THE PRITCHARD-GREENER BAYONET

By MARTIN PEGLER

Introduction

One of the most bizarre oddities to emerge during World War I was the Pritchard-Greener pistol bayonet. Combination pistol/knives are not uncommon, several examples being extant in the Royal Armouries collection at H.M. Tower of London.[1] However, a detachable fighting knife was a step beyond the modest penknife-sized blades hitherto produced.

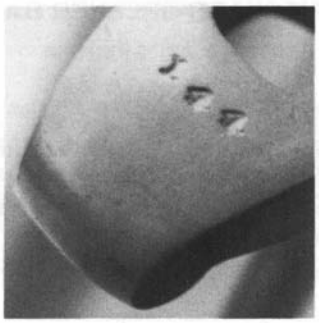
This article is an attempt to cover the history and development of the Pritchard bayonet, as well as examining the construction of both original examples and modern reproductions, of which a large number have appeared from the Indian sub-continent in recent years.

Arthur Pritchard

Captain Arthur Pritchard has proved an elusive figure. Born in 1898 in Finchley, London, of middle class parents, he was one of the generation destined to spend their youth in the conflagration of the Great War. He enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment in early 1915, and was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion in May 1915, becoming Temporary Lieutenant in November of that year. The 2nd Berkshires were on active service in Flanders at this period. In late 1916 Pritchard returned to England, possibly wounded. After attachment to the 3rd Berkshires, a training battalion stationed at Fort Nelson, near Fareham, Hampshire, he was sent to 20th London Regiment, with whom he remained until the Armistice, leaving with the rank of Captain.[2]

Development and Manufacture

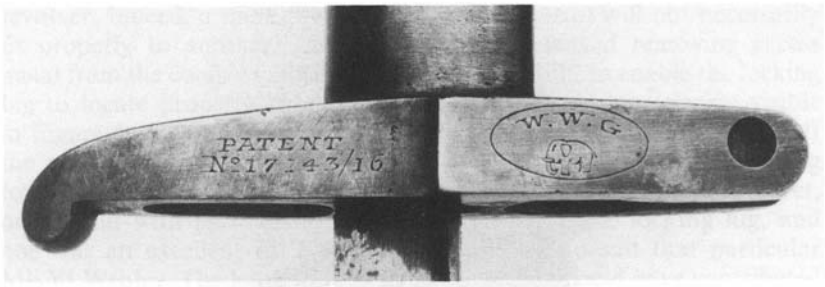
Arthur Pritchard approached John Wilkinson-Latham of Wilkinson's Sword, late in 1916 with the idea of utilising the Wilkinson factory for the manufacture of his bayonet. From Pritchard's sketches, a prototype was made by Waterers, the cutlery division of Wilkinson's. It was constructed of a brass or gunmetal grip, with the tip of an 1897 Infantry Officer's sword providing the blade. A leather scabbard with steel chape and frog was also provided. The author has not been able to trace the whereabouts of this prototype.[3] At that period, the problem facing Wilkinson's was that their entire production facility was given over to manufacture of the 1907 Sword Bayonet and 1908 Cavalry Trooper's Swords. Although they were permitted under the terms of their contract to 'complete orders for third persons, if and so far as they may be able to do so',[4] it was clearly impractical for them to engage in limited production of a weapon that required blades from existing swords, and



1. Serial number stamped on the quillon.
The numerals are deeply struck and irregular.

a high level of manual labour to hand finish and assemble. Exactly why Pritchard then went to W. W. Greener is not known, although the simple answer may be that the premises of Wilkinson's and Greener's were quite close to Pall Mall. It is unlikely that Wilkinson's recommended Greener's, as there was a long-standing professional enmity between the two companies. Indeed, Robert Wilkinson-Latham recalled this still being prevalent during his period as Manager of Wilkinson's in 1964–8. Nevertheless, Pritchard approached Greener's who were prepared to undertake the manufacture of the bayonet, but were clearly dubious of the blades used in its construction, although whether through financial or manufacturing reasons cannot be determined. Certainly, obtaining sufficient sword blades would be problematical, if not impossible, as supplies would have to come from Wilkinson's, and the cost of a blade would be prohibitive, bearing in mind two-thirds of its length would be scrapped. Greener's were able to solve the problem by substituting a Model 1874 Gras bayonet for the sword blade. A proportion of their business was in refurbishing obsolete weapons and selling them to what would now be termed 'third world' powers. As a result, they had access to a considerable amount of surplus Gras bayonets which proved an excellent substitute for the Pattern 1897 sword, and at far less cost. As the numbers to be manufactured were likely to be small, keeping costs down would have been of primary concern to Greener's. It was in this form that the bayonet was patented.[5]

