

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT - 49

TO THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Throughout 2021, the Virtual Visit series will be continuing to present interesting features from the Museum's collection and their background stories. The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is now open four days per week, Wednesday through Friday plus Sunday. Current COVID19 protocols including contact tracing apply.

DEFENDING THE PORT OF FREMANTLE

Albany, the principal mail port and coaling station of Western Australia in a unique example in inter-colonial military cooperation, saw the construction of defensive works at the **Princess Royal Fortress** with costs being shared by the pre-Federation colonies. The official opening of Fremantle port in 1897 saw the focus of maritime commerce shift from Albany to Fremantle. Concern was immediately expressed that the defences of Fremantle were inadequate when compared with the planned defences of Albany.

Was this the case? In the days of the Long Jetty and the North Jetty prior to the discovery of the Kalgoorlie Boulder Goldfields, commercial shipping through Fremantle was considered inadequate to merit the cost of fixed port defences. Proposals for Martello Towers and similar fortifications were beyond the means (and interest) of the colonial administrators. A volunteer unit, however, required minimal government expenditure for weapons and only the issue of some items of uniform. The result was the formation in 1879 of the **Fremantle Naval Artillery Volunteers** as a volunteer artillery unit to help provide for the defence of the port of Fremantle.

This Virtual Visit describes the weapons issued to this unit for the defence of Fremantle Port

1879 – 6 POUNDER FIELD GUNS

*Colonial Secretary's Office
10th February 1879*

His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to approve the formation of a Naval Volunteer Force at Fremantle under the designation of ‘

FREMANTLE NAVAL VOLUNTEERS’

and of the following gentleman officiating in the capacity stated opposite his name pending the result of the examination to be held before a Military Board assembled under the Government Notification of 20th April 1875.

GEORGE A. FORSYTH, ESQUIRE, LIEUTENANT, COMMANDING.

*By His Excellency's Command
Roger Tuckf'd Goldsworthy
Colonial Secretary*



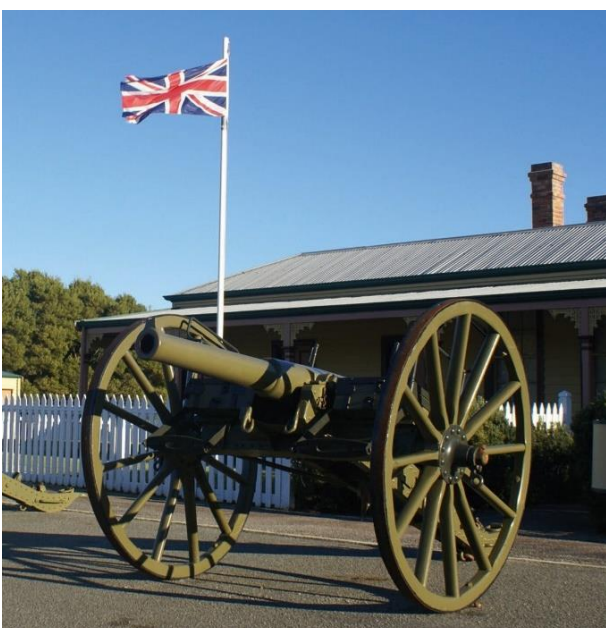


The initial weapons for the Fremantle Naval Volunteers were two 6 pounder bronze field guns. These guns were cast in 1720 and 1739, had been recommissioned for service during the Napoleonic Wars.

Two 6 pounder smooth bore guns positioned around the Queen Victoria monument in Kings Park are recorded as being cast in 1813 and 1814 are most likely the original guns used by the Fremantle Naval Volunteers. The second date would be the year that these weapons were reworked for further service.

Due to the lack of limbers the guns left their depot on only rare occasions. The Naval Volunteers attended the camp and manoeuvres at Albion in 1884. During these manoeuvres they were used as field artillery to support other volunteer units.

1889 – 9 POUNDER RIFLED MUZZLE LOADER GUNS



Following the change in title in 1888 to Fremantle Artillery Volunteers, the unit was issued with two 9 pounder rifled muzzle loading field guns. These weapons together with limbers, wagons and ammunition were a gift of the British Government just prior to the granting of responsible government.

