



# Hammers Back

VINTAGERS NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 14 March 2004

## Committee Members

**President:**

Peter J Smith Contact No. 0428 332 781

**Vice President:**

Mark Brenton Contact No. 0405 517 501

**Secretary:**

Judith Kent Contact No. 0408 619 226

**Treasurer:**

Judith Kent Contact No. 0408 619 226

**Committee Executives:**

Russell Pearson Contact No. 0418 580 991

Phillip Taylor Contact No. 0417 400 411

**Fax No.:** (03) 9572 0069

Email Address: [judithk@bigpond.com](mailto:judithk@bigpond.com)

**Postal Address:** The Secretary  
PO Box 269  
Carnegie Vic 3163

Website: [www.vintagers.org.au](http://www.vintagers.org.au)

*All correspondence must be addressed to the Secretary. No responsibility will be taken should it be handled by any other person.*

The Committee welcomes a new member, Wayne Robinson to the Club and wishes him an enjoyable membership.

## President's Report

Apologies! It has been some considerable time since our last shoot, but please don't despair. What with Xmas, the New Year, in addition to work and home-related activities, we have not really had the time to orchestrate and put a shoot together.

The very good news is that we now have several activities for your enjoyment well in hand and underway!

Russell Wilkin from Holland and Holland will be visiting us once again in April, and with

this in mind, Judith will be co-ordinating the **Holland and Holland luncheon on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> April**. This is a "must" for the classic sporting gun/rifle enthusiast. (**See notification enclosed.**)

This will be followed **with our Club Shoot on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April** at the Frankston Australian Clay Target Club. (**See notification enclosed.**)

In addition, the Big Game Rifle Club will be conducting their 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary competition shoot on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, and you are welcome to attend. (**See notification enclosed.**)

A Holland and Holland luncheon supported by two days of shooting; what more could you ask for!

You will also read in this issue of our plans to conduct our long overdue rifle shoot, possibly in May or June. Mark Brenton has put considerable time into locating a suitable range and developing the shoot program. Mark will be assisted by two or three of our members who are very experienced and well trained (SSAA Vic.) with rifle range and safety rules/requirements.

We always learn something from the running of our shoots. One thing that readily comes to mind is that there are an isolated few who do not wear a shooting jacket or belt cartridge bag, and carry the ammunition from station to station in the manufacturers packets, placing those packets on the ground then taking the stand and loading. This course of action is entirely up to you, but it has been brought to our attention that on occasion, during the process of stooping down to remove cartridges from the packet on the ground/loading, that the barrels have occasionally been inadvertently pointed in what is considered to be unsafe directions. In addition, the "stooping down" may some day possibly result in a stumble, placing the personal safety of the shooter, other squad members, or observers, in question.

We would politely recommend that you refrain from this practice, and if necessary, borrow a jacket or belt bag from one of the other shooters.

Please accept these comments in the spirit in which they have been given; safety at all times. They are for both the benefit of the Club and the members. Remember, safety is always our prime issue.

On a final note, take a look at our web site. Considerable time and effort has been put into re-designing it and bringing it up to date.

Hammers Back!!

---

## What One Finds!

By Max Lee

Sometimes being in the right place at the right time can really surprise you – and for the better, you end up finding things that you were least expecting.

The following is a wonderful extract from a book, which I happened to spy squashed in the corner of an already full and jumbled bookshelf in a colleague's office at a major hospital in Melbourne a few years back. The title simply caught my curiosity because it seemed so out of place with every other book along side it – but glancing at the chapter on *Sports* – that caught my imagination. The book is titled 'Melton – Plains of Promise' and written by Joan Starr (1985) and as a commemorative historical work, it was commissioned by the then Melton Shire Council.

As a historical record of the times, places and pioneers that have gone together to influence the township (or suburb?) of Melton today, the book is wonderfully thorough – detailing all from *Native Plants*, various *Pioneer families* and their homesteads through to *Schools*, *Railways*, *roads* (the Calder, of course) and .... Yes, *Sports*. Highlighted in word and some black and white photo's in the chapter, are the achievements of some of shootings' earlier names that maybe warmly familiar to many *Vintagers*, such as Donald Mackintosh and Hector Fraser (aka *Parvo*).

So with full acknowledgment to Joan Starr and her work 'Melton – Plains of Promise', here's a selected reprint of the *Sports* Chapter.

