

Blesma

Bulletin Members' Newsletter – Spring 2016



Benefits: what the changes really mean

The lowdown on how the Welfare Reform Act will affect you [p20](#)



Ask not what Blesma can do for you...

Help out and have fun in 2016 by volunteering for Blesma [p24](#)



Your BSO is ready to help. Find out how

Get in touch for help and advice on a wide range of subjects [p04](#)

Have your say!

We're planning more of what you love for 2017. Help us out by completing our Activities Survey

Inside: Blesma Week to be bigger than ever!



Kenevo

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Blesma Bulletin

Spring 2016



I hope 2016 has got off to a good start for you. The articles in this edition are vitally important for Members. The Prosthetics Update focuses on a new pathway for eligible veterans to access Headley

Court. There are set criteria but, nevertheless, it is an unprecedented decision by government departments. Blesma campaigned hard for this and we will be monitoring closely.

The 2016 Members' Weekend is selling out at pace. We can acquire more rooms but please do not delay in speaking with Sue at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7091 if you are interested but have not yet put your name down. Blesma covers the cost of Ordinary and Associate Members and their partners or carers. The weekend aims to be highly social, with the chance to find out what Blesma Members are up to and for you to have a say on what Blesma should be doing to support.

The Activities Programme for 2016 has been published and we look forward to your applications. We are particularly keen to hear from Members who have not taken part before or for some time.

We welcome Liz Watling in Membership Services and Steve Burton as BSO for the North. Steve is the final piece in the Support Officer restructuring plan and the map on p05 shows how it all works. Our next piece of work is to refresh volunteering for welfare purposes. With the help of Members we are also considering perceived and real barriers to fulfilling employment.

This Bulletin is about being engaged and creating dialogue to benefit and interest Members. Please do keep the conversations flowing.

Barry Le Gry
Chief Executive

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The Blesma Support Officer Area Review

You may be aware that, following the Trustees' decision to invest in the BSO team, we reviewed the BSO Areas and have made a number of boundary and Area changes as the size of the individual geographical areas is reduced.

We have created a new Area, "North" which encompasses Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Steve Burton is the new BSO (North), and succeeds Peter Shields in Scotland, and Mike Downes in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Prior to assuming the role of BSO (North) Steve served in the Army, his last appointment being in command of the West Midlands Personnel Recovery Unit.

Steve is looking forward to getting to know Members in his Area and will be making contact in due course. However, if you would like him to arrange to visit you as a priority because you need advice or support, please get in touch with him. His details are at the top of the panel to the right.

All Members who have been affected by these changes will have received a letter confirming the details of their BSO. However, if you are unsure as to just who your BSO is, please contact Elaine in Membership Services by telephone on 020 8548 7093 or by email at memberadmin@blesma.org

You can learn more about Steve in the next edition of *Blesma Magazine*.

CONTACT YOUR BSO

Have you got a question or need advice? Don't hesitate to get in touch with the Blesma Support Officer in your area

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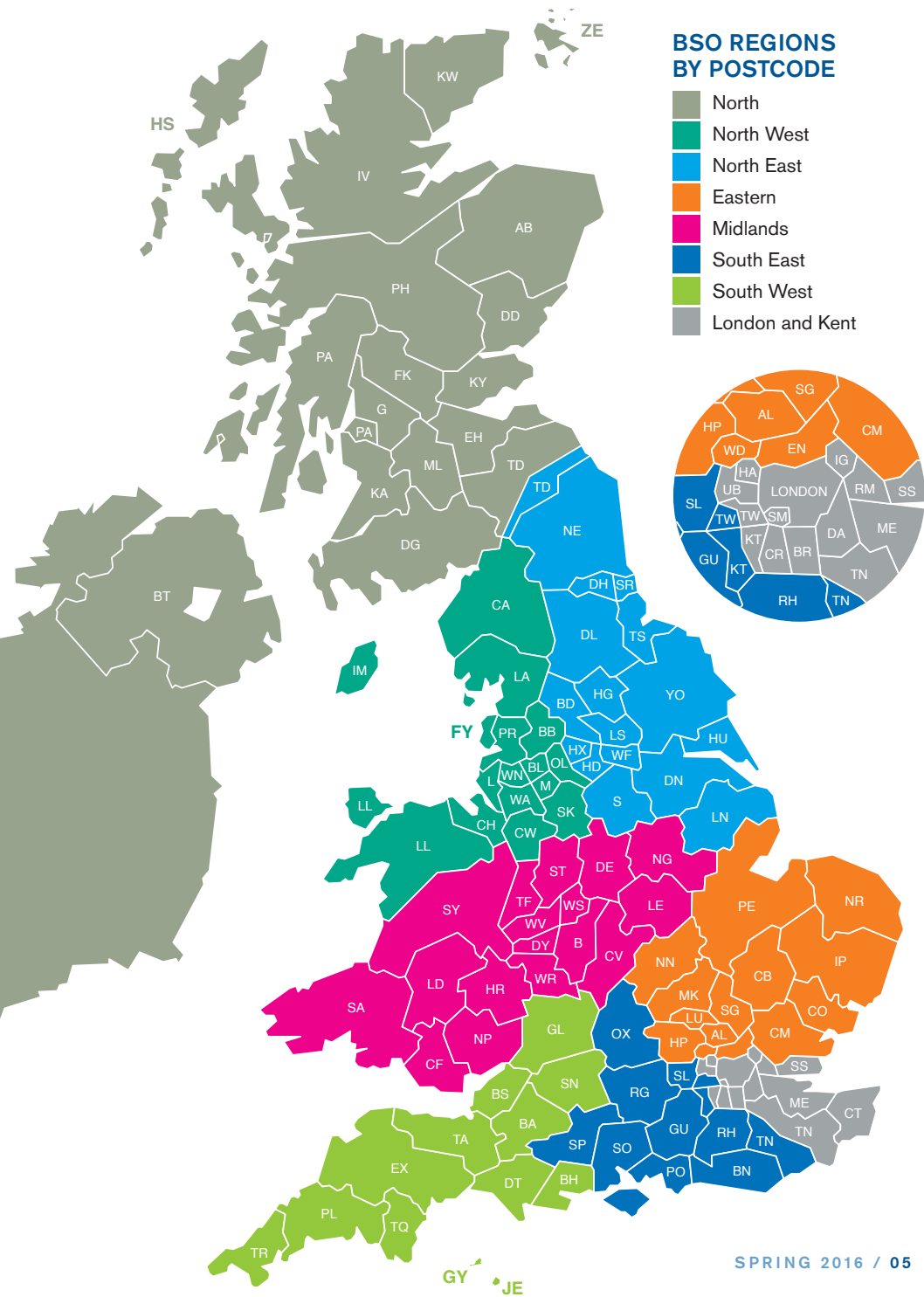
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Introducing Liz, our new Membership Services Support Assistant



