

## IN THE GUNROOM FOR DANGEROUS GAME

Donald Dallas

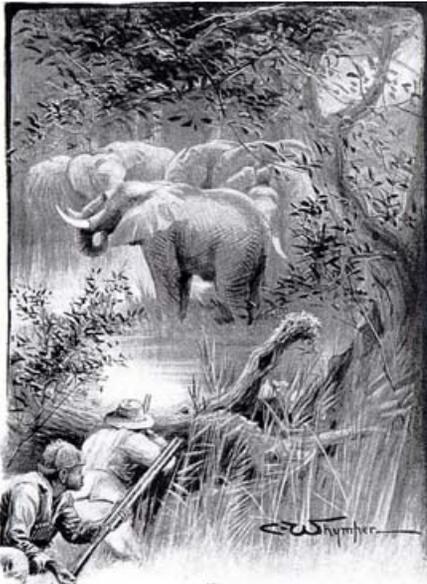
It is just as well that the Holts sale in December is the first to be conducted from their charming premises at Sandringham in Norfolk and not at their previous venues in London. Contained within this sale are an impressive collection of big bores, some single-barrelled and many double-barrelled and each one extremely heavy. No lifting, no groaning, they can all remain in situ in Sandringham.

Standing out amongst the big bores is lot 776, an 8 bore single-barrelled hammer big game rifle by G.E. Lewis of Birmingham, to quote Holts antique gun expert Robert Morgan, "for dangerous game". It is an absolute monster of a rifle and weight 18 ½ lbs. and yes it is only a single-barrel.

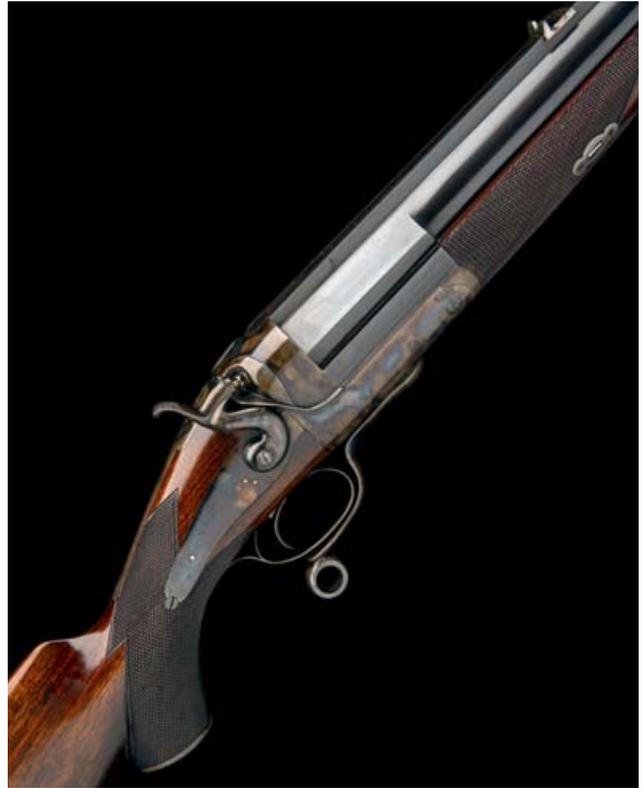
The expansion of Empire in the 19th century opened up big game hunting to soldiers, explorers, hunters and administrators in this entity and since a very different quarry was encountered, specialist rifles had to be built. Before high velocity cordite rifles appeared in the late 19th century, the black powder rifle was used. With its slow burning powder and consequent low velocity, very large bore sizes had to be employed with very heavy projectiles to ensure massive stopping power against dangerous game. A Holland & Holland test during 1879 showed the enormous loads of these rifles. Their 8 bore rifle fired 10 drams of black powder (a 12 bore shotgun fires 3 drms.) to propel 875 grs. of bullet at 1450 feet per second. Their 4 bore rifle was charged with 14 drams of powder to propel 1250 grs. of bullet at 1500 f.p.s.

Such was their very poor velocity and trajectory, these massive rifles were intended to be used at very close range. Hunters had to get in really close to ensure a knock-out blow and such rifles were sighted to just 50, 100 and 150yds.

Sir Frederick Jackson, the explorer and big game hunter who wrote the *Big Game Shooting* edition for the Badminton Library published in 1894 recommended the following battery for dangerous game. A single 4 bore weighing 21 lbs. firing 14 drams of powder, a double 8 bore rifle with 12 drams and a double .500 Express firing 6 drams.



Sir Frederick Jackson, the big game hunter and explorer getting up close with a 4 bore and a double 8 bore for back up.



Lot 776, an 8 bore single hammer rifle no. 8108 by G.E Lewis built in 1889. Estimate £12,000 - £16,000.

The logistics of moving these heavy rifles, powder and ammunition around was problematic and required a retinue of helpers. The recoil was fearsome and the dangers of an enraged or wounded animal was very real particularly at the close ranges encountered.

Lot 776 is a massive single-barrel 8 bore underlever hammer rifle no. 8108 built in 1889 by G.E. Lewis of 32 & 33 Loveday Street, Birmingham. It has a 29" barrel rifled with nine grooves and weighs an enormous 18 ½ lbs. Like many of these rifles it has no engraving but this just seems to enhance its power and purpose, devoid of extraneous embellishment.

George Edward Lewis was born in Birmingham in 1829 and although trained as a gunmaker, decided to specialise in engraving. However, he returned to the gunmaking side of the business as well as engraving and from 1859 was recorded as a gunmaker at 32 & 33 Loveday Street. In 1878 he introduced the "Gun Of The Period", a boxlock gun for which the firm is perhaps best known. He exhibited at many international exhibitions in the late 19th century and won many awards and medals.

Lewis built a great variety of guns and rifles including building many big bore shotguns and big bore rifles. They also did a great deal of work for the trade. G.E. Lewis died in 1917 leaving his sons, G.E. Lewis and E.C. Lewis to run the business.

There is something quite seductive about big bore rifles, their weight, their power, their sheer size and their sense of purpose. Have a look at lot 776. Would you want to wander into the jungle with an 18 ½ lb. rifle and get up really close to dangerous game? And remember it is a single-barrel rifle – only one shot.