Of particular interest to collectors is the question of how many bayonets were actually manufactured by Greener's. Most original specimens are stamped on the rear face of the quillon. The highest number found during research was 144 (Figure 1), the lowest was 27. The situation is confused by the existence of at least two original specimens with no production numbers stamped on them, indicating that many more may have been made. Unfortunately it is not possible to draw any conclusions as to the numbers manufactured.

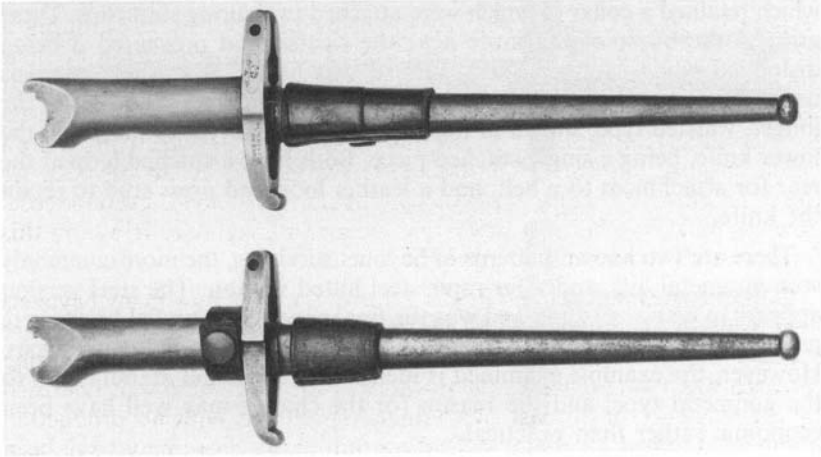


2. The Patent and Trademark found on all original examples.
The quality of engraving is very good.

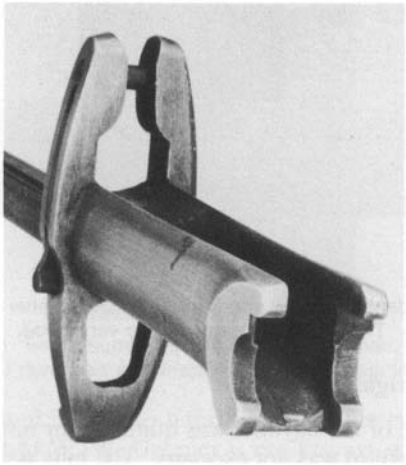
Manufacture of Original Bayonets

The manufacture of the bayonet was quite labour intensive, although the number of parts used (6) was not excessive. The hilts were rough cast in one piece, then hand finished and polished. Evidence of the casting may be seen in the recess on the back of the grip, where the sand casting marks remain. Under close scrutiny, file marks are often visible on the exterior polished surface of the grip. The hilt is drilled to accept the tang of the blade.

From specimens stripped, it appears that the Gras blades were cut 213 mm (8⅜ in.) from the tip and a round tang welded in place, with the end threaded to accept the locking nut. Once inserted into the grip, the retaining nut was tightened and the visible part of the tang peened over. In some instances, a series of small cuts were made in the tang end probably by use of small chisel, which also served to ensure the nut was secure.



3. Examples of two gunmetal hilted bayonets illustrating the different pattern frogs.
Note also the difference in angles at the pommel to permit fitting to individual pistols.



4. A view of the locking catch and rear of the pommel.

A small retaining clip was then inserted into a machined aperture on the left side of the hilt. It was sprung-loaded at its lower end, and retained by a tiny grub screw inserted in the face of the hilt, to the left of the blade. The final touch prior to sale was the engraving, again on the left side of the locking bar. This takes the form as shown on Figure 2 with the patent number to the left of the trademark. There do not appear to be any exceptions to this format on original bayonets.

