

# Blesma

The magazine for limbless and injured veterans | Autumn 2023

**PLUS:**  
THE ONE-ARMED  
MOTORCYCLE RACER  
BENEFITS ADVICE  
THE KNITTER FOR  
HOLLYWOOD'S STARS  
MEMBERS' WEEKEND

## BULLETIN INSIDE

# FROM DARKNESS TO BEING ON TOP OF THE WORLD

HARI BUDHA MAGAR  
IS BACK HOME AFTER  
HIS RECORD-BREAKING  
EVEREST EXPEDITION.  
BUT NOTHING WILL EVER  
BE THE SAME AGAIN



THE LATEST  
ON BENEFITS,  
BRANCHES AND  
BLESMA NEWS



# Fundraise for Remembrance

## this November



**FREE**  
fundraising  
pack and  
giveaways

Remember the fallen by fundraising for Blesma this November. Do a suggested activity such as a run, bake sale, gaming event or cycle, or choose your own activity.

For more information and to sign up please visit the events page on the Blesma website

**Blesma**  
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

**Prizes**  
for top  
fundraisers

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**EDITORIAL** If you have a story you'd like to put in the next issue, or if you'd like to get in touch to let us know what you think of this issue, drop us a line at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



Please send any written correspondence to the Blesma office at:  
115 New London Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0QT

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## Storytelling workshops to build confidence and reduce isolation

FOLLOWING ON FROM THE HUGELY SUCCESSFUL MAKING GENERATION R PROGRAMME, A NEW COURSE WILL AIM TO HELP MEMBERS TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT ASPECTS OF THEIR LIVES

**B**lesma's new Storytelling and Wellbeing programme is now open and taking applications from across the entire membership. The new initiative, which follows on from the Making Generation R (MGR) programme, has been designed to coach a range of communication skills to help Members build confidence and wellbeing through telling their story.

The new course is open to all Members, including Widows and

Widowers as well as Members who served in the UK Forces from other nationalities, while those who have already taken part in MGR are also welcome to apply.

"This is a very positive and constructive way of building confidence and helping people talk about moments or aspects of their lives that they might find difficult to express," said Tony Bloomfield, Blesma's Operations Director.

"Many people find it tough to talk

about what has happened to them and how it has impacted their lives, and that can lead to social isolation.

"We want to help Members become more comfortable talking about these things, whether in a group setting, to friends and family, work colleagues or simply people they meet. Having that confidence can build better relationships and reduce social isolation."

The two-year project will be facilitated by The Drive Project,

**Above: Making Generation R enabled some 110 Members to tell their stories of resilience**

# Welcome



The storytelling workshops will range from three-hour sessions to full days

which ran the award-winning Making Generation R programme that enabled some 110 Members to tell their stories of resilience to youth audiences across the UK. It will involve online and in-person workshops that will guide Members in how to use language, their voice and energy to express themselves.

Workshops range from three-hour sessions to full days, with

**“THIS IS A WAY OF BUILDING CONFIDENCE. MEMBERS CAN USE THE SKILLS THEY DEVELOP IN A WAY THAT SUITS THEM”**

no long-term commitment required.

“We are really looking forward to launching the programme in September, when we will announce the full list of dates for season one along with details of how Members can sign up,” said Alice Knight-Driver from The Drive Project. “Online workshops will be open to Members across the UK and in-person workshops will be held in the South West and West.”

Tony added: “There won’t be a public performance, so Members will be able to use the skills they develop in a way that suits and benefits them. This will help them talk about what happened – and what is happening – in their lives and improve their wellbeing.”

*For more details, and to register your interest in the programme, email [eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org)*



Welcome to the autumn edition of the magazine. As usual, there is a huge amount going on within the Association. In this issue, you will find reports on the Members’ Weekend and AGM in June, as

well as a range of articles covering some of the things Members have been doing. We have a gripping account of Hari Budha Magar’s ascent of Everest, Chris Ganley tells us about how he competes as a motorbike racer and Honorary Member Joyce Meader reports on how she and a dedicated group of friends produce authentic clothing for the movie industry.

We have accounts of another highly successful Blesma 100 cycle ride from Jonathan Bell, a record-breaking swim in Switzerland by Steve White and an inspiring story from the friends and family of Harry Houston.

As usual, Members have been taking part in a huge range of activities, from extreme sports and record attempts to social events and days out. A number of these, like the photography week in Shetland with Kev Bryant, have been organised by Members – so if you have an idea for an activity, please let us know.

Members will be aware that this will be my last magazine as your Chief Executive. It has been a real honour to play a part in this great Association since the early days of Covid in March 2020, and I will take many fond memories of great times spent together. I wish Vivienne Buck every success as your new Chief Executive from October.

Enjoy the issue.

**Jon Bryant**  
Chief Executive





Trustee Steve White swam the width of Lake Geneva in July

## Vice chairman swims his way into the record books

**B**lesma Trustee and vice chairman Steve White has become the first above-knee amputee to swim across the width of Lake Geneva. The Army veteran, who lost his left leg after a training injury, made the gruelling nine-mile crossing without a wetsuit in 5 hours 19 minutes to go down in the record books, raising almost £3,000 for Blesma along the way.

“Swimming is liberating for me – when I am in the water I am not disabled. I am able to compete alongside those who aren’t disabled on equal terms, although I swim using only my arms,” said Steve, 58, from Shotley in Suffolk, who trained for two years for the attempt.

“I was due to swim Lake Geneva last July but the flight cancellations that blighted the UK stopped that. I’m relieved to have completed it as so many people sponsored the attempt and I didn’t want to let them down,” added Steve, who joined Blesma in 2011 and became a Trustee in



June 2020. Steve, who served in the Royal Green Jackets for four years, is not a stranger to swimming challenges. He was part of a Blesma team that became the UK’s first all-amputee team to swim the English Channel in 2014, and he is also the first amputee to swim the two-mile Alcatraz

Crossing in San Francisco Bay. Steve left the Army in 1986 to pursue a career in business and is now chair of a housing association and is on the board of an organisation that provides housing, care and support services. He had more than 20 operations to try and save his leg but eventually had the amputation in September 2008.

“Blesma supports its Members in so many ways,” said Steve after the swim. “The Association is awash with Members who do the most amazing things.”

Steve has plans to reunite with the cross-Channel team for a 10th anniversary attempt of the 21-mile England to France swim next year.

## TOM RECEIVES MBE FOR HIS SERVICES TO MILITARY VETERANS

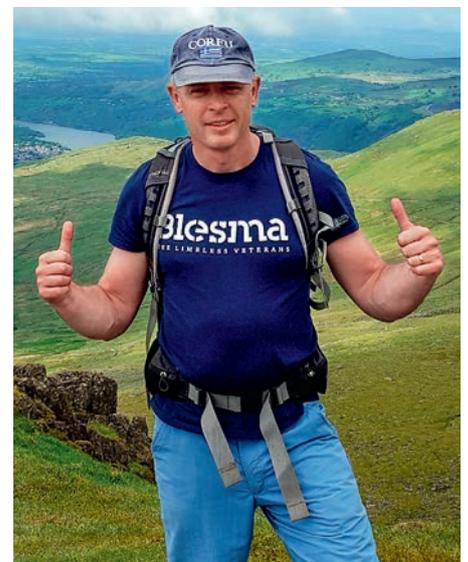
FORMER COLDSTREAM GUARDSMAN and current BSO Wales and West, Tom Hall, has been awarded the MBE for services to military veterans in Wales.

Tom received the honour in the King’s Birthday Honours List in recognition of his work helping injured veterans and their families. He lives in Pembrokeshire, and as BSO is answerable to 203 Blesma Members aged from 23 to 98 years old.

“It was totally unexpected and a huge shock when I found out,” said Tom, who completed a 29-year military career in the Coldstream Guards and REME, serving in the Gulf, Bosnia and Afghanistan. He then worked at the Personnel Recovery Unit in Brecon for the last five years of his Army career before joining Blesma as one of nine Support Officers.

“I am really proud of what we do and I’m just one in a brilliant Blesma team across the UK,” added Tom, who works with Outreach Officer Jason Suller visiting Members across Wales and liaising with healthcare and government departments. “I thoroughly enjoy my work and I really appreciate all the warm and positive comments I’ve received.”

Congratulations also go to Denzil Connick who was awarded the British Empire Medal in the King’s Birthday Honours List.



Tom Hall MBE is “really proud” of Blesma

Robert Jordan: "We had a fantastic time at the centre and were looked after superbly"



## A "fantastic" summer break thanks to Blind Veterans

**F**ormer Army Catering Corps chef Robert Jordan and his wife Sharon (above) loved being by the seaside during a short break at the Blind Veterans UK centre in Llandudno recently. The couple used the impressive building and facilities as a base to explore north Wales and Liverpool on their five-day stay.

"We had a fantastic time at the centre and were looked after superbly," said Robert, 67, who served in the Army for nine years before working as a butcher in a supermarket and then in construction. "BSO Tom Hall mentioned that the centre was available to Members at a Blesma event that we attended, and he arranged for us to spend a week there in a self-contained, ground-floor apartment as I need to use a wheelchair permanently."

"We had a great time during the week visiting Llandudno and Anglesey, and had a day out in Liverpool at the Albert Dock and the Beatles Experience."

Robert, who initially followed his father into the Catering Corps before finishing his service with the Royal Engineers, was badly injured in a motorcycle accident.

He met Sharon while he was in hospital where she worked as a nurse. After enduring years of pain and having developed osteomyelitis after a work accident, he took the decision to have a through-knee amputation of his right leg in 2017 on medical advice.

"I hadn't heard of Blesma until after the accident, but while I was at the hospital prosthetic department I saw *Blesma Magazine* and discovered what an incredible organisation it was," said Robert, from Cwmbran, south Wales. "It has been fantastic for us and has supported me financially with help towards the cost of adaptations in the house and the purchase of my electric wheelchair. The Association even took me scuba diving to Florida in 2019!"

Blesma has been forging links with Blind Veterans UK in recent years, and an exclusive Blesma Member offer for respite holidays at Llandudno has been agreed. Accommodation and travel assistance may be available where need is identified. It is hoped that access to activity and themed weeks at the centre will be open soon.

## WELSH BIKE RACE WELCOMES FIRST ARM AMPUTEE

Motorbike racer Chris Ganley has made history by becoming the first arm amputee to race in the Welsh national event at Aberdare Park. The former Rifleman, who steers his 650cc bike with just his right arm, was on the starting grid for one of the prestigious road races around a challenging circuit where bikers can hit speeds of up to 140mph.

The 0.95-mile course around the perimeter road of a Victorian park has attracted a host of racing legends in the past, including World Superbike champion Carl Fogarty.

Turn to p32 to read more about the unique race as well as Chris's story.



## GOT A STORY? GET IN TOUCH!

Have you got a story you'd like to tell? Want some help publicising an event or expedition you're planning? To put your story in the magazine just get in touch with us at [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)



Pictures: Patrick Walsh

## Cyclists hit 100 for the Association once more

**F**ormer members of The Green Howards Regiment have put on another mighty display of pedal power, cycling 100km through North Yorkshire to raise funds for Blesma. The annual event, organised by Blesma Member and ambassador Jonathan Bell, attracted more than 50 cyclists and raised in excess of £6,000.

“It was a great day and fantastic to see old friends from the regiment and their families who supported us on the ride,” said Jonathan, who served in The Green Howards – now part of the Yorkshire Regiment – for nine years. “A lot of people were involved in organising the ride and making it possible for us to raise so much for Blesma. It was a great turnout and there was lots of banter throughout the day that made it thoroughly enjoyable.

“We have been doing the Blesma 100 for eight years now, and it is always well supported by veterans and the public.”

Jonathan was injured along with 15 other soldiers from 1st Battalion, The

Green Howards when a car drove into a foot patrol during a night-time training exercise on Salisbury Plain in 1993. The accident left him paralysed from the upper chest down, with severe head and leg injuries, and needing a foot amputation.

Jonathan left the Army aged 26 and, after extensive rehabilitation, studied for

a university degree before joining the BBC, where he worked as a producer on programmes such as *Panorama* and *Newsnight*.

“It was Blesma that initially got me into hand cycling, and this ride is about getting old friends back together and doing something to support a charity that helps so many people,” added Jonathan.

“It was a big team effort,

with lots of people making sure all the cyclists had enough water and everything else they needed along the route. The public support was fantastic, and it is great to be able to raise awareness of Blesma and the work it does to help Service personnel lead independent lives after injury.”



## THREE'S THE MAGIC NUMBER FOR LEXI

LEXI CHAMBERS HAS A THIRD world record in her sights. The former Royal Signals soldier is aiming to push a non-sport wheelchair the furthest around an athletics track in 12 hours.

Lexi, who elected to have her left leg amputated below the knee after living with Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS), holds the world record for completing the marathon and half-marathon in a non-sporting wheelchair.

“I’m confident I can go considerably farther than the current record of 60km,” says Lexi, from Exeter. The rubber composition of the Exeter Arena track, combined with the grip of the wheels on her chair, will make for arduous wheeling to meet the 150-lap target.

“It would be much easier using a sporting wheelchair, but I want to show what can be done in an ordinary one,” added Lexi. “I want to inspire people and help them realise that they can do things.”

Lexi uses exercise to cope with pain, and her current training regime has already included a 10-hour wheeling session on the 400m track. There will be little time for a break afterwards as she will be back in training for another world record – wheeling from John O’Groats to Land’s End in a non-sporting wheelchair in 2024.





## New boxing fitness course is a knockout

**P**unching power is helping Blesma Members stay fit and improve their wellbeing in a unique training programme for veterans. The boxing-based sessions work on technique, coordination and balance to help work up a sweat, and provide a chance to meet and socialise with other Members.

“It is a fantastic thing to do and an opportunity to meet other veterans,” said Maurillia Simpson, a former Royal Logistic Corps soldier. “It’s a boxing-based class but it is adapted to what you can do. It gives me a sense of belonging and also that great feeling of having a go. I had a major spinal operation last year, so this is part of my recovery journey. I really enjoy it and would recommend it to Members.”

Blesma Outreach London and South East has collaborated with The Fighting Chance to develop the programme, which will run over three years. Members can

attend the weekly 90-minute sessions in Battersea, London, where all the kit is provided and no experience is necessary.

“I feel fitter and now have a new hobby – PT is fun when it’s a choice. Cheers Blesma!” added Adam Phillips, who served with the Royal Signals.

Organiser Imran Khalil said: “We use boxing to improve health and wellbeing and bring about positive change. The training is accessible to anyone and we have great coaches who know how to adapt to meet veterans’ fitness and capabilities.”

“The training is non-contact and no experience is required, so it is perfect for beginners. The gym is wheelchair accessible and the training is suitable for wheelchair users. Going to a boxing gym can be daunting, but we meet in a café before and go in together. This is a long-term project, so we are building it around the needs of Blesma Members.”

## News in brief

### QUEENIE CELEBRATES HER 100TH BIRTHDAY

Blesma Widow Queenie Smith celebrated her 100th birthday in July. Her husband was a Royal Marine who served in WWII. In 1955, he was hit by a car whilst on his motorbike and lost a leg. Queenie now lives in a home overlooking Devonport Park.

“Queenie is a joy to talk to and has many war-time stories which are both amusing and extremely harrowing,” said Bill Arscott. “She still shows a keen interest in, and has strong views on, present day events. We were very fortunate to visit her with all her family around her on her special day.” Happy birthday Queenie!



### “BLESMA HAS GIVEN ME MY DIGNITY BACK”

A new wetroom has made a world of difference to Roy Townsend, who was in danger of falling every time he took a shower. The former Grenadier Guardsman, who has an above-knee amputation to his right leg, had to hop backwards over a four-inch ledge to make it into his old shower.

“Roy has an artificial knee in his left leg, and being a tall chap who weighs 17 stone it was difficult for him to keep his balance and he fell a few times,” said Roy’s wife, Diane. So the couple turned to BSO Tom Hall who arranged for the transformation project at their home near Aberdare, south Wales.

“I cannot thank Tom and Blesma enough,” said Roy afterwards. “They have changed my life and given me my dignity back.”

The group at Fort Charlotte (From left): Paul Cockram, Mark Jenkins, Mike Fowler, Ash Hall, Tom Penny, Ann Siddons, Kev Bryant, Dave Croshaw, Pete Siddons, Terri Hunt, Cheryl Haynes



Photograph: Kev Bryant

## Shetland wows photographers again

**T**he untamed nature and wildlife of Shetland provided the perfect backdrop for the latest photography masterclass that produced these stunning images. Members spent a week touring the UK's most northerly group of islands to capture stunning moments and landscapes framed by its legendary light.

"The Shetland Islands provide incredible opportunities for photography," said Kev Bryant, who organised the trip. "We are on the same latitude as Bergen in Norway, and are closer to Norway than Edinburgh. The islands appeal to all photographers; whether they love land and seascapes, street scenes, buildings or wildlife. There's a huge variety of subject matter here."

Kev spent 25 years in the Royal Engineers before working in landmine clearance and moved from Kent to Shetland in 2010 with wife Cheryl Haynes. He has organised two previous photography trips for Members.

The event, which started off with a flight from Heathrow to Aberdeen, was delayed

when a connecting flight to Sumburgh was cancelled, forcing the group to take a ferry and arrive a day later than planned.

But they crammed in a good number of photography hotspots around the rugged coastlines and took a boat trip to get closer to sea birds and aquatic life as well as ferries to the northern isles of Yell and Unst. The schedule also included breaks for tea and cakes, a Shetland pony experience, hospitality at legendary East Burra bar, The Outpost, and a social evening.

"It was full-on, but everyone enjoyed it and thousands of images were taken," added Kev. "There is so much to see here,

**"THIS WAS MY THIRD TRIP TO SHETLAND. THE ISLANDS NEVER DISAPPOINT, WITH AMAZING VIEWS WHEREVER YOU TURN"**

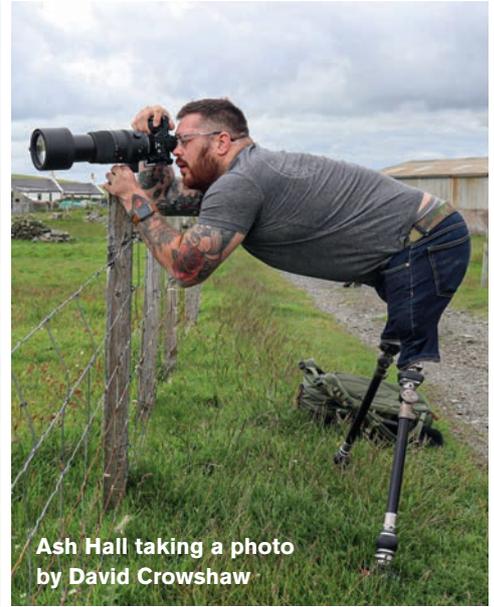
with rugged landscapes that attract unique wildlife including migratory birds and mammals such as whales and Orcas."

Kev and Cheryl organised their first Shetland photography tour in 2019 but had to postpone the next two annual events because of Covid. "We started again last year, so this was our third one," said Kev, who now supports the local Army Cadet Force on Shetland. "It was very enjoyable, and I hope we can do it again next year."

