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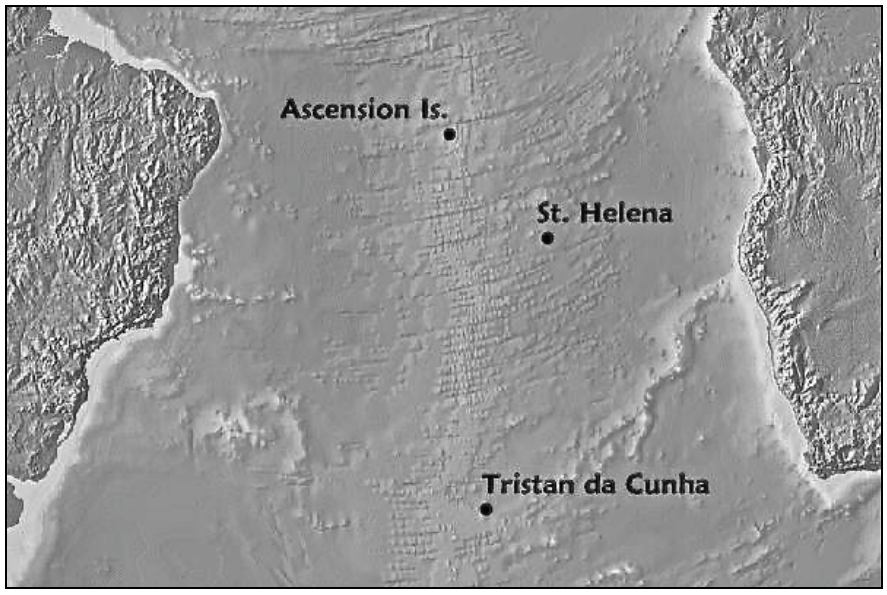
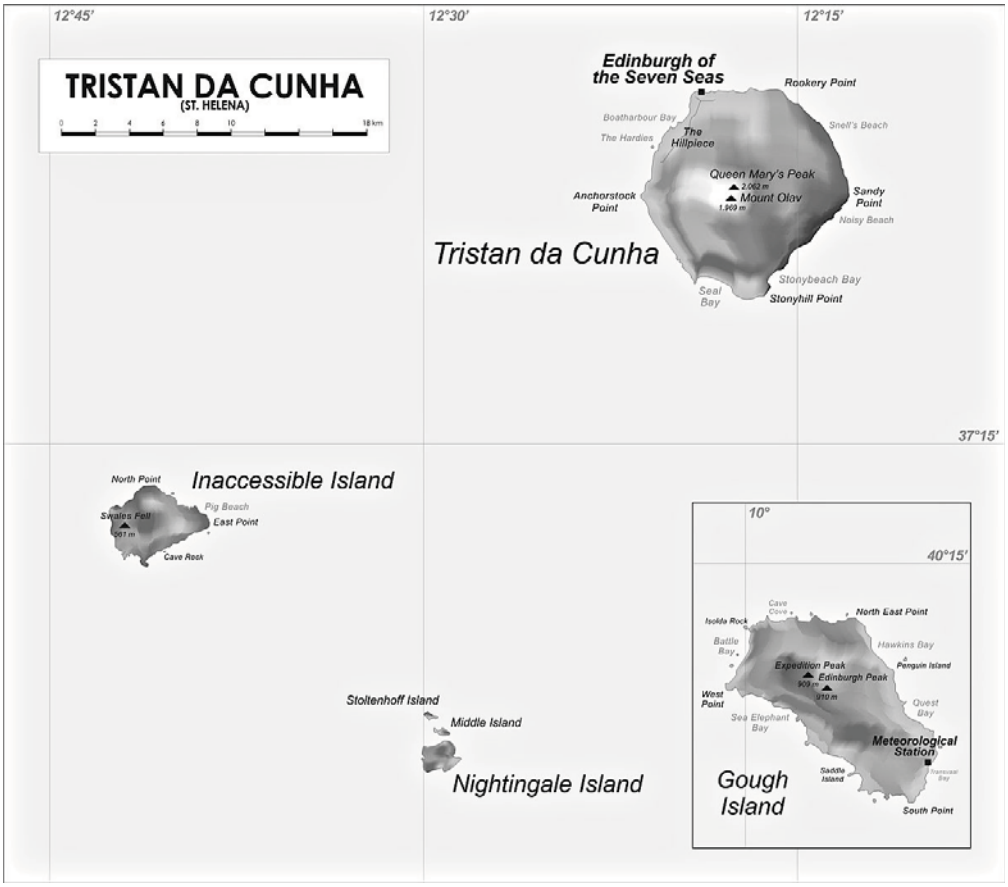
Prologue

1.1 Getting there

According to the 1998 edition of the *Guinness Book of Records*, Tristan da Cunha, situated in the mid-central South Atlantic Ocean, is "the remotest inhabited island in the world". Situated approximately half way between Cape Town, South Africa and Buenos Aires, Argentina, the village in which the currently 264 islanders live (who call themselves 'Tristanians') is exactly 2,334 kilometres (or 1,450 land miles) distant from the next nearest permanently inhabited settlement: Sandy Bay on St Helena.

St Helena, the former exile of Napoleon Bonaparte, is another island in the South Atlantic Ocean, further north and closer to the equator. The remoteness of the Tristan da Cunha community is truly unparalleled, particularly when put in context and illustrated with reference to well-known urban areas. For instance, the distance between Tristan da Cunha and St Helena is approximately the same as that from Chicago to Miami in the United States, or from Frankfurt to Istanbul in Europe.





Getting to the world's loneliest island requires time, meticulous planning or luck, and occasionally good nerves, making Tristan one of the most difficult places to get to on our planet. First of all, there is no regular direct ship or flight connection between St Helena and Tristan da Cunha so all visitors to Tristan have to fly to Cape Town, South Africa, or Ushuaya, Argentina, and catch a ship from there. South Africa is more convenient since most ships operate out of Cape Town. This lengthens the voyage considerably: Table Bay is about 2,800 kilometres (1,750 land miles) away, which is the equivalent of the distance between New York City and Denver, Colorado, or between Dublin and Moscow. To complicate travel plans still further, it is practically impossible to travel from South Africa to Tristan da Cunha on the date of choice. Visitors need patience and good timing; it still is the case that no more than 12 or 15 ships make this journey each year. A South African company sends out a ship at irregular intervals, the *Edinburgh*, to fish at Gough, Inaccessible and Nightingale islands, and a few cruise liners and the *Agulhas*, an annual supply ship, schedule trips to Tristan as well. The best bet for visitors is the *Agulhas*, since it guarantees more or less fixed dates of departure from Cape Town and allows a stay of about three

weeks on the island. It provides the crucial annual relief and supply to three remote stations Marion Island, Gough Island and SANAE (South African research base) in Antarctica. As this book goes to press, a contract has been given to a Norwegian company to build a replacement ship for the *Agulhas* that will enter service in 2012. The new ship is a 143 metre-long 120000gt icebreaker with on-board facilities that include a gym, library, small hospital and hanger space for two Puma utility helicopters. It will accommodate 44 crew and some 100 passengers and has some 800m^2 of space for laboratories and on-deck research areas.

The *Agulhas* in Cape Town harbour

The *Edinburgh*

The final complication is that travelling from Cape Town to Tristan da Cunha can take up to two weeks, depending on weather conditions that, in this part of the world, are unpredictable and ever-changing. Visitors may be lucky and travel there in six days, even in winter (i.e. between June and August, Tristan being in the southern hemisphere) but it is not uncommon at all for ships to take ten days or more since they are hit by a storm and cannot make progress, travelling at a maximum speed of a few knots.

Travelling to the world's loneliest island is nevertheless an experience unlike any other. Visitors spend day upon day on the open sea, gazing at nothing than the deep blue of the water and the sky above. Along the South African coast, lots of seabirds circle around the ship but with every passing hour their numbers decrease and there are hardly any birds after about two to three days. Occasionally dolphins, whales or sunbathing sharks can be seen, but there is also debris or garbage from ships. (It can be quite depressing to see how much of western civilization's rubbish floats in the middle of a major world ocean). The sight of gliding albatrosses is particularly impressive; the effortlessness with which they move through the air is of unparalleled elegance and truly inspiring. Apart from these welcome distractions, however, the monotony of sea and sky prevails, a welcome relief for many from their hectic everyday lives, and perhaps this is one of the most intense experiences of the largeness of the world's oceans one can find.

Then, gradually, birds appear seemingly out of nowhere and circle around in ever-increasing numbers, indicating that land must be near; quite abruptly, a dark mountain emerges steeply from the depths of the sea. Visitors are simply overwhelmed by the impressions of the gigantic black cone in the sea, which contrasts sharply with the monotony one has quickly become used to. On a clear day the 'mountain in the sea', as some have described it, can be seen on the horizon from a distance of about 100 kilometres. Black cliffs dominate the beach line and from afar it looks virtually inaccessible, giving the island the same look it had more than five hundred years ago, when the Portuguese discovered it.

A first view of Tristan da Cunha from the sea

People travelling to Tristan for the first time initially have some difficulty in accepting the idea that the island they see in the distance can be inhabited; they simply cannot imagine where a village might be situated. The steep cliffs, surrounding the island on all sides, give the impression that landing is impossible, let alone permanent living. However, as the ship gets closer to the island's northern shore, a small plateau becomes visible and a number of houses can be discerned. This plateau is the only place on Tristan where living is possible at all, though there have been ill-fated attempts to establish settlements elsewhere.

An aerial view of the Settlement

The final adventure is getting ashore. Tristan used to have a landing beach, but this was covered by a lava flow when a volcano erupted and the entire community had to be evacuated in 1961. Upon the return two years later, a little harbour was built, guarded with concrete blocks called *dolosses* to provide protection against the incoming tide. This serves its purpose for fishing (though this is hazardous as well) but the little inlet and the lack of depth (the shallowest part of the harbour area is merely 40 centimetres deep) make the new harbour unsuitable for the off-loading of freight and passengers. The *Agulhas* carries a helicopter to fly people ashore, but it only visits the island once a year.

For all other visiting ships, there is a 'taxi service', i.e., barges that transport people and cargo from the ships to the island. Visitors have to descend from their ships on long rope ladders, assisted by men on the barge, and are then transported to the island. Loading is dependent on weather conditions. If wind or weather prevents the off-loading, the ship has to wait in the lee of the island until the weather conditions improve. More than once has it happened that ships were forced to

return to South Africa with their cargo after a week of bad weather made it impossible to bring the supplies ashore.

The isolation and difficult accessibility of the island, as well as the lack of regular transport to it, mean that not many people from the outside world have visited or stayed on Tristan. Tourism is scarce and visitors come to the island only a few times a year, mostly on big cruise ships. They usually stay for a day, wandering around the Settlement or daring to take a hike on the mountain, and then return to the ship at dusk. Even though they are not used to receiving visitors from abroad, the islanders treat tourists with respect and friendliness. They guide them around the island, showing them the most spectacular views as well as the unique endemic wildlife on the island. Tristanians look forward to chatting with people from other parts of the world, but such visits can also have uncomfortable side effects. The arrival of ships is sometimes accompanied by epidemics, since the local community is not immune against diseases they may inadvertently bring. In 2000, for instance, tourists brought whooping cough to the island and this troubled some Tristanians for more than four months. In 2010 a common cold, introduced by passengers on the *Agulhas*, affected more than a third of the population. Older members of the community are particularly afraid of epidemics and are reluctant to leave their houses until the tourists have left and the ship has lifted anchor.

Only few outside people are privileged to live on Tristan for longer periods of time. They usually have an official mandate, mostly in political administration, education, medical care or economic development. The United Nations, for instance, has a facility for observing earthquakes on the island. Others, such as artists, adventurers, and scientists, are fascinated by the locality and come to live on the 'world's loneliest island' for a while, simply for the experience or to study its flora and fauna, the local variety of English, etc. Tristanians have a special name for the people who come from the outside world to share their lives with them: "station fellas". For most of them, staying on Tristan is an unforgettable and once-in-a-lifetime event. Outsiders are particularly impressed by the rugged beauty of the island and its surroundings as well as by the generosity and friendliness of the community. Visitors come to recognize that geographical isolation has nothing to do with loneliness. Even though a lack of contact with other people has at all times influenced the social history and the life of the islanders, the Tristanians are far from backward and self-centred loners (as some short-term visitors or journalists have wrongly assumed). After a short period of shyness, the Tristanians are keen to share their world with visitors and happy to introduce outsiders to their unique culture and lifestyle. Most "station fellas" have fond memories of their stays on Tristan, leaving can be an emotional experience for many, and they return to the outside world with impressions they cherish for a lifetime.

1.2 Being there

Before setting foot on the island, tourists on a cruise ship must await the arrival of the barge bringing the immigration officers. They board the ship and welcome the passengers. The island's only police officer, Conrad Glass MBE, stamps the passports of those wishing to go ashore. (This procedure repeated when they leave the island.) The landing fee for cruise ship passengers is £30 (which includes a £5 harbour tax for those going ashore). For other tourists, the fee is £20. Visitors are then taken to the harbour on a company barge – weather permitting, of course.

