

# FROM *the* GUNROOM

## A CHARLES PRYSE HAMMERGUN

TOM OPPEL

Charles Pryse is probably unknown or only vaguely known to most people interested in British firearms from the early self-contained-cartridge period. However, Pryse was a fairly prolific maker, and his guns pop up here and there for sale on various Internet sites. My gun was purchased a few years ago from George Caswell at [Champlin Firearms](#), in Enid, Oklahoma.

The Pryse firm was founded in Birmingham in 1838 by Charles Pryse (the Elder) and was especially active during the second half of the 19th Century.

There is little information about the company in my rather extensive library of British firearms reference books. The firm made guns, rifles and handguns under its own name and also in conjunction with Richard Redman as Pryse & Redman. It initially was known as Charles Pryse, Gun & Rifle Maker (according to Geoffrey Boothroyd), changing to Charles Pryse & Co. in 1840. In 1842 Pryse the Elder paired up with Richard Redman, and the company name was changed to Pryse & Redman until 1873, when Charles (the Younger)



*The author's 12-bore Pryse has about 60-percent coverage of crisp scroll engraving and 30" barrels of browned Damascus steel with clean bores.*

took over and changed the name back to Charles Pryse & Co. (Pryse the Elder also served on the first Board of Directors of [BSA](#) and must have been well known in the Birmingham trade.) The younger Pryse continued the business through

1888. While the firm made all kinds of firearms, it is especially noteworthy for its revolvers, for which the elder Pryse held a few patents, and the younger Pryse held [Patent 4421 of 1876](#), which was for a very popular centerfire revolver.



Based on its general appearance, this gun is a medium-grade hammergun. The back-action locks are marked inside with “Joint Patents—Stanton & Co.,” and outside with “C. Pryse & Co.,” which puts the gun’s manufacture during the younger Pryse’s ownership. There is no surviving list of Pryse serial

numbers that I’ve been able to find, so dating manufacture to a specific year is not possible. My gun is numbered 18xxx, so it seems likely that Pryse produced a lot of guns over the years.

Like many 19th Century British guns, my Pryse was made with an exceptional amount of skill. It has about

