

BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

President: G. H. H. Brooke (NC 1949 - 1954)

REPORT ON 2015 SEASON

This year's **London Lunch** at the Special Forces' Club on 3rd March proved to be another highly enjoyable occasion, not least because we were again privileged to have as our guest Mrs Nicola Huggett, Head of Blundell's. Not only did she make time for us, but she was accompanied by Barry Dawe, SSI to the cadet force. Old Boys were given an in-depth account of various achievements by pupils in academic, sporting and more general areas, together with intimations of other hoped-for objectives over the next year or so. We also learnt some details of the likely shooting programme for the cadets during 2015, including weapons due to be available, standards being aimed for, and a possible smallbore venture later in the summer at the HQ of the NSRA at Bisley.

This was the ninth in the series of such lunches, and the Magpies were particularly grateful to the club's Principal Coach, David Bentata, ably supported by Linda Smith, for working so hard during a time of adverse health to manage and chair what turned out to be a typically successful event. There were 15 former pupils, and 5 honoured guests, an excellent turnout considering it was in the middle of a weekday and 200 miles from Devon!

The Blundell's pilgrimage to Normandy in early May continued the excellent tradition whereby respect is paid to those Old Blundellians who have been unfortunate enough to fall in war, in this case during the 1944 invasion and period immediately following. Although this was not in any sense a 'Magpie' occasion, it was gratifying to note that some seven out of 28 OBs were former shooters; the leaders of the pilgrimage were Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay and Brig. Rob Tailyour. Most of the main invasion beaches, dropping zones and battle sites were visited, and the graves of the majority of the Blundell's fallen were duly honoured. Of particular interest was the connection between several members of the tour and relatives who had served in the field (some of whom survived, and some did not): one or two very poignant individual testimonies were given, which lent the trip an added dimension.

OB Day at the School on 20th June was again marked by a mini-range match between the cadets and the Magpies, mainly sandwiched somehow between the end of the chapel service and the marquee lunch. Any ambitions the old and bold may have been harbouring to avenge their defeat in 2014 were soundly banished by sound marksmanship by the cadets; the School scored a creditable 377 ex 400, the Magpies an honest 361. The 'no slings' excuse didn't apply this time, as sandbags were allowed! It is only fair to mention that David Kyd did produce a score (94 ex 100) which at least matched the average of the opposition, so - well done that man. Other OBs who shot included Hugo Brooke, Peter Ward, and the Chevithorne Captain, Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay.



The OB Day teams. Individual highest scorer Monty Crowe is 4th from left, School shooting captain Cormac Oliver 3rd from right, both with respective trophies, which were presented by Ben Wrey. Purely coincidentally, Cormac is indeed Amber Oliver's son! (Pictures courtesy of Katrina Page.)

The match trophy and the prize for the individual highest scorer were kindly presented by Ben Wrey to the School's captain, Cormac Oliver, and to Monty Crowe respectively. In addition, the cadets were handed commemorative medals to celebrate their part in the overall win. As ever, all present were most appreciative of the effort put in by Col. Tim and Barry to make sure the morning was enjoyed by all who took part.

The **Public Schools' Veterans match** took place at Bisley on 9th July, in sunny and pleasant conditions of the sort we usually dream about. This year there was also the opportunity for practice firing, which Hugo Brooke took advantage of, despite some uncertainties as to how the system was supposed to work. The club's Principal Coach, David Bentata, was kind enough to make his rifle available to other Magpies, as was Chris Barker, and the other team members, Richard Price, Mike Chandler, Peter Ward, and Hugo, were accordingly most grateful. Ben Wrey, despite pressure of earlier meetings etc. managed to get to Century range well in time to support the team and to take part in the subsequent social activities.