Members were full of praise for the trip. "I really enjoyed visiting Shetland; such beautiful and diverse islands, rich in an interesting history with so much to see," said Ash Hall. "I will definitely come back to visit."

Terri Hunt added: "This was my third Blesma trip to Shetland. The islands never disappoint, and there are amazing views wherever you turn. The local community made us feel welcome and shared so much of their knowledge."

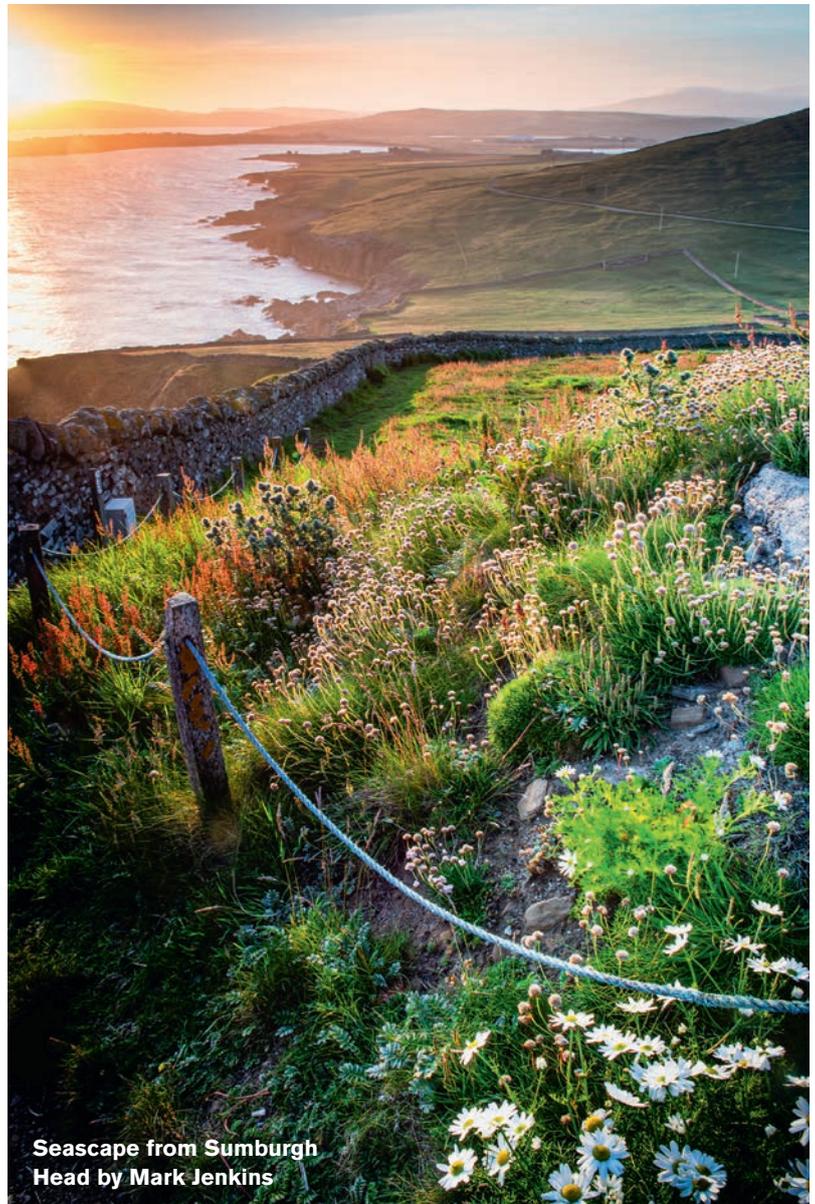
Houses at Gutcher  
by Ann Siddons



Ash Hall taking a photo  
by David Crowshaw

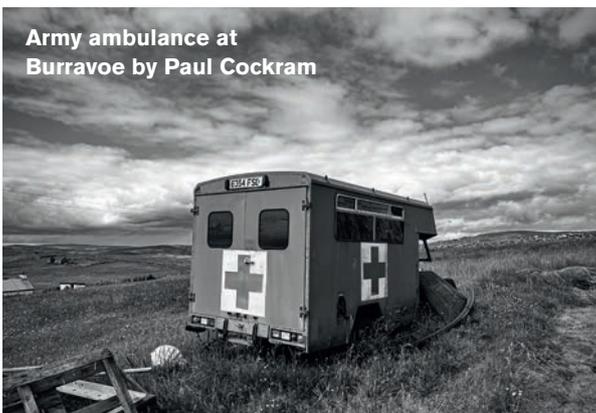


Gannets at Noss  
by Pete Siddons



Seascape from Sumburgh  
Head by Mark Jenkins

Army ambulance at  
Burravoe by Paul Cockram



## MEMBERS ACHIEVE PERSONAL BESTS AT REHAB TRIATHLON

BLESMA MEMBERS STRUCK GOLD IN the Rehabilitation Triathlon held in June at the iconic Plymouth Hoe. The gruelling event, hosted by the Hasler Naval Service Recovery Centre, involved a swim in the Tinside Lido, a cycling time trial, and a final challenge on static rowing machines.

Some 200 veterans and tri-Service competitors attended the event, sponsored by the Royal Marines Charity and infrastructure consultants AECOM, which launched the Plymouth Armed Forces Day.

“I tested myself to do the full distance without any assistance on my bike,” said Roch Rochester, who served in the Royal Artillery. “It was great to be part of a military family again, sharing the day with serving personnel and veterans.”

Paul Stocker, who served as a Royal Navy radio operator as well as in the Territorial Army, added: “I totally enjoyed the experience and managed to get my fastest time yet. I intend to be faster next year, but the sense of achievement was second to none and the support from the public was amazing.”

Blesma BSO South West Sarah Payne added: “We had a good team of Blesma Members competing and they all had a great time challenging themselves. Some personal bests and gold medals were an extra bonus. It was a day of competition but the camaraderie was amazing.”



**Matt pushing hard on the rowing machine**

**Alison and Emyr at their home before their trip to see Mick**



Words: Danny Buckland

## Camaraderie “is really what Blesma is all about”

**M**ick Foulds and his wife Sue proved to be the perfect hosts when fellow Member Alison Evans and her husband Emyr visited for a summer break. The couple were guests at the Foulds’ home, which allowed them to take a trip down memory lane and visit the RAF base where Emyr served, as well as their former family home.

“Mick posted on the Blesma activity bulletin that he was happy for Members to go and stay with him and, as we had lived in the area and brought our daughters up there, it seemed an ideal opportunity to go back and see places we didn’t really have time to visit when we were bringing up the family and working,” said Alison, who served in the RAF for 14 years. “We couldn’t make the dates Mick initially gave, but he was happy for us to visit another time. Mick and Sue were incredible and really made it something special for us.”

Mick (pictured below) who lost both legs in an accident while working in a railway goods yard after his service with the Royal Engineers, has previously hosted Blesma garden parties and fundraising events.

“I thought we’d just be staying in a room and might see Mick a couple of times,

but it was great to spend time with him,” said Alison, who lost both legs below the knee, her left hand and the fingertips of her right hand following a misdiagnosed condition that led to sepsis. “It is really what Blesma is all about; helping each other and having that camaraderie.”

She and Emyr visited RAF Wyton, Sutton Hoo, Southwold and picturesque villages during their stay.

*You can read about Alison’s diagnosis and what happened next in the Spring 2023 issue of the magazine at <https://blesma.org/media/450105/blesma-mag-spring-2023.pdf>*



# Activities

THE FULL 2024 ACTIVITIES CALENDAR WILL BE PUBLISHED IN THE WINTER ISSUE, BUT IF YOU CAN'T WAIT UNTIL THEN FOR YOUR NEXT ACTIVITY, WHY NOT HIT THE SLOPES IN THE NEW YEAR?

**Y**ou don't have to be a downhill demon to have fun on the slopes. Start 2024 in style with a trip to France. [Email eventsca@blesma.org](mailto:eventsca@blesma.org) or call 020 8548 7097 to book your place.

## WINTER SPORTS EUROPE 2024

**Location:** La Plagne, France

**Date:** 06-14 January 2024

**Application deadline:** 01 October

A week-long trip of snow sports to suit everyone. Mono ski, snowboarding, stand-up ski, three-track, and ski bike will all be available. Please state which winter sport you are interested in taking part in as well as your skiing experience, if any. Please note: if you have not skied before, or in the last five years, you will need to take part in one of our lesson days in collaboration with DSUK (see below). Members will also be expected to sign a declaration of fitness before attending.

**Who can apply?** All Members.

## WINTER SPORTS TRY-OUT DAYS

**Location:** Tamworth Snowdome

**Date:** 27-28 September

**Application deadline:** 15 September

Ever fancied taking part in our winter sports programme but weren't sure where to start or if you'd enjoy it? If so, this is the event for you! To help Members get the most out of our winter sports events these trial days are compulsory for those who have either never tried snow sports before or haven't been on the slopes in the last five years. This will be compulsory in the run-up to the trip to La Plagne (above).

**Who can apply?** All Members. Please note: we are unable to run ski bike trials from the snowdome.



## WOULD YOU LIKE TO PUT ON AN ACTIVITY?

If so, we'd love to hear from you! The Activities Team is available to give you as much support as you need in organising an activity and can explain exactly what you'll need to do. First, you will need to complete the Activities Proposal Application Form which is on the website, or you can contact [aelocal@blesma.org](mailto:aelocal@blesma.org)

You will be able to discuss the things you'll need to consider about the activity and venue to ensure everything runs smoothly and that Members and Widows are able to enjoy themselves in a safe environment. For example: is the activity suitable for those with limited mobility? Is the venue accessible and wheelchair friendly? Are there accessible toilets?

Blesma will pay for the cost of hiring the venue, the activity itself, refreshments and, where appropriate, accommodation. Please get in touch with the Activities Team on the contact details above if you would like to learn more.





## Phoning home is about the only thing ET can't do

**W**ith his relaxed personality, two-year-old Labrador ET has a habit of melting hearts wherever he goes, but he can also spring into action with life-saving skills and help owner Allen Parton (above) navigate planes, trains and much more besides.

ET (the name stands for Endal Three) is Allen's third assistance dog. His first, Endal, helped him regain his life and purpose after a life-changing injury.

"ET is a cracking dog and is technically brilliant," said Allen, who founded the charity Hounds for Heroes which provides specially trained assistance dogs to injured and disabled Armed Forces and Emergency Service personnel.

"He's already been on more than 40 flights with me, he's got his own Oyster card for the London Underground, and he can put my ticket in the barrier when we travel by train.

"He amazed people in the airport when he was pressing buttons to open doors for me. He is very intelligent and intuitive, and I am very lucky to have him with me."

Allen suffered a severe head injury in a car accident in the aftermath of the first Gulf War when he was a Royal Navy Chief Petty Officer. The accident left him unable to walk, talk or remember much of his life, but his first assistance dog gave him hope and encouraged him on what was to be a very long and incredibly complex rehabilitation journey.

"We called him ET because he has a personality that seems like it's from another planet," added Allen, 63. "He can do everything that Endal could do. He is a worthy successor and I know the Blesma community will adore him."

Hounds for Heroes is a charity that specialises in training assistance dogs that help people overcome the physical barriers of disability and avoid isolation. It is currently collaborating with Blesma on a project in Northern Ireland for military veterans and Emergency Service personnel.



**Allen Parton founded Hounds for Heroes**

## MILITARY PILGRIMAGE TO LOURDES BRINGS PERSONNEL TOGETHER

DAVID LOFTUS, A RETIRED CHAPLAIN at the Royal Military School of Music, was part of a group of disabled ex-Service personnel who travelled to Lourdes for the annual International Military Pilgrimage in May. This year, the event attracted some 16,000 personnel from 40 nations.

"The entire trip went very well and we were well looked after. I would thoroughly recommend the experience to Members," said David, a bi-lateral, above-knee amputee who also served with the Queen's Own Highlanders. "It was great to see so many military personnel together, and

although there is a spiritual and religious side to the event, there is no compulsion for anyone to partake."



Whilst in France, the group also visited the memorial to the crew of a Halifax bomber that crashed in the area in 1944 while attempting to drop supplies to the French Resistance.

"It was a poignant reminder of the sacrifice people made as well as being an uplifting experience," David added.

*Next year's event coincides with the 80th anniversary of the crash, which killed all seven air crew, and commemorations are being planned. For details, contact David at [armedforces.treasurer@hcpt.org.uk](mailto:armedforces.treasurer@hcpt.org.uk)*



# Paddleboard helps Ben find life's perfect balance

**F**ormer Regimental Sergeant Major Ben Elton is back on the water thanks to a Blesma grant for a paddleboard. The 58 year old, who had his left leg amputated after an accident during an Army wakeboarding competition, has found it to be a perfect balance with his life of adventuring around the UK.

Ben, who served 25 years in the Royal Logistic Corps, is building an Instagram following for his photos and videos of

stunning landscapes, wild camping, hiking, climbing and hitting the road in his van.

"I went through a period of feeling a bit low but this has given me a new lease of life," said Ben. "We pack up the van and take the grandkids out exploring, and the paddleboard is perfect for that. Thanks to Blesma; what it does is incredible."

*You can follow Ben's adventures on Instagram at [tommy\\_vanlife](#)*

## News in brief



### DIRTY HARRY MAKES BLESMA FEEL LUCKY

Harry Houston's grandson and a few of his friends have raised £2,500 for Blesma. Member Harry, 85, from Shifnal in Shropshire, lost an arm and the sight in one eye from an explosion while serving in Oman in 1973.

His grandson, Tom Saxton, ran this year's London Marathon to raise money for the Association. Not to be outdone, Tom's friends Nat Carothers and George Colley, who run The Yard, in Norwich, put a London Marathon cocktail on the menu at their restaurant.

"It was an amazing effort from them all," said Harry, who became a teacher after 22 years' service: "It was great that Tom ran the marathon for Blesma, and then his friends made that gesture of creating a cocktail which I said should be called the Dirty Harry."

Sales of the whisky-based tippie brought in more than £800 for the Association while it was on the menu!

## SHARING EXPERIENCES

BLESMA MEMBERS ATTENDED a Veterans Coffee Morning at Morriston Hospital in Swansea in June to coincide with Armed Forces Week. The event was part of a wider initiative by Swansea Bay University Health Board to engage with veterans, Service personnel and reservists.

"We are working towards being a Gold Standard provider of health for the Armed Forces community, and we also have a lot of veterans and reservists working for the health board," said Leon Murnieks, a senior project support officer at the Health Board and a member of the Royal Navy Reserve.

"The idea is to make services more inclusive and to tap into different skills staff may have acquired in service. It's about understanding as much as we can and using everything we have to support veterans and their families."



Words: Danny Buckland



## Fishing match held in memory of Dave Lewan

**T**he Dave Lewan Fishing Match was held at the Arena Lake on the Cudmore Fishery Complex near Newcastle-under-Lyme from 30 June to 02 July. This was the third time the event had been contested at what is one of the top match fishing venues in the country.

“We were offered the use of the water on the Friday prior to the match for practice, and by the lunchtime all the participants were at the water, honing their skills in preparation for the semi-serious bit on the Saturday,” said Member Roger Fullbrook.

“Although, as usual we all mustered in the bar on the Friday evening to rekindle old friendships!”

Saturday morning arrived and the forecast was fair. After six hours of serious fishing, the scalesmen did their rounds while the eight Blesma competitors packed their kit up and retired to a café for tea, cake and the all-important



**Dave Lewan at a previous match**

prize giving. Dave Eynon rightly earned the Blesma bragging rights this year with a winning weight of 139.9lbs, second was Lee Mason with 81.6lbs and third Keith Meakin with 75lbs.

“We all found the event a great unwinder and very therapeutic,” said Roger. “Just to get out into the great outdoors and see all the nature and beauty of the countryside was good for the soul. As always, we would like to extend our thanks to Edward, the owner of Cudmore Fishery, and his staff for their continued support, the use of the water, butties and beverages during the event, and the generous donation to Blesma.”

*If you have never fished, or haven't for a while, why not come along to one of the two coarse fishing events that Blesma holds every year. For more information, contact [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)*

## DO YOU FANCY THE IDEA OF BECOMING A PARATRIATHLETE?

PARATRIATHLON IS THREE SPORTS in one, it's full of excitement and challenge, and has something for everyone. It is also a welcoming community of like-minded individuals challenging themselves, feeling the thrill of racing others and crossing the finish line having achieved something they have worked hard for.

British Triathlon runs the Paratriathlon Super Series which caters for everyone from those looking to try the sport for the first time to seasoned triathletes. The sport has three classes: visual impairments (PTVI), Standing (PTS), and Wheelchair users (PTWC). PTS encompasses individuals with neurological and limb



impairments, and you do not need to be classified to take part in the Super Series.

PTS competitors need a triathlon suit, wetsuit, road bike and trainers, along with any prosthesis they require to cycle or run. PTWC individuals need a triathlon suit, wetsuit, hand bike and race chair. PTVI competitors need a guide to swim, cycle and run with them.

All abilities can take part in the Super Series, with courses created for access and with safety marshals and lifeguards on hand to support athletes transitioning from one discipline to the next.

*Interested? The first thing to do is contact your local triathlon club (you can find your nearest one at [www.britishtriathlon.org/clubs/search](http://www.britishtriathlon.org/clubs/search)) or get in touch with the Activities Team at [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)*



Gaz wants to introduce the sport of pickleball to Blesma Members

# Gareth Golightly is the pick of the pickleballers

**G**areth 'Gaz' Golightly is blazing a trail for disabled players in pickleball, the racket-based sport that is quickly growing in popularity. The 41 year old, who was injured in a car accident while serving with the RLC, is the UK's only internationally registered wheelchair-based coach, having completed a course funded by Blesma.

Gaz, from Cumbria, is now in demand as a coach and is on a mission to introduce the sport to Blesma Members and other injured veterans while also encouraging pickleball clubs to open facilities for wheelchair players.

He even entered the recent English Open Championships and played five matches against non-disabled opponents in the sport – in which players use paddles to hit a wiffle ball over a net on a badminton-sized court – to highlight wheelchair-based skills.

“It is a great game and it doesn't matter if you use your legs or a wheelchair as it is so inclusive and you can play together,” said Gaz. “I entered the full tournament to raise awareness among players and clubs so they can run wheelchair sessions. It would be great to introduce the game to Blesma Members and more veterans as it is something they can play with their families. We're hoping to put sessions on so people can learn the sport.”

His wife, Denise, added: “Gaz is getting a lot from pickleball and he wants other veterans to enjoy the sport, particularly as it's a family event where everyone can join in rather than a Blesma Member having to go off and do the sport on their own.”

*The Association would like to find out if Members are interested in pickleball. If you would be interested in trying it please email [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)*

## News in brief

### LOCK, STOCK AND TWO SMOKING FUNDRAISERS

Blesma supporter Tommy Flynn put himself in the firing line by agreeing to be locked in a set of stocks as part of a Blesma fundraiser.

