

## 'ABC' - Allan Bryant Crawford (1912-2007)

by Marilyn Crawford. Pinelands Stamp Circle, Cape Town.

Allan Bryant Crawford died on 26 February 2007 in East Sussex, UK in his 95th year. Allan spent most of his working life in Cape Town and was associated with the South Atlantic island of Tristan da Cunha for over 70 years. For collectors of Tristan stamps the mention of "ABC" and Tristan philately will always conjure up the image of this amazing man who has left behind such a legacy of memories!

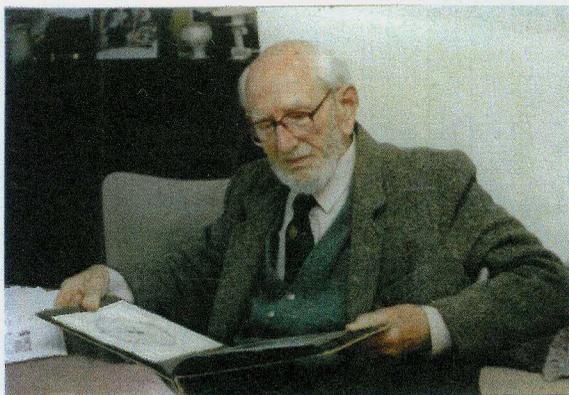
Allan Crawford's first contact with the island of Tristan da Cunha was in 1937, when he was asked at the last minute to join a Norwegian Scientific Expedition as their surveyor. Although he was an engineer and not a surveyor, he did a two week crash course in surveying and the use of a theodolite and spent four months on Tristan with the expedition. The chart he produced was accepted by the Hydrographer of the Royal Navy and is still in use today.

Allan's second and third visits to Tristan were during the Second World War, when he went in a meteorological capacity. This was a secret mission when the island was referred to as 'HMS Job 9' and later as 'HMS Atlantic Isle'. While there he formed the Tristan Defence Volunteers, probably the smallest unit of the Allied Forces, comprising sixteen men! During this time he decided that the island needed a newspaper and he started producing a weekly news-sheet called *The Tristan Times*. These were printed one by one on an old Bantam copying machine. The news-sheets cost three cigarettes or four large potatoes, as money was not used on the island! The early issues of this newspaper are highly prized. While stationed on the island, Allan saw that the people of Tristan da Cunha needed postage stamps, as their letters were posted without stamps and the recipients had to pay the postage due.

On his return to Pretoria, Allan set about designing some stamps for the island. He thought up and drew all the rough designs, but his friend, Sergeant Jimmy Brown, who was a draughtsman, did the finer artwork. He did not have permission to use the Monarch's head, so used the Union Jack instead. Because of the absence of money on Tristan, the values on the stamps were shown in potatoes – one penny being equal to four potatoes. At his own expense, Allan had 20 000 of the penny red stamp featuring the Rockhopper penguin printed at Hortor's in Johannesburg. They were gummed and perforated and printed in sheets of 35 (7 rows of five to each sheet). These were not official postage stamps, nor were they used for local postage. Probably the best term for these would be "essays".

In May 1946, Allan and the island councillors,

sent a petition to the Postmaster General of the Union of South Africa, giving valid reasons why Tristan should be given her own stamps. The petition included ten of his stamp designs, ranging from 1/2d to 2/6. The request was forwarded to the Colonial Office in London, but was turned down in September 1946. However, the "Potato Stamp" essays lived on and were affixed to much of the mail that left the island as a propaganda exercise. This exercise achieved success, as Tristan received her own postage stamps just six years later, in 1952! Today the "Potato Stamps" have become sought-after items by Tristan collectors.



Allan Crawford photographed in 1996 with his scrapbook

Allan was involved in many other adventures on sub-Antarctic islands, even extending to the Antarctic. These included leading the expedition (which included Tristan islanders) to establish the first South African weather base on Marion Island, after its secret annexation by South Africa in 1947. There he also became Marion's first postmaster! In the 1950s, he was appointed Honorary Welfare officer for Tristan da Cunha by the Colonial Office and made further visits to Tristan in connection with his career, which was now meteorology.



