

# FIREARMS

By

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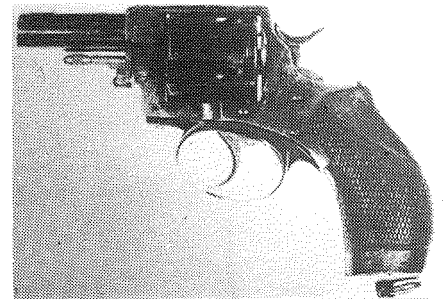
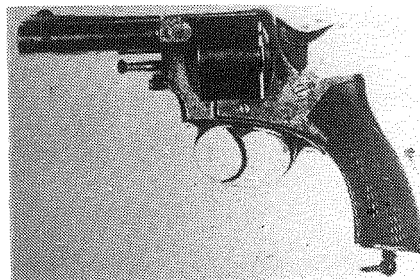
PART 1

● **THERE** are few more evocative subjects than that of the gun. To some the image immediately conjures to mind the winning of the West, to others the issue of law and order at home, to some again a flood of childhood memories, the first shot with a twelve bore shotgun at an empty milk can or a cactus. This sort of memory can confer the gun for ever with nostalgia and romance which growing older simply intensifies. To others again it stands as a reminder of the gulf between the classes or at least between the moneyed and the not so well off. And there are those who see the gun as a mark of social superiority just as others see the horse as a great divider and that is one of the major reasons that the editors of this magazine "Il-Pulizija" decided to enlighten the readers about guns.

It is a normal way of introducing a new subject on a Magazine by illustrating the history at the very first instant, but due to the uncertainty of the origin of the gun and gunpowder, we would not like to attempt writing for instance the discovery of gun powder which lies shrouded in the mists of time.

Therefore we are going to give some highlights on various firearms which are familiar to us on these islands. Reasonable enough we are to start by giving a brief history on the Webley revolvers. We are sure that this firearm is very well known among the members of the Malta Police Force. Obviously these firearms are manufactured by Webley & Scott Ltd. Handsworth Birmingham, England. (Formerly P. Webley & Son (1860-1897); Webley & Scott Revolver & Arms Co., Ltd., (1897-1906); Webley & Scott Limited (1906- ).

Philip Webley bought the business of William Davis, a Birmingham gun implement maker, in 1845, and started manufacturing percussion cap and ball revolvers in 1853. When Colt shut down his London factory in 1857, the field was opened to British gunmakers. He removed the main competition in the field of mass-produced handguns, and Webley was not slow to take advantage of the opening. For some years, Webley had been striving to produce interchangeable components, and



*A Webley .455 R/C Model 1883 (top picture), and a Webley .442 No. 2 R/C (picture above).*

to get away from the individual hand-produced weapons which were still the standard production of the British gun trade. The American Civil War gave a needed fillup to the business, and small government contracts followed it.

## DIFFERENT DESIGNS AND VARIANTS.

The firm always concentrated on revolvers, with only one brief essay into automatic pistols, and were never afraid to seek new ideas or to employ talented designers. Infact, the history of the firm is enormously complicated by the number of different designs and variants that were brought out. Having settled upon

a satisfactory design the tendency was to stay with it, introducing modifications as experience dictated, but striving to retain as much of the original as possible. Thus, in one series of a revolver, say, the R.I.C. models, there was a steady improvement on the original from 1870 through to 1883, with alterations to the action or the calibre on different occasions.

In general, it must be said that the Webley revolvers were, and still are, among the best that have been made for the mass market. They all combined good workmanship with extreme reliability and robustness. They were carried by soldiers, Police and civilians all over the British

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Empire, in innumerable colonial wars, and in two World Wars. The record of the Webley is as good as any other revolver the world has so far seen, but the glamour of the cowboys and his legendary exploits in the American West has robbed it of its rightful place, and concentrated the popular mind upon the Colt.

