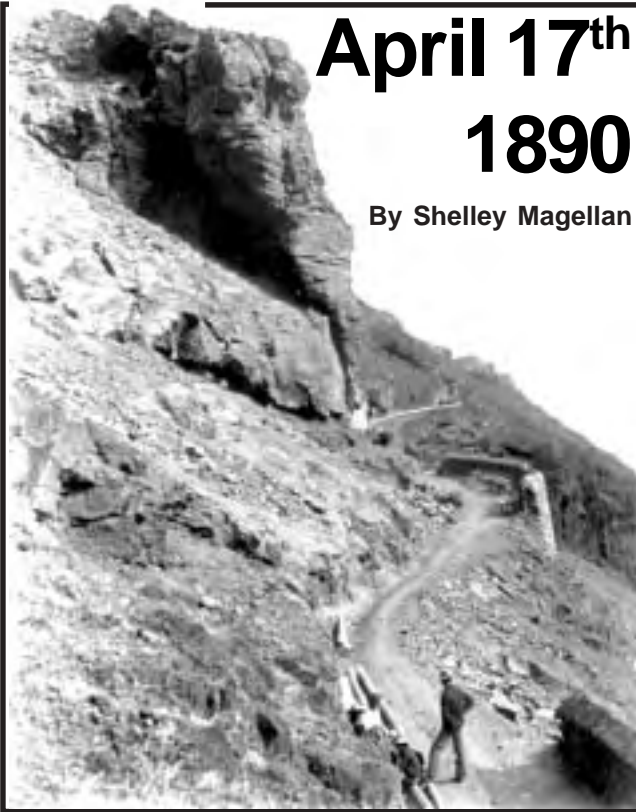


April 17th 1890

By Shelley Magellan



During a research session at the Archives I came across an article in the *St Helena Guardian* that sparked my interest. It was entitled "A Dreadful Calamity" It was the report on the Rock Fall at High Rock, that claimed the lives of 9 people on 17th April 1890. Certainly I'd heard of this terrible disaster, so have many of you, but I had no idea of the extent of damage and the effect it had on St Helena back then. This is how it all began. There had been many a rock fall on St Helena, primarily in Jamestown (due to the town being situated between two massive hills), but none so terrible as that which occurred in the early hours of Thursday morning, April 17th 1890.

The inhabitants of Jamestown were awakened in the dead of night around 12:45am to a devastating crashing and rumbling sound. It did not take inhabitants of lower Jamestown long to realise that it was a rock fall, and judging from the horrific sound, a disastrous one. A cliff of rocks had fallen from between High Rock and Pierie's Revenge on the west side of Jamestown. Once the earth shattering noise had ceased, men from all over town, Artillerymen, men from the East

Yorkshire Regt, soldiers from the garrison including sailors from *HMS Archer*, who were on shore together with another watch from the ship came ashore armed with picks and shovels, they all worked throughout the night, excavating the bodies of the dead and the injured.

There were several narrow escapes here are a few:

Miss M Bagley escaped a large rock of about 25 tons, which fell into the yard of her house, breaking into her bedroom and jamming her legs between her bed and some furniture, she was later rescued by sailors from *HMS Archer*.

Two large rocks passed right through Mrs McLaughlin's house, in which her son, servant and herself were sleeping, they emerged with just a few bruises.

Several rocks crashed through the house of Mr James Fagan, where his wife and three children were sleeping, the rocks broke all their furniture, but fortunately they were not harmed. Joseph George, a shoemaker, heard the noise, jumped out of his bed, and just made it to the door in time to escape a huge rock, which crashed through the roof of his bedroom. Charles Peters, the son of Thomas Peters (who was killed in the rock fall), jumped out of his window, narrowly escaping being crushed, his leg and arm were only a little

bruised. Unfortunately not everyone were lucky enough to escape,

The death count totalled nine.

1. Thomas Peters, Labourer 60yrs
2. Elizabeth Peters, wife of Thomas Peters 48yrs
3. Sarah Samuel, wife of Thomas Samuel, boat man, 47yrs
4. Thomas Samuel, son of Thomas and Sarah Samuel, 15 months
5. John Samuel, son of Thomas and Sarah Samuel, 14yrs
6. Caroline Samuel, wife of James Samuel, 36yrs
7. Edward Cooper, Fisherman, 59yrs
8. James Johnson, 13yrs
9. William Bowers, Fisherman 45yrs

The following is an extract from *the St Helena Guardian* Friday 18th 1890; it gives an account of what apparently happen to the deceased.

"Thomas Peters and his wife were crushed to death in bed by a rock weighing from 5 to 6 tons, from which only their heads were visible. A boulder weighing about

9 tons crashed through the roof of a 2-story house, driving Mrs Sarah Samuel with her child in her arms, as she ran out of the bedroom door, right through the floor into the room below where her son James Samuel, his wife Caroline and child were sleeping, the boulder severed Sarah Samuel's body in two also killing the child she had in her arms, along with her other son a boy of 14 years, and her son's wife Caroline. James Samuel was subsequently dug out from under the rock alive but in a very mutilated condition. A huge rock had driven a fisherman named Edward Cooper right through the floor from his room to a room on the opposite side. The debris smothered a boy; James Johnson aged 13 and a man named William Bowers." The Island was in shock, 9 lives taken, 14 homes destroyed and many injured. The newspaper made the following statement: "We have never yet heard of a fall of rocks in St Helena that has done so much damage to property and killed and injured so many persons as this one has, and we feel sure it will be remembered for many a long year to come." Now that the rescuing process was over, along came the cleaning and repairing process. A large number of men were employed in clearing the road to Ladder Hill. The walls in many places had been broken away to the extent of some hundred feet. The men worked long and hard to clear the debris on Ladder Hill Road, for the Funeral procession for eight of the deceased, that took place the next day, (18th April) On September 12th 1891, (exactly 111yrs yesterday), a drinking fountain was erected in Main Street Jamestown, in remembrance of the nine lives that were lost on that tragic night of 17th April. (Apparently no one knows what happened to this once prestigious Fountain that prominently stood, just below the roundabout in Main Street)



The unvailing of the memorial fountain.