Company barge entering the harbour (with the *Edinburgh* in the background)[1]

It is a short, five minute walk from Calshot Harbour up to the Settlement, where one can easily spend a few hours getting acquainted with life on the island and the history of the community (see next section) before making one's way back to the ship in the afternoon.

Visitors arriving on the *Agulhas* are likely to be flown ashore. This combines a safe arrival with an exciting, once-a-lifetime opportunity of a helicopter trip in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean.

[1] The strangely shaped "rocks" at either side of the harbour entrance are in fact *dolosses*. See p 5 and the Glossary for details.

Flying ashore on a helicopter from the *Agulhas* (in the background)

Travellers wishing to spend one or more nights on Tristan must request permission from the Island Council *before* the journey. They need to contact the Administrator in advance and inform him about the purpose of their intended stay (work, holiday, etc.). As and when their request is granted, the Administrator's private secretary will arrange a suitable place to stay. Visitors are often accommodated at the home of an island family, where they can find everything they need and participate in Tristanian life. An alternative possibility is to rent a guest house. These are usually an annex to a house but have their own cooking facilities if required. Guest houses provide more privacy but the opportunity for becoming integrated into the Tristan community is reduced. The costs per person per night at the time of writing vary from £20 (in a self-catering guest house) to £40 for full-board accommodation in either a family home or a guesthouse.

Tourists who will be spending only a few hours on the island are advised to plan their stay carefully. The following pages provide a map of the Settlement and a list of places of interest for tourists, i.e. places they might want to see or visit, complete with information about each of them. The Tourist Centre (lower right-hand side of the map, just above the Administration building) provides further information and offers additional help, if required.

Places of interest in and around the Settlement

Within entries, words in **SMALL BOLD CAPITALS** have their own entries in the alphabetical sequence, while more about words in ***bold italics*** can be found in the glossary at the end of this book

ADMINISTRATION: The Island Council meets formally in this building four times a year, and also informally at other times as needed. It is chaired by the ***Chief Islander*** and only full-time British representative, the Administrator (generally known as the ***Hadmin***) who is President of the Council. This building also houses the Finance Department and island's only **BANK**. It hosts an extensive **LIBRARY** of books relating to Tristan da Cunha.

ALBATROSS BAR: This occupies part of the **PRINCE PHILIP HALL** (see X1 on the map, and the photograph on p 62). On weekdays, it is open from 6.00 to 9.00 p.m. (winter) and 6.30 – 9.30 p.m. (summer).[2] On Sundays, it opens from noon until 3.00 p.m. only. It is closed on bank holidays.

BANK: This is located in the **ADMINISTRATION** building. Visitors can exchange foreign currency here (euros, US dollars, South African rands; British and St Helenian pounds are the local currencies). The Tristan da Cunha Bank is a branch of the Bank of England and all official business is carried out by Crown Agents, who also handle money transfer for those wishing to send money to Tristan or who have a bank account on Tristan. The bank is open from 8.00 a.m. until noon on weekdays. For obvious reasons, personal cheques are not accepted.

CAFÉ: This is X3 on the map. The Café serves snacks and drinks (non-alcoholic beverages, but also beer, wine and sherry) and is normally open from 4.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. (Monday to Saturday) and 11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. on Sundays.

"CANTEEN", *see* **SUPERMARKET.**

CEMETERIES: There are three cemeteries, the oldest being the smallest one which is located furthest to the east. William Glass, founder of the settlement, is buried in this small graveyard, as are many others of the first Tristanians (Peter Green, Thomas Swain, etc.).

CHURCHES, *see* **ST JOSEPH'S** (RC) and **ST MARY'S** (CofE) below.

DONG: The Dong (X5 on the map; see also the photograph on p 65) is struck to notify the community of important events. On certain mornings, such as ***Anniversary Day*** (August 14), ***Queen's Day*** (in late January or even in February, depending on the weather or the arrival of ships), and ***Ratting Day*** (held in May or June), it announces a public

[2] Tristan is in the southern hemisphere so the winter and summer months correspond, respectively, to those of summer and winter in the northern hemisphere.

holiday. It is also used to let fishermen know when it is a ***fishing day***. Following the arrival of a ship, it is sounded to inform people that mail can now be collected at the **PRINCE PHILIP HALL**. On New Year's Eve, its sound marks the ending of the old year and the start of the new one. There are also two other gongs positioned at the west and east ends of the village, which are used to inform people of the outbreak of a fire.

FISHING FACTORY: The lobster industry brings in the islands main revenue. The original factory was on Big Beach (east of the Settlement) but was destroyed by the **1961 VOLCANO**. A second factory was built in 1963, but this caught fire in February 2008 and had to be abandoned. The present factory has been built on the same site as the previous one. It was opened in June 2009 and conforms to EU standards. Lobster, locally called "crawfish", was at first canned, but today it is exported in three forms: whole raw, whole cooked, and raw tails.

HANDICRAFT/COFFEE SHOP: This is located in the same building as the **POST OFFICE, TOURISM CENTRE,** and **MUSEUM**.

HOSPITAL: The Camogli Hospital, so named after the Ligorian village from which Lavarello and Repetto came, is near the top right corner of the map.

LIBRARY: This is part of the **ADMINISTRATION** building and includes an impressive collection of books on Tristan da Cunha. Visitors must obtain permission from the Administrator's secretary to take out books. They have to register and are liable for any damage caused. There is also another library in the school building. This has fewer books on Tristan history (and these cannot be borrowed by visitors).

LONGBOATS: These are located at X6 on the map, midway between **ST MARY'S SCHOOL** and the **RESIDENCY**. Originally designed on the model of old whaleboats, longboats played an important part in the island's early survival. They were used for bartering with passing ships, and for visiting Nightingale and Inaccessible to collect guano, birds, eggs, and bird oil for cooking purposes.

MISSION GARDEN: This is located to the west of the Settlement and is where the missionaries used to stay. Today it is used by the Agriculture Department for growing vegetables for local consumption. Although there does not appear to be any hard evidence, it is suggested that this was also the site of Fort Malcolm where the garrison lived in 1816.

MUSEUM: This is located in the same building as the **POST OFFICE**. Another museum, but of a rather different kind, is currently under construction; see **THATCHED TRISTAN COTTAGE** below.

POST OFFICE: This is situated next to **ADMINISTRATION**.

PRINCE PHILIP HALL: This is named after the British Queen's husband. Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who visited the island in 1957. This houses the community centre and the Albatross Bar and is open for

refreshments and handicrafts (as also is the **CAFÉ** just opposite). The community centre is used for parties, dances and weddings.

RESIDENCY: This is C19 on the map and is occupied by the island's resident Administrator (the ***Hadmin***), a full-time British government representative appointed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for 2-3 year postings. The Residency was built just before the 1961 volcano and has been modernized over the years.

ST JOSEPH'S CATHOLIC CHURCH: The Roman Catholic community on Tristan was founded by the Irish sisters Agnes and Elizabeth Smith, who arrived in 1908. The first church was built in 1983, the present one in 1996. It contains a picturesque stained glass window portraying the Virgin Mary, a longboat, the island and an albatross.

ST MARY'S ANGLICAN CHURCH: Located next to house B25 on the map, this is the church of the majority of Tristanians. It was built in 1923 and renovated in 1990. The church bell comes from the 1878 shipwreck of the *Mabel Clarke*.

ST MARY'S SCHOOL: Officially opened in 1975. Before this the old wooden school, shop and hospital, was within the old naval station built in 1942 to accommodate a top secret radio lookout for enemy vessels and U-boats as part of the Allied war effort. When funds became available in the early 1980s, school leavers were sent to Denstone College in UK or Prince Andrew School on St Helena. There are currently about 30 children at school, all between the ages of 3 - 16.

SUPERMARKET: The islands grocery and hardware store. This sells a variety of imported goods and local handicrafts and is locally known as the Canteen; see p 109 for details.

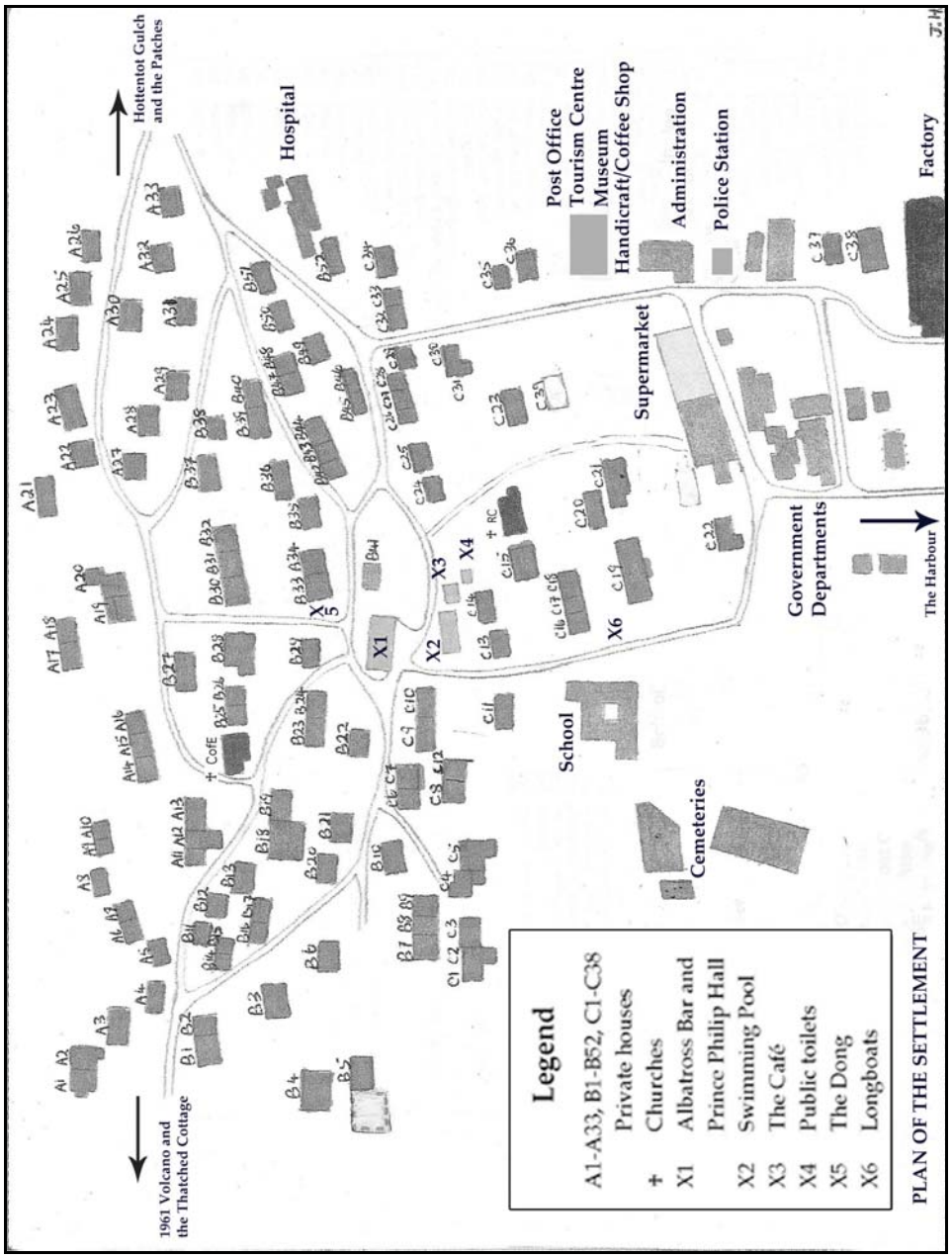
SWIMMING POOL: This is X2 on the map. This has recently been taken over by rockhopper penguins, recovering from the damage done to them from the oil released by the *Oliva* (see chapter 3).

THATCHED TRISTAN COTTAGE: Currently under construction a short distance to the east of the Settlement, this will be a museum portraying island homes in the 1900s.

THE PEAK: This is 2,051 metres (6760 feet) above sea level and is the summit of a very ancient volcano. It takes a lot of time and effort, and the help of a local guide, to climb this, and is definitely not something people visiting for just a few hours can do. However, the volcanic cone known as the **1961 VOLCANO** is at a much lower level close to the Settlement and can be visited by anyone with an hour or so to spare (see entry below).

TOURISM CENTRE: Erected in 2010, this building also houses the island's **POST OFFICE, HANDICRAFT/COFFEE SHOP,** and **MUSEUM**. The Tourism Office is the essential place to visit for anyone seeking accommodation or almost any other kind of information.

1961 VOLCANO: While the island of Tristan de Cunha came into existence as the result of an undersea volcanic eruption which took place about one million years ago, the eruption which occurred in 1961 was that of a volcanic cone located just to the east of the settlement. This led to the evacuation of Tristan and the two "Volcano Years" in exile in England. Visitors can climb up to the top of this in about 30 minutes but care must be taken because this area is prone to rock falls.



