

OW! My eyes! The OFs are finally back at Bisley.

Blinking, we stumbled into the gleaming April sunlight like miners emerging from a long shift in a deep shaft.

We wiped the dust from our eyes and stared in wonderment at the sprawling green range in front of us – its wind flags bobbing enthusiastically in the Spring breeze like children in front of the ice cream van.

It was a sight as welcome as a hot dog stall at a vegan folk music festival.

The skipper breaks the silent awe.

“Fss muk mk a sudd foazoommb muvy.”

“Take your mask off Kim,” says Jon “Red Leader” Ford, being, as he is, the sensible one.

“Ahem,” says the OFRC skipper lowering her mask (by Pierre Cardin, obvvs). “I said: ‘This looks like a set from a zombie movie’.”

“Well, we’ve got the guns,” chips in Mohammad Al Nutjob Bin John FitzHalahan (aka *O’Charlatan*).

The shambling horde of 12 riflepersons of the Old Framlinghamian RC survey the scene, wistful smiles revealed as they remove assorted face masks like satisfied highwaymen.

“And the caff is open, we can have bacon sarnies,” chips up Jimmy “*The Spreadsheet*” Overbury. Jimmy is the Hon Sec – his legendary organisational skills and attention to detail showing through. “As long as we’re outside, there’s only six in a group, you are wearing a mask and socially dist....”
Fade to stage left.

We are here. At Bisley. At last. To shoot competitively, in the annual Q-Match against four teams of Old Boys, for the first time since we thought Covid-19 was a character in Dr Who.

The excitement is tangible.

We take stock. There are the usuals: James “*Plastic Jock*” Mehta, John O’Charlatan, *Shiver-me-Kimbers* Pope, *Red Leader* Ford, Nigel “*Smersh*” Burnip, Jon “*Bafta*” Thorp, *The Spreadsheet* and Steve “*Tantrum*” McDowell.

We welcome back two old friends. Jeff “*We have a problem*” Houston and Neil “*I’m much too old for this*” Joy. He’s only 86, we don’t accept that excuse – OFs call it character building.



Also, there are ringers... Ahem. The Old Framlinghamians RC being, as it is, an “open” club, it is not actually necessary to have been a student at the College to compete with the club (except in the Veterans). Thus shooting friends, whose connection to the College is that their cousin’s next-door-neighbour’s cat once defeacated on the Brandeston Hall cricket square, can get to be in the team.



It is this loose definition of ethnic qualification which makes Halahan and Pope Irish, Mehta Scottish and McDowell, Welsh. A bit like Scottish Rugby, Welsh Football or English Cricket.

So, into the wide embrace of the OFRC’s welcoming arms we bring Ros Wiltshire. Ros joins on two counts. One, she is a multi-international who came 7th in the Grand Aggregate last year – which to the uninitiated is a kind of world ranking and, two, she’s James Mehta’s girlfriend. Either one of which amply qualify her.

And Sasha “The Tsar” Radkovskii, who is Russian and attended Sevenoaks. But he’s a mate of Jon Thorp’s, a good shot and a dashed fine fellow to boot, so he’s in. Natch.

With our equally bewildered, hairy and tubby opposition (the Old Lawrencians, Albanians, Bedfordians, Lancing, Cranleigh, Kings School Wimbledon et al) we settle down to shoot 10 rounds to count at 500 yards and then 600 yards. The captains agree teams of

four and the OFs are very cocky given we have three teams including two top-notch ringers. Top drawer ringers, indeed. Multi-internationals. Yes siree.

It’s in the bag.

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Except, we all know what fate awaits the best laid plans.

We have a gorgeous, calm, cloudless Spring day, though as we shall discover, not quite windless. The problem with wind is that, though it may not show up too much to blow one’s shots off course, it can also go both ways.

A steady left-to-right or right-to-left wind is, in reasonably competent hands, relatively predictable. If it goes both ways, it’s a Fishtail and causes all kinds of problems even for the most expert wind-coach.

And our problem is, Steve McDowell’s wind-coaching hands are rarely confused for reasonably competent.

Plus, as it transpired, it wasn’t just our kit that got rusty during lockdown.

McDowell’s shoulder, for a start, which he claims to have damaged moving house. It simply won’t bend enough to shoot without causing very distracting layers of pain, so he sticks to the coach’s chair.

The fast-firing Halahan leads the way – his first two shots showing the wind to be, though not strong, a tricky customer. Click.

“Misfire.” Misfires are a pain because the firer must wait in the aim for 30 seconds in case the round is ‘cooking off’ and explodes while the bolt is being opened.

As it turns out, the primer has been inserted the wrong way round.

And so follows a litany of comedy errors. Well, they would be comedic if indeed they were funny. Tsarsha, normally an excellent shot, ends up with a score in the low 40s, even Mehta and Halahan, normally gun platforms to rival the Hawker Hurricane go down in flames. The Chairman stands tall with a 49 and Red Leader - reliable as ever crashes in with a solid 48.

Geoff Houston, like he has never been away shoots a 49 and even the Father of the House, Neil Joy, chips in with a cheery 45.

Then comes our much-vaunted new bug. Surely the magnificent Ros can hold up the standard and wave it like a glorious debutante. Er no. Uncharacteristic elevation problems bring her in a score on the low 40s causing much mumbling of apologies and the birth of her OFRC nickname. *World's Worst Ringer*.

We lost the Q-match. To the Old Lawrencians. Tsk.

And then we lost the All-Day match the next month. Boo! Hiss!

Revenge can only come in September, with the Long Range Q match. Given the OFs in their usual strength in numbers are heading for the Imperial Meeting at Bisley maybe we'll get to practice...

