

Royal Naval visits to Tristan da Cunha 1852–1904: an annotated list

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ABSTRACT. From 1852 to 1904 the captains of Royal Naval vessels visiting Tristan da Cunha were generally expected to prepare reports on their visits and these were published, usually in British Government papers. These reports constitute a most significant group of primary sources for the history of the island and they also provide information concerning the attitudes of the captains of the vessels to the islanders and their society. An annotated list of these visits is presented.

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Introduction

The most prolific sources of first hand information concerning Tristan da Cunha during the second half of the nineteenth century are the reports of the captains of Royal Naval vessels that were instructed to call there at periodic intervals, usually in order to ascertain the condition of the settlement and to maintain its communications with the outside world. Some were published privately but very many appeared in British Government papers, the famous blue books. They afford fascinating reading providing, in addition to statistics of population, and agriculture, impressions concerning the people and their state of welfare and, albeit unintentionally, considerable insight into the personalities of the officers doing the reporting. These were always the captain of the ship, sometimes in collaboration with the surgeon and, less frequently, with the chaplain if there was one on board.

During the period in question one of the main issues affecting the islanders was whether they should abandon the island to take up residence elsewhere, most probably in Cape Colony, and the Royal Navy took a prominent part in the consideration of this possibility. Another main activity of naval vessels visiting the island was the conveyance of stores being presented to the islanders frequently for their courage in rescuing shipwrecked mariners and for their unreserved and generous hospitality to such persons during the time, often several months, before a ship called upon which such involuntary guests could be taken away. During the period covered in this note an important matter for the islanders was the various introductions of alien animals, rats for example, that had deleterious effects on the indigenous wildlife and on the crops that were grown. These are occasionally mentioned in the reports.

But, surprisingly, even though the usual sources for the history of Tristan da Cunha mention many of the visits (for example Brander 1940; Headland 2009) no comprehensive and annotated list of them appears to exist and it is intended to fill this gap, and to present comments concerning the main points made by the various captains concerning the islanders and the recommendations that they felt constrained to make to their superiors.

The Royal Navy was, of course, heavily involved in the settlement by military personnel of the island in 1816 and of the evacuation of the garrison when it became clear, as it did fairly quickly, that the concept of Tristan being used as a base for an attempt to rescue Napoleon Bonaparte from St Helena was fanciful. It is well known that when the Royal Navy arrived there were two residents and that when the last elements of the garrison departed in 1817 they left behind three men plus a woman and two children. This group, headed by William Glass, formed the nucleus of the population of the island, which continues to the present day.

There appears to have been ten Royal Naval visits to Tristan before 1852 but relatively little is known of these visits because neither their captains, nor the government, published any records. For the sake of completion these appear to have been those of HMS *Woolwich*, Captain F. Beaufort, in 1806 and 1807; HMS *Niger* and *Laurel* in March 1814; HMS *Falmouth*, Captain R.W.G. Festing, in 1816 that landed the garrison; HMS *Conqueror* and HMS *Spey* in 1817, that removed part of the garrison; HMS *Julia*, Captain J. Jones, in October 1817, that was wrecked; and of HMS *Eurydice* in 1817 that removed the remainder of the garrison. There was also the visit of *Satellite*, a vessel possibly not British, on 21 June 1821. In later years there was the visit of HMS *Forrester* in 1834.

However with the 1850s the visits became more regular and captains' reports of varying lengths and usefulness are available for the historian. The following list sets out all the 35 visits from that of HMS *Herald* in 1852 until that of HMS *Odin* in 1904 after which naval vessels seldom visited Tristan. For each, the name of the captain follows that of the ship together with reference(s) to the visit and an abstract of the captain's report is

presented, where one exists. In a very few cases such as HMS *Sphinx* in 1860 and HMS *Gorgon* in 1861, beyond the fact of the visit itself nothing is known. The author's comments on specific or general points are in brackets.

List of visits

1852 *Herald* H.M. Denham (Denham 1853)

Approached island on 11 November 1852. Boat put off from southwest point (? northwest). From crew, two English, one Dutch, one American, learnt of the settlement of nine families 'which we had heard of' on NW point of island'. The 'fine healthy and robust' fellows made him feel that it was a British island, 'even the Dutchman had become English'. Sent civil messages to William Glass, and stood off for night. Next day northwest wind. Settlement was on a lee shore but stood in towards it. Described landing by boat through kelp belt. Stayed all day to learn as much as possible about people 'who as a nucleus of English blood, language, customs, and church, claim our sympathy and protection.' Population 85. Rev. W.F. Taylor (Taylor had originally gone to Tristan on board *Earl of Ripon* arriving on 9 February 1851 (Headland 2009: 178)) was prominent and noted 'the devotedness of that amiable man.' Visited cottages. Noted scanty furniture but 'abundance of English farm productions.' Ships were beginning to visit and advised that they should not anchor but should stand 'on and off.' Details of population. Very healthy, no diseases and no vice. Visited children. 18 years since last naval visit (HMS *Forrester* 1834). Children were very attentive and neat. Taylor asked for two barrels of gunpowder plus pickaxes in order to build a cottage to act as church and school. Granted with pleasure. Describes the physical features, plus climate and position. (Denham's report was very sympathetic and he found out a great deal of information in a short visit. His report is probably the warmest in tone of the whole corpus. The visit is commemorated in Herald Point, the prominent headland west of the settlement).

