FIREARM INFORMATION SHEET

COLLECTION NUMBER: 9164

TYPE: Extremely early Flintlock English Cavalry Carbine

IGNITION SYSTEM: Earliest form of English Flintlock with dog and inside frizzen spring.
LOCK MARKINGS/DECORATIONS: See under MAKER

DATE OF MANUFACTURE: Circa 1620-30
PLACE OF MANUFACTURE: Probably England but possibly imported from the Netherlands or from France.
MAKER: Lock marked RL/R or RL/B

LENGTH OVERALL: 42 inches
BARREL LENGTH: 25 5/8 inches
CALIBER: 1 inch

WOOD TYPE: Walnut
MOUNTINGS: Iron. Decorative scrolled triggerguard. Spiral fluted ramrod thimbles, with original ramrod .

BARREL MARKINGS/DECORATION: Flare at muzzle and at breech with sighting notches in both. Sixteen-sided to round with three grooves at junction. Retains original ramrod.
STOCK MARKINGS/DECORATION: Paddle-shaped butt retained from wheel lock guns of the same period (most often seen on French or Alsatian arms). See under "MAKER".
REPAIRS/RESTORATION: Barrel with scattered light pitting (originally russetted - browned). The lock has deep pitting consistent with long term storage in damp climate (England).

HISTORICAL/ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE: Rare example of earliest form of flintlock.
PROVENANCE: Ex-Collection of William Keith Neal. Retains the original medal tag with collection number G589.
Via John Gangel
PUBLICATIONS: For information and related examples see:

"The World's Oldest Known Flintlock Pistol?", by William Keith Neal, published in Arms and Armor Volume I, Edited by Robert Held, 1973, page 114- General information on early flintlocks.

"The Significance of "Inventor" in Felix Werder's Signature", by Arne Hoff, published in Arms and Armor Volume I, Edited by Robert Held, 1973, page 164 - For similar flintlock carbine but of German origin. Lock similar but does not contain dog.

COST:
ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE AND DATE:

Arms and Armor Annual

Volume One

Edited by
Robert Held

Digest Books, Inc., Northfield, Illinois

The World's Oldest Known Flintlock Pistol?

