



Witney Rifle Club

<https://wrc.wpr.org.uk>



Robert Courts visit to Witney Rifle Club 19th October 2023 @ 19:30

The ongoing government consultation with a view to change firearm laws mentions gun related crimes totalling close to 5000 over a given period (another example of figures below includes over 8000). However, the majority of these are not covered by the current laws the consultation is with regards to. Invalid figures are being used to justify changes that are not at all necessary and are nothing more than trying to look like something is being done. The proposed law changes will not have any impact on the number of gun related crimes and will only put additional burden on the police and legal shooting community. Any law changes should be based on facts backed up by evidence, not fiction.

It should be noted that the recent Plymouth shooting was a police error. After they withdrew his shotgun certificate they suggested he attend some counselling after which he was then granted his certificate again and subsequently went on to commit murder. It should be noted that the shotguns used in that crime were the same type regularly used by farmers and game hunters and were not of the type that falls under the stricter Firearms Certificate (FAC).

Looking further back in UK history, the Hungerford shooting was also a police error, as was the Dunblane shooting, where there was total disregard of protocols by the police. The Firearms Enquiry Officer recommended a FAC should not be granted but this was overruled by a high ranking police friend of Thomas Hamilton, the enquiry into this is still partly restricted which can only be assumed because it would cause too many problems for the police – that's the public's assumption at least. Why is this restricted information so long after the incident? What could possibly be in the public interest here?

Because of police mistakes leading to the Hungerford and Dunblane shootings the law has been changed significantly and has partly destroyed various forms of target shooting in the UK. Pistols are no longer allowed, not even the .22LR calibre which is a very small round, ideal for target shooting and killing rats but not much else. Pistol sport in the UK has been ruined but the impact on pistol related crimes is a massive ZERO. Pistols were not the issue in the Dunblane shooting, the fact that a high ranking officer overruled the recommendations of the Firearms Enquiry Officer is the only issue as it is very likely Hamilton could have obtained a pistol illegally. Why was the FEO overruled? Surely this suggests the police need training rather than the shooting community need punishing? The most recent figures below show pistols are still the leading weapon causing death in the UK, even though they are not legally available. Why not allow the legal shooting community to own and use small calibre pistols again? They weren't an issue, they were banned because a government uninformed of the subject made knee-jerk decision to look good when it came to votes.

The majority of gun related crimes in the UK are:

- Blank firing / deactivated - these have zero threat to life
- Pistols – these are readily available on the black market but not available to the law abiding shooting community, if the law regarding these can't be maintained, changing the law for the UK's shooting community will have no impact on numbers of crimes
- Air guns – these are a VERY small threat to human life, in fact, I've not heard of anyone being killed by an air gun, though the figures below show one fatality
- Shotguns – readily available legally and illegally



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Unfortunately the police do not break numbers down to give any indication of how many crimes are committed with legally held firearms, surely this should be key to any law change? Or is this intentional to try and impose further restrictions by exaggerating the truth?

Before attempting to change any law it is essential to understand where the problem lies. Police figures need to break down the firearm related crimes to show how many were with legally owned and how many were with illegally owned. Why bring in a new law to cover something that is already illegal?

From Table 3 downloadable from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/offencesinvolvingtheuseofweaponsdatatables> – this is a classic example of how number DO NOT provide useful information.

Number of offences recorded by the police in which firearms were reported to have caused injury, by degree of injury and type of principal weapon:

England and Wales, year ending March 2021

Source: Home Office - Police recorded crime

Principal weapon	Total offences	Fatal injury	Serious injury [note 10]	Slight injury
Shotguns	536	8	59	52
Handguns	2,125	24	84	141
Other firearms excluding air weapons	3,048	3	84	761
All firearms excluding air weapons	5,709	35	227	954
Air weapons	2,590	1	25	228
All firearms	8,299	36	252	1,182

SHOTGUNS

As already mentioned, shotguns are easily available illegally. 536 offences is quite significant, but how many of those would be with legally held shotguns? The number for those not legally held will not change, so how significant would any law change be? Also, there are two categories of shotgun, these numbers need to be broken down to each category.

