

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Bisley General Meeting

Minutes of the Bisley General Meeting

held in the Umbrella Tent, Bisley
on Wednesday 20th July 2016 from 9.00pm

Present:

Chairman:	Mr JGM Webster
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Vice Chairman General Council	Dr JD Warburton
Treasurer	Mr D Lowe
Members:	150 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

The Bronze Medal went to Miss LAE Crowson of Old Sedbergians with a score of 105.17v.

The last score qualifying for Stage II is 101.10v, finishing 35.4 at 600 yards.

Chairman

Proceedings

Chairman

Welcome to the Bisley General Meeting of 2016.

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

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: Philippe Ginestet from France, Norris Gomez from Trinidad, Stan Frost and Jim Thompson from Canada, and Cliff Mallett from Jersey.

I would also like to welcome one, I think I can see in the room, of our newest Vice Presidents who is here this evening, and I'd like to ask Peter Hobson to step forward to accept his Vice President badge.

Peter Hobson has made a number of significant contributions to our sport and our Association, as a member of GC, as a Trustee, and as one of the founding fathers of F Class. *(round of applause)*.

Peter Hobson

Mr Chairman, thank you very much, I am really honoured. Thank you so much.

Chairman

And thank you for all your contributions. *(round of applause)*

Moving on to competitions:

We started with the Service Rifle events, which were supported by overseas teams from Canada, Oman, the Falkland Islands and the US National Guard. Some 220 competitors took part.

The winners of Her Majesty the Queen's Medals were as follows: for the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, Cpl Al Kendrick, Royal Marines; Army Reserve, Corporal D Alexander, 253 Northern Ireland Medical Regiment; for the Army, Corporal Bal Gurung, 4 Regiment, Royal Logistics Corp, and for the RAF, Sgt Alexander Lilley of the RAF Regiment. The main prize giver was General Nicholas Carter, KCB, CBE, DSO, Chief of General Staff.

The Army Reserve prizes were presented by Major General John Crackett, Director of Army Reserves.

The Methuen Trophy Inter Corp Team Shoot was won by the Royal Marines. The cup was presented by Colonel Philip White, MBE, of the Small Arms School Corps.

Civilian Service Rifle, which runs alongside the Service Rifle events, opened the 2016 Imperial Meeting with their first shot taking place on 29th June.

This year saw 356 competitors shoot over 5 days, up on last year's number of 338, culminating in the NRA Methuen Cup Match. This was won by The Highpower Rifle Association, with London Practical Shooting Club "A" Team coming second, and the Saluza Scouts taking third.

The winner of our fourth NRA Military Adaptive Championships this year was Olaf Jones with a score of 343 and 45 Vs.

The Inter-Services Cadet Rifle Meeting was very successful; there were 600 cadets attending from 120 teams, up from last year's 408 and 102 respectively. These included the Royal Canadian Army Cadet National Rifle Team. The winning team in the Team Grand Aggregate was E Company 2nd (NI) Battalion ACF with a score of 930.38 and Cdt R Imrane - 2452 (Shawlands Academy) Sqn ATC won the Bossom, the individual prize, with a score of 242.22. The prizes were presented by Maj Gen RJAЕ Stanford M.B.E., General Officer Command, Regional Command.

At the Schools' Meeting there were 43 schools taking part (the same number as last year) including some from Canada and South Africa, with 517 cadets taking part. 28 of those schools participated in the Ashburton Shield which was won by Wellington College with a score of 761 with 6vs, narrowly beating Dollar Academy into second place by 1 point.

Mention of cadets brings me to the Cadet Imperial Meeting that is taking place on Century Range, alongside the short range shoots in the Grand Aggregate. 42 cadets from open units are taking part in this new event which culminates tomorrow, and the standard of shooting has been very high. My thanks go to Neville Stebbings, Peter Turner, John Bloomfield, Simon Fraser and the Cadet Unit Leaders who have made this event possible. We intend to continue with this competition in future years.

The Historic Arms Meeting was run by Peter Cottrell who was the Match Director and aided by volunteers to whom we owe our thanks. The event saw a pleasing increase in the number of competitors, up from 90 in 2015 to 103 this year, with more matches shot. Cadets from 211 ATC (Newbury) Squadron acted as markers and performed to their usual high standard.

Coming to Match Rifle, the Hopton was won by Mike Bailie-Hamilton, beating Rob Lygoe by 3 points on 1002 with 127 V bulls. Nick Tremlett won the Albert, the last shoot in the Hopton, with the score of 223-23. The Elcho was retained by England beating Scotland by 42 points in a match shot in changeable weather. Top scorer in the match was Julian Peck with 223.34 which included a remarkable 75.10 at 1200 yards, and no sighters! Congratulations to him and particularly his coach which I am reliably informed was Alex Cargill-Thompson.

There were 46 F class competitors again this year. The Farquarson Open trophy was won by Darren Stewart, and the Farquarson-TR trophy was won by Simon Gambling. Special mention should be made to Dr David Lloyd who achieved an impressive PB score of 100.7 at 1000 yards in their version of the Donaldson Memorial.

