

THE NUMISMATIC SIDE OF THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING

by Steve Feller

During 1899 the Boers (fierce people of European descent in South Africa) and the British forces in the region prepared for war for a second round. On October 13, 1899 the town of Mafeking in the Transvaal Republic was besieged by the Boer forces. This siege lasted a long 217 days. About 2000 British troops under the command of Colonel Baden-Powell (known by his troops as BP) defended the town until it was, at last, relieved. This war has been called the last of the gentleman's war but it was far from that rather it was a hard and brutal affair. Significantly, the siege of Mafeking has a rich numismatic history.



Map of the Boer War in South Africa. Note the site of the Siege of Mafeking in the northeast part of the region.

By January 1900 coin was scarce and siege paper currency started to be issued in Mafeking. It was initially printed by Townshend and son in Mafeking and the emissions were of three distinct types: The lowest set of denominations of one-, two-, and three-shillings, the ten-shilling note, and the one-pound (or twenty-shillings) note. The one, two, and three shilling notes were issued January and February 1900 while the ten-shilling and one-pound notes were issued in March, 1900. One- and two-shilling notes were printed but not used in March.

Full details are given in John Ineson's marvelous book, *Paper Currency of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* and are briefly summarized here:

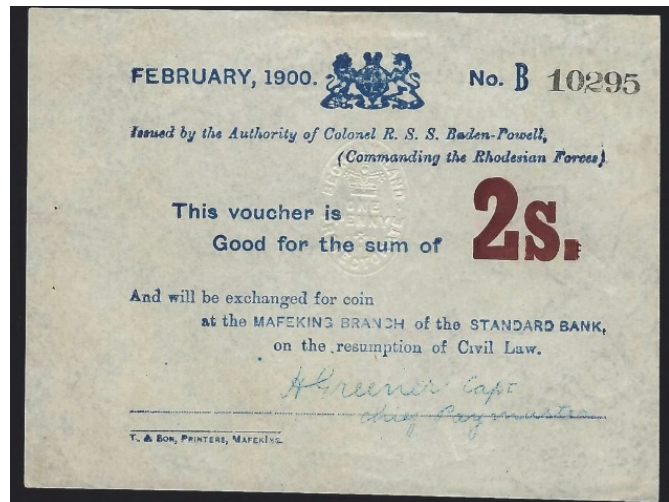
The number of notes issued were:

One-, two-, and three-shilling notes:	13,493
Ten-shilling notes:	7,000
One-pound notes:	683
Total number of notes printed:	21,176

The notes are scarce but obtainable from reputable dealers such as Colin Narbeth. Many varieties exist as well. The notes sell today from hundreds to thousands of dollars each.



One-shilling Mafeking Siege note, January 1900.



Two-shilling Mafeking Siege note, February 1900 (Colin Narbeth).



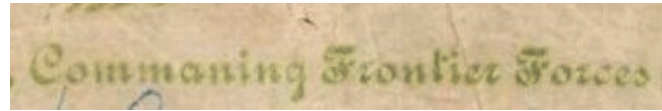
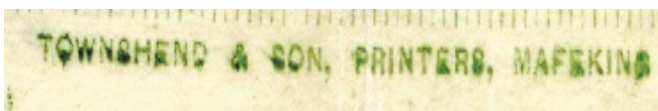
Three-shillings Mafeking Siege note,
January 1900



Ten-shilling Mafeking Siege note, March 1900.
Note printer name at bottom.



Error 10-shilling note. Note Commaning not Commanding



However, the one-pound note, the most decorous and desirable of the notes, went through a rather laborious and curious process of manufacture. The notes are like miniature blue prints. The process was described by one of the signers of the notes, Captain Herbert Greener. His diary has been published and provides a fabulous description of the printing of the notes. He is quoted in *Inside Mafeking "A Monument to British Pluck" The Diary of Herbert Greener*:

"In February (1900) the gold began to run short so we discussed the issue of a £1 note. I suggested something more elaborate than the small notes and BP (Baden-Powell) drew a design on wood which was cut out by G. Riesle, who had some experience in the making of in the making of wood blocks. It depicted two men at either side, one firing a machine gun and the other a 7 pounder, with a shell exploding between them, and above, in the smoke of the explosion, were the words 'One Pound'."

"BP was not satisfied with the result so drew another design, this time on paper. It was a picture, more suitable for an engraving than a wood block that Riesle could produce. In the centre was the 'Wolf' (the mortar made by the railway workmen); beside it stood a trooper of the Protectorate Regiment clasping his rifle with bayonet fixed; below him, as though under his protection, knelt a woman with a child in her arms; on the right a troop of the BBP shooting over the top of his rocky position at Cannon Kopje; on the left one of the Town Guard, with rifle in hand behind his sandbag defences. Above all on a pole at the back, floated the Union Jack with the two words 'Mafeking Besieged', one on either side of it and in the background, behind the figures under the flag, in feint letters, was 'ONE POUND'. It really was a work of art and it seemed a pity not to make use of such a typical design, but Whales (the printer and editor at the newspaper 'The Mafeking Mail') had no apparatus for reproducing it as a print and we were giving it up and falling back on the wood block when E.J. Ross, a partner of Alfred the auctioneer, and who was an amateur photographer suggested reproducing it by photography."



