

A Short History of the Perth Fremantle Rifle Club (Incorporated)



Logo: Clubs have officially recognized colours. The colours of Perth in 1902 were Maroon and Green. The colours of Fremantle in 1902 were Green, Gold and Blue. The colours of Perth Fremantle from 2009 are Red (substituting for Maroon), Gold and Green.

inaugural meeting of the National Rifle Association of Western Australia was held and so started the civilian rifle shooting movement in Western Australia.

From the early 1880's the colonial settlements of Perth and Fremantle had established Volunteer Rifle Corps. The Volunteer Corps were modelled on military service units and the volunteers were issued rank and required to attend meetings, parades and shooting dressed in their Corps uniforms. Shooting competitions arranged between the two Volunteer Corps often drew a large crowd of interested spectators. The Perth Volunteers shot at what is now known as Kings Park and the Fremantle Volunteers shot at South Beach, South Fremantle.

As the 1880's came to an end so did shooting at Kings Park and South Beach with the Volunteers moving shooting to at Karrakatta.

By the early 1900's civilian rifle clubs were established as successors to the colonial era Volunteer Corps. On the 12th of July 1901 the



Figure 1 Perth RC Team Winners of the Hackett Shield 1902. Middle front row is RG Ferguson, 'the father of rifle shooting in WA'. Middle back row Martin Lloyd first WA shooter in Australian team to Bisley

1901 – 1910 Foundation Years

The first Annual General Meeting of the Perth Rifle Club was held on the 7th of January 1902¹. The office-bearers elected were: Patron, Sir John Forrest, G.C.M.G., P.C., Federal Minister for Defence; President, Sir George Shenton; Captain, Mr. J. N. J. Vincent; Vice Captains, Captain Castles and Mr. R. Greaves; Secretary Mr. R. G. Ferguson; Treasurer Mr. G. Stubbs.

On the 4th of April 1902 Fremantle Rifle Club held its first annual general meeting with the following officers being elected: President, Mr. J. H. Eales; Vice-presidents, Mr. H. Briggs, MLC, and Mr De Lacey Bacon; Secretary and treasurer, Mr. A. Dean.

Generally, members of the Perth club armed themselves with Martini-Lee Enfields and R.G. Ferguson was able to arrange for supply of these from the Department of Defence at two pounds ten shillings each. It is interesting to note that some riflemen paid out what would have been large sums of money for better rifles. Martin Lloyd for example, used Webley Lee-Enfields which cost ten pounds each imported from England and specially adapted for target shooting. Ferguson himself used a Fulton Lee-Enfield.

By 1904 a club house was built on the Karrakatta range for the Perth Club. It was designed by J

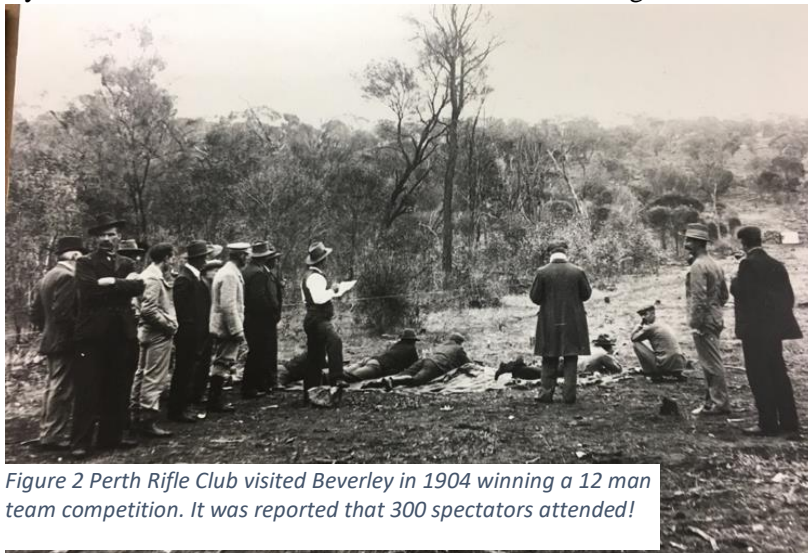


Figure 2 Perth Rifle Club visited Beverley in 1904 winning a 12 man team competition. It was reported that 300 spectators attended!

