

OF Rifle Club at Bisley 150th Imperial Meeting

By Steve McBowell, Shooting Correspondent

Sandy Walker, GC, OF



We've said it for so long now. Our kid, the Gangling Metronome, Sandy Walker one day would win *Something Big* under the banner of the Old Framlinghamian Rifle Club.

Already he is the youngest shooter to represent his country at every level, not only did he return from the Commonwealth games in Australia last year with a bronze medal, and another from the World Championships.

But in 2019 at the Imperial Meeting at Bisley – he really did win a *very very VERY Big One*. The Grand Aggregate is the combination of all 12 qualifying shoots in the meeting over six days in all weathers and at all ranges (300 yards to 1000 yards).

To win this legendary and world-famous title (and the Gold Cross and thus forever to have the post-nominals "GC" added to your name), you must beat 1200 of the best marksmen and women from all over the world, with brilliant consistent shooting.

Out of 755 points, Sandy and two other firers dropped only 15. In the last shoot, the 15-round Prince of Wales – he knew that to win the title by one V-Bull, he needed to shoot a maximum 75 with 12 central V-Bulls. He got down to shoot in the very last detail, in the hardest conditions, around midday on a bright hot day, with a turbulent thermal wind making wind assessment a harrowing nightmare.

Lacking as he does anything at all resembling an adrenal gland and having the mastery to perform in the wind, he duly shot a 75.12 – described by his target mate, himself a distinguished shooter as “the best shoot I’ve ever seen”.

It is no exaggeration to say he is among the best handful of full-bore shooters on the planet. And he gets to fire a cannon in celebration.



[Click here](#) for link to video

He is as ever our pride and joy and we are immensely proud of him.

And he's only 32.

The bastard.

A Custard of Captains

BISLEY 500 yards, 17 July 2019. PS VETS.

The first big day – a Wednesday because of the additional shoot to celebrate the 150th meeting and the Public School Veterans' Match. This is one in which Fram has shown its success in keeping the fires of yesteryear running. Not only did we welcome back – yet again – Neil “Father of the House” Joy who at the age of 84 was shooting his 71st successive Bisley but two new old faces, in shape of former captains Will Clough (Z&K 79-84) and Paul Baker (K84-89).

As it transpired, of the 15 OF shooters there were no fewer than *nine* former captains of Framlingham shooting on parade. We decided the collective noun for Fram shooting captains is a custard.

Here they are, left to right in order of seniority:



Jon Ford 1962-63, David Argent 1964, Nigel Burnip (inset as he was coaching at the time of photo) 1965, Will Clough 1984, Steve McDowell, 1985-6, Paul Baker 1988-89, Sandy Walker 2005, Kim Pope 2009.

We performed creditably, as ever, and as ever in serious world class company, without silverware. The A-Team dropped only three from 250. 50s from Mehta, Halahan and, naturally, Walker, 49 from Ford and 48 from Pope not even getting us in the top ten. The B-team showed a 50 from Jon Thorp and a 49 from McDowell but also to no glory.

A Team	
James Mehta	50.7
Sandy Walker	50.7
John Halahan	50.6
Jon Ford	49.7
Kim Pope	48.3
	247.30
1 st Epsom A: 250.35; 7 th :Old Frams A	

B Team	
Steve McDowell	49.6
Nigel Burnip	48.4
Jon Thorp	50.5
Jim Overbury	39.1
David Argent	47.6
	233.22
1 st Old Guildfordians B: 247.30, 12 th Old Frams B	

C Team	
Will Clough	46.4
Brian Smith	37.0
Paul Baker	50.6
Andy Slade	47.2
Andrew Horton	47.3
	227.15
1 st Old Guildfordians C:244.29, 10 th Old Frams C	

Huge credits go to the old faces – Will Clough, having not picked up a full-bore rifle in 35 years scoring a highly respectable 46.4 for the B-Team and Paul Baker, who has, a 50.6 for the C-Team (selection issue, skipper?)

Finally, it was great to see back Andrew Horton, who has been absent for a few years while making babies who hit a 47.4 showing some of his old style, but sadly the absence of his dad John who had the ill-fortune to suffer appendicitis, thus forcing him to miss what would have been his 60th successive Imperial Meeting.

It was also great to lay annual eyes on Brian Smith, Andy Slade and David Argent.

Lastly, at the AGM following the shoot, it was decided the OFRC needed a fresh younger face as skipper and so the grizzled James Mehta was terminated in favour of the gorgeous pouting Kim Pope.

With great poise, knowing his time was up, the outgoing Cap'n Jim presented La Pope with a welcoming present. A tin of silver polish.

