



THE CANNON ASSOCIATION OF SA

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NEWSLETTER No. 19 - Sept 2006

A service to the muzzle loading cannon enthusiast

MISSING NEWSLETTERS

Two of our postal readers have contacted me and asked when newsletter 18 would be posted. This came as a surprise because they had been posted in two batches about two weeks before the enquiries. If any other postal readers have missed issue 18, please let me know.

REQUEST BY THE CENTRE FOR PORTUGUESE NAUTICAL STUDIES (SA)

As proposed in the previous newsletter, and at the request of the CPNS, Ian van Oordt and I went to Pietermaritzburg and measured the 12 Portuguese cannon, four of which are in the Natal Museum and eight are lying on planks in a dirty store behind another municipal building. These are the oldest guns that we have recorded in SA, some were more than 100 years old when Jan van Riebeeck set foot in the Cape.

Four of the guns were salvaged off the *São Bento* which sank off the Wild Coast in 1554 and eight of the guns came off the *Santiago* which sank in the Mozambique Channel in 1585. The guns are all of bronze and have been remarkably well preserved in spite of 400 plus years under the sea. The guns, all of which show the Portuguese crest and an armillary sphere are :-

Durr 694 ex SANTIAGO is a chambered perrier, or stone firing gun of *camelo* proportions. These guns were typically of 8 to 14 calibre lengths. Peculiar to this gun is the fact that the first reinforce is of smaller diameter than the second. This saving in bronze and weight was made possible by the reduced diameter chamber. All four lifting rings are missing from the gun.

Durr 695 ex SANTIAGO is a culverin or "*colubrina*", a gun which is very long in proportion to its calibre, 27 calibre lengths in this case. It is doubtful that this piece is chambered, and we could not access the bore due to obstructions. This gun is similar in all respects to Durr 696 except that the third mark could not be located.

Durr 696 ex SANTIAGO is a culverin or "*colubrina*", a twin to Durr 695, also of 27 calibre length. This piece shows a Portuguese crest, an armillary sphere and a mark of "SEBAS TANIVS" with an "R" above and an "I" below. This refers to King Sabastian 1557 - 1578 and dates the two guns accordingly.

Durr 876 ex SANTIAGO is a "*Berço*" or "cradle", a swivel gun of 72mm bore which had a separate iron chamber, or chambers which were not located on the wreck, presumably they had corroded away. The gun shows the Portuguese crest, armillary sphere and a single "C", probably the founders mark, in raised relief on the top of the chase. Notable on this piece was the asymmetrical nature of the receiver, the cavity which received the chamber. The wall thickness on the left side was 45mm and on the right side it was 58mm. There was no indication of severe corrosion or erosion and it is likely that the gun was manufactured, albeit inadvertently, in this manner.

Durr 877 ex SÃO BENTO is a chambered "*Camelo*" with a 230 mm bore and of 12,5 calibre length. The first reinforce is of smaller diameter than the second. The gun has the normal Portuguese crest and armillary sphere, but no third marking could be located. On top of the front of the second reinforce is a simple depiction of a camel in raised relief. It is this marking which led to the naming of the type / calibre / length as a "*Camelo*".

Durr 878 ex SANTIAGO is a "*pedreiro*" (stone firing gun) of 173 mm calibre and of 16,3 calibre length. We could not access the bore to establish if it was chambered or not and the exterior gave no indication of this, the first reinforce being of greater diameter than the second. Pieces of this calibre and proportion were often known as a "*camelete*". This gun shows the Portuguese crest, armillary sphere and a third mark of "S B T A" (possibly representing King Sabastião) in an oblong patch all in relief. The weight is marked as 12-2-14.

Durr 879 ex SANTIAGO is a “*Berço*” or “cradle”, a swivel gun of 108 mm bore which had a separate iron chamber which must have been about 550mm long. The gun has the weight 7-2-2 incised into the top of the rear of the receiver. The gun shows the obligatory Portuguese crest, armillary sphere and the remains of the mark “SEBAS TANIVS” of which only part is decipherable.

Durr 880 ex SÃO BENTO is a “*Berço*” of 70 mm bore. The piece shows the Portuguese crest, armillary sphere and the founders mark “FCRo” in a patch with divergent bird heads on top, all in raised relief.

