

# BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

## REPORT ON 2014 SEASON

Our year began on 4th March with the latest in the series of **London Lunches**, organized by David Bentata, this year again in the awesome surroundings of the Special Forces Club. We were very honoured by being able to welcome the Head of Blundell's, Mrs Nicola Huggett, as principal guest, which doubtless explains why our numbers were at record levels (17 Magpies and 5 guests attended the occasion). During the most convivial meal, speeches were made by the Head, in which she outlined pupils' recent achievements and emphasised the importance of former pupils in the Blundell's community, and by David Bentata, who requested Lt.Col. Tim Courtenay to present to her an illuminated, framed poem entitled 'The Chevithorne Lament and Magpies in memoriam', an elegy he had compiled about the golden years enjoyed by school shooters at both the one-time local range and at Bisley. David also presented the Head with a copy of 'Call to Arms', a history of Eaton Hall Officer Cadet School, to which he had been an active contributor.

Beside David, Col. Tim and the Head, others present included John Batten, Chris Barker with guest Marion, Hugo Brooke with guest Gilly, Mike Chandler with guest Di, David Condy, Cdr. Martin Knapp, David Kyd, Peter Moore, Tim Motion, Alex Rainey, Dr David Rutter, Linda Smith (a governor of the school), George Tilley, Peter Ward, David Willoughby and Ben Wrey.

In late April there took place a unique event, which was the **Centenary Pilgrimage to the Great War battlefields of France and Flanders** by a group of people associated in various ways with Blundell's, who wished to visit and pay respects at as many memorials as possible to the School's fallen. Though this was not a Magpie event, we are proud that several Magpies were on the trip, and that most of the organization was initiated by Lt.Col. Tim Courtenay, our Chevithorne Captain. The pilgrimage proved to be highly memorable, and high points included the wreath-laying at the Menin Gate, led by Brig. Robert Tailyour, and a similar ceremony at the Thiepval Memorial, led by Brig. John Dean. The tour party's itinerary included the resting places of several members of the School's pre-1914 Bisley teams, which gave the remembrance an additional focus for the Magpies present. All who took part were very grateful to have had the opportunity to do so, and plans are under way to carry out a similar pilgrimage to Normandy in June 2015 (the 71st anniversary of D-Day).

**OB Day** occurred this year on June 14th, and was marked by a smallbore match at Blundell's between the Magpies and current pupils. This was the first time this had happened for a number of years, and a great deal of preparation was evident on the part of Col. Tim and the new SSI to the School's cadet force, SSI (RSM) Barry Dawe (like Col. Tim, a former Royal Marine). A display of shooting memorabilia and remarkable personalities stood outside the range, including photographs of former teams, and the cadets were clearly well disciplined and proud to wear their cap badge. Those who shot had also acted as escorts to the new School Standard, an emblem which had been carried into the chapel as part of the OB service, and were therefore in smart parade dress. Unfortunately perhaps for the Magpies, this detracted not a whit from their marksmanship!

Despite the inflexible timetable during the morning, the match was successfully shot in between the end of the chapel service and the marquee lunch; the rifles were fairly light, and no slings were allowed! This may have taken the Magpies by surprise, but as a genuine test of shooting it was eminently fair. The cadets proved to be consistently steadier than their ageing forebears, and the result was a convincing win for the School (240 over 234). Col. Tim duly presented the team trophy to their captain, cadet RSM Harry Boddington, and the individual prize for top score to Ed Barlow of the School, who had achieved 70 points ex 80. All members of the School squad were deservedly presented with commemorative medals (which had kindly been procured by Ben Wrey), and the opportunity was taken for photographs...



Col. Tim magnanimously delivers the team trophy to Harry Boddington.



Ed Barlow, highest individual scorer. (Any tips for us wrinklies, Ed?)



The teams together. Top left is school coach Barry Dawe, (late Royal Marines), and seated right is Magpie Chevithorne Captain Lt.Col.Tim Courtenay, (er, late Royal Marines).

