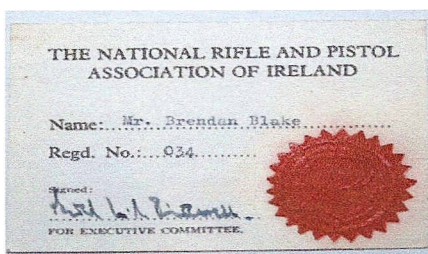


Apollo 8 orbits the moon for the first time, the film 2001 Space Odyssey is released, the first Boeing 747 takes to the air, the last steam passenger train runs in the UK, Robert F Kennedy is assassinated, Martin Luther King Jnr is assassinated, the Vietnam war is at its height. This was 1968 the year the Eagle Gun Club was founded.

As a relative newcomer to the Eagle Rifle & Pistol Club I needed to talk to someone who was with the club from the beginning before I could write this article. Brendan Blake (Chairman and original committee member) was the obvious choice. I made arrangements to meet Brendan at his house and in the comfort of his gunroom surrounded by Eagles memorabilia he talked me through the 40 years of Eagles Gun Club history. I hope that the following is a reasonable summary of details Brendan gave me during that memorable conversation.



In the early to mid sixties a group of shooters identified the need for a local shooting club to serve the target shooting community in Dublin west. At the time the north side of Dublin was served by the Ravens Shooting Club, the south side was served by the Dublin Rifle Club while the National Pistol and Rifle association had a range in Bray.



Brendan was at pains to point out how very few people owned cars in the mid sixties and that whilst Bray does not seem so difficult to get to from Saggart today, in the mid sixties you had to depend on the few shooters who owned cars to collect and drop off their associates. This in turn took some considerable effort to organise given there was no such thing as e-mail and in many cases no phone. Six members of the NRAPA got together in 1968 and founded the Eagles Gun Club in order to overcome these difficulties and provide a local shooting facility in Dublin west.



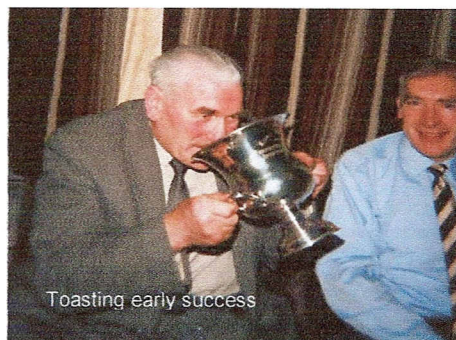
The Eagles first range was a 24yd x 25yd ditch in Firhouse (near Tallaght Co. Dublin). Unfortunately the neighbours were not as welcoming as the Eagles had hoped and the Club had to close this "range" and look for a new home. After a significant search for a new home the Eagles secured sufficient land from a local landowner and set up a suitable range at Bohernabreena near Tallaght Co. Dublin. The Eagle Gun Club now had the facilities it required and the members no longer had to face the long trek to Bray for competition and practice.

The Club continued to grow and develop on this range in Bohernabreena. The Eagles started to gain a good reputation as members were winning many competitions. Club blazers, Club ties and Club range jackets were the order of the day and it was becoming obvious that the Eagles were not going to be a flash in the pan. It appeared that all was going well until the Club was asked to move off its range as the land was about to be sold.

Unfortunately the Eagles were homeless for almost 12 months until another opportunity presented itself. This move took the Eagles to another site at Bohernabreena (currently the BRC range), which was a disused quarry and at the time was used as a dumping area for scrapped cars. After much effort and negotiation with the County Council and others, a 3.5 acre site was cleared. Using railway sleepers for a backstop and with minimal facilities the Club was back in business.



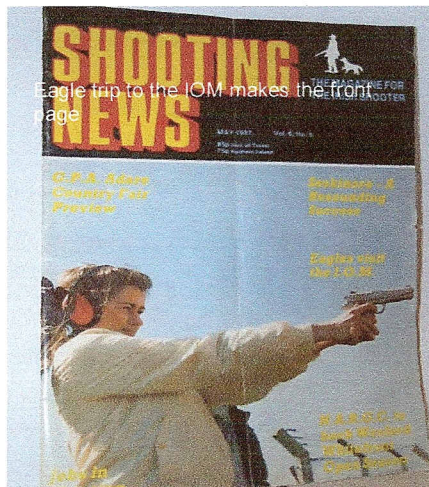
In the early seventies the shooting community was growing, The Ravens and Swan Gun Clubs were thriving on the north side of Dublin, as was the Dublin Rifle Club. The Eagles boasted 70 plus members most of whom owned rimfire and centrefire rifles and pistols. The Eagles was now a well-established thriving Club. As well as having a significant shooting calendar the Eagles held regular social events. These social events were organised by the Eagles Committee. The events served as a forum to recognise achievement, a social event for shooters families and a mechanism to raise funds for the further development of the Club. Two charity shoots a year allowed the Eagles to give something back to the community and further publicise the Club.



