsman Will Kevans and began on 11 September in aid of Blesma.



War veteran sets himself epic 18-month challenge

A super-fit Wigan war veteran has embarked on an extraordinary charity challenge that involves running 4.57km every day for 457 days.

That telling figure is the number of British soldiers who did not return from the war in Afghanistan, a conflict in which 42-year-old Andrew O'Donoghue (above) was a participant.

His aim is to raise as much money as possible for survivors less fortunate than himself who lost limbs in the war, either through gunshot wounds, road accidents or, most commonly, improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The Ashton dad of one, who was in the Queen's Lancashire and later Duke of Lancaster's regiments during 22 years of Armed Forces service, not only in Afghanistan but also in Iraq, will be boosting Blesma's funds.

He has set himself a modest target of £1,000 and, having started in May, has already raised more than twice that amount. But with still more than 300 daily runs to go he will only be finishing this mammoth feat in August 2023!

"I consider myself fortunate to have come

through both of those conflicts pretty much unscathed both physically and mentally," said Andrew, who is these days a triathlon instructor. "But there were plenty of soldiers who did not. A total of 457 did not come home and then there are those helped by Blesma. So I have set myself this challenge, which started on 16 May. It benefits me as well as Blesma because I find fitness is good for both the body and mind. I like pushing myself: it keeps me strong.

"And I also hope it will raise the profile of Blesma and the ex-Service personnel it works hard to support."

Andrew has mainly been running around the area where he lives. Sometimes, when the weather is really bad or if he's pushed for time, he takes to a treadmill at home, but it is all faithfully recorded for his followers on Facebook and Instagram.

To track Andrew's progress, you can follow him on Strava Challenge 457 (Andrew), Facebook @challenge 457 or Instagram @Challenge457_

To donate to Andrew's fundraising exploits, please visit <https://blesma.enthuse.com/pf/challenge457>

WHEELCHAIR PROVES TO BE A SMASH HIT

GLEN LEVERSEDGE CREDITS Blesma for his success in wheelchair tennis competitions after the Association helped him buy a tennis wheelchair earlier this year.

"Following a shoulder injury, I wanted to get back into fitness and start losing weight," said the Royal Anglian Regiment veteran, who suffered a spinal cord injury in 2014. "The club chair was too narrow for me, so I spoke with Blesma who were more than happy to support me. I started training with a local team in Shrewsbury. It has helped me physically and it's been brilliant mentally because I am training with people who are like me.



"My club asked me to compete in a tournament as a novice. I won three games but lost in the semi-finals. Six weeks later, I played a tournament in Wrexham and ended up winning the doubles competition.

"A few weeks ago, I played in a tournament in Shrewsbury and won the singles and the doubles novice titles as well as a couple of matches in the senior doubles. In the next tournament I'll move up to the seniors and will be playing the first and second ranked Welsh players. The wheelchair that Blesma provided has allowed me to achieve all that."

Stuart can't use his right arm so has to shoot with his teeth



Golf buggy donation leads to archery dream

A Blesma-funded golf buggy is helping Royal Navy veteran Stuart Padley with his continued recovery from a severe stroke that left him with reduced mobility and aphasia in 2018.

“We still don't know exactly what caused the stroke, although a tear to an artery in Stu's neck resulted in a blood clot leading to the brain,” said Stu's fiancée Jacqueline. “The whole of Stu's right side was paralysed and he was left unable to stand or walk, and with poor speech.”

Stuart, who has been a keen golfer since the age of five, was desperate to return to the golf course.

“Stu had a handicap of seven before he was injured but is now playing off 19.4,” said Jacqueline. “He was right handed before the stroke, so has had to re-learn to play with only his left hand.

“But being on the golf course really helps Stu's mental health. He is surrounded by a familiar community that replaces what he had during his service. But his time on the course depended on whether a buggy was available, and even when there was one to use, the hire cost was expensive.

“Blesma very kindly helped Stu with a golf buggy two years ago, which gives him the independence and freedom to play whenever he wants. Monday is the only day he isn't out playing golf now!”

Sport has been an integral part of Stuart's physical and mental recovery, and has led

to him competing at this year's Invictus Games in indoor rowing and archery, where he won a silver medal for archery.

“That was a new sport for Stu, and because he can only use his left arm he has to shoot the arrow with his teeth,” said Jacqueline. “Now he is looking at international competitions with the aim of getting on the Paralympic pathway.”

Stuart's inspiring story has caught the attention of local media and he is a finalist for Sports Person of the Year at the Kingdom FM Local Hero Awards 2022.



STEVE HAS BEEN BOWLED OVER BY BLESMA SUPPORT

STEVE PENDLETON LOST HIS sight, his left leg and the hearing in his right ear in a helicopter crash 30 years ago while serving with 1st Battalion Royal Green Jackets in Northern Ireland. When he recently started using a wheelchair full time, he decided to learn a new skill.

“Last June, I had to start using my wheelchair permanently and soon discovered the Rochester Blind Bowling Group,” said the 53 year old. “Blind bowlers use a string that runs from the mat to the jack. My wife guides me by lining me up to get me on target, then I just do the bowls



and hope to get close. I really enjoy it and have become quite good at it.”

In April, as the weather became warmer, the club moved to an outdoor venue and Steve was left with a wheelchair that was unsuitable.

“I needed to get a specialist lawn green wheelchair, so I contacted Blesma. The Association funded the wheelchair, and my Support Officer even brought it to my house.

“I don't get out much now that I use the wheelchair, so I really enjoy the social aspect of bowling as well as playing the sport. It's having a positive impact on my emotional wellbeing, too,” said Steve.

LETTERS

HAVE YOU GOT SOMETHING THAT YOU WANT TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST OR SHARE WITH YOUR FELLOW MEMBERS?
SEND YOUR LETTER TO STORIESANDPRESS@BLESMA.ORG

A BIG THANK YOU FROM MALCOLM

I volunteered in the Glorious Gloucester (The Gloucestershire Regiment), which is now known as The Rifles.

I was injured in 1958, when I was only 18 years old, but didn't lose my leg until 1994. I was shot in the leg during service in Cyprus and eventually infection set in, so they advised me to have an amputation. It sounds cruel but I feel better for it now. I was told about Blesma when I came out of the Forces and what a jolly good job they did! They have been really good, and I always recommend them to everybody.

I would like to thank Blesma and all the staff for the help they have given me over the years I have been with them. Firstly, myself and my wife would like to thank the Association for the Christmas lunches we have had over the years.

Secondly, for the week in Jersey which was fantastic, and for the Queen's Garden Party which enabled us to meet some famous people like javelin thrower Fatima Whitbread, dancer Wayne Sleep, actor and singer Alfie Boe, and actress Brenda Blethyn.

I would also like to say a big thank you to Blesma and the Royal British Legion for getting me a mobility scooter and a lift hoist for my car three years ago. They have helped me a lot. I'm not as agile as I used to be,



so they're really helpful when I go on trips. My granddaughter took us on a trip to Scarborough, where this photo (above) was taken, and the scooter was a great help!

I also want to thank all the staff at Blesma and all the Outreach Officers for the work they do. I remember one time the Government stopped my money because I had filled out the paperwork incorrectly and my Support Officer was able to correct it for me.

P.S. My neighbour loves reading *Blesma Magazine* when it comes. She finds it thoroughly interesting!

Malcolm Maiden

AMPUTATION: THE BEST DECISION OF MY LIFE

Back in 1990, I was serving as an 18-year-old Gunner on my first tour of duty in Northern Ireland. Three months into my tour I started suffering from severe pain and cramps in my right leg and struggled to walk more than 50 yards. I was eventually diagnosed with popliteal artery entrapment syndrome – five centimetres of my artery had collapsed behind my right knee.

Roll on to 1991 and I had my first bypass operation, which was unsuccessful. This was shortly followed by angioplasty surgery. My leg was shot. I struggled with Basic Fitness Training, Combat Fitness Tests and most sports. I was in constant pain so, in 1996, I left the Forces.

In 2018, while walking my dog, the original injury returned when the artery collapsed again in the same place. Another bypass operation was carried out, however the main nerve in my leg was severed so I now had no feeling from the knee down.

The thought of having my leg amputated had been on my mind for a while because of the constant pain. In 2020, I received a phone call in response to an email I had sent to a surgeon in Salisbury Hospital and the journey began.

On 18 November 2021, I made the best decision of my life and had an above-knee amputation of my right leg. It has opened up my life to so much and I could not have done it without the help of my family and Blesma, who have been incredible. I'm still golfing, I'm out with the dogs, and the only thing that has changed is I walk a bit slower. Life is good and gets better every day.

Stacey Cresswell





Blesma Member and Scotland wheelchair rugby league captain Michael Mellon (with the ball) in action in the Celtic Cup

READY TO RUMBLE



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

THE WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP WILL BE HELD IN ENGLAND IN NOVEMBER, WITH SEVERAL BLESMA MEMBERS REPRESENTING THEIR COUNTRIES IN THE SPORT. TIME TO GO PITCHSIDE WITH MICHAEL MELLON AND THE SCOTLAND TEAM FOR A CRASH COURSE

The crunching sound of metal on metal fills the sports centre as wheelchairs smash headlong into each other. The repetitive collisions test the strength of the frames to the limit and send shockwaves through the players' bones, muscles and tendons. And this is just the warm-up! Welcome to wheelchair rugby league; a sport played at heavy metal thunder levels in which an irresistible flow of action rages across an indoor sports arena, punctuated by feints, swerves and misdirection as well as a conveyor belt of crashes, smashes and tumbles from wheelchairs.

It's World Cup year for the sport, both on field and wheelchair-based, and the home nations are gearing up for a tilt at the crown which will be fought out in Sheffield, London and Manchester in November.

"It can be a bit daunting when you first see the sport as there are lots of collisions, but there's a huge amount of skill and tactics involved that make it a compelling sport to watch and play," says Blesma Member and Scotland captain Michael Mellon.

Today, his team are vying for honours in the Celtic Cup, a key warm-up tournament against Ireland and Wales. Held at the Plas Madoc Leisure Centre near Wrexham, the matches are frenetic, and the percussion of jarring metal and shouts from the players and fans make a deafening chorus. But what makes wheelchair rugby league much more than merely a demolition derby are its rules. Possession changes after six tackles, which are made by ripping Velcro tags from a player's shoulder after blocking their way. This creates end-to-end action with wheelchairs being up-ended or crashing on their side as players swerve, lunge and reach for an advantage.

Tries are scored by grounding the ball, often with a spectacular dive that sends both wheelchair and player airborne, with conversions performed by hitting the ball with the hand through goal posts that are one third the size of standard posts. The five-a-side games are played with a size 4



"THE SPORT GIVES YOU COMPETITION, CAMARADERIE AND THE ABILITY TO WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM"



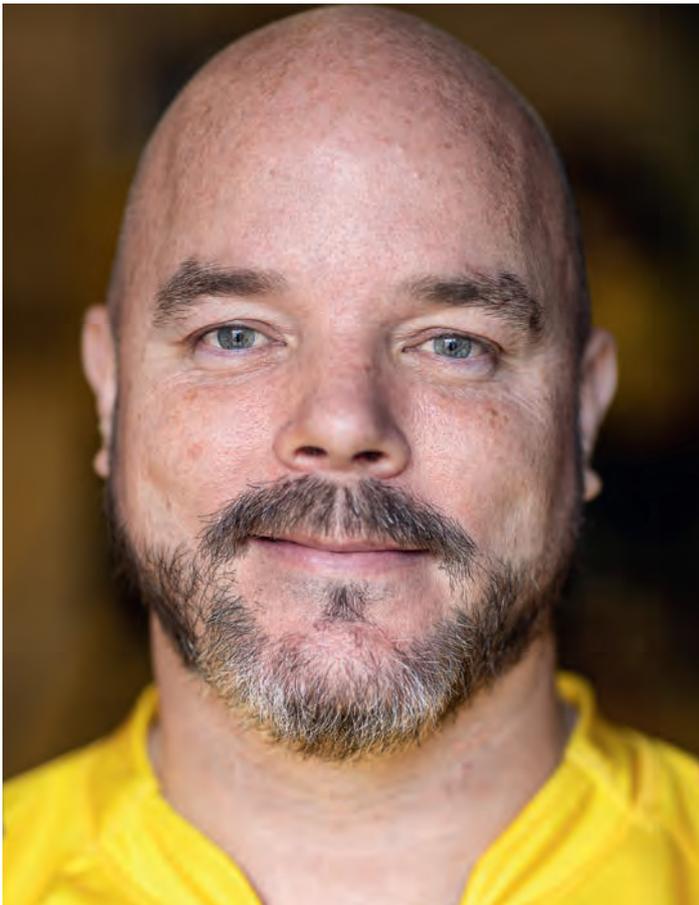
4 rugby ball (one size smaller than the professional sport) over two 40-minute halves, with 10 substitutions allowed. The sport is inclusive; it is open to any player with a registered disability, with teams allowed to field two players without disabilities.

RAF, RUGBY AND REHAB

Michael, who served in the RAF, represented his station at both rugby union and rugby league before an injury in a match led to his left leg being amputated in 2013. He represented Great Britain at wheelchair rugby and basketball before taking up rugby league and becoming Scotland's captain.

"It's an exciting, high-energy sport and it's great to be involved in the Scotland set-up," says Michael, 41, who is married with three children. "Since I joined Blesma, I've been able to try loads of sports, and that has been fantastic for me as I was at home and putting on weight after the amputation, and was struggling with the psychological impact as I had always been so active.

"Getting back to sport gave me a fresh start. We train hard and push ourselves, and we have developed a professional set-up with great managers and coaches. We don't







have the playing depth of some countries, but we are committed and are determined to have a go at the World Cup.”

Before the first match in the Celtic Cup the Scottish team, complete with a strength and conditioning coach, physios and a performance analyst, hold a squad session to run through set plays, discuss opposition strengths and weaknesses, and award Scotland jerseys to new caps before Michael leads them out to face Ireland with an inspiring team talk.

From the very first whistle the pace is blistering, and the noise almost deafening. Tags fly in the air – the player has to replace them from a supply after each tackle – wheelchairs clatter and instructions echo around the sports hall. In the chaos, the players perform rapier-like darts through fast-closing gaps to off-load the ball before they are buffeted and bashed off course.

Ireland take an early lead in the opening match, but tries from John Willans – whose right leg was crushed in a motorbike accident – and Connor Blackmore keep it tight, with Michael in the thick of the action. The lead changes hands several times before Ireland eventually claim the win 38-35 in a pulsating advertisement for the sport.

Wales, ranked number three in the world, prove too strong for both their rivals in the round-robin competition, and hold on to the title in convincing style, with Stuart

Williams becoming the first player to score 50 tries in Wales rugby league colours after his six-try haul in the tournament.

Ireland claim second spot with former Grenadier Guardsman Toby Burton-Carter starring as vice-captain. “It’s a breathtaking sport. I have PTSD and a degenerative disc disease in my spine,” says Toby after the action. “I used to be on medication that was turning me into someone I, my family and friends couldn’t recognise. I started



JAY ANDERSON

Jay made her international debut at the 2015 European Championships. Seven years later and she would recommend the sport to anyone...

“A man in a pub said I should play wheelchair sports and that just started my interest,” Jay says. “I quickly fell in love with wheelchair rugby league, so that random meeting was fate.

“I enjoy playing the sport but the camaraderie is something truly special. If you’re having a bad day, your teammates pick you up and if you are slacking they’ll push you on. There is nothing like the culture in this sport!”

Jay, from Dundee, was on the pathway to the Olympic Games as a field hockey official until a condition caused tissue to grow around the base of her spine when she was 22 years old. “It basically strangled the nerves so they stopped sending messages to my legs. Three operations later and I’ve got a permanent seat. It’s tough, but you have to look at the positives,” says Jay, 49, a part-time sports coach who works with children and adults with learning difficulties.

“I would one hundred per cent recommend this sport to anyone. The chair takes all the contact so absolutely give it a try. I’m not a scientist or an engineer but despite the collisions you don’t really feel the impact because the chair absorbs all the force – so don’t be scared!”

a wellness programme and then got into sport, which gives me a physical and adrenaline boost. My weight has gone down from 21 stone to 16 stone, and it has done wonders for my mental health.

“It gives me a fantastic outlet; I play with a number of people I served with, and it gives me the chance to meet other ex-Forces personnel, and it is great to have this level of competition.”

Toby, 44, from Warrington, who has also had success as a wheelchair basketball player, adds: “I was invited to go along and give wheelchair rugby league a go just after lockdown. I remember getting bounced all over the place in my first game but loved it and took to it quickly.”

Michael, who lives in Fife and plays for Dundee Dragons, is very keen for more Blesma Members to get involved in the sport. “It is a great sport for those of us who are ex-military as it offers a genuine element of competition, the ability to work hard as a team and a real feeling of camaraderie. I would definitely recommend it to any Blesma Member.”

