

THE HISTORY OF CHICHESTER RIFLE CLUB

Preface

This history of Chichester Rifle Club was primarily written by the late President of the Club Mr. Fred Francis who joined the club in 1951.

The Club's Origin

The Home Guard was stood down in 1944 and there was a general feeling amongst members that the camaraderie generated during the war should be preserved by the formation of old comrade associations. A meeting was held at the British Legion on January 29th 1945 and the Chichester Home Guard Old Comrades Association was formed.

In the main this was a social club and a smoking concert that attracted 140 members at the Assembly Rooms in Chichester. Children's Christmas parties were arranged, as were dinners and dances. Altogether there was, on paper over three hundred members. However, there was a strong shooting element and on February 10th 1945 a Rifle club was created within the association. It's H.Q, was at the Fleece Inn, East Street, Chichester where monthly meetings were held and all Home Guard members were welcome.

On April 5th 1945 a range committee was elected, after which shooting was to take place weekly at the Drill Hall in East Row Chichester. Ten .303 and two .22 rifles had been allocated to the club from army sources. Full bore shooting took place at the Cocking range, the Barracks and the gravel pits. The range at Cocking extended to 800 yards but it is probable that only 200 and 300 yard firing points were used. The gravel pits extended to about 100 yards and the barracks were 30yds.

The small-bore range at the Drill Hall was 25 yards long and accommodated in a brick built lean-to along the side of the hall which had a corrugated tin roof (the potential damage to ears was not realised then). The firing points in the Drill Hall consisted of two sloping wooden platforms, and, between these was a pillar to which the only telescope was attached. The .22 rifles and ammunition were kept in a locked wooden cupboard in the range (security was not an issue). The targets contained five bulls, and, a member watching through the telescope on the pillar did the spotting. The spotter would spot for both shooters calling the position of the shots on the targets. Later when another telescope was obtained a spotter got down on the firing point with the rifleman and called the shots. When later the number of members increased, the sloping wooden platforms were removed and this enabled three members to shoot and spot for themselves. In passing it should be mentioned that Chichester were not the only club to find range accommodation to be a problem. e.g. Harting HG Rifle Club used one of the bars of the White Hart Inn for a 15-yard rifle range on Friday evenings. During this period, matches took place against County Hall, Sussex Police and R.A.F. Tangmere, all at their own ranges. R.S.M. Nash of the Royal Sussex Regiment was in charge of the Drill Hall and proved a good and helpful friend to the club over the many years that the premises were used.

In November 1946 civilians were accepted as members and the headquarters moved to the Royal Arms in East Street. At a meeting in January 1947 the Chichester Home Guard Old Comrades Association was wound up and later that month on the 22nd, the constitution of the Chichester H.G. Rifle Club was drawn up and officers appointed. Admiral Palmer was elected president and in March 1947 the headquarters moved to the White Swan in Westgate where it remained for many years. It may be mentioned that the Club's various headquarters were adorned by a small wooden shield denoting its place in each move and was finally placed on the Quarry Lane range in 1961 before disappearing (who took it?).

For the remainder of the forties the club flourished and became affiliated to the N.S.R.A., the N.R.A. and the Sussex S.B.R.A. It had matches at Cocking and entered the Canada and Norfolk cup competitions at Kithurst, where they also had club competitions. Small-bore matches were continued and there was a monthly spoon shoot within the club.

1951-1960

This decade was one of the most active in the club's history. Membership continued to grow with a total of between 60 and 70 members. The first lady member joined in 1953 and was soon joined by several others enabling them to form a ladies team in 1955. There was a nucleus of junior members and on the competitive side the club entered the County Small-bore events, with Fullbore teams in the Canada and Norfolk cups. In addition the club held eight half-day Full-bore meetings at Kithurst where the Price and Croft cups were contested. The club captain had entered both the annual N.S.R.A. and N.R.A. National competitions at Bisley in 1954. This encouraged other members to follow suit and at every one of these meetings since that time the club has had members participating. Also during this period members entered the S.C.R.A. annual meetings at Hampden Park, Eastbourne and the W&WS meetings at Fittleworth. Full-bore matches took place at Langley Point Eastbourne, Welcome Bottom Hurstpierpoint and at Tipnor Ranges Portsmouth. As a result of the many competitions entered, shooting time was extended to as late as 11pm, from a 6.00pm start.

