



# THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SA

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## NEWSLETTER No. 18 - June 2006

A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

### MISFIRE AT MUIZENBERG AUG 2006

I regret that the commemoration of the Battle of Muizenberg on 06 August has been cancelled. Although the Cannon Association was prepared to plan, organise and conduct the re-enactment, it appears that the event was more than the locals were prepared to undertake. I apologise to all who have put effort into early planning and preparations, but I am sure that we will find a worthy cause that appreciates the publicity and attention that we can draw for them.

### CHAVONNE'S BATTERY

Has closed to the public as predicted, fortunately Cedric has found alternative employment. And now to more cheerful subject matter. . . . .

### MORE ON FINAUGHTY'S GUNS

I am reliably and credibly informed by Ian Cross of Pietermaritzburg, who has measured and studied the two Finaughty guns in Bulawayo that their markings are as follows :-

4 pdr Gun - BP & Co. - Weight 6 - 3 - 2, a crown and B.P. in relief and 4P on the trunnion end.

6 pdr Gunade - BP & Co incised into the gun, Weight 5 - 3 - 8, and 6P on one trunnion end and 23 on the other. The gun is dated 1808.

Thank you Ian for clearing that up. I have seen fit, due to the SA connection, to record these two guns in the Durr Record as numbers 871 and 872.

### MRS PLANT'S CANNON (Durr 820) - GREYTOWN

This cast iron gun which is housed in the Greytown Museum is either a 4 or a 6 pounder, depending upon who is providing the measurements. Andy May measured the bore at 79mm (4 pdr) and its length as 1250mm ( 4 ft?).

The gun was reportedly transported to Greytown in C.1860 in a wagon from Port St Johns by a Miss Sarah Jane Bryant, the daughter of a sea captain who had been lost at sea.

In Greytown, Miss Bryant became the housekeeper to Mrs Windham, the wife of Mr Ashe Smythe Windham, the Magistrate. Mrs Windham had a brother who is mentioned only as Lt McLean. McLean proposed to use the cannon to trade with the Swazi King for certain concessions, but was dissuaded from doing so by the local authorities, probably by his brother in law the Magistrate.

Sarah Bryant married a local butcher Henry Plant, but was widowed in 1872. Mrs Plant subsequently opened an inn and acted as the local Post Mistress between C.1873 and 1880. It is assumed that the cannon remained her possession, but not necessarily in her custody.

The gun was prepared, but not necessarily used, to signal a warning to the town of an impending attack during the Zulu Wars.

The Magistrate ordered the gun fired on the rare occasions when the mail arrived in the town. The firing was financed by subscriptions.

The gun was, for several years fired on the occasion of Queen Victoria's birthday. On 24 May 1880 the gunner, George Leuchars, was severely burned when the gun fired during the loading of the tenth consecutive round. It appears that he had not been adequately dousing sparks in the bore with a sponge. **(ALL GUNNERS PLEASE TAKE NOTE)**

Occasional unauthorised individual attempts were made to fire the gun on Guy Fawkes, New Year and other occasions while it stood at the Cenotaph and at the Magistrate's Court.

The gun was donated to the town by Gilbert Plant, the only son of the late Mrs Plant.

## **GUNNER'S TOOLS - THE RULE or STILETTO**

The gunner's rule was a strip of metal, apparently most often in bronze, which was marked with the diameters of the different calibres of gun. The gunner could measure the bore of a gun or the diameter of a shot and read off the calibre as opposed to the measurement in the usual units of length.

The earlier models, from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries often had more than one scale on the rule, one for stone shot, one for lead shot and one for cast iron shot.

The gunner's stiletto was an ornate refinement on the rule and, as the name implies, was shaped like a dagger with the graduations on the blade. Some stiletos were triangular and had different scales on the three facets. The stiletto version of the rule was apparently reserved for Master Gunners as there are references to individual senior gunners being authorised to carry, or wear a gunner's stiletto. Long after the rule and stiletto had been made obsolete by the calliper shot gauge, the stiletto remained the traditional badge of seniority for a Master Gunner.

When gunner's rules or stiletos from different countries are compared and one finds that a 30 pdr gun had a bore of 165mm which is larger than a 32 pdr of 163mm you may wonder who has been sniffing the tipex. The simple answer is that only the English had 32 pdrs and only the French had 30 pdrs and their pound units of weight were different.

## **THE SEA SERVICE MORTAR**

Mortars can be divided into two main groups, land service and sea service and, as their names imply, one type was used by field artillery units and the other aboard ships. Sea service mortars were mainly of 10 and 13 inch calibre and they were mounted aboard specially modified vessels termed "Bomb Ships" or just "Bombs".

