

IN THE GUNROOM

A WEDDING PRESENT FROM JAMES PURDEY

By Donald Dallas

It is certainly not very commonplace to receive a brand new Purdey shotgun as a gift; I am sure we can only dream of this as it would take a very special friendship or relationship for this to happen.

But what if the date is 1883 and you are about to marry James Purdey's daughter? What better wedding present could you have than a Purdey best gun gifted to you by your future father-in-law, James Purdey the Younger.

James Purdey the Younger, born in 1828 was given full control of the business on 1st January 1858 by his father James Purdey the Elder (1784-1863). His father was then aged 73, his son James aged 29 and it was deemed a sensible arrangement to secure the future of the firm. It would be James Purdey the Younger who would patent in 1863 one of the most famous gun patents of all time, the Purdey bolt, the standard closing mechanism on most guns.

On the 19th March 1851 young James married Caroline Thomas and as was the norm at this time, they went on to raise a large family of seven children. Their fifth child, Constance Julia Purdey was born on the 28th December 1863 at the family home, 1 Manchester Square in London. In her late teens Constance met a Swedish gentleman in London by the name of Carl Svedberg. Romance blossomed and they were married on the 30th June 1883 when Caroline was nineteen years old.

Carl Svedberg was involved in the Swedish iron trade and there must have been some connection with the Purdey gunmaking business for Constance to have met him. The 1881 census lists him as an "Ironmonger Merchant" living at 58 Charlotte Street, London. He was obviously affluent as after their marriage they lived at the prestigious address of 17 Lansdowne Crescent and employed five servants.

It would be interesting to speculate why James Purdey decided to give him the very generous gift of an expensive best gun. Did he genuinely like him, did he want to forge links with the Swedish iron trade or did he give his other sons-in-law similar presents? Whatever the reason it was quite an honour to be given such a personal wedding gift.

The gun given to Carl Svedberg by James Purdey still survives and is on offer in this sale in lot 1414. It is a 12 bore sidelock non-ejector no. 11684. The entry in the Purdey Dimensions Books for this gun is particularly interesting as it records "C Svedberg per Mr. Purdey". How daunting must it have been for the Purdey gunmakers knowing that James Purdey personally ordered this gun and no doubt would cast a critical look over it before he presented it to his future son-in-law.

The escutcheon is in gold and was engraved specially to mark the occasion "June 30th, C.S. From J.P. 1883". What a wonderful present to have been given – a best gun by the most famous gun manufacturer in Great Britain as a personal present on the occasion of your marriage to his daughter.

This 1883 Purdey is built on the Beesley self-opening action patented by Frederick Beesley in patent no 81 of 3rd January 1880. Beesley was an ex Purdey stocker and Purdey bought his patent the day before the patent was published. Since this date Purdey have used this action on all their hammerless guns.

This gun is a non-ejector as the true Purdey ejector, invented by one of their gunmakers William Wem, was not patented until 29th February 1888. Carl Svedberg's gun is one of the first to be fitted with Whitworth fluid compressed steel barrels. Sir Joseph Whitworth had invented fluid compressed steel in the 1870s and this metal was proportionately stronger than Damascus. Purdey were the first gunmakers to use Whitworth steel and the first recorded use of this metal in the Dimensions Books is in 1878. It was more expensive than Damascus and consequently was only used on best guns.

The gun also employs the Purdey "Third Fastening", an additional short bolt to lock the breech above the extractors. This was patented in patent no 397 of 30th January 1878 and again it was only used on best guns, rifles, pigeon guns and the like.

A lovely little touch that Purdey added in the 1880s were delicately chiselled fern leaves on the fences that gave such guns a very distinctive look. The Svedberg gun sports such fences.

Carl Svedberg must have been very pleased with his wedding present from his illustrious father-in-law. A best gun from the owner of the best gunmaker. Provenance is everything in the gun world and in lot 1414 it doesn't get better than this.



James Purdey the Younger in 1895