

Ancient Firearms of Scotland

By G. Maxwell Longfield

Speaking here in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I cannot help but feel that it would be more fitting if my subject was "Pennsylvania Rifles of the Lancaster School."

Rather, I have chosen to speak about "The Ancient Firearms of Scotland" mainly because, so far as I am aware, the subject has not been dealt with at great length in the past.

"In Scotland, a country whose Independence for centuries was only maintained by force of arms, and whose internal history down to the middle of the 18th Century was a record of civil wars and family feuds, the possession of arms was a necessity and not a luxury."

Unfortunately for the collector and student of these arms, pitifully few of the pre-Culloden Firearms have survived to this day. In fact Charles Whitelaw could only account for some twenty-one surviving shoulder arms in all of Scotland, so needless to say my remarks will be almost entirely restricted to hand firearms which always seem to show a greater survival.

Even in the great National Museums of Scotland, only a few dozen pieces are on display and the great majority of these pieces are obviously archaeological battlefield finds with many parts missing, and with severe damage to the metal by corrosion from being buried for many years.

Despite the lack of many specimens for study, I have had a consuming interest in these weapons for over thirty years. This interest received its initial impetus when very early in my collecting career, I obtained a fine *Tho: Caddell* pistol, presumably a relic from the Battle of Culloden Moor, and which I will talk about at greater length during the latter part of my address.

In 17th century Scotland, native iron was scarce, arms production was small, and many arms were imported from Germany, the low countries and Spain.

Material for making arms had to be imported from England and Sweden and from this a quantity of arms was made in Scotland, where distinctive national types were developed. These arms are of particular interest as the Celtic forms of decoration died out in Europe by medieval times, but survived in Scotland well into the 19th Century. Pistol making began as early as the 16th Century in the principal towns of Scotland, situated for the most part along or near to the Eastern Seaboard, from whence development spread to the clan armourers of the central and western highlands. The characteristics of these weapons suggest that they were evolved from Dutch pieces imported into the country during the 16th Century.

During the early years of this present century, Mr. Charles E. Whitelaw, the greatest student of Scottish firearms, became interested in the subject of art and craftsmanship in Scotland from medieval times to about 1850. He noted that documentary evidence bearing on Scottish arms had scarcely yet been touched under his leadership.

Types were classified according to the form of the butt, while the chronological arrangement was made to follow the evolution of the lock mechanism.

From the beginning, Scottish pistols incorporated and retained distinctive characteristics not found in firearms made in other parts of the world. While some of the earliest pistols were stocked in wood with metal butt-caps and overlays, those with metal stocks, either of



brass or of iron, were more frequent. Later metal was used almost exclusively. Barrels were usually of iron, although brass was not uncommon. Silver was used frequently in the decoration of stocks and barrels. Other distinctive features are the narrow graceful lock with square-ended tail, the long belt hook on the side opposite the lock, the complete absence of a trigger guard, several peculiar butt shapes and the lock mechanism.

Pistol making in Scotland as stated earlier began toward the end of the 16th Century. The snaphaunce is the earliest form of native-made firearm identifiable. Pistol making continued through the 17th Century, but had practically ceased by the end of the 18th Century. Some pistols were made during the 19th Century but most of these were intended as adjuncts to the Caledonian dress and are known as costume pistols. They lack nearly all the aspects of good taste in design and decoration which made the earlier pistols prized by discerning collectors.

Let us now examine in some detail the components of a typical Scottish pistol.

THE STOCK

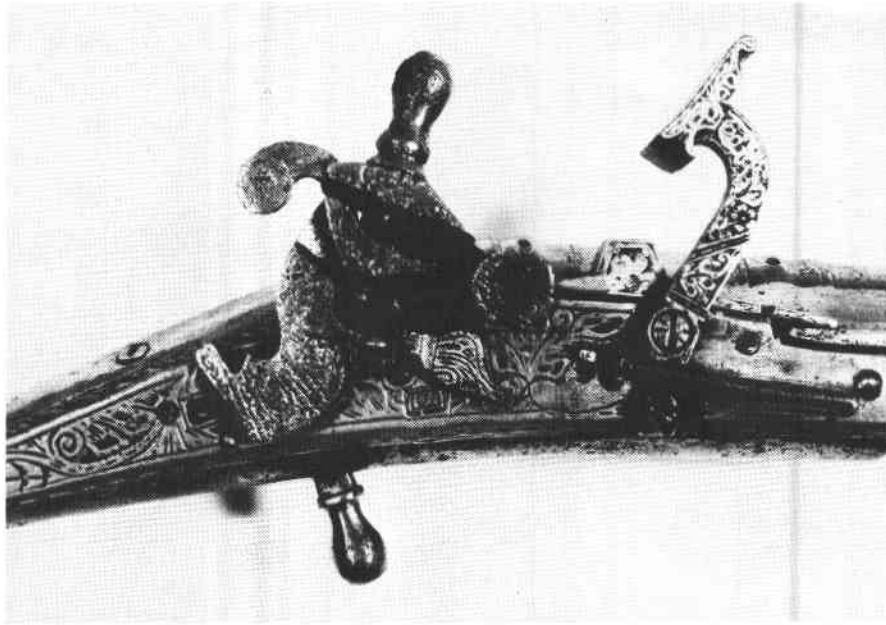
In his work, *A Treatise on Scottish Hand Firearms*, Charles E. Whitelaw classified Scottish pistols by the type of butt.

