



## ***Getting Started in Muzzle Loading A Thames Estuary Branch guide.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

If you are new to shooting sports or currently enjoy other shooting disciplines then welcome to the world of black powder. What is Muzzle Loading? Muzzle Loading is a branch of the shooting sports whereby the powder and projectile(s) are loaded straight into the barrel via the muzzle. The firearms used are shotguns, rifles, muskets, pistols and revolvers. For most, the powder is 'black powder' - the original form of gun powder in use before the advent of the modern nitro-powders found in the cartridges of today. The projectile can be a single round ball, conical bullet or, in the case of shotguns, lead shot. The exception to the statement about loading via the muzzle are revolvers; these are loaded directly into the cylinder.

The purpose of this guide is to set out the simple steps necessary to get you shooting with a muzzle loader; it does not purport to be an authoritative guide to the law.

### **New to Shooting**

For the purposes of this guide, it is assumed you want to take part in target shooting, so this guide will not go into what is required for shooting a muzzle loading shotgun.

In simple terms, in order to participate in target shooting, you need to be a member of a Home Office Approved shooting club like the ***Basildon Rifle & Pistol Club (BRCP)*** & ideally join the *MLAGB* where you will automatically be entitled to become a member of the *Thames Estuary Branch*. This is where the *Thames Estuary Branch* of the *MLAGB* does most of its shooting. If you ultimately intend to own & shoot your own guns then you will need to apply for a ***Firearms Certificate (FAC)*** or ***Shotgun Certificate (SGC)*** [See section on definition of a shotgun below]. However to get started you can use the club's firearms & consumables, provided at the club range for a nominal fee.

### **Probationary Members**

Once you have contacted the club, you will be invited to visit the range or attend a club meeting so that you can see the facilities on offer, meet the members and for both parties to generally check each other out. All being well, you will be invited to apply for membership. Once you have submitted your application, the club will notify the police of your application and, assuming they raise no objection, you will be granted Probationary Membership.

During your probationary membership, which lasts 6 months, you will receive instruction on safety, range etiquette, loading, cleaning and shooting techniques. During this time, the club will assess your attitude to firearms, competence, safety and your general character. As a member, Probationary or Full, you may use the club firearms. Most club members will willingly let you try their firearms, under their supervision and this is highly recommended as some types/models will suit you better than others but don't forget to offer to pay for the consumables! Always remember, "safety first" and that achieving high scores is not essential.....some never do but they still enjoy the sport.



## Full Membership

Assuming all goes well during your probationary period and there are no objections by the club, you will be offered Full Membership. You may then apply for a FAC.

## Applying for a FAC

A FAC is issued by your local police authority. Completion of the application form (which can be downloaded from the local Police website) is quite straightforward & help will always be on hand from any *Thames Estuary Branch* member. For the grant of your first FAC, it is suggested you apply for at least 3 or 4 firearms e.g. a rifle and two pistols/revolvers. You will be visited by a Police Firearm Enquiry Officer who ascertains that you have "good reason" to possess and have suitable safe storage for the weapons. Once your Certificate has been granted, you can always apply for a "free-variation" to vary the type or calibre. For instance, you may have applied for a percussion rifle of .577 calibre but now decide you would prefer a .45 cal flintlock rifle instead. Once you have used up your authorised items, additional variations may be requested on payment of a fee. FACs are currently valid for five years and variations requested at time of renewal are free.



## Security

Your FAC will not be handed over until you have somewhere secure to store your firearms. Most common is a steel gun cabinet (to BS7558) bolted to the fabric of the house, in a discrete location e.g. in the loft or under-stairs cupboard. Intruder alarms are not normally required unless you live in a vulnerable location or wish to possess more than 10 or 12 firearms. Although a cabinet to BS7588 is likely to be a minimum requirement, a discussion with your local Firearm Enquiry Officer before any purchase would be prudent. Be aware, when choosing a cabinet, that many muzzle loading rifles and muskets are much longer than breech loading rifles and shotguns.

## Shotguns



Smoothbore muskets e.g. a Brown Bess flintlock or any other traditional percussion, flintlock or matchlock smoothbore firearms can be held on a SGC. Provided you are not a prohibited person, you may apply for a SGC. You will need to provide the same level of security as for firearms.

