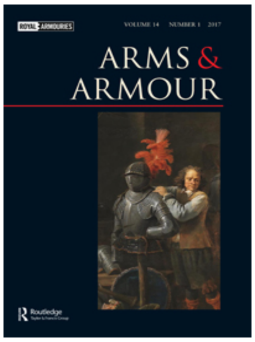
"TRUSTY BESS": the Definitive Origins and History of the term "Brown Bess,"

by Jonathan Ferguson

DID YOU EVER WONDER WHERE THE TERM "BROWN BESS" COMES FROM? Why hasthe 18th Century British smoothbore musket been given that name? Well, theregiment is pleased to present the ultimate explanation of that term's origin and history, sent to us by our friend Jonathan Ferguson, Curator of Firearms at the famed Royal Armories in the United Kingdom. This definitive history is a fascinating look at the source, myths and meanings of the word, appearing originally in the museum's publication *"Arms and Armour"* in the spring of 2017.

— Major Paul Loane



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‘Trusty Bess’: the Definitive Origins and History of the term 'Brown Bess'

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The aim of this article is to settle once and for all the question of the term ‘Brown Bess’, as applied to the British soldier’s musket. The specific origin and meaning of this obviously affectionate nickname has long confounded arms and armour scholars, re-enactors, and collectors alike. As a result, various possible solutions have been offered. The article outlines the historical usage of the name, including earlier written references not widely known in the field. The scope of the term is also addressed, using period sources to demonstrate what ‘Brown Bess’ meant to those who actually used the name historically. The many false etymologies of the name are assessed and found wanting or ‘debunked’ outright. Finally, drawing upon existing research from the field of linguistics, the article details the real meaning behind ‘Brown Bess’ the firearm and places ‘her’ in a wider sociohistorical context.

KEYWORDS Brown Bess, brown, Bess, musket, bill, Land Pattern, India Pattern, percussion, flintlock, East India Company, sexual language, Hannah Snell

Introduction

This article addresses the nickname ‘Brown Bess’ as applied to the British soldier’s musket: Almost universally known, yet somehow enigmatic and frequently misunderstood in terms of its origins. Following a burgeoning of interest in historical arms in the later 19th century a range of origins and explanations have been put forward by academics and enthusiasts. The first section of this article provides a short history of the written usage of the name, including newly identified written references from as far back as 1763. It also addresses the range of firearm types to which the term may legitimately be applied. The second part analyses and debunks several erroneous explanations offered to date. Finally, it details the compelling evidence for the real meaning of the name, its wider application to any long firearm, and the important sociohistorical implications

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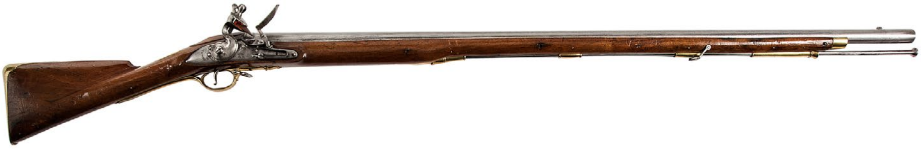

FIGURE 1. The 1777 Short Land Pattern musket (XII.3091). One of many patterns worthy of the name ‘Brown Bess’, this example was produced at around the same time that its nickname appeared in Sir Francis Grose’s dictionary (1785). © Courtesy of the Trustees of the Armouries.

bound up with it. This paper conclusively demonstrates that far from having obscure and contentious origins, ‘Brown Bess’ was an extension of an existing slang term into the world of arms and armour.

At Blenheim and Ramillies fops would confess

They were pierced to the heart by the charms of Brown Bess.

-‘Brown Bess’ by Rudyard Kipling (1911)[1]

‘Twas then I thought on trusty Bess;

Who, tho’ I knew she was but poor,

I always found a faithful Whore.’

-’*Fecit Recantatio Versum’* by Thomas Brown (1730)[2]

Usage

‘Brown Bess’ is today usually taken to apply to the ‘Long’ and ‘Short’ Land Pattern muskets in use from 1730 (see Figure 1), and often to the Board of Ordnance India Patterns of 1793 and 1797. It is sometimes used in reference to any British flintlock smoothbore infantry arm, to include the pre-1730 ‘Colonel’s Pattern’ designs, and the late patterns such as the New Land Pattern and the Victorian ‘Extra Service’ flintlock musket of the 1840s.[3]

In his seminal 1961 book, noted arms and armour scholar Howard Blackmore chose to restrict the name to the Long Land Pattern of 1730, on the basis that this was the more ‘graceful’ of British military muskets. This view he shared with R. Scurfield, who had in 1955 made ‘*a personal plea that the affectionate nickname be applied only to the pattern of musket that from the 1720’s to the end of the eighteenth century was “the” British arm, the “Queen of Weapons”*’.[4] This seems to have been an entirely sentimental opinion made without reference to period usage. On the thorny subject of etymology Scurfield appeared confident.[5] Blackmore on the other hand opted to reserve judgement. Although he did reference several then-current theories, he stated that the origin of the name remained ‘obscure’.[6] Subsequent publications, including Erik Goldstein and Stuart Mowbray’s useful and concise 2010 work (itself titled ‘Brown Bess’) have reinforced this view.[7]

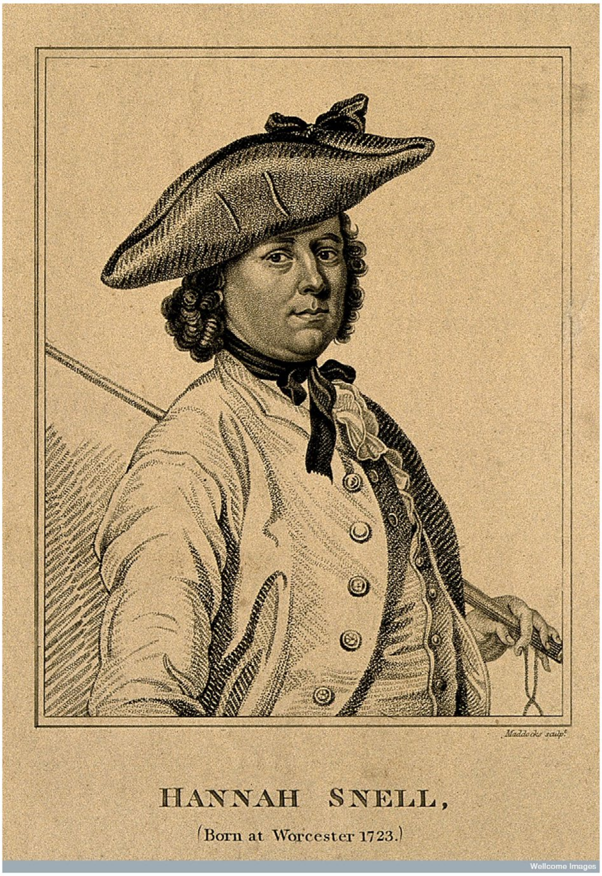
Maddocks sculp.
HANNAH SNELL,
(Born at Worcester 1723.)
Wellcome Images

FIGURE 2. The celebrated soldier and marine Hannah Snell, c1750. Of note here for her popularisation of the musket nickname, she also carried one in anger. Indeed, as a lower class woman turned common soldier, Snell herself was something of a 'Brown Bess'. © Wellcome Library, London.

Blackmore also provided what was for many years thought to be the first written reference,[8] an entry in Francis Grose's famous dictionary of slang, first published in 1785:[9] Grose also provided crucial context for the phrase (of which much more below):

> *Brown Bess. A soldier's firelock. To hug Brown Bess; to carry a firelock, or serve as a private soldier.*

It is logical to assume, as Blackmore apparently did, that a vernacular term such as this would pre-date any printed reference by many years. In fact, there exist several earlier little-known references that prove this assumption to be correct.

The earliest recorded instance of 'Brown Bess' thus far was found in the British Library archive by archivist Avril Pedley in 2010, though she was (understandably) unaware of its significance to the field of arms and armour.[10] This is a letter written by a young British clerk by the name of John Grose, who in 1763 left Britain for India to make a career with the East India Company. Civil unrest required that he join the local militia and be issued a weapon:

> *'Every body in Calcutta are now turned soldiers on account of the troubles they all wear a Red Coat faced with blue which is the Regimental of the Calcutta Militia as we are called. Us new Writers were, a day or two after our arrival, saluted with a Coat, Pair of Breeches and musket (alias Brown Bess) thus equipped we go out upon the parade 3 times a week at 6 in the Morning in order to learn our Exercise.'*[11]

This letter is dated October 17 1763, a full seven years before the earliest reference discovered thus far. Importantly, it refers not to British Board of Ordnance pattern muskets, but those in service with the East India Company.[12] This shows just how generic and widespread the term really was.