These types are: Fishtail Butt, Globose or Lemon Butt, Heart Butt, Scroll or Ramshorn Butt and Lobe Butt.

The Fishtail Butt

The Fishtail Butt appears on the earliest known Scottish pistols. The earliest dated pair of Highland pistols are in a museum in Dresden and are engraved 1598 on the breech of the barrels. The wooden stocks are flat at the grip and the Fishtail Butts terminate in a tri-lobed design when viewed in profile. The Fishtail Butts are decorated with an iron backstrap. The triggers are short and decorated with an acorn finial. There is no trigger guard on either piece.

Each barrel is decorated with raised, engraved and gilt panels and bands. The early Snaphaunce locks are engraved and illustrate the comb and flint securing manner peculiar to Scottish arms of the period. Other pistols of the Fishtail Butt type are found in wood capped with metal and with metal overlays and in all metal. The Fishtail Butt is not found on pistols after the middle of the 17th Century.



Scottish snaphance lock

The Globose or Lemon Butt

The Globose or Lemon Butt made its appearance on Scottish pistols about the beginning of the 17th Century and is somewhat similar in appearance to the butts on contemporary European pistols, resembling a ball or lemon in shape. This style of butt declined and disappeared by the third quarter of the 17th Century.

Decoration of the Fishtail Butt and the Globose or Lemon Butt Scottish Snaphaunce are divided into panels and engraved in various art forms, to include chevrons, vines, intertwined scrolls, celtic knots and often a floral design around a rosette.

The Heart Butt

The Heart Butt Scottish pistol seems to have been mainly a product of the east or northeast lowlands of Scotland. It developed about the middle of the 17th Century and ceased before 1750 or within one hundred years. Heart Butt Pistols are constructed of iron or brass and only very rarely of wood. A picker used to clear the touch hole of dirt and fowling is screwed into a recess in the end of the butt.

The Scroll Butt

The Scroll Butt or Ramshorn Butt appeared about the middle of the 17th Century and retained its popularity well into the 19th Century. It consisted of two scrolls of metal which curl toward the centre line of the butt. In the centre between the two scrolls is a threaded recess which contains the picker usually fitted with an engraved silver terminal. The terminals of the picker and the trigger on Scroll Butt pistols are of the same material and shape and engraved with the same design. The terminals are usually of silver but may be of iron or brass and in the late costume pistols may be in the form of thistles, acorns, and even fitted with coloured stones or cairngorms.

The Lobe Butt

The Lobe Butt appeared about the middle of the 18th Century, perhaps by Thomas Murdock and was popular during the last half of the 18th Century. They were constructed with iron or brass stocks, engraved and sometimes gilt. The butts terminated in a dome shaped cap similar to conventional wooden stocked pistols of that period.

THE LOCK

Six types of lock are found on Scottish pistols. Whitelaw working from dated specimens has classified them as follows: Early Snaphaunce (late 16th Century to 1686), Middle Snaphaunce, Late Snaphaunce (1640-1702), Dog Lock (1665-1700), Flintlock (1700-1820) and Percussion (1820-1850).

The Early Snaphaunce

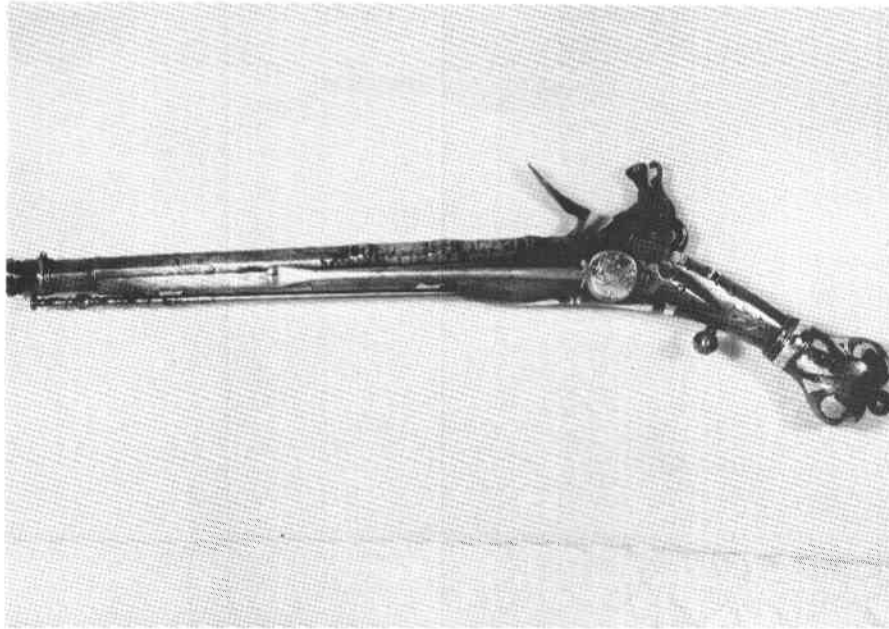
The Early Snaphaunce was characterized by an extension or tail on the cock. When the cock is drawn to full bent, the nose of a laterally acting sear working from within the lockplate snaps over it to hold the cock in position. As the cock falls forward, it is arrested by a buffer. There is no half cock provision on the tumbler. The design of the cock, and particularly the fastening of the flint, is peculiar to pistols of Scottish origin. The clamping or traveller screw is a separate body which passes through the bottom and top jaw. A cross-pin holds the traveller secure to the bottom jaw when pressure is applied, and a nut running up and down the threaded traveller provides the pressure. A drooping plume of feather-like decoration acts as a comb to hold the top jaw straight and in line with the bottom jaw. This design provided great flexibility for flints of varying size.

