

Chagos News

The Periodical Newsletter of the Friends of the Chagos

No. 2

December 1993

Editorial

Further milestones

Milestones in the evolution of the "Friends of the Chagos" have been passed since the last Newsletter, the Association's formal launch being marked by a reception in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office hosted by the Commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territories on 13th October. On the same date the first Annual General Meeting was held. This cleared the way for formal application to the Charity Commissioners for charity status; the application was made in November.

Both of these functions are reported in this issue, and we hope in the next to be able to confirm that Charity status has been granted. This is our next milestone, and is an important one - not easily achieved, so your Executive Committee have spent many hours trying to ensure that they have got it right.

Box of Delights

In this edition you will also find, on the historical side, a spotlight on the RAF's lifestyle on island during the war, a description of the beginnings of development in the early 1970s, and a report on how historical conservation is being tackled on island today. On the scientific side, Dr Charles Sheppard balances the scales with an article on how the best minds in the business are being rounded up to create a Scientific Steering Group. Scientific planning is concentrating on the next research expedition to the Chagos. And there is news of a new book which could be an on-island best-seller in 1994.

Over to you

I asked last time for your thoughts in writing on the 'Friends', and especially on this Newsletter. I have had some feedback and a couple of

articles, for which I am grateful, but the great majority have so far remained silent. If membership of the Friends is providing you with all that you hoped it would, I am delighted; but it is a fair bet that most readers have some constructive ideas on how either the Association or Newsletter could be improved. Of course you're all busy; but your suggestions would really be helpful in giving our organisation the form in which it will be most productive. For example, I have changed the format of the Newsletter this time: is it more readable? Do tell us! Comments, please, to me at **32 Holly Grove, Fareham, Hants. PO16 7UP**. And please note that the deadline for all articles for the next Newsletter is 1st May 1994.

Membership

We are heartened by the steady increase in membership over the past six months: numbers have risen from around 50 in July to the mid-80s on 1 December, with at least a dozen more who have indicated their intention to sign up. In this issue we enclose a list of members to date: if you know a name or two who ought to be there, please contact them - they will probably be very pleased! This especially applies to those in the Services, whose colleagues are often hard to trace.

Finally . . .

Some of last year's members have still to renew their subscriptions (£5 or \$10) for '94. If you haven't done so yet, do it now: preferably direct to the Treasurer, Nigel Wells, at **12 Monks Orchard, Petersfield, Hants. GU32 2JJ**. Thanking you and wishing you all a Happy Christmas and an excellent year in 1994.

Richard Martin

A Historical Heritage Perspective

The Commissioner's Representative, Commander Fred Hatton, has provided the following description of how the historical heritage in Diego Garcia is being handled, and where on-island historical conservation initiatives stand today.

The trouble with serving and living in Diego Garcia is that the corporate memory is only 12 months long. I am sure all our readers know what I mean by that. However, I am fortunate in that I managed to sweet-talk someone into letting me stay here for *two* years and as I write, at the 18-month point, I am probably well placed to provide a historical heritage view on the Chagos Archipelago.

Having said that, it would be wrong of me to second-guess what my predecessors did during their time: I could delve into the files, but would be limited to repeating what they documented; I would not be able to put a subjective slant on it. Anyway, as they sit and read this, it might prompt one or two to write future articles for this Newsletter.

When I arrived here in June 1992 the policy of 'benign neglect' had been dismissed, and restoration was the order of the day. Work on the East Point Plantation manager's house was nearly complete and his private chapel and the main church had both been fully restored. Along the path to the Met Station, the morgue, bleeding stone and hospital were also restored.

Many buildings remained in

a poor state of repair, the main problems being the roofs, of which some were dangerous and others had already collapsed, and the vegetation and trees which had taken root in the walls and structures of the buildings. There is widespread evidence of walls and foundations being destroyed by 20 years' unchecked growth: I have an old picture of the church showing a tree growing out of the roof.

The last 18 months have seen a continuing drive towards preserving those buildings which our Conservation Consultant has prioritised, a determination to get the cemetery under control, efforts to clear collapsed roofs when safe to do so, and to control the vegetation. I have been determined to show all visitors to the East Point Plantation that progress is being made in making the site as appealing, tranquil and well cared for as we possibly can.

