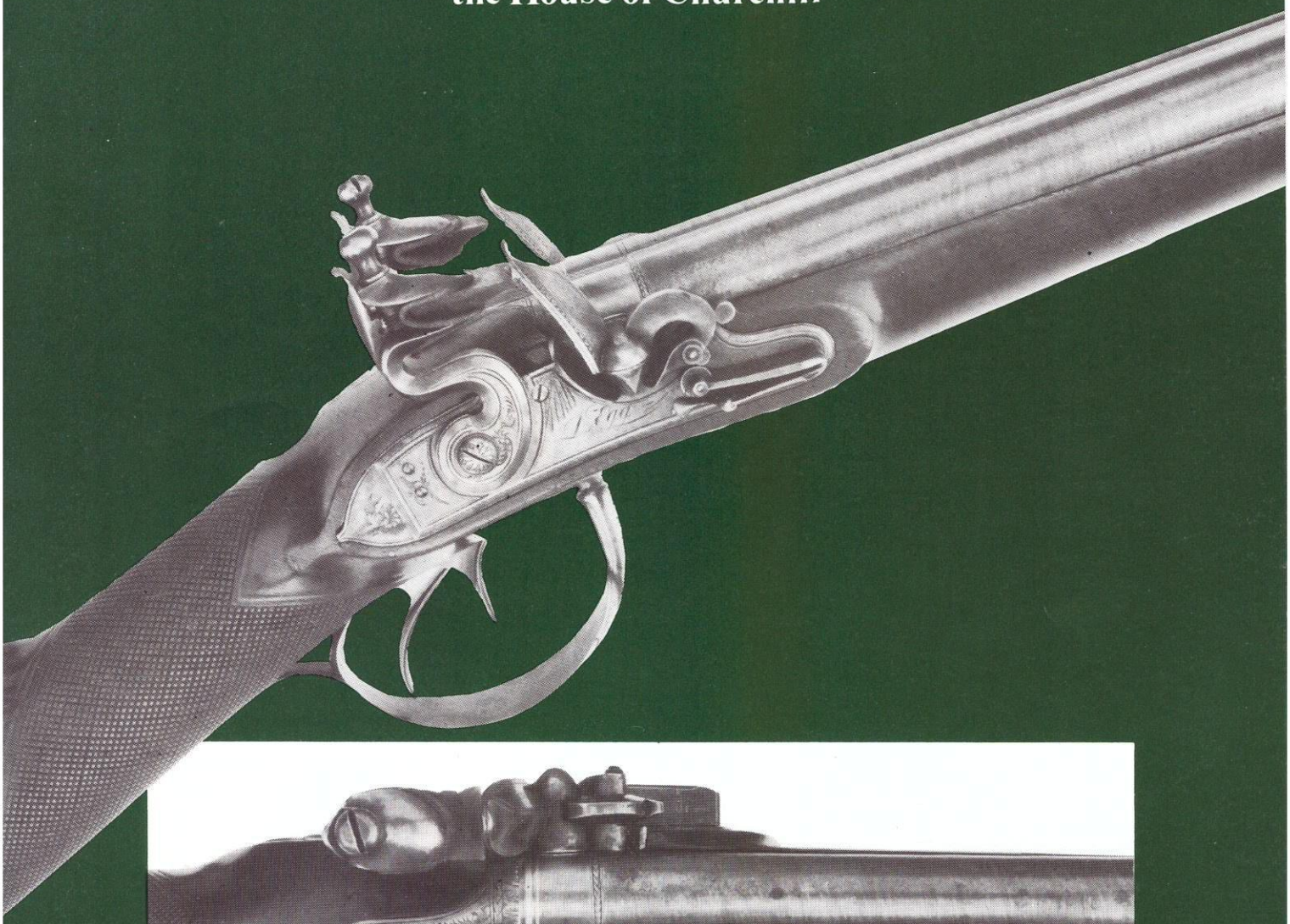
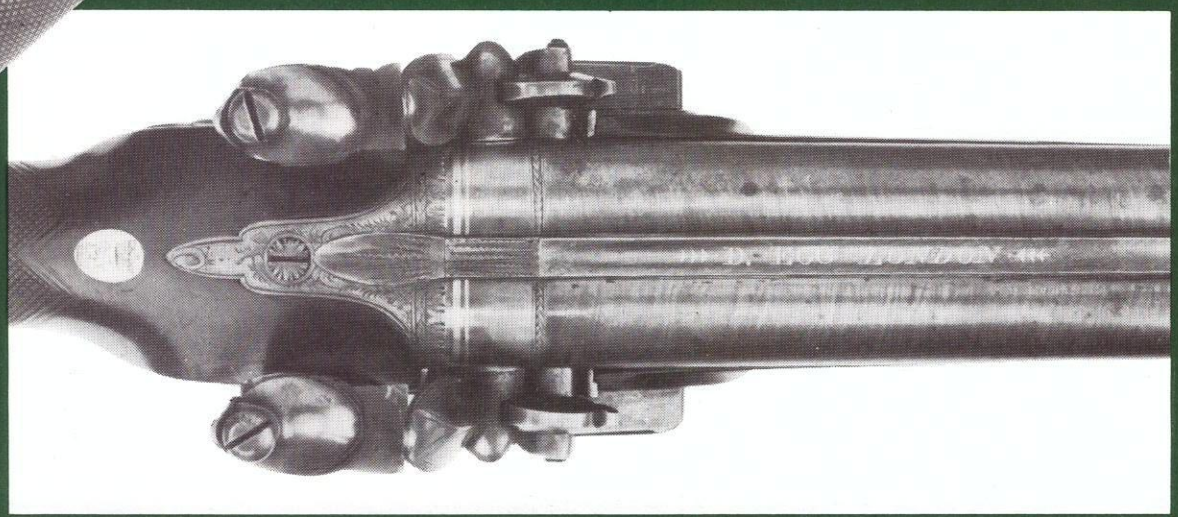
# One Hundred and Fifty Years of Shotgun History

