

Records of the Island of St Helena

Lat. 15° 55' S. Long. 5° 42'W

By G. C. KITCHING
Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia

“I Know St Helena Very Well.”
THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON

Records of St Helena may be classified in seven periods, each period covering a change of ownership or government as follows:

Period	Government
1502-1588	Portuguese
1588-1633.	Portuguese (nominal only)
1633-1659	Dutch (nominal only)
1659-1673	British East India Company
1673	Dutch (four months)
1673-1836	British East India Company.
1836-date	British Crown.

Period 1502-1588

A detailed knowledge of these eighty-six years has been denied to us and as far as the writer is aware, no book has been published in English that contains anything but a superficial account of this long period of undisturbed Portuguese possession. No contemporary document, written by an eyewitness, describing the discovery of the Island has yet been rescued from the archives of Europe, but on the evidence furnished by the early Portuguese historians, St Helena was discovered by Joa da Nova in 1502.¹

This Portuguese officer was the commander of a squadron of four vessels that had been visiting the King of Portugal's new empire; Vasco da Gama having advised that a fleet should be sent from Portugal for this purpose every year. Whilst on the voyage home, driving along before the South East trade wind, they sighted and landed on a little island, hitherto unknown to mankind, and named it St Helena.²

¹ So far neither Da Nova's journal nor an account by a member of the Expedition who landed on the Island has been published in English.

1. Theal, G. McC. Records of South Eastern Africa, Cape Town. 1903. Vol. 4, p. 98 and Vol. 6, p. 105.
2. Axelson, Eric. South East Africa. London 1940, p. 54. Theal is citing from De Goes, post, and gives 400 men as the strength of the three ships and one caravel probably including crews. Da Nova was chief magistrate of Lisbon and had seen much service in Africa. He sailed from Belem on 5th March 1501 and returned on 11th September 1502. Captains of the four ships were Diega Barbosa, Dom Alvaro de Braga, Francisco de Novaes, and Fernao Vinet. Axelson cites the strength of fighting men as 80.

We assume that the event took place on the 21st of May because it is the day appointed to be the feast of St Helena, but the 3rd of the month is also the day for celebrating the Invention of the Cross, so until a contemporary document is found, the exact date of the discovery must always remain uncertain.³ Indeed we have no sure knowledge that the Island was found in May at all; all that can be said is that as Da Nova anchored in the Tagus early in September and knowing his approximate rate of sailing, he would have to have left St Helena in June. For all we know, however, he might have arrived there in March.

Situated as it is, in the direct track of shipping sailing from South Africa to Lisbon before the trade wind, and blessed with abundant supplies of pure water, edible greenstuffs, and an equable climate, the discovery of the Island must be counted a most fortunate event for a western nation bent upon exploiting the riches of the East. Here the ships could be repaired after the battering they received when rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and the crews rest and refresh, before beginning the last stage of their long journey home.

It has been asserted⁴ that the Portuguese managed to keep the geographical situation of St Helena to themselves and that no other nation knew where this interesting Island was to be found; but this theory is exploded by a fact noted by Theal⁵ that a French corsair was watering there in 1528. A much more likely explanation for the Portuguese being free from disturbance for so long, is that other nations had not reached a stage in their economic development that permitted them to spare ships and crews for long and arduous voyages to remote continents.

The first Englishman to call at the Island was Thomas Cavendish who landed there from the *Desire* in 1588, and to him we are indebted for the first account of it in English.⁶ Although St Helena has been described as the “best known of all the solitary Islands of the world” it is remarkable what little we do know about its early history. There are a few facts, and no more. In the Island itself there are no archives relating to the Portuguese and their period is likely to be one of much interest, not only to historians, but also to scientists. All that we do know is derived from a few references made in the works of the early historians, De Barros, Treasurer of the India Department 1552, De Goes, Chief Archivist 1566, and Osorio, 1572.⁷ It is true that the two first named must have had a full knowledge of the public records that

³ There is also a Latin saint, St Helena of Auxerre whose day August 8th may be disregarded as she was not recognised by the Portuguese. A picture of St Helena appears on the 5/- stamp of the so-called “Centenary Issue.” It was reproduced from an ikon in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre presented to a former Governor of the Island by the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church.

⁴ Dominions and Colonial Office List. London 1937.

⁵ 6 2. (1). Op. cit. Vol. 2, p. 52 from Correa, Caspar. *Lendas da India*.

⁶ 6 Whitaker’s Almanack. London 1941, p. 824.

⁷ Barros, Joa de. *Da Asia*. 1552.

Goes, Damiano de. *Chronicle de Felicissimo Dei don Emmanuel*. 1566.

Osorio, Jerome Bishop of Selves. *De Rebus Emmanuelis*. 1571.

The last refers to Fernao Lopez the mutilated apostate who hid his shame on St Helena in 1513. By far the best account of him is that by: Clifford, “Heroes of Exile,” *Blackwoods Magazine*, Edinburgh 1906.

they were writing about as well as some personal knowledge of the events; but their subject was a wide one and St Helena no more than an insignificant detail on a tremendous canvas.