The 60-year-old ex-Royal Corps of Transport soldier was covered in 'gunk' at the Dog & Gun pub in Wisbey, Bradford, during a charity soccer match to raise £1,520.

“Pete Shields, the former BSO, was my training sergeant and I've always wanted to do something for the charity because it does so much good,” said Tommy, from Bradford. “The owner of the pub, Rory Gallagher, doubled what we made which was great and another pub, Raggalds, chipped in with £45.”

### LIPTON ICE COOL AS HE MAKES HIS WAY TO £1,600

Mark Lipton trekked the 200 miles of the Hebridean Way taking in 10 islands and six causeways to raise £1,653 for Blesma in June.

“The weather was amazing, there was wildlife in every direction and the people I met on the way were very kind and supportive,” said Mark, who carried his own kit and wild camped during his 10 days on the trail. “A big thanks to all those who kindly donated to the Blesma cause and sent good wishes that helped motivate me to the end.”

### WHO'S UP FOR JOGGING IN GERMANY IN 2024?

Blesma is excited to become a charity partner to the Berlin Marathon, which will take place in September 2024. The marathon is one of six in the World Major Series and offers one of the largest running stages in the world.

*Applications are now open to select six amazing fundraisers to take part in the event. If you are interested, you can find out more information from the Blesma Fundraising Team. Contact them by email at [fundraising@blesma.org](mailto:fundraising@blesma.org)*



Words: Danny Buckland

## Following D-Day route to raise money for Blesma

**A** 23-kilometre walk tracing the route of Op TONGA, the critical first stages of the D-Day Landings, has raised £4,000 for military charities.

Memorial March, organised by Royal Engineer Major George Bromley, followed a route from Café Gondrée on the famous Pegasus Bridge to Hill 112 outside Caen.

Major Bromley, whose intrepid Solo Beeline Britain expedition from Land's End to John O'Groats has already raised

£10,000 for charity, led a group of 12 including former Gloucester and England rugby player James Forrester, whose grandfather landed on D-Day, on the march earlier this year.

"It was a humbling route as we started in Rainville, which was the first town to be liberated in France, before walking to the Pegasus Memorial as a warm-up and to remind ourselves of the incredible feat the 6th Airborne Division achieved in June

1944," said George. "We met with Arlette Gondrée at the famous Café Gondrée to start the event. We then broke the march down into 6km stints and at every stop someone was charged with providing a vignette of what happened at the location 79 years before. The first was provided by Captain Robert Tait, who offered insights into the methods and determination required to secure the rivers and beaches."

The final stop of Hill 112 gave James a chance to offer insight into Major General Forrester's story and his achievements on D-Day, and gave him the opportunity to follow in his relative's footsteps.

Major Bromley, 38, from Bath, started fundraising after breaking his neck in a military rugby match in 2019, which led to the temporary loss of use of his left arm before he made a recovery to fitness in 2022.

His first challenge was an unsupported 1,000-mile 'beeline' route which involved kayaking, swimming, climbing and walking the length of the UK to raise funds for five military charities, including the Association.

"I'm committed to raising funds for military charities and I like to be inventive in the challenges I set," he added. "Next year, I plan to swim from Portsmouth to Sword Beach in Normandy to commemorate D-Day's 80th anniversary.

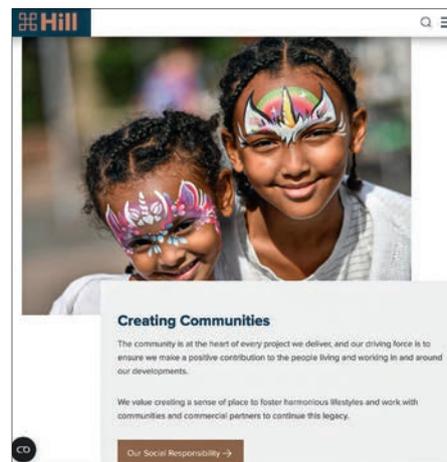
"There will be a team of up to six of us who will take it in turns to complete the 80 nautical miles non-stop. It will be a big challenge, but we are raising money for Blesma and Rugby for Heroes, who do so much good work for those who need it most."

## MAKEOVERS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO MEMBERS' LIVES

AN AWARD-WINNING HOUSE BUILDER is helping transform the lives of Members with garden and interior makeovers.

Hill Partnerships Homes, a corporate partner, has already completed three projects that have improved access and features to allow Members to enjoy their homes. More are currently in the pipeline.

"They've done some great work making my garden wheelchair-accessible, and it's



fantastic to be able to get out there easily and move around," said Phil Hutcheon, who was injured in Northern Ireland in 1973 serving with the Royal Green Jackets.

"My condition got worse and I ended up using a wheelchair, which is why the garden is so important to me," added Phil. "The team worked really hard on the job and I was really impressed."

Richard Wilkins, senior site manager with Hill Partnerships, said: "We've helped with bucket collections before, but it is really good to be involved in these projects as you can see the difference they make to Members' lives. We are looking forward to more projects for Members in the future."



## Maurillia gets confidence at LimbPower Games

One week after Maurillia Simpson attended her first Blesma activity at this year's Members' Weekend, she took part in the LimbPower Games. The Games, organised by the charity LimbPower, were held at Stoke Mandeville Stadium in early July to support people with loss of limb and loss of use of limb.

The weekend included tasters for various sports, ranging from sitting volleyball to swimming and from wheelchair basketball to archery. The activities were supervised and coordinated by trained personnel, including Paralympians and members of the England sitting volleyball team.

"I wanted to get back into sports but wasn't sure how my disability would affect that," said Maurillia. "I spoke to Member Janet Riddell and Outreach Officer Elmo Moses at Members' Weekend, and they told me about the LimbPower Games, which were about to take place."

Maurillia attended the games unsure if she would ever be able to participate in sports again. During the weekend she was at times tearful from disbelief and happiness at how well she did.

"I achieved a Paralympic time in rowing and learned to swim for the first time," she said. "The weekend has opened up a whole new world of sports for me. Swimming was always something I wanted to learn, but due to a lack of confidence I never pursued it."

Over the weekend, Maurillia summoned up the courage to enter the pool, and after some confidence building and tuition she was able to swim four lengths with the help of swimming aids. That success has given her the enthusiasm and confidence to pursue other activities.

"Taking part in the Games has helped my confidence," said Maurillia. "I've now started rowing at a club in Guildford and can't wait to see where that goes."

## THE CHALLENGE THAT LASTED FOR MORE THAN A YEAR

CONGRATULATIONS TO BRITISH ARMY veteran Andrew O'Donoghue, who has successfully completed his extraordinary challenge to remember the 457 British soldiers who died in Afghanistan, raising funds for Blesma along the way.

Andrew spoke to *Blesma Magazine* in the autumn 2022 issue about the challenge he had set himself to run 4.57km every day for 457 days in memory of the 457 British soldiers who did not return from the war in Afghanistan, a conflict in which the 42 year old was a participant.

The Ashton dad-of-one was in the Queen's Lancashire and later the Duke of Lancaster's Regiments during 22 years' service including in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"I consider myself fortunate to have come through both of those conflicts pretty much unscathed, but there were plenty of soldiers who did not," said Andrew. "So I set myself this challenge, which started on 16 May 2022. It benefitted 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 hope the challenge will raise the profile of Blesma and the ex-Service personnel it works hard to support."

Andrew set himself an initial target of £1,000 but has raised almost three times that amount.



A high-altitude mountain peak, likely Mount Everest, is the background. The mountain is covered in snow and has a dark, rocky peak. The sky is a deep blue. In the foreground, a climber wearing a yellow and blue jacket and a large backpack is seen from behind, walking on a snowy slope. A rope is visible on the snow. The overall scene is a dramatic and challenging mountain environment.

**“I DIDN'T  
TAKE THE  
RISK  
LIGHTLY  
BUT I KNEW  
IT WAS MY  
ONE SHOT”**

Hari Budha Magar,  
photographed at his  
home in Kent in the  
climbing suit he used  
to summit Mt Everest



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate, Abiral Rai



**HARI BUDHA MAGAR MADE HISTORY IN MAY WHEN HE BECAME THE FIRST DOUBLE ABOVE-KNEE AMPUTEE TO SUMMIT MOUNT EVEREST. BUT BEFORE HE COULD FOCUS ON CLIMBING HE HAD TO CONVINCING THE NEPALESE GOVERNMENT HE SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO EVEN TRY**

It was a journey out of darkness to the very top of the world. With an exhausted swing of an ice axe and one final, weary heave, double amputee Hari Budha Magar had made it to the summit of Mount Everest after a gruelling ascent. His five-strong team’s jubilant cheers were carried away on the roaring winds that – at an altitude of 8,848 metres – are fierce enough to whip ice particles into skin-puncturing needles and choke the ability to speak.

But even hampered by low visibility and a dwindling oxygen supply, the 44-year-old Blesma Member and former Gurkha corporal was able to enjoy the moment. “There were tears,” he says. “I was so happy to make it to the summit, but I also knew this moment was about more than me and my team. No-one could write off an amputee or disabled person again!”

The lethal lure of Everest – four climbers from other parties lost their lives during Hari’s successful ascent – represented more than a chance to test his limits; it was an opportunity to conquer the demons that swirl around anyone whose life path has changed in an instant and irreversibly.

For Hari, that moment came when he was blown up by an IED in Afghanistan

while on patrol with the Royal Gurkha Rifles in 2010, resulting in double above-knee amputations. He had escaped poverty when, at the age of 18, Hari became one of 230 candidates out of 12,000 to be selected for the Gurkha Regiment, where he served for 15 years. But after his injury he slumped into depression, drank too much and even considered taking his own life before finding resolution and a way out through activities – organised by Blesma



and other military charities – that in turn led to a mission to change perceptions through a string of climbing endeavours.

“There were certainly dark days. I found my situation very difficult to cope with, but I had the chance to rehabilitate and start again,” says Hari from his home in Canterbury, where he lives with wife Urmila, sons Brian and Ubran, and daughter Samjhana. “I eventually decided to make the most of my disability and to help others believe in themselves as well as make people and societies think more about disabled people.”

**MOVING MOUNTAINS**

Hari had already achieved a number of notable successes before he set his sights on Mount Everest. He became the first double above-knee amputee to climb Mount Toubkal in Morocco and the 6,058m peak of Chulu Far East in Nepal, climbing both using prosthetic legs. And before he got anywhere near Everest, which he finally tackled this May, he had to spearhead a mammoth fundraising effort, overturn a Nepalese government ban on disabled people climbing the mountain, and deal with numerous false starts because of the Covid pandemic.



**Hari on a training climb  
at the 6,476m summit  
of Mera Peak in Nepal**



**Hari successfully  
summitted Mt Everest  
on Friday 19 May, 2023**





## “WE DIDN’T TAKE THE RISK LIGHTLY BUT I KNEW IT WAS MY ONE SHOT. I WASN’T GOING TO COME BACK, SO IT WAS NOW OR NEVER”

And once on the mountain, perhaps unsurprisingly, Hari faced huge logistical and physical barriers on his route to the top of the world. Every piece of clothing and equipment had to be individually designed and manufactured, while his restricted gait made his ascent three times slower than that of non-disabled climbers.

To add to the pressure, the expedition almost hit disaster at Base Camp when a piece of a bracket on his specially designed crampons sheared off, threatening its ability to connect to his bespoke prosthetic legs. Five years of planning and training were in serious jeopardy before the climbing had even begun.

“The crampons were specially made for me in Orlando and there wasn’t enough time to get a replacement,” Hari says. “We only had a short window for the climb and there was no time to send the crampon to Kathmandu for repair. I had to go with it and keep my fingers crossed!”

Hari and his initial team of 13, which included his brother Nanda, laboured through treacherous ice fields, across shifting crevasses and up hugely technical climbs to progress through Camps 1 to 4 and enter the ‘Death Zone’. Here, the altitude turns the slightest exertion – even merely breathing – into a superhuman feat.

Vitaly, he wore three heat-preserving base layers and a down suit that had been fitted with specially tailored draw-strings to pull tight around his prosthetics to ensure the elements couldn’t find a way through.

“It was hard going, but we didn’t encounter any major problems,” says Hari. “The biggest issue was when we reached Camp 4. We should have established a fifth camp to allow us to get more oxygen further up the mountain and have the chance to rest before the final push for the summit, but because of the weather that wasn’t possible. We stopped for two-and-a-half hours and considered our options.

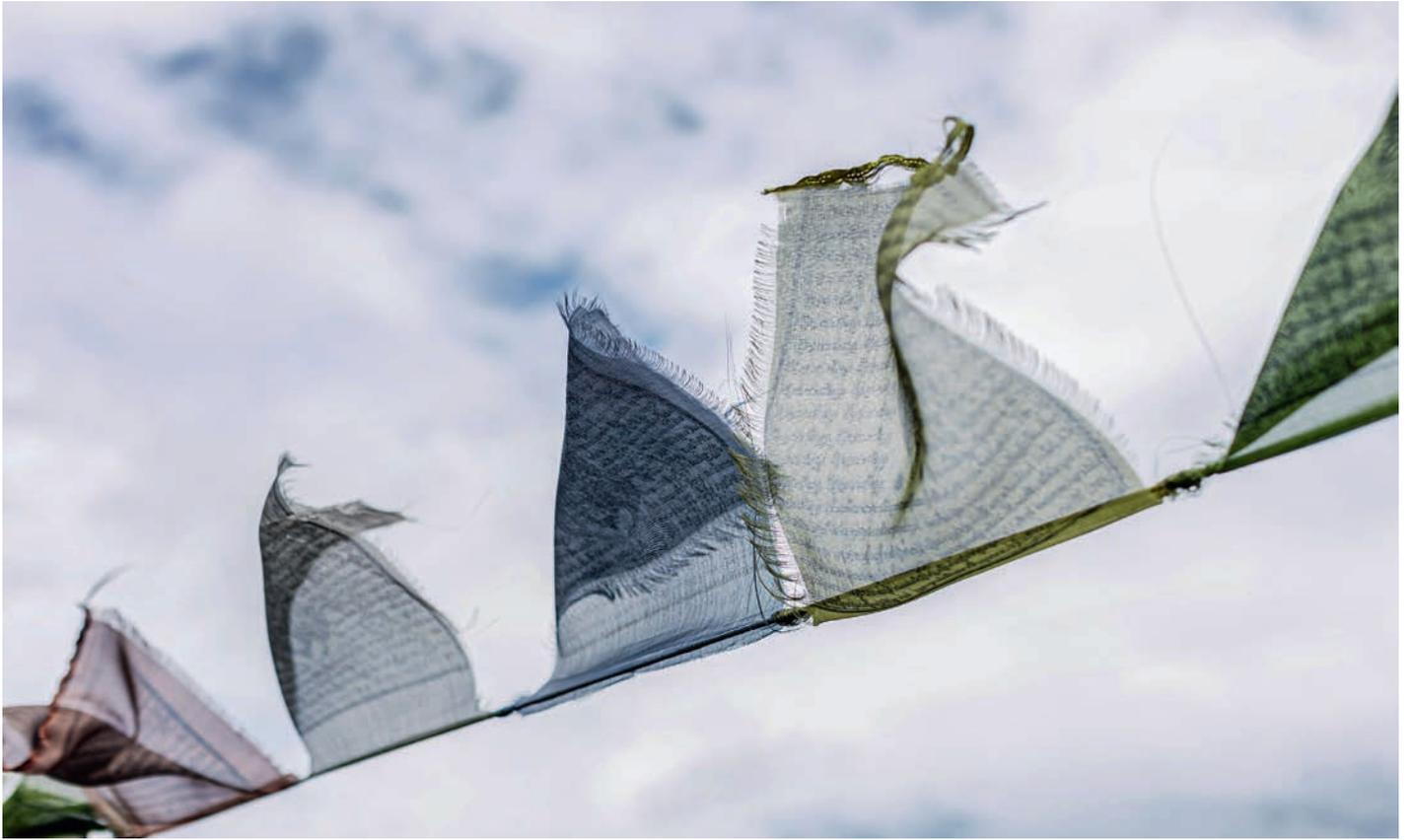
We had been climbing for 14 hours from Camp 4 and really should have rested a night there before going for the summit, or to a Camp 5. But I’d spent almost six years preparing for this and had so many supporters and charities behind me – so many people had worked so hard to give me a chance – I couldn’t let them down.

“It was a big risk – 17 people have died on Everest this year and four climbers died on the mountain on the day of our summit. I didn’t take the risk lightly, but I knew it was my one shot. I wasn’t going to come back to the mountain so it was very much now or never. It was a risk, but it was a calculated risk.”

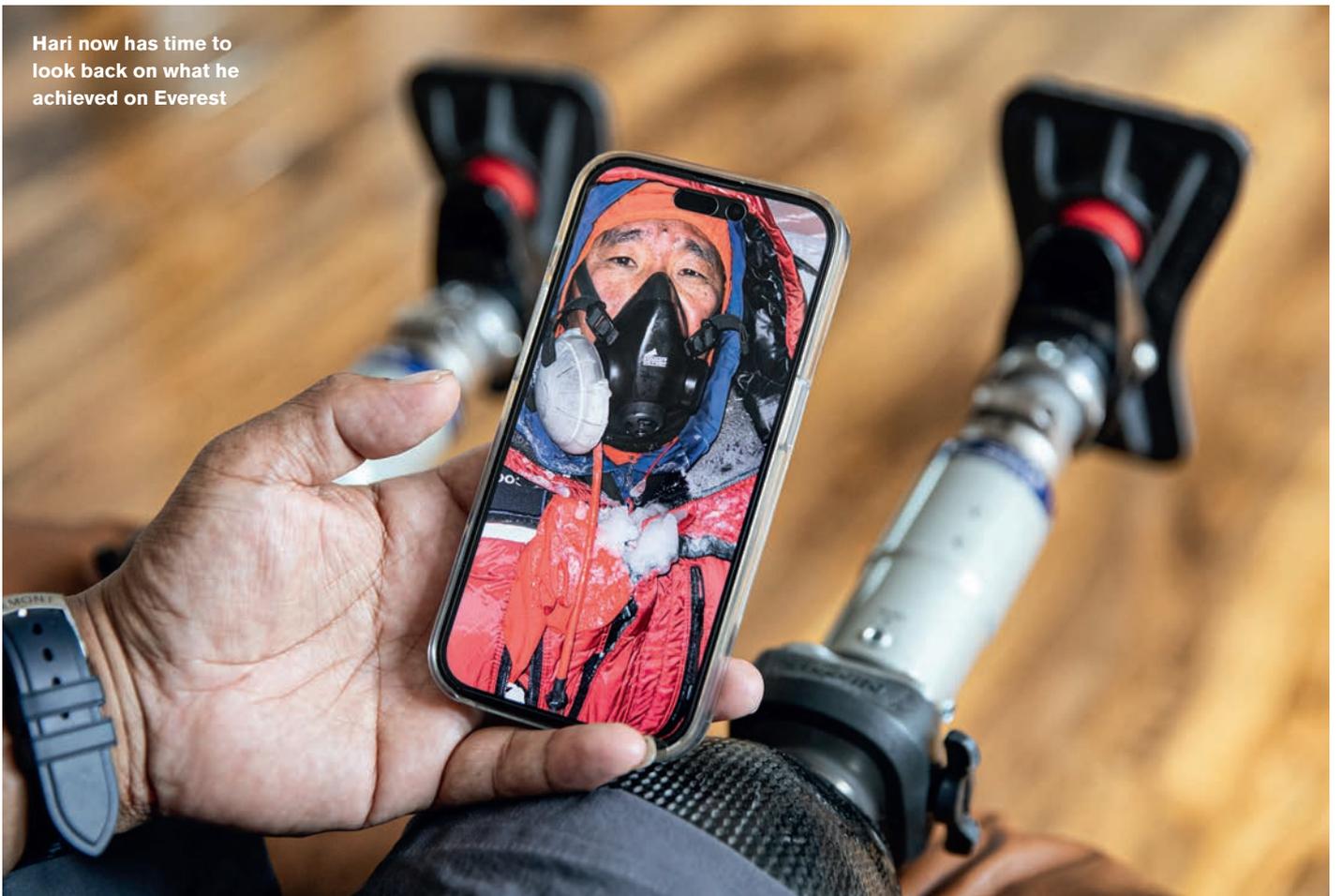
### THE PRINCIPLE OF MOMENTUM

Hari admits that on the final push to the summit in the ‘Death Zone’ there was a point when he told his team they should all go back down because the conditions were too bad and he didn’t feel that the necessary logistics were in place.