The Middle Snaphaunce

This differs only slightly from the Early Snaphaunce and might be considered simply a variant. There is thickening of the upper portion of the cock to act as its own buffer against the lockplate, and the external buffer is removed from the plate. The tail was strengthened by making it wider, and a hole was pierced through the tail of the cock to accept the nose of the sear at full bent. Middle Snaphaunce cocks had lost the earlier method of clamping the flint, moving to the more usual screw and top jaw. The plume was also dropped.

The Late Snaphaunce

This was developed about 1640. The lateral acting sear was retained, but the point of contact of the nose of the sear was moved from the tail of the cock to a notch on the tumbler. The method of making the Snaphaunce safe was achieved by the separate pan cover and steel. When the pistol was loaded and primed, the pan cover was closed, but the steel was set back from the action, so that if the cock accidentally fell, it would not produce a spark.



Decorative panels and sash hook

The Doglock

The development of a flintlock in the early years of the 17th Century, wherein the pan cover and the steel were combined as a single unit, necessitated the introduction of some form of safety. This was achieved initially by the application of a dog-catch to the lock.

Three variations of doglock have been identified:

Type I — Similar in form to the late Snaphaunce, with the addition of a dog-catch designed to engage in a notch on the rear of the cock.

Type II — On this type the dog-catch was moved lower on the plate to engage with a notch on the bottom of the cock. The sear on this design passed through a hole in the lock plate and engaged with the breast of the cock.

Type III — Externally similar to the Type II doglock but internally changed to provide for a half cock position on the tumbler.

The Flintlock

In Scotland the Flintlock appeared in two forms:

- (1) The classic Scottish Flintlock incorporated a laterally acting sear working through the lock plate and catching on the breast of the cock.
- (2) The second form was a simple adaptation of the "French Flintlock" wherein a vertical sear worked on a half-cock and full-cock notch in the tumbler.

Percussion Lock

Seen on the later 19th Century decadent pistols intended as adjuncts to the Caledonian Dress and known as Costume Pistols. These are similar to other percussion pistols made throughout the world.

CONSTRUCTION OF SCOTTISH PISTOLS

The construction of a Highland Pistol is ingenious. Excepting variations in the forms of the butt, the metal stocks were shaped in much the same fashion. The smith forged the iron over a mandrel which he used as a pattern. The stock of a typical Scroll Butt Pistol of the mid-Eighteenth Century was formed from one piece of metal, the seams on the side being brazed or heat welded with flux and

hammer. The lock was rough forged, filed and fitted; the belt hook shaped, pierced, decorated and hardened; and the scroll was brazed over the open end of the butt. The barrel frequently contained a large portion of old horseshoe nails, which had been forged into a ribbon of steel and formed around a mandrel. The tube was then ground and filed, a breech plug installed and the whole fitted to the stock.