Michael is currently developing a project that will aim to run taster sessions for new players, including Blesma Members. For more information about Scotland wheelchair rugby league, and the sport in general, visit www.scotlandrl.com



“GETTING BACK TO SPORT ALLOWED ME TO HAVE A FRESH START. WE TRAIN HARD AND PUSH OURSELVES”

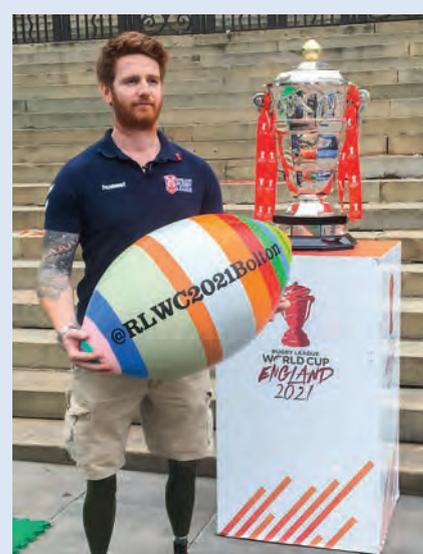
WORLD CUP 2022

The World Cup will run from 03-19 November, with group games being played at the Copper Box Arena in London and EIS Sheffield. The final will take place at Manchester Central.

France will head into the tournament ranked world number one, with England in second seed, Wales in third, Scotland sitting in fifth and Ireland in sixth. England and Ireland will meet each other in Group A alongside Spain and Australia, while Scotland and Wales are in Group B with France and the USA.

The tournament opens with a double header at the Copper Box Arena with Spain facing Ireland at 5pm followed by England against Australia at 7.30pm, while Scotland and Wales are in action the next day at EIS Sheffield against USA and France, respectively.

The Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup will be televised live on the BBC



JAMES SIMPSON

Blesma Member James has spent the last few years travelling the world as a Rugby League World Cup ambassador

The Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup has been a long time coming for England and Leeds Rhinos player James Simpson. The competition was postponed last year due to Covid, and as an ambassador for the event since 2018, November will mark the end of a four-year journey for James.

“Over the last few years my role has taken me everywhere from Dubai to Downing Street. It’s mind-blowing to see how much the game has grown,” says James. “Performing the role of ambassador has been absolutely brilliant, with so many ‘pinch yourself’ moments.”

James is currently playing his 10th season for Leeds Rhinos, and won his first England cap in 2014. Before that, he served in 1st Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment until an IED in Afghanistan took both his legs, three fingers and the muscle in his right forearm in 2009.

“I loved the sport from the moment I started playing. It is not even 20 years old yet, so as a player and an athlete I have evolved with the game – it has been amazing to have been part of that journey,” says James.

A longer interview with James, explaining how to get involved in the sport, will appear in the winter issue







Members' Weekend 2022

Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

Members' Weekend was back in its usual June calendar slot in 2022 after a few years of Covid disruption. The event attracted many first-timers, who soon felt like they'd been attending for years

The eagle (ok, owl!) has landed as Members' Weekend returned with full participation after the restrictive pandemic period. The majestic bird landed on a Member's arm as part of an array of activities ranging from painting and chocolate making to archery and welly-wanging. More than 200 Members, family members and Blesma staff enjoyed the weekend as the Association underscored its commitment to bring people together, listen to their views and move the charity forward. It was a weekend of insight and ice cream, business and banter, Tai Chi and target shooting.

The Chesford Grange, in Kenilworth, was once again the chosen venue. Guests arrived on Saturday afternoon and immediately got into the spirit with old friendships renewed and new ones made. A service of remembrance led by The Reverend Jim Caldwell brought a poignancy

to proceedings, and the three-course dinner ensured a memorable, laughter-filled end to the opening day.

The AGM covered a range of topics; from Blesma's direction as we emerge from the pandemic to issues that affect Members as the rising costs of living begin to bite. Some well-directed questions from Members added to the openness of the event and the feeling that Blesma is in good health and prepared for the challenges ahead.

Members' Weekend is always a mix of business and pleasure, and the Activities Team made sure there was something for everyone to try. The hotel grounds were alive with laughter as the events rolled through the afternoon before an evening barbecue. The archery and crossbow firing range and virtual clay pigeon shooting drew a stream of contenders, while the crafts sections inside the hotel were fully booked all day.

AGM 2022 report

1. The National Chairman opened the meeting by thanking the Members and staff who were attending, as well as the Members who had submitted proxy voting forms. He also thanked Mr Will Dixon for his excellent service to Blesma as a Member, Trustee, and as the Deputy National Chairman.
2. Chairman's Report. The National Chairman reviewed the 2020 Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements as follows:

As Members were aware, 2021 was a somewhat turbulent year. Blesma went in and out of lockdowns and was forced to cancel a number of functions and events. Another impact of the pandemic was its effect on the delivery of statutory services as many staff worked from home. Feedback from BSOs indicates that casework has become significantly more complex and time intensive, particularly where Members required a multi-agency approach.

Although there were no major combat operations in 2021, UK personnel were deployed across the world and played a key part in the Government's response to Covid at home. The unexpected events in Afghanistan in August reminded us that our military personnel can very quickly find themselves in harm's way, and also that the after-effects of conflict can last a lifetime.

The hasty withdrawal, and the fact that those Afghans who had fought alongside coalition forces remain under significant threat to their lives, meant that a number of Afghan refugees were resettled in the UK. Two Afghans who were very seriously injured whilst serving alongside UK forces have been admitted to Blesma as Associate Members in the exceptional circumstances of the withdrawal.

SECURITY

2021 saw a 40% increase in contact levels with our Members when compared to 2020. Blesma's support has included professional counselling, improved assistance with financial planning and debt management, along with work to secure the correct provision of pensions and allowances. In total, the Association awarded 18% more grants to 6% more Members when compared to 2020. We have also increased the number of cases where we collaborate with other charities by over 50%; a prudent move as money gets tighter.

Staff continue to directly support individual Members who wish to claim War Pensions, Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Awards or DWP benefits. Blesma has also worked hard to develop its working relationship with Veterans UK as staff work to assist Members in resolving issues. Although it would be true to say that many challenges remain, our links with the agency are strengthening and we have been able to use our contacts to improve support and overcome obstacles in a number of cases.

Throughout the year, Blesma and Anglia Ruskin University have been conducting research to investigate how Members who have loss of use of limb and their families and carers cope with the challenges of daily life. The Families 2 project is a repeat of similar work on the effects of limb loss and is set to report its findings soon. Blesma has also collaborated with Help for Heroes and Blind Veterans to sponsor a research project into the clinical needs of disabled veterans in the UK, the services available and barriers to support.



IDENTITY

Linking Members and their families together in comradeship was particularly important in 2021. Although Covid restrictions significantly affected our ability to arrange live activities throughout the year, the Association worked hard to deliver whenever we could within the rules. Following a review by the board, Blesma's Venture funding was increased in 2021. The six-year Making Generation R programme reached an audience of more than 30,000 people during the year.

CONNECTIVITY

Maintaining connectivity across the Association was a key requirement in 2021. Strong connections between Members were kept up through a steady flow of publications, social media and participation in activities. The use of video was a particular success story in the latter



Blesma's Chairman Sir Adrian Bradshaw fields questions from the floor during the AGM

half of the year, covering Remembrance commemorations, Member activities and Blesma's annual Big Give campaign.

Our work on behalf of Members continued throughout the year, with direct input to policymakers and statutory authorities across the four national governments, and work to reinforce our connections with agencies such as the NHS, Veterans UK and the Department of Work and Pensions. At the end of the year, Blesma and Help for Heroes submitted a joint bid to the Treasury for £2.5 million to extend the Veterans Mobility Fund that provides vital support to veterans with attributable injuries.

The Chairman concluded by saying that the 2021 Annual Report reflected that Blesma continued to thrive throughout a challenging and unpredictable year. He had great confidence that we are well-placed to respond appropriately in support of our Members and their families as we

face further uncertainty. He invited Members to join him in thanking our Trustees, staff, volunteers and supporters for their work on behalf of the membership to make this possible.

3. National Treasurer's Report

The Financial Review in the Annual Report summarises the situation, addresses fundraising, investments, and reserves. The Independent Auditor's Report from Crowe gives their opinion of our accounts, where they once again give Blesma a clean bill of health.

Despite the impact of the pandemic, the Association increased its general fundraising income by 27% from £1.8M in 2020 to £2.3M in 2021. That said, legacies income was hit hard, down by 69% compared to 2020. Legacies income is projected to increase across the sector, and we are currently reviewing this important source

of fundraising income. The investment portfolio also appreciated in value, resulting in a net gain of £3.4M compared to £1.3M in 2020. Net income was therefore up by 164% from 0.9M in 2020 to £2.3M in 2021. The Treasurer added that the results for 2022 will largely depend on the impact of the war in Ukraine on the world economy, new Brexit negotiations driven by the Northern Ireland protocol and, of course, any potential surprises from COVID-19, which is still very much with us.

4. Trustee Interviews

The Chairman said that four applications to become a Member Trustee had been received, although one Member had withdrawn. He explained that nominations included a resumé detailing their membership and why they wished to join the Board. They then attended an interview panel with members of the board which examined their motivation, their knowledge of the Association and in particular our strategy, their knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of Trustees, their awareness of the challenges facing the charity and their vision for the future of the Association.

Following this process, the interview panel made a recommendation as to which of the Trustee candidates should be elected. This year, the panel felt that all the candidates interviewed had something to bring to the board. Their recommendation was Mr Richard Gilbert but Members were, of course, able to vote for whichever candidate they wished. The board intended to conduct a review of the process for Trustee selection prior to the next AGM.

5. Resolutions

The following Resolutions were voted on at the AGM:

- a. To receive the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2020. Carried by 109 votes to 5.
- b. To appoint Crowe Clark Whitehill LLP as Auditors of the Association to hold office until the conclusion of the next General Meeting at which the Accounts are laid before the Association. Carried unanimously.
- c. To announce the retirements of Trustees and re-elect the persons listed below as Trustees of the Association.

Retirements

Mr Will Dixon

Nominees

Mr Steve White (99 votes)

Ms Ali Grant (104 votes)

Mr Stu Croxford (104 votes)

Election of New Blesma Trustee

Mr Charley Streather (35 votes)

Mr Richard Gilbert (75 votes)

Mr Archie Naughton (4 votes)

Mr Richard Gilbert was accordingly elected to the Board by a majority vote.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6. The following items were raised by Members:

Key Personnel – Pay

A Member noted that the total remuneration paid to key personnel at Note 4 of the Accounts was greater than the sum of the salary staff bands stated. The Chief Executive (CE) explained that this was due to a combination of salary, National Insurance, pension benefits and vehicle benefits. The Senior Management Team also had a staff changeover during the year.

Debtors

A Member raised a concern over debtors who owed funds to the Association. The CE said that the debtors were recorded at a specific moment in time as part of routine accounting. The Member asked why a rental figure was owed. The CE said that at the moment in time that the audit was taken some rent may be owed according to the payment schedule, but that our tenants were not in rent arrears.

AGM and Members' Weekend

Following a discussion over whether to separate the AGM from the Members' Weekend the Chairman asked for a vote on the issue. The clear majority felt that the AGM should continue to be held as part of the Members' Weekend.

Communication with Members

A Member questioned the previous Board decisions to close the Blackpool and Crieff Homes. In response to the Member's view that the decision was correct but more consultation should have taken place, the Chairman said that it was important that the Board should be able to make decisions in the best interests of the Association, but that the membership should be consulted where there were strong views on major issues.

Change of Venue

A Member asked whether the Members' Weekend could be moved to a different location periodically. The CE replied that this remained an aspiration. Eighty alternative venues had been considered in the previous year. None were considered suitable or affordable, although the intention remained to make use of alternative venues that were reasonably central in the UK.

Digital Communications

A Member asked that Blesma explore the option of giving Members the option of receiving the magazine digitally. This was agreed.

Working with Partners

A Member asked how the Association was working to secure consistent standards of healthcare across the UK. The CE replied that BSO (Prosthetics) is currently involved in work with the NHS to establish common performance standards across NHS England. Although health is now a devolved responsibility, central government could not impose these across the whole UK, but the expectation was that these common standards would be considered useful to compare performance. The Association is hosting a meeting with Limbpower and the Limbless Association to strengthen the ties between our charities and seek to drive up standards.

Electronic Voting

In response to a question from a Member, the Chairman asked for a show of hands in favour of electronic voting at the AGM. Although there was support for this, a significant number of Members abstained from expressing a view. The Chairman concluded that whilst there was support for electronic voting, it should probably not be the only option available to Members.

Review of Grants

A Member asked that Blesma consider reviewing the smaller grants such as the gardening grant, decorating grant and mileage allowance in view of rising costs. This was agreed. (Afternote: following the meeting, the mileage allowance for attendance at the AGM was raised to 35p/mile. A Hardship Grant of £200 has been made available to Members who wish to receive it.)

Female Members

A Member said that the recent event in Sheffield focused on female Members was a great success. She had also found that events involving children had been hugely beneficial. She asked that both types of events be repeated. The Chairman said that this was the intention.

Information on Spinal Injuries

A Member asked that the Association publish more information relevant to those with spinal cord injuries in order to raise awareness and understanding. Ms Ali Grant said that she represented those Members with spinal cord injuries on the Board and that issues relevant to these Members were discussed at every Board meeting. The Association would look to increase communication of these.

Llandudno Home

A Member asked how Blesma's investigation into the use of Blind Veterans UK's Llandudno Home was progressing. The Director Independence and Wellbeing and BSO Wales and West had visited the facility. Although the facilities were excellent, the home was not yet ready for Blesma Members to make full use of it.

Diversity

A Member asked about diversity on the Blesma board. The Chairman said that this was a consideration in the recruiting and selection process. Ms Grant added that whilst she was currently the only female Trustee, she felt able to represent the interests of female Members. She would encourage female Members who wished to become a Trustee or raise a specific issue to contact her.

Widow Trustee

A Blesma Widow suggested that the Board should consider whether to establish a position on the Board for a Widow in order to represent this important community within the Association. The Chairman thanked her for her suggestion and said that this would be considered as part of the review of Blesma's rules in the next year.

The Chairman thanked Members for their active participation in a busy and productive AGM.

Blesma Awards winners 2022: The citations

Every year, during the gala dinner at Members' Weekend, the Blesma Awards are presented to their deserving winners. This year, the combined talent, selflessness and dedication on show were as humbling as ever. Let's meet this year's winners...



THE HAMBRO AWARD

Awarded to Vinod Budhathoki

This award recognises high achievers in any field who display exceptional commitment and dedication. It was established in memory of 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.

This year, it was awarded to Vinod Budhathoki in recognition of his commitment to raising awareness and funds for Blesma.

In 2021, Vinod set himself a challenge to walk 100km over several outings in Maidstone. On one walk along the bank of the Medway River, his strength drove him to achieve 14.5km despite the sores and pain he would endure as a double amputee. Vinod pushed through to complete his challenge, raising £560 for the Association.

His commitment and passion to raise funds for good causes grew out of observing people standing in the street collecting for charity. He felt he could do

something more challenging and wanted to be more innovative, hence his idea of taking on demanding treks. From the outset, Vinod has been very clear and focused on his mission to raise money and awareness for Blesma. This, in part, is his desire to give something back to Blesma, a charity close to his heart that has supported him through his journey of recovery since 2010.

To complete the 100km challenge, Vinod displayed his true grit and resolute will power by digging deep to put one leg in front of the other as he battled tiredness and pain from scars on his stumps.

Vinod has shown true determination, passion, spirit and dedication in his pursuit to raise money to give back to charity to show his appreciation and respect, and to help others in time of need and distress. In doing so, he has shown he is the living embodiment of the spirit of this award.

Blesma Awards winners



THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD

Awarded to Donna Molloy

This award is in memory of Blesma Member Cyril Stephens OBE, one of the founder Members of the Association who was Honorary Auditor for Blesma from 1932-1947, and National President from 1949 until his death in 1956. It recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters, and this year is awarded to Donna Molloy.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Donna consistently and selflessly gave her time to actively support her local community by working in a food bank, and also supporting Blesma Members in need.

Donna provided support to Blesma Members who were not able to get to the shops or were struggling to cope throughout the pandemic. She, along with her husband, personally delivered essential food parcels to Members, sometimes driving more than 40 miles to deliver non-perishable items at a time when there were no delivery

spaces during lockdown. This was truly a lifeline for Blesma Members who otherwise would have suffered terribly. Her personal contribution was all the more important when Blesma's own support services were restricted due to COVID-19 restrictions. Further, Donna has also directly helped a Blesma Member by redecorating their house following fire damage, making it a cherished home once again.

Donna's response to being a lifeline to helping vulnerable Members feel less anxious and alone was truly inspirational, especially in a difficult and testing time for the country.

Her selfless commitment, example, compassion, and sense of community make Donna a very well-deserved recipient of The Cyril Stephens Award.



THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD

Awarded to Raymond Evans

The Jack Trigg Memorial Award was established in memory of Blesma Member Jack Trigg who served in the Welsh Guards in World War II and lost an arm in Normandy in 1944. Following Jack's passing, a request was made that a silver salver was purchased to recognise personal endeavours or sporting agility. This year, it was awarded to Raymond Evans.

