

Feature

Should you carry your firearm and shotgun certificates?

by the NGO's firearms advisor, George Wallace

WITH CERTAIN EXCEPTIONS, THE FIREARMS ACT makes it an offence to be in possession of a firearm without also being in possession of the appropriate certificate, and there seems to be a common assumption that you must have the certificate with you.

It does not mean that at all.

As far as the legislation is concerned, you are in possession of a firearm or shotgun if you have simple access to it; in other words, if you are able to get your hands on it without having to break in and steal. And the same applies to your certificates.

You are in possession of a certificate – which is what the law requires – whether it is in your pocket or in a drawer at home.

On the other hand, the Firearms Act (1968) allows a police constable to

seize your guns unless you are able to produce your certificate. That is still in the legislation but it has been overtaken by technology because nowadays a police officer can use his radio to access the firearms registry at any time, day or night. He or she can check in an instant whether you are in lawful possession of firearms, which means that seizing your guns could easily be seen as unreasonable and heavy-handed.

If you feel more comfortable having your certificate with you, then by all means carry it, but take all precautions to prevent it being lost or stolen. If, for example, you put it in your jacket pocket, then keep the jacket on; don't take it off and then forget it or lose it. And it's not much safer in the car.

Let us say, for example, that you are on a shooting trip to a distant part of the country and have your certificate with you in case you need to buy ammunition. If the certificate is lost or stolen, anyone finding it might hand it in at the nearest police station; or they might not, in which case they now know who you are, where you live and what guns you own. Just as important, they also know you are not at home, and your wife won't thank you if a couple of heavies call round to steal guns. She may not know where the cabinet keys are, but they could make an awful mess of the poor lass before she convinced them. Not good.

If you must carry your certificate, then stick to it like muck to a blanket; or get it locked in a safe until you actually need it.

If you don't need to buy ammo, but still like to carry your certificate, there is a safer way and the picture shows a copy of my own firearm certificate with almost as many blacked-out areas as an MP's expense account. Any legitimate enquirer – which means only a police officer, really – can still see your name, your photograph, the number of the certificate, its expiry date and the name of the issuing police force. Your credit card or NGO Membership card will confirm your identity if that becomes an issue.



To make one of these 'Get Out of Jail Free' documents, make a photocopy of the front page of your certificate and then, with a good, black marker pen, black out your address and postcode and also, if it's a copy of your firearm certificate, any details of firearms which might appear in the Conditions at the bottom of the page.

We're not finished yet. If you hold the copy up to the light you can still see all the details beneath the blacking; so copy that again and the second copy will just show black. Now shred the first copy and put the real certificate in a safe place. Job's a good 'un!

Firearms Act 1968 to 1997 Firearms Form 102

Firearm Certificate

This certificate is granted for the purpose of section 1(1) of the Firearms Act 1968 to the holder named below, and relates to the firearms and ammunition specified below.

Name and address of holder: MR WILLIAM GEORGE COATES WALLACE		Photograph of holder	Stamp of issuing Police Force
Post Code [REDACTED]	Date of birth [REDACTED]		NORTH WALES POLICE FIREARMS/SHOTGUNS DEPT. VICTORIA ROAD PRESTATYN DENBIGHSHIRE LL19 7TD
Certificate number FC28521	Valid from to 22/03/2006 to 21/03/2011	Signature of Chief Officer of Police 	Date 23/02/2006
Usual signature of holder [REDACTED]			

Conditions
This certificate is issued subject to the following conditions. It is an offence to fail to comply with any of the conditions below. Maximum penalty for non-compliance: six months imprisonment and/or a fine.

- The holder must, on receipt of the certificate, sign it in ink with his usual signature.
- The holder of this certificate must inform within seven days the chief officer of police by whom this certificate was granted of the theft, loss or destruction in Great Britain of this certificate and/or the theft, loss, deactivation or destruction of any firearms or ammunition to which it relates.
- The holder of the certificate must, without undue delay, inform the chief officer of police by whom the certificate was granted of any change in his permanent address.

Additional conditions may be added here by the chief officer of police:

- [REDACTED] to which this certificate relates shall be used for shooting deer, and other animals, and for zeroing on land suitable for the use of this class of firearm subject to permission from the person by whom shooting rights are owned, leased or otherwise obtained. The ammunition referred to in this condition, either possessed or to be acquired, may include expanding bullets.
- The Firearms and ammunition to which this certificate relates shall be used for target shooting whilst a member of the [REDACTED] SHOOTING CLUB, and on ranges in respect of which a safety certificate for that class of weapon has been issued by the competent military authorities and has not been revoked, or on ranges controlled by the Ministry of Defence if permission to use the range for that class of weapon has been given and has not been revoked.
- [REDACTED] to which this certificate relates shall be used for vermin control and for zeroing on suitable land over which the holder of this certificate has permission to shoot with this class of firearm from the person by whom shooting rights are owned, leased or otherwise obtained. The ammunition referred to in this condition, either possessed or to be acquired, may include expanding bullets.

4 (a) The firearms and ammunition to which the certificate relates must at all times (except in the circumstances set out in paragraph (b) below) be stored securely so as to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, access to the firearms or ammunition by an unauthorised person.
(b) Where a firearm or ammunition to which the certificate relates is in use or the holder of the certificate has the firearm with him for the purpose of cleaning, repairing or testing it or for some other purpose connected with its use, transfer or sale, or the firearm or ammunition is in transit to or from a place in connection with its use or any such purpose, reasonable precautions must be taken for the safe custody of the firearm or the ammunition.