



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

REVIEW 2014





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4 OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL
 5 CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS
 6 SOCIETY NEWS AND FUTURE PLANS
 8 FRANKINCENSE: THE PEARLS OF THE DESERT
 11 THE SOCIETY’S GRANTS SCHEME
 13 LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE RESEARCH PROJECT, MASIRAH ISLAND
 14 THE RUSTAQ-BATINAH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY
 17 BRITISH EXPLORING SOCIETY OMAN
 18 BEFORE AND LATER
 22 WALKING IN THE OMAN MOUNTAINS
 24 GALLOPS OF OMAN



28 STUDYING INSECTS IN OMAN
 29 BORDER SURVEYING IN OMAN 1964
 32 LETTERS HOME... THE GUBHRA BOWL
 34 OMAN IN GUBBIO: CONNECTING CULTURES
 36 NEW GENERATION GROUP
 CULTURAL INTERACTION AND COMMERCE
 IN COUNTRY VALUE (ICV)
 OMAN’S TOURISM TREASURE
 AHMAD’S ASTON WITH EYES ON LE MANS
 NGG TROWERS & HAMLINS INTERNSHIP
 AN OMANI STUDENT IN LONDON
 AN OMAN WORKING MOTHER’S PERSPECTIVE

52 THE NEW BRITISH OMANI DELEGATION
 CONNECTING CULTURES
 EVENTS IN LONDON
 THE OMANI STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL
 OMAN MISCELLANY



55 ARABIAN DAYS AND THE TRUCIAL OMAN SCOUTS
 57 OUTWARD BOUND OMAN
 58 THE WEEKEND
 60 AN OMANI WEDDING
 63 OMAN: A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE
 65 THE LEGEND OF WADI BANI KHALID
 68 ORAL/VIDEO HISTORY
 69 THE LECTURE PROGRAMME
 70 FOCUS ON EXPANDING TOURISM
 72 TRUCKS, CAMELS AND DONKEYS
 78 ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME 2013
 82 OMANI BRITISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION
 85 REMEMBERING MICHAEL GALLAGHER
 86 ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON
 88 AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP
 89 BOOK REVIEWS



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CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

BY ROBERT ALSTON

It is a privilege to have been invited to become the Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society and I look forward immensely to my term in that role.



Robert Alston

It is a privilege that one of my first duties is to welcome readers to this the first issue of the new annual Review which replaces the Society's Newsletter. The Review becomes the principal record of the Society's activities and events, but also provides much more scope to include material about aspects of Oman's history, development, and ongoing relationships with Britain. With experienced hands from our sister SAF Journal involved, I am sure it will be a handsome production and a good read.

The Society's affairs are in very good shape. For this we all owe a debt of gratitude to my fellow Trustees and especially to the leadership of Vice-Chairman Nigel Knocker who, on top of his role in the SAF Association, has led the Society with energy and skill over the past twelve months. Relations between Britain and Oman in so many dimensions are active and thriving and, with our Sackville Street base, the Society is admirably poised to continue to make a real contribution to this process.

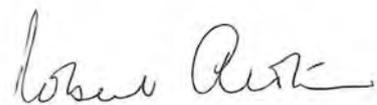
Our sister organisation in the business sphere, the Oman Britain Friendship Association, has recently been re-launched with a major event at Sackville Street and we look forward to working closely with them. The rapid growth of the New Generation Group in both countries makes the Society a real leader in encouraging ties between the two countries in the coming generation to compare with those which so many of our members have enjoyed over past decades. It is exciting to see the Society able to engage with some of the many young Omanis who study here and this is

something which I hope we will see continue to grow.

The 40th Anniversary of the creation of the Society in 1976 will fall in January 2016 and will be a major event in our calendar. We will hope to celebrate it in style. Planning is only just beginning so 'watch this space'.

As well as being part of the bigger picture of the relationship between the two countries is it important that we are also felt to be a Society which offers its members what they would like to see from it. Communication is important and I hope that members will feel free to contact me, other Trustees or the Manager at any time with ideas they may have. Especially helpful are contributions to the Review and ideas for speakers, particularly those, whether British, Omani or other, who can keep us abreast of the exciting things happening in Oman on so many fronts. Ian Kendrick does sterling work on this front and deserves all our support.

Finally I take this opportunity to record our appreciation for the support and partnership the Society receives from our President, the Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman, and his team. Their contribution is essential to the aim, which I am sure we all share, that the Anglo-Omani Society should be an exemplar and a pacemaker amongst the community of bilateral societies which exist in London.



Robert Alston

SOCIETY NEWS

BY NIGEL KNOCKER

At the Society's Annual General Meeting at Sackville Street in July, Mr Robert Alston, a former British Ambassador to Oman, was elected to the vacant post of Chairman. Vice Chairman Nigel Knocker was thanked for covering the post while it had been vacant and for his Annual Report on The Society, which follows:

Ladies and gentlemen. It has been an eventful time for the society and we have seen much activity in many ways, all of which have continued to develop our excellent relations with the Sultanate.

Your board has been busy! Apart from the usual lectures and social occasions, all of which are well attended, we have:

1. Made considerable financial grants for a variety of schemes. £97K in total. Last year it was £34K, so the increase is £63K.
2. We have continued to sponsor ten students a year from a cross-section of British universities to attend an Arabic course at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers. The college is located just outside Manah in the Interior and is arranged and supervised by Dr Elisabeth Kendall of Pembroke College, Oxford. Ambassador Abdulaziz al-Hinai has been actively involved in supporting this scheme to ensure its continuity. The scheme has run successfully for four years, and the fifth cohort of students will begin their month-long course on 2nd August this year. The scheme is supported by Oman's MOFA and Diwan, with the society paying for flights and insurance. Former students continue to acknowledge the important role played by the scheme in their education and formation. Many of them are now active in the Society's New Generation Group.
3. We continue, in conjunction with Shell in Oman, to sponsor bright Omani students to come to the UK to attend summer schools to improve their education before going on to university.
4. We continue to send up to eight British students each year – male and female now – to the Sultan's school in Muscat. We have now sent just over seventy students to the school since 2002, all of whom benefit in so many ways, as does the school by having them there, to take part in the wide variety of school activities, so it has benefits in both ways.
5. The New Generation Group flourishes

- under Ollie Blake's guidance, ably assisted by Rocio Corrales. This group is the foundation for the future of the Society and has carried out a wide variety of events, including visits to the UK by bright Omani young professionals, government employees and students. Links have also been established with colleges and universities where Omani students are studying. These have a programme of future events on a regular basis including a seminar at Pembroke College, Oxford this coming August. It is no exaggeration to say that the NGG is a most important aspect of the Society.
6. Under the direction of Ian Kendrick, assisted by Denis Grey and Neil Fawcett, the Newsletter is being replaced by an Annual Review, the first edition of which will come out this October. Please give this your support by providing editorial material – articles, photographs, news about friends and anything which may be considered interesting to readers about the Sultanate.
 7. We are also establishing a virtual library, oral history, developing public relations and arranging internships from universities to assist Ben and Rocio in the day to day running of the office. Two interns start in August and it is planned that there will be a continuous flow of them thereafter – if that is the right word!
 8. In March we gave a briefing about the Society to 20 students on the first course of the Oman National Defence College, mainly senior service officers and some high flying civilians. The course is roughly the equivalent of the RCDS in the UK. This will be an annual event.

You may have also heard of the Omani British Friendship Association – OBFA. This has been in existence since 1989 with its object to primarily foster the business and commercial relations between the two countries – different objectives to those of AOS. As OBFA has no premises, and at the moment no money, as a goodwill gesture we

offered to sponsor a reception for them to relaunch OBFA. We agreed on the understanding that this should not become a habit, and the staff here should not become their secretariat. A most successful reception was held on 18th June with HRH The Duke of York as Patron attending, and also HH Sayyid Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture and Tourism. The new Omani chairman is Maqbool Sultan, a former trade minister, and the UK chairman is Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, a much experienced former diplomat and now senior advisor to HSBC's group chief executive. About one hundred and eighteen guests attended, with a mix of British and Omanis.

NOW FOR DOMESTICS

As you will know, Noel Guckian resigned as Chairman last August for personal reasons.

In the absence of a chairman, we formed a managing committee to manage the affairs of the Society for a year pending the appointment of a new Chairman. This comprises myself as Vice Chairman, Martyn Bishop as Treasurer, Alan Milne as Company Secretary and Richard Owens as the sheet anchor.

Robert Alston has gallantly agreed to become Chairman of the Society following this AGM and I will hand over the reins to him. Robert is a former Ambassador to Oman, High Commissioner in New Zealand so has a wealth of experience.

We said au revoir to Duncan Allen last December as Chief Executive. Duncan had been responsible for the early days at 34SS and we are very grateful for all his efforts in the detailed work in establishing 34SS.

Duncan's workload has been taken on jointly by Ben Wright as Office Administrator,

and Rocio Corrales who supports Ollie with the NGG, and also handles events. Between them, they are doing sterling work in running the ever growing daily business of the Society.

Denis Grey has left the board and we are most grateful for his contributions.

Finally, I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the whole board for all they do for the Society – all in their own time and with such dedication and good humour. A lot of it is exacting and time consuming work.

Martyn Bishop, Geoff Brindle, Neil Fawcett, Lis Kendall, Ian Kendrick, Richard Owens, Ollie Blake, Louise Hoskings and Alan Milne. We are also so grateful to the Vice Presidents for their wisdom and advice when needed, in particular Richard Muir who has kept us on the straight and narrow.

They have been an enormous support during this last year to me as acting Chairman and I thank them all. ■

THE SOCIETY'S FUTURE PLANS

Readers will be interested in the Society's future plans up to May 2016. These include the following main items.

Under the direction of Ian Kendrick, the Newsletter is being replaced by this Annual Review. It is planned for it to be published each October. Please give this your support by providing editorial material – articles, photographs, news about friends and anything which may be considered interesting to readers about the Sultanate.

A cornerstone of the plan is considering the increasing number of applications for grants for a variety of different projects which fall within the Society's charitable objects. In 2013 the total spent on grants was £34,000. In 2014 it was £97,000 – an increase of £63,000.

We continue to sponsor ten students a year from a cross-section of British universities to attend an Arabic course at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers. The college is located just outside Manah in the Interior and the project is arranged and supervised by Dr. Elisabeth Kendall of Pembroke College, Oxford. The scheme has run successfully for four years, and the fifth cohort of students began their month-long course on 2nd August 2014. The scheme is supported by Oman's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diwan, with the Society paying for flights and insurance. Former students continue to acknowledge the important role played by the scheme in their education and formation. Many of them are now active in the Society's New Generation Group.

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The New Generation Group flourishes under Ollie Blake's guidance ably assisted by Rocio Corrales. This group is the foundation for the future of the Society and has carried out a wide variety of events, including visits to the UK by bright Omani young professionals, government employees and students. Links have also been established with colleges and universities where Omani students are studying. It is no exaggeration to say that the NGG is a most important aspect of the Society.

We will continue to assist the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA) with some of their activities in UK.

We are also establishing a virtual library, oral history, developing public relations and arranging regular internships from universities to assist Ben and Rocio in the day to day running of the office.

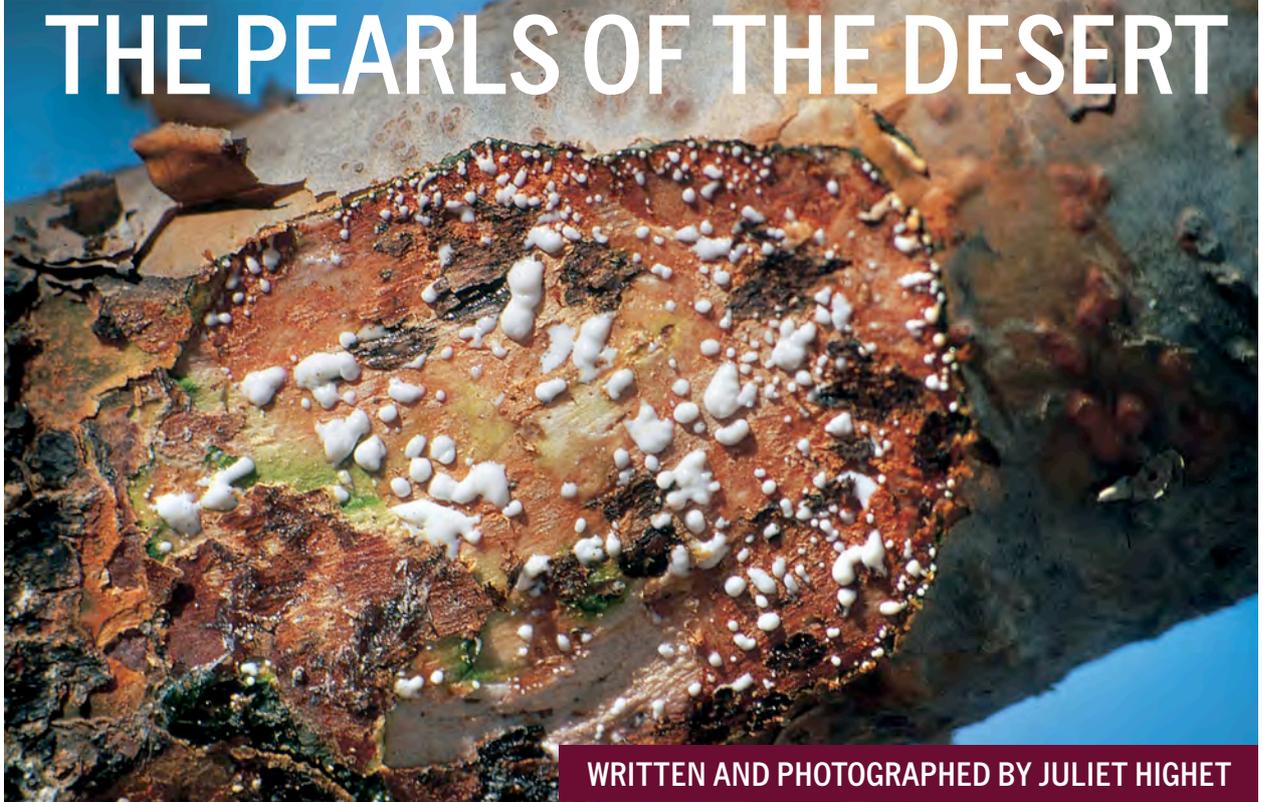
Our core activities such as the regular programme of lectures, the biennial House of Lords Tea parties and the annual lunch remain in the plan.

We shall shortly be starting preparations for the 40th Anniversary of the Society which is due to take place in 2016.

Finally, for those on the internet do please look at the Society website for up to date information. ■

Nigel Knocker

FRANKINCENSE: THE PEARLS OF THE DESERT



WRITTEN AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY JULIET HIGHEE

Recently UNESCO named a group of archaeological sites in Dhofar, southern Oman, as World Heritage Sites, since they “represent the production and distribution of frankincense, one of the most important luxury items of trade in the Old World in antiquity.”

But production in Dhofar today is negligible. The gum resin at the heart of an immensely profitable luxury trade spanning several millennia was once as important to the economy of the Middle East as oil is today, literally worth its weight in gold. During the Roman Empire, at the height of the trade, Oman was called *Arabia Felix*, Fortunate Arabia, from exporting the coveted incense, as well as other luxuries like silk and spices, believed by the outside world to have originated in southern Arabia, but actually imported from south-east Asia in Omani built, ocean-going *dhow*s. Nowadays, you can buy a gift pack for about £12 at the Frankincense Souk in Salalah, capital of Dhofar, primarily patronised by tourists.

For thousands of years frankincense has been burned from Karnak to Ninevah, its fragrant white smoke spirally upwards in Sumerian temples some 2,500 BCE, its oil used in therapeutic massage by aromatherapists to this day. This resin, derived from beneath the bark of strange scrubby little trees growing in arid semi-desert, was the foundation of the Arab, and

much later the international multi-billion pound Western perfume industry, the very word ‘perfume’ derived from the Latin *per fumem*, meaning ‘through smoke’.

But frankincense was and is very far from being just a luxury product or a pleasing smell; nor is its potent symbolic value confined to its healing powers, which are





considerable. At the time frankincense was given to Jesus at his birth, along with gold and myrrh, three thousand tons were exported from Dhofar annually to Rome alone, not counting other user cultures. Pliny described Omani ‘Silver Incense’, still considered the best by connoisseurs, as “brilliant white and gathered at dawn in drops or tears in the shape of pearls”. Why were these “pearls” of the desert, these little bits of resin crystal, so prized that Alexander the Great planned to invade southern Arabia to control the trade at its point of origin? Only his death prevented him.

The answer is that frankincense was given to Jesus because it symbolised *divinity*. It was believed that as the perfumed smoke rose, it took the prayers of the people to the gods. Not just a sumptuous (though also austere) smell then – everybody had to have it, from Cleopatra as she sailed to meet Anthony, censers billowing forth her presence; to a Roman centurion, who would spend half a month’s salary on a modest supply.

Frankincense was exorbitantly expensive by the time its merchants had travelled thousands of miles across hugely inhospitable terrain of desert and mountain, encountering many hazards, including murderous thieves. All along the 65 staging posts of the western route ending at Alexandria, embarkation point for Europe, the travel expenses mounted. The huge camel caravans had to pay for accommodation, food, camel fodder and repairs at the *caravanserais*; as well as

Frankincense was exorbitantly expensive by the time its merchants had travelled thousands of miles across hugely inhospitable terrain of desert and mountain, encountering many hazards, including murderous thieves.



protection money to soldiers and local chieftains, and gratuities to temple priests along the route, and Roman officials at Alexandria.

The famous visit of the Queen of Sheba, from her Sabean Empire in today’s Yemen, to King Solomon in the 10th century BCE, was almost certainly to secure an agreement on frankincense and myrrh advantageous to both parties. Sheba’s stunning wealth depended on control of the trade along the western Incense Route. The great Nabatean valley culture of Petra grew rich too through control of the route passing through southern Jordan.

After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the 4th century AD, the use of incense burnt on altars began to decline. But the history of frankincense has not ended. It is still an ingredient in 13 per cent of up-market female scents, and three per cent of male, both as a sensual, woody yet fresh base note, and as a fixative. In ancient Egypt and several other cultures, the unguent derived from the gum resin was used cosmetically against ageing. Recently major brand Western companies have been developing this hugely commercial proposition, marketing skincare products containing frankincense. Key in that ‘F’ word on the Internet and a wonderland of shopping opportunities opens up.

Many rural Arab homes are censured at sunrise and sunset, to keep away insects and protect those inside against evil spirits. In lands traditionally short of water, clothes and bed linen are stretched over a special frame and censured. A Dhofari woman who blends incense, a skill taught by her mother, told me that, “Women drink frankincense water to help deliver babies when they won’t come out, and after the birth, mother and baby are constantly censured.”

Historically, in the traditional medicine of many cultures from North Africa to China, frankincense has been used medically against plague, leprosy, meningitis and a raft of other serious conditions. In Europe it was part of the pharmacopoeia until the beginning of the 20th century, after which, with the development of synthetic drugs, it fell into oblivion. Except, that is, used as an aid against stress-related problems, respiratory complaints, ulcers and so on, by modern aromatherapists.

FRANKINCENSE: THE PEARLS OF THE DESERT

With frankincense's component of natural monoterpenes, which have antiseptic, anti-inflammatory and astringent properties, it is perhaps not surprising that startling information on new medical results is emerging. It has been traditionally used in the Indian Ayurvedic system of medicine, notably for control of rheumatoid and osteoarthritis. Now, chemically controlled, scientifically conducted and reported research, trials and treatment could shake up the medical establishment. Again, in India, patients with ulcerative colitis and bronchial asthma have gone into remission.

In Egypt, immune-stimulant results have been observed, and in the USA, the ability of frankincense to repair DNA. Even more amazing are Chinese and American reports of medical breakthroughs. In China, it exhibits "anti-carcinogenic and anti-tumour

activities", while in the USA, cervical cancer and tumours have been cured.

Ironically, just as exports of frankincense from Dhofar are now eclipsed by those from Somalia, Ethiopia and India, cultural tourism into this fascinating and fabulously landscaped region is being very successfully promoted, playing on the frankincense card. Western media coverage focuses on the role of frankincense in the cultural and economic heritage of Oman. The recently opened Muscat Shangri-La resort has a superb spa offering frankincense and rose body wraps; and centre-stage in the shops of most five-star hotels, museums and galleries, are elegantly wrapped products containing frankincense.

But 70 year-old Musallam Rehaba, who used to cull the pearls of the desert, told me none of his sons or grandsons have followed him. "It's barely a living for very hard labour. Cheaper incense from Somalia spoils the market." What has happened is that black gold has supplanted the white, and the young men have moved away from Dhofar. Those that remain, prefer to dive for the highly lucrative abalone, exported to Southeast Asia. In a two-month season a diver can earn £25,000, whereas the annual harvest for frankincense nets about £80. In a further irony, stocks of abalone are already depleting; while an ancient heritage slips ignominiously away. ■

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A photo-illustrated book by Juliet Hight was published by Prestel, titled *FRANKINCENSE: Oman's Gift to the World*. ISBN 3-7913-3695 9



PHOTO ©BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS

THE SOCIETY'S GRANTS SCHEME

One of the primary charitable objects of The Society is the provision of funding to UK and Omani nationals through a grants scheme for educational, cultural and environmental projects.

Applications for grants are welcomed from individuals and academic, training or cultural institutions in the UK and Oman, and grants are made throughout the year.

In addition to The Society's well established student programmes, at the Sultan's School primarily for UK gap-year students, and at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers for under-graduate and graduate students (see separate articles about these projects), The Society has awarded grants during the last year to:

- Eight scholars from the Sultan's School to attend International Baccalaureate summer schools in Oxford and Cambridge.
- The British Exploring Society to support the Chief Scientist for expeditions to the Dhofar region in conjunction with

Oman's Office for the Conservation of the Environment.

- The Natural History Museum, London, and the National Museum of Wales to support training of two Omani students in crop sciences.
- Biosphere Expeditions, UK, for bursaries for three Omani students to work on marine conservation in the Musandam, and support for a UK marine expert from the Marine Conservation Society.
- Oman's Office for Conservation of the Environment for language training in the UK for three Omani Rangers.
- Durham University for archaeological research at Rustaq and the Batinah Coast in conjunction with Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture involving up to 20 students.

THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

- Outward Bound Oman for training Omani instructors.
- Professor Marilyn Booth for translating a book by Omani author, Jokha al-Harhi, into English.
- Helen Couchman for a photographic project: "Women of Oman".
- The Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford, for preservation of photographic archives of Oman.

This wide range of projects illustrates the extent of the activities supported by The Society, with all making valuable contributions towards promoting Anglo-Omani relations. ■



PHOTOS ©BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS



NHM Students.



Physics lesson.



Sultan's School.



OCE Oman – Hadi Al Hikmani.



British Exploring.



Women of Oman.

LOGGERHEAD SEA TURTLE RESEARCH PROJECT, MASIRAH ISLAND

ARTICLE BY ROXANNE WHELAN

Oman is very important for sea turtles, four species nest and feed along Oman's coast and a fifth feeds and migrates within Oman's waters. Masirah Island is known internationally as having the largest population of nesting Loggerheads, which is listed as an endangered species. After volunteering for the Environment Society of Oman's (ESO) turtle project in 2011 on Masirah Island, I was determined to travel back to Oman to do my undergraduate dissertation research there.

Light pollution is a worldwide problem, affecting nocturnal animals such as bats, insects, migratory birds and turtles. Although Masirah is remote and has a relatively small population of people, there are still threats and impacts to sea turtles there, such

as artificial lighting. My research project intended to investigate how much of an impact artificial lighting from the town, road lights, the Royal Air Force of Oman base and a hotel were affecting Loggerhead hatchlings after they emerge from their nests. Naturally, the hatchlings would navigate towards the sea. However, light pollution disrupts and confuses them, often leading them inland where they ultimately perish.

Turtle research is hard work! My voluntary helpers and I all became nocturnal; walking up and down the beaches searching for emerging hatchlings at dawn and dusk for hours was a challenge but in most cases rewarding – we had to find many hatchlings in a day to carry out the

experiments in the evening in line with the moon cycle – so a very tight schedule! Unfortunately signs of seagulls swooping, diving and frantically chasing each other in the early morning was a clear sign for us; hatchlings were racing from their nests to the sea and this was often how we located them – even if they were 1km away we had to get there fast...

On the first night of experiments, 90% of

affected) going inland and dying, threatening a vital population of an already endangered species.

The next step to be taken from this research is to mitigate and manage the light problems; to educate and include the local residents to try and change or modify the lighting to more 'turtle-friendly' options. It may also help and influence decision-makers in other important nesting sites

along Oman's coast before they become too over developed and avoid any further decline of Oman's important wildlife and biodiversity.

Masirah is a beautiful island; the local people are very friendly and we experienced typical Omani hospitality. During my time there, I managed to visit other places around the island, beautiful remote



ON THE FIRST NIGHT OF EXPERIMENTS, 90% OF THE HATCHLINGS ORIENTATED AND MOVED TOWARDS THE LIGHT AWAY FROM THE SEA.

the hatchlings orientated and moved towards the light away from the sea. This was surprising, I predicted to see a proportion going to the light but this was unexpected. Unfortunately, this was not an anomaly and the majority of sites had similar outcomes, not only were they visible to us, the turtles noticeably turned to the light sources or glow even when placed facing the sea. This has been shown in other research in Florida (where they also have a similar large population of Loggerheads), Turkey, West Africa and India. Masirah is developing more and more, the population is growing and development visible from the beach such as new houses is creating more light sources and, consequently, increasing the likelihood of turtles (adults are also

beaches, wadis and even shared Iftar (breaking fast in Ramadan) with the local ranger, friends and volunteers. There were also several opportunities to see other wildlife – groups of uniquely resident endangered Egyptian vultures were frequently seen every morning coming back from the beaches, and of course a curious camel or two!

I would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society and its patron, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, for giving me the means and opportunity to return to Oman and complete this research for my University degree. I anticipate this project will further the knowledge and understanding of Oman's environmental threats for future conservation efforts. ■

THE RUSTAQ-BATINAH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Derek Kennet, Department of Archaeology, Durham University

Many people imagine that archaeologists spend most of their time digging holes trying to find valuable ancient objects. Whilst there is no doubt that digging up ancient graves and settlements is a lot of fun – and can be very interesting – archaeology has developed into a much more complex science over past decades and now employs a wide range of sophisticated scientific techniques amongst which radio-carbon dating, ground-penetrating radar, DNA analysis of humans and animals and analysis of satellite images are included. In fact, the definition of archaeology is to investigate the human past (from the evolution of humans until modern times) using material evidence as opposed to the written evidence that historians would use. Material evidence might consist of artefacts such as pottery, stone, glass and metal objects, as well as the remains of buildings, roads, settlements, graves, mills, forts and so forth.

Increasingly now, archaeologists also make use of what we call 'ecofacts', or environmental evidence derived from animal bones, plant remains and a wide range of natural, organic materials that can help us to reconstruct the ancient environment by determining what type of plants grew, how much rainfall is likely to have fallen and what sort of temperatures

prevailed. A good example of an ecofact – and one that many people find surprising – would be snail shells. Because snail shells can survive for thousands of years once they are buried, and because each individual snail species lives in very specific conditions (as any gardener will know), finding a particular species of snail shell on an excavation can tell the archaeologist a great deal about the prevailing humidity, temperature and the types of plants that were growing in the vicinity of the human settlement.

So we can think of archaeologists as ancient forensic detectives trying to piece together human history. One very important and relatively new area of archaeology which also has nothing to do with digging holes is what is called 'landscape archaeology' or 'archaeological survey'. This type of archaeology tries to reconstruct a complete map of the human landscape, identifying the locations of towns, villages, farms, fields, irrigation systems and roads etc. This is done by walking across the landscape, step by step, looking for the surface remains of buried human activity. Once located, scatters of objects or mounded earth – the tell-tale sign of ancient field systems and houses – are

This type of archaeology tries to reconstruct a complete map of the human landscape, identifying the locations of towns, villages, farms, fields, irrigation systems and roads etc.



The Rustaq Batinah team in action using a 'camera on a stick' to photograph archaeological sites from above.

carefully mapped using GPS and are dated on the basis of the objects found.

Because every single square foot of the ground has to be inspected, it can take a long time to cover even a few square miles but once an area has been surveyed, it can give absolutely vital information about the development of human settlement in a particular area. The map, once drawn, is literally 4-dimensional because it includes the element of time – which most maps obviously don't include. The map will show archaeologists what settlements looked like in the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age and the historical period and so on. Such maps will allow archaeologists to answer a number of key questions. For example, how did the density of human settlement change? Did population grow at any particular period, or did it decline? Where was human settlement concentrated at any particular period – close to the sea, in the mountains, in fertile, cultivable areas or high on hill tops where settlements can be easily defended? The answers to these questions will give important insights into the type of society and economy that prevailed in the past, and how these developed and changed as time passed.

This type of 'landscape archaeology' research is exactly what the Anglo-Omani-Society-funded, 'Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey' is undertaking. The work is organised through the Durham University Department of Archaeology in the UK in close collaboration with the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Culture and Sultan Qaboos University Department of Archaeology. British students from Durham, as well as Omani students, are involved in the work. For the British students, in most cases, it's their first visit to Oman and the amazing preservation of ancient remains, as well as the sheer beauty and hospitality of the country, usually turns them into instant Omanophiles. For example many of the students who were involved in the first season in December/January 2013/14 have decided to go on to complete undergraduate research dissertations on Omani topics. The visit to Oman also gives them the chance actually to practise Near Eastern archaeology on the ground, which will be very useful for their future careers. Meanwhile the Omani students have a

chance to work with their British counterparts, to exchange knowledge and to become familiar with the latest techniques and theories being developed in UK universities.

The first season of work concentrated largely on Rustaq and its immediate vicinity. Before the start, the team were unsure what they were going to find because relatively few archaeological sites have been reported in this area. Indeed, there was always the risk that relatively little would be found. In the end nothing could have been further from the truth – in the brief five weeks of fieldwork, the team uncovered a wealth of large and spectacular archaeological sites dating from the Bronze Age (2700-2000 BC) to the early Islamic period (7th & 8th century AD). Twelve significant new sites were added to the Ministry's list of nationally protected heritage locations and over 650 'locii' or areas of archaeological interest were recorded, whilst upwards of 10,000 ancient pot shards were collected and catalogued!

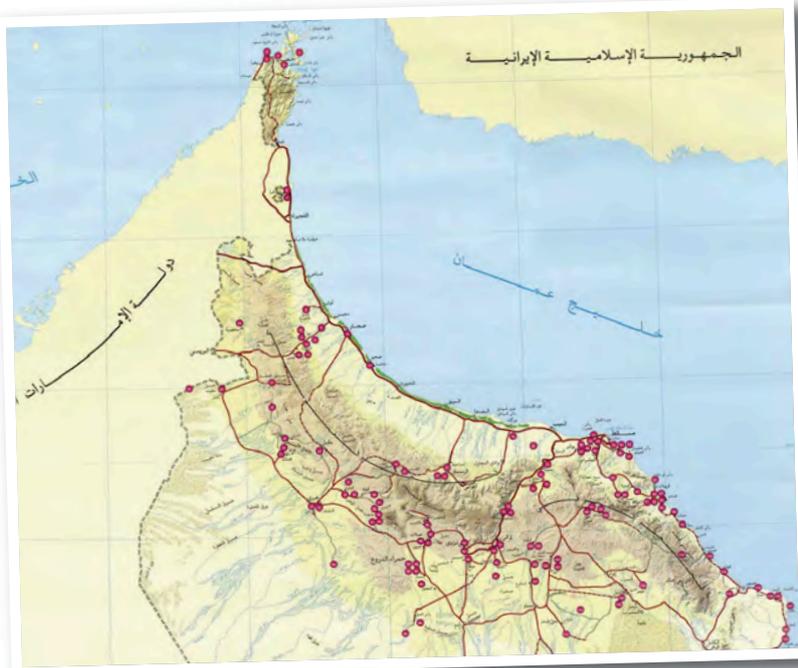
The Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey is concentrating on the archaeology of the Batinah coast. The reason for this is because, archaeologically speaking, the Batinah is one of the least explored areas of Oman. This is surprising, as analysis of recent settlement patterns shows that the Batinah contains 50% of Oman's agricultural land and 33% of its population. If this has been true in recent years, then it is likely to have been true in ancient times as human settlement is normally associated with areas where water is abundant and where good quality, cultivable soils are to be found. However, when we look at a map of key archaeological sites in Oman we can see that the Batinah is very much an archaeological vacuum, especially compared to the interior where numerous famous sites are to be found in the Sharqiyah, for example. This anomaly can be explained by two factors: human destruction and sedimentation. With regards to human destruction, it is generally true that wherever human populations have



The team inspecting a 17th century archaeological site close to Rustaq recorded by the 2013/4 season of the survey.



The UK members of the Rustaq-Batinah team 2013/4.



Map of Oman showing key archaeological sites – the absence of sites on the Batinah coast is immediately obvious.

With each rainfall more silt is carried down from the mountains and surface archaeological sites become slowly buried by the alluvium over the centuries until they are invisible to archaeologists.

been most dense, then archaeological sites will be the least well preserved. This is simply because humans will go to old buildings and remove items that are useful such as building stone, timber, material for mud-brick etc. Archaeologists call this 'robbing' or 'spoliation'. Obviously then, the relatively dense populations that have inhabited the Batinah coast since ancient times will have damaged the archaeological sites there without realising the significance of what they were doing. In the meantime, sites in the much less densely settled areas such as the Sharqiyah have remained in much better condition. Secondly, the Batinah coast is a big alluvial plain up to 35 miles wide. With each rainfall more silt is carried down from the mountains and surface archaeological sites become slowly buried by the alluvium over the centuries until they are invisible to archaeologists.

There is little that the Rustaq-Batinah team can do about the first problem, other than look for the hidden traces that can often indicate to the trained eye the location of a now-destroyed archaeological site. As far as the second point is concerned, the team is planning to use a range of modern techniques such as ground-penetrating radar – a mobile radar that can look under the ground – as well as the simple technique of visiting places where wadis and wells have cut into the ground offering a glimpse into the buried deposits.

This aspect of the work is going to be quite challenging. In its first season the project discovered and recorded an incredible number of new archaeological sites that had never been noted before, but in future years it is likely that the discoveries will be much less spectacular, although potentially much more significant for our understanding of Oman's long

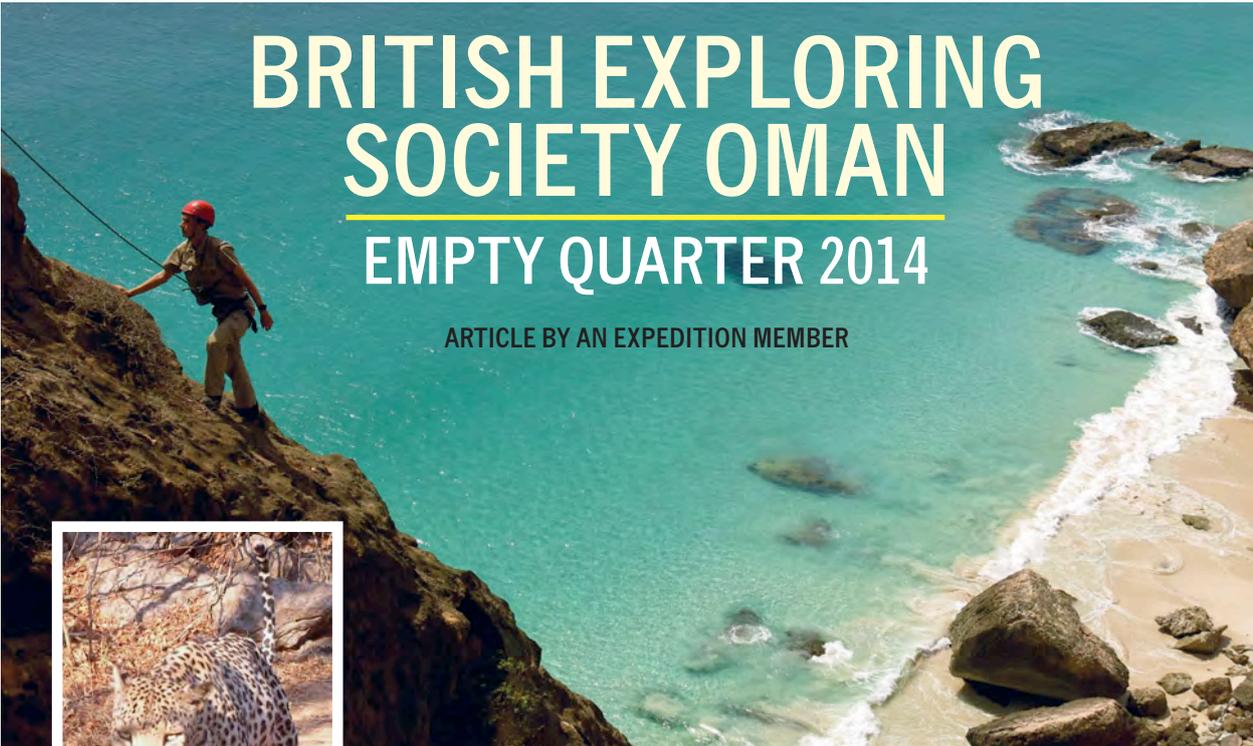
history and especially the history of the Batinah. ■

Acknowledgements

The Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey would like to express its profound thanks to the Trustees of the Anglo-Omani Society for the generous financial support that they have provided to the project, without which the project would not have been able to go ahead.



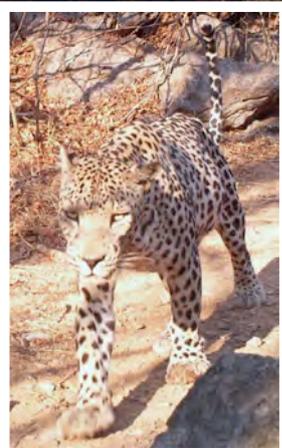
FIG 5. An extensive Iron Age (1300-400 BC) archaeological site close to Wadi Hoqain recorded by the 2013/4 season of the survey.



BRITISH EXPLORING SOCIETY OMAN

EMPTY QUARTER 2014

ARTICLE BY AN EXPEDITION MEMBER



The 2014 British Exploring Empty Quarter expedition was a venture into some of the wildest and most remote parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

While trekking through the most desolate yet mesmerising scenery I have ever witnessed in the Jebal Al Qamar Mountains in southern Oman, we were reminded that our footsteps might be the first of western origin to ever set foot on this landscape. This was the first thing that attracted me to this project; the feeling of real adventure and being pioneers in such a distant yet extraordinary part of the world. Further to the explorative nature of the expedition, the chance to take part in the Arabian leopard study, a conservation project aiming to protect an extremely endangered species of leopard, was a huge factor in my involvement with British Exploring.

As well as an adventure into remote environments such as desert and mountainous terrain and a number of conservation efforts, the expedition included elective modules in photography, film making and travel journalism. As an aspiring writer and photographer, this was a perfect opportunity to practise my skills in a challenging environment and to confirm whether or not I would like to make a career in this field. Through some great mentors on the expedition, I also feel I have developed my writing and photography skills.

During the expedition, we worked closely with the Oman Office for Conservation of the Natural Environment. As part of this partnership, we worked

with 20-25 conservation rangers on a variety of large mammal conservation projects, including the Arabian leopard study. The OCE do some terrific work in conserving these most remarkable yet fragile ecosystems in Oman. We were able to offer a large number of participants with an interest in conservation. For instance, during the Arabian leopard survey, we undertook an absence/presence survey to assess the environments in which the leopards and other large mammals live. Because of our large group (34), we were able to cover a larger distance in the survey and, as a result, found leopard presence in an area between two different populations, suggesting interbreeding between two groups which is vital to the future of the leopard. As well as offering assistance in the science projects, we were able to learn a great deal from our Omani counterparts. They showed a level of hospitality, generosity, warmth and welcome I have never before seen and this trait is something I am keen to develop when meeting visitors to our own country.

I am now an ambassador for British Exploring with the hope of getting young people to sign up to future expeditions – I will use my knowledge of fundraising and sponsorship to help others to take part in a similar, hugely worthwhile experience. We are all most grateful for the generous support of the Anglo-Omani Society. ■

British Exploring Society Oman Empty Quarter 2015 – Now Recruiting

If you are aged 18-25 (or know someone who is) consider joining us from mid-January to mid-March for a 4 or 8 week expedition – £2,600 or £3,100 plus flights
www.britishexploring.org

BEFORE AND...



LOU HAS KINDLY
LOANED THIS
PAIR AND FIVE
MORE FROM HIS
EXTENSIVE
PERSONAL
PORTFOLIO.

Many readers with experience of living in Oman will recognise this pair of photographs. One shows the Ruwi Valley as it was in the early 1970s, and the other shows the changes after fifteen years of the Renaissance. They became familiar as a pair hung up in numerous offices, messes and houses, and were taken by Lou Lyddon when he was working in Oman in 1967-71.

...LATER

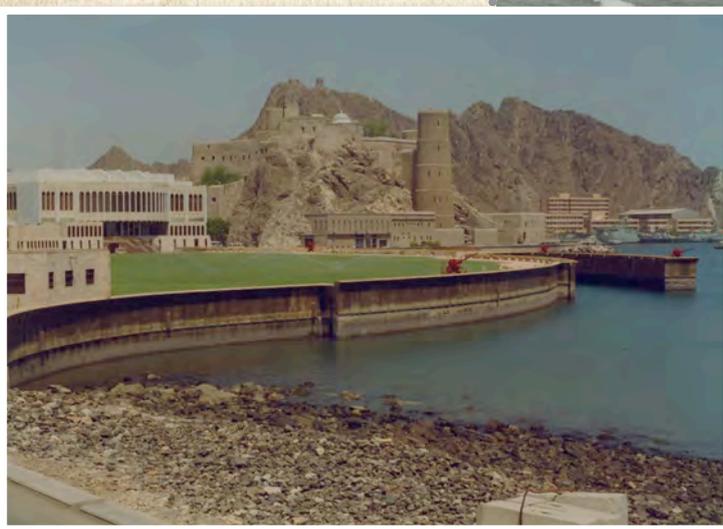


Lou: "Before I left Oman in March 1971, I went round taking a few photographs of the built up areas. About fifteen years later I did the same photographs again, showed the Wadi el Kabir prints to someone in SOAF who asked to borrow them. A couple of hours later he called me and asked for forty copies of each. And so it started..."

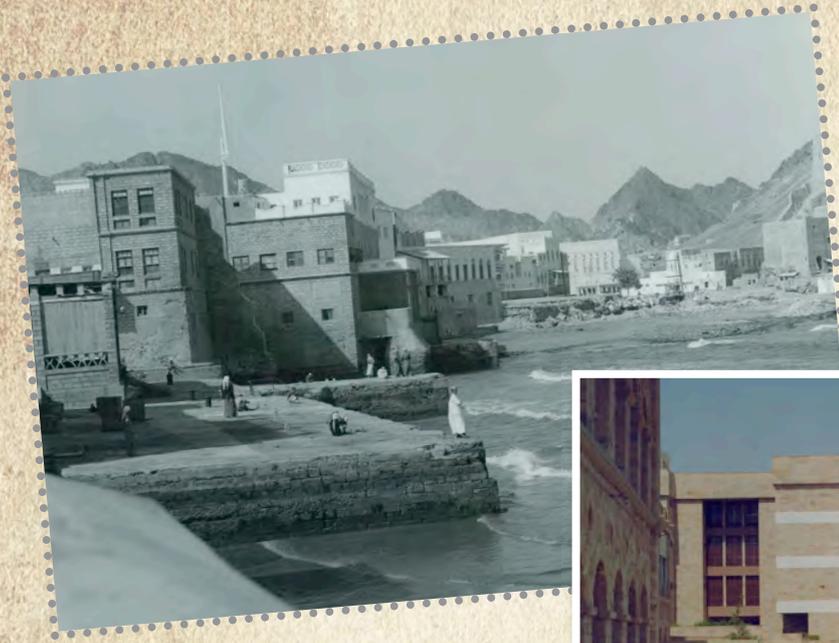
Muttrah Fort overlooking the sea front.



