Ketland Guns in America

by Joseph V. Puleo

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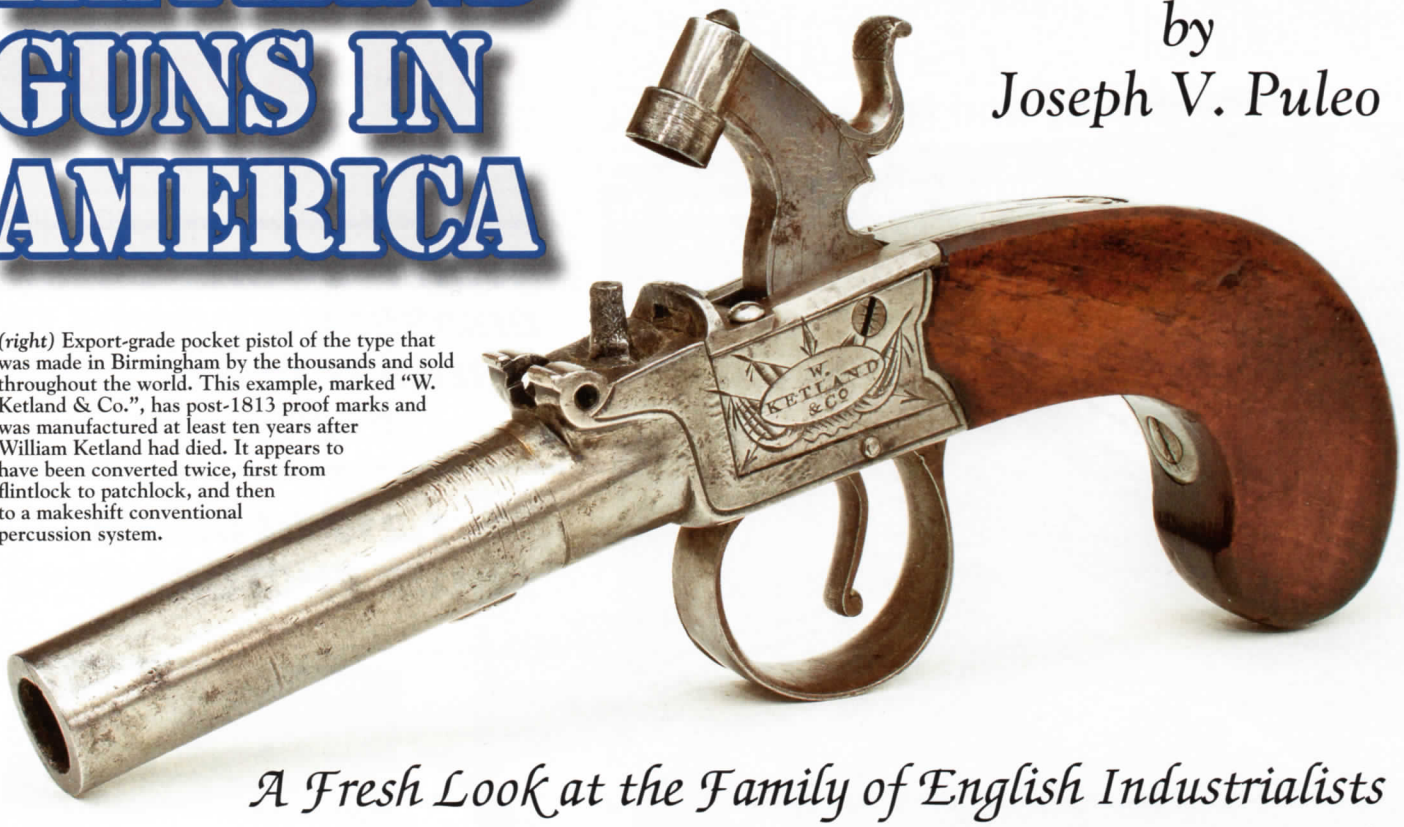

(right) Export-grade pocket pistol of the type that was made in Birmingham by the thousands and sold throughout the world. This example, marked "W. Ketland & Co.", has post-1813 proof marks and was manufactured at least ten years after William Ketland had died. It appears to have been converted twice, first from flintlock to patchlock, and then to a makeshift conventional percussion system.

A Fresh Look at the Family of English Industrialists Who Dominated the Early American Firearms Trade

The Ketlands were almost certainly the best-known gunmaking brand in America from 1790 until the 1830s. Literally thousands of their muskets, fowlers, pistols, rifles and even more of their gun locks — all prominently marked with the famous "Ketland" name — were sold in the United States during that time. Even though the Ketlands were from across the ocean in Birmingham, England, it is no exaggeration to claim that they dominated the American marketplace.

Ketland firearms have been well known to collectors for at least 100 years. Over the generations, numerous references to these men and their products have been published. In general, what these sources concluded was that the Ketland family began making guns in Britain during the 1740s or 1750s, and that they exported complete guns and loose gun locks to America both before and during the Revolution. Then, in 1789, two members of the family immigrated to the fledgling United States, where they settled in Philadelphia and proceeded to actually manufacture firearms on American soil.

These essential details have been accepted by collectors and researchers for decades. But as we shall see, although there are grains of truth in these suppositions, they are essentially incorrect. A detailed examination of the primary sources has revealed a very different and perhaps much more interesting story. Much of what has been written about the Ketlands now appears to have been a mixture of wishful thinking and conjecture, often based on faulty sources or fanciful family lore. The purpose of this article is to begin the job of sorting Ketland facts from Ketland fiction.

Fortunately, the family name "Ketland" is unusual, which was helpful in tracking them down. But it wasn't as easy as it seemed, because the exact same Christian names were used over and over again. For example, the Ketlands covered in this article include two Williams and two Thomases, and it can be tough to keep them straight. (For simplicity's sake, they will be called William 1, William 2, Thomas Sr. and Thomas Jr.) The three generations of men who concern us most include: William 1 (born ca.1703–04); his son Thomas Sr. (b.1737); and the four sons of Thomas Sr., who were William 2 (b.1760), Thomas Jr. (b.1761), John (b.1769) and James (b.1771).[1]

William 1 is often referred to as the founder of the Ketland gunmaking dynasty. But there is no evidence for this at all. In fact, there isn't a shred of documentary proof that he had anything to do with the gun trade. William 1 lived most if not all of his life in Aldridge, South Staffordshire, a small agricultural village, a few miles north of Birmingham. While it is close to several towns that are known for their association with gunmaking, there is no evidence that anything of the sort went on in Aldridge. However, it would have been very easy for William 1 to have apprenticed his son to someone in the gun trade, which is what appears to have happened. William 1 was still in Aldridge in 1747 when his daughter, Jane, was baptized.

[1]Most of the genealogical information in this article has been gathered from the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints Family History website and their International Genealogical Register. The single exception is the record of the birth of Thomas Sr., in which case a microfilm copy (also from the LDS Family History Center) of the actual Parish Register was used. The material from the LDS website is excellent, but it is subject to occasional transcription errors. For our purposes, however, it is more than adequate.