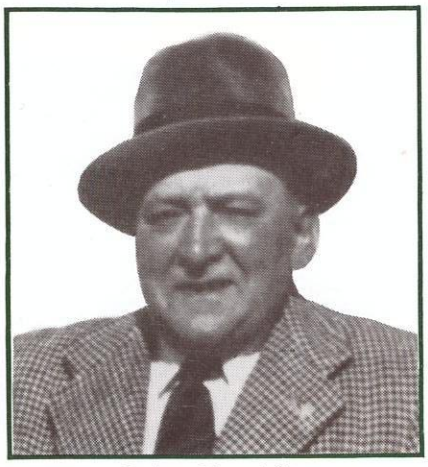
## Including something about the House of Churchill





Charles Lancaster

Stephen Grant



Robert Churchill

Double flint-lock gun by Durs Egg, London c. 1805, predecessor of Watson Bros. The furniture incorporates the crest and motto of the Prince Regent, later King George IV, son of the last "King of America".

*The various businesses now incorporated as Churchill, Atkin, Grant & Lang, Ltd., between them have played no inconsiderable part in developing the great tradition of London gunmaking in the 150 years since 1821, when the long reign of the flint-lock was ending. How the House of Churchill finally united all these firms in 1972 is more clearly shewn in the Family Tree which is included in our catalogue. We hope you will agree that our products justify the efforts at unification made over many years. Meanwhile we include some notes on these firms and think they will be of interest to many besides the historian.*

***Joseph Lang & Son.*** *In 1821 Joseph Lang commenced for himself by acquiring an old-established business, which he developed into a great and world-wide connection. The policy he adopted was to produce guns and rifles of the highest standard of design, workmanship and finish, and even secondhand weapons were not offered for sale in his establishment unless they had been made by the most eminent London makers of that period. In the "Morning Chronicle" of the 8th June, 1826, he advertised the entire stock of Joe Manton.*

*At a later period, to meet the requirements of those who for various reasons did not wish to purchase the most expensive guns, he introduced several cheaper models which were greatly appreciated and enabled every sportsman to obtain the best value for whatever price he wished to pay.*

*In opening his Shooting Range in 1827 he was the pioneer of the modern Shooting School. In 1852 he introduced the breech-loading gun into England and many inventions and improvements will always be associated with his name.*

***Charles Lancaster.*** *In 1826 Charles Lancaster founded, at 151, New Bond Street, what soon became the world-famous gun-making business bearing his name. He had previously attained great eminence as a barrel maker and supplied the barrels used by Joe Manton and other celebrated gunmakers. Colonel Hawker, the great sportsman of that period, wrote of him in his well-known book on shooting as follows:–*

*"Lancaster, who has raised many gunmakers to the head of the trade by allowing them to put their names to what was his work in all the essential parts of the barrels, has long since started for himself. This I advised him to do if ever Joe Manton retired . . . I may safely say that no man stands before him."*

*This opinion must have been shared by many other sportsmen, for Charles Lancaster at once became one of the great and fashionable gunmakers. His rise to fame was not only immediate but progressive and over seventy First Class Prizes, Medals and Diplomas were awarded to him.*

*His first Royal Appointment was from the Prince Consort in 1843 and the three succeeding generations of the Royal Family continued their patronage.*

*The "Twelve-Twenty" gun was probably the firm's most outstanding model and it alone would have been sufficient to make the name of Charles Lancaster one of the most famous in the history of gunmaking.*

***Henry Atkin Ltd.*** *Established in 1862 this firm traded for 60 years in Jermyn Street, and subsequently at 27, St. James's Street until 1960, when it amalgamated with Grant & Lang. Its guns were of the highest quality and the spring-opening model is widely admired.*

***Stephen Grant & Sons.*** *Stephen Grant – a man of great experience and exceptional skill in the building of best quality guns and rifles – commenced business on his own account at 67A, St. James's Street in 1866 and from the very first he occupied a prominent position in the front rank of famous London gunmakers. He was entrusted to build the six big-game double rifles used by H.R.H. The Prince of Wales – afterwards King Edward VII – on his visit to India in 1875 and also received orders and Warrant of Appointment from the Royal Houses of France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Russia, Persia and Turkey and from many of the Ruling Princes of India.*

