

I. Collections Level Description

Department: FIREPOWER! Royal Artillery Museum, Woolwich

Collection Type: North American Collection

Reference: LDRAR.COLLECTION

No. of items: 22 (approx.)

Notes

Date of Research visit: 28.05.2014 Contacts: Mark Smith, Curator, Paul Evans, Librarian, and Jonathan Mortemore, Collections Assistant



Zulu shield and assegai on display
[LDRAR.MISC.30/512]



Tiger shield or 'Po', China
[LRAR.MISC.17/675]



Naga leg armour, India or Myanmar
[LDRAR.MISC.17/226]



Metal gong, probably Chinese
[LDRAR.MISC.17/697]



Shield, Middle East
[LDRAR.MISC.30/577]

Category

Arms and Armour
'Miscellaneous'
Catalogues (Archival)

Description

INTRODUCTION: The Museum of Artillery was originally started in 1778 at the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich as a museum of weapons, which was justified for training purposes. Following a fire in 1802 surviving artefacts were housed in the Old Military Academy building, and then the main collection was moved to the Rotunda on Woolwich Common in 1820 where it remained until 2001.

This museum was distinct from the Royal Artillery Regimental Museum (opened in 1946) which set up in another part of Woolwich and was run by the Royal Artillery Institution (RAI, founded 1838), an organisation that is funded by subscriptions from serving officers and is the custodian of the Regiment's heritage. There were no guns in the Regimental Museum, but rather items of personal property such as uniforms, hats and telescopes. The regimental museum was supported by the Government (civil service staff) until the late 1980s/early 1990s when it became entirely the Regiment's responsibility. The loss of support also meant that its physical location in the Old Military Academy at Woolwich (on Shooters Hill) had to be given up and the withdrawal of all this support meant that it could not be kept going. It was therefore absorbed into the 'new museum', renamed Firepower! in 2001 when returned back to the Royal Arsenal.

True its original purpose FIREPOWER! Royal Artillery Museum is still primarily a museum of guns and weapons. As a result there was only one non-European item (a Zulu shield)

on display, and even though there was once a large number of ethnographic objects in the collection there seems to be only a fraction of this now. 'Class XIX' in the Museum of Artillery's catalogue relates to 'Weapons of Aboriginal Races of Africa, America, and Polynesia'. In the catalogue dated 1864 there were 112 entries, in 1874 there were 294 entries and again in 1906 there were 294 entries in this category. From records elsewhere, we know that some of this material was sold to other museums and private collectors in the 1930s.

This record is a summary of a one day research visit (May 2014) to research North American material and a more comprehensive survey would be required to fully document non-European material in the collection.

OBJECTS:

LDRAR MISC 19/287 smoking pipe, which has been linked via its accession number to a group of objects presented by Colonel Burn of the Royal Artillery. However, due to subsequent research this smoking pipe has been identified as Sudanese rather than North American.

There were also a number of other objects categorised as 'MISC' and stored on a shelf of 'Ethnic' objects. This included:

- a piece of Naga leg armour LDRAR.MISC.17/226 (see image) LABEL: 'Naga leg armour pre 1873' 1906 CATALOGUE: 'Armour for the legs composed of mat-work, to which cowrie shells are attached by strong fibre; the edges are ornamented with strips of red stained cane. This piece is very well made.'
- a tiger shield or Po from China, made from coiled basketry and painted with a tiger's face LRAR.MISC.17/675 (see image) 1906 CATALOGUE: 'Two circular cane shields, Chinese. Diameter, 33 in. Purchased.' ADLIB: 'Chinese shield painted with the stylised mask of a snarling tiger. A traditional design widely used by infantry up to 1900. Sometimes the shield had a central boss with hair tufts. The tiger design is said to have been particularly effective in confusing and alarming the enemy. Cane and wood. "Tiger men" 1840-1860. Imperial Chinese Army.'
- a metal gong LDRAR.MISC.17/697 (see image) incorrectly numbered and identified as a Chinese mirror, it actually fits the description of 1906 CATALOGUE entry: '696. Gong of white metal, 20 in. diameter.'
- Shield LDRAR.MISC.30/577 (see image)
- Zulu shield with an old label which reads 'ZULU SHIELD made of cowhide. Brought back to England by an Officer of the Royal Artillery in 1879.' There is also another larger Zulu shield [LDRAR.MISC.30/512] and an assegai on display in the museum (see image). These seem to be the only two non-European objects on display.
- a Chinese wooden table presented to the museum in 2009 at the same time as a Tibet medal awarded to Lieutenant David Mason. The table had the regiment's crest/insignia carved on it so was clearly commissioned when the regiment was stationed in East Asia at some point, this may have been Hong Kong[?].
- There were several crossbows and other weapons as well, including miniature African drums and a miniature shield/spears.

