

IN THE FIELD

JULY 2023

By Sir Johnny Scott Bt.

OUT OF AFRICA

Amongst the antique, vintage and modern guns and accessories, militaria, edged weapons, works of art, sculptors, books and prints sold through every Holts auction, there are always any number of Lots which are either unique, have a fascinating provenance, or very often, as in the case of Lot 1404 in the July auction, both. This is a scarce and rare AYA 12-bore 'Centenary' single-trigger, hand-detachable sidelock ejector, serial number 160-15, for 2015, the year of manufacture, plus the full Spanish code 16-03-160-15.

The 32in. nitro chopperlump barrels are steel proved, made with high performance steel and swaged chokes; two-and-three quarter inch chambers, bored approximately half choke in both. Gilt top lever with AYA trademark, automatic safety with gold 'SAFE' detail, removable striker discs, hand-detachable lockplates, gold-inlaid cocking-indicators, 'custom Centenary' bold acanthus scrollwork on a matted background, with scrolling banners to the sides engraved 'CENTENARY 1915 - 2015'. The triggerguard has the model designation in gilt and the triggerguard tang is numbered '36 / 300'. The well-figured pistolgrip stock is 14 3/8in., including 1/2in. recoil pad, with the gun weighing 7lb. 5oz. and is sold with a canvas and leather slip.

That this gun is unique is confirmed by Edward King, Managing Director of Anglo Spanish Imports. AYA only made a limited edition of their Centenary guns to celebrate a hundred years of gunmaking excellence and this is the only single gun made with 32-inch barrels, a single trigger and a pistolgrip stock. The intention was to create the perfect high pheasant shotgun. It was consigned to Holts via Tim Warner, Holts agent in Denmark and CEO of Game and Gun in Copenhagen, and is offered for sale by Baron Richard von Blixen-Finecke, of Näsbyholm Castle, his ancestral 2,200 acre seat in southern Sweden. Baron von Blixen's grandfather was the brother of Bror von Blixen, the renowned safari guide and leading white hunter in early colonial East Africa. Bror von Blixen was born in 1886, the youngest of the seven children born to Baron Fredrik von Blixen-Finecke and his wife, Countess Clara Krag-Juel-Vind-Frijs and grew up on the estate at Näsbyholm. He attended the Swedish university of agriculture at Alnarp and was managing one of the family farms, when in 1912, he became engaged to his cousin, Karen Dinesen and decided to seek a future in Kenya. Bror and Karen married in 1914 and her trustees purchased a 4,500 acre coffee plantation in the Great Rift Valley, but for much of WW1 Bror was away hunting, or serving with Lord Delamere's volunteers patrolling the German Tanganyika border. With Bror absent for long periods, the farm did not prosper and by 1921, Karen and he had separated, and whilst she remained managing the farm, Bror became a professional hunter, developing his safari business catering for wealthy clients.



Sir (Walter) John Scott, Bt. MFH

Sir Johnny (as he is better known) is an author, natural historian, broadcaster, columnist, countryside campaigner, artisan snuff manufacturer and retired hill farmer.

He wrote and co-presented the BBC2 series *Clarissa and the Countryman* with Clarissa Dickson Wright. He writes for a variety of magazines and periodicals on field sports, food, farming, travel, history and rural affairs.

A lifetime devotee of the countryside and its sports, he is currently:

- Joint Master, The North Pennine Hunt
- Regional Director, Vote OK.
- President, The Gamekeepers Welfare Trust.
- President, The Tay Valley Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Newcastle Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Association of Working Lurchers / Longdogs.
- Centenary Patron and Honorary Life Member, British Association for Shooting and Conservation.
- Patron, The Sporting Lucas Terrier Association.
- Patron, The Wildlife Ark Trust.
- Patron, The National Organisation of Beaters and Pickers Up.
- Board member, The European Squirrel Initiative.

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He formed Tanganyika Guides Ltd in partnership with veteran hunter, Phillip Percival and became the leading white hunters in East Africa, providing meticulously organised safaris lasting from one to three months. Nothing would be left to chance for the client's comfort: Fly camps, fuel depots, airstrips, provisions and staff would always be laid out well in advance, with the area thoroughly researched to check on waterholes and game movements. Among Bror's famous clients were: Ernest Hemingway, Alfred and George Vanderbilt; Lord Furness, the shipping magnate. Freddie and Winston Guest, cousins of Winston Churchill and Ernst Udet, the German aviator. In 1928, Bror with his friend and fellow white hunter, Hon. Denys Finch Hatton - who had become Karen's lover - were commissioned by the Prince of Wales to take him on safari to hunt lion and buffalo, and again in 1930, to hunt elephant.

Bror officially divorced Karen in 1925 and in 1928, married Jacqueline Harriet "Cockie" Alexander and with Bror's earnings from his safaris, managed to buy their own farm, which Cockie managed, whilst he concentrated on the safari business. In 1932, he met Eva Dickson, the remarkable Swedish explorer, rally driver, aviator, travel writer, war reporter and aviator, who was the first woman to cross the Sahara desert by car. They became lovers, with Bror divorcing Cockie in 1935 and marrying Eva the following year, spending their honeymoon in Cuba with Ernest Hemingway and his wife, Pauline Pfeiffer. Eva was killed in a car crash outside Baghdad in 1938 and a devastated Bror left Africa for good, eventually returning to Sweden, where he died in 1946. Apart from being one of the greatest white hunters, Bror von Blixen was a talented writer and his autobiography, *African Hunter*, is a wonderful record of game hunting in Africa during the era of big safaris.

Karen von Blixen too left Africa under tragic circumstances. Her lover Denys Finch Hatton was killed on safari when his de Havilland Gypsy Moth biplane crashed in 1931 and at the same time, the slump in the price of coffee forced her to sell the coffee plantation and return to live with her mother in Denmark, where she began writing. Her first book, *Seven Gothic Tales*, written under the pseudonym, Isak Dinesen, was published in 1937 to critical acclaim, but her second, *Out of Africa*, published in 1937, firmly established her reputation as an author. Among her many subsequent publications, this wistful account of her life in Kenya and her love for an Africa that was fast disappearing, has remained a classic, which in 1985, was made into a film starring Robert Redford and Meryl Streep.



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