



# A.W. Rule & Son

by Stephen Davy-Osborne

Stepping up to take on the family business was no mean feat for Gareth Rule, but he had learned his skills from one of the best - his father.

As 2014 draws to a close, sporting gun and rifle stock maker A. W. Rule & Son have marked a decade at their current base in Somerton, south Somerset, experiencing a growth in trade whilst remaining true to the family ethos of a bespoke personal service. The business is now in the hands of son Gareth, who is driving his father's vision forward.

The seeds of the family business were planted in 1950s London when Anthony William Rule began his training as a gun maker with James Purdey & Son, The Worshipful Company of Gun Makers. From 1957 he channelled his enthusiasm as a working lad to serve a formal apprenticeship in the fine art of gun making under the watchful eye of Master Harold Delay. During this time he excelled at his chosen craftsmanship as a master gun stock maker and, upon completing his formal training, he gained the Freedom of the City of London in 1964.

Three years later the Rule family moved west to the rolling countryside of Huish Episcopi in south Somerset to begin a new life in the country at the heart of the rural game and shooting community. Despite the firm's humble beginnings in the spare bedroom of the family home, word soon spread of Anthony's masterpieces and he found himself in serious demand with game keepers and shooters alike. Remaining loyal to the firm that had taught him his craft, Anthony continued to work almost exclusively for James Purdey & Son, but it wasn't long before he found himself highly sought after by other gun makers, which saw him carry out



commissions for John Wilkes Gun Makers, Holland & Holland Gun Makers and Boss & Co Gun Makers to make bespoke shotgun stocks and forends including many new guns.

But after many years of building up a client base, the enterprising gun maker decided he wanted to serve his own private clients, bringing the high-end London quality engrained in his training to shooters in the rural West Country. Once more the family home formed his base as he expanded his own workshop, and a roaring trade followed. A diversification into fishing tackle saw four shops in their own right spawned as well.

Meanwhile, Anthony's young son Gareth was becoming a familiar sight around the workshop, getting to know the customers and often being tasked with helping clean up after a day of crafting bespoke sporting guns. Being immersed in his father's passion for craftsmanship led Gareth to make the decision to join the family business

himself, delighting his father as he could extend the business name to A.W. Rule & Son in 1996.

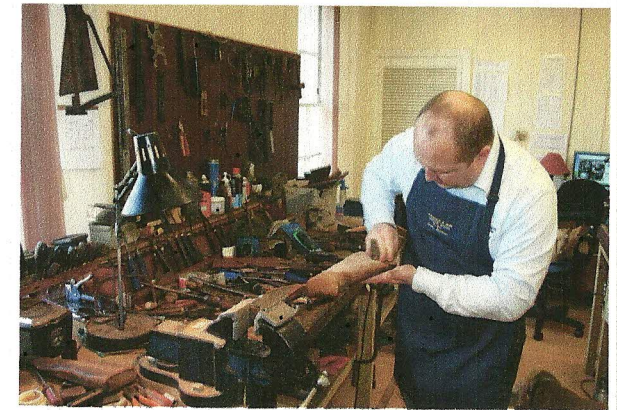
Gareth then began his own gruelling apprenticeship, guided through the intricate craftsmanship by his father, who imparted his own skills learned almost four decades previously in post-war London. Anthony taught him only the traditional methods of gun stock making, while eager to ensure that all aspects of the family business were covered to set Gareth up with the wide knowledge and skill base needed to drive the company forwards. In 2004, as Gareth was nearing the end of his apprenticeship, the father and son team took a giant step together, with the support of wife and mother Jennifer, and opened their current premises in the heart of Somerton town centre, overlooking the historic Buttercross. As the ancient royal capital of Wessex, a more fitting location couldn't have been secured as a base for father and son to

welcome clients eager to own their own piece of history.

The following year Gareth completed his apprenticeship, making his father and Master incredibly proud, while also winning the praise of The Worshipful Company of Gun Makers and The Gun Trade Association. The family business was in very capable hands indeed. It has built a reputation over the years for a truly unique end product, directly sourcing the finest walnut from Turkey, much of which is in excess of 300 years old. Once the wood is on Somerset soil, Gareth begins the intricate carving and crafting process that will see the finished gun become the envy of all on the shoot.

Just five years after the family sign went up, Gareth found himself without the guiding light of the business following the untimely death of his father in 2010. However, this instilled a new drive in the son to step up and become Mr Rule himself.

In an era of online trade, Gareth accepted that the internet had to form part of the business, but remained determined that he would not lose sight of his traditionalist values in doing so - allowing him to retain his appreciation for the fine art of something that was made 100 years ago that he in turn could keep running and put his own stamp on for another 100 years. While being online may not have been something he initially wanted to do, he soon



became aware of certain benefits of opening up to those who otherwise may not have encountered the firm and the services it offers. He quickly found himself in demand with shooters from across Europe, Dubai and the Middle East.

Gareth is keen that the business's success in turn has a knock-on effect for the rest of the town that his family have come to call home. He often welcomes clients from Scotland - and even further afield - who make the journey along the A303 to Somerton for the individually tailored service A.W. Rule & Son prides itself on. This in turn sees his visitors enjoy some of the other sights and attractions Somerton has to offer, as well as the hospitality of the local pubs and B&Bs.



Looking to the future, Gareth is confident that the business will continue to enjoy the same success his father enjoyed early in his career. Ingrained in rural heritage and prestige, shooting is a pastime and, indeed, a necessity of rural life that has been passed down through generation after generation. ■

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