

WHAT, WHEN, AND WHERE?

CONFUSING MARKINGS APPLIED TO MILITARY, COMMERCIAL, AND IMPORTED HAND-GUNS USED BY BRITAIN IN BOTH WORLD WARS

by Bob Maze

The topic of *what* types of British proof and inspection markings appear on civilian and military firearms from the first half of the 20th century might be considered a rabbit-warren of misunderstanding for many who collect these interesting and historical weapons. Much of this confusion between civilian and military proof markings arises from *when* each type was applied. Here, several variables come into play all stemming from *where* the arm originated. Was it commercially manufactured or by a Royal Small Arms Factory (RSAF), or was it imported? Insofar as the latter is concerned, was the firearm imported by a retailer or by the British government, such as the British Purchasing Commission (BPC) or the Lend-Lease Program during the Second World War? Did its career start as a private purchase or service issued weapon? Hopefully this article will be informative and will illuminate some of these more dimly-lit corners of history.

To bring us all up to speed, or at least into the 20th century, the following is a very concise history of the British proof houses, their acts and rules associated with them as they pertain to our topic.¹ Britain now has two establishments for proving commercial firearms and those released from His Majesty's (H.M.) Service (i.e. surplus weapons), the initial one being established in London. During the reign of King Charles I, a 1631 Royal Edict established the Armourers' Company composed of seven London gunsmiths that were charged with keeping the arms of the Citizen's Militia in shootable condition and granted rights for their inspection and repair. Shortly thereafter, 125 gunmakers, half of which were located in London, banded together and on 14 March 1637 formed The Worshipful Company of Gunmakers (a.k.a. the Gunmakers' Co.), which is commonly referred to now as the London Proof House. This amalgamation of industry talent initiated the prevailing directive that all firearms were required to be both "viewed" (i.e. inspected) for their overall quality and "proved" with an excessive charge over their normal loading pressure as [proof] of their integrity and thus proving the arm safe. From that time on, until 1954 when London view marks were dispensed with, chamber exteriors and barrels bear marks of both view and proof, while the frames display only view marks.

Throughout the 18th century as the firearms industry grew progressively in the Midlands, so did the demand for honest and professional proving, which was then either sent to London, nine days away, or undertaken locally by individual gunmakers; the majority of these being honest, but some were unscrupulous, producing cheap and dangerous products. A second proof house was established in Birmingham (The Guardians of the Birmingham Proof House) by an act of Parliament in 1813, but then again reformed in 1855 as Birmingham was quickly becoming the center of the firearms manufacturing industry in Britain.

Relevant to our story are The Gun Barrel Proof Acts of 1855 and 1868 setting the framework for all subsequent proving rules for the next hundred years; these also being the last acts dealing primarily with muzzle-loading firearms. As arms' technology advanced from

muzzle-loading to breech-loading, and propellants changed from black powder to smokeless, the proving and inspection processes evolved as did the proof marks. Gun proving acts by necessity kept up with the times and implemented an array of new markings and modifications to the old ones as the industry progressed. The supplemental rules and regulations from 1875, 1887, and 1896, issued by the Secretary of State for the War Department were fundamentally addenda to the 1868 Act, and dealt progressively, and respectively, with such advances as chokes in breech-loading shotgun barrels (c. 1875) that obviously caused problems when solid ball rounds were fired through the constriction, Express and Paradox rifles (c. 1887), and the numerous smokeless and semi-smokeless propellants then being introduced (c. 1896).

When Britain entered the First World War, the newest rules and regulations dating from April 1904 were still a progression from the original 1868 Act, brought up to date to contain various new, but mostly reshuffled, categories to include the preponderance of a variety of breech-loading weapons chambered for smokeless cartridges, including the new self-loading, or "repeating," pistols. By 1916, an additional category (#10) was introduced with these new rules of proof to include modern military magazine breech-loading rifled arms and machine guns with a bore diameter not to exceed 0.315." Category #10, along with the prior #7 that dealt with sporting rifles, encompassed all of rifles in Britain that could chamber the .303" service cartridge. These new markings were not a military proof as such but designated that a military weapon had passed commercial nitro proving. Applied to the barrel only were: intertwined LMP surmounted by a rampant lion for London and BM surmounted by a crown for Birmingham (Figure 1), accompanied by the words "NITRO PROVED."

Nothing changed significantly for the next nine years until the new "*Rules, Regulations, and Scales*" were implemented in August 1925,³ and even then nothing much changed except the rules for marking foreign arms. Prior to World War I, Great Britain had recognized gun proving laws from Belgium, France, Spain, Imperial Germany, and Austria-Hungary. However, without an obvious explanation, in 1925 Britain halted recognition of all other nations' proofing; therefore all foreign guns in or entering the country were to be reproved. So, for firearms of all foreign countries, the United States obviously being one, the lower portion of the view and proof marks were circled and the often boxed-in words "NOT ENGLISH MAKE," were impressed into the guns' frames and barrels or slides (Figures 2 and 3). It wouldn't be until 1948 after the post-World War II formation of West Germany that Britain would once again observe a German proof mark along with Belgium, France, Spain, and subsequently an increasing number from other nations, but still not the United States.

