

SOME VARIATIONS OF THE BRITISH COACHING BLUNDERBUSS

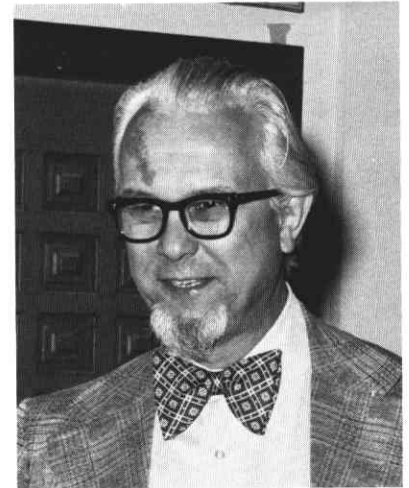
By C. R. Suydam

I note that our good program chairman, George Missbach, has allotted me a full two hours for this presentation. Since this is my first effort before you, I suppose it is requisite that I use all of that time. However, should I fail to do so — and since the next item on the program is the lunch recess — I hope you will forgive me.

Before going into the details of the arms under consideration, it might be well for me to discuss their name. Romantically inclined persons have suggested that the word “blunderbuss” is a compound of two words, blunder and buss, which refer to osculation by an unskilled practitioner. Another interpretation is that the words are separately defined as “to err” and “to kiss,” and the meaning is therefore, “to kiss the wrong person.” These are, I think, interesting, but not correct or applicable to the field of firearms. Nor is the suggestion that I collect them because they speak loudly and emphatically, and so do I, especially friendly.

The name “blunderbuss” came to England from the Low Countries with the appearance of the weapon shortly before the mid-point of the 17th Century. “Donner busse,” or the German “Donder buchse” — thunder gun — easily became the English “blunderbuss.” The plural is generally “blunderbusses,” not “blunderbye” or “blunderbeese.”

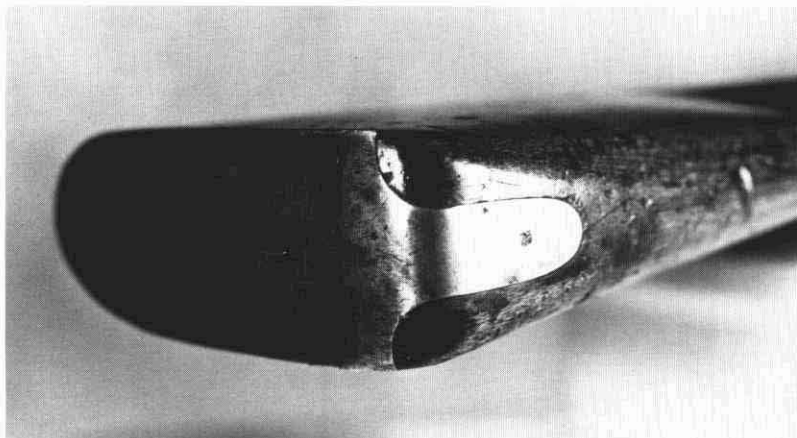
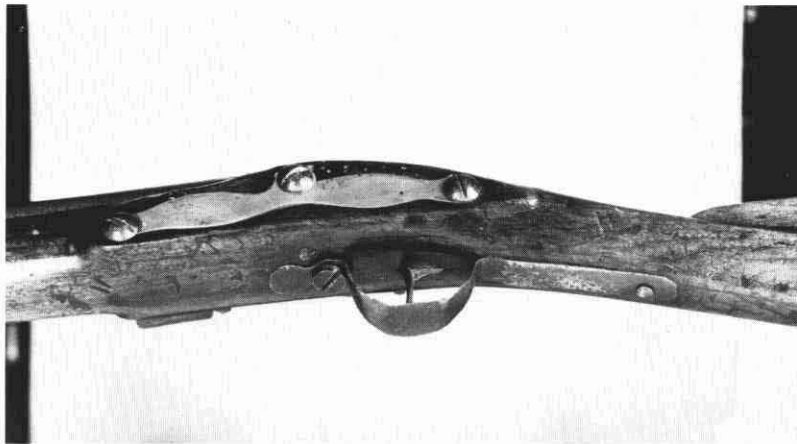
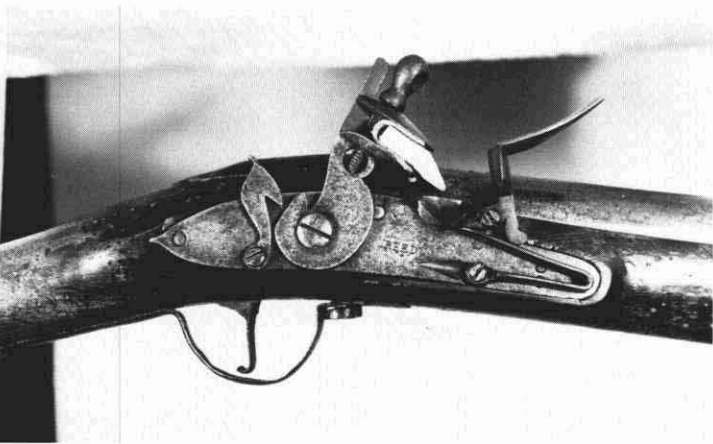
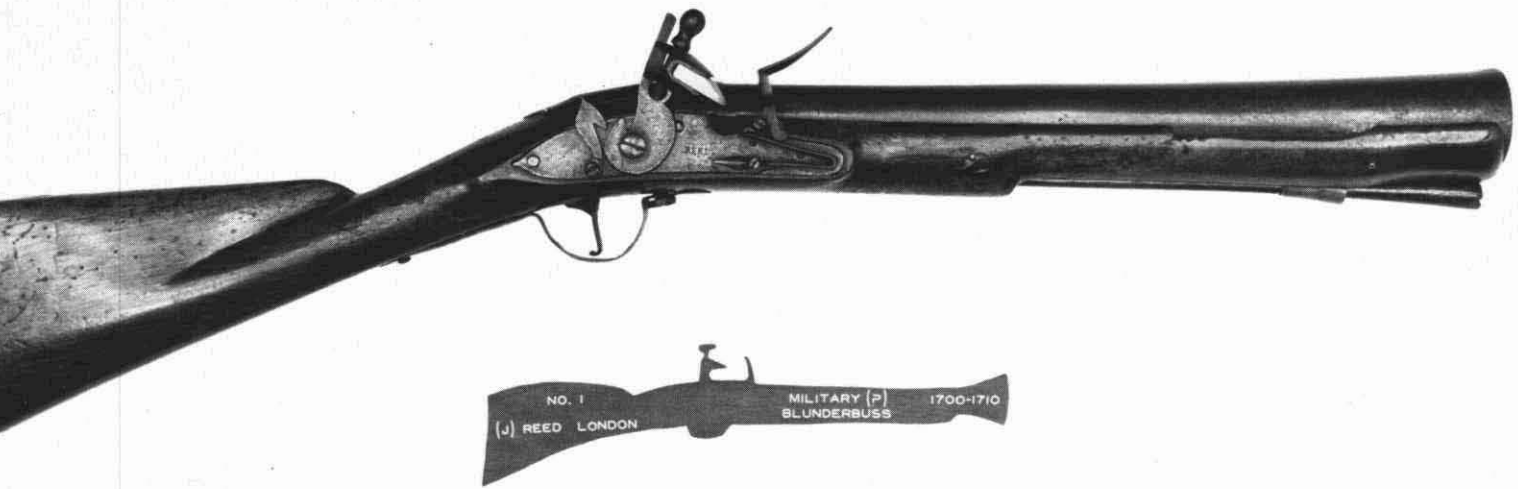
My own interest in the genre began about 1962 in Santa Ana, California. At that time Sherm Jones had an antique gunroom there; he also had a fine industrial-type polaroid camera, with which he took some pictures for me, over a period of several weeks. While he took the pictures, I kept out of the way by sitting in a red leather chair against the back wall; a double-barrelled percussion blunderbuss by Conway (figure 64) leaned against the same wall, next to the chair. As a boy I hunted cottontails in the cornfields of northern Illinois, where fast snaphooting was the rule, and as I looked down into the muzzles of the short barrels of that blunderbuss, I became hypnotized with its potential as a rabbit-getter, and finally told Sherm I wanted it. He protested: I was a cartridge collector, a collector of Remingtons — that was before Karl Moldenhauer bought 'em all — it was not for me. Finally I won, and we traded some of my Remingtons for it. Shortly after, (figure 39) Art Yates had a typical brass barrelled flintlock blunderbuss that had been in Frank Bivens' collection, and I had to have that as a contrast to



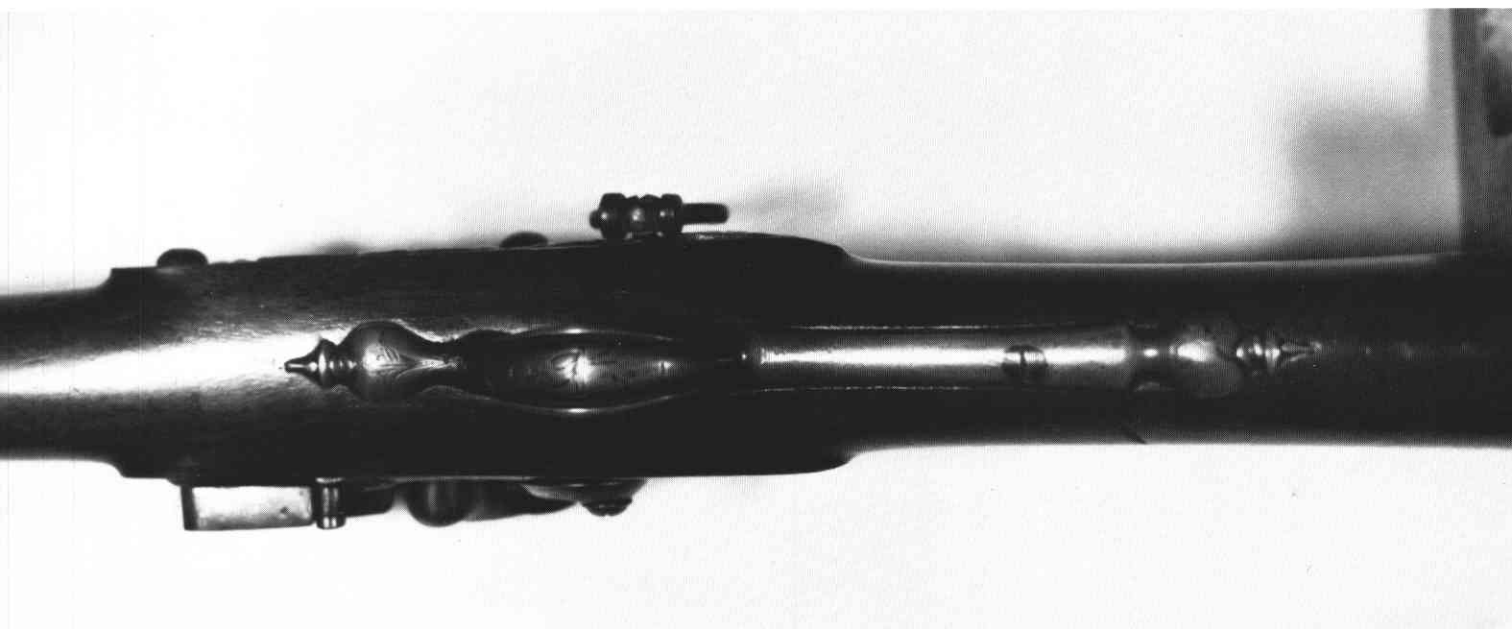
the iron barrelled Conway. Then another dealer had a single barrelled version of my Conway (figure 70). Do you remember the advertisements for potato chips that said something to the effect that “you can't stop at one”? Well, blunderbusses and potato chips have more in common than you might think. I now have about 30 of them. Blunderbusses, not potato chips!

