

Boss & Co. The best London guns, with a Scottish history

John Robertson, arguably the most famous of the Boss & Co forefathers, was a proud Scotsman born in Haddington, East Lothian. We explore how Scottish heritage shaped the most famous of London Gunmakers.



John Robertson at gunmaker's vice. Circa 1805

Boss & Co, a name so highly regarded it has become the gun of choice for those seeking the very best money can buy. Thomas Boss was the name behind the company, Boss being a common surname in the 12th and 13th centuries, but while Thomas is rightly credited with the foundation of Boss, in this story we will concentrate on a Scotsman called John Robertson.

John's father, John Ireland Robertson founded his own gunmaking business in Haddington, East Lothian in 1830, situated at 1 Hardgate, an address that still exists and the building remains largely unchanged. Robertson senior had a reputation as a master gunmaker who made guns with incredible accuracy and precision and, according to the Donald Dallas book 'Boss & Co Best Gunmakers', Robertson was also the first to fit a telescopic sight atop a rifle during the 1830s.

In 1839 John Ireland Robertson and Jean Dudgeon had their third son, christening him John Robertson, a child who would later become the owner of Boss & Co. As he grew, John was immersed in his father's renowned and highly-regarded gunmaking business where he learnt his own craft under the direction of his father.

In 1858 Robertson made the decision to leave Haddington for Manchester to join gunmaker Whitworth. This decision was taken for a number of reasons, one being the fact that his father's gun business was seeing a steady decline, as provincial demand for guns waned. The second was a feeling that he had to move South to be at the forefront of the gun trade, despite there being a number of highly-regarded Scottish gunmakers at that time.



Workbench at the Boss & Co factory, London

After 4 years at Whitworth, where he gained a huge amount of experience in gun and rifle manufacturing, Robertson left Manchester in 1862, moving further south to Westley Richards in Birmingham. Robertson spent a short 2 years in Birmingham, his interest captured by their development of breech-loaders, but the lure of London was too tempting to ignore.

1864 saw Robertson finally make the move to London where he found work for James Purdey. At the time Purdey, like Boss, produced high quality guns and welcomed skilled journeymen like Robertson. During his 9 years at the company he became the right-hand man of James Purdey, a position that afforded him the opportunity to develop his skills in business leadership while continuing to be a hands-on gunmaker.

After many years as an in-demand journeyman, he longed to run a business of his own where he could unleash his knowledge and skills while feeding his never-ending passion for innovation. In 1873, aged 34, he went his own way and rented premises in London where, rather than create his own brand, he used his reputation to gain work as an outworker for the leading gunmakers of the time. Unsurprisingly his reputation and experience meant he was soon working for most of the leading gun manufacturers of the time, and his business expanded rapidly.

Across London Boss & Co was being run by Edward Paddison, a nephew of Thomas Boss who apprenticed to Boss in 1838 and

owned the company from 1872. In 1890 he sought a partner to help reinvigorate the company as he had aged and found managing the business a struggle. Robertson has long-supplied skilled work to Boss and had sent plenty of large bills, some of which remained unpaid. Having had first-hand experience of his work, Paddison had little hesitation in offering Robertson a half-share in Boss. The deal would see outstanding debts cleared, leaving a sum of £600 to be paid by Robertson to complete the deal.

Upon the death of Paddison in 1891 his half share was passed to a nephew who had little interest in anything other than drawing his share of profits. Eventually, in 1893, Robertson bought out the other half share and became the sole owner of Boss, having had to re-mortgage his home to release the required funds. Boss & Co was now, finally, under his sole control.

Robertson maintained his trade business alongside Boss & Co, but soon the Boss business expanded rapidly. This expansion was accredited to his new approach and innovations at Boss attracting more interest and more sales. To cope, many staff had to move from the trade business across to Boss to keep up with the increased demand Robertson had attracted.

Before his ownership Paddison had continued to make guns in the same way he had done for years, with reliability taking the lead over style. Robertson changed that almost

Air Rifle shooting with a disability

By Davie "Barndoor" Scott



Scottish air rifle clubs have many members with disabilities as members and facilities are constantly being upgraded. A fine example is Cloybank APRC near Cumbernauld which has taken the following steps to help shooters with mobility problems. They have installed wider doors on all their ranges and have installed low thresholds to each door. Hanging shooting benches are installed which allow wheelchair users to get a proper shooting position as there is nothing below

the bench to get in the way and blue badge holders car parking is available both at the range and at the cafe.

They even have a shuttle service from the cafe to the range if required and trained instructors and safety officers are available should anyone need help getting their gear in from their cars.

Shooting with a physical disability is often very possible to do with the right help and no matter if you just want to have a quiet day shooting or take part in competitive shooting you will be made very welcome. You will of course be subject to the usual laughs and banter and apart from being helped with equipment that you may need you will be treated the same as every other member. You will not be treated as "special" and that's the way it should be.

Not all disabilities are physical and trained instructors are available to help in all circumstances and you can have a great day out and perhaps find a new sport that you can compete in or just enjoy.

Give it a go. You never know! You might just turn out to be the new Commonwealth or Olympic champion. At the very least you will have a great day out.





