Third Model Colt Deringers Sold in England

By Doug Eberhart

It is my belief that most Colt Deringers sold in England were imported by Baron Fredrick Von Oppen. Baron Von Oppen was a retired Prussian army officer who opened the Colt agency in London circa 1870 to sell the Colt line in England. The agency was located at 14 Pall Mall in London. This area seems to have been a popular place for guns, as a number of other English gun makers and dealers were located nearby.

John E. Parsons, who wrote in the first Deringer book "Henry Deringer's Pocket Pistol," indicated that Colt factory records showed shipments to England. These amounted to over 10,000 Colt 3rd models from 1871 through 1882. Probably at least 10,000 more 3rd models were shipped to London from 1882 until 1912, when this model was discontinued. These records also furnished numbers on Nationals #1 and #2, which Colt owned after their purchase of National in 1870. These figures totaled over 2,400 pieces in that same period.





Von Oppen claimed that dealers other than himself were buying directly from Colt, and it was undermining his sales. Dealers in Liverpool and Birmingham as well as Irish and Scottish gun dealers took advantage of Colt's liberal pol-

icy until Baron Von Oppen complained to Colt. Then Colt tried to make his agency the sole distributor in England of Colt Deringers.

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Figure 1B. Pall Mall pages.

Figure 1A. Original Sales Broadsheet.

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Figure 3. Pall Mall pages.

I have the original "Inventory on hand" pages, from the 14 Pall Mall agency dated 1877. These four pages show, at that time, that the agency had 419 Colt Deringers on hand. It doesn't give classifications as to number of 1st, 2nd or 3rd models. It also shows 10 gold-plated National Deringers on hand. Many other Colt pistols are also mentioned. These same sheets show creditors owing the agency money for purchases. Here I will only show those dealers known to have sold Deringers. They are BOSS & Co., R. Jones, J.H. Watson, E.M. Reilly, Cogewell & Harrison, Watson & Son, and F.T. Baker. There is also reference to Deringer pistol cases, such as a fancy Deringer & Cigar Case, and two fancy cases for Colt Deringer's and Cigars. One of these can be seen in my book "The Deringers in America," volume II, page 49. On one other type case for Deringers & Cigars, no name was listed as to the make of the Deringer, but it is a good guess that it was for a National Deringer, probably a 2nd model.

I have a complete collection of National Deringers totaling 14 pieces, including two patent models, with all the variations in both 1st and 2nd models. The one thing I do not have is a National with English proofs. We know that they had them in stock from the listings on these inventory sheets. Other Deringer collectors like myself who specialize in Nationals have not recorded a British proof piece as of this writing.

I would like to thank our member, and one of my best friends, Anthony Stone, for acquiring these pages and giving them to me, so I could share them with you.





Figure 7. (National F. A. Co., Brooklyn, NY) 2nd Model National, this gun is very fancily engraved in the NYC style of L.D. Nimschke's shop. It is my opinion that it was made for a company executive or for an exposition. The fancy burl walnut grips are plain without checkering, this is a feature seen throughout the total production, with no particular pattern or reason. The piece originally was silver plated frame, gold wash was applied over the silver with a blued barrel. Less than 10 examples have this style of fancier engraving on the 2nd Model NATIONAL Deringer Serial #10,000.



Figure 5A and B. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #36591, assemblers letter E. This piece was brought into England by Von Oppen and has the Colt & C on the left side frame and the E.M. Reilly LONDON on the other side. This shows it was marketed by Reilly in the Cigar Casing shown here. This style casing is very rare. This photo is courtesy of the Woolaroc Museum and is part of the Phillip R. Phillips Collection in Bartlesville, OK.



Figure 6.



Figure 8. (National Arms Co., Brooklyn, NY) 2nd Model with 2.5" barrel and brass frame. The piece is specially factory ordered engraving; it's typical NYC style from the shop of L.D. Nimschke. The gold plated frame, is stamped under the grips A&60 as are the walnut grips. The barrel is full silver plate that has never been polished and appears to be blued. The full Serial #5460 appears on the bottom of the barrel in the normal place. Deluxe finished National Deringers like this one are very rare.



