



Bowmen of Arleigh
Small Newsletter No. 115
June 2020

As noted in Newsletter no. 114, due to the “lockdown due to the Coronavirus epidemic, shooting was suspended “for the foreseeable future” by Archery GB on Tuesday 17th March so the Monday session the evening before was the last time people shot at Arleigh.

We received notice on 14th May that shooting could re-commence subject to 8 criteria being matched and shooting re-commenced at Arleigh on Sunday 24th May 2020.

We could comply with all the criteria except for one, which was a recommendation that targets be left out. This might have proved to be something of a gamble at Bretons so it was decided that sanitizing spray should be used on the 5 targets we can use on the field before putting out and putting away. All members have been notified by Archery GB and by the Committee about the procedures to be used.

Thanks go to Brian Harris for the pictures of our members social distancing as required on the 24th May we began shooting again. This is according to the requirements of Phase 1 and when Phases 2 and 3 are reached is anyone’s guess at the moment.





We're presently using alternate spots to save re-measuring new ones so we are creating more space between bosses than is required. Distances are being kept low as the less time spent looking for arrows within the two-hour session slots being used.

Sessions are being set by Paul Champion according to the bookings by members with a minimum of 5 people shooting so there are enough people to set out and put away. The uptake after the initial shoot has been quite slow but as people get used to things perhaps there'll be more.

Just a note that Michelle Horsley (Jason's better half) recently lost her footing on some stairs and broke one ankle and some bones in her other foot. Fortunately she's had an operation and treatment and is getting better now. Ardeleigh sent some flowers and wished her well.

As I threatened in the last newsletter, regarding some historical deliberations (of which there are many!) what follows is some correspondence between Tom Major and me some years ago after Tom published an article in the Essex Bowman Magazine and some more thoughts of mine on the mental side of things, from August, 2013. Some of this is a repetition so my apologies for that but these articles were originally written some years apart.

"Below is some email correspondence I had with Tom Major, a Senior Coach about an article he wrote for the Essex website I believe towards the end of 2012. This, I think, goes a little deeper into the mental side of things and confidence and my initial email and his response are shown below: - (The Jim mentioned was Jann's husband, a long-standing member with us since he was a junior. He's no longer with us but he most certainly had had the Archery operation on his brain!

"Tom; I know we spoke about your recent article on noise that is on the Essex website but I don't remember exactly where that conversation went and forgive me if I iterate some things we already discussed on my own thoughts touching on items you mention. I try to read all the "bits" people kindly put on the website but I find your articles start my brain working more than most, certainly on the mental side of things.

"You'll be aware I'm sure of the circumstances that Ardleigh have during their practice sessions and if you can concentrate through some of these you can travel to any shoots confident that you can certainly handle most things that occur during them. That said, when there is a competition proper we do have the "best of order", in fact, when it's quiet at our Club, for example with our Indoor Championships, the silence can be almost unnerving!

"Back in the days when I consider I could "shoot" and my confidence was 110%, my favourite place to be at in an outdoor event was just off the leader board with a couple of dozen to go as I knew that more often than not, most of my arrows would be in the gold at 60 yards. You just knew it would be so. I didn't appear much on the leader board (if there was one) at many of the competitions where I won or was placed. This is what fascinates me more than anything else as most archers have a reasonably good and consistent technique and are capable of great things. The trouble with a lot of them is that they don't believe it!

"I will say that when I was shooting well I was shooting at least four times a week including competitions (mostly with Jim as well), not always doing a round, plus everyday in my garage at home (just outside it, actually). When I wasn't shooting I was reading about it or thinking about it, even during the journey to work and I must admit that when I was at the "top" of my game I was fortunate in having a very understanding wife who encouraged me throughout. Jim and me developed a shooting programme that involved doing a New National Round where we shot 6 arrows straight off and ran down to the target and then walked back to the shooting line to give our diaphragms the chance to settle down. I think the rounds were completed mostly in under an hour. We also did "Ardleigh" Nationals which started at 120 yards and we also shot at the normal distances using an 80 centimetre face (Jim also had an understanding wife who, like Barbara, was also an archer!).

"Indoors was another matter but we still shot one "official" round plus another on top (quite a number of our members still do this now.). I recall getting to competitions and seeing the leader board for the first session, or whatever and knowing if the leader had a good score, say 574 for a Portsmouth, I just knew that I would beat it. I never actually "tried" because I knew I didn't have to. It didn't mean I always won but I was generally at or around a placing at most Indoor competitions I went to and generally came away with an award of one kind or another, even up to National level. My confidence in my shooting technique guaranteed me a good score. I never took any notice of how others were shooting during competitions as this wasn't relevant to me.