2

The History of Tristan da Cunha

Introduction

Ever since the Portuguese discovered it in 1506, the geographical location of Tristan da Cunha has had a profound impact on its history. Being so remote and hazardous to sail to, far away from the known sailing routes, the island remained uninhabited for almost three centuries after it was first discovered. Even though ships occasionally visited and landed on Tristan, the island only attracted permanent visitors following the extension of the American fishing and whaling industry to the South Atlantic Ocean in the late 18th century. Consequently, Tristan was not colonized until the founding fathers of today's community arrived in 1816 to establish the first local settlement. With the exception of a two-year interval in the early 1960s, the island has been inhabited ever since.

The history of Tristan can be classified into five main periods:

- 2.1 The 'prehistory' from its discovery to the arrival of the first colonists;
- 2.2 Early settlement until 1857;
- 2.3 Growth and increasing isolation until the 1885 lifeboat disaster;
- 2.4 Restructuring and modernization in the first half of the 20th century; and
- 2.5 Evacuation following the 1961 volcano eruption and subsequent adaptation to the outside world.

2.1 Discoverers, whalers and adventurers (1506 - 1816)

In 1506, Alfonso de Albuquerque, first viceroy of Portuguese India, was commanded to sail from Lisbon to India via the Cape of Good Hope, and he decided to take the southern route from South America. Being the leading sea power, the Portuguese were the first to discover the trade winds that blew along the coast of Brazil and then across the South Atlantic to Table Bay, which seemed to be the most suitable option.

However, his fleet of thirteen ships was hit by a violent storm and some of them were driven too far south, among them the ship sailed and commanded by Tristão da Cunha (pictured here). The trip was disastrous and several sailors died of starvation or froze to death because they were not prepared for the harsh climate and freezing temperatures. This forced Tristão to alter the course of his ships. Sailing in a north-easterly direction, he discovered a hitherto unknown island in the middle of the South Atlantic Ocean, and named it after himself.

The Portuguese were the first maritime superpower and ventured to areas nobody had explored before. When discovering uninhabited places they considered of interest to the empire, they were in the habit of setting free animals to secure food and provision for crews following in their wake. The first permanent inhabitants of the island found large numbers of wild goats and hogs in the early 19th century. This makes it likely that the Portuguese – perhaps even Tristão himself – had set foot on the island and introduced these animals, but we will never know for sure. Despite the fact that no records of a landing are known, there is no doubt that the Portuguese developed an interest in the islands. Tristan made its first appearance on nautical maps that were produced around 1509, under the inscription *ilhas que achou tristan da cunha* ('islands that were discovered by Tristan da Cunha'). The islands were also shown on charts of 1520 and 1534, as well as on Mercator's 1541 Globe of the World. In 1520, Ruy Vaz Pereira, captain of the *Lás Rafael*, called for water at Tristan en route to Muscat and India. In spite of this, we do not have any reliable information as to whether and when Portuguese fleets were sent out to explore the islands in the remainder of the 16th century, as only one more visit is reported in 1557. Official documents do not suggest that the Portuguese had any serious colonization plans, and that the islands were only visited infrequently until the 1700s.

The English and Dutch followed the Portuguese sailing routes in the early 17th century onwards and on September 25 1601, the Dutch vessel *Bruinvis*, bound from Amsterdam to the East Indies, anchored off the coast of Tristan da Cunha. The skipper reported their discovery of the island as follows:

> On the 25th they came to the thirty-sixth degree, sailing eastward with a prevailing breeze by which they came to an island that they had not seen in the daytime... In the morning the ships came near the coast; it was a high one and as they could observe, a round island covered on the top with snow. Apparently there were no landing places owing to the steepness of the cliffs

> on all sides; in consequence they stood off again. Then they felt a great whirlwind rapidly coming down from the heights of the island.
>
> On the 26th of the Autumn month Willem brought up a new topmast, the violent winds having long prevented this. Then the ships made for the land at the Cape of the Good Hope.

The Dutch East India Company recognized that the voyages to the Dutch colonies at the Cape were considerably faster when ships took the southern route, picking up the westerly winds off the coast of the Brazil and then sailing across the South Atlantic Ocean to Table Bay. Consequently, in 1617, the directors of the Company made the southern route mandatory for all commanders of vessels travelling to the Cape. Dutch logbooks from the 1620s and 1630s frequently mention Tristan da Cunha but landing attempts (such as in 1628) were not successful.

It was not until 1643 that there is an official record of sailors setting foot on Tristan. The Dutch vessel *Heemstede* anchored off Tristan for eight days, and its crew did manage a landing on February 17. They left a tablet on the island, saying that "Today, February 17th, 1643, from the Dutch fleet *Heemstede*, Clases Gerrits en Bier, Brootsfot de Hoorn, and Jan Coertsen van den Broec, landed here", and the captain reported in his logbook that the ship "took in very good fresh water, while the crew was refreshed with vegetables, seamews,[3] penguins, seals, and very good fish, which are to be found in surprising abundance". The favourable reports encouraged Jan van Riebeeck, the first governor of the Dutch colony at the Cape of Good Hope, to send out the galliot[4] *t'Nachtglas* in order to explore whether the island could be used as a refreshment and supply station for the Dutch fleet. However, the commander's report upon his return to the Cape was entirely unfavourable. After a second exploratory trip failed in 1669, the Dutch East India Company abandoned all colonization plans for Tristan da Cunha as well.

Of all the seafaring powers, it was the Dutch who were most interested in exploring the islands during this period. Albert Beintema, who has conducted extensive research on shipping in the South Atlantic, notes:

> We may well call the 17th century the 'Dutch Period' in Tristan history. I know of at least 18 Dutch ships around Tristan or Gough during that period, against only six others (5 British, 1 French). By contrast, in the 18th century there were no Dutch visits at all. Tristan visitors were British, French (there even was an Austrian), and American.
>
> (*http//home.wxs.nl/~beintema/ships.html*)

[3] *Seamew* is an obsolete term for the seagull.
[4] 'A Dutch cargo-boat or fishing vessel' Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.

The British were the last sea power to develop an interest in the South Atlantic Ocean. The first British logbook mention of Tristan da Cunha dates from as late as 1610. However, there were no attempts at settling until 1684 when the directors of the East India Company authorized three of their shipmasters to sail from St Helena to Tristan da Cunha in order to investigate the islands and to attempt a landing, attesting to the close connections between these two islands in the South Atlantic.

> Upon further consideration of the great advantage that may accrue to us if there prove to be a harbor at the Island Tristan de'Acunha we think fit upon Capt. Knox arrival from Madagascar in case you find encouragement by the acct you shall have from Capt. Knox you doe put on board Capt. Knox some intelligent person by the name of Governor at the salary of £30 per ann: 5 soldiers at 14/ per mouth besides their dyett – *3 or 4 of the Company's oldest negroes that speak English with their wives &c.* and what animals, plants or seeds Capt. Knox can conveniently carry all which wee would have him land in his passage for India (*Letter from the Court of Directors*, April 25 1684).

The expedition met with no success for a most unexpected reason – shortly before the *Tonquin Merchant* was bound to set sail for the South Atlantic Ocean, the crew mutinied in the harbour of Jamestown, St Helena, capturing the ship and sailing off on their own, so that the captain had no other option than to return to England. When a second exploratory trip was not successful, the English abandoned their colonization plans. As a result, the island remained deserted and unexplored until the end of the 18th century.

Even though the European seafaring powers had little interest in colonizing the island, their presence in this period left a permanent imprint – all the islands in the archipelago were named by 1700. The main island of the group was charted by the Portuguese, and the Dutch were mostly responsible for exploring and naming the other islands of the archipelago. The names changed again when Dutch influence waned and the English and French began frequenting the area. In 1760, the English Capt. Gamaliel Nightingale visited the island then known by its Dutch name 'Gebroocken' ('broken island') and re-named it 'Nightingale Island' in honour of his own name, as was the custom. In 1767, the French corvette *Étoile du Matin* landed on what was then known as 'Nachtglas Island', renaming it 'Inaccessible Island'. The islands' names consequently reflect the rich nautical tradition in the South Atlantic Ocean and the islands in the Tristan archipelago bear names of three seafaring powers (Tristan da Cunha – Portuguese; Nightingale Island, Gough Island - English; Inaccessible Island - French), not to mention the now abandoned names originally given by the Dutch.

In the second half of the 18th century, the relative quietness and solitude of the South Atlantic Ocean came to an end. The American fishing and whaling industry expanded southwards from the 1780s

onwards, and whale and seal hunters visited the area more often. At least ten whaling ships, mostly from Massachusetts and New England, fished off the Tristan coast in summer 1789. The islands served as occasional resort to the sealers and whalers, and a certain Capt. John Patten of Philadelphia stayed on Tristan da Cunha with a few men from August 1790 until April 1791. The men lived in tents on the north-western plateau and reported that they collected 5,600 sealskins during their seven-month stay, a massive return on investment indeed. Moreover, they claimed that they could have "loaded a whole ship with sea elephant oil in three weeks" if only they had had sufficient man-power. Such reports helped to boost the whaling and sealing industry and attracted an ever-growing number of ships to the South Atlantic.

The growing economic interest, as well as the strategic position along a major sea route, soon attracted adventurers who intended to settle Tristan da Cunha permanently. On 27 December 1810, a party of three men arrived on the island: Tommaso Corri from Livorno, Italy, a man named Williams, presumably an American, and the leader of the group, Jonathan Lambert, a native of Salem, Massachusetts. They were joined by man called Andrew Millet in January 1811.

Jonathan Lambert

The main motivation for their settlement plan was to exploit the natural resources of the islands and to sell fresh provisions to passing ships. Lambert advertised his business in the *Boston Gazette* in 1811 (an adventurous and risky undertaking; he gave the text to a captain who sailed to North America via Brazil and it took half a year before the advertisement was finally published). Therein, he publicly proclaimed himself sole proprietor of the island group and renamed them 'Islands of Refreshment' (for marketing and advertisement purposes). The text ran as follows:

> Know all men by these presents that, I, Jonathan Lambert, late of Salem, in the State of Massachusetts, United States of America, Mariner and Citizen thereof, have this 4th day of February in the year of the Lord Eighteen hundred and eleven, taken sole possession of the islands of Trestan [sic] da Cunha so called, viz. the great Island and the other two known by the names of Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands, solely for myself and my heirs for ever … In consequence of this right and title by me thus assumed and established, I do further declare that the said Islands shall for the future be denominated Islands of Refreshment, the great Island bearing that name in particular, and the landing place to the north side, a little east of the cascade, to be called reception, and which shall be the place of my residence. The Island called Inaccessible, shall henceforth be called Pinsard Island, and that known by the name of Nightingale Isle, shall now be called Lavel Island… For the above purpose, I intend paying the strictest attention to Husbandry,

> presuming when it is known in the world that refreshment may be obtained at my residence… I do hereby invite all those who may want refreshments to call at Reception, where by laying by, opposite the Cascade, they will be immediately visited by a Boat from the shore, and speedily supplied with such things as the Islands may produce, at a reasonable price.

Lambert tilled the ground and planted two acres of vegetables, but ships did not frequent the island as he had hoped they would. Nevertheless, he was a flexible businessman and revised his plans quickly. In 1812, he sent a message to the British government with a request to take over his property, on condition that he was employed on a regular basis and that he received a monthly income. He never received an answer. We will never know what would have happened to the islands had Lambert had had the time to put his ideas into practice. Unfortunately, he died on May 17 1812, for reasons that remain obscure. When the *Semiramis* called in March 1813, Corri was the only inhabitant left, and he gave conflicting accounts of what happened to his colleagues. Occasionally he would claim that they died while fishing along the rocky northern coast. Another version was that they were discontented and left Tristan in a boat to resettle on Inaccessible Island, never to be seen again, or also that they had a fishing accident and drowned when their boat sank. Captains and sailors who met Corri in person suspected foul play, and there are even allegations that he was a pirate who murdered his companions to get the full share of a treasure.

Whereas the fate of Lambert remains unknown, in August 1816, when serious settlement of the present-day community began, there were just two people living on the island permanently: Tommaso Corri, and Bastiano Poncho Comilla, a boy from the Spanish island of Minorca, who must have arrived in 1814 or 1815.

2.2 Early settlement (1816 - 1857)

In 1816, the island was formally colonized, and it appears that there are two main reasons why the British Crown decided to install a military garrison on Tristan da Cunha. The first was strategic: during the Anglo-American war of 1812-14, American men-of-war and privateers attacked British vessels and they occasionally operated from Tristan da Cunha, using the island as a base camp for their manoeuvres. The raging war had serious implications for the little community and Corri claimed that American mercenaries repeatedly took away his livestock and produce, threatening to kill him if he resisted. This was a matter of some concern to the British governors of the Cape colony, and they asked the Admiralty to consider annexation of the Tristan archipelago.

