

Cape Colony: Boer War: Kimberley Siege: Diamond Fields Artillery Tribute Medal

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Form: Ornate shield with voids. Attached loop for a ring.

By: G Loveridge & Co (George Loveridge), Birmingham

Date: 1913

Ref: Laidlaw: 1205;

Variations:

| Size | Metal | Mass | Value |
|-------------------|----------|--------|-------|
| 31.4 mm x 41.0 mm | Gold 9ct | 4.6 gm | \$150 |

Edge: Plain.

Obverse: On a raised central shield bonded to the back piece in engraved diagonal script: "Sergt. J. / Wheaton".

Reverse: Across in engraved script: "Pres. to / Sergt. J. Wheaton, (in an arc) / by the / centre section / D.F. Artillery / Boer War". At the foot the makers mark: "G.L".

Notes: James Wheaton was born on 5th April 1859 in Winkleigh, Devon. He attested for 10 years service in the Royal Navy on his birthday in 1877. He served for a further 3 years and was discharged with the rank of petty officer in 1890. His naval record shows that he obtained gunnery experience during his service.

At some stage he emigrated to South Africa and became employed as an electrician by the De Beers Diamond Mining Company in Kimberley. The town was situated only five miles from the Orange Free State border and by early 1899 preparations for the defence of the town were well underway in anticipation of war with the Boer Republics. On 1st July 1899 Wheaton signed up with the Diamond Fields Artillery with the rank of sergeant.

The Siege of Kimberley started on 14 October 1899. The Diamond Fields Artillery had a strength of 97 men and six 7-pdr RML 2.5 inch Mountain Guns. These had a maximum range of about 3,000 yards and were hopelessly outgunned by the besieging forces. However, De Beers had a well equipped workshop and George Labram (Chief Engineer) and Edward Labram (Chief Draughtsman) set about the manufacture of a modern artillery piece. Work on the gun commenced on 26th December and was completed 24 days later. It was an extraordinary achievement given the limited resources and the absence of prior experience in how to make such a weapon.

The gun was nicknamed 'Long Cecil' after Cecil Rhodes, the Chairman of De Beers. It was a 4.1 inch breech-loading weapon firing a 28-pound shell with a maximum range of 8,000 yards.

On Friday, 19 January, Long Cecil was taken for testing, successfully firing 16 rounds. Two days later it was handed over to the Diamond Fields Artillery who provided a 10-man detachment under Sergeant James Wheaton. During its 28 days in service Long Cecil fired 260 rounds in action.

After the siege was lifted Long Cecil acquired well deserved fame throughout the Cape Colony. Wheaton and his men took the gun to Cape Town for inspection by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later H.M. King George V and Queen Mary) during their Royal Visit. Then, on 26 March 1902, Cecil Rhodes died and Long Cecil went to Cape Town for the second time during the war, on this occasion to serve as the gun carriage in Rhodes's funeral procession to Cape Town railway station, again from Bulawayo station to his final resting place in the Matopo Hills.

For his service during the Boer War, Wheaton was awarded with the QSA medal with the Defence of Kimberley clasp and the Kimberley Star. He also received the Rhodes Funeral Medal (Laidlaw 0503).

Wheaton resigned from the DFA on 6 January 1903. This tribute medal was presented to him 10 years later presumably on the anniversary of his discharge by the members of the Long Cecil gunnery team.