

# PRIDEAUX'S

*Patent in U.S.A.*

*Other Patents pending.*

1914

## IMPROVED PATENT

# MAGAZINE LOADER

FOR

## RAPIDLY LOADING REVOLVERS

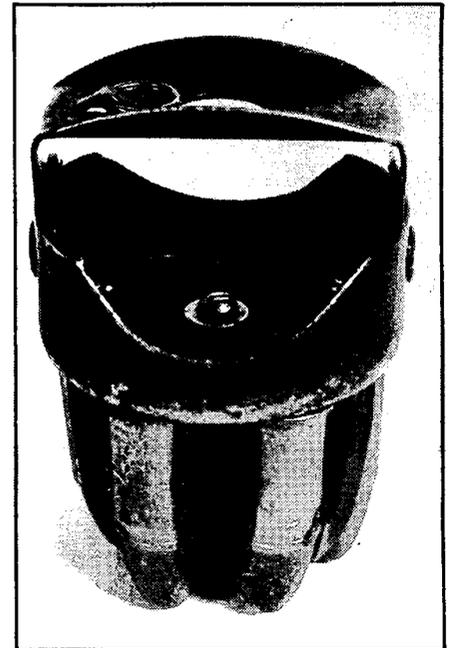
### *An historical review by Nigel Utting*

**T**HE SEMI-AUTOMATIC PISTOL'S single-stroke magazine reload is a strong point in its favour, but a skilled revolver shooter can dump six empties and reload by means of a speedloader in a remarkably short time. With a little practice, five seconds from the last shot of the first six to the first shot of the second six is easily obtained, even by an average shooter, but I've got news for those of you who thought that the speedloader was a new development on the revolver scene.

Perhaps the ultimate speedloader was the entire spare loaded cylinder carried by

percussion revolver shooters in the American West: fire six rounds; withdraw the cylinder pin and dump the empty cylinder; insert a complete, loaded cylinder and back to the fray.

Modern revolver shooters can choose from the selection of speedloaders made by Dade, Safariland, Jet, HKS, etc, but somewhere in the middle of all this came a real product of its time: Prideaux's Improved Patent Magazine Loader.



*The Prideaux Instantaneous Loader, again with six rounds of .455. Note the MoD broad arrow and 'P-L-1919'.*

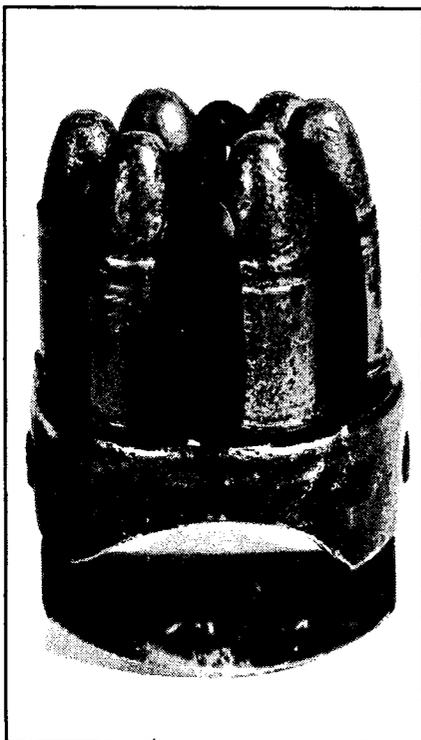
### Webley revolvers

Webley revolvers, in all their versions, reigned supreme as sidearms of the British Empire for decades. Around this time, revolver-armed officers led their men against determined foes of the Empire who had, apparently, never been told that they were meant to fall down when shot. In those circumstances an empty revolver at the wrong moment could significantly reduce your chances of promotion, due to being prematurely dead!

William de Courcy Prideaux's invention, also known as his Instantaneous Revolver Magazine, was not the only reloading device designed for the Webley, but it was the most successful. Prideaux was in fact granted two United Kingdom Patents: No. 3560 of 17th February, 1893, entitled 'Rapid Reloading Device for Revolvers', and No. 22653 of 17th November, 1914, entitled 'Improvements to Prideaux Rapid Loader'.