Enough about me. Let's look at blunderbusses (figure 1). In the beginning they weren't too pretty. This one by James Reed of London, although dating right at 1700, looks much like those of the 1650 period. Its lockplate, with dog catch, looks like an early English pattern, but internally it is the French lock, with vertical sear and full- and half-cock notches on the tumbler (figure 2). Other early characteristics are the three-screw lock and sideplate (figure 3 and 4), the flat iron trigger guard and upward-pointing tang screw, and the flat, nailed-on buttplate (figure 8). The stock is badly wormed, and there is now extensive plastic around the lock, but it is still an early representative piece.

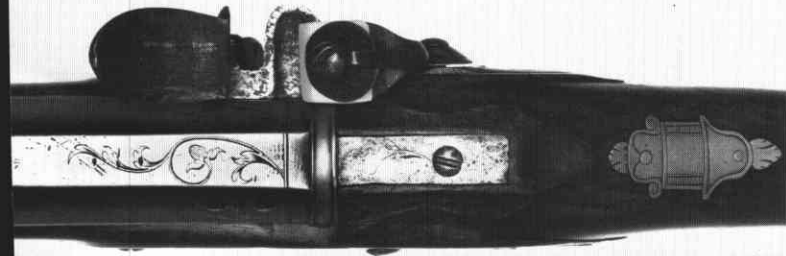
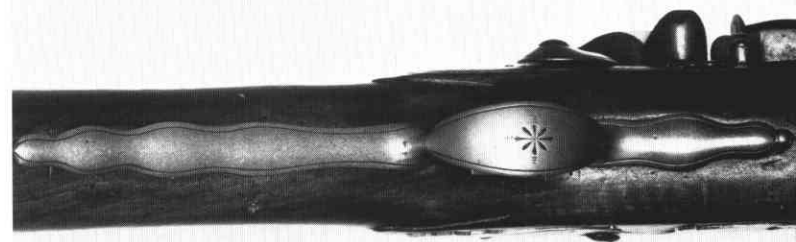
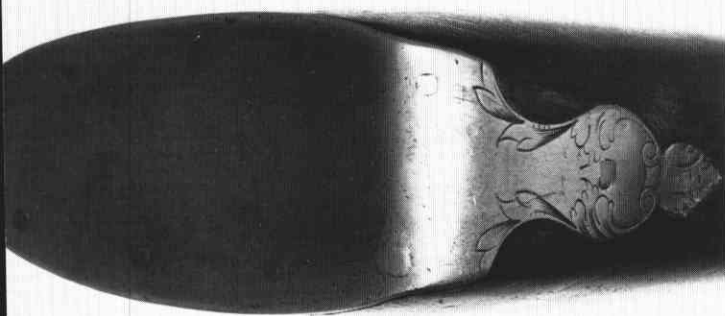
Actually earlier is this one by George Trulock (figure 6), the metal of which dates ca. 1665-85, and the wood a century or so later. Restocking of old hardware is not unusual; what is less desirable is that this has been reconverted to flint — the auction house in London didn't mention that when I was bidding on it through their Los Angeles office. However, the work is not too badly done, and the rest of the metal is good. The sling swivel (figure 7) — added by a long-forgotten coach guard?? — and the dragon sideplate are typical of the period, as is the lockplate with its grotesque masque at the rear (figure 8) — and the doubtfully accurate round bottom replaced pan. The trigger guard has a nicely engraved bird (figure 9), and it and the elaborately engraved buttplate are correct for the period, and again nicely done.



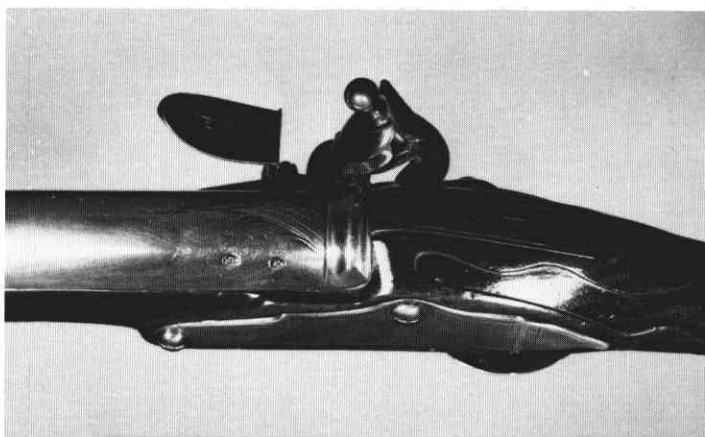
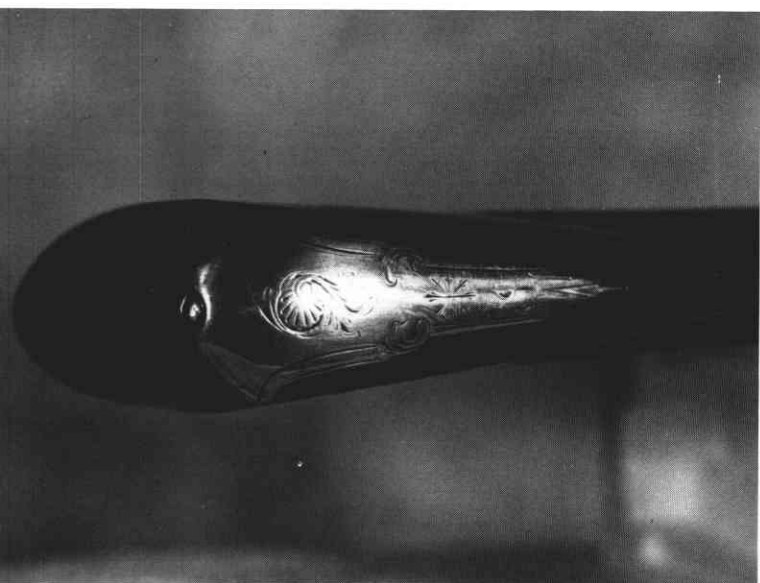
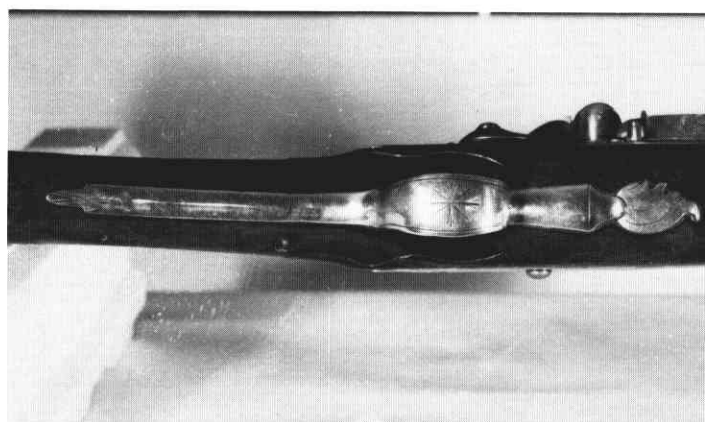
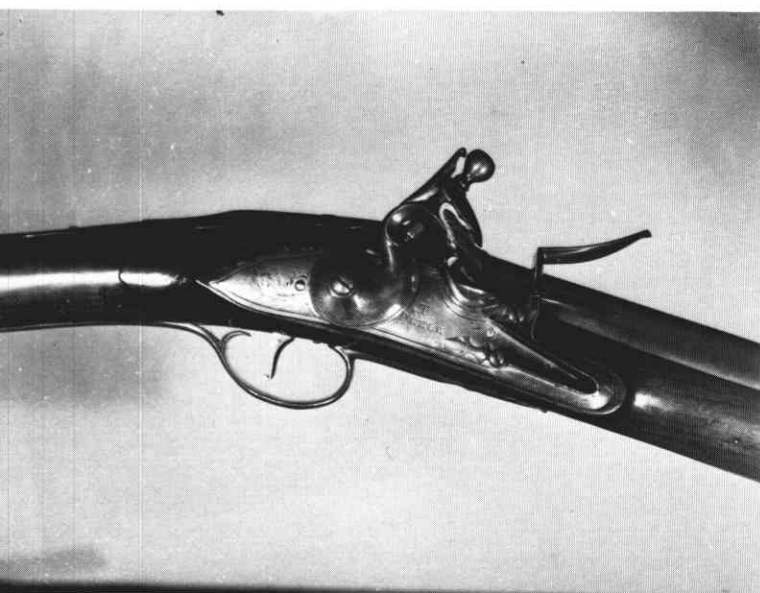
Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5: Blunderbuss by James Reed of London, first half of the Eighteenth Century.



Figures 6, 7, 8, and 9: Blunderbuss of the last quarter of the Seventeenth Century restocked in the next century. Trulock of London.

