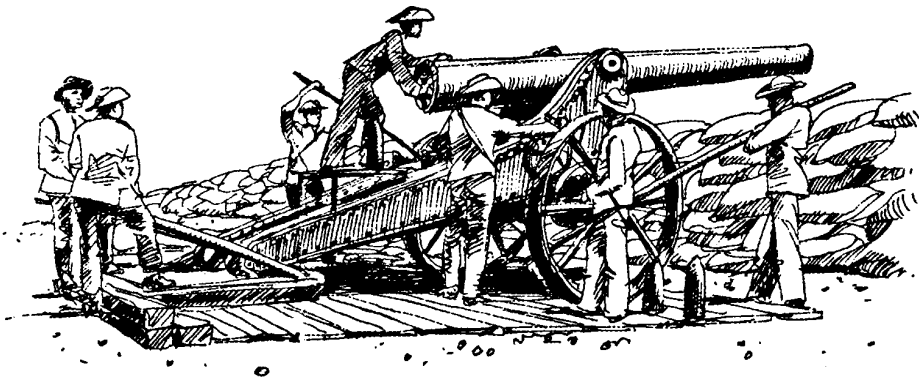


# OF BULLETS AND BOYS

by Jay Heale

The story of  
**MAFIKENG** and  
its connection  
with the birth of  
**SCOUTING**



**SOUTH AFRICAN  
SCOUT ASSOCIATION**

THE PLACE OF STONES is famous for the siege in which Robert Baden-Powell defended the town of Mafeking (as the British spelt the name) in 1899-1900. Here, in outline, is the story of this town from its first beginnings, of its place in local African history, of Sol T. Plaatje, and of the idea which led to the worldwide Scouting Movement.



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Illustrations come from Chip Snaddon (front cover), the SACHED Trust graphic novel version of *Mhudi* and sketches by Robert Baden-Powell.

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*Cover: Boer troops preparing to fire one of their four Schneider siege guns. The long poles were used to move the gun for aiming.*

The men crouched there, hiding. It was a good place to hunt. Vast herds of zebra and hartebeest roamed the plains and came to drink at the river which flowed all year round. The rocks gave the hunters shade and shelter. With their stone-tipped arrows and hand axes, they caught many a buck, using the meat for food and the skins for clothing. As was their custom, they engraved these animals on chosen rocks. Gradually, their families grew. They built shelters to rest in while they hunted. Sometimes they stayed there several nights at a time. It seemed a good place.

### **A TIME OF TWO BROTHERS**

For long years the Barolong people lived without interference. They hunted game on the hard dry plains, they developed iron working skills and tended their herds of cattle. The Barolong grew in number, giving different tribes their own special names. One powerful clan was the Ratshidi who lived near the rocks by the river. There were occasional fights between neighbouring tribes, but these were mostly a test of strength or a display of valour. Then the first intruders arrived. They were Matabele from KwaZulu, far to the east, led by Mzilikazi, once a general under King Shaka. The Ratshidi were no match for Mzilikazi's trained warriors and they fled to the plains near Thaba Nchu.

At about the same time pale-skinned, Dutch-speaking men came rumbling over the veld in canvas-covered wagons. These Boer trekkers were looking for fresh land and they were willing to fight for it. Their guns persuaded Mzilikazi to move further north and the Ratshidi returned to their original homes. When their great chief Tawana died, he was succeeded by his eldest son Montshioa (pronounced 'Monswa'). But the Boer leaders also wanted those lands and claimed 'compensation' for driving out the Matabele. To them, this meant land or cattle or both.

Deciding that the Boers were raiding their villages and cattle kraals too often, the Barolong took up arms under their new Chief Montshioa and fought back. But the firepower of the Boers was too strong. Many of the Ratshidi were forced to leave. Led by Montshioa, they went north into what is now called Botswana. The year was 1852. Montshioa's brother, Molema, stayed behind and built the beginnings of a town on the north bank of the Molopo River. Starting with about twelve families, it became known as Molema's Town.