The next earliest reference was identified by the author in an anonymous biography entitled 'The Adventures of a Kidnapped Orphan'. This describes events that would have taken place during the 1750s and were related to the author in 1758, but was not actually published until 1767. Pressed, or 'crimped,' into service aboard an East Indiaman, Mr Page, the titular orphan, had been learning to use the musket whilst at sea in the English Channel:

> *'Page however was more tractable to discipline, than the major part of them, and had the mortification on that account, to hear the officers say, that he promised fair to make a useful fellow, as he began to handle Brown Bess with tolerable dexterity.'*[13]

Until the publication of this article, the earliest appearance was thought to be the American 'Connecticut Courant' newspaper for April 2 1771, and although no longer the earliest, it is nonetheless important for its sensational nature and wide dissemination. It reported remarks made by the infamous Hannah Snell (see Figure 2), who had successfully posed as a man and served in the British army.[14]

This important source seems to have been unearthed in the late 1990s, and was published in a reenactment newsletter (since republished online).[15] The discoverer, apparently working from a newspaper archive located in the United States, could not have known that by April 1771 this was 'old news' in Britain. A number of newspapers and journals there had covered the story some months earlier. The first to do so appears to have been The Oxford Magazine for January 2 1771, which helpfully reported that the Snell incident had occurred 'Friday last', i.e. December 28 1770. Otherwise, the wording was the same, including:

> *'.. but if you are afraid of the sea, take Brown Bess on your shoulders and march through Germany as I have done.'*[16]

As well as being intrinsically useful as another early reference (predating Grose by more than a decade), this popular usage of the phrase is useful in establishing its currency. If a British journal and an American newspaper were both able to use such a phrase without explanation, they must have a degree of confidence that it will be understood by their respective readers. For this to be so, the term had likely already gone beyond limited slang usage by the British soldiery and become a somewhat recognisable phrase.

Returning to the East India Company, the present author has been fortunate enough to discover another 'new' reference in research for this article. This letter, reproduced in a 1776 issue of the (London) Morning Chronicle, included the line:

> *'...unless some unforeseen stroke of chance happens, we may carry brown Bess (alias a musket) for some years longer'*.[17]

This time the correspondent was not a conscripted civilian, but an officer cadet of the EIC. His bracketed explanation, provided for the benefit of his friend, suggests that that 'Bess' was not yet a household name. Nonetheless, the weight of evidence shows that it was certainly in widespread military usage well before it was documented by Grose.

Another little-known reference was found by the author in a 1778 diary entry concerning another clerk-turned-soldier who had, as he put it, *'...exchanged the pen, master, for Brown Bess'*.[18] Finally, ten years later we find a relevant line in an untitled air published in 1788 (later dubbed 'though I am now a very little lad'). It is again a clear reference to the musket, though styled as the name of a woman, lacking the indefinite article usually applied to an object (i.e. not 'a Brown Bess'):

> *'Brown Bess I'll knock about, oh! there's my joy, With my knapsack at my back, like a roving boy.'*[19]

This brings us up to Grose and his 1785 dictionary entry. At the time of these early references, the dominant musket pattern in British army use was the Long Land Pattern musket of 1730. However, the Short Land Pattern began to supplant it from 1768, and as we have seen, non-Ordnance patterns were also embraced by the name. Even without taking into account later references, it is clear that Blackmore's suggestion that only the 'graceful' Long Land Pattern musket of 1730 - 1780 was 'worthy' of the name 'Brown Bess' does not align with historical reality. A decade later, De Witt Bailey would be somewhat more inclusive in his definitions. The 'typical Brown Bess' that he outlines includes the entire Land Pattern series of muskets in service from 1730 - 1793, but excludes the Ordnance India Pattern that supplanted it and, by implication, all later patterns.[20]

This selective approach has gained currency with scholars, collectors and enthusiasts in the fields of arms and armour, militaria, military history,[21] and beyond.[22] Debates were had in re-enactment circles about the historicity of the term even in the context of the 1770s, and although some concluded that it was appropriate for costumed impressions, it should only ever be used as a proper name, i.e. 'Brown Bess', never 'a Brown Bess'.[23]

Others favour a broader definition, for example Goldstein and Mowbray, who elected to include the Ordnance India Pattern arms in their recognition guide.[24] Those working from primary sources take an even wider view. As Oman has put it, in an historical context 'Brown Bess' might describe:

> *'...any British Army flintlock smoothbore musket from Queen Anne onwards.'*[25]

However, even this more inclusive attempt to respect actual historical usage falls short. In reality, the term saw consistent use into the 19th century and indeed the percussion era. With respect to popular usage, though it had currency, it was not *universally* known by civilians until the latter period. As late as 1823, former army officer George Proctor, a veteran of the War of 1812, felt obliged to explain 'Brown Bess' for his readers:

> *'Having been asked what Havresack's sweetheart has to do with my experiments, I find to my surprise that there are people in the world who do not know that "brown Bess" is the cant, or rather pet term, of our soldiery for the companion of their fatigues, the instrument of their glories- the musket.'*[26]

Because of this late popularisation, there is actually more written evidence for the late flintlock and percussion 'Brown Bess' muskets of the early Victorian period than for the purist's Land Pattern musket of 1730 - 1793. This is no doubt in part due to the explosion in print media, as well as usage by those who sought to disparage old technology in favour of the new Pattern 1851 and 1853 rifles.[27] This was no late revival, but simply one aspect of continuous usage lasting for as long as smoothbore muskets were issued to fighting men of the Empire (and, of course, beyond).

Few today would regard the Pattern 1842 percussion musket as a 'Brown Bess', yet period sources drew no distinction between forms of ignition employed on the arms of the day, let alone specific patterns. Features such as flintlock or percussion mechanisms or handrail or 'shotgun' style stocks did not define the character of the weapon as they do today. Instead, only the presence or lack of rifling grooves in the bore was significant. 'Bess' was strictly a smoothbore musket; none of the British military rifle patterns (in parallel but limited use from 1776) were referred to as such. With the universal adoption of rifled muskets in the 1850s, 'Bess' was living on borrowed time. Explaining the supply situation in the Crimean campaign, *The Illustrated London News* of 26 May 1855 said:

> *"BROWN BESS AND THE MINIE RIFLE. —I am glad it is in my power to give a satisfactory explanation of a point respecting the Guards, which has struck many as somewhat mysterious. The fresh draughts came out with Brown Bess, and, as the older soldiers are armed with Minies, the confusion of the two weapons in one and the same corps seemed dangerous to their efficacy in battle.*[28]

Whence 'Brown Bess'?

The origin and meaning of 'Brown Bess' has been a curiosity or even a fascination for many over the years.[29] Following the early twentieth century interest in antique military arms that was both reflected and catalysed by Blackmore's book, various etymologies for have been put forward. Perhaps the most flawed of these, yet one of the most widespread, is the idea that 'Brown' might refer to a browned barrel:

> *The musket used by the British Army was the Land Pattern, considered to be the best of its type, and was known commonly as 'Brown Bess', a name thought to have derived from the browned barrel with the added affectionate name of Bess;...'*[30]

Browning was certainly known and commonly applied to gun barrels in the 18th century, but the infantry musket was not browned until at least 1808.[31] Nor was it suffered to become brown from corrosion acquired in use. In fact, Blackmore relates Orders for the Foot and the Horse (1742) requiring that arms be 'as bright as silver'.[32] Surprisingly, the browning is not a modern claim based in the ignorance of the passage of time. It was first suggested in 1833, only 18 years after the change in practice:

> *'…in Spain, and allowed the barrel to be browned; hence the familiar title of " Brown Bess," which was given to the musket by the men during the peninsular war.'*[33]

The use of 'brown' in this context will be explored later in this article, but as we have already seen, the suggestion that the weapon was only described as 'brown' after 1808 is in error. Despite protests to the contrary from academic quarters,[34] this idea gained significant currency over the years.[35] Today it remains the most common explanation for the 'Brown' in 'Brown Bess'.[36]

