

THE NEW SOUTH WALES RIFLE ASSOCIATION Inc

ESTABLISHED 1860



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**Reference Rigby Rifle Black Powder Target Rifle
.451 PERCUSSION MATCH RIFLE
Serial No. 14192,
Marked NSW No 4**

The Story of the New South Wales Rigbys.



The New South Wales Rifle Association was formed in October, 1860, 'To give permanence to Volunteer Corps and to promote Rifle Shooting throughout New South Wales'. The same year saw the formation of the Victorian Rifle Association with similar objectives.

The military rifle of the day was the Enfield Pattern 1853 percussion muzzle loader, (there were numerous variations). It was .577 inch calibre, with a barrel length of thirty nine inches, rifled with three grooves at the rate of one turn in seventy eight inches, weighing about nine pounds and with a muzzle velocity of 1200 feet per second. To hit an object at a range of 1000 yards required a trajectory in excess of seventy five feet above the line of sight.

The first Intercolonial Match was held in Melbourne in 1862, for the Bronze Challenge Shield. This was a match for small bore rifles, which at that time was any rifle of calibre less than .577 inch. The members of both teams were using an assortment of Whitworth, Kerr, Alexander Henry and Turner rifles. These were all percussion muzzle loaders, of .451 inch calibre.

The New South Wales riflemen were victorious in this first match, but while returning to Sydney on the 'City of Sydney' were fortunate not to lose their lives when the vessel ran aground near Green Cape on 6th November, 1862. Of the ten rifles used

by the team, six were lost - three Whitworths, one Alexander Henry, one Turner and one Kerr. Privates Lynch and Dickson ran below decks and rescued their Whitworths while the cabins were filling with water. Two other rifles, owned by Captain Harbottle and Lieutenant Campbell, had been mistakenly left at the Melbourne hotel by the carriers, and consequently survived.

New South Wales won the match again in 1863, Victoria in 1864, and New South Wales then won three matches in succession – 1865, 1866 and 1867, entitling them to permanent possession of the Bronze Challenge Shield.

This handsome trophy, crafted in Belgium, was not completed until 1872, when it was presented to the New South Wales riflemen by His Excellency the Governor, Sir Hercules Robinson, at a ceremony at the Exhibition Building in Sydney. It is now on permanent display in the Dehn Auditorium at the Anzac Rifle Range, Malabar, Sydney.

In 1873, an Intercolonial Match for military rifles was created, and the Intercolonial Small Bore Match was resumed, both held at Sandridge Butts in Melbourne.

The Military Match was shot with Hay rifles, (a variation of the Enfield), and New Zealand also competed, using the medium Enfield rifle. New South Wales was successful, winning the Samuel Gardiner Challenge Cup and the Victorian Cup, with Victoria second and New Zealand third.

The Small Bore Match between Victoria and New South Wales was shot at 600, 800 and 900 yards, 15 shots each, eight men a side. Any make of rifle was allowed, maximum weight of stock and barrel not to exceed 10 lbs, with a minimum trigger pull of 3 lbs. Shooters were allowed to fire from any position that could be assumed on a flat surface, but with no artificial rests.

New South Wales was represented by Private Slade, Corporal Brownlow, Sergeant Maddocks, Lieutenant Cooper, Private Lynch, Colour Sergeant Gee, Captain Strong and Private Bushelle.

The contest was won easily by Victoria by 37 points. At the 600 and 800 yards ranges there was a difference of only 3 points in Victoria's favour, but at 900 yards Victoria scored 34 points more than their opponents. This great falling-off on the part of the New South Wales team was mainly attributable to the rifle belonging to Sergeant Maddocks having been damaged, compelling him to use a Whitworth rifle to which he was unaccustomed. In the last 7 shots at 900 yards he missed the target 6 times. Until then, Maddocks had been shooting in top form, so it was reasonable to conclude that, but for this accident, the Victorians would not have won so decisively.