Further research is required and it is in the archives of Lisbon, the Vatican, and Goa, then the capital of Portugal's eastern empire, where unpublished manuscripts and records are likely to be found.⁸ Theal, the eminent South African archivist to whom the historians of that country owe so much, has printed a few extracts from the Lisbon archives in one of his major works;⁹ Axelson, another South African historian, has published much valuable information on the Lisbon repositories and his work is likely to be of great help to all who seek to advance our knowledge of that part of the world that was once the Portuguese Empire. The writer has no knowledge of what may be found in the Vatican, but obviously there are likely to be rich deposits hitherto undisturbed by English translations. The Archivist of Goa has been kind enough to write that he does not possess a copy of Da Nova's journal, but what other manuscripts there may be in that remote office is not known. Da Nova's Journal, for example, is a basic document; but it is lost to us and it is much to be feared that it was destroyed by the conflagration that followed the great Lisbon earthquake of 1760 when so much valuable material must have been burned.¹⁰ It is reasonable to hope, however, that a copy may still be found in the Vatican Library.

Scientists have always attached a special significance to St Helena.¹¹ It is to Professor Daly, for example, of Harvard University that we owe the first full technical account of its geology, compiled after an arduous visit for field work, where he reveals that the Island was created by a series of successive volcanic eruptions spread over a long period of geological time. Other scientists have explained to us that it was once joined to a great land mass that disappeared after some gigantic convulsion of nature, leaving behind it for the instruction and interest of civilisation, a small fragment lost in the wastes of the South Atlantic, 1,200 miles from the nearest continent, known to us as The Island of St Helena. On its shores and hills there can be found a marine life, a bird (*Aegialitis Sanctae Helenae*) the local "wire bird", insects, and a beautiful and unique flora, all indigenous to the Island and unknown to any other part of world.¹² It will easily be understood how important it is to us to know

⁸ 2. (1) *op. cit.*

⁹ *Ibid.* (2).

¹⁰ Mr Axelson's work is likely to be of great help to St Helena.

¹¹ A short description by an amateur geologist, Captain J. R. Oliver, an officer of the Royal Artillery, is said to have great merit. It will be found published by: Grant, Benjamin. *A Few Notes on St Helena* to which is added . . . Captain J. R. Oliver's *Geology of the Island*. St Helena 1883.

¹² The insects should be more properly described as beetles of which 128 are indigenous. As also are 17 sea fish. The fact that the beetles are mostly wood borers is taken as confirmatory evidence that the greater part of the Island was once covered with forests. The St Helena flora is one of the glories of the scientific world. Although protected by legislation it is fast disappearing on account of changes of climate and rainfall. It has a bibliography of its own and there is the great Burchell collection in the Kew Herbarium. The following works may be usefully consulted: Wolaston, T. V. *Coleoptera Sanctae Helenae*. 1875.

Mellis, J. C. *St Helena etc.* 1875.

what plants, trees, and creatures were introduced either by Da Nova or his successors or whoever, in truth, may have been the first human being to have set foot on its shores.

Research into the manuscripts of the period implies ability to make good translations: De Goes, for example, is made by his translator to say in one place “the meat that they find there” when referring to the supplies that the Portuguese sailors used to find on the Island. This is a very significant remark.¹³ Does the statement mean that Da Nova found edible meat when he landed there (this would prove conclusively that he was not the first human being to set foot on its shores) or does it refer to the animals that he had introduced, i.e. hogs and goats, and so ensured a supply of meat to his successors? A knowledge of Latin and Portuguese is essential to the searcher.

Period 1588-1633

This was the age of the early mariner, merchant, or pirate (whichever description is most apt) from many of the nations of Europe all intent on trade with India. It marks the decline of the Portuguese Empire and the foundation of the British East India Company; and at its close St Helena had passed into the hands of a stronger power, the Dutch, already engaged in the struggle with the British for supremacy in the East. Again there are no archives in the Island; but there are numerous descriptions of it at this time, and what was happening there, in the journals of the travellers, many published by the Hakluyt Society. Records must be sought in Lisbon, the India Office, London, and The Hague, thus adding the burden of two more languages to the shoulders of the historian who would write a history of St Helena. This matter of languages is unfortunate; and the multiplicity of tongues persists down the ages, for by the time the French come into the story still another is required. It is, perhaps, this circumstance, more than any other, that accounts for the incompleteness of our knowledge of the Island previous to the year 1659.

On shore the sailors used the place as they liked.¹⁴ Here they fought and squabbled; and so violent were the times that the Pope granted plenary absolution to the Portuguese sailors voyaging to St Helena lest sudden death overtake them there at the hands of the turbulent English. The provident among them planted fruits and greenstuffs against the privations of the future, whilst the careless denuded the trees, much to the disgust of their successors, of the lemons so sorely needed by the scurvy stricken sailor. The Island became an unregulated inn that all might use at their

Hemsley, W. B. Botanical Section Challenger Expedition. 1875.

Mellis gives a fine description of the flora with good illustrations and an excellent drawing of the wire bird, so called because it is found in the wire grass.

¹³ 2. (1) op. cit.