Others have suggested that 'brown' in this context might refer to the wooden stock of the weapon.[37] This is far more plausible, and as we shall see, does have a part to play in the real meaning of the phrase. Yet sometimes this explanation is taken too far. When the word is selectively rendered as 'Braun' (or 'Brawn'), as in 'Braun Bus', the whole phrase is usually claimed to be European in origin, with 'Bess' as a corruption of the Germanic 'buss' (as Scurfield had rendered it) 'bus' or 'büchse', meaning 'gun'.[38] This was superficially plausible, given the strong etymological claims made for 'arquebus' and 'blunderbus'.[39] In an apparent misunderstanding of this claim, the 2017 BBC4 documentary series 'Sword, Musket & Machine Gun' suggested that 'Bess' derived from the name 'arquebus' itself.[40]

Some investigators did recognise 'Bess' as a personal name, which as this article will make clear, is quite correct. Once again however, some read too far into the possible connections. Direct connection to Queen Elizabeth I has been attempted, at least as far back as 1844,[41] though this explanation still has some currency to this day.[42] Another extraordinary claim made in relation to Queen Elizabeth was that 'Brown' might be a reference to the royal gunfounder Thomas Brown. This was suggested in 'Notes and Queries' in 1906, and was almost immediately shot down in the same periodical, where it was pointed out that musket barrels were forged, not cast.[43]

'Why 'Bess'?'

'Bess' was of course historically a very common female nickname. In simple terms it was merely a diminutive for 'Elizabeth', and might be applied by friends and loved ones to women of all social classes. Famously, Queen Elizabeth I herself acquired the nickname 'Bess'. However, neither commoner nor courtier would have dared to use this to her face, and though they might use it as a nickname, the upper class would not conscience it as a given name. On hearing that her daughter the Countess of Bute had named her new baby 'Louisa', Lady Montague expressed relief in a letter, dated October 9 1754:

> *'I am fond of your little Louisa : to say truth, I was afraid of a Bess, a Peg, or a Suky, which all give me the ideas of washing-tubs, and scowering [sic] of kettles.'*[44]

Like 'Nan' for Anne and 'Moll' for Mary, 'Bess' was often used in a derogatory or at least dismissively generic way, rather like 'Sheila' in modern Australian English.[45] It became an indicator of the low status and/or unfortunate woman exemplified by 'Mad

Bess' in Purcell's 'From Silent Shades',[46] or the alliterative 'Bess O'Bedlam' to indicate a madwoman.[47] It was also one of several English names borrowed by (or for) black slaves in the United States.[48]

Though his dictionary lacked this kind of contextual evidence, etymologist Ernest Weekley did propose in his landmark 1921 dictionary that the 'Bess' in 'Brown Bess' was not likely to be a corruption of 'Busche', but was 'more prob. a personal name'.[49]

The use of personal names to describe firearms is detailed below, and 'Bess' will figure prominently in this. However, as 'Bess' does not appear to have been much used on its own in this context, we shall turn our attention to the word 'brown'.

Why 'Brown'?

In one sense, the meaning of 'brown' in the context of arms is obvious. Weapons may, to a greater or lesser extent, be brown in colour, and this was certainly part of historical usage (just as it is today). However, there is once again a deeper meaning to be discovered here. Needless to say, the primary usage of 'brown' in modern English is as a descriptor for things that are dark in colour. Anderson summarises convincing evidence for the application of this meaning to differentiate dark-coloured or rusty arms from their more usual 'bright' equivalents.[50] Anderson correctly dismisses Tremaine's re-assertion that the British musket was so-called because of its browned barrel,[51] but does not offer an alternative. That the barrel of a musket might routinely be allowed to grow 'brown' through rust occasioned by neglect seems unlikely in the context of military discipline, though no doubt it did happen *in extremis*. As the author of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' letter remarks, *'brown-musket was not an uncommon phrase'*, and its usage was a case of '*taking the part for the whole, the stock for the steel.*'[52]

After all, the wooden stock of the weapon is the more readily visible portion of it, and perhaps more significantly for this paper, that most often in direct physical contact with the user. References to 'brown musket' are indeed numerous, the first dating to 1707 in an anonymous treatise on reforms that might prevent desertion.

> *'And these are hardy Fellows, that with a little Camp-Discipline, would serve to carry a brown Musquet…'*[53]

In context, many references emphasise the ordinary nature of the weapon, 'brown' functioning as synonym for 'ordinary'. Satirist Edward Ward uses the phrase more than once in 'Mars stript of his armour, or, The army displayed in all its true colours', first published in 1708. For example:

> *'To look upon his Plate, his Tapistry, and the Furniture of his Tent, you'd believe it impossible that the Time was, when he carry'd a brown Musket on his Shoulder…'*[54]

The 1709 play 'The Busie Body' contains the line; *'I am upon my last project, which if it fails, then for my last refuge, a brown musket'*,[55] whilst an essay published in a 1754 edition of 'The Connoisseur' magazine includes it as part of a fascinating claim regarding military ritual:

> *'…even our common soldiers (like the knights of old) are dubbed Gentlemen on the shoulder; with this only difference, that instead of the sword, the ceremony is performed by a brown musket.'*[56]

All of these emphasise the mundane nature and common status of the military musket relative to more expensive arms.[57] Military arms of all kinds have always by necessity been plainer and more cheaply made than commercially available or custom-made equivalents. Though it is perhaps a subject worthy of its own paper, the predecessor to the infantry musket, the bill, was similarly known as the 'Brown Bill'. In fact, none other than Samuel Johnson sought to tie the two together on this basis in his famous dictionary. However, he did not do so until the 1805 edition, despite having defined 'Brown bill' in his 1755 first edition. In any event, the evidence for any direct continuity between 'Bill' and 'Bess' is lacking, and Johnson was apparently unaware of the long prior usage of 'brown'.[58]

What is certain is that something 'brown' was traditionally something ordinary and unremarkable; a thing 'brown' in both colour and in significance. Importantly, this dual usage of the word could also be applied to people as well as weapons and other objects. This is the biggest clue toward the answer to the 'Brown Bess' question.

Bess the Woman

With this in mind we turn to another important instance of 'brown musket' that appears in an essay published in 1720 by Whig polemicist Thomas Gordon. Obscured by thick euphemism and *double entendre*, Gordon seeks to satirise the practice of adultery, casting oblivious or cuckolded husbands as pimps, and the adulterous wives as their prostitutes. He comments by analogy that London men are happy to pay for sex with women that their own pimps (or 'petticoat-pensioners' he later compares to 'journeymen') would not themselves sleep with (as he puts it, 'set foot within their ware-houses').[59] Shortly thereafter we read that:

> *'They may think it hard to pay an honest Porter half a Crown, to lug about a brown Musquet for them when the Trained Bands march; but, let me tell them, they give a much greater Gratuity to a certain Sort of Swissers that come from Covent-Garden, And carry Arms in their Stead, on another Occasion.'*[60]

Here, Gordon is saying that such men are reluctant to pay taxes for a man of the militia (or 'porter' of the 'trained bands') to carry a 'brown musket' in defence of the city so that they don't have to, but are happy to pay a lot more to pimps ('a certain sort of Swissers' or mercenary soldiers) from Covent Garden (a well-known area for prostitution) to 'carry' their whores ('carry arms in their stead'). Despite the oblique turn of phrase and layered meaning, the direct comparison between the weapon; the ordinary brown musket, and the woman of low morals, is quite clear. The musket is physically, but also metaphorically, 'brown'. This, if anything, is the 'missing link' in the story of 'Brown Bess'.