The second motive was by nature political, and some say this was the principal reason for British involvement on Tristan da Cunha. Following

the defeat at Waterloo in 1815, Napoleon Bonaparte was exiled to St Helena for the remainder of his life. The Admiralty was concerned that the French might attempt to bring him back to Europe (as they had done before), and in August 1816, the British Crown formally annexed Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha. On November 28 1816, an entire military garrison embarked for Tristan da Cunha, commanded by Josias Cloete and consisting of five officers, three non-commissioned officers, and 35 rank and file soldiers, as well as a group of so-called "Hottentots" to assist them in their work. Upon their arrival, they immediately set up a settlement and a fort to defend the island in case of a military attack or invasion by Napoleon's allies. Tomasso Corri was overjoyed at the British presence; he assisted the soldiers and helped them explore the island. He also boasted having a secret treasure on the island and rumour had it that he would sometimes disappear for short periods, only to return with gold coins to buy drinks in the garrison's canteen. Immediately rumours started that a heavy iron chest with incredible riches, known to this day as "Thomas's kettle", was hidden somewhere near the beach by the waterfall. Corri, in his desire for liquor, announced that he would show the secret hiding place in due course, and the soldiers were only too keen to keep him company and to entice him to drink with them. Perhaps there was some truth to Corri's claim, or perhaps he simply took advantage of the soldiers' gullibility. He died on January 21st 1817, officially due to breaking a blood vessel when talking to some of the soldiers, unofficially by alcohol poisoning, and he took his secret to the grave with him. After he passed away, the soldiers started an immediate search of the island, but the treasure, if ever there was one, has not been found to the present day.

Meanwhile, the British Admiralty reassessed the situation and considered it rather unlikely that Napoleon's loyalists would transport the former emperor to an island that was positioned more than 2,300 kilometres to the south of St Helena. The admirals recognized that Tristan da Cunha was rather unsuitably located to be part of a potential escape route, particularly as Napoleon would have had to sail back north again, passing the place of exile on his way back to France. As a result, the Admiralty reconsidered the permanent settlement of Tristan. In May 1817, Lord Bathurst sent a letter to Capt. Cloete, informing him that it was "no more expedient to retain possession of the Island of Tristan da Cunha" and ordering a swift withdrawal of the garrison and all army personnel.

This ended all activities: a road to the beach had already been completed and the construction of a fort (named Fort Malcolm in honour of Rear Admiral Sir Putney Malcolm) was well under way. The evacuation was substantially delayed and became a total disaster when HM sloop of war *Julia*, sent to remove the rest of the Tristan garrison, was shipwrecked on the north-western coast, taking 55 men down with

her. The perilous Tristan waters have seen numerous shipwrecks, but this was by far the most fatal one.

As the soldiers prepared to return to South Africa, it looked as if the island would be uninhabited once again. However, just before the garrison was ultimately withdrawn in November 1817, a non-commissioned officer and two soldiers requested permission to stay on Tristan for good: Samuel Burnell and John Nankivel, two English stonemasons from Plymouth in Devon, and a Scottish corporal named William Glass, with his wife, a Cape Coloured, and their two small children, a boy and a girl. There are several theories as to why Glass in particular asked for permission to leave the army and stay behind: simple wariness of the hectic life may have been one (he confided to a visiting artist in 1823: 'Why, you know, sir (…), what could I possibly do, when I reached my own country, after being disbanded? I have no trade, and am now too old to learn one. I have a young wife, and a chance of a numerous family; what could I do better for them than remain?'), others speculate it may have been adventurism and hope of finding the treasure (which seems rather unlikely), or also that he was concerned about prejudice since he was married and had two children with his Cape Coloured wife. Whatever its exact motivation, the request was granted and they were allowed to settle and colonize the island. Glass and his companions used the buildings that were erected by the garrison and received animals, tools, and plants from the leaving soldiers (who were probably happy not having to take them back).

Still in the presence of the British officers, they laid the foundation of a joint project they called 'the Firm'. The men recognized William Glass as the leader of the community and devised their own constitution, formally decreeing that the coexistence of the community should be based on equality and cooperation of all its members.

The community faced tremendous hardships and the first years were tough. The men had to clear the land and make pastures and fields arable. (Most of the plateau was covered in thick tussock grass and huts had to be built and maintained.) Glass's original plan, just like that of Jonathan Lambert earlier, was to barter surplus agricultural products for the bare necessities the community could not produce themselves, such as flour, clothes or coffee. However, his hopes were bitterly disappointed: the whaling and sealing industry was on the decline and few ships visited the island in the 1820s. Moreover, there was personal disappointment; Burnell was sent to the Cape on the *Ceres* in November 1819 to sell sea elephant oil, sealskins and potatoes. He sold his goods and returned to England, where no more was heard of him.

Nevertheless, there was hope. Despite the fact that the number of calling ships was declining, a number of new settlers arrived and the population increased. The waters around Tristan have always been

hazardous and wind and weather can change abruptly. Some captains underestimated how perilous the area was and there were so many shipwrecks that Tristan da Cunha became known as the 'graveyard of the South Atlantic'. As a result of these accidents, a number of ship-wrecked sailors and castaways arrived. Some of them waited for the next ship to transport them to South America or Table Bay, while others stayed behind and added to the permanent population. Two more influential arrivals were Richard 'Old Dick' Riley (from Wapping, East London), who was shipwrecked in December 1820, and Alexander Cotton (from Hull, Yorkshire), who arrived in 1821. Both of them settled permanently and lived on the island for almost 40 years.

The original constitution of the colonizers

"We, the Undersigned, having entered into Co-Partnership on the Island of Tristan da Cunha, have voluntarily entered into the following agreement - Viz -

1st That the stock and stores of every description in possession of the Firm shall be considered as belonging equally to each -

2nd That whatever profit may arise from the concern shall be equally divided –

3rd All purchases to be paid for equally by each –

4th That in order to ensure the harmony of the Firm, No member shall assume any superiority whatsoever, but all to be considered as equal in every respect, each performing his proportion of labour, if not prevented by sickness –

5th In case any of the members wish to leave the Island, a valuation of the property to be made by persons fixed upon, whose evaluation is to be considered as final –

6th William Glass is not to incur any additional expence on account of his wife and children.

(Signed) Samuel Burnell
William Glass
John Nankivel[5]

Somerset Camp
Tristan da Cunha
7th November 1817

The dwindling number of visiting ships was a matter of concern to Governor Glass and he finally decided to buy a schooner and export produce instead of selling them to passing ships. The plan was that crews of settlers should man the boat and ship their products to the South African market. However, the enterprise was a commercial disaster. The first trips were not profitable and the endeavour came to an abrupt end when the schooner wrecked in Table Bay in February 1823, apparently through carelessness of the crew. None of the ten deckhands returned to Tristan da Cunha. Glass and his remaining

[5] Nankivel was illiterate and in consequence actually signed with a cross (X).

companions never heard from them again, adding, just as in the case of Samuel Burnell in 1819, personal disappointment to financial loss.

An event of a very different kind was to bring additional hardship to the community. In July 1821, the East Indiaman *Blenden Hall*, bound for Bombay, was shipwrecked on the rocks of Inaccessible Island. The 50 survivors spent months on Inaccessible, living under tense social and hygienic conditions in improvised tents, feeding off raw fish, penguin eggs and muddy water, before they finally managed to build a raft and sail to Tristan da Cunha, merely twenty miles away. As soon as the people on Tristan learnt of the desperate situation, they set out to save the rest of the survivors and brought them back to their homes. But the unexpected presence of 50 people caused serious problems to the little community. The food supplies dwindled dramatically and quarrels among passengers and crew led to upheaval and unrest. When two months later a visiting captain finally agreed to ship the passengers of the *Blenden Hall* to Table Bay, all the supplies of the community were gone and they had to restart their efforts from scratch. Only two of the 50 visitors stayed behind, an Englishman named White and his wife Peggy.

In March 1824, the *Duke of Gloucester* anchored off the coast of Tristan da Cunha to barter for fresh water and vegetables. One of the passengers was Augustus Earle, an artist and naturalist, who took the opportunity to go ashore and make some sketches of the island and its fauna, "hoping to be able to add a few interesting drawings to my portfolio, as this was a spot hitherto unvisited by any artist". While he was painting on the island, the weather changed rapidly and a heavy gale sprang up, forcing the captain to set sail and take off. The poor man was left behind with nothing else than his painting materials and the clothes on his body. At first Earle was excited by the new surroundings and impressed by the friendliness of his hosts, who accepted him as a member of their community and helped him in whatever way they could. His initial excitement waned quickly, however. The months passed, no ships arrived, and he ended up spending more than nine months on Tristan da Cunha.

Fortunately for anybody interested in Tristan's earliest settlement period, Augustus Earle kept a diary of his experiences as a 'castaway artist'. His narrative is the first ever account of the Tristan community, and it provides fascinating insights into the harsh yet happy living conditions in the mid-1820s. His description of William Glass and his companions follows Earle's famous self portrait.

Solitude
A self portrait painted by Augustus Earle in 1824, depicting his long wait for a ship that would allow him to leave

Extract from Earle's diary:

The chief person of our little community (commonly called the Governor) is Mr. Glass, a Scotchman, a ci-devant corporal of the artillery drivers; and he certainly behaves to me with every possible kindness: nothing within his power is spared to make me comfortable. I experience from him attention and hospitality, such as rarely found in higher situations of life... My three other companions have all been private seamen, who have remained here at different times in order to procure sea elephant oil and other oils, to barter with vessels touching here; and they all partake greatly of the honest roughness of British tars... Of the fair ladies of our colony, Mrs. Glass is a Cape Creole, and Mrs. White a half-caste Portuguese from Bombay. Children there are in abundance, all healthy and robust, and just one year older than another…

Our governor, Glass, who is the original founder and first settler of this little society, was born in Roxburgh... The next in rank (for even here we must have distinctions made) is a man of the name of Taylor,[6] and he, being the oldest sailor, steers the whale-boat; and, as is usual among all gangs of men engaged in either fishing, sealing, or any boating work of that description, those who are at the helm assume a superiority over their comrades... His comrade at the time I became a member of the society was a

[6] Earle refers to Alexander Cotton here, who, for reasons which are unclear, was sometimes known as Alexander Taylor (and not to be confused with Charles Taylor, who stayed on the island in the 1850s and is still remembered by the local place name *Shateller's Hut* ['Charley Taylor's hut']).

> dapper little fellow, as Taylor used to say, "half sailor, half waterman, and half fisherman: born at Wapping, served his time in a Billingsgate boat, and occasionally vended sprats"... The name of this worthy was Richard, but he was always called Old Dick. He prided himself as being "a man-of-war's man", having at the close of the war entered the service, and was on board a ten gun brig; but every attempt he made at a nautical yarn was always instantly put a stop to by Old Taylor, with such epithets of contempt that he was obliged to desist; but his local knowledge of Deptford, Bugsby's Hole, the Pool, &c. was truly extraordinary... The last, and youngest of our party, is named White. There is nothing very particular in his history. He is an excellent specimen of a young sailor, has all and their characteristic warmth of feeling, and desperate courage, added to a simplicity almost childish... He was one of the crew of the 'Blendenhall' Indiaman which was wrecked on a neighbouring island. He had formed an attachment to one of the servant girls on board... and he and his Peggy made the second couple married on the island, and no two people can be happier.

Earle also described many of his adventures on the island, including hunting a wild boar, finding a dead body, trying to intercept passing ships for bartering, and exploring the mountain. He returned the Tristanians' hospitality by helping out the community in whatever way he could. He acted as assistant minister to William Glass and as schoolmaster, helping him in his efforts to teach the children basic reading and writing. Earle also produced a number of sketches of the founders of the community, two of which are reproduced below.

William Glass standing in front of his cottage

(Artist: Augustus Earle, 1824)

William Glass and companions
(Earle's 1824 painting of the interior of Glass's cottage)

In 1825, the first non-anglophone settler arrived, a Dane named Peter Petersen. The was later joined by a certain George Pert (or Peart), who had fled ship to escape trial in New Zealand. The year 1826 saw relevant changes to the island community. The White family left Tristan da Cunha and resettled in the Cape area, and their departure was much lamented by William Glass. In November 1826, Thomas Swain, a sailor from Hastings, Sussex, arrived. In time he was to be another core member of the community and stayed on Tristan da Cunha until his death in 1863. Swain had an interesting story to tell (and apparently was fond of telling it too). He was a soldier in the English army but was taken as a prisoner of war by the French. They forced him to fight the British troops who in turn captured and kept him in captivity for years. They assumed him to be French, and he did not dare to reveal his true identity for fear of being sentenced as a turncoat. Swain had the reputation of being a great storyteller, and his ultimate claim to fame was that he served under Admiral Nelson and that he caught the dying admiral in his arms when he was mortally wounded in the battle at Trafalgar.

