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# Auctions

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## Intensive Care

The working life of a modern auctioneer

**H**olding four sales a year doesn't sound much like hard work initially, but Nicholas Holt can tell you otherwise when he breaks down the schedule *Holt's Auctioneers* works to in order to achieve this. The reality is in a three month period he has just over a month to source a million pounds worth of guns, three weeks to photograph and catalogue them and produce an impressive, glossy catalogue which is sent out worldwide in advance of each auction.

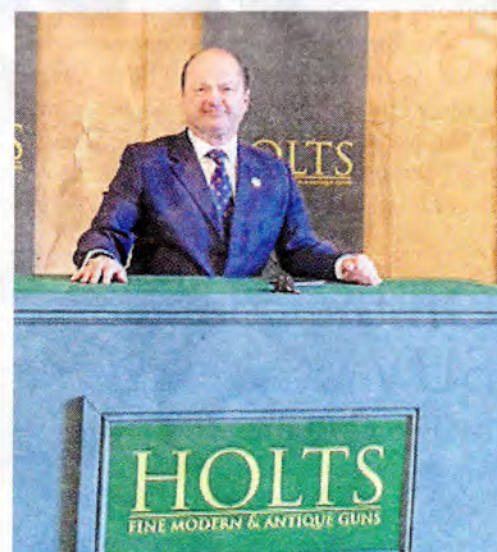
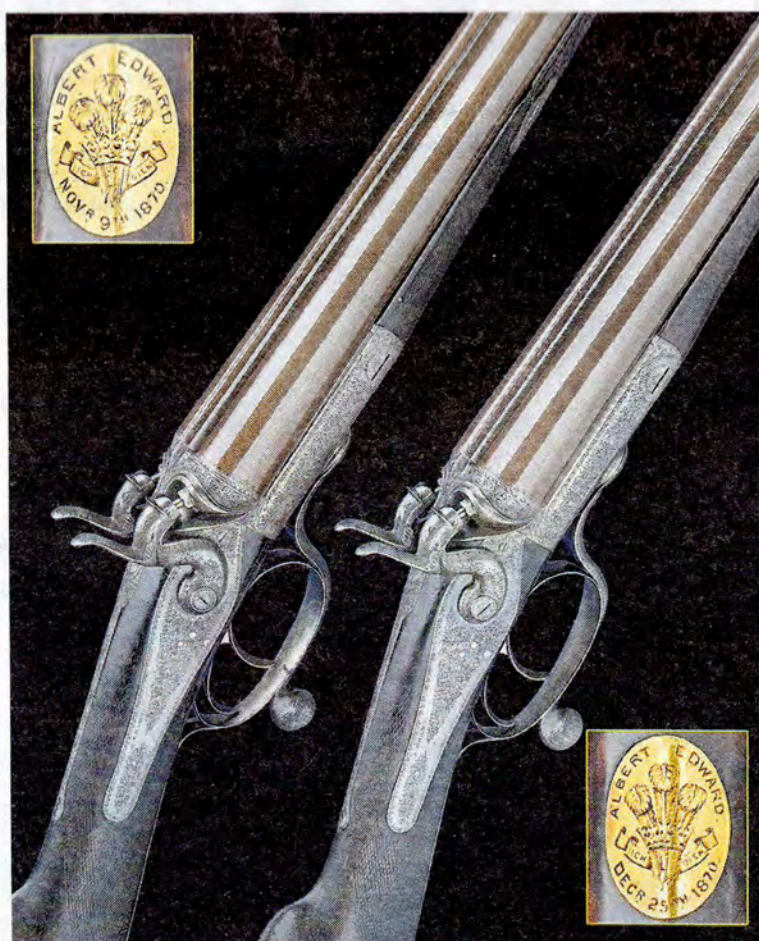
"It's an intensive business which keeps me and my team constantly on the go. Thankfully we have been building up an extensive network of both regional and international representatives who help tremendously by being able to spend time with clients in their area. They can liaise directly on a local level, which is invaluable, especially regarding overseas clients when one has to overcome not just language difficulties, but having to negotiate the different legislation issues each country presents. Much of my time nowadays is spent visiting these agents, attending their equivalents of our game fairs and exhibitions, or holding valuation days which they have organised for me. They will have already put in a lot of groundwork in terms of publicising the event and drumming up potential business and of course when it comes to the logistics of moving firearms around the world we'd be hard pressed to do it without them!

It never ceases to amaze me at what can turn up on these overseas ventures, for example, at the Paris Game Fair, just before our June sale, I met three young lads who had brought a Boss sidelock 'over and under' for valuation and possible sale. That in itself is fairly unusual, but this particular example had been buried on the family farm by their grandfather in advance of the German invasion during the Second World War. Sadly it had been buried with no protective case or cover and was extensively pitted and rusted all over (oddly enough though, not internally). I put a cautious estimate of £3000-5000 on it and everyone was surprised to see it make an unbelievable £11,500 on the day of the sale. These lads are still ringing up my French representative, Sebastian, on an almost daily basis asking "how much did it sell for!?"

It is as much the stories and the history that accompanies the guns we sell that gives them such a push commercially. It is not unusual for us to hold back selling an item in the next immediate sale in order to really be able to research the story that goes with it, and importantly, get that story published in the various shooting publications to give it maximum coverage. A perfect example of this would be the pistols owned by Lord Lovat, which he carried with him on D-Day and the Dieppe raid. The publicity resulted in the perfect outcome; with one going to the newly reformed Commando Regiment (initially founded by Lovat) and the second finding its way back home to the Lovat family. That was a terrific result.

The biggest nightmare we have to endure is when a vendor suddenly decides to change his mind on selling an item, especially after you have put the work in to the cataloguing, photography and publicity. Not least of all, having to explain to a potential buyer who has flown halfway across the world to buy something, that 'it has been withdrawn' is no fun at all.

Knowing how soul destroying this can be sometimes results in sacrificing potential



**Top:**  
A pair of presentation 20-bore James Barbar silver mounted pistols  
Sold by Holt's Auctioneers: March 2012  
Hammer Price: £11,000.  
**Left:**  
Pair of 16-bore Stephen Grant hammerguns  
Sold by Holt's Auctioneers: December 2009  
Hammer Price: £50,000  
**Above:** Nick Holt. A day in the life.

consignments for the sake of good relations with the other auction houses. Only recently I was asked to collect some items that had not sold with one of the other houses. When I found out that it was on the verge of printing its catalogue and that these items had been re-entered by it for sale (featuring quite prominently), I felt bound to persuade the vendor to leave them with the other house. To have had them pulled at that stage would have been a serious blow to them.

Outside of work I lead a pretty normal life. If I'm not somewhere on the other side of the world I'm up at 6:30am for a jog around the local park, doing the

school run and then into the office (where generally a ton of paperwork awaits me!). There is always a meeting to be at, whether with my staff or with the various committees I am involved with, such as the *Gun Trade Association* or the *Gunmakers Company Charitable Trust* (a very important charity set up to provide financial support for the development of craft skills and the new technology associated with the gunmaking trade. You can contact me for details!).

I'll aim to be back home for 7:30pm to spend some time with my children and then a glass of wine with my ever patient wife Kathryn. There is never a dull moment!