

MAFFICKING AT BANBURY, OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL,

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maffick *v* (1900) used, especially by places to designate the behaviour of the crowds (in London and other towns) that celebrated with uproarious rejoicing the relief of the British garrison besieged in Mafeking (17 May 1900) during the South African War (Boer War). . . ¹

The text book account of the war in South Africa usually runs along the lines of a conflict between Britain on one hand, and the Afrikaners (or Boers) on the other. Hostilities began in 1899 and ended three years later with the Peace of Vereeniging. At the outset of hostilities many assumed the mighty British empire would be able to bring the two Boer republics to heel without too much difficulty, yet such was not the case. The Boers demonstrated their prowess by laying siege to Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking, prior to scoring a significant victory at Spion Kop in January, 1900.

Thereafter, the tide moved slowly in favour of the British. Mafeking – the best known of the relief operations – passed into folklore, a symbol of defiance, having withstood a siege of seven months. News of this British success caught popular imagination, and was the signal for delirious rejoicing that lasted several days. Yet a review of the first few months of 1900 reveals that Mafeking was one of a series of what came to be regarded as victories, that were marked by celebrations not just in Britain but throughout the empire.

Some of the festivities were organised by local authorities, while others were spontaneous outpourings of joy at what were considered victories. Banbury was no exception in this respect: the borough council sensing the popular mood gave civic sanction to the lighting of bonfires and firework displays in respect of the relief of Bloemfontein in March, and some weeks later entered into the rejoicing at the good news from Mafeking. Other incidents indicating the progress of British policy South Africa were apparently deemed by the councillors as being unworthy of a celebration. Some, though not all townspeople, felt

¹ J. Ayto, *Twentieth Century Words* (Oxford, 1999), p. 31.