Ray became an amputee in April 2018 having suffered with an injury to his left leg since the 1980s. Shortly after his amputation, Ray showed his resolute strength of mind and determination by learning to walk with a new prosthetic just eight weeks later. Not resting there, he capitalised on this success by pushing himself to return to his extremely active self and start running competitively.

Persevering through plenty of falls, pain from liners and wearing through socks, Ray has

driven himself to reach his goals. He has now run hundreds of miles, competed in many races, completed several marathons and has skilfully designed his own ultra-endurance races to raise money for Blesma and other worthy causes.

Life has its daily challenges for Ray, who has not been immune to his own health challenges, but true to his incredible courage, fortitude and form, has faced these silent trials with quiet determination, and has successfully overcome the many adversities these bring.

Ray embodies an inspiring approach to life by thinking and acting for the good and benefit of others through his regular and active fundraising, whilst at the same time maintaining a high level of personal fitness. His upbeat and positive frame of mind, unrelenting determination, and commitment to succeed make him a worthy recipient of this year's Jack Trigg Memorial Award.



THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY

Awarded to Loraine Brummitt

This award is in memory of Dr Charles Frankland Moore OBE and his wife Dr Elizabeth Frankland Moore OBE who were held in very high esteem by Blesma Members as a result of their vital work after World War II in securing Blesma's strong financial position. This award recognises the work undertaken by Blesma's Welfare Volunteers (known as Welfare Reps).

Loraine initially became involved with Blesma through organised Zoom calls in the North East. She and her husband, who is a Blesma Member, were always cheerful and friendly contributors to meetings, welcoming newcomers, putting people at ease, helping to generate conversation, and provide support and advice to others.

Loraine's understanding and first-hand knowledge of families coping with limb loss, coupled with her engaging, cheerful and friendly approach, made her

perfect in the role of Welfare Volunteer. Following becoming a Welfare Volunteer in 2020, Loraine has been very active in helping to plan and run a ladies lunch club and book group, along with coordinating the region's befriending group to help maintain a strong sense of community.

Loraine regularly calls her flock of 30 Members to check on their wellbeing, providing a welcome and empathetic ear for a friendly chat. In doing so, she provides timely feedback to the Support Officer to better the provision of welfare services.

Loraine is a patient and deeply considerate listener, enabling her to develop good relationships with some of the more vulnerable people on her patch. The mark of her success is how well she is regarded by all who encounter her. Loraine provides a hugely valuable service to her local Blesma Support Officer and is truly deserving of the Frankland Moore Trophy.



THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD

Awarded to Brendan and Ann Snoddy

This award was established in memory of Blesma Member Major The Earl of Ancaster KCVO TD, who served in the Leicestershire Yeomanry in World War II and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944. It recognises the work undertaken by a Blesma volunteer. This year, the award is presented to Brendan and Ann Snoddy.

After joining Blesma in 2010, Brendan and Ann quickly demonstrated their selfless attitude to their own challenges through active roles in the Bournemouth Branch. Within weeks of joining, Brendan stood in to cover the Honorary Secretary's role with discretion, enthusiasm, energy and commitment, and in an unobtrusive and judicious manner for the next 12 years.

Ann became increasingly active in supporting and then organising Branch lunches. Her attention to detail and great humour shone through in every event she delivered, including the

Branch 75th anniversary celebration in December 2021.

Ann has also supported the Branch Chairman and Welfare Officer by maintaining regular telephone contact with Branch ladies and alerting the BSO where further support is required. As their commitment to travel the 100-mile round trip from Portland to Bournemouth becomes increasingly challenging, they have been reluctantly forced to hand over their Branch roles.

They will be greatly missed in the incredible work they have provided over many years to ensure the Bournemouth Branch has remained strong, relevant, vibrant, caring and active.

It is wholly right that with their significant and joint contribution to the Branch's wellbeing, its members, and to Blesma they should now be recognised. They are most worthy recipients of the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award.



Gala Dinner

Members' Weekend wouldn't quite be the same without the chance to get dressed up at the Gala Dinner

Meeting fellow Members and their partners over dinner has always been one of the highlights of the weekend. We did our fair share of mingling, but if we didn't get around to saying hi, you can still have your say. Let us know what you thought of the event by dropping us a line at storiesandpress@blesma.org





Festival fun as activities take centre stage

Activities are a much-loved part of Members' Weekend and as this is the Association's 90th year, what better way to celebrate than with a festival atmosphere? If live music and free ice creams isn't your thing you could always try a bit of falconry and welly wanging...

SHOOTING AND ARCHERY

It's no secret that target shooting is a favourite amongst our military-minded Members, so it wouldn't be Members' Weekend without a chance to sharpen those old skills. At this year's event, laser clay pigeon shooting went down a treat, with Members taking on one another (and the Chief Executive!) in a bit of friendly competition, while archery and crossbow shooting were also on offer.

"I took part in the shooting, archery and falconry," said Dave Moore. "The shooting was brilliant; it was a long shot, and the targets were small. Despite having my hand in plaster, I managed to work out how to shoot by using my forearm and index fingers. This was my first Members' Weekend and it was absolutely brilliant; well-structured with so many activities to choose from."

CYCLING

Members know that cycling is a great way to stay active post-injury, but not all cyclists want to take on the Race Across America (see p52). At Members' Weekend there were cycling taster sessions on a range of upright and recumbent bikes that are offered on Blesma's popular 'Intro to Cycling' activity.

Janet Knight lost her left leg below the knee after surgery went wrong while she was serving in the Women's Royal Naval Service. She tried a three-wheeled electric bike. "It's expensive, but I can see the benefits – it would give me independence," she said. "Lots of us could benefit from trying these options."

WELLY WANGING

This was an activity that caught the eye of many Members. Competitors had to throw a wellington boot as far as possible or aim for the ultimate target; a golden dustbin. From Widows to Paralympians, everyone enjoyed having a go.



"It was great fun but a lot harder than it looked" said Charmaine Healy. "I had a game against Matt Woollard, Owen Pick and BSO Eastern Kevin Long. I didn't come last as Owen kept throwing his welly backwards!"

Owen added: "It was harder than I thought it would be – it's difficult to throw a welly a long way in a straight line! The weekend was really cool; it was great to chat with Members I don't normally see. You can get a lot out of the weekend and there's a lot to do."

FALCONRY

Nik Eley was the first person brave enough to feel the force of the American Eagle that was the star of the falconry display. "It was a fantastic experience," said the former Army man. "You could feel the eagle's raw power and predatory aggression. It was much





heavier than I thought it would be when it landed on my arm. It was the highlight of a very enjoyable weekend.”

Lisa Johnston, who served for 17 years in the Royal Army Medical Corps, made the most of her first Members’ Weekend, trying everything from watercolour painting to welly wanging. “It’s been incredible, with lots of fun and banter; like being back in the military but without the rubbish bits! I’ve tried falconry, had a beauty treatment and made chocolate – I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my first Members’ Weekend!”

SOAP FELTING

A degree of head scratching probably ensued when Members saw soap felting on the itinerary, but for those in the know it all made perfect sense. Felting proved to be a popular online lockdown activity for many, with Members felting everything from Remembrance poppies to cheeky gnomes. Naturally, soap was next on the

list! Water is used to layer woollen fibres onto a bar of soap. As those layers build up they form a pattern of felt. The bar of soap can then be used normally, and will last longer as there will be less waste from suds running down the drain. So now you know!

TAI CHI

A rejuvenating and restorative practice, Tai Chi helps to soothe the nervous system and relieve stress, whilst being a great form of gentle exercise. It proved very popular with Members during lockdown, so Members’

“THERE HAS BEEN LOTS OF FUN AND LOTS OF BANTER; I’VE TRIED FALCONRY, HAD A BEAUTY TREATMENT AND MADE CHOCOLATE. IT’S BEEN INCREDIBLE”

Weekend gave people the chance to take part in face-to-face sessions. With the weather holding out, the hotel’s garden soon turned into a dojo of serenity. “I’ve been taking part in the Tai Chi activity on Zoom, so it’s been great to try it outdoors in the lovely weather,” said Lorraine Anderson. “I never thought I’d be doing something like this a few years ago.”





Left from top:
who knew that
soap felting
was a thing?;
model making
with Conrad; Tai
Chi in the garden



WATERCOLOUR PAINTING

Hosted by Ian Lloyd, the watercolour activity for beginners is a firm Members' Weekend favourite. This year, our budding artists had to produce a silhouette of a boat in a harbour.

"I'm teaching the basics of watercolour painting to those who haven't done it before," said Ian, a former Royal Marine and lifelong painting enthusiast. "All Service personnel are taught attention to detail and I'm trying to make them see that they don't have to portray things exactly as they appear."

Ian ran tuition for up to 15 people and everyone who took part got something out of the class. "We break it down into stages and if they listen, they will end up with a good result," said Ian. "Everyone seemed to enjoy it and it opened doors for a few people to want to take it up as a new hobby."

"I just want to inspire people to get out and paint. It can help to keep you sane. I was housebound for six years and if I hadn't had my watercolour painting and craft activities

at home I would have struggled. I could always sit down and do a bit of painting to give me something to focus on and tune out from the rest of the world."

SKETCHING

According to Member Sidney Millard, if you can write your signature on a cheque then you can draw. The Army veteran has been sketching – or doodling as he likes to call it – since the age of seven. A week before Members' Weekend, the 83 year old retired from teaching his art class, but he was happy

"THE WHOLE POINT OF DRAWING IS TO HAVE SOME FUN. MY ENJOYMENT IS SEEING THE LOOK ON PEOPLE'S FACES WHEN THEY DO SOMETHING THEY THOUGHT THEY COULDN'T"

to open up his pencil case one more time for the Association.

"My enjoyment is seeing the look on people's faces when they do something they thought they couldn't," said Sidney. "The aim of the activity was to show people that, with a little bit of knowledge and explanation, anybody can draw. The whole point of drawing, or doodles as I call them, is to have some fun!"

"I showed the Members some tips to draw birds and bottles, and then we moved on to some bigger landscape drawing. We started with a single line, and I showed them how to add a horizon using the letter M. If you spread the letter out across the width of the paper, you get two hills. I then showed them how to use a pencil to add in a hedgerow and a tree by scribbling up and down."

"We then added lambs, a road, and even a fence to create a vanishing point before we coloured it in. Most of them couldn't believe the drawing they were leaving with!"



Clockwise from above: only a very well-trained dog would ignore the welly wanging (left); laser clay pigeon shooting was one of the weekend's most popular activities

MODEL MAKING

In the hotel foyer Conrad Molloy is telling anyone who will listen about the benefits of model making. Eight years ago, he realised the pastime gave him a focus and took his mind off his troubles.

“Model making helps me with my PTSD and stops me ruminating on the past when I’m having a bad day. I can go into my hobby shed – which Blesma funded – and focus on the model I’m building. I’ve had a group of six building models today and two other Members have taken a kit away to make at home. I’ve let them get on with building and just helped whenever they got a bit stuck.

I really hope the Members enjoyed the activity so I can hopefully return next year to make it even bigger and better.”

CHOCOLATE MAKING

Some Members jumped at the opportunity to take part in a chocolate making ‘taster’ session. Members had the chance to create their own indulgent chocolate creations and enjoy a chat in the process.

Everyone got to make six Belgian chocolate truffles and pipe the fresh cream truffle filling into the shells provided. These could then be dipped and decorated, and even personalised with edible writing. Gift-wrapping was

provided, though not all the truffles made it that far! “I really enjoy the creative activities, so this was great fun,” said Penny Gore, who served in the Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps before losing her legs in 2015 and 2021 after getting an infection. “It was easy to pick up; the shells were ready to use, the fondant was already in packaging, and the chocolate was already melted. All we had to do was put the chocolate into the shells, fill them and then dip them into more chocolate. Then we used white chocolate for the swirls. I gave my chocolates to my boyfriend and he thought they were brilliant.”

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

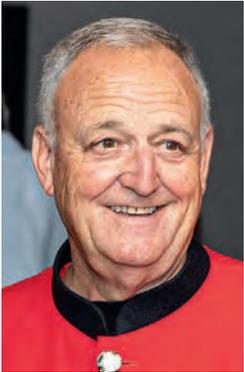
Before Members’ Weekend, Terri Hunt got in touch with other Blesma photographers to find out who would be happy to have their photographs on display at the event. The resulting exhibition showcased images taken on Blesma’s photography trips to places like the Shetland Islands and the Isle of Man.

How to get involved in 2023

Some of these activities, and many more besides, will be on offer throughout next year – all for free! For more on what’s coming up in 2023, and detailed instructions on how to apply, keep visiting www.blesma.org/activities

VOX POPS

What did you make of Members' Weekend?



"A truly memorable weekend. As a Chelsea Pensioner, I was humbled and inspired by the sheer exuberance and positivity of all the Association's Members. Thank you Blesma."

ALAN GILL



"I enjoyed meeting Members from the different areas and hearing their stories. The weekend was enjoyable from start to finish. It was worth travelling from Belfast!"

CATHY KELLY
(PARTNER)



"Having my partner attend was nice. Jenn really enjoyed our first Members' Weekend, and it gave her more of an insight into Blesma. It was an excellent weekend."

CLIVE SMITH



"It was the best atmosphere I have known at Members' Weekend. There were new and old faces, great conversation at the AGM, and a great sense of appreciation after lockdown. Members value the opportunity to get away."

WILL DIXON



“It was great to get together with everyone, the AGM was interesting, and I thoroughly enjoyed taking part in Tai Chi, felt soap making and playing with the owl. The highlight is always the gala dinner though!”

MO BIRD (RIGHT)



“It’s great to be back to normal and enjoying seeing friends again. Members’ Weekend is stress free and there’s plenty to do. I forgot my suit trousers for the gala dinner; I would have been out of place wearing shorts to dinner anywhere else, but not at a Blesma event!”

JOHN PHILLIPS



A word from the Padre

The Reverend Jim Caldwell, CF, Chaplain 1st Infantry Training Battalion, attended his first Members’ Weekend

The Remembrance Service provided a moving tribute and a time to reflect on sacrifice and lives lost. The Reverend Jim Caldwell attended his first Members’ Weekend, deputising for The Reverend Professor Philip McCormack MBE who could not make the event.

The Reverend conducted a dignified service, emphasising this was a “time to be together with friends and family.”

“There is something about the Armed Forces that creates relationships and banter which sustain us through good times and bad,” he said.

The service was well attended, the hymns approached with gusto, and the prayers and readings provided moments for personal contemplation. The Reverend Jim Caldwell, who is based at the Infantry Training Centre in Catterick, also conducted a Sunday morning service and met scores of Members over the weekend.

“I was delighted to be asked to attend and was instantly impressed by the atmosphere and the buzz,” he said. “Just walking through the hotel reception on arrival, you could feel that sense of camaraderie – that is something you cannot buy. It has to be natural. It was great to meet people and learn what Blesma means to them and how they have benefitted from the Association.”



Photography: Andy Bate

BLESMA AT 90

To watch the commemorative film go to
<https://www.youtube.com/BLESMA1932>



Blesma
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

1932 – 2022

MEMBERS' MEMORIES PAY TRIBUTE TO A MAJOR MILESTONE

THREE MEMBERS GO ON RECORD TO MARK THE ASSOCIATION'S 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Can you hold your hands up in front of your face and clap once?" the video director asks Lamin Manneh as he prepares to start recording. Lamin looks down at his right hand and then across to where his left arm stops midway between his shoulder and where his elbow used to be. "No!" he replies. Cue an awkward pause, followed by profuse apologies from the video director that are drowned out by Lamin's infectious belly laugh. It's not the start you might expect to a day shooting a poignant film to commemorate Blesma's 90th anniversary, but the exchange goes a long way to highlight the grace, resilience and good humour that typify Blesma's membership.

"For me, Blesma is one of the best military charities this country has ever provided," says Lamin when the cameras are rolling minutes later. "When you are a veteran you can feel alone. In that lonely place, in





**Above (from left):
Vinod, Ali and
Lamin on set
during the making
of Blesma's 90th
anniversary film**



my darkest moments, Blesma has stood by my side. I cannot be more grateful for the charity's help. Without it, I don't know if things would be the same for me."

Lamin has been joined on set by fellow Member Vinod Budhathoki and Member Trustee Ali Grant, who were both happy to give up their time to tell their stories of injury, rehabilitation and resilience on camera.

"I have been a Member Trustee for six years, and the amount of work Blesma does to support its Members and Widows, as well as their families, is phenomenal. Nothing is too much," says Ali. "The work Blesma does behind the scenes with the MoD and the NHS is amazing."

The film has been made for the Association's 90th anniversary celebration which will be held at the Royal

Hospital Chelsea in October, and will be used for both awareness and fundraising in the run-up to Remembrance Day. In it, Lamin explains what happened to him: "My life changed on New Year's Eve 2010," he says. "I stepped on an IED and lost both legs above the knee and my arm above the elbow. That's where my journey started."

