

**Manuscript of the Month
August 2013**

Harry Hoare's Pocket Game Register, 1887

Shooting Ground *By Wood & Woodhall*¹³
 Date *Dec 2. 1887*
 Weather *Perfect.*

Grouse		TOTAL.
Black Game		
Partridges	<i>44</i>	<i>44</i>
Pheasants	<i>125</i>	<i>125</i>
Woodcock	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>
Snipe		
Hares	<i>107</i>	<i>107</i>
Rabbits	<i>32</i>	<i>32</i>
Various	<i>4</i>	<i>4</i>
TOTAL		<i>313</i>

REMARKS. *Rippling day. - Major Stork
Michael, Boyd Taylor Brooks.*

Morning dawns, and "heavily with mists comes on the day". The sleepers on benches and chairs are first on the alert...breakfast is prepared...all is tumult, noise, and confusion...the howling and yelping of dogs, the cracking of whips, the charging and firing of guns, and every other note of preparation. Then away for the heather and hills...far, far from the busy, money-getting world. (New Sporting Magazine, Sept 1833)

For over two centuries 12 August has signalled the start of the grouse shooting season. Each year the 'Glorious Twelfth' lures thousands to the heather rich moors of the north, while dealers and restaurateurs vie with one another to serve up the first birds of the season. Hunting is of course as old as man. But the origins of modern game shooting coincide with the earliest days of Hoare's Bank.

In 1671, a year before Hoare's Bank was established, Parliament passed the Game Act, limiting the right to hunt game – hares, partridges, pheasants and moor fowl – to those in possession of freehold land worth £100 p.a. or leasehold land worth £150 p.a. At the same time the Act granted lords of the manor the right to employ gamekeepers armed with the power to seek out and confiscate guns, nets, snares or hunting dogs from anyone who fell short of the £100 p.a. benchmark. Together these measures theoretically barred all but a tiny minority from hunting game, although in practice many landowners and magistrates turned a blind eye to their unqualified neighbours' hunting activities, provided they were confined to their own property.

Game traditionally had been hunted with an assortment of nets, snares, dogs, hawks and pipes. But the emergence of the flintlock shotgun or fowling piece during the later seventeenth century ushered in a new type of hunting: 'shooting flying'. Shooting with flintlocks, though, was a hazardous business. Writer George Morgan warned: *Do not fire full against the wind when it blows hard, for it will then drive the powder into your face; and if it rains, immediately give over your sport. Never blow at the mouth of your piece after it has missed fire, lest some latent spark discharge it through your head. Keep your gun always directed from you, and your thumb on the flint, which you should never hammer, because the sparks may fall into the pan, and kill a bystander.* (The Complete Sportsman, 1785)

From the outset, the Hoares proved themselves to be enthusiastic sportsmen. Henry Hoare's private accounts show that in June 1720, before his new house at Stourhead, Wiltshire, was even finished, he spent £4 on a fowling piece. The following year he purchased two more fowling pieces and appointed a man to act as warrener/gamekeeper on his estate. By the 1730s, Henry's son, known as Henry the Magnificent, was settled on an estate at Quarley, near Andover, and his accounts too

reveal a predilection for 'shooting flying': 5 guineas to gamekeeper John Munday; 8s 5d to Widow Munday for plucking birds; 16s 9d to the landlord of the George Inn, Salisbury, for sending game to his brother Richard in London and various sums to gunsmith Charles Pickfatt for powder and shot as well as the cleaning and mending of guns.

To ensure a ready supply of game, landowners began creating game-friendly plantations on their estates. According to Annals kept by Sir Richard Colt Hoare, over 75,000 trees were planted at Stourhead between October 1798 and November 1799 alone. Each spring, game eggs would have been gathered up and hatched in specially constructed pheasantries before being transferred to the plantations, while the liberal scattering of grain would have attracted additional partridges and pheasants into the coverts. At the same time predators, including foxes, crows, stoats and hawks, would have been sought out and exterminated. But even the most assiduous game preserver could do nothing about the weather. In 1812 the Annals recorded *the worst breed of Partridges ever remembered. Winter set in very severely*. Next season Richard bagged just 63 partridges, a far cry from the 500 or more he was accustomed to, while the following year yielded a paltry 18 birds.