Markings evident from the regulations and rules introduced in 1954⁴ that became effective in February 1955 will probably be the last vestiges of proof marks that commonly appear on Second World War firearms released from service, and are the pattern for

Important Proof Marks of the 1904 Rules with the 1916 Barrel Proof Mark for Ex-Military Weapons



Figure 1. Though generally straightforward, a few of these marks may benefit from an explanation. Provisional proof pertains to unfinished barrels (usually shotgun barrels) that will eventually be assembled into a complete weapon and then require inspection and a final, or definitive, proving with an over-pressure load. From 1916 ex-military small arm barrels and receivers were proved at the commercial proof houses using a jacketed nitro (smokeless) proof round, and subsequently marked with this new symbol. The reproof mark usually applied to black powder arms that were reproofed for nitro powders.²

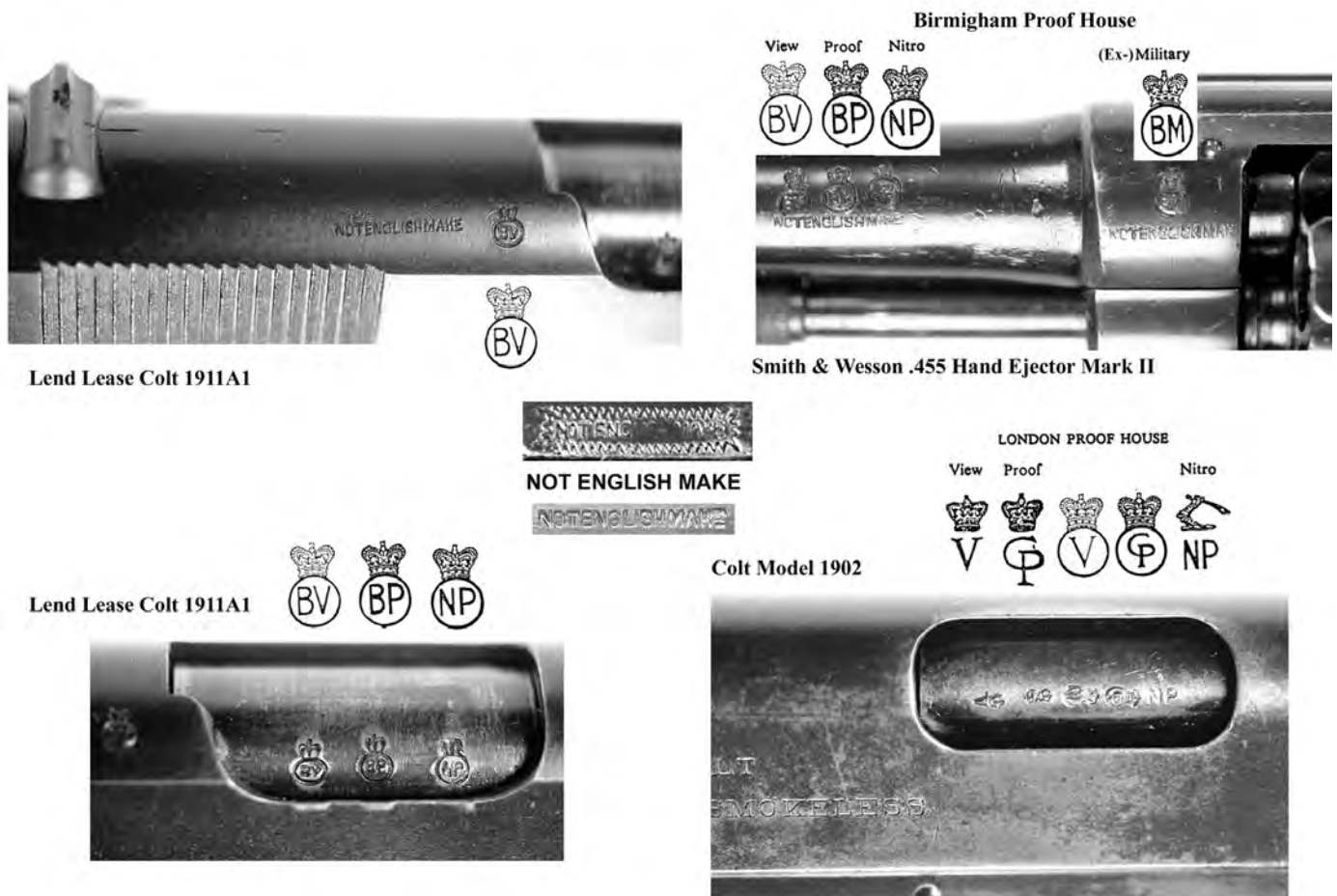


Figure 2. Examples of U.S. handguns Proof Marked under the 1925 Rules.

all subsequent proof mark styles. Important to this article, at that time, was the elimination of the view mark from guns proved in London (though guns were still rigorously inspected (Figures 4 -

6), with the additions of chamber length, caliber/bore diameter, and the indication of the standard pressure in tons per square inch.

