

THE FLAGS OF THE DIGGER'S REPUBLIC

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The Diggers' Republic – also variously described as the Free (Diamond) Republic, the Klipdrift Republic, the Griqualand (West) Republic and the Republic of Adamantia – existed for some months during the latter half of 1870 in the alluvial diamond fields on the banks of the Vaal River between Hebron in the east and its confluence with the Harts River in the west.

The first stone to be positively identified as a diamond in South Africa, was found in 1866 on a farm in the Hopetown district on the southern bank of the Orange River. This was followed in the succeeding months by further discoveries in the area north of the Orange River, including that of the magnificent 83,5 carat stone now known as the «Star of South Africa» which was found in March 1869 and was later bought by the Earl of Dudley¹. Before this stone left South Africa the Cape Colonial Secretary, Sir Richard Southey, laid it on the table of the House with the prophetic declaration: «Gentlemen, this is the rock on which the future of South Africa will be built»².

The publicity surrounding the discovery of diamonds led to hundreds, and then thousands of persons flocking to the diamondiferous territory which maps were, before long, to show as «Adamantia»³. Initially many of the diggers were British subjects from within South Africa, but as word spread further afield they flocked in from almost every corner of the world.

Hitherto political interest in the sparsely-populated arid area of the southern African sub-continent near the western reaches of the Vaal River had been virtually non-existent and national borders were but ill-defined. South of the Orange River lay the Cape Colony which then laid no claim to any territory north of the river. The Republic of the Orange Free State, whose independence had been recognised by Britain in 1854, was generally accepted as extending westward to the confluence of the Orange and Vaal Rivers, while the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (or Transvaal), as the latter name implies, lay north of the Vaal, although its western border was as yet undefined⁴. The reason was simply that there was no sovereign independent state to the west with which to negotiate a fixed border and its citizens had merely drifted westward carrying the border with them.

Such territorial negotiations as had hitherto taken place had been with the indigenous local tribes, the Batlaping and Koranas, who were largely nomadic and consequently had no fixed borders to their lands.

Also resident in this area, with undisputed lands around their capital Griquatown, but with grazing lands further afield for their flocks and herds, was a tribe of people of colour known as the Griquas with whom various agreements had also been concluded from time to time. Other than to the Griquas, the indigenous African inhabitants, and a handful of white farmers who had settled there, this was an area of so little economic interest that none of the surrounding states had shown sufficient interest to appoint any form of magistrate or administrator. The Griquas and local tribes were left in peace to roam freely though this almost forgotten territory.

This peaceful existence was brought to an end by the discovery of substantial numbers of diamonds on the banks of the Vaal near Pniel, the site of a German Mission Station just south of the River. As the news of the discovery of diamonds spread and the so-called «River Diggings» opened up on both banks of the Vaal, this brought a radical change to the area. Klipdrift, across the river from Pniel, was soon to develop into the principal centre of these diggings.

With the Cape Colonial, Orange Free State and Transvaal treasuries all chronically short of funds, the prospect of a convenient source of income being generated by the diamond diggings was a most appealing prospect, and all three governments suddenly developed an intense interest in an area which they had hitherto ignored. The Griquas, with some judicious prompting by their agent David Arnot, also laid claim to the whole of the already identified diamondiferous area as being their traditional lands and called for British support for their claims.

In the absence of any form of government control, the diggers framed a code of rules for the regulation and management of their affairs on the diggings⁵. In the face of what they considered to be predatory claims by the Orange Free State and Transvaal, and also the Griqua Chief Nicolaas Waterboer, the diggers at Klipdrift also established a «Mutual Protection Association» with Stafford Parker, who had long traded in the area, as Commandant. Parker, a former able-bodied seaman in the Royal Navy, merchant seaman, painter and one-time member of the Frontier Armed and Mounted Police, was then a prominent general dealer and owner of a music saloon in Klipdrift⁶.

Although the Free State Volksraad had, on 17 May 1870, asked Waterboer to prove his claim to those lands which they deemed to be Free State territory⁷, the first real sign of official interference in the affairs of the diggers came the following month when the Transvaal Volksraad, with effect from 24 June 1870, granted the exclusive rights to mine for diamonds, other precious stones and minerals in all lands between the Vaal and Harts Rivers to three men, Messrs. Webb, Posno and Munnik⁸.