Sea service mortars were much heavier than land service mortars of the same calibre. A 10 inch LS mortar would weigh between 12 and 18 cwt. and a SS mortar between 47 and 52 cwt. A 13 inch LS mortar would weigh between 25 and 32 cwt. and a SS mortar of the same calibre would weigh between 80 and 100 cwt.

Bomb ships were very seldom part of the regular naval fleet, rather they were made up by modifying sturdy ships when and as required. The modifications included an extensively strengthened section of the deck where the mortar would be mounted, and a general strengthening of the rest of the structure in order to cope with the massive recoil forces. Bomb ships were used primarily to bombard shore installations, harbours and coastal defences.

In order to achieve the maximum range of 3000 yards with a 200 lb shell, the 13 inch sea service mortar fired a charge of 20 lbs of gunpowder. After firing 30 or 40 rounds parts of the ships structure would begin to show the strain of the recoil and bomb ships were often forced to withdraw from the action in order to effect essential repairs.

## **APPOINTMENT AS MASTER GUNNER (1703 AD)**

*By virtue of the authority to me by your Queen's most Excellent Majeftie on this behalf given upon ye good teftimony and assurance which I have received of your Loyaltie, Integritye and Abilities I doe hereby nominate, conftitute and appoint you to be Mafter Gunner of Her Majeftie's Garrifon from henceforth during fo long as you shall behave yourfelf Loyally, Faithfully and Diligently in Her Majeftie's Service.*

*You are therefore to take upon you the care and charge of all ye Ordnances and Stores of War that fhall be comitted to you for ye fervice of ye garrifon hereby ftrictly charging and requiring you to ufe your utmoft fkill and diligence in ye performance of your duty in ye faid place and to obferve and to obey the orders and directions of ye Superior Officers and perfons af fhall and may from time to time call upon you for ye performance of your duty af Mafter Gunner in Her Majeftie's Service*

*For ye better keeping and preferving of ye gunns, carriages, ammunition and other ftores of War under your care and charge from decay and perifhing and for rendering a juft account of ye expenditure thereof.*

*For ye care and diligence herin you are to have and receive ye daile Vaile or fee af ufuall and is appointed by Her Majeftie's Eftablifhment to be payd you by the treasr of Her Majeftie's Land Forces Forts Caftles and Garrifons in England.*

*Given at ye Office of Ordnance under my hand and seal this 31<sup>st</sup> day of March 1703 in ye second year of her Majeftie's Reign.*

Duke of Marlborough

Mafter General of ye Ordnance

## **THE ROGUE'S GUN**

It is still a tradition in the SA Navy to fire a single cannon prior to the commencement of a Court Martial. This signal has always been known as "The Rogue's Gun", but I had, until now, been unable to determine the origins of the practice. Thanks to replies from Capt. Terry Korsten and others who responded to my query, I think that we have a definitive answer.

The origin appears to be with the Royal Navy where a gun was fired to muster all hands in the fleet to witness an execution from the yardarm. Thus a rogue was punished and all hands learned from the experience.

Terry Korsten extracted the following from a book on naval customs:-

*A Rogue's Salute or One Gun Salute is the signal gun fired to denote that a Court Martial is about to assemble to try a case under the Naval Discipline Act. If the Court assembles on board one of HM ships, the Union Flag is flown at the peak halyards while the court is sitting. In olden times it was customary to fire this signal gun in order to muster the hands of all ships in company to witness a yard-arm execution. A yellow flag was hoisted at the same time and kept flying until the sentence had been carried out.*

A recent proposal to introduce this concept into the political sector in South Africa was abandoned due to insufficient yardarms and fear of the enormous pollution that would be caused by all that gunfire.

## **CONFERENCE ON PORTUGUESE MARITIME STUDIES**

The conference mentioned above will take place in Mossel Bay from 06 to 08 August 2006. I have been invited to deliver a paper on the Portuguese cannons in SA, particularly those off wrecks such as the *SAO BENTO* and the *SANTIAGO* which floundered off our eastern coast in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. These are some of the oldest cannon in South Africa and are rare even on a world-wide basis.

Thanks to a sponsorship by Ian van Oordt, he and I will be going to Pietermaritzburg to measure and study the 12 guns in that museum. Thanks to Ryk de Wit, he and I will be going to the conference with a cannon to open the proceedings and deliver the paper.

## **BLACK POWDER PERMITS**

Application has been made to the SA Police Service for black powder permits for six of our most experienced members. This should reduce the excessive flow of gunpowder via myself and have my name removed from the list of people displaying suspicious behaviour.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership of the Cannon Association has risen to 38 with the addition of the Swiss cannon expert, Rudi Roth, as an honorary member. Rudi has studied and made accurate detailed drawings of more cannon than anyone else on earth. It is indeed an honour to have him on board.

Gerry de Vries : Scribe to the Cannon Assn. of SA.