Durr 881 ex SÃO BENTO is identical to 880 above, but the bore measured 75 mm in diameter at the muzzle.

Durr 882 ex SANTIAGO is a “*pedreiro*” of “*camelete*” proportions with a bore of 179 mm and is chambered to 129 mm. The Portuguese crest, armillary sphere and “FCRo” markings are in remarkably good condition and show all details. Notable on this gun is the misplacement of the lifting rings, they are misaligned.

Durr 883 ex SANTIAGO is another “*pedreiro*” of “*camelete*” proportions with a bore of 180mm. The weight is shown as 12-3-13 on top of the base ring. The calibre to bore ratio in this case is 13,5. The third marking was “SEBAS TANIVS”, but only the last two letters of each word can be read.

Durr 884 ex SÃO BENTO also a “*pedreiro*” of “*camelete*” proportions with a bore of 169 mm and a length of 13,5 calibres. Apart from the now customary crest and sphere, the gun bears the founders mark “OC” in vertical orientation and each in its own raised square. This is thought to be the mark of Sabastio Cobris C1514 - C1530. The gun has, in place of a button, a small bronze loop in the form of a rope with a left hand lay set high on the flat cascable.

There is an “identical” gun off the São Bento in the Port Shepstone Museum, but the rope loop on the cascable has a right hand lay.

Ian van Oordt has produced magnificent drawings of some of these guns and these were used in the presentation that we made to the CPNS Conference in Mossel Bay. Ian and I have written a lengthy article on these guns which we hope to have published in the UK based Ordnance Society Journal.

The CPNS and the local Portuguese Consul are working on an idea to extract the guns from storage, get them cleaned and preserved and have them on public display, where they can be appreciated as symbols of the Portuguese contribution to the maritime history of the Cape.

CANNONS AND THE LAW

A delegation from the collective firearms collectors societies delivered a report to the Portfolio Committee on Firearms on 16 August. In this report was a section dealing with the cultural use of antique cannons and suggestions that some form of provision be made in the Act which provides for this activity. The early signs are very positive.

RECENT CULTURAL FIRINGS

Ryk de Wit kindly sponsored my trip to the CPNS Conference lock by personally driving me there and providing accommodation. After the CPNS Conference in Mossel Bay, Ryk made his half pounder cannon available and a few of the foreign delegates had the opportunity of firing a shot. The guests left with broad smiles on their faces.

Martin Venter fired his 7 pdr RML in Muizenberg on 06 August to mark the official opening of the battle site which has been cleaned and fenced by the Muizenberg Heritage Society.

Ryk's half pounder was in action again on 15 August in Durbanville where the Mayor, Helen Zille, fired the gun to mark the 200th birthday of Durbanville. The Mayor proved to be a natural unflinching gunner and photographs in the press showed a steadfast gunner behind a dramatic flame and smoke cloud. The shot did sober up a local vagrant who had been sleeping un-noticed in the shrubbery in front of the Town Hall. The Mayor, dressed in long robes of red, black and gold, complete with mayoral chain and other insignia, had the decency to apologise to the man. The shock followed by the apology by an apparition appearing from the smoke promptly turned the man to religion.

The 6 pdr Dutch gun at Durbanville Hills Wines was fired on Friday 25 August at the launch of their new wine, “BASTION”, a very palatable and pleasant blended red wine.

The 6 pdr at False Bay Yacht Club was fired on 26 August to launch the opening cruise of the season.

SPRING SHOT

Spring shot consists of two 16 mm diameter lead musket balls joined by a length of tightly coiled copper wire of length varying between 60 to 80 mm. Some shot are joined by a single strand of wire and others by three, thinner twisted strands. These were designed for use in muskets.

The weapon was loaded with a slightly reduced powder charge and a pair of spring shot which, when fired, would separate to the extent allowed by the copper wire. The intention was to provide a rudimentary flail shot and was primarily intended for the hunting of fowl.

What is of interest to us is that these 16 mm spring shot have been found on the wrecks of the Dutch ships VISCH and WADDINGSVEEN which both sank off the Cape coast. Of greater interest is the fact that they were found tightly bound in bags of 14 and 15 pairs, each bag weighing approximately 2 Amsterdam pounds.

The lists of stores carried on VOC ships indicate that the spring shot was supplied to the ship in 100 Amsterdam pound casks (*Vaatje met draat kogels*). Had the shot been prepared for use by a hunting party to supply fowl for the ship, they would surely not have been tied quite so securely.

