



Captain Rodney Young: connecting St Helena with the rest of the world



# The long way home

St. Helena liegt im Südatlantik. Die Insel abgelegen zu nennen, ist eine Untertreibung. Und die einzige Verbindung zum Rest der Welt ist das Postschiff.

**JULIAN EARWAKER** hat sich den geschichtsträchtigen Frachter angesehen, als er jüngst in Großbritannien vor Anker lag.



## A CLOSER LOOK

The RMS *St Helena* is one of only two British vessels that still operate as **Royal Mail Ships** (the other is the *Queen Mary 2*). The title “RMS” was introduced in 1840 to show which ships had contracts with the Royal Mail to deliver the post throughout the British Empire. “RMS” was a high-status title for ocean-going ships — including the *Titanic*.

Its white paint and yellow funnel shining in the sunlight, the big ship stands proudly in the waters of Portland Harbour in Dorset, England. Before me lies the RMS *St Helena*, one of Britain’s last working **Royal Mail Ships**. Walking up the gangplank, I receive friendly greetings from several crew members. They have never seen me before, but I soon discover that such friendliness is normal on board. After all, the RMS *St Helena* is much more than just a ship.

“The RMS really is an extension of the island,” explains Kedell Worboys, the UK representative of St Helena. “Everything going to the island goes on that ship,” she says. “Once you step on board, it’s almost as if you’re stepping on to St Helena itself.”

Both Worboys and the boat are a very long way from home: one of the most remote inhabited islands on earth, the volcanic island of St Helena is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom that lies 6,400 kilometres from

Britain. It is located far out in the South Atlantic Ocean, roughly midway between Angola on Africa’s west coast and Brazil.

The Portuguese discovered St Helena as an uninhabited island in 1502, but it was the British who were to colonize it by 1659. Its position along important trade routes kept it a busy place, and in 1834, it officially became one of Britain’s Crown Colonies. It is best known as the last place of exile and original burial place of Napoleon Bonaparte after his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. He died on the island in 1821, after spending six years in a small town called Longwood, a few kilometres from the port capital at Jamestown.

“We are still as isolated, perhaps even more isolated, now than we were when Napoleon was exiled here,” says Worboys, “because in those days, you had more ships. We depend now almost solely on the RMS. She is our only real link with the outside world.” This may sound dra-

matic, but it is accurate. There is no airport on St Helena, and although it belongs to the same overseas territory as Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha, these islands lie thousands of kilometres away. Food, fuel and the other necessities of life have to be brought in by the RMS from places it regularly visits, such as Cape Town.

Built in 1989, the 105-metre-long vessel is designed to carry both cargo and passengers. Walk on board, and it is immediately clear that this is a working ship — clean and functional, but not luxurious. The RMS *St Helena* is big enough for its 65 crew members and 128 passengers without being spacious, and the atmosphere on board is relaxed. “We all know each other, us islanders,” explains Rodney Young, the ship’s captain. “We know each other’s families and friends. I know all the crew. I went to school with some of them.”

Even VIP guests such as HRH Princess Anne, who travelled on board in 2002, happily mix with other pas-

Fotos: Julian Earwaker; Justin Fox; St Helena Tourism

<b>burial place</b> ['berɪəl pleɪs]	Grabstätte
<b>cargo</b> ['kɑːɡəʊ]	Fracht
<b>defeat</b> [di'fi:t]	Niederlage
<b>funnel</b> ['fʌnəl]	Schornstein
<b>gangplank</b> ['gæŋplæŋk]	Landungssteg, -brücke
<b>HRH = His/Her Royal Highness</b> [ˌeɪtʃ aɪr 'eɪtʃ]	Ihre königliche Majestät
<b>midway</b> [ˌmɪd'weɪ]	auf halbem Weg
<b>necessities of life</b> [nəˌsesɪtɪz əv 'laɪf]	lebensnotwendige Dinge
<b>ocean-going</b> ['əʊʃən ˌɡəʊɪŋ]	seetüchtig
<b>solely</b> ['səʊlli]	einzig und allein
<b>spacious</b> ['speɪʃəs]	geräumig
<b>vessel</b> ['vesəl]	Wasserfahrzeug, Schiff