Clapping is one thing Lamin Manneh hasn't been able to do since New Year's Eve 2010, but thanks in part to Blesma, and to a much greater extent because of his indomitable spirit, he can do so much more now than he ever thought would be possible a decade ago.

You can watch the 90th anniversary commemorative film at <https://www.youtube.com/BLESMA1932>

Vinod Budhathoki

Vinod served in 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles. He began his service in 2005 and was injured in 2010

Tell us about the day you were injured...

It was my second tour of Afghanistan. I was clearing a path for my patrol and we had to cross a canal. Just before I stepped in the water there was a huge bang. There was dust everywhere and then my legs felt as if they were burning; as if someone was wringing them out like wet clothes.

Were you aware of your injuries right away?

I could see that both my legs were smashed; my right leg was missing and although my left leg was still there, it was so smashed that I knew it would have to come off. I was conscious throughout the evacuation. My colleagues put tourniquets on me, gave me morphine, and tried to stop the bleeding.

What were you thinking at that time?

I was thinking about my wife because she was pregnant with our first child, and I worried how she would be if I died.

What was life like after your surgeries?

After my amputations my life was upside down. I remember lying in the hospital bed in Selly Oak and no one had told me how high up my amputations were. I put my hand under the blanket, touched my legs and realised they were above the knee. I just cried. But I never showed anyone that. As a soldier I just tried to be tough; I didn't want to show any weakness.

How did your wife cope with what had happened to you?

She is a very strong person and has played a huge role in my life. She has helped me to recover, to bring my life back to normal as much as possible. She told me that she just wanted me to be alive no matter what.

How did you find out about Blesma?

I met someone from Blesma when I went to Headley Court. I didn't know anything about Civvy Street, so he showed me how to fill out all sorts of forms and documents.



Blesma was very helpful to me right from the beginning of my recovery.

How would you describe the Association to someone who has never heard of it?

Blesma is one of the best charities in the UK. It supports in all sorts of ways; mentally, physically, emotionally and financially. Blesma has helped me a lot and has been a very big part of my life. It is good to meet and talk to other Members; that's when all the good memories come back.

How do you look back on your injury?

Honestly, I feel lucky because I lost so many friends who I served with in Afghanistan. I survived and now have so many opportunities in life, but they can't come back. We supported each other in a warzone, and that is a very, very tough place to be, but it is also the place where we became very close to each other.



Alison Grant

Ali joined the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps as a nurse in 1991 when she was 23 years old

Can you tell us how you were injured?

I had just come back from a tour of Iraq during the Gulf War and was on leave driving to my parents in Switzerland when I was hit by a drunk driver. I broke my neck which resulted in me using a wheelchair.

What do you remember from the crash?

I remember the emergency services cutting me out of the car, which took about four hours. I remember the engine being on fire. I remember the feeling in my legs starting to go, and I remember an excruciating pain in my collarbone. It was a frightening time.

What were the extent of your injuries?

Because the other car landed on top of mine it was like a compression injury on my neck. I fractured five of the seven vertebrae in my neck, but with the whiplash, one completely shattered. I fractured my collarbone and cut tendons in my right hand, but I was lucky not to sustain any internal or head injuries. It could have been a lot worse.

You received treatment in France...

I spent six weeks in intensive care in a French hospital. They put me on a ventilator and performed a tracheotomy to secure my airway. They thought I would have to be on a ventilator for the rest of my life. After six weeks, I was transferred to the spinal injuries unit at Stoke Mandeville Hospital where I spent eight and a half months in intensive rehab: physio, hydrotherapy, occupational therapy, getting used to a



"I spent six weeks in intensive care. I quickly realised I had two choices: curl up and die or get on with it"

wheelchair. I realised I had two choices: curl up and die or get on with it. I chose the latter.

How did the crash change your life?

Life changed totally and I can't do it without help. I have two very kind people who help me on a 24-hour basis. After I was medically discharged, I couldn't nurse any more. I'd lost my career so I went back to university and did a law degree. After I graduated

I chose not to practice, so now I do voluntary work and I am a Blesma Trustee.

What does the Association mean to you?

I was one of the first people with loss of use of limb to become a full-time Member. The camaraderie, especially on activities and at events, gives a real feeling that you're still within the military family. But it's about so much more than activities. It's the welfare support to Widows, to families, and to the individuals, to the people who are on their own. I have been a Member Trustee for six years, and the amount of work the Association does is phenomenal.

How often do you revisit the accident in your mind?

I don't think of the car crash very often any more – when I do I tend to burst out crying. Over the years, a lot of friends have lost a lot more than I have.

Lamin Manneh

Lamin, originally from The Gambia, joined 1st Battalion The Irish Guards when he was in his late twenties

You were injured on New Year's Eve...

That's right, in 2010. I don't remember what happened, I just know what colleagues have told me. I stepped on an IED on operations in Afghanistan. I lost both legs above the knee and my arm above the elbow, as well as my two front teeth. I do remember lying on a stretcher, then I felt something go into my chest. Two weeks later I woke up in hospital in Birmingham.

And your wife was by your bedside...

When I came out of the coma my wife told me that I had lost my legs. I didn't believe her – I could still feel them. When I touched my arm, I said: 'Oh my God, it's true.'

Can you remember your initial thoughts?

I thought that was the end of everything in life for me. I thought I was going to be useless, that I would never be able to do anything for myself. Before, I liked to challenge myself but without my arm and legs I thought I wouldn't be able to do that. It was devastating for me. It hit me hard.



How did your wife deal with all this?

When I woke up, my wife didn't want me to see her upset. A long time afterwards, she told me the doctors would call her and my parents in those two weeks to come and say goodbye because they thought I was going to die. My breathing would stop and the doctors would scramble to get things working again. She had a lot of sleepless nights.

And you had a young family at that time...

At first, I felt I wouldn't be able to give them the support they needed. But when I went to Headley Court I started to realise that no matter what your circumstances, there are always things you can do. I wanted to show my kids that nothing is impossible if you have resilience, that if you put in the effort you can get to where you want to be. Things happen that you have to accept rather than moaning and blaming others or yourself.

During rehab you learned of Blesma...

For me, it is one of the best military charities this country has ever provided. Blesma stood by my side in my darkest moments. No matter the time, day or night, their support network was always there. Without them I don't know if things would be the same for me – I cannot be more grateful.

How important is the camaraderie it offers?

Blesma plays a vital role in keeping veterans in touch with each other. Sometimes, you meet older veterans who served in WWII and you know you are on the same path because you went through the same thing.

How do you feel about your injuries now?

We all pay a price, but I'm here to speak to my kids, to take them to football, to give them guidance and provide for them. We all go through hardships, but many people don't have the opportunities I have.

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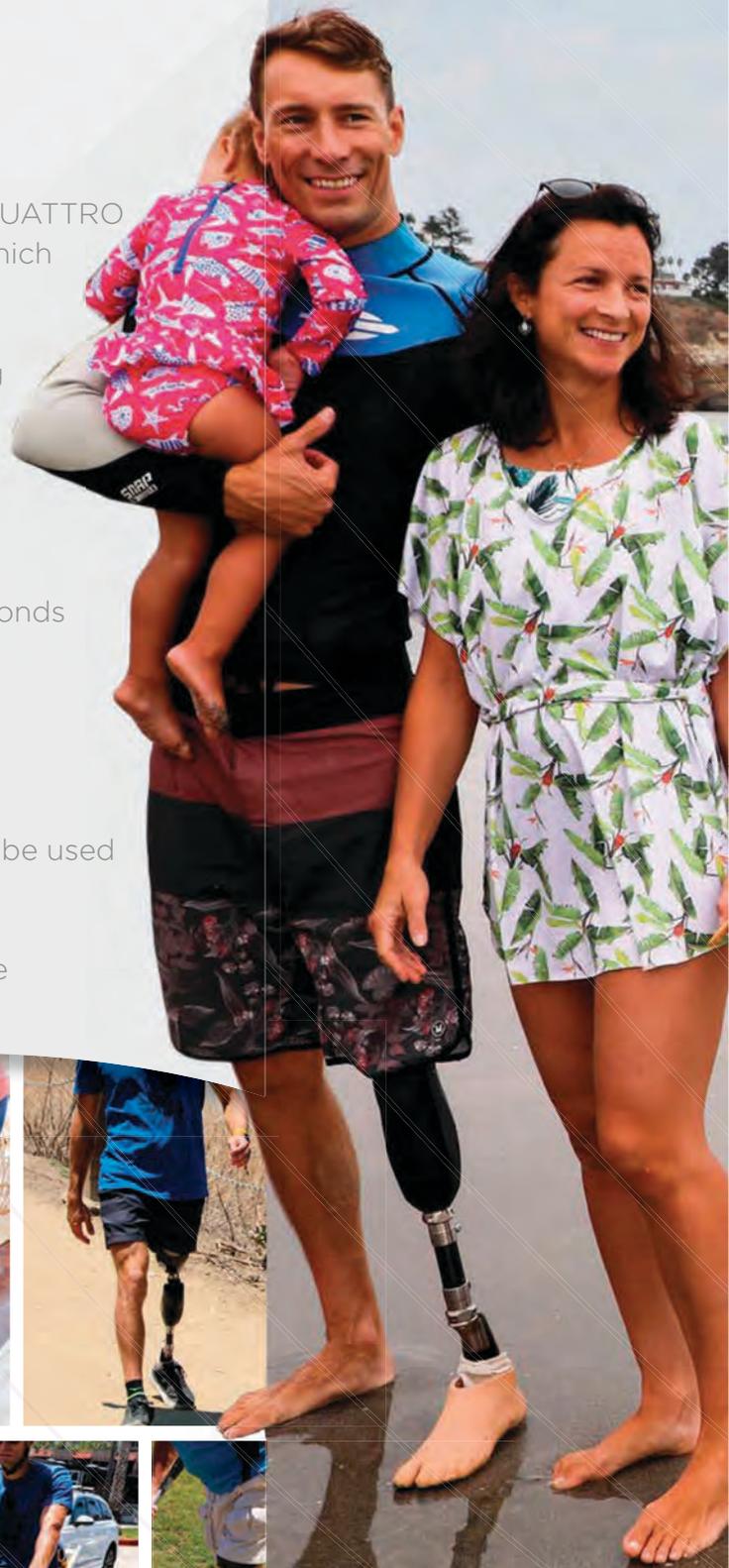
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“WE WERE UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT RAAM WAS GOING TO BE VERY DIFFICULT”

THIS SUMMER, A TEAM OF BLESMA MEMBERS HAD TO COPE WITH BROKEN BONES AND BROKEN DOWN BUSES AS THEY PUSHED THEIR MINDS AND BODIES TO THE ABSOLUTE LIMIT IN A NON-STOP 3,000-MILE BIKE RACE FROM ONE SIDE OF THE USA TO THE OTHER

When you're taking part in an event that's billed as the world's toughest bicycle race, you really don't want to have to deal with a series of unexpected problems. But for the Blesma team competing in the Race Across America (RAAM) in June crashes, technical malfunctions, and heat so severe that one Member's flip flops started melting into the Tarmac came thick and fast.

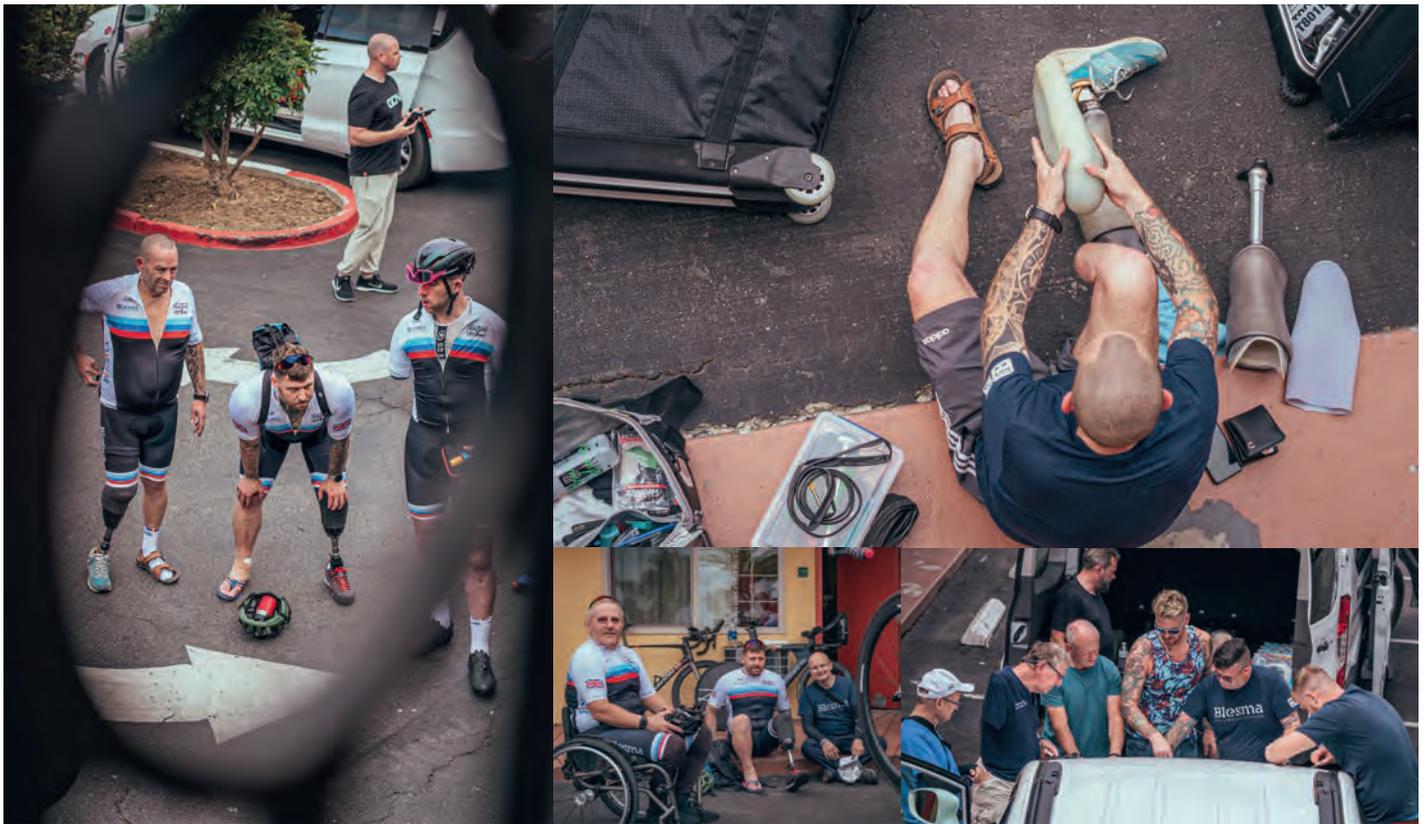
“It looked just like the inside of a cheese toastie,” says Dan Richards about his molten footwear. “Arizona and California weren't just hot, they were too hot to stand still for even a moment. I was definitely glad to see the back of those states, but we were under no illusions that it was going to be difficult.”

That's an understatement. The RAAM is a daunting 3,081-mile ride from the Pacific Coast in the west of the US to the Atlantic Coast in the east. It traverses deserts (with the aforementioned heat) and wild open plains, and negotiates busy cities across





Words: Nick Moore Photography: Dave Zaple Photography



12 states with over 190,000 feet of ascent. The kicker to RAAM's already-spiky challenge is that there is little chance to rest: at any one time during the race, a member of your 'pod' (Blesma's eight riders split into two pods) must be on the road, moving steadily forward.

Sleep deprivation becomes a real problem as there isn't enough time to fully rest, and for the support crew in the coach alongside the riders, having to constantly navigate and assist those on the road takes its toll.

DEALING WITH A DOUBLE DISASTER

Postponed for two years due to Covid, the original Blesma involvement was meant to be back in 2020. The event is tricky enough for any team, but Blesma's squad included two arm amputees, two hand cyclists with spinal injuries, two above-knee, and two below-knee amputees. And matters were certainly not helped when team captain Wil Browning had a serious crash early in the race that meant he had to withdraw.

Second-in-command Dan Richards, a former King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery soldier who had his right arm and shoulder amputated following a motorcycle accident, suddenly had to step up.

“HE WAS GOING FAST AND THE RESULTING CRASH FRACTURED RIBS AND PUNCTURED A LUNG. HE HAD TO GO STRAIGHT TO HOSPITAL”



The team had other issues, too. “We were riding the first section in Borrego Springs, California when we were told our support coach had a problem,” says former Invictus Games athlete Dan. “We thought it would be fine, but nine hours later we learned it had catastrophically broken down. The coach is the hub of any team – it is where everyone eats, travels and recovers, so it was a real problem.

“Then, coming into the city of Brawley, there were terrible road surfaces. I told Wil to be careful on them but shortly afterwards we got news that he had come off his bike. He'd gone over the hard shoulder – in the US they are sunk into the cement – and crashed his bike. He was going fast in a tailwind and the resulting crash fractured some of his ribs and punctured a lung. He had to go straight to hospital.”