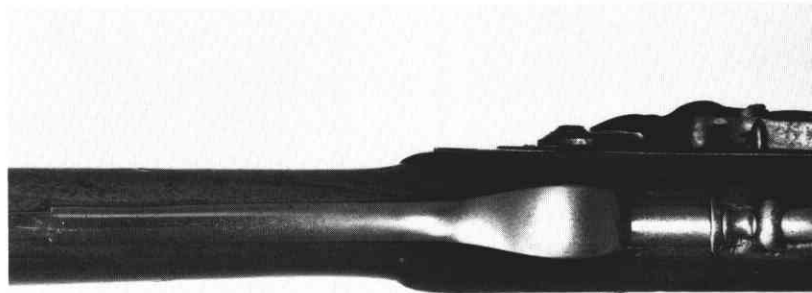
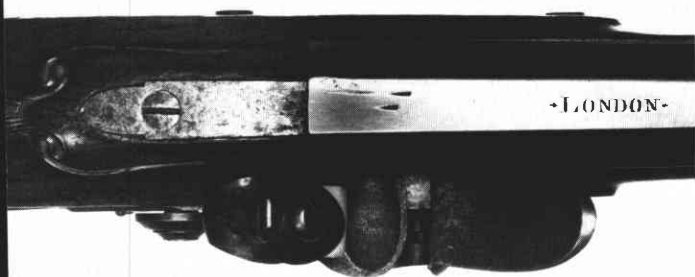
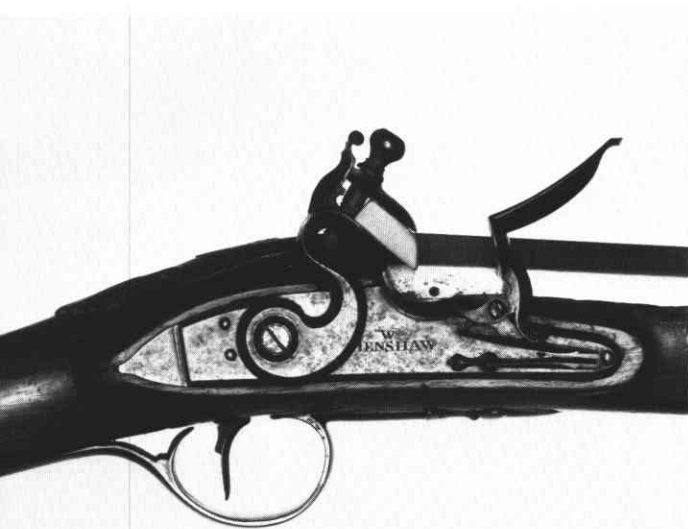


Figures 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15:
Walker of Oxford, circa 1690 to 1710.



Another early piece is this brass-barrelled one by James Walker of Oxford, ca. 1690-1710 (figure 10). Again, the wood has been replaced, but as far as I know the metal is right. This picture shows the rather plain lockplate (figure 11), and, at the far right, one of the problems of the early barrels: a nice crack, just at the edge of the picture and almost touching the stock. The sideplate (figure 12) is well engraved, the buttplate (figure 13) is nailed on, the trigger guard (figure 14) is long and plain; but there is a touch of strawberry engraving at the

Figures 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20: Blunderbuss by T. Peele of Whitehaven.



breech, as well as an elaborate escutcheon plate (figure 15).

By 1720, the blunderbuss had become pretty. This very large specimen by T. Peele of Whitehaven (the western-most port of England) was probably made for maritime use: all possible fittings are of brass (figure 16). I believe it is unfired. Little comment is needed as we see the large brass lockplate (figure 17), the flame-finial triggerguard (figure 18), engraved buttplate tang, (figure 19) and the long sideplate (figure 20). This shot of the top of the barrel shows a touch of engraving, the long, heavy iron barrel tang, the shield-shaped escutcheon plate, and a minor bit of wood carving.

Now that we've been introduced to blunderbusses, let us for a moment look at some arms which are almost, but not quite, blunderbusses. That they have a slight swell or swamping at the muzzle, that they are interesting pieces and of fairly good quality, and that I have an elastic conscience when it comes to fitting things into the collection, is their excuse for being here.

Figures 21, 22, 23, and 24: Blunderbuss musketoon by Hinshaw of London.



Figures 25 and 26: Griffin and Tow Coaching musketoon, circa 1770 to 1780.

The first of these is a blunderbuss musketoon by Hinshaw of London which dates around 1780 (figure 21). The musketoon has been called a long-range blunderbuss: it fired multiple balls, but had a longer barrel than the typical coaching blunderbuss. This musketoon should not be confused with the military version, which is a round-ball-firing short musket. On this one, the lockplate (figure 22) is somewhat larger than usual, and the lock is equipped with the only wheeled frizzen in the collection — there are several which have a wheel on the fly spring, but this is the only one on the frizzen itself. The trigger guard (figure 23) is an unusually plain one to have an acorn finial; there is some nice and unexpected carving around the tang (figure 24), and it seems early to have siderail cups rather than a solid sideplate. The barrel is also plain, with clean, simple lettering.

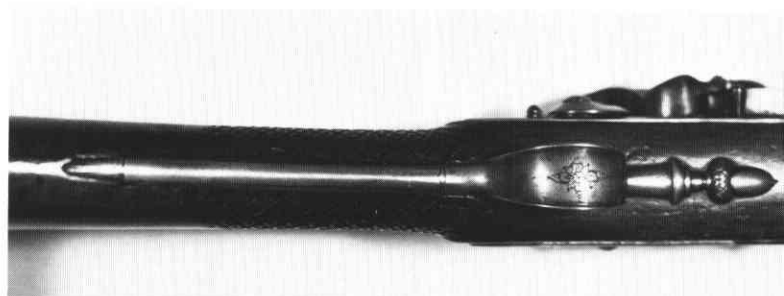
Slightly smaller is this one by Griffin & Tow (figures 25 and 26), dating ca. 1770-80. It is a typical musketoon, has a well-shaped breech section. The barrel clearly shows the “S.S.” mark of barrel-maker Stephen Sandwell between the usual London proof marks. The ornamental escutcheon plate is engraved with the initials “W. A.”

In comparison, and only slightly smaller, is this blunderbuss by William Jover of London (figure 27), which Eddie Reider was good enough to let

me have a few years ago. Note the early form of checkering, the wide safety latch, and the fancy frizzen spring finial (figure 28). The trigger guard is typical acorn and rose pattern (figure 29), the barrel is decoratively marked (figure 30) and the sideplate slightly engraved (figure 31).

Somewhat similar to the musketoon is the coaching carbine, but they differ in that the carbine was intended to fire a single ball. This pretty brass-barrelled specimen by J. Jones of Temple Bar, London, ca. 1725-35 (figure 32), is early, deluxe, and has just enough swell at the muzzle to get in the collection. The breech has a slight sighting groove, the escutcheon plate is rococco, and the carved fan or shell at the tang is an attractive feature (figure 33). The sideplate is similar to that on the Jover, but the trigger guard (figure 34) suggests an earlier date.

This little iron barrelled carbine by Wogdon (figure 35), ca. 1760-70, has a plain sideplate (figure 36), and a very plain trigger guard (figure 37). Its claim to fame is its safety. As the button located between the hammer and the frizzen spring is moved to the rear, it moves a little iron wedge inside the lockplate, between the pan reinforce and the top of the hammer spring, keeping the latter from moving upward, and the hammer from reaching the full-cock notch (figure 38). I’ve never seen another like it, although No. 87 in Clay Bedford’s book may be similar.

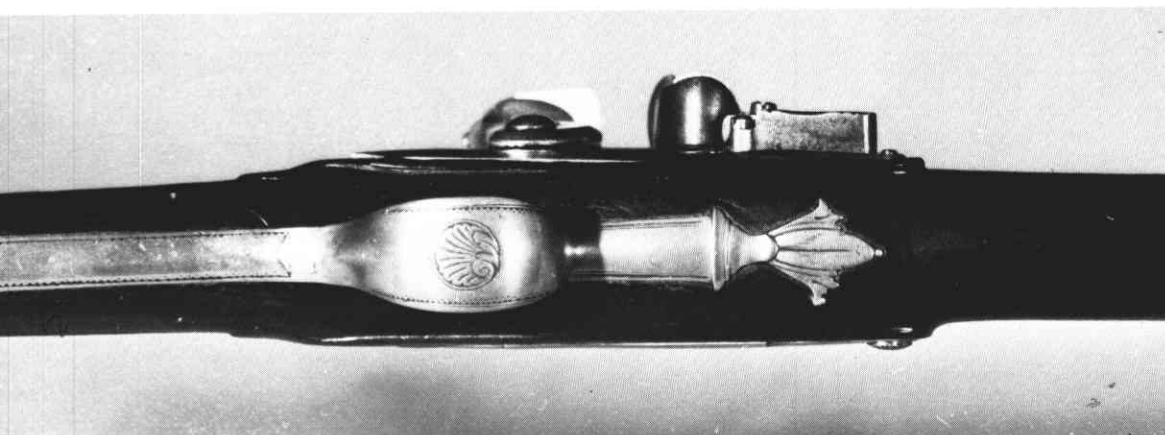
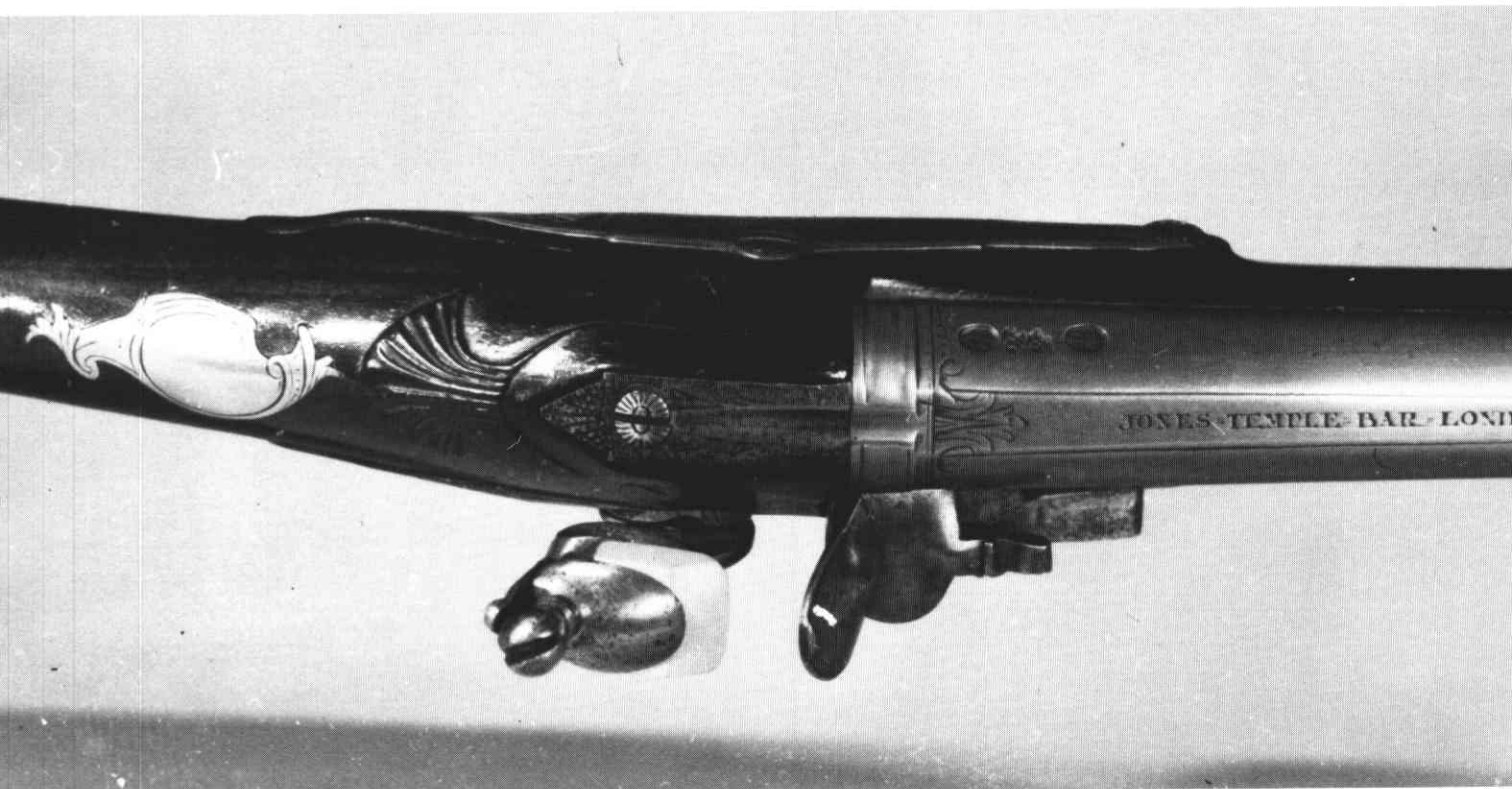