Figure 3. An ex-Lend-Lease Remington Rand M1911A1 with "RELEASED BRITISH GOVT. 1952" replacing the previous opposed Broad Arrows →← as the sales permit mark. At that time the 1925 rules were still in effect, thus the circles around the Birmingham proof and view marks and the "NOT ENGLISH MAKE."



London .455" Nitro Proof Marks on a BPC Colt New Service Chambered in .45 Colt

Crossed Sceptor View Mark of the Birmingham Proof House



Birmingham .38" Nitro Proof Marks on a BPC Military & Police



A Webley Mark VI Displaying Nitro Proof, Caliber, Case Length, Proof Pressure, and View Marks from the Birmingham Proof House



Figure 4. Some examples of markings from the 1954 Gun Proving Act.

Military Proof

In Britain the military ownership, proof, and inspection marks took a form composed of the following attributes together, separately, or in some combination thereof: the Broad Arrow of Government ownership, the cypher of the reigning monarch incorporating their Latin titles (e.g. VR for Victoria Regina, GR for George Rex, ER II for Elizabeth Regina, etc.), a "P" and/or crossed pennants (a.k.a. pennons or flags) indicating proof (Figure 7). These markings would in many cases eventually be somewhat simplified in wartime as evidence of the conflict's demand for rapid and increased production.

Military view marks varied by region, near London the weapons were inspected at the RSAF at Enfield, Middlesex (in north London), and near Birmingham, at the Sparkbrook RSAF or the Birmingham Small Arms Co. (BSA) located near Small Heath. These Birmingham facilities also proved and inspected arms

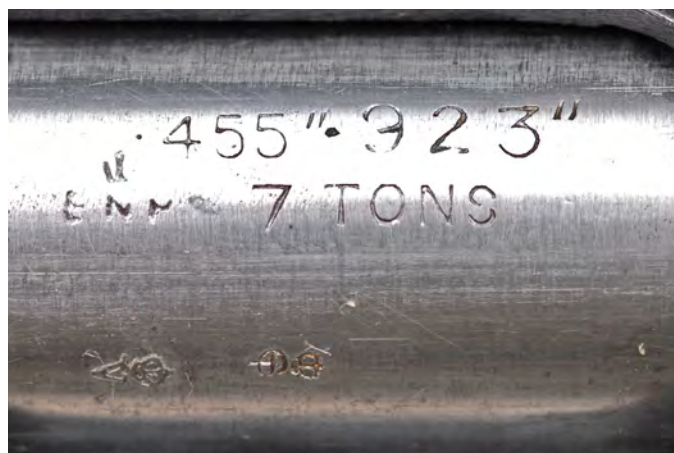


Figure 5. Birmingham 1954 proof marks above the original London 1904 markings on the chamber area of a .455" Colt Government Model's barrel.



Figure 6. The barrel of a British Purchasing Commission Colt New Service in .357 Magnum bearing London 1954 proof marks. Noteworthy are the lack of a view mark and indications of the nitro cellulose (NC) propellant proving charge and bullet weight.

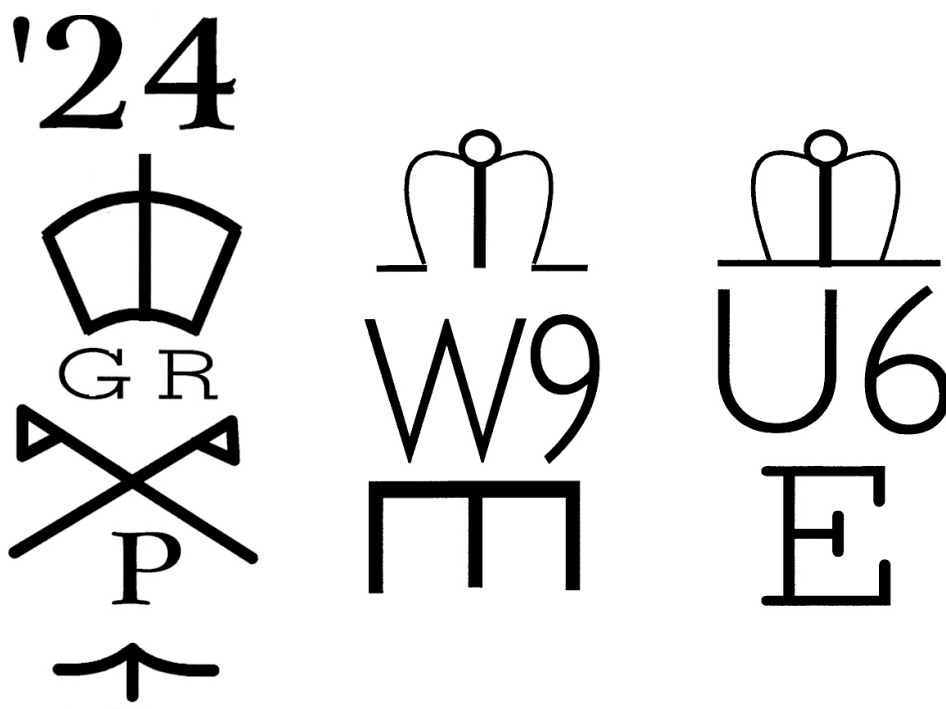


Figure 7. Left is an example of a typical British military proof mark. This one is a replica of that found on an Enfield .455\"/>

made by contractors, such as Webley & Scott and BSA, and many small arms imported for the military. Every inspection mark incorporates a letter denoting the particular RSAF (i.e. E or E for Enfield, B for Sparkbrook, or *B* for BSA) and the inspector's letter, number, or alphanumeric designation. In Figures 8 through 10 there are a few variations on the above theme.

