

BLESMMA Magazine

The magazine for limbless veterans



ottobock.

Quality for life



Genium

The next generation of lower limb prosthetics.

The Genium – Bionic Prosthetic System represents groundbreaking progress in the technology of lower limb prosthetics. It is the result of an extensive research and development programme as well as more than 14 years of practical experience with the C-Leg® technology.

Thanks to the latest computer control technology, the functionality of the Genium far surpasses previous prosthetic solutions. The Genium is the first of a whole new generation of microprocessor-controlled, intelligent prosthetic systems. It will help redefine quality of life and everyday mobility for amputees.

www.ottobock.com/genium



Mind over matter

Meet the man who can move his prosthesis just by thinking about it

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



Look after your stump

Top tips, tricks and techniques from the people who know best **p30**



BLESMA and the rock star

Bryan Adams' new book shows our Members in a whole new light **p26**

It's definitely not about the bike!

This year, SR UK was tougher than ever. Could you take part next year? **p32**



RE-DISCOVER YOUR RUNNING STYLE



The sleek look of the bladeXT makes it stand out. It's a compelling piece of kit because it allows us to look good, train hard and expand our thinking about taking part in new activities. It's not just elegant, it's physical.



CONTENTS

Inside the Winter 2013/14 issue



26

News

- BLESMA REMEMBERS** 04
The charity's Members pay their respects at the Remembrance Day parade at the Cenotaph
- STEPPING DOWN** 08
Jerome Church looks back on his time as Chief Executive as he prepares to retire
- LETTERS** 17
Your thoughts on various burning issues; from the magazine to the Membership
- THE BIG DEBATE** 18
Should prosthetic services be in-house? We ask opinion from each side of the argument

Features



30

- I AM THE FUTURE** 20
Meet the first person in the UK who controls his prosthesis simply by thinking about it
- BLESMA AND THE ROCK STAR** 26
Bryan Adams' photographs show BLESMA Members as they've never been seen before
- HOW TO...** 30
We ask Members to give their top tips for keeping a stump healthy and comfortable
- ON YER BIKE!** 32
UK and US veterans saddle up and hit the road, cycling 250 miles on this year's SR UK

USEFUL CONTACTS

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| Editorial: 020 8548 3513 dosc@blesma.org | Activities: 020 8548 3519 07880 497781 activities@blesma.org | PR and Media: 020 8548 7090 07770 919760 prsupport@blesma.org |
| Membership Services: 020 8548 3515 doms@blesma.org | Fundraising: 020 8548 3517 fundraising@blesma.org | <i>You can also follow us on Twitter @BLESMA Stay in touch.</i> |

Inserted into this magazine is a copy of the *Activities Calendar for 2014*. Book your place as soon as possible to avoid missing out!

A Day in the Life

- ANDY MUDD** 38
The ex-RMP man talks bombs, Bonsais, Beirut and the power of positive thinking

Special thanks to: Andy Bate, Jerome Church, Dave Coulton, Frank Garside, Annette Hall, Aureen Jones, Jacqui Longden, Nick Moore, Heather Nicholson, Prarthana Rao, Bryony Stevens, Ian Waller, James Winspear. **BLESMA Magazine** is published on behalf of the **British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (BLESMA)** by **Scratch Publishing**. Contact Scratch Publishing at scratchpublishing@gmail.com. Printed by Wyndeham Grange. This publication may not be reproduced or transmitted in any form, in whole or in part, without the prior permission of the publishers. All prices and addresses are correct at the time of going to press. Every care has been taken in the preparation of this magazine to ensure the contents is fully accurate, but neither Scratch Publishing nor BLESMA can be held responsible for the accuracy of the information herein, any omissions or errors, or any consequence arising from it. The views expressed by contributors, customers and Members might not reflect the views of Scratch Publishing or BLESMA. Publication date: Winter 2013/14. © Scratch Publishing 2013/14.

Simon Hildrew, Harland Quarrington, Sergeant Rupert Frere/MOD



BLESMA Members remember

We turn out in force once more to take part in the Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph

Remembrance Day is marked in the calendar of every military veteran, and for Members of BLESMA, who always form part of the memorial service at the Cenotaph in London, the event holds very special significance.

“I think it is poignant for BLESMA Members, because many of us were injured in incidents in which other people died, so those people are on our mind,” said Chief Executive Jerome Church MBE, who led the veterans’ march for the final time this year, as he is stepping down from the role (see

separate story on p08). “Marching past the Cenotaph is a very special occasion. We are a ‘close shave’ organisation, and we’re grateful to be doing the remembering, rather than being remembered.”

As with most years, some 40 BLESMA Members took part in this year’s service. “We meet up on Horse Guards Parade in our chariots and always cause chaos because we barge through,” laughed Jerome. “We’re very well drilled and get into position. This year we had 24 Members on mobility scooters, in three ranks of eight, then the walking

wounded, widows and carers behind them. The service is always very moving – then we march. We often get a mention from David Dimbleby on TV, which is gratifying. It was an honour for me to lead our Members.”

Once the emotional focus on the service at the Cenotaph was over, things became a little more light hearted, says Jerome. “We broke out of formation and there was a different atmosphere – I just tried not to get run over!” he said. “We got lots of cheers, and people always comment on how great it is to see us taking part, and they

also note what a great age range our Members have.”

Jerome was also grateful that one past disaster was avoided during this year’s parade. “As you get towards the end of the parade and return to Horse Guards, we salute a member of the Royal Family,” he said. “One year, as I shouted ‘BLESMA, Eyes Right!’, we had a pile up. One of our Members had taken his hand off his scooter to salute and ploughed into the person in front. It was chaos. Thankfully, everyone was more careful this year!”

**Main picture:
BLESMA Members
at the service**

welcome

As many of you will already be aware, I will be standing down as General Secretary and Chief Executive at the end of December. I have been in post for more than 13 years. It has been an extraordinary time – in the real sense of the word. I look back and see the old BLESMA and its historic and heroic generations who fought for us and the world we now live in, and gave so much in doing so. They were very welcoming to me and I quickly realised that my job was to take on and run the BLESMA they had built.

I knew it would be difficult and that change lay ahead, but I quickly become confident that I would have the support and good will of my fellow Members on the long journey that lay ahead. And so it proved – thank you.

Looking back at some of my editorials from years gone by the word and theme of *Change* does seem quite prominent. The most obvious change, and the thing that really saddens me, is the demise of the Branch structure – so many have gone into history. Branches were the part of BLESMA that were truly relevant in the lives of the Members, and once gone they cannot be reinvented. The Branches drove HQ and HQ supported them. Now we have to meet and provide support directly, and that has caused big changes – as an example, just look at our welfare service and how much that does.

So I leave a BLESMA that has changed hugely. I do not take credit for all of it by any means, but I think the HQ team has responded well to what was changing around us, and the Association still thrives. There is always more to do and more I want to do, but now that’s for someone else. Time to be humble. I won’t be far away. I will become an active Member in the years ahead and I will always enjoy being with my friends in BLESMA. I thank you all; Members, widows, trustees and, of course, the staff who perform all the miracles. I wish you all well.

Jerome Church MBE
Chief Executive



Your top tips

BLESMA Members talk stump maintenance on p30



Plié® 2.0

**Introducing Plié® 2.0
The World's Most Responsive MPC Knee.**

The new Plié 2.0 features an advanced hydraulic system with cutting edge microprocessor control of both swing and stance that reacts to ambulatory stimuli in 10 milliseconds. As the most responsive MPC knee, the Plié 2.0 provides amputees with a more natural experience of mobility. Plus, an array of innovative features deliver increased reliability and durability over a broad spectrum of activities.

- Rated up to High Activity
- Water Resistant Electronics
- Interchangeable Batteries
- Advanced Stumble Recovery
- Available in 11 Interchangeable Cover Designs



SR UK goes from strength to strength

BLESMA Members teamed up with members of America's Wounded Warrior Project in October for the third annual SR UK ride. Twenty-five cyclists covered more than 250 miles over six days as they cycled across the south east of England.

The riders, many on adapted cycles and hand bikes, were waved off from Windsor Castle on Sunday 6 October by Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrice of York. They rode past iconic locations including the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Battle Abbey, Arundel Castle and *Top Gear's* Dunsfold Airstrip before finishing at Horse Guards Parade six days later.

They were met at Sandhurst by the Mayor of Farnham, Brigadier Patrick Blagden CBE, a retired Royal Engineer, and were joined by members of the public on a ride around the grounds of the Academy. Later in the week Francie Clarkson, wife of *Top Gear* presenter Jeremy, joined them. "They were great guys and the teamwork was extremely impressive under difficult circumstances. It was a very tough ride," she said.

Elsewhere, pupils at Battle Abbey School laid on sandwiches, tea and cakes for the riders, while local Army Cadet Force detachments came along on several parts of the route to cheer the riders on.

At the finish line at Horse Guards Parade, the riders were congratulated by the Rt Hon Mark Francois MP, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces.

Jerome Church Chief Executive of BLESMA said: "SR UK got off to a really cracking start on a beautiful morning at Windsor Castle. The riders were delighted that HRH Princess Beatrice was able to meet them and wave them off at the start of their great adventure around southern England. This was a true shoulder-to-shoulder special relationship event. It was about allies who have suffered much together and overcome much together." *Read more about SR UK on p32*

GB WIN SIMPSON CUP FOR SECOND SUCCESSIVE YEAR

While BLESMA cyclists bonded with their American counterparts on SR UK, the charity's golfers were beating theirs to win the Simpson Cup for the second year running. The Ryder Cup-style event is held between injured Servicemen and veterans from the United States and Great Britain. BLESMA had 10 Members competing.

Last year, Team GB won the inaugural event in Florida and this time they triumphed at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, running out eventual winners 13.5 points to 4.5. Paul Swain sank the winning putt 12 months ago and was the hero of the hour once more as his singles victory secured the cup for the second time in as many years.

"It's a great feeling. I got the winning point but that's irrelevant, it was a real team effort," said Paul. Ian Bishop was proud of his team's success. "The lads have done fantastically well. It was tight after the first day. The score doesn't reflect how close it was but it shows how well our boys played." *Next year the Simpson Cup returns to the United States and will be played at the Congressional Country Club in Washington in October 2014.*



Ten GB players are BLESMA Members

BLESMA's Chief Executive retires at the end of the year after 13 years at the helm. We look back at the work of

Jerome Church MBE

Jerome Church, BLESMA's Chief Executive and General Secretary, will retire at the end of December after 13 years at the helm. Following a long military career, during which he lost a leg, he became a Member of BLESMA and was appointed the charity's General Secretary in 2000. Over the years since, he has helped steer the organisation through a period of great and often unpredictable change and national conflict. He tells us about his pride in what the Association has done and how he sees the landscape in the years ahead...

