A

Famous Pistols and Hand Guns

General Editor

A. J. R. Cormack

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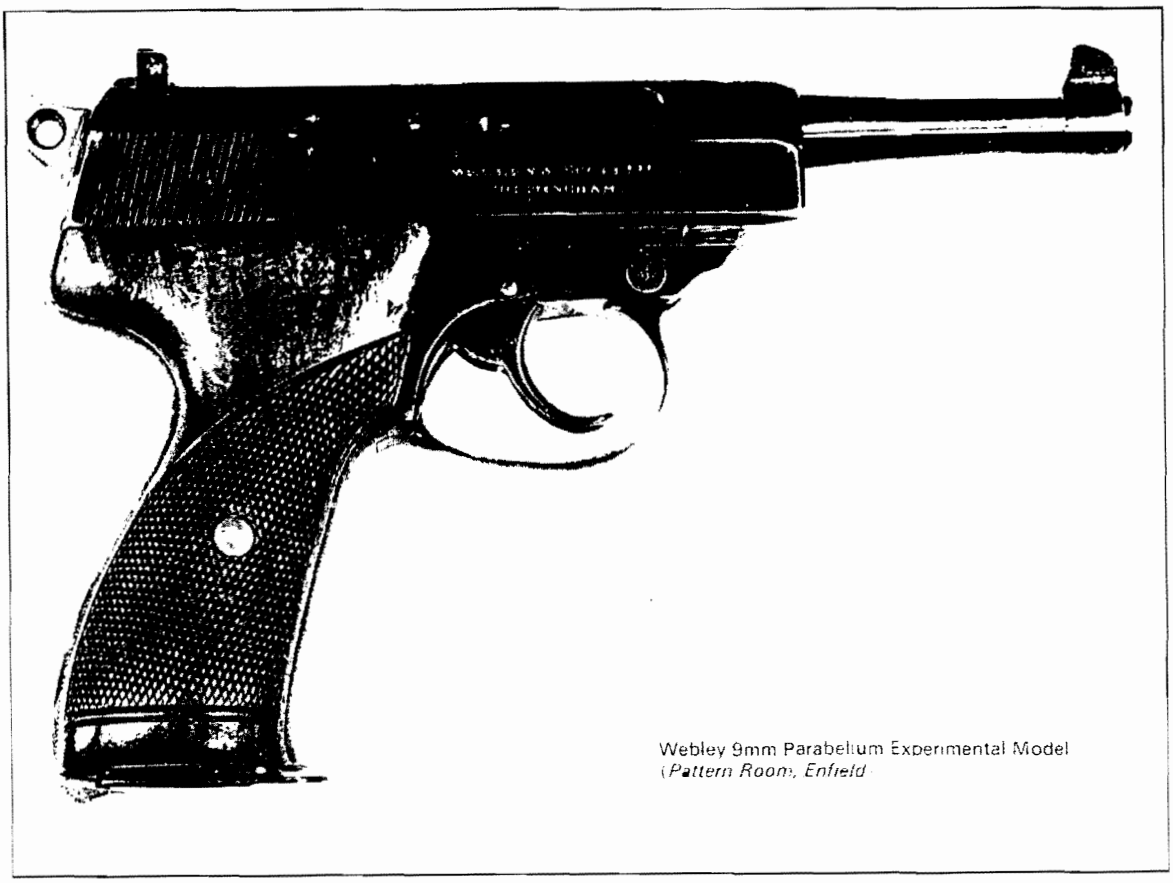


Webley 9mm Parabellum Experimental Model
(Pattern Room, Enfield)

