

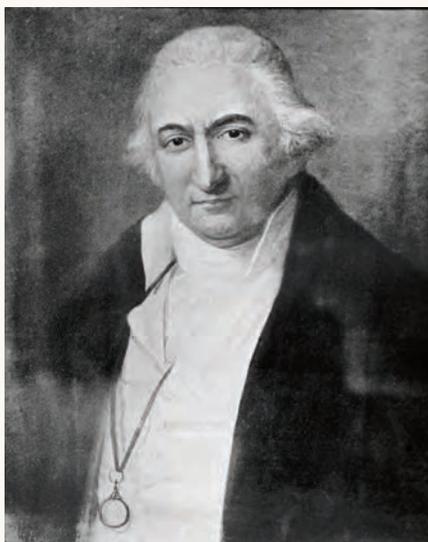
THE GALTON FAMILY DURING THE NAPOLEONIC WARS

Jenny Uglow

Many of the guns used by British troops during the Napoleonic Wars were manufactured in Birmingham by the Galton family. The Galtons grew wealthy from the gun trade, but as the war with France intensified, their commercial prosperity set them on a collision course with the pacifist Quaker Society to which the family belonged.

When William Pitt declared war on France on a rainy night in February 1793, one of the first things the government needed was a good supply of guns. Over the next twenty-two years, until the final relief of Waterloo, these were supplied by Birmingham makers, including three generations of the Galton family, grandfather, father and son – Samuel, Samuel and Samuel.

The Galtons' firm was in Steelhouse Lane, near John Kettle's cementation furnaces, in an area where the back gardens of elegant Georgian houses had now become a maze of workshops. Samuel Galton senior (1720-1799) had entered the gun trade in the 1750s, making barrels and locks in the company run by his father-in-law, James Farmer. When Farmer's firm nearly crashed after the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, Galton bought him out, taking on a stream of government contracts. His son, Samuel Galton junior (1753-1832) – Samuel John to his family – joined the company at seventeen and when he was twenty-one his father put £10,000 into his business account and made him manager at Steelhouse Lane. A year later he was a partner and by the 1780s he had quadrupled his investment, and married



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Samuel Galton junior contributed to Birmingham's economic success and the Lunar Society's scientific knowledge, but his gunmaking business brought him into conflict with his fellow Quakers. *Samuel Galton, The Younger (1753-1832)*. From *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, Vol. I, 1914, Karl Pearson.

the redoubtable Lucy, from a Scottish branch of the Barclay family. They went on to have five sons, Samuel Tertius (1783-1844), Theodore, Hubert, Ewen Cameron – named after Lucy's relative, a flamboyant highland chieftain – and the nature-loving John Howard, and three daughters Mary Anne, Sophia and Adele, growing up in a household of noise, music and books, in town in winter and on their estate at Great Barr in summer.

Samuel junior was bulky and serious, with heavy brows and a piercing glance. His daughter, Mary Anne Schimmelpenninck, remembered how he spent the mornings in business in Birmingham, 'but from about

one o'clock, when he usually returned, he was chiefly engaged at home in intellectual pursuits; and of these he had an endless variety'. A great supporter of Joseph Priestley and a friend of Matthew Boulton and James Watt, he was a keen member of the Lunar Society, writing on optics, colour, canals and birds, and building up a fine library and collection of scientific instruments.

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The direct gaze of the 'redoubtable' Lucy Galton, Samuel junior's wife, a member of the Scottish branch of the Barclay family.
Mrs Samuel Galton (Lucy Barclay) (1757-1815).
From *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, Vol. 1, 1914, Karl Pearson.

Conflict with the Quakers

In 1793 when the first war orders arrived, the gunsmiths' district rattled with business, making muskets, carbines and pistols, and sending gun barrels and locks to London to be 'set up' at the Tower. The Galtons worked on larger and larger orders, including an unusual request for 5,100 expensive 'French pattern' muskets. In the crisis, gunmakers were asked to send in anything they could make, and they flooded the Tower with cheap guns of all shapes and sizes, until the Ordnance adopted the East India Company's standard firearm, a version of the 'Brown Bess' muzzle-loading flintlock known as the India pattern, cajoling the Birmingham makers to make these by giving them a higher payment for longer credit.

Galton was raking in money, but his gunmaking put him in a difficult position. He and Lucy belonged to old Quaker families, related to the Darbys, Gurneys, Lloyds and other powerful clans - and the

Quakers were pacifists. Before the war, at the Yearly Meeting in 1790 the Birmingham Meeting had issued a firm statement:

If any be concerned in fabricating, or selling Instruments of War, let them be treated with in love; and if by this unreclaimed, let them be further dealt with as those we cannot own. And we intreat that when warlike preparations are making, Friends be watchful lest any be drawn into loans, arming, or letting out their Ships, or Vessels, or otherwise promoting the destruction of the human Species.

In 1795, accused of 'fabricating, and selling Instruments of War', the Galtons, father and son, were formally investigated by the Meeting and threatened with 'disownment'. Furious, Samuel junior pointed out that the family had made guns for seventy years without any rebuke. This did not necessarily imply an approval of war: indeed guns were vital for defence and for keeping the peace. He would give no pledge about abandoning the business, but would, he said, 'reserve to myself, a perfect Independence on that head'.

