

## Lecture Reports

### *Brian Little*

**Thursday 11th December 2003.**

***The History of Duelling with Pistols* – Hugh Hinde.**

This was a highly entertaining and well-presented talk to a small but warmly appreciative audience.

It appears that the earliest pistol dates approximately to the start of the eighteenth century, a time when swords were less fashionable. Young army officers, especially in Ireland, developed a liking for this form of weaponry and it is to their ranks that we must look for reasons for combat. Frequently these were frivolous and often a way of settling differences over favoured ladies, matters of integrity and honour and even an extension of earlier dog fights in which no animal was supreme.

As for the duels themselves, the way these were organised was often haphazard, as for instance two people shooting from either end of a table or at the length of a scarf.

By the 1770's rules for duelling had been formulated and seconds were acquired by duelists to ensure that the event was well organised and brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Their other duties related to time and place and above all access to a surgeon. Wounds could be very serious as medical aids were limited compared with today.

The greatest beneficiaries were the gunsmiths, many located in London. They developed flintlock and percussion varieties of pistol and some like Manton and Griffin developed a name for their work. It was the accuracy of performance of the percussion type which may well have led to the decline of duelling. *The Times* spoke out against it and Queen Victoria frowned on the activity despite being surrounded by many one-time activists.

In England fights between individuals developed into target pistol shooting, By contrast duelling in France was still evident in the 1930's. Our neighbours across the Channel were late in appreciating the many hazards of 'pistols for two'.

**Thursday 8th January 2004.**

***The Gunpowder Plot, 1605* – Graham Sutherland.**

This was history delivered on a popular front and in a breezy manner. Graham lost no time in setting the scene. In his words, there was an air of expectancy in London at the start of the seventeenth century. March 1603 and the Queen was dead. There were no less than three contenders for the throne. Each needed to be aware of a general suspicion of Catholicism and a fear of Spain. Then there was also the deviousness of Robert Cecil, who had been adviser to Elizabeth.