



THE SHOOTERS' RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

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RULES AND BYELAWS **AS AMENDED** **JULY 2013**

Shooters' Rights Association

RULES AND GUIDANCE

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NEW RULES, NEW GUIDANCE FROM THE SRA

Recent claims made under the SRA's public liability insurance have exposed one or two ambiguities in the Association's Rules and Bye-laws. The revised and updated version, as approved by the SRA Committee, is printed here, along with useful guidance for members performing battle re-enactment and for those using live ammunition

**RULES AND BYE-LAWS
of the
SHOOTERS' RIGHTS ASSOCIATION
November 1993
with Amendments to July 2013**

RULES

1. The name of the Association is The Shooters' Rights Association, hereinafter referred to as the SRA.
2. The objects of the SRA are to protect the rights of present and future firearm and shotgun certificate holders and promote and generally to further the interests of those concerned with and authorized in the holding, possession and use of (whether by certificate, exemption or otherwise) firearms, shot guns, air weapons, explosives, bows, ammunition (including component parts of ammunition) and similar or associated items of equipment; to provide information and assistance of a technical, practical, legal or other nature in relation to such matters as the possession, handling, storage, repair and servicing thereof and by all other available means to increase and disseminate such knowledge and information in relation thereto; to carry on any or all of the businesses necessary for the SRA's objects and to publish and advertise as necessary to further the SRA's objectives.
3. Persons who are collectors of, dealers in, concerned with or authorized in the use of (by certificate, exemption or otherwise) any firearms, pyrotechnics and explosives; firearms, ammunition and all associated items of equipment kept for taking part in any shooting activity, collecting, battle re-enactment, living history and airsoft skirmish are qualified for membership using weapons as appropriate to their historical period. Persons prohibited from possessing

firearms by virtue of section 21 of the Firearms Act, 1968, as amended, may not use any firearm within the meaning of section 57(1) until prohibition is lifted by the passage of time or a Crown Court application under section 21(6), as appropriate and will not be covered by SRA insurance if doing so in violation of the law. A prohibited person may use historical non-firearm weapons for battle re-enactment and living history activities.

4. The SRA is (amended January 1998) an unincorporated membership association, managed by its officers, steered by *ad hoc* and standing committees and accountable to its members.
5. The SRA's assets are the responsibility of the officers and trustees.
6. The SRA is responsible for meeting the administrative and other such costs as are generated in pursuit of the SRA's objects.
7. Every member of the SRA shall, subject to these rules and bye-laws from time to time in force, be entitled to use and enjoy in common with the other members of the SRA all facilities offered or provided by the SRA, but shall not by reason of his membership be under any financial liability except for payment of his annual subscription to the SRA, other than as separately agreed between the SRA and that member.
8. PROVIDED always that no member of the SRA shall have the right to represent the SRA or otherwise pass himself off as representing the SRA in any matters concerning the policies, objects and aims of the SRA other than such as are stated in these rules and bye-laws or such as are published from time to time by an SRA committee unless the member is authorized in writing by an SRA committee to do so.
9. The SRA shall consist of any number of founder, lifetime, annual (full), family, principal, associate, corresponding, guest and honorary members. Other classes of membership shall be instituted from time to time by additions to the bye-laws approved by committee. Members shall be ordinarily resident in the

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United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, including the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, or the Republic of Ireland, to enjoy the full benefits of membership.

10. The membership fee payable by a member on acceptance shall be such sum (if any) as the committee shall from time to time determine. The committee may require membership fees of varying amounts and may remit the whole or part of the membership fee of any member.

11. An individual member accepted after the first day of January, April, July or October in any year shall be granted membership valid until the last day of March, June, September or December the year following and shall be required to renew his membership on or before the due date.

12. Any club or group accepted after the first day of February, May, August or November in any year shall be granted membership valid until the last day of April, July, October of the year after, or in the case of November, the last day of January twelve-month after joining. Members of such a group are deemed to be associate members of the SRA.

13. Any group of members may seek an alternative renewal date for their own convenience on first joining, provided that it is not less than 12 months hence, by paying the additional fee *pro rata*.