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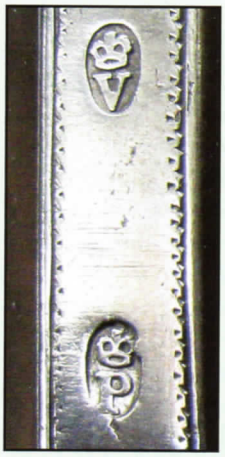

Birmingham Private Proofs: We still do not know with certainty who operated the private proof house in Birmingham that originally used these marks. However, there is very good circumstantial evidence that it was the partnership of Farmer & Galton. It appears that their proof house was located in Weaman Street, and that it was in operation from at least the middle of the 18th century and probably much earlier. Farmer & Galton apparently developed this neighborhood early in the century. On Westley's 1731 map of the city, Farmer Street connected Weaman Street to Slaney Street, but was gone by the time Hanson's map was drawn in 1781. Birmingham Private Proofs, very likely versions of those shown here, go back to at least the 1st quarter of the 18th century and thus pre-date the Ketlands by many years. As early as 1717, the London gunmakers were complaining that the Birmingham private marks were easily confused with the more prestigious London marks. Their complaint was valid, and the marks are still being confused today. These marks are commonly seen on excellent quality guns made for the British market as well as on export-quality guns. Another version, with the "P" and "V" but without the crowns, has been recorded on a W. Ketland dueling pistol. It would not have been legal to sell a gun with these proof marks in London.

Ordnance Private Proofs: The "crowned crossed scepters," struck twice on the barrel, are the marks of the Ordnance proof house at the Tower, but done for the civilian gun trade rather than for the government. The practice of doing private proofs began around the middle of the 18th century. We do not know when it was discontinued, but during the Napoleonic Wars, the Ordnance was actively trying to discourage the private trade in order to divert workmen to government work. The Ordnance Department also proved barrels in Birmingham starting in 1796, but so far there is no evidence that private proofing was done there. Indeed, since the facility was set up to expedite Ordnance production, it seems unlikely that they would have tolerated the distraction. Still, the proofmaster was originally allowed to keep a portion of the fee for private proofing, so the jury might still be out on whether they were done in Birmingham or not.

Note that barrels could have been sent to London for proof quite efficiently. This had been done for years with barrels made in Birmingham for the Ordnance and the East India Company. The English canal system made this practical, inexpensive and not terribly time consuming. The limitations of water transport have far more to do with volume than they do with weight, so a huge number of gun barrels could have been sent down to London and returned to Birmingham without great cost. Ordnance muskets were not assembled in Birmingham until 1804, so until then all barrels had been shipped to London for assembly into muskets.

In his 1926 volume, *The History of Firearms,* H.B.C. Pollard wrongly attributed the marks shown here to the Ketlands, a mistake that has been repeated numerous times since, including in the official history of the Birmingham Proof House. The notion that the Ordnance Department would have allowed a private house in Birmingham to copy their own mark hardly bears serious consideration.

A magnificent pair of double-barrelled, silver-mounted belt pistols (note the belt hooks) by Ketland & Co. The silver mounts are by Charles Freeth and are hallmarked for 1783, two years before Thomas Sr. opened his London outlet. These pistols have the "crowned P" and "crowned V" Birmingham Private Proof marks discussed in the green sidebar. ***Courtesy of the Craig Ross Collection***

He may also have been the father of another girl, Ann Ketland (born ca. 1753), who married Thomas Sr.'s partner, John Adams.

Although William 1 does not seem to have been a gunsmith, his oldest son, Thomas Ketland Sr., certainly was. Baptized at the Aldridge Parish Church on February 2, 1737,[2] Thomas Sr. does not appear again in the written records until March 3, 1760, when he is recorded as taking an apprentice. In the apprentice register, Thomas Sr. is clearly listed as "Thomas Ketland gunsmith of 7 Lichfield Street" in Birmingham.[3]

Thomas Sr.'s business prospered. In about 1777, he moved into expanded facilities in the neighborhood of Birmingham that eventually became known as "The Gun Quarter."[4] He also took in partners: first William Walker (who was likely a relative of some sort) and later, John Adams (who may have been his brother-in-law).[5]

In or around 1785, Thomas Sr. further grew his business by opening a London location, listed as "Ketland & Co., Wholesale Gun & Birmingham Warehouse" at 2 Scots Yard, Bush Lane, Cannon Street.[6] His son, William 2, would also maintain a London sales outlet. W. Ketland is first listed in a London directory in 1800.[7]

Despite his London address, Thomas Sr. was never a member of the London Gunmakers Company. Because of this, his busi-

[2]The actual recorded date is February 2, 1736. However, at the time, the numerical year changed on April 25th (i.e., April 24, 1736, was followed by April 25, 1737). Dates between January 1 and April 24 need to be increased one year in order to coincide with the modern system. Such dates are often written "1736/7" but this can be almost as confusing as having the wrong date.
[3]Apprentice Register in the British National Archives IR/54.
[4]"Birmingham's Gun Quarter and its Workshops" by D.M. Smith in the (British) *Journal of Historical Archeology*, Volume 1, No. 2, August 1964.
[5]John Adams married Ann Ketland in 1776. She also came from Aldridge, and her father's name was William. It is uncertain if this was William 1 or another Ketland relative.
[6]Howard Blackmore, *Gunmakers of London, 1350–1850,* (York, PA: George Shumway, 1986), p. 127. N.B. This work also appeared in an identical British editon published by Phaidon-Christie's and entitled *A Dictionary* of *London Gunmakers, 1350–1850.*
[7]Howard Blackmore, *Gunmakers of London*, p. 127.

A pair of W. Ketland four-barrel volley pistols with silver wire inlay and silver buttcaps. The buttcaps are undated, which helps illustrate some of the problems associated with dating Ketland pistols by their appearance. A logical date by style alone would be c.1785, but it is most likely that they were actually made after William Ketland's share in the Ketland firm was liquidated in 1801. ***Peter Finer***

ness opportunities in the city would have been limited by the fact that guns bearing Birmingham Private Proofs could not legally be sold in London.

There are five possible combinations of proof marks that have been seen on Ketland guns (see the two green sidebars in this article for full details). I have yet to personally examine a Ketland-signed gun with true London proofs. This is almost certainly because true London proofs probably appear on only the very best quality Ketland arms intended for the British home market — few of which were ever exported. One of my British colleagues, John Evans, graciously undertook an admittedly unscientific survey of Ketland guns offered in Britain over the past 50 years. Of the 68 guns in John's survey, 7 were described as having London proofs. The W. Ketland volley pistol illustrated here has correct London Gunmaker's Company marks, so we can be certain that the London proof house was used at least occasionally.

Most Ketland guns have either Birmingham Private Proof Marks or Ordnance Private Proof Marks. Ordnance Private Proofs were done in London at the Ordnance proof house on Tower Wharf. The barrels would have been made in Birmingham and shipped to London via the inland canal system. Since Ketland guns were not assembled in London, the proved barrels then had to be shipped back to Birmingham. The location of the government Proof House on Tower Wharf made this more convenient than sending them to the Gunmakers Company proof house. It has also been suggested that, after 1796, Ordnance personnel in Birmingham could have proved them, although no documentary evidence that Ordnance Private Proofs were ever done in Birmingham has been found to date.

The business done by the London branch of T. Ketland & Co. was probably exactly as its full name implies, wholesale to the trade. The Gunmakers Company understood this situation and tried to attract dealers like Ketland to membership. In their 1778 application for the grant of livery, they openly admitted to wanting to attract "Merchants, Warehousemen and Tradesmen, not makers of, but dealers in and Exporters of Firearms."[8]

For most of its existence, the London office was managed by James Ketland, another of Thomas Sr.'s sons. The export of firearms from Britain usually required a license, and for much of the period in question, this was a function of the Privy Council.[9] Dozens of these licenses were issued to James Ketland, making him the obvious agent for the export of his family's products to America and other parts of the world. There is no documentary evidence that the Ketland family trade with America began before 1789 or that the Ketlands had anything to do with the American trade before or during the American Revolution. The association of any Ketland products with the French & Indian War (1754–1763) is even more ludicrous. Thomas Ketland Sr. was only 17 years old when the French & Indian War began, and had barely started in business when it ended. The idea that the Ketland family was in the gunmaking business in the 1740s or 1750s (Gardner gives a date of 1715!)[10] appears to be based on the uncritical acceptance of family stories and a simple lack of research opportunities amongst the earliest authors on the subject.

