

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Bisley General Meeting

Minutes of the Bisley General Meeting

held in the Umbrella Tent, Bisley
on Wednesday 16th July 2014 from 9.00pm.

Present:

Chairman:	Mr J Webster
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Vice Chairman General Council	Mr J Warburton
Members:	200 Registered and other Members

BISLEY GENERAL MEETING

Notice of the Bisley General Meeting

The notice of the Meeting was taken as read.

ITEM 1 - SPEECHES

The Speech of the Chairman is attached hereto and initialled by the Chairman.

ITEM 2 - OPEN FORUM

ITEM - 3 – QUALIFYING SCORE HM THE QUEENS PRIZE, STAGE I

There is a tie for first place with a score of 105.19v between Mr TA Ringer of the Uppingham Veterans Rifle Club and Mr FWA Coetzee of South Africa.

The last score qualifying for Stage II is 102.12v, finishing 34.5v at 600 yards and 34.3v at 500 yards.

Chairman

Proceedings

Chairman

Welcome to the Bisley General Meeting of 2014.

I am joined here on the rostrum by John Warburton, the Vice-Chairman of General Council, Derek Lowe, our Treasurer, Andrew Mercer, our Chief Executive, and Peter Hobson, one of our longest serving Trustees.

Before we start proceedings, it is my sad duty to remind you that we have recently lost two distinguished Vice Presidents of our Association. Many of you will already know that Ms Liliane Stewart passed away earlier this year. She was a massive supporter of our sport, financially as well as spiritually, and did much to foster the strong relationship between the DCRA and ourselves. She will be much missed on both sides of the Atlantic.

I am also sad to report that Arthur Clarke passed away 10 days ago on the eve of the Match Rifle meeting. As well as being a trusted gunsmith to many, he was twice a winner of the Grand Aggregate (doing so in successive years, 1979 and 1980 – he also won the Silver Cross in 1985), and he won the individual full-bore Gold Medal at the 1982 Commonwealth Games, remarkably in his 60th year. A masterful wind coach, he pioneered many of the target coaching techniques that GB teams still use today and that were so effective in reviving the fortunes of GB teams after a long period without success, by winning the Palma matches of 1992 and 1995, when he was main coach of the GB team. He represented Scotland 32 times in the National and Mackinnon matches and Great Britain 19 times in the Australia, Palma and Kolapore matches, including captaining the GB Kolapore team in 1992. He shot in 16 Queen's Finals, and won 15 Grand Aggregate crosses, including those mentioned already. He also won the Hopton in 1991. In addition to this, he was, in Jane Austen's inimitable words, "the kindest and best of men".

Could I please ask you to join me in a moment of silence in memory of these two great contributors to our sport, to Bisley, and to our Association? Thank you.

And so to business.

I would particularly like to welcome all our Vice-Presidents who have either been here, are here or are coming here. I would particularly like to welcome those from overseas: Robert Chombart and Philippe Ginestet from France, Norris Gomez from Trinidad, and Cliff Mallett from Jersey. I would also like to wish Stan Frost from Canada a speedy recovery from his recent surgery.

Moving on to competitions:

We started several weeks ago with the Service Rifle events, which were supported by overseas teams from Canada and Oman and some 160 competitors took part.

The winners of Her Majesty the Queen's Medals were: for the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, Air Engineering Technician Fisher, Royal Marines; for the Army Reserve, Lance Corporal DJ Alexander, 253 Northern Ireland Medical Regiment; for the Army, Sgt Sanjeep Rai, 2nd Royal Gurkha Rifles, for the Royal Air Force, Corporal RKL Jamieson of the RAF Regiment who retained the title. The prize giver was Major General PNYM Sanders CBE DSO Assistant Chief of Defence Staff Operations.

The Methuen Trophy Inter Corps Team Shoot was won by the Army Reserve.

Civilian Service Rifle, which runs alongside the Service Rifle events, opened the 2014 Imperial with the first shot taking place on 25th June. 2014 saw 119 competitors shoot over 5 days, culminating in the prestigious NRA Methuen Cup Match, which was retained by The Highpower Rifle Association, with London Practical Shooting Club "A" Team again coming second, and Pennine Shooting Sports Association third.

The individual winners were James Geering who won the Historic, George Ellis who won the Iron, Adrian Newberry who won the Practical and Peter Cottrell who won the Service Optic. The overall winner of the 2014 NRA Military Adaptive Championships this year was L/Cpl W Reeks, 2nd Royal Tank Regiment.

The Inter-Services Cadet Rifle Meeting was very successful; there were 558 cadets attending from 110 teams, including the Royal Canadian Army Cadet National Rifle Team. The winning team in the Team Grand Aggregate was 1344 (Cardiff) Sqn ATC with a score of 916.045 and Sgt Chloe Jones, 1344 (Cardiff) Sqn ATC won the Bossom, the individual prize, with a score of 243.16. The prizes were presented by Major General RMB Nitsch M.B.E. General Officer Commanding Support Command.

At the Schools' Meeting there were 48 teams (2013: 50) including those from Canada and Australia, and there were 696 cadets (2013: 540). 38 schools participated in the Ashburton Shield which was won by Wellington College with a score of 755 including a 99 from Sgt O Graziosi, beating Epsom College into second place by 17 points. Prizes were presented by Major General Ian Dale, Chairman of CCRS.

The Historic Arms Meeting was run by Peter Cottrell (Match Director) with the invaluable assistance of CROs Steve Dean, Tony Cattermole and Ian Gunning, and aided by volunteers to whom we owe our thanks. There were 103 competitors, a little down on last year, who fired 401 match cards. Cadets from 211 ATC (Newbury) acted as markers and performed to their usual high standard. Judging by favourable reports from competitors the weekend seems to have gone well.

Turning to Match Rifle, the Hopton was won by Rob Lygoe, beating Ted Hobbs by ten points on 1003 with 129 V bulls. Nick Tremlett won the Albert, the last shoot in the Hopton, with the score of 221-31 without sighters.

The Elcho was won by England, beating Scotland by 36 points, in very testing conditions particularly at 1200 yards. The medals were presented at a separate MR prize giving by the Earl of Wemyss and March, together with his son, Lord Elcho.

Overall Target Rifle entries show an increase on last year. The Grand Aggregate has 856 entries (2013: 828). With the Commonwealth Games immediately following this meeting, there are a number of individuals and teams from overseas including Australia, Canada, Falkland Islands, France, Germany, Guernsey, Guyana, Jamaica, Jersey, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and Trinidad & Tobago. Encouragingly it seems that domestic entries (i.e. UK based competitors) for TR only (i.e. not including F-Class) are up year on year by 9%, and many of the concurrent Aggregates show an increase of between 10% and 20% on the same basis.

Perhaps most encouraging of all is that the entry to the Young Rifleman's aggregate is up by 46% from 98 to 134. My thanks to Bill Richards for this analysis. Our oldest competitor is 91 and the youngest is 14.

The Imperial Gallery Rifle meeting had 91 competitors, which was slightly up on last year. The number of cards sold was just over 1,000 which produced an increase of 10% of takings. Our thanks go to those who helped organise this very enjoyable and relaxed event.

This is the last year of the current RUAG contract, and I think you will all agree that the ammunition has performed well over the past few days. However, this raises the prospect at least of a change going forward. We had a discussion at the AGM in June about the viability of introducing hand-loads into NRA competitions. At that time, I ventured to suggest that any decision about this – and I confirm that no decision has yet been reached – must balance the requirements of ‘inclusivity’ on the one hand – notably the younger shooters – which might favour a factory-loaded solution, versus ‘affordability’ on the other hand – which favours hand loading. Your Council will be giving this very careful consideration over the coming months and I am pleased to say that there appear to be a number of viable options open to us.