Assembly of the scabbard required the lower 224 mm (8¾ in.) of a Gras scabbard to be removed. The neck was drilled to accept a grub screw which retained a collar to which were attached two spring steel clips. These gripped the blade of the knife near the ricasso and prevented it being dislodged when carried. The scabbard was blued. A leather frog was usually fitted and two patterns have been encountered. The first is the longer, waisted type, shown in Figure 3. The second type is shown on the lower knife, being a single stitched piece. Both have a stitched loop at the rear for attachment to a belt, and a leather loop and press stud to retain the knife.

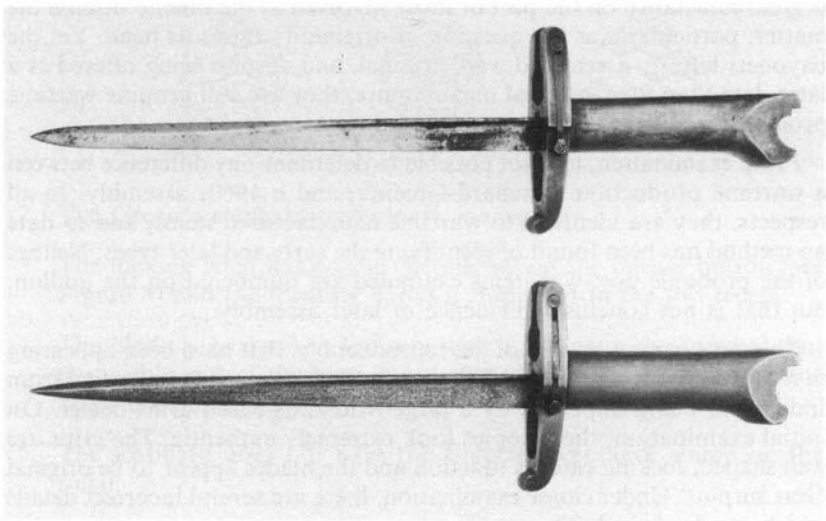
There are two known patterns of bayonet surviving, the more commonly seen gunmetal hilt, and a far rarer steel hilted version. The steel version appears to be a steel alloy and was the final production model.[6] Few were produced, and their scarcity has made it impossible to compare like types. However, the example examined is identical in form and manufacture to the gunmetal type, and the reason for the change may well have been economic rather than practical.

Experiments with a number of original knives indicate that each one required a certain amount of hand fitting to mate it to a Mk VI Webley

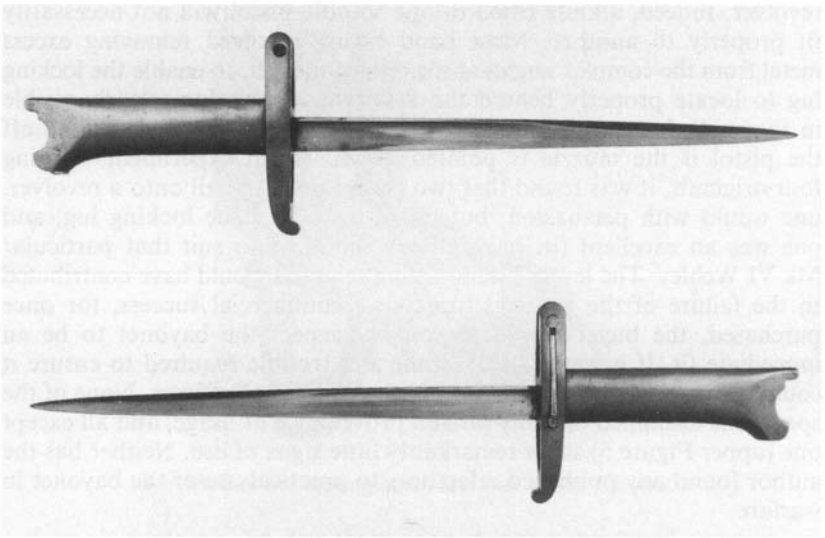
revolver. Indeed, a knife fitted to one specific pistol will not necessarily fit properly to another. Most hand fitting involved removing excess metal from the complex angles at the rear of the hilt, to enable the locking lug to locate properly behind the foresight. If this lug (clearly visible in Figure 4) does not lock into position, the bayonet will simply fall off the pistol if the muzzle is pointed down. In an experiment utilising four originals, it was found that two would not fit at all onto a revolver, one would with persuasion, but failed to engage the locking lug, and one was an excellent fit, having been modified to suit that particular Mk VI Webley. The level of hand fitting required would have contributed to the failure of the bayonet to achieve commercial success, for once purchased, the buyer would reasonably expect the bayonet to be an immediate fit. If it were not, the time and trouble required to ensure it could be used may have been beyond the abilities of officers. None of the specimens examined had any proven provenance of usage, and all except one (upper Figure 5) show remarkably little signs of use. Neither has the author found any published references to practical use of the bayonet in warfare.