*With a clientele desiring only the very finest guns and rifles that skill and money could produce, Mr. Grant naturally devoted his whole attention to the production of best quality weapons. After being carried on for a century the tradition has now become like the laws of the Medes and Persians.*

***Watson Bros.*** *This firm was founded in 1875, by acquiring the business and premises of Durs Egg, one*

*of the great names in gunmaking, who had also achieved world renown as a pistol maker as early as 1785.*
*They carried on business for 60 years at Old Bond Street and Pall Mall till brought into the group in 1935. Besides a very fine general connection, they made a speciality of small bore guns for ladies and boys and these are being continued.*

***F. Beesley.*** *This business was established in 1880 and was carried on by the founder and his son at 2, St. James's Street, till purchased in 1939. Mr. Beesley was a man of great skill and some of his earlier inventions are still considered amongst the best. Catering principally for the highest class of trade, he had built up an extremely fine connection.*

***Charles Hellis & Sons.*** *Commenced in 1894, this business was carried on in Edgware Road by the founder and two following generations until acquired by Henry Atkin in 1956. Although many Hellis guns were made, the firm was probably best known for its extensive trade in cartridges.*

***Harrison & Hussey.*** *After the end of the Great War this firm was commenced by bearers of these names, both of whom died within ten years. A wonderful connection had been built up in such a short time, but as the heirs decided not to continue the business, it was acquired in 1930.*
*By uniting these businesses, selecting from their staffs every man we could suitably employ, carrying a very large and comprehensive stock and working always on sound business principles, we are now in an exceptionally favourable position for giving the best possible value and service. How great a wealth of experience has evolved into the House of Churchill is, we hope, best illustrated in the historical essay on the evolution of the modern shot gun which follows.*

*Churchill, Atkin, Grant & Lang, Ltd.*

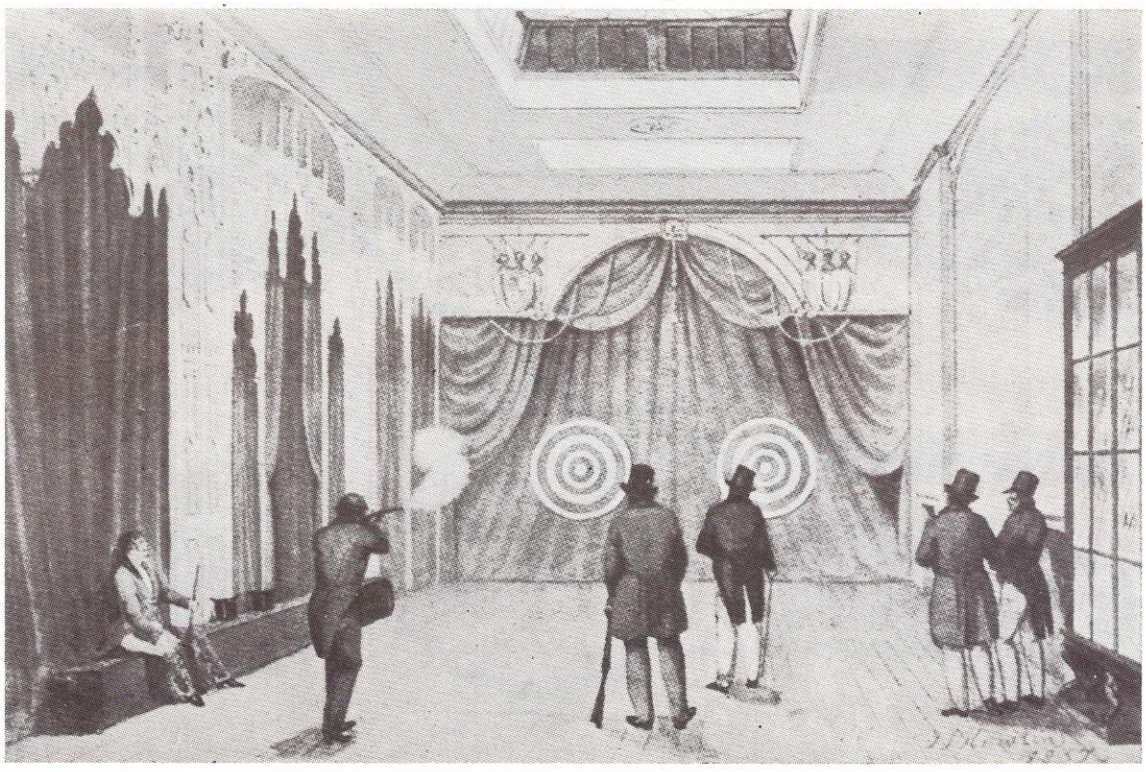
# 150 Years of the Shot Gun

THE history of firearms and their projectiles is a long and involved one, the adequate recording of which would require endless research and result in several large volumes. In presenting this historical essay it has been our much more modest aim to outline the part played by our Group in the evolution of the shot gun since Joseph Lang started in business in 1821, to be followed in 1826 by Charles Lancaster, who had already attained eminence as a barrel maker. His initials are to be found on the barrels of guns by the Mantons and other leading makers of the day.