Allan Crawford in naval uniform in front of the Marion Island Post Office in 1948.

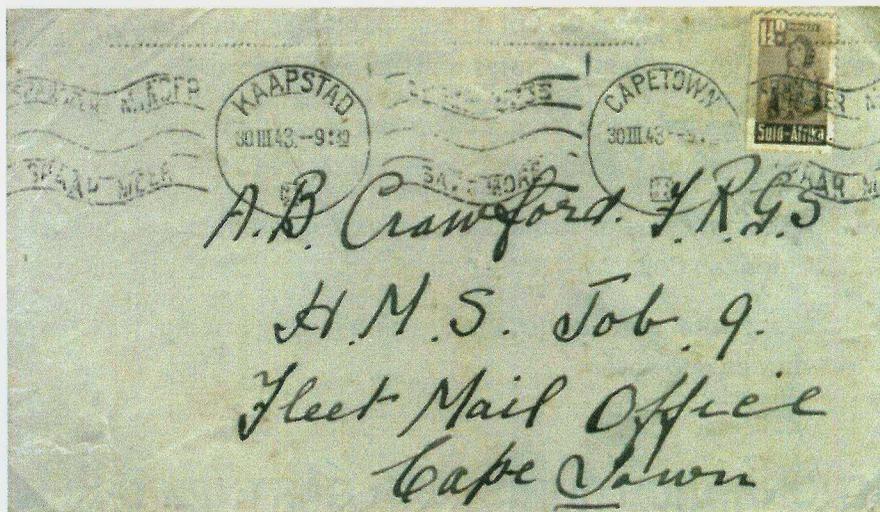
In 1959 he travelled with the first SANAE expedition to the Antarctic, calling at Bouvet Island en route to see if it was suitable for a South African weather station.

After the eruption of the volcano on Tristan in 1961, Allan went there as deputy-leader on the Royal Society Expedition to ascertain whether the island was safe for the population's return.

After receiving scores of letters from the islanders, he played a large part in getting them back to their beloved island. To this day, the Tristan islanders are still very grateful for his role in their repatriation.

Following his retirement from the SA Meteorological Service in 1976, Allan returned to the United Kingdom, where he continued his busy life, designing over sixteen sets of postage stamps for the island, founding the "Tristan da Cunha Association" and staying involved with Tristan matters. His last visit to the island was in 1984 when he was accompanied by his son, Martin, and his oldest grandchild, Shirley.

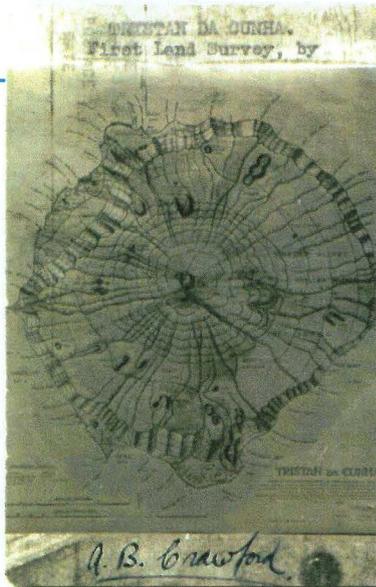
Over the years, Allan wrote numerous articles about Tristan and produced five books. *I went to Tristan* was published in 1940, *Tristan da Cunha* and *the Roaring Forties* in 1982 and Penguins, *Potatoes and Postage Stamps* in 1999. His third book records his stamp designs and is a must for Tristan philatelists. Then, after an old manuscript was discovered in the loft of his house, he produced *Wartime Invasion* (2002). This book was originally written when he returned from the island after the war years, but because of the shortage of



