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European Imports

For the past six or seven years I have been importing antique handguns from the US and Europe, with varying degrees of success: American imports are easier to execute because I can often go to the shows in the US myself and pick the guns I want. For my European imports I have to rely on my contacts in Germany and France to help me find what is suitable for sale here in Canada. There are two major considerations: price and quality. American-bought merchandise is usually cheaper, and quite often (especially in the case of American-made guns) of better quality however the European-made guns bought in Europe are also of high quality and more unique. They tend to be a bit more pricy, though. With the Euro trading at a good 23% more than the US dollar, purchases in Europe can be quite expensive, especially for me as a Canadian. The Euro trades at about 1.6 right now. This does not stop me from shopping around though and recently a contact in Czech Republic put me onto this auction house which specializes in antique guns. I managed to pick up five very fine, and rare, European-made revolvers. One of them is this Italian-made pin fire revolver of the Papal guards, ca. 1860. It is a very rare Mazzocchi brothers 9mm revolver designed along the lines of Chamelot et Delvigne. Anyone who knows these guys' designs will recognize it for what it is. Very unique. The gun has been featured in European collectors' magazines, and in Chris Curtis' book "Systeme Lefauchaux – Continuing the Study of Pin Fire Cartridge Arms". Curtis writes this about the Mazzocchi revolver: "The four Mazzocchi brothers – Giovanni, Pietro, Luigi and Giuseppe – were *camerali*, exclusive official armsmakers for the Papal troops in the territory of Rome. The Model 1868 revolver...is very similar in physical appearance and mechanical function to the Chamelot & Delvigne models. Marked "*Fili Mazzocchi – Roma*" on top of the barrel, the Model 1868's cylinder revolves counter-clockwise, the loading gate is on the left side

of the frame, and chambered for the 9mm caliber pin fire cartridge. The spur trigger is unusual for a pin fire revolver, however."



Article in Germany's „Deutsches Waffenjournal" 1993

The further history about Mazzocchi goes like this:

In the early 19th century Italian arms maker Gaetano Mazzocchi was entrusted with the privilege of being the exclusive supplier of arms to the Pope, and the "keeper of the Papal Armory" at the Vatican. This was during the time of Napoleon Bonaparte's reign and conquest of Europe. It was a tumultuous and frightening time for Italy and the Vatican. Italy was a fractured country of small states, including the Kingdoms of Sicily, Sardinia and Naples,

the republics of Genoa, Venice and Piedmont, Rome and, of course, the Vatican, all independent states vying for power and influence over the others. Small military expeditions against neighbouring states and civil war-like engagements were commonplace. Bonaparte saw both an opportunity to widen his European conquest as well as a need to quell the unrest in Italy and put an end to much of this by various means: he occupied Northern Italy with his troops from Alto Adige to Florence and finally to Rome, installing his own governors and nobility to control the Italian states, and in 1805 he crowned himself "King of Italy". The Pope was scared. Napoleon suspended the Papal power over its military, and with it, Gaetano's duty as keeper of the armories. Then, in 1809 Pius VII was arrested (or kidnapped, depending on who you listen to), and transferred to France where he spent the next five years in confinement. Napoleon's troops occupied the Vatican, and with it the Papal Armories at Castel Sant' Angelo. It was not until the fall of Bonaparte's empire in 1814 that the Papal reign was restored, and the Vatican once more became a city-state, autonomous of the surrounding Roman government and institutions. Pius VII granted Gaetano Mazzocchi's four sons Giovanni, Giuseppe, Pietro and Luigi, the former privilege of being the sole manufacturer and supplier of arms to the Vatican's military once more. In the mid-1850's Pius IX requested of the Mazzocchi brothers to select a suitable design of carbine for the Pope's elite squad of sharpshooters, and some 10 years thereafter he ordered a new type of side arm for his famous Swiss Guards. The designs being considered included Colt, Adams, Remington and the French made Lefauchaux. The Papal specifications were quite detailed:

1. The gun had to be light, easily drawn from a holster and be usable with just one hand
2. The gun had to be of a simple construction, but rugged and reliable.

3. The successful hand gun had to utilize cartridges. That eliminated Colt and Remington, who were still primarily engaged in the design and manufacture of percussion guns. Rim - and center fire cartridges were still in their infancy, and largely under the protection of the Rollin White patent of 1858.
4. The gun had to work as single-action only, which narrowed the "field" even further, leaving either an Adams-type revolver or one designed along the system of Lefauchaux. One has to remember that in the late 1850's the most common, and most trusted cartridge ignition system in the world was still the pin fire, and although Adams and Webley were making progress with cartridge developments of their own, none could compete with the "Systeme Lefauchaux".
5. The Papal commission stipulated that the gun had to employ a spur-trigger, and that the extractor rod be removed from under the barrel and housed in the grip of the gun instead. These two requirements were thought to make drawing the gun from a holster easier, with less chance of entanglement.

