

Caps & Flints

Number 6

August 2022



Antique and Historical Arms Collectors Guild of Victoria Inc.

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Journal of the Antique and Historical Arms Collectors Guild of Victoria Inc. (No. A31993D)

Dedicated to the collection, preservation, research and interpretation of antique and historically significant arms, accoutrements and ephemera

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ISSN 0045 - 5695

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Cover photo: *Joseph Manton Flintlock with "the Lot"* – Matthew Schneiderman - see page 2

Inside cover photo: *Victorian Royal Navy Captain's Full-Dress Coat* – Eric Estlin



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British Yataghan blade bayonets

Derek Complin © 2022



yat·a·ghan /'yadəgən, 'yadəgan/ noun historical noun: yataghan; plural noun: yataghans
a sword without a guard and typically with a double-curved blade, used in Muslim countries

It was never my intention to write a comprehensive history of the British yataghan blade bayonet, but so much misinformation seems to lurk out there via the internet that it felt like a worthy project. The realisation that these bayonets had a continuous service life that spans the last half of the 19th century and well into the 20th also adds to their allure.

Most of the following information has already been published in a variety of well-researched and professional volumes. But given that much of this is now out-of-print and hard to come by, the task of assembling this specific information seems timely.

By enhancing existing references with knowledge accumulated through the examination and handling of numerous examples over the past 50 years, the information presented here is offered to veteran and novice collectors alike as a quick reference guide. The following examples chart bayonets that were the product of the British Ordnance system of supply and bear the appropriate Ordnance inspection markings. There are also many examples lacking Ordnance

markings that are 'private purchase' or export models. A small selection is also profiled here.

The Early British yataghan blade bayonets.

The first British yataghan sword bayonet accepted into regular Service was modelled on the French M1842 yataghan bayonet (fig 1).



Fig 1

This image illustrates how the configuration of the long, slender, single edge recurved blade is as ideal for thrusting as it is for cutting and slashing. Before launching into the tale of British yataghan blades, it is worth looking at why they were selected in the first place. Before the mid-19th century, most bayonets produced were socket style with a 17-inch triangular blade, intended to fix onto an infantry musket.

While these fulfilled the major needs for armies of the day, several specialist firearms had been occasionally adopted for cavalry, sappers, artillerymen and the like. Until the 1850s most small-arm barrels were smooth bore, inaccurate and with short range effectiveness. New manufacturing techniques created the possibility of mass-producing small arms with rifled barrels, vastly more effective than the smooth bore. The Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock was set up with new, state of the art production machinery to make rifled infantry muskets, and shorter versions for cavalry and artillery use.

The Artillery Carbine was accepted into service in 1853. To compensate for the shorter length of the carbine over the infantry rifle, a longer bayonet was deemed necessary, providing the artilleryman the same combat 'reach' with bayonet fixed to that of the infantry musket with bayonet.



Fig 2

The P1853 Artillery Carbine (fig 2) was a compact and handy piece when working around the big guns. With the French M1842 bayonet as inspiration, the decision to produce a similar weapon provided the chance to equip the artilleryman with a combined bayonet and sword.

The British yataghan bayonet was designated the Pattern 1853, closely following its French inspiration with a cast brass hilt. The method of fixing the bayonet hilt to the carbine barrel also mimicked the French design. The bayonet bar on the barrel comprised a short lug with a long lead bar (fig 3).



Fig 3

The back of the bayonet hilt (fig.4) was cast and finished appropriately to fit snugly onto the barrel lug



Fig 4

and bar, and the whole attachment secured with a catch held fast by a leaf spring riveted into the grip.

Several contracts were issued to Belgian and English makers by the British War Department through 1853 and 1854. Steel blades with wrought iron cross guards were fitted with cast brass hilts (fig.5a).



Fig 5a



Fig 5b

A minor variation was applied to the crossguard during later production, when the position of the lower quillon was changed from swept back to swept forward (fig.5b). Scabbards were made from sheet steel. All elements were subjected to Ordnance inspection



Fig 6

before being accepted into service, and once approved were stamped accordingly with a view mark (fig.6). Produced in very limited quantities, *British Military Bayonets* (Skennerton & Richardson) puts the total at approximately 10,000 bayonets.

