

# *A WAHURI MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB*

## **1922 – 2019**

History of the formation of the Awahuri Miniature Rifle club has proven rather vague, as early records of the club have not been located. Library records make reference to the Awahuri Defence Rifle club which was functioning in 1916.

Miniature rifle shooting had become a popular sport in the early twenties when several clubs had been formed in the Manawatu. The first indication of the Awahuri club being in existence was recorded in the Manawatu Standard on November 29th, 1922. An excerpt from the paper recorded that a representative team from the newly formed Rongotea club (1921) journeyed to Awahuri to fire a match with the local side. A thirteen man team fired a series of matches, with the visitors winning by a substantial margin of 287 points. Before returning home, the Rongotea team were entertained to supper at the residence of Mr C Cleaver, President of the club. Men who shot in this match were F Hughes, C Bennett, G Lucas, A Dear, A Goodman, H Hancock, J Lucas, C Cleaver, S Hume, J McCutcheon, P Campbell and C Morris.

In early 1923, the club placed an order for the purchase of several Vickers rifles. This led to the club being more competitive and several matches were fired with neighbouring clubs. By late 1923, the standard of shooting had risen appreciably and a challenge was lodged for the McKelvie Cup. The locals journeyed to Marton where the home team won by 24 points. The final match of the season occurred in November when a triangular match was shot between the Bulls, RSA and Awahuri Clubs, resulting in a win for the RSA Club by a margin of 4 points from Bulls with a further 11 points back to the home team. A Goodman shot a double possible, while J Milligan, A Henson, T Cribb and H Montgomerie shot creditably.

The club was represented by Mr Beattie and Mr Cleaver at a meeting held in Rongotea in 1924, which led to the formation of the Manawatu Miniature Rifle Association. In the same year, the first MMRA Championships were held in Palmerston North, at which Awahuri were well represented, when R Campbell finished second in the A grade and H Montgomerie, who won the silver medal for second place in the B grade, later went on to win the gold medal in 1925.

J Milligan presided over the annual meeting in 1926, where he remarked that for a young club, it held good positions in all competitions. He later jokingly said that if they kept on improving they would soon have the McKelvie cup in their possession. The election of officers resulted as follows: Patron, Mr J Linklater MP; President, Mr T Simpson; Vice-presidents Mr W Mayes and Mr A Henson; and Secretary, Mr H Montgomerie with Mr L Oke as assistant. The balance sheet showed a credit of £20 (\$40).

A wind-up social was held in the local hall to mark the finish of the season, when a programme consisting of dancing and musical items were presented by Miss Cheetham (piano) Miss Campbell (musical monologue) and Mr Lewer (song). A Euchre tournament was also held. Mr A Henson won the guessing competition, the prize being a cake donated by Mrs Steele. The President (T Simpson) spoke on the activities and successes of the club during the past season, and then called on Mr Linklater MP to present the cups and trophies. At the conclusion of the presentations the Secretary, Mr H Montgomerie and his assistant, Mr L Oke were made the recipients of two valuable presents from club members for their past services. Special mention was also made of the ladies who so willingly helped with the supper.

In 1933, Les Shailer of the Bunnythorpe club donated the Shailer Shield for competition between Bunnythorpe and Awahuri clubs and said that he hoped the matches would be the first of many pleasant evenings between the two clubs. The following trustees were appointed: L Shailer, H Matthews, W Matheson, E O'Donnell and W Salmons. Mr Shailer also stated that he hoped the trustees would see their way clear to allow other rifle clubs to compete for the shield. The first match was then fired, with Bunnythorpe being the first winners.

The Bunnythorpe Club dropped out of MMRA competitions in 1934, resulting in Les Shailer and Laurie Curtis joining the Awahuri Club. However these and several other members were lost when the Feilding Club was formed in late 1935.

Reference was made to Mr (Pop) Lucas, known as 'father of the club', and probably the oldest active member shooting in the Manawatu when he was elected a Life Member in 1935. Several members paid a tribute to his untiring and generous help, especially his part in founding the club.

The Awahuri Club travelled to Aokautere in June to take part in a challenge for the Hopcroft Shield. As this was the first time the shield had been competed for, the Aokautere President (Mr J Smith), called upon Mr Hopcroft to present it to the winning Captain, Mr Les Hastings. Mr J Milligan, on behalf of the Awahuri team replied, stating that while Awahuri were not successful on this occasion, they would be back for another attempt in the future. The club lodged several unsuccessful challenges for the Hopcroft Shield over the next few years and were finally rewarded when they won it in 1939 and held it until the end of the season.

On resumption of shooting after the Second World War, the club's roll was strengthened when a number of members from the defunct Feilding Club joined up. Amongst these were Les and Morris Shailer, the Aitken brothers and F Bocking. Brian Telfer also started his shooting career at this time.

The annual meeting in 1956 saw A Henson re-elected as Patron, a position he had held for a number of years. President was J Milligan; Secretary/Treasurer, A Lucas assisted by D Boddy; Club Captain was C Aitken; Vice-Captain, G McKinnon and delegates to the Manawatu Smallbore Rifle Association, I Aitken and T Simpson.

In 1964 the present hall was erected and a range was constructed under the stage. This was a great improvement over conditions in the old hall. Furore was later created when the RSA Club visited Awahuri for an interclub shoot. One of the visiting members had recently purchased one of those new fandangled Anschutz rifles and, not used to the light trigger pull, he managed to fire a shot through the newly purchased piano on the stage. Several members of the hall committee were of the opinion that rifle shooting should be banned, and there was much discussion before the club was allowed to continue shooting.

The club continued to shoot on this range with a large and strong membership. It has provided many representatives for MSRA teams and several have gone on to represent New Zealand. However credit must be given to older members who contributed to making the club what it is today. Amongst these are the Henson family who have represented Awahuri for the past 77 years, G Lucas, Joe Milligan, Gordon McKinnon, the Mathews family, the Hancocks, and many more who helped lay the foundations of the present club



The Awahuri Hall was used as a base as it had a rifle range attached to the hall, however in the late 1990s the Club was urged to find a new shooting range as other hall users were becoming concerned about lead dust and the possible contamination of the hall.

The Club relocated to a purpose-built facility at Manfield Park in Feilding in early 2004. This hall was constructed by volunteer labour and designed by Eddie Adlam. This range was named the Adlam Range.

Several years later, due to various reasons, the Club had to relocate yet again. The club members adapted a space under the main grandstand at Manfield Park for shooting purposes, and this range was used from 2012 to 2017.

Eventually, due to a decrease in numbers and Manfield Park wanting to demolish the grandstand, Awahuri Club members shot at the Colyton Smallbore Rifle Club range from March 2018. They finally amalgamated with the Colyton Club in March 2019.

The Awahuri Smallbore Rifle Club had three long-standing members made Life Members – Russell Henson in 2017, John Sutherland and Sid Martin in 2018. Today these three members are still helping out at the weekly meetings at the Colyton Club, and Sid Martin is still shooting.