

RYNO GREENWALL

Artists & illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War

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Without a doubt this work by Capetonian dentist, Ryno Greenwall, on the contemporary artists and illustrators of the Anglo-Boer War is one of the most remarkable and useful reference books on "The War" published to date.

Jane Carruthers of the History department at the University of South Africa sets the tone of Greenwall's book with an outstanding introduction on western war art and war art in South Africa before and particularly during the Anglo-Boer War. She states (p. 13): "While the rich oral and written record of the Anglo-Boer War has received considerable scholarly attention, far less prominence has been given to the formal and iconographic evaluation of pictorial material. And yet, owing to its subject matter, the social and propagandist function of war art is clear, for it deliberately serves contemporary society". Greenwall takes up admirably from this point of departure.

The imperialist and capitalist dimensions of the Anglo-Boer War affected the art which emanated from it. As Carruthers puts it: "The Anglo-Boer War as a conflict of opposing ideologies is particularly evident in much of its illustrative record" (p. 13), it being either relentlessly pro-British or insolently pro-Boer.

The War of course captured the imagination of millions of people all over the world - not only in Britain and her colonies, but also in the United States and a pro-Boer Europe. Magazines and newspapers reproduced thousands of illustrations by war artists at the theatre of war or by home-based artists working from information by those at the front. Postcards - then at the height of their popularity throughout the world - also portrayed the War, often in satirical vein.

Greenwall has divided his book into five sections. In Part I artists at the front are covered. There were 'special' artists on the war front, men specifically commissioned (often by illustrated newspapers) to depict scenes from the front. These included famous artists like Melton Prior, Mortimer Menpes, and the England-based Austrian, Johann Schönberg, who was commissioned by *The Sphere* to paint from the Boer lines.

Working alongside the 'specials' were a few correspondents who possessed enough artistic ability to augment their stories with sketches. Winston Churchill, correspondent for *The Morning Post*, was amongst them, although his contribution was limited to three sketches that appeared in *The Graphic* in February 1900. Of the many professional soldier-artists whose work was used in the illustrative press, S.E. St. Leger, was the most famous. His work also appeared after the war in his book, *War sketches in colour*.

The enforced idleness and boredom of the besieged British inside Ladysmith and Mafeking acted as a stimulus to artist-correspondents to make sketches, which were smuggled through the Boer lines by means of black runners. The artistic contribution from Mafeking was made almost exclusively by the commander of the beleaguered town, the one and only Colonel Robert Baden-Powell. Some of his work was considered to be of outstanding quality. Many of his Mafeking sketches and drawings were used in 1907 to illustrate his book *Sketches in Mafeking and East Africa*.

Far rarer than paintings from the British side were those done from the Boer point of view. Two men who were to become famous artists, were the Dutch-born Frans Oerder and the German-born Erich Mayer. Oerder was commissioned by the ZAR government and, accompanying official war historian N.J. Hofmeyr, made some fine sketches from the Natal and western fronts in the first phase of the war. As a p.o.w. on St. Helena, Mayer produced a large number of paintings, drawings and sketches on the War. Greenwall also covers other Boer p.o.w. work handmade during the war, which could be labelled as curios.

Part II of the book treats work on the War specifically done for newspapers and periodicals. This includes work by British home-based artists for publications like *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, and *Black & White Budget*. Also included are special British periodicals on the war, e.g. Cassell's *Illustrated History of the Boer War*, *With the Flag to Pretoria* and *After Pretoria: the Guerilla War*, all of which later appeared in volumes. Illustrated periodicals of Europe on the war were of course pro-Boer - publications like *Le Petit Journal* in France, and the Dutch *Boon's Geillustreerd Magazijn*. The American *Harper's Weekly* was again pro-British.

During and even after the war, several European organizations set about raising funds for the destitute white women and children in South Africa or the dependants of the British troops fighting in the war. Their charity publications included *Der Burenfreund* in Germany and *Nederland-Transvaal* in the Netherlands.

Greenwall covers the satirical artists in Part III, a section that links up well with Professor M.C.E. van Schoor's *Spotprente van die Anglo-Boereoorlog* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1981). These cartoonists and caricaturists did work for publications like *Punch* in Britain, and *Le Rire* (notably the Russian-born artist 'Caran d'Ache') and *L'Assiette au Beurre* (for whom Jean Veber worked) in France. In the Netherlands the most famous cartoonist was Johan Braakenstiek.

Picture postcards and illustrated novels are treated in Part IV. Picture postcards form one of the richest sources of Anglo-Boer War illustration. They were also a good indication of the extent of British and pro-Boer propaganda. They varied enormously in style and quality. Some were of an extremely high standard, especially in their colour reproduction. In this section Greenwall also discusses the influence of the war on European artists. Included is Cornelis de Bruin with his tableaux of battle scenes (in the Café Transvalia in Rotterdam), and a series of drawings by an 18-year old Spaniard called Pablo Picasso.

Part V (pp. 102-238) covers the major part of Greenwall's book. This is a most useful reference section. In alphabetical order, it contains the **biographies** of more than 1 100 artists, including professionals and amateurs, cartoonists, soldier-artists, painters, poster artists, etchers, sculptors, designers of memorials and medallions, and carvers. Each biography is supplied with a brief bibliography. Obviously there is some overlapping with the first four sections of the book, but it is skilfully done and it appears to be remarkably comprehensive. Dr. Erwin Schmidl of Vienna has mentioned to me that he misses only one artist - an Austrian teacher by the name of Peter Strauss who had been on commando with the Boers and had painted scenes from the war.

An addendum on medallists and four appendices on artists' initials, British exhibitions, postcard artists, and Anglo-Boer War covers in major French illustrated newspapers, enormously increase the value of Greenwall's book, particularly for collectors of postcards and other illustrative material of the war.

In a publication like this the layout, and the quality of illustrations and paper are of extreme importance. Fernwood Press must be congratulated on a masterpiece. There are 208 pages in colour, printed to the highest standards on 128 gsm Japanese matt art paper and containing over 200 illustrations in colour and 250 in black and white. Indeed, apart from paying for the contents, R295 for a work of this superb quality is a bargain.

I have found a few factual errors, but these are not in connection with the artists. There are seven mistakes on p. 8 ("Important dates of the Anglo-Boer War"). Furthermore, the (Piet) Grobler whom Johann Schönberg met in Pretoria (p. 26) was not the State Secretary (who was in fact F.W. Reitz) - Grobler was an able civil servant. The assertion (p. 30) that Louis Botha was nowhere near the scene of Churchill's capture, is also incorrect. Botha was indeed the commanding general at the incident. And artist Antoon van Welie's subject in the Netherlands was not General Ferreira (p. 100), but Ignatius Ferreira, military secretary to and son-in-law of General de la Rey.

These few errors do not mar an otherwise extremely well-researched and commendable publication. It belongs on the shelves of every library and all collectors of material on the South African War and South African culture in general.

FRANSJOHAN PRETORIUS
University of Pretoria