The British Pattern 1853 sword bayonet



Fig 7

British Pattern 1853 sword bayonets were produced at the newly upgraded and retooled Royal Small Arms Factory (RSAF) at Enfield specifically for the Artillery Carbine of the same year (fig.7). The brass hilt was abandoned and replaced with a steel pommel and checkered leather grip scales.



Fig 8

The long lead bar on the barrel was shortened, and the bayonet slot in the hilt now featured a profile to match the bayonet lug and shortened lead bar on the barrel (fig.8).

The muzzle ring was stepped up slightly from the back of the hilt to align it with the barrel (fig.9). An all-steel scabbard continued to be provided, considered to be more durable when working around artillery guns than traditional steel-mounted leather fabrication.

The later P1856 Artillery Carbine was produced without the lead bar on the barrel, resulting in a different hilt configuration and new pattern, the P1856 bayonet.



Fig 9

The British Pattern 1856 sword bayonet

Viewing the British P1853 and P1856 sword bayonets side by side (fig 10) reveals no immediate difference in appearance apart from the rivet securing the catch spring of the P1853, which was soon replaced with a screw during early production. The difference between these two patterns of bayonet lies in the hilt configuration.

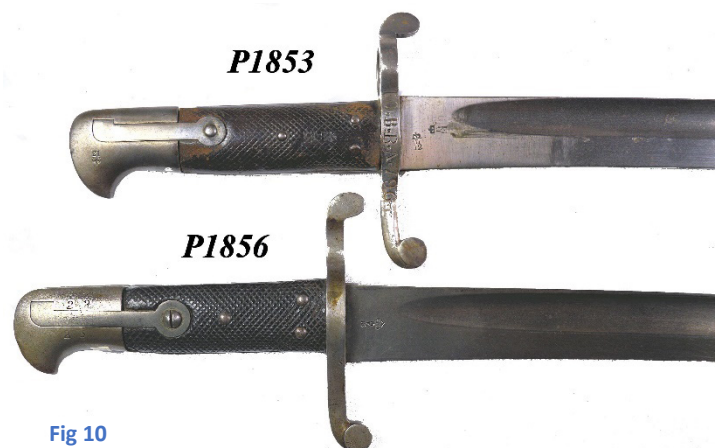


Fig 10

The P1853 bayonet was intended to fit the Enfield Artillery carbine of the same pattern year, the bayonet lug on the carbine barrel comprising a lug with a short lead.

Dispensing with the lead bar, both the Artillery Carbine and the Enfield Short Rifle of 1856 had a simple bayonet lug brazed to the barrel, as did the Artillery Carbine of 1858. The hilt of the bayonet was correspondingly configured, without the channel for the lead bar (fig.11).

To further secure the bayonet against the barrel, the back of the hilt and tang were slightly concave in shape. Now that the back of the hilt lay flush against the



Fig 11



Fig 12

barrel, it was necessary to align the muzzle ring accordingly (fig.12).

The P1856 is the most common British yataghan sword bayonet. It saw service in several iterations through to the early 20th century. Originally produced by the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock, the government soon turned to British and German trade suppliers to keep up with demand. It is not unusual to find Government inspected bayonets bearing Birmingham and German tradenames and marks.

P1856 Bayonets found without Government View marks must be considered commercial examples, sold by the same suppliers but for private purchase by the burgeoning Volunteer movement, colonial and foreign government contracts.

