

An Unusual Percussion Pocket Pistol

by Ian Ford



The pistol is of normal box lock construction, with a slab sided butt and two barrels in an over and under configuration. The barrels of about .36 calibre, are 1 ½ inches long and are smooth bored. The eight deep grooves filed into the muzzles of the barrels are for a key which is needed for their removal when loading.

Both barrels and frame are stamped with post 1813 Birmingham proof marks, and the sides of the frame bear the names FRAY and LEICESTER in ovals against a background of flags, drums and spears, which are rather crudely executed.

The unusual feature of the pistol is the tap action mechanism for firing the second barrel. Whilst this system is fairly common on flint pistols with two, or more, barrels I do not recall seeing another percussion pistol using this system.

When using the pistol, presuming both barrels are loaded, if the thumb piece of the tap is in line with the barrels, only the top one is fired. The thumb piece can then be moved downwards through 90 degrees, another cap put on the nipple, and the lower barrel can be fired. Should the thumb piece be in the lowered position when first firing, both barrels will go off, I am not sure if this is meant to happen or is due to possible wear of the internal rotating tap. I have not tried it with the pistol loaded with powder and ball, but it certainly performs this way with just a cap being fired.

The pistol does not seem to be a conversion from flint, there is no sign of a pan or frizzen bridge, but the maker, FRAY, may hold a clue. According to Bailey and Nie's book, *English Gun Makers*, there were three Frays working in Leicester between 1817 and 1863, who were probably all related. The most

likely maker for this pistol is John Fray who had premises in the High Street in 1817 and at Belgrave Gate from 1821 to 1828. Unfortunately he does not appear in the earliest census records, for 1841, and may have been dead or moved away by this date, but a Thomas Fray, probably a son, is listed as a 26 year old gun maker, working at Belgrave Gate. Presuming the maker was John, he would have been making guns during the flint lock period and may have used the same tap action mechanism he was familiar with to produce similar pistols on the new percussion principle.

The barrels and frame of this pistol are marked 3 and 4 which suggests it is one of a pair. I would be interested to hear of any other double percussion pistols using the tap action mechanism, rather than the more common double hammers and triggers, or turn over barrels which Members may have encountered.