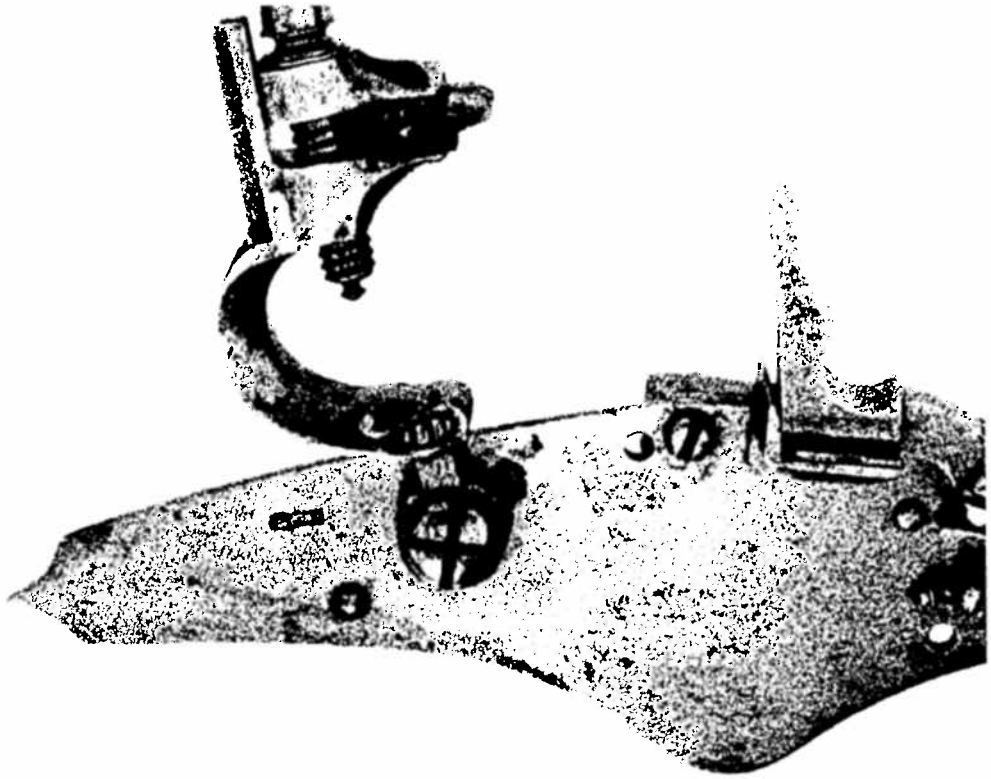
by W. KEITH NEAL

William Keith Neal, one of the world's foremost collectors of arms and armor and doubtless the foremost of firearms, is the author of Spanish Guns & Pistols *(London, G. Bell & Sons, 1955), and co-author, with D.H.L. Back, of* Forsyth & Company: Patent Gunmakers *(G. Bell & Sons, London, 1969) and* The Mantons: Gunmakers *(London, Herbert Jenkins, 1966). He resides in Wiltshire, England, but travels far and often for his unending researches into arms history.*

The flintlock pistol which is the subject of the present notes is a new and hitherto unpublished discovery which may, I think, be fairly described as sensational: for if it is not the actual pilot model for the world's very first military fintlock handgun, as it may well be, it is in any event an example of an archetypal flintlock weapon unknown in arms studies until now.

To begin with, it is a true fintlock, as defined by Torsten Lenk, in his classic work *Flintlaset,* (Stockholm, 1939): a mechanism in which a flake of flint, held in the jaws of a forward-snapping cock, is made to strike against, and excite sparks out, of the flat, vertical limb of an L-shaped piece of steel whose horizontal foot, pivoted at the toe, forms the flash-pan cover, while internally a vertical-working scear engages notches in a vertically-working tumbler and holds the cock in the half- and full-cock positions. It is, in short, essentially—though prototypal and unrefined—the flintlock all collectors know, usually in its later forms; it remained in use in Europe and America into the 1830's (by the military into the 1840's), and elsewhere into the present century. Its antecedents in the sixteenth century were the Portuguese and Spanish miquelet locks, the Dutch-Scottish snaphaunce, the Italian snaphaunce and perhaps the Swedish snap lock.

It is this mechanism that constitutes the most important part of the pistol under consideration. Its approximate chronological and typal parallels are to be found on two long arms made by the Le Bourgeoys family of Lisieux between 1600 and 1620 for



the French court (for full illustrations and descriptions, see *Flintlaset,* sup.cit.). Both of these are considered to be the earliest known true flintlocks, made by the inventors; both were once part of the *Cabinet d'Armes* of Louis XIII (born 1601, reigned 1610-43), of which a very complete inventory has come down to us. Both are luxury weapons, their stocks superbly carved and inlaid, the barrels richly ornamented—but the locks comparatively plain, though well-made and elegant. The earlier of these pieces, now in the Hermitage in Leningrad, may have been made for Henry IV (father of Louis XIII, born 1553, assured of the crown 1594, assassinated 1610). The other, until 1972 in the collection of the late William Goodwin Renwick of Tucson, Arizona, and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, may be dated about 1615; it bears the cypher "L" of Louis XIII surmounted by a crown amidst sprays of leaves inlaid in silver on the stock, and is exactly described in the *Cabinet d'Armes* inventory as Item No. 134. (See sales catalog, Sotheby & Co., 35 New Bond Street, London W.1, *Sale of the W.G. Renwick Collection, Part II,* November 21, 1972, with additional notes in photocopy on the Le Bourgeoys gun by John F. Hayward.)*

A comparison of the lock of the present pistol with that of the ex-Renwick Le Bourgeoys gun shows common characteristics as well as significant differences. Internally, both arrangements of mainsprings, tumblers and scears are very similar, but the pistol lock plate is more full-bellied along its bottom edge, much as in contemporary French wheellocks, and the hole for the foremost of the transverse screws that hold the lock to the stock is placed almost below the screw that holds the mainspring in place (in the Le Bourgeoys gun the corresponding hole is in the normal position). The pistol cock is of a much more archaic form than its counterpart on the gun: its C-curve makes it a close relative still of wheellock dog-heads, its base is small and octagonal (no larger than the head of the retaining screw), and the main C-shaped mid section, terminating in the jaws, is supported by a square pillar between octagonal base and C-curve. Then, the fall of the Le Bourgeoys gun cocks is arrested by a buffer, that of the pistol cock by a stepped shoulder that strikes the top edge of the lock plate. An extraordinary feature of the pistol lock is the tail of the pan-cover: it has four projections, the first acted upon by the feather spring to present the frizzen in firing position with the pan closed, the second holding the pan-cover in the normal open position, and the third allowing it to rotate still farther forward, much like the rotation of the frizzen arm of a snaphaunce. The shape of the pistol frizzen follows very closely that of the frizzens on the Le Bourgeoys guns: the peascod front, the rolled top and the short, squat shape are sufficiently alike to speak persuasively of a connection between this pistol and the Le Bourgeoys pieces. If, however, the Le Bourgeoys and the pistol locks are examined side by side with both cocks set

*Since this was written, Mr. Hayward's notes have been published in expanded form in *Livrustkammaren,* Vol. 13, 1973 (Stockholm)—Ed.