Until the mid-1800s, manufacturing technology was not sufficiently refined to allow for interchangeability of bayonets between firearms. Each was hand-finished for a good fit to a particular firearm, numbered to match, and remained mated as a unit until the end of its service. During this same period the Enfield factory underwent a huge refit with the installation of state-of-the-art manufacturing machinery. The result was a more efficient production of arms with manufacturing tolerances that allowed firearms and their bayonets to

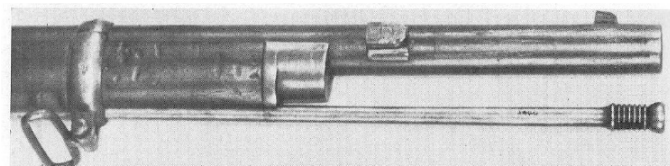
be mismatched but still fit properly. No more hand finishing to fit the gun.

The new machine-manufactured yataghan bayonet became universal to the Artillery Carbine and the Enfield Short Rifle, each with a simple lug brazed to the barrel. The hilt remained the same 'bar-on-barrel' configuration, but was distinguished by a new designation, the Pattern 1860 sword bayonet.

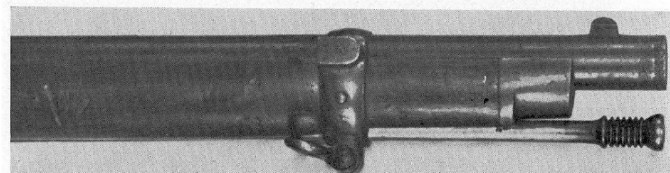
The bayonet survived the passing of the Enfield Artillery Carbine and Short Rifle muskets and continued to be issued with their Snider rifle successors. Interchangeability was at its most efficient. Identifying the minimal difference between a P1856 and P1860 yataghan is nigh on impossible.

The British Pattern 1858 sword bayonet

A new pattern of Enfield short-rifled musket was introduced into service in 1858. It differed from previous patterns, with a full-length stock.



P1856 Short Rifle, bayonet 'bar-on-barrel'



P1858 Short Rifle. bayonet 'bar-on-band'

Fig 13 Fore-end images courtesy *The British Soldier's Firearm 1850-1864*, C.H.Roads

The bayonet lug was moved from the barrel to the front barrel band (fig.13), so P1856/60 bayonets would not fit. A new pattern bayonet was produced, with similar overall appearance to the P1856/60, but a dramatically different hilt configuration (fig.14). The British P1858 sword bayonet can be easily identified from its forerunners.

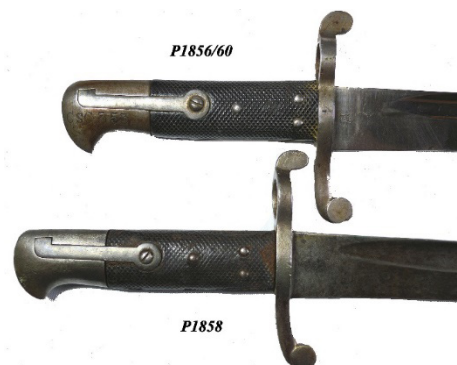


Fig 14

In order to fix to the rifle, the muzzle ring required raising up approximately ¼ inch from the back of the hilt (fig.15). The concave contouring of the back of the hilt was unnecessary and was eliminated. All other elements remained the same as Patterns 1856 and 1860 (fig.16).

Relatively few of these short rifles were produced, and according to Skennerton, approximately only 50,000 of these P1858 'bar-on-band' sword bayonets were made, resulting in a scarce find for collectors today.

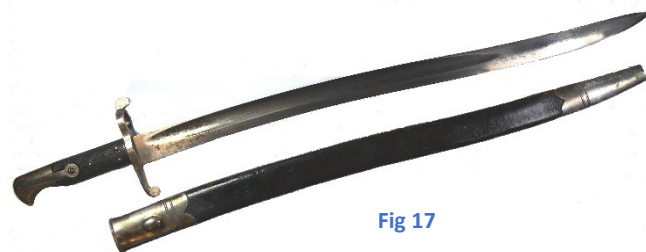


Fig 17

However, the lug was circular in cross-section bayonets (fig.18) and required a hilt with a circular bayonet slot to mount the bayonet on the rifle.



Fig 18

Although issued to several line regiments for trial, the Whitworth rifle never succeeded in achieving wider adoption, being overtaken by the Martini Henry rifle in 1871. The P1863 Whitworth sword bayonet is both a scarce and desirable find for the advanced collector.