In 1953 the Club dropped the Home Guard title. This arose from a 1953 national scare, when a new Home Guard was formed and a unit was created in Chichester. The club was asked to provide volunteers and there was liaison with the new unit. However, the M.O.D ordered all old clubs to drop the Home Guard title. This caused resentment amongst the original H.G. so they retaliated by calling themselves H.G. 1944. This was later dropped and the club became the Chichester Rifle Club, more apt as there were hardly any original H.G. members. The pistol section was then created and the club adopted the title of Chichester Rifle & Pistol Club.

Following a match at Havant R.C. on their self-built range Chichester members were inspired to follow suit especially as the membership had grown. The first thing required for a new range was a site and the then Club Secretary, Reg Plumb and Club Captain Fred Francis travelled many miles and spent many hours seeking one. Farm buildings in Oaklands Park were offered by the City Council but were unsuitable. The site where the Festival Theatre now stands was also offered but it had too many snags and so it went on and on.

Reg Plumb left the club and Basil Ballantyne became secretary and helped continue the search. At one time the possibility of an outdoor range at Westhampnett in one of the old gravel pits raised hopes and plans went ahead. The pit was kindly made available by Messer's Heavers. Police and local people who might object were approached and all seemed well but the pit flooded and that was the end of that. However nothing daunted the search, which continued on until the latter part of the fifties, when after two approaches, the City Council, offered the club the Quarry Lane site. Additional land could have been acquired for an outdoor range but the outlay was beyond the club.

In the meantime a full shooting programme was followed with teams in National and County competitions. The social side was not neglected with dances, prize givings and entertainment taking place regularly at the Unicorn Hotel where the committee meetings also took place. Basil Ballantyne took money raising for the new range in hand and having attained charity status, an annual national charity draw was arranged. National businesses and organisations were approached for funds. Amongst the donators were Billy Butlin, Imperial Tobacco and International Stores.

On a trip from Bisley the club Captain had inspected the ex Canadian Hospital buildings which were being dismantled at Superior camp Greyshtot and thought it had possibilities. A sub-committee from the club made an inspection and a decision to buy at a cost price of about £200.00, which included dismantling and transport. The sections of the hut were stored in Quarry Lane by the kindness of Cole Bros who had a works yard there. Enthusiastic members prepared the site in Quarry Lane and again due to the generosity of Cole Bros were given the footings for the building. One weekend all the sections were laid out on site ready for construction but vandals intervened and all 365 panes of glass were smashed. Thanks to the foresight of Basil Ballantyne there was insurance cover and the Portsmouth glass company repaired the damage. Amongst the benefactors was the club president, Mr Macleod-Wallace, who made an interest free loan of £200.00 to the club and also made a generous donation.

Towards the end of the decade the club suffered the loss of several of its old and experienced members due to their work taking them away from the district and consequently competitions suffered. The social side was also low key, with the prize giving, buffets and the Christmas parties being held at the Drill Hall courtesy of R.S.M. Nash. The East Preston Rifle club had closed owing to lack of support and had very generously donated equipment and surplus funds to the club. A little later, West Ashling club (club no. 8 on the N.R.A. register) who formed in volunteer days before the Great War and had been defunct for many years, asked if their rifle equipment would be of any use to Chichester members. The equipment was acquired. It was of vintage interest and sold to Chichester members.

Equipment had become more sophisticated and consequently more expensive, so in order to help members purchase equipment an interest free loan scheme was inaugurated by the club's committee.

1961-1970

Shooting took place on the new Quarry Lane range in March 1961. It was of an experimental order and it was found that owing to "give" in the wooden floor it was not conducive to accurate shooting. Later a working party under the guidance of Phil Holmes, constructed a concrete floor at the firing point. Interest in the formation of a pistol section arose and later a dropped firing point at twenty yards was also constructed again under Phil Holmes supervision. The club captain had noted in the "Rifleman" that Northumberland County Council had allocated funds to a Rifle club to further shooting by youngsters as part of the educational program and suggested that the W.S.C.C. be approached for a similar grant. This was done and the council agreed to donate £1.00 for every pound that the club subscribed. The club received a total of £106.00, part of which went to the new pistol section under the care of Basil Ballantyne and the remainder of the grant purchased a new rifle. Shooting was still suffering from loss of members but one member; Diana Turnbull had been Sussex lady champion in the past season. The W.S.C.C. grant was to be devoted to junior members and their training. It would be a maximum of £53.5s.6d and subjected to an annual report. Junior membership expanded rapidly during this period. The pistol section also became popular with Tuesday evenings being allotted to this section.