Thomas Ketland Sr. was a very successful Birmingham gunmaker. As he became more prosperous, he opened a London outlet in about 1785. That the odd pair of pistols or fowler of his make may have been brought to America before or during the Revolution cannot be denied — but this is no more likely, nor are they any more "American," than any other gun by a good English maker.

THE PHILADELPHIA KETLANDS

The Ketlands did not make guns in America. Three Ketlands, Thomas Sr., Thomas Jr. and John, arrived in Philadelphia from England in 1789. We know that one of them, probably Thomas Jr., had been to the United States previously, because a Thomas Ketland had been elected to membership in the New York Society of the Sons of St. George in 1787.[11] (Thomas Jr. was an active member of this society, which is why it was probably him.) Thomas Sr. returned to England while Thomas Jr. set up shop in Philadelphia. John may also have returned to England, but we cannot be sure. He is not mentioned again in Philadelphia until March of 1794.

When the Ketlands arrived, Britain and the United States did not share diplomatic relations. Despite the fact that Britain was America's largest trading partner, and America was Britain's largest customer, it wasn't until 1791 that

[8]Blackmore, *ibid.*, p. 23.
[9]C.O. Paullin and F.L. Paxson, *Guide to the Materials in the London Archives for the History of the United States* (1914, Reprinted by Kraus Reprint Corp., 1965) pp. 292–325.
[10]Col. Robert E. Gardner, *Small Arms Makers* (New York, Bonanza Books, 1963) p. 276.
[11]Kit Ravenshear in a privately published pamphlet. Ravenshear lived in Pennsylvania, and while some of his general conclusions are based on now discredited secondary sources, there is no reason to doubt his references taken from primary documents in the Pennsylvania Archives. He states that Thomas Jr. took the Oath of Allegiance to the United States in May of 1790. Also, see *A History of St. George's Society of New York from 1770 to 1913*, p. 270.

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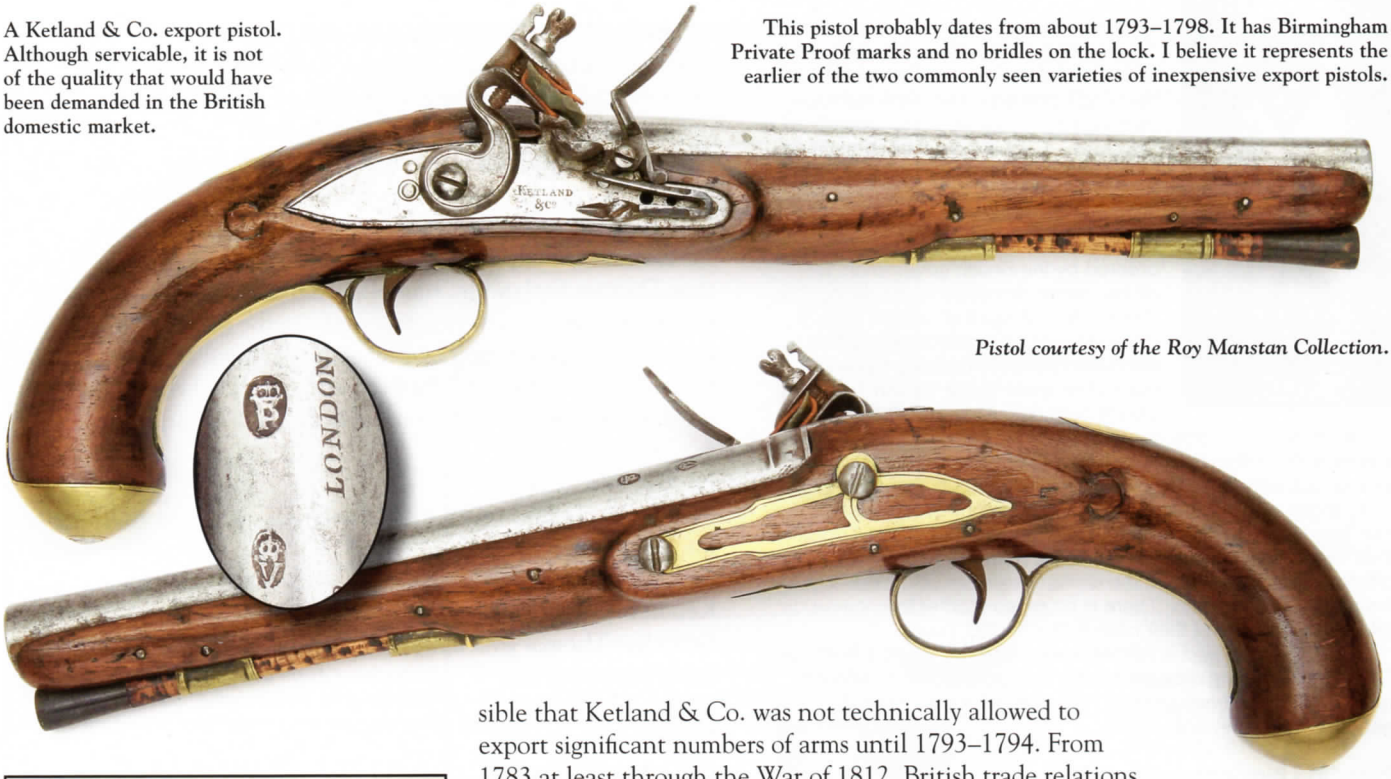
A Ketland & Co. export pistol. Although servicable, it is not of the quality that would have been demanded in the British domestic market.

This pistol probably dates from about 1793–1798. It has Birmingham Private Proof marks and no bridles on the lock. I believe it represents the earlier of the two commonly seen varieties of inexpensive export pistols.



Pistol courtesy of the Roy Manstan Collection.

sible that Ketland & Co. was not technically allowed to export significant numbers of arms until 1793–1794. From 1783 at least through the War of 1812, British trade relations with the United States were managed in the Privy Council, which issued licenses authorizing the export of military stores to America. The first "Special orders for the exportation of military and naval stores" are not dated until December 21, 1792. "Military and naval stores" included all forms of small arms. Licenses were granted for shipping "arms to Charleston," "gunpowder to Philadelphia," "arms to Baltimore," etc. Thereafter, these licenses were issued regularly. For example, in March of 1793 a license was issued to ship "fowling pieces to Philadelphia."[16] We are not sure yet who, specificially, was being issued these licenses, but it was during this time that Ketland guns probably began entering the American marketplace with some frequency.

Regardless of when, exactly, he began importing firearms, Thomas Ketland Jr. was certainly making quite a success of himself owning shares in ships and underwriting voyages. There was even a ship named the *Thomas Ketland*. The extent and variety of these ventures, not to mention the staggering amounts of money involved, beggar the imagination. In 1909, long after everyone concerned was dead, the U.S. government finally rejected a French Spoilation Claim for $38,597.98 by "Thomas [Jr.] and John Ketland, together with the said Henry Philips and one Simon Walker, citizens of the United States…"[17] for goods shipped to Ragusa, in Sicily, that were seized by the French Army in 1796![18]

Aside from their shipping interests, the Philadelphia Ketlands were also liquor and wholesale dry-goods merchants on a grand scale. They advertised heavily, and of the many ads examined, only one is devoted almost entirely to arms, including 4, 6 and 9 pound cannon, 12 pd. Carronades, Light Dragoon sabers, Light Cavalry swords and cutlasses. Most of the arms were offered in case lots only. Some Ketland advertisements make no mention at all of firearms, and most only include them as one or two items among a long list of others such as "Queen's ware in crates," and "400 pipes of Barcelona Brandy."