Not all the pale-skinned foreigners brought war with them. Some brought peace and news of a new religion called Christianity. Molema had become a Christian while



he was in Thaba Nchu so when Joseph Ludorf, a Wesleyan missionary, came to his town Molema welcomed him gladly. Ludorf built a chapel there and taught Molema's people.

From his place of exile, Chief Montshioa continued to try to prevent the Boers from moving into what he rightly considered Barolong lands. He appealed to the British for protection. This angered the Boers, since one of the main reasons they had left the Cape Colony was to escape British law and interference in their lives. In 1870 there was a conference at Buhrmansdrift. The Barolong chiefs aided by missionary Ludorf met with a delegation from the Transvaal Republic which included President Pretorius and Commandant Kruger. There was no agreement between them. The dispute was referred to Governor Keate from Natal. The boundary line he suggested was fair and favourable to the Barolong, which explains why the Boers refused to accept it. But a measure of peace did return to Molema's Town and Chief Montshioa decided to rejoin Molema. The two brothers met once again in November 1881 with great rejoicing, and the two parts of the Ratsbidi clan were joined.

The town already with a population of about 1000 grew even larger. Now the home of the paramount Barolong chief, it became known as Mahikeng, 'the place among the rocks', because of the outcrops of grey boulders. Sheltered among the trees beside the river, the little town had good views over the surrounding plain but plenty of protective cover. For this reason it was a good defensive position – as Montshioa had found when the Boers attacked. Sol Plaatje noted this defensive advantage in his diary during the siege of 1899.

*That first tribal town of Mahikeng had the layout of a typical iron age settlement. The buildings are still arranged in semi-circles (each of 10-15 homes) round the central Kgotla, which was the chief's living area and the tribal meeting place. Those more closely related to the chief lived nearer to him. At first Mahikeng had traditional circular thatched huts, but when the thatched roofs were replaced with corrugated iron, the Barolong started building houses in rectangular shape, copying European style.*

### **THE FIRST SIEGE OF MAFIKENG**

The Boers who had moved west from the Transvaal were well aware of the return of Montshioa, but they were busy setting up a new land of their own. They named it Goshen, as it seemed a desert-like place, perhaps similar to the valley of Goshen where Moses and the Israelites had lived in Egypt. The Boers from the new Republic of Goshen made frequent attacks into Barolong land,

even shelling Mahikeng with a small naval gun. This was, in its way, the first siege of the town. The local people named the rocky outcrop the Boers fired from ‘Cannon Kopje’ and it has been called that ever since. Montshioa was increasingly forced to hand over more land and cattle to the Boers. In 1882, the forces from Goshen forced him to surrender to what they called Boer ‘protection’. Montshioa refused to sign their demands to hand over all Barolong land, so his signature was forged by the Goshenites who then took the land anyway.

On 31 July 1884 this conflict turned into open battle, south of the town. The spark which set fire to the constant conflict was the theft by Boers from Goshen of about 3000 head of cattle from the Barolong and Bangwaketse cattle posts. It remains the greatest battle ever fought at Mafikeng, in terms of the number of casualties. The name given to the battle, ‘Tigele’, means ‘collapse’. Over 200 died in this bloody encounter – 112 Barolong, together with 67 allied Bangwaketse, 50 Boer Goshenites and two Englishmen. One of these was Christopher Bethel, who lived in Mahikeng.

Mr Bethell, a nephew of Sir Charles Warren, a British army officer in the Cape, was regarded by his relations as ‘the black sheep of the family’. Having left Cambridge university in a hurry because of the gambling debts he had accumulated, he was hurried off to ‘darkest Africa’ where a post was invented for him as liaison officer to Chief Montshioa. In the pay of the British government, Christopher Bethell enjoyed himself thoroughly. He married into the Barolong tribe and was glad to fight on their side in the Battle of Tigele to defend his home and wife. During the fighting he was caught by one of the Goshenites who had heard how Bethell had ‘gone native’, and to demonstrate the disapproval of the Boers, Bethel was tortured to death.