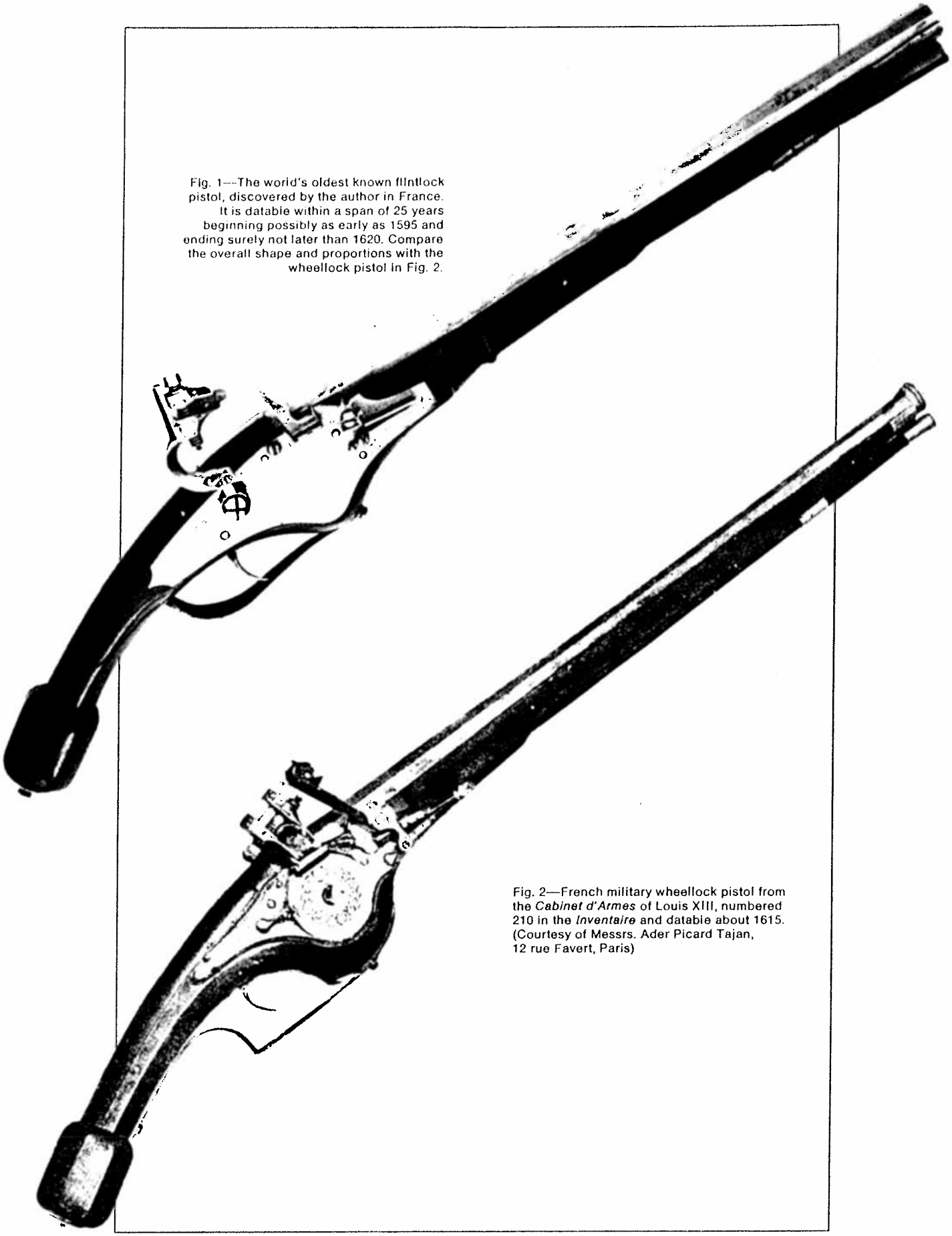