How have these objectives been achieved? The answer is simply that over the past 18 months all sections of the community have cared enough to volunteer their services from time to time, using whatever skills they possess. The Public Works Dept (PWD) and the Seabees have the right sort of equip-

ment, and the know-how to use it; the USMC and the RMs have the brawn; and everybody else - Americans, Britons, Filipinos and Mauritians, military and civil, male and female, young and old - have given of their time to do something to keep up the initiative.

The 'adopt-a-building' scheme, initiated in 1989, was not a long-term success because of the rapid turnround of people: with one-year appointments for the majority, an initiative begun by one well-meaning individual is soon lost when his or her relief arrives and finds other things to do with spare time, or takes a few months to settle into the job before finding those spare time outlets.

Having had the first visit by the Conservation Consultant, and his report having been accepted by the Commissioner, we have now earmarked substantial resources to restore four more buildings, to complete repair of the internal walls of the manager's house, and to begin a museum project.

We have not been able to identify a building we can use as a museum, but have accepted that a dispersed museum in the downtown area is the next best thing.

Display boards based on a theme will be placed in common areas such as the library, galley, '61 Club', gymnasium, Seamen's Club, and elsewhere. We are open to suggestions and welcome inputs from any of the island community, past or present. We also intend to use the manager's house as an on-site museum for some of the larger artefacts and memorabilia that have been uncovered over the years. I hope we can see these projects coming to fruition by the end of 1994.

With all this work going on and progress being made, my predecessor made a bold and wise decision - to levy a \$1 a day fee on passes to the Restricted Area (with discounts for monthly, quarterly and yearly passes). This has certainly not put people off: on the contrary, when they are told the money goes into the fund from which we finance restoration projects, they are only too pleased to contribute. When we have made further progress on the 1994 projects, including the museum, we intend to raise the fee, and I do not envisage any objections to that.

In attempting to open up more of the island to the community, the services of the PWD, CBs, USMC and RMs have been applied to clearing the road from East Point all the way to Barton Point. No attempt has been made to improve the road surface, which comprises sand, rough coral, tree roots, etc. We certainly do not want a racing track, nor to make driving easy; we merely wanted to

open up the last 10 miles or so of island to the sort of visitor who would appreciate the natural beauty and serenity of the area.

Four-wheel drive is still the only safe and sensible means of vehicular access, and access has also been restricted to duty and essential traffic only. The true nature-lover can thus enter the area in peace and near-solitude, hopefully undisturbed by cars and vans. One problem, of course, is fallen trees across the road. Walkers and bikers are not stopped by them, but vehicles are; and the last place to be is on the wrong side of one just as the sun is setting - though perhaps under it would be worse!

As the reader can see, a great deal has been achieved and a lot more is planned. But it is important that the money continues to flow so that our objectives can be realized. We have some sources of revenue, such as the cost of the passes, but my plea is, the more we have, the more we can do; and the **'Friends of the Chagos'** have the ability to allocate money received to any projects their Executive Committee vote to support. So, keep up the good work, and help recruit new members whenever you can!

Peaks of Limuria - The Story of Diego Garcia

There has long been a need for a readable and easily available description of Diego Garcia. The vivid descriptions by Sir Robert Scott, Governor of Mauritius, in his book of 1960 are becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile with the islands of today; while 'Under Two Flags', drafted by former BRITREP John Spinks in the early 1970s, was never published. Those on island have been poorly supplied with authoritative historical and general information

This gap is about to be filled by the publication of **"Peaks of Limuria"** by Richard Edis, the last BIOT Commissioner and now HM Ambassador in Mozambique. His book, with a foreword by HRH the Duke of York, describes the islands' flora, fauna and geomorphology before concentrating on their history. It will be on sale, in hardback, from mid January, at £13.95. At Mr Edis's insistence, all proceeds from the sale of the book will go towards conservation projects in the Chagos Archipelago.

It will be available in the downtown bookstore in Diego Garcia, through any UK bookshop, or from the publishers, who are offering it to readers of 'Chagos News' at the special price of £10.50 plus post & packing (£1 to UK addresses; check with Bellews for p&p to other countries). Contact Bellew Publishing at The Nightingale Centre, 8 Balham Hill, London SW12 9EA (Tel: 081-673-5611), quoting "Chagos News".

[ISBN: 1 85725 070 2.]

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Early Days

John Canter, in September 1971 the first BRITREP to be appointed (on 'loan to the FCO/loan to the USN') to Diego Garcia, has contributed some recollections of the early days of Britrepcy.