If you intend to shoot a muzzle loading shotgun (as opposed to a smoothbore musket), then this is a different discipline which is not catered for at the *BRPC*. However the *MLAGB* has a shotgun section & information can be found on the main *MLAGB* website.



## **Explosives Certificate**

In order to acquire, keep and transport black powder you will need an Explosives Certificate (E.C.). It is illegal to even *handle* black powder without an E.C. No certificate is required to buy a black powder substitute such as 'Pyrodex' but you may be asked to show your FAC or SGC when purchasing. These substitutes are not as popular as black powder partly because they are more expensive, not as versatile, are harder to ignite (more misfires) and are more hygroscopic i.e. more likely to corrode un-cleaned barrels. Explosives Certificates are issued under the Control of Explosives Regulations. The Certificate is free and issued by your local police once you have a FAC with authority for muzzleloading firearms or have acquired a muzzleloading shotgun. The police may wish to inspect your powder storage box prior to handing over the E.C. The Home Office approved pattern timber box can be made or purchased and a full specification together with guidance on siting the box can be found on the main *MLAGB* website. Your Certificate will stipulate how much and what type of black powder you may keep and where it is to be stored.

## **Existing FAC / SGC Holders**

If you already hold a FAC or SGC and your club does not practice the Black Arts then join the *MLAGB* and find your local Branch where informed guidance will be available.

## **Originals & Reproductions**

**Originals:** One of the joys of muzzle loading is owning and using historic firearms such as 200 year old flintlocks, the Enfield rifles of the Crimea War or the revolvers of the American Civil War. In simple terms, an original muzzle loader is an antique and may be possessed without any certification. If however, you wish to fire the piece, it must be entered onto a FAC or SGC and will be subject to the same restrictions as any modern firearm. Before using an antique weapon, it should be checked by a gunsmith. There is also the matter of whether the arm is 'in-proof' i.e. safe to use but that is a subject beyond the scope of this guide. If you buy well and look after the item, as an antique, it should not depreciate in value over time.

**Reproductions:** Most newcomers to the muzzle loading discipline will opt to start with one of the many reproductions (repros) that are available. In most cases they are near faithful copies of an original piece. They are all subject to firearms legislation and, as such, require the appropriate certificate. Repros offer a low cost entry into the sport without the fear of wearing out or breaking the family heirlooms! As with all things, unless you are lucky, you get what you pay for. Prices start around £200 for a revolver to maybe £2,000 for a custom built match rifle. There is always the chance of picking up a good second hand firearm & *Thames Estuary Branch* members will always be willing to offer advice on what to look for.



## **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

**Equipment:** Appended is a suggested list of items to get you started with a percussion revolver or pistol.

**Consumables:** are powder, ball, bullets, patches, percussion caps & targets etc. There are various suppliers of consumables out there (refer to other areas of web site) & you will find some of the *Thames Estuary Branch* members are also willing to sell items at a reasonable cost.

The *BRPC* is a Registered Firearms Dealer & will also purchase items including firearms on your behalf at very good discounted rates.

### **Suggested Basic Equipment List for Blackpowder Percussion Single Shot Pistol and/or Revolver**

1. Single shot pistol / revolver.
2. Black (Gun) powder.
3. Powder flask with measuring nozzles for different loads.
4. Vials for holding pre-measured loads (never load direct from flask).
5. Patches measured in thousandths of an inch (Pistol).
6. Ballistic Filler like semolina (Revolver).
7. Lead ball e.g. .433/.451/.454/.457 appropriate to the calibre.
8. Lube for patches / revolver chamber mouth.
9. Small non-ferrous hammer & starter (Pistol)
10. Ramrod with jag appropriate to the calibre & cleaning accessories.
11. Percussion caps.
12. Targets
13. Cleaning cloth cut to appropriate size for barrel
14. Cleaning cloth general
15. Cleaning fluid.
16. Gun oil.
17. Screwdriver to fit screws on firearm (for dismantling and cleaning).
18. Nipple key & nipple pick
19. Binoculars or telescope.
20. Note book/target diagram to record loads and point of aim.
21. Box or bag for the above.



**Please Note:** The above is provided purely for your convenience by The Thames Estuary Branch of the MLAGB & it is strongly advised that you check current restrictions under the law as these are subject to change.

*After a document by Paul Roberts. Surrey Branch Secretary May 2010 - amended and revised by Thames Estuary Branch MLAGB 2017.*