

GUNMAKERS TO THE COURTS OF KINGS AND QUEENS

BY STEPHEN WESBROOK

This article provides relevant information to sportsmen who may be interested in hunting with classic doubles. The article is not about classic doubles that were specifically made for any specific king, queen or other titled nobility, rather it is about the shotguns produced by those same gunmakers from 1870 to 1915 and sold to anyone who could afford them. The initial owners came primarily from the new class of super-wealthy industrialists, merchants, financiers, investors and landowners created by the Industrial Revolution. Although these guns lacked the level of ornamentation of those made for royalty, by and large they were of the same design, used the same functional components and were built in the same shops by master craftsmen.

Many of these guns have migrated to the United States over the past 80 years. The first surge arrived with veterans returning from WWII and the occupation of Germany. It was sustained with the creation of NATO and stationing of half-a-million soldiers, sailors and airmen at bases throughout western Europe. More vintage doubles crossed the Atlantic in response to the surge of interest in the 1980s in shooting hammer and hammerless vintage doubles, which was sustained through the creation of shooting clubs and competitions at the local and national level. More recently, the internet-driven globalization of the vintage shotgun market, coupled with restrictions on ownership and use in Europe, have added a steady flow of exceptional guns.

Here, the word “classic” conveys that something: (1) has come to exemplify the best of its kind or class, (2) has a timeless quality of beauty of design and (3) has been popular or otherwise valued for a long time.

In order to be able to provide relevant information at a level of detail to be useful, the number of gunmakers had to be limited. Authoritative books, such

as *The Double Shotgun: The History and Development of the World's Most Classic Sporting Firearms* by Don Zutz, tend to identify about a dozen manufacturers of British best-guns. There seems to be some agreement in the classic double's literature on the best three or four Belgian and half-dozen German gunmakers. But there are no generally accepted objective criteria that could be used to reduce these numbers.

A solution to this dilemma is to defer to the decisions of the monarchs of the period, as evinced by the royal warrants they issued. While their collective choices are certainly not inclusive of all best-in-class gunmakers, the ones herewith clearly fall within this category.

Royal patronage had played a significant role in European commerce for centuries, executed through royal charters and warrants. Their original function was to ensure a reliable supply of high-quality goods to both the nobles personally and government generally. The system had many variations, but most distinguished purveyors of goods to the government from companies provided their products to the royals themselves. The purpose and meaning of royal appointments evolved

between around 1850 and 1900. The pace varied from country to country but, by the end of the century, they had become, in most cases, more a marketing tool for which a company paid a fee, rather than a statement of royal patronage.

Guns and hunting had been the exclusive domain of the nobility for the previous three centuries. Outside of the aristocracy, almost no one was allowed to own guns. It was a matter of noble privilege and potential threat to their rule. Moreover, they owned the land, which was the major source of wealth at the time, and the game on it.

This began to change in the 1830s with the Industrial Revolution. Advances in manufacturing, engineering, commerce and global investment resulted in a new class of super-wealthy commoners. Some adopted the lifestyle of the aristocracy, including its shooting and hunting culture. By the 1880s, they were the primary market for sporting arms makers. The royals were the celebrities of the age, and the premier gunmakers used royal warrants to attract clients among the newly rich. Some monarchs favored the guns of the company to which they gave a royal

appointment, but most did not use them exclusively. Nevertheless, the monarch's name conveyed exceptional quality.

In Britain, the key words of a warrant issued by a monarch were "By Appointment to ..." his or her majesty followed by the name of the king or queen. A warrant also identified the general category of the product and authorized the use of a coat-of-arms in signage and correspondence. Russia and many of the smaller European states, such as Sweden, Spain and Italy, tended to follow the British system.

In the Germanic countries, the award of title *Hofbuchsenmacher* had a similar function. In English it translates as "court gunmaker" or "gunsmith to the court." A "*Königlicher Hofbuchsenmacher*" was a gunmaker of a royal (king's) court.