1852 *Torch* W. Chimmo (Brander 1940: 153; Headland 2009: 179)

Arrived 16 November 1852. *Torch* was a steam ship. Was 'tender' to *Herald*. Islanders went on board to wonder at the new means of propulsion.

1856 *Frolic* M.S. Nolloth (Nolloth 1856)

Arrived 18 March 1856. Taylor met the landing party. All the population were well. Nolloth explained object of visit. To enquire after welfare of inhabitants or 'take steps for the eventual removal' of such as might want to leave. People pleased. Bishop of Cape Town present. Nolloth explained prospects that would there await them.

Received information from Taylor. Population 71 (including Taylor). Departure January 1856 of Mrs Glass plus 13 children and grandchildren and son in law with family of 10, 25 in all. Islanders had 200 cattle, 300 sheep. Potato was only crop. Exchange with whalers would cease with failure of supply and their visits were

reducing in numbers. Potato disease would reduce to starvation. Wood was decreasing. Feels absence of all prospects for providing for children. If *Frolic* could have taken families some would have gone at once leaving property behind. More would quit if could take property. Salt would have to be brought for removal of stock. Gives a list of people who would go without property. The total was 42 and that would leave 28 on the island. But then the 28 would go because there would be insufficient people left to man boats etc. Taylor anxious to remove unmarried females. Men sometimes go but girls rarely. No promises made and no unreasonable expectations raised. Return on board on 22 March. *Frolic* had been 'on and off' without anchoring. Noted problems of landing. If vessel was sent to remove stock, weather might prevent it for days. Nolloth 'appointed' Alexander Cotton to take charge.

Nolloth included a long *post scriptum* 'a few particulars'. (Brander notes that the Governor of Cape Colony was urged to send another vessel with sufficient accommodation to remove that part of the population that wished to leave (Brander 1940: 166). This visit appears to have been the longest of the whole sequence. *Frolic* had been 'on and off' for four days. Nolloth's report constituted a comprehensive description of the island but he took a less favourable view of the population than did Denham.)

1857 *Geyser* E.R. Power (Brander 1940: 167)

Arrived ? March 1857. Removed 45 settlers to Cape 'to prevent overpopulation.' Left 4 families, 28 in all. Took off Taylor. (This visit was in fulfilment of Nolloth's undertaking. Nolloth's prediction that the island would be totally evacuated was not borne out.)

1857 *Cyclops* W.J.S. Pullen (Pullen 1862)

Arrived 26 December 1857. Boats came off. Communicated the purpose of visit (to convey thanks of British Government for help given to survivors of shipwrecked *Joseph Comes*). Islanders went to 'get oxen in' to be traded with vessel and to be ready on beach to receive stores that *Cyclops* had for them. Pullen landed. Informed 'John' Green (it was, of course, Peter Green) that stores were a present from the government as acknowledgement for service they had given to distressed British shipwrecked mariners. Islanders most valued a boat that had been presented. Not medicine as 'no one was ever sick.' 3 children baptised.

Population was 35, divided into six families. Lists them. All in good health. Satisfied with lot. Same clothing throughout year. Believes American whalers leave spirits.... 'an excited state from something stronger than water.' Soil good. Bullocks very good. Sheep fair. Potatoes suffering from 'black grub.' Water fine, firewood scarce. Pullen did not have a favourable opinion. The community was not as united as he had been led to expect. Whalers' visits injurious. Some were 'a little the worse for

liquor.' Few foods were taken from the island, as Pullen wanted to get away.

1858 Sidon ? Crawford (Brander 1940: 185)

Gave a Union Jack and authorised hoisting as signal to ships. Did so because the territory had always been English speaking and had sympathy for Great Britain. Flag lasted 10 years.

1860 Sphinx (Brander 1940: 185)

1861 Gorgon (Brander 1940: 185)

(Brander notes the difficult status of Tristan as demonstrated during the American Civil War when Peter Green was unable to demonstrate to American vessels that the island was British (see 1875 *Sappho*)).

1867 Galatea HRH Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh

(Brander 1940: 188–195; Milner 1869: 34–53)

Arrived 5 August 1867. Boat came off to the ship. Peter Green on board. Supplies were ordered by Prince Alfred. Party of officers went ashore. Visited all houses. Chaplain baptised 16 children born since 1857. Population 53. Party visited graveyard. Name of Edinburgh was adopted for the settlement. Many books etc were presented by chaplain. (This was the voyage that brought Tristan into public knowledge due to the publicity arising from it in Britain.)

1873 Challenger G.S. Nares (Brander 1940: 196–202; Moseley 1879)

Arrived 15 October 1873. Boat came off to the ship. Peter Green on board. Several parties landed and examined natural history of the area around the settlement. Population 80. 28 children had been born since visit of *Galatea*. Described houses and potato patches. Many cattle and sheep. Described system of society. Threatening weather caused departure for Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands. Took off Stoltenhoff brothers from Inaccessible, gave passage to the Cape. Named Middle and Stoltenhoff Islands.