Though this important source does not include 'Bess', that complete phrase was already in use by the late 16th Century. Gordon Williams' book 'A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature'. This contains a long list of references that definitively link 'Brown' and 'Bess', and as we shall see, the musket as well. Using multiple sources dating back to 1538, Williams defines the slang name 'Bess' as 'generic for wanton', 'Brown' as a descriptor for a common ('nut-brown') woman, and 'Brown Bess' likewise.[61] Perhaps the clearest example for modern readers is quoted from Done's *Polydorun (1631):*

> *'Things proferrd and easie to come by, diminish themselves in reputation & price: for how full of pangs and dotage is a wayling lover, for it may be some brown bessie?'*[62]

'Brown Bess' in this context remained in current use well into the era of the musket of the same name, for example in a poem entitled 'A Receipt to Make a Pretty Fellow', first published in 1767.[63] This interesting piece of social commentary emphasises the low status of a 'brown' woman as opposed to that of her well-to-do or 'fair' (though equally generically named) counterpart.[64]

> *"…Thus inform'd and grown up, you must fix him in town,*
>
> *Where, to greatest advantage, such talents are shewn;*
>
> *Ne'er balk his amours, let him kiss all he meets,*
>
> *From Fanny the fair, to brown Bess in the streets…."*

With arguably sexist undertones (by modern standards), the name was transferred to farm animals and other beasts of burden. A farmer's will, dated 1650, specified that two of his cows should go to his daughter. Their names were 'Brown Bess' and 'Napus'.[65] Famously, the highwayman Dick Turpin's horse was named 'Black Bess', for her colour certainly, but perhaps also for her dark role. But a horse might also be 'Brown Bess'.[66] The name appears frequently in horse racing reports to be found in various British newspapers.[67]

As we have seen in the case of the term 'brown', the affectionate and/or ironic likening of fallen or low-status women to inanimate objects has a long tradition. The same goes for 'Bess'. At the close of the 17th Century we find it in use as a nickname for a crowbar or pry-bar.[68] It seems that the word is still used in this context by members of the Irish Traveller community[69].

This feminisation and anthropomorphisation of inanimate objects is well-documented and widely known.[70] What schoolchild has not heard of the 'Spinning Jenny' or 'Ravelling Nancy'? Guns and small arms are no exception, and it has even been suggested that the very word 'gun' might derive from the Norse female name 'Gunilda/Gunnhildr' meaning 'war' (in context, essentially 'war woman').[71] However, as Adrienne Lafrance points out, in a military context it is the big guns that have traditionally received female nicknames like 'Big Bertha' or 'Mons Meg'. Individualised pet names for firearms were also common in civilian circles.[72] Some of these are obviously akin to 'Brown Bess', notably 'Black-Bitch', recorded by William Carr in 1828 as slang for 'A gun'.[73] One of the more famous, again linguistically related to 'Bess' is Davy Crockett's 'Betsey', a rifle that he refers to fondly, protectively, and even romantically in his 1859 memoirs:

> *'The chief was for making love to my beautiful Betsey, but I clung fast to her…'*[74]

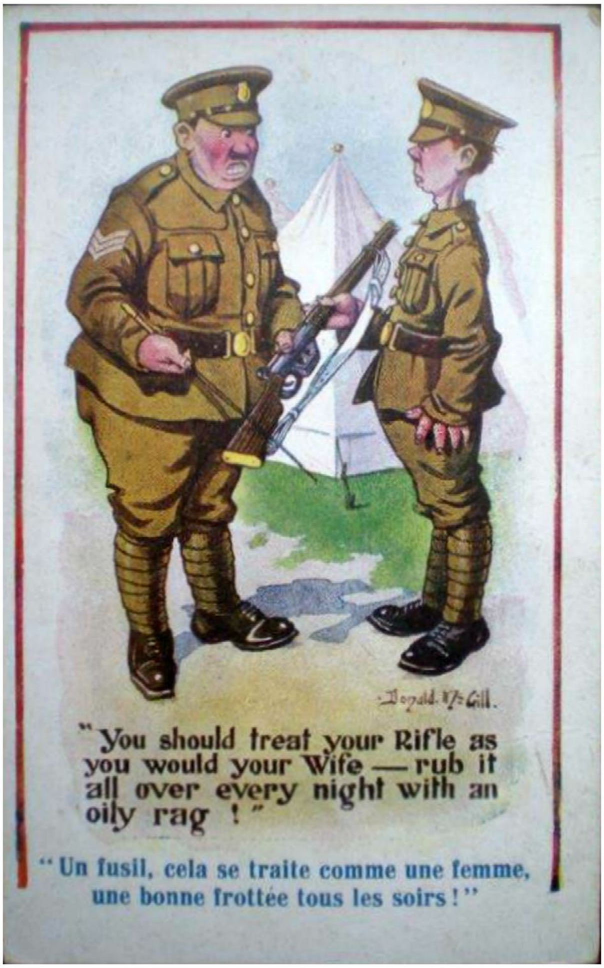
Donald McGill.
"You should treat your Rifle as you would your Wife — rub it all over every night with an oily rag !"
"Un fusil, cela se traite comme une femme, une bonne frottée tous les soirs !"

FIGURE 3. First World War postcard by Donald McGill. Courtesy of David Williams.

A less dramatic example is the following poem from Bentley's Miscellany of 1841, which applies 'Brown Bess' as a specific personal name for a weapon:

LINES TO MY DOUBLE-BARRELLED GUN, BROWN BESS

I have a sweet friend, and her name is Brown Bess !
Who often in raptures I ardently press,
And as on my shoulder she'll rest or recline,
I glory to think that I can call her mine.
Her voice how it echoes through valley and grove,
When I make her repeat the fond fire of her love,
It comes from her bosom in one noble strain,

Where, save to please me, it would ever remain.
She's tall, and she's slender, with scarce any waist,

And, what is most curious, she hath but one breast;

If there I should touch her in play or in sport,

It is strange, she's the first one to spread the report.[75]

It was common to write poems, odes and songs to Brown Bess in her military guise.[76] These tended to minimise the sexual implications of the name, and can appear almost romantic in tone. However, a much older (1792) military song explicitly referred to the weapon as a 'lover', and again cast 'Bess' as a common weapon/woman:

'Her skin, though not so soft and fair,

As some soft dames, I must confess,

Yet as much good time and care

Has been employed on poor Brown Bess.'[77]

An overtly sexual pun was made in a 1798 letter to a gentlemen's magazine entitled 'On Military Motions', ostensibly written by a woman. This satirical stab at drill-obsessed volunteer soldiers includes a *double entendre* play on the word 'motion', based on the many motions required to drill with the musket. Referenced several times in the letter, 'Brown Bess' is wilfully misunderstood by the volunteer's attention-starved wife as a mistress, on the basis that the reader will understand that 'she' is really an 'it':

'I am sure there have been no motions in this house for the last three months, but with that Brown Bess he talks about.'[78]

Later, in 1819, Thomas Moore directly equated the firing of a musket with sexual activity by comparing (again in verse form) a disused Brown Bess with an equally neglected old maid:

And Brown Bess shall soon, like Miss Tabitha Fusty,

For want of a spark to go off with, grow rusty.[79]

Bridging the military and civilian worlds, and showing that (outside a British military context) even a rifled arm might be called 'Brown Bess', we find this quote from the 1833 short story 'Pete Featherton':

'...throwing "Brown Bess," - for so he called his rifle - over his shoulder.'[80]

The titular character was not a soldier, but a 'bold rattling Kentuckian' more in the mould of Davy Crockett than Tommy Atkins.[81] One anonymous poet, writing in 1810, even drew the analogy between going hunting with his 'volunteer musquet' and committing adultery with 'brown Bess':

'I arose from my bed, and without the least strife,

Resign'd to the arms of another - my wife;

Determin'd to Somnus her snorings to yield,

And join with brown Bess in the sports of the field,'[82] Note that this, like other sources, renders 'brown' in lower case, emphasising the personal name 'Bess' over the descriptor 'brown'. The common musket is yet again compared with the common, wanton woman. Even more 'on the nose' is this operatic epilogue:

> *'Yet though, like roving blades, they hugg'd brown beſs,*
>
> *They'll never love their charming wives the less.'*[83]

All of these references emphasise the user's co-dependency upon his weapon, comparing it with the relationship he might have with a prostitute, mistress, or (if a low-born soldier himself) his wife. A well-to-do sportsman or military officer would carefully choose his weapon, and might pay a great deal to have it decorated and personalised to him. By contrast, an enlisted man or non-commissioned officer was issued his personal weapon. It was plain, identical to that of his comrades, roughly made by comparison with civilian firearms, and more cumbersome to carry. It might be stubborn and 'high maintenance' sometimes. However, as these sources suggest, it had 'curves', gave the soldier comfort, and 'spoke' loudly in the direction of his enemies. Given this male-dominated application of 'Brown Bess' to the musket, it is ironic on the face of it that the first published use should be attributed to a woman. However, as Hannah Snell clearly strove to be perceived as equal to any man, her use of male-dominated military slang is actually wholly appropriate. It may be that her high-profile public outburst, reported by a number of papers and on both sides of the Atlantic, was the impetus for the passing of the name into everyday speech and the wider print media.