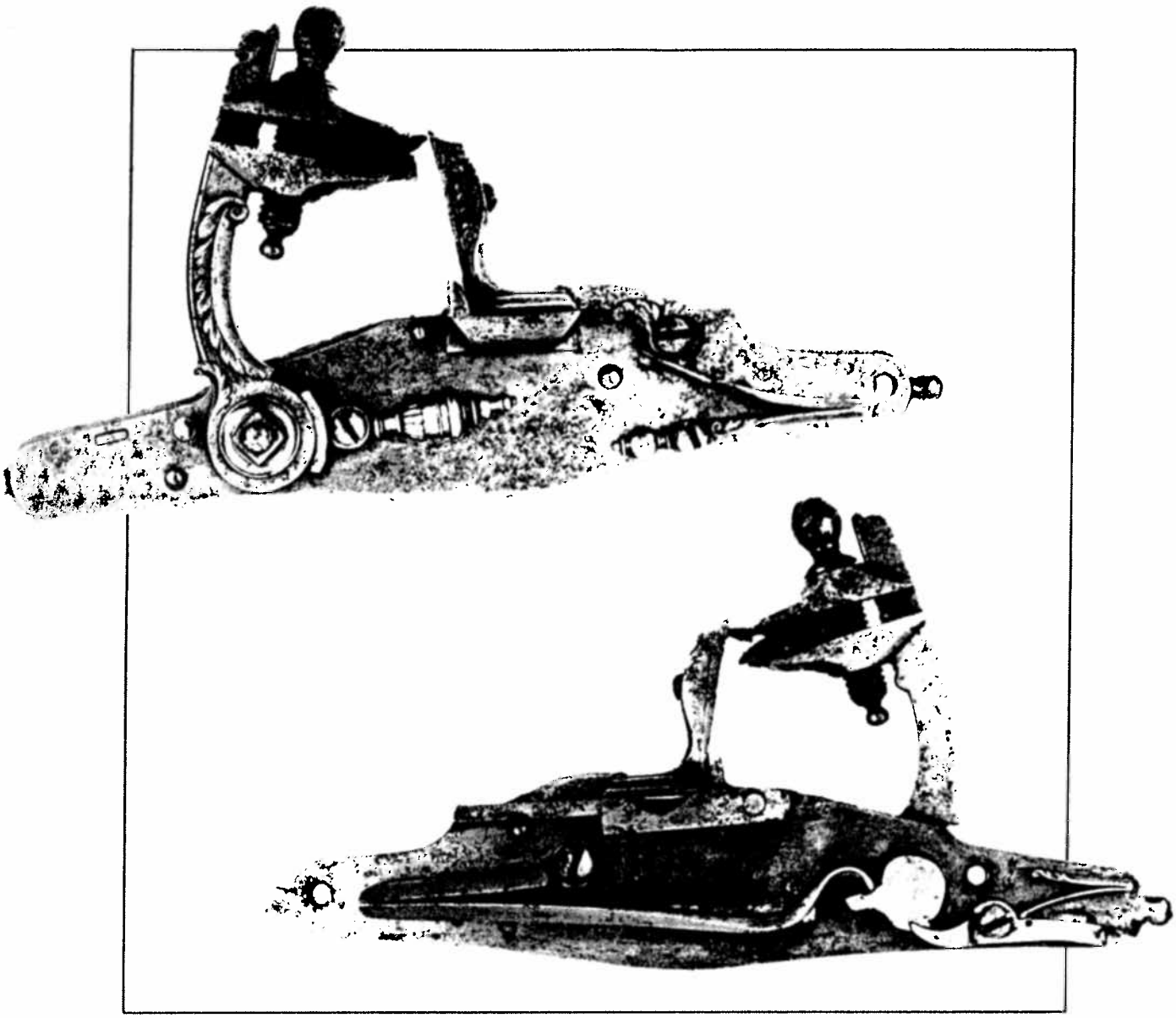


