A LOOSE CANNON:
Charles Gascoigne in eighteenth century Russia

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A new era of Anglo-Russian relationships in the early eighteenth century was heralded by the arrival of Ardrei Artamovich Matveev (1666-1728) in London. Matveev, who presented his credential in 1707, was the first permanent Russian diplomat at the Court of Saint James (Cross 1980, 5). From then on, the scope of Anglo-Russian relations expanded, and in 1734 the first commercial agreement between the two countries was duly signed (ibid, 10).

By 1766, when the second commercial agreement was negotiated between the two countries, the Russian Empress, Catherine II, proved herself to be more an astute and clever negotiator than a cooperative trading partner. The history of economic and political interchanges between Russia and Britain in the eighteenth century is an interesting mixture of diplomacy and politics. During the eventful thirty-four years of Catherine II's reign, there were no less than six changes of Russian ambassadors in London.

It was Semen Vorontsov (1744-1832), who played the most important role in our story. Vorontsov was Catherine's most famous ambassador in England. Appointed in 1785, he spent some forty-eight years there, playing an important role in many Anglo-Russian ventures. The Empress herself paid him a two-sided compliment by describing him as a "dangerous character" (Cross 1980, 23).

Catherine the Great was well aware of the importance of developing relations, backed by a strong fleet of commercial and naval vessels. Intending to increase and modernise the Russian navy, she looked to the West, and particularly to Britain, for the necessary expertise (ibid, 15). Thus began the cultivation of a great commercial intercourse between the two countries.

Between 1768 and 1774 Russia had been involved with Turkey in a struggle for the control of the Black Sea and domination of the Near East. Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 1783 and the second war with Turkey took place between 1787 and 1792. During the wars fought in the eighteenth century, France sided with Turkey against Russia. Britain, which at this time found itself in conflict with France, naturally inclined to support the Russian cause.

Already in the first months of her reign, Catherine turned to the British for help in the development of her navy and an interchange programme was activated

between the two navies (Cross 1980, 159).

Instrumental in the development and training of the Russian Navy as well as in furthering British involvement in Russia, were ninety-five British naval officers. Of these officers, the most respected by the Russians was Sir Samuel Greig (1735-1788). He entered the Russian Navy in 1764 as a captain of the first class in command of a ship-of-the-line called the *'St. Dimitri Rostovski'*. His career in the Russian navy was most rewarding. By 1766 he had risen to the rank of Vice-Admiral, was Governor of Kronstadt, and was decorated as a Knight of the Orders of St Andrew, St George, St Vladimir, and St Anne. On 18 July 1776 the Empress herself paid him a state visit on board his flagship, dined in his cabin, reviewed his fleet, and pinned the star of St Alexander Nevski on the Admiral's chest (Panorama 1985). If Greig's achievements in the improvement and development of the Russian navy were admirable, at least he reaped rich rewards for his endeavours.

In 1782 Greig was appointed as an observer to the Alexandrovski works in Petrozavodsk on Lake Onega, to seek a solution in improvement in manufacturing canon. Well aware of the importance of reliable artillery in 18th century warfare, he opted for British specialists to raise the output of the Alexandrovski works to the best contemporary standards. Russian mechanics and technical specialists went to consult with British experts on many aspects connected with cannon manufacture, and to visit the most advanced foundries and iron works such as the Carron Company's Foundry near Falkirk, and Boulton’s enterprises at the Soho Works in Birmingham (Cross 1980, 178).

In 1786, Greig at last found his long-sought armament expert in the person of Charles Gascoigne (1738?-1806), who had risen to be manager of the Carron Iron Works between 1769 and 1786. To persuade Gascoigne to accept his offer, Greig engaged a team of men composed of Adam Armstrong (a former tutor of his children), who was then Governmental Registrar in the Olenecki armoury, Mikhail Stepanovich Stepanov, a secretary of the Admiralty College, who in 1786 was a student at Edinburgh University, and "the dangerous character” ex-ambassador Vorontsov.