*"Apart from school sporting activities, Melton has always been a sports minded community.*

*From the hunting days of earliest settlement, to the wide and varied range of sporting activities in the district as the population grew, it has produced many people who became famous in their particular field of activity.*

*One such person was Donald Mackintosh, World Champion gun shot, who was born and lived on the Mt Cottrell Road. He is said to have purchased his good gun with money saved from the sale of rabbit skins. Among his many trophies was a World Championship from Monte Carlo.*

*He and another splendid shot from Melton, the so-called "boy freak" Hector Fraser who shot under the name of Parvo share with another Victorian named Grig the principal prize money at Monte Carlo too. Each scored 23 "kills" out of 25 shots.*

*Hector lived with his parents on a property on the Keilor Road, which was later owned by Jim Gillespie. His father was also a first class and taught Hector to shoot at a very early age. One of his first public appearances with a gun was at the Morelands Shooting Contests, when he was 11 years old. He carried off first prize. He later shot in Europe for several seasons and he and Donald Mackintosh brought many substantial prizes back to their hometown.*

*Harry Coburn was another leading shooter who used to shoot as "Notlem" (Melton spelt backwards). Among his many trophies was the Australian Championship won at Bright, Victoria. And there was Col. William Oldershaw, born in Melton (Oldershaw's Road). He was the first Victorian representative at the Queens Shoot at Bisley, England. He was later Controller-General of sugar for the Federal Government, at Federation."*

## Convert or Not to Convert? Was that the question?

By Peter J Smith

At our recently conducted Vintage Cup Down-Under for 2003, a couple of unique sporting guns made their debut. "Unique", to say the least. "Unique", for want of a better word. Both had started life as muzzle-loaders, and were later ingeniously and professionally converted to central fire breech-loaders.

One was a Manton converted by Army and Navy of London, the other a Wm. Churchman of East Street, Chichester, Sussex, presumably converted by him.

Now an essential part of the evolution and development of the sporting gun is how a considerable number of sporting guns were converted to keep up to date with technology, and take full advantage of progressive new ideas. To put into modern day terms, "to keep up with the Jones's".

All of this came about during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when there was an abundant availability of low paid yet highly skilled gun-smithing labour, in addition to the rate of changes in gun design. Remember that the flintlock muzzle-loader was regarded as being the pinnacle of achievement at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, only to be replaced by the single trigger breech-loading ejector at the end. In between came the percussion muzzle-loader, the pin-fire breech-loader, the central fire hammer gun, and the early hammerless gun. Remember that it was common practice (and relatively easy) to convert a flint ignition gun to percussion, using the "drum" method.

But let's get back to the Manton and the Churchman. Both of these conversions, carried out in a period when it was recognised that individual craftsmanship was at its best, hold a particular fascination. They display how a person had the enviable combinations of ability, intelligence, and skill, to take a finished gun and completely rebuild it, without the availability of drawings, and "off the shelf" parts.

As I have said, the Wm. Churchman commenced life as a 13-bore muzzle-loader. London proof house marks are evidence that

in its original state, it was built between 1856-1868. The conversion to 12-bore central fire (or should we say "heroic surgery"), was undertaken around 1865 using the patent of Thomas Bissell, of Tooley Street, London. The original highly figured 5 blade Damascus barrels were retained, but shortened by a quarter of an inch so as to remove traces of the breech plug threads. A lump incorporating two bites was braised to the barrels, in which an extractor was fitted. The original high quality 7-pin bar action non-rebounding locks were retained, but fitted to a replacement action bar. (The engraving on the lock plates is at some variance to that on the bar and hammers). Replacement hammers were fitted and the head of the original stock was slightly altered to accept the firing pins. The action incorporated a Jones under-lever.

Theoretically, all this "surgery" sounds quite unacceptable, but when confronted with this 130+ year sound old gun, well used but still in occasional use, there can be no argument with what has been carried out.

Now you are probably wondering as to what the cost of such a conversion was. Purdey's usual charge in circa 1870 was £21 when their guns sold for £60. By comparison, Frederick Williams of Weaman Street, Birmingham, whose best quality side-lock hammerless ejector sold for £100, and his top lever nitro proved hammer gun sold for £12 circa 1920, advertised in his extensive catalogue that he would convert pin to central fire from £6. This was at a time that he advertised re-stocking from £7 and fitted replacement steel barrels from £8.

---

## Vintage Cooking

By Patrik Mort (also known as "the Boronia Chef")

This is the first instalment of what will be a regular feature in Hammers Back. It will cover recipes of all feathered and furred game. We hope you will try some of these delicious recipes with a nice bottle of wine. Enjoy the fruits of the field!