General Sir Lashmer Whistler, Patron of the club, opened the range in Quarry Lane officially on the 2nd September 1961, in the presence of several members of the city council and other guests who had helped the club. The General was president of the N.S.R.A. and N.R.A. as well as the Sussex S.B.R.A. and he also managed the N.R.A. overseas teams. He took great interest in the club and presented it with some of his medals which were mounted on wooden shields by Phil Holmes for annual competitions of which one, the Whistler Inter club trophy, is still shot annually on the first Friday of April. Sadly he died during that year, he was greatly missed. During this period Life Membership was granted to the President and Club Captain, Messer's Macleod-Wallace and Fred Francis who duly received certificates to this effect.

The junior section was coached on Wednesday evenings by Basil Ballantyne and succeeded in winning the Davis Bowl in the county division 12, winning every round; it was the team's first competition venture.

Four members Bob Kennett, Den Voke, Fred Francis and Phil Holmes joined Fittleworth club's outdoor section in the N.S.R.A.'s 50-yard summer league paying their own entry fee's etc. although they were not as successful as the juniors.

Through the sixties the range was used by various organisations including cadets and the Bognor R.P.C., who had their own area in the clubhouse. The Bognor R.P.C. had lost their old range on church premises when a new vicar arrived. The local archery club The Chichester Bowmen also used the Chichester range for practice. Owing to terms on the Club's lease the Club was not allowed to sub-let, instead it received donations.

Fundraising continued including weekly raffles at the club, novelty items such as pens etc, collecting newspapers, a football pools scheme and many other ideas. At this time in Chichester there was a demand for a swimming pool and the old Gaumont cinema was earmarked. To further this project, Mr D Thomas of the T.S.B. formed the Chichester Sporting Trust involving leisure interests in the city and the club was

approached. This involved football results and work on Saturday afternoons from an office in the market. Don Netley played a very active part in this with a band of volunteers and as a result the club benefited by receiving many grants over the years. On the social side, the annual prize giving and dances continued first at the Pond Club Bracklesham and then for many years at the Clair-Haven Hotel Bognor Regis, usually attracting about 70 guests and members. The decade was very active proving that the club was in good health.

1971-1980

Shooting was changing; the club had overcome the poor performance of the early sixties. There were three teams, each in the National Leagues, the County and West Sussex plus two in the National Pistol League. Den Voke helped the club captain at the range, the members were keen and most had their own equipment.

Full bore participation had declined owing to a number of factors the worst being the loss of ranges. Kithurst was available only with difficulty. Cocking had gone many years before. Wellcome Bottom and Langley Point had gone and this meant that inexpensive and half-day facilities had dwindled. Shooting did take place at the Steyning Range but this was regularly vandalised. The H.G competitions still took place at Kithurst but with dwindling competitors.

The club continued to thrive with membership somewhere around the fifty mark. Bob Kennett who had won the Viking Shield at the N.S.R.A.'s National meeting at Bisley in the sixties was now joined by a band of keen competitors, who participated in open events at National and County levels. The range was no longer the isolated building in Quarry Lane with improvements to the range including toilets.

One notable feature of the club house was the massive safe, which had been obtained by the club captain and adapted by Bill Pope as a rifle store.

Members took an active and full part in competitions of the S.C.R.A at Bisley and also N.R.A. and N.S.R.A annual meetings, one or two also went to the Channel Isles. The club also enjoyed a long extension of the lease. During this period the building was beginning to show its age and needed constant repairs. Shooting progressed much the same as it had in previous years and membership remained around the fifty mark. There were still no ladies or juniors teams, and the club suffered from two burglaries but sustained no serious loss or damage.

Meanwhile, Quarry Lane was fast becoming an Industrial site.

