

This file contains three documents. While ostensibly about the history of the Bruce family, there are many interesting links into the 19th and 20th century history of St. Helena.

The documents are:

Thomas R. Bruce, the Life of a Saint	p1
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Memories of the Early Island Civil Service, by Robert Bruce	p16
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The Soldier and The Harbour Master	p20
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The items are individually attributed.

Thomas R. Bruce, the Life of a Saint^{*}

by Ian Bruce

Thomas Robert Bruce was born at Vinall's House, Napoleon Street, in December 1862, the fifth of Randal and Sabina Charlotte Bruce neé Tracy's nine children.¹ He was baptised six weeks later at St James church by the Rev Henry Whitehead. His father worked all his life on the wharf, eventually rising to become Harbour Master, and Tom (as he was called by all that knew him) spent much of his time in or on the water, learning to swim in a little pool on Jamestown beach called Turtles Pond, which unfortunately no longer exists.²



Tom and his Mother, early 1870's

From his stories, he was an extremely lively child, for example catching feral cats, then tying tin cans to their tails and releasing them with a clatter across the galvanised roofs of houses in Jamestown. Again, he and his friends apparently enjoyed playing “funerals”, a highly insanitary game using the reusable coffins formally used to bury African slaves who had died in the Liberated African Establishment (1840-1864). These had hinged bottoms that allowed corpses to be dropped into graves – the game comprised lifting the coffin with children lying inside and then unexpectedly springing the bottom open to see whether the occupants would fall out. A still more

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awful story was the occasion he and his friends dug teeth from some of the slave graves in Rupert's Bay in the hope of selling them to the chemist for the manufacture of false teeth.

As a child, Tom would have seen the devastation wrought on Jamestown's buildings by the "white ant" and was nearly 16 when his father died in 1878. In November of the following year, his sister [Sarah] Leonora Bruce married the captain of a New Bedford whaler, Frederick Tripp. She emigrated to New Bedford in 1881 and Tom often recounted how he followed her shortly after, boarding an American ship as a stowaway and working his passage to America, regaling the story with a vivid description of the challenges posed when coping with the calls of nature on a bucking ship of sail in a stiff wind.³ He worked his passage and was landed at Boston. There he managed to persuade US immigration officials to allow him into the country on the proviso he travelled directly to his sister at New Bedford.

Tom always claimed to have crossed the equator 13 times. Documentary evidence has been found for nine equator crossings from 1887 onward. It is therefore presumed that in addition to the above undocumented voyage, he probably made a second unrecorded voyage, probably between 1881-7.

The St Helena Guardian is an important source of biographical information, and it is apparent from advertisements that Tom was back on the island from around 1887 using his musical and engineering skills to make a living tuning and repairing pianos and harmoniums, probably operating from his mother's Napoleon Street house. His skill in restoring "an organ all in ruins" at the Cathedral was fully reported by Governor Sterndale.⁴ It is known he led a brass band in America between 1889-1894 (see below), so it is likely he developed an interest as a member of W. D. Grant's brass band in the late 1880's. Another of his hobbies was shooting, being mentioned as Treasurer of the St Helena Rifle Association in 1889.

The first documented evidence for Tom's travels (although it was probably his third return trip) was in March 1889 when he sailed to New Bedford on the *Lottie Beard*. Arriving in St Helena roughly twice a year, this American schooner (Captain Marquand) brought goods for the island from the USA and then loaded up with barrels of whale oil etc. previously landed by whalers on Jamestown's wharf. Taking about a dozen passengers on each of her passages to her New Bedford homeport, the *Lottie Beard* was important for Saints emigrating to the USA.⁵ This was usually a one-way trip, the ship seldom taking passengers on her outward voyages to St Helena.



Lottie Beard (left) at New Bedford Quay - note barrels of whale oil on dock

Once again, Tom lived with his recently widowed sister Leonora in several rented houses. Trade directories list him as a machinist and we know from a letter written by one of Leonora's sons that Tom worked at the Morse Twist Drill Company, ". . .operating a drill that was the finest in the plant, it made the very small holes for watches and articles of this character. The work was so very fine and exacting that he finally gave it up as he found it affected his eyesight. . He was a man of many talents, he composed and taught music, could play any instrument, in fact, he taught pupils to play the piano, violin, banjo, guitar, and all brass instruments, right at our home; he was the leader of a local brass band and composed some of the marches used by them; he was a wonderful artist. Once he made a marvelous picture of *The Last Supper*. . . This immense canvass was on display in the large windows of one of the biggest department stores in New Bedford for a long time. . . He was quite an amateur magician, and helped out at his Lodge or some ladies' sewing circle at the church.⁶ This mention of "his Lodge" is the earliest documentary evidence we have that Tom was a Freemason. He is certainly known to have been a member of the Napoleon Street lodge No 488 in later years, several houses from his mother's house.⁷ In May 1893 whilst still in America Tom's youngest brother [Narcissus] Campbell Bruce⁸ arrived from St Helena, also on the *Lottie Beard*. He and Leonora continuing to live together for most of the remainder of their lives, Campbell dying in Vancouver in 1974 aged 102.

Documents in New Bedford show Tom embarked for St Helena on the *Lottie Beard* in June 1894. He was the only passenger, the voyage took 64 days and cost \$5.⁹ On his return to St Helena, he immediately published advertisements for repairing and tuning pianos, organs and harmoniums. Within a couple of months, the newspaper announced that Tom had repaired the harmonium at the Cathedral.¹⁰ About this time, he and Benjamin Grant, son of the newspaper proprietor, published a musical score under the name "Cleopatra". Tom must have been reasonably well known as a musician because he was employed to teach Dinizulu at Moldavian House in the period up to 1895 – relating this story in later years, Tom described how Dinizulu's preference was for church music.¹¹ He was appointed Lieutenant and bandmaster of the St James Church's Boy's Drum and Fife band¹² and acted as Secretary of the St Helena Brass Band¹³.

Tom had a wide breadth of interests at this time. For example, he seems to have enjoyed the occasional game of cricket – a newspaper report in January 1896 shows his St James team beating their opponents by 55 runs to 39¹⁴ – maybe both sides had demon bowlers! He also worked as Assistant Overseer of the Poor Society.¹⁵ Again, he invited the governor onto the wharf to demonstrate a new curing process he had developed for extending the life of locally caught fish allowing them to be exported at ambient temperatures – the Governor took samples to England but nothing seems to have come from the idea.¹⁶

In September 1896, a British ship *Zuleika* bound for New York unexpectedly called at St Helena to make emergency repairs. Tom seems to have seized the opportunity to travel to America. Marched to the wharf steps by the Drum and Fife Band, his was certainly a memorable farewell.¹⁷ He may have visited his brother and sister at New Bedford; although there is a tradition within the family that he at one time earned a living as a musician in New York. After some months, he sailed to England and from there returned to St Helena on the *Doune Castle* in July 1897.¹⁸

Within six months, Tom had been appointed postmaster with effect from January 1898 on a salary of £100 per annum¹⁹ - the circumstances leading to his appointment are not known. There is no indication that he ever worked for the island's civil service before this time. He was the fourth of his brothers to join the island civil service – George Caleb Bruce was Harbour Master; Charles Bruce was the Registrar and Government Printer whilst Robert Bruce worked at the Colonial

Office in a wide range of positions.²⁰ As was the case for most Government appointments, he was employed on a temporary basis for several years (until 1905). In January 1899, he was required to give a £100 bond for the “due discharge of his duties”, which were guaranteed by W. A. Thorpe and by C. E. S. Grant. In August 1899, Tom was co-opted onto an Industrial Exhibition Committee.

One of his early tasks in March 1899 was to retrieve £8,000-worth of obsolete Queen Victoria stamps for sale to overseas philatelists. Throughout his long career as postmaster, he was paid a 2.5% commission on the face value of all stamps sold to overseas buyers over and above his basic salary. In 1900, his annual salary rose to £125, reflecting the considerable increase in mail volumes following the influx of Boer prisoners and British troops.



Thomas R. Bruce, possibly dressed for his wedding, 1899

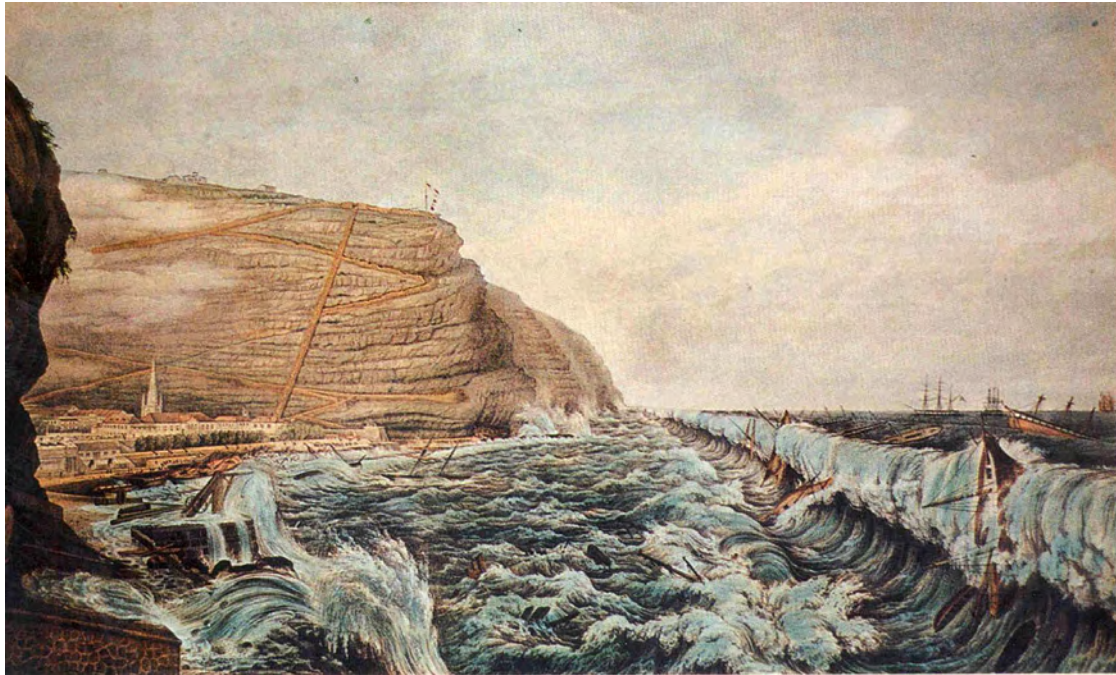
In February 1899, he married Ethel Mary Thorpe, eldest daughter of William A. Thorpe, founder of Thorpe’s business. The wedding was a big affair and was attended by Governor Sterndale. The honeymoon was spent at one of the Thorpe households, Woodcote. Tom had a house built at Briar’s village, possibly the gift of his father-in-law because he seldom had significant savings. Tom named the house “Fair View” when he sold it in 1920 and this name will be used hereafter.²¹ It still exists, albeit with many changes, and is today occupied by Mr Fred Williams.