Greig’s decision to engage Gascoigne was not made without deliberation. Gascoigne was reputed to be the inventor of the most famous product of Carron - the carronade, introduced in 1779. Initially, but only for a short period of time, this gun was known as a Gasconade, in tribute to Gascoigne's work in its design and production. (The popularity of the carronade reached its peak later, during the Napoleonic Wars, when the gun was used extensively both on land and sea. Carronades became obsolete by about 1850.)

Illus 1: Charles Gascoigne.

Ambitious and capable, Charles Gascoigne had joined the recently founded Carron Iron Company in the mid 1760s. He soon worked his way to the top of the Company, and set about making Carron the unrivalled producer of heavy metal castings. By 1776 he was in complete control at Carron.

The first request to Carron from Catherine the Great of Russia came in 1773. It was an order for a 'fire-machine', instigated by Admiral Charles Knowles (1704-1777). Gascoigne produced, with the help of John Smeaton, a "Grand Plan for converting the Mill N into a Fire Engine for draining the docks of Kronstadt", but by the time the group of fourteen workmen under chief engineer Adam Smith had arrived from Scotland to construct this engine late in 1774, Knowles had already left Russia. Greig took over the operation in the summer of 1775. This engine work was invoiced at Carron in September at a price of £2,037 11s 6d. The coal to fuel it was also sent to Russia.

Carron-made cannon began to arrive in Russia from 1784 onwards (in 1773 there had been a single consignment of 160 tons of cannon). A large consignment, valued at £3,400, went in August 1784. Between 1784 and 1786, five hundred and twenty-seven cannon were imported (Panorama 1985). Not only did Gascoigne accept Russian orders, he also sent patterns, plans and instructions for the casting of cannon and for cannon-boring machinery.

In terms of the British legislation prohibiting export abroad of machinery and expertise (Cross 1974, 258) Gascoigne's activities seriously compromised his position. He was interviewed by the Lord Advocate, and pardoned "*because he was ignorant of the error of his ways, and also because, when duly enlightened, he offered the information against himself*" (Campbell 1961, 90). On 28th April 1786, the Court ruled that Gascoigne should go to Russia in the summer and take with him "*such machinery as could be exported*" (ibid, 151). He arrived at Kronstadt in June 1786 and set about re-organising the Alexandrovski cannon works at Petrozavodsk on Lake Onega, and the nearby Konchezerski foundry, both on the Carron model. Later he set up a branch of the Petrozavodski works near Kronstadt on Kotlin Island, which was designed to make use of the old cannon there and to supply the immediate needs of the Navy (Cross 1974, 256).

With the formal annexation of the Crimea by Russia in the summer of 1783, the southern area of Russia came under development. Gascoigne set up a factory in Mariupol (Zhdanov) on the Sea of Azov, but his name was mainly

associated with the Alexandrovski factory of which he remained director until his death. [For a description of cannon manufacture there and the role of Carron men see Bailey 2002.] The Alexandrovski factory had been founded in 1765 by two French entrepreneurs, Pierre Barral and Denis Chanony. When a new associate, also French, named Foullon, joined the enterprise it came to be locally known as the French Factory. Foullon alone survived its bankruptcy and liquidation in 1777. His son Alexander Andrejevich joined the state service under Gascoigne and made for himself a notable career. In 1818 Alexander succeeded Adam Armstrong in the position formerly held by Charles Gascoigne as director of the Olonets and St Petersburg factories (Bartlett 1979, 173).

The conflict of interests between the two governments soon came to a head. The Carron Company supplied Gascoigne's orders for articles unavailable in Russia, but the British residents, who for one reason or another lived in Russia at the time, and who had already ostracised Admiral Greig, soon rejected Gascoigne also (Campbell 1961, 151). Eventually, in 1787, the Company declined to be further involved in the manufacture of guns in Russia, but agreed to "*readily execute at their works at Carron, whatever orders the Court of Russia may be pleased to transmit to them*" (ibid, 152).

