

**"THE BEAUMONT MINIATURE RIFLE CLUB"  
AT 'SARNIPER' (SINOPE)**

**Including supplementary information on  
Pte G.E.Irons, of Swannington  
a former member, who was killed in WWI**



**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - NOVEMBER 2021  
Updated February 2025**

Transcribed from the Leicester Daily Post - Monday 06 May 1907

## LORD ROBERTS AND RIFLE CLUBS

### OPENING OF A RANGE NEAR COALVILLE

#### GENERAL ELLES AND COMPULSION

##### LETTER FROM LORD ROBERTS.

On Saturday afternoon, General Sir Edward Files fired the first shot on the miniature range at "**Sinope**," locally known as "**Sarniper**" a disused colliery in the neighbourhood of Coalville, in which thousands of pounds have been 'sunk' without any prospective return.

The "range" is fifty yards or so in length, and a pit bank forms the butt, a perfectly safe arrangement.

**Lady Beaumont (wife of the 10th Baronet of Stoughton)**, to whose initiative the movement is due, attended the opening, and in addition to General Sir Edmund Elles (who, by the way, is one of the British delegates to the forthcoming Hague Conference), **there were present Mr. and Mrs. Abel-Smith, of Coleorton Hall**; Mr Leonard Fosbrooke, Ravenstone Hall; Colonel Hamilton and Colonel Sturgess, (both of whom aided Lady Beaumont in the movement); Mrs. Geo. Millen and Mrs. Chas. Pratt, Ashby-de-la-Zouch; Dr. and Miss Jamie, Coalville; Canon Hugglescote; the Rev. and Mrs. Formby, Ravenstone; the Rev. F G. and Mrs. Copeland, Coalville; the Rev. H Robinson, Coleorton; the Rev. J. H. F.. Bailey, vicar of Swannington; the Rev. Cooper, Thornton; the Rev. —. Moore; Mrs. Ridley, of Bardon Hill; Mr. George Kennaway, agent to the Wyggeston Hospital Trusts; Mr A. J. Bette, Gracedieu; Mr. Johnson, Swannington; Mr. Williams, Osgathorpe; Lieut.-Colonel German, of the Volunteers; Mr. T. M. Bott, Coalville; Recruiting-Sergeant Bachelor, Coalville; Mrs. Wittman, Mrs. Spencer, and Mr. Firth, Swannington, Mr. and Mrs. R. G. Creswell and Miss Creswell; Sergt.- Major Turnbull, of the Whitwick School of Arms and of the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and a crowd of probably two hundred.

Colonel Hamilton said that General Sir Edmund Elles, who had kindly consented to open the range, had a distinguished career. He had commanded several divisions in India, holding a high position in Tirol, and had had more experience in war than most generals of the present time. He had been a member of the Council of India, which was one of the highest positions which could be held by a man short of that of Commander-in-Chief, and he (Colonel Hamilton) was sure that the kindly interest the general had taken in the club and its opening would materially lend to its success.

General Sir Edmund Elles, who was warmly cheered. said that he accepted the invitation with some diffidence having no local claim. But as Lord Roberts was one of the patrons he felt that the best way to ingratiate himself would be to bring a message from Lord Roberts, who had written to him from Englemere, Ascot, under date 27th April, as follows :-

Dear Elles.—I write in reply to your letter of the 25th inst. to say how very glad I am to hear you are going to open the rifle club which **Lady Beaumont** has so kindly established. I know from what Colonel Hamilton has told me how much **Lady Beaumont** is doing to encourage rifle-shooting, and it is most gratifying to one to receive her help in a movement to which I attach so much importance. - If we could make all our young men skilled shots, we should have gone a long way towards

solving the problem of our national defence, for shooting is the most important part of the training of a soldier, and rifle clubs give man the opportunity of learning the art, and of so far qualifying himself to do his duty to his country. I say "so far," because it must be remembered that though shooting is important, it is not all that is required to complete this qualification; and though rifle clubs are so useful, they cannot in themselves be looked upon as military units. To skill in rifle shooting must be added a knowledge of drill and a sense of discipline, and it is for this reason I am so strong an advocate for universal military training. "All good wishes for the success and prosperity of the Rifle Club."

Proceeding, the General said that there had never been a time when the question of national defeat had been before the public as at this present moment, and for this, there were three causes - Mr. Haldane's scheme, Lord Roberts advocacy of the principles of the National League, and the presence in the country of the Colonial Premiers who had been discussing the subject of National and Imperial defence. Mr. Haldane's scheme was an heroic effort to solve the almost insoluble problem on a voluntary basis.

