

## THE ORIGINAL AIM OF THE NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Upon formation on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1859

For the encouragement of Volunteer Rifle Corps and the promotion of rifle shooting throughout Great Britain.

### PUBLISHED STATEMENT OF THE CHAIRMAN

Upon the foundation of the National Rifle Association

The aims of the Association were publicised through the columns of *The Times*, and on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1859, the following letter from Lord Elcho was published:

Sir, - As many of the letters which the Committee of the National Rifle Association daily receive show considerable misapprehension as to its nature and objects, the Committee hope that, for the sake of the public convenience, and in the interest of the Rifle movement, which you have done so much to promote, you will find a place in your columns for a short explanatory statement on the subject.

The Association is formed for the purpose of encouraging the volunteer movement, and fostering a taste for Rifle shooting; but it does not propose to do so, as many would appear to think, by in any way aiding or assisting in the formation of Rifle Corps; it does not intend to draw up any rules for their guidance; neither does it presume to offer advice, or undertake to give information on matters connected with the organisation, management, discipline, arms or accoutrements, dress, &c., of Volunteer Corps; and there is no idea of making the Association a kind of court of appeal in cases where any differences of opinion may exist. It is, no doubt, desirable that there should be some recognised central authority to whom reference might be made, and from whom information might be obtained on all such matters. But it appears to the Committee that they do not come within the province of the Association, and that the only proper authority on such questions is the department of the War Office, which has been especially devoted to the volunteer service.

Having said this much in explanation of what the National Rifle Association does not propose to do, let me now shortly state what its nature and objects really are.

The National Association is formed “for the encouragement of Volunteer Rifle Corps, and the promotion of Rifle-shooting throughout Great Britain” by raising funds for the establishment of a great annual national meeting for Rifle-shooting, similar to the “Tir Fédéral”, which takes place every two years in Switzerland, at which prizes will be competed for. The principal prizes will be opened only to enrolled effective volunteers, and it is thus that encouragement will be given to the volunteer movement: but, at the same time, with a view to promote Rifle-shooting as a national pastime and custom, it is proposed likewise to establish prizes which will be open to all comers, whether volunteers or not.

It is further intended that the Association should embrace Scotland as well as England in its operations; and that, following the example of the Royal Agricultural Society, it should hold its annual meetings in different towns in the United Kingdom. The first

meeting will be in the neighbourhood of London, and it is proposed that it should take place the second week in July.

Such, shortly, are the nature and objects of the Association. It has been formed in the belief that something of this kind will be necessary to give permanence to the volunteer force, and to render it, as it ought to be, part and parcel of our institutions, for, when once a large volunteer force has been organised, and the present excitement on the question of national defence has subsided there is danger of our becoming lukewarm on the subject, and again relapsing into the state of fancied security from which we have recently happily been roused. Nothing, therefore, it appears to the promoters of the Association, is more likely to keep up these Corps, and to nationalise in this country a taste for Rifle-shooting, than the creative spirit of rivalry and emulation, such as a great and annual gathering of prize shooting could not fail to call forth. We see the good effect of such meetings in Switzerland, for the best Rifle shots flock from all parts of the "Tir Fédéral", where a truly patriotic feeling prevails, and a national brotherhood in arms is established. The taste for Rifle-shooting is thus thoroughly nationalised; it penetrates into the remotest valleys, and the natural fastness of that small country, thus garrisoned by a people trained to arms, become the home and stronghold of a nation in the enjoyment of the utmost political freedom, though surrounded by despotic Governments. In our own country, archery was formerly the chief national pastime, and therein lay the nation's strength and security. What the bow was in former times, the rifle now should be. Competition is the life and soul of our national sports. How long would cricket flourish without "Lords", or horse racing without "The Derby"? We want, then to encourage volunteers and Rifle-shooting in Great Britain by establishing an annual "Rifle Derby"; but this cannot be done without money; the number of prizes and their value will necessarily depend on the number of those who join the Association, and on the amount of donations.

At the "Tir Fédéral" at Zurich, in 1895, the total value of the prizes shot for amounted to £10,000. Let it not be said that the people of Great Britain are less liberal and patriotic than the Swiss.

I remain, your obedient servant,

ELCHO

*(On behalf of the Committee).*

23, St James's Place,  
London  
December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1859