

# The St Helena Printing Presses

by G. C. Kitching

The books and pamphlets printed in St Helena are something of a curiosity. It was not until 1806, or close upon 150 years after the Island had been first occupied by the British, that a small press was imported by a few private residents and set up as "The St Helena Press," under the management of Mr Saul Solomon, whose family have contributed so much to South African and local history. The business was taken over later by the East India Company, but during the years 1807-1813 it produced a number of interesting publications. An early specimen of its work, the *Government Gazette Published by Authority*, No. 5, June 20, 1807, is preserved in the public records at Jamestown; no other copies are available locally, and as the paper does not appear again, and then in another form, until 1845, it would be interesting to know what happened to it and whether it was published during the intervening thirty-eight years.

With the appointment of Alexander Beatson as Governor in 1808, the publishing trade began to boom. He seized on the press as the means of disseminating his views on agricultural development; and in the *St Helena Monthly Register*, which began publication in 1809, he described his plans and explained his experiments with, as the late Lord Rosebery was to remark a hundred years later, "a minuteness which could scarcely be justified in the case of the Garden of Eden." Twelve copies of this curious little journal, about 8in x 4½ in., were sent regularly to East India House, but so far only one compilation has been found, and that incomplete. Other publications during Beatson's period of office were 'Papers relating to the Devastation committed by Goats on the Island of St Helena.' By Authority. 1810.; a compilation of laws relating specially to land, 'Abstract of the Laws and Ordinances relating to Land and Tenures and the Moral and Agricultural Improvement of the Island of St Helena.' By Authority c. 1810; the laws of the little settlement under the title 'Abstract of the Laws and Regulations established by the Honorable Court of Directors or by the Governor and Council of the Island of St Helena.' By Authority. 1813; and more papers on goats and sheep, 'Island of St Helena. Proceedings of the Governor and Council regarding Lands, Tenures, Goats and Sheep.' 1813.

The *Register* was, of course, a quasi-official newspaper; but soon after the appointment of the Rev. Richard Boys to the junior chaplaincy in 1812, it seems to have got into trouble. "Objectionable remarks" appeared in its columns, with the result that any future material about which there was any doubt, was required to be submitted to the Government Secretary before publication. Dr Baidon, the Company's Medical Superintendent, who acted as editor, was so outraged by this order that he

wrote an angry memorial to the Court of Directors protesting at the reflection on “his literary attainments, and general respectability of character” which, as Mark Wilks observed later, “would be invaluable in any community.” His protest was unavailing and Boys was appointed to his place. Island life became perceptibly brighter when he and the Rev. Mr Jones began to print and circulate abusive letters to each other; but the squabble that ended in the latter being retired to the post of tutor to the Balcombe children on a pension of 5s. per day, supplemented by the Emperor’s sympathy, put a stop to private publishing in St Helena for very many years.

With the departure of Beatson, the *Register* ceased publication, and, with the exception of the printing of the first ‘Report of the St Helena Benevolent Society,’ 1814, the press was confined during the captivity to turning out official notices, Acts of Parliament, regulations, menacing proclamations, etc., until at the last scene of all, it printed the catalogues of the dead Emperor’s household effects.

The next seven years saw the issue of the *Proceedings* of the St Helena Agricultural and Horticultural Society 1824 to 1831, and a very, uncommon item, a ‘Flora St. Helenica,’ 1825. New type also seems to have been received about this time; and in 1828 a new compilation of laws was published entitled ‘Bye Laws of the Island of St Helena and Regulations for the Civil, Judicial, Medical, and Marine Departments, 1828, of which a further edition with supplements was issued in 1834. An addition to the equipment of the press of this period was a “Lithographic Press” which was used to reproduce Manuel Johnson’s famous catalogue of the stars in the southern hemisphere before it was transmitted to East India House for publication in London in 1835. Another publication, by the “Government Printing Office” was the ‘St Helena Calendar and Directory,’ printed in 1832, 1833, and 1834, when the Island was transferred to the Crown.