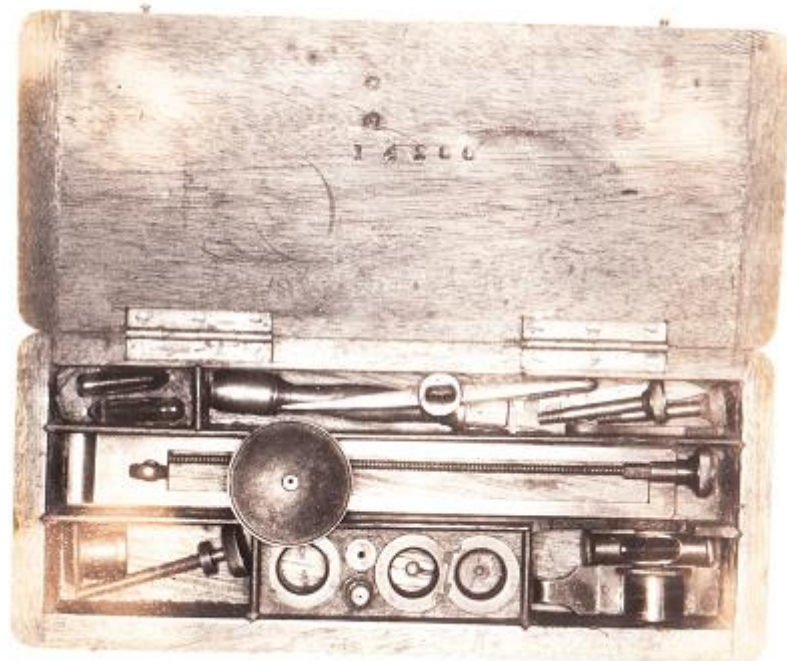
When the New South Wales returned to Sydney, they approached the Colonial Secretary for the purchase of new rifles, stating that the small bore rifles used by the Victorians were far superior to their own. They made out so good a case that he ordered 12 Rigby match rifles from England, at a cost of several hundred pounds.

These Rigby rifles, purchased in 1874, were percussion muzzle loading long range rifles designed for competitive shooting and were described as 'Best Match Rifles'. Their serial numbers are 14191 to 14200 inclusive, and 14215. They have N.S.W. Nos. 1 to 12 stamped on the left side of the stock and on the top flat of the barrel near the breech plug.

These numbers have been stamped on at random, e.g. serial number 14191 is stamped N.S.W No.5, serial number 14200 is N.S.W No.8, while number 14215 is stamped N.S.W No.4.



Each rifle was cased, with powder flask, vernier sights, cleaning and loading rods, nipple wrench, mainspring vice and projectiles. As with many percussion match rifles, there was no provision for a bullet mould, machine-made paper patched projectiles were supplied by the gunmaker.



Barrel lengths varied from about 34 inches to 38 inches, but apart from this the eleven rifles examined are basically the same, with only minor differences.

The following description of rifle serial number 14191 is typical of the twelve Rigbys supplied:-

The round barrel is blued, length 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, key-fitted to stock, screw plug under nipple, has no rear sight fitting on barrel, the foresight block is 1 inch from the

muzzle. The top of the barrel is engraved 'John Rigby and Co. Dublin and London' and N. S. W No. 5 is stamped on top flat near breech. The underside of the barrel shows the Rigby trade mark, two letter Ps, 14191 on barrel and on colour case-hardened breech plug - there are no proofs. The rifling is eight shallow grooves, calibre .451 inch. The guide muzzle is rifled, and is stamped 14191 and N. S.W No. 5.

The colour case-hardened lock is by J. Stanton and has 'Jno Rigby & Co' engraved thereon, as well as the Rigby trade mark. Serial number 14191 is stamped inside the lock.



The stock is walnut with checkered fore-end with horn cap and checkered pistol grip with horn cap. N S W 5 is stamped on the left side of the stock 5 inches from the butt plate. Serial number 14191 is engraved on the trigger guard tang and the trigger is smooth, the blued butt plate is checkered steel, there are fittings for vernier sights on tang and heel.

A flat spring under these sight fittings exerts pressure on the vernier sight to keep it upright during firing. At least two of the rifles have a different arrangement to keep the sight upright, in the form of a small hook on the lower part of the sight and a corresponding hook on the sight fitting, which when connected by a small coil spring, keeps the sight rigid.

This rifle is cased – the case contains two rods, a leather covered Hawksley powder flask, marked NSW No. 5 on collar, the charger is graduated to allow loading of 70 to 120 grains of black powder. The oil bottle is unmarked, with eight flat sides.

