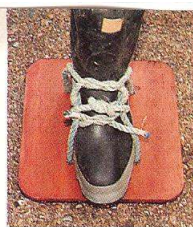
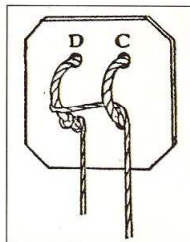


Up the creek?

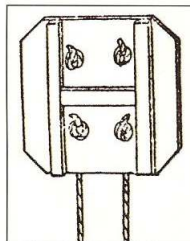
Having sparked controversy with his damning views on Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey's knowledge of punt-guns, **Nick Horten** asks if there was a self-serving pattern to the great man's writings



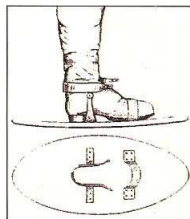
Wearing well: putting the patten to the test



Bindings on traditional pattens are simple



Battens on the patten's underside give grip



Payne-Gallwey's dished patten was short-lived

MY CONVICTION that Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey was not the authority on punt-gunning that he and his disciples would like us to believe did not come about overnight. I spent much time and effort on practical and historical research before concluding – as disturbing to me at first as it is plainly unacceptable to others now – that Payne-Gallwey often wrote in authoritative tones on subjects about which he knew little or nothing.

I began to doubt Payne-Gallwey's credentials many years ago, but at first my doubts were confined to a seemingly insignificant item of fowling equipment, one that few fowlers use nowadays – the mud patten. Its history and development reveal a similar pattern to Payne-Gallwey's treatment of punt-gunning. Again, a tried-and-tested idea was abandoned and replaced by an inferior method that was subsequently lauded in print by Payne-Gallwey. With this piece of equipment he leads fowlers up the creek, where he abandons them without a paddle in the same way as he did with punt-gunners.

The humble mud patten is probably one of

the most misunderstood and misrepresented pieces of wildfowling equipment. Blindingly simple in theory but surprisingly complex in practice, it is the ultimate illustration of what I call the "Payne-Gallwey syndrome".

Stout wooden boards fastened to the fowler's feet spread his weight across a large surface area, reducing the ground pressure and preventing him from sinking into the mud upon which his shooting depends. However, there are a few basic rules regarding the general shape of the board and the method of fastening it to the wearer's foot. The more these are disregarded, the more the pattern becomes uncomfortable, inefficient and even dangerous to use. Simplicity of design and ease of construction using cheap, readily available materials such as plain, flat board and rope are also important considerations.

So much for the theory. As to the practice, I can claim to have some small understanding of the mechanics of mud-pattens because I had to use them for many years. I also made and field tested my own pattens using plans found in all the classic fowling literature.

The ideal shape for a patten is square, about

12in across, though it does depend on the consistency of the mud to be walked upon. Fastenings need to be strong and easily replaceable in the event of breakage far out on the mudflats. Critical to the patten's operation is the position of the wearer's foot on the surface of the board. The toes need to hang over the leading edge so the effect of transferring your weight forward as you walk breaks the suction of the mud to the patten sole, while common sense demands that there be some form of cross-battening underneath to prevent slipping and sliding on the mud.

Walk normally

PROVIDED YOU do not try to walk on mud that is too liquid, pattens following these basic principles will serve you well under most fowling conditions. You will be able to walk normally, kneel comfortably and even climb steep-sided creeks by simply kicking your toes into the mud.

Those among you who are, shall we say, hostile to my opinion of Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey's wildfowling "expertise" may wish to stop reading at this point. Having already slipped the stilettos into the ribs of his reputation, I deeply regret

that I now intend to drive the blade home.

Tucked away in the pages of Colonel Peter Hawker's *Instructions to Young Sportsmen* is a diagram of a perfectly serviceable pattern, conforming to all the above requirements. It had been developed over many years by thousands of users and had been barely improved upon. With monumental arrogance, Payne-Gallwey ignored Hawker's advice and in the 1882 *Fowler in Ireland* conjured from the recesses of his imagination the most expensive, impractical and dangerous patten ever invented.

Oval in shape, measuring 18in x 8in, made from 3/4in elm with leather fastenings, it breaks every rule in the book. With the foot placed in the centre of the board, the leading edge overlaps the toe by some 4in forcing the wearer to adopt an unnatural, uncomfortable and tiring heel-down slouch, rather than a normal walking gait. The smooth sole gives no grip and the wearer has great difficulty maintaining his balance. It is impossible to kneel or to climb creek banks. Its construction is a major and expensive undertaking, needing the use of a boatbuilder's steam box to "dish" the boards, while the leather fastenings are best made by a saddler or cobbler. If the fastenings break in use, they are impossible to repair in the field.

Diabolical creations

SADLY, SUCH eminent writers as Stanley Duncan and James Wentworth Day were deceived by Payne-Gallwey's writings into including thinly disguised adaptations of these diabolical creations in their books. To his credit, Duncan at least expressed his reservations about the design.

