

The History of
Cambridgeshire
and
Isle of Ely
Smallbore Rifle Association

(1909 - 1961)

ALEC T. WALLACE

CAMBRIDGESHIRE & ISLE OF ELY
SMALLBORE RIFLE ASSOCIATION.

A HISTORY

covering the first 52 years
(1909 - 1961)

by

ALEC T. WALLACE

*With a Foreword by B. N. Bebbington, Esq., O.B.E.,
Chief Constable of Cambridge and President of the
Association.*

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Cambridge.
A. T. WALLACE
May, 1961.

P R E F A C E

'The sport of rifle shooting was originally a very cheap one, and, in its origin, was known as the Working Man's Rifle Movement.'

Thus wrote the National Smallbore Rifle Association in a Booklet issued in 1951 to mark the Association's Jubilee.

That this description requires considerable revision is well known to members of over 4,000 Clubs which are affiliated to the National Association. Anyone contemplating taking up the sport today would have little change left out of £100 provided he (or she) decided to acquire all the latest types of equipment. From humble beginnings the sport has developed into 'big business.'

In endeavouring to set out a History of the County Association I have had to wade through, and assemble in chronological order, a great mass of newspaper cuttings, Notes and old Minutes, in addition to garnering authentic information from several of the Founders of the original Association in 1909, who are to-day hale and hearty, and who, despite the weight of nearly fourscore years, have retained lively recollections of activities and incidents of over half a century ago.

Some years ago in a Cambridge paper, Mr. W. R. Smith contributed an excellent article touching briefly on the Association's history, in which it was suggested that the Association was first formed in 1912. As a matter of fact the formation took place three years earlier (i.e., in 1909), but it was not until 1913 that affiliation was made with the National Association, although the individual Clubs in the Town and County of Cambridge were for the most part affiliated to the National Body.

The Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs (as the National Body was originally named) was founded in 1901 by Field Marshal Lord Roberts, and, as stated above, the Cambridgeshire Association (originally known as the Cambridge Town and County and Isle of Ely Miniature Rifle Association) was formed in 1909. It is known that a considerable number of Clubs had been in existence for some time prior to 1909 (notably the Abington Club—1906), but no attempt had been made to get a County Association formed until that date.

The County Association has operated in three phases since its formation, i.e.,

1909 to 1915
1928 to 1939
1946 to date

so that although its history covers a period of over 50 years, it has been operative only for about 30 years, due to the incidence of two World Wars, and for 20 years it lay dormant.

F O R E W O R D

As I write this, the American Astronaut, Colonel Glenn, is orbiting a world that is 53 years older than it was when the County Association was first formed. From horse trams to space capsules, from 25s. Martini rifles to £86 10s. 0d. Anschutz Model 54 (Super Match) that is the period covered by the history of the Association—a period of ups and downs, of peace and war, and peace and war, and peace again.

Through this unsettled half century the Association has had its moments of great activity and of quiescence, yet the flame of enthusiasm for rifle shooting has never been quenched. After each of the wars a few sportsmen have started re-building on the old foundations. I was present at the latest re-birth of the Association and remember how impressed I was by the determination of the little band of sportsmen who acted as 'midwives' on that occasion.

Alec Wallace was one of those 'midwives.' He was Secretary, Treasurer, Match Secretary and Statistical Officer of the Cambridge Small Bore League, and became Secretary of the re-formed Association. Since then he has held other posts in the Association and has given to it an immense amount of his time and energy. What is more, he has, as a wife, one of the finest 'marks-women' in the country. She, in partnership with her husband, has given great help to the Association. We owe a debt of gratitude to that little team of two—the Wallaces, and who better than the senior partner of that team could we have to write our history.

Today the Association is in, as Alec Wallace calls it, 'the third phase,' and we have a similar number of clubs with us as there were in the period before the First World War. We all hope that this phase will continue from strength to strength for many years to come, and that there will be no more interregnums.

B. N. BEBBINGTON,
President.

In the first phase there was tremendous enthusiasm for the sport, and a great number of Clubs were affiliated. Many of those Clubs had active membership of 80 and over.

In the second phase there were few clubs—all of the originals from phase one having disappeared, with the exception of the Gas Company and Abington.

In the third phase interest was renewed, and although clubs are not so strong in membership as in phase one, they are not now concentrated almost entirely in Cambridge and its environs, but are spread over the whole County and the Isle of Ely.