In 1789 Gascoigne's contract in Russia was renewed by a royal decree for a period of four years at a salary of £2,500.00 sterling. In June 1793 he signed a new contract which stated that he was welcome to stay in the service as long as it pleased him (RBS 1962, 258). Catherine II made him a business consultant, awarded him the Order of St Vladimir and a grant of land. Her successor appreciated Gascoigne quite as highly, and in 1798 bestowed upon him the Order of St Anne and more than two thousand serfs (ibid, 259). Gascoigne died in 1806 at St Petersburg, leaving a large fortune.

Illus 2: Russian trunnion markings followed a fairly standard format. The right trunnion recorded the gun serial number, the foundry or factory where the gun was made, and the Director's name. The left trunnion recorded the calibre weight, the gun weight in pud (1 pud equals 16.38 kg), and the date of casting.

Gun No 6431 located at Dufferin Terrace, Quebec City. Cast at Alexandrovski factory under the direction of C. Gascoigne, 1799. This may have begun life as a ship's gun as suggested by the word 'frigate' marked above the gun weight.

The cannon cast in the Alexandrovski factory saw service in wars in the second half of the eighteenth century and later in the Crimean War, at Sevastopol. Sevastopol held a crucially important strategic position on the Black Sea, as a bastion against the centuries old threat of invasion by sea from Asia Minor. The harbour, heavily garrisoned and fortified, could accommodate the biggest

war-ships of the Russian Imperial Navy. The forts of Sevastopol bristled with heavy artillery, ready to answer any threat to the Motherland.

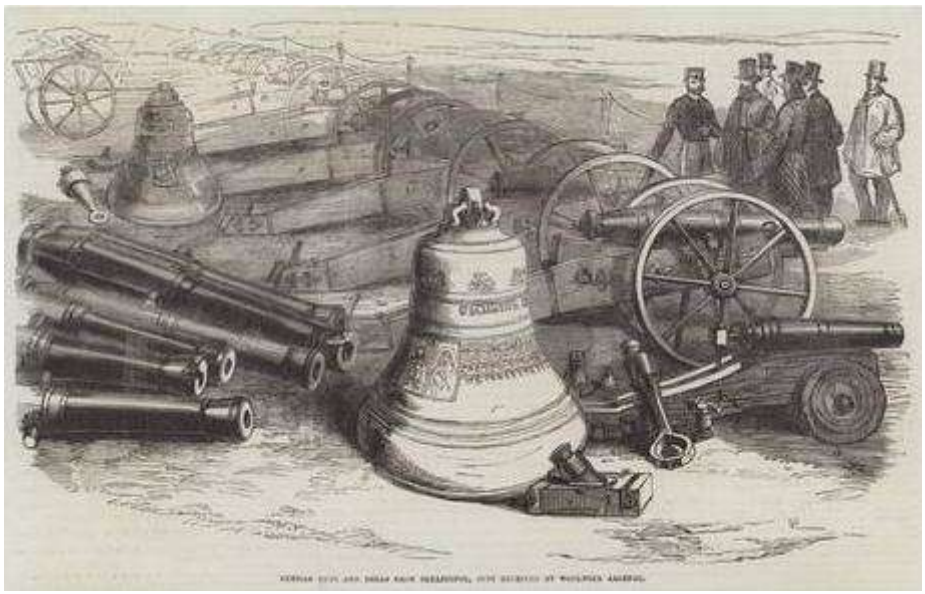
The next crisis in the area arrived under the rule of Czar Nicholas I (1825-1855). The power struggle for the territories of the declining Turkish Empire brought back into prominence the so-called 'Eastern Question'. This time, Russia's natural interest in the division of these territories was very much in conflict with those of Austria, France and Britain. The war that ensued was certainly one of the most incompetently fought campaigns by all the countries involved.