Overall Target and Match Rifle are showing 1093 entries, a pleasing increase of almost 50 on last year's figures. 172 of those are from overseas. The Grand Aggregate has had 816 entries which is up by 36 on the preceding year and we have seen teams and individuals from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Guernsey, Guyana, Jersey, the Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and Trinidad & Tobago. Amongst them, I would particularly like to welcome Bruce Millard, the immediate past President of the NRA of New Zealand who has agreed to present the prizes on Saturday. 74 Under 25s competitors and 267 Under 21s competitors are represented in those figures. Jo Wright remains our oldest competitor at 93 and still winning medals, although only a bronze this year, and the youngest is Mr GH Nicholls at 13 years of age.

The Imperial Gallery Rifle meeting had 98 competitors, which was slightly down on last year's number, although the same number of competitions were shot. Our thanks go to those who helped organise this very enjoyable and relaxed event.

Some important notices before I pass on to my thank you's.

- First, the three independent investigations related to concerns regarding Rule 150 have been concluded and the results are available on the website. They will be discussed in detail at our upcoming General Council meeting, but the conclusions are that the concerns expressed that brought these investigations about were unfounded.
- And second, the much vaunted “death of TR” on social media is, in my view, overblown. Since January 1st 2015, almost 500 new members who shoot TR have joined the NRA. Over the first 5 months of this year, TR match ammo sales through our range office are 3½ times those for the equivalent period last year. While the quality and price of GGG ammo enable us to take market share from other providers, this is indicative of an overall increase in TR activity, and perhaps explains the increasing pressure on marking resources that some of you have experienced earlier in the year; this is despite the fact that expenditure on marking (and therefore markers) has increased over the same period. Therefore, despite more markers being available from and provided by the NRA, this increase was insufficient to meet the increased demand.

We wish all the best on Friday to Reg Roberts with his Kolapore team, and to Lindsay Peden and his team to Canada and the USA next month.

May I also add our belated congratulations to Martin Townsend and his GB Match Rifle team for successfully retaining the Woomera Trophy in Australia earlier this year, and particularly to Rick Shouler and his NRA Channel Islands team for their successes in the Channel Islands in May. Of particular note was their performance as a team of eight in Guernsey where this team put up the highest score ever achieved on Guernsey soil.

(round of applause)

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 in Pirbright.
- To the Bisley 'V' Club for holding, in conjunction with the NRA, the annual Arthur Clarke long range match for cadets. This gives the cadets a rare opportunity to shoot at long range.
- To Maj Simon Fraser and the CCRS for their support of the cadets with both ISCRM and the Schools meeting.

- To our Chief Range Officers, John Miller and Tony Clayton on Stickledown and Peter Turner and Lisa Railton on Century.
- To our Chief of Staff, Mike Turner, Chief Butt Officers, Colin Scoles on Century and Shane Cake 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 the butts.
- To the staff who have prepared the Camp and the Ranges. The wet weather leading up to the meeting has presented real challenges with which they have coped manfully.
- And finally 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. Members continually come up to me during the meeting to say what a great job they have done
- 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.

That brings me to the end of my formal speech. I would now like to open the meeting to comments and questions from the floor. If you could please come forward to the microphone here at the front, and state your name before you speak.

(round of applause)

Nigel Wells, UK Police

The scramble boards drive me up the wall. Some years ago I entered Match Rifle and was given a target number and it makes life so much easier. I think it is time now that Target Rifle took a leaf out of Match Rifle and just gave a target number and did away with the scramble board.

Chairman

Thank you Nigel, I'm sure we will take that under advisement. I had believed, and I'm speculating now, but I had believed the reason I had a scramble board, particularly on short range, is the butts are easily

accessible and it could be quite easy for somebody who says you are on the right, centre or the left, but to know exactly who is shooting on that target. I think on Stickledown, quite clearly with the barrier, it is different. However, we will take it under advisement. I'm sure Bill Richards, who doesn't appear to be here, will tell us one of the reasons that may or may not be the case.

Nigel Wells:

If you can speak Romanian, Polish, Latvian or Hungarian in the butts, then you might stand a chance. But I worked in the butts a couple of seasons ago and English was a second language, so I think that is well out of the window.

Chris Law, North London Rifle Club:

Good evening Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

May I briefly transport you to the Adriatic in 1997 in the Summer, to a vineyard going down into the water, to the blissful period in the evening when they put on quite ethereal music for relaxation. This is one of the things I didn't notify you about, but I'm inviting you to consider whether such an opportunity might arise on our Bisley ranges during the Imperial Meeting.

Would anybody here have any particular dissention, if for an hour or so somewhere, some music was put on after shooting had finished, whether it is the umbrella tent, whether the idea goes any further, I'll just sow the seeds in your mind.

You mentioned Colin Scoles, the Chief Butt Officer, who I visited this afternoon. You will find a complete hive of industry down in Century butts, and a totally dedicated man; 13 hour days etc etc. The camp will have a serious loss if and when he ever leaves that post.