“It was my brother and a Sherpa who told me we could make it,” says Hari. “I thought how far I had come and how many steps I had already taken. I also thought about my military training and the principle of momentum, which is part of our doctrine. It’s not about how fast



Hari now has time to look back on what he achieved on Everest





The specially made crampon that broke at Base Camp



## “IT WAS TOUGH AND SLOW, BUT WHEN YOU’VE MARCHED AND MARCHED THROUGH THE NIGHT YOU KNOW HOW TO KEEP GOING”

you go, it’s all about keeping going. If you pause, you lose the battle. That was in my mind. I took a risk, but I had momentum on my side. We started from step one – we might be slow and it might take us a long time, but every step up the mountain added momentum.

“I had to pull myself up with the ice axe and a jumar [*a device for climbing up a fixed rope*] then push myself with a walking pole or ice axe to go forward, which was tough and slow, but when you’ve marched and marched through the night you know how to keep going.”

Eleven out of the 13-strong party made the summit attempt, but during that push six had to turn back for various reasons.

“When we reached the summit, I cried like a baby as what we had achieved began to sink in. There was a moment of triumph and we took pictures, then it was back to work to get down safely. We radioed down that we had summited, but the wind was

so strong that they couldn’t hear what we were saying and they thought we had called it off before the summit. It wasn’t until we got back down to Camp 4 that we were able to confirm we’d made it!”

News of the team’s success travelled around the world, and Hari received congratulations from Prince William, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Nepalese government diplomats and from celeb supporters such as actor Tom Hardy and the expedition’s patron, Joanna Lumley.

There were cheers and tears back in Canterbury where Hari’s family waited anxiously while he was out of radio contact.

“We were nervous while he was on the mountain, but it was cool when we got the news and we are all proud of him,” says his son, Brian. “We were worried about him getting down because that is tricky too, so we were relieved when he got to Base Camp. It was his childhood dream, and he got it done!”

Hari, who is raising funds for Blesma, The Gurkha Welfare Trust, On Course Foundation, Team Forces and Pilgrim Bandits, adds: “The support I have had is fantastic and I wanted to give back to organisations like Blesma that helped me in the initial days after the IED. The Association gave me an opportunity to ski and try other sports, which helped give me my confidence back.”

Now Hari aims to raise awareness of disability and inspire others to challenge and believe in themselves to climb their own mountains, whatever they may be.

“The wonderful thing is that I get messages from around the world from people telling me they took my story to their heart at a time when they were suffering. Some people have even said they were considering taking their own life but now they have purpose and hope. I feel fortunate that I can inspire people.”

Hari has other mountaineering challenges lined up, and a TV documentary and book are in production, but he remains humble about his remarkable triumph on Everest.

“If what I’ve done gives people the courage to do whatever challenge they want, then it’s good,” he says.

For more, visit [www.haribudhamagar.com](http://www.haribudhamagar.com)





# SHE KNOWS HOW TO SPIN A GOOD YARN

HEARD THE ONE ABOUT THE BLESMA MEMBER AND THE HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER? IT'S NO JOKE BUT IT MIGHT HAVE YOU IN STITCHES

**J**oyce Meader's work features in a series of blockbuster films, but you won't find her name on any of the credits. The Honorary Blesma Member is one of the UK's foremost historical experts on military knitwear, and is in serious demand when film producers need garments that are historically accurate, often working around the clock with a group of local knitters to hit deadlines. Joyce has already played a significant behind-the-scenes role making period-perfect knitwear for the movies *Warhorse*, *1917* and *The Wildest Dream*, which stars Ralph Fiennes as pioneering climber George Mallory.

"It's still a real thrill to see one of my pieces of knitwear being worn on screen in a movie," says Joyce, who is a member of Blesma's Southampton Branch. "It's good to know that I have created something that is perfect for that particular period, and that it adds authenticity to a film."

Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Roger Allen



**Joyce has a 'knitting room' in her home full of garments and pattern books from the past**

Keen-eyed movie goers will have seen actor George MacKay, who plays Lance Corporal William Schofield in the WWI epic *1917*, wearing a muffler that was knitted by Joyce in scenes throughout the film. Glimpses of other cast members in fingerless gloves, stump socks, yet more mufflers, and balaclavas are peppered throughout the Oscar-winning production.

#### **WWI AND THE RISE OF KNITTING**

Joyce's skills in reproducing copies of time-specific knitted garments have been honed by a vast collection of original patterns that stretches back to the Crimean War, and her home has a 'knitting room' full of yarn and hundreds of pattern books that offer a fascinating window into military and social history as well as fashion.

"I first got interested in military knitwear after selling some webbing to a re-enactment enthusiast who said that he also needed some socks. I've always knitted for as long as I can remember, so I helped him out and got really engaged with it," says Joyce, a former nurse from Chandler's Ford in Hampshire.

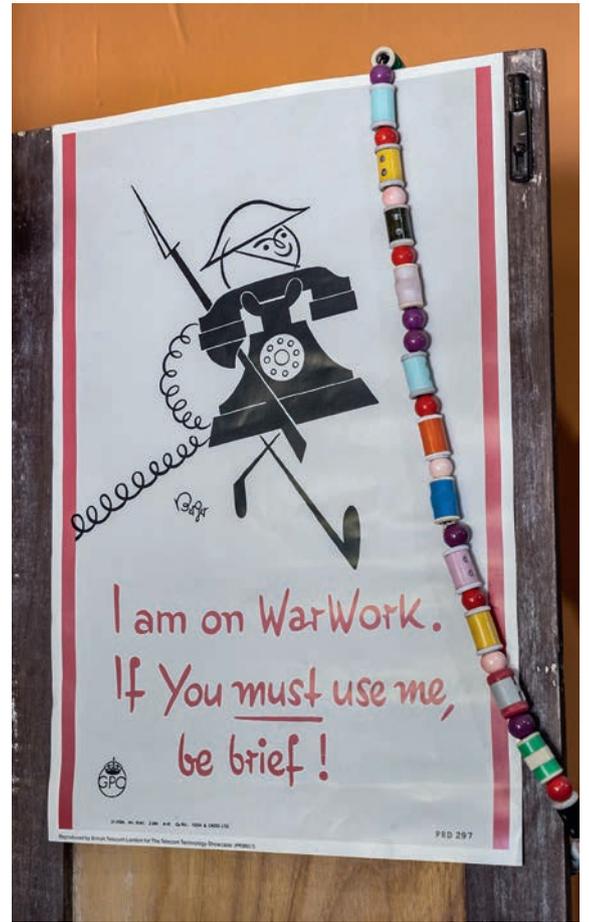
"A friend suggested contacting the Hampshire Museum's wardrobe department in Winchester, but it only had patterns from the Crimean War period. I then went to the National Army Museum, which was very helpful, and from there I've just built up my collection and knowledge. I guess people working in films were directed to me when they wanted help with knitwear as it is not something you can just produce



without knowing the various styles, types of wool and techniques that were around at the time."

World War I saw a massive rise in home knitting; troops on the front line were desperately short of equipment and clothing as they weathered terrible winters while the war dragged on. Knitting clubs were set up in many towns and villages, while people also knitted on buses, in queues and even in between courses at restaurants to meet demand for woollen gifts that would provide warmth and boost morale.

"I've got a posse of about 14 knitters locally and we all enjoy it when we get a film commission. The orders usually come in with just a few weeks' notice



so I couldn't possibly do it all on my own," adds Joyce, whose husband Clive served in the Royal Corps of Transport and Catering Corps TA.

"For 1917, we were still pressing the last jumper as I was due to post it. I don't let anything leave my house unless it's perfect, which is ironic as for that film everything was immediately dragged through the mud for extra authenticity!"

"We all went to see that film together when it came out and loved it, as well as having that special bit of pride every time we saw something we had knitted!"

Joyce also worked on *The Wildest Dream*, which portrays George Mallory's ill-fated 1924 attempt to become the first person to climb Mount Everest. He was reputedly dressed in a tweed jacket and hobnail boots when he was last seen alive 800 metres from the summit. But Mallory, whose frozen body was only discovered in 1999, was actually at the forefront of outdoor wear technology.

"You see photographs of him at Base Camp wearing his tweed jacket, which is where the myth comes from, but he actually wore a lot of clothing that was very

cleverly designed," says Joyce. "He wore three pairs of woollen socks, which we reproduced for the film, two pairs of long johns, three shirts, a jumper and a jacket that was quite advanced for its time as it was made from tightly-woven material that didn't let the cold in. Meanwhile, his climbing partner Sandy Irvine, was the first to have zips on his climbing clothes."

Joyce was introduced to Blesma after volunteering as a home visitor for SSAFA after her 30-year nursing career. She regularly volunteers at Blesma events and attends Branch meetings, gatherings and lunches. She also gives talks and lectures on historical military knitwear and is currently knitting socks for Ukrainian soldiers fighting against Russian troops.

"Their conditions are appalling, and they run the risk of developing trench foot because their feet get wet and they cannot leave their positions," says Joyce, who has two grown-up children. "This is an issue that we normally associate with WWI, but it is a huge danger today in Ukraine. It is not much, but it does make a difference for them, and I am always happy to help men and women serving on the front line."

**Joyce is a member of the Southampton Branch and does a lot of volunteering for the Association**

**"IT'S A REAL THRILL TO SEE ONE OF MY PIECES BEING WORN IN A MOVIE AND TO KNOW THAT I HAVE ADDED AUTHENTICITY TO A FILM"**

# “JUST TAKING PART SENDS A MESSAGE”

CHRIS GANLEY LOST HIS LEFT ARM IN A MOTORCYCLE ACCIDENT ALMOST A DECADE AGO. HE HAS BEEN ON A MISSION TO MAKE HISTORY AT THE ISLE OF MAN TT EVER SINCE



Chris became the first arm amputee to race at the Aberdare Park Races at the end of July



Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate



Chris gets a post-race debrief from his biggest fan; his five-year-old son Alexander

**W**ith the throttle cracked open and the 650cc engine howling in protest, Chris Ganley hunches down for maximum

streamlining. He takes the chequered flag at 100mph, and although it's not quite the podium finish he was hoping for, the left-arm amputee has just supercharged disability motorsport by competing in an iconic road race, melting into the tight turns and mastering the course with deft touches and precision adjustments.

Blesma Member Chris is the first arm amputee to ride in the prestigious National Motorcycle Races at Aberdare Park around a testing track that has attracted serious names in motorsport including superbike world champion Carl Fogarty.

"It was an incredible experience and I was buzzing for weeks afterwards," says Chris, a former 1 Rifles Infantryman who served in Afghanistan. "The weather was atrocious over the weekend, with rivers of water running across the track, so it was a big challenge. But I also felt added nerves because I was the first arm amputee rider

to be given a slot in the race, and I didn't want to let anyone down. I knew that if I messed up, it might be a long time before any other disabled riders would be given another chance. I let out a huge sigh of relief when I crossed the finish line!"

Chris was injured in a motorbike accident in 2014 which ended his Army career, but he was back on two wheels within six months with a determination to continue riding and to blaze a trail for other injured veterans and civilians.

"I had lost my career in the Army but I didn't want to lose my other love – motorbikes – as well, so I turned my attention to adapting bikes (see p36) and learning how to ride again, but this time with just one arm," he says. "Now, I get huge personal satisfaction from my achievements, but what really motivates me is helping and inspiring others.

"Just taking part at Aberdare sends a message about what can be achieved. And I loved every minute of the weekend, being with riders who were really welcoming and encouraging."

#### THUNDER AND FRIGHTENING

Chris has received support from Blesma for kit, equipment and race entry fees, and rode in the Sound of Thunder race around the demanding 0.95-mile course which runs on the perimeter road of a Victorian park in Aberdare, south Wales.

"It was a really challenging race as the turns are much tighter than regular circuits and there were no run-off areas if you happened to come off the bike. Usually, if you fall you slide across gravel and into hay bales, but here there are trees and benches very close to where you race," adds Chris, whose ambition is to be the

**"THIS IS WHAT BLESMA IS ABOUT FOR ME. IT HELPS YOU, AND IN DOING THAT IT EMPOWERS OTHER PEOPLE TO ACHIEVE THINGS"**



(Very) slippery when wet:  
the conditions were far  
from perfect in Wales



## HOW CHRIS HAS ALTERED HIS BIKE

Chris has had to make one main modification to his bike to allow him to ride without his left arm. The bike's clutch has been moved from the left side of the handlebars to just behind the front brake on the right hand side – but that's pretty much it!

“I think the hardest thing to get used to, certainly when racing, was hard braking and accelerating,” says Chris. “When you brake hard your body is pushed forward onto the bars and both arms soak up and separate all that weight. I was just pushed onto the right-hand bar so I built a pad on the tank to brace myself against so the bike could stay as stable as possible.”



first arm amputee to compete in the Isle of Man TT. “There was a good crowd despite the poor weather and the organisers were incredible. A couple of the riders admitted that they were amazed by what I was doing considering they were struggling with two arms. It was an absolute honour to be there with such a great, supportive community.”

Chris believes that his day job as a motorcycle instructor gives him the strength and skills needed to control a powerful bike around a race circuit.

“I obviously have to set the bike’s controls up for just my right hand, and I don’t race with a prosthetic arm because the nerves were ripped out of my shoulder in the accident so I would have even less control if I used one,” he adds. “I made a vow to get back on a bike after the injury to prove something to myself. Now, I’m also racing to inspire others.

“It’s been a long journey to get to where I am today. In the beginning, my goal was just to stay on the bike, then I’d enter small races with the aim of making sure I didn’t finish last or get lapped. What’s kept me going throughout has been the messages from people around the world who have told me they’ve struggled with their disability, but when they’ve seen me riding with one arm, it has given them a boost to do more.”

### ROAD RACING ROYALTY

The Aberdare Park races, which see a Victorian park transformed into a race circuit in just 72 hours, have been a feature on the road racing calendar since 1950 and have attracted road racing legends such as Mike Hailwood, John Surtees and Guy Martin. The circuit has even been rated one of the top 10 road courses in the world.

“Chris did brilliantly and we are proud to have him on board,” says race organiser and chairman Derek Smith, who is from a military family. “The weather was really bad, but Chris stuck at it and did well. We’d be delighted to have him back next year, along with any Blesma Members who might want to take part or spectate.”

Derek has offered discounted entry for Blesma spectators at next year’s races and is hoping that other disabled riders will



follow in Chris’s slipstream. “The fastest people on two wheels have competed here over the years, but this event is about so much more,” he says. “Having Chris ride has been great for us and the crowd loved him and what he has achieved.

“I come from a military family; my dad was in the Royal Welch Fusiliers and served alongside the Gurkhas. My brother-in-law was in the Royal Signals and I have worked with Ministry of Defence security services, so I know what sacrifices are made. People like Chris have given an enormous amount for our country and they don’t always get much back, so we

would be delighted to welcome Blesma Members to the event and hope to see them next year.”

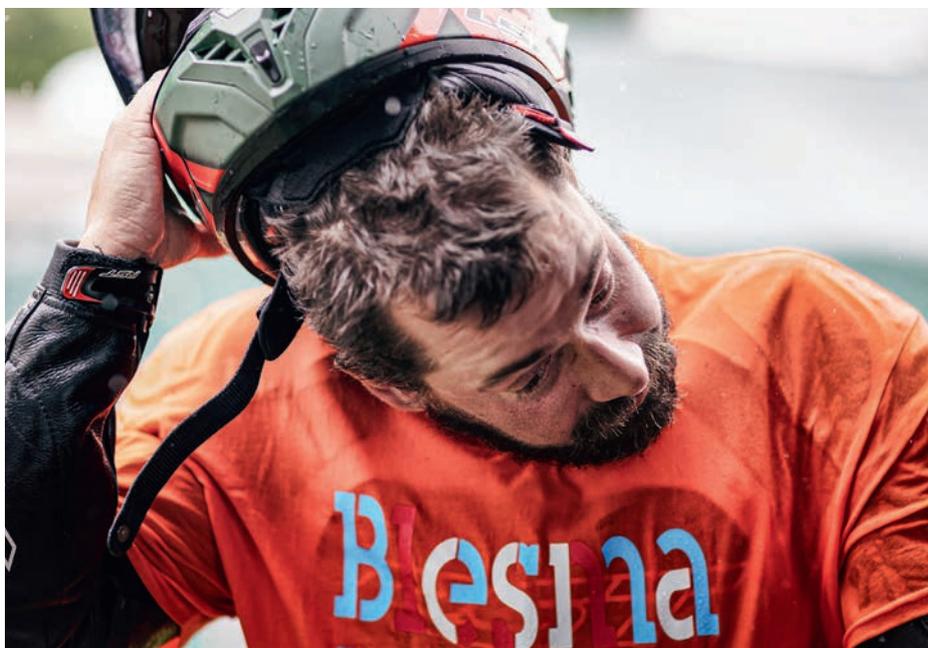
Chris, who was cheered on by his wife Charlotte, and five-year-old son Alexander, adds: “Alexander loved it and was shouting every time I went past, but he was a bit disappointed I didn’t wave to him! It was fantastic to have my family with me, but there is no way I could have achieved this without Blesma. The Association has supported me from the word go.

“For me, the next step is to enter more races to continue to raise awareness of disabled riders. My ambition is to ride in the Manx Grand Prix next year to prove I can handle the course and then move on to the TT races. It is a big ambition, but with Blesma and the racing community behind me I will strive to make it happen.

“This is what Blesma is about for me. It helps you, and in doing that it empowers other people to achieve things. It doesn’t have to be anything like riding in a race, but if it encourages people to be more active and independent then that is the big win for me.”