We're delighted to welcome Liz Watling who joined Blesma in January as our new Membership Services Support Assistant. Liz is working in the office in Chadwell Heath and is an experienced Benefits Adviser. Before joining the charity sector she worked in local authorities, and has been supporting amputees since 2014. Her expertise in welfare benefits is something she hopes can greatly help Blesma Members.

How have you settled into Blesma?

I had the choice between this and another job, and because of how nice everybody was when I was shown around I decided to take the job here. Everyone put their pens down and looked me in the eye. Brian [Chenier] showed me around and everyone had a smile on their face and said hello. Everybody's just so nice.

What does your role involve?

Originally, the role was just to process the grants, but once they found out I had benefits

knowledge – quite specialist knowledge – the role was developed to take into account that experience. I will also attend DWP events on behalf of the charity, so I will go along to the events to raise awareness of Blesma but also to find out what is happening and feed that back to the Support Officers.

How can this help our Members?

I'm going to produce some fact sheets on the benefits which we believe affect our Members. They will be available on our website, but also in hard copy, so that Members can have a look at the benefits themselves. The fact sheets will contain information about the benefit and how Members can claim, so they could actually do it themselves if they wanted to. Or if they read it and think; 'This benefit is right for me', they will be able to contact their Support Officer who would give them in-depth advice if they needed some more face-to-face support. It's about saying to people; 'Here's the information, if you feel comfortable to do this yourself then you can, or come back to us if you want more support.'

So, what do you like to do outside of work?

Working in an office, you can become very sluggish and I'm not particularly motivated to go to the gym, so I wear a step monitor and have a target every day that I have to beat. I do it purely to give myself some level of fitness, but I do like walking. Every Thursday is 'Five-Mile-Walk Night' and I like to go walking in Suffolk. Family is really important to me, too, so I see family quite a lot, especially my parents.

Explora Foundation Scholarship Fund

The Explora Scholarship Fund (ESF) provides scholarships to members of the British Armed Forces who have been seriously disabled through their military service. These scholarships are open to serving personnel and veterans, and to their dependants (including spouses, children, legally dependent partners, and other family members who are, or were, directly dependent upon the income of the injured member of the UK Armed Forces).

The scholarships are awarded for further or higher education, ranging from A Levels/diplomas/foundation degrees to a first degree or, in exceptional circumstances, a post-graduate qualification. The maximum award is up to £15,000 per year.

Eligibility

- Applications for Further Education study must be supported by appropriate academic recommendations, a clear and strong justification, and a confirmed offer at the place of education
- Application for first degree study must be supported by a clear and strong justification, a confirmed place at a UK university and supporting academic recommendations
- Applicants for post-graduate study will be expected to have completed their first degree, or be about to do so, and for a post-graduate Masters programme would normally have an Honours degree at 2nd class, 1st division, although suitable qualified experience may be taken into account by each university

Application and Assessment

- Applications must be made to the ESF at the address shown on their website (www.theexplorafoundation.org). Potential applicants will be advised on their eligibility and application requirements. Blesma Members applying will be supported through the process by their Blesma Support Officer.

For more information about the scholarship, including the terms and conditions, please visit the ESF website on www.theexplorafoundation.org. You can also contact the Foundation at info@theexplorafoundation.org or on 020 7736 3420. When contacting the Foundation, please mention that you are a Blesma Member and if you would like your Blesma Support Officer to assist you in the application process, please get in touch with him.

Prosthetics Update

Travel Costs and the NHS Hospital Travel Cost Scheme

You may recall that Blesma is looking at the anomalies within the Hospital Travel Costs Scheme available to eligible War Pensioners. We have also raised the issue of inequity relating to those who have received an award under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme who are required to travel to Limb Centres.

Although we have no definitive answers to our questions yet, we can confirm that we are speaking directly to NHS England who have appointed a project lead to investigate our concerns. Blesma's enquiries have identified that some locations appear to have continued the practice of using locally produced expenses forms which have caused confusion or delays in payment of claims. It would also appear that some Blesma Members are still encountering issues in respect of the subsistence element of a claim, and these points have been forwarded to the NHS lead for inclusion in the review.

It will be some time before an effective and equitable solution is found, but be assured we continue to pursue this matter on your behalf.