Fig. 1—The world's oldest known flintlock pistol, discovered by the author in France. It is datable within a span of 25 years beginning possibly as early as 1595 and ending surely not later than 1620. Compare the overall shape and proportions with the wheellock pistol in Fig. 2.

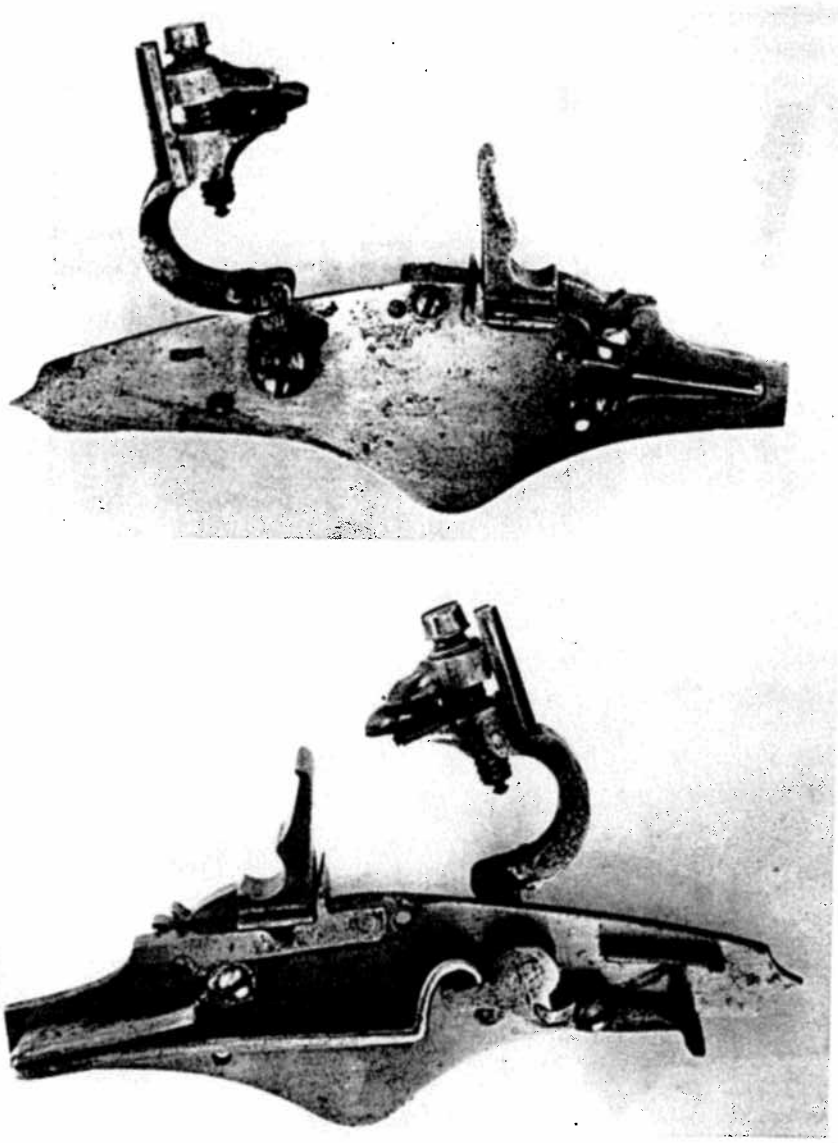
Fig. 2—French military wheellock pistol from the *Cabinet d'Armes* of Louis XIII, numbered 210 in the *Inventaire* and datable about 1615. (Courtesy of Messrs. Ader Picard Tajan, 12 rue Favert, Paris)



Figs. 3 & 4—Outside and inside views of one of the two Le Bourgeoys locks, considered the oldest extant examples of the true flintlock. Lock shown comes from the ex-Renwick Collection fowling piece, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; it is datable about 1615. It is clearly two or three evolutionary steps beyond the lock of the pistol under discussion.

at half-cock, it becomes apparent that the pistol cock stands much higher against the face of the frizzen than does the gun cock—a position reminiscent of the sweeping or scraping action of the Scandinavian snaplocks. These small differences—the "paunchy" lock plate, the position of the transverse screw hole, the C-curved cock and its high position, the three-way frizzen rotation—would tend to suggest that the pistol lock represents an evolutionary step preceding the more sophisticated, far less uncertain and experimental Le Bourgeoys devices.

