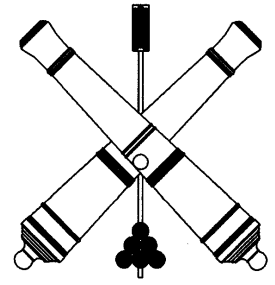


# THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

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## NEWSLETTER No. - 22 JUNE 2007

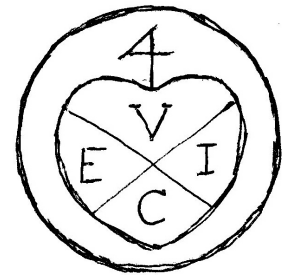
A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

### CAOSA MEMBERSHIP

Membership of the association had grown to 58 with the addition of the Voortrekker Monument in Pretoria and Ronnie Cockcroft of Cape Town. There are also four potential new members in the wings. Ian van Oordt has, as a result of personal commitments, resigned as Chairman of CAOSA, but will remain a fully active member. Thanks to Ian for getting us off on a good start. I will be acting as Chairman until we can hold another meeting to elect his successor..

### RARE GUN MARKING

The marking shown here is on the left trunnion of an English Blomefield pattern gun which is on the island of St Helena. The letters within a heart denote the English United East India Company. The heart was originally surmounted by a cross, but religious sensitivities while seeking business in the East caused the additional bar to be added which turned the cross into a four. When asked the meaning of the four, the diplomatic answer was that the UEIC traded in the four corners of the earth.



### GUNS ACCORDING TO ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA 1771

For those who are not quite sure, Prof. Peter Spargo of the Department of Physics at UCT has provided me with the definition of "Gun" as described in the Encyclopaedia Britannica dated 1771.

"GUN" – a fire arm, or weapon of offence, which forcibly discharges a ball, shot or other offensive matter, thro a cylindrical barrel, by means of gunpowder. Great guns, called also by the general name "cannons" make what we also call ordinance, or artillery; under which come the several sorts of cannons, Cannon-Royal, demi-cannon &c, Culverins, fakers, minions, falcons &c. Small guns include mufquets, mufquetoons, carabines, blunderbusses, fowling pieces &c. Pistols and mortars [ and howitzers ? ] are the only sort of regular weapons charged with gunpowder that are excepted from the denomination of "guns".

If you are now more confused than before - fo am I ! One also hopes that UCT has a few more recent publications.

### THE TIMING OF MORTAR FUZES

It may be difficult for us to comprehend, but up until the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Master Gunners had no accurate means of timing fuzes. The Text Book of Ammunition states that "*In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the repetition of the Apostles' Creed was one of the Proof master's favourite measurements of time*". The text book then continues, "*and though such a method may have commended itself to the orthodox, it could scarcely be said to have constituted a standard of accuracy*".

It was not until well after the invention of the watch in 1674 that the difficulties of timing began to be solved, and from then on much progress was made.

### **DASSEN ISLAND GUN**

The Dutch placed a light 4 pounder gun near the most accessible landing area on the landward side of Dassen Island. The placement was deliberate and could not have been accomplished using a small boat without some considerable effort. The purpose of this gun is not clear. The single light 4 pounder would never have been considered suitable for defending the island from any determined attempt to land there. The landing could have taken place, possibly at greater risk, out of the line of fire of the gun.

If the gun was meant to be a signal gun then one wonders to whom the islanders would need, or wish to signal. There were apparently no permanent residents on the nearest mainland, where Yzerfontein is today, to hear the signal.

### **PETANQUE**

Although widely played in France and often considered to be a French game, this game started in several different parts of the world at more or less the same time. It started because cannon were becoming a defence tool and associated with these were stacks of cannon balls. Some of these balls were only about the size of a baseball or an English cricket ball. The balls were stacked near to the cannons on ramparts that were often gravelled. It was a simple step for bored soldiers to start playing about with these handy objects. Thus the game arose spontaneously in places where the cannon proliferated.

