



# SECOND IS NOWHERE

A pair of Westley Richards pistols, a Vaughan gun case, a Holland & Holland two-inch chambered 12-bore, an early Westley Richards boxlock. These all have one thing in common: **Diggory Hadoke** was the underbidder at Holts's auction on 21 September

**UNDERBIDDING** is a frustrating business. What does it tell us? You might argue that it means we are right about the likely price of something and err on the side of caution so as not to overpay. The less charitable might suggest it means we know the value of something but never want to pay it. It might be that we are simply disciplined; we fix a value on something and stick to that come what may, therefore never getting caught up in a bidding frenzy and letting emotion get in the way of sober judgement.

One thing it does illustrate is that, despite putting down lots of bids, you walk away with nothing. But on this occasion I did secure a Heym double rifle for a client.

It is tempting to convince yourself that you were within one more bid of success and perhaps you should have been bolder if you actually wanted the item under the hammer. That is probably untrue most of the time. It may well be that your opponent had more determination and deeper reserves and would have continued bidding well beyond the point where your little competition stopped.

You can never really know. For example, I was authorised by my client to take that Heym bidding to £11,000 if necessary. So if the underbidder, who bid £9,000, thought one more bid of £10,000 would have secured his prize, he was wrong.



The weird and wonderful are always lurking in the sealed bids sale

Still, it grates and "I was the underbidder" always makes it seem like you were pipped at the post.

One rumour we can at least put to bed based on evidence this time around is that traditional British guns will plummet in desirability and value because

of the threat to their perceived viability when lead shot is banned. Were that the case, you would expect such things as the Holland & Holland 2in chambered 'twelve-two', with its unusual chamber length and light weight, to be one of those items left on the

shelf. I bid for a client up to £7,500 and it sold for £8,000, meaning £10,400 by the time commission and VAT had been factored in. You might suspect the buyer was overseas and not worried about British regulations, but my bidder was British and still bullish about the future of traditional guns.

## Biodegradable

Perhaps we all should be. Anecdotal evidence from the field, now the season is under way, is starting to gather some reaction to the effectiveness of the new ammunition packages emerging in response to the lead issue. BioAmmo launched a new product last year that has a biodegradable case, biodegradable wad and a shot compound that rivals bismuth in performance, and is half the cost.

Partridge shooters are telling me that it is very effective. BioAmmo recommend this 'blue' load—a mixture of bismuth, zinc, tin and aluminium—be restricted to ranges up to 25 yards and, let's face it, most partridges are shot within that range in this country. The cartridges cost £539 per 1,000.

So it seems we already have an effective load for hedge-bursting driven partridges and covert pheasant shooting with shot that will not damage your British guns and at a price increase that might add only £30 to your typical driven day. Meanwhile, innovation continues. ➤



The Holts main sale was not as big as the one in June but it delivered in a big way, selling 83% on the day





A tiny proportion of lots for the sealed bids sale

One of my favourite guns at the sale was a magnificent-looking Purdey 12-bore built for wildfowling with 32in barrels and 3in chambers. The gun dates from 1894 but retains a lot of original finish and sporting a pretty and distinctive fence carving by engraver James Lucas that contrasts nicely with his very fine rose and scroll.

The £25,000 reserve was high but the gun is lovely. It was built for the same French general who ordered the four-barrel gun on display in Purdey's Long Room.

#### Original correspondence

Another impressive piece was the William Ford double 8-bore, cased with some original correspondence with the maker. Given the detail into which some customers now go regarding

their orders, it was refreshing to note the original paperwork for the Ford, which features numerous types of ducks as well as scrolls, simply states 'nicely engraved'.

**“ We have an effective load for hedge-bursting driven partridges and covert pheasant shooting ”**

Holts managed a turnover of over a million pounds on the day of the sale, with the unsold lots entered thereafter into an online format where bids can be made until the deadline.

The sealed bids sale is massive and seems to be growing every cycle. The results will swell the coffers in the weeks to come. As always, viewing in Wolferton was a pleasant and unhurried experience

with coffee and even *boerewors* sandwiches supplied by the chaps manning the barricades while the boss was no doubt sunning himself on a beach somewhere nice.

Now Holts is over, the auction action quiets down for a couple of months, though Wallis & Wallis had a 28 September sale, including a LeFauchaux-type pinfire by Firmin of Paris, cased and rather stunning. Bidding as of the time of writing was £1,200, which seems good value for a Best quality example of the gun that changed us from shooting muzzle-loaders to breech-loaders.

December will be upon us soon so there will be another round of auctions before Christmas to look forward to. Bonhams is one to look out for in November, more details about that next month.

With Holts selling 83% on the day of the auction and 33% of those sales going to people in the room—allowed again for the first time since Covid struck—there is a feeling of returning normality and a bullish market for used guns. **GIN**



One of Diggory's picks, a Hartmann & Weiss 7mm-08, cost the buyer £10,500 once all fees were paid—about a third of new cost and in perfect condition



A Holland & Holland howdah pistol that topped £10,000