One observation he did make to cast on this evening, was that there has been for a couple of years a Markers shoot on Century on the second Monday. They were not able to hold it this year because there weren't sufficient coaches available, but he observed that in the previous two years, the effect on the markers was quite electric. They were highly motivated when they came into the butts to realise what was going on at

the firing point end. So may I sew the seed in your mind for it to be repeated in subsequent years. (*hear hear – round of applause*)

Whilst talking about markers, it would occur to me that a number of years ago there was competitor marking. Some competitors might appreciate the opportunity to go down there if they can get some credit in their direction. Some overseas visitors appreciate the opportunity to meet with other shooters in a place away from the firing point.

I raise this because we are told perpetually that it is difficult to obtain markers within this area. We have a lower number of targets in use this year as there are only about 70% of the targets in use on Century today and at best about 60% on Stickledown during the meeting. In a busy year I just wonder how the NRA might actually be able to find sufficient markers and some of you may remember years ago when we had whole butts full for some of the prime competitions, Queens, etc and office staff were in fact ferried down to the other end of Century just to pull the targets. I don't know if there is any future in that, but I would like the committee to contemplate that.

I'm not going to apologise for returning to the business of the composition of the targets of Corex or whatever the trade name is. I'm not at all satisfied that gives you a true record of your scores and on two particular occasions during the meeting it gave a poor show for some competitors. How can it be on a target, and you're on the penultimate target, so you've got little to the left of you and there are no stray shots lost to the right, how can it be your target is pulled three times in the middle of your preparation for a shoot? And it comes back up with a mark shot on it, and no shots have been lost from elsewhere?

The small patches just don't work. I was told that 50,000 patches of the larger size were sent to Stickledown to be used during the Hopton, but they didn't come into use. The targets in Stickledown stayed in there for about a week from pre-Friday until the beginning of the Target Rifle phase. Over 1000 rounds have gone into that target and only the centre portion was changed to this day. It is not at all surprising that there have been serious shots missing. In the Humphries at 1000 yards, one more shot was marked that was actually fired! What sort of accuracy is that in the score for a major competition?

I invite the NRA to return to this. I know they've done some tests during the year, but they were done on Century. They've not been done on Stickledown in the sheeting rain. In sheeting rain when a projectile goes through corex, and I've heard from the mouth of a marker, it is quite known

that the hole will completely self-seal. An experienced marker watched an impact, brought the target down and the hole to all appearances was gone.

Chairman:

Chris, can I ask you to make your point quickly. If everybody wants to make their points as long as this we will be here for a very long time. So can I give you message 9!

Chris Law:

OK. Please shout me off. I'm inviting you to use larger patches, especially on Stickledown, as the small ones fall off, they dry up, they curl up. I invite you to use larger spotting discs. The four inch spotting discs is poorly discerned on the ranges and this is the point I made last year. The four inch spotting disc is very hard to discern and at long range for the Hopton, I would prefer it to be five inches square not four.

We spoke earlier in the year, the Chief Executive and I, about the firing point renewal; I'm sorry to hop onto all these different things, but you've got to see what is going on in camp.

(MESSAGE 9!!)

Chairman:

Thank you Chris. We have done quite a lot of investigation into this topic, so I'd ask John Bloomfield to comment if he can on the results of that investigation, which has been put up in front of General Council for your information and there were no camp points made.

John Bloomfield, Chairman of the Shooting Committee:

Thank you Chairman. Ladies and Gentlemen.

Following on from Chris Law's comments last year, we investigated two aspects of this; the first was the number of misses that was alleged to have happened, large number of misses that were alleged to have happened during the shoots of the Grand Aggregate, and the second thing which came out later were the misses in Queen's III.

If I deal very briefly, I don't want to drown you in figures, with what went on in the two 1,000 yard shoots in the TR meeting, the first thing that was of some interest was that the conditions were clearly much more difficult in

the Lovell than they were in the Corporation. Scores across the board for all four classes were 4 points less in the Lovell than they were in the Corporation. Equally the number of wide shots and misses that were recorded were also considerably larger in the Lovell.

Just to give you an example, in the Corporation there were 66 misses recorded on the score cards, having gone through all of them. In the Lovell there were 113. When I then looked at the number of hits and outers in the Lovell, because of course those are parts of the target that are not covered in paper, we find that there were 379 shots actually recorded as hitting the target. So you end up with a very large number of shots that were in corex which were found.

What we don't know, of course, and I don't think we are going to find out in a hurry, is how many of the misses might have been in the corex. But I think we need to bear in mind that if you are capable of throwing an outer at 500 yards vertically, that would be off the target, either above or below, at 1000 yards simply because of the angle the target extends.

I then looked further at what went on in Queens III and there were in fact 9 misses in Queens III. Perhaps some might find that surprising because of the quality of shooter that has got there. However, on further investigation there were 3 misses at 900 yards, one of those was a rifle malfunction; the rifle went off before the shooter was ready, the other two were on the wrong target.

Of the 6 misses at 1000 yards, one of them we know nothing about because it was a Canadian cadet and their entries come in bulk through the CCRS and we have no way of contacting the young man to find out. Of the remaining five, four of them were shot on the wrong target, one gentleman firing twice on the same target, three targets away on the next butt. I don't know whether Rick Shouler is here, but they were both bullseyes.