One possible conclusion that can be drawn is that the spring shot were prepared as anti- personnel grape shot for the 2 pdr swivel guns.

Readers who are mathematically minded will need to know that 14 of the 16mm shot weigh one Amsterdam pound (A-lb) or 0,494 kg.

CANNON PHOTOGRAPHY

Ian van Oordt has discovered a new field of photography, that of old cannons being fired. There are several challenges to be met if one wants to obtain a good picture, particularly if one wants to capture that elusive flame that lasts for only 100 milliseconds. Ian has been present at just about every firing that I have attended over the past 8 months and he has perfected his technique, producing some very dramatic photographs.

FUTURE EVENTS

The 6 pdr at Durbanville Hills will be fired on 04 November for the Von Propalow Society at 14h30 after a talk on the Dutch Cannon Signal System.

Hout Bay East Battery will have a firing on 05 November, details will be advised by e-mail.

This year marks the 200th year that the Noon Gun has been disturbing pigeons around the Mother City. We are considering some form of celebration in late November or early December when the weather is more predictable. One possibility is a battery of guns on Signal Hill, above the Noon Gun, to fire an extended salute which would end with the Noon Gun firing the last shot.

Dave Cowley of Hout Bay is planning a Freedom Day celebration for April next year which would involve every gun and gunner that we could muster. The 10 years of democracy firing two years ago was a great success and Dave wants to better that effort. He is looking at attracting maximum TV and press coverage. More details will follow.

I have been asked by several members to find out what is planned for "Blouberg 2007", but nothing has been said by the organisers as yet.

ANOTHER STOLEN CANNON

Zane Palmer located a gun in Karatara near Sedgefield and 'phoned me to ask if it had been recorded. I told him that we had no gun of that type listed in that area. He mentioned that it had the name "ROGERS" in relief on the chase and he gave me the marked weight of the gun, the name rang a bell with me. I located it in the Durr Record as number 758, but situated in front of the library in Lydenburg. Zane contacted the library where he was informed that the gun had been stolen some time ago. Zane and I were both contacted by the Lydenburg and Sedgefield SAPS with the result that the gun is back in Lydenburg. Zane does it again !!

THE DURR RECORD

The number of guns recorded now stands at 894 and still growing.

A NEW GUNNER

Born on 29 August (Dave Cowley's birthday) to Elize, wife of member Leon de Vries, a healthy 8 pdr complete with fuse. My comment regarding my fourth grand child, "Well done ! Sponge out and reload", has not endeared me to the family.

ITEMS FOR SALE

There are still a few copies of "The ML Cannon of SA" available at R120 local and R150 overseas all inclusive.

Our 18 page A4 size publication "Cannon Safety" as updated in Aug 2006 (and a full colour cover) is available at R 60 local and R75 overseas all inclusive. This is the training booklet for gunners and is a requirement for the competency certificate.

We had 10 wooden gunners boxes of which 6 remain. These have been modified to meet the legal requirements as defined by the SAPS. The boxes are sub-divided into storage compartments and have a lift-out section which holds the vent tubes and priming powder containers. The boxes are painted red and have "EXPLOSIVES" stickers on all sides. These are available at R200 each.

Included with each box is a list of what should, and what should not be in the box.

SENTINEL WINE ESTATE

The Sentinel estate was sold on auction to a local buyer on 25 August. The cannons and the ammunition display did not form part of the auction as Rob Coppoolse wants to keep the collection, the best in Africa, together, and possibly retain ownership. He will possibly negotiate a deal for the display to remain in situ.

FINANCES

Full members of the association will be receiving, attached hereto, a copy of the expenses incurred over the first official year of our existence. You will note that costs exceeded income, but this can be rectified by recruiting additional full members and by some cost cutting ideas which I will implement. The fees will remain as they were and members will receive personal renewal notifications.

ADVERT

Those readers who live in Gauteng, or are due to visit there, could spend a very interesting day at the Animal and Snake Park in Hartbeespoort, where one of our members, Jack Seale, has a magnificent private weapons museum.

Jack has a wide selection of ML cannon, both bronze and iron, some Boer War guns and one of the best collections of African traditional weapons in the country.

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Gerry de Vries - Scribe to the ML Cannon Association of SA