After expressing his surprise at being nominated as 'a real live Desert Island Discs candidate', he wondered if his qualifications for this highly unusual post could have been his Naval flying training at Pensacola (where he had been when Pearl Harbour was attacked in 1941) or whether it was connected with an opinion he had been invited to give, some years later, on the suitability as an airfield site of Aldabra, where he carried out a survey of the lagoon entrance, Passe Horeau.

He had given Aldabra the 'thumbs down' for several reasons, inter alia the presence of giant tortoises; he had also found some of the bird life - fodies and flightless rails - extraordinarily tame, a rail even allowing him to remove it by hand when it started to interfere with his survey equipment. On his later return to London he had been called to the office of the Minister for Air, Lord Shackleton, where a delighted Geographic Conservationist announced that the Aldabran airfield option was being dropped, and consideration was being given to the idea of placing Aldabra in the hands of the Royal Society as a place of scientific study. He continues:

And so it was that I was despatched to Diego Garcia - via the Seychelles, where the Governor, who was also Governor of the British Indian Ocean Territories, briefed me succinctly on my duties: 'Do whatever is necessary to assist the USN in building the facility, and whatever powers you need to carry out this function - give them to yourself and then let me know.' He gazetted me as a Magistrate, appointed me as a Postmaster, and sent me on my way.

In the Autumn of 1970 I arrived on a tiny airstrip, complete with full set of golf clubs, on the biggest bunker with no fairway ever known to the Royal and Ancient.

The aim of the USN's work in progress was to construct a joint RN/USN Communication Facility to complete a highly reliable, worldwide HF point-to-point ring in which Diego Garcia would provide the link between stations in Ethiopia and Australia. The plan was to use US Naval Construction Battalions (Seabees) in rotation, each CB having a particular construction task. On my arrival the first CB unit was halfway through constructing first a tented village, then the airstrip, then a more substantial wooden-hutted village with basic services such as electricity, sewage and water. The second CB Unit's task was to prepare enough coral aggregate for construction, then to set up storage and facilities for mixing concrete in large amounts, enlarge the water supplies etc; so that the next Unit could start building a full-sized airfield, black-top roads, and permanent buildings. Each succeeding Unit built on the work of its predecessors.

I stayed long enough (3 years) to see the commissioning of the Communications Facility with a joint USN/RN Ship's Company, and the completion of permanent working and accommodation buildings, roads, power plants, the sewage system and a basic berthing facility in the lagoon. My 'USN' task in all this was to be the Operations Officer, responsible to the US Navy Commanding Officer.

The energetic application of 1000 US Navy men to this work had

an immediate effect on the island, in two ways in particular. First, there was a need for hardened coral aggregate. This meant using the ledges between the beach and the reef, where the coral had been exposed to oxygen, dying and hardening. These coral ledges may well have been fully exposed to the atmosphere at some stage when the sea level was lowered, perhaps during the Ice Age. The coral was obtained by blasting out strips from the beach to seaward, and drag-lining the debris ashore to be crushed and left for the frequent rains to leach out the salt.

The second environmental effect was the destruction of large areas of standing coconut trees. The rotting of these trees had caused a vast increase in the population of rhinoceros beetles, which were now attacking the standing trees, the tell-tale straight cuts in the foliage being seen everywhere.

My duties as 'British Representative' took up little of my time. Having established with the USN Island Commander our respective responsibilities - his being those relating to the US Services and mine being virtually the rest, with areas of duplication resolved by mutual agreement, the British civil administrative view having the final say - I was able to turn my attention to the state of the Island.

My first priority was to find a way of disposing of the decaying palm trees using a minimum of USN time and resources. The FCO proposed using an air-blown, deep-fire trench 40 feet long and 10 feet deep; this could burn complete tree trunks at a very high temperature and very

quickly. The US Navy responded rapidly by bringing in one of these systems from the UK, and that problem was solved.

And so to the rest of the coconut plantation. Until recently the plantation had been owned and managed from the Seychelles, the workers - the 'Ilois' - coming mostly from Mauritius. Most had been on the island for many years and a good number had been born in Diego Garcia. On the closure of the plantation the workers had been repatriated to Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Early forays of the island quickly showed that this plantation had not been run as efficiently as the ones I had seen elsewhere; although there had at one time been a well regulated regime of planting in operation, by now almost the whole of the western arm of the island and much of the eastern side had relapsed into a 'God's Tree' operation: fallen nuts not collected had germinated and just been left to grow on, making harvesting the nuts at the right stage very difficult. Other parts of the island, though, were well planted and harvested. It was impossible to tell whether the encroaching dereliction of plantation and living areas was economic, bad farming or both.

The living areas comprised two principal, recently evacuated sites and three much older ones. At Pointe Marianne, half way down the western arm, was the Area Manager's house, office and stores, and a group of about 20 standard two-roomed huts for the workers. Also of note were a gaol, and a very small ruined chapel, about 12 foot square, at the entrance to an old cemetery site.

On the opposite side of the lagoon was the island's main administrative HQ at East Point. Here was the Manager's house (which I used quite often, my wife and I residing in it when

she visited the island for two weeks in 1972); also store-rooms, drying sheds and platforms, workshops; an oil-crushing rig (two blind-folded donkeys pulling round in a circle a pestle with its crushing end in a hollowed-out takamaka trunk mortar) used to extract copra oil; the ubiquitous gaol, a blacksmith's shop, a fully furnished Catholic Church and a cantonment of 30-odd workers' huts.

Nearby to the north were a school, school-mistress's house, hospital and nurses' residence. Also in the vicinity, a piggery with about eight pig-pens and a great iron pot for boiling up pig-food: this was a delight, the pot being large enough to climb into and having all the hallmarks of a 'cannibal pot'. There was an enclosed area for growing sugar-cane, from which the local rum had been derived (but that's another story); an orchard containing many orange and lime trees, a cemetery beyond the hospital, and a second children's cemetery in a secluded spot behind the Manager's house, which I did not find until a year later, after I was told its existence. Finally, there was the pier, connected to the working areas by a light railway line.

The village at East Point was a complete unit. It had not long been evacuated and most of it was in good repair; however, considerable vandalism had already taken place. In an attempt to preserve what remained I asked the US Navy C.O. to make the East side of the island 'off limits' until I had a chance to evaluate what was there.

North of the village was a cleared area, still with soccer goal posts, and the Mauritius Meteorological Station, still manned by two Mauritian Met Officers; this station was closed as soon as the US Navy Met Office was established in 1971.

[The last Mauritians signed off on one of the walls of the Met Station, and their farewells can still be clearly read today.]

The three older sites were at Carcasse, Minni-Minni and near Barton Point. At Carcasse, a mile or so south of East Point on the lagoon shore, were a few ruined coral buildings and a large citrus orchard; north of East Point was Minni-Minni, a similar group of buildings, but larger ones, overgrown with the hanging roots of banyan trees which I took to be evidence of previous Hindu occupation. East of Minni-Minni, on the ocean side, was an old burial site with one readable date of 1809, and many of the graves looked older. Finally, near the northern tip of the eastern arm I found the remains of a sub-manager's house and a small group of derelict workers' huts; these had clearly been long abandoned.

The animal (other than bird and crustacean) life of the island appeared to have been introduced by man. There were many donkeys scattered over the island, three horses - stallion, mare and filly, many feral cats, and a few dogs. Domestic birds included numerous hens and two ducks. The real curse was a population of rats.

So, this was my parish. What to do with it?

... And with luck we shall hear, in a future edition, what was done with it: watch this space. In the meantime, recent or current visitors to the island may have comments on some of the points raised in John Carter's article, in particular on what has become of the remains he describes.

The Scientific Plan for the Chagos

Dr Charles Sheppard, recently elected onto the Executive Committee, explains how he intends to tackle scientific conservation in the Chagos, bearing in mind the need to lay groundwork for the next research expedition to the area, planned for 1996.

As a scientist who has lived in tents for a total of almost a year on Chagos (and you wouldn't do something like that in the rainiest part of the Indian Ocean unless you quickly became captivated by the place), I was delighted to be asked by John Topp to take on the "Scientific Leadership" of the Chagos project. This requires several immediate tasks, and I would like to briefly bring Friends of Chagos up to date on what these involve.

First though, a word about my own philosophy behind any future scientific plans. This is to have a policy of openness, and one which is designed to involve as wide and diverse a range of scientific skills as possible, compatible with the overall objectives of the Friends of the Chagos and of our conservation and scientific hopes and goals for it.

This is necessary because Chagos is a very big place. Not geographically - we all know that it is just a pinprick on the Indian Ocean map - but conceptually. It does become a bit larger than a pin prick when you are actually there, given its isolation and the logistical and transport difficulties, but its conceptual size is much greater because of its scientific importance. It is a biogeographical crossroads; it is an oasis in the Indian Ocean vastness; it is a haven for birds; it is largely uninhab-

ited (which alters the usual conservation framework completely); it is biologically very rich and diverse; and scientifically it is probably already the best studied group of atolls and reefs in the Indian Ocean. To optimise and to build on all this will be no trivial task.

I intend therefore to fully involve the talents of many first rank environmental scientists from Britain and elsewhere, and the vehicle for arranging this will be a Scientific Steering Group. This is in the process of being formed now, and enquiries have gone out to leading environmental scientists and organisations in the UK, the USA and Australia so far (all three being noted for their tropical marine research programmes and researchers, and for their ability to apply science to conservation problems). Several offers of help and participation have been received and I hope that by the time the next newsletter is due, a more-or-less defined Scientific Steering Group will be complete.

Confirmed members of it so far are Professor Jacqui McGlade who is eminent in fields of ecosystems analysis as well as in fisheries, and Dr Andrew Price whose work is in coastal management, and who also works for the World Conservation Union. Both are close to home (for me) and we share the same university address. John

Topp is also a member. This is partly because this will be commensurate with ensuring good communication within the wider group of people interested in the Archipelago, but also because a great deal of the work will be done by John, including database preparation, and later, remote sensing work. Hardware and software to do this has already been obtained, and is being set up now.

My early tasks I see as having four main threads. These are:

- preparing a preliminary outline of the scientific objectives and setting up initial facilities;
- continuing to make contact with scientists who fit the requirements to join the Scientific Steering Group;
- seeking the inputs and participation of a wider range of scientists in connection with suggested programmes of work; and
- working with them to obtain ideas on funding for the work.

The work itself can fall into two main categories, though these are by no means mutually exclusive. First will be work which is entirely applied to the Chagos and its directly relevant conservation problems. First, in this case, also means foremost. Second will be the use of the unique position of the Chagos to strengthen some

environmental work and general environmental understanding which has a wide importance. This will feed back to the first objective, but should be of a more global nature. The world, not only the Chagos, needs this too.

Details that will develop gradually include decisions which will eventually determine how big (in terms of scope and participants) the scientific and field work will be. At this stage, very little is cast in reef limestone. We have just started, and I hope that in future issues we will be able to expand on the scientific scope, and then on progress. I, or any member, would welcome comments.

*Charles Sheppard
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FCO Reception

The Commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territory, Mr Tom Harris, very kindly invited some ninety people to a Reception in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 13th October on the occasion of the Launch of the 'Friends of the Chagos'. A good number of Friends were present.

Literature on the Chagos, and on the Friends, was available for perusal, and photographs and transparencies of the islands' wildlife were on display. The Commissioner welcomed the diversity of interested guests he had brought together, and gave tangible expression to his support for the 'Friends' by generously contributing a cheque for £300 on behalf of the BIOT Administration.

The Chairman, John Topp,

thanked the Commissioner and outlined for the guests the present state of development of the 'Friends', and Dr Charles Sheppard spoke of the ecological importance of the Chagos as a uniquely unspoilt area of scientific interest.

It was a superb evening, greatly enjoyed and appreciated by those present, and the perfect launch for the "Friends of the Chagos". We are all very grateful of the Commissioner for his kindness and generosity and for providing, with the assistance of his team - Don Cairns, Alex Page and Eamonn Lorimer - such an excellent evening.

Annual General Meeting

The first Annual General Meeting of the Association was held at 20 Lupus Street, London SW1 on 13th October.

The Chairman gave a resume of the origins of the 'Friends' in 1992, the growth of the Executive Committee and its five meetings to date. He said that much importance had been attached to producing coherent Articles of Association, which would meet the present and foreseeable needs of the Charity. He asked those present to propose any final amendments which should be made to them before their submission to the Charity Commissioners. Several amendments were proposed, discussed and adopted, and the Articles of Association were finalised. It was agreed that the Chairman should proceed with formal application for registration.

The Treasurer produced a statement of accounts and this was adopted. Subscriptions received totalled £295 and \$320, and expenditure was £102.51 - mostly on the first Newsletter. It was agreed that the end of our accounting year would be 30 September annually.

Ducks and Dengue

Following on from the misadventures of Catalina K/240 at East Point in 1944 related in the last edition, 'Ed' thought that some sample extracts from the wartime records of No 29 Advanced Flying Boat Base (AFBB) might be of interest. They are intended to provide a flavour of lifestyle of those Magnificent Men in wartime... but first, a couple of paragraphs of history:

Lifespan

The earliest mention of RAF activity in the Chagos is in the March 1943 Air Force List: Diego Garcia is listed as an 'Island Base' under SHQ Kogalla (presumably in India or Ceylon, as it comes under AHQ India, in New Delhi). Two squadrons of Catalinas - one RAF, the other RCAF - were based at Kogalla, and the former, 205 Sqn, has a detachment listed as based in D.G. during September and October 1944. The designation No. 29 AFBB is given from May 1944 through to the final entry in May 1946.

Also in D.G. from November 1943 was No.1 Meteorological Reporting Centre; but when, in July 1945, the Base was reduced to care and maintenance status, the Met Centre - now redesignated No. 800 - continued in operation. It was later taken over by Mauritian staff and did not finally close until 1971 (*see John Canter's article*).

The build-up

No formal operations records seem to have been written until May 1944, by which time the build-up was in full swing. In that month a 10,000-gallon fuel tank and refrigerator plant were installed, searchlight and generator work was completed, and further tanks (probably for fresh water) were installed be-

hind the Officers Quarters. July 1994, when the ration strength was 275, was probably the busiest month operationally: Catalinas from D.G. were instrumental in saving 254 survivors from the torpedoed SS NELLORE. Most of these were fed and flown out within 18 hours, but 100 were detained for 8 days in a temporary 'rest camp' set up with the help of the Indian General Hospital.

Health

A Major preoccupation for the Base. Apart from the routine accidents and cases of fish poisoning which kept the hospital busy, flies were a constant menace at East Point. This led to a determined blitz on 21 October 1944:

"Flying Officer Jenkins led the sanitary squad into action today against the donkey stables, which is a prime breeding ground for flies: literally millions were killed during the day, and the larvae attacked vigorously. (Sounds like a counterattack by the larvae on the Flying Squad! - Ed) Anti-mosquito spraying was also carried out on an extensive scale."

But this Trafalgar Day victory was not completely one-sided. On 26 October dengue fever, a mosquito-borne disease, spread rapidly, probably as a result of the blitz on the 21st.

"Two officers, the Medical Orderly, 2nd Cook and Station Electrician have been admitted to hospital; the OC of the hospital, the Company Manager, F/O Jenkins and several other airmen appear to be sickening for it . . . only two officers are left fit."

And by 28 October new cases included the Adjutant - leaving one fit officer - and the rest of the Sanitary Squad. Nevertheless, the fly problem started to come under control.

Food

A remark in the record on 7 October sums up the approach:

"Every effort is being made . . . to maintain the standard of food at a reasonable level . . . to avoid the worst monotony of living out of tins. The standard has been improved by the full use of the native flora and fauna, i.e. langdeache, small fish, pigeons, palm salads, seafowl, etc. . . ."

Lobster figure elsewhere in the record, 73 being caught in a lobster hunt in March 1945. But much work had gone into producing vegetables and eggs. In August 1944 land had been cleared and planted with beans, carrots, onions and corn-on-the-cob; and in early September:

"Ducklings have hatched out . . . Further seeds planted in the Station Vegetable Garden, carrots, runner beans, tomato and corn . . . numbers of birds on the chicken farm showing signs of increasing."

In October:

"The C.O. visited East Point . . . for the purpose of purchasing three ducks, a drake and a gander for the Station Egg Production Board . . ."

and

"Materials are now ready for construction of the Station Piggery . . ."

The distribution of the 260 eggs produced by the Production Board in October was 120 to the Hospital, 100 to the Airmen, 20 to the Officers and 20 for settings. And the policy of self-help was steadily developed:

on 26 December:

"The produce of the garden is now ready for consumption, Indian corn, tomatoes and beans in gratifying quantities having ripened."

Then on 31 December:

"Tomatoes and pumpkins have been sampled . . . melon, cucumber, aubergines etc, are showing great promise."

. . . All of which makes me, as an ex-BRITREP, wonder why such enterprise has gone by the board. We now expect everything to be imported, by air or sea, ready packed and approved for edibility. The exceptions (in my time) were fresh fish, especially tuna, and honey, which we resumed producing in small quantities - and these were among the best foodstuffs available on island. Aren't today's island-dwellers tempted to replicate the entrepreneurial farming spirit of the '40s?

(Replies to the Editor, Please - in time for the June 94 Chagos News! And while we're on the subject, anyone seen any pigeons recently? What is langdeache? And USN divers: any comment on the lobster?)

"Chagos News" is a private newsletter. . . Association which has applied for charitable status . . .