

From My Collection - The Webley-Fosbery



When you have collected the whole Webley military revolver series, Mark I to mark VI, you might start to wonder 'what next?'. The Webley British service revolver, developed in the 1880's, was the most effective military sidearm of its day. However, by the turn of the century automatic pistols were making an appearance, with a number of different and competing technologies. The Borchardt/Luger toggle, Mauser/Bergman bolt and Browning slide actions are the best known.

Amongst the other contenders was the quintessentially British Webley-Fosbery automatic revolver, the brainchild of Lieutenant Colonel George Fosbery, VC.

Fosbery, ignoring all the other systems emerging in the 1890's, devised a simple and ingenious method of harnessing the recoil energy of a fired round to rotate the cylinder and cock the hammer of a revolver. This was achieved by dividing the frame into two sections, with the upper part, consisting of barrel, cylinder and hammer assembly, fitted to slide to the rear of the lower part under the force of the recoil. A small vertical stud fixed to the lower section engages with zig-zag grooves on the outer surface of the cylinder, rotating it to bring the next chamber into line with the bore. At the same time the rearward movement of the upper section is used to cock the hammer.



Apart from the fact that it cannot be fired 'double action', the operation of the Fosbery is otherwise similar to that of the top-break Webley service revolver. However, the cylinder is fixed and cannot be rotated with the action closed other than by firing a round or manually pushing the upper section rearward. It must be manually cocked to fire the first round, either by pulling the hammer back or by pushing the upper part to the rear. Thereafter, each pressure on the trigger fires a round - exactly like a semi-auto.

The Fosbery can be easily loaded and fired with one hand, unlike most other semi-autos. It has a safety catch, enabling it to be carried loaded and cocked.

Fosbery patented his basic design in 1895 and, after further development with the Webley & Scott Revolver and Arms Co., the Webley-Fosbery Automatic Revolver was introduced to the shooting world at the July 1900 Bisley matches and became popular with target shooters.

A special .455" calibre cartridge was made by Kynoch for the original Webley Fosbery revolver. The bullet had two cannelures, the case mouth being coned into the foremost and choked into the rear. Case diameter was a constant .478", and the rim .529". The bullet was of lead with a nickel envelope and weighed 222 grain, propelled by ten grains of Cordite. This round was soon superseded by the standard British service .455" round. A small number of Fosbery revolvers were produced in .38 ACP calibre.

The British Army evaluated the arm for military use but did not adopt it, ostensibly on the grounds that it would not perform well in the mud and dust of the battle field. However it was a popular private purchase choice amongst officers of the Royal Naval Air Service in the Great War.

Production numbers of the Webley-Fosbery were quite small, with around 4,000 being made between 1900 and the end of the war in 1918. A further 200 or so were assembled in the interwar years. Surviving examples are seldom seen in good condition.

After long yearning for a Fosbery, the writer was fortunate enough to acquire a good one from a private collection that was being dispersed after many years.