It should be emphasised that the barrels are the most important part of a gun and, as the idea of projecting a charge of small shot from a metal tube has persisted for centuries, it is not surprising that barrels of today bear a striking resemblance to those of 200 years ago. Changes there have been in plenty, but these have all been directed to improving the speed, convenience, cleanliness, safety and certainty of loading and firing. The principle has remained the same, as indeed it must until someone is clever enough to circumvent the laws of elementary Dynamics.

For many decades ignition of the powder by the flint-lock system was the only method of starting the shot charge on its way. The flint in the jaws of the " cock " fell upon the steel " hammer " and sparks were directed down upon the priming in the pan. A successful shot usually followed, which is perhaps surprising when we remember that the shooter had to keep his powder dry, to avoid it being carried away in a gale, to escape a hang-fire or a flash in the pan and to keep swinging his piece. Correspondence on " swinging versus pointing " still crops up from time to time in the sporting papers but it was vitally important to keep swinging in flint-lock days.

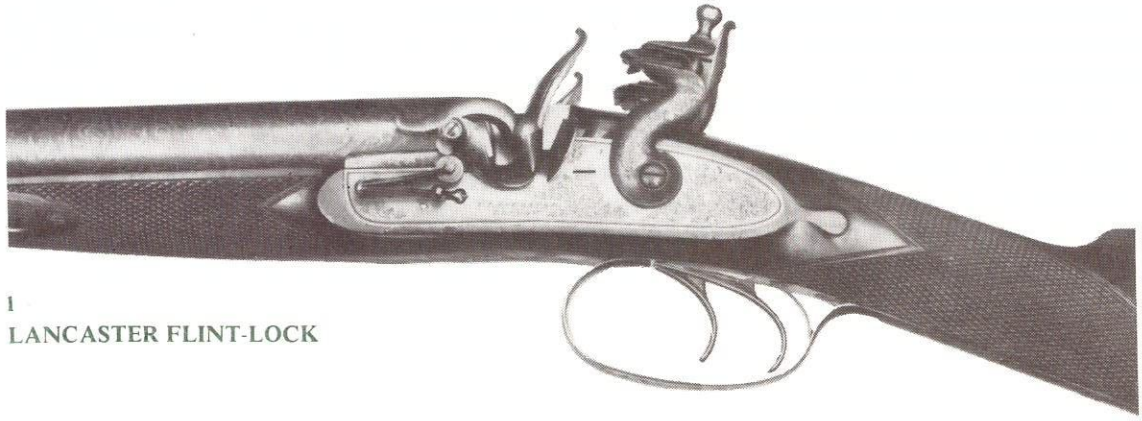
*Lang's Shooting Gallery in 1827 at 7, Haymarket, London.*



The flint-lock gun (1) chosen to illustrate the ultimate development of the system is interesting in that it was made without a ramrod and must have been intended for pigeon matches or for use in the field by a gentleman attended by a loader. It is interesting also because it was shown both in the Great Exhibition of 1851 and in the Centenary Exhibition of 1951, having in the meantime figured in the " Field " trials of 1889.

The year 1807 was the beginning of the end of the long reign of the flint-lock, as it was then that the Rev. Alexander Forsyth, of Belhelvie, near Aberdeen, patented his percussion system, which took the form of a self-priming repeating lock utilising the explosive properties of fulminate of mercury to provide the ignition instead of fine grain black powder. This was highly satisfactory so far as it went, but other ways of using fulminate were soon developed, notably that shown in (2), in which a copper tube containing fulminate was placed in the equivalent of the pan of the flint-lock, and when struck projected a flame laterally through the touch hole in the same way.

The next development (3) was the percussion cap placed over a nipple with a hole forward and down direct to