1875 Sappho N.S.F. Digby (Parliamentary Papers 1876: 1)

Arrived ? January 1875. Digby was under orders to visit. Short account. Food available. 14 families, 85 people. Casual visits of ships. Want of flour. Visiting vessels reduced since American Civil War. American whalers before that. . . 'now but seldom seen.' Peter Green influential. He considered island under jurisdiction of Cape Town. Should be some recognised authority or regular visits by naval vessels. CSS *Shenandoah* dropped prisoners off there during the American Civil War, and locals were powerless to resist. Boats were 'rarely' prevented from communicating with ships due to 'stress of weather'. (This is the first report printed in the Parliamentary Papers and is the shortest in the series.)

1875 Diamond G.S. Bosanquet (Parliamentary Papers 1876: 5–10)

Arrived 12 October 1875. Bosanquet was under orders to visit. Had instructions (letter of 15 June 1875 from Colonial Office) to investigate questions of government (Tristan not being a part of Cape Colony), whether people want to leave, and where, and communications. (Colonial Office was grateful to Admiralty 'for the occasional visits' of naval vessels.)

Bosanquet reported that could not 'see any need for establishing rules for their future guidance'. Digby's report was accurate. Little to add. (But he actually sent 5 pages of report and this is one of the most detailed in the series. It includes a full census and demonstrates that Bosanquet was a sensitive observer of the community.) Only 15 mature males. Peter Green is 'referee'. He is European. About land 'any quantity' could be cultivated, but no market. This was previously American whalers who bought produce from the islanders. Kelp used for manure. Islanders go to Inaccessible Island for seals and elephant seals, and wild pigs. Believes island is overpopulated. People do not want more settlers, as they would increase pressure on land and sea. Necessities difficult to obtain because no visiting ships. If the islanders owned a small vessel this would not help because there was no safe anchorage. Refers to comment by the governor of Cape Colony concerning alleged inhospitality by islanders. Does not think that they deserve this. Have been hospitable to wrecked crews. Suspicion that some wrecks were deliberate. Could find food for schoolmaster. Clergyman (Taylor) resided in 1850–1856, when he left took more than half the inhabitants to Cape. Communication problem. Chaplain baptised 25 children and did one wedding. There was a great feast and he noted the 'excellence of the *cuisine*'. Clean, neat and good manners. Held meeting to confer about objects of visit. Concluded that there was no need for any rules of Government. But wanted some constitutional authority to prevent recurrence of *Shenandoah* incident. Lists needs of island: 1 minister 2 bibles etc 3 whaleboats 4 agricultural implements 5 clothing 6 signal staff plus flags 7 gun powder. If not possible from government then possible from charitable donations. Supplied stores. Green most fit to be magistrate.

Gives a list of vessels lost. Then gives suggestions for 'the establishment of some authority' on the island. Suggests naval officer in command of the Cape station should be governor. Submits a 20 point list of procedures for an appointed magistrate.

1876 Wolverine L. Brine (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 2–6)

Arrived 30 October 1876. Following instructions. Green came on board. No change since *Diamond* but for six births. No sickness. Ships had visited. Community 'thriving'. Brine landed. Described settlement. Good soil etc. Harmony, 'unwritten customs and rules', of interest. Details land tenure. Proceeds of sales to ships divided

equally. Each family takes turn in supplying ships. Private sales may take place to individuals. Disputes referred to Green but society was 'a simple republic'. Prosperity depends on visiting ships. Latterly 20 ships per year, mostly British. Problems about health of animals and of mice eating wheat. Shipwrecked crews billeted upon each house until vessel takes them away. Questionable if 'any change made by authority would benefit them'. Establishment of authority would meet with dissatisfaction. No one capable of being magistrate. Will be less European blood in future and regulations may be necessary. Supplied long list of stores, including spelling books. Asks sanction of Lords of Admiralty. Attached medical report.

Medical report. 91 people. Living in healthiest conditions. Boast no diseases, only cause of death is old age. Notes three 'distinct' races. Pastoral, good food. Notes mice. Houses clean: 'a sober and contented people'. no excess alcohol...but like an occasional 'treat'. 200 children have been born on the island. Only five died in infancy or in birth. Liable to epidemics from foreign visitors. Smallpox would be serious and as there had been no vaccination for 20 years, all 39 people who had not had it were vaccinated. Suggests that visiting HM ships should do it in future.

Chaplain baptised six, including two pairs of twins.

1878 *Emerald* W.H. Maxwell (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 8–9)

Arrived 16 October 1878. In compliance with orders. Weather was fine. Boarded by two boats. Brought livestock, vegetables. Went ashore with Peter Green, an 'Elder'. Seven children born since visit of *Wolverene* were baptised. Two deaths since then. Population was very healthy. Had been visited by USS *Essex* in connection with loss of American ship *Mabel Clark*. Great gallantry had been shown by the islanders in the rescue. Maxwell delivered packages and cats. But cats were not wanted. There were wild ones, which were shot for skins. The cats did not catch mice; they preferred birds. (This is the second shortest report published in the Parliamentary Papers.)

