

# Mafeking Night

They say that every picture tells a story! It may simply be that they stimulate our imagination. Or they may show how people are touched by events in history.

One photograph in my collection of family photos illustrates the latter.

It was taken on **Mafeking Night, Friday 18th May 1900.**



The 217 day Siege of Mafeking took place in the 2nd Boer War. The small garrison was commanded by Robert Baden-Powell, who later founded the Boy Scouts. The town was surrounded by a large Boer force who cut the telegraph link between Mafeking and the outside world. Messages were then carried through the Boer lines by African runners. However the Daily Mail correspondent attempted to leave the town himself and was captured by the Boers. This was propitious. His replacement was Lady Sarah Wilson, aunt of Winston Churchill and wife of Baden-Powell's aide-de-camp. In November 1899 the Daily Mail published the first of a series of articles, "Our Life in Mafeking" written by Lady Sarah Wilson. This was a huge scoop for the Daily Mail. In the following months the plucky defence of Mafeking provided good news in a war which was not going well for the British Forces. Lady Sarah Wilson described it all - not only the shelling, death and destruction, but also the observation of the Sabbath by both sides, allowing one happy day in seven, with polo and other sports, tea parties and other pursuits. Remarkable!

So though Mafeking actually played a minor part in the war, it had a huge place in the hearts of the British public. Mafeking was relieved on Thursday 17th May but it took a day for the first rumours to reach England and several further hours before official confirmation, By the Friday evening huge crowds were on the London streets celebrating with boisterous rejoicing. Flags were everywhere. They were "mafficking", a word which survives in dictionaries.

The photo shows Susie and Bert Hamment (my grandparents), together with two of Bert's brothers, clearly ready to join the throng. Bert has a large "Union Jack", and Susie appears to have a version of the Royal Standard, with images of lions just discernable.

There had been a milestone in photography - the arrival of the cheap roll-film camera which brought photography to the people. Up to about that date most photographs were 'studio' photographs, taken by professionals with bulky plate cameras. But the Kodak 'Brownie' was launched in February 1900 and everyone wanted one. Perhaps Bert's other brother, missing from the group, had just acquired one?

Of course we are also seeing part of a personal story. It was then only a month since Susie and Bert had been married in St Pancras, not far from the London Station.

Four daughters came along, one being my mother.