Non-European objects on other shelves in the museum's store:

- African [Ashanti?] wooden stool

- 'Moorish Saddle. Presented to Field-Marshal Rt. Hon. Earl Roberts [...] by the Moorish Envoys who visited England in the year 1901.'
- African mask
- Chinese carved wooden box

Further to these objects, a powder horn is listed as being in the collection but it is not currently located. The first reference to this is in 1851 catalogue (see 410 above) and here is a fuller entry in the 1864 catalogue: '110. Powder-horn covered with elaborate and very well executed engraving, and from the occurrence of English, French, and American Indian figures, was apparently done by a soldier of one of the Scotch regiments engaged in the capture of Quebec, 1759. 410'. The powder horn is listed with the same description, but a different number, in the 1934 catalogue, and was in the collection at the Rotunda but has not been located since moving back to the Royal Arsenal.

RELATED DOCUMENTATION:

A number of catalogues dating from 1822 to 1963:

- 1822 Models and arms, with an introduction by Sir William Congreave
- 1829 Models and arms (annotated version of 1822 catalogue, with additional entries and letters written by Colonel Williamson between 1828-1832)
- 1822-1851 catalogue annotated reprint of 1822 plus handwritten additions up until 1851
- Catalogue of the Models, Arms, Ancient Ordnance, and Military Machines, Contained in the Rotunda and Grounds of the Royal Military Deposit at Woolwich, Printed at the Royal Artillery Institution, 1851
- Official Catalogue of the Museum of Artillery in the Rotunda, Woolwich. By Brigadier-General J. H. Lefroy, 1864
- 1874, same as above but with a few more entries
- 1889 same again with some annotations
- Official Catalogue of the Museum of Artillery in the Rotunda, Woolwich. Prepared by Order of the Secretary of State for War Under the Direction of the Committee of the Royal Artillery Institution. 1906 (the introductory notes refer to 'the collection of the weapons of other uncivilized races with whom the British soldier is frequently called to engage.')
- Royal Artillery Institution Collection of Exhibits, Uniform, Equipment, etc. October 1929 (the introductory notes refer to 'a collection of regimental trophies of great historical value.')
- There is also a heavily annotated [1933] working copy of the 1906 catalogue, in which some of items have been scored out
- Official Catalogue of the Museum of Artillery in the Rotunda, Woolwich. Prepared by Order of the Secretary of State for War Under the Direction of the Committee of the Royal Artillery Institution. 1934 (2 copies, 1 is annotated)
- Museum of Artillery Catalogue, 1963 (various)

A 'class' system of categorising the objects in the collection was introduced by Brigadier-General J. H. Lefroy in the 1864 catalogue, this remains today and accession number relate to the different classes, which historically have been for example:

Class XVI. – Ancient and modern defensive armour

Class XVII. – Oriental and Chinese arms and armour (including a 'Naga' section)

Class XVIII. – Pre-historic weapons of the stone and bronze periods

Class XIX. – Weapons of aboriginal races of Africa, America, and Polynesia

These also provide some background to the RAI collection and the Museum of Artillery collection, and several of the catalogues are heavily annotated. All collection papers prior to 1940 were destroyed in a fire during the blitz. These catalogues are the only surviving documentation for the collections pre-1940.

OBJECTS NO LONGER IN THE COLLECTION: The museum previously had a much

larger collection of non-European objects, a large proportion of which were dispersed in the 1930s. At this time H. G. Beasley, a private collector of ethnographic material, bought ten North American objects from the 'Artillery Museum. Rotunda. Woolwich.' in 1932. These objects are listed in Beasley's 'Catalogue Vol. III' held at the British Museum, as some of his collection was subsequently given to the British Museum following his death in 1944, and have been connected with the group of ten North American items associated with Colonel Burn in the Museum of Artillery catalogues (see below).

The Beasley's 'Catalogue Vol. III' reads as follows:

'1932

7-4 Purchased from the Artillery Museum. Rotunda. Woolwich.

PLAINS INDIANS:- PAWNEE A buffalo skin robe having a fringe. The centre sparsely decorated with geometrical design in black with a red border. T MA – [notes by JK] 'In the BM' and '1944 Am 2 219'

PLAINS INDIAN: SIOUX:- a woven satchel of brown buffalo hair, with white trade bead decoration & with shoulder strap and fringe. M MO - [blue ink] 'OSAGE' [notes by JK] 'In the BM' and '1944 Am 2 214' [Red ink] 'C.F Note Next Page'

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX DELEWARE:- A satchel of trade cloth embroidered with flowers in coloured silks, with a nicely woven shoulder strap of native materials A E

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX HURON:- A carrying band of woven material in a dull pattern, edged with small white trade beads and with long woven cords MO – [note in pencil] 'possibly 1944 Am 2 253'

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX HURON:- A narrow belt of woven material decorated in subdued colours in a geometrical pattern, & with metal tassels at the ends. The edge lined with small white beads. H –

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX:- (OSAGE) A long belt of red brown into which is woven a geometrical pattern of white trade beads. The end fringed H –

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX:- (OSAGE) A short belt or garter of red brown woven material. The pattern formed of white shells woven in. The ends with long tassels H –

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX:- (OSAGE) A long belt joined in the middle of similar technique. The ends with fringes. H –

PLAINS INDIANS: SIOUX:- (OSAGE) A shorter belt of similar technique with fringes at ends. H –

[Note CF MAN 1906. Page 177. No. 111. D. I. Bushnell Junr. The Use of Buffalo Hair by the N. American Indian] Said to be Ohio Valley.

