

# *MARTON MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB*

**1915 – 2024**

During the mid 1800s, Wanganui had become an established township and settlers arriving in the area found land hard to purchase owing to the warlike menaces of the native population. To the south lay the fertile land and plains of the Rangitikei to which the settlers ventured and started clearing tracts of land so as to eke out a living with a few sheep and cattle.

By 1869 the settlement of Marton had been established and the Royal Rangitikei Rifles had been formed. At this time the settlers felt that a hall was needed to provide a venue for meetings and entertainment, and a series of fund raising events were launched. Land for the hall (North Broadway) was donated in 1870 by Captain Pennington Richardson for military purposes, and the Drill Hall, at first called the Drill shed, was built between 1870 and 1872 with voluntary labour headed by Mr W Birch. The building was constructed of heart Totara cut from Major Marshall's bush and also from surrounding bush at Porewa, and an idea of its strength can be gauged from the fact that the studs were 5" x 3" (120mm x 75mm), and the panelling and rafters were 6" x 3" (150mm x 75mm). The hall had a striking appearance with castle like turrets and was of such immense size that the complete regiment of the Royal Rangitikei Rifles could parade inside (unmounted of course).

In the early 1900s the government of the day, alarmed at the outbreak of war in South Africa, decided to establish a defence corp to form a pool of trained riflemen in case of further conflicts. This was done by the forming of cadet and territorial units and caused the collapse of the Royal Rifles who finally disbanded in 1911.

These events eventually led to the formation of the Marton Miniature Rifle Club in 1915, where the first balance sheet showed a credit of 8/9- (88 c) after meeting heavy initial expenses. Officers elected at the first annual meeting (1916) were President - A Bryce, Captain - C Rofe, Vice-captain - A Sayers, and Secretary - W Snellgrove. A silver challenge cup was presented by R Wood for the club championship. The club ceased to exist in 1917 through a lack of membership.

In response to an invitation extended by Mr Ken Fowler, 23 rifle enthusiasts attended a meeting on September 22nd 1922 in the Drill Hall, where a suggestion that the club be reformed was carried unanimously. Office bearers elected were Patron - Captain Mead, President - T Nesbit, Captain - J Harrison, and Secretary - E Copestake. Subscriptions were fixed at 7/6 (75 cents) entrance fee and 2/6 (25 cents) as an annual fee, and the President and Sergeant Major Davies were appointed to purchase the necessary accessories. Names handed in indicated that the membership would soon reach 50.

Changes in the McKelvie Cup rules in early 1923 saw competition opened up to all clubs within a 25 mile (40km) radius of Rongotea. The nearby Bulls Club took quick advantage of the rule by winning the cup, however, the Marton Club lodged a successful challenge in mid 1923, bringing it home amid a tumultuous welcome.

In September, after facing four challenges, the club was forced to travel to Palmerston North in defence of the McKelvie Cup trophy, where it was lost to the Linton Club by 36 points. Mr Gibbons, in presenting the trophy to the winning Captain, G Tremaine, referred to the strange conditions of the challenge cup rules, whereby a club that had successfully defended a challenge had to fire a repeat challenge (consecutively) by the same club on the opponent's range.

The end of year function was attended by the Mayor (F Purnell) who presented the trophies to various members. The Wood Cup - C McDonald (club champion), Gold medal - M Bevan

(handicap), Silver inkstand - C Gibbons, Silver spoon - M Kehoe, Mr Horliss's hair brushes - J Evans, and silver butter dish - P Anslow. Dancing was conducted to the excellent music of the Marton Orchestra on a fast and full floor. In concluding the President, C Gibbons, congratulated the club's members on winning the Wanganui and Districts Miniature Rifle Association Championship and finishing second in the Aggregate Shield competition.

Thanks to the generosity of Mr J Hannon, proprietor of the Marton hotel, donating sufficient land to enable the erection of new butts, the club was able to open the 1924 season on an entirely new range.