(laughter).

The final one is one that we are unable to determine for certain what happened, however, the shooter concerned was on the target next door to David Calvert, and the target to the right of David Calvert, I was shooting at myself. So we obtained copies of the scoresheets, compared the corrected wind brackets and once you've got the shots in the right order, it was quite clear because the corrected winds lined up to half a minute, what might have gone one. That is the gentleman who missed, fired his last account with 11 on, his partner subsequently fired his last account for a V-bull with 5 on, so it is entirely possible the change was there but was not visible, or he

missed the change. Or the third possibility is because David Calvert had finished two shots earlier, that he fired it at David's target which was marked without anybody seeing it.

So, I think reasonably what went on in Queens III were accounted for. We have a little further testing to do because we have so far been unable to see what the effect of corex or what effect hot sun has on corex, the sort of thing you would get during the meeting, because until yesterday we simply haven't had a suitable day. So the investigation will continue until that is completely. Thank you very much.

Chairman:

Thank you John. I spy at the back of the room that one of our other new Vice Presidents is now with us and I would like to ask Simon Fraser to come forward and receive his badge.

As you know, Simon has been the long serving Secretary of the TA Rifle Association and the Council for Cadet Rifle Shooting. This means he has been responsible amongst other things, for the successful running of cadet shooting which remains a very significant feeder for our sport. He steps down later this year from these posts. Simon, thank you for all your hard work and congratulations.

(round of applause)

Simon Fraser:

I am very honoured and very grateful for the tremendous you have bestowed on me. Thank you very much indeed.

Chairman:

You are entirely welcome and it is richly deserved.

Silke Lohmann, Co-opted Member of the Membership Committee:

Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

In the capacity of co-opted member of the Membership Committee I try and represent the general membership to the best of my ability. Loyalty is very important to me and I can understand that the Trustee's decision making can be affected by loyalty to fellow trustees. However, may I stress that the Charity Act says "a conflict of interest is any situation in which a Trustee's

personal interest or loyalties could, or could be seen to prevent them from making a decision only in the best interest of the Charity.

Due to some unfortunate circumstances, I have been informed of various incidents that would suggest that the head of the Shooting Committee and Trustee, Mr John Bloomfield, has a conflict of interest. I will only name a few incidents which have been reported to me, but I consider these to be the tip of the iceberg, but I feel they portray a variety of conflicts we are faced with.

Rule 156, that is an MR rule, recently amended this year, which was for no obvious reasons to MR shooters. However, Mr Bloomfield as Chairman of the Shooting Committee, and I'm not aware he is any longer a Match Rifle shooter, he seemed to be keen for this rule change. The appearance of that was during the Match Rifle meeting selling rests with specifications outlined in the amended rule, sold by Mr Bloomfield and Mr Mik Maksimovic, resulted in suggestions that there was a conflict of interest here.

I don't want to talk about the meeting ammunition incident in detail as it still needs to be investigated, but it has come to my attention that a similar incident, more severe in fact, was never properly investigated. The Chairman of the Shooting Committee persuaded Mr Andrew Mercer that a proper investigation wasn't necessary. A clear conflict of interest given that Mr Bloomfield had also supervised the making of that ammunition.

I'm sure you will all agree with me that it is not appropriate for a Trustee to threaten or bully a fellow gunsmith because they have accepted some business with Mr Bloomfield used to be part of. I have a print out of his most recent threatening email and if anyone would like to see that, that's not a problem. I can also provide further reading material if necessary.

I didn't really want to bring up Rule 150 as we are still awaiting the results from the Proof House, I believe. I believe further tests to determine the permitted jump are still outstanding. But I was surprised to hear that the Chairman of the Shooting Committee, supposedly received £6,000 for his time to conduct the tests for the NRA.

It is quite a significant sum and I think it should have probably been put out to tender to avoid any conflict of interest. I assume that special authority for the Trustee's payment, because there's some governing document or proof that authority was provided by the Charity Commission in advance.

The Charity Commission states that even the appearance of a conflict of interest can damage the charity's reputation. So conflicts of interest need to be managed carefully and always with transparency.

As much as I value loyalty, which Trustees have a duty to stop conflicts of interest or they are in danger of committing a conflict of loyalty. I urge the Trustees to give this some serious attention and ask for an investigation by a competent party.

Thank you very much.

(round of applause and cheers)

Chairman:

Thank you Silke. I think it was a great pity that you did not put that to the Trustees before so they could properly answer that meeting. *(hear, hear)*. Some people find that pretty irresponsible behaviour from a member and I think before you start throwing stones, you should look at your own conduct in that particular matter.

There are some issues here that you have brought to light. I'm perfectly happy to investigate them. I would ask John Bloomfield if he wants to answer them, but I think that would be enormously unfair, given the fact that you have not given him any prior warning on that, or the Trustees for that matter. So we will answer those questions in due course, unless you would like to comment on them now?

John Bloomfield:

Thank you Chairman. Yes I would like to comment on them.