In a report filed from Klipdrift on 15 July 1870, the Argus correspondent reported that as a result of the news of this concession: «The diggers are in a fearful state of excitement... and there is to be a meeting of what they proudly call the Provisional Republic tomorrow afternoon»⁹.

The following day the special correspondent of the Aliwal Observer, also writing from Klipdrift, reported that «several from the crowd... were immensely cheered whenever .. they called for the diggers to declare for a «Free Republic». He continued that «Great enthusiasm was manifest throughout and the call «Parker and a Republic» was received with cheers and an irregular salute of musketry. I hardly think that it will be safe for Messrs. Munnich (sic), Posno and Webb to put in an appearance at the diggings if they have any regard for a whole body»¹⁰.

Writing from the Pniel side of the Vaal River the following day (17 July 1870), the special correspondent

of the Aliwal Observer noted: «Union jacks and British ensigns flying today»¹¹. This is an observation which I believe to be of special significance.

Precisely when the diggers declared their «Republic» with Stafford Parker as President is not clear from official British correspondence, but various writers give the date as 30 July 1870.

Although it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction in the accounts of his life and activities, Parker was a man of outstanding charisma and a genuine orator, with the air of one born to command. Writing in 1874, an American, A.H. Hornsby, who had spent some time on the diamond fields and then prepared a guide-book for prospective diggers, however, had the following to say: «It will grieve American ears to hear that rumour said Mr. Parker owed his election to the liberality with which he provided for the thirsty loafers of the camp»¹².

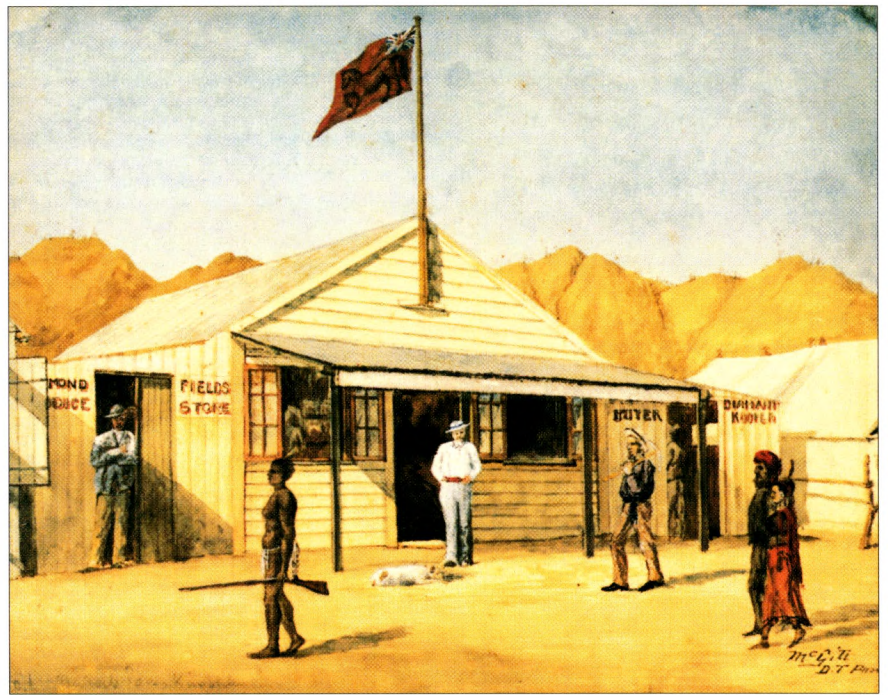
The name «Griqualand West», to describe the whole area claimed by the Griquas under Nicolaas Waterboer was coined by their agent David Arnot in a letter to the Free State President on 24 August 1870¹³. Five days later, following an inconclusive meeting with Waterboer's representatives at Nooitgedacht, the Orange Free State proclaimed the lands over which they disputed Waterboer's ownership, which included the diamond fields, to be its territory and appointed Olaf Truter as Magistrate at Pniel¹⁴.