Wilkie and a levy of 5 shillings per man was struck.

Members of both Clubs competed successfully in the many competitions that were held between the more than 100 clubs in WA. Martin Lloyd, a founder of the Perth Club, was Western Australia's first member of an Australian Team to travel to Bisley in 1903.

1911 - 1920 Shooting at Karrakatta

The Karrakatta rifle range was quite some distance to travel in the early days and Fremantle Rifle Club members sought a range much closer to home. The Sunday Times of 9 June 1912 reported that

“The Fremantle Rifle Club visited the Congdon Street [Cottesloe] range site for the first time yesterday, when they indulged in some field firing, there being a record attendance of members. The firing at figure targets at unknown distances from 700 to 200 yards resulted in H. Young securing first prize (a spoon) with four hits out of his ten shots. Captain H. J. Simper coming next with three hits.

Considerable delay was experienced owing to the fact that portion of the riflemen got absolutely bushed in traversing over the beautiful newly-made road which DOESN'T run from the station to the ranges. The department promised some time ago that this very necessary road should be completed before shooting commenced, but so far it has made no

¹ The oldest surviving club at Pinjar is the South Perth Rifle Club which was formed in August 1901.

sign of coming up to scratch, and the shooters must perform find their way to the range through the bush as best they can.”

The Perth Rifle Club presented the Commercial Tailoring Company Challenge Cup (valued at 25 guineas - now worth \$3,100) for handicap teams' competition to the MDRA in 1914. Teams competing for the cup following the war in 1919 were: Perth, Fremantle, Leederville, Tramways, Wooroloo, Rocky Bay, ANA, Boan Bros (a department store), Darling Range, Crown Law (State Government department), Police, Post and Telegraph (forerunner to Telstra), South Perth, Water Supply, North Perth, Subiaco, Mines (State Govt department), Midland Junction Railways, AOF, Wholesale Soft goods (a business).

The Challenge Cup was renamed the Rocky Bay Cup in 1947 for Handicap Teams shooting with South Perth winning the Cup in 1947. The Rocky Bay Cup was competed for until shooting ended at Swanbourne.

1920 - 1939 Challenges

The First World War had a devastating effect on Australia. There were less than 3 million men in 1914, yet almost 400,000 of them volunteered to fight in the war. An estimated 60,000 died and tens of thousands were wounded. At least two Perth members (S Andrews and G Larkin) were known to have been killed in action.

Many returned servicemen suffered from injuries from which they never successfully recovered. While it is not possible to adequately account for the impact of the war on the Perth and Fremantle Clubs here, the club records show that membership suffered, and illness was frequently mentioned as keeping office bearers from fulfilling their duties.

Many Captains' annual reports referred to a decline in discipline, shooters turning up too late and



Figure 3 W Garrity Kings Winner 1910 and 1927

frequent disputes over team selection and handicapping. Club harmony was severely tested in 1921 with a long running dispute at Fremantle over when a competition should be abandoned for the day due to inclement weather and the late muster of shooters.

The Clubs could not recruit young members as they had before the war. However, amalgamations such as the Crown Law and Boans (a Department Store) clubs with Perth helped stem the decline a little. Many members were unable at times to pay their subscriptions and attendances fell away towards the end of the 1920s so much that

Fremantle compelled to reduce the number of targets from 2 to 1 and insist that the Leederville Club pay a fee for the use of the Fremantle target.

The popular pre-war discipline of miniature range (smallbore) shooting fell away and was largely abandoned. The Fremantle Club shot at two Drill Halls in Fremantle including HMAS Cerberus V (Croke & Mouat Streets).

