

# Tokens, Tickets and Notes of the De Beers Diamond Fields

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Diamonds were first discovered in southern Africa in the mid-1860s on the farm of Nicolas and Diederick de Beer (there is no contemporary documentation for this local legend)<sup>(1)</sup>. In March 1869, a native boy working for a local white farmer discovered a large diamond (83 carats) and sold it to Schalk van Niekerk<sup>(2, 3)</sup>. He was paid 500 sheep, 10 herds of cattle and one horse. Van Niekerk then sold it to for £11,000 sterling. News of this diamond created a digging frenzy along the banks of the Vaal. In July 1870, there were about 800 prospectors digging in the area but by October, the number had risen to 5,000. Early claims were about 31 feet square. Many more diamonds were found a few miles away from the river on the Bultfontein and Vooruitzigt farms.

Another large diamond was found on the Vooruitzigt in July 1871, starting the second diamond rush and by December about 7,000 prospectors were digging down 60 feet on their claims. Prospectors came from all races and nationalities including African, British, Dutch, German, Swedish, French, Turkish, Norwegian, Russian, and Greek. This area and main settlement in the Cape became known as New Rush but was renamed Kimberley in 1871, after the British Secretary of the colonies.

In 1869, 16,542 carats of diamonds were exported; 102,500 carats were exported in 1870 and 269,000 carats were exported in 1871. By 1872, about 1,080,000 carats were exported from present day South Africa.

The diamond fields were located on the northern boundary of the British Cape Colony in a region claimed by the Griqua, the Tswana and the Kora. A British Court of Inquiry ruled that the Griqua had the most valid claim over the territory and consequently the Griqua sought protection from the British. The Griqua were a multiracial group in the Cape without a single leadership. The British took the opportunity to annex the territory in 1871, as the British Colony of Griqualand West.

By 1870 more than 50,000 people were living in tents and make do shelters. Africans numbered about 30,000 but only about 10% actually owned diamond claims, the rest were migrant workers. Demand for food supplies and tools grew tremendously. Between 1870 and 1874, the trade in grain and livestock alone made the Sotho peoples more than £1 million at Kimberley. Between April 1873 and June 1874, more than 75,000 guns were sold at Kimberley. However, in 1877 the British prohibited the sale of guns to the native tribes.

A shortage of labour meant that working a 14-hour day in summer and 10 in winter, labourers could earn 10-30 shillings per week plus food and these wages accounted for 86% of a claim owners costs.

For a while the native labourers were in the majority and could control the wages and working conditions and could move from employer to employer, refusing the most dangerous work. Government Notice 68 of July 1872 established a depot at Kimberley at which all native labourers would be required to register on arrival and be issued a pass entitling them to seek employment contracts not less than 3 months. Employers who hired unregistered labourers would be liable for a £10 fine and 3 months imprisonment. This was the beginning of non-native minority control of the land, the country and the industry.

Failure to carry the pass meant a labourer could be fined £5, imprisoned for up to 3 months or receive up to 25 lashes. Diamond theft could result in 50 lashes or 12 months imprisonment with hard labour. Whilst colour was not explicitly stated, these rules formed the foundation for apartheid laws enacted almost seventy-five years later.

In 1871 Cecil Rhodes bought his first claim at the De Beers mine and, with this as a financial base, eventually bought up most of the diamond mines in southern Africa. In 1888 he incorporated De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. The initial 3600 claims had been bought up to leave a few major players, including Barney Barnato, but Rhodes with the backing of the Rothschilds won out. For a short while diamond supply exceeded demand then Rhodes also moved to monopolise world diamond distribution. By the 1890s he had formed the Diamond Syndicate, a forerunner of the Central Selling Organization (CSO) which is now known as the Diamond Trading Company (DTC) and controls much of the world's diamond mining and supply.