The reason the Rule 150 was changed was quite simple. The rule says that you may rest the forearm or the back of the hand. In the course of last year's Match Rifle meeting, I discovered two competitors who were resting both. Now that quite clearly is cheating.

The only way of dealing with that was to actually change the rule to make sure that the rest could not be larger than the area that somebody could apply either their hand, or the back of the arm to. There was a degree of resistance from the Match Rifle sub-committee about it, however it was felt that it was sufficient and put finally at the Shooting Committee and subsequently Council, that it was sufficiently important that people should

not break the rules, to alter the rule to make it impossible for them to do so. That is why the rule was changed.

The rule was changed to make it the top of the rest approximately the size of the Bisley Bible. Now, in fact it is actually the area of contact that is the important thing and most of you, if you look at the back of your left hand and compare it to the size of the bible, will find that they are about the same.

Part of this use of both wrist support and arm support was in the Elcho Match. I spotted one competitor in the Elcho Match who was doing just that. He had been warned on the Friday beforehand that he was not to do it. He continued to do so. My view at that stage, was that the team concerned should be disqualified until such time it was pointed out to me that there was another competitor from another of the teams in the Elcho Match also doing it. I felt at that point it was inappropriate to ruin the match by disqualifying two teams out of four.

That had happened before in the past, when there only three teams competing in the Elcho Match, where two rifle barrels were found to be overweight, ie, didn't comply with the rules. The match was awarded to the Irish who refused to take it in default. So rather than ruin the match, I left the result to stand.

As far as the other complaints are concerned, the ammunition question I have investigated myself and there are a number of factors in that which Silke Lohmann is completely unaware of and does not have the technical capability to investigate for herself anyway.

The third one, as far as being paid is concerned, I have not been paid for any of the work that I have done.

I think that answers most of the questions. Was there another one? I think there were four points.

Silke Lohmann:

Bullying. You forgot the bullying.

John Bloomfield:

I wrote an email to another gunsmith saying I thought it was grossly discourteous what he had done, and that is what it was.

Jonathan Haward, Exonia & Tiverton Rifle Club:

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

On a slightly lighter note, I'm pleased to say, I'd just like to say a couple of things. Firstly, Bisley is looking great, absolutely fantastic. (*round of applause*). It's been a great meeting. The grass is green, the roads are no longer claiming shock absorbers and the butt marking, from my point of view, has just been exemplary. It's a huge effort to get it that way so thank you very much indeed.

Hear, hear (round of applause)

The slight disappointment I have is, as Chris Hockley will testify, I very proudly introduce people to the corporate days. In fact, they are probably measured in their hundreds now that people come in, and one of them has been quite a generous sponsor for Lindsay Peden's team going to Canada which is great. Tomorrow I've got another little sort of guest, a friend of mine coming in, who said 'I'm interested in this shooting, Jonathan', and I said come on down and I'll show you round.

He said 'well, I just want to come down quietly and have a look around, and what about this collection of silver you've got?' I said it's the largest collection of sporting silver in Europe, it's actually fantastic, come and look at it.

Of course, I made enquiries today as to where I may go and have a look at it, only to find it is locked away. It's not there for people to see, it's not there for shooters to see, it's not there for families to see, and I just think it is a great shame. I don't know what other people feel?

Hear, hear (round of applause and cheers)

Andrew Mercer:

I agree! In the refurbishment and development of the Pavilion, I met with the designers yesterday and I've asked them to include a large display of our finer silverware in what will be the new café, retail emporium and range office. So that will go hopefully some way to allay the concerns you have expressed.

Johnathan Haward:

I just think it would be very nice at this time of the meeting, as it always used to happen, that all the silver is out there for people to see, families to come and have a look at, people to bring their families and see the silver that their uncle won 50 years so something. It is just a great shame it hasn't gone on display so any steps to bring it back would be very greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much.

(round of applause)

Clive Wall, Exonia & Tiverton Rifle Club:

By coincidence only am I also a member of Exonia & Tiverton – this was not arranged!

I am also a concerned member of two clubs on site – the North London and the English XX. I would like to ask the Chairman if he would be prepared to share with us his understanding of how the new policy regarding leases for the clubs on the site is compatible with the charitable status of the National Rifle Association and its responsibilities and aims under that auspice.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Thank you Clive. I'd be happy to take that on.

There are four governing principles that your Trustees are trying to get to intersect and they are, in no particular order, English Property Law, the NRA's Trustees Code of Conduct, the Charities Act of 2011, and the Real Estate Policy of 2007, which was updated in 2010.

So, English Property Law says, whether we like it or not, that at the end of the lease the buildings belong to the NRA. That is just fact and actually I don't think it is in now in any dispute amongst the club owners.

The Charities Act of 2011, and I particularly want to point interested parties to sections 117-123, and in particular Section 119, says that we have to do several things when we dispose of the building, and that includes a lease, and in particular it says that we have to make sure that the terms of the

disposition are the best that can be reasonably obtained. The best refers to the terms, and the way that you obtain them have to be reasonable.