On a brighter note, despite a decline in membership, those that remained became enthusiastic travellers to country clubs including York, Beverley, Jarrahdale, Collie, Moora, Round Hill (east of Moora) and Namban (north of Moora). Club members enjoyed their Kings Prize meetings and frequently won matches. Perth's Bill Garrity won in 1910 and 1927. In 1926 Fremantle member R J

Halliday won The Kings Prize at Kalgoorlie. A record entry of 15 Fremantle club members attended. On the back of Fremantle winning the Hannan cup and Levinson shield, the Club decided to buy a red Australian ensign with FRC to be embroidered in the corner. Shooters also enjoyed competitions against visiting warships including the Battle Cruiser HMS Renown and HMAS Marguerite.

The Fremantle Club hosted the Bunbury Rifle Club in 1920 and provided ‘entertainment’ that must have been quite lavish as the Club recorded a debt that was still outstanding to the tune of £10 in 1921.

In 1922 the Fremantle club decided to delay partaking of refreshments until after the monthly meetings were concluded. Refreshments were provided by the venue for the meetings. Until June

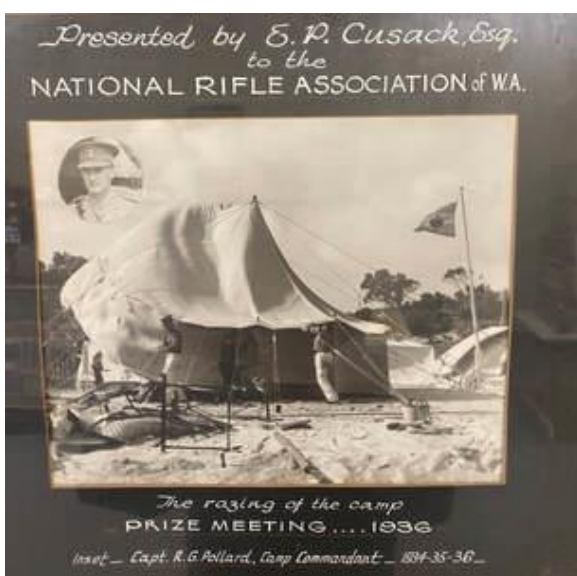


Figure 4 EC Gare Winner of Kings 1926 and 1933

1929, Fremantle met at the Terminus Hotel. The Club moved to the Oddfellows Hotel (now the Norfolk Hotel) in July 1929. The Perth Club on the other hand met at Protestant House. No doubt making up for the lack of refreshments by hiring the steam ferry Emerald to visit Garden Island in 1928.

The Clubs shifted their club houses to Swanbourne in the 1920s and enjoyed the slow roll out of the long ranges by the Army. The Long range opened in 1928. There was concern that the 200yd range was too close and 1000 range too far to shoot but both continued to be used. Far greater challenges lay ahead as the Depression deepened in the 1930s.

The 1930s were a testing time for Perth and Fremantle. Membership continued to decline for the first 5 years or so. Membership fees for Fremantle rose to £1 (\$74 today) in 1930. They were just 5 shillings at Perth in 1934. New ‘short’ rifles were introduced from 1933 but many members found it difficult to pay the £4 even on terms. The reduction in free ammunition from 100 rounds to 50 in 1935 did not help matters. Money and enthusiasm for social events declined and Fremantle temporarily abandoned them in 1937 after an embarrassing failure of the two Fremantle Club organisers to turn up to run an event after the 1936 AGM.



The conditions for competing for trophies were ongoing sore points for some members, made worse when the prizes in the shape of hams did not materialise in 1937.

The Fremantle Club elected a large number of honorary vice presidents including from 1929 to 1931, John Curtin, member for Fremantle and future war time prime minister. Local members and mayors of Fremantle, East Fremantle, North Fremantle and Cottesloe and on one occasion, the Mayor of Claremont was also elected.