14. A member absent abroad for the whole of any membership year shall, upon giving written notice to the SRA and on payment of his regular membership fee, be entitled to receive such circulars and other material as is sent to ordinary members of the SRA at any one domestic or overseas address in accordance with his instructions.

15. Any person living permanently abroad, of any nationality, may apply to the SRA for membership and if accepted will similarly be entitled to receive all communications as are sent to domestic members on payment of the appropriate membership fee; PROVIDED that such insurance benefits of membership as are provided for residents of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland do not extend to overseas resident members. Such members shall be known as corresponding members.

16. Annual subscriptions shall be payable to the SRA before the due date shown on the membership card. The SRA shall make every effort to draw members' attention to the need to attend to renewal of their subscription, but any failure by the SRA to do so is essentially the member's hard luck.

17. If any member is in arrears, the SRA will send him one reminder and if his subscription is not paid within twenty-eight days from the seventh day after the notice was posted, an authorized person will remove that

member's details from the SRA's records, thus to comply with the Data Protection Act. He shall thereupon cease to be a member and forfeit all rights of membership. PROVIDED that the committee may at any time in their discretion restore him to membership upon payment of all arrears of subscription due, or otherwise as the committee sees fit.

18. A member may resign his membership at any time by writing to the SRA secretary at his office, but shall be liable for his subscription for the remainder of the year in which he resigns. The SRA shall discontinue sending circulars and other communications to resigned members as soon as practicable after receipt of the resignation, and will delete a resigned member's database entry as soon as practicable after the expiry date thereon.

19. Upon receipt of a notification of a member's death, the SRA shall avoid causing distress to the bereaved household by removing the late member from the database forthwith. The SRA's condolences shall be forwarded to the appropriate next of kin, if known, or to the informant, if appropriate. The SRA shall make its firearms-related services available to the late member's family or executor, if required. The unused portion of the late member's subscription year can be transferred—as an honorary membership—to the said next of kin or executor for its duration or for 12 months in the case of deceased life members.

20. Any member convicted of any offence shall furnish the SRA with full particulars of the conviction in the event of any claim on any insurance that members benefit from through the SRA. Any member found to be a 'prohibited person' within the meaning of section 21 of the Firearms Act, 1968, as amended, may retain membership but shall not use or carry firearms within the meaning of section 57(1) of the 1968 Act until the prohibition is lifted by the passage of time, or by a successful application to a Crown Court sitting in its capacity as successor to the Quarter Sessions.

21. If the committee are of the opinion that a member has not conducted himself satisfactorily, or has failed to justify or explain any questioned conduct satisfactorily, the committee shall call upon the member in writing to resign and may expel him if he does not resign. A member thus expelled shall forfeit all privileges of membership forthwith. Any appeal from a person in these circumstances shall be considered promptly and sympathetically and the opinions of stalwart founder and life members may be canvassed.

22. An annual general meeting of the SRA shall be provided for in accordance with SRA Bye-law 13.

23. The committee shall exercise the powers given to it by these rules and other such powers of management as the affairs of the SRA may from time to time

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require, including responsibility for reviewing and amending bye-laws as necessary. The committee shall consist of the officers and other functionaries of the SRA whose posts are identified in SRA Bye-law 1. Additional persons, who must at all times be full members of the SRA, may be co-opted to the committee whenever a need for their expertise is recognized by the committee.

24. The annual general meeting may appoint up to four additional members to the committee for a year following the AGM.

25. A quorum of the committee shall consist of the SRA secretary and a simple majority of officers, co-opted and appointed members. Apologies for absence count as attendance for quorum purposes, provided that the person apologizing for absence has received minutes of the previous meeting and an agenda for the meeting he will not attend.

26. Committee members may reclaim their reasonable expenses, caused in the exercise of their duties to the SRA, from the SRA Treasurer, if they can nail him or her down.

