

Ascension Island Mail: the last 3 Decades

- **I worked at BBC World Service most of my working life – 1973 to 1998**
- **During the last 16 years of that I was in charge of the department that handled all incoming mail, and did all the audience research for the World Service**
- **Before that I was a producer and presenter of radio programmes for Africa, from 1973 to 1982**
- **Ascension Island played a very important role in both those career periods**
- **All long distance radio transmissions rely on shortwave**
- **Getting signals into Africa and Latin America poses many problems. Ascension Island is an ideal place from which to transmit to both continents**
- **Short wave use has declined but it is still vital to get to areas not well served by online/digital facilities. Shortwave also cannot easily be blocked by dictators.**
- **Between 1998 and 2015 I did some consultancy work for Babcock, the company that runs the BBC transmitters on Ascension.**



- Created by Volcanic Eruption 1 million years ago
- Discovered on Ascension Day in 1503 by Afonso de Albuquerque
- 1,000 miles from Africa
- 900 miles from South America
- 800 miles from St Helena, the nearest bit of land.
- British garrisoned it from 1815 when Napoleon was exiled on St Helena
- Ascension has had roles in many fields, especially
 - Cable communications
 - Space communications
 - Radio (shortwave) to Africa
 - Naval and marine base for refuelling, food, water
 - Refuelling for flights to the Falklands
- There is no indigenous population. Everyone works for the companies that have activities there – mainly Babcock, Cable and Wireless, that RAF, USAAF, NASA, and local support services such as power, the port, the shops and the post office. The majority of the workers are “Saints”, people from St Helena.
- The current population is c 800. It has remained about the same for more than 50 years.
- Tourism is very limited. The only air service is by the RAF from Brize Norton.
- Visits by cruise ships are occasional and limited. The regular ship service from Cardiff to the three islands ended when St Helena got an airport a few years ago.