Robert Baden-Powell, 1896, just before the Siege of Mafeking (National Portrait Gallery, UK).

The note producers settled on a chemical process to make the notes. Greener describes the process in his diary:

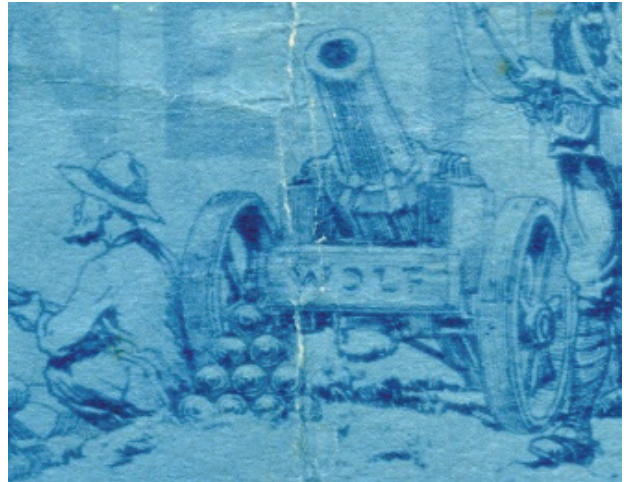
"Ross photographed the picture which was drawn in black and white, and printed a copy. It was a great success as a photograph but was not suitable for the purpose for which it was required. He suggested it would look well on what is known as a 'blue print', for which the surface of a suitable paper could easily be prepared by sensitising it with a solution of ferro-cyanide of potassium."

However, there wasn't that chemical in Mafeking. A post runner was sent to the North to secure the compound but the wrong chemical was sent! A second try was dispatched but it was captured. A third try was successful. After getting the process to work it took 15-20 minutes to produce a note after exposing it to the strong sunlight of Southern Africa.

The finished “blue print note” was quite similar to the original drawing. Below is the uniface note in its full glory.



The historic £1 note of the siege of Mafeking.



Close-up detail of the historic £1 note of the siege of Mafeking.



The actual “Wolf” was homemade in Mafeking as were the cannonballs (National Army Museum Study collection.).



The Wolf today. It is a 4.5 inch howitzer that resides at the Firepower Museum in London.



The Bechualand Protectorate one penny embossed stamp on the £1 note



Some of the notes had printing difficulties due to the awkward process used. Blotches occurred near the end of the run of 683.



Ross prints the £1 note in Mafeking
(Australian War Memorial)



The Standard Bank of Mafeking during the siege. (Ineson, Paper Currency of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902)

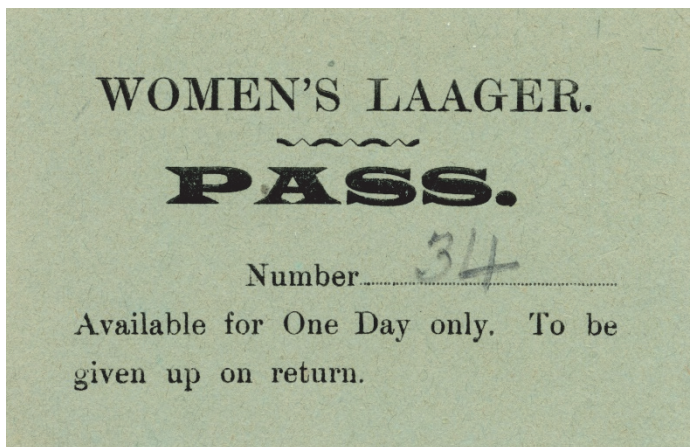
683 notes of the £1 note were printed; few were redeemed. By the end of December 1907 Ineson says just 44 were redeemed and by the end of the redemption period (15 September 1910) a total of 59 one-pound notes were redeemed. This left $683 - 59 = 624$ souvenirs for collectors to have a chance at.

Other Items:

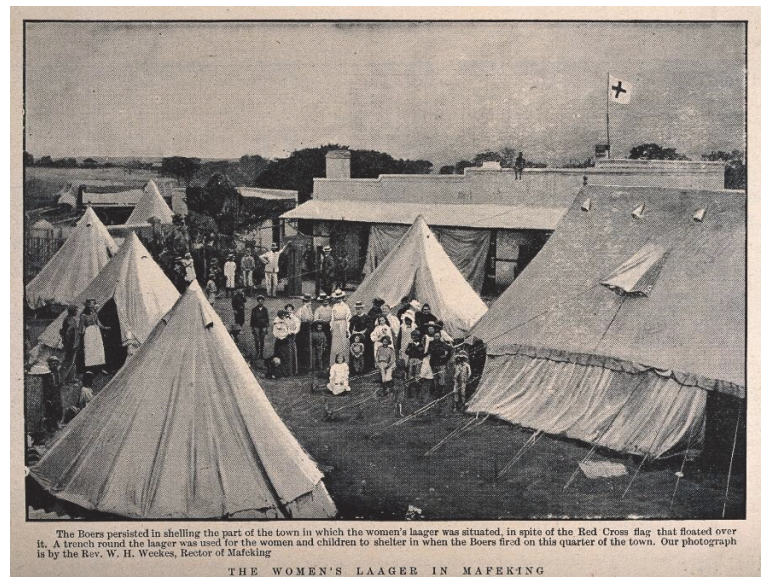
Other numismatic related items are known from this siege or from one of the other simultaneous sieges. Representative ones from Mafeking are reviewed here.

