

Obituary

Allan Bryant Crawford MBE, who died on 5 March 2007 aged 94, had a unique knowledge of Tristan da Cunha, compiled during nearly seventy years of close association with the island and its people.

This began in December 1937 when, as a young engineer, he found himself travelling to South Africa with the Norwegian botanist, Erling Christophersen. Christophersen was on his way to lead the Norwegian Scientific Expedition to Tristan da Cunha, and he had been asked by the Hydrographer of the Navy to map the coastline of Tristan and fix the relative positions of it and nearby Nightingale and Inaccessible Islands, but he lacked a surveyor. Crawford, sensing 'the opportunity of a lifetime', volunteered to take the task on, without pay. He had not done a survey course, but a fellow engineer was able to teach him the basic principles during the voyage and he was shown how to use a theodolite after arrival at Cape Town.

Accompanied by Islanders, Crawford travelled all over Tristan, making the first accurate map of its coastline and of the central 2060 m high Peak, with its numerous parasitic volcanic cones and radiating gulches. His work formed the basis of a new Admiralty chart. He also forged enduring friendships with a number of Tristan Islanders, especially Arthur and Martha Rogers. Returning to the Cape in the sloop *HMS Milford* he was a member of the party that landed on Gough Island on 29 March 1938 and formally declared it a British possession. This was probably the last sub-Antarctic island to be annexed.

Allan Crawford was working as an engineer in South Africa when his first book, *I went to Tristan*, was published in 1941. As the only person in all Africa who had spent time on the island, he was a natural recruit for a Royal Navy observation post and weather station established in 1942, first code-named 'HMS *Job 9*' and then 'HMS *Atlantic Isle*'. Appointed Flight Sergeant and hastily trained in meteorology, Crawford was put in charge of the weather station and made responsible for liaison with the island community. He lodged with Arthur and Martha Rogers for over a year, started the first island newsheet, the *Tristan Times*, formed a Home Guard unit, the Tristan Defence Volunteers, drew up the first family tree of the seven island families and made the first colour film of island life.

Returning to Cape Town in October 1943, Allan Crawford drew up plans for a weather station on Gough Island, to be run in conjunction with the one on Tristan and so provide a better picture of weather systems in the South Atlantic. He transferred permanently to the meteorological service in 1946, the year in which he was

awarded the BEM. While based in Pretoria he designed the first set of Tristan postage stamps, the celebrated 'potato stamps', so named because in addition to their values in English currency they bore a note of their local value in potatoes, for use in the then moneyless Tristan economy. Although this particular design never gained official recognition, his campaign for stamps and a Post Office eventually succeeded in 1952.

In May 1946, Allan Crawford returned to Tristan for the third time, as head of the weather station and also as custodian of the buildings and stores left behind by the Royal Navy. It was a difficult period, with bad weather and uncertainty over the future of the island: indeed forcible evacuation was being considered, to the horror (and fury) of the Islanders. This threat was seen off, and in 1948, the potential for a fishery based on the crawfish or 'rock lobster' (*Jasus tristani*) was established. Fishery revenues, together with those from postage stamps, laid the foundation for Tristan's renewed prosperity. By then, however, Crawford was far away for in January 1948 he and a party of six Islanders led by his friend Arthur Rogers departed for the Cape and then for a top-secret 'Job 10', the establishment of the weather station on Marion Island, sovereignty over which was transferred from Britain to South Africa. There, not only was Crawford officer-in-charge, supervising the building and running of the station, but he mapped a substantial part of the island and made a detailed record of its birds.

