

THE MAFEKING MAIL SPECIAL SIEGE SLIPS

Mafeking lies 1392 kilometres north of Cape Town and 298 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 Cronje, 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.

General Piet Cronje, a courageous and charismatic leader of men, at the beginning of the war he assumed the supreme command of the Boer forces in the west. After notable military successes, he surrendered to Field Marshall Lord Roberts at Paardeberg on 27 February 1899 and was imprisoned on St.Helena until 1902. He retired to his farm in the Klerksdorp district of the Transvaal and died in 1911.

THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS, NEWSPAPERS AND THE CAPE COLONY

The art of printing was brought to the Cape by Johann Christian Ritter in 1784 - and with Ritter's Almanack began a turbulent history of conflict with government at the Cape. For years, and to the disgust of many, printing remained a legislated government monopoly. Following numerous petitions to Westminster, this issue was resolved on the 8 May 1829 with the promulgation of The Cape of Good Hope Ordinance No.60 (the "Magna Carta" of the Press), guaranteeing the freedom of the press. Indeed, the fight for a free press in South Africa is a substantial part of general history of this country and appears set to remain thus.

With the acceptance of the "Magna Carta" of the Press, the right to publish was carried north by missionaries and Trek farmers. The principle was accepted and embodied in the constitutions of both the Oranje Vrij Staat and Transvaal Republics. On 27 November 1882, 26 men representing the best of the publishers and journalists of the day, met in Grahamstown and created the unique Newspaper Press Union established "to protect its members in the proper discharge of their public duty". The freedom of the press was to be briefly challenged by Theophilus Shepstone and President Paul Kruger in the Transvaal; by Field Marshall Lord Roberts and Colonel Baden-Powell during the Anglo-Boer War, and actively manipulated and undermined by apartheid South Africa.

By 1850, a flurry of activity had led to the establishment of 30 newspapers in the Cape Colony alone. Later, the discovery of diamonds at Bultfontein (near present day Kimberley) in 1869 led to the publication in that area of no less than sixteen newspapers in eighteen years. Throughout the Cape Colony, thus, there was an interest in newspapers and their economic viability was a certainty for businessmen with the skills, such as A Walter Townsend.

In Mafeking, there was to exist a fragile peace between the publisher and editor of the Mafeking Mail Special Siege Slip, G H N Whales, and the military authorities. Whales was somewhat acerbic of tongue. He once publicly thanked the press censor for saving his life, a boer shell having destroyed his editorial chair whilst he was submitting his newspaper copy for military scrutiny elsewhere in the village. He was to be briefly imprisoned on one occasion for publishing querulous criticism on the conduct of the siege and the restrictions put on the availability of news. In protest, he was known to

publish empty columns (No.47) and indeed cancelled one whole edition (No.45) as visible disregard and mute testimony to the censor's liberal use of a blue pencil. However, the formidable powers that Baden-Powell enjoyed in Mafeking clearly were tempered by his background, good sense and his establishment of a Summary Court of Jurisdiction which aspired to treat matters at a dispassionate arm's length.

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" and other mementos of the siege.

Incidentally, the "good fors" in Mafeking were of two types: emergency issue vouchers printed under the supervision of the Military Paymaster, with face values of 1/-, 2/-, 3/-, 10/- and $\text{œ}1$, and placed in circulation by Baden-Powell in lieu of legal tender of which there was an acute shortage. These were to be redeemed at the Standard Bank on the resumption of civil law. The others were "Sowen Tickets" redeemable at one of three kitchens against a locally-devised gruel of oats husks.

Equally, the spirit of entrepreneurship was manifest in the publication of the THE MAFEKING MAIL : Special Siege Slip by Townsend 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 community service. In a sense, this is the story of that endeavour.

From the outset, the principle was clearly stated that the receipt of The Mafeking Special Siege Slip was through weekly subscription paid in advance. Indeed, the banner headline underscores the dangerous and trying circumstances under which the newspaper was produced. There it states : "ISSUED DAILY - SHELLS PERMITTING" and goes on "ONLY TERMS ARE ONE SHILLING PER WEEK PAYABLE IN ADVANCE"

This sagaciousness can be interpreted in three ways:

* it allowed forward planning of the print runs, for paper was in extremely short supply. With the completion of each ream of paper, special arrangements had to be made for new supplies to be released from the government store.