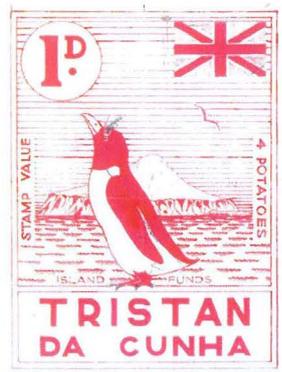
Cover addressed to Allan on Tristan during the World War II when Tristan's secret address was "HMS Job 9"

paper at the time, it could not be published. The manuscript got put away and moved around with him, until it came to rest in the loft, where it lay until its rediscovery. His final book, 'Memoirs – North, South, East & West' was published from his hospital bed in October 2006. A number of videos are also available – the most comprehensive being Allan Crawford's Tristan da Cunha. This is 16mm film footage shot on visits in the 1940s and 50s and documents island customs of that time. His interesting commentary was added many years later. In 2002 Allan was awarded the MBE for his services to the island of Tristan da Cunha.

Looking back at his life, his family (which includes nine grandchildren) is understandably proud of his achievements. He certainly led a very fulfilled and exciting life and was an inspiration to all who met him. Thankfully, his story will live on through all his writings and his contribution to the island of Tristan da Cunha will never be forgotten.



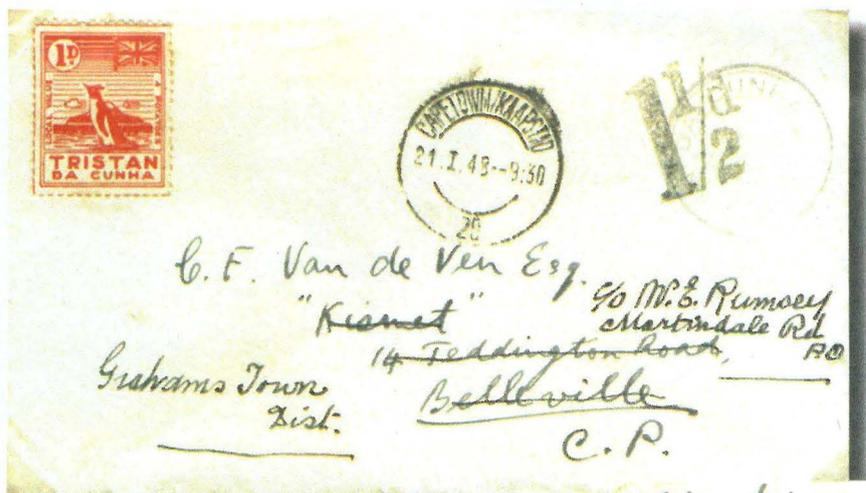
(above) One of 6 postcards Allan had printed showing the map of Tristan produced from his 1938 survey



Edited artwork of the potato essay



Potato stamp black and white final artwork



This 1948 cover, showing the use of the potato stamp as a propaganda exercise, was charged postage due at the single rate, but the fee was not collected!