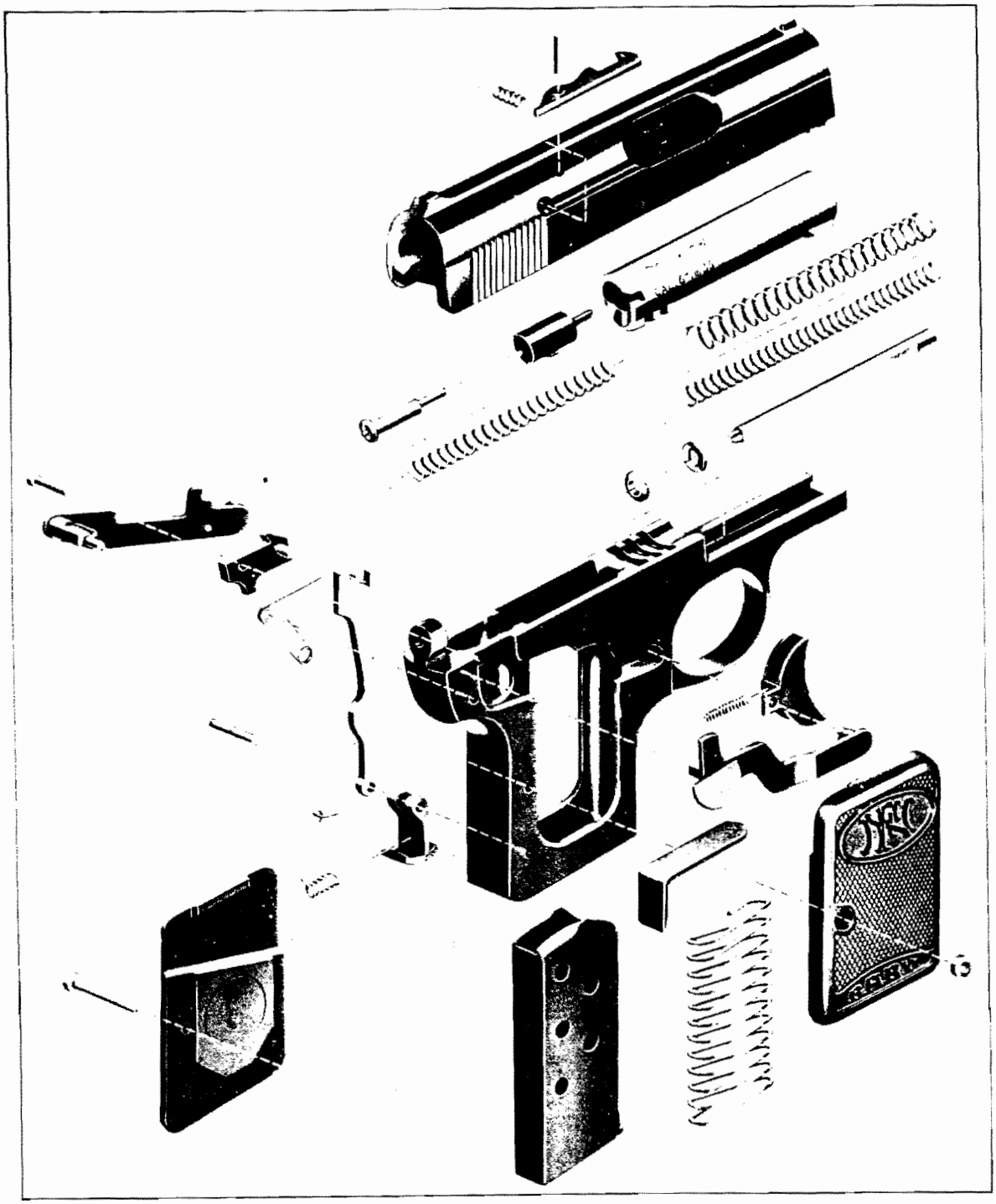
Webley and Scott Automatic Pistols

A. J. R. Cormack

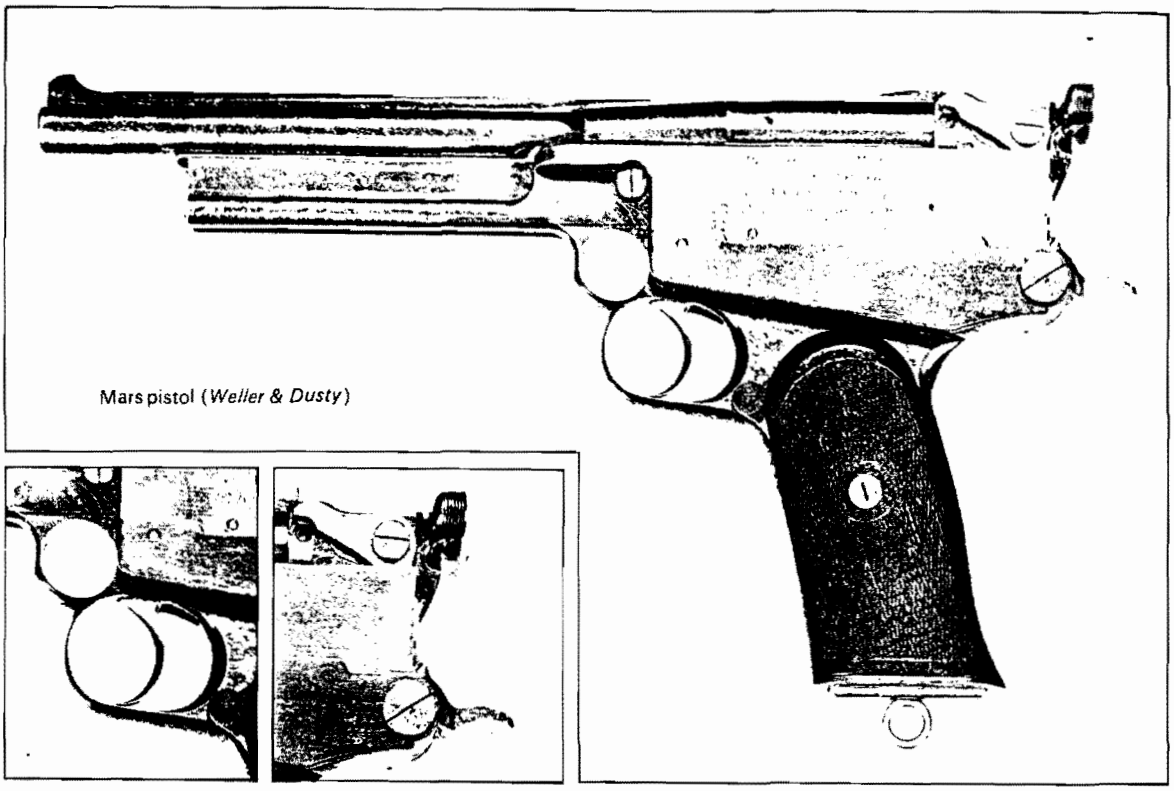
An expert can often tell the origin of a pistol by its look and finish. One would not need to be an expert to identify the Webley automatic pistol. The unmistakable square features could only come from the country from which emanates the bulldog breed. This is a weapon which has no pretensions to beauty but has an honest look of reliable dependability.
The idea behind and the development of the Webley automatic pistol took place in four stages. First, the ill-fated Mars Fairfax pistol which, although of a most advanced design, never achieved commercial success. (The failure of the Mars set Mr Webley the task of developing a reliable and commercially viable automatic pistol.) Second, the successful range of automatic pistols developed and put into production, between 1903 and 1940. Third, the Harrington and Richardson Licence Built pistols, and fourth, the 9mm parabellum pistol developed unsuccessfully for small arms trials around 1952. (The failure of this pistol probably stopped any chance of the British small arms industry equipping any future British Armed Forces with an automatic pistol.)

Mars Pistol

This weapon will be dealt with in a future Profile, however a short description is necessary to understand the development of the Webley range. The Mars is a massive strong locked breech pistol. It fires a number of different bottle necked cartridges. Considering the date of its design and production, which was between 1895 and 1907, the power achieved by the ammunition and weapon can only be considered astounding. However, this massive construction, so necessary with such high powered cartridges and the complication of the basic mechanism, led to its non-acceptance.



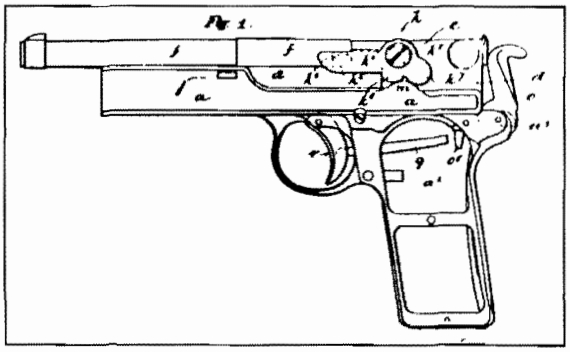
Exploded view Browning Baby (*FN*)



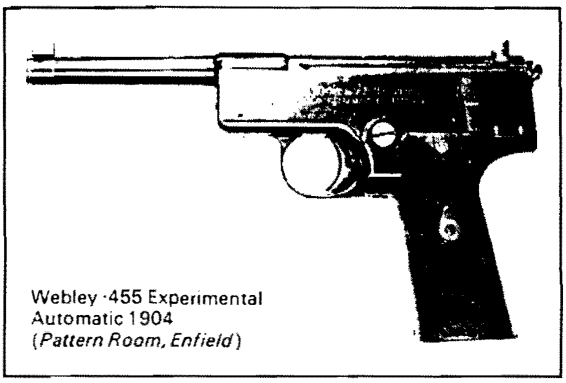
Mars pistol (*Weller & Dusty*)

Webley Automatics
·455 Experimental Automatic
1903 Prototype: The 1903 prototype was developed under the guidance of Mr Whiting who was under the direct control of Mr T. W. Webley. This pistol was patented on 4 September 1902 (Patent No. 19032). The weapon was designed to chamber the ·455 rimmed revolver cartridge and not the later ·455 Webley automatic cartridge. An external hammer was used as in all future ·455 automatics. The locking system was interesting in that the locking was accomplished by two pivoted locking pieces mounted externally on the slide which were held by cams into engagement with recesses in the barrel. On recoil different cams pushed the locking levers out of engagement allowing the breech to open. A recoil spring closed the breech chambering a new round.

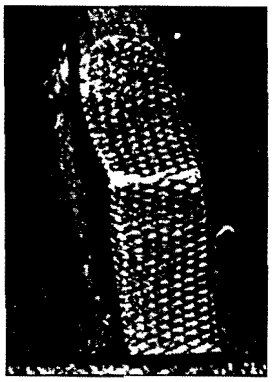
Webley ·455 Experimental Automatic 1903

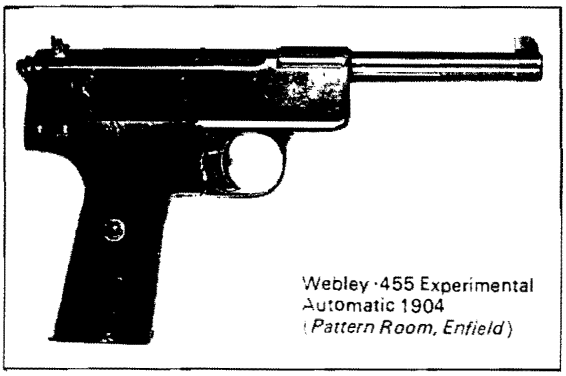


1904 Prototype: In 1904 a patent was taken out (No. 3820) on 16 February, followed by further patents in August and November of the same year, for a new type of locking system. This weapon far from being a simplified one, was most complicated in design and construction. The locking system involved a vertical sliding bolt and a barrel latch which combined to give a not very reliable operation. The patent in August (No. 17856), was for a hold-open device and the November patent contained further details of this device, also details of a stripping device and a trigger mechanism to prevent double shots. This weapon was chambered for a modified cartridge with first the regulation rim plus a groove and finally the semi-rimmed type used in the later pistols. The 'V' recoil spring was adopted and continued throughout most of the Webley designs. This weapon was tested by the British Government in October 1904 and also in March 1905. The results would seem to be somewhat contradictory as on one test the weapon was found satisfactory and on another completely unsatisfactory. The weapon was 10¼in. long, weighed 3lb 1¼oz and had a barrel length of 6½in. The magazine carried 7 rounds.
1906 Prototype: A further design, a stage nearer the final one, was patented on 13 June 1906 (No. 13570). This model was the first to use the inclined rib type of lock. The basic mechanism works as follows:
The barrel is free to slide in three ribs on either side of the main body, these ribs are inclined forward at an angle of 45°. When the slide closes under the influence of the 'V' recoil spring the barrel is forced

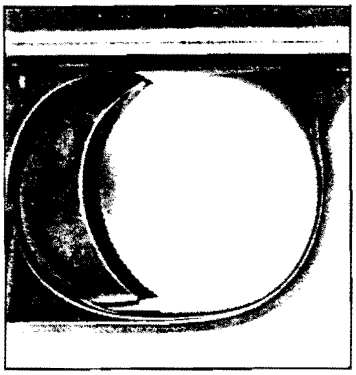


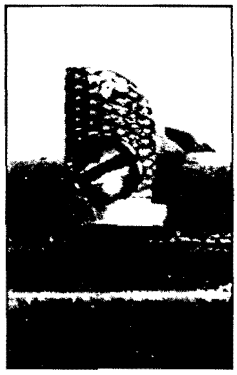
Webley ·455 Experimental Automatic 1904 (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)





Webley ·455 Experimental Automatic 1904 (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



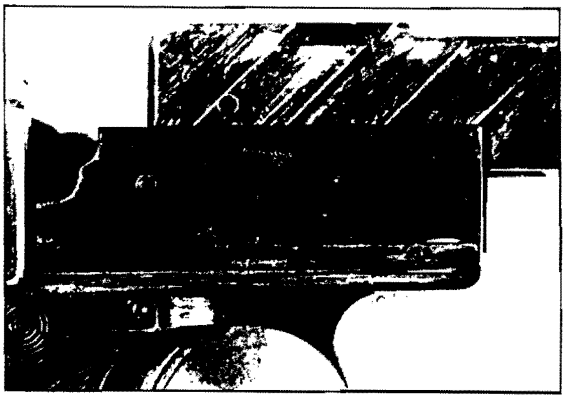


forwards and upwards guided by these ribs. As it moves upwards a rib on the top engages with a corresponding rib on the slide, thereby locking the slide and barrel together. When the weapon is fired the fact that the slots are at an angle coupled with the help of the friction of the inclined surfaces holds the slide and barrel together until the pressure drops sufficiently to allow safe ejection. When the pressure has dropped to a safe limit the barrel moves rearward and downward allowing the slide to move backward ejecting the empty case. The weapon was tested by the British Army and progressive modifications made. A report in September 1909 indicates modifications to the safety and to the trigger, and in October 1909, 1254 rounds were fired with only one failure. This was combined with an accuracy rated higher than that of the issue Service Revolver. In September 1910 in competition with the Colt model 1905 ·45 automatic (described in the *Profile* No. 5 'The Colt ·45 Automatic') the report favoured the Webley and found the Colt unsafe. The conclusion of the tests suggested that modifications to the safety were necessary and that the Army required a lighter pistol.