For advice on claiming travel expenses, contact Brian Chenier on 020 8548 7080 or by email at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org

Direct Skeletal Fixation (or Osseointegration) Key Facts

In the last issue of *Blesma Magazine*, reference was made to our campaigning work to get DSF on the agenda in the UK. While work continues to finalise the detail, it is anticipated

that the MoD-led programme is on track to commence this Spring.

BACKGROUND

Direct Skeletal Fixation (DSF) is the term used by the NHS in England to describe the surgical procedure to implant a titanium rod into the shaft of a bone, from which part is exposed through the skin and an external prosthetic device directly attached.

The Chancellor recently announced a £2 million programme, led by an MoD team, to provide this surgery to up to 20 serving military or veteran patients over two-and-a-half years from April. Previously, the MoD had funded five serving personnel (three of whom had the procedure in Australia and two in the UK) and we are aware of four veterans who have had the surgery privately in Australia.

The surgery can, for some, be life changing, as it does away with the need for traditional prosthetic sockets, which are a source of severe complications for some. Blesma campaigned hard for veterans to have access to an MoD-run clinic to assess suitability, and have been concerned that interested Members have not had independent advice on this operation. We are pleased to know that NHS(E) is to evaluate the programme for its effectiveness and risks.

The procedure is not suitable or available to every serving or veteran amputee. The full referral pathway is yet to be confirmed, but for veterans this will be via their NHS Limb Centre to DMRC Headley Court and will be based on clinical need. These key facts have been provided by the MoD team that has been tasked with leading the programme:



ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for referral to DMRC Headley Court, veterans must have previously been treated by the prosthetics service at DMRC *and* be in receipt of the AFCS or War Pension. All referrals are subject to final MoD/NHS approval.

CLINICAL CRITERIA

- 1 Through- or above-knee amputee. Through-knee will require conversion to above-knee during implant fitting surgery
- 2 Primarily a wheelchair user
- 3 Ongoing socket fit issues – unable to obtain adequate sockets through NHS and/or MoD prosthetic services
- 4 Non-smoker
- 5 No active infections or osteomyelitis
- 6 Non-diabetic
- 7 Must be able to commit to at least two

- 8 six-week periods of rehabilitation at DMRC
- 8 Must be able to mentally tolerate protruding metal devices from the residual limb – psychology assessment prior to surgery

RESTRICTIONS

- 1 Must remain a non-smoker
- 2 Must be aware that DSF implants are not considered safe for running, whatever prosthetic devices are used distally

RISKS

- 1 Surgical risks from orthopaedic operation
- 2 Infection – potentially leading to implant removal, further stump revision or bone resection, which may further compromise future socket use
- 3 Long-term cancer risk from stoma requiring annual review as a minimum

Research Projects/Studies

From time to time, Blesma is asked to help spread the word about ongoing research. As part of the process, checks are made that the researcher has the appropriate ethical approval and supervision in place, and that the subject lends itself to being advertised to Members.

The normal outlet for these requests is social media. However, for projects that have a longer lifespan, we will endeavour to inform Members via this Bulletin or *Blesma Magazine*. Any decision to get involved in research projects is entirely your own and contact should be made directly to the named research lead. This helps maintain the confidentiality often required.

Top Tips

Air travel advice on carrying dangerous liquids, aerosols and sprays

Member Chris Jones has told us about his experience when flying abroad when carrying a lubricant spray used on silicon liners before inserting the residual limb (stump) into the suction socket. Iceross, distributed by Ossur Prosthetics, does carry two warning labels, one being 'Inflammable'. Chris has tried it on newspaper and it really goes with a whoosh!

So what should amputees do when flying? Chris was faced with the dilemma; attempt to smuggle a small amount in another container and hope no-one noticed or risk having it taken off him at security. Water or saliva is a poor substitute and doesn't make fitting the prosthetic easy. However, Chris has found a very good substitute and uses it all the time. He discovered that hand gel, which can be bought cheaply in supermarkets in 50cl bottles, is ideal for holidays and will not infringe air transport safety regulations. A 50cl bottle lasts about two weeks.

So, if you are planning on travelling abroad by air, please be aware of all the relevant regulations in force at the time. If in doubt, check with your airline and remember this tip kindly shared by Chris.

Socket Problems – Getting Your Point Across

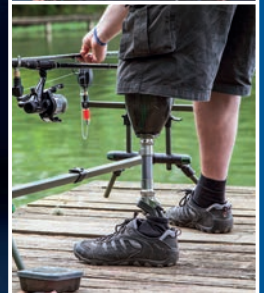
For amputees, wearing a prosthetic limb is dependent on the fit and comfort of the socket. When this isn't right, you will need to visit your prosthetist at your Limb Centre. Over the past two-and-a-half years, BSOs have accompanied many Members to their appointments and have found a significant value in being able to explain, in detail, the problems associated with socket fit. It really does help the prosthetist identify potential causes for the rubbing, sores and pressure.

We have noticed that it is often difficult to recall the detail of what is going wrong with the socket or limb when at the appointment. The problems may have developed over some time, or only occur sporadically or as a result of a particular function. This is especially true when there is some time between making the appointment and it actually taking place.

Maintaining a "limb use diary" when you start to notice a problem developing will really help. Make a daily note of what you are doing when the problem or issue occurs; what you do to relieve the pressure or soreness (if you can) and what is the effect of the problem on you. This is all very helpful to the clinician. Taking a photograph of the residual limb showing redness or sores can also be helpful.

An advantage of making such notes is that you do not have to rely on memory and by producing written notes it tends to focus the attention of the prosthetist, allowing you to really explain what is happening. It is also useful to make a note of when the limb or socket is OK too, as this helps develop a pattern of usage which may assist in your discussions with the Limb Centre clinicians.