The growth of the population had an important consequence as Tristan increasingly became an “island of men”. Seafaring in those days was a man’s world and women were not employed as sailors or deckhands. The community became increasingly unbalanced, as the new arrivals were exclusively male. Some of the single men lived in the

same building, which, certainly with a good sense of humour, they referred to as Bachelors' Hall. In early 1827, there were at least seven men living on the island, and William Glass was the only one of them to have a wife and family (the White family having left in December 1826). The islanders were aware of their dilemma and consulted about what to do. It so happened that the Norwegian captain Simon Ammon (or Amm) called at the island to barter for provisions, and he knew the islanders well as he had called at Tristan da Cunha on previous voyages. The men talked to him and persuaded him to try to find female companions for them on the island of St Helena. There is some anecdotal evidence that the men offered him a sack of potatoes for every woman he would manage to bring along, but this story may be too anecdotal to be true. In any case, Capt. Ammon took this request to heart and on April 12 1827, he arrived with several women who agreed to move and settle on Tristan. When doing research on St Helena, some documents were found that indicated the names of the women, who, as will be seen in chapter 4, were extremely important for the socio-linguistic development of the local Tristan variety. The most important of these women are:

- Maria Williams, born on St Helena circa 1805, described as a mulatto. She married Alexander Cotton and died on Tristan da Cunha in 1892, approximately 90 years old.
- Sarah Williams: the sister of Maria. She was born on St Helena in circa 1795. She arrived with a daughter (Mary), married Thomas Swain, and died in 1898, 98 years old. Bishop Gray, who visited Tristan on the *Frolic* in March 1856, described her as a "negro".
- Mary Williams, the daughter of Sarah Williams. She was born on St Helena in circa 1815, married Peter Green in 1836, and died in 1900, 85 years old.

The arrival of the women from St Helena resulted in overnight demographic balancing and led to rapid population growth. Governor Glass conducted a census in 1832 and reported that there were six couples - Glass, Riley, Cotton, Petersen, Peart, and Swain - with 22 children (this census was discovered in a family bible of descendants of the Glass family who emigrated to America in the 1850s). Thus, the total population in the early 1830s numbered 34, quite an increase compared with the figure of 12 reported by Earle just 8 years earlier.

The 1830s and 1840s saw a revival of the whaling industry and numerous ships frequented Tristan da Cunha in need of fresh water and supplies. The captain of the British sailing ship *Pyrane* wrote in 1829 that there was an abundant crop of wheat and potatoes and a promising one of oat; in addition, the Tristanians had 170 head of livestock. The whaling in this period was large-scale since Reverend William Taylor, who served as minister from 1851 to 1855, reported that as many as 60 to 70 ships were sighted whaling off the Tristan da Cunha coast at the same

time. The increasing economic interest in the South Atlantic Ocean had a number of consequences, the most immediate one being the arrival of new settlers. When the *Emily* was shipwrecked in October 1836, Pieter Willem Groen from Katwijk in the Netherlands, and Peter Møller from Denmark settled permanently, both marrying daughters of the women from St Helena. At the same time, the presence of large numbers of whaling ships led to the arrival of American sailors. Some were temporary residents and stayed only for a few weeks or months. Thomas Rogers, for instance, married one of Glass's daughters but left the island after two years only. Other whalers settled more permanently: Samuel Johnson and William Daley stayed for 15 and 20 years respectively, and Capt. Andrew Hagan arrived in 1849 and became a member of the community for more than half a century. Unfortunately, whaling had some negative effects for the community. Rev. Taylor reported that American whalers brought alcohol to the island and he was distraught because they apparently had a bad influence on some of the younger Tristanians. Another negative effect was the common practice of dumping frail or ill sailors who were no longer of use in the workforce. Glass himself wrote that sailors were repeatedly "left ashore sick from whale ships". The fate of most of them was a sad one. There was no doctor or hospital on the island and they received no medical care; some of them suffered for months before dying of consumption.

The re-establishment of the whaling industry resulted in considerable out-migration. Whaling was a hazardous business in those days; whale catchers often perished during the voyages and the captains were in constant need of restocking their crews. As a result, young Tristanian men were offered employment on the whaling ships, particularly as they were expert fishermen with an excellent knowledge of the waters around Tristan da Cunha. Governor Glass repeatedly complained about this, since he felt that the men were corrupted at sea, introduced to tobacco and alcohol and using foul language on their return. Moreover, many accepted the job opportunities and left the islands for longer periods and some Tristanians even left the island altogether. Young women left the island as well: five of Glass's daughters married American whalers and emigrated to North America in the 1840s.

The year 1851 saw the first resident clergyman on the island, Reverend W Taylor. He served as a priest and schoolteacher and was assisted by one of the daughters of 'Old Dick' Riley and his St Helenian wife. Taylor sent letters and reports to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel which offer fascinating insights into life on Tristan in the 1850s. Soon after his arrival, he conducted a complete census and wrote that there were nine family names on the island: Glass, Riley, Cotton, Swain, Daley, Green, Miller [sic; an apparent anglicization of Møller], and Hagan, with a total of 64 children, and he performed the first legal marriage on Tristan (on August 4 1853) – the wedding of Mary Riley and

James Glass. Another interesting account of the Tristan community in the early 1850s comes from Capt. Denham, who commanded the *RMS Herald* and visited Tristan da Cunha on November 11, 1852. His reports show how strong the British character of the community was at the time: "The fine, healthy, and robust fellows, clad and speaking as Englishmen, gave the impression that they were from an island of Great Britain; even the Dutchman had become English".

On November 24 1853, merely two weeks after Capt. Denham's visit, Governor William Glass, the well-respected patriarch and founder of the community, passed away at the age of 66 years. He had suffered from cancer of the lower lip and chin for some time. Having lived on Tristan for 37 years, he was survived by his wife and 16 children (8 boys and 8 girls). Glass was buried in the island cemetery and Samuel Johnson (one of his sons-in-law) arranged for a marble gravestone to be sent from South Africa, on which was engraved a verse the Governor used to read in Sunday school:

Asleep in Jesus, far from thee,
Thy kindred and their graves may be
But thine is a still blessed sleep
From which none ever wakes to weep.

Glass's death was much lamented by everyone who knew him; he left his wife and sixteen children, nine of whom were still living on the island. Shortly after his death, Alexander Cotton became his successor as head of the community.

Just two years later, in January 1856, Maria Glass, together with 24 children and grandchildren, left Tristan to rejoin their relatives in New

Bedford, Massachusetts, for reasons that remain unclear. The Norwegian sociologist Peter Munch believed that there were tensions among the island families and the death of the old Governor triggered a rebellion against the privileges of Glass' family. This may be true to some extent, but perhaps it was simply the case that Maria Magdalene Leenders longed to see her family in Cape Town and in North America and decided to join them, taking her family along. In any case, when the archbishop of Cape Town, Bishop Gray (to whose diocese Tristan da Cunha belonged at the time), heard of the imminent exodus, he sailed to the island to offer the Tristanians free passage to South Africa and resettlement in the Cape area. His purpose was to "inquire after the welfare, and to make arrangements for the eventual removal of such of them as might wish to quit the island". After five years on the island, Rev. Taylor's enthusiasm had waned and he now strongly advocated a total evacuation, claiming that the island had become unsuitable for habitation due to an over-exploitation of natural resources. Originally he had been supportive of the colony, but five years in geographical isolation turned him into a pessimistic and depressed man. He saw no future for the community and persuaded a number of families to accept Bishop Gray's offer to leave the island. Gray was convinced that this was the right thing to do since he wrote to his son that "Nothing could be more satisfactory than Mr Taylor's work: I hope that in a few days a large ship will be sent to bring them all (the islanders) away". In 1857, a total of 45 people left the island, namely: William Taylor, the entire families of "Old Dick" Riley, Peter Møller, William Daley, as well as three daughters each of both Thomas Swain and Alexander Cotton, and two daughters of Peter Green. Only 28 people, sharing just four surnames, decided to remain on the island: the families and descendants of Thomas Swain, Alexander Cotton, Peter Groen and Andrew Hagan. There was nothing like home for them, and they could not imagine life anywhere else.

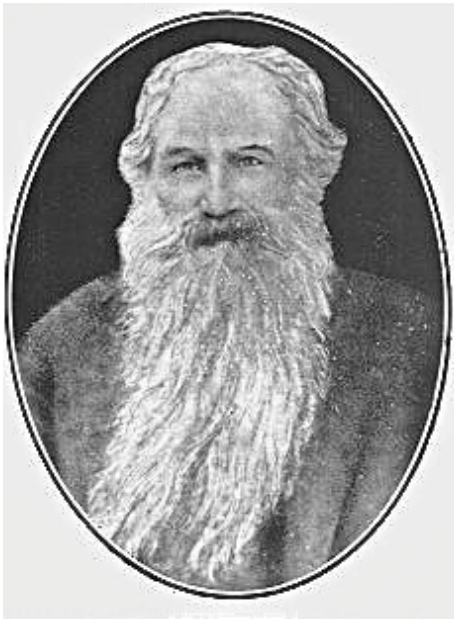
Thus, the year 1857 marks a milestone in the social history of Tristan da Cunha. After almost 40 years, the period of Governor William Glass came to an end (and with him the early settlement period). The name Glass disappeared from the island for almost ten years until Thomas Glass returned in 1866, marrying one of Thomas Swain's daughters and thus restoring the Glass family name to the list of island families.

2.3 Isolation and growth (1857 - 1885)

The exodus caused some social restructuring in the community, and Pieter Groen (or rather Peter Green, for he anglicized his name in that period) emerged as the strong man on the island in the late 1850s, even more so after Thomas Swain, one of the founders of the community died in a wood-chopping accident at the age of 102 years (a splinter flew into

his eye, causing haemorrhage). When ships called on the island, it was Peter Green who would negotiate and barter on behalf of the entire community. Captains described him as a kind, generous and intelligent man, and said that he was highly respected by the other members of the community. Douglas Gane, an English businessman who met Green when visiting the island in July 1884, said the following about him:

> He was a veritable fund of good humour and he quickly sought the captain and made his own bargains on behalf of the community, giving livestock consisting of diminutive pigs and sheep, geese, bluefish, crawfish and potatoes, which they had brought with them, in exchange for flour, peas, oatmeal, biscuits, cocoa, coffee and spirits... Peter Green became the 'grand old man" in every sense of the phrase. He had married a native of St Helena who had proved a brave and in every way suitable helpmate. Such was his fairness and impartiality in settling questions that he acquired a great influence there, for he had a philosophic way with him that was most convincing... He is a man of education, with a gifted pen and irresistible humour.



When HRH Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, paid a visit to Tristan on the *Galatea* in 1867, Peter Green acted as spokesperson on behalf of the entire community. Despite the fact that he officially represented Tristan da Cunha, Green impressed his visitors by stressing that the community had no elected leader, uttering the memorable words "I am in no respect superior to the others - on Tristan we are all equal". Green guided the royal visitor through the village when he paid a formal visit to the island families. Later that day, Prince Alfred was invited for dinner in Green's

house and received a rare treat, a delicious island meal and the only bottle of wine on Tristan da Cunha, leaving schoolbooks, catechisms, pencils, slates, and writing paper in return. Green also urged the Prince to protect the island against foreign influence, informing him that in December 1864, an American Confederate ship, the *Shenandoah*, had dumped 35 prisoners on Tristan, who by mere chance were picked up by a Federal gunboat two weeks later (if this had not happened, the stocks would have been used up in very little time, just as had happened following the *Blenden Hall* disaster 40 years earlier). Approaching Prince Alfred about this matter was a wise move because, on his return to England, it was discovered that Tristan had never been officially put under the protection and jurisdiction of the British Crown. The withdrawal of the garrison in 1817 put an end to the British annexation and Tristan did simply not belong to the Empire, even though the Tristanians considered themselves British and hoisted the Union Jack whenever foreign ships came in sight. After further distressing incidents, when American war ships engaged in sea battles around Tristan da Cunha looted the island and dumped more prisoners of war on the island and no proof of a British status could be given to the ship commander, the British Government now took the matter to heart and Tristan da Cunha was formally declared a dependency of the British Empire in 1875. The colonial status was important as it meant that Tristan da Cunha was frequented at least once a year by one of Her Majesty's ships.

From the 1860s onwards, the community underwent a period of growing isolation and there were many reasons for this. The American whale trade had reached its climax in the 1840s and 1850s and declined quickly in the second half of the century; the increasing use of steamships made bartering unnecessary; and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 drastically reduced the number of ships in the South Atlantic. All this led to decreasing contacts with passing ships. In the mid-1880s, for instance, the island was virtually cut off from the outside world; only about two ships called at Tristan da Cunha per year.