Figure 9. (National Arms Co., Brooklyn, NY) Deluxe 2nd Model Deringer. This gun is Serial #7317 on the barrel as usual, and #BX17 on the frame under the factory pearl grips. The brass frame is gold washed, with silver plated barrel. It is .41 short rim fire caliber. National Deringers finished like this one are rare.

Other English dealers that sold Deringers not listed on these sheets are Williams & Powell of Liverpool, Watson & Hancock, Holland & Holland, Robert S. Garden, Thomas Watson, Watson & Son, and Watson Brothers. I believe all these Watson listings are the same family at various stages of their operations. There may be more obscure dealers, which I have missed. I am now in the process of trying to rethink the old statements in my books as well as many others, that there was a total production of 3rd models of about 48,000. Rex Pope in England has also been working on this for many years. We have established that the serial numbers were started over at least three times, with the greater portion of 3rd models being manufactured after the open-grip-style frame and low hammer spur were brought into the line. I have survey sheets, if anyone wishes to help nail this down. I very much solicit all the help I can get.

Because 3rd model Deringers have been cataloged with serial numbers as high as 48,000, many collectors, dealers, and writers, including myself, believed that the numbers ran from serial #1 through 48,000, covering the five variations, with that figure being the total product.

I will show the five variations and the differences and give estimates as to the number made.

The very first type 3rd model was made with a thinner, lighter frame. They have the barrel screw bolster or potbellied frame. The COLT stamping on the barrel top is considerably smaller, measuring only about 11 mm or 7/16" in length. When the frame was beefed up because of cracking on or near the recoil shield after only a few shots, there was a new larger COLT stamp introduced at this point. This stamp was carried through until the end of production, circa 1912. It measures 17 mm or 11/16" in length. This first type 3rd model stopped being made after only a few days, with a total production of something less than 500 pieces finished and sold. These numbers were carried on into the 2nd variation.

As I stated previously, the 2nd variation is about the same size but the metal makeup of the frame was changed from a straight brass composition to a bronze makeup, to give it more strength in the same size pistol, making it stronger and the same weight, which is 210.5 grams or approximately 7.5 oz. The same bolster around the barrel pivot screw is present, as well as the high hammer, and the tight curve in the grip remains. There were approximately 2,400 pieces like this produced. This includes the first type, which numbered a little less than 500 pieces, making the second variation total just less than 2,000 pieces. At this point a new serial number series was started.

Figure 10. (3rd Model Colt, 1st Variation) The very first type 3rd model was made with a somewhat thinner lighter frame. They have the barrel screw bolster or pot bellied frame. The COLT stamping on the barrel top is considerably smaller, measuring only about 11 mm or 7/16" in length. When the frame was beefed up because of cracking on or near the recoil shield after only a few shots, there was a new larger COLT stamp introduced at this point. This stamp, carried through until the end of production circa 1912. It measures 17 mm or 11/16" in length. This first type 3rd model stopped being made after only a few days, with a total production of something less than 500 pieces finished and sold. These numbers

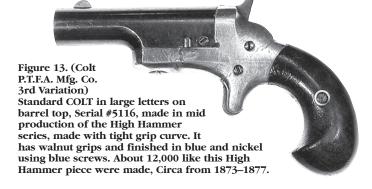


were carried on into the 2nd variation which we will see now.

Figure 11. (Colt 2nd Type 3rd Model) Marked with the standard COLT on the barrel top, there were about 2400 pieces produced like this one. All have the high hammer and are caliber .41 rim. fire. This piece is Serial #507. The high hammer style was discontinued about serial number 13,000. Full Nickel finish examples with blued screws in this early model are extremely rare.



Figure 12. (3rd Model Colt) 2nd Variation, Serial #994, this style Deringer was manufactured up to about Serial #2400. Then the frame style was changed to make it stronger. This piece is factory engraved in the NYC style, Class C coverage. The factory ivory grips has the deluxe checkering pattern, which is seldom seen. Engraved examples of this variation are extremely rare.



The 3rd variation began when the barrel screw bolster was replaced with a solid frame, which added strength and a more streamline appearance to the piece. This style retained the high hammer and tight curve in the grip. There were approximately 13,000 of these made.