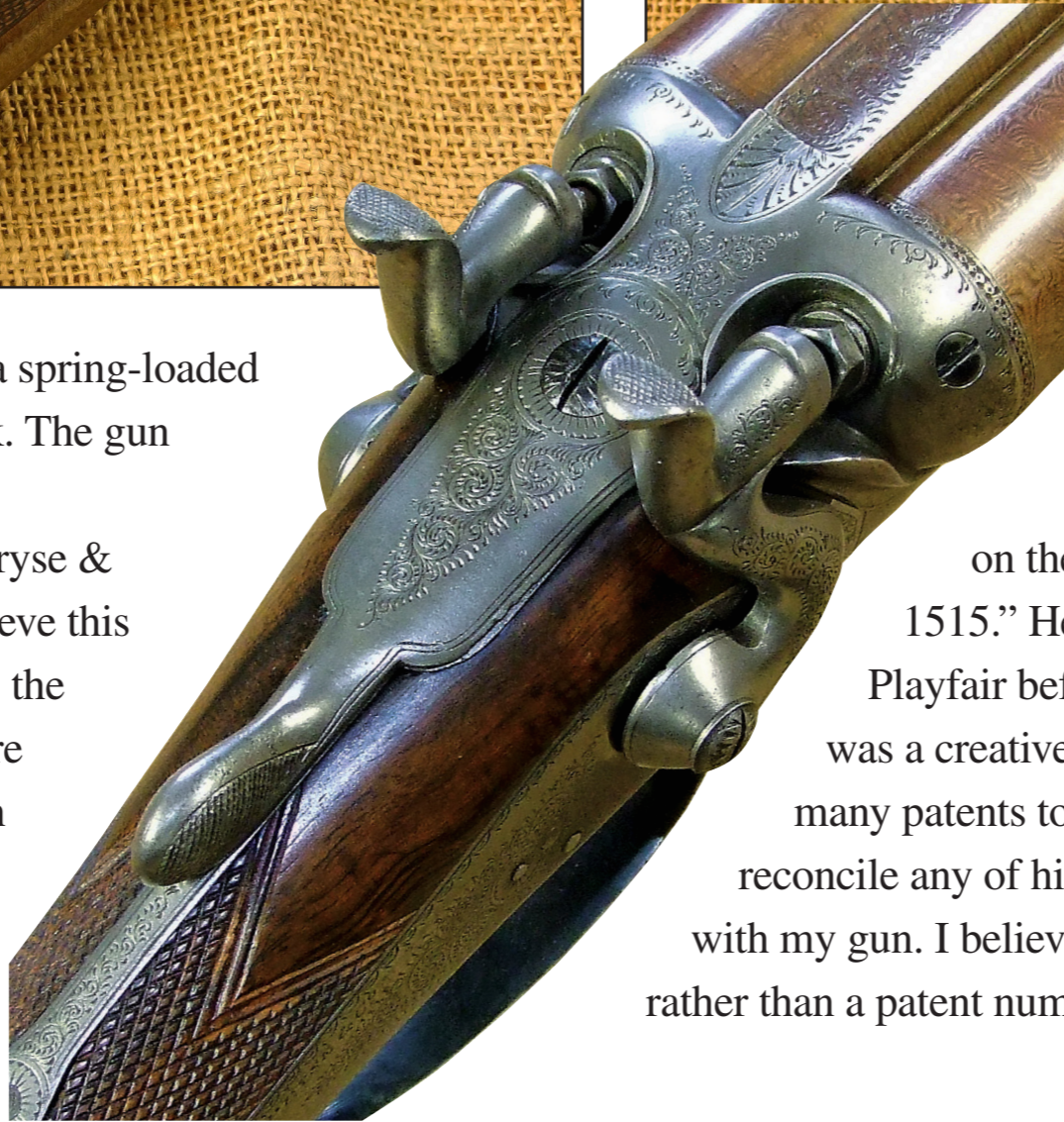


60-percent coverage of crisp scroll engraving. The 30" 12-bore Damascus barrels with 2½" chambers have near-perfect bores free of dents, rust and pits and display a bright and shiny appearance. They measure .729", have a likely refinished browning, and have recent nitro proofs. They're beautiful! Each barrel is choked .005". The back-action locks have rebounding hammers. The buttstock is made from a very nice piece of walnut, and the refinishing and recut checkering were both done well. The length of pull is 14¾" to a nicely checkered horn buttplate, drop at comb is 1<sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub>", and drop at heel is 2¼". There is very slight cast-off. The forearm is nearly fully checkered and has a nicely sculpted horn tip. It uses a



common snap-on mechanism with a spring-loaded roller that catches in the barrel hook. The gun weighs 6 pounds 12 ounces.

The top rib is engraved “Chas. Pryse & Co. Makers, London,” though I believe this is not original in two respects. First, the style and quality of the engraving are not on par with what one expects on a gun of this period; and second, as mentioned, Pryse was a Birmingham maker and, as far as



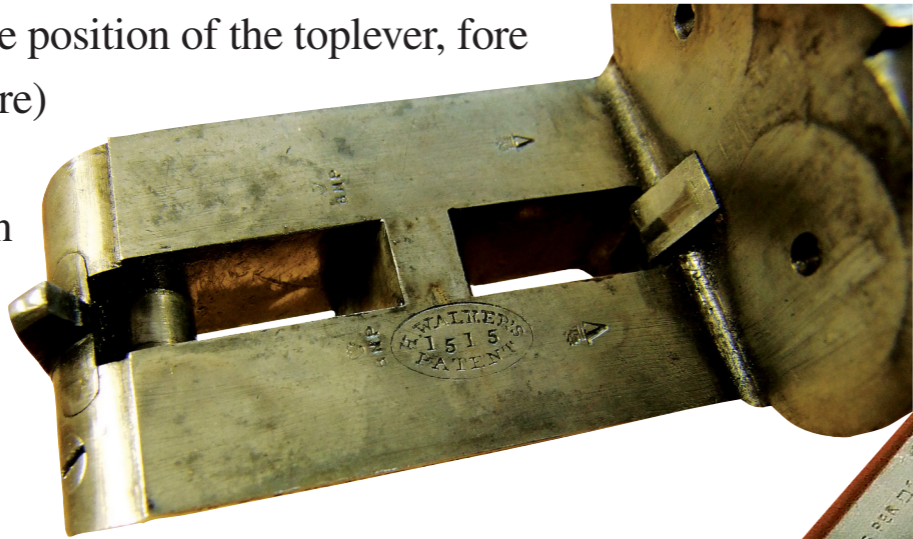
I can determine, never had any premises or other connection to London. Another anomaly is the patent stamp on the action flat that reads “H. Walker’s Patent 1515.” Henry Walker was a machinist with Bentley & Playfair before setting up on his own as a gunsmith. He was a creative and active designer in the gun trade and had many patents to his credit, but unfortunately I was unable to reconcile any of his patents, either by description or drawing, with my gun. I believe that 1515 designates a patent-use number rather than a patent number, as it does not comport with any of the

patent numbers granted to Walker. The design patent used in the gun remains a mystery—at least to me.

This gun has a unique toplever locking mechanism. It consists of a single bite in the rear of the barrel lump and a wide sliding bolt that moves, based on the position of the toplever, fore (with spring pressure) and aft (using the toplever) in a slot in the lower middle of the action.

Its mechanical operation is similar to many “single bite snap action” designs found in *The British Shotgun—Volume I*, by I.M. Crudgington and D.J. Baker; however, I could find none that matched exactly the design on my gun. I am curious to see exactly how the mechanism works but not

For more photos of the Pryse hammergun, [click here.](#)



curious enough to take it apart. Suffice to say that it works well, as the gun is certainly tight.

My Pryse 12-bore is used regularly for skeet and sporting clays throughout the year and is frequently admired by other shooters. As is the case with my other aged treasures, I use light loads of  $7/8$  oz of shot at a modest velocity, which keeps the wear and tear on these old guns to a minimum.

---

*Tom Oppel is a retired information-systems professional who lives in Montana's Flathead Valley. He has had a passion for guns nearly all his life. In the past dozen years he has concentrated his collecting on late 19th Century British guns and rifles, and he has several examples of each. He is also an avid long-range blackpowder single-shot cartridge rifle shooter and is active in cowboy action shooting.*