

In the style

How Andrew Harvison's vision has established Holloway & Naughton as a serious name in gunmaking.

Practically all of our famous gunmaking names have been around for a very long time. They are substantial, well respected companies, but they were each a vision of one man. James Purdey, Henry Holland and Edwin Churchill all laid their own particular foundations of what was to follow.

So perhaps it will come as no surprise when the latest English gun is launched at the October Tackle & Guns Show at Stoneleigh it will have been made by their modern day equivalent. For the new Holloway & Naughton trigger plate over-under is very much one man's baby, and a very pretty one at that.

Andrew Harvison will have good cause for pride in his achievement which in some ways is a culmination of the decision he took in 1992 when he set out on the road to becoming a respected gunmaker. Though in fairness his work has already been vindicated when his sporting clays gun won the 2006 Highly Commended Best New Gun Award from the shooting sports industry.

Up until now he has focused his work on classic sidelock over-unders, which sell for £50,000 upwards. But his new trigger plate model is half of that price, and weighing in at 7½ lb is clearly aimed at the keen game shot who enjoys a few clays from time to time.

Born in 1947 on the Isle of Arran, Andrew spent seven idyllic years of his childhood on the island until moving to Leicester. His father had

spent 25 years in the Royal Navy and was in the Middle East when the war broke. "He had a very hard war in which he was sunk four times" Andrew explained "and by 1942 he was in the Mediterranean for the siege of Malta. As chief petty officer but suffering from poor eyesight, he became the sick bay doctor. The ship was hammered coming out of Crete with 200 killed, a huge number badly injured and just father and one orderly to look after them, for which he was highly decorated.

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"He was then posted to Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre, where after four weeks he met my mother – they were married six months later. Following the war he worked as a customs officer on the west coast of Scotland."

He was originally from the Leicester area and through a set of coincidences the family moved there. "He went into the knitwear industry and set up his own business which he ran successfully before retiring back to Arran."

Arran was to have a big influence on Andrew's life. "Father was a keen shot and fisherman, and I cannot remember a time when I didn't have a fishing rod and gun. Initially it was an airgun, then a Belgian folding .410 with which at seven I shot my first pheasant. In fact, not so much shot as ambushed – I had stalked it all afternoon, then crept up on it on the opposite side of a

of past masters

stone wall, and leapt up and shot at virtually point blank range. But father taught me early on of the value of accuracy. He gave me my first two cartridges, and told me that if I shot something then he would give me two more. It didn't take long to work out that if I shot successfully with the first barrel, then I was then up to three cartridges."

At school in Leicester he had a couple of very good friends who were as keen on shooting as himself. "At 16 I bought an AYA 12 bore side-by-side and we did a lot of rough shooting, before the next year discovering wildfowling on the Wash - we also used to holiday on Arran, where it was shooting, fishing and sailing. Great, great times."

He had also by now started shooting clays and at a bigger competition locally he saw a couple of top shots using Browning B25 over-unders.

This was clearly the gun for the job, so he bought a Browning B1 30" and his scores rose dramatically.

He was still using the AYA for game shooting, which

by now also included his share of driven pheasant. One of his pals' father had an agricultural machinery business, which opened the doors to a lot shooting. "We had fabulous days at Belvoir Castle and on brilliant wild pheasant shoots on the fens."

He was by now hooked. The next step was his own shooting ground. "I placed an advertisement in the Leicester Mercury and got one response, from a farmer at Launde Abbey." So in 1968 the Abbey Shooting Ground was born with seven day planning and an Olympic trap layout. It ran happily until 1975

when half of the farm was sold.

By this time Andrew and his brother Bill had developed a very successful textiles factory. "I had a degree in textile technology while

Bill was the UK sales manager of a large textile machinery company, and came back from an exhibition in 1970 with an idea to print on man-made fibres, which was entirely new to the UK at the time. We started the business in May 1971 and it proved an immediate success, pretty soon approaching a £10m turnover. Then disaster struck in 1976 when the factory burnt down. It was an awful experience but in hindsight the next two or three years saw an avalanche of people doing the same thing and cheap imports took the market."