HANDGUNS

These are illegal, no matter how you change the law, this figure will not change. Current laws need to be enforced, not changed. Handguns are illegal. Full stop.

OTHER FIREARMS EXCLUDING AIR

Break this down. What impact would any law change have? If the number of crimes with legally held firearms is a very small number then law changes will have a very small impact.

CONCLUSION

Out of 36 fatalities, 24 were committed by already illegal hand guns. Whatever laws are put in place, this is nothing to do with the legal shooting community. Clearly current laws regarding already illegal weapons are not working. Concentrate on those crimes rather than the legal shooting community.



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The next highest number, 8, is with shotguns. Legal shotguns? Section 1 or Section 2 shotguns? Will a change in law reduce this number? If not, no change is needed.

Other firearms – legally held and obtained? If not, no need for a law change.



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It is important to understand how the shooting community helps keep gun crimes low and enforces safety protocols.

The community are constantly monitoring each other, any concerns are brought to the attention of the police and the police quite rightly confiscate all firearms held by that person. However, I know of a case where someone volunteered their certificate due to personal reasons but when the police came to remove their firearms there was absolutely no respect for the value of them and the police were seen “playing” with them. This is far from professional and is dangerous. Untrained police officers should never handle firearms unless in an emergency situation. If they do handle a person's firearms they should do so with respect, as they should with property belonging to anyone.

Another important aspect of the legal shooting community is bringing in game hunters and pest control shooters. We have several in the WRC and we ensure they follow safety protocols when in the range. It is hoped that such protocols are continued when they are out in the field. Without facilities for them to practice and be prompted to follow safety protocols, they use when out in the field could be more dangerous.

We have both active and retired military members (RAF and Army). One RAF member has mentioned that he carries a sidearm while flying but doesn't get enough range time. He can't use his sidearm out of the RAF but having his own civilian version firing just .22LR would be a huge bonus for him. If laws are to be changed, bring back .22LR pistols.

Other interesting members include the owner of Crocodile World, he was pretty much told by the police to get guns and join a club. He needs to be able to target and eliminate a wild animal very quickly if it were to escape. Regular practice with a rifle is extremely important to him.

More recently we have a potential new member who needs rifle training for arctic expeditions where polar bears are a real danger so a rifle is carried for self defence. Her initial training will be with Oxford Shooting Academy (OSA run under a law exemption which is about to be changed – this is a whole different case which I would happily discuss if interested) but she wants to keep her skills up so is planning on joining the Witney Rifle Club.

Then we have a small number of specialists who are authorised to hold single and double shot special pistols for “humane dispatch”, surely somewhere for them to practice discharging their weapon is an advantage to safety?

Without a legal shooting community pest control shooters will pick up bad habits. Zoo keepers will never get to fire a gun and arctic expedition leaders won't be able to train. Not only does the shooting community support safe shooting, it insists upon it.

There is a necessity for the training and safe shooting enforcing for civilian shooters, this is already difficult because of laws thrown in place blaming those who were not responsible, but it is something that should be maintained.



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During your visit we would like to demonstrate a range of shooting disciplines, depending on who is in the range at the time, we hope to demonstrate:

- Bench Rest
- Prone
- Free Standing
- Black Powder

We hope you will have a go at target shooting on a rifle. It always looks easy on TV, but you will see how difficult it actually is even with the best of rifles and lots of magnification to show the target very clearly.

If you have hearing defenders please bring them, if not we can provide some which have been sanitised.

I'm hoping to book a room in the main club building where we can have further discussion and allow the club to get on as normal.

The range at Witney is managed by a volunteer committee and is used by nine clubs, one of which is an archery club. Some clubs travel from Swindon and Oxford as the facility is quite scarce these days. It is run on a shoestring with no expense to the council who own the building and collect rent from us for little in return.

According to BASC, shooting supports the equivalent of 74,000 full-time jobs. People who shoot spend £2.5 billion each year on goods and services, bringing income into rural areas, particularly in the low-season for tourism.

According to the Met, "There is a long and proud history of civilian target shooting in the United Kingdom. Target shooting is a growth sport, attracting young and old alike, and cutting across race, gender, and social divides."