"I don't consider my recent relative lack of what we call "success" is anything to do with my being older. I can still pull the bow (when I shoot properly!) with reasonable ease. My difficulties are with my confidence. I no longer believe that all my arrows will hit the middle, Not that they all did when I was shooting well as our Club Record Portsmouth of 590 had an 8 in it. Notice I don't recall all the 10s I got, just that bl---y 8! I just took no notice of what could be called wayward shots and carried on. The difference, I think, reflecting on it, is that I no longer care so much about where the arrow ends up but how it was shot. If my arrow was aimed at 3 o'clock in the red and that's where it went, how bad is that? The really interesting ones are those that were aimed at 3 o'clock in the red and they still hit in the 10 ring. These are the ones that were shot with no conscious interference and just went with the minimum of fuss, easily and without effort. The ones "it" shot. My old shooting "skill" is still there but it just doesn't manifest itself as often these days.

"I still shoot well enough to get selected regularly for our Summer League Team and have shot in most of our matches since the early 70s but our Club now has archers who are most capable of beating me and indeed have relegated me to the lower reaches several times this year, which is as it should be. This does not mean, however, that I have to like it! I have, though, accepted that while I shoot less often than I used to I can't expect to get the results I'd like!

"My time at the Club is mostly spent in making sure our members' equipment is properly set up and building their confidence with praise where it's due. So many people go through life without being told, "you did that really well". I know I mentioned to you that I don't believe there is really a right or wrong way to shoot, providing that what people do is consistent. The only time they seem to run into any problems is when they get a good group in the 10 ring and start to think about what they're doing and analyse things to distraction.

"I think I've gone on long enough about this so I'll let you get on!

Best wishes
Michael

This was Tom's reply.

"In response to your comments on my article about "Noise" I do agree that an archer who has complete confidence in their shooting ability, based on good practice, will have an advantage at a competition providing, as you say, they have the inbuilt knowledge of "how" they are producing "the shot". This would involve allowing the body to take complete control, which, as we both know, is the hardest part of the process. When an archer achieves this level of confidence it is then, and only then, that they walk away from the event feeling as though they had been in the "Zone". I know that you have had that experience but, unfortunately, very few people do.

"I have often said to Iris that an archer who continues to evaluate the process of their technique will not be able to reach the state of automation required to be "in the zone" because they never let their body take over, which suffocates the body's inbuilt flow which the archer has been practicing hours to achieve. However, I must not generalise, because, of course, there are individuals who can achieve high levels of skill in a methodical way. But could they achieve an even higher level if they would let their body have a "free rein"? You probably recognize the term which, as you know, comes from horse and hounds to let the horse free to jump the various obstacles during the hunt, without having the biting bit putting them off.

"I note your comment about aiming at three o'clock in the red and hitting it, and the interesting ones which you say were aimed at three o'clock red but still hit the ten ring. As you know, the brain had already shot the arrow at the ten and your conscious mind had kicked in as your sight was passing three o'clock red. That is being in the zone. The arrow was already on its way to the ten ring because you would only have consciously aimed at three o'clock red if you were allowing for a known wind strength.

"I take an interest in the summer league and have noticed that your scores over the last couple of years have shown an upward trend. Keep up the good work.

"Thank you for your comments on my articles.

Tom

The following pages are a series of articles, not in any particular order, I've written over the years, some for the Essex Bowman Magazine (some of them more years ago than I care to remember!), when it was a printed issue and others that appeared on our first website

THOUGHTS

Over the years, I've had most of the problems that people get with their archery so I can speak with some degree of personal experience. Recently, I've been shooting less regularly and accept, for various reasons, that I can't expect to get the results that I used to. That said, I do still like to shoot and, if I analysed it, I'm probably getting more enjoyment out of it. To use Rudyard Kipling's observation, "I can look at triumph and disaster and treat those two impostors just the same". I enjoy shooting well but have more of an interest in how the arrow got to the target rather than where it hit. (This does not mean that I enjoy shooting a bad score!). I've been doing a little coaching and I enjoy this very much. Helping a new archer to develop their skills is really very satisfying. While I am watching people shoot, though, the thought runs through my mind that a lot of them don't really seem to enjoy it very much! The youngest archers it seems to me, have the edge in the enjoying department. Three, or 6 arrows on the target are quite satisfactory, whatever the distance being shot. (On reflection, though, when I'm shooting my longbow, I'm pretty pleased with that as well, so I suppose it's all relative!). When the desire to get better scores comes along then the problems seem to start.