Yataghan bayonet for Alexander Henry short rifle

At the height of the Empire, British Colonies and Possessions relied on the home country for military protection. But as self-reliance grew, so did the ability to raise forces locally. Britain remained the main source of armaments, but not exclusively. Local Government authorities were at liberty to seek alternate sources, as in the case of New South Wales, Australia.

Having procured a quantity of Alexander Henry short rifles, the government contracted Weyersburg of Solingen, Germany to supply appropriate bayonets



Fig 19



P1856/60

Fig 15

P1858



P1856/60

P1858

Fig 16

P1863 Whitworth bayonet

The last half of the 19th century was a period of intense firearm innovation and development. The British government were besieged with sales pitches of new and improved weaponry by many well-established gunsmiths. Most never made it beyond initial evaluation, but some succeeded in the next step, troop trials.

The Whitworth rifle was accepted for trials in December 1863, and 8,000 ordered produced by RSAF Enfield, along with a similar quantity of bayonets (fig.17). The yataghan sword bayonet was very much favoured by the Service and picked to accompany the Whitworth rifle on trials.

Like the P1858 Enfield short rifle, the Whitworth had a full stock with a bayonet lug fixed to the front barrel.

(fig.19). A typical British yataghan bayonet style was used, except for the distinctive spatulate crossguard (fig. 20), a copy of the British Dixon hilt.



Fig 20

The blades were stamped with the Weyersburg trademark, a crowned king's head (fig. 21). The bayonets are devoid of British markings, as these were a direct purchase outside the Ordnance procurement system.



Fig 21

Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle – P1

Although several trials had been conducted, a dedicated sword bayonet design for the Martini Henry rifle, introduced into British Service in 1871, was not decided upon until 1875.

Meanwhile, with large numbers of Enfield and Snider yataghan bayonets in store, it was an easy decision to

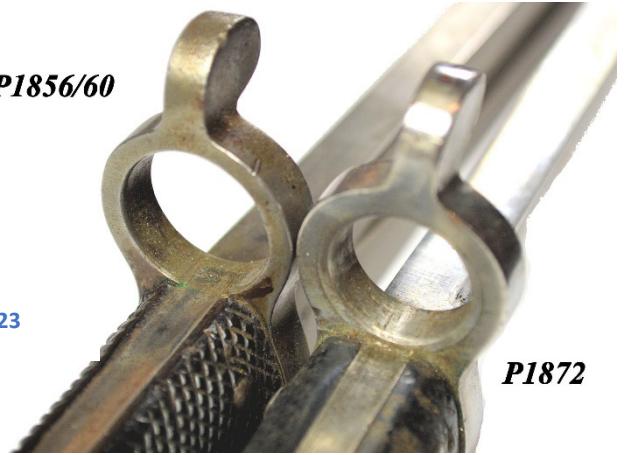
modify them for use with the Martini Henry rifle with its bayonet bar located on the front barrel band (fig.22).

Both the P1856/60 bar-on-barrel and P1858 bar-on-band bayonets were subject to modification. The calibre of both Enfield and Snider rifles was .577", but with the reduced bore of the Martini Henry at .450"

P1856/60

Fig 23

P1872



and thus smaller outside barrel diameter, the muzzle rings of all yataghan bayonets needed to be resized. They were accordingly bushed to reduce the inside diameter from 20mm to 18mm (fig.23).