Hot on the heels of the Free State, the Transvaal Government on 10 September 1870 issued a proclamation at Klipdrift declaring the territory between the Vaal and Harts Rivers to be part of the Transvaal¹⁵. Four days earlier President M. W. Pretorius of the Transvaal had been warned that should he attempt to hoist the Transvaal Vierkleur at Klipdrift the diggers would tear it to pieces. Tempers on the river diggings were clearly getting frayed and President Pretorius and his men withdrew to their camp at Hebron¹⁶.

In a letter to Lieut-General Hay the Acting Governor of the Cape Colony, Theodore Doms, political agent of the Baralong and Batlapin branches of the Bechuana Nation wrote that on 16 September 1870 «a flag was hoisted by [one part of] the diggers [they have different political feelings], viz., a white flag with the name Free (diamond) Republic, and the Union Jack above, and an independent Government was proclaimed....»¹⁷

To the best of my knowledge this flag described by Doms has not previously attracted the attention of vexillologists. From the description it is unfortunately not clear if the Union Jack was directly above the name or perhaps in the canton as with British ensigns. It is certainly not the flag hitherto assumed to have been that of the Diggers' Republic.

That the diggers had a flag which they could raise is confirmed by a certain W.A. Krige from Bloemhof who declared under oath in a submission to the Transvaal Republic «that on the 17th Day of September 1870 he was present at a meeting convened at Klipdrift, Diamondfields, S.A. Republic, and heard that certain Thomas Beeton made use of the following expressions: That the Transvaal Government of the said Republic were unable to protect their own laws and in consequence could not protect the interests of the diamond diggers. That he proposed that the Free Republican flag



should be hoisted instead of that of the S.A. Republic requesting and proposing that every digger in favour of the proceeding should solemnly swear to protect the former even at the cost of his life....»¹⁸

According to McNish, Parker's Presidency was at first only a galvanised iron building in the veld but later a more substantial place in the main street of Klipdrift was used. He writes, «A flag was designed showing the Union Jack in the top right hand corner with a large rearing horse as the central item. This flag was hoisted daily on a flagstaff set up in front of the presidency building»¹⁹. We will come to this flag shortly.

There is no doubt that the Diggers' Republic brought a semblance of order to much of the alluvial diggings, and served to stave off both Free State and Transvaal claims to the area.

It seems that Parker, who had had his differences with members of his committee, and resigned as President for a short while, did not have any illusions about ruling indefinitely and was as anxious as many of his compatriots for British authority to be imposed on the diggings.

John Campbell, whom the British authorities had appointed as magistrate duly arrived at Pniel on 12 December 1870, and was rowed across the River to Klipdrift the following day. On his arrival there President Parker was waiting for him and after a mutual exchange of letters the rebel republic gave way to the British Empire²⁰.

The Diggers' Republic was significant not for the duration of its existence, but for its demonstrating the independence and determination of the diggers to manage their own affairs.

In December 1870 the Vaal River came down in flood and destroyed most of the diamond claims at Klipdrift and Pniel, washing away much of the equipment which had stood on its banks²¹. The «dry diggings» at Du Toit's pan were by now proving to be more promising than the river diggings, and together with many other diggers Stafford Parker now also moved to Du Toit's Pan

where he again opened a general dealer's store and music saloon, before moving a year or so later to the newly-discovered goldfields of the Transvaal²².

It is to W. McGill, an artist who visited Du Toit's Pan in 1871, that we owe what seems to be the only contemporary illustration of the flag which writers have hitherto considered to be that of the Diggers' Republic [Figure].

Brian Roberts illustrates McGill's painting, with the following caption: «Dutoitspan Government Offices shortly after the rush to the «dry diggings». This painting by McGill depicts the defiance of the Dutoitspan diggers in hoisting the «horse» flag of the recently defunct Diggers' Republic»²³.

Anthony Hocking (who incorrectly attributes the painting to J.W. George) has in turn captioned the same painting as follows: «J.W. George painted this canteen-cum-store-cum-diamond merchant's in Dutoitspan. It flies the flag of the shortlived «Diggers' Republic» which survived until the British took over in 1871 (sic). Walking past the canteen are a «kaffir» (the term was not derogatory) proudly carrying a rifle which was an important status symbol; a digger complete with pickaxe; and an oddly costumed couple apparently from the East»²⁴.