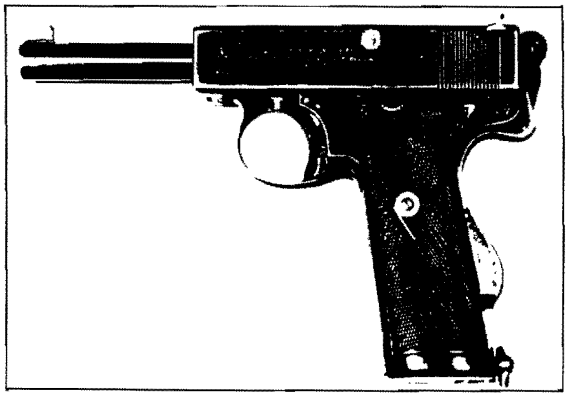
Model 1912 ·455 Mk. I

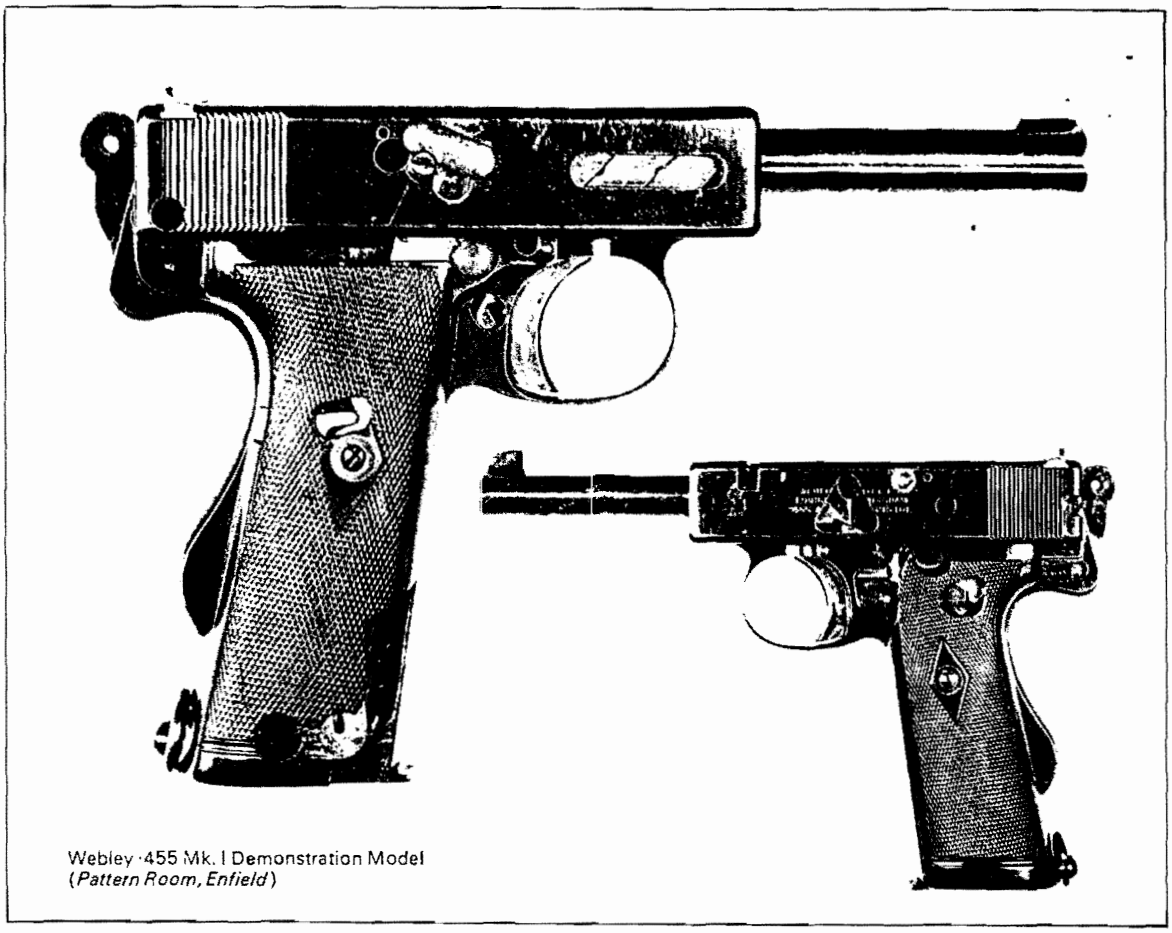
This weapon was the one finally adopted for Government Service. The Royal Navy accepted it as a limited standard weapon on 19 May 1914. It was also used by the Royal Marines. The basic differences between this weapon and the 1906 concerned those enumerated above, plus the fitting

Webley ·455 Locking system (*Lowland Brigade Depot*)

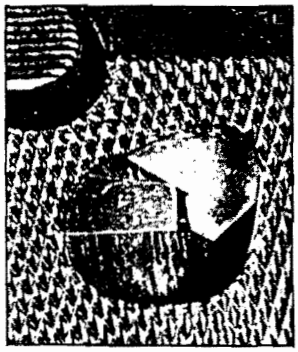


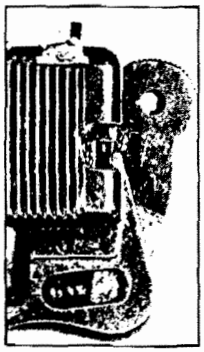
Webley ·455 Mk. I Model 1912 (*Bowman*)





Webley ·455 Mk. I Demonstration Model
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

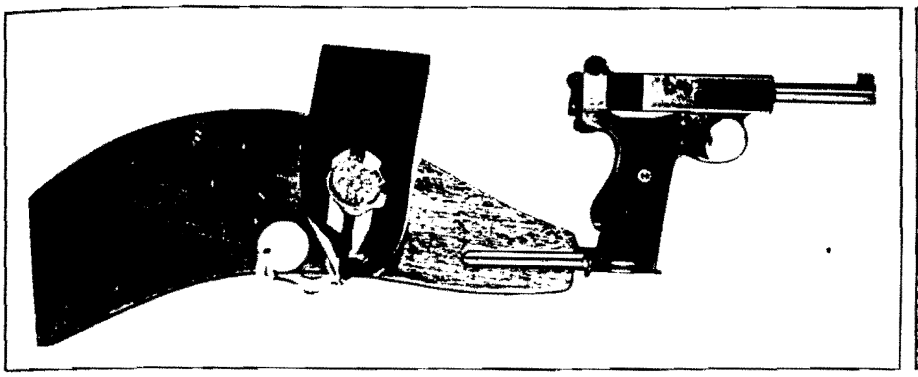




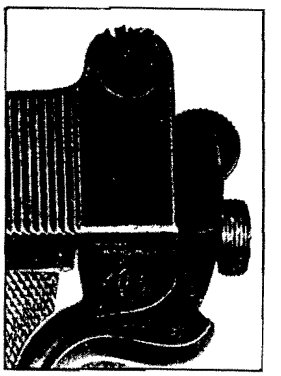
of a grip safety and the reduction of the ribs from six to four—albeit larger ones—thus simplifying machining. The magazine release was standardised as the button type used on all later pistols and the dismounting pin modified for ease of use. This weapon was also produced for commercial sale and one such ·455 automatic was used by the Vauxhall Factory Guards during the Second World War by which time the Webley was not a front line service weapon although it would still act as a powerful deterrent to an intruder.