### **Duck Catherine**

*Serves 4*

2 kg (4 lb) duck  
2 tablespoons butter  
salt and pepper  
3 tablespoons dry red wine, water, or vegetable stock  
 $\frac{2}{3}$  cup (6 fl oz) light sour cream

#### *Stuffing*

1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
1 small onion, finely chopped  
250g (8 oz) finely minced (ground) veal  
90g (3 oz) chopped mushrooms  
60g (2 oz) fresh breadcrumbs  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
3 tablespoons light sour cream  
1 egg, lightly beaten

Sour cream is used in the stuffing and gravy of this roast duck, counteracting the richness without detracting from the flavour. Serve simply with roast potatoes and peas.

#### *Method*

Make the stuffing. Pre-heat the oven to hot.

#### *Stuffing*

Heat the oil in a frying pan (skillet) and cook the onion until transparent. Mix in the veal and cook until it changes colour, breaking up any lumps with a fork. Add the mushrooms and breadcrumbs, stirring together. When all the pan-juices have been absorbed, remove the pan from the heat, season the mixture with salt and black pepper, and leave to cool slightly. Stir in the sour cream and bind with the egg.

Spoon the stuffing loosely into the cavity of the bird and close the opening with small poultry pins or coarse thread. Fold the wings under the body and put the duck on a rack in a roasting dish. Prick the skin all over with a skewer. Rub the skin lightly with the butter and season with salt and pepper. Roast the duck for 20 minutes, reduce the temperature to moderate, and cook for 1 1/2 hours, or until the juices run clear when a thigh is pierced with a skewer.

Transfer the duck to a heated carving dish, remove the pins or thread, and keep hot. Allow the pan-juices to settle, skim the fat from the surface of the roasting dish, and add the wine, water, or stock. Bring the pan-

juices rapidly to the boil, reduce the heat, and stir the sour cream into the simmering liquid. Heat through gently, without boiling, and adjust the seasoning. Serve the sauce separately.

---

### **Mango Quails**

*Serves 8*

16 quails  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons vegetable oil  
1 small clove of garlic, peeled  
1 medium onion, finely chopped  
1 large or 2 small fresh mangoes, stoned and sliced or 425g (15/No.300) can sliced mangoes  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons very finely grated lemon rind  
2 cloves  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground coriander  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons plain (all-purpose) flour  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup ( $\frac{1}{3}$  pt) chicken stock  
2-3 tablespoons lemon juice  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup ( $\frac{1}{3}$  pt) cream  
hard-boiled quail eggs or thin lemon slices

#### *Method*

Season the quails inside and out with salt and black pepper. Secure the wings to the body with poultry pins or cocktail sticks. Pre-heat the oven to moderate.

Heat the butter with the oil in a frying pan (skillet) and sauté the garlic cloves without browning for 2 minutes, to flavour the fat. Discard the garlic and lightly brown the quails on all sides, cooking only a few at a time. Transfer to a casserole large enough to hold them upright without crowding.

Add the onion to the frying pan (skillet) and cook over low heat until transparent. Add the mangoes and fry with the onion for 2 minutes, turning once or twice. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the mangoes and onion to the casserole, spreading the mixture over and between the quails.

Add the lemon rind and cloves to the frying pan (skillet) and sprinkle with the cinnamon, coriander, and flour. Stir until blended into the pan-juices and cook for 1 minute.

Gradually add the chicken stock and 2 tablespoons of the lemon juice, stirring constantly between each addition, until the sauce is smooth. Simmer for 1 minute, adjust the seasoning, and, if you like, add a little more lemon juice. Pour the sauce over the birds, cover, and cook for 30 to 35 minutes, until the quails are tender.

Carefully lift the birds from the casserole, arrange on a heated serving dish, and keep hot. Bring the sauce quickly to the boil on top of the stove. Reduce the heat, stir in the cream, and simmer for 1 or 2 minutes. Adjust the seasoning before pouring the sauce over the quails. Garnish with quail eggs or lemon slices.

Mangoes, understated spicing, and the tang of lemon make a very tempting combination. If you use canned mangoes, drain and slice the fruit into thin strips. Use as directed but increase the amount of lemon juice if necessary. Do not serve this dish with carrots, as the colours clash horribly. Crisp vegetables and salad are far more appealing.