BYE-LAWS

1 The officers of the SRA shall be the chairman, secretary and treasurer. The chairman (elected 1984) is Mr Jan A Stevenson. The secretary of the SRA, (appointed June 1985) is Mr Richard A Law. The treasurer of the SRA, co-opted in May 2001, is Mrs Elizabeth M Law. The Scottish representative, co-opted in August 1996, is Mr Francis Berry. The Welsh representative, co-opted in May 2003, is Mr Phillip Chennells. The editor of the newsletter (title amended to *The Shooter's Journal* in 1992) is Mr Peter Brookesmith (appointed 1998).

2 The committee shall regulate its own procedure and keep only such records as it thinks necessary.

3 The committee may appoint sub-committees and depute to them any relevant powers. Members of sub-committees are not to be regarded as members of the SRA committee unless already on the committee or specifically co-opted to be so.

CLASSES OF MEMBERSHIP

4 Members should ordinarily be resident in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands or the Republic of Ireland to benefit from the SRA's public liability insurance policy. Membership applications from any person living beyond the defined territory will be accepted as corresponding members.

5 Full annual members of the SRA are those individuals who have paid (or been excused) the full membership fee in force for the year in question.

6 With effect from 1 July 1988, family members are those persons resident with a full member, for whom the full member has paid the additional fee set by the committee.

7 Full members of the SRA who first joined between 1 August 1984 and 15 July 1985 shall be regarded as founder members and as such shall be entitled to a distinctive membership card.

8 With effect from 1 October 1985, associate membership is recognised for members of any club, group or syndicate that affiliates to the SRA as a unit, paying the appropriate membership fee for each of its members. One member of the group shall be the principal member, through whom payments shall be made and to whom correspondence shall be directed.

9 With effect from 1 April 1992 a class of life member is recognized on payment of the set fee or by the award of the committee.

10 The SRA recognizes as guest members, who benefit from the public liability insurance, persons invited to attend an SRA affiliated club or group activity where the guest is legally entitled to carry or use firearms and shotguns under subsections 1-6 of section 11 of the Firearms Act, 1968, or sections 15(1) and 16 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act, 1988 only, and provided that they are closely supervised on a one-to-one basis at all times while doing so. Outside of these legal exemptions, no guest, visitor or member of the audience may use any weapon of any description unless they can satisfy the organiser that they have their own effective public liability insurance in force at the time.

11 The SRA Committee may appoint any person an honorary member to any class of membership. Honorary members pay no membership fee for the duration of said honorary membership.

GOOD ORDER AND DISCIPLINE

12 All members are expected to comply with the law of the land with respect to their ownership, possession, storage and usage of any firearm or other weapon appropriate to the activity being engaged in. Members must also comply with the rules or laws of any association, club, group, syndicate or other body through which they are so insured or engaged. Where no formal rules exist, members should observe traditional safety standards or etiquette as appropriate. Be aware that acting unlawfully or in violation of local rules or etiquette may void any claim a member may have to make on public liability insurance.

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GENERAL MEETINGS

13 The SRA Committee shall hold an annual general meeting each year in March in the range clubroom and any member may attend at his own expense. If thirteen (13) or more Annual, Founder, Honorary, Life or Principal members petition for a meeting regarded as necessary at any other time of year, it will be deemed an extraordinary general meeting and may be held at any location suitable to its purpose.

FEES

14 Fees for each class of membership shall be set by the committee and reviewed periodically to accommodate the SRA's costs. The current fees are to be published in the *Journal* each time the journal is published. The SRA is expected to be self-funding from membership fees, the sale of promotional goods, course and competition fees and range fees.

NEWSLETTER

(title amended to *The Shooter's Journal* in 1992)

15 The SRA shall produce a journal periodically to keep its membership informed of both the SRA's activities and relevant current affairs topics. The ideal frequency is four issues per year, but this is to be approached flexibly by the editor—increasing frequency during campaign periods and reducing it in quiet news periods. The *Journal* is to be sent, on publication, to honorary and life members; to all paid-up full (annual and founder) members, to the principal member of every paid-up club or group and to corresponding members. At the treasurer's discretion, a renewal reminder may be included to those whose subscriptions will fall due for renewal up to three months after publication. At the treasurer's discretion, recently lapsed members may receive a *Journal* with a reminder, or a reminder promising them a *Journal* after receipt of their subscription. The *Journal* shall also be sent, on publication, to those persons on the 'free list' maintained by the secretary. Any committee member may nominate persons for inclusion on the free list and the list is to be revised by the secretary immediately prior to publication of each *Journal*.

