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# A scattergun approach

**Robert Morgan** enthuses about the singular legacy of the eccentric Scottish collector Charles Gordon, two pieces from which are to be auctioned by Holts

**W**e have talked about Charles Gordon in these pages before, but a couple of his guns have recently come to light that I just have to share with you all.

For those of you new to *Sporting Gun*, Charles Gordon was an eccentric Scottish gun collector of the late 19th century. Instead of seeking out antique guns, however, he had them made by famous and top-end gunmakers of the day. The majority of them were already obsolete styles when commissioned – models such as muzzleloaders and pinfires. Even the few centrefire guns he had made were hammer guns, bearing in mind that hammerless actions were already well-established. For years his guns were treated with derision,

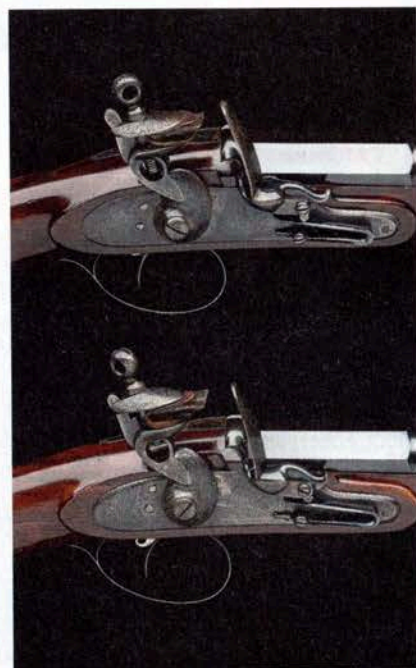
classed by many collectors as little better than replicas. That's as may be, but Charles Gordon expended a sizeable chunk of his inherited wealth having these guns built. When his family had him declared of unsound mind, the majority of his collection was sold at auction in 1908. Most of the guns went for just a few shillings to a couple of pounds each.

## Sought-after

Time moves on and today things are different. Gordon had well in excess of 300 guns produced for him and never fired any of them. As such, many existing models are in outstanding condition. They were often lavishly cased with myriad accessories, always of the highest quality and have become sought-after items. Despite being 'out of period' in style, the prices achieved often far outstrip the genuine antiques they were imitating in the first place.

The pair of guns shown here represent Charles Gordon's most eccentric purchase. Manufactured by John Dickson of Edinburgh, his favourite gunmaker, this magnificent pair of flintlock blunderbusses was ordered on 9 June 1893.

They are significant for two reasons: they were Gordon's first flintlocks; and they were to be his only blunderbusses. It is interesting for a student of arms to note the differences between them and blunderbusses actually produced in the 18th century. Most, but admittedly not all, were produced with brass barrels. Those few that were made with iron barrels tended to be very heavy in construction, with considerable wall thickness. Gordon's blunderbusses have best blued barrels with walls not much thicker than conventional shotgun barrels of the day, certainly at the muzzles at any rate. If one looks past the pan, frizzen and cock of the lock you can see a familiar profile of a



The 8-bore flintlock blunderbusses

lockplate normally found on a best sidelock. Dickson's probably had blanks for these on hand and they lack the customary pointed tail common to many earlier pieces.

The engraving is best rose and scroll, a type of engraving never found on period blunderbusses, and the profile of the butts mimics those of conventional sporting guns of the late 19th century. Remember, at the time these guns were made there was probably no one alive who had built a blunderbuss.