On the formation of the Manawatu Miniature Rifle Association, the club had received a letter inviting them to compete in the interclub matches, but this was declined as it was felt that their future lay with the Wanganui and Districts Association. Later the club had a major rethink on the policy it wished to pursue, resulting in Ken Fowler and C McDonald attending the annual meeting of the MMRA in 1925, where it became an affiliated member.

During the season the club shot poorly in these competitions, though it managed to win the Jones Shield on one occasion. (Note: this match was shot twice annually for the first few seasons). Towards the end of the year electric lighting was installed on the range replacing the gas and this change upset some of the older members. Mr A Todd, who installed the new lighting system, stated that it was a great time and trouble saver, and should prove a boon to the club.

A lack of interest was noted when Mr Gibbons presided over the 1926 annual meeting. Officers elected were Patron - A Way, President - C McDonald, and Rifle Custodians - A Taafe and E Neumann. The appointment of Secretary and the Executive was held over. Subscriptions for old members were increased from 2/6- (25 cents) to 5/- (50 cents), and new members were left at 10/- (\$1).

The meeting expressed disapproval of the action of the Wanganui District Miniature Rifle Association in not forwarding trophies won at the West Coast Championship shoot in the previous year. It was pointed out that the winner of the Senior Championship (W Twigg) had not received his medal and considerable trouble had been experienced in the past concerning the delivery of trophies.

Mr C Gibbons considered that the club had become stale in its shooting the previous year and he thought that if they left team shooting alone, it would be better for the club. It had been difficult to get teams to travel, and if only trophy shooting was carried out interest would be retained.

It was decided to affiliate with the Manawatu and New Zealand Associations and to advise Wanganui that the club would not compete for the shield that year. An excerpt from the Manawatu Standard dated July 12, 1926 stated "There appears to be very little interest taken in the miniature sport in Marton this season, and this once strong club has experienced difficulty in fielding teams, with the result that it has reluctantly been compelled to withdraw."

The club continued shooting with reduced numbers but further disaster was to strike when the Drill Hall was destroyed by fire on November 7th, 1926. The alarm was given at 2 am and the fire spread quickly from the rear to the front, and the Fire Brigade could do little but protect the neighbouring buildings. However about 19,000 rounds of ammunition and 20 rifles were saved through the efforts of a team of salvagers led by the officer in charge of the hall, Sergeant -Major Domney. A supply of uniforms belonging to the cadet unit and the targets of the rifle club went up in smoke, along with other contents. The fire was thought to be the work of an arsonist who had been responsible for several mystery fires in the town. This was the final straw for the Marton Club which went into recess shortly afterwards.

Efforts to revive the club were made at a public meeting in May 1932 presided over by Mr C McDonald, who reported that quite a number of young men and 'old timers' had expressed a willingness to take up the sport again. However this met with a lukewarm reception and, at a further meeting in June, it was decided to let the motion lapse. At this point the trustees decided that the

remainder of the defunct miniature rifle club's funds (1926), £23/3/3 (\$46.32) should be passed on to the newly formed Defence Rifle Club.

On the 28th of May, 1936 a public meeting was held in the Jockey Club rooms where a good crowd of those interested decided to form a club. The Empire Hall in Hair street was engaged for shooting purposes and a start was made on June 29th, 1936. In October the club journeyed to Sandon where it was soundly beaten. The older marksmen gave the youngsters every encouragement and said, with a little more practice the tables would soon be turned. W Rankin won the club Championship cup with A Taafe runner-up, and the season ended with 48 financial members and club assets valued at £25 (\$50).

The first annual meeting of the re-formed Marton Miniature Rifle Club saw the following officers elected: Patron - F Purnell, President - L Gordon, Secretary - held over, Club Captain - W Rankin, Vice-Captain - A Clark, and Auditor - Reverend P Leonard. It was decided to hold the opening night on Monday, 15th March. Ladies were admitted and a letter was to be written to Frank Soler thanking him for the use of his telescope. Subs were set at 5/- (50 cents) and 1/3 (12 cents) per night for 16 shots.

