

About the English 6-inch field gun 1914-1940

Introduction



Six-inch Guns, 1916.

Drawn by [Fortunino Matania 2\)](#).

In the postscript to my article QF 4.7-in Field Gun, another pamphlet is mentioned which - also with a past as ship's artillery - was used as heavy artillery during the First World War, namely the *BL 6-in Field Gun Mk 7*.

BL 6-in Field Gun Mk 7 1)

The Mk 7 version was sent to France in early 1915, i.a. with 60th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery.

The lavette was attributed, possibly wrongly, to Commander Percy Scott, whose efforts during the Boer War provided the English artillery with mobile, heavy field artillery. In any case, the craft was reminiscent of the improvised types used in South Africa.



However, it quickly became apparent that the range of the cannon was not long enough, as the bow limited the possibility of raising the cannon sufficiently.

In April 1916 it was therefore decided to construct a new one (*Carriage, traveling, BL 6-in Mk II*) which allowed at least 30° elevation (against the 22° allowed by the first version), in addition to a number of other improvements.

In 1917, guns of the new model entered the heavy batteries in France.

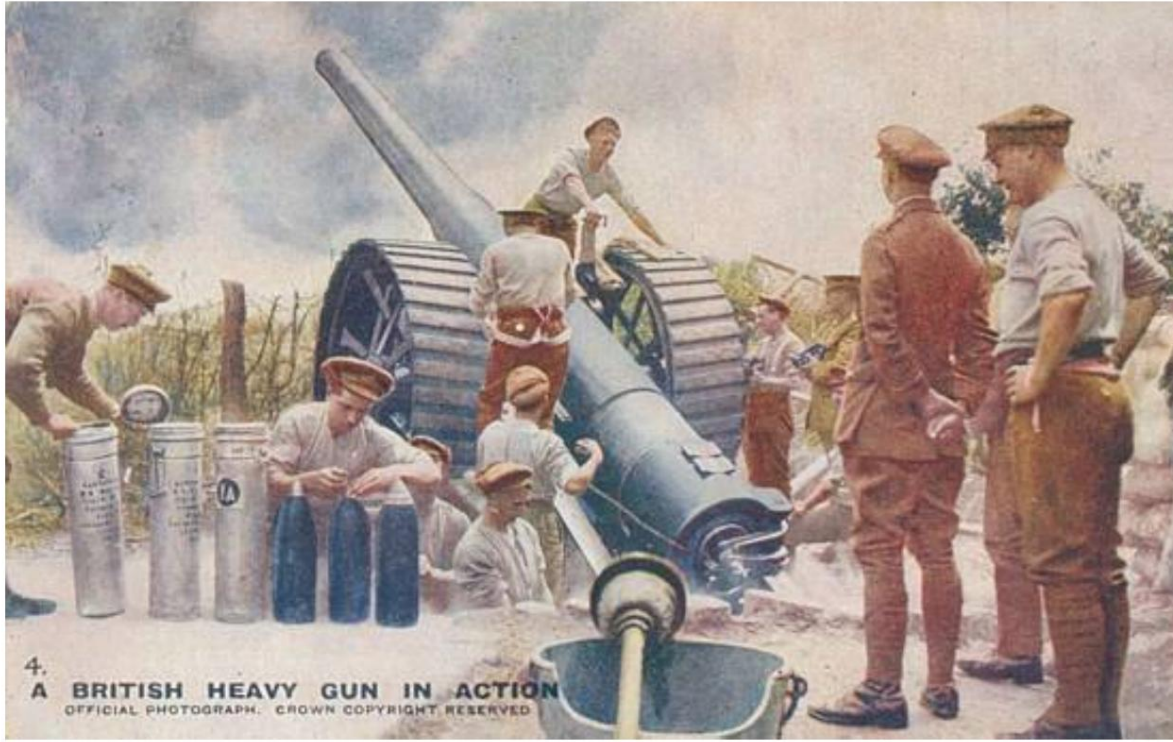


However, they were still hampered by the cannon's weight - 26 tons - and the development of it was parallel

new made, trials initiated with a lighter version.

On 25 May 1916 a meeting was held in London where it was decided to combine the laver of an 8" howitzer (Mk VI) with an improved version of the gun barrel. After the first test firing on 17 October 1916 it was decided to start production immediately of this new type.

The two images originate from the Imperial War Museum's extensive image collection; I bought mine at a postcard market.



