

FISHY PHILATELIC FUTURE FOR ST HELENA?

by Trevor W. Hearl

If, as one assumes, stamp committees choose subjects to enhance a country's image, then St Helena might surely be expected to focus on its new-found sources of income - coffee and tuna. I would not say that the export of either will make St Helena rich, or that it arouses great enthusiasm among Islanders. But while sufficient coffee is left for local sale and access to fish stocks is assured to local fishermen, it is accepted. If included in the Colony's future philatelic menu they might arouse interest, if not pride, in Island production.

Fish is St Helena's latest export. Indeed, as the *Statistical Yearbook* (1989) emphasizes, "the only export of any significance is fish." Its value has risen from £18 thousand in 1985 to over £125 thousand in 1989, when fishing licenses accounted for a further £420 thousand. But the long-term story of St Helena fisheries - now told in an excellent illustrated book by Alasdair Edwards - is not so encouraging that present efforts will not need all the support they can get.

A little philatelic publicity would not come amiss. The St Helena Fisheries Corporation nevertheless hopes that, with improved methods of processing, their new products will whet commercial, as well as gourmet, appetites overseas. And recently an initiative by John Rogers of the Natural Resources Institute, hosting a trade fish lunch at Chatham, has resulted in frozen vacuum packs of St Helena fish - choice tuna, wahoo, barracuda and jack - being sold in the United Kingdom by C.J. Newnes, 73 Billingsgate Market, London E14 STQ. Philatelists will recall that some of these very fish graced St Helena stamps as recently as July 1985 - Rock Bullseye (7p); Mackerel (11p); Skipjack Tuna (15p); and Stump (50p) - illustrating "Marine Life," while others (Cunning Fish and Trumpet Fish) put in a modest appearance in 1961. Fisheries has never been featured on the Colony's stamps, however, but now Dr Edwards' fine photographs and sketches gives designers material to work on.

That *coffea arabica* has not already appeared on a stamp is surprising as the third annual shipment of St Helena coffee is shortly going to Taylor's Tea & Coffee at Harrogate. And when Colin and Marlene Yon of C. & M.'s Store, Jamestown, were recently in the United Kingdom, they met an enthusiastic reception from Tony Wild and his staff at Taylor's, for Colin had pioneered the re-introduction of St Helena coffee on the local market in the early 1980s. St Helena coffee is drawing gourmets to Harrogate - a young Swiss couple recently went there specially to try it - and no doubt it would be an added attraction for tourists to St Helena, if only they knew about it! Stamps make cheap advertisements.

Whether tourism - potentially a far more lucrative income-generator - will find favour as a future theme with the stamp committee seems more doubtful. Tourist maps and a tiny tourist budget are planned to coincide with the new, larger RMS *St*

Helena, the St Helena-Ascension Island shuttle ship, and the projected St Helena airfield. And who is to use this extra passenger capacity if not visitors? But while the benefits of tourism may appeal to students of the Prince Andrew (High) School, most Islanders are dubious of meeting the needs of high-class tourists who, like journalists, appear to an isolated community too demanding, inquisitive and critical.

But finally, let us not forget the money-spinner that imposes few demands on the local community - philately! As revenue from this source goes into the coffers of Crown Agents, unfortunately it does not appear in the St Helena Government's *Statistical Yearbook*. Yet however good a year it has been for stamp sales, it will only put small change in the Treasury's purse with Britain's grant-aid to the Colony for 1989-90 estimated at over £24 million. But this allowed only £15 million for the new RMS *St Helena*, the cost of which has now rocketed to over £32 million. It will take a lot of coffee, fish, tourists and stamps to make up that little deficit!

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