Tell us a bit about your Army career

I'm from a naval and military background, so going to Sandhurst in 1966 at the age of 18 seemed absolutely natural and almost expected. I was commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in 1968 and started out on the typical busy but enjoyable life of a young officer learning my trade – albeit in the sunshine posting of Gibraltar. When I returned to the UK in 1972 things were more serious as we deployed to the then very active theatre of Northern Ireland.

I was injured in the first month, losing a leg in the process. I was well looked after but the care was much more informal than it is today. I decided to try and stay on and make a career of the military. I think most people forgot I had a “wooden leg” – and there was a lot of wood in those days, so much so that my leg once actually caught fire on exercise at Sennybridge; not much sympathy, everyone was too busy laughing!

I had a good career with excitement and variety along the way, as did my growing family (four children, all born in different garrisons). The leg was not so much a hindrance as a bit annoying at times.

What was your exposure to BLESMA?

I was languishing in my hospital bed in the Aldershot Military Hospital when these two fine old gentlemen appeared – they seemed old but they'd have been younger than I am now. They came with beer and cigarettes (it was the 70s!) and told me about BLESMA. They were able to give a realistic and encouraging idea about my life ahead –

priceless really. A year later I was invited by BLESMA to join a crew of WWII heroes on a yacht for Cowes Week. Seeing them cut about the deck in wind and awful weather was amazing and encouraging, and I have loved offshore sailing ever since.

Experiences like that are important and our modern activities programme reflects the impact it had on my life after amputation. I grew to understand that most BLESMA Members are here today having suffered a bit of a close shave. We really are a unique fellowship of shared experience and, I like to think, our glass is always half full.

JEROME'S CAREER

- 1966** Enters RMA Sandhurst
- 1968** Commissioned into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers
- 1972** As a young officer, loses a leg on patrol in Northern Ireland
- 1973 to 1978** Training and operational duties at home and abroad
- 1978** Instructor at RMA Sandhurst
- 1982** Attended Army Staff College
- 1983 to 1989** Served on staff and at Regimental Duty in Hong Kong, Catterick, Northern Ireland and Cyprus
- 1990** Promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. Appointed to the Directing Staff of the Kenyan Defence Forces Staff College
- 1991** Appointed to command the Army Training Regiment Basingbourn
- 1994** Posted to Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, SHAPE, where he remained until retirement in 2000
- 2000** Starts work as General Secretary of BLESMA. Appointed to, or served on, The Central Advisory Committee for Pension and Compensation (CAC), Executive Board of COBSEO, the Confederation of Service Charities Executive Board of Veterans Scotland, The Lord Boyce Review of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, The Independent Medical Expert Group (IMEG) Lay Member, Governor of Motability, and much else besides
- 2013** Steps down as Chief Executive

How has BLESMA changed over the years you have been General Secretary?

Obviously it has changed a lot – more than I originally anticipated, that's for sure. When I joined BLESMA we were a Branch-orientated organisation. The Branch was the powerhouse but I was aware that age was already a wearying factor and that the Headquarters would inevitably shoulder more and more of the burden. I thought I would be managing a “genteel decline”. We had thousands of WWII Members and their needs would increase with age, so growing the welfare service seemed sensible. I could also see ahead to a time when we would not need two care homes, and our Crieff Home is no longer with us. We passed it to another provider at the start of this year. I'm proud to say that was a challenge completed in a gentle and sensitive way.

But the events that unfolded before our eyes as we were glued to the office TV that afternoon on 11 September 2001 would, as I told the staff at the time, change our work in the years ahead. The first BLESMA-type casualty happened within about six weeks, in Afghanistan. Of course, the levels and complexity of amputational wounds rose dramatically in Iraq and then Afghanistan.

I think we reacted pretty well to change. BLESMA was always invited into Selly Oak Hospital by the Defence Medical Services as an organisation that really did know about the life ahead for a young amputee. We do have a very broad take on this as our experience is on the impact of amputation on every decade of life, as our oldest Members in their hundreds will testify to.

What about prosthetic change?

Obviously, as the leading limb loss charity, we have to be good at this, and we are. We know our way around the limb provision system and the prosthetic community, and we are well respected as effective and realistic advocates for our Members.

The new influx of military amputees was originally dealt with by the NHS not Headley Court, as the military had no experience in this area. I think it's fair to say that, with a bit of nudging here and

“We really are a unique fellowship of shared experience and, I like to think, our glass is always half full!”



there, we played a part in getting prosthetics fully established at Headley. In fact, we were delighted how ambitious their prosthetic prescriptions turned out to be, but that led to a big worry – could the NHS manage to provide equivalent hi-tech equipment when serving amputees became veterans, as for many centres the costs involved could break the budget. To cut a long story short we dug away at this – and it took a bit of time – and the Government's Murrison Report eventually set in place a radically new approach. With much influence at the coal face from BLESMA we are now looking at the biggest change to prosthetic provision in this country for a generation. Our Members with War Pensions from earlier conflicts are benefitting as well – indeed I know of one very active Member in his nineties on two hi-tech feet – positively bouncing around with enthusiasm and why not; yep, that's something I'm proud of!

What else has BLESMA achieved?

Enough to keep us all busy that's for sure! Our predecessors, my predecessor, were real experts in the complex ins and outs of the War Pension, and that is still important for the majority of our Members, and unlike a normal pension it must be managed as our Members' conditions change.

The new Armed Forces Compensation Scheme, or AFCS for short, turned out to be very different when it replaced the War Pension in April 2005. We were fully consulted but we did think there were flaws. So as the conflict tempo increased so did the loud dissatisfaction with AFCS.

Through a number of carefully orchestrated events and happenings we managed to air our view that AFCS was unsatisfactory in logic and mean spirited in perception. The resulting campaign led to the Boyce Review, which I was part of, leading to improvement – a definite result and our Members have definitely benefitted. The real impact of our work is more intimate, more directed to individuals and their wellbeing. I'm always proud of our welfare service, both professional and volunteer, which provides ever available support – it's a bit more than fire and forget casework. I'm also delighted that we have come so far in building our activities – adventure and challenge can be difficult for amputees to access so we have expanded this area – it can be life changing.

We have also had to adapt to a changing charity landscape. New charities have emerged and this can lead to duplication of effort. We have kept true to our rather unique fellowship role – there is nothing quite like an amputee activity club which is what we are and, of course, no one really knows their way around all the aspects of



Top: Jerome in his office at BLESMA HQ Above: Jerome's office is a celebration of his time with BLESMA and recognition of his invaluable contribution

limb loss as we do. Other charities defer to our position as we do in letting Combat Stress get on with leading on mental health and Blind Veterans for loss of sight.

What about the future?

Well, I didn't forecast a decade of conflict which changed BLESMA's approach to so much. I can say that we have been looking ahead and I will certainly be recommending to my successor to keep BLESMA engaged and working collaboratively with our friends across the charity scene.



James Wmspear

We do take a long view – amputation is something young people live with for a long time – I know! So I counsel against those who worry about our importance in the life of the modern Member – we are in it for the long haul and always have been. Stay relevant, be really good at making the difference and remember we are a special bunch of people – there's no-one quite like us.

What are your personal plans?

To never surrender, to do good where I can, to enjoy being a Member and to help out where I might be able to. I intend to travel a little bit, I have grandchildren to amuse, three of them are American – they're triplets, so I might yet re-apply for my old job – anything for a quiet life!



BLESMA Members dive a wreck in the Red Sea, Egypt

Divers see deep blue in the Red Sea of Egypt

BLESMA Members enjoyed a diving trip to Sharm El Sheikh in the Red Sea in September. Led by trustee Philip Monkhouse, the group of 15 Members lived on a boat for a week and took part in a number of dives.

"This was the first diving I'd done in 19 years," said Nigel Rogoff. "It was like entering a different world, but it was such a fantastic trip. It's hard to put into words how much I loved it. Great company, the sun on our backs, and we were out at sea the whole time – food, accommodation and all the instructors were on board.

"But it wasn't just about diving. I'm 54 and spent a long time in service, but some of the younger lads are recently injured and are finding that whole experience a bit raw. Us older Members could give them some advice because we've been there.

"At the same time the younger Members really inspired me. They just get on with everything and have a great attitude. The whole trip really brought a smile to my face," said Nigel.

Working towards recognised PADI diving qualifications, everyone on the trip achieved the collective goal of getting to 'Open Water' standard, while many were able to work towards more advanced qualifications. Among them was John Reeves, 53, a former corporal in the Parachute Regiment, who completed his 100th dive on the trip. "Apparently you have to do your 100th dive naked!" he laughs. "I did 21 great dives over the six days, diving on four different wrecks including the SS Thistlegorm, which was sunk during WWII. It was very interesting, as it still had lots of the armaments on it – that was great for us military guys to see.

"But the best thing about the trip was the social side, though. It was almost like being back in the Army because there was so much banter. The instructors were great and I would recommend doing something like this to anyone of any standard."

To get involved in BLESMA diving, call Dave Coulton on 020 8548 3519, or email him at activities@blesma.org

BRANCH NEWS SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER & DISTRICT BRANCH

THE BRANCH CONTINUES TO thrive, concentrating on its usual mix of welfare and social activities. Sadly, our former Branch Chairman George Gates passed away on 7 March. He had been our long serving Branch Chairman for many years. Anne Miles, a former Branch Welfare Officer, and a Widow of the Branch sadly passed away in August. We send our condolences to her family.

In March, the Branch held its AGM. Malcolm Fidler, the Honorary Treasurer, decided to retire and I [Stephen Coltman] was elected in his place. Paul Pedrick was also elected to the Committee.

Three of the Committee; Chairman Dennis Stevenson, Welfare Officer Jacqueline Brodrick and Flo Taylor, attended the BLESMA AGM in Swindon. It was an interesting meeting. We were also delighted that David Asdell became a Life Vice President on his retirement as a trustee of BLESMA. Finally, it was with great pleasure that we were told that our Branch Welfare Officer, Jacqueline Brodrick was awarded the Lord & Lady Shuttleworth Award for all her hard work.

The Branch had its Summer lunch on 13 June in a new location at Ower. The Deputy Mayoress of Winchester and her daughter were guests. This was followed by our Autumn lunch on 9 October and our Christmas lunch on 16 December. We are looking to hold a Branch lunch in Spring 2014, as well as a visit to the Mary Rose and, of course, our regular Branch meetings at Totton Community Centre – we like to keep busy!

