

MAFEKING "GOOD FORS" and 1d. REVENUE SURCHARGE

Let me make a declaration from the outset. I am no authority on the Bechuanaland Protectorate, nor the use of Revenue Surcharges by postal and/or banking authorities in southern Africa. What follows is intended as a report, on which others may care to develop an accurate reconstruction of history.

Much has been written about the Mafeking Siege (14 October 1899 to 17 May 1900); its importance or otherwise in the horrendous conflict that played itself out as the Second Anglo-Boer War, of Mafeking the place, of Mafeking and its personalities, of the pluck and the postal peregrinations. These are described *ad nauseum* elsewhere.

What we shall consider briefly is its "good fors", those promissory notes created during the siege.

Early January 1900, the Mafeking Mail Special Siege Slip gave notice of Baden-Powell's ("BP") intention to issue exchangeable monetary instruments in the face of diminishing stocks of gold and silver coinage. Reportedly, what had been happening was that coins had been hoarded by the population to such an extent that the traders had run out of money. Seeking a solution to this problem, "BP", with the aid of Mr R Urry, the manager of Standard Bank, arranged for "bank notes" (later to be known as "good fors") to be printed. The denominations finally decided upon were 1/- (1 shilling), 2/-, 3/-, 10/- and £.1 (one pound sterling).

The paper currency was issued through the "Garrison Deposit Bank" (in happier times the Mafeking branch of the Standard Bank). The 1/-, 2/-, 3/- and 10/- denominations were printed by Messrs. Townsend & Son. The lower denominations were bound together in booklet form by two staples and perforated along one margin in order to permit their later removal from the booklet. As could be expected, errors did occur in both the printing and numbering process.



3/- Good-for with numbers altered (21 known)

The £.1 notes were photographically produced by Edward Ross using the selfsame technique he used in the development of the Mafeking "blues".



£.1 Mafeking "blue" Good-for (683 produced)

Production of the "good fors" was under the supervision of Captain H Greener, Chief Paymaster to the garrison, whose rubber stamp signature appeared on all the notes. Urry's signature together with that of Greener appeared on the 10/- and £.1 notes. Each of the £.1 notes was personally autographed by both. Of interest is that Charles James Weir, the accountant of the Standard Bank, Mafeking, other than commenting on the awkward shortage of coinage, was remarkable silent on the whole matter.

It appears that all the notes, irrespective of their denominations, were to bear a blind embossed one penny revenue stamp of the Bechuanaland Protectorate.



Detail of 1d. Bechuanaland Protectorate impressed surcharge stamp

Though some sources state that the embossing and signatures were added when the notes were placed in circulation, each of the thirty-one uncirculated 1/- notes remaining in a booklet in the possession of Ineson already carry a number, signature and surcharge. Yet, there are some notes amongst each of the denominations, where the surcharge does not appear to have been applied.



Booklet of pristine 1/- Good-fors (with the permission of John Ineson)

Both Ineson and myself speculate that applying this surcharge stamp did not have any fiscal significance whatsoever, that is to say that it did not earn any revenue for the fiscus, but rather that it was impressed merely to make the Mafeking "good-fors" appear "authentic" to the populous. To me, the explanation finds resonance with "B.P.'s" known love for the Thespian!

Though logically, in the case of the Townsend-printed denominations, the surcharge would have been applied to batches of notes, and thus would explain the varying intensity to which it is imprinted on the notes, it leaves unexplained the absence of the surcharge on some. Whether some booklets - and thus a complete series of "good fors" - were inadvertently overlooked would require some investigation. Of interest, there is a £.1 note known to the author that also carries no surcharge.

What use was made of the embossed stamp prior to the Siege of Mafeking? Well, the "Garrison Deposit Bank" was the Mafeking branch of the Standard Bank; and if a revenue stamp was to be found in the town, the bank or magistrate's court were the most logical places to look. It is my understanding that nothing similar has been recorded as a revenue mark for the Bechuanaland Protectorate. So whether, as in more recent times, a surcharge was applied to cheques when issued, or whether the stamp used on notarised documents, equally deserves some investigation. As with so much to do with the Mafeking Siege, the explanation no doubt will be curious.

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