



THE ORDER *of* ST. GEORGE

2nd Annual Symposium
2025



Compassion in Action:
From Support to Strength

Thursday 4th September 2025

The Honourable Artillery Company
Armoury House, City Road, London EC1Y 2BQ
18.00 – 22.30, the Long Room

Blesma
THE LIMBLESS VETERANS

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Registered Charity (England) No. 1137397

About the Order

The International Knightly Order Valiant of St. George (The Order of St. George) is a worldwide confraternity of men and women who seek to support, in a modest way, the timeless social virtues of compassion, charity, faithfulness and courage – in a word, chivalry. We take our inspiration from the original Order of St. George established in 1326 in Hungary, which was the very first royal and military order of chivalry.

St. George is the patron saint of soldiers and holds a special place in the affections of Christians in Africa and the Middle East. True to this heritage, the Order of St. George focuses on supporting vulnerable communities in Iraq and Egypt, and with charities supporting the welfare of NATO and Commonwealth armed forces personnel. The Order has special consultative status at the UN as an NGO. We are affiliated to the Royal Society of St. George and partner with several organisations who share our aims and with whom we work to deliver our humanitarian projects.

The 3rd Battalion Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment is the Order of St. George's affiliated regiment, and we financially support the work of the Regimental Welfare Fund. Known as the Tigers, the Regiment recruits many of its officers and soldiers from Kent, Sussex, Surrey, London, Middlesex and Hampshire as well as the Isle of Wight. It is also the only infantry regiment that recruits from the Channel Islands.

The Order has also been a long-time supporter of the Royal Hospital Chelsea and became a Platinum Friend of the Hospital. We also have a Commandery based at the Hospital. Founded in 1682 by King Charles II and intended for the 'succour and relief of veterans broken by age and war', the Royal Hospital, with its Grade 1 listed buildings, still serves its original purpose.

The annual symposium

As the nature and scale of humanitarian crises are evolving, organisations are now focussing on the aftermath of conflicts and emergency situations, and both the immediate and long-term effects of both. The annual Symposium is an initiative which was launched in 2024, to provide a platform where members of the Order and other related organisations can present their work to external audiences, and highlight not only the great work being undertaken, but also identify and discuss new emerging themes to inform the development of the humanitarian aid response. The event facilitates shared learning, the identification of new initiatives and a convivial environment for networking and potential future collaboration.

Last year's inaugural and highly successful event focused on the evolution of humanitarian response in a rapidly evolving geopolitical climate, where we heard from keynote speakers on themes ranging from the war in Ukraine, the effect of war on children, the challenges faced by Christians in Nigeria, and more locally, youth gang crime prevention initiatives in London boroughs.

This year's event theme, '*Compassion in Action: From Support to Strength*', aims to explore how military, emergency services and disaster response personnel are supported after traumatic events like conflicts, terrorist incidents and other role related traumas.

Supported by Blesma, the military charity for limbless veterans, the evening will address the physical and psychological traumas they face, the long-term effects, and support for their families, while evaluating available services. The objectives, as outlined, are multifaceted, but aim to address

- ✚ Support Mechanisms: Explore how personnel are supported post-trauma, emphasising best practices and sharing insights broadly.
- ✚ Trauma Analysis: Discuss the types of traumas — both physical and psychological — and the long-term effects of trauma on health and wellbeing.
- ✚ Family Support: Understand how families cope and receive support, highlighting their role in the recovery process.
- ✚ Service Evaluation: Assess the sufficiency of available services, identifying gaps and potential improvements.

With a programme of eminent speakers, and the addition of some of our younger members showcasing their own humanitarian work and study in the field, we hope you will find the evening to be both informative and enjoyable, with an opportunity to network with friends, colleagues, and discuss how organisations can better respond to the evolving domestic and global challenges we now face.

Dame Commander, Dr Sylvie Edwards.
Hospitaller, Order of St George.



Join us for a special evening on 30 October 2025 at London's prestigious Honourable Artillery Company to support *Life and Limb* – our humanitarian aid programme supporting war-wounded civilians and children in Ukraine.

For further details and booking information please visit the following webpage or scan the QR code

<https://orderofstgeorge.co.uk/2025/07/25/life-and-limb/>



EVENT PROGRAMME



Blesma
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1800	Registration <i>Meet and greet</i>
1820 – 1825	H.E. The Chevalier Stuart Notholt GCStG <i>Opening address by the Chair</i>
1825– 1855	Tony Thompson, Director OTHO Ltd <i>Providing psycho-social support following transport related emergencies.</i>
1855 – 1925	Dr Victoria Sparkes and Liam Sullivan <i>Warfare and neurological impairment. A constellation of issues from the battlefield and sport as a rehabilitation tool.</i> Ellina Lesnik <i>My Broken World</i>
1925 – 1955	Brian Chenier MBE, Blesma Support Officer (Prosthetics) <i>Caring for the Carers - A Family Perspective</i> Colin Branch, Head of Welfare Support Blesma <i>A Veterans Journey</i>
1955 – 2035	Frank Chege, Patient Liaison Trauma Nurse, London's Air Ambulance <i>Difficult roads can take you on a beautiful journey</i>
2035 – 2115	Professor Rosemary Sage <i>Intercultural communication matters for compassion in action.</i>
2115 - 2130	Panel Q&A session
2130 - 2230	Buffet, drinks and charity auction*