The third thing that we talk about quite often is the Trustees Code of Conduct. The Trustees Code of Conduct, which every Trustee has signed, says that the Trustees must administer the Charity for all its beneficiaries. That includes all 8200 members we have today. And it includes, explicitly, those people who are not yet members, and we must avoid any exceptional advice.

The fourth piece here is the Real Estate Policy which actually we have been accused of diverging from, but in fact I think we have stuck to pretty religiously. And I will read to you policy A1 which says, all leases are to be negotiated at arms-length on an open market basis, ie the best commercial terms.

So, when I try and stitch all those together, this gives me a rather difficult thing to do and gives the rest of the Trustees and the Executive rather complicated series of consequences. You talk about the aims of National Rifle Association, it is quite clear that there is a market for property in this part of the world. The market for that property is much more significant outside the gates, than it is inside the gates. And there is a couple of very very good reasons for that.

One is that every building on this camp pretty much, and we have 86 buildings, 46 huts and something in the region of 350 plus caravans, there are restrictions on use and restrictions on who can be a tenant. And successive generations of Trustees have chosen to use that Bisley real estate for the furtherments of the Charity's objectives, ie the promotion of shooting at Bisley, by restricting the people who can actually use those buildings. Otherwise, we could get any Tom, Dick and Harry in here and actually there is a methodology which says that if you maximise income and spend the lot on electronic targets and markers training and all of that sort of thing, we would be achieving objectives but we actually feel along with our predecessors that it is better to have restricted use.

The second thing we need to bear in mind in terms of the discount from the open market outside the gates, is that we are in a conservation area so to speak, and there is the age and character of the buildings which we all know and love, and that means that typically there is a pretty high cost of repair to these buildings, and I don't for a minute doubt that. So there is an open market outside the gates, and then there is the Bisley market inside the gates and the difference between the two is something in the region of 50-80%, and it's impressive that you can walk from Gate Cottage and 20

yards away there is the Old Sergeants Mess and they are very, very different real estate enterprises because of that Bisley difference.

So clearly the Bisley market internally does ebb and flow quite a lot. But what we do and try to do and living up to our charitable objectives, is to make sure that any recent transaction that has been concluded gives us a market for within Bisley, and there are some parts of that which command a premium; accommodation clearly, retail use is another which commands a premium, but in the interests of everybody there is, I think, a fair Bisley market for all of these particular buildings.

The clubs are fairly varied in their rents and we think that they probably shouldn't be. But there is a market for a traditional club house, which doesn't have accommodation, which appears to be around about £2.75-£3.00 a square foot. Accommodation seems to run at around about £5.50-£6.00 a square foot. And these numbers come from all of the transactions that we are dealing with on a regular basis and because we have 85 to 86 buildings and 46 huts, and 350 caravans, there is quite a lot of data that comes in.

And we have to remember that we all have a horse in this race. We are either a member of an affected club, and I shall declare here and now that I am a member of four; I am a life member of the North London, and I am a member of the English XX Club, I am a member of the British Commonwealth Club, and I am a member of (there's one more I can't remember) – the Surrey! I am an associate member of the Surrey. *(laughter)*. So I have a horse in this race. But there are also people in this room who also have a horse in this race because they are members of the NRA but are not members of these affected clubs. And they have every right to expect that the NRA in its policies and it's Chief Executive who implements those policies, gets the correct rent and a fair rent from all of those people who use these clubs. There are some differences, and we believe that it's only fair that everybody pays their fair share.

It's that simple.

(round of applause)

Clive Wall:

Thank you for that. However, please correct me if I'm wrong, because I'm personally finding it quite difficult to understand the complexities of this. But my understanding of what is actually happening is that when a lease is coming up for renewal, the NRA wishes to take over the ownership of that

building, and charge a rack rent rather than a ground rent, of which there is a very, very different situation and my understanding of the figures that are being talked about are that the nett result of that is going to be that clubs are going to be virtually bankrupted or they going to lose members at a phenomenal rate. So acknowledging for me to be fair to all that the Bisley clubs provide certain services to the sport which clubs outside of Bisley do not, and it seems to me that just a very simplistic look at it, the whole character of this campus will change dramatically over the next ten to fifteen years if you continue to take the line that you are taking at the moment. Because the only way a club is going to be able to afford the sort of rack rent which has been voiced and which I understand is being suggested, is that they are going to be a phenomenally increase in membership fees and people will not pay it.

Chairman:

Let me take one point here very quickly, and this is the point of fairness, and then I am going to hand over to Andrew.

Let's take two clubs on camp; both are very successful, both run competitions, both have an active membership, both are clubs that we know and love. One is the English XIII Club and one is the North London Rifle Club, and I am a member of the North London.

You can fit, practically fit, the English XIII Club into the North London's dining room. And yet it pays a higher rent than the North London. I just, even as a member of the North London, think that isn't fair. That's all I'm saying. I don't know what fair is, but I know for sure that is not fair.

