

THE WEBLEY AUTOMATIC SERVICE PISTOL



Revolvers weren't the only handguns produced by this veteran gunmaker.

BY PHILIP SCHREIER

The name “Webley & Scott” is an iconic imprimatur of the English arms trade in the 20th century. Best recognized for the six marks of its famous .455 service revolvers, its automatic pistols deserve a closer look, not only for their historic contribution to arms development but for their mechanical features and use by Empire troops around the globe.

The industrial revolution of the 19th century changed the world of material

goods just as drastically as the American Revolution, and those that followed changed the political landscape of the world. Rapid advances in manufacturing technology created a domino effect that accelerated everything in its path. Interchangeable parts and assembly-line production made everything less expensive and economically feasible for most of the population. As firearms technology developed, guns with rapid rates of fire became desired by most of the world's major military powers. The military conflicts of the post-American Civil War era saw huge numbers of troops

in the field armed with breechloading rifles and pistols. Yet one major obstacle remained: the use of black powder as a propellant in arms.

Black powder had been used as a propellant in firearms since their initial development in the 14th century. The major efforts in technology development following its introduction had mostly been in the field of finding more practical methods of ignition. From matchlock to percussion, the propellant always stayed the same and had the same consistent failing, which was fouling. Fouling is the slick, grimy residue left in a barrel that,

after a number of repeated shots, begins to constrict and decrease the diameter of the bore. Efforts to reduce fouling in a rifled barrel became the main source of interest to those arms designers who wished to produce arms that could fire rapidly without the actions of their mechanisms becoming fouled and creating a stoppage of fire.

Once black powder as a propellant was replaced by smokeless powder in the 1880s, an explosion in arms development and design followed quickly. By 1886 the French were using the new propellant in their Lebel rifle, a tubular magazine-fed

and Henry merged the venerable Webley and Philip Webley, his sons Thomas passed away. In 1897, following the 1888 father-in-law, William Davis, when he 1834, assuming the business from his Philip Webley founded his firm in of Webley & Scott.

(1864-1924) of the Birmingham firm is English designer William Whiting hold names of the above-listed icons Nobile but absent from the house-

Manlicher and John M. Browning. mann, Hugo Borhardt, Ferdinand von tables of Georg Luger, Theodore Berg-models that flowed from the drafting broomhandle of 1896 and the various modes. Most notable was the Mauser in full-automatic and semiautomatic introduction of handguns that worked design and development that soon saw the This opened a new era in firearms

regard to powder residue. could now fire indefinitely and without world's first practical machine gun. Guns Maxim, who by 1885 had developed the it." That was a clarion call to Hiram S. each others' throats with greater facil- that will enable these Europeans to cut to make a pile of money, invent something your chemistry and electricity! If you want I had known in the States. He said, "Hang Vienna, where I met an American whom of Vienna and related, "In 1882 I was in opportunities met a friend on the streets eling in Europe trying to gauge business In 1882 an American from Maine trav- loved suit. rifle, and soon all major militaries fol-

Today there is a flurry of misunderstanding in the popular media about firearms and how they operate. Most common among misused terms are "automatic" and "semiautomatic," "machine gun" and "submachine gun." With regard to handguns, the following terms are appropriate: a Automatic Pistol—Denotes a hand-held pistol (with rare exception, a revolver) that is capable of firing one round after charging and self-extracting the spent casing, cocking the firing mechanism and automatically charging the breech with a fresh round ready to be fired again once pressure from the shooter is applied to the trigger. This is technically semiautomatic in operation, but as there are a few that are truly automatic in that they will fire repeatedly as long as direct pressure is applied to the trigger (the Schneidfeuer M96 Mauser and the Beretta 93R), the term "automatic pistol" has come into common use. Commonly used during the contemporary manufacture of these guns is the term "self-loading," which can be seen in many period catalog descriptions.

Terms In Use

& Sons with the firm W. & C. Scott and began trading as the Webley & Scott Revolver & Arms Co. The firm prospered in Birmingham during the Boer War years (1899-1902) making the classic Mk IV

A close-up view of the "N," denoting Royal Navy contracts of the Model 1912.



The Webley Automatic Service Pistol Mark I as adopted by the Royal Navy in 1912. This is a late-1914 production gun with hard rubber grips.