"Because you'll need it," he quothed, before setting foot on the plank.

Of course we wish her luck.

And so to...

Eleven successive days of long-range shooting, roistering and eating barbequed meat. Savage rainstorm-soakings and 37C degree heat. Tears of horror and many more of sheer joy and triumph.

Even for the shooting nuts of the OFRC the 150th Imperial Meeting left us...

Bored of the Rings

Featuring...

Nigel 'Gandalf' Burnip

Sandy 'Aragorn' Walkson-Walker

Kim 'Galadriel' Pope

James 'Bilbo' Mehta

John 'Gimli' Halahan

Jon 'Elrond' Ford,

Jonathan 'Gollum' Thorp

Steve 'Legolas' McDowell

and introducing

Jim 'Frodo' Overbury

The year was a special year. Not only the 150th Imperial Meeting where top shooters from all over the world have descended on Bisley camp. Australians, Kiwis, South Africans and, for the first time in many years, the welcome sight of the United States Rifle Team.

But it is also special because the OFRC have found a new Bisley home – in the glade on the edge of the magical kingdom of Stickledown range.

It is called the Hedgehog Hut, a colonial style shed with a cool and shady verandah. In its cramped but comfortable innards live Bilbo Mehta, Legless McDowell and Frodo Overbury, five rifles and a case of a very creditable Australian Merlot.

The trio venture forth on to the ranges, with Frodo Overbury making his Imperial Meeting debut at the tender age of 56.

Frodo Overbury's diary for the **18th July** reads: *"Totally overwhelmed with the occasion. In OF shooting someone else reads the wind and does the scorebook. This demands abilities I don't think I possess. I love it."*

It beats talking to the trees.

Which he does. Frequently.

"I guessed the wind right – 1 ½ minutes left – but left the sights alone. Why?"

The usual liaisons gather at Hedgehog HQ as both the Chairman – Gandalf – and Gimli Halahan have acquired golf buggies for the duration. Shame they aren't road legal to get to the off-licence and back.

Friday 19 July

These were mad slightly complicated by severe rain, in which McDowell, the fool, was required to shoot the Astor county championship for the West Suffolk Rifle Club – being as he is a member of both them and the OFRC. Mehta shoots in the Hospitals Cup for London, on the basis that he once had an interview at the Royal Dental Hospital. Everybody else enjoys a bit of a lie-in.

Still, we plan a monster barbeque when the Suffolk match comes around.

"Did better. Beginning to understand. Got a decent group with full-bore for the first time. 4 minutes at 500 yards."

Frodoverybury sucks his quill in contemplation.

"Position. Must settle on one."

Generally speaking, the remainder of the OFRC points out to him, that's a very good idea.

"What is?"

Vox Pop: "One position. It's called settled."

"Oh right," says Frodo, scribbling away.

Saturday 20 July.

"The 600 yards was amazing. Every time I got into position, it was dead on and steady. 3 Vs in a row. Buzzin'. 45.4"

Gandalf and the venerable Elrond – aged just under 150 between them -reveal they both snaffled bronze medals in the Fulton Pairs.

Elrond says: "Steve when you write the report you should put me down as KOS – Knackered Old Shit."

As if I would...

The rain persists.

McDowell continues to moan about it.

Sunday 21 July.

"Shot 300 (The Times) like small-bore, badly, therefore learned the difference between small and full bore – lower, looser but tight, wind, light and companions."

Well, that, and much larger bullets

1000 yards – the Dreaded Corporation. *"Saw the target numbers fine, wind and rain. Hit 42 beating Thorp, Kimbers and Steve. Love it."*

The Corporation, ten scoring shots at 1000 yards, brings out tragedy and triumph in equal measures. If you are stuck for something to be superstitious about, the Corp is it.

At this stage, two OFs on the Grand Aggregate leader board as Gollum makes a quick appearance in the top 50 of the Grand. The Corporation sees him fall off, never to be seen again. Aragorn Walkson hovers behind the leaders, waiting to strike.

There was some celebrating from those for whom the day had not ending in splurges of pain and custard and some mournful whimpering from those whose had.

"Best intentions for an early night failed totally."

Monday 22 July

The sun is now well and truly out with the great yellow bead of Sauron pouring down on our leathered bodies, only our shorts exposing sallow calves. Temperatures on the shadeless range vary from 35C to above 40.

"Very hungover. Position horrible and cheek piece all over the place. But I am getting the hang of it!"

The afternoon is taken up with the Intercounties with McDowell in the coaching chair for Suffolk at Long Range and firing at short. Pope fails in her attempt to be a non-playing Suffolk Captain so she can eat ice creams while sitting in her portable paddling pool to cool off.