Early View of Briars Village circa 1890's

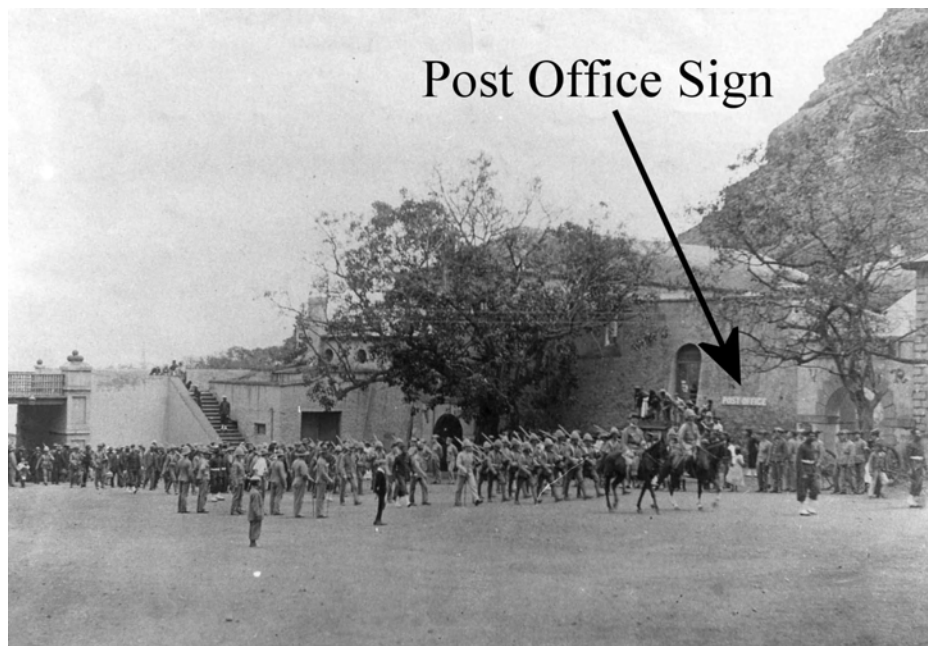
Tom and Ethel had four sons: William Thomas, born January 1900; Stanley Thorpe, born January 1902 (died a year later from acute bronchitis) and twins, Donald and Eric, born May 1904. Ethel must have been very sick indeed during her last pregnancy because she died at the age of 25 from TB, only three months after the twins' birth. She is buried next to her short-lived son Stanley in the Thorpe family plot at Knollcombe cemetery. Ethel's father took over the upbringing of her three surviving sons from Tom. It is not known how willingly Tom entered into this arrangement, but there is little doubt these sons benefited from an affluent upbringing, private tuition on the island and public school education in England.²²

As described in Emily Jackson's book, sometime before 1903 Tom produced a well-known oil painting of the 1846 rollers catastrophe involving the wrecking of 13 ships off Jamestown harbour.²³



Tom's Painting of the 1846 Rollers Catastrophe

Tom little knew that his second father-in-law, Sergeant George Lovelace, had arrived at St Helena in 1902 working in the army warehouse as part of the Army Service Corps (ASC). George was posted to the island a second time in 1906, this time bringing his wife and six children on the *Braemar Castle*.²⁴ His wife was introduced to Tom at one of the governor's monthly receptions at Plantation House and she made a point of introducing her eldest daughter Edith to Tom at the Post Office the next day, then located at the front of the Castle where the IT Centre operates today.²⁵



Location of Post Office circa 1900 when Boer Prisoners Arrived

Despite their age difference (Tom was 26 years older than 15-year-old Edith), the two were soon going for long walks round the island together. Edith later said her parents did nothing to discourage the romance, regarding him as relatively affluent with several house servants and a well-paid job. It should perhaps be added though that in 1907, coincident with the departure of the last British troops, and in line with pay cuts suffered by many other island civil servants, Tom's salary was reduced by £14 to £126 per annum and he was not to have a wage increase for another 13 years. This courtship was rudely interrupted by the fact that in July 1906 Edith's father was caught making a false entry on a return.²⁶ This was rapidly followed by a string of other offences - the army threw the book at him! He was court-martialled in August, reduced to the ranks and ordered back to Britain on the next available ship. Tom and Edith rapidly announced their engagement before she returned to England (still being described as one of seven children in the island newspaper²⁷) with her family in early September.

Tom must have wondered whether he would ever see Edith again, but Edith received no discouragement from her parents and she set off for St Helena in the *RMS Galeka* nearly two years later in April 1908.²⁸ Unbeknown to Edith, the previous February Tom had obtained special dispensation from Bishop Edward Cannan to marry without banns, enabling the couple to be married the day she arrived, the congregation comprising in fairly equal numbers his family and friends on his side and a great many of the ship's passengers on her side of the church.²⁹ They lived at Briars in Fine View house, where my father Norman Tracy Bruce was born in July 1909, the birth being assisted by Dr Arnold. The following year the family moved to the house of Tom's birth in Napoleon Street so they could take care of his elderly mother. After the birth of their second child George in September 1910, Edith was sufficiently run down for Dr Arnold to send her to New Longwood House, then being used as a sanatorium, for 2-3 months. Her condition may not have been helped by the fact that whilst she was also looking after her mother-in-law during her pregnancy, Tom was heavily involved in forming Bruce's Brass Band, which first performed in February 1910.³⁰ In addition, about this time, he was described as "an active and energetic deputy" to Dr Arnold (then the acting Governor) at the Overseas Club.³¹ At all events, Tom's sister, Sabina Vinall, returned from Vancouver to take care of their mother - Sabina continued to live at the house until her death in 1945.



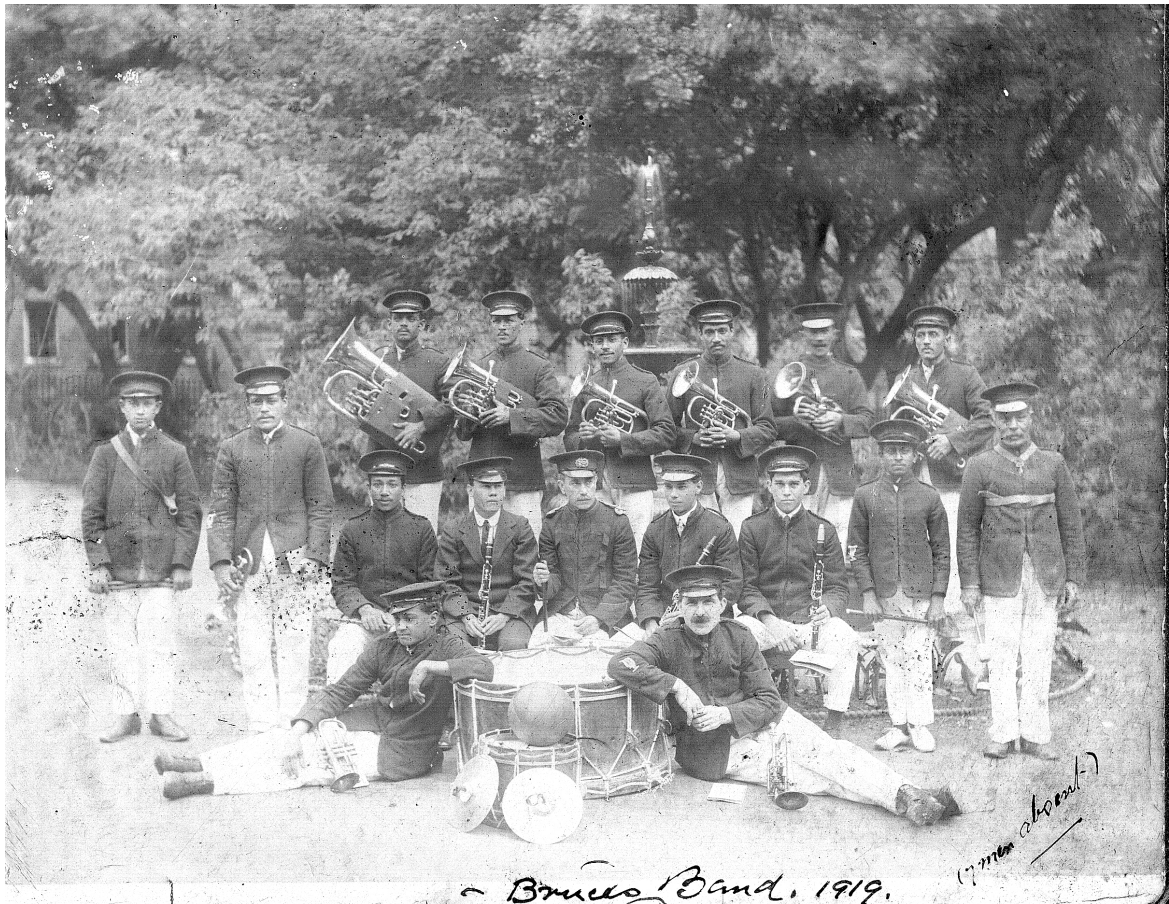
Officers' Quarters Circa 1913 (now Pilling Primary School)

Tom and Edith's third child Ronald, today the only surviving member of his generation, was born in September 1912. A few months later, the family moved to the Officers Quarters (now the Pillin Primary School). It is believed the post office moved from its position in front of the Castle to its present location towards the end of 1914.³² With the outbreak of war, a garrison of troops was brought in. The army therefore needed the Officers Quarters so, following the birth of their first daughter Vera in December of that year, the family moved to the first floor of the post office. Tom was given free quarters and it is suspected the same may have been true for his rooms at the Officers Quarters.



