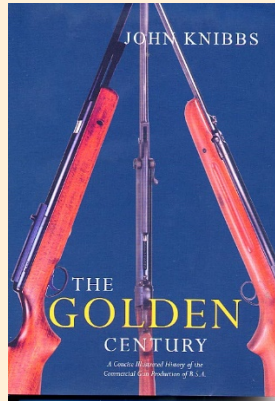


The Golden Century

By John Knibbs

Review by John Groenewold

This appeared in *Airgun Illustrated* in October 2002 and in *Rimfire and Airgun Magazine* also in October 2002. Unfortunately as of January 1, 2010 this now out of print.



This newly published book on the Birmingham Small Arms Company's (BSA) commercial gun production breaks new ground in the field of British firearms history. It documents the activities of the firm's mass production techniques rather than the traditional gun making methods in use during the 19th century. *The Golden Century* is a concise, illustrated history of the commercial gun production by the BSA firm from 1906 to 2000. The book, however, begins with the origins of the company in 1861. Brief mention of BSAs military production is made as well as reference to other British gun companies.

BSA was founded in 1861, by a group of Birmingham gunsmiths. They constructed a new factory at Small Heath, and equipped it with the latest machines. The factory was designed for mass production of firearms right from the beginning. The basis of this mass production was interchangeable parts. This system was in stark contrast to the production of sporting arms, which were entirely hand-made at that time. This concept proved economically successful, however, by 1904, the company had to diversify. In 1904 it received a contract to supply 1,000 Lincoln Jeffries model H air rifles to the Lincoln Jeffries Company. The War Office granted BSA a contract for 100,000 War Office Miniature Pattern .22 rifles. These precision-made guns were so successful that BSA moved into the modestly priced, good quality sporting arms market. In 1908, BSA introduced the BSA No. 1 model Miniature rifle. Due to the mass production techniques in use at BSA this gun was much less expensive than competitors guns. It was so successful that in 1911, the company introduced a 410 shotgun based on the Metford bolt Acton. By 1914, BSA had obtained several air rifle patents but the outbreak of World War I delayed the introduction of BSAs new air rifles until 1919.

In the years between the two World Wars, BSA produced a wide variety of shotguns, sporting rifles, and airguns. The airguns included model names like the Standard, Light Pattern, Club, and Breakdown air rifles.

After World War II, BSA produced models with names like the Airsporter, Merlin, Cadet, Meteor, Mercury, and Scorpion. Post war sporting rifles included the Martini, International, Sportsman, and others. Current production includes such air rifle models as the Goldstar, Firebird, Lightning, Superten, Supersport, and Superstar.

The Golden Century is a complete history of the BSA firm. It includes evidence from original source material, a detailed study of the guns themselves by collectors, and interviews of former BSA employees. It is illustrated with black and white, and color photographs, as well as line drawings.

The author, John Knibbs, a former BSA employee himself and a Governor of the Birmingham Proof House is eminently qualified to write the history of BSA. In his first book, BSA and Lincoln Jeffries Air Rifles, published in 1986, he included a complete assessment of the air rifles produced from 1906 to World War I. John Knibbs is still a familiar figure at the BSA factory.