

Henry Shrapnel



Henry Shrapnel was born on 3 June 1761 in Bradford on Avon he was an army officer serving with The Royal Artillery and was the inventor of the Shrapnel Shell which was still being manufactured up until the end of the First World War and much used during the Peninsular War and also at Waterloo.

It is believed that in 1784, while a lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, he perfected, with his own resources, an invention of what he called "spherical case" ammunition: a hollow cannon ball filled with shot which burst in mid-air. This device was for use as an anti-personnel weapon. When it was finally adopted by the British Army in 1803, it immediately acquired the inventor's

name: the shrapnel shell. (It has lent the term "shrapnel" to fragmentation from artillery shells and fragmentation in general ever since, long after it was replaced by high explosive rounds.)

Shrapnel served in Flanders where he was wounded in 1793 and was promoted to Major on 1 November 1803 after eight years as Captain. After his inventions' success in battle on 30 April 1804, Shrapnel was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on 20 July 1804, less than nine weeks later.

In recognition of Shrapnel's contribution, the British Government in 1814 awarded him £1200 a year for life. He was appointed to the office of Colonel-Commandant, Royal Artillery, on 6 March 1827. He rose to the rank of Lieutenant-General on 10 January 1837.

A patent was lodged on September 6, 1834. When as a Major-General of Royal Artillery whilst resident of Salisbury for "Fire-arms and ammunition."



The Shrapnel family seem to have lived at Midway House, Lower Westwood, near Bradford, (see above image) the name of " Mr. Zechariah Shrapnell" appearing on Andrews and Dury's map of 1773 in connection with Midway House.

General Shrapnel died March 18, 1842, and was buried in the family vault in the chancel of Bradford Church. An obituary appeared in Gentleman Magazine (3rd Series XVIII, 95)

His son, Henry Needham Scrope Shrapnel, presented a petition to the House of Commons in 1869, praying for some further reward in respect of his father's invention. The petition was printed as a pamphlet at Salisbury, where the petitioner was then living.