

## Royal Navy bayonet belt frogs

If you're set on acquiring examples of regulation pattern bayonet belt frogs as issued to the Royal Navy, you're in for a real hunt.

Whilst some later patterns are common enough, early leather frogs issued in the Senior Service present both a challenge to discover and to identify. Fortunately Anthony Carter's seminal reference work, *'Bayonet Belt Frogs'*, offers enough clues to be able to identify patterns from the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Following its initial issue, four styles of Sea Service leather belt frog evolved. Ultimately designated the Mk. I through to the Mk. IV, each was an improvement over the other, but all remained in service until their natural life played out.

First issued to carry cutlass swords or the P1859 and P1871 Cutlass bayonets, the later Marks were intended only for Martini Henry sword bayonets, and finally the P1888 short sword bayonets.



Drill with Martini Henry cutlass bayonets

Viewing the images below and following the references in *'Bayonet Belt Frogs'* (which has repaid my modest investment in the book many times over), it is easy to see the progression of changes and improvements made to the original Naval Leather Belt Frog.

### Royal Navy - Leather Belt Frogs



Mk. I



Mk. II



Mk. III



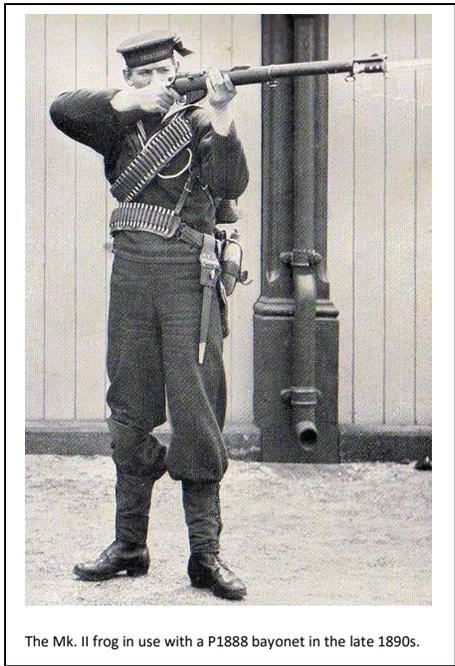
Mk. IV



Quite when the Navy made the transition from carrying a bayonet in a cross belt to a sliding waist belt frog is not clear. A sliding frog is visible in the Maclise painting 'The Death of Nelson', although their use probably goes back much further. The first official mention of a frog appears in W.O. Circular 907 dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1865 which has a Sea Service section relating to the RN. Within the listing is *Frogs, sliding, for waist belts, brown leather, 7 ¼d. each*. No Mark was assigned as it was the only frog then on issue. It was subsequent to the introduction of the Mk. II that it became the de facto Mk. I. The illustrated Mk. I has a cartouche impressed into the leather on the back, makers name BRYAN & Co C&M and a date. Unfortunately, it is so worn that it's hard to be sure of the date. However, this is the same frog illustrated in 'Bayonet Belt Frogs', #57. Author Anthony Carter deciphered it as 1860.



Designed for carrying a cutlass, the Mk. I was totally inadequate in accommodating the bowl guard.



The Mk. II frog in use with a P1888 bayonet in the late 1890s.

Designated *Frog, leather, brown, sea service*, the Mk. II was an attempt at improvement by merely strengthening the belt loop, not enlarging the whole frog. Using 'Bayonet Belt Frogs' again as reference, Carter writes "LoC 3969 illustrated and described the Mk. II frog stating that three rivets secure the eye" (belt loop), whereas on the Mk. I it was stitched. The LoC also states that the Mk. I frog be kept in service until used up and be designated as a cutlass frog.

No trace of maker or date on the Mk. II; however there is a clear government ownership WD surmounted by a broad arrow impressed in the back of the loop.

Approved for service 16 June 1888 (LoC 5540), the Mk. III was yet another upgrade attempt. The use of stitching in the body of the two previous Marks was abandoned. Rivets were used throughout, as stitching deteriorated in salt atmosphere. Five rivets now secured the loop with an additional three rivets used to hold each side of the body. The example illustrated is impressed on the back of the body with makers name BRYAN BROs. C&M and the date 1889.



The Mk. IV is the final in this series of Naval Accoutrements Belt Frogs. For improved strength the face and rear of the body and belt loop were now

fabricated out of one piece of leather. Rivets were still the preferred means of securing the body and belt loop, but the whole frog was increased in size, the more easily to accommodate the Martini Henry sword bayonet scabbard.



The example illustrated is impressed on the back of the body with the maker's name C & W ALMOND C&M and the date 1897.

This post card image shows matelots exercising with Long Lee Enfield rifles and P1888 bayonets. The frogs are the Mk. IV.



A Royal Navy philosophy of the times appears to be "kept in service until used up". Thus it's not surprising to note different patterns of frogs overlapping in use.

The P1901 Naval Accoutrements Belt Frog had a good lifespan. Originally intended for a cutlass, or P1888 bayonet, their usefulness was extended to the Ross and P1907 bayonet.

The Ross bayonet example to the left came from a vendor in Scotland.