Historically, the primary responsibility of a gunmaker to a royal court was to build and repair guns for the king and others in the court. But as gun ownership expanded, albeit more slowly than as in Britain, the title also became a marketing tool. The gunmaker paid an annual fee to the king, for which he was authorized to use the title in promoting the sale of his guns to others.

From the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 through the end of the Great War, all of the major European powers except France were monarchies, as were most other states. These are the gunmakers who held a royal warrant, or were designated as a gunmaker to a royal court, in Great Britain, Russia and Germany.

The question of "Best-at-What?" had to be answered to avoid apples-to-oranges comparisons. During this period, there was no all-purpose shotgun. In W. W. Greener's famous book *Modern Shot Guns*, first published in 1888, he describes five types of shotguns: (A) "the ordinary game gun" (used primarily for driven pheasant); (B) "the gun for covert shooting" (a covert is a thicket or woodland providing a hiding place for game); (C) "the gun for grouse driving;" (D) "the gun for pigeon shooting" (e.g., live-pigeon trap) and (E) "wildfowlers." The first three types generally fit within the concept of a "game gun." [Greener classified pigeon guns and wildfowlers as "specialty" guns.]

The substantive core of this article are those sections that describe and provide pictures of representative guns. To make best use of available space, the priority is to the locks. One reason is that they are functionally the most important of the four components of a shotgun. Another is that very few



A 16-GAUGE GAME GUN BY A.F.W. TIMMER, THE GUNMAKER TO THE COURT OF KAISER WILHEM II, ON A NORTH DAKOTA PHEASANT HUNT.

owners or perspective buyers of high-quality classic doubles have ever taken, so-to-speak, a "look-under-the-hood."

Also, the locks are the one component of a gun by a particular gunmaker that stays the same regardless of for whom a gun was made or how much money went into engraving and other ornamentation. The locks are also the key to the extraordinary durability and endurance of the highest quality doubles of the era.

Terry Wieland, in his book, *Vintage British Shotguns*, poses the rhetorical question of what allowed a standard English game gun by a top-tier manufacture to "go into the field, day after day, in rain and sleet, take the pounding of thousands of rounds, season after season, and continue doing so without breaking down, without a pause, for a hundred years." His answer was:

"The secret lies in hand-fitting the parts so closely there is no play, no tolerance, and no built-in self-destruction. Guns that rattle soon rattle more, and eventually rattle themselves to pieces. Not a fine game gun. Its parts work closely together almost as one. So hand labor contributes durability. It also creates the legendary handling qualities."

Stocks can weigh heavily when considering purchase options, even when condition is not an issue. The quality assessment of stocks on European vintage doubles, however, is best done from the perspective of the European gunmakers at the time. As explained by Bill Dowtin in the article "Stock Wood for Best Guns" (Winter 1993 *DGJ*):

"The selection of gunstock blanks historically has followed the same five criteria. In order of importance, they are: a. grain layout; b. density or hardness; c. drying and seasoning; d. overall background color; e. figure and how well it is defined."

Dowtin posits that Americans, when evaluating quality, tend to move the visuals (e.g., criteria "d" and "e") to the top of the order.

Among the highest-quality pre-1915 European doubles, superlative achievement of the first three criteria is a given. Differences in the visuals are more likely to be related to the purpose of the gun than to the quality of the wood. For example, light game guns used to hunt in woods, briar patches and salt marshes, will generally have less color and figure than heavy game guns built for shooting driven pheasants on estates. But for both types of guns, the precision of the inletting and condition of the wood behind the locks are valid quality indicators.

The functional importance of the barrels is self-evident. For Damascus-barreled shotguns, the cost of the barrels represented half the cost of the gun. The higher the quality, the lighter, stronger and safer the barrels. Guns with damaged Damascus barrels can be functionally salvaged by sleeving. But the barrels are irreplaceable, and the character of the gun is forever changed. After fluid-steel was invented in the late 1880s by German and British steel companies, the cost and relative quality differences of barrels narrowed.