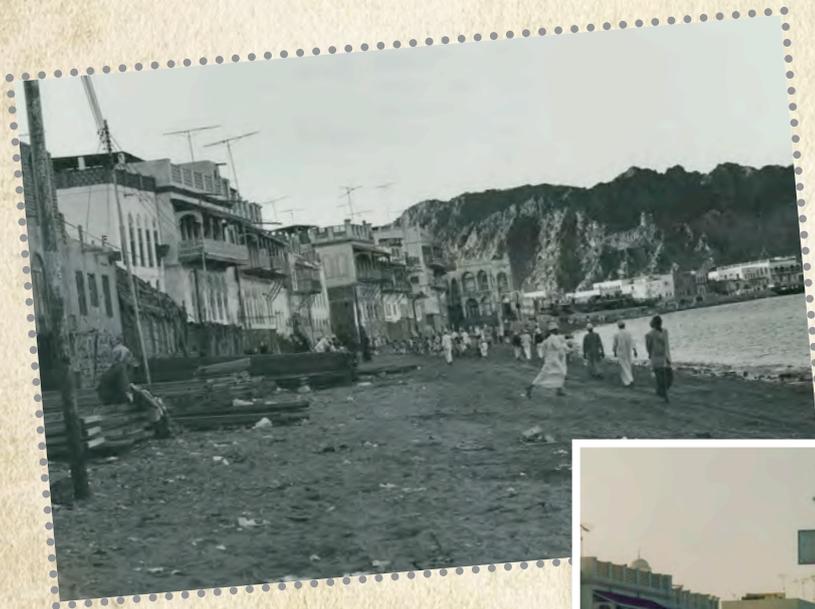
Mirani Fort overlooking Muscat Harbour.



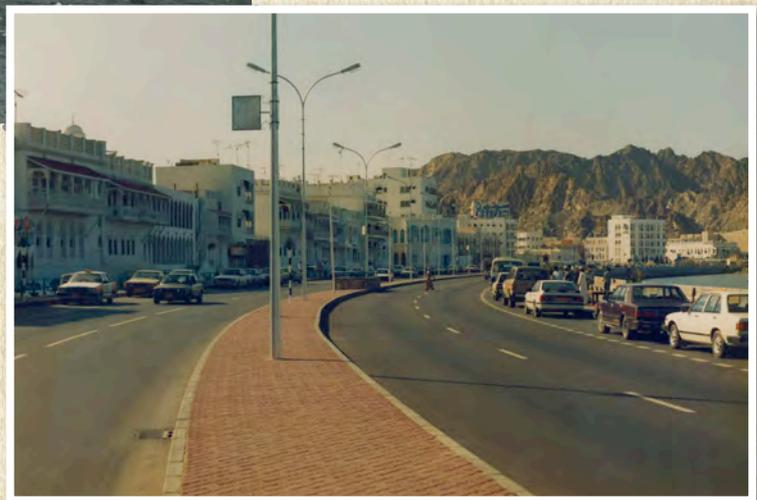
BEFORE AND LATER



The Old Custom House later replaced by an extension to the Royal Palace.

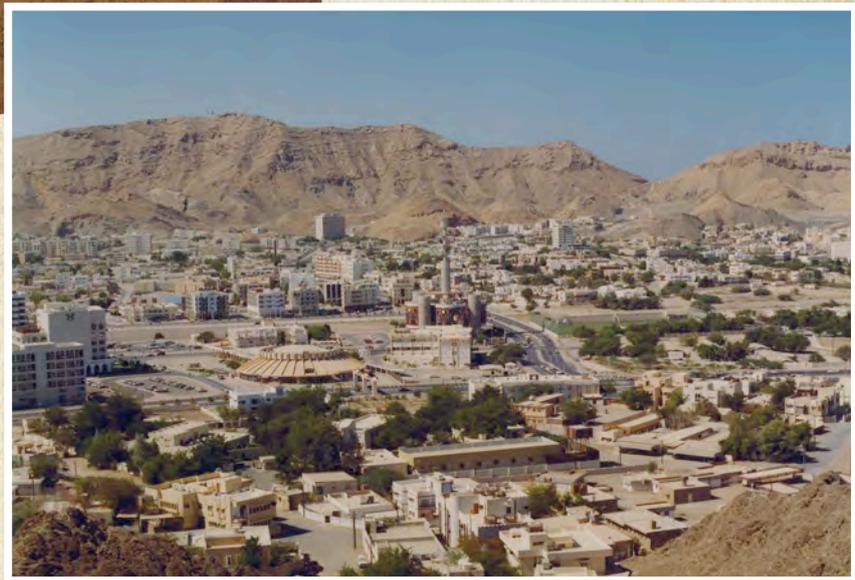


Muttrah sea front with the later Corniche.





Airworks buildings (foreground) and Al Falaj Hotel (background) a few months after building started.



Annual Golf Match – Tuesday 16 June 2015

For the last nineteen years there has been a Golf Match played in June at the Dorset Golf and Country Club (See www.dorsetgolfresort.com) between Bere Regis and Wareham in Dorset. Initially held for members of the Sultan Armed Forces Association the match was later broadened out to all who have been to or have associations with the Sultanate. The number of players fluctuates between twenty and thirty and now includes several ladies with others joining us for lunch.

The occasion is very much social and for enjoyment. However, for those keen to compete there are some very nice prizes and the honour if you win, of having your name recorded on our shield. The day finishes with a sumptuous three course lunch with wine and Prize Giving. The total cost for 2015 is £46.00 for players and £18.00 for lunch guests only. The day normally starts with a bacon butty and coffee at 9am and finishes by 5.30pm.

We would welcome more players, both men and ladies, from anyone interested, who has visited, or worked in the Sultanate of Oman. It would be marvellous if any Omanis could join us as I remember in the '80s there were several very good players at the Ghallah Wentworth Club in Muscat.

Please e-mail or drop me a line to declare an interest and I will furnish you with more information and put you on the mailing list.

Robin Gainsford
(82-87 Sultanate of Oman)
Grebe Cottage, 19 Briantspuddle, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7HS

01929 471419/ 07768 395085 • e-mail: robingainsford@hotmail.com

WALKING IN THE OMAN MOUNTAINS

ARTICLE BY ALASDAIR MACKENZIE

There are a surprising number of paths in the Oman mountains. The most spectacular are found on the north side of Jebel Akhdar, connecting the lower down wadis to now abandoned villages or cultivated areas located close to the area where springs emerge from the cliffs. Other routes lead up and over the cliffs to connect one village with another.

Paths can be found on the ground as slightly flattened areas, sometimes marked by cairns, but often identifiable by polished rock either in obvious footholds or handholds. Paths vary from “person-only” to those that have been built to allow pack-animals access to the villages. The degree of construction on steep sections varies from the placement of one or two stones to allow access from one ledge to another, to impressively constructed zig-zagging sections of steps, to fairly dangerous sections where stones are wedged into cracks up high sections of cliff. There were several times on our travels when we wondered when the last HSE inspection had been carried out; however there was only once when we decided that the staircase really was too dangerous to attempt.

Our first walk took us high above Wadi Sahtan, along the cliffs below Jebel Shams. It was here that we found our first serious piece of construction: a stairway made of stones and large branches. Figure 1 shows the author testing the stairway; the branches were secured by a large chain! On the same walk we found the steps shown in Figure 2. This part of the route had been designed for donkeys, with large walls built to contain the steps. The

Figure 1



Figure 2



size of the stones indicated that this would have been a major construction project.

The route up to the abandoned village of HalHal (above the new village) in Wadi Bani Kharus gives a beautiful day's walking. The path has some spectacular sections and Figure 3 shows how the ledge section has been filled to provide easy walking. Another path in Wadi Bani Kharus has the section shown in Figure 4. Here, a 5-6m "ladder" has been built up a cleft in the rocks to allow access to the next "easy" ledge.



Figure 3

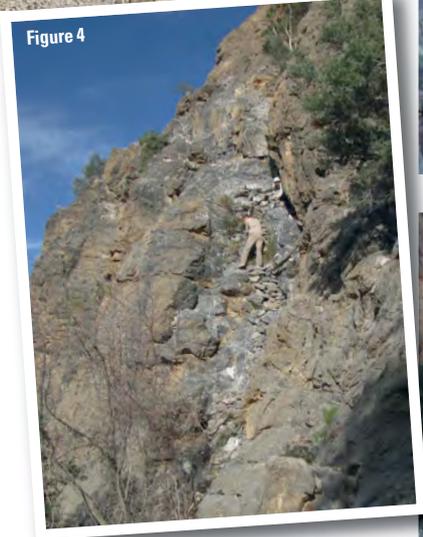


Figure 4

Walking on the southern flank of Jebel Shams, we found a path with clear signs of recent maintenance (Figure 5). Branches had been placed, and stones laid over them, to allow passage for animals over a tricky section. We did meet a shepherd and his flock higher on this route.

Finally, the walk from Hadash in Wadi Mistal to the Sumail Gap road is a classic long distance walk over the mountains. The first half, as you climb up the cliffs from



Figure 5



Close up of wolf trap from Figure 6 below.

Hadash gives spectacular views, and although exposed, the path is wide. Figure 6 shows part of the walk. The photo also includes a well-preserved wolf-trap (see zoomed photo): a small chambered-cairn construction with a larger stone which would fall and block the entrance.

During our many walks we only found one path with signs of recent maintenance; all others are gradually returning back to nature and it is only a matter of time before their eventual disappearance. When this happens, Oman will have lost a truly remarkable asset. ■

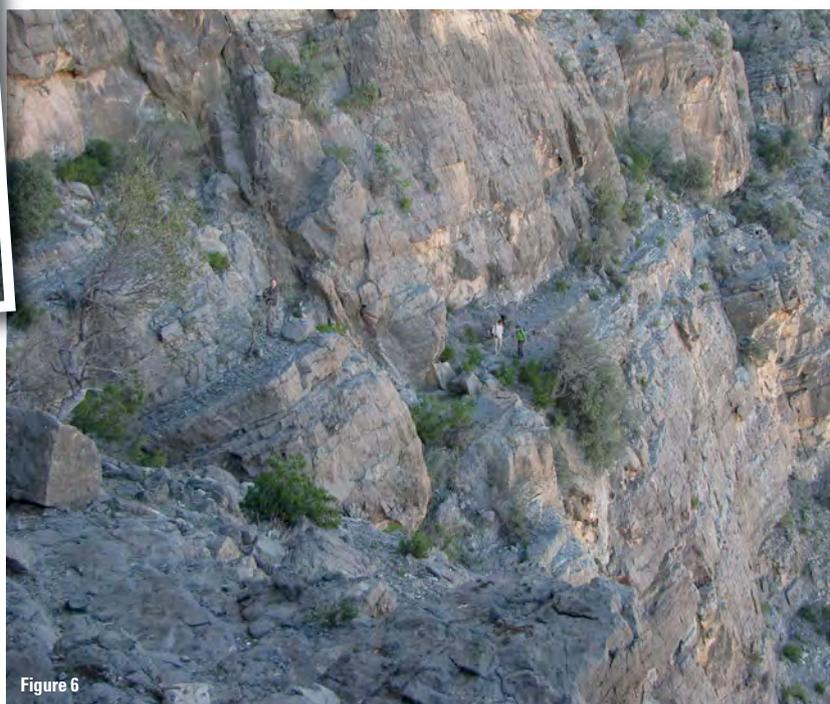


Figure 6

GALLOPS OF OMAN

17-21 FEBRUARY 2014

ARTICLE BY EDWIN GOULD

I said, “this is a very ambitious project” –
I thought, “they must be mad, it will never happen”.
But happen it did and it was a great success.



The “Gallops” had everything. First and perhaps foremost was the desert. For the vast majority of the 110 participants this was their first experience. Thousands of photographs were taken but they do not do justice to the beauty or majesty of the landscape. It is a cliché but we all witnessed the dunes changing colour as the day progressed, from a pale pink as the sun rose, to a bright yellow during the morning, to a light straw colour through the mid-day heat haze, to a deep maroon almost mauve as the sun disappeared all too quickly over the horizon. After a cool, if not cold night on the floor of an army tent much appreciated were those first rays of sunlight that appeared over the dune and warmed the back of the neck. The landscape changed but it was always dramatic. The ride also gave us an opportunity to observe Bedouin encampments and even experience genuine Arabic coffee and halwa at some of the water points.

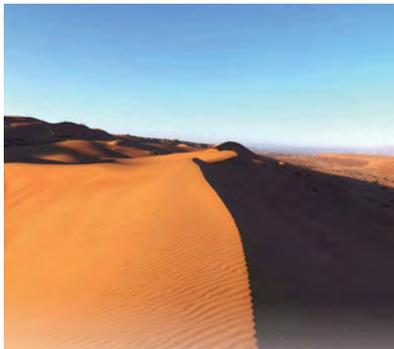
There was a competitive element. The 110 participants were divided into teams of five. It was not a race. The teams were assessed on their horse management. Horses were checked by a vet at each of the many water points and penalties were awarded should a team arrive too early or

The “Gallops of Oman” project was a rally on horseback through the Wahiba desert from Al-Rakah to the sea. A distance of almost 200kms over five days with over a hundred participants. The military camp would be moved five times to provide the logistics, water, food and fodder for well over 130 horses and a far greater number of humans. Providing all the facilities to maintain such an expedition was truly a gargantuan challenge for the organisers and the ride itself for the participants was certainly not the normal leisurely hack.

too late. Even more penalties were awarded should a horse's heartbeat be over a certain level, an indication that it was being pushed too hard. The day's ride was 25 to 40kms and proved a test for both horse and rider. For the majority, this was their first experience of the Arabian horse; its lively character makes it not the easiest to ride but most riders quickly adapted, discovering its natural courage and willingness to give of its best once it has confidence in the rider. Bonds were formed between the horse and rider. On the last day I saw riders in tears as they said good-bye to their mounts. To some teams the results were important, to others it was the whole experience that enthralled them.



The living conditions were more than adequate but it was a military encampment. It is certain this slight hint of "hardship" commonly shared, engendered a sense that this was "something special". The logistics challenges were massive. But every night the camp was ready, the tents were up, the horse boxes had been erected and plenty of hay and water was available, our personal kit bags had been transported from the previous camp, showers worked and the



The living conditions were more than adequate but it was a military encampment



GALLOPS OF OMAN

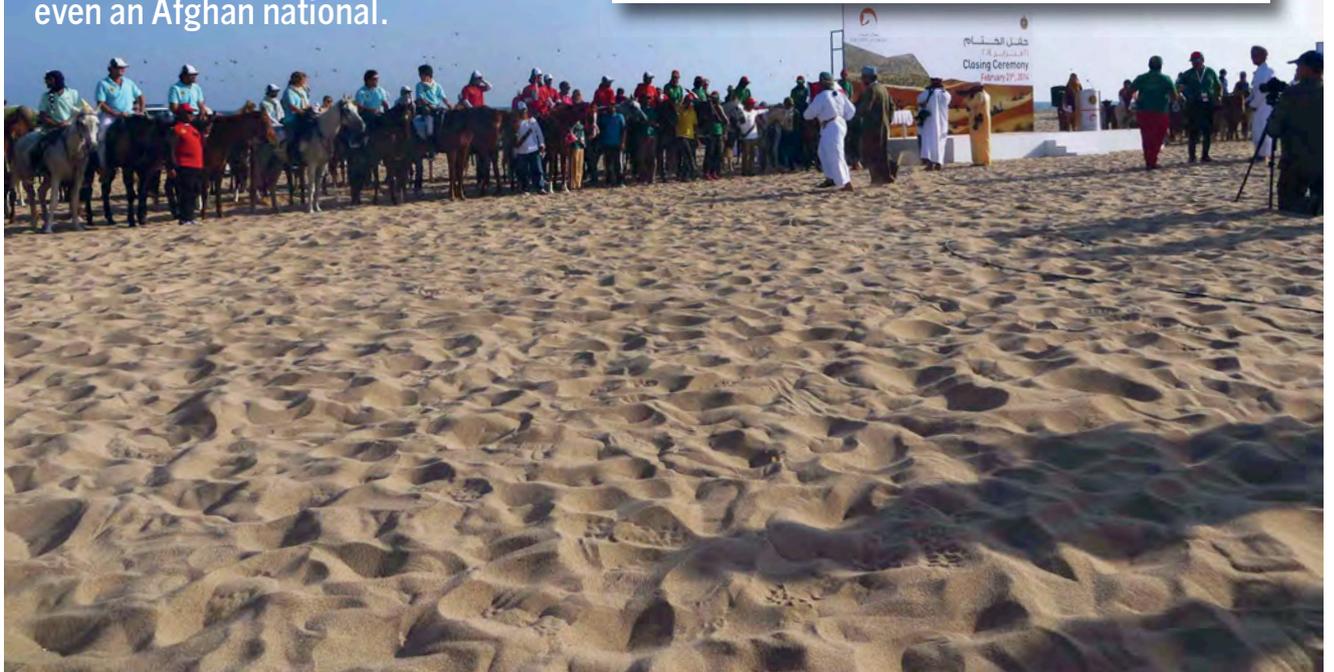
food in the communal tent was not only hot but incredibly good. It was at night around the traditional tables sitting on the floor during meal times that the day's events were related, lively conversations roamed over a myriad of subjects and friendships were secured. The large French contingent ensured that French was the dominant language, but participants came from far and wide: an English lady resident in Argentina,

a Frenchman living in China, Italians, Germans, English, even an Afghan national.

The event is the brain child of Bady Kebir, fluent in Arabic, based in France and a keen polo player. He and his team organised the participants. The Royal Cavalry of Oman were the driving force in Oman. Their ambition was well rewarded. A truly exceptional event, hopefully to be repeated. ■



The large French contingent ensured that French was the dominant language but participants came from far and wide: an English lady resident in Argentina, a Frenchman living in China, Italians, Germans, English, even an Afghan national.



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برقيا: تاول مسقط

STUDYING INSECTS IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY DAVID AGASSIZ

Last September, thanks to generous funding from the Anglo-Omani Society, I had the chance to accompany two entomologist colleagues to Oman, to sample the fauna in Dhofar.



Heliothela ophideresana



Dhofarensis

I had been told in advance that Oman was the nicest and the safest place in the Middle East – and this was definitely confirmed by my experience.

My two colleagues were studying “true bugs” (Heteroptera) whereas my specialism is small moths, but we shared collecting time around a light at night. In the mornings I needed to process the preceding night’s specimens rather than spend more time in the field. We were all impressed by the Entomology Dept. at Sultan

Qaboos University near Muscat; there is no longer any UK university with an entomology Dept., the staff were most helpful giving advice and lending us equipment.

Dhofar in September was wonderfully green and our expectation was that this would indicate a richly diverse fauna. It came as something of a surprise that this was not so, perhaps the two or three months of khareef does not make it easy for species to survive through the rest of the year. A further surprise to me was the richness of apparently barren ‘desert’ areas – this was my first visit to the Middle East. Our collecting produced a great richness of variety and I returned to London with some 800 moths of over 250 different species, some of them new to science. There were several species whose larvae I had been able to find during the day, and these were kept with their food plant until the adults emerged. I was not always able to identify the plants but assistance was obtained from Dr Ghazanfar at Kew Gardens, who is currently preparing a book on the Oman flora. Life histories are important to understand since they have applications in economic entomology,

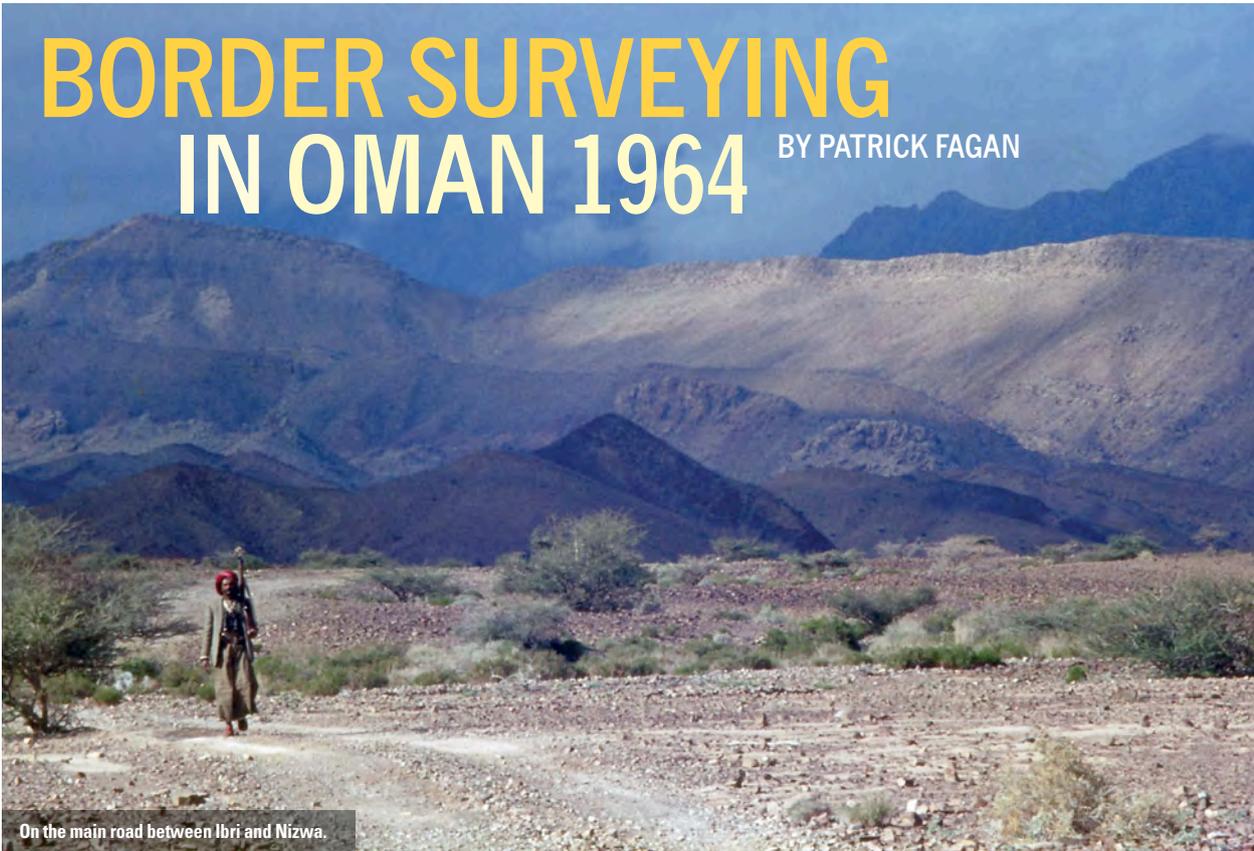
especially if one can learn about their natural enemies. Since returning and speaking at the Anglo-Omani Society I have been put in touch with Dr Annette Patzelt, a botanist in Oman, so that if there is further field work, we will be better placed for plant identification within the country. The study of life histories is, of course, much better undertaken by those resident in the country where host plants are available, and the conditions in captivity can be very similar to those outside. It would be very good to work alongside local entomologists sharing methods and understandings about the insects encountered.