1. The Women's Laager (Camp) Pass.

The women's camp was established within the siege area but away from the fighting. A pass was required to leave the camp and to return to it.



The Women's Laager Camp Pass

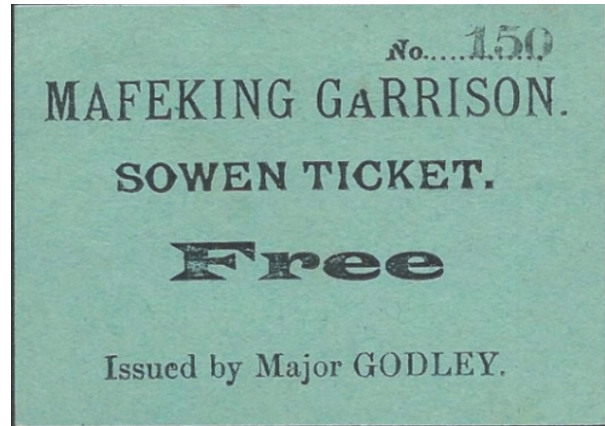


An image of the Woman's camp during the siege of Mafeking.
This picture was taken by the rector of Mafeking, Rev. W.H. Weekes

2. **Food coupons**--Communal food fed the troops as well as the native population.



A Mafeking coupon for 2 quarts of Sowen, a kind of porridge. This was for a family (Colin Narbeth).



Major Godley issued this ticket for free sowen for the Mafeking Garrison (Colin Narbeth).



Major Godley in Mafeking. He later became a general and commanded New Zealand forces in WWI.

3. Stamps

The Mafeking Post Office continued throughout the siege. Runners were used to get the mail past the Boers and, internally, cadets (precursors to the Boy Scouts) on bicycles delivered the mail. At the end of March 1900 stamps began to be revalued by a surcharge overprint, see the illustration below of a 2-pence stamp with a 6-pence surcharge. Many similar Mafeking “Besieged Stamps” stamps are known. This was for mail being secretly sent out of Mafeking past the Boer defenses. The surcharge covered the added expenses of the runners. For internal use between “dingy holes,” where people lived, other stamps were issued.

By early April two locally-produced stamps were issued, the so-called Mafeking blue stamps. These were produced by the “Mafeking Mint” using the blue print technique used previously for the £1 note. These very attractive stamps were produced in 1- and 3- penny denominations.

From *Inside Mafeking* we further learn of the one pence stamp: *The penny one (stamp), bearing the design of the messenger riding a bicycle, also has its history. The messenger was a boy named Goodyear, son of Captain Charles Goodyear, the well-known quartermaster of the BBP at one time. I took a snapshot of him posed in rather an unsteady position on the road, as though riding a dispatch, with the down pedal resting on a stone.*

In addition, the three-pence stamp has an interesting history. At first Paymaster Greener and his coworkers thought of putting Queen Victoria on this stamp. However, the modest use of the stamp made them switch to using Baden-Powell instead. His photograph was taken and it was trimmed to use as the model for the “blueprint” stamps. Twelve stamps per sheet were printed. BP actually questioned why the Queen wasn’t selected and this modest use

reason was given to him. He is quoted by Greener as not really liking it but allowing his portrait to be used after they had all been prepared already.

The stamps are scarce today and very popular among philatelists. Varieties exist.



2-pence stamp with a 6-pence surcharge



A one-penny siege stamp of Mafeking, postally used in May, 1900. The C.G.H. in the cancellation stands for Cape of Good Hope.



Close up of the rider on the one-penny stamp.



A three-pence siege stamp of Mafeking, unused, 1900. This stamp featured Baden-Powell himself from a photograph taken within Mafeking (Robert Siegel).



The Mafeking post office was also where low denomination notes were printed (Ineson).



London rally celebrating the end of the siege of Mafeking, May, 1900 (Wikipedia).

The siege ended on May 17, 1900. It had lasted 217 days. This was massively celebrated throughout the United Kingdom.

I now have a much better appreciation of the meaning of “Mafeking” in British history.



Formal portrait of Major-General Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell, 1st Baron Baden-Powell that is in the National Portrait Gallery, UK. It was made in 1912 (National Portrait Gallery, UK).

Bibliography

Robin Drooglever (ed) *Inside Mafeking "A Monument to British Pluck" The Diary of Herbert Greener* (Token Publishing: Honiton, Devon, England) 2009.

John Ineson, *Paper Currency of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Spink: London) 1999.

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