Things changed after the introduction of the Temporary Custodial Order of 1972. Pistols and centrefire rifles (over 22-250) were taken up by the authorities (initially for a 3 month period). As it became obvious that a temporary measure was indeed becoming a permanent one interest in the sport, and consequently Club membership numbers, started to fall. Over the next ten years the club membership declined very significantly until only a small group of core members were left. Determined not to let the Eagles go the way of the Ravens and Swan Gun Clubs this core membership set about rebuilding the Eagles and interest in the sport.

An example of these efforts was in 1986 when Brendan Blake (then club secretary) ably supported by the late Peter Maxwell (chairman) organised an Inter-Club Shoot with an Anschutz 1422 as first prize. It's worth mentioning that the 1422 was won by a gentleman who is still very active in the sport today (and from what I have seen has the same interesting sense of dress).

In 1987, fifteen years after the authorities had temporarily taken up their pistols the Eagles membership were still eager to get involved in competitive pistol shooting. In response to this the Club organised a trip to the Isle of Man. Nineteen club members left Dublin on the 10th of April to compete in both centrefire and rimfire pistol competitions. The Peveril Club were excellent hosts providing the facilities and firearms necessary for the competition. Arthur Sinclair and Brendan Blake took honours for the Eagles. The trip earned the Eagles a cover photo in the May edition of the Shooting News with a lot of coverage inside. This was the first of many trips to the Isle of Man by the Eagles and by all accounts they were very enjoyable.



1989-90 saw the Eagles without a range again. It seemed things could be getting terminal. However, Brendan Blake continued to make contact with the membership and keep things alive until a range could be found. Eventually with the help of Peter Maxwell, a piece of land close to Saggart (Co Dublin) was found and the Eagles had another new home. A lot of work went into developing the range and in January 1991 fifty five shooters turned up to participate in the first open shoot on the Eagles new range at Lugg Hill, Saggart.



Despite the new range and improving facilities it was difficult to keep the membership numbers at a sustainable level in the early to mid nineties. At one stage the club had to avail of a bank loan to pay for range planning permission and Clubhouse repairs. The Eagles simply did not have enough members to generate the funds necessary to cover operating costs. Once again the Eagles overcame adversity and the implementation of a sensible policy allowed the Club to attract

the necessary level of suitable new members.

By 1998 the Eagles had increased membership significantly, cleared their bank loans and had 30 shooters competing for an Anshutz 1710 to mark the occasion of their 30th Anniversary. Paddy O'Shea (Eagles club secretary) took the honours and the Anshutz 1710, with John Walsh (Eagles stats team) close behind.

Ranton New Mexico (1999) was the next venue that delivered international success for the Eagles again with John Walsh and Paddy O'Shea (using borrowed equipment) coming first in Master Class High Powered Hunting Rifle (with N. Flood of Fassaroe as Team Captain). In Ireland at the National Silhouette Championships John Walsh succeeded in becoming the National Smallbore Rifle Champion with Paddy O Shea taking the honours for Class A. This was a good finish to a definitive decade in the development of the Eagles Rifle and Pistol Club.

Since 2000 the successes of the Eagles Rifle & Pistol Club members are too numerous to mention.

It seems that the Eagles are well represented at almost every National shoot and they are always in contention for the top spots. On the international scene the Eagles have also made an impact not least at last year's 15th AETSM European Metallic Silhouette Championships in Germany where 3 Eagles picked up medals a gold, silver and a bronze. It seems like Walsh, O'Shea, Egan (x2) and Scanlon are always in contention, be it in pistol or rifle competitions regardless of discipline, target or range.



Today Club members ages range from 23 years old to hmmm "quite old"

really". With two of the founder members still actively involved in the club (Brendan Blake and Arthur Sinclair), there is plenty of experience available to be shared with new members. The Club's many successful shooters are always ready to coach the less experienced members and encourage continuous improvement in all. Using our own resources, sponsorship and donations from the individual members the Eagles are currently investing in range and facility developments at locations in Dublin and Kildare. We believe these investments are necessary to secure our future.

With a current membership of 32 and a waiting list for membership, the Eagle Rifle & Pistol Club is looking forward to a bright future which we hope will do justice to those who gave us such a rich past.

The Eagles Rifle and Pistol Club are holding a number of events this year to celebrate our 40th and we look forward to your support for these events. We will keep you informed.

*By Michael Tope
Public Relations Officer
Eagle Rifle & Pistol Club.
29th January 2007*