

# CHARLES GASCOIGNE

THERE can be few things which have influenced the development of Falkirk District in the last 200 years as much as the iron industry.

This Millennium maker played a major part in that development and not only helped shape the future of his company, but probably the shape of the world.

The expansion of the iron industry In the 19th century was almost entirely due to the existence of the mighty Carron Company, the greatest foundry of them all. It was fed by the seemingly bottomless coal mines which dotted the landscape, and were worked night and day to feed its furnaces . . . and it was led by the remarkable Charles Gascoigne.

Carron Company was founded in 1759 and began the production of iron in late 1760. The company was the brainchild of three men, Dr John Roebuck, chemist; Samuel Garbett, a merchant; and William Caddell, a wealthy ship owner.

Carron Company's early years were precarious. The new workforce needed time to acquire the necessary skills to succeed in this new business and, while they learned the trade, the partners were forced to bring in, specialists from south of the border to get the venture up and running. Finally, however, the skills were mastered and the moulding shops began to turn out a vast range of products.

While there was a ready market for these early Carron Company goods, they did not make that much profit and the company's financial position was always rather shaky.

One way of easing these difficulties was to win government contracts, especially for guns, which paid well.

As early as 1762, Carron Company was trying to interest the Board of Ordnance in its products, but was having no success. It was not until 1764 that a deal was agreed, but the quality of the workmanship met with mixed response from customer and supplier alike. The quality of the Carron gun was variable , with a high level of failure. Even Samuel Garbett was forced to admit that some of the workmanship was `a disgrace'. That was all to change, however, with the arrival of an Englishman by the name of Charles Gascoigne.

## The Russian Story

With Charles Gascoigne's Carronades defending the British Empire around the globe, demand for such an efficient and reliable weapon was high and the company was kept busy filling its orders on time.

One came from Imperial Russia. The Russians were convinced they needed to build their own gun making foundry and turned to Gascoigne for help. The British government was not that impressed when it heard that plans and machinery were being sent from Carron to Russia and ordered the trade to be stopped.

Gascoigne apologised, but continued to supply the Russians anyway. He even went to Russia to supervise the work and took a number of his best men from Carron Works to show the Russians how it should be done.

It will never be known whether Gascoigne ever intended to come back to Scotland, because he stayed in Russia and died in St. Petersburg a 1806, by which time he had become a member of the Russian government and was known as State Councilor Karl Karlovich Gaskoin!

### Gascoigne Put Firm on Target

CHARLES GASCOIGNE had strong local connections. Although born in England about 1738, his mother was a daughter of Charles, Lord Elphinstone, and she had been born at Elphinstone Tower near Airth.

Gascoigne visited the area regularly and knew it well. Indeed, in Brian Watters' excellent book, *Where Iron Runs Like Water*, it is suggested that the Carron site may have been Gascoigne's suggestion in the first place.

While Carron was struggling with its faulty guns, changes were made in the company's management.

One of the new arrivals was Charles Gascoigne who, by this time; was Samuel Corbett's son-in-law and destined to take over the management of the works from William Cadell junior, son of another of the original founders.

Gascoigne was to introduce many improvements to Carron, but perhaps the most significant was his decision to take a personal hand in improving the poor quality record of the company's guns.

In 1773, after years of complaints, the Admiralty told Carron that it would no longer supply guns to the Navy and that all existing Carron guns would be removed from the fleet. This news was a body blow to the company, but Gascoigne resolved that the matter would not be left there.

Within three years, better metal production techniques and the building of a new cannon boring mill had led to the introduction of much lighter guns. By 1778, these had been developed to the extent that they could be fitted to ships. Gascoigne called these new weapons 'Gasconades', but the name was quickly changed to 'Carronade' and were easily identified by their short barrels and large calibers.

Between 1778 and the final order in 1852, Carron Company manufactured thousands of these guns and sent them all over the world to wreak havoc and death. They were on board Lord Nelson's ships, with HMS Victory herself carrying six 18-pounders and two 64-pounders to pound the French into submission at Trafalgar.

They were also fitted to ships of the United States Navy - who used them against the Royal Navy! - and, of course, also carried by Carron Company's own fleet of vessels. The company also manufactured and sold a wide range of ammunition for its guns, including several designed by the famous Major-General Henry Shrapnel. In 1812 the Duke of Wellington, fighting in Spain, wrote to Admiral Berkley of the Royal Navy to tell him he would only consider guns manufactured by the Carron Company for his armies. Quite a remarkable turnaround from the situation of a few years earlier!