¹⁴ Welch, S. R. (The Rev.): Some Unpublished Manuscripts. Pretoria. 1930. Extracted from Vittorio Emmanuele Library. Fondo Gesintico Cod. No. IS. Theal I (2) op. cit. also quotes a letter to the King of Portugal that ships should not touch at St Helena on account of disturbances by the English.

convenience or leisure; and from the condition of St Helena to-day, it is evident that immense damage was done in these disorderly times to the forests, vegetation and scanty soil.¹⁵ It must have been about this date that the Chapel that had been built by the Portuguese, and described by Cavendish in 1588, began to crumble away. “Chapel Valley” is the oldest place name in the Island and a church has stood on the same site as the Portuguese Chapel since the very earliest days of the British occupation. The date the Portuguese are believed to have completed it is said to be about 1570. Quite recently the Library of Congress brought to notice a rare and early book containing a view of the Chapel.¹⁶

In 1633 the Dutch, fully alive to the high value of St Helena, sent a fleet under Jacques Specz to annex it to the States General by proclamation.¹⁷ This was done and the fleet sailed away. But it is one thing to annex a useful little Island and another not to occupy it and this the Dutch failed to do, a serious mistake that they were to regret later.¹⁸

Period 1633-1659

We now enter the periods in the Island’s history when a complete documentation begins to be available to students, to be found in the archives of the India Office, The Hague, and Cape Town. It is to Sir William Foster,¹⁹ the former historiographer of the India Office and historian of the East India Company, that we are indebted for our knowledge of these years. He was the author of a most important article on the early history of St Helena, published in the *English Historical Review*, that quite displaces all other accounts and notably Chapter I of Brooke,²⁰ hitherto regarded as the standard work on the subject. It is a misfortune that this authoritative contribution is not more widely known as writers continue to repeat the errors and misstatements that have hitherto prevailed.

In 1645 we have the first local record in the form of an inscribed rock describing the visit of the Indiaman *Dolphin* as follows:²¹

¹⁵ Old maps reveal the enormous extent of the damage done to the forests.

¹⁶ “Hondius, Jodocus. *Klare Besgryving van t’ Eyland S. Helenae*. Amsterdam 1652. This description is based on the accounts of Cavendish and Linschoten. It contains a view of the chapel and the Island. For another view of the chapel see Linschoten’s *Voyages* Edition 1598.

¹⁷ Gosse, Philip. *St Helena* 1502. London 1938 gives an illustration of the Proclamation.

¹⁸ Foster, Sir William. “The acquisition of St Helena,” *English Historical Review*. Vol. XXXIV, July 1919

¹⁹ The assistance given by Sir William at the India Office has been continued by his successors.

²⁰ Brooke, Thomas Henry (Secretary to the Government). *A History of the Island of St Helena*. 2 Eds. 1808 and 1824. The 2nd Edition is the best.

²¹ This stone was built in to the plinth of an ostentatious monument over the tomb of Anne, wife of Governor Isaac Pyke. There is a small illustration in Mellis op. cit.

SHIP DOLPHIN
WILLIAM FREEMAN COMMANDER
JOHN PROWD MASTER
ARRIVED HERE MARCH 21st
DEPARTED HENCE MAY 18
OSTLO NOVO
1645

The purpose of these inscribed stones has been much discussed, especially in South Africa, where many are preserved in the South Africa Museum at Cape Town.²² It is a common belief among the public that they were cut by the sailors to indicate that a letter had been placed beneath the stone to await the next caller, so acquiring the name of "Post Office Stones." There is, perhaps, a less romantic explanation. Ever since the days of the Romans, all those who have borne arms in the service of the State or the Conqueror, often in dull and lonely places, have whiled away the unrelieved tedium of their duty by scratching their names and military devices on walls and rocks. Such records can be seen in any part of the world where soldiers or sailors have ever served. Did not King David, for example, "scrabble" on the gate? The practice is as old as mankind. The Dolphin Stone weighed a ton and a half; it is hard to believe that seamen would choose such a rock for putting on top of a letter. It seems much more likely that when they cut this rock that they did so because they wanted something to do to pass away the hours of their enforced idleness on shore. Moreover we have a contemporary record that in St Helena the sailors left their letters on the altar of the chapel.

Before passing to the period 1659-1673 there are three subjects that require mention:

- (a) The struggle between the British and Dutch.
- (b) Brooke's History of St Helena.
- (c) India Office publications.

The British and the Dutch

The struggle between the two great Companies was for commercial supremacy in the East. It was a struggle where ports of call had the same significance as landing grounds have in modern warfare. The worth of the Island was immeasurably greater than its size and with the Dutch holding the Cape, it is doubtful if the English could have sustained the struggle had they not possessed St Helena. There was no other port open to them and certainly not one so easy to make or so safe to sail away from;

²² Peringuey, L. "Inscriptions left by Early European Navigators on their way to the East." Annals of the South Africa Museum, Guide Leaflet No. 1. The Mossel Bay or Da Nova Stone illustrated at p. 7 is now attributed by Axelson, reason not stated, to the second journey by the discoverer of St Helena in 1507.

and in these respects the Island far surpassed Cape Town, a dangerous port for sailing vessels. St. Helena's part in nourishing its country's mercantile marine has been overshadowed by the exile and death of Napoleon; but it is the former that has the greatest claim on Great Britain's consideration.

Brooke's St Helena

This well-known book was written by Thomas Henry Brooke, Secretary to the Government, and was published in two editions in 1808 and 1824, the first having been published when he visited England, almost blind. The history is founded on the local archives only, no use having been made of the East India Company's records in London. The first chapter and parts of the second are now much out of date, but the remainder is still the only standard work available, for the reason that there has been no research of later date in London. Research in these rich fields is likely to result in substantial alteration to this history.

India Office Publications

Some years ago now the India Office began publication of a series of calendars of the Minutes of the Court of Directors of the East India Company,²³ each volume being published with a most helpful introduction. Naturally enough the affairs of the Company's little possession, St Helena, came up before the Directors for consideration and decision and they often expressed themselves in no uncertain terms about it. The Editors of these volumes have brought to light much valuable information and small though the Island is, it has received a full share of their labours. But these minutes are by no means the only records relating to the Island to be found in the India Office where there are accumulations of two centuries, and it is much to be hoped that in future years the St Helena Manuscripts will also be calendared.