It has been said of Sir Ralph that his, "*breadth of experience and depth of enquiry surpassed those of any sportsman this century*". Were this remotely true, the experience and enquiry he devoted to his version of the mud patten should have ensured its supremacy for all time – but it didn't. It endured for a mere four years until 1886. Meanwhile, Hawker's pattens were working perfectly well.

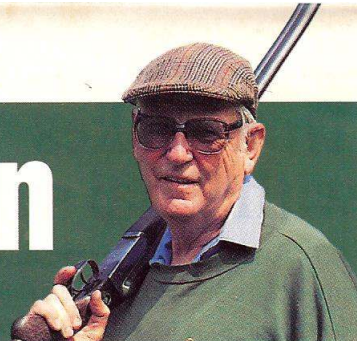
Sir Ralph, it seems to me, could not bear to be beholden to Hawker – nor did he seem capable of asking the advice of his own professional puntsmen. To be fair, though, by 1886 in the *Badminton Library's Moor and Marsh* volume, he had thrown all the experience and enquiry devoted to his first attempt at pattens out of the window and introduced an equally thoroughly researched 12in square board. Common sense at last.

However, in a book noted for its illustration of the most minute items of fowling equipment, there is no description of how to wear or fasten them and, "*strapped to the feet something like a skate*", is the best Payne-Gallwey can offer. He also introduces a strange wooden block to put against the heel, the function of which is unclear. That's all – no picture, nothing.

However, 10 years later in Payne-Gallwey's most comprehensive work, *Letters to Young Shooters*, a book regarded by many fowlers as the font of accurate information on all things pertaining to wildfowling, he finally admits defeat and omits any reference to this vital piece of equipment. You can, and doubtless will, draw your own conclusions from these facts. In the meanwhile, I can find nothing to alter my original view that, in matters wildfowling, Sir Ralph Frankland Payne-Gallwey was a self-serving fraud. ■

Town Gun

WITH COLIN WILLOCK



'My betting is that the society just can't afford, though it ought to be able to as it has an income of £30 million a year, to upset the little old ladies, or rich old ladies for that matter'

HAVE never been much of a one for car badges – at least not of the, "I've been to Butlins at Minehead" variety. Even if I had been there, I'd probably keep quiet about it. However, my Land Rover does display a fair variety of field sports badges, including a treasured original insignia from the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland – now the British Association for Shooting and Conservation. Alas, the badge has lost its red enamel as the result of a head-on argument with a tree. As mentioned recently (*Town Gun*, February 19), I suffered having my tyres slashed for daring to have a "Counterside March" sticker in the rear window of my Volvo.

Badgewise, I am in favour of some conservation organisations strictly outside the realm of country sports. For example, I visibly support the Worldwide Fund for Nature. However, I would not pay a penny towards the upkeep of the National Trust because of its anti-hunting bias – and as for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals... you must be joking.

It may come as a surprise to some, since I have something of a reputation for being greatly bird-oriented, that the very last badge I would stick on my windscreen would be that of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. There – I've said it. Having come clean about that, I feel at least I owe it to that powerful and rich organisation to give my reasons – not that I imagine the RSPB will care either way.

I read with great interest Alasdair Mitchell's article *Friend or foe?* (May 7), which stated at the outset that the RSPB – "*the most powerful conservation organisation in Europe*" with a million members and an annual income of more than £30 million – deserved its good reputation. However, in a long and fair interview with Graham Elliott, the RSPB's head of investigations, I think I detected an underlying sense of unease at the society's attitude towards shooting.

I know that, being a charity, the RSPB is not permitted to take sides on field sports issues. However, as Mr Mitchell wrote, "*RSPB*

officials are generally reasonable people and members of the shooting community have a great deal in common with them", I would beg to turn that sentence on its head. The RSPB has, or anyway should feel it has, a great deal in common with the shooting community.

I am certain that being, "*generally reasonable people*", officials of the RSPB know this perfectly well. They don't need me to tell them that an estate properly managed for shooting will, generally, have more migrants and resident songbirds per square metre than a similar acreage where the owner or tenant farmer doesn't shoot but grubs out every piece of cover and copse that he can.

This, dear RSPB, is what we have in common. So why, without endangering your charitable status, can't you acknowledge this and work openly with shooters without actively supporting them? In the USA, state and federal wildlife services did it in partnership with a shooting and conservation body called Ducks Unlimited. The partnership was and is a classic success.

Feeds the tits

AM I being a mean and suspicious old Town Gun when I say that I have a sneaking suspicion I know the answer? Who puts the pennies in the collecting boxes? Who leaves large chunks of their estate to the RSPB? I have no way of knowing, of course – and I know I am caricaturing the situation when I conjure up this image of a little old lady who feeds the tits at her bird table. It would be interesting, though, to see a breakdown of RSPB members to discover how many are urban rather than truly rural.

My betting is that the society just can't afford, though it ought to be able to as it has an income of £30 million a year, to upset the little old ladies, or rich old ladies for that matter, by showing that bird-lovers and shooting people – who can, of course, be one and the same thing – have common cause. Also, just as a wicked afterthought, old ladies keep an awful lot of moggies and moggies kill one hell of a lot of dicky-birds every year...

Next week *Country Gun* wields the hammer at a sporting auction for a local shooting club.