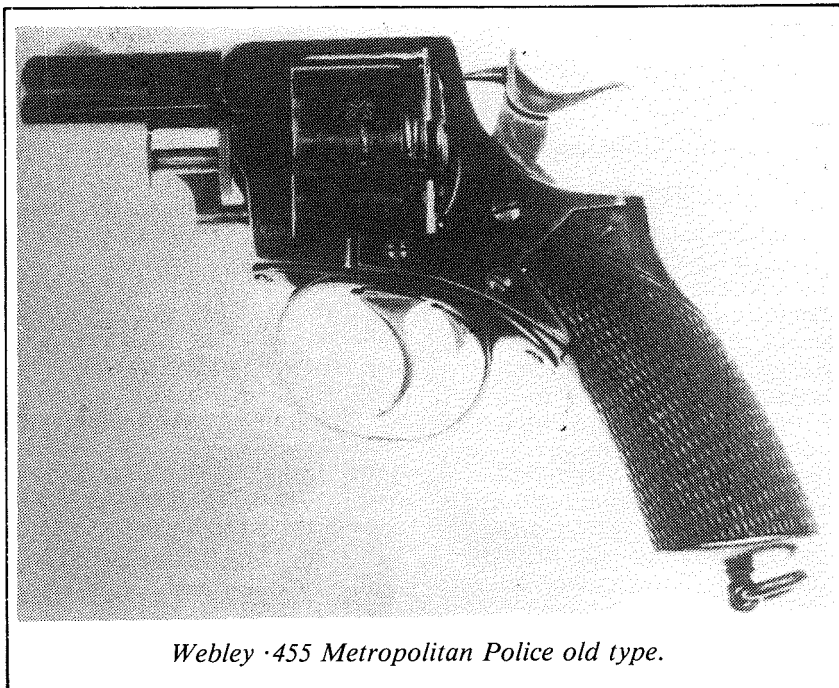
The first Webley revolver to be dealt with in this issue is one which carried the reputation and fortunes of the firm for several years, the Royal Irish Constabulary solid-frame models.

## ROYAL IRISH CONSTABULARY

### DOUBLE-ACTION MODELS

**.450 Model 1872.** In 1867, P. Webley & Son manufactured the first of a series of a pattern of revolver which was to remain in production until the early years of the twentieth century. This revolver was adopted by the Royal Irish Constabulary when that force came into being in 1868, and the weapon immediately took the name from them. There were many variations in different calibres and barrel lengths, but all were solid-framed type of considerable durability and reliability. The first model which comes within the scope of this text is the civilian copy of the R.I.C. revolver built for a .450 cartridge. The barrel is 3½ inches long, and has a small curved foresight on the muzzle, a typical feature of the Webleys of that time. The butt is rounded to fit the hand and the wooden grips are heavily checkered. The malleable iron solid-frame is almost identical with the Police Model, differing only in the compound curve at the hammer-slot. The cylinder is loaded and the cases ejected through a spring-loaded gate on the hand side of the frame, the swivelling ejector rod being housed in a hollow cylinder axis pin.

The cylinder is a solid block, machined to provide locking



*Webley .455 Metropolitan Police old type.*

notches at the rear, and a ratchet. It rotates to the right. The hammer is generously proportioned and the flat curved spur is easy to work with the thumb. The trigger guard is one of the features of this model, being unusually large and oval in shape. The working parts are few and well made, contributing to a long life with few breakdowns. In fact, the R.I.C. model is made throughout with an eye to simplicity and resistance to wear and rough handling, all facts which contributed to its popularity and steady sales.

**3½ inch Barrel Model 1872.** This model came out in 1872, shortly after the 3¼ inch barrelled version; however, there is more to this revolver than a simple change of barrel length. There are several minor changes, mainly in the sections of the components. The gate parts are square in section, instead of rounded, and the top strap is humped at the rear. The hammer slot reverts to the shape of the Police model, running in a clean curve to the top of the butt. This is curved, but not quite so much as with the 3¼ inch version, and it has a lanyard ring in the base.

The cylinder is identical with the earlier model, and takes the .450 cartridge which was produced by Webley for this

series.