If you need any advice or support in your dealings with your Limb Centre, or if you have any questions, get in touch with Brian Chenier at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7080 or by email at bsoprosthetics@blesma.org



Members' Weekend

When: 04-06 June

Where: Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth

The 2016 Members' Weekend is nearly fully booked! If you would like to come along to meet old friends and make some new ones, find out what Blesma Members have been doing, and to have your say on what Blesma should be doing

to support Members, please contact **Sue at Chadwell Heath on 020 8548 7091** or email officeexec@blesma.org

Blesma will cover the cost of Ordinary and Associate Members, and their partners or carers. There are no formalities. ***We hope to see you there!***

Activities Update Survey

Tell us what you think about the Activities Programme

We are always striving to provide activities that interest and engage as many Members as possible, and in order to do this we need your help.

To do this, we have produced a survey that has been inserted into this issue of the Bulletin. We would like to hear from Members who are yet to participate in Blesma Activities as well as those who have previously taken part. The survey is specifically looking for feedback between 2014 and 2016.

“The feedback we receive at the moment is based around individual activities, but it would be great to get a deeper insight into them overall,” says Jess March, the Activities Manager. “The aim of the survey is to find out why Blesma Members do activities, and if they don’t do activities, why not. We have split the survey into two parts, one is for Members who haven’t yet participated and the second is for those who do take part.

“From this feedback, not only will we be able to focus our activities package on what Members want, but we can also give the Members who lead activities a better insight into the barriers stopping some Members from participating. We can then work together to break down these obstacles.

“We are planning an Activities Workshop for activities leaders at the Members’ Weekend, when we will discuss the feedback and results of the survey, and how we can best apply any changes required. We want leaders to feel supported by us, so their feedback is important,

too. We need our leaders to feel confident in both us and themselves when leading an event, because leaders assume responsibility for the safety and well-being of fellow Members who are participating in the event.

“By the time this Bulletin goes to print we will have contacted the Members who lead activities to invite them to the Workshop and we will update all Members on the progress of this initiative in a future Bulletin.”

Emily Mizon, Membership Engagement Assistant, was responsible for planning and implementing the survey.

“We are focusing on how we can engage not only with Members who are new to Blesma, but also with those who don’t participate in the Activities Programme,” she says. “We want to reach them to see how we can get them involved, and discover the reasons why they haven’t got involved so far. We also want to hear from Members who do attend events to see if there are any areas in which we can improve, and to learn more about the impact that attending the events has had on them.”

We look forward to hearing your feedback, so please complete either Survey 1 or Survey 2 and return it to Emily at the FREPOST address by 08 April. If you would rather complete the survey online, please look out for the link to the survey in the March Activities Update email, which will be circulated on 25 March.

If you have any questions about any of the activities on our programme, or if you would like to put your name forward for a particular event, please contact Emily on 020 8548 7094 or email her at mea@blesma.org

HAVE YOUR SAY!

Please complete the Activities Survey that has been inserted into this issue of the Bulletin and return it to Chadwell Heath using the Freepost envelope provided.



Blesma Week

06-12 June 2016

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
#ForOurWounded

Blesma Week is our annual week of fundraising and awareness raising activities, and there are lots of ways that you can get involved. Now in its third year, Blesma Week 2016 is set to be bigger and better than ever! *To find out more, including how you can get involved in activities like these, please contact events@blesma.org or call 020 8548 7089*



Bungee Jump at the O2 Arena

When: Saturday 11 June and Sunday 12 June

SPONSORSHIP

Registration fee: £30 plus a minimum fundraising target of £300

SELF-FUNDING Registration fee: £75 plus a suggested fundraising target of £150



Climb Ben Nevis

When: Friday 10 June to Sunday 12 June

SPONSORSHIP

Registration fee: £99 plus a £300 minimum sponsorship

SELF-FUNDING £199 plus a suggested fundraising target of £100

Yorkshire Three Peaks

When: Friday 10 June to Sunday 12 June

Join our Chief Executive as we climb the stunning Yorkshire Three Peaks.

SPONSORSHIP

Registration fee:

£99 plus
£300 minimum sponsorship

SELF-FUNDING

£199 plus a suggested fundraising target of £100



The Patron's Lunch

When:

Sunday 12 June
HM Queen Elizabeth II will celebrate her 90th birthday on 21 April 2016.

To commemorate this milestone, why not hold your own Patron's Lunch to celebrate and raise vital funds for Blesma at the same time?





Blesma BBQ

Stick the barbie on, invite a few mates over, play a few games and raise whatever funds you can!



Do Your Own Thing!

Whether at work or at home, there are lots of things you can do to fundraise. Be inspired with some great fundraising tips and ideas by contacting us at events@blesma.org



Enter our Prize Draw

Take part in the Blesma Grand Prize Draw. You can buy tickets, sell them on our behalf, or why not do both? Tickets cost just £1 each and the top prize is £1,000. Draw closes on 17 July with the winners announced soon after.



Hold a Collection

We're looking for individuals to support us with our collections throughout the UK during Blesma Week. If you can spare a few hours or would like to hold a collection at your local supermarket, please get in touch.

Recommend a School

Do you know a school that would like to get involved in Blesma Week? We are keen to hear from them, so please get in contact with the Blesma Fundraising Team and let us know.