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*If you would like to take part in next year’s event, or just go along and watch, send an email to [activities@blesma.org](mailto:activities@blesma.org)*





Words: Danny Buckland Photography: Andy Bate

# Members' Weekend 2023

## Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

Members' Weekend is one of the key events in the Association's calendar. This year didn't disappoint as Members came from across the UK for a weekend of fun, laughs and camaraderie

In the early days after WWI, when the Association was gathering its strength and purpose, Blesma meetings were held in sombre committee rooms and were focused on the business of challenging injustice and ensuring veterans' voices were heard. Some 90 years on, that fight remains as strong as ever but Members' Weekend has evolved into a unique and positive display of camaraderie and the advances made by decades of campaigning and collaboration.

This year's annual get-together shone a spotlight on how Blesma has pulled together to weather the storms of the pandemic and the economic crises that are testing the nation. And, despite the sharp attention to business, the weekend was full of fun, laughter and the shared experiences that are central to the Association's ethos of Member helping Member.

In June, more than 200 Members, family members and staff assembled at the Chesford Grange Hotel, near Kenilworth, for the annual event which offered plenty of opportunities to catch-up and try activities from model-making and painting to falconry and axe-throwing in the grounds of the hotel.

At the Service of Dedication and Remembrance which started the weekend, Padre Jim Caldwell summed up the historical thread that runs through Blesma by highlighting the first official meetings of limbless ex-servicemen in Glasgow.

"A group of people gathered together to comfort one another, to discuss their problems and to encourage each other. Something happened among those men who met in Glasgow a long time ago, a spirit of confidence rose within them," he said. "Now those who have served in the Armed Forces will know





what a spirit of confidence is, they will know what camaraderie is. And among those men, that camaraderie set course a chain of events that continues to this day.

“Those of us who have deployed overseas or an operations will know that camaraderie and friendship are key. It’s about those shared experiences of being together.”

At the Gala Dinner on the Saturday evening Chairman General Sir Adrian Bradshaw welcomed Members and their families, and underscored the Association’s agile response in using financial reserves to ease hardships caused by the cost-of-living crisis. He also celebrated the nature of Members’ Weekend. “We’ve been through quite an interesting time since we last met,” he said, “but this is a great gathering, and it’s always very uplifting to be here and just experience the atmosphere of everybody coming together again.”





For many, it was a chance to sample the event for the first time. “I’ve really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and the chance to meet people I wouldn’t normally see,” said 34-year-old Nick De Vita. “It’s good to talk to people about the experiences we share and how we deal with the disability we have.”

Nick, who was injured in a motorcycle accident, served with the Royal Logistic Corps for three years then the Queen’s Royal Hussars for six years. “I’m new to my disability – three years into it now – and it would be good to have more opportunity to meet people with a similar disability so I can learn from them,” he said.

Brian McGuffie and his wife Lisa were also attending their first Members’ Weekend. “We’ve had a great time and the whole weekend was professionally laid out,” observed Brian, who served in the King’s Own Scottish Borderers

**“THE HIGHLIGHT WAS THE ABILITY TO TALK TO PEOPLE AND SHARE EXPERIENCES ON HOW WE SOLVE PROBLEMS AND BALANCE OUR LIVES”**



before being medically discharged and following a career as a supermarket retail manager in Colchester, Essex.

“Everyone was very friendly and it was so easy to get on with people. The highlight was the ability to talk to so many people from different walks of life and share experiences and information on how we solve problems and balance our lives. It was really informative and helpful.”

Brian, 54, joined Blesma after having a below-knee amputation in April 2021 attributable to developing diabetes in service. “After the operation, I was using a wheelchair and virtually felt like a prisoner in my own home,” he added. “Friends were going to build a ramp for me, but BSO Kevin Long got us a grant to help pay for it and that made the world of difference to our lives. It gave me my freedom.

“This event just reminds you how good Blesma is and how great it is being part of the wider Blesma family.”



Maurillia Simpson, who served 13 years in the Royal Logistic Corps before suffering nerve damage in her leg in a training accident, was also experiencing her first Members' Weekend after joining Blesma two years ago. "I'm a real newbie, and I was a bit anxious. I was going through my recovery journey by myself and not knowing if anyone cared. Then, suddenly, I'm part of an organisation that cares, and not only was I told what they could do for me but they actually did it!"

The 48 year old from London added: "I didn't know what to expect and the welcome was a bit overwhelming – in a good way – so I needn't have worried. Everyone was very friendly and it was good to have that camaraderie and banter with people who have shared experiences."

Hugh Gwilliams, 72, who lost a leg after an injury in The Falklands while serving with the RAF, added: "There's a shared language and bond between Members.

## **"THIS EVENT JUST REMINDS YOU HOW GOOD BLESMA IS AND HOW GREAT IT IS BEING PART OF THE WIDER BLESMA FAMILY"**

You lose that camaraderie when you leave the Forces and because we are all ex-Service people it is a great opportunity to get it back, albeit for a day or two.

"It doesn't matter who you are or what role or rank you had, there's that military banter you don't get anywhere else."

Members enjoyed the Gala Dinner and Blesma Awards ceremony, and the array of activities that were put on the following day – from welly-wanging and archery to model-making and felting – but there was also business to attend to in the form of

the AGM. General Sir Adrian spoke of the Association's ninetieth year as being "challenging" with stresses on household incomes from the war in Ukraine, soaring energy costs and rising inflation.

A hardship grant of £200 was made available from reserves last year and two-thirds of the 2,697-strong membership took it up. Engagement through Blesma Support Officers and Outreach Officers continued to rise, with 950 home visits in 2022, up from just over 500 in 2021. That provided grant support to Members with a range of needs; from wheelchairs, scooters and stairlifts to kitchen, bathroom and garden adaptations.

NHS hospital backlogs from the Covid restrictions continued to impact Limb Centres. "This, coupled with an increase in complexity of issues post-Covid, led to waiting times of around six weeks after a request compared with two weeks pre-pandemic," said Gen Sir Adrian. "We



**As usual, there was something for everyone to enjoy at Members' Weekend, whether that was wanging a welly as far as you could or crafting a collage out of pieces of coloured paper**

continue to monitor developments in prosthetic provision to our Members across the UK and advocated directly for 106 Members at their NHS Limb Centres. The Association also helped 190 Members with attributable injuries to access specialist clinical care via the NHS Veterans Trauma Network, now renamed Op RESTORE."

The Chairman also highlighted the full sweep of support activities that had been carried out by staff and volunteers during 2022, covering complex medical cases, benefits and pension queries, and access to health and social care as well as providing a calendar of almost 200 varied activities which were enjoyed by 2,900 Members and their families.

"2022 was a challenging but ultimately successful year for the Association," Gen Sir Adrian told the Members. "We started off in lockdown but were quick to transition to more normal operations as

the country emerged from Covid. As the Annual Report shows, the war in Ukraine, a great deal of political uncertainty at home, and the cost of living crisis towards the end of the year, caused us to dip into our reserves in order to sustain our support to our Members. We continue to believe that keeping up this level of support in difficult times is the right thing to do."

The packed afternoon of activities on the Sunday followed the previous day's moving Service of Dedication and Remembrance and a Sunday morning service. The ice creams, live music and

birds of prey show, combined with the mix of indoor crafting activities and more energetic outdoor events, allowed Members to continue to share experiences, ideas and information with the banter of military camaraderie always in full flow.

"Members' Weekend has a way of re-energising you about what you can do for the organisation and fellow Members," added Gen Sir Adrian. "There is an incredible buzz at the event and a feeling that this is a community in which people help each other and are part of a collective and team. That is very much the ethos of Blesma."

## How to get involved in 2024

*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 2024, and detailed instructions on how to apply, keep visiting [www.blesma.org/activities](http://www.blesma.org/activities)*



## 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 [editor@blesma.org](mailto:editor@blesma.org)*





# Report on the 2023 Blesma AGM

## 1. OPENING THE MEETING

The National Chairman opened the meeting by welcoming and thanking all the Members and staff who were attending, as well as the Members who had submitted proxy voting forms. There were no issues raised over the record of proceedings for the 2022 AGM published in the autumn 2022 issue of *Blesma Magazine*.

## 2. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The National Chairman reviewed the 2022 Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements as follows:

Blesma entered its 90th year in 2022 anticipating a challenging year as the country took time to recover from the Covid pandemic. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February had significant economic consequences that were then made worse by considerable political and economic upheaval at home. The cost-of-living crisis caused by huge increases in global energy prices had a major effect on household incomes towards the end of the year, while market uncertainty also impacted on investments.

The consequences for Blesma were an increase in need for many of our Members, a more difficult fundraising environment and a loss on the market value of the Association's reserves. As Members were aware, the Association had made a conscious decision to maintain existing levels of service and help Members through the cost-of-living crisis by drawing on the reserve in 2022.

Although the backlog from the pandemic continues to affect the delivery of many statutory services, staff have been actively engaged with a variety of other agencies to fight through bureaucracy and help coordinate the delivery of support.

The Association also took the decision

to assist Members when energy prices rose significantly in the autumn, offering all our Members a one-off £200 Hardship Grant. Approximately two-thirds of the membership took up this offer.

After Covid restrictions ended in March of 2022, we were finally able to re-start the Activities Programme at home and overseas. As well as skiing trips, sailing, the Race Across America cycling event and various fitness and lifestyle courses, Members also took part in family glamping events, Widows and Seniors Weeks and a wide range of group activities across the UK.

### Security

In the early part of 2022, a spike in Covid cases partially interrupted face-to-face service provision. Things did settle down in the spring, however, and Blesma was able to conduct more face-to-face welfare delivery. In total, there were 950 home visits in 2022, up from just over 500 in the previous year.

During 2022, for example, all NHS Limb Centres reported longer-than-normal waiting times for appointments. Blesma continues to monitor developments in prosthetic provision to our Members across the UK and has advocated directly for our Members at their NHS Limb Centres. The Association also helped Members with attributable injuries access specialist clinical care via the NHS Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) – now renamed Op RESTORE by the Office of Veterans' Affairs and the National Health Service.

Blesma's Benefits and Social Care Adviser has successfully resolved benefit enquiries submitted via BSOs and directly from Members. She has also conducted a number of home consultations alongside BSOs to advise and support Members with particularly complex cases. Blesma



continues to engage with the Department for Work and Pensions, and keeps staff and Members up to date with legislation and processes.

In 2022, Blesma and Anglia Ruskin University concluded a two-year research study into living with loss of use of limb, in particular the effects on families. The report has been outlined in *Blesma Magazine* and the full report will be published later this year.

Blesma's five regional Branches continued to support and connect our Members through their local networks of members and volunteers, supported by regional BSOs and Outreach Officers. Head Office staff have also begun a programme of visits to individual Branches.

### Identity

Blesma's 90th year began under Covid restrictions, with some international events including January's skiing trip to France having to be cancelled due to the



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

Omicron Covid variant. By spring, these restrictions were eased and international travel could restart, enabling the second planned skiing trip to France to take place. This was the first overseas Blesma activity to take place in two years.

As well as the Members' Weekend and 90th anniversary reception, Blesma was selected as the chosen military charity at the 2022 Belfast International Tattoo. Members received a standing ovation from the crowd at each performance, and Blesma was selected as the lead charity again this year.

The Venture Fund continued to support an increasing number of Members taking part in personal sporting and adventurous challenges, as well as in the Winter Paralympics and Invictus Games. Members were supported in a variety of activities including polo, aerobatic flying, archery, motorsports, ice hockey and sailing.

The Making Generation R programme was also able to return to face-to-face training and presentations in 2022. After

running this hugely successful programme for six years, the Association commissioned an external evaluation of MGR to seek the views of Members, audiences and supporters before deciding on its future. After analysing the results, we decided to transition MGR into a storytelling programme in which Members can tell their story to audiences of their choice.

#### **Connectivity**

Blesma continued to maintain the close ties between our own Members through an expanding programme of social events and activities delivered by our 10 Outreach Officers. This led to the successful delivery of almost 200 activities to 2,900 Members and their families in 2022.

More widely, the Association continued to advocate on behalf of its Members with the Ministry of Defence, the Office for Veterans' Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Social Care. Blesma continued to develop its working relationship with Veterans UK, with two training sessions

at Norcross for Veterans UK staff delivered by Blesma BSOs.

During the year, the Association also provided detailed feedback and advice on several government consultation papers on health, disability, and the provision of care services. Blesma's Chief Executive sits on the executive boards of Cobseo, the Confederation of Service Charities, and Veterans Scotland. We also collaborate through the Disabled Veterans Charity Partnership with Help for Heroes and Blind Veterans UK.

In 2022, we streamlined our communications and marketing operations by relaunching *Blesma Magazine* with the Blesma Bulletin included within it rather than as a separate publication.

A review of the Blesma Connects app found that audience and usage figures had not met expectations and the app had struggled to meet its goals. A lot of the information on the app was available elsewhere, and many Blesma Members preferred to use other social media platforms to communicate. The decision was therefore made to close the app and focus on other digital media outputs. A Member asked to be provided with detail on the cost of the app. Afternote: a total of £196,829 was spent on design and set-up costs during 2019-20. Maintenance and Support costs over the life of the programme (2019-22) were £33,900.

Press and social media coverage of Blesma focused on the achievements of our Members at the Paralympics and Invictus Games, the Everest and Kilimanjaro climbs and the Land's End to John o' Groats fundraising challenges. The 40th anniversary of the Falklands War and Blesma's own 90th anniversary were highlighted through videos describing our Members' experiences and the support provided by the Association. Our social media following has continued to grow, with an 11% increase since 2021 taking the number to 68,000 followers.

#### **Resourcing Overview**

In 2022, three quarters of all income came from general fundraising in the form of donations and legacies, 18% from the investment portfolio and investment

property (rent), 5% came from grants and 1% from miscellaneous sources. Although general fundraising income (excluding legacies) was down 23% compared to 2021, it was above the target set at the start of the year by 9%, a real achievement considering the significant economic and fundraising challenges experienced over the year. The Chairman congratulated the Fundraising Team on this success.

### Conclusion

The Chairman concluded by saying that 2022 was a challenging but ultimately successful year. The Association started off in lockdown but was quick to transition to more normal operations as the country emerged from Covid. As the Annual Report showed, the war in Ukraine, a great deal of political uncertainty at home and the cost-of-living crisis towards the end of the year caused Blesma to dip into its reserves in order to sustain support to its Members. We continue to believe that keeping up this level of support in difficult times is the right thing to do.

### 3. NATIONAL TREASURER'S REPORT

The Treasurer summarised Blesma's 2022 financial results as follows:

#### a. Introduction

Despite the pandemic and economic challenges in 2022, the Association made a conscious decision to maintain existing levels of service to its Members by drawing on its reserves to meet its commitment to provide life-long support. The Association also took the decision to assist Members when energy prices rose significantly in the autumn, offering all our Members a £200 grant to help with high inflation and additional living costs at a total cost of £368,000. Approximately two-thirds of the membership took up this offer.

#### b. Incoming Resources

Donations, legacies, grants and other total income amounted to £3,956,288, less by 6% compared to 2021 (£4,225,724) and included:

- £1,240,673 of Legacy Income – a significant increase of £553,090 (80%)



on the previous year (£687,583). The Association had increased its legacy fundraising capability in 2022 by employing a legacies manager

- £1,982,814 of Donations and Grants – a decrease of £508,731 (20%) on the previous year (£2,491,545), largely due to the high cost of living and its impact on disposable income available for charitable donations

- £709,717 of Gross Investment Income – an increase of £69,459 (11%) on the previous year (£640,258) which was affected by the war in Ukraine

- Total Incoming Resources less the cost of generating funds amounted to £2,893,815, a decrease of £224,625 (7%) on the previous year (£3,118,440)

#### c. Resources Expended

Expenditure on charitable activities was £5,292,307 representing an increase of £1,000,515 (23%) over the previous year (£4,291,792). This included:

- £4,979,536 Welfare delivery (Security and Identity) – an increase of £1,065,371 (27%) over the previous year (£3,914,165), largely due to inflation, an increase in the need for welfare grants, one-off cost of living grants to Members and other membership costs such as Members' Weekend

- £312,771 covering representational work – a decrease of £64,855 (17%) on the previous year (£377,626) due to a reduction in staffing and costs during the year

#### d. Balance Sheet

Total funds were down by 13% from £44.4m in 2021 to £38.6m in 2022, largely due to the net loss on investments of £3.43m and the increase in operating costs.

#### e. In conclusion and looking forward

Despite the cost-of-living crisis, the Association had demonstrated that it will continue to be there for its Members for life. Blesma will continue to focus on astute planning for the short and long term, careful use of reserves to sustain support for Members when they most need it and proper management of its resources.

### 4. RESOLUTIONS

The following Resolutions were voted on at the AGM:

**a. To receive the Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2022**  
Carried by a majority.

**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 agree the following amendments to Blesma's Articles and Rules:**

**(1) To allow for electronic attendance and voting at future AGMs in order to allow more Members to play a full part in future AGMs.**

**(2) To extend the period for Member Trustee nominations to be considered and published to the membership prior to the AGM in order to ensure that Members had sufficient time to consider Trustee nominations and, if they wished, vote on them by proxy.**

Carried unanimously.

**d. To announce the retirements of Trustees since the last AGM and re-elect the persons listed below as Trustees of the Association.**

**(1) Retirements:**

Mr Brendan West

Mr Stu Croxford

Mr Bob Watts

**(2) Election of New Blesma Trustees:**

Mr Alan Mistlin. Carried by a majority

Mr Colin Whitworth. Carried by a majority

Mr Neil Heritage. Carried by a majority

## **5. BOARD UPDATE**

The Blesma Members Survey and Future Strategy. The Chairman updated the AGM as follows:

Blesma commissioned NfP Research to conduct a Members' Survey at the end of 2022 and beginning of 2023 to ensure that Members' views and requirements were at the heart of its strategy going forward. The main findings were covered in the summer 2023 issue of *Blesma Magazine*.

The survey asked Members about their lives, their needs and the type of support they wanted from the organisation. Members told us that their main concerns were over mobility and physical health in the future. They wanted the Association to support them in these areas, and also to

continue to provide opportunities to socialise and take part in a broad range of activities and events.

Overall, the feedback from Members was very positive. Three quarters of those surveyed identified Blesma as being the military charity that had been particularly helpful over the last 10 years. There were also a few concerns raised. Some Members were concerned about the pressure on BSOs, with large geographic areas, increasingly complex cases and the pressure being felt in the Health and Social Care sector generally. Other respondents noted that Members' needs varied depending on their age, type of injury, gender and whether they were injured veterans or Widows/Widowers.

The Blesma Board considered the results of the survey as part of its Strategic Review earlier in the year. Having looked at the financial impacts of recent events, the Board decided to continue to invest in delivering the welfare support that Members said they needed, making use of some of the reserve to do this and adjusting structures if necessary. In particular, the intention is to continue to invest in delivering support in person where possible.

The Association is also looking at ways to meet the specific needs of Members of different ages and types with a set of delivery standards and a range of activities and events that meet the needs of all types of Member, including Blesma's Widows.