These notes go a little deeper into the mental side of things and are really an extension of the main glossary for those who wish to explore this side of Archery a little more. If I'm asked to apportion how much to allocate between the physical and mental side of Archery, I really do find it difficult. Sometimes I think 20% physical and 80% mental and sometimes I reckon the importance of the mental side even more.

Once you've got the basic skills running reasonably, where you don't have to think so much about every little detail of your shooting process, then you can really start to get to grips with what it's all about. The problem, if you

perceive it as one, is that you must want to shoot well, but you mustn't try. Your conscious mind must be aware of outside influences, like what the wind is doing, but it mustn't interfere with the progress of the shot, any adjustments being made by the sub-conscious part of your mind, working with the information the conscious part of your mind is sending. In this ideal state of mind you will have total trust in your ability to shoot well. A number of times, when people have some problem, and have asked me to watch them shoot, I usually can't find very much of what might be perceived as wrong with their technique. Only little things. Most have practised long and hard to get a consistent style and way of shooting that works well for them and generally seem, for the most part, to have achieved it. What they haven't developed is the ability to trust themselves and to stop consciously analysing every part of the shot. Let your sub-conscious mind get on with that. It's really not possible to have your head filled with all the details of what makes a good shot. Let your body get on with it, it's quite capable of shooting beyond your wildest dreams, if you let it!

Relax, empty your mind of caring where the last arrow went or where the arrow in your bow is going; let your subconscious mind attend to matters and it will. Don't worry about aiming too much, just put the sight somewhere in the middle of the target and let it get on with it, just hold your eye on the gold through the sight and make a good, in line shot.

On occasion, in practice, saying "just try this, for me" I have managed to get archers to relax enough to do this. Without exception they have all shot much better groups, from 3 arrows in the 10 ring on a Portsmouth Round to, on one memorable occasion, 3 arrows in the inner 10 'X' ring.

There were no "flukes" because they followed each end with similar groups repeatedly. All shot without a trace of the "shakes", fluidly and with total control, without apparently trying, and all with a much shorter time in the holding and aiming department. It really is almost magical! The real problem that archers seem to have is to maintain this absolute trust in themselves. They know it works, but can't believe it can be that simple! So the conscious brain starts to meddle again, and that glimpse of what they can achieve gets buried under a pile of little, meddlesome, details

Use the wind as a friend. Practice in any wind below gale force to find out what happens. In a competition just shoot the best you can. A well-shot arrow will not deviate from the centre as much as a poorly shot one. Trust your eye and brain to do the aiming. I've been at some competitions where the first thing I've heard, even before shooting has started is people saying "I never shoot well in the wind". Great, that's half the field beaten already!

Another friend is the rain. Most of the paragraph above applies to rain in the same way. No one likes shooting in it but if you practice in the rain you find out what happens in poor conditions, giving you more confidence when you are in a competition or a match, when the choice of stopping is perhaps not an option, unless things get really bad!

Another mutter you'll hear is "if I get good sighters, I can't seem to follow it up when the score counts". The "answer" to this "problem" is right in front of you. Either don't get good sighters or shoot all your arrows in the same, probably more relaxed way that you shot the first 6 arrows.

When you are at a competition, and if you are inclined, see how many archers shoot what they perceive as a poorly shot arrow and then shake their heads with great gloom and despondency. If they do that a few times they will really build up a great supply of self-deprecation and this is also a most conducive ingredient in the quest for a poor score. All the negatives most certainly do not make a positive but getting rid of them is easier said than done. If your arrow goes where you aimed it, hitting the blue that your sight was on when you loosed, use it as a confidence builder, don't view it as a mistake. The arrow is supposed to hit where you aim it and that's what happened. Use it as something to build on, rather than view it as "wrong" Roy Matthews observed in "Archery in Earnest" many years ago that aiming was a very overrated thing anyway, when the sight was on the middle and the hit was in the blue! If though, you reverse this and get a hit in the gold when the sight was in the blue then you must have made some alteration to the aim to make this happen, even allowing for random chance. (It's very worthwhile, if you can, to get hold of a copy of "Archery in Earnest". It's a very useful read, whatever stage of Archery you're at.)

Michael Bell, Ardleigh.

SOME MORE THOUGHTS ON ARCHERY

Once again, I'm sitting in front of a monitor wondering what's going to pop out of my mind and onto the paper.

Here's a thought. What happens to the people who are interested in Archery, take a Beginners' course, pay club and affiliation fees, shoot three or four times and then virtually disappear, sometimes forever. Perhaps it's something to do with our Club but I'd be interested to see some replies to this magazine if the "vanishing archers" are a more common occurrence.