Periods 1659-1673 and Four Months of 1673

It was Oliver Cromwell,²⁴ the father of our liberties and founder of his country's greatness, who was the first to appreciate the high value of St Helena in the development of British trade with India. It was not until after his death that the occupation was completed in May, 1659, when John Dutton, a mariner from Greenwich, landed and built a fort and installed a garrison.²⁵ He left behind him two fine relics, the foundation stone of his fort now built into the walls of the present Castle, and a

²³ India Office London. Calendar of Court Minutes of the East India Company. In 1939 the volumes had reached 1679. The references to St Helena in the introductions and Sir William Foster's article are the most important contribution to the history of St Helena.

in the past 120 years.

²⁴ 4 Sir William Foster.

²⁵ Illustrations of Dutton's Stones will be found in:

(1) The St Helena Almanac 1913.

(2) Barnes, John. A Tour through the Island of St Helena. London 1817.

beautifully inscribed stone chiselled by the Carpenter of the ship *Marmaduke* now built into the seaward wall of the Castle Terrace. The documentation of this short period is in the India Office and there are also accounts by early travellers. In January, 1673, the Island was lost to a Dutch expedition from the Cape and was recaptured by the British in May of the same year by a fleet from England under the command of Captain Richard Munden. These incidents are well-documented; Theal and Leibrandt have published extracts from the Cape Records and there are the Court Minutes as well as Munden's Journal, besides a splendid account by Mr Boxer compiled from the Dutch Archives.²⁶ In spite of this wealth of material there is much that is still obscure. In any age the invasion of a well-guarded St Helena by a descent on its forbidding coasts would be a most formidable undertaking, and the fact that the Dutch, greatly outnumbered in men and guns, should have been able to land at all demands an explanation that has not so far been furnished. It is clear that there was no fighting and that the Governor packed up all his stores and treasure on a sloop waiting in the roadstead and decamped with the greater part of the garrison to Brazil, the Dutch fleet not interfering with his departure. There are no archives of this period in St Helena, and it is assumed that the Governor took them all with him in his shameful flight. It is possible that these may still be found in the India Office.

Period 1673-1836

These one hundred and sixty-three years cover the entire period of the East India Company's rule of the Island, it having been granted to them "as of a manor" by Royal Charter in December, 1673. Under the Company's guidance, more often benevolent than oppressive, the little settlement advanced from a turbulent and disordered community²⁷ to a prosperous and well-organized Colony garrisoning one of the most strongly fortified fortresses of the age.²⁸ The local records of this long rule are all deposited in the Castle Jamestown, the seat of the Island Government.²⁹

Some description of the way the Company conducted its public business may be helpful to those unfamiliar with the East India Company. could live there without its permission and nothing could be bought or sold; it had a complete monopoly of

²⁶ Theal, G. MacC. *History and Ethnography of Africa (South of the Zambesi)*. Vol. II. 1909. Leibrandt, H. C. V. *Precis of the Archives of the Cape of Good Hope Journal 1671- 1674*, Cape Town 1902. Pp. 93, 96, 116-117, 124, 131-133, 145-146. Boxer, C. R. "The Third Dutch War in the East," *The Mariner's Mirror*, October 1930. *Mundens Journal*. Pepys Mss. Magdalene Coll. Cambridge.

²⁷ Serious mutinies were prevalent. A number of estates held by the Crown today were originally the property of mutineers sequestered by Government, cf. "Pouncey's" and "Luffkin's" two soldiers who had landed with Munden.

²⁸ About 250 pieces of ordnance were mounted in very considerable fortifications. The strength of the regular garrison was about 800 with a militia of about 400.

²⁹ Extracts from these Records were published in 1885 by: Grant, Benjamin. Extract from the St Helena Records compiled by the late Hudson Ralph Janisch. St Helena 1885. The above does not tell the entire story. Janisch was the Governor of the Island and had spent a very considerable time calendaring the records, His work was not complete when he died. He had previously published some extracts in the local newspaper, "The St Helena Guardian," of which Grant was editor, publisher, and printer. It is doubtful if Janisch, had he lived, would have allowed publication in the form presented. The book is useful but lacks an index. Janisch had prepared a very complete index in manuscript to the whole records.

the port and any private ship trying to trade to India or wanting to use the Island was an “interloper” and treated as such; settlers could only obtain land on which to live subject to acceptance of the obligation to military service and providing so many soldiers per fifty acres. It fed and sustained the population and not until the last years of its reign was private trade permitted. It is still a matter for much discussion whether the abolition of the Company’s monopoly in 1836 was beneficial to the welfare of the civil population or not; on the whole, and although there may have been no alternative, the change-over in the event proved unfortunate.

In local affairs the people were ruled by a Governor with a Council to advise him, but supreme authority rested with the Governor who was appointed by the Company and not by the Crown, nevertheless all had to take an oath of allegiance to the King. The Governor and Council combined every function of Government; they made and passed the laws; they were the Judges at the High Court of Session and under their laws could hang a man as expeditiously as anyone else; and they carried on the day to day task of administering the government and commanding and directing the troops. Many able men held the post of Governor under the Company and it is of interest that the last six appointed under their rule all appear in the Dictionary of National Biography.³⁰

It was the practice for the Governor and Council to meet at weekly intervals for the formal disposal of the public business, their proceedings being recorded as the “Consultations of the Governor and Council.” Here are written down all the affairs of a small English community living far from their homes, the local events of interest, the arrivals and departures of ships, the epidemics, the alarms, and the calamities. The whole constitutes a rich record of the social life of the time as well as the frailties of mankind in a sterner and ruder age. What, for example, was a ‘kissing dance’ and why should it offend the susceptibilities of Robert Jenkins,³¹ the loss of whose ear started a war?