They must pardon soldiers if they felt that the spirit of patriotism which they knew to be there might possibly come a little too late. It was surprising to hear that the word compulsory was objectionable to the Englishman, when all Laws were compulsory. Colonial statesmen took up a strong position with regard to compulsory training and Mr. Hughes, a Labour representative of Australia, was the first to advocate compulsory training for that country. Many in England relied on the, navy, but with a number of warships disabled, where would the second line of defence be? As to the range they were opening that day, he asked those who could not use it to give encouragement to the younger ones to take an interest in rifle shooting., and he also urged the members to submit to training and discipline.

Rifle shooting was the first step towards fitting themselves to take part in the defence of their country. It was strange to him that compulsion should be a bogey to the average Englishman. Mr. Deakin, the Australian Premier, had said compulsion was the basis of all civilisation. There was one present at that assembly who would not pay Income-tax unless the law was behind him, and that was himself (Laughter.) Compulsion was a factor in education, vaccination, and other matters. The range had been generously and loyally provided by **Lady Beaumont** and they had in Mr. Sheppard a good safe manager, and he appealed to the crowd to take their part as players. He expressed a hope that rifle shooting would become a main national pastime; it used to be a national pastime since English bowmen were known and feared throughout Europe. They could obtain peace only by being ready for war, and they desired peace under one flag and one empire. (Loud applause.) Lieut. Colonel German spoke of the pleasure it afforded him to attend the opening of the "Rifle Range" which would enable the members to qualify themselves to defend their country in time of need. The establishment of such clubs in various parts of the country must be an immense boon. Shooting, they would find, was not only useful but. a fascinating recreation; He hoped that the members would eventually join some branch of his Majesty's forces. But it was not the intention of the promoters of these clubs to engender militarism in an objectionable form; their aim was "Defence?". By these means, there was a better means of maintaining a better position in the councils of the world. He hoped the members would take a thorough interest in the club, which had been opened with such distinguished auspices. and that General Elles would be able to regard the "**Beaumont Rifle Club**" as one of the most promising of his children. (Applause.)

Colonel Sturgess, in proposing a vote of thanks to General Elles for opening the range, said he had had the honour of serving on the general's staff in India. and instancing what General Elles did during the Tirah campaign said that when a body of troops was well-nigh overwhelmed by natives, General Elles, taking in the situation, sallied out with a few staff officers, took command, and turned the position of affairs. His fame and name ranges throughout India. Colonel Sturgess hoped that the members of the club would take to heart the advice given them, and he again thanked General Elles for opening the range.

The vote was carried with acclamation, and General Elles briefly acknowledged the compliment. Canon Broughton spoke of the interest **Lady Beaumont** and Colonel Hamilton had taken in the formation of the club. The movement was like measles—it was catching. They were being called ginges and blood-thirsty wretches, but that was a mistake. He believed that in knowing how to use a rifle they were making for peace. Cheers were accorded **Lady Beaumont** and Colonel Hamilton, and the latter, replying, said that it had been little trouble to him. but it was a pleasure to help **Lady Beaumont** to establish the club.

The National Anthem was heartily sung and lbstock band engaged for the occasion accompanied.

**General Elles fired the first shot, scoring "a bull."**

### **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON Pte G H IRONS**

Mr and Mrs Thomas Irons, of 2, Ash Cottages, Swannington, have been officially notified that their youngest son, Pte. G. H. Irons, of the Royal Naval Division, was killed in action on the Western Front, on January 3rd. He was a single man, 28 years of age, formerly living with his parents and up to the time of enlisting on June 24th last, had been employed at Messrs. Stableford and Co.'s waggon works, at Coalville, since leaving school. The last letter from him was received by his parents on the last day of the old year, when he wrote in a very cheery strain. Pte. G. H. Irons will be remembered as one of the most enthusiastic members of the Beaumont Miniature Rifle Club, founded some years ago, by Lady Beaumont, of Swannington House, and which up to the outbreak of war was very successful. Pte. Irons improved wonderfully in his shooting practice at the Club's range at Sinope, near Coalville, and became one of the best shots, winning the rose bowl for the club championship two years in succession, besides many silver medals and spoons in the monthly competition.

**Transcribed from the Coalville Times - Friday February 1st 1918**