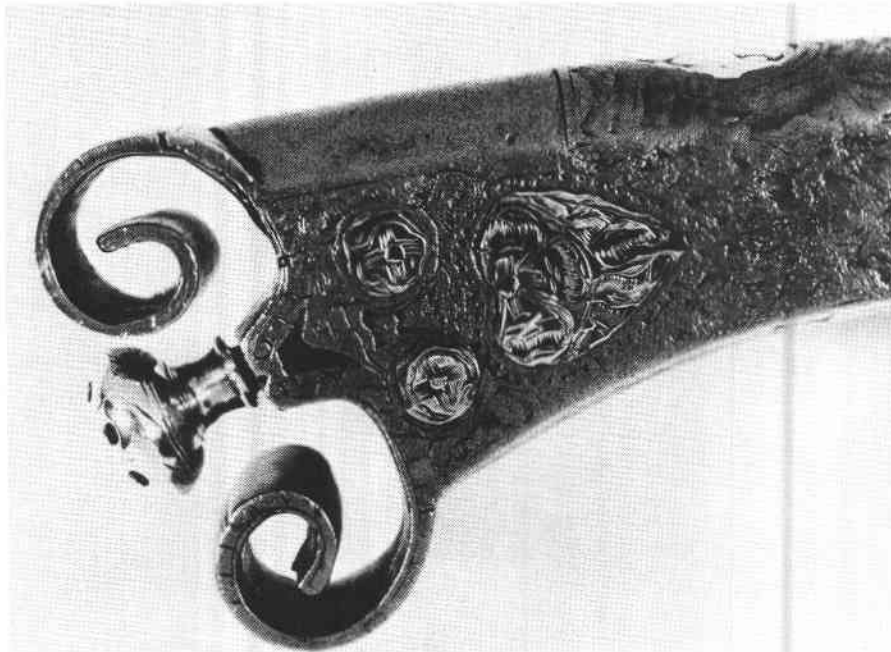
DECORATION

The artistic abilities of the gunmakers came to the fore in the decoration of a Scottish pistol. Often the stocks are engraved and enhanced with silver inlays of traditional Celtic design. Prominent design include scrolls, hearts, and floral patterns. Engraving on blued iron does not show to the best advantage, but the contrast of the silver and the blued metal is most pleasing to the eye. In my opinion only the late 18th Century pieces were blued, while the earlier pieces of the 17th and early 18th Centuries were of bright steel polished to a mirror finish. Oval panels set in the sides of the Scroll Butts frequently display the arms, crest, or monogram of an owner.

The terminals of the trigger and the picker are usually of silver, if silver is used on the stock, and engraved with a rose. The barrels of the better and later Scottish pistols are fluted at the breech and flared at the muzzle. They have decorative engraved panels on the exposed parts of the barrel not covered by the stock. Slender picker, faceted, and fluted ramrods and pierced and engraved belt hooks are in keeping with the relative grade of the pistol. A distinctive comb, in the form of a perforated disc, appears on some pistols (particularly Scroll Butt pistols) from shortly after 1700 to mid-century.

During the last quarter of the 18th Century, the decoration of a small group of Scottish pistols was carried to extremes. The use of all the above mentioned materials, plus gold and enamels, produced exotic arms which were intended primarily as presentation pieces. In reality, they are jewelry, not arms intended for use.

Scottish pistols were not provided with elaborate fitted cases. Each pistol was kept in a velvet bag, frequently lined with silk to



Decorative panels and pierced picker knob

protect the finish, and the outside embroidered. The pistols in the bags were placed in plain unfitted oak cases for further protection.

THE MAKERS

Little is known about the early 17th Century makers of Fishtail and Heart Butt Snaphaunce pistols peculiar to the east and north-east coastal regions of Scotland. Their pistols were mainly signed only with initials, often bore the date of manufacture on the fence of the pan. This group of makers would include I.L. or John Low of Dundee, James Gray Senior also of Dundee, Alex Shires of Old Meldrum and James Mackenzie of Brechin.

Foremost among the makers of Classical Highland Type Scroll Butt pistols are the four generations of Caddells who worked in Doune in Perthshire. The eldest Caddell moved to Doune in Perthshire from Muthill before the middle of the 17th Century and is credited with being the father of the Doune Gun-making Industry.

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The collecting of Scottish pistols is fraught with considerable danger in that all-metal pistols are easier to age artificially than wooden stocked pistols. During the past five years I have had numerous pairs and single pieces offered to me which fortunately required just a glance to determine that they were of superb workmanship and design but from the second half of the 20th Century. These have ranged from gold decorated early type Snaphaunce pistols to numerous Scroll Butt pistols signed John Campbell or Murdoch or Caddell and even a late costume-type flintlock pistol embellished with coloured semi-precious stones. A few have been very difficult to detect and one or two I am still not sure as to whether they are old or reproduction. Therefore let the motto be: "Caveat Emptor". It is a good idea to remove the lock and examine the screws for presence of machine made precision threads.