By the instructions of the Company these records had to be copied and the originals sent to London. The dossier also had to include any letter under reference that might have been received together with returns, accounts, store lists, muster rolls and descriptions of the defences. It is for these reasons that the “Consultations” form so convenient and compendious a record. The next step was to send them to London under covering letter, now preserved in the “Letters to London” series signed by the Governor and Members of Council in person together with a schedule of everything else that was being sent by the ship that carried the letter. The writer is one of those who believe that such schedules have great value for the purposes of research, and it is a misfortune that in most cases copies of them have not been

³⁰ Robert Brooke, Robert Patton, Alexander Beatson, Mark Wilks, Hudson Lowe and Alexander Walker. Robert Dalas, the last Governor of the Island, achieved a greater distinction by preserving John Dutton’s foundation stone and the East India Company’s Arms over the Castle.

³¹ For an account of Jenkins see Gosse, II, 4, op. cit.

preserved in the Island. On safe arrival in London the correspondence would be handled in the Company's office and finally disposed of, if necessary, by a formal Minute of the Court of Directors, their decision being communicated to St Helena by letter signed by all the Directors, in person, as "Your Loving Friends." It was not the practice of the Directors to send a copy of their Minutes to the Island and they confined themselves, more often than not, to exhortation, admonition, or reproof, and sometimes an appropriate sermon, in a style telling the Governor what they thought of him of whom they were completely the master.

The following broad schedule of subjects to which main references will be found in the Consultations may be of help:

- Arrivals and Departures of Ships
- Rent Rolls
- Muster Rolls of the Island Troops
- Accounts and Inventories of the Public Stores
- The State and Armaments of the Defences
- Roads and their condition
- Land Tenures and Distribution of Land
- Afforestation
- Agricultural Development
- Exploitation of Local Resources
- Shipping and the condition of the Company's Cargoes from the East

The main ancillary records are to be found in the following series:

- Will Books containing the wills of the inhabitants
- Proceedings of the Courts of Sessions, a most valuable record of the treatment of slaves
- Land Records and Grants of Land

There are many other volumes that cannot be properly included in the above series, some unique to St Helena and not preserved elsewhere. When it is remembered that the records continue to-day under slightly different titles, few will deny that the St Helena Records constitute a noteworthy inheritance that may well be envied. But what is to be deplored in the Island is that so much was destroyed when the Crown took over in 1836, for example, many of the schedules accompanying the "Letters from London" are missing. It is these documents that tell us so conveniently what was sent to the Island in the course of succeeding generations.

Napoleon's Exile and Death

Napoleon's end was a dramatic episode that still arouses intense interest and its documentation is a special subject about which there is a good deal of confusion. An Act of Parliament was needed to make his detention lawful and the Crown also took power to choose a place for him to reside in as well as to appoint a person to be his Custodian. The East India Company agreed to loan St Helena as the place of detention and to appoint the Crown's nominee to be Governor, subject to the Crown reinforcing the garrison and bearing all the extra expense of these arrangements. It was a convenient plan and Lowe, therefore, held two posts, Governor of St Helena and responsible to the Company for civil affairs, and Custodian of Napoleon and responsible to the Crown for the welfare and treatment of the great exile and for the affairs of the troops of the British Army. The documentation of civil affairs is to be found in the Island with the usual copies in London but that of Napoleon and the troops must be sought elsewhere, there scarcely being a paper of importance in the local records.

There is often much dispute as to why the Crown selected this lonely Island³² and it was, probably, misinformed about local conditions. There were, of course, innumerable people who knew all there was to know about this remote outpost; but it is possible that all their knowledge was highly coloured by hostility to the ex-Emperor rather than very much sympathy. A good example is Beatson's memorandum that he pressed on the British Government where it is evident that security, and nothing but security, from the man who had plunged Europe into such terrible slaughter and loss was uppermost in men's minds. On this basis the British Government can justify its action since St Helena was the one place where the ships of every nation could be excluded by virtue of the Company's monopolies³³ with one exception, namely the United States of America,³⁴ which in due course also acquiesced in its ships being excluded too. There can be no doubt that in the first instance the whole proceeding was unlawful and in the latter unconstitutional.

Sir Hudson Lowe was not the monster that he is so often made out to be by partisan controversialists. He was no more than an ordinary type of British General Officer during one of the most illustrious periods of the Army's history, considered to be specially qualified by his long continental service with the armies of the Allies and his knowledge of European tongues, for the task of guarding the dangerous exile. He is not usually credited with having been a man of very much intelligence or foresight, but he did have a great sense of the occasion that would for ever be

³² One of the reasons put forward in all good faith was that there was "very fine house in St Helena," i.e. the Castle, not Plantation House, the Governor's official residence.

³³ See also: Hone, W. *Napoleon's Deportation for Life to St Helena*. London 1816.