·455 Mk. I No. 2

Records would indicate that 100 Webley ·455's were issued to the Royal Horse Artillery in 1913, —50 of which had shoulder stocks—and to the Royal Flying Corps on 26 April 1915. The Model 1915 differs little from the 1912 except that it has an additional safety and a new type of back sight similar to the one fitted to the Luger which adjusts automatically for windage. Keeping in mind the similarity, it would seem that the progression from 1912 to 1915 is far from distinct. One interesting feature was that the magazine had a second holding notch whereby it could be held only partly in, thus allowing the pistol to be loaded single shot fashion keeping the full magazine in reserve. The advantages of this system rather escape the author but they are possibly explained by a paragraph in the Manual of Military Engineering dated 1893 which although referring to the magazine fed Lee-Metford would



Webley ·455 Mk. I No. 2. *Note:* The Pattern Room Seal of acceptance. This indicates that the weapon has been accepted as suitable for production (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



Webley ·455 Mk. I No. 2 Note Safety catch (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

seem appropriate—'As a single loader (it) will fire about 12 aimed shots a minute. *The magazine is kept as a reserve for critical moments.*'

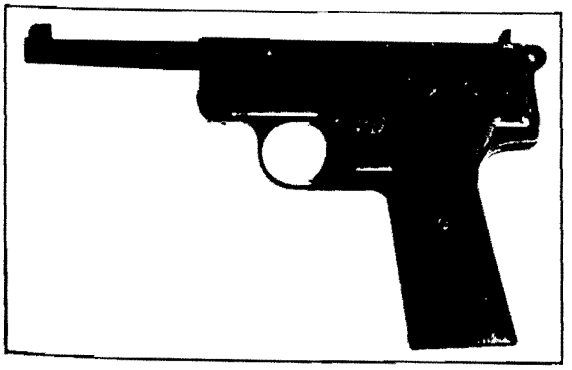
·38 ACP Model 1904

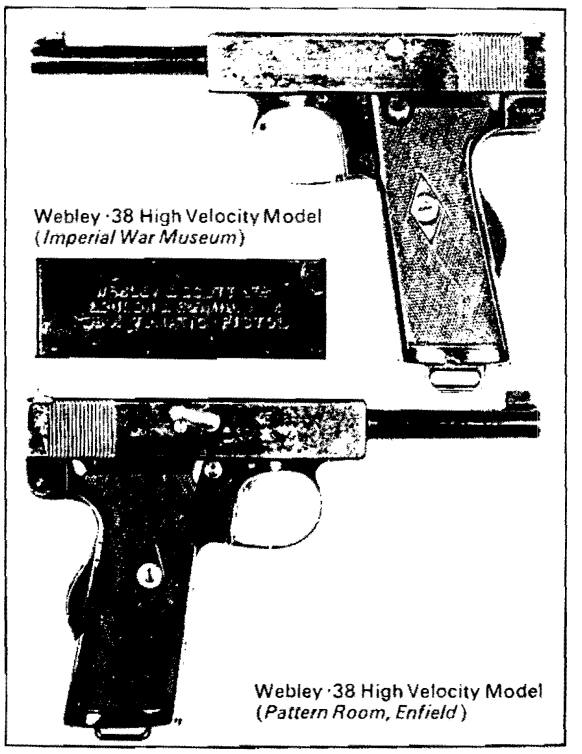
This weapon was the first attempt by Webley to manufacture a ·38/9mm. calibre pistol and naturally enough the 1904 ·455 automatic was used as a basis. The weapon is chambered for the ·38 ACP cartridge and as can be seen is identical in all major features to its larger brother. The lock system employed is also basically the same as the ·455. Only a very few of these weapons have survived and it may be assumed that as the highest numbered one known is No. 29 the weapon never attained production quantity. The reason for this could be the lack of interest at the turn of the century in a small calibre weapon. The calibre used by all major countries was ·45 or larger.

·38 High Velocity Hammerless Automatic Models 1910 & 1913

With the possible changing of military requirement from a weapon firing the low velocity large bore ·455 revolver or automatic cartridge, to that of a smaller bore high velocity cartridge, Webley decided to develop a weapon suitable for the latter. The cartridge chosen was the ·38 ACP which had received acceptance with the line of Colt automatic pistols. The model 1909 9mm which had been chambered for the 9mm Browning Long Cartridge was a simple blow-back weapon and therefore not suitable for the use of a high velocity cartridge. As there was already in existence at this time the ·455 automatic which was chambered for the relatively powerful ·455 automatic round and thus had a locked breech, it was logical that the ·38 ACP weapon should be a modified version of this.
The first version is normally identified as the Model 1910 and the only basic difference between it and the ·455 Mk. I is that an internal hammer is used. It has a barrel length of 5in. and a magazine capacity of eight. In 1913 the modified version 'the Model 1913' was developed. The major change being the adoption of a safety catch similar to that on the ·32 automatic. These weapons are, with the exception

Webley ·38 ACP Model 1904
Note: Similarity to ·455 Model 1904 (*Frame*)





Webley ·38 High Velocity Model (*Imperial War Museum*)

Webley ·38 High Velocity Model (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

of the 9mm parabellum automatics, the rarest of all Webley automatic pistols.

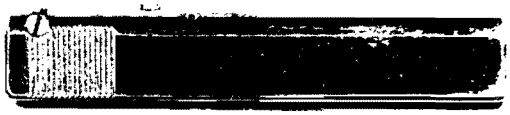
9mm Browning Long, External Hammer Automatic Model 1909

This pistol was developed after Webley & Scott had, along with various other American and Continental manufacturers, submitted for trial a number of pistols to European Governments. The outcome of these tests was that although the weapons concerned (probably calibres ·32 or ·455) met with approval by these Governments, the calibres for which they were chambered did not. As a result Webley decided to manufacture a pistol with a calibre of 9mm. It was chosen because the 9mm Browning Long was a popular pistol and sub machine gun cartridge much used in Europe at the time. It had also the advantage of being sufficiently low pressured to enable a blow back design to be adopted. A large number of patents were taken out during the development of this weapon, between 1908 and 1909. Webley manufactured some 20 weapons by hand for further trials before the commencement of production in 1909. This pistol was eventually adopted by the South African Police Force in 1920 as their official automatic pistol. The main patent numbers 1664; 2569; 19177 were taken out in 1908.

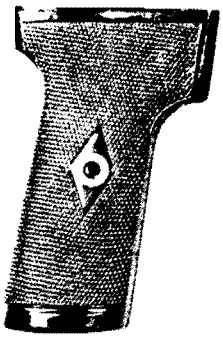
One of the interesting features of the weapon is that the grip safety and the trigger mechanism are manufactured as a single unit and thus the sear is held away from the trigger bar until the grip safety along with the trigger mechanism is pressed into a position where they can make contact. The weapon continues with the method adopted in the ·32 automatic of holding the barrel to the receiver by the trigger guard. Unlike the other weapons ·25 ACP, ·32 ACP, ·380 ACP, there is a positive hold-open device fitted. This differs from the other weapons in that the slide stays back when the last round has been fired and is held there by the magazine follower. Needless to say on the extraction of the magazine the slide returns forward. On the 9mm however, the slide has a positive hold-open and for it to be closed the small button on the top of the slide has to be depressed.

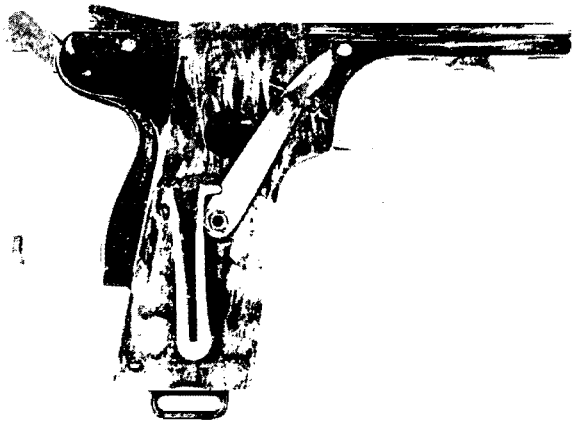
Some of the earlier weapons were produced with a safety catch on the right hand side but on all later weapons it was of a similar type to the later ·32. Two types of grips were employed, one of hard rubber and the other of bakelite.

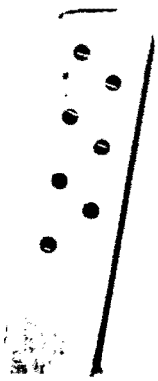
Webley 9mm Browning Long Model 1909
Note: Slide Release Button

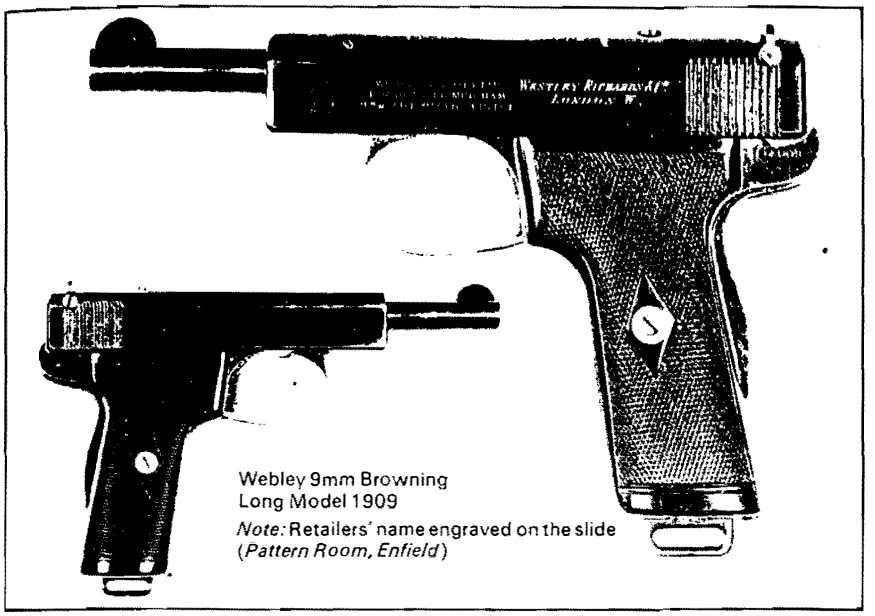


Webley 9mm Browning Long Model 1909
Note: 'V' spring normally covered by the grip and the trigger guard in its unlocked position

