

# THE ST HELENA GOVERNMENT GAZETTE

by Trevor W. Hearl

Dedicated St Helena watchers may welcome a note on the St Helena Government Gazette omitted from my recent paragraph on “The Islands’ Press” in Vol. XII, No. 1 (page 7). Do not, however, expect exciting, or even comprehensible reading except for civil servants, lawyers and accountants, but for an annual subscription of 10 pounds (post free), I imagine most readers will gain surprising new insights into Island affairs.

In appearance, the St Helena Government Gazette seems to rely on the skills and machinery of the old Victorian printing press at The Castle - featured in a splendid photograph by Rory Coonan in 1984 - though some concessions to modernization (if not to economy) were made last year by reducing the format from foolscap to A4.

In content, it records in a style suited to its magisterial authority, the legal and financial measures, great and small, required in running the Colony and its Dependent Territories. Although this includes the Postmaster’s announcements of new stamp issues, do not expect a subscription to bring you prior knowledge of his plans, as you will see below.

The Gazette appears on the last day of each month, but as numerous “extraordinary” supplements seem to be needed, there are usually 40 to 50 issues a year, most of them printed on single sheets. Let us take November 1987 as an example. An eight-page issue came out on 30 November (Vol. XXV, No. 43), of which the first two pages were devoted to government staff changes involving 10 officials ranging from a trainee clerk to the coroner.

Then the Postmaster, R. A. Legg, in a report dated 23 October, announced that the marine mammals’ special issue and first day covers “will be released on 24 October 1987”, his six-week-old notice having been held over from the previous month’s publication! Next, the acting Clerk of the Peace notified that liquor licences were due for renewal - fortunately for the 10th of December - reprinting sections of the Liquor Ordinance for objectors with a liking for legal language.

One acting Government Secretary (A. A. Green) reported that “His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to delegate to the Attorney General the powers and duties conferred upon him by the Wireless Telegraphy Ordinance, 1969”. (Schoolboy readers of *Spycatcher* scenting some subtle portents here) while another acting Government Secretary (R. E. Essex) advertised four “changes in name” in the conventional manner. (To prevent any confusion of roles between the two “acting Government Secretaries”, the Government Secretary announced under “Relinquishment of Acting Appointments” that the Deputy Government Secretary (Mr. Green) had “relinquished the post of acting Deputy Government Secretary”. To whom, I have no idea).

Finally came an application to the Financial Secretary for a “shop and mercantile license” and (anonymously) the rainfall figures from six weather stations for the periods 22 September through 21 October and from 22 October through 21 November. The variation between Jamestown and the more central areas of the island was quite dramatic, ranging between 0.19 inches in town and almost three inches in the country at Scotland, the Agricultural Department’s headquarters.

November also saw the issue of four “extraordinary” Gazettes. Between them they announced three new appointments - a Sheriff, a member of the Land Tax Tribunal and an acting General Manager of the Agricultural Development Authority; two applications for trading licenses (from an auctioneer for the Handicapped Persons Day Centre and a shopkeeper “near the Arch”; and nine pieces of legislation with such titles as “The Parastatal Corporations (Amendment) Ordinance, 1987. Price 36p”, “The Interpretation (Tristan da Cunha) Ordinance, 1987. Price 18p”, and “The Application of St Helena Law (Ascension) Ordinance, 1987. Price 12p”.

Potential subscribers will notice that copies of the Colony’s laws are charged extra and must be specially ordered. Some of these titles will appear in a later list when the Government Secretary can announce that “The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has informed His Excellency the Governor that Her Majesty the Queen will not exercise her powers of disallowance with respect to the following Ordinances of the Legislature of St Helena

Among the Gazette’s more striking features remembering that it relates to a total population on all three islands of under 7,000 - are the proliferation of government officials and the relatively numerous applications to trade and to change names. During 1987, over 30 new trading licenses were sought and about a score of Islanders changed their names by deed poll. St Helena must be the most bureaucratized community in the world; the per capita costs of administration are certainly among the highest recorded and members with an appetite for such statistics can find them in the Gazette.

The separate financial statements of government sponsored bodies, such as the St Helena Fisheries Corporation, are published annually, as well as a summary of the Colony’s balance sheet, juggling with several million pounds. Such information is unfortunately rarely analysed in the local news sheet. How residents get to know the issues involved, quite apart from the figures, I really cannot say. Perhaps from the fleeting word over the air from the St Helena radio station?

During 1987, subscribers to the St Helena Government Gazette received an extra bonus in the Register of Electors (otherwise 8.64 pounds per copy!). But the report of the decennial census, taken in February, and yet to be published, will not be included. I will comment on both in a later article. Meanwhile, should you want to sample the Gazette, send your subscription to the Information Officer, Broadway House, Jamestown, Island of St Helena, South Atlantic Ocean. Then wait for it - any periodical printed in Jamestown must surely be a collector’s item!

**South Atlantic Chronicle, July 1988, Vol. XII, Nos. 2-3, p. 16.**

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