Fremantle’s meetings switched to the Newcastle Club Hotel in 1932 and the Commercial Travellers Club in 1938. Perth continued its abstinence when it switched venues to Pastoral House and later

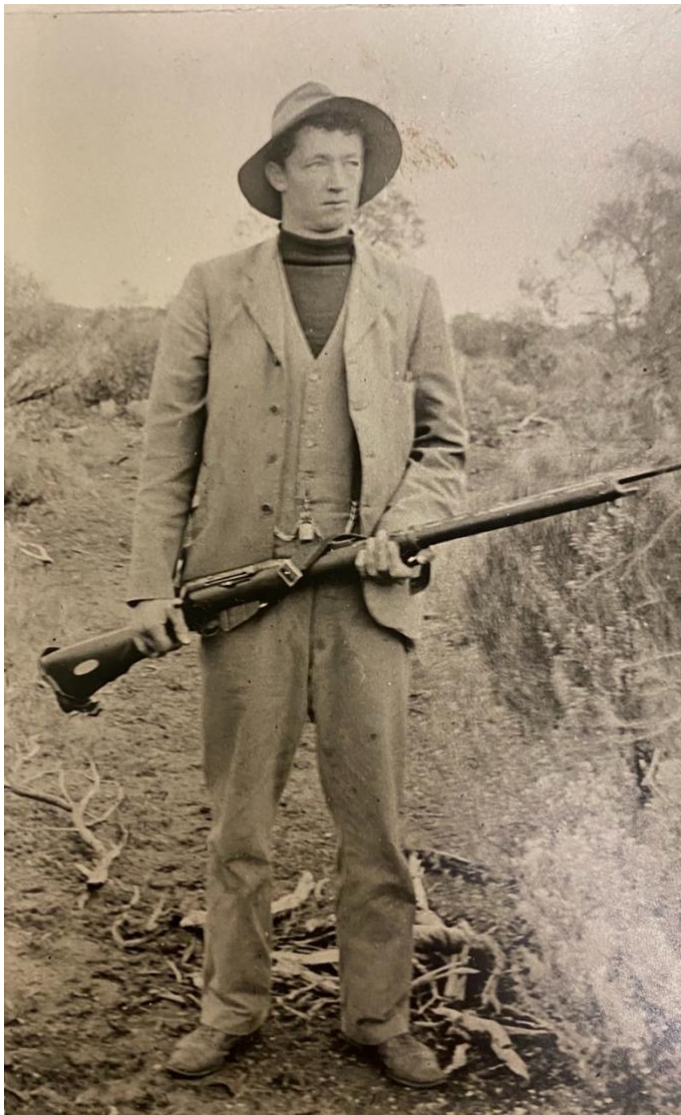
Orient House.

By 1940, both clubs were urging members to participate in buying war bonds and other activities. The Fremantle Club sought to enrol members of Fremantle's Home Service Corps.

It has long been a tradition that Perth – Fremantle Rifle Club members and spouses gather together for an annual prize presentation dinner. We usually have a bit of fun by participating in a raffle or some other activity. Newspaper reports show that very similar events were held in the past although the 'fun' events have changed somewhat. In 1934, the Sunday Times reported:

“A gay evening was spent at the Arundale Hall [Cnr James & Museum Streets and owned by the Theosophical Society] on Saturday May 12 by members of the Perth Rifle Club and a large number of friends. The president, Mr. Martin Lloyd, welcomed the Commandant, Brigadier Martyn, who distributed the many trophies won by club members during the year 1933. Interposed between the dances were musical items rendered by Messrs. Keith McKenzie, C. A. Lloyd, and J Eastmon, and flute solos by Mr. Paul Buddee. As an encore. Mr. Buddee gave an enthusiastic audience the first public, rendering of his own composition, "The Dance of the Banksia Cones."

The “Dance of the Banksia Cones” may well have been in reference to the popular Australian stories Snugglepot and Cuddlepie by West Aussie born May Gibbs that featured the Banksia Men.



