

# MUZZLE LOADING CANNON OF SOUTH AFRICA

A Guide For The Enthusiast

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## NEWSLETTER No. 5 - September 2002

In newsletter No. 4 I asked the silly question, "Is anybody actually reading this stuff?" The positive answers came back in squadrons, herds and bunches. OK! I got the message. Some readers suggested that a fee be charged to cover the costs, but this would be contrary to our original intention of developing interest in old cannon, and thereby encouraging their preservation. When the remains of the Durr Estates sponsorship money was exhausted I fell back on the income from the books to cover the costs, mainly for paper, envelopes, photocopies and postage for the 65 odd non-e-mail recipients and for subsequent follow-up correspondence. I am managing thus far, but the readership is growing and growing . . . . .

### NOON GUN CENTENARY

The Noon Gun has been in operation for about 194 years, but it was moved to Lion Battery from the Castle in August 1902. The centenary of the first firing from Lion Battery was celebrated on 03 August at the battery. The Victoria & Alfred Waterfront saluted by specially preparing and lowering the old Time Ball. Bloemfontein, Grahamstown, Fort Beaufort and Hout Bay fired their ML guns 15 seconds before noon as a remote salute to the Noon Gun. The Cape Town Black Powder Club fired a salute with their muskets and two pipers from the Cape Town Highlanders rounded off the occasion with stirring sound.

Zane Palmer presented the SA Navy, represented by Admiral Eric Green, with a model of the Noon Gun in recognition of the service which the navy provides to the Mother City.

### MODEL MAKING

Several people have contacted me for designs and drawings from which model cannon could be made. I have diligently sent off by post, drawings, dimensions and photographs to assist in this most satisfying hobby. Some model makers have sent me photographs of the results of their labour, and I must say that there appears to be great talent and much patience out there. As a result of the frequency of these requests, I have produced a document which lists the principles and pitfalls of model cannon making. This is available from me on request, by e-mail or by snail mail.

### REASEARCH TRIP TO JOHANNESBURG

My son Leon and I undertook a trip in June to Gauteng to deliver a gun and carriage to a client. We transported the carriage in our "bakkie", but the gun was moved with the assistance of Imperial Truck Hire. We delayed our return by rushing about there and in the North West Province to record another 13 guns. We also learned of the locations of four more guns. It appears that in every city we learn of more guns in the previous city that we visited. This is a highly inefficient trend, but it sure keeps us busy.

### THE STATE OF PUBLIC GUNS

Having seen 779 muzzle loading guns in SA to date, and probably being the only person do have done so, I feel obliged to comment on the plight and general condition of guns in public places. In the main, the guns which are in private hands, whether singly or in collections, are in better condition, better preserved and better presented than are guns in public places and in public institutions. Many guns on public display were mounted many years ago and had their last inspection and protective treatment at the same time. It appears that once a gun has been mounted there is no thought given to periodic maintenance and preservation.

Other guns, particularly those cast in bronze, are being over maintained by means of the enthusiastic application and removal of abrasive metal polish, some to the point where the crests and other markings have been all but obliterated. Please! Save the metal polish for doorknobs and ornaments and just wax the guns.

Photographs taken of iron guns 20 to 40 years ago show them to have been in fairly good condition in spite of 200 years in the same position. The same guns, still in the same position today, show deep blistering corrosion and the onset of rapid deterioration. I am informed that this is largely due to pollution and the acid rain that results from this pollution. Preservation of the guns has thus become of vital importance if future generations are to be offered an opportunity to see and study them.

On the positive side, the commendable efforts by a few museums and heritage societies to preserve and present the guns in their care is encouraging. The trend does however need to expand more widely.

### WAGON AND CARRIDGE WHEELS

The only remaining wheelwright in SA appears to be Professor (Entomology) Erik Holm of Hartbeespoort in the NW Province. He is the editor of "Die Houtspeek" (The Wooden Spoke), the journal of the Houtspeek Society. I had the pleasure of meeting him in his busy, wheel filled workshop on top of a mountain near Hartbeespoort in June. Telephone/ Fax 012 - 259 0200, or e-mail [houtspeek@freemail.absa.co.za](mailto:houtspeek@freemail.absa.co.za) , or PO Box 805, Ifafi, 0260.

### A GUN AT ST HELENA

Herewith an extract from my report on the St Helena guns which were measured, photographed and recorded by Martin, Marilyn and Murray Crawford during their recent visit to the island.

### GUN 9

This bronze culverin (nominally an 18 pounder) was salvaged by RAF divers in 1998 from the Dutch ship WITTE LEEUW which sank in James Bay in 1613. The WITTE LEEUW, fully laden and carrying several cannon, was on the homeward voyage from the Dutch East Indies when she was attacked by two Portuguese carracks. Three other bronze cannon were salvaged from the wreck in 1976, one of these guns is in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam.