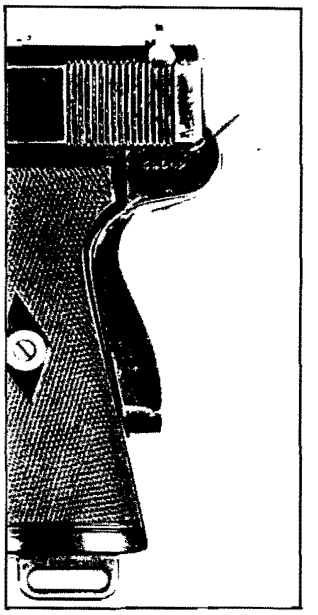






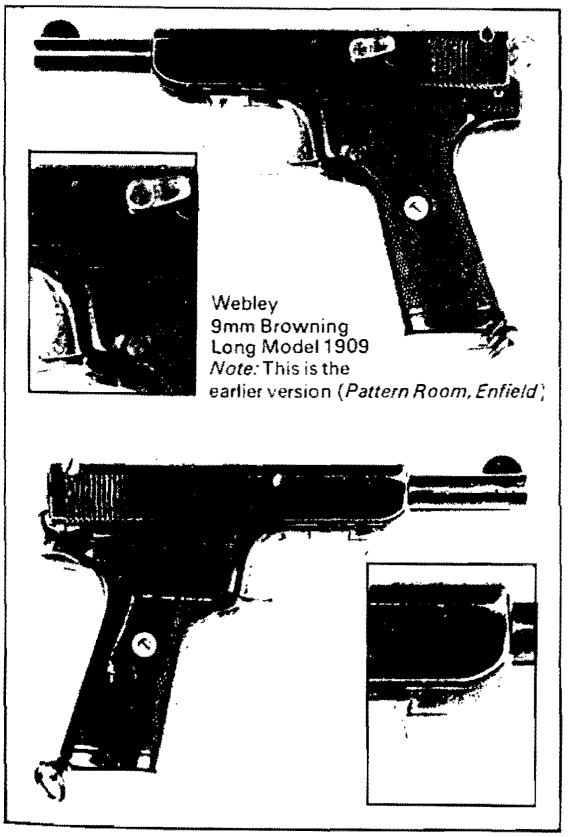


Webley 9mm Browning
Long Model 1909
Note: Retailers' name engraved on the slide
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



Note: Grip safety in its locked position

This weapon was also tested by the British Government who although it had found acceptance by the others, described it has having a number of faults and, in any case, not conforming to the required specification.



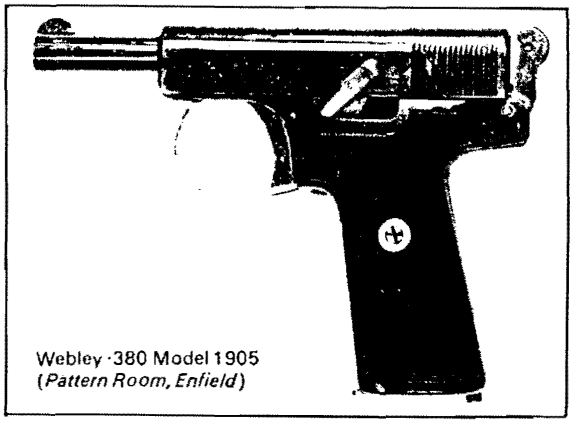
Webley
9mm Browning
Long Model 1909
Note: This is the
earlier version (*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

·380 Automatic Model 1905

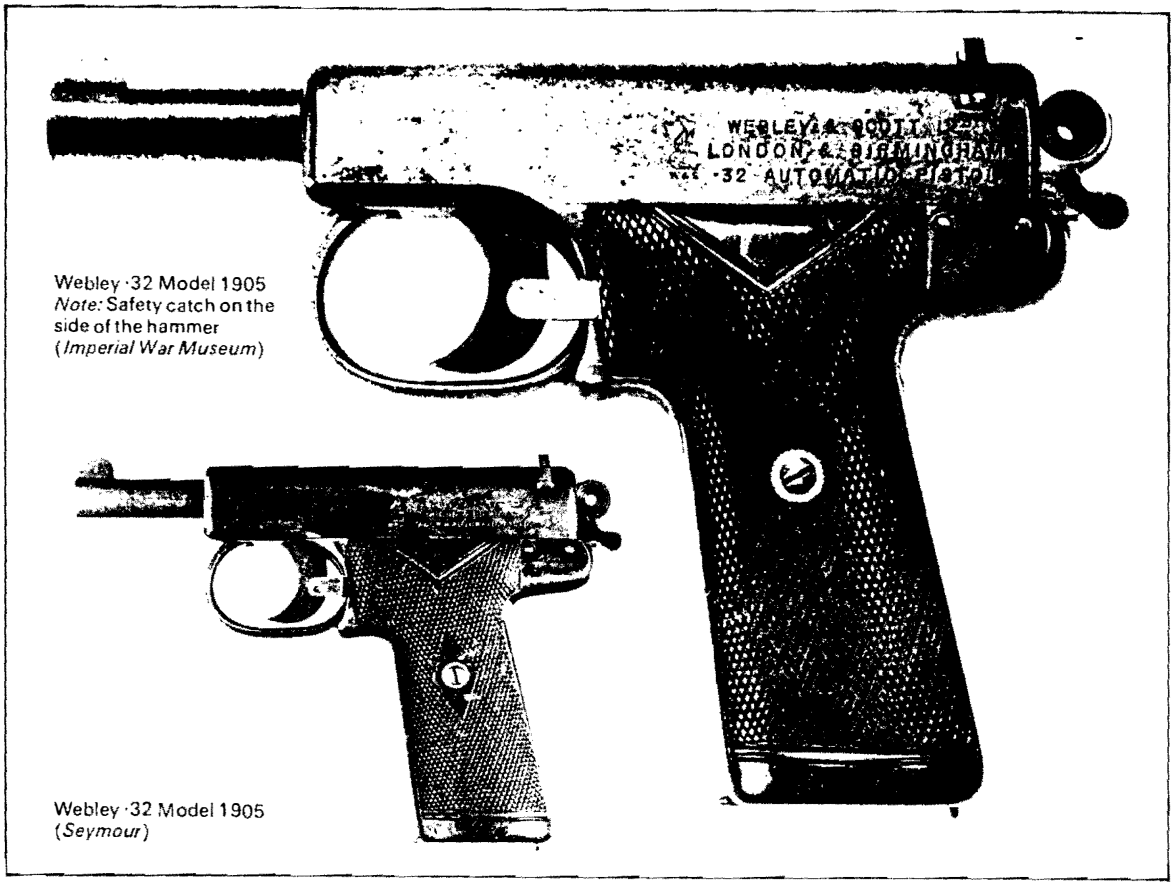
This weapon is identical to the ·32 1905 and its construction is covered by the patents applying to that weapon, therefore no separate description of it is necessary.

·32 ACP External Hammer Model 1905

This weapon was designed by W. J. Whiting and patented in 1904 (Patent No. 15982). It was first marketed in 1905 and continued in a series of modified forms to be produced until 1940. It is, therefore, the Webley automatic which attained the largest acceptance and production volume. It went through three basic phases of design, starting with the 1905 production model which has a fixed barrel and the simple blow back design of the later models. The distinguishing features of the 1905 are the external trigger bar, the thick trigger, the multi-ring hammer and the safety catch which is mounted on the left hand side of the hammer.