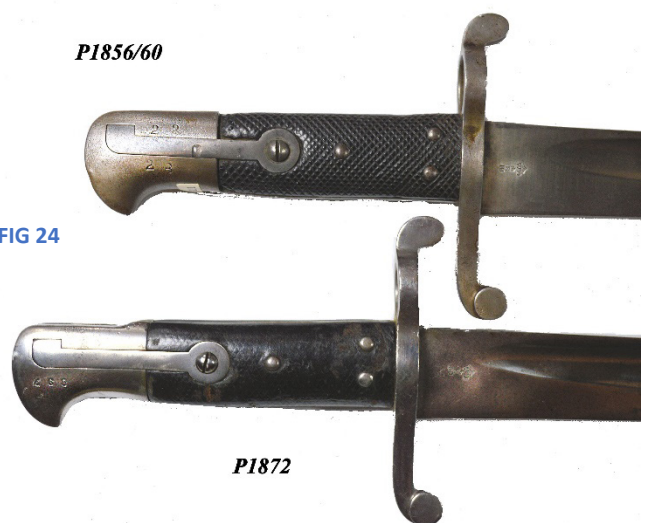
However, as already detailed, the hilts of P1856/60 bayonets were originally set up to lie flush with the barrel. It required further modification by milling the pommel to fit the Martini Henry properly. This stepped pommel is easily recognizable (figs.24 & 25).

The conversion of these bayonets was approved in January 1873, and blades will usually be found stamped with the month and year of modification.

P1856/60

FIG 24

P1872



Conversion dates span nearly twenty years, from 1872 through 1889 when they were officially withdrawn,



Fig 25

P1872

although they continued in use long after, testimony to their extended service life.

Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle – P2

The P1858 bayonet was also subjected to a similar modification. However, as the hilt configuration was already designed to fit the Enfield short rifle with its bayonet bar on the front band, the modification was relatively easy.



Fig 26

To adapt it for the Martini Henry rifle the muzzle ring simply needed to be bushed to an inside diameter of 18mm (figs. 26 & 27). Examples are scarce, as the original P1858 bayonet was only produced in limited

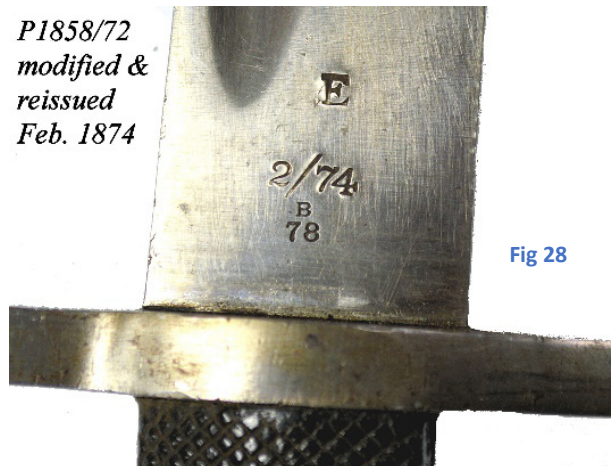


P1858

Fig 27

P1858/72

numbers. Conversions were accomplished at RSAF Enfield and stamped accordingly along with the date of reissue (fig.28).

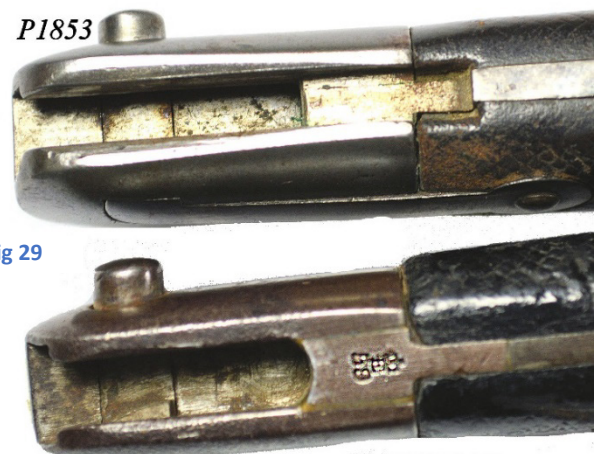


*P1858/72
modified &
reissued
Feb. 1874*

Fig 28

Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle – P3

P1856/60 and P1858 sword bayonets were not the only patterns subject to conversion. With such large quantities of yataghan blade bayonets in store, all perfectly serviceable for the function for which they were intended, modification to fit the Martini Henry rifle was a no-brainer. Thus, it was not surprising to come across this altered P1853 Artillery carbine bayonet, although I must confess to have never seen another.