Whether the County Association continued to be affiliated to the National Association during the years of inactivity is not known, as there would appear to be no County Financial Records available prior to 1946.

Unfortunately the National Smallbore Rifle Association cannot assist me on this point, as the whole of their records were destroyed by enemy action during an air-raid on London on the night of 10th May, 1941.

For the most part this short history is factual, but it is hoped that it will prove to be informative and of some interest to even the youngest rifleman.

Having been so closely connected with the Association since 1946, and having kept in touch with Officials and members of various Clubs since my retirement, such observations as I have made (particularly in describing the third phase) reflect my own opinions on certain points, and there is no personal reflection on the many hard-working officials, who, I am sure, have at all times done their best according to their lights, but it is true to say that the "looker-on" sees most of the game.

As I was so intimately concerned with the resuscitation of the Association after the Second World War, I have written the history which follows in an impersonal manner, and have endeavoured to include all relevant facts and data, and to pay due tribute to the many outstanding and hard-working people who have helped to administer the affairs of the Association and guide its destinies.

Every effort has been made by enquiry and research to get the facts right, but if any discrepancies are found, I hope these may be forgiven.

THE FIRST PHASE (1909 - 1915).

Although the County Association (and that is how it will be referred to throughout) was first formed in 1909, some desultory and sporadic shooting undoubtedly took place for several years before that date by clubs in the Town and County of Cambridge.

These Clubs were for the most part associated with Public Houses or Rural or Working Men's Clubs, and were run on somewhat the same lines as are Darts and Bar Billiards at the present time of writing, with friendly matches between Clubs.

After a lapse of nearly 60 years it has been found impossible to secure much documentary information as to how those Clubs were originally constituted, but there is no doubt that the formation of the Society of Miniature Rifle Clubs by Lord Roberts in 1901 stimulated an enthusiasm throughout the country for Miniature Rifle Shooting.

Contrary to general belief (and this has been well verified by 'old stagers' and by the most exhaustive enquiry) there was no shooting on Miniature Ranges in this County prior to 1901.

There was considerable pre-occupation with Air Rifle shooting towards the end of the 19th Century. The writer can just remember an Air Rifle Club run by his grandfather (in Scotland), but .22 shooting was practically unknown—at any rate there was no sort of organisation to control it, and presumably no Rules.

Another County Association.

There was indeed a "Cambridge and Isle of Ely Rifle Association" formed away back in the seventies, carrying on into the 20th Century, but this was a full-bore organisation controlled for the most part by the Yeomanry and Territorials of the day with a few private Clubs, the Range being on Coldham Common.

Rifles and Ammunition.

It is doubtful if there were many rifles available capable of firing a bullet of .22 calibre, but after the formation of the National Society by Lord Roberts, that Society, in addition to drawing up Rules, made available large quantities of Martini Rifles (converted by Greener) at a cost of 25/- to include carriage from London. This may seem a trifling sum to-day, but it was quite a considerable sum for working men to lay out in those days. The National Association also provided Ammunition at 12/6 per 1,000 rounds. At first the ammunition, which was of German manufacture, was excellent. Later some black powder British ammunition was put on the market. This, when fired, threw out flame from the barrel and an acrid stench. On occasion the powder charge was insufficient to propel the cartridge through the barrel, but some quite remarkable scores were returned nevertheless, as we shall read later.

The Boer War Influence.

The conclusion of the Boer War gave a great stimulus to shooting. Veterans of the South African Campaign doubtless "shot a line" in the Locals and encouraged working men and others to take up the sport, and in many cases acted as Coaches and Instructors.

The fact that the War was so far away and that the British Army was for the most part composed of Regular Soldiers and Militia, coupled with the reputedly wonderful marksmanship of the Boers, fired the young men who had stayed at home with the desire to become "sharpshooters," and enthusiasm rapidly spread.

The Beginning

Although 1909 marks the date of the formation of the first County Association, it was nevertheless not the starting point of organised shooting, for in 1908, at the Great Northern Hotel in Cambridge, Mr. Jack Utteridge, of the Lensfield Club, organised a League Competition of home and away shoulder-to-shoulder matches between the Clubs existing at that time.