Figures 27, 28, 29, 30, and 31: Coaching blunderbuss by Jover of London, circa 1770 to 1780.

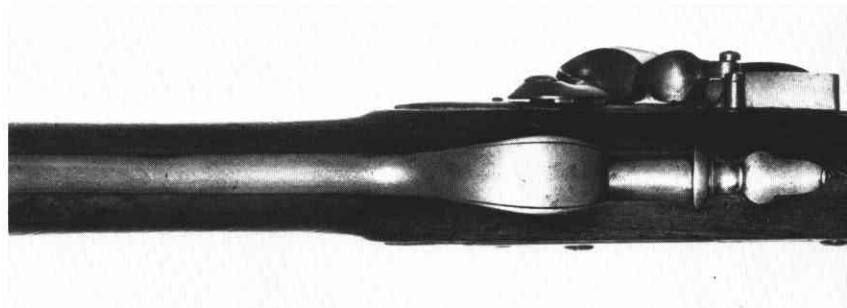
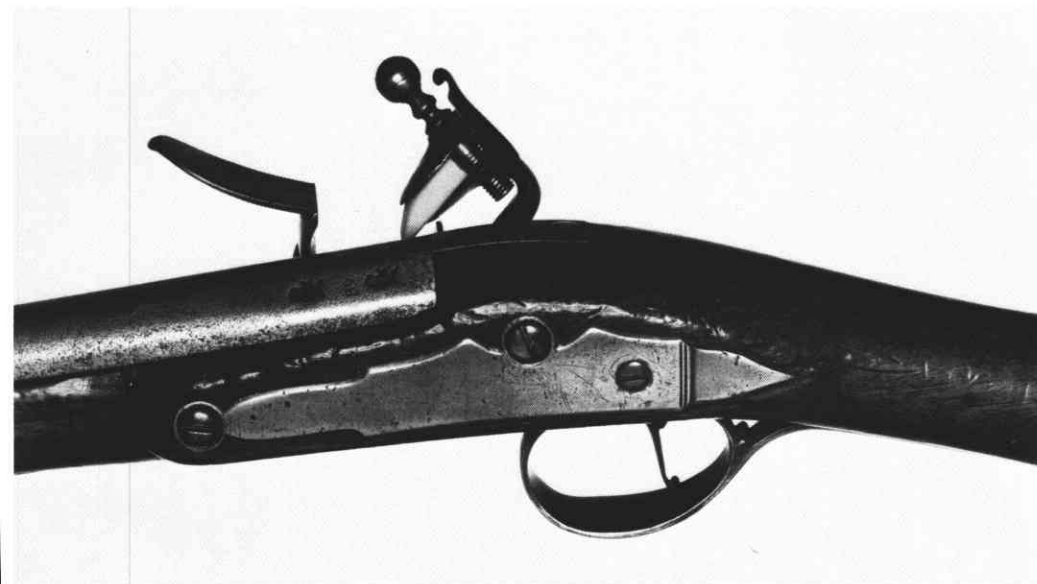
To get back to blunderbusses: other than the bell-mouthed figment of imagination carried by Pilgrims in cartoons, the archtypical blunderbuss from England is brass barrelled, flintlock, and has a spring bayonet. Here are some of them: this one by J. Richardson of Manchester (figure 39) dates ca. 1780-90, has a 15 $\frac{3}{8}$ inch barrel with a 20 gauge bore and 1.165" muzzle, Tower private proofs (figure 40), and a good lock (figure 41). The trigger guard (figure 42) is the typical acorn pattern, and the rest of the furniture is good but not fancy. A similar specimen by Thomas Cartmell of Doncaster is in the hall — as are all of these, of course.

All arms with special markings are of extra interest, and this applies to blunderbusses as well as any other type. This typical coaching blunderbuss is unusual in that it has the Arms of the City of Nottingham on the lock (figures 43 and 44), and is marked "Nottingham Police" on the barrel (figure 45). Modification of the usual Jacobite trigger guard finial to something resembling three features — those of the Prince of Wales? — is noteworthy (figure 46). The backplate (figure 47) has been replaced by a miniature fan and a cup, similar to those used on the Hinshaw musketoon.

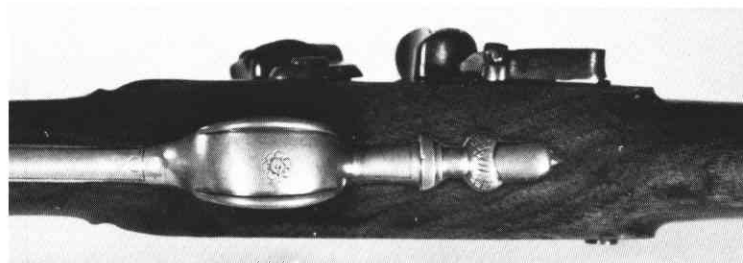
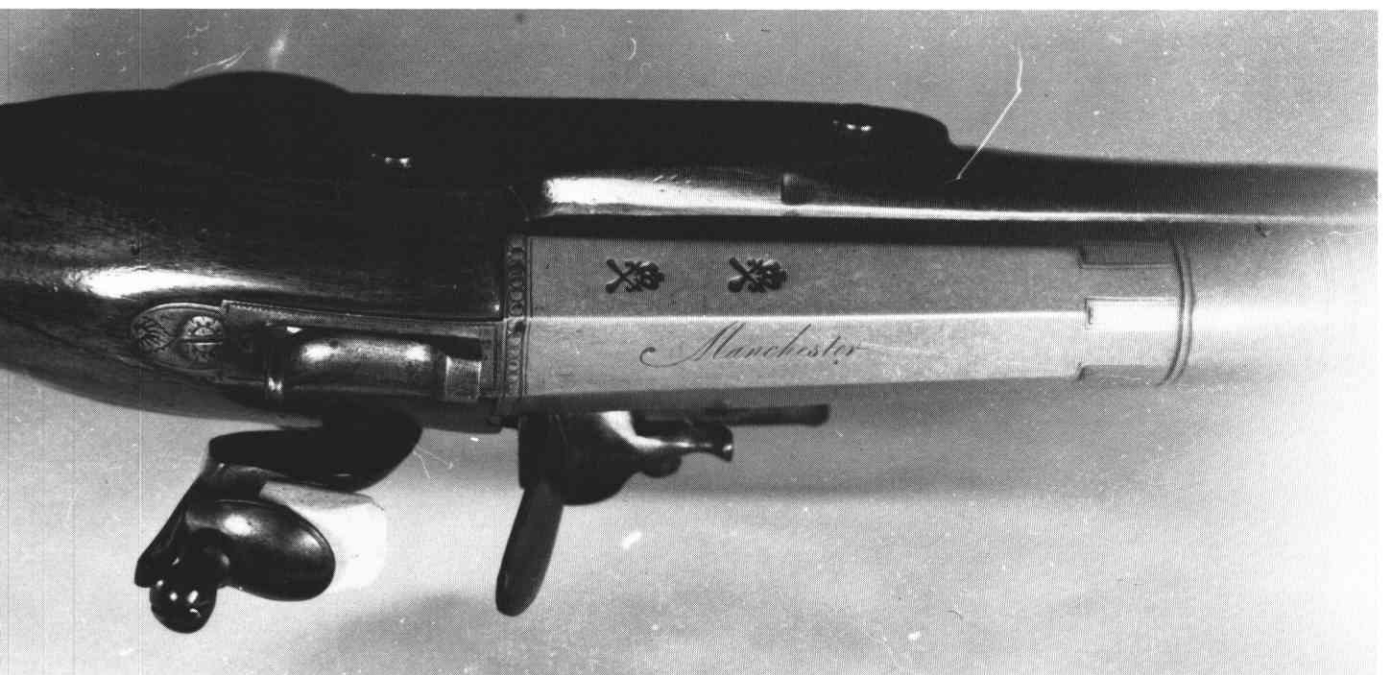
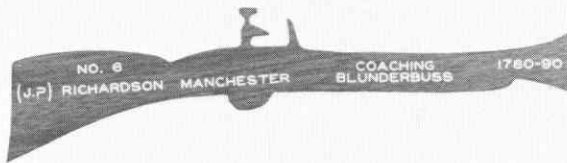
Extra-small, almost miniature, blunderbusses are called "bedroom blunderbusses" on the supposition that they might have been kept within the curtains of the 18th Century bed as a protection