Mention of ammunition brings me to the so-called ‘Rule 150’ issue. Council and General Council have agreed a protocol to sort this out as follows:

A series of tests to establish if working pressures are dangerously compromised when using issued ammo when free-bore (aka ‘jump’) is reduced by degrees to zero. These tests will be conducted by the Proof Master of the Birmingham Proof House and his team.

A review of the process by which Rule 150 evolved to its present form as written in the Bisley Bible to be conducted by an independent QC.

A review of claims made that the NRA might have acted illegally. This will also be conducted by an independent QC, but different from the one above.

As all these are ongoing at present, it will be difficult for me to answer any specific questions on these issues, but you can rest assured that each is being conducted properly by a truly independent person.

As I mentioned at the AGM, our financial circumstances are very much improved. The hand-to-mouth existence of previous years have obviously left us with a back-log of maintenance arrears which need to be addressed. Of course, our new found profitability brings its own complications, particularly what is a fair and reasonable surplus for an organisation such as our own. This requires us to balance affordability of shooting and ancillary activities with profitability and with fairness to others – whilst always keeping an eye on protecting our heritage and future survival. This is a complicated judgement to make, and we will all have differing views. Please rest assured that the Trustees are keeping this very much in mind as we progress.

Please also be aware that we are doing more with less. After all, this is often how businesses are turned from loss to surplus. Over the past three years, staff costs at the NRA as a percentage of turnover have fallen from 46% to 30%. Not only have they fallen in relative terms, they have also fallen meaningfully in real terms. This will mean that some things won’t get done the way they used to be done.

It also means that our key staff’s time is a scarce resource that needs to be managed and protected if we are going to pass these savings onto you as members and shooters. That is the goal to which we are working.

An enormous amount of work has been done by Trustees and staff – past as well as present – to get us to this much improved state of affairs. It remains very much a key focus that we do not backslide from here.

We wish all the best on Friday to Dick Rosling with his Kolapore team, and to Matthew Charlton and his team to Canada and the USA next month. May I also wish all members and friends of the Association who are competing at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games all the very best of luck in Scotland.

Now to my thank you's to those who have worked very hard over the last 4 weeks of competitions.

To the Operational Shooting Training Team who produced military range teams and the MoD and Landmarc teams at Pirbright.

To the Bisley 'V' Club and Mick Barr in particular, for holding their annual long range match for the cadets. This is much appreciated and gives the cadets a rare opportunity to shoot at 900 and 1000 yards. It is proposed that this match be renamed "The Arthur Clarke" going forward as it was his brainchild in the first instance as President of the Bisley V Club.

To Maj Simon Fraser and CCRS in their support of the cadets with both ISCRM and Schools.

To our Chief Range Officers, Tony Clayton on Stickledown and Peter Turner on Century.

To our Chief of Staff, Mike Turner, Chief Butt Officers, Colin Scoles on Century and Jack Evans on Stickledown, and all the RCOs and Butt supervisors who have kept things going for us. Our sincere thanks also goes to all the markers who have done a sterling job in all the butts.

To the staff who have prepared the Camp and Ranges. I do hope you continue to see an improvement in the facilities here at Bisley.

To Ted Molyneux and his team of volunteers who have opened the Museum.

I would also like to thank the front counter team for ensuring everyone had their squadding cards on time, the Stats team who have produced all the results, the Range Office and Armoury staff who have ensured the ranges run smoothly, as well as all those working diligently behind the scenes to ensure a successful Imperial Meeting for all.

Before I open the meeting to questions and comments from the floor, I would like to call upon Tony de Launay to give us the results of the General Council elections. Before I do, you should all note that we have received a dozen or so applications to become a co-opted Trustee. I am very encouraged by this. We will be screening these applications into a short list for interview over the next few weeks.

I would also like to thank Tony and Paul Charlton, who acted as scrutineers for this election. We had a very large turnout and they worked long hours to get us these results.

Tony de Launay

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Paul Charlton and I accepted the request of the NRA to act as scrutineers and supervisors at the count of ballot papers for the 2014 NRA General Council Election. Given that there were 13 candidates for 5 places we anticipated that the count could be a lengthy and intricate

task. In the event the size of the response to the ballot meant that a team of six persons, including ourselves, spent an aggregate of some 33 hours on the task.

At the start I wish to pay tribute to Georgina Thatcher and her team, Richard Blackmore, Mandy Haughton and Chris Dyers for their diligence and application. Paul Charlton's forensic accounting skills were invaluable in setting up basic check totals from which we were able to validate the count and cross-check to resolve any queries or apparent mismatches in our final totals.

We are both satisfied that the ballot papers were sent out with clear instructions for their completion and return. We are satisfied that the voting envelopes were kept safely and that none had been opened before the count. We are also satisfied that the count was carried out in a fair and thorough manner. We saw no evidence of any mis-use of papers that required any specific investigation.

6950 papers were sent out and 1896 returned - a 27% return.

Of the total number of voting papers, we discarded six as spoiled before any counting took place. Under our supervision the papers were separated into stacks of 5, 4, 3, 2 and one votes marked on the paper. From this we were able to produce check totals, amounting to a total of 8497 votes cast. We give you this information to demonstrate our approach to the count. We then carried out the count using pre-prepared recording sheets. The process took from 2pm to just before 8pm last night.

I will now ask Paul if he has any comment that he would like to make.

Paul Charlton

The result of the Election is clear. However it was close.

We, the scrutineers, considered the processes that took place during the count and also assessed the risk of error. We also tested the count process so as to ensure that the result is an accurate record of the votes validly and clearly cast.

The counting task was undertaken in almost silence as much of our attention was taken up by the process of scheduling the batches of votes so that the result is incapable of significant error.

Despite the closeness of the votes cast for some of the candidates we believe the result is a true reflection thereof.

It is perhaps a reflection on the strength of the qualities of all the candidates that the result was so close.

Now back to Tony for the result.

Tony de Launay

Result starting with the highest number of votes cast:

John Bloomfield	1046
David Calvert	979
David Crispin	797
Stephen McDowell	774
George Gilpin	672

These five are elected as members of the NRA General Council. The remaining votes polled were:

Ian Thomson	667
Steve East	667
Martin Farnan	666
John Morgan-Hosey	641
Jonathan Tapster	463
Steve Wallis	421
Alan Wragg	393
Martin Osment	311

That is a total of 8497 votes cast and that concludes the results of the election.

Questions from the floor

Brian Taylor, Army Target Shooting Club & North London

In your opening address you paid tribute to a number of people, sadly no longer with us and other people here, but I think bearing in mind the shooting infliction called deafness, I think you're missing one important person who was going to be presenting prizes on Saturday in the form of John Fitzgerald, the Chairman of the National Rifle Association of Australia, who sadly is still in Frimley Park Hospital.

Chairman

Thank you Brian. In my remarks I was referring to our Vice Presidents: John is not a Vice President of the NRA. But you are kind to mention this. John's been a great friend of this Association. John was to have been our prize giver for Saturday. He has sadly been indisposed with a flare up of his arthritis in his knee. I'm pleased to tell you that Bernard de Beer, who is the Chairman of SABU, is going to stand in his stead. There is still an outside chance that 'Fitzy' will be able to join us, but I think it is an increasingly outside chance.

Brian, thank you for that. He's not a Vice President, but he's a worthy friend.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

I would like to know why it's not possible during the main meeting to have the Annual General Meeting which is when the majority of members I'm sure are on site and why does it have to be held two or three weeks beforehand, when so many people who would like to attend, probably can't make it?

Chairman

Thank you for that. I am not sure what I'm about to say is entirely accurate, so please take it as what I think is the answer to your question, but I would like to have it researched and corrected if it's wrong.