Toward the end of the First World War, from roughly the end of January 1918 onwards, proof and inspection marks on British contract Colt Government Models in .455\"/>

Private Purchases, a Plethora of Peculiar Proofs, and Two World Wars

It had been an accepted custom in the British military, from at least the 18th Century, for serving officers to provide their personal weapons, including their handguns, with the only recommendation being that the latter be chambered in the current service caliber; but if not, the officer was to supply his own ammunition. However, this understanding had disappeared by 1917 when service revolvers began being issued to a vast new crop of young officers filling the ranks in a burgeoning army as well as to crews of the Machine Gun Corps. Prior to the Great War in the last half of the 19th Century, and even after the standardization the iconic .455\"/>

Figure 8. The military barrel proof on the topstrap of a .455" Webley Mk. VI (c. 1918). Since Webley & Scott Ltd. was a civilian arms manufacturer, a RSAF, in this case BSA, was used to provide Government inspection.



'18 - Year of barrel manufacture
Crown/GR - Cypher of George [V] Rex
X – Pennants, military proof
P – Proof
← – Broad Arrow
Crown/4M/ B - BSA inspector's mark

Figure 9. Another example of a military proof on the barrel of an Enfield No.2 .380 revolver.



Crown/GR - Cypher of George [VI] Rex
X – Pennants, military proof
P – Proof
← – Broad Arrow
'43 – Year of barrel manufacture

Figure 10. Enfield inspection and proof mark ensemble on a pre-1918 WWI era .455" Colt Government Model [W62020]:



X – Pennants, military proof
← – Broad Arrow
Crown
T9 – Inspector
E – Enfield

Figure 11. Late Great War .455" Colt Government Model (W100232) inspected in America, yet having all the primary components of the above Enfield inspection.



← – Broad Arrow
X-Pennants, military proof
Crown
G2 – Inspector G.W.R. Steadman
A - America

ernment's regulatory purview, and thus were generally not marked with the opposing Broad Arrows (→←) of the Sales Permit when the owners' service careers ended and the weapons were sold on. Examples of exceptions that display this mark were the early commercially manufactured service pattern revolvers chambered in .450 Boxer: Robert and John Adams' Mks. I-IV (c. 1867-1879) and those commercial M1868 Tranters and M1878 Colts purchased as an expedient during the 1879 Zulu War (Figure 12).

WORLD WAR I

By 1914, the choices of commercial offerings for private purchase hadn't necessarily diminished but the popularity of Webley & Scott and Colt revolvers and semi-auto pistols had risen extensively. Smith and Wesson also had a large presence, but more of an official one with their .455" Mks. I&II Hand Ejectors purchased in quantity, alongside the Colt New Service, by the British gov-



Figure 12. Zulu War era commercial Colt M1878 (Left) and William Tranter M1868 (Right) both acquired by the War Dept. in March 1879, then later sold out of service.

ernment throughout the war. Focusing primarily on Webley and Colt, there are markings distinctive to their products favored for private purchase.

The Webley & Scott “Boxed C”

Though not associated with weapons acquired from America, this mark, associated with Webley & Scott revolvers of the Great War, should be mentioned for completeness. It’s commonly found impressed low on the left side of the frame, below the hammer and on the top strap (Figure 13). The “Boxed C” appeared as an indicative mark on commercial Mk. V & VI revolvers in service caliber that had passed commercial proof and functioned correctly, but did not meet a specified standard for acceptance as a service weapon, and were sold for private purchase. However, in 1917, when the War had grown into an all-consuming behemoth, these commercial Webley revolvers were scooped up by the War Department for emergency issue. Thus, the military had made a [C]oncession (i.e. compromise) by accepting them. These revolvers will display evidence of military inspection, but not proof, and a later sales permit mark when sold out of service.

Colt’s London Agency and the Curious JJ stamping

The JJ mark is found on the frames, usually in the trigger guard area (Figure 14), of Colt automatics and revolvers sold by their London Agency, and later by the London Armoury Company, Limited (LAC) during the period from 1911 until 1930. While not 100 percent explained “JJ” are likely the initials of James Joseph Goodbody, the last manager of Colt’s London Agency. Mr. Goodbody died on July 1, 1913, and with him the original London Agency which had been in existence since the mid-19th Century. Subsequently, the LAC, operated by the Kerr family, was appointed as Colt’s exclusive distributor. It is believed that the LAC retained and continued the use of this stamp until 1930. Those British proof marked Colts, without the JJ mark during the above time period were likely imported by other retailers or brought into the country privately. Any JJ-marked handgun should, obviously, bear London proof and view marks. Marking a pistol or revolver with JJ would have been a clear endorsement of Colt’s willingness to stand behind their product, something other retailers/importers may or may not have been able to accomplish to their customers’ satisfaction.