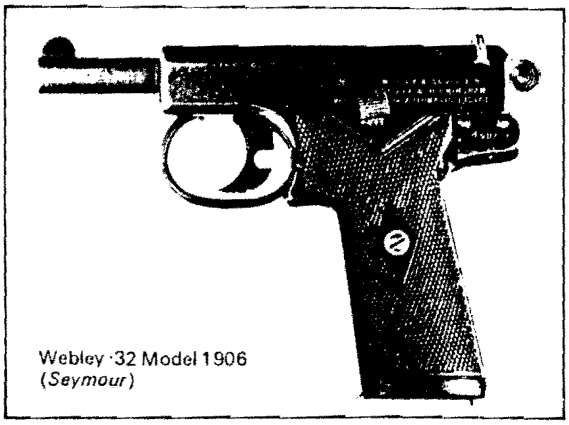
Webley ·380 Model 1905
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



Webley ·32 Model 1905
Note: Safety catch on the side of the hammer
(*Imperial War Museum*)

Webley ·32 Model 1905
(*Seymour*)

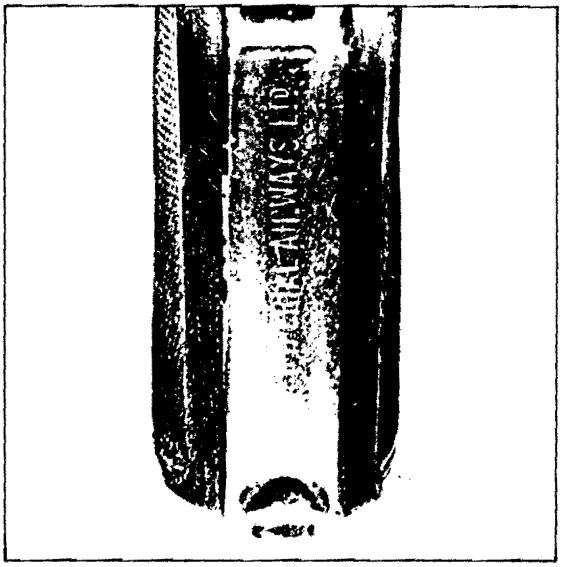
1906 Model
Model 1906 had a modified safety covered by Patent No. 24382 1 November 1906. This modification moved the safety from the side of the hammer to a position on the top of the left grip. The movement was now in a vertical plane. One interim version is illustrated in the Webley Catalogue of the time and shows a weapon with the early type of hammer, early trigger guard and external trigger bar, but with a safety of the later type. It must be remembered that Webley throughout the production of this weapon employed a policy of continual improvement and as a result some interim weapons cannot be classified into the normally accepted divisions.

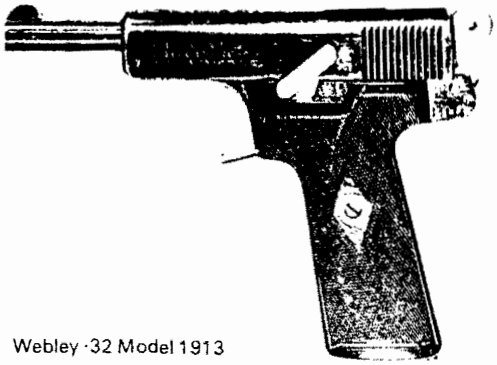


Webley ·32 Model 1906
(*Seymour*)

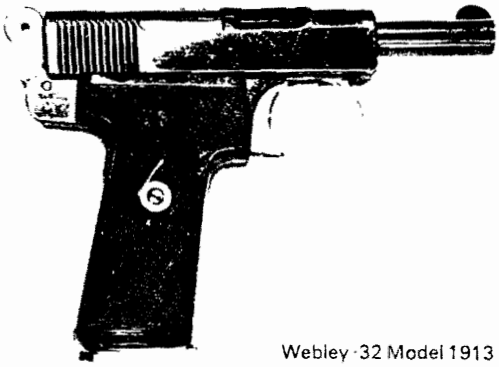
Model 1913
A number of different patents were taken out for modifications before the final 1913 version, the main one being No. 2468 dated 30 January 1913. The main differences in the Model 1913 are the replacement of the external trigger bar by an internal one, the use of a hammer without the tings and the

Webley ·32 Model 1913
Note: Imperial Airways Ltd Stamp (*Smart*)



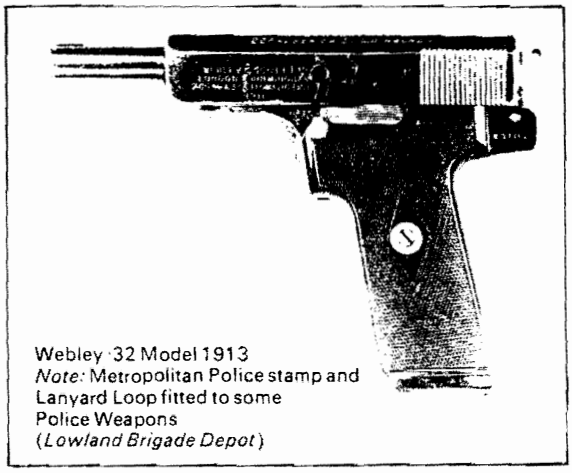


Webley ·32 Model 1913

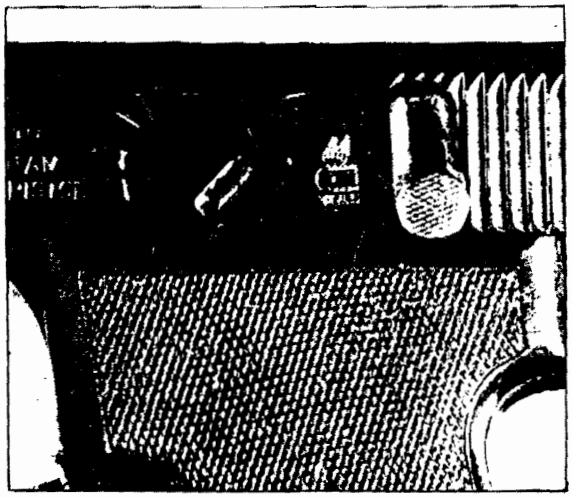


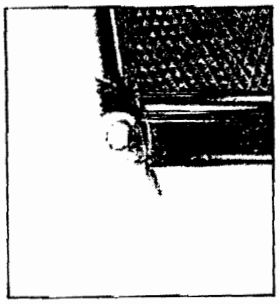
Webley ·32 Model 1913

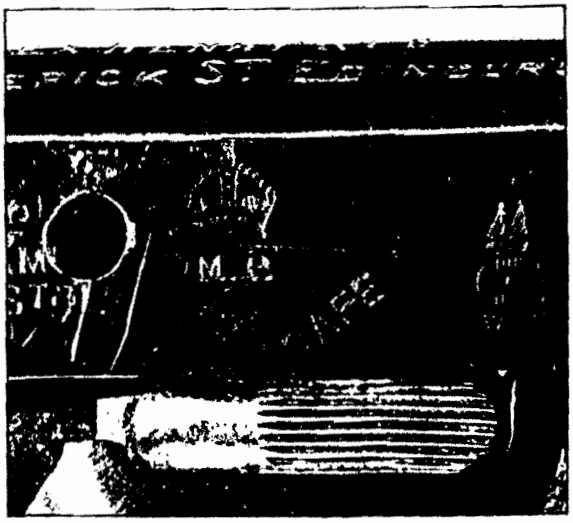
safety operating in the radial manner at the top of the left hand grip. There were two main versions of the 1913 model, the first produced for the Police This weapon was adopted in 1911 by the London and Metropolitan Forces and then by numerous other Police Forces throughout Britain. It is interesting that the reason for the adoption by the Police of a fire-arm was as a result of the famous or infamous Battle of Sidney Street which, under the direction of the then Home Secretary Winston Churchill, resulted in troops being called after two Policemen had been murdered. The 1913 Police Model is identified by the later 'thin' trigger guard, the radial safety and normally an adjustable backsight. The second version was the Civilian equivalent of

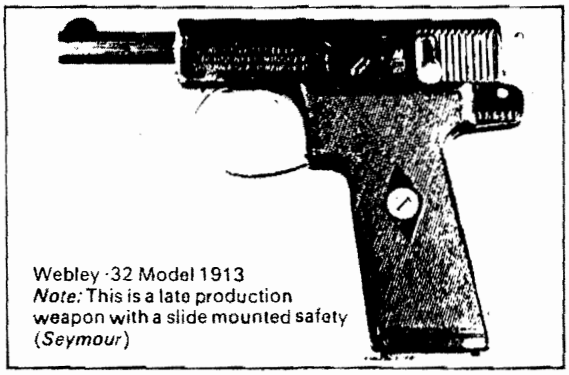


Webley ·32 Model 1913
Note: Metropolitan Police stamp and Lanyard Loop fitted to some Police Weapons
(*Lowland Brigade Depot*)



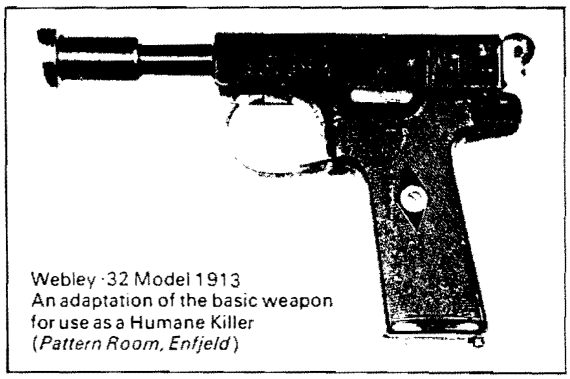




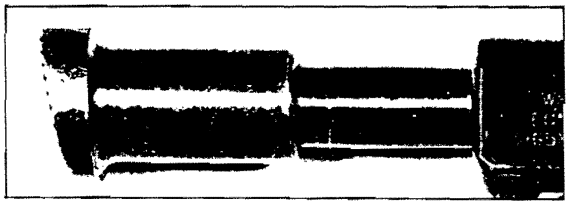


Webley ·32 Model 1913
Note: This is a late production weapon with a slide mounted safety
(*Seymour*)

the above. The only difference in specification was in most cases the deletion of the adjustable sight and the substitution of a machined groove in the slide to act as a sight. A further variant illustrated shows a change to slide mounted safety catch. This is a late production weapon.
One interesting weapon illustrated is a ·32 ACP automatic marked 'Imperial Airways'. A former