She has a miss at 900 yards thus dooming the team to mediocrity. Legless manages to keep everyone in the black in severe winds, bar one. Guess who? He makes up for it by an effortless custard 49.6 at 600 in the short range.



Mehta, newly appointed Captain of Essex, whips his team into shape for a creditable 6th place at Long Range, but fails to beat Suffolk at Short Range.

Suffolk barbeque at the hut. Cooked potato salad and roast veg for the Suffolk team. This is such fun."

Gorgeous pouting Galadriel Pope, now OFRC captain as well as Suffolk, does the honours. Her small car bulging with goodies as 25 OF and Suffolk acolytes devour the feast.

"Will I never get an early night?"

Tuesday 23 July

Pulling out his self-breathalysing machine, Frodooverbury calculates it will take him 2.4 months to be sober enough to drive.

The rest of us head for the range for another hot day.

"Very, very hot. These conditions require a different preparation. A sweat band and something to cool down the shooting mat. I burned my legs."

Wednesday 24 July

We wave goodbye to Frodooverbury as he sets out to distant Suffolk thinking of his ring.

Hours later he sends on WhatsApp:

"Home and work. Very depressing."

"Where are you guys?"

"Getting arseholed in the Artists," replies Gollom with a wicked smirk.

Bilbo is sulking about his ruined Grand Aggregate on WhatsApp: *I got 34 with three misses. F*&%\$ng butt-marker.*

On investigation by NRA staff it turned out the poor lad was autistic and left unsupervised, he was given his wages and escorted home.

Gimli responds: *I got 50.8 so tough t@&^^*s*

Mehta: *Where are the Hedgehog Boys?*

Burnip: *Good question.*

McDowell: *I am eating stinky cheese, drinking redders and looking at the stars if anyone fancies a nightcap.*

Burnip: *I'll be right there*

Thursday 25 July

This extra day to celebrate the 150th Imperial Meeting was devoted to team matches. A rare occasion to host the America Match in the UK saw Walker and Mehta performing for Scotland against the other assembled countries, and to claim a silver medal to England's gold, with the USA a long way back in 4th.

For the rest of us this was the NRA 150 match – a special celebratory and one-off competition which shows Logaless McD in the coaching chair, Kim la Pope, The Chairman Gandalf and two tyro shooters representing the OFRC in the competition.

Lacking as we do any Tyro-class shooters we had to recruit one (which was needed for the team) so we ended up with two. One of them, a 14-year-old Bradford College lad called Matt Keel who out shot us all and the other a 56-year-old vascular surgeon from Aberdeen called Ewan Crawford who endured the worst luck with dodgy ammunition anyone can recall.

He was much more gracious about it than any of the OFs who whined like a turbojet with a seagull in it.

La Pope coped admirably with the 37C heat with her paddling pool.

Bafta Thorp, shooting for the under 25s, won silver.

Friday 26 July

Friday James McBilbo is in the St George's Prize final. This is a big deal – second only to the Queen's Prize. The early morning conditions are benign: hot and a low, predictable wind.

With 15 rounds to count at 900 yards and McMehta is in an enviable position carrying through a maximum 75 with 7 v-bulls from the previous round at 600 yards.

Knowing the scores will be high, but full of his own braggadocio he decides he needs more Vs to improve his chances of a high position and so declines to convert an ordinary cooking-bull 5 sighter. Naturally the Law of Custard comes into play and he drops his last shot for a 74.7. This plunges him from 16th place to 42nd. It becomes known as a Cascade of Custard. Walker of course makes the coveted top 25.

Saturday 27 July

There are two OFs in the Queens Final. Walkson, of course, about whom there is tremendous excitement as he has a chance to do the double (The Grand Aggregate and Queens Prize) in a single year. Nobody has ever achieved this in history.



Mehta and Halahan prepare to keep score whilst Walker (background) kneels to the Wind Gods

Elrond Ford of course makes a brave go at it, his form dramatically improved after last year's cataract surgery.

Walker makes a tremendous maximum score of 75.14 at 900 yards, putting him within a v-bull or two of the leader Old Greshamian Glyn Barnett. Nails are bitten to the quick at 1000yds but Sandy drops his thirteenth shot for a 74.9 ending his attempt for glory, and having to settle for 6th place.



Ford, who keeps insisting he is retiring from the sport to concentrate on dog-walking, shoots a 74.10 and a 72.9 to finish in 49th place, thus promoting himself to the highest X class (again) and ensuring that retirement is postponed for now and belies his KOS status.

And so endeth another terrific and exciting season for the OFRC.

Only the annual .22 match with the College remains and we look forward to seeing you then.