Figure 13. Two views of a WWI Webley & Scott Mk. V bearing both the commercial caliber designation and Birmingham proof and view marks. It was then used as a service weapon, then subsequently sold out of service Sales Permit mark is also in evidence. Note both the [C] and the Government “B” (for the Sparkbrook RSAF) inspector’s mark.



Figure 14. A "JJ" marked London Armoury Co. retailed Colt M1908 Hammerless .380 (27462) manufactured in late 1915. Note also the London proof and view marks on the barrel.

The Interwar Sold out of Service Sales Permit Mark on Private Purchases^{8,9}

With the First World War concluded, and its costs to the country enormous, the Government sold off vast numbers of .455" service caliber weapons, primarily revolvers, on the commercial market to slimly recoup the monies outlaid during the conflict; however, the Colt Government Models were mostly retained and would reappear in Army or Royal Naval Air Service use in the subsequent global war 19 years on. These relinquished handguns would, of course be marked with the opposed $\rightarrow\leftarrow$ signifying them being sold out of service.

An interesting twist on the above applies to those pistols of service caliber that were privately purchased, many of these too are in evidence today bearing the opposed Broad Arrows of sale from the post war period. The Army Council Instruction No. 350 of 7 June, 1920 dictated: "MARKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT SALE MARK OF SERVICE PATTERN REVOLVERS PURCHASED BY LICENSED GUNSMITHS." Many service personnel returning home, like the Government, also needed funds, and with the



Figure 15. Here are two photos of an early [M1901] .455" Webley Fosbery that exhibit what is believed as evidence of the 1920 Army Council's "Instruction" to mark service caliber revolvers with the sold out of service marking.



Figure 16. This service .455" Mk. IV Webley displays the sale permit mark which has been subsequently cancelled out, thus voiding its sale out of service. Also, this revolver has never been commercially proven.

new restrictions on civilian handgun ownership implemented in 1920, found that disposing of their trusted sidearm might be a desirable, and a somewhat lucrative, option. Though this “Instruction” doesn’t seem to have been largely followed, there exist many commercial .455” revolvers from this period that have the sold out of service Sales Permit marking (Figure 15).



Figure 17. While unlikely, the * might be misconstrued as a small version of the Sale Permit mark. Alternatively, various upgrades or modifications to British military small arms are designated by the addition of a*, referred to as a “star” in the official nomenclature (e.g. SMLE Mk. III* or No. 2 Mk. I,** etc.). However, if the * is over a chamber or forcing cone, on the Nock’s form, or on the barrel, it simply means rust or wear.

The Cancellation and Rust Marks

Some say that you can never go back, but this was not the case with British service weapons. The cancellation mark, which appears as if two exclamation points share a common period, basically negated whatever marking that was beneath it. Additionally, the rust mark *, placed over a chamber or on a barrel, indicates that there is either corrosion or damage in that area of the chamber or bore. These marks loosely fall into a category of infrequently seen stampings that may cause some confusion and should be explained. Here are two examples (Figs. 16 & 17) that should demonstrate these points.

WORLD WAR II

The British Purchasing Commission (1939-42) and Lend-Lease

Originally referred to as the Anglo-French Purchasing Board until the Fall of France, the British Purchasing Commission (BPC) was formed in New York City in November 1939 as a means to

circumvent the United States’ neutrality by obtaining war materiel directly from manufactures on a cash-and-carry basis using \$4.5 billion available at the time, the United Kingdom’s gold reserves, and assets held in the United States for payment.¹¹ The BPC continued as the Ministry of Supply subsequent to the passage of the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941 which gave the U.S. government the ability to supply arms directly to Great Britain and her Commonwealths’ militaries. At the time of France’s surrender in June 1940 the BPC began purchasing vast quantities of handguns of every description from Colt and Smith & Wesson (Table 1) and ammunition from Winchester, undoubtedly then anticipating invasion or a protracted war.

Two facilities in the greater London area inspected shipments of these revolvers and pistols, along with other U.S.-made small arms like the Colt-manufactured Vickers M1915 machineguns (chambered in .30-06) and M1928A1 Thompson sub-machineguns. These facilities were the Enfield RSAF to the north and Woolwich Arsenal to the east on the southern bank of the Thames. The inspection mark applied by the former is readily identifiable and has been mentioned previously, however that of the latter, a “W” within a crown, or the Crown-W mark (Figure 18), has been cloaked in controversy for many years, many believing, with some rationale, belonging to Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, since many British arms were supplied to the Dutch forces following the war. Nevertheless, the Crown-W mark belongs to the inspectors at Woolwich Arsenal.^{12,13,14}

Although these markings are commonly encountered on BPC arms, apparently, many slipped through without either being inspected or subsequently marked. In evidence today, many BPC Colts with letters from Colt’s historical archives are devoid of any military inspection, either by Enfield or Woolwich, from this period.