Family Photographed on the Balcony

My father recalled that all their food was cooked on woodstoves with internal light provided by paraffin lamps and candles. All water for cooking and washing was sourced from filtered water in tanks run off the post office roof. The First World War seems to have shaken few if any parts of the British Empire less than St Helena and there was considerable social life with parties, gatherings and a monthly invitation to Plantation House for government officials. Tom's brass band regularly played under the trees at the top of Main Street and sometimes from the family's first floor balcony at the Post Office. Performances were usually timed to coincide with the full moon so that players could better read their scores. Tom was able to send off for uniforms with money raised from these concerts.



Bruce's Band, 1919 (17 men absent, Tom seated centre)

The image below shows the band leading the troops on the fourth anniversary of the outbreak of the war - it looks a festive rather than a mournful occasion.³³

Two other children were born at the Post Office – Ada in 1918 and Ernie in 1922. In addition to his Brass Band interests, Tom was also involved in several other activities. For example, he remained a member of the Overseas Club and is recorded as entering shooting competitions in 1920. He was appointed manager of the St Helena Savings Fund (later named the Savings Bank) in November 1920 at an annual salary of £40.

Because of his brother Robert's many other responsibilities, Tom was unofficially delegated to work as Harbour Master some time after Robert was appointed to that position in 1903.³⁴ As a result, Tom was heavily involved in the wreckage of the Norwegian ship *The Spangereid* (captain Thorstensen), a large iron sailing ship, in September 1920. Carrying a cargo of coal that caught fire, the ship was manoeuvred close to the shore so it sunk with about six foot of decking above sea level. Dynamite was then used to open a hole, enabling a large proportion of the cargo to be extracted using a make-piece grab made out of two steel plates. Nevertheless, many Saints were also able to gather large quantities of coal washed up onto the beach over the succeeding months.³⁵ Considerable quantities of goods were also rescued and were auctioned off the following

November “under the trees” – purchasers were required to pay customs duties on all items, which were deemed as imports.³⁶



Bruce's Band Leading Garrison, 4 August 1918

Because of his artistic skills, Tom was asked to submit designs for a stamp to celebrate the end of the war. Tom's rough designs for the peace stamp, the first to feature the ship and rocks badge emblem, were discovered by the St Helena Museum in 2005.³⁷ This never came to anything but several years later Tom was asked to create a design to replace the 1912 George V edition. Featuring several similarities in design to the Peace stamp and issued in 1922, this was used for the next 15 years until the crowning of George VI (image below). Tom never received payment for his work, which was assumed to form part of his duty as Postmaster.

The departure of Tom and his family from St Helena stretched over a period of eleven years and is now described in some detail because it well illustrates the unusual employment situation at that time – that in the 1920's a much better living could be made at St Helena than England. The decision to leave the island was made following advice from Dr Arnold that their eldest daughter Vera, who was frail with a heart condition, would receive better medical attention in England. A visit by Edith's mother in 1920/1 provided the opportunity for Vera to be taken to England. They decided Vera's eldest brother (my father) should accompany her on The Braemar Castle in February 1921. A tape left by Edith makes clear that it was planned the whole family would shortly follow these two children, initially with Edith setting up a home whilst Tom sent money out from St Helena. However, this plan was delayed by Edith's pregnancy with her last child,

Ernie. Disaster struck during this period when their house at Briars village was badly damaged by fire.



Tom's 1919 and 1922 Stamp Designs

If this fire was a disaster, much worse was to follow. Around the time Edith and her four remaining children finally left the island in April 1922, her father was briefly jailed for embezzling money at the sub-post office he and his wife were running outside Chichester. Edith's mother and eight children (Vera, my father plus six of Edith's younger siblings) were forced to move to a small house. Edith and her children arrived shortly after. All her money appears to have been used to pay off the debts arising from her father's conviction. Edith therefore had no choice other than to move herself and four remaining children in with her mother.

The household was now so crowded (two adults and 12 children) that my father and his two boisterous younger brothers had to live outside, sheltering from the winter in an upturned packing case, only being allowed indoors to sleep. For relatively affluent children used to the mild St Helena climate, this was hard enough, but far worse was the fact that there was so little money in the household that my father and his two brothers spent much of their free time scavenging for food out of dustbins and grubbing root vegetables from nearby fields. Lacking the funds, an immediate return to St Helena was not an option. It took several months before Tom could raise enough money from the island to allow Edith to extricate her family, moving to a series of rented houses along the south coast between Littlehampton and Worthing. Money was always short thereafter, but never as critically scarce as when she lived with her mother.

Meanwhile, at St Helena Tom disposed of most of the furniture by auction, from which it is inferred he no longer qualified to have the post office accommodation, and so moved in with his sister at Vinall's House. His stay was lengthened by the need to send Edith fresh funds but he eventually resigned as Postmaster in April 1923. A most unusual document dated the 5th April bears the signatures of 21 members of Tom's Freemasonry lodge expressing their sincere regret at his departure and wishing him a safe and happy reunion with his family. One of the signatories of this document was his eldest son Willie. A few days later, the brass band played a farewell concert in Tom's honour.

In May, he left St Helena on the *Guildford Castle*, for what he thought was the last time, accompanied by his brother Robert and family who were emigrating to America. The departure of these two talented brothers was greeted with some dismay by the newspaper. Commenting on Tom, the *Guardian* stated, "During his tenure of office his department has been marked by the

*highest efficiency combined with altogether exceptional consideration for the convenience of the public. Outside his official duties Mr Bruce is a man of many accomplishments. He has acquired a high degree of skill in music and painting. To his energy and enthusiasm in the face of much lack of support, we owe the existence of the only band St Helena possesses. . . . It should be gratifying to him to leave behind him a gratifying and graceful memorial in his own department. In any work requiring mechanical skill Mr Bruce was at home and in many other ways showed originality and ability. It also stated that "During this long and faithful stewardship he has made many friends and we can add, what is most unusual in a small place like St Helena namely, that during that lengthy period has made no enemies. Always cheerful, courteous and ready to oblige he has been an ideal official . . ."*³⁸

When reunited with his family at Littlehampton, Tom rapidly realised the difficulties he faced to earn sufficient to support his family, concluding he could earn more in St Helena. He returned to the island on the *Guildford Castle* in October 1923 and immediately placed advertisements in the local newspaper offering his services as a piano and organ tuner. A few months later in February 1924, Tom was exceptionally lucky and regained his old job as Postmaster. This followed the resignation of George Moss, who had had difficulties travelling each day from his country house to Jamestown. Tom's reappointment was dated from the 1st February; his salary remained unchanged at £190 per annum and his duties again included the management of the Savings Bank. All known philatelic sources fail to mention this nine-month break in his service as Postmaster. Tom also received a letter in February 1924 from the Home Office in London advising he was to receive the Imperial Service Medal in recognition of his long service as Post Master. The presentation was made by the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, the following June. The following October, Tom finally succeeded in selling his Fair View house to Mrs Alice Benjamin for the princely sum of £25.



Visit by Edward Prince of Wales, June 1924

He reached his 65th birthday on 4th December 1927 but worked an additional year beyond this – his annual pension of £84.11s.8d dates from the 7th January 1929, although the records show he finished work a few weeks later, on the 31st January. There is no record of his departure from St Helena but it is very likely he left about February 1929. Once again, he must have thought this would be the last time he would see the island.

Arriving back in England to his family, now living in Worthing, Tom yet again found it difficult to find sufficient work. Discussing their options, Edith's mother suggested the family should move to Croydon in South London, then a rapidly expanding town, where job prospects should be better. Whilst Croydon was certainly a better location for their children to find work, at his age and in the teeth of the great depression Tom was eventually forced back to the conclusion he could probably bring more money into the household from St Helena than Croydon. He sailed from London in December 1929, again on the *Guildford Castle*, and worked on the island for the next 18 months, this time as a general engineer and carpenter. His final sight of St Helena was from the decks of the *Llangibby Castle* on the 14th June 1931.

He moved his family from central Croydon to nearby Norbury until finally moving a few miles away to Thornton Heath in 1933/34. He continued to earn a little extra tuning pianos, his pension from St Helena remaining unchanged until the day he died.

Apart from growing potatoes amongst Edith's flowers, somewhat to her irritation, Tom was never much interested in gardening. His interests continued to lie in the area of engineering. He built a large wooden shed that he used as a workshop and carpentry shop, equipping it with a wood and metal lathe with which he spent many happy hours working/playing. He created a large assembly of model ships set at full sail in corked bottles and, with his active mind, regularly drew up designs for perpetual motion machines, normally based on rolling ball bearings. He even once wrote to the War Office during the war with a snorkel-style idea enabling British submarines to extend their period submerged.

For leisure, Tom also enjoyed the football pools, making several small wins that buoyed his optimism and, in the 1950's, was introduced to the wonders of television. By this time, most of my generation knew both our grandparents very well. He was always keen to show us his photograph albums of St Helena and we all have strong memories of seeing images of an island with strangely shaped rocks named Lot and Lot's Wife, barren mountain slopes and a heart-shaped waterfall.

I well remember a small party in December 1956 given by Edith to celebrate Tom's 94th birthday. By this time, he was a little frail but still very alert and ambitious to reach his one-hundredth birthday. To the end, he would do physical exercises and was always able to touch his toes. Alas, a few days later over the Christmas period he developed acute prostrate problems and died several days later. Edith spent much of next two decades visiting friends and relatives, finally dying in November 1975. Tom and Edith are buried together at Croydon cemetery, Tom's deepest desire, to someday return to the island of his birth, remaining unfulfilled.

1. Vinall's House is located opposite the Community Centre on Napoleon Street and is named after Mrs Sabina Vinall, Tom's eldest sister, who continued to live there until her death in January 1945.
2. Turtles Pond was still in existence during my father's day. He described the way the sea flowed over the top of the rocks, keeping the pool water fresh. My father related that it was destroyed by a rock fall caused by the vibration of guns being fired in the cliffs above – this probably occurred during the First World War. Thereafter my father and his brothers had to walk round the headland to Rupert's Bay for their swimming.