---

### Creole Rabbit

*Serves 4*

2 tablespoons butter  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 rabbit, cut into servicing pieces  
2 medium onions, chopped  
3 tablespoons chopped parsley  
2 cloves of garlic, crushed  
3 large tomatoes, peeled and chopped  
1 cup (9fl oz) beef stock, from cubes  
½ cup (4 fl oz) dry sherry  
2 tablespoons rum  
1 teaspoon ground bird's eye chilli  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
90g (3 oz) ground hazelnuts

#### *Method*

Melt the butter with the oil in a heavy, flameproof casserole and brown the rabbit pieces on all sides. Lift the browned rabbit from the pan and set aside. Add the onions, parsley, and garlic to the casserole and cook over low heat until the onions are

transparent. Stir in the tomatoes, stock, sherry, and rum. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for 3 or 4 minutes.

Sprinkle the chilli, salt, and black pepper over the rabbit and return it to the casserole. Spoon the sauce over the rabbit, cover, and cook over low heat for 2 hours, until tender. Stir the lemon juice into the sauce with the hazelnuts. Simmer uncovered for 4 or 5 minutes, adjust the seasoning, and serve from the casserole or transfer to a heated serving dish.

The full flavours of Louisiana are well matched with the pale rabbit. Serve with boiled rice or noodles and a green salad.

---

## A Few Good Early Openers! (to name just a few)

*By Peter J Smith*

Since the adoption of the breech loading sporting gun, the most widely accepted method for loading has been the hinged, drop-down barrel. Over some 170 years, gun-makers have been prolific in inventing and developing levers and other forms of opening mechanisms.

Some of the more recognised are:

**LEFAUCHEUX.** Patented in France on 1834, this was the first to be widely adopted. In general terms the lever protected the barrel and as such formed part of the fore-end.

**JOSEPH LANG.** Designed a shortened and somewhat neater Lefauchaux lever in the 1850's.

**DOUGALL.** His design of the "Lockfast" action of 1860, which incorporated a side lever, not only allowed the barrels to hinge downwards, but also allowed them to move slightly forward to unlock.

**SCHNEIDER.** A snap action of 1861 incorporating the short lever curved around and in front of the trigger guard.

**HENRY JONES.** The double bite, screw grip under-lever action of 1861. This is the one most commonly encountered at the Vintagers.

**PURDEY.** 1863 saw the introduction of what is regarded as possibly the most widely used

system of locking barrels on a double gun, the Purdey bolt. Originally operated by a short lever hinged on the trigger plate, access to which was gained by a large hole in the trigger guard. This gave rise to the affectionate term, the “Purdey Thumb Hole Action”.

**WM. POWELL.** The “lift-up” lever dated from 1864.

**WILLIAM M. SCOTT.** Patented his top lever and spindle in 1865. The Scott lever combined with the Purdey bolt has been the most widely used system for over a century.

**GRANT.** Invented the classic side lever, which employed the Purdey bolt. Grant did not patent the idea, and was one of the most recognised of those makers who fitted their guns with side levers.

---

## Engraving

*By Peter J Smith*

If you take the time to think about engraving from a somewhat logical approach, then engraving can be considered an odd feature on a sporting gun.

From the ballistic point of view, it can add nothing to the performance (and patterns) of the gun in question, yet we find that that an unadorned high-grade gun is an exception to the general rule. (These un-engraved high-grade guns are affectionately referred to as “funeral” or “widow” guns.)

The style of engraving is purely a matter of preference or personal taste, be it game scenes, scrolls, and/or the like. What I find unusual, and cannot imagine why, are the stylised dolphins, monsters or serpents usually found on the hammers on muzzle-loading and pin-fire guns.

One typical style of engraving on a pin-fire is the “sunburst” around the holes where the cartridge pins project. Why this style of engraving should be executed is yet another puzzle. Perhaps it is an attempted representation of what occurs within the gun when a cartridge is detonated.

It must be recognised that in England in the late 1870's, a gun could be absolutely smothered with engraving for as little as £5.

This was at a time when a best gun cost of the order of £60.

---

## Damascus Barrels re-visited

*By Peter J Smith*

Since writing the article on how Damascus barrels were manufactured (a brief summary that was printed in our last news letter), I have been surprised at the number of queries from interested readers about using Damascus barrelled black powder guns.

Having said that, let me continue by saying that I am one of the disciples who regularly use Damascus barrelled black powder guns both in the field and on the clays, but in every instance I undertake a rigid pre first time use safety check. Needless to say, I only charge them with black powder; definitely no “nitro”.