1880 *Comus* J.W. East (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 14–15)

Arrived 6 February 1880. Landed with chaplain, surgeon and other officers. Green welcomed them 'very cordially'. Meat plus vegetables sent to ship. Assembled people in Green's house, gave presents from President of the United States in recognition of 'services rendered' to the crew of *Mabel Clark*. Sincere thanks expressed. William Green (Peter Green's son) distinguished himself in the rescue. Suggests award of Albert Medal or equivalent from the Royal Humane Society. Islanders have rendered assistance to many vessels. Intended to visit Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands to ascertain if wrecked mariners were there. But people had been there a short time previously so this was unnecessary. Went to potato patches. 20 acres under cultivation. Have never changed seed. Are excellent. Chaplain baptised five children born

since the visit of *Emerald*. Suggests proper books for births, marriages, and deaths. Population 109 (highest ever). Island was in a 'flourishing state'. It could maintain 200. Only four deaths in 13 years. Peter Green is 72. One 'malformed' child. 500 cattle, 500 sheep. Pigs and fowls. Started to export cattle to St Helena. Rabbits and goats had disappeared. A 'contented and orderly life'. Green 'their chief' but he does not consider himself this. All share alike. Green's family is about half the population. No change in government recommended. Would like resident clergyman or teacher. Could provide house room plus food, but no salary. Supplied stores. Notes that grapes could be grown. No corn because of mice. The island is most easily visited from St Helena.

1880 *Miranda* E.S. Dawson (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 20–22)

Arrived 30 October 1880. Kelp not thick. Went ashore. To Green's house. Delivered registration books. Gave William Green medal from Shipwrecked Mariners Society. Two births and one death since *Comus*. Few cases of dyspepsia. Health excellent. Trying to continue trade with St Helena. Would be of vast benefit if could be continued but problem is absence of harbour. Whalers visit once per month. August and September birds eggs collected. Resources capable of development. Grazing grounds on the other side of the island are of the same extent as that of the settlement. Houses clean, but no flower beds. Wood problem...each year have to go higher up the mountain to secure it. 500 cattle. Would benefit from new blood, no imports for 50+ years. Highland cattle and deer plus pheasants might flourish. Population 103. Very skilful sailors. Visited the potato patches. Went aboard due to increase in surf. Gave stores and gave passage to Cape to a Swedish seaman, previously wrecked. Inaccessible not visited since last February. Had been by sealing schooner *Themis*, and had been reports of a shipwrecked crew. Examined it on 31 October. No signs but observed a small hut probably built by sealers.

1881 *Diamond* A.T. Dale (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 25)

Only extracts of report printed. Arrived 20 January 1881. Boat came off and packages delivered. Next morning landed and went through the settlement with Rev. E.H. Dodgson, chaplain of the island. 105 people; 'fairly prosperous'. Trade in provisions with whalers and merchant ships. Depend on them for flour, tea, sugar, clothing etc. Ship was supplied with beef plus vegetables. Ship supplied clothing etc. Also gave 90lbs of blasting powder for building church. Dodgson anxious to have it completed. Also nails for repairing whalers, plus three oars.

1883 *Sapphire* J.R.T. Fullerton (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 29–30)

Arrived 22 April 1883. Followed sailing orders. Boat came off. Delivered parcels etc. Walked through with

Dodgson, called on Peter Green. Population 93. (There is no note on the reason for the drop in population since *Diamond*.) Healthy and prosperous. Interiors 'untidy and dirty'... 'general appearance of neglect and indolence throughout the settlement'. Dodgson wants commercial signal set and signal books. No means of communicating with ships if sea too rough to launch a boat, which was often the case. Kelp disappeared. Notes difficulty of landing. Believes that landing place on chart is not the best. Islanders like it because can haul boats out of reach of surf. Sandy bay (?) to east is better. Supplied 30lbs of powder 'for the purpose of building another church'(?). Would take 20 or 30 years as labour was voluntary on two days a week. Blocks of stone weigh 'at least half a ton' bullock cart and no skill. (Whaler was offered by British government because of hospitality to crew of *Shakespeare* wrecked on Inaccessible Island. Fullerton's view was rather more negative than was that expressed by most of the captains.)

1884 Opal A.T. Brooke (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 31–33)

Arrived 27 December 1884. Full report: 'the island being so seldom visited' any information would be interesting. Boat came out. Ascertained from the people that there was no 'regularly deputed governor of the island.' Gave them lifeboat from Board of Trade (in recognition of rescue of *Shakespeare* on Inaccessible Island) and code of signals from Admiralty. Next day landed at Fullerton's recommended place 'accomplished it with only a slight wetting' (see *Sapphire* 1883). Visited Green and Dodgson and acquired information set out in report. Dodgson had been there for four years. Much good done by him. Attended service in cottage used as church. Well filled. But Dodgson was in ill health, anxious to leave, Brooke agreed to take him to Cape. Agreed to wait until 29 December so he could settle things. Population 54 males, 52 females. 15 cottages. Very clean and neat (compare Fullerton's comments in *Sapphire* 1883). People healthy and robust. Produce. Men good seamen. 20 miles out to sea to intercept ships. 20 vessels in the year. 30 acres in cultivation. Potatoes, rats from a wreck prevents grain crops. Notes it 'has been suggested to remove people to another settlement'. Many averse. 600 to 700 cattle, 500 to 600 sheep. Lists wants... flour etc (including rat poison). Supplied 520 lbs flour in exchange for potatoes. Green is 77. Looked up to. Wind to north and returned to ship (using the new lifeboat). Dangerous for sailing ships. Suggests meteorological instruments be supplied. Weather became calm again so Dodgson and baggage came on board. Proceeded. All liked the visit. Sums up in a sentence... 'community 'orderly and well conducted'.

