

MAFEKING, DAVID TAYLOR and a TRIBUTE MEDALLION

Boer War Tribute Medals really came into their own with the publication of Hibbard's seminal work on the subject.¹ In the preface, the author acknowledged that there may well be other such medals as yet not described, and the tale which follows relates to one such similar item.

THE BACKGROUND

Mafeking lies 1390 kilometres north of Cape Town and 300 kilometres west of Johannesburg. Mafikeng "*The Place of Stones*" was first settled in the early 1850's. From the early 1860's it became a centre of squabbling and outright fighting between the Transvaal Republic, the Baralong, The Goshen Republic, the British South Africa Company and The British Empire.

By the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War it was a robust "dorp" with some 1500 European citizens, a group of Indian and oriental background and 5000 Baralong. It was a major rail junction with a station and railway workshops; a significant commercial centre, and boasted a number of substantial buildings including two schools, two churches, a Standard Bank, a Masonic Lodge, a newspaper building, a public library, the Victoria Hospital and St. Josephs Convent (Irish Sisters of Mercy).

The Siege of Mafeking was conducted between 14 October 1899 and 17 May 1900, that is 217 days, and began 3 days after the declaration of war by the Transvaal Republic. It involved British and Colonial Forces under the command of Brevet-Colonel Robert Stephenson Smythe Baden-Powell, the besieged, and Boer Forces *ab initio* under the command General Piet Arnoldus Cronjé, and later Kommandant Sarel Eloff, the besiegers.

Brevet-Colonel Baden-Powell (later Lord Baden-Powell of Gilwell O.M., K.C.M.G., K.C.B., K.C.V.O.) was to end the war fêted in the United Kingdom as a national hero and go on to find greater fame as the Founder of the international movement of the Boys' Scouts. He died in Kenya in 1924.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING

For a small, remote village in the Cape Colony, there was a high level of entrepreneurship in Mafeking. This first was controversially visible early on in the siege when Julius Weil, a "wholesaler merchant, direct importer" and talented businessman, was roundly criticised for holding the citizens of the town and the military authorities to ransom - for he had judiciously stock-piled essential equipment, foodstuffs and general goods well ahead of the siege. This spirit is further evinced by advertisements that appeared during the siege from time-to-time in The Mafeking Special Siege Slips suggesting a brisk trade in stamps, "good fors" (locally printed money vouchers), shells and other mementos of the siege.

The spirit of entrepreneurship was further manifest in the publication of the THE MAFEKING MAIL: Special Siege Slip by Townsend

¹ "Boer War Tribute Medals : The Definitive Work of Boer War Tribute Medals" H G Hibbard. Publ: Constantia Classics, 1982.

and Son under the management and editorship of G.N.H. Whales. Townsend and Whale early on clearly perceived the curiosity value of their publication, and printer and editor proceeded to create a business out of what was initially a community service.²

DAVID TAYLOR, the PHOTOGRAPHER

Mr David Taylor was just such an entrepreneur. He was born to Charles Taylor (a master tailor) and Mary (née Adam) on 30 March 1867 in Carse Barracks, Parish of Forfar, County Forfarshire, Scotland. He married Helen Notman on 25 February 1898, and wife his new bride, travelled to South Africa. They were to produce six children (3 boys 3 girls). In his late teens, he had joined the 1st Battalion Highland Light Infantry and remained a private in the regiment until his discharged in Cape Town in January 1899.

By the beginning of the siege (14 October 1899) he, together with other family members, was in Mafeking. In the mind of the collector, he was to become synonymous with the creation of several desirable items, all associated with the siege: the famous Mafeking "blue" stamps, the publication of an outstanding portfolio of siege photographs, and the memento publication of the Mafeking Mail Siege Slips under the auspices of *Townshend, Taylor and Snashall* of Cape Town.

The Mafeking "blues" were of two denominations : 1d. and 3d. The 1d., illustrating Sgt-Major Warner Goodyear, was issued on 10th April 1900. Dr W A Hayes, a medical officer on Baden-Powell's staff, was the designer, and David Taylor the photographer and printer. The first design was rejected as too elaborate so Hayes reworked it. After a committee made up of Lt.Col Lord Edward Cecil, Maj. Godley and Capt. Greener passed the design, Taylor went to work. The first "shoot" was interrupted by a boer shell bombardment.

The 3d. Col. R S S Baden-Powell stamp issued on the 7th (or 9th) & 10th April 1900, was designed by the Chief Paymaster, Capt. Greener. The photograph of Baden-Powell was taken in Mafeking at the time of the siege and though E J Ross claimed the credit for the exercise, there remains little doubt that it was the work of David Taylor^{3 4}.

Taylor's portfolio of photographs which he published during the South African War is a sensitive and definitive collection by a truly talented craftsman. It ranks in quality with the Arthur Elliot Collection of South African vernacular architecture, and is highly sought after as a collectors' item. In it, he not only documents the everyday events of a town under siege, but also, with the eye of an

² Townshend, Taylor and Snashall mentioned in "Nicprint-50; being an account of the history of printing etc." Picton L.J. Unpublished thesis. University of Cape Town. 1969;44-45

³ An interesting aside is that David Taylor erroneously has been called Dr D Taylor, "photographer and physician", in philatelic articles, auction house, banknote and stamp catalogues for over 80 years.