Email: events@blesma.org Telephone: **020 8548 7089**

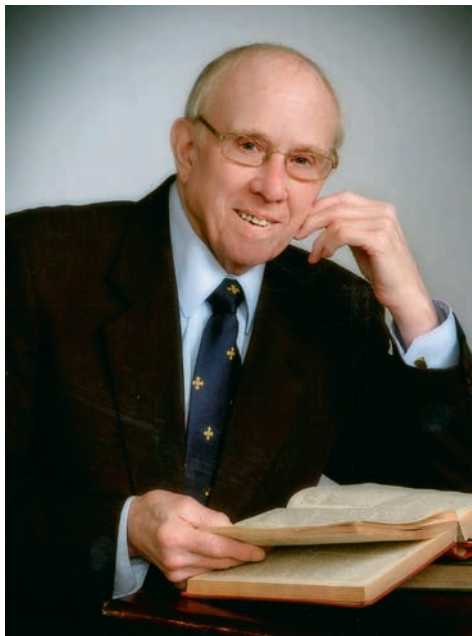
Walsall and District Branch

The Branch enjoyed a really excellent Christmas lunch at the Shropshire Golf Centre on 02 December, with 34 Members and guests present. Our main guest was Major “Bill” Billington, 2IC West Midlands Personnel Recovery Unit. We did invite his boss (Lt Col Steve Burton) but he was unavailable – probably preparing to take over his new post as BSO (North)!

This was followed by some very sad news; the passing of two of our Members over the Christmas/New Year period. Roy Durose passed away on Christmas Day whilst in hospital. Roy was a keen supporter of the Branch, always attending functions when he was able. On 03 January we were also very saddened to learn of the death of our President and Treasurer, Bill Madeley MBE (pictured). An obituary of Bill will appear in the Spring issue of *Blesma Magazine*. Needless to say, he will be greatly missed by all Members of the Branch as he first became involved with the Branch as a volunteer in the 1960s!

We were also saddened to learn of the death of Gwen Marsden MBE at the Blackpool Home on 04 December 2015. Before becoming a permanent resident at the Home, Gwen was a member of the Walsall Branch and thoroughly enjoyed the social life and activities of the Branch. She was an Ordinary Member of Blesma, having served in the WRAC during WWII, and was injured whilst working on a gun site when attached to the Royal Artillery. Unfortunately, her injury resulted in a below-knee amputation.

Gwen was well known in her area as, for 30 years, she was the Parish Clerk of Richards



Castle, a village split between Shropshire and Herefordshire. Gwen served both ‘sides’ of the Parish and was awarded the MBE for her excellent service to the community.

Martin Kettrick, our intrepid cycling stalwart, has stepped forward to fill the post of Branch Treasurer, and we are most grateful to him for doing so as it enables us to continue to function. Volunteering seems to be contagious. Mal James, the wife of our Member Jessie James, is to take over as the Midlands Area Secretary. Our thanks go to both Martin and Mal for taking on these essential posts.

The ongoing renovation of the National Memorial Arboretum throughout this year means we are looking for an alternative venue for our Summer outing. The Committee Members have their thinking caps on! We are looking forward to the Members’ Weekend at Kenilworth from 04-06 June, and anticipate seeing many old friends there. Until then, have a very enjoyable Spring.

Mike Gallagher, Secretary

Help us to keep you connected!

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

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

Why not nominate an email buddy?

We are very conscious that, despite living in a world of emails, the internet and social media, there are still many Members who are unable to access emails easily, or who do not wish to make use of these methods of communicating. Please be assured that we will always provide hard copies of our publications to Members who rely on receiving information through their letterboxes.

However, for those of you who have family members or friends who could receive emails on your behalf, please let us know by emailing the Membership Services team at memberadmin@blesma.org so that we can update our records and add your details to our electronic mailing lists.

A message from Blesma's Digital Media Officer, Nick Tuck

Many of you will no doubt have noticed that we have been working hard to develop Blesma's digital presence. The mix of website and social media gives us a great opportunity both to raise awareness of Blesma and increase

fundraising. We recently welcomed volunteer Sue Wright, who has joined the media team one day a week on a voluntary basis, and she is doing great work.

Why not share your Blesma story?

We have been using social media to share some fantastic stories about Members' achievements; from Owen Pick competing at the X-Games to the Row2Recovery crew crossing the Atlantic. *If you would like to share your story about your involvement with Blesma, please get in touch with Nick at digitalmedia@blesma.org or by calling 01299 896282*

Let's get connected

We are looking at how we can increase the ways in which Members can connect to Blesma and each other using social and digital media. We would be interested to hear your ideas, so if you would like to contribute, please get in touch with Nick by 31 March.

In the beginning there was LESMA

Among the Leeds and District Branch documents I recently discovered – or rediscovered – a fascinating account of a series of deputations to various government departments, the Central Electricity Board and the Central Electricity Commissioners by officers of the Limbless Ex-Servicemen’s Association, LESMA, the organisation which was a precursor of our own.

LESMA had held a conference in Southport in March 1929 and had appointed three officers: Mr Currie of Glasgow (the President), Mr Adamson of Dundee and Mr Stephens of Leeds (later to become National President of Blesma) to form a deputation with instructions to interview various ministers in connection with Resolutions approved at the conference.

However, Parliament was dissolved shortly after the conference and at the election which followed, Labour emerged as the largest single party and Ramsay MacDonald formed his second government. The LESMA officers had sensibly decided to postpone their deputations until the new government had settled in, and they arrived in London in early October 1929 intending to obtain interviews with the appropriate ministers on 03 and 04 October.

Unfortunately, the President, who it seems had been given the responsibility of arranging the interviews – how extraordinary, it appears now, that it was then possible to arrange such interviews without prior arrangement – had failed to do his homework. The Members soon discovered that the ministers they hoped to see, with the exception of Mr Lees-Smith, the Postmaster-General, had gone to Brighton to attend the Labour Party Conference!