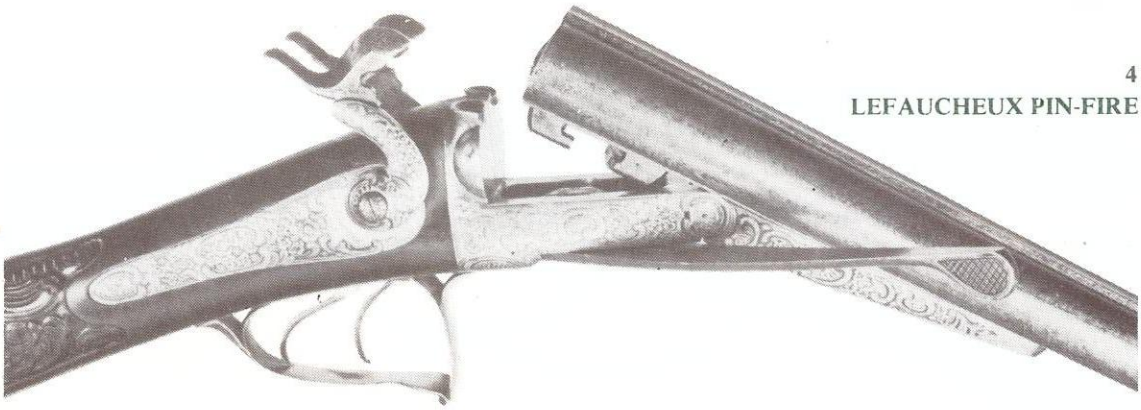
1
LANCASTER FLINT-LOCK

2
LANCASTER TUBE-LOCK

3
LANG PERCUSSION CAP GUN

the powder charge. There were many claimants to this invention but the honours are probably divisible between Colonel Hawker and Joe Manton. This was indeed a great advance in the certainty of shooting, but there still remained the slowness and danger of muzzle loading, it being remembered that in reloading after a single shot the hand was repeatedly over the muzzle of the unfired other barrel. Nowadays the breech loader is taken very much for granted and it is difficult for the shooter of the present day to realise the inconvenience of all the loading apparatus which the shooter had to hang around him before sallying forth, and the slowness and perils of loading.

The idea of breech loading was, of course, not new when Lefaucheux, a gunmaker of Paris, produced his gun with drop-down barrels, which was not a pin-fire but used a cartridge of another type. The pin-fire gastight cartridge seems to have been invented by Houillier, another French maker. In this a brass pin projected radially from the base of the case and when struck it fired a cap positioned internally. Lefaucheux showed at the 1851 Exhibition and (4) is an example of his work. Joseph Lang perceived the advantages of the system and it is greatly to his credit that within a few months of the close of the Exhibition he was marketing such guns (5), the first British



4
LEFAUCHEUX PIN-FIRE

5
LANG PIN-FIRE

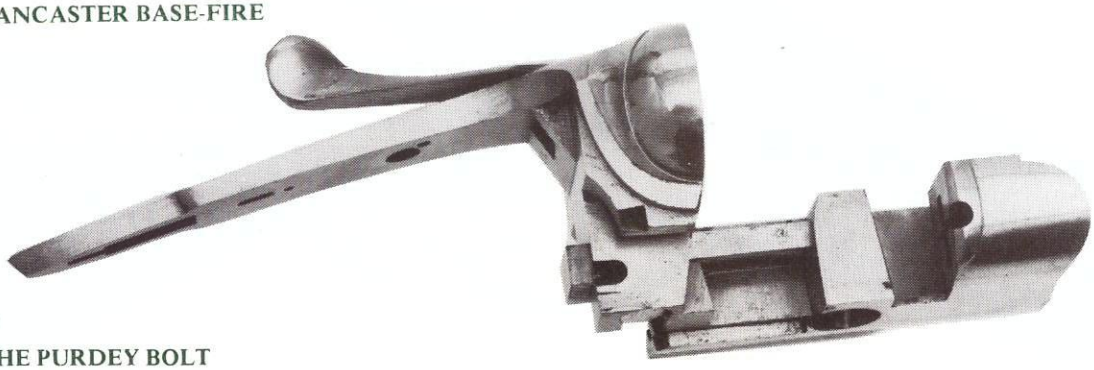
6
DOUGALL " LOCKFAST "

breech-loaders. This introduction raised a storm of opposition of extreme fury and bitterness which persisted for several years, and it was only after extensive trials carried out by the " Field " in 1858 and 1859 that shooters in general came round to seeing that the advantages of the breech-loading system more than outweighed the defects of the earlier guns. Developments soon followed, a most interesting one being the " Lockfast " gun (6) by Dougall (then a leading gunmaker in London) in which we see the extractor introduced to make easier the removal of the fired cases. The single grip holding the barrels down is fortified by the ingenious system in which on closing, the barrels slide back over the bosses formed on the face of the standing breech. The gun shown was made as a pin-fire and later converted to centre fire. The Grant pin-fire (7) is a late specimen included principally for the beauty of its outline. It has a double grip lever-over-guard action, but, curiously, no extractor.

Reverting to our theme of ignition, the next step seems to have been Lancaster's gun (8). To be noted in this is the beautiful " rabbit ear " hammer, the breast of which struck a horizontally placed striker of exceptionally large diameter. The cartridge may be described as a base-fire as it incorporated something similar to the paper cap used

7
GRANT PIN-FIRE

8
LANCASTER BASE-FIRE



9
THE PURDEY BOLT

in the toy pistols of our youth placed between the base of the cartridge and an inner metal plate perforated with four flash holes. This invention was in its turn as momentous as the introduction of the detonating system and the breech loader, as we see in it the first true and practical centre fire cartridge, and it antedated by several years the cartridge as we now know it with the percussion cap sunk centrally in the base with an internal anvil taking the place of the nipple. This type is attributed to Schneider and/or Pottet and was not introduced until 1861 by Daw of London.