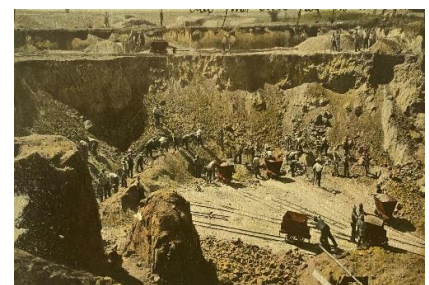
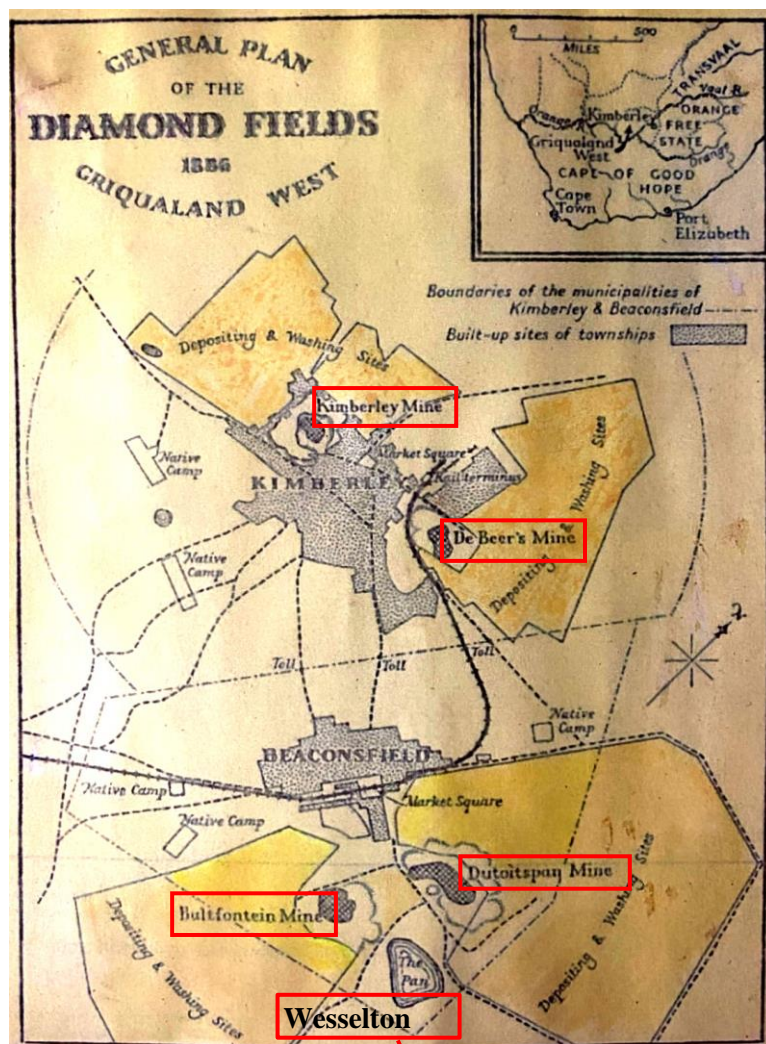
The discovery of more diamond bearing mines near Pretoria and along the coast of German South West Africa (now Namibia) in 1902 and 1908, undermined de Beers monopoly of the diamond market.

Ernest Oppenheimer, who had founded the Anglo-American Corporation in 1917, moved into the diamond industry in the 1920s. Having gained control of the southwest African diamond mines he created another diamond syndicate. He bought a seat on De Beers' board in 1926 and became chairman three years later. The monopoly of the diamond supply was almost complete.

The Great Depression of the 1930s reduced demand for diamonds, with several mines closing in 1932. Through the efforts of the advertising agents N.W. Ayer and Son initially persuading the American market, and then much of the rest of the world, to associate diamonds with romance and social status. The slogan "A diamond is forever" was coined by N.W. Ayer in 1947.

The lure and the lore of the diamond continues, as do the issues of cartels, monopoly industries, workers' rights and working conditions, corporate taxation and the amount of money that is or isn't reinvested in the countries supplying the raw diamonds.

The figure below shows a map of the various mine locations and postcards of some of the mines and their infrastructure.



Kimberley c. 1869



Kimberley c. 1875



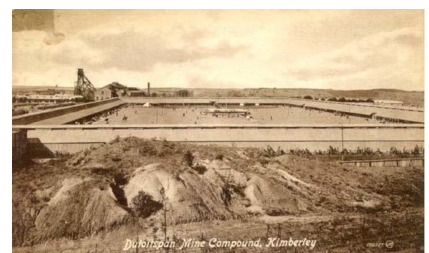
Kimberley c. 1930



Bultfontein Washing Plant



Wesselton Lifting Gear



Du Toitspan Compound

**Fig. 1.** Location of the De Beers mines around Kimberley.

There are several series of tokens<sup>(4-8)</sup>. The metal tokens are part of a truck system, used to pay the workers and acceptable only in the store of the same camp, hence the distinguishing cutouts. The pages that follow illustrate the known tokens issued by De Beers including six previously unrecorded pieces.