Part of 19th
century fort



Tropical vegetation half
way up mountain











BBC Transmitter
staff at a
welcoming party
for me March
16th 1993



14°25 W

Ascension Island

North Point

Porpoise Point

Pyramid Point

7°55 S

George town

Cross Hill

Two Boats Village

Boatswain Islands

Base

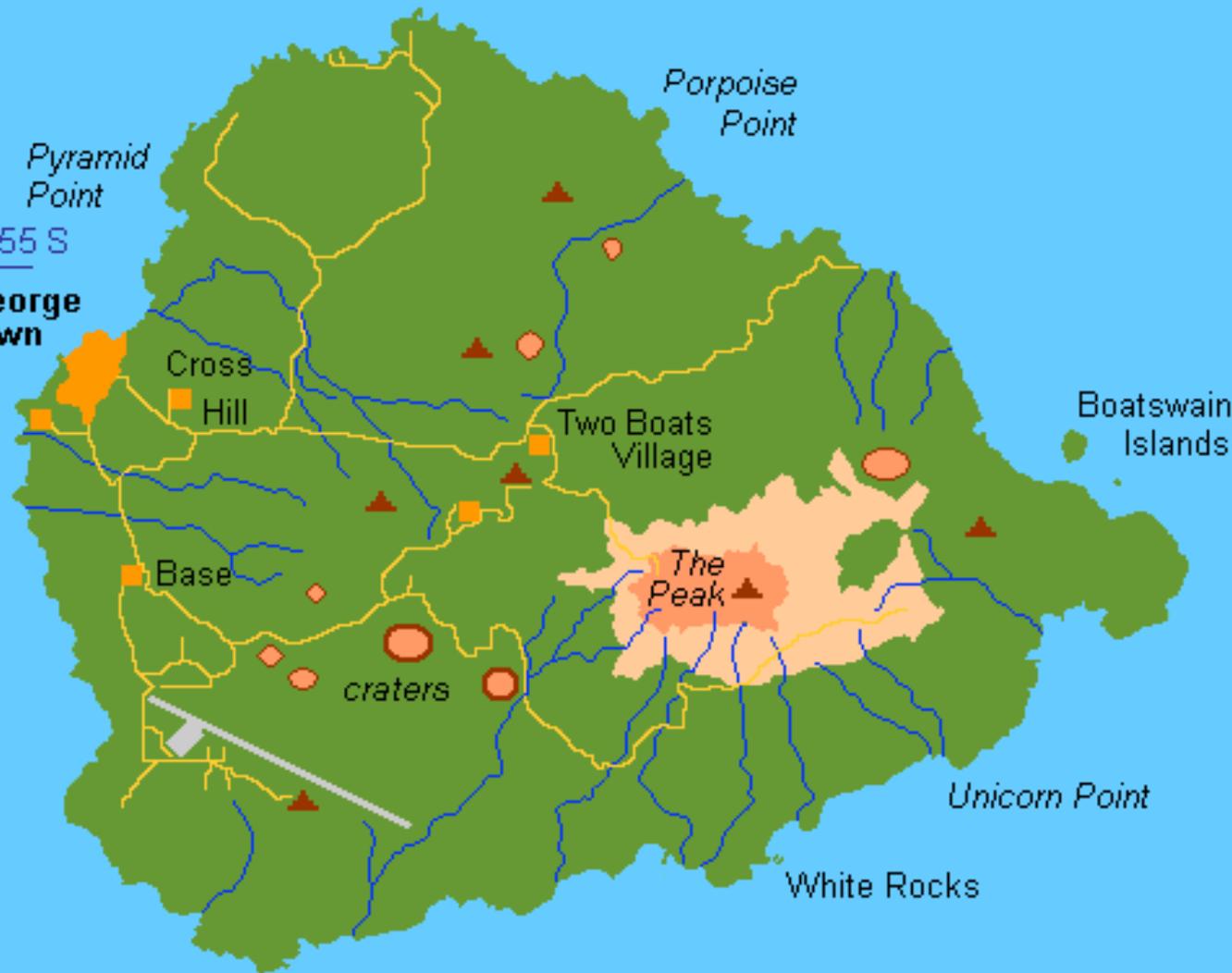
The Peak

craters

Unicorn Point

White Rocks

South Point

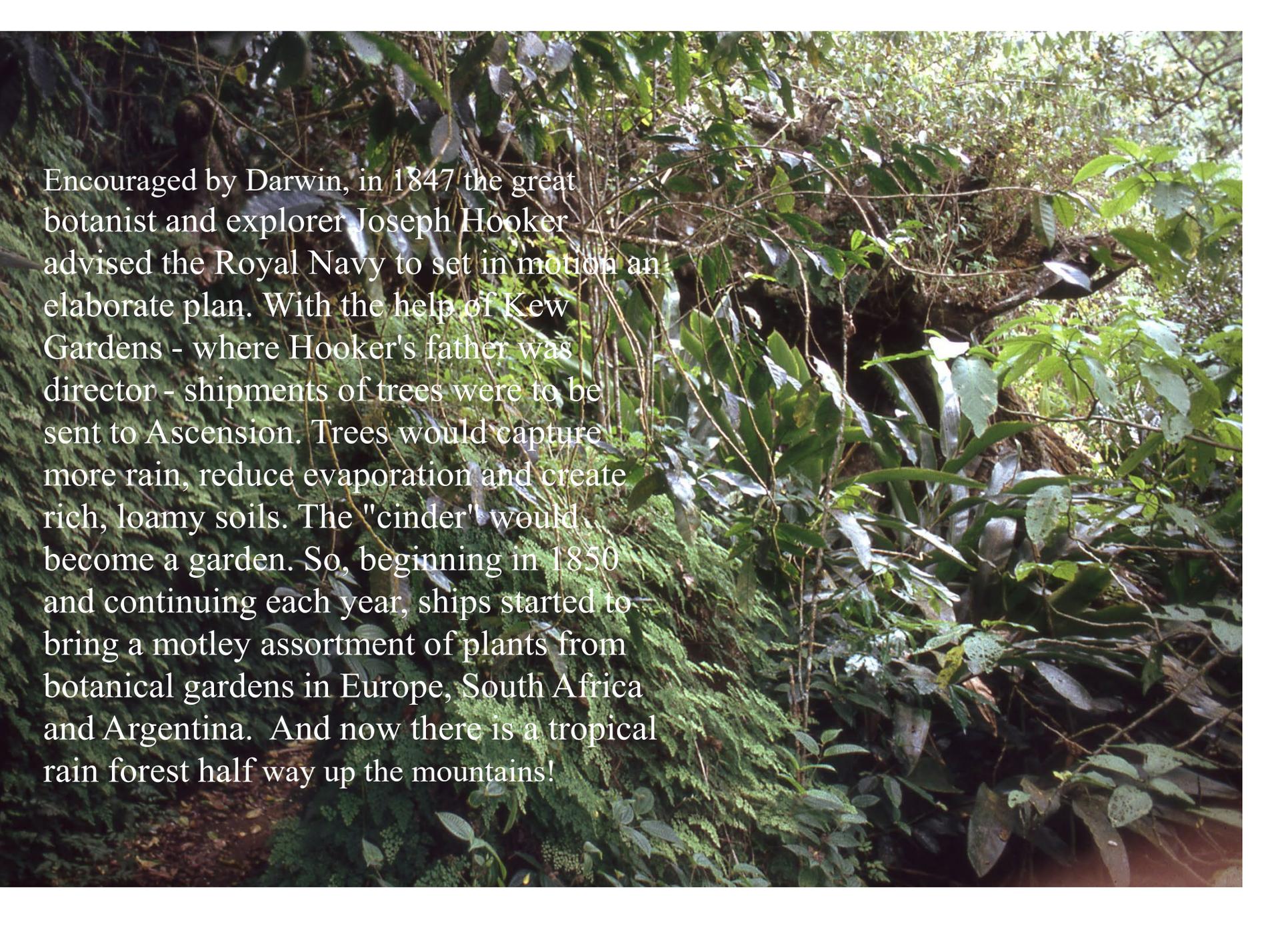


By air mail
Par avion

The cover uses the entire 1982 set commemorating the 150th anniversary of Darwin's Beagle voyage. Darwin landed on the island in 1836. What is not widely known is that his visit was to have consequences that would change the island for ever. At the time of his visit the island was arid and rocky and devoid of much in the way of major vegetation. Darwin realised that the aridity could be changed by human intervention. Plants can change the weather!

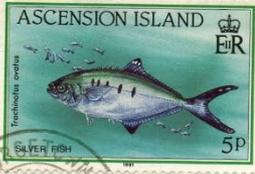


Graham Mytton
BBC World Service
Room 510 Queens House
UK. WC2G 56, Lincoln's Inn Fields
LONDON ~~W1A 3LJ~~