I believe under the Charity Commissions we are bound to hold our Annual General Meeting and produce our annual report within 6 months of the close of the financial year end, which is the end of June. We tend to coincide the AGM with what we think is the most populous NRA sponsored competition at that time which is the Inter-Counties.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

If that's the case, could I just ask what the attendance was at the AGM?

Chairman

I don't happen to have that figure to hand, but believe it was about 70.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

I suspect that there are more than 70 people here and if the stumbling block is simply to do with the financial year, it's relatively easy to change that and I would suggest that it should be done so that the AGM is held during the main meeting when the majority of members are present.

(Round of applause)

Chairman

I'm totally happy to take this under advisement and maybe a comment from some more learned gentlemen than me.

Paul Charlton, Stock Exchange Rifle Club (and also a Chartered Accountant)

I believe the meeting is part of the Charter and it can't be to do with the year end because the yearend moved from September to December about 12 years ago.

Chairman

Fair enough. Neville, thank you for raising the point. There is a gentleman with a comment at the back so let's hear that.

Guy Trembath, Northern Member of General Council

This is something I raised in absentia a couple of years ago and I wholeheartedly support Neville's motion here. There are a number of people who can't get down to the Inter-Counties, the Northern regions in particular, and I guess this is the meeting when the greatest number of TR members are here. We should move it. It is scheduled too, I think, in our constitution so we just need to put it in place to do that, and I suggest we do it.

Chairman

Let us remember everybody that there are 7,500 members of this Association, less than half are TR shooters. There are other people who are engaged, so while it might sound like a good idea to us who are predominantly a TR audience, I think we should take it into consideration that the other members of the Association should also have a similar say.

But thank you Neville, Guy and others for raising this and let us take it under advisement.

Any other questions?

Brian Taylor, ATSC & North London

First of all, if I give you a little bit about my background you might understand the question.

I'm ex-Army, chartered civil engineer in the Army and when I left the Army I moved into a difficult business which is basically Human Resources in the construction industry, so I have a strong feel for the human resources.

Now, a lot of people don't know what human resources is, they don't understand the role they have to play in many businesses and things, but they actually are important to businesses because they keep the lawyers at bay! Employment lawyers, because over the last 20 or 30 years, there's been so much employment legislation introduced by assorted governments, it doesn't matter what colour they are, it is coming from all different directions and Human Resources, one of their primary things is to try and keep the lawyers at bay. But it is also to look after the interests of employees and look after the interests of the employers and they sit on the fence between the two.

Now my question is, I think the General Council here is a hugely unwieldy, not very useful organisation. There are far too many people co-opted, ex-officio, and voted members. Clearly the NRA is really run by the Trustees and the Chief Executive. My question is, what plans are there to put in place how the Trustees and Chief Executive are assessed on their performance? I'm talking collectively, but individually?

(Round of applause)

Chairman

You are absolutely correct that the power within this organisation lies with the Trustee body. Council is pretty much all powerful. Charles (*Brooks*), please correct me if I wander off the reservation here, as the author of our updated constitution.

The General Council in its make-up is to advise Council on various issues and it obviously is beholden upon the members of Council to listen to General Council. It is also important to remember that the members of General Council have a say as to who serves on Council, particularly my position, (*Chairman*) and the position of Treasurer. And there are three members of General Council who are ex-officio Trustees. It is also part of our constitution as written currently, that at least one of the Trustees must be co-opted and although it's not explicit, it seems to me in reading of the constitution that that means that somebody needs to come from outside General Council, if you like to act as a balance.

You ask about performance and objectives. With respect to the Chief Executive, the Chief Executive's line manager is the Vice Chairman. At the moment, we do not have a Vice Chairman because as the process of actually asking for a full complement of Trustees is only just coming to an end, it was decided by the members of Council that we would look at the full complement of 11 or 12 people who are sitting on Council and pick therefrom a suitable Vice Chairman who then becomes the line manager of the Chief Executive.

At the moment because I was your erstwhile Vice Chairman, I remain the Chief Executive's line manager. He has a series of objectives, they are embedded in a strategy, but we do not necessarily set out objectives in specific detail with 1 to 5 scales of accomplishment. There are avenues through which I will learn and/or he will learn whether he is performing well or badly.

With respect to the Trustees and their relationship with Council, it has been our view that we are only now in a position to have the luxury to do these type of things without the pressure of a more hand to mouth existence. The General Council effectively should have a much better understanding of what each of the Trustees do and why. So at each General Council meeting going forward, there will be a bio on each of the Trustees, because quite often they change, and also there will be an opportunity for each of the Trustees to present, those who are not necessarily well known to the General Council, to present on an issue on which they are working, and they can get feedback right there and then.

So clearly, there is an opportunity with Council and General Council for feedback to flow both ways, as to how well each of those Trustees is performing in their job.

Does that answer your question? We could make it more formal, but we are not sure that we have the capabilities yet to do that.

Brian Taylor, ATSC & North London

Thank you John. I'm not familiar to the Charities Commission Law and things like that, but obviously that is an important governing aspect of how the Trustees perform, but with all due respect, I'm not sure that Council and the General Council have the people necessarily there or able to properly assess them and I think it needs, I think the Trustees need to have more outsiders amongst them who are non-shooting people who are able to assess how they are performing. I think the NRA Council, General Council is too much of a club and it is a status symbol for some people. I accept there are many people on General Council who work very hard and do a fantastic job, but I have a feeling, and I know this is shared with others, that there is a lot of people who think it's a club and it's a badge to wear because they have been voted onto General Council and some of them, I don't think necessarily, do as well as maybe they could. So I am worried that maybe Trustees are not properly monitored and vetted in terms of their performance.

(Round of applause)

Chairman

I hear the applause and I worry that people think that some of your Trustees are not behaving in the way that they should be behaving. That concerns me a little, not least because there is a lot of hard work that gets done. I'd be perfectly happy to stand up and have a series of robust conversations about what is done and what is not done, and why it's done the way it's done.

Let us take it under advisement. I think the design of Council and General Council quite clearly had this in mind. There are quite a lot of advisors who will come and do an enormous amount of work with Trustees and with General Council, and we have had a presentation on this very issue. You should know that that nearly all of your Trustees, since that presentation, have been to a refresher course with a firm of solicitors to help them be reminded of their obligations as Trustees and what "for public benefit" actually means, and what they should and should not be doing.

So we are moving into a phase where we want to be better educated about what we are doing. But I'm very mindful of the fact that we've only just got past a very difficult financial period and regulators sometimes make an awful lot of work which is actually not necessarily for the benefit of anybody else but providing information to the regulators.

I've worked in regulated industries my entire life, and at its best, regulation is best done by guidelines and by behaviour of the people inside, rather than from the outside. That's a personal view.

But let's take a look at it. We would like to advance in this direction for sure, so I'm not closed to the idea.

Brian Taylor, ATSC & North London

Last thing. I don't want to actually give the impression that I'm getting at the Trustees. I'm just concerned that the NRA has gone over a very turbulent period over the last 5, 6, 10 years almost and I would like to see that we move out of that and move forward. I'm not trying to get at any individual or collective Trustees, but I am concerned that performance management is something which is very important and I would like just to feel comfortable that the Trustees are being looked at very closely to make sure that we, as an Association, are being well managed.

Chairman

I wholeheartedly endorse that and we can probably sit down and talk about how to do that better.

Peter Hobson

I'm Peter Hobson, I'm one of the longest standing Trustees and was part of the team, under Robin Pizer, that turned the NRA around to our profitable situation at the moment, and I can tell you it was humbling to join that group of people. There were some incredible talent on there who gave their time unbelievably selflessly to turn what was a dreadful situation for us all and the future of our Association.

