

CASH IN THE ATTIC

Cashes of potentially valuable antiques are still out there waiting to be discovered, says Robert Morgan



At Holt's we put in a lot of effort to seek out previously unseen items for our various sales. We pride

ourselves on the fact that more than 70 per cent of any given catalogue are fresh to market private items never before offered for sale. We are also fortunate that our many trade clients tend to hold back the rare and unusual for us, knowing that these items invariably perform better in an auction environment.

However, from my own point of view, the best "finds" are those that come from clients who had absolutely no idea of what they had, or simply did not attach any value to those items. A good example of this occurred quite recently.

A number of photos were emailed to me with a request for approximate value. This is quite a common occurrence, and while "a picture speaks a thousand words", sometimes they can also be extremely misleading, with items turning out to be replicas or copies. These particular photos were a little blurry, and appeared to show, among other items, a North African musket along with a number of early style flintlock pistols. One was an English Civil War dog-lock, a pistol that has had a common shootable replica on the market for years.

Fearing the worst, a quick telephone call to the customer soon established that he was very near someone else I was due to visit the following week, so despite risking a potentially wasted journey an appointment was duly made.

When I arrived at the client's house I



The European flintlock conversion of a matchlock dated from around 1570

was ushered into the front room where a large number of guns and edged weapons were laid out on a dining table. To say I was blown away by what I saw would be the understatement of the year! The North African musket was actually an early European flintlock conversion of a matchlock, and dated from around 1570. Despite having suffered the ravages of time, it was pretty much complete with only small losses to the intricately carved and engraved bone inlays that covered the woodwork.

The dog-lock pistol was also original and was the first one I have been privileged to hold outside of a museum. Again, some renovation had taken place but I could forgive that to a pistol produced circa 1660. There was also a

large number of "Queen Anne" pistols, the earliest of which dated from around the first quarter of the 18th century, a handful of duelling or officer's pistols and some extraordinarily early edged weapons, including an English Civil War officer's sword and a dagger that could possibly even pre-date that.

After going through each piece in relation to its type and age with the vendor, I was asked the immortal question as to whether they were worth anything. Condition was against many of the pieces, and this was

explained, but even so, conservatively speaking, there was between £10,000 and £20,000 worth laying on the table.

This figure caused a few raised eyebrows, so I enquired as to how he had come by this lovely collection, and the answer was almost as amazing as some of the items themselves. Apparently, the client had bought a derelict house to renovate for his daughter, and while the builders had been removing the roof this whole collection had come to light, stored in trunks in the loft. When, or by whom, they were collected will probably remain a mystery, but I do find it particularly heart-warming that caches of potentially valuable antiques are still out there, waiting for some lucky individual to unearth. **SG**

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