Full lists of stores landed for community and Dodgson. (A letter from Green follows in the Parliamentary Papers. It is clear that Dodgson wanted to break up the settlement. It was possibly his idea to evacuate the people. Green's letter was written immediately after Dodgson had left.)

1886 Thalia D.H. Bosanquet (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 55–57)

5 August 1886. Landed Dodgson with provisions, clothing, stores and live animals plus other useful items in view of destitute condition, cost £20 16s 11 1/2d (list). (Dodgson had returned to Tristan with the aim of ascertaining the situation on the island.) Found condition 'by no means so bad as had been reported in England' 'but bad enough to give rise to uneasiness for their future.' Potatoes had not failed. 100 bushels sold to passing ships in 12 months. 4cwt to *Thalia*, plus have 600 bushels of seed potatoes. 19 families, 97 people. The islanders have milk cows plus bullocks and 500 other cattle. In 12 months there had been two whalers plus eight other vessels. Five births in 18 months. Only deaths were 15 men drowned in November 1885. Have two serviceable boats plus 11 men.

But for three months were 'destitute of flour, tea, coffee, rice, salt, tobacco and soap'. Only 100 lbs of biscuit. Whalers almost ceased coming. Rats are becoming very numerous. Danger to potatoes. People not anxious. Believe government 'is bound to support them'. They believed the island might become a convict settlement for Cape Colony.

Evident that people could not be evacuated 'absolutely penniless'. Suggests case for eventual removal be considered if potato crop fails. Terms of compensation. Free passage plus £5 per head 'would clear the island.' Separate terms for aged people. Cost to public funds would be outweighed by stopping sending provisions and stores if people not to starve. Islanders would make useful colonists for South Australia.

Suggestions on communication. Visiting ships need a light whaleboat. Stores in watertight casks. Local boats are too light for the surf in winter.

1886 Rapid A.J.W. Musgrave (Parliamentary Papers 1887: 58)

Arrived 18 August 1886. Very short report. On arrival Dodgson came on board. Surgeon went to vaccinate 28. Population 95. General health good. Dodgson said whole population wanted to be removed even at sacrifice of cattle. If could be given grant £5 'each for a start'. Supplied a few stores. Noted 'sandy bay' best landing for boats. Meteorological instruments were handed to Dodgson.

(Comments by Rear Admiral W. Hunt-Grubbe (Simon's Bay). Believes Dodgson imbued them with idea to go 'in a few days', if given £5. Cannot believe all would go. Problem would be the same and there was no problem about continuing annual visits. Should not receive things free as it leads to 'loss of self-respect'. Bosanquet described difficulty in getting them to land the stores sent. Are 'incomparably' better off than 'the poor in the west of Ireland'.)

1888 Acorn W.E.B. Atkinson (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 1–2)

Arrived 25 January 1888. Senior Lieutenant went ashore. On return ‘reported that some of the people required a passage to the Cape.’ Stood off for night. On 26 January the surgeon went ashore to vaccinate. Embarked a family of mother, three sons, four daughters and one grand daughter. Went to Inaccessible Island. On arrival fired gun. Saw wreckage of ‘*Blenheim Hall*’ wrecked in 1821 (actually *Blendon Hall*). Went to Nightingale Island. Fired guns. Abandoned hope of finding crew of *Earl of Jersey*. Went to Cape.

General Remarks. No poverty. Boats came off but would not take stores in payment for produce. Preferred money. Impression was that they intended leaving for America or Australia. Population 91. Inaccessible and Nightingale Island are mountainous. Wrecked persons could easily be seen because they would stick to the low coastal areas. (This seems to be the only case in which the captain of the vessel did not go ashore himself.)

1888 Curaçoa R.U. Stopford (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 28)

Arrived 11 December 1888. £45 of provisions and clothing taken by islanders. Fresh provisions exchanged. Dodgson assisted in barter. Had no tea, flour, sugar for months. 22 children vaccinated. Supplied free supplies to value £28 4s 8d. Medicine, a rifle plus 200 rounds to kill cattle. Jolly boat and fittings. (The report of this visit was not printed in the Parliamentary Papers but a summary was published in 1896).

1889 Curaçoa R.U. Stopford (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 3–4)

Arrived 12 December 1889. Weather fine. Kelp had increased ‘since last year when there was very little.’ Population 64. ‘Since my last visit’ two deaths and two births. Gave passage to Cape to 10 people plus Dodgson ‘acting under medical advice’.