A second pattern Ross bayonet with British modified scabbard and P1901 Naval Accoutrements Belt Frog

A P1907 bayonet for the SMLE with a P1901 Naval Accoutrements Belt Frog



1940 – a Rating presents arms. Ross Mk.III rifle, Mk.II bayonet, scabbard and P1901 frog.

The British Home Fleet was based at Scapa Flow in Scotland during the Great War and, as the RN were issued with Ross rifles, it would seem reasonable to conclude that this bayonet and frog have always been together.

The frog with the Ross bayonet was manufactured by Hepburn, Gale & Ross Ltd. and is dated 1904. The frog with the SMLE bayonet was made by T. Thompson & Son, and is dated 1917. Only one frog is impressed with RN ownership mark 'N'.

The use of the ownership mark by the Royal Navy was applied to all arms and equipment where practical.



Following rapidly on the heels of the Pattern 1901 belt frog came the Pattern 1903 Naval Mk. II and Mk. III Scabbard with integral belt frog.

These formed part of a group of scabbards with permanently attached belt frogs intended primarily for Land troops issued with the P1903 Bandolier Equipment.

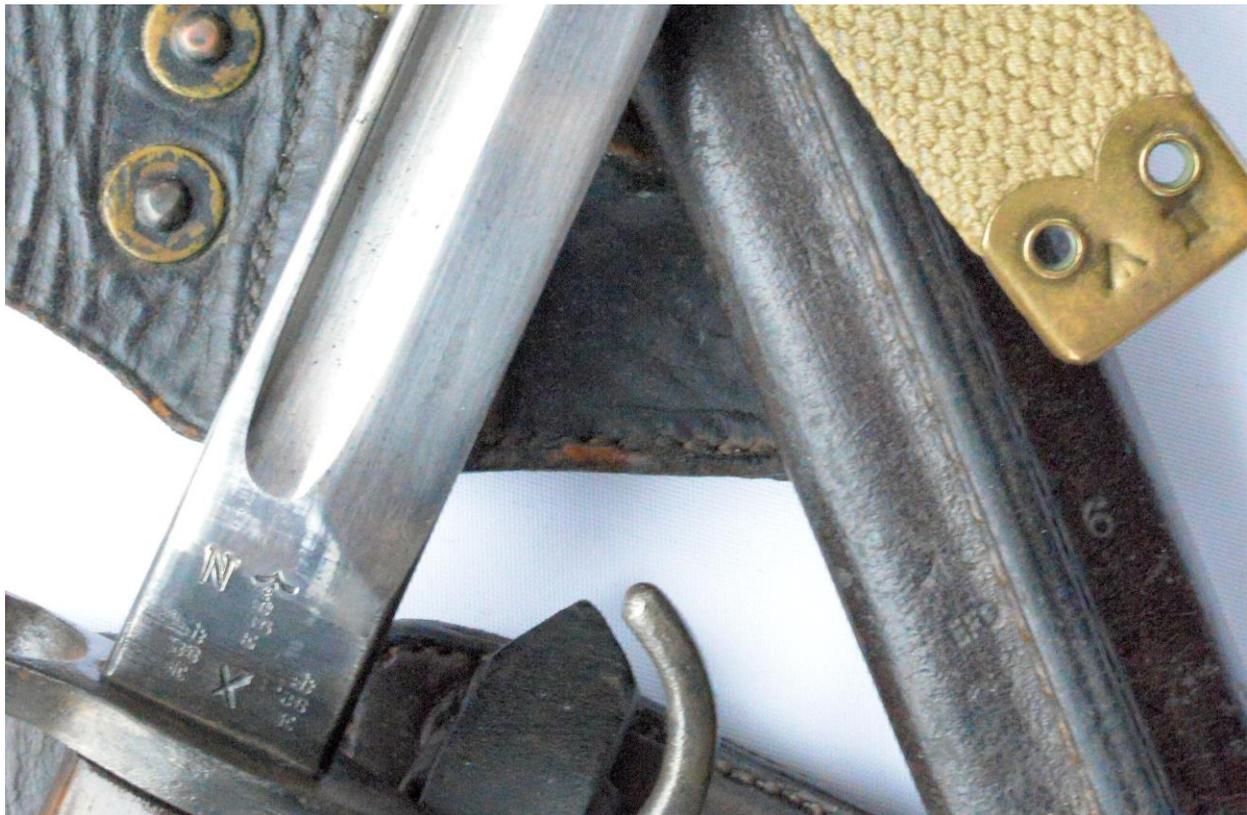


The frog of the Mk. II is secured to the scabbard with rivets. The Mk. III frog is stitched to the scabbard. Both scabbard bodies are impressed with RN ownership marks.

The only bayonets I've encountered in these scabbards are versions of the P1888, although fair to

assume P1903 bayonets were also issued with them. The pommel of each of these P1888 bayonets is stamped 'N'.

By 1919 the Royal Navy succumbed to uniformity. A decision had been taken to re-equip the Fleet with Web Equipment Pattern 1908 for those with rifles and W.E. Pattern 1919 for those armed with pistols.



Ownership by the Royal Navy continued to be identified by impressing steel, leather and brass with 'N' on the P1907 bayonet, scabbard and P1908 W.E. frog. A Broad Arrow was supposed to accompany the 'N'.



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