INSURANCE

16a With effect from 15 July 1985, SRA members shall benefit from a policy of legal costs insurance [SUSPENDED JULY 2009]. Claims in respect of section 44 appeals cannot be made to the SRA while appropriate insurance is not in effect. Members who get into this difficulty after joining will be assisted to the full extent of the SRA's expertise and any member may be assisted with funding in appropriate cases.

16b With effect from 17 July 1988, the SRA members shall benefit from a policy of public liability insurance in the sum of [AMENDED] up to £10 million per claim in respect of claims against them arising from their negligence specifically while engaged in any kind of lawful shooting activity, or archery, airsoft skirmish, battle re-enactment and living history activity. This insurance does not absolve members from their legal responsibility to hold third-party insurance while using vehicles on public roads.

Claims relating to or potentially relating to likely action by a third party (whether a member of the SRA or otherwise) shall be notified to the secretary within seven days of the incident, or with an adequate explanation of the delay if later.

Accidents involving personal injury to any person at any meeting where members are engaged in any of the activities listed on the public liability insurance policy should be recorded in the accident book for the range/venue/event site on the day it happens. The names and contact details of relevant witnesses should also be recorded.

An accident/incident form should be returned to the SRA secretary within seven days of any such accident or incident occurring at any meeting where members are engaged in any of the activities listed on the public liability insurance policy. The format for such notification can be downloaded from the SRA website or a paper version can be requested from the SRA secretary.

WAR CHEST

17 The treasurer shall maintain in the number two account, funds donated by members or raised by events to be used as a fighting fund in times when firearms legislation is under Parliamentary scrutiny. The use of the fighting fund shall be at the sole discretion of the treasurer.

FUND RAISING

18 The SRA's principal fund-raising—for the purposes of meeting its overheads and insurance premiums—is the membership subscription. Cash and cheque payments will be processed through Alliance and Leicester (formerly National Giro) and credit or debit card transactions via the National Westminster Bank. The SRA's officers will constantly consider additional ways of raising money either to help with the SRA's overheads or for the fighting fund, as appropriate. Where an event or activity is specifically for raising fighting-fund money, its purpose should always be clear to participants. Where no specific purpose is made clear, the treasurer has sole discretion as to how the money should be stored and used.

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PROMOTIONAL GOODS

19 The SRA owns the copyright of its logo, drawn by the late Terry Hill and based on the 1973 Larry Watkins design. Promotional goods featuring the logo will be sold for the benefit of general funds. All such goods should be purchased or commissioned by the SRA and sold through its own outlets. This bye-law does not envisage promotional goods being sold wholesale or in partnership with any other business or organisation.

TARGET RANGE

20 The SRA shall construct and maintain a 25-metre target range at Llanerchymedwr, Pembrokeshire, on land leased from the Law family, for the convenience of members. The range shall be constructed to Army specification and a range safety certificate obtained [issued May, 1988]. The range shall be managed for the SRA by the Charter Gun Club or its successors. The committee of the club managing the range shall be regarded by this bye-law as a sub-committee of the SRA for the purposes of decisions relating to any financial commitment relating to the range facility. Club members using the facility shall pay fees to the club as appropriate. SRA members using the facilities outside of club meeting times must comply with any and all range rules and pay the relevant fees to the SRA. The Charter Gun Club Committee or its successors are, in their capacity as a sub-committee of the SRA, expected to raise such funds as are necessary to maintain the range to Army standards. Where improvements are to be made for the convenience of members, it is expected that the costs shall be shared by the management club and the SRA. The range remains the property of the landowners to whom it reverts as private property if or when any lease or agreement ceases to have effect.

