

Blessed are the gunmakers

A dirty gun is a dangerous gun, so get a traditional stocker and smith such as A. W. Rule to service it for you. **Paul Quagliana** stops by to see how it's done

Based on my experiences of taking fishing reels completely to pieces, I would never dare even try to strip a firearm. It's something that requires specialist tools and knowledge, and some gun owners, like many car drivers, haven't a clue how their metallic companions work.

While some might adopt the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," how many of us really know what is going on in the mysterious bowels of our firearms, after whole seasons of work in the cold and wet? Prevention is better than cure, and gun servicing is important both for safety reasons and for the longevity of the

firearm concerned. One establishment that still offers a bespoke service to the highest levels of the traditional British gun trade is A.W. Rule & Son in Somerton, Somerset. The firm is run by Gareth Rule, along with his mother, Jenny, Gareth's old school friend, Adam Phillips, and trainee Rupert Ellingham.

Gareth grew up watching his father, Anthony, at work making guns, and decided to follow the same path. Gareth joined the family firm in 1998, finally completing his indentured apprenticeship from the Gun Trade Association as a stocker and gunsmith under the watchful eye of his father in

2005. In 2006 Gareth became a member of the Society of Gunmakers of the City of London.

Anthony, a master gun stock maker, had begun his own career with James Purdey in 1957, learning the traditional methods that Gareth has continued to use. Since his father's death in 2010, Gareth has expanded the family business, while offering the same high level of expertise to his clients. The firm also offers a retail service, and stocks some superb walnut blanks to suit all tastes.

"Personal service is paramount to us," says Gareth. "We get clients from all walks of life and, if someone needs an

"I have been known to work until the early hours to get a part made and fitted"

Gareth Rule (left) and Adam Phillips in the workshop at A. W. Rule

12 steps to servicing a gun



The process starts with a chat with the customer to discuss any noticeable problems, such as poor ejection. Next, the gun is checked for any cracks in the woodwork or knocks to the barrels. Gareth then looks at the functioning of snap caps and trigger-pulls and checks that the safety catch is working properly.

Gareth removes the barrels and inspects them for dents or signs that the rib may be lifting, and will measure the bores at the customer's request. "Modern shooters are using heavier and heavier loads in old guns that were designed for lighter loads and paper cases, and this can cause problems. There seems to have been a recent resurgence in paper cases, which is good," says Gareth.



Gareth pours methylated spirits into a container that will be used for degreasing the action and its parts. He starts by removing the trigger-guard, checking for faults all the time as he does so. Next he removes the lockplates. Screws can vary in size, so Gareth hand-grinds his own screwdrivers to fit, and uses a handmade carpenter's brace on tough screws. "Sometimes screws are easy to remove, and sometimes they can be jammed in with dirt," he says.

Gareth uses a tapping stick to knock out the lockplates, and looks for problems such as congealed oil, which can get in between the face of the tumbler and the striker, and cause misfires. He then checks the mainsprings for fatigue and cracks. "A dirty gun is a dangerous gun," says Gareth. ▶



You can contact A.W. Rule at www.awruleandsongunmakers.co.uk, tel 01458 270024.

emergency repair, I have been known to work until the early hours to get the part made and fitted and the gun returned." It is refreshing to meet someone who still offers this level of service, and in such a traditional atmosphere. It is a world away from online sales and automated payment schemes—convenient though those may sometimes be. At A.W. Rule you have the reassuring experience of speaking to a human being.

On these pages Gareth goes through some of the steps involved in thoroughly stripping and cleaning a gun, in this case a J. Purdey side-by-side shotgun, which is more than 100 years old. ■