1941 – 1950 Recess and Re-establishment

With the outbreak of war, the Clubs endeavoured to assist with 'musketry' training. However, the Government quickly ceased the supply of ammunition and took away equipment. The Perth Club invested 16 pounds in war savings certificates before going into recess.

The clubs carried on using .22 rifles for training purposes, with all trophies won in 1941 being donated back to the club. From this period on until 1946, there was no rifle club activity as such.

The Fremantle Club at this time elected the Honourable John Tonkin as a vice president. A member of the Australian Labor Party, he served as a Member of the Western Australian Legislative Assembly for a record 44 years from 1933 to 1977, and was the 20th Premier of Western Australia, serving from the 1971 election until the 1974 election.

Most clubs set about re-establishing themselves from late 1946. Perth members met on 18 June 1946 at Orient House, but it wasn't until March 1947, that the club got off the ground by enrolling members for 10 shillings each

and selling the club .22s to members to raise money to buy .303s. Some **30 to 40** targets were in use at Swanbourne at this time!

The Fremantle Club met at the Rendezvous Cafe, 90 High St, Fremantle and introduced a trophy competition designed to prevent the problems experienced before the war. The Fremantle Club House was in a sad state of repair and a sand drift threatened one wall. Finances were poor and the Club sought to sell its pre-war trophies (many of which had a high level of silver) including the Chamber of Mines Shield to the NRA of WA for 50 pounds. It is not clear, but it seems that this trophy was eventually donated and renamed the Frank Simper Trophy after the Fremantle life member. Eventually 4 prominent citizens led by Sir Frank Gibson (President) donated the 25 pounds needed to repair the club house and remove the sand.

By 1949, post war shortages notwithstanding, both clubs had thoroughly re-established themselves and became forces to be reckoned with in MDU (metropolitan district union) competitions.

1951 – 1960 Consolidation

Rifle shooting consolidated and developed in the post war years. Membership grew with Fremantle recording 42 efficient (paid up active) shooters. Metro clubs linked together with army units to shoot the Merritt Cup with Perth winning in 1951. In 1956 Wilfred Owen (Bill) Connell transferred to Perth from Bellevue. Bill, his son (Stan) and grandson (Grant) have participated in Club, State and Australia rifle shooting teams across the decades. All three have held leadership positions in our club and been highly successful in competitions.

1961 – 1970 Changing rifles

The year 1969 saw the phasing out of the old faithful .303 rifle, and the introduction of the 7.62mm weapon. It was a sad day for many shooters but an inevitable one as .303 ammunition was getting scarce as it had ceased to be produced in Australia.

And so it was that from this point that the rifle shooting movement really advanced. True target rifles were now available to shooters and then came more sophisticated ancillary equipment and of course better scores. To overcome the high scoring, Target dimensions were reduced but still scores tended to improve. The 1969 Commonwealth Queens which was shot at Swanbourne was the last Queens Prize meeting shot with .303 rifles in Australia. It was won by Perth member Stan Connell. Stan went on to win two more Queens in quick succession with the new 7.62mm rifle.

1971 – 2000 Glory Days

The Fremantle and Perth Clubs enjoyed considerable success both on the range and in their respective



Figure 5 Perth RC Centenary picnic shoot

club houses. The Fremantle Club in particular had a vibrant social and shooting scene with success on the range from members Jack and Laurie Ward, Bill Maker, Phil and Bruce Philips, Des Tyler, David and Marianne Lascelles, Les Fossilo and many others putting in weekly award-winning scores. David Lascelles led the Fremantle team to victory over a Murray Districts team in 1982. The following year Fremantle shooter Les Fossilo won the 1983 Queens Prize. Also in 1983, Des Tyler moved up to A Grade where he has remained to this day regularly shooting club championship winning scores.

The Fremantle Club was strengthened during the 1980s with several women taking up the sport. Mary Murphy, Debbie Pearman and Leslie Cobb regularly shot well. The Clubs 30 plus members enjoyed social nights and the introduction of a newsletter was well received.