Barter took place. Advised dressing beef on shore oneself. Last year it was unpalatable, and had been dressed by islanders. Also islanders will supply ‘oldest and toughest geese’. Advice to other captains to keep islanders out of ship until transfer effected. Will loiter about on board and ship will be delayed. Now Dodgson has gone there is no one to make a signal by mercantile code...but there is full equipment. Race deteriorating; lack of fresh blood. Mental qualities ‘at a very low ebb.’ Spirits and tobacco unknown.

In last year five ships, two were whalers. Trade is bad. Question of removal ‘or be allowed to die out.’ When two ships a month were calling ‘good and comfortable’ but now? Few old people would require annuities (if moved). Transported whaleboat from St Helena and it was ‘thankfully received’.

A further memo on how to barter with the islanders. (Stopford clearly had a low opinion of the islanders).

1890 Swallow R.J. Fortescue (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 5)

Arrived 31 January 1890. Weather good. Boat came out. Population 84 (Brander states 64 noting that Fortescue in the report states 84. Probably was 64 because could not have been an increase of 20 in less than a year (Brander 1940: 291)). People ‘all seemed healthy and contented.’ Surgeon vaccinated 13 people. Only four married couples. Brought away three men. Only enough men left to man one boat. Supplies of meat and vegetables bartered for provisions.

1890 Magicienne J.P. Pipon (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 6)

Arrived 16 December 1890. Population 63. Green old and deaf. Says people left for Cape because Dodgson had told them that they would get on well there. 500 cattle, 300 sheep. Want of soap, salt, flour, blankets, clothing but wants ‘cannot have been extreme, as they were disposed to drive hard bargains for everything.’ Get much from whalers. Would take money, not only barter. ‘very steady, industrious, slow, but by no means unsophisticated...’ Naval visits ‘as a right’ to be exploited. Health excellent. No spirits or tobacco.

1892 Raleigh A. Barrow (Parliamentary Papers 1897, 7–8)

Arrived 24 February 1892. Boat came to ship. Population 63. Peter Green was now 87. Gave passages to six women, three children and four men. Embarked next day. Beef etc bartered for sugar, flour etc. Gives remarks on safe bearings. Information supplied by Green. With 13 leaving on *Raleigh* remaining population was only 50. Only sufficient for one boat crew. No sickness. 500 cattle, 300 sheep. 15 houses, 40 acres cultivated. Fish but too lazy to catch. So much beef no necessity. Soon it will be necessary to take everyone from island.

1893 Racer S. Rolleston (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 8–9)

Arrived 19(?) March 1897. Population 52 (increased by two since previous visit). Occupation cultivation of gardens of potatoes, cabbages, onions and there are orchards on south of the island. Women knit etc. From October to February the island receives four or five whalers. Traffic for produce. American sealing schooner pays annual visit in November. Good health. Wealthy, as many sheep and cattle as can deal with. In dealings no disposition to drive hard bargains. Green flies ‘Union Jack’. Trading done by ‘Captain’ Hagan, an American who is the principal proprietor. Mrs Swain teaches children. Minister would be a great benefit. Mail received with indifference. Blankets and flour more in demand. Thriving and contented. No complaints or desire to leave. Want children to have better education. (Rolleston must have gone ashore. Much more hopeful than previous captain).

Short report from surgeon.

1894 Raleigh E.H. Gamble (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 16–17)

Arrived 24 April 1894. Population 61. Two men from *Italia* and one from *Allanshaw* had decided to remain. Married. Health excellent. 600 cattle, some wild. Supplied a rifle, on payment. Sheep, pigs and donkeys. Potatoes. Partial failure last year but large harvest this year. Rats and wild cats. Occasionally went to Inaccessible Island. List of ships seen in last nine months of 1893. List kept by mate of *Allanshaw*. Only two vessels had been communicated with. Secured boats from the two wrecks. Chaplain christened three children. Population now as many as island can support. Need cement and lime, plus furniture plus grindstones.

(Gives the articles presented in recognition of help given to *Allanshaw* survivors. In 1895 Admiralty became anxious about the cost of visits. Suggested mail etc could be taken from St Helena by whaling vessels. Colonial Office resisted the suggestion taking the view that the Royal Navy was much more reliable (Brander 1940: 301)).

1895 Widgeon G.M. Marston (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 21–24)

Arrived 13(?) April 1895. Population 63. Several recent births. Health good. Can pull 15 miles to trade with ships. Educated by Mrs Swain and Mr G.H. Cartwright, mate of *Allanshaw*, who had settled on island. Best person to approach. Natives ‘extremely reticent and rather unintelligent.’ Greatest want was a minister of religion. 450 cattle. 150 owned by absentees at the Cape had died from starvation. Other livestock plentiful. Potatoes are staple produce. Many exported on *Widgeon*. Kelp used for fertiliser. Fishing seldom, though fish plentiful. Albatross eggs for trade. Used to make clothing; now traded for with visiting ships. Trading system described. . . results common property. . . supplier recompensed in kind. Possible to accumulate wealth. Hagan owns ‘major portion of the cattle in the island.’ Would give cash but preferred to trade in kind. Men farm. When ship sighted ‘all work is deserted’. Distressed people looked after free. *Allanshaw* crew were looked after for months. Have testimonials. Green’s authority is ‘merely nominal.’ But no disturbances. People kindly but do not like outsiders coming to settle. Rats a pest. Go to other islands but never to Gough.

