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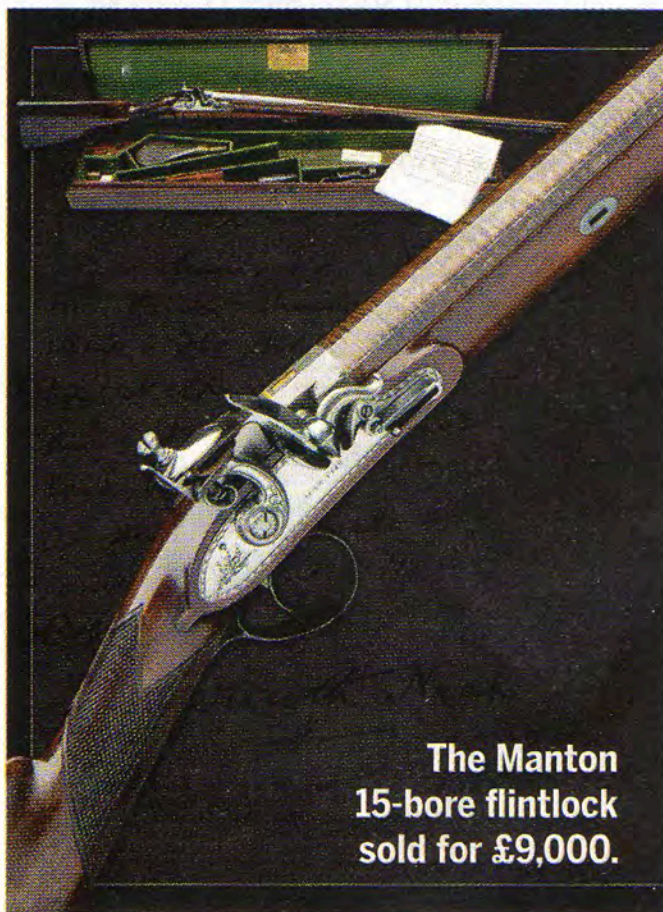
STRONG SALES AT HOLTS MARCH SALE

Modern sporting guns and rifles, fine shooting accessories, percussion guns, edged weapons and militaria all went until the hammer during Holts first ever two-day sale in late March.

Lots included a rare Mortimer 16-bore sporting gun with both flintlock and percussion locks, which sold for £11,000, a fine Manton 15-bore flintlock single-barrelled sporting gun (£9,000) and a rare pair of hammer ejectors built by James Purdey & Sons and intended for the Paris Exhibition in 1899, which sold for £24,000.

Turn to pages 72 to 75 for more about the Paris Exhibition and these great guns. ■

For more information on this and future sales, visit holtsauctioneers.com



**The Manton
15-bore flintlock
sold for £9,000.**

ANDREW ORR/ HOLTS AUCTIONEER

In his 100th article for *Shooting Gazette*, gunmaking historian **Donald Dallas** examines a pair of guns fit for, but never shown at, the Paris Exhibition of 1889.

Paris Exhibition Purdey hammer ejectors

We all know that the provenance of a famous individual or somebody with a fascinating history will increase the interest in a firearm as well as boosting its value. Last year, I bought a pretty (but fairly ordinary) flintlock cannon-barrelled pistol dating from the mid 1700s. I bought it because it had an interesting large crest and when I researched it, found the pistol originally belonged to Lord Jeffery Amehurst (1717-1797), who defeated the French in Canada in 1760 and was subsequently promoted to field marshal. There was another crest on the pistol and this turned



The "Exposition Universelle", Paris, 1889, showing the newly constructed Eiffel Tower.

out to be the Order Of the Bath. For his service in Canada, Lord Amehurst was made a knight of the Order of the Bath in 1761 and this was the presentation pistol that had been given to him on this occasion. This little pistol is now definitely not fairly ordinary.

However, occasionally, a gun or rifle will surface with a fascinating story that has nothing to do with an individual, but is connected to a famous event. In the March Holts sale I was immediately drawn to a very attractive pair of Purdey hammer ejector guns as such guns are very rare indeed and are highly sought-after. I delved into their

The modern Purdey hammer ejector gun

Such is the name and reputation of the Purdey hammer ejector gun and the glamour that is associated with it, Purdey decided to reintroduce the hammer ejector in 2004.

