



# BOER POW CAMPS IN CEYLON 1900-1902

The object of this exhibit is to illustrate and document mail to, from and between Boers held in British prisoner-of-war camps on the island of Ceylon during the Second Anglo-Boer War.

*British Queen's South Africa Boer War Medal, with Bars for service in Transvaal, Orange Free State and Cape Colony. Awarded to Pte. W. Heywood. 10th Royal Hussars.*

During the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) the British authorities determined that prisoner-of-war (POW) camps in South Africa were not suitable. Decisions were made to send Boer POWs overseas, initially to camps in the remote South Atlantic island of St. Helena. When occupancy of the St. Helena camps reached capacity (around 6,000 prisoners), additional camps were established in Ceylon (and later in Bermuda, India and Portugal).

Around 5,500 Boer POWs were dispatched to Ceylon. To accommodate the prisoners, POW camps were established at:

- ◆ **Diyatalawa:** the main camp in Ceylon  
4,000 POWs; opened 8 August 1900
- ◆ **Mount Lavinia** (for convalescents)  
150 POWs; opened 17 December 1900
- ◆ **Ragama** (for dissidents)  
380 POWs; opened 8 January 1901
- ◆ **Urugasmanhandiya** (for prisoners on parole)  
80 POWs; opened 10 September 1901
- ◆ **Hambantota** (for prisoners on parole)  
120 POWs; opened 19 September, 1901

Additionally, **Welikada Gaol** in Colombo, established in 1841 for civilian criminals, housed the most antagonistic prisoners from other Ceylon camps.

Material is presented by POW camp and the camps *in the order in which they were established*. Within the camp sections, material is presented in two groups: *inbound and outbound mail* then by *country/region* and within these groups generally *in chronological sequence*, i.e. by date item entered mailstream. The camp opening sequence does not hold for Welikada Gaol,



*Colombo, the capital, was the port of entry for POWs*

Procedures for the exchange of correspondence to, from and between prisoners-of-war initiated by the British during the Second Anglo-Boer War established international ground rules for handling such mail; they were later incorporated into the 1907 Hague Convention and the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

**Main reference:** *Ceylon. The Camps for Boer War Prisoners of War 1900 to 1902, Their Postal History*, R. Stroud, Anglo-Boer War Philatelic Society, Chester, Cheshire, England (1989).

*Items of special interest, scarcity or demonstrating original research are mounted with red mattes.*