

BLUNDELL'S MAGPIES RIFLE CLUB

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

ANNUAL REPORT, 2019 SEASON

The club's traditional season opened with a most successful **London Lunch** on 5th March, very well attended and held in the revered surroundings which we have been privileged to use for more than a decade. The occasion was organized and chaired by David Bentata, closely supported by his partner (and past School Governor) Linda Smith. An account of the Lunch has already been posted on the main shooting website, but in essence we were honoured to have as guests the Headmaster, Bart Wielenga Esq., and Capt. Barry Dawe, Officer Commanding the School's Cadet Force. Three honorary memberships were confirmed or awarded to Diane Chandler, Linda Smith and Barry himself, each for their loyal support of the club over a number of years.

The annual **mini-range match between the Magpies and the School on OB Day** (15th June) was one of the most enjoyable of recent years, and (as things turned out) proved to be the only competitive event between OBs and pupils which actually took place that day. Barry and Col. Tim Courtenay had arranged beforehand that firing could begin at an earlier time than in previous years. This enabled more people to shoot before attending the chapel service, at which many OBs particularly wished to hear ex-Head Jonathan Leigh's eulogy for the late Paddy Armstrong.

Scores recorded on the day once more confirmed that the current pupils were consistently better marksmen than their forebears. In fact, from a total of 11 firers, the top 5 just happened to be the nominated pupils' team! The best of the rest were therefore the official Magpie opposition; though no-one shot badly, there was nevertheless a 42-point gap between the respective team scores (464

to 422). As if gently to underline the situation, the leading pupil, Josh Cowap, achieved a nice 'possible' (100 ex 100 - watch that chap; he'll go far), to which team captain Tom Baxter added a useful 96. Josh was therefore the day's highest scorer; as for the Magpies, the leading light - for the 2nd year running - was club President Hugo Brooke, who was this year rightly prevailed on to receive his accolade publicly from the delighted Chevithorne Captain, Tim Courtenay. Hugo, let it be noted, is the oldest currently 'active' Magpie shooter, being now 83.

It was very good to see a healthy total of fourteen OB Magpies, marksmen and supporters alike, present on OB Day, with several accompanying spouses and partners - sections of this contingent made up significant elements of four lunch tables. One very gratifying aspect of the day was that there were several ladies actually shooting, two for the OBs and one for the School, and we hope this may be the start of a developing pattern. In a similar vein, during the last two years we have been encouraged by the emergence of some half-dozen OBs from the early 1980s, although it must be added that one Magpie re-emerged this year after a hibernation of sixty years! Very nice to see you again, Phil.



Josh Cowap - man of the match



Hugo Brooke - Magpie top scorer

For the record, the winning team consisted of Tom Baxter, Josh Cowap, Jack Swain, Grace Chapman, and Oscar Parr.



The combined teams, with the outgoing Chevithorne Captain Col. Tim Courtenay on the right, and his successor Mark Wooff behind Hugo Brooke to the rear.

The roll-call of Magpies on OB Day included Alex. Brook (nee Brownlow), Hugo Brooke, Jessica Lampard, Phil Stevens, Peter Ward, Mark Wooff (all of whom shot), Col. Tim Courtenay, Chris Barker, Rob Bentata, David Condy, David Kyd, Peter Marten, Col. Jim Muir and David Willoughby. We were sad that neither Linda Smith nor David Bentata were able to be with us owing to David's ill-health, and best wishes were expressed for his early recovery.

Following a long run of years in office (since 1988), Col. Tim has decided to relinquish the appointment of Chevithorne Captain in favour of Mark Wooff, who will assume the purple as from now. It is perhaps lucky for us that Mark is amongst the last few Blundellians actually to have shot on the old range at Chevithorne before it closed in 1980, so he personally understands the significance of the title. We are more than grateful to Col. Tim, who has continued to maintain the tradition of the OB Day matches through a few lean years, finally teaming up with fellow ex-Royal Marine Barry Dawe to achieve a series of six successive, memorable annual matches from 2014 onwards. We hope we'll continue to see him as a supporter in the future, bringing his rich store of anecdotes and humorous observations as of yore.

On July 17th the Magpies entered a team in the **Schools' Veterans competition at Bisley**. There was a fair turn-out, including eight Magpies and four other supporters, and following a leisurely lunch in the North London RC clubhouse (see below) the opportunity was taken to watch the closing stages of the Ashburton competition and to see various aspects of the ranges and meet old friends. During this interlude we were pleased to meet James Postle, formerly on the Blundell's staff, who was clearly maintaining a close interest in the school cadets' activity - in view of his continuing responsibilities with the UK Athelings and their annual rivalry with the Canadians.



Some of the Magpie group relaxing before the match (photo Chris Barker)

As regards the match itself, we were lucky to have two rifles available, one kindly arranged by David Bentata despite his being unable to attend in person, and the other owned by Chris Barker, the only one of our number who still fully practises the art of Target Rifle marksmanship on his own account, and is currently accredited as 'competent' by the NRA. Chris shared the coaching of other team members with Ben Wrey, who has arguably more experience in this field than any other Magpie, past or present. Of those available, only four were actually able to shoot, being Hugo Brooke, Chris, Richard Price, and Peter Ward, which meant we were one short of a full team; nothing daunted, the faithful nevertheless proceeded to fire. It was very good to see Richard again, after a period of several years, and we were reassured to find him apparently in good health and - as ever - with his customary brand of good humour. The progress of the valiant four was, shall we say, not without some difficulties, and

despite the careful ministrations of Ben and Chris, and a reasonably steady performance by Chris himself, the resulting total of 138.3 was insufficient to challenge the magnificent score of the Old Epsomian 'A' team, each member of which had achieved a perfect whammy of 50 ex 50. There was a brief post-mortem on the firing point, during which it was agreed that several possible specific factors underlay the probable truth that the Old and Bold were suffering to a growing extent from Anno Domini - their average age being nearly 75! Nevertheless, it was good to be back at Bisley, and once again to savour the atmosphere of the Imperial Meeting.



The shoot (here Richard and Ben) and the subsequent post-mortem (all!) - photos Chris Barker

The general turnout of former pupils was excellent: a total of 48 schools fielded a total approaching 100 teams (there are 'B' and 'C' team matches for those who can produce such numbers, and many schools can). One school (Marlborough) managed to field no fewer than 5 teams. Clifton were represented, and as their score rather exceeded ours, the Anstey Salver must remain with their Headmaster for a further year. The prevailing level of marksmanship among most of the 'A' teams - and a good proportion of the 'lower' sides - was very impressive, with the average individual performer achieving 48 points out of 50, indicating the presence of a solid phalanx of experienced Bisley shots among former pupils generally. However, by contrast, possibly influenced by current MoD policies, only 20 schools actually competed for the Ashburton Shield this year, which gives cause for some doubt as to whether the hitherto constant stream of accomplished target rifle shots - at least from the schools - will continue to be maintained at present levels.

Following our exertions on the range, there was a welcome adjournment back to the clubhouse to socialise a little more and dispense wise advice on national issues, before some folk had to start back for home whilst there was some light left to see by. It was agreed that a letter of loyal greetings should be sent to the Headmaster as from those present, and from the Magpies in general.



The Magpie group before adjournment from the range: (L to R) Richard Price, Peter Ward, David Condy, Susie Condy, Hugo Brooke, Ben Wrey, Gilly Cox and David Kyd. Not shown are Chris Barker (who took the picture), Jo and George Tilley (who'd had to leave a little earlier), and Richard's guest Elyn, (snapping the many sights elsewhere on the Common).