Lest readers assume that 'Brown Bess' was only a romantic contrivance of civilian authors, poets, and songwriters, its usage and meaning is supported by (among others) the memoirs of John Shipp. Shipp saw active service from 1797 until 1825 in both British and Indian armies, as drummer boy, enlisted man, non-commissioned officer and finally as an officer.[84] In a chapter entitled 'Musket, Nicknamed "Brown Bess". Its relationship to a soldier', Shipp explained the anthropomorphic meaning behind the nickname at some length:

> *'It is his best and dearest friend in time of need; his pillow on which he rests his weary head; it is his constant companion day and night; it defends his name and honour against the encroachment of his enemies; it is his dependance; it warms his cold chilly bosom; he is wedded to it in honour - bound to it by love - rivetted [sic] to it by long tried attachment. It is his great and sure peace-maker between him and his foes; they seldom quarrel, save when she misses fire, but which is not intentional, but from the cold damps of night, and the silvery dews of morn, or the drenching rain. It is more - it is his shield that will ward off the impending blow of his foe'.*[85]

Though as a nickname, 'Brown Bess' appears in no official military publication, it does appear in an equally unofficial and maritime-tinged version of one of the 'Manual Exercises'. Published as a letter to the editor of the Liverpool Mercury in 1821, this source again anthropomorphises the musket throughout, including such suggestive phrases as '*rouse Brown Bess by the middle*', '*receive Brown Bess by the breast*' and '*slew Bess half round and seize her with the starboard fist*'.[86]

This curious relationship between man and gun is not unique to the British experience, nor exclusively to the 18th and 19th centuries. Unlike their civilian counterparts, soldiers do not appear to have individually named their firearms, and though that function was for a time fulfilled by the generic 'Bess', there is no evidence of a successor name. However, there was nonetheless a military tendency to feminise arms throughout history. The 19th century Dutch phrase 'Mijn geweer is mijn vrouw', or 'my musket/rifle is my wife'[87] is echoed by the famous scene in Stanley Kubrick's Vietnam film 'Full Metal Jacket' in which the conscript soldiers are taught that their days of chasing girls are over, and that they are now *'married to this piece. This weapon of iron and wood'* (meaning their M14 service rifle). This is based upon actual practice in U.S. military basic training. Stephen Ambrose writes of the previous (Second World War) generation of recruits:

> *'When they were issued their rifles, they were told to treat the weapon as they would treat a wife, gently. It was theirs to have and to hold, to sleep with in the field, to know intimately'.*[88]

As Barrère and Leland wrote in their 'Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant' in 1889:

> *Brown Bess (common), the old Government regulation musket. Soldiers of all nations are fond of giving names of persons to their weapons. The French troopers sometimes call their swords "Jacqueline," and most of the siege guns during the siege of Paris in 1870 had been nicknamed in the same manner by the sailors who manned the forts, their favourite being a very large gun called "Josephine".*[89]

To their examples we may add the ironic nickname given by French soldiers to the Lebel magazine rifle of the First World War. The name 'Lebel Ma'm'selle' was a pun on 'La Belle Mademoiselle' (the pretty young woman).[90] The sentiment survived well into the 20th century, as cartoon training pamphlets issued to U.S. GIs in Vietnam show. In these, the M16A1 service rifle is always referred to as 'she'.[91] The idea was even subverted in a British First World War postcard by cartoonist Donald McGill (see Figure 3).

Stating the Obvious?

Whereas 'Brown Bess' remains controversial among students of arms, in other fields of study (notably English Literature) it has long been known that this name and its component words all carried anthropomorphic as well as descriptive intent. Grose had been quite definitive regarding this meaning as early as 1785. That it was common knowledge at this period is evident from an anonymous 1797 letter to 'The Gentleman's Magazine':

'Dec 4

Mr Urban

> *Can you trace the application of the term Brown Bess to any thing loading or fatiguing such as a musket to soldiers tired on a long march, or to a wooden pump in a brewhouse? Or is it confined to wooden burdens only, and derived from the colour of the material? Why is Bess the more favoured term than Nan or Moll? A brown-musket is not an uncommon phrase, taking the part for the whole, the stock for the steel. But why is Bess brought in?*
>
> *Etymologus.'*[92]

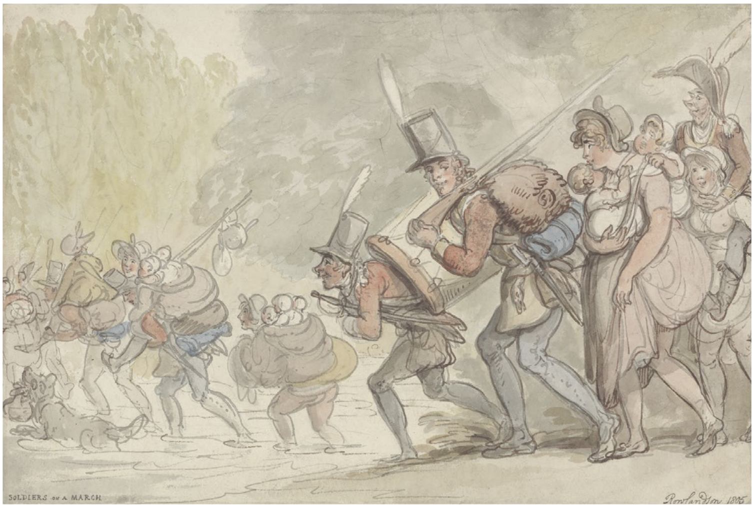

FIGURE 4. ‘Soldiers on a March’ by Thomas Rowlandson, 1805. The parallel between ‘Brown Bess’ the musket and ‘Brown Bess’ the woman (in this case as camp follower) is well made. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1975.3.110).

Though the author is unclear as to why ‘Bess’ was preferred to other generic female names, by citing ‘Nan’ and ‘Moll’ he demonstrates awareness of the soldier’s intent. Interestingly, though he correctly identifies one reason for the use of ‘brown’, he does not appear to be aware of pre-existing use of ‘*Brown* Bess’ that both provides the word ‘brown’ with a double meaning and answers his question. That is, ‘Bess’ was chosen because it was already associated with ‘Brown’ and that very double meaning. The name was also alliterative; ‘Brown Moll’ would not have had quite the same ‘ring’ to it!

As we have seen, this meaning was still in currency toward the end of the smoothbore era.[93] Nor was it forgotten by Victorian scholars. Barrère and Leland, writing in 1889 when the musket was long out of service and the Lee-Metford magazine rifle was being issued, were also convinced of this explanation.[94] Though increasingly overlooked following the turn of the 20th century, this origin was effectively championed by the famous writer Rudyard Kipling. Kipling’s letters make clear that he was well read not only in military history, but in the history of the musket itself.[95] Though he was obliged to sanitise it somewhat for younger readers, his poem ‘Brown Bess’, published in 1911, expands upon the meaning of the name and celebrates Bess as both burden and heroine, as well as a sort of *femme fatale*.[96] Kipling’s poem was widely read and quoted, but as an artistic work it lacked the supporting scholarship that might have put an end to this debate.[97]

Much more recently, Williams unequivocally placed the firearms term ‘Brown Bess’ in context alongside the other, older meaning of that name already discussed above.