***The money raised from the charity auction will go to Blesma and the Order of St George charity.**

The Order of St George would like to extend its thanks and gratitude to the Honourable Artillery Company for facilitating this event, to the HAC Light Cavalry for its support and representation, and to Searcy's for the delicious buffet. We also extend heartfelt thanks to Blesma for supporting this important event.

Introducing our keynote speakers



Tony Thompson

Director OTHO Ltd

Tony has a lifetime's experience in emergency preparedness and response in the UK and overseas, dating back to 1968 when he was part of a military deployment to major flooding in Surrey to support the local community. He served in the Royal Air Force, British Transport Police and then, as a civil servant, was Head of Regional Resilience for Southwest England. In 2005, he became Head of UK Emergency Response and Resilience for the British Red Cross prior to moving to live and work in the Middle East.

In 2011, he established OTHO, an award-winning crisis management consultancy, and in 2022 was part of an international consortium of companies designing an early warning system for the Government of Peru intended to protect people living along the Peruvian coastline from major flooding and landslides.

Tony is a former chair of the Emergency Planning Society and a Fellow of the Institute of Civil Protection and Emergency Management. He is a member of the Leaders Council of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and acts as a pro bono advisor to several resilience groups. He holds a master's degree in civil emergency management and a Bachelor of Laws degree and lives in Weston-Super-Mare, Somerset, in the UK.

He was appointed by the Minister for Defence People and Veterans as a member of the Veterans Advisory and Pensions Committee (VAPC) for Southwest England in 2021. The VAPC is an independent advisory non-departmental government body, sponsored by the Ministry of Defence. Members advise, advocate and represent veterans and their families in their regions.



Dr Victoria Sparkes

neuroscientist, physiotherapist, and neuromuscular
electrical stimulation (NMES) specialist

Dr Victoria Sparkes is a neuroscientist, physiotherapist, and neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES) specialist with over 20 years of experience making the impossible possible in neurorehabilitation. With a doctorate in neuroscience, a master's in physiotherapy, and further qualifications in medical law, ethics, and professionalism, she is currently tackling a master's in extreme medicine. Her mission? To shine a spotlight on the medical journeys of disabled explorers, especially veterans dealing with blast-induced mild traumatic brain injury and operator syndrome, while advocating for better care and opportunities in the UK's most daring corners.

Once a leading light at diPulse, Vikki used NMES technology to help patients with stroke, spinal cord injuries, and osteoarthritis get back on their feet—sometimes quite literally. In 2025, she swapped corporate life for the wild world of extreme medicine, diving into research on how NMES wearables might keep surgery at bay. Her work is all about clever, non-pharmacological solutions, using electrotherapy and active recovery programmes like Capillarisation to boost movement and give medications a bit of a rest.

Vikki has taught neurorehabilitation at UK universities, led research on neuroplasticity, and advocated for non-pharmacological interventions in healthcare, drawing on her expertise from previous NHS roles. Vikki's also got a knack for business—she founded and sold a successful venture before returning to her first love: neuroscience. Known for her engaging talks, she blends clinical know-how with a dash of entrepreneurial spirit. Whether she's in a lecture hall or out in the field, Dr Sparkes is sparking change in neurorehabilitation—one electrifying idea at a time.



Liam Sullivan

Founder, Tackling Matters

Liam Sullivan is the visionary behind Tackling Matters; a sports rehabilitation charity he founded in 2025 to harness the power of football for those affected by conflict. A lifelong Arsenal supporter, Liam channels his love for the game into creating hope, community, and resilience for those who need it most. With strong ties to the football world, he has turned his passion into a mission that's changing lives.

When the war in Ukraine broke out three years ago, Liam didn't hesitate. He and the Tackling Matters team loaded a van with essential aid and drove across Europe to the Ukrainian border. But Liam saw beyond immediate relief—he recognised that sport could restore a sense of normality in times of crisis. What began as a single effort to provide sports equipment and pitches has grown into a global movement. To some, it might seem unconventional; to Liam, it's essential.

Football, in Liam's eyes, is more than a game—it's a lifeline. For injured soldiers, amputees, and those living with PTSD, the pitches Tackling Matters builds are more than fields—they're arenas of healing. "These spaces aren't just for play," Liam says. "They're where people rediscover their courage, rebuild their strength, and reclaim their purpose." His vision ensures that even in the darkest times, there's a place to heal, connect, and thrive.