⁴ Much controversy has surrounded the authorship of the Baden-Powell photograph used on the 3d. "blue" (*SA Philatelist* 1999:75(2);39-40, 75(3);66-67,75(4);94-5,75(5);141-146). The honour was claimed by Edward J Ross ("*Diary of the Siege of Mafeking etc.*" E Ross. Ed: B P Willan Publ: VRS 1980: 192). However, it is certain that the original was taken by David Taylor.

historian, captures the personalities that went to make up a "plucky" garrison.⁵

Recent research has documented the existence of three editions of the famous Mafeking Siege Slips⁶, the last of which was the product of the A Walter Townsend company, *Townshend, Taylor and Snashall* of Cape Town. This business was to become famous for printing the most important source book on the Great Trek, "*The Diary of Eerw. Erasmus Smit*" and a complete replica collection of The Mafeking Special Siege Slips (a "Cape Town memento" printing, 1902)².

DAVID TAYLOR, the SOLDIER

But what of his military activities during the siege? Little is known about this. He was enrolled and sworn in as a member of the Mafeking Town Guard under the command of Col. Courtney B Vyvyan. For this service, he, as with all other members of the Town Guard, would have been paid an allowance of 2/6d. a day against wear and tear of clothing. Baden-Powell made it clear that this stipend was not in lieu of pay and carried with it no rights⁷. He was appointed one of twelve fort commanders, taking responsibility for No.1 fort⁸ which was part of the town's inner line of defence during the siege. He appears to have been a most unobtrusive person and there are only rare references made to him in print⁹. He certainly had permission to move about freely and diligently photographed the people of, and events affecting, the town during this most famous of sieges⁵.

The Town Guard was disbanded on 18th May 1900 following a thanksgiving service led by Baden-Powell¹⁰. David Taylor was to die aged 58 in the Johannesburg Hospital on 4 January 1925 of carcinoma of tongue and jaw. He is buried in the New Cemetery (now the Brixton), Johannesburg.

Were it not for the enigmatic person that was David Taylor¹², there would be but a poor photographic record of one of the most renowned sieges in the military history of the British Empire.

⁵ Following published calls early in April 1900 for group photographs of "Refugees", "Old Etonians", "Australasians", "Ex-Navals etc.", he made known his intention of fully commercialising this venture in the *The 'Mafeking Mail' Special Siege Slips* No.148 of 23 May 1900. Later, a book was published titled "*Souvenir of the Siege of Mafeking 1899-1900 etc.*" D Taylor. Publ: Leng and Co., Sheffield, 1900, a lasting tribute to his talent as an entrepreneur and historian-photographer.

⁶ "*The 'Mafeking Mail' Special Siege Slips*" Robin Pelteret. *SA Philatelist* 1999:75(5);132-136

⁷ "*Diary of the Siege of Mafeking etc.*" E Ross. Ed: B P Willan Publ: VRS 1980: 50. This was a bone of contention for it was held in stark contrast to a black labourer who would have been paid at a rate of 2/- per day, and Colonial Contingent (and former town mayor) Capt. Goodyear who received at 15/- per diem '*Mafeking Mail' Special Siege Slip* 1899, 7th December No.28

⁸ It is unknown to which fort this specifically refers, though Cannonkoppie or Warren's Fort (Fort Eloff) appear good candidates

⁹ In *The 'Mafeking Mail' Special Siege Slips No.102* reference is made to his winning a competition within the town "for the best Collection of not less than Forty Siege Photos.....", the product of which was to be hung, once the siege was broken, in the new Town Hall. It was later recorded that : ".....Mr. Taylor's deservedly took the first prize on account of their superior technical finish, showing [with reference to the other competitors] how the amateur starts heavily handicapped in open competitions."

¹⁰ *Diary of the Siege of Mafeking etc.*" E Ross. Ed: B P Willan Publ: VRS 1980: 236

DAVID TAYLOR, the MEDALLIC AWARDS ¹¹

David Taylor was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 in silver with the battle clasp "Defence of Mafeking" with "FORT:- COM: D. TAYLOR. MAFEKING TOWN GD:" impressed thereon ¹³.

The Mafeking Tribute Medallion (illus.1&2) - made out of a blank, rimless Pond that has been engraved - is of uncertain provenance in so far as the circumstances of its presentation are unknown. Nothing is known of Indian Defenders from whom he received it. It appears to have been designed as an Albert or "dangler", fashioned for wear on a watch chain. Its description is as follows :



Obverse :

MAFEKING
SIEGE
1899 - 1900

¹¹ Unlike most Taylor memorabilia which were sold by the family, his medals remain in the family, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for the information.

¹² David Taylor and his wife Helen (neé Notman)(illus.1), the only photograph of the couple known to the family. Essentially no biographical details are known to exist. The South African National Archives is National Register of Manuscripts (NAREM), State Archive, Cape Town or Pretoria; The Bensusan Museum of Photography, Johannesburg, and The Municipal Museum, Mafikeng have no records.

¹³ "Defence of Mafeking Medal Roll" Dr F K Mitchell. Publ: Chimperie Publications, 1962