Mr. Utteridge is to-day very hale and hearty for his years. He told the writer that he acted as Hon. Secretary for the first experimental Winter League Competition in 1908, after which he handed over to Mr. Powell Chandler, who was appointed Hon. Secretary to the first County Association, and who continued to act in that capacity until the appointment of Mr. T. S. Moore, of the Abbey Club in 1912.

Mr. Utteridge has in his possession a record of all the Winter League matches shot by his own Club (Lensfield) in 1909, and the writer has had the pleasure of browsing through these meticulously kept Records of over half a century ago.

The writer has also had the pleasure of talking with Mr. Fred Russell, one of the early "pi-neers," and still an active member of the City Police Rifle Club. Mr. Russell has lent the writer the Records of the Gas Company Teams in the years 1912 and 1913. These are similar to the Records kept by Mr. Utteridge. In these days there was no need for a Scoring Committee, as the League Matches were shoulder-to-shoulder, and the rival Captains (or Secretaries) agreed the scores on the spot and forwarded the results to the County Secretary for his Records.

Mr. Ivan Clark, of Abington, has produced for inspection a copy of the first County Association Booklet containing the names of the Officers and also the Association's first Constitution and Rules. The Patrons were Field Marshal Earl Roberts, V.C., and The Right Honourable General Sir Arthur Paget, K.C.B., The Right Hon. Viscount Clifden (Lord Lieutenant of the County) was President, and among a very long list of Vice-Presidents are such names as Messrs. Horace Darwin, F.R.S., D. A. L. Huddleston, J.P., Sir Joseph Larmor, M.P., Douglas C. Newton, J.P. (later to become Lord Eltisley), Major Oliver Papworth, F. P. C. Pemberton, J. C. Denison-Pender, Alderman G. Stace, Sir Charles Waldstein, Lady

Cooper, Professor G. Sims-Woodhead, M.A., S. O. Buckmaster, K.C., M.P., Hon. E. S. Montague, M.P., Venerable Archdeacon Cunningham, and many other distinguished gentlemen in the town and county.

It would appear that Lensfield, Abbey and The Gas Company were the leading Clubs in point of membership, and that despite the poor quality of the ammunition, the crack shots in these, and some other Clubs, not infrequently put up scores of 98 to 100, but in teams of eight or 10 the standard rapidly failed off.

The 13 Town Clubs taking part in the first League Tournament in 1908 were: Sawston, Bell, Gas Company, Albert, Lensfield, Abbey, Saxon, Chesterton, Romsey Town (also known as Cantabs), Cherry Hinton (St. John's), Yeomanry, C.E.Y.M.S., and Police.

Major Oliver Papworth.

The driving force behind the Miniature Rifle Club movement was undoubtedly provided by Major Oliver Papworth, who did so much for sport generally in Cambridge, and who can be said to be the father of Cambridgeshire Smallbore Shooting. He was President of the Lensfield Club, and Chairman of the newly-formed County Association, acting as Chief Range Officer at Championship Meetings, and he donated a Cup, which is one of the many prized by the Association to-day. Major Papworth's many benefactions to sport are commemorated by a bench with a raised back situate at Hobbs Pavilion in Parker's Piece, one of the carved plaques depicting crossed rifles.

Major Papworth was ably assisted in the earlier years by Mr. Jack Utteridge (Lensfield) and Mr. T. S. Moore (Abbey).

Large Memberships.

We are rather apt in these days to consider a Club Membership of 30 to 40 as being out of the ordinary, but in the year 1910 the Lensfield Club had 88 active shooting members. The first Membership Card of the Cambridge Gas Company Rifle Club, i.e., for 1908/1909, lists the names of 92 active members and contains a set of Rules and Regulations. These Rules and Regulations are for the most part similar to those obtaining to-day in the N.S.R.A. and Clubs generally. The officials in this first phase of the Association's activities certainly laid good and lasting foundations. At the second Open Meeting of the County Association in 1910 there were (according to the Press of that day) a total of **720 Entries**. This sounds a little fantastic and very like a mis-print, but in addition to the entries from the large Clubs in the Association there were competitors from the Regular Army, the Yeomanry and other Territorial Units. The Press reported that "there was a great throng of people," and the writer is informed by one who was present that the figure of 720 may be approximately correct. This then is an all-time record. This meeting was held at the Military Range on Coldham Common.