I will approach the query from this angle, firstly by commenting without referring to any specifics relating to their safety, that any barrels other than steel are at least 90+ years old. Just for this reason alone, it can be questionable as to whether or not they are still within proof.

If the barrels are heavily pitted then my advice is to simply retire them. Should the action be off the face, or the rib(s) be loose, (but the bores acceptable), then the gun may well be a shooter but only **after** professional repairs have been completed to the rib/action.

If the gun is generally sound, very good bores (signs of minimal pitting only), and the barrels ring true, I next measure the internal diameters of each barrel to confirm just how much metal has been removed. Should the internal diameters record 0.010" greater than the nominal diameter marked on the occasion of the last proof or reproof, I consider it prudent not proceed with live firing.

From a personal safety point of view I will only fire standard black powder loads (3 drams of Ffg pushing one and one eighth ounce, or 32 grams of lead shot) in a black powder only proof Damascus barrelled gun. It may well be the case that if the barrels were submitted for nitro proofing, they would

pass, but without that formal endorsement I certainly lack the confidence and don't intend to try my luck.

There exists a strong belief amongst some shooters that it is acceptable to shoot smokeless loads in Damascus barrelled black powder proof guns if those loads are "light" (32 grams of shot or less). With modern (smokeless) commercial ammunition, this is not really the case. A light shot weight propelled by a fast burning powder will certainly put strain on Damascus that may well be sufficient to burst it.

Black powder shells do not develop much pressure (generally up to around 6000 PSI), and tends to burn slowly, generally all the way to the muzzle. Particles that are not burnt the full length of the barrels are "spat" on the ground. Fire a black powder gun around twilight or in the dark and you will be amazed at the shower of sparks. Modern smokeless powder changed all that. It burns in a much shorter space, and the result of this is higher pressures in the chamber and the first few inches of the bore. If a Damascus barrelled black powder proof gun is subject to firing it with modern smokeless ammunition that it was never intended for, then personal safety could well be compromised.

Safety is the key issue. For safety's sake, interpret the proof marks and ensure that the barrels are still within black powder proof. Put another way, that the bores have not been interfered with or honed/polished, so that the measurements are not enlarged at the expense of strength. Should there be any level of doubt, my recommendation then is to place the gun in retirement.

**NOTE:** this article relates to Damascus barrels that record black powder only proof marks. Those with nitro of nitro re-proof are another issue.

---

## Vintagers Inaugural Rifle Shoot

*By Mark Brenton*

We have been discussing having a Rifle Shoot for a long while, and it looks like we

have organised a range to use. We envisage the use of side-by-side rifles, Vintage/Classic sporting Rifles as well as Military Rifles due to our understand that the majority of members may not own a double rifle. Events would be:

1. .22 Sporting Rifle 25 yds
2. Double Rifle 50 yds
3. Black Powder Rifle 50 yds
4. .303 Open sighted Military 100 yds
5. Centre Fire Sporting Rifle 100 yds.

As part of Membership you can use the Vintagers for your genuine reason to have Category B Firearms so it would be a good idea to attend not to mention the fun factor.

As in keeping with all our Shoots the emphasis will be on use and appreciation not on scores and individual competition although I can see a couple of side bets going on with a bottle of wine being contested for between friends.

The use of Black Powder will be fine and a couple of members have mentioned they will bring a couple of extra rifles for members who do not have a suitable rifle or would like a shot of something different which is both very generous and very much in the Club spirit.

The date has not been set as yet but we hope it will be on a Sunday in May or June. As always we would like an idea on numbers of people attending for both catering and organising purposes, so if you could please contact Mark Brenton on 5995 3404 or 0405 517 501 or Peter Smith on 0428 332 781.

Even if you do not own a rifle it will be a great opportunity so come down and have a look at some nice rifles and enjoy the day.

---

## A Visit to Purdey

*By Russ Bate*

For a number of years I have been lucky enough to enjoy driven shooting in England. This indulgence has been enabled by the support of a tolerant wife and the generosity of a group of English friends and relatives who continue to include we two "colonials" in their annual arrangements.

Each year has brought its particular highlights, some great days, some great shoots and always great company. This year however brought an additional pleasure, a visit to James Purdey and Sons hosted by the Chairman, Richard Purdey.

Arrangements for the visit were made by Jonathan Irby, West London Shooting School's General Manager. West London's proximity to Heathrow Airport, coupled with their superb grounds and excellent coaches, has made it a compulsory stop to help blow away the jet lag and to brush up on the driven targets we so rarely get a chance to enjoy in Australia.