Post 1960 Assemblies and Modern Reproductions

In total, nine original and two modern reproductions were examined.[7] However, within the group of originals are two that are believed to be of post-war assembly, dating from the closure of the Greener company in 1968. The clearance of the factory premises revealed a substantial



5. The upper bayonet is a rare steel hilted variant.
The lower is a gunmetal specimen. Note the different patterns of locking latches.



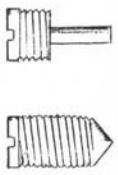
6. A modern Indian copy. The punched hole for the locating bar is clearly visible in the top illustration.
The lower photograph shows the straight, coarse chequered latch.

number of component parts which required assembly, possibly up to 50 bayonets having been stored over the years. These were purchased by a militaria dealer, and subsequently released over a period of time. There is great reluctance on the part of those involved at the time to discuss the matter, particularly as the question of originality raises its head. Yet the bayonets latterly assembled were original, and despite being offered at a later date than their original manufacture, they are still genuine wartime production.

From examination, it is not possible to determine any difference between a wartime production Pritchard-Greener, and a 1960s assembly. In all respects, they are identical to wartime manufactured items, and to date no method has been found of identifying the early and later types. Neither of the probable post-war items examined are numbered on the quillon, but that is not conclusive evidence of later assembly.

The same cannot be said of the reproductions that have been appearing in recent years (see Figure 6). These are well-made copies, emanating from India, and being imported by a large Midlands-based arms dealer. On initial examination, these copies look extremely authentic. The grips are well shaped, locking catches function and the blades appear to be original Gras surplus. Under closer examination, there are several incorrect details which can be found. These are:

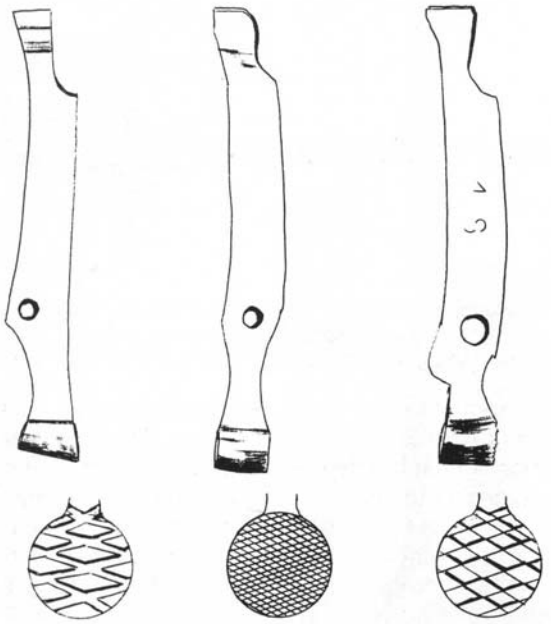
1. The patent date is stamped onto the crossguard, not engraved.



7.

7. Locking catch grub screws. The top example is from a modern copy.

8. On the left is the release catch from a modern copy. Centre and right are originals showing variations in shape and chequering.



8.

