



The Antique Arms Gazette

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www.oldgunscanada.com

A New Volume of Newsletters

Today we start "Volume 2" of my somewhat monthly newsletter. It feels big and important, even if it isn't...

But, before I go on, let me thank all of my loyal subscribers and customers for continuing to show interest in my work and my products. What started as a mere hobby to support my collecting "habit" has turned into a lively business, and I am very happy with the response I am receiving from my customers. I have been in customer service for 40 years, and I know how important my customers are. Without you, I would not have a business, so, thank you all very much.

Before I continue, I would like to draw your attention to a bill before parliament right now, called Bill C-71. Many of you are aware of it, I am sure, but if you are not, please check it out and fill out the brief on-line survey that goes with it. No matter what your response, it is important to impress on the political knuckleheads that this kind of bill will land them OUT-OF-OFFICE. That's the only language they understand. The link is <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cnslttns/hndgn/index-en.aspx>

From there you can get to the actual bill and read it, if you like. The most threatening part is the provision of giving the RCMP the power to classify any firearm as prohibited without having to justify their decision. This could impact antiques, such as guns chambered for .44 Russian, and ALL other centerfire calibers!

Enough said...

Victoria Show Disappointing

I spent last week end in Victoria at the annual 2-day show and have to say it was mildly disappointing. Not much in the way of antiques, at least not worth buying. I picked up a few things, including some scarce rim-fire ammo some of my customers have been asking for. I also have two Colt Thunderers awaiting classification, and a Remington Police in .38 rim fire (STILL legal...). Keep checking the website, they should be up soon.

Christian Sharps

Few names in American arms manufacture conjure up greater images of success than that of Christian Sharps, inventor of the Sharps carbine, the most widely used rifle during the American civil war. Christian Sharps made, and shaped, American history by providing the right product, at a crucial time. Had it not been for his engineering ingenuity and ability to manufacture in large quantities, things might have turned out differently for the Union...

Sharps large-bore "Buffalo" rifles of the 1870's and 80's were synonymous with the expansion and "conquest" of the American West. Another famous instance in American history which involved Sharps is the famous raid on the armory at Harper's Ferry in 1859 by John Brown. The model 1853 carbine is often referred to as the "John Brown Sharps" as he and his abolitionist supporters apparently bought some 400 of these for the raid. A very outspoken abolitionist preacher, Henry Ward Beecher was quoted as saying in 1856 that "one Sharps carbine has more moral power than 100 bibles"...

Sharps did not only make long arms, though, and there are at least four handguns known to have been designed and manufactured by Sharps: a single-shot, breech-loading percussion pistol for which he was granted a patent in 1848, a "pistol-rifle" based on the design of the former, and a percussion revolver which looks very similar to S&W's First Model pocket revolver. It is the fourth design which would make Sharps famous as a pistol maker, though: the four-barrel pepperbox. Its design is ingenious, and its appearance unique. There were over 215,000 made of the various models, not including the two licensees Tipping & Lawden of Birmingham, and Ghaye of Liege, Belgium. Of the 21 different models made in a twenty-year production period, some models had as few as 50 produced while others were made in the 60,000 – plus range. The pepperboxes are all marked with an 1859 patent date, the patent he received for his revolving firing pin. The interesting part of this design is in the fact that the four

barrels remain stationary while the firing pin rotates with each cocking of the hammer...

Christian Sharps was born in 1811, in Washington NJ. He married one Sarah Elizabeth Chadwick, and the couple had two children. Sharps apprenticed in the 1830's at the Harpers Ferry arsenal under the famous inventor Captain John C. Hall, inventor of the Hall's rifle, one of the early American breech-loading rifles of the day. Sharps soon recognized the shortcomings of this design and in 1848 he was granted his own patent for a "slanting breech" rifle which was an improvement over the Hall's rifle. His invention would be manufactured at the A. S. Nippes arms manufacture in Philadelphia. In 1851 Sharps ventured out on his own, forming the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Co. together with two partners. While the other two managed the factory and finances, Sharps was in charge of "R&D" as we would say today. Together with the Robbins & Lawrence arms manufacture, he produced his 1851 carbine, and several others until 1856, when he moved into his own manufacturing space built on R&L land.

Sharps had a rocky relationship with his partners at best, and he left the first Sharps company in 1855 and formed the C. Sharps Co. to manufacture his percussion pistols and pepperboxes. Rifles and carbines would continue to be manufactured at the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Co. until 1881.