THE DECLINE

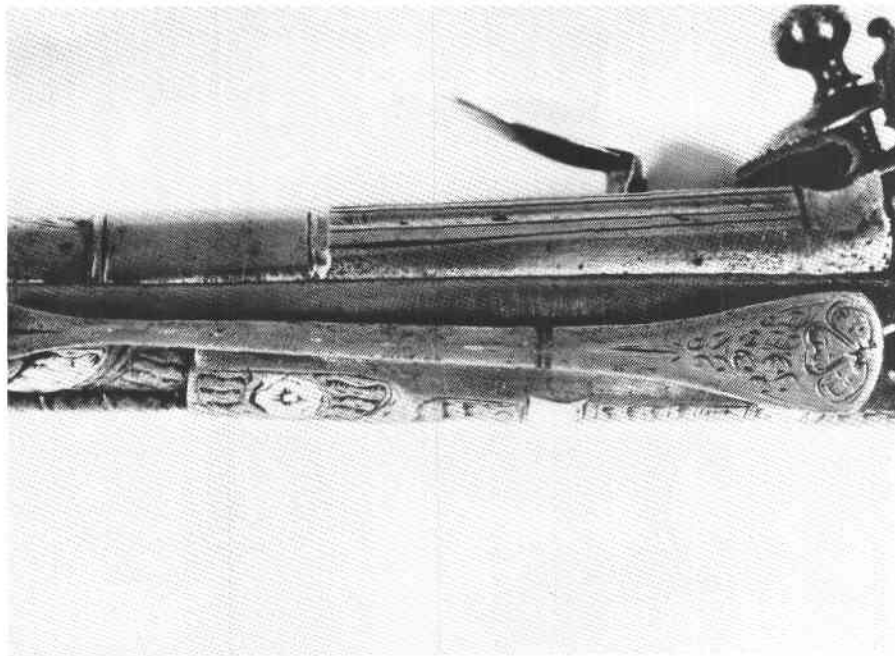
Following the defeat of the Scots at Culloden Moor, the

clansmen who fought against Cumberland and the English were forbidden by Act of Parliament to possess and bear arms, wear the kilt, and play the pipes. Consequently many broadswords and firearms were concealed, often under the thatched roofs of their houses. This act was repealed in 1782, but by that time the ancient clan system had been broken up and pistol making in Scotland became almost non-existent. In 1798 the statistical account of Scotland noted "There is now very little demand for Scottish pistols, owing to the low price of pistols made in England; but the chief cause of the decline is the disuse of the dirk and pistol as part of the Caledonian dress; and when Mr. Murdoch gives over business, the trade in all probability, will become extinct." By this, the writer meant that the everyday wearing of arms by Scotsmen as a necessity had declined to the point where they no longer purchased them. This decline was not a sudden occurrence; it took place over a period of approximately fifty years. It was partially influenced by the high cost of production compared with what could be produced in England with increasing use of machinery, and was probably accelerated when the all-metal pistol was no longer an arm of the Highland Regiments in the last half of the 18th Century.

I would like now, for the last part of my talk, to direct your attention to a rather fascinating pistol which I acquired very early in my collecting career.

My interest in collecting ancient firearms began quite suddenly after seeing the huge and then well known collection of Mr. John Flint of Detroit, Michigan, in August of 1948. I will admit to being a collector of many things from a very early age, but the John Flint collection was without question the most fascinating group of related items which I had ever seen; it instilled in me a great desire to build my own collection of antique firearms.

At the time my wife, Grace, and I lived in a small village in Central South Western Ontario near Peterboro, where I carried on a general practice in medicine. This proved to be an asset, and within the year I had fifteen or twenty old guns of dubious quality and mixed condition. I early decided I would be a general collector but restrict my collecting to Flint and Percussion British and American handguns since I found them convenient to store and transport and to be most closely linked with my historic knowledge and hereditary background.



Engraving on sash hook, stock, and barrel

In October of 1951, I received a letter from a Mr. Beattie, who operated a private printing business on Dundas Street in downtown Toronto. The shop is now gone and is replaced by a car parking lot. In the letter he stated that he understood I was interested in antique firearms and that he had a few in his possession which he would sell. The very next Wednesday afternoon half holiday found me in Toronto and at Mr. Beattie's shop.

After a few minutes of small talk, Mr. Beattie reached under his printers bench and pulled out a hemp bag in which he kept his collection. He displayed them instantly by emptying the contents of the bag on his desk. As I half suspected, they consisted of a large group of .22 and .32 calibre "suicide special" revolvers which were not of interest to me. However, within the pile, my eye caught a glimpse of two pistols which made my heart race and set the blood to thumping in my ears. The one was a plain military type Wheelock of Central European origin (probably German) such as was used at the time of the English Civil War. The other was the *Tho: Caddell* Scottish pistol which I now hold in my hand.

I at once sensed great desirability so far as the Scottish pistol was concerned, despite the fact that at the time I had never actually seen one or held one in my hands. I became all the more excited when I quickly examined it and found it to be apparently in excellent condition, unbroken, and with all original parts, but that was not all! On the side under the belt hook was an inscription which read "Taken from a Cameron at the battle of Culloden — fought April 16th, 1746 by Lieut. Loftus Cliffe of Dejeans Regiment." In the oval silver medallion set into the left butt was a family crest. Trigger and picker were of silver and the cock showed the presence of a comb or finial pierced with a star. Mr. Beattie stated that he obtained the pistol from the widow of a W.W.I veteran and assumed he had brought it back from Europe after the war.