The French and the British were determined to check Russian power and expansion, and to destroy the fortress of Sevastopol, the Russian naval base in the Crimea. The siege of Sevastopol, that lasted three hundred and forty nine days, proved the incompetence of both sides. Separate military blunders such as the famous 'charge of the Light Brigade' and other disasters were widely publicised and romanticised.

Russian artillery held a position of high esteem, under Nicholas I, and the arsenal at Sevastopol was well-stocked with war materials at the beginning of the siege. There were one hundred and seventy-two pieces of ordnance, many of them very heavy guns mounted in their embrasures, and countless stores of lighter artillery pieces in reserve. Sevastopol fully justified Sir John Burgoyne's warning that "... *the more the Allies looked at it, the less they would like it*" (Wood 1915, 583).

After nearly a year's siege, when Sevastopol fell, there were hundreds of guns still unused in the artillery park. Lieutenant Colonel E Bruce Hamley, in his book 'The Story of the Campaign of Sevastopol', records the following scene:

"*Passing down a road parallel to the Inner Harbour, we crossed on a wharf between the Creek Battery and the water, and entered the arsenal, which lay along the edge of the inlet, and contained many rows of ordnance never used, cast as our own used to be in the Carron Foundry*."



Illus 3: Russian guns and bells from Sebastopol at the Woolwich Arsenal. (From the Illustrated London News, 23 Feb 1856).

A commission of officers of the English and French armies was appointed to apportion the immense quantities of war booty, such as guns, ammunition, anchors, and supplies of all sorts, including vast amounts of copper sheeting, church bells, etc., that had fallen into the hands of the Allies after the capture of Sevastopol. The most important of the military stores were "four thousand pieces of ordnance, upwards of four hundred and twenty thousand pounds of powder" (Murray 1856, 423).

A selection of the cannon captured by the British was shipped from the Crimea to England in 1856. In February of that year the Queen visited the Arsenal at Woolwich, and inspected several Russian guns displayed there, together with other trophies such as bells (Windsor Archives).

On 13 December 1856 the British War Department wrote to the Colonial Office, requesting the views of the Governor General of Canada on how he would dispose of "up to twenty pieces of Iron Ordnance as Trophies of the success of British Arms in the late War" (PRO CO 42/607, f372). The Governor General replied on 17th February 1857, enclosing his Executive Committee's acceptance of the offer, but not actually explaining how he might dispose of the guns (ibid f239-241). The War Department wrote again on 26th March to say that the guns were at Woolwich and that the Canadian government should authorise someone to collect them (ibid CO 42/612, f135). On 23rd July, the Governor General sent a copy of the Executive Council's approval of the appointment of Mr Hugh Allan of Edmonstone, of the Allan Company of Montreal, to undertake their conveyance (ibid CO 42/610, f207-8).

The barque '*Panthea*' sailed from London on 25th July 1857, anchored off the Downs later the same day, and continued her voyage on 29th July, arriving in

Montreal on 18th September 1857 (Lloyd's Reg, 1857). Upon their arrival the cannon were unshipped and placed on the Champ de Mar in Montreal. Early in 1860 the following cities received two guns apiece: Hamilton, Kingston, London, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City, and Toronto. Applications for trophies were also received from other towns, such as Brantford, Dundas, Galt, Sarnia, St Catherines, St John's in Ontario and Trois Rivieres in Quebec.

The cannon in Canada had been produced in the Alexandrovski factory over a period from 1799 to 1845, under the supervision of Charles Gascoigne, Adam Armstrong, Alexander Foullon, and Butenev (who was Russian).

It is an historical irony that these artillery pieces were designed by a Britain, cast in Russia, in a French founded factory, captured by the British and finally exiled to Canada, where they serve as reminders of the persisting tendency of the human race to apply the best of its ingenuity to the production of means of destruction.

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