We all brought skills to it, some had more skills than others in various areas, but we've got a fairer and equitable Association now than we had three years ago. We've got a profitable NRA now, better managed, thanks to Andrew and his team, which was brought in by the Trustees to see that we go forward with a really positive legacy for the future. We've made a lot of mistakes. It's natural in a changing environment. We've also got rid of a body which actually, no matter what you said here, or what the General Council said, or even what the Trustees wanted to do, they could do what they wanted. That has gone. Those times are behind us. We must look to the future.

The people who have served on the board of Trustees and have now left, their time is up, you owe a great debt of gratitude to. The future Trustees that come on board will have a better idea of where to take us, a more positive way forward with funds to do it, and I don't regret my time as a Trustee as busy as it's been, and as difficult at times as it's been. It isn't all roses in there.

I think you perhaps don't understand what has gone on over the past 3 or 4 years. We've paid our debts – we owe no money – we are in profit. We can change shooting for the better. We can go for cheaper shooting, bring our cadets in, drop or reduce membership fees. All of this is possible now.

We have the General Council. You may not hold them in high regard and you may feel that it's a badge of honour. But they also actually have quite a bit of power. I'm elected by General Council to serve on the board of Trustees and I feel that the vote they gave me to represent them was well thought out and certainly well deserved. I think I have served them well, I think my other Trustees have served you exceptionally well.

I take your comments perhaps a communication issue is what's wrong here. It certainly isn't for the work that your Trustees have done on your behalf.

The new Trustees will come in, bring new ideas, new energy, new direction perhaps, and I welcome it. We have a lot to be grateful for. We were going down the pan. Now we have a future – a strong future – a strong financial future, a strong sporting future. And that's for the board of Trustees and your General Council who appointed some of them.

(Round of applause)

Chairman

Any further questions or comments from the floor?

Paul Charlton, Stock Exchange Rifle Club

My question is regarding the facilities for Section 5 pistols. After the Olympics, Bisley became the only place in this country where the GB Pistol teams could practice on a Section 5 range. What plans does the NRA have to bring those facilities up to international standards?

Chief Executive

I think it's a very important part of the work we are doing. The more observant of you who've been down to Cheylsmore Range will know that that range is finally now being brought back into action.

The full bore pistol shooting that currently takes place on Melville is part of what we do. I think having those facilities at Chelysmore range properly set up for the pistol shooting that you describe is something that the work is ongoing. We have commissioned a series of work to repair the stop butt, to double up the sleeper walls as a boundary and to put in new targetry specifically for and targeted at providing facilities for pistol shooting disciplines.

Paul Charlton, Stock Exchange Rifle Club

Would that be traffic lights targetry or turning targetry?

Chief Executive

As I understand it, the Olympic pistol people require traffic light targetry, so we've got one bay, I think, of 6 targets we are planning to be specifically designed for the Olympic pistol team. The other targetry I think is going to be turning and possibly some advancing as well.

Charlie Kennish, Isle of Man and Middlesex

Can you explain why there's a lack of trade tents on the range this year?

Chief Executive

Firstly I think we made a bit of a fish of selling trade stand space this year. We looked at the charges that were levied at trade exhibitors last year which were pretty woeful. Our endeavours to get people to pay the modest fees that were charged were also not terribly successful.

So we went at it slightly clumsily. And I think we need to review what we learnt. What we learnt was that the traders generally claim poverty and claim that the business that they yield from Bisley is very modest and I think we need to work hard to bring sufficient paying punters, paying customers to their doors to justify their being here.

So I think to be honest, we didn't cover ourselves in glory. Just as an aside, the fee that we charged last year was £40 per pitch per day, which in anybody's terms is incredibly modest. We quoted a figure that was wrong, we went back and quoted £44 per day and still had very limited takers.

I think to be frank, we need to revisit what we are trying to achieve with trade stands. Is it effectively to bolster and enhance the improved experience? I think that's probably the priority. Gaining significant remuneration I think perhaps ought to be a lesser requirement in future.

(Round of applause)

Charlie Kennish, Isle of Man and Middlesex

Unfortunately those who live further away from Bisley, Isle of Man or Scotland, they are limited as to what they can get off the shelf. So the more the better I think. Certain facilities here do charge a premium above and beyond.

Simon Cox, Chairman of CCRS Schools Committee

I'm just concerned about future dates for the Imperial Meeting and implications for the schools. I believe in the past that the NRA have just made these decisions, not communicating with exam boards to check that the schools meeting is not too long after the end of school's terms. Certainly schools are concerned that there will be too long a gap, particularly overseas pupils, where if it's more than a week after the end of school term, will have gone and not come back.

I ask that whoever makes these decisions and updates should consult with the exam boards to find the future dates and make sure that it's a convenient programme and that we don't lose schools.

Chairman

Thank you. We have recently taken a decision at Council to try and regularise the dates of the Queen's Final from which everything would then fall. My analysis of this is that we're damned if we do and damned if we don't, partially because private schools and the non-private schools break up at different times. We've got a real issue as to whether we keep the cadets that we've got or we seek to keep or open it up to a bunch of other cadets who we don't know much about. So it's a very complex issue, we have not set any foot down this path without consulting very heavily with the CCRS and Simon Fraser in particular.

I know some stuff has come up recently so we may have to revisit the decision that we've taken, but thank you for bringing it up.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

Sorry, it's me again! I'll put my other hat on, as well as being City of Newcastle Rifle Club I'm also the Cadet Shooting Officer for 15 Brigade. There is a big problem with the cadets who are in the state schools system. Public schools finish their terms sooner, the majority of state schools don't actually finish until this Friday.

So all of the cadets that I have here, and I have 15 from my brigade shooting the meeting, have had to have special permission to have time off school, which is becoming increasingly difficult to get. I usually manage it by writing to the Heads of the schools and telling them well why shouldn't we take school pupils because they're disadvantaged compared to the public schools and that normally does the trick.

However, I think what needs to happen is that the NRA should be in communication with the Department of Education and they need to have this recognised in some way as an approved sporting event, or something which is on the educational calendar which will then make it easier for people who are applying for leave of absence for cadets to come and shoot, that they can refer to and point to it and say it is an approved activity.

Last year, I believe there was something like 250 cadets shot the Imperial, which was approximately a quarter of the entry. I don't know what the number is this year, but I would be surprised if it was very different. I think it's very, very important that the NRA recognises the number of cadets that are shooting the meeting and takes that into account and dates when the meeting falls are important, but as far as the cadets from the state schools system are concerned, it is always going to be during term time.

There needs to be some work done there to make it possible for us to continue, because it is getting more and more difficult to get time off. I had one cadet from Cleveland whose school would not give her permission to come and shoot the meeting and threatened to sue her parents, or fine her parents £60 per day if she came. I think this is going to spread if we're not careful so there needs to be some work done there to pave the way for our cadets in future.

(Round of applause)

Chairman

Great suggestion, thank you very much.

Dietra Kimpton, HPS Target Rifle Ltd

I'd like to comment to the gentleman from the Isle of Man, one of the traders here, and I'd like to correct some figures because one particular trader that isn't here actually spoke to us on the phone. Yes it was £41 per day plus VAT originally, but it went up to £216 a day plus VAT. No we're not claiming poverty, but please may I remind all the membership that we come down here, we have to travel, we have to feed ourselves, we have to get our accommodation. And I'm sorry but there are not the same numbers of people going through things like the CLA Game Fair where you get 30,000 people coming on a daily basis and different faces.

We come here because we want to support the shooters, and I wholly back you up – there are people that cannot get things, it's so difficult now to send primers and powder – you cannot put those things in the post. The charges are exorbitant now so this is the only place for people that do come from far and wide can actually get their supplies and go home with them and not have to worry about postage and packing.