I told Mr Beattie I was very much interested in the Scottish pistol and was prepared to attempt a deal with him for it. He stated that he thought he should get \$80.00 for the pistol but he was willing to take trade as all or part payment. That suited me fine since I had little or no money anyway. When I had called for an appointment he suggested I bring along any trade material I might have, especially books, magazines and journals relating to outdoor living, camping and hunting. This I had done, and after looking over my trade

material, to my great relief, Mr. Beattie stated that he was willing to trade the Scottish Caddell pistol for all of the books, catalogues and magazines which I had with me. The deal was made and I practically floated the 80 miles back home, feeling a certain warm kinship with those misty 18th Century figures of Caddell, Cliffe and a Cameron who had lost the pistol over 200 years before.

The next few evenings were spent in reading all that we could find about the rising of 1745, the attempt of Charles Edward Stuart to regain the British Throne for his father, and finally and most importantly, everything that could be learned about Culloden.

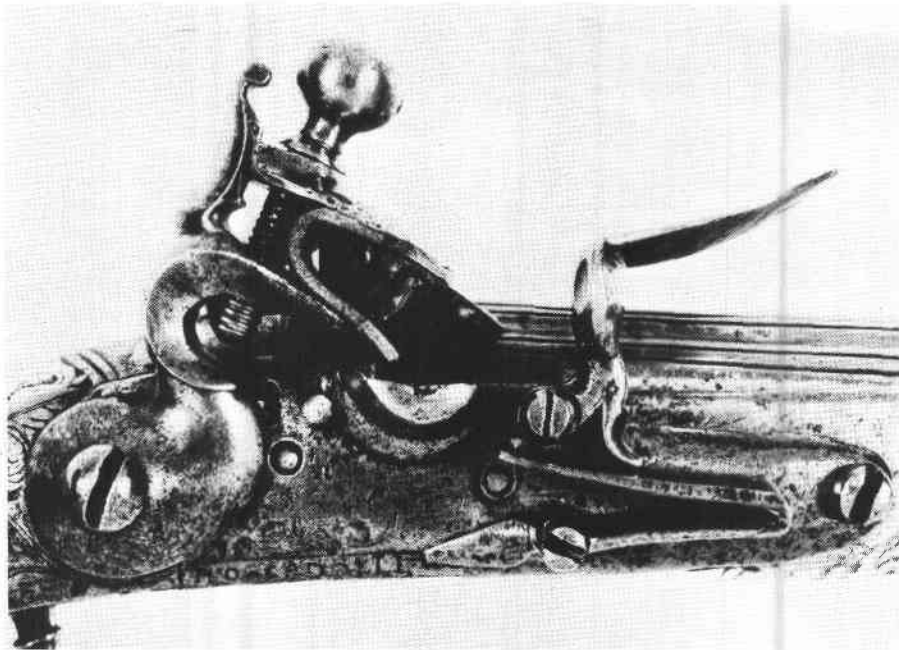
(Space does not permit the inclusion of Dr. Longfield's exposition of the events that led to the battle at Culloden and its results. We pick up his talk where he discusses the inscription on his pistol.)

Now, what of the inscription on the left side under the belt hook, which states: "Taken from a Cameron at the Battle of Culloden, fought April 16th, 1746—by Lieut. Loftus Cliffe of Dejeans Regiment'.

I am as aware as any of you that an inscription is very often spurious and that for years forgers, some very skillful, have been at work. I will therefore let each of you decide for yourself whether or not you can accept the inscription as genuine.

My research into the inscription has in any event led me into a number of interesting and fascinating avenues. A couple of months after acquiring the pistol I made a tracing of the crest on the butt and sent it to the College of Arms or Heraldry on Queen Victoria Street, London, England. I had supposed that the crest was that of the Cameron who had presumably lost the pistol at Culloden, but instead, in a letter from the master of Sinclair Portcullis dated December 14, 1951, I was to learn that the wolf's head per pale indented argent and sable was indeed the crest of the family of Cliffe of Huxley Co. Cheshire and was apparently placed on the left silver medallion of the pistol by Loftus Cliffe.

The letter contained certain other information about the Cliffe family going back to the 17th Century. The writer also informed me that he had seen other items taken in battle at that period, inscribed and the crest of the new owner placed on the article which probably became a conversation piece in the den of an 18th Century military officer. In any of my reading on Culloden, I was never able to reconcile a Dejean's Regiment with the English forces.



Lock of the Tho. Caddell pistol, showing name

There the matter rested. During the 1950's, when I was a resident in pathology at Michigan, I joined the Michigan Antique Arms Collectors and showed the pistol to a few people who might be able to shed some light.

One of these was Mr. Woodie Woodard of Detroit, Michigan, who was a professional engraver. After examining the inscription he stated quite categorically that the engraving was old and of the style of letters used in the 18th Century. In other words, physically, the inscription looked right.