Military proofing on BPC firearms wasn’t uniformly practiced during these trying times and when it infrequently was, it seems to have occurred only on those revolvers chambering military caliber ammunition, such as the .380” Mk. I (.380/200) or Mk. II cartridges, that could be easily adapted for service use (see below). Most of these weapons would ultimately only bear subsequent commercial proof marks, commonly from the 1925 or 1954 Rules, after their release by the Government in the two to three decades following the war. This, unfortunately, runs contrary to author Keith Cochran’s description of “on the spot” proving of “Battle of Britain” Colts.¹⁵ The “Crossed Scepters” and alphanumeric coding Cochran puts forth were actually applied later, postwar, at the Birmingham Proof House. This format of marking was initiated in 1921 by the then Proof Master Lt. Col. Charles Playfair and simply denotes the

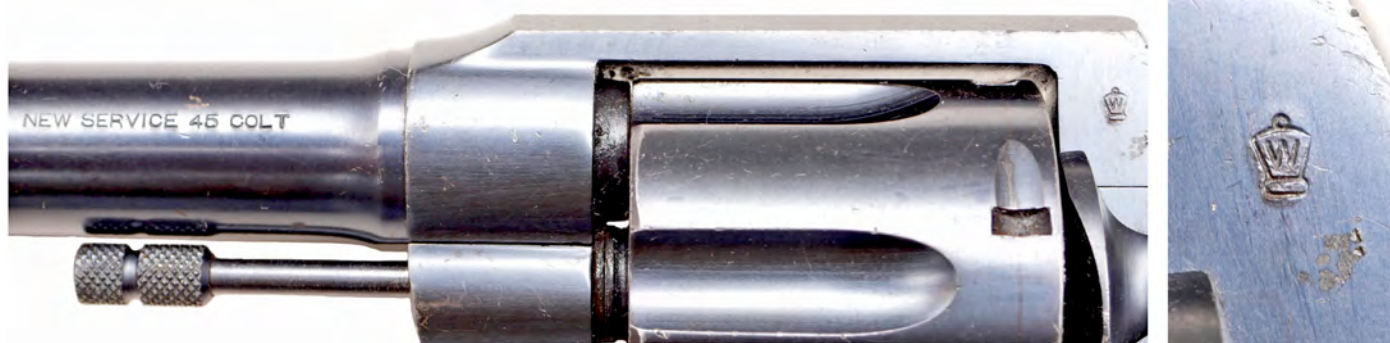


Figure 18. The Woolwich “Crown – W” as it appears on a BPC Colt New Service revolver.

BIRMINGHAM PROOF HOUSE PRIVATE VIEW MARKS

<u>From 1st Jan 1921 to Dec 1941</u>		<u>From 1st Jan 1950 to Dec 1974</u>		<u>From 1st Jan 1975 to Dec 2000</u>	
A	1921-22	AB	1950 (Started again 18 th July)	AB	1975
B	1922-23	BB	1951	BB	1976
C	1923-24	CB	1952	BC or CB	1977
D	1924-25	DB	1953	DB	1978
E	1925-26	EB	1954	EB	1979
F	1926-27	FB	1955	FB	1980
G	1927-28	GB	1956	GB	1981
H	1928-29	HB	1957	HB	1982
I	1929-30	JB	1958	JB	1983
K	1930-31	KB	1959	KB	1984
L	1931-32	LB	1960		
M	1932-33	MB	1961	CD	2000
N	1933-34	NB	1962	DD	2001
O	1934-35	OB	1963	ED	2002
P	1935-36	PB	1964	FD	2003
R	1936-37	QB	1965	GD	2004
S	1937-38	RB	1966	HD	2005
T	1938-39	SB	1967	JD	2006
U	1939-40	TB	1968	KD	2007
V	1940-41?	UB	1969		
Taken out of use during Military management during WWII		VB	1970	LC	1985
		WB	1971	MC	1986
		XB	1972	NC	1987
		YB	1973	OC	1988
		ZB	1974	PC	1989
				RC	1990
				SC	1991
				TC	1992
				UC	1993
				VC	1994
				XC	1995
				YC	1996
				ZC	1997
				AD	1998
				BD	1999

Note:- The number below the letters identifies the Inspector concerned

Figure 19: List of the Birmingham Proof House's "Private View Marks" obtained recently through correspondence with the Birmingham Proof House Museum.¹⁸

inspector and the year in which the arm was viewed and proved. A June 1981 *Guns Review* (a British publication) article by Udo E. Tröster: "Britain's Secret Proof Marks"¹⁶ explains the history of these marks from their inception until 1980 and how they have evolved from their initial form. The London Proof House also adopted a similar, but simplified, system in 1972. On examination of several weapons, the commercial proving of BPC handguns occurred after the war when these guns found their way into the surplus market. On page 134 of Charles W. Clawson's book: *Colt Government Models (Commercial Series)*,¹⁷ the author brings Birmingham's year-specific codes up to 1997, the year in which the UK handgun ban was implemented. Through a recent correspondence with the Birmingham Proof House, they've supplemented Clawson's data with date codes to 2008 (Figures 19, 20).