The new Western Australian Government subsequently purchased a further 8 of these weapons. The gun was rifled using the Palliser system, in which studs protruding from the side of the shell engaged with three spiral grooves in the barrel. [See Virtual Visit 43 – Kings Park Bottle Guns]

An example of this gun is fired on ceremonial occasions at the Princess Royal Fortress in Albany.

1902 – 15 POUNDER BREECH LOADING GUNS



Under its self-governing status, Western Australia redesignated its military units and the Fremantle Volunteer Artillery became No 2 Battery, Field Artillery. It was not until 1902 that the unit was issued two 15 pounder breech loading guns. This weapon was the standard field gun of the British Army used throughout the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899 – 1902.

Although newly issued, the ongoing development of smokeless propellants and quick-firing guns was to make them obsolete quickly. It was with these guns that No 2 Battery was absorbed into the Federal Defence Organisation in January 1903 as No 2 Western Australian Battery, Australian Field Artillery.

A restored example of this weapon may be found on display in the Artillery Store at the Army Museum. It will be on display during the **Night at the Army Museum** on 16 and 17 April. <https://armymuseumwa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/A-NIGHT-AT-THE-MUSEUM-A5-WEB.pdf>

1907 – 6 INCH MK VII COAST DEFENCE GUNS



Two 6 inch Mk VII guns emplaced at Fort Arthur's Head

After Federation, the importance of Fremantle, now the chief port of the State, necessitated improvement in its defences. Up-to-date armament of 6 inch Mk VII coast defence guns was installed in two forts, Fort Arthur's Head and Fort Forrest.

This necessitated an increase in Artillery personnel in the State, and, also the provision of more volunteers. To provide for the latter, No. 2 Field Battery was, in October 1907, re-rolled as No. 2 Battery Australian Garrison Artillery (AGA). In 1911 the numbering was changed to No. 11 Battery AGA. Permanent artillery units were distinguished from the militia units by carrying the name Royal Australian Garrison Artillery (RAGA).

The Artillery Barracks, housing the Australian Army Museum of WA, were built to accommodate the permanent force garrison of Fort Arthur's Head and Fort Forrest.

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

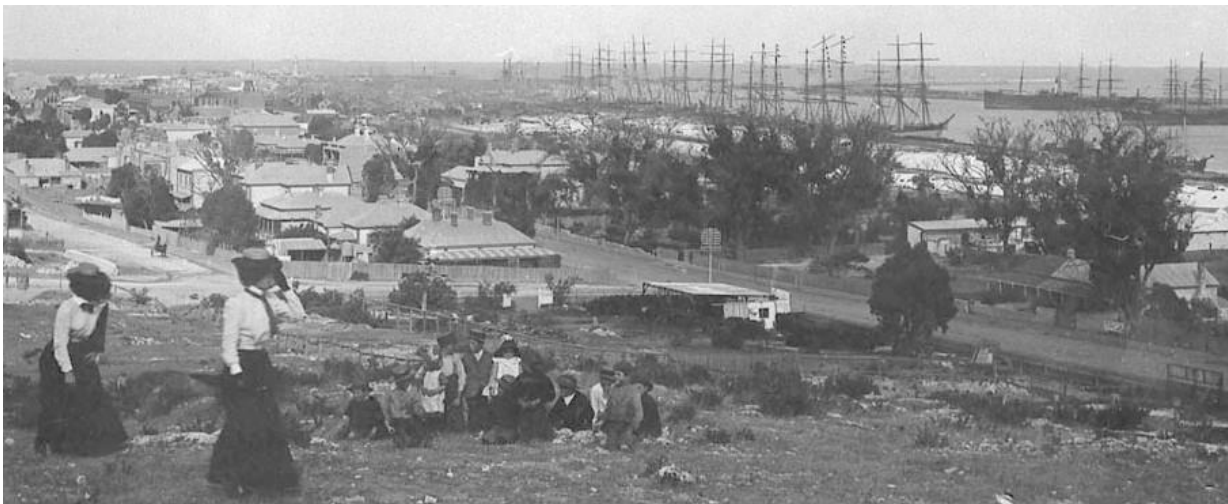
<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

<https://fremantlestuff.info/jetties/index.html>

<https://fremantlestuff.info/arthurhead/index.html>

https://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b1504220_105.pdf

https://www.wikiwand.com/en/victoria_quay,_fremantle



Shipping along the jetties in the Port of Fremantle, 1899, viewed from Cantonment Hill



Port of Fremantle from Cantonment Hill, 2010