3. For obvious reasons, there is no documentary proof at St Helena of this voyage and neither the precise date nor name of the ship are known.
4. R. A. Sterndale, "St Helena in Extremis", 1894.
5. An article about the importance of the *Lottie Beard* to the island was published in the St Helena Guardian, 2nd April 1891. As an example of her cargo, the 20th September 1894 edition of this newspaper stated the *Lottie Beard* had left for New Bedford with 453 barrels of fish oil comprising 180 barrels of sperm oil from the *Sunbeam*, 267 barrels of sperm and fish oil from the *Platina* and six barrels of black fish oil from the *Greyhound*. Documentation at the New Bedford Whaling Museum also shows that a proportion of goods carried on the ship was specifically earmarked for a number of Saints who had previously placed orders from St Helena.
6. Letter written by one of Leonora's sons, Will Tripp, in the 1960's.
7. The present day lodge still use an undated Mark Master Lodge Scroll bearing Tom's signature as the painter.
8. Family tradition tells that his harbour master father, who was very friendly with the master of the ship *Narcissus*, gave Narcissus Campbell Bruce his first name.
9. New Bedford Whaling Museum, Ship Logs, Lottie Beard. The log showed the ship was becalmed off the American coast for several days and had to be towed out to sea by a steam ship. Tom's arrival was reported in the St Helena Guardian, 6 September 1894.
10. St Helena Guardian, 4th October 1894.
11. This Dinizulu story is sourced from family history, no documentary evidence has been found for this claim. According to Barbara George, who is presently researching Dinizulu, he moved from Moldavian House to Francis Plain in 1895 - it seems unlikely Tom would have travelled there from Jamestown to teach the piano.
12. St Helena Guardian, 16th January 1896.
13. St Helena Guardian, 23rd April 1896.
14. St Helena Guardian, 2nd January 1896.
15. For example, St Helena Guardian, 16th April 1896.
16. St Helena Guardian, 21st May 1896.
17. St Helena Guardian, 7th September 1896.
18. Castle Line passenger lists, Doune Castle, 1897 sourced from www.findmypast.com - all other ship embarkation documents are derived from the same source; Tom's arrival reported in St Helena Guardian 8th July 1897.
19. All records regarding Tom's employment have been sourced from government "Blue Book" records at Jamestown archives.
20. See Wirebird No 36, Spring 2008, pp 16-21 for article by Robert Bruce, "Memories of the Early Island Civil Service".
21. Confusingly, the house was normally referred to as "The Briars" within the family, a name that is still used by Fred Williams but which is all too easily confused with name of the village and with Briars Pavilion.
22. William Bruce, known as "Willie" by the family, married Caroline Grant in 1926 and remained on St Helena, working at Cable & Wireless until his early death in 1946. Donald and Eric Bruce were witnesses to William A. Thorpe's death from a fall down a precipice in 1918 and both eventually left St Helena. Donald worked as a clerk at Chelmsford Hospital. Eric subsequent life is unclear since he gave contradictory claims and tales about his wartime activities and later career. He died in South Africa.
23. This painting is portrayed in several books, the earliest of which is Emily L. Jackson's somewhat chaotic book "*St Helena the Historic Island*" Jackson, Ward Lock & Co, London, 1903. It is illustrated opposite p 16 and discussed on p 250.
24. Braemar Castle embarkation papers; St Helena Guardian, 6th January 1906.
25. The location of the Post Office is clearly described by Emily Jackson in *St Helena the Historic Island*, p 158. The post office was located on the wharf at an earlier period, possibly near the Customs House.
26. Army records kept for soldiers discharged from the First World War, recorded on microfilm stored at the Public Record Office, Kew, London.
27. St Helena Guardian, 7th October 1906.
28. RMS Galeka embarkation documents, April 1908; St Helena Guardian 23rd April 1908.
29. The marriage certificate and all the documents created ahead of the marriage, including the Galeka's passenger manifest, gives Edith Lovelace's age as 18, but she was actually only 17 when she married.
30. The first performance by the band was reported in the St Helena Guardian on the 17th February 1910. On the 14th April of that year, the newspaper reported Tom playing a most unusual brass instrument, a tubeophone.
31. St Helena Guardian, 12th October 1911. The Overseas Club was a patriotic association of members who had travelled and lived abroad and that welcomed visitors into its folds.
32. The present post office was for many years used as the Officer's Mess. After the final withdrawal of the garrison in 1907 it was used as the Government Lace School. Hugh Crallan's authoritative 1974 report "Island of St Helena. Listing and Preservation of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest" unfortunately mistakenly describes it as: "A fine building, originally the Officer's Mess and designed by a Victorian military engineer". However it is at least 50 years older than this, as demonstrated in Robin Castell's 1998 "St Helena

- Illustrated” which includes a 1787 drawing of the building by Ozias Humphrey when it was the Lieutenant General’s house.
33. It would be interesting to know why this procession assembled on this date. It was probably not heading for the war memorial on the wharf, which presumably did not exist by this date, and it is difficult to believe the outbreak of this terrible war was actually being celebrated.
 34. This is family tradition - no St Helena government documentary evidence that Robert’s delegated his Harbour Master duties to Tom have been found.
 35. I heard this story about the Spangereid from my father, who happened to be one of the first to see the burning ship from the wharf approaching the island – he also vividly recalled the stupendous sight of three visiting German dreadnoughts some years earlier in February 1914.
 36. St Helena Guardian, 6th November 1921.
 37. The origin of St Helena’s ship and rocks badge is uncertain. The design was probably influenced by a 17th century ship (with a high poop) and rock drawing used by the East India Company for the colony’s public seal since the 1680’s. The ship carries three furled sails on each of the three masts, a pattern that is also used for the ship design in J. C. Mellis’ “St Helena” book in 1875 and Emily Jackson’s “St Helena” in 1903. However, these later design feature a more modern ship, probably dating from the late 18th century. In 1910, the Colonial Office published an official book of British overseas flags, badges and arms showing a ship with four furled sails on the fore and mid masts and three sails on the rear mast. This pattern of sails was used on the 1913 St Helena Almanac, on Tom’s 1922 stamp and is still used to the present day.
 38. St Helena Guardian 17th March 1923 and 5th May 1923.

MEMORIES OF THE EARLY ISLAND CIVIL SERVICE*

by Robert Bruce

Introduction and Notes by Ian Bruce

The following is taken from a typescript copy of an article written in the 1930s for an American newspaper by Robert Bruce (see photo), one of my grandfather's younger brothers. The exact publication details are not recorded. Born at Jamestown in 1868, Robert rose mg rapidly through the ranks of the St Helena civil service. He started as a clerk in March 1885, a little before his seventeenth birthday. Throughout his career, he always operated in the Colonial Office, attached to the Governor's Office. Initially responsible for the collection of government rents, within a few years he was promoted chief clerk at the Colonial Office and thereafter signed the majority of government proclamations, including the announcement of his own appointment to supervise the 1891 census. In 1894, he became responsible for the collection of island taxes in addition to rents. Simultaneously, he was appointed Deputy Registrar of births, marriages and deaths.



He reached a turning point in the island's society in 1896 when, still only aged 28, he was appointed a magistrate and JP. In 1899, he was paid an additional premium to cover the extra duties involved with the arrival of Boer prisoners of war. On their departure in 1903, Robert was promoted to one of the top civil service jobs, Colonial Treasurer, as well as Harbour Master. Three years later, he was also appointed as Shipping Master. He retained these posts throughout the difficult years of the First

* This is a modified version of an article published by Friends of St Helena - Ian Bruce, 'Memories of the Early Island Civil Service', *Wirebird The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 36 (2008): 16–21. Full details of the Society, its objectives, publications and considerable other information on St Helena can be seen on <http://www.sthelena.uk.net>

World War until his retirement. Two of his sons travelled to America after the war and presumably wrote to him describing the county's superior educational and employment prospects. Accordingly, aged 54, Robert resigned from all his government posts and in April 1923 emigrated with his wife and five other children to America. He made his home at Kansas, Missouri, and worked for a bank (the Commerce Trust Co.) until his retirement and relatively early death in 1937.

To those who have lived their lives in the heart of a great continent away from the sea, the ships and the glamour and spirit of adventure that goes with them, it may be somewhat boresome to read the ravings of one who was born and brought up within sight of them and surrounded by them. Therefore, I will attempt to confine myself to the realistic and not the idealistic.

St Helena stands by itself like a sentinel among the waters of the stormy Atlantic, about fifteen degrees below the Equator, directly in the path of the cooling trade winds, the path of roses for the now almost extinct windjammer. The unprepossessing cliffs and rocky coast gives some promise of the beauty of the interior, but convey aptly the fitness of such a place as the forced residence of England's political prisoners, among whom I may mention Napoleon Bonaparte, General Cronje of the Boer army, with a large number of his followers, Prince Dinizulu, prince of the Zulu tribe, the finest, both physical and moral tribes now existent in South Africa, and the latest, the Sultan of Zanzibar, who, with his retinue of wives and servants, was confined there during the late First World War.

The island has changes hands several times since its discovery by the Portuguese on May 21st, 1502, who gave it the names St Helena, in honour of St Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, whose birthday it was. The Dutch have had possession of the island twice, but it finally fell into the hands of the British who have held it until this day, it is one of their oldest possessions. Many of the scars of these early disputes may still be seen, and some of the fortresses built by the Portuguese are still standing.¹ So you see my island home is quite historically interesting.

