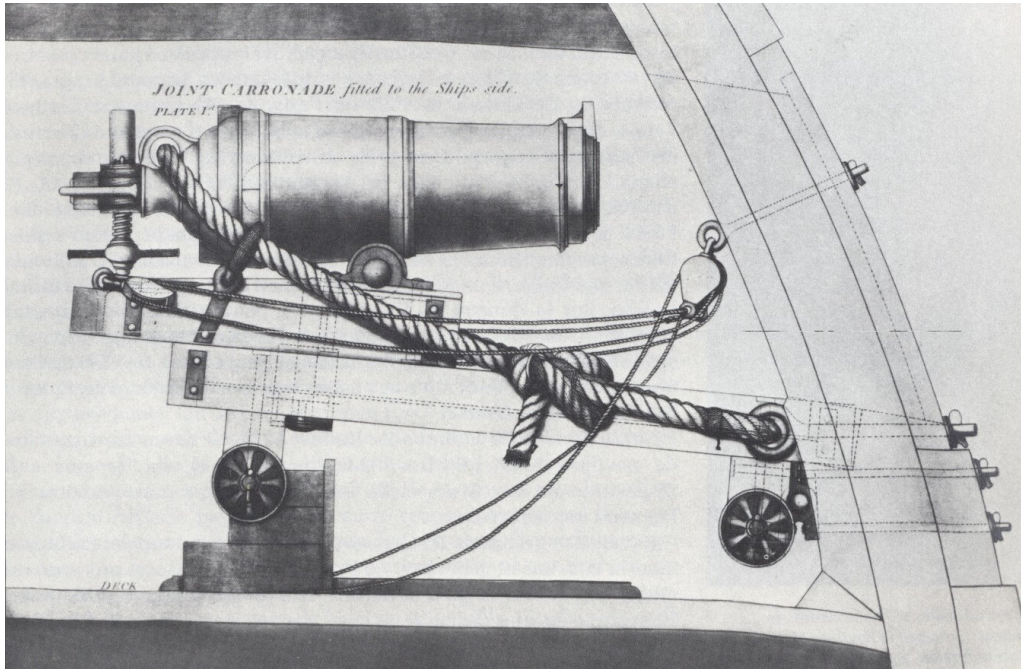


The Carron Company



On Boxing Day 1760 the first blast furnace was brought into use at the newly formed company, known as 'Roebucks, Garbett and Cadells' after the three founders (two Englishmen and a Scotsman). The site was ideal, on the north bank of the river Carron, two miles north of Falkirk; the relatively untapped mineral fields of Central Scotland providing coal and ironstone, the river providing a source of power. The method used to make iron was that perfected by Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale, in which coke was used to in the furnace instead of the more usual charcoal. Due to Scotland being undeveloped industrially in the mid-eighteenth century all the materials to build the works, the craftsmen and the foundry men were brought in from England, and the latter were expected to teach the local Scotsmen their trades.

At that time cannon manufacture was a lucrative business, and by 1765 the British Navy had given the company a contract to supply guns. However by 1773 the contract was lost due to the guns being of low quality and guns of 'Carron' manufacture were withdrawn from all ships of the Navy.

In response, Garbett's son-in-law, reportedly a 'ruthless and determined character', Charles Gascoigne, who now had control of the company ensured that the problems were overcome. Improvements were made in the quality and types of iron made, with cannons known as 'the new light constructed guns' being made from 1776 at the now named 'Carron Company', which received its Royal Charter in 1773. These guns were a success locally but were refused by the British Government.

It was in 1778 when a completely new type of gun was produced at 'Carron', being a much shorter and a third to a quarter of the weight of an equivalent long gun. Originally known as a 'gasconade' or 'melvillade' after their attributed inventor, Lieutenant General Robert Melville, it later became known as a 'carronade'

In 1779 the Royal Navy adopted the gun which was initially very successful at a time when typical naval tactics emphasised short-range broadsides. Their lighter weight allowed a ship to carry more carronades than long guns; they could be mounted on the upper decks where heavy long guns could cause the ship to be top-heavy; carronades were faster to reload, easier to aim, and required a smaller gun crew. HMS Trincomalee was originally built to carry eight carronades in its 46 gun total.

In the two decades after the Battle of Trafalgar greater emphasis was placed on the accuracy of long range gunfire and less on the weight of a broadside, and the carronade disappeared from the Royal Navy from the 1850s.

What of the fate of the 'Carron Company'?

In 1786, the determined Charles Gasgoine left for Russia to set up iron manufacturing for the Czarina, Catherine the Great. On Sunday 26th August 1787 Robert Burns was refused admission to the works because it was a Sunday, and he did not have the required 'ticket'. In revenge he retired to the Carron Inn and scored a verse of poetry on a window of the inn.

This is the poem Burns 'penned' onto the window of the Carron Inn (he used a diamond-tipped stylus which had been given to him in Edinburgh by James Cunningham, 14th Earl of Glencairn:

*We cam na here to view your works
In hopes to be mair wise,
But only, lest we gang to hell,
It may be nae surprise;
But when we tirl'd at your door,
Your porter dought na hear us;
Sae may, should we to Hell's yetts come,
Your billy Satan sair us.*

These lines were seen by William Benson, a clerk at Carron Works (from 1765). He penned a reply:

*If you came here to view our works
You should have been more civil
Than to give a fictitious name,
In hope to cheat the devil,
Six days a week to you and all,
We think it very well;
The other if you go to church,
May keep you out of hell.*

Benjamin Franklin was another notable person, who in his case was able to visit the works and is said to have left a design for a stove, 'Dr Franklin's stove' or the 'Philadelphia stove'. In 1866 one of their main products was the cast iron Carron bath, and during the world wars the company turned to the production of munitions.

The biggest contract ever given to a Scottish iron foundry came to the Carron Company in 1962 – the production of cast iron rings for the Jarrow-Howden road tunnel under the river Tyne, something to remember when travelling north up the A19.



Logo of the Carron Company

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