The earlier device consisted of a circular disc or thrust plate, through which protruded 12 spring steel fingers designed to hold six fresh rounds in the correct

position for insertion into the empty cylinder. Sliding the thrust plate forwards pushed the fresh rounds from between the fingers and into the empty chambers. The disadvantage of this early design was that it was possible for the sliding thrust plate and the steel fingers to part company as the loader was operated. What distinguishes the improved from the original loader is a stamped, bridge-like 'handle' at the rear of the thrust plate which limits the travel of the steel fingers so that the various components cannot become detached. In practice, as the loader is pushed forwards and the steel fingers contact the back of the cylinder, they are pushed just far enough rearwards to allow the thrust plate to push the rounds into the chamber, and no further.



*The Prideaux Instantaneous Loader shown with six rounds of .455.*



*The Old Way:—Loading singly from pouch.*



*Loading with Patent MAGAZINE Loader*

*The Problem of the Empty Revolver and how to charge it instantly*

.. ..

LOADING FROM POUCH:

*Loss of Time and Life, plus Waste of Cartridges.*

.. ..

BY MAGAZINE:

*Instant Service and no Spilt Ammunition*

Part of the cover of the Prideaux sales brochure, circa 1914.

Prideaux's own publicity material describes his later, improved, loader as consisting of: '... a circular frame, fitted with six steel clips in the same relative position as the cartridges in a Revolver. A sliding disc or thrust plate is fitted at the rear of the Loader, which, on pressure, pushes the six cartridges clear of the clips, into the revolver, releasing the loader for refilling at leisure'. From my own experience I can confirm Prideaux's loader to be fast and efficient, with a most 'positive' feel to it, and refilling of the loader is simplicity itself.

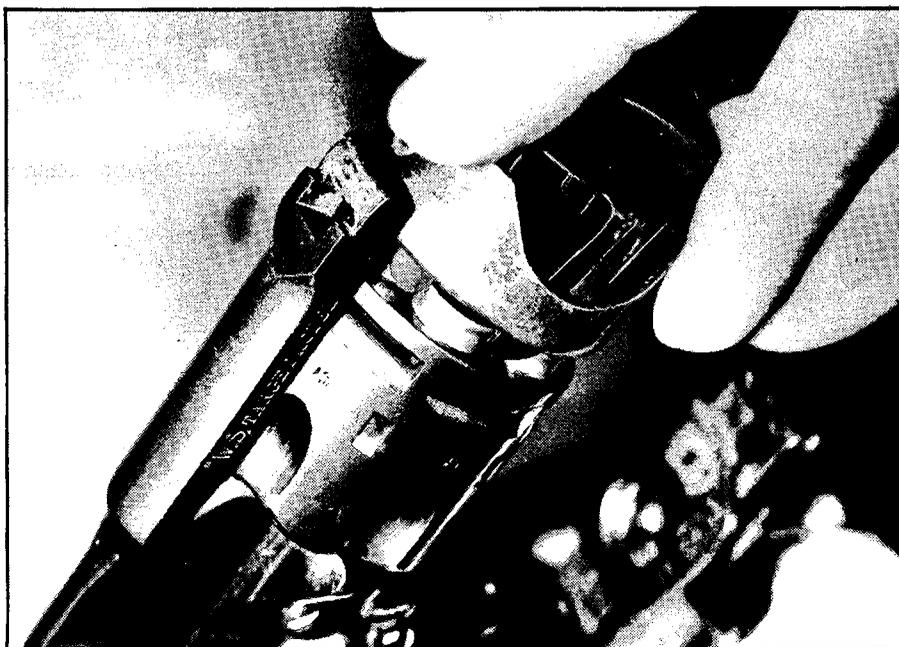
The inventor continues: 'The construction of the loader is simple, and there is nothing to get out of order. Nor are there any loose parts to get misplaced. Actual trial proves that revolvers can be fired three times more rapidly by the use of the Prideaux Loader'.

## Advantage

As a top-break revolver, the Webley has the distinct advantage of dumping all

six empties as it opens, without involving the free hand at all, leaving this free hand to go for the loader. Having recharged the cylinder, the revolver is snapped shut and the user is back in action.