1981-1990

There was little change in the shooting pattern. The Bognor Club had long since left and combined with Aldingbourne who had recently built a new range at Eastergate. The other users, Chichester Bowmen and the Jazz Band had also left but the pistol section was thriving on Tuesday evenings.

Problems arose due to safety and the range was closed until the matter was remedied to the satisfaction of the inspecting officer. During this period the club was accommodated at Aldingbourne to shoot team cards.

In the sixties interest had been shown for three positional shooting and the necessary rifle and equipment had been purchased but the interest died, however, towards the end of the decade keenness was again expressed.

A big problem was now showing itself, the site was infill land and there were signs of serious subsidence. Detailed discussion took place, either to quit the site and obtain compensation for the unexpired portion of the club's lease or rebuild on the original site. The latter would be an expensive project as piling would be required, the former would mean finding another site, in either case funds would have to be raised so it was back to the fifties again. Eventually it was decided to remain on the site.

Once this decision had been taken then the old problems of fund raising etc arose yet again. Donations however, were received from many local businesses and other rifle clubs. One in particular from Lerwick R.C. demonstrated the fellowship among clubs. Promises of grants and loans were also received. There was a surprising lack of assistance from certain rifle organisations. Eventually the old range, but not the clubhouse, was dismantled and piling commenced. Steelwork for the roof and supports were ordered. The skilful club members, mainly under the supervision of stalwart Phil Holmes, carried out footings and the brickwork.

Shooting in the meantime was carried on in a limited scale through the kindness of Aldingbourne R.C., who let the club use their range, (accepting no payment).

It should be mentioned that the pistol section had previously decided to separate from the rifle club and had formed Novio Magnum P.C., but they continued to use the range on a rental basis which proved satisfactory to both parties. On a national scale both Peter Terry and Neil Braisher excelled, Neil also reaching the Queens final at Bisley.

Peter Terry introduced a scheme to the committee; it was an annual competition involving sponsored teams from local pubs with a grand finale at the range. The proceeds from the sponsors were then divided in half, one half going towards a chosen local charity and the other half towards the club's funds. It involved a great deal of work and organising, and many thousands of pounds were raised for local charities. It ran successfully for many years but hasty and restrictive legislation following Dunblane killed it.

1991-2000

The highlight of the year in 1991 was the completion of the new range, which was opened by the local M.P. of the time, Anthony Nelson. There were several visitors present and Mr Nelson duly shot at the customary plate. All enjoyed refreshments afterwards.

Shooting continued on the usual lines throughout the year. On Sunday afternoons the range was used by a P.S.K. group (Prone, Standing and Kneeling). The clubs star members were P Terry and N Braisher who both excelled on a national scale the latter on an international field. At long last shoulder-to-shoulder matches had got a hold and competitions were contested in the Hampshire League.

The new range was in great demand by other shooting clubs for finals day etc.

Another outstanding event was a dinner to celebrate the club's fiftieth anniversary. This was held at the Jarvis Hotel and was the most colourful social event since the last dinner and prize giving at the Dolphin Hotel in 1973.

Sadly the decade was blighted by the tragedies of Hungerford and Dunblane. The club had introduced its probationary system over thirty years previously to weed out such people as these misfits. Aggressive and hostile legislation following these tragedies have not helped rifle shooting.

During the decade the club, which was founded primarily as a Full-bore club, became mainly a Small-bore organisation. There were two main reasons for this. The change from the old .303 target rifle to 7.62, and the loss of full-bore range facilities.

2000-2005

Despite the ever increasing legislation relating to shooting, the membership remained reasonably stable at 45–50 members. This included a small number of enthusiastic female shooters and an increasing number of junior members.

The major headache was now the clubhouse at Quarry Lane, which was showing its age and becoming increasingly costly to maintain. Following the earlier rebuilding of the range at Quarry Lane, it had always been the intention to rebuild the club house, once sufficient funds were available. However, at this time the site lease had only a few more years to run and the committee felt it prudent to obtain a new lease, prior to embarking on another major rebuilding project. Discussions therefore commenced with the landlords, Chichester District Council. Eventually the Council responded with a refusal to extend or renew the current lease. It appeared that Chichester Rifle Club would disappear after 2012! This would be yet another casualty on the ever increasing list of rifle clubs losing their ranges.