The catalogue of the Africana Museum in Johannesburg, where McGill's painting now hangs, does not shed much more light on the topic. It reads as follows:

«McGill, – M12 Du Toits Pan, c. 1871 No inscription. Water-colour, 10x12 3/4. Signature «McGill D.T. Pan», J.G. Gubbins, 1934, No. 6277: Depicts a wood and iron store with the words «...mond Fields ...duce store» – «...Buyer» – «Diamant Kooper» painted on it. Above the store flies a flag with a horse on a red ground and a Union Jack in the top corner nearest the flag-pole. This has been described – on what grounds is not known – as the flag of the Griqualand Republic. The name of the artist and subject are adduced solely from the signature».

McGill painted the flag as a Red Ensign bearing but a very small Union Jack in the upper hoist corner and showing almost all over the red field a naturalistic brown horse passant facing the fly [Figure].

I would certainly doubt Roberts' assertion that the building depicted was the Du Toit's Pan Government Offices, and believe instead that it might well have been Stafford Parker's own establishment at Du Toit's Pan. He never allowed people to forget he had been a President and was known as the «ex-President» for the remainder of his life. It is logical to assume, bearing in mind the independent nature of the diggers, that Parker might well have continued to fly a flag adopted during his presidency, while living at Du Toit's Pan.

When Griqualand West, which included most of the diamondiferous area, was proclaimed a British Crown Colony on 27 October 1871, the diggers were infuriated. Many favoured defying Britain and re-instituting their republic, but Parker saw the futility of such a move and won the men over to an acceptance of the fact that he was no longer their President and that the Diggers' Republic no longer existed²⁵.

As far as the flag flown at Du Toit's Pan is concerned, there are a number of factors which point to it having indeed been a flag of the Diggers' Republic. I have already mentioned the fact that many of the early diggers were British subjects (from Natal and the Cape), and that the Union Jack and British Ensigns were widely flown at the River Diggings. As we know, the flag described by Theodore Doms contained a Union Jack, so it is well within the bounds of probability that the Red Ensign – also flown on the diggings – could have formed the basis of another flag for the Diggers' Republic.

With his naval background Stafford Parker would have been well acquainted with the Red Ensign - which with a distinctive badge in the fly was later to form the basis of many colonial ensigns. Horse racing was furthermore one of Parker's great loves and he was later to become an official of the Jockey Club in Johannesburg²⁶. This flag thus certainly incorporates a number of elements dear to Stafford Parker.

A white horse would certainly have shown up better on the flag, but when studying McGill's painting it seems to me that the horse might well have been painted onto the bunting. Before moving to the diamond fields Parker had earned a living for a while as a painter under the name «William»²⁷, so I wonder if he did not actually paint the horse onto the flag himself.

When the available documentary and circumstantial evidence is weighed, I believe that the Diggers' Republic in all probability had more than one home made flag; one of these being that described by Theodore Doms, of which we unfortunately do not have an illustration, and another being a variant of the British Red Ensign, with a prominent dark horse passant, with its tail to the hoist, occupying much of the field. Although we have McGill's illustration of the latter flag, flying at Du Toit's Pan, I am afraid I have not succeeded in tracing concrete documentary evidence that the Diggers' Republic did, in fact, fly it at the River Diggings

I would have liked to settle the question of the Diggers' Republic's flag(s) for once and for all, but regret that this has not been possible

Acknowledgements

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Notes

The principal source of official documentation relating to the early days of the diamond fields is a British Parliamentary «Blue Book», South Africa, XXI, Griqualand Diamond Fields & c., 1871–73, containing «Correspondence respecting the affairs of the Cape of Good Hope», which was presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty (Queen Victoria) on 17th August, 1871. The report of the discovery of diamonds is contained in a dispatch dated 4 August 1870 from Lieut. Governor C. Hay to the Earl of Granville, pp. 28, 29.

² O. Doughty: *Early Diamond Days*, (1963), p. 3.

³ A. F. Lindley: *Adamantia. The Truth about the South African Diamond Fields*, (1873), map facing p. 16, A. H. Hornsby. *The South African Diamond Fields*, (1874), map facing p. 8.

⁴ E. Walker: *A History of Southern Africa*, (3rd ed., 1959), pp. 327–340.