Active in Branch support is the Headquarters team and we particularly want to thank John Francis, formerly AWO (SW) on his elevation to BLESMA Support Officer (Projects) and welcome his successor, Paul Greene as BLESMA Support Officer (BSO SW). We would also like to thank Bill Gillett (BSO SE), who helps keep an eye on some of our Members in the east of our area – keep up the good work guys.

Finally, the Branch Committee would like to wish all BLESMA Members and Widows across the Association a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Stephen Coltman OBE

In the spotlight

PAUL GREENE
SUPPORT OFFICER (SW)



Paul Greene (second from left), Charley Streather and staff from BLESMA Blackpool

“**I REALISE HOW IMPORTANT THIS GREAT CHARITY IS, HOW IT WORKS, HOW IT'S PERCEIVED, HOW IT PROVIDES AND HOW IT WILL SURVIVE**”

They say time flies when you're having fun. Well, if that's the case then I'm having a great time, as my first eight months as a BLESMA Support Officer (South West) have flown by. Back in January, John Francis got in touch and mentioned that the role was to become available. I applied for it, was successful and started work on 11 March. I now realise just how fortunate I am to be in such a unique position that allows me to give something back to our wounded servicemen, women and veterans.

“On joining BLESMA I immediately felt comfortable. All the BSOs are ex-military, so we have a common bond and they have been a great bunch of guys who are always at the end of the phone for advice and direction. The knowledge and wealth of experience these guys have obtained over the years working for BLESMA is colossal and straight away I realised the importance of my role as a BSO.”

“My first responsibility was a three-day trip to South Wales to carry out home visits. With around 760 Members in the South West it's going to take me three years to visit everyone! This is not acceptable, especially when a Member should be getting at least a yearly visit, therefore HQ is looking very closely at adjusting our boundaries, which should improve our visit timetable and balance the numbers more evenly. Currently, and until such time as this adjustment comes into effect, if a Member wants a priority visit then please don't hesitate to give me a ring on 01752 766555 and I'll try to visit as soon as possible.”

“I've completed 185 visits so far. Each one brings its own rewards and behind every door brings a different story; some very painful, some extremely courageous, some awfully funny, some very awe-inspiring and some totally unbelievable, but each one has caught my imagination and respect. I've heard many compliments about the support BLESMA has given Members, but I've also heard complaints. That's understandable, because we can't please everyone and people don't necessarily like change.”

“I've witnessed, even in my short period with BLESMA, many positive changes within the charity's procedures and I really believe the charity is looking forward, moving in the right direction and working hard to improve its efficiency and maintaining that all-important mission to our Members.”

“I've quickly realised the importance of Branch Committee meetings and lunches. They've given me a unique opportunity to meet Branch Members. They have also given me an understanding of how each Branch operates and the importance of their continued existence – how nice it would be to see our younger BLESMA Members join our Branches.”

“Visiting care homes where our Members live is as important as visiting a Member in their own home. I've had some fabulous visits so far. I've also realised the importance of our Blackpool Home, after visiting it on four occasions. The residents are happy and the staff caring, focused and totally professional. Each time I've visited I've been very humbled by all the good that goes on there.”

“I had the pleasure of shadowing Charley Streather on the September Widows Week. Yes, the ladies had great fun, but the togetherness and support for each other were the overriding factors of my time there. I could not get over the energy and enthusiasm these ladies gave the week.”

“In between visits I've been engaging with other supporting charities, agencies, care facilities and businesses, which have been all very accommodating and massively understanding. It's now up to me to foster these relationships, especially with our Limb Centres and Personal Recovery Units (PRU) so together we can strive to perfect our services.”

“I've had a great first eight months. I've learnt an awful lot, even about myself, and along the way met some truly wonderful people – young and old. I now fully understand the importance of this great charity, how it works, how it's perceived, how it provides and how it will survive.”



Simon Hildrew

Save the dates for 2014

Separate Members Weekend set for May with AGM to follow in June

The Trustees have agreed that, from 2014, a Members Weekend will be held in May (running from late morning on the Saturday to early afternoon on the Sunday) and a separate Annual General Meeting held in June.

The inaugural BLESMA Members Weekend will be held from 17-18 May. Some Members may not have attended previous AGMs in Swindon because of the distances, and potential venues are being considered in the Midlands. Work has already started on the programme, which will include updates on BLESMA's work,

prosthetics presentations and demos, and BLESMA activities presentations as well as “taster events”. Most importantly, there will be opportunities to socialise with other BLESMA Members. Every effort will be made to keep costs to a minimum.

Similar work is being done to find a venue for this year's AGM, which will be held in London on 24 June. This will be an event that not only fulfils an obligation under charitable law to present the charity's accounts, but also the “usual” business of electing Trustees. Look out for further updates in the New Year.

CALLING ALL WIDOWS

Ordinary and Associate Widows are invited to enjoy a week's break at the BLESMA Home in Blackpool in April, where they will be able to sample the excellent hospitality of the Home and enjoy the wonderful sights of Lancashire.



If you would like to be considered for one of the two weeks, please complete the form inserted into this magazine and return it to Membership Services by 17 January 2014.

Each of the weeks will have a full programme of events, so it is important that the ladies who attend are fully mobile so they can enjoy the holiday to the full. Please note that the weeks are open to Ordinary and Associate Widows only.

HQ NEWSLETTERS TO GET NEW LOOK

It is vital that Members have the opportunity to read about issues that are important and relevant to them, and to learn what their fellow Members have been doing. It is with this in mind that the HQ Newsletter will be relaunched in the New Year, and will be published three times a year; in February, June and November.

BRANCH NEWS WALSALL AND DISTRICT BRANCH



From left Jim Keating, Tony Lloyd, Pat Whittaker and Mike Gallagher

OUR PREVIOUS TREASURER, PAT WHITTAKER, has been awarded the Earl of Ancaster Memorial Award for her work for the Branch over 10 years. Pat was unable to travel to Swindon in June to accept the award, but it was presented to her at the Midlands Area outing to the National Brewery Centre in Burton-on-Trent later that month (above).

We were very pleased to welcome Hatice from HQ and her partner, Bill to our Summer Lunch in June for her second visit to the Branch. There were 30 Members present, and Charley Streather kept us all amused as ever!

We welcome a new Member; Roy Durose. Roy was visited by one of our Members, Martin Ketrick. Martin had his RBL hat on at the time, but he discovered that Roy was an HQ Branch Member and convinced him of the benefits of transferring to our Branch.

A wreath was laid on behalf of the Branch in the BLESMA Garden at the National Memorial Arboretum on Armistice Day, and this will now become an annual event. Very sadly, we have suffered a number of deaths recently. Violet Ponting passed away in April aged 93. Violet was a regular at our lunches, and a very popular Member. In May, Albert Hughes passed away and, in June, Jack Edgley died. In August we lost Sylvia Stirman and Gerald Robson in September. They are all sadly missed and our thoughts and prayers are with their families. Jim Keating represented the Branch at each funeral.

A number of our Members are suffering from various illnesses at the moment and we wish them all a very speedy recovery.

Mike Gallagher, Secretary



Jacqui Longden's **BLESMA Blackpool round-up**

GARDEN PARTY IS A BIG HIT ONCE AGAIN

It wasn't until people began telephoning to ask whether we would be holding a Garden Party again this year that I realised just how popular the event had become in the local calendar.

I was able to assure them that it would take place, but at a later date than usual. The wonderful summer weather held for the event, which was a great success. It certainly seems to be a highlight in the ex-Services calendar and its popularity was, as usual, endorsed by the members of the local press as well as Radio Lancashire.

Fantastic entertainment was provided this year by the Royal Artillery Lancashire Volunteers Band, and serving soldiers were well represented by visitors from HQ 42 Brigade at Fulwood Barracks, Preston.

As always, I have to say a very special thank you to the Blackpool Home's staff who worked so hard to make the afternoon so pleasurable for everyone.

BLESMA BLACKPOOL RECEIVES AWARD

A few weeks after the Garden Party we ran the North West Area Summer outing, held this year at the Imperial Hotel, Blackpool. Guests enjoyed afternoon tea and were entertained by the Banjo Boys, who are part of the Irish Guards Singers based in Merseyside. Everyone had a good time.

Widows Week, as usual, went with a swing and we look forward to seeing some of the ladies again when they come to spend this Christmas with us. We were surprised to find that the Home had been awarded a prize in the "North West in Bloom" competition. David Higginbottom, a Senior Care Assistant (pictured below right) who also looks after our gardens, went along to Blackpool Town Hall, where he was presented with the award by the Mayor.

RECEPTION PROVES TO BE A BIG SUCCESS

More recently, Lancashire County Council hosted a special reception

for Lancashire's BLESMA Members in County Hall, which provided an opportunity for younger Members to meet some of our veterans from the Home. It was a most enjoyable and worthwhile occasion.

Armistice Day was blessed with fine weather and a huge public turnout at the Blackpool Cenotaph. After the ceremony came the usual procession, in which we took our traditional place at the rear to great applause. Later we attended a North West Remembrance Service at the Marine Hall, Fleetwood.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR DONATIONS

I end with what may be an obvious point, but it is an important one; once people get to know us their donations begin to flow. Particular thanks this time go to Emma Smalley from Cosatto in Bolton (pictured below left) who, along with her father Captain Smalley, visited BLESMA Blackpool and presented a cheque to the residents and the North West Branch of The Royal Artillery Association.



Left: Emma Smalley and her father present a cheque to the residents of the Home
Above: David Higginbottom receives NW in Bloom award

OBITUARIES

Those we have lost

Bert Evans

Bert died on 1 October 2013, aged 92.

Bert Evans, who has died aged 92, was one of the last survivors of the massacre at Wormhoudt, near the Franco-Belgian border, during the withdrawal to Dunkirk.

Bert was serving with D Company 2nd Battalion the Royal Warwickshire Regiment (2 Royal Warwicks) which, on 19 May 1940, came under a devastating air attack near Tournai, suffering many casualties.

A week later the Royal Warwicks were ordered to hold the village of Wormhoudt to buy time for the evacuation of thousands of soldiers of the BEF. On 27 May they were dive-bombed by Stukas, and many of the houses in the village were set ablaze.

The next day the remnants of the battalion were surrounded and forced to surrender. After being interrogated they were stripped of anything that might identify them – letters and photographs – and marched to Esquelbecq, about a mile away. Stragglers were shot and the remaining prisoners, some 90 in number, were pushed into a barn which measured about 10ft by 20ft. Many of them had been wounded during the fierce fighting, and called out for water.

A German soldier was seen taking a grenade out of his boot. Capt James Lynn-Allen, the senior officer, banged on the bolted door to protest that there was no room for the wounded to lie down. Crammed against the barn door, Evans lit up a last cigarette. "This is it, Bert," said one of his fellow soldiers. "We're finished."

