

# Introductory Material for St Helena Ancestor's Database

By the Transcribers, Dr Chris & Sheila Hillman

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## General Introduction

The St Helena Ancestors Database aims to collate as much information as possible on the people who generated the population of the Island we know today. The first people to land on the Island, to the best of our knowledge, were a few Portuguese mariners in 1502. Since that time people from very varied origins have landed, lived, bred and died on the Island to produce today's very cosmopolitan population. These include "Honourable East India Company" (HEIC) officials until 1836 when the British Government (Crown) took over governance following legislation two years earlier. HEIC encouraged settlers from England to farm and work the land, as well as bringing in slaves from Madagascar, the West Coast of Africa, and from their holdings in the Far East – such as Indian stations, Bencoolen and others. Over time these were augmented, especially by men serving in the St Helena Regiments and passing seamen in their hundreds – who, however, while they may not have settled, certainly contributed to the gene pool. Other itinerants were the whalers from New England and England, and merchant ships from the Netherlands, France, Spain and Portugal, USA and Scandinavian countries. A large number of Chinese indentured labourers were brought in to work the land as slavery was abolished. Large numbers of freed slaves – the "Liberated Africans" – were brought to the Island by the British Navy West Africa Squadron – who then lived on the Island for periods before being moved again, and a few of whom settled and integrated. (Figure 1).