The models of pistols acquired by the BPC were so varied that a scheme was devised for identifying those that chambered non-standard British service ammunition. This procedure involved painting red bands either on the slides or barrels, then stenciling in black the US caliber on them (Table 2). On extant weapons, both the red and black have understandably aged exhibiting varying degrees of completeness during the last eight-and-a-half decades.

Revolvers that could chamber the British service cartridges, those in .38 S&W, .38 Colt New Police, or the New Service in .45 [Long] Colt²² (chambering the .455 Mk. II), more common-

ly found their way into active service with other Commonwealth nations' troops (Figures 21, 22). Colt Government Models in .45 ACP were widely used by the commandos and airborne forces, serving with the former throughout the war and with the latter until early 1945 only then being replaced by the 9mm Inglis-made FN Browning High Power.^{23,24}

Lend-Lease small arms supplied by the U.S. Government during the war exhibit much the same subsequent post-war commercial proving legacy as BPC weapons, with one minor exception. Those arms supplied during Lend-Lease were mainstream "U.S. Property" and were marked as such, and inspected in America by U.S. Army inspectors, just the same as any weapon issued to U.S. servicemen during the war. None of these weapons showed any indication of British military or commercial inspection or proof, that being during their service life in the hands of British or Commonwealth forces. The majority of arms supplied under Lend-Lease were standard weapons used by U.S. forces. An exception would be the S&W Victory Model revolver, the service version of the company's Military & Police (M&P) 1905 Hand-Ejector, supplied to the British and Commonwealth Forces. It was chambered for the .38 S&W round (not S&W.38 Special, as supplied to U.S. troops), this being the same specification as the British Mk. I&II .380" service cartridge used in the No. 2 Enfield revolver. The reason S&W was producing the Victory Model in this non-standard chambering for the U.S. Government was the result of a failed endeavor in

Manufacturer	Model	US Chambering(s)
Colt	New Service/ Shooting Master (target Revolver)	.38 S&W Special .357 Magnum .45 [Long] Colt
	New Service Target	
	Official Police/ Army Special	.38 S&W Special
	Police Positive	.38 S&W/ .38 Colt New Police
	Officers' Model (target revolver)	.38 S&W Special
	Army (single-action)	.38 [Long] Colt .38 S&W Special .357 Magnum .45 [Long] Colt
	Super .38 (Government Model)	.38 ACP .38 Super
	Government Model (commercial 1911/ 1911A1)	.45 ACP
Smith & Wesson	Military & Police	.38 S&W .38 S&W Special
	S&W DA .45 (commercial 1917)	.45 ACP .45 Auto-Rim

Table 1. The dominant revolver and automatic pistol models acquired through the British Purchasing Commission during 1939-41¹⁹



Figure 20. As an example of these “Secret” or “Private” View marks, here on an ex-Lend-Lease Remington Rand M1911A1, just in front of the grip panel, surrounding the crossed scepters are: DB = 1953 year of proof and 5 = Inspector’s designation.

producing a semi-automatic “Light Rifle” in 9mm Parabellum for the British in 1940. Though between 20,000 and 22,000¹⁴ were initially ordered, neither of the two marks of this rifle were accepted. Only 1,010 were delivered before the contract was cancelled and after a considerable monetary outlay by the British for their design and manufacture, thus the Lend-Lease program offered S&W an avenue for paying off its debt.

From its expenditures during that great conflict, Britain was in dire financial straits. The cost of the war would cause food rationing until 1954. Britain needed money, so huge stocks of arms, rifles, pistols, revolvers, and machineguns were sold, often by the pound (i.e. weight), onto the, largely, international surplus market to recoup some of the financial outlay from the war. These arms, though many bear military proof marks, needed to be once again

commercially re-proven before they were eventually sold on the open market and likely exported. With these vast post war sales we encounter the multitude of commercial proof marks on prior BPC and lend-Lease weapons, but these proof marks will all be of post war origin.

Concluding remarks

Though it might seem like a travesty to deface an elegant piece of history with a multitude of stampings, but every hammer blow is another chapter in a story telling: *What, When, and Where*. Small arms inducted into the British military often display an embossed scroll of proving, inspection, sales, reproving, re-inspection, etc. With this storyboard, if properly deciphered, a collector might be able to follow an arm through its place in history.

