

# *PALMERSTON NORTH MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB*

## **1937-1984**

Shooting had prospered in the Manawatu, with 13 clubs and 300 members taking part in Association competitions. At a meeting in May 1937, Mr A Drew, President of the MMRA, stated that the last club shooting in Palmerston North itself, was in 1932, and he saw no reason why the city should not be able to revive interest and form at least one strong club.

A number of halls were suggested and it was ultimately decided that a committee consisting of A Drew, R Ramsay and J Shelley make enquiries throughout the city for a suitable building.

At a further meeting in June, presided over by Mr J Gordon, the Palmerston North Miniature Rifle Club was formed, with a range being rented in the showgrounds. There was a short discussion on the naming of the new club and it was decided to alter the name to the Palmerston North (Linton) Miniature Rifle Club, the name Linton being embraced as a gesture to the defunct Linton club whose trustee had offered the use of its rifles, bullet traps and associated gear for the new club.

The official opening ceremony in July was performed by the Mayor (Mr A Mansford), who expressed surprise that the city had been without a club for so many years, and he assured the club of every reasonable support from the City Council. The fact that there was already a membership of 50 was indeed a happy omen and he felt certain that the new club had come to stay.

In 1938 a shift was made to more suitable premises in Lombard Street and the President (Mr J Gordon) approached the Palmerston North City Council to obtain a permanent site behind the Opera House Service Station in Church Street, opposite the present Police Station. However nothing became of this and the club finally withdrew from competition when a lack of interest caused a falling membership.

The club was later revived in 1947 when a joint venture with the Longburn Miniature Rifle Club saw the construction of a range in Manawatu Street on Mr Ernie Strong's property. The Longburn Club had existed in name only as most of its members came from the city area.

At the Annual meeting in 1948, the two clubs merged and Mr F Andrews was elected President with E Strong, W Birch and N Hansen being Vice-presidents. Mr L Hunter was Secretary.

In 1949 the PN City Council offered the club a new site in Albert Street in a hollow at the rear of the PNCC depot. Construction of a new range followed and, with the aid of a Government grant, the building was ready for shooting in 1950. To aid the finances, the club sublet the range to the PNRSA Club and the Rifle, Rod and Gun Miniature Club, which was formed in late 1948.

The middle 1950s saw the club at its strongest with the following shooters competing successfully: Ernie Strong, Florian Lewis, Ed Bunting, Wes Birch, Ron Andrews, Charlie Baines, Les Hunter, Phil Cowlshaw and Dave Wackildene. Mentioned also was a promising young shooter, Gordon Clapperton.

Disaster was to follow when the club's range was destroyed by fire in late 1956. The premises had been let for a private function and the fire caused the loss of £3,000 (\$6,000) in lost rifles, ammunition and equipment for the 3 clubs concerned, however much of this loss was covered by insurance.

The clubs rallied together and, after a series of fund raising events, a new range was ready for shooting in 1958. The range was rather unique for its day, being a split level structure with the social hall on the top level and a 12 mound shooting bay below. Due to the low lying nature of the area, the range was prone to flooding, which rendered the bottom 6 mounds unusable and, on occasions, restricted access.

The Manawatu Smallbore Rifle Association used this range as its headquarters for the Manawatu and North Island Championships until 1981, when it opened a new and modern 20 mound range in Totara Road. In the same year, the Palmerston North Club shifted its activities to the new range. The club continued shooting in conjunction with the Rongotea Club on Monday nights.

Some of the members drifted away and, because of dwindling numbers, the club went into recess in the mid eighties, and the remaining members then joined the Rongotea Club and loaned its equipment to them.

Thus ended the history of the club which had played an active part in shooting in the Manawatu for about 47 years.