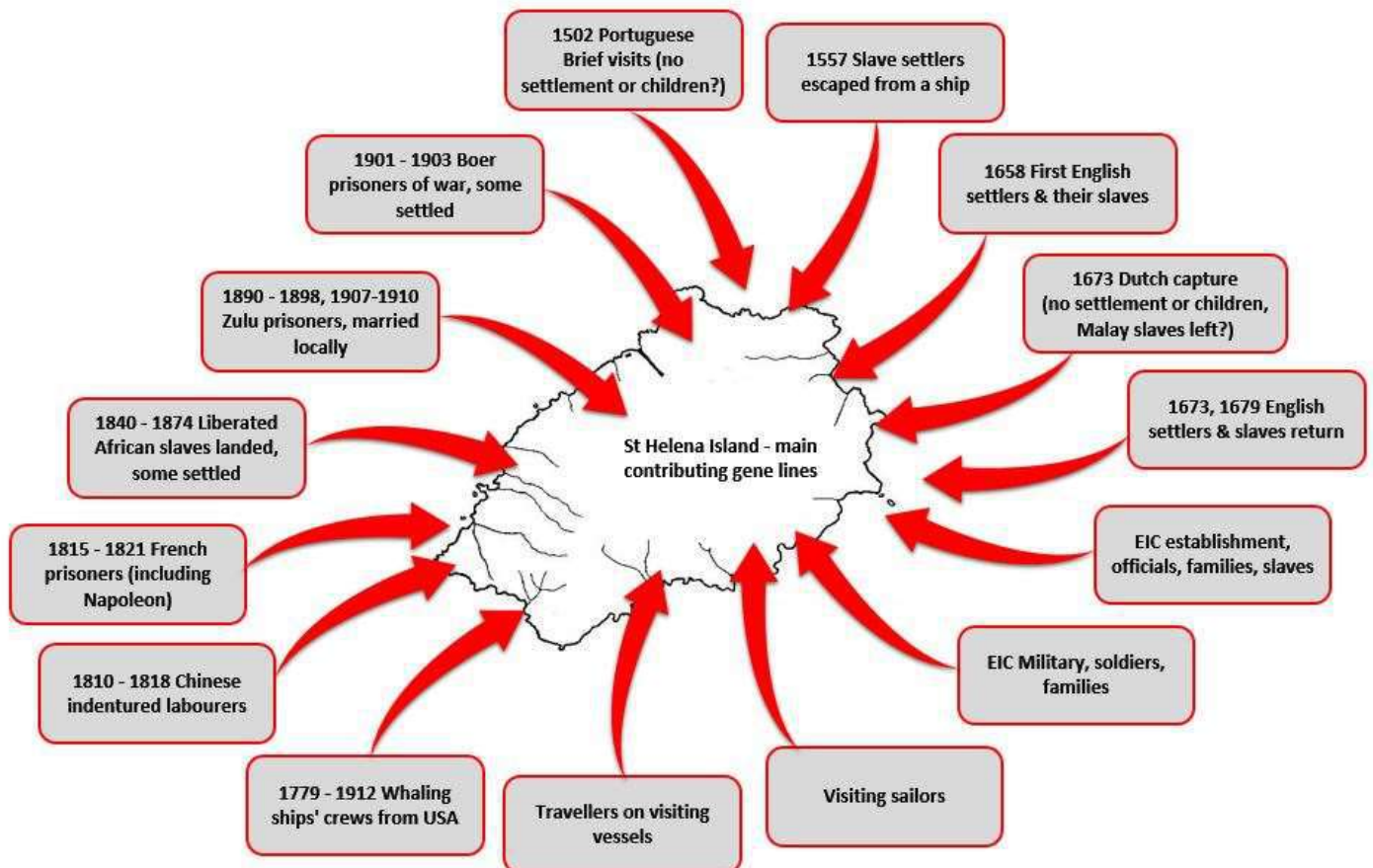


Figure 1 The various sources of genes on St Helena over time

All these made their contributions to the present-day makeup of the Island population. The late 1800s saw an economic downturn of the Island’s economy due to the change from HEIC to Crown governance, the emancipation of slaves, and the reduction in visiting shipping as the Suez Canal came into use and sail gave way to steam-powered ships. This led to massive emigration of “Saints” who left the Island and settled elsewhere – particularly in South Africa and the UK.

This database seeks to open windows onto the origins, family history, livelihood and movements of the “Saints” we know today, where interested Saints can hope to establish some further idea of their identity. Each of the tables here presents data from different aspects which together can provide significant background on Saint ancestors.

The Anglican Church Register records date from 1680 and were transcribed from the scans of the original documents available on the Church of the Province of South Africa records archived at the University of Witwatersrand Library (CPSA Diocese of St Helena Registers 1680-1986 <https://tinyurl.com/y69ovvyb>).

These Registers are in a parlous state, with old-style handwriting, and have been subjected to centuries of indifferent care, being affected by rain, dust, insect damage and mould making some parts illegible. It is also evident that some volumes may have been missing at the time they were scanned (1980s). Until 1830 all Anglican church events were conducted and recorded at St James’ Church in Lower Jamestown. After that date additional churches were built and came into use, with their own registers at St John’s in Upper Jamestown, St Matthew’s at Hutt’s Gate, and St Paul’s Cathedral near Plantation (Table 1). More recently other churches were built – St Helena and the Cross at Bluehill, St Mark’s at Longwood, St Martin in the Hills at Thompson’s Hill, St Peter’s at Sandy Bay and St Andrew’s at Half Tree Hollow – but it would seem their events were recorded in the main three church registers listed. There are also some “Garrison Chapel” records that seem to largely duplicate those from St James, being for families of the HEIC military. New sects also came into being on the Island in 1852 and later – primarily the Baptists and the Roman Catholics, but these records have yet to be transcribed. If you fail to find a name you may need to request a search from the St Helena Archives or from the church concerned.

*Table 1 Time periods for registers at different Island churches*

	<b>St James</b>	<b>St Paul’s</b>	<b>St John’s</b>	<b>St Matthew’s</b>	<b>Garrison</b>
Baptism	1680-1938	1830-1943	1862-1947	1862-1957	1859-1905
Marriage	1681-1939	1830-1944	1881-1939	1862-1974	1859-1899
Marriage Banns	1849-1924	none	none	none	none
Burials	1767-1888	1830-1954	none	1927-1988	1868-1905

The Registers include a total of over 6,700 surnames, which with a simple assessment of synonymy suggest around 5,000 different family names in use on the Island over the past 500 years. Given the vagaries of spelling described earlier this is probably far fewer than the 5,000 suggested. However, many names came for short periods of around only four years’ service before leaving again, while others will go unrecorded in the Registers since they did not marry, have children or die on the Island during their service.

