

HARKOM DOUBLE RIFLE

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If you want to see a stunningly beautiful hammerless double rifle of the very best quality, then study lot 735 in this sale, a Joseph Harkom of Edinburgh .500 sidelock no.2267 dating from 1896 and estimated at £4000 - £6000. It is completely different to a conventional double rifle yet it is as stylish as is possible to be.

Joseph Harkom was very unusual for an Edinburgh gunmaker in that he did the reverse of most provincial gunmakers, being born in London, yet for some reason travelling to Scotland to set up his business. He was born in London in 1808 where his father was a gunmaker and was no doubt apprenticed to him. Instead of remaining in London, he re-located to Edinburgh and set up his business there in this 19th century city renowned for its quality gunmakers.

After various changes of address, he settled at the address that the firm is best known for, 32 Princes Street. His shop was virtually opposite the side entry to Waverley Station and of course just along the street was John Dickson & Son at 63 Princes Street.

He sired various sons most of whom became gunmakers and in 1870 the firm was renamed Joseph Harkom & Son. It was a large business and in the 1871 census he described himself as employing 11 men. Joseph Harkom died in 1881 aged 83 with the business now being carried on by his sons. Around 1897 the business re-located to 30 George Street and finally ceased trading in 1922 when Mortimer & Son took over the firm.

Joseph Harkom is always associated with the very stylish boxlocks guns he made, quite different in style to the conventional boxlock. Where he was also unique was that he did not buy in boxlock actions from Birmingham, he made them in Edinburgh and as a handsome addition, most were gold washed internally. His hammer guns likewise are all of high quality but compared to the other two quality names, Dickson and Henry, his production was far smaller.

Since he specialised in top quality sporting guns, if a customer came in and ordered a double rifle, Harkom would not have the experience or facilities to build one. He could easily have ordered one in the white from Birmingham, but with his eye for quality and style, he sought out one far closer to home, just a few blocks away, from none other than Alexander Henry in St Andrews Square in Edinburgh.

This lovely double rifle no. 2267 was not made by Harkom, but was made by Alexander Henry in 1896. Harkom would buy in the rifle from Henry in the white and then have it finished and engraved in his own in house style.

Henry by this time had established himself as the pre-eminent rifle maker in the world, selling rifles the length and breadth of the globe to many notable clients. Consequently, it made sense for Harkom to buy in this fine rifle from Henry. Henry had patented his design for a hammerless gun/rifle in patent no. 5273 of 1882. It was a lever cocked hammerless action designed primarily for double rifles with a robust Jones underlever. Back action locks were employed used in conjunction with a beautifully sculpted action and the result was a very handsome yet powerful looking rifle. The design just exuded power and strength and yet at the same time it appeared graceful and elegant with its semi-rounded bar action bar. Due to the expense and

quality, not a great many were built by the Henry, the Dimension Books recording a mere 241 including this one.

On this rifle, in addition to the Harkom serial number 2267, the number 6790 is stamped in the action, Alexander Henry's number showing that he built this rifle. A study of the Henry records shows that this rifle no 6790 was completed for stock on the 22nd June 1896 and subsequently sold to Harkom two years later on the 11th October 1898. Unfortunately, the Harkom records do not survive hence we have no idea who bought this rifle.

If you want a beautiful top quality double rifle that is a little bit different, then look no further afield than lot 735, a rare Henry double hammerless rifle yet bearing the name of Joseph Harkom. I have never seen another.