

Guernsey resolves old dispute

By DON LEIGHTON

The generosity of Tek Guernsey has played a major role in bringing to a peaceful conclusion the "arms race" between Guernsey and Plymouth, Massachusetts.

This cross-Atlantic dispute didn't exactly create world-wide tension, but its settlement drew the support of President Reagan.

The latest chapter in the story started about 40 years ago when it was discovered that Plymouth had one more of a certain type of 16th century bronze cannon than did Guernsey. The cannon, of the "Falcon" type, was originally made for Guernsey. And since it is the only Guernsey Falcon known to exist, the folks in Guernsey wanted it back.

The first chapter in the story starts about 1550, according to an account in the *Guernsey Evening Press*:

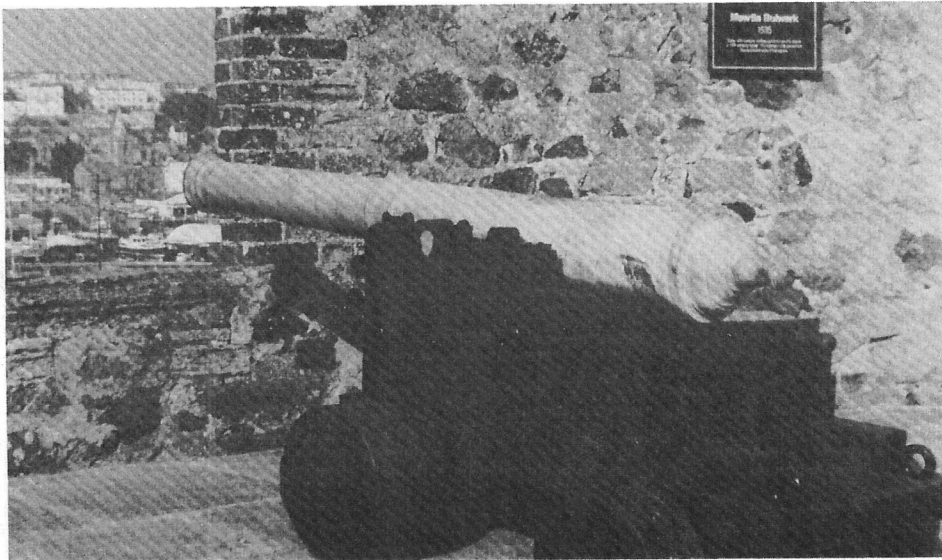
The cannon in question was cast by the gunfounder to the English Crown for the Island of Guernsey, where it was installed at Castle Cornet. "By the middle of the 16th century, cannon had become the most important means of defense, and much construction was done at this medieval castle to accommodate cannon."

During the English Civil War (when Oliver Cromwell successfully led the Parliamentarians and Puritans, and King Charles I unsuccessfully kept his head) Guernsey declared for Parliament while the castle held out as the last royalist stronghold.

For eight years, from 1643-1651, Castle Cornet, just a quarter mile offshore, was in conflict with the island. (The two are now connected by a causeway.) During this time, some 10,000 cannon balls were fired at the town of St. Peter Port from the castle, and undoubtedly some were fired from the Guernsey Falcon.

During World War II, what cannon remained at the castle were removed and sent to Germany to be melted down. (Guernsey is closer to the shores of France than England and was occupied by the Germans.) By then, however, the Guernsey Falcon was long gone.

A detailed ordnance inventory from 1680 showed no bronze Falcon cannon left in the castle. In 1652, Parliamentarian Colonel John Bingham had taken four bronze cannons from the



The Guernsey Falcon cannon is finally back in its original installation and aimed at the city of St. Peter Port, Guernsey.



Harold Guilbert (Tek Guernsey operations manager) gets bang out of cannon report.

castle to England for his own use, and the Guernsey Falcon may have been one of them.

The Guernsey Falcon eventually reached the Rotunda Museum of Artillery at Woolwich, London.

In 1921, the cannon was given to the Town of Plymouth where it was installed on Burial Hill, the site of the

Pilgrim Fathers' original fort. And there it might have remained but for the efforts of the late Jack Hart, a Guernsey firearms enthusiast. He read of the cannon in a book and traced it to Plymouth in 1948. For the next 32 years, until his death in 1980, he tried to obtain its return to Guernsey.

The cause was then taken up by his son, police inspector Dick Hart, and the States (of Guernsey) Ancient Monuments Committee, which reopened negotiations with the Town of Plymouth.

In May last year, the selectmen of Plymouth agreed to return the Guernsey Falcon in exchange for a replica of a Saker cannon, the type actually carried on the mayflower and taken ashore at Plymouth.

The only remaining problem was for Guernsey to raise the money for casting the duplicate. Tek Guernsey made a major contribution of 5,000 pounds. That, along with donations from five other parties, assured the return of the Falcon.

The Guernsey Falcon was recently re-installed, with appropriate

ceremonies, at the Mewtis Bulwark, Castle Cornet, where it probably stood more than 400 years ago.

A telegram from President Reagan expressing gratitude for the loan of the Guernsey cannon to Plymouth was read at the ceremonies: "The fact that the cannon was given to the town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, in the year of the 300th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims and is being returned in the year of the 200th anniversary of British-American diplomatic relations is a fitting symbol of the close ties which have long bound our two countries."

Harold Guilbert (Tek Guernsey operations manager) says a proposed future project of the monuments committee could improve "productivity" of 21-gun salutes. The Saker cannon replica mold would be used to create a battery of seven cannons suitable for firing salutes.

Explains Harold: "Apparently Castle Cornet, at the moment, has only three cannons capable of firing salutes, and this makes a 21-gun ovation a somewhat drawn-out affair." □