Wants were a chaplain and a strong whaleboat. People ‘prosperous, happy, and contented.’ Naval visits a matter of course. Mailboxes etc ‘were still lying on the beach when we re-embarked.’ Prevailing wind northwest. Whalers few. List kept by Cartwright of ships since 1 Jan 1895 attached. 25 in all during 1894. No fewer than three on 1 April 1895.

Medical Report. Inhabitants not of as good physique as expected considering healthiness of climate and surroundings. Saw several patients, detailed notes. Noted ‘consanguinity of parents’. Records births. Mrs Green is midwife. Statement of educational problem. Children

should be removed. If they were brought up out of the island they would receive impressions necessary to form ‘an intelligence’.

(This suggestion was followed up by the Colonial Office but to no avail. This is a very long and detailed report perhaps because Marston held the junior rank of Lieutenant and wished to impress his superiors.)

1896 Magpie H.V. Elliott (Parliamentary Papers 1897: 31)

Arrived 16 November 1896. Rough sea caused delay in departure until 18 November. Had ‘nothing of importance to communicate.’ Population 64. All well, no sickness, ‘proverbial good health.’ Cattle, sheep, poultry in abundance. Peter Green wanted conveyance of thanks to HM the Queen for the picture she had presented to the island.

Flour, chocolate etc most in request. . . but on a share basis between families of which there were 16. Do not care to take anything unless it is in a sufficient quantity to make such division between families worth while.

(This is the most cursory report. Elliott was Lieutenant and Commander.)

1898 Thrush J.W. Pochin (Parliamentary Papers 1903: 1)

Arrived 3 November 1898, departed 5 November. Poor weather. November was not a good month for visits. 35 males, 37 females including 22 children under 14. Health excellent. Peter Green now 91. 800 cattle, 600 sheep 60 donkeys. Brought shipwrecked crew of *Glen Huntly*, 11 in all. Abandoned off island on 4 June having a leak. Took two single men, a married man wife and five children. Have one good whaleboat, canvas boats and the whaler ‘supplied by the Admiralty.’ Part payment for it was in produce; 17 sheep and 156 lbs of potatoes.

(The whaler was supplied by government in 1897 and delivered by another ship but obviously not paid for on delivery. See *Beagle* 1901. Pochin was Lieutenant and Commander).

1901 Beagle H.V. Elliott (Parliamentary Papers 1903: 8–10)

Arrived 19 November 1901. Closed shore and communicated with inhabitants. Sent stores ashore. 21 November was fine. . . took mail, plus food for ship. Sets out information on island. Population 74, 18 families. Two deaths and eight births in the last three years. Deaths were from violent causes. 500 cattle, 600 sheep, 50 pigs. Potatoes, apples and peaches. Juniper wood. More ships of late. Communicated with eight in last year. Have five boats. . . whaler supplied by government in 1897 plus four canvas boats. Mrs Swain teaches. Peter Green is now 94 ‘an imbecile’. Landed on date of arrival. People welcoming. Balance of £12 13s 6d remaining from the debt of £45 for the whaler was paid off in mutton plus potatoes for ship.

Need a telescope plus the new International Code of Signals. (A much more detailed report by Elliott compared with that in 1896. He was now a Commander.)

1903 Thrush H.L. Watts-Jones (Parliamentary Papers 1903: 12–21)

Arrived 28 January 1903. Went to the late Peter Green's house. Few older women and some of men were present but most of the men were landing stores. Explained object of visit (to report on possible removal of the population). Heads of families came and stayed to midnight giving information about themselves and the island. Took it down. Next morning saw two more heads of families. Surgeon Lobb attended many of the people. Assembled at Green's house and Watts-Jones baptised 18 children. He had a general commission from the Bishop of St Helena. Returned on board at noon on 29 January. Had collected information and asked numbered questions. Considered he had acquired a better 'insight into the inner life of the people' than previous visitors.

General Information. Population 76. 17 households. Common property is divided by household. Oldest man 46 but there were women over 55. All had been born there except four. Two Italians, one St Helenian and one from Cape but of island parents. Five men given passage out. No deaths since Green, no marriages. Six births since *Beagle*. Description of racial trends. Men were not of 'fine physique.' Women were better. More intelligent. Children fine 'surprisingly well clad.' No mental or physical deterioration due to system of marriage. Healthy but there was asthma. Epidemic colds do not occur now. Description of a few defects.

No form of government. Averse to the idea of anyone having more influence than the rest. Never has been a crime. Registers of births, marriages and deaths kept. People were anxious about education. Would welcome a clergyman. Watts-Jones believed that views on education were influencing opinion on leaving the island. Potatoes, beef, mutton, poultry were in plenty. But for everything else community depended on ships. But no ship in recent years was 'prepared to trade'. Rats were the big 'curse'. Described the stock situation. Plentiful fish. Pasture good. Occupations of men. Try to board ships with produce etc. Sometimes necessitating a pull of 30 miles. In January five vessels boarded.