A further improvement in the shooting of guns, apart from the design, was the development of choke boring, for which we have to thank Greener of Birmingham and Pape of Newcastle, whose names have been deliberately mentioned alphabetically! This was about 1866 and the next year saw the introduction of the Purdey bolt, which slides in the action to hold down the barrels with a double grip. It was an invention of the utmost value and was actuated in a number of ways culminating in the top lever now in almost universal use and shown in our sectioned model (9). By about 1875 the hammer gun had reached the form shown in (10). This has back-action locks, but

10
LANG BACK ACTION GUN

11
GRANT BAR LOCK

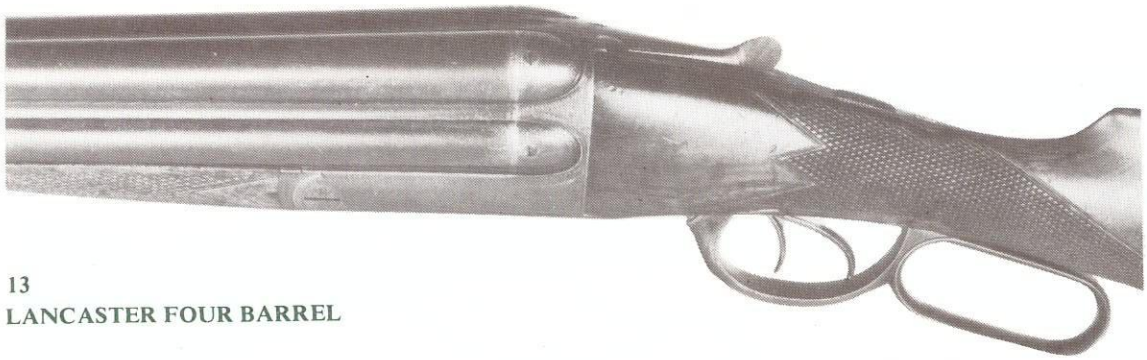
12
THE LANG HAMMERLESS

other guns had bar locks as in (11), with the mainspring in front of the hammer. This surely must be one of the most perfect hammer guns ever made.

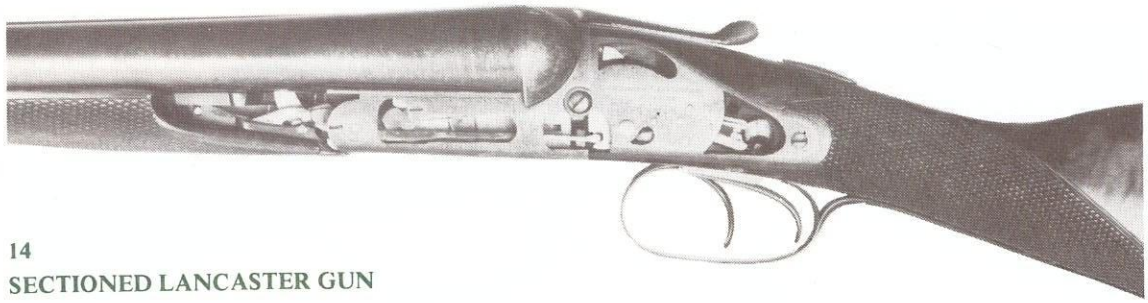
A few years before this there had already appeared the hammerless gun made by Murcott, and the hammerless designs of other makers followed with great rapidity and in general much ugliness, the Lang gun (12) being typical, with the Lancaster four-barrelled gun (13) an interesting variant. Many of these early guns incorporated some form of " lever-cocking ", whereas in later years cocking was carried out on the opening or the closing of the gun, or even divided between these two operations.

The year 1876 saw the Anson and Deeley action of Westley Richards, in which the lock work was carried by pins extending from side to side of the action. Developments of this design, now often known as the boxlock, provided the basis on which the majority of the guns since that time have been made. The other main system is the sidelock, in which the locks for the two barrels are carried on separate side plates.

About 1879 Needham and Deeley produced their ejector mechanisms, followed by a multitude of others, all



13
LANCASTER FOUR BARREL



14
SECTIONED LANCASTER GUN

15
GRANT HAMMERLESS EJECTOR

different – and all claimed as perfect. By 1895, however, ejectors had become usual and reliable, Damascus was giving way to steel as the material for barrels and smokeless powders were replacing the black powder which had been in use for so long. This state of development is typified by a Grant gun of the period (15) and a sectioned Lancaster gun (14) offers almost push-button facilities for " seeing the wheels go round ". It has to be admitted that the gun of today is, with one notable exception, basically the same as that of seventy-seven years ago, the principal alterations being in refinements of design including the important reductions in weight which have been possible following the tendency to lighter shot charges. The notable exception is the Churchill gun with its 25 in. barrels and " Churchill rib " which was pioneered by the great Robert Churchill in the face of considerable opposition and criticism.