**2½ inch Barrel .442 inch Barrel 1872.** This snub-nosed revolver is the forerunner of the whole Webley range of short barrelled hand guns. It first appeared in 1872, a year of innovation for the firm. Although it is one more variant of the R.I.C. revolvers, it has certain minor differences from the two .450 models. The frame is largely similar to the first .450, but it is more rounded off at the front, and foreshortened. The cylinder release is different, and in fact seems to have come from an earlier .557 weapon. There is no ejector rod, and spent cases are removed either by a separate tool – through the same right hand gate or by removing the cylinder entirely. Strangely enough, for a revolver that was meant to be carried in a holster or pocket, the foresight was quite out of character. It was a small solid bead instead of the more usual and practical rounded blade. The trigger guard was still the large oval of the other models, and all told, this little revolver must have made more than a small bulge in the pocket.

**R.I.C. Metropolitan & County Police Model 1880.** Substantial numbers of this revolver were

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# MILL-GHAQDA PENSJONANTI TAL-PULIZIJA

## POLICE PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION POLICE SHOW HELD ON 4th MAY 1986 IN AID OF THE BOMB VICTIMS FUND

### Income

Adverts 1st programme	Lm110.00,0
Adverts 2nd Programme	55.00,0
Entrance Tickets	231.00,0
Other Income	399.25,0

Lm795.25,0

### Expenditure

1st Programme PRI 6154	Lm 47.00,0
2nd Programme PRI 6219	45.00,0
Hire of Hall 00900	183.25,0
The Music Shop	75.00,0
P. Schembri	6.00,0

Lm356.25,0

Cash Collected: Lm439.00,0 Profit

2nd Programme

JB Store	Lm15.00,0
P. Camilleri	15.00,0
Clavis	15.00,0
J. Briffa	10.00,0

Lm55.00,0



List of Adverts:

1st Programme	
Big Ben (Watch dealer)	Free
Cafè Premier	Lm 15.00,0
Mithna	15.00,0
Big Ben (Gents Wear)	15.00,0
Square Deal	15.00,0
Charles Butcher	15.00,0
Neriku	10.00,0
Elmo Insurance	10.00,0
Gauci Borda	15.00,0

Lm110.00,0

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● *continued from page 11*

made in the 1880s for the Police. The action is the same as the second model of R.I.C. revolver and the general arrangement of the frame is very similar. The cylinder holds six-shots of .450 calibre, and the barrel is 2½ inches long. The butt is the same length as for the larger models, making this a generous-sized weapon for the length of barrel that it has. There is a lanyard ring on the butt plate.

• **430 James Hill Model 1880.** Apart from the calibre, this revolver is virtually identical with the one described above. Webleys made it for the London gunsmith James Hill, and chambered it for the Eley .430 cartridge. Specimens can be easily

recognised by the initials 'W.J.H.' stamped on the frame.

• **R.I.C. No: 1 New Model 1883.** This model was really the last in the R.I.C. series to be made in any quantity. The differences were only small, and are outwardly apparent in the barrel lengths, and the fact that the cylinder is grooved. The standard barrel length was 4½ inches and the calibre was .455. The revolver was intended to cope with as wide a range of ammunition as possible, and at the time of its introduction it could fire at least seven different types of ammunition ranging from .476 to .450 and .44 Winchester.

• **Short Barrelled New Model 1883.** At the same time as the .455. New Model, Webleys introduced a short barrelled version in .450 calibre with a 2½ inch barrel. This was intended for

Police use, and the Metropolitan Force accepted it straight away. It was exported to the colonial Police forces, notably in Australia. The Police models were stamped with a Webley trademark showing two hands in handcuffs.

• **Naval Service R.I.C. Model 1884.** This model has several differences from the standard versions. In the main, these relate to the materials used in its construction, but the barrel length is altered also. The frame is entirely of brass, together with the majority of the external items of the mechanism. On the original weapons, the steel barrel, cylinder, hammer and trigger were blacked for protection from corrosion. The barrel was 2 5/8 inches long, and usually for Webley-made R.I.C. models, was octagonal.

● *continued in next issue*