We let people know about how much time Archery can take up and the cost of equipment before they join us. We stress that they should not buy any equipment, except, perhaps, their own tab and bracer until they have settled into shooting, as they can use our Club equipment until they get their own gear. We advise on the equipment that they should buy and accompany many of them to the retailers if they wish us to. When they have made their purchases we help them to set it up and shoot along with them so they don't feel isolated away on their "own" targets.

We encourage all new members to take part in Club events, but don't push it, leaving them to make their own minds up when they wish to take part, although we do encourage them to shoot at least three rounds (Warwicks upward) so they have a handicap as all of our Club competitions have a handicap element in them.

The question (a slightly silly one, it occurs to me, on reflection!) that springs up in my mind is whether we are trying too hard to make it easier for people to enter our sport. I know that when I started in Archery, (1970) new members were started on a much lower key, after the initial instruction was completed. We had to buy our own equipment within six weeks of joining but we were made aware of this from the beginning and I do remember that I couldn't wait to go to the Archery Shop in Forest Hill (this was the outlet for Sherwood Archery Products in those days). The cost of all my gear (a Raven bow, set of Practistreak arrows, Arten sight, Rawlings leather quiver, tab, bracer, leather score pad and Grosvenor tackle box, with arrow rack) came to £40.00 the lot. It doesn't seem a great deal now but that was about a month's wages for me then, after tax, etc. so I don't think things have altered much since, in comparison. Coaching was carried out by members as it is now, on a regular basis but we were left much more to our own devices, just with help available when we asked for it.

I also wonder whether people have changed in that they expect too much too quickly, with hitting the gold the main aim of the game, losing the benefit of just "being there" and enjoying what they're doing, irrespective of the final score.

SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE SUBJECT OF ARCHERY

(Or, "Can I Write Something That Might Be Worth Reading Before I Run Dry")

One or two people have very kindly said that they'd read my meanderings in the last issue of the E.B. The interesting thing was that most of them said much the same thing, that any of them could have written it, in that some of their experiences were similar to those that I referred to. It just happened that I got there first.

As I said before, I never really know where this sort of article is going to end up when I let my mind wander (a bit like my archery!), so here we go again on the Mystery tour, where even the coach driver doesn't know where we are going, or which pub we're going to visit! What I must be careful of is that I don't descend too far into waffle!, or not further than I normally do, anyway!

Thought No.1. Do you often not do as well at the closer distances as you do at the longer ones? It is possible that you have decided that you don't before you've even started the second distance (see positive thoughts, last issue), BUT... do you use foot markers? Do you re-align them at each distance when the targets are moved? If you don't, and you aren't over the spot, you are having to alter your draw line to aim at the middle of the target, at best twisting

at the waist or, more damaging, twisting at the shoulders. As the targets come closer, if you are to the left or the right of the spot, the angles become more pronounced. Back in the old days when the shooting line was moved the foot markers were adjusted each time that you moved. This is, as I said, only a thought, but it might account for one little niggle at your confidence that is physical rather than mental, (where most of the creatures that nibble at the roots of your archery tree reside!). I've noticed recently that fewer people are using foot marks. I still use them occasionally, indoors, but I haven't used them outdoors for some time. I find that when I go on to the line I'm already lined up, just having looked at the target. As the body tires, or you settle in, you automatically compensate for it, rather than trying to hold a stance that felt right at the beginning of the shoot but ,might later on in the day cause some problems. Effectively, what started out as a physical problem can become a mental problem if you let it tell you that you "don't do as well at the shorter distances" after a confident start.

Well, that's set my brain going, so let's see what's next.

An archer who I have known for more years that he would care to remember and who I consider is one of the best and most consistent archers that I know, (and with whom I feel I've always got on very well so I won't embarrass him by giving his name!) came up to me at a shoot and said that he'd read the article in the E.B. and that he agreed with the analysis that archery is only a game, and that it doesn't really matter if an arrow hits the gold, the blue or misses altogether. Life goes on. This is the ideal attitude to have to your archery. He then went on to say that he started a shoot with this in mind and began really well, then shot a slightly slack arrow that didn't hit where he wanted it to and decided "blow it! it does matter" (I think "blow it" was what he said, but I might be wrong). This interestingly shows up a contradiction in the order of things. You must, deep down, want to shoot well, but you musn't try to. Separating the "wanting to" bit from the physical side of shooting is the tricky part. This comes under the general heading of "Letting It Happen". Of practicing good shots so that the technique is so ingrained that you really don't consciously think about too much at all when you are actually shooting, just a few little things that make the shot happen more efficiently. This is where we can also get into really murky ground with the mental side of things, travelling down a path where, probably with good reason, relatively few archers go.