Moments later, grenades were lobbed into the barn. With great gallantry two NCOs threw themselves on top of the grenades, but then the machine-gunners opened fire. When the firing stopped, the barn door was opened and the survivors were hauled out in batches of five from among the bodies of their dead comrades, and were shot.

Before that, however, the explosions from the grenades had forced the Germans to fall back, and in the confusion Lynn-Allen saw a chance to make a run for it. He grabbed hold of Evans, whose arm had been shattered, and the two men managed to stagger some 200 yards and hide in a pond.

Seeing them trying to escape, an SS officer pursued them. He shot Lynn-Allen in the head at point-blank range. Evans was shot in the neck, and slid into the pond, where he was left for dead. He was subsequently found by regular German soldiers and taken to



a hospital, where his right arm was amputated. Only a dozen men survived the massacre.

Bert Evans was born in Devonport on 21 February 1921. He enlisted in the Gloucestershire Regiment in November 1938 and transferred to the Warwicks a year later.

In 1943 he was repatriated under prisoner exchange arrangements organised by the Red Cross. After the war, some of the survivors, accompanied by members of the War Crime Interrogation Unit, returned to Wormhoudt, but it was decided that it would be impossible to build a case for prosecution.

He worked for Birmingham City Council from 1950 until he retired to live in Redditch in 1986. In 1955, at Northfield Baths, he saw

a child in the water who was in serious difficulty. Despite having only one arm and not being able to swim, he jumped in to help. He received a bravery award from the Royal Humane Society.

The French authorities and British veteran associations restored the barn at Wormhoudt. Bert made many pilgrimages to Esquelbecq with his regimental association to remember Capt Lynn-Allen, the man who saved his life.

In retirement Bert thoroughly enjoyed fishing, playing darts, bingo, dancing and foreign travel. He had no children of his own, but his sister-in-law's five children were an important part of his life. Bert married, in 1954, Elizabeth Yould, who predeceased him.

Others who have passed away recently

August 2013 – October 2013. May they rest in peace

| | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Aldridge C | Royal Regt. of Fusiliers | HQ |
| Baines D | 12 (Yorkshire) Parachute Bn | Blackpool |
| Blenkinsop T | Civilian Casualty | HQ Sunderland |
| Boyle D | RAF | HQ |
| Cox Mrs E | Civilian Casualty | HQ Richmond |
| Davies J | Coldstream Guards | HQ |
| Evans A | Royal Warwickshire | HQ Walsall, Birmingham |
| Fulton G | Scots Guards | HQ |
| Low Mrs L | Women's Royal Army Corps | HQ |
| Mayhew D | RHA | HQ |
| McCallum A | HLI | HQ |
| Northwood A | RASC | HQ |
| Pearson A | Royal Hampshire | HQ |
| Robson A | South Staffs | Walsall |

Dougie Baines passed away on 29 November 2013, aged 89. His obituary will appear in the next issue of the magazine.



Wet behind the ears? Not us

Five BLESMA Members took part in a canoeing expedition in the Dordogne in September. Single above-knee amputees Alan Long, Nigel Smith, Tom Higgins, and Chris Jones, along with left wrist amputee David McDonald took part in the week-long expedition organised by the Bendrigg Trust. The canoeers had to deal with irregular waves, medium rapids and small obstacles such as eddies and whirlpools.

“On Day One expedition leader, Jill Corso made sure we were capable of handling the canoes in calm water before thrusting us into the rapids,” said Chris. “It was something of a refresher for Nigel, Tom and I, but it was all new stuff to David and Alan.”

During the week the five adventurers received constant tuition as they made their way through the beautiful landscape. “The water was always very clear and we could often see the fish,” recalls Chris. Kingfishers

were a common sight, as were water voles and even the occasional otter. By Day Four the team were paddling through water that was much faster and with rougher white water in places. “At one point Tom and I clipped a submerged rock and tipped over at considerable speed,” said Chris. “I hung onto the capsized canoe and floated with it for about 70 metres until I came to calmer water, where I was able to get onto a rock.

“After that Jill came up with the idea of appointing team leaders, and every half hour we took it in turns to sit in the front of the canoes. This ensured we weren’t just idly following but instead had to read the river, recognising the signs that indicated hazards such as obstructions and faster, deeper water.

“By the end of the trip we had all had a great time and we sincerely hope this venture with the Bendrigg Trust will be repeated,” said Chris.



GET INVOLVED IN 2014

Inserted into this issue of BLESMA Magazine is a calendar of activities that are on offer to BLESMA Members in 2014. “All the activities we provide are free, Members only pay for their transport to and from the meeting point,” says Activities Manager Dave Coulton, “and we make sure we cater for every level throughout the year, from beginner to serious adventurer!”

And if you think BLESMA activities are for adrenaline junkies only think again – more artistic pursuits such as painting and photography are on offer. “Whatever the event, our Members share fantastic experiences,” says Dave. “The events we put on get people interested in new activities and hobbies, it is not just about a holiday.”

Take a look at the events on offer and book your place before the closing date to ensure you get a place.

SHORTS

CORBETT RAISES £12K

Outgoing Stourbridge Golf Club captain Barry Corbett has raised £12,000 for BLESMA and Help for Heroes during his two years as club captain. Thanks go to him!

BLESMA MEETS LABOUR
BLESMA's Chief Executive Jerome Church and Director of Support & Communications Ian Waller met with Labour leader Ed Miliband and Shadow Defence Secretary Vernon Coaker in November. They spoke about BLESMA's work and what the charity expects from the British Government,



whatever its political make-up, in supporting its Members. Jerome spoke of the need for the NHS to continue, and develop, its programme of prosthetic support for those transitioning out of the military as well as amputee veterans.

WOOTTON BASSETT RUGBY CLUB DONATES £1000

A recent weekend of activities to celebrate the opening of the new clubhouse at Royal Wootton Bassett Rugby Club raised £1,000 for BLESMA. The charity was chosen because it reflects the club's involvement with the military. “We wanted to raise money for a charity that is worthwhile but that we felt doesn't receive enough attention,” said the club's vice chairman Jim Brierley. “We chose BLESMA because Royal Wootton Bassett has a strong relationship with the Armed Forces and a lot of current and ex-members are one-time-servicemen.”

TELL US ALL ABOUT IT

What do you think of this issue? Write to us at editor@blesma.org and let us know so that we can constantly improve your magazine.

INBOX

Word from our inbox. Get in touch at editor@blesma.org

BIG THANKS TO BLESMA

Four years ago I had my left leg amputated and I was put in touch with BLESMA. I was embarrassed about applying for help because there are many people much worse off than me.

However, I was contacted by Tom Ormiston and he has been very good to both my wife and I. We were told to apply for help with our bathroom conversion so I could have a shower. Later, I was given an electric wheelchair which has been a godsend. Then I was unable to get on the bus due to the steps. Tom wrote to the bus company and the buses now have ramps to get on board.

I received the new magazine (very good, by the way) and inside was the gardening grant form which I've received each year. It was filled in and posted. I thank BLESMA for all their help and Tom for his visits.

Gerald Adams

DEFYING THE ODDS

I have been a lower limb amputee from the age of 10, and I joined the Army in 1990, although it was decided I could only join the RAMC and that I was never to deploy.

I was awarded the Daily Star Gold Award For Courage for completing basic training. I then served all over the world, including Germany, Gibraltar, Saudi Arabia and Iraq as well as the MOD in London and Gosport. I also transferred from the RAMC into the AGC (SPS), and later served with the RE, RA, RAMC, QARANC and RGR.

I ended up completing 23 years' service as an amputee, reaching the rank of WO2, and was awarded a commendation from the director of my Branch and the Meritorious Service Medal two years later.

Six months prior to my discharge I lost the remainder



Editor's Choice

GRAND TO SEE GRAND DESIGNS FEATURING JON WHITE

I would like to congratulate all at Channel 4 for the fantastic episode of *Grand Designs* that aired several months ago featuring BLESMA Member Jon White.

Jon is, as I soon discovered from watching the programme, an ex-Army officer who lost three limbs after being caught in an IED blast while serving in Afghanistan.

I found Jon to be an absolute inspiration and it was interesting to learn about his new home and how he designed it in light of his injuries.

Avril Burton

We couldn't agree more. In fact, we enjoyed the episode so much that we went straight over to Jon's house to interview him for the next issue. Ed



of my leg as my knee had degenerated to the point where I could hardly walk.

I then went to Headley Court where I was issued with my new legs and completed six months of rehab. I was discharged in April 2013 as completion of service and not as a medical discharge, and now live in Gosport with my family.

Jeff Scott

EXCELLENT EXPERIENCES

I would like to thank BLESMA for all the rehabilitation events I have participated in. I have done much sailing, competing in the Fastnet Race in 2009, the Caribbean R.O.R.C 600 and Cowes Week in 2010; real team building events with some very inspiring people, Paul Burns being one of many.

I am proud to have taken part in SR UK for the last two years. I met other Members and our American counterparts, and exchanged past experiences. Knowing that I am not isolated and that, through BLESMA and self-commitment, I can achieve almost anything have been big parts of my rehabilitation. Since becoming a Member I have learnt a lot about myself and how to achieve what I once thought would be impossible, like sailing a 62-foot yacht with a crew of amputees!

As a bilateral above-knee amputee I have learnt that life goes on after injury and, with the help of my area welfare officer, Charlie Streather, and all the staff behind the scenes at HQ I've been able to participate in some incredible events.

A significant and poignant event, and one that I shall never forget, was the Remembrance Parade this year. I would also like to thank BLESMA for helping me to get a lightweight wheelchair which has made a tremendous difference to my lifestyle.

BLESMA is not just a charity, it is THE charity, and once again I thank you with all my heart for your kindness, support and empathy. I look forward to meeting new and old friends in the future and to show that BLESMA is a family unit as well as a caring supportive charity.

Paul Hagan

James Winspear



Andrew on operations in Afghanistan (for left) and awaiting life-changing surgery (left)

The technology that will allow you to control your prosthesis by thought alone is still years away, right? Wrong. Meet the first person in the UK to be fitted with the revolutionary TMR, and prepare to be amazed....

Words: Nick Moore

Just think about it...

My mum and dad used to watch *The Six Million Dollar Man* on TV," says 26-year-old Corporal Andrew Garthwaite. "They never thought it'd be real. But now that's what they call me." Andrew may not be able to run at 60mph, have infrared eyes or the punch of a bulldozer like secret agent and astronaut Steve Austin, but his story is far more remarkable than any tale of fiction.