The spelling of all names and other words in the Registers varied considerably over the centuries. The clergy were literate to an extent, each having their own view on what a name was and how it should be written. Clerics came and went with significant rapidity and clerks were also involved in some cases. Until the majority of the congregation acquired literacy and determined for themselves how their name should be spelled this has resulted in considerable variation that needs to be kept in mind, and any way, few parishioners ever had the opportunity to see and correct the ecclesiastical records. For example, there are at least six different spellings recorded for Corker and 11 for Isaacs.

There are evidently several missing periods, either a whole register, or parts of a register, and some pages may be totally illegible through damage. In some cases that church was closed for repairs, particularly after the ravages of termites.

Church	Year established	Baptisms
St Paul's	1822	1848
St Matthew's	1862	1939 1940
Marriages		
St Paul's	1822	1845 1846 1855 1868 1869 1942
St John's	1862	1862 1881
Burials		
St James	1659	1680 1767
St Paul's	1822	1855
St Matthew's	1862	1862 1927
St John's	1862	1862 →

Figure 2 Missing periods in church registers

## Sources

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## Main locations of Historical Churches, Graveyards, Memorials & Residential Area

Churches (historical)	Memorial Locations
St James', Lower Jamestown	St James' Church
St John's, Upper Jamestown	The Cenotaph Memorial, with Darkdale Memorial (Wharf)
St Matthew's, Hutt's Gate	Dr Arnold's Memorial, Grand Parade, Jamestown
St Paul's	Castle Gardens, Waterwitch Monument
St Helena & The Cross, Bluehill	Papanui Memorial, Public Library
St Martin in the Hills	Bridge Clock Memorial, Jamestown
St Michael's, Rupert's Valley	Forester's Hall Officers Boards, Jamestown
St Mary's, Briars	St John's Church
St Andrew's, Half Tree Hollow	St Matthew's Church
St Mark's, Longwood	St Paul's Cathedral
St Peter's, Sandy Bay	St Andrew's Church
Roman Catholic Church, Jamestown	Baptist Chapel, Jamestown
Baptist Chapel, Jamestown	High Rock rockfall Memorial, Ladder Hill
Baptist Chapel, Knollcombes	
Baptist Chapel, Sandy Bay	
Graveyards	Main Residential Area
St James (disused, built over)	Jamestown
Middle Burial Ground, Jamestown (disused, built over)	Hutt's Gate
Upper Burial Ground, Jamestown (disused, built over)	Plantation
St John's, Jamestown (stored gravestones)	Bluehill
Chinese Burial Ground, China Lane, Jamestown (disused, built over)	Thompson's Hill
St Matthew's Church Burial Ground	Rupert's Bay
Halley's Mount (Children's) Burial Ground	The Briars
St Paul's Cathedral Burial Ground (various denominations)	Half Tree Hollow
Plantation Forest Graves (Butchers & Chinese)	Longwood
St Helena & the Cross Burial Ground	Sandy Bay
St Michael's, Rupert's Valley (stored gravestones)	New Ground
Rupert's Valley Slave Burial Ground	Francis Plain
Knollcomes Baptists Burial Ground	Scotland
Knollcombes Boer Prisoner of War Burial Ground	Pouncy's
Half Tree Hollow Burial Ground	Horse Pasture
Chinese Burial Ground, New Ground	Thompson's Wood
The Dungeon Burial Ground	Alarm Forest
Lemon Valley Slave Burial Ground	Deadwood
Mt Eternity, slave graves	Levelwood
Teutonic Hall grave (Sutton)	Woody Ridge
Willow Bank graves	

