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Editor: Robert Lewis

The bells of Jamestown, South Atlantic Ocean *by Colin Lewis*



Looking down on lower Jamestown from near the top of Jacob's ladder, showing St. James' church, the castle gardens (with trees and lawns and a monument to seamen who lost their lives enforcing the anti-slavery blockade of West Africa during the 1800s), and, between the gardens and the sea front, The Castle, divided from the sea by the town wall

The island of Saint Helena is one of the last outposts of the British Empire, complete with a Governor and Legislative Council. The capital, and only town, is Jamestown, named in honour of King James II.

St. Helena measures 17km x 10km and covers just 122 km² (47 sq.miles). The highest point, Diana's Peak, rises 823m above sea level. The island originated as two volcanoes, which began to form on the floor of the Atlantic Ocean more than 14 million years

ago. Volcanic activity ended some 7 million years ago, since when this volcanic island has been eroded into deep valleys radiating from a central ridge.

The island is renowned for its steep slopes, beautiful scenery and rapidly changing vegetation. Coastal areas are semi-arid and usually brownish in colour, largely devoid of vegetation. Uplands are clothed in lush forests of yellow-woods and other trees, mainly introduced from the Cape of Good Hope, with

just a few survivors of the pre-European endemic flora.

Groves of eucalyptus trees, introduced from Australia, exist at lower levels. Lower still come lush grasslands, with introduced Kikuyu grass providing excellent pasture for sheep and cattle. Far too many upland areas are covered in what the locals call "flax", but which is really hemp, formerly used by the British Post Office as a source of fibre for string for tying parcels.



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At the eastern end of the island lies semi-arid Prosperous Bay Plain on which, some day, an airfield might be built (there is none on the island at present). Further north is the grassy Deadwood Plain, on which Napoleon and his colleagues raced their horses when he was imprisoned nearby.

The island was first discovered in 1502, by Portuguese sailors. The Portuguese introduced goats, donkeys and pigs, as well as various plants, to provide for the needs of seafarers. When Captain Thomas Cavendish visited the island in 1588 he found "...a church, which was tiled,... a very fair causeway... upon [which] is a frame erected, whereon hang two bells, wherewith they ring to mass."

Three years later Jan van Linschoten visited the island with the Portuguese East India fleet, which used the island as a base for the supply of fresh water and provisions. He reported that "...no man dwelleth therein; but only the sick men...all the sick persons...in the ships...are left there...till other ships come and take them away. They are commonly soon healed in the island."

Soon after van Linschoten's visit the Dutch started calling at the island on their way to the East and disputes with the Portuguese began. In 1625 the Portuguese started to fortify the island, but to no avail. In 1633 the Dutch claimed the island, using it as a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company's fleet. In 1652, however, the Dutch decided to establish a refreshment station at the Cape and to abandon St. Helena.

Under Oliver Cromwell the English East India company was granted the right to fortify and settle its establishments. Two years later, on behalf of the Company, John Dutton took possession of the island and increased the fortifications. King Charles II issued a Royal Charter in 1661, granting the inhabitants "...all liberties...as if they had been...borne within this our realme of England". Thenceforward, apart from a few months when the Dutch occupied the place, St. Helena has been British.

The English East India Company appointed chaplains to the island from 1674, and services were held in a church in Jamestown. There is no record of what had happened to the earlier Portuguese church or its two bells, neither is there any record of the building of the first Anglican church. By 1732 "...the Chapple at the Fort...is so much out of repair that it is shameful...". Nevertheless it was not until 1772 that a new church was erected, the present church of St. James.

In 1834 St. Helena passed from the East India Company to His Majesty's Government, becoming a Crown Colony. From 1834-61 Colonial Chaplains were appointed, even though the Diocese of St. Helena was established by Queen's Order in Council in 1859. The new diocese became, as it remains, part of the Province of Southern Africa, under the leadership of the Archbishop of Cape Town.

Reaching St. Helena is a pleasant challenge, since the island is only served by one regular ship, the RMS St. Helena. This is a comfortable cargo-passenger vessel of 6,767 gross tonnes, capable of carrying 128 passengers. The ship sails from Cape Town and serves Ascension Island as well as St. Helena. Occasionally it proceeds to Portland Harbour, in England, but that service is being discontinued in 2005.

I joined the St. Helena in Cape Town harbour on a calm and bright blue afternoon one day in July. After five days of absolute luxury, overfed and feeling very lazy, I reached

Jamestown, mid way between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Equator in the middle of the South Atlantic.

The vessel anchors in the Bay and one goes ashore in launches, landing at the steps on the sea front. Ship day is a great occasion in Jamestown, and many of the island's population, of just under 4,000, flock to the sea front to see who is coming and going. Formalities over, it was time to meet my hosts and then attend the rededication of St. James' church following restoration.

The church was full, with choirs from all the island churches, robed, in attendance. The local Scouts and other organisations trooped their colours, which Bishop John Salt laid up in the sanctuary. Rather to my embarrassment I found myself ushered into the front pew, together with Captain Martin Smith of the RMS (who is also a bell ringer) and the family of the alternate church warden. The singing was lusty, the sermon good and the whole occasion an experience that I would not have missed for anything.

St. James' church has three lancet windows at the east end, the middle of which is of stained glass. The windows on either side had been re-painted by a talented young lady, Emma Jane Yon, who had been one of the passengers on the mail ship. On the walls are memorials to many of the officers and men who lost their lives in various African



Arthur Bizaare, one of the gifted craftsmen who repaired the eighteenth century clock; Captain Martin Smith (Master of the RMS St. Helena), Gloria and Peter Rauh. Gloria, then Maltby, undertook voluntary teaching service on the island, sponsored by the people of Kettering, over thirty years ago. She and her husband live in Switzerland (where he is a senior meteorologist) and were visiting the island for the first time since Gloria completed her voluntary service

campaigns or who, like Major General John Hare of Grahamstown, died of exhaustion on their way back to Britain after fighting on the eastern frontier of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope.

The tower of St. James' holds a surprising treasure. In it are two bells. The oldest, cast by John Wamer and Sons in 1877, and about 790 mm in diameter, is used as the clock bell. The bell has a wooden headstock and stay and, like the 6cwt Taylor bell consecrated in February 1950, hangs in a wooden frame that

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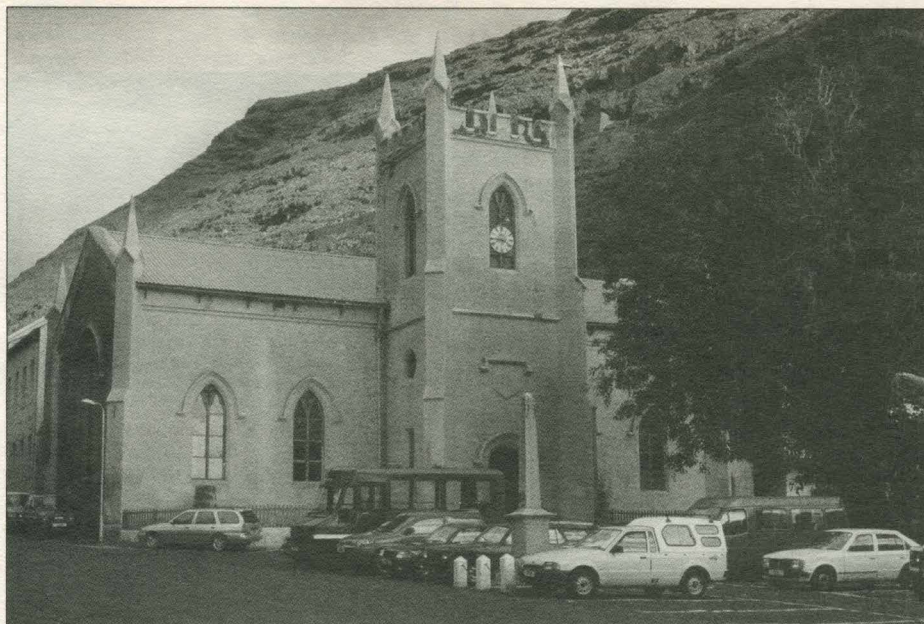
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St. James' church, Jamestown – the oldest Anglican church south of the Equator

rests on two wooden beams that were obviously once of ship's masts.

The Taylor bell has a metal curved headstock, wooden wheel, weighted clapper for slow swing chiming and, chalked inside it: "HELENA 2-71/2". The bell has been tuned and sounds like a typical Simpson tuned bell. It is swung chimed a quarter of an hour before services, its melodious tones reverberating between the cliffs in the deep and narrow valley in which the church and Jamestown itself are sited. There is no sign of the earlier bell on which the clock presumably struck.

The real treasure in the tower, however, is not a bell, but the clock. On the brass dial on the case are the words Aynsworth Thwaites / Clerkenwell London /1786. This clock was made by Aynsworth Thwaites and was purchased by the Governors of the East India Company for erection in the tower of St. James' church, where it was placed in 1787. In 1834 it was removed and then, in 1841, placed in the nearby Court House. Four years later it was replaced in the new tower of St. James' church.

Recently the clock had been out of action until three gifted islanders: Geoffrey Scipio (a mechanical engineer), Arthur Bizaare (the Government Printer and also sexton of the church), and Douglas Yon (a taxi driver), made new parts to replace those worn by age. The clock is still wound by hand, even though its weights caused much concern in years past when, as the church records state: "...one of the massive weights ...crashes through the floor above into the porch below." The new wooden floor inside the tower should reduce such risks in future!

The tower itself is just over 3.3 metres wide and almost the same broad, and is built of massive basalt blocks, strong and sturdy, like the people of the island themselves. The Saints, as they are called, are British through and through, even though divided from their homeland by many miles of sea. They have the full rights of British citizens: they are British citizens. All they need now is a proper ring of bells to make this the most English of all islands. How wonderful it would be if that could be done in St. James' church, the "oldest Anglican church south of the Equator".



A launch takes passengers from the RMS St. Helena to the landing steps at Jamestown while the ship rides at anchor in the Bay

Editorial

Preparations for the 2005 Ringing Roadshow at Newbury Race Course are now well underway and the Roadshow website, sponsored by *The Ringing World*, is up and running (see back page). We are confident that next year's show will be the biggest and best yet – with a first rate venue, which is easily accessible by road from all directions and has the added benefit of its own rail link. This is an event that you simply cannot afford to miss: Saturday, 10th September 2005.

One of the great advantages of email is that it often allows us to include material in *The Ringing World* much faster these days. However, we frequently receive e-mailed letters, stories and news items without a full postal address and contact telephone number appended. Please remember to include these important details – we need them for identity verification purposes and to solve the queries that inevitably crop up from time to time.

First Peal Congratulations

Margaret Triste, Megan B. Mitchell, Brian Price, Thomas J. Hinks

Built like the Forth Bridge?

Not like a Battleship... we are reliably informed that the Bredon bell frame pictured on the back page of last week's issue is not a 'battleship' frame. It is, in fact, a patent vertical 'cantilever' frame.

Youth Hostels article

John Brain has asked us to record a couple of corrections to his YHA article (p.900 last week): youth hostel curfew was 10.30pm, not 10.50pm, and his first tour was in 1957 not 1947.

PLEASE try to use the correct e-mail address when sending items to *The Ringing World*. This will help to avoid confusion and speed up publication. See inside front cover for the full list of addresses.

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