

BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

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

ANNUAL REPORT, 2018 SEASON

This year for several reasons was for the Magpies a more than averagely memorable one. A full account of the **London Lunch**, organized and chaired by David Bentata on 6th March, can be found on the main shooting webpage, but we were graced by not only the Head of Blundell's, Nicola Huggett, but also by her elective successor, Bart Wielenga; we were also very pleased to welcome Diane Chandler, our new honorary Magpie, whose late husband Mike had been such a stalwart supporter - and fine marksman - for some 50 years. Mrs Huggett had been very positive towards School and Magpie shooting since her accession in 2013, and Club President Hugo Brooke wished her well in her new position as Head at Cheltenham College (one of Blundell's old shooting rivals!).

In the early part of the year, this being the centenary of the Armistice, it had been agreed that we should particularly remember those former shooters who had died as the result of military service in the armed forces since 1914. With reference to the School Roll of Honour, and the valued advice of the School's Archivist, Mike Sampson, a list of 38 former pupils and staff was drawn up and circulated amongst club members as a private aide-memoire as to the sacrifices of our shooting forebears. The losses affecting the pre-1914 teams many find to be especially poignant, in view of the young ages at which the majority were taken.

OB Day on June 19th was very well-attended by OBs: no fewer than 13 Magpies supported the event, and two marquee tables were largely filled by former shooters and their ladies. The mini-range match was shot in the morning, and consisted in the three senior pupils available vs. the nominated Magpie team. However, as neither slings nor shooting jackets were allowed, the School very sportingly let the Old and Bold nominate their team after the scores were known. This gesture was very much appreciated by the less marksmanlike of the OBs, who thereby escaped some embarrassment, and the outcome of the match was - School 271, Magpies 258 (ex 300). Top scorer of the day, and winner of the Courtenay Tankard, was the School's Will Curtis with 93; Hugo Brooke, just weeks away from his 82nd birthday, was top Magpie scorer with 90 (thus eligible for a 'pot', although the Brooke-Smith Tankard had gone missing). Other good scores were 92 by Will Scripps (School), 86 by Tom Baxter (School), 85 by Mark Wooff (Magpies - we'd suspected he was better than he pretended!), and 83 by David Kyd of the Magpies.

Other Magpies who attended were Cdr. Martin Knapp, David Condy, David Bentata, Peter Marten, Peter Ward, Ben Wrey, Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay (Chevithorne Captain), Anthony Ward, Col. Jim Muir, and Richard Hughes. Richard we were especially pleased to welcome, as he'd not previously taken part in Magpie activity - though he'd clearly not lost his aptitude for shooting. Some of these did actually fire, but the bit of paper with their scores on has unaccountably gone missing. The Magpies were very grateful to Col. Tim, Capt. Barry Dawe, and to SSI Dave Driver, who had all worked to set

up the match and associated activity (which included the planting of the Delville Wood memorial sapling by Col. John Hollands, MC, immediately before lunch).



Mini-range match: Hugo Brooke congratulates the winning team.



Mini-range match; the combined teams.



Col. John Hollands plants the Delville Wood memorial sapling (photo by Mrs Amber Oliver).

The merry company then made their way to the marquee on big field, where they were delighted with the excellence of the lunch provided, and by the anecdotally rich sequence of speeches, which were imbued with a golfing flavour to reflect the passion of the guest speaker, Nick Swarbrick. By chance, one or two Magpies understood the golfing code, and could clarify arcane allusions as necessary.

The Schools' Veterans match at Bisley, on 19th July, possibly because of the unusually fine summer, turned out to be a real red-letter day. Not only did a record number of Magpies turn up, accompanied by a delightful band of lady companions, but in spite of Anno Domini we were again able to field a

full team of 5 firers. The recent practice of assembling for an informal lunch at the North London Rifle Club was continued, and during the afternoon people were able to socialize, or wander round the range behind the ongoing schools' shooting competitions, or to take advantage of the chance to zero weapons (as did several of those present). After the schools' events had been decided, the Veterans proceeded in the early evening to contest the former pupils' match. The team score of 208 (8v) did not threaten the leaders in the field (the two top teams scored quintuple 'possibles'), but was a satisfying performance, given that most of the team were well over 70 years of age. Top scorer was Chris Barker with 47.5; Hugo Brooke performed solidly with 44.1, as did Rob Bentata with a similar tally. David Kyd was persuaded to take up a full-bore rifle for the first time in 60 years, managing it with considerable aplomb, and Peter Ward succeeded in tracing a neat pattern of inners, just outside the bull, in every conceivable direction.

Beside those already mentioned, the support team featured Lt. Col. Tim Courtenay, George Tilley, Di Chandler, Gilly Cox, Marion Augustin, David Bentata (who'd thoughtfully brought his rifle for use by team members), Linda Smith, Susie and David Condy, Katrina Page (who brought welcome refreshments on a dry and dusty day), Dr David Rutter (who achieved a long-held ambition to fire at Bisley, having been denied at school because Chevithorne had been out of commission), and Ben Wrey, who despite the sultry atmosphere of the range, lay assiduously on the firing point coaching all our firers one by one.

It was agreed by all that in view of the gratifying attendance at the shoot, there would be a further entry for the Veterans' match in 2019. In addition, The President and members asked that the Bisley Captain should write to the elective Head of Blundell's, Bart Wielenga Esq., to convey the Magpies' loyal greetings to the Governors and all concerned with the welfare of the School. .



Schools' Veterans day: a merry, sociable meeting, well ahead of the actual shoot.

It was noticeable that whilst the former pupils of 49 schools turned out to shoot in the Veterans match, and that there were over 90 Veteran teams (there being separate competitions for B and C teams), only 19 schools had turned up to contest the Ashburton Shield. In passing, it was learnt that the Old Cliftonians had shot well (team total 243.26), and that therefore the Anstey Salver would continue undisturbed in the Clifton Head's study for a further year.



Veterans' match: Chris Barker (top scorer) takes aim; Ben Wrey awaits the outcome.



Veterans' match: shooting over; smiles of relief for (nearly) everyone! (photo by Katrina Page)

This year, as an unexpected but thoroughly well-deserved accolade for arguably the Magpies' most accomplished member, Ben Wrey was invited by the NRA Council to present the prizes at the end of the Imperial Meeting. Ben had been Captain of the Blundell's shooting VIII in 1958, and had risen to prominence with the Cambridge University team during the following few years; after this he had shot for England and Great Britain in many international matches, and for the next four decades would be a regular member of the Queen's Hundred, and a frequent participant in the touring parties which had visited various Commonwealth and other countries, representing the UK. After this long and active shooting career, Ben had worked hard as a member of the NRA Council to manage the Bisley complex, as well as national civilian rifle shooting generally - a time-consuming business, often fraught with sensitive issues and difficult decisions. As Ben had previously won many of the prizes he

was giving out, some more than once, we can imagine he must have felt considerable pleasure (possibly also a hint of wry amusement?) in finding himself on the 'presenting' side of the table...

All in the Magpies are very proud that Ben's long and unpretentious dedication to shooting has been acknowledged by the NRA in such an appropriate way. He is seen below at the culmination of the prizegiving ceremony, awarding the gold medal to this year's Queen's Prizewinner, David Luckman Esq. of Sedgemoor TSC:



The Queen's Prizewinner, 2018: photo by kind permission of the National Rifle Association.