One constant feature, however, was poaching. Early eighteenth century poaching tended to be small scale and the penalties not overly severe. In 1740, labourer Richard Brewer was bound to Benjamin Hoare for £20, *not for the face of ten years to make or cause to be made, use or have in his possession any snares etc for the destruction of game* within Benjamin's manors at Boreham, Essex. But as landowners began investing significant sums of money in game preservation, they became increasingly anxious to crack down on poaching. In 1752, Henry Hoare (Magnificent) was one of the earliest subscribers (£2-2-0) to the newly formed Association for the Preservation of Game, which funded the prosecution of poachers and offered rewards for information leading to their conviction. At the same time, such large concentrations of game proved irresistible to poachers, particularly after a ban on the sale of game in 1755 created a lucrative black market, one organised poaching gangs were only too happy to supply. And as the stakes rose, so did the poachers' ruthlessness. In January 1787, Richard Colt Hoare's gamekeeper was violently beaten after stumbling across a gang of eight or nine poachers in the Stourhead woods. Two of the gang were later jailed for twelve months and fined £3 apiece. According to the presiding judge, both were lucky to escape the death penalty. As long as there were profits to be had, however, the problem persisted. In 1803, Hugh Hoare instructed his lawyers to proceed against a waterman found on his estate at Barn Elms, Surrey, *professedly for ye purpose of shooting Pigeons as it however might be difficult to get witnesses to prove this fact, the simple & short method appears to [be to] alarm & fine him for carrying a gun, being unqualified*.

By the nineteenth century, there were persistent calls for the Game Laws to be reformed or even abolished. Reformers argued that legalising the sale of game would drastically reduce poaching, which in turn would relieve the country's overcrowded prisons – up to a third of all prisoners were serving sentences for poaching-related offences. The property qualification too was condemned: *What can be more ridiculous than that which prevents a man who has 100,000l in the funds, from being qualified, while...any other person not possessing one hundredth part of that property in land, is considered so qualified?* (The Mirror of Parliament, 1831). Eventually, after years of wrangling, a new Game Law was passed in 1831. The property qualification was abolished and licensed dealers permitted to sell game, while the close seasons, dating back to the 1770s, were confirmed. Partridges could only be hunted from 1 September to 1 February, pheasants from 1 October to 1 February, black game from 20 August to 10 December and red grouse from 12 August to 10 December. Heavy fines were introduced for those caught hunting outwith these dates or purchasing game from unlicensed sources. Finally, the law enabled all landowners, not just those deemed lords of the manor, to employ gamekeepers.

By then, however, the sport of 'shooting flying' had been transformed. While for most of the eighteenth century game was 'walked up', by the early nineteenth century it was being usurped by a new form of shooting – the battue. Under the battue system, sportsmen stationed themselves at fixed points, or 'pegs', while beaters drove the game towards them. For purists, who revelled in the thrill of the chase, the battue was an anathema. *Such sport seems very tame*, lamented one, *Pheasants, numerous as barn-door fowls in a farm yard and as easily shot down; rabbits, thick as in a warren; and hares without end; each sportsman supplied by his servant with ready-loaded guns to be discharged as soon as loaded; all plain matter of fact work; no anxious, almost breathless silence, lest he should discover himself as he hears the footfall of the startled hare, which, having stealthily evaded the spaniels and the beaters, listens at the cover's side before breaking away to seek a more secure one; no nervous waiting for the exciting words "look out", uttered by the keeper or beaters...but a continuous bang, bang, for an hour or two together.* (Farmer's Magazine, 1869) Yet for others the battue offered a more sociable, less strenuous form of shooting and before long it had become a staple of the country house weekend.

