



CANNON RESEARCH PROJECTS

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A free service to the muzzle loading enthusiast

THE CARRONADE (The poor cousin of the long gun)

The concept of the carronade is attributed to General Robert Melville who proposed a shorter and lighter gun in 1774. The Royal Navy and the Board of Ordnance were unimpressed with the theory put forward by Melville, and they rejected the concept as being of no practical value, especially to the Royal Navy. Undeterred by the initial rejection, Melville had a prototype cast by the Carron Company in Falkirk, Scotland. The outcome of the proof and demonstration firings is not known to the writer, but no orders for these guns were placed as a result.

The Carron Company was a large organisation. They owned their own coal mines, coking ovens, furnaces and the company contracted a formidable fleet of ships, which delivered manufactured goods to their clients. The Manager of Carron, Charles Gascoigne, concluded a deal with the shipping company to arm their ships in return for their carrying cargo for the company. The guns that he supplied were a modified version of Melville's 1774 design. These short guns became known as carronades.

A series of successful actions by merchantmen armed with carronades prompted some members of the Board of Ordnance to reconsider the usefulness of these short guns.

The carronades which were eventually adopted for Royal Navy service displayed the following characteristics:-

- Their bores were 5 to 6, and later 6 to 8 calibres long.
- They had a mounting loop under the gun as opposed to trunnions.
- Their breeches were chambered smaller than the bore.
- They had a muzzle cup or funnel to blow flame and smoke forward and out of the gun ports. These also facilitated rapid loading.
- Most had their buttons drilled and tapped for an elevating screw.
- The windage (gap between shot and bore) was reduced from the norm for guns.
- The English calibres were 12, 18, 24, 32, 42 and 68 pounders. Smaller calibres did exist, but are thought to be experimental models and guns for merchant use only.

Carronades were very quickly copied and produced by the French, Swedes and the Dutch. Most historians report that carronades were cast only in iron, but in 1804 the Dutch gunfounder, Christiaan Seest, cast an unknown number of 12 pdr bronze carronades, five of which have been recorded in SA, all came off the Dutch naval corvette ZEEPAARD (Capt. Reynes) which was wrecked off Sardinia Bay on 7 May 1823.

There is also a 30 pdr (no misprint - 30 pdr) bronze carronade dated 1800 by C. Seest in a private collection in Hamburg, Germany.

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The 6 pdr gunade which was unearthed at Cape Town High School many years ago, and has been standing on a simple carriage at the school since, is being donated by the school to the Voortrekker Monument Museum in Pretoria. The piece is very similar to those which accompanied some pioneer parties on their migrations north from the Cape.

I have restored the gun and made a set of loading equipment for it. The gun will be mounted on a replica makeshift carriage as was done in the mid 1800s. The carriage is being made in the workshops at the monument. If a permit can be obtained, the gun will be fired on special occasions.

MORE ON GUNS MARKED "VB"

The markings "VB" on the trunnion end of Swedish guns is known to signify the foundry at Stafsjö, but the significance of the letters was not known to us. The Stafsjö foundry was established by Gerdt Störning in the latter part of the 17th century. His successor was von Berchner, whose initials "VB" became the founders mark for the foundry.

REFURBISHMENT OF DURR 777, A BRONZE CARRONADE

We collected a 12 pdr Dutch bronze carronade from Port Alfred and brought it to our workshop. The green verdigris and sediment were painstakingly removed and the gun was cleaned and treated. We designed and built a carriage of the type used for carronades ashore. We delivered the gun, carriage and a full set of equipment to the very happy owner in Port Alfred.

Pictures will soon be available on our web site.

MORE ON GUN MARKINGS

The simplistic explanation of some gun markings in our book has led to some confusion and several enquiries. It must be remembered that over the centuries when ML cannon were in use there were generations of gunfounders in many countries and some generations of guns became obsolete, as did the markings used by specific foundries. It was inevitable that at some time a founder was going to use the same, or a very similar marking to that which had been used a century earlier.

When identifying a marking, "F" or "B" or any other marking on a trunnion end, it is essential that the country of origin and approximate age of the gun be identified by the style and proportions of the gun, before the marking can be confidently attributed to a specific gunfounder or foundry.

As an example, an "F" on the trunnion end of an 18th century Swedish gun can reasonably be attributed to the Finspång foundry, whereas a very similar "F" on an English gunade would be the markings of Fawcett Preston & Co in England. An "L" on a trunnion end could signify the Lauvrig Works in Norway or a French gun with the "L" for one of the Louis.

Another point of confusion is the ancient form of letters. An "I" could, and often does, signify a "J" and a "V" was the easier manner of chiselling out a "U". Well, nobody said it was simple!

PUBLICATIONS

There are two interesting booklets which have recently been published on the subject of ML guns.

"Die Kanon "Grietjie" ISBN 0-9584118-3-2 (33 pages) published in Afrikaans on behalf of the Voortrekker Monument by Binedell Publishers, PO Box 3095, Pretoria, 0001. This well researched and illustrated booklet covers the many actions and engagements in which this gun was used, from Blood River to the First Boer War of 1880 - 1881.

"Grahamstown's Historic Cannons" ISBN 0-86810-395-0 (30 pages) published by Pat Irwin PO Box 972, Grahamstown, 6140. This booklet covers the technical detail and known histories of the 7 guns in Grahamstown, including the 7 pdr RMLs used by the Grahamstown Volunteer Horse Artillery (1876 - 1895).

Greetings

Gerry de Vries