A photograph of a lush tropical rainforest. The scene is filled with dense green foliage, including various types of leaves, ferns, and vines. The lighting is dappled, suggesting sunlight filtering through the canopy. The overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant, thriving ecosystem.

Encouraged by Darwin, in 1847 the great botanist and explorer Joseph Hooker advised the Royal Navy to set in motion an elaborate plan. With the help of Kew Gardens - where Hooker's father was director - shipments of trees were to be sent to Ascension. Trees would capture more rain, reduce evaporation and create rich, loamy soils. The "cinder" would become a garden. So, beginning in 1850 and continuing each year, ships started to bring a motley assortment of plants from botanical gardens in Europe, South Africa and Argentina. And now there is a tropical rain forest half way up the mountains!

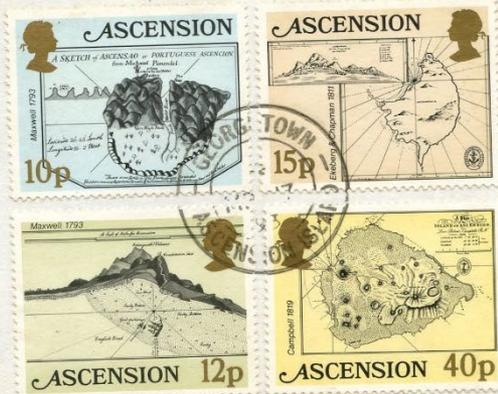
By air mail
Par avion



UK.

Janet Mylton,
Sandrock, Horsham Road,
DORKING RH4 2HZ

By air mail
Par avion



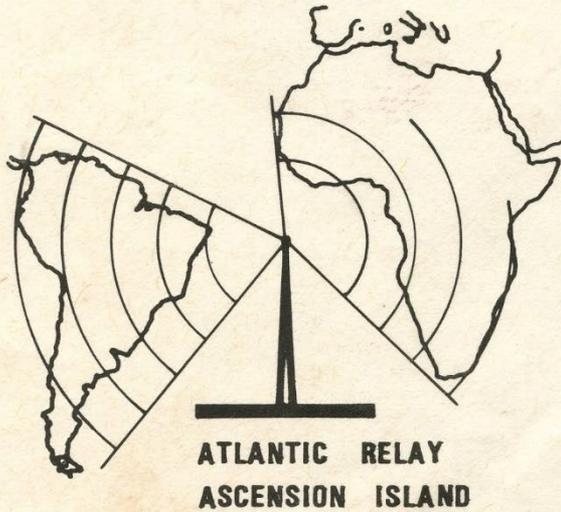
Janet Mylton
Sandrock, Horsham Road,
DORKING RH4 2HZ

