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Soaring prices at Holts

Donald Dallas examines interesting lots from recent auctions.

Now and again a lot comes up and you just know there is going to be a great deal of interest in it. Anticipation abounds and whenever it starts to go above its estimate the room starts to hush. If it soars over its estimate the room goes completely quiet and if a very high price is achieved the room bursts into spontaneous applause. This happened to two lots in a recent Holts auction.

Whenever Lot 1502 came up in the June auction, there was the usual babble in the room. Estimated at £3,000 to £5,000 it rapidly made £5,000 but as online and telephone bids came in one after the other, the room rapidly hushed as the lot hit £10,000. You could have heard a pin drop when it hit £15,000 and when the gavel came down with a bang at £20,000 the room burst into applause. This gun had gone for £15,000 above its estimate.

Lot 1502 was a 16 bore round-action gun No. 3808 by John Dickson & Son of Edinburgh built in 1883, but what made

it really special was that it was a skeletal, or bar-in-wood, action. In this type of action the woodwork is continued over the action bar to give a very graceful design.

The gun was originally built for an army officer, Lieutenant-Colonel John Fletcher Hathorn, who resided at Castlewigg House, Whithorn in Wigtownshire. He was a partner in Hathorn, Davis and Campbell, manufacturer of steam machinery, but unfortunately he died young in 1888, aged 49, just five years after he bought the Dickson.

The other lot that soared came in as a job lot and was just put aside in one corner. It didn't even look particularly special as it was just an old pine chest with metal hasps and appeared to have been made by a local carpenter.

But there was a name painted on the side: "Lt Col. Honble A. Gordon". Now that made it a lot more interesting as it was just the type of challenge that I love to get my teeth into. Unfortunately both Alexander

and Gordon are very common names but eventually I uncovered only one Lt Col. Honourable A. Gordon and this was Sir Alexander Gordon (1786-1815).

Alexander Gordon, the third son of Lord Haddo, joined the army in 1805 and fought in the Peninsular War during the Napoleonic Wars. In 1809 he became the aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington and in 1813 was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel.

He was mortally wounded at the Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815, from a round shot that took off his leg. Such was the respect that Wellington had for him that he offered Gordon his bed, where he subsequently died. Wellington wrote to his brother, Lord Aberdeen, the next day, saying: "He had served me zealously and usefully for many years".

Anything with a Wellington or Waterloo connection will command a high price and this basic chest, estimated at just £200 to £300, made £2,100 due to its historic and exciting provenance. ■



A military campaign chest belonging to Sir Alexander Gordon, aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington and killed at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. Estimated at £200 to £300, it made £2,100 at Holts' June sale.