Mazzocchi presented a modified Chamelot et Delvigne Model 8 revolver to the commission in June of 1867. After making a few more changes – the barrel had to be shortened to 95mm, the caliber changed from 12mm to 9mm, the grip had to be modified and the trigger mechanism simplified to use just six moving parts – the commission approved and ordered the brothers to produce 2,500 units with a weekly delivery of 40 pieces at 56 Lires each. The new gun would be named the "Roman Pattern of 1868" and was issued to the Vatican police and Papal Guards. To this day, the Mazzocchi "Roman Pattern" revolver is one of the most unique and rarest of pin fire revolvers.



« F.lli Mazzocchi – Roma » marked
Model 1868

New Shipment Just Cleared

A shipment of excellent pin fire and large-frame European percussion pistols, bull-dogs and small pocket revolvers have just been cleared by Canada Customs! They will be listed in the next few days on my website www.oldgunscanada.com.

Philip Webley and the R.I.C. Pattern Revolver

P. Webley and Son, perhaps the most famous of English gun makers was founded in 1834 in Birmingham, England and would produce world-famous hand and long guns until 1979. Webley pattern percussion revolvers and cartridge guns have been copied by countless other makers, proof that the designs were excellent and the response by military and civilian users was favorable. The most famous of all their designs were the Bull Dog (often copied as "BRITISH Bull Dog" by other European and American makers), the R.I.C. (Royal Irish Constabulary) pattern, and the Webley Top Break or "Self-Extracting" Revolver Marks I through VII which were in service from 1887 to 1963.

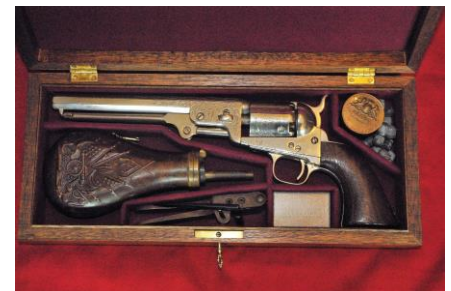
The R.I.C. pattern was created by Philip Webley in 1867 as a compact, pocket-size revolver with a serious attitude. The gun, although easily concealable in a coat pocket came in a massive .450 or .455 caliber and proved to be a formidable defensive weapon for police and military alike. In January of 1868 Webley secured a government contract for the supply of R.I.C. pattern revolvers to the British government and thus ensured a long and lucrative relationship with the state to supply military and police weaponry for decades to come. The R.I.C. was at first a solid-frame, double action revolver with a loading gate on the right, and a swing-out extractor. The extractor also ensures the cylinder pin remains locked in place, and a spring inside the pin provides the necessary drag on the cylinder to keep it from spinning freely. This is a common design feature on European pocket revolvers of this type – "Bull Dogs" and otherwise. The "First Model" design of the Webley R.I.C. remained in use until 1890 when the first of the top-break models was introduced. The advantage of the top-break design was primarily the speed with which the gun could be loaded and the spent cartridges could be extracted, however the hinge weakened the overall integrity of the frame somewhat. From 1890 to 1915 successive improvements from Mk I to Mk VII were introduced, all as top-breaking variants of the original R.I.C. pattern. Famous (or infamous) Webley users were General George A. Custer, of whom it is said that he died at Little Big Horn with two Webley's in his hands (although they

say the same thing about him and two S&W Old Model Army's...), and one Charles Guiteau, who used a Webley Bull Dog to assassinate US President Garfield in 1881.

Webley revolvers were the standard sidearm for military and police from Hong Kong and Singapore to Australia, Canada, Africa, and the Middle East, and saw action in all military and civilian conflicts from the 1850's to the 1970's. Today, Webley's are much sought-after items for collectors. Those, like myself, who would rather possess the "original" configuration than a modified version, look for fine specimens to add to our collections, but then there are those who will alter the gun to accept a modern cartridge for firing on a range. This practice, in my opinion, is regrettable. The use of modern, high-pressure cartridges is dangerous and may cause parts of the gun to rupture, and moreover, will make a previously "antique" classed gun "prohibited", or at the very least "restricted". I get many requests and inquiries for Webley Mk I revolvers, either as a "conversion" to .45 ACP or as an original .455 Webley. These guns are popular for the reason that they can, conceivably, be converted to .45ACP, and are very hard to come by, and fetch an unreasonably high price (IMO). In the days before short-barrel prohibition I used to own a .38 S&W Webley Mk IV which I used to fire occasional with original ammunition. It was not a particularly powerful gun by today's standards, however it performed well and proved quite accurate within 25 yards.



A Webley R.I.C. No. 2 revolver from
about 1885



A very fine looking display of a Colt 1851
Navy, in a modern case, with accessories