Although the Churchill XXV gun achieves considerable reduction in weight, its prime purpose was to promote the Churchill system of " natural " shooting. Briefly, the sportsman is trained to fix his eye ahead of the game and allow his gun to swing naturally along with his concentrated gaze. He does not concern himself with the details of

16

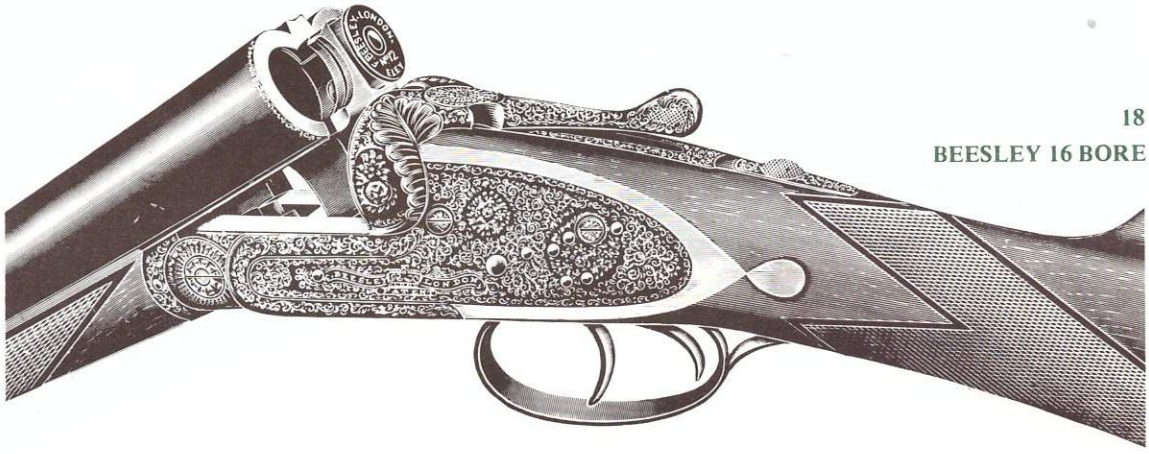
LANG " UNDER AND OVER "

17

LANG DETACHABLE LOCK

18

BEESLEY 16 BORE



elevation swing and angle of lead of his weapon, but maintains his concentration and allows his fast moving Churchill to move almost as a part of himself. The short XXV barrels and special raised rib facilitate the required fast natural swing without detriment to ballistic performance. That results can be fantastic is best illustrated by the fact that Robert Churchill trained his Home Guard company during the Second World War in this system of shooting and produced men with rifles who could hit moving targets in the air or on the ground in a manner to rival legendary American frontiersmen.

There have been other developments to suit special requirements, but as all these are in current use it is only necessary to record without description that the remaining specimens include an Under and Over gun (16) (reviving the original barrel positioning of the double gun, and also showing the Lang single trigger mechanism), a gun with hand-detachable locks (17), a 16 bore best sidelock (18), a 28 bore (19) and a 12 bore 2-in. gun (20).

Our first illustration is of a Lancaster gun and it is perhaps therefore appropriate to conclude with the Lancaster " Twelve-Twenty " (21), which is thoroughly representative of the modern light gun of the highest quality.

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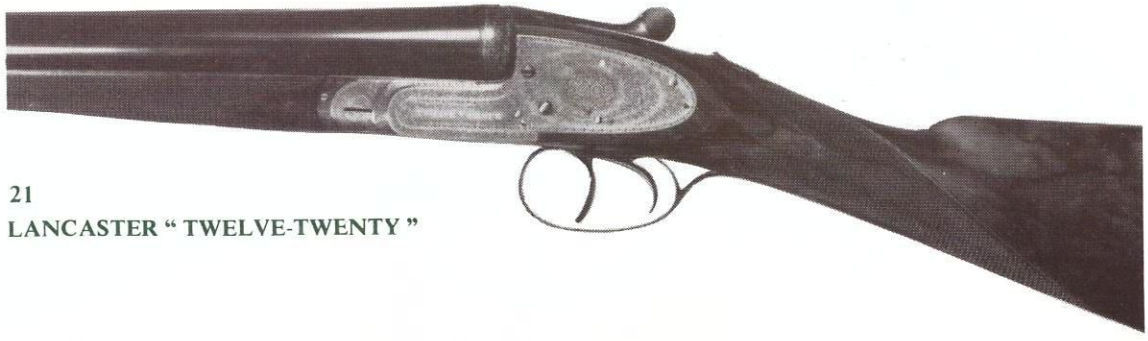
19
**WATSON 28 BORE**

