

GUN CLUB BY TAM VALENTINE



Loaded weapons: a cased pair of 52-bore flintlock duelling pistols, circa 1785, sold for £12,000 at Holt's Auctioneers

BLASTS FROM THE PAST

Specialists in putting antique guns and militaria under the hammer, auctioneer Holt's has found that every vintage firearm triggers a rich back story

In 1993, firearms expert Nick Holt took a big risk. He resigned his post at Bonhams auctioneers in London and went solo, taking on the combined might of his ex-employers, Sotheby's and Christie's. But unlike his competitors, Nick only sold guns and militaria, creating an international portal for sporting enthusiasts. Sixteen years on,

Holt's puts thousands of guns under the hammer every year in its London sales, drawing many of the finest and quirkiest guns on the market.

"The attraction of a specialist sale is that the choice is so much greater," Holt said. "We have a number of experts on hand to give advice on condition, provenance and realistic value.

"We're all gun nuts here, so the history of a gun is important. We just sold a 1928 Holland & Holland big game rifle, owned by English hunter Denys Finch Hatton. I found a photograph of Denys posing in front of a dead lion with the Prince of Wales, just after the rifle had been made. That's the magic of antique guns." HOLTSAUCTIONEERS.COM