In the illustrations below I have tried to find a good colour image of every token. Most of the images have been provided by Allyn Jacobs. Some pieces are surprisingly scarce, and images in greyscale have been taken from Hern and Jacobs. Numbers in square parentheses are from the Hern & Jacobs catalogue 2009 edition (H&J).<sup>(8)</sup>

The six new pieces that are added to the H&J listings are as follows:

- D.B.M.Co STORE 6d token,
- D.B.M.Co CONVICT 3d token,
- D.B.C.M. 1 LITRE MILK token in blue plastic,
- DE BEERS DIAMOND FIELDS 2/6 paper note
- DE BEERS DIAMOND FIELDS 1/- paper note, and
- J. GIFFORD MINE COMPOUND BRANDY token.

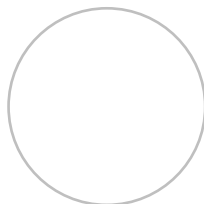
Metal analysis, using XRF, of three of the white metal (wm) one-shilling tokens shows they are all almost pure Zinc. The composition is: Zn  $96.64 \pm 0.58\%$ , Pb  $1.47 \pm 0.07\%$ , and Si  $1.34 \pm 0.06\%$  (the latter likely in the dirty powdery surface).

All images are 100%.

#### De Beers Mining Co - Store – Predates the March 1888 Amalgamation



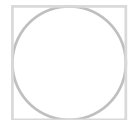
**2/6** 38.5mm tin? Likely zinc  
[H&J - 1072]



**1/-** expected  
[H&J - ]



**6d** 22mm? tin? Likely zinc, Milled edge?  
Seen on bidorbuy.co.za in 2013 [H&J - ]  
Went missing in the post.



**3d** reported  
[H&J - ]

#### De Beers Mining Co – Convict



**3d** 41.4 mm Br [H&J - ]

This piece confirms the problems of labour shortages during the early diamond rushes and the use of convict labour.