If the significance of engraving is debatable, its functional purpose is straightforward—to reduce glare and hold oil. It is not unusual for the receivers and sideplates on the best British and Belgian guns designed for covert shooting to have limited coverage. In contrast, it is unusual for best guns intended for driven pheasant or live-pigeon trap shooting to not have extensive coverage. Among best-in-class game guns, the primary purpose of a gun, the social setting in which it is used, and the hunting traditions of a country are more credible explanations of differences than the quality or cost of a stock.

EACH OF THE NEXT THREE SECTIONS CONSISTS OF A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE REIGN OF THE MONARCHS, INFORMATION ABOUT ONE GUNMAKER APPOINTED BY EACH AND DESCRIPTIONS, PICTURES AND ANALYSIS OF A REPRESENTATIVE GUN FROM EACH MAKER.

UNITED KINGDOM

BETWEEN 1870 AND 1915, BRITAIN HAD THREE MONARCHS: QUEEN VICTORIA, KING EDWARD VII AND KING GEORGE V. THEY ISSUED ROYAL WARRANTS TO GUNMAKERS JAMES PURDEY & SONS, STEPHEN GRANT AND SONS AND WESTLEY RICHARDS, RESPECTIVELY.

QUEEN VICTORIA / JAMES PURDEY & SONS

QUEEN VICTORIA awarded James Purdey & Sons her royal warrant in 1878. During her reign, which historians refer to as the Victorian Age, the size of the British Empire doubled. When she died in 1901, British power was at its peak. The popular sound-bite of the day, "The Sun Never Sets on the British Empire," was accurate.

In 1840, she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a German state of some significance located on the southern border of Prussia. In British society, he was considered a pillar of respectability and a sponsor of science and education. The queen relied heavily on Prince Albert's advice. They had nine children, who through marriage would connect royal families throughout Europe.

Prince Albert was an avid hunter. By all accounts, Purdey's appointment was due to her late-husband's preference for its guns.

James Purdey & Sons is the pre-eminent name in shotguns.

In the public mind, and among many experts who write about vintage guns, Purdey is the best in the world. For the past 150 years, it has symbolized excellence. Geoffrey Boothroyd, in *Shotguns and Gunsmiths: The Vintage Years*, states that from its earliest years:



PURDEY GUN NO. 15,008 ON A SOUTH DAKOTA PHEASANT HUNT.

"The 'house style' was restrained and totally respectable. It is indeed rare to find a flamboyant Purdey, but in this sober magnificence you will not find the smallest flaw in even the smallest screw. Superlative workmanship was not enough; to reach and maintain these heights technical innovation was also required."

The invention of the Purdey double-bolt, which was patented in 1863, was technically and financially the most significant of its innovations. It became, and remains today, the most used means of securing the barrel to the receiver. It also made the company a fortune through licensing fees. The second most significant was the adoption in 1880 of the Beesley self-opening sidelock action, which Purdey still uses.

Purdey Gun No. 15,088, pictured here, is described in the gun history certificate obtained from Purdey as a "hammerless ejector game gun." The gun was built for a Mrs. Salkeld. When it was completed on July 31, 1895, it weighed 6 pounds, 4 ounces and had 27 1/2-inch Whitworth barrels that were choked cylinder and cylinder. The self-opening locks had intercepting safeties. The lock-plates were engraved with game birds and rabbits. The cover email from Purdey that transmitted the gun's history certificate also added that: "It is a particularly rare example of very early game-scene engraving"

The self-opening locks are 4.8 inches long and 1.4 inches high. Each weigh 3.5 ounces. As concisely explained by Diggory Hadoke in the February 2025 *Vintage Gun Journal*, the locks use the "power from the mainspring to push on rods, which project through the bar of the action, ending in flat ended limbs, which press on the barrel flats. As soon as the lever releases the bolts, the tension forces the gun open so effectively that it can be operated one-handed with total confidence, leaving the other hand to reach for cartridges, even as the gun is ejecting the spent shells."