TRAINING COURSES

21 The SRA shall offer shooting-related training courses to the limits of the expertise of its officers. The SRA shall also use the facilities for promoting other shooting courses for the benefit of members and the general improvement of safety and expertise within the shooting community. The facilities may be leased by other training organisations and used for their private training periods when the facilities are not required by the Charter Gun Club or its successors with funds thus raised earmarked for the purpose of maintenance and improvement.

DEFINITIONS

22 'He' or 'his' etc. should be read to also mean 'her' or 'hers' etc. as necessary. The SRA recognises male

and female members equally and has neither a lower nor an upper age limit for any class of membership.

Firearms are defined in the UK by section 57(1) of the Firearms Act, 1968 as lethal barrelled weapons from which any shot, bullet or missile can be discharged. Firearms are ordinarily subject to section 1 of the 1968, which require the keeper to hold a firearm certificate. Some firearms additionally are subject to section 5 controls, while others are exempted from section 1, such as low-powered air weapons, shotguns and antiques. Some people are exempted from the need to hold a certificate under certain circumstances.

Where a shotgun is exempted from section 1 controls, its keeper ordinarily requires a shot gun certificate under section 2 of the 1968 Act.

Low-powered air weapons are exempted from the need to hold a section 1 certificate, but have to be secured when not in use under provisions in the Crime and Security Act 2010.

Nothing in the Firearms Acts applies to any antique firearm possessed solely as a curiosity or ornament.

Deactivated firearms are recognised by section 8 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988.

Realistic Imitation Firearms are defined by the Violent Crime Reduction Act, 2006.

Members of the SRA live in England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey and the Republic of Ireland. The law relating to the possession and use of firearms and other weapons varies throughout these seven administrations; members must take care to comply with the law for the area they live in and the law of any other territory that they enter in the course of their shooting or related activities.

Guidance

BATTLE RE-ENACTMENT & LIVING HISTORY

Mistakes to avoid!

REMEMBER—

- Public liability insurance covers the third (or innocent, uninvolved) party's losses arising from your negligence.
- You have a duty to minimize that risk, hence completing risk assessments, training for and rehearsing events. *People who are not trained for a particular scenario should not take an active part in it.*
- SRA membership and thus your insurance includes

member-to-member cover, still with the caveat that, at the time of the incident, that claimant was the third, or innocent party.

- Our policy does not extend to personal injury, so if you fall on your sword, there's no third or innocent party; if you're pushed onto your sword, was the pusher negligent?
- If you use volunteers in your events, their role should not extend beyond what they are trained to do. You do not have time at an event to train volunteers up, so anybody who's not a member of your group should not use any of the weapons.

THE EXCEPTION to this is the carefully supervised one-to-one that occurs within living history demonstrations. You can let people feel the weight of your sword or rifle, for example, but the only circumstances in which non-members can use weapons are in closely supervised one-to-one 'have a go' archery and the equivalent with a rifle under section 16 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act, 1988, or at a Home Office approved club's guest day.

Outside of those limited circumstances, non-members aren't insured, so if you let guests loose with weapons, the damage they do would be at their liability, and if they injure themselves, they might think you negligent for letting them use weapons they haven't been properly trained on, particularly if you didn't get them to sign a disclaimer first.

The point of public liability insurance, as you know, is to protect you personally (indemnify you) for the cost of claims against you from a third or innocent party who suffers loss, damage or injury as a consequence of your negligence.

Negligence can creep in via complacency, but also through misunderstandings or simply where you don't think things through. The position with live ammunition is quite strictly controlled and while a lot of the regulation is designed by the Home Office to prevent shooting becoming a more popular pastime, its origins lie with safety and can be usefully applied to the theatrical side of what our members do. Do read the relevant article in this journal.

The umbrella terms 'battle re-enactment' and 'living history' cover a broad church of activity, from Dave Partridge tuning up and firing cannons to ladies demonstrating 14th-century cooking techniques. Our ranks, and thus our readers, range from practically pre-history to Falklands and Northern Ireland re-enactment groups. The Second World War is probably the most popular period, although more people engage in activities related to the Wars of the Roses.

