

A comment on the Bicentenary events from French Consul, Michel Dancoisne-Martineau:

“This week was the culmination of a programme that has been in progress for over 10 years. In 2010, together with the Fondation Napoléon, we launched a fundraising campaign in order to complete the restoration of the Napoleon's companions' quarters and the furniture in Longwood House. This fundraising campaign was so successful that by 2015 we had completed all the work we had set out to do. And moreover 1700 donors made this possible and we are very grateful to them all.

Thanks to them, we had the means to send to Paris the most emblematic items of the exile (such as the terrestrial and celestial globes, the billiard table, etc.) so that they could undergo very complex restoration. Before being shipped back to the Island, they became the core of an exhibition Napoleon on St Helena, the Conquest of Memory which at the time was the most successful exhibition held at the Musée de l'Armée, in Les Invalides, with tens of thousands of visitors. Amaël Gohier a professional furniture restorer came to the Island and trained two local residents - Arthur Francis and Christen Yon - and together restored the furniture which were not sent to Paris (Christen later was able to complete his training in the UK and France and has since restored some of the Plantation House furniture).

Then, with the creation in 2015 of the local charity, the St Helena Napoleonic Heritage (SHNH), we were able to continue this restoration effort and redo, among other projects, all the sunken paths of the gardens that Napoleon created between 1819 and 1821. Of all these ambitious programmes to restore the House, the interior decorations, the gardens and the furniture of Longwood House to the condition it was in 5 May 1821; only the room that served as the library remains to be restored.

Around the bicentenary, the SHNH completed two exhibitions: One on-Island for Plantation House around the work of Sir Hudson Lowe. It was done with HE Governor Lisa Honan and the contributors we wish to thank again: Napoleonmuseum Thurgau Schloss und Park Arenenberg, The St Helena Tourist Office, Enterprise St Helena, The St Helena Heritage Society, The Plantation House team, The Longwood House team, Edward Baldwin, The St Helena Archives, Le Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, Le Musée national des Châteaux de Malmaison et de Bois-Préau, Craig Williams, Jodie Scipio-Constantine, Jean-Paul Mayeux, St Helena Government and La Fondation Napoléon (Paris). Another one in South Africa was held at Groot Constantia Wine Estate and was done with the support of the French Ambassador and Iziko Museums of South Africa, to promote St Helena Island. It was attended by Governor Lisa Honan as a guest of honour. And to finish the programme, three ceremonies we held on 5 May, 6 May and 9 May 2021. They were planned back in late 2019 when we knew that over 1000 visitors would be making the journey. Everything had been designed to offer them a dignified and respectful commemoration. But Covid-19 forced us to revise our plans. In order to publicly display our resilience, together with the Fondation Napoléon and the French Properties, we had decided at the beginning of the pandemic to maintain the ceremonies as planned. But in a more intimate way. As for the Catholic mass which, instead of being held on the Longwood Green with over 800 seats, was able to be held in Napoleon's Chapel at Longwood with just the 30 seats. In doing so we gained emotional capital.

As for the ceremonies that took place on 5 and 9 May at Longwood and at the Tomb, only the number of visitors physically present was different from what we had planned. However, paradoxically, with the technical support of Sure South Atlantic Ltd, John Isaac's Contractors and Damien O'Bey, we were able to reach many more people around the world virtually with live streaming which, while they may seem trivial elsewhere in the world, represent a real technical achievement locally.

Of course, without the adaptability of the French Properties team, without Creative St Helena and all its musical performers, without Father David, without the St Helena Government in the person of Carol George, without Eric Barthe who came to the Island for 45 days to lead the event communication, nothing would have been possible. We owe them the success and the compliments we received from all over the world.”

Many Thanks,
Michel Dancoisne-Martineau