But the difficulty went further. The Galtons not only sold guns to the army, but to Africa traders, to exchange for slaves. This was anathema to the Quakers, who were leaders of the anti-slavery movement. Indeed, the Galton family themselves embraced the cause. The great campaigner Thomas Clarkson often visited Duddeston, the home of Samuel Galton senior. Of these visits to her grandfather, Mary Anne remembered:

In the evenings we often read pamphlets on the subject, or examined in detail the prints of slave ships and slave treatment, and both my cousins and I resolved to leave off sugar, as the only produce of slave labour within our province to discontinue.

When this issue was raised, Samuel junior retorted that as far as his guns went, he could not be held responsible for their abuse:

Is the Farmer who sows Barley, - the Brewer who makes it into Beverage, - the Merchant who imports Rum, or the Distiller who makes Spirits; - are they responsible for the Intemperance, the Disease, the Vice, and Misery, which may ensue from their Abuse? Why should he be held more responsible than those who traded in tobacco, rum, sugar, rice and cotton?

The words carried a sting, as many Quakers were connected to the West India trades. But on 10 August 1796, Galton was disowned by the Society of Friends. Although Samuel Galton senior now retired at the age of 76, Samuel John continued defiantly.

Profiting from war

The war profits grew, reaching £139,000 in 1799 (around £7 million today). During the short-lived Peace of Amiens of 1802-1803, Galton became an arms supplier to the East India Company, thanks to Matthew Boulton's contacts, but he was happy to see war come again. When government

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officials asked Boulton what the weekly output of muskets and bayonets might be if every possible man in Birmingham was pressed into making them, Galton helped him work out an estimate. The gunmakers increased production to fourteen thousand muskets a week and the Ordnance agreed new terms and prices. As well as the faithful India pattern muskets Galton now had to cope with making the new rifles, recently adopted by the army: in 1806, when a huge order came in, Galtons sent 1,597 rifles, plus 15,106 rifle barrels and 11,980 locks, to be set up in London.

The firm increased investment and joined other gunmakers in a contractors' cartel, the Committee of the Manufacturers of Arms and Materials for Arms, which met at the Stork Hotel, Old Square, to set prices, deal with negotiations with the Ordnance, and amend the apprenticeship rules so that more men could be trained in each workshop. But by now Samuel Galton junior had had enough.

At fifty, he was a wealthy man, making money from canal shares, rents and investments in Welsh copper smelting as well as guns. In 1804 he set up as a banker, handing the gunmaking over to his eldest son, Samuel Tertius – the third Samuel. Three years later Tertius married Violetta, the lively daughter of his father's old Lunar Society friend, Erasmus Darwin: their youngest son Francis would become a well-known eugenicist – though not as famous as his cousin, Charles Darwin.

A life of leisure

The Galtons were now leisured and wealthy, going to Bath for their health and to London to shop, see exhibitions and catch the latest plays. While Mary Anne remained deeply religious, her sisters Adele and Sophia enjoyed gossip and fashions. The whole family followed the war news eagerly – after Trafalgar the sons wrote splendid gossip in mock naval language. They suffered their own tragedy in the death of Tertius's brother Theodore from fever in 1810, on his way home from a tour of Spain, Turkey and Greece, in defiance of the war, with his brother-in-law Sacheverel Darwin. 'They mean to pay their respects to the Knights at



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Samuel Tertius Galton, eldest son of Samuel junior and Lucy, wound up the gunmaking business after Waterloo, ending the dilemmas the business could bring.

Malta – & to Mt Aetna in Sicily. But a little more formidable mountain is, I fear, in the way – it is Bonaparte!' wrote his mother Lucy. But the Galtons also saw how people's lives were troubled by wartime hunger, trade restrictions and industrial unrest. And by 1812, although muskets by the thousand were being shipped to Wellington's armies in the Iberian Peninsula, Tertius began to work for peace. With fellow manufacturer Joseph Webster, he formed a committee to promote a peace petition and correspond with the Quakers in other towns. War, these petitions pointed out, was destructive of human happiness and all the best interests of mankind, 'the crime of corrupt humanity'.

In 1815, after Waterloo, Tertius was among the men who took addresses from Birmingham to congratulate the Prince Regent on the restoration of peace, and when the wartime orders ceased, he gave up gunmaking altogether. Ten years later, after the financial crisis of 1825, Tertius slowly wound up the Galton bank, finally closing it in 1831. Over the past decades, the Galton family had played a central part in the great story of Birmingham's growth, illustrating both the riches, and the dilemmas, that gunmaking could bring.

Jenny Uglov's latest book is *In These Times: Living in Britain through Napoleon's Wars, 1793-1815* (Faber & Faber, 2014). She is a biographer and historian, author of *The Lunar Men: The Friends who Made the Future* (Faber & Faber, 2003).

Further reading:

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The Galton archives. Letters from four generations of the Galton family, from 1741-1882, are held in Archives & Heritage at the The Library of Birmingham, MS 3101/C/D.

Revolutionary Players at www.revolutionaryplayers.org.uk includes much information on Samuel Galton junior and his work, interests and connections.