

"It seems a very long way when we think back to a small, leaky potting shed behind our home in Lancashire," Elaine Stewart, the director of Longthorne Gunmakers, told me. "Although this didn't deter too many people with the foresight and belief in our products, it is so much nicer to be able to give clients a much better experience in our factory in Northampton."

Life in the world of gunmaking for James and Elaine, who own Longthorne, started back in 2006 at their home in Hesketh Bank, Lancashire. After a conversation with a shooting friend of theirs, a seed was planted and James, bored and unchallenged with subcontract engineering, decided to manufacture a shotgun.

Longthorne currently produce five custom shotguns – all manufactured with the same technology – the Celtic, Hesketh, Hesketh Deluxe, English Small Rose & Scroll and their newly launched Nouveau model, all of which are produced for a discerning worldwide market.

Elaine shared her thoughts with me on how the ideas from the potting shed led to the creation of their brand. "It all began with the name, we didn't want to buy a name like so many other gun companies, we wanted to be true to our roots and build our identity from the start.

"We knew we were going to be different and I don't think it would have done our brand any good at all to be labelled as just another company. Longthorne is actually James's family name, we thought it sounded appropriate and therefore just resurrected it. Once we had the name decided upon we set about designing a logo. As luck would have it our daughter, Chloe, is a talented artist so she was able to do this for us," Elaine explained.

So, with a logo created, next the branding had to be decided upon with a strong image as to what the ethos of Longthorne were aiming to achieve. I asked James how they progressed forward in such a competitive worldwide market. "We launched in 2010 at the CLA Game Fair and it probably took about three years of constant brand reinforcement before it began to feel established in the UK, but we have plenty of other markets we are still establishing ourselves in," James told me.

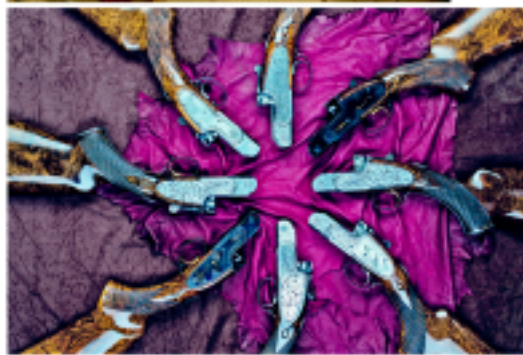
"I don't believe in being complacent, it has to be worked on constantly. There were many aspects that we had to create such as stationary, company culture, staff, etc. We wanted to build a strong image from the start so we took everything into account, from the colours we wanted to use to represent us to the style we wanted to portray.

"Obviously budget played a big part in this in the early days but we did the best we could with the finance we had available to us. As the budget has increased, we have invested more into our brand. We have always considered image to be very important for Longthorne and in doing so we tweak various aspects from time to time while continuing to develop the brand for the current market."

However, as with any company starting up with big plans to reach a global market, Longthorne faced testing times as they tried to secure their place in the pantheon of British gunmaking. "Being a little naïve back in 2010 we thought we were bringing something useful to the gun trade," Elaine told me. "Our aim, at the time, was to be a major contributor toward realigning a British global position as a manufacturer of shotguns.

"Unfortunately, as total newcomers appearing on the scene from nowhere, many didn't regard us in this way and a degree of resistance became evident. A great deal of negativity pursued us for quite some time which was to be expected. Yet here we are several years on with several friends in the trade, still here and in fact making parts for certain factions of the trade."

In the early days, James and Elaine also had some initial production problems due to substandard equipment. The effects were manufacturing delays which caused them a number of unforeseen issues for a while and made it very difficult to move forward with their plans. However, since they moved to their new factory in 2015, they have been able to further reinvest in reliable e



me. "They are so strong I can stand on a set, bridging two blocks of wood, and they don't bend. There is also a photo of someone driving a Range Rover over them with no resulting damage."

Despite being light, Longthorne barrels are also tough enough to handle three-inch steel Magnum loads through full chokes without bulging. "This ensures our guns are 'future proofed' in the event of a lead ban," says Elaine. The barrels are also perfectly straight yet a charge from either will strike the same point of impact at 40 yards. The most significant feature of Longthorne guns is that they have negligible felt recoil, even with the heaviest loads, which the makers attribute to a greater rigidity compared to traditional guns.

"All our shotguns are 100 per cent English made (and all in-house) – and we believe we are the only UK company who can claim this. Our patented barrel technology, which ensures low felt recoil and muzzle flip, is also proofed for Magnum Steel up to full choke (in our three-inch chambered guns with fixed choke as standard)."

With plans to launch a side-by-side, a Woodward inspired over-and-under and boxlock as well as the development of further models and innovations, James and Elaine are taking Longthorne into the 21st Century in exquisite style. The Longthorne legacy is worldwide and their place within the pantheon of British gunmaking is well and truly set in both steel and stone.

For more information on Longthorne Gunmakers please visit www.longthorneguns.com

equipment as well as employ more staff, which has propelled the company forward.

"Northampton is a hub when it comes to attracting staff with technical skills, such as CNC programming," explains Elaine. "It proved to be the perfect location as it's so central, near lots of major motorways and, most importantly, being the centre of the automotive trade there are lots of experienced engineers who can operate our equipment."

With a tremendous factory and a stunning range of shotguns on offer, Elaine gave me an insight into exactly how their famous barrels came to define the legacy of Longthorne's shotguns. "When James originally started making the shotgun barrels he used conventional methods but, being an engineer, he wasn't satisfied because they were never going to be straight," Elaine explained. "So, with utter determination to achieve perfectly straight barrels, he decided that making them from one piece of steel would achieve this precision."

What are the advantages of using just one piece of steel for barrels instead of the conventional two? "The significance of creating both tubes, the ribs, lumps and chokes out of a single 27kg block of high-quality steel is that the barrels are trim and light but also unbelievably strong; substantial without being bulky," James told