As in all things, it's a question of identifying

hazards and planning on how to manage the risk. It's like teaching a child to swim; if that's the mission, you have to figure how to do it safely so that the child (a) can learn to swim and (b) doesn't drown trying.

The Boy Scout principle of proficiency works well. Train new members of your group to the highest standards; make sure everyone in the group understands the management of risk, rehearse and display. Negligence is most likely to creep in with a stranger or a beginner. Your audience can become claimants, but often contribute to the problem, such as by tripping over tent pegs.

Guidance

USING LIVE AMMUNITION

Be aware of your liabilities

Live ammunition shooters are wholly responsible for every shot they fire, wherever they are. The Ministry of Defence discontinued issuing range safety certificates in 2006, since which time police forces have changed the wording of the firearm certificate condition relating to target shooting from one that restricted the use of firearms to ranges which had a range safety certificate to a condition restricting the use of firearms to insured ranges.

The current condition is nonsense, of course, although the Home Office has ignored representations on the subject. The new wording was a knee-jerk reaction to range safety certificates ending and was dreamed up by someone who didn't bother asking the insurers if it made sense, never mind seeking advice from anybody competent. It's like restricting licensed motorists to using their cars only on insured roads. What it means in practice is 'insured clubs', since one can't these days have a firearm certificate for target shooting without being a member of a Home Office approved club, even when one is using firearms for which the club is not approved by the Home Office.

In the old days of the 1968 Firearms Act, before the rapid series of knee-jerk reactions (1988-97) distorted things so much, shooting clubs could apply to the Home Office for approval under section 11(3) of the Act. The utility of being approved was that club members could then use firearms for which they did not personally hold a certificate. Some clubs had training firearms specifically for new members to learn on and practice with, held on a free club certificate usually issued to an officer of the club. The Webley single shot break-action .22 pistol with a 10 inch barrel was a ubiquitous entry-level pistol, as was the .22 BSA

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12/15 rifle the start point for many a smallbore rifleman. Cadets had Lee Enfield number eights and a fullbore club would usually have a P14.

Beyond that, however, the club exemption extended to any firearm, so it could be borrowed from another member or introduced to the club by any authorized person—a registered firearms dealer or from another club etc. Home Office approval covered all firearms, so some rifle clubs had clay pigeon and practical shotgun sections, where again, newcomers could train on borrowed guns until sufficiently experienced to acquire their own.

The rot set in with the 1988 Act, which took Home Office approval of target clubs out of section 11(3) and put it into section 15(1) of the new Act. The difference is that 11(3) covered 'drill or target practice' and covered rifle club and cadet corps members. After 31st October 1989, section 11(3) referred solely to cadet corps and the new 15(1) for target clubs referred only to target practice.

We don't know what menace the Home Office thought not allowing clubs to drill would avert, nor have they ever explained why safety drills, malfunction drills etc. had to be discontinued. It was probably paranoia, or a simple misunderstanding of the English language. Maybe they outsourced the drafting of the legislation to India. Every aspect of training with a firearm other than shooting it is a 'drill'; or was until 1989, now it's a 'training protocol'. Marching about in formation with rifles was not something clubs did, that having been prohibited by the Unlawful Drilling Act, 1820, and the Public Order Act, 1936.

Then it got worse: from 1990, Home Office approval only extended to four classes of firearms, viz: full bore rifle, small bore rifle, full bore pistol and small bore pistol. That removed Home Office approval from air gun and shotgun training, which had to continue under other exemptions. The 1988 Act also lifted repeating shotguns from section 2 to section 1 and the new system of approval meant that there was no legal way to borrow or lend a section 1 shotgun. Clubs had to apply in each category that they wished to continue shooting, the pivot point for approval or otherwise being what firearms types were on the club range safety certificate, or more accurately, the range safety certificates of the ranges the club used.

There were fourteen variants of range safety certificates. Ranges were approved as 'danger area' or 'no danger area'; the ammunition used was classified against calibre, muzzle velocity and striking energy and the shooting stance as standing, kneeling, sitting or prone. The calibre limit did not apply to muzzle loaders or shotguns, and where used the Army typically just put 'shotgun' and 'black powder' on the

face of the certificate as necessary.