AMERICA. N.W. COAST:- A heavy whale bone club of patu[?] type both sides of the blade being carved with meandering pattern 19 ¼ " M - - '

The British Museum also acquired a number of pieces linked to Lefroy of the Royal Artillery in the 1990s.

Original description

1851 CATALOGUE:

[under 'Various Articles, Drawings, Etc.']

'408. Ornamented Cloak, Indian.'

'409. Two Pouches and String of Beads, ditto.'

'411. Two pair of Mocasins, Canadian.'

[Under 'Miscellaneous Collection of Articles chiefly Indian' 449-527]

'482. Two bracelets, platted straw.'

'484. Three belts of Red Worsted.'

'485. An Indian Sling.'

'486. A Straw Belt, (colored).'

'491. A pair of Snow Shoes.'

1864 CATALOGUE: 112. A string of wampum of 37 beads about the size of pigeon's eggs; Indian buffalo-robe, pair of snow-shoes, mocassins, pouch, bullet-pouch, tobacco pouch, and other articles of North American Indian attire. Presented by Colonel Burn, R.A. 408 409 411 491 482 484 485 486

1906 CATALOGUE: 281-91 A string of wampum of 37 beads about the size of pigeon's eggs; Indian buffalo-robe, pair of snow-shoes, mocassins (two pairs), pouch, bullet-pouch, tobacco pouch, five belts, and other articles of North American Indian attire. Presented by Colonel Burn, R.A. [An annotated version of this catalogue dated 1933 scores out the 'Indian buffalo-robe', 'pouch, bullet-pouch, tobacco pouch, and other articles' in red pen and reduces adjusts the catalogue number accordingly to 281-284]

1934 CATALOGUE: 281-284 A string of wampum of 37 beads about the size of pigeon's eggs; Indian buffalo-robe, pair of snow-shoes, mocassins (two pairs), articles of North American Indian attire. Presented by Colonel Burn, R.A. [the whole entry has be crossed out in pencil]

Production information:

Place: North America
Canada, North America
Date: 18th-mid 19th Century

Name Associations

Type

Note

The Royal Artillery	regiment/service	
Beasley, Harry Geoffrey (1881-1939)	personal name	Private collector
Lefroy, John Henry, Sir (1817 – 1890)	personal name	
Burn, Robert, General (d. 1878)	personal name	General Robert Burn was Colonel-Commandant of the Royal Artillery. He gained the rank of General in the service of the Royal Artillery. He married Letitia Crofton 1829, d. 1878; his youngest son was Captain Charles Rosdew Burn, later Forbes-Leith of Fyvie, Royal Dragoons & M.P. (1859-1930).
		Service Record (Protection of Imperial assets from US interference): Can., 6.14-6.16 (Canada June 1814 to June 1816) France, 7.16-11.18 (July 1816 to November 1818) Jam., 10.21-9.22 (Jamaica October 1821 to September 1822) Can., 8.43-1.49 (Canada, August 1843 to January 1849)

Exhibitions

Name of exhibition: *FIREPOWER!*

Exhibition area:

Cat. Number: 4 & 5

Case Number:

Notes:

LABEL: 4 Zulu Shield / The shield on display is an isihlangu, a Zulu war shield of a type carried by the Zulu army from the 1850s, thought to have been brought to Britain in 1879. The wooden shaft supporting the shield would originally have been surmounted by a fur crest. 30/512

LABEL: 5 Zulu Assegai / This example of a Zulu throwing assegai, with a damaged tip, carries a band with the inscription: This assegai was picked up within four inches of the Prince Imperial's body by D. Hackett A. H. G. being one thrown at him during the time he was selecting a camping ground for the next day June 1879. 30/[?]

Bibliographic references

Hime, Henry W.L., Lieut. Colonel. 1908. History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery 1815-1853. Longmans, Green and Co. See especially Chapter VIII 'War Services 1815-1853', p.107

Out of the Dark: Celebrating 230 years of the collections of the Royal Regiment of Artillery 1778-2008 (2008) exhibition catalogue. CATALOGUE TEXT: 'The exhibition provides a showcase for 230 objects never before seen by the public. As can be expected, many of the objects have been locked away for over a hundred years in most cases, some even longer.' The exhibition included objects which provide a 'unique insight into many cultures from around the world' such as a Chinese leather flint pouch (2); a Naga sword in a bamboo sheath donated by Colonel Hogge CB in 1864 (5); an 'Ashanti wooden stool'; a powder flask from Afghanistan; a bronze war gong from Burma; a Natal (South Africa) nerita shell armband; a whale's tooth presented by the Regiment of Fiji Artillery in 1951; an Indian dagger; two metal quoits and a quoit axe; a piece of bandage taken from a Mummy at Thebes in a glass jar, acquired by a Royal Artillery officer in 1820.