Then in 1961 John Prebble brought out his book, *Culloden*, which was subsequently made into a successful television film. There on page 97 of the second chapter, entitled "Drumossie Moor," I read a paragraph which again gave me as great a thrill as finding the pistol in the first place back in 1951. Prebble writes of Munro's Regiment, who met the Cameron charge: "They suffered nineteen killed and sixty-three wounded during the few minutes that the Camerons and the Stewarts closed with them. The yellow facings of the first rank were soon as scarlet as their coats, and behind each levelled bayonet was a face black with powder. Their old Huguenot Colonel, Louis Dejean, stood on the foot to the rear of the colours, shouting encouragement in French and in English." Thus I at last had an explanation for Dejeans Regiment. Louis Dejean was the Huguenot Colonel of Munro's Regiment and Munros Regiment met the Cameron charge. Everything fitted and made sense.

"I had the honour to command the Grenadier Platoon," wrote an officer of Munro's to the Londen Press, "our lads fought more like devils than men." His letter was reproduced in the Scots Magazine

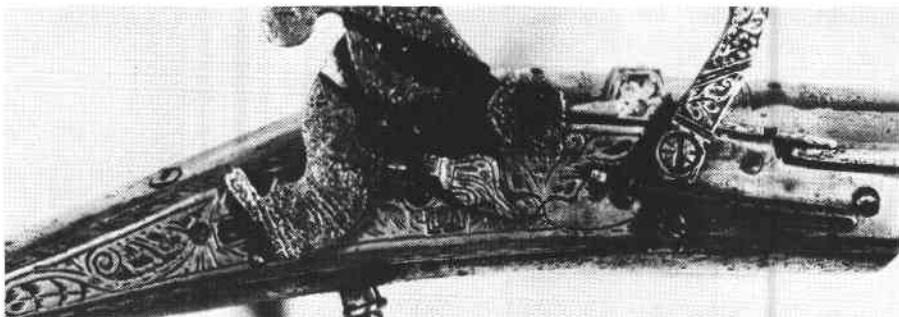
for April, 1746, and the pertinent part so far as I am concerned read as follows: "but you may judge the work," wrote this same officer of Munro's, "for I had eighteen men killed and wounded in my platoon. I thank God I escaped free. In the midst of this action the officer that led on the Camerons called to me to take quarter, which I refused and bid the rebel scoundrel advance, he did, and fired at me, but providentially missed his mark. I then shot him dead and took his pistol and dirk which are extremely neat."

I must say after reading this passage I was at least circumstantially convinced that my pistol might well be the pistol described in his letter.

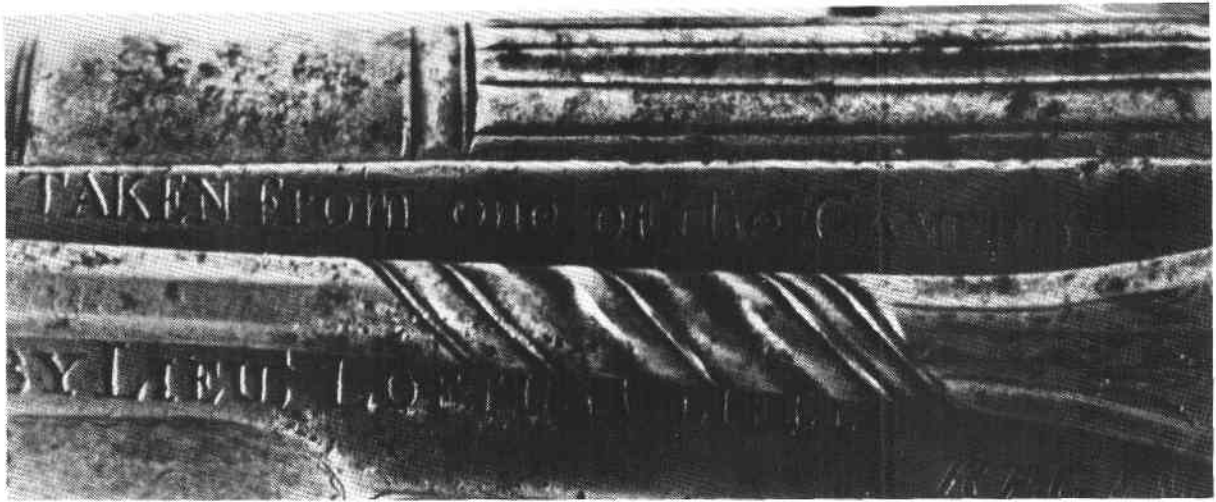
The pistol itself is a *Tho. Caddell Ramshorn Butt Pistol* of the 1730 period, probably made by the son or grandson of the man who made my large Caddell pistol. I believe it is of the quality befitting a major clan chieftain and it is the feeling of most historians that only a high ranking officer or clan chieftain would carry such a pistol into battle. The clansmen put their trust almost totally in the steel of their broadswords.

History records that Lochiel Cameron, the clan chieftain, had his legs shot from under him in the charge. Prebble writes: "during the retreat, the Camerons paused by Lochiel, lifted his lamed body, and carried him with them."

