

DISCOVERING and RECORDING HISTORY

In the 1950's, Joseph Hurwitz, the owner of *Sam Hurwitz' Wynberg Trading Company, Footwear Specialists and Outfitters*, purchased a portmanteau for £3.00 at an auction held by John Marcus & Sons, Long Street. The plywood portmanteau with metal corners, when stood erect, opened up into hanging space on one side and drawers on the other. Jamming one of the drawers closed was a leather briefcase containing a few personal possessions of one, Peter Stuart.

This collection contained Mafeking stamps, illustrated Boer-War postal stationary posted within the town, a compendium of Mafeking Mail Special Siege Slips ¹, a Queen's South Africa Medal with the bars "Defence of Mafeking" and "Transvaal" ², and various handwritten copies of official Mafeking police reports 1893 to 1901 ³.

Peter Stuart was born 1868 in Kirkmichael, Bonffshire, Scotland, and joined the Linlithgow County Constabulary on 28 December 1888, being sworn in the next day by Lt.Col.A Borthwick (Chief Constable). He progressed via the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police to an appointment to post No. 107 of the Cape Police Corp No.2 Regiment, Kimberley on 1 February 1892 for "a minimum of 3 years". The Siege of Mafeking was conducted between 14 October 1899 and 17 May 1900 and Peter Stuart was there.

My being a bit of a pagan, it was something other than the stamps, the Mafeking Siege Slips or the Queen South Africa medal that really decided me to purchase this hotchpotch of memorabilia; for nestling amongst old postcards, grubby newspaper cuttings, congratulatory telegrams, caricature drawings and a life's disorderly detritus, were three "blue-print" photographs.

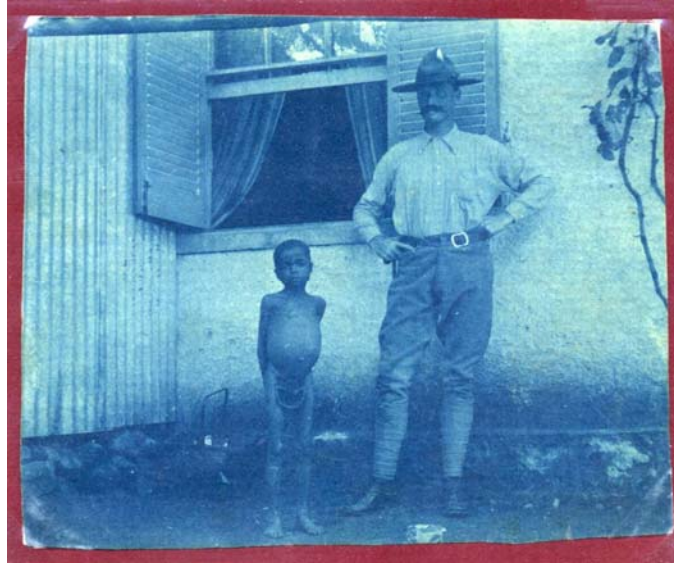
Now, two famous items were produced in Mafeking on "blue" paper: the famous Mafeking Blues and the £1 siege banknotes. These photographs constitute a third. Here I was looking at someone whom I was to learn later was Sgt Peter Stuart ⁴, in uniform, together with an African infant clearly suffering from marasmic-kwashiorkor; at men scrambling to enter an underground bunker; and a stretcher party removing a wounded man.

¹ Using this collection, I was able to complete my exploration of the circumstances surrounding the publication of the Mafeking Siege Slips : "The Mafeking Special Siege Slips". SA Philatelist 1999:75(5); 132-36.

² For his activities during the South African War 1899-1902, No.107 Sgt. Peter Stuart, Cape Police District No2, was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 with battle clasp Defence of Mafeking (16 October 1899 until 17 May 1900) and state clasp for the Transvaal.

³ Though mostly trivial, it includes a copy of an affidavit by one Louis Solomon, an employee of the Cape Government Railways based near Oaklands north of Mafeking and relating to events which took place on the 13th and 14th October 1899 involving a skirmish with Cronje's men and the destruction of the railway track.

⁴ He is identifiable also in the Cape Police Corp No.2 Regiment group photograph taken in Mafeking at the time of the siege by David Taylor and published in "Souvenir of the Siege of Mafeking 1899-1900"



Peter Stuart with child suffering from Kwashiorkor. The photograph is produced Croxley paper bearing the Oceana Fine watermark

These photographs I speculated would have been made in a manner identical to the famous 3d. Baden-Powell and 1d. Sgt. Major Goodyear stamps of the siege. They were produced from a glass-slide negative by contact printing on ordinary blue-print paper and were developed by washing through successive changes of water. The paper was a good quality "Croxley" rag paper with a horizontal laid bâtonné character, produced by the Oceana Paper Co. a company of the famous Dickinson & Co (Pty) Ltd in England. It bore one watermark per "foolscap" page reading "OceanaFINE" in double-lined characters, the first word being in old English and the second in Roman capitals. The paper was locally sensitised with potassium ferricyanide smuggled into town and ferric ammonium citrate, a process developed in 1824. On exposure to light, the ferric ammonium citrate changes to a ferrous ion which, on becoming wet, combines with ferricyanide to form Prussian blue.

Oceana
FINE

Ocean Fine watermark (after Goldblatt 1978)

As only 8% of Mafeking "blues" were said to exhibit the watermark, it must have taken a good deal of effort on the part of Dr K Freund^{5 6} to define and describe its nature. Would there be evidence of the watermark, I wondered? On raising one of the photographs to the light, there it was - the watermark - and all but complete. And as with the Mafeking Siege stamps, it is likely that David Taylor would have been the photographer. A true find!

⁵ The Status of the Mafeking Siege Stamps : Facts about a Fascinating and Classic Issue : Freund K. The S A Philatelist December 1947 and sequential issues

⁶ The Mafeking Blues : Goldblatt R. The S A Philatelist March 1978

Peter Stuart went on to become Chief Military Constable of Mafeking. He transferred to Woodstock Police Station on 31 October 1901 as an inspector. In 2 February 1905, Insp. Peter Stuart of "B" Division took 42 days leave between 6 February 1905 and 19 March 1905 ~ "the first ever" ~ drawing pay for forage and farriery for two horses, travelling "to East London and elsewhere". He had married Sr. Ella Sophia Victor ⁷, then a nursing sister of New Somerset Hospital, on 6 February 1905 and moved into 33 Walmer Road, Woodstock. The 1909 edition of Juta's Cape Town Dictionary lists Capt. P Stuart as living in Court Road, Wynberg. He died at 30 Clee Road, Observatory on 2 May 1938, leaving his wife and two children, Victor and Violet. His possessions presumably came onto the market following the death of Violet in January 1953.

There is a dignity to history; and when we are gone, history is all that is left. History is about people; not only the biographies of great men, but of those innumerable ordinary folk without whom the great would be nothing. Through a seemingly trivial discovery on my part, Peter Stuart in his small way has contributed to my later understanding of elements of the history of Mafeking, and thereby vastly enriched my free time.

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⁷ In 1905, Sr. Ella Sophia Victor was one of 11 ward sisters and 39 nurses employed by Somerset Hospital and working under the famous Matron J C Child (1903-1907). Ref : The Somerset Hospital Celebrates its Hundredth Birthday. Col. C. Graham Botha. 1959. National Commercial Printers.