

Firearms and Genealogy

by J Raymond S.

The story began in 1982 when by chance I spoke to Thomas Woodcock – a shooting colleague at that time. I had acquired a cased Deane Adams Deane (D.A.D) revolver some years previously and the lid carried an escutcheon displaying armorial devices which I had hoped would lead to the original owner of the revolver and perhaps its history.

“Do you know anything about heraldry and armorial devices?” I asked of him. “A bit” he replied, “I am Somerset Herald in the College of Arms – what do you wish to know?” And so began a fascinating journey into the genealogy of the Landsberg-Velen family of Westphalia Germany and the historical significance of a (D.A.D.) revolver.

The revolver, shown in fig. 1, was manufactured by Deane Adams Deane of 30 King William St. London Bridge, oak cased with accessories. The Adams’s Patent inscription is of the earlier form which places the year of manufacture C1852 and retailed by Wilkinson & Son 27 Pall Mall.

The calibre is 38 bore (0.5”), 5 chambered, 7 1/2” barrel, self cocking with an unloaded weight of 0.97 Kg. In spite of its relatively light weight, it is by any standard a large powerful weapon more suited to cavalry than foot.

The frame carries 99% original ‘London blue’ with the cylinder aged to a light grey mottled patina. Faint discolouration of the muzzle edge suggests abrasion due to holster wear.

Accessories comprise a brass ‘tonged’ double ball & bullet mould with legend:- ‘Registered R. Adams 28 Nov. 1851’, a planished tin and brass Hawksley flask, Hawksley oil bottle, wood/brass ramrod, nipple key & pricker, 38 bore wad punch, spare nipples and case key.

The case lid carries a brass escutcheon 36 mm diameter displaying an heraldic shield and armorial devices shown in fig. 2.

The shield was identified in Rolland’s illustrations to J-B Rictstap’s *Armorial General* as being the arms of the Landsberg-Velen family of Westphalia shown in fig.3. The description of the shield is described in heraldic terms thus:- Aux 1 et 4 d’or a` la fasce de gu., frette’e d’arg. (Landsberg); aux 2 et 3 d’or a` trois merlettes de gu., range’es en fasce (Velen).

So here at last was a clue to the family who acquired the revolver all those years ago and for what purpose.

For those taking an interest in heraldry for the first time it will come as a surprise to learn that all animate objects chiefly mammals and birds always face left when viewing the shield as a spectator (refer ‘sinister’ and ‘dexter’) yet here it is to be noted that the ‘merlettes’ face to the right in contradiction of heraldic tradition.

This very fact provides a clue to the urgency of the purchase in 1852. Someone from the Landsberg-Velen family probably travelled to London by way of the Channel or North Sea to stay over and make the purchase from Wilkinsons of Pall Mall. Before returning, probably in haste, a request would have been made to have an escutcheon applied to the lid in order to display the family arms. To do so they would offer a family seal or more likely a signet ring supporting a miniature version of the seal to be copied – probably overnight. The simple and crude manner in which the work has been executed suggests great haste.

Most artisans of the period were illiterate and would not be familiar with the subtleties of heraldry. Turning the ring round to view the inscription, they would have copied what they saw hence our little ‘merlettes’ look the wrong way. The error probably went unnoticed at the time or perhaps it was too late to rectify it before the owner returned to Germany.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace offered an opportunity for Adam’s revolvers to be displayed to the public for the first time, albeit in small numbers and, since the exhibition attracted attention throughout Europe, it is possible that Adams received orders for his revolvers for completion the following year.

In due course, Thomas Woodcock had researched a genealogy family tree of the Landsberg – Velen family commencing with Ignaz von Landsberg – Velen 1st Count von Landsberg – Velen and Gemen b. 1st Dec 1788, through to Maximilian von Landsberg – Velen Count von Landsberg – Velen and Gemen b. 1925.

The owner of the revolver was most likely to be a young man in his early to late twenties starting out on a military career – possibly cavalry. A suitable candidate from the family tree would be Baron Ignaz von Landsberg – Velen b. 1830, this makes him just 22 when the purchase was made.

In 1852 trouble was brewing in Eastern Europe. Russia had seized Moldavia and Wallachia from Turkey who were negotiating an alliance with Germany. British naval operations in the Baltic had resulted in the destruction of a Turkish fleet at Sinnope. Britain and France drifted towards war with Russia and the landing at Sevastapol wasn’t far off. It comes as no surprise to find Germany preparing for conflict and the officer class anticipating war.

The next step was to find the family and make contact with them in the hope of finding something further. The original family residence was a schloss in Westphalia which still stands but the family no longer lived there. However with the kind assistance of Rotary International I eventually located an address. Having got so far I couldn’t turn back. I had to face the daunting task of writing an unsolicited letter to an aristocratic family in perfect German and account for all the formal etiquette particular to the language.

With considerable assistance a letter was eventually drafted outlining the possible history of the revolver and its connection with the family.