The committee remained optimistic however and lobbied for support from the press and local Councillors. Eventually the club became aware that the Council were looking at a major redevelopment in Quarry Lane and the Rifle Club was sitting in the middle of the site. During 2003 the club learnt that Covers had obtained the old BT site adjacent to the club and wished to expand their current premises westwards. In order to progress this project, Covers had generously offered to provide a new range subject to the Club

surrendering their current lease on Quarry Lane. The first proposal was relocation to the rear of the old BT site and outline drawings were produced. For various reasons this option was abandoned. Later in 2003 a site in College Lane was proposed, but following objections by the highway authority, this was also rejected.

During this period a sub-committee had been meeting to update the Club's Bylaws and Constitution in order to better protect members interests. The revised Bylaws and Constitution were adopted, following an EGM in January 2004. Also at this meeting a presentation was made to the President, Fred Francis in recognition of his long service to Chichester Rifle Club.

Another change during this period was the development of a Club web site.

In spring 2004 yet another site was proposed behind Chichester Rugby Club and drawings were produced for the necessary planning application. Despite a great deal of opposition from local residents and wildlife conservationists, approval was granted in September 2004. However, the approval was subject to an ecological survey, which revealed the presence of rare great crested newt on the site of the new range. As its breeding cycle runs to June 2005, this meant a possible delay on the project for a further 9 months.

Another problem to be faced was certification of the new range. The MoD was no longer inspecting civilian ranges and currently there was no new system in place for issuing range safety certificates. Enquiries via the local MP indicated that discussions were ongoing with the Home Office and Police.

Work finally commenced on the new range in Oaklands Park in October 2005. Subsequently, a new 25 year lease was signed with Chichester District Council and final internal details of the range were agreed with Covers.

In 2005 after 25 years as club treasurer Richard Ellams handed over the club's finances to John Peart.

2006

A momentous year. After a period of over 50 years at Quarry Lane, the Club received the keys to their brand new, state of the art, eight firing point 25yd range, on 25 August 2006. The new range was erected and paid for by Covers Builders Merchants in exchange for the Club's Quarry Lane site. The new range was designed under the guidance of Major (retired) Frank Haxton, who also issued the Range Safety Certificate. Before retirement, Major Haxton was Officer Commanding the Technical Advisory Section of the MoD's Land Warfare Centre, Warminster. Indeed Major Haxton wrote the original version of the MoD Code of Practice for range safety (Joint Services Publication 403 part 2)

On 5 September 2006 Sussex Police inspected the range and acknowledged its state of the art safety and security features. Unfortunately they would not permit shooting to start on the range, because Major (retired) Haxton was not approved by the MoD. Thus the Club was in a catch 22 situation. The new range had been designed and inspected by the man who wrote the rule book, but the MoD were no longer certifying civilian

ranges. At this point the Club realised it had no way of complying with the current legislation.

What was now urgently required from the Home Office were the new regulations which it had been drafting in conjunction with the Police, NSRA and NRA, since 2003.

At this juncture (mid September 2006) the Club contacted the Home Office and spoke to Dennis Wilmer, who had been charged with sorting matters out. To Dennis Wilmer's eternal credit, he did indeed sort out the problems and Home Office Circular 031/2006 (Firearms: Civilian Target Shooting Ranges) was issued on 23 October 2006. The Club was therefore finally able to move into its new range and obtain Sussex Police approval. The first shot was fired by the President, Chris Wade on Sunday 5 November 2006 – an appropriate date!

Throughout this frustrating process, Covers were very understanding and allowed the Club to remain at the old range in Quarry Lane. In particular, Patrick Green, Covers Chairman was extremely supportive and has subsequently become the Club's Patron (along with the Mayor of Chichester). The old range at Quarry Lane was finally demolished in early November 2006 and a new era commenced for Chichester Rifle Club.

2007

The formal opening of the new range, attended by members old and new was carried out by Patrick Green on Saturday 17 March 2007.

At the AGM in May 2007, the club's long standing President, Fred Francis finally managed to escape! Subsequently Chris Wade, a Trustee and past Chairman of the Club, was persuaded to step into this role. This was particularly fitting in view of the work Chris had put in over the years, culminating in the Club's recent move to the new range in Wellington Road.