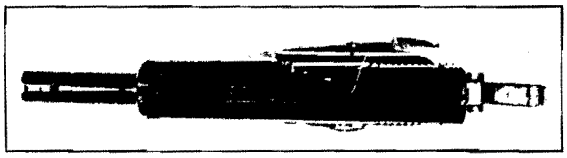


Webley ·32 Model 1913
An adaptation of the basic weapon for use as a Humane Killer
(Pattern Room, Enfield)

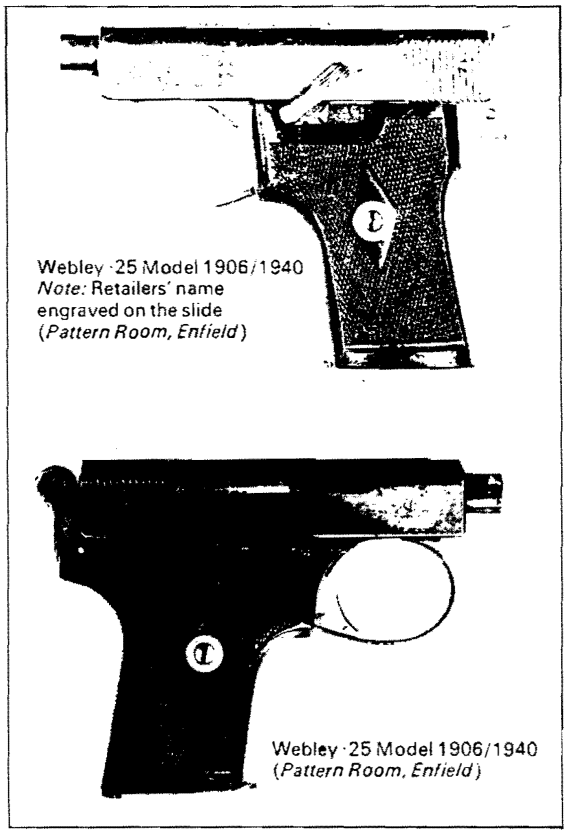


Captain in Imperial Airways related that along with Beau Geste Forts and machine guns near Sharja on the Omar Peninsula where there would be some danger, Imperial Airways issued this weapon.
This can only make the present situation of hi-jacked airliners and the controversies regarding armed guards a case of history repeating itself.
An early catalogue for the ·32 Webley automatic pistol sums up many of the intentions of the Webley Company. It names strength, simplicity of construction, small bulk and light weight as the pistol's greatest assets, and goes on to say that the Webley automatic pistol has amongst other advantages over the common revolver the following: ease of manipulation, rapidity of fire, accuracy of aim, increased velocity and penetration. It further remarks that owing to the construction, the recoil is largely absorbed by the moving parts thus leading to greater accuracy on the second shot.

Webley ·32 Model 1913
Note: Machine groove acting as a sight



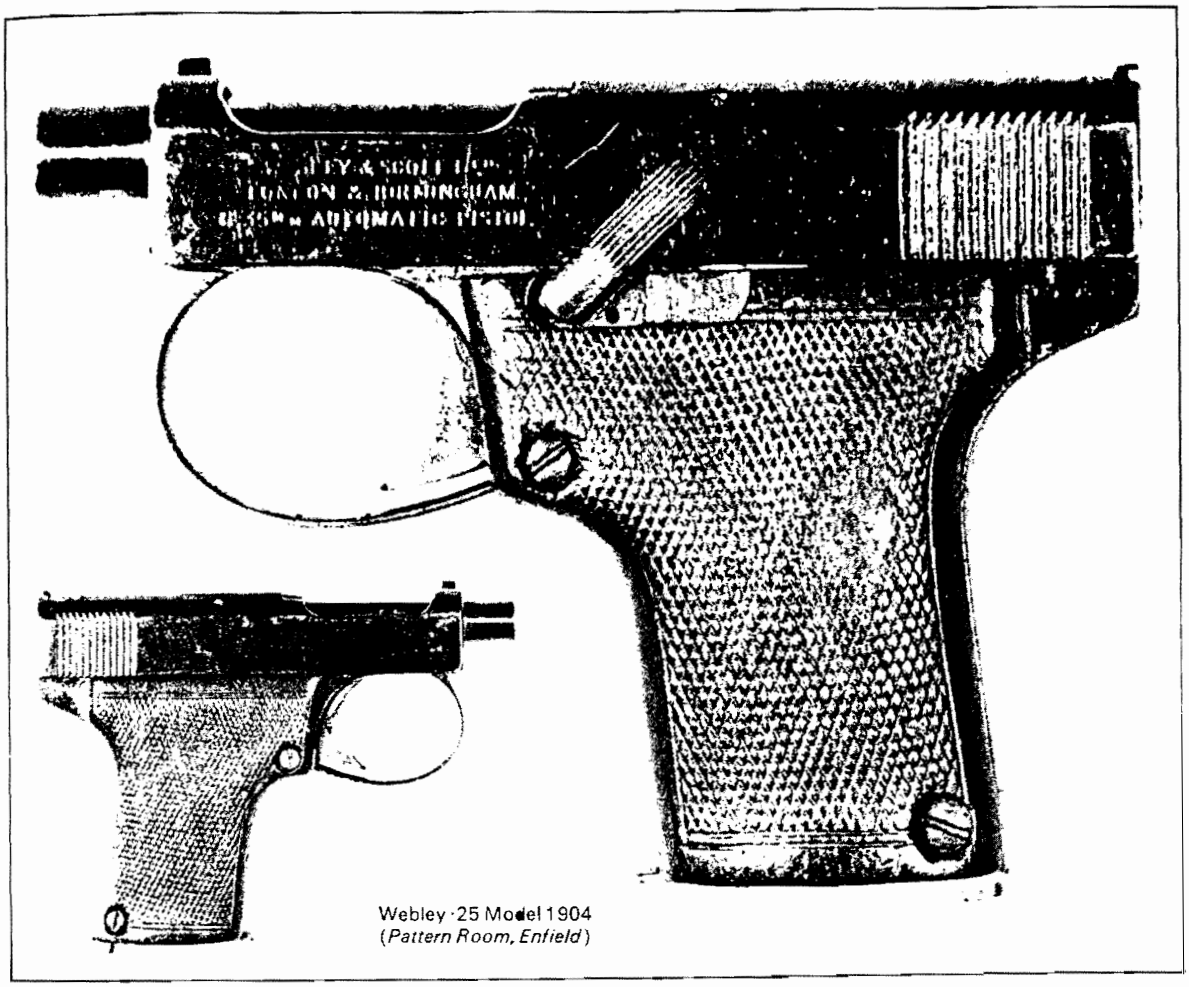
·25 External Hammer Experimental Model 1906
The initial ·25 Webley which was not developed and bore no relation to the later weapons in this calibre was patented by Mr J. Carter on 22 December 1906 (Patent No. 29221). The reason that Mr Carter patented this weapon, rather than its designer Mr W. J. Whiting, was that the latter was on a tour of the United States. Mr W. J. Whiting was probably the foremost handgun designer in Britain at this time. The trip to the United States, by Mr Whiting, probably resulted in the Harrington & Richardson Arms Co. manufacturing under licence the later model ·25 and ·32 weapons. These will be described under a separate heading. The 1906 ·25, unlike most weapons developed in the Webley family, uses a single coil spring as the recoil spring. It was a simple blowback weapon, as were all Webley automatic pistols, with the exception of the ·38 ACP, 9mm parabellum and ·455.



Webley ·25 Model 1906/1940
Note: Retailers' name engraved on the slide
(Pattern Room, Enfield)

Webley ·25 Model 1906/1940
(Pattern Room, Enfield)

1906/1940 Model
For one reason or another, probably that of simplicity, it was decided to develop the ·25 ACP automatic on the lines of the 1906 ·32 ACP weapon. The designs of the ·25 ACP, ·32 ACP and ·380 ACP blowback automatics are so similar that Webley uses one diagram to illustrate the parts for all three weapons.

