



## Joseph Manton IS BACK

One of the most revered names in the history of gunmaking is returning, and **Will Hetherington** meets the men behind the groundbreaking new business.

The stunning sidelock side-by-side is one of four guns, including one triple-barrel design, which will be available in the new Manton range.

Opposite page: Joseph Manton is widely considered to be the godfather of British gunmaking.

**A**mong the pantheon of great British gunmakers there are few names which elicit more immediate respect among the cognoscenti than Joseph Manton. This famous son of Grantham in Lincolnshire (what is it about this market town that also gave us Sir Isaac Newton and Baroness Margaret Thatcher?) lived from 1766 to 1835 and in that time made a seismic impact on the gunmaking world.

The name may not be as universally famous today as some other London marques, but both James Purdey and Thomas Boss worked for Manton before they went on to found their own empires. Manton was undoubtedly the godfather of modern British gunmaking and this mentoring role is just one of the many reasons he is held in so much respect. In his book

*British Gunmakers*, Nigel Brown says: "Joseph Manton was unquestionably one of the most inventive brains in the firearms field of his period." And the equally revered Colonel Hawker (sporting pioneer and scribe) was responsible for Manton's epitaph, which read: "... an everlasting monument to his unrivalled genius is already established in every quarter of the globe, by his celebrity as the greatest artist in firearms that ever the world produced, as the founder and the father of the modern gun trade..."

Joseph Manton is widely credited for the transformation of the London gun trade from what James Purdey described as a "parcel of blacksmiths" into the producers of the most famous, functional and beautiful sporting firearms the world has seen. He's some act to follow...

### The modern day

So can you imagine my intrigue as I drove to Suffolk to meet the three men who are bringing his name back to the market with a range of new Joseph Manton London guns. Who would be brave enough to take on such a daunting challenge? Is it genius or lunacy? Was I

having my leg pulled? To avoid further suspense the answer to the last question is an extremely firm negative.

Geoff Walker, Ian Spencer and Dick Casleton are three British men with the deepest of respect for our great gunmaking heritage, and a passion for shooting. They also have, respectively, the

money, the marketing expertise and the technical know-how to form a rather effective triumvirate in this field.

Walker sold his London financial services business in 2004 and, looking for a different market to deal in, decided to build on his existing love of flintlock firearms to become a collector and dealer of some of the most beautiful duelling pistols you are ever likely to see. And it's not just duelling pistols. In the collection at the moment there is also a Henry Nock seven-barrel volley gun (made famous by Sergeant Harper in Bernard Cornwell's *Sharpe* novels and TV programmes) from 1780 and a very rare bullion-protection blunderbuss. And there are many more stunning testaments to ingenious gunmaking and our bloody history, which make the mind boggle. I could have spent all day among that collection, investigating



The three men behind the new Joseph Manton London marque, from left; Ian Spencer, Dick Casleton & Geoff Walker.





“Our simple aim is to re-establish Manton as the ultimate expression of London gunmaking excellence.”

the stories these remarkable historical pieces could tell.

But the collection has another purpose in the context of the rebirth of the Manton name. It gives the whole project added credence. Once you have set eyes on these guns you cannot doubt the sincerity of the men behind it. Make no mistake, this team has the deepest of appreciations for our sporting heritage.

### The reformation

Combine this shared passion for the great names of the past, a love of shooting and the fact all three live very close to each other, near Sudbury,

and they appear to be something of a dream team. Spencer brings a wealth of marketing and advertising knowledge, while Casleton is a retired engineer with a lifelong love of gunmaking: “I like the combination of the artistic and the functional elements in the building of these beautiful guns. I find the whole area fascinating.”

What Casleton also brought to the partnership was the Joseph Manton name: “It came up about 15 years ago when the company went into liquidation. I checked with the patent office and bought the trademark from them. I have used a pair of Joseph

Mantons for most of my shooting so I had a vested interest.”

So with the name in the bag and the seeds of an idea sown, one thing led to another and on August 20, 2010 the new company of Joseph Manton (London) Ltd was formed and it was time to start making guns...

### Embracing technology

Casleton was instrumental in the design of the new guns and worked closely with some of the best outworkers in the British trade today. Using specific computer design software they were able to carefully tailor each model

in the four-gun range to their exact requirements. As Ian Spencer said: “Joseph Manton was a pioneer. He would have been the first to embrace technology and to exploit the potential of advanced machine tools. For this reason we have no hesitation in using them in our quest for engineering perfection. However, we also know precisely where cutting edge technology ends and the craftsman’s eyes, hands and experience take over.”

### The new range

First up is the Legend, a sidelock, side-by-side with straight hand stock and



Above: The new sidelock will come complete with case and a price tag of around £50,000.

Left: An original Joseph Manton flintlock.

double triggers, which I was privileged to handle in the presence of the team. This was the 20 bore, 28 inch barrel version, but other bores and barrel lengths can be made on request. Weighing 6.4lbs, not only is it a work of engineering genius, it is also stunningly beautiful. And to add an extra frisson of excitement, as you turn the gun over in your hands the eyes are drawn to serial number 11,501, carrying on from where Joseph Manton left off. I confess my heart skipped a beat when I saw this stamp of confirmation that this is the genuine rebirth of one of our most significant gunmaking names.

Also in the final stages of production at the moment is the Signature, an elegant bar-in-wood model, weighing 6.35lbs. This gun will be available for viewing from July this year and promises to be equally as beautiful as the Legend. Third in the range is a classic over-under – a nod to Manton’s innovative mind and a welcome addition for those who prefer this barrel alignment.

The fourth and most intriguing of all is the triple-barrel shotgun. Yes, the triple-barrel shotgun! With two sidelocks and the third lock on the trigger plate, it will operate with a single trigger firing the right, left and then the bottom barrel. Geoff Walker, who has a particular passion for three-barrelled (and more) guns, said: “With the gun broken over your arm it will look like

a lovely English side-by-side, and to the neighbour on the next peg it will appear to be a delightfully crafted over-under. However, instead of fumbling for another cartridge as the best bird of the drive appears over your head after you’ve fired two shots, you will have another opportunity to impress!”

I was also lucky enough to handle this remarkable gun in the white and I was bowled over by its audacity, elegance and balance. It might not be everyone’s cup of tea but it’s something very special indeed.

### Coming to the market

Available for viewing now, the side-by-side sidelock carries a price tag of approximately £50,000 and this reflects the commitment to using the very best steel, wood and gunmakers available. Ian Spencer said: “Our simple aim is to re-establish Joseph Manton as the ultimate expression of London gunmaking excellence.”

From what I have seen, the first stage of this journey has been completed and the results are jaw-droppingly beautiful. I can hardly wait for the next chapter in this story of three men who turned a dream into a reality. 🦅

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