Though Christopher Bethell’s family had not approved of him when alive, the manner of his death disturbed them greatly. It was not long before the inhabitants of Mahikeng learned that Sir Charles Warren, Bethel’s uncle, had been appointed Special Commissioner for Bechuanaland. He was on his way north with four thousand British troops to avenge the death of his nephew. (There were hidden political motives as well, but no one mentioned them.)

At first, the Barolong regarded the Warren Expedition (as it became called) as a most friendly intervention. In March 1885, the Boers were chased out, the land they had taken was restored to the Barolong and the Goshen Republic ceased to exist. The territory was to be known as the Crown Colony of Bechuanaland. Life in Mahikeng became peaceful once again. The damage of war could now be repaired. Part of Warren’s expeditionary force was a

detachment of Royal Engineers. Barolong soldiers made the bricks and helped the Engineers to build a new church to replace the missionary chapel which had been destroyed during the fighting.

Warren’s military camp was set up in the ‘Imperial Reserve’ east of the tribal town. A peacekeeping force, the Bechuanaland Border Police, was established on the Imperial Reserve. One and a half kilometres further east was laid out the British colonial town of Mafeking – this anglicised name being adopted to distinguish it from the African town of Mahikeng. Montshioa would have preferred the town to have been built at Rooigrond, the capital of the recent Goshen Republic. He did not want a British colonial town too close to his tribal town because he considered the moral standards of the British soldier were much lower than those of the Ratshidi.

*The British spelt the name of the town ‘Mafeking’. Today it is known as Mafikeng. To save complications, the modern spelling will be used from here on.*

In the musical *The King and I*, the king of Siam ponders on politics:

“Shall I join with other nations in alliance?  
If allies are weak, am I not best alone?  
If allies are strong with power to protect me,  
Might they not ‘protect’ me out of all I own?”

It was much like that for the people of Mahikeng and Mafikeng. Their time of protection and peace did not last long.

## **THE IRON ROAD TO THE NORTH**

Far away to the south lived a man named Cecil Rhodes. A lonesome, bad-tempered Englishman, Rhodes had made money in the Kimberley diamond diggings and by 1881 had been elected a member of the Cape Assembly. His dream was to spread British rule throughout the world. By using the modern inventions of railways and telegraphs as a link, he wanted the British Empire to stretch from one end of Africa to the other – ‘from the Cape to Cairo’ as some put it. The proposed route of the railway line led north through Mafikeng and what had been the Boer Republic of Goshen. Rhodes wanted all this land for Britain.

So the united Bechuanaland under Chief Montshioa did not last long. The protective British proved to be no more trustworthy and just as land-hungry as the Boers. Although Sir Hercules Robinson travelled all the way from the Cape

to meet the chiefs of the region at Mahikeng and assure them that their land would never be annexed to the Cape, he merely deceived them.

The railway line was built steadily northward and reached Mafikeng in 1894. Cecil Rhodes, by then prime minister of the Cape Colony, established a border along the Molopo and Ramatlabama Rivers, and in 1895 he annexed the southern section to the Cape. Chiefs Montshioa and Mankurwane sent petitions of protest but without any effect. Their land was to be known as British Bechuanaland. However, Chief Khama of the Bamangwato prevented Rhodes from seizing the northern section as well. He went with a delegation to London and asked the British government to protect his land. They agreed, and it became known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate, ruled directly from Britain.

*This situation remained until the land gained independence as Botswana in 1966. Up to this time, its capital city remained Mafikeng, though this was outside the country!*

### **THE BRITISH COLONIAL TOWN**

As was the way with rich colonising nations, the 'white' town of Mafikeng grew rapidly round its central square and its railway storehouses, while the 'black' town which had been the original settlement was ignored by those in power. They thought of it only as the 'Stad' with no idea how important a factor it was going to prove in a few years' time. But while the town was growing, other things were dying. 1896 saw the cattle disease, rinderpest, strike the area. Cattle was both a livelihood and an outward sign of power and wealth. To be without cattle was equivalent to poverty. Later that year Chief Montshioa died, perhaps out of despair for his people's lack of cattle. He had been a remarkable man – in many ways ahead of his time. Those who wrote of him afterwards described him as kind, generous, forgiving, shrewd and courageous. Though never baptised a Christian (as his younger brother Molema was), Montshioa encouraged the work done by missionaries especially in educating his people. In administering justice, he never once imposed the death penalty.