Watts-Jones was unable to understand the bargaining system. Wood available. Attempt to work guano on Nightingale.

Now had six boats. A naval visit was 'the event of the year'. The people were disturbed at being told that they 'must not reckon on the visits continuing indefinitely in the future.' 'Contrary to a previous report' (Marston 1895) people do care about mail. *Thrush* took 33 cases to island, 45 packages taken back. The packages reported as left on the beach (by Marston) were tracts.

Shipping for cattle is best in February. Schooners used to come for them from St Helena. Was a regular cattle trade. But 'rascality' of captains brought it to an end. If could be revived it would be possible to discontinue naval visits. It was going to be tried. Wool can be produced plus salt fish (if salt available) plus donkeys. Guano on Nightingale Island. Intermediate station for telegraphs

and 'assistance given to shipwrecked people' are the only reasons for occupying the island.

Removal to the Cape. Heads of families stated views on being told that naval visits could not be reckoned on indefinitely. Mrs Hagan entreated him for passage. This was refused and she asked him to ask the Admiral (at the Cape). Seven unmarried men and one girl said that they would like to leave. Five of the men went on *Thrush*. Heads of families said they would go if they received compensation for cattle. Lists of personnel presented with views. A similar request was made when Dodgson was there but there was no answer. Not much in earnest. No wish to go to St Helena. Will be unsettled until they hear whether steps are to be undertaken. Views would be modified if a clergyman was coming to teach children. Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was searching but would desist from their efforts if they knew removal contemplated. List of names of the population and numbers of cattle.

Rough estimate of the trade done in one year. Allowing 10 merchant ships a year plus one naval vessel, trade amounts to £177.

Medical report. List medical items supplied. List of other items supplied. List of societies and persons interested in the islands is presented. List of usual requirements, flour, tea, coffee etc.

(This is the longest naval report and covers no fewer than nine pages. The commander in chief commented on Watts-Jones' and Lobb's 'useful and interesting Report.' Watts-Jones had taken 'much pains to acquaint himself with the circumstances.' 'Possibility of removal having been presented to the islanders...')

1904 Odin H.L.D. Pearce (Parliamentary Papers 1906: 4–10)

Arrived 23 January 1904. Landed stores and Mr Hammond Tooke, the commissioner whose task it was to ascertain views of the population concerning possible removal. Pearce landed and indicated that he wanted to see heads of families next day. Did so. Tooke made the offer. If all wanted to go, the Cape and British governments would give free passage. Would purchase livestock, and settle the populations within 100 miles of Cape Town. Each family would receive two acres on rent plus advance of money to start. Near coast where there were fisheries. Pearce said that henceforth the island could not rely on yearly naval visit. Gave them 24 hours to consider. Next day... three families wished to go, seven wished to stay, and one was neutral. As it was not unanimous Tooke withdrew the offer. *Odin* took six people to Cape.

Pearce reported that there were 400 cattle. Most belong to people who have left the island. Described people. Hardy, cheerful, good natured. Abstemious, expert boatmen. Go far out to sea to meet ships. Flour is chief want. Potatoes. No degeneration. Good at bargaining. Issued some stores. Exchange for meat, vegetables. Left on 26 January to Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands where he noted there was valuable guano.

Possible improvement on the present condition of the inhabitants. Try to induce ships to call. Following industries could be established. Guano, whaling and fish curing. Capital needed. Bring to notice of colonial government 'with a view of the annexation of the island.'

Medical report. Vaccinated 20 children. People very healthy. Slight cases of dyspepsia, asthma. Population 77. Great powers of endurance. Abstemious. Would like a clergyman. Supplied medical stores.

Hammond Tooke's report. (Tooke prepared the most detailed historical report on the islands and their people to date. 43 pages in all.)

Conclusion

The information presented by the captains of visiting naval vessels constituted the main basis upon which decisions concerning the island's future as a British territory were made. There was, of course, parallel correspondence from the islanders themselves, most notably during this period that from Peter Green, correspondence from the various clergymen resident on the island at different times, and that from a few merchant captains. But there is no doubt that the Colonial Office, the government of Cape Colony and especially, and naturally, the Admiralty were much more inclined to place credence on the views of naval officers than they were upon those of civilians. And yet it is obvious that the degree of objectivity exercised by the captains varied greatly. There were some for whom it seems clear that the visit, a result of a direct order, was simply a disturbance in the daily nautical round. Their reports are cursory at best and they are the ones that are most likely to be critical of the islanders and of their ways of conducting business.

Others appear to have approached the task with some enthusiasm and to have acquired an astonishing amount of factual information in a very short time, especially in view of the fact that rather few of the visits lasted longer than one day. The reports of these officers appear to have been written by cultured, sympathetic, and above all, interested individuals who appear to have relished the possibility of visiting a very little known community, and of being able to exercise some good while they were there.

But for the historian these reports constitute primary sources of the greatest value. Indeed they are uniquely

informative with regard to the island's society in the second half of the nineteenth century and they should not be ignored by any writer on the history of Tristan da Cunha.

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