This was also the period of one of the most curious settlement attempts in the island's history. On November 27 1871, the two German brothers Frederick and Gustav Stoltenhoff landed on Inaccessible Island with the aim of establishing a business by selling sea-lion skins and oil. The captain of the *Java*, who had dropped off the Stoltenhoffs, informed the Tristanians about this, and almost the entire male population paid their new neighbours a visit on December 1st, helping them build a hut. The German brothers built up an infrastructure and struggled against all hardships – their hut was blown down and they lost their whale-boat in June 1872 – to make a decent living of some sort. They lived off wild goats (presumably left their by the Portuguese) and fish that were so plentiful they could be caught off the rocks; they were invited on several

occasions by passing captains to leave the island but always decided against doing so.

Then something inexplicable happened. In December 1872, more than a year after their arrival and a friendly relationship throughout, a party of Tristan islanders sailed to Inaccessible apparently to hunt seals; while on the island, they shot 8 of the 12 goats. They returned in February 1873, landing clandestinely on the west side of the island and either killed or else removed the remaining four goats. This dealt a serious blow to the Germans' colonization and business plans. The Stoltenhoffs were now forced to feed on pigs (in a letter home, Frederick described the meat as "atrociously unpalatable owing to their partially feeding on sea-birds") and penguin eggs, no matter whether it was the breeding season or not (informed readers will know what this means). Their food supplies dwindled and the two brothers finally gave up and left the island on board the *Challenger*. It remains obscure why the Tristanians harmed the Germans this way, particularly since they initially were friendly and fully supportive. Frederick wrote in a letter:

> For what reason is difficult to say as there (on Tristan da Cunha) is an abundance of food of every description, including sheep. As they did not communicate at all with us, and this was obviously intentional we have considered that their object was to drive us from the island. Probably the Tristan da Cunha people considered that our residing on Inaccessible interfered with their hunting-ground. In all events after their previous kindness to us, their conduct was at least rather inexplicable. Indeed they endeavoured to avoid being seen, or so it appeared to us, who were in a measure unable to communicate with them.

An alternative explanation was given by Jan Brander in 1940; Green may have been worrying that Germany would officially colonize Inaccessible Island because Germans lived there, and this would have endangered the local status of the Tristanians. As a result, he urged taking measures to destroy the Stoltenhoffs' natural resources. This seems plausible, since Green was well informed of global events and may have perceived Germany as a threat, but it will never be known why the Tristanians acted the way they did. The fact that is German involvement in the area came to an end once and for all on October 16 1873.

The Rev. Erwin H Dodgson, brother of Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*, served on the island as a minister from 1881-84. He conducted a population census and found that there were more than one hundred people living on the island. His two major concerns were the construction of a church (until then the community worshipped in the living room of Peter Green's house) and the establishment of an education system. Until his arrival, Peter Green and one of Alexander Cotton's daughters had made considerable efforts to teach basic writing and reading skills even though neither of them was a teacher by

profession. Erwin Dodgson made some progress but, like the Rev. Taylor in the 1850s, he was not capable of adapting to the living conditions in such a remote place. He suffered from depressions and his health fared badly. His first reports had been utterly favourable and he was impressed by the friendliness and helpfulness of the community. However, his initial optimism waned rapidly and he too turned against the idea of a permanent settlement on Tristan. In a letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, he deplored the "mindlessness of the children and young people and also of the grown-up people", adding: "there is not the slightest reason for this island to be inhabited at all. It has been my daily prayer that God would open up some way for us all to leave the island." It is not exactly known why he so desperately hoped that the Tristanians would leave their homes for good, but it seems that part of his frustrations were due to the fact that the construction of a church did not progress the way he hope it would.

W F Taylor E H Dodgson J G Barrow

The first three clergymen sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to serve on Tristan da Cunha

Dodgson became increasingly frustrated. He failed to persuade the Tristanians to leave the island and could not understand why they rejected the idea of resettlement in the Cape Town area. The situation culminated briefly before his departure in 1884, when he wrote a pamphlet 'About us Sinners at Tristan' in which he referred to the Tristanians as a "new link in the Darwinian Chain between Man and Ape". His flock, needless to say, was bitterly disappointed when the pamphlet was found, and the Tristanians felt that they had been betrayed by a man from the outside world for whom they had had high respect. Peter Green expressed his disappointment by sending an official complaint to the Lords' Commissioners of the Admiralty; it is in this document that one finds Green's intelligence, his philosophical approach to life and also his good sense of humour:

> I, Peter W Green, have been here over 48 years, my wife has been on the island over 57 years; we have not everything we want; but is it not the same in England? So we must take the good times with the bad times… We received a bag of papers and a publication in which the Rev. Dodgson said of us that we are sinners, that we are going to the devil, that is our young men that ship in them, i.e. in whale-ships: I would rather remain here as a British subject than to go and leave Tristan with the reputation of a Satanic subject… That we are going to make a new link in the Darwinian chain between the man and ape. I consider that me or mine claim no more of the monkey than Mr Dodgson: I love him from my heart: He is in my mind so often that I can hardly believe in his writing. He was at Tristan nearly four years, he was the godly, most kind, unselfish; he practiced what he preached; but if his theory about apes is true, we may say eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we will be apes.

However, the disappointment caused by Dodgson's cynicism was dwarfed by the community's most disastrous tragedy ever - a lifeboat disaster during which fifteen local men perished. This was truly heart-breaking; Martha Green, the sister of Betty Cotton, alone lost her husband (one of Peter Green's sons), her two sons, two brothers, and two brothers-in-law. To the present day it is not known why virtually all of the community's able-bodied men ventured out in one lifeboat to intercept a passing ship, and why they rowed out nine miles leeward in hazardous weather conditions. Perhaps the infestation of rats in 1882 led to a potato shortage, or all hands were needed as the men were unfamiliar with the handling of a modern lifeboat (which had been given to the community only the year before). We will never know what really happened, but the sad fact is that none of the 15 men returned. Rumours persist to the present day; the captain of the ship and Peter Green produced different (and to some extent contradictory) accounts of the event. Some say that the captain and crew of the ship were careless, ignoring the distress signals sent by the men in the lifeboat, whereas others believe that the Tristan men were shanghaied and sold into slavery.

The lifeboat disaster was a terrible loss and inflicted an almost fatal blow to the community. Deprived of their husbands, Tristan became known as the 'Island of Widows'. When the *City of Sparta* called at Tristan da Cunha on December 26 1885, the total population consisted of 92 inhabitants of whom just four were married couples. There were merely four adult men on the island, Peter Green, aged 77, Andrew Hagan, aged 69, and the youngest adult man was Thomas Swain at the age of 45 - the rest were women and young children. News of the tragedy reached the outside world and the Rev. Dodgson returned from England to help as best he could, offering £5 to every Tristanian wishing to leave. The British Government decided to send out annual supply ships to help the community. Again the islanders were offered a free passage to Cape Town and again they rejected the idea of leaving their

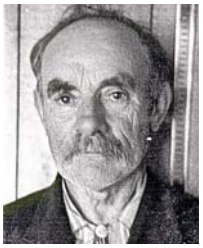
homes. However, Reverend Dodgson managed to persuade ten people to leave the island when he returned in 1889. The population reached a low of 50 when 13 more Tristanians emigrated in 1892, and future prospects for the community looked bleak.

2.4 Restructuring and modernization (1885 - 1961)

The late 1880s and 1890s were without any doubt one of the hardest and most demanding periods in the history of the Tristan community. The terrible loss of virtually the entire male population affected the community, and the women and children endured years of physical strain and emotional distress. They had to run the island alone and do all the men's work. They had to till the ground, harvest the potatoes, fish, and butcher cattle – all the hard physical labour their husbands would have done. In hindsight, it is truly amazing how the community managed to pull through this disaster. The will to survive and the decision to continue colonization against all odds attest to the strong characters of the Tristanians, and the way they coped with this terrible blow is the most remarkable testimony of their attachment to the South Atlantic Ocean.

At least the women and children received a bit of help. The *Allen-shaw* was shipwrecked on the island in 1892 and the surviving crew-members were forced to spend months waiting for the next ship. One of the survivors, Capt. Cartwright, reports that he and his shipmates helped the community and that they worked in the patches to assist the women. Cartwright himself fell in love with an island woman and stayed on the island for five years; he kept a diary of his stay and wrote that they produced their own food, living off fish, sheep, cattle, birds, and milk products.

A second fortunate circumstance was that two new settlers arrived when the barque *Italia* was stranded on the cast coast of Tristan da Cunha in October 1892. Two members of the crew, Andrea Repetto and Gaetano Lavarello, both natives of Camogli, a fishing village south of Genoa in Italy, stayed behind, adding their names to the list of island families.



Gaetano Lavarello in 1937

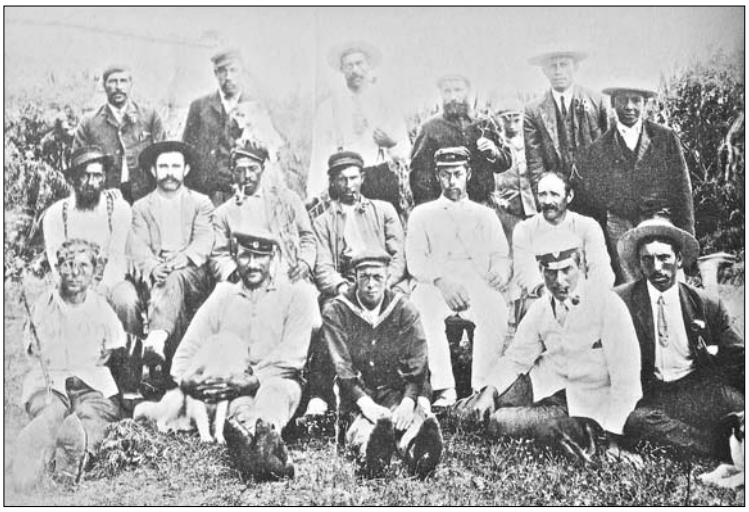
Repetto died just 10 years later, but Lavarello lived on the island until after WWII. Derrick M Booy, a naval telegrapher who was stationed on the island in 1942-43, described him as follows:

> His name, we found on seeking his acquaintance, was invariably shortened to Gaeta; and by many of the young people, even those unrelated to him, he was affectionately called Uncle. He was short and stocky, but still active,

dressed usually in a seaman's blue jersey and a pair of oversize trousers that he rolled up over his ankles. His head was disproportionately large, with a wide, flat crown and silvery hair that curled in clusters over his ears but had almost vanished on top. His face was the colour of sun-kissed stone and remarkably expressive. The silvery bars of his moustache lifted as he smiled, giving the lie to the grey, tufted eyebrows which he dragged down in a frown of mock severity to hide the twinkling of his eyes.

Talking to Gaeta was like looking into an old mirror which magically gave back reflections of fifty years before; and his Italian accent combined to droll effect with his Tristan dialect. He had been born in the town of Camogli, near Genoa, and some of the sunniness of his native climate had passed for ever into his nature, surviving even the winds of Tristan. At the age of eleven he had run away from the vineyards and gone to sea in a sailing ship. His first passage, he remembered, had been from 'Swansee-ah' to Odessa where the cold made him long again for Italy. He had loaded 'teaka wood' at Rangoon and 'colda beefa' in South America, while still no more than a boy: 'I musta could on'y been some littla fella then, for I'se on'y a littla shorta fella now!'

As a result of the arrival of the two Italians and newly established families, the population started to grow again and an 1899 census revealed that there were 18 families with a total of 74 people.



Men of Tristan, 1908

The turn of the 20th century saw the deaths of some of the most influential members of the community. The first founding figure of the community to pass away was Mary Green, who had emigrated from St Helena to Tristan da Cunha as a young girl in 1827 and had been married to Peter Green for 65 years. Her death was followed by those of Capt. Andrew Hagan, who had lived in the community for over 50 years, and finally by Peter Green himself, who passed away in 1902, at the age of 94. Within less than two years, Tristan da Cunha had lost

three of its members who had influenced the community for much of the 19th century.

Shortly before his death, Peter Green had written a letter to the secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, explaining the urgent need to have a resident priest and schoolteacher. This request was not immediately taken up – the Boer War preoccupied the British and South African governments – and it was not until Andrea Repetto sent another plea on behalf of the community that the SPG decided to send out a new minister. On April 8 1906, fifteen years after the second departure of Erwin Dodgson, the Rev. J G Barrow arrived with his wife and servant to serve as missionary for a three-year term. (Interestingly, Barrow had a personal motive; his mother survived the 1821 *Blenden Hall* disaster when she was a small child.) They were joined by Mr Kasper Keytel, a businessman from South Africa, who was sent out by his company to start a local fishing industry. The first business scheme of Tristan da Cunha turned out to be a failure: even though fish was plentiful in Tristan waters, most of the catch rotted during the drying process and what was left was damaged by flies. The islanders could not attend to the produce all the time – they were simply too busy supporting themselves and had no time to export goods for the South African market as well. When the export of sheep also failed, Mr Keytel was forced to return to the Cape after only one year.