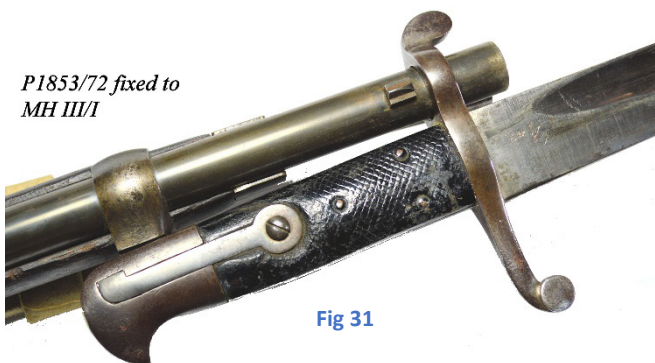


P1853

Fig 29

P1853/72

Not referenced anywhere I can find, but I am guessing the modification is obscure enough to be easily overlooked. The slot for the short lead bar was filled in (fig.29), and the muzzle ring was bushed down to 18mm inner diameter (fig.30). Otherwise, no further modification was required to fix to a Martini Henry rifle (fig.31).



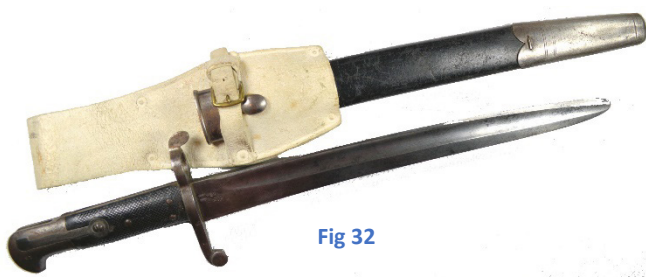
life. In its original form it was intended for use with the P1856/60 Enfield Short Rifle, with a 'bar-on-barrel' bayonet lug. The pommel was milled and muzzle ring bushed post 1872 (fig.33) to fix to the Martini Henry Rifle. The Roman numeral II stamped into the blade indicating it was relegated to Drill Purpose, the blade was shortened and the bayonet refurbished at RSAF Birmingham, indicated by the BR (Birmingham Repair) inspector's stamp (fig.34). This was re-issued in 1894 (fig.35) for cadet use, still with a Martini Henry rifle, long after the introduction of the Lee Metford rifle to regular troops.

Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle – P4

The introduction into service of the Lee Metford rifle in 1888 heralded the gradual replacement of the Martini Henry as a front-line weapon. Many were relegated to British Empire Forces around the globe and liberally passed down to cadet forces at home.

Those yataghan bayonets previously altered for use with the Martini Henry rifle back in 1872 went with them, but with one additional modification. The blade was reduced to 13 inches in length, and the tip severely blunted (fig.32), least cadets might be tempted to damage each other.

The history of the example illustrated here can be traced though the markings applied during its service



Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle – P5

Fig 36



This was another modification for cadet use (fig.36), originally produced for a P1858 Enfield Short Rifle, with a 'bar-on-band', with the bayonet lug located on the top barrel band of the musket.

Fig 37



The conversion to fit a Martini Henry rifle simply required the muzzle ring to be bushed down to 18mm (fig.37). The blade shows modification made at Enfield and re-issued in Martini Henry format in February 1875 (fig.38).

Fig 38



Subsequently downgraded to Drill Purpose, the blade was shortened to 13 inches and blunted. The blade bears a German contractor trademark. The Ordnance inspector's 'S' stamp identifies the location as Solingen with '98 stamped on the blade for reissue in 1898 (fig.39).