After reading John Prebble's *Culloden*, I wrote to him regarding my pistol with the inscription, to see if the name of the officer writing to a London newspaper was known. I received four letters in close succession from Mr. Prebble, who was obviously greatly excited by the pictures and notes regarding the pistol. Photostats of



Decorative panel on bottom of stock and lock



Inscription on the Tho. Caddell pistol

his letters are with my exhibit for any who are interested in reading his comments in toto. The following points are made in the research carried on by Mr. Prebble at the Army Museum in Chelsea:

(a) Loftus Cliffe was indeed an officer of Munro's regiment. He obtained his colours in October, 1737, his Lieutenancy in July, 1742, and a Captaincy in February, 1750. Thus he was indeed a Lieutenant in 1746 at the time of Culloden. He was severely wounded and undoubtedly present at the battle of Minden on August 1st, 1759, after which he became the Major Commandant of the 117th Regiment of Foot in March 1762. He died in 1766.

(b) Loftus Cliffe would have been in a position at the battle to acquire the pistol from a fallen Cameron.

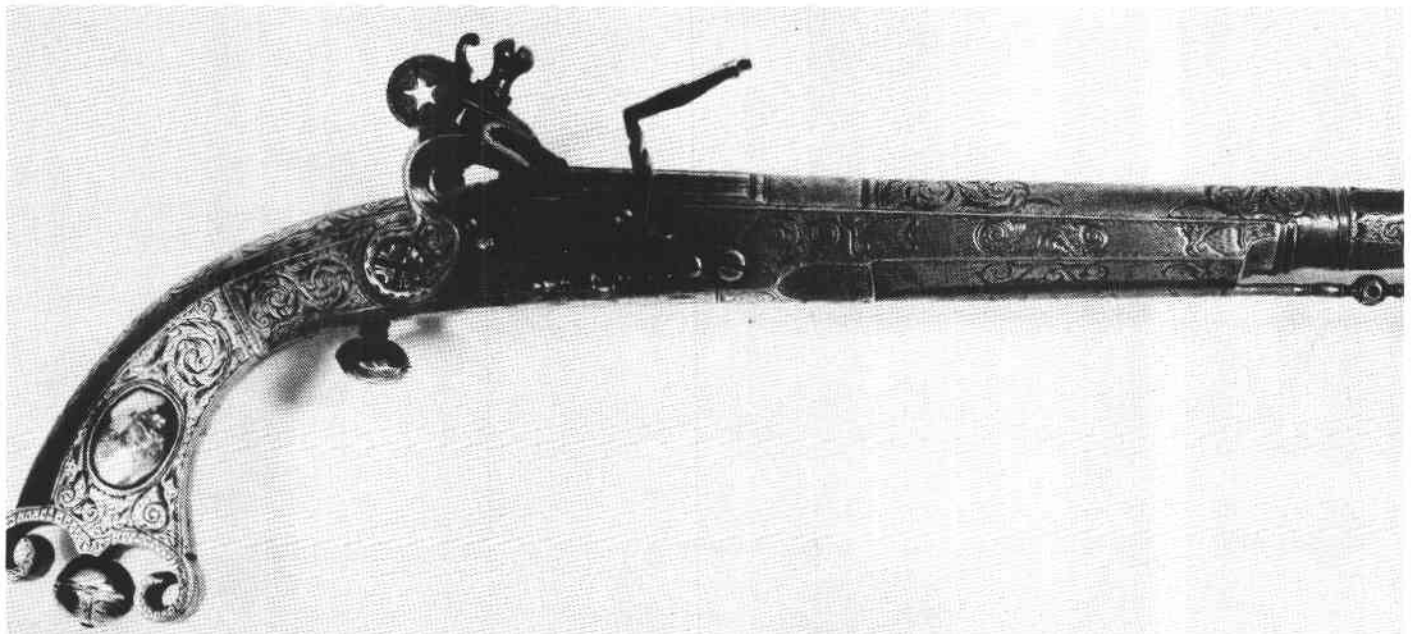
(c) Prebble states in the last paragraph of a letter to me dated January 22nd, 1977, "if I have not satisfied you that the officer of Munro's quoted in the Scots Magazine was Loftus Cliffe, I still think the circumstantial evidence is strong. Many officers at Culloden must have picked up Highland weapons, but what strengthens the evidence is that the "officer of Munro's" and Loftus Cliffe each identify their souvenir as having belonged to "a Cameron".

And so the matter stands at this time. We have not to date

learned the name of the officer of Munro's Regiment who had his letter published in the Scots Magazine for April of 1746, telling about those awful moments when Dejeans' or Munro's Regiment met the murderous Cameron charge on Drum Mossie Moor, and about his taking a fine pistol from the dead body of the officer who led on the Camerons. I will leave it to you to decide if you think his name was Loftus Cliffe.

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The Caddell pistol; the crest of Cliffe is nearly visible in the oval on the grip.