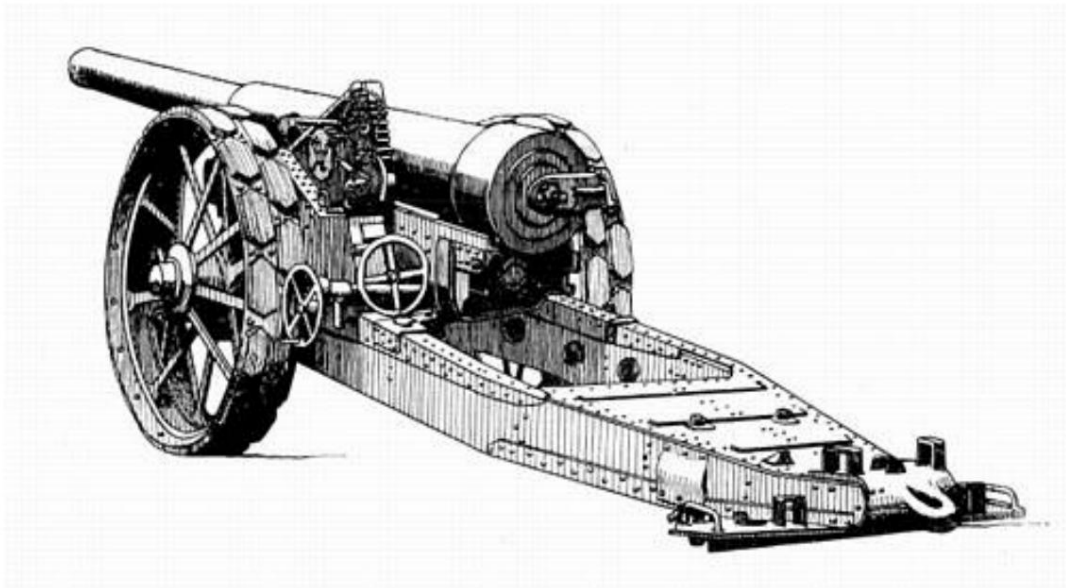
A British heavy gun in action, approx. 1916.

A postcard in the series *Official War Photographs (Series 1, No. 4)* published by *the Daily Mail* newspaper during the First World War.

The text on the back of the card reads:

The heavy gun on the British Western front seen in action is a unit in the tremendous siege which we are making - "not on a place, but on the German Army."

Here you get an impression of the cannon crew's functions, incl. tempering shells and preparing charges; the cases on the far left of the picture contain charge bags.



BL 6-in Field Gun Mk 19

6" gun, Mk 19. From Source 3.

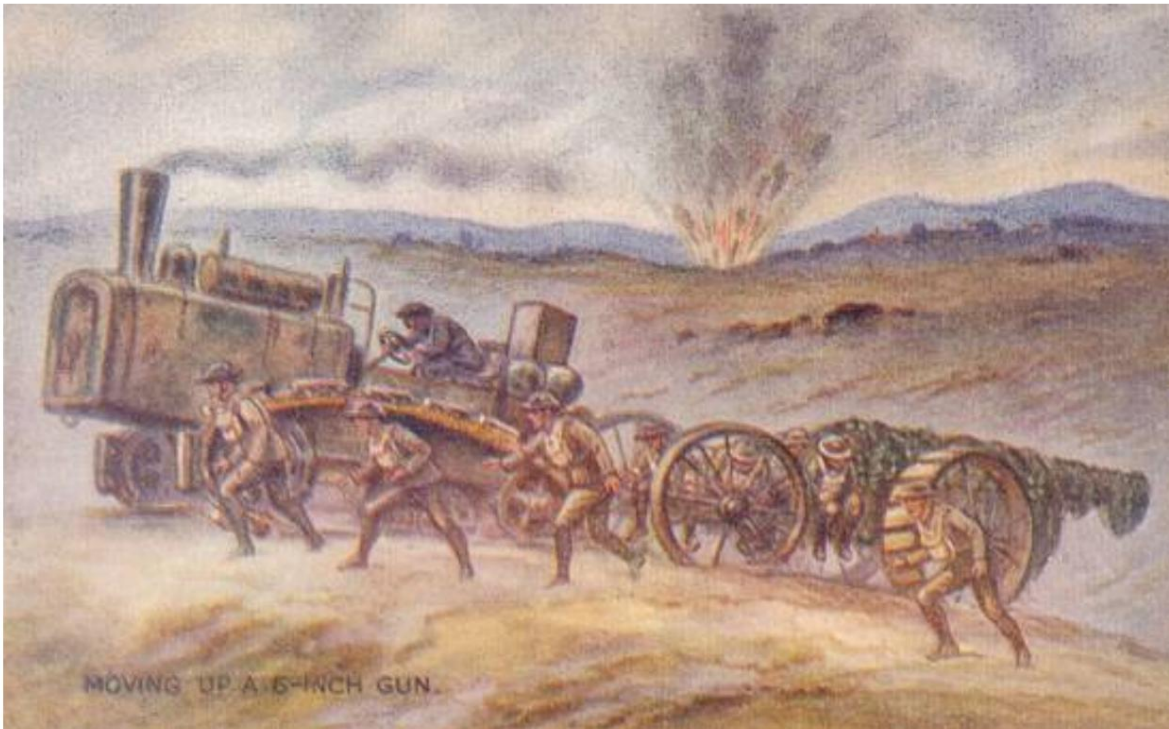
The new model gradually, but not completely, replaced the Mk 7 version.

At the end of the war, 44 units were thus Mk 7 and 108 pcs. Mk 19 at the heavy batteries in France.