The printing office, happily, survived the shock of a change which revolutionised St Helena; but to the printer it meant only a change in the design of the coat-of-arms at the head of his public notices and proclamations, the solid brass block used for those of the East India Company still being preserved in the present printing-office.

The exhumation of Napoleon’s remains in 1840 provided the opportunity for a major publication, ‘Narrative of the Proceedings connected with the Exhumation and Removal of the Remains of the late Emperor Napoleon,’ by a Resident, 1840, rightly attributed to W. G. Janisch, and crudely illustrated with sketches by Sergeant Patterson of the 91st, lithographed on the old press. In 1842 there was issued the first of what was to prove a long series, of ‘The St Helena Almanack and Annual Register,’ which was to continue in publication for upwards of forty-five years; and in 1845 the *St Helena Gazette. Published by Authority*, reappeared in its new form. This paper set out to be something more than an official newspaper, and it provided extracts from the London newspapers, descriptions of local events of interest, obituary notices, and such like. The *Gazette*, and the Almanacks with their valuable introductions, tables of remarkable events, and lists of officers, constitute one of the

most important sources of information on the history of the Island after its transfer to the Crown.

The history of modern printing in the Island dates from the year 1851, when George Gibb, who was allowed to undertake private work, printed and published 'A Guide to St Helena Descriptive and Historical with a Visit to Longwood and Napoleon's Tomb,' by Joseph Lockwood, 1851; and in the same year the first "free" press was imported and established. Its introduction was hailed with a joy that was almost delirious; Magna Carta cannot have had a more jubilant reception; public opinion was no longer to be suppressed; and the liberty of the Press, the birthright of mankind, was also to provide a remedy for all the Island's economic ills.

These transports were somewhat moderated by financial considerations and the gloomy reflection that to ensure success, the local Government must become the new venture's largest subscriber. The Governor obligingly closed down the *Gazette* and presented the new paper with a small income as payment for the advertisement of official notifications, etc. Assured of this steady support, the *St Helena Advocate and Weekly Journal of News* began publication on 8 May, 1851. It soon got into trouble for intemperate criticism of its chief subscriber, who retaliated, not unnaturally, by withdrawing the official advertisements and publishing them in a new official paper, the *St Helena Chronicle*, printed, but not "By Authority," at the Government Printing Office, the first number appearing in March, 1852. The withdrawal of official support killed the *Advocate* and it was replaced in 1853 by the *St Helena Herald*.

In the course of the past ninety years St Helena has been served by two able journalists, the first of whom, Joseph Lockwood, was the editor, in practice if not in name, of both the *Advocate* and the *Herald*. He was a curious character with a marked historical sense, and held the appointment of Clerk of Works, when he was responsible for the building of the present Cathedral Church. He contributed an excellent account of the exhumation to the *United Service Journal*; his 'Guide etc.,' is much sought after; and he adorned the columns of the *Advocate* with valuable material when he printed 'Andrew Darling's Account of the Funeral of Napoleon,' which was reprinted by *The Times Literary Supplement* in 1915. Another of his discoveries was 'Sally Phil's Tale at the Tomb of Napoleon on the Arrival there of a Visitor,' printed in the *Herald* in 1853. Sally was the wife of a freed slave Jack, who was the gardener at Napoleon's tomb, where she used to recite doggerel about the Emperor to tourists and visitors. Lockwood hit upon the idea of editing this and printing it, with some additions of his own, in the *Herald*. Another very uncommon pamphlet published at this time, for which Lockwood may have been responsible, was 'Longwood Old House, A Brief Sketch of its past history and present state in connection with the late Emperor Napoleon,' Anonymous, 1855, which seems to have been written with the object of calling the attention of the French to the neglect prevailing in the house in which the Emperor died, and recommending that a marble column be erected in its place. Subsequently he used his position with the *Herald* to ventilate his views on

the abilities of his superior officer, action which earned him the distinction of a new edition of the regulations relating to the subject of officers contributing to the Press.

