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*Nick Hott*



*Hott's Auctioneers, Wolferton*





IMAGES: © Andrew Orr – Holts Auctioneers

# History, heritage and Holts Auctioneers

*From a converted dairy farm on the Sandringham estate, sportsman, gun enthusiast and auctioneer Nick Holt oversees a world-famous business that never fails to amaze...*

**T**owards the end of January 2002 a pair of steel-mounted 'saddle' pistols were sold at auction for almost £1.5 million. They'd been presented to George Washington (the first president of the United States) by the Marquis de Lafayette during the American Revolution, and consequently played a part in the young republic's struggle for independence.

Guns such as these can hardly be described as weapons. They're a part of history, they're a tangible link to the past, and they're often works of art.

None of which comes as much of a surprise to Nick Holt.

The man who brought Holts Auctioneers to an old dairy farm on

the Sandringham estate over 20 years ago has had a love of weaponry and associated memorabilia since he accompanied his father to legendary gunsmith John Wilson.

"As soon as I left school I started working with John as an apprentice gunmaker," says Nick. "It was a world of history, tradition and craftsmanship that fascinated me as a young boy - and that fascination has continued to this day."

Following a spell with the Royal Armouries at the Tower of London, Nick started working at Bonhams (one of the world's oldest and largest auctioneers of fine art and antiques) as a porter, and within a few years had established a specialist gun department

for them.

The founding of Holts Auctioneers at Wolferton was a natural development, and it's since grown into one of the country's only auction houses specialising in guns and weaponry. It's also one of the most famous in the world.

In this beautiful corner of west Norfolk, Nick and his team of researchers, gunsmiths and ballistics experts have sold guns belonging to D-Day heroes, recipients of the Victoria Cross, British and European royalty, three different James Bonds, global rock stars, Oscar-winning actors, and historical figures from explorer Henry Stanley to the bare-knuckle boxer who gave his name to Big Ben.



*“This world of history, tradition and craftsmanship fascinated me as a young boy, and that fascination has continued to this day...”*

“That’s the real appeal of these wonderful things,” says Nick, who happily admits to losing four fillings while firing the largest handheld rifle in the world a few years ago.

“It’s all about the provenance. We never use words such as ‘reputedly’ or ‘possibly’ when it comes to our lots, because having a proven history makes them all the more special. And it also makes a huge difference to their value.”

A case in point is a pistol appearing in Holts’ auction of antique, vintage and sporting guns at the end of June. Coming to Holts through the family

and engraved with his name, it belonged to Lord Louis Mountbatten of Burma - who was the last Viceroy of India and received the surrender of Japan in Singapore at the end of the Second World War.

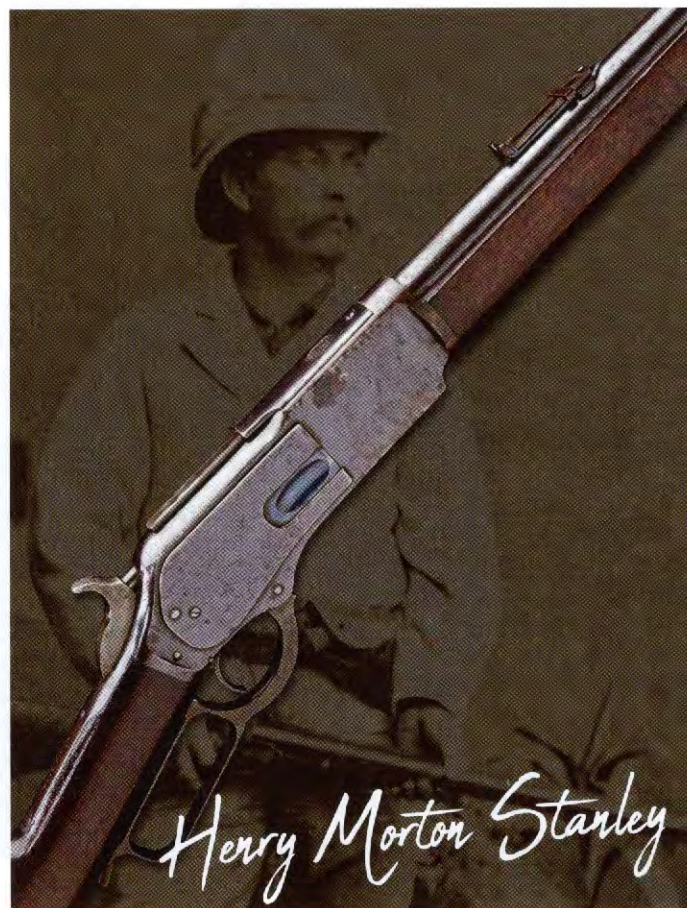
A similarly unique item is the .455 Webley service revolver still in its original holster and stamped “JA Purdey 21st Lancers” on the pistol itself - the initials standing for James Alexander Purdey, a descendant of the man who established the most famous gunmaker in the UK. Holding no less than three Royal Warrants and specialising in bespoke shotguns and rifles, Purdey still only makes around 150 guns a year - many of which are owned by the royal families of Europe.

It’s a perfect example of just how exclusive Holts Auctioneers is - and how much it’s embedded in the country life heritage of Norfolk.

“We’ve been hosting a clay pigeon shoot at Sandringham for decades and it’s always been for a good cause,” says Nick.

“We’ve raised a huge amount of money for the Ghurka Welfare Trust and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust and it’s always been important that we support an incredible local tradition of country pursuits. We’ve always loved this part of west Norfolk, and I like to think this part of west Norfolk has always loved us.”

Ordinarily guns tend to get a bad



**PICTURES:** The worldwide appeal of Holts Auctioneers lies in the provenance of the lots themselves and the stories of their previous owners - from Victorian explorer Henry Stanley (above) to guns belonging to Lord Louis Mountbatten and James Purdey (below)

press, but having spent a lifetime with them Nick Holt is keen to put the record straight.

“They’re obviously made for a rather controversial purpose primarily, but for many people that’s the least important element of a gun,” he says. “These are really beautiful works of art, they’re valuable and unique parts of our history, and they’re outstanding examples of one of Britain’s finest and oldest crafts. I’ve been excited about them all my life and I still get a thrill from something very special coming to us.”

And at the end of the day that’s exactly what Holts Auctioneers is all about. Every lot, every item, every piece of memorabilia and every gun has a story - and it’s a story that shouldn’t be forgotten.

### Forthcoming Auctions

Holts holds a number of auctions and free valuation days throughout the year. Please check the latest dates opposite and visit [www.holtsauctioneers.com](http://www.holtsauctioneers.com) for the latest details, information, and online catalogue.

