

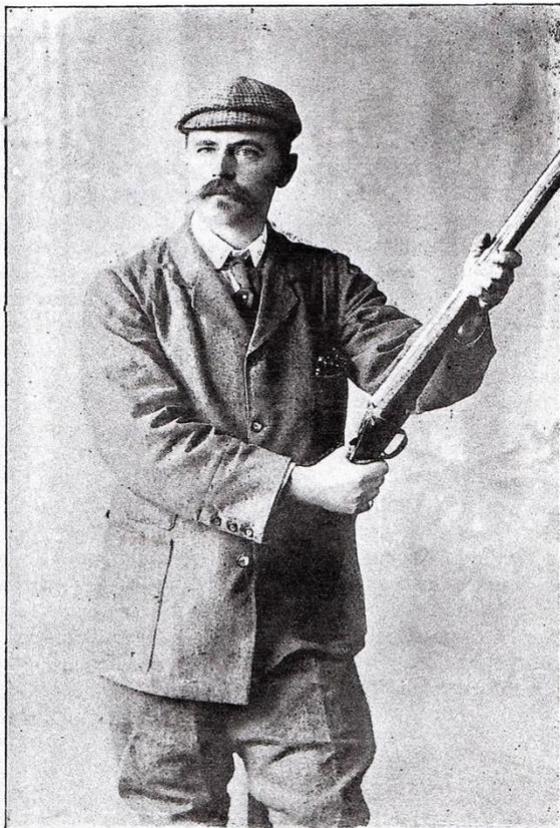
IN THE GUNROOM

THE WATTS GUN

Donald Dallas

Lot 1472 in this auction is yet another top quality sidelock ejector. Estimated at £1000 – £1500, such guns are always reasonably priced considering their quality. However, lot 1472 is a little bit different, a “Watts Gun”, top quality, yes, pretty rare, yes, but what makes it really special is that it has a fair bit of Boss in it.

William Webster Watts claim to fame is that he set up the first purpose built shooting school in the country when he established the London School Of Shooting in the 1880s. There were plenty of shooting grounds in existence before for gun clubs shooting competitions over live pigeons or early clay pigeons, but they were not shooting schools. Gunmakers likewise had their own grounds, but they were testing grounds for their rifles and shotguns.



However, the new generation of gentleman in London interested in shooting had no shooting background and wanted to learn how to shoot and have a bit of fun at the newly introduced clay pigeons. W.W. Watts realised this and accordingly set up the first shooting school in Britain in the 1880s to teach these aspiring sportsmen how to shoot since they had no experience of guns.

William Webster Watts was born into a farming family in 1853 at Wolston in Warwick. Having lived on the farm, he had been involved in shooting since a young age and found himself to be a natural shot. He realised that there was a market in London for him to impart his shooting skills and with plenty of capital behind him, set up The London School Of Shooting at Willesden in the 1880s. It was so successful that he found he needed bigger premises and in 1896 moved to Renters Lane at Hendon, a site of some fifty acres. He renamed his ground The London Sporting Park. It is interesting to look at the O.S map of the period. The shooting ground is shown, and all the surrounding area is completely open farmland. (Today part of the Brent Cross Shopping Centre is built on the shooting ground – ah the wind of change).

W.W. Watts was highly regarded as a shooting instructor and in G.T Teasdale-Buckell's book *Experts On Guns And Shooting* published in 1900, a whole chapter is devoted to The London Sporting Park. Not only did he have his own shooting school there, but he also leased it out to two famous London gunmakers, Edwinston Green and Boss & Co. The relationship between these two gunmakers and W.W. Watts explains the stylish Watts gun. In addition to teaching shooting, Watts also decided to sell guns bearing his own name. With his connection to Edwinston Green, he asked this firm to make his guns to the very best quality. He knew John Robertson of Boss well thanks to the shooting ground and consequently persuaded Robertson to arrange to have his own guns engraved by Boss's specialist top quality engraver, Jack Sumner. Just look at the engraving in this gun in lot 1472, it is Sumner/Boss engraving with the scrolls and bouquets of flowers. He named his gun "The Watts Gun". Production was low and along with the Boss engraving; The Watts Gun is highly sought after today.

World War One put an end to the shooting school and by early 1918 the London Sporting Park was in liquidation and up for sale. In addition, the relentless sprawl of London created a massive demand for housing in the suburbs and fifty acres in Hendon would be a prized asset.

William Webster Watts retired to Trumpington near Cambridge and died nearby in 1941 at Debden.