Winner of the 2003 "Best Shooting Ground" in the annual UK Sporting Industry Awards, West London has enjoyed a long and close relationship with James Purdey and Sons. Purdey recommend that their clients, wherever possible, have their guns fitted by the West London team. West London's senior instructor, Alan Rose, is regarded as one of the best gun fitters in the UK and is in particular demand.

A 'phone call from Jonathan to Richard Purdey and arrangements were made for Jacqui and I to meet with Richard on the following Thursday. Richard offered to show us around Purdey's famous Audley House premises and following lunch to take us to their Hammersmith factory. And so on the morning Thursday October 9<sup>th</sup>. we arrived at Audley House. Arriving ten minutes early proved to be a mistake as it provided just enough time for Jacqui to choose a Purdey ladies shirt but more of that side of the Purdey business later.

Richard Purdey is a generous and entertaining host. A 6<sup>th</sup>. generation Purdey, he was invited by the Richemont Group to take over as Chairman of James Purdey and Sons following their acquisition of the company in 1994. Richard succeeded Richard Beaumont, who had been chairman since 1970 and had decided to retire. Prior to his appointment Richard Purdey had been Chief Executive of Merrydown Cider. As well as appointing Richard as Chairman, Richemont also appointed Nigel Beaumont, Richard Beaumont's cousin, as Managing Director. Nigel was previously Purdey's factory manager and had completed a

Purdey apprenticeship in 1980. An honours graduate from Manchester University, Nigel joined Purdey's in 1977 as an actioner and is said to be one of the very few men who can make a Purdey gun through all processes.

It would be fair to say that Purdey's Audley Street premises is one of the best known addresses in the shooting world. Purpose built by James Purdey, the building was completed in 1892. The Purdey workshops were originally situated in the basement and cellars however with manufacturing now located at Hammersmith the basement currently houses the Purdey offices. If the Audley St. building is one of the shooting world's most famous buildings then the Purdey Long Room is certainly its most famous room. Originally the office of James Purdey, the Long Room now functions as Purdey's board room and show room. It provides a marvellous environment in which to display not only the family portraits and other memorabilia that describe the firm's history but also the exceptional guns and rifles that Purdey produce.

Richard possesses an encyclopaedic knowledge of Purdey's operations, past and present. A keen shooter himself, it was quickly apparent that he is an extremely active and involved chairman. His strong commercial background was evident as he outlined Purdey's current operations and plans for the future.

Like most of the London gun trade Purdey's has seen a marked slowdown in orders following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack on the World Trade Center. Prior to that, the US had accounted for 70% of Purdey's sales and the slow down that followed 9/11 has hit Purdey just as it has hit all London gun makers. Despite these current market challenges Purdey continues to prosper and judging from the guns we were to see later in the afternoon there is still a strong demand for quality of the kind that Purdey has become famous for.

During our visit to the Long Room Richard arranged for me to have a closer look at a new Purdey gun and new bolt action rifle. There is a feel to a best London gun that is unmatched by any other. Those who are lucky enough to own one will know what I mean when I say that few if any guns quite

match the guns produced by London's top makers for balance and finish. The guns that I was able to handle in the Long Room proved to be almost understated in comparison to some of the guns we were to see later that day during our visit to the factory but they were nonetheless beautifully engraved and finished and, needless to say, very desirable.

Our Long Room visit also provided an opportunity to meet Nigel Beaumont who had come up to Audley St. from the Hammersmith factory. The Beaumont family connection with Purdey's began in 1946 when Sir Hugh Seely, Later Lord Sherwood, became the major shareholder in Purdey's following an approach by Tom Purdey. Lord Sherwood was Richard Beaumont's uncle and in 1949 he gave ownership of Purdey's to Richard.

Following our tour of Audley Street and lunch at a restaurant opposite, Richard drove us to the Hammersmith factory. Here we were able to follow the making of a Purdey through all stages, starting with the drop forged steel from which Purdey actions and barrels are made, through the various stages of actioning, stocking and finishing and were ultimately able to inspect some magnificent finished guns that were awaiting shipment.

At first glance the Purdey factory looks just as you would imagine any London gun maker's premises would have looked like early in the 20<sup>th</sup>. century: craftsmen working at benches facing the windows and lit largely by natural light. The manufacturing process appears to be essentially the same it has been for the last hundred years. It is not until you reach the end of the room that houses the actioners, stockers and finishers that you reach the area that houses the latest in CNC and other equipment that Purdey's have recently installed. Purdey's have not been slow in recognising that the latest manufacturing technology can offer tolerances and economies that ultimately add to the quality of their finished product.