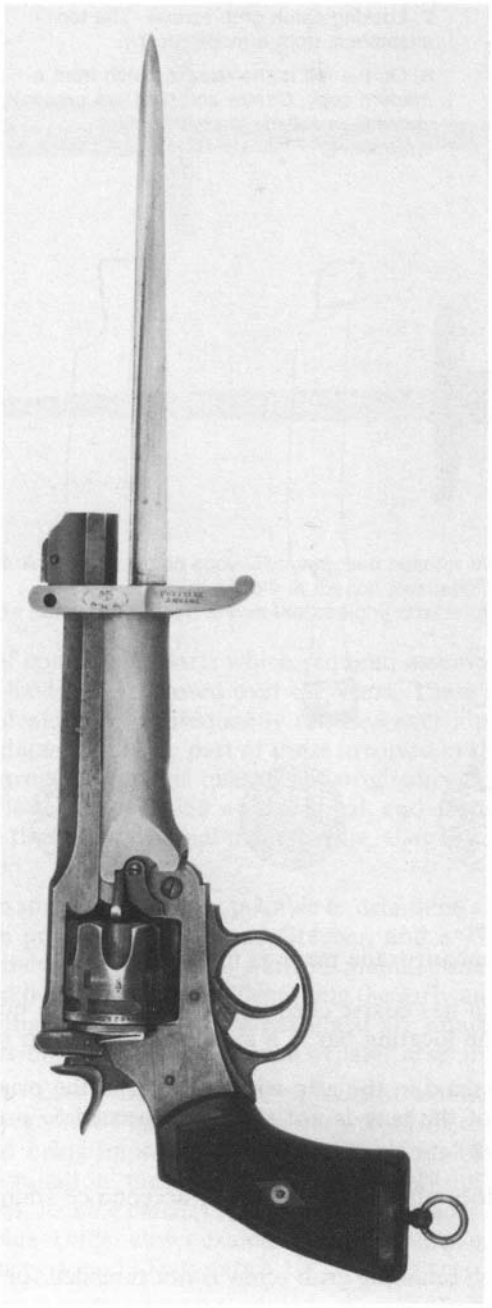
2. The Greener elephant trade mark is missing.

3. The locking latch has coarse chequering on the release button (see Figure 8) and the locating bar is a sloppy fit in the top recess.

4. The blade is retained in the grip with a nut as in the original, but the visible end of the tang is not slotted or peened to prevent the blade unscrewing.

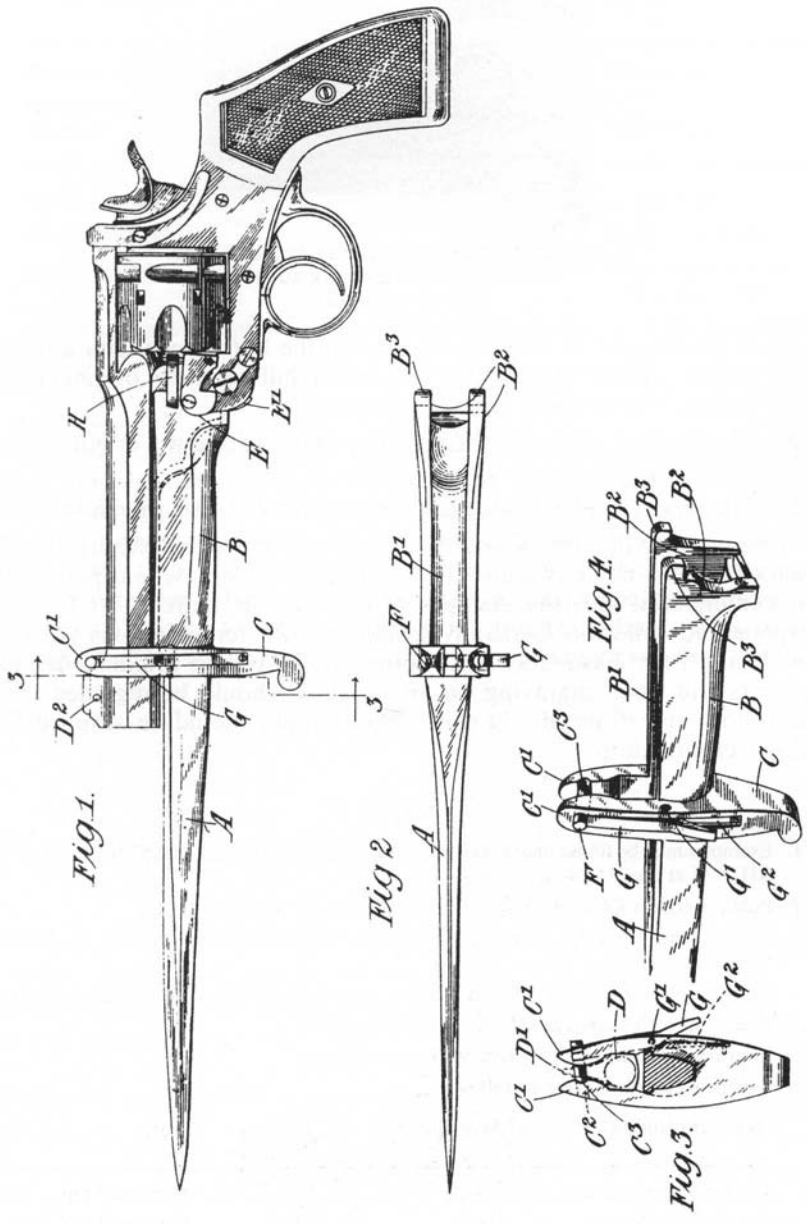
5. The scabbard does not have the French acceptance stamp on the finial.