At Transport and Labour, therefore, the officers were received by a “senior and effective deputy”, presumably a senior civil servant.

The purpose, in almost every case, was to seek better employment opportunities for disabled ex-Service men, particularly the limbless, so “not only might the arrangements put into operation immediately after the war be fully carried out, but that the spirit might operate more effectively in their favour”.

Each interview lasted more than an hour and, although the deputations were received courteously and seemed to think they had received definite undertakings, it is apparent from reading the actual accounts (or between the lines) that the departments were not prepared, and were probably not able, to do more than they were doing already.

In many cases this was considerable, since it was explained that some 57,000 disabled ex-Service men were, at that time, employed in government offices, more than 16% of the total number of government employees. Each department tried to put the onus on one of the others and all of them suggested that much of the responsibility rested on local authorities.

When Mr Currie suggested to Mr Piggott at the Ministry of Transport that definite instructions might be issued to local authorities to reserve appointments of car park attendants as far as possible for limbless ex-Service men (LESMA clearly did not aim very high) Mr Piggott replied; “any such instructions would be much resented by the Authorities as an unwarranted interference with administration matters by the Ministry of Transport”. How times have changed!

“The purpose, in almost every case, was to seek better employment opportunities for disabled ex-Service men, particularly the limbless”

The account of the interviews with the Central Electricity Board and the Central Electricity Commissions is particularly interesting. It seems that Glasgow Corporation was employing a large number of limbless ex-Service men in its metering department and Mr Currie suggested to Sir Andrew Duncan, presumably the Board's Chairman, that a circular be sent to all electricity undertakings, including those at the time controlled by corporations, urging them to adopt a similar system.

Sir Andrew replied that this was not one of the Board's responsibilities and, in any case, “what usually happened when circular letters were received by Electricity Undertakings was that they were immediately filed away and no notice was taken of them”.

The Electricity Commissioners were, fortunately, rather more constructive in their attitude and did agree to urge the undertakings under their administration to give preference to the war disabled where appropriate. Moreover, “the Deputation was favoured with light tea on this occasion”, apparently the only

time any refreshment was offered.

At a later date, 17 October, the officers, augmented by two Members from Glasgow, had an interview in that city with the Minister of Pensions who was visiting Scotland. The interview lasted only half an hour and in so short a time it was only possible to discuss two resolutions; one concerning allowances for wives of disabled ex-Service men whose weddings had taken place after the War, and the other requesting a clothing allowance for war amputees. In both cases success was achieved – in 1946/7 after 18 years and another world war!

The final section of the account is a little puzzling, since although there was an active Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield (the first woman cabinet minister), it seems that three other ministers had been charged with dealing with employment matters and the officers had hoped to be received by them.

In effect, none agreed to meet them. JH Thomas, the Lord Privy Seal, was in Canada; George Lansbury, First Commissioner of Works could see no purpose and the third, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, had been called away from town. His name – history is full of irony – was Sir Oswald Mosley.

But the deepest and bitterest irony was yet to come. On 29 October, a mere 12 days after the interview in Glasgow, the Wall Street Stock Market collapsed. In a short time, the world's frail economy was devastated and the period of unemployment which resulted lasted almost a decade, bringing distress to able-bodied and disabled alike. In such circumstances was Blesma founded.

Spotlight on Benefits

Changes to the Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

The government has made extensive changes to the benefits system as a result of the Welfare Reform Act. This has included Disability Living Allowance (DLA), which is being phased out and replaced by Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This currently only affects those living in England, Scotland and Wales. Most existing claimants of Disability Living Allowance aged 16 or over are expected to be invited to claim Personal Independence Payment at some stage by the end of 2019. This includes those who have an 'indefinite' or 'lifetime' award.

According to forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility, only 74 per cent of DLA claims reassessed will be successful in a PIP award. Those who were aged 65 or over on 08 April 2013 will not be affected and can continue to receive Disability Living Allowance.

What will happen?

The Department for Work and Pensions will send you a written invitation to claim Personal Independence Payment. This must inform you that you have 28 days to make a claim and tell you how to do so. The letter must also tell you that, if you do not claim Personal Independence Payment, your Disability Living Allowance will end. The 28 day time limit can be extended if the Department for Work and Pensions considers it reasonable to do so.

If you claim Personal Independence Payment within the Department for Work and Pensions' strict timescales you can continue to receive Disability Living Allowance whilst your claim

is being decided. If you do not claim Personal Independence Payment within the timescale, your Disability Living Allowance will be suspended from the next payment day. You must be sent a letter explaining that your award has been suspended and that it will be terminated if you do not claim Personal Independence Payment within a further 28 days. If you subsequently make a claim within this timescale your Disability Living Allowance will be reinstated.

If you fail to claim Personal Independence Payment at this stage then your Disability Living Allowance award will end. You cannot challenge the decision to end your Disability Living Allowance in this situation. If you subsequently choose to claim Personal Independence Payment after this date, you cannot have your Disability Living Allowance reinstated.

If you make a claim for Personal Independence Payment within the time limits, your Disability Living Allowance award will continue until a decision is made on your Personal Independence Payment claim. Your Disability Living Allowance award will then end four weeks after the payment date following the decision, whether or not your claim is successful. If your Personal Independence Payment claim is successful, your entitlement will start from the day after your Disability Living Allowance award ends.

What if I lease a Motability vehicle?

Currently Disability Living Allowance claimants who receive the higher rate of mobility component can use their payment

towards leasing a vehicle from Motability, which is a national charity helping disabled people with their personal mobility. To continue with this, you must have a successful award of Personal Independence Payment at the enhanced rate of mobility component. The criteria for this is much more challenging and most claimants will have to show they cannot reliably walk more than 20 metres.