Dan was suddenly thrust into the role of team leader. “I had been very happy being second in command – I never thought I'd have to be captain – but 12 hours into the race, that's exactly what happened!”

With the dual disasters of losing their bus and captain, the race organisers, keen to support a team of disabled veterans,



John Williams takes on the scorching heat of Arizona during one of the early days of the race



IT'S A VERY LONG WAY ACROSS THE USA

More than 3,000 miles to be exact – what better way to do it than by bicycle?

While RAAM's individual competitors are (obviously!) allowed to stop and sleep, teams must always have someone cycling – day and night. Racers cycle more than

3,000 miles across 12 states, climbing more than 190,000 vertical feet. Teams must finish in nine days, while solo racers have 12 days to complete the race.

cut them some slack. They were allowed to regroup in a local motel to work out how – or even if – they could continue, and eventually opted to restart in Colorado.

“I consulted with Wil, even though he was in hospital, so we could make a team decision,” says Dan. “It was a bitter pill to swallow, but as a team we made the decision to accept the organisers’ offer of being escorted to a new start point to catch up. We had lost a day and a half between the damage to the vehicle and Wil’s crash, so we decided to go for it.”

TIME TO FORM A SUPER POD

“We combined our teams after restarting, and transformed into a super pod,” says Dan, “and after we reached Flagstaff in Arizona, the next 48 hours became my favourite part of the whole race. I was with Matt Edwards in one support vehicle, and at one point we’d had four hours’ sleep, and there was a 40-mile climb ahead with a six per cent average gradient. We found something to laugh about when the chips were down – it felt like being on operations again! We decided to do short stints up the hill to try and maintain a decent average speed.



Wil Browning had a serious crash during the event, breaking ribs and puncturing a lung



Lack of sleep and the heat was wearing on everyone, so Matt and I decided to tag team the hill. We did 500m stints, and I think it geed up the other guys, like Grant Jenkins, who was brilliant and really surprised himself.

“As captain, watching the team grow in confidence was great. We got into a rhythm and just focused on what we were doing; we put our heads down and just turned the pedals over.”

As a huge cycling enthusiast, Dan’s training during lockdown kicked in. “I’d heavily researched what was involved in the event and when RAAM was postponed twice I thought I’d train for the worst case scenario, and anything better would be a bonus. I think it saves you getting let down.

“With the time I saved working from home I decided to throw myself into cycling. I was out training at 5am in the morning, five days a week. I knew what I’d signed up for with RAAM, and that I was one of the stronger cyclists on the team, so I took that as a responsibility. I wanted to feel ready.”

Back in the US, the terrain and climate eventually became a little more forgiving.

“When we got to Kansas it was very flat and straight – I was happy to get home and

“WE FOUND SOMETHING TO LAUGH ABOUT WHEN THE CHIPS WERE DOWN. IT FELT LIKE BEING ON OPERATIONS ALL OVER AGAIN”

see a roundabout – and then everything got greener as we headed to the east coast.”

OFFERING MORE THAN SUPPORT

The event wasn’t just gruelling for the riders, though. The support squad worked ridiculous hours, spinning multiple plates to keep the show on the road. Steven Williams, who served with the Royal Scots and 1 Scots before losing an eye in a training accident, was part of the crew. “I was the red pod leader – we’d do nine-hour shifts while the other pod rested,” he says. “We did some training for the event back in March, and



ALEX KROL

Alex, 40, is a former Royal Marine from Liverpool and was one of the hand cyclists to participate in RAAM

How did you get involved in RAAM?

I’ve done quite a few cycling trips with Blesma, and when I saw the email about RAAM I thought: ‘Wow!’ I’m not a natural cyclist, the recumbent bike isn’t comfy and you are vulnerable on the road, but I liked the idea of the challenge. I just had to go for it!

How was the race for you?

That first 12-hour stint through the desert heat was tough! We weren’t meant to do hills on the hand bikes, but ended up doing some massive ones. Then the plan went out the window when the bus blew up and Wil had his accident.

But you pushed on...

At no time did we think we should jack it in. We had a responsibility to ourselves, to Blesma, to a gang of people following us on social media. On the road, the variety of scenery was amazing. It was mega going down a nine-mile descent called The Glass Elevator, for example. We freewheeled down 10,000 feet!

Have you stayed in the saddle since?

I’ve been back biking this week, so I’m sticking at it. This was a great chapter in my story book and I’m definitely going to keep challenging myself.



Dan Richards had to step up and captain the team after Wil's crash forced him to retire

I liked the mechanics of it, the nature of it, and the responsibility. I've done Blesma trips before but most of those were a lot more leisurely than this.

"We had minimal sleep as we had to sort out the riders' eating, sleeping and drinking, as well as timing shifts and constantly navigating. I also found it a bit tricky being a younger member of the team as I was delegating tasks to people in their 50s and 60s, and worried they were thinking: 'Who the hell are you?'"

But as is often the case on challenges like this, adversity bred camaraderie.

"The extra struggles with Wil getting knocked off and the bus breaking down did bond us together as a group," says Steven. "It's one of the most challenging things I've done, physically and mentally, but it was fantastic – I loved it!"

"Watching the robustness of the cyclists given the conditions was very impressive. It was so intense but I really enjoyed the social side of it. We all built friendships and I've managed to stay in touch with a few people."

Reaching the finish line stirred up new emotions. "We were so glad to see it as

"IT WAS INTENSE BUT I ENJOYED THE SOCIAL SIDE OF IT. WE BUILT FRIENDSHIPS, AND I'VE STAYED IN TOUCH WITH A FEW PEOPLE"

we'd completed half the distance under very difficult circumstances," says Dan. "It made me realise that I want to do the full race again – and this time finish it properly. It was a great experience and I've developed hugely as a cyclist. I think everyone – from the riders to the crew – took something positive away from the experience. New-found confidence was a take-home for everyone."

Blesma offers a comprehensive cycling programme that caters for all levels and injuries. Find out more at www.blesma.org



WIL BROWNING

Wil, 48, served with the Scots Guards and lost his left arm as the result of a vascular condition. He suffered a serious crash early in the race

Can you remember your crash?

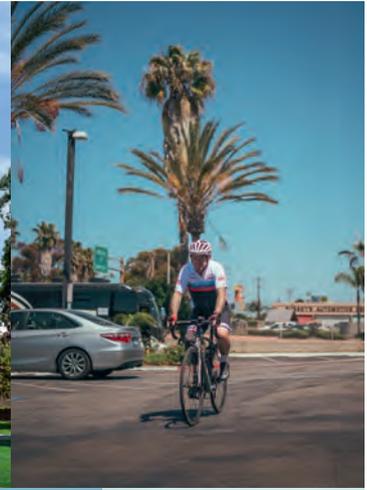
I decided to go out early and lead by example after our bus had problems. I was enjoying the adrenaline and had been riding for seven miles. I was doing 27mph when, before I knew it, I was in the air. I didn't know if I'd hit something, because there was a lot of rubbish on the road, or if I'd had an issue with my prosthetic, but I was just scraping along the floor still attached to my bike.

What happened next?

I was knocked unconscious and came round with people shouting. I was put in the van and just thought I'd be back out again soon, but I was concussed and sent to hospital. I was triaged and then flown in a helicopter to Park Springs. It turned out I had four broken ribs, a punctured lung, a broken collarbone and fractures in my shoulder blade. I was disappointed, embarrassed and emotional.

Are you planning to get back on a bike?

I'm still struggling with injury, but I'm getting better. I'd love to do RAAM, to right that wrong, but before that I'm going to do the Pan Celtic Race, which is a 1,600-mile self-supported ride. I believe I'll be the first amputee to take part.



Alex Krol (centre) and in action (above) was one of two hand cyclists who took part in the race

Come along to Blesma's Christmas 2022 Carol Service

Tuesday 13 December
Chelmsford Cathedral at 7.30pm

- * Festive readings
- * Christmas carol singing
- * Performance from soprano singers
- Classic Reflections
- * Mulled wine and mince pies
- * Chat to staff, members and other supporters

Register for your
free ticket at
www.blesma.org



Bulletin

Cameras ready for the Isle of Man trip

C On 11 May, seven Blesma Members headed to the airport for a short flight on a private plane to the Isle of Man for a week-long photography expedition. The trip was organised and paid for by a very kind Isle of Man resident called Patricia.

The activity was led by Terri Hunt with the help of John Francis. In the time leading up to the trip, John contacted all the participants informing everyone what the activity entailed and what to expect, whilst also taking the time to answer any questions we had, and alleviate any concerns.

On our arrival at the Isle of Man airport we were greeted by a volunteer from the island who helped with our luggage and escorted us to a minibus, which was to be our mode of transport for the week. Before going to the B&B we were invited to lunch at the Priory Hotel, where a three-course meal was on offer at no cost to the Members or Blesma, as it was funded by Patricia.

Once lunch was finished, we headed to the B&B, which was part of a working farm. On arrival, we were greeted by the owner, our host for the week, Helen Masson. Helen not only looked after all our needs throughout our stay, but also, along with family members, became our tour guide, confidant, and friend. The family, and in



particular Helen and her husband John, went above and beyond what was expected of them in accommodating our individual needs, ensuring our trip would be one that would be fondly remembered by all in attendance.

The week was extremely well organised and thought out, which must have taken a lot of time and effort in planning. We visited numerous beautiful places on the island, which gave Members fantastic opportunities to take some spectacular photographs whilst

developing their skills with the help of Terri, John and Steve Marsh (an islander and veteran).

The week was action packed and included a variety of events and opportunities (the following list is not exhaustive):

- A morning sail with the 'Sailing for the Disabled' charity on a 46ft yacht. This gave Members the opportunity to gain sailing skills as well as stunning photography and video opportunities

“We visited numerous beautiful places on the island, which gave Members fantastic opportunities to take some spectacular photographs whilst developing their skills”

Continued from over

- An afternoon with two professional photographers from the island, who gave invaluable guidance and information in the art of photography
- An evening at the Manx Legion, where we were treated as special guests and offered free food and drink throughout the evening, with fantastic entertainment and even an opportunity to practice our bingo skills. This was a fantastic opportunity, not only to get to know the islanders, but to also promote Blesma as a charity
- An evening at The Maze in the South Barrule Forest Park, where we participated in an axe throwing competition, (which I was very poor at!) and laser shooting (my forté!) Again, this brought the group closer together and made the evening fun. Once again, it also afforded Members a fantastic opportunity for photography. The whole event, which included dinner, was laid on and funded by the owner, Carl Underwood, who is a veteran
- A visit to see the long haired/horned cattle. The owner very kindly took one of the Members, a double amputee and a wheelchair user, amongst the herd in a towed trailer, to give him a better vantage point to take photographs of the cattle
- Along with Terri Hunt, the family and owners of the B&B arranged a trip to visit their equestrian centre, cows and calves, and milking station. There were also donkeys on the farm where we were staying and, along with Terri, I took the opportunity to groom them. This was a challenging but rewarding experience in itself

Every day threw up new challenges and opportunities, and with the guidance and encouragement from both Terri and our host family, I was given the valuable opportunity to overcome my fear of horses and cows, and of flying in a small aircraft. This has been a lifelong fear of mine, which I can now say I have come a long way in overcoming, and for this I will be eternally grateful to all those involved.

I can honestly say that this was a fantastic experience, and one which I will treasure



The group had an amazing experience, which allowed them to take some amazing pictures



for the rest of my life. As with all Blesma activities, not only do I feel the activity in itself was amazing but so was the opportunity to bring Blesma Members together, allowing stories to be shared and offloaded, whilst also giving Members the opportunity to make lifelong friends.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Blesma Activities team, Terri Hunt, John Francis, Helen and John Masson and family, Steve Marsh, Patricia (who



funded not only our flights to and from the island, but also the sailing, minibus and several meals out), and also the many islanders who made this a memorable and rewarding experience.

Janet Riddell

Outreach Scotland's anniversary BBQ

On Monday 04 July, Outreach Scotland held its 90th anniversary BBQ. With 35 people attending, it was the largest event that the Scotland team has held to date. The event was held at the Military Museum Scotland, which also provided the lovely BBQ food. Gerry McGregor from The Veterans Tribe (a local charity providing crafting activities for veterans) provided stone painting and wind chime making activities for everyone free of charge.

There were also books from Reading Force and a representative (Paul Johnson) from Finding Your Feet (a local charity supporting amputees) who chatted to Members about the charity.

Transport for a Member was provided by Fares4Free, and their driver coordinator judged the baking competition along with Paul from Finding Your Feet and BSO Steve Burton. The competition was won by Deborah Mellon, a Member's wife, for her sunflower biscuits, with Member Dave Moore coming a very close second with

his pavlova. A kids' colouring competition was won by a Member's grandson Harris Britton, with second place going to Member's daughter Sarah Mellon.

Member Ian Reid and his wife donated a number of cakes, including a large birthday cake to celebrate the event, which was funded by donations from Ancre & Somme Association Scotland and Widow Member Helen MacKenzie.



Support Officer checks in on Member during flying visit

A Blesma Support Officer's visit to a Member would normally be conducted in their home, usually at ground level, and ideally over a cup of tea. But with Member Louis Farrell firmly into his Commercial Pilot License training, the only way BSO South West Steve Fraser could pin him down was to join him for a training flight above Exeter and the south coast.

Steve admitted it was quite novel trying to conduct his health and welfare checks at 3,000ft – especially as Louis had to be constantly alert to the constant flow of information from Exeter Air Traffic Control and other aircraft in the area.

However, Louis handled the visit and the business of safely operating the aircraft in busy airspace faultlessly, demonstrating

why TUI have accepted him onto their pilot programme along with three other veterans.

Louis' training has been coordinated and funded by Wings for Warriors, with additional funding coming from The Veterans Foundation and Blesma.



A fine day out at the National Arboretum

Following the closure of the Walsall and District Branch last year, a group of Members got together to visit the National Memorial Arboretum. The trip was organised by former Branch member Mike Gallagher, who plans to host such get togethers at least twice a year to help former Branch members stay in touch.

The group of 10 included friends and partners, who enjoyed the visit on a lovely May day. The gathering started off with coffee in the sunshine, which gave the opportunity for many catching-up stories to be shared. The group then went their separate ways as they enjoyed train rides, visits to favourite memorials, and leisurely walks. There is so much to do in just a small amount of time.

The group reconvened for lunch in the Heroes Square, which enabled further stories to be shared. The visit ended with a mid-afternoon photo opportunity in the Blesma garden. All agreed it had been a lovely day with lots of laughter and, thankfully, no rain!

Annie gets award for 30 years' service

In April, Annie Macmillan was recognised with the Meritorious Service award for 30 years of committed service to the welfare of limblex ex-servicemen and women.

"I am very humbled to receive the award. It was 35 years ago that I did my first fundraising for the Association," said Annie on receiving her award. "I have loved every minute of my time with Blesma. It is a caring and compassionate association. Thank you so very much for this unexpected award. I will treasure it."

Annie was presented with her award on 15 June by Ian Harper, Blesma's Director Independence and Wellbeing.

Widows Week: a time for fun and making new friendships

After organising and leading several regional events and activities in Northern Ireland, I was fortunate to be selected to lead the Widows Week at Littlecote House (Warner Hotels) in Berkshire with BSO Steve Burton.

The itinerary focused on sightseeing in and around the Cotswold countryside, socialising, and taking some time to relax. For a few of the ladies, including myself, this was their first ever Widows Week. On arrival at the hotel the ladies with a shared life experience greeted one another with a warm welcome which set the tone for the rest of the week. Within days they were fondly referring to themselves as ‘The Magnificent Seven’.



The weather was kind to us during our sightseeing trips. We boarded the GWSR steam train at Cheltenham Racecourse Station, somewhat late due to an unplanned detour, but the train waited for us and once we got on board we were able to see the glorious views along the way to Broadway.

After a quick photo shoot with the train staff and a short drive, we enjoyed the delights of afternoon tea in the village of Bourton-on-the-Water known as ‘The



“A fabulous week was had with much fun and laughter, good food and some dancing. The ladies greeted one another with a warm welcome which set the tone for the rest of the week”



Venice of the Cotswolds'. There was some time to sit and relax, taking in the views of this beautiful village whilst some spent their time shopping in the eclectic local shops.

The next day we travelled to Sudeley Castle and Gardens, once a royal residence, where we learned about the history, and admired the library and rooms as well as the exhibitions on show within the castle and gardens. Some ventured into St Mary's Church opposite the castle to see the tomb

of Queen Katherine Parr. A short lunch was followed by more walks around the gardens including the Queen's Garden, the Knot Garden and the Secret Garden, where some of the Widows found a distorting mirror; a lot of fun and laughter followed.

Thursday was a rest day; some of the Widows took a grand tour of Littlecote, not one but three houses. The earliest dates back to around 1250 and is steeped in history with its own chapel, haunted landing and bedroom, long gallery and great hall, surrounded with the most beautiful grounds. The ladies finished the week with a spa treatment of their choice.

