

An Iron Cannon Salvaged from the *Marquise de Tourny*, Western English Channel

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The wreck of the *Marquise de Tourny* was discovered in the western English Channel in 2008 by Odyssey Marine Exploration and subjected to a ferrous metal FADE survey in 2009. The site is 80m deep and 100km southeast of Plymouth. The presence of 25 iron cannon combined with discovery of the ship's name and date embossed onto its bronze bell, *La Marquise de Tourny* '1744', identified the wreck as the remains of an armed privateer built in Bordeaux and lost during the War of the Austrian Succession. The corsair sank around the mid-18th century.

An unknown European organisation is believed to have salvaged the cannon from the wreck. It was subsequently found in a coastal scrap yard and the author of this paper notified. The gun is incised with *fleur de lys* comparable to those present on a swivel gun recovered from the wreck in 2008 and is identified as deriving from the *Marquise de Tourny*. At 242cm in length and with a bore diameter of 10.5cm, the gun is an 8-pounder of French origin. The cannon's salvage reflects the impossibility of supervising and protecting historical shipwrecks located outside territorial waters from non-authorized access, and underlines how essential it is to record and sample at risk underwater cultural heritage of international importance.

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1. Introduction

The author was recently made aware of an iron cannon salvaged from a wreck believed to be the *Marquise de Tourny*, a French privateer built in 1744 and lost in the late 1740s or early 1750s in the Western English Channel (Cunningham Dobson, 2011). The gun was made available for recording (Fig. 1). The cannon can be identified as an 8-pounder on the basis of its 10.5cm-diameter bore. It was missing its trunnions and muzzle. Further minor damage was visible. Simple ornamental rings divide the cannon into three parts: breech and first reinforce, second reinforce, and chase (Fig. 2). On the first reinforce an astragal ring with fillets marks the end of the vent field, and a similar set of rings is positioned on the neck between the muzzle and the chase (Fig. 3). A notable reduction of thickness was measured at the reinforces. Except two *fleurs de lys* located at the beginning of the first reinforce and three-quarters of the way along the second reinforce, no further marks were identified (Figs. 7-8).

The key preserved dimensions are (Fig. 2):

- Breech: 19cm
- Barrel (forward of the breech): 242cm
- Th. at the vent field: 37cm
- Th. at the muzzle astragal: 21.5cm
- Bore Diam. 10.5 cm

2. Historical Background

When France started to develop a navy in the first half of the 17th century, few local foundries were capable of casting a strong iron cannon. The iron district of Perigord produced guns and even exported them, but many failed test firings (Klein, 1965: 218). By then the Dutch had already successfully established iron foundries in Sweden, and guns from there soon found their way onto the Amsterdam arms market and onwards to France. By 1674 the first regulations regarding standards for cannon



Fig. 1. The iron cannon discarded in a salvage yard dump. Photo: Nico Brinck.

Iron 8 Pounder (7'10" French)

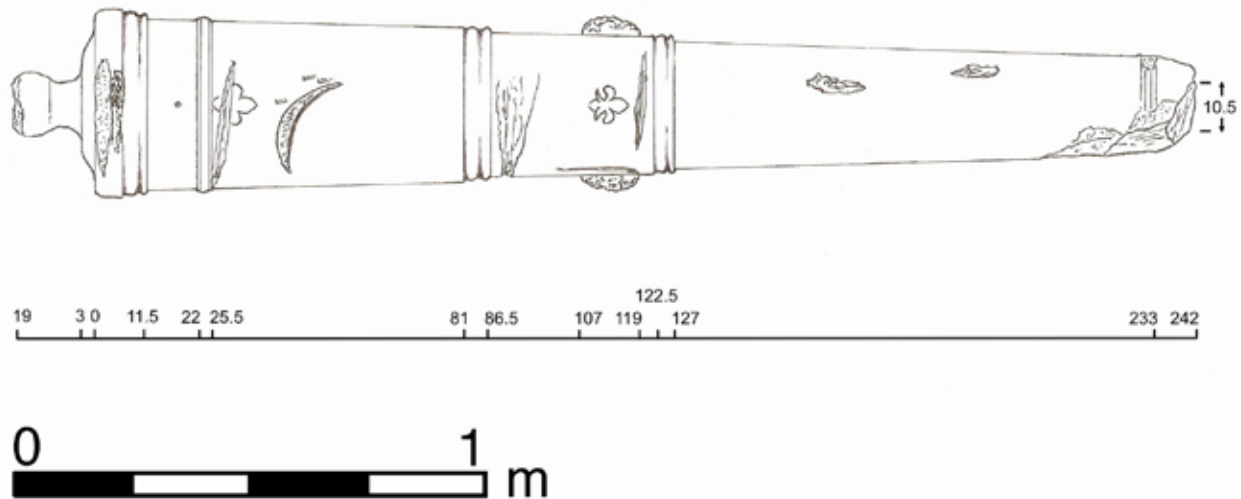


Fig. 2. The iron cannon discarded in a salvage yard dump. Length measurements in cm. Photo: Nico Brinck.

appeared in French Royal Docklands management regulations (Boudriot, 1996). From time to time the regulations changed (not unlike the English ‘Establishments’) and new standards were fixed for French sea ordnance. Very little is known about cannon used by the French merchant navy. Foundries probably enjoyed greater independence in gun shape and size compared to orders for the fighting navy.