Unfortunately, only part of the Magpie presence is shown above (Peter Ward, David Bentata and Hugo Brooke with Col. Tim in the front row). David Kyd also shot, whilst David Condy, Brig. Rob Tailyour and David Willoughby were additionally present: Brig. Rob was reader of the lesson at the chapel service. However, one aspect of the time pressure of the day was that the marquee lunch for OBs was due to start before the prizegiving for the shoot could take place. Those not pictured no doubt felt their proper place was in the marquee; the truants in the frame are therefore most grateful to them for having saved the club's collective face! The Magpies felt most encouraged to see such a re-emergence of the erstwhile pride in the School's CCF tradition, and this feeling was reinforced a few weeks later when Blundell's finished top of 8 schools competing at their combined annual camp in a military skills competition.

On 10th July the Magpies entered a team in the **Public Schools' Veterans** match at Bisley. The weather had been quite miserable in the morning, and several of us had driven through rain to Bisley fearing it would continue likewise. Imagine our shattered cynicism when a calm band of sunny sky appeared over the Common an hour or so before kick-off - and remained in situ for the duration! Apologies to Murphy, who does sometimes work in reverse.

Our position on Century was the left-most target in use on the whole range (i.e. nearest to the club bars), and by the RV time of 17.00 we had five seasoned, in-date shooters ready to do their damndest. With the valued services of Ben Wrey as coach, David Bentata, Hugo Brooke, Chris Barker, Richard Price and Peter Ward proceeded to fire

their quota of rounds most steadily, refusing on principle to yield to the inexorable weight of increasing years (average age on the point was about 70) and notching up a total of 210.8. Hugo Brooke actually had the chutzpah to return a round unused after scoring a bull sighter. Whilst this total did not threaten to unseat the eventual winners (The Troubleshooters, with a very fine score of 248.34) it served to fly the flag where it mattered, and to remind the shooting world that Blundell's still has a presence in the scheme of things. We were greatly indebted to both David and Chris, who both brought their rifles for other Magpies to use, and to David for sharing the coaching with Ben.



PS Veterans 2014: Brooke, Barker, Price, Cdr. Knapp, Bentata, Ward, Wrey.

Not only did we have the active team present, but there was support and encouragement in the form of our guest ladies Marion and Gilly, and just as welcome was the unexpected appearance of Cdr. Martin Knapp, following a conversation with Ben at the London Lunch in March.



(Shooting is definitely not a spectator sport, but patient supporters are always a valuable asset...



...particularly when there's a lot of intense, serious discussion taking place.)

The move from the range was a little slower than anticipated, mainly because the adjacent club, for whom we had to provide a register keeper, kept fielding new firers for yet more additional teams; it was nearly 20.00 before we were able to get ourselves into the bar of the North London RC and start the proper business of the evening. Luckily, the sun was still shining, so half an hour or so was spent in the reminiscence department, contemplating what had been, and in all wistfulness, what might have been (huge scope here).

From there, most of us gravitated to our old haunt of the Worplesdon Hotel for what turned out to be a very enjoyable dinner. It was unanimously resolved that a letter of loyal greeting be sent to the Head, Mrs Nicola Huggett, adding our congratulations on the performance by the Blundell's cadets at their recent CCF camp. (This was duly done a day or so later.)

A pleasant item to report is that, later in the Bisley meeting, David Bentata acted in his traditional role as adjutant to the Oxford University team in the 'varsity match, and was gratified to see his fellow members win the trophy (after a few lean years!).

2014 has for the Magpies been a relatively full and very satisfying year, balanced between particular respect for our forebears, renewed contact with current School activity, and the traditional seasonal programme. Our grateful thanks are extended to all who have enabled the various events to take place so successfully.

Peter Ward  
(Magpies' Bisley Captain)

Postscript: who, when and where? (Perhaps better no names, no pack drill...)