The 4th variation is a combination of 3rd variation frames with the tight-curve grip style and the introduction of a new streamline low-profile hammer spur. This style hammer would continue until the end of production. This variation is not commonly seen but serial numbers run as high as

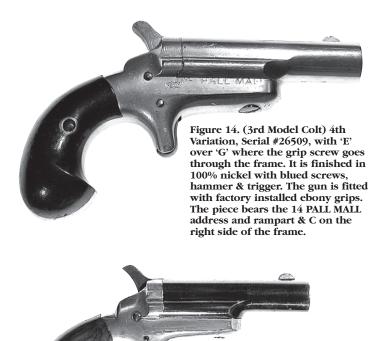


Figure 15. (Colt 3rd Model) 5th Variation, open grips low hammer. Serial #1230, which was probably made circa 1880 when this open grip series began and serial numbers were started over at one at least twice and ended at about 48,000.

27,xxx. This is confusing unless all the serial numbers ran consecutively through this variation. That would then indicate a production of around 12,000.

During late preparation to complete this article, I discovered that a gun in my book, which I showed earlier, is a 4th variation with the serial number 1230. You will see in the next photo a 5th variation piece with the same serial number. I believe this shows without a doubt another start over in the serial numbers, even before we get into the 5th variation, which we definitely know, were started over at least twice. The 5th variation is where the serial numbers were started over again and the larger grip, open-curve style began. No engraving of dealership markings have been shown, to keep counterfeiting to a minimum! This is the type Deringer most people know and are most likely to encounter at gun shows and auctions, etc. There is strong proof that the numbers were started over again at least twice on this model. There is agreement between most advanced collectors of 3rd model Deringers that the highest serial number recorded of approximately 48,xxx is merely the highest number in the last batch.

The gun you see here is Serial #1230, illustrating that if the numbers ran straight through, this piece would be a high-hammer tight-curved grip, and bolster screw-style gun.

Using the best estimation system, my guess of a total production of all variations is at least 70,000 and could be as high as 100,000. They are certainly one of the most likely Deringers that one will see at gun shows and auctions. With all that said, it is a subject that can keep a collector searching most of a lifetime to obtain all the variations, dealer markings, casings, and finishes.

The following photos will show examples of 3rd models from my collection, which have the markings by the dealers I have mentioned. Also, a few cases, which are extremely rare, show a small sampling of the labels by some of the better known English dealers. Many English-proofed 3rd models only bear the proof marks and have no names, etc., to tell the collector, who actually sold them or when. Most of these were probably imported and distributed to other dealers by Von Oppen at 14 Pall Mall, London.

Thanks to my friend Jeff Norris, who did this photography.



Figure 16. (Cased Matched Pair of 3rd Model Colt Deringers) This set is English proofed and stamped with the rampart Colt and "C" on the frames. These guns were cased and sold in London by Baron Fredrich Von Oppen who was Colt's authorized dealer in London. The pair are Serial #19408 and #35702, both guns are cased in their original English Oak Casing, which is blue cloth lined and in excellent condition with the 14 PALL MALL label in the inside lid of the case. Serial #19461 was stolen out of this casing at the Louisville, KY show 2005. It was the factory mate to this set.





Figure 17. (Colt 3rd Model) 4th Variation, Serial #E26017. This piece is factory engraved Class C. It is English proofed on barrel bottom. The piece is in it's original English oak single gun case, lined in green blase and the original dealer label is in the top inside lid, E. M. REILLY & CO./502 New Oxford Street, London.





Figure 18. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #36093, with a 'P' on the frame under the grip. Factory ivory grips with entwining scrimshawed initials J.M.B. This piece has the rampart Colt & C and .41 CAL on the frame denoting it as being sold through Von Oppen in London. The piece is 100% nickel finished overall with blued screws and case colored hammer and trigger with the original mole skin carring purse.



Figure 20. (COLT P.T.F.A. MFG. CO. 3rd Model, 3rd Type) This matched pair was sold in England by BOSS & CO., 73 ST. James St., London. They are cased in their original leather over wood casing with the original oil can and turn screw. Both Deringers are Class "C" engraved and British proofed. They are Serial #10101 and #11367, and fitted with Fancy Walnut grips. Factory cased sets are rare.