Much of my work in recent years has been in savannah areas in East Africa. It came as something of a surprise how similar to that fauna were the moths in Oman. Eurasia comprises the Palaearctic biogeographical region whereas sub-Saharan Africa is the Afrotropical or Ethiopian region. Sometimes the southern half of the Arabian peninsula is counted as belonging to the Afrotropical region. One can see that for populations to cross the Red Sea is much less of an obstacle than the Sahara desert. What all this means is that Oman is at a very interesting crossroads where some of the creatures have their nearest relatives in Africa, whereas others have theirs in Europe or Asia. Further study might reveal a difference of affinity between those occurring in the north of Oman and those in Dhofar. ■

The two insects pictured are from Oman and are representative – the grey one is a new species, and is not so attractive! The other Heliothela ophideresana is a species which occurs both in Africa and in Asia, so the Arabian peninsula is the linking territory.

BORDER SURVEYING IN OMAN 1964

BY PATRICK FAGAN



On the main road between Ibri and Nizwa.

In the early 1960s, various oil interests had expressed concern to the UK Government over the precise position of the border between Abu Dhabi and Oman (and that between Saudi Arabia and Oman further south). As a result Julian Walker, a Foreign Office Arabist, travelled amongst the tribes in the area, determining which owed allegiance to which country, and in this way clarified the general position of the border.

The task of doing the precise survey was later handed to the MOD, and this in turn led to it becoming happily my responsibility, with my Field Troop, based in Aden.

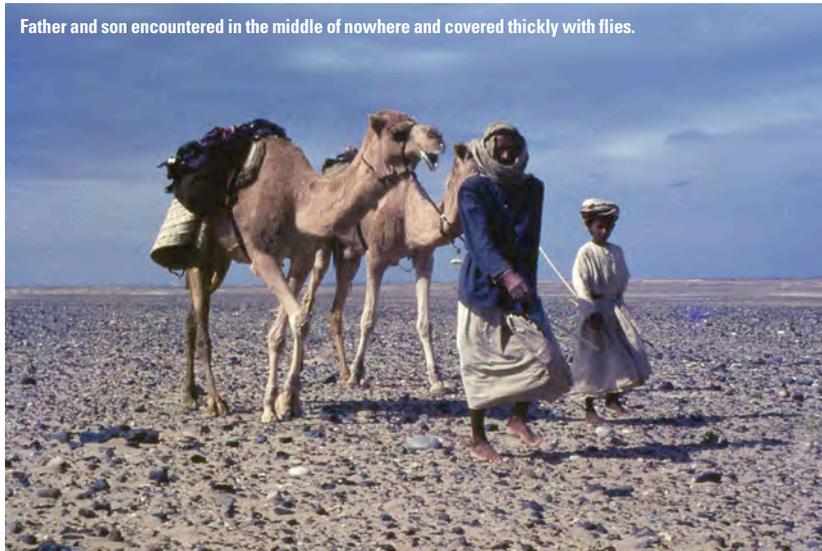
We had long wanted to put in survey control for future mapping of the area, part of a larger scheme to link the surveys of Africa with those of the Survey of India, and this gave us our opportunity to put in control for mapping further to the south.

In January I flew up from Aden for a 3-week reconnaissance with my excellent Troop Sergeant.

Two months later, after returning to Aden to plan the operation in detail, my Troop of 20 set out by sea with all kit, vehicles etc, for Dubai – which was then a picturesque little creek surrounded by a few whitewashed mud-walled buildings. They were to be involved in phase 2 of the task, but the border survey came first.

A smaller party of 4 flew up by air with me to Sharjah, where we were hosted by the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS). For security reasons we were not permitted at any time to go near the coast or the larger population centres of Oman, but entered the country discreetly from the north, through Al Ain where Sheikh Zaid was in charge. Similarly all logistic support was to be through the TOS, and not through Oman. In Al Ain we met up with Martin Buckmaster (Julian Walker's successor), and were provided with Dodge Powerwagons for the border survey. These were 1-ton trucks with huge balloon tyres, necessary for travelling in these giant sand dunes just south of the Liwa area.

Father and son encountered in the middle of nowhere and covered thickly with flies.



Our start point was a very remote well, called Umm az Zamul, which was accepted, I understood, as a point common to Saudi Arabia, Oman and Abu Dhabi. Some trouble was anticipated, so our vehicles were mine-plated, and we had an infantry escort provided by the TOS. The well water was really horrible, but of course we had to try it. However, to our surprise the arab drivers of the TOS escort refused to use it even to top up their radiators.

The nature of the survey is easily explained. The well's position was fixed from the stars by position lines observed over two nights, and an oil drum was then used to 'shutter' a concrete pillar left there. Our route lay NE, across the grain of these very large dunes (one was measured at 450 ft high), and our route followed on aerial photos of the area, taken by the RAF. We had 2 guides each from the tribes on either side of the border who agreed the limits of their tribes grazing, thus defining the border, and traced this carefully over the dunes shown on the photos. About every 10 miles we did further astro fixes, pricking the location very carefully on the photographs.

We were just 6 from Britain, including Martin Buckmaster, and lived something of the life of the locals in this then very remote area, carefully husbanding water as there were only 2 wells on our route, and those close to the start and finish, and sharing food between us. I was very conscious that Wilfrid Thesiger had been denied access to this area only 10 years previously (see his book, "Arabian Sands"), as the ruler of the local Duru tribe had been hostile then to

Our start point was a very remote well, called Umm az Zamul, which was accepted, I understood, as a point common to Saudi Arabia, Oman and Abu Dhabi

foreigners, but now things could not have been happier. In those days there were, of course, no surfaced roads anywhere, even in the coastal towns of Sharjah and Dubai. In Oman, there were no cars outside Government

Later, back in Al Ain, we met up with the rest of the Troop now set up for the control survey phase of the operation. They had already been working at this from the Trucial coast to Bureimi, and now we joined up to continue to the south to Jebel Fahud. I think that for most of us, this was one of the highlights of our lives. Confident of our ability in our task, working in a very remote area, living a militarily relaxed lifestyle, with no temptation to spend, we travelled up and down this land doing what was necessary. Probably all of us have vivid recollections of events there, but I will share here just a couple.

One evening I had seen a survey off to



the south, and was returning to Bureimi with my driver. Just before sunset, the front axle seized when the gearbox oil ran out – the forward facing drain plug had been knocked out by stones. In the distance we could see a camel caravan, a rare sight in the area. I left the driver, who was armed and had food and water, and set off for the camels who were about to be settled for the night. I persuaded one chap to help me, and so the two of us set off into the night for Bureimi and help, about 35 miles away. My lack of expertise was very evident when, given a leg up, I fell over the far side of the camel. These were pack animals without saddlery, unused to being ridden; I had to ride bare back. My camel was tethered to the one in front, who led, while I sat like a sack of potatoes on the very sharp and painful spine of mine. We rode through the night, stopping for an hour only where another caravan had halted. They kindly fanned their camp fire back to life, and milked a camel for me; no nectar could have been more welcome. We made it back to our Al Ain camp by breakfast, but it is hard to impress the British soldier and my heroics were greeted very casually. On being helped down, I saw that my trousers were caked in blood from the painful rubbing on the camel's spine, and I could not sit comfortably for a week. I have resisted all offers to ride a camel ever since.

The Political Agent in Abu Dhabi was Colonel Hugh Boustead, a very remarkable man and a colourful character. One day he set up his camp near ours in Al Ain, and invited me to dinner. Out under the desert sky we had a delicious dinner of local dishes, served by his servants. They were accomplished musicians who regaled us memorably after dinner. We sat there, replete, out in the open on a hot night with the stars shining brightly out of the black sky, with this timeless singing working all kinds of magic on our minds. Now that really was an experience to savour, and one to end this story. ■




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LETTERS HOME... THE GUBHRA BOWL ... FROM PROCTOR HUTCHINSON

The Gubhra Bowl is beyond Nakhl where the country road
turns West and follows the feet of the mountains



After Nakhl, the land is deserted. To the right is broken ground and rock hillocks and to the left the foothills, and in the bright sunlight exaggerated three dimensional saw tooth mountains bare of any vegetation beyond the odd thorn bush. In due course, a left turn leaves the macadam road for a well graded dirt road heading for a slot in the mountain range through a plain of tamarisk thorn and bleached wadi bed cobbles.

Immediately the road dives in among boulders the size of a lorry, following the wadi bed in deep gravel, the walls of the wadi at the narrowest being about thirty feet apart and rising at forty-five degrees to the mountains above.

After a mile or so the wadi opens out into a steadily broadening alluvial plain with spreading Ghaf trees under which you can park to take a break from the hammering of the suspension. Further along, after another mile or so, you enter the bowl

proper to find a few villages growing crops on the plain surrounded on all sides by the limestone cliffs rising a thousand metres and more above the sedimented glacial rocks which form a sloping rampart to the foot of the cliffs. The base of the bowl is glacial conglomerate, originally sludge with larger lumps in it dropped from the melting ice floating above. I wonder who worked that out.

Apparently, the conglomerate is impervious so the water, percolating through the limestone, emerges in springs at the discontinuity which is 500 to a 1000 metres above the floor of the bowl. It is 15 kilometres across the bowl and at the Southern end the road begins to rise after crossing a deep wadi bed full of pebbles.

The road climbs out of the plain and up the gentler slope to two villages. The first has a watch tower and is quite low compared to the second which is well up above the plain. The altimeter in the truck read 1500



metres when I parked and I think the base was 500 metres. There is very little space to park at the village – Wikan – but there were only three vehicles there so I was alright, leaving the truck parked on the edge of a cliff above the road I had just ascended.

I walked up into the village between close set houses and was greeted by a little boy in Arabic. I replied as best I could from which he assumed I could speak more and set about leading me up the hill among the gardens beside the falaj, his chatter competing with the chuckling of the stream of canalised water. The falaj is only some nine inches wide and six deep but it runs steeply down the hillside so carries a good flow of water to the grapevines, date palms, pomegranate trees and plots of maize and vegetables.

The women in their bright dresses and shawls were tilling the soil, carrying water, washing clothes and children while the men sat under a vine on a trestle drinking coffee. I greeted them and plodded on up the steep path after my little friend, his bare feet and fuzzy head going before.

The village already has a magnificent view of the bowl but as I climbed – puffed, the altitude – and climbed again, it opened out more and more. There were a couple of stops for my tour guide to explain in fluent Arabic the significance of this or that stone built hut. I believe one was a miniature mosque at some time.

Further up small reservoirs had been provided in the stream, concrete tanks about the size of a small swimming bath with a drain plugged or unplugged by the branch of a tree with the right size end to it. As the ground grew steeper the cultivation lessened to whatever could find a horizontal space to grow on, a grape vine here or a date palm with its own little diversion channel to carry the water to it. The grapes are grown on trestles or trellises made of poles and the spines from the palm leaves.

The path is formed by large stones set as steps so it is not too difficult to climb and, failing that, you can walk on the side of the falaj. Where necessary the ground is terraced with uncut stones built into retaining walls. The work forced upon these people's ancestors just to keep alive is incredible, the available space is no longer fully utilised, some of the plots seemingly having been abandoned.

The cultivation ended and my guide left me to plod on upward, still beside the running falaj, until I came to a tank and a fall where the water emerged from the rock wall. After this the path became less distinct with grass growing beside it and a variety of shrubs and trees – more like Table Mountain than Arabia. To my right there was the remains of a fortress of some sort set high above the village on a bluff. The path to it seemed to run between the mountain and a great vertical slab of rock that had split away but remained upright. I considered following it up but decided that getting up would be fine but getting back down again would be hard on the knees, so followed the path the other way which I believe eventually winds its way up onto the plateau at 2400 metres. I stopped at convenient rock with a foot hold to climb up onto it and sat there to survey the bowl and the village below me. ■



OMAN IN GUBBIO: CONNECTING CULTURES



Omani Artists at the Opening.

Sally Ricketts' review of an unusual artistic venture between Italy and Oman

In reality my involvement in 'Oman in Gubbio' is thanks to my husband who led me to two beautiful countries with two beautiful peoples. In Gubbio there was his ancient family house and in Muscat, W.J. Towell.

When Giampietro Rampini, a ceramist in Gubbio, showed an interest in Islamic art we decided to do a joint venture inviting both local artists and artists from Muscat.

A young friend of mine Shinuna Esry was more than willing to help. We had worked together on another project and knew we could rely on each other. Little did we realise what we were in for!

Umbria is famous for ceramics. Ettore Sannipoli, a renowned author and an expert on historic and modern ceramics in the area, became very enthusiastic about the idea. For him, it was to bring together the past and the present. Twelve centuries ago techniques of tin glaze and metallic iridescences arrived in Gubbio straight from the Islamic world.

Giampietro and I went to the Omani Embassy in Rome and were given some good advice from

Farahaat Al Riyami. The Late Sarah White also gave us ideas and advice from Bait Al Zubair in Muscat.

Thus armed, the plan was to have an exhibition in the centre of Gubbio. In part it was to be a working exhibition. The idea was to invite seven artists from Muscat, five of whom would be willing to try their hand at ceramics, and two photographers who could reveal the Sultanate of Oman that we love. Our problem was sponsorship but, thanks to Shawki Sultan, Lubna Zawawi entered the picture. Lubna and her husband, Karl Whelan (Wolf Group) were our very generous and main sponsors throughout this venture which was to take us also to both Rome and Muscat. The Commune of Gubbio was also incredibly helpful, as were our daughter Anna and Giampietro's late son, Francesco.

The five Omani artists had a quick induction course and created beautiful designs, among other things Omani-style coffee pots and coffee cups. These were exhibited along with their



These two ceramic sculptures 'The Tortoise' and 'The Story' have been donated by Sally Ricketts to The Society.



paintings. Alongside there were the most amazing ceramics created by Umbrian ceramists. In the following days the Omani and Italian artists worked together in a tent outside the exhibition. Saleh Al Shukairi was even to be seen teaching children Arabic!

The actual opening of the exhibition was a joy. It was held in the Palazzo dei Consoli with the Omani artists in their National dress. Lubna Zawawi opened the event and H.E. Said Nasir Al Harthy was guest of Honour. Shinuna provided Omani sweets and Omani coffee to the great interest of the Italian 'foodies'. And the Ambassador brought his cook to provide an Omani dinner for all those involved!

It would take too long to write about the subsequent events. Suffice to say that a Seminar was held in Rome in conjunction with the transferred Exhibition; and a few months later a follow up Exhibition and Seminar took place in Muscat. Shinuna was unable to give further help because her dear husband Najad Al Riyami had died during

the Muscat preparations. Marijke and Fudli Talyer Khan courageously took over – what would we have done without them! At Bait Baranda, the Umbrian ceramics looked even better than before. I wish that we had taken a video of the Seminar at Bait Al Zubair. Shinuna had previously found Omani Speakers (Naima Al Sibani, Ali Hamood Al Mahrouqi and Dr Bader Al Mamari) who were captivating, and the Italian speakers likewise.

The continuation of 'Connecting Cultures' remains to be seen. The Italians would dearly like to start a school for ceramics in Muscat, and the Omani artists would like to play a part in this. The Omanis are coming to stay with us again this year, and will be

working again with Giampietro. Funding the sort of school that they would envisage may always be an insurmountable problem. However, already lasting interests and friendships have been made.

The artists involved in this venture were as follows: Ahmed Al Busaidi, Ibrahim Al Busaidi, Juma Al Harthy, Saud Al Hunaini, Abdul Majeed Karooh, Mohammed Al Ma'mari, Saleh Al Shukairi, Lucia Angeloni, Maurizio Biancarelli, Nicola Boccini, Patrizio Chiucchiu, Marino Moretti, Graziano Pericoli and Giampietro Rampini.

If anyone would like to meet up with any of the artists, or would like to go on a course in ceramics I think that I could help! (rickettssally@googlemail.com) ■

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NEW GENERATION GROUP



Oliver Blake.

With the launch of the inaugural Anglo-Omani Journal, I wanted to take this opportunity to explore some of our New Generation Group's (NGG) recent successes

With the launch of the inaugural Anglo-Omani Journal, I wanted to take this opportunity to explore some of our New Generation Group's (NGG) recent successes. As most of our readers will know, NGG was created in 2011 with the clear mission of continuing Britain and Oman's historic friendship into the younger generations of both our countries. With the world's data train of hyper connection continually linking cities, cultures, countries and people, NGG protects an old and very special friendship in modern times.

So how does NGG reach out and bridge a new generation of young men and women living, studying and working in our two countries? In

London, we host six events per year at the Anglo-Omani Society building on Sackville Street. These events aim to pick speakers, themes and exhibitions that will encourage young British and Omani men and women to meet, explore ideas and begin new friendships. In addition to these London gatherings, NGG keeps in touch with the Oman Student Consultative Council and the many Omani Students Societies around the UK. This communication

inspires ideas and plans from Omani football matches to job fairs. Finally, the NGG has a cultural outreach programme that engages with external partners such as the Oman Embassy in London, the Royal Geographical Society and the British Exploring Society in order to host interesting and informative events.

In Muscat, the newly formed NGG board, *al Jil al Jadid*, consists of 12 dynamic and hugely impressive Omani men and women from across the public and private sectors. Meeting once a month to review ongoing projects, the board is then addressed by a Minister or CEO on a topic concerning Oman's national development as part of the *Strategy Talk Series*. This allows a two way flow of information, both educating the board and providing critical feedback from the front line managers to the country's decision makers. *al Jil al Jadid* recently inaugurated the *NGG Networking Series* bringing impressively energetic and avant-garde individuals together from across a wide

spectrum of Omani Society. These sessions encourage knowledge exchange, idea sharing and above all, new Anglo-Omani bridges.

Ambitious to widen our father's footsteps of friendship, the New Generation Group is also paralleling senior Anglo-Omani diplomatic, political and commercial relationships. That Oman and the UK cooperate on all manner of affairs with few bureaucratic blocks is testament to old friendships and a deep sense of mutual loyalty. *The New British Omani Delegation* (NBOD) was launched in 2013 to connect public and private sector high flyers from the UK and Oman. The recent delegation to Oxford looking at East

African commercial development was a great success and is explored later in this section.

Oman leads the world in protecting its past as it embraces the future and NGG draws our inspiration from His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' wise leadership. First and foremost, the Anglo-Omani Society exists to protect our friendship and within this context, NGG focuses on the younger generation, the guardians of the future. Having launched several successful

initiatives in the last year, we will now strengthen the sails on all projects ensuring our NGG dhow sits solidly in the water.

In the coming pages you will read articles from our members in Muscat addressing modern topics for modern times, working mothers in Oman, in country value and cultural relevance in the 21st century amongst others. You'll explore the incredible growth and development of our online presence through the website, Twitter and Facebook and see some of the most popular pictures posted from the last 12 months. Above all, I hope you sense the exciting momentum that is driving NGG towards ever greater friendship amongst our younger generations.

Oliver Blake
Chairman, NGG

In the coming pages you will read articles from our members in Muscat addressing modern topics for modern times, working mothers in Oman, in country value and cultural relevance

CULTURAL INTERACTION AND COMMERCE

In addition to his work with the Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science (SQHCCS), Abdullah al Ajmi is also on the Oman NGG board and an integral part of the New British Omani Delegation (NBOD).



There is little doubt that trade and commerce are closely aligned with cultural interaction. The more two nations communicate and grow to understand each other's unique norms and ways of life, the easier it is to conduct business together.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom have shared a close friendship for over three hundred and seventy years. The warm relationship between both our nations started when Imam Nasser Bin Murshed

requested the East India Company to send an envoy to Sohar in order to negotiate a trading relationship with the UK. The Company subsequently sent Mr. Philip Wild to Sohar who signed an agreement that has since led to many hundreds of years of cooperation. This trade has always been built on the firm foundations of Anglo-Omani cultural understanding and friendship. We know and respect each other's cultures, languages, histories and nuances and in that shared knowledge, we flourish.

In our modern world of trade and commerce we are faced with a continual need for progression, development and the creation of more jobs for growing populations. In the midst of this rush, we must not forget about the relevance of cultural interaction. We must continue to explore our values, customs and traditions and celebrate those that are similar and those that differ. Through mutual respect, understanding and learning we will continue to build strong bridges and firm foundations upon which trade can flourish.

One such example of cultural cooperation that has led to a greater commercial dialogue is that of the New Generation Group (NGG). An Anglo-Omani grouping of young, dynamic and like-minded individuals from across the public and private sectors, NGG is first and foremost focused on bringing Omani and British people together to continue friendships begun by our great great grandfathers. In addition to international delegations, NGG has recently inaugurated an excellent networking event in Muscat that was held in June 2014 at the Omani Photographic Society. On the back of cultural exchanges and social gatherings, this event brought Omani and British businessmen and women together and many new interesting conversations and relationships were initiated. The event fused business and culture as people explored different backgrounds, ideas and aspirations which in turn led to fruitful business exchanges.

In conclusion, the cultural interaction between our two countries encourages friendship, knowledge exchange and diversity and within that comfort zone, our young generations are able to freely discuss business ideas, entrepreneurship and ambition. ■

IN COUNTRY VALUE (ICV)

In-Country Value (ICV) programme, which is known as local content too, is being pursued under different titles in many countries around the world

Oman's In-Country Value (ICV) programme, spearheaded by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), seeks to maximise the total spend retained in the country, which will benefit business development, contribute to human capability development and stimulate productivity in Oman's economy. In short, it promotes products made, and services provided by skilled Omanis in Oman for the oil and gas sector. The main thrust of the ICV programme is to maximise the

employment of Omanis and placements on vocational/professional training, attractive to Omani graduates and technical school leavers.

Although there is no ICV law or regulations in Oman – the ICV programme is embraced on a voluntary basis, but this setup has produced pan-industry solutions that meet both the Government and the Operators' objectives. According to a study conducted for an ICV blueprint strategy for the oil and gas industry, as much as \$64

billion worth of ICV opportunities exist down the entire value chain of the up-, mid- and downstream oil and gas sector between 2013 and 2020 in Oman.