At the beginning of that same year occurred a remarkable event which was launched from Pitsani, two stops up the railway line from Mafikeng. It is known in history as the Jameson Raid. Dr Jameson was a close friend of Cecil Rhodes and together they had plotted to move British troops in to Johannesburg in order to 'rescue' the British subjects there from the apparent threat posed by the Boer government in Pretoria. The operation was a total disaster. Jameson gathered only about 600 men instead of the 1500 he had counted on; the citizens of Johannesburg did not arm themselves and join him

as had been planned; and the Boers knew that the raid was on its way. Jameson was surrounded and overpowered at Doornkop without ever reaching Johannesburg.

This defeat was grimly felt in Mafikeng because 120 volunteers from there were among those captured and imprisoned by the Boers. Almost for certain, it increased the lack of friendship between the inhabitants of the town and the Transvaal Boers. And, quite certainly, the ill-fated Jameson Raid was the herald of war to come.



*The design of the 'Mafeking money' printed for use during the siege, using a drawing apparently by Baden-Powell.*

### **AN ECCENTRIC ENGLISHMAN**

Shortly after this an unusual character arrived in Mafikeng. Robert Baden-Powell had been educated at a private school in England where he often slipped away to track animals in a nearby wood. He loved surviving on his own out in the countryside, hiding, stalking and discovering. The army called such activity 'scouting' and by 1876 Baden-Powell found himself training army scouts in India. He had already seen action in Africa during Chief Dinizulu's rebellion. Then he developed his military scouting skills in Ashanti, West Africa and in Rhodesia in 1896. The warlike Matabele so respected his

scouting skill and constant watchfulness that they named him Impeesa, ‘the wolf that never sleeps’.

When war with the Boer republics seemed likely, Colonel Robert Baden-Powell was sent to South Africa with instructions to recruit and train two mounted regiments of men, numbering about one thousand, for the defence of Rhodesia and Bechuanaland. He chose Mafikeng as his headquarters, as it was strategically placed on the route from the Cape to Rhodesia and just outside the Transvaal border.

Baden-Powell was an experienced and inventive soldier. He used his own original ideas for training men. Fitness and absolute cleanliness were vital, he felt. But he also appreciated his men’s need for sport and recreation. He wrote a book, *Aids to Scouting*, which summed up the training he gave to his army scouts.

### **THE ANGLO-BOER WAR OF 1899-1902**

The conflict which had taken place in and around Mafikeng between Boer and British was now to be re-enacted countrywide. President Paul Kruger issued an ultimatum demanding that all British troops must be removed from the frontier areas within 48 hours. Britain, as expected, scoffed at and defied the order. On 11 October 1899 the Second Anglo-Boer War began between the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State and the British colonial government of the Cape Colony and Natal. Africans, the original inhabitants of most of the land, were pushed aside.

Soon after the declaration of war, General Cronjé, the famous and feared Boer general, moved forward and entrenched his forces firmly around Mafikeng. It was the beginning of a siege which was to last seven months. Cronjé was warned that Mafikeng could well prove a trap — and it did. Baden-Powell had intended just that. Once the siege had been started, the Boer forces were trapped there. They were not able to capture the well defended town and they could not move away and leave a military force loose to attack from the west.

The war itself lasted two and a half years, over sixty-two thousand people died, and it achieved little. The Boers, who had fought essentially for freedom from British rule and interference, lost the war but achieved their independence in 1910. However one curious result was that in Britain the besieged town of Mafikeng became famous, the man who defended it became even more so, and

for a while a new word was added to the English language – ‘mafficking’ which meant ‘going wild with delight’.