Variation, Serial #6228. The piece was imported into England by HOLLAND & HOL-LAND. The proof marks are on the side of the frame and barrel, instead of the normal stamping on the bottom of the barrel and silvered frame, with burl walnut grips.

Figure 19. (3rd Model Colt) 3rd

Figure 21. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #42964, it has a 'D' where the grip screw goes through the frame. It is finished in 100% nickel with blued screws, hammer & trigger. It is fitted with walnut grips. The piece was marketed and marked by WATSON & HANCOCK, LONDON. On the reverse frame it has the .41 CAT stamp instead of the standard .41 CAL stamp.

WAYSON & HANCOCK LONDON

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Figure 22. (3rd Model Colt) 4th Variation, Serial #22432, with G on frame under the grip. This piece is finished with silver plated frame and blued barrel. It was imported into Britain by WILLIAMS & POWELL, of LIVERPOOL, and is so marked on the barrel side. The walnut grips have the serial # in India ink inside.

Figure 23. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #5467. It is finished all in nickel with blued screws, hammer & trigger. There is a secondary Serial #1769. It has walnut grips, the frame is marked .41 CAL., the barrel side is stamped R. JONES/MANCHESTER ST/LIPOOL.

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Figure 25. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #32732, it has a "C" where the grip screw goes in the frame. It has 100% nickel finish with blued screws and case color hammer & trigger. The grips are walnut. The piece has a .41 CAL and the rampart Colt & C and the #14 which is an incomplete stamping for 14 PALL MALL. Figure 24. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #7750. It is finished with nickel frame and blued barrel, with walnut grips. It has a secondary Serial #16706 which was applied by the London dealer. The back strap reads COGSWELL & HARRISON, LTD./141 NEW BOND ST & 226 STRAND, LONDON. Stamped .41 CAL. on frame. The address is all hand cut engraving.

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Figure 26. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #39391, with a H-3 on the inside grip frame. This piece was finished with a silver plated frame and blue barrel, and walnut grips. It has a .41 CAL. stamp and the rampart Colt & C denoting it was sold in LONDON by VON OPPEN, to T.W. WATSON at #4 PALL MALL, LONDON, and these markings are engraved down the back strap showing it was sold by them. Double dealership markines like this are seldom seen.

Figure 27. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #P37561, with a "H" assemblers stamp on the grip frame. The piece was finished with silver plated frame and blued barrel, and burl walnut grips. This piece was imported by VON OPPEN and has the .41 CAL and the rampart Colt & C on the left frame side. It was then sold to E.M. REILLY & Co. LONDON, because it has their dealership name on the right side frame. This double dealership stamping is seldom seen.

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Figure 28. (3rd Model Colt) 5th Variation, Serial #39247, it has a 'P' where the grip screw goes through the frame. It is finished in 100% nickel with blued screws, hammer and trigger. It has factory ivory grips. The piece was originally imported by Von Oppen and has the Rampart Colt & C, and was probably sold by them to E.M. REILLY & Co. of LONDON, as it also has their dealership marking. This dual dealer marking is rare.

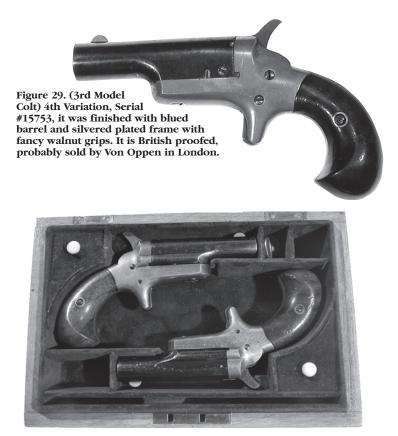




Figure 30. (3rd Model Colt) Cased pair Serial #38250 and #39046, both guns are of the 5th Variation, and have the Von Oppen markings as well as the 14 PALL MALL address. They were marketed by WATSON & SON in LONDON, circa 1900. Each has the British proofs and was finished in blue and silver with walnut grips.