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# SHOOTING

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## REACH FOR THE SKY

How clays can get you  
ready for the season

## WE NEED TO GET OUR GAME TOGETHER

A stark warning  
from chef  
Tim Maddams

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Are enough young  
gundog handlers  
coming through?

## PLUS

In conversation with  
Auriol, Marchioness  
of Linlithgow, of  
Bryngwyn Hall



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# Quite an arsenal

*Donald Dallas reflects on the lots that went under the hammer at the recent Holts sale.*

**T**he new Holts venue for its London auctions is most agreeable. The Army Reserve Centre in Kensington is smaller than the previous premises but it is cosy and easy to get to.

There were a number of distinctive lots in the March sale exemplified by Lot 120, a Webley & Scott .22 Model Senior air pistol dating from 1946. What made this lot so special was that it appeared just as it left the dealer in 1946. The original factory enquiry letter dated May 1946 was there and the pistol was complete in its rare, post-war black Rexine case with trade label. The original Webley oil can was present as was the pellet tin. The cocking instructions were present and the pistol was still contained in its original manufacturer's brown card carton with other period accessories. It doesn't get better than this and estimated at £1,000 to £1,500, it made £1,100.

Going back three centuries, there was a rather special German or Austrian 20 bore wheel-lock rifle dating from around 1700. Wheel locks were in existence before flintlocks and this was a late-built example. A wheel, powered by a strong mainspring, turned rapidly about a quarter of a turn against a hammer with iron pyrites clamped in its jaws. The resultant shower of sparks set off the gun. Wheel locks were more complicated to make and more expensive than flintlocks, hence most, like this one, were of good quality. It had a walnut full stock and a set trigger but what made it stand out was that it had not been 'improved' in Victorian times. The Victorians often added carving to many wheel locks, thereby destroying their originality. Estimated at £4,000 to £6,000, it made £4,000.

Most of us would have heard the expression "as safe as the Bank of England". Well, Lot 510 made the bank just that little bit safer. This was a .750 regulation percussion musket dated 1853 by Lacy & Co. with 'Bank Of England' engraved on the barrel. In the early 19th century, with memories of the French Revolution still vivid, riots such as Spa

Fields in 1816 and Peterloo in 1819 caused concern. Add the Chartist demonstrations of the 1840s and the Bank of England felt it had to protect itself. Throughout the first half of the 19th century it ordered muskets and this was one from its arsenal. Estimated at £900 to £1,200, it made £1,700.

There is no doubt that the star of the auction was Lot 595, an exceptional pair of 40 bore double percussion rifled pistols by Joseph Harkom of Edinburgh, built around 1895. They were in mint, unfired condition, contained in their original oak case with every single accessory. Absolutely stunning. They were made for the one and only Charles Gordon, the patron of John Dickson and Joseph Harkom in the second half of the 19th century, who ordered hundreds of the finest quality guns from them but never

fired a shot. When he was declared insane his collection was auctioned off in Edinburgh in 1908 and these pistols are listed as having achieved 10s (50p). Forward to March 2019 and the estimate was £10,000 to £15,000. It is hard to put a price on pistols like this, especially because of the keen interest in them. The bidding started at £10,000, then leapt to £15,000 and then slowly climbed to £20,000 before they went for £21,000.

The other lot that drew gasps was 1250, a magnificent Holland & Holland .500 Royal double rifle. The reason for its magnificence was that it had been engraved in deeply carved and highly individual style by renowned engraver Philippe Grifnee. He was twice awarded medals for his work by the Belgian government. Estimated at £200,000 to £250,000, it did not meet its reserve. ■



**A pair of double percussion pistols by Joseph Harkom of Edinburgh c.1895 in their original case in mint condition.**

ANDREW ORR/HOLTS AUCTIONEERS