CLA Fair, 30,000 people, I'd be happy to pay £216 per day plus VAT. But I'm sorry this is Bisley Camp, how many people are here? We've got 1000 shooters, 1200 shooters, not all of them are going to shop through us, and some of them are going to go to another supplier, that's fine. But this is the same 1200 people that we have seen now for the last 3 weeks.

There's only so much money you can spend, as much as we try and coerce it out of you when you do come into our shop! But I'd like to remind the NRA that I think their job is to support the shooters and give them what they need.

(hear hear – round of applause)

And we can all win in this bargain. If we have more traders on this camp, more people will come to Bisley, more people will use the ranges, and more people will go to the clubs and use their facilities and stay overnight because the clubs are also suffering. I'm not going to get on that bandwagon, but we all know the trouble that they're having with rentals. You cannot bleed a stone, I'm sorry, thank you.

(round of applause)

Chairman

I think Andrew was pretty clear. We made an error with Norman Clarke ... let's be clear, we know who we are talking about....Norman Clarke was made an offer in error and it was a mistake, and Andrew has said it was a mistake.

But note we have to be fair to everybody. If we give away pitches to people, Fulton's can't make money – do you think that's fair to Fulton's? So let's be balanced regarding some of the comments that we have about these issues.

It's very important that we are fair to everybody; absolutely important. And that is an overriding ambition of your Trustees. We will make mistakes. I mentioned in my speech that we are trying to navigate a way as to what an appropriate surplus after losing nearly £1M over the last 5 years. We've got some work to do on camp, we have some reserves to put by for a rainy day so we do not backslide, and we have to make sure that everybody pays their fair whack, so we can make it affordable and fair to *all* 7,500 members; *all* 7,500 members.

The NRA doesn't belong to the people in this room and the TR community. It belongs to all of them. We have three main drivers of income in this organisation. We have membership, we have accommodation which is broadly speaking the NRA acting as a landlord, and we have range hire. Range hire year on year is up 80%, 80 percent in financial terms. These ranges are busy and they are going to get busier because of the MoD in their wisdom, are closing ranges to access for people like us, not least because they are changing the structure of the armed forces from 100,000 full-time soldiers to 80,000, and 10,000 part-time soldiers to 30,000. And those guys are going to have to shoot somewhere, and most of that time is going to be on the weekend when we want to shoot. So the pressure on these ranges here is going to grow.

I get complaints that we are being unfair to clubs in particular by putting up their rents. The Bisley club membership of the total NRA membership is a minority. The clubs must understand that if they want to get busier as the NRA gets busier, they've got to start thinking about getting the folks who hire the ranges into their clubs to spend their money. Their pound note is just as good as a pound note from the TR community. So we must think about getting the best out of the asset that we have here for all the members of the Association, and not just ourselves.

It's those types of things that we try and weigh up. Sure, with Norman Clarke we got it wrong, and it's on the record. "Norman, I'm sorry" and I wish he was here, he's been a very good supporter of the Match Rifle meetings, the Target Rifle meetings, and I genuinely hope he comes back. It was not something that we would want to repeat.

But we have to remember that for everybody that gets a bargain, the rest of us have to pay unless we want to start losing money again. So everybody who chisels away at the NRA and say "ooh I just screwed the NRA" has screwed all the other 7,499 members of this Association, and we have to pay for it, or we lose money. It's that simple.

So what we must do is make sure that we balance our books and get income from outside, commercial revenue such as the CNC, such as the MoD, so we can put some fat on our back, build better ranges here, better facilities, better facilities away from Bisley so we can have people shooting in the West Country for example. It's not lost on everybody that the Cornish Open is had to be shot as a concurrent with the Grand Aggregate because they hadn't got any access to their ranges.

So there are a lot of complicated things going on here and please be aware that we, certainly the guys that you see up here, are intensely sensitive to that when we think of how to structure things. And sure, we will make mistakes, but I hope you can give us some credit for trying at least and head in the right direction.

(Round of applause)

Ian Brown, Wandsworth Fullbore Rifle Club

Before I ask my main question, can I just comment on the last item? It seems to me at times that the Trustees have behaved a little bit like the committees of various clubs at Bisley who suddenly find themselves without a steward and panic and interview all sorts of people and get the guy they think is the right guy, and then they bog off and go shooting! And then they wonder why, a few months' down the line, things aren't going as they should.

Can I suggest that our very able Chief Executive may have been left on his own a bit too much without having being educated as to what cock-ups have been made in the past which have then been repointed because the Trustees have all bogged off and gone shooting.

However, that's not my main point!

My main point is that I'd like confirmation that the £10,000 apparently that we are spending on this Rule 150 business includes for fully independent empowered forensic IT people that can follow email trails right through to source. So that the whole matter can be brought out properly. And I'd also like to know the number of people who have been found with negative jump and who have been sent away to get their chambers reamed, how many of them have been brought before the Disciplinary Committee because they were in a clear breach of Rule 150 as currently drafted.

Thank you.

Chairman

I can confirm that the review of how Rule 150 as written is taking place and the QC who is doing it, Jean Ritchie, has given a very wide remit to get what she requires to do her job. So that's all I can confirm about that.

As far as I am aware, and I don't know the stats, I don't know who has a negative jump. So if you'd like to get the names to me, we can get them checked.

Chief Executive

We have been doing the routine testing of about 10% of the rifles that have been presented to the armoury. From memory, there's a small handful as we find every year that are sent away to be adjusted and brought back to ensure that they are compliant with Rule 150 before they are allowed to be shot at Bisley.

(The question was, what happened to these people in breach of the rules)

Chief Executive

Their rifles were presented that did not conform with the test that was made on them, and as has been the case for as many years as the test has been done, any person's rifle who fails the test, is sent away to be adjusted before shooting at Bisley.

John Carmichael, NRA Life Member

I'd just like to comment on this particular situation, as you can probably gather that I've been involved with it somewhat by raising the points.

One of the points which continually seems to get ignored in all this issue, is that there are quite a number of rifles around with severely negative jump and yes, it's absolutely correct, rifles that have been through proof have actually succeeded in getting through proof in the past because of incorrect declaration by the gunsmiths, or by the person taking them there.

But, the point that I've raised and I have actually two items of a distinct proof this year of instances where their barrels have turned up which were, in one instance, one barrel which I have in my possession because it's been taken out of a rifle, was proofed originally in 1990 and is 60 thou short of 2.8 inches, sorry 70 thou short of 2.8 inches. This has been shown to a member of the NRA staff who has confirmed it. But what's interesting about it is there is a green sticker on it, so someone has stuck a green sticker on it, and yet it patently does not pass the test.

And we have a second one that was sent up to us where there was a green sticker on it and the owner actually took it into the armoury to have it checked and it was 60 thou short and that had a modern green sticker on it.

So please can we investigate who it is that's putting stickers on guns and declaring them as being correct and proper to Rule 150 is actually brought to task by chasing those numbers.

I have been told that some of the records as to who actually was issued with the green stickers with certain numbers seem to have disappeared. Can this be investigated please and stopped for safety reasons?

(round of applause)

Chairman

We will certainly look at it.

Dietra Kimpton, HPS Target Rifle Ltd

I want to go back to the business about what you said, John, about making sure that Fulton's is taken care of. I'm sorry to ask it this way, I know Robert quite well and I know a lot of the staff in Fulton's quite well and when we used to have our tent next to the Fulton's block we

got along quite fine. We always shared. If there was something they could do that we couldn't we'd put the customer down to them, if there was something their people couldn't do, they'd put them down to us.

We've been trying to get on Bisley camp as a permanent entity for 10 years now. I won't bore you, but if you're interested and wish to join me for a drink in one of the club houses afterwards, I'll give you the long story!