Gun development can be a bit like reinventing the wheel. Not so long ago nobody wanted 20-bores and until the 1970s you could not sell 30in barrelled guns as short-barrelled guns were in fashion. I am looking forward to the day when my 20-bore with its 26in barrels comes back into fashion to shut up the syndicate with the extended poles they carry. But *plus ça change*,

and the Purdey hammer ejector made its re-appearance in the early 21st century.

Always looking for something different, a group of Americans asked Purdey to build once again its famous hammer ejector. Purdey agreed and in 2004 relaunched the Purdey hammer ejector gun. It is available in two bore sizes, 12- and 20-bore with various barrel lengths. The 12-bore weighs 6lb 8oz to 7lb and the 20-bore 5lb 15oz to 6lb 4oz.

The gun is a bar action sidelock and the only real difference between the Purdey hammer ejector of the 1890s and the present-day example, is the provision of a safety.



A modern Purdey 12-bore hammer ejector gun.

They have proved popular. The Purdey hammer ejectors built in 1889 would cost around £150. A pair of similar guns in 2018 cost £240,000. *Plus ça change?* ■



A pair of 12-bore Purdey hammer ejector guns nos. 13213/4 built in 1889 and intended for the Paris Exhibition in that year.

ANDREW ORR/HOLTS AUCTIONEERS

provenance and there in the Purdey *Dimensions Book* of 1889 was the note "Made For The Paris Exhibition".

Exposition Universelle

In 1889, the French decided to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Storming of the Bastille by holding a major exhibition in the centre of Paris, an Exposition Universelle. The centrepiece was to be the Eiffel Tower, built between 1887 and 1889 and only just opened in time.

The Paris Exhibition was open between May and October 1889 as a "showcase for scientific and technological advances" and more than six million visitors attended.

A large section of the exhibition was devoted to firearms and a great many makers from Europe displayed their creations. Great Britain had scores of gunmakers taking part, with their stands crammed full of their latest gun and rifle developments.

The pair of 12-bore hammer ejector Purdeys nos. 13213/4 were completed on 30 July, 1889. The guns were built to exhibition standards with highly figured stocks, gold ovals and extra-fine engraving, with Purdey pulling out all the stops to exhibit its best work.

The hammer ejector was the pinnacle of development for the hammer gun in the 1880s and

1890s, but since hammerless ejector guns were by this time the very latest development, few hammer ejector guns were ever made. Consequently, such guns today are highly collectible and in addition very usable.

One reason for their undoubted attraction is that hammer ejectors were favoured by many of the famous sportsmen of the late 19th century, including Lord Ripon, Lord Walsingham, the Prince of Wales and the future King George V. They all claimed that the hammers were an excellent aid to sighting.

Purdey soon acquired 'the name' for hammer ejector guns as all these famous sportsmen used such ▶

The Great Exhibition, 1851

The modern breechloader has its origins in France, a series of developments in that country in the early 19th century initiating the great changes that would take place.

They began with the Pauly breechloader of 1812. Later, Casimir Lefauchaux took over Pauly's business, and in the 1830s he took out various patents in France concerning drop-down breechloading guns with pinfire cartridges.

While this flurry of innovation was occurring in France, the breechloader was almost completely ignored by British gunmakers in the 1840s. This was all about

to change with the Great Exhibition of 1851.

The Great Exhibition took place in Hyde Park, London, between 1 May 1851 and 15 October 1851, with around six million people visiting. Class VIII, naval architecture, military engineering, guns, weapons and so on meant that for the first time in the history of the gun trade, hundreds of gunmakers from all over the world came together to exhibit their wares.

With hindsight, the most important exhibitor was no. 1308, Casimir Lefauchaux in the French section showing "Different Sorts of Guns".

GUN TO BE LOADED AT THE BREECH, ON LEFAUCHEUX'S PLAN.



FIVE-BARRELLED PISTOL.—LEFAUCHEUX

The Lefauchaux pinfire revolver displayed at the Great Exhibition in 1851 as shown in *The Illustrated London News* of 5 July, 1851.

