



useum of Saint Helena

Fact sheet: The Island as a Halfway House

In 1659 the first English settlers arrived.

For centuries after it appeared on European maps St Helena provided ships with a place for sailors to recover from illnesses such as scurvy and to restock. The maritime Spice Trade expanded and European nations competed for trade with Asia and for the island's resources. Fernando Lopez was the first to farm the warm valley of present day Jamestown to supply passing ships.

The Dutch and Portuguese made claims to the Island, but England finally claimed permanent possession. Cromwell and Charles II granted charters giving the East India Company the right to rule the island on behalf of England. In 1659 the first English settlers arrived to make their home, work for the Company and defend the island.

East India Company ships laden with pepper, precious stones, silk, cloves, porcelain and other Asian goods assembled here and sailed home together for protection against pirates. They depended on the island and the islanders depended on them for business and contact with the world. Stories of the East India Company period (1659-1833) are filled with mutinies, drunken clergyman, epidemics, slave rebellions, agricultural experiments, environmental disasters and both good and bad governors.