

# MUZZLE LOADING



## Getting started – a Surrey Branch guide.

### INTRODUCTION

If you are new to shooting sports or currently enjoy other shooting disciplines then welcome to the world of black powder! Firstly let me correct one falsehood: it doesn't have to be dirty....well, not very.

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 cartridges today. There are a couple of black powder substitutes such as 'Pyrodex' but more of that later. The projectile can be a single round ball, conical bullet or lead shot in the case of shotguns. 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

In simple terms, in order to shoot you need a Firearms Certificate (FAC) or Shotgun Certificate (SGC) if you only wish to shoot the later or both certificates if you want to shoot rifles, pistols and shotguns. There are exceptions to this statement e.g. using club guns or shooting with a landowner but most will aspire to their own FAC or SGC.

#### **Firearms.**

These are rifles, pistols and revolvers. FAC's are issued by your local police provided you can show good reason which for most is usually membership of a Home Office Approved Club. Assuming you have found a club that does muzzle loading and/or joined the MLAGB, which is also a Home Office approved club, you need to apply to join. All clubs will invite you 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 submit your application the club will notify the police of your application and assuming they raise no objection you will be granted Probationary membership.

**Probationary Members:** During your probationary membership, which can last 3 – 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, in other words are they happy for you to become a member. Once a member, probationary or full, you may borrow firearms to try from other members, this is highly recommended as some types/models will suit you better than others. Most members will

willingly lend you their guns, under their supervision, but don't forget to pay for the consumables. Remember, safety first and achieving high scores is not essential.....some never do but they still enjoy the sport.

**Full Membership:** Once you have completed your initial training and are granted full membership you may then apply for a FAC.

**Applying for a FAC:** Completion of the application form is quite straight forward. For your first FAC we would suggest you apply for at least 3 or 4 firearms e.g. a rifle and two pistols/revolvers. You will need to state the calibre of each firearm. Once you have authority to possess you can always apply for a free-variation to vary the type or calibre. For instance you may have applied for a .577 m.l. rifle but now want a .451 m.l. rifle. Once you have used up your authorised items additional variations can be requested on payment of a fee or await the next renewal.

**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. Be aware when choosing a cabinet that many muzzle loading rifles and muskets are much longer than breech loading rifles and shotguns. Although a cabinet to BS7588 is likely to be a minimum requirement a discussion with your local Firearms Enquiry Officer before any purchase would be prudent.

### **Shotguns.**

Smoothbore muskets e.g. a Brown Bess flintlock and traditional percussion or flintlock sporting guns are held on a SGC. Provided you are not a prohibited person anyone may apply for a SGC and membership of a club is not a requirement. You will need to provide the same level of security as for firearms and subject to adequate security there is no limit to the number of shotguns you may possess.

### **Other Certificates and Permits.**

In order to acquire, keep and transport black powder you will need an Explosives Certificate (E.C.) and an RCA Document. 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. The black powder substitutes are not as popular as black powder partly because they are not as versatile, are harder to ignite (more misfires) and are more hygroscopic i.e. more likely to corrode barrels if left uncleaned.

**Explosives Certificate:** 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 muzzle loading firearms or have acquired a muzzle loading shotgun. The police will expect to see your powder storage box prior to handing over the E.C. The approved pattern timber box can be made or purchased and a full specification together with guidance on sitting the box can be found on the MLAGB website (in the News area) [www.mlagb.com](http://www.mlagb.com)

**The Recipient Competent Authority (RCA) Document:** This certificate allows you to transport explosives. It is also free but issued by the Health and Safety Executive once you have an Explosives Certificate.

## **EXISTING FIREARM OR SHOTGUN CERTIFICATE HOLDER**

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 and training will be available. FAC holders can then apply for a variation for the rifle, pistol, revolver and calibres of their choice and at the same time apply for an EC. SGC holders can buy a muzzle loading musket or shotgun just like any other shotgun.

Once you have your variations or muzzle loading shotgun you can apply for the other certificates as noted above.

## **ORIGINALS AND REPRODUCTIONS**

**Originals:** One of the joys of muzzle loading is owning and using historic arms 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 use the piece then it must be entered onto a FAC or SGC and be subject to the same restrictions as any modern firearm. Before using any 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 new to muzzle loading 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 start 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 £50 for a used Remington revolver to maybe £2000 for a custom built match rifle.

## **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

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

**Supplies:** Consumables are powder, ball, bullets, lead shot, wads, percussion caps and flints. If your local gunshop does not stock muzzle loading supplies then they may be willing to order it in for you. Blackpowder is stocked by the NRA and Fulton's at Bisley. Bulk supplies of various powders can be ordered from Peter Starley [www.black-powder.co.uk](http://www.black-powder.co.uk) Check with your local MLAGB Branch to see where other members source their supplies. Surrey Branch holds stocks of lead shot which is always better collected rather than sent.

## **REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING**

- Firearms Law –Guidance to Police 2002. Home Office.

- Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations 2005 (SI Number 2005/1082)
- The Modern Muzzle Loader by Andrew Courtney. Published by MLAGB 1997
- The Definitive Guide to Shooting Muzzle Loading Pistols by Derek Fuller. Published by The Crowood Press Ltd 2002

**Lastly.....** If in doubt or need further help, just ask!

**Paul Roberts. Surrey Branch Secretary.**

**May 2010**

### **SUGGESTED EQUIPMENT LIST FOR BLACKPOWDER REVOLVER OR PISTOL**

\* denotes items which are optional but recommended.

1. Revolver/Pistol
2. Lead ball e.g. .433/.451/.454/.457 appropriate to the calibre.
3. Powder flask with appropriate black powder, usually medium or fine grade.
4. Flask for revolver chamber filler (semolina) or simple scoop and pot.
5. Spare spouts for flasks
6. Semolina
7. Cotton patches for single shot pistol ball.
8. Lube for revolver chamber mouth, specialist lube, tallow or heavy grease.
9. Percussion caps.
10. Spare flints.
11. Small priming flask for flintlocks with very fine priming powder.
12. Pliers (straight snipe nosed)
13. Knife.
14. Screwdriver to fit screws on gun for dismantling and cleaning.
15. Blackpowder solvent.
16. 'Four by two' cleaning cloth
17. Cleaning rod.
18. Jags and brushes for rod.
19. Gun oil.
20. Scales to check powder charges.
21. Nipple key.
22. Binoculars or telescope.
23. Rags or kitchen towel.
24. Shooting (golf) glove.\*
25. Glass/plastic phials for pre-measured charges. \*
26. Note book/target diagram to record loads and point of aim. \*
27. File for fore-sight adjustment. \*
28. Sight black. \*
29. Box or bag for the above.