Such a bland title belies the fact that this was none other than his pinfire breechloader and cartridge.

What is telling is that two examples of the Lefauchaux pinfire breechloader were specially chosen to be shown

in the popular periodical *The Illustrated London News*. The Lefauchaux breechloader consequently received excellent publicity, it was copied by British gunmakers and a mere decade later in 1861, the muzzle-loader was obsolete. ■

Purdey guns, hence Purdey built more hammer ejectors than any other maker. With such credentials and pedigree, it is hardly surprising Purdey would want to show off its hammer ejector gun at the Paris Exhibition of 1889.

Big Three no-shows

However, this pair of exhibition-grade Purdey hammer guns never actually arrived at the Paris Exhibition. When the idea to build this pair of guns was conceived a year earlier in 1888, Purdey had every intention of taking a stand at the exhibition and consequently built the guns to the highest standard.

An article in one periodical of June 1889 on the British exhibitors bemoans the fact that the really famous British gunmakers, Purdey, Holland & Holland and Boss, were conspicuous by their absence. A great many other makers were present and Charles Lancaster, James Lang, Cogswell & Harrison, E M Reilly & Co, W W Greener and W

& C Scott & Sons all won medals. The top medal, the Grand Prix, was won by Westley Richards.

The reason for the absence of the Big Three at the Paris Exhibition lies in the dilemma that these makers constantly faced: whether to take part in trials or exhibitions or not. Their

“It was thought to be slightly vulgar for a top firm to advertise, relying on word of mouth instead.”

reputation was such that if they took part and did not come out top, then their reputation could be tarnished. It was far better not to take part as they had more to lose than any other makers if they were not successful. Purdey had, in fact, taken part in international exhibitions in the 1870s and 1880s, and had won medals, but the size

of this exhibition made them pause for thought.

One can almost hear James Purdey the Younger mulling it over in his mind, deciding in 1888 to exhibit at such a prestigious event in Paris the next year and having this pair of hammer ejectors begun along with others to show the best Purdey standards, then deciding later on not to exhibit. There was also a reticence on Purdey's part to advertise in any way, as in this era it was thought to be slightly vulgar for a top-class firm to do so, relying on word of mouth and recommendation instead. As a result of this, there are no Purdey advertisements in periodicals of the time.

I think this understanding of why these guns never reached the Paris Exhibition only adds to their exclusivity and attraction. They were intended for exhibition, built to the highest standards, but Purdey decided not to exhibit. “Paris Exhibition” the *Dimension Book* states and Paris Exhibition guns they are. 🦋



Purdey decided not to take a stand at the Paris Exhibition, so the guns were never shown.

Alexander Henry and the Calcutta Exhibition, 1883-1884

Alexander Henry was *the* rifle maker in the second half of the 19th century, having a far bigger international customer base than any other British gunmaker. He sold a vast number of rifles to India and during the 1883-1884 Calcutta Exhibition put on a lavish display.

The Henry display in Calcutta comprised a large 9ft by 5ft cabinet made of ebony and gold surmounted at the front and back by the Prince Of Wales's feathers and each side with the Duke Of Edinburgh's crest. It contained no fewer than 38 rifles and guns in many different calibres. Two of the rifles were handsomely inlaid in gold as the Maharajahs were regular customers of Henry and liked ostentatious firearms.



A bit closer to home, the 1886 International Exhibition in Edinburgh, where Henry also exhibited.

The Scotsman of 15 January, 1884, described Henry's exhibits: "Among the novelties are a new patent hammerless double-barrelled breechloading Express rifle with telescopic sight. As showing the varied

nature of the exhibits, they include a miniature .360 Express rifle, .400, .450, .500 rifles for deer, tiger and a .577 Express rifle for bison and other tough-skinned animals and large-bore rifles for elephant hunting."

The exhibition must have been a great success for Henry as he sold hundreds upon hundreds of his rifles in India, to Maharajahs, army officers and administrators.

As to the magnificent display cabinet it seems unfortunately to have vanished or fallen to bits in the Indian climate. However, most of the rifles in the display do still exist and in the Henry dimension books, the note "Calcutta Exhibition" denotes their provenance. ■