A fabulous week was had with much fun and laughter, good food and some dancing. Before the Widows went home I wanted to hand over some gifts. The 'Crafty' Blesma Widows from Northern Ireland had sent with me some handcrafted items for the ladies; crochet lap/shoulder blankets in Blesma colours and knitted hats. Along with this the ladies received handmade cards from children and grandchildren of Northern Ireland Members with messages of kindness. A fitting finale and the Widows were hugely grateful.

A big thank you goes to the Activities Team for organising and planning this revitalising week for our Widows.

Fiona Morrison

What the ladies had to say...

"I really don't want to go home. It has been such a wonderful holiday with the most incredible ladies who I shall miss. Steve and Fiona, you have been amazing – what lovely people you are. The hotel, the excursions, the care and help you have given us has been above and beyond. You made us all feel special. I could go on and on. Thanks again for everything, this will go in my special memories."

"What I got from Widows Week: a new lease of life, a chance to meet new people who quickly became friends, and to go home feeling revitalised. A great few days with fantastic people!"

"I have enjoyed a lovely few days away with other Widows. Fiona and Steve have been wonderful and very kind to me. It means such a lot."

Landscape painting course: from treescapes to seascapes

The aim of this local activity was to bring out the inner artist in those Members who were participating whilst helping with their general mindfulness and wellbeing. It was not about just copying, drawing and painting, but about having a go and participating in a new experience. All materials were provided, although Members could bring their own if they preferred.

Six Members participated, and across the three-day course each Member was encouraged to let go and allow their imagination to take over. Cat Croxford, the resident professional artist, encouraged, empowered, and shared techniques which allowed each person to get the most out of the experience.

The studio was based in the middle of the Mapledurham Estate, with pheasants running across the fields whilst birds of prey circled above. We therefore got the chance to paint to the sound of birds singing all around. For two days we had

“Everyone had a fantastic experience. We laughed, gave and received a lot of banter, and now just need to figure out where to hang our new pieces of art”

a swallow regularly assessing the studio as a nesting site! The studio and hotel were completely accessible, so everyone was able to participate fully and complete all parts of the course.

On the first day we were straight in at the deep end drafting and painting a treescapes. On day two we progressed to a larger canvas for a seascape and finally,



on day three, we chose our canvas to paint a landscape in whichever style we chose. Importantly, each Member was encouraged to develop their own style.

Everyone had a fantastic learning experience. We laughed, gave and received a lot of banter, and now just need to figure out where to hang our three new pieces of art (the term ‘art’ being used very loosely!)

We would all like to thank Blesma and the team in Chelmsford for a fabulous activity. It is very much appreciated and has made a huge difference to us all. Thanks must also go to Cat, who clearly has the patience of a saint.

Steve McNeice



Members were able to unleash their inner artist on the three-day painting course

A first and fabulous Seniors Weekend for Ron and Denise

I have been a Blesma Member for about 10 years but until recently had never been on an activity with my wife before. As with everyone else, the Covid period took its toll on us, so we decided to apply for a place at Seniors Weekend. It was a great experience, in particular meeting and socialising with other Members from the different Blesma areas. Being able to socialise, discuss and explore individual life experiences with fellow amputees was both inspiring and educational.

The various activities were an exceptional mix, and the freedom to choose whether or not to participate in an activity was refreshing. It was great to just be able to chill out at the hotel venue, use the swimming pool or have a massage – the choice was up to the individual.

It was such a refreshing change being able to have my wife with me to help with things like my medication. But the real bonus was for my wife not having to push or lift my wheelchair daily into the different venues or cars.

The one standout question that my BSO asked me was if there was anything they

could do to help make the break more enjoyable? I asked if there was a chance of hiring an electric wheelchair or scooter from the hotel and shortly thereafter I had a call confirming that I could have a loaned electric wheelchair! This meant that for the very first time as a couple my wife and

I could go to a Blesma gathering without my wife having to work to care for me as previously described.

If I hadn't been given the opportunity to borrow the electric wheelchair I would have dismissed the occasion after the first day. But the two BSO organisers were so switched on and had done an extremely thorough pre-venue reconnaissance which made the venue accessible for us.

The trips were – I believe for the whole group – exceptional, creative, imaginative and very well received.

From the timing of the transport to the food and toilet breaks, the trips ran like clockwork. An exceptional, well organised few days that my wife and I needed and thoroughly enjoyed.

I would like to thank all the Blesma staff who made this activity possible but in particular the two BSOs concerned for their hands-on sterling approach in dealing with the whole trip.

Ron Scott



Orca attack makes for a thrilling sailing adventure

Last June I caught the Eurostar from St Pancras to Paris, then took a taxi to Montparnasse station. From there, I boarded my next train, which took me to Brest in Brittany, north west France.

Almost a year earlier we had arrived in Brest from Gosport on board a 45ft sailing boat. *Zephyr* is a cruiser/racer; a boat that I have sailed many thousands of miles on, including in the 2017 Fastnet. Marinos, the owner, is Greek and he was planning on taking the boat to the Ionian Islands. Unfortunately, due to Covid, we were now doing this in legs rather than one passage.

The plan was to sail from Brest to Sardinia, a passage that we estimated should take around 10 days. When the right weather window came on 23 June we headed out into the Bay of Biscay, hoisted our sails, set our course and off we went.

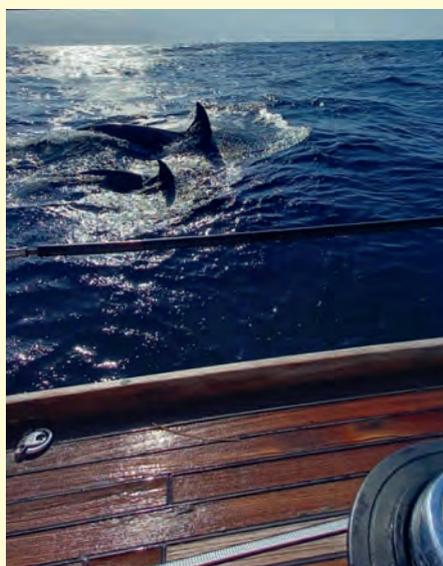
It takes a day or two to get into the watchkeeping routine, but with the northerly airflow we had a relatively smooth passage across Biscay and, two-and-a-half days later, Cape Finisterre on the north west tip of Spain came into view. We continued south down the Portuguese coast, rounding Cape Trafalgar and into the Gulf of Cadiz.

On 29 June, the sun was just breaking through, the morning watch were handing over to the forenoon, the coffee was brewing and the bacon was sizzling. We could just see Morocco on our starboard bow. Life doesn't get much better than this!

We were then joined by a pod of dolphins, or so we thought. We had seen many pods on the way down but these were much bigger and they surrounded the boat, nothing ominous at this stage, until our helmsman shouted that he couldn't turn the wheel. That's when our predicament became apparent, we were being attacked by a pod of Orcas! We could see them swimming under the stern and biting the rudder – we could hear it as well! As debris from the rudder started coming to the surface, the two steering wheels were being swung violently both ways until eventually, and with a loud bang, the steering cable snapped.



This now rendered the steering wheels useless and some of the other Orcas were literally headbutting the side of the boat – it was a very surreal moment! A hasty call to the Spanish coastguard confirmed our suspicions and they informed us that many other boats in this area had been attacked



by the Orcas and they too had lost their rudders. They advised us to switch off the echo sounder and the engine, and just sit it out. After about an hour or so the attacks stopped and the Orcas disappeared. In the cockpit we just sat looking at each other and thinking to ourselves: 'Did that really just happen?'

By now, the coastguard had made their way out to provide assistance, and were offering a tow. The next day, with the help of a diver, we assessed the damage. The rudder was beyond repair and, with no chance of a replacement in the next few days, we decided to leave the boat there. It was disappointing to have to finish our voyage there, but I did get the chance to visit Gibraltar – some 45 years after my first visit aboard HMS Plymouth as a JMEM when the frigate was there on guard ship duties for a month in 1976.

Nigel Smith

Mark Smith: from needing help to helping others

Blesma Member Mark Smith has an incredible story to tell. Having signed up at 16 years of age with little-to-no education, he suffered with many mental health struggles post-service which nearly took his life. Then, a diagnosis set him on the right track. He got himself back up and back into education, eventually completing a post graduate diploma while dealing with the loss of his leg. Now, with help from Blesma, he runs his own counselling service to help other veterans.

When I was 16, I joined up as a Junior Soldier with the Coldstream Guards, then joined the 1st Battalion after completing my training. I spent nine years serving, from 1988 to 1997. During that time, I carried out ceremonial duties in London and armoured Infantry duties in Germany, and I took part in operational tours in the Gulf War, Northern Ireland, and Bosnia.

I had a lot of problems when I left the military and my marriage fell apart. I suffered with drink, drugs, anger issues and a few mental health problems as well. I had quite a few years on 'the other side of the fence'. I was getting into trouble, spiralling downhill, and I ended up with a spell of homelessness as well. Following a suicide attempt, a psychiatrist took me on and diagnosed me with PTSD as a result of my military service.

That was the turning point for me, because after a few years of these issues I finally knew why I was how I was. Having a diagnosis gave me the kickstart I needed, and really helped me put into place where



I was with my mental health. Later however, I saw an NHS counsellor, who couldn't even hear my stories about Bosnia. He shut me off and said he wasn't trained to deal with it. That really set me back, and I hit rock

bottom again. That's when I started thinking about what was going on out there; if that could happen to me, was it happening to other veterans, too? I was very lucky to come out the other side, but there are a lot who don't. So I decided then that I wanted to help other veterans. At first, no one would take me seriously because I didn't have any qualifications; I needed the paperwork.

I got help from Billy Macleod at Veterans in Action, and he encouraged me to get into education and get my maths and English qualifications. I then took three A levels to get into university, where I decided to study Counselling and Psychology. I learned so much about myself it was amazing, it was like I'd found myself again. We talk about reflection a lot in counselling, and when I looked back on the hard times and where I'd come from, it started making sense.

Studying PTSD helped me to make sense of things, and I asked my university if I could do an additional module for veterans. They agreed, and I graduated with a 2:1 honours.

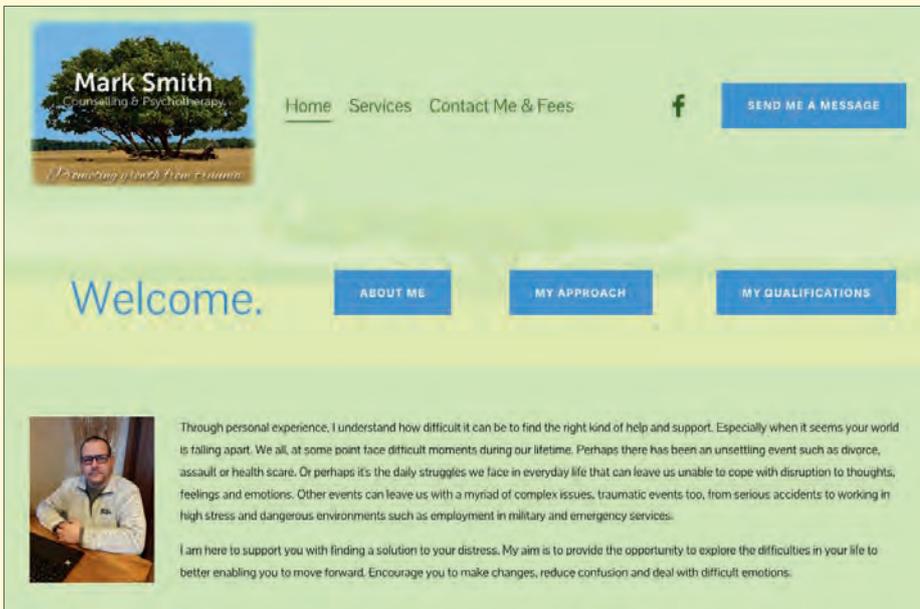
EXPERIENCE AND VOLUNTEERING

Next, I wanted to gain experience. I started doing a lot of volunteer work, including casework for SSAFA and counselling at a family support centre, and I found that I was able to communicate well with a lot of people from diverse backgrounds.

Without disclosing too much, I was able to show that I understood their situation and empathised with what they were going through. At that time, I was working as a kitchen and bathroom fitter alongside my education, but soon I started to have health problems. I suffer with diabetes, and I was starting to get nerve damage in my big toes, and pains in my hands. That was when I started slowly making the transition, spending less time on labour and more time on the counselling side of things.

Whilst volunteering, I engaged with a lot of veterans and their families, helping to signpost them, and just talking through options to show what kind of counselling

“If that could happen to me, was it happening to other veterans? I was lucky to come out the other side, but there are a lot who don't. So I decided that I wanted to help other veterans”



would be right for them. One thing I noticed was that many veterans don't reach out until the very last point when it comes to their mental health, which can make NHS waiting lists frustrating for them to deal with when they need help there and then. I started doing more and more volunteering for veterans, not just counselling, but talking things through, which allowed me to signpost them to the people and organisations that could help. I carried on volunteering and studying, and finally started on my post-graduate diploma in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy.

A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Then came the point where I started losing bits. It started with an infection in my big toe that I didn't even notice. It turned into sepsis, which meant the toe had to come off. The doctors said that four more days and I wouldn't have made it. Things took a turn for the worse in my final year of university, as the infection had started to spread to the rest of my foot. I ended up having a below knee amputation, but I kept a positive attitude throughout thanks to the mindset and dark humour of other injured guys



I'd worked with. Unfortunately, another infection meant I had to have a through-knee amputation. I had to take a year out of university to heal, but that was the best thing I could have done. It healed nicely, and I was finally able to use a prosthetic which helped me to stay active – I even climbed Mount Snowdon with my brother!

Once I had completed my post-grad, I decided to set up a private counselling practice. I now had all the training and

“I can't thank Blesma enough for that kickstart, because without it I don't know where I'd be now. I'd have probably struggled on, but I didn't need to struggle. It was just that one thing that meant so much, so thank you!”

the insurance to run one properly, as a sole trader, but one thing I didn't have was the money needed to get the equipment to kickstart it. That's when I reached out to Blesma. My BSO Christine was very supportive, and she told me exactly what she needed from me in order to apply for a grant. The application was successful, and allowed me to buy a more suitable laptop for the business, as well as set up the website and pay for the software packages I needed.

As well as my own private clients, I now work with Cranstoun Inspire To Change in South Yorkshire. Of course, I still do my volunteering! I can't thank Blesma enough for that kickstart because without it, I don't know where I'd be now. I'd have probably struggled on, but I didn't need to struggle. It was just that one thing that meant so much, so thank you!

Mark Smith

For more information on Mark and his counselling services, visit his website www.marksmithcounselling.uk

Bournemouth and District Branch celebrates 75 years

Bournemouth is now packed with tourists so we decided to host the Branch meeting in Dorchester, which we also hoped would entice the western end of the county to join in. We chose to hold this on D-Day, 06 June, which seemed appropriate. All were invited as we were having a Jubilee lunch afterwards.

As it was D-Day, I thought it appropriate to remind everyone of the Members who were present on that momentous occasion, and suffered for many years because of it. We then held our silence.

The meeting was the usual light-hearted affair and we said our thanks to Brendan and Ann Snoddy for their sterling work for the Branch over many years. As they were unable to receive their award at Members' Weekend, BSO South West Steve Fraser presented Brendan and Ann with The Earl of Ancaster Award 2021 which recognises service by a Blesma volunteer. This was given to Brendan for his long service as the Branch Honorary Secretary, a role he was forced to give up this year, and for the numerous functions and events that he and Ann have jointly organised (and continue to assist with) since joining the Branch in 2010.

The Branch gave Brendan an engraved tankard and for Ann, a keen gardener,



a planter full of flowers. We also welcomed two new Members before we retired to the Duchess of Cornwall for a very long lunch. As it was her Jubilee, I wrote to Her Majesty and sent her loyal greetings from the Branch. She was gracious to send a reply which was welcomed by us all.

Peter Sherston-Baker
Branch Chairman and Welfare Officer



Lunch back on the menu after Covid

SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER & DISTRICT BRANCH

One effect of the COVID-19 pandemic over the last two years has been that it sadly reduced all Branch activities, including our Summer Social Activities and the outings on the Alison Macgregor boat which are much loved by Branch members.

Nonetheless, the Branch Committee has been very active in keeping in touch with all our members and widows, either by email or telephone, should any problems arise.

Sadly, we have seen some members and widows pass away. Dennis Stevenson, a former Honorary Treasurer and Chairman passed away in May and Sheila Rayner, who was our Social Secretary for many years, passed away in June. May they rest in peace.

In March 2021, we saw the members at our AGM appoint David Rowe as our Chairman and Gloria Ellerker as our Vice Chairlady. This was endorsed in March and they are supported by Jacquie Brodrick, our

Welfare Rep and myself, Stephen Coltman, as Honorary Secretary and Treasurer. Caroline Pedrick is our Social Secretary and the rest of the committee is made up of Margaret Savage, Stephen Bailey and Joyce Meader.

The Branch meets every fourth Monday at the Totton Community Centre and has a buffet lunch. Should any Blesma Member or Widow who lives in the area wish to join the Branch, they should contact myself on 01202 764168 and they would be most welcome.