Andrew Mercer:

I think the other point in terms of rack rent and ground rent. It is incontrovertible, and this has been accepted, as I'm sure Martin Osment will confirm this from the Association of Bisley Clubs and Tenants, that at the end of the lease the buildings affectively become annexed to the land, form part of the premises and therefore are liable for rent. That is old law; Martin tells me that law goes back to the 1800s and I think it was updated in 1925. And so it's not as if this is a revolution. I think the issue in terms of who owns the buildings is a red herring. It's clear, through all the advice we've got, and I know that Martin Osment agrees with me, or he will tell me if he doesn't, the buildings do form part of the landlords demise and are therefore liable for rent.

The real question is what should that rent be. And as the Chairman has said, if you look at two fine Bisley clubs, with a rich history of tradition, the English XIII and the North London Rifle Club, it cannot be right that the English XIII pay more rent than the North London Rifle Club. And what we are trying to do, amongst the context of having whatever the Bisley rent is, there is a market in Bisley; we are not trying to compare commercial rents that you enjoy on properties outside of Bisley. We recognise that all the building stock is used for charitable purposes; there are restrictions as the Chairman has said in terms of people who can rent a property, there's restrictions on how those properties can be used, that has been a decision made by successive generations of Trustees, so all Bisley real estate is aligned and associated in the delivery of shooting at Bisley.

What we are trying to do is have an equitable, fair application of rent across the piece and the transition is difficult. What we are trying to do is to negotiate with our tenants to understand, actually, how we can help them make the transition. But what we are trying to do is to make sure that the process is fair.

Clive Wall:

I'm sorry, I must come back and I will then give way as I'm sure there are others who have got points to make, but it strikes me that the comparison between the North London and the English XIII is muddying the waters. I simply want to ask two questions and leave it at that.

The first question which relates to this directly is; the ownership of a building goes over to the NRA and the occupants pays a rack rent rather than a ground rent, does that mean that the NRA takes on full responsibility for the upkeep of those buildings?

Andrew Mercer:

No it does not. There are two types of leases. We have leases where there is an automatic right for renewal. If you have an automatic right for renewal, that is broadly on the same terms, save for modernisation and a recalculation of the rent. I think pretty much all of the Bisley properties are held on full repairing and insuring type leases. So the responsibility for the maintenance of the buildings, actually has always been, and will remain in the liability of the tenant.

Clive Wall:

That makes the situation even worse!

(round of applause)

Thomas Harrison, NRA member:

I am one of the caravan owners and I want to know if the NRA intends to honour its written contracts with us that the full site rental will be as described from March through until the end of November. Last year all the services were closed off in November, we could not close our caravans properly at the end, and some of us were put to considerable expense having to find accommodation elsewhere. I don't think this is correct and you shouldn't be in breach of your own written contracts.

(round of applause)

Andrew Mercer:

It's a fair point and my staff were rather too enthusiastic in shutting down some of the outlying ablution blocks rather too early last year. *(and the year before)*. You made your point very clearly and very vigorously to me last year and it's something that we have accepted.

I think there is always a fine balance – the staff are always very keen to shut them down to try and protect the facilities from frost, and I suspect we were a bit too enthusiastic last year and possibly in earlier years as well.

Ed Jeens, Welsh RA

A question regarding the meeting membership fee raised for those who are not annual members, but do wish to shoot the Imperial.

I wish to question if it is felt fair that a flat rate of £58 is charged to enter irrespective of the number of competitions they shoot or rather enter. I note particularly that if one were to shoot just the Queens, which I hope would be a popular thing for someone just dipping in for the year, they would pay £62 entry, plus £58 temporary membership, thus £120 for a Queens I. That's over £5 a round. Do we feel this is fair is my question.

(round of applause)

Andrew Mercer:

I think described in those terms it's palpably unfair. However, I've been charged by the Trustees to look at membership in the round. In crude accounting terms we absorb meeting membership into the meeting income. Trustees have set myself and the staff with a target of making sure that each meeting generates a surplus of 5% of gross income as a margin. If the meeting achieves a margin higher than that then we need to look at the fees we levy. If we produce a margin lower than that, then we need to either trim our costs, or increase the fees.

Last year the Imperial Meeting generated a margin of £11,000 against a turnover of £680,000. So the specific case that you've described, it is palpably unfair. However, I think to make a decision against that I think would be unwise. What we are looking to do is to look at meeting benefits in the round and there is a significant piece of work that is underway regarding membership across the piece, both in terms of what full NRA members gain benefit from competitions and shooting at Bisley and how that is reflected against the benefits that members of affiliated clubs get. And also what the benefits that non-members and guests get.

I think, if I'm really frank, that we are not putting enough value to the full members of the NRA in the way that we should across the piece, and that is something that we are keen to address.

Ed Jeens:

By that, would you rather people pay a full annual membership rather than £58?

Andrew Mercer:

Of course I would.

Ed Jeens:

Even if it's only one day a year.

Andrew Mercer:

I would like to think there's more value to NRA membership than just one day shooting or one competition's entry fee.

Hear, hear (round of applause)

James Watson, previous Membership Committee Chairman:

I would just make the comment that temporary membership is not allowed of Home Office approved clubs, which is a complication of having membership fee for the meeting. The largest cost of that is the insurance that we have to pay on anyone shooting under the auspices of the NRA club. So it is not perhaps as simple as just paying a day rate, which we are not allowed to do legally, I believe.