Since losing his right arm to a rocket propelled grenade in Afghanistan in September 2010, he has embarked on an incredible programme of rehabilitation. In December 2013, Andrew became the very first person in the UK to be fitted with a prosthetic arm that's controlled by his own mind. Thanks to a pioneering surgical

process called TMR, or Targeted Muscle Reinnervation, performed by an expert surgeon at the Medical University of Vienna in Austria, Andrew is blazing a trail. It's no exaggeration to suggest he represents the future of prosthetics, one in which they could start to rival real limbs.

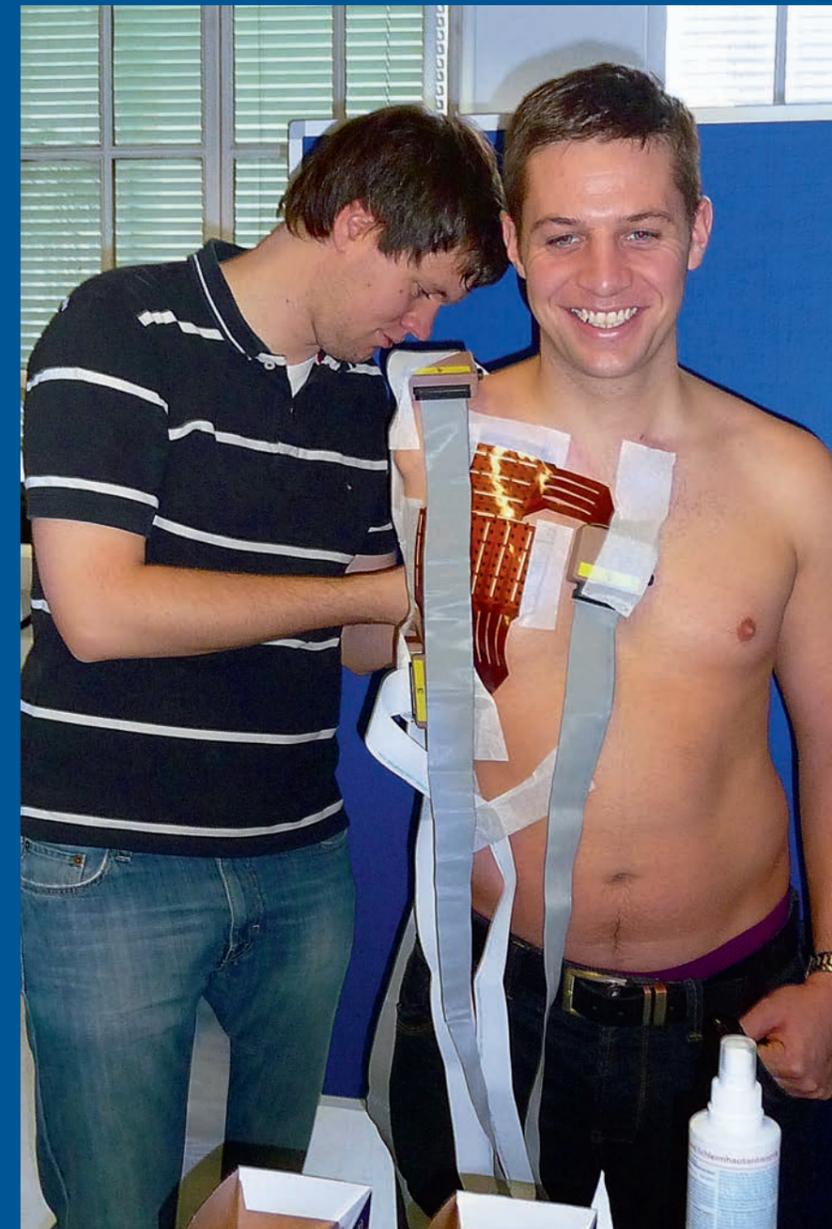
"It has been an amazing journey," says Andrew, from South Shields, Tyneside, who was wounded while serving with the Queen's Royal Lancers. "After the injury happened, I could never have dreamed that a few years later I would have a replacement arm that is capable of so much, and can get me back doing normal things. I feel really honoured to have been a part of the process. It is a dream come true."

A fellow British soldier was killed during the attack, so despite additional shrapnel

wounds and a partial loss of hearing in one ear, Andrew considers himself lucky. "I have stayed positive throughout the process," he says. "There have been hard times and the amputation was traumatic, but I have just cracked on. I can't change what happened, and I've had a great support team around me; my family, Headley Court, the MOD and Professor Oskar Aszmann, the surgeon in Austria."

FROM AFGHAN TO AMAZING

Getting to his current condition has taken a while. After the injury, Andrew was brought back to Birmingham for a number of initial operations. "Rehab went well, but it took longer than I expected," he says. He was using a more traditional prosthetic arm for a while, but it frustrated him. "It only



worked from two points," he says, "so I could only perform one movement at a time, then I had to wait for a while. It made me impatient, and it discouraged me from wearing the limb at all."

When the possibility of TMR was suggested, Andrew jumped at the chance. Two years ago he underwent a six-hour operation as Professor Aszmann redirected intact nerves into muscles on his chest wall.

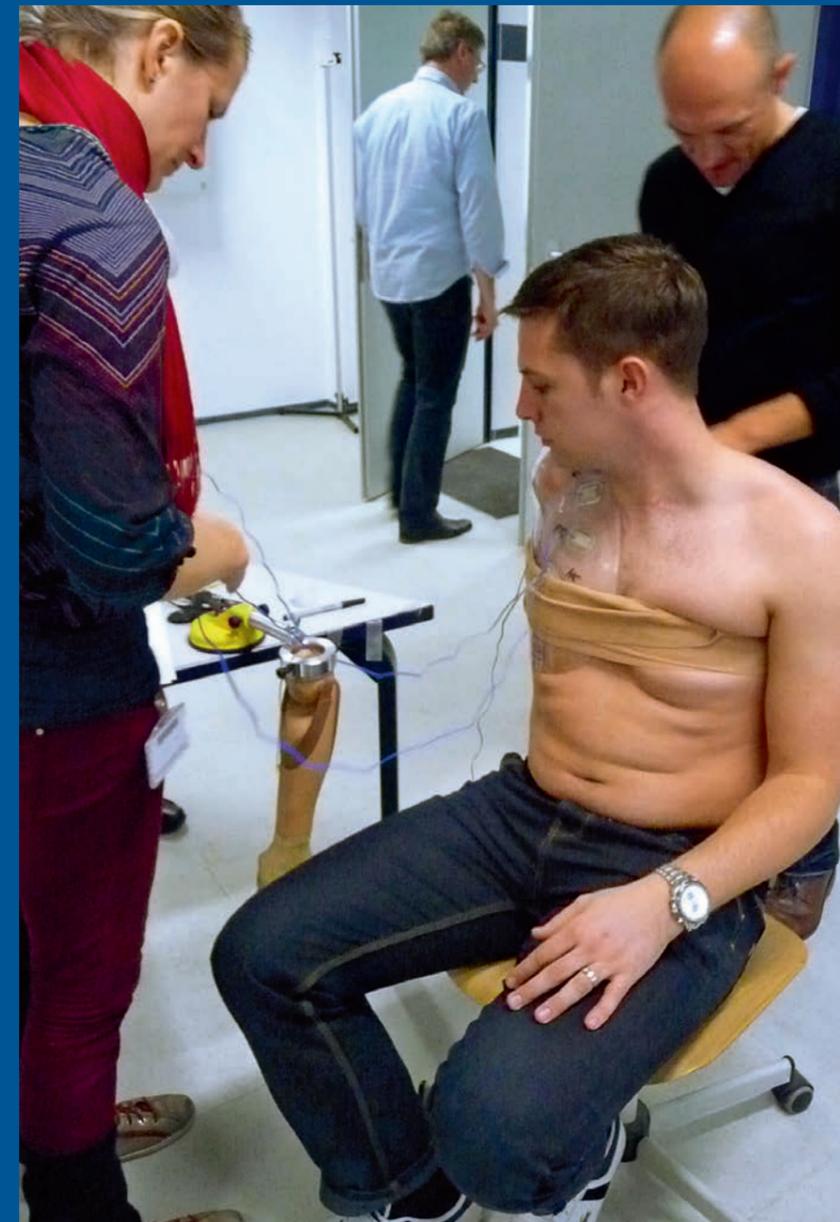
The surgeons performing this work are extremely clever. The process can help those who have lost part of an arm, or the function of it, as long as the nerves remain intact. TMR transfers the nerves to working muscles in other areas of the body.

Electrodes are placed on those muscles, which become natural amplifiers and then work the prosthesis. Andy lost his arm from

"Andy thinks about using the arm and his mind processes lifting or extending. The arm automatically does just that"

his shoulder, so the surgeons have had to redirect the nerves into muscles in his chest wall. Now, when Andy thinks about using the prosthetic arm, that thought triggers the operation. His mind processes lifting or extending, and the chest muscles trigger the arm to do just that.

With five different points of movement, Andy was impressed by the new limb's versatility. "When I first got to speak with Professor Aszmann, he showed me all the technology he'd been working on. I was in a room with computers, heat sensors, muscle movement analysis equipment, it was like being in the future. It looked a bit fake and surreal, to be honest. But lo and behold, two years down the line, it is all real. The technology is in my limb. We put in a lot of work with the rehab team



Andrew after the operation with pioneering surgeon Professor Oskar Aszmann (far left)



at Headley Court on getting the muscles moving, and alongside the TMR team in Vienna, but it has all come true.”

While the arm is undoubtedly hi-tech, its key benefits lie in helping Andrew with mundane, everyday tasks that other people take for granted. “Opening jars, making coffee, stirring soups, reading, riding a pushbike, holding a piece of paper down while writing on it – all those normal things I was struggling with have become a hell of a lot easier,” he says. “The hand can open and close, the wrist can rotate and I can move the elbow up and down. It’s a massive improvement. Having five points means I can perform a number of different motions at once very quickly. It makes my life so much easier. It also means I wear my prosthesis much more

“Opening jars, making a coffee, stirring soups, reading – all the things I struggled with have become a lot easier”

because I don’t get frustrated. I have become more proficient with my real hand – I’ve even learned to write with it – so my right arm is now my supporting arm, but that’s great. The two work well together.”

Andrew has been the model pupil, according to his medical team. His control of his new arm is very good and he has worked hard, practicing and practicing until he has become quite adept with it. The arm is clever but, say the specialists, the graft Andy has put in, and how he’s embraced the technology, must be admired.

Andy has been through all sorts of tests – pouring water from a jug, lifting and lowering the elbow into very controlled positions, squeezing a sponge ball gently and firmly. He’s had a lot of determination and made a big effort to make it work.