But the most recent story I want to tell is the fact that we've gotten very close and an issue came up over what we would be allowed to sell, and we got to the point where we wouldn't be allowed to sell any of our powder, primers, cases, bullets or any of our ammunition. We got passed that one after a very heated discussion; I had to leave to the meeting because I was extremely upset, and we got to the point where OK, you're going to be allowed to sell all your little components and all your ammunition, but you're going to pay the NRA 12.5% of all your UK sales!

So I say again to the membership, if you want traders on this camp, if you want some permanent people on this camp, there is no reason why there can't be fair competition. It will not affect Fulton's. We do things that Fulton's doesn't do, Fulton's do things that we don't do. We need jacket makers, we need barrel makers, we need all kinds of people on this camp to service all the types of shooting that goes on, on Bisley camp. We are target rifle primarily, Fulton's does a lot of the black powder stuff, we don't touch that. What is the problem, and I address this to the entire panel, all the Trustees and everybody involved in making these decisions. Thank you.

(round of applause)

Chief Executive

I think you rather base the question as to who these commercial decisions actually suit. Dietra makes a very passionate presentation of trying to reduce the fees that they are charged to pay. She made some earlier interesting comments about an expectation of going to the Game Fair for £250 a day. I think you will find that any trade stand at the Games Fair will cost you a minimum of £5,000.

I think there needs to be an element of commercial logic. We are trying to drive up revenues for the benefit of the NRA and its overall membership. We will take that from the most appropriate cases. We are trying to reduce the burden on the paying membership. We have committed for the next 3 years to RPI or less increases on key charges to members and we are striving to drive up commercial revenues to take the pressure off of our hard pressed membership.

In terms of actually the specific commission arrangement that I proposed to HPS, that was something that I thought was fair and appropriate, because one of the revenues that the NRA enjoys and is important, is the sale of ammunition. We charge for ammunition and we sell ammunition and it accounts for about £0.5 million.

With respect, you can buy ammunition from anybody in the country, but at Bisley you have ammunition available at Fulton's without description whether you choose to buy or not to buy from the NRA's armoury. We are trying to buy ammunition as cheaply as possible, in large quantities, for fair value prices. If we are unable to achieve that, then you will have the opportunity to go and purchase your ammunition anywhere else.

The key issue for me is making sure that wherever possible, we spread the burden of maintaining the NRA's estate and improving the facilities here. Now what we are trying to do is to reduce the absolute burden that each and every member has laid upon them.

But I think in terms of commerciality, of course Dietra will actually present to you her case because she wants for her business the very best deal. She has traded at the Old Bisley Gun Club on an arrangement that was made; whether she has traded there for charity or whether she is trading there for profit, I will leave her to make her own case on that. My suspicion is that there is profit in it, or else they would not be here, and I have absolutely no issue with that.

Dietra Kimpton, HPS Target Rifles Ltd

Well, of course there's going to be profit in it. I'm sorry I do love shooting and I love all you shooters, but I do like to put food on my own table.

I have two questions to follow up.

If there's no restriction with Fulton's and versus you, I'd like to know why that's a special case. Secondly, I would also like to know has the NRA not really figured it out that if you had 20 tents on that green during this meeting, and charged a fair rent, you would actually make more money than having one tent on there at £250 a day.

If you actually made this the centre of shooting, I have also sat down and read all of the charters as well, including the original one written by Queen Victoria, and your mandate says that you are supposed to support shooting. Without the people in the trade doing the gunsmithing, making the ammunition, getting the export licenses, getting the import licenses which cost us an awful lot of money, there would be no shooting.

(round of applause)

Chief Executive

If you put the facts together, membership is up and growing, range hire is up and growing, the organisation has moved from significant and consistent losses to surpluses that we can invest in Bisley and shooting. So to paint a picture that the NRA is failing the very community that it exists to serve I think is factually incorrect.

We are trying to recover from a period of many, many years of a failing organisation and of course there will be challenges to boot. You ask a specific question about Fulton's. They are trading under the terms of a lease that was signed 15 or 16 years ago. Those terms are clear and concise and we have no issue with those. In terms of the negotiations with HPS, that agreement is yet to be struck and I expect to have a robust discussion and I think it is absolutely my responsibility to get the very best deal out of any commercial transaction for the benefit of the NRA and its membership.

Henry Watson, Scotland Life Member & Royal Navy Target Rifle Club

I don't think I need a microphone!

I am concerned at the tone of this discussion that's gone on. Things have got a hell of a lot better, but the NRA to my mind, has one very, very serious issue that needs addressing and that is communication, as your presence here has shown.

(hear hear, applause)

Isn't a complete surprise to me as I did read the Journal that came out just a few weeks ago, but nothing came out to the membership about how things have changed at the top, why things have changed at the top, and I think like those which have been mentioned by the Chief Executive, what his tasks are, what his objectives are should be known to the membership. What his reasoning is about commercial things should be made known. Yes, of course you want to get the maximum amount of money from anybody and everybody to keep the sport going. But you have to look at Bisley as a whole. Bisley now in some ways is better, in other ways is worse and I don't think you are prepared to accept that in some ways things actually got a little bit worse and please be flexible, please look at the things in the round.

Can we get off governance and can we get onto communication please?

(round of applause)

Chairman

Thank you for that. I am more than happy to take the second admonishment in my short time as your Chairman that we need to do more to communicate.

I would just take one exception you said about the maximum amount of money. What I was trying to say in my words is that losing money is an absolute no-no; it is the torpedo below the waterline which if you don't block it up, sinks the entire crew and we all go down with the ship. That's exactly what Peter Hobson was referring to, and a lot of hard work was done to right that particular situation.

We are now in a delicate place where we have to make this a commercial business, but we also have to ensure that there is a surplus, but not an unreasonable surplus, from which we can all benefit. We have long debates about this. The NRA is a £5 million turnover business, broadly speaking. Is 10% a reasonable surplus that we should aim for every year after a capital expenditure budget to keep the place going of £250,000? I think that's a not unreasonable starting place.

But if you do that, we've got to make sure that everybody shares. And not all of our 7,500 members use Bisley. So I sit here as a Trustee - very important word, I've got a duty of care and an obligation to every single one of those people whether they come to Bisley or not. I take that incredibly seriously and there are a lot of people in this room who represent not the majority of this particular membership, but I have to be careful to represent everybody. So what I'm trying to do is to find the right balance between surplus so that we can put money back into the sport in two ways; 1) better facilities at Bisley, more commercial income for Bisley which can obviously be shared around all of the different sports, and finally, ultimately, cheaper prices and 2) more affordable shooting because it's better, because it's easier, and because we've got purchasing power.

But we've got some things to do before we get there.

Job number one has been done - and has been done with a lot of pain - and that is the torpedo below the waterline has been patched up and we are now feeling our way into an area where everybody's got to pay their fair share. If you want my honest opinion, what I would like to see for all the members of this Association, that all of our activities - that is all shooting at Bisley and everywhere else - breaks even, and the commercial income that we get from renting this place out to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary or the MoD, is surplus in which we all share. We share in it in two ways; with better facilities and some reserves for a rainy day.

This means that we can go out and do some innovative things in the regions, or with targetry, or with just better facilities for everybody. So that's the goal that certainly I'm, and I think everybody else here, is working to.

So, regarding the word maximum, we're not trying to be greedy. I know it might feel like that to some, but we're just feeling our way as to where that actual line really lies. Yes we get things wrong, but the big task has been done and we need to feel our way through to the next level.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

In the last 5 minutes there have been 2 or 3 comments which are quite pertinent to what I want to say which provides something of a link.

There was a comment about poor communication and I think that is correct. You also mentioned that not all of our membership shoots at Bisley, which is also correct.