By the mid-18th century, when the *Marquise de Tourny* was active, the dimensions of a gun for a royal ship, naval or privateer, the so called ‘pièces légitimes’ were: circumference at the vent 11 calibres; forward of the trunnions 9 calibres; and at the chase astragal 7 calibres (the diameter of the bore is one calibre). The centre of the trunnions had to be positioned at 3/7th of the length of the gun (excluding the breech) (Boudriot, 1996).

All thickness measurements of the salvaged 8-pounder adhere to these regulations, and the center of the trunnions differs by only a few centimetres from the standard. Further, this piece exhibits two *fleurs de lys*. A third one was probably originally engraved onto the muzzle swell, but the gun is broken at this point so that about 15cm of the muzzle is missing.

The armament of a ship could change over the years. Generally a royal ship would receive new cannon when fitted out after launching. However, during her service damaged and worn cannon would be replaced on an as needed basis, and not always with identical pieces. After a long career the armament could be mixed in appearance, if not in calibre.

A comparable ship to the *Marquise de Tourny* is the *Machault*, a French frigate lost in 1760 down the River Restigouche in Canada (Bryce, 1984). Two of her cannon were salvaged, including a 12-pounder produced in France and engraved three times with the royal *fleur de lys*. The second cannon is a Swedish Finspong gun, most likely bought in Amsterdam. This gun does not feature the *fleur de lys*, but rather the anchors’ symbol of the French navy. The *Machault* cannon are not comparable to the *Marquise de Tourny*’s 8-pounder.

A French 8-pounder is known from Valletta, Malta, however, where it stands in front of the Auberge de Castilia, and exhibits almost the same dimensions and shape as the gun from the English Channel (Fig. 9). The rings and trunnions are all set in the same place, its trunnions are still

conical and the length is 258.5cm, which may also have been the length of the gun in question. Regulations preferred a length of 256cm for an 8-pounder, which is close to the length of the Valletta gun. After 1766 the regulations demanded shorter guns for the navy and trunnions were always straight cylinders. Thus, the English Channel cannon and the Valletta piece both date to the earlier half of the 18th century. The Channel 8-pounder fits very comfortably with the timeframe of the privateering actions of the *Marquise de Tourny* (Cunningham Dobson, 2011: 98-101).

3. The *Marquise de Tourny*

The wreck of the *Marquise de Tourny* (designated as Site 33c) was discovered by Odyssey Marine Exploration in 2008, 100km southeast of Plymouth, at a depth of around 80m in the western English Channel (Cunningham Dobson, 2011). A pre-disturbance survey was conducted, including the recording of surface features and the production of a photomosaic. The presence of a blue glass *flacon* bottle and *fleur de lys* decoration along an iron swivel gun suggested a possible French nationality for the vessel. The discovery of the ship's bronze bell, inscribed with the name *La Marquise de Tourny* and the date of 1744, confirmed that Site 33c was a Bordeaux-based privateer.

Other than dense concretions surrounding iron ballast and cannon, the wreck is poorly preserved in shallow sediments, compounded by trawler damage. The survey revealed a spread of 25 iron cannon intermixed with 13 large concreted masses (0.85 x 0.25m to 3.5 x 3.0m), some of which cover areas of 2-10 square meters and appear to consist of approximately 1m-long cylindrical iron concretions. A minimum of 167 linear concretions are visible on the site's surface, although the merging of concretions and unseen stratigraphy severely complicated identification. The total volume of ballast ingots may have been closer to 500-600 pieces.

Some red galley brick fragments are present, but no potsherds. No visible wooden ship structure survives, other than minor sections of timbers in shallow pockets of sediment and gravel. The site offered no visible indication as to which part of the wreck signifies the bow or stern. The shipwreck measures approximately 35 x 25m. Taking into account the number of cannon present, the wreck may be interpreted as the remains of a moderately armed 25-gun sailing vessel.

Conservation identified a recovered cannon as a half-pounder swivel gun (L. 85.5cm, bore Diam. 4.0cm). As with the salvaged cannon in question, the swivel gun's first and second reinforces featured a single incised *fleur de lys*, which were the only markings present (other than a



Fig. 3. Full-length view of La Marquise de Tourny's salvaged 8-pounder. Photo: Nico Brinck.



Fig. 4. Detail of the cascabel and button of the salvaged 8-pounder. Photo: Nico Brinck.



Fig. 5. Detail of the cascabel and button of the salvaged 8-pounder. Photo: Nico Brinck.



Fig. 6. Detail of the broken bore of the salvaged 8-pounder. Photo: Nico Brinck.



Fig. 7. Detail of a fleur de lys on the first reinforce. Photo: Nico Brinck.