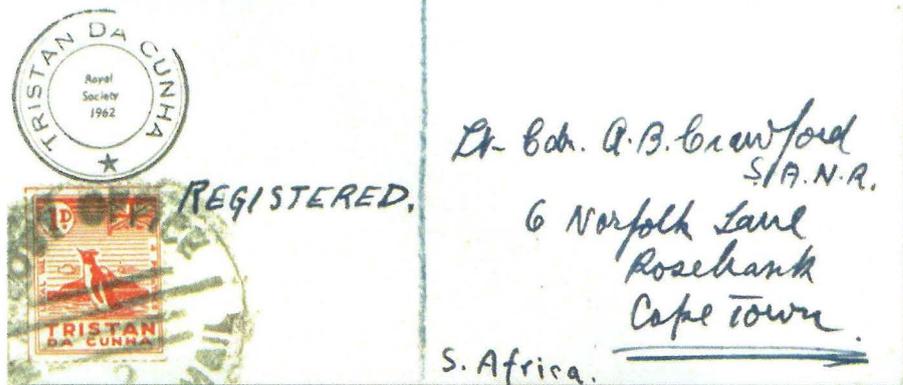
A.B. Crawford  
Act. Postmaster



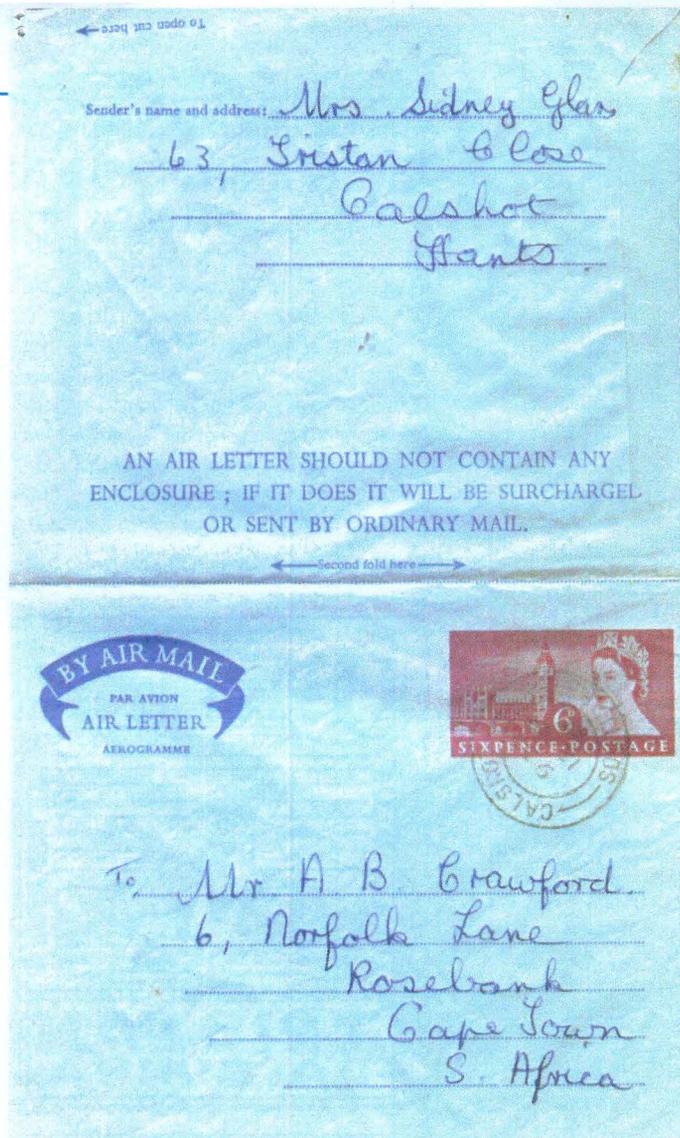
Mr. Trevor Schulze,  
c/o Mr. John H. Marsh,  
"Bellerive",  
Strathmore Road,  
Camps Bay, C.T.



Scarce cover from the first mailing from Marion Island in January 1948, signed by ABC as "Acting postmaster". The Marion island handstamp was provided by ABC.



1962 cover carried on HMS Protector which took off the Royal Society Expedition after they had completed their work. The RS Expedition cachet shown was provided by ABC



(Above) One of the sets Allan designed for Tristan was this one issued 28 Nov 1985 to commemorate the centenary of the "lost lifeboat" - when 15 island men were lost at sea trying to intercept a vessel.



Allan proposed and designed a series of three "shipwreck" stamps which appeared between 1985 and 1987. Early sketches for one stamp are shown.

During 1962 Allan received over a hundred letters from the exiled islanders such as this one requesting assistance in their repatriation. The islanders were quartered in Calshot in south UK.



Final artwork of the issued stamp, which appeared on a miniature sheet.

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