

IN THE FIELD

JULY 2026

By Sir Johnny Scott Bt.

THE MIDWOOD PURDEY'S

Lot 1352 in Holt's Fine Modern and Antique Guns sale on 29th July is the pair of Purdey twelve bore hammerless sidelock ejectors, no. 21397/8, with the usual Purdey fine acanthus scroll engraving, in their brass -cornered oak and leather case with canvas outer. The guns were commissioned by W.H. Midwood, a prosperous Liverpool cotton broker, as a twenty-first birthday present for his son Ralph and completed in October 1916. Three months later, 2138 was returned to Purdey to have new barrels made, the first having been damaged when Ralph apparently attempted to shoot a salmon. Either this youthful indiscretion amused Atholl Purdey, or W.H. Midwood was a very good customer, but records show that the new barrels were made and fitted made free of charge.

In 1919, W.H. Midwood bought the 20,000 acre Syre Estate in Sutherland from the Duke, including the whole River Naver, all the lodges, Bettyhill village with its hotel and Loch Naver. The epitome of a Highland sporting estate, with its beats on the finest salmon river in the world, stag and hind stalking, woodcock shooting and walked up grouse - in 1927, two parties shooting over setters shot 1200 brace - Syre would have been a paradise to Ralph and his younger brother, Eric. Their father was a keen hunting man and turfite, who was Master of the Cheshire Hounds from 1923 until 1931, during the golden age of foxhunting and bought the gelding, Shaun Gollin for 1,250 guineas, which won the 1930 Grand National at odds of 100-8. This horse remains unique among winners of the Grand National in having an unknown sire.

Foaled in 1920, at Major Edwards' stud in Tipperary, Shaun Gollin's dam, Golden Day, had been in a paddock next to another containing three uncut colts, one of which jumped the fence and served the mare. Edwards always maintained the culprit's name was Shaun Abu, but officially Shaun Gollin was registered as "sire unknown" and sold as a two-year old for just 22 guineas to the equestrienne, Joan de Sales La Terriere of Kiltinan Castle. He developed into a superb jumper and was re-sold as a five-year old to the trainer, Jack Widger for 500 guineas. Midwood sent Shaun Gollin to be trained under the Irish jockey-turned-trainer, Frank Hartigan at his stables in Weyhill, Hampshire. The Irish jockey, Tommy Cullinan rode him on the great day at the end of March 1930 and Shaun Gollin, who always refused his food when he was away from home, had only eaten an apple just before the race. Nevertheless, out of a field of 41 starters, only five remained on the final straight and Shaun Gollin won by a shortest of heads. A delighted Midwood is reputed to have given Cullinan a cheque for a £1000.

Ralph Midwood was a first rate shot and racehorse owner, who bought Rookery Hall, the Georgian style mansion near Worleston in Cheshire and built up an



Sir (Walter) John Scott, Bt. MFH

Sir Johnny (as he is better known) is an author, natural historian, broadcaster, columnist, countryside campaigner, artisan snuff manufacturer and retired hill farmer.

He wrote and co-presented the BBC2 series *Clarissa and the Countryman* with Clarissa Dickson Wright. He writes for a variety of magazines and periodicals on field sports, food, farming, travel, history and rural affairs.

A lifetime devotee of the countryside and its sports, he is currently:

- Joint Master, The North Pennine Hunt
- Regional Director, Vote OK.
- President, The Gamekeepers Welfare Trust.
- President, The Tay Valley Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Newcastle Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Association of Working Lurchers / Longdogs.
- Centenary Patron and Honorary Life Member, British Association for Shooting and Conservation.
- Patron, The Sporting Lucas Terrier Association.
- Patron, The Wildlife Ark Trust.
- Patron, The National Organisation of Beaters and Pickers Up.
- Board member, The European Squirrel Initiative.

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extensive stud. He died in 1969 and the Purdey's were inherited by his son David, a Grenadier and keen shot, who farmed in Suffolk near Newmarket. In the early eighties, he was introduced to greyhound coursing under National Coursing Club Rules by his friend, Sir Mark Prescott, the Newmarket trainer and became involved with the South of England Coursing Club. Later, he was elected to the Waterloo Cup Committee, eventually becoming chairman and in office in 2005, when the Hunting Act 2004, that monument to envy, ignorance and spite came into force and the last Cup was run. The three-day Waterloo Cup "the blue riband of the leash", held on the Altcar marshes north of Liverpool, was started in 1836 by the William Lynn, the proprietor of the Waterloo Hotel in Liverpool. The first Cup drew such a phenomenal number of spectators, that Lynn organised a steeplechase meeting the following year to provide extra entertainment for the crowds attending the Cup. Since 1839, Lynn's Grand Liverpool Steeplechase, has been known as the Grand National.

Coursing Under Rules, the only field sport where the object was not to kill the quarry, had a history and ethos dating back over a thousand years to the ancient Greeks. In AD 116 the historian Arrian wrote "The true sports-men does not take out his dogs to destroy the hares, but for the sake of the course and the contest between the dogs and the hares, and he is glad to see the hare escape" In 2025, David Midwood and Charles Blanning, Keeper of Stud Book of the National Coursing Club, were responsible for creating The Virtual Coursing Museum, a visual history of coursing, which I recommend to anyone interested in our diminishing rural cultural and her-itage.

After a hundred and ten years in the same family, David decided it was time for someone else to enjoy these lovely guns, built in the great days of gun-smithing. If only they could speak, what stories they could tell of great shoots, such as Six Mile Bottom, Drumlanrig, Kings Walden and the woodcock and grouse shooting at Syre.



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