³⁴ By a convention between the U.S.A. and Great Britain of July 1815 the vessels of the former had the right to touch for refreshment but not commerce. This was suspended by mutual arrangement after Napoleon's deportation. See *Treaties and other Acts of the United States*, Hunter Miller, Vol. 2, 1776-1818, Washington 1931. The writer is indebted to the Library of Congress for this information.

associated with his name. From his manner of conducting the public business it seems as if a kindly providence had warned him of the fate that he was to be one of the most ill-used and most maligned Governors who have ever served the British Crown, and in all his work there can be seen a determination to set up an unchallengeable record for posterity of the way he had discharged his duty.

Every public transaction was reduced to writing and every conversation carefully recorded; every paper received was preserved as well as a copy of everything going out over his name or by his instructions; no document large or small, unimportant or important, even a fragment, escaped his widely spread net. The whole monumental collection was carefully packed and transported to England and is now deposited in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Museum. As records of the events the Lowe Papers have never been challenged. It is indeed most curious how every major attack on Lowe can be controverted by their contents and more than once they have been the means of sustaining his reputation against the assaults of his critics. In erecting this sure defence Lowe rendered a notable service to history, yet it is surprising how many people are prepared to write books about Napoleon in St Helena without troubling to study these documents. A prominent example is, perhaps, the most widely read book of all, *The Last Phase* by the late Lord Rosebery, a book that mars the eminent author's reputation. However beautiful the prose, the book is often in grievous error in fact and detail and consequently presented a fine target for two devastating rejoinders, one commissioned by Lowe's family.³⁵

So far the unfortunate Governor has not been convicted of suppressing any document from this great collection of papers, however unfavourable to himself. He was a humane man, a quality acknowledged by his worst enemies, and it is in St Helena that there is preserved the account of the slave woman who begged for his protection at the entrance to Plantation House, her back bleeding from the lashes of her master, an officer in one of the Island regiments. Lowe was scandalized and had the offender brought before a court martial and dismissed from the service. His three children were all born at Plantation house, an unusual occurrence the only other recorded case in the past one hundred and twenty-five years being a daughter to Governor Thomas Gore Browne in 1852.³⁶ We have no biographical details of the elder son; Edward, the second child became a Major General in the Army after a fine career in the Indian Mutiny and Susan, the youngest child and only daughter, died at an advanced age after a life spent in the service of the poor chiefly among the victims of cholera in the slums of London. Whatever may be said about Sir Hudson Lowe the act of sending Napoleon, a man whose principal recreation was intelligent conversation with the best brains of his age, to St Helena and putting him there in a house where he could be most easily secured rather than where he would

³⁵ Young, Norwood. *Napoleon in Exile. St Helena* 1914.

Seaton, R. C. *Napoleon's Captivity in Relation to Sir Hudson Lowe*. 1903.

³⁶ D.N.B.

be most comfortable, cannot in any sense be regarded as a responsibility resting upon his shoulders.

Objects used by Napoleon during his last exile are eagerly sought after by museums and collectors. There are two classes of such objects, firstly the personal property that he removed from France and was allowed to take to St Helena such as jewellery, uniforms, swords, toilet articles, the great Sevres service, plate, and so forth, and secondly the household furniture and equipment provided by the Island authorities and the British Government, the supply being on a generous scale. The diet was lavish too; and the Longwood establishment the scene of unwarrantable extravagance, waste and shameful speculation.

All the personal property and effects were disposed of in a detailed will that has been published in various works, practically everything being left to the son. There can be no doubt that this will is a remarkable document and the last manifestation of that flaming energy, indomitable spirit, and fierce determination that had destroyed the Armies of Europe. There were two personal gifts, a snuff box to Lady Holland with a personal message and another snuff box to Dr Archibald Arnott,³⁷ Napoleon's British medical attendant for whom he had conceived a warm personal liking. There was also a fee of 600 napoleons. Arnott's gift was unique as on the gold lid there is an imperial "N" inscribed by the dying Emperor with his nail scissors. It is painful to think, however, that a medical officer who received so splendid a gift could not think of any better treatment than a massive dose of calomel for a patient moribund of cancer of the stomach. Opium was never administered at any stage of the disease and the great soldier died in revolting agony.

It should be easy for collectors and museums to establish the authenticity of any personal property mentioned in the will and it may be taken as certain that nothing was left out. The furniture is a much more complex problem. It was all the property of the Crown and the East India Company and distributed over three houses, Longwood the home of the exile, Bertrand's house and specially built for him, and Longwood New House a new residence built for, but never occupied by Napoleon. The basic document in regard to the furniture is the inventory of all furniture in charge of the Longwood establishment prepared by Mr Darling of the Island government after Napoleon's death. It is preserved in the St Helena Records and has been published by Mr Norwood Young to whom we are also indebted for full plans and descriptions of the three houses.

Sir Hudson Lowe left St Helena in July, 1821 and before he sailed, having every reason to believe that the furniture would be sold, reserved to himself certain pieces in the inventory that he wished to have as a memento of his historic period of office.³⁸ His action was quite normal and regular in every way. We must presume here

³⁷ Chaplin, Arnold. *A St Helena Who's Who*. 2nd Edition 1919.