The origin of the practice of the Army approving civilian ranges was that rifle clubs affiliated to the National Rifle Association qualified as charities if one of the 'objects' in their constitution was defence of the realm. Civilian riflemen were supposed to be practicing in peace to '*para bellum*'. Clubs so constituted got the free services of the Army to make sure that the range was so designed as to be safe *for the firer*. Nothing to do with public safety, it was just so that the Army could commandeer the range in an emergency and use it for training purposes, confident in the knowledge that it was already safe to use and would not need modifying for their purposes.

The idea of restricting target shooters to 'approved' ranges came in with restricted and unpublished guidance to police in 1969. And ended in 2006. Now the responsibility for a shot being safe on a range is a decision entirely for the shooter.

The 1997 legislation worsened matters somewhat by inadvertently creating a new class of firearm—the long barreled pistol. This gizmo is outwith the remaining classes for which a club can attain Home Office approval—full bore rifle, small bore rifle and loose ammunition pistol, so it goes on the list of firearms for which one has to join a Home Office approved club to possess for target shooting, but on which the club can't train you.

One shot at a time

It was ever thus in the field. Riflemen engaged in pest control or deer stalking in the countryside have always had to assess every shot for safety before taking it. In practice, the ground is a good backstop and everything else isn't. Hedges might let a bullet through to and on into the unknown. Walls might return it to sender. In the field, one seeks to match the ammunition to the type of shot.

The Deer Act, 1963, sets minimum (but not maximum) calibres, velocities and striking energies for different species of deer. These are suspect, in that they look like restrictive practices to us. The most popular American deer stalking cartridges—.30-30 and .45-70—didn't meet the requirements, for example, so American-made rifles wouldn't be so frequently imported. Or so, perhaps, some official with an eye on the balance of payments may have hoped.

A bit of height helps make the ground a clearer backstop, hence the use of high seats for deer stalking. If you're after rabbits, standing in the back of a pick-up truck helps. As a rule of thumb, if you can see sky anywhere in the telescopic sight when taking aim, it's probably not a safe shot. The objective is a through-shoot to disable your intended victim. With a shotgun,

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the sky is one's usual backstop, so it's even more important to understand the range of your cartridges .

A 12 bore gun is so named because 12 balls of ammunition for it can be cast from a pound of lead. Shotgun cartridges used to contain an ounce and a quarter of pellets, but these days loads tend to be lighter. The largest shot size is LG (large game). They have a .36" diameter each and typically you'd get six of them in a cartridge. SG (small game) is next, nine to a load. Going on down, there's Special SG, SSG, AAA, BB and then shot sizes 1-9, 9 being the smallest with 580 pellets to the ounce (25.4 grammes).

The objective with a shotgun is to get as many hits on the target from the cartridge at once, so number 9 shot, with more pellets in it gives you more chance of hitting a clay pigeon. However, small pellets lack individual mass, so their effective range is limited against clays and they don't have the striking energy to be used on birds or animals. Moving up the scale, number 6 shot (270 to the ounce) is reckoned to have an effective range of 35 yards from a 12 bore. A 12 bore ball will be effective out to around 150 yards, but if fired up at an angle of 30 degrees will still be airborne a mile later.

The potential 'range' of rifle ammunition can be several miles. The .303 1912 Vickers machine gun rear sight elevates to 4,000 yards, volley sights on the Lee Enfield go to 3,400 yards, which is just short of two miles. Columnist A G Banks, writing in the 1930s, reckoned a Lee Enfield rifle was accurate at up to 600 yards, and a .22 in the right hands would be lethal to 'Huns' at 300. Both rounds will travel much further, and can still kill or wound, however inadvertently.

So in the field, shooters have to assess their range to target, identify the quarry species as fair game, assess the backstop as safe and then shoot. Target shooters have a known distance to target, and the backstop on their ranges was assessed as safe by the Army until 2006. Now it's the club's problem.

