

Argentines hoist a flag on Falklands

By Simon Scott Plummer

About 50 Argentines landed illegally on an outlying part of the Falkland Islands, a British colony in the South Atlantic, and hoisted an Argentine flag, the Foreign Office said yesterday.

The group, which arrived in a ship chartered from the Argentine Government, had a commercial contract to remove scrap metal from an old whaling station at Leith, on South Georgia, about 1,400 miles east of the Falklands archipelago.

The British Antarctic survey team at Grytviken, on South Georgia, reported the arrival of the Argentine group on March 19. They were asked to leave immediately and to seek permission from the British authorities if they wished to continue their work.

The British Government, which is in dispute with Argentina over the sovereignty of the islands, sought clarification from Buenos Aires and was informed that the party had left South Georgia on March 21. Yesterday, Whitehall was awaiting confirmation of this from the British survey base.

After talks between Britain and Argentina in New York last month, the Argentine Government said it would break off negotiations with London and seek other means of solving the dispute unless there was a speedy settlement.

Mr Richard Luce, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, who headed the British side at the talks, said the Argentine statement would not help to resolve the dispute and reiterated the British position that the islands would not be handed over to Argentina without the express approval of the Falkland islanders and the British Parliament.

Yesterday the Foreign Office reacted sceptically to the suggestion that the landing on South Georgia last week was instigated by the Argentine Government. It was more likely to have been to an irresponsible action by people acting for a commercial company.

However, Mr John Biggs-Davison, Conservative MP for Epping Forest, called the landing "a provocative act of aggression."