Club members travelled far and wide competing in district and local competitions. New Perth member Peter Green, made quite an impact winning the local Queens and several interstate competitions including the Canberra Rifle Club's 75th Anniversary Prize.

2001 – 2016 Innovation



Figure 6 Gordon Neil shooting F Class

The new century heralded change and innovation. The F Class discipline was introduced with surprising results. Proponents thought that scoped rifles on rests would give older shooters a chance to extend their shooting careers. The Club was pleasantly surprised to find that it attracted a number of bench rest and sporting shooters. Later, as word got around, several new-to-shooting people found F Class to be to their liking. Aiding this welcome development was the introduction of electronic targets at Swanbourne. The MDRA clubs pioneered this innovation in Australia and the WARA held the first Australian Queens to have the Kongsberg target system. This era was also a time of change with the amalgamation of the Perth and Fremantle Clubs. Numbers at Fremantle had dwindled significantly in the first decade of the new century while Perth maintained a core of shooters.

The opportunity for amalgamation was due to the generosity of the Fremantle members towards a homeless Perth Club. The Perth Club house sandwiched between the Fremantle and Subiaco club houses had been severely damaged by a 'willy willy' that targeted the Perth club like a Queens Prize winning shooter needing a V bull on their last shot. Perth moved into the old University Rifle Club house, but lightning does strike twice it seems because a couple of years later another 'willy willy' took out Perth's borrowed club house. It must have been with some trepidation that Fremantle invited Perth to move in with them!

The new Perth - Fremantle Club set about consolidating the change and adapting to the innovations in rifle shooting. The fortunes of the amalgamated Club were aided with further innovation including the development of a website in 2012 and later a Facebook page. The website and Facebook sites have been directly responsible for attracting a large number of visitors to the Club, many of whom have taken out membership. So many in fact that the Club has purchased additional electronic targets, new club rifles and implemented a training programme. The challenge ahead was seen to be to nurture and retain members particularly when the Club moved to the new Pinjar Range.

On the 12th of December 2015 the last shot was fire on the Swanbourne rifle range and many members gathered to say farewell to a range that many had known for more than 30 years and some more than 50. It had been the headquarters rifle range of the Western Australian Rifle Association WARA and the Metropolitan District Rifle Association and its member clubs home range for nearly 100 years.

Our Club took up an offer by the Bindoon Rifle Club to shoot at Mooliabeenee until the Pinjar range was completed.

2017 onwards and upwards: goodbye TR shooting?

After shooting up at the Bindoon range, the club moved to the new Pinjar facility in 2017 where the club continues to promote and innovate rifle shooting.

Innovations include visitor days, night shooting, gong shooting and Sporting/ Hunter Class shooting. These innovations have attracted new members and assisted existing members to expand their enjoyment of the sport.

While the Club welcomes visitors on every club shooting day, it also has run successful events specifically for visitors including ladies' days and corporate events.



Figure 7 Gong targets

On selected Saturdays the Club holds gong shooting matches in addition to our normal afternoon Club Matches. There are two formats of centrefire gong shooting: a Standard Format which emulates normal competitions in prone shooting position and an Advanced Format which emulates the Precision Service Rifle (PSR) and Precision Rifle Series (PRS) styles of competition.

Unfortunately, the number of traditional TR shooting (iron sights, slings and elbows) within the Club has been in decline. By the end of 2022 there are just 3 or so TR shooters that represent a direct link to the shooting of our founders in 1902, out of over 55 members.

The Club's willingness to adapt and evolve has proved very successful and before the end of 2023, the Club will expand the gong shooting to include small bore (22LR) formats just like that for the centrefire formats.

With 22LR shooting being far less expensive than centrefire, this is anticipated to attract more shooters to the Club and offer members more opportunities to shoot.



Figure 8 Ladies Day picnic shoot



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