> *‘The old military musket’ was nicknamed Brown Bess, and the soldier's relationship with it is as intimate as with a mistress.’*[98]

A soldier referring to his 'Brown Bess' was, on the one hand, disparaging the weapon as nothing particularly special. As a character in Kubrick's movie puts it, 'there are many like it, but this one is mine'. It was something not particularly attractive, that might be subject to rough handling, that would strike him hard for his trouble, and would prove to be a burden when on the march. Yet the name also acknowledges that, like a woman, he cannot live without 'her'. Like a real mistress or other camp follower (see Figure 4), 'she' would safeguard his life and that of his comrades, and provide emotional, if not sexual support. As Goldstein and Mowbray observed; '*...the nickname is obviously an affectionate one. Bess was a sturdy, dependable wench who felt good in your hands during desperate moments.*'[99] The name also reflects the absence of female company. When deprived of a woman, the soldier had only his 'Brown Bess' for comfort and quite literally lived and slept with 'her'. Travel author Robert Ker Porter advised in 1809 that:

> *'A good soldier should be ever on the alert: and, sleeping with his hand on his musquet, his wedded wife and dear brown Bess, be ready at a moment's call to spring upon his feet, and take her In his arms'.*[100]

Conclusions

'Brown Bess' as a nickname for a firearm was certainly in current and widespread military usage by 1763, superseding the related and apparently older term 'brown musket'. Given prior usage in other contexts and the illiteracy of the common soldier, a pre-existing military oral tradition is very likely. The sudden appearance of the term in print (1771) without any attempt at explanation certainly suggests some level of awareness even among the civilian population. Even those unfamiliar with this usage would have grasped the intended association of weapon and woman. 'Brown Bess' had been in common use for centuries to describe a low-status woman. By 1700 it had already made the leap to anthropomorphic nickname for animal, tool, or machine, especially 'anything loading or fatiguing'.[101] The stage was then set for Brown Bess the musket to make her entrance. Of the early sources, only a very few dictionary entries seek to explain these other, long-standing meanings. This is no doubt because readers in the 1760s and 70s would have understood intuitively why a similarly unremarkable weapon might be given such a name. By the 1780s 'Bess' had become part of popular culture and required neither context nor intuition to be understood. Yet by the 1830s, some were already muddling the origins of the name with invented, presumed, or otherwise false etymologies (browned barrels, 'Bess' as 'Busche' etc) that still confuse matters today. With the withdrawal of the last 'Brown Bess', the Pattern 1842 percussion musket, knowledge of its anthropomorphic and bawdy origins seems to have waned. Though Kipling's poem would later revive them, it would be in somewhat sanitised form for a young audience. Though arguably the ultimate expression of the meaning behind 'Brown Bess', as a piece of art it was not well placed to challenge false etymology. At the risk of introducing fresh speculation, it is tempting to wonder whether there might have been some reluctance to seriously discuss these origins. It is possible that alternative, culturally 'safe' explanations might have been offered as more palatable alternative origin stories for the well-to-do reader. However, it is more likely that this ignorance arose simply from the passage of time and the modern tendency to assume strictly practical reasoning in the naming of things. In fact, there was no detailed technical or historical origin to be uncovered. Fighting men had simply borrowed an existing nickname for an object that, like a 'wanton' woman, they perceived as something of an indispensable burden.

In terms of modern usage, it seems safe to say that 'Brown Bess' may be correctly applied to any British military smoothbore musket of at least 1730, right through to the late 1840s when the last of the India and New Land pattern muskets were still in use. This should extend beyond government usage to include the several patterns in use with the East India Company. Only with reference to rifled arms, notably the Pattern 1851 and 1853 rifled muskets in the 1850s, does the name cease to be appropriate and begins to fall out of use. Though the weapons themselves passed into obsolescence, 'Brown Bess' herself was elevated from the status of common musket and 'mistress' to join Britannia as a revered personification of British martial pre-eminence.

Notes

[1] C.R.L. Fletcher & R. Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 178-179.

[2] T. Brown, *The works of Mr. Thomas Brown, serious and comical: in prose and verse, with his remains in four volumes compleat, Vol. 4* (London: E. Midwinter, 1730), 217.

[3] Though the pattern is rarely specified, 1830s and 40s references to flintlock 'Brown Bess' must refer to one of these later patterns. See for example J. Connor, *The Australian Frontier Wars, 1788-1838* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 18 and R.S. Stewart, *American Military History – Vol. 1* (Washington: Center of Military History, 2005) [Electronic edition, Accessed 13.2.16], 24.

[4] R. Scurfield, 'British Military Smoothbore Firearms', *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research* 33 (1955), 70.

[5] Ibid, 70. Scurfield believed that the British soldier applied the name 'Brown' to the musket 'for her bright polished stock', and that 'he had picked up from the Hanoverians' the word 'Buss', corrupted as 'Bess' (more on this below). He offered no supporting evidence for his conclusions. However, he did make the important connection that is the thesis of this article between 'Bess' the gun, 'Bess' the woman, and the feminisation of objects; '...this nickname has just a hint of the musket as the soldier's mistress. "Your rifle's your best friend," the sergeants told recruits in 1914.'

[6] H.L. Blackmore, *British Military Firearms* (London: Studio Vista, 1964), 45.

[7] E. Goldstein & S. Mowbray, *The Brown Bess: An Identification Guide and Illustrated Study of Britain's Most Famous Musket* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, Inc., 2010), 4.

[8] H.L. Blackmore, *Firearms* (London: Studio Vista, 1964), 45.

[9] F. Grose, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 2nd Edition* (London: S. Hooper, 1788).

[10] Personal communication, February 19 2016.

[11] British Library MSS EurE284(14). Referenced in A. Pedley, John Grose (1744-1771): Correspondence relating to his Career in Bengal, 1763-1771, eBLJ 2010, Article 8, p.5. <http://www.bl.uk/eblj/2010articles/pdf/ebljarticle82010.pdf> [Accessed 17.2.16]

[12] The East India Company fielded its own patterns of firearms, comprehensively documented by David Harding in his 'Smallarms of the East India Company' (Foresight, 1997). Three separate patterns had been introduced by 1776, most famously the 'Windus' pattern that the British Board of Ordnance would base its own 'India Pattern' upon.

[13] *The Adventures of a Kidnapped Orphan* (London: M. Thrush, 1767), 49-50.

[14] 'LONDON, Jan. 2', The Connecticut Courant, Issue 328, Tuesday April 2 1771, 2.

[15] D. N. Hagist, Is the Term "Brown Bess" Appropriate for the Period of the American Revolution?, Web, 2002: <http://www.revwar75.com/library/hagist/brownbess.htm> [Accessed 13.2.16] (Originally published in *The Brigade Dispatch*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2, (Summer 1998), p. 19).

[16] 'Foreign & Domestic Intelligence', *The Oxford Magazine: Or, Universal Museum, Vol. 6* (London: S. Bladon, 1771), 35 [Accessed 14.2.16].

[17] 'Extract of a letter from a Cadet in the service of the East India Company, to his friend in Edinburgh, dated Camp at Belgram, 19th of October, 1776.', Morning Chronicle, London, July 27 1776.

[18] P. Phillips, *A Sentimental Diary, kept in an excursion to Little Hampton, near Arundel, and to Brighthelmstone, in Sussex* (London: J Ryall, 1778), 56.

[19] *The New Vocal Enchantress* (London: C. Stalker, 1788), 49. The air was originally sung by Louisa Fontenelle, the female lead in a musical comedy entitled 'The Highland Reel'. At this point in the story she is posing as a young boy. 'Knock about' in context likely refers to drill and other weapon handling.

[20] D.W. Bailey, *British Military Longarms, 1715-1865* (London: Arms & Armour, 1987), 15-16.

[21] S. Reid, *British Redcoat 1740-93* (Oxford: Osprey, 2012), 58.

[22] G.L. Carter (Ed.), *Guns in American Society: Vol. 2* (ABC-CLIO, 2002), 85.

[23] D.N. Hagist, Is the Term "Brown Bess" Appropriate for the Period of the American Revolution?, Web, 2002: <http://www.revwar75.com/library/hagist/brownbess.htm> [Accessed 13.2.16] (Originally published in *The Brigade Dispatch, Vol. XXVIII*, No. 2, (Summer 1998), 19). See also D.L. Hafner, "Brown Bess" – Musket Misconception, Web, 2001: <http://www.lincolnminutemen.org/brown-bess-musket-misconception/> [Accessed 3.3.16]. This conclusion may not be strictly correct. Most historical sources do avoid the indefinite article more common to modern usage i.e. 'a Brown Bess', or 'the Brown Bess musket'. However, as early as 1798 we find '***I tell you, Sir, I will carry a Brown Bess on my shoulder, with a youthful agility, to assist on that glorious occasion…***' from General J. Wilkinson, *Memoirs of My Own Times - Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1816), 603 - 604. This usage becomes far more common in the later 19th Century, and it may be that as fewer men were armed with 'Brown Bess' in the mid-19th Century, there was a shift from strict personification to the informal designation that is still used today.

[24] E. Goldstein & S. Mowbray, *The Brown Bess: An Identification Guide and Illustrated Study of Britain's Most Famous Musket* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, Inc., 2010), 4.

[25] C. Oman & P. Griffith (Ed.), *A History of the Peninsular War Vol. 9* (London: Greenhill, 1999), 293.

