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WURGABUP: HOME OF CHAMPIONS

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By Harry Smith

Size smaller. { My thanks go to Mrs Cicely Blackall of Katanning who provided the details of the first eleven years from her father's diary. The years from 1952 came from the club minute books that were available, and from the memory of the author.

On July 9 1910 a meeting was held in the Rockwell Hall to discuss the forming of a Rifle Club. No attendance record is available, but apparently there was sufficient interest to go ahead with the lease of available Commonwealth land and the Wurgabup Rifle Club was formed and established on the same site it occupies now.

Within days the clearing of trees began, all done manually of course, and by August tenders were called for the construction of a target pit and stop butt (the remains of which are still to be seen today). The target mechanism installed was quite different from our present frames. Targets were in pairs and pivoted on a central axle which meant one was in the ready position at the top and the other at the bottom to be marked. The marker's job was to rotate the target when fired on.

In the years between 1910 and 1921 some forty odd members attended the club, however other sports such as football and cricket became more attractive and it had to close in 1922.

Thirty years lapsed before moves were made to re-form the club and start shooting again. The intervening years had seen the range revert to bush, hardly distinguishable from its surrounds.

Walter Blackall, who had some target shooting experience aroused district interest and on April 2 1952, he and Eric Smith convened a meeting in the supper room of the old Badgebup Hall and, together with eight others, reformed the Wurgabup Rifle Club, electing a Captain - Eric Smith, Secretary - Walter Blackall and Treasurer - Alan Beeck. The very next day an inspection showed that the old range constructions weren't of any value and they would have to start from scratch.

On July 1 1952 the first General Meeting was held and enthusiastic members decided to proceed with the clearing of timber and to construct a two target pit. Much help was given by Mr Bill Harrison, the Inspector of Rifle Ranges of that time, who provided plans and advice.

The clearing was contracted to Murray and Jim Taylor, one of the first bulldozing contractors in the area, who had an International TD 18 tractor. Some of the pit earth work was done free of charge by John Wake of Wakes Garage who demonstrated a Fowler Crawler tractor from his business in Katanning.

Subscriptions to the club were set at ~~\$2.0.0~~ (\$31.), with a

further ~~£2.0.0~~ (\$31.) and ~~£1.0.0~~ (\$15.50) levies to pay for the ~~£84.0.0~~ (\$1 300.) clearing account. This sum was later reimbursed by the Defence Department who at that time were in control of all rifle ranges.

The club needed membership numbers to get army assistance, and it was quite typical of the district people that many of them joined just to help us get established. Some didn't even shoot.

Under Army control .303 ammunition was very cheap and I recall the sale of brass cartridge cases paying the costs of purchasing new supplies.

The official opening and first recorded shoot was held in very hot weather on January 11 1953. Neighbouring clubs attending were Nyabing, Kojonup, Katanning and Broomehill. Keen rivalry developed between these clubs and we were to later have many a grudge match against them. The late Wally Williams of Katanning performed the opening ceremony; congratulating members on their effort and giving sound advice on shooting and club performance.

There have been a lot of highlights of the club and one incident that at the time seemed quite unpleasant, but now more humorous, led to better things. It happened on a hot day when there was no club house to get out of the heat. Tempers became frayed and consequently punches were thrown resulting in one fellow not having to open his mouth to clean his teeth as his lip was split enough for them to protrude.

After that incident a ^{23 foot by 12 foot (7 m x 3.5 m)} ~~7M x 3.5M~~ club house was built, a water tank was purchased along with a kerosene refrigerator and cool refreshments were the order of the day from then on.

On another occasion, a new club member arrived at the range on his second visit, and saw a small group of long timers all with heads bowed talking in low tones and kicking the dirt. Thinking a bereavement must have been on their minds, he waited a respectable time before approaching. "G'day, what's up?" he asked. "What's up? I'll tell you what's up. There's no cold b----- beer, that's what's up!

With membership growing and enthusiasm for better facilities, an upgrading at the range in the early 70s saw a lot of manpower put to the test on building a stone strong room. The reason for this was to make the beer secure, someone having emptied the refrigerator at this time. A cell door from the old lockup being demolished in Katanning was purchased from the Police Department to make sure no-one gained unauthorised access to this illegal (in those days) supply. Following this S.E.C. power was connected and the club acquired a restricted liquor license. From then on refrigerated refreshments were kept cool at all times and safe from theft. It was legal too. The strongroom is very much a feature of today and incorporated into the present ^{60 feet by 30 feet} (18M x 9M) building. Power, toilets, showers and caravan park bays are some of the facilities visitors have at their convenience when attending the two 2 day prize meetings held each year and of course these are enjoyed by members on the many other competitive

shooting days throughout the year.

The range has been upgraded from the first two target pit to take as many as ten shooters on targets at a time. The latest project completed is a new target pit, beyond the present one in use, allowing us to shoot over 800 metres. This extra distance gives shooters a chance to improve their skills.

Wurgabup have the distinction of having had several members chosen to shoot in State and Australian men's teams. They are John Caldwell, Barry Ramm, Jim Moore and Alex McWhirter. Alex has also been an Australian team member in competition at Bisley in England. Betty Atkinson has been in the State Ladies team and Gray Robinson in the State Under 25s. This is a record of which the club is justifiably proud. Club shooting is of a high standard with many highly commendable scores recorded.

Members who have given outstanding service to the club have been honoured with life membership and are:- Walter Blackall, Eric Smith, Alan Beeck, the late Bob Tree, the late Laurie Caldwell, Ross Beeck, Gaved Beeck and in 1987 George Edwards.

Any Club is only as good as the members that belong to it and Wurgabup has always had those who get on well together and are willing to work. This in turn has produced a spirit of good fellowship and good sportsmanship. It is probably no coincidence that the standard of shooting is very high and

that many champions are proud to call Wurgabup their club.
Long may it continue.

Italics [The author, Harry Smith, won the inaugural West Australian Rifle Association President's Award of 'Club Member of the Year' in 1986. This prestigious award was donated by the late M.S. Herbert O.A.M., J.P. who was State President at the time of his death. Any club may nominate one of its members who has given outstanding service to the sport, and it is greatly to Wurgabup and Harry's credit that he was first in the State to receive this honour. Ed.]