If you are a bilateral leg amputee you will automatically meet this criteria. If you are a single leg amputee you will need to demonstrate your walking ability using your prosthesis. So it is important to evidence any difficulty you have with your prosthesis and whether you have any other health conditions or disabilities which affect your walking ability e.g. a heart condition which results in you getting out of breath on exertion.

If you are not awarded the enhanced rate of mobility when your Personal Independence Payment claim is decided and you have a Motability vehicle, you will lose this. You will be able to keep the car for a maximum of 21 days after the higher rate of Disability Living Allowance payment stops. You may be eligible for a one-off transitional support package from Motability of up to £2,000. **To find out more please contact Motability on 0300 456 4566 or visit www.motability.co.uk**

COMING SOON! A NEW ONLINE BENEFITS INFORMATION SECTION

We will shortly be creating a Benefits Information section on our website. In the meantime, if you would like more information on the criteria for Personal Independence Payment, as well as some hints and tips on how to fill out the claim form, **please contact Liz in the Membership Services team on 020 8548 3516 or by email at membersupport@blesma.org**

Government Consultations

From time to time the government undertakes a review on certain benefits to ensure that they deliver on the required policy intent or when they wish to make certain changes to the benefit legislation.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) consultation

In December 2015, the government launched a public consultation into how the use of aids and appliances is accounted for during assessments for Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

PIP is designed to help people, aged below 65 at the first point of claiming, with the extra costs associated with their disability. A recent independent review highlighted concerns that the current policy on aids and appliances might not be working as the government intended. Further analysis showed that 35% of claimants of the daily living component do so solely on the basis of their use of aids and appliances. Of these claimants, the government says, the vast majority receive their weekly rate of £55 despite having low or minimal costs arising from their disability – with some having no identifiable costs.

The government is therefore seeking views on a range of options to ensure that Personal Independence Payment is meeting its original policy intent – which is to provide support with the extra costs associated with disability. Blesma, with input from some Members, has responded to the review and strongly disagrees with any negative changes being made to the benefit with regard to the use of aids and appliances as we believe any move to reduce the level of Personal Independence Payment will have a detrimental impact on the physical health and well-being of claimants.

We will update you on the outcome of the review in due course.

Attendance Allowance consultation

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

As part of the Local Government Finance Settlement, the government announced on 17 December that it is planning to consult on whether Attendance Allowance should be devolved to local government in England and to the Welsh Assembly Government. This will, therefore, not affect those living in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

This proposal within the consultation will potentially mean transferring the budget and responsibility for Attendance Allowance to local councils, giving them more responsibility to support older people with care needs. The government plans to publish a consultation which will include information about the proposals and questions on which they would like to gather views.

Any changes which the government wishes to make would result in a change to the law and therefore would have to be debated and agreed by Parliament with local government given time to implement it. It will be at least April 2018 before any changes are made.

The government has said that those who currently receive Attendance Allowance will not be affected by any future change.

Blesma will be responding to the consultation as we believe Attendance

Allowance should remain as it is. It can allow people to maintain their independence and reach their potential without the need to have a care package. It also means people could be supported by a carer of their choice, for example, a member of the family, who could then claim Carers Allowance. So any changes to the benefit could have a negative impact on some of our Members and their carers. Once the consultation is published Blesma will be seeking Members' views.

Benefit rates from April 2016

Disability benefits are usually increased each year in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). However, in September 2015, when the rates were set for the following benefit year, the CPI was announced to have fallen. This means that those benefits that are usually increased in line with this measure will not see an increase. Therefore, claimants of Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance (along with other benefits that are aligned with this calculation) will not see an increase in their weekly entitlement.

Other benefits for working age people, such as Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance, will be frozen in cash terms for four years from April 2016. State Pension is unaffected by this as it is protected by the 'triple lock'. The triple lock is the measure used for uprating State Pension each year. The government has guaranteed to increase State Pension by increases to wages, prices or 2.5% – whichever is higher.

War Pensions and Allowances

You may have seen in the press that the Ministry of Defence has announced that there will be NO increase to War Pensions and Supplementary Allowances in April. This is because the established practice is to change the rates annually in line with the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) inflation figure calculated the previous September. As the CPI for September 2015 was negative (-0.1%) it has been decided that, from April 2016, War Pension Scheme pensions and allowances will remain the same as the 2015 rates.

This approach is consistent with the rates of disability benefits paid by the Department for Work and Pensions.

There has, however, been a small increase in the level of earnings that a War Pensioner can receive before certain allowances for employment difficulties are affected. This is known as the “therapeutic earnings limit” and increases to £5,590 per year from 11 April 2016.

Please note that Veterans UK will not be issuing a standard uprating letter.

Therapeutic Earnings

A War Pensioner (WP) in receipt of UNSUPP is permitted to undertake some work without his/her allowance being affected. The arrangement continues to be known as “Therapeutic Earnings”, but this is now somewhat of a misnomer.

In order for any work to be accepted by Veterans UK as “therapeutic”, it must be for no more than 16 hours per week, and should not produce earnings that exceed a specified amount – £5,590 per year from 11 April. Additionally, the work proposed must not be considered detrimental to the health of the pensioner. To avoid any misunderstanding, prior approval should be sought from Veterans UK if the WP is in receipt of UNSUPP and wishes to start any work that he/she would like to be considered under the “Therapeutic Earnings” rules.

If the job finishes, the WP must seek further approval before starting another job, and any increase in hours or earnings must be reported. If you have any questions, please contact your Blesma Support Officer.