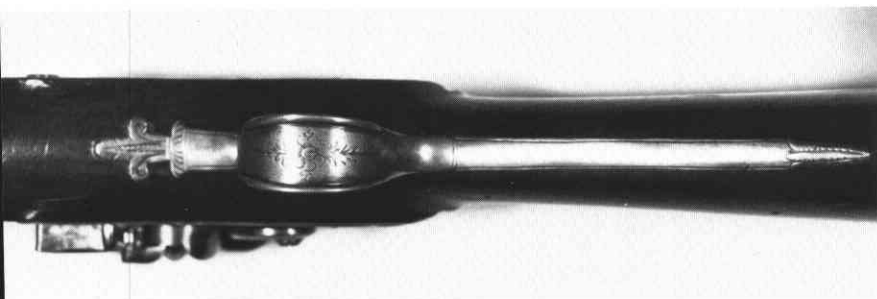
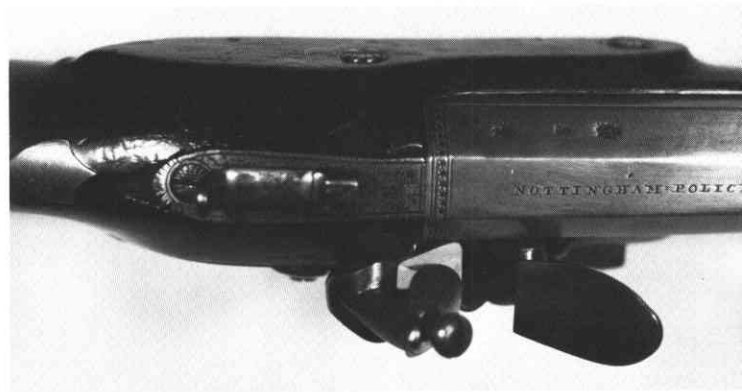
Figures 32, 33, and 34: Coaching carbine by J. Jones at Temple Bar, London.



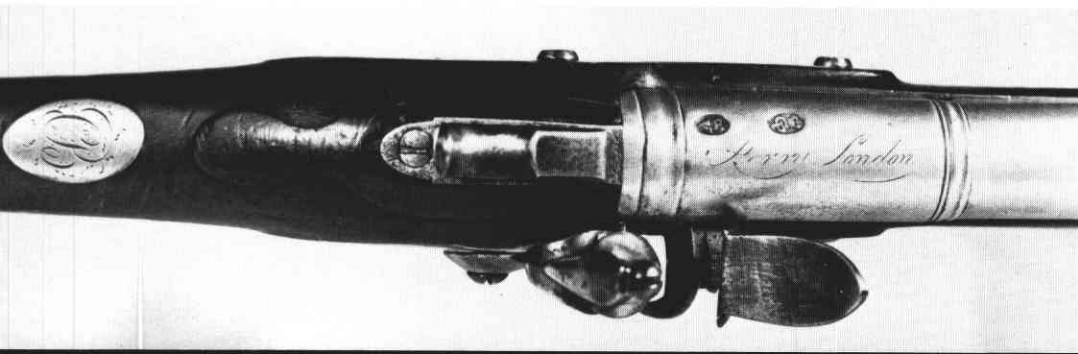
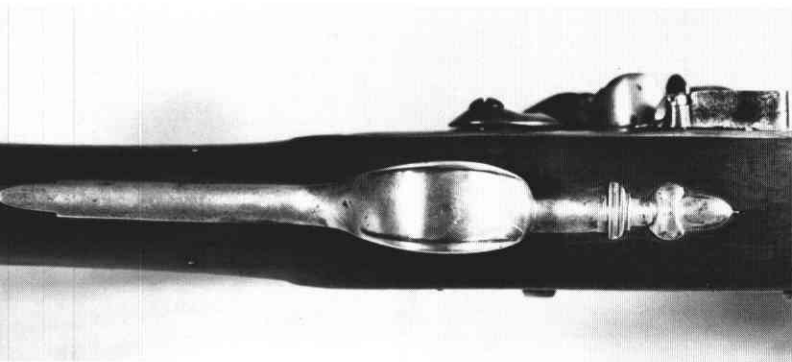
Figures 35, 36, 37, and 38: Coaching carbine by Robert Wogdon, London, circa 1760 to 1770.



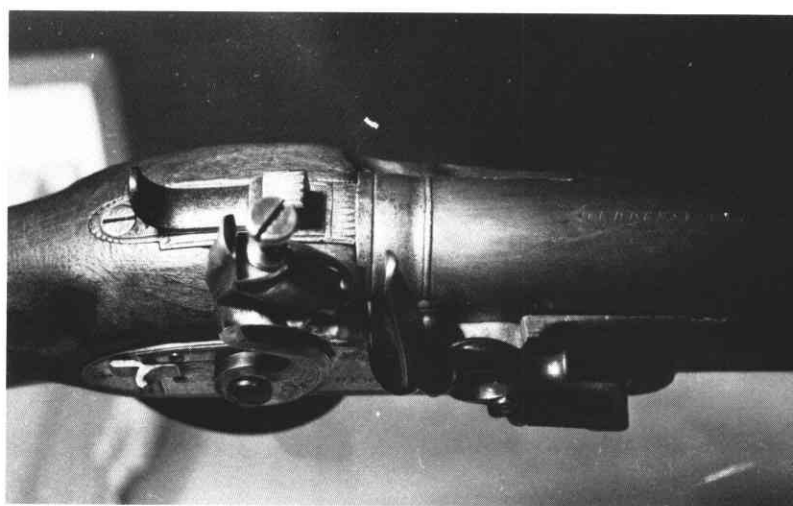
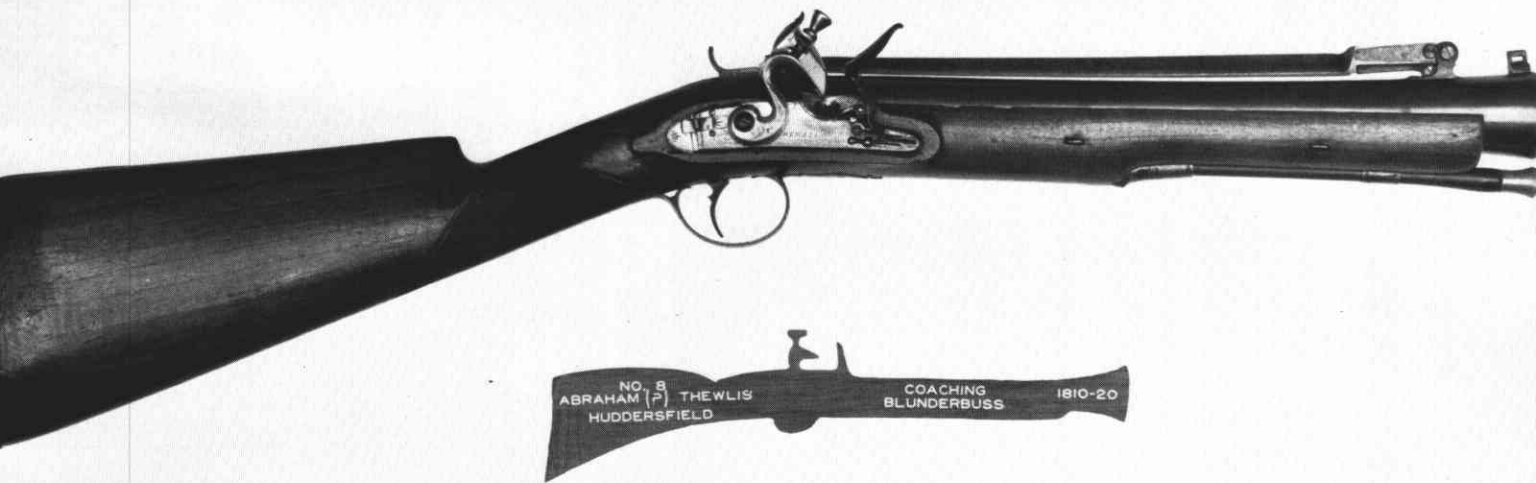
Figures 39, 40, 41, and 42: Coaching blunderbuss by Richardson of Manchester, circa 1780 to 1790.



Figures 43, 44, 45, 46, and 47:
Nottingham Police blunderbuss.



Figures 48, 49, 50, and 51. Miniature Coaching blunderbuss by Perry, London.



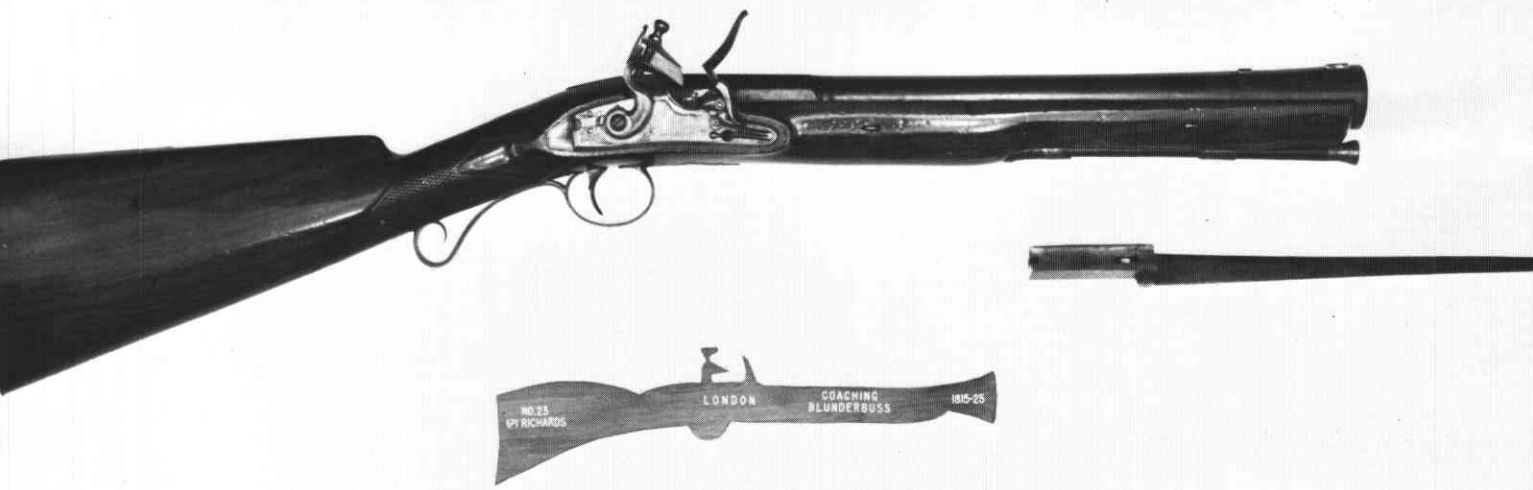
Figures 52, 53, and 54. Coaching blunderbuss by H. Thewlis of Huddersfield, circa 1810 to 1820.

against housebreakers. I have suspected this may be a 20th Century term, but when so eminent an authority as Keith Neal tells me it's right, I must believe. In any event, this specimen by Perry of London (figure 48) is the smallest I've seen. It is 23½" overall, with 10⅝" barrel, .950" at the muzzle, with a .550" bore. As a matter of recent history, it was shown in Dexter's 35 Year Scrapbook of 1947 — for \$90. It has a brass lockplate (figure 49), a plain sideplate, acorn trigger guard (figure 50), and a little oval escutcheon plate with the initials "C. B." The Perry name is more clearly visible here on the barrel than on the lockplate. The spring bayonet is a later addition, has a screw through the barrel to hold it in place. A slightly larger "bedroom blunderbuss" by Twigg is in the hall.