Early Maps of Ascension. The 1981 set of four stamps on the first cover are from a miniature sheet which uses not a map but detailed drawing of the island from two angles. It was done by the Dutch cartographer Jan Huygen van Lischoten in 1599. He also did the maps shown on the individual stamps on the second cover, also in the same set. The official Ascension Island Historic Society website describes his maps as "rather inaccurate". On the first cover I added a 5p stamp from the current 1991 definitive fish set to make up the ordinary 25p rate for airmail to the UK

BBC

EXTERNAL SERVICES

1932-1982



Official BBC 1st Day Cover



The 50th Anniversary of the BBC World Service in 1982 was commemorated on Ascension Island but not in the UK. The BBC forgot to suggest an issue to Royal Mail! The BBC was, and maybe still is, the best known British institution globally after HM the Queen. In some places it is better known. The stamps depict Bush House, the home of the World Service from its early days (not at the very start) until 2012, Lord Reith, whose idea it was to set it up in 1932, King George V who made the first ever Christmas broadcast shortly after it started and the Ascension Island Transmitter station aerial arrays.

Y AIR MAIL
par avion
Royal Mail



Signature Required
Royal Mail

JAMES ROLFE
FINANCE DEPT
VT COMMUNICATIONS
20 LINCOLNS INN FIELDS
LONDON WC2A 3ED
UK

Signature Required
Royal Mail



A lot of my material comes from mail to Merlin Communications, later VT Merlin Communications, Late VT, and now Babcock. Note the country code on the Registered mail sticker. SH stands for St Helena

Stamp World 1990 set on cover posted by me home during my visit on 17th March 1993 with its insert.

By air mail
Par avion



R ASCENSION
004404

G. Mytton
"sandrock"
Horsham Road,
DORKING RH4 2HZ U.K.

J ARTHUR DIXON

Printed in Great Britain
by J. ARTHUR DIXON



Ascension

17.3.93

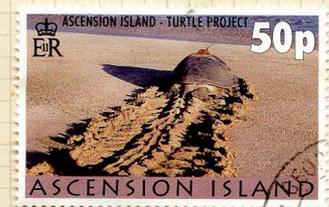
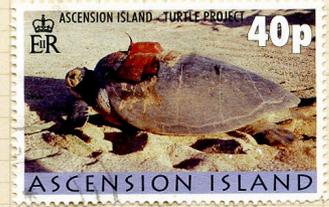
Graham Mytton

Ascension Island Historical Society

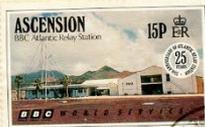
HELEN LARGE
FINANCE DEPT.
VT COMMUNICATIONS
20 LINCOLNS INN FIELDS
LONDON WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND

POSTNET

ASCENSION ISLAND



↑ Turtles: 2000 issue depicting the island's important Turtle Conservation Project &
← Ascension Island Scouts rescuing a stranded Turtle, 2007.



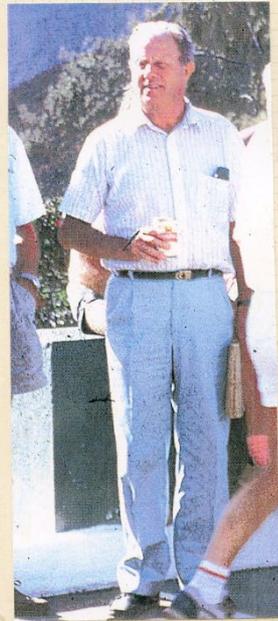
By air mail
Par avion



BBC
Jim Gray
Resident Engineer.

R ASCENSION
004405

Graham Mylton
Sandrock, Horsham Road
DORKING RH4 2HZ
U.K.