For the next season the club would be divided into two grades, the top 14 being graded A with the remainder classified as B grade. The club shot to a high standard during the season and reached the semi-finals of the MMRA B Grade Championship where they were beaten by Feilding.

A delightful 'close of season' dance was held in the Empire hall where both 'old time' and modern dancing was enjoyed to the music supplied by Miss M Taafe (piano), and Mr R Neilson (accordion). Mr W Rankin, Club Captain, then presented the following trophies: Club championship - A Taafe, Junior championship - A Bridger, and Handicap cup - C MacGregor. Mr Rankin, in conclusion said he thought a function of this sort would benefit the social side of the club.

The annual general meeting of 1938 saw the following officers elected: Patron - Mr Ormond Wilson MP, President - W Rankin, Secretary - Arthur Clark, and Club Captain - Jack Hammond. It was decided to change to the new Remington ammunition after the ICI brand had been used and to continue shooting in the Empire Hall. However an opportunity arose and the club was able to purchase a billiard room in French Street for use as a range for the sum of £126 (\$252) with rates to be £1/2/6 (\$2.25) per annum.

Towards the end of the season the club passed through a rather critical period but, with financial assistance through the issue of bonds, was able to weather the storm. Much work was done on the building before it could be used as a range. This was done by cutting holes in several walls and the erection of concrete butts at the rear of the building, to get the maximum length of 25 yards. This meant that the bullet had to travel partly in the hall and across an open courtyard before it reached the target. Shooting was carried on in this way until the Second World War when the club was forced to cease shooting.

In the post-war era many renovations have been made to the range. The shooting tunnel has been shifted to the right hand side of the building, a sliding target holder introduced and a new kitchen block erected, thus making it a most comfortable range.

Over the years the Marton Club has hosted many important events on behalf of the Manawatu Smallbore Rifle Association. The first being the North Island Championships in 1957, when the Palmerston North range was burnt down, and in later years held the Jones and Collinson shoots. Today it runs an annual trophy shoot which plays an important part in the New Zealand shooting calendar.

Mention must also be made of the contribution to shooting by members of the club. These include Henry Coles, Murray Gledhill and Noel Palmer as NZ representatives, Ailsa Dickson and Shelley Rhodes as NZ junior reps just to name a few. Many other members have also represented Manawatu at various shoots. The history of the club would not be complete without mentioning the

Rhodes family, Neville, Shelley, Rebecca and Caroline. Shooting must run in the family as Neville's grandfather originally shot for the Rata Rifle Club and presented the Rhodes Cup in 1929.

By 1999 the club had 17 members and was in a good position going into the new millennium.



# Target Shooting Marton 2000 – 2024

At the AGM for the year 2000 it was moved that the main hall would be carpeted to make the area more welcoming and quieter. Funding for this project was to be sourced from Pub Charity and this project was completed before the start of 2001 season.

Shelley Rhodes was selected to shoot at the Oceania Games (Australia) and this was a truly great achievement for the Rhodes family. Shelley's father Neville would later be awarded the Rangitikei Coach of the Year for his outstanding contribution to new shooters coming through both the Inter Schools competition and at local club level.



*Caroline and Rebecca Rhodes part of the Junior Team - 2007*

The shooting range was unfortunately broken into in 2002 with the loss of several target rifles. These rifles would have been completely useless as there were no bolts or actions stored with the rifles. Although the perpetrators were caught, the rifles were never recovered. This brought about a decision by the club to apply for funding, once again through Pub Charity, to purchase 4 replacement Anschutz rifles to better accommodate the new shooters in the Club and provide enough rifles to run our Sports and Business house shoot. 2002 also produced a record number of entries for the Club's annual Business house shoot with 89 teams entered (356 people over four nights). This number of teams entered has never been surpassed.

The early 2000 was an exceptional period for School grade and Junior shooters within our Club. A number of them were selected for both North Island and New Zealand Junior representation.