*Inside Mafikeng was a civilian population of about 1500 whites of whom 630 were women and children. In those genteel Victorian days, it was a man’s world. They thought women were there to be loved and protected, and children were just little children. Soon some of the boys were going to prove their worth. Baden-Powell commanded a force of some 1230 men which included 469 regulars of the Protectorate Regiment, various armed police units and 300 armed civilians who called themselves the Town Guard.*

*Outside Mafikeng but inside the line of defensive forts and trenches were about 6000 Barolong in their Stad (the old Mahikeng), small communities of Chinese and Indians, with a number of what Baden-Powell referred to as ‘foreign Africans’. Here was the main labour force for the defenders, but here too were the bulk of hungry stomachs.*

### **THE FOOD PROBLEM**

It is hard for us to understand now – and harder still to forgive – the way that both British and Boers thought of Africans a hundred years ago. Both sides considered this to be a ‘white man’s war’. Black Africans were there to be used as carriers, workers, servants and if they should happen to die during the fighting then it was not considered anywhere near such a misfortune as if a white man died. General Cronjé considered it ‘an enormous act of wickedness’ that Baden-Powell had armed the Barolong and some other Africans inside Mafikeng. The truth was that Baden-Powell had no choice: there were simply not enough able-bodied men to defend the place. When the siege began, nobody was very worried about food.

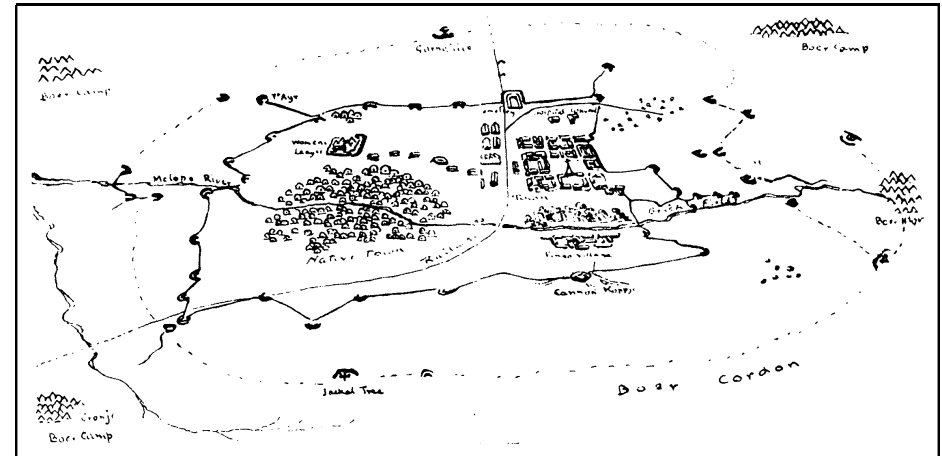
A large consignment of goods was sitting in the railway yard destined for Rhodesia. This was taken to supply the town. In addition, Ben Weil who owned Mafikeng’s largest wholesale business agreed to provide more food from his own warehouse on the strength of a written promise of repayment from Lord Edward Cecil, Baden-Powell’s Chief Staff Officer (and also the son of the British Prime Minister). Social life continued as closely to normal as possible. Baden-Powell organised concerts and acted in them himself. There was no fighting on Sundays (by mutual agreement from both attackers and defenders) and the men of Mafikeng sallied out to play cricket. On Christmas Day the menu at Dixon’s Hotel listed nine courses.

But when the siege showed no sign of coming to an end by January 1900, rationing was started. That was when the difference between the white and the black inhabitants of Mafikeng and Mahikeng showed itself more starkly. One solution seemed to be to force the 'foreign Africans' to go, leaving fewer mouths to feed. Baden-Powell cancelled their food rations, so they had the choice of starving or of breaking out through the siege lines with the risk of being shot by the Boers. Soup kitchens were set up, serving a thin mixture made from horse meat but even there the Barolong received smaller food rations than the white civilians. The Barolong could make bread only from oats: corn was reserved for whites. Sent by the British to raid the Boer lines to steal cattle, the Barolong were not allowed to eat any of the meat which came from these captured beasts. Provided with a few firearms, they were used to man all the perimeter forts (while British looked after the safer ones in the town) and yet, despite their proven bravery, they received no medals at the end of the war nor any compensation for damaged property or possessions.