Despite this use of technology in the initial machining of actions, a Purdey gun is still hand made. Richard pointed out that some 650 man hours go into the making of a Purdey gun, 120 hours into the barrels alone. Engraving can add significantly to this and I

was interested to learn that some Purdey customers who require special engraving now book their slot with the engraving house first and order their gun when it fits the engraver's schedule. The wait for top engravers like Ken Hunt, Alan Brown or Phil Coggan can be up to five years and with a lead time of eighteen months to two years for the gun itself, the Purdey customer needs to plan carefully. Purdey's sidelocks provide a canvas for many of the world's finest engravers and the finished work we were able to view was absolutely magnificent.

While it was obviously a great pleasure to see and handle guns of this quality I was also interested in the current and future prospects for Purdey's and the other great names in the UK gun trade. Richard was happy to share a good deal of information about the business, their plans and their prospects.

He is keen to expand the retailing side of Purdey's but was at pains to emphasise that Purdey's would always remain focussed on shooting as their "raison d'être". As was plain from our earlier visit to Audley Street, Purdey's has resisted the temptation to become a "themed boutique" with gun room attached. Their clothes and accessories may be extremely elegant but they are also, first and foremost, very functional. Despite ownership by the Richemont Group, who also include Dunhill, Cartier, Van Cleef & Arpels and Mont Blanc among a stable of famous luxury brands, there appears to have been no pressure to capitalise on their brand in other than traditional lines.

Richard also expressed an interest in further developing the sale of quality used guns, principally Purdey but also including other guns by top makers. Those who have visited Purdey's premises will have noticed that there are few used guns for sale and that the firm has clearly focussed on the sale and manufacture of new guns until this point in time.

He remains optimistic about the future. The US market is showing signs of recovery and there are older markets that have been largely untapped in recent years. Richard is particularly keen to visit Australia and would like to get an idea of the numbers and location of Purdey's in this country. It is my

hope that, with the aid of organisations like The Vintagers and Field and Game Australia, we may be able to accumulate a basic register of Australian Purdey's and ultimately host a visit by Richard later this year.

In all it was a great day. A chance to spend time with a company that is synonymous with quality and that is part of shooting history. In particular a chance to meet and watch craftsmen at work, men who clearly still take great pride in the guns they make and the company they work for.

  
**Victorian Arms Supplies Pty Ltd**  
**Licence Gun Dealer 478 393 50F**

**For Sale – a number of 12 bore  
hammer guns at reasonable  
prices!**

**Contact Russell on 0418 580 991  
(all hours)**



## Reviving the Pinfire Shotgun

*By Mark Brenton*

There are an awful lot of Pinfire Shotguns around Australia, unfortunately collecting dust, just there to be looked at, and due to original Pinfire cartridges being quite scarce, not doing much more. I myself fitted into this category, until recently reading an article in a book written by a well-known author. In the article the author like myself is giving credit for this modification of a modern shotgun cartridge to someone else.

The article gave me the basic idea of how to make a Pinfire Shotgun Cartridge out of a modern shotgun cartridge but unfortunately it took a fair amount of time and experimentation to arrive at the point where the cartridge would fire reliably. This is the reason for writing this article to make it easier and certainly quicker to get your Pinfire Shotgun up and running. Also I think it is very nice to see some of these lovely old guns out and being used again.

The modern Pinfire cartridge is a plastic case with a percussion cap chamber fitted into where the modern primer was and a hole drilled into the top of the case for the pin (I have used active cases).

First thing is to make or have made is your percussion cap chamber. Obviously it has to be the same diameter as a shotgun primer and 7.7mm long (Diagram 1). This can be made in a lathe then the hole for the percussion cap can be bored in using a mill (Diagram 2), in a holder specially made for the job. I don't profess for this to be the best or only method just the one I used. The size of the hole size is determined by the percussion cap used. I use a No. 10 pistol cap because they are a shorter cap, you can use a rifle cap but will have to file it flush once fitted into the cap chamber. A "V" filed into the end of cap chamber is necessary to get the fired cap out with small long nose pliers. (Diagram 3).