The gun was cast by Henk (Henricus) van Muers in 1604, the foundry was very likely in Utrecht. There was a family of bell and gun founders by that surname in Utrecht at the time. One of this family, Jan Aelten van Muers, came from Utrecht and was appointed bell and gun founder in Amsterdam from 1619 to 1623. (Reference - The Visser Collection by Rudi Roth) Jan van Muers may of course have been in Amsterdam for some time in a junior capacity prior to this appointment. It is known that Henk van Muers was related to this family.

The weight is inscribed on the top of the base ring but the two centre digits are almost illegible, it could be 3880 A or 3330 A, or a combination of the centre two numbers. The A indicates that the weight was in Amsterdam pounds (1 A = 0.494 kg). The diameter at the vent is 398mm.

One interesting point about this gun is that our intrepid amature sleuths, wishing to confirm that the gun was made of bronze, borrowed and applied a magnet to various parts of the gun. There were several areas, particularly on the first reinforce, but not confined to the base ring area, where the magnet showed a slight but definite attraction to the gun. The iron parts are the crown and chaplets which held the core which formed the bore in place during casting. The remains of these iron pegs remain trapped in the bronze gun. Many bronze guns which have been salvaged show large square or oblong holes where these iron chaplets have corroded away.

### CASTLE PUBLICATION

The new annual publication of the Castle Military Museum has been released. The subject is The Cape Royal Rifles and other Volunteer Units 1855 - 1881. This limited edition of 170pp is available from Natie Greeff at the Castle Museum, PO Box 1, Cape Town, 8000 at R82.00 all inclusive. He also has back copies of the previous publications

### A BROADSIDE OF GUNSMOKE

The Hout Bay Heritage Society have forged ahead with the refurbishment of guns in that strange little republic. We managed to clear the vents and bores of six of the remaining seven guns at East Fort and have mounted the 24 pdr (Durr 200) on its new carriage at West Battery, near "Fish On The Rocks". All have been proof fired by Peter Gibb with the assistance of the SAPS Explosives Branch. All guns will be in action on 24 September to repulse the invaders. The proofing of the 24 pdr was apparently worth hearing /feeling.

### MAYBE GUNSMOKE IN PAARL

I was approached abot the possibility of firing the 6 pdr gun ( Durr 420) on 24 September to begin the Heritage Day celebrations in Paarl. My son Leon and I clambered over Paarl Rock armed with drills, guages, bore scrapers and other gadgets. After four hours of probing, picking, drilling, scraping, poking and scratching we declared bore and vent clear. The bore is in very good condition as a result of its lying in a slightly muzzle-down attitude for the past 100 years. The Paarl residents now have a functional gun, they have yet to decide if they are going to use it.

### ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY

It is not one of ours, but a gun on St Helena has provided some interesting information. The gun has a marking on the trunnion end which consists of a heart shape surmounted by a "4". Inside the heart and arranged in a square are the letters "V E I C".

Dr Dan Sleigh of the VOC Foundation has kindly, and with a fair amount of trouble, obtained the meaning of this marking. I quote from his letter :-

" The VEIC is an abbreviation of the words United East India Company, with a Roman V in stead of a U, as the straight lines were easier to cut. The Company's full name was *The United Company of the Merchants of England trading with the East Indies*. The earliest occurrences of the letters VEIC are on paper, from the years 1710 - 1711, but they do not appear on arms or armour until 1804.

The Company's earliest symbols or insignia were a crucifix and a circle, which appear from 1600 to 1709. The figure 4 and the heart symbol were not used before 1698, when they occasionally replaced the crucifix and circle, so as not to offend non-Christian trading partners. The cross became a figure 4, the heart shape varied over the years."

(Extracted from DF Harding : *Small arms of the English East India Company*. (4 vols) London 1997.)

We have now learned that a 4 is not always a 4. Sometimes it is a crucifix with one small diagonal line added. Rixdollars, \$US, \$Canadian, a buck is a buck and business is business!

### GUN 409

This English Blomefield pattern 32 pounder was dug out at the camber in Simon's Town where it had served as a bollard for more than a century. Its length has been revealed as 2883mm or 9½ foot. The markings are KG III monogram, C.A.B. on the left trunnion end and serial number 276 on the right. The meaning of CAB is not yet known, but I am working on it. The gun has been cleaned and painted by the SA Navy and it is their intention to mount the gun on a suitable carriage near to the Martello Tower in Simon's Town.

### THANKS

I would like to thank all of those who have located guns, followed rumours and provided answers to many questions. Some have gone the extra mile and provided drawings, measurements, markings and photographs of guns located. I receive a fair amount of communications via the post, fax, e-mail and those who knock on the front door. Without these clues and information the gun record would have been bogged down long ago.

I now have about 70 guns that need to be recorded, they are strewn all over the country and my prospects of getting to them all are getting slimmer by the day. I requested a research grant from SAHRA, as I felt that the record that I was compiling was in their interest, but it appears that this is not the case. This makes the assistance that I get from readers all the more valuable if I want to finish what I have begun.

Gerry de Vries : Cape Town : September 2002