

FOR ST HELENA INVASION OF 1672, IT WAS A MATTER OF DATES

by Trevor W. Hearl

St Helena's 500th anniversary in 2002 is already being celebrated by the post office; a second series of "Discovery" stamps was released on July 2, 1998. Its official first day cover, decorated with the 1596 Linschoten view of the island in sepia, contains a welcome insert telling the story behind each of the four stamps in the set.

About the 25p stamp, which depicts a dramatic scene of settlers raining rocks down upon men trying to land on the beach below, it explains, "1672 - Dutch Invasion. The Dutch fleet arrived off St Helena on 20 December 1672. Soldiers landed at Lemon Valley on New Year's Eve..."

Just a moment! If this is supposed to mean December 31, or "Old Year's Night" in St Helena parlance today, then what were the Dutch doing for 11 days? And are we to believe that St Helena observed New Year's Day on January 1 when in England it was March 25? Though Gosse (p. 62) and most others describing the event support the philatelists, it seems unlikely. The question of which calendar was in use by St Helena's settlers is rarely raised, but events show it is not a trivial issue.

At the time of the Dutch attack after the outbreak of the Third Dutch War (1672-74), England (but not Scotland) observed the "Old Style" calendar, and as St Helena usually followed English custom, we should first remind ourselves what that was. When in 1582 Pope Gregory XIII introduced the "New Style" calendar, it was adopted by all Roman Catholic states and soon afterwards by most others, including Scotland -- but not England. When Holland, then the United Provinces, adopted it is not so easily found; Haydn's Dictionary of Dates gives 1584, others 1700, and the Encyclopedia Britannica ignores the Dutch altogether, but from St Helena evidence, 1584 seems more likely.

The reason for the change was that the old calendar, founded by the illustrious Julius Caesar in 46 BC, had "lost" 10 days so that the Spring Equinox, which determines the date of Easter, fell on March 11 instead of the 21st. To put it right at one fell swoop, Gregory ordained that 5 October 1582 should become the 15th, and New Year begin on January 1. Another detail allowed an extra leap year every 400 years, so that AD 2000 will have an extra day to keep the calendar on track.

So when did the Dutch invade St Helena? The answer would seem to depend on which calendar is being used. For example, as we have seen, according to the English version, the Dutch fleet arrived on 20 December 1672, and in his article on "The Loss and Recapture of St Helena" in *The Mariner's Mirror* (1950), Geoffrey Kitching, the former Government Secretary (1932-40), suggests that they said this to convince the directors in London of their prolonged resistance to invaders, whereas the Dutch dated their arrival on the 29th., and, helped by a disaffected settler and a desultory defence, were in occupation in a couple of days. The dispari-

ty in dates, I suggest, was not due to any trickery by the settlers, but to the different calendars in use by the Dutch and the English.

This also affects the date of recapture by Captain Munden a few months later. C.R. Boxer, the authority on Dutch trade with the East, significantly gives Munden's arrival off the island at "May 4/14th 1673," allowing for the use of both Old and New Style calendars in protagonists' records. Though this does not say which St Helena was using, their reference to 20 December shows that it was Old Style. This cannot be checked in Janisch's Extracts from the St Helena Records, unfortunately, as they do not start until December 19, 1673; nor does he refer later to any change in island usage from "Old" to "New" style to keep in line with English practice.

England remained stubbornly attached to the Julian Calendar until 1752. It was then 11 days behind solar time, making business in neighbouring states more and more difficult. To put matters right, the government decided to call September 3, 1752, the 14th. It is alleged that uproar erupted in towns and cities across the country with marching mobs chanting "Give us back our eleven days!" under the impression that a ruthless regime had shortened their lives. More than that, 1752 was clipped to nine months so that AD 1753 started on January 1 rather than March 25.

But returning to St Helena in 1672/73, only fellow St Helena historian Dr Percy Teale has noticed the calendar problem, prefacing his account in *The Seizure by the Dutch* (second edition, May 1979) with "A note about dates." Unfortunately, he does not solve the discrepancy, believing both countries to be using the Old Style in 1672. The New Style, he said, "was not observed by the Dutch and British until 1700 and 1752 respectively ... Eleven days must be added to the dates contained herein."

So if any reader can produce irrefutable evidence to show when Holland and St Helena switched to "New Style" it would solve a mystery. The *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* suggests that not only England, but "her colonies" adopted the New Style in 1752, but if so, no one has mentioned this momentous event during Governor Hutchinson's time (1747-64). Clearly, no mobs marched down Main Street demanding their 11 days back. Probably no one noticed.

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