

MUZZLE LOADING CANNON OF SOUTH AFRICA

A Guide For The Enthusiast

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A free service to the muzzle loading enthusiast

PLEASE - If you are receiving your newsletter by normal mail, and you do have an e-mail address, please let me know as the costs of this exercise are rising steadily. Also, if you no longer wish to receive the news, please let me know and I will remove you from the automatic mailing list.

UPDATING OF THE CANNON LIST

Every time Jon and I think that is time to publish a consolidated update to the Durr list of cannon, more guns turn up. The record now contains 762 guns and there are 48 definites and some 20 probables to be recorded and several rumours to be investigated. We will get there - sooner or later.

ST HELENA (The Island) - UPDATE

Martin and Marilyn Crawford returned from St Helena with the details of 59 guns. Murray, their son, remained on the island for another month to assist in the preparation of their new museum and he will be bringing back some additional info plus the info on more guns that he has located. In spite of Dutch and Portuguese influence on the island, nearly all the guns appear to be of British origin. There are 7 inch RMLs, many Armstrong and Blomefield pattern guns and some which show the Rose and Crown of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. There are two bronze howitzers mounted outside the Castle which have had almost all of their markings enthusiastically polished away. The cherry on top being a bronze *culverin* (nominally an 18 pdr) which was salvaged off the WITTE LEEU, a Dutch ship which floundered in James Bay in 1613. This gun is now in the new museum.

I am still busy, and will be for some time, with the analysis of the data that they captured. Martin will be sending a copy of the listing to the museum on the island and I will produce an article for publication.

WHO MADE THESE HYBRID GUNS?

Guns 193, 194 in Camps Bay and 273 and 276 at Macassar have some distinct English characteristics, yet they are marked with the Amsterdam Admiralty mark consisting of crossed anchors straddled by the letters "A" and "A". The weight is inscribed into the top of the base ring in the same manner that other Dutch guns are marked.

The muzzle mouldings are identical to those of the English guns which preceded the Blomefield pattern guns. The style of the guns is different to the Swedish guns which the Dutch favoured. The trunnion markings consist of a single large "B" in relief, which could only have been cast with the gun. This "B" is neither known as a Swedish marking nor a mark normally found on any Dutch guns.

The gunfounder John Wilkinson of Bersham Ironworks in Wales invested heavily in his foundry during the lucrative years of the Seven Year War and the American War of Independence while cannon were in great demand. When this latter war ended in 1783 Wilkinson had a stock of guns which the Board of Ordnance was neither inclined nor obliged to purchase. Wilkinson then turned to the British East India Company and other foreign buyers. One of the markings which Wilkinson is known to have placed on his guns is a large "B" for Bersham on the trunnion end. Is it possible that?

GUNSMOKE

The Hout Bay Heritage Society has obtained an official permit to fire their 18 pdr gun at East Fort. The permit allows the purchase of gunpowder and the storage of a limited quantity under specified storage conditions at the home of the resident gunner. The police have indicated that they were willing to issue the permit to an appropriate and accredited organisation, but not to an individual owner.

The gun also had to be properly proof fired in order to ensure public safety at future events. The normal blank charge for the gun is 1 kg without any wadding. We first proofed the gun with 2,5 kg and then 2 kg with 1 kg of shot blasting grit in front. Both were pretty dramatic, the first looked like a flame-thrower and the second had a particularly sharp bang, it also cleared six square metres of alien bush.

Hout Bay has now been given a 24 pdr gun for West Fort which they hope will be ready to fire on 14 September.

THE "AMERICA" PUZZLE SOLVED

Gun 674, listed under Johannesburg - Private, has the remains of an inscription which has puzzled us for a while. The inscription, as we could decipher it, read "IKONZES VIEJOSVCU NVEVOSE AMERICA". A much clearer version has been found on a bronze gun at Essaouira in Morocco. This inscription reads BRONZES VIEJOS Y COBRS NVEBOS DE LA AMERICA. "COBRS" is apparently a shortened version of the word for copper. On gun 674 there is no spacing between words and the copper is written as "CU", a shortening of the word "cupro" for copper.

The meaning of the inscription is that the gun was cast from bronze which consisted of tin and new copper from the Americas. The Portuguese and Spanish imported significant volumes of copper from Mexico and from Peru. This was meant to differentiate from guns cast in bronze which had been recovered from previous castings which might contain an unacceptable level of impurities or be of a lower grade.