### **THE SECOND SIEGE OF MAFIKENG**

The famed defence of this little town lasted for 217 days. In the early days of the siege, the Boer forces around them were over 6000. Had these commandos been free to fight elsewhere – who knows? The result of the war might have been different. Baden-Powell strengthened Mafikeng's defences with over sixty forts and lines of trenches and earthworks. Though short of artillery, he managed to give a false impression to the Boers of the town's defensive strength. He ordered black boxes to be buried, one of which exploded spectacularly, convincing the watching Boers that all the boxes were mines. At night the defenders shone a searchlight (made from a paraffin tin with an acetylene burner) dazzlingly in one direction, and then rushed to another part of the town and lit it again to give the impression of a ring of flood-lights. Perhaps as a result, there were no night attacks.

The Boers preferred to use heavy guns rather than risk lives in attacking prepared defensive positions. Against the Boers' sixteen-pounder Krupp guns and one massive Creusot which fired a ninety-four pound shell, Mafikeng had four seven-pounder field guns and one ancient muzzle-loading cannon which had previously been used as a gatepost. When the barrel was dug out of the gateway, the letters B.P. were found to be stamped on it and everyone decided this must be a sign of good luck. (The initials stood for the manufacturers: Bailey, Pegg, ironfounders – certainly not for Baden-Powell!)



The Boers were sufficiently convinced by Baden-Powell's various tricks that a frontal attack would cause too many casualties. Instead they spent most of their energy in shelling the town and hoped to starve the besieged into submission. Inside Mafikeng, the citizens ran to shelter in dugouts (dug by African labour) whenever lookouts saw the distant puff of smoke and predicted an arriving shell. It was possible through binoculars to see the exact direction in which 'Old Creaky' (the largest Boer gun, named by them 'Grietje') was pointing. After, the children gathered up the fragments and sold them as souvenirs. There were very few casualties from shelling.

The most determined attack was led on 12 May 1900 by Commandant Eloff, a grandson of Paul Kruger. He planned to break in before dawn through the Barolong Stad on the west side of the defences while a few Boers were making a diversion on the east. There were no defence lines between the Stad and the town of Mafikeng, only one old police barracks. Eloff probably reckoned that there would be no resistance from the Barolong. At first it seemed he was right. The Barolong families rushed around in terror in the first light of dawn as many of their homes were set alight. But the flames and smoke gave a clear signal to Baden-Powell's watchers. The church bell sounded the alarm, his telephone network relayed the information, men in pyjamas rushed to their posts. Meanwhile, though the Boers had entered the Stad easily enough, the Barolong had no intention of letting them out. With the British regulars on their way from Mafikeng and the armed Barolong blocking any retreat. Eloff's Boers were caught in between. Cut off from any reinforcements, Eloff was forced to surrender – within the tribal town which he had considered an easy

way in. He had lost a hundred and eight men – almost half his assault force. Baden-Powell counted twelve dead and eight wounded, most of them Africans.

Five days later, a fast-moving column of Hussars reached Mafikeng and found that the encircling Boers had left. Baden-Powell, exhaustedly asleep, was woken by his younger brother who had come with the relieving force. When the news of the relief of Mafikeng reached London, the whole city went wild and folk went ‘mafficking’ in the streets.

### **SOL T. PLAATJE**

Inside Mafikeng, working as a court interpreter during the siege, was Solomon Tshekiso Plaatje, aged 24. His diary, kept during the siege of Mafikeng, tells us much about the true situation inside the town.