Christian Sharps continued to be active in the design of firearms until his death in 1874. He died of tuberculosis at the age of 63.



Sharps Four-Barrel Pepperbox Model 2B in .32 rim fire short

Philip Webley & Son

Here in Canada we tend to know a lot more about the American arms makers, and it would seem that Colt, Remington, and Smith & Wesson receive all the attention and interest of collectors. On a global level, however, many European makers are as famous, and as accomplished as any of the Americans. Yes, the “Big Three” (okay, “four”, if you include Browning...) command the lime light, but their European counterparts deserve equal attention. The likes of Enfield, Webley, Lefaucheu, FN Herstal, Sauer, SIG... the list goes on, all contributed to historical changes and innovations from the early 18 hundreds to today. One of the most influential was Philip Webley of Birmingham.

Birmingham was to arms manufacture in England what Hartford and Springfield was to the USA, and Liege was to Continental Europe. Many of the best-known English makers either had their start in Birmingham, or established their businesses and factories there and contributed to the reputation of this English “steel town”. Among the famous makers in Birmingham’s “Gun Quarter” were: Philip Webley & Son, later Webley & Scott, BSA, the British Small Arms company which made everything from sporting rifles and machine guns to bicycles and bus bodies, Joseph Bentley who collaborated with Webley in his early years, and William Tranter, inventor of many fine handguns. It is estimated that Birmingham gun makers produced more than two thirds of all English firearms between 1804 and 1815, with more than 750,000 pieces per year! By 1851 there were more than 450 gun makers in Birmingham, employing almost 3,000 workers. These numbers dwarf anything the American gun makers had achieved to this point, and for a long time thereafter. It is not surprising that there was such a need for guns in England – the British Empire stretched around the globe, and their involvement in just about every war from Napoleon to the Crimea, to India, Canada and China required massive amounts of supplies to keep the troops engaged.



A Webley RIC No. 1 “New Model” from about 1875



A Webley RIC No. 2 in .450 Adams

The RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary) Pattern was one of Webley’s most famous designs. This hefty side arm was carried by service personnel (police and military) in Commonwealth countries around the globe, from Australia and New Zealand to Hong Kong, India, Canada and places in Africa. Its name comes from the official adoption as the side arm of the Royal Irish Constabulary in 1868. Webley’s other legendary design, of course, was the much-copied “Bull Dog”, the short-barreled, large caliber revolver which proved to be one of the most popular pocket revolvers ever made...

The Webley arms company had its origins with William Davies, a maker of bullet moulds in Birmingham. Philip Webley, born in 1813, worked all his young life with Davies, and in 1834 took over the business. In 1838 he married Davies’ daughter Caroline, and the couple would have five children, the oldest of them, Thomas, becoming a partner in the business later on. Philip continued making bullet moulds and weights for fishing nets, but soon turned his attention to percussion sporting arms. As of 1849 he is listed in the Birmingham directory as an arms maker. The company of Webley and Son would continue until 1897, when it became Webley & Scott, a British arms manufacturing legacy still in business today.

Among Webley’s many achievements were several collaborative ventures, using the expertise and creative genius of other arms makers. Webley worked with Birmingham gunsmith Joseph Bentley for example, to produce the famous Webley-Bentley percussion revolver.



Webley – Bentley Percussion Revolver



PHILIP WEBLEY,

(Successor to the late WILLIAM DAVIS,

Original

BULLET AND SHOT MOULD

MANUFACTURER,

To the Honorable Board of Ordnance and to the Honorable East India Company.

No. 84, WEAMAN-STREET,

BIRMINGHAM.

And Manufacturer of the

IMPROVED TWO-GROOVE RIFLE MOULDS,

Ball Cutters, Barrel Gauges,

FISHING NET MOULDS, GUN AND PISTOL LOCKS,

Stipples, Stipple Wrenches,

TURNSCREWS, WADDING PUNCHES,

SPRING CRAMPS,

GUN PORTFOLIO, RIFLE STOPS,

SWIVELS,

And Gun Implements of every description.



William Tranter

Philip Webley’s military and civilian small arms shaped and influenced world history from the Crimean War, the American Civil War, the Zulu wars and WW I and WWII to many small and seemingly insignificant skirmishes around the world, and is to this day a renowned and recognized name in the world of arms manufacturing. Philip Webley died in 1888.

New Shipment Trickling In

With Customs releasing a few pieces at a time, the latest shipment is coming in a trickle! Check my website frequently for new stock: Webley’s, Sharps, Colts, Remingtons among others...