³⁸ The pieces so reserved are marked with an asterisk in the Inventory. See Norwood Young *supra*.

that Lowe would have picked the choicest pieces, and that he would reserve the most interesting and historical, i.e. those most closely associated with Napoleon. The items were duly packed and awaiting shipment when Lowe's successor as Governor arrived, Brigadier Alexander Walker who, in a most discourteous and impolite manner attempted to accuse Lowe of stealing the Company's property so that he might misappropriate it for himself. A fierce and bitter dispute arose that took four years to resolve.³⁹ In the end the East India Company awarded the pieces to Lowe and the furniture was duly delivered to him at the East India Docks London. Among it was Napoleon's St Helena writing table that Lowe, as we know from the record, had presented to his former second in command and old friend of Corsican days, Brigadier Pine Coffin.⁴⁰ Lowe died a poor man in 1844 when all his effects and furniture were put up to auction by a well-known firm of London's auctioneers, including the St Helena furniture. The Sale Catalogue cannot be traced and from this date Lowe's Napoleonic furniture disappears from view.

Whilst this dispute was proceeding the moment arose to sell the whole of the public stores of the Longwood Establishment when a catalogue was prepared and printed at the Government Press. A marked copy of this catalogue⁴¹ shewing the price paid for each item, but not the names of the buyers, is preserved in the Lowe Papers; but these names are not necessarily lost to us and further research is likely to reveal them in the Company's accounts in the records of the India Office. Except for the pieces in possession of the Government of St Helena, all this furniture is now dispersed. Odd pieces will be found in museums; a good many pieces must have gone to India with the departing troops; some found its way to South Africa; and a great deal in all probability was sold to the French Expedition that came to the Island to take away Napoleon's remains for the second funeral.

It is to be noted that the furniture supplied to the New House, but never used by Napoleon or his entourage, is of an ornate gilt and mahogany pattern and has no special historical associations except as evidence of the extent to which the British Government were prepared to go to promote the welfare of the exile. The remainder of the furniture was of a common, and not very desirable, style supplied either by the Company's tradesmen or from its stores. Those interested in the matter will find a photograph of one authentic piece, used by Napoleon at Longwood, in the late

³⁹ The letters exchanged in this dispute between the ex-Governor and his successor are contained in a thick well-bound volume deposited in the St Helena Records. The exchanges were of a very acrimonious character in which Lowe showed himself well able to hold his own. In 1909 the late Lord Curzon visited the Island and later published two St Helena sketches in his books *Tales of Travel and Leaves from a Viceroy's Note Book* of which one was on this dispute where Lowe secures the great Viceroy's sympathy.

⁴⁰ D.N.B. and St Helena Records. The name was originally "Coffin" to which "Pine" was added later. He was second in command of the Troops and as far as is known was no relation of a British Army family of this name. He comes to notice during the captivity for his transactions in bullocks raised on his small farm at "Knollcombes" then his temporary home.

⁴¹ British Museum. Addl. Mss. 20229.

Mrs. Jackson's work⁴² that was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition in 1930 and later presented by the Government of St Helena to the Longwood Museum.

Museums and collectors should be chary of accepting alleged Napoleonic furniture from St Helena, save in the face of documentary evidence and knowledge of the style of the period, it having been a common practice for passengers touching at the Island on their return from the East before the days of the Suez Canal, to purchase some piece of furniture as having been used by Napoleon. The Government of St Helena has some examples of the Longwood New House furniture as well as the illustrious exile's commode and the bidets of the Establishment.

The End of the East India Company

The death of Napoleon marked the beginning of the end of the East India Company's rule, and fifteen years later with the abolition of the monopolies, the Island passed to the direct control of the British Crown. In taking leave of the records of the period it must be understood that the Island was one of the Company's smallest and most insignificant possessions, but a valuable one. At the height of its fame the East India Company was, perhaps, one of the most remarkable achievements of the British people. It was more: it was an expression of free and private enterprise manifested in its highest form. Its representatives could be found on the boundaries of Turkey and Persia; they were all about the shores of China and the confines of Japan; and from high Asia, right across the plains and mountains of India, its rule reached to little St Helena washed by the seas of the remote South Atlantic. A Memorial to the Company in the British Embassy Baghdad reads as follows:

The British Residency Baghdad
was founded in 1765 and withdrawn in 1766.
It was re-established under Mr Harford Jones of
the Honourable East India Company's Service
on 24th August, 1799
To counteract the designs of Napoleon in the East.
The present site was occupied in 1904.

And on the Island where the great Conqueror was called to a last account, the proud motto "Auspicio Regis et Senatus Angliae" greets the visitor at the main entrance to the Government Offices.

From East India House in Leadenhall Street in the City of London the Company exercised all the powers of Government. It made laws and coined money; it raised Armies, maintained fleets, and conquered great Empires whilst all the time engaged in lawful trade. No Company ever built better ships and its services to its country,

⁴² Jackson, E. St Helena the Historic Isle. London 1903.

in this respect, have never been surpassed. In these days it is often the fashion to remember the East India Company, whose Directors were once the “Lords Proprietors of the Island of St Helena,” only by the evil it did and not the good. But anyone who is familiar with the smallest fragment of the great Company’s history will freely acknowledge that the advancement of mankind, the spread of religion, and the welfare of the people committed to its care, were often uppermost in its mind. ICHABOD is written large all over St Helena.