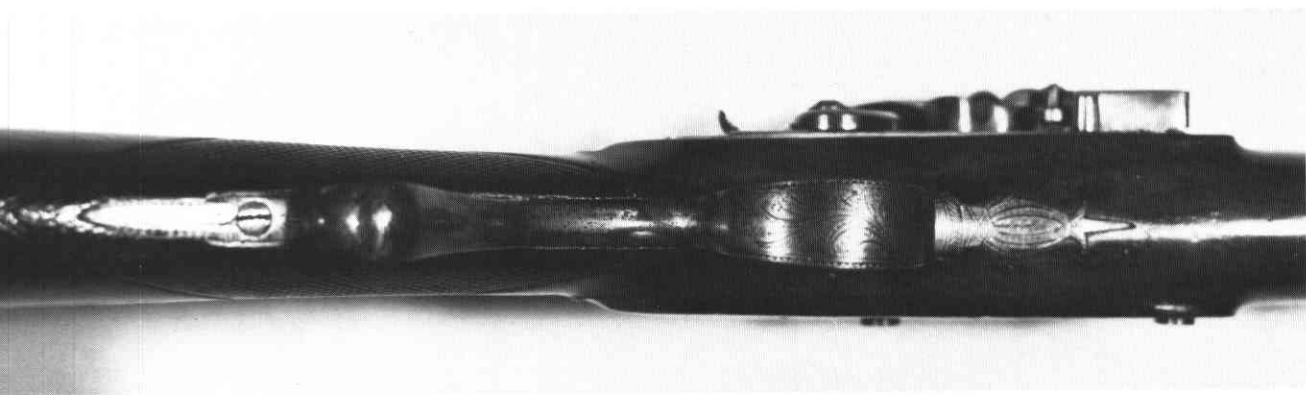
If brass barrels are typical, the later iron barrels of slightly different configuration are interesting. This one of about 1810-20 by Thewlis — probably

Abraham Thewlis — of Huddersfield (figure 52) is average: smooth, once-browned barrel, checkered stock, brass-tipped ramrod, iron furniture. The lock (figures 53 and 54) has a roller frizzen spring, almost free-standing pan, and a touch of engraving. There is a similar specimen by Andrews in the hall. Thewlis was a whitesmith by trade, probably dealt in firearms only as a sideline.

Slightly earlier, ca. 1790-1800, this specimen by Richards of London (figure 55) has several interesting variations. The snap-on bayonet is quite unusual, seems too fragile for ordinary use. The pan is semi-waterproof, standard for the period; the lockplate (figure 56) is nicely if modestly engraved, and there is good checkering at the small of the stock. The use of a rifle-pattern trigger guard on a blunderbuss is unusual. This view shows the typical engraving and pineapple finial of an iron trigger guard (figure 57).



Figures 55, 56, and 57: Coaching blunderbuss by Richards of London, circa 1780 to 1800.



One of the variations of the spring bayonet is that found under the barrel, released by a forward trigger or pulling on the trigger guard bow (figure 58). This piece is almost new, very nicely finished overall, with a late French-style hammer and

nicely engraved lockplate (figure 59); note the bayonet release in front of the trigger guard. Here we see the ramrod on the left side of the barrel, the little square silver escutcheon plate, and, almost, the word "London" on the browned barrel (figure



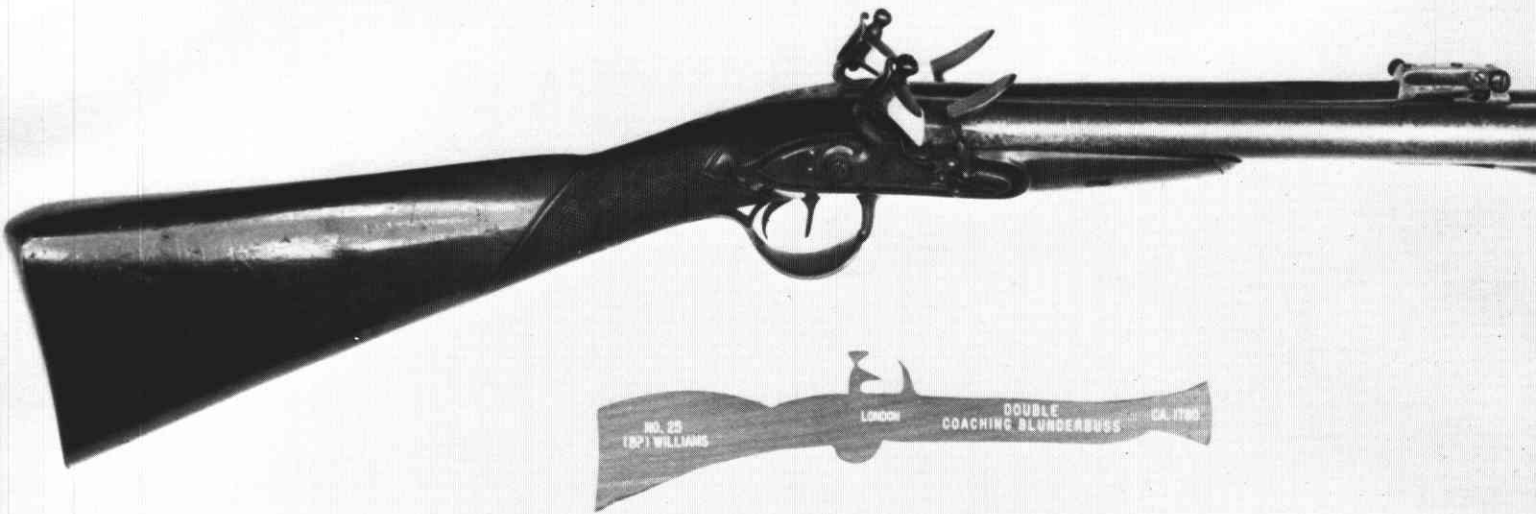
Figures 58, 59, and 60: Coaching blunderbuss, unmarked, circa 1815 to 1830.



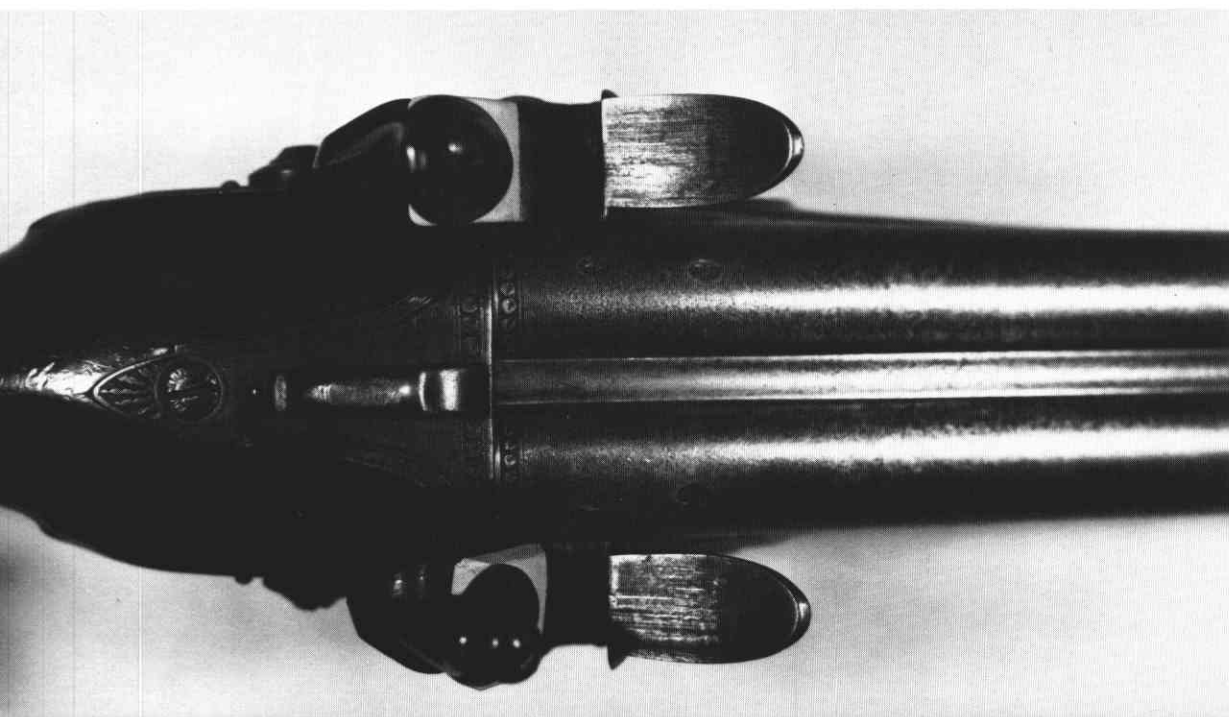
60). This is a mystery weapon: though obviously of good quality, there is no clue as to its maker.