* it was good business practice, as with each one of the frequent bombardments by the boer guns, Oud Kraker and Black Maria, the press could have been permanently knocked out by a direct hit

* and similarly, the readership inevitably was set to dwindle during an action, and surely "a bird in the hand....."

It is interesting to note that, with the first issue of The Mafeking Special Siege Slip on 1 November 1899, the price increased from the previous 3d. per issue to one shilling a week in advance. These selfsame issues were later to exchange hands in London at $\text{œ}10$ a copy.

CREATING THE MAFEKING SPECIAL SIEGE SLIPS

Over the years, there has been much debate as to the history of these "slips". The Townsend family was well known in the Northern Cape and in Cape Town itself. A Walter Townsend arrived in South Africa in 1880 to work for the Argus in Cape Town. He has served an apprenticeship as a compositor with Unwin Bros. in London. He, together with his brother and father, established the Progress, a family weekly, in Cape Town; in 1888, the Bechuanaland News in Vryburg; and the Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian in 1899.

Thus, the Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian was in its infancy as a newspaper when the siege was imposed on the village. Indeed, it was only to publish twenty-two editions before it ceased publication in its established format and was re-issued as the THE MAFEKING MAIL Special Siege Slip. Later, A Walter Townsend was instrumental in establishing Townshend, Taylor and Snashall in Cape Town, famous for printing the most important source book on the Great Trek, the diary of Eerw. Erasmus Smit.

* The Printing Press

The so-called "Improved Columbian Press" (**illus.1**) was originally built by George Clymer of Philadelphia in the United States of America, as an improvement on the old wooden screw presses. The pressure was obtained by a set of levers connected with an elegant counterweight on top - moulded cast iron in the form of an American bald eagle. The Columbian was to become the best known press in Europe.