Prideaux stated that: '... A charged Loader at hand, instead of loose cartridges, is practically a loaded revolver; it is especially useful in the dark or cold. No chamber can be passed over, and its great handiness makes the Loader particularly useful in any hand to hand fighting and to all mounted men.'



The Loader in use with an original Webley 'WS Target Model'. The heads of the rounds can just be seen below the loader and the rear of the cylinder.

## Competition

Prideaux's were not the only speed-loaders designed for Webleys. Major Arthur Watson's design, one of the few which went into full commercial production, was remarkably similar in function to HKS speedloaders, except that each round was held in place by a small projection catching the outer edge of the rim, rather than the inner edge. Both released the fresh round by twisting part or all of the base of the unit.

Prideaux wasn't alone in praising his improved loader, and his 1914 publicity sheet quotes testimonies from a number of influential users. Major General Sir Alfred E. Turner, KCB, RA, says: 'I am much obliged for the Magazine revolver Loader, which is very ingenious and practical.' and 'Expression of Opinion on the PRIDEAUX LOADER from the Late

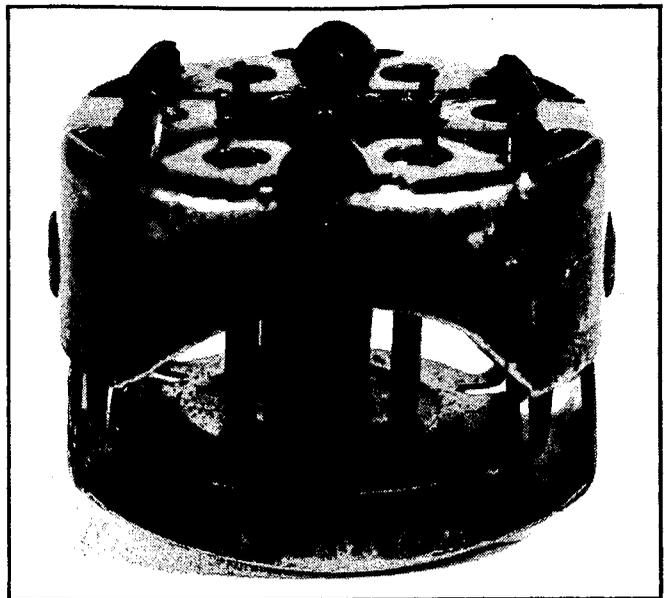
Field Marshal Earl Roberts: "I am directed by Field Marshal Lord Roberts to acknowledge your letter of 2nd May, and to inform you that the Magazine Revolver Loaders, sent him by Mr Prideaux have been distributed amongst the Officers of His Lordship's Staff, by whom it is pronounced to be an entire success."

The front cover of Prideaux's publicity sheet has two superb period line illustrations showing, on the one hand, a distinctly worried-looking officer fumbling loose rounds from a belt pouch and, on the other hand, a coolly self-assured officer, confidently recharging his Webley with his Prideaux Loader.

It wasn't just the standard Webley service revolver that benefitted from these loaders, however, since the same device could be used to reload the Webley Fosbery automatic revolver, the .455 Service Colt or Smith & Wesson.

In 1914, the needs of the mounted soldier still figured strongly in military thinking, as reflected in *The Navy and Army Illustrated's* review: "... in moments of excitement, on horseback, or in the dark, the open, rotating cylinders are apt to elude the loader's fingers, and ... the chambers are snapped-to, imperfectly filled ... this failure may cost the owner of the weapon his life. A

*The Prideaux Instantaneous Loader shown fully discharged: i.e., with the spring retainers pushed back through the thrust plate, having released the six fresh rounds.*



*charged loader ... may be easily used in the dark, and its great handiness makes the loader particularly useful to all mounted men'.*

For ease of carrying, Prideaux's improved loaders could be supplied: 'in a small circular leather pouch with loop for attachment to the belt, or in Prideaux's registered holder, affording room for Revolver and Loader' — cost 10/6 (52½p for younger readers!)

"With a top-break Webley and a pair of Prideaux speedloaders on his belt, the ability to both unload and reload in a single stroke must have been of considerable comfort to an officer in the mud, darkness and confusion of the trenches or, worse still, when leading his men across the barbed wire. Who knows how many lives may have been saved in the heat of battle by Prideaux's simple, but highly effective, loader?"