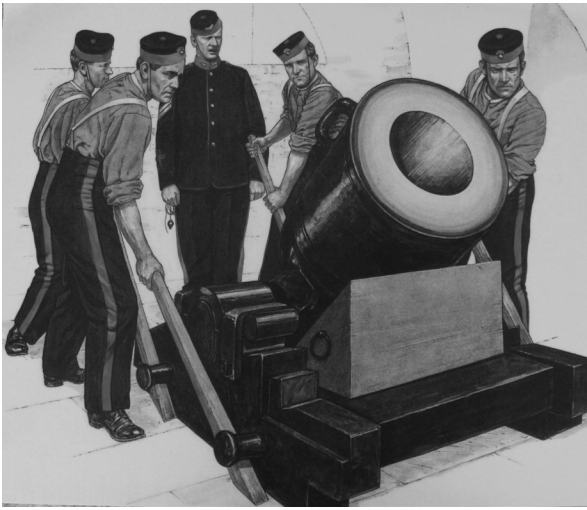


What is a hand spike?

by Izzy Sumner



Members of the Portsdown Artillery Volunteers shift a 13-inch Land Service Mortar using handspikes c 1870.

*Courtesy the Trustees of the Royal Armouries
From an original by Jeffrey Burn*

Whilst setting up the new display on 'Self Sufficient Emsworth', our research led us to a variety of occupations held by Emsworth residents over the years. Consulting sources such as census returns (the Museum has a selection on disk) and trade directories, we picked out some of the more varied and interesting trades. Who knew, for instance, that in 1841, Emsworth parish employed a rat-catcher? Overall, thirteen different trades are represented within the display case.

One of the more unusual occupations, however, was that of Jane King who in 1852 was contracted by the Government (Board of Ordnance) to supply handspikes. But what is a handspike? An early reference from 1734 describes Mr Smith, Carpenter of his Majesty's sloop the *Hound* taking up a Hand-Spike and murdering the Quarter Master following a verbal dispute. Smith's weapon of choice was a large, solid lever (typically made of elm or ash) used either at sea to alter the elevation of a large gun via the steps on the carriage cheeks or on land to move a mortar and bed (see image). Handspikes were sometimes tipped with a steel plate at the lower forward face to protect the wood.

They were readily available on ships and in garrisons where such equipment was a part of daily life.

Jane King can be found in the 1851 census living at King Street, Emsworth, with her daughter and grandchildren. Following her husband's death she had been making a living as a timber & coal merchant, and her success is evident in the fact that she was able to employ two local girls as servants. Jane had, in fact, almost certainly inherited the business from her husband John, whose family, having arrived in Emsworth in the mid-1780s, had founded the John King shipyard on what became King Street. An interesting story told about John King's father is that when an attempt was made to Press Gang his men during the Napoleonic wars, he blockaded the shipyard until a safe conduct could be got from the Commander-in-Chief at Portsmouth.

Whilst researching the archives on another local timber & coal merchant, William Foster, I came across a further reference to hand spikes. In August 1875, Mr Foster was requested to supply seven dozen (84) handspikes, each 6 feet in length, to W. Nunn & co, on behalf of the Army & Navy Lamp Signal & Binnacle works. W. Nunn & co, known for their production of lamps, had been founded by W. Nunn, lamp manufacturer to the Admiralty and Board of Trade. The handspikes purchased by them may have been used within the company, for instance to raise and lift heavy items, or may have been sold on to a further Naval contact such as the dockyard.

Sources:

'London' *Derby Mercury*, 30 May 1734 p.3
1851 census, 'King Street, Emsworth', H.O.107
1656

<https://www.kovels.com/collectors-questions/nunn-ships-lanterns.html>

<https://thespring.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/f-no-6-a-short-history-of-emsworth-and-warblington.pdf>