Among some of the other points of interest, I may mention 'Jacob's Ladder' which mounts the cliff on the west side of the town, Jamestown, it is 933 feet in length with 700 steps, and is said to be the longest structure of this kind in the world. The Coat of Arms of the East India Company cut in solid rock at the entrance to the town through an ancient portcullis is over the moat built by the Portuguese to protect the town from invasion. The Mecca of the tourists, however, is the Tomb where Napoleon's body rested for from the time of his death until 1840, when it was removed to Paris. The site of the tomb, about 40 acres, is very beautiful, and at one time Barnum, the noted American circus man attempted to purchase it with the intention of making it a show place. These attempts at commercialism led the French Government to purchase the property. A French consul is now resident at the island and controls the interests of his government. At the tomb a registry of visitors is kept, which is very interesting, among the signatures signed in this registry are those of the Duke of Connaught, Empress Eugenie of France, the Prince of Wales and many other celebrities. Some two miles from the Tomb are the two houses connected with Napoleon's sojourn on the island, the one where he lived and died, and which is kept in the same state as when the Emperor lived there, even to the colour of the wallpaper, and the other which was being rushed to completion at a cost of about seventy thousand pounds (\$350,000) at the time of his death in 1821. This house was renovated at the close of the Great First World War and hopes ran high that it would be the residence of the Kaiser for the rest of his life.

If I were a Floridian or a Californian, I might be able to describe aptly the beauties of the interior, but as I am writing this for citizens of the "Show-Me-State" I will have to be conservative. However, it is a fact that roses and other plants that thrive in England and the northern countries thrive almost as luxuriously among the numerous species of tropical flowers and plants, many of which are indigenous to the island. Geraniums grow wild and cover some of the hills, while in the valleys, scarcely a mile away, Arum lilies for which we would pay a dollar or more each here in Kansas City, stretch from the heads of the small streams almost to the sea shore.

Is it any wonder that the people who live there are contented and satisfied, sometimes too much so. They have an efficient government and practically no taxes. Fish in unlimited quantities and in great variety may be had for the catching, and the land yields its abundance with little labour and less skills. Please do not think that I am trying to sell you the idea of an earthly paradise, we had many disadvantages, petty bickerings, and, especially during the late war, some politics.

Among these surroundings, a few hundred yards from the sea, I was born and brought up.² As a boy the greater part of my time was spent on or in that sea. It was only natural that when I grew up I should turn to the sea and its associations for a living. For thirty years I served in the employ of the British Government, and held among many other positions those of Harbour Master, Colonial Treasurer and Magistrate. During that time I served directly under fourteen governors, the last of whom was Colonel Robert Peel, grandson of the noted English statesman who defended the cause of the American colonists, in the English Parliament before and during the Revolutionary War.

During the Civil War of 1860, vessels of both the Federal and Confederate parties made use of the port of Jamestown (St Helena) as a rendezvous, to take on coal and water. In many cases the commanders of these ships were friends, and avoided each other purposely, sometimes leaving messages for each other. An ex-union soldier, Frank Flagg, recently died at St Helena, he was a great friend of mine, and it used to be my duty of Justice of the Peace to sign his regular pension papers. It was particular coincidence that on the day of his death an American cruiser arrived at the port, and the Commander buried the old soldier with full military honours in that distant party of the world. Before the opening of the Suez Canal large numbers of sailing vessels called at the island, the majority of them of American register. This necessitated the establishment of an American consulate. The last consul resident there was R. P. Pooley, and he was an uncle of mine. The consulate³ was the meeting place of all the captains and many were the droll anecdotes told, amid the musical blink of bottle against glass. Perhaps this one is a good example, although I will not vouch for its veracity. Captain Flanders, of an American whaler was relating how one day he had encountered a swarm of locusts near the 'Doldrums' within sight of the African coast, so numerous that they seemed like storm clouds and so voracious that they ate all the sails from his vessel, leaving her under bare masts. Captain Wicks, one of the listeners, replied that he was in the same latitude and longitude that very same day, and encountered this swarm of locusts and that each and every one of them wore a pair of canvas trousers. Most of these captains recruited their crews from the natives of the island, by this means many of them migrated to New Bedford.

It was part of my duty to look after all marooned, sick or shipwrecked sailors. To tell you about all the different characters and the many experiences would require several volumes. I have had to look after Chinamen, natives of the West Coast of Africa and many other nationalities, some of them very bad men. The periods of the Boer War and the Great War, when large numbers of war and troop ships made use of the port, were stirring times. Most of these ships were moving under sealed orders and their destinations were often unknown even by the officers of the ship. At one time I boarded the convict ship "Success" which I believe now lies at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as a show place. This ship is a living testimony to the brutalities practiced upon the convicts being taken to the penal colonies in Australia. The broad arrow, the sign of the convict, was painted all over the ship, even on the sails, and the original instrument of torture, such as the cat-o-nine-tails with iron ball at the end of each thong of leather. The rack and thumb screws, were still intact. In many of the cells there were effigies of noted prisoners chained to the bulwarks.

The opening of the Suez Canal was a great blow to the prosperity of St Helena, this with the falling off of the whaling industry in the waters of the Southern Atlantic and Antarctic Oceans, are the main reasons for the great decrease in the shipping calling at our port.

My humble efforts during the whole period of the Great War were rewarded with the Honour of the Illustrious Order of the British Empire awarded by the King in recognition of special services rendered.

It was with no little feeling and compunction, that in 1923 I retired from the Civil Service of the British Government, and decided to leave the island to give my younger children the advantage of a higher education, and the opportunities offered in the wider fields of the world. It seemed natural that, coupled with the fact that I already had two sons there, I should pick the United States of America.

In the spring of 1923 I started on the first lap of our long trek, the voyage to London. I renewed acquaintance with many of the civil and military officers who had taken part in the Boer War, and who had subsequently taken up service in South Africa. On our way to London we visited Tenerife, an island off the northwest coast of Africa, it was a wonderful little island, flowers and fruits seemed to grow in great abundance and variety. We stayed two months in London, visiting and securing our papers necessary for our entrance into the United States.

The passage across the Great Pond was our next stage. The ocean voyage to Quebec was uneventful except for a delay due to icebergs. Personally, I was glad of this delay as it gave me the opportunity to see one of these gigantic masses of ice that are such a menace to shipping. It was a wonderful sight to see the berg in the early morning sun, scintillating like a great jewel. Our trip up the St Lawrence River to historical Quebec in its picturesque surroundings was a delight I would give much to participate in again. We were delayed at Quebec by the American Commissioner of Immigration, but were soon given permission to enter the States. We arrived at Detroit on early morning of July 4th, 1923, to the burst of firecrackers and noisemakers. My two sons met us there, and we were soon settled, however, a month later my wife's brother came from Kansas City, Missouri, to visit us and extended us the invitation to come to "Heart of America", which we did. The many friends we have made and the blessings we have enjoyed, have convinced me that my move was indeed a good one, although I must admit, there are times when we all long for a sight of the blue sea.

Notes:

1. Neither this, nor any other structures, survive from the days of the Portuguese.
2. Vinall's House, opposite the Community Centre in Napoleon Street.
3. Now the Consulate Hotel.

THE SOLDIER AND THE HARBOUR MASTER*

By Ian Bruce

This is the story of two of my ancestors, father and son, each sharing the same name of George Randal Bruce and each playing a minor role in St Helena's history.

The Father - Soldier

George Randal Bruce¹ was born in St Mary's parish, central Dublin, around 1784-1788.² Letters from one of his sons and grandsons³ together with ecclesiastical records from St Mary's church in Dublin suggest his household lived on Little Mary Street, off O'Connell Street.⁴ George's ancestors were probably Ulster Scots and it is known from the above letters his immediate forebears were involved in the dangerous business of "land grabbing" in the southern counties of Ireland.⁵

As reflected by his initial employment as a clerk at Dublin's Custom House, he may well have received a good education.⁶ In early 1804, he sailed from Ireland to Liverpool, travelled to London and signed up as a soldier serving with the Honourable East India Company. Letters from one of his sons suggest he was ambitious to make his career in India. If true, this displayed a degree of naivety, there being little opportunity for an ordinary EIC soldier to achieve fame or fortune.

Recruited on 27 March for an unlimited service, back-paid from 20 March, whatever military ambitions he may have had in India will have been dashed when he was embarked at Portsmouth on board *The Marquis of Cornwallis* for transportation to St Helena. This ship, already notorious for the cruelties meted out to convicts back in 1796 when used as one of the first convict transportations to Australia⁷, sailed on 2 April. The voyage to St Helena took 14 weeks, George landing on the island on 23 July 1804 when he was enlisting into the St Helena regiment.



Marquis of Cornwallis⁸

* This is a modified version of an article published by Friends of St Helena - Ian Bruce, 'The Soldier and the Harbour Master', *Wirebird The Journal of the Friends of St Helena* 42 (2013): 23-38. Full details of the Society, its objectives, publications and considerable other information on St Helena can be seen on <http://www.sthelenauk.net>

He joined the St Helena infantry under the command of Captain Charles Sampson.⁹ The regimental muster lists for this company are very fragmented, the first to carry his name only appearing 18 months later in the final quarter of 1805, by which time he was already a corporal. His companies muster lists for the next two years are also missing, but this was mainly because it was operating away from the island for much of that period. His was one of several companies from the St Helena regiment transported with regular British troops to capture Buenos Aires. He was to have his military adventures after all, not in Asia but in South America, being one of nearly 300 infantry and 100 artillerymen from the St Helena regiment transported from the island in a British fleet on 21 May 1806.

Space does not permit a full description of the Buenos Aires misadventure.¹⁰ The success in capturing the city on 27 June and the taking of over a million and quarter dollars in prize money was followed by catastrophe six weeks later when the city was recaptured by native South American forces. As a non-commissioned officer, George would have been marched with other troops as a prisoner of war into the interior countryside.