As to the general shape, style and outline of the pistol, comparison with the wheellock pistol numbered 210 in the Louis XIII *Cabinet d'Armes* inventory is profitable. Both butts, typically French for the period 1600-1620, are octagonal, faintly ovoid cylinders with chamfered edges top and bottom, that of the flintlock terminating in a small iron pommel surrounded by four iron fleur-de-lis inlays. The shape of the flintlock pistol lockplate clearly shows its close family ties to the wheellock (whereas the Le Bourgeoys locks are already more elongated, more shaped to their own new needs rather than to lingering tradition). The rear transverse lock retaining screws of both pistols pass through the breech plug flats, retaining thus also the barrels in the stocks. The forward screw is placed, as already noted, to pass below the long mainspring, whose pin, in fact, takes up the usual position of the forward screw. Careful study of the inletting of the lock recess leaves no doubt whatever that the flintlock is the original, first and only lock made for



Figs. 5, 6 & 7—Outside, inside and top views of the pistol lock. Note its affinity to wheellock shape and proportions, the odd transverse screw holes, the obvious archaicness when compared to the Le Bourgeoys lock.

this weapon. Another point of interest is our pistol's trigger: it is hung vertically as in a wheellock, but has a rearward horizontal extension which, when the trigger is pulled, moves upward in order to lift the tail of the vertically-acting scear. This is another indication that the pistol represents a transitional step still harking back to wheellock conventions.

It was the present writer's good fortune to have found this challenging piece in France not long ago. At the time of its "discovery" it had the look of an arm that has long lain untouched. Lock, stock and barrel were all coated with that characteristic yellow film one often finds on old weapons which have been stored away for many years in arsenals or in very old collections—it seems to consist of animal oil with perhaps some shellac to harden it. At all events, it was a wonderful preservative, as no trace of wood worm had infested the stock, nor had any rust formed on the barrel or the lock. The piece's overall length is 23 in. (58.4 cm.). The octagonal barrel is 14½ in. (36.8 cm.) long, and of .500 calibre (12.7 mm.). The wood is pear, much favoured by the French for quality service arms. The lockplate itself measures 6¼ in. (16.5 cm.).

Now, for the proper framing of the pistol's origins in terms of time and purpose, one must bear in mind one not-widely-known but extremely important historical fact, viz., that in 16th-century France it was illegal to possess or use pistols fired without conventional wheellocks, there being cases on record even from the end of the century of the death penalty threatened upon offenders. It is hence unlikely