After the departure of the Barrow family in 1909, the Tristan community was almost completely isolated for more than a decade. WWI took the world's attention, the British Admiralty decided to abandon the costly practice of sending out an annual supply ship, and very few other ships called at Tristan in that period. We know that a number of Tristanians returned from South Africa in this period: Joe Glass, Bob Glass, and Jim Hagan had enrolled to serve in the Second Boer War and had married, bringing their families home to Tristan with them. The community received no mail for ten years, and at one stage they had no communication whatsoever with the outside world for more than three years. As a result, we know almost nothing about Tristan during this period, and it was only in the 1920s that ships again called at Tristan on a regular basis.

More information became available when the Rev. and Mrs Rogers served on Tristan da Cunha from 1922 to 1925. The Rev. Rogers was concerned about the safety of his young wife and he enquired of the Colonial Office whether the British Government, in addition to his official function as a missionary, might consider appointing him resident magistrate. His request was granted by Winston Churchill, who at the time was Colonial Secretary in Downing Street. The arrival of Rev. Rogers thus marked the beginning of a new era on Tristan da Cunha, namely one of a resident administrator with official status to act on

behalf of the British Government. The Rev. Rogers took the matter very seriously and started what he called the 'Island Council', which consisted of the head of each family and Rogers himself. Both he and his wife were very popular in the local community; they initiated a number of social changes, such as setting up Boy Scouts and teaching the younger generations the games of football and cricket. In a letter to a friend in England one of the islanders wrote in 1923: "I am sure the children shall miss the Reverend Rogers for they love him very much... It is the first time that they have seen a football".

The Alfred Green family in the 1920s

The extent of Tristan da Cunha's isolation in the late 1920s is illustrated well in a letter sent by one of the successors of the Rogers, Philip Lindsay. He was sent to the island in 1925, and – like many of his predecessors – he suffered from depression and illness. In 1929, he bitterly complained to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (no emphasis is added to Mr Lindsay's original letter):

> It is alarming to realise that not a single cargo vessel has called here on its own account since 1925 (3 years). How can we get back under such conditions? If one calls it may not take us. We have seen no trace of a ship in nearly a year!! We cannot stand this much longer. - I am not too well - my teeth are aching. What shall we do. PLEASE HELP US AT ONCE

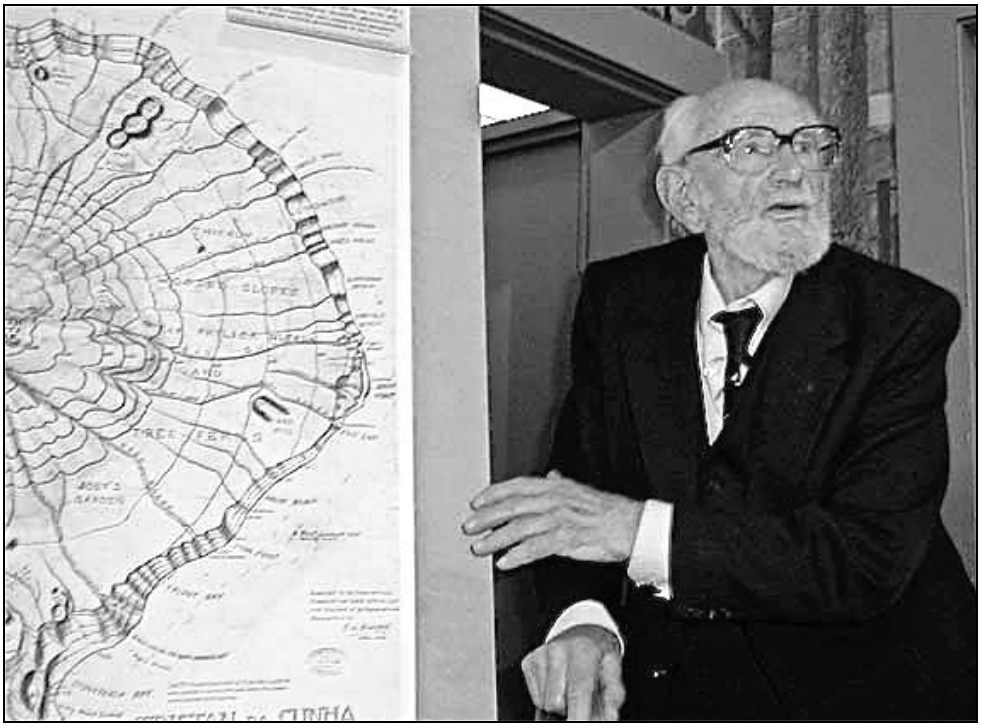
The 1930s saw further political changes in the community. The local church was completed under the direction of the Rev. Partridge, who also started compulsory education for the children and instituted the Sunday School. In line with Churchill's decree, the resident ministers acted as commissioners and magistrates for the island, and it is during

this period that we find the first attempts to restructure the Tristan community along political models of industrialized countries. William Repetto, the oldest son of Andrea, was appointed Chief Islander and Head of the Island Council in 1933.

Partridge's ambitious plans were pursued by arguably the most autocratic minister Tristan da Cunha ever had, Harold Wilde, who worked on Tristan da Cunha from 1934 to 1940. Wilde served as preacher and administrator while at the same time acting as storekeeper, teacher and postmaster. Even today, the oldest members of the community have vivid memories of Wilde's 6-year reign and the iron grip he had on the community. For instance, Wilde kept a pillory to punish sinners and offenders, intercepted, read and censored all personal letters he got hold of, and supervised and rationed the distribution of food. (There are claims that at one time women had to obtain his permission to make potato cakes.) Some of his plans included the colonial expansion of the community and he ordered a group of local men to settle neighbouring Inaccessible Island. Rev. Wilde was not a popular man on Tristan, and his attitudes alienated the Tristanians more than anything else. Some of them saw no reason to worship and attend Sunday services when Wilde was on the island. Others converted to Roman Catholicism that had been brought to the island by two Irish sisters who married Tristanians and settled in 1908. Consequently and rather ironically, Wilde's behaviour was instrumental in the establishment of the Catholic Church on Tristan da Cunha in the 1930s. Today, both Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism are represented in the community.

The so-called 'Norwegian Expedition' (led by Dr Erling Christophersen) arrived in 1937 and an entire team of scientists stayed on the island for three months, examining environmental, botanical, biological and sociological aspects of Tristan da Cunha. One member of the team was Allan Crawford, who produced the first geographical survey and accurate map of the island (see page iv). Crawford was to have a lifelong connection with Tristan: he returned during WWII as head of the weather station, founded the first local newspaper (*The Tristan Times*), and designed the now famous "potato stamps".

A Tristan da Cunha "potato stamp" indicating the value of four potatoes as being equivalent to one British penny.



Allan Crawford and his map of Tristan da Cunha

Crawford also founded the Tristan da Cunha Association in England and wrote several books in which he relates his personal reminiscences of Tristan. Another member of the Norwegian Expedition was the sociologist Peter Munch. His reports indicate that the Tristan community in the late 1930s had not benefitted in the least from the massive changes that had occurred in the outside world. Tristan da Cunha was not industrialized in the late 1930s; there was no electricity or piped water, and there were no motor vehicles (the means of transportation was oxcarts). Munch found that only 6 out of more than 200 islanders had ever left the archipelago, and he also attested "a strong sense of cultural subordination as contrasted with the outside world". He observed that Tristanians always addressed foreigners as 'Sir', even when they were requested not to do so. For instance, when, after a while, Munch asked one of his Tristan friends to drop the 'Sir' and call him by the first name, the man, who was anxious to do so, replied: "No, Sir, we's only low and poor people".

World War II approached and the British government assessed the possibility of an open sea war in the South Atlantic Ocean, particularly after the German battleship *Graf Spee* and German U-boats were sighted off the Tristan coast. Immediate measures were taken and the Tristan group was declared a dependency of St Helena in 1938. A local defence corps was founded (the 'Tristan Defence Volunteers'), and finally the

British Admiralty ordered the installation of a naval station on Tristan da Cunha. A naval garrison was established on the island in April 1942, run by the Admiralty in cooperation with South African engineers and Air Force personnel. The main purpose of the station (referred to as *HMS Atlantic Isle*) was the construction of a meteorological and wireless station. A member of the party was Derrick M Booy, a naval telegrapher who stayed on the island for 14 months and whose book *Rock of Exile* is a most candid and intimate portrait of the islanders' everyday life at that time.

A traditional Tristan house

A Tristan oxcart

Tristan schoolchildren in 1923

Rev. Rogers distributing the mail

Images of Tristan in the 1920s and 1930s

The presence of the soldiers affected the everyday life of the Tristanians in many ways. Most of the officers brought their wives and children along, and an appointed education officer established a regular school and made the attendance of the Tristan children compulsory as well. The soldiers built living quarters with a running water supply and a sewage system, electricity, and there was even a rudimentary telephone system between the barracks. Radio contact was established with Cape Town and for the first time ever Tristan da Cunha was in regular contact with the outside world. The soldiers depended on the Tristanians' help, as they could not build the barracks alone, and the commanding officer employed the local men as workforce. At first he paid them with wood,

paint, tobacco, and food, and then distributed coupons to be used as currency in the shop. However, when money was officially introduced as a means of payment in December 1942, the workers were paid two shillings a day. This was a milestone in the community's history, as it marked the end of the bartering era; from this time on Tristanians could buy groceries in the local store and did not depend on the (often) hazardous interception of passing ships.

The community benefitted from the presence of the naval garrison in many ways. Obviously, there was a financial gain as jobs were available in construction and maintenance of the station. Moreover, the continuous presence of outsiders had psychological implications as the expertise of the islanders was requested and urgently needed. The Tristanians realized for the first time that people from the outside world actually depended on their skills and labour, and that they were respected as dedicated and meticulous workers. This resulted in the decrease of the strong sense of "socio-cultural subordination" that Peter Munch had diagnosed in the late 1930s, less than ten years before.

With the end of WWII in 1945, the naval station was evacuated and all military personnel were withdrawn. However, the South African government decided to retain the meteorological station (manned with civil personnel), which meant that Tristan da Cunha continued to have permanent radio contact with the outside world and also that supply ships arrived on a regular basis. Perhaps the most far-reaching change brought by the establishment of the naval garrison was the economic transformation of island life. The Rev. C P Lawrence, who served as minister on Tristan da Cunha during the war, recognized the economic potential of the island. The community, in his view, was surrounded with incredible riches at the bottom of the ocean that had hitherto not been exploited – "crawfish" (lobsters), jokingly known as "red gold". There was a growing demand for lobsters in South Africa and the "crawfish" in Tristan's waters were abundant and easy to catch (apparently they could be caught by simply dropping a weighted pair of socks to the bottom of the sea and pulling it up shortly later - the crustaceans would persistently claw onto the wool). Upon his return to Cape Town, Rev. Lawrence set out to devise a fishing scheme and lobbied in favour of commercial fishing. When a trial run was promising, the Tristan Development Corporation (TDC) was formed in 1949, obtaining exclusive rights to establish a permanent fishing industry on the island. The plan was to employ virtually the entire local workforce, the men in off-shore fishing and the women in crawfish processing in the canning factory. The TDC's economic interest led to rapid changes in the local community. Their traditional subsistence economy was replaced by a paid labour economy, and their habitual way of life was modified as a result of the creation of permanent jobs with regular working hours. The development scheme brought considerable benefits

to the island as the TDC guaranteed full medical, social and educational amenities to the local community.

The old factory at Little Beach

The socio-economic commitment of the TDC had political implications as well. The exclusive fishing concession of a South African company led to the presence of South African businessmen who developed private interests in the island. As a result, the British government and the office of the Commonwealth felt the need to be formally represented on Tristan da Cunha. The decision was made that a resident British Administrator should be sent to the island in order to represent the interests of the islanders as well as those of the Commonwealth. With the arrival of Mr H P Elliott in January 1950, the first Administrator directly appointed by the British government, the political structure of the island was transformed once again. The practice of ministers and missionaries who governed the island more or less on their own accord had finally come to an end. Mr Elliott (whose principal duty was "to act for the people of Tristan in their relations with the company") immediately reinstated the Island Council, appointing Willie Repetto as Chief Islander and ten Tristanians, as well as two company representatives, as councillors to assist him in his decisions.

In 1955 a group of young scientists, the Cambridge University Expedition to Gough Island, called at Tristan and stayed six weeks, surveying and making recordings of local songs and the voices of some of the islanders. They found that this was a curious period, in which old and new mingled and traditional ways and modern innovations coexisted. The women still carded, span wool and knitted traditional 'garnseys' and when the men did not work for the company, they still did what they used to do, namely cultivating their patches, hauling stone in bullock carts, building rough-hewn cottages and thatching them with

flax. The island women they still wore head scarves but used new materials for making old-style dresses, only slightly shorter. Shoes for men and women were sold in the store. For climbing and beach work the men still wore their moccasins but they attended church in dark suits, caps, and black shoes. The team also brought back news that most of the cottages had been equipped with new beds and many kitchens had small cooking stoves, but the open hearth remained the source of warmth and the centre of domestic comfort. Peat was occasionally used as fuel, the old-style bird-oil lamps survived but many replaced them with candles bought at the store. The station had, for a short period of the evening only, electric lights, supplied from a dynamo left behind by the Navy. The greatest surprise to the visiting scientists was that nearly every cottage living-room had a radio (still called 'wireless' in those days), used for listening to both local radio-telephony conversations and broadcasts from the BBC World Service.