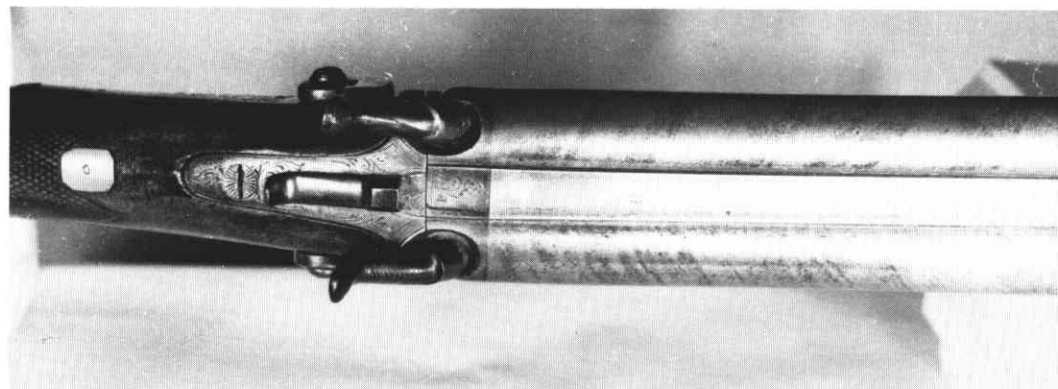
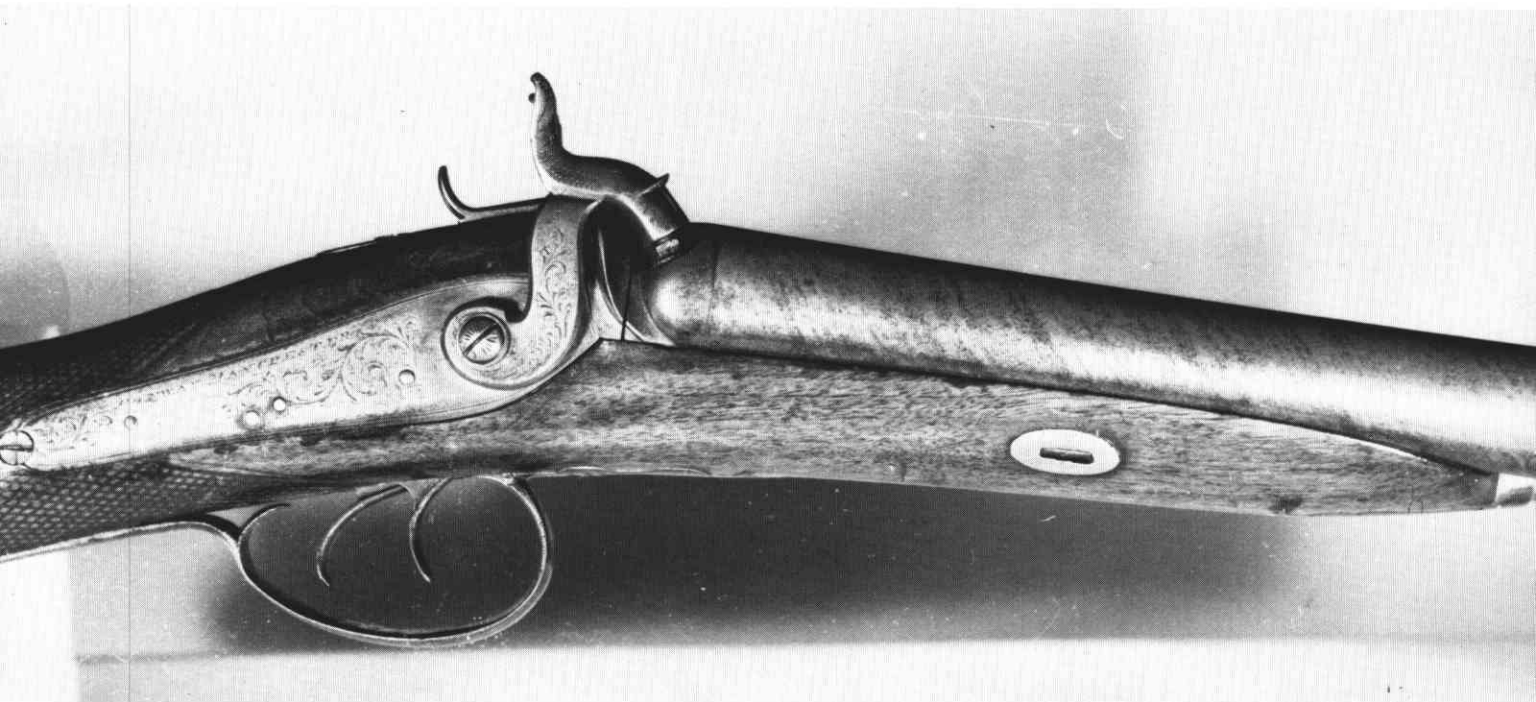
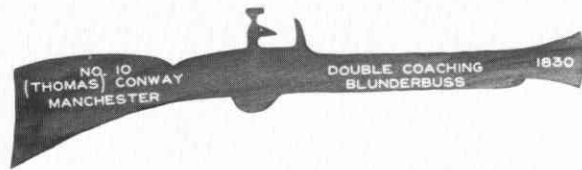
Double barreled blunderbusses, iron or brass, are not common. How Frank Bivens persuaded Dr. Hendricks to sell me this one I didn't ask — I'm happy to have it! It is of extremely high quality, with bronze rather than brass fittings, and an "old

horseshoe nail" pattern to the barrels which you can see better in the hall than in these pictures. I believe it was made by B. Williams of London about 1780 (figure 61). The trigger guard (figure 62) is of the French pattern, the locks plain but well done, and the breech massive (figure 63)!



Figures 61, 62, and 63. Double Coaching blunderbuss by Williams, London, circa 1780.





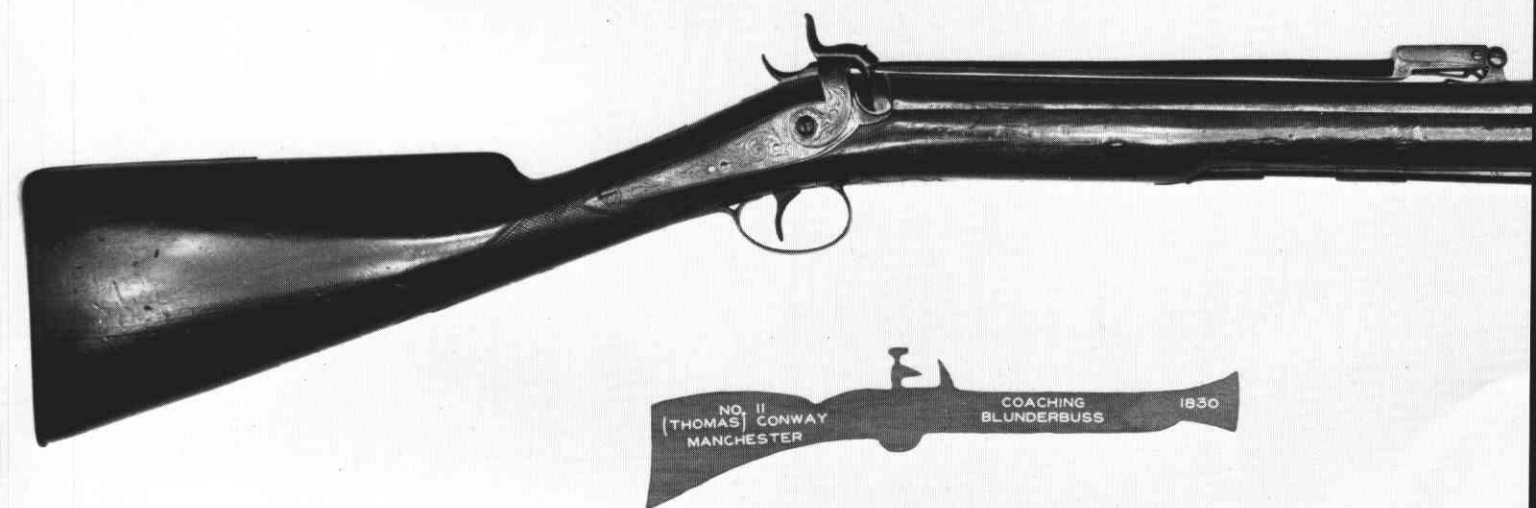
Figures 64, 65, and 66: Double Coaching blunderbuss by Thomas Conway of Manchester, circa 1830.

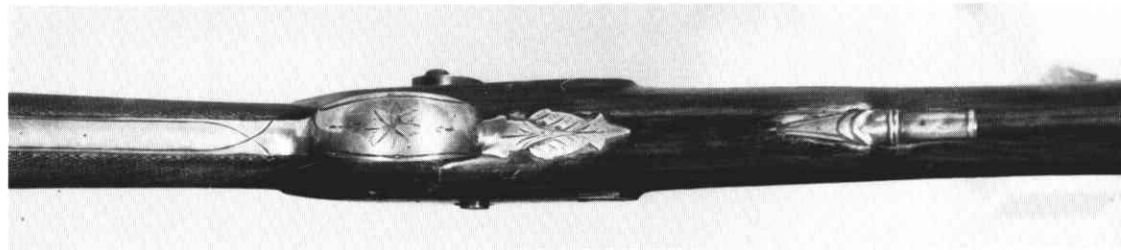
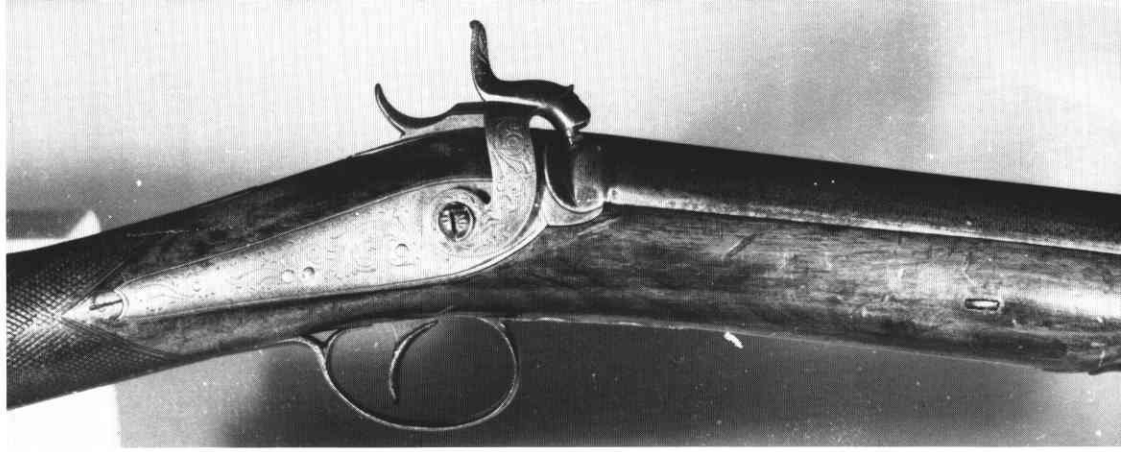
Here again is the Conway double that started all this (figure 64). The locks are early back-action (figure 65), identical to that on the single barrelled specimen soon to be shown, as are the fittings; the stock is half-length and walnut. The barrels are twist steel, and it is nice to note that they turn in opposite directions (figure 66)!