His positive mental attitude has been great and, while getting used to the arm has been a “huge learning curve”, Andy is also experiencing other benefits, like a return of feeling to his missing limb.

“It is surprising and amazing – mad really. Words can hardly describe what it feels like,” he says, “but I’m getting feelings back in my little finger, my thumb and my forearm when I’m moving the arm. I can visualise my phantom limb when I touch my chest, and feel my hand when I touch my other arm. It’s very hard to describe the feeling, but it’s great.”

Andrew’s family are just as impressed as he is. “They’ve been fantastic,” he says. “My wife took it naturally – the arm is just a part of me now, it doesn’t affect her at all. The limb looks good when I’m out and

about too – the only giveaway is that it buzzes when it moves, so I get the odd strange look in the shops.”

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Andrew has been a BLESMA Member for two and a half years. He has been too involved with his rehabilitation to throw himself fully into the organisation, but plans to do so in the future, and has certainly benefited in many other ways.

“BLESMA spoke to me at Headley Court and they got me on the books, and I’m very interested in what they do,” he says. “I will do some sailing and climbing in the future, it all looks fantastic, and I want to stay active. But BLESMA is mainly useful because you get to mix with people going through the same kind of thing as yourself.

The knowledge they share is invaluable and you meet some inspiring people.”

For now, he intends to carry on his rehabilitation and perhaps pursue a career in TV. “I’d like to get into the producing side of television, that would be fantastic,” he says. “But whichever door opens, I’ll go for it. I just want to see what’s out there.”

He also hopes that the technology in prosthetics can continue to progress. “They’re never quite going to be exactly as good as the real thing, but Professor Aszmann wants to get as close as possible. There can be more points of movement on an arm, a better elbow maybe, a hand that moves better. I’m very thankful to the MOD and Headley Court. I’m hoping we can help other people with similar injuries, and progress even further.”



How does Targeted Muscle Reinnervation actually work?

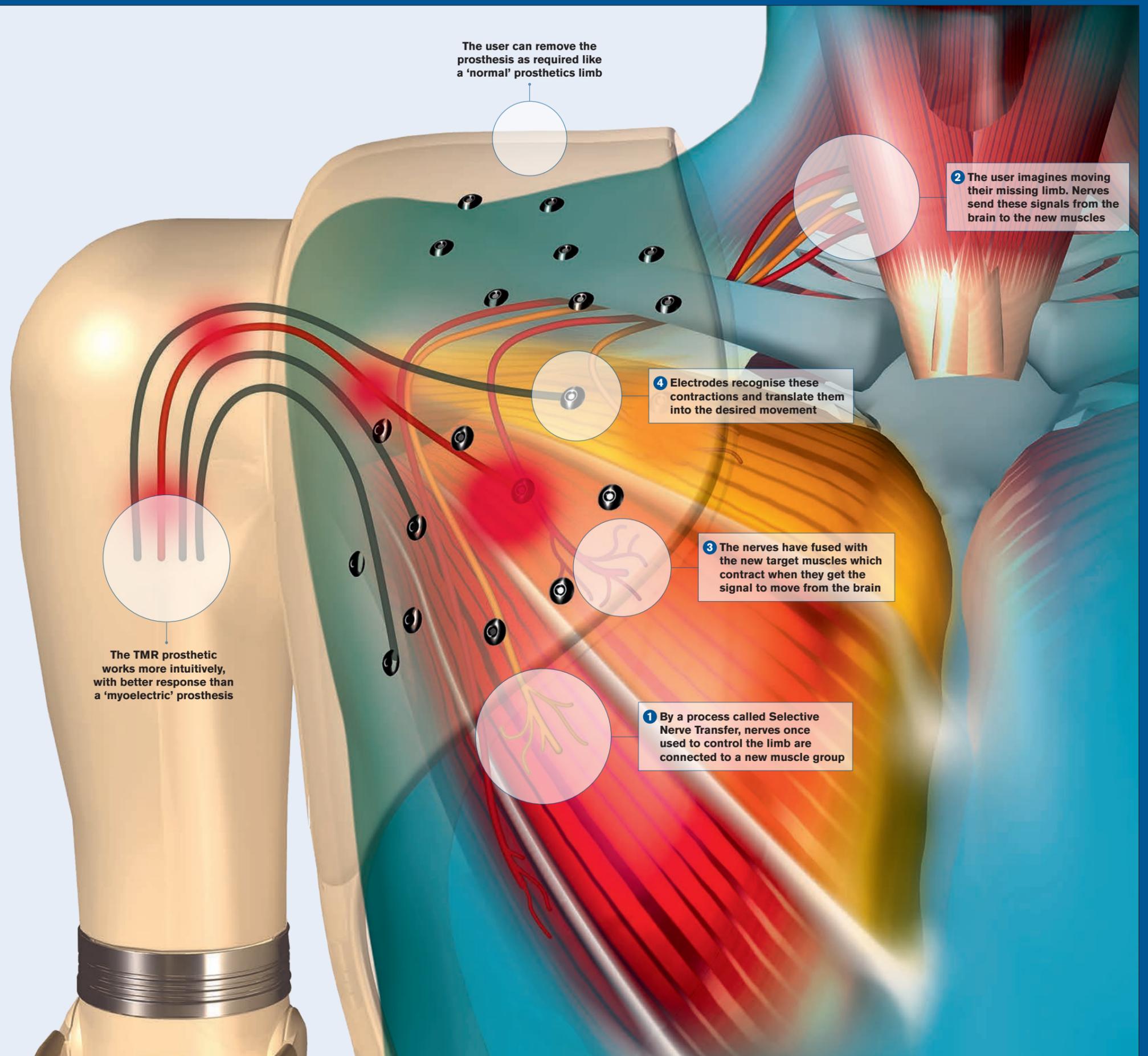
With Targeted Muscle Reinnervation, a prosthetic limb is controlled solely by a user's thought processes. The user imagines moving the prosthetic limb – and the prosthesis responds accordingly.

A surgical procedure is required to redirect the nerves that were originally used to control the limb to a new muscle group. For those like Andy, who have lost their arm at the shoulder, the nerves are usually redirected to the chest muscles. For above-elbow amputations, the biceps and triceps can be used.

This 'selective nerve transfer' connects the existing functioning nerves - which previously controlled arm and hand movements - to other muscles that can read the signals. After the surgical procedure, nerves form new connections with the new target muscles. This process of connecting the residual arm nerves to other muscles is Targeted Muscle Reinnervation, or TMR.

For the prosthesis to work, the user imagines moving their missing limb. Nerves send these thought signals from the brain to the new target muscle, and the muscles contract. Electrodes carefully selected and placed against the skin recognise these signals and, with the aid of a small computer, translate them into the desired movement. The user is then able to intuitively control the prosthesis.

By controlling intuitively, the response time is much faster than a traditional 'myoelectric' prostheses. TMR technology also allows the user to control more than one joint at a time. This means the user can open and rotate their hand, or rotate their wrist and flex their elbow simultaneously. These features have previously not been possible.



Wounded: the inside story

A chance encounter between a journalist and a wounded soldier five years ago has led to a truly compelling project

Words: Nick Moore Photography: Bryan Adams

CAROLINE FROGGATT is an ITN journalist. In May 2008 she was assigned to a story at Headley Court where she met BLESMA member Mark Ormrod (pictured opposite). "I thought he was handsome and funny, and then I found out that he'd lost three limbs just four months earlier," she says. "It was astonishing how much he seemed unfazed by what had happened." As a result, Caroline decided that a photographic project showing veterans' injuries would be a great platform for them to "shout out about their survival." She sought to recruit a top photographer with a good profile, and the former rock star Bryan Adams immediately came to mind. "I love Bryan's portraits and I thought he'd relish the subject matter. I was right – he didn't need much convincing," she says. Here, Caroline and Bryan tell us about *Wounded*.



had been injured and so, over time, we started collecting photos and interviews with the hope that it would eventually materialise into something. The series of photos had the potential for an exhibition, and one thing led to another...

Why Bryan Adams, and what was it like working with him?

CF: Firstly, because he's a great photographer. I'd seen his work before and was impressed. Putting the book together has been a roller

coaster because Bryan is such a ball of energy. He's hugely open minded and very easy to work with. He takes on board the opinions of those around him and that helped him capture something unique in each BLESMA Member. He's very intuitive and creates a buzz wherever he goes. He's been very bold with this project and the images have remarkable integrity.

BA: I'm very, very proud of these images. I think they're incomparable to anything else I have done in many respects. For some of the guys, this was the first time they had revealed their scars and their disabilities to anyone other than their immediate family and friends. Some were willing to reveal their wounds in full. Others, understandably not. Either way, to have the faith to work with me made me very proud and I didn't want to let them down. To witness how they and their families have coped was extremely humbling.

What was it about BLESMA Members that got you thinking a book would be the right thing to do?

CF: In 2008, seriously injured Servicemen and women weren't really on the general public's radar. They were hidden away and that felt wrong. I wanted to change that. I'd met Mark and some other guys at Headley Court and they were very impressive.

BA: Caroline initially proposed the idea of doing a project with veterans. She knew some of the men who

MARK ORMROD

How did you get involved with the book?

A contact I had from a fundraiser suggested that I should get involved. She asked me if I wanted to go to Bryan Adams' house in Chelsea for a photo shoot. I'm obviously not going to say no to that!

How was the whole experience?

It was great. He's a very normal, nice, down-to-earth guy – although his house must have cost a couple of million! I was a bit worried about posing for the photos but he did it in a very sensitive, tasteful way. I think the pictures are excellent.

Tell us about your injury...

I was injured on Christmas Eve in 2007 serving with the Marines in Afghanistan. I was on patrol and stood on an IED. I was the first triple amputee of the conflict.





SIMON BROWN

Was Bryan's celebrity status useful?

CF: The people we photographed were a mighty bunch, and we needed a mighty photographer to match them. Of course, in this day and age a celebrity does propel a cause into a higher stratosphere, and we're hoping that for the guys in the book, this happens. BLESMA really deserves that, too.

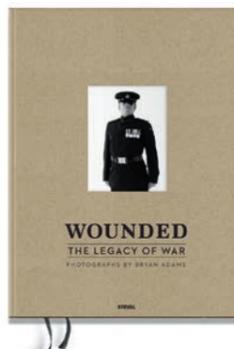
How did the writing side of it work?

CF: I wrote a retrospective foreword and interviewed all the guys we photographed. The guys dug deep in the interviews and were searingly honest about their injuries, their rehab, the trauma their injuries caused their loved ones, everything you could imagine.

BA: I was determined to display the human side of the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the best way to do that was by keeping the shots raw and simple. Photographs convey what words alone cannot. It was a great learning experience to work with such extraordinary people.

