

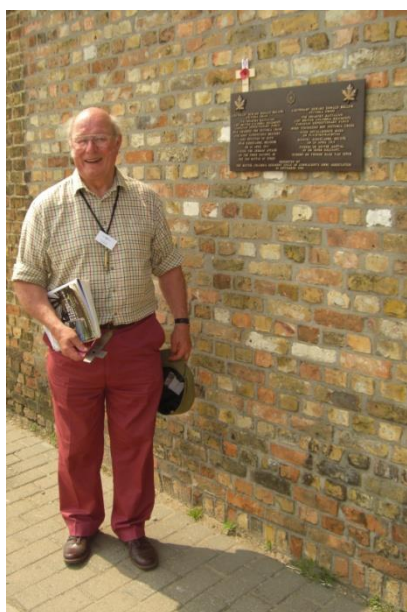
BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

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

REPORT on 2016 SEASON

The Club's year opened with another well-attended merry meeting at the Magpies' London Lunch, the tenth in the series, organized by David Bentata on 8th March at the Special Forces' Club. With David as Chairman, the gathering saw 14 Magpies assembled with 5 guests, who included Barry Dawe, SSI at Blundell's, and Cormac Oliver, School Captain of Shooting. The occasion was marked by Hugo Brooke's Presidential Address, during which various interesting snippets were imparted to us (as well as a good laugh or two), after which Barry brought us up to date with recent achievements, and hopes and aspirations for the new shooting season. The evident pleasure which this event gives to those who attend it is a fine compliment to the energy with which David, strongly supported by Linda, has devoted to setting up and managing these lunches since 2007. A fuller account of this lunch can be found on the OB Club website under the 'Shooting' tab.

In May several of the OB shooters joined the Blundell's Battlefield Tour in France and Belgium, organised by the School's Development Office. Tour Leaders were Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay, Brig. Rob Tailyour, and Col. Richard Preston (all distinguished former Royal Marine officers) with Mrs Amber Oliver as 'Adjutant'; the areas involved covered the fields of Waterloo, Ypres, Langemarck, Passchendaele, Zeebrugge and Dunkirk amongst others. These spanned two centuries and three wars, so offered interest to historians, strategists and family researchers alike! The immediate aim was to honour the memory of OBs who had fallen in these conflicts, but it was also possible to visit other sites of significance such as the plaque honouring Blundell's only VC winner, Capt. E.D. Bellew (who survived the Great War), the Menin Gate, and the memorial to all fallen OBs in the church in Ypres.



Col. Tim beside the plaque to Capt. Bellew, near the Canadian Memorial at Kerselaere. (On 24th April 1915 Capt. Bellew was o/c machine guns with the 7th Bn. British Columbia Regt.)



Memorial to all fallen OBs in St Richard's Church, Ypres (installed by David Albrecht Esq.)

A mini-range match took place on **OB Day, 18th June**, at which the Old & Bold attempted to return to some sort of parity with the Blundellian shooters. Despite its being a hugely enjoyable and well-supported Magpie occasion, the sad fact is that the scores between the teams are, shall we say, more divergent as the years pass. The OBs were offered the use of excellent shooting jackets, slings, and modern rifles, but these advantages weren't enough to swing the balance; the end result was Blundell's 382 (ex 400), Magpies 354. Most appropriately, the top scorer of the match was a lady, Jessie Zhu, with 99 (ex 100), who was duly awarded the RM Tankard on a day when the School was celebrating the achievement of 'girls in sport'. OBs who turned up at the range included Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay (Capt.), Hugo Brooke (President), David Bentata, Ben Wrey, Chris Barker and Peter Ward.

It is good to be able to record Hugo Brooke's valiant score of 93, which at least maintained some dignity for the Magpies in defeat, but in fairness the attempt by the (Bisley) Captain to alter his sights on an unfamiliar weapon cannot be disguised - failure to recce the situation beforehand led to unfortunate results...

The current pupils were duly awarded their trophies by Hugo, and the Magpies moved up to the Marquee for a very pleasant lunch, after which the achievements of Blundell's girls in sporting and other fields were proudly described in several memorable speeches.