Next the cartridge case itself. Since the original Pinfire cartridge had almost a nonexistent rim because to extract the case all you had to do was to pull it out by the pin. The case we know today came along later with extractor then ejector guns. The modern case therefore will not fit the Pinfire gun so you need to turn the rim off the case. I did this using a lathe with a rod turned down on the end to firmly slip the case on and to lock it there used a hose clip. Then it's a simple matter of turning the rim off. I used active cases as they are entirely plastic outside and have a metal washer inside the base making for a strong case. On the inside the active case has a raised plastic section in the centre. This being there causes of problems for us as the cap is sitting sideways and this will be in the way. It is easily removed with a 12mm drill bit

stopping when you touch the metal rim on the inside of the primer here.

The case is now ready to drill the hole for the pin. I made a jig out of an old H&R cut down single barrel, to trim the cases down to 2½” long (using a Stanley knife), and to use as a guide for drilling the hole for the pin. The hole has to be as close as possible to the metal rim of the case and on an angle (see Diagram 4) and 3/16” in size.

The pin is made out of 3/16” brass welding rod (you may have to take the flux off). In a 12 bore the size is 23mm long for other bores you will have to experiment and measure the protruding pin on a sample.

You are now ready to assemble a cartridge but before you load I suggest you try a primed cartridge in the gun to make sure (1) the gun closes and (2) the cap goes off and everything is fine. Since Pinfire guns have not been around for a long time I only load 65 grains of 2F black powder and 1 oz shot with a 3/8” thick lubricated fibre or felt wad in between. Using an over shot card (around 1/8”) and sealing with nail polish. I use this system to save the end from splitting from being crimped so you can use the case many more times.

I do hope this helps to iron out most of the problems I experienced and I do know from experience that when you fire your first shot it will be before than worth the effort.

**(Please note.** If you are considering manufacturing cartridges to “crank up” your trusty Pinfire, then at law the Pinfire must be registered.)

Diagram 1



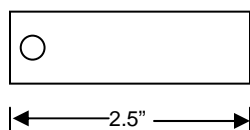
Diagram 2



Diagram 3



Diagram 4



## Widow's parting shot!

*Sent by Clive Whelan and Tony Kelly*

(A story reproduced from today's (17 February 2004) "MX" that I'm sure will interest any shooter looking to cut funeral expenses)

An English widow has commemorated her gun loving husband by having his ashes loaded into shotgun cartridges for use by his close friends in the last shoot of the season.

Widow Joanna Booth organised the shoot on January 31 for 20 close friends of an estate in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, after asking a cartridge company to mix the ashes of her husband James with traditional shot.

James Booth had been an expert on vintage shotguns until his death two years ago at 50. He had been in a coma for 18 months after contracting food poisoning.

London's Daily Telegraph reported that 275 12 bore cartridges were produced from the mix and were blessed by a minister before they were used to bag pheasants, partridges, ducks and a fox.

Joanna Booth, of Streatham, south London, said "it was a marvellous day out and her husband would have loved it".

"It was not his dying wish, but I remembered that he had read somewhere that someone had their ashes loaded into cartridges and he thought it was very funny," she said. "One of our friends, a woman who had never shot before, got four partridges with James's marked cartridges."

The Caledonian Cartridge Company's Julian McHardy said the request was the first he had received to put ashes into shotgun cartridges.

"He was loaded in our Caledonian Classic, a 28 gram load, No 6 shot with degradable plastic wadding," he said.

Church of Scotland minister Alistair Donald from the nearby village of New Deer, who blessed the cartridges, said he had no qualms.

“It was a perfectly normal scattering of ashes, a few words and prayers,” he said. “After all, he had a lifelong interest in ballistics.”

The widow said the cartridges bagged 70 partridges, 23 pheasants, seven ducks and a fox.

---

## Reminder!

Don't forget to diarise the **Holland & Holland luncheon** being held on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2004. This is an exciting event with Russell Wilkin giving a talk on some interesting topics.

To avoid any disappointment complete the booking form and forward it with your cheque to confirm your attendance as soon as possible. Bookings will not be taken after the RSVP date of Thursday 25 March 2004 due to the request of the Caterers.

Also don't forget to diarise the Shoot at Frankston on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2004. Russell Wilkin will also be our guest.

Bring your picnic lunch and have some fun.

### For Sale

Leopard Skin Head Mounted  
8 ft 2 inches

Excellent Condition

Cost \$5,500

Telephone 9884 5185

### DISCLAIMER

*The articles, opinions, and sometimes unusual views expressed in Hammers Back are not necessarily those of the Editor, or the Vintagers (Order of Edwardian Gunners) Inc., and are not to be taken seriously.*

# Hammers Back!