[16]Paullin and Paxson, p. 298. The names of the licencees are not usually listed in this work.
[17]Simon Walker (b. 1771) was another son of William Walker and brother of Alexander Walker.
[18]House of Representatives, Document No. 1134, 60th Congress, 2nd Session. French Spoilation Claims, Washington, Government Printing Office, 1909.

The copartnerſhip be-

tween William Walker, and Alexander Walker, of Birmingham in Great Britain, and Thomas Ketland, jun. of Philadelphia, merchants, trading under the firm of William and Alexander Walker, and Co. being this day diſſolved by mutual conſent, all perſons in America having demands on that houſe, will pleaſe apply to Thomas Ketland, jun. and thoſe perſons who are indebted to that firm are ſolicited to pay him the reſpective balances, he being duly authorized to adjuſt the concerns of ſaid company.

WILLIAM & ALEX. WALKER, & Co.
Philad. Dec. 31, 1793. dtf.

Juſt Imported,

In ſhips William Penn, Amiable and Jean from London,

A quantity of CANNON, ſizes 4, 6 and 9 lbs. } with ball ſuitable.
Canonades–12 lbs. }

Muſquets, Muſquetoons, Cutlaſſes and Piſtols, for ſhips uſe } by the
Rifle barrelled Guns, Fowling Pieces, and Horſeman's Piſtols. } package only.

400,000 Flints, chiefly for muſquets, in kegs
Regulation Light Dragoon Sabers, with iron Scabbards, in cases of 50 each.
Light Cavalry Swords in cases
Sabers, Swords, and Cutlaſſes with plated mounting
Ironmongery and Cutlery in caſks, a general aſſortment – For ſale by

THOMAS & JOHN KETLAND,
Philadelphia, 25th October 1798.

(top) Advertisement from the *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* dated January 1, 1794, dissolving Thomas Ketland's partnership with the Walkers. However, this does not mean that they were no longer business associates. William Walker and Thomas Ketland Sr. remained partners up until they both died, so this probably represents a rearranging of their relationship and the opening of a new set of books. *(bottom)* An advertisement from *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser,* Philadelphia, October 26, 1798. This is one of the few Ketland advertisements that is predominently arms. Notice that it includes "Rifle barrelled Guns" as well as a large assortment of swords, sabers and cutlasses. *(Thanks to Bruce Bazelon for his help finding these ads.)*

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A Massachusetts-made militia musket with a "T. Ketland & Co." lock.

This musket is significant because it has a Massachusetts-proved barrel dated 1814. The lock is of a distinctly better quality than that of the pistol shown previously. It has an internal bridle and probably had an external bridle. It is apparent that "T. Ketland" locks reached a much wider audience than simply the Philadelphia area. *Author's Collection.*

Advertisement from *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser,* Philadelphia, November 2, 1799, announcing the dissolution of the Thomas & John Ketland partnership and offering a variety of goods. 400 pipes of brandy is 50,400 gallons!

THE CO-PARTNERSHIP OF

Thomas and John Ketland,

BEING DISOLVED

By the death of Mr. JOHN KETLAND, all perſons who have demands againſt ſaid firm are requeſted to bring in their accounts for payment, and thoſe indebted to the ſame are ſolicited to make payment to

THOMAS KETLAND.

Juſt Imported,

135 Hogsheads, } Prime SUGAR
91 barrels, }
150 do. Green Coffee
25 Boxes brown, } Havannah SUGAR,
25 do, white. }
12 hhds. James' River Tobacco,
30 Packages well aſſorted German Linens
Ruffia Cordage, aſſorted,
400 Pipes Barcelona Brandy, 4th proof,
Hazelnuts in ſacks,
Brown Stout Porter, draught and bottled
40 Caſks Shot, No. 1 to 6
Lead in pigs,
8 hhds. ground Lead, aſſorted,
4 Caſks Glauber Salts, Cream Tartar, &c.
Black quart wine Bottles, in Crates, 1 groce each
Queens ware in Crates,
Cannon, 4, 6 and 9 pounds calibre, with Shot, round, grape and canniſter,
Swivels,
Corks in bales, 1ſt quality.
ditto in ſheets,
Claret in cases, ſuperior quality.
Port Wine, ditto.
Horſemen's Swords, Hangers, &c,
Fowling Pieces and Piſtols in caſes,
Ship Muſkets and Blunderbuſſes, in do.
Bath ſtove Grates, for chambers, &c. &c.

For ſale by

THOMAS KETLAND,
Walnut ſtreet.

In November of 1797, Thomas Jr. and John Ketland were awarded a contract to provide the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with 10,000 Charleville-pattern muskets to be delivered by November of 1798.[19] The muskets were not delivered, and several authorities have stated that the British government cancelled the contract. There may be some other reason for this failure to deliver, because the records of the Privy Council (which had jurisdiction over American trade and the export of arms) for June 1 to November 30, 1798, record no such refusal. They do record a refusal to permit the export of 5,000 stand of arms to Charleston. However, in the same time period, 195 permits for the export of military and naval stores to the United States were granted for items including cannon, gunpowder and saltpetre.[20] In 1800, the Ketlands delivered 1,746 musket locks to the Philadelphia Depot.[21] As far as is known, this was their only sale to the United States government.

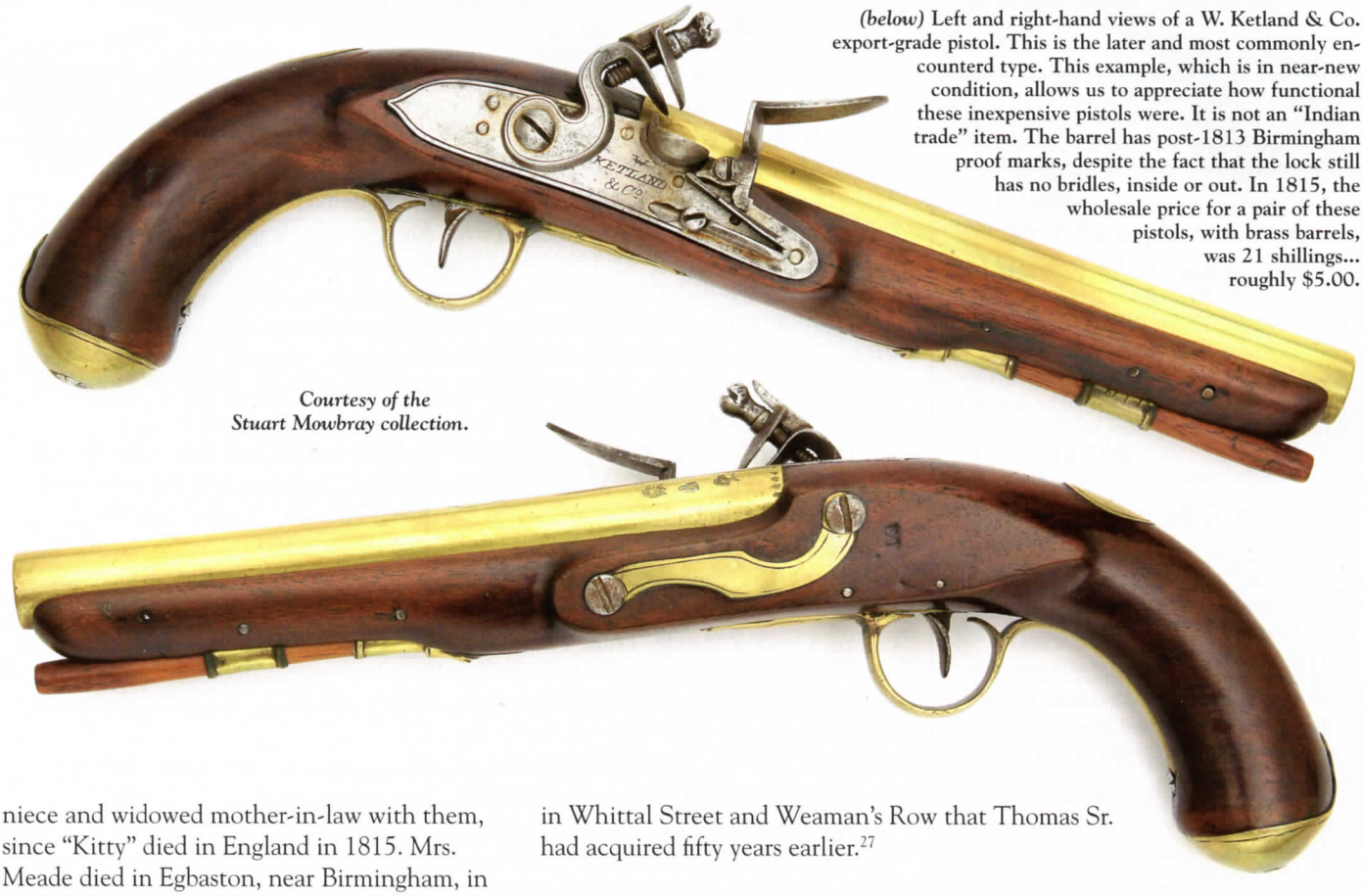
Thomas Jr. married Elizabeth Meade of Philadelphia on June 3rd, 1790. In 1796, John married Henrietta C. Meade, Elizabeth's sister. The Meade family was prominent and successful. George Meade, Elizabeth and Henrietta's father, was a major American merchant and importer of liquor from Spain. Mr. Meade died in 1808, but the Ketlands appear to have maintained a lifelong business relationship with Richard W. Meade, their brother-in-law and the father of famous Civil War General George Gordon Meade. Thus, Thomas Jr. and John Ketland were both uncles of the victor at Gettysburg. John Ketland died in Philadelphia in 1799, just short of his 30th birthday. John's wife, Henrietta, died in 1801. They left one child, Catherine "Kitty" Ketland.[22]

