

# Hidden treasures at Holts

*Donald Dallas takes a deeper look at some unusual auction lots.*

I think that out of both the main Holts sale and the sealed bid sale, I prefer the latter as it is absolutely brim full of little gems: everything from £10 lots upwards. There are thousands of lots and it is always a pleasurable hour to search through them all online. Trouble is that you always find something you can't live without.

For example, Lot 2029 in a recent sale showed such an item. In flintlock guns, a shot pouch was never used. The common shot pouch came in with percussion guns in the 1820s but flintlock guns used shot belts – long, thin snake-like belts that could be fastened around the body.

Have a look next time you see a flintlock gun case and you will always notice one large, long and narrow compartment for the shot belt. One defect of the belt was that it couldn't carry much shot, so occasionally two shot belts were stitched together. These are quite rare, but Lot 2029 showed such a double-shot belt dating from around 1800 estimated at £20-£30. It went for £73.

Good percussion guns by famous makers always fetch high prices, but condition is everything and if one comes up in less than good condition, the price drops dramatically. Lot 2083 was a very nice late-built Westley Richards double 16 bore percussion gun No.1593, built around 1855. It was a very typical Westley Richards gun

with elegant wood bar locks. It was pitted, and a mainspring didn't work, but it was still a Westley Richards and estimated at £250 – £350. It remained unsold. I have never understood the minty complex that many collectors have. If a gun is worn, then it's just part of its history, and in many ways makes it more interesting. "Restored" guns, though, which attempt to look minty by having years of patina removed in a mistaken attempt to "improve" them. No comment.

I found Lot 2158 hard to resist. It was a completely derelict flintlock musket dating from around 1750 with an enormous 56" barrel. The lock was missing and the stock was not only minus its butt, it was spectacularly wormed into the bargain. But at £60 - £100 it would look wonderful hanging up on the wall of the workshop or garage, and would elicit far more comment than the pair of Purdeys you have just bought. It went for £66.

In the sealed bid sale there were two lots that I thought were spectacular. The first was a single-barrelled 4 bore percussion live pigeon gun by H. Holland – the founder of Holland & Holland. Harris Holland began life as a tobacconist in London. He was a keen live pigeon shooter and he soon expanded this business into selling guns as well, particularly live pigeon guns. This was a quality gun by a very famous maker and was

untouched. It had no provision for a ramrod and being a live pigeon gun was light for a 4 bore. It was estimated at £700 – £1,200 and went for way over its estimate at £1,565.

The second gun that tickled my fancy was Lot 2911: a double 28 bore top lever hammer gun by Walter Locke & Co of Calcutta. Locke were importers into India and this gun would have been built in Birmingham. It was a very elegant, high-quality little hammer gun with Damascus barrels, but what made it especially attractive was the game scene engraving on it. It is unusual to find quality small bores as they were primarily built for boys. The bores were excellent but the action was loose – however, nothing that the thump of a hammer would cure. It was estimated at £250 - £350 and went for £580.

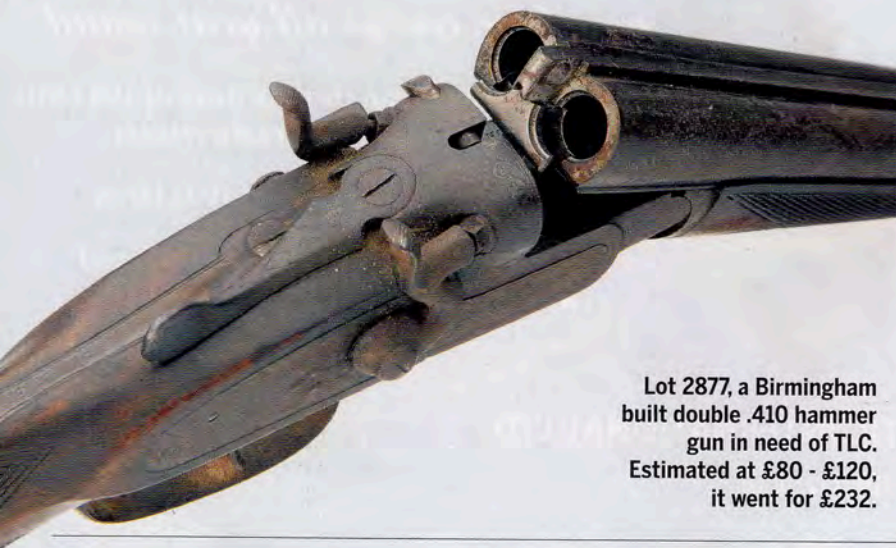
Boxlock guns are such good value for money and in Lot 3002 there was a lovely W.W. Greener Empire non-ejector wildfowling gun No. 78521. It weighed 7lbs 10oz, with 32" barrels, both bored full choke. It was estimated at £350 - £450 – little money for a quality gun and perfect for goose shooting, but unfortunately did not sell.

Another gun I liked was a double .410 hammer gun in Lot 2877, with no name on it, but built in Birmingham.

Double .410 hammer guns are plentiful but most were made in Belgium and are of dubious quality. This gun was plain but of sound quality. Estimated at £80 - £120 it was rusty but the rust to me looked surface only and it would have made an excellent working gun for a moderate outlay. It made a very good £232.

I always like taking a look at the job lots in the sale, where several items are cobbled together to make up one lot. In Lot 2347 there was a box containing several original percussion cap tins with a half decent Hawkesley powder flask thrown in for good measure. Percussion cap tins always look good in cased sets and individually fetch good money. This lot was estimated at £80 - £120 and made £122. ■

ANDREW ORR/ HOLT'S AUCTIONEERS



**Lot 2877, a Birmingham built double .410 hammer gun in need of TLC. Estimated at £80 - £120, it went for £232.**