The sight case and sights are missing. Rigby sights of this period are generally cased in walnut boxes, approximately 7 inches by 3 inches by 1¼ inches high, containing a vernier rear sight, foresight with spirit level and windage adjustment, foresight inserts, nipple wrench, spare nipples and a sight wrench. The actual sights and the walnut box bear the serial number of the rifle for which they were made, while the foresight inserts usually are stamped with the last two digits of that serial number.

The overall length of this rifle is 50½ inches, weight 9½ lbs.

Major A. B. Leech, in his 'Rifle Shooting in Ireland' published in 1867, made the following enthusiastic observations:-

'To such perfection has the manufacture of long range rifles been carried, within the last few years, by the few makers who have given their attention to the subject, that it is now difficult to imagine that any further progress is possible in this direction. To shoot with one of these rifles is, when the first principles have been learned, the very

poetry of rifle shooting. The system of sighting is so perfect, and the accuracy of the rifle so great, that I have frequently seen beginners, who never fired any rifle before, and who had one of these rifles placed in their hands for the first time (the sight being first set for them) hit the bull's-eye (three feet square) the very first shot, at a distance of 800 yards, nearly half a mile. Recently I saw five members practising at 900 yards, at the Dublin range, and two rounds were fired while I watched them, i.e. ten consecutive shots, all of which struck the bull's-eye except one, and that grazed it. Three of the shooters were inexperienced shooters in their first year but all were using match rifles made by Rigby, which only require pointing at the bull's-eye to hit it.'

Major Leech made it sound so easy – he also stated: 'I shoot with Rigbys, and I believe there is no better: there is less fouling, less recoil, and it produces a lower trajectory than any other I have seen'.

In 1874, the New South Wales Rifle Association Annual Meeting for prize shooting was held at Paddington Range, attended by two teams from Victoria, to compete in the Intercolonial Military and Small Bore Matches.

In the Military Match, (Hay rifles were used), Victoria won by 10 points, while in the small Bore Match:- 'The New South Wales team was successful and the action of the Government in importing the new Rigby rifles was fully justified by the result, the match being won by this colony by over 100 points.'

INTERCOLONIAL SMALL BORE MATCH

VICTORIA

	600	800	900
Major Sleep	51	46	*
Captain Greenfield	52	52	*
Captain King	54	51	*
Sapper Der	50	49	*
Captain Wardill	56	40	*
Private Lacey	51	52	*
Corporal Draper	53	52	*
Trooper Miles	52	49	*
	419	391	

NEW SOUTH WALES

	600	800	900
Private Lynch	58	53	51
Private Bushelle	53	52	43
Captain Strong	57	52	50
Colour Sergeant Gee	56	51	53
Private Slade	51	53	53

Private Linsley	52	52	40
Captain Compton	54	49	45
Sergeant Maddocks	53	50	44
	434	412	379

* Victoria subsequently retired and gave up the contest.

The esteem in which Rigby muzzle loading match rifles were held by riflemen of the day is confirmed by the fact that when the Victorian Rifle Team visited Wimbledon to represent Australia in 1876, they purchased four Rigby Best Match Rifles, (three of which have been located). Rigby muzzle loaders featured in the Elcho Shield Match at Wimbledon, well into the 1880s, when successful and efficient breech loaders were already widely used and accepted throughout the world.

Of the twelve Rigby Best Match Rifles purchased by the Colony of New South Wales in 1874, it is remarkable that only one rifle is unaccounted for after 135 years. Certainly, very few have been found complete with the original case and all accessories, but it is surprising, and pleasing, that so many from the original order have survived.



References.

Rifle Shooting in Ireland. A. B. Leech, 1867.

New South Wales Rifle Association Annual Reports. 1862, 1863, 1873, 1874.

The National Rifle Association of New South Wales – Jubilee Souvenir – Lieutenant H. E. Mills, 1909.

The Elcho Shield Records. 1968.

Imperial measures have been retained, but for those who think in metric, the following table may be useful:-

1 inch (") = 2.54 centimetres.

1 yard (yd) = 0.91 metres.

1 pound (lb) = 0.45 kilograms.