Since I did the last article I have been trying to consistently put into practice the way of shooting that I outlined. I've complicated the issue by buying a new bow. This bow has a variable draw weight and tiller so I can really have a ferret around, and have! The wood grip on the handle has been suitably hacked around and I've finally got me shooting it so that the arrows hit reasonably close to where I'm aiming them most of the time, so what more could I want! Question? If this grip is the most heavily researched one that there's ever been, why do I have to customise it when every other bow that I've ever had hasn't needed touching, or had alternative grips available? I believe that, like so many other things with modern equipment, the manufacturers kid us it's for our benefit when its really for theirs. I've gone down in draw weight and up in draw length so I've probably finished up at about the same weight on my fingers as before but the loose and follow through seem to be a lot better, sharper, if anything and with less tendency for my draw hand to come away from my face in anything other than a backward line. It's taken a new bow to make me think again about my basic technique, virtually back to the start. I've had problems that stemmed (I believe) from the grip on the bow that with some judicious sanding seem to have been solved and now I feel more in control of the bow. I don't really want a bow that hits the middle on a good shot. Any of them can do that. I want a bow that still hits the 9 on a bad shot. The last bow that I had that did that was the Marksman TD 75. For me, that bow was magic to shoot. Total confidence that you are going to hit the middle. Don't worry about the loose or how you are pushing and pulling, you know the arrow will hit the middle, even if your sight wasn't on it! The bow feels like it's part of you, just one unit, consistently hitting the middle.

I've been trying ever since to get the same wonderful feeling with all my bows and still get it with my Perris Whitehart. When it does happen the feeling is indescribable, effectively like the effects of a drug. You disappear into your own little world. You are still enjoying the company of your friends but when you go onto the line your concentration is total, but you aren't concentrating. You aren't actually "doing" anything! Just shooting, almost on a sort of automatic pilot, reaching down for the next arrow until they're all gone. I can tell you that you feel like you are floating about two feet above the ground. I've been trying to recapture the feeling ever since and have had the odd occasion when I know that "it" is there but not to the same degree. (probably because I want it to be there). Indoors, the Portland was the same and I enjoyed a deal of success with both. I still haven't bettered the York scores that I did with the TD75 in the early 80's, pulling 46 pounds with dacron strings and 30 inch XX75 2016's with heavyweight piles. I use the bow now mainly for clout shooting and still go into raptures when I shoot it

because it's so quiet. As far as I'm concerned, noise when you shoot the bow is a waste of energy and every bow I've had since has been shot at its quietest setting. The new bow (Hoyt Radian) seems to group best at the noisiest setting so I think I'm going to have to put up with a bit of noise, for the moment anyway! I might try going back to a dacron string and heavy arrows and see what happens. Every bow that I've had has always done well for me, but I never really feel that I've done as well as I might. I don't think that any archer ever really thinks that, even when a competition is won. You still think that it could have been better, even when you're satisfied with the results. It is this quest to do better that makes archers what they are, whether they're in the top flight or the people (most of us) who go to competitions and gain enormous pleasure from just being there, and if you happen to win something, including the raffle, then it's a bonus.

I think I've gone about as deeply into the mental side of things as I can for the present. Everyone has their own way of looking at or approaching things. I am writing strictly from my own point of view. The mental side of Archery fascinates me because that is where the key to good archery lives. If you can let go and just shoot with no interest in where the arrow goes and let each arrow be shot without conscious consideration of where the last one went and with no fear of where the arrow now in your bow will go when you shoot it, whether it misses the target or hits the gold then you will be starting on a journey that will be like nothing you can imagine. Just have faith in your skill as an archer. You've practiced well, your technique is as good as you can get it. If you can shoot one arrow into the middle, then they can all go there. Believe it and you can do it.

Now I've really got buzzing, it's probably time for me to stop. I hope that I've managed to avoid meaningless psycho babble and have kept to the point. I'll repeat what I said in my previous article. If you believe that you can do something, it's much more likely that you will succeed in doing it. I'm still trying to regain that elusive feeling of absolute control without conscious effort and sometimes it feels very close. Whether the scores will follow remains to be seen. I do know that I'm enjoying my archery more now than I have for years, and I've enjoyed it a lot, believe me! I love just shooting. Every so often I get the wonderful feeling of a shot that I just KNOW is going to hit the middle; the shot that you didn't really have anything to do with. I could go on, and on, and on, and further into the mental side of things. I have had some strange things happen when I have been shooting, both in practice and in competitions and if I write about them here you'll probably think I'm weirder than you may already do.

That, perhaps, is a story for another day!