The study of the sub-Antarctic islands, and the development of weather stations there, was a dominant theme of Allan Crawford's life. In 1949, back from Marion, he began to plan an expedition to Gough Island in consultation with Dr Brian Roberts of the Scott Polar Research Institute and Foreign Office. That plan came to nothing at the time, partly because of another meeting aboard a Union Castle vessel bound for the Cape, this time with Joyce Burch, lecturer in Speech and Drama at the University of Cape Town. They married in April 1949 and took up residence in Cape Town where Crawford was appointed Port Meteorological Officer, and (in 1952) joined the South African Naval Reserve as a Lieutenant and meteorologist. From the Cape he kept up his contacts with Tristan, buying goods for Islanders, arranging the repair of shoes, watches and clocks and helping people evacuated to the mainland for medical attention. This arrangement was formalised in 1955 when he was appointed Honorary Welfare Officer for Tristan da Cunha in Cape Town. That same year he visited the island for the fourth time, travelling with the members of the Gough Island Scientific Survey who were to fulfil

his dream of making a thorough survey of that island and establishing a weather station there. He acted as South African liaison officer for the expedition and arranged for the secondment of a South African meteorologist to them. The station on Gough has been operated continuously by the South African Weather Bureau ever since.

Allan Crawford's work as a naval meteorologist also took him into polar latitudes. He visited the Antarctic in 1960, when South Africa took over the Norwegian IGY base and converted it into SANAE. For many years he was keenly interested in the prospects for a weather station on Bouvet Øya, the most isolated volcanic island in the South Atlantic. His first visit in January 1956 found no suitable site for a base, but in 1958 the US Coastguard vessel *Westwind* reported a low-lying, rubble platform: Crawford inspected this from the sea in 1959 and was confident that it had been formed within the past five years, probably by volcanic activity. In 1964, he was able to land on this new terrain but it proved unsuitable for a base, though a Norwegian party did spend three months there in 1978 and set up an automatic weather station.

Allan Crawford served as South African delegate to numerous meetings of the WMO Commission for Maritime Meteorology, and he was active in its working groups. He designed a special 'bucket' for measuring sea surface temperatures. But Tristan da Cunha remained his particular interest. When, in 1961, an unexpected eruption threw up a new cone and lava flows close to the Settlement and forced the evacuation of the community, he was meteorologist and deputy leader of the Royal Society Expedition sent to study it. Afterwards, satisfied that the island was once more safe to live on and in receipt of many letters from Islanders yearning for their home, he persuaded the Royal Navy and the Tristan Development Company (operators of the crawfish fishery) to support an official inspection which in turn paved the way for the Islanders' return.

Even after Allan Crawford's retirement to England in 1977, Tristan and its welfare remained a preoccupation. He was convinced that the island community remained vulnerable to external political and economic forces, and that some kind of 'supporters' club' was needed. Therefore, in 1987 he and Michael Swales, the latter a member of the Gough Island Scientific Survey and leader of two other scientific expeditions to the islands, created the Tristan da Cunha Association. Crawford was its first Chairman, and became Life President in 1992. The Association proved its worth when a hurricane struck the Settlement of Edinburgh in 2001 and £30,000 was raised for the disaster fund. In 2006, the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the islands, an education fund with a target of £100,000 was launched and a celebratory cruise to the island attracted over 100 of the Association's 500 members. Sadly, Allan Crawford was by then too frail to travel but he lived to see the year of celebrations brought to its conclusion, and the Association flourishing as his last, and possibly most enduring, contribution to the welfare of Tristan and its people.

Allan Crawford will be remembered as an enthusiast for the south Atlantic islands, a dedicated meteorologist, and above all as a kindly man deeply concerned for the welfare of the Tristan people. He was a committed Christian, whose faith was strengthened by the example of the Islanders. He was also a devoted family man. He published three books about Tristan, its history and his own visits: *Tristan da Cunha and the roaring forties* (1982), *Penguins, potatoes and postage stamps: a Tristan da Cunha chronicle* (1999) and *Tristan da Cunha, wartime invasion* (2004), while his final book of memoirs, *North, south, east and west* appeared in 2006. His life's work for Tristan was recognised by his appointment as MBE in 2002. His wife, Joyce, died in 1997. He is survived by their two sons and nine grandchildren.

Martin Holdgate