

Saint Helena

South Atlantic Ocean

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28 October 2025

OVERVIEW

Saint Helena is a volcanic tropical island in the South Atlantic Ocean, 4 000 km east of Rio de Janeiro and 1 950 km west of the Cunene River, which forms the border between Namibia and Angola in southwestern Africa. It is part of the British Overseas Territory of Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

The island measures about 16 by 8 km and has a population of 4 534 (2016 census).

There are no minerals and almost no industry. The island has a system of roads and an airport (2016) on Prosperous Bay Plain, near the island's eastern coast.

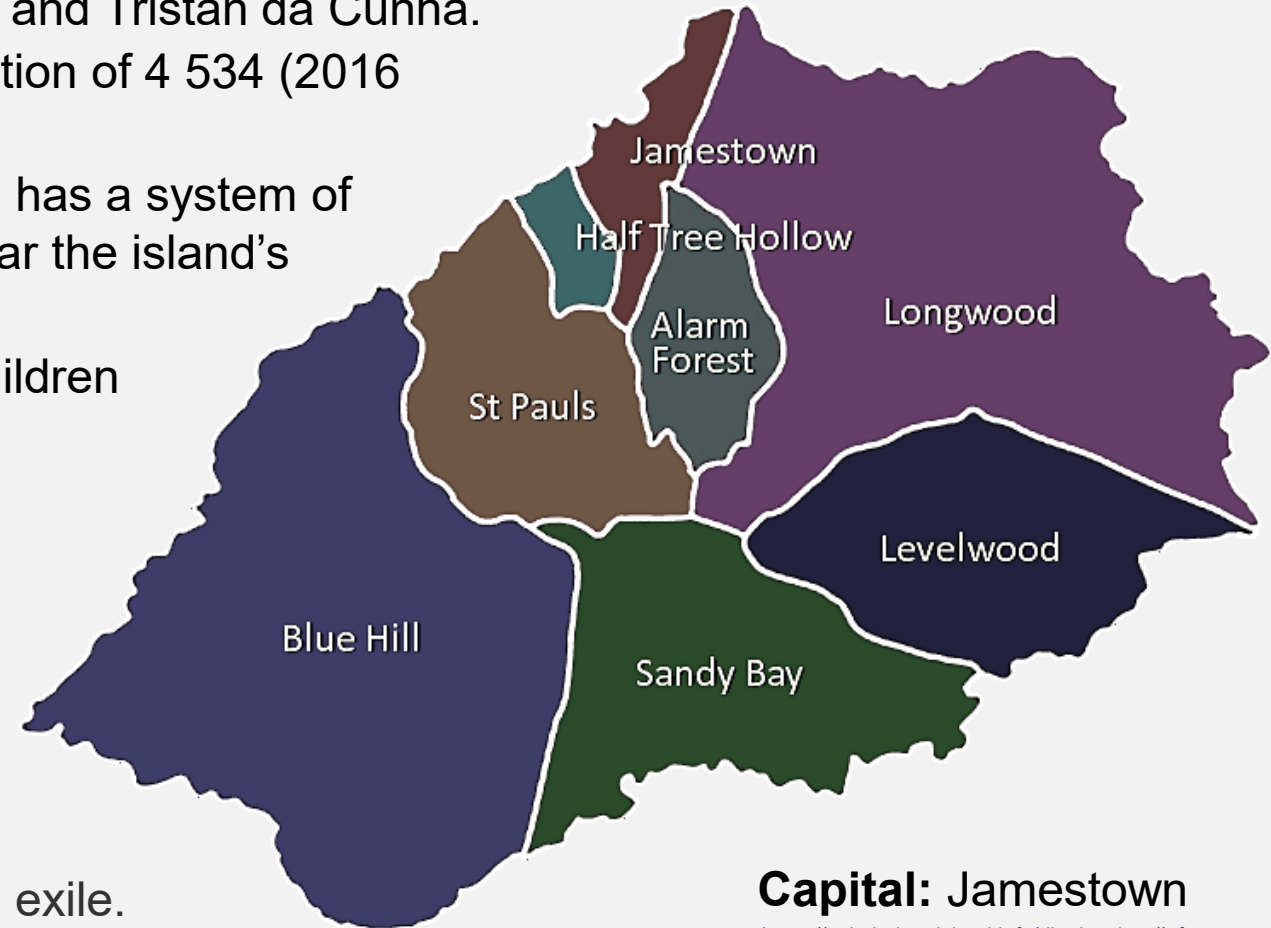
Education is compulsory and free in public schools for children between the ages of 5 and 15.

From James Bay (the port) extends a narrow valley for 2.4 km inland. In this valley is nestled the capital of Jamestown.

Jamestown is the only town among the settlements on the island and accommodate about one-sixth of the island's population.

During the years, several people was imprisoned there in exile.

Saint Helena is Britain's second-oldest remaining overseas territory after Bermuda.



Capital: Jamestown

<https://sainthelenaisland.info/districts.htm#af>

THE ISLAND

Observation by Walter Henry, an army surgeon in the team guarding Napoleon



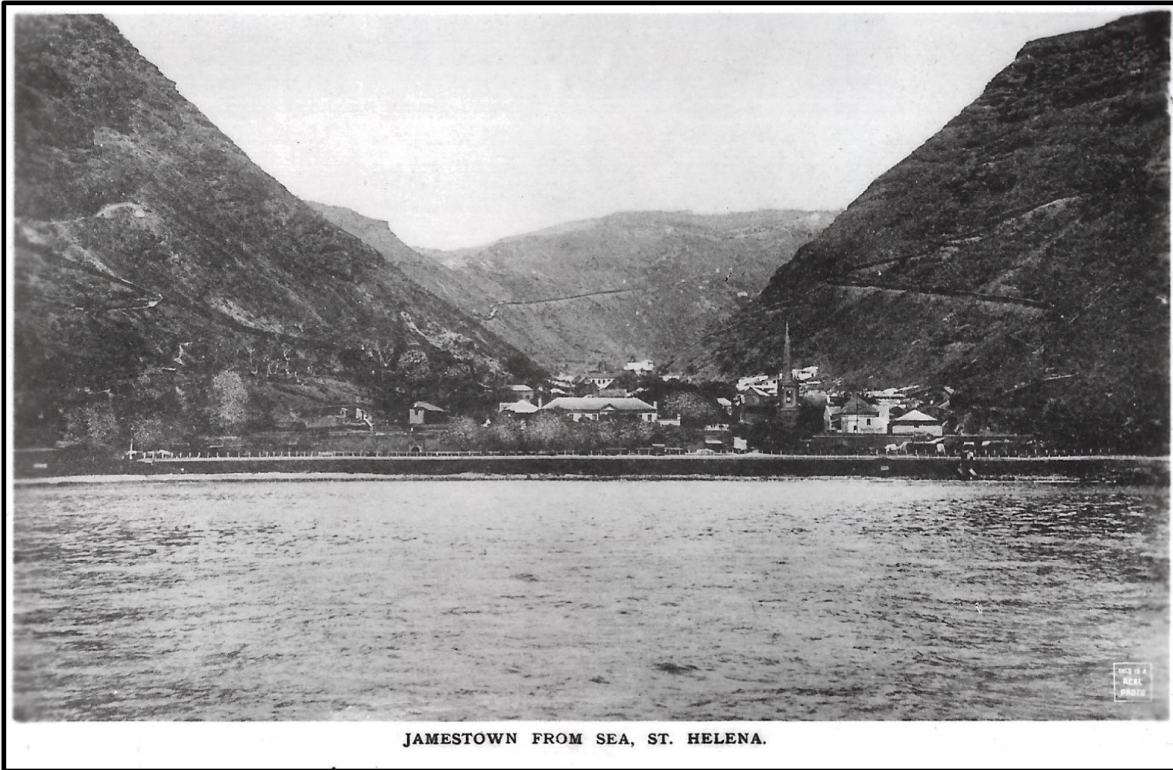
"...the ugliest and most dismal rock conceivable... rising like an enormous black wart from the face of the deep"

Observation by Walter Henry, an army surgeon in the team guarding
Napoleon

FIRST IMPRESSIONS - FROM THE SEA

Because there is no dock, ships and yachts anchor offshore at Jamestown Harbour and use ferry services to access the shore. The wharf, set beside steep cliffs, is the main landing point for passengers and cargo.

Walking up the stairs onto the wharf, arrivals follow the same path used by passengers or goods arriving on the island for over 500 years.



JAMESTOWN FROM SEA, ST. HELENA.

Looking south from James Bay - sight of Jamestown nestled in the valley between the hills

Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print



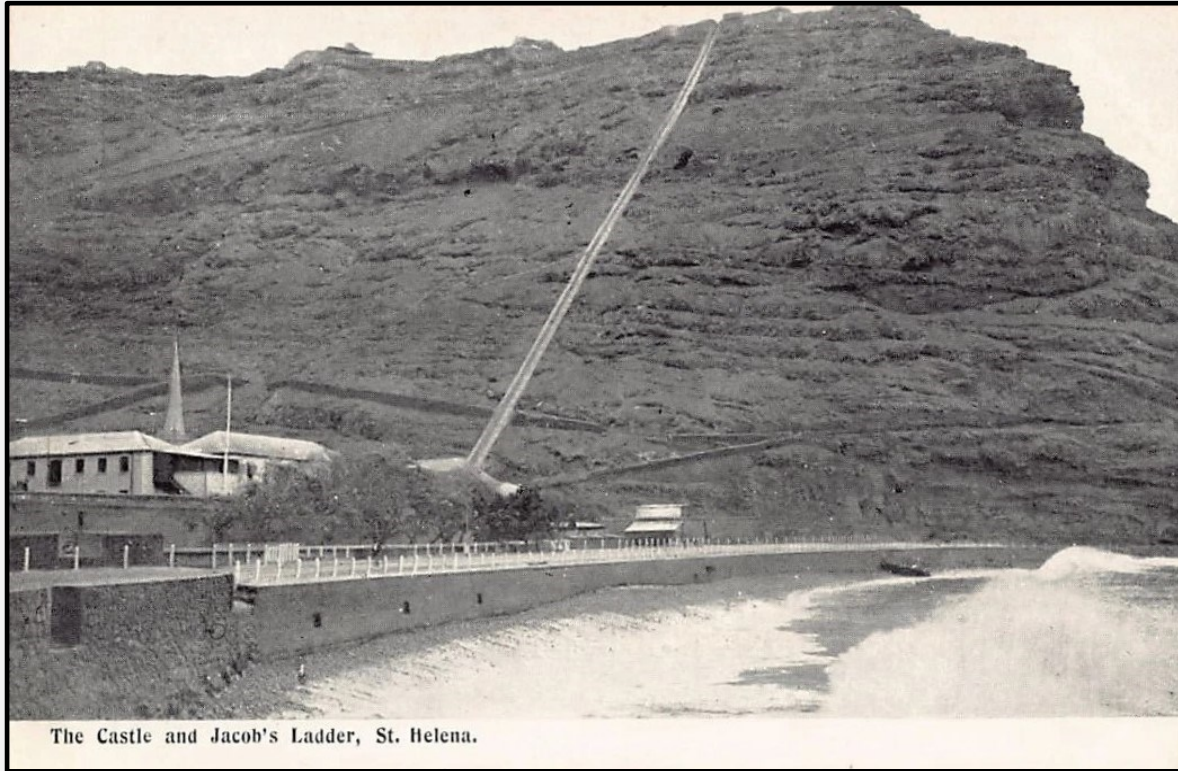
THE WHARF, ST. HELENA.

The wharf and eastern rocks

Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

Although Jamestown harbor is not a deep-water port; it remains vital to the island's daily activities.

Jacob's Ladder - a 699 step staircase - climbs the cliff behind town, offering panoramic views and a serious workout.



The Castle and Jacob's Ladder, St. Helena.

Jamestown harbor showing western rock with Jacob's ladder, wharf, castle building and church tower

Publisher unknown with DB in black - Collotype print



MUNDEN'S POINT, ST. HELENA

Munden's point - eastern rock

Publisher unknown with DB in grey. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

Jacob's Ladder is the remains of a vertical-axled rotating cable way. The capstan bar and ropes worked by mules, dated back to 1829 to haul loads of manure, accumulated in stables and stockyards, to inland farmers on top of the mountain and to bring fresh produce back down.

The system was suspended in 1871 and a staircase was built between the two sides by the Royal Engineers.

JAMESTOWN

Jamestown, the capital, was founded in 1659 and named after James, Duke of York (later King James II). The capital is built in a narrow valley, sandwiched between steep cliffs, that extends 2.4km inland from James Bay. The residential area is thus restricted to the narrow and densely populated valley floor.



Capturing rugged beauty - Birds eye view of lower Jamestown from the western rock

M.A. Frank, Rotterdam with UB in black - Collotype print



Looking North down the valley - Lower and Upper Jamestown Pharmacy, St Helena with DB in black Collotype print

Lower Jamestown serves as the administrative and commercial centre.

UPPER JAMESTOWN

The upper part of town is mainly residential with the hospital also located here and roads leading to the surroundings.



*Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England
Silver gelatin print*

Upper Jamestown



*Polytechnic, St Helena with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England
Silver gelatin print*

The town retains its 18th century character, with structures built by the English East India Company still standing.

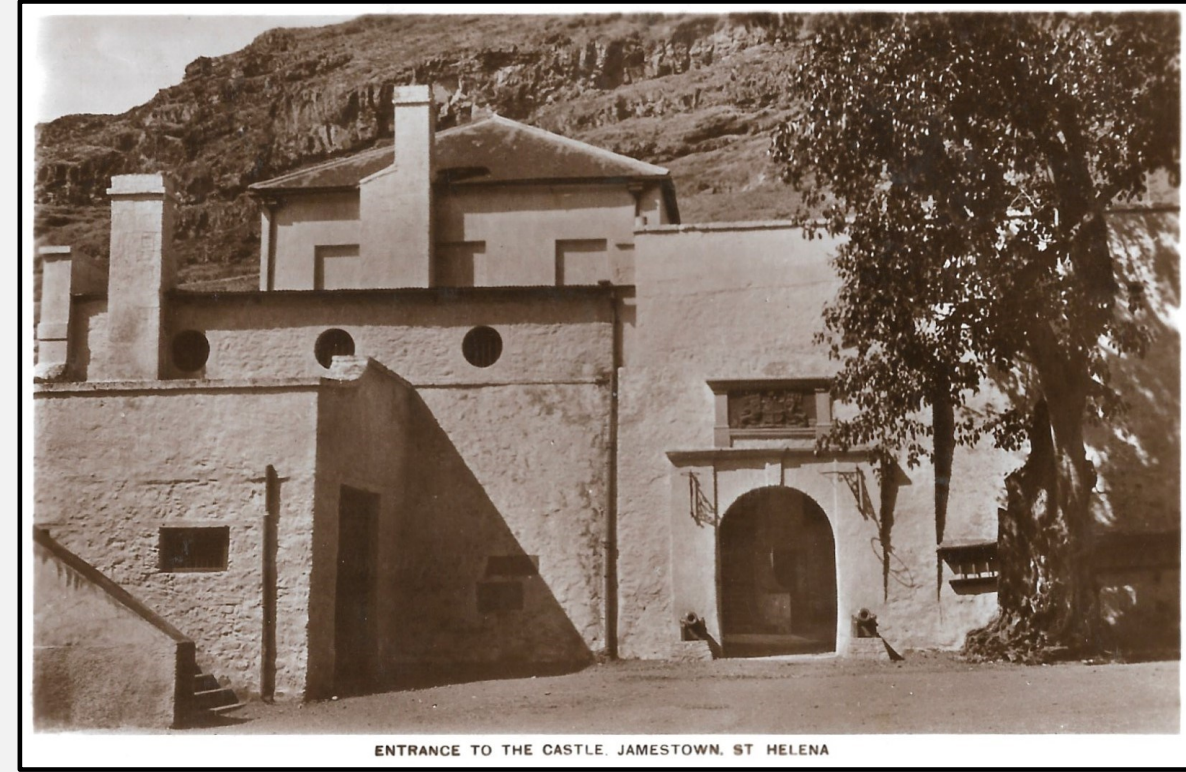
DOWNTOWN JAMESTOWN

The city is a time capsule with buildings of Georgian architecture lining its narrow streets.

St James Church, built on the old military parade ground, forms a focal point and is surrounded by the Castle, Court House, Library and HM Prison.



St James church with part of the grand parade
Polytechnic, St Helena with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print



Seat of Government, the Castle and its entrance
Publisher unknown with DB in grey. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

The original castle was constructed in 1659 and replaced in 1708 and again in 1867. Most of the early Governors lived and worked there. The official residence was moved to Plantation House, some 5 kms away in the countryside, and the castle became the seat of government.

DOWNTOWN JAMESTOWN

Jamestown's Main Street is one of the finest surviving examples of unspoiled Georgian architecture. It stretches from the wharf to the Grand Parade and up James Valley, flanked by historic buildings.



Main Street with the Post Office on left with Pharmacy next to it on the western side of the street

From T. Jackson, St Helena with DB in green - Lithographic print, hand coloured



Clear view of the eastern side of the street opposite the area of the Post Office and Pharmacy

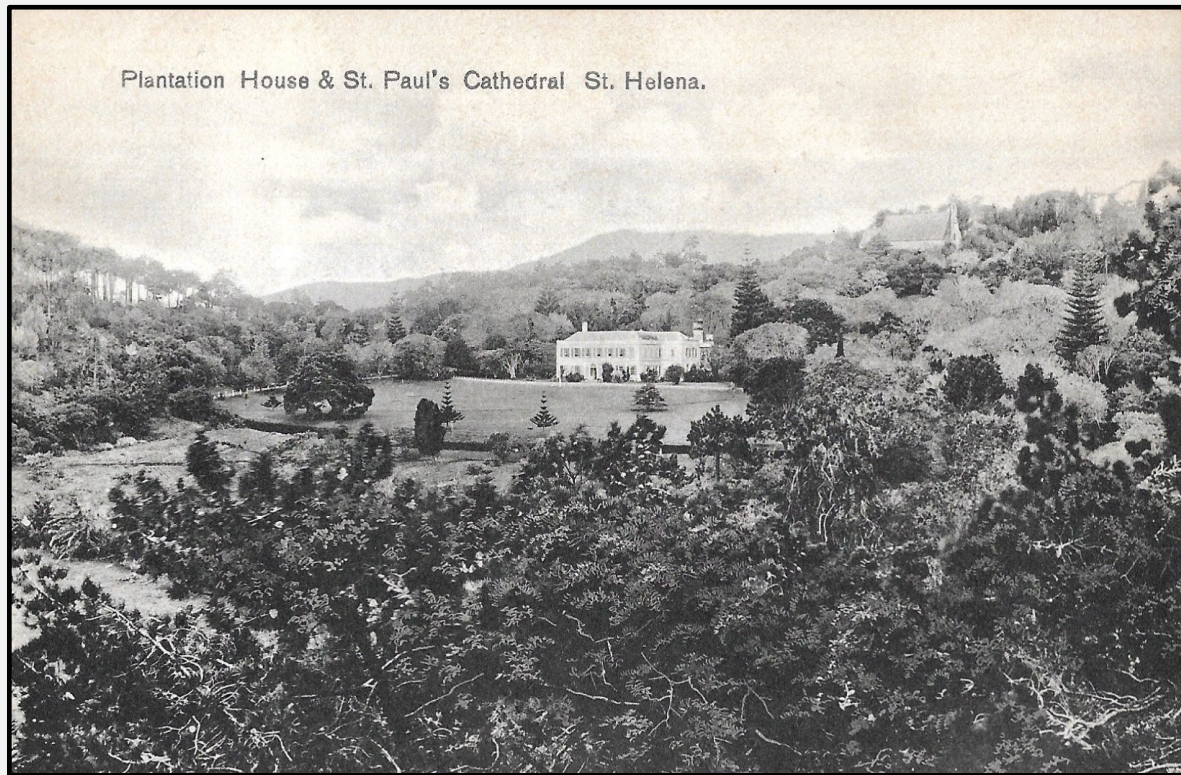
Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

Thomas Jackson owned the pharmacy during the first half of the 20th century. He published postcards under the names *T Jackson* and *The Pharmacy*.

Jackson sold the pharmacy in the 1950s and the new owner renamed it "Polytechnic". It continued to operate as a pharmacy and remains producing postcards in a distinctive style.

COUNTRYSIDE

The countryside is a patchwork of volcanic terrain, misty peaks, deep ravines, grazing lands and coastal cliffs. In the early 1790's an official residence was built for the governor on a farm known as "The Plantation", some 5km from Jamestown in the St Paul's district. It was inaugurated in 1792 and became known as *Plantation House*. Francis Plain, originally a grazing land, is about 5 km out of town on the way to Plantation House. The plain is the site of the island's sports field and also the Prince Andrew secondary school.



Plantation house and the country church, St Paul's Cathedral, in the distance

T Jackson, St Helena (copyright) with DB in black - Collotype print

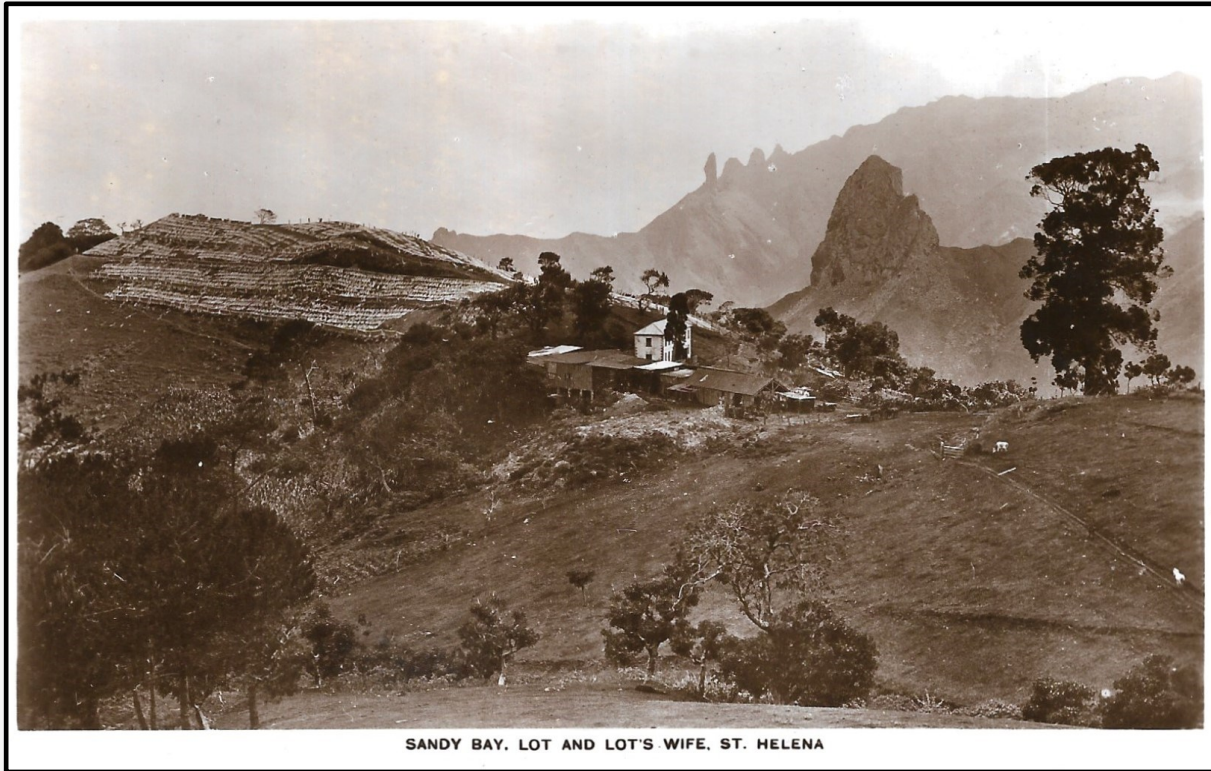


The recreation ground at Francis Plain.

Publisher unknown with DB in brown - Collotype print

From 1907 New Zealand flax, cultivated for its strong fibres and ideal for ropemaking was the backbone of the island's economy.

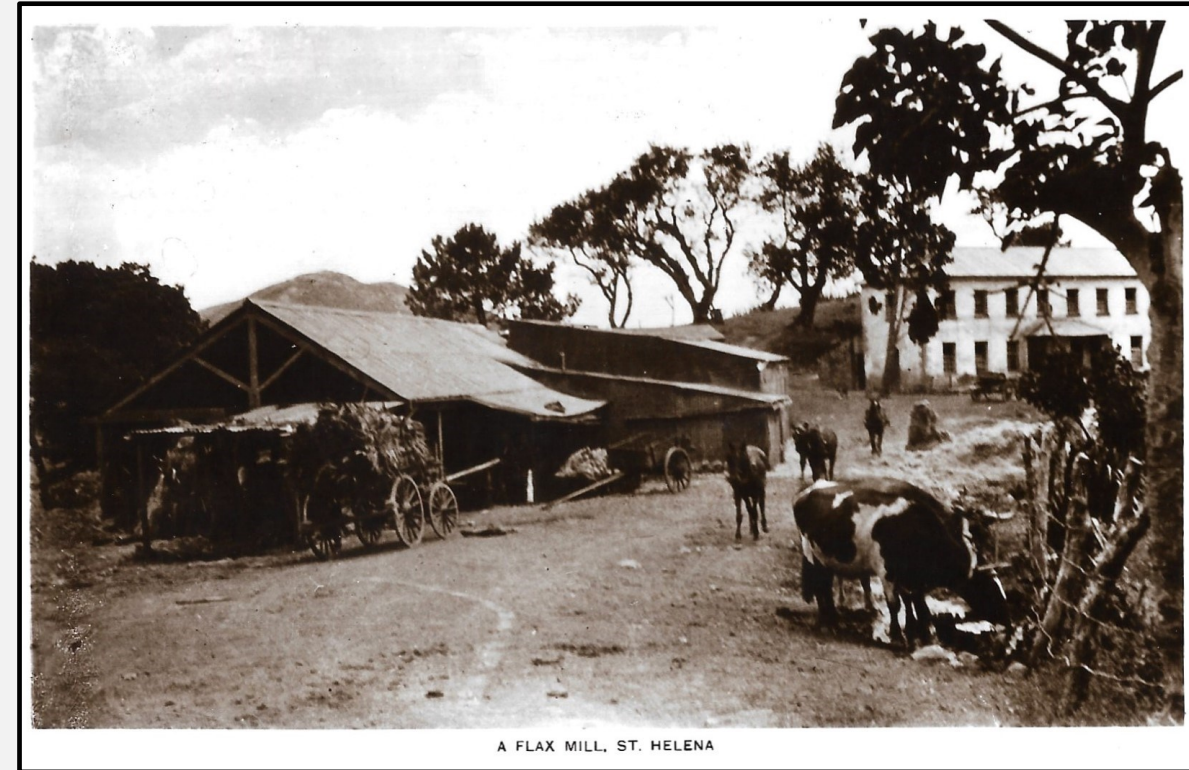
The global demand for synthetic fibres saw a decline for natural fibres that played a key role in the shutdown of St Helena's flax mills in 1965. The once thriving industry could no longer compete.



SANDY BAY, LOT AND LOT'S WIFE, ST. HELENA

Sandy Bay - On left is a plantation of New Zealand flax with a homestead and flax mill in the foreground and the landmarks of Lot's wife and Lot behind - named after the biblical story in which Lot's wife was turned into salt

Publisher unknown with DB in black. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print



A FLAX MILL, ST. HELENA

A closer look at the Flax Mill

Publisher unknown with DB in black. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

Tourism, coffee, and sustainable fishing has steered the island's economy in new directions.

By 1908 the first Government Lace School in Jamestown was established in what is now the Post Office building. The handmade lace making tradition continues today and items can be bought at Souvenir Shops. Fishing is a cornerstone of St Helena's food security. Fish landed early in the morning, cleaned and sold directly to residents, restaurants, and small vendors.



Lace workers busy with their craft
From T Jackson, St Helena with DB in black. Collotype print



The fish market is a modest but functional space
Publisher unknown with DB in black. Collotype print

The market stimulates community interaction, with stories, recipes, and fishing lore exchanged daily.

LANDMARKS

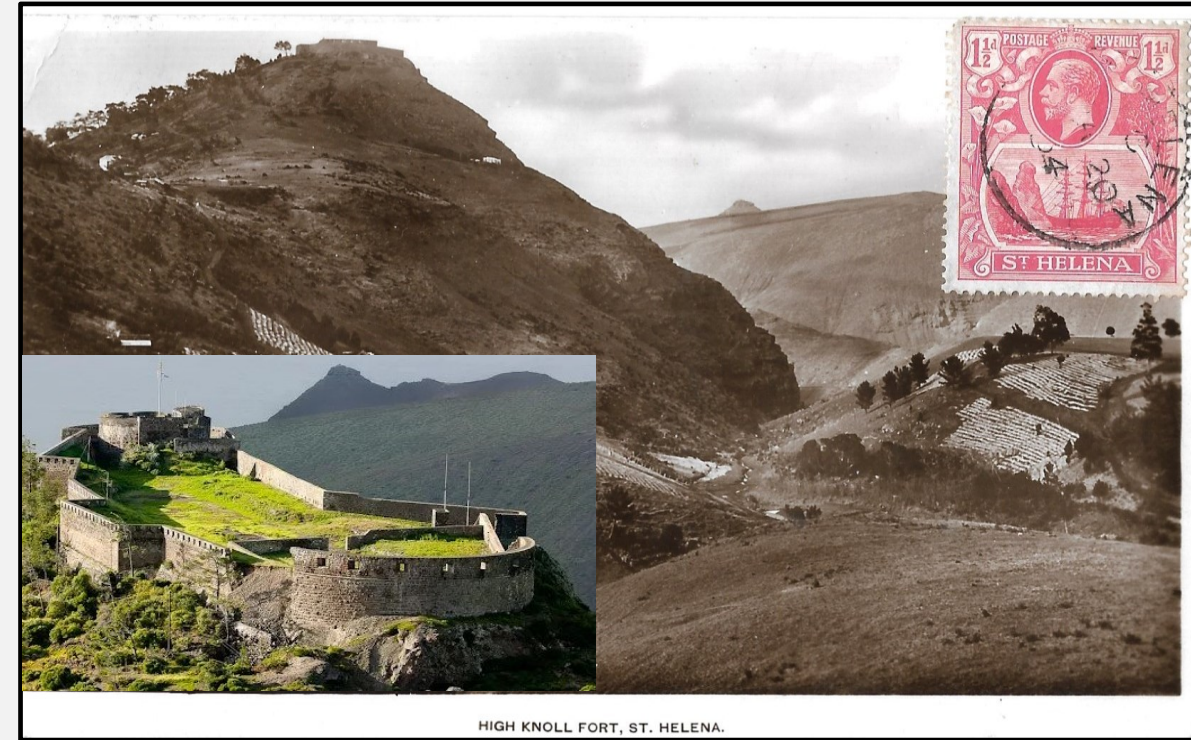
Diana's Peak is located at the tripoint of three districts: Sandy Bay (southwest), Levelwood (east), and Longwood (north). It is the highest point on the island, rising to 818 m above sea level. It is of volcanic origin and is home to more than 200 endemic species, including tree ferns and black cabbage trees.

High Knoll Fort, 584 m above sea level, is a robust-style fort built by the English East India Company about 1.6 km southwest from Jamestown in the Half Tree Hollow district. It overlooks the town and was strategically built to assist in defending the island as a second line of defense against potential invaders.



Diana's Peak

T. Jackson, St Helena with DB in brown - Collotype print



High Knoll Fort, top of the mountain on left

Publisher unknown with DB in black. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

Diana's Peak was declared St Helena's first national park in 1996, covering 81 hectares of cloud forest.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

(In exile: 1815 - 1821)

Napoleon's failed Russian Campaign (1812) and defeats in Germany and France (1813-1814), led to his forced abdication as Emperor of the French in 1814. He was subsequently exiled to Elba.

The European allies allowed him to retain the title of Emperor and gave him sovereignty over Elba, a small island off the coast of Tuscany.

He reorganized Elba's administration and even created a small army. Aware that the restored Bourbon monarchy in France was unpopular, he escaped Elba less than a year later. He reclaimed power from King Louis XVIII, who fled, proving that exile on Elba was not the end of his ambitions.

On 18 June 1815 he was decisively defeated at Waterloo and abdicate for the second time.

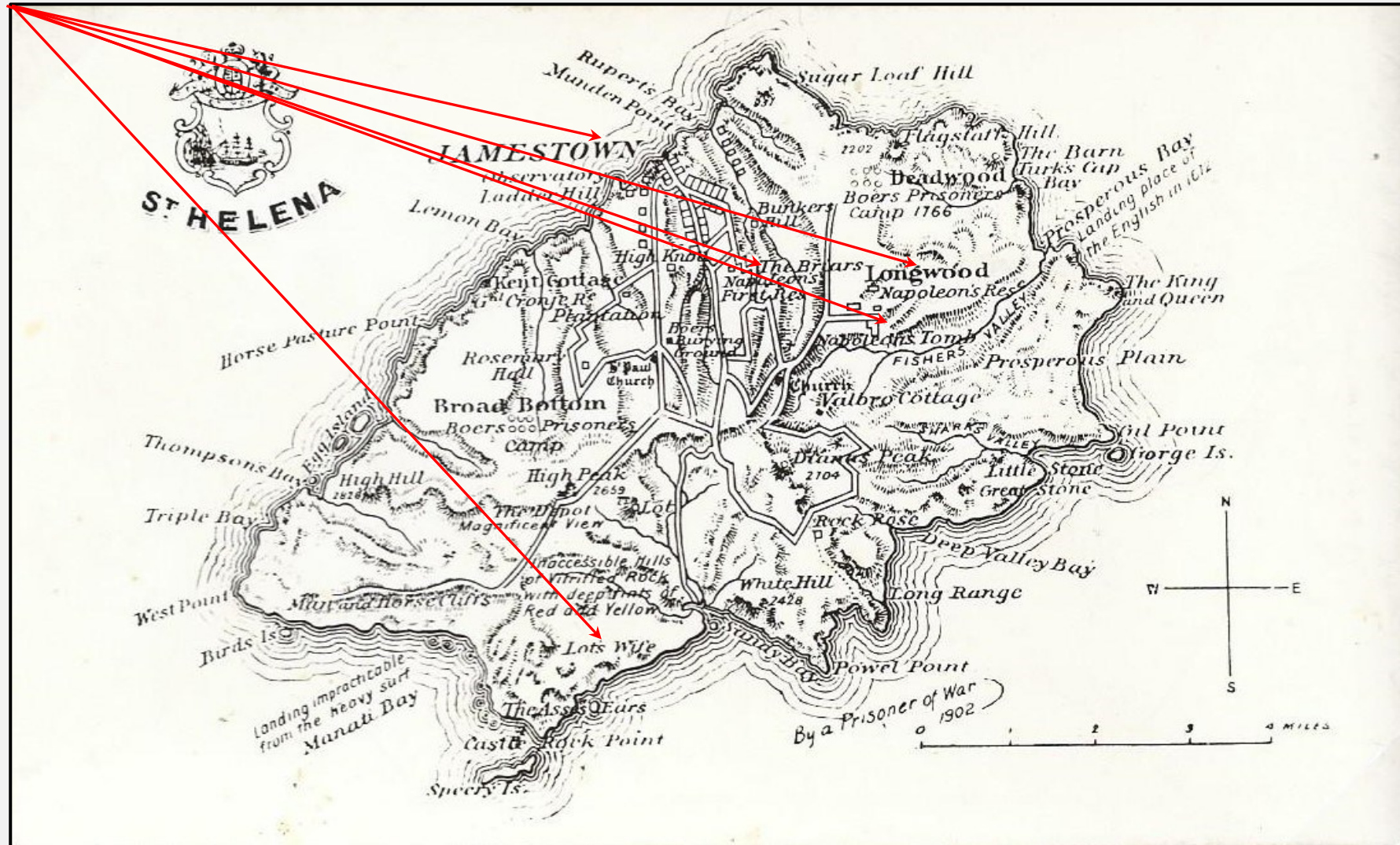
The major European powers, Britain, Austria, Prussia and Russia, had just redrawn the map of Europe to restore stability. Napoleon's return threatened this fragile peace, prompting them to choose a more remote and secure place of exile - **Saint Helena**.



Postcard from Cherbourg, France showing the equestrian statue of Napoleon I against the backdrop of the Harbour
Publisher unknown with DB in grey - Collotype print

AFTER WATERLOO

This first section covers four of the eight island districts: Jamestown (the port of arrival), Alarm Forest (first residence in the Briar's Village), Longwood (Napoleon's last home and burial site), and Sandy Bay (last daytrip).



A SYMBOL OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY

The HMS Northumberland, a 74-gun warship, launched in 1798 carried Napoleon to his final place of exile on the remote island of St Helena.

On 15 October 1815, Napoleon disembarks on St Helena after a two-month voyage. The arrival manifest the beginning of Napoleon's last chapter - written not in battle, but in isolation.



The HMS Northumberland in the St Helena quayside
Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print



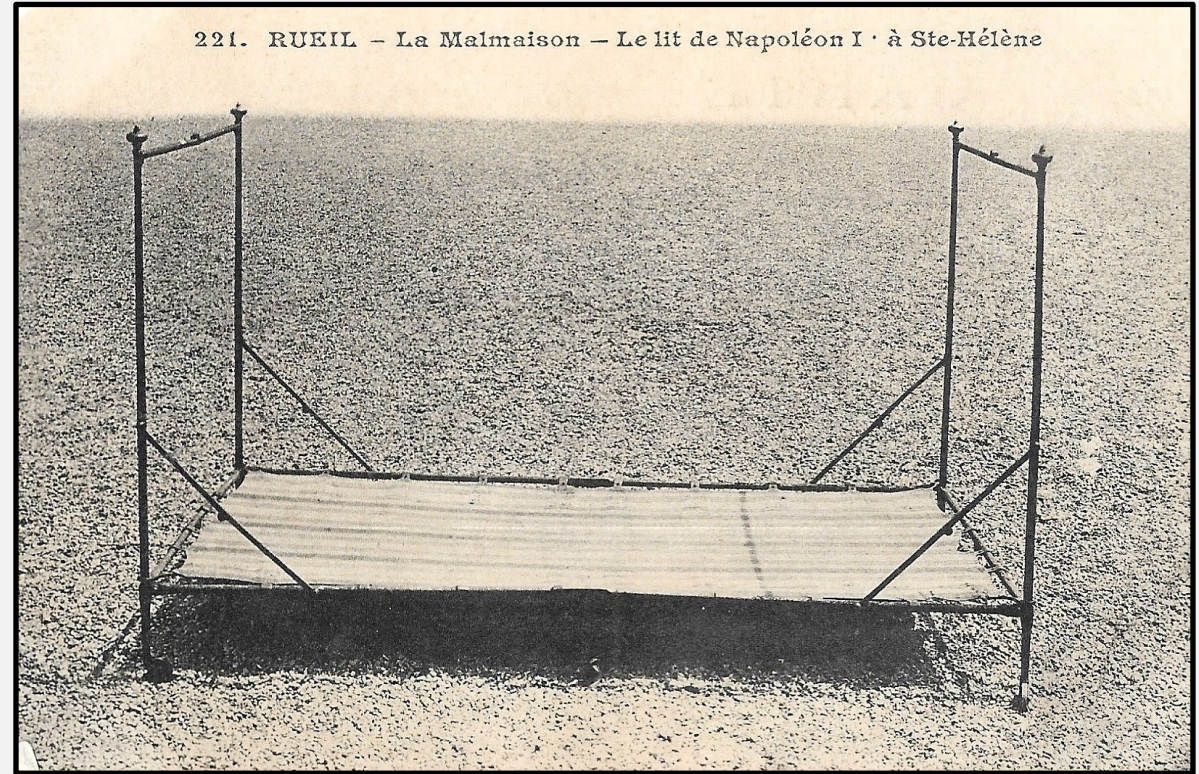
Porteous House, a modest multi-story colonial building, Napoleon's first night accommodation, denotes the commencement of his exile on the island

Pharmacy (T Jackson), St Helena, DB in black - Collotype print

Napoleon's initial residence on the island was located in the Briars Village, Alarm Forest district, which is also the site of the landmark Heart shaped Waterfall.



Briars village with the striking Heart shape Waterfall on right
Pharmacy (T Jackson), St Helena, DB in black -
Collotype print



Museum artifact with caption translated: Bed of Napoleon 1 in St
Helena

This is the bed Napoleon reportedly used during his exile on St.
Helena - a potent symbol of fallen grandeur, number 221
(Rueil-Malmaison is Napoleon's former residence turned museum)

A. Ossart édit. Rueil, DB in black - Collotype print

RESIDENCE

Longwood Old House was a stately estate with multiple connected buildings enclosed by stone walls and shaded by mature trees - a portrait wrapped in colonial architecture.

Napoleon considered Longwood House to be unsatisfactory. The house is located 550 meters above sea level on a dry plateau that frequently experiences fog and damp conditions throughout much of the year.



No. 24. LONGWOOD AVENUE, SHOWING NAPOLEON'S HOUSE IN DISTANCE: St. HELENA.

Longwood Avenue and in the distance, the Longwood Old House,
Napoleon's final residence

*Publisher unknown, number 24 with DB in black. RPPC printed in England -
Silver gelatin print*



LONGWOOD HOUSE, ST. HELENA, IN THE TIME OF NAPOLEON

Longwood Old house: The enclosed residence, figures at the gate and
approaching rider, adding life and a narrative of surveillance and
restriction

Publisher unknown with DB in black. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

LAST DAYS

On 4 October 1820, Napoleon visited Sandy Bay. Accompanied by his party, he held a picnic on the lawns of Mount Pleasant. Sir William Doveton, owner of the property and his family, were invited to join them for lunch with champagne.

On the way back, Napoleon had trouble riding his horse and was transferred to a carriage at Hutts Gate, a quiet residential area in the Longwood district.



SANDY BAY LOOKING EAST, ST. HELENA.

A homestead at Sandy Bay

Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

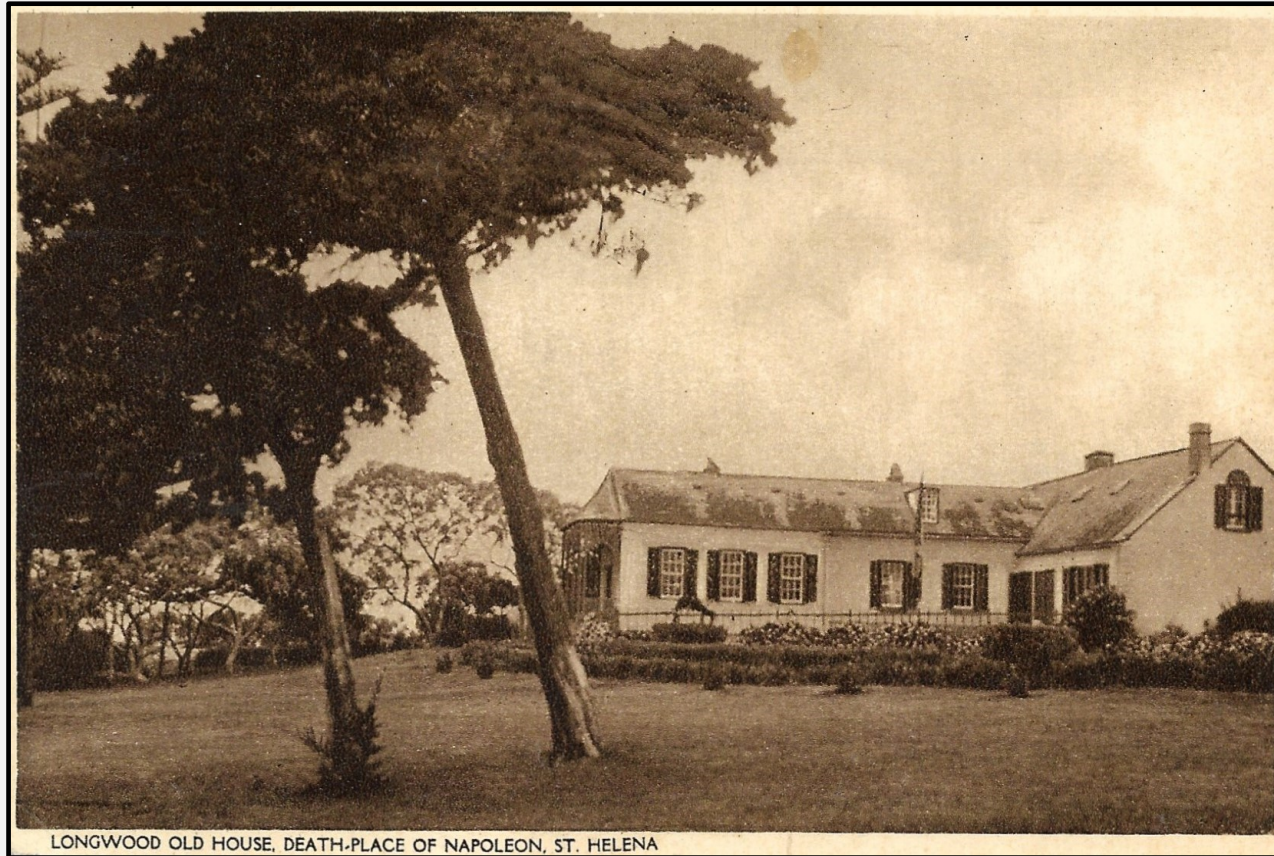


HUTTS GATE, LEADING TO LONGWOOD, ST. HELENA

Hutts Gate, about 2km from Longwood old house

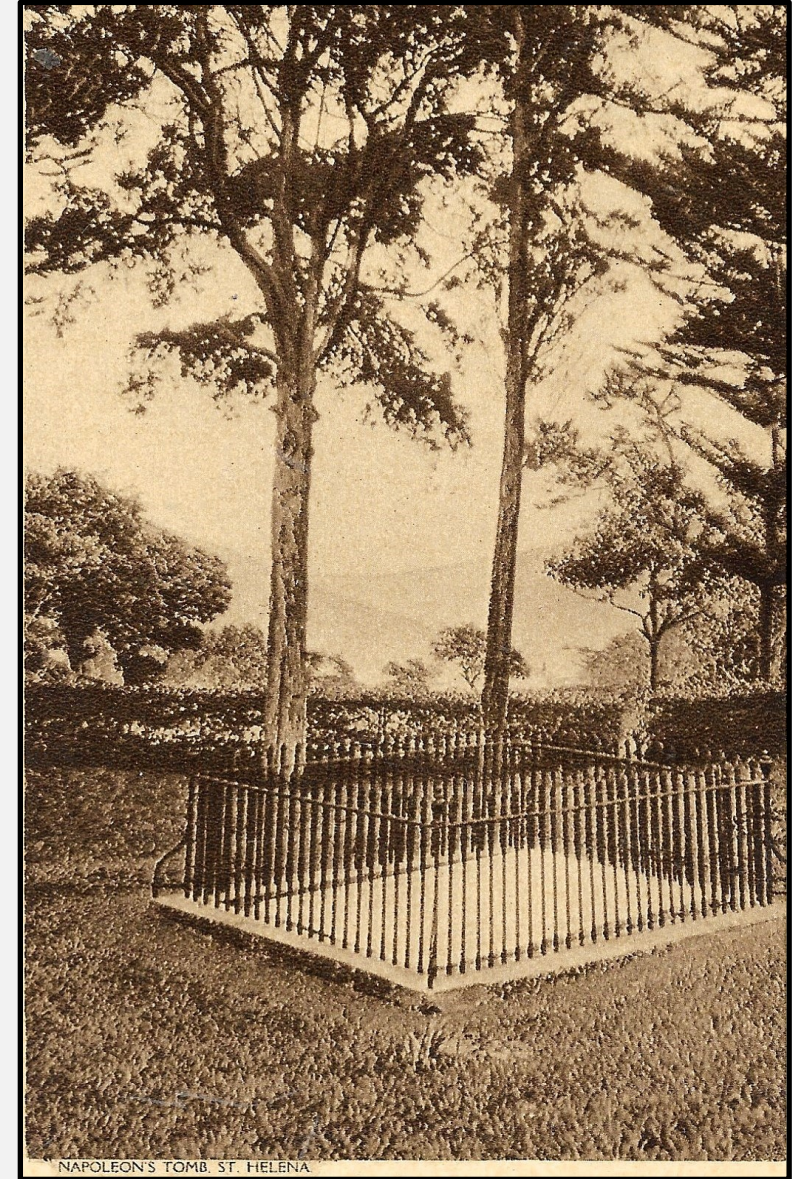
Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

He was transported back to Longwood House, which he did not leave again. Napoleon passed away on 5 May 1821 at the age of 51 years. He suffered from severe stomach pain in his final days, before dying of stomach cancer. He was laid to rest in the Valley of the Tomb on 9 May 1821 about 1.2 km southwest of Longwood Old House.



LONGWOOD OLD HOUSE, DEATH-PLACE OF NAPOLEON, ST. HELENA

Longwood old house - Napoleon's residence and place of death
Publisher unknown with DB in black. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print

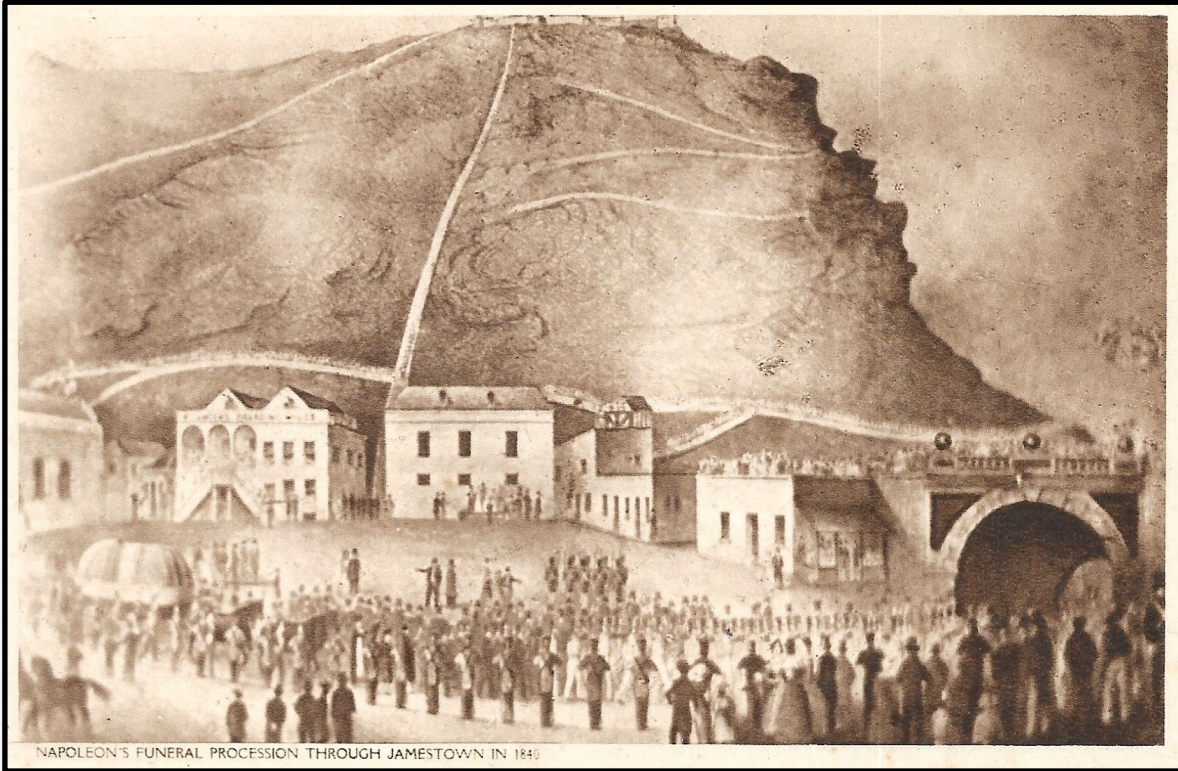


NAPOLEON'S TOMB, ST. HELENA

Napoleons original tomb on the island
*Pharmacy (T Jackson), St Helena, DB in black -
Collotype print*

RETURN TO FRANCE

Napoleon's remains were exhumed and transferred from St Helena on 15 October 1840, almost 19 years after his death.

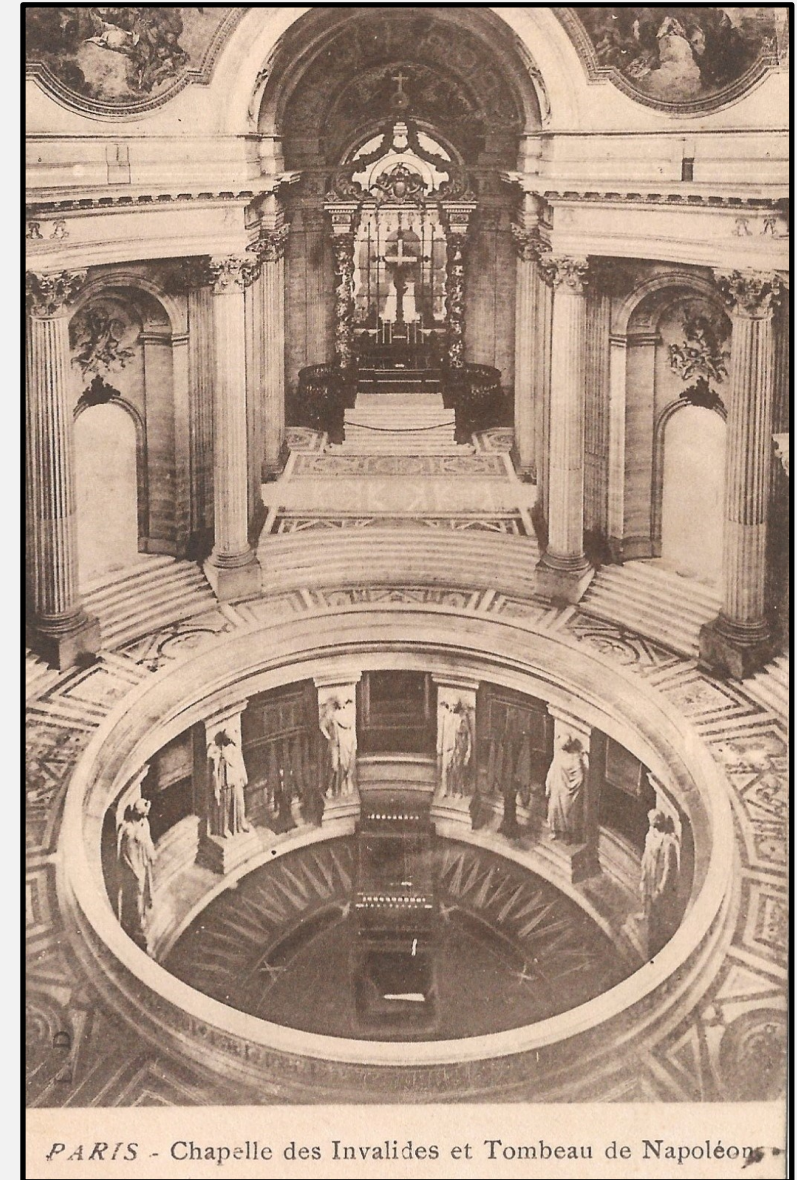


The funeral procession of Napoleon in 1840 through Jamestown was led by a horse-drawn hearse, its canopy draped in mourning cloth

Publisher unknown with UB in black - Sepia-toned offset lithography print

The coffin arrived in Paris on 15 December 1840, where it was reburied with full honors in the Chapel Les Invalides, where his tomb remains today.

The operation began at midnight on 14 October, coinciding with the anniversary of Napoleon's arrival on the island. His body was placed in a new lead coffin, enclosed in an ebony casket brought from France.



PARIS - Chapelle des Invalides et Tombeau de Napoléon
Chapelle des Invalides, focusing on the tomb of Napoleon Bonaparte
Publisher unknown with UB in black - Offset lithography print

CHIEF DINUZULU

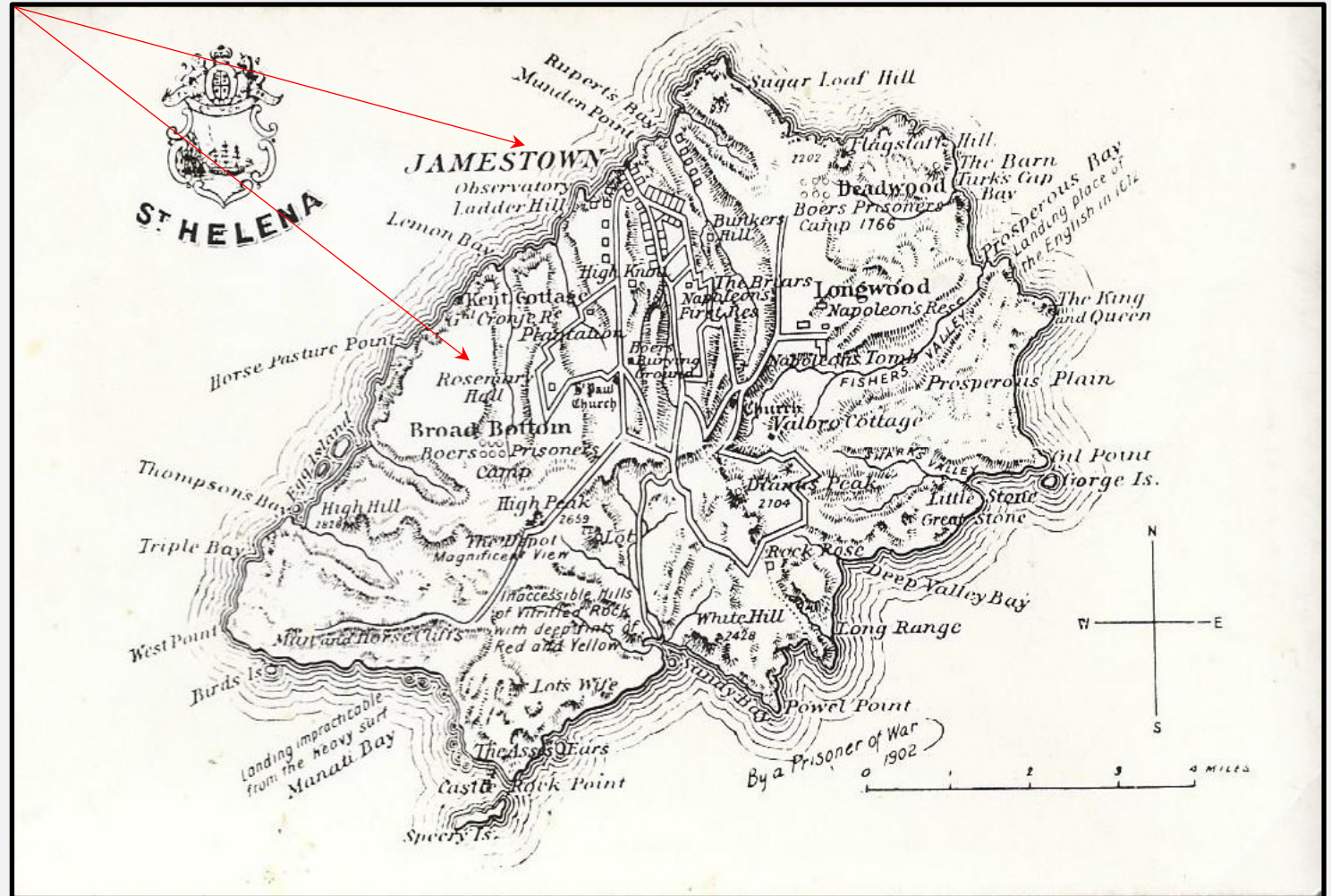
(In exile: 1890 - 1897)

This section covers two of the eight island districts: Jamestown and St Pauls.



ZULU CHIEF
DINUZULU

Chief Dinuzulu in his later years
*Publisher unknown with UB in black -
Lithographic print*



ARREST AND EXILE

In 1890 Chief Dinuzulu and twelve Zulu prisoners, of which two of his uncles, arrived at Jamestown, St Helena on 25th February 1890. They were exiled by the British Government to St Helena to prevent their focus of further unrest in Zululand.

After the annexation of Zululand in 1887, Dinuzulu was implicated in the Zulu rising against the British in 1888. He escaped arrest but eventually surrendered to British authorities.

By 1890 he was accused of inciting rebellion, resisting colonial rule and convicted of high treason. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and exiled.

On 25 February 1890 Dinuzulu and his entourage arrived in Jamestown and remained there until 1897.

They were accommodated at Rosemary Hall in St Pauls. In 1893 they were moved to Maldivia in upper Jamestown.

In 1895 Dinuzulu himself and his immediate family were moved to Francis Plain in St Pauls district (in what is now the Prince Andrew School Staff Room), leaving the rest at Maldivia.



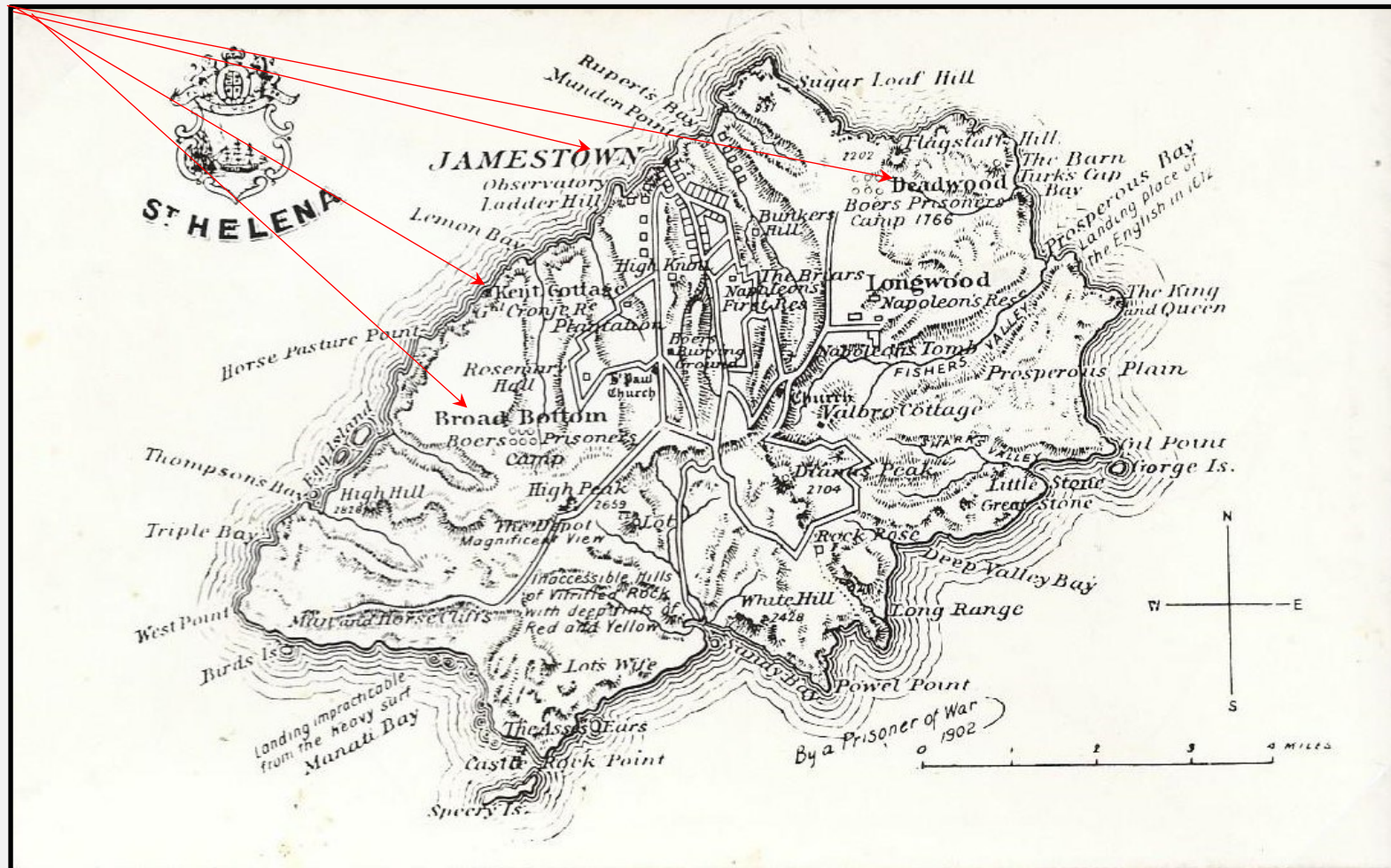
Landing of the Exiled Zulu Prince Dinuzulu - from the Illustrated London News, 26 April 1890

Twenty five Zulu Poll Tax Prisoners were also exiled here from 1907 to 1910.

ANGLO BOER WAR - POWs

(1900 - 1902)

This section plays off in four island districts: Jamestown (port of arrival), Half Tree Hollow (Gen. Cronje's residence), Blue Hills (Broad Bottom Concentration Camp) and Longwood (Deadwood Concentration Camp).

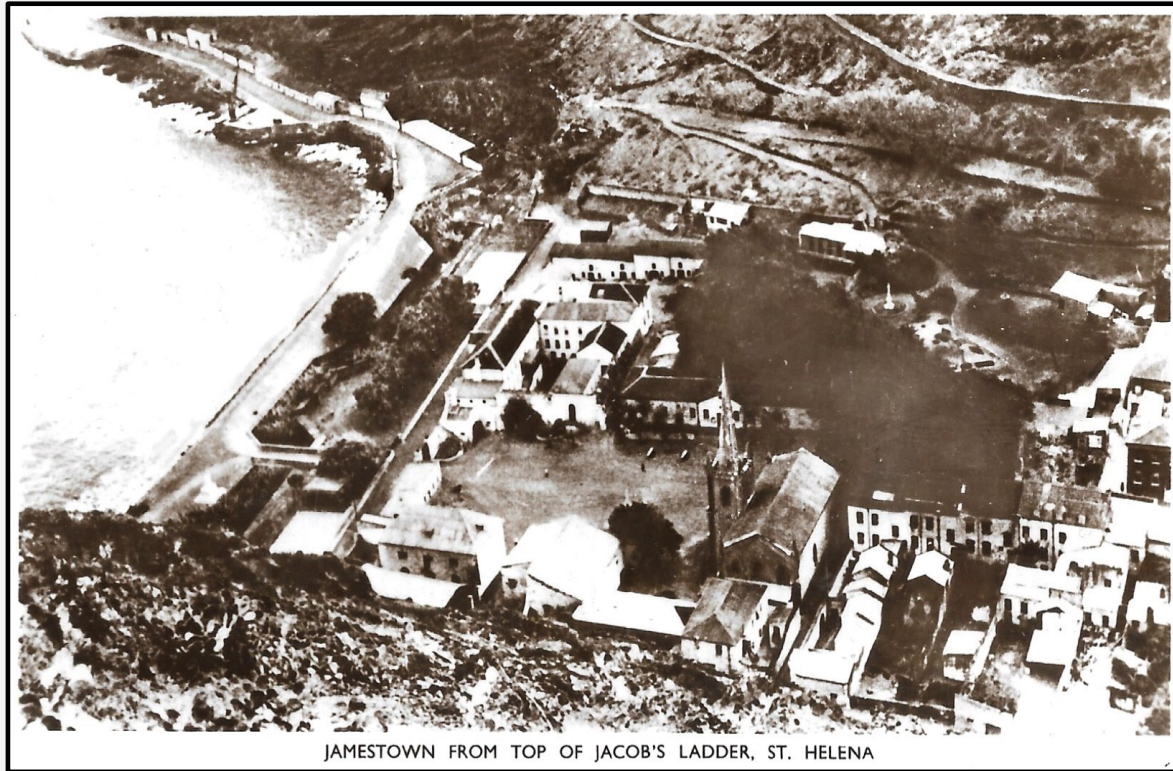


ARRIVAL

Between 1900 and 1902, St Helena - already etched into imperial memory as Napoleon's final prison - became home to over 5 000 Boer Prisoners of War (POW's), exiled by the British during the Second Anglo-Boer War.

These men, captured from the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, were transported across the ocean to prevent further resistance and to isolate them from sympathetic local populations.

The first group of 514 POW's, included Gen. Piet Joubert and his wife, arrived on 10 April 1900.



JAMESTOWN FROM TOP OF JACOB'S LADDER, ST. HELENA

Jamestown Harbor - Ships weigh anchor in the bay and small boats ferry passengers and goods from the ships to the wharf
Publisher unknown with DB in brown. RPPC printed in England - Silver gelatin print



PRISONNIERS BOERS ARRIVANT A L'ILE S^{te} HÉLÈNE
Gravure du Journal l'Illustration

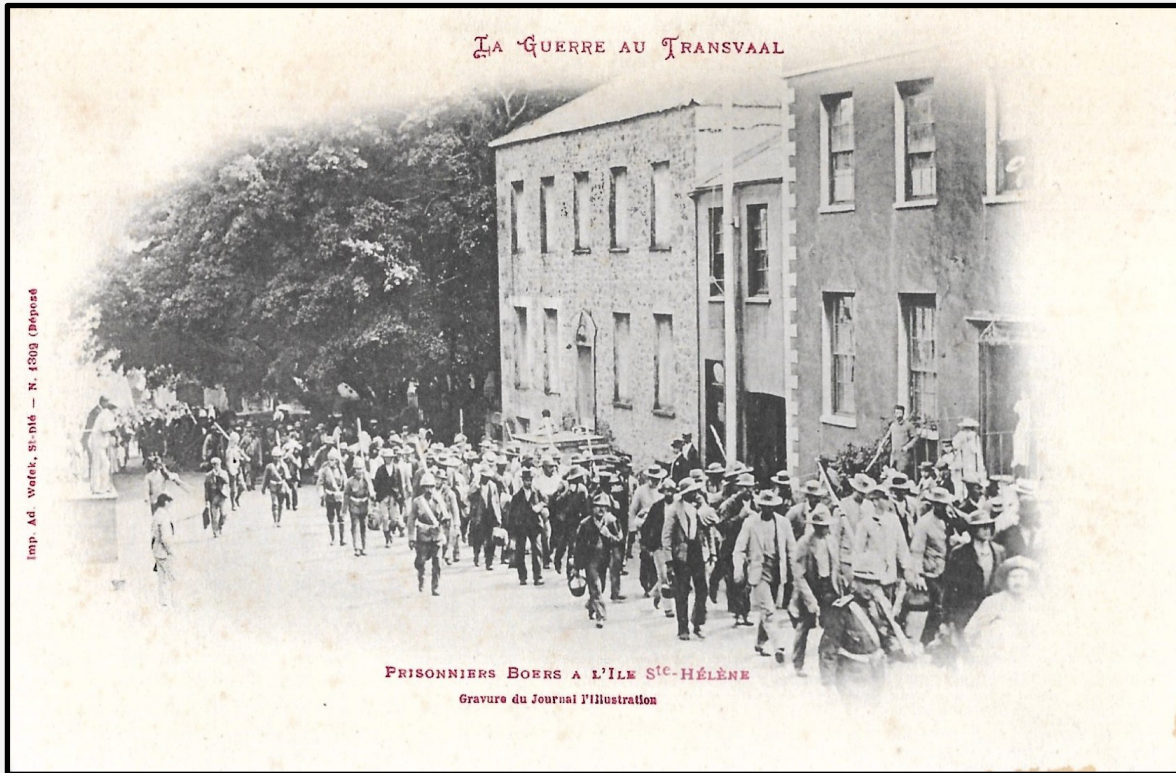
Boer prisoners arriving at St. Helena - the calm waters of the bay offer a sharp contrast to the turmoil that brought the POWs across the ocean

Imp. Ad. Weick. St-Dié - N1299 (Déposé), UB in black - Collotype print

LIFE AND TIMES

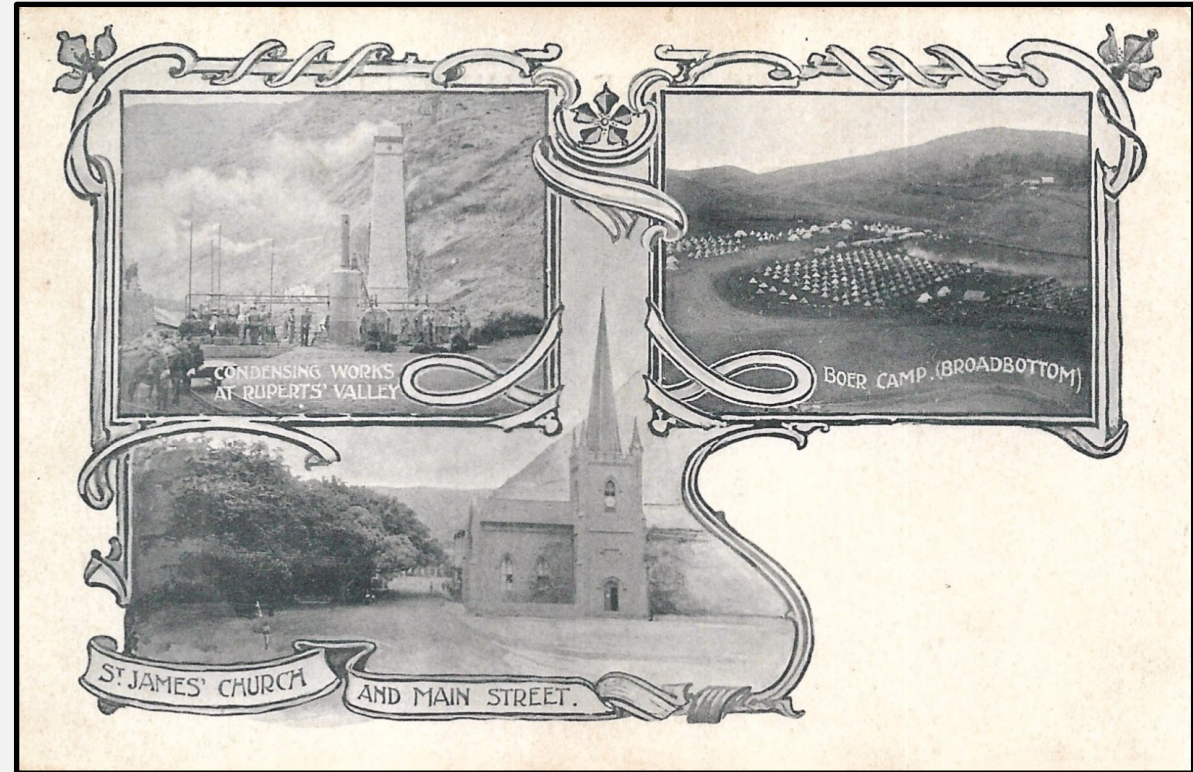
After arriving on the Island, POWs were housed in two main camps: Broadbottom (Blue Hill district) and Deadwood (Longwood district), each settled in the island's rugged terrain.

Two smaller camps, Lemon Valley and Rupert's Valley (both in Jamestown district), also exist and served as sites used more selectively, likely for overflow housing or logistical support.



Boer prisoners marching through Jamestown Main Street, flanked by guards and watched by onlookers

Imp. Ad. Weick. St-Dié - N1302 (Déposé), UB in black - Letterpress print

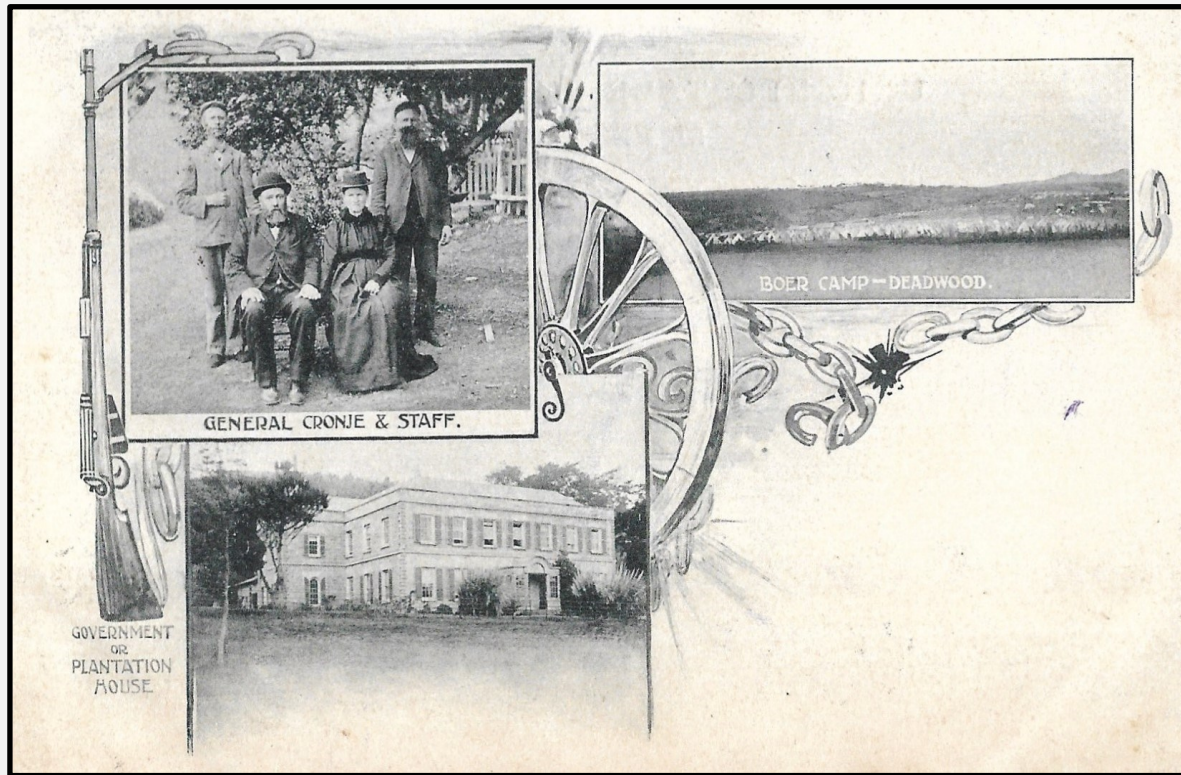


Three vignettes showing condensing Works at Rupert's Valley, Broadbottom POW camp and St James Church and Main Street

Publisher unknown with UB in black - Offset lithography print

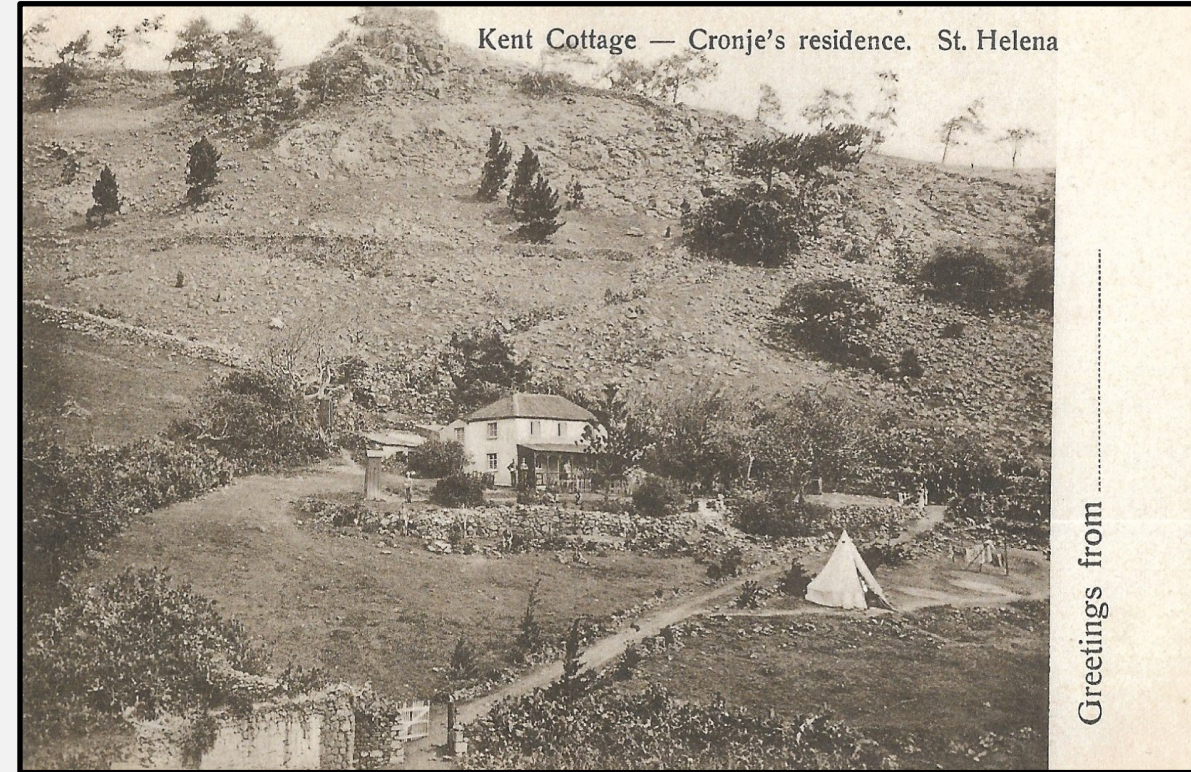
General Piet Cronje's wife, Hester Susanna Cronjé née Visser, accompanied him during the Anglo-Boer War. She was notably present at his surrender at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900.

After his surrender, Hester was taken prisoner alongside him, and both were sent as POWs to St Helena until the end of hostilities in 1902. They were housed in Kent Cottage, Half Tree Hollow district.



Three vignettes showing Gen Cronjé, his wife and members of his staff;
Deadwood POW camp and Plantation House

Publisher unknown with UB in black - Offset lithography print



Kent Cottage, the residence of General Piet Cronjé during his exile
on St. Helena

*Published by T Jackson (Pharmacy), St Helena, Copyright. UB in black -
Collotype print*

Hester became a symbol of Boer resilience - not just the men who fought, but the women who endured.

Conditions in the camps varied. Officers were often granted more comfortable quarters and freedom of movement. Rank-and-file prisoners endured basic rations, strict surveillance, and the psychological toll of separation from their families and homeland.

To pass time, POWs carved wooden objects, wrote letters, or posed for studio portraits - acts of self-representation that challenged the narrative of defeat.



Deadwood Camp, one of the main Boer POW sites on St Helena with rows of canvas tents stretch across a grassy plain, bordered by rugged hills
A. L. Innes, St Helena, number 19, with UB in green - Letterpress halftone print

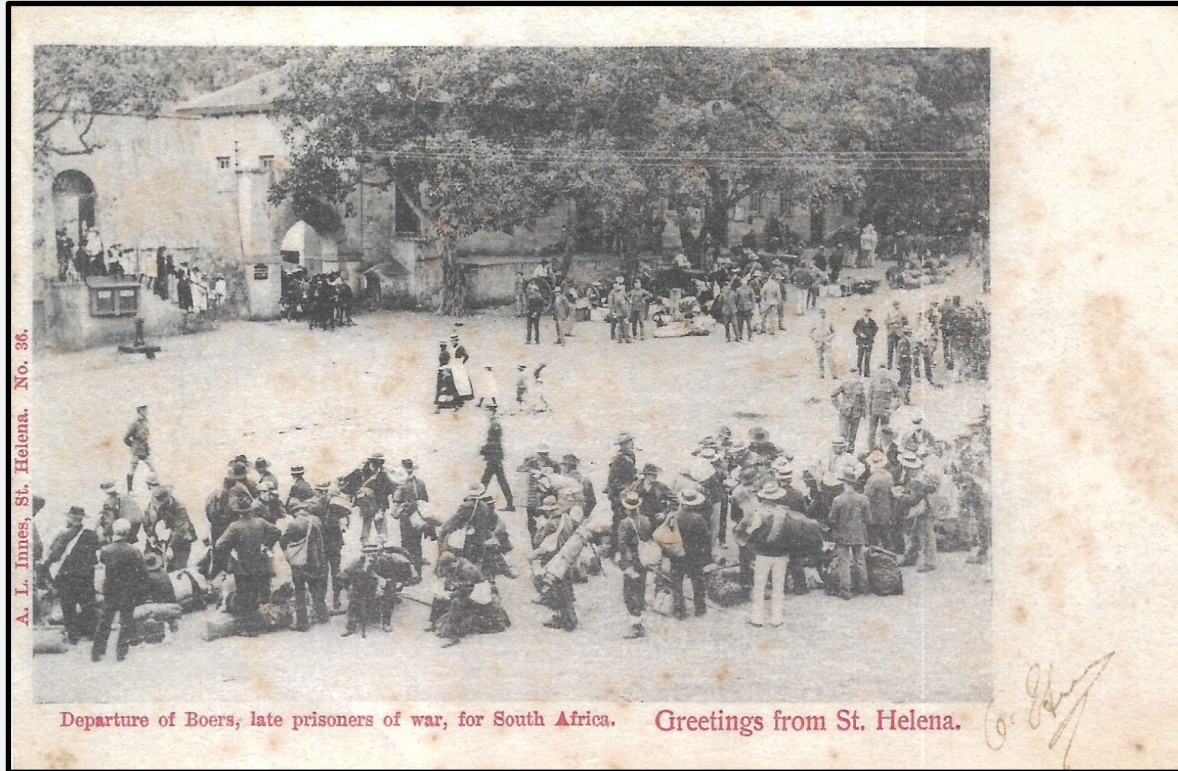


Translated, the caption read 'Boers at work". Two groups of three men kneel and (seemingly) work with tools, while others stand as overseers. It rather look as if they are busy with a competition of some kind
M. A. Frank, Rotterdam with UB in black - Collotype print

RETURN HOME

Many accounts speak of camaraderie, cultural pride, and efforts to maintain their traditions and dignity throughout their internment.

Following the Treaty of Vereeniging in May 1902, the POWs began their return to South Africa. Some with hope, others with uncertainty, leaving stories behind that still echo in local memory.



Departure of Boer prisoners following the end of the Anglo-Boer War. Their attire and belongings suggest readiness for repatriation
A. L. Innes, St Helena, number 36, with UB in black - Letterpress halftone print



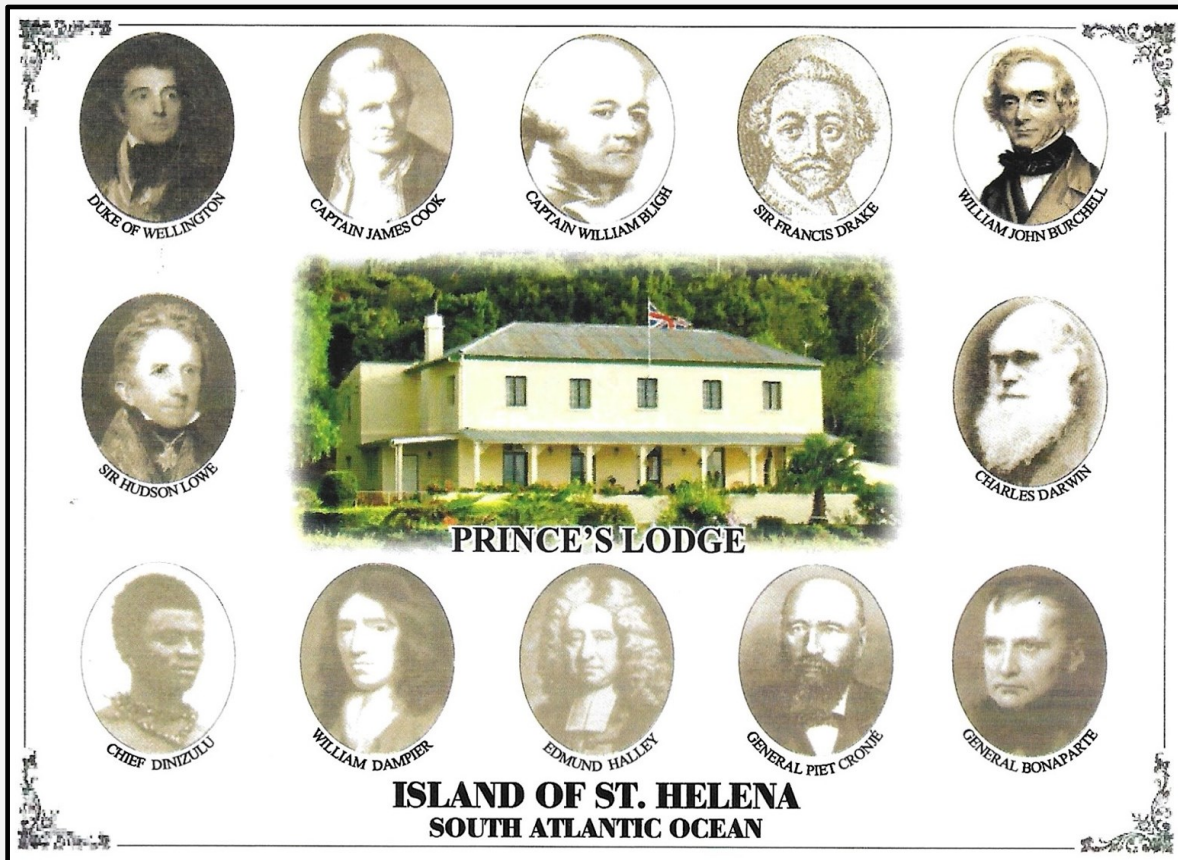
Boer prisoners boarding boats to return to South Africa after their internment on the island. Note the men in coats and hats, some carrying belongings, others standing in quiet anticipation
A. L. Innes, St Helena, number 34, with UB in black - Letterpress halftone print

Their exile had ended, but the war's legacy would shape South African identity for generations.

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

Prince's Lodge was built in 1808 and was originally known as Knoll Cottage because of its proximity to High Knoll Fort. It is nowadays classified as a museum and historical site.

It was owned by a succession of dignitaries until leased eventually to a Mr Richard Prince, from whom the name of the house originates. In 1999, Robin Castell, a St Helena historian acquired the home, naming it Prince's Lodge. The Lodge is home to the Castell Collection which claims to be is the world's largest collection of artworks, images and maps of St Helena.



← Encircling the lodge are twelve oval portraits of notable people who either visited, was exiled to, or had a historical connection with the island.

Duke of Wellington	Passed through en route to India; military icon
Captain James Cook	Charted South Atlantic waters
Captain William Bligh	Commander of HMS Bounty and related Bounty mutiny; naval legacy
Sir Francis Drake	Early maritime explorer
William John Burchell	Naturalist who documented the island flora/fauna
Sir Hudson Lowe	Governor during Napoleon's exile
Charles Darwin	Visited aboard HMS Beagle; ecological observations
Chief Dinizulu	Zulu exile
William Dampier	Part pirate, part scientist, and explorer; passed through island
Edmond Halley	Astronomer; conducted geomagnetic studies on the island
General Piet Cronjé	Boer POW held on the island
General Bonaparte	Napoleon 1 - St Helena's most famous exile

Thank you