Away from the pitch, Liam's a man of many passions. You might catch him swinging (and occasionally missing) on the golf course—his handicap is a closely guarded secret. He's just as happy enjoying a pint of Guinness with mates or spending time with his best pal, Ferguson, a gloriously ginger wire-haired Hungarian Vizsla, who steals the show wherever he goes.

Liam Sullivan isn't just building football pitches; he's building futures, one goal at a time.



Ellina Lesnik

Jethro Civil Diplomat

Ellina Lesnik is a Ukrainian author, speaker, and biblical counsellor. She is the founder of Help for Heart, an online school that partners with the Christian Counselling & Educational Foundation (CCEF) to provide biblical counselling training across the Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking world.

Ellina is the author of several books on faith, suffering, and emotional resilience. Her most recent book, *My Broken World*, is a deeply personal reflection on living through war in Ukraine. Drawing from her own experience of surviving missile attacks and walking alongside people affected by trauma, displacement, and loss, she offers a compelling picture of faith forged in crisis. Her writing blends theological depth with raw honesty, offering gospel-shaped hope to readers facing pain and uncertainty.

In addition to her writing, Ellina is pursuing a master's degree in counselling at Westminster Theological Seminary. She regularly speaks at conferences on mental health, grief, addiction, and how the church can respond to crisis with Christ-centered care. She lives in Ukraine with her husband and three daughters, continuing to serve on the frontlines of faith and compassion.



Brian Chenier MBE

Blesma Support Officer (Prosthetics)

Brian served for 27 years in the British Army after joining as a Junior Leader in 1985. Brian served for almost half of his career in the Royal Military Police before transferring to the Military Provost Staff at the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC) in Colchester in 2001. Serving mainly in the UK or Germany he completed operational tours in Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Iraq. On leaving the Army he took on the role of project manager for the North Essex Veterans Mental Health Network (NEVMHN).

Brian also worked as a trainer and facilitator, delivering emotional health and wellbeing training. He joined Blesma in April 2013 in the newly formed role of Support Officer (Prosthetics) where he has been the focal point for all prosthetic matters within Blesma, as well as direct management of more complex cases. Brian has developed this role to include being a member of several research groups and networks that deliver health interventions to veterans and the wider population. Brian was appointed an MBE in the New Year 2022 honours for services to disabled veterans.



Colin Branch

Head of Welfare Support, Blesma

Colin began his military career in 1991 as a junior leader, going on to serve with the 1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment for 14 years. His service took him to a number of operational theatres, including Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Croatia, and Afghanistan. Sadly, an injury sustained during his time in the Army led to a medical discharge. After several attempts to repair the damage through surgery, Colin ultimately lost his leg above the knee.

After leaving the Armed Forces, Colin became a foster carer and moved into roles within statutory and educational services, working in welfare, behaviour support, and safeguarding for both children and adults at risk. He later joined Help for Heroes, where he led the organisation's welfare and safeguarding services. In this role, he managed a team of dedicated professionals, providing support to veterans and their families across the country. He remained with the charity until June 2022.

Colin then took up his current position as Head of Welfare Support at Blesma, where he leads on complex welfare matters and serves as the charity's Designated Safeguarding Lead. He is also a proud and active Blesma Member, continuing his lifelong commitment to supporting the Armed Forces community.



Frank Chege

Patient Liaison Trauma Nurse, London's Air Ambulance

Frank brings a wealth of clinical experience to the role of patient liaison nurse. Frank qualified as an adult nurse in 2003 and went straight into a career in the emergency department of Basildon and Thurrock Foundation NHS Trust. He started working as a staff nurse at the emergency department of The Royal London Hospital, home to the London's Air Ambulance's helipad, in 2007 and became a senior charge nurse in 2011.

Frank has been involved with London's Air Ambulance prior to his appointment, not just working alongside the charity at The Royal London Hospital but also attending the London's Air Ambulance clinical governance days and pre-hospital care courses.



Professor Rosemary Sage

Speech-language pathologist, Psychologist, Teacher & Magistrate

Professor, Doctor Rosemary Sage is a speech-language pathologist, psychologist, teacher & magistrate; former Dean at the College of Teachers, leading the first EU sponsored Practitioner Doctorate; Director of Speech & Language Services; Teacher in schools; Senior LEA Language Advisor; Academic & Professor in 4 universities; International researcher in language, communication & workplace issues.

Rosemary is the academic lead for the EU INTERMAR Military & Marine project on miscommunications & mishaps. Academic Principal of the Collegium of Intercultural Communication Matters. Additionally, she is a board member for publications at the University for Economics and Innovation; Lublin, Poland; Editor for Nova Scientific, New York, the Journal of Current Social and Political Issues, and Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, as well as judge for the English-Speaking Union.