Original scabbards were shortened to match the blade length. P1858 'Bar-on-band' bayonets are scarce to start with, with only small numbers made. To have

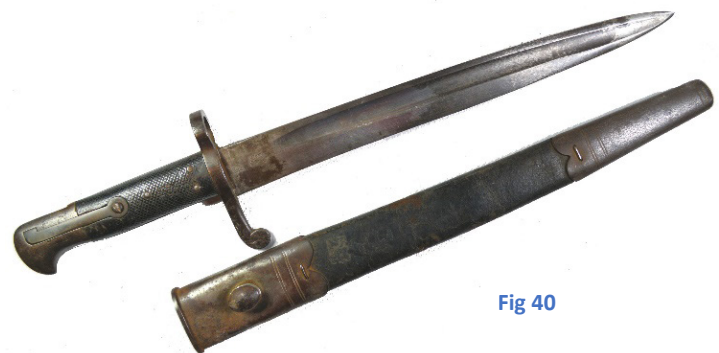
Fig 39



survived two modifications through its service life is remarkable.

Yataghan modifications to fit Martini Henry Rifle-P6

Fig 40



This yataghan (fig.40) has progressed through many modifications. Originally a British Pattern 1856/60 sword bayonet with Solingen-made blade (fig.41a & 41b), for the Short Enfield rifle or possibly Artillery Carbine with a bar-on-barrel fitting, it was modified post-1872 by grinding the pommel flat and bushing the

Fig 41a



Fig 41b





Fig 42

muzzle ring down to 18mm to fit a Martini Henry rifle (fig.42). Subsequently, it was further modified by the removal of the top finial, and the blade reduced to 12 inches in length (coincidentally the same length blade as P1888 and P1903 bayonets) and given a very effective point. This suggests a bayonet modified for active service, possibly for colonial troops and not blunted for cadet use. The scabbard has been shortened to be compatible with the blade length.

Yataghan modification to fit an unknown rifle - 1

The previous item profiled was a British Ordnance yataghan blade that had been issued for 50+ years, ending its service modified, possibly issued to colonial troops armed with Martini Henry rifles just prior to the Great War. Other yataghan blade bayonets endured a similar fate, one illustrated below (fig.43). With the blade shortened to 12 inches, the crossguard has been severely altered to fit an unknown firearm (fig.44).



Fig 43

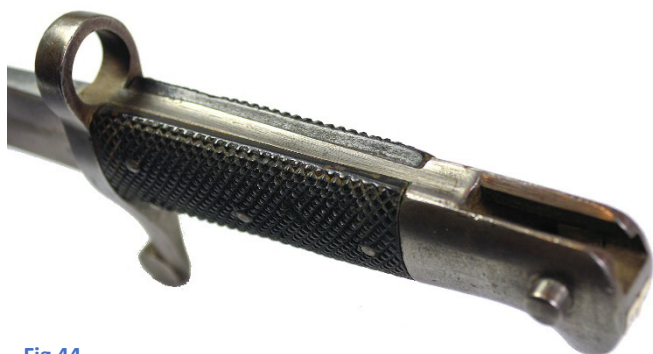


Fig 44

Missing is any evidence of inspector stamps, or having been subjected for Ordnance approval, so this must be considered to have originally been a 'volunteer' or private purchase piece. Indeed, the faint remains of a German trademark (fig.45) on the blade supports this, as the Solingen trade supplied many yataghan bayonets to the British market.



Fig 45

More about non-Ordnance yataghans follows.

Yataghan modification to fit an unknown rifle - 2

A heavily modified P1853 Artillery sword bayonet (fig.46), with the blade shortened to 442mm (approx. 17 inches), and a false edge of approximately 130mm.



Fig 46

The mortice slot for the lug guide has filled in, and the hilt is regripped, with the chunkier diced leather grips, associated with Birmingham Repair (fig.47).

