

OPENING OF PRINCE ANDREW SCHOOL MAY BE BIGGEST NEWS EVENT OF YEAR FOR ST HELENA

by Trevor W. Hearl

The official opening of the splendid Prince Andrew School on Francis Plain provides St Helena's main news story of the year so far. The ceremony on 5 June 1989, performed not as hoped by Prince Andrew but by visiting MP John Taylor, was held in the imposing hall of this "most beautiful of schools", as one expatriate teacher called it, before the largest indoor gathering ever held on the island. The 5 m. pounds Sterling project, which realizes a 25-year-old dream to establish a kind of "village college", an educational and cultural centre for the whole community, may be unique in the Southern Hemisphere, and if developed by the community as planned, could well become a model for other isolated societies.

St Helena education has been advancing on other fronts, too. The school system has changed to a three-tier structure of First (3 ½ to 7); Middle (8-12) and High (13-18) schools, in which plans for technical training at all levels, from motor mechanics to marine studies, form a major element. Meanwhile, the first St Helenian to enter university directly from school, Jane Huxtable, will be reading economics at Aberdeen; another, Joy Stroud, completing A-levels at Cheltenham, has been provisionally accepted to read medicine at St Mary's, Paddington; Tara George continues her international baccalaureate at the Atlantic College, Cardiff, and former headmaster Dan Yon has gained a Canadian scholarship to read for a master's degree in Social Anthropology.

On the commercial front, too, prospects have brightened this year. By early May, St Helena Fisheries had set a new season's record of 363 tons for skipjack landings, while three years' production of Island coffee has been bought by Taylor's Tea and Coffee. It can be had from Betty's, Harrogate, at about 9 pounds Sterling per pound. Coffee connoisseurs will know that it comes from the finest mocha strain planted by the East India Company in the mid-18th Century, and in 1851, gained first prize at the Great Exhibition. Betty's describes this rarest of coffees as "smooth, with a hint of sweetness and acidity, and the richness associated with coffee from other volcanic islands, such as Java and Sumatra".

Even more promising for its prosperity, Cable & Wireless has just secured a 21-year contract to operate St Helena telecommunications which by November will be linked to a £1 million satellite giving worldwide fax, data and auto-telex provision, backed in 1991 by a £1.8 million digital telephone system. A significant spinoff from this leap into the 21st Century may be to attract a commercial bank to the Colony, without which poor St Helena can never earn her livelihood!

Dark clouds on the commercial horizon, however, are currently caused by dock problems at Cape Town and Avonmouth. Switching the RMS St Helena to Milford

Haven has concerned Jamestown Chamber of Commerce to whom Mr. Andrew Bell of Curnow Shipping recently explained the implications of dockers' strike threats. But South Wales is better than the alternatives - Antwerp or Tenerife. And while on communications, the 12-page weekly St Helena News soon celebrating its fourth birthday - has a new editor, John Cranfield. After Pamela Lawrence returned to teaching in January, the paper was kept very much alive by Gillian Gough and Alicia Thomas. If you like keeping up with Island news and views, the annual £4 subscription must be the best bargain in newspapers today.

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