Thomas Jr. returned to England for an unknown time in early 1796. Passing through Paris, he called upon James Monroe to request a passport for his sister and servant, both of whom were English subjects. Monroe (who was anti-British in political sentiment) was reluctant to grant this request, but the incident was reported to James Madison in exhaustive detail, specifically mentioning that Ketland had married the daughter of "Mr. M[eade]" and that this "was of itself a good recommendation."[23]

Thomas Jr. remained in Philadelphia during the War of 1812. In January of 1813, he was a member of a committee that secured an Act of the Pennsylvania Assembly incorporating the Society of the Sons of St. George.[24] He and his wife must have returned to England immediately after the War, taking their orphaned

[19]David Stewart and William Reid, "Pennsylvania Contract Muskets – 1797 Arms Procurement Act" in the *Journal of the American Society of Arms Collectors*, #91, pp. 10–39.
[20]Paullin and Paxson, pp. 305–306.
[21]Peter Schmidt, *U.S. Military Flintlock Muskets and their Bayonets, The Early Years, 1790–1815* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Incorporated, 2006) p. 26.
[22]The two newlyweds died unusually young, even for those times. This may have been the result of Yellow Fever.
[23]S.M. Hamilton, *The Writings of James Monroe*, Volume II (New York, NY; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), p. 445. The letter in question is dated January 20, 1796.
[24]J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *A History of Philadelphia*, Volume II (Philadelphia, PA; L.H. Everts & Co., 1884) p. 1467. Ironically, the first and last references to Thomas Ketland in the United States both concern the Society of the Sons of St. George.

The "Ketland & Co." name is barely readable, engraved on the brass lockplate of this better-quality export pistol. The lock (converted to percussion) not only has a sliding safety, but it incorporates a roller on the mainspring that bears against the tumbler. It has Ordnance Private Proofs and probably dates c.1795–1805.



(below) Left and right-hand views of a W. Ketland & Co. export-grade pistol. This is the later and most commonly encounterd type. This example, which is in near-new condition, allows us to appreciate how functional these inexpensive pistols were. It is not an "Indian trade" item. The barrel has post-1813 Birmingham proof marks, despite the fact that the lock still has no bridles, inside or out. In 1815, the wholesale price for a pair of these pistols, with brass barrels, was 21 shillings... roughly $5.00.

Courtesy of the Stuart Mowbray collection.

niece and widowed mother-in-law with them, since "Kitty" died in England in 1815. Mrs. Meade died in Egbaston, near Birmingham, in 1822.[25] Once home, Thomas Jr. probably took up management of the family's Birmingham interests. Alexander Walker, the son and partner of William Walker and the Ketlands, remained in Philadelphia and may have continued to represent the family there. Alexander died in Philadelphia in 1822.

Thomas Sr. died in 1816. William Walker disappears from sight, but probably died in the summer of 1818.[26] Thomas Jr. and John Adams appear to have continued on. The business was officially declared bankrupt in 1821, but it was not until 1825 that Thomas Jr. and John Adams relinquished control of the two properties in Whittal Street and Weaman's Row that Thomas Sr. had acquired fifty years earlier.[27]

W. KETLAND & CO.

William 2 (b.1760) was the oldest son of Thomas Sr. and the grandson of William 1. It has often been said that "he joined his grandfather's firm." This is not true. The "grandfather story" appears to have originated in the 1950s as an attempt to reconcile published, but incorrect, Ketland activity dates with fragmentary genealogical information about later members of the family.[28]

[25]The deaths of Mrs. Meade and of Catherine "Kitty" Ketland were reported in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette.*
[26]Ketland's obituary is in *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*. William Walker's obituary is not, but his will, proved in August of 1818, was obtained from the British National Archives.
[27]The deed of transfer is in the Birmingham Central Library, MS 58/49.
[28]In the course of preparing this article, a search was made of most of the major antique arms books that mention the Ketlands, starting with Charles Winthrop Sawyer's *Firearms in American History*, published in 1910. As a result of that search, it now appears that the first reference to William 1, the grandfather of William Ketland of W. Ketland & Co., is contained in Ian Glendenning's "Notes on the Ketland Family" in the list of gunmakers included in his 1951 book *British Pistols and Guns, 1640-1840*. Glendenning cites no sources for his story, although it is clear he had access to some material on the demise of the business. He may have con-

