



Guns & the Law: Guidance

Reeds Target Shooting Club

Coscopum Petimus

FOUNDED 1917

The Firearms Laws of Great Britain (comprising of England, Scotland, and Wales) are extensive, and can be found in greater detail on the various Police Firearm Departments websites, Home Office online resources, and at the Office of Public Sector Information website.

An introduction to Firearms Law however is provided below.

It should be noted that this information is not definitive, and acts only as a guide relating specifically to activities carried out by *Reeds Target Shooting Club*. For further information, refer to the sources cited at the end of the document.



1. DEFINITIONS OF FIREARMS & SHOTGUNS

- i) Firearm
- ii) Shotgun
- iii) Section 1 Shotguns
- iv) Owning Firearms or Shotguns

2. PROHIBITIONS

- i) Prohibited People
- ii) Prohibited Weapons and Ammunition

3. EXEMPTIONS TO THE REQUIREMENT TO HOLD A FIREARM/ SHOTGUN CERTIFICATE

- i) Deactivated Weapons
- ii) Antique Weapons
- iii) Air Weapons & Ammunition
- iv) Blank Cartridges
- v) Shotgun Cartridges
- vi) Firearms
- vii) Temporary Possession
- viii) Borrowing Rifles
- ix) Borrowing Shotguns

4. YOUNG PERSONS

- i) Under 17
- ii) Under 15
- iii) Under 14
- iv) Summary Table
- v) Air Weapons

5. THE CERTIFICATION PROCEDURE

- i) Firearms
- ii) Granting a Firearms Certificate
- iii) Component Parts
- iv) Shotguns
- v) Granting a Shotgun Certificate

6. KEEPING FIREARMS & SHOTGUNS

7. CO-TERMINOUS CERTIFICATES AND VARIATIONS

8. BUYING/ SELLING/ TRANSFERRING GUNS

9. TARGET SHOOTING

- i) Shooting with other Clubs
- ii) Long Barrelled Revolvers
- iii) Use of Firearms

10. TARGET SHOOTING CLUBS

- i) Shooting with a Target Shooting Club
- ii) Transporting Firearms as a Member of a Club
- iii) Requirements of Approved Clubs
- iv) Member Attendance
- v) Range Approval

11. BLACK POWDER

- i) Purchase
- ii) Storage

12. SOURCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. Definition of Firearms and Shotguns

i) A “Firearm” means a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or other missile can be discharged, and includes any prohibited weapon, whether it is such a lethal weapon or not, any component part ... of such a lethal or prohibited weapon, and any accessory to any such weapon designed or adapted to diminish the noise or flash caused by firing the weapon.”¹

ii) A shotgun is defined as a smooth-bore gun (not being an air gun) which:

- has a barrel no less than 24 inches in length, and does not have any barrel with a bore exceeding 2 inches in diameter,
- either has no magazine or has a non-detachable magazine incapable of holding more than two cartridges,
- is not a revolver gun.

iii) A Section 1 shotgun is different from a usual Shotgun (as held under the conditions of a shotgun certificate) as **it is has a magazine capable of holding more than two cartridges**. Such guns are required to be held on a firearm certificate.

iv) **To own either a shotgun or a firearm, you must hold a Shotgun Certificate, or a Firearm Certificate.**

Legally, “possession” may be considered to include having free access to the firearms rather than simply owning them.

Under sections 1 and 2 of the 1968 Firearms Act, it is an offence for a person “to have in their possession or to purchase or acquire” a firearm or ammunition to which section 1 applies, or a shotgun without holding the appropriate certificate.

Possession is an absolute offence.

[Index](#)

2. Prohibitions:

i) Prohibited People

Certain people are prohibited from acquiring a Firearm Certificate.

Section 21 of the 1968 Act sets out restrictions on the possession of firearms by certain categories of persons convicted of crimes. In short, **persons who are sentenced to a term of imprisonment of 3 years or more are never allowed to possess firearms**, and persons who are sentenced to a term of imprisonment for 3 months or more but less than 3 years must not possess

¹ *Firearms Law- Guidance to the Police*, The Home Office, 2002. Chapter 2.3

firearms until five years have passed since the date of release. Having served a custodial sentence, upon release, a person is informed of the provisions of section 21 of the Act.

Persons prohibited under section 21 of the 1968 Act may not possess any firearms or ammunition, not just those for which a certificate is required. Thus the prohibition extends to all air weapons, air gun pellets and shot gun ammunition².

Provisions within the Act enable a person who is prohibited by the provisions of the section to apply to the Crown Court (or the Sheriff in Scotland) in accordance with the provisions of Schedule 3 to the 1968 Act for the removal of the prohibition. This is usually done where the offence has not involved violence or firearms.³ This can be opposed by the police.

A court in England and Wales that imposes a suspended sentence may order the forfeiture of a firearm or cancel a firearm or shot gun certificate. Even if a court does not make such an order, chief officers of police have the power to revoke a firearm or shot gun certificate in certain circumstances.

ii) Prohibited weapons and ammunition

With the 1997 Firearms Amendment Act, firearms “which either has a barrel less than 30cm in length or is less than 60cm in length overall, other than an air weapon, a muzzle-loading gun or a firearm designed as signalling apparatus”⁴ were prohibited. **Handguns fall under this prohibition in general terms**, but it refers to all small firearms.

Section 5 of the 1968 Act stated the prohibition of any firearm that is designed/ adapted so that two or more missiles can be successively discharged without repeated pressure on the trigger. This includes weapons “such as machine guns, sub-machine guns, chain guns and the so-called “burst-fire” weapons in which several missiles (typically 3-5) are discharged in succession on a single application of the trigger”⁵.

Expanding ammunition- i.e. ammunition incorporating a missile that is designed with the purpose of expanding in a controlled manner upon impact- is only allowed to be used for certain activities:

- The lawful shooting of deer.
- The shooting of vermin or, for the purposes of estate management, other wildlife
- The humane killing of animals
- The shooting of animals to protect other animals or people.

It is not allowed for target or competition shooting.

² *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.5

³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5.8

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2.24

⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3.3

3. Exemptions for the Requirement to Hold a Firearm/ Shotgun Certificate

There are some exceptions to the need to have a firearm certificate to hold certain guns.

i) Firearms that have been deactivated, and conform to a standard approved by the Secretary of State, and bearing a mark to show that it is incapable of discharging a bullet/ missile of any type – is exempt from Firearms legislation, as it is considered unable to meet the definition laid out in the 1968 Firearms Act.

Additionally, the 1988 Firearms Amendment Act does not rule out that Firearms can also become considered deactivated by some other means, for example corrosion in a museum piece, that renders it unusable. If parts can be replaced however, to re-enable it to be used as a firearm this may not be the case.

ii) In addition, if an antique firearm is to be kept as a **curiosity or ornament**, it may be exempt from the provisions of the 1968 Firearms act, as long as it is not to be used, if it is it will fall under normal firearms certification.

Also exempt from the need of a firearm or shotgun certificate are:

iii) **Air-weapons and their ammunition, either air or gas operated.** These are exempt from certification if not of a type considered especially dangerous under the Firearms (Dangerous Air Weapons) Rules -1969 or the Firearms (Dangerous Air Weapons) (Scotland) Rules -1969. These that are considered especially dangerous if capable of discharging a missile so that the missile has, on being discharged from the muzzle of the weapon, kinetic energy in excess, in the case of an **air pistol, of 6 foot lbs** or, in the case of an **air weapon other than an air pistol, 12 foot lbs.**

Air weapon ammunition is exempt in all cases.

iv) Blank cartridges, no larger than 1 inch in diameter are also exempt from certification procedures.

v) A shotgun certificate is not necessary to possess or acquire shotgun cartridges containing 5 or more shot, none of which exceed 0.36 inches in diameter. However, a Shotgun certificate, (or in the case of section 1 shotguns – a Firearm Certificate) is normally required to purchase shot gun cartridges. All single bulletted ammunition, e.g. solid slug, spherical ball or projectiles for bird-scaring equipment, require a firearm certificate.

vi) **Firearms:**

Section 11(4) of the 1968 Act allows a “person conducting or carrying on a miniature rifle range (whether for a rifle club or otherwise) or shooting gallery

at which only miniature rifles and ammunition not exceeding .23 inch calibre or air weapons not declared by the Secretary of State to be specially dangerous are used, may without a firearm certificate, purchase, acquire or have in their possession such miniature rifles and ammunition therefor[sic] ... it is generally accepted that this refers only to rifles firing .22 rimfire cartridges ... Persons using the range are exempt from holding a firearm certificate in respect only of the use of such miniature rifles and ammunition at the range or gallery.”⁶

Whilst a member of an Approved target shooting club, a non certificate holder may have in their possession firearms and ammunition for use in connection with or during club target shooting. (See Section on [Target Shooting Clubs](#))

vii) Section 7 of the 1968 Act enables a chief officer of police to issue to a person a permit authorising them to possess a firearm or ammunition to which section 1 of the 1968 Act applies, or a shot gun, in any special case where it may not be necessary or desirable to issue a certificate. For example, a permit should in normal circumstances be issued to authorise the temporary possession by a relative or the executor of a deceased person, or the receiver of a bankrupt's estate, of firearms or ammunition forming part of the property of the deceased person or bankrupt.

viii) Borrowed rifles on private premises

Section 16 of the 1988 Act enables a person to borrow a rifle from the occupier of private premises and to use it on those premises in the presence of either the occupier or their servant without holding a firearm certificate in respect of that rifle.

However, the occupier and/or their servant must hold a firearm certificate in respect of the firearm being used, and the borrower, who must be accompanied by the certificate holder, must comply with the conditions of the certificate. The effect of the provision is to allow a person visiting a private estate to borrow and use a rifle without a certificate. The exemption does not extend to persons under the age of 17 or to other types of firearm. They may also, under this section, purchase/ acquire ammunition for the rifle in question during the period of borrowing. This must also comply with the conditions of the certificate⁷

ix) Shotguns:

Section 11 of the 1968 Act allows an individual, without holding a shot gun certificate, to borrow a shot gun from the occupier of private premises and use it on those premises in the occupier's presence. The borrower may be of any age but an offence may be committed under section 22(3) if a minor under the age of 15 is not supervised by a person over 21 years of age⁸

⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.3

⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.16

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 6.14

Additionally this section allows an individual, without holding a shot gun certificate, to use a shot gun at a time and place approved for shooting at artificial targets by the chief officer of police for the area in which that place is situated.

[Index](#)

4. Young Persons

i) Age restrictions apply to those under the age of 18.

Sections 22(1) and 24(1) of the 1968 Act **prohibit the purchase or hire by, and the sale or letting on hire to, a person under the age of 17, of a firearm or ammunition.** For the purpose of these sections, the expressions “firearm” and “ammunition” include all classes of firearms and ammunition falling within the definitions of section 57(1) of the 1968 Act, and not only those to which sections 1 and 2 apply.

A person under seventeen is prohibited by the 1968 Act from purchasing or hiring any firearm or ammunition.

They may however, acquire other than by purchase or hire (e.g. as a gift), firearms or ammunition to which section 1 of the 1968 Act applies, providing that they are in possession of a valid firearm certificate which applies to the firearms or ammunition concerned.

A person over fifteen but not yet seventeen may similarly acquire, other than by purchase or hire, shot guns to which section 2 of the 1968 Act applies providing that they are in possession of a valid shot gun certificate.

ii) Under the age of 15

It is an offence for any person under the age of fifteen to have an assembled shot gun with them unless either:

- a) They are either under the supervision of a person aged 21 or over. (The supervisor is not required to be a certificate holder.)
- b) The gun is so covered with a securely fastened gun cover that it cannot be fired.

The Act does not prohibit a person under fifteen from having a shot gun certificate. Nor does it exempt them from the need to have a shot gun certificate in order to have an assembled shot gun in their possession in the circumstances described above.

It is an offence to make a gift of a shot gun or ammunition for a shot gun to a person under the age of fifteen.

iii) **Under 14**

Section 1 firearms may not be given or lent to a person under fourteen.

The 1968 Act prohibits persons under the age of fourteen from having with them any such firearms or ammunition except in certain circumstances. These include possession at rifle clubs, on a miniature rifle range or as a member of a cadet corps.

A person under fourteen may not be granted a firearm certificate in any circumstances.

iv) **Summary Table:**

	Under 17	Under 15	Under 14
Hold a Shotgun Certificate?	YES	YES	YES
Hold a Firearm Certificate?	YES	YES	NO
Purchase any firearm or ammunition?	NO	NO	NO
Possess Section 1 Firearms?	YES	YES	NO, unless a) carrying for sporting purposes, b) using at a rifle/pistol club/ cadets or c) on a miniature range
Receive a gift of a section 1 firearm?	YES	YES	NO
Possess assembled Shotgun?	YES	NO, unless under supervision of someone 21 years old or over, or the gun is securely covered	NO, unless under supervision of someone 21 years old or over, or the gun is securely covered
Receive Shotgun as gift?	YES	NO	NO

v) Air Weapons:

The 2006 Violent Crime Reduction Act (enforced as of October 1st 2007⁹) **raises the age for the purchase or hire of air weapons to 18**. This does not only apply to air weapons, but also their ammunition.

It is an offence to give an air weapon, or ammunition for it, to a person under 18 years of age. (It is not an offence for that young person to receive it.)

It is an offence for any person under the age of 18 to have an air weapon, or ammunition for it with them except either:

- a) As a member of an approved club while engaged as such in or in connection with target shooting.
- b) While at a shooting gallery where only air weapons or miniature rifles not exceeding .23 inch calibre are used.
- c) Whilst under the supervision of a person aged 21 years or over; or whilst shooting, on private premises, including land, provided the missile is not fired beyond those premises- in which case an offence is also committed by the person allowing him to do so.
- d) From the age of 14 years old, whilst on private premises with the consent of the owner. No supervision is required.

Regardless of age, you may not have an air weapon with you in a public place unless you have a good reason.

(If an under 18 is transporting an air weapon to a range/land for use he must be accompanied/supervised by someone aged 21 or over.)

It is an offence to fire your air gun beyond the boundary of the premises that you are permitted to be on.

[Index](#)

5. The Certification Procedure

i) Firearms¹⁰

Before issuing or renewing a firearm certificate, the chief officer of police must be satisfied that the applicant can be permitted to have the firearm(s)/ammunition in their possession without danger to the public safety or to the peace. This will normally involve an interview with the applicant, a home visit and an inspection of their security.

⁹ As of October 1st 2007 the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 also restricts the sale of air weapons by way of trade/ business to Registered Firearms Dealers. Sales must be made face to face, with both the buyer and seller present.

¹⁰ *Guidance, Op. Cit.*, Chapter 10

An applicant is not entitled to withhold information about a previous conviction, however old or minor, on the grounds that it is “spent”. This includes convictions outside Great Britain.

Applicants are required to enter the calibre and type of firearm(s) to be purchased or acquired. The information will need to be specific and not cover a range of calibres or a generic group such as .22 centre fire.

An application or renewal has:

a) to be accompanied by **four identical photographs** of a current true likeness of the applicant and sized 45mm x 35mm (eight photographs must be submitted where a co-terminous certificate application is made). Ordinary passport style photographs are suitable for this purpose. A computer generated likeness can be submitted if it is full face, against a plain background and printed on good quality photographic paper.

b) **to be endorsed by two people who are resident in Great Britain**, who have known the applicant personally for at least two years and who are of good character.

A Firearm Certificate is usually valid for 5 years.

In the case of renewals, in relation to a rifle or muzzle-loading pistol for use only for target shooting, one of the referees must be an official of the approved rifle or muzzle-loading pistol club specified in the application.

ii) A chief officer must not grant a certificate to any person whom they have reason to believe to be:

- a) prohibited by the Act from possessing a firearm
- b) of intemperate habits or unsound mind
- c) to be for any reason unfit to be entrusted with a firearm.

Also, chief officers of police should be satisfied that the applicant:

- a) has a good reason for requiring the firearm or ammunition in respect of which the application is made, and
- b) can be permitted to have the firearm and ammunition without danger to public safety or to the peace.

“Good reason” should be neither confined to need nor equated with desire. Most firearm certificate holders possess firearms for reasons of their profession, sport or recreation, and may properly wish to exercise discretion as to what types of firearms they choose for these purposes. On the other hand, a simple wish to own a particular sort of firearm is not in itself “good reason” without further supporting evidence of intentions.’¹¹

The police will make inquiries to verify the applicant’s “good reason” for possessing firearms. With target shooters this will be the verification of club

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter10.28

membership and shooting activities. To acquire a personal firearm certificate, should involve a genuine intent to use the firearms concerned regularly.

iii) **Component parts of firearms are also subject to certificate control**

“Component part” is deemed to include

- (i) the barrel, chamber, cylinder,
- (ii) frame, body or receiver,
- (iii) breech, block, bolt or other mechanism for containing the charge at the rear of the chamber
- (iv), any other part of the firearm upon which the pressure caused by firing the weapon impinges directly.

Magazines, sights & furniture are not component parts.

Sound moderators are subject to certification under the description of “items designed to reduce the noise or flash of a firearm”. The applicant will need to provide a “good reason” for noise reduction before it is granted on their certificate.

Sound moderators on air weapons or section 2 shot guns are not considered to be component parts.

iv) **Shotguns**

Shotgun certificates are the mechanism of licensing for those smooth-bore guns that do not require firearm certificates.

Unlike firearm certificates, a shotgun certificate allows a person to have in their possession, or to acquire, an unlimited number of shotguns without the need for approval in respect of individual guns. It must however, specify the shotguns to which it relates.

Shotguns held on loan for less than 72 hours do not have to be entered on to the certificate, nor does notification of temporary transfer have to be given by either party.

As already mentioned, a shotgun certificate is not necessary to possess or acquire shotgun cartridges used with section 2 shotguns, though to purchase shotgun cartridges a certificate is generally required.

An application for a shotgun certificate must be made to the chief officer of police for the area in which the applicant resides. An applicant is not entitled to withhold information about a previous conviction on the grounds that it is spent.

As with the Firearm Certificate application, 4 identical photos must be provided.

The application is to be counter-signed by someone resident in Great Britain, who has known the applicant personally for at least two years. They must be

a Member of Parliament, Justice of the Peace, minister of religion, doctor, lawyer, established civil servant, bank officer or person of similar standing. The term “person of similar standing” may be taken to include persons whose name might be found in a public book of reference, including members of professional bodies (such as architects, accountants and surveyors), persons who have or at one time held a commission in Her Majesty’s Forces or who are qualified teachers in recognised schools. It may also be appropriate to include an applicant’s employer if it is a well-established business and the applicant is well known to them.

The police should be willing to interpret “person of similar standing” widely in the case of people who may have few professional contacts in the community. The good standing of the proposed counter signatory and their knowledge of the applicant are more important factors than their professional position.

Members of the applicant’s family must not act as counter signatories.¹²

- v) No certificate shall be granted or renewed if the chief officer of police:
- a) has reason to believe that the applicant is prohibited by the Act from possessing a shot gun;
 - b) is satisfied that the applicant does not have a good reason for possessing, purchasing or acquiring one.

Good reasons for possessing a shot gun can extend to sporting and competition purposes or shooting vermin.

An application may not be refused merely because an applicant wants to possess but not use a shot gun nor lend it for another person’s use. E.g. when the shot gun is of special significance to the applicant, such as an heirloom or is of some other sentimental value.

However, **the Act does NOT require the applicant to make out a good case for being granted a certificate, but rather extends the chief officer of police’s grounds for refusing one.**

Chief Officers of police have to satisfy themselves that the applicant can be permitted to possess a shot gun without danger to public safety or to the peace. This will necessitate an interview and consideration of their security arrangements¹³

The application forms for firearm and shot gun certificates require the applicant to give permission for the police to approach the applicant’s GP, in order to obtain factual details of the applicant’s medical history. **This authority is to assist the police in dealing with cases where there are genuine doubts or concerns about the applicant’s medical history that may have a bearing on the applicant’s suitability to possess firearms.**

The GP may provide factual information on an applicant’s medical history, but should not be asked to give general access to applicants’ medical records or to offer an opinion on any of the medical information given.

[Index](#)

¹² *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.7

¹³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11.10

6. Keeping of Firearms & Shotguns

Firearms and ammunition must be stored securely at all times to prevent unauthorised access excepting:

- a) When the firearms or ammunition are in use,
- b) When certificate holders have the firearm with them for cleaning, repairing or testing it or in connection with its use, transfer or sale,
- c) The firearm or ammunition is in transit in connection with any of these purposes.

If so the certificate-holder must take precautions for the safe custody of the firearms or ammunition to ensure that unauthorised persons are not able to gain access.

The storage of a shotgun certificate are the same, apart from that it does not include the storage of shot gun cartridges.

Police must assess individual circumstances when it comes to security and safekeeping of firearms and shotguns.

Usually the provision of a cabinet, designed for the keeping of either firearms or shotguns, is deemed a suitable security measure. These cabinets should be attached to the structure of the premises, and located in a place that would be difficult to gain entry to by anyone visiting the premises.

Additionally, ammunition and easily removable component parts (e.g. rifle bolts) ought to be stored separately from the respective firearm.

While carrying firearms in a vehicle guns should be hidden preferably in a locked boot etc.

[Index](#)

7. Co-terminous Certificates & Variations

The life of a shot gun certificate may be reduced in order that it expires on the same date as the applicant's firearm certificate. A reduced fee is payable so long as the shot gun certificate is renewed and made co-terminous at the grant or renewal of a firearm certificate.

There is no reduced fee when the applicant is applying for grant or renewal of a shot gun certificate but requests the expiry date to coincide with the firearm certificate expiry date.¹⁴

If a certificate holder wants to vary the certificates allowing them to possess or acquire firearms or ammunition, they may apply to the chief officer of police who issued the certificate. A fee is payable only in respect of variations which increase the number of firearms to which the certificate relates: if the holder wishes to dispose of one firearm and replace it with another at the same time

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Chapter 10.44

then no fee is payable. A variation is required if a certificate holder wants to change one of the firearms, even if they wish to purchase one identical to the one they are selling.¹⁵

[Index](#)

8. Buying /Selling/ Transferring Guns:

All firearms and shotguns possessed by certificate holders are recorded by the Police.

All transfers of firearms and shotguns should be in person. This also extends to Section 1 ammunition. As such, no sale or transfer of a gun can be by post unless a dealer is involved in the transaction, but then the dealer must be responsible for handing over any gun in person.

A person transferring any gun should satisfy themselves that the new owner is a valid certificate holder and authorised to acquire the gun. This essentially means that the buyer of the gun must produce a valid certificate to enable the transferor to endorse the details of the transaction on the reverse of the certificate.

It is advised that the transferee checks the certificate of the person selling the gun to ensure that the gun is in fact a legally held firearm.

Both parties must then notify the police of the transaction, giving full details of the gun and details of all parties involved. Written notification of such a transaction must be given to the police within 7 days of the date of the sale.

With shotguns, you may loan a shotgun to another certificate holder for up to 72 hours, but any longer, you will need to notify the police.

If a gun which is legally held is subsequently deactivated the certificate holder must immediately notify the police.

If a gun is lost, destroyed, or stolen the certificate holder must immediately notify the police.

With a firearm certificate the buyer must be authorised to acquire any gun.¹⁶

[Index](#)

9. Target Shooting

i) A person whose only reason for possessing a rifle or muzzle loading pistol is for target shooting must be a member of a target shooting club approved by the Home Office or the Scottish Executive Justice Department¹⁷. **The applicant is not confined to shooting only with that club.**

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Chapter 10.48-51

¹⁶ *Hampshire Constabulary*,

www.hampshire.police.uk/Internet/advice/firearmslicensing/transferringsellingweapon.htm

¹⁷ 1997 *Firearms Amendment Act*, Section 4

ii) **Long-barrelled revolvers, long-range pistols and section 1 Shotguns do not fall within the Home Office categories of approval for target shooting clubs; hence they cannot take advantage of the free club certificate issued to Home Office approved clubs.** They can however be held on an individual's firearm certificate if they have the facilities to use the firearms for target shooting.

iii) An applicant should have access to appropriate ranges for the types of firearm that they wish to obtain and all shooting must comply with the Range Safety Certificate, or any local standing orders in force on that range.

Target shooting must be carried out on an approved range.

Target shooters are expected to use their firearms fairly regularly: three or more times a year. The police should consider on renewal whether "good reason" continues in respect of **all firearms** held for this purpose. Failure to shoot in a year should be regarded as grounds for further enquiries, rather than automatic partial revocation of the certificate for lack of "good reason".¹⁸

Also, shooting quarry- including shooting pest species (vermin) and other shooting over land, and the collection of firearms can be considered a "good reason" for the grant of a firearm certificate. There are however various limitations and requirements for both of these reasons. These will not be covered in this section, as Reeds Target Shooting Club is not directly involved in either of these activities.¹⁹

[Index](#)

10. Target Shooting Clubs

i) Members of rifle clubs, miniature rifle clubs or muzzle-loading pistol clubs which are approved by the Secretary of State (or Scottish Ministers) may, without holding firearm certificates, have in their possession firearms and ammunition when engaged as members in, or in connection with, target shooting.

It is not stipulated that the firearms must be club firearms. It is lawful for a member of an approved club to possess temporarily a firearm belonging to another person for target shooting as a member of the club.

ii) It is acceptable for members other than the firearm certificate holder, if the activity is clearly in connection with target shooting, to transport firearms to another club or authorised range for a competition or to a dealer for repair. It is advisable when transporting firearms as a member of a club to have some form of written authorisation from a club official.²⁰

¹⁸ *Guidance, Op. Cit.*, Chapter 13.46

¹⁹ For more information see the *Home Office Guide to the Police, 2002*. Chapter 13

²⁰ *Guidance, Op. Cit.*, Chapter 18.12

iii) **Approved clubs must ensure that:**

1) the club is a genuine rifle or muzzle-loading pistol club with a written constitution.

2) the principal officers of the club are responsible persons who can be entrusted with the proper administration of the club.

3) the club has at least 10 members at the time of application for approval and at all times whilst approved unless, exceptionally, the Secretary of State or the Scottish Ministers determine that there are special circumstances which justify a lesser number.

4) members must be of good character.

5) the club must appoint a member to act as a liaison officer with the police and the chief officer of police must have confidence that this person is providing the police with such information as they require to ensure that the activities of the club and its members are conducted properly and safely and give no cause for concern.

6) the club will maintain a register of the attendance of all members with details for each visit of the firearms which they used and the competitions, if any, in which they took part.

7) the club will inform the police of any holder of a firearm certificate who has ceased to be a member for whatever reason.

8) the club will inform the police if any member who holds a firearm certificate has not shot with the club for a period of 12 months.

9) the club will inform the police of any application for membership, giving the applicant's name and address, and of the outcome of any application.

10) no application for full or probationary membership will be granted unless the applicant has informed the club of whether they have ever had an application for a firearm or shot gun certificate refused by the police, or had a certificate **FOUNDED 1917** revoked.

11) members, prospective members and guests must be asked to sign a declaration to say that they are not prohibited from possessing a firearm or ammunition by virtue of section 21 of the 1968 Act (as amended).

12) the club has regular use of ranges with safety certificates for the categories of firearm in respect of which approval is sought or given, as the case may be.

13) the security arrangements for the storage of club firearms and ammunition are satisfactory.

- 14) the club does not run a day or temporary membership scheme.
- 15) the club does not have more than 12 guest days a year. Guest members must be either members of a recognised outside organisation or individuals who are known personally to at least one full member of the club.
- 16) guests must be supervised on a one-to-one basis at all times when handling firearms and ammunition, by either a full club member or someone who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the UK or national Sports Council. The club secretary must notify each guest day to the police firearms licensing department of the area in which the guest day is to take place, at least 48 hours in advance.
- 17) anyone who applies for membership must be sponsored by at least one full club member.
- 18) before becoming a full member, individuals must have a probationary period of at least 3 months during which time they must attend and shoot regularly. The probationary member must be given a course in the safe handling and use of firearms on a one-to-one basis by someone who is either a full member of the club or who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation and governing bodies.
- 19) until a probationary member has satisfactorily completed a course in the safe handling and use of firearms, they must be supervised at all times when in possession of firearms or ammunition by either the range officer, or a full member of the club, or someone who is a coach with a qualification recognised by the Great Britain Target Shooting Federation and governing bodies.
- 20) the probationary period may be waived, at the club's discretion, for someone who is already a full member of another club which has been approved by the Secretary of State or the Scottish Ministers in respect of the same type or types of firearm; or holds a firearm certificate; or has handled firearms in the course of their duty in the police or the armed services, and has a statement from their existing or former senior/commanding officer saying that they are fully trained in handling the type of firearms in respect of which the club has obtained approval and is able to use them safely without supervision.
- 21) the club never has more probationary members than full members unless the Secretary of State or the Scottish Ministers determine that there are special circumstances which justify a greater number of probationary members.

22) there is nothing else that would make the club unsuitable for approval.²¹

Clubs are obliged to notify the police of any applications for membership, giving the applicant's name and address, and of the outcome of any application.

Clubs make their own arrangements for assessing whether members or prospective members are of good character.²²

Rifle and muzzle-loading pistol clubs approved by the Secretary of State or the Scottish Ministers are required to allow any constable or civilian officer duly authorised in writing to enter any premises occupied or used by the club and to inspect those premises and anything on them to ascertain whether the provisions of section 15 (1988 Act- as amended) and any limitations or conditions in the approval are being complied with.

Inspections might include whether or not the ranges used by the club remain safe, both for members and for the general public, and that the standard of the organisation and membership of the club remains satisfactory.

iv) The club's attendance register should also be checked to ensure that all members with personal firearm certificates are regularly shooting all their guns and that the club's return of members who have not shot with them for twelve months is accurate. The frequency of use of ranges will vary depending on the club's individual circumstances. **Target shooters may be expected to use their firearms regularly, at least three times a year.²³**

v) Civilian ranges historically have been inspected and certified by the military. The military no longer approves ranges, and responsibility now falls upon the range owner/ operator to ensure the safe construction of their ranges. Owners must have the appropriate financial arrangements to meet any injury or damage claims, e.g. insurance cover.

The NSRA and NRA have arranged a scheme of inspection and approval, which unlike the military, requires regular inspections to ensure that ranges do not deteriorate.

However, range owners/operators can choose not to use the NSRA / NRA scheme, and can obtain inspection from elsewhere, e.g. an independent inspector.

"It is not intended that police forces will need to become expert in range construction or to have to inspect ranges".²⁴

[Index](#)

²¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 18.13

²² *Ibid.*, Chapter 18.15

²³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 18.23

²⁴ *Home Office Circular 031/2006*, Section 14,

<http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/HO/circular.nsf/79755433dd36a66980256d4f004d1514/3b88fef2419138208025720b002ec446?OpenDocument>

11. Black Powder

i) Purchase

Black powder can only be purchased with an explosives certificate (use form COER1A obtainable from the police licensing department) and an RCA document. An RCA document (Recipient Competent Authority) is issued to the person who takes possession of the explosives.

The RCA document is the approval for all transfers of explosives that the consignee is legally entitled to acquire or keep. In most cases it will be valid for a maximum period of three years, expiring on the same date as your explosives certificate issued by the police.²⁵

An explosives certificate is not required to purchase Nitro-cellulose based powders.

You will usually be asked to produce a valid shotgun or firearm certificate before the seller will sell you powders, this is not a legal requirement- but is a common practice to ensure responsible use.

Explosive certificates are available in “*Acquire Only*” or “*Acquire and Keep*” format for explosives.

“*Acquire and Keep*” certificates allow the storage of black powder in addition to acquisition.

Explosives certificates are free to those who wish to obtain black powder for use with their firearms/shotguns.

Ensure that you produce/have sight of a valid RCA document or certified copy when selling/purchasing explosives. When moving your own explosives the RCA document or certified copy must be kept with the explosives. RCA Documents are free²⁶.

ii) Storage

To keep powders, you must adhere to certain storage regulations. Dangerous substances are categorised by a UN system, and explosives fall under Class 1 of this system. The Manufacture and Storage of Explosive Regulations also categorise explosives which fall under this UN category with *Hazard Types* which range from 1 to 4.

²⁵ A Guide for Sportsmen to the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations (MSER) 2005 (Updated Feb 2007) BASC <http://www.basc.org.uk/media/explosiveguide.pdf>

²⁶ To apply for an RCA document send or fax a copy of your explosives certificate and indicate whether this is your first RCA Application to : The Explosives Policy Section, Health and Safety Executive, 7NW Rose Court, 2 Southwark Bridge, London, SE1 9HS. (Tel 020 7717 6262) Fax 020 7717 6690.

Black powder is defined as Hazard type 1, which means that it must be stored with a separation distance from other buildings. This does not apply however when it is stored in a suitable, partitioned wooden box:

- This box must be constructed of plywood with a minimum thickness of 18mm – or other material capable of providing an equivalent in fire and physical resistance. Metal boxes of any sort must not be used.
- If the box is to hold more than one container of black powder, each individual container must have a 6mm wooden partition separating them, which is securely fixed to the outer walls of the box.
- Each compartment must allow 30% additional height between the top of the container and the inside of the lid.
- It is a recommendation that the box have a sealing strip around it, especially if this can be one that swells up when heat is applied.
- The box must have no exposed metal on the inside. Internal nuts must be covered by a glued wooden liner no less than 6mm thick.
- It must not be stored in a metal container.

The box must not be located near any form of escape, in the same room as flammable liquids, or any where that there is a risk of fire. You must ensure that there is no unauthorised access to your powder.

Inside this box powders should be in their original packing of plastic or card-not tin, not exceeding 550g per container. (Until all manufacturers change their packaging- there is a temporary exemption for 1kg non metal containers).

Nitro Cellulose powders are usually Class 3, and as such do not need to be stored in a partitioned wooden box, as long as there is less than 25kg of powder. (NB to store more than 5kg of nitro powder you must be registered with the police).

If you are storing both black powder and nitro cellulose powders in the same store, you must treat the explosives as the more hazardous- requiring the greater separation distance.

However, it is acceptable to store the black powder in a wooden box in one area of your premises and the nitro powder in another storage area separate from the black powder. This will negate the need to combine the storage of both powder (and Hazard) types in the wooden box.²⁷

[Index](#)

²⁷ *A Guide for Sportsmen, Op. Cit.*, Annex C (p13).

12. Sources

A Guide for Sportsmen to the Manufacture and Storage of Explosives Regulations (MSER) 2005 (Updated 2007), BASC,
<http://www.basc.org.uk/media/explosiveguide.pdf>

Antisocial Behaviour Act, 2003,
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2003/20030038.htm#aofs>

Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997,²⁸
<http://www.dvc.org.uk/dunblane/fa1968.pdf>

Firearms (Amendment) Act, 1988, (c.45),
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1988/Ukpga_19880045_en_1.htm

Firearms Law, Guidance to the Police, 2002
<http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/HO-Firearms-Guidance.pdf?version=1>

Firearms Security Handbook, 2005,
<http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/operational-policing/firearms-handbook.pdf>

Hampshire Constabulary,
<http://www.hampshire.police.uk/Internet/advice/firearmslicensing/>

Home Office Circular 031/2006 Section 14,
<http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/HO/circular.nsf/79755433dd36a66980256d4f004d1514/3b88fef2419138208025720b002ec446?OpenDocument>

Office of Public Sector Information,
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/>

The Home Office,
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/>

The Metropolitan Police Firearms Enquiry Teams,
<http://www.met.police.uk/firearms-enquiries>

Violent Crime Reduction Act, 2006,
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060038_en.pdf

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Richard Malbon, of SAGBNI for his assistance, particularly with regards to air weapon laws and young shooters.

[Index](#)

²⁸ This link is provided as a reference to the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1997. As it is hosted on a personal website *Reeds Target Shooting Club* accept no responsibility for the views expressed therein.