Historical archaeology is a sub-field of archaeology that combines excavations with either documentary evidence or oral traditions, or sometimes both. In southern Africa historical archaeology relates to the past 500 years. In other parts of the world this may differ since it depends on the date of the earliest available documentary evidence.

The Archaeology Department of the Museum is currently engaged in excavations at an interesting Anglo-Boer War site close to Bloemfontein. This allows for research using a combination of excavated material and documentary sources, whereby objects can be identified, leading to the dating and interpretation of the site.

Some interesting objects identified so far include several badges from British military units and some British objects, all dating to roughly the same period, namely 1899 – 1908.

**Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise’s)**

In 1872, Princess Louise (1848 – 1939) was appointed by Queen Victoria as the Colonel-in-Chief of the 91st Regiment of Foot (Princess Louise’s Argyllshire Highlanders). In 1881 the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were formed by the amalgamation of the 91st Regiment and the 93rd (Sutherland Highlanders) Regiment. Princess Louise then became Colonel-in-Chief of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders from 1881 until her death in 1939. She showed great interest in her regiment, to the extent of designing the new regimental badge herself. Her design combined the Argyll Boar’s Head and the Sutherland Wild Cat, surmounted by her own cipher and coronet. The 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders had the largest cap badge in the British Army. This Scottish infantry regiment fought under Lord Methuen at the battles of Modder River, Magersfontein and Paardeberg.

**The Cameronians (Scottish Rifles)**

The Cameronians, also known as the Scottish Rifles, were formed in 1881 by the amalgamation of two regiments, namely the 26th Regiment of Foot (the original Cameronians) and the 90th Perthshire Light Infantry. They were the only regiment with historical religious ties, named after Richard Cameron, a leader of the Presbyterians who resisted the Stuart monarchs. Every new member of the regiment was issued a Bible as an acknowledgement to Richard Cameron. The badge of this unit incorporates the Douglas Star, one of the oldest insignia in Scottish heraldry. It also includes a bugle horn at the bottom, indicative of a light infantry or rifle regiment. The Cameronians were active in several battles in the Free State and Northern Cape, such as Slabbert’s Nek.

**The Norfolk Regiment**

In 1799 King George III awarded the 9th Foot Regiment the privilege of bearing the figure of Britannia as regimental badge. Britannia was a Roman term for the island of Great Britain. The Romans personified Britannia as a goddess. She later became the national personification of the United Kingdom. The insignia of the Norfolk Regiment features Britannia seated with a
shield and trident. There are many versions of Britannia on their badges.
In 1881 the 9th Foot (East Norfolk) Regiment became known as the Norfolk Regiment when it was decided to link all the numbered infantry regiments to specific geographical areas. It took part in several battles, such as Belmont, Graspan, Magersfontein, Paardeberg, Modder River and Driefontein, as well as the relief of Kimberley, Bloemfontein and Pretoria.

The Northumberland Fusiliers

The Northumberland Fusiliers were formed in 1674 and were originally known as the Irish Regiment. Later they became known as the 5th Regiment of Foot and adopted the figure of St George and the Dragon as their badge. They also adopted the motto Quo Fata Vocant (Whither the Fates Call), that is displayed on their badges. In 1881, after several name changes they became known as the Northumberland Fusiliers.

The two battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers played an active role during the Anglo-Boer War. The 1st Battalion, under the command of Lord Methuen, fought at Belmont, Graspan, Modder River and Magersfontein. The 2nd Battalion defended Natal against the Boers and also fought at Stormberg where 350 men were captured by the Boers. The Northumberland Fusiliers were actively involved in the taking of Bloemfontein during March 1900.

Badge no. 1 above is a good example of the complete cap badge (a grenade with flames), while badge no. 2 is in a much worse state of deterioration and is missing the flames at the top.

The Royal Engineers

During the Anglo-Boer War the Royal Engineers were responsible for tasks such as the building and maintenance of bridges and railways, defense construction, the operation of telegraphs and the provision of cantonments and hospitals. They also sabotaged bridges and railways in Boer territory. Major General Sir Elliot Wood, Chief Engineer, was responsible for the idea of using blockhouses. By the end of the war about 8 000 blockhouses had been erected.

Prince George William Frederick Charles, Duke of Cambridge (1819-1904), was the first Colonel-in-Chief (1861-1904) of the Corps of Royal Engineers. After the prince's death in 1904, King Edward VII assumed this position. The badge and button above bear the inscription "VII", indicating the rule of King Edward VII, and therefore dates to after 1904.

The cap badge was used as a "hat badge" for the first time in 1899, when it was worn on the khaki helmets issued to British troops during the Anglo-Boer War. The badge displayed here contains a crown at the top and the words "Royal Engineers" at the bottom. The inscription "Royal Engineers" was added to the cap badge during the reign of King Edward VII. The mottoes of the Royal Arms are Dieu et mon Droit (God and my Right) and Honi soit qui mal y pense (Evil to him who evil thinks). Both the badge and the button shown here bear the motto Honi soit qui mal y pense as well as the inscription "Royal Engineers".

Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry

In 1881 the 32nd and 46th Regiments of Foot were amalgamated to form the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. The 2nd Battalion was sent to South Africa in 1899 and fought against the Boers in several battles, such as Driefontein and Paardeberg. They were also involved in the taking of Pretoria. In 1901 the 1st Battalion was sent to Ceylon to guard South African prisoners-of-war. In 1902 they returned and were stationed at Stellenbosch (1902), Middelburg in the Cape Colony (1903) and Wynberg (1904). The 2nd Battalion returned to England in 1903. The cap badge featured above consists of the King's
crown at the top and the bugle horn at the bottom. The bugle horn usually features in badges of all light infantry and rifle regiments. This is a reminder of their original role during war - to skirmish ahead of the main force. The bugle horn was used for conveying signals in the field because it was easy to carry and had a penetrating sound. The badge displayed here probably belonged to a member of the 2nd Battalion and is therefore pre-1903.

3-Pence coin

Example of a 3-Pence coin (from www.en.wikipedia.org)

An old British coin, identified as 3-pence, was discovered. The inscription on the coin was deciphered as "EDWARDVS VII D G BRITT OMN REX F D IND IMF" which means, "Edward VII by the Grace of God, King of all the British territories, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India".

King Edward VII ruled from 1901 to 1910, placing the coin within this time period. From 1817 the 3-pence (with the 1-, 2- and 4-pence) was primarily used as Maundy money which was given to deserving poor people during a religious ceremony. However, issues for Colonial and general use in the United Kingdom were made from 1845.

Unidentified – do you know this badge?

This badge contains the figure of Britannia as well as the King’s crown at the top and is therefore definitely of British origin. We have not been able to identify it and appeal to anyone who has information, to contact us.

We also appeal to anyone who has collected badges, coins and other identifiable objects from dumps and campsites in the Bloemfontein area to contact us. This information could provide a better understanding of the site we are currently excavating.

Dateable items (e.g. badges) discovered during excavations, help date layers within the dump. The types of objects found tell us about the people who used them and help with the identification of the site, linking it to a specific event in history. In this case mainly British objects have been found, linking this site to the Anglo-Boer War and more specifically to the occupation of Bloemfontein by the British forces.

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