20
**LANG 12 BORE 2-INCH**

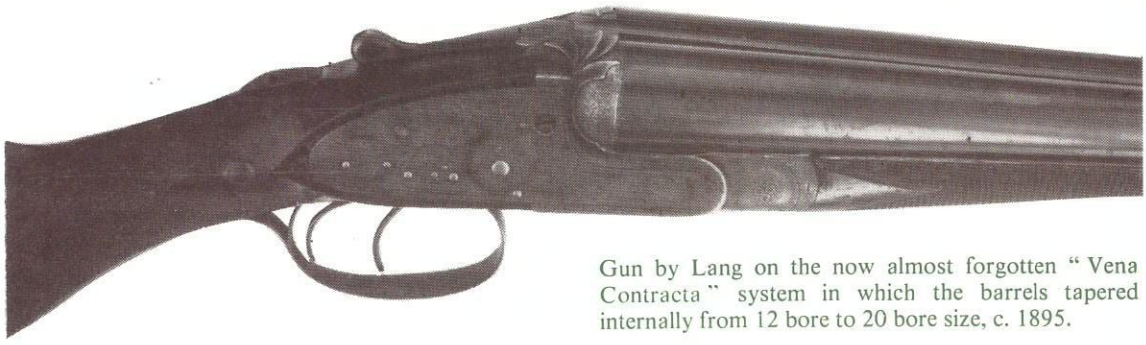


21
**LANCASTER " TWELVE-TWENTY "**

# Additional Guns of Historical and Technical Interest

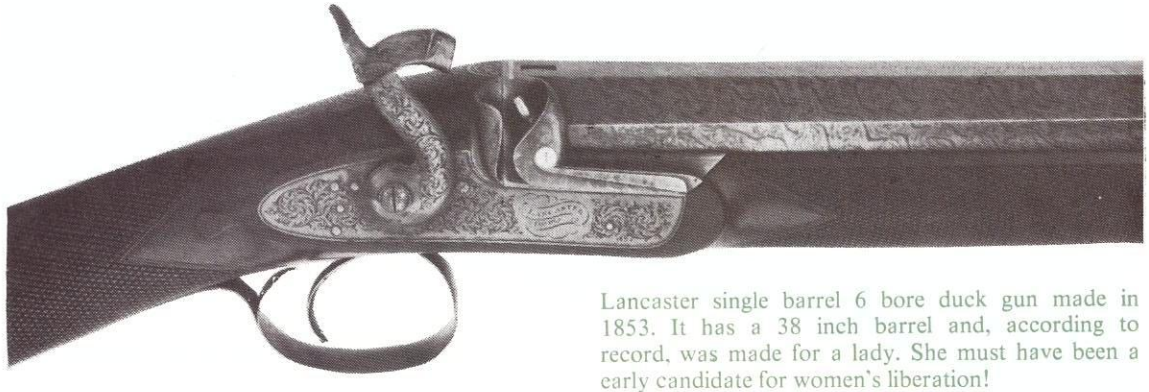
*From the collection of Mr. W. Keith Neal,*
*of Bishopstrow House, Warminster, Wilts.*


Pair of single barrel guns with improved copper primers, made by Lancaster in 1837, complete in case with original accessories.

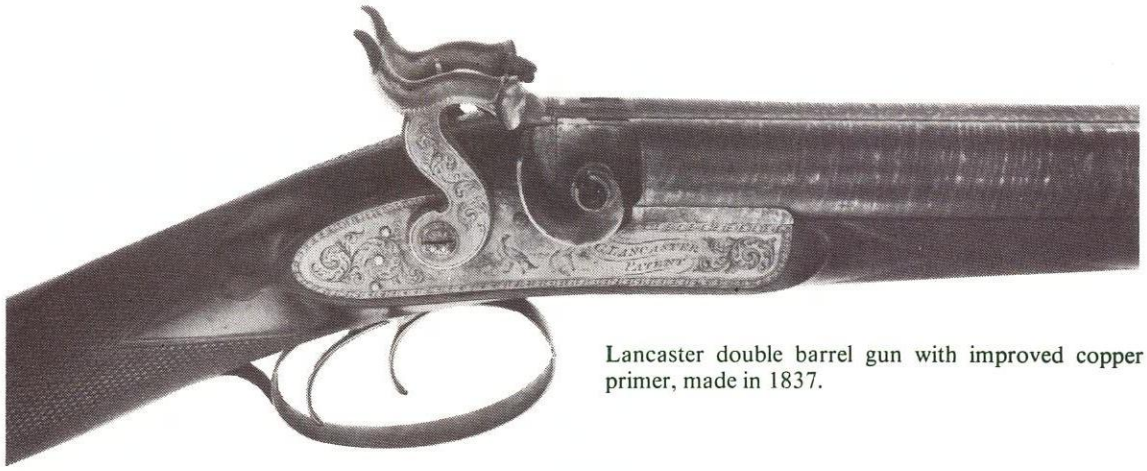


Gun by Lang on the now almost forgotten " Vena Contracta " system in which the barrels tapered internally from 12 bore to 20 bore size, c. 1895.

Double barrel early pin-fire rifle made by Joseph Lang showing early form of breech action and cartridge, c. 1858.



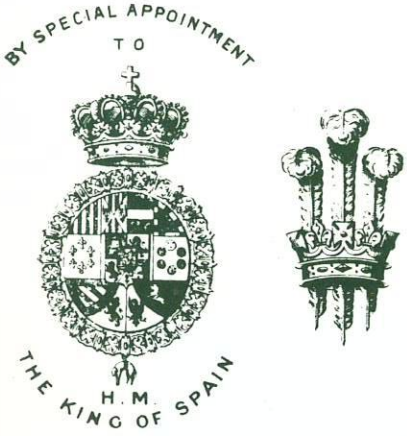
Lancaster single barrel 6 bore duck gun made in 1853. It has a 38 inch barrel and, according to record, was made for a lady. She must have been a early candidate for women's liberation!



Lancaster double barrel gun with improved copper primer, made in 1837.

Double barrel tube-lock gun made by Joseph Manton, c. 1818.
Barrels of the Manton tube-lock illustrated below bearing the initials of Charles Lancaster, who forged them.

# Churchill, Atkin, Grant & Lang









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