



Mike Martel has a record of 17 appearances in the Queen's 100 at Bisley. Left: Martel pictured with the St George's Vase, which he was only the second Guernseyman to win.

(9246686 and 9246694)

# 'The last bastion of the Empire'

The time is fast approaching for Guernsey's finest full-bore rifle shooters to make their annual pilgrimage to the Imperial Meeting at Bisley and, as **Rob Batiste** reports, for two of them in particular, it is an occasion that holds many fond memories

**R**OY HARPER, the old English folk/rock singer, famously penned a song, *When An Old Cricketer Leaves The Crease*. It was his example of cricket poetry and released as a single twice. It is possibly Harper's best-known song. The song captures the atmosphere of a village cricket match and is an elegy to the game as played during Harper's youth. It featuring Harper's 12-string acoustic guitar backed by the Grimethorpe Colliery Band. To my knowledge, no half-famous musician has ever turned their writing observations on the famous shooting ranges of Bisley, as I'm sure Lulu's Eurovision entry, *Boom Bang-A-Bang*, had love at its heart and not V-bulls. I make the comparison, because the analogy *When An Old Cricketer Leaves The Crease* could so easily be altered to *When An Old Shooter Leaves The Range* and when it comes to old rifle-shooters, Guernsey has a few of them.

'There can't be many sports where you represent Guernsey in your teens and you're still doing it in your 70s ... but that's rifle-shooting,' said Bruce Parker, who, along with fellow veteran Mike Martel, will soon be making that annual pilgrimage, not to the village-green pitch, but to the famous Bisley ranges in Surrey for the Imperial Meeting. It's long been part of their life. Parker and Martel, two of Guernsey's leading marksmen, have been representing the island since the 1950s and have been involved in 60 years of rifle-shooting at the home of Commonwealth rifle-shooting, Bisley.

The two started their shooting careers as cadets at Elizabeth College and together they were in winning teams in national schools competitions both small-bore and full-bore. Bruce was the Great Britain cadet forces small-bore champion and also the Public Schools champion. Their first appearances at Bisley 60 years ago coincided with the opening in Guernsey of the Fort Le Marchant range in 1955.

Before the L'Ancrese range came into use at 200, 300 and 600 yards, the then College boys had to practice at 25 yards in a moat at Fort George and at 50 yards in a clearing at the Vale Castle.



Mike Martel, left, and Bruce Parker back home on the Le Fort Marchant range. They have been shooting at Bisley for more than 50 years and will be heading back there for next month's Imperial Meeting. (Picture by Tom Tardif 9246692)

**'In the 1990s, the House of Commons team were short for their match against the House of Lords and asked me, as a member of the Commons Press Gallery, to make up the numbers. The Lords allowed it on the basis of voting me, for one day only, as "The Hon. MP for Guernsey"'**

Bruce Parker, pictured drinking out of the Century Cup at Bisley



does the island do so well? Mike is of the view: 'Guernsey is blessed with far better facilities than a town of similar size in the UK ... better than many counties, even. And then there's the tradition of being successful which spurs us on.' And what do the pair recall of each other over the years?

It was a situation that did not make for champions. Both Mike and Bruce were in the 1957 Elizabeth College Bisley team which narrowly missed winning the GB Schools competition for the Ashburton Shield. The team achieved a record score at 200 yards (which was never beaten) and was piped by a point at 500 yards by Uppingham.

**O**ut of school they kept shooting. Mike has been in the Queen's Prize final 100 more than any other Guernseyman - 17 times - and was winner of the St George's Vase, second only in status at Bisley to the Queen's.

He has made more appearances in the international Kolapore team competition than any other Commonwealth marksmen. Bruce has been in the Queen's 100 on a number of occasions and in Kolapore teams and both Mike and Bruce were members of the Guernsey teams who won the Junior Mackinnon Long Range matches four times at 900 and 1000 yards in the 1960s. Bruce won Bisley's Century Cup with a record score in 1963. Mike will be shooting the main Imperial Meeting at Bisley again this year, while Bruce will be on the sidelines - having had cataract operations - but will still be reporting on the rifle-shooting fortunes of Guernsey for the Guernsey Press as he's been doing, off and on, for 56 years. The prospect of another pilgrimage to Bisley was the perfect excuse for the duo to talk to Full Time about the event, their careers and, their greatest moments there. 'My first appearance in the Queen's 100 coincided with my 21st birthday ... I couldn't have wished for a better present,' remembered Bruce. 'Winning The Century was memorable. Then, in the 1990s, the House of Commons team were short for their match against the House of Lords and asked me, as a member of the Commons Press Gallery, to make up the numbers.

'The Lords allowed it on the basis of voting me, for one day only, as "The Hon. MP for Guernsey".' As for Mike, there is one specific memory which will never go away. 'Of course, winning the St George's was a great moment and especially as my own great uncle, John Mahy, had been the first Guernseyman to win the St George's in 1901. 'Like Bruce, winning my first Queen's 100 badge in 1961 was a high.'

**B**ut where there are triumphs, there are disappointments and both men have had them. 'Losing the Ashburton Shield by a point ... if I'd scored a bullseye with my last shot, we'd have won it,' said Bruce. But how has Bisley changed over 60 years? 'There has been a dramatic improvement in both the accuracy of the rifles and consistency of the ammunition,' said Mike. 'What I like about Bisley is that it hasn't changed all that much,' says Bruce. 'The colonial-type huts and the general feel of the place is the same as it was when I first went there as a 14-year-old. "The last bastion of the Empire" they call it.' Guernsey has twice provided Queen's Prize winners and a host of trophy-winning shooters and teams, so why

Mike on Bruce first: 'When Bruce started shooting he was a natural and it surprised nobody when he won The Century in the 60s. He could have won more prestigious events if he'd had the time.' Bruce about Mike: 'He's calm and resolute ... just what you need to be to shoot well. 'He's also one of the most modest people I know and, in his mid 70s, still manages to beat people more than 50 years his junior in the big matches - amazing.'

As for their greatest influences... 'Both of us were trained by Nick Ozanne on the small-bore range and then the great Captain Bisset who became a Bisley legend,' agree the pair. 'We were both in the Queen's 100 in 1962 when Captain Bisset, then aged 74, also won a place,' added Bruce. But do they have any ambitions left at Bisley? Too true. 'I'd like to get into the Queen's Final again,' says Mike. 'I'd like to help chair Mike off the ranges as the Queen's Prize winner ... or if that doesn't happen, one of Guernsey's younger crack shots who are brilliant shooters,' says Bruce. In the meantime, it's far from time when these two old shooters leave the range and perhaps Roy Harper might yet get around to re-fitting his old song.



The renowned rifle ranges at Bisley.

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