Bisley is the jewel in the crown of full bore shooting, and it's quite right that we should talk about Bisley and talk about it as a business and talk about keeping it afloat, because it provides a focus and it provides a home and it provides a centre of excellence where we can come and shoot.

However, only about 10%, I'm guessing, but roughly 10% of those people who were involved in full bore shooting are actually full members of the NRA. The majority of the rest are associate members through clubs who pay very little to the NRA and I would like to ask that the Trustees and the Board and everybody should look at this because to my mind it makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

I think that there should be a review of the membership and the fee and that anybody who's involved in full bore shooting should become a full member of the NRA. Whether that means they pay a reduced rate because they don't actually shoot at Bisley, or because they live too far away for it to be practical to come here very often, maybe with a pricing structure for range hire according to what class of membership you've got, doesn't really matter. But the communication part is important because at the moment, that 90% of people who are involved in full bore rifle shooting, you don't even know who they are! You can't write to them, you can't communicate with them, you can't invite them, you can't do anything to get in touch with them except through their club. And in some cases, I suspect the clubs hardly know who they are.

Now that to me, for any major organisation is a catastrophe. This is not the Bisley Rifle Association, you're supposed to be the National Rifle Association and yet only a fraction of the national shooting fraternity are a member. And that has to be a catastrophe. Surely to goodness with the things that you can offer as part of membership, the membership benefits of insurance and all the rest of it, you can come up with some sort of a plan where people can pay a modest membership and boost the revenue of the Association and put you in touch with all of those people who would strengthen the foundations of what we do.

(round of applause)

Chairman

Thank you. Andrew is going to respond.

Chief Executive

I think there are very well made points in that particular statement. I think our membership runs at about 7,500, best estimate there are 22,500 other full bore shooters scattered across the country. That's the sort of ratio that we're working to. I think you're absolutely right, we need to reach out to those people and offer them value in such a way that they want to be members of the National Rifle Association.

I think when you look the other shooting associations, and we have done a fair deal of work looking at organisation like the BASC and the other shooting national governing bodies to see what offers they have.

I think aligned to that is another structural issue in the fact that the ranges at Bisley are getting busier and busier and there's quite a debate going on at the moment amongst ourselves in terms of trying to rationalise where we want the members to be. Not because we want members for the sake of having members, but in terms of what we, the NRA, can offer to those members and also with respect, what they can offer the NRA. And those discussions are still very live at the moment and are proving to be a complicated issue that we are miles away from resolving. But it is a key issue and is something I think we do need to get a grip of because we are in the happy situation at the moment that our membership is growing, we are receiving around 100 new applications for membership every month, and it's causing challenges for the instructor team to get people through the probationary course, and the absolute last thing we want to do now is run a major advertising campaign and bring new people in to full bore shooting, because to be frank, as at this moment in time, we have not got the capacity to deal with them.

So there are some really interesting opportunities, terrific opportunities for full bore shooting, certainly at Bisley, and I also think nationally, but we do need to pace ourselves and have a cunning plan properly thought through and properly resourced plan to take full advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to us.

Neville Stebbings, City of Newcastle Rifle Club

Can I just make one comment on that? I hear what you say, but for those people who already shoot with clubs, an issue of training and probationary membership shouldn't really be an issue because they are already accredited, otherwise they wouldn't be shooting on MoD ranges.

(round of applause)

Michael Deakin, British Alpine Rifles

I'd like to ask the question, it's not really me, my wife's told me to come down here and ask the main man the question – but she's not a member!

We try to do everything on a shoestring, I've got a young family. We drive in, we see the sight that's been cleared for the £40k caravans. I haven't got £40k, I haven't even got the £2k to even have one.

We just wondered how long it would be before the tide moves from there through Chelysmore through the rest of it. The only thing I can do is put an advert in the Journal and sell my kidney!

I'd like some sort of guarantee from the main man sat there, because I asked him the same thing in Birmingham. He probably won't remember it, but if you could just give me some form of comeback.

Chairman

We have 387 caravans on the Bisley camp site and we have gone through an exercise in the last 12 months to understand who owned what, how much they were paying and how much they were using their caravans and whether it was legitimate.

As a result of that exercise, all 387 berths were not filled and some people had a rather rude awakening as to why they couldn't keep their caravan, because they hadn't been paying the proper amount.

That, I hope you would all agree, is just part of the fairness exercise in making sure that everybody pays their fair whack. If you have a caravan you pay the same as the next guy who has a caravan. But it also struck us as an opportunity when we cleared some number of those 387 sites to think about the whole portfolio across the 387 pitches, and see if there was a market for different levels of accommodation.

So, at the upper end there would be a serviced caravan pitch with a car parking stand and full facilities and at the lower end it would be "good old cheap and cheerful" just like when we all started shooting all those years ago. I used to thank the lord that as a student I could go to the Army Target Shooting Club and get three square and a tent for about a £1 a day. So that's what we're working to.

The problem for the caravan sites is we have to spend some money. We have to spend some money on upgrading to see if these serviced pitches work so we have to price it accordingly, because the benefits of that go mainly to the person whose sits their caravan on top of it. So there was a lengthy debate as to how we would do that and what it would look like. We thought we seem to have some demand for this so we'll try it.

To those people who have been inconvenienced by this, and I know we had a lot of conversation about this at the Annual General Meeting, I again apologise. There is a curiosity that you cannot do serviced sites pitch by pitch, you must do them site by site. So there was some angst for those people who had to be moved, and that was traumatic for some. We will find out if this is going to work, but it does seem as though as we move into a Bisley that is the centre of excellence for shooting, that we need to think about upgrading some of the accommodation that goes with it. But not forsaking those who want and are perfectly prepared to live in what I would call "cheap and cheerful" accommodation. And so this is an experiment and we shall see if it works.

David Bentata, Life Member, North London Rifle Club

My question is really to seek a point of information with regard to sponsorship.

Just to refresh the memory of members of the Committee and the Meeting, I was responsible for, amongst other things, arranging the sponsorship which enabled every competitor in 1990 when we had our centenary celebration of our move to Bisley to take away a medal, a competitor's medal.

In Millennium year I was also responsible for every competitor being able to take away a competitor's medal. Bentata Associates, amongst other things, sponsored both the senior and junior Millennium matches. Also arranged to sponsor the Young Rifleman's Aggregate in 1990 for 3 years, and so on and so forth.

Having done all of this, and in particular the Millennium matches, nobody contacted me ever since with regard to sponsorship and as far as I was concerned, if there was no interest in sponsorship, I wasn't interested either, which is very sad because some of the burden of all that you've been discussing with regard to the cost of shooting at Bisley could have been lifted from the shoulders of everyone if a real drive had been made with regard to sponsorship.

That's my question; what have you been doing with regard to sponsorship?

(round of applause)

Chief Executive

In a previous life, sponsorship was a very important part of the charities that I used to represent. My experience was you need to have a good product, you need to have a successful organisation that is confident about itself, and then you need to get out and sell attractive sponsorship packages to properly identified organisations.

There is some sponsorship where people sponsor for love or the sport or for personal pleasure. Those sponsorship packages tend to be very rare and most sponsors that I've had personal involvement of require carefully crafted sponsorship packages with targets that need to be achieved.

I think you have an organisation that presents itself well, that is successful, and to be frank, Bisley Camp and the way that the organisation has been run recently is not in a particularly fit state to go out and sell for sponsorship. That is a situation that I think we are addressing with some speed, but there are a whole host of other commercial targets, sponsors are one, grants and donations are others, legacies are also another issue.

They are all opportunities that I've had some experience with, but you've got to get your ducks in a row, you've got to have a successful organisation, you've got to get your communications right, you've got to have your façade and some integrity in terms of what you are actually promoting.