ICV will also count in contracts' awards, based on the ICV brought to the table – not on equity or shareholding. On the other hand, however, ICV is not at any cost – it has to make good business sense.

ICV is a long term journey – it is not a sprint, it's a marathon, and perhaps without a finish line! However, the strategic investment of today's oil and gas revenues has helped, and will continue to help provide a platform to support a sustainable industry for the future.

ICV success is always cited as having a competent, world-class local workforce; globally competitive local oil and gas products and services to meet the local and export demand and innovative and sustainable local solutions across the whole supply chain. ■



Mohammed Al-Ghareebi

In addition to being the In Country Value Manager

for PDO, Mohammed is also on the Oman NGG board and an integral part of the New British Omani Delegation (NBOD).

OMAN'S TOURISM TREASURE

In addition to her work as a BD specialist with OMRAN, Halima al Kindi is also on the Oman NGG board and an integral part of the New British Omani Delegation (NBOD).

Tourism in Oman has come a long way over the past ten years; owing to a distinctive yet unmistakable shift in the focus of the Omani government. Right from the setting up of the Ministry of Tourism in 2004, the advent of the tourism complexes and most recently the closure of the Sultanate's largest commercial port to develop a tourist hub, Oman has made significant progress in a relatively short time frame.

A closer look at the tourism sector's report card reveals that it is by no means mediocre – it contributes 3% to GDP; attracts more than 2 million visitors annually; and generates 3% of total employment. What's even more promising is that WTTC forecasts that its contribution will continue to grow at 5.5% per annum for the next ten years – at which point it will account for more than 8% of the economy. Employment is expected to double over the same time period.

This however, is just the tip of the iceberg. We are only beginning to realize the full potential of what Oman has to offer. The Sultanate has huge un-tapped treasures that can be harnessed to shape the future of tourism. Diverse landscapes, natural attractions, a pristine coastline and a rich heritage and culture set Oman apart from the rest of the region, as well as providing a strong basis for tourism expansion.

Several plans are currently underway that will encourage even greater tourist numbers to Oman, including the Oman Conventions & Exhibition Centre project which is set to receive forty nine thousand visitors annually by

2020. Plans are also underway to enhance many of the existing heritage sites for cultural tourism purposes.

It must be emphasized that a key component of Oman's tourism success story lies in the development of its human resources by sustained capacity building and SME development. Greater initiatives need to be taken to ensure the country has an adequate pool of trained personnel in the industry.

That being said, it is important to ensure that the tourism sector develops in a sustainable manner and that our rich heritage and natural resources last for decades to come. In this regard, the government has been proceeding cautiously, taking into consideration the well-known negative cultural and environmental side effects tourism can have if development plans are rushed.

The views expressed in the article are personal to the author and do not reflect OMRAN policy. ■





AHMAD'S ASTON

ARTICLE BY AHMAD AL HARTHY

WITH EYES ON LE MANS

Ahmad al Harthy was the first Omani to speak at a London NGG event and has been one of our wonderful international ambassadors from the outset

It's been an incredible year so far for the Oman Racing Team in both the Avon Tyres British GT Championship and Blancpain Endurance Series, with the opportunity to once again proudly fly the flag for my home nation on an international stage, writes Ahmad Al Harthy.

Last season was a major milestone in my career. After winning the Pro-Am 1 title in the Porsche Carrera Cup GB Championship in 2012, the culmination of three wonderful years in the category, I knew I wanted a fresh challenge and needed to pursue some new opportunities.

My goal has always been to become the first Omani competing in the Le Mans 24 Hours so, with that in mind, the natural choice was to

make the full-time transition into endurance racing. Thanks to the incredible support of my sponsors – led by Oman Air – we were able to create an exciting dovetailed programme in British GT and Blancpain.

Happily, 2013 was a strong year. We won races in the UK and also enjoyed class success in Blancpain so, with the first step into long distance endurance competition having gone so well, this season had to be a progression.

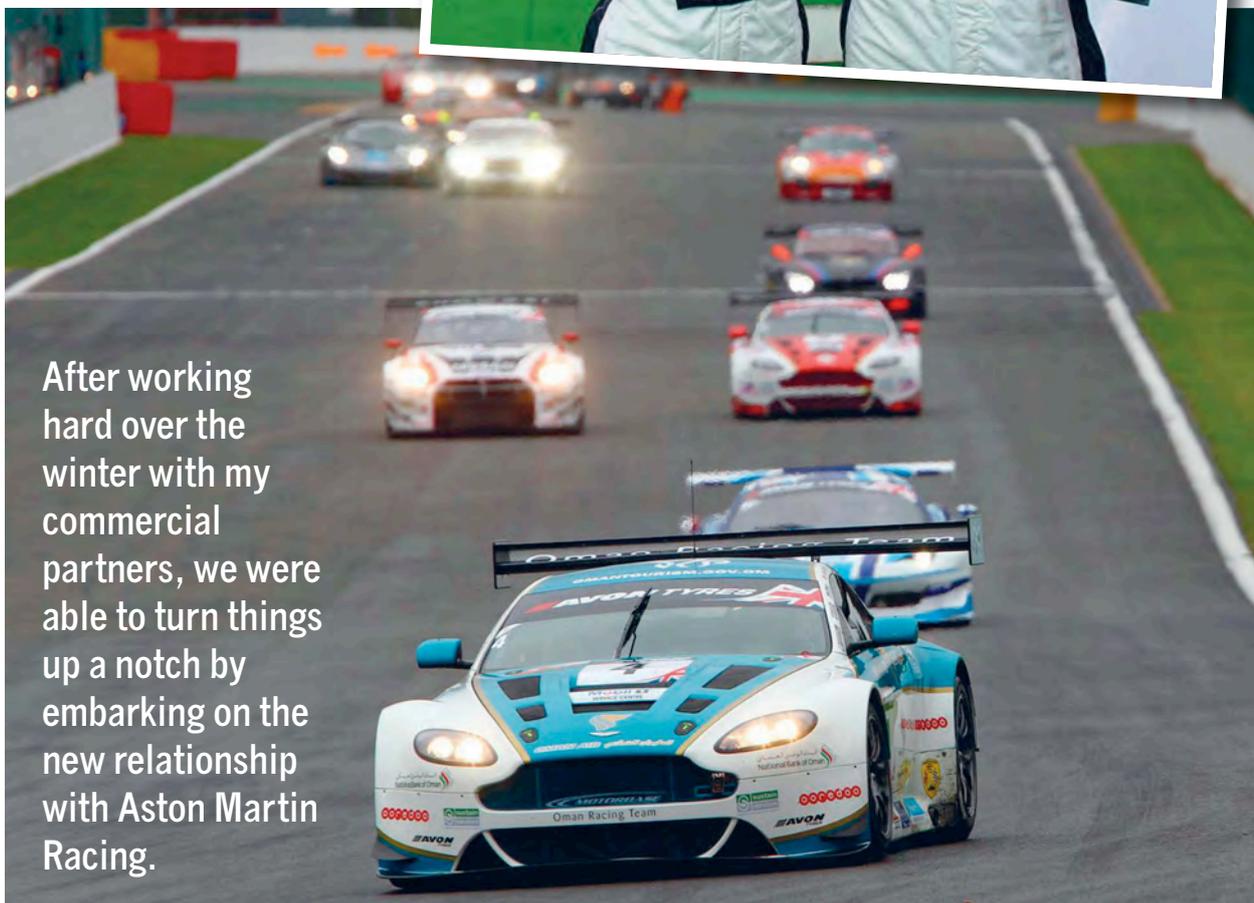
After working hard over the winter with my commercial partners, we were able to turn things up a notch by embarking on the new relationship with Aston Martin Racing. From day one with AMR, the experience has been nothing short of exceptional, everyone is so professional and that's an ethic the Oman Racing Team is built on. Our V12 Vantage GT3 is pretty amazing to drive too!

With two race wins in British GT this year, we're firmly in the hunt for the championship title with a couple of rounds still to run at Brands Hatch and Donington Park. For the time being, though, our focus is on the next round of Blancpain – this month's Total 24 Hours of Spa.

Other than Le Mans, the Spa race is the biggest and most prestigious endurance competition in the world and attracts the very best GT3 drivers and teams from across the globe. Other than the actual experience of taking part in a twice-round-the-clock race, nothing can prepare you for its demands and challenges. We've adapted

well to the Aston Martin, though, so hopes are high. ■

To learn more about Ahmad Al Harthy and the Oman Racing Team, visit www.ahmadalharthy.com or follow Ahmad on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AlHarthyRacing and Twitter @AlHarthyRacing



After working hard over the winter with my commercial partners, we were able to turn things up a notch by embarking on the new relationship with Aston Martin Racing.

NGG TROWERS & HAMLINS INTERNSHIP

As a direct result of the 2013 inaugural New British Omani Delegation to London, NGG member Youssef Boulos, spoke with his law firm and initiated a series of annual internships for aspiring Omanis. The first intern, Badar Al-Raisi, reflects on his experience.



ARTICLE BY BADAR AL-RAISI

I recently spent three weeks at Trowers & Hamlin's London office, where I had the opportunity to gain a great level of exposure to a wide range of practice areas within the firm.

During my work placement I sat in the corporate, banking and finance, commercial property and property litigation departments. I enjoyed my time in all of the seats where I was given responsibility to undertake real work in a supportive environment. What immediately struck me was that no two departments were the same, from the pace and nature of the work to the type of client for whom the work was being undertaken. I spent my first week in the corporate department where I sat with a partner. I undertook a variety of tasks including proof reading contracts and cross checking agreements against regulatory guidelines. It instantly hit me that everyone from the partners through to the trainees made a big effort to introduce themselves and despite obviously being busy took time to ask me about myself. In addition to departmental work, I also had the opportunity to attend a number of presentations and interactive workshops relating to Trowers & Hamlin's core practice areas.

The firm's supportive culture allowed me to take on challenging matters from early on. You can expect top quality work, in a commercial yet supportive and fun environment. You will be encouraged to reach your full potential and be part of a team, where people come to work because they enjoy what they do. Everyone I encountered was more than happy to give me the background to the particular piece of work allowing me to fully understand where it fitted in the overall picture.

The opportunity to have direct exposure to a firm, its work and its people, from trainee to partner, is invaluable. Moreover, undertaking a work placement at a law firm isn't just about experiencing the glamorous, exciting side to life as a lawyer, it's about giving you a realistic understanding of the profession.

The experience was as practical, enjoyable and true to the life of a trainee solicitor as possible and I look forward to building on this experience on my quest to securing a training contract. ■

AN OMANI STUDENT IN LONDON: A PERSPECTIVE ON STUDYING ABROAD

ARTICLE BY LAMYA HARUB

For most international students, living abroad away from family and friends is initially a lonely experience.

When I first arrived in London, I missed the comforts of Omani hospitality, family guidance and familiarity. Fortunately, here I am a year later making friends with people from all over the world and immersing myself in my newfound independence. The comforts of Oman have been replaced with London's dynamic and welcoming nature.

For many students, studying abroad is a stepping-stone. They come to London to become fluent in English, earn an educational degree, obtain a fresh perspective on certain economic or political issues and so the list goes on. I, however, believe that studying abroad goes beyond this. As a PhD student, I find living abroad is *a lesson in life*, a lesson about oneself and an opportunity to grow. It is an occasion to meet the deep longing present within oneself, to be intensely inspired and in turn, go back home and express one's inspirations through whatever field one chooses to focus on. In my opinion, studying in the UK is a bridge connecting London to Oman and an adventure of immersion

in a new culture that naturally evokes a voyage of discovery within me.

On this basis, I have managed as an aspiring academic, diplomat, Arab, Omani, and Muslim woman, to plant myself amongst the British people and indulge in a different culture. Thus far, I have learned many life lessons by trying new foods, exploring and appreciating the north and south of the UK, befriending the locals (and emulating them in some ways), allowing my fashion tastes to be swayed and in return, allowing them to accept my innate individualism.

At the end of this educational chapter, I will record the many lessons I have learnt on this incredible journey. This painted portrait of my life in the UK is the background and I look forward to adding new aspects of this incredible experience as further stories and experiences unfold. Studying abroad is simply about inspiring yourself and inspiring others along the way. By sharing my perspective, I hope it will benefit Omani students studying in the UK, and the world at large. ■



Lamya Harub, PhD Political Economy (expected 2017)
Department of Political Economy
Research Associate, European
Centre for Energy & Resource
Security (EUCERS)
King's College London –
July 7, 2014

One of our early ambassadors, Lamya has been a huge supporter of NGG from the outset and was a founding member of the New British Omani Delegation (NBOD).

An Omani working mother's perspective on the maternity laws of Oman

Since the renaissance, the number of Omani working women has increased across all sectors. The Omani Government has made substantial efforts to encourage Omani women to pursue higher education and become key players in Oman's work force. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos said:

"We have given our full attention, since the beginning of this era, to the participation of Omani women in the march of the blessed renaissance, so we have provided them with education, training and employment opportunities and supported their role and status in society. We have also stressed the need for their contribution in various development spheres. We have facilitated this through regulations and laws that guarantee their rights and explain their duties in order to be able to develop their inner abilities, expertise and skills to build their country and raise its status."

In the past 10 years alone, the number of Omani women working in the private and public sector has tripled. Despite not having statistics available in relation to the number of Omani working mothers, we can assume that with the increase of working women in the past 10 years, there has also been an increase in the number of working mothers especially taking into account Oman's age demographic. Like many working mothers around the world, Omani working mothers struggle to balance their drive to pursue a career and attend to a growing family.

The Labour Law of Oman was amended in 2011 to provide paid maternity leave of 50 days, which can normally be taken with annual leave. In addition, unpaid leave can be taken at an employer's discretion. However, with the high cost of living, many working mothers cannot afford to take unpaid leave and if they do not have available annual leave, they are back at work when their new born is only 7 weeks old! As a result, many working mothers either choose not to go back to work or look for alternative positions which provide shorter working hours.

In order to encourage working mothers to continue working,

specifically in the private sector and climb the corporate ladder, the Oman Labour Law needs to change to provide working mothers with greater benefits and flexible working options. For instance, in the UK, working mothers can take maternity leave up to 52 weeks (which is partially paid by the Government and the employers if provided for in the employment contracts) and have flexible working options available to them after their maternity leave such as:

- working part time, or flexible hours or compressed working hours (working longer hours on some days in order to take more days off a week);
- working from home; or
- job sharing, where two persons share one job

Oman recognised part time working when it issued its part time working regulation in September 2013, yet this regulation does not apply to most professional sectors in Oman such as legal, accounting, finance and engineering. Therefore part time employment is not an option for many professional working mothers unless specifically agreed by their employers. Perhaps Oman law does not provide flexible working options because it is relatively affordable to hire help and many working mothers have great familial support. However, as a working mother, I believe there is no substitute for a mother raising her own children and despite the availability of help, there are many professional working mothers who choose to resign or take up jobs that do not necessarily further their career, but at least provide shorter working hours and a decent income.

Unless the labour law of Oman is revised to incorporate flexible working options, the efforts made by the Omani Government to encourage female participation in the work force will be compromised. Introducing flexible working options to working mothers will undoubtedly make Omani women key players in contributing to Oman's growth and prosperity. ■

In addition to being a corporate lawyer with Trowers & Hamlin's Muscat practice, Leyan is also on the Oman NGG board and an integral part of the New British Omani Delegation (NBOD).

AN OMANI WORKING MOTHER'S PERSPECTIVE

ARTICLE BY LEYAN AL MAWALI



THE NEW BRITISH OMANI DELEGATION

PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD, 2014



After the successful New British Omani Delegation (NBOD) visits to Muscat and London in 2013, this year the New Generation Group (NGG) were delighted to host the third NBOD at Pembroke College, Oxford University for a two-day seminar at the end of August.

Once again, the NGG brought together the leading minds and future decision-makers of both the UK and Oman's public and private sectors. The theme this year was East African Commercial Development and through a number of leading British scholars, members of the international business community and political analysts, the NBOD were able to explore a wide range of opportunities for more Omani cooperation on the African continent. Day one started with Dr. Nic Cheeseman's regional overview of economics, politics and security, followed by David Ledesma's focus on gas exploration and Tutu Agyare's spotlight on financial investment. Delegates were also

privileged to have a round table discussion with Sir Alan Duncan in his first official engagement as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Oman. Day two provided a fascinating insight into business practices in the region with Sudan as a case study from Tom Stephenson, followed by Alastair Newton's much enjoyed talk on regional and wider world political risk. Hannah Waddilove provided an excellent end to the symposium with an analysis of East Africa's official integration agenda, its progress and prospects for the future.

As important as the formal talks were, many moments allowed time to rekindle old

friendships and begin new ones. The Anglo-Omani New Generation Group hosted an extremely enjoyable dinner in Pembroke's Great Hall on the Thursday and were honoured to have in attendance HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman, Sir Alan Duncan, Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe and many other senior friends of Oman. Sir David Scholey kindly said a few words on the significance of maintaining the very special friendship into the younger generation of both our countries. The programme closed with a cultural visit to Blenheim Palace and we all very much look forward to the British Delegates visiting Muscat in early 2015." ■

To view video scan QR Code above or visit: www.youtube.com/watch?v=am5RkBpT4zs





CONNECTING CULTURES THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DESERT

ARTICLE BY TILLY QUIGLEY

Connecting Cultures is a unique educational initiative organised by Outward Bound Oman that sends a delegation of young people from Europe and the Arab world on an expedition into the desert in the Sultanate of Oman.

The programme is formally endorsed by UNESCO, and is supported by The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre, and the MBI Al Jaber Foundation. There are currently three expeditions per year and I had the huge privilege of being selected to represent the UK on the most recent expedition.

To say it was an incredible experience does not pay it homage. There were 15 girls (all from different countries) who met in Muscat feeling apprehensive but excited, and ready to begin our journey into the sands. We spent five days trekking across the beautiful expanse of the desert, and camping at night under the stars – no phones, no showers, no comfort zone to retreat to, or facade to hide behind. Each day as the sun reached its highest point, we stopped to put up a tent and escape the heat of the day, and it was under this shelter that the real discussions and debates began. We spoke about our cultures and how we think others view them; we identified shared values; we

broke down stereotypes – recognising the roots and reasons for them; and we discussed what we can do to remove these cultural misunderstandings, which inevitably lead to hate, conflicts and wars.

The location of the expedition was an essential ingredient of the trip; I don't think anyone was unaffected by the beauty and vastness of the sands and stars, as Wilfred Thesiger wrote 'In the desert I found a freedom unattainable in civilization; a life unhampered by possessions...' and on top of this I think everyone was touched by the renowned Omani hospitality which was constantly shown, whether at the hands of our group instructor, the Bedouin who shared their meal with us, the Omani girl on the expedition, or those we met along the way.

I think the expedition gave us all a much needed moment's perspective on life. It became more transparent day by day how many similarities there are between all of us, regardless of our cultures, religions or what we have experienced in life. It is clear that the key to relinquishing cultural misunderstandings is the promotion of communication and education, and what the expedition really taught us was that we all have an ability to make an impact and change – no matter how small. ■

EVENTS IN LONDON



Inaugurating this year's NGG Programme of Events, members and guests were treated to a fantastic lecture by Dr Chadden Hunter, producer of the BBC TV Series 'Wild Arabia', on 12th February

This sequence of three one-hour programmes was first screened on BBC Two in spring 2013, preceded by over 18 months of very hard behind-the-scenes fieldwork by Chadden and his team. The next generation of Anglo-Omani friends were given a phenomenal insight into the beauty and diversity of Oman in a lecture that was incredibly well received, and certainly the most popular to date for the New Generation Group.

In March, the NGG partnered with the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) to organise a private viewing of the exhibition 'Oman's Natural Heritage (Land, Nature and Culture)' by the National Centre for Environmental Conservation of Oman. The NGG were honoured to be accompanied by Mr Alexander Maitland, curator of the exhibition. The group also had privileged access to the RGS private Collections, including the atlas by Ptolemy that was greatly appreciated and photographed. It was such an engaging and delightful evening and the NGG thoroughly enjoyed





It was another fantastic session where members enjoyed the natural beauty of The Sultanate

the insight into Oman's heritage and the historic links between both of our two countries.

Our last event before the summer was brought about by the team of young explorers from the British Exploring Society expedition to Oman 2014. The group spent two months in Oman working in collaboration with the Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE). After their return, they exhibited a series of fabulous photographs and audio visual material (and a much desirable and healthy suntan too!) that took the attendees from the heart of London to Oman's sand dunes, wadis, and mountains. It was another fantastic session where members enjoyed the natural beauty of The Sultanate and got to know more about the work being done by these organisations to preserve the wildlife of this fast-developing and paradisiac country. ■

The next New Generation Group event in London will be on 26th November. Please visit our website [www.aos-ngg.com] for more details.

The New Generation Group

at a glance

400 members



Strategy series
monthly talks in Muscat with a Minister or CEO

Social evenings
At our Anglo-Omani home in London, 34 Sackville Street

Cultural events
informal talks & exhibitions

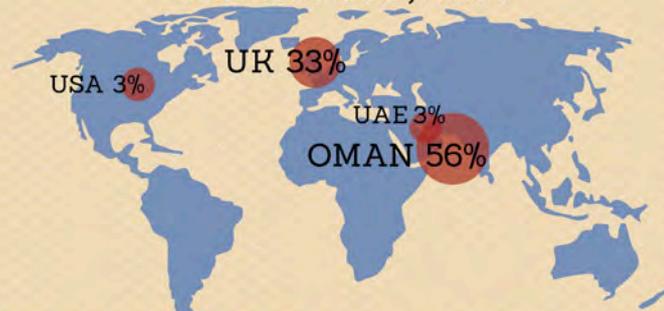
Outreach

Networking sessions
every three months, Muscat

New British Omani Delegation
High flyers from the public & private sectors

On Social Media

Where are our Twitter followers?



@BritOmani



/TheAngloOmaniSociety



www.aos-ngg.com

THE OMANI STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL ACTIVITY PLAN (2014-2015)

The Omani Student Consultative Council is a representative committee of all Omani Student Societies in the UK.



The Council plays an important role in organising student activities and enhancing professionalism between them through Omani students' societies across the UK. An extension of the role of student societies includes outreaching to Omani students in the UK and spreading the culture of Oman in the UK. This has been possible through the great support provided by the Oman Cultural Attaché in London. As part of their duties; the Omani Student Consultative Council (OSCC) has developed an activity plan for the new

academic year (2014-2015) as follows:

A. Omani National Day in Manchester:

Omani students around the United Kingdom have been celebrating the Omani National Day every year in conjunction with the celebrations in our beloved country.