Sol Plaatje was a talented linguist who was fluent in Setswana, Sesotho, English and Dutch, as well as speaking some Xhosa and German. Though he was able to do shorthand, his diary was written in longhand (and in English). In his early entries (October 1899), it was the frequent shelling which affected him: “Our ears cannot stand anything like the bang of a door: the rat-tat of some stones nearby shakes one inwardly.” In January 1900, when their meat ration was reduced, he noted “There is a very great difference between white and black even in a besieged town”. By February he had recorded, “I saw horseflesh for the first time being treated as human foodstuff”. In March he noted how “Our local Zambesi friends” dug up the vagrant dogs which had been killed by town officials in order to cook and eat them, and how the theft of some green mealies was punished with six days’ hard labour. His last entry was on 30 March (several weeks before the siege ended) when he wrote, “The Colonel Commanding has published a hot protest against alleged rumours to the effect that ... he starves the inhabitants”. Plaatje did not have time to write more, or he might well have recorded how the threat of starvation inside the Stad became desperate.

*Sol Plaatje later edited a Tswana-English weekly paper before moving to Kimberley where he started Tsala ea Batho, the first Tswana newspaper. He became the first secretary of the African National Congress. His historical romance, Mhudi is the first known novel by a*

*black South African – published in 1930, it had been written some ten years earlier. Sol Plaatje died in 1932 and his grave in Kimberley has been declared a national monument.*



*Sol Plaatje’s novel Mhudi told of the Matabele invasion and of the Barolong retreat to Thaba Nchu.*

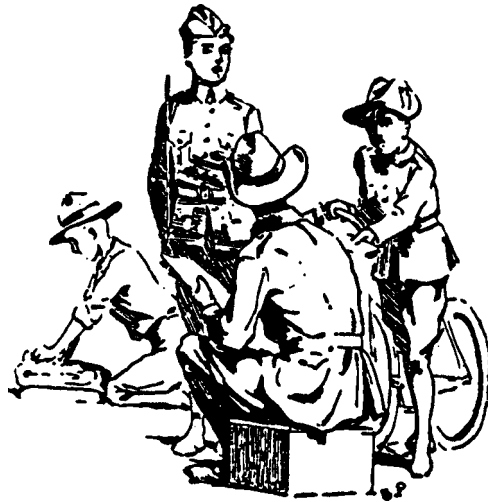
### **THE CADET CORPS**

A cadet corps of white boys had been formed in the colonial town of Mafeking (as it was spelt then) before the famous siege ever started. Put under the command of Lord Edward Cecil during the siege, they quickly proved themselves useful, which freed the adult men for vital defence work. With a military garrison in the town, they had always wanted to ‘play at soldiers’. Now they were able to feel that they were playing an active part in the defence.

The cadets had their own boy commander – Warner Goodyear, the son of an army Captain, who was given the rank of Cadet Sergeant-Major. Uniforms were made for them and they were provided with bicycles. One story tells how a boy on a bicycle skidded his way through the shell fire to deliver a message to headquarters. Baden-Powell suggested that he should take more care. The boy laughed and said, “I pedal so quick, sir, the bullets will never catch me!” The cadet corps was kept busy, running errands, helping to man observation

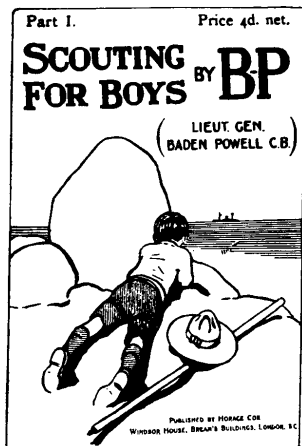
posts and performing various non-combatant duties. In spite of the danger, only one cadet, Frankie Brown, was killed by an exploding shell.

These siege cadets were not the first Boy Scouts. Indeed, there is no evidence that Baden-Powell took much notice of them, but after the siege was over he remembered how useful they had been. If boys could be so dependable in wartime, he thought, why not also in peace time? Later he wrote, "It is safe to say that there would have been no further development of the Scout movement as we know it had there been no siege at all." He had observed the possibility of giving boys responsibility and treating them seriously – and this was to form one of the basic ideas behind the Scout Movement.