Amongst those present that day were the Lord Lieutenant (Viscount Clifden), the Mayor (Councillor W. P. Spalding), various Town Councillors and Officers of the Regular and Territorial Army, including a Lieut. Greenwood, of the Lancashire Regiment. Major Papworth was, of course, in charge of the operations.

This was the first occasion on which the Viscount Clifden Cup, the Paget Cup (presented by Lt.-General Sir Arthur Paget) and the Hammond Cup (presented by Mr. J. Hammond, Mine Host of the Castle Hotel) were competed for, and were won respectively by the Lensfield, Chesterton and Abbey Clubs.

Reports of the Championship Meetings in those days almost invariably refer to "sunny skies and great heat," so that there may after all be something in our recollections of boyhood days that it never seemed to rain!

At the presentation of Prizes at these Annual Meetings the principal speaker usually exhorted all those who had not done so to join the Territorial Army, arguing that as the Territorial Army had supported the Association, the Association should in its turn support the Territorials. Whether this exhortation fell on deaf ears, or whether there was a concentrated rush to get into uniform, history does not relate.

Targets and Scores.

The scores in those far-off days make interesting reading. To qualify as a Marksman required a score of 370 ex 400 (an average per Target of 92.5), and the Independent Press of July, 1910, remarks that "there has been so much improvement in scoring in the past twelve months that a team in the Winter League must average **close upon 90** per man to feel safe for a win." Teams were at that time 10 a side.

The first Target used on Indoor Ranges was a single bull, and it was not uncommon for claims to be made for 10 scored Bulls when the scorers could only see what appeared to be a "clover leaf" of three shots. To get over this difficulty Targets were changed to "two-bullers" (after the style of the present-day 50-yard Target) on each of which five shots had to be fired. Later the 5-bull Target appeared. This contained a "sighter bull," on which only **one** round was allowed. Any Target containing more than 11 shot-holes (including the one sighter) was automatically disqualified. Before this Phase closed, a 10-bull Target was in use. This may surprise many present-day shooters who may have claimed that it was first introduced in the 1946/61 Phase.

The writer has been shown by Mr. Russell one of the iron back-sights in use on Rifles in these early days. These were provided by the S.M.R.C. and consisted of a single peep-hole which had to be kept centred on a central base. There was no mechanism to keep it in a fixed position, and the present-day cult of keeping the eye

pressed against the sights would have been fatal to expert marksmanship, as the sight could be thrown out of alignment by the slightest pressure.

At the first County Championship Meeting in 1909 the leading scores were as follows:—

25 yards — H. Knott (Gas Works)	97
50 " — F. W. Cox (Abbey)	94
Time-Limit (25 yds.) — J. Uttridge (Lensfield)	91.
Ditto (50 yds.) — G. Bowyer (Lensfield)	93.
Hammond Cup — Abbey "A" 362 ex 400.	
Lord Lieutenant's Cup (deliberate and Time Limit) — Lensfield "A" 1769 ex 2000.	

There was no shooting at any distance greater than 50 yards at this Meeting.

Dress.

The writer has seen a photograph of a group of shooters taken at the Second County Championship Meeting. Seated in the centre is Major Oliver Papworth, a jovial figure with a sweeping beard, reminiscent of the photographs of W. G. Grace. The photograph shows that the dress of the day for such occasions was best lounge suits, high starched collars and ties, cloth caps, straw boaters and even bowler hats.

The First Woman.

This photograph (one of the earliest to be taken in the County Miniature Rifle Movement) is doubly valuable in that it depicts among those present a Miss Tabor (Bell R.C.), the first woman to shoot in a County Championship Miniature Rifle Meeting. Miss Tabor was the women's "pioneer," and a very good shot by all accounts.

The Oldest Clubs.

There is a great mass of newspaper cuttings available reporting at very considerable length the Championship Meetings, Inter-Club and League Matches, and the like, but, unfortunately for posterity, only a few of these contain the years or dates of issue.

For this reason it has been found rather difficult to submit an accurate list of Clubs taking part in the earlier years of Phase One, but it is clear that far and away the two oldest established Clubs now existing are Abington and the Gas Company.

ABINGTON R.C.

This Club was formed in 1906 and affiliated to the National Association in May, 1906. A perusal of the Treasurer's book of those days shows that 10/- was paid to the County Association to cover Entrance and Affiliation Fees in March, 1909. In subsequent years there are entries showing 5/- having been paid to the County Association.