Cormac Oliver receives the match trophy from Magpie President, Hugo Brooke



The teams and coaches relax after the shoot, with team & individual winners holding their prizes: back row (l to r): Jessie Zhu, Will Curtis, Cormac Oliver, Ed Rees, Barry Dawe (SSI & School coach) - for front row also-rans, see text above!

The Magpies were back at Bisley on 14th July to compete in the **Schools' Veterans** rifle match. As a new idea, the majority of OBs and supporters foregathered for lunch at the North London Rifle Club, where some planning could be done for the late afternoon shoot, but more importantly, where people could socialise away from the immediate pressure of the firing point. This proved an excellent innovation, albeit that a few could not be there quite so early, and the presence of a number of ladies made for a delightfully civilised interlude.

During the afternoon the party visited the Century Range, bumping into a number of old friends including James Postle, who was still maintaining important connections with the Athelings and the schools' shooting scene in general. The cadet matches finished mid-afternoon, and those of our party who wished to practice before the match itself were able to do so, once they had worked out the arcane system of target booking.

The performance of the Team itself was moderately creditable, or would have been had enough firers taken part: of the six Magpies who had turned up, sadly three were unable to shoot by reason of bodily infirmity. The remaining three therefore bore the burden of the day, but Chris Barker, Hugo Brooke and Peter Ward had two important advantages: not only was the redoubtable Ben Wrey on hand to coach, but Chris was kind enough to let the others use his magnificent Musgrave rifle. The final score was 130.9v, not a bad effort for a trio of fairly long-in-the-tooth chaps. The atmosphere to the rear of the firing point was one of jocular camaraderie, sweetened by the input of the ladies; supporters included David Bentata, Linda Smith, Mike and Di Chandler, Marion Augustin, Katrina Page and Gilly Cox.

The weather was good to us, and as the length of the shoot was briefer than usual for our attenuated ranks, the Magpies moved gratefully once again into social mode, returning to the North London RC for a quiet 'one for the road', before dispersing their various ways home. It was agreed that a message of loyal greeting should be sent to the Head of Blundell's, and the Bisley Captain was requested to undertake this agreeable task. Sadly (for us at least), it was understood that the Clifton Veterans had shot rather better than we had, and we had therefore to cede the Anstey Salver for a further year.



The Magpie Veterans and support group behind the firing point (taken by Mrs Di Chandler): rear (l to r) Peter Ward, Chris Barker, Ben Wrey, Mike Chandler, Katrina Page, Linda Smith, David Bentata and Hugo Brooke; seated in front, Marion Augustin and Gilly Cox.

After the departure of some of the party, half a dozen folk retreated to the comfort of the Worplesdon Hotel, where a comfortable meal was enjoyed and yet more of the nation's problems were put to right. It was generally agreed that, despite the lack of team numbers, the day had been one of the most enjoyable anyone could remember. A resolve was made to approach the numbers problem by attempting to interest recent Blundell's leavers in a subsidised 'invitation package', to be arranged for the day of the Veterans' shoot in 2017... (watch this space!)

Of interest to past shooters, there were 48 former pupils' rifle clubs in the Veterans' competition, with nearly 100 teams in three divisions. The winners of both A and B divisions achieved HPS of 250 ex 250, so great is the level of expertise among some clubs. However, the number of schools entering the Ashburton Shield competition this year was a record low of 28, which is a cause for some regret amongst those whose memories of past school visits to Bisley remain so bright and vivid.

Finally, it just happens that our President, Hugo Brooke, celebrated his 80th birthday in late July; many congratulations are extended to him on this milestone occasion. He may reflect that his predecessor, Dr Herbert Price, shot at Bisley in a Veterans' match at the age of 83, so he has perhaps something of a tradition to maintain! Hugo was Captain of the VIII in 1954, since which time he has proved himself a consistent supporter of the Magpies, and a doughty marksman to boot. We are indeed grateful to him, as we are to the select group of his near-contemporary Magpies, for their indefatigable help and counsel.

...and as a Parthian shot:



The Magpies and friends in summery mood around the Chevithorne 'falling plate'. What have we got to be thankful for? A great deal... Photo courtesy Janet Wooff.