This work will be used to inform Blesma's strategy over the next five years, so that we can continue to deliver the level and type of support that our Members have told us they need. The Association will keep the membership informed as this work goes forward.

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The following items were discussed:

**a. A Member asked whether the Association could send birthday and Christmas cards to Members.**

The Chairman agreed to examine how this might be done.

**b. A Member suggested that Nepal would be an excellent venue for Blesma**

**activities in the future.**

The Chairman agreed that Nepal was particularly suited to adventurous activities and that this would be considered.

**c. A recently-joined Member asked for more detail on the proposed Trustees and the Chief Executive read out the pen pictures as published in the voting papers for the meeting.**

The Chairman added that members of the Board interviewed all Trustee candidates to confirm they were aware of the requirements of the role and had appropriate skills and experience to contribute to the Board and assume the full responsibilities of a Trustee. All those presented to the AGM were considered suitable for the role.

**d. A Member asked whether it was appropriate for Blesma to run female-only events. She noted that there did not seem to be any male-only events.**

The Chief Executive said that the Association aimed to respond to the demands of the membership, and that a number of female Members had asked for a small number of events that allowed participants to focus on issues affecting female Members in particular. The Chairman asked the female Members present whether they would wish to have the opportunity to attend events specifically focused on their needs. A number indicated that they would. When asked, no male Members indicated a preference for male-only events. The Chairman summarised the position that Blesma would seek to meet the demand for a small number of events for female Members, with the remainder being open to all.

**e. A Member asked whether consideration could be given to making Blesma-branded clothing available in children's sizes.**

The Chairman asked the Executive to examine this.

The Chairman thanked Members for their active participation in the AGM.  
*Jon Bryant, Chief Executive*

# Blesma Awards 2022: The recipients

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 recipients...



## THE JACK TRIGG MEMORIAL AWARD 2022

**Awarded to Lexi Chambers**

**T**his award recognises personal endeavours or sporting agility. This year's recipient, Lexi, lost her left leg below the knee in 2019 and since then has become a full-time wheelchair user. In 2022, Lexi set out to challenge herself by setting a goal to complete a year's worth of events for Blesma in her non-sports wheelchair. She completed three half marathons, two full marathons (including the London Marathon) and a triathlon. Along the way, she set two new world records; the first for the fastest woman to complete a half marathon using a non-sports wheelchair, beating the previous record by 18 minutes, and the second for the fastest woman to complete a full marathon using a non-sports wheelchair, which she beat by 28 minutes.

Her courage, resilience, dedication, drive and enthusiasm have been second to none and have shone through at every stage. In the process, she pushed a stunning 1,787km in 2022 whilst in 'excruciating pain' suffering from Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) and fibromyalgia.

In August, she took part in her third world record attempt and fundraiser at Exeter Arena. See page 08 for more.

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*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.*



## THE HAMBRO AWARD TROPHY 2022

### Awarded to Bryan Phillips

**T**his award recognises high achievers in any field having displayed exceptional commitment and dedication. This year, it is awarded to Bryan Phillips in recognition of his selfless commitment and dedication in supporting veterans, raising awareness and funds for Blesma across a very politically sensitive Northern Ireland.

Bryan joined 1st Battalion The Irish Guards in 2005. In 2012, he stood on an IED, losing both his legs above the knee. Bryan wanted to give back to those who supported him and, in 2017, set his sights on fundraising. His Poppy 100 and a number of gruelling events helped raise thousands of pounds for charities in Northern Ireland.

Eager to support others, Bryan helps fellow Members through his bicycle repair business by encouraging motivation and fitness. As well as being an active MGR speaker, Bryan regularly supports his Outreach Officer in delivering presentations. His personality and openness to share his life experiences enable him to reach out across the generations, from young cadets to those who are retired.

He has been the Blesma flag bearer at the Belfast International Tattoo, was 'Inspiration of the Year' and 'The Community Award' winner at the inaugural 2022 NI Veterans Awards, and is now Honorary Vice President of the 72 (Omagh) Squadron Royal Air Forces Air Cadets. Bryan is a 'quiet achiever' with a humble and unassuming manner – he surreptitiously set up a JustGiving page and has raised more than £4,500, for example. His passion and dedication to help others epitomises the spirit of this award.

*The Hambro Award was established in memory of Blesma Member Major J O Hambro MC, a former Chairman and Treasurer of Blesma who served with the Coldstream Guards and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944.*



## THE CYRIL STEPHENS AWARD 2022

### Awarded to Janet Wilkes

**T**his award recognises the work undertaken by Blesma supporters, and Blesma Widow Janet is an incredibly kind-hearted and generous supporter of the Association. Janet has recently published two books; a short biography of her life called *After the Blossom*, and a collection of poems called *Singing Birds and Silence*. She donated proceeds from both books to Blesma, raising more than £5,000. Janet has also taken over the newsletter for the Sutton, Merton & District Branch.

Janet attends most of the events laid on by the London and South East team and will contribute the cost of that event back to Blesma. She is always very welcoming and engaging to Members on these activities and will assist Members where she can. She is also a great help to her local BSO and Outreach Officer, notably helping put together a Christmas card-making workshop over Zoom and supplying all the materials needed.

Janet is a big advocate of Blesma and is always engaging and socialising with Members. She wears her Blesma hoodie with pride and will speak positively and affectionately about the charity with everyone she meets.

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

*The Cyril Stephens 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.*



## THE FRANKLAND MOORE TROPHY 2022

Awarded to Steve Beasley

**T**his award recognises the work undertaken by Blesma's Welfare Volunteers (known as Welfare Reps). Steve has been a Member and keen supporter of Blesma since 2007, providing his knowledge and support as a volunteer for more than 10 years. Steve uses his expertise to help Members with mobility equipment and supports BSOs and Members in a number of areas with advice and support with mobility equipment.

Steve has travelled hundreds of miles across the country to deliver much-needed equipment to those in need, supported them with repairs, maintenance and advice, and has been a consistent supporter and volunteer for both the Support and Outreach Officers within his Midlands area.

Steve also provides support for Members through the storage unit; regularly maintaining, servicing and managing used equipment that will benefit Blesma Members when required. Nothing is too much trouble for Steve, and without him Blesma would not have been able to provide a rapid response in repurposing equipment to numerous Members over the years.

*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 WWII in securing Blesma's strong financial position.*



## THE EARL OF ANCASTER MEMORIAL AWARD 2022

Awarded to John Miles

**T**his award recognises the work undertaken by a Blesma volunteer. John Miles, 76, has had a long relationship with Blesma following the work of his father, who was instrumental in setting up the Bournemouth Branch. His first involvement with *Blesma Magazine* came in the early 1950s, when he would assist his parents with mailing out copies.

John's next role with the magazine came in 2007 after he suffered kidney failure. His recovery was long and slow, and during that time he would read the magazine to his mother, who is a Blesma Widow. While reading it, he came across the request for help with the audio version.

At first, John recorded magazines into cassettes which could end up six hours long! He now produces the magazine on CD and memory stick rather than tape, and he even does the copying and distribution himself. To date, John has audio transcribed 81 publications – 57 magazines and 24 News Bulletins – over 16 years.

John has been a great help to the Communications Team, is always on time with an issue and is proactive in finding new listeners if he sees an opportunity.

*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.*

# Vox Pops

What did you make of Members' Weekend?



**"It's good for a reconditioning of the mind, body and soul. The activities were very well coordinated and everyone was polite and friendly."**

STEPHEN THOMPSON



**"This was my first Members' Weekend and I'd definitely do it again. I enjoyed the activities; the crossbow and welly-wanging were really good."**

NICK DI VITA



**"The weekend was really inclusive and everyone made me feel so comfortable. I felt as though I was part of a big family that I didn't even know I had!"**

MAURILLIA SIMPSON



**"I enjoy Members' Weekend. It's a great opportunity to talk to people in similar situations with similar injuries who know what you are going through."**

ANDY JEPSON



## THE HAMBRO AWARD TROPHY 2022

### Awarded to Ted Hill

**T**his award recognises high achievers in any field having displayed exceptional commitment and dedication. This award was given under exceptional circumstances in recognition of the extraordinary and unique contribution that Ted Hill made during his membership. Ted was an above-knee amputee who was a Member since 2018. He embodied the essence of what it is to be a Blesma Member and fully embraced the fellowship and values of the Association in all he did to support other Members.

From the outset, Ted was a very active and visible Member. He went above and beyond to provide practical support to the charity, as well as offering advice, friendship and encouragement to other Members. Ted was selfless and generous in giving up his time to become a digital volunteer, spending considerable time training and supporting other Members to engage with digital activities. In addition, he provided immeasurable support to the Outreach Programme during the long period of isolation caused by Covid.

Ted was perhaps best known for creating his 'power cord people' after learning the skill during a Blesma online activity, taking the hobby forward and raising money for Blesma. Most of all, Ted had a special, gentle and engaging way about him that instantly put others at ease. Despite challenges with his own health, Ted continued to provide unwavering emotional and practical support.

Ted's contribution to the charity and its Members has been truly inspirational. His positive energy and approach to life have been truly humbling. Ted passed away on 29 October 2022.

*The Hambro Award was established in memory of Blesma Member Major J O Hambro MC, a former Chairman and Treasurer of Blesma who served with the Coldstream Guards and lost a leg in Normandy in 1944.*

# Save the Date

for Members'  
Weekend and  
AGM 2024

## New venue!

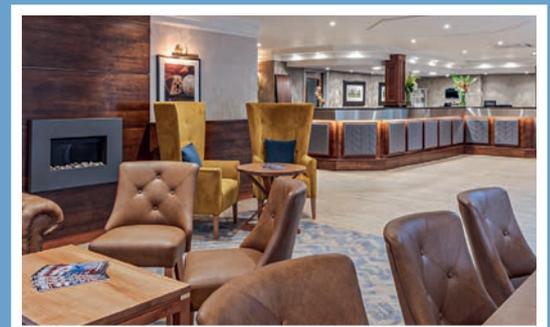
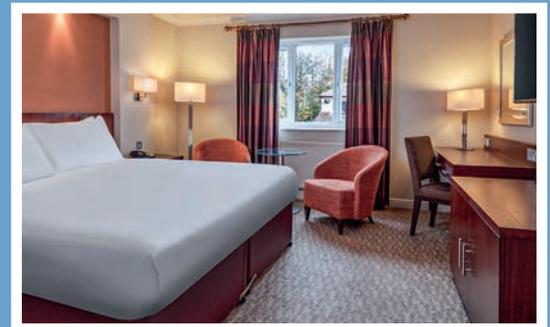
Forest Pines Hotel,  
Spa and Golf Resort,  
Broughton, Lincolnshire  
DN20 0AQ

[www.forestpineshotel.co.uk](http://www.forestpineshotel.co.uk)

29 June - 01 July 2024

Applications open 15 December 2023

**Blesma**  
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS



# Bulletin

## Scotland on safari for biggest ever event

*Spotting wild animals, pizza and cake for lunch, and the chance to catch up with like-minded people. What's not to like?*

**B**lesma Scotland hosted its biggest-ever event when a group of 53 Members, family members and volunteers visited Blair Drummond Safari Park near Stirling in July.

“We hired a yurt (right) which acted as our meeting point, and as Members and their families arrived, they were greeted by Blesma volunteers Lorraine Anderson and Pauline McQueen,” said Outreach Officer Emma Gratton. “The yurt was a great base, especially as we had some heavy showers throughout the day.”

Fiona Maxwell from the charity Reading Force provided free books for the 19 children at the event, and she also kindly gave books to Members to take home for children and grandchildren who were not able to attend on the day.

“Families spent time wandering around the park and drove through the nature reserves before enjoying wood-fired pizza for lunch followed by lots of amazing cakes made by Ian Reid’s wife, Diane,” said Emma. “After lunch the weather improved and everyone visited the animals and watched the talks and demonstrations. Events like this can be stressful, but



**From left: Steve Becala, Andy McQueen, Volunteer Pauline McQueen, Outreach Officer Emma Gratton, Michael Mellon**

the minute you see the Members and their families enjoying their day, sharing these experiences and having a good time, it makes it all worthwhile.”

The day was certainly a big hit with Members. “It was great to meet Members who I have only interacted with on Zoom. Inspirational thinking to organise this wonderful activity!” said Widow Member and volunteer Lorraine Anderson.

Deborah Mellon, wife of Member Michael, was enthusiastic: “What a smashing day. Sharing his stories with other Members definitely helps Michael. It was great for him to speak to others about stump issues.”

Dave Moore perhaps summed it up best: “Special thanks to Emma for another fantastic day out. It’s the first time I’ve experienced this in my 52 years, and I was like a kid at Christmas!”

**“Special thanks to Emma for another fantastic day out. It’s the first time I’ve experienced this in my 52 years, and I was like a kid at Christmas!”**

# Northern Ireland: seeds, sailing, smartphones and so much fun

## SMARTPHONE PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

As Outreach Officer, I wanted to re-energise this previous activity and so persuaded a Member to lead a four-week smartphone photography workshop. Sharing the therapeutic benefits this can bring, along with the simplicity of capturing and transforming everyday images, sparked creativity and confidence. During the last week, Members had the opportunity to frame and caption their favourite edited image as a memento.

## REAP WHAT YOU SOW

The spring 'At Home' activity was chosen to help and encourage Members and their families to 'Grow Your Own' organic summer vegetables from seed. The excitement didn't stop from the first green shoots right through to the bumper harvest. Patience and nurturing played a part and definitely paid off.

## BEGINNERS' WATERCOLOUR PENCIL WORKSHOP

"You are never too old to learn more than you already know and to become able to do more than you already can." This quote came to mind whilst I watched an 85-year-old Member start our three-week Beginners' Watercolour Pencil Workshop on Zoom. This learning experience created an atmosphere of relaxation and fun.

## 'BIG SHOT' COMPETITION

A novelty competitive shoot was next on the cards; a fantastic day on the range with two trophies up for grabs. Lee B was awarded the 'Big Shot' cup for being the top shot while Bryan Lawrence won the 'For Showing Up' cup. The day turned out to be hugely competitive and the scrutiny of scoring became very important!

## SAILABILITY

Lough Erne Yacht Club runs Sailability, which supports all abilities using specially designed boats. The Blesma group took to the water alongside Blind Veterans UK and



Members, Widows and volunteers on the Blesma stand at Armed Forces Day NI



Sailing the day away with Sailability

Help for Heroes, and were able to set their cares and worries aside, have a go at sailing, and simply enjoy the wonder of Lower Lough Erne. One of our Widows was initially nervous about stepping into the small sailboat, but although she was fearful, she did it and when she got ashore she said it had been one of the best experiences of her life. Well done Margaret for being brave!

## WHERE HISTORY HAS WINGS

A visit to the Ulster Aviation Society did not disappoint; fast jets and helicopters, as well as propeller-driven WWII and vintage aircraft were all on display. The



Volunteer David Turpee laying a wreath

crew of volunteers shared their knowledge to ensure everyone left knowing more than they had when they arrived.

## AWARENESS RAISING AND FUNDRAISING

Armed Forces Day NI was held at Sandy Bay playing fields in Larne, and a big thank you to the Members and volunteers who came along throughout the day to offer support and to chat to those who visited our stand to help raise awareness of the charity.

The Spectrum Centre Belfast hosted a spectacular evening concert in the company of The Band, Bugles, Pipes and Drums of The Royal Irish Regiment accompanied by



**Fast jets and helicopters wowed kids and grown-ups alike during an interesting and enjoyable visit to the Ulster Aviation Society**

Willie Donald. Blesma received a truly warm welcome and was given the opportunity to introduce itself to the audience. This was an outstanding evening of music with the proceeds in aid of Blesma.

What a privilege to be part of the Ulster Branch Irish Guards Association Charity Golf Day and evening. This event was all about playing golf, having fun and raising awareness and funds for the Irish Guards Charity and Blesma. Some 130 golfers 'teed off' in their 4 balls (131 if you include me having a wee swing!) During the evening's proceedings, it was an honour to present Bryan Phillips with the Blesma Hambro Award 2022; an award in recognition of his selfless commitment and dedication in supporting veterans and raising awareness and funds for Blesma (see p51 for more).

On 8 July, a Blesma wreath was laid at The Irish National War Memorial Gardens, Dublin for the first time. This was part of the RBL Annual Somme Ceremony of Remembrance; an event which commemorates all those who lost their lives in the two World Wars. David Turpee, a Blesma volunteer, officially laid the wreath on behalf of Blesma.

**Fiona Morrison, Outreach Officer**



### **MEMBERS ENJOY MEMBERS' WEEKEND**

**As always, Members from Northern Ireland came to Members' Weekend in force and had a great time meeting fellow Members from the rest of the Association. "It was fantastic to have one of our new Members and his wife come along to their first Members' Weekend – and I know it won't be their last!" said Fiona Morrison.**

# Scotland: sailing, shooting and spreading the word in Glasgow

## GLASGOW CENTRAL TRAIN STATION FUNDRAISER

Following a chat with the Fundraising Team, I got to work to see if I could get a group together to help raise awareness with a bucket collection at Glasgow Central Train Station. Members and volunteers rallied around, and thanks to the generous people of Glasgow we raised almost £900 on 11 May.

## CLAY PIGEON SHOOTING

Back by popular demand! The format was different from last year's event, with a taster session in the morning followed by a competition in the afternoon. Once again, the Cluny Activities Team provided expert tuition and there was much laughter to be heard through the venue, particularly from the ladies' team. The competition was won by Member's wife Karen Abbot (who had never tried clay pigeon shooting before!), and the wooden spoon was won by Johnny Britton. A big thank you to Andy McQueen who provided the wooden spoon and demonstrated his pyrography skills.

## ACVC HUB VISIT

The Veterans' Hub is a great place to go for a bit of relaxation and to take part in some crafting activities. Members and their families created some lovely pottery and pyrography artworks. We attended the hub with members of the Veterans' Community (VC) Hub Lanarkshire, which gave our Members more of an insight into their activities, and we now have some Members who attend the VC Hub.

## INVERNESS BOTANIC GARDENS AND AFTERNOON TEA

Originally planned to be a canal boat trip with the Seagull Trust, the boat trip had to be cancelled because high temperatures were having an impact on a metal bridge and caused safety concerns. All was not lost as the Seagull Trust suggested a visit to the Botanic Gardens which did not disappoint. The relatively small site in



Afternoon tea at the Glen Mhor Hotel after a trip to Inverness Botanic Gardens



Member Ian Reid and his wife Diane fundraising at Glasgow Central Station



**Mick Currie looking on as Rose Tippen, wife of Member Mike, takes aim at a clay**



**Powerboating with Fife Sailability**

the city centre packs in a huge number of plants, there are different areas to walk or to just sit and enjoy the surroundings.

**SUMMER BAKING COMPETITION**

At the time of writing, the competition to make some ‘biscuit pops’ is in full swing, with Members baking items during the school summer holidays. The competition will be judged by the winner of the last competition, Mick Currie and his granddaughter Jessica. We were also lucky to try the ‘bear cake pops’ made by the Mellon Family at the Safari Park (see p55).