In sum, the post WWII period saw unprecedented changes in virtually all domains of everyday life. These changes were by nature *economical*, as the community was restructured from subsistence to paid labour economy; *political*, as the presence of the Commonwealth resulted in a reformation of the community's political structure; *social* and *socio-psychological*, as outsiders were permanently residing on Tristan da Cunha, bringing their know-how to the island while by the same time depending on the islanders' expertise (particularly in fishing); and *educational*, as British teachers were commissioned to set up a regular school system and formal education became compulsory for all local children. Tristan da Cunha in the 1950s enjoyed an economic boom, and the living conditions and housing standards improved almost overnight. Even though old traditions continued, the changes brought about by the development scheme led to a transformation of the traditional Tristanian way of life within a few years. Tristan was undergoing modernization and moved towards a British living standard, and it looked as if the islanders would adapt to the outside world and complete these changes quickly. Then, however, destiny struck yet again. Nobody had anticipated what would happen in October 1961, when the community received a blow that eventually had a more long-lasting effect than any other single event before or after: the volcano erupted.

2.5 Evacuation, return, and economic prosperity (1961 - 2011)

It was a Sunday - August 6 1961 - and the community was congregated in church, when all of a sudden the earth began trembling. Radio messages from Cape Town confirmed that the tremors had been recorded and the administrator sent an urgent inquiry to the Foreign Office. No immediate measures were taken because British scientists

were of the opinion that the volcanic activities were caused by underwater tectonic movements; they calmed the fears of the community, claiming that the tremors were not permanent and that there was no reason for concern. However, the activities intensified, big cracks appeared and disappeared in the ground, and on August 22 twenty-four tremors were recorded on a single day, resulting in cracked walls and jammed doors in the houses on the eastern side of the Settlement. The heaviest tremor occurred on September 17, causing a massive rockslide near the canning factory. Administrator Peter Wheeler, who had come to office just a few months earlier, was in his house and described this harrowing experience as follows: "Suddenly the walls heaved, the floor trembled and for one sickening second the roof threatened to cave in". However, the British government did not make any concrete evacuation plans.

Islanders Driven From Homes Watch Volcano Erupt In Pacific

[Compiled from CP, AP, Reuters]

CAPETOWN — The 260 stunned men, women and children of Tristan da Cunha spent a night of agony on a rocky outcrop in the South Atlantic, eying the glow of a volcano that threatens to destroy their homes.

The refugees fled Tuesday aboard two small fishing boats from earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that began Sunday on Tristan de Cunha, a 40-square-mile speck of land halfway between South Africa and South America and one of the most remote islands in the world.

The refugees fought their way through 13 miles of dangerous seas and waded ashore at Nightingale Island, a bleak, uninhabited rock a mile long and three-fourths of a mile wide, to spend the night and await a Dutch liner coming to take them to Cape Town.

Here, the islanders will wait while nature decides the fate of the island where they and their forebears have lived in almost complete isolation for 150 years.

Scarcely a dozen of the 260, the total population of Tristan, had ever left the British-ruled island before. Their knowledge of the outside world is based on books, films, radio and hearsay. The populace refused evacuation during the Second World War.

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Plans were for a small group of volunteers to stay behind on Nightingale Island when the 9,284-ton Dutch ship Tjisadane picked up the rest of the refugees this morning.

The volunteers were to watch the course of the eruption — the first in modern times on the island — and return to Tristan if anything is left. They will act as caretakers until the others can return, tending the island's handful of sheep and cattle and its tiny fruit and potato crops.

The 7,640-foot high volcano, which occupies most of the island, was reported erupting heavily last night, perilously close to the lone settlement of Edinburgh.

[Note that the headline writer located Tristan in the wrong ocean!]

Finally, on October 9 1961, the volcano erupted about two hundred metres to the east of the Settlement, and there was a slow yet constant lava flow down in the direction of the two landing beaches. Wheeler took immediate action and ordered a total evacuation to the potato patches and then to neighbouring Nightingale Island. The SOS signals

were picked up by the Dutch cruise ship *Tjisadane* bound for Table Bay which arrived at the island within a few hours. The Tristanians could only collect their bare necessities before they were transported to Cape Town. On board the *Tjisadane* they looked at their houses again, many of them with tears in their eyes as they thought they would never return to the island. This was without any doubt a most traumatic experience and older generations of Tristanians remember it vividly to the present day. In Cape Town harbour, huge crowds of curious South Africans welcomed the inhabitants who had come from the world's loneliest island. Accommodation was sought, fundraisers were organized, and the Tristanians were at first under the impression that they would remain in South Africa. A few days later, however, they were told to pack their bags again and to move on to England.

The Tristanians arrived in Southampton on November 3rd 1961. The British government was at a loss as to where they should be resettled and a number of plans were considered, among them resettlement in northern Scotland or on the Falkland Islands, which seemed a most suitable environment for them. It was finally decided that they should be housed in Pendell Camp, an unused army camp at Redhill, Surrey. The arrival in England and the resettlement in unfamiliar surroundings were traumatic for the community, particularly for the elderly generation. The vast majority of Tristanians had never left the island before and were not used to the British climate and local viruses. Many of them suffered from chest infections or influenza, and within the first two months three elderly Tristanians died of pneumonia. However, the cohesion of the community was maintained as nearly all of them stayed together, but this no doubt was of little comfort considering the shock caused by the evacuation and their concern as to whether they would ever see their homes again.

A few months later they were permanently settled in Calshot Camp, a former Royal Air Force station near Southampton. Families could have their own houses in Calshot, and they were able to form their own little community, including a chapel, community hall and post office in a nearby general store. The Southampton area had another advantage, as there was a strong local demand for labour and most Tristanians found jobs in local factories and companies. These permanent jobs facilitated their integration into the outside world. However, even though the Tristanians were treated kindly by most people, a number of things happened that made it difficult for them to embrace the idea of permanent settlement in the UK. Groceries were stolen when they were left unattended, an elderly Tristanian (who had only one arm as a result of a fishing accident) was mugged and beaten up by local "Teddy Boys", street vendors and Jehovah's Witnesses pestered them, and a number of scientists came to use them as study objects for all purposes (in the words of a Tristanian: "they treated us like we was pigs"). The scientific

attention they received was not favourable and some researchers upset the Tristanians tremendously: for instance, a psychologist diagnosed that all the children were language impaired, and an ophthalmologist claimed that within a few generations the entire population would be blind as a result of continued in-breeding.

Trina Glass in Calshot (1962)

Moreover, the "story" of the Tristanians was of great interest to newspapers, and journalists extensively covered the "clash of cultures" and the experiences of the islanders in the outside world. Not one day passed without a newspaper report, and the Tristanians received more attention than they could care for. Life in the public eye and the political discussions about their status and future alienated them considerably; they were most annoyed when a Member of Parliament filed a petition that Tristan da Cunha should be used as a test site for nuclear weapons as the island had been "abandoned by its inhabitants". As a consequence, the islanders, certainly the older generation, expressed a wish to return to the South Atlantic at the first possible opportunity.

In January 1962, the Royal Society sent an expedition to Tristan da Cunha with the aim of investigating causes and effects of the eruption. The scientists reported that there was considerable lava flow but that it had missed the Settlement by a mere one hundred metres; only one house in the Settlement had been destroyed. The earthquakes had changed the drainage pattern on Tristan, but the main damage was that 25 acres of cultivated land were covered under volcanic debris. Worst of all, the two landing beaches and the canning factory were buried under

20 metres of lava. It was also discovered that some of the houses had been looted, that drawers and doors were forced open and that clothing and papers were scattered over the floor. Moreover, the safe in the post office was broken open and all the sheep and some of the cattle had disappeared. It eventually turned out that valuables left behind by the islanders during the hectic evacuation were stolen, most likely by sailors who had landed on the island while in the meantime. The expedition's final report to the government concluded that, even though the volcano was still glowing and very hot (200° C at night), the eruption had terminated and repatriation should be considered as an option.

The Tristanians were overjoyed when the results of the report were made public. When a vote was held, 148 voted in favour of an immediate return to the island (and only five opted to stay in England). An advance party of twelve men was sent ahead to grow potatoes, repair the houses and boats and to attend to the remaining livestock. The remaining Tristanians arrived in two parties, the first in April 1963 and the second in November of the same year. The first years were hard: the seed potatoes imported from England were infested with root worm and not resistant to the violent gales in the South Atlantic Ocean, and the crop failed for two years in a row. Sheep were from imported the Falkland Islands along with chickens but it took the livestock a long time to recover and build up again.

The dramatic evacuation and the two Volcano Years in England affected the islanders more than any other event in the history of the community. The naval station in WWII had given the islanders a taste of what was in store for them in the outside world, but it was the unintended evacuation to England that showed them what it was really like. This was to change the Tristanians in many ways. With the exception of the elderly generation, they adopted modern dress and entertainment. On Saturday nights they now played rock 'n' roll music and danced the twist. Traditional dances, accompanied by an accordion and old tunes, quickly became outmoded and old-fashioned. There was more entertainment in the 1960s than ever before, as the islanders were introduced to bingo and card games, and a cinema was set up in the main hall. They had adapted to the outside world with remarkable speed in the two Volcano Years and the adoption of a western lifestyle so quickly resulted in socio-psychological changes also. Quite rightly, the Tristanians were proud of their exceptional ability to cope with a difficult situation, and the professional expertise they gained in England helped them fit back in the world they knew best. The sense of "socio-cultural subordination" that Peter Munch had found so persistent in the late 1930s was definitely gone, replaced with robust self-confidence and pride in their will and ability to survive as a community. On the other hand, the exposure to western lifestyle also had negative effects. Western foods, particularly sugar and fat, had become a regular staple of

the diet and were to have an effect on Tristanian health. In 1937-38 the Norwegian dentist R F Sognaes had found that the islanders had excellent teeth; he only had to extract three teeth in the entire community even though there was not a single toothbrush on the island. After the return from England in 1963, sweets and sugar could be purchased in the local canteen and this was to affect dental hygiene. The "gleaming white teeth" so many captains had mentioned in their reports can still be found, but they have become rare.

Twistin' the night away back home in Tristan

Despite the initial hardships after the return to Tristan, the islanders' living conditions were soon to improve. Modernization took place almost immediately: new radio telephone equipment was installed (for the first time enabling a direct contact with London), tractors replaced the traditional ox carts, and it was only a matter of time until the first Land Rovers and cars were brought to the island. The lobster industry resurfaced and a new fishing company, the South Atlantic Island Development Corporation (SAIDC), was established in 1964; its subsidiary, the Tristan Investment (Pty), guaranteed full employment for the entire community. The SAIDC built a new on-shore factory and a new harbour, about half a mile to the west of the lava stream, and the men were employed as its workforce when it was constructed. Calshot Harbour was opened on January 2nd 1967 and, when the fishing factory was completed shortly after, the lobster industry provided permanent jobs. The fishing company also supplied all households with electricity. Electric light replaced the old-style oil lamps, and refrigerators and deep freezers made it possible to store food for a long time.

As a result of the renewed economic prosperity the community modernized quickly. The 1970s and 1980s saw an unprecedented economic boom and money poured in. The islanders could afford to import articles from Cape Town that were virtually unknown a few years before, such as cars and motorcycles. Today, there is no shortage of motor vehicles on the island. It is estimated that there are now more than 200 of them, mostly second hand motorbikes, tractors, and *bakkis*, but there are also some sports cars. With only six kilometres of road to drive on, Tristan may well have the highest vehicle density in the world. Electric appliances, video recorders, and furniture were bought, and the steady income meant that from the mid-1980s on, many Tristanians could afford to expand their houses or spend holidays in Cape Town. A new school building was completed in 1975, the supermarket was enlarged, and a range of foods and fashion goods became available. A local museum and craft centre was built, and the Tristanians received a community centre, a pub and a café as well as their own swimming pool. The prosperity had important implications for education as well: in the early 1980s overseas teaching programmes became available in England and on St Helena. The first Tristanian teenagers left in 1983, and today 15-year olds are offered the opportunity to receive secondary education off the island. Similarly, adults are encouraged to undergo further job training on St Helena and more Tristanians than ever before leave the island for further education and training.

In brief, the Tristanians today have an altogether different lifestyle from that of their great-grandparents 100 years ago. Nowadays, the living conditions on Tristan da Cunha are comfortable, and the standards of the houses certainly resemble those in the UK. Most technological innovations, such as e-mail, internet access, television, and satellite telephone, have made it to the island and many of the younger islanders are on Facebook or keep their own websites. As a result, Tristan da Cunha today resembles places in the outside world in many ways and has practically nothing in common with the island as it was before the WWII.