

A Falkland Islands miscellany

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This version was published on 2015-06-24



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Contents

Introduction

I suppose my attention was first drawn to the Falkland Islands through stamp collecting as a schoolboy. It joined an ever expanding list of almost mythical places like Tristan da Cunha and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon known from little coloured squares of paper with various pictures, portraits and values on them, the latter often in exotic currency. Those from the Falklands had pictures of elephant seals, penguins, old ships and low, grey mountains as well as of various British kings and Queen Victoria.

And there the Falklands remained, in the stamp album with just a brief appearance in my early twenties when a neighbour told us that his brother had been the police inspector for the islands and their dependencies. Apparently this meant spending a third of the year in the islands themselves, a third going around the Dependencies, including Antarctica and the remainder of the time on holiday. Since the area he covered was almost crime-free this seemed an attractive occupation.

The islands came closer in the early 1970s when our daughter Nicola-Jane sought a pen friend in some distant land. The Falklands seemed a suitable candidate, so we wrote to the headmaster of the school in Stanley, the Islands' capital (I later discovered he received many such requests) and he paired her with Anne-Marie Blythe. For two or three years there was a regular exchange of letters before Anne-Marie and her family moved to New Zealand, after which the correspondence gradually faded.

Then in 1982 the world's attitude towards the Falkland Islands changed completely with the outbreak of the conflict over them and their dependencies between Great Britain and Argentina. Like many others I became totally absorbed in what was happening due to the amount of detail transmitted through the media and we all learnt a great deal more about the islands, though some of it was misleading. It is not my purpose here to chart the history of this episode which has been very well covered in other writing, though inevitably I shall touch on it from time to time where it affected my story. It was, for example, due to the conflict, that I became involved in detail with the area

It has long been known that our recollections of the past are not as accurate as we often suppose. As time goes by we add, delete and modify for no obvious reason except, perhaps, to improve the story. I recall quite vividly rushing round the playground of my primary school in north London when I was about seven but, at the time, the school had not apparently moved back to London from the west Country. So some of my memories of the Falklands might have 'developed' over the past twenty five years or so though they seem accurate to me.