Boss & Co continue to make Best Guns by hand in London

immediately and set about streamlining their guns, adding grace, shape and form with no loss of reliability. This desire for visual appeal led to him designing

the Boss Hammerless Ejector in 1897, a mechanism that had beauty as well as reliability and is an action still in use at Boss to this very day. The invention of

the Hammerless Ejector led Boss to be known as the racehorse of best guns, their sleek appearance giving similarity to the lines of a muscled thoroughbred horse.

The lithe beauty and form of the Boss Ejector allowed Robertson to create the now world-famous Boss Over and Under gun in 1909. Robertson did not invent the O/U



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A completed pair of Boss guns presented in bespoke gun case

but he created an Over and Under gun that was elegant, shapely, strong and far lighter than any other on the market. Immediately it set the standard and became the benchmark, a celebrated design that remains unsurpassed. So good, the Boss O/U is one of the most copied gun designs in history, but nobody builds one better than Boss.

Robertson is also credited with the invention of the first reliable single-trigger in 1893, an invention that enabled both barrels to be fired with one trigger, rather than the more commonplace two. Robertson had studied the single trigger since 1890 and defied press and customers alike who said it couldn't be done with the required reliability. Not only did he show a working double-trigger, that he allowed media and customers to fire, he also built a triple-barrel gun to further demonstrate the effectiveness of the single-trigger. Once again, it fired perfectly during a non-stop test. The single-trigger was produced from that day forwards and has since been heralded as the last development of importance in modern guns.

Boss now had more to offer than ever before, reliability and quality mixed with innovation and style. A winning combination that would set Boss on a fast-track to be the very best, setting a standard the company would follow for years to come.

Today Boss is owned by Arthur DeMoulas, a man we featured in a previous issue when he shared with us his love of Scotland. DeMoulas has a strong connection to our country, regularly to be found

on hills and moors partaking in shoots but also through his strong association to Scotland through Boss. While Boss are known as Builders of Best Guns Only, the best gun being a London gun, it was a Scotsman who elevated Boss to be the best in the world.

DeMoulas is a man who understands the importance of history and the value of heritage and is as determined and driven as Robertson was to see Boss become innovators and pioneers once again. Long before his acquisition of the company, DeMoulas was a Boss passionate having fallen in love with the guns, the story and the quiet progress they had made for over 200 years. His desire to own the company was born of a longing to see Boss run as it should be and to recreate the excitement of the 20s and 30s heydays.

Today at Boss, each skilled worker is inspired by the legacy of the great men that went before them, DeMoulas leading and reigniting a strong passion for the company and the guns they produce. They are, once more, a gunmaker that is open for business, where off-the-peg is not available but bespoke, unique guns are in production. Each Boss is created using traditional methods and truly handmade construction, fast becoming a rarity with the increased popularity of machine-made guns even at the top of the market.

With such an illustrious history to look back on, Boss are able to reintroduce actions that have not been seen since the 20s. They are able to remanufacture a gun that was built in the past as



The "Year of the Gamekeeper 2020" is a multi-organisational initiative which aims to raise the profile of gamekeepers and celebrate their unique position as custodians of the countryside as well as support and sustain the long term future of the Gamekeepers' Welfare Trust.

Following on from "Raising the Game" which continues to encourage keepers, stalkers and ghillies and their families to consider their own physical and mental health, talk and support for those who are struggling. Stag Training courses and mentoring, are amongst the projects which are aimed to encourage everyone think about their own situation, their resilience and increase communication in their professional and personal lives.

Gamekeepers, stalkers and employers are in a unique position, very often in being able to create interesting ways of raising funds for charities and causes close to their hearts. These include clay shoots, simulated game, social evenings etc. We hope

that in 2020 you may consider doing one thing for GWT – whatever that may be.

Our ability to support gamekeepers, stalkers, ghillies and their families– past, present and in the years to come depends on a sustainable future. We hope you can help us to achieve our aims to build on the support we can offer and celebrate who and what we represent. Thank you.

To demonstrate our own commitment CEO Helen Benson is undertaking her own GWT Royal Challenge in April 2020 which sets off from the Castle of Mey down to Braemar and on to Holyrood and on to Wales, Cornwall and finishing at Sandringham. This is over 1500 miles and will be undertaken in every type of transport gamekeepers and stalkers have used over the years from boots to bicycle to pony, quad, landrover and argo! Please help us to help our gamekeepers, stalkers and ghillies. Scotland's rural future depends on them.

justgiving.com/campaign/GWTYOTG2020

www.thegamekeeperswelfaretrust.com
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Tel: 01677 470180

Boss & Co.

a one-off. They can create fully bespoke guns for clients as their gunmakers have the rare skills needed to create any element from raw metal. We today, like our ancestors, can walk into Boss & Co Gunmakers and feel the history in the room. We can order a bespoke handmade gun that will be built with love by craftsmen devoid of the distractions corporate ownership can bring. They are in the business of making guns, nothing else, and have a desire to make their forefathers, the likes of Boss, Paddison and Robertson proud.

When you next walk the moors, or towns of Scotland think of this story. You may or may not own a Boss gun, but it is here in Scotland that John Robertson, the man who made Boss what it is today, was born. A best gun will always be a London gun, but the best guns in the world carry a piece of Scottish history within them.



An example of the intricate artistry offered by Boss master engravers



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