Fig. 8. Detail of a fleur de lys on the second reinforce. Photo: Nico Brinck.

gunner's 'V' near the muzzle). This form of versatile ordnance was mainly situated on stanchions or on rails at the high ends of a vessel and along the main deck. On warships they were mounted on platforms between the lower mast and topmast. In these positions they could be used effectively to rain fire down on a vessel's main deck.

The *Marquise de Tourny's* 25 iron cannon confirm that it was armed very similarly to its brother ship *Le Grand Marquis de Tourny*, which carried 24 guns and had an approximate 460-ton burden. The iron ingot ballast defining the site's surface, in addition to an absence of identifiable cargo, suggests that the ship was likely transporting an organic cargo when she foundered, which has now deteriorated. The seizure in 1757 and description of another Bordeaux privateer, *Le Grand Marquis de Tourny*, reflects the common import of sugar, coffee, indigo and logwood, of which the first two products would certainly not remain preserved within Site 33c's marine environment. The *Marquise de Tourny* may have been sailing short-haul between Bordeaux and the French Channel ports when she was lost during a storm in the late 1740s or early 1750s.

Beyond two outstandingly preserved wrecks undergoing excavation off St. Malo, France (the 300-ton royal frigate *La Dauphine* lost in 1704 and 400-ton *L'Aimable Grenot* sunk in 1749), and the comprehensive excavation of the French *Machault* by Parks Canada, Site 33c is the only other privateer of this period to have been examined archaeologically. The date of 1744 on the *Marquise de Tourny's* bell coincides with the year when France joined the War of the Austrian Succession (1739-48). The ship would have actively participated in the protection of trade and the art of privateering. Privateers like the *Marquise de Tourny* deployed their own resources to attack and seize vessels and the goods of foreign subjects, over which they acquired the rights to the property appropriated. The practice was not random, but was officially sanctioned under the law of the sea. During the war around 2,828 British privateers went to sea and just over 6,800 English, French and Spanish craft were seized by all sides (Kingsley, 2011).

4. Recording & Protection

The majority of cannon recovered from seabeds in the modern era can be divided into three basic groups: those landed by fishing vessels, found by dredgers, and thirdly removed by salvors, whether professionals or amateurs. By far the greater volume of guns have been brought ashore by fishing vessels as part of the unwanted daily haul that often includes explosives, such as sea mines and airplane bombs from World War II. The number of trawled up cannon runs into the hundreds (Kingsley, 2012: 17).



Fig. 9. An 8-pounder French iron cannon at Valletta, Malta, of the salvaged Marquise de Tourny form. Photo: Nico Brinck.

Trawling can be a hazardous job in the European coastal seas. Many fishermen have lost their lives after striking exploding sea mines, torpedos and bombs, which surfaced in their nets. Sometimes the heavy weight snagged in a net is a harmless cannon. These are always landed, unlike some other categories of finds that are usually dumped on wreck sites. A gun in the net can deliver some easy cash for the crew and good money if it is a bronze gun. To avoid paying taxes (import tax, income tax) on this extra item of income, the find is typically kept as secret as possible, also because fishermen are afraid their find will be confiscated by heritage authorities. This reality is all very frustrating for the ordnance historian. Sometimes serious detective work is needed to trace a gun once it has entered the black market. Fortunately, there are exceptions when guns are sometimes reported after the trawler lands its catch.

In the past dredgers and survey vessels have played a part in gun recovery from the sea. Dredging zones have to be surveyed before the dredger arrives, but the surveyors do not see what lies beneath the seabed. Guns from this group are usually reported to the authorities. Gun finds removed by salvors are also problematic. Several professional wreck salvors exist in the Netherlands, for instance, who do not focus on historical wooden wrecks. Their main goal is more recent cargos, lost anchors, trawl nets and re-floating recently stranded and foundered vessels.

Sometimes during their surveys for lost anchors salvors come across wooden wreck remains with cannon, and on occasions they have brought one home (cf. Kingsley *et al.*, 2012: 5-6 for the salvage in 2011 of a 24-pounder bronze

gun from the First Rate English *Victory*, 1744). These have all been recorded by the author. Hobbyists, like sports diver groups, are also famous for discovering many more wrecks and cannon than professional archeologists. Unfortunately, these are not always reported. If bought by collectors, they still end up sooner or later under the eye of the ordnance historian.

In the Netherlands a new Heritage law is under development and scheduled to come into force in 2016. All salvage by professional and hobbyists groups will be prohibited. Finds by fishing vessels and dredgers will need to be reported by law as soon as possible. However, fishermen and dredger captains cannot always know what lies in their path and avoid underwater cultural heritage. Anchored ships dragging their anchors in a gale have ripped many wrecks apart and have dispersed artefacts far and wide. Some guns are found several miles from their wreck. A 3000Hp trawler can pick up a cannon in its net without even being aware of the catch. The gun can cut through the net after a few miles and become lost once more. In conclusion, it is impossible to prevent trawlers and dredgers from catching guns. But it is necessary to convince the crews that such finds should be reported to the proper authorities.

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