### **These shooters being:**

Shelley, Rebecca and Caroline Rhodes, Jessica Crawford, Briar and Nicola Lissington.

Special mention must be made to Neville Rhodes whose contribution was recognized at TSNZ level by receiving a Silver Merit award for services to coaching.

2003 we were joined by ex Utiku members Gary Cuff and Don Hamilton. Gary brought a wealth of experience and passion to our Club and has been rewarded over his time with numerous personal achievements at various championships around the lower North Island. Gary together with Tony Bayler and Fiona Mills have also gone on to be selected regularly at national levels across various teams.

In 2011 the Club applied for more funding, once again through Pub Charity, for the purchase of 6 more target rifles to replace the last of the aging 12/15 and BSA rifles. This allowed every participant in our now very popular Sports and Business House shoot to be able to compete with modern rifles. The Sport and Business House shoot has been held since 1978 making it the longest running business house competition in the Rangitikei area. This shoot has also been a great way of introducing people to our sport and consequently increasing our membership.

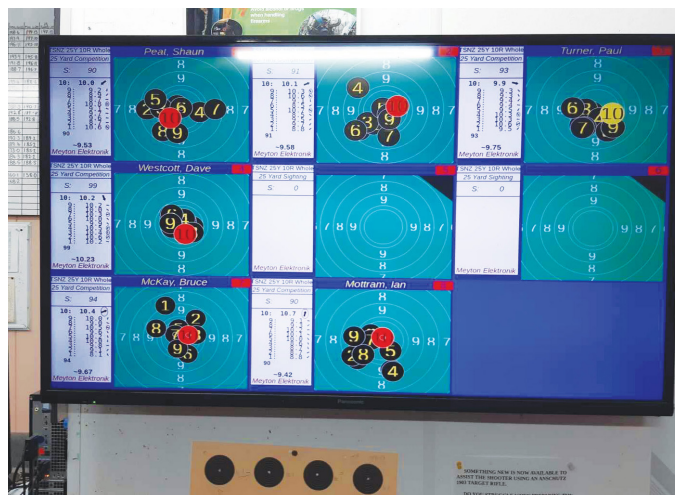
Due to the closure of the Awahuri Club we welcomed four new members:

Brent and Matt Reid (since moved to Australia) and John and Fiona Mills. They have proven to be a welcome asset to our Club and have brought with them a wealth of experience.

At the 2017 AGM, a decision was made to make Marton the first indoor club in the country to use a digital shooting facility. Work commenced at the end of the 2017 season with a lot of personal time and effort by a keen group of club members. By the start of the 2018 season the club was ready to embark on a new era of target shooting at the Marton range. It would be fair to say that the change to a digital format of shooting came with its challenges. It seemed like every Monday night there was a different set of issues to deal with. Once this 'sorting out' period was behind us it was soon realized that going to a digital shooting format has been very beneficial for the future of the Marton Club. It must be noted that three of the digital targets were funded by members of our club, a fourth target was provided by the recent closure of the Awahuri club and a fifth target was provided by the generosity of a local businessman. At the time of writing the Marton Club is still the only indoor target shooting facility to be using the digital format.

The first Sports and Business House shoot used the digital targets for the first time in 2022, this was met with an overwhelmingly positive response by all of the participants. This also made the running of the shoot a lot easier for club members.

Target Shooting Marton has always been well supported by local businesses to assist with the running of various tournaments by the way of sponsorships and upgrades to the facility. This includes full replacement of the roof; the installation of the heat pump in the shooting range; carpet installed on the target mounds and a safety rail installed. This has made the shooting range more comfortable and safer for shooters.



The future of the Marton club looks very positive with the influx of new members keen to experience the new digital format. The membership growth can only be attributed to the club having a great atmosphere, along with the introduction of the digital shooting facility format making competition nights at the Club a lot easier for those members who would normally be changing and marking targets under the previous paper card system.