**Members’ wives crafting at the ACVC Hub**

**SAILING AND POWERBOATING WITH FIFE SAILABILITY**

This was our third attempt to get out sailing as the two previous trips failed due to a lack of wind! This time, the weather was atrocious but that didn’t dampen spirits, and we all enjoyed either the powerboat or the sailing boat. Andy Mahoney was very adventurous; he went out on the trimaran and had a great time.

**SHOOTING TASTER SESSION**

Alloa & District Shooting Club invited Members along for a taster session. The

day started with a safety briefing and then Members got the chance to familiarise themselves with the air rifles. After lunch, Members were split into two teams and had a mini competition, which was won by the ‘A’ Team of John Westwater, Chris Souden, Michael Mellon and Alan Izzard. The ‘B’ Team of Andy McQueen, Geoff Norris, Julie Izzard and Dave Moore were gracious in their defeat and vowed to do better next time.

**FRIDAY ONLINE DROP-IN**

Our regular Friday online drop-in has continued with a beekeeping talk which we are hoping will lead to an online introduction to beekeeping course.

**PROSTHETIC AND PAIN MANAGEMENT FORUM**

A popular forum that attracts a mix of Members with both amputations and loss of use of limb. This activity is held every six-to-eight weeks with the BSO and Outreach Officer fully engaged. The forum is a great opportunity for the BSO to provide an overview of the current situation in the five Limb Centres followed by an open forum for Members to provide updates and share various tips and stories.

**BOOK GROUP**

The book group continues to offer Members and their families the chance to get together to discuss their love of books. We are currently able to provide books in a variety of formats including paper and digital copies, and via Audible. The books are chosen by the Members present at the Zoom meeting and are then sent out to the group to read before feeding back their reviews.

**WIDOWS, SPOUSES AND PARTNERS ONLINE DROP-IN**

This group meets monthly in the evenings and gives people the chance to catch up with each other, share experiences and generally have a laugh.

**Emma Gratton, Outreach Officer**

# Wales and West: from welfare visits to social connection

Over summer, Blesma Wales and West continued to support its Members closely and prioritise help and advice where it was needed. More than 25 home visits were carried out by BSO Tom Hall alongside numerous visits to support Members at Limb Centres and other venues between June and mid-August.

A survey was sent out in June asking Members what type of Outreach events they would like to see introduced and if they had any ideas for new activities and social events. It seems our Members thoroughly enjoy the social lunches and being part of an informal social group in their area. Trips to the zoo and family events are popular, and a variety of cultural, historical and informative activities have been suggested.

Our younger Members would like to see more adventurous events, whereas older Members enjoy connecting with others and spending time with friends and colleagues. It's extremely satisfying to know that what we are doing throughout the areas is hitting much of what our Members want.

## WELLBEING AND SUPPORT WORK

Members are being hit hard by the cost of living and mortgage payment increases, and our Members are turning to Blesma for help and advice in areas such as private health costs, legal aid for family crisis, housing support and transport costs to medical appointments where the NHS has removed services they used to rely on.

There has also been an increase in help with funding mobility and disability aids due to the increase in wheelchair assessments and lack of NHS and Community Occupational Therapists (OT) supporting at home. This has meant a higher than average use of private OT support to ensure that Members are able to access the adaptations and equipment they urgently need. This consistent increase in support and advocacy has increased the importance of partnership work across the charity sector. Spreading the workload across the third sector network helps to relieve pressure on Blesma field staff but



Raymond Gwilliam takes a spin around Castle Combe as a passenger



also strengthens bonds. For the BSO, it has been increasingly important to build these stronger ties, especially across the Armed Forces forums and NHS Health Board groups. Blesma is now well known in Wales and is a respected partner.

The veterans network is close and strong. The Veterans' Commissioner for Wales held a Veterans Working Group amongst the main charity and veterans agencies to seek

ways to improve support to veterans and their families. Blesma was a close and positive part of this and is also playing a supporting role in the new Pers Hwb (improvement in support to veterans) group that has been put together by the MOD at Headquarters 160 Brigade Wales. Tom has also been continuing to work closely with the Welsh Government, and the Welsh Health Specialised Service



Bill and Lisa James enjoyed the visit to Chester Zoo with their daughter



Jason Suller spends time with ex-Liverpool footballer David Fairclough



North West Member John Gibson



Back: Peter and Elizabeth Borley with their daughter, Sharon, and Frank Bowen

Commission and Limb Centres in Wales as part of the Prosthetics Forum looking for ways to increase and improve support to amputee veterans. This work is important and runs concurrently with the normal (but crucial) everyday support to Members, Widows and their families.

*If you would like to arrange a visit or receive support contact Tom on 07780 165085 or [bsowest@blesma.org](mailto:bsowest@blesma.org)*

### SOCIAL EVENTS

Outreach Officer Jason Suller has continued to organise activities and social lunches for Members and their families, as well as providing low-level welfare support to the BSO. The following are just some of the activities enjoyed: social lunches throughout the area, a passenger track day at Castle Combe racing circuit, an online stone air freshener workshop, Zip World

North Wales, an online stone felt dragon workshop, a visit to Chester Zoo and many more!

### FUTURE EVENTS

**St Fagan's Museum and Gardens**  
Tuesday 26 September 10.00-16.00  
Chester Area Lunch

**Thursday 28 September 12.30-14.30**  
Jason sent out a survey in June and the response indicated very strongly that Members would like to continue to be able to access social lunches. But Jason is always looking for new events and activities, and would like to invite Members to get in touch with their own ideas for future events.

*Contact Jason on 07741 744141 or [outreachwest@blesma.org](mailto:outreachwest@blesma.org) for more details and to join in*

### SUMMARY

Tom and Jason would like to thank the Independence and Wellbeing team at Blesma head office. Without their hard work and dedication, Members would not get what they need and would struggle to access grant funding, advice for benefits and entitlements, and so much more.

# Midlands: canals, curry nights and the Cosford Airshow

## DUDLEY ZOO AND CASTLE

In April, 18 Members and their families came together from across the Midlands for a fun-filled family day at Dudley Zoo and Castle. The zoo is home to hundreds of animals and is set in the grounds of an 11th century castle. Everyone had a lovely day; Members enjoyed socialising with one another, coming face-to-face with an array of animals and exploring the historic site.

“Thanks for organising a fantastic day out,” said Chris Smith. “I’m already looking forward to our next adventure!”

## DUDLEY CANAL TRUST ACCESSIBLE UNDERGROUND NARROW BOAT TOUR

Nine Members visited the Dudley Canal Trust in April to explore a magical underground world that dates back 428 million years! Members took a trip on the accessible narrow boat and went under ground for a sound and light tour, historic recreations, and informative commentary from the skipper. That was all followed by a delicious buffet!

## CURRY AND QUIZ NIGHT

The Bombay Nights restaurant in Nottingham played host to a curry and quiz night on Tuesday 25 April. Sixteen Members enjoyed some delicious Indian cuisine whilst socialising with other Members and sharing many laughs and jokes.

## CARSINGTON SAILABILITY

In May, 10 Members take part in adaptive sailing on the beautiful Carsington Waters. The Carsington Sailability team ensured that everyone was well looked after and had a wonderful time despite the stormy weather. Back on dry land, Members enjoyed a delicious lunch followed by hot drinks and a natter.

## THE COSFORD AIRSHOW

The Cosford Airshow is always a spectacle and it certainly didn’t disappoint this year. A Blesma contingent of 42 people, made up of Members and their families, enjoyed an



Sixteen Members enjoyed a curry and quiz night in Nottingham earlier in the year



Members loved the Dudley Zoo family day

action-packed flying display that included demonstrations of modern military aircraft from the RAF and international military partners. There were captivating appearances from iconic aircraft and adrenaline-pumping aerobatic displays. Members enjoyed the show from the ‘Squadreunion Area’ which was dedicated to ex-military personnel. “It was a fantastic day with great company as per normal, thanks to all who organised the day,” said one Member.



All aboard the Severn Valley railway ride

## SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY RIDE

On Wednesday 14 June, a group of 24 Members and family members met at Comberton Place in Kidderminster for a trip on a Severn Valley steam train. Once aboard, Members enjoyed beautiful views of the English countryside whilst tucking into a delicious cream tea. The train ride went as far as Bridgnorth, where Members had time to explore the beautiful surroundings before returning to Kidderminster.

*Sian Richards, Outreach Officer*

# News from around the Branches

## NOTTINGHAM BRANCH

We continue to flourish, regularly welcoming new members and meeting throughout the year. We will be holding our remaining 2023 meeting/lunch on 14 November at 11.30 at The Vale Hotel, Daybrook, Nottingham. If you would like to join us you would be made very welcome.

On Sunday 23 July many of our members were looking forward to running a Blesma fundraising and awareness raising day at Thoresby Park and Military Museum. Unfortunately, it was cancelled due to the forecast of possible thunderstorms, but we will hopefully run it in the future. Meanwhile, after a three-year absence, we were very excited for this year's Branch Summer Evening Meal at Colwick Hall on 24 August. The Branch Christmas Lunch will be held on 12 December.

If you are interested in joining the Branch, or would like to know more about our activities, please contact me on 07794 309927.

*David Ledger, Honorary Secretary*

## SUTTON, MERTON & DISTRICT BRANCH

We are happy to report that our Branch is thriving and is financially sound. Our meetings are very well attended; we have an excellent lunch in convivial company and following the business end of the proceedings, we socialise. Thanks to our area BSO Steve and Outreach Officer Jess, we have quite a few new Members.

Following the pandemic, we have resumed getting out and about. Member Peter Turner is a Chelsea Pensioner and has organised tours for us at his home at The Royal Hospital. It was an honour and a privilege to be invited and given lunch in the Grand Hall.

Our members attended Members' Weekend recently, which was an amazing experience. It was great to meet other Branches and exchange views – full marks to everyone involved in organising this event. Next year will be our Branch Diamond Jubilee (1948-2024). Until meeting up at Members' Weekend we thought we were the oldest Branch, but we are beaten by Bournemouth by one year.

We must thank staff in Chelmsford for their invaluable help with many enquiries, we are eternally grateful.

*Annie MacMillan*

## SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER & DISTRICT BRANCH

The Branch continues to thrive, and we hope those from the old Portsmouth Branch who have joined us are content with what we do. We were very pleased to be able to hold our Summer Lunch on 28 June in Bursledon and hope it helped those who live to the east of Southampton who wished to attend.

We were delighted to have the Mayor of Winchester, Councillor Angela Clear, and BSO South Pat Donnachie as our guests, and we were very pleased to see all who came. It was also very pleasing to see that the Mayor made a great effort to go around all the tables and meet everyone.

*Stephen Coltman, Honorary Secretary*

# Those who have passed away

May they rest in peace

<b>BEECH R A</b>	Royal Sussex Regiment	18/05/2023
<b>BIRCH D G</b>	Royal Horse Artillery	16/06/2023
<b>BREESE W M</b>	Associate Member Widow	21/07/2023
<b>BUTLER P</b>	Royal Air Force	26/07/2023
<b>CHAMBERS S</b>	Widow	24/07/2023
<b>GARDNER D</b>	Widow	07/06/2023
<b>GILL D</b>	Associate Member Widow	20/06/2023
<b>GORDON J</b>	Royal Air Force	25/05/2023
<b>GOWAR T G</b>	Royal Sussex Regiment	24/07/2023
<b>GUILD G J</b>	Royal Anglian Regiment	07/06/2023
<b>HAZAN R L</b>	Royal Anglian Regiment	18/05/2023
<b>HOLT J</b>	Associate Member Widow	19/06/2023
<b>LOVEDAY CJ</b>	Scots Guards	19/06/2023
<b>MAY D G C</b>	Royal Warwickshire Regiment and Royal Worchestershire Foresters	19/06/2023
<b>MCKONE M</b>	Parachute Regiment	18/05/2023
<b>MITCHELL M</b>	Widow	05/06/2023
<b>NEWTON J W B</b>	Royal Air Force	25/05/2023
<b>PENNYCOOK M</b>	Widow	04/07/2023
<b>PRETER K</b>	Royal Marines	26/07/2023
<b>PRICE D M</b>	Royal Artillery	14/06/2023
<b>SHARP T</b>	Royal Air Force	12/05/2023
<b>SWIFT F M</b>	Widow	25/05/2023
<b>WILSON K K</b>	Army Catering Corps	24/07/2023
<b>WRIGHT G A</b>	Queen's Highlanders (Seaforth & Camerons)	19/06/2023

## Ken Preter

24 October 1923 - 26 July 2023

The first day Ken and I met we became good friends. Over the last 12 years he told me all his wartime exploits – it was like a book that I could not put down. He was on a landing craft in Falmouth to take part in D-Day but his section was taken off and sent to Iceland to guard a floating dock. He was then shipped to Australia to start training to invade Japan but after the surrender was sent to Hong Kong to take Japanese troops as prisoners. He told me about the atrocities he witnessed that haunted him all his life. Ken was a friend whom I will never forget.

*Peter Deluce*



# Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

**W**elcome to the Bulletin’s regular section on the benefits system. As well as highlighting some useful information regarding the benefits system, on occasions we will be raising awareness of some health and social care matters or other available support. For further information about benefit entitlements, Blesma Members can contact their Support Officer or Blesma’s Benefits and Social Care Adviser Liz Watling (all contact details can be found on p68). Please note these contact details are for Blesma Members only.

In this issue, we are focusing on the support available for those on a low income. Which benefit to consider will depend on your age. If you are of working age, please read the section on Universal Credit. If you are of State Pension age, please read the section on Pension Credit.

If you are part of a couple, both of your incomes and capital will affect your entitlement. If one of you is of working age you will need to read the section on Universal Credit.

## UNIVERSAL CREDIT

### What is Universal Credit?

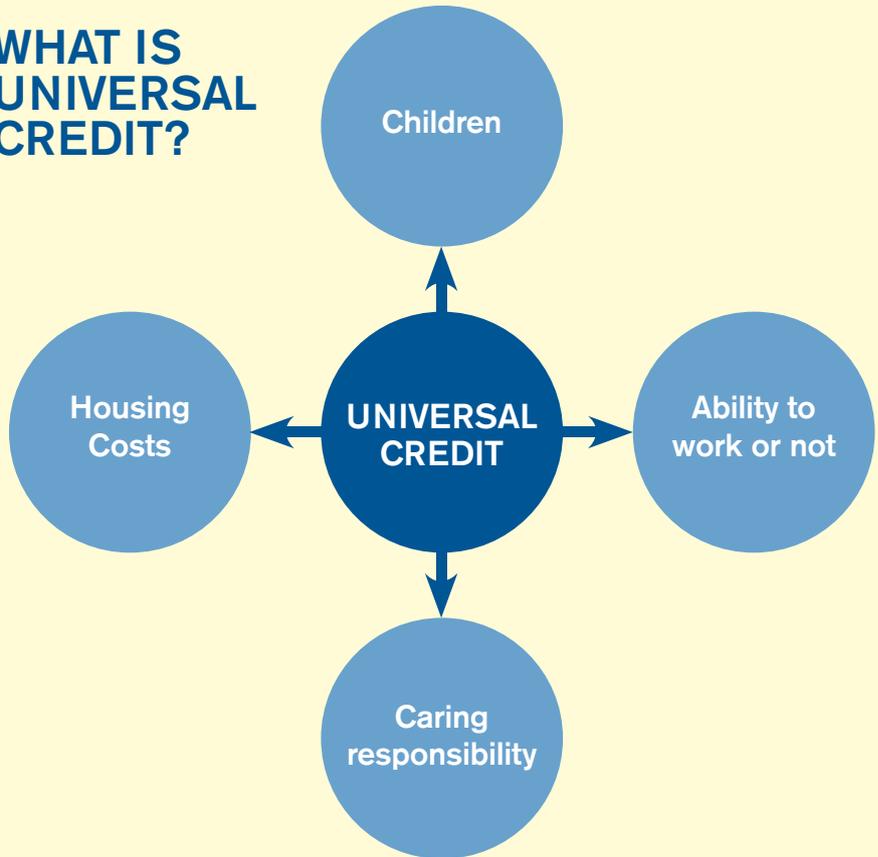
Universal Credit supports people of working age and on a low income, whether in or out of work. It includes support for the cost of housing, children and childcare, and financial support for people with disabilities, carers, and people too ill or disabled to work.

It is a means-tested benefit. This means your income and savings will affect your entitlement. Some of your income and capital may be ignored.

### Who can claim Universal Credit?

You can apply for Universal Credit if you are in or out of work. You will usually only be able to claim Universal Credit if you are aged 18 or over and under State Pension age. Some people within this age bracket will be excluded from claiming, such as certain students. You will need to be present and resident in Great Britain

## WHAT IS UNIVERSAL CREDIT?



and not subject to immigration control.

### How is Universal Credit calculated?

Universal Credit is a single payment that is made up of different amounts depending on your circumstances. The payment will take into account:

- Your earnings if you are working
- Your partner’s earnings if they are working
- Any other income that is coming into your household e.g. some other benefits or an occupational pension
- The capital you and your partner have

The amount you get is worked out each month, so may be different from one month to the next if you earn a different amount, or if your circumstances change.

Some income may be ignored within the calculation, such as a War Pension and

Armed Forces Compensation Scheme Guaranteed Income Payment, although you may see some supplements of your War Pension affected if you are awarded Universal Credit.

There is a capital limit of £16,000, meaning that claimants with capital above this level will not be able to receive a payment of Universal Credit.

### What is expected of the claimant?

In return for getting Universal Credit, you may be expected to meet further requirements, such as look for or prepare for work. Claimants will have different responsibilities depending on their circumstances.

If you are out of work due to ill health or disability, you will have to take part in a Work Capability Assessment to determine

what level, if any, of further requirements are attached to your claim.

### What does Universal Credit replace?

Universal Credit replaces:

- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit

These are known as 'legacy benefits'. If you receive any of these benefits or tax credits and your circumstances change, you may need to claim Universal Credit instead.

*Please note that when you apply for Universal Credit this will mean you can no longer receive these benefits or tax credits. Some people may see a decrease in income. It is important to get advice before making a claim if you are on one of the above legacy benefits. Please contact your Blesma Support Officer via phone or email (all relevant contact details can be found on p68).*

### When will you have to change to Universal Credit?

If you are receiving a legacy benefit and have a change of circumstances – for example, you separate or become part of a couple – you may be expected to claim Universal Credit and your legacy benefit will stop.

Legacy benefit claimants who do not have a change of circumstances will be expected to claim Universal Credit at some stage. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will contact claimants to advise when they are being affected. This is known as managed migration.

Currently claimants who receive Tax Credits are being contacted. Other legacy benefit claimants will start to be migrated in 2024. The process to have contacted all legacy benefit claimants is expected to be completed in 2028.

### What is the managed migration process?

The managed migration process is not an automatic change from legacy benefits to Universal Credit. Therefore, the onus is on claimants to apply for Universal Credit once they receive a migration notice.