The muzzle ring (fig.48) has been bushed to 15mm, thus probably not intended to fit a rifle, but rather to be used as a side arm. It should be noted that the

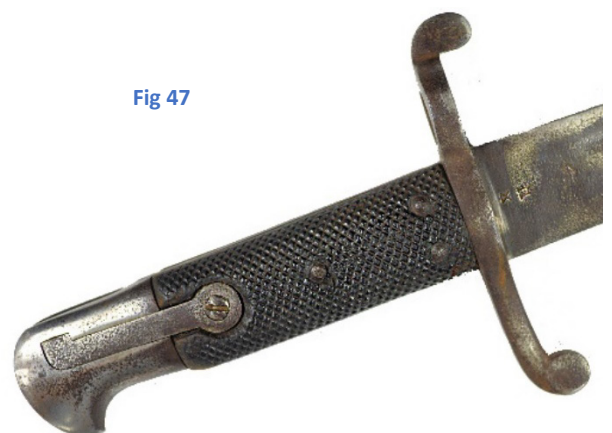


Fig 47

Fig 48



muzzle ring diameter is like that of the Martini carbine, acquired and issued to the Volunteer Training Corps, produced during the Great War. Markings on the blade trace the history of this piece.

The right forte stamped with a Roman numeral II (fig.49), indication of downgrading for cadet use, and interestingly an X stamp, showing the blade was subjected to a bend test, usually associated with P1888 bayonets and later.



Fig 49

The left forte is stamped with the mark of Birmingham Repair inspector, number 26 (fig.50). The '05 represents a reissue date of 1905.

Fig 50



Yataghan blade bayonets for private purchase – Pt.1

Yataghan blade bayonets (fig.51) were hugely popular with the British volunteer militia movement (fig.52) during the second half of the 19th century. Largely

Fig 51



Fig 52



financed by private funding, and outside the Ordnance inspection system, volunteer units were free to purchase weapons of their choice.

A yataghan blade bayonet was the perfect partner for an Enfield Short Rifle. The Solingen and Birmingham trade (fig.53) were already filling government contracts and readily supplied the needs of Volunteer regiments. For those with a generous budget, manufacturers offered blades that were embellished with etching.

Fig 53



Yataghan blade bayonets for private purchase – Pt.2

These privately purchased British Volunteer brass hilt yataghan sword bayonets (figs.54 & 55) all have slightly different hilt fittings and two have unit markings.



Fig 54 & 55



Yataghan blade bayonets for private purchase – Pt.3

This example (fig.56) is illustrated in *British & Commonwealth Bayonets* – B169. The English maker Reeves is stamped into a typical British style yataghan blade (fig.57), with a rather 'Jacobs' looking basket guard (fig.58).

Fig 56



I've no idea what firearm it was intended for, but the muzzle ring diameter is 20mm, which may provide a hint.

The catch configuration is not the usual arrangement (fig.59).



Fig 57



Fig 58



Fig 59

Suggestions welcomed.

Yataghan blade bayonets for private purchase – Pt. 4

These are similar in hilt configuration to the yataghan



Fig 60

blade bayonet above; this example also has the complicated 'two step' lug and catch (figs 60).

The handguard resembles a cutlass bowl, with a cut-out for the sight, and a 20mm muzzle ring, suggesting it was for an Enfield or Snider calibre firearm (figs 61 - 62).



Fig 61



Fig 62

This bayonet is also illustrated in *British & Commonwealth Bayonets* – B168. The standard yataghan blade retains the faint mark of a Birmingham Ordnance inspector's stamp on the back (fig.63).

Yataghan blade bayonets were not the unique domain of the British military establishment. Their popularity extended to armed forces throughout the globe, and



Fig 63

they provide a fascinating focus of study and collecting in themselves. It's my hope that this short article will provide an introduction.

Much of the information presented here is gleaned from *British & Commonwealth Bayonets*, by Ian D. Skennerton and Robert Richardson, published in 1984. Although so much more information has been researched and published since, their work set the standard, and by numerous experts and enthusiasts in this field it is still considered a 'bible' on the subject.



References:

Skennerton, I. & R Richardson, *British & Commonwealth Bayonets*, Self-Published 1984.

Roads CH, *The British Soldier's Firearm 1850-1864*, Herbert Jenkins, 1964.

Antique & Historical Arms Collectors Guild of Victoria

Meetings *normally* held on the last Monday of the month (not December) at 7pm.

Eley Park Community Centre

87 Eley Rd, Blackburn South (Melways Ref: 61 H5)