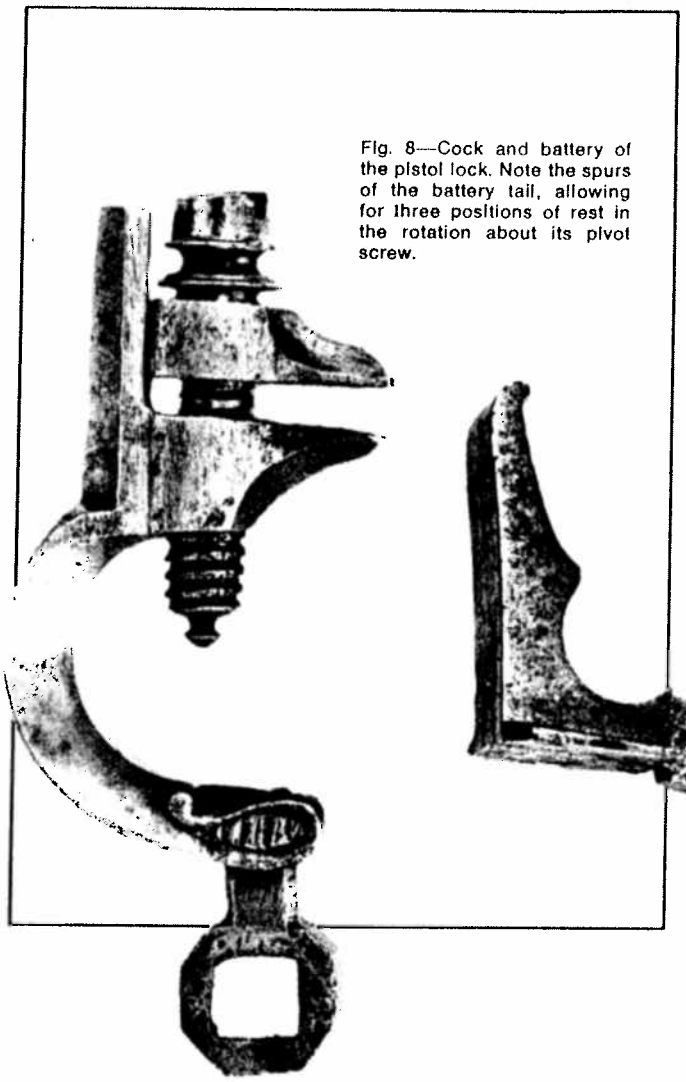
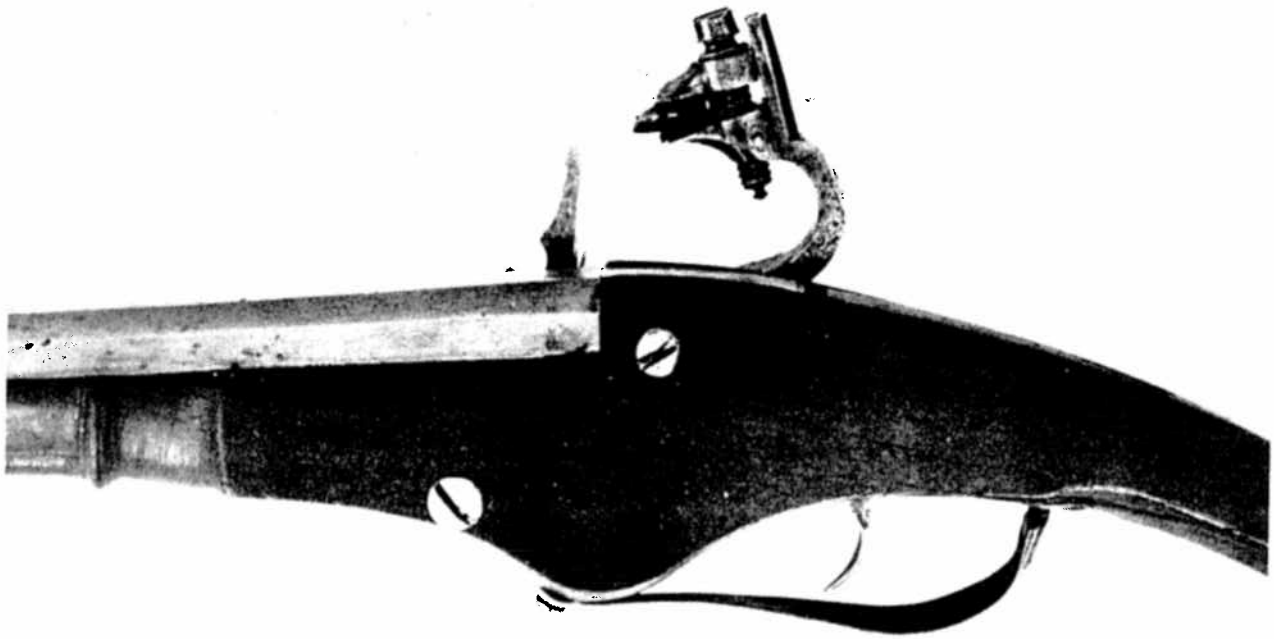


Fig. 8—Cock and battery of the pistol lock. Note the spurs of the battery tail, allowing for three positions of rest in the rotation about its pivot screw.

Fig. 9—Detail of the butt of the pistol.

Fig. 10—Unusual positioning of the transverse screws.