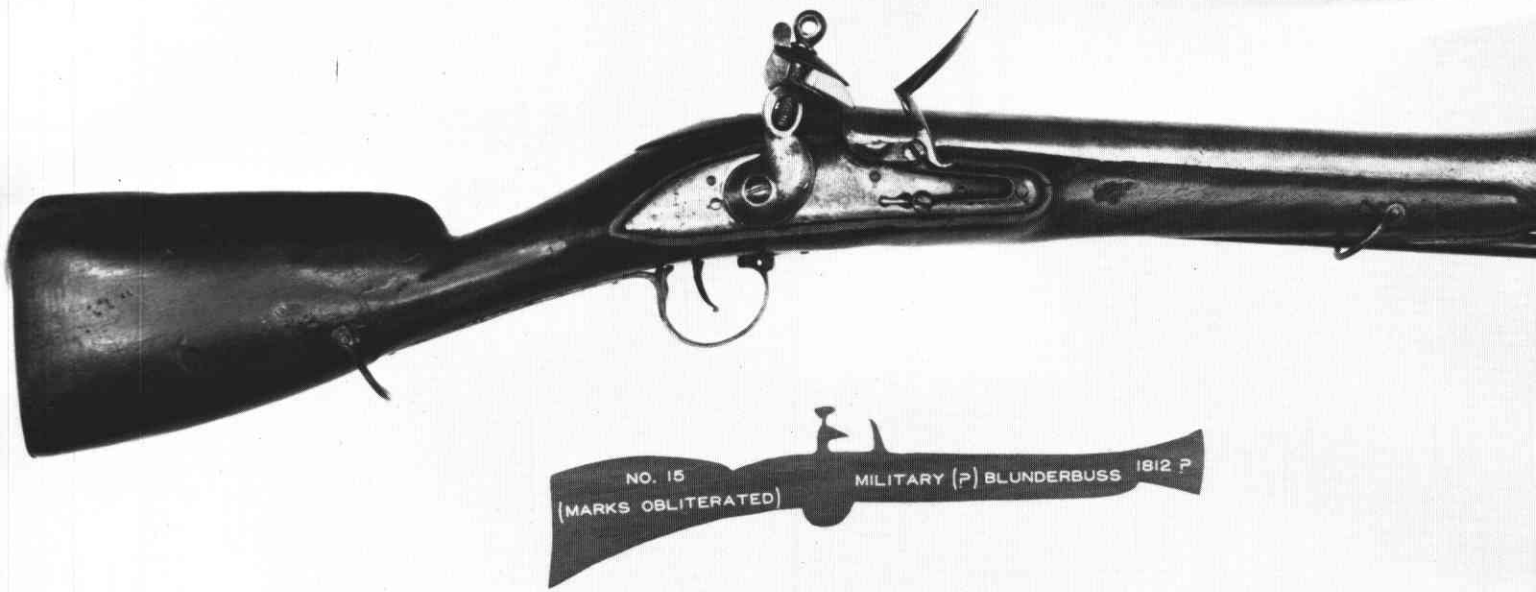
Figures 67, 68, and 69: Coaching blunderbuss by Dunderdale, Mabson, and LeGron of Birmingham.

Figure 70 and, opposite top, Figure 71: Coaching blunderbuss by Thomas Conway of Manchester.





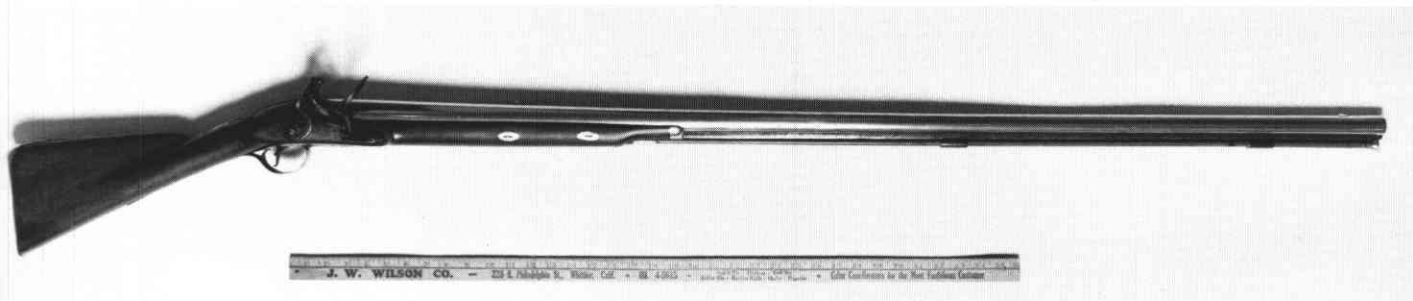
Figures 72, 73, 74, and 75: Coaching blunderbuss by Brown, London, Circa 1830 to 1835.

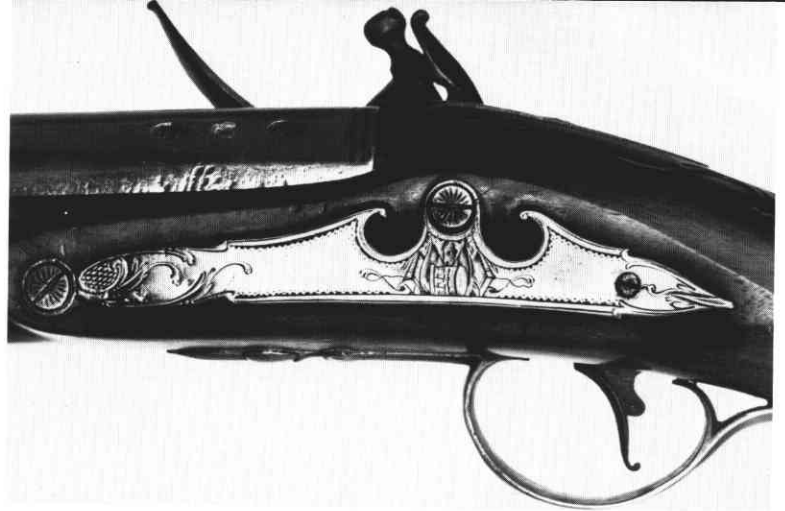


Figures 76 and 77 : India blunderbuss.



Figures 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, and 85: Brass barreled gun by Jackson of Maidstone.

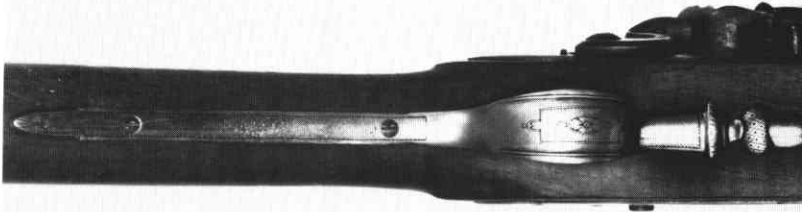




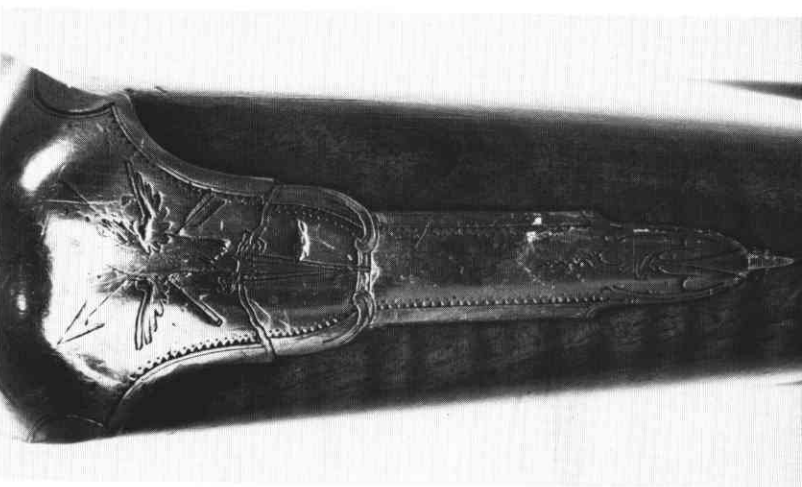
Almost coeval with the coming of the percussion era in England came the railroads, safety on the roads of the land, the end of the highwayman, and the end of the blunderbuss era. Some of the flintlock blunderbusses were converted, and this one by Dunderdale, Mabson & Lebron is a fine example (figure 67). A large blunderbuss of about 1780, is an early conversion — ca. 1825? — as this view of the lock shows (figure 68). The trigger guard (figure 69) is typically acorn, the sideplate a modest one similar to that on the Nottingham Police gun. I like this specimen: where but in England in the height of its glory could you find three such names on the lockplate of a gun?



Later — ca. 1830-35 — is this very plain specimen with back action lock by Conway of Manchester (figures 70 and 71), almost a mate to the double by the same maker mentioned before. The decline of the arm is shown in the whitewood stock stained to look like walnut — but even this one has modest engraving on the iron furniture.



Last of the blunderbusses in point of time, and last of the little ones, is this very late side-lock specimen marked “Brown” on the lockplate and “London” on the barrel (figures 72, 73, 74 and 75). It is almost new, nicely browned with roughly fitted brass trigger guard. The wood is again white wood, grained and stained to look like walnut. Yet one owner was proud of it; he had his initials, “R.L.” engraved in the center of the buttplate.



I have one more blunderbuss to show you, but before I turn to it, I'd like to interject this thought: all of the guns discussed here can be seen and handled in the hall, plus a few others, some pistols, and one unusual brass-barrelled long fowler (which you will note has a swamped muzzle and is therefore the longest barrelled blunderbuss in the collection!) I've told you what I think I know about them: I'll be happy to learn what you know about them when we have a chance out there. And I'd like to add a special thanks to Ed Prentiss of Whittier, California, who took these and the black and white pictures for me.

The last of this series is one I call my “ugly duckling” (figures 76 and 77). Its lock, and probably some of the other parts, started life as an East India Company musket. There is still a faint

“heart” on the barrel, but all of the military marks, except for a “2” under the pan, have been ground off. The trigger guard was made by an Indian artisan. The little gun represents a lot of history, and, if it could, would speak with the roar of any good blunderbuss. But it must remain silent, and with this, so will I.