Was it tough for you, and them?

CF: It wasn't easy, it was harrowing to do and harrowing to tell, but they were great interviewees. The interviews complement the images well, and I hope they provoke a lot of questions. I wanted the interviews to be very



different, and because we did the interviews after the photographs, I sensed the guys opened up more than they might otherwise have. Maybe they felt vulnerable after the pictures. It was definitely a good recipe for getting them to talk about what had happened.

Which parts of the process stuck in your mind?

CF: What touched me the most was the reflections the guys made about their mums. Whenever they talked about how their mum felt, or how she had suffered, or what she'd done for them, it was very emotional.

BA: I was always amazed by them talking about the tasks that others take for granted, such as making a cup of tea or playing with their children.

What were the challenges?

CF: The logistics. It's tough for guys who can't walk, or talk, or see. But they approached it head on. It's impossible to shy away from that as an onlooker. Bryan became more and more enthused as he went on. He bounced off their energy – they are such a remarkable bunch. We were very privileged to work with them.

And why BLESMA?

CF: We were guided by the guys. Many of them said what a difference BLESMA had made, so we were keen to help.



HANNAH CAMPBELL



MARK SUTCLIFFE



RORY MACKENZIE



RICK CLEMENT

HOW TO...

Maintain your stump

Whether you're new to BLESMA or have been a Member for years, chances are you can pick up some tips from your peers. Read on...

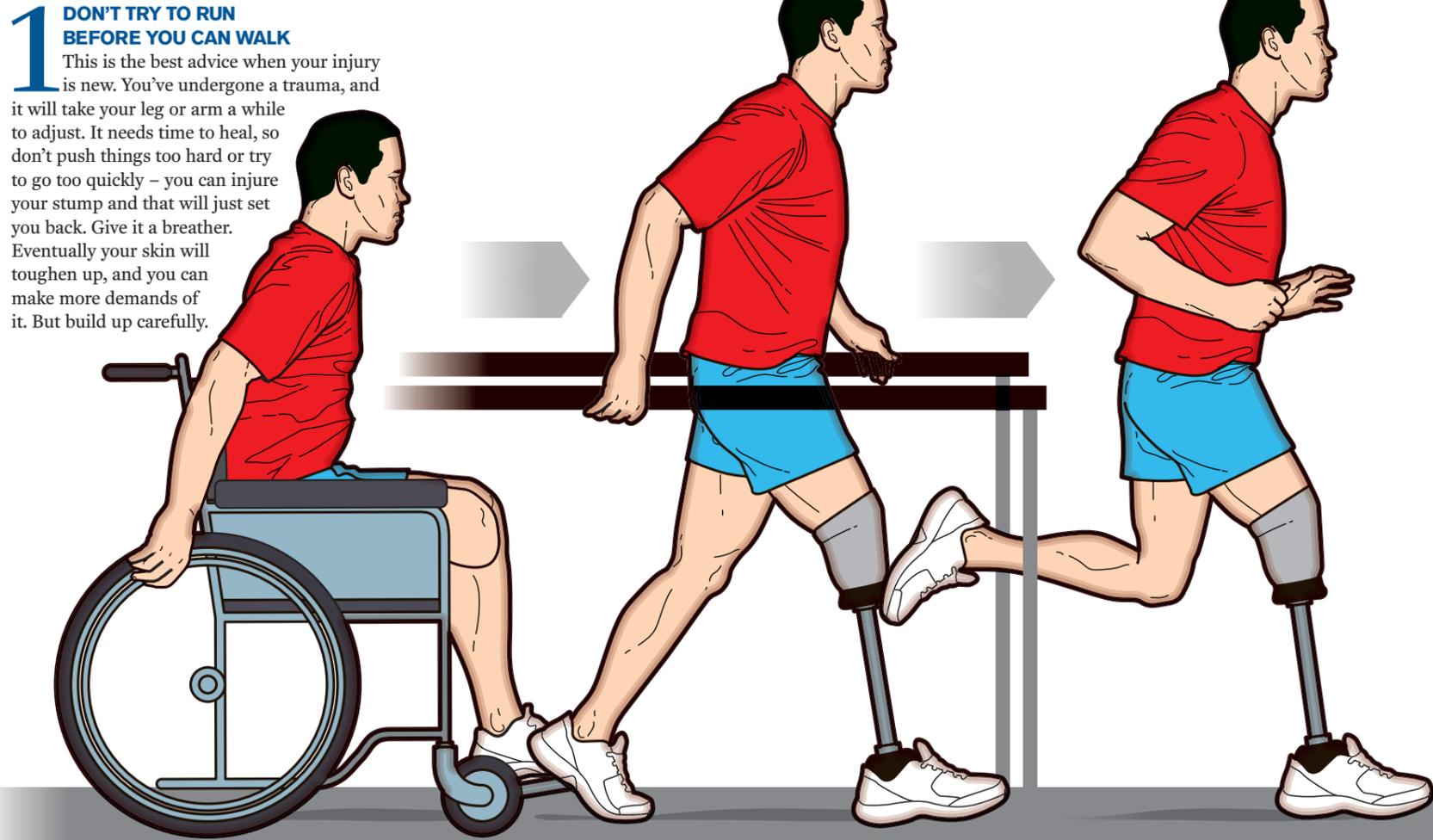


Illustration: Peter Loddard

1 DON'T TRY TO RUN BEFORE YOU CAN WALK
This is the best advice when your injury is new. You've undergone a trauma, and it will take your leg or arm a while to adjust. It needs time to heal, so don't push things too hard or try to go too quickly – you can injure your stump and that will just set you back. Give it a breather. Eventually your skin will toughen up, and you can make more demands of it. But build up carefully.

THERE ARE PLENTY OF THINGS YOU don't get told by the NHS when it comes to looking after your stump following an amputation. One of the huge benefits of BLESMA membership is the chance to share ideas and best practice with other Members who have been through similar situations. Members help Members to become experts themselves – and they tell you how things really are, rather than just how they should be in theory.

With this in mind, three Members who live with amputation (two quite recently, one for a very long time) have taken the time to give us their very best tips, hints and techniques on how to look after your stump. Whether you've lost an arm, a leg, or both, check out their pearls of wisdom...

2 KEEP ON TOP OF MINOR CUTS AND BRUISES

You've got to be more careful than most with cuts and bruises, and treat them immediately, otherwise you can have problems. Mix Savlon liquid into a bath – it's better than having a shower – and always treat even the smallest injuries with antiseptic. Mepilex Lite is very good



for corns on a leg. We all know someone who has neglected basic things and suffered from infection as a result.

3 MAKE SURE YOU USE ANTI-FUNGAL PRODUCTS

You're at a high risk from fungal infections. Try an anti-fungal wash called Hibiscrub – it kills everything! Make sure you get it on prescription because it's expensive. Use it twice a week, you can also clean your liner with it. Afterwards, dry yourself thoroughly and use an anti-fungal athlete's foot powder on both your stump and liner – that works really well.

4 EXFOLIATE!

It's very easy to get ingrowing hairs when you wear your sleeve over your stump, especially if you're quite hairy. These are a real pain and can be a problem if they get infected. The best solution is to use an exfoliating glove daily while washing to remove the dead skin that causes ingrowing hairs. You'll soon notice if you forget to exfoliate.

5 LOOK AFTER YOUR "GOOD" BITS

As you get older your supposedly good leg (or arm, or eye) can start to have problems. It is vitally important that you take care of the limbs you do have because you rely on them that much more. If you've lost a leg, make sure you always wear decent shoes and keep your good leg strong by doing gentle but regular exercise. That will help to keep your hip and knee healthy as you get older.

6 PROTECT YOUR STUMP WHEN DOING EXERCISE

If you are into exercise, get a Swiftwick sock.

Put it over your stump before putting your liner on. It's perfect for fitness training. The big issue you'll have when exercising with a prosthetic is sweat, because it causes your socket to loosen. This can lead to discomfort, bruising and inconvenience, because you have to keep readjusting. The Swiftwick is phenomenal – it keeps your stump dry and comfy. Will Dixon even used it while rowing the Atlantic.



7 FIND YOUR OWN WAY

All the advice you'll get from everyone is great, but no two amputations are the same, so make sure you experiment and do what's best for your stump. Some people shave them, some don't, for example, and there are lots of different products that do different things. The key is to try a few and stick with the ones that work for you.

8 STAY ACTIVE

Some people lose a limb and they never work or do any activity again. It's the wrong attitude, and it's bad for your mental and physical health.

Ron Rose has done physical jobs working in dockyards since 1945 and he's still busy at the age of 91. His advice? Don't sit about!



Meet our experts

These tips, tricks and techniques have been given by the following BLESMA Members...

ANTHONY HARRIS, 32



Anthony, from Shropshire, lost his left leg below the knee after being injured in an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2010. He was an officer in the 2nd Battalion, Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. He now works as a motivational speaker for BLESMA, Help For Heroes and various corporations, as well as being a rally driver for the Race To Recovery team.

WILL DIXON, 29



Will Dixon, from Gloucestershire, lost his left leg below the knee while serving as an officer with 3 Rifles in Afghanistan. He now lives in Battersea and works for Barclays Bank as an Associate Director.

RON ROSE, 91



Ron, from Portsmouth, lost his right leg below the knee in 1945 during WWII. He was injured by a landmine on the banks of the River Rhine. Following his injury he worked as a plumber, welder and metal worker in Portsmouth's dockyards before retiring in 1984. He is one of BLESMA's longest-serving Members.

WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS?

Have you discovered other great ways to look after your stump? Write in and tell us at: editor@blesma.org and we'll print the best in the next issue.



GET ON YOUR BIKE AND RIDE

Six days, 250 miles, 25 riders, one challenge: to conquer the South East of England by bike. Welcome to SR UK 2013

Pictures: Andy Bate Words: Nick Moore

Box Hill in Surrey is one of Britain's toughest cycle climbs. It was a gruelling part of the London 2012 Olympic road race and its zigzag section has been likened to Alpe d'Huez, the most iconic mountain climb in the Tour De France. Long popular with cyclists seeking a true challenge, at first glance 25 riders snaking their way along it on a Friday morning isn't unusual.

But a closer look will reveal something unique about the group. For this small peloton of riders is made up of limbless ex-Servicemen and women from Britain and the United States. Each one of them is recovering from traumatic injuries – some visible and some, like PTSD, double vision and all manner of emotional scars, not so apparent. Many of the riders are missing one or both legs; five are riding specially-adapted hand bikes.

