

Dating a Gun

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Following my search to accurately date a couple of my guns, I came across another illustration of my ignorance in, of all things, an American magazine. I was dimly aware of the code used by the Birmingham Proof House, but had no copy of it to use, and in the hope that I am not the most ignorant of our small group I repeat it here.

Before I come to the code, a brief mention of the American magazine. If any of you have not seen a copy of "*The Double Gun Journal*" then look for a copy in the Coch-Y-Bonddu bookshop at the next game fair you visit. They contain an extraordinary collection of articles on shotguns and double rifles with brilliant photographs. Many of the articles concern British guns and makers. In fact the code I now give to help in dating shotguns was contained in an article about a Westley Richards shotgun. The author had always wanted a British gun and had finally got a good one by telephone bidding in an auction.

In 1921 the Birmingham Proof Master began to impose a mark that showed the year that the gun was proved. The earlier marks consisted of crossed sceptres with the space in the top quadrant left blank, the letter "B" in the right quadrant, a figure in the bottom quadrant is to do with the inspector and a letter in the left quadrant gives us the date in code. The dates run from 1st July one year to 30th June in the next year. The codes are:-

A	1921 - 1922	B	1922 - 1923
C	1923 - 1924	D	1924 - 1925
E	1925 - 1926	F	1926 - 1927
G	1927 - 1928	H	1928 - 1929
J	1929 - 1930	K	1930 - 1931
L	1931 - 1932	M	1932 - 1933
N	1933 - 1934	O	1934 - 1935
P	1935 - 1936	R	1936 - 1937
S	1937 - 1938	T	1938 - 1939
U	1939 - 1940	V	1940 - 1941

The marks ceased in 1941 but were re-introduced in 1950 but in a circle divided into three, with the year letter on the left. Again the letters ran through the alphabet, excluding "I" and "Q". When this finished in 1974 they continued but the circle was not divided into inner divisions.

Using this information I can now say that the Bate that I had managed to date between 1896 and 1904 was re-proofed in 1939/1940.