Not unexpectedly, the stock's grain alignment is perfect. Visually, the contrast of the dark grain with a uniform background color is attractive. The stock has some fiddleback, but

no marbling or other figure. The inletting for the locks is as exquisite as the locks themselves. After 130 years, it remains in near-pristine condition, a testament to the quality of the wood used to stock this gun.

The engraving combines the classic rose-and-scroll pattern with game scenes. The engraving has softened some, an indicator that the gun has seen some field use.

The fact that No. 15,088 was ordered with relatively short barrels and cylinder chokes suggests that it was not intended for driven pheasant shooting or live-pigeon trap. It would, however, have been ideal for covert shooting, a purpose it still accomplishes very well.



KING EDWARD VII / STEPHEN GRANT & SONS

KING EDWARD VII reigned from 1901 to 1910. It was a period of peace, prosperity and elegance, at least among the upper classes, that is now referred to as the Edwardian Age. Perhaps best known for his personal excesses when he was Prince of Wales, as king he was popular at home and a superb diplomat abroad. In the latter, he was aided by the fact that many of the monarchs in Europe were his relatives. Among those were Kaiser William II and Czar Nicholas II, who were his nephews. The kings of Norway, Denmark and Greece were brother- or sons-in-law.

With few official responsibilities during his 59 years as Prince of Wales, he devoted much of his time to shooting. He hosted extravagant multi-day shooting parties at his Sandringham estate. These became the center of the social life of the sporting lords of the realm. Following the prince's lead, his guests hosted similar events. The result was a unique shooting culture.

Stephen Grant's association with the royal family started in 1870 when Queen Victoria placed an order for a pair of 16-bore hammer guns intended as gifts to her son. She gave him one on his 29th birthday and the other at Christmas. Four months later, Stephen Grant received his first royal warrant appointing him "Gun and Rifle Manufacturer to His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales."

Stephen Grant got his start in the London shotgun trade in 1843 working for Charles Lancaster and then Thomas Boss. He set up his own shop in 1867. In 1889, the company was re-named Stephen Grant & Sons. It still exists today as a component of the firm Atkin, Grant and Lang.



Wieland describes Grant as a "conservative gunmaker" and "a man of consummate taste and discernment ... which shows in the guns that bear his name, both hammer guns and hammerless. They are graceful, seductive guns—elegant, austere, and flawlessly made."

Grant developed a distinct style that set him apart from his contemporaries. A major element of this was his use of side-lever release mechanisms. He was not the only gunmaker building hammer guns with side-levers. But somehow, he integrated them so elegantly and ergonomically as to raise the gun's overall appearance and handling characteristics. A Stephen Grant hammer gun is recognizable even at a distance and is a joy to shoot.

When hammerless guns overtook hammer guns in popularity, Grant offered them with both side-levers and top-levers. However, a back-action side-lever 12-bore hammer gun with Damascus barrels is regarded by many to be the quintessential Stephen Grant.

Grant No. 4,946 is such a gun. It was made in 1881 as No. 2 in a pair. The gun weighs 6 pounds, 12 ounces. The length of pull is 14 3/4 inches, drop at the comb 1 5/8 inches and drop at the heel 3 inches.



There is a record of this gun in the original Stephen Grant sales ledgers, which are housed at the Atkin, Grant and Lang headquarters in St. Albans. A copy was provided without charge. Gun No. 4,946 is described as a "snap-action breech-loading centre fire 12 bore with 2-foot, 6-inch barrels." It was sold in 1881 to Ralph Sneyd, Esq. Using internet resources, the archivist made the extra effort to find the correct Ralph Sneyd, who lived in Staffordshire from 1863 to 1949.

The rebounding locks are as elegant as the whole. They are sleek (4.5 inches long and .9 inch high) and light (3.5 ounces). The round-body receiver has similar characteristics.