Herr Dr. von Landsberg responded via an intermediary with a helpful letter to say that whilst he had no knowledge of the matter, the family papers were in archive in Münster and by way of the letter gave his permission to search through the documents. Unfortunately it is at this point that I had to draw matters to a close for the present.

As a retirement exercise I would like to take up the trail once more and go to Münster to see for myself the evidence that may exist because I am sure that it was Baron Ignaz who carried the revolver at the commencement of his career.

The archived documents will have been written in old German so that will be another hurdle to negotiate. Meanwhile the revolver remains carefully preserved for posterity.

A brief introduction to Deane Adams Deane Revolvers

The trading partnership of John Deane, Robert Adams and John Deane (jun) under the style of Deane Adams Deane is assumed to have been set up circa March 25th 1851 - that is about a month after the sealing of Adams's English patent for his famous self cocking revolver, and less than a month before the final closure of the original catalogue for the 'Great Exhibition of The Industry of All Nations' (now commonly known as the 'Great Exhibition of 1851'). The title of **Adams's** was later changed to **Adams** which helps to identify early and later models because the serial numbers do not agree with sequential production.

Adams managed to produce a few of his revolvers in time to be exhibited on stand no. 223 at the exhibition but there is no doubt that his modest effort was completely swamped by Samuel Colt's display of in excess of a hundred firearms of all descriptions.

The bullet mould cased with the revolver here discussed is dated 28th Nov. 1851.

The publication 'The Revolver 1818-1865' by A.W.F. Taylerson illustrates several Adams revolvers in particular pg.47 plate7.

The upper illustration is of a 38 bore revolver dated 1851 with holes drilled into the side of the frame to accommodate the safety spring which is missing.

The lower two revolvers are 54 bore and 120 bore with the safety spring in place.

A brief description of the 1851 Adams self cocking revolver is of interest. The five chambers could be discharged simply by the repeated pulling of the trigger. The revolver could not be cocked in advance to facilitate an aimed shot and there was no hammer spur to snag on clothing. Clearly the revolver was designed to overcome the awkwardness of cocking before each shot particularly when used with one hand as found necessary with the Colt system. The design was intended to leave one hand free for saber or reins.

The safety device comprised a small bolt passing horizontally across the face of the hammer thus preventing contact between the hammer nose and the nipples. The bolt was held in place by

hammer pressure. On pulling the trigger the bolt was released and a small attached spring withdrew the bolt to allow the hammer to fall. The system was simple and foolproof as it was not necessary to withdraw the bolt by hand, the simple operation of the rising hammer was sufficient to clear the bolt. Once the bolt had been withdrawn by the first shot it remained out of play until manually reset.

There was no mechanical rammer, ball or bullet had to be forced into the chambers by hand. Problems arose due to ammunition becoming loose and falling out of the cylinder and not everyone appreciated the safety device either, although this feature was retained throughout the production programme.

It became obvious that whilst the Select Committee of her Majesty's Honourable Board of Ordnance were delighted with the basic design of the Adams revolver, Service orders would not be forthcoming until the revolver could be cocked for an aimed shot and the question of the loose ammunition resolved by the addition of a mechanical loading lever. In the meantime Colt was picking up orders for considerable quantities of his Navy pattern 0.36" cal. revolver which left a lot to be desired in the field because they were not a 'man stopper'.

The requirement for a loading lever was resolved by the introduction of a rammer designed by Adams. Rigby of Dublin & London came up with an alternative design and yet a third design was offered by J.Brazier.

The more difficult problem of making a double action was resolved by Lieutenant Beaumont of Barnsley, Yorks. In 1855 Adam's first true double action revolver complete with loading lever was introduced under the Beaumont – Adams partnership. Because of the fine quality of Adam's revolvers which were available in 0.5" cal. Service orders began to arrive in substantial quantities. Fine examples can be seen in A.W.F. Taylerson's publication plates 10 & 11.

It should be noted that Adam's superior double action closed frame revolvers were in production 5 years before Colt's open frame 1860 Single action Army model came into production.

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Acknowledgements

A.W.F.Taylerson THE REVOLVER 1818-1865

Thomas Woodcock SOMERSET HERALD College of Arms

[Figs 1,2 & 3 comprise six illustrations over the following three pages]