The celebration is considered one of the many ways Omani students passionately express loyalty to our beloved country while away and to its leader and nurture: His Majesty The Sultan Qaboos bin Said.



Six years since the last Omani National Day celebration was hosted in Manchester, the Omani Student Society in Manchester is delighted to organise this year's celebration in cooperation with the OSCC.

The main theme this year will be focused on 'Oman the shine of civilisations' with different activities and performances targeting both Omanis and the local community. As usual, we aim at making this a spectacular and memorable event for all. The event is scheduled to take place during the weekend following the 18th of November 2014. Hence, stay tuned and follow us in our various social media accounts (visit www.m-omanisociety.com) for all updates.

B. The Omani Open Days 2015:

The Omani Student Society in Loughborough in association with OSCC will organise the Omani Open Days for 2015. The open days have been scheduled to take place from 10:00-20:00 between Friday and Saturday 30-31 January 2015. Between 600-800 guests are expected to come and participate during the open days. This year, five events will be incorporated in the event:

- **Graduation Ceremony**

The graduation ceremony targets Omani students in the UK who will graduate in 2015. Around 300 students are expected to participate in this event.

- **Omani Traditional Games**

The Omani traditional games will be organised in two days. The first day involves participants from student societies at Loughborough Student University. The second day will feature the participation of Omani students in the UK as well as all visitors to the event.

- **Omani Exhibition**

The Omani exhibition will feature sections that display Omani heritage, culture, lifestyle, and the Omani Renaissance.

- **Recruitment Fair**

The recruitment fair is expected to involve more Omani companies this year. Different companies will

promote their profiles and conduct interviews with Omani graduates from UK universities.

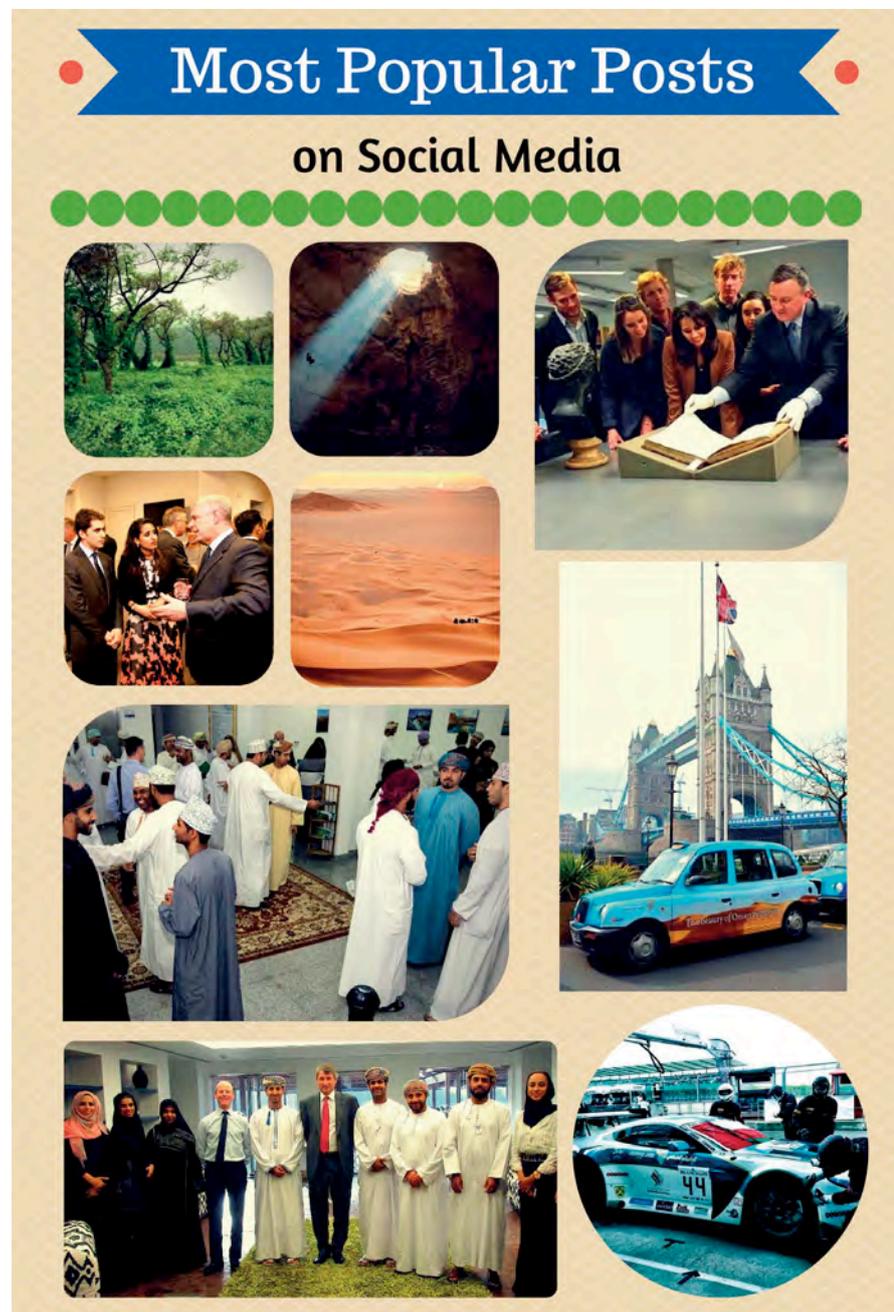
- **Poster Presentation**

Omani postgraduate students will present their research topics in poster sessions for two hours during the second day of the event. A new journal (The Omani Student Consultative Council Journal Abstracts) will be released as well. The journal aims to present the projects of Omani postgraduate students in the UK to the public. (Follow us on Twitter: [OSSL@ossliboro](https://twitter.com/OSSL@ossliboro)) for all updates.

C. Sport activities:

For the first time, all student societies in the UK will participate in a football league that will take place in different cities in the UK. This event will be organised by the Omani Student Society in Sheffield.

The league will start at the beginning of October. There will be two stages to this league. The first stage will be before the national day when all teams will be distributed between specified groups and play against each other. The second stage will be on the national day event in Manchester when the final competition will take place. ■



OMAN MISCELLANY

Society member Andy Dunsire arrived in Salalah in 1970 as one of the Airworks team. He was an ex-RAF air radio engineer, but he subsequently changed to Photographic Reconnaissance, which gave him the chance to build up an extensive collection of photographs recording his life in South Oman

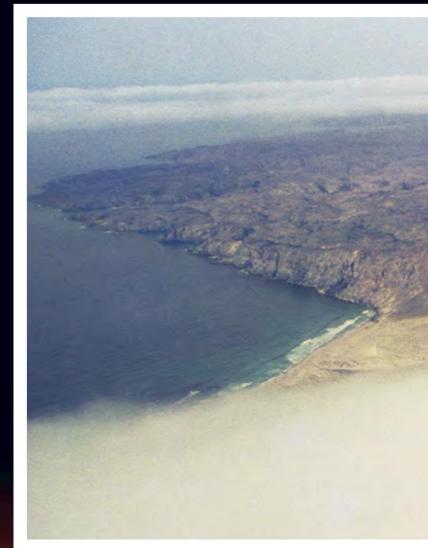
In 1973, he joined a small expedition to explore Tawi Atair, the 600 feet deep sinkhole east of Salalah, and this was his introduction to caving. Then in 1977, he joined the Dhofar Flora and Fauna Survey, a six weeks expedition, taking three and a half thousand photographs for them.

In the early 1980s, during a further tour at Thumrait, he began caving again and brought out specimens of the blind cave fish, *Garra barreimiae*, from the Jebel Akhdar. These were a new sub-species, and in the Natural History Museum in London, they re-grew the optical lobes in the brain over a period of four and a half months. This rapid

regrowth of about 20 % of the brain in adult fish was previously unknown in science. He also brought out micro-ophthalmic fish from Tawi Atair, which now bear his name.

He helped his eccentric friend Neil Barnes to collect snakes and other creatures which were taken to the UK for venom research, and in 1991, he became much involved with the Trans-Arabia Archaeological Expedition searching for the Lost City of Ubar.

Andy is now based in UK working on developing surveillance equipment for numerous countries, including Oman. The following photographs are his personal selection from his collection of thousands. ■



ARTICLE BY ANDY DUNSIRE



Face of the Dung Beetle.



Flying Doctor's surgery held in tent.



On the Jebel Samhan Escarpment.



Jebel Qinqari between Mirbat and Sudh.



Tawi Atair – Boxing Day.



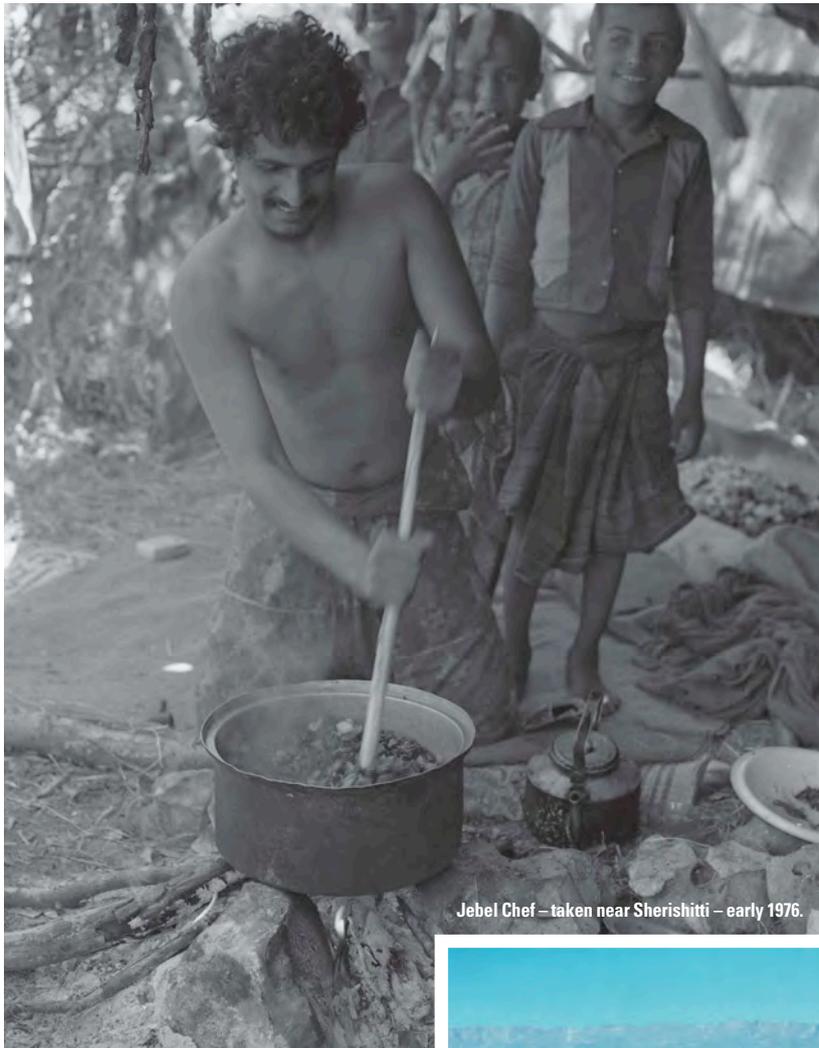
Masirah Sunset.



Crib with infant.



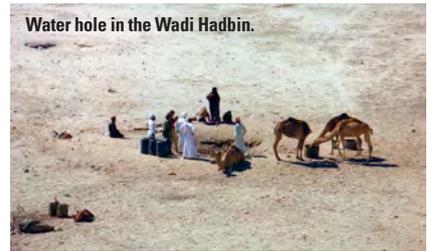
Wadi Hadbin youngster.



Jebel Chef – taken near Sherishitti – early 1976.



The Amphitheatre in the Hoti Cave.



Water hole in the Wadi Hadbin.



Our 'Flying Doctor'.



Sawqirah School.



Sheikh Mohammed – Naib Wali of Sudh – 1976.



Village of Sudh – East of Mirbat – 1976.

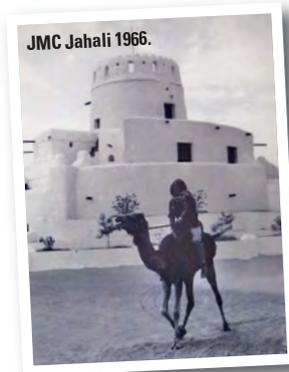
ARABIAN DAYS AND

THE TRUCIAL OMAN SCOUTS

This was the subject of my lecture to the Anglo Omani Society in May



Testing the water at al Ain.



ARTICLE BY
MICHAEL CURTIS

The late Col Antony Cawston and I wrote our memoirs of our time in the Trucial Oman Scouts in our book, *Arabian Days*, and included a brief mention of what we did in the Army before our time there and what we did subsequently in our civilian lives, mostly based in the Middle East (amongst other things, I was lucky enough to spend nearly eight years in the Sultanate of Oman as General Manager of Matrah Cold Stores!).

The Trucial States (now the United Arab Emirates) had an agreement with Great Britain and the East India Company and were so called because of the truce and treaties of friendship. The Trucial Oman Scouts were formed in the 1950s (originally the Trucial Oman Levies) to defend the area, foreign affairs and to keep the peace, under the auspices of the British Foreign Office. The officers were mainly British and the men were from the local area.

I arrived in Sharjah in March 1966, having spent three months learning Arabic in Aden. My first post, as Second in Command of 'A' Squadron, was at Mirfa, on the coast between Abu Dhabi and the Qatar border. From here we patrolled the area around the new oil fields to the Saudi and Qatar borders – it was a very hot, humid place to live, with air conditioning only for three hours at night, if we were lucky.

The Squadrons moved round every six months, the operation being called 'Roundabout', and I, luckily, only had a couple of months at Mirfa, before our Squadron moved to Sharjah, the headquarters of the TOS. Here, we had some patrolling duties and also

did 'public duties', which involved a bit of ceremonial and parades for visiting dignitaries. In Sharjah, we had air conditioning and there were starting to be quite a few expatriates there and in Dubai, which gave us the opportunity for more social and sporting activities.

During my time in Sharjah, my Squadron was involved in helping the Abu Dhabi royal family to replace Sheikh Shakbut with his brother, Sheikh Zayed, which was a very important day in the history of that area. Sheikh Zayed had the vision to use the new oil wealth well and start the development of what was to be the United Arab Emirates. In 1966/68 for example, when I was there, there were only five miles of tarmac road and we had to drive our vehicles on the beach or over the sand or through the wadis.

Our next posting was Fort Jahali in Al Ain, where we patrolled a large area to the Saudi and Omani borders and looked after the pipeline between Al Ain and Abu Dhabi, sometimes on camel patrol, sometimes with Landrovers and Bedford trucks. This was the best posting of all – no air conditioning, but we didn't need it in the old fort. We had a small plunge pool and could borrow horses from Sheikh Zayed's stables for our spare time.

For conferences in Sharjah, we would set off very early in the morning over the dunes, when the dew was still on them, or we were allowed to go through Wadi Mahada in Omani territory if we set out too late for the morning dew. There was a very good system that we had to report, by radio, when we set out from all outstations and when we arrived at our destination, to prevent dangerous situations.



Fort Jahali officers mess.

At all the postings we were responsible for checking public health and the well water and our next posting was to Masafi, where we had to stop many disputes between the local tribes over the use of a well and its water. By this stage I had become Squadron Commander and my Second in Command was a young Arab officer. We also had to patrol the coast, in the Force dhow, to protect against illegal immigrants who were coming to the area because they thought the 'streets of Dubai were paved with gold' and carried out donkey and helicopter patrols into the mountainous areas, which were impossible to reach by Landrover.

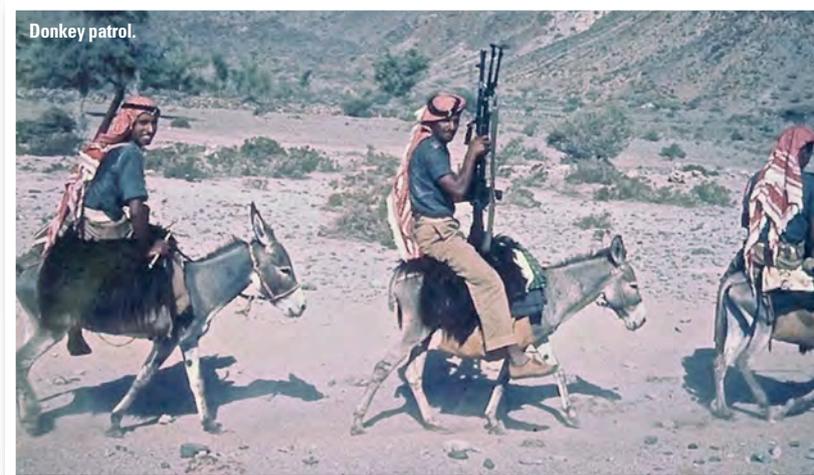
My final posting was to Manama, the training camp, where the Squadron had to show the young recruits how to be soldiers, and we did some patrolling. Sadly, at this stage, my two years in the TOS came to an end, and with a heavy heart I said goodbye to my Squadron and friends and set off back to Sharjah to be dined out, before leaving for

good. Here, in our new camp, we had a good evening and fired the two cannons outside the mess as a farewell gesture. This annoyed the Force Intelligence Officer, as the cannons were normally only fired at the beginning and end of the holy month of Ramadan, and so he had to send out messengers to tell the local area that we had not seen the moon, which would have started Ramadan.

I have kept in touch with quite a few of my old soldiers, especially my Sergeant Major, Atiq bin Murad, who now lives in Al Ain and we speak on the phone quite often and occasionally visit. ■

If you want to know more about the TOS and the UAE in the 1950s and 1960s then the book, Arabian Days by Antony Cawston and Michael Curtis, is available from Michael Curtis, Gastons, Kilmeston, nr. Alresford, Hampshire, SO24 0NL, at the price of £15 + £3.00 postage & packaging.

E-mail – michael@gastons.plus.com



Donkey patrol.

GLADSTONE PRIZE SHORTLIST

For information Abdel Razzaq Takriti was shortlisted for the Royal Historical Society 2013 Gladstone Prize. This is an award of £1000 for a history book published in English on any topic that is not primarily British history. It must be a first book. Abdel's book *'Monsoon Revolution: Republicans, Sultans, and Empires in Oman 1965-1976'* (Oxford University Press) was one of this year's six short listed works, announced in the Royal Historical Society May 2014 Newsletter. To be shortlisted is a major accolade but the award, made at University College London on 2nd July 2014, went to another Oxford University Press title and Sean Eddie for *'Freedom's Price: Serfdom, Subjection, and Reform in Prussia, 1648-1848'*.
Lester Hillman

Did you serve in the Royal Oman Police or the Oman Gendarmerie? Were you involved with them in any other capacity?

I've conducted archival research into the formation of policing structures in the Sultanate and am now looking for people with firsthand experience who would be willing to speak to me about their experiences.

If you'd be interested in taking part in this research project then feel free to write or e-mail at:

Dr James Worrall
School of Politics & International Studies,
University of Leeds,
Woodhouse Lane,
Leeds, West Yorkshire LS2 9JT

Email: j.e.worrall@leeds.ac.uk

OUTWARD BOUND OMAN INSTRUCTOR TRAINING PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY SIMON LAKE, INSTRUCTOR, PLAS Y BRENIN

Supported by a grant from the Anglo Omani Society in London, and with the support of the British Ambassador in Muscat, four Omani Outward Bound Oman instructors spent ten days at the National Mountain Training Centre at Plas Y Brenin in North Wales.

The aim, for Sultan Al Hasni, Sultan Al Jabri, Anisa Al Raisi and Mohammed Al Jabri, was to build on Oman based training and develop specific skills to increase their capacity to become more effective instructors when working with Omani young people. Key areas of focus were security on steep loose ground, micro navigation and rope work/rock skills.

The aim, as Outward Bound Oman expands and creates more jobs for young Omanis as instructors, is to send a small number back to Plas Y Brenin each year to build on the skills delivered in-country in

Oman. The grant from the Anglo Omani Society makes this possible.

“This was a great course to run with some highly motivated and able instructors from Outward Bound Oman. They all got actively involved in everything we did all week, despite tiredness at times. We covered a range of topics over the course of the 10 days and I feel they are leaving with a good understanding and some new skills have been learnt. It has been a pleasure to work with Jabri, Hasni, Mohammed and Anisa and they are great ambassadors for Outward Bound Oman.” ■



THE WEEKEND

ARTICLE BY ALLAN MALCOLM

Life as an expat has many sides but invariably the one thing that everyone has (had) in common was looking forward to the weekend.

Whether you got one day off or were fortunate to enjoy a two day weekend, you had the opportunity to seek out new adventures that are not available back in the United Kingdom. Whether you chose to spend your time exploring the hidden secrets of the many beautiful wadis dotted along the coastline, went ultra-adventurous and dared to challenge the Wahiba Sands, went diving in the crystal clear Arabian Sea or simply decided to soak up some rays on the beach the weekend was an opportunity to relax and enjoy.

There was, however, another side to the weekend, a side that saw the expats take the opportunity to follow their own favourite pastimes and, in the process, meet new people through a coming together of like minds, expat and Omani alike. It allowed the military to break out from their garrisons, the diplomats to mingle with the masses and the greater number of commercially orientated folks to meet the former on the common ground of shared passion for sport. What we took for granted in our homeland(s) was not always a priority in the

Sultanate in the 1970s and '80s but the expats took the initiative to set up clubs and societies that provided a means to participate in a favourite pastime and to lay the foundation of what would ultimately become one of the key stepping stones that would lead to government initiatives to encourage the participation of the Youth of Oman in sport.

Playing cricket on concrete wickets or rugby on sandy pitches, running marathons in the early morning heat or carting your astro turf around a sand golf course with 'browns', proved challenging but these were challenges that were overcome through the desire to participate and the joy of competition. Not everyone could afford the luxury of a boat, or the membership of the Yacht Club, but there was always a means of integrating with like-minded people to get something going for mutual enjoyment. For many years, there was a lack of Omani involvement in some of these pastimes but it soon became apparent that for clubs and societies to achieve longevity, Omani participation was vital. The rest they say is history.



Muscat RFC April 1984.