The stock is well-figured French or Italian walnut with a somewhat darkened original finish and enough handling marks to establish that it was both regularly used and well cared for. The inletting behind the back-action locks is as precise and well preserved as that on the Purdey. The wood-to-metal fit is perfect. This would certainly have been expected during the decades of its use. That it has remained so after 144 years can only be attributed to the high density of the wood and the drying and seasoning of the stock blank, which would have taken 10 to 12 years.

The 30 1/2-inch barrels are made of extra-fine three-rod Damascus steel finished in London brown. They are chambered for 2 3/4-inch shells, are choked improved cylinder and light modified and weigh 52 ounces.

The gun throws a pattern with 80 percent of the pellets striking above the point of aim, which is ideal for driven pheasants and live-pigeon trap. Mr. Sneyd would most certainly have been proud to take it to estate shoots. His eulogy referred to him as "a fine sportsman, a keen fisherman and expert shot." One can reasonably conclude that Stephen Grant No. 4,946 brought him happiness and was an important part of his life.



KING GEORGE V / WESTLEY RICHARDS

GEORGE V had not expected to be king. He served 15 years in the Royal Navy until his elder brother's death in 1892 put him second in line for the throne. He was crowned in 1910.

In just the first decade of his 26-year reign, he led Great Britain through World War I and the tumultuous post-war years, which saw the collapse of the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires abroad followed at home by troubles in Ireland that would lead to its partition and the founding of the Irish Republic. George V was an avid sportsman and reportedly an even better shot than Edward VII. Unlike his father, however, he used hammer guns throughout his

life and famously remarked that a gun without hammers "looks like a spaniel without ears." In 1911, George V awarded a royal warrant to Westley Richards.

No gunmaker contributed more to the development of the double barrel shotgun than Westley Richards. In 1864 it invented the first commercially successful top-lever release action and the doll's-head top-rib extension. In 1875, Westley Richards patented the Anson Deeley boxlock and improved it with two patents in 1883 and 1884. It rapidly became the industry standard throughout Europe. Its Deeley & Edge forend latch became, and still is, the most commonly used means of connecting the forend to the barrels



Westley Richards gun No. 6,309 is a 12-bore bar-in-wood sidelock. It was completed in October 1885, and was sold in August 1886 to G.E. Hickman, Esq. It weighs 6 pounds, 2 ounces.

Westley Richard's unique top-lever release action is visually distinctive. It operates by moving a top-bolt forward into the notch in the doll's-head extension. The rebounding locks are of standard Birmingham design, except they are unusually long (4.7 inches) and narrow (.95-inch). Each weigh 3.8 ounces.

The stock's perfect grain alignment imparts strength to the relatively long, thin wrist. Visually, the dark grain and fiddleback pattern is very attractive.

Wood-bar (also known as bar-in-wood) guns are not uncommon among best-guns of the era. Fitting the bar into the stock rather than the receiver saves weight and is elegant. Hadoke writes in *Hammer Guns in Theory and Practice* that his examination of wood-bar guns in good, original condition establishes that they are stronger and more durable than some might think. He writes "the quality and thickness of the wood over the bar and the expert fitting executed by men who were clearly masters of their craft proves guns of this configuration were practical as well as attractive."

The 30-inch barrels are made of fine laminated steel and weigh 44 ounces. They have 2 1/2-inch chambers and are choked cylinder and improved cylinder. The engraving is modest in design and coverage. The gun's weight, easy handling and pointability make it ideal for upland game.



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THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE HAD TWO MONARCHS BETWEEN 1870 AND 1915: CZAR ALEXANDER III AND CZAR NICHOLAS II.

THE REIGN OF ALEXANDER III began in 1881. Seeking to maximize his autocratic powers, he reversed some of the liberal reforms initiated by his father, Alexander II, who is best remembered as the Czar who freed the peasants. Alexander III's major foreign policy achievement was the 1892 formation of the Franco-Russian alliance, which would bring Russia into World War I.

