

THE LONGWOOD AND BRIARS MUSEUMS

by Trevor W. Hearl

A recent rumour that the French Museums on St Helena at Longwood House and The Briars Pavilion might be closing before the Millennium has proved, fortunately, to have been a somewhat premature obituary. Residents and visitors can be assured that these important historical assets will at least remain as they are for the foreseeable future.

The story of their possible demise seems to have arisen from a belief that the present French curator at Longwood, M. Michel Martineau, having been in office for some years, might be seeking pastures new. This would have faced the French Government with the difficult task of finding a successor which, if unsuccessful, would raise the tricky question of the care of their Napoleonic legacy on the Island, including the 'Martineau Collection' donated to the French Government in 1995. The museum authorities in Paris, in discharging this important responsibility to their nation, would no doubt prefer to curate its material in existing museums such as Malmaison, until a custodian could be found to devote his - or her - career to this highly specialised and lonely work on the Island. Nurtured on Napoleonic legends of St Helena, it is not surprising if members of France's overseas service would rather go to Outer Mongolia. Readers might therefore like to know at least the names of those who have devoted themselves to Longwood's restoration and custodianship during the 140 years of French ownership so far.

- Major GAUTHER de ROUGEMONT, 1858-67
 - assisted by Capt. Masselin (1859-61)
 - M. Marechel (1859 onwards)
 - Sgt. L. Morilleau (1861-1907)
 - Sapper Moutardeau at the Tomb (1861-73)
- M. MARECHEL, became "guardian" of Longwood in 1867
- Sgt. LUCIEN D. MORILLEAU, succeeded as "guardian" until his death at 72 in 1907
- M. HENRI ROGER 1907-1917; from the French consular service, retired to France
- M. GEORGE COLIN succeeded in 1919, his ship having been torpedoed en route to St Helena in 1917. Mme Colin died at St Helena in 1942
- M. GEORGE PEUGEOT followed in 1947 when Longwood returned to French ownership after the Second World War
- M. GILBERT MARTINEAU OBE succeeded in 1957, wrote 27 books there; died in 1995
- M. MICHEL DANCOISNE-MARTINEAU became "Conservateur des domaines francais de Longwood", 29th April 1988; and Honorary Consul

for France, June 1991. May these Museums flourish for the benefit and pleasure of all concerned.

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