We have resumed our normal Social Lunches and the latest was on 22 June. We welcomed the Mayor of Winchester, Derek Green and Sheila, his wife. Boston Mwense, the Blesma Finance Director, and Pat Donnachie (BSO South) were our other guests. We were very grateful to Caroline Pedrick for organising it.

Stephen Coltman
Honorary Secretary and Treasurer

Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

AMBROSE M	Royal Navy	28/06/2022
BALMFORTH G	Army	Not Known
BLACKBURN B		06/05/2022
BLADES C	RAF	Not Known
CANNON C		13/04/2022
CHAPMAN D	Army	07/05/2022
COLEGATE A		21/06/2022
CRAWFORD J	Army	24/05/2022
FITTON K	Army	Not Known
GLASS J	Army	01/08/2020
HANDLEY J		07/05/2022
HERRING D		03/01/2022
HOLLAND H		Not Known
MCALLISTER W	Army	16/06/2022
PETTY E		29/05/2022
PRITCHARD M		21/05/2022
PURVIS E		09/05/2022
ROBERTSON N	Army	24/05/2022
SAMPSON J		01/05/2022
SEELEY GLANVILL SMITH J	Army	10/05/2022
STEARN J		02/06/2022
STEVENSON D	Honorary Member	Not Known
SYKES A	RAF	28/06/2022
TURNER B		25/06/2022
WIGNER W		19/05/2022
WILLIAMS A	Army	Not Known



Northern Ireland update: from dinner dates to clay pigeons

It has been wonderful to see our Members and their families come along and enjoy the ever-increasing face-to-face activities. In addition to these activities, the At Home WhatsApp Book Club thrives, we have baked for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, and Members continue to meet online.

COME DINE WITH ME

Come Dine With Blesma was the theme for our cookery school event where Members and their partners learned how to cook the perfect steak with sides of garlic potatoes and spring greens followed by mini pavlova and raspberries. The talented Chef Jeffers ensured this was an enjoyable experience; as they say 'great food made simple'. One of our Members was chosen as the 'Master Blesma Chef' much to the delight of his wife; there won't be any more excuses for not cooking in that household! Everyone came away knowing how to cook the perfect steak and with those famous words 'Yes Chef!' ringing in our ears. A big thank you should go to the National Lottery Community Fund NI, who provided the funding for this event.

BIG SHOT

Big Shot was the chance for Members to enjoy a day of clay pigeon shooting from either a seated or standing position. Was there competitiveness? Yes, absolutely... A great day where the camaraderie between Members was clearly evident. The assistance and encouragement from the range conducting officers made this a day to remember.

GONE FISHING

Gone Fishing was the order of the day for Members and their families to enjoy 'catch and release' fishing at Northern Ireland Cross Community Angling. The volunteers at the fishery came out in force and did an astounding job of looking after us – from providing one-to-one coaching, to serving up a well-earned lunch before returning to the stands for the rest of the afternoon.



Member Frank Toner and his wife Lorraine



Brian Lawrence takes aim



Noel Downey (left) at the roadshow



Catch and release!



Member Nigel Lockhart (seated)

Rainbow trout, rudd and perch were all caught and released in this tranquil location. With everyone managing to catch a fish, no doubt there was a story to tell, from the biggest catch of the day to the one that got away. A big thank you must go to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) for their grant to help fund this event.

This was also the first opportunity to welcome Jake Bomber, the great-grandson of former Blesma Member Arthur Bomber, who passed away in 2019 aged 100. Jake is spending the next six months volunteering with Blesma Outreach for his Silver Duke of Edinburgh's Award and I look forward to helping him achieve this.

CHARITY OF CHOICE

We are extremely excited to be able to announce that Blesma was chosen as the charity of choice for the Belfast International Tattoo 2022 which took place in early September.

BLESMA MAKES A STAND

Hosting the Blesma stand at the NI Veterans Commissioner's Office Roadshows across many of the counties has been great fun and a good opportunity to better inform veterans and their families of accessible services in their local areas. It has also been an important time to enable organisations to network together. Additionally, we have been out in the community talking to various groups about Blesma. It is always an added bonus when a Member or Widow agrees to come along to give a personal account of the support provided.

Fiona Morrison



Member's grandson Zak with the first catch



Members in action



Outreach Officer Fiona with fundraiser Iain McAfee and his son Cameron

Scotland update: from drop-in talks to dolphin spotting

ONLINE DRAMA PROJECT

We are coming to the close of our second project with Stand Easy Productions. Members have been learning a bit more about performance and have subsequently made some changes to the script. At the time of writing, we are about to go into the final stage of recording the performance, which will be edited and then we will look at setting up online screenings.

As a result of our collaborative work with Stand Easy Productions, Members were invited to a performance of one of their other projects involving retired police officers. It was a very moving performance, and Members had the opportunity to chat to the performers before and after the performance.

PROSTHETIC AND PAIN MANAGEMENT FORUM

This continues to be held every six-to-eight weeks. The forum is a great opportunity for the BSO to provide an update from Limb Centres followed by an open forum for Members to share various tips and stories.

These meetings have proved very useful, and some Members have been referred for wider support with Pain Association Scotland and the Thistle Foundation who have helped them to manage, and even improve, their mental health and wellbeing. Initial feedback suggests that the courses have been really helpful, and Members have let others know what is involved to encourage them to take part.

CARRIAGE DRIVING

A request from a Member at one of the Christmas lunches to consider carriage driving as an activity led to a session with Gillian at Carrbridge Carriage Driving. The day started with Members meeting the horses and learning about the equipment, which was followed by some reign training before finally getting to practise with the horses. The weather was great and we finished the day with a lovely lunch in the Speyside Centre.



Sadly, Members didn't see any whales or dolphins on the whale and dolphin watching trip

ONLINE MOSAIC WORKSHOP

Once again, we had the pleasure of Rachel Davies leading us through an online mosaic workshop. This time, Rachel had designed a Blesma 90th anniversary-themed tile for us to work on. The results were quite striking.

RACKET SPORTS TASTER SESSION

Badminton Scotland organised a lovely day of racket sports and Members got to practise skills for both badminton and tennis. Who knew that Member Mike Tippen was a 'fiend' with a tennis racket, which was pretty amazing as he played from his mobility scooter.

WHEELCHAIR SPORTS TASTER SESSION

Following Mike Mellon's talk about the Dundee Dragons Wheelchair Sports, Members were keen to try out some of the sports. The Dragons organised a great day for the Members which included wheelchair skills practice, wheelchair rugby and rugby

league, basketball and badminton. Here's hoping we have some budding wheelchair athletes as a result!

CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING AND ARCHERY

This was by far the most popular activity in the last few months, and Members thoroughly enjoyed the coaching in both indoor archery and clay pigeon shooting. The old target skills soon came flooding back and Members became quite competitive, with some of the stars of the day coming from our Widow Members.

BURRELL COLLECTION VISIT

The Burrell Collection has been closed for refurbishment for a number of years and when one of our Members received an email confirming that it would be open soon, he suggested that it might be a good activity for Blesma Members. He was right! The collection is vast, and it was good to see some old favourites as well as some



Recent Outreach events have included wheelchair sports tasters, clay pigeon shooting and a visit to Dundee Therapy Garden

previously unseen items on display. Members made their own way around the exhibits but we all met in the café, which has also had a fabulous facelift, where it was great to sit and chat about the visit, what had been seen, and the changes that had been made.

WHALE AND DOLPHIN WATCHING TRIP

This was another activity suggested by one of our Members. The weather was great (we have been very lucky!) and we set sail from Inverness hopeful of spotting some wildlife. Sadly, no whales or dolphins were to be seen, however, we did see seals and various birds including a storm petrel (named for its ability to 'walk' on the surface of the sea, like St Peter). The lack of wildlife didn't matter too much as the surrounding area was spectacular to look at and we ended the day with lunch in Inverness. Thank you to JWPM who sponsored this event.

DROP-IN TALKS

David Hill from Simplicity in Mind joined our Friday drop-in for a talk about how to improve your mental health using three principles. David is himself a veteran and has support available for veterans. Please visit www.simplicityinmind.co.uk/veterans for more information.

Ruth Duncan from Myofascial Release Therapy (MFR) also joined the drop-in and spoke about how MFR can help with pain and other health conditions.

DUNDEE THERAPY GARDEN

Members and their families visited the hidden gem that is Dundee Therapy Garden, which is mostly run by volunteer veterans. The staff at the garden arranged some painting of pots and planting as well as a tour, and the youngsters in the group were keen to talk to the gardener and pick some fruit and veg. After a lovely lunch, the painted pots were filled with either basil or spider plants and we then embraced our

inner artist and had a go at chalk drawing on the patio.

MEMBER-LED TALKS ANTS TO ELEPHANTS

South West Area Member Coral MacKenzie has joined our Scotland online activities a few times over the last two years and offered to give a talk about her life in South Africa. It was both informative and fun, and Members really enjoyed it.

DAVID DENT MBE

During Members' Weekend, David had been chatting about his career and it was suggested that Members would be interested to hear his story. David was happy to do this, and we enjoyed hearing about his medical career within the military and his life and career post injury.

Emma Gratton

South west update: from knotting to photography via canal boats

PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP TRIP TO LONDON

As part of the Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust, we received funding for an overnight trip to London which took place in June. Seven Members attended the trip, meeting at the Union Jack Club in Waterloo on the Monday for a sunny afternoon on the South Bank. After dinner, we headed to the Millennium Bridge and St. Paul's Cathedral for a night shoot. On Tuesday, we had an early start for a tour of the Lloyds Building, which was kindly arranged by Alana in Corporate Fundraising. There, we met up with Jess Linge (Outreach London & South East) and some of the area's Members and volunteers as well as Jackie King (Grants and Outreach Executive) for the tour.

The building was incredible and the Liveried Waiters who gave the tour were fantastic. After a much-needed coffee and cake stop at the Lloyds café, we meandered back towards the Union Jack Club enjoying the weather and taking lots of photographs. We stopped for lunch by the Golden Hind at the Old Thameside Inn and then continued our way back to the hotel.

It was a lovely couple of days away, which was summed up perfectly by attendee Mark Hancock: "Thanks to everybody involved in arranging the London trip, especially to Sarah and Darren for their hard work and dedication. I enjoyed every aspect of the trip – of course the photography, but more than that, the friendships, the company and of course, the banter! It truly was a great few days of leaving problems behind and just focusing on good things. I must admit that as a total beginner in the photography field I am well and truly hooked!"

DECORATIVE KNOTTING WORKSHOPS

Over the last two years, Phil at gr8 knots has kindly donated his time to host online decorative knotting workshops for our Members. Despite the lifting of the Covid restrictions, these workshops continue and in addition to our South West Members, we also have attendees from the Midlands and



Above: Shaun Regan takes a photograph of the River Thames



The South West Photography Group visited Longleat Safari Park

the North East. Members have learned how to make bracelets, placemats and Remembrance Poppies amongst other things, and have formed some great friendships. Our next challenge will be to get the group to meet for a face-to-face workshop.

Some of the group have been busy in their own time producing bracelets which they've

used to help raise funds for both Blesma and a number of Ukrainian charities.

"I wanted to learn knotting initially to be able to make a bell rope because when I finished my cancer treatment we were expected to ring a bell," said Mike. "When I rang it there was just a piece of cloth in place of a bell rope. Phil sent me a tape and



Continued from over

some instructions to make a bell rope, with a warning that it would normally take months to learn. Unfortunately, I couldn't get the hang of it, so good old Phil made me one himself. I gave it to the hospital, but unfortunately because of Covid they were not able to hang it. However, they did raffle it, raising £300 which has gone to cancer research. I have learned how to do basic key rings though, and was able to give a few to Blesma for the days at Weston-super-Mare."

INTRO TO GOLF

We arranged to spend the morning with the Burnham & Berrow Golf Club pro, Nichola, to learn the basics of golf followed by lunch in the club house. Despite the temperature being in the high 30s, a group of six attended. Nichola and her assistant Laura covered putting, chipping and long shots – and things got very competitive! It was great to see everyone outside learning a new skill and really enjoying themselves, and it was brave of Burnham & Berrow Golf Club to trust their greens to our wheelchairs and scooters!

"Really enjoyable and great fun. I have never played golf before and the instruction was great," said Mike. "It was accessible for all and whether Members used a wheelchair or prosthetics, we were all able to participate equally."

Meanwhile, Darran Thompson said: "What another fabulous day out organised by Sarah at the Burnham & Berrow Golf Club. Both instructors were great, well organised and so relaxed. An understanding of each of our disabilities and mobility issues were taken into account when trying putting, chipping and driving, all finished off with a little competition. A perfect day and great company that was thoroughly appreciated by everyone who attended."

PHOTOGRAPHY TRIP TO LONGLEAT

We arranged a day out to Longleat Safari Park for the South West Photography Group (funded by our AFCFT grant) which took place on 19 July. Little did we know when



Members enjoyed a relaxing day boating on the Kennet and Avon Canal in July

we hoped for sunshine, that we'd be visiting in 37°C heat! We were a group of 10, and although we had the safari portion of the park as an option, nobody was brave enough to risk their cars being dismantled by the monkeys!

But even without completing the safari, there was plenty to see and do. Members were able to take a boat trip along the river to see the hippos and we spotted red pandas, koalas and crocodiles to name just a few animals.

As well as the wildlife, Longleat has a stunning stately home with formal gardens and parkland to wander through. All of our attendees had a fantastic day and enjoyed meeting up with one another.

CANAL BOAT TRIP

We booked a second trip with Bruce's Boats along the Kennet and Avon Canal for 20 July. The boats are completely accessible, with ramp access and lifts allowing access

to all areas. We were a group of 11 (plus Doris the dog) and were joined by BSO South West Steve Fraser (who was on galley duty). We travelled up through four locks, with Members helping us travel through. Everyone was given an opportunity to steer the boat, before we stopped off at a turning circle to enjoy a picnic lunch on board. Everyone had a hugely enjoyable day and there was much talk and laughter. The crew were fantastic and seemed to enjoy themselves as much as we did!

"The peace and tranquillity of the Kennet and Avon Canal was such a difference to the normal hustle and bustle of everyday life," said Neil Owen. "To be transported in an adapted narrow boat on a sunny day, with a crew who jumped out and opened locks, was absolute bliss. Thanks to Sarah and Steve for a delightfully pampered and relaxing day, and to the volunteer crew who made the whole day possible."

An R&R break in Wales for Mike with Blind Veterans UK

Earlier this year Blesma Member Mike Smith got in touch with BSO Steve Burrell about the prospect of taking a short R&R break. He was aware that Blind Veterans UK had a centre in Llandudno, North Wales, and that it was open for residential breaks, and so was curious to find out more...

Between myself and Steve we arranged a week's visit for me in a self-contained apartment. I drove up to Llandudno on 10 May from Kent, arriving mid-afternoon. The first thing that greeted me as I drove through the gates was a magnificent Victorian-style building, originally built in 1902 by the Forrester family as a convalescence home for shale miners. It became home to Blind Veterans UK in 2011.

I was met by the very helpful reception staff and shown to my well-appointed self-catering apartment. Mine was in a separate block of four apartments known as the Leader Buildings, named after a former CEO of Blind Veterans UK and situated just behind the main building. What a lovely spacious area this was and ideal for a wheelchair! There was a wet room, lounge, bedroom and kitchen with all the mod cons that you could possibly think of.

Alternatively, there is the option to stay

in the main building with bedroom and en-suite facilities. The whole area including the main house and gardens have been designed to support those with a variety of disabilities.

The main centre has several different lounges, a bar, outdoor terrace, a fully equipped gym, a sports and activity hall, an arts and craft workshop, and a restaurant serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. There are many activities organised for guests during the day as well as visits to local landmarks where accessible transport is provided. There is also the option to just laze

around and admire the wonderful building. If you have not been to Llandudno before then I can highly recommend the area.

Anglesey is an hour's drive, or if you want some more stunning scenery then head to Snowdonia – that too is just an hour away.

So, if any Members are thinking of going on a short break or maybe longer at very reasonable rates, then perhaps think about supporting Blind Veterans UK at Llandudno. They have plenty of space and, as a Blesma Member, you will be welcomed with open arms.

Mike Smith



Blind Veterans UK's centre at Llandudno is spectacular both inside and out

Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

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

COST OF LIVING PAYMENTS

In a recent Bulletin we wrote about a payment to support with the cost of living which was going to be treated as a loan. However, many of you might have seen it reported that there has been a further announcement that there are now several different payments available, and none are required to be paid back. If you are on a means-tested benefit, the payments will not be treated as income within the calculation of your entitlement.

You could get up to four types of payment depending on your circumstances on a particular date during a particular period:

- A cost of living payment, if you get a qualifying low income benefit or Tax Credits
- A disability cost of living payment, if you get a qualifying disability benefit
- A pensioner cost of living payment, if you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2022 to 2023
- Energy bills support scheme

Cost of Living Payment – Low income benefits and Tax Credits

You may get a payment of £650, paid in two lump sums of £326 and £324, if you get payments of any of the following:

Universal Credit

To receive the first cost of living payment you must have been entitled to a payment of Universal Credit for an assessment period

that ended in the period 26 April to 25 May 2022. The payment will be made separately from your benefit and will appear on your statement as 'DWP Cost of Living'.