The *Herald* was superseded by another weekly, the *Record*, in 1860, and in 1861 the *Guardian* appeared; from henceforth all papers published in the Island were to be weeklies. The editor of the *Guardian*, Benjamin Grant, was the most successful of a long line of St Helena printers and journalists. His paper, always admirably conducted, had a place to fill in the Island's social life; and it continued in circulation, under the editorship of his son, until comparatively recent times. Grant was fully alive to the interest taken in St Helena's historical associations, to which he made more than one valuable contribution, and scientists are under an obligation to him for printing and publishing 'The Geology of St Helena,' J. R. Oliver, 1869, which still remains one of the standard works on the subject. Competitors to the *Guardian* were not slow in appearing, and the *Advertiser*, 1865, the *Spectator*, 1866, and the *Star*, also 1866, all had short but hectic lives; but for the next twenty years the *Guardian* Press was to have the field to itself and, with the exception of some official material published by the Government Press, it had a monopoly of private printing.' Rare pamphlets from the official Press were 'First Report of the Committee of Enquiry on the Ravages of White Ants,' 1864; "Scraps from Records,' H. R. Janisch, 1872, and a 'Precis of Information concerning the Island of St Helena prepared by the Governor and Colonel Commanding the Troops,' 1876; whilst the *Guardian* was responsible for printing and publishing the 'Report of the St Helena Industrial Exhibition 1874,' and 'Sally Phil's Poem' in 1875, under the title of 'An Account of the late Emperor Napoleon the 1st on his arrival in St Helena on October 15th 1815 etc.,' 1 at the cost, it is believed, of Mr C. A. Carrol, an aged merchant who had been a young man when Napoleon died.

'A Few Notes on St Helena, A Descriptive Guide to St Helena,' and 'Some Remarks on St Helena as a Health Resort,' all written and printed by Grant, were published in 1883, followed by 'Extracts from the Records of St Helena,' H. R. Janisch, in 1885, some of which had been published in the *Gazette* and the early newspapers.

With the appointment of an active personality as Governor in 1887, political feeling in the Island began to run high, when there was a lamentable lapse into vulgarity on the part of the local printers. Rival political factions borrowed their type and produced two disreputable sheets, the *Bug* and the *Mosquito*, both illustrated with "jellygraph" cartoons of prominent notables. Politics also gave birth to new weeklies, the *Times*, 1889; the *Monthly Critic* and *Flashlight*, 1891; the *St Helenian*, 1895, and the *Observer*, all disappearing when the particular crisis to which they referred was over. In 1889 it was announced that St Helena would be abandoned as a military post, whereupon the *Guardian* Press produced 'The Citadel of the South Atlantic,' being a reprint of letters from various persons urging the claims of the Island to be regarded as the great fortress of the South Atlantic.

The Boer War saw the appearance of a foreign edition of what was really the *Guardian*, the *Krijgsgevangene* published in Afrikaans for the use of the Boer prisoners then on the Island; and in 1908 Grant's son published a new edition of 'Extracts from Records.'

The *Guardian* ceased publication soon after the close of the European War when private printing and publishing passed into the care of the Church magazines which had begun with the *St Helena Church News* in 1888. This was followed by the *Parish Magazine*, 1889, the *Diocesan Magazine*, 1901, and the *Jamestown Monthly*, 1912, which is still in circulation under the title of the *St Helena Magazine*, 1933.

Collectors and students will, no doubt, be able to add to the books and pamphlets that have been described; and there are, of course, many official reports, etc., that have not been mentioned, whilst little has been said of the problems that arise in the management of a printing-press in St Helena or of the services of the Government Press. There is no printer who has not learnt his craft in the Island, and none has seen a modern power or roller press. At one period their art, which passes from generation to generation, was in danger of being lost to the Island; but owing to the labours of the late Canon Porter, who taught the apprentices himself, it was kept alive with much benefit to the small community. His example has been followed by the present Vicar of Jamestown; and printing in St Helena has never reached a higher standard than that which can be read to-day in the *St Helena Magazine*, and some of the official publications such as the *Government Gazette* (which was re-issued in its present form in 1871) or the *St Helena Highway Code*, 1935.

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