In 2007 after 12 years as the full-bore captain Tony Christofi stepped down and Dave Foy took over the **reigns**.

2008

In 2008 Bob Allgrove was elected as Chairman.

The Club took part in the first 'Sport For All' day (subsequently called the 'Get Active Festival' organised by Chichester District Council in Oaklands Park

2009

In 2009, the driving force behind the Club for over half a century, Fred Francis passed away. His massive contribution to the Club in particular and shooting in general was recognised at the May AGM when the range was renamed the Fred Francis range. The range being formally opened by Fred's wife Sue and son Jeremy.

Vetting and barring via the CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) though not a legal requirement was adopted.

Three position shooting was introduced to the Club by Peter Terry.

2010

This year saw a number of changes:

- The formal introduction of a child protection policy and procedures.
- Eight new shooting mats were purchased.
- The overhead heaters on the firing point were disabled due to their lack of effect.
- Sea cadets from TS Sturdy started shooting on a regular basis through the winter.
- An EGM was held to discuss conversion of the Club to a CASC (Community Amateur Sports Club). Under Inland Revenue rules significant financial advantages accrue to the Club as a CASC, the conversion was duly approved, with the Club being granted CASC status in 2011.

The Club enjoyed national success with Sara Carr shooting for the GB junior team and, Rob Dowling shooting for both the England Junior team and the GB junior team.

2011

The Club was shocked with the untimely death of its Chairman Bob Allgrove. A packed Thanksgiving Celebration for Bob's life was held at the Assembly rooms in Chichester.

At the AGM in May Nigel King was elected as the Club's new Chairman.

2012

The Club suffered another year of sad news. The year started with the passing of Bernie Littler, Vice President and one of the Club's original members. Then in October, whilst shooting at Bisley, Dave Foy had a heart attack. Thankfully he survived following emergency surgery. The year ended with the death of Nigel King, our Chairman.

At the AGM Tim Osborne was elected to be a life member.

For several years the club had been keen to restart air rifle shooting. This came to fruition with the purchase of some air rifles with the help of a £500 grant from Chichester District Council.

During the year, Rob Dowling was chosen as a member of the GB Pershing Match Squad, to be shot in US July 2013. Subsequently Rob received a grant from Chichester City Council towards his costs. Rob achieved the third highest score at the Pershing Match, shot in 2013, but ultimately the USA won the match.

For the first time in a generation the Club won the Whistler shoot.

2013

Following Nigel King's death at the end of 2012, Ed Kent took over as temporary Chairman, and was then elected to Chairman at the AGM..

John Robbins, from Petworth RC, gave a talk on Lightweight Sports Rifle (LSR) shooting. He followed this up with two practical training sessions for club members. This was much appreciated but at that time the committee decided it could not proceed due to lack of staff resources.

For the second year in a row the Club won the Whistler shoot.

2014

Local scoring came into play this year with a scorers' course being held at the Club.

Sara Carr received a gold award for her international shooting.

Peter Terry and Hamish Matheson volunteer to attend on Wednesday evenings to instruct new joiners and to coach junior members.

2015

At the AGM Maurice Penfold was presented with an engraved silver salver in recognition of his long service to the Club.

In October, for only the second time, the Spitfire Challenge event between the Club and Chichester Bowmen took place with the Bowmen retaining the trophy.

2016

The year started with our Vice President and last of the Club's original members, Phil Holmes, passing away.

2016 was the 50th anniversary of the Whistler shoot. The strength of the Club's shooting was demonstrated when the Club won the Whistler Trophy for the third time in five years. The trophy was presented by Bim Mackay from Liss, who is a distant relative of the trophy's donor General Whistler.

Over the last couple of years there had been an increase in the number of junior shooters. Unfortunately, the Club did not have a sufficient number of junior rifles to cover this influx. To remedy this situation the Club successfully applied to Sport England for a grant of £4,000 to enable the purchase of four Anschutz 1903 junior rifles.

For over ten years the Club had had a very basic website. The Committee decided that a new much more comprehensive site was required. This new website was developed during the year and launched just before Christmas.

In order to diversify the Club's shooting, Chris Wade volunteered to get bench rest shooting started at the club.