

## JOHN'S JOTTINGS

### GUNS IN THE GARDENS

In July 1949 the Town Clerk of the Ballarat Council received a letter from George Prideaux requesting some tuberous or bulbous plants "when your Gardens Curator has finished planting all his beds." He recalled visiting Ballarat in the 1920s and being shown around by Tom Toop. Tom asked him if he could provide any information about the 4 muzzle loading guns near the Gardens Pavilion which he had been told came from the Crimea and a "Big Gun" nearby understood to have come from the Rock of Gibraltar.

He could not have asked a more knowledgeable person. George Prideaux had joined the Victorian navy in 1885 serving as an armourer rising through the ranks to retire 45 years later as a Lieutenant Commander. He examined the "Big Gun" and showed Toop the crack in the trunnion which he had noted as Armourer on the "Cerberus" after the gun had been fired in practice in the early 1897. The gun was immediately taken out of commission and off the boat and sent to the Phoenix factory in Ballarat. Unfortunately the Foundry was not able to repair it and it was handed over to the Council who installed it on the foreshore of the Lake at a cost of 77 pounds. There it stayed to the delight of successive generations of children until the Council returned it to the Navy in 1987.

George also explained that the 4 smaller guns were from H.M.V.S. "Nelson". Laid down in 1809 and launched in 1814, the "Nelson" was originally a 120 gun Ship of the Line. She did not see any action and in 1854 she was cut down to a 2 decker and fitted with a steam engine and her guns reduced to 46. When the Victorian Government requested a vessel for training its volunteers she was transferred on 'permanent loan,' arriving in Hobson's Bay in 1868. Incidentally, George's father, John, came to Australia on her as a sailor and lived in Williamstown. With the Russian scare in the 1870s she was further reduced to a single decker and her guns replaced. The old muzzle loaders were distributed around the State; Ballarat, I believe, got ten, two at the South Gate of the Gardens, two at View Point and two in Victoria Park apart from the four next to the Pavilion.

On leaving, George told Tom that he would prepare a plaque for the "Big Gun" and one for the group of four guns which can be seen today. He describes them as being "presented" to the Citizens of Ballarat whereas a small plaque on another gun records that they are "lent" to the Council by the Defence Department. It is reassuring to know that if the worst happens our guns are there as a last line of defence.

George Prideaux was a keen gardener and was responsible for the planting and upkeep of the garden at the Flinders Naval Depot - HMAS "Cerberus" - the Prideaux Rose Garden. On one occasion he arranged for one of his men to transport a weeping Ash from the Ballarat Gardens to the Depot on a motorcycle and apparently it did well. On retirement he became a founder of the



West Australian National Rose Garden. I am certain Tom Beaumont made sure that his request for plants was granted.

By the way, if you want to see the "Big Gun" again and George's plaque you may have to join up and see it at H.M.A.S."Cerberus"

\*\*\* The Story of Victoria's Navy is quite fascinating, particularly the history of the "Cerberus" which was sunk as a breakwater in the Bay off Black Rock whilst poor old "Nelson" finished up as a coal hulk and was eventually "fired" to salvage her brass. Sic transit gloria.



PRESENTED  
TO THE  
CITIZENS OF BALLARAT

32-PR. M. L. GUNS FORMING PART OF THE ARMAMENT  
OF THE THREE DECKER LINE OF BATTLESHIP, H. M. V. S.  
"NELSON", 120 GUNS; SENIOR NAVAL OFFICERS SHIP  
OF THE VICTORIAN NAVY.

KEEL LAID 1798  
LAUNCHED 1814  
ARRIVED IN HOBSON'S BAY 1869  
OUT OF COMMISSION 1898

THIS 10 INCH, 18 TON, RIFLED MUZZLE LOADING  
ARMSTRONG GUN, NUMBERED 17, WAS FABRICATED AT  
THE ROYAL GUN FOUNDRY, WOOLWICH, ENGLAND, IN  
1869.

IT FORMED PART OF THE PRIMARY ARMAMENT OF  
H. M. V. S. CERBERUS, WHICH ARRIVED AT FORT PHILLIP  
IN APRIL 1871. DURING GUNNERY PRACTICE IN THE  
BAY IN 1884 SERIOUS CRACKS (STILL VISIBLE) DEVELOPED  
IN THE R. H. TRUMION, MAKING THE GUN UNSAFE TO  
FIRE. IT WAS BROUGHT TO A BALLARAT FOUNDRY  
FOR REPAIR, BUT WAS BEYOND THE CAPACITY OF THE  
FOUNDRY AND LEFT HERE.

IT IS THE ONLY REMAINING COMPLETE GUN FROM  
THE CERBERUS; THE HULK OF WHICH NOW FORMS A  
BREAKWATER AT HALF MOON BAY, SANDRINGHAM,  
VICTORIA.

MUZZLE LOADED, THE GUN WAS FIRED ELECTRICALLY,  
HENCE THE VERY SMALL TOUCH-HOLE.