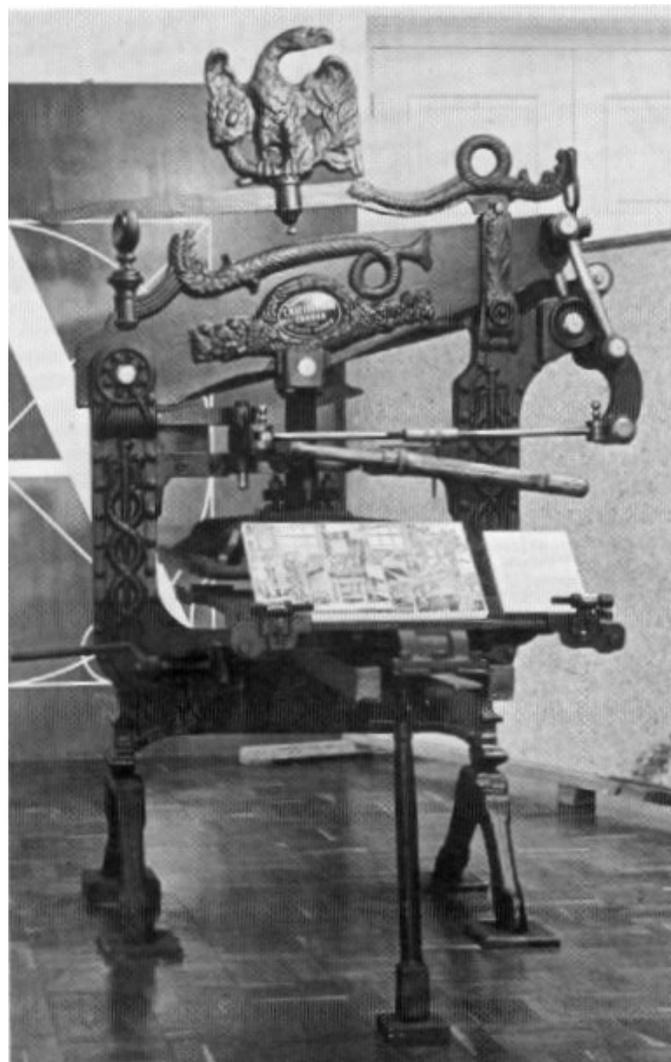


Illustration 1 : The Improved Columbian Press

An example of this press stands in the South African Museum, Gardens, Cape Town and was donated to the South African Museum by the The Michaelis School of Art of the University of Cape Town. The machine was built in 1814 by T Mathews & Son in their Albion Works, London. It is the original press used in the production of the siege stamp overprints which, together with The Mafeking Special Siege Slips and the "good fors", themselves were produced in Mafeking by Townsend and Son. It was moved to Cape Town by A Walter Townsend, and when Townsend, Taylor and Snashall was bought by the Cape Times in 1935, it was donated to the Michaelis School of Art.

PUBLISHING THE MAFEKING MAIL SPECIAL SIEGE SLIPS

The last full edition (No.22) of the MAFEKING MAIL and PROTECTORATE GUARDIAN was published on Saturday 14 October 1899, the first day of the siege; and the MAFEKING MAIL and PROTECTORATE GUARDIAN Special Siege Edition (No.23) dated Saturday 21 October 1899 but headed "re-printed on 23 October 1899".

On the 1 November 1899, a fortnight after the beginning of the siege, saw the publication by the same company of the first of the famous siege slips headed "THE MAFEKING SIEGE SLIPS" ... "ISSUED DAILY SHELLS PERMITTING" "ONLY TERMS: ONE SHILLING PER WEEK, PAYABLE IN ADVANCE". They were to be numbered 1 to 152, of which 143 (less nos.45 & 56) appeared during the actual siege. The newspaper contained snippets of information - both parochial and national, General Orders and advertisements (illus.2).



Illustration 2 : The Mafeking Mail Special Siege Slip No. 94 printed in the town during the siege

From recent research conducted by the author, it now appears certain that there are three different printings which appeared as four "editions". Numerous differences between each printing can be listed. However, in this essay, attention is given only to the major distinguishing features.

* MSS EDITION 1

In the first issue, No.1 of 1 November 1899, the word "Siege" is spelt incorrectly as "Seige". Issues No.1-6 have the word "ONLY" (as in "ONLY TERMS") in the subhead.

No.1 was out of print by 6 November 1899 (this is stated in issue no.5); and Nos. 1 & 2 out of print by 9 November 1899 (stated in issue No.7). An offer or intention to reprint Nos. 1, 2, 3 was published on 16 November 1899 in issue No.15.

* MSS EDITION 2

There was a reprint of Nos.1-5 (perhaps Nos.1-6) on sale soon after 22 November 1899. In these, the spelling of "Siege" was corrected and various additions made; such as a headline "THE CANNON KOPPIE FIGHT", which was added to an article, having been originally excluded from the first edition (illus. 3). The founts remained the same, but the setting, including the alignment of the banner headlines, is different. The original intention to reprint issues Nos.1-3 was advertised in issues No.15 & 16 and was to be done in response to popular demand. What is crucial - and distinguishes the first and second printings of Nos.1-5 (possibly Nos.1-6) - is the loss of the word slug "ONLY" (as in "ONLY TERMS") which either dropped out of the forme or rolled onto its side. Certainly, it was not present from issue No.7 onward.



Illustration 3 : Comparing the Nos. 1 of printing 1 (P1) and printing 2 (P2) . (A) the word "ONLY" appears in P1 but is lost to P2. (B) "Siege" is misspelt in P1 and corrected for P2. (C) The headline to the article "THE CANNON KOPPIE FIGHT" omitted in P1 is added to P2.

All the copies of issue No.6 seen by the author show the word "ONLY". It is suspected that the commercial value to the printers of The Mafeking Siege Slips had been discerned by the time No.6 came to press and a substantial "overrun" allowed (and set aside) for later sale.