Andrew Mercer:

James, I am disappointed you haven't read my most recent update on the website about the new Home Office guidance that becomes effective on 1st August. That said, your answer is far better than mine and I'm grateful for it!

Richard Jeens, North London Rifle Club:

Can I go back to the rent discussion and ask the question, assuming everything else that you've said is right, and I'm sure that's contested by some still, how do you propose to encourage capital investment of any form in any of the properties on camp?

Hear, hear (round of applause)

Andrew Mercer:

That is a very good point. I think in terms of all of our tenanted buildings stock, I am very keen that they are active and are used and particularly the clubs actually generate enough income, 1 - to keep the buildings in good repair, 2 - provide a good quality service for their members, 3 – generate sufficient cash to fund capital improvements, and 4 – pay the NRA a fair and equitable rent.

I think what you have described actually goes to the heart of the issue. Because I think there is a challenge that some of the clubs have in terms of the way that they are constructed, the way they operate and some of those, because of the restrictions that we, the beastly landlord, place on the activities of the clubs. I think the user covenant on the clubs actually in a lot of cases are too restrictive and I think we need to, putting it crudely, loosen the reins to allow the clubs to become more dynamic, to become more entrepreneurial in how they go about using their facilities. I think to

rely on a small number of members as the sole source of income is going to make life very difficult.

There is a really interesting conundrum that assails my eyes most weekends when I see the results of a rapidly growing NRA membership, rapidly growing demand for the ranges here, significant increases in footfall to the ranges, but clubs who appear to be struggling to attract people through their front doors. I don't think there is any easy answers in that, and I think this is a problem that we, the NRA, recognise and I think we need to have a much closer dialogue with our clubs to help them identify the areas that they are struggling to succeed in.

Richard Jeens:

I think that is very helpful. All of those factors that assail your eyes and the third of your four factors there, which is to encourage capital investment, I just don't quite understand how the terms of the leases that you are proposing help that. Because even if all of this fantastic new footfall turned up, signed up with a club, generated more profits for a club, why should that club and the officers appointed, or its members, put any of the money into capital investment if in 21 years' time they were going to be charged more for the work they've done?

Hear, hear (round of applause)

Andrew Mercer:

In terms of assessing rents on lease renewal, consented improvements during the previous term cannot be rentalised for the next term. If in year 2 of a 21 year lease you put improvements through, the NRA, as the beastly landlord, would not have the opportunity to charge rent on those improvements for the rest of the term of that lease – 19 years –and the entire term of the subsequent lease – 21 years. I think a 40 year return on that particular example is a pretty fair time!

Hear, hear (round of applause)

Nigel Wells:

I'm back again! Out of curiosity as I came to the Umbrella Tent, I looked at the flagpoles to find there is a significant number of flags missing. Apparently, after asking a few questions, do you know that someone has helped themselves to the ropes so they can't fly the flags; in particular the Isle of Man flag!

Andrew Mercer:

That is yet another thing to add to my list of disciplinary transgressions that I need to investigate. I'm grateful for that.

Martin Osment, ABCAT Chairman:

Can everybody hear me? Good.

I'd like to start if I may by asking Andrew (Mercer) one question. We were previously told that we were going to get the updated report from Strutt and Parker by the end of this month. Is there any further news on that please Andrew?

Andrew Mercer:

Is that the report on the receipts and expenses methodology of assessing rents?

Martin Osment:

Correct.

Andrew Mercer:

That was reported to the tenant in question.

Martin Osment:

Well we haven't heard that and you said it would be published by the end of this month.

Andrew Mercer:

The question was raised by one of our tenants, and we responded in full to that tenant. I'm surprised he hasn't told you Martin.

Martin Osment:

No, I haven't heard it, so would you like to tell us Andrew?

Voice from the audience:

No! Completely irregular.

Martin Osment:

No it's not!

Voice from the audience:

Yes it is!

Martin Osment:

It's the advice to the Trustees from...

Voice from the audience:

It's a matter between that tenant and the Council.

Martin Osment:

No, because it is generally applicable advice.

Voice from the audience:

It's between that tenant and the Council.

Martin Osment:

No, it concerns all tenants on Bisley, every single one of them. So it is therefore relevant. But if you're not prepared to disclose it, Andrew, then I'm sorry about that because I actually was going to try and be very positive because I appreciate your comments that transition is difficult, and you wanted to find ways of helping, and you wanted to find fair process. But if you are withholding the information as to what the opinion of the advisors is as a fair process, we have great difficulty in dealing with that. Therefore, with that lack of cooperation from you, I feel disinclined to offer any further cooperation from myself at this time until your position changes.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Does anybody have any further questions?

The news that I guess everyone has been waiting for.

879 firers entered the first stage of Her Majesty the Queen's Prize today. The winner of the NRA bronze medal, and an NRA bronze badge is Miss LAE Crowson of the Old Sedbergians, with a score of 105.17v.

(round of applause and cheering)

The last score in to the second stage is 101.10v with 35.4v bull at 600 yards.

Thank you very much everybody and we are adjourned.

Meeting closed at 10.10pm.