Cover sent to self, bearing two of the Ascension Island sets relating to the BBC. The set on the left commemorates the 25th anniversary of the transmitters in 1991. The set on the right is the issue commemorating the 50th anniversary in 1982 of the BBC External Services, renamed later as BBC World Service. The cover bears the signature of Jim Gray, Resident Engineer at the time of my visit in May 1993.

Jim Gray, Resident BBC Engineer

BY AIR MAIL

Helen Large
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincolns Inn Fields
London WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND

POSTNET barcode consisting of vertical bars of varying heights.



Island Views,
Fauna and
Flora:
Definitive set of
2002

TINA SMITH
FINANCE DEPT
VT COMMUNICATIONS
20 LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS
LONDON WC2A 3ES
UK



Stamps from two sets of "sport" fish. Both sets, the first from 2003 and the second from 2006 depict species of Tuna found in the South Atlantic.

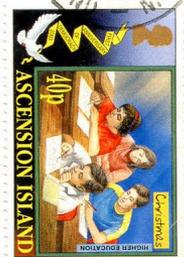


Helen Large
Finance Dept
VT Merlin Communications Ltd
20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London WC2A 3ES
United Kingdom



BY AIR MAIL
par avion
Royal Mail

Herein large
FINANCE Dept
VT MERLIN COMMUNICATIONS LTD
20 LINCOLNS INN FIELDS
LONDON WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND



Christmas Issue 2003. A remarkable issue for its subject matter – the 1st anniversary of democracy on the island. The first assembly of 7 elected members was inaugurated in 2002. But it didn't last long. There was discontent about relations between the elected members and the Governor of St Helena, and his representative on Ascension. Eventually the dispute was resolved and a new island council was sworn in on 28th October 2008. Ascension Island is now not a “dependency” of St Helena but has a Governor in its own right. He/she just happens also to be the Governor of St Helena!

The first cover, sent by VT to its office in London bears two stamps from the 2004 set commemorating the bicentenary of the Royal Horticultural Society, which has supported and been involved in several island projects. The second cover, also to VT, bears two stamps from the 2006 Christmas issue which shows views of the island.

HELEN LARGE
 FINANCE DEPT
 VT COMMUNICATIONS
 20 LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS
 LONDON WC2A 3ES
 ENGLAND



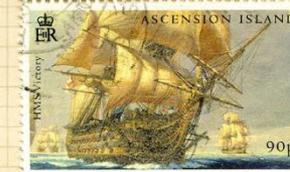
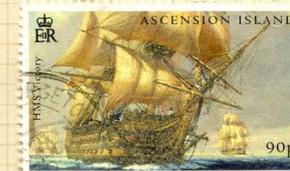
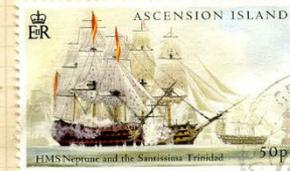
Helen Large
 Finance Dept
 VT Merlin Communications Ltd
 20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
 London WC2A 3ES
 United Kingdom

POSTNET barcode consisting of vertical bars of varying heights.

BY AIR MAIL
par avion
 Royal Mail



2005 October 21st: the
200th anniversary of
the Battle of
Trafalgar. There were
two sets, both of
which are represented
here featuring Lord
Nelson, his ships and
battle scenes



HELEN LARGE
FINANCE DEPT.
VT COMMUNICATIONS
20 LINCOLNS INN FIELDS
LONDON WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND.



2005 Seabird stamps used on cover to VT
Communications, formerly Merlin
Communications, now Babcock which now runs
the BBC transmitting station



BY AIR MAIL

rina smith
finance department
VT communications
20 Lincolns Inn Fields
London WC2A 3ED
u.k.

Helen Large
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincolns Inn Fields
London WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND



VT
Merlin
Communications



25th Anniversary of the
Liberation of the
Falkland Islands. 2007



Tina Smith
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
LONDON WC2A 3ES
UK



Helen Large
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London WC2A 3ES
ENGLAND

VT

Communications

10th
anniversary
of death of
Diana,
Princess of
Wales
2007



Ascension
Scouts
sitting
on gun
from
HMS
Hood
2007



Tina Smith
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
LONDON WC2A 3ES
UK

New Coinage. Actually
these coins although legal
tender are hardly used on
the island and are mainly
for collectors



P.O. Box 16.
Bush House.
Strand.
London. WC2B 4PH
ENGLAND.





