

With “the year that shall not be named” behind us, 2021 saw the English XX Spring Meeting return to its rightful spring spot over the late May bank holiday weekend. Around 150 competitors (130 taking part in the Grand Aggregate) were clearly in need of their ‘fix’ of Target Rifle shooting, making this one of the biggest Spring Meetings in recent years and hopefully a positive sign for future years to come, as competitors enjoyed warm weather, bright sunshine, clear skies, exciting winds and the opportunity to meet up with friends not seen, in some cases, since 2019.

Competition started on Saturday afternoon with The Association, a Queen’s 1 shoot and in conditions that set the scene for the weekend. 26 possibles at 300yds dipped to 23 at 500 and 24 at 600, only two members of the field managing to do so at all 3 distances, a (by his own admission, pleasantly surprised) Roger Ellis pipping reigning Queen’s Prize winner David Luckman by a V to take the match on 105.12. 3rd place was the best of the 104.13s, with John Bellringer seeing off Adam Leech, Nigel Ball and John Pugsley on Vs at 600yds on countback.

Sunday largely continued where Saturday left off, but 9 extra shots in The Second Stage ensuring that nobody went clean. 50s were relatively plentiful at 300 yards but by lunchtime and with 500yds also shot, perfect 100s were few and far between. Even the eventual winner John Bellringer was one point down, though a tidy 50.5 at 600yds in the afternoon saw him improve on the previous day’s good form, taking The Second Stage with the only 149(.20). Chris Mitchell’s tight shooting pipped John on Vs, but with 148.24 had to be content with second place, only 4 Vs ahead of John Cload on 148.20. Saturday’s other names of note slipped back, though none below 23rd place.

The second 600yds shoot of the day, The Cortis, saw competitors stretched further in equally tricky conditions with an extra 5 shots to count. Only 5 competitors made a perfect 75 with a further 16 getting away with only one point away for a pack of 74s ranging from 6 to 11 Vs. However, coming back fighting from his morning dip was David Luckman, taking the Cortis on an impressive 75.12, holding off Jeremy Tuck by a V and close competition John Bellringer by one more on 75.10.

With the above now complete, the Sunday Aggregate and Short Range Aggregate were likewise and both in a consistent style, John Bellringer taking both from David Luckman and Chris Mitchell chasing close in 3rd place for both. With the latter representing the Grand so far, this appeared to be a strong indication for things to come,

Monday morning, as always, saw the long range phase of the meeting, commencing at 900 yards with The Long. Deceptive gentle conditions soon began catching out the unwary, with fickle flags making shooters rely strongly on the mirage and for some shots, a degree of experience and instinct. This clearly worked for 14 of those present with a healthy block of 75s at the top of the prize list, the current England touring captain Andy ‘Turbo’ Barnes leading by example on a 75.13. Second place went to Verne Putter by a single V, but familiar names John Pugsley and David Luckman were joined by Andy Daw on 75.11, taking 3rd to 5th on countback respectively. 900yds also completed The Inner Aggregate, being everything bar the very first and last distances of the meeting. No surprises there; David Luckman squeezed ahead on 368.44, with 366 for 2nd and third being decided only on Vs, with John Bellringer’s 47 pipping Jeremy Tuck’s 43.

Falling back those infamous 100yds to 1000 for The Final took its usual toll, this time only one 75 appearing courtesy of GB Under 25s captain Charlie Dart, restoring form from last year’s Imperial Meeting by going clean with 10 Vs. 74s then followed, with 9, 7 and 6 Vs placing David Luckman, Rupert Riley and Simon Cleveland 2nd to 4th respectively. This gave David Luckman the Monday Aggregate from Charlie Dart by a single V on 149.20, with 3rd to 5th being the only 148s from Jeremy Tuck (20V), Rupert Riley (14v) and Simon Cleveland (13V).

However, the mix of new names at long range had little effect on the overall results, with early good starts and steady shooting from the previous day's leaders sealing their own successful fates. David Luckman took the Grand and the Johnson Lion Trophy on 477.58, having slowly pulled ahead of John Bellringer on 473.57. Jeremy Tuck's long-range performance bagged him 3rd on 471.55, but early contender Chris Mitchell kept hold of 4th place on 470.58, John Pugsley only just behind on 469.52. 6th place was held by Simon Cleveland on 468.50, with several present wondering how he'd ended up in O Class as he took the Booth Cup for top place amongst them. Top Cadet winning the Donegall Badge was Cdt James Duffy, on a highly respectable 441.39.

Prizes aside, the thing taken away by all was a warm, dry, challenging but enjoyable weekend, and hopefully the intention to come back for more in 2022, or in the case of organiser Martin Liversage (to who our thanks as always go), a sensation of both exhaustion and relief!