Nicholas II ruled from 1894 until his abdication in 1917. Historically, he is considered to have been supportive of modest political reforms. He promoted economic modernization based on close ties to France and attracting foreign investment. Unfortunately, he took the second part of his title—Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias—too literally. Defeats suffered by the Russian military in World War I, coupled with an inability to deal with the suffering of the general population, undermined his authority. After the riots in St. Petersburg in early 1917, he abdicated the throne. In July 1918, during the Russia civil war, he and his entire family were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

AUGUST LEBEAU COURALLY

RUSSIA WAS HISTORICALLY a major market for the Belgian gunmakers of Liège. In the 1890s, competition was keen among its best gunmakers. August Lebeau Courally was one of the first Belgian gunmakers to recognize the importance of marketing and the role royal warrants could play.

Some European royals were already using his guns. The most notable was Nicholas II. By some accounts, the Czar had been exclusively shooting Lebeau Courally doubles since around 1890. Following the British model, Lebeau Courally sought and received a royal warrant from the Czar. Lebeau Courally guns were prominently displayed at the St. Petersburg Exhibition in 1897, one winning a gold medal. An obviously posed picture of Nicholas II



A LEBEAU COURALLY 12-GAUGE WITH MALLARDS TAKEN IN THE PRAIRIE POTHOLE REGION OF MANITOBA.



hunting with a pair of 20-gauge Lebeau boxlocks, signed by the Czar himself, was used in the company's catalogues.

The Lebeau Courally double shown in this section, No. 36,170, was manufactured circa 1904. A 12-gauge with 30-inch barrels, it weighs 7 pounds, 6 ounces.

This gun was clearly intended for heavy duty shooting. The receiver and barrels are secured by three bites: a double under-bolt and a top-bolt. The locks are robust and designed to be durable and reliable. They are 4.7 inches in length and 1.45 inches in height. Each weigh 3.3 ounces.

The stock is made of highly figured French walnut. The length of pull is

14 1/2 inches, the drop at comb is 1 5/8 inches and the drop at heel is 2 inches. The inletting behind the locks and the wood-to-metal fit are superb.

The engraving is in the traditional London style. Lebeau outsourced it within the Liège engraving community, which produced high-quality work.

The barrels are made of fluid steel, have 2 3/4-inch chambers and are choked full and full. They weigh 55 ounces and throw an 80/20 pattern similar to the Grant. This gun was probably intended for shooting driven birds. However, today these same characteristics make it a good duck gun.

Lebeau Courally died in 1896. At the turn of the century, the company entered into a short-lived joint venture with the Birmingham arms maker P. Webley & Sons, which primarily manufactured pistols for military and police. The intent was to market each other's products in geographic areas where each was strongest. The companies did not merge and each continued to operate independently. The design and manufacture of Lebeau Courally production in Liège did not change. However, shotguns made from around 1902 to 1906 (including the one shown here) have the name Webley—Lebeau Courally on top of the receiver. Production ended when the Germans invaded Belgium on August 4, 1914.

THE GERMAN EMPIRE

THE GERMAN EMPIRE, WHICH WAS CREATED IN 1871, CONSOLIDATED 25 PREVIOUSLY INDEPENDENT STATES, FOUR OF WHICH REMAINED KINGDOMS. THE KINGDOM OF PRUSSIA HAD THE MOST LAND, LARGEST POPULATION AND MOST POWERFUL MILITARY. THE PRUSSIAN KING BECAME THE GERMAN EMPEROR AND HELD THE DUAL TITLE OF KING AND KAISER. DURING IMPERIAL GERMANY'S SHORT LIFE, IT HAD ONLY TWO KAISERS, WILHELM I AND WILHELM II. AUGUSTUS FRIEDRICH WILHELM TIMNER WAS GUNMAKER TO THE ROYAL AND IMPERIAL COURTS OF BOTH.

KINGDOM OF SAXONY, the capital of which was Dresden, was the second most significant kingdom in the German Empire. Saxony was part of the Holy Roman Empire for centuries; it became an independent monarchy in 1806. King Albert of Saxony ruled from 1872 to 1902. During his reign, Saxony became a constitutional monarchy.