Of scores we need not talk at length (as the walrus almost said) - the team total was 211 with 12 'v's, putting us 40th out of 45 entries (3 more had registered, but didn't appear). Hugo and Chris performed very steadily, and Mike produced a most accomplished 47.6 ex 50, from which mathematicians can draw their own conclusions. The winners were the Old Epsomians with 246.37, from which, albeit a magnificent score, we deduced that we weren't the only team which had problems with the variable breeze. The Old Cliftonians achieved 235, meaning that the Anstey Salver will remain at Clifton unless the respective school teams have, unknown to us, decided the issue somewhere else!



The Magpies' team in the Schools' Veterans match, July 2015. Standing (L to R): Price, Brooke, Wrey, Chandler, Marion (lady guest), Barker. Crouching: Ward. Sitting: Bentata. Photo courtesy Mrs Diane Davey.

Following the shoot, there followed the traditional adjournment to the verandah of the North London RC, the Magpies being guests of Ben and David, and from there after an hour or so most people found themselves having a relaxed meal at the Worplesdon Hotel.

During this enjoyable interlude several things happened of note. Firstly, Di Davey and Mike Chandler announced their engagement, to general good wishes and congratulations. Then it was proposed that a letter of loyal greetings should be despatched to the Head from the assembled company as from the club generally (this was seconded unanimously by all present, and indeed done on the following day). Finally, there was a discussion about the question of whether the club presidency, vacant since the death of Dr Price nearly five years before, should be filled again, and if so, by whom and under what terms of reference? It was agreed that it should, and that the Bisley Captain should take the matter forward in consultation with the four most senior active Magpies, hopefully by measured discussion until it should be agreed which of these obvious candidates should be the chosen one.

As a matter of interest, the Ashburton Shield was contested this year by 33 schools; a total of 48 former pupils' rifle clubs entered for the veterans' competition, some with 3 or more teams, which implies that memories weigh more heavily with those concerned than any prospect of future success. 50 years ago there were more than 100 schools on the Common!

Later in July, the matter of the Presidency was indeed taken further, and the outcome was that by general consent **the office of Club President should be offered to Hugo Brooke**. Hugo had been Captain of the VIII in 1954, and as a onetime regular army and later TA officer, had been a redoubtable marksman for the Magpies over some decades since. Hugo duly accepted, and the appointment was greeted with enthusiasm by Magpies generally, many of whom went out of their way to express their satisfaction.

In a 'normal' year, the Veterans' shoot would have been the last event of note, but in 2015, on 15th August, there was **a trip to Bisley's small bore meeting for a team of Blundellians**. The Magpies had been most interested to hear of this, and some asked if they could drop in as a kind of supporters' group. Four OBs were able to attend: Hugo Brooke, with his new chain of office, was there virtually as dawn broke, surprising even the current pupils with his lively interest in the proceedings. A little later saw Chris Barker appear, and at a more relaxed juncture (after the early 50x shoot had finished), Peter Ward materialised, shortly after which there was a collective gasp as the noted snapper and litterateur John Batten strode into view.



The Blundellian shooters with coach Barry - Picture courtesy of Hugo Brooke, our new President. Although the immediate impression is of somewhere beside the Mediterranean, they are actually standing in the middle of the Century Range! Tentage covers the usual view of the better-known stopbutt.

Luckily there was a break in shooting at this point, and the chance was taken to enjoy a cuppa and wad and to chat to Barry and the team members (who were naturally the essence of politeness, whatever they might have thought of their forebears of 50 or 60 years before).

This was a new insight into an aspect of Bisley which conventional full-bore shooters know little about. To see the Century Range covered with tents and strange target frames, with plenty of refreshment areas and other facilities to hand, was very interesting in itself; the involvement of Blundell's as the only school team there was also very gratifying. The current pupils seemed to be getting a lot of pleasure from their shooting, which was reflected in their very sound results and which caused the Magpies to leave Bisley with an unusual spring in their step. It did not pass unnoticed that both team and coach had sacrificed a good part of their summer holidays to be at Bisley, and their keenness was a tonic to the older generation.