MRFC 1981.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said at the inaugural Muscat 7s held at Wattayah on the 1st and 2nd March, 1973 and the Club had the privilege of representing the country in the world famous Hong Kong 7s in 1981 and 1982 following success in the regional Dubai 7s (see picture left). In the '80s one of the main aims of the club was to introduce Omanis to the game and this was initially achieved through engaging teams from the Army, Navy and Air Force to participate in the annual Muscat 7s. Whilst avid soccer players, the Omanis loved the idea of running free with the ball in their

Oman now plays a part in all major world sporting events and whether it is seeing a 400 metres runner in an Olympic final or a goalkeeper making his debut in the Premier League, it is all down to a policy of development that saw its seeds sown in the '70s and '80s by expats. We have to believe that we left a legacy and that legacy is one that encompasses integration and competition, the desire to achieve and the aspiration to win.

In an effort to (hopefully) open up a section of the new Review to cover such pastimes, I would like to offer a brief overview on a few of them, with the aim of seeing how they have evolved and if they have survived. Here goes...

Visitors to the Sultanate today have the opportunity to play golf on exquisite 'green' courses of championship standing, whereas in the past a round of golf was a sweaty slog around an ankle deep sand pile with fairways delineated by whitewashed stones and 'browns' being a mixture of sand and oil mixed, spread and levelled to form a target area. Courses at PDO, Ghallah Wentworth, The ROP Automobile Club and RNO Wudam were the main courses in the north, with healthy membership and keen competition.

Athletics is an all-encompassing term for

what a lot of us simply term 'running' and it was a much loved pastime for many through various branches/clubs under the Hash House Harriers banner. Different clubs visited each other's regular runs and used the opportunity to make new friends and to engage in healthy post run social camaraderie. Today, as alluded to before, the Sultanate is a bona fide member of the Olympic movement and there are first class track and field facilities throughout the country that are open to all ages.

The SAF Aqua Club (as was) had a branch of the British Sub Aqua Club that ran courses for all and there were a few hotels that ran short term PADI courses. These allowed proficient instructors the opportunity to pass on their expertise in a structured training environment leading to formal BSAC and PADI qualifications and the ability to enjoy safe diving in beautiful waters off the Omani coast. Today, diving is an integrated part of the tourism ministry and there are several commercial entities offering world class diving.

The Muscat Rugby Club was formed in 1971 by Hamish Donald, Brian Fawcett and Tony Jenkins, all of whom had arrived in the country to work on various government projects. Perhaps the most auspicious occasion for the Club was the attendance of

hands and tackling people but were not too enamoured when tackled themselves. A key Omani player throughout the '80s and into the '90s was Mohammed Toki who worked with PDO.

Perhaps one of the key points about the Muscat team was the diversity of the players' backgrounds which included two Oxbridge individuals, two military officers, two PDO employees and three individuals from the wider commercial sector. The club is still in existence today.

Well, as Bamber Gascoine would say, that is a starter for ten and hopefully will engage a few minds to dredge up their own tales of the weekends spent in the Sultanate. ■

Note about the author: Allan Malcolm lived and worked in Oman from 1981 until 1998, initially in the Royal Army of Oman and later in the Royal Navy of Oman. In 1994 he became the business manager of His Highness Sayyid As'ad bin Tarik Al Said, now Personal Representative of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Allan has spent 30 years working and living in the Middle East region, latterly in Jordan where he was engaged in setting up new businesses on behalf of His Majesty King Abdullah II Design and Development Bureau (KADDB) and other regional business leaders. Allan lives in Surrey.

AN OMANI WEDDING

Bridal henna and veil.

Returning to – An Omani wedding seen through the eyes of four British girls

Three years ago we made up the British contingent of the first ever all female team to summit the third highest sand dune in the Rub al Khali. This had been a fantastic opportunity for us to meet and get to know four Omani girls and to learn about Omani culture. After returning from Oman, thoroughly enchanted by the country, we remained firm friends with the girls and were delighted when Fatma Al Zadjali announced her engagement to her friend, colleague and sweetheart Yasir Al Balushi. We were even more excited when Fatma invited us all to attend her wedding, and when we received a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society to make a second trip possible.

This was how we found ourselves at Heathrow on a plane to Oman in January this year with the best that Britain has to offer in our suitcases (milk chocolate, shortbread, and fudge) and not a notion of what to expect from an Omani wedding apart from the necessity for very bright evening gowns.

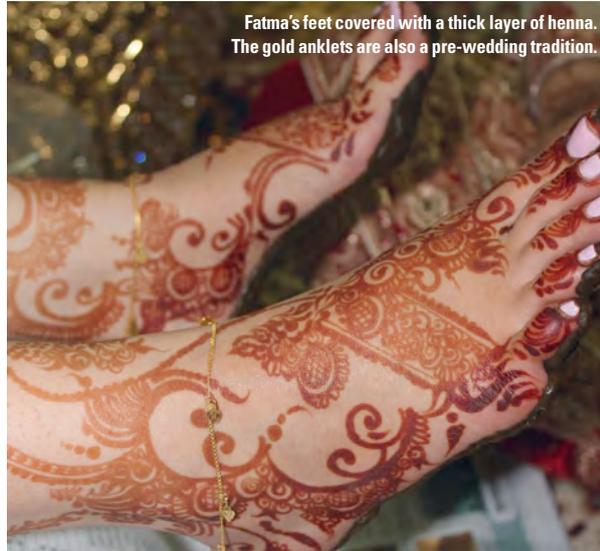
On arrival, we were greeted with what we have grown to expect of Omani hospitality, by the bride's brother's friend and taken to the family home before the bride's arrival. As soon as Fatma arrived, all five of us picked up where we left off, and so began a hectic week of wedding preparations and celebrations for a ceremony we knew nothing about but were very much involved in!

The engagement party had been held some weeks before. This is when the bride receives gifts of



Having our own henna applied.

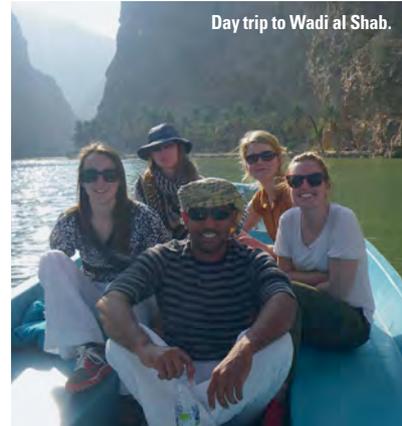




Fatma's feet covered with a thick layer of henna. The gold anklets are also a pre-wedding tradition.



White wedding dresses adorned with glitzy diamantes are the outfit of choice for the modern Omani bride.



Day trip to Wadi al Shab.

jewellery from the families. There are many exquisite traditional Omani designs which use a beautiful yellow gold and have very intricate patterns. As well as these, more modern jewellery items are now also being received.

The legal part of the wedding also happens sometime before the wedding party to which we had been invited, so the bride and groom were already technically married when we arrived. On this occasion, the husband visits an Imam and they then travel to the bride's house, where the Imam asks the bride if she accepts her husband to be while he waits at the door.

Although these events had all occurred before our visit, the most hectic and exciting wedding preparations were still to come. Fatma was combining the traditional Omani wedding with some modern influences. Traditionally, a bride stays in her house covered up for the three days preceding the wedding. However, Fatma decided not to stick to that tradition as she rushed around ensuring that everything was running perfectly, even inviting us to go with her to the wedding dress shop to collect her dress.

We were flattered but soon realised it was because she needed five people to lift it! A key part of the preparations for the wedding day is the rigorous beauty regime the bride undergoes in the days leading up to the wedding including: hair removal, skin exfoliation, massage with scented oils, hair highlighting and cutting, eyebrow shaping and nail manicures. One morning we were party to a traditional henna application where Fatma had her arms and legs completely covered in intricate henna designs which can take many hours to dry. It looked rather tiring to have to hold your arms that whole time but the finished product was amazing. We were also fortunate to have individual designs applied on our hands.

The evening before the wedding, the four of us were honoured guests at a henna party. This was a female only affair with lots of traditional elements. The bride wears a traditional green dress, and has the soles of her feet covered in a thick layer of henna. Her mother then covers her in a green

shawl and basil leaves are thrown over her by her family whilst they recite a chant. A red paste, made of natural ingredients, is also applied to the bride's face in the final stage of the skin regime for the wedding itself. Everybody then sits down to enjoy a shared meal - the hosts did have to clarify that we would both eat with our hands and eat sitting on the floor. After dinner the dancing began and our moves were quite the hit with the younger generation!

The day of the wedding was very hectic with the bride and her family spending a long time at the salon getting ready for the evening celebration. Since the wedding is also a female only affair, the women relish the opportunity to shed their abayas and headscarves, instead favouring heavy makeup, bright dresses and elaborate hairdos. Hair extensions are now very popular and we saw many of the girls getting them added.

The wedding party itself is held in the evening and is a very grand affair with lots of glitz and glamour. On our arrival we were greeted by the groom's mother and aunt who seemed to already know who we all were and were keen to ensure that we secured some of the best seats. Traditional sweets were handed around at the start and then some dance music was played. This was definitely not traditional Omani music – 'Gangnam Style' featured multiple times! For the first hour or so whilst guests are arriving and enjoying the dancing, the bride is kept in a separate room where she can spend some time with close friends and family. Fatma was keen to see us all before the wedding as we were unlikely to have a chance to talk to her properly once the ceremony started and after that she would be off on her honeymoon.

AN OMANI WEDDING

Then at around 9pm the bride made her entrance into the large hall, down a huge red carpet to the other end where there was a stage with a sofa for her to sit on. Whilst she was walking down the room, everybody chanted in Arabic. Once the bride was seated on the sofa, friends and family were invited to go up and sit with her and have their photos taken. During this part, food was also served which was a great chance for us to try even more Omani dishes.

After the photo ritual, an announcement is made that the groom is on his way, and the room becomes a sea of black as all the women don their abayas and headscarves. The bride also covers her dress and face with a white veil known as a Moroccan hood. The groom enters with his brother and, in this instance, his female relatives as well. They were accompanied by a band playing what looked like the bagpipes, although we were told that this was a modern influence that Fatma and Yasir had chosen specifically. The groom is dressed in traditional Omani dress which includes a khanjar. Upon reaching the stage he sits beside the bride and once the band leaves, the bride is able to uncover her face. More photographs are taken, and as with British weddings, there is a cake and a first dance – this is one of the modern influences on Omani weddings. After further dancing and photos, the bride covers back up and is escorted off to her room with the groom, signalling the end of the ceremony.

This was a very different experience to our last visit in Oman, but once again the country and the Omani hospitality have left a lasting imprint on our minds. We were very lucky to be hosted by Fatma's family for the duration of our visit which gave us a unique insight into family life in Oman (albeit in a slightly less than usual week!) and as well as being treated to a range of Omani cuisine, provided opportunities for fascinating intercultural dialogue. Fatma's mother cried as we left and her Father has invited his 'four daughters' back for Sara his youngest daughter's wedding, whenever that will be. It's certainly a trip we won't forget in a hurry! ■

Thanks again to the Anglo-Omani Society for their generous support. Clare Howes, Alison Davies, Shannon Edwards and Laura Watson.



Pre-wedding henna party.



The Bride and Groom.



Above: A sample of Omani sweets.



Left and below: Intricate gold jewellery received by the bride at her engagement party.



Connecting Cultures 3 years on (L to R: Alison, Shannon, Laura, Fatma, Clare and Wafaa).

It has been a great privilege for me to not only visit the beautiful country that is Oman, but to have been able to get so close to some of the greatest archaeology I have ever seen.



OMAN: A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE

ARTICLE BY MIKE GOGAN

The combination of Oman’s antiquity and the technical innovation of modern computer games technology offers an exciting opportunity for a world-wide audience to explore and to learn about our earliest ancestors and their culture. I hope that my contribution will help the world appreciate the long history of the Omani people and their many treasures.

I have been working with heritage organisations since 1999, when I first oversaw the building of a virtual reality model of Shakespeare’s Birthplace. This model was designed to enable disabled visitors to explore the upper floors of the Birthplace which had hitherto been inaccessible to anyone who couldn’t make it up the stairs. Fifteen years later, this facility is still in use.

Over the past 15 years my company has taken advantage of developments in computer games technologies, which have enabled high resolution imagery and interactivity to be delivered over the Internet. Still working exclusively in the Cultural Heritage sector, the Virtual Experience Company has moved on to develop virtual reconstructions of some iconic sites in the UK and beyond, including Tintern

Abbey, Westminster Hall, the Bodleian Library and others.

In 2009 I was invited to deliver a presentation at the E-Games Conference at Knowledge Oasis Muscat. This conference was attended by leading developers in the UK and was designed to bring these new technologies to young people in the Sultanate. Following a warm reception to my presentation, I was invited to develop a



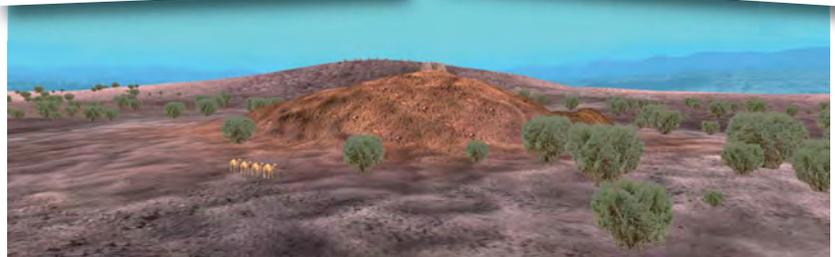
project in collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and KOM. This project involved a virtual reconstruction of the World Heritage site of Bahla Fort. Using computer gaming techniques, this model enabled users to explore the Fort and discover information about its various parts.

Although this project was a small start, it gave me the great advantage of being able to visit Oman on a number of occasions and explore this beautiful country. The richness and antiquity of the built heritage of Oman is truly inspiring and I decided to make a determined effort to help to bring this to a world-wide audience.

During my trips to Oman I have made many friends and experienced some of the natural beauty of the country, including spectacular drives over Jebel Shams and helping some friends to sail their dhow from Al Sufi to Sur. I have also been able to visit numerous heritage sites at Al Baleed and Khor Rori in the Dhofar region, the Bronze Age tombs at Bat and, of course the beautiful fort at Nizwa, an ancient seat of learning.

I have recently been working with the Office of HE the Cultural Adviser to HM The Sultan to develop a reconstruction of the Archaeological Castle at Salut. The history of this site goes back into the mists of time – when it was visited by Sulayman bin Dawud (Solomon son of David) during one of his voyages, nothing was known about its history or who built it. Legend has it that the sole occupant was an eagle, who told Sulayman that it had been uninhabited for centuries. The site is currently being excavated by a team of archaeologists, led by Prof. Alessandra Avanzini of the University of Pisa. They have discovered a wealth of evidence of buildings and artefacts, particularly relating to the Bronze Age, the Early Iron Age and the Late Iron Age. In addition, there are artefacts from the mediaeval period pointing to a long, if not continuous, occupation of the site over many millennia.

The challenge was to produce a visualisation of each of the three major periods of occupation, which would enable visitors to see how the site may have looked, but converting the technical information produced by the archaeologists into a user-friendly 3D interactive. The resulting work includes a number of Virtual



Reconstructions, as well as 3D models of many of the artefacts.

As further developments are made in digital technologies there are more opportunities to exploit these to help us learn more about our past. For example, the use of laser scanning, combined with 3D modelling has opened up a chance to investigate some of the most ancient

man-made tools. These Nubian Cores were found in Dhofar and are the earliest indication of occupation.

I am currently working with colleagues to

test the use of 3D laser scanning to examine these tools in detail and to help archaeologists to use the Internet to share their findings. High definition scanning will enable us to compare minute details of each item and to find evidence of similarities between them, resulting in an even deeper

understanding of the ancient history of the Sultanate of Oman. ■



Mike Gogan

Director of the Virtual Experience Company

Mike has recently given a lecture on this subject to Society members.

THE LEGEND OF WADI BANI KHALID

BY SIR TERENCE CLARK

At the beginning of 1972, I was posted to Muscat as the first Head of Chancery in the newly upgraded British Embassy, which had previously been a Consulate-General.

In those days Oman was only just beginning to make the transition between the Middle Ages and the Twentieth Century. Away from the Capital Area it was still a largely undeveloped country and some of the remoter parts were difficult to access. This, however, made exploring all the more interesting and challenging; and you could never be sure what to expect.

At this distance I do not recall the exact genesis of this particular expedition but in October 1973 a group of us, consisting of Dr Philip Horniblow (radiologist and medical practitioner), Captain Romilly David (Sultan's Armed Forces), John Shipman (British Embassy),

and I, decided we would explore a popular legend of a land "flowing with milk and honey" in the Wadi Bani Khalid in the Sharqiyah. Philip and Romilly were practised mountaineers and John and I were experienced Arabists.

A SAF helicopter took us on a training run for the short flight towards Sur and hopped over a col in a ring of mountains that surrounded the Wadi Bani Khalid. There was then only a donkey track that connected the Wadi with Sur. As we were to hear later, the inhabitants of the Wadi were largely self-sufficient but used to make the arduous



Helicopter landing

THE LEGEND OF WADI BANI KHALID

journey to Sur occasionally to obtain essential supplies, such as salt, in exchange for their own products, such as woven date frond mats.

When we descended from the helicopter we were immediately encircled by some of the wondering inhabitants, who had never seen anything like such an arrival by strangers. Indeed, I formed the early impression that they had never seen Europeans before, as one or two of them touched the skin on my hand as if to feel the difference. We seemed to have the same sort of effect as a landing by Martians might have on rural Wiltshire! Our helicopter departed with the promise of a return the next day to collect us.

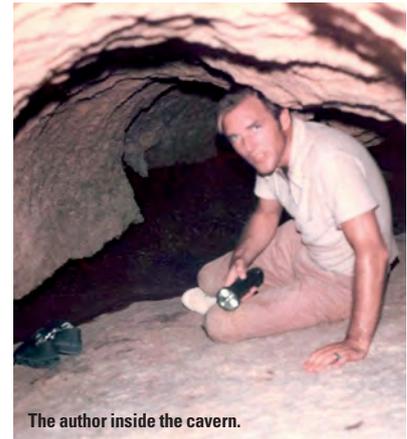
Some of the locals showed us the way up the Wadi to their mud-brick village, nestling in a palm grove by one of the series of limpid pools that punctuated the stepped valley floor. We were entertained to coffee and dates by a group of men who were delighted to break off from their arduous work of

weaving palm frond mats by hand. We were also plied with questions about the world outside their home and about the object of our visit. They seemed to know all about the legend and said we needed to ascend to the top of the Wadi where a cave gave entrance to the mythical land.

There was no shortage of volunteers to



Building Traps.



The author inside the cavern.



Villagers weaving mats.

The cave proved to be deceptively large. Indeed, it was vast inside and clearly served as some kind of a shrine, for the floor was polished by the passage of feet and tiny pieces of material were pinned to the walls as votive offerings, much as can be frequently seen at the tombs of revered Muslim marabouts.



show us the way from among the young lads who crowded round us everywhere we went. However, the further we toiled up the wadi, the fewer our escorts became. Some of them were keen to show us the ingenious traps they had set to catch birds and small mammals. One was a sprung device baited with a wriggling caterpillar, while another was an intricate contraption with a noose attached to a weighted wooden arm. By the time we had reached the head of the wadi we were left with only a young deaf mute boy, who pointed the way up the cliff face to where we could see the entrance to a cave.

The cave proved to be deceptively large. Indeed, it was vast inside and clearly served as some kind of a shrine, for the floor was polished by the passage of feet and tiny pieces of material were pinned to the walls as votive offerings, much as can be frequently seen at the tombs of revered Muslim marabouts. The cave funnelled down gradually until we were reduced to wriggling forward on our stomachs, with only our torches to light the way. It was ferociously hot and we were soon dripping with perspiration. After what seemed like an age and I for one was feeling increasingly claustrophobic, we suddenly emerged into a somewhat larger cavern through which ran a stream of clear, cool water. Without any hesitation we all refreshed ourselves and were unanimous in declaring that the water was as sweet as milk and honey!

We still had to negotiate our way back out and when we eventually emerged dripping into the late afternoon sunlight, we found our faithful little deaf mute guide waiting to show us the way down again. As he descended the cliff face nimbly ahead of us he accidentally brushed against a hornets' nest, the colour and texture of which made it virtually indistinguishable from the rock face. Within seconds the poor boy was attacked by the angry beasts but could make no sound as he twisted this way and that in a vain attempt to shake them off. He



fled away down the wadi leaving us to find a different path to a pool where we camped that night.

The next morning we descended the wadi in stages, stopping to swim and cool off in each of the deep pools that we encountered to the amusement of the boys that rejoined us along the way. We reached our rendezvous on time and still somewhat bedraggled we were quite glad to be whisked up into the cooler air, leaving behind another world and its legend. ■

Given the approaching 40th Anniversary of the end of the Dhofar War, now seems the time to collect together memories to provide a fuller picture. If you were involved in the Dhofar War or in the wider statebuilding processes in the Sultanate and either don't have the inclination to write your memoirs or have only partly completed them(!) then please get in touch as I am hoping that there will be enough interest in participation for me to be able to compile a volume of oral history of this crucial period in Anglo-Omani relations.

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ORAL/VIDEO HISTORY

ARTICLE BY FIONA WARTON

As a new member of the Anglo Omani Society, let me introduce myself.

I am Fiona Warton, widow of Keith Warton who flew with SOAF (now RAFO) in 1966-68.



Last year I started making video interviews of colleagues who served in Oman at the same time as Keith, as an extension of his Family History. Some have since died but their stories remain through these videos. This prompted me to consider widening the interviews beyond Keith's colleagues so that as much of the oral history of this important part of Oman's renaissance can be recorded before it is lost entirely. Thanks to the blessing and help of the SAF Association this project has taken off!

To date I have recorded 30 interviews of British Officers from RAF / Army / Royal Marines who served the Sultan of Oman. To a man they all enjoyed their time in Oman, with many staying on for decades of their careers, some even returning to fight the war even after spending up to a year in hospital having been badly injured. Many have returned whenever they can for holidays and to visit old friends. They all have a deep love for Oman and a bond of affection not only between each other but also with those Omanis who served with them under such demanding circumstances. The story is of Oman's success and it would be incomplete if Omanis' stories were missing. To this end, with help from one of my interviewees, Ian Gordon, who still remembers some Arabic and Jebali, I hope to soon be interviewing Omanis to record their stories which involved great fortitude, courage, sacrifice and enormous good humour. Together with the leadership of HM Sultan Qaboos, they gave Oman the opportunity to become the great country it has become today, moving from a time warp that had not moved on in two Millennia to a First World Country of the 21st century.