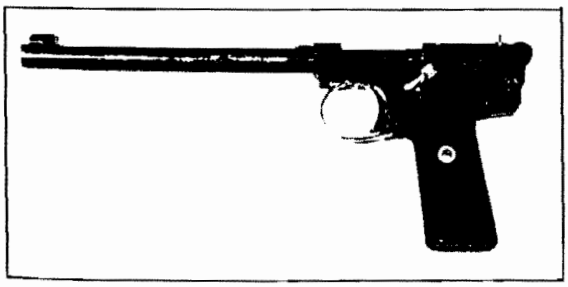


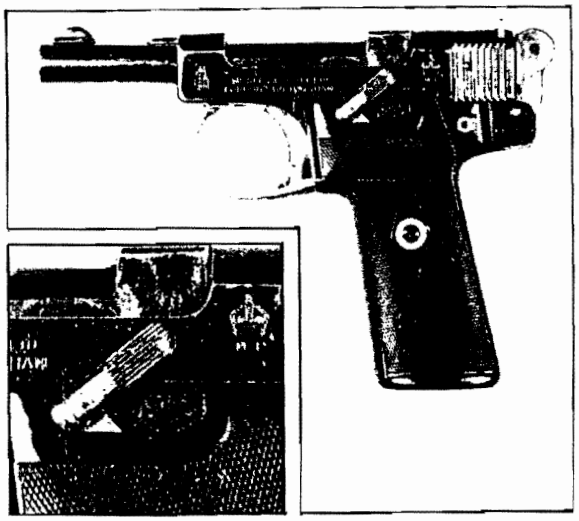
Webley ·25 Model 1904
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

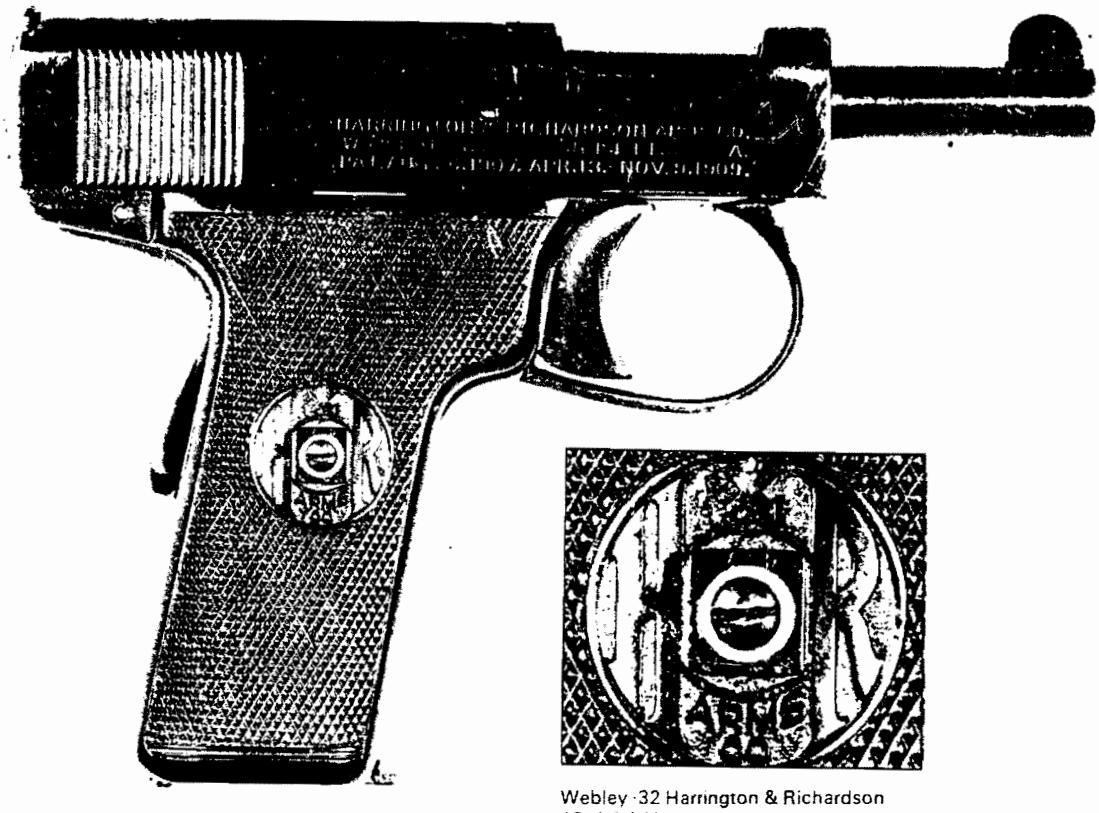
·25 ACP Hammerless Model 1909

This weapon, covered by Patent Nos. 23564 15 October 1909 and No. 20367 1 September 1910, is the smallest and simplest of all Webley automatic pistols. It has only four main parts, the body, barrel, breech slide and magazine. Although it is similar to the previously described ·25 ACP pistols in that it is a straight blowback, it does however have the V spring replaced with twin coil springs. These springs are mounted on either side of the firing pin in the slide. The ·25 ACP is often known, as the heading indicates, as a hammerless pistol but this is not its true designation as it has a concealed hammer.

Below right: Webley ·22 Model 1911 Long Barrel
Note: Different construction from that of the ·32 (1913)
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)
Below: Webley ·22 Model 1911 Long Barrel (*Bowman*)

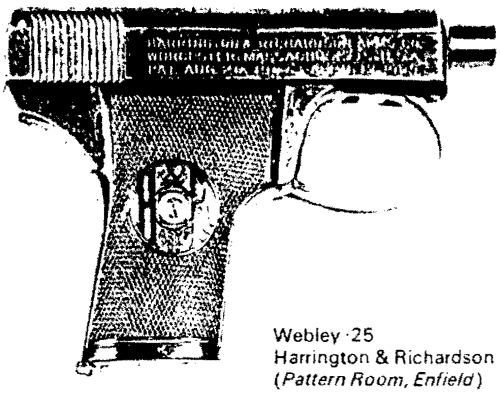




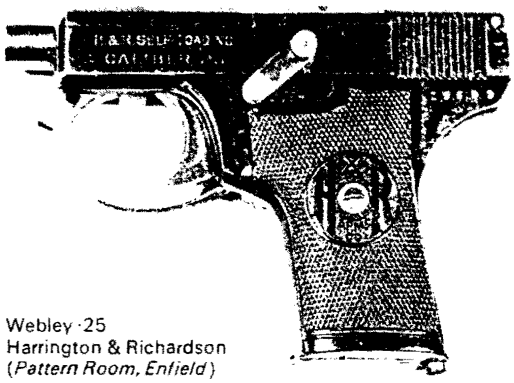


Webley ·32 Harrington & Richardson
(*Dalgleish*)

Webley ·32 Harrington & Richardson
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



Webley ·25
Harrington & Richardson
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)



Webley ·25
Harrington & Richardson
(*Pattern Room, Enfield*)

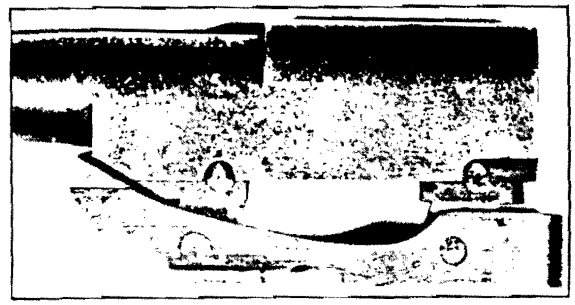
The 1911 ·22 Single Shot Semi-Automatic Pistol

This weapon which was used by the Metropolitan and other Police Forces in a 4½in. barrel version for practice was based on the issue ·32 ACP automatic. This meant that men could be trained with a weapon that was identical in handling to that of the official issue. A model with a 9in. barrel along with a shoulder stock was also available. The weapon is an oddity to say the least in that although the slide is blown back on firing and ejects the empty case, it remains open and the pistol has to be manually loaded with a single round and the slide closed again. In other words it is more an automatic ejector than a semi-automatic pistol. A hand ejector is also fitted for use in the event that the spent case is not blown clear.

Harrington & Richardson Arms Co. ·25 and ·32 Automatic Pistols

The above weapons were covered under Webley's American patents in August 1907 and April 1909. These patents were assigned by Webley & Co. to the Harrington & Richardson Arms Co. The ·25 ACP was introduced in 1912 and remained in production for a period of three years, about 20,000 being manufactured. In 1916 H & R introduced the ·32 ACP which was a modification of the basic Webley design in that it was a striker fired weapon as opposed to the Webley concealed hammer or hammers. Production of this pistol ceased in 1939.

The basic difference other than that mentioned between these pistols and their corresponding Webley counterparts was the use of a coil recoil spring as opposed to the 'V' type.



Jurek. The Twin Link locking system and its Cradle
(*Dr Jurek*)

9mm Parabellum Prototype Automatics

The result of the trials for which Webley had submitted an entry was that the Browning Hi-Power was chosen. The Webley entrant is however of great interest both historically and technically. The designer, Dr Marian K. Jurek, was born in Poland on 7 September 1904 and even at the age of 15 was dabbling in the art of the gunmaker. In 1937, after a brilliant scholastic career, Dr Jurek became the Head of Research at an ammunition factory. During the war Dr Jurek saw service with a number of branches of the Services including the 1st Armoured Division Worksnops. In 1946, while still a serving member of the Parachute Regiment, he designed two submachine guns which fired from a closed bolt and used a separate hammer to reduce

Jurek 9mm Parabellum Prototype
Note: Progressive increase in the number of locking lugs
(*Dr Jurek*)