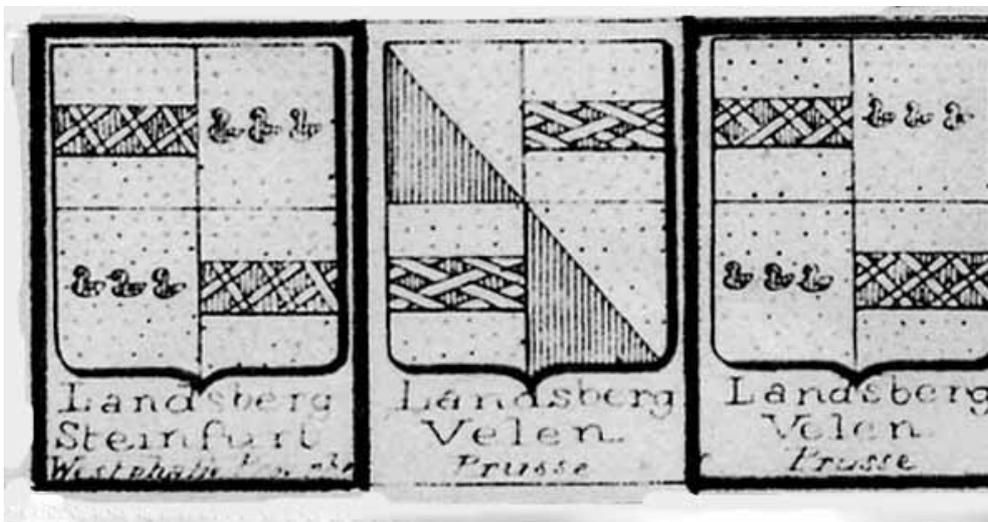


Fig 1





Fig 2



Dexter

Armorial devices originating from the right hand side of a shield from the bearer's point of view and therefore on the spectators left.

Sinister

Opposite to Dexter.

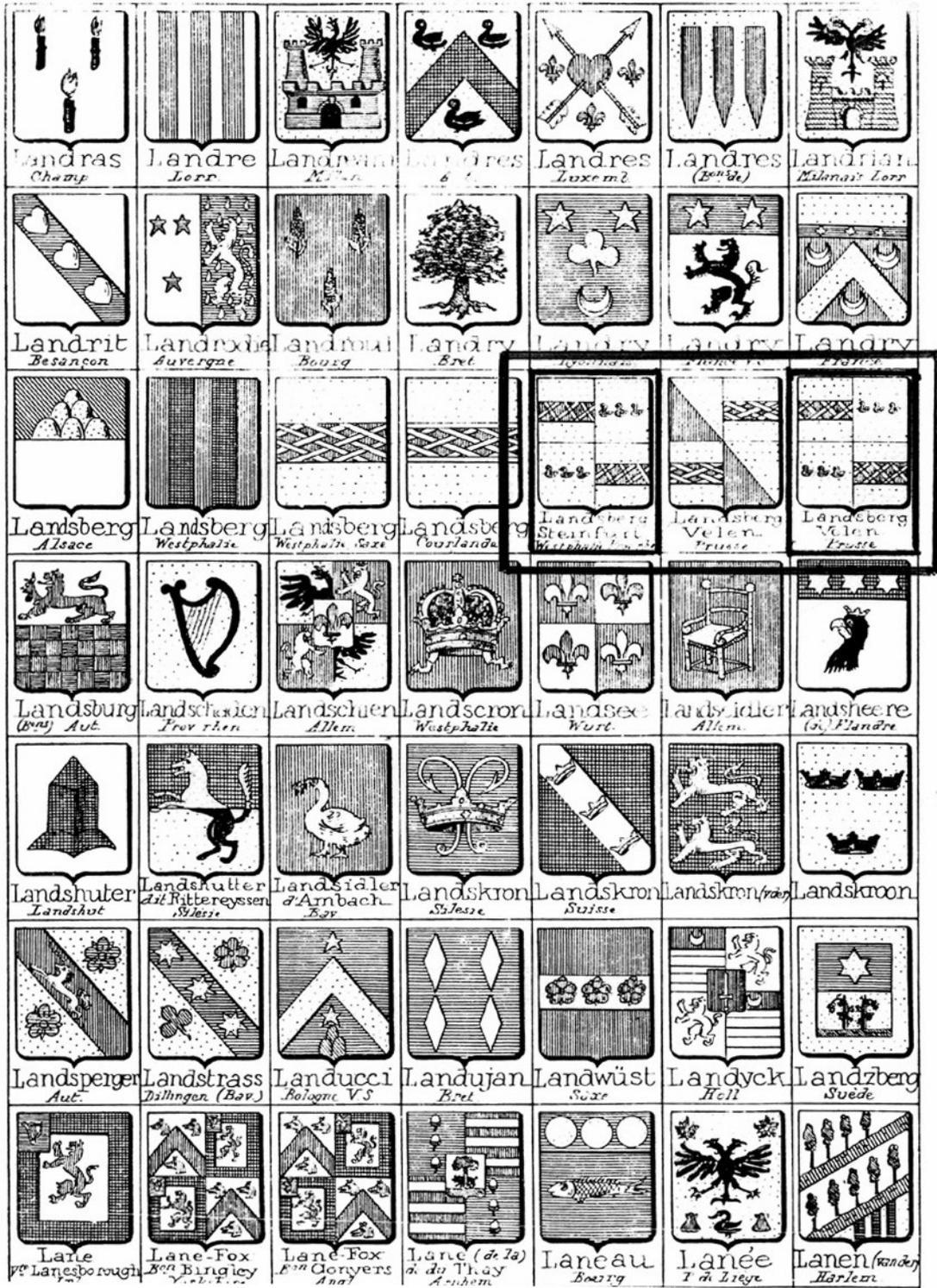


Fig 3

End