⁵ E. Rosenthal quotes the «Rules for the Vaal River Diamond Fields. Alluvial Claims», in *River of Diamonds*, pp. 67, 68.

⁶ C. J. Beyers (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, V, pp. 600, 601, W. S. Robertson: «President S. Parker», in: *Pretoriana* (Festival Edition), April–August 1966, pp. 48–51.

⁷ «Blue Book», op. cit., p. 37.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 33–35.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 29–31.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 32.

¹² *The South African Diamond Fields*, pp. 7, 8.

¹³ Lindley: *Adamantia*, pp. 115, 116.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 234, 235, 260; «Blue Book», op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁵ «Blue Book», op. cit., p. 92.

¹⁶ D. E. Schaefer: «Diamonds, Diggers and Dreams», in: *Lantern*, XXXVI, 4, October 1987, p. 10.

¹⁷ «Blue Book», op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁸ *Transvaal Archives Depot* SS 129, R1126/70, pp. 356, 357.

¹⁹ J. T. McNish: *The Road to Eldorado*, (1968), p. 181.

The flag is illustrated on p. 186.

²⁰ B. Roberts: *Kimberley: Turbulent City*, p. 32.

²¹ McNish, op. cit., p. 186.

²² *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, V, pp. 600–601.

²³ *Kimberley: Turbulent City*, p. 47.

²⁴ *Old Kimberley*, p. 5.

²⁵ E. Atwell: «From Rolling Stone to President», in: *Looking Back*, (Journal of the Historical Society of Port Elizabeth), XX, March 1982, pp. 24–27.

²⁶ *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, V, pp. 600–601.

«The Late Mr Stafford Parker», in: *South Africa* (London), 17 April 1915, p. 123.

²⁷ *Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, VIII, pp. 453–454.

A NEW COUNTRY, OLD SYMBOLS: FLAGS AND ARMS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Aleš Brožek

Czechoslovakia was born out of the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. It united several nations but two were the most populous – the Czechs in the west and the Slovaks in the east – and this fact was reflected in the country's name. When the question of a national flag for a new country arose, the traditional flag of Bohemia (white over red) had to be rejected just in the first selection. It was too similar to those of Poland and of Austria. Therefore a new flag pattern was designed¹. A white over red flag with a blue triangle at the hoist was then officially adopted by a law of 30 March 1920. This flag contained the Pan-Slavic colours as both nations were Slavs. There was no official symbolism of colours and the design of this flag, but it was later believed that the blue triangle stands for Slovakia. The aforementioned law determined greater, medium and lesser arms as well as the president's flag which carried the greater arms in the centre and had flame-like borders.

The national flag of Czechoslovakia was in use till 1939 when the first partition of Czechoslovakia took place. Bohemia and Moravia became a «protectorate» of the German Reich under a German governor, Slovakia declared its independence and introduced her traditional flag of white over blue over red by a law of 23 June 1939. The Czechs tried to change only the arms and wanted to keep the Czechoslovak flag for the pro-

tectorate saying that the blue triangle stood for Moravia whose arms contain a blue shield². When this flag design was rejected by pro-German politicians, two variants of the flag for the protectorate were submitted to the protector for approval. The first variant consisted of white over red with a blue vertical stripe at the hoist instead of a blue triangle. The other variant was a white over red over blue tricolour. The latter was approved and adopted together with lesser and greater arms and with the flag of the state president by a law of 19 September 1939.

The Czechoslovak flag was still used by the Czechoslovak government in exile and flew on battlefields abroad where Czech and Slovak soldiers died. After 1945 it was readopted and it remained unaltered even after 1948 when a communist regime was set up. When Czechoslovakia achieved socialism, «the first step on the way to communism», in 1960 (at least in ideas of Czech and Slovak communist leaders), the national arms together with the flag of the president were changed by a law of 17 November 1960, but not the national flag.

During the «Velvet Revolution» in November 1989 the Czechoslovak flag played a prominent role in mass demonstrations against the communist regime. Thousands of national flags, large and small, were displayed daily both by the Czechs and Slovaks who were in opposition to the communists. However, relations between these two nations grew worse in the following months. They were also reflected in discussions among Czech and Slovak members of the Federal National Assembly after president Václav Havel suggested the elf-