## De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd – Kimberley – After the 1888 Amalgamation



**2/6**  
38.5mm Br  
Also known without piercing  
[H&J - 150a]



**1/-**  
27mm Br  
[H&J - 150b]



**1/-**  
27mm Br,  
large central hole  
[H&J - 150c]



**6d**  
22x19mm Br,  
[H&J - 150d]



**3d**  
15x15mm Br,  
[H&J - 150e]

## De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd – Bultfontein – Dumbell cutout



**2/6**  
38.5mm wm  
[H&J - 150f]  
Incuse Springbok



**1/-**  
27mm wm  
[H&J - 150g]  
Incuse Lion



**6d**  
22x19mm wm,  
[H&J - 150h]  
Incuse Sheep



**3d**  
15x15mm wm  
[H&J - 150j]  
Incuse Hare

## De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd – Du Toitspan – Crescent cutout



**2/6**  
38.5mm wm  
[H&J - 150k]  
Incuse Springbok



**1/-**  
27mm wm  
[H&J - 150l]  
Incuse Lion



**6d**  
22x19mm wm,  
[H&J - 150m]  
Incuse Sheep



**3d**  
15x15mm wm  
[H&J - 150n]  
Incuse Hare

## De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd – Wesselton – No cutout



**2/6<sup>(8)</sup>**  
38.5mm wm  
[H&J - 150o]  
Incuse Springbok



**1/-**  
27mm wm  
[H&J - 150p]  
Incuse Lion



**6d**  
22x19mm wm,  
[H&J - 150q]  
Incuse Sheep



**3d**  
15x15mm wm,  
[H&J - 150r]  
Incuse Hare

## DBCM – Later Plastic Tokens



**1 lb BREAD<sup>(8)</sup>**  
(with false colour)  
25.5 Black on red  
plastic  
[H&J - 150s]



**1 SMALL LOAF  
BREAD**  
25 mm red plastic  
[H&J - 150t]



**MILK 1 pint**  
25.5 Black on white  
plastic  
[H&J - 150u]

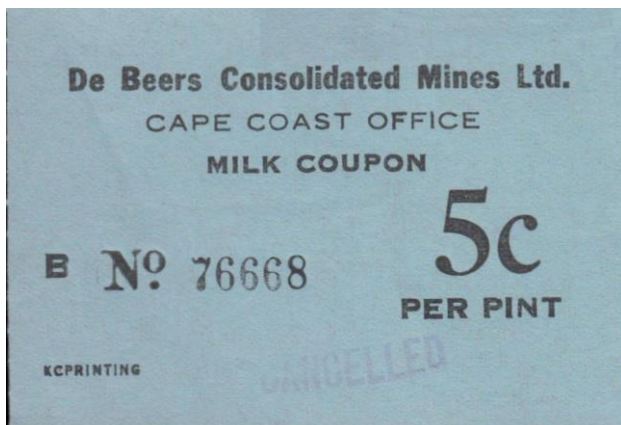


**1/2 LITRE MILK<sup>(8)</sup>**  
Post metrication  
1960's?  
25.2 mm white  
plastic  
[H&J - 150v]  
Made by  
"EXACTO" (1948- )

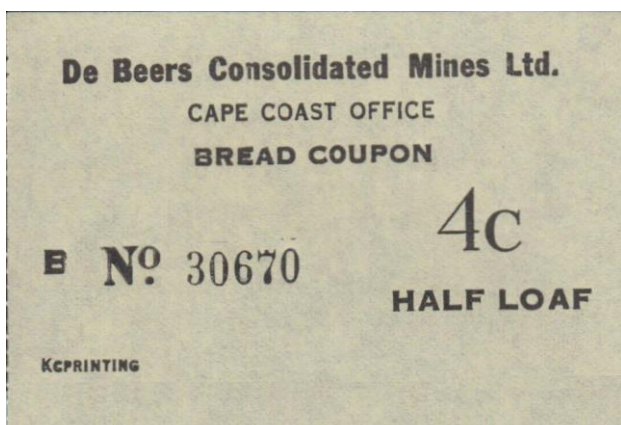


**1 LITRE MILK**  
Post metrication  
1960's?  
25.2 mm blue plastic  
[H&J - ]  
Made by  
"EXACTO" (1948- )

## DBCM – Paper Tickets and notes



**5c PER PINT  
MILK COUPON**  
Blue Paper  
82 x 57mm  
CANCELLED in purple  
[H&J 150w]



**4c HALF LOAF  
BREAD COUPON**  
Also on Yellow and  
White paper  
84 x 56mm  
[H&J 150w]

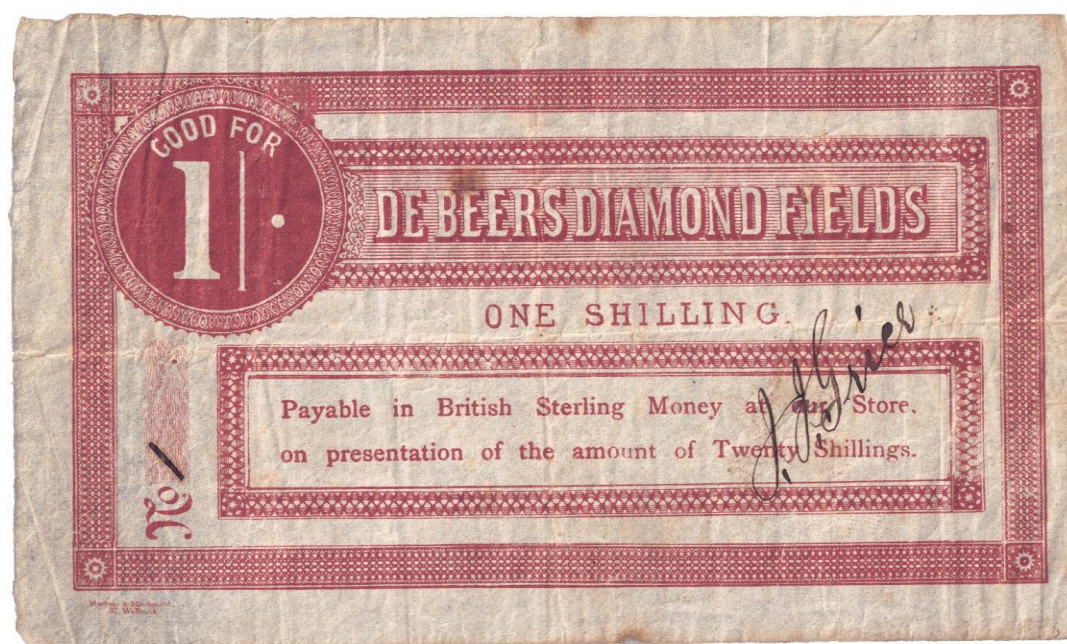
Different print runs have slightly different text layouts.