(See <http://www.dave-cushman.net/pet/petanq.html>)

### **ORANGE FREE STATE ARTILLERY CORPS**

Should any of our readers take a particular interest in historical South African artillery which is of the early breech loading era, such as Krupp, Armstrong, Maxim, Whitworth, Le Creusot etc. as used before and during the Boer War, then this contact will be of great interest. The OFS Artillery Corps, in the form of MC Heunis, publishes a series of outstanding articles on a wide range of subjects. To subscribe to their newsletters, e-mail to [kruppgun@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:kruppgun@yahoo.co.uk). Don't let the co.uk confuse you, they are based in Pretoria.

### **THE HOUT BAY MASTER GUNNER'S TOAST**

The merry band of Hout Bay gunners have adopted a toast which is exercised after a firing. What exactly they drink during the ceremony has not been divulged, but it is not the used sponging water.

*They protected Hout Bay with round shot and grape  
When the enemy tried to invade our fair Cape.  
Now we're a Republic, no longer at war,  
Friendly fire honours those we invite to our shore.  
Sturdy cannon that we will bequeath to our sons,  
The spirits of Hout Bay – I give you – THE GUNS.*

Jeremy Hele

### **GERT "HOUTKANON" VOSLOO (1768 – 1860)**

One of our new members, Dr Wallace Vosloo of Stellenbosch, told me the story of one of his ancestors who made a working cannon out of wood. My disbelieving look and sceptical comments prompted him to send me a volume of documents relating to the event. There are accounts of this ill conceived event by several historians, which appears to add some credibility to the story which flows roughly thus –

Gert Vosloo was a wagon maker in Graaff Riet (Eastern Cape) and was involved with the Boer Uprising in that district in 1799. He saw fit to make a cannon out of a hardwood log which was bound with iron wagon wheel bands and mounted on a wagon axle and wheels. Several men dragged the gun up "Magasynheuvel", a hill near the town where it was to be tested. The appointed bombardier, Cobus Venter, loaded the gun with a charge and scrap iron and the gun actually functioned quite well, but with insufficient velocity and range. The second shot, with a significantly increased charge, resulted in a massive explosion and the entire contraption was blown to pieces.

Gert "Houtkanon" Vosloo was arrested with 21 other participants in the uprising and sent to the Castle in Cape Town. When he died in 1860 he still bore the scars of the rawhide manacles on his wrists.

## **RECENT FIRINGS**

Hout Bay 18 pdr was fired twice on 14 April, once by General Pretorius, Chairman of the Gunners Association and once by the CO of Cape Field Artillery to commemorate 150 years of that unit.

The firing of a chain of eleven guns between Simon's Town and Cape Town took place on Freedom Day 27 April. Participants were :- John Newton, Martin Venter, Peter Wright & Colin Johnstone, Jurg Zimmermann & Neville Potgieter, Allan Delbridge and Dan McCannon, Jacobus van Niekerk, Gerry(jr) & Leon de Vries, Alf Parris & Alan Martheze, Ryk de Wit & Gerry de Vries and Johan van Zyl. The weather was foul, with rain, wind and mist making the task both difficult and miserable. The gunners acquitted themselves well with ingenuity and perseverance winning the day. All eleven guns fired on time and much was learned about the art of working with gunpowder in the rain. The schnapps with the Mayor of Cape Town afterwards sped up our recovery.

The organisers of the Freedom Day event, and Dave Cowley in particular, arranged a "thank you" cocktail function in the Sergeants Mess of the Cape Town Highlanders at the Castle. The event was well attended with several CAOSA members present. Dave presented a slide show and some video clips which looked far more professional than we felt while firing the guns in the rain. It is hoped that the success of the event will assist the present efforts to have Chavonne's Battery opened to the public again.

## **THE DURR RECORD OF CANNONS IN SA**

Our good friend, the late Jon Hall, meticulously kept the record up to date since its inception in 1994. With his passing away his co-workers at SITA kindly and thoughtfully downloaded all cannon related material from his computer and passed it on to me. I will never gain the computer skills that Jon had, but I have located the latest Durr list and updated it to include the few guns that I had not yet passed on to Jon.

I am now able to pass on updated lists on CD in XL format to those who want updated lists. The CD will have two lists, one in numerical order and one in alphabetical order by position. On the CD will also be copies of newsletters 1 to 22 and a selection of photographs of cannon firings.

The cost of the CD is ZAR 45 which includes postage and packaging. The funds will go to the CAOSA coffers.

UBIQUE

Gerry de Vries  
Secretary to CAOSA