[26] G. Proctor (writing as H. Ravelin), *The Lucubrations of Humphrey Ravelin, Esq., Late Major in the ** regiment of infantry* (London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1823), 33. <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xw1gAAAAcAAJ> [Accessed 26.2.16]. Proctor was identified in C.F. Klince, *Some Anonymous Literature of the War of 1812, Ontario History, Vol. XLIX* (Ontario: Ontario Historical Society, 1957), 49-60.

[27] 'The old "brown bess" is now nearly acknowledged to be worthless. It is in fact little more than a handle for the bayonet…[British soldiers] would have equally carried all before them with pitch-forks.'

From a note in R. Montgomerie, *The Rose of Rostrevor: An Episode of the Boyne Water* (Dublin: Hodges, Smith & Co., 1856), 92.

[28] 'BROWN BESS AND THE MINIE RIFLE', The Illustrated London News, Vol. 17, 498.

[29] Many examples are referenced in this article, but for recent attention see 200 Objects of Waterloo: Brown Bess Musket, Web, 2015: <http://waterloo200.org/200-object/brown-bess-musket-bayonet/> [Accessed 7.4.16].

[30] R. Cusick, *Wellington's Rifles: The Origins, Development and Battles* (London: Pen & Sword, 2013), 2. See also the Waterloo 200 website, which repeats both this and the 'Busche' error: 200 Objects of Waterloo: Brown Bess Musket, Web, 2015: <http://waterloo200.org/200-object/brown-bess-musket-bayonet/> [Accessed 7.4.16]. Please note that this information was provided by a colleague at the Royal Armouries Museum before he was made aware of the content of this article.

[31] R.B. Prosser, 'Browning Musket Barrels', *Arms & Explosives*, 13.148 (London: 1 Arundel Street, 1905), 60. There is some disagreement on this point: 1815 is given in D.W. Bailey, *British Military Longarms, 1715-1865* (London: Arms & Armour, 1987), 87.

[32] H.L. Blackmore, *British Military Firearms* (London: Studio Vista, 1964), 157.

[33] 'Art. II. The Cabinet Cyclopaedia...Iron and Steel Manufactures', *The Monthly Review*, Vol. 2, (London: G. Henderson, 1833), 166.

[34] Ibid, 127.

[35] B.R.B. '"BROWN BESS", in *Notes and Queries*, Series 2, Vol. 5 (London: J.C. & J. Francis, 1858), 447. Web: <http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/content/s2-V/117/259.1.full.pdf+html?sid=042306b7-cc06-41c5-ba5b-5346627e1ff2> [Accessed 18.12.15]. See also R. H. Angier, *Firearm Blueing and Browning* (London: Stackpole Books, 1936), 43 & 62.

[36] For example, S. Bull, *Encyclopedia of Military Technology and Innovation* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 49.

[37] Ibid, 49.

[38] For example R. Payne-Gallwey, *The Crossbow* (London: Longmans, 1903), 26 and J-R Clergeau, Vainqueur Du Waterloo Le Brown Bess, Gazette Des Armes N°38, May 1976, 31.

[39] A subject for a different article. However, for a somewhat outdated discussion of these words, see A.S. Palmer, *Folk Etymology* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1882), 32. E-book edition: <https://archive.org/details/cu31924027422405> [Accessed 10.4.2016].

[40] BBC, 'Sword, Musket & Machine Gun', Series 1 Episode 3 'Rapid Fire' (BBC4, 2017).

[41] J. Mortimer, Hildebrand, Or, *The Days of Queen Elizabeth: An Historical Romance*, Vol. 3 (London: Henry Richards, 1844), 69.

[42] G. Rottman, *The Big Book of Gun Trivia* (Oxford: Osprey, E-Book edition, 2013). Also referenced (and dismissed) in the BBC4 documentary mentioned above.

[43] B.R.B. '"BROWN BESS" AS APPLIED TO A MUSKET', in *Notes and Queries*, Series 10, Vol. 5 (London: J.C. & J. Francis, 1906), 414.

[44] S. Wilson, *The Means Of Naming: A Social History* (E-Book edition: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 311.

[45] G.A. Kleparski (edited by C. Kay & J.J. Smith), *Categorization in the History of English* (London: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 79 - 82.

[46] D. MacKinnon, *'Poor senseless Bess, clothed in her rags and folly': Early modern women, madness and song in seventeenth-century England, Parergon,* Vol. 18, No. 3 (Crawley: University of Western Australia, 2001), 119-151.

[47] As H.F. Reddall put it: 'NOTE - 'Bess o' Bedlam. A nickname among the common people for a female maniac. The corresponding term for a male lunatic is Tom o' Bedlam. Bess and Tom are common English names, while Bedlam is a comprehensive term for all mad-houses.' From H.F. Reddall, 'Fact, Fancy, Or Fable' (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1889), 70. <https://archive.org/details/cu31924073177689> [Accessed 25.2.16].

[48] G.A. Kleparski (edited by C. Kay & J.J. Smith), *Categorization in the History of English* (London: John Benjamins Publishing, 2004), 79 - 82.

[49] E. Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: John Murray, 1921), 208.

[50] E.R. Anderson, *Folk-taxonomies in Early English* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 195-196.

[51] See H.P. Tremaine, *Beowulf's 'Ecg Brun' and Other Rusty Relics, Philological Quarterly*, Issue 48 (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1969), 145-50.

[52] *'The Gentleman's Magazine'*, Vol. 82 (London: John Nichols, 1797), 1022. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081674271;view=1up;seq=522> [Accessed 24.2.16].

[53] 'An Essay on the most effectual way to recruit the Army, and render it more serviceable, by preventing desertion' By a Lover of his Country and the Army, (London: Benjamin Barker & Charles King, 1707), 6. NB that this anonymous work is sometimes attributed to Daniel Defoe. Another instance is *'And one Cause (and that none of the least) of the Scarcity of Men, I think , the Gentlemen in Scarlet are only answerable for, eviz. Their admitting none to carry a brown Musquet , except he be full five Foot and six Inches high.'* Ibid, 7.

[54] E. Ward. *'Mars stript of his armour, or, The army displayed in all its true colours'* (London: H. Serjeant, 1709), 9. <https://archive.org/stream/marsstriptofhisa00warduoft#page/10> [Accessed 2.3.16]. Other references include: *'...if they had seen him mount the Guard in Tangier, with a brown Musket on his Shoulder, and never a Souse in his Pocket'* (p.25), and just as colourfully: *'He can draw in a poor Tradesman to carry a brown Musket, as cleverly as a Bawd can entice a young Damsel to carry his commanding Officer'* (67).

[55] S. Centlivre, *The Busie Body* (Norwich: Robert Davy, Fifth Edition, 1746), 9.

[56] *The Connoisseur*, Vol. 1, August 29 1754 (London: R. Baldwin, 1754), 165. <http://ota.ox.ac.uk/text/5407.html> [Accessed 2.3.16].

[57] This contrast was later spelled out by a Captain Hart of the Bombay Native Infantry:
'In the Punjabee districts every kind of European weapon, from the Joseph Manton of the officer to the Brown Bess of the soldier, found a ready sale; the latter, for the use of their disciplined levies, were particularly acceptable.' Hart, 'Reminiscences of Upper Sinde', *The United Service Magazine*, Vol. 43, (London: W. Clowes, 1843), 50.

[58] S. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, Vol.1 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, 1805). For a later assertion of the same claim, see 'New Editions of Old Ballads', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 203 (London: John Henry & James Parker, 1857) 266.

[59] F. Grose, *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue, 2nd Edition* (London: S. Hooper, 1788).

[60] T. Gordon, 'Of Female Disguises', in *'The Humourist: Being Essays Upon Several Subjects'* (London: W. Boreham, 1720), 96.

[61] G. Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, Vol. 1 A-F (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 103. Among the older cites are: 'Misagonus (c.1570; Bond) II.iv.75, a supposed 'leman', a 'smurkinge wench', is described as *'a fare mayde marion she is none of these coy dames she is as good as brown bessye'* and '...a West-Country jigg (C17; Euing 385) describes high jinks: *'Then up with ALEY, ALEY, up with BESS so Brown; In came wanton WILLY, and tumbl'd them upside down.'*

[62] Ibid, 2001, 103.

[63] A. Cowper, *Poems and Translations by the Author of Process and Physic* (London: W. Sandby, 1769), 58.