So I think it is a very good point well made, but we are a little way off actually being in that happy situation where we can, to put it bluntly, sell with confidence.

Henry Watson, Scotland Life Member & Royal Navy Target Rifle Club

Another change of subject.

So far we have had a lot of discussion about the Bisley Rifle Association. You've talked about the problems in provincial ranges, but we haven't heard anything about what you're doing to try and bring further ranges into use, keep ranges in use, and support for shooting in the provinces.

May I ask you specifically who within the organisation is responsible for this, and what successes have they had since the last Bisley General Meeting?

(round of applause)

Chief Executive

That responsibility sits on my shoulders. In terms of are we making startling good progress I can report to you answer; No. We are playing very much at the moment a rear guard action to protect what we have. We have started a programme trying to identify potential ranges where we can start the exercise of creating a series of regional ranges, and this is something where we have made approaches, or rather I have made on the Association's behalf, approaches to the MoD to say what about the NRA taking the Hedley's, what about the NRA then sharing the management of regional ranges with regional clubs and organisations.

That is a business model proposal actually that is gaining some traction. There is a range down in the South West that we've got our beady eye on, but we need to in the first instance is actually prove that we can run Bisley successfully. That has not been the case in the past, but what we are looking to do is to say 'look what we are doing at Bisley, isn't that successful, aren't civilian shooters supporting terrific facilities that you, the military can use from time to time as and when you require it'. I think that is a good proposal that will in the fullness of time be attractive to the MoD.

But, we need more than just warm words and cheery reassurances. We need hard cash and that is something that this whole exercise is planning on delivering.

Chairman

Any more questions?

Peter Turner if you can hear me, don't go too far please.

John Tapster, Surrey Rifle Association

Mr Chairman, could you update the assembly on what's currently going on with the Muzzle Loaders hut, as was, now known as the Exhibition Hut. Anecdotally, I understand that the strategic review document was put out at the General Council with plans for the camp over the next 3 years or so, and that the Exhibition Hut was deemed to be used as a Visitor's Centre come security centre, selling place for caravans and a cafeteria for the visitors.

The work started on the Muzzle Loaders/Exhibition Hut and building control turned up, threw the builders out, not once but twice, as it appears that the Exhibition Hut is in fact a Grade II listed building and the work started with no planning permission. Since that work has been stopped, it would appear that the road running alongside between the Exhibition Hut and the Pavilion was dug up and a gas main for a commercial meter put in around the back which has not apparently gone unnoticed by building control and my best information that I have at the moment is that there may well be a prosecution pending!

That is not a good thing to have.

Chief Executive

It's been a very interesting exercise.

It's fair to say that the planning authority actually have raised concerns. Those concerns actually have turned out to be very interesting. Every time we put our building staff into any building, friendly souls on Bisley ring up the Council and claim foul.

I've just had the latest contact from Building Control about our plans for the serviced caravan pitches. That has not been unexpected. It shall be very interesting to see how much work and energy is being invested to try and stop the Association doing sensible things.

In terms of the specific issue regarding the Exhibition Hut, the work that we'd actually planned was deemed not to require planning permission. After discussions with the planning authority there was two specific issues that they felt we did; we have submitted an application and the area of contention at the moment is solely the interior cladding of the Exhibition Hut and I'm meeting next week or the week after with the planners to see if we can get that resolved.

What has been absolutely fascinating was the amount of energy and effort that good people of Bisley are investing to try and stop any development that the NRA does with its building stock.

We had a specific example with the HAC. We did some interior work to prepare that for short-term letting to the CNC and we were well on our way and then yet again the planning control turns up.

This attitude is a fascinating one for us to experience. Quite what people think they are trying to achieve to try and distract the NRA from work it's perfectly entitled to do on its own building stock, I find that motivation quite interesting to deal with.

The whole work in terms of the serviced caravan pitches another interesting example, that work has been cleared. We've taken very careful, professional advice and we were expecting that our 'friends' at Bisley to notify the planners and that's exactly what they've done.

But we are prepared for this. We know now that we need to dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's and then re-dot the 'i's' and re-cross the 't's at not an inconsiderable cost to the Association because there are people on camp who are very keen to try and trip us up at every twist and turn.

That is not something that I was expecting, but it's something that we are having to learn to live with.

Chairman

That's a pity. I think that's a great, great pity because everybody in this room is paying for that!

Unknown

Excuse me, but if you are right making those changes, how can they stop you making those changes?

How can the Council stop you from making those changes, if you are always in the right?

Chief Executive

The lady said 'if we were right, why is the Council stopping us'.

We thought we were right, the Council thought we were wrong. We actually stopped work at their behest. We submitted an application as they requested and the project has stalled.

We will deliver what we said we were going to deliver. It has been delayed, but as far as I'm concerned actually all the work we've got planned, what we're now doing is negotiating over the interior facings of the building. The cafeteria and all the other finishing's have been approved. We are just waiting for the final area to be sorted.

It has been, as I've said, a very interesting, very illuminating exercise. I have had some experience of dealing with listed buildings in the past, having spent 2½ years doing a castle restoration in the Lake District.

But what I hadn't expected was the pernicious and deliberate attempts to trip us up coming from within the NRA. That has been a considerable surprise to me.

We do expect, and we are obliged, and my Trustees are particularly keen that we trade within the law. But as is always the case of the experienced people, and I can see Mr Brown standing there, he will know full well that when you are dealing with listed buildings as Exhibition Hut is, there are often matters of interpretation.

Henry Watson, Scotland Life Member & Royal Navy Target Rifle Club

Would it not have been better to clear it with the planning authority first?

Chief Executive

In retrospect, yes it would!

Ian Brown

I'm sorry, we come back to the same old thing don't we; communication.

I think possibly what the Trustees didn't tell Andrew was that every gallant person in this tent feel he owns Bisley camp and therefore it's his property or her property.

It's very unfortunate that a lot of us have been coming here for a very long time and we feel a sort of proprietary feeling for it. The daft thing is, if we had a pretty detailed draft of this forward plan and what was going to happen in a fair amount of detail, then nobody would have had any sort of bicker about what was happening.

The other thing is, that in the past, the NRA has operated in a very secretive manner and this even extends particularly for something that is very, very dear to our hearts, firearms certificates and legislation. And until the very welcome article in the Journal in the Spring about what to do if you get into trouble, there was virtually no support on firearms certificates.

So there is distrust naturally of the NRA which is probably going to take a few years, and there are very welcome signs, but it's going to take a few years to actually gain people's trust and I think again if you communicate, tell people what you want to do, you may even get some pointers about why that would be a daft idea and why don't you do it this way.

Thank you.

(hear hear & applause)

Mick Barr, City Rifle Club

Have stats yet come up with cut-off for the Queen's second stage?

Chairman

957 competitors shot in Her Majesty the Queen's First Stage today. There is a tie for first place with a score of 105.19v between Mr TA Ringer of the Uppingham Veterans Rifle Club and Mr FWA Coetzee of South Africa.

They will contest the tie on Friday, after Queen's II is completed.

Subject to Stats and protests and everything else, the last score qualifying for Stage II is 102.12v, finishing 34.5v at 600 yards and 34.3v at 500 yards.

Let me read that again, the last score qualifying for Stage II is 102.12v, finishing 34.5v at 600 yards and 34.3v at 500 yards.

Congratulations to Mr Ringer and Mr Coetzee. Congratulations to those who have got through to the second stage.

We have had a robust debate, I think one of things I can take away from this debate is that we all care deeply for this organisation and I think that's at least a healthy sign. Sometimes we have a weird way of showing it perhaps, but certainly I think it's a general healthy sign and I wish you well for the rest of the meeting.

Thank you very much.

(Round of applause)

MEETING CLOSED