The spread of the battue was aided by advances in gun technology. Flintlocks, so dominant during the 1700s, were superseded in the early 1800s by percussion caps, which made shotguns safer and more reliable. Then in the 1850s-60s the first breech-loading shotguns and central-fire cartridges were introduced. Together these innovations made shooting more popular and affordable than ever before. They also dramatically increased the size of the average bag. In November 1868, The Times reported that: *At a Suffolk Battue 5,235 head of game were killed in four days, of which 2,357 were brought down the second day.* Victorian estate owners assiduously recorded the fortunes of their shooting parties in large leather-bound game books. And for the sportsman on the hoof there were pocket game registers, enabling them to keep a personal record of their season. The one shown here, dating from 1887, belonged to future bank partner, Harry Hoare. In it, 20 year old Harry faithfully recorded the date and place of each day's sport, the names of his companions and a breakdown of the bag. There are also comments on the weather and the day in general.

The first entry, on 2 September 1887, found Harry shooting near the family home at Staplehurst, Kent, alongside two uncles, Willie and Alfred Hoare, and a neighbour, Major Dixon. The weather, he noted, was unkind, *Westerly gale & driving rain*, and their day got off to an unpromising start: *Didn't see a bird for the first hour & could hardly face the wind – but at last we came in sight of some large coveys & got 7 brace before lunch.* The total bag that day was modest; ten brace of partridge and one hare. Nor did the party fare any better next day, managing just four brace between them.

A month later Harry visited Ampton Hall, Suffolk, home to another uncle, John Paley. By then the pheasant season was in full swing. *The best day I've ever had*, Harry enthused on 17 October, as the six guns bagged 197 pheasants, 11 hares and 109 rabbits. Harry's youthful high spirits remained undimmed throughout. *A very cheery party & no end of sport* he writes of a day at Timsbury, Somerset, the seat of bank customer Hon Ralph Heneage Dutton MP, adding *I never saw so many hares in my life.* His most successful outings, however, were at Woodhall, Norfolk, home of his friend Michael Stocks. One wet November day Harry's party of eight bagged 5 partridges, 363 pheasants, 121 hares, 77 rabbits and a woodcock. Two days later, they did even better, bringing down over 400 pheasants alone, although Harry was vexed they did not bag more: *Ought to have got 900 but the birds came in such flushes.*

As the battue system became more widespread, the long-running debate about the over-preservation of game intensified. Tenant farmers protested that too much of their land was being set aside for

game, while large concentrations of pheasants, partridges, rabbits and hares feasted on their crops with impunity. Even fiercer opposition came from the fox-hunting fraternity, adamant that the maintenance of coverts and the systematic destruction of foxes put paid to their sport. Up and down the country this squabble was played out in communities both real and fictional: *Then there came on that well-worn dispute among sportsmen, whether foxes and pheasants are or are not pleasant companions to each other. Everyone was agreed that, if not, then the pheasants should suffer, and that any gentleman who allowed his gamekeeper to entrench on the privileges of foxes in order that pheasants might be more abundant, was a "brute" and a "beast", and altogether unworthy to live in England.* (The American Senator, Anthony Trollope, 1875) At Peter Richard Hoare's Devon estate, Luscombe, however, preservation consistently trumped the desires of others. In 1871, Peter's agent suggested that the Dawlish Horticultural Society might hold their annual show on the lawn *without any fear of damage; of course there would be someone to stop them roaming in the covers etc.* But while this request was granted, one from the local Hunt met with a peremptory refusal: *I hardly think that it would do for the Hunt to scour the Plantations. The Hounds would do almost as much harm as the Foxes...I sh'd think that it would hardly do for the Pheasants & Hares. I certainly don't think it would do to preserve Foxes all through the Property.*

Today shooting, whether driven or walked up, is still a popular pastime. It is also big business. The British Association for Shooting & Conservation estimates that there are currently 459 grouse moors alone in the UK, covering an estimated 1.5M hectares and attracting sportsmen from across the world, all happy to pay tens of thousands of pounds for a day or two's shooting.