SWIVEL GUNS WITH LOOSE CHAMBERS

Most maritime nations supplied their ships with one or other form of breech loading (BL) gunsThe Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish were the most prolific users of the type, but other nations adopted BL swivel guns as well, but in smaller numbers.

The standard number of these guns issued to ships varied between nations, the size and nature of the ship and the prevailing threats. Most ships carried between 4 and 10 swivel guns. Although normally stowed below decks until a threat presented itself, they were mounted only on the upper deck and in the fighting tops. They very seldom fired solid shot,grape shot in the form of lead musket or pistol balls being their normal ammunition, particularly the bronze guns, as iron grape damaged the bore. The guns were used in the anti-personnel mode at close quarters where the idea was to fire downwards onto the deck of the enemy ship.

Their calibres generally vary between one half and three pounders. There are some which are more than 2m long. These guns have incorrectly been termed "signal guns" as they were selected as the easiest and least expensive means of firing a gun signal. These guns were designed, and used as combat weapons and do not deserve the demotion to "signal gun".

In England the terms "falcon" and "falconet" were guns of a specific calibre, 70 and 57mm respectively. Some archaeologists and historians refer to a "falconet" for any calibre of BL swivel gun. What these calibres were termed by the European nations at the time is not known.

Most swivel guns had a handle (or tiller) on the cascable of the gun with which the gunner could aim_while_firing. Guns in carriages were aimed_and_then_fired, if the target moved in the interim - too bad, you missed. These handles took many forms :- (1) a metal rod, either bent or straight, with a hand knob on the end. (2) a wooden handle for which a round or square hole was provided in the cascable or button. (3) a loop of rope for which some provision was made on the cascable. The gunners often added the short rope to the fixed handle as the rope did not recoil and numb the hand as did the solid handle.

Archaeologists tend to measure the length of a gun as from front to rear extremity. This is the artefact length and means nothing in the cannon world. The length of a normal ML cannon is from behind the base ring to the muzzle face. This is the length of the gun as quoted by the gunfounders and gunners and is the length of the gun that relates to the internal ballistics of the piece. The correct length of a swivel gun is more complicated. Some ancient documents refer to the length from the rear of the chamber to the muzzle face, and others from the rear of the bore to the muzzle face. It is best to provide an explanation which measurement has been provided, or even better to provide both.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION GUNS 496 & 497

Dr Dan Sleigh has pointed out that the bronze Guns 496 and 497 at Robertson are listed as having no visible markings, but that they do in fact have the VOC (A) marking on the first reinforce. 497 also shows the letters - - - - SZ✕AM - - - - - on the base ring. (Our excuse has to do with the excellent Robertson wine route and rain on the guns). The guns are very definitely of Dutch manufacture, and the AM - - - - - appears to be the first letters of AMSTELODAMI, the manner in which many Amsterdam castings of the period are inscribed.

The gunfounders of Amsterdam were : -

Cornelis van Ammelroy	c.1599- ?
Gerard KosterI	1606-1618
Jan Aelten van Muers	1619-1623
Francois & Pieter Hemony	1623 - ? (from here on there were two foundries)
Assuerus Koster	1625-1661
Gerard KosterII	1654 - 1679
Mamertus Frémy	1681- 1683
Claude Frémy	1681 - 1699
Claes Noorden	1699 - 1713
Jan Albert de Grave	1699 - 1713
Jan Albert de Grave van Sel	1717 - 1729
Cyprianus Crans Janzoon	1734 - 1755 (son of Jan Crans)
Pieter Seest	1755 - c.1781
Christiaan & Jan Seest	1781 - 1792 (both sons of Pieter)

(SOURCE-THE VISSER COLLECTION BY RUDI ROTH 1996 page 93. - ISBN 9040098824)

The "Janzoon" after Cyprianus Crans indicates that he was the son of Jan. This was often abbreviated to a single "Z" after the name. As can be seen from the list above the only name that could fit the letters - - SZ✕ AM - - on gun 497 is CYPRIANUS CRANSZ✕ AMSTELODAMI. It is thus highly likely that the guns were cast by Cyprianus between 1734 and 1755.

Is anybody actually reading this stuff ?

Regards to all

Gerry de Vries