

Guns with a right royal heritage

■ Two sales in London feature firearms made for Indian princes and others from French nobility

Holt's

FINE and unusual English guns made for Indian princes formed the most lucrative sub-section of **Holt's (22.5% buyer's premium)** London sale on September 20, when a pair of massive four-bore wildfowling guns built for the Maharajah of Bhavnagar by H. Clarke & Sons of the Midland Gun Works, Leicester, were reunited for the first time in several generations.

The two single-barrelled guns, each of which weighed in at 14lb 13oz (6.75kg), came to the saleroom from two different vendors, having had very different histories since they were last together.

The first was mounted with an enamelled gold escutcheon on the comb of the stock emblazoned with the maharajah's arms and was further adorned with a medallion indicating that it was from the collection of one of England's best-known collectors, William Keith Neal. He apparently acquired the gun in the 1960s and despite its weight and provenance regularly used it to shoot

geese in Scotland until he was in his 70s.

The second was discovered by its vendor in the gunroom at Holland & Holland's Bruton Street showrooms in London in the 1980s where the quality of its manufacture shone through despite the fact that it was minus its stock and without any finish on the metalwork.

These deficiencies were put right by Hollands (at the cost of a king's ransom, reported the vendor) and the gun spent the next 20 years in South Australia. When it finally appeared in the saleroom alongside its long-lost companion it was therefore refinished and had a non-original stock without the Maharajah's escutcheon.

It had long been the dream of the vendor of this second gun to reunite the pair and the stage was finally set last month. The main battle was for the first gun with its powerful combined provenance and original stock. Once this had been bought for £21,000, the same buyer was able to take the second for £10,000.

There will presumably now be a period of intensive training for both shooter and loader if these 36in (91cm) barrelled heavyweights are once again to be used as a true pair.

The princely selection also included a Rigby 7x65R sidelock ejector double rifle



Left: the pair of 4-bore shotguns made for the Maharajah of Bhavnagar which were reunited at Holt's on September 20. Number one on the **left**, pictured with the Maharajah's crest inset, made £21,000, number two on the **right** with a replacement stock took £10,000.

built in 1907 for the Maharana of Udaipur which sold for £15,000 and an Alexander Henry .360 black powder double rifle completed for the Maharaj of Dholpur in 1902 which took £4200.

However, most princely of all proved to be an exceptionally well-preserved 10-bore sidelock ejector made by Charles Lancaster in 1910 for the Maharajah of Patiala, a notably lavish and flamboyant

ruler in an age when there was no shortage of free-spending princes from the east patronising the best English makers of everything from cars to guns.

Retaining much of its original finish and inscribed *MADE SPECIALLY FOR H.H. THE MAHARAJAH SAHIB BHUPINDER SINGH OF PATIALA*, this gun reached £31,000.

The name of William Keith Neal also

drew extra attention to a group of five 18th and 19th century Continental shoulder guns from his collection which appeared earlier in Holt's sale. The prettiest of these was the 25-bore flintlock double-barrelled sporting gun, pictured **below right**, made by Dolne of Liege for Prince Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig of Prussia, which made £6500.

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