

IN THE FIELD

NOVEMBER 2026

By Sir Johnny Scott Bt.

THINK LIKE A PIGEON

The pair of twelve bore round-action Dicksons in Lot 1364 were made in 1911 for Lawrence Nugent Hope of Whitney Court, in Herefordshire. This remarkable Neo-Jacobean house with views across the Wye Valley, was built regardless of expense at the end of the 19th century through a collaboration between various members of the Hope family, the prime mover being Lady Mary Nugent, the widow of the Hon James Hope-Wallace of Featherstone Castle, Northumberland; her daughter-in-law Eliza Coats, youngest daughter of textile magnate Sir Peter Coats, joint founder of the Scottish thread-making firm of J. & P. Coats; Eliza's favourite brother, another Peter Coats, who provided the funding; and Lady Mary's second son, James Louis Alexander Hope.

In 1973, Lawrence died and his widow, Mrs Constance Hope gave the Dicksons to her cousin, Major Archie Coats, well known as a superb shot on both game and pigeon, and author of *Pigeon Shooting*, which is still the definitive work of shooting pigeon over decoys. As is his emphasis on prior reconnaissance and bird psychology, with his famous maxim for success; "to think like a pigeon". Archie Coats was born in 1916, the youngest son of Ernest Coats, a director of J&P Coats and Nora Poutney. He grew up at his parent's home, Sundrum Castle in Ayrshire and was educated at Lockers Park preparatory school and Eton College. In 1939 he married his first wife, Virginia, daughter of the Marchese and Marchesa Agostino Ferrante di Ruffano and in the same year, was called up and subsequently commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Scots Guards. He was sent to North Africa and wounded on 20th June 1941, when shot by an Italian officer whilst serving with his regiment during the Western Desert Campaign, leaving the army with the rank of Major in 1946. In 1952, he married his second wife, Prudence, daughter of Colonel Eric Strettell and a couple of years later, they bought Tower Hill Farm, near Dummer in Hampshire. Prue Coats was a superb cook, who became the author of several cookery books, among them; *Prue's Perfect Guide to the Fishing Picnic* and *Prue's Perfect Guide to the Perfect Shooting Lunch*, (1991), *Prue's Country Kitchen*, (1997) and *The Poacher's Cookbook*, (2017). Needless to say, the shooting lunches at Tower Hill Farm were to become legendary.

Once settled at Tower Hill, the "Major" decided to become a professional pigeon shot, touring the farms of Hampshire and neighbouring counties, offering crop protection. Everything from a pea to a potato is fair game to a pigeon and even today, it has been calculated that a thousand pigeons eat every week, 10 tons of food intended for human consumption, at a cost to agricultural producers running into many tens of millions of pounds annually. Despite the ingenuity of farmers trying to protect their crops, pigeons eventually become immune to every form of deterrent and gas guns, scarecrows,



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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revolving reflectors, hawk kites or banger rockets, all become ineffective. The only thing they never get used to, is being shot and the universally accepted method of controlling crop damage is to shoot them. In those days, the Min of Ag provided subsidised cartridges for crop protection and Archie averaged 16,000 birds a year, often shooting 200 a day, with a personal best of 550, which would have been higher, if he hadn't run out of cartridges twice and been forced to leave his hide on two occasions to resupply.

The Dicksons were well used by Archie on game in the UK and on partridge in Spain, when the ornithologist and conservationist, Tom Gullick, developed superb wild red-legged partridge shooting at La Mancha, in 1972. Archie predominately used a Webley 700 for pigeon shooting, which he bequeathed to the artist, Will Garfit, but also occasionally the Dicksons. He can be seen shooting over decoys from a hide with one of them in the short film, Pigeon Shooting, which he and John Batley, a fellow professional pigeon shot and director of the Gun Trade Association, made for Holland and Holland in conjunction with the Shooting Times. This is available to watch on YouTube, as is the other one on pigeon shooting, which Archie made with Jack Charlton for the TV series, Jack's Game.

Shortly before his death in 1989, Archie gave the Dicksons to his son-in-law, Richard Owen as a wedding present on the marriage to his daughter, Lucy. Richard has used them regularly up until the present date and the time has now come to give someone else the opportunity to enjoy them.



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