British surrender by General Beresford, Buenos Aires 1806¹¹

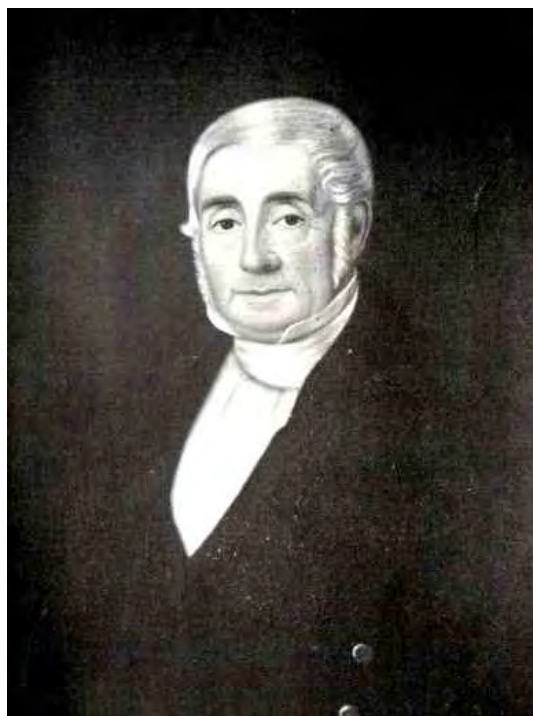
In response, Britain sent out fresh troops who successfully captured Montevideo on 3 February 1807, but attempts to follow this up with the recapture of Buenos Aires met with another disaster when the local defence overwhelmed the British. An armistice signed on 7 July required all British troops to leave the country, including the still occupied city of Montevideo. The agreement, paralleled by the later expulsion of Spanish forces from the newly independent Argentina, included an exchange of prisoners and the re-embarkation of British forces from Buenos Aires and Montevideo. All released prisoners and military personnel had boarded British ships by 12 July. George and his regiment presumably returned to St Helena sometime during the latter half of 1807 although in the fragmented quarterly Regimental muster lists his name, still a corporal, only appears a year later in the last quarter of 1808.

It is not known how the St Helena regiment's non-commissioned men fared as POW's. Significant desertions, with POW's going "native", occurred amongst the regular troops, mainly of Irish origin, and many Argentineans can trace their family origins back to these deserters. For the George's company, the muster list for his company a year after its return comprised roughly 25% fewer men than before the campaign, indicating substantial desertions or casualties. Since the prize money won when Buenos Aires was first taken was shipped back to England, each of the returning soldiers

received a small share - corporal George R. Bruce was paid a total of £29-7s-1³/₄d in three dividend payments over the years through to 1813.¹²

Muster lists thereafter are less fragmentary and show he finally reached the highest rank possible as a non-commissioned officer of quarter sergeant, equivalent to today's sergeant major, by late 1813. His promotions may well have reflected his clerical skills - these would also prove useful in his later civilian life.

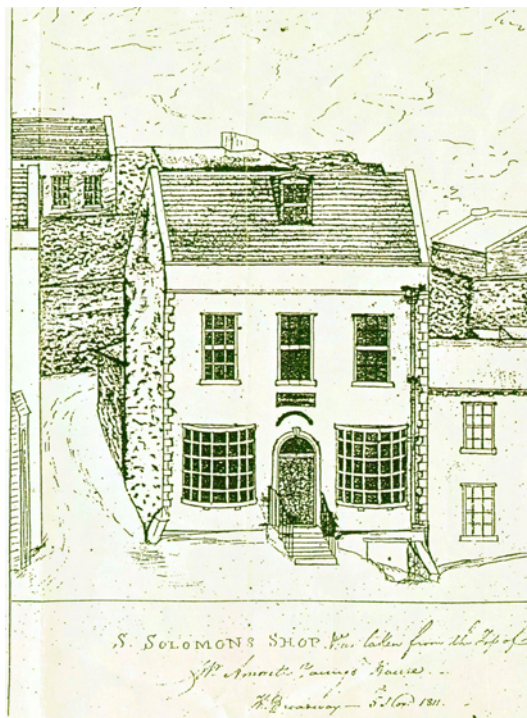
The Napoleonic wars resulted in a significant strengthening of St Helena's defences. The strategic importance of St Helena was well understood, although it was several decades before it was known how real had been the threat of French invasion - in September 1804, Napoleon drew up plans that included the capture of St Helena, with the intention of using it as a base to attack and capture homebound British shipping.¹³ Several accounts have described the systems of defence developed during the wars and whilst Napoleon resided on the island.¹⁴ In practice, these defences never had to be employed, and it takes little imagination to understand how crushingly boring ordinary soldiers must have found their duties manning the coastal barricades and lofty viewpoints. Unlike their officers, there was no opportunity to organise concerts, theatricals or horseracing.¹⁵ Entertainment was probably limited mainly to female company and the consumption of alcohol. As discussed below, there is no doubt George and his colleagues found plentiful female companionship. As to drink, heavy consumption of alcohol amongst members of the St Helena regiment was a major problem during the wars. Governor Beatson found when he arrived in 1808 drunkenness rife amongst the population and troops, a significant proportion of the latter being hospitalised for alcoholism. As he commented, "*the intemperate use of spirits had raged for more than a century*".¹⁶ In 1811, he blocked the import of spirits from India, also removing the license for taverns to sell spirits, only permitting the civil and military population to consume lower alcohol beverages such as imported South African wine or locally produced beer. In consequence, some 250 troops, presumably used to spending their leave in an alcoholic haze, were sufficiently sober to break out of their Jamestown barracks on Christmas Day 1811 with the aim of marching up to Plantation House and seizing the Governor. Approaching their objective, the mutineers had dwindled to only about 75 men before local troops commanded by Captain Sampson surrounded them. Since this was his commander, George presumably formed part of this loyal force, although there is no specific mention of his name in the several accounts of this mutiny. The uprising resulted in the hanging of six private soldiers and a sergeant.¹⁷



Saul Solomon¹⁸

He left the regiment just a few weeks ahead of news arriving on 11 October 1815 of a battle at Waterloo and the imminent arrival of a fleet carrying Napoleon with significant regular British military forces to guard him. He commenced his new life working as a clerk for Saul Solomon who, with the possible exception of William Thorpe, was the most successful entrepreneur ever to live on the island.¹⁹ His timing was perfect - he joined the business at precisely the moment when St Helena's population, and Solomon's trading opportunities, grew because of Napoleon's presence.

Solomon's Emporium where he worked was one of the few island locations where members of Napoleon's household could mix with the island population. As such, the ever-vigilant Governor Hudson Lowe eyed the shop with great suspicion. Indeed, the Emporium has been described as *"the resort of malcontents and, if not quite a Cave of Adullam, at least a Club des Jacobins. Everyone who had a grievance against Lowe or Reade²⁰, or a piquant anecdote about Brooke²¹ or Bingham²², naturally gathered hither and publicly delivered himself of the matter to an appreciative circle. Even young subalterns and midshipmen were amongst the number, doubtless out of bravado. Sometimes mine host himself would set the ball rolling . . ."*²³ I managed to confirm the location of this shop in late 2006 using a copy of an engraving sent to me by Trevor Hearl.²⁴ Signed by M. Broadway and dated 5 November 1811 with the description *"S. Solomon's Shop taken from the top of Mr Amoretti Young's House"*, the image turned out to be the modern-day Rose and Crown grocery store in Market Street. The perspective of the engraving is from a high point on the opposite side of the street, but there are no buildings there today. There are many points of similarity, most memorably the small protuberance near the front bottom corner of the building which still exists - it is the miniature red-painted cannon embedded vertically into the building.



Solomon's Original Emporium, today the Rose & Crown

In June 1818 Hudson Lowe drew up a list of 34 people, mainly in the mercantile trade". . *whose character may render them more or less suspect*" in colluding with the French, for example, in helping to smuggle their letters out of the island.²⁵ Saul Solomon and George Bruce operating from the Emporium were at the very top of this list of suspects, respectively in first and second places.

The events prompting Lowe to draw up this list followed a conversation the previous month between Mr Ripley, captain of the East India ship *Regent*, and Sir Thomas Reade.²⁶ This threw a spotlight on how the French were managing to smuggle letters out of the island. Lowe claimed in a letter to Lord Bathurst²⁷ in London: ". . *after he [Captain Ripley] had landed at St. Helena on the 24th [of May], he*

was told by some person (but whom he did not recollect) that, if he consented to be the bearer of a letter from the French at Longwood, he might receive £600 for so doing; and the money would be paid by a draft upon the banking firm of Sir John Lubbock and Co. He was told that, if he would walk on the road between Hutt's Gate and Longwood, he would meet a person who would deliver both the letter and the draft, and to whom he would have to give a pledge of secrecy. He was further assured that two of the commanders of the Company's ships last season had taken letters in a like manner, and had each received a similar draft on the same firm. Sir Thomas Reade several times asked Captain Ripley to recollect if possible the name of the person who gave him this information, but he declared he could not remember." Hudson Lowe expressed frustration that Ripley's selective amnesia about events occurring only a few days earlier had not been more vigorously probed; still more was he upset he had personally had not the opportunity to interrogate the captain before the *Regent* sailed.

Lowe then recalled a conversation reported to him the previous March between Count Balmain²⁸, Captain Stanfell²⁹ and Sir Thomas Reade in which Balmain was quoted as saying, "*Oh! They can always get letters taken if they pay £600 for it*". In the event, Lowe was probably correct in his suspicions, given that "*When after the emperor's death, the English officials were poking about in the Longwood apartments to see what they might discover, they came across a lot of half-consumed papers in Montholon's³⁰ grate. These were rescued and pieced together and the blanks made good. They turned out to be clandestine memoranda from Lewis Solomon to Montholon dated July 1819 in which the former apprised the Count, among other facts, that his letter had been forwarded by the Favourite Route. . .*"³¹. Saul Solomon's brother Lewis was listed fourth on Lowe's shortlist of suspects.

George was probably not employed by Saul Solomon much beyond 1821 because an ex-naval clerk called William Thomas started to work for Solomon in a similar capacity about that time.³² The manner of William Thomas's death seven years later from drowning after visiting a ship suggests George's work likewise included trips out to ships to arrange for the landing of cargo or shipping of goods. If so, this was the start of a long association by George and his descendents with St Helena's wharf activities.

