

# IN THE GUNROOM

ONE OF ONLY ELEVEN

**BOSS DOUBLE RIFLE NO. 4679**  
(Lot No. 1229. Please see page 160)

By Donald Dallas

What do you think of when you hear the name John Dickson & Son? – the round action; Alexander Henry? – double and falling block rifles; James Woodward & Sons? – side-by-side and over and under guns; Alex Martin? – ribless shotguns.

Boss & Co.? What does that name mean to you? – superb quality side-by-side guns, over and under guns and single triggers; you certainly don't think of double rifles as the firm specialised in sporting guns. Yet very occasionally, Boss & Co. built hammerless ejector double rifles, albeit in tiny numbers and during the research for my book *Boss & Co. Builders Of Best Guns Only* I encountered only eleven such rifles in their ledgers.

To put this into perspective, Boss & Co. have built around 4000 hammerless ejector guns since their introduction in the early 1890s, hence any one of these eleven double rifles is a rare beast indeed. As their logo states, Boss & Co. are "Builders Of Best Guns Only."

I received a call from Chris Beaumont at Holts the other month telling me that one of these ultra rare Boss double rifles was due to appear at auction and my mouth duly dropped as I had only ever seen one before. It is certainly a very rare event for one to surface.



An advertisement c1900 promoting Boss & Co's speciality, single trigger guns.

During the year 1812, Thomas Boss completed his apprenticeship with Joseph Manton and shortly afterwards, around the year 1816, set himself up in business as a gun and truss manufacturer at 3 Bridge Road, Lambeth in London. (trusses utilised very powerful springs hence the connection with gunmakers). After various changes of address, he moved in 1837 to St James's Street, the address that is synonymous with Boss, remaining there until 1908.

Right from the start, Thomas Boss concentrated in two areas; firstly guns of the highest quality and secondly sporting gun manufacture. A small number of double muzzle-loading rifles were built (31 out of around 1100 muzzle-loaders) but the main area of specialisation was top quality shotguns.

After Thomas Boss's death in 1857, Stephen Grant became managing partner and after his departure in 1866, Boss's nephew Edward Paddison ran the firm until 1891. Again Boss continued down the line building best sporting guns in the breech-loading era and very few rifles were built.

When Boss & Co. were bought by John Robertson in 1891 the practice continued and he designed a new beautiful hammerless gun along with their renowned over and under gun and if anything, rifle manufacture diminished. Boss & Co. were and are Builders Of Best Guns Only.

However, very occasionally loyal customers would not go to Holland & Holland or Rigby, they would remain with Boss to order a new double rifle. Such instances are very rare to the extent that only eleven double side-by-side hammerless ejector rifles have been built from the 1890s to the present day.

Chris sent me the photos of double hammerless ejector rifle no. 4679, one of the eleven, and what immediately struck me about it was how elegant it looked – just like one of Boss & Co's handsome shotguns. It has often been said that Boss guns are like racehorses, elegant and slender yet exuding great style. No. 4679 certainly qualified on all counts.

No. 4679 is a double hammerless ejector .303 stalking rifle with single trigger ordered on the 17th October 1898 by Major T.F. Brinckman. Theodore Francis Brinckman (later Sir) was born on the 28th May 1862, the eldest son of the 2nd Baronet and Lady Cecilia. He was educated at Eton and Sandhurst where he was a Lieutenant in the Household Cavalry. He served in the Boer War 1900-1902, was mentioned in dispatches twice and by 1902 was a Lt. Colonel commanding the 3rd Battalion, The Buffs. From 1908 he was made Honorary Colonel in the Special Reserve of his regiment and served in World War One. In 1905 he succeeded to become the 3rd Baronet.

He resided around the time he ordered the Boss double rifle in London at 34 Grosvenor Street and he also owned 2500 acres at Nairnside near Inverness, no doubt the location that he intended to use no. 4679. If you want to ask him anything about the rifle his telephone number is Mayfair 6166 but that is a 1920 number and might be out of date! Sir Theodore F. Brinckman died on the 8th September 1937.

With the adoption of the Lee Metford rifle in calibre .303 in the late 1880s, .303 became a very popular commercial calibre with several makers building such rifles. With its rimmed cartridges it was the ideal double rifle for deer stalking in its day and ammunition was easy and plentiful to come by.



John Robertson around the time he bought Boss & Co. in 1891.

As for the rifle itself, it is very typical Boss in all respects. Whenever John Robertson bought Boss & Co in 1891, he set about re-designing their hammerless gun and he managed to achieve a near perfect look of supremely elegant lines, yet powerful and purposeful. Boss & Co's guns are quite distinctive with their racy lines and it is easy to understand why they are so sought after today.

Boss & Co. are unique amongst British gunmakers in that they have produced one quality only right from the early days of Thomas Boss, the best and in conjunction with their racy lines, superlatives have always abounded in any discussion on Boss guns.

One very important factor in creating the style and quality of the Boss gun was in their continuous use of Sumner engraving right from the earliest days until 1939. There were four generations of Sumner engravers, all confusingly with the Christian name John. The first John Sumner was born in 1806, the second in 1835, the third in 1859 and the fourth in 1886.

John Sumner (1) began the engraving business around 1837 at 10 Queen Street, Soho and it was to him that Thomas Boss went for his guns to be engraved. Boss continued to use the various generations of Sumners but it is to John James Sumner (3) 1859-1909 that credit must go to for creating the very distinctive and beautiful rose and scroll engraving that instantly identifies the Boss gun. Whenever John Robertson acquired Boss & Co. in 1891, aesthetic considerations were equally important to



Jack Sumner (4) 1886-1959 who engraved all the Boss guns in the inter war period until 1939. A photograph taken at Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight 1935.

mechanical perfection and he was determined to create a particular Boss engraving style.

In discussion with John Robertson, John Sumner (3) created the highly distinctive engraving style that is so Boss; he engraved on the lockplates five bouquets of roses set within a framework of scroll engraving. Such a prolific use of rose bouquets gave the lock a rich elegance, yet restrained and delicate. Sumner engraving is of the highest quality and coupled with the elegant design, this engraving was a major factor in the success of the Boss gun. Just look at the engraving on double rifle no. 4679 engraved by John Sumner (3).

Unusually for a double rifle, no. 4679 has the Boss single trigger patented in 1894. John Robertson regarded it as so reliable that he demonstrated it to the sporting press in 1896 with trigger pulls down to 1lb and also on a double 4 bore rifle.

Take a close look at Boss double rifle no. 4679, one of only eleven built. Admire its style and elegance as it is highly unlikely you will see another one for a considerable length of time.