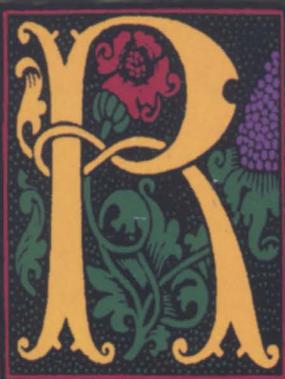


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# Renaissance

FAIRES and CULTURE

**Renaissance  
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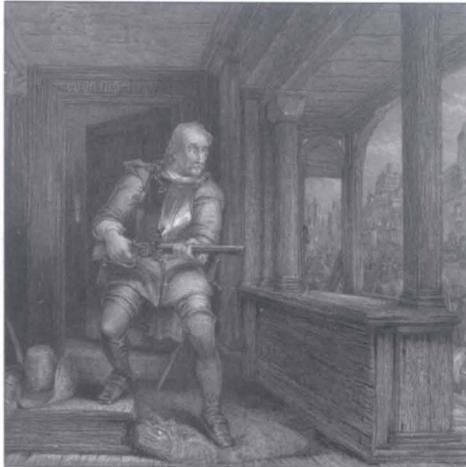
**Playing  
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**Exile!**

Book and Music Reviews, plus 2014 Faire Listings!



# Renaissance GUN CONTROL



James Hamilton in the act of assassinating The Earl of Moray at Linlithgow. Artist unknown.



A. Moulleron, 1854: "Old Linlithgow, Assassination of Regent Moray" (in 1570).



Hans Eworth, 1561: James Stewart, 1st Earl of Moray. From Darnaway Castle, Scotland.

by don hollway

The scene has become sadly familiar. The national leader passes in majestic cavalcade, basking in the adoration of the crowd. High above, an assassin leans from a window. Gunshot! The crowd's adulation turn to screams, a panic-stricken stampede. The leader slumps, mortally wounded. In the confusion his killer escapes.

Except this wasn't Dallas in November 1963, but Linlithgow, Scotland, in January 1570. The target was James Stewart, First Earl of Moray, Regent of Scotland in the name of his exiled half-sister

Mary, Queen of Scots and her son, James VI (eventually James I of England). The assassin, James Hamilton, took Mary's cause upon himself. His weapon of choice for the deed was a newfangled matchlock carbine.

Requiring little skill or practice, the heavy, bulky, and sulfur-smoking matchlock musket was barely an improvement over the original hand cannon, and offered little advantage to potential assassins. To screen his match cord's smoke, Hamilton had been forced to disguise his window perch with hanging laundry.

## The Self-Igniting Wheel Lock Pistol

The Renaissance brought us countless innovations, of which one was handgun violence. Three years before the assassination of James Stewart, François de Lorraine, Duke of Guise, a Catholic leader in the French Wars of Religion, had been ambushed on the road and shot in the back. The Huguenot gunman, Jean de Poltrot, used a high-tech military firearm: a wheel lock pistol. Invented circa 1500 (some say by Leonardo da Vinci, but more likely by south German armorers and clockmakers; it was basically a clockwork mechanism wedged to a gun barrel), it was the wheel lock that blew open Pandora's box. Designed for cavalry use, it was short and handy, used a steel wheel and a bit of pyrite for ignition, and could be pre-loaded and tucked out of sight, ready to fire at a moment's notice. It was the original concealed-carry firearm. It quickly became the preferred weapon of every miscreant with the means to acquire one, regardless of training, ability or even common sense. In one of the first recorded firearms crimes, in 1515 a German man showing off his wheel lock to a prostitute accidentally shot her in the chin. (She survived, but with a predictable loss of income. Her customer was sentenced to pay her a pension for life.)



## Rulers Respond to the New Technology

As early as 1517 Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I outlawed "self-striking hand-guns that ignite themselves" with the same fervor modern legislators apply to "semi-automatic weapons with high-capacity magazines." In 1523 the city council of Ferrara, Italy recognized

