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Condition and originality

Donald Dallas examines the lots which made an impression at the recent Holts sale.

It is well known in the collecting world that condition and originality are the prime factors in desirability and driving up prices. The latest Holts sale had several lots in this category exemplified by Lot 518, a lovely Charles Lancaster percussion gun. This gun, no.2322 of 1853 was a very high quality percussion gun by a very famous maker. It had 31in Damascus barrels with original brown and finely scroll-engraved locks with an additional banner "C. Lancaster, London". It had a patent grip safety and a nicely figured stock. It was contained in an oak case with many accessories and estimated at £1,600 to £2,000 it rocketed like a pheasant to £2,800.

Another very original percussion gun was Lot 540, a good single 10-bore gun by James Wallace of Edinburgh c.1835. It was in untouched original condition and was of very high quality. John Dickson was apprenticed to James Wallace and after his apprenticeship continued working for the firm as its foreman and it is quite possible he actually made this gun. Estimated at £1,000 to £1,500 it soared rapidly to £1,600.

The good old cute factor was very evident in Lot 570, a charming pair of 120-bore percussion turnover pocket pistols by D. Egg, London c.1830. The barrels were rifled and both pistols seemed unused with much original finish. The chequering on the butts was very fine and they were contained in their original case with all accessories. Pairs of little pistols like this don't get much better than this, they just ooze "buy me" and consequently their charm worked on the many bidders, selling for a whopping £4,000 against their estimate of £1,500 to £2,000.

Pairs of good British guns can be difficult to sell at the moment due to the myth of the invincibility of the continental vertical barrelled gun and any that do sell represent an absolute bargain. Lot 1301 went for a snip at £2,500 against their estimate of £2,500 to £3,000. They were a pair of Charles Hellis "Featherweight" sidelock ejector guns nos.3743/4 built around 1930 and of excellent quality. I love Charles



The cute factor: a pair of unique D. Egg percussion pocket pistols c.1830 in their original case. Estimated at £1,500 to £2,000, they made £4,000.

Hellis guns. They were not actually made by Hellis, being built in Birmingham to his exact specifications, but there is something a little bit quirky about many of them such as the crossed feathers on the lockplates of these guns. They had 26in barrels, the death knell for many guns, again due to the myth that has been created about short-barrelled guns. I shoot with 26in barrelled guns and they are a delight. How much would a pair like this cost today? Well over £100,000 yet this pair went for £2,500.

Dickson round action guns are always in good demand and have a very loyal following. They must be one of the most graceful guns ever built and in addition to this, two other factors guarantee their desirability. First, every single round action is a best gun and secondly, only around 1900 have been made in total. Lot 1313 saw a pair of 12-bore Dickson round actions nos. 7296/7 of 1934 and estimated at £8,000 to £12,000 they made £13,000. As a

postscript, the new owner of John Dickson, the respected gunmaker J-P Daeschler, intends to reintroduce the classic Dickson sidelever on round actions.

There are always a couple of lots that seem to elicit attention and one such lot was Lot 1322, a pair of Purdey 12-bore sidelock ejectors dating from 1889 in their original case. They were of the highest quality although very worn, chequering rubbed smooth, rubber recoil pads distressed, wall thicknesses below the recommended minimum and so on. They looked like a pair of Purdeys that had aged considerably but still had bags of that elusive quality. But what drew the crowds to them? They could not be sold as they were, the No.1 could only be offered as stock, action and fore-end only as the barrels had exploded! The No.1 barrels were in the case but there was a great ragged hole in one barrel caused by an explosion. I have no idea what caused it and estimated at £2,500 to £3000 they burst above this estimate to fetch £5,200. ■