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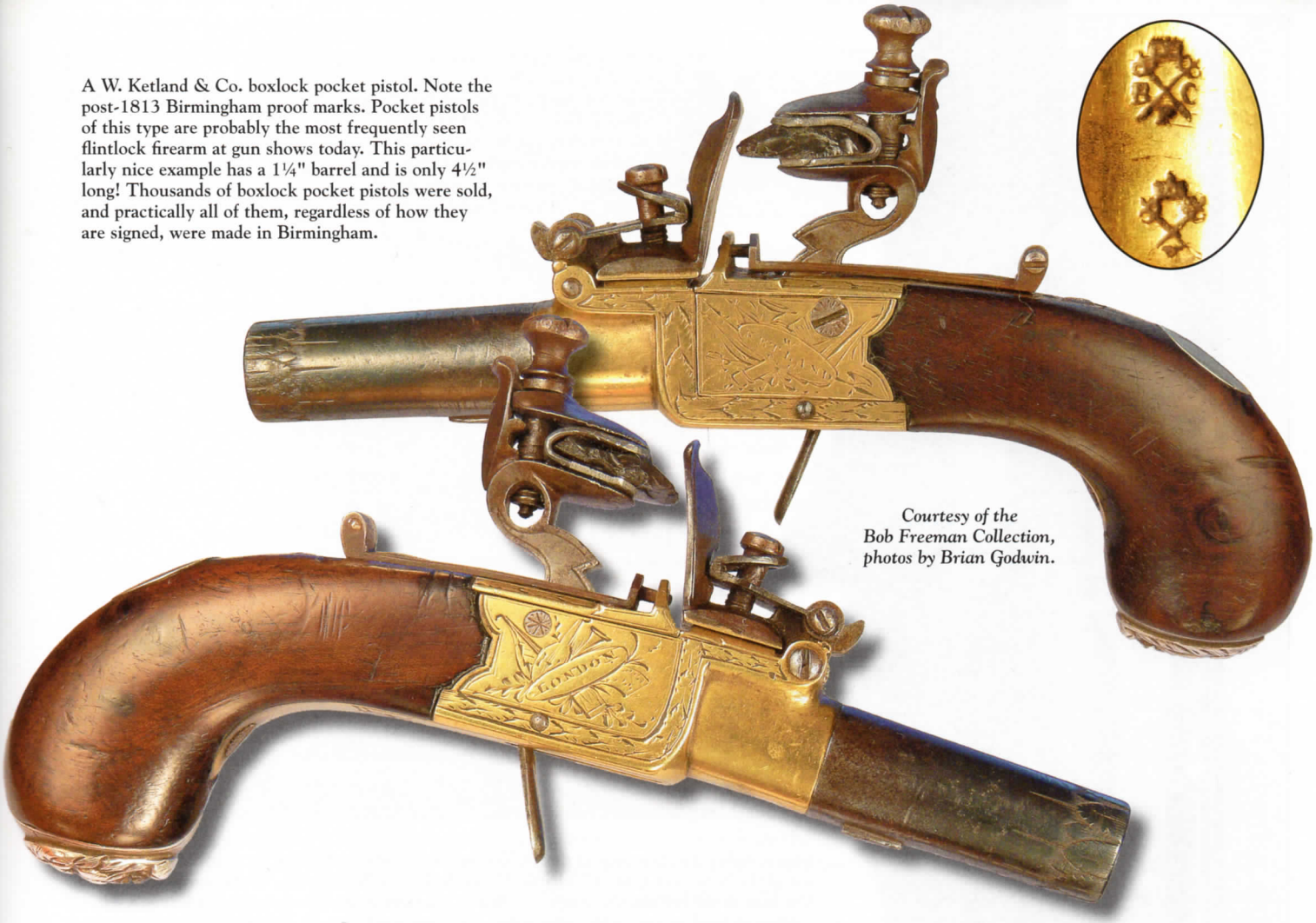


A W. Ketland & Co. boxlock pocket pistol. Note the post-1813 Birmingham proof marks. Pocket pistols of this type are probably the most frequently seen flintlock firearm at gun shows today. This particularly nice example has a 1¼" barrel and is only 4½" long! Thousands of boxlock pocket pistols were sold, and practically all of them, regardless of how they are signed, were made in Birmingham.

Courtesy of the Bob Freeman Collection, photos by Brian Godwin.

(Part of this misunderstanding perhaps stems from the fact that the Ketlands had a confusing family tradition of naming the first son after his grandfather and the second son after his father.)

William 2 is the only son of Thomas Sr. who had an ownership position in his father's business. He was a full partner until 1801. In 1791, William 2 had married Elizabeth Izon, the daughter of John Izon, a very successful Birmingham ironmonger and brass founder. It was probably William 2's marriage settlement that supplied his share of the capital in Ketland & Co. and eventually put him in a position to sell out and start his own firm. The process of liquidating William's share of Ketland & Co. began in April of 1800, and the partnership was officially dissolved as of March 25, 1801.[29]

The name of the new business he started first appears in a London directory as "W. Ketland & Co." in 1800. In the Birmingham directories, "William Ketland" is first listed in 1802. The matter becomes even more confusing when we realize that William 2 died in 1804 at the age of 44. But the "William Ketland" directory listing continued until 1807 and then became "William Ketland & Co." from 1808 until 1831.[30] We would usually presume that the addition of "& Co." implies the addition of new partners, but in this case it looks as if William had a partner from the very beginning — James Allport. Shortly before William 2's death, the two men agreed that Allport would run the business for 21 years.[31] But James Allport fell sick in 1806, and effective control of W. Ketland & Co. was assumed by his son, William Allport. All evidence suggests that the "W. Ketland & Co." business name was never actually dropped.

The W. Ketland firm was just as involved in the American arms trade as Ketland & Co., although it appears to have confined itself to exporting guns rather than expanding into general merchandise. There is no evidence that they opened an American branch; they operated through agents in America instead. What is almost certainly the most informative surviving document of the Ketland gunmaking dynasty dates from the period when the W. Ketland firm was being managed by William Allport. It is a four-panel wholesale price list addressed to "H. Upson" at the "Hotel". We know from other correspondence that Henry Upson, a partner in the New York City firm of Richards, Upson & Co., was in Birmingham during the summer of 1812 purchasing military goods for export to the United States.[32]

This price list clearly illustrates the breadth of items offered by the Ketlands, from the cheapest fowler at 17 shillings to cased, silver or

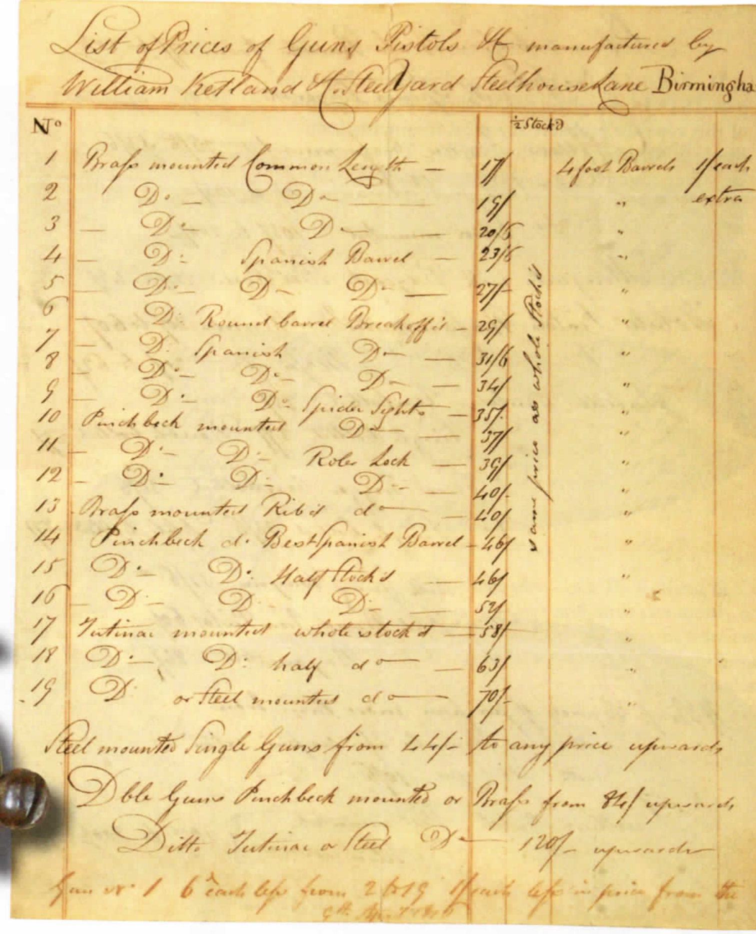
fused Thomas Sr. with his son having the same name, thus missing an entire generation. (This mistake was made by more than one author.) Until proven otherwise, it is my contention that he extrapolated the "grandfather" story in order to reconcile the incorrect dates in previous publications with new material he had acquired about the later members of the family.

