

Army Museum of Tasmania

Anglesea Barracks
HOBART

Information Sheet No 25

40 Pounder ARMSTRONG GUN On Travelling Siege Platform

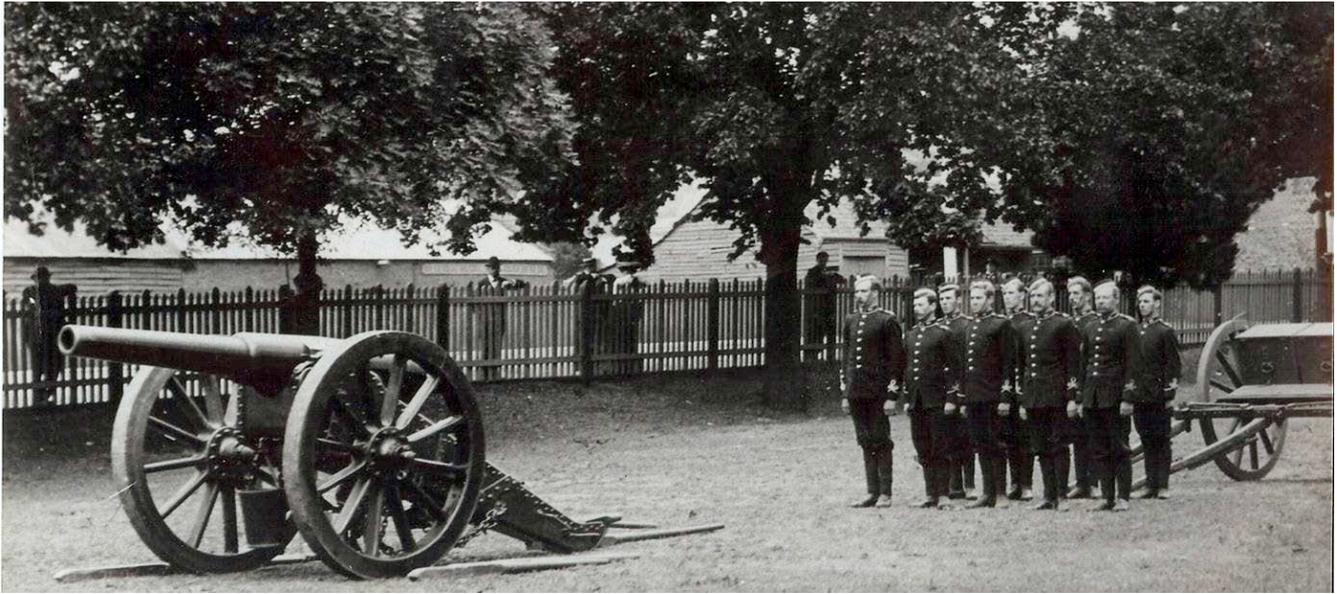
In the early 1882 the Tasmanian Colonial Government received a Report of a Royal Commission on the Defence Forces of Tasmania¹. This report was to lead to the appointment of Major Vincent Legge, Royal Artillery to the position of Commandant of Tasmania's Defence Force with the rank of Colonel.

Legge who was born in Tasmania, had been educated in England and later joined the Royal Artillery. His travel to Tasmania was delayed to enable him to attend the proofing trials of the two Armstrong Guns on travelling siege platforms. These guns were part of a suite of Artillery pieces that would provide the Tasmanian Defence Force some flexibility in defence and were to be issued to the Southern Tasmanian Volunteer Artillery and the Launceston Artillery.

The STVA were issued field guns (see Information Sheet No 12) and the Launceston Artillery two guns each of mountain and siege artillery.

The 40 Pounder Armstrong Gun on a travelling Siege Platform was of the latest design and their purchase occurred at the same time as the Government appointed Legge to his new Command. Legge decided to delay his return to Tasmania in order to attend the proofing trials of the two Armstrong 40 Pounders in England prior to their despatch. Legge arrived in Tasmania in 1883.

¹ Tasmania House of Assembly Royal Commission Report 28 September 1882



40 Pounder. Armstrong Gun and Launceston Artillery Detachment

At Patterson Barracks Launceston circa 1887

Whilst the guns could be fired with out the siege platform, the recoil would cause the gun to run backwards and the gun would have to be run forward again into “battery” by the Detachment. The ammunition limber would have to be located some distance behind as depicted in the above image.

The siege platform comprised a demountable wooden base to which was affixed a cylinder that contained a large spring. This cylinder was normally attached to the gun and could be raised when the gun was travelling or it could be removed completely from the gun (as seen in the below image).

When the platform was used, on firing the rearwards movement would compress the spring and the recoil absorbed. The spring would then re assert and run the gun forward to the firing position again.