Pistol Chambering (US)	Type of Marking; Paint and/or Stamp	Acceptable Ammunition
.38 Colt New Police or .38 S&W with cylinders longer than 1.5".	.38/.380 stamped on barrel; some have only 38 S&W on barrel.	US chamberings in addition to the .380" Enfield Mk. I, II & IIx service rounds.
.38 S&W Special and .357 Magnum.	Red band painted around barrel with a black stenciled "38 SPECL" on band.	Only US .38 S&W Special and .357 Magnum cartridges.
.38 Colt New Police or .38 S&W with cylinder lengths less than 1.5".	Left unmarked.	US chamberings in addition to the .380" Enfield Mk. I, II & IIx service rounds.
.45 [Long] Colt.	.45/.455 stamped on barrel. Typically, Colt New Service revolvers.	US chambering in addition to British .455" Mk. II, VI & VIx cartridges.
.45 [Long] Colt.	Red band painted around barrel with a black stenciled "45 SPECL" on band. Typically Colt Single Action revolvers.	Only US chamberings.
.45 ACP/Auto-Rim revolvers.	Red band painted around barrel with a black stenciled "45 Rimless" on band.	US chamberings. 3 round half-moon clips were used with .45 ACP.
.38 ACP, (.38 Super also?) ²¹	Red field painted on top of slide with a black stenciled "38 Rimless" within.	US chambering.
.45 ACP	Red field painted on top of slide with a black stenciled "45 Rimless" within.	.45 ACP only.

Table 2. Marking scheme for commercial pistols bought by the British Purchasing Commission, 1940-41²⁰.



Figure 21. This Enfield inspected BPC .38 Colt Police Positive (in nickel) bears evidence of military acceptance by the simplified .380 and crossed pennants proof mark. (Below) Its 6" barrel has also been counter-bored at the muzzle to reduce the bore length to the standard 5" of service revolvers.²⁵ And curiously, its lanyard ring has been replaced, or fitted, with one from a Webley or Enfield revolver.



Figure 22. Unlike the Colt Single-Action Army, due to differences in cylinder dimensions, the New Service in .45 Colt could chamber the British .455" Mk. II service cartridge. This BPC revolver displays crudely, but yet officially, the Broad Arrow of military acceptance.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Arnold, Richard. *The Shooter's Handbook*, Chapter 10, Proving of Arms,; Nicholas Kaye, London. 1965. Pp. 215-232.
- ² Maze, Robert J. *Howdah to High Power; A Century of British Breechloading Service Pistols (1867-1967)*, Excalibur Publications, Tucson, AZ. 2002, P. 82.
- ³ Rules, Regulations and Scales, Made in the Month of August, 1925, by the Gunmakers' Company and the Guardians of the Birmingham Proof House, Under the Authority of the Gun Barrel Proof Act, 1868. (Copy)
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- ¹¹ Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour*; Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston. 1949, P. 555.
- ¹² [Official] *List of Stamps Used in Various Divisions; Revised 1/10/39 (R.2122); List of Stamps Used on Gun Stores*.
- ¹³ Correspondence with Mr. Steve Hubbard on information acquired from the Imperial War Museum, London, on the "Crown-W" Woolwich inspection mark.
- ¹⁴ Hubbard, Steve. "Update: A Mysterious Smith & Wesson". *Classic Arms and Militaria*, Vol. XV Issue 6, Pp. 50-51; Blaze Publishing, UK. 2008.
- ¹⁵ Cochran, Keith. *Colt Peacemaker British Model; On-Spot Proofing*, pgs. 46-47; Cochran Publishing Co., Rapid City, South Dakota, USA. 1989.
- ¹⁶ Tröster, Udo. "Britain's Secret Proof Marks". *Guns Review*, Vol. 21, No. 6, P. 455. 1981.
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- ¹⁸ Correspondence with Mr. Dave Evans at The Birmingham Proof House Museum; museum@gunproof.com.
- ¹⁹ Adapted from: Army Council Instructions; 4 June, 1941. No. 925. USA. *Types & Details of Pistols, Various, Received From U.S.A.*
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- ²¹ Colt Government Models in .38 Super were sent to Britain during this period. No information has been found on whether the .38 Super ammunition was made available by British Military supply channels specifically for these pistols. However, the .38 ACP cartridge does have sufficient power to function in .38 Super automatics.
- ²² The Colt Single-Action Army (SAA) revolver was unable to chamber the .455" Mk. II, VI, or VIz service cartridges used by the British armed forces at the beginning of the 2nd World War. The rim diameters of these cartridges were wider than that of the .45 [Long] Colt, and the SAA's cylinder too narrow. Those chambers of earlier SAA's that accepted British ammunition (.450", .455" & .476") were actually angled centrally from breech to throat to separate the cartridge rims
- ²³ Maze, Robert. "His Majesty's Government Models", *American Rifleman* Vol. 155, No. 7, P. 48. 2007
- ²⁴ Law, Clive M. *Inglis Diamond, The Canadian High Power Pistol*. British Adoption – for Airborne Forces Only, P. 79; Collector Grade Publications, Inc.; Cobourg, Ontario, Canada. 2001
- ²⁵ Correspondence with Mr. Richard Jones, Curator Emeritus, Royal Armouries, UK. The jacketed .380" Mk. II bullet apparently had a propensity to stick in barrels of greater than 5" in length, thus counter-boring was a remedy for this problem. Barrels counter-bored to 5" can be commonly found on any model of BPC revolver with the ability to chamber the British .380" service cartridge

