

BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

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

ANNUAL REPORT, 2017 SEASON

The initial event of 2017 was, as in previous years, the London Lunch, organised and chaired by David Bentata with the close support of Linda Smith. This has been reported in detail elsewhere on the OB website, and proved to be as enjoyable and well-attended as any before it. The Magpies were especially honoured to have as their principal guest Mrs Nicola Huggett, Head of Blundell's, whose kindness in going so far out of her way to be with us during a busy part of the Spring term was very much appreciated. Apart from the incredible ambience (so many reminders of military heroes of past years lining the walls of the stairways and rooms of the Special Forces Club), two things were especially noticeable - the Head's obvious pride in the achievements of Blundellians in many fields of endeavour, and the excited enthusiasm of Magpies at being able to re-engage with old friends and rekindle the memories of shared episodes from the past. Whilst these lunches are perhaps easier for retired folk to attend, we have a reasonable excuse in that most of the current 'active' Magpies are well into their 70s! Great gratitude is once again due to David and Linda for their hard work in facilitating a most memorable event for the rest of us. This year saw 14 Magpies and 5 honoured guests gracing the occasion.

The traditional mini-range shoot v the School on OB Day, 17th June, was this year rather well attended - so much so that **two** tables were required to accommodate the assembled company at lunch in the marquee! Lt Col Tim Courtenay, Chevithorne Captain, and Capt Barry Dawe (now OC the Blundell's Cadet Force) had worked hard to prepare for the event, and no less than 12 Magpies appeared on the scene, together with a number of lady guests. The School was fielding an elite team of four smallbore shots, and sportingly agreed that of the eight Magpies who were able to shoot, the best four scores would count as the official club total, leaving the others to make up a valiant 'B' team. In the event, which was fired without slings or jackets, the School achieved a score of 371 ex 400; the Magpie A followed with 340, the B with 261. Whilst a casual observer might have noticed slight margins of difference here, it should be noted that Col. Tim led his men on the point, and moreover scored sufficiently well to qualify for the A team. Well done sir! Other members of the A were Hugo Brooke, Peter Ward, and Cormac Oliver, our youngest Magpie to join the ranks. The B included Peter Marten, David Kyd, Cdr Martin Knapp, and Mark Wooff (Janet's husband), a welcome new addition to the club. Other Magpies present were Ben Wrey, David Bentata, David Condy and Jim Muir (yet another newcomer whom we were delighted to see).

This year, the prizegiving was held near the Beale Centre, which allowed other OBs to see for themselves the presence of these curious shooters and the results of their activities. Ed Rees, the Blundell's captain, received from Magpie President Hugo Brooke the challenge trophy for

the School, and Will Curtis Col. Tim's tankard for the best individual score (97). All the Blundell's team were presented with medals for their efforts, and for the Magpies Peter Ward was credited with top score - which would have been more convincing had he not fired two of his shots on the same aiming mark. In fairness, his own protest was disallowed, and the matter was settled by gentlemanly adjudicators. The weather was sunny throughout the day, and although shooting prevented some from attending the chapel service (eat your heart out, Ecclesiastes) the marquee lunch was a most pleasant interlude, and the opportunity to relax with old friends and their good ladies was golden in more than one sense.



OB Day: Hugo Brooke presents the match trophy to Edward Rees, captain of shooting. (Photo Katrina Page)



OB Day: Some of the Magpies watch the proceedings (the lady is entirely innocent). (Photo Katrina Page)



OB Day: The winners - with their coach! (Photo Ben Wrey)

And so to Bisley. On 13th July (Schools' Veterans match), which turned out (Dei gratia) to be a pleasant sunny afternoon, notwithstanding some tricky wind conditions, the Magpies assembled for lunch at the North London Rifle Club as guests of David Bentata. Best wishes had been received prior to the event from Di and Mike Chandler, Cdr Martin Knapp, and Lt Col Tim Courtenay, who for various reasons were not able to be with us. After a memory-laden meal, there was time to wander across to see the preliminary results of the schools' meeting, and to have a practice shoot. Hugo Brooke took the chance to zero, being able to use the rifle kindly made available by David Bentata, and being coached by Anthony Ward, whom it was good to see again in this role.



Bisley, social interlude: Magpies relaxing **before** the shooting starts! (photo Gilly Cox).

The Veterans' match itself began at 17.15, and as only two of the five Magpies present were actually able to shoot, it wasn't long before our performance was complete. Hugo's prior zeroing paid dividends, and coached by Ben Wrey he proceeded to score a very respectable 48 ex 50. He was followed by Peter Ward, who seemed to start promisingly, but managed to end with two inners, giving him 47. Sadly, a full team in this event requires five members, so that despite 'flying the Blundell's flag', the club was obliged to accept its eventual placing at

no. 45 in a field of 45! Nevertheless, the event was, as ever, a most enjoyable experience, bringing back for us (as for many former pupils in other schools) a poignant reminder of times long past and cherished in retrospect. This year there was no evening meal, as the increasingly venerable membership finds it useful to have some daylight left for longish journeys home... It was agreed that the Bisley Captain should send a message of loyal greeting to the Head of Blundell's, as from the members of the club in general. This was duly sent by quill and seal a day or two later.



Bisley, practice: assessing the zero (Hugo and Anthony).



Bisley, to count: getting them in (Hugo and Ben).

With respect to our future at Bisley, it is clear that the increasing age of those harking back fifty or sixty years is now reducing the likelihood of our being able to field a team of five in future Veterans' matches. These are always held late on a Thursday, and apart from dedicated Bisley shots, most working former pupils will always find it difficult to attend. It has been agreed in principle that we will enter a team once more in 2018, partly at least out of respect for those members of pre-1914 Blundell's Bisley teams who by 1918 would not return (we believe more than 20 men). Thereafter, unless unforeseen numbers materialize, there will be no more entries for the time being. The success of the OB Day gatherings, however, are very encouraging, and we look forward to many years of continued sparring on the mini-range (with or without jackets and slings).

Lastly, by way of nostalgia, a glimpse of Bisley at its most appealing: sunny, relaxed and sociable (photo Ben Wrey):