[29] *Izon v. Ketland* (1807), British National Archives, Document C 13/1611

[30] Blackmore, p. 127 (London dates). Also see DeWitt Bailey and Douglas Nie, *English Gunmakers* (New York: Arco Publishing Co., 1978) p. 43 (Birmingham dates).

[31] Will of William Ketland in the British National Archives, IR 26/355.

[32] The Upson correspondence is in the Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. A few of the letters were published in *The American Eagle-Pommel Sword* by E. Andrew Mowbray (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Inc.,1988). Mowbray's complete file of Upson letters is now in the possession of this author.



List of Prices of Guns Pistols &c manufactured by
William Ketland & Co. Steelyard Steelhouse Lane Birmingham

No			½ Stock'd		
1	Brass mounted Common Length —	17/		4 foot Barrels	1/ each extra
2	D° — D° —	19/		"	
3	— D° — D° —	20/6		"	
4	— D° Spanish Barrel —	23/6		"	
5	D° — D° — D° —	27/		"	
6	D° Round barrel Breakoff'd —	29/		"	
7	D° Spanish D° —			"	
8	D° — D° — D° —	31/6		"	
9	D° — D° Spider Sights —	34/		"	
10	Pinchbeck mounted D° —	35/		"	
11	D° — D° — Rolo Lock —	37/		"	
12	D° — D° — D° —	39/	Same price as whole Stock'd	"	
13	Brass mounted Rib'd d° —	40/		"	
14	Pinchbeck d° Best Spanish Barrel —	40/		"	
15	D° — D° Half Stock'd —	46/		"	
16	D° — D° D° —	46/		"	
17	Tutinac mounted whole stock'd —	52/		"	
18	D° — D° half d° —	58/		"	
19	D° or Steel mounted d° —	63/		"	
		70/			

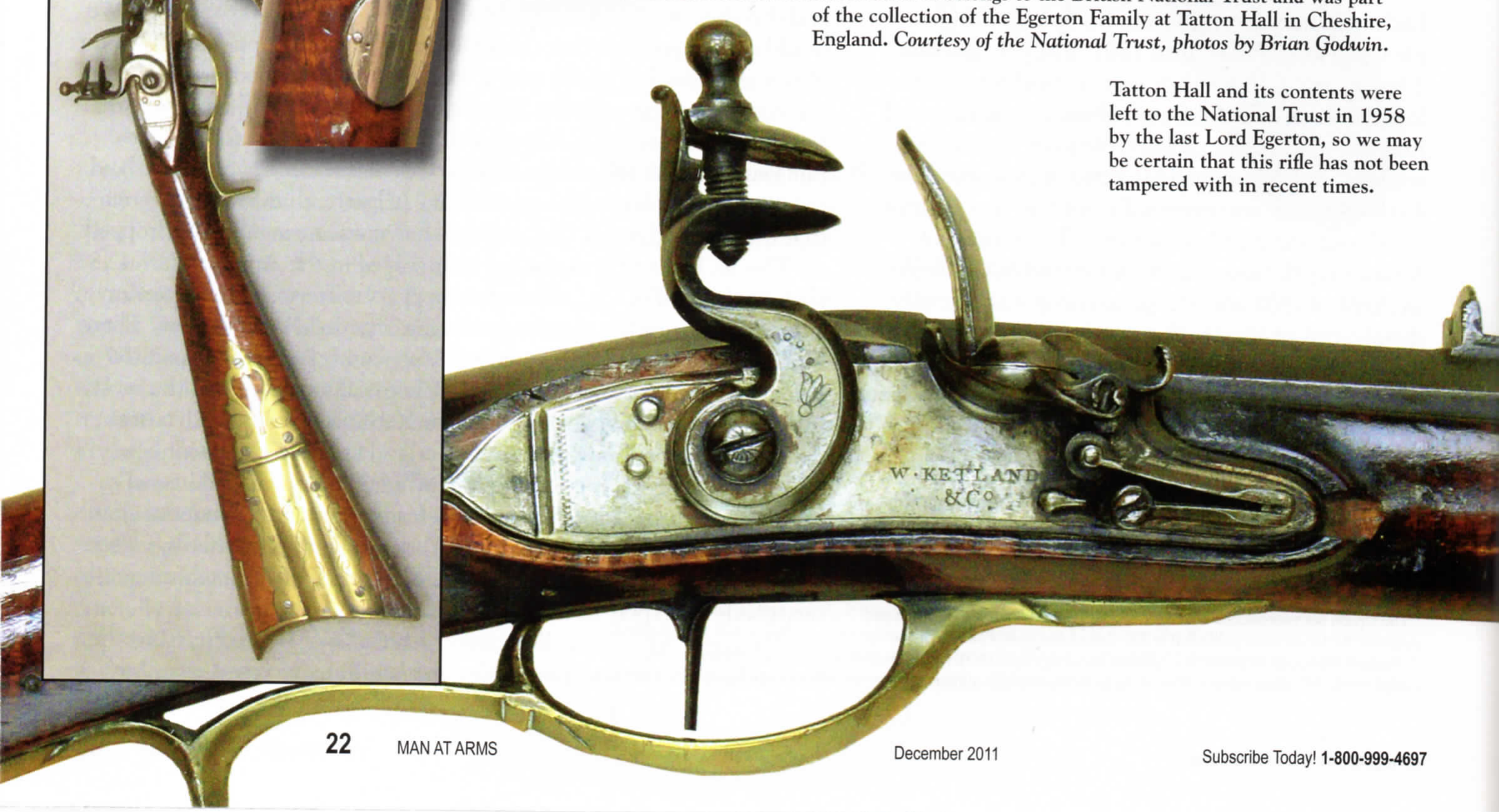
Steel mounted Single Guns from 44/- to any price upwards
Dble Guns Pinchbeck mounted or Brass from 84/ upwards
Ditto Tutinac or Steel D° — 120/- upwards

Gun No 1 6d each less from 2 to 19 1/ each less in price from the 9th April 1815

(above, right) The first page of the W. Ketland & Co. wholesale price list supplied to Henry Upson of the New York firm of Richards, Upson & Co., in Birmingham, in the summer of 1812. The note at the bottom, showing a decrease in prices as of the 9th of April, 1815, is added in a different hand and probably reflects the reopening of trade at the end of the War of 1812. In fact, it was written only about two weeks after the war ended. *Author's Collection.*

(left and below) The "Tatton Park" Ketland rifle. I believe this to be a completely English-made rifle intended for the American market. Despite its superficial resemblence to a "Pennsylvania Rifle," it exhibits several distinctly un-American features, including a 32" barrel that shows no sign of having been shortened (it is slightly swamped at the muzzle), a break-off breech and a steel ramrod along with British Ordnance Private Proof marks. It belongs to the British National Trust and was part of the collection of the Egerton Family at Tatton Hall in Cheshire, England. *Courtesy of the National Trust, photos by Brian Godwin.*

Tatton Hall and its contents were left to the National Trust in 1958 by the last Lord Egerton, so we may be certain that this rifle has not been tampered with in recent times.



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(right) Two Boston newspaper ads listing W. Ketland & Co. products. Although the ad at the top doesn't specifically mention "W." Ketland, it is almost certainly referring to them because the T. Ketland firm went into bankruptcy in 1821. W. Ketland & Co. continued in operation until at least 1831. The muskets mentioned in these ads were being sold to members of the Massachusetts Militia, all of whom were responsible for furnishing their own arms. The top ad is from the *Boston Daily Advertiser,* September 28, 1821. The bottom ad is from the *Boston Commercial Gazette,* September 19, 1822.

