

Napoleon died physically of cancer of the stomach. If the truth be known, more than anything he died of boredom. For a man who throughout his very active life had never spent more than a few months at any one place, the sudden restrictions to "Longwood" and its immediate environs must have been soul-destroying. Throughout the writings of the daily life at "Longwood" can be detected that growing note of despair at the monotony of it all. Towards the end of 1817 his health began to deteriorate. He grew increasingly fat, and from 1819 onwards suffered from occasional fainting fits and increasing stomach pains, which could only be eased by long hot baths. (The bath is still at "Longwood".) On October 4, 1820, he made his last visit outside the grounds. He gradually became weaker, until towards the end of April the next year it became apparent that he was dying. The end was not far away; at 2.00 a.m. on May 5, 1821, he spoke his last words, "France, Head of the Army, Josephine". Just before six o'clock that evening he died. He was not quite 52 years old.

St. Helena has changed but little and Napoleon would have no difficulty recognising it today. Certainly some of the buildings have vanished, victims of the white ants that were accidentally introduced to the island in the mid-1800s. The Porteous House has gone, and its site is now occupied by a cinema. The "Briars" has long been pulled down and is now the Cable & Wireless Co. station. Fortunately, in 1958, just before the Cable & Wireless Co. were going to dismantle it, a descendant of one of William Balcombe's sons, Lady Mabel Brooke, bought the pavilion from them. She gave it to France; it has been restored and is now a museum, devoted mainly to Napoleon's early days on the island. Plantation House is still the residence of the Governor, and it is still much as it was in Hudson Lowe's day, although contrary to tradition the giant tortoise Jonathan, which lives in the grounds, was not alive in Napoleon's day.

The tomb is empty. In 1840 Napoleon's body was exhumed and taken back to France, where it now rests in an ornate mausoleum at the Invalides in Paris. The willows have gone, destroyed by a century and a half of souvenir hunters. (Even after Napoleon's death Lowe still had to show his pettiness; the French wanted the inscription on the tomb in the Sane Valley to read simply "Napoleon" with dates. Lowe insisted that it read "Napoleon Bonaparte". In the end it remained bare. It still is.)

Longwood House had many vicissitudes of fortune. Shortly after Napoleon's death the land was rented out as a farm, and for some time the house used for sheltering cattle and slaves. There was considerable outcry from the French, who came to carry his body back to France in 1840 (some of

whom had been with Napoleon in exile), at the dilapidated condition of the house. However, it was not until 1858 that anything was finally done about it, when in that year Britain agreed to sell "Longwood" and the site of the tomb to France. The house was restored, as far as was possible to its original condition, but unfortunately the white ant had hold, and although over the years there had been several efforts to eradicate them and complete restoration, notably 1914-21 and 1931-34, by 1945 the house was in danger of collapse and had to be closed. In 1947 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited the island, and it was largely through their dismay at the condition of the old house that further restoration by the French Government was put in hand. It was to last for five years, until 1955 when the house was again opened to the public.

"Longwood" is a sprawling bungalow of 34 rooms. Of these Napoleon used six, with occasionally four more smaller ones, and it is these rooms that are now preserved as a museum. Some of the furniture is original, recovered from various parts of the island where they had been dispersed during the general sale of effects after Napoleon's death; other pieces are careful copies. The windows still have wooden shutters, and although not the originals still have holes, cut so that Napoleon could spy on his guards without being seen himself. The height of these holes show that he was a man physically of small stature.

The rest of the house contained the usual domestic offices and quarters for some of his aides and staff. Today the French Consul, M. Gilbert Martineau, lives in part of it, and it also houses his large and valuable collection of Napoleonic memorabilia. The gardens are laid out very much as Napoleon would have known them, although some of the flora, notably the trees, have now changed. The outlook too is different, for Deadwood Plain, just below "Longwood", where once there was an army encampment, is now covered with the aerial masts of the Diplomatic Wireless Service, and just to the east of the house itself is a golf course!

It is a pity that Sir Hudson Lowe is remembered only in infamy for his treatment of Napoleon, and not for the fact that he was active in the suppression of slavery. Napoleon, outside France, is chiefly remembered as being a would-be conqueror of the world. But it must be borne in mind that he was a man who unified a nation, a nation torn apart by bloody revolution and civil war, and he gave to that nation a code of law that is still in use today and which has been copied by many lands throughout the world. I have heard it said of Napoleon that he was "The Man in a Thousand Years". Perhaps he was, but I am not sure. But then I am not a Frenchman.



The Regional Director of Posts and Telecommunications, Mr. Gawie de Kock, loads the last bag of mail to be shipped from Cape Town on Southampton Castle's final voyage in the Mail Service. Looking on are Mr. Neil Sempill, CISA managing director, and Captain N. F. Wray-Cook. Picture: Terence McNelly.

Promise fulfilled

Promises are promises and Union-Castle has recently honoured a promise made 14 years ago.

In May, 1963, as Pretoria Castle headed for Southampton on her homeward run, Dr. Richard Heald was fighting to save the life of one of the ship's youngest passengers. Twice on the voyage nine-month-old Felicity Taylor nearly died from gastroenteritis. She was nursed continually during the day by Sister Elizabeth Levell and male nurse Lawrence Pearce, and each night by two South African nurses travelling as passengers.

Mrs. Mag Walton was one of those nurses and when Dr. Heald decided Felicity's best chance of survival lay in flying her to Guy's Hospital from Las Palmas, Mrs. Walton volunteered to accompany her to London.

Happy Felicity recovered and Mr. R. J. Bloxam, at that time director and general manager, wrote to Mrs. Walton thanking her for her assistance and as a token of gratitude offered a free passage between Durban and Cape Town. Mrs. Walton was delighted but as time went by the letter was discarded among other papers and the trip forgotten.

The sequel to the story was unfolded when, in April this year, Mrs. Walton came across Mr. Bloxam's letter and she wrote to Castlemarine in Durban and asked if by some miracle the offer was still open. The Company was delighted to inform her it was and as a result Mrs. Walton and her husband, Michael, were passengers on Windsor Castle in May—just 14 years later.