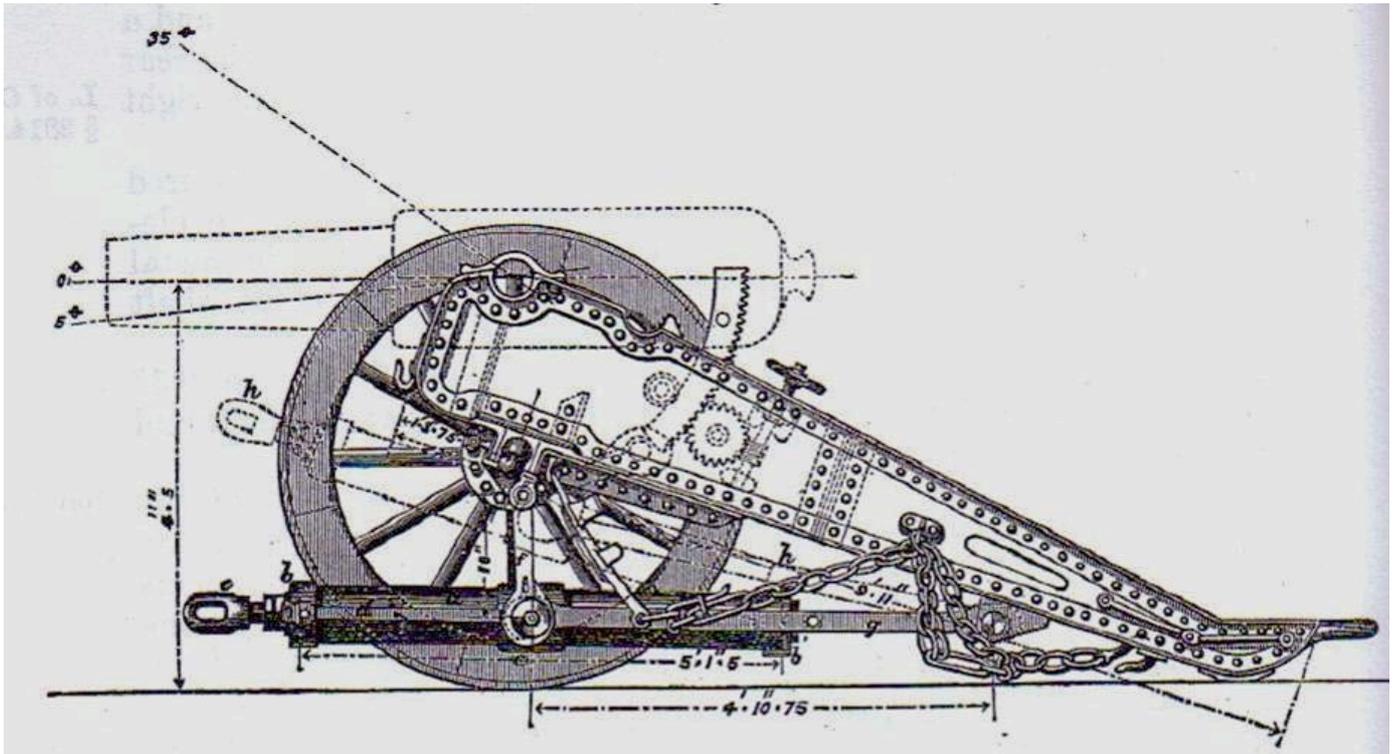
The diagram below from the Royal Carriage Department² book shows the cyclinder in the lowered position. When in the travelling position this is shown in the drawing as a dotted line. Note the connection loop on the front of the ram. This attaches to the platform.

² The complex at Woolich comprised the Royal Gun Factory (RGF, cast cannon), the Royal Laboratories (RL, manufactured powders), Royal Carriage Department (RCD, produced Gun carriages, limbers, wagons) and Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock (RSAF, firearms, swords and bayonets). The RCD produced books with drawings and descriptions of all carriages made by its Department.

Treatise on Military Carriages 1888, HMSO, London

Treatise on military carriages and other manufactures of the Royal Carriage Department 1888, HMSO, London

Treatise on Military Carriages and Stores Connected with Them 1895, HMSO, London



The below image shows the Armstrong 40 Pounder on its Siege Platform at the Ross Easter Encampment. The wooden platform and recoil cylinder are apparent as the gun is in full recoil having just fired.



By 1900 the Armstrong Guns were obsolete and they were presented to the Launceston Municipality by the Commonwealth Government in 1910. They were located on Windmill Hill Park. The below plaque was attached to the guns³



The guns remained at the park until the 1950's when the Launceston Council offered them back to the Australian Army. At that time Brigadier Dollery was Commander of the 6th Military District and he asked his staff at Launceston to report. The report suggested they were not worth recovering but Dollery was not daunted and insisted they be removed to Brighton Camp. He had a drawing made of the parade ground showing an artillery piece at each corner. The two 40 Pounder Armstrong's were to be accompanied by the German 21cm Der Morser and 70 Pounder RML Armstrong that he agreed to remove from the Queens domain in exchange for the Crimean Gun (see Information Sheets No 7 and No 8).

In the event, neither of the 40 Pounder Armstrong's were moved and they simply disappeared.

³ One of the plaques was donated to the Australian Army Museum Tasmania by Mr. John Presser