[64] Clearly 'Brown Bess' still had her charms for the well-to-do. The poem appears to advocate that young men should have sexual relationships within and without their own social class.

[65] R.S. Thomas, 'Isle of Wight County Wills', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1899), 247. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4242159> [Accessed 4.3.16]. An 1857 book of stories gives us: *'What fun it was to follow them through the country roads, — Old Brindle, and Brown Bess, and Betty Whiteface!'*. See S.L. Arnold & C.B. Gilbert, *Stepping stones to literature: A Second Reader* (New York, Boston, Chicago: Silver, Burdett & Company, 1857), 63 <https://archive.org/stream/steppingstonesto6gilbgoog/steppingstonesto6gilbgoog_djvu.txt> [Accessed 4.3.16].

[66] T.J. Hewlett, *Peter Priggins* (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), 99.

[67] For example the Chester Courant, Tuesday 11 September 1804, 2.

[68] *'"Bring Bess (& Glym)" - bring the instrument to force the door (and a lamp)',* from B.E. Gent, *A new dictionary of the terms ancient and modern of the canting crew* (London: W. Hawes, B. Gilbourne & W. Davis, 1699), which also references the related 'Betty, c.a small Engin to force open the Doors of Houses'.

[69] Personal Communication, Anonymous, July 23 2015.

[70] See A. Liberman, *Word Origins...And How We Know Them: Etymology for Everyone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 10, especially 109-112. Also A. La France, Adrienne, 'Why People Name Their Machines', *The Atlantic* (June 24 2014) Web: <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/06/why-people-give-human-names-to-machines/373219/> [Accessed 7.3.16].

[71] Ibid. A. Liberman, *Word Origins...And How We Know Them: Etymology for Everyone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 111.

[72] For example 'Black Eyed Susan', a nickname for a revolver in 19th Century Texas. J.S. Farmer, *Slang and Its Analogues Past and Present*, Vol. 1 (London: A.P. Watt, 1890), 212.

[73] W. Carr, *The Dialect of Craven: In the West-Riding of the County of York*, Vol.1 (London: William Crofts, 1828), 36.

[74] D. Crockett, *Life of Col. David Crockett* (Philadelphia: G.G. Evans, 1859), 359.

[75] Bentley's Miscellany, American Edition, Vol. 8 (New York: Jemima M. Mason, 1841), 310.

[76] See 'Brown Bess' in *Charms of melody, or, Siren medley*, Numbers 1-100 (Dublin: No.10 Bedford Row, 1796), 157. <http://digital.nls.uk/91431011> [Accessed 24.2.16], and 'Brown Bess' in Q. Queerum, *Ashburner's new Vocal Repository* (Ulverston: George Ashburner, 1807), 19.

[77] W.F. Sullivan, The Old Soldier, Or, Poor Brown Bess, The Flights of Fancy (1792), 41.

[78] M. Muscadine, 'On Military Motions', in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, Vol. 102, (1798), 405 - 407.

[79] T. Moore, *Tom Crib's Memorial to Congress* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1819), 4. The full verse reads: *'Let us now hope that wars and rumbustions shall cease;*
That soldiers and guns, like " the Dev'l and his works,"
Will henceforward be left to Jews, Negers, and Turks ;
And Brown Bess shall soon, like Miss Tabitha Fusty,
For want of a spark to go off with, grow rusty,'

[80] J. Hall, *The Soldier's Bride and Other Tales* (Philadelphia: A. Waldie, 1833), 341.

[81] Note that the famous 20th century nickname for the British soldier is far older than many suppose, first appearing in print in 1743. See J. Laffin, *Tommy Atkins: The Story of the English Soldier* (The History Press Ltd., 2003), 7.

[82] 'The First of September, Or, The City Sportsman' in *Yorick's Budget, Or, Repository of Wit, Humour, and Sentiment* (London: Vernor, Hood & Sharpe, 1810), 119-120.

[83] J. Atkinson, 'Occasional Epilogue, Spoken by Mrs Creswell, of the Theatre Royal of Dublin, in the Character of Don Carlos, in the Duenna', in *The Lady's Magazine Or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex: Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement*, Vol. 30 (London: 1799), 279. NB The Duenna was a comic opera first performed in 1775.

[84] T. Seccombe, 'Shipp, John', in S. Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 52 (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1897), 115 - 116.

[85] J. Shipp, *The Military Bijou; Or The Contents of a Soldier's Knapsack: Being the Gleanings of Thirty-three Years' Active Service*, Vol. 1 (London: Whittaker, Treacher & Co, 1831), 58 - 59.

[86] 'Manual Exercises', Liverpool Mercury, Friday 20 April 1821, 6.

[87] First recorded in 1858, but likely older. See B.R.B. '"BROWN BESS", *Notes and Queries*, Series 2, Vol. 5, (London: J.C. & J. Francis, 1858), 447. Web: <http://nq.oxfordjournals.org/content/s2-V/126/447-h.full.pdf+html?sid=042306b7-cc06-41c5-ba5b-5346627e1ff2>

[88] S. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 20.

[89] A. Barrere & C.G. Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant*, Vol. 1 (London: Ballatyne Press, 1889), 184.

[90] M. Pegler, *Soldier's Songs and Slang of the Great War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 122. A similar soldier's nickname of 'Rosalie', after a popular civilian song of the time, has also been alleged for the rifle's long socket bayonet. However, an anonymous soldier known as 'Le Poilu' denied this in 1915. The difference in tone between the two names is certainly evident; one wearily ironic, the other bloodthirsty and warlike. See L.V. Smith, S. Audoin-Rouzeau, & A. Becker, *France and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 105.

[91] SPORTS – What To Do In A Jam, (November 2015), Web: <http://soldiersystems.net/2015/12/31/sports-what-to-do-when-youre-in-a-jam/> [Accessed 7.2.15].

[92] 'The Gentleman's Magazine', Vol. 82 (London: John Nichols, 1797), 1022. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433081674271;view=1up;seq=522> [Accessed 24.2.16].

[93] *'So, young fellow, you have come all the way from Banbury to pick up a young wife, and have got married to Brown Bess for your pains.'* See C. White, *The married unmarried, by the author of 'Almack's revisited*, Vol.1 (London: Saunders & Otley, 1837), 258.

[94] A. Barrere & C.G. Leland, *A Dictionary of Slang, Jargon & Cant*, Vol. 1 (London: Ballatyne Press, 1889), 184. Intriguingly, ‘Brown Bess’ was also noted as rhyming slang for ‘yes’. No confirmation of this claim has been found by the author.

[95] Kipling wrote to his father on January 4 1911: *‘I have not been altogether idle for I’ve done an additional set of verses for my history book – a metrical version of the life, death and adventures of the old Tower musket which from 1710 to 1835 or 40 was the arm of England and won for us all the main blocks of Empire. Naturally the refrain is “Brown Bess.”’* P. Keating, ‘"Brown Bess" (The Army Musket – 1700-1815)’. The Kipling Society, Web, 2006: <http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/rg_brownbess1.htm> [Accessed 7.2.16].

[96] C.R.L. Fletcher & R. Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911), 178–179. See for example the excerpt at the beginning of this article.

[97] A somewhat earlier retrospective ode is to be found in ‘Rhymes for the Ranks (Soldier’s Songs & Sonnets)’, edited by Richard Chandler and published in 1875 (T. Bosworth, London), 37 - 38, E-book edition: <https://archive.org/stream/cu31924013461912/cu31924013461912_djvu.txt>.
This contained the lines*: ‘Poor Brown Bess! somehow, I confess/I’ve a kind of sneaking weakness/For Old Brown Bess.’* ‘Bess’ also appears elsewhere in this volume, in a verse of the poem ‘The Soldier’s Dream’ (pages 92-94).

[98] G. Williams, A *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, Vol. 1 A-F (London: Athlone Press, 2001), 103.

[99] E. Goldstein & S. Mowbray, *The Brown Bess: An Identification Guide and Illustrated Study of Britain's Most Famous Musket* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, Inc., 2010), 4.

[100] R.K. Porter, *Travelling Sketches in Russia and Sweden: During the Years 1805, 1806, 1807, 1808* (Philadelphia: Hopkins & Earle, 1809), 216–7. E-book edition: <https://archive.org/details/travellingsketcooportgoog> [Accessed 13.2.16].

[101] Ibid, 1022.

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