We're looking for volunteers

WELFARE REPS

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

One of the consequences of the Area Review is that BSOs have reduced geographical areas

of responsibility which allows them to be better-connected to Members. All BSOs are using this opportunity to review their team of Welfare Reps and we have drawn up a Code of Conduct for Welfare Volunteers which explains the requirements of the role. This will be included in the new Welfare Rep tool kit that we are producing and which will be sent to each Welfare Rep shortly.

All Welfare Reps will be asked to confirm that they understand the boundaries of the role and that their tasking and line of communication is through their local BSO, before they will be able to continue with their





support to Members. If you are interested in volunteering to help your fellow Members and would like to learn more about the role of Welfare Rep, please contact your local BSO (their details are on page 04).

BRANCHES

When discussing how fortunate Blesma has been to benefit from the support of willing volunteers, at the vanguard has been those who run the Branches. Finding volunteers who are prepared to take on the commitment of being an office bearer remains the greatest challenge and, regrettably, Branches are unable to function without the positions of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. Chadwell Heath is here to support Branches, by distributing newsletters or other correspondence, for example, or by providing grants to enable Members to get together for social events. If your Branch needs support, please contact Membership Services.

CHADWELL HEATH (HQ) BRANCH MEMBERS

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

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

FANCY GETTING INVOLVED WITH BLESMA? THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Volunteers are a great asset and play an essential role in Blesma. They make a difference to the lives of our Members and, by helping the Association, the volunteers gain new skills and experiences.

You don't need any previous experience to volunteer; a willing heart, enthusiasm and a 'can do' attitude are what counts!

Why not consider:

- **Event support** Help make a difference by volunteering at one of our events. You can promote Blesma events in your area, come along to an event and bring a cheer squad, or help on a stand at Armed Forces Day.
- **Community events** Put on coffee mornings, lunches or afternoon teas, or why not arrange outings for Members and their families?
- **Fundraising** Why not organise your own event? If you need inspiration, or if you already have an event in mind, we can support you to support us!
- **Admin Support** Work alongside our Chadwell Heath staff providing support in the office by making up event packs, helping with mailings or supporting volunteers.
- These are just a few ways in which you can help. You may have ideas of your own and we'd love to hear them.

***Interested in lending your support?
Contact Frank Garside, National Volunteer
Officer by email at nvo@blesma.org
or by calling 020 8548 3510***

A hospital with an Armed Forces connection



King Edward VII's Hospital's connection with the Armed Forces dates back to its founding in 1899 as a hospital for officers returning from the Second Boer War. The hospital is proud to have upheld this commitment by providing subsidies and grants for all uninsured Service and ex-Service personnel, and their husbands and wives.

All Service or ex-Service personnel without medical insurance are entitled to a 20% discount on their hospital bill, regardless of rank or length of service. This offer also extends to their current or ex-spouses and includes widowers and widows. Grants covering up to 100% of all hospital and consultant costs are also available. These are means tested and dependent upon income and savings. Payments received under the War Pension and Armed Forces Compensation Scheme are not taken into account.

The hospital is in Marylebone, central London, and has 56 en-suite bedrooms as well as a four-bed Intensive Care Unit. The hospital also benefits from a full imaging and scanning department as well as physiotherapy, including a hydrotherapy pool.

The King Edward VII's Hospital is unique in that it only invites consultants to work there, ensuring patients are looked after by the very best healthcare professionals who will complement the excellent nursing care the hospital provides. For more information on the services available please visit www.kingedwardvii.co.uk

If you require further information about the subsidies and grants, or would like an application form, please email the Chief Executive's office at catherinewood@kingedwardvii.co.uk or call 020 7467 4319



Blesma helps with Welsh Manifesto

The RBL has launched its manifesto “Building a Better Future for the Armed Forces Community in Wales” ahead of the National Assembly for Wales’ election in May. The manifesto contains seven key actions for the next Welsh Government to improve the welfare of the Armed Forces community in Wales. The recommendations are the result of the biggest consultation the Legion has held in Wales, incorporating Service personnel, veterans, Legion members and partner organisations including Blesma.

The launch was held at the Welsh Assembly building in Cardiff and a number of Assembly Members were present. The Legion consulted with Blesma on one of the seven assertions, namely “that the next Welsh Government should ‘ensure that veteran amputees have access to the best levels of care that meets

their clinical need, via the NHS in Wales”.

To make this point to the Assembly members, two Blesma Members, Terri Hunt and Patrick Provis, were invited to attend along with Blesma’s BSO (Prosthetics) Brian Chenier.

Patrick gave a passionate presentation during which he made the point that this was not a simple case of funding prosthetic components, but that proper investment in the Limb Centres is also required. Patrick is quoted in the manifesto document as saying; “We’ve done our duty, now it’s the turn of our Welsh Government to do theirs and sign up to protecting our wounded by ring-fencing the funds for prosthetics provision in Wales.”

You can read the full manifesto at
www.britishlegion.org.uk/community/news/campaign

MEET JESS MACKINNON

Jess Mackinnon has joined Chadwell Heath in the role of in-house journalist.

What does your role involve?

Creating stories for *Blesma Magazine*, the Bulletin and website, and I will be running

the new Blesma Instagram page, which means I'll be talking to Members a lot.

How are you finding it?

There's a lot to learn, especially about prosthetics, but everyone is really helpful. The Members I've spoken to so far have been

amazing – their stories are incredibly inspiring!

Why did you decide to join Blesma?

I've just finished a journalism degree and have covered charities for work placements, so knew I enjoyed this area.

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Read the incredible story of
Vincent Horton in the next issue
of Blesma Magazine

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