He appointed Carl Grundig gunmaker to the Royal Saxonian Court. Grundig retained the position during the reigns of Albert's successors, Kings Geog and Friedrich August III.

Kaiser Wilhelm I was King of Prussia from 1861 and German Emperor from 1871 to 1888. He is considered to have deferred on most matters of state to his famous chancellor, Prince Otto von Bismarck.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was 29 years old when crowned, had grandiose visions of the future of Germany and pursued expansionist militarist policies. Some historians credit him with being the one person most responsible for the start of World War I.

Hunting had been a major activity of the German nobility for centuries. The website germanhuntingguns.com, which is maintained by the German Gun Collectors Association (GGCA), has a substantial section on German hunting traditions, which includes an article on royal hunts and hunters.

Kaiser Wilhelm II took hunting, like many other things, to extremes. An article in the Winter 2025 issue of *Waidmannsheil*, the journal of the GGCA, shows a 1910

document that the Kaiser maintained of his personal bag over decades. On average, he killed 1,300 animals per year. Of these, 93 were various species of deer; 66 were wild boar; 696 were pheasant, partridge and grouse and 408 were hare and rabbits.

The September 2003 issue of its predecessor, *Der Waffenschmied*, contains a translated article about Kaiser Wilhelm's hunting guns from a 1913 issue of *Wild und Hund*. The Kaiser had 32 rifles and 24 shotguns in his Berlin palace (and presumably many more at his hunting lodges). Among those rarely if ever used was a matched pair of Charles Lancaster shotguns given to him by his cousin, King Edward VII. The Kaiser reportedly considered them "... on the heavy side and not very handy."

AUGUST FRIEDRICH WILHELM TIMNER

FOUR GUNMAKERS held the title of *Hofbuchsenmacher* to the Royal Court of Prussia in Berlin for some period of time in the last half of the 19th century: Wilhelm Foerster, Heinrich Barella, Heinrich Leu and J. F. Timpe. All were located in Berlin and had been providing guns to Prussian royals before formation of the German Empire.

A.F.W. Timner held the title of *Hofbuchsenmacher* to both the Royal Court of Prussian and the Imperial Court of the German Empire. He was the first and only *Hofbuchsenmacher* whose shop was not in Berlin.

Not a lot is known about Timner. His shop was located in Coblenz, an ancient city located at the confluence two international rivers, the Rhine and Moselle. In the 19th century it flourished as a center of national and international trade and commerce.

Timner was technically ingenious and creative. He held a number of patents, including one issued by the United

States. His later professional life was devoted to developing the *vierling* (four barreled gun, two rifle and two shotgun).

Not a lot is known about the game gun pictured in this article. The inscription on the rib is: *A.F.W. Timner Coblenz, Hofbuchsenmacher Sr. Maj. D. Kaisers u. Konigs*. By custom, this was done only if a gun was made for someone who worked at the court in any position, from gamekeeper to a titled cabinet minister. However, without a symbol of rank and a family crest or monogram, it is not possible to know for whom.

This gun has neither proof marks nor a serial number that might help date it. However, the water-table is stamped with a crown-over-V (Vorrat). This mark was an avenue for guns previously made to conform with the new proof rules. It also was a pathway for guns on the shelves to be compliant. From the mark, the completion date of the Timner can be definitively established as the last few months before the first German law requiring guns to be proofed came into effect on April 1, 1893.

The Timner weighs 5 pounds, 14 ounces. The receiver and locks are of the "Nimrod" design created by Suhl-gunmaker Theime & Schlegelmilch. The company was known for producing best-quality guns of its own design, and for its inventions (eight patents between 1877 and 1900).

The receiver and parts were likely forged at the Romerwerk factory in Suhl, of which Theime & Schlegelmilch was a principal or partner. The Romerwerk produced gun components for gunmakers



throughout Germany. Timmer would have received the parts in a semi-finished state. His shop would have done the finishing, hand-fitting and engraving.



