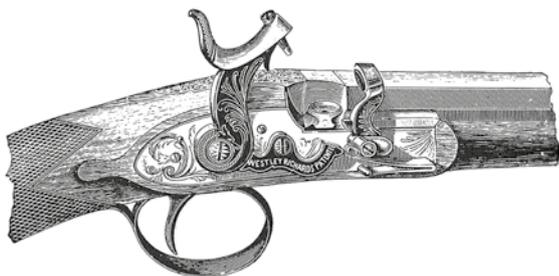


IN THE GUNROOM WESTLEY RICHARDS GROUSE GUN WITH THREE DIFFERENT LOCKS

Donald Dallas

What do you do if the date is 1833 and you regularly rent a big grouse moor and shooting lodge at Strathgarve just north of Inverness? You have taken days to get there by coach as the railway is not in existence and the moor itself is quite remote. Do you take a trusted flintlock or do you take a percussion gun but run the risk of not being able to buy percussion caps?

If your name is Captain Thomas Dilke R.N. and you want to cover all eventualities you order yourself a Westley Richards gun with three entirely different, yet interchangeable ignition systems, flintlock, percussion cap and self-priming pellet lock.



The Westley-Richards Detonating Gun.

Lot 499 in this sale is an extremely rare cased Westley Richards 13 bore gun no. 2655 built in 1833 for "Captain Dilke" with three different types of lockwork, flint, percussion cap and self-priming pellet lock.

Thomas Dilke was born on the 21st July 1797 at Maxstoke Castle, Coleshill, Warwickshire. Aged fourteen in the year 1811, he joined the Royal Navy and by 1819 was a Lieutenant. At the Battle of Navarino in October 1827 during the Greek War Of Independence, he acquitted himself so well that he was immediately promoted to Captain. He retired in 1837 to run his family estate of Maxstoke Castle. He was very fond of shooting., particularly grouse shooting in Scotland and regularly rented a shooting lodge, Strathgarve Lodge (now a

nursing home!) and estate north of Inverness. There are regular reports in the contemporary papers of his prowess at grouse hence the reason he ordered this unusual Westley Richards gun with its short barrels for grouse.

By the time this gun was built in 1833, the flintlock was well obsolete but in such an out of the way location as Strathgarve it could be more practical than a percussion gun if the caps ran out or became damp. But the percussion gun was more reliable and the pellet lock with its even bigger load of detonating compound even more reliable. Perhaps he preferred the flintlock for walked up grouse and the percussion for driven grouse.



Captain Dilke approached Westley Richards in 1833 and the result was this gun built with three different types of ignition system to cover all eventualities.

The flintlocks are very late built type locks with long limbed frizzens and completely waterproof pans. If the percussion cap system was desired,

the frizzens and flint cocks could be removed and replacement nipple “pans” fitted along with percussion hammers to fire conventional caps.

Just in case the percussion caps proved hard to come by, entirely different self-priming percussion locks were also supplied built to a Westley Richards patent. In 1821 Westley Richards took out patent no. 4611 for a magazine for loose powder fulminate or pellets of detonating compound. An oscillating lever on the outside of the lock, when hit by the fall of the hammer, was pushed down at the rear whilst at the same time the front of the lever containing the magazine was pushed up away from the pan. A pellet or detonating powder would have been left from the magazine to be hit by the hammer to produce ignition. After firing, the magazine could be returned and another detonating charge released.

Unlike many of these eccentric guns with unusual mechanisms, this gun has seen a bit of use as is evident by slight rubbing of the chequering. Captain Dilke obviously used the gun but I wonder which ignition system did he prefer. There is a grouse shooting report in *The Scotsman* for the 1829 season mentioning him shooting 21 ½ brace in November 1829 just before he bought this gun. There is another report on him in the 1834 season with equally good bags and he most probably used this gun.

But what an exciting sojourn the year 1833 must have been, travelling all the way by coach or boat from Maxstoke Castle in Warwickshire to Strathgarve in Invernesshire with his new Westley Richards gun complete with flints, percussion caps and pellet fulminates. Three different firing mechanisms so to hell with the Scottish drizzle.