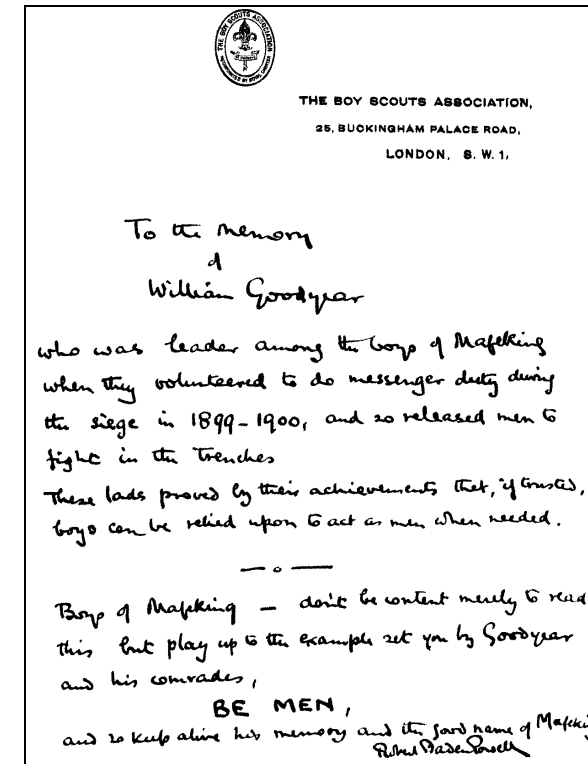
## SCOUTING BEGINS

Three countries played a part in the birth of the Scout Movement: India, South Africa and England. It was in India that Robert Baden-Powell served as an army officer and first learned the skills of military scouting. During the siege of Mafikeng in South Africa, he saw 'how useful boys can be on active service'. On Brownsea Island in Poole harbour, he held the camp in which his 'Scouting for Boys' ideas were first put into practice. The same Union Jack which had been flown during the Mafikeng siege was hoisted every day at that first 'Scout' camp.



The Brownsea Island camp was held in 1907. In January 1908, the first of six fortnightly parts of *Scouting for Boys* was published in which B-P (as he was to be known all over the world) suggested how boys could train themselves as Scouts. So they did!

A hand-written letter from Robert Baden-Powell later suggested the wording of a memorial to the boy leader of the Cadet Corps:



*"To the memory of William Goodyear  
(B-P made a mistake: it should have been Warner)  
Who was the leader among the boys of Mafeking when they volunteered  
to do messenger duty during the siege in 1899-1900, and so released  
men to fight in the trenches.  
These lads proved by their achievements that, if trusted, boys  
can be relied upon to act as men when needed'.  
Boys of Mafeking – don't be content merely to read this but play  
up to the example set you by Goodyear and his comrades,  
BE MEN,  
and so keep alive his memory and the good name of Mafeking."*

In 1992 a memorial to Warner Goodyear was erected in the Randfontein cemetery.



All over England – and soon after that, around the world – groups of boys went into action on their own accord, calling themselves Scouts long before any sort of official organisation had been set in place.

There will always be argument over which was the first Scout Troop in Africa. Those first Scouts were far more busy doing active Scouting than bothering to get registered! The 1st Mafikeng Troop was started soon after 1908 and is still there.

In a way, what B-P did was to set up a scheme in which European boys would become able to do what any African boy could do already – look after himself, light a fire, cook, hunt, make a shelter. White boys were going to learn to be as independent and as useful to the community as black boys already were. So it is fair to say that the idea of Scouting came from Africa. Viewed in that light, Mafikeng is indeed the birthplace of Scouting.



## **SOME KEY DATES**

- c1850 Molema's Town started beside Molopo River
- 1875 Sol Plaatje born near Boshof
- 1884 Battle called 'Tigele' fought at Mahikeng
- 1885 Warren Expedition / British town of Mafeking started
- 1895 Land annexed as British Bechuanaland
- 1896 Death of Chief Montshioa / Jameson Raid
- 1899 2nd Anglo-Boer War began on 11 October Siege of Mafeking started on 14 October
- 1900 Mafeking relieved on 17 May
- 1907 Baden-Powell's experimental camp on Brownsea Island
- 1908 *Scouting for Boys* published