GUNMAKING

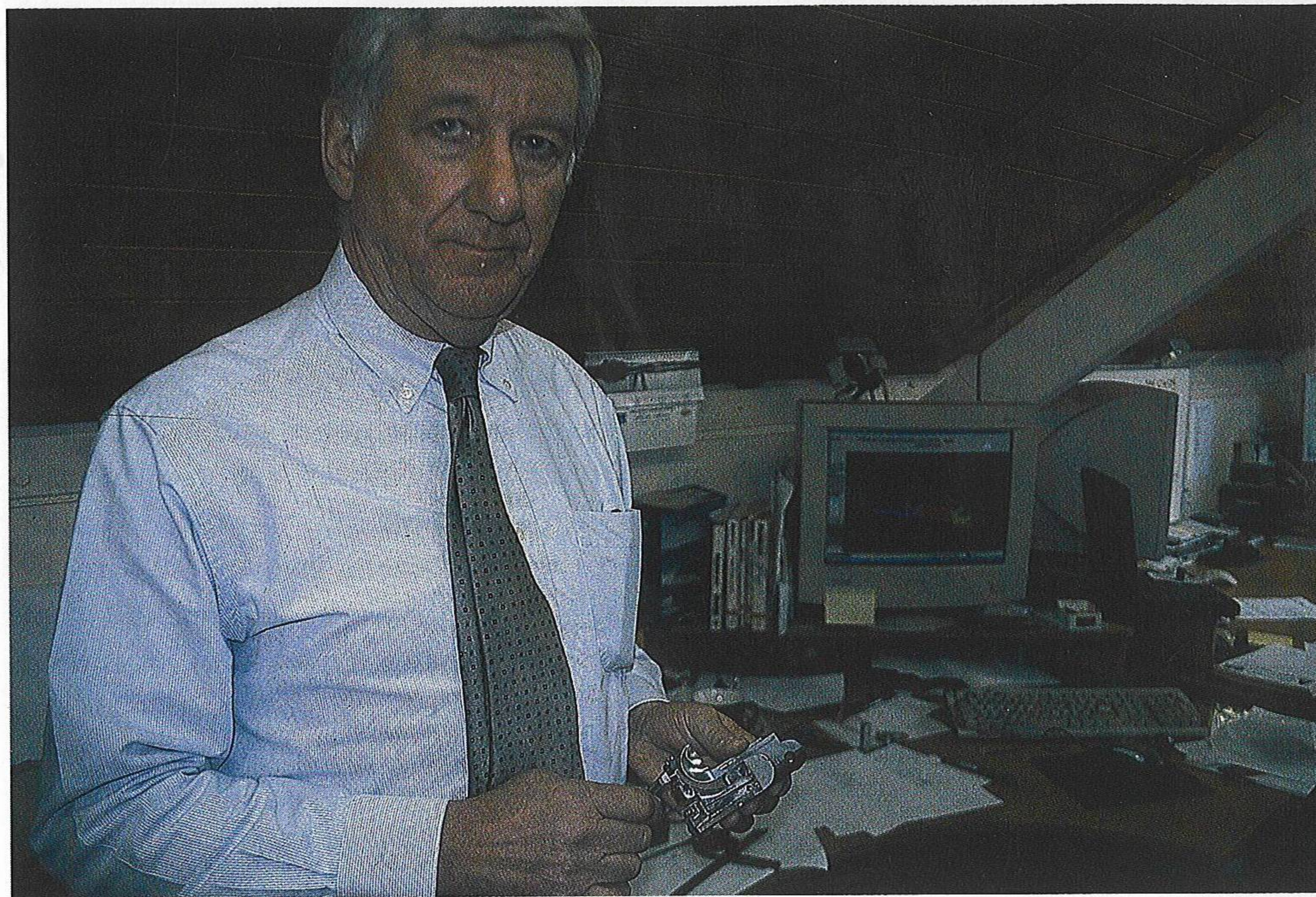
However textiles was their world. They opened a factory in Corby, investing heavily in hi-tech equipment and winning orders from the likes of M&S. They employed in the order of 100 people and ran the business successfully for nearly 20 years, but by the very early 90s however, imports again reared their ugly head and in 1992 the brothers opted to sell the business.