Data

	Weight of the pamphlet	Firing range	Weight of the
BL 6-in Field Gun Mk 7	grenade 26 tons	12.3 km	100 kg
BL 6-in Field Gun Mk 19	10 tons		50 kg

Cannon tractors



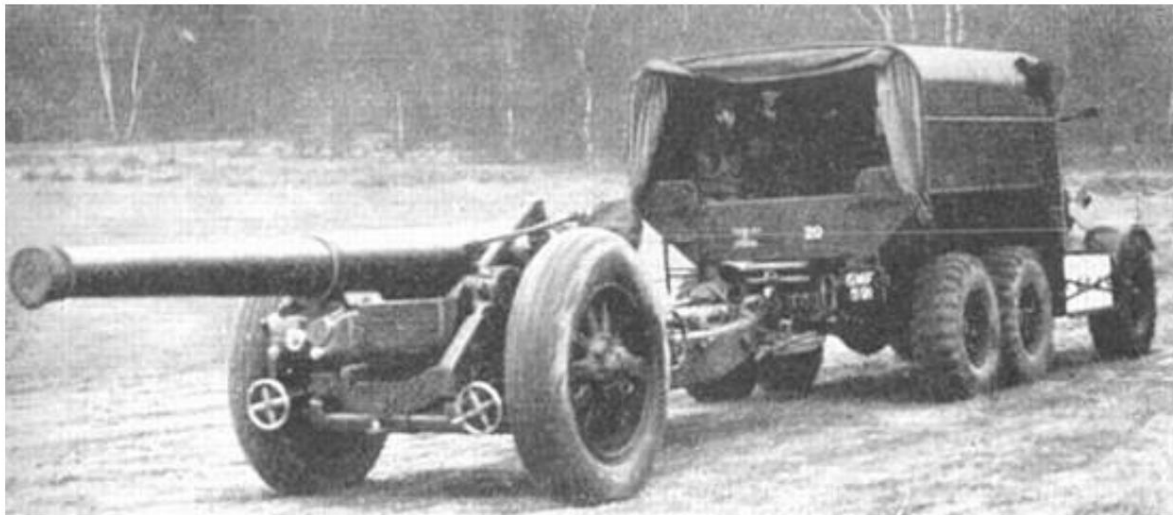
Moving up a 6-inch gun, approx. 1916.

No. 10 in a contemporaneous series of postcards issued to support the sale of war bonds; of the campaign

theme *Feed the Guns with War Bonds* is printed on the back.

The gun tractor pictured appears to be of the *Little Catapillar* type, which was manufactured by the Richard Hornsby & Sons tractor factory in Grantham 3). It is not currently clear to me whether the type was developed beyond the prototype stage. However, the postcards in the series are usually drawn after contemporary photographs, so perhaps the prototypes were used in the field if necessary.

1939-40



6" gun Mk 19, with Scammell Pioneer gun tractor.

From Source 3.

In the 1930s, modernization began and the cannon was now fitted with rubber wheels.

However, some pamphlets were only modernized after the start of the war.



BIG GUNS DEMONSTRATE.

WAR OFFICE PHOTOGRAPH B.1628.

Big Gun Demonstration - A battery of 6" guns Mk 19, France 1939-40.

From a simultaneous postcard.

The Expeditionary Corps in France had 3 batteries of 6" guns. See my article *On the English 9.2" Howitzer 1914-1940* for a discussion of the organisation.

Sources

1. *British Artillery Weapons & Ammunition 1914-1918* by Ian V. Hogg and LF Thurston, Ian Allan Ltd., Surrey 1972, SBN 7110-0381-5.
2. *British & American Artillery of World War 2* by Ian V. Hogg, Arms and Armor Press, London 1978, ISBN 0-85368-242-9.
3. *Taschenbuch der Heere* by Kurt Passow, JF Lehman Verlag, Munich / Berlin, 1939.
4. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Western Front 1914-18* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1986, ISBN 1-870114-00-0.
5. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Between the Wars, 1919-39* by BP Hughes, Brassey's, London 1992, ISBN 0-08-04098-9.
6. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - The Years of Defeat 1939-41* by Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1996, ISBN 1-85753-080-2.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) BL - *breech* (= bottom piece) *loading*, means directly translated rear *loader*. In the period used as a designation for a pamphlet in which the projectile and charge bag(s) are separated from each other. The opposite is QF - *quick firing* - where the charge is placed in a brass casing.
- 2) The image comes from an advertisement for Naval & Military Press, reproduced on the back of *Nery, 1914 - The Adventure of the German 4th Cavalry Division on the 31st August and 1st September* by Major AF the 1 Becke, Naval & Military Press, London 2004, ISBN 1-84574 -030-0.
- 3) The factory invented the caterpillar tracks in 1905, but despite official recognition, the idea did not gain traction, which is why the patent was sold to the American tractor factory Holt (later The Catapillar Company). At the beginning of the First World War, the American belt-driven Holt 75 hp tractor - see my article *About the English 8" howitzer 1915-1940* - gained traction, and as a kind of irony of fate, you now had to import the tractors that could in principle have been manufactured in England.