There are also two notes for a halfcrown<sup>(9)</sup> and shilling<sup>(10)</sup> which have appeared for sale recently and at present both appear to be the only known specimens.

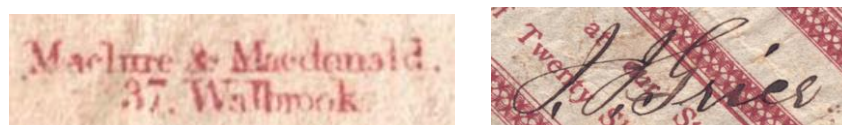


**Fig. 2.** De Beers Diamond Fields 2/6 Store note.<sup>(9)</sup> Colour unknown. Size estimated from the shilling as most of the design appears to be from the same printing plate. [H&J - ]. Thanks to Stanley Gibbons Currency Ltd.



**Fig. 3.** De Beers Diamond Fields 1/- Store note, 85×142 mm [H&J - ].

The note is signed J.J. Grier, who I have not yet been able to trace. Looking closely at the bottom left-hand corner of the shilling note reveals in very small print the name and address of the printers; Maclure & Macdonald. 37, Walbrook.



**Fig. 2.** Printer's address and J.J. Grier signature.



Andrew Maclure (1812-1885) was a Scottish artist, painter and lithographer; in 1835 with Archibald Gray Macdonald he established the Glasgow printers, engravers and lithographers Maclure & Macdonald in Trongate. Frank Maclure, one of Andrew Maclure's sons, was made lithographer to Queen Victoria in 1886.

As the company grew, it opened businesses at the following addresses:

57 Buchanan Street, Glasgow (in 1851)  
Then Bothwell St, then offices at  
1 Brunswick Street, Liverpool (in 1841)  
37 Walbrook, London (in 1853)  
97 Queen Victoria Street, London (1876-1900)  
Then Manchester in 1886  
27 Ray Street, Clerkenwell (1889-?).

They invented a power-driven lithographic printing press in 1853. They engraved and produced stamps for Uruguay (1866), Sarawak (1869 and 1875) and telephone stamps for Great Britain (1884). The company also produced very high-quality lithographic prints. The company was acquired in 1992 by J.R. Reid Printers of Blantyre, South Lanarkshire.

The London address of the printers, combined with the history of the company, would suggest a date range 1870-1888 for the notes. The absence of a serial number suggests these are possibly printers' proofs or trials.

## References and Acknowledgements

- (1) Encyclopedia Britannica online <https://www.britannica.com/topic/De-Beers-SA>. Last updated March 20, 2020.
- (2) Anon. Kimberley Diamond Mines: Discovery and exploitation (1860-1870's). <https://www.globalblackhistory.com/2016/09/kimberly-diamond-mines-discovery-exploitation-1860-1870s.html> accessed 22 November 2020.
- (3) S. Kanfer. *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds, and the World*. 1993.
- (4) E. J. Maynard. *Tokens of Southern Africa: a catalogue based on the collection in the Africana Museum*. 1966.
- (5) G.P. Theron. *Tokens of South Africa and their History*. 1978.
- (6) B. Hern. *Hern's Handbook of South African Coins*. 1991.
- (7) B. Hern. *Handbook on Southern African tokens*. 2004.
- (8) B. Hern and A. Jacobs. *Hern's Handbook on Southern African tokens*. 2009.
- (9) Stanley Gibbons Currency Ltd List 45, included in *Coins and Medals*, July 1980. Item C33 on piii.
- (10) DNW 16<sup>th</sup> April 2019 lot 1500.
- (10) R.V. Turrell. *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871-1890*. p170. 2009.

Many thanks to Allyn Jacobs for the illustrations of the mines and infrastructure and the images of most of the tokens, with photography by Wikus van der Westhuizen. Thanks also to Sharon Dobson and Dean Shepherd from Stanley Gibbons for permission to use the image of the De Beers 2/6 note. A final thankyou to Mark Smith for bringing the following piece to my attention.

## Postscript

Though not explicitly naming de Beers, this 33.6 mm uniface brass "MINE COMPOUND" token for "BRANDY" was issued by J. Gifford. Research has revealed that a J(ames) Gifford was manager of the Kimberley central compound for De Beers in the 1880s<sup>(10)</sup>. The token was possibly a perk for deserving employees. Thanks to Allyn Jacobs and Mark Smith. [H&J - ].