Heleen Lange
V.T. COMMUNICATIONS
FINANCE DEPT
BLUE FIN BUILDING
110 SOUTHMARK ST
LONDON SE1 0TA
U.K.



VT
Communications

Christmas Stamps
2008: Raymond
Briggs' wonderful
cartoons of Father
Christmas on
holiday: this time
on Ascension!

Fauna and their eggs. The 2008 definitive set of 12, features birds, a lobster, a crab, a turtle, insects, a gecko and a fish.

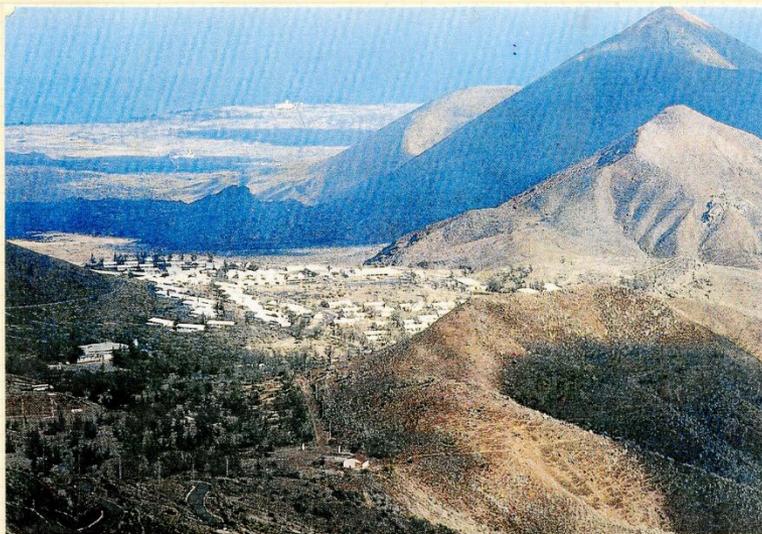


VT Communications
Ascension Island ASCN 1ZZ

Tina Smith
Finance Dept
VT Communications
20 Lincoln's Inn Fields
LONDON WC2A 3ES
UK



This card is one from a (rare) tourist who wrote this on the RMS Centaur ship that sailed from Cardiff to St Helena and Ascension Island, calling also at Dakar, Madeira and Las Palmas on the return. The RMS Centaur was not the usual vessel. That was the previous (to the vessel on the previous page) RMS St Helena which at the time of this voyage (August 1983) was being refitted after its use in the Falklands War the previous year. The Centaur was on loan from the Blue Funnel Line. The card depicts Two Boats village on Ascension.



5/8/83 RMS Centaur
 Dear Tom, June, Michael & David
 Here we are mid Atlantic -
 halfway between St Helena and
 Ascension islands. We had all
 day Saturday on St. Helena
 touring all the places of interest.
 Had to use a small boat between
 the ship & shore. We are due
 to arrive in Ascension tomorrow
 we are having a tour. The landing
 is dangerous so we cannot take
 Christopher with us.
 We are all doing fine. We
 are also stopping at Dakar,
 Las Palmas and Madeira
 will see you soon. Love
 Sam, June, Michael &
 Christopher xx

AIR MAIL

Ascension
 Yellow Allamanda 15p

Mrs Mrs I. Williams
 6 Highfield Gardens
 SCUNTHORPE
 South Humberside
 ENGLAND

P.O. Box 460, Bengalen, 741 RSA, for the Office of the Administrator, Ascension Island. Copyright © 1983, by the authority and publishing by Peter Johnson, FIP, FRPS.

Two Boats village nestled in the shadow of The Sisters, Ascension Island.

The card reads, in part, "He we are in Mid Atlantic half way between St Helena and Ascension Islands (sic). We had all day Saturday on St Helena touring all the places of interest. Had to use a small boat between the ship & shore. We are due to arrive in Ascension tomorrow. We are having a tour. The landing is dangerous so we cannot take Christopher with us.

A major source of revenue are stamps.
The Ascension Island Post Office
(pictured) receives orders for stamps,
covers and other items from collectors
all over the world.