6. The locking catch retaining grub screw is not threaded for its entire length (see Figure 7).



9. A bayonet fitted to a Mk VI Webley. The precise fit required can be gauged from this illustration. Royal Armouries Nos. XII.3986 and X.428.

10. Patent drawing Number 111,526. 26th November 1917.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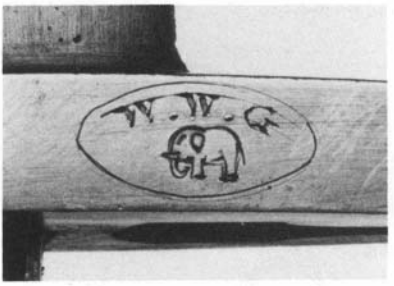

11. A modern copy that has had its blade aged, and a spurious trademark added. Private collection.

7. If the bayonet is held by the tip and the hilt tapped with a metal object, a brass reproduction will emit a dull noise. An original gives a clear, tuning-fork, noise.
8. The locking catch is of a different shape to known originals (see Figure 8).
9. The recess for the locking pin is stamped out rather than machined.

One instance of a reproduction bayonet with a spurious elephant trade mark has been noted (Figure 11). The quality of engraving is poor, and in conjunction with the stamped patent date is unlikely to fool an experienced collector. Generally speaking, these reproductions are well made and bear reasonably close comparison with the original. Altered patents and poor engraving on an 'original' should be regarded with suspicion, and if any doubt exists, the bayonet should be stripped for closer examination.

NOTES

1. Examples may be found under class reference XII.1111, XII.6827, XII.5309/10, XII.8179, XII.2936 at the Royal Armouries.
2. Public Records Office WO 329, Officers Record of Service.
3. Information provided from Wilkinson Co., correspondence retained by Robert Wilkinson-Latham.
4. Extract of contract terms quoted by kind permission of Robert Wilkinson-Latham.
5. Patent 111, 526 was granted November 29th, 1917.
6. Information courtesy of Robert Wilkinson-Latham.
7. Bayonets examined were as follows:

Owner/Institution	Accession No.	Bayonet Serial No.	Notes
The Royal Armouries	X 428	27	Gunmetal hilt
The Pattern Room	I/4	144	Gunmetal hilt
Imperial War Museum	65/88 (WEA 628)	141	Gunmetal hilt

7. Bayonets examined (continued):

Owner Institution	Accession No.	Bayonet Serial No.	Notes
National Army Museum	8306-57	NVN	Gunmetal hilt
Scottish United Services Museum	M1990-6	29	Gunmetal hilt
Mr B. Lees	—	NVN	Modern reproduction
Mr G. Yannaghas	—	57	Gunmetal hilt
Mr G. Yannaghas	—	NVN	Steel hilted pattern
Mr R. Lyndsay	—	NVN	Reproduction with added trade mark

An extensive search of public records has failed to give any clues to Arthur Pritchard's career post-war.

Acknowledgements

The author is indebted to Mr M. J. Allen at the Imperial War Museum, Mr H. Woodend at the Pattern Room, Mr M. Hinchcliff at the National Army Museum, Mr S. Wood at the Scottish United Services Museum for information and access to samples in their collection. Also to Mr B. Lees and Mr G. Yannaghas for access to their private collections. Much information, otherwise unobtainable, was provided by Mr Robert Wilkinson-Latham, to whom I am most grateful. Many items were photographed by Mr Jeremy Hall, who as usual produced excellent results.