

Trafalgar Muzzle Loaders

2007 is the 21st anniversary year of the founding of the Trafalgar Muzzle Loaders clay shooting club. And, as far as I am aware, this is the first contribution to Black Powder by the club.

The club became, almost at the outset, a branch of the MLAGB but under the auspices of the Warwickshire Branch. In the second year the club became the official Staffordshire Branch. One of the Warwickshire members remained with us until his retirement and move from the area.

The club was the brainchild of Ron Curley, a re-enactors gun maker, who convened and chaired the very first meeting. His purpose, to show other re-enactors what 17th century guns could do and in doing so instil a sense of safety in their use of black powder. He also wanted somewhere to shoot *his* guns!

Foremost among the founder members attending this first meeting was Coleridge Weston MBE who later became the club's first and only President.

The first shooting ground was at the rear of the Nelson Inn at Chorley, near Burntwood, in Staffordshire. Amazingly, after more than nine changes of landlord and unbelievable peaks and troughs in the quality of the service and fare offered, it is still our only shooting ground. Happily, with the current landlord, both customers and shooters are enjoying a peak.

The club too has enjoyed its peaks and troughs, membership rising from 3 or 4 initially to over 30 at its peak, down to as low as eight or nine and now risen again to 15 well involved members.

We were not alone in having the average age of members rise to over 60 years; many muzzle loading clubs having reported similar situations. For a number of years it was impossible to hold a competition for The Veterans vs. The Rest. The Veterans *were* the rest! Thankfully, of late the recruiting efforts of club members are paying off and the average age has now fallen sufficiently to hold such a competition.

We run five competitions per year with cups, shields and medals down to third place. There are also five other annual awards. In addition to the competitions we run a Boxing Day Shoot. This has taken place almost every year since the founding of the club, with the exception of "Foot and Mouth" year. Each shooter brings a present up to a specific value, suitably disguised; try disguising a bottle of wine, and in descending order of score selects their prize from the table.

Matchlocks and flintlocks are regularly in use at practice and competition shoots. Sorry, no big bores.

In our 21 year history several notable shooters have passed through the club, their names appearing on many of the trophies. These include two previous muzzle loading World Champion clay shooters.

Possibly our most notable member at present is our Vice President, Mr Mike Newland, former Curator at the Birmingham Science Museum and acknowledged authority on the 18th and 19th Century English gun trade. He has many other fields of expertise too numerous to mention here, but if you have ever met him you will know exactly what I mean.

The founding member, Ron Curley, also has claims to fame. Trading as Albion Small Arms, he manufactures guns for re-enactors, mainly 17th century, but from as early as the 14th century. He has also made replica eighteenth century muskets for the Danish Artillery Museum, Copenhagen and a matchlock for the Mary Rose Museum, Portsmouth, all of which are currently on display at the respective museums.

The club has over the past 10 or 15 years regularly provided the public the opportunity to try muzzle loading at a succession of Game Fairs across the Midlands, most notably at Shugborough, Weston Park and Catton Hall, but also including Malvern, Stoneleigh Agricultural Centre and small country fairs.

We are a club with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and a very good safety record.

We welcome MLAGB visitors on practice shoots which take place fortnightly on Sunday mornings from 10:00hrs to 11.45hrs. The fee is £5 but you *might* get a free coffee. In depth discussion of the morning shoot takes place in the Nelson immediately afterwards with real ale, purely for medicinal purposes, their excellent coffee or a Sunday lunch.