Period 1836 to Date

The transfer of St Helena to the direct care of the Crown was an ill-conducted piece of business, much bitter feeling being aroused. The servants of the Company suffered severely, and none more so than the two Regiments who were disbanded and dismissed. The old records were put on one side and new series begun, it not being until a number of years later that very much sympathy or affection was shown for the old. The Consultations became “The Minutes of the Executive Council” a dull, bare record of decisions taken lacking all life and colour. The series is complete from 1836, Letters to and from London are replaced by “Despatches to and from the Secretary of State.” It is these despatches, indexed and well-bound in annual volumes, that constitute the main source of information on all affairs of St Helena for over a hundred years; and there is no better or more authoritative source, the wealth of fact and knowledge that they contain being remarkable. Those from London, between the years 1837 and 1885, are all written on a high level of literary style and form a model that might be copied with advantage. If the Governors were unable to reach the same standard, those written by Hudson Janisch will challenge comparison with any other similar documents of the period. From 1885 there is a decline in the literary grace with the coming of the typewriter and later, the telephone and stenographer, but this decline is not confined to the English only. The fine black enduring ink gives way to the cheap ink of the purple ribbon and the high quality paper to a lower grade article that will make plenty of copies in a chattering machine. Even the binder fell under the evil spell of so-called progress and good stout leather gives way to cheap boards, cloth, and inferior glue. In the years to come the searcher among the St Helena records will stand amazed at the enduring quality of the East India Company the visitor at the main entrance to the Government Offices. From East India House in Leadenhall Street in the City of London and early Crown records when compared with the products of modern civilisation.

The following series of new Records were begun:

- Letters to and Letters from the Colonial Secretary.
- Harbourmaster’s Registers of Arrival and Departures of Ships.
- Treasury Cash Books and Ledgers.
- Births, Marriages and Deaths.

Annual Blue Books.

Colonial Secretary's Letters

It was the practice in St Helena up to about the year 1890 for all letters addressed to the Colonial Secretary to be gummed into leaved "guard books" in chronological order, quite irrespective of the subject that they might deal with. Thus one guard book might contain correspondence on about a hundred different subjects. Outgoing letters were copied into stout well-bound letter books, and here the same difficulty arises. About 1890 the dossier system was introduced, all letters relating to one subject being collected together and when finished with, being folded up and placed on a shelf. From this system there was evolved the modern method of having one strong manila cover, variously called a file or jacket, for each subject under correspondence and filing all letters relating to that subject therein. The old guard and letter books were an admirable method of preserving documents but must have been a most inconvenient system for reference and are most irritating to search. The modern method on the other hand presents difficult problems in preservation. So complex is modern administration that these jackets or files come off the "production line" at an ever increasing and alarming rate. A common practice is to place three or four such jackets in steel containers, but this practice takes no count of available space and lack of this alone will put an end in due course to a satisfactory enough procedure. Binding of jackets is commonly used; but this has to be high quality as an inexpensive variety in tropical climates is dangerous to the preservation of records.

Harbourmasters Registers

When the Crown took over it was faced with the task of raising additional revenue by taxation and introduced a tax of one penny per ton on the registered tonnage of every ship anchoring at the port, an extremely controversial measure that was ultimately withdrawn. The step resulted, however, in the use of admirable registers and the authors of an unpopular and unjustified measure have bequeathed to us a very fine record of every ship that ever called at St Helena. The registers are interesting for the practice of one harbourmaster of entering all sorts of unusual meteorological information in his register; and to him we are indebted for the knowledge that thunder is often heard in the Island, many having stated that it is unknown.

Treasury Accounts

These are disappointing and contain little information.

Births, Marriages and Deaths

Registration of vital statistics did not become compulsory by law until 1851 and 1853. Previous to that date information must be sought in the India Office and the Parish Registers.

Annual Blue Books

The St Helena Blue Book that is the annual statistical summary, is not printed on account of the lack of facilities for printing statistical material. It is prepared in manuscript in quadruplicate and no copies are available to the public, but it can always be consulted in London or St Helena where there is a fine 'run' of 102 volumes containing all the material of the past hundred years that a student is likely to require. The above notes on the records of St Helena are not intended to be exhaustive: they indicate only the main heads of some fine archives and where other, and much needed, manuscripts are likely to be found. In St Helena itself there are other documents of great interest and value, a few of those likely to be of use to students are as follows:

- Plan of Jamestown in 1814 with names of occupiers of houses.
- Report of the Commissioners sent out by the Crown to report on the Island prior to transfer.
- Confidential Military Report on the Defences prepared by the Officer Commanding the Royal Engineers in 1816 for use by Sir Hudson Lowe.
- Numerous Plans of Longwood.
- Orders issued to the Troops for the Second Funeral of Napoleon. Signal Codes in use in 1807.
- Mr Solomon's Account for the Entertainment of the Officers of the French Expedition to remove Napoleon's Remains. (Hot Bath 10/6d.)
- The Laws and Constitution of the East India Company.
- A complete Establishment List of every person including officers and soldiers and the Officers and Crew of the Company's Schooner *St Helena* drawing pay in the Island from the East India Company in 1817.

For the historically minded few places can have quite such an attraction as this small Island.

Acknowledgments. The writer wishes to acknowledge the help that has been generously given him by many Libraries and Societies in the United States. He is specially grateful to the late Eugene Fairfield MacPike of San Diego, the distinguished authority on Edmund Halley, the great astronomer, who visited St Helena in 1676 and whose fame is preserved there by "Halley's Mount." The Library of Congress has been unfailing in its courteous assistance, and so also have Harvard University Library, the Hispanic Society of America, the American Geographical Society, Dartmouth

College Library Hanover, the American Historical Association, and Amherst College Mass., and to them all the writer tenders these short notes about a small Island, familiar to many of their countrymen, as an expression of the cordial thanks he is unable to offer in person.

G.C.K.

Original Paper: G. C. Kitching, 'Records of the Island of St Helena Lat. 15° 55' S. Long. 5° 42' W.', *The American Archivist*, 10, no. 2 (1947): 151–171.