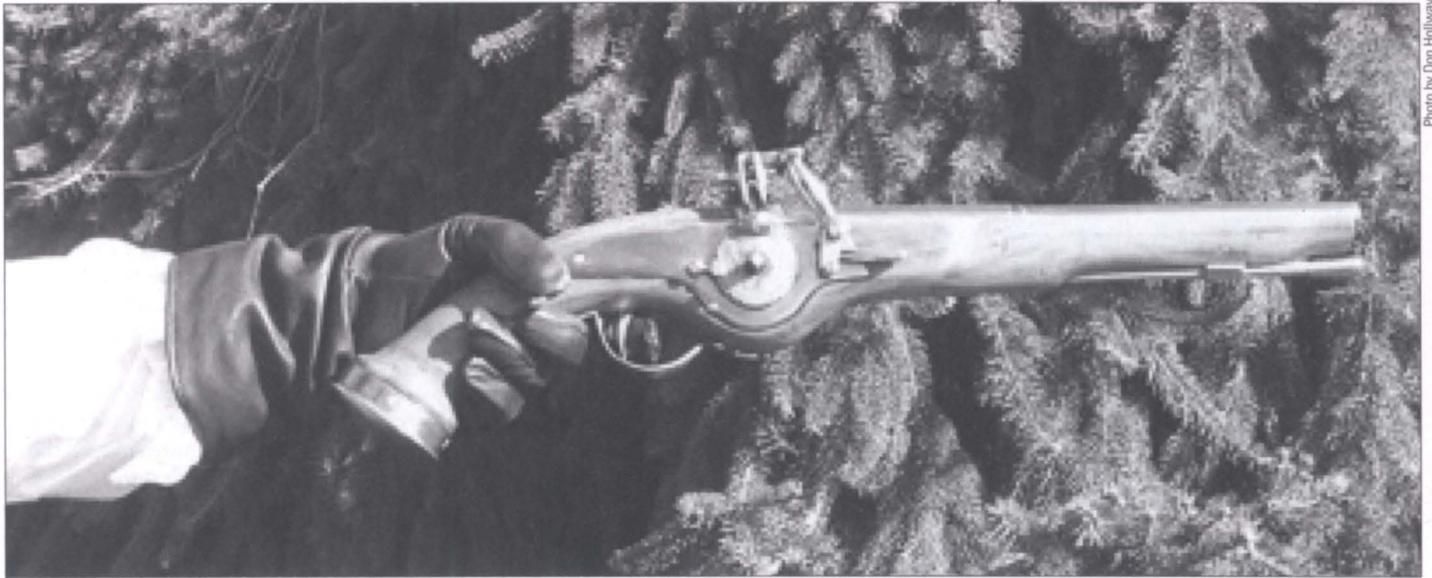


Photo by Don Hollway

**Wheel lock pistol. Pyrite chip is held against spring-wound steel wheel, which spins & sparks when trigger is pulled.**

that "an especially dangerous kind of firearms have come to be used, which are called Wheelock, with which a homicide can easily be committed ... devilish arms," and enacted an ordinance prohibiting "their being carried without explicit authorization, under penalty of having a hand publicly cut off." In 1537 England's Henry VIII instated a pistol ban, despite the fact that he was an enthusiastic collector himself, a discrepancy often levied against anti-gun legislators today. Elizabethans imposed their own ever-tougher gun restrictions, at one point making it illegal to shoot, sell, or even make a pistol within two miles of Her Majesty the Queen.

Their fear was justified. Such costly weaponry was increasingly inflicted on high-profile targets. In 1582 the paid killer Juan de Jáuregui fired a ball through the jaw of William I "the Silent," Prince of Orange. De Jáuregui overloaded his pistol; the explosion not only blew off his thumb, rendering him unable to finish the job with his dagger, but set fire to William's hair and beard, cauterizing his wound and saving his life. Not for long, though. Two years later, Catholic fanatic Balthasar Gérard worked his way into William's circle. He is said to have wheedled 50 crowns from one of the prince's own guards to buy a brace of pistols from another. The next day he caught William on a stairway of the Prinsenhof in Delft, Netherlands, and fired once, having also over-loaded his

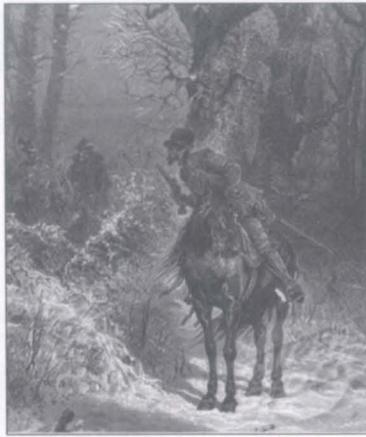


Photo by Don Hollway

**Matchlock arquebus, showing smoldering matchcord poised over firing pan.**



**Clouet, Francois: Francois de Lorraine, Duc de Guise (1510-1563). From the Louvre, Paris, France.**



**Protestant Jean de Poltrot, sire de Mere, lies in wait to ambush and murder Catholic leader Francis, Duke of Guise.**



**Duke of Guise assassination by Jean de Poltrot near Orleans, France, 1563. Artist: Hadamard, after old engraving by Tortorel and Perassin, published in Magasin Pittoresque, Paris, 1882.**



Jean de Poltrot drawn and quartered in Paris, March 18, 1563. From Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

gun, not with powder, but with three balls. (Two bullet holes are still in the wall.) William died on the spot.

In retribution, monarchs enacted terrible punishments for handgun abuse. Captured, de Poltrot was tortured, drawn and quartered, though his limbs failed to part and were severed by sword. Gérard's gun hand was not cut off, but burned off, and he was brutally (even by the standards of the day) tortured for three days prior to execution. He is said to have maintained his composure through his ordeal; unfortunately, some killers are so self-righteous that no punishment is

terrible enough to deter them.

And even in those early days, the ease of dealing death by bullet often led to the proverbial "escalation of gun violence." Moray's successor as Scottish regent, Matthew Stewart, Fourth Earl of Lennox, was himself gunned down in a shootout with Mary's followers. After de Guise's murder, the French Huguenot leader Admiral Gaspard II de Coligny (ironically, William of Orange's father-in-law) was implicated, and in retaliation wounded by a de Guise sniper. Before Coligny's supporters could step up the vendetta, Montague-Capulet style, the de Guise forces stormed his house, slaughtering him and his Protestant followers in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Because Protestant Poltrot shot Catholic de Guise, France ultimately became Catholic.

By the end of the Renaissance the genie was well out of the powder bottle. For over 400 years we've been trying to put it back in. It's true that, with matchlocks and wheel locks, mass shootings required massed shooters, and were thus rare, but the lone gunman was a creature of the Renaissance. The wheel lock pistol proved to be a dead end in firearms evolution (it was an expensive, overcomplicated curiosity) but the flintlock, which replaced it, was the next step on the way to the assault rifle. In another 400 years our descendants will surely look back on the AR-15 and AK-47 as similar antiques, but will they look upon us as fools for tolerating them, or trying to ban them? By then they'll almost certainly possess weapons we can scarce dream of. Let's hope they outgrow the need of them. ☺

*Unless otherwise noted, illustrations from Wikipedia*



Adriaen Thomasz: William I (1533-1584), Prince of Orange, called William the Silent. From the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.



Nicolaas Pieneman, 1838: Murder attempt against William the Silent in 1582.



The murder of William the Silent on the stairway of Prinsenhof by Balthasar Gérard. Artist unknown.