Welcome to the third annual SR UK event (formerly known as Soldier Ride) – a cycle tour held jointly by BLESMA and its Stateside equivalent, the Wounded Warrior Project. In America, the event has been running for nearly a decade, and in 2011 the event was exported to the UK. This year, over six days, a dozen Brits and 13 visiting American members of the military, all of whom have overcome significant injuries, have completed more than 250 miles around the South East of England. The route has taken in iconic spots such as Windsor Castle and Beachy Head, as well as a “victory lap” of London before finishing at Horse Guards Parade.

“This year we chose a difficult route, and the aim was to make it a real challenge, a proper achievement,” explains Dave Coulton, BLESMA's Activities Manager, who was the event's organiser and who also took part

SIGHT-SEEING FROM THE SADDLE

From Windsor Castle to Horse Guards Parade via Beachy Head and RMA Sandhurst. Here's the route at a glance

STAGE 1

Windsor to Petersfield
52 miles

STAGE 2

Petersfield to Arundel
30 miles

STAGE 3

Brighton to Battle (Hastings)
45 miles

STAGE 4

Beachy Head to
Penshurst Place
40 miles

STAGE 5

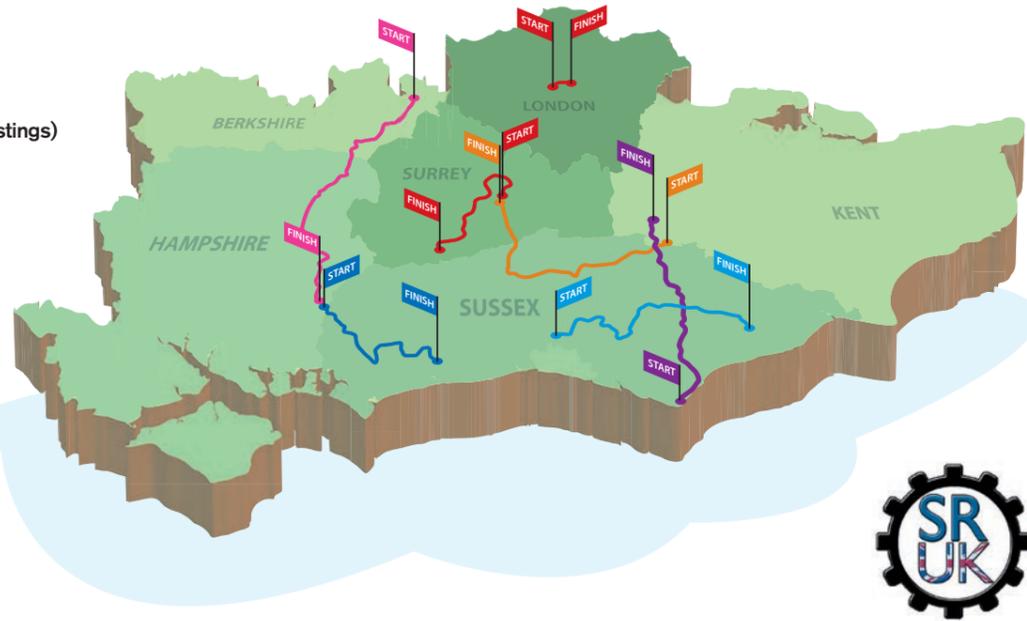
Royal Tunbridge
Wells to Dorking
45 miles

STAGE 6: PART 1

Box Hill to
Dunsfold Aerodrome
29 miles

STAGE 6: PART 2

Horse Guards Parade
to Tower of London
2.6 miles



in the ride. “The participants didn’t want it to be too easy. In the past we’ve run less difficult events, with the aim of getting more people involved in cycling. We’ll do that again, I’m sure. We’re always trying to strike what is a difficult balance between involving as many beginners as possible and putting on events that will appeal to more experienced riders.”

This year’s event certainly was a mission for those involved, however hardened. “It was one of the most physically demanding rides I’ve been on but I really enjoyed it,” says Paul Hagan, 52, from Leicester. Paul, a double amputee with lung disease, was taking part in his second SR UK on a hand bike. “We rode 57 miles on the first day, with a 1,000m climb. It’s extra difficult not having thigh muscles to really push on! But we felt a great sense of teamwork and achievement. It brings you all together.”

Jarrad Turner, a retired US Army Staff Sergeant from Georgia, echoed Paul’s feelings. “Before SR UK I had never ridden for five days straight,” he says. “This was a mental as well as a physical challenge.”

There were many highlights. “I really enjoyed the route and all the different places we saw,” says Ben Zissman, 24, from Walsall, who was paralysed by a spinal injury in 2010 and is now an experienced hand biker. “I loved the different levels of abilities, too. I’m a keen cyclist, I’m part of the Help For Heroes team. I race and

I trained hard for this event, so it was nice to help people who are less experienced. I was able to pass on some of my knowledge and skills – which gears to use, that kind of thing. BLESMA is great because everyone learns from each other. It was great to meet all sorts of people with different injuries and different stories to tell – from Afghan to Northern Ireland. Everyone’s overcome different things. The aim was always to get everyone to the finish, not to finish first!”

The route took the cyclists past Dunsfold Aerodrome, the test track made famous by the TV programme *Top Gear*. Here, the riders were joined by Francie Clarkson, wife of *Top Gear* presenter Jeremy. A very keen cyclist and long-time supporter of ex-Servicemen’s charities, Francie was impressed with the fitness levels of the

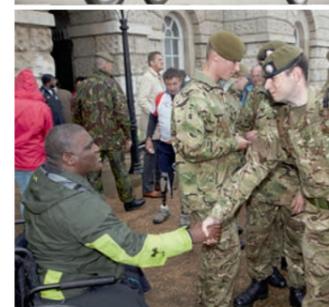
“BLESMA events make everyone learn from each other. The aim was always to get everyone to the finish, not to finish first!”

cyclists. “They’re great guys and the teamwork was impressive under difficult circumstances. It was a tough ride,” she said. For Ben, this was one of the highlights of the ride. “I’m a big fan of the show, so it was a buzz to go around the track where they test all the cars,” he says. “It was amazing to be able to put it into perspective by riding around it. I completed three laps on the hand bike. We did a test lap in a Land Rover first. I got some good speed up and did a lap in two minutes 50 seconds, which I was chuffed with.”

PEDALLERS ACROSS THE POND

The American contingent were enamoured with England. “I loved stopping at the many historical sites,” says Jarrad Turner. “I will never forget our first day, with the sun rising over the walls of Windsor Castle. The morning fog lifted and it felt like we were knights going on a majestic journey!”

Different abilities were well catered for, making the week truly inclusive. “We split the participants into two different speed groups, and made sure each was always supported,” says Dave Coulton. A key aim, and one central to any BLESMA event, was to encourage Members to socialise. “The Americans and Brits enjoyed mixing and are all friends now. I believe it even got a bit emotional on the last night!” says Dave. “The Americans were amazed by some of the buildings like Windsor and



Off-road runner Colin:
Below knee amputee



Life Without Limits

Custom designed ultra-lightweight prosthetics

- Ultra light maximum comfort socket for all day wear
- High activity prostheses/running blades
- Self funded or NHS referrals accepted
- Local clinics

Our **NEW** revolutionary carbon socket technology reduces the weight of prosthetics by up to 50%.

Developing new technology so you can push the boundaries.



Life without limits.....

FROM THE RAZOR'S EDGE *Two personal views of the 250-miler*



PAUL HAGAN, 52

How was the ride?

It was the second SR UK I've done and it was one of the most demanding rides I've ever been on. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

What was the most difficult part of the ride?

We did 57 miles on the first day, and it included a 1,000-metre climb. I can't use my thigh muscles, so it was too hard for me.

How good has cycling been for your recovery?

It keeps me active, which is important with my lung problems. Two years ago I had my right leg amputated and 17 blood clots passed through my heart. Biking keeps my lungs going.

How much has BLESMA helped you?

A huge amount. I have massively benefitted from BLESMA, the activities it offers have been a huge part of my rehabilitation.



STEVEN GILL, 44

How was the ride?

There were far too many hills for a hand bike. I made it up most of them, but had to get a helping shove up a few. The ride was awesome, though, I loved it. We all worked well together.

Will you keep getting involved with cycling?

I'll keep doing every SR UK. I've travelled to America to take part in a couple of the Wounded Warrior rides, too.

What are the benefits of cycling to you?

It's so good for you. For amputees it's a massive plus and it doesn't damage the body. I'd like to see more cycling events.

Would you encourage amateurs to get involved?

Of course. There's no pressure to reach a certain standard, and if you run out of energy you can always get a lift in the van!

Arundel Castles, while the Brits couldn't believe all the Americans' amazing kit."

The après-cycle more than made up for the sore muscles. "The camaraderie with the Americans was unbelievable, there were lots of laughs," says Steven Gill, from Leicestershire, who has taken part in all three rides to date. "I'll keep doing every event like this, and I've done a couple of the Americans' tours in Miami and New York as a result of getting involved, which were brilliant. It's a big deal over there."

"Getting to bond with other brothers and sisters in arms was a priceless experience," adds Joe Qualls, a Sergeant in the US Infantry. "The teamwork was epic. There is no difference between us and the Brits. We all sacrificed for the countries we love – this allows us to become instant family.

There isn't anything too hard when you look at these warriors. I fell in love with those from BLESMA and it was a huge accomplishment to complete the ride. It was a humbling and priceless experience."

Everyone could agree on that. "I owe the biggest debt of my life to BLESMA," adds Paul Hagan. "So far I've already completed a Caribbean yacht race, taken part in Cowes Week and done lots of cycling with BLESMA. It has been a huge part of my rehabilitation, and cycling has been massively beneficial for my lungs."

The ride ticked a lot of boxes in this regard and that was always the intention according to Dave Coulton. "The social side, the fitness side, achieving something and giving the participants a real sense of achievement – they were all covered here."

Ben agrees; "I'd recommend it to anyone thinking about getting involved in cycling," he says. "I'd advise that you get some miles under your belt first, but as long as you've been riding for a few months and understand the safety side, I'd say go for it. There are all different standards on the ride, so anyone can take part. Sure, there are avid cyclists, but the aim is always to help the team. It's not a case of finishing as quickly as you can. It's a case of getting the whole team to the finish line."

If you would like to take part in next year's SR UK, or would just like some advice about how to get involved in cycling call Dave Coulton on 020 8548 3519, or email activities@blesma.org

Free consultations for all military and ex-military personnel

Free trial fittings for all latest technology, including BiOM Foot and Genium Knee (excludes cost of test sockets)

To find out more contact us at enquiry@dorset-ortho.com or +44 (0) 1425 481794

www.dorset-ortho.com

7 clinics throughout the UK (Glasgow from Jan 2014)