Income based Job Seeker's Allowance / Income related Employment and Support Allowance / Income Support / Pension Credit

To receive the first cost of living payment you must have been entitled to a payment of the benefit for any day in the period 26 April to 25 May 2022. The payment will be made separately from your benefit and will appear on your statement as 'DWP Cost of Living'.

Tax Credits

To receive the first cost of living payment you must have received a payment of Tax Credits with an annual award of at least £26 for any day in the period 26 April to 25 May 2022. If you have a joint claim with a partner, you will get one payment of £326, and one payment of £324 for your joint claim. The first cost of living payment was made between 14 July and 31 July 2022 for most people. The qualifying date of the second cost of living payment is yet to be announced by the Government, but is expected to be paid in Autumn 2022.

Disability Cost of Living Payment

You may get a lump sum payment of £150 if you are receiving any of the following benefits:

- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Adult Disability Payment
- Armed Forces Independence Payment
- War Pension Mobility Supplement

You must have received a payment of one of the qualifying benefits on 25 May 2022. If you get more than one of these benefits, you will receive one Disability Cost of Living payment only. You should receive the payment from September 2022.

Pensioner Cost of Living Payment

If you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2022 to 2023, you will get an extra payment for your household of £300 paid with your normal payment from 2022. This is in addition to any cost of living payment you get with your benefit or Tax Credits. To qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment this winter you must have reached State Pension age in the qualifying week beginning 19 September 2022. If you did not live in the UK during the qualifying week you might still get the payment if both the following apply:

- You live in Switzerland or a European Economic Area country
- You have a genuine link with the UK social security system, such as having lived or worked in the UK for most of your life

You cannot receive the payment if you live in Cyprus, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Malta, Portugal, or Spain because the average winter temperature is higher than the warmest region of the UK.

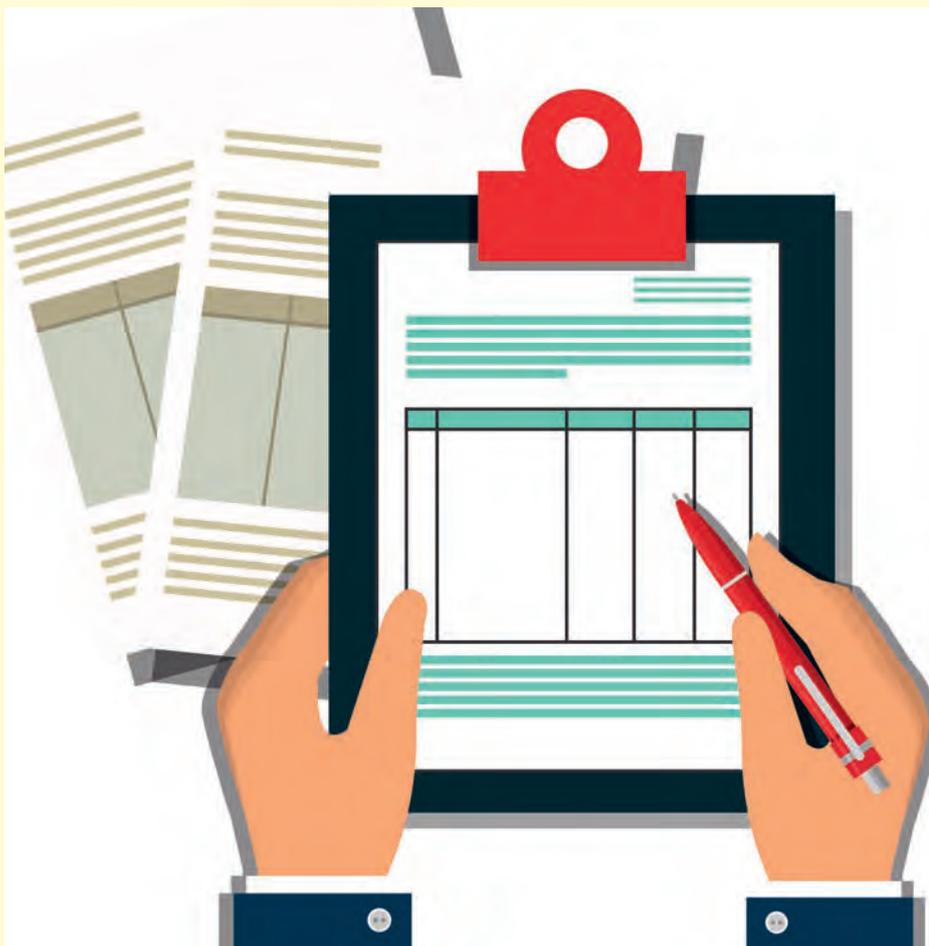
You will not qualify if you meet one of the following excluding conditions during the qualifying week:

- You are in hospital getting free treatment for more than a year
- You lived in a care home for 13 weeks or more at the beginning of the qualifying week and have been getting a means-tested benefit
- You were in custody serving a sentence imposed by a court
- You need permission to enter the UK and your granted leave states that you cannot claim public funds

Energy Bills Support Scheme

The Government announced £200 support earlier this year to support households with their energy costs. This would have had to be paid back in stages.

However, this has now been changed. All households with a domestic electricity connection will automatically be eligible for a £400 grant, which is not required to be paid back. The £400 discount will be



administered by energy suppliers and will be paid to customers over six months from October 2022.

Those with a domestic electricity meter point paying for their energy via a standard credit, payment card and direct debit will receive an automatic deduction to their bills over the six-month period.

Traditional payment meter customers will be provided with Energy Bill discount vouchers in the first week of each month, issued via SMS text, email or post, using the customer's registered contact details. These customers will need to redeem their vouchers at their usual top-up point.

The payment also applies to students and other tenants renting properties with domestic electricity contacts from landlords where fixed energy costs are included in their rental charges. In these circumstances, landlords who resell energy to their tenants should pass the discounted payments on appropriately, in line with Ofgem rules to protect tenants.

Energy policy is devolved in Northern Ireland, and the Northern Ireland Executive has been funded to provide comparable support. Blesma is still waiting for an announcement as to how the grant will be processed in Northern Ireland.

ADULT DISABILITY PAYMENT SCOTLAND

We have written before about the introduction of Adult Disability Payment in Scotland. This is a disability benefit for people aged from 16 up to State Pension age who have difficulty with their daily living activities such as washing and bathing, preparing food, managing therapy and making budgeting decisions (the daily living component) or have difficulty with their mobility (the mobility component).

Adult Disability Payment is replacing Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance in Scotland only. The benefit is being introduced in phases for new claimants and will be completed by 29 August 2022.

If you are not already receiving Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance and you think you may be entitled, you should seek advice. For more information visit: www.mygov.scot/adult-disability-payment or you can also contact Steve Burton, your Blesma Support Officer, on 07766 258461.

If you are already receiving Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions your benefit will be transferred to Adult Disability Payment and paid by Social Security Scotland. The transfer will take place between summer 2022 and summer 2024. You do not need to apply for Adult Disability Payment; you will receive a letter from Social Security Scotland explaining what will happen next.

When is the move happening?

Some Members may have already transferred to Adult Disability Payment as part of the phased roll-out in June, however the majority will transfer between August 2022 and Summer 2024. Please remember you will receive a letter from Social Security Scotland informing you when you will transfer.

Members who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance will transfer to Adult Disability Payment on a phased approach between August 2022 and summer 2025. Please remember you will receive a letter from Social Security Scotland informing you when you will transfer.

Until your Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance award has moved to Adult Disability Payment, you will need to continue answering any requests from the Department for Work and Pensions, such as filling in a review or renewal form and reporting any changes of circumstances.

If you have any questions please contact your Blesma Support Officer, Steve Burton on 07766 258461

Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS			
BSO (Prosthetics)	Brian Chenier	M 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
BSO Eastern	Kevin Long	T 020 3954 3020 M 07825 536364	bsoeastern@blesma.org
BSO London & South East	Steven Burrell	T 020 7501 3030 M 07469 242277	bsolse@blesma.org
BSO Midlands	Vanessa Lucas	T 020 8548 7095 M 07825 536363	bsomid@blesma.org
BSO North East	Christine Landess	T 020 3954 3027 M 07917 972825	bsone@blesma.org
BSO North West	Amanda Brownlie	T 01257 795144 M 07825 536362	bsonw@blesma.org
BSO Scotland & Northern Ireland	Steve Burton	M 07766 258461	bsosniroi@blesma.org
BSO South	Pat Donnachie	T 020 3954 3026 M 07741 846106	bsosouth@blesma.org
BSO South West	Steve Fraser	T 01278 789393 M 07788 312747	bsosw@blesma.org
BSO Wales and West	Tom Hall	T 020 8548 7098 M 07780 165085	bsowest@blesma.org
Members Living Overseas	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 3516	iwabenefits@blesma.org
BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS			
Outreach Officer Eastern	Francesca Anastasio	M 07741 661159	outreacheastern@blesma.org
Outreach Officer London & South East	Jess Linge	M 07741 845793	outreachlse@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Midlands	Shantel Carty	M 07741845429	
Outreach Officer Northern Ireland	Fiona Morrison	M 07741 744617	outreachni@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North East	Adele Miller	M 07741 847211	outreachne@blesma.org
Outreach Officer North West	Catherine Green	M 07741 846674	
Outreach Officer Scotland	Emma Gration	M 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Elmo Moses	M 07384 834449	outreachsouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Sarah Payne	M 07741 737563	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Wales and West	Jason Suller	M 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org

Jamie takes fellow vet diving

Jamie Hull has used his Blesma-funded scuba diving qualification to help another Member become a PADI scuba diver. He took Ben Parkinson, the most severely wounded soldier to survive the war in Afghanistan, to the Bahamas as part of a rehabilitation trip in April after being approached by Ben's family in Autumn 2021.

Jamie suffered 63 per cent burns in a plane crash and found scuba diving to be a great help to his own recovery.

"Ten years ago, Ben and I did a successful try-dive but we were both having a lot surgery and rehab, so it never progressed," said Jamie. Now that Jamie is a qualified PADI course director thanks to Blesma funding, Ben's family approached him to pick up the activity again.

"Phase one was training in the pool to assess Ben's ability. Phase two was completing a recce in the Bahamas, phase three was refresher training in the UK to gradually build up

depth, and phase four was the expedition itself," said Jamie.

The pair flew to Nassau in April with Ben's family before travelling on to Long Island for the 10-day trip. Blesma provided Ben's scuba equipment.

"For the first two days, we started in 1.5 metres of water, and slowly built it up, which was important as Ben is a double leg amputee and was subjected to a traumatic brain injury in 2006," said Jamie.

The pair moved into Dean's

Blue Hole, which is the deepest naturally occurring blue hole on the planet, where they reached a depth of 12 metres. Ben and Jamie also visited several famous dive sites including The Ray of Good Hope from the James Bond movie *Thunderball*.

"The best part of the trip were the shark dives we did with Stuart Cove's Dive Bahamas," said Jamie. "We made 90 dives together, logged 14 hours under water, and Ben became a diver. Given Ben's disabilities it was a tremendous achievement and I signed him off as a certified PADI scuba diver."

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING			
Benefits and Social Care Advisor	Liz Watling	T 020 8548 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
Grants and Outreach Activities Executive	Jackie King	T 020 8548 3516	goaexec@blesma.org
Membership, Branch and Volunteer Network Executive	Debbie	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Grants Admin	Susie Grainger	T 020 3954 3022	grantsadmin@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
ACTIVITIES			
Activities Manager	Jess March	T 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Membership Engagement Officer	Emily Mizon	T 020 8548 7094	meo@blesma.org
Activities Executive	Clare Wellings	T 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Activities Executive (Local)	Nicole Findlay	T 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
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Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	T 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Senior Community and Events Officer	Abbie-Louise Mills	T 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	M 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org
Senior Corporate Fundraising Officer	Alana Warwick	T 020 8590 1124	scfo@blesma.org
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Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
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Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Director Independence and Wellbeing	Ian Harper	T 020 8548 3515	diw@blesma.org
USEFUL CONTACTS			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org



Powerlifting best for Micky in third Games

Micky Yule has won bronze at the Commonwealth Games at Birmingham 2022.

The last time Micky was in Birmingham, he arrived in a coma fighting for his life after an IED blew off both his legs in Afghanistan. Micky won bronze in powerlifting with a personal best bench press of 192kg as he represented Team Scotland at his third Commonwealth Games. Micky

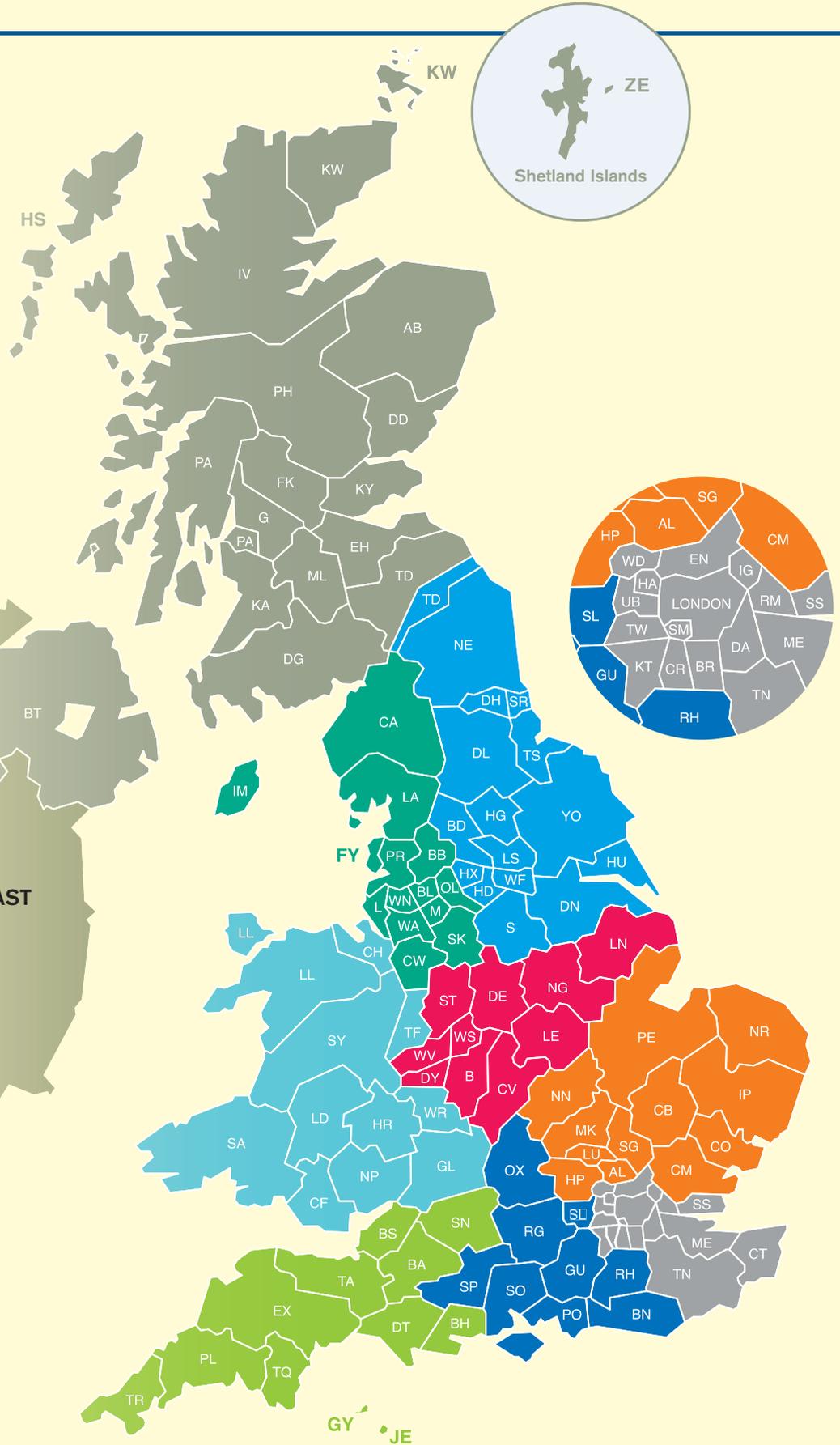


became the first Scottish athlete to compete in Para-sport powerlifting at the 2014 Games in his hometown of Glasgow.

Blesma by area

Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area. The contact numbers for all BSOs, Outreach Officers, and relevant members of staff can be found on p84.

- SCOTLAND & NI
- NORTH WEST
- NORTH EAST
- EASTERN
- MIDLANDS
- WEST
- SOUTH
- SOUTH WEST
- LONDON AND SOUTH EAST



In the winter issue

Fran Townsend: Remember the name!



Almost every bone in Fran Townsend's body was broken when she was hit by a lorry in 2013. Now, after years of rehab, she does this!

Back for the third year



Running to Remember



Join us on
13 November

Wherever you are



Contact fundraising@blesma.org
020 8548 7089