The sequence of events to this point were:
Edition 1 (all showing the "ONLY")

- issue No.1
- issue No.2
- issue No.3
- issue No.4
- issue No.5
- issue No.6 a likely "strategic overrun"

Edition 2 (all showing the absence of "ONLY")

- issue No.1
- issue No.2
- issue No.3
- issue No.4
- issue No.5
- issue No.7 et seq. (excluding Nos.45 & 56) up until and including No.152

* MSS EDITION 3

In issue No.151 dated 30 May 1900, there was an offer to make up sets at 30/- each of the Nos.1-147 for "delivery July next (and which would be) wire stitched". This is twice the former annual subscription for the MAFEKING MAIL AND PROTECTORATE GUARDIAN

The copy in the hands of the author, was constituted of second edition re-prints of Nos.1-5, a first edition No.6 and all those issues that were printed sequentially after No.6 and during the siege. It closes at issue No.147 (as was the originally advertised intention). This edition appears to have been a commercial venture issued soon after the lifting of the siege; was cardboard-bound into two books of differing sizes and held together with metal staples.

* MSS EDITION 4

The final and third printing were facsimiles of the originals found in edition No.1 (warts 'n all), that is issues Nos.1-6 followed by those of edition 2, Nos.7 to 152. However, whereas it was a true representation of the text in almost every detail, various easily distinguishable differences do exist (illus.4). The most obvious are the font used in the header "ONLY TERMS" and"ISSUED DAILY, SHELLS PERMITTING", the existence of newer, less worm type-pieces, the differing Old English and Gothic type-pieces and the font-sizes. There was more efficient inking, more pages, the overall dimensions differed marginally and the whole was bound either in scarlet or Prussian blue cloth.



Illustration 4 : Comparing the Nos. 1 of printing 1 and printing 3. (A), (B) and (C) illustrate the differences, in type and size, between founts used in the two printings

This printing was first advertised in a Special Siege Slip No.156 dated 5 June 1900, that is, well after the lifting of the siege. It was later to be printed and properly bound in Cape Town by A Walter Townsend (the son), Taylor and Nasal. It contains a preface and list of those members of the town guard present during the siege. Amusingly, it also includes an issue that was never produced during the siege, that of issue No.45. This edition later became the subject of an acrimonious court case (see The Mafeking Mail and Protectorate Guardian of the 8 May 1902, the article headed "Vryburg Regional Magistrates Court" et seq.) during which A Walter Townsend and G.N.H. Whales were to fall out over commercial aspects and moral responsibilities relating to the reprinting of famous "slips". At this time, the publication was declared to be of "sentimental value..." only and not intended to have commercial worth.

THE MAFEKING SPECIAL SIEGE SLIPS IN PERSPECTIVE

The lifting of the siege of Mafeking brought great jubilation to an Empire in need of a elevation in its morale. Many personalities were to publish books on their experiences during the siege. Many a fable was written around events that took place during the siege. All items of memorabilia, be they Mafeking siege overprints or the famous "blue" local stamps, the "kaffir-runner" postal history or original Taylor photographs, the "good fors" or banknotes, continue to attract great interest in auction houses around the world. Even forgeries dating from that time have their own intrinsic value and indeed often carry a premium.

For many, The Mafeking Special Siege Slips have cornered the market for they bear testament to the mood within the town (the British "pluck"), the tempo and the eccentricities of "the last gentlemen's war" and its effect on one remote and seemingly insignificant village in South Africa. Indeed, in the History of the War in South Africa, it is acknowledged that the significance of the siege exceeded the "actual military gains resulting from it.....(that) a prolonged siege.....becomes a victory to the side of the defence and a festering sore in that of the attack".

Complete collections of whatever edition of The Mafeking Special Siege Slips remain uncommon. There is no known record of how many were printed in toto. That there is considerable rarity value in the first printing of The Mafeking Special Siege Slips Nos. 1-5, there can be no doubt. Few originals are known to be preserved in South Africa. Certainly, all the examples of the "slips" seen by the author outside of the Mafeking Museum, be they made available for scrutiny in public libraries, sold in antiquarian bookshops or photographically represented in publications, have been from the third ("Cape Town memento") printing.

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