As was common with fine German game guns, the stock was shaped with a cheekpiece (in this case for a right-handed shooter). The length of pull is 13 3/4 inches, drop at comb is 1 3/8 inch and drop at heel is 2 3/8 inches.

The barrels have 2 5/8-inch (65mm) chambers, are choked full and extra-full and weigh 43 ounces. They are made of extra-fine Bernard steel. Bernard steel is considered, then and now, to be among the strongest and most beautiful Damascus steel ever made. As no firm in Germany made extra-fine Damascus-steel barrels, Timmer ordered the tubes from the talented barrel-makers in Liège. The barrels would have arrived at Timmer's shop in a condition referred to as "rough bored" and not yet joined. Timmer sent them to the firm Gebruder Kelber in Suhl to be finished (as determined by its mark on the underside of the barrels).



The ornamentation on this gun is obviously of exceptional quality. The double bands bordering the breech are inlaid in gold, as is the vine pattern and the lettering on the top rib. Fine engraving covers nearly 100 percent of the receiver, sideplates and bottom metal. The pattern on the sideplates is substantially different than the deeply-carved game-scene patterns on most high-quality German shotguns. It appears to be a fusion of French and Germanic styles, perhaps inspired by the convergent cultures as well as rivers at Coblenz.

This Timmer is an American G.I. bring-back. Besides being in terrible

shape when it came up at auction a decade ago, its grip cap and metal forend tip were missing. As those would have been ornately engraved and inlaid with precious metals, the German owner in 1945 most likely removed them before turning the gun over to the Americans. Their absence diminishes the character of the gun somewhat, and also takes away the means to possibly identify the person for whom it was made.

Nevertheless, it does not diminish its hunting effectiveness. It has proven exceptionally versatile in the field, harvesting grouse, pheasant and ducks on a single hunting trip.

CARL GRUNDIG

In 1876, after a long apprenticeship, Carl Grundig was awarded the title of *Buchsenmachermeister* (Master Gun Maker) by the German Gunmakers Guild. Shortly thereafter, he opened a shop in Dresden. Dresden was the capital and Crown City of Saxony. It was also rich and prosperous.

Although Grundig paid for it, the title *Königlich Sächsischer Hofbüchsenmacher* was his ticket to mix with the city's nobles and rich merchant class. One does not necessarily expect a gunsmith to have the social and political skills to be good at that, but he apparently did and developed a prominent clientele.



After Grundig's death in 1913, his two sons carried on. Their guns can be distinguished from his in that they are not engraved with his title. After the war, they transformed the business into a successful retail gun store. It existed until Dresden was near-totally destroyed by British and American bombers in February 1945.

Grundig No. 13,979 is a 20-gauge back-action hammer gun. It weighs 5 pounds, 8 ounces. It is also a G.I. bring-back.

The locks each weigh 3.1 ounces. The lock plate is 4.5 inches long and 1.35 inches high. What is especially interesting about this lock is how petite the components are.



A CARL GRUNDIG 20-GAUGE WITH SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN THE CHARLES M. RUSSELL NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE.



The stock is made of nicely grained Italian walnut that swirls over the cheek piece. Its length of pull is 13 5/8 inches, the drop at comb is 1 1/2 inches and the drop at heel is 2 3/4 inches. The gun is fitted with the hardware for a sling, which is common with German hunting guns.

The barrels are made of fluid steel. They are 29 inches long, have 2 1/2-inch chambers and are choked light modified and improved modified.

The style of the engraving on the top of the receiver and bottom metal is classic Germanic. The sideplates are engraved with pictures of flushing partridge, scurrying rabbits, flushing ducks and a running deer. The deer is symbolic and common, however, one might be skeptical about a 5 1/2-pound 20-gauge being used to hunt ducks. Nevertheless, this gun has harvested ducks around prairie potholes in the American West in settings not too dissimilar to the game scene engraved on the gun. ■

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