Shooters learn all this from one another by joining a club or attending field courses. Some field sportsmen have been mentored by family or friends, but it's still possible for a landowner to get a certificate for firearms or shotguns to use on his land without taking any training. This is because the fixation of the law is on 'good reason'; competence doesn't come into it.

All that said, incidents involving live ammunition shooters getting things wrong are rare and those which have crossed our desk are few. One chap using a shotgun against wildfowl on the Scottish foreshore damaged a greenhouse half a mile away, because he didn't know that SG shot (which is a bit big for geese) will go that far. It easily will. Maximum range from a shotgun is achieved by an upwards angle of about 30

degrees. You can see this for yourself with a hosepipe. Point the hose horizontally to the ground and the water will go straight for a short distance, then drop away. As you elevate the nozzle, the point of impact moves away from you until you get past 30 degrees, when it starts coming back towards you and if you get the nozzle to the vertical, you'll get wet.

All ammunition follows that trajectory, the distance to where it starts dropping off being determined by its mass and velocity, and its overall range by the angle of elevation. The German pocket battleship *Scharnhorst* clobbered the British aircraft carrier HMS *Glorious* at 15,500 yards or so in 1940, at which range the shells would have dropped vertically through the flight deck.

Another hazard is ricochet, when the projectile hits something and bounces off. High velocity hunting ammunition, which has only a bronze jacket where the bullet touches the rifling, tends to break up on impact. We suspect that the lead core may actually be molten in some cases, so the ricochet hazard is quite minimal in the field. The rifleman chooses a good backstop and that's what his bullet hits. Low velocity ammunition is more likely to bounce and in this category we include .22 rimfire, shotgun slugs and large pellets.

Learn from others' experience

If these projectiles hit hard ground at a shallow angle they'll bounce onwards. A chap in the Home Counties fired his .22 rifle from a bedroom window at a magpie, which he missed. The bullet ricocheted off a tree stump and ended up a mile away stuck in a double glazed sealed unit, having broken the outer pane.

The police back-calculated the trajectory of the bullet to find the shooter. They amended his certificate so that after that he could use the .22 rifle only on land deemed suitable by the police, and the damage was treated as a public liability claim. It didn't go to our insurers though; the negligent shooter was too sheepish to put the claim in and simply paid the costs himself.

The shotgunner who got the greenhouse was prosecuted for criminal damage. We don't know what happened as, not being a member, he didn't tell us. Apart from those two incidents, we've encountered one case of mistaken identity in which the rifleman shot a horse in the dark, mistaking the reflection of its eyes in his lamp beam as those of a fox. We think he was lying; fox and horse have different eye colour reflections, but what does look the same as horse at night is a deer, so we think he took a chance and got a vet's bill for his negligence.

It's not a lot to write about after having the public liability policy for more than a quarter of a century, and that reflects well on the standards met by live

Shooters' Rights Association

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ammunition shooters in the UK. The potential is out there for things to go wrong, and they do. A retired policeman with a loaded shotgun and a dog on a lead was pulled over when his his dog lunged at a serving policeman's dog, also on a lead. The retired cop dropped his gun, which went off peppering the serving officer with pellets.

The retired cop wasn't doing anything wrong in the sense that there was no published advice against having a loaded gun closed and a dog on the lead at the same time. It became a serious incident because he carried a loaded gun closed, the gun lacked inter cepting sears, his dog lacked horse sense and was hefty enough to pull his elderly owner over. It wasn't a case for our insurers, he not being a member; that one went

through his household contents policy, through which many of you have public liability insurance.

The late Bob Kleasen fell over at a clay pigeon shoot, firing his gun in the process and bagging a lorry. The windscreen survived, but the truck cab needed a paint job.

More recently, a driven-game shooter shot a pheasant, which was carried on the wind to crash through a barn roof. Pigeons too can glide when hit instead of folding. We don't know why, but maybe 0.1% of pigeons we've shot do it, so the potential is there for it to collide with something.

So on the range or in the field, safety first.

Remember: if something *can* go wrong, it *will* go wrong.