I passionately feel that these stories must not be lost to future generations so that they can benefit from the lessons learned at such cost and difficulty. To that end all my recordings will be given to the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies at St. Anthony's College, Oxford and to a suitable archive in Oman. ■

Please feel free to contact me if you would like to contribute to this record, via the Manager of AOS Ben Wright. I am especially keen to hear from the Officers who served on the SON Dhow in the early 1970s, including Jeremy Raybold and Gordon Gillies.



Jeremy Raybold checking rigging on SON Dhow Easter 1967.

THE LECTURE PROGRAMME

The lecture programme has always been an important part of The Society's activities. By providing a reason for members to meet and socialise while hearing a variety of talks on Oman-related subjects, it has bonded and strengthened the membership.

In the early days, The Society had a very limited budget and no building for a permanent base, so the lectures were presented in borrowed (hired) lecture rooms, principally the Middle East Association. In view of Oman's recent history, it will come as no surprise that early lectures were frequently given by military speakers who had been involved in Oman's successful war against Marxist insurgents, and by civilians who had successfully searched and drilled for oil in the Sultanate. Once peace had been established, these subjects began to be replaced by the rapid progress and successes of the Renaissance.

The increasing variety of subject matter for lectures is a reflection of the advances being made in so many fields in Oman, including culture. There has even been a

recent talk about Omani young people performing Shakespeare in Arabic in rural areas of the Sultanate.

The Society now has its own modern lecture room with audio/visual equipment and catering facilities, and the lecture programme is as popular as ever. A recent policy change has been to bring Omani lecturers to Britain to talk on their specialist subjects, and this has been most successful.

This first edition of our new magazine includes several articles based on recent lectures, and it is intended that future editions will include an article about each lecture subject during the previous year. We enjoy ten lectures throughout each year, and you can find full details with a booking facility on our website. www.angloomanisociety.com ■



THIS ARTICLE AND THE PHOTOGRAPHS HAVE BEEN SUPPLIED BY SONIA SHAW OF SHAW TRAVEL



FOCUS ON EXPANDING TOURISM

Over the next few years the changes in Oman's infrastructure will accelerate. Some of these changes may be unnoticed by tourists but whether small or large, many will be.

Starting in September 1st 2014, Mina Sultan Qaboos will gradually turn from its previous role as Oman's principal receiving port for imports into what could well be one of the most attractive leisure ports in the world; its focus will be on passenger ships large and small. The crescent facing the port is already in the first stages of redevelopment; the old Fish Souq has already disappeared and its replacement is well on its way to completion. Japanese style toilets are already found along the route into 'old' Muscat and the Omani version of the Boris bike will enable the visitor to get a view with their exercise.

All of this sea change is part of Oman's focus on tourism as a key driver of economic growth for the next 5 year plan. Currently some 40,000 jobs have been created in the tourism industry and it is expected to reach 60,000 in 2024. These jobs will be a key ingredient to reach an expected contribution of OMR3,886.3mn (8.2% of GDP) in 2024.

Currently high-speed ferries link Muscat

and Musandam, and these will be joined by comparable vessels between Masirah Island and Shennah on the mainland. The changes at sea are complimented by the focus on Oman's air traffic. Muscat's airport will be replaced by a new terminal that could be completed by 2016 to handle 12 million passengers annually. Further expansions to boost the airport's annual capacity to 24, 36 and 48 million passengers if required. A complimentary new terminal is expected to open in the same period in Salalah. Already the new terminal in Duqm is receiving flights to give quick access to the port and new hotels there.

These major upgrades in the transport system are matched by the upcoming Convention & Exhibition Centre, due for completion within 3 years. The excellent facility can host 3,200 people and with more than 22,000 square metres of exhibition, space can offer impressive facilities to any exhibitor.

Oman's tourism focus decidedly remains up-market and over the next few years 3835

new Rooms should become available – this 30% increase in rooms is mostly in 4 & 5 star.

In 2014 the Alili brand opened its first property in Oman in the cool heights of Jebel Akhdar. This will be joined by a further 5 star property on the mountain.

In the south Rotana opened a major hotel in the Muriya development just outside Salalah in spring 2014. Muriya are also working on a much smaller property on one of the Hallaniyat Islands, a 20-room and 12-villa resort on Sodah Island.

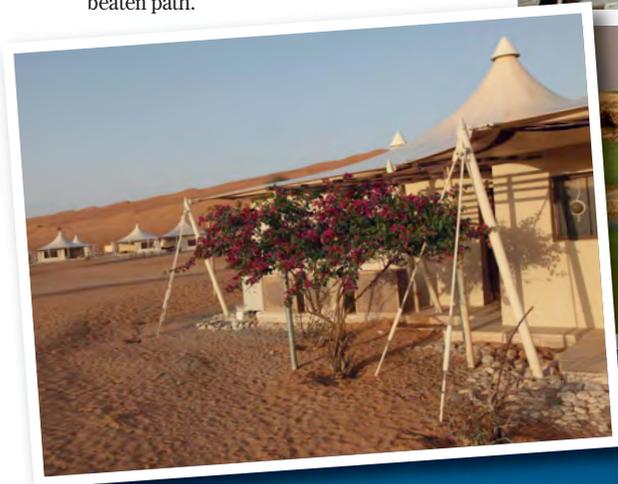
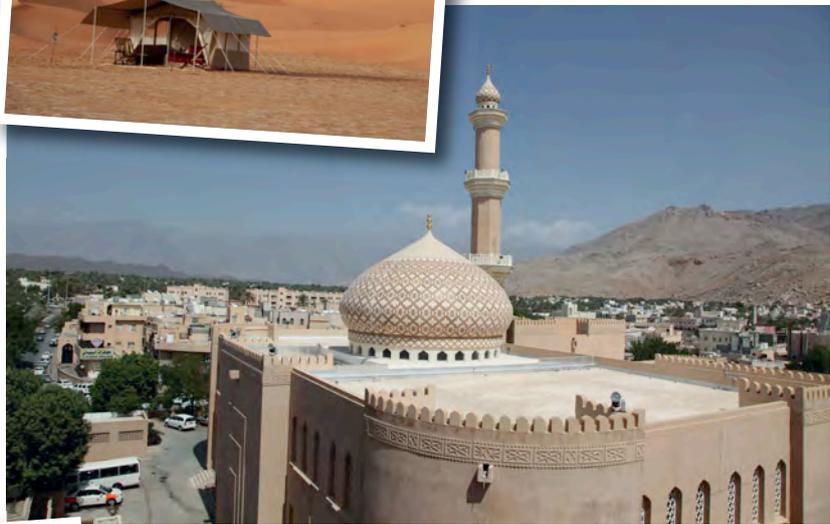
The opening during 2015 of the impressive new National Museum opposite the palace in Muscat should add interest to the cultural dimension of any holiday into Muscat. Salalah's UNESCO sites of Sumhuram and Al Balid will have additional facilities to appeal to European and Arab visitors.

Salalah highlights one of the issues that the Oman government is having to address, the seasonality of Oman's tourist industry. In the north until recently it has been a winter focus and in the south summer and monsoon driven. The new properties in the northern mountains may begin to change perceptions, and increased up-market properties in the south may encourage more European visitors to venture off the beaten path.

An area that is being considered by the Ministry of Tourism is heritage hotels in some of Oman's forts and abandoned villages. Spread around the country these may appeal to a visitor who prefers accommodation with local character and history.

Tourism of course is not about hotel and museums for foreign visitors. Internal tourism is an important aspect and the festivals in Muscat in February and Salalah in August are key attractions that appeal mainly to the local population. Smaller scale events occur throughout the country from the marine focus in Taqah in spring to a similar one in Sur in mid-summer.

On your next visit to Oman you will still find the same welcome you are used to along with a far more comfortable way of receiving it. ■



TRUCKS, CAMELS AND DONKEYS

“Trucks, Camels and Donkeys” recounts the sometimes light-hearted experiences of Major General (Ret’d) Alan Sharman CBE who, as a newly commissioned officer in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, spent 6 months in Nizwa in 1962/63 as MTO for the Muscat Regiment.

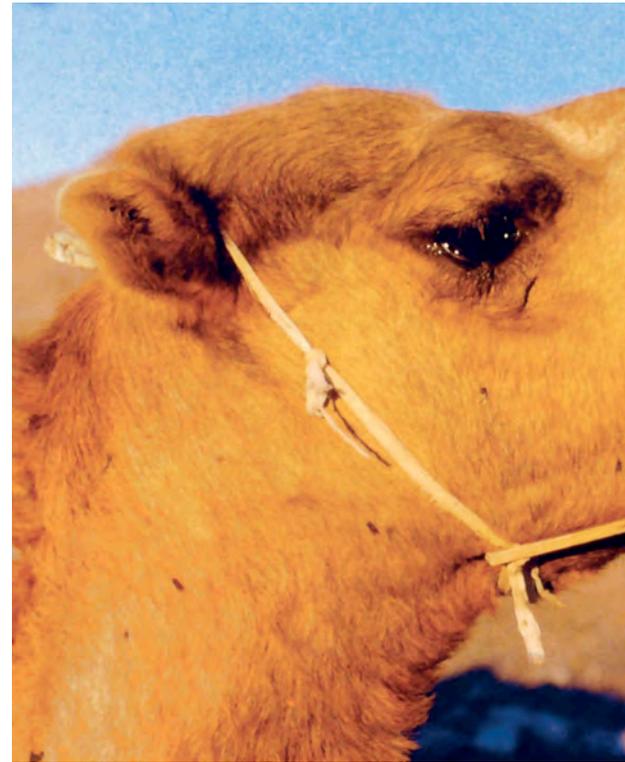
This article is based on the script of a lecture he gave to the Anglo Omani Society in December 2013.

AT SANDHURST

I had the great privilege of attending Sandhurst on the same course as His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. We were in different Companies but the same College. On commissioning in 1962 he went to Germany to serve with the Cameronians. I went to Oman via Aden for 6 months under the, so called, Junior Leader scheme.

I fell in love with Oman at first sight. Muscat itself was a fairytale. Oil wealth was not yet exploited. Even HQ SAF at Bait al Falaj was based in a gleaming white fort reminiscent of the Raj. The Navy was in its infancy and consisted of just 3 powered Dhows moored in the harbour.

In keeping with the spirit of the times I was encouraged to and did present my card at the British Ambassador’s Residence.



Unfortunately, I did not stay long enough in Muscat to receive the hoped for cocktail party invitation!

After a couple of nights in the Bait al Falaj officers mess I went inland to Nizwa by Land Rover driven by Major Malcolm Dennison – something of a legend himself in the development of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF). The journey was about 120 miles but at an average speed of little more than 10 MPH, much in the dark, the journey time was considerable. We stayed overnight with a Company of the Northern Frontier Regiment (NFR) based in Izki. There was something “Beau Geste” about it as we approached in the dark and heard clicks as the armed sentries cocked their rifles. We found the Company Commander, a Contract Officer (effectively a mercenary), on the terrace of his chalet with a bottle of whisky, a searchlight and a rifle, shooting at any unfortunate animal that moved in the scrubland. The next day we arrived at the Muscat Regiment (MR), then based in Nizwa, and met some of the fine officers with whom I would spend the next 6 months:

CO – Lt Col Clive Chettle, Devon & Dorsets
 Adj – Capt (later Lt Gen) Thomas Boyd Carpenter, Scots Guards (son of the British politician John Boyd Carpenter who was a Minister in the MacMillan Government).



RMO – Major John McVee, RAMC
 Int Officer – Capt David Earlam – Royal Artillery
 Coy Comd – Maj John Cooper of WW2 Long Range Desert Group fame, ex SAS, Contract Officer
 QM – Capt Ivor MacEwen, ex Indian Army, Contract Officer

Nizwa was another fabulous and indescribable place. The famous Fort was guarded by an MR section who turned out, even for me as a mere 2Lt, and presented arms. Even the civilian prisoners they were guarding saluted. The generous hospitality of the Omanis was also well demonstrated by my first initiation to “fuddle” by the Wali of Nizwa.

Probably because I was a REME officer and he had a vacancy, Clive Chettle decided to make me the Motor Transport Officer (MTO) which, effectively, also meant being the REME style Light Aid Detachment commander. This was a real job, which I relished, with responsibility for the unit’s transport and its maintenance.

The MT Platoon soldiers and NCOs were a mix of Omani, Baluch and Pakistani drivers and mechanics. I was probably the only 2Lt in the British Army at that time that had my own Landover and driver.

The regimental transport consisted of around 24 Bedford 4 ton trucks including a water bowser and a recovery vehicle, a similar number of long wheel based Land Rovers, 16 donkeys and the 6 camels that belonged to the Recce Platoon.

Few vehicle spares were available and they were very basic: spark plugs, belts and





extraordinarily skilled. Oxygen was provided in large cylinders but he made the acetylene in a process similar to a witch's brew. He burned some things that looked a bit like pieces of white charcoal over a brazier and somehow collected the acetylene gas that was given off into a flexible container which he could then squeeze to provide some pressure and mix with the oxygen. The process must have offended every Health and Safety tenet now known to man but it seemed to work.

Skills in keeping the vehicles going were not matched by those for looking after the animals.

A fight amongst the Recce Platoon camels resulted in one of them having a broken jaw. It was probably repairable but, in ignorance, a civilian camel doctor was invited in. His treatment was to brand the poor creature in the offending spot, which permanently tightened the skin. This, of course, meant that it now could not, nor ever would be able, to close its jaw and chew, so it had to be fed by hand. It was thus militarily worthless and had no market value either. Its fate was inevitable and a feast ensued – my first experience of camel meat, which is very tough.

One of the most interesting of our vehicles was a LR based at the Company position at the top of the Jebel Akdhar at Saiq. It was the only one there and was falling to pieces. Yet it was quite important as a means of moving stores from the airstrip up there to the Company position – about a km. It was very old, too. We constantly sought a replacement from HQ SAF but in vain, even though their expert had condemned it as beyond the pale. The problem was the cost of getting one there. The original had been lifted up in a Twin Pioneer aircraft some years before. Engine,



the odd, small sub-assemblies such as starter motors. So there was a formal vehicle replacement policy.

The arrangement was that new vehicles were issued to the Regiment and expected to last two years before replacement, with a ration of just two sets of springs and tyres during that time. They had to be kept going meanwhile on the limited support that was available. If a vehicle became unusable through accident or major failure before two years was up we had to do without it but, of course, it was then cannibalised for spares for the others. With the state of the tracks and roads as they were then (there were no metalled roads), very few of the vehicles had shock absorbers after a few months' use, which made for interesting driving. This also led to the roads and tracks developing corrugations which made for an even more exciting ride and even shorter vehicle life.

The mechanics could manage to bash out dents etc., but we could also carry out oxy-acetylene welding. The SNCO welder was



gearbox etc. had been removed, the chassis sawn in half and the two halves lifted up in different loads. The body was then welded together again and the whole reassembled on site – brilliant.

The Saiq Company was serviced by a regular Sultan of Oman’s Air Force (SOAF) Beaver flight every Tuesday. It arrived at the Nizwa camp airstrip and then proceeded to do 6 or 7 trips up to the top and back carrying all requisite stores even including grass for the donkeys up there. The alternative of carting everything up and down the Jebel by manpack or mules was pretty challenging involving an arduous nine hour climb. It was also a great opportunity for some aerial photography for those that could steal a ride.

STEAMROLLER AND GRADER

The Nizwa airstrip was adjacent to the MR Camp. Abandoned beside it, in a dilapidated condition, was the large steamroller used in its original construction, along with an equally large, towed grading machine. I thought it would be fun to try and start the steamroller and on initial attempt, it coughed once or twice in encouragement but would not start. Two members of the platoon were then set to keep trying. After half an hour they reported no luck but were tasked to continue. After another half an hour it still would not start and their hands were blistering. They were replaced but if it failed to start again I would lose a lot of face. Finally and to my huge relief it started. After

a quick “teach yourself how to drive a steamroller and use a grader” course we set about the local roads. In a few weeks we had graded, rolled and oiled all the roads for about 3 miles in all directions from Nizwa. The only roads in the country (outside Muscat) that were free of corrugations for a few months at least – very popular.

A highlight of my time was the trip to take a number of old vehicles to HQ SAF and return with the new replacements. With some careful driving all was well until we were in the vicinity of Bid Bid.

There the heavens opened and it rained like a monsoon. The Wadi began to run like a torrent. All the vehicles were across but mine – a very clapped out Land Rover. I got halfway across and the engine stalled with the water rising rapidly, well above the bottom of the doors, and the risk of being swept away. A couple of the soldiers reversed in with a 4 tonner and, against quite a current they bravely waded back, connected a towrope and pulled the Land Rover out; a great adventure. Needless to say the return journey with new vehicles was a joy and we probably broke all the shock absorbers at once from driving too fast.

A first during my time was the arrival of the cinema. An old 16mm projector and film were delivered and I was tasked to show it. There were no instructions but after a few worried hours playing with the projector I got the hang of it. We then set it up in the entrance to one of the camp huts and draped some large white sheets along the side of a 4 tonner to act as the screen. The soldiers then sat on the ground in between. It was the first time that most of them had ever seen a film and some even sat down at first facing the projector.

This first film was an epic of the 19th Century Indian Raj called North West Frontier, starring Kenneth More, Lauren Bacall and Herbert Lom. At one point in the film insurgent tribesmen, looking very much like our MR soldiers in mufti, attacked a train carrying the heroes. Much to our amusement and relief, instead of cheering the insurgents with whom they might have been expected to identify, the boys cheered the British cavalry regiment that charged to the rescue. They also cheered loudly when the hero and heroine inevitably kissed.

The second film to arrive was called Beat

Girl which, as its name implied, was rather risqué. It seemed to me to have been an odd choice of film to have sent but it seemed to be popular with the soldiers and certainly opened their eyes to Western decadence.

Another first in my time was the building of the first proper European style loos in the camp for the soldiers. Until then they had had to leave camp during the day or use a not very attractive deep trench latrine arrangement at night when the camp was secured. The new loos were eventually a great success but it took a lot of training and patience by the Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) before the men adapted to the use of paper instead of the small rocks with which the loos initially became blocked.

Happily there was no military conflict during my time in Nizwa but there was considerable excitement and an operational





deployment when some 48 prisoners made a mass breakout from Mutrah Jail on 14 Feb 63. All but one of them were ex-Talib supporting rebels and they were all successfully captured or shot trying to avoid escape by the 19th. Interestingly, the one that got away was not a rebel but a murderer, one Backshut Shambi al Baluchi. He had, allegedly, killed his wife in Mutrah, the story went, by shoving her down a well. Clearly the locals did not see that as too serious an offence then and, unlike for the ex- rebels, they seem to have provided him with a measure of help to evade capture.

We enjoyed some exciting training days from time to time. Notable were the SOAF Range days. Two piston engine Provosts with their pilots were made available to us for two days and we took it in turns either to act as Forward Air Controllers or fly in the aircraft as machine gunners. It was all very exhilarating and far more risky than would have been allowed in training with the RAF at home.

Similar were the Artillery days with SAFs one and only 6 gun battery of 25 pounders. For this event there was no range as such but the Recce platoon were sent out early in the morning to warn locals to leave the target area. Officers, along with some senior local dignitaries were gathered on the side of a hill facing the cleared area with the battery located some kms to our rear. We then took it in turns to call down fire, by radio, on features in the terrain and practise "bracketing" the target. All seemed to be going well when one of our local guests began to get very alarmed. It transpired that he had realised that the target now being "bracketed" was a property (albeit empty) belonging to his brother!

DAILY LIFE WATER TANKS AND DEAD GOAT

Individually each officer had a chalet block room with an en-suite shower and loo. Water was provided for each room from a tank on the roof, which was re-filled daily by soldiers, using cans, from the water bowser, which in turn had been filled from a local falaj. There was some alarm amongst us one day when an officer out for a walk discovered a dead goat in the falaj, not far above where the water was collected. The collection point was moved upstream of the

goat but since it had obviously been dead for a long time it probably made little difference to us and our immune systems.

Interestingly, a while later a group of officials from the UN came to stay with us whilst they carried out an investigation into human rights in the Nizwa area. Their arrival was not popular and unfortunately for them they had to cut their visit short when they all went down with severe tummy troubles. I have often speculated upon whether the water for their roof tanks was collected below the goat again for the duration of their stay!

Officers' Mess food was generally good and well cooked. It was mainly frozen but supplemented by fresh vegetables from the Nizwa Experimental Farm. Simply because it added tone to our affairs we wore black tie for dinner most evenings.

Over Christmas we fared well. It was not a holiday for the soldiers, of course, so some work continued but we had an excellent lunch, raced Land Rovers in the Wadi and watched a film in the Officers' Mess. In keeping with British Army tradition all the officers also repaired to the Sergeants' Mess for drinks, where the two British SNCOs treated us very generously.



DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS RESUMED WITH SAUDI ARABIA

The freedoms we enjoyed were a joy by British Army standards and I made a number of lengthy trips to distant outposts and interesting places. The hospitality in every small town or village was always generous and memorable. During a visit to one village a festival took place in the evening, with the men and older boys dancing and firing their rifles into the air whilst the women and children stood together and watched.

In Buraimi I was given the use, by the Wali, of a beautiful, disused fort in which to camp overnight.

It was just after this trip that the momentous news arrived that, after some years, the diplomatic relations, which had been broken in 1956 by Saudi Arabia with Britain following the Buraimi incident, had been resumed. We were asked to canvass local opinion. So my short tour ended on a historically important note.

As for all who have had the good fortune to serve in Oman, I can confidently



say that I never again enjoyed such freedom nor had a better posting during my Army career. With new wealth and modernisation, the infrastructure and quality of life for the citizens of Oman has improved out of all recognition in the intervening years, thanks hugely to the wise rule of my fellow Sandhurst cadet. But as someone with a keen sense of history and the romantic I consider it a

great privilege to have been there, as a young man, at that time when most of the country was, probably, as it had been for centuries. ■

**Note that the photographs used to illustrate this article were taken originally as 35mm slides over 50 years ago and subsequently scanned into digital format. Their quality is therefore less than ideal.*



ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME 2013

DR ELISABETH KENDALL, PEