



TOP TEN shooting schools

Michael Yardley spins the clay discs and rates his hits

THERE are many places where one can shoot clay pigeons in Britain. There are, however, not so many establishments that might properly be called shooting schools. The latter are distinguished by their broad expertise, by their facilities (which allow for the simulation of gamebird-shooting as well as conventional clay-busting) and, most of all, by their reputation for effective instruction at all levels. Some are known for teaching a particular style and some have a speciality, or a quality, that sets them apart from the mass.

Our Top Ten may be described as the universities of our sport, centres of excellence for higher shooting education (and a “grand tour” of them might be deemed part of the journey to becoming a complete shot). They are repositories of shooting wisdom where you might go yourself or confidently send your son, daughter or an old but inexperienced friend to learn the art and the science of shooting well.

I have not included my excellent home ground, Fennes, in Essex, lest I be accused of bias, nor have I, with two exceptions included a ground at which I have not shot frequently. It is appropriate, meantime, to give honourable mentions to some grounds/schools that have many admirers but of which my own experience is old, limited or absent: Southern

No matter how experienced a shot you are, an expert eye can be helpful

Counties (the official training ground for the 2012 Olympics); East Yorkshire Gun Club (renowned for trap); The Joe Neville Shooting School at Matlock (Joe was the first man to shoot 200 straight at Olympic skeet); Bywell in Northumberland (another great trap centre); Southdown in West Sussex (famous for Dave Peckham’s testing sporting targets); Howard Kirby’s welcoming Lains Shooting School; David

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Olive’s Apsley (David was taught by Percy Stanbury and the Rose brothers); Mark Russell’s Grimsthorpe (Mark is a side-by-side specialist); Mike Meggison’s Kelbrook Shooting School; Mike Reynolds’s Mid-Norfolk (scene of many a championship), the late Michael Pinker’s Lady’s Wood; and, in Scotland, North Ayrshire, Braidwood and Gleneagles.

The Top Ten are given in alphabetical order (because we could find no fairer way to do it).

Bisley Shooting Ground

THIS SMART ground is located within the historic Bisley camp some 30 miles from London. It is headquartered in an attractive wooden clubhouse and encompasses two shooting areas: Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia. Both lie in an unspoiled setting of some 3,000 acres of Surrey heathland. The targets are especially good for game-shots and include interesting “flushes” and “drives”. There is an excellent grouse simulation and Bisley’s grouse butts allow for birds to be taken realistically behind the line as well as in front. The tower is the highest in Europe and can present birds from 50ft to 200ft-plus.

Under the leadership of shooting manager, John Heagren, the instructors all use the same methods and techniques. Gunfitting is offered and a set of personal measurements issued, with a copy kept on file for future reference. The ground not only caters for game-shots but sporting-clay, skeet- and trap-shooters as well. Unusually, it is open seven days a week. Individual lessons cost from £75 per hour (£85 with Heagren); juniors (16 and under) £43 (£48, Heagren).

■ tel 01483 797017
 ■ email office@bisleyshooting.co.uk



EJ Churchill Shooting Ground

EJ CHURCHILL, or West Wycombe as it was known, is also about 30 miles from London, three miles off the M40 from both Junctions 4 or 5. It operates as a commercial club and as a ground and school and has been voted the best shooting ground in the country four times. The ground offers gunfitting as well as instruction and has large pattern plates, good towers, excellent grouse butts and more than a hundred shooting stands as well as two skeet layouts. The shop offers guns for testing by clients.

Managing director, Rob Fenwick, notes: “We are very proud of our service and our reputation... we still make our own English guns... we have our more affordable Continentals made in Spain. Our gunroom sells over 300 guns a year.” Non-members pay £96 for a lesson and £48 for 100 English sporting targets (rounds are caddied). Membership costs £345. Members get about 25% off all their shooting and a 15% discount in the shop as well as other incentives.

■ tel 01494 883227
 ■ email reception@ejchurchill.com



Shooting clays at a Bisley charity do (above) and from a grouse butt at EJ Churchill’s ground (below)

High Lodge

HIGH LODGE was built on a greenfield site by six-times World FITASC Champion John Bidwell (pictured below). I have known Biddy for years; he is not only a fabulous shot-gun marksman and teacher but a very hard worker and a great salesman. He always seems to be building or plugging something new. Consequently, High Lodge offers golf, fishing ponds, chalets and an ever-bigger clubhouse. It is situated halfway between Ipswich and Lowestoft just off the A12 near Southwold. Shooting facilities include four skeet ranges, down the line, compact sporting, FITASC and numerous woodland sporting stands (with exceptional and deceptive targets). There are 60ft and 120ft towers.

A team of professional instructors delivers John’s Move-Mount-Shoot technique to all comers. It is an instinctive maintained-lead system that does not involve deliberate measuring. A one-hour adult instruction session costs from £55. John himself no longer teaches by the hour. He does, however, offer one-day shooting clinics in which a place (there may be up to four in a group) costs £250. Practice clays are priced from 26p per clay, membership is available for £50 for a year (CPSA members, £40), which gives discounts of up to 15%.

■ tel 01986 784347
 ■ email info@highlodge.co.uk

Hodnet (West Midlands)

HODNET IS in north Shropshire, about an hour north of Birmingham and 40 minutes south of Manchester. The ground has more than 85 stands and 200 traps. A north-facing escarpment dispenses with the need for conventional towers and is used as a realistic flush point for high birds. A 40ft cherry picker with a double spring midi trap throws at 170ft. This ground offers especially good sporting targets.

The ground specialises in small groups and has three instructors: John Powell who has been there for 26 years; Alan Ellison (15 years); and Duncan Lawton, twice world FITASC champion. Introductory lessons cost £45 including 25 clays/25 cartridges. One-hour individual lessons cost £60. The shop is well stocked and there are four gunsmiths on site.

tel 01939 200644

email tom@wmmsg.co.uk



North Wales Shooting School

This school, located at Sealand in Flintshire, is another one with a long tradition; it was started by Glynne Jones in 1958 and is now run by his grandsons, Guy and Justin and co-director Mark Garston. As well as a 100ft and 60ft towers and an area reserved for private instruction, there are three sporting layouts and facilities for compact sporting, Olympic trap, ball trap, down the line and skeet (three ranges). There is a shop and an on-site gunsmith, Stewart Myzylowskyj, who is extremely helpful as well as being skilled at his trade. Archery is being added to the list of attractions.

tel 01244 812219

email info@shootingschool.net

Holland & Holland

THE HOLLAND & Holland establishment, a couple of miles from Ruislip, extends to over a hundred acres, with a huge array of electric traps and a number of towers. H&H also boasts an excellent 100-metre rifle range.

The four uniquely experienced, full-time instructors are real experts in all aspects of shooting and gunfitting and they benefit from the use of a large collection of try-guns and the best pattern plates in England. How many instructors do you know who can fit a left-handed cross-eyed stock? All these can. The ground offers what others aspire to. Steve Denny, who directs operations with amiable efficiency, is a consummate pro with vast instructing experience. The chief instructor, Chris Bird, is first rate and deserving of far more recognition. Roland Wild is the premier sporting rifle instructor in Britain and an excellent shotgun man as well. Hour-long lesson from £92 plus cartridges and clays.

Clients can fly in to the RBSS ground (below). A testing time on one of H&H's high towers (inset)



tel 01923 825349

email shooting.grounds@hollandandholland.com

eld.co.uk

Royal Berkshire Shooting School

ROYAL BERKS (RBSS), on 100 beautiful acres near Pangbourne, is managed by Dylan Williams who once worked with Nick Penn. Only 50 minutes from London, it is one of the smartest operations in the country, offering excellent sporting and simulated game targets including a really challenging grouse butt (which cost me the world 28-bore championship when I slipped on a turn and two vital birds sailed past). There are seven instructors. Individual lessons cost £94 (adult), £55 (child), excluding clays and cartridges.

tel 01491 672900

email info@rbss.co.uk



Sporting Targets

THIS GROUND is situated near Bedford and has two resident instructors, Tony Fletcher and Steve Matcham. On 13 ranges, there are more than a hundred traps. The ground is especially well known for its towers, of which it has three – 60ft, 110ft and 120ft – each equipped with multiple traps. There is also an air-rifle range and air-rifle instruction is available. Several well-known freelance instructors use this ground including Mickey Rouse, Stuart Clarke and Carl Bloxham. Instruction from one of the resident pros is from £60 per hour (£50 for members). Clays are charged at £5.25 for members per 25 and £6.50 for non-members. Membership costs £60 per annum and entitles holders to cartridge as well as clay discounts.

■ tel 01234 708893

■ email general@sportingtargets.co.uk



West London Shooting School

THE WEST London Shooting School, established in 1901, has history, great facilities and dedication to excellence. It is located off the A40 within the M25 and is accessible by road, tube, train, and air. The ground's "bloodline" may be traced back to the great Percy Stanbury. You can take a lesson there with his former apprentice Alan Rose and feel a direct connection. Alan's style is a memorial to his old master.

Gunfitting or private tuition costs £106 per hour (excluding clays and cartridges), ladies are charged £95, and under 18s £89. West London is pre-eminent in simulating game-shooting with high towers and good grouse butts. There is a rifle range and a well-stocked gunshop. West London is more than a great shooting school, it is an institution.

■ tel 020 8845 1377

■ email info@shootingsschool.co.uk



West Kent

WEST KENT Shooting School is set in 20 acres of partially wooded ground close to Tonbridge. This is a family run business begun by Patrick and Barbara Lynch with their son Michael in 1974 and currently run by Michael and his wife Gillian. The ground is well known for offering ZZ (helice) birds as well as conventional clays. Though relatively compact, it offers one of the most comprehensive range of clay-pigeon shooting facilities in South East England.

West Kent offers good hospitality and a friendly, intimate, atmosphere. The English sporting layout offers more than 100 combinations of targets, including a 100ft high tower. There is also an English skeet layout. West Kent is the home to the British Helice Team and has held the Helice British Grand Prix for 30 years.

Lessons cost £75 per hour excluding clays. The ground operates an automated clay system. Non-members pay £15.50 per 50 clays, members £13.50. Gunfitting costs £95.

■ tel 01892 834306

■ info@wkss.demon.co.uk

Instruction at West London, more an institution than a school (above). At Sporting Targets (top) an oscillating trap makes for harder work. A view of the West Kent ground (right)