Throughout Andrew managed to mix this high pressure business with his love of shooting. After Abbey he was approached by Leicester Wildfowlers to run their shooting ground, a 12 acre facility at Kibworth, about 8 miles south of Leicester. His desire to be involved in the sport was so great that he found a way of fitting it in with the demands of the factory, and in 1982 he brought a friend, Barry Burnham, into the business, which the two developed considerably over the next 10 years, until Barry took over Andrew's share in 1992.

By now Andrew was absorbed by all aspects of coaching, technique and gunfit. Indeed the building of guns. He had also developed into a seriously good shot and in 1984 won the British Open Sporting Championship, the world's largest clay competition and became the holder of the Daily Telegraph Trophy. He went to win the English Skeet Championship twice and represented England in three different disciplines.

But by the turn of 1990 he saw that he would have to opt for knitwear or running the shooting ground. It became clear that he couldn't do both, so he sold his interest in the ground. "Fairly soon after this, my brother and I decided to sell the business - we could see what was happening, the market was changing dramatically and being flooded by imports from the Far East. We could see that it would become impossible."

So now at the age of 42 he was at a crossroads. Not that he had any doubt. "This time I wanted to have absolute control of my destiny - I would make guns, it would be my business and I would



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be entirely responsible. Textiles had been good to us but ultimately it twice delivered a salutary lesson, so I resolved that no matter how much pain in the meantime, I would make guns which would stand the test of time.

"I had no manufacturing contacts, and knew little of the actual process - but I did know what the market demanded, and was absolutely determined to make it work. It may have been foolhardy, but I knew it was not a mystical art and felt sure my manufacturing background would help. I have never found anything comes

“Making new guns from scratch is technically demanding and not the easiest thing to get into.”

easily. Mostly it comes down to hard work and resolve.”

During the first eight years he had relationships with other companies who had different areas of expertise. Some worked well, some didn't but he learned a lot. He also took himself off to the States where he attended the Shot Show and Safari Club International. Now he has a number of American clients for both guns and coaching. Last March he spent five weeks in the States, flying to Atlanta, taking in St. Louis, Columbia, Kansas, Wichita, Oklahoma, Dallas, Houston and San Antonio, on a series of coaching clinics.

“Fortunately Nicole has been totally supportive, which obviously makes a difference” The couple have two daughters, Lauren (14) and Ashleigh (11).

He had acquired the name Holloway & Naughton for the making of over-unders and side-by-side sidelocks, but is focusing very much on the over-under market. “I had the design for the first gun but clearly I needed customers.” So when asked what he considered to be his biggest step forward, he didn't hesitate: “Without question, finding a particular American customer, someone who believed in me – which proved significant in more ways than one as he has subsequently bought a further six guns from me.”

Of course there have been many times when the going has been less than smooth. “There are very few people coming into gunmaking, and it's not hard to see why. Making new guns from scratch is technically demanding and not the easiest thing to get into. Apart from looking the part you need to make a gun that works – you also need to be able to ride the disappointments

and sarcastic comments of others. Not everyone is charitable.

“But I have learned a tremendous amount in the last 15 years, and the real turning point was perhaps seven years ago when I decided that I would do it all myself by taking charge of the design, development and manufacturing. This coincided with teaming up with some first class gunmakers who I have got to know really well, guys at the height of their profession, and finding a specialist engineering firm in Leicester with vast experience of design and engineering technology. The guns are not only modelled on screen, all parts are produced in Leicester, enabling me to have ongoing involvement throughout the process.

“The guns are entirely made here in the UK by my English team, with the exception of purchasing the stock blanks from overseas. The gunmaking professionals who assemble and finish each gun are tremendous – the quality of their work is immediately evident on seeing the guns.

“Initially we started all those years ago with a traditional sidelock based on the Boss design. It's a lovely gun but its price places it at the top end of the market.” Next came a variant which though at a lower price is still £40,000. The new gun is aimed at an increasingly important sector of the industry in the £25,000–£35,000 range. It's a bespoke true trigger plate with options on barrel specification and is delivered with our proprietary brand of Holloway & Naughton interchangeable chokes. “I have made them with very fine tolerances and I know they work because I still shoot competitions on a regular basis.” In fact he continues to shoot exceptional scores using the £40,000 model – almost certainly the prettiest and most expensive gun on the circuit. But at the same time incredibly effective.

Like those gunmaking masters of yore, he walks the talk. In many ways his is a remarkable achievement, and without parallel in contemporary gunmaking.

