



"The two guns are consummate works of art..."

The silver hall-marked plate ready for the guncase.



One of the pair: a beautiful object, but with a job to do.



Story and photos by David Grant

# The Boulton commemorative guns



Assay marks for 1773 reproduced on the trigger tangs.

James C. Codell Jr. of Winchester, Kentucky, USA, and his wife Carol had been avid collectors of Matthew Boulton silver for some 25 years when they had the brilliant idea of combining their love of silver with their other great love – shotguns.

According to Jimmie Codell, Boulton – or Mr B as he was known – was unquestionably the giant of 18th century silversmithing. Boulton, like Henry Ford some 175 years later, was a leader in mass production. As Ford perfected the production line, so Boulton perfected the specialisation of labour. Boulton employed many famous men in his workshops – the Adams brothers were probably the best known of the designers.

Together with his other partner, James Watt, Boulton also developed the steam engine. He worked closely with Josiah Wedgwood and invented an automated coin-making machine which, for the first time, enabled coins to be of a uniform size with a raised border to resist wear and with a milled edge to prevent the unscrupulous reducing the size of coins. Boulton, being the man he was, was also instrumental in the formation of the Birmingham Assay Office.

Carol and Jimmie Codell were determined to commemorate the bicentenary of the Birmingham Assay Office by having a pair of best guns made with engravings depicting Boulton's designs.

After several exploratory trips to Birmingham, they finally chose A.A. Brown & Sons to make the guns. Keith Thomas, an engraver from Buckinghamshire, was chosen to decorate the guns, with Sidney and Robin Brown co-ordinating the whole operation. Working out the details entailed many hours of discussion, many letters and telephone calls across the Atlantic. It took two years to reach the definitive design. Stepping into the world of silversmithing brought a whole new vocabulary to the English team – gadroon, ribbon reed, guilloche, ormolu. Such words became part of regular conversation when discussing the engraving of the guns.

Wood for the stocks and fore-

ends was selected from a piece of exhibition grade French walnut. Casecraft Designs of Kingston Blount, Oxfordshire, were commissioned to make a double gun case in brown English oak covered in ostrich hide. The case was to be French-blocked and lined in green velvet. The conventional leather hall-marked plate was replaced by a silver hall-marked plate framed in brown oak. A full set of ivory-handled, nickel silver gun-tools and cleaning accessories were made by Mike Marsh and engraved by Keith Thomas.

## Special attention

The actions needed special attention from the gunmakers. To make the plates plain in order to avoid interrupting the engraving and inlaying, "blind-hole" locks were made so that external pins, pegs and stud holes were invisible.

Each gun has 28in chopperlump barrels with 2 3/4in chambers, English game rib and quarter and three-quarter choke. Double triggers and internal lock mechanisms are gold-plated – which is standard practice for all Brown sidelocks. The guns are easy-openers with English splinter fore-ends housing Southgate

ejectors.

After the engraving had been completed, the guns were colour-hardened and then polished by hand to a silver finish. Great care had to be taken in the deeply-carved areas to polish just the peaks in order to leave the colour of the hardening in the valleys.

The left locks depict a pair of ormolu-mounted Derbyshire spar two-light candelabra. Of the 13 candelabra recorded, six are in Osterley Park in West London, still in their original setting in the Tapestry Room. The right locks depict one of a pair of silver soup tureens.

Both candelabras and tureens are significant pieces in the Codell collection. They were originally to have been engraved on the locks, but at some stage the plan changed. The candelabras would be inlaid in yellow gold with red gold portraying the Derbyshire spar. The tureens were to be inlaid in white gold.

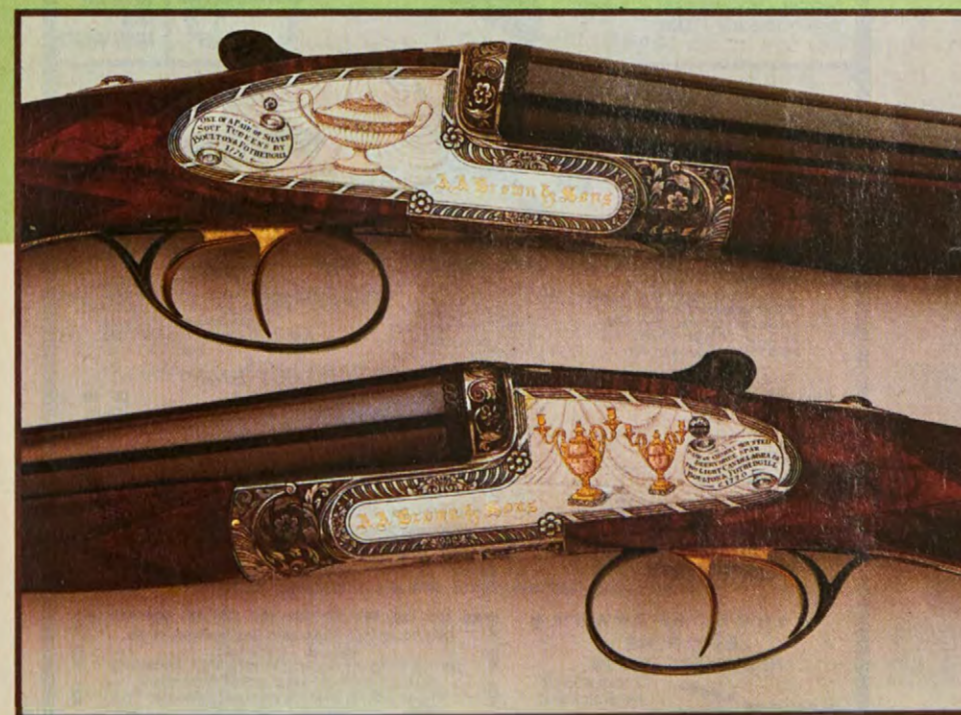
The underside of each action shows identical portraits of Mr B, reproduced from a portrait by Sir William Beechey. The periphery of the locks have ribbon reed carved borders and the fences are carved with acanthus flowers and leaves –

all familiar features in Boulton's designs for silverware.

An anchor is inlaid in gold on the top levers, the anchor being symbolic of Birmingham's assay mark. Boulton's maker's mark – a sunburst design – is carved on the thumb-piece of the lever. The tang of each trigger guard is of sterling silver, engraved with copies of the original assay marks of Boulton and Fothergill and, being made of silver, each has current hallmarks as well. The tang is unusual in having no visible means of fixing. A silver trigger bow was contemplated at one stage, but the thickness required to give it strength ruled out the idea. A normal steel bow is used instead and let into the silver tang.

Completed, the two guns are consummate works of art, combining great skill and artistry from craftsmen who know that a gun, apart from being a beautiful object, has a job to do. Indeed, both guns have already been shot.

Sadly Carol Codell died before the guns were completed, but I'm sure she would have been as delighted as Jimmie is to see the imaginative and creative ideas they had together some five years ago so successfully accomplished.



Candelabra and a tureen decorate either side of the actions.



From drawing board to finished product – the Guns and the drawings from which their designs were taken.