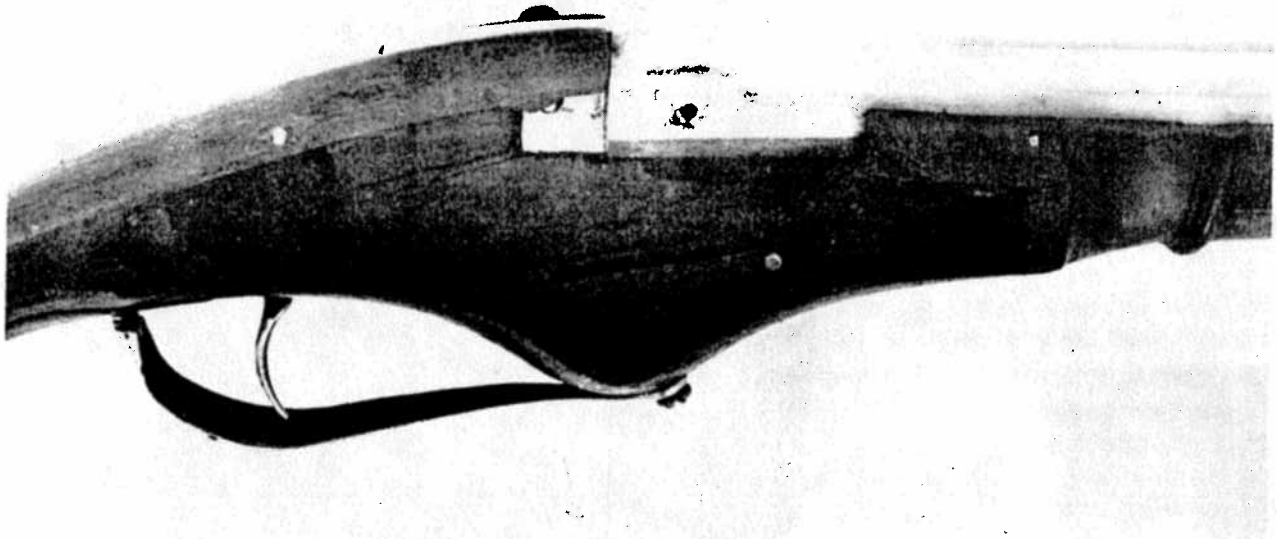


Fig. 11—Interior of the lock recess. The flintlock is the first and only lock ever to have been fitted to the pistol—it is not a substitution for an earlier wheellock or other snapping mechanism.

that any gunmaker would construct a flintlock pistol at the very beginning of the 17th century unless either for, or by the order of, a personage secure of his immunity from such dangers: and this personage, in the case at hand, could very plausibly have been the king, for both Henry IV and Louis XIII—especially the latter—were impassioned devotees of firearms and their development. Louis received his first gun at the age of four in 1605, and six years later had seven; throughout his life he collected firearms from all over the world, and it was largely due to him that France became the world's fountainhead of the gunmaking arts and sciences. He personally supervised the gunmakers working on pieces made to his order; he did not limit his interest to princely sporting weapons but was equally fascinated—as the inventory shows—by plain service and experimental arms.

Is it not quite tenable, then, that this remarkable pistol was designed as a prototype of a radically new service pattern, based on the then barely-invented true flintlock, made either by Louis's order or for presentation to him by an enterprising gunsmith?—and that by a trick of fate it has remained hidden away these past 350-odd years? The author of these lines thinks it not only tenable but likely. In any event, the piece surely stands in relation to military hand guns as the Le Bourgeoys long arms stand in relation to sporting weapons: in each case, the very first specimen known with true flintlock ignition. Until contradictory evidence comes to light, the pistol under discussion must stand as the oldest surviving true flintlock pistol.

Fig. 12—A flintlock cock from the pattern book of Philippe Daubigny, 1635. By the 1630's, flintlock cocks had developed into their essentially permanent, basically S-shaped form, already far removed from the Le Bourgeoys cock and even farther from that of the pistol under discussion.

FIREARM INFORMATION SHEET

COLLECTION NUMBER: 9164

TYPE: Flintlock Carbine

IGNITION SYSTEM: Earliest form of English flintlock c dog + inside frizzen spring

DATE OF MANUFACTURE: C. 1620-30

PLACE OF MANUFACTURE: Probably England but possibly imported from Netherlands or France.

MAKER: Lock marked RL/R or RL/B

LENGTH OVERALL: 42"

BARREL LENGTH: 25 5/8

CALIBER: 1"

WOOD TYPE: Walnut

MOUNTINGS: ~~Iron.~~ decorative scrolled ~~decorative scrolled~~ triggerguard. Spiral fluted ~~Spiral fluted~~ ramrod + thimbles. with original ramrod

BARREL MARKINGS/DECORATION: Flare at muzzle and at breech with sighting notches in both. ~~Octagon~~ 16 sided to round c 3 ~~rings~~ grooves at juncture. Original ramrod.

STOCK MARKINGS/DECORATION: — Paddle shaped butt ~~released~~ retained from wheelock guns of same period (most often seen on French or ~~alsation~~ alsacian arms)

REPAIRS/RESTORATION: — BBL with light pitting scattered (originally ~~"russeted - browned~~ "russetted" - browned) Lock with deep pitting consistent c longterm storage in damp climate (England)

HISTORICAL/ARTISTIC SIGNIFICANCE:

PROVENANCE: Wm Keith Neal Collection — retains metal tag c collection # G589
WILLIAM KEITH NEAL

PUBLICATIONS: — Arms + Armor Annual, Vol 1 by Robt Held ROBT. HELD p. 164 similar but German Carbine c similar but German carbine without English dog-lock
— Arms + Armor Annual by Rob Held p114 - general info on early ~~Kittlock~~ flintlock by W. Keith Neal

COST:

ESTIMATED MARKET VALUE AND DATE: