

# The St Helena Connection



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## Buoys Marking the Proposed Landing Route of the Equiano Cable at Ruperts Valley

(photo Vince Thompson)

### In this issue

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 Editorial / Joining the Friends.</li> <li>3 Society News</li> <li>4 Member Response to SHC 30 (Tomb and Gov Murphy)</li> <li>5 Visit to St Helena by HMS Protector – Edward Baldwin</li> <li>6 Landing of the Equiano Cable – Edward Baldwin</li> <li>7 Equiano Cable (cont.)</li> <li>8 St Helena Revisited: Changes in a Decade - Urs Steiner</li> <li>9 Dutch Territorial Stone from Teutonic - R Moerenhout</li> <li>10 What Happened with Thornton: An Inside View - J.Coyle</li> <li>11 Coyle: Thornton - The Progressives</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12-13 Coyle Photo Coverage of the Thornton protests</li> <li>14 Thornton Affair - Voice of the Union ed by E.Benjamin</li> <li>15 Waterwitch Commemoration – Adam Sizeland</li> <li>16-17 The Endangered Archive Programme on St Helena by Andy Pearson</li> <li>18 Saving the Cloud Forest Project - SHG</li> <li>19-20 Asc &amp; St H Temp &amp; Precipitation Data Series - Jones, P &amp; Lister, D</li> <li>21 The Mitey Minors of St Helena - Richard Grainger</li> <li>22 Nothing Can Stop Us: Tristan's volcanic eruption by R. Grundy and N. Robson - new book publication</li> <li>23 Sidepath Upgrading by E. Baldwin. Ascension-new book publication</li> <li>24 FoSH Publications.</li> </ul> |
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**Next Meeting: Details will be announced after the January/February Committee Meeting**

## St Helena Revisited: What Has Changed in a Decade? by Urs Steiner



While in 2011 the monthly total of on-island non-St Helenian population varied around 100, the 2021 data show the monthly number usually being in the high 200s (which is a far cry away from the 400 to 600 often recorded during the airport construction period). The conclusion is of course that yes, Yes, there are more expats on the island.

While hiking in St. Paul's, I visited the Cathedral and the cemetery with its historic gravestones. I was surprised to find that the cemetery contained a considerable number of new graves and with so many decorated graves. I recalled the regular death announcements I had heard on Radio FM during the week. Has the death rate so dramatically increased since my last visit? After all, the average age of the population has increased by 2 ½ years within the last five years as mentioned in SHC 30. A look at the SHG statistics calmed me down. The number of yearly deaths on the island has been stable over the past decade, ranging usually

between 50 and 60 per annum. I conclude that my impression was misled by the fact, that I visited the cemetery shortly after All Saints Day, when many Saints obviously visited and decorated the graves of their loved ones.

Last, but not least, rabbits. Everywhere I hiked or when sitting on the veranda in Upper Jamestown looking into the nice garden of Maldivia, I noticed rabbits hopping and running around. I initially thought I should close this article by remarking that this subjective impression can't be backed by SHG statistics. But at the National Trust AGM the topic of rabbits was raised. It is estimated that 45,000 to 51,000 rabbits live on St. Helena. So it looks as if my impression was correct and that the rabbit population has been growing dramatically since my last visit. During the meeting it was asked whether rabbits could not be put on the menu as a local product as there are so many of them. It was confirmed that this could be a possibility. So on my next visit I will look at the menus of the restaurants and takeaways to see if I can find advertised, in addition to local fishcakes, local rabbit burgers.

Usually, the life of a community doesn't dramatically change over a decade. St. Helena, as in many aspects, is different in that aspect as well, considering the radical change in the way that the island can be reached with the opening of the airport in 2017. The last time I visited the island was shortly before the commencement of the airport's construction.

I decided to visit St. Helena again in October/November 2021 for a six-week period and try to find out what has changed over the last decade.

The method of arrival is of course the main change. From a tourist's point of view, on the RMS, one arrived as a friend on the island as so many contacts with Saints and other travellers could be established during the voyage. Nowadays you arrive still as a stranger, as the few hours on the plane do not provide the same opportunities to make lasting contacts. Of course, the benefits of the airport for both resident and non-resident Saints go way beyond the views of an arriving tourist.

Many Saints commented on the increased number of cars and the traffic in general. Lower Jamestown has become a kind of a car park with buildings around it, especially during shopping hours and weekend evenings. To obtain a more objective picture I consulted SHG's excellent statistics website. This shows a 28 percent increase in registered cars between 2011 and 2020 thus confirming the general feeling. What I particularly noticed was that much larger cars like SUVs and especially impressive looking pickup trucks which can barely manoeuvre around the hairpin curves, are much more common now than ten years ago. Another look at the vehicle statistics also confirms this general observation. Private cars have only increased by around 10 percent (roughly equal to the population increase between 2011 and 2020) but the category of *vans/pickups* rose by nearly 40 percent. Conclusion: yes, traffic has indeed increased.

Something else which caught my eye while strolling around Jamestown was that there seem to be more expats around than ten years ago. As memory over time can be misleading, I wanted to confirm my subjective impression by again turning to SHG's statistical data.