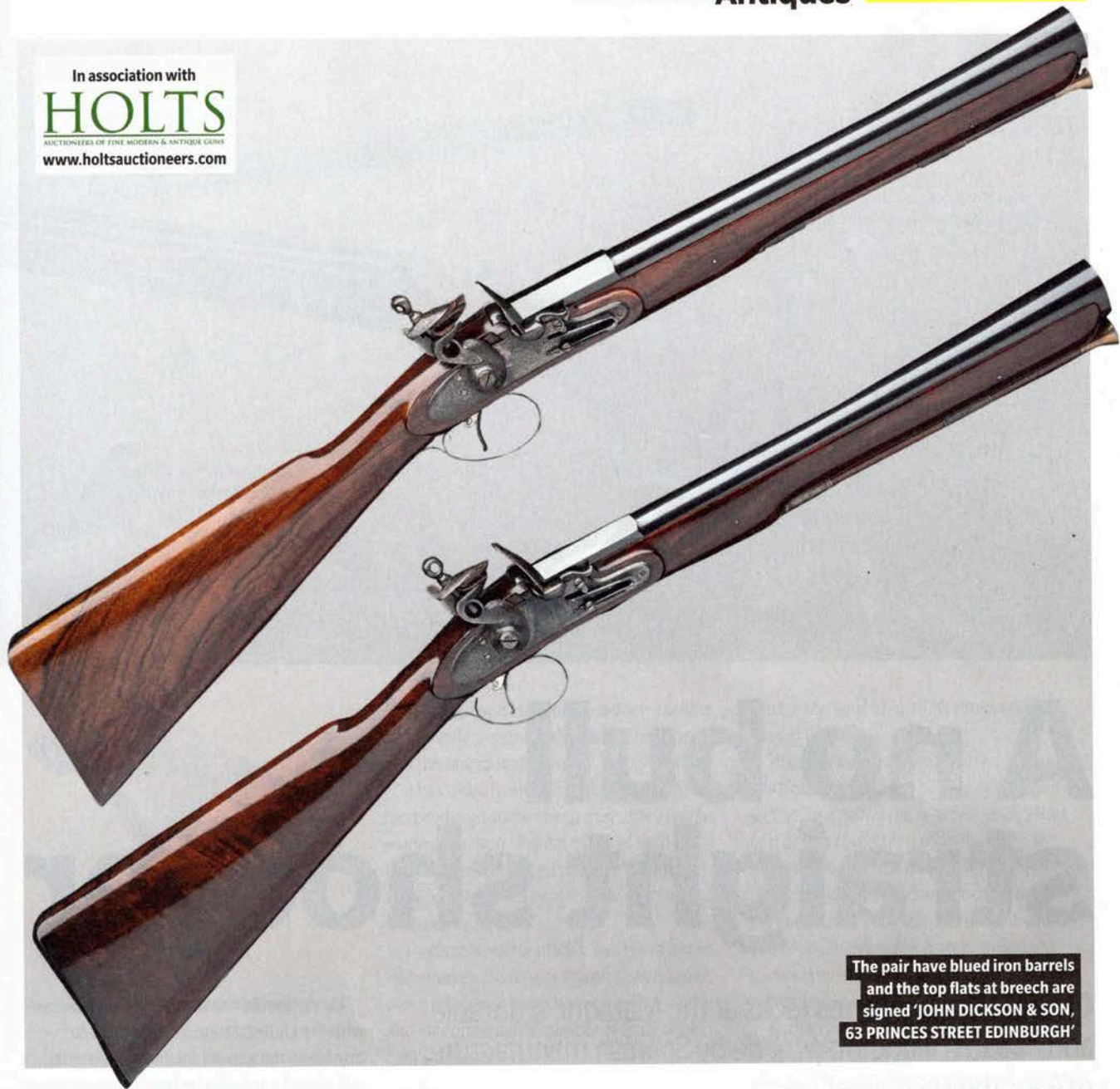
## Unknown quantity

When these guns were sold in the 1908 auction of Gordon's property, they were separated as Lots 333 and 334, fetching 65/- and £4 respectively; quite a lot in comparison to many of the other guns sold. This was, perhaps, because blunderbusses were reasonably well collected as decorators even



Charles Ferrier Gordon was born in 1854

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The pair have blued iron barrels and the top flats at breech are signed 'JOHN DICKSON & SON, 63 PRINCES STREET EDINBURGH'

## "The prices achieved often far outstrip the genuine antiques they were imitating in the first place"

back then; although the following, Lot 335, was an actual antique blunderbuss of which we have no further detail as to make or condition. That only made £2, so someone recognised quality. That person was John R Findlay of Edinburgh, owner of *The Scotsman* newspaper, although why he bought them is unknown. He probably had no idea that Gordon had paid in excess of £50 for them 15 years earlier.

The guns disappeared from the collector market for years, only to re-emerge recently. They will now be sold in Holts' September sale of fine modern and antique guns (17th). They are expected to realise around £20,000, proving the point of how sought-after and valuable Gordon's guns have now become, especially when you consider that you could buy two reasonable antique blunderbusses for little more than 10% of that figure. ■