*If you receive a migration notice and struggle to navigate the process, please contact your Blesma Support Officer.*

- Claimants will receive a migration notice informing them that their legacy benefits are ending and that they must claim Universal Credit by the deadline specified in the notice
- The deadline for claiming Universal Credit is three months and one day from the date the migration notice is issued. This can be extended at the DWP's discretion if they agree there is good reason
- For Tax Credits claimants, HMRC will be notified by the DWP once a migration notice has been issued. HMRC may carry out a 'pre-migration check' and contact some claimants to ensure their Tax Credit award is as accurate as possible at the time of migration
- The DWP will send reminder letters and texts to encourage claims by the deadline to ensure that claimants are aware of the sources of support available to them
- Legacy benefit payments continue for a further two weeks after the Universal Credit claim has been made or the deadline date passes, after which they will end. Tax Credits will stop either on the day before the Universal Credit claim is made or the day before the deadline date if no claim has been made

### What is Transitional Protection?

Transitional protection is a top-up payment awarded if the claimant is financially worse off when they transfer to Universal Credit. This payment is not intended to permanently replicate the amount of income a claimant received from legacy benefits and its value erodes over time. It may not fully compensate

some claimants for the difference received between the legacy benefit and Universal Credit. Transitional protection is only available for claimants going through the managed migration process.

Certain changes in circumstances bring transitional protection to an end such as stopping work, sustained drops in income, or a couple either separating or forming a new couple.

### How do you claim Universal Credit?

You must normally claim Universal Credit online at [www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit](http://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit). If you need help, you can call the Universal Credit helpline on 0800 328 9344. This number can be very busy so please be prepared to wait.

*Please speak to your Blesma Support Officer to discuss the implications for you before making a claim for Universal Credit.*

## PENSION CREDIT

### What is Pension Credit?

Pension Credit supports you if you are of State Pension age and on a low income, whether in or out of work. It is a means-tested benefit, meaning your income and savings will affect your entitlement. Some of your income and capital may be ignored. There are two types of Pension Credit:

### PENSION GUARANTEE CREDIT

Pension Guarantee Credit provides a guaranteed level of income and is worked out by comparing your income with an amount the Government says you need to live on.

### PENSION SAVINGS CREDIT

Pension Savings Credit is designed to reward people who have saved a modest amount of money for their retirement, such as an occupational pension or savings. Pension Savings Credit is being phased out and can only be claimed by those who reached pension age by 06 April 2016.

*Continued over the page*

## Spotlight on Benefits and Social Care

### Who can claim Pension Credit?

You can apply for Pension Credit if you are in or out of work and on a low income.

You can claim Pension Credit if:

- You and your partner, if you have one, have both reached State Pension age
- You are present in Great Britain and not subject to immigration control
- You meet the income-related criteria

If you are in a couple who already receive Pension Credit, you can continue to receive it if one of you is under State Pension age. Otherwise, if you are not already receiving Pension Credit and you are in a couple, one of whom is under State Pension age, please read the Universal Credit section.

### How is Pension Credit calculated?

Pension Credit is a single payment that is made up of different amounts depending on your circumstances. The payment will take into account:

- Your earnings if you are working
- Your partner's earnings if they are working
- Any other income that is coming into your household e.g. some other benefits or an occupational pension
- The capital you and your partner have

The amount you get is worked out weekly, but you may be paid every week, fortnight or every four weeks. Some income may be ignored within the calculation, such as some supplements within a War Pension. There is not the same full disregard for War Pension and Guaranteed Income Payment as in Universal Credit.

There is currently no capital limit for Pension Credit. However, if you have capital above £6,000 you will be assumed to have a set level of income from this. The higher your capital the more income you will be assumed to have.

You can find out how much you may be entitled to by entering your details into the Government's online calculator at [www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator](http://www.gov.uk/pension-credit-calculator)

### How do you claim Pension Credit?

#### If you live in England, Scotland or Wales

You can claim any time after you reach State Pension age, but your claim can only be backdated for three months. You can start your application up to four months before you reach State Pension age, but your claim will not start until you reach State Pension age.

#### Apply online

You can use the online service if:

- You have already claimed your State Pension
- There are no children or young people included in your claim

[www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim](http://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim)

#### Apply by phone or post

You can contact the Pension Credit claim line on 0800 991 234 to make a claim by phone or to request a form is sent to you. The date of your claim will be the date of your telephone call, as long as you return the completed form within the requested timescale. If you prefer, you can use the online link to print out a form to fill in. The date of your claim will be the date the form is received.

#### If you live in Northern Ireland

You can claim any time after you reach State Pension age, but your claim can only be backdated for three months. You can start your application up to four months before you reach State Pension age, but your claim will not start until you reach State Pension age.

#### Apply online

You can use the online service if:

- You have already claimed your State Pension
- There are no children or young people included in your claim

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/applying-pension-credit](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/applying-pension-credit)

#### Apply by phone

You can contact the Northern Ireland Pension Centre on 0808 100 6165 to make a claim by phone.

#### Apply by post

You can download a claim form or complete it online. You can then print and post your form. The date of your claim will be the date the form is received.

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/pension-credit-application-form](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/publications/pension-credit-application-form)

## HOUSING BENEFIT FOR PEOPLE OF PENSION AGE

Unlike for Universal Credit, there is no allowance for housing costs within Pension Credit.

### What is Housing Benefit?

Housing Benefit is to support pension-age people who are on a low income and who pay rent, whether to a social landlord or are privately renting. If your tenancy agreement is with a relative, or is not on a commercial basis, you may be excluded from receiving Housing Benefit.

### Who can claim Housing Benefit?

You can claim Housing Benefit if:

- You are of State Pension age and deemed liable for rent. If you are part of a couple, you both need to be of State Pension age
- You have a low income
- Your capital and savings are under £16,000 (unless you get Pension Guarantee Credit, in which case there is no capital limit)

### How is Housing Benefit calculated?

If you receive Pension Guarantee Credit you will get your maximum amount of Housing Benefit, but this will not necessarily cover all of your rent. Those who don't receive Pension Guarantee Credit can still make a claim and the Local Authority will look at your income and capital and compare this to the rent you pay. Your entitlement may be restricted if:

- You live in an area where rents are higher than the level set by your Local Authority
- You live in a property with more bedrooms than you need
- You have other adults, who are not part of your benefit claim, living in the property

### How do you claim Housing Benefit?

Housing Benefit is administered by your Local Authority. You can make a claim online or by contacting your Local Authority and requesting a claim form.

## COST OF LIVING PAYMENTS

These payments are for those on low income or disability benefits. The Government has committed to payments for the financial year. There are five payments: three for the cost of living, one for pensioners and one for disability. You will receive a payment for each one you meet the criteria for. The payments are not taxable and will not affect any benefits or Tax Credits you receive.

### Cost of Living Payment

#### Low Income Benefits and Tax Credits

You may be entitled to up to three Cost of Living Payments of £301, £300 and £299 if you get any of the following benefits or Tax Credits on certain dates. At the time of writing, only the first payment date has been announced and if entitled you should have received this between 25 April and 17 May 2023.

#### – Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you were entitled to a payment for any day during the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023

#### – Universal Credit

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you were entitled to a payment of Universal Credit for an assessment period that ended in the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023

#### – Tax Credits

You are eligible for the first Cost of Living Payment of £301 if you received a payment of Tax Credits for any day in the period 26 January 2023 to 25 February 2023

The payment will be made separately from your benefit payments. If you receive Tax Credits and one of the other low income benefits, you will only receive one Cost of Living Payment. If you are receiving Tax Credits or low income benefit as a couple, you will only receive one Cost of Living Payment.

#### When will the next Cost of Living Payment be paid?

We are still waiting for the eligibility dates for the qualifying benefit test and will provide updates in future Bulletins. However, we do currently know the approximate dates of payment:

- £300 paid during autumn 2023 for most people
- £299 paid during spring 2024 for most people

#### Disability Cost of Living Payment

You will be entitled to a Disability Cost of Living Payment of £150 if you get any of the following benefits or payments on 01 April 2023:

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

If you are receiving a qualifying payment through the War Pension or Armed Forces Independence Payment and you also receive a qualifying benefit from the Department for Work and Pensions, you will receive one Disability Cost of Living Payment only. This will be paid via the Department for Work and Pensions.

#### When will you be paid?

If you are entitled to the Disability Cost of Living Payment, you should have received the payment between 20 June 2023 and 04 July 2023.

#### Pensioner Cost of Living Payment

If you are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2023/24, you will get an extra £150 or £300 paid with your normal payment for the coming winter.

The full amount of Winter Fuel Payment (including the Pensioner Cost of Living Payment) you will get for this winter depends on when you were born and your circumstances during the qualifying dates.

If you are eligible, you will be sent a letter in October or November advising how much you will receive and when your payment will be made. We will also update Members in the next Bulletin.

#### What do you do if you have not received your Cost of Living Payment?

You can report a missing Cost of Living Payment online at [www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/cost-of-living-payment). Please note: you will need your National Insurance number.

Use this service if you were expecting one of the following Cost of Living Payments but have not received it:

- £301 paid between 25 April 2023 and 17 May 2023 for most people
- £150 Disability Cost of Living Payment paid between 20 June 2023 and 4 July 2023 for most people

Before reporting a missing payment, the Government advises to check your bank, building society or credit union account, or your Payment Exception Service voucher receipt. The payment will be made separately from your benefit.

It advises to not report the same missing payment more than once.

# Useful contact numbers across the Association

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>BLESMA SUPPORT OFFICERS</b>			
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	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	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	Sarah Payne	M 07741 737563	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 7080	iwabenefits@blesma.org
<b>BLESMA OUTREACH OFFICERS</b>			
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		M 07741845429	outreachmid@blesma.org
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		M 07884 695703	outreachscotland@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South	Amy Barnes	M 07435 283102	outreachofficersouth@blesma.org
Outreach Officer South West	Gordon Clark	M 07788 312747	outreachsw@blesma.org
Outreach Officer Wales and West	Jason Suller	M 07741 744141	outreachwest@blesma.org
<b>INDEPENDENCE AND WELLBEING</b>			
Head of Welfare Support	Colin Branch	T 020 8548 7090	hws@blesma.org
Benefits and Social Care Adviser	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 Mayne	T 020 8548 7093	mbvexec@blesma.org
Welfare – Direct Line		T 020 8598 9459	
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>			
Activities Manager	Jess March	T 020 8548 3519	activities@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Clare Wellings	T 020 3954 3021	ae@blesma.org
Events Coordinator	Nicole Findlay	T 020 8548 7097	aelocal@blesma.org
<b>FUNDRAISING</b>			
Head of Fundraising	Anna Scalera	T 020 8548 3517	hf@blesma.org
Community and Events Manager	Abbie-Louise Mills	T 020 8548 7089	communityeventsofficersnr@blesma.org
Corporate & Regional Fundraising Mgr	Chris Knight	M 07774 797318	crfm@blesma.org

TITLE	NAME	TELEPHONE	EMAIL
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>			
Digital Media Manager	Nick Tuck	T 01299 896282	digitalmedia@blesma.org
Blesma Magazine			editor@blesma.org
<b>DIRECTORS</b>			
Chief Executive	Jon Bryant	T 020 8548 3512	ce@blesma.org
Operations Director	Tony Bloomfield	T 020 8548 3513	od@blesma.org
Interim Director Independence and Wellbeing	Brian Chenier	T 07796 715908	bsoprosthetics@blesma.org
<b>USEFUL CONTACTS</b>			
Main Office		T 020 8590 1124	info@blesma.org

<b>BLESMA BRANCH OFFICIALS</b>			
<b>BOURNEMOUTH BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Peter Sherston-Baker		chair.bournemouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Mary-Jane Sweetzer		Please use Chair's email
Treasurer	Hazel Crofts		treasurer.bournemouth@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Peter Sherston-Baker		Please use Chair's email
<b>GREAT YARMOUTH AND LOWESTOFT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Bob Monkhouse		chair.yarmouth@blesma.org
Secretary	Helen Cullen		secretary.yarmouth@blesma.org
Treasurer	Simon Cavie		treasurer.yarmouth@blesma.org
<b>NOTTINGHAM BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Andy Fitzgerald		chair.nottingham@blesma.org
Secretary	Dave Ledger		secretary.nottingham@blesma.org
Treasurer	Keith Meakin		treasurer.nottingham@blesma.org
<b>SUTTON, MERTON &amp; DISTRICT BRANCH</b>			
Chair	Annie MacMillan		chair.sutton@blesma.org
Secretary	Karen Mason		secretary.sutton@blesma.org
Treasurer	Dave Hobson		Use Chair or Secretary at present
<b>SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH</b>			
Chair	David Rowe		chair.southampton@blesma.org
Treasurer and Secretary	Stephen Coltman		secretary.southampton@blesma.org
Welfare Officer	Jacqueline Brodrick		welfare.southampton@blesma.org

## Important information for emailing Blesma Branch officials

Anyone wishing to email a Branch official must use a specific Blesma email address rather than a personal account with immediate effect.

Previously, Members have been sending and receiving personal data in potentially unsecured emails, which has been placing the Association at risk of large penalties. Official Blesma Branch email addresses

have now been established (please see the table above) which ensure the Association is working within the legal framework and is compliant with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

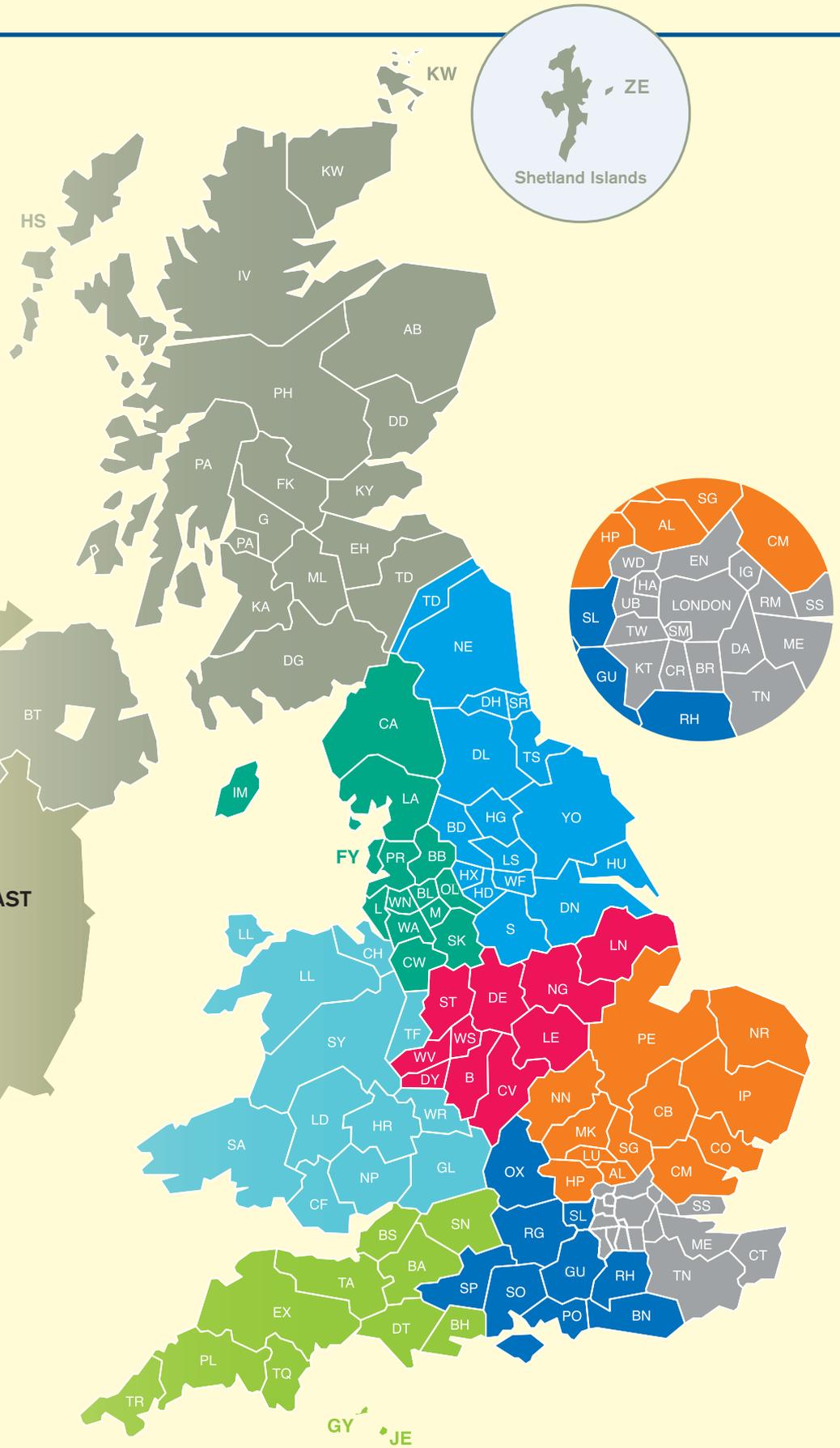
If you want to send an email to a Branch official that is not related to Blesma activity, then personal contact information can still be used.



# Blesma by area

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

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



# Play the lottery in support of Blesma, The Limbless Veterans



Only  
**£1**  
a week

Guaranteed weekly cash prizes  
plus a £500 rollover up to £25,000

An easy and  
fun way to  
support  
Blesma!

*“Blesma was there  
for me right from  
the start.”*

*Lionel O'Connor*

WIN up to  
**£25,000**

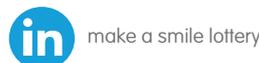
Play  
once or  
regularly  
every  
week



SCAN ME



to find out more!



You must be 18 or over to play make a smile lottery. Please play responsibly. Responsible gambling support: [www.begambleaware.org](http://www.begambleaware.org). make a smile lottery is wholly owned by St Helena Hospice, a charity working with other charities to raise much needed funds. Promoter: St Helena Hospice trading as make a smile lottery. St Helena Hospice Limited is licensed and regulated in Great Britain by the Gambling Commission under account number 4685 [www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk](http://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk). St Helena Hospice is a company limited by guarantee. Registered in England and Wales Number 01511841. Registered Charity Number 280919. Registered Office: Myland Hall, Barrcroft Close, Highwoods, Colchester, CO4 9JU. make a smile lottery office: 6 The Atrium, Phoenix Square, Wyncolls Road, Colchester, CO4 9AS. make a smile lottery Privacy Policy and Terms & Conditions can be viewed on our website.





## Free Will writing service

Blesma is partnered with two free Will writing services for anyone wishing to leave a gift in their Will.

The National Free Wills Network will connect you to a local solicitor to guide you through the process of writing or amending your Will.

Guardian Angel's online process is quick and easy. Every Will is fully checked by their team of qualified solicitors.

A gift in your Will helps us be there for limbless and injured veterans. Always.



1 in 5 Blesma Members is helped through gifts in Wills

Guardian Angel online process takes just 30 minutes

National Free Wills Network sends a Will writing pack by post or email

No obligation to leave a gift

Learn more

Contact  
[legacies@blesma.org](mailto:legacies@blesma.org)  
020 8548 7085

Visit  
[blesma.org/legacy](https://blesma.org/legacy)