

## An unbroken historical lineage, descending from London's 'King of Gunmakers'



*Blacksmith in the Minories - James Purdey 1739-96*

### **East Scotland Origins**

It was a hard walk, that first journey down from east Scotland that John Purdey took in 1690. We can't be certain, but it seems likely he was travelling in search of work, joining the Purdeys of Wandsworth and Stepney who had already settled, and prospered, in the city.

John's second son, James, was born in 1739. James worked as a blacksmith in the Minories, close to the Tower of London. As the gunmaking quarter, it's doubtless that James carried out barrel work on behalf of the local gunsmiths.

But it was not until James's own son, also christened James, and born in August 1784, started an apprenticeship with his brother-in-law the gunsmith Thomas Keck Hutchinson, that the Purdey gunmaking tradition truly began.

## **James Purdey the Founder**

James Purdey was just 14 when he was apprenticed to the gunmaker Thomas Keck Hutchinson, who was married to James's sister. The guns of the day were flintlocks, and the young James was passionate about learning every aspect of making them. He forged Damascus barrels out of nails from old horseshoes, heated up, hammered into strips and then beaten around rods. Horseshoes were believed to make the toughest of steels, having been hardened by trampling hooves.

James completed his apprenticeship in 1805. In seven years he had flourished, earning a place with Joseph Manton of Oxford Street - England's greatest gunmaker. Manton had transformed the sporting gun into a thing of exquisite beauty. James Purdey was later to say: 'but for him we should all have been a parcel of blacksmiths'. Within three years, James had risen to Head Stocker at Manton's. Talented and ambitious in 1808, after learning all that he could, James left to join another famous gunmaker, Forsyth at 10, Piccadilly. Dr Forsyth had invented a new kind of lock, which worked by detonation. James was to spend the next four years there, as stocker and lock-filer.

In 1814 having mastered his skills, Purdey set out on his own. He opened for business at 4 Princes Street, in a modest shop off Leicester Square, building single and double flintlock guns, duelling pistols, and rifles.



*James Purdey the Founder 1784-1863*

### **Burgeoning business**

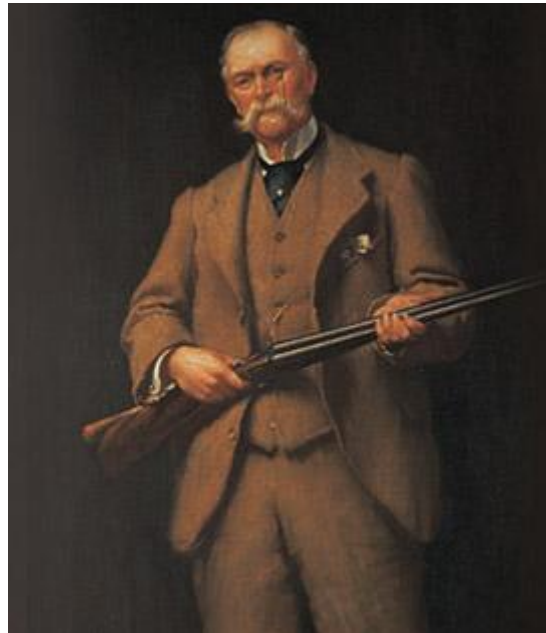
The very earliest ledgers are now lost. But from 1818 onward we have a complete record of the daily transactions of the firm. These include James Purdey's comments on customers who failed to honour their debts, noted alongside the main entry as 'BAD' in a fine copperplate script.

From the very beginning James Purdey's business thrived. His reputation, established at Manton's and Forsyth's, meant he attracted the most discerning of customers. Purdey's specialized in the 'best' bespoke guns. They were sold in every conceivable bore size, from 10 to 22. There is even a record in the ledgers of a 17 ½ bore, which must have belonged to James Purdey himself, as there's no record of it at the London Proof House.

