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# A Short Note on a Major Acquisition

GRAEME RIMER

*Academic Director, Royal Armouries*

Just as this issue of *Arms & Armour* was going to press the Royal Armouries received news that its bid to acquire an exceptionally important piece had been successful. After months of negotiations all the funding was at last in place to secure it for the nation.

The piece concerned is a finely decorated flintlock sporting gun completed in 1688, having been commissioned by George Legge, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Dartmouth, from Henry Crisp, Gunmaker to the Ordnance and Furbisher at the Tower.

In 1688 George Legge was simultaneously Constable of the Tower of London, Master General of the Ordnance and Commander in Chief of the English fleet. In November that year he was at Spithead commanding the fleet assembled to oppose the invasion forces of William of Orange, the future King William III. His opposition proved ineffective, however, and the invasion went ahead successfully. James II and the Prince of Wales fled abroad and Legge stayed in England. Given his previous loyalties it is not surprising that he was subsequently deprived of his post as Master General, and in 1691 he was imprisoned in the Tower accused of conspiring against the new king. Legge sadly died in the Tower shortly afterwards, reportedly of apoplexy. He was just 43 years old.

The gun itself would be a remarkable piece even without its exceptionally important associations with the Tower of London and one of the most influential figures at the time of the Glorious Revolution. It is built around a fine silver-inlaid Turkish barrel of late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century date, which has close parallels to a group of three now in the Musée de l'Armée, Paris, formerly part of the gun cabinet of Louis XIII. The lock, sideplate and buttplate in particular have decoration inspired by the designs published in Paris in 1684 by Claude Simonin, and the silver furniture, made by William Knight of London and hallmarked 1688, are the earliest recorded silver mounts on a surviving English gun.

This gun, which does not appear to have previously been exhibited or published, was kept at Orchard Wyndham, Somerset, the seat of the Barons Wyndham, until the 1970s, when it was purchased by the eminent dealer, Geoffrey Jenkinson. It then passed into a major private collection. An export application showed that the gun was to be sold to a museum abroad, however the application was expertly challenged by our colleagues in the arms and armour department of the Wallace Collection, London, and the case to oppose its export upheld. The particular and notable

association of this gun with the history of the Tower of London and one of its most notable officers of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, together with its exceptional quality and unique features as a sporting gun, made it an obvious candidate to enter the Royal Armouries collections. The Secretary of State agreed with the judgement of the Reviewing Committee for the Export of Works of Art, and gave a period of three months for any suitable organisation within the UK to demonstrate that it had sufficient funds to meet the asking price of £115,000. The deadline given to raise these funds was the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2008.

With the approval of its senior management and Board of Trustees the Royal Armouries' interest was registered with the Reviewing Committee, and efforts to assemble the funds began. The Royal Armouries is extremely grateful to The Art Fund and to the National Heritage Memorial Fund for their generous support which, when enhanced by its own contribution, enabled the gun to be secured.

The gun will initially be displayed in Leeds, and in time will return to the Tower of London, with which it has such a strong and unusual association.

The lock of the gun forms the front cover of this edition of *Arms & Armour* and a full article about it will appear in the next issue.