POST OFFICE
DESPATCHED
08 SEP 2015
ASCENSION ISLAND

Please do not bend

Ascension Island Post Office
Building No. 228, Ascension Island,
South Atlantic Ocean, ASCN 1ZZ

Peter Riggs
6 Larkspur Way
North Holnwood
Dorking
GB
RH5 4TS

I wish to thank Nigel Fry, Bob Hammond and Marie Dziedzic at
the BBC World Service and Neale Bateman and others at
Babcock Media Services for their assistance with some of this
collection.

Nigel Fry, Head of Distribution for BBC World Service
posting a letter at the Post Office in Georgetown in August
2016



Much of this display is about recent use of mail services from the island. The mail service is less necessary than it was until quite recently. Most of the inhabitants and companies on the island now use email, the internet and SMS messages, mainly between the island and the UK and of course St Helena from where most of the Ascension work force and their families come.

Ascension Island

BBC ATLANTIC RELAY STATION

BBC
WORLD
SERVICE



Ascension Island
First Day of
Post



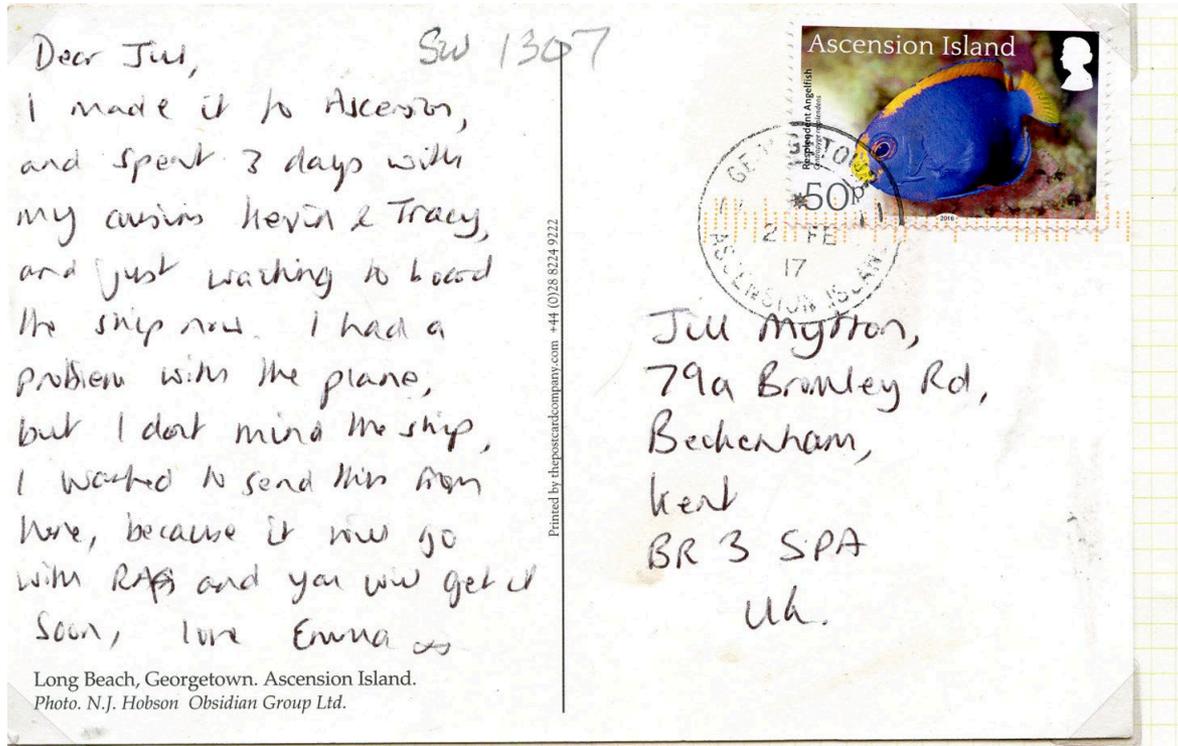
Official First Day Cover



The 50th anniversary of the Transmitting Station was commemorated with a special issue on 3rd July 2016. The stamps depict the original control desk, the transmitters viewed from English Bay Beach, two pictures of new modernised facilities, the Wind Farm now used to provide some of the power needed, and the so-called Klinka Klub. This 25p stamp shows the transmitters in the background; in the foreground is the BBC staff social club given this name from the volcanic rocks that surround it.



PRINTED AND



A card sent to my sister, Jill, in 2017, from a (rare) tourist friend.