Given the experience thereby obtained, it is not surprising he ran a retailing operation after leaving Solomon's employment. Certainly, this was his occupation between 1825 and 1836 when records are available in the form of an annual census, which consistently lists him as a shopkeeper.³³ In 1820, he inherited £40 from the estate of one of his ex-military colleagues, sergeant William Green, which may have helped to fund his move into retail.³⁴ It also seems likely he sold fresh produce in the Market because the Island's Agricultural Society (held in 11th February 1833 but recorded on 13 July 1833) states, "*An application from Mr Bruce was received for permission to keep a greenstall in lue of the one relinquished by Mr Tracey.*"³⁵ *Agreed to, provided he enter into the requisite recognizance to abide by the Market Regulations*".³⁶ The latter required all meat, fish, poultry, eggs fruit and vegetables to be sold in the market (between sunrise and sunset) - i.e. not delivered to homes or ships.³⁷

He does not seem to have been short of female company. Although never marrying, he had at least nine children by five different females - Mary Lewis³⁸, Sarah Seale³⁹, Sarah Hercules⁴⁰, another Mary and Sarah Smith.⁴¹ The baptisms of his first four children recorded them as illegitimate (the fourth implicitly because the mother's surname on the baptism was different from the father's), but the mothers of the last five children each claimed to be married to George. This almost certainly reflected the heavy influence against illegitimacy by the Reverend Richard Boys.⁴² Initially speaking out in his sermons against the immorality of high placed officials living with their mistresses, Boys next waged war from the pulpit on the number of illegitimate baptisms taking place on the island. As a result, these numbers steadily fell each year from 198 in 1813 to a low of only seven in 1825.⁴³ Chaplin innocently claims the "*statistics bear their testimony to the good work of the iconoclastic cleric*".⁴⁴ However, if George's five youngest children were typical, it seems more likely the clergy were insufficiently familiar with its flock to

recognise that the wool was being pulled over their eyes by parents claiming to be married when submitting illegitimate children for baptism.

He seems to have had a role in bringing up all but one of his children. The exception was Sarah Bruce (baptised 1819), daughter of Sarah Hercules, both mother and daughter being slaves. Thanks to Colin Fox's researches, both Sarah Hercules and Sarah Bruce have been identified as slaves belonging to James Dickson's estate in 1827.⁴⁵ Although then described as "*useful at needlework, etc*" and valued at £20 (second class), by 1839 Sarah Bruce was working as a prostitute, described as "*a notorious thief now in jail for theft*". When she died as a pauper in 1903, the registrar was George's grandson, Charles Bruce. In writing out her death certificate, Charles inserted a prominent question mark against her name, suggesting he was puzzled how she related to him.⁴⁶

Records show George owned at least two slaves, putting up a 13-year-old boy, Jack Rippon, as collateral against a loan to a Mr John Cummings. This was a slightly circular arrangement whereby, in the event of George failing to pay a debt to Mr Cummings, the slave would pass to a Mr Eyre, who would then presumably pay off the debt.

St Helena December 16th, 1823

*I do hereby mortgage to Mr A Eyre for an account of Mr John Cummings, a slave boy named Jack Rippon and agree that if the balance of Mr C's Bill is not paid by the 16th February next that the said boy be sold for his benefit.*⁴⁷

(Signed) G R Bruce

Registered this 5th September 1825

A search of slaves drawn up prior to their emancipation a couple of years later in 1827 showed John Rippon (aged 17, second class, valued at £65) was one of seven slaves owned by Mr Eyre, being described as "a waiting servant let out for £12 per year". Therefore, George presumably failed to pay off his debt by the due date. John Rippon (aged 18, slave of Mr Eyre) was buried just a year later on 24 May 1828, according to ecclesiastical records. These records also show George owned a second slave, "*Margaret, slave of Mr Bruce*", giving birth to William David Rippon on 9 January 1831 (baptised 16 months later on 24 May 1832). This was four years after the emancipation of slaves started in 1827, so she was late being set free.⁴⁸

He presumably continued to work as a shopkeeper throughout this period. The economies introduced after 1836 when the UK government installed its first Governor undoubtedly badly affected retail trade. This may explain why he eventually fell back on his clerical skills, joining the island's civil service as clerk to the harbour master on 11 June 1839 on an annual salary of £86-18s-6d.⁴⁹

He was therefore a wharf employee at the time Napoleon's body was exhumed in October 1840. He was somehow directly involved in the handover of the body because after the coffin had been boarded onto the French ship, the Prince De Joinville presented medals to a number of officials on the wharf, including George.⁵⁰ This medal left the island with his grandson Robert Bruce when the latter immigrated to the USA in 1923.

George "Randell" Bruce (aged 58) died 18 months later. He was buried in Jamestown on 5 April 1842. This age would suggest he was born about 1784 rather than the year 1788 indicated from his military records. His headstone has not been located.

The Son - Harbour Master

George Randal Bruce, son of George Randal Bruce (soldier and shopkeeper) and Sarah Smith, was born on 1 July 1828 and baptised at St James church on 18 December of the same year, his mother

claiming to be Sarah Bruce. He was the seventh of his father's nine known children. An elder brother, born some eleven years earlier to Sarah Seale, was also given the same name, but he died as a two-year-old in March 1819.

His mother died when he was only seven (August 1835) and he was still only 12 when his father died (April 1842). He spent all his working life working from the wharf, successfully applying for a license to operate a passenger boat on 14 June a few months after his father's death.⁵¹ Five years later on 16 June 1847 aged 18 he officially began working for the government as Overseer of Water and Craneage. This was a position of some responsibility, commanding an annual salary of £77 7s 6d. Several official government Blue Book civil service records for the period defined his duties - he was responsible for supplying the many ships then calling at St Helena with supplies such as water, fruit and meat, as well as offloading goods for the island. Additionally, he was required to oversee the transportation of water and provisions to the island's batteries. The following painting probably represents an accurate portrayal of the wharf three years later in 1850.⁵²



Jamestown's Wharf, 1850

The island's harbour master, Captain Edward Gulliver RN retired in 1851.⁵³ Whilst most references state George took over as harbour master, Blue Book records tell a different story, only officially describing him as harbour master in 1872.⁵⁴ However, he was effectively doing the job of a harbour master over the 1851-1872 period, the records variously listed him as customs officer, health officer or overseer of the water cranes, these titles seemingly changing almost randomly one to another over the years.⁵⁵ In short, whilst given the authority and carrying the full responsibility of a harbour master, he was not salaried as such. St Helena's government has a long tradition, persisting to the present day, of awarding its own citizens a lower salary for doing the same or much bigger job as officials brought in from the UK. As will be seen, this was certainly true for George, his salary for directly undertaking a much wider range of jobs only being £75 per annum compared with the £200 wage paid to his predecessor, Captain Gulliver.

The multiplicity of his responsibilities is highlighted in an ordinance issued by the island government in early 1856 that the customs officer was also to be recognised as harbour master.⁵⁶ However, an order from the UK Queen's Council complicated matters by decreeing "*that every Ship or Vessel approaching the Island of St Helena, shall previously to her coming to anchor, be visited by the Harbour Master and Health Officer . . .*" The St Helena government therefore issued a second ordinance declaring the customs officer should simultaneously be recognised as having the status of

both harbour master and health officer. With this official recognition that George was undertaking at least three jobs, maybe even four because he was still overseer of the water cranes, the island government that year generously boosted his salary by £25 to £100. Even when officially given the title of harbour master, to the end of his career he was still described as also being the Quarantine Officer and the Overseer of Craneage and Water.⁵⁷

He will have been very well aware of the dangers of his occupation, his will showing he had taken the precaution of insuring his life with the Standard Life Assurance. An indication of the difficulties of the job were provided in the following letter, written on 27 June 1864 to the governor by R. M. Pritchard, then Collector of Customs, from his office at Customs House:⁵⁸

At the request of Mr G. Bruce Overseer of Water and Cranes I have the honour to transmit the enclosed application for an increase to his salary and have the honour to state for the information of His Excellency the Governor that, the additional duties performed by Mr Bruce as Health or Boarding Officer are of a harassing nature requiring prompt attention at all times of the day, frequently at night and exposed to all weather, Sundays and Holidays included. As the other junior officers of this Department have been granted an increase to their salaries I beg to recommend Mr Bruce's appeal to the most favourable consideration of His Excellency the Governor in the earnest hope that some attention may be made to his present income.

I have the honour to be Sir, Your most obedient Servant
R. M. Pritchard

This letter presumably resulted in an increase in salary to £140 in 1865 and to £150 in 1866. His pay finally peaked at £175 in 1869, remaining the same static for the next nine years, when he left the service. He married a widow Sabina Faria neé Tracy in 1855 and the couple had nine children. Four of their five sons also worked as government officials, including my grandfather Thomas who was Post Master for about 30 years from 1899.⁵⁹ As mentioned above, one of their sons Charles worked as the island's Registrar whilst two others, George Caleb and Robert⁶⁰, were in turn appointed the Harbour Master. When Robert was appointed, the following description was given of his father: "*Mr Bruce is a son of the late George R. Bruce, Esq, Harbour Master, who succeeded the late Mr Gulliver, R. N., in that office, a gentleman who at all times commanded the very highest respect, and proved himself a most convenient, active and efficient officer, and whose love and long valuable services were recognised by Governor Janisch by the appointment of his son George Caleb Bruce as harbour master . . .*".⁶¹



George Randal Bruce's Restored Headstone, St Paul's Cathedral

He resigned in 1878, presumably because of ill health because he was then only 49-50. He died on 24 November 1878 from chronic hepatitis.⁶² Buried at St Pauls, his gravestone was in an almost collapsed condition when visited in 2000. My wider family would like to express grateful thanks to Basil George for organising a complete restoration of this, my great grandfather's grave. Our timing was most opportune because the sites of several dilapidated and badly neglected graves seen a decade ago have since been cleared and reused for modern burials.

¹ Later generations used "Randal" as the spelling for their middle name. Also, this was how the clergy spelt the name in most ecclesiastical records. However, all his military records used the spelling "Randel".

² His military records suggest he was born in 1787-1788 but the age of 53 quoted for his burial in 1842 indicates he may have been born as early as 1784.

³ I should like to thank Robert (Rob) Bruce Soffe who sent me copies of letters written by George Randal Bruce's son Wallace and grandson Robert Randal Bruce to relatives (descendents of Wallace's son George James Bruce who had emigrated to South Africa) around 1920. Robert was my grandfather's younger brother and as Colonial Secretary had access to St Helena's archives. Certainly, he seems to have been the only member of his generation to know his grandfather was Irish and not Scottish.

⁴ <http://churchrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/reels/d-277-1-4-233.pdf> At that time O'Connell Street was known as Sackville Street.

⁵ The descriptive term of "land grabbers" was actually popularised at a later date, after George's death, during Charles Parnell's parliamentary campaign to gain home rule in Ireland in the late 1880s.

⁶ British Library, IOL, Infantry Description Book, 1801-5, L/MIL/9/32, P 4. This record lists George Bruce, aged 16, height 5 feet 2½ inches, born in the parish of St Mary's, Dublin, occupation before recruitment was Clerk to the Customs.

⁷ A Desperate Set of Villains, The Convicts of the Marquis Cornwallis, Ireland to Botany Bay, 1796; Barbara Hall, Coogee, N.S.W., Australia, 2000.

⁸ Marquis Cornwallis under sail, 1793, François Balthazar Solvyns, State Library, New South Wales.

⁹ British Library, IOL, Muster Lists, St Helena Regiment, 1802-5, L/MIL/13/4; 1806-12, L/MIL/13/6; 1812-15, L/MIL/13/7. Charles Sampson died 14 August 1817.

¹⁰ An account of this campaign in South America was published by Ian Fletcher, *The Waters of Oblivion, The British Invasion of the Rio De La Plata, 1806-1807*, Spellmount Limited, Stroud, 2006.

¹¹ *La Reconquista de Buenos Aires*, Charles Fouqueray, 1909, currently located in the Buenos Aires Cabildo.

¹² National Archives, Kew, WO 164/518-520, Buenos Aires 1806 Dividends, list of names, Commissariat Department Royal Artillery, 20th Light Dragoons, 71st Regiment of Foot, St. Helena Artillery, St. Helena Infantry. I am very grateful to Colin Fox for sourcing and copying these references for me.

¹³ M. A. Thiers, *The History of The Consulate and the Empire of France under Napoleon*, Johannes Willms (Translated from the French by D. Forbes Campbell and H. W. Herbert), p. 642, Kessinger Publishing, 2005; *Napoleon & St Helena - on the Island of Exile*, Haus Publishing, London, ISBN 9-7819-0579-1, pp 48-49, 2007.

¹⁴ Trevor W. Hearl, *St Helena Britannica - Studies in South Atlantic History*, Edited by A. H. Schulenburg, Society of Friends of St Helena, London, 2013 (pp 77-88, 111-114); Ken Denholm, *From signal gun to satellite: a history of communications on the island of St Helena*, privately published, 2001.

¹⁵ Trevor W. Hearl, *St Helena Britannica - Studies in South Atlantic History*, pp 129-150.

¹⁶ A. Beatson, *Tracts Relative to the Island of St. Helena; Written During a Residence of Five Years*, Nicol, Booth, London, p59, 1816.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp 207-291. This provides full details of the mutiny and includes an appendix with officer statements.

¹⁸ Image sourced from Saul Solomon *The Member for Cape Town* by W. E. G. Solomon, Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1948, opposite p 54.

¹⁹ Trevor W. Hearl, *St Helena Britannica*, pp 165-174.

²⁰ Lt. Colonel Sir Thomas Reade, Deputy Adjutant-General 1816-1821, also appointed Inspector of Police in 1819.

²¹ Thomas Henry Brooke, Secretary to the St Helena Council, published "A History of St Helena" in 1808 and was appointed acting governor after Hudson Lowe's departure in 1821.

²² Brigadier-General Sir George Ridout Bingham, commanded British and St Helena Regimental forces on the island 1815-1820.

²³ *A Polish Exile with Napoleon*, G. L. De St. M. Watson, Harper & Brothers, London, 1912, footnote on p71.

²⁴ Regrettably, Trevor Hearl never told me where he sourced this engraving before he died in January 2007.

²⁵ Hudson Lowe Papers, British Library, Manuscripts, shelf mark ADD 29126, folio 357. A couple of these letters are also quoted in *History of the Captivity of Napoleon at St Helena*, from the letters and journals of the late Lieut. Sir H. Lowe and official documents not before made public, William Forsythe, John Murray, 1853, London, Vol 3, p 165.

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- ²⁶ Deputy Adjutant General.
- ²⁷ Lord Henry Bathurst, Secretary for War and the Colonies 1812-1827, a Cabinet member responsible for the army and the British colonies (other than India).
- ²⁸ Comte de Alexandre Antonovitch Balmain, the Russian Commissioner, posted to St Helena 1816-1820.
- ²⁹ Captain Francis Stanfell, transported Hudson Lowe and staff to St Helena in January 1816 in the frigate *Phaeton* and was later appointed commander of the *Conqueror*.
- ³⁰ Charles Tristan Comte de Montholon, present with Napoleon throughout his period at St Helena, 1815-1821
- ³¹ A Polish Exile with Napoleon, G. L. De St. M. Watson, footnote on p71.
- ³² The life of William Thomas is detailed in *Wirebird*, No 37, Autumn 2008, p21. Born in Coity (Wales) in 1797, a series of letters show he enlisted as ship's clerk on HMS *Eurydice* in 1816 and visited St Helena en-route to the Cape of Good Hope. There is then a gap of five years, and 1821 finds him working as clerk for Saul Solomon. He appears to have become very close to his employer, stating in an 1826 letter that Solomon behaved to him like a father and that he had entered into a bond to be admitted as a partner from the 1st January 1828 under a penalty of £1,000. However, only a few months after thus advancing his career, on the 3rd February 1828, he was drowned when returning in the dark and a heavy sea from the ship *Medina*.
- ³³ British Library, India Office Library, on-shelf census records 1825-1836.
- ³⁴ George R. Bruce was a beneficiary in Sergeant William Green's will dated 29 August 1814 (seen at Jamestown Archives Office). William Green was buried 24 May 1820.
- ³⁵ William Gratten Tracey/Tracy, recruited into the St Helena Regiment in 1795, 1825-1836 census records list him as a watchmaker. His granddaughter Sabina Charlotte Tracey married George Randal Bruce Jr. in 1855.
- ³⁶ British Library, India Office Library, Public Consultations, St Helena, 1833-6, 13th July 1833.
- ³⁷ The Proceedings of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of St Helena, 3 July 1823, pp 30-33.
- ³⁸ Mary Lewis (Free) was buried on the 7th November 1814.
- ³⁹ Sarah Seale, baptised August 1797, the youngest of three illegitimate children born to George Seale and Sarah Nokoto.
- ⁴⁰ Data recently published by Colin Fox on the Friends web site suggests Sarah Hercules was born a slave about 1797.
- ⁴¹ Sarah Smith, baptised October 1794, daughter of "April and Sarah".
- ⁴² See Gosse, pp 266-7, 283-9. Boys arrived at St Helena in 1811, initially acting as junior chaplain he was undertook the duties as senior chaplain 1815- 1830.
- ⁴³ These statistics followed an inspection of ecclesiastical records by Major M. F. Foulds, medical officer of the British forces stationed at St Helena during the First World War.
- ⁴⁴ Arnold Chaplin, *St. Helena Who's Who, or, A Directory of the Island during the Captivity of Napoleon*, privately published, 1914, p 231. Chaplin's text and statistics are reproduced almost word for word by Gosse, *ibid*, pp 288-9.
- ⁴⁵ See the Finding Slave Ancestors web page in the members-only section of the Friends of St Helena web site, <http://www.sthelenauk.net>
- ⁴⁶ Registrar records, death certificates held at the Records Office, Jamestown. Sarah Bruce died at the age of 86 at Jamestown's Poor House on the 7th March 1903.
- ⁴⁷ Chaplin (*ibid*, p 210) listed Purser John Cummings as making an affidavit in support of Barry O'Meara in the libel case initiated (but never completed) by Hudson Lowe. Chaplin (*ibid*, p 20) also stated Andrew Eyre owned a boarding house in Jamestown, much frequented by captains, and was similarly described by Hudson Lowe in his shortlist of suspects discussed above, where he was listed in 20th place.
- ⁴⁸ Eleven other birth, marriage and death records were found with the Rippon surname. Most of the births and baptisms were the children of Margaret Peter, a slave owned by John Knipe. The father was normally named as "John" although whether that referred to the owner or to a John Rippon is not clear. An elderly John Rippon (free, aged 65) died on the 28th May 1827.
- ⁴⁹ Blue Book records for 1839 held by the St Helena Archive Office
- ⁵⁰ Gilbert Martineau, *Napoleon's Last Journey*, Translated from the French by Frances Partridge, John Murray, 1976, p124.
- ⁵¹ *St. Helena Proclamations, 1818-1943* by Robin Castell, privately published, 2004.
- ⁵² By Adolphe D'Hastrell, printed in Paris as a lithograph by Hubert Clerget in 1850. This is featured in Robin Castell's *St Helena Illustrated*, limited edition, privately published in 1998, p 124.
- ⁵³ Captain Edward Gulliver R.N., was Harbour Master for St Helena for the period 1836-1851 - *St Helena Almanack & Annual Register*, 1913, p 53.
- ⁵⁴ For example, Geo. R. Bruce is listed as Harbour Master from 1851-1872 in the 1913 *St Helena Almanack* and Registrar. Likewise, a *St Helena Guardian* newspaper article in February 1903 states that he "succeeded the late Mr Gulliver" as Harbour Master.

⁵⁵ Another ancillary responsibility would have been to daily signal the Greenwich time to all shipping. Certainly, this was the situation in 1841 when captain Henry Mapleton was appointed acting harbour master - information sourced from Polar Portraits - Collected Papers by A. G. E. Jones, 1992, Caedmon, Whitby, pp 181-185.

⁵⁶ St Helena Herald newspaper, 17 January 1856.

⁵⁷ The St Helena Almanac and Registrar, 1877, p 27.

⁵⁸ Mr R. L. M. Pritchard was Harbour Master 1877-1890 according to the 1913 St Helena Almanack and Registrar.

⁵⁹ Wirebird, Issue 37, Autumn 2008, p 3.

⁶⁰ Wirebird, Issue 36, Spring 2008, p 16.

⁶¹ St Helena Guardian newspaper, 31 July 1902

⁶² It is not known which of several forms of hepatitis George died. However, a rare form can be caused by yellow fever - it would be ironic if this were the case because his eldest son George Caleb Bruce, also harbour master, died in 1894 because of boarding a ship and catching the disease from a sick sailor - working as harbour master at St Helena carried considerable risks.