MUSKETS, – 20 cases **Muskets,** with Bayonets, complete, of **K**etland's manufactory, just imported and entitled to a debenture–for sale by **GEO. L. DEBLOIS & CO.**

FOWLING PIECES, MUSKETS, PISTOLS, &C.

JAMES YOUNG, 4, Lindall-street, Agent to Messrs. W. Ketland & Co. has received various patterns of double and single barrel'd Fowling Pieces, Muskets, Pistols, &c. which he can furnish at remarkably low prices. Among them is a double barrel'd Gun made according to the order of an experienced sportsman, and particularly adpted to the wildfouls, plover and other shooting of this country.

For sale, a highly finished double barrel'd Gun Case &c.

50 crates EARTHEN WARE, suitable for the Country trade, which will be disposed of at very low prices.

sept 19

steel-mounted dueling pistols. Of particular interest is the first page, which lists and describes 19 different fowlers of increasing quality, available either with full or half stocks and designated simply by numbers for ease of ordering. On the last page, gun locks are offered by the dozen from 25s to 145s. There was no difference in price between pistol locks and what are simply called "gun" locks.

In 1813, William Allport was an original Guardian of the Birmingham Proof House, a distinction he shared with John Adams, the partner in the T. Ketland & Co. business.[33] In 1816, the year that James Allport died, advertisements were appearing in American newspapers warning readers of fraudulent Ketland gun locks. These ads were jointly signed W. Ketland & Co. and T. Ketland & Co. Locks are well known to American collectors marked "W. Allport late with Ketland & Co." William Allport set up his own business in April of 1816, on the death of his father and the dissolution of the old W. Ketland & Co. partnership.[34]

William 2's will named three trustees to administer his estate. They were his wife, Elizabeth, his brother-in-law, Thomas Izon, and James Roberts. Roberts resigned as a trustee in 1812 and was replaced by William Izon and Isaac Hands. In 1816, when the old partnership agreement was dissolved and the Allports were all out of the picture, the trustees took over the business. It looks as if this is what William 2's agreement with the Allports was intended to prevent.

William Izon, having inherited his father's brass and iron foundry, had larger interests. He left the gunmaking business in the hands of Thomas Izon and Isaac Hands. Thomas went bankrupt in 1831 after borrowing a large amount of money from the company. He died intestate in 1835. Isaac Hands also died intestate in 1835, and Elizabeth Ketland died intestate in 1841. The business withered away, falling further into debt, but probably still operating up until about the first year or two of the 1830s. In a lawsuit filed long after the company had disappeared, William Izon was accused of permitting "Thomas Izon his brother to have uncontrolled management of the business, and by that reason he became largely indebted to the business…"[35]

These final details are of little use to collectors, aside from providing an explanation for those percussion shotguns that are sometimes encountered bearing what would otherwise be a highly unlikely "W. Ketland & Co." marking. I have only examined two or three of these guns, and given the now-extended operating dates of the W. Ketland & Co. enterprise, they would appear to be authentic. The examples I have seen had a distinctly "early" profile to their hammers, suggesting a possible manufacture date in the late 1820s or early 1830s.

(below) **An example of the type of advertisement that was being placed jointly by the two branches of the Ketland family in order to protect their collective interests against copyists illicitly making use of their highly regarded name and reputation.**

To Merchants, Store-Keepers, and others in North-America.

A CAUTION

BEWARE OF DECEPTION

WHERAS it has been discovered that large quantities of Gun Locks, Rifle locks, and Pistol Locks, have lately been manufactured in England, and marked or engraved KOTLAND for the purpose, it is believed, of being exported to the United States of America, and there to be sold as the manufacture of Thomas Ketland & Co. or William Ketland & Co. of Birmingham and London, Gun and Pistol Manufacturers.

We, the undersigned, in order to protect our friends in America from imposition, deem it our duty hereby to give notice, that all Guns, Pistols, Gun Locks, Rifle Locks, and Pistol Locks, of our respective manufacture, are marked either T KETLAND & Co. or W KETLAND & Co., and not KOTLAND, and that all Guns, Pistols, Gun Locks, Rifle Locks, and Pistol Locks, otherwise marked than with our separate names, are not manufactured by either of us.

THOMAS KETLAND & CO.
WILLIAM KETLAND & CO.

Birmingham, 9th December, 1815.

"FAKE" KETLANDS

Collectors almost never suspect that inexpensive products like those the Ketlands exported to the United States might have been faked by competing manufacturers during historical times. Nevertheless, the Ketlands had enough "name recognition" that this was actually a problem for them from at least 1816. The advertisement from the *Boston Weekly Advertiser* illustrated here is one of many that appeared in newspapers all along the eastern seaboard. Philadelphia, Boston and New York papers all carried similar ads that were worded identically. Note that the two Ketland companies were both concerned and placed these notices jointly.

I have never seen a "KOTLAND"-marked gun or lock, but, in the course of our research for this article, we have identified numerous early 19th-century Belgian-made "fake" Ketlands. The Belgian pistols are a bit clumsy looking but are nearly as well made as some of the original articles. Indeed, while the lowest grade of Birmingham-made Ketland export pistols have no bridles on their locks, the Belgian pistols have a bridle between the pan and the frizzen. The Ketland name is sometimes stamped on the lockplate in an arc, whereas on Birmingham-made guns it is always stamped in straight lines or, on better quality guns, engraved.

(Story continued on page 44...)

[33]Clive Harris, *The History of the Birmingham Gun-Barrel Proof House* (Birmingham; Guardians of the Birmingham Proof House, 1946; 2nd edition, 1949.) p. 30.

[34]The announcement of W. Allport's new business appears in the April 22, 1816, issue of *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*. It specifically mentions "his late father's illness" and his "having had sole management of W. Ketland & Co.'s business for the previous ten years." I am particularly indebted to Dr. DeWitt Bailey for this important piece of information.

[35]*Scott v. Izon* as found in *The English Reports*, Volume LV, Rolls Court VIII (London; Stevens & Sons, 1905) pp. 703–705.

(Story continued from page 23...)

Numerous photos showing a Belgian pistol marked to fool the customer into thinking it was made by the Ketlands. Note that this is a forgery created during the era when genuine Ketlands were being sold and not some sort of modern fake.

(more about the photos above) Today, the fact that it was fraudulently marked in this way actually increases its collector interest and value. Note the detailed view of the markings on the lockplate, where "Ketland" is shown right next to the maker's mark of the actual Belgian manufacturer. The mark, itself, is thus far unidentified. Also note the top of the barrel with its spurious "London" mark, accompanied by a Liège proof mark and the maker's mark repeated. No effort was made to disguise the Belgian origins of this pistol, so it is likely that whoever sold it did not expect his customers to be able to tell the difference. *Courtesy of the Ed Dorsey Collection.*

The "fake" pistol illustrated in numerous views above has a Belgian maker's mark on the lock and barrel and a conventional Liège proof mark. The easily recognized oval "ELG" mark only came into general use around 1816. I believe that all of these Belgian guns postdate the War of 1812. As a final note, some recent dealer advertisements have suggested that the Belgian "Ketland" copies were made on contract for the Ketlands, themselves, for sale to America. I don't believe this for a minute. The Ketlands were masters of the Birmingham gun trade and probably the most successful British export gunmakers of the entire 19th century. You don't "ship coal to Newcastle." If you ask me, Liège had nothing to offer them. ❑

(left) Another spurious Belgian lock marking, this time on a fowler found in Maryland in the 1940s. Belgian-made locks are easily recognized from the large typeface used for the Ketland name. *Courtesy of Patrick and Gary Gloyd.*

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