Just like today, Purdey in 1814 not only made best guns, but also serviced and repaired them, not to mention selling shooting equipment and accessories. As well as cartridges, wadding and powder flasks, you could find daggers, cutlasses, and razors. Cast iron targets in the shape of rabbits, salmon hooks and "the best cigars". Purdey even sold live sparrows.

With success came expansion and on 1 August 1826, James took charge of 314 ½ Oxford Street, the premises of his former master, Manton. This was the most famous gun shop in London, supplying orders to everyone from English aristocracy to Indian princes. In 1831 Charles Darwin paid a visit, ordering guns and supplies for the voyage of HMS Beagle.

In 1838 James Purdey's most famous customer placed her first order. In the year of her coronation, Queen Victoria commissioned a pair of double-barrelled pistols from Purdey, for presentation to the Imam of Muscat.



*James Purdey the Younger 1828-1909*

### **James Purdey the Younger**

James the Founder had married in 1805 or 1806 – the exact date is unknown. His wife Mary gave birth to their first child, also Mary, in 1807. But it was not until 19 March 1828 that their first son was born, who would go on to take over the firm.

Just like his father, the boy, known as James the Younger, was apprenticed at 14. He perfected his craft and took over the running the firm in 1858. James the Younger witnessed great change in his

lifetime, not least in his own sphere, where the muzzle loading flintlocks, popular in the decade of his birth, came to be replaced by breech loading, hammerless ejectors.

### **Royal Warrants**

On 12 February 1868 the Prince of Wales, who became King Edward VII, granted James Purdey his Royal Warrant of Appointment. A decade later, on 28 March 1878, having purchased many Purdey guns and rifles, Queen Victoria assigned a Royal Warrant to Purdey, as has every British monarch since.

Four years later Purdey moved into Audley House, a specially built property in newly developed Mayfair. 57 South Audley Street is still Purdey's home to this day, and its famed Long Room, originally built as a working office, is today revered in the game-gun community.

### **War years**

Athol Purdey took over the running of the business from his father, James Purdey the Younger, seeing it through the prosperous Edwardian years, and supervising Purdey's manufacture of weapons' parts and equipment for the War Department during World War One.

Athol's sons, James and Tom, both joined the firm in the 1920s, taking over its running in 1929. Although the number of gun orders rose steadily after World War One, difficult times returned with the onset of World War Two. Once again, Purdey's turned to the war effort, and our craftsmen, overseen by Harry Lawrence, aided Britain's efforts by manufacturing precision tools and gauges.



*Athol Purdey 1858-1939*



*Tom Purdey 1897-1957*

### **The Beaumont era**

After the Second World War, the prospects for London gunmakers looked bleak. Jim and Tom Purdey sold their majority shares in the business to Hugh and Victor Seely. They passed the company to their nephew, the Hon. Richard Beaumont, in whose ownership it stayed until 1994. When Tom Purdey retired in 1955, Richard Beaumont took over the running of Purdey.

It was Richard's wife, Lavinia, who had the idea of taking adjoining premises in Mount Street, and offering Purdey customers a range of fine quality shooting wear. It was a great success, and a first for a London gunmaker. The Hon. Mrs Richard Beaumont designed the early clothing ranges herself.

In 1977, a chance conversation at a family gathering in Wales brought Richard Beaumont's young cousin, Nigel Beaumont, to Purdey, beginning as an actioner's apprentice.

In the decades since then his barrels, actions and stocks have gone out on dozens of Purdey guns. Nigel Beaumont is one of only a handful of men who knows how to make a Purdey through all of its processes.

He became Managing Director in 1993 and, in 2007, Chairman of the firm.

### **Among the best company**

After fifty years of stewardship, Richard Beaumont approached the Richemont Group, keen to secure the future of the firm.

Richemont agreed to buy Purdey's in 1994, at which point Richard Beaumont retired and appointed Athol Purdey's grandson, Richard Purdey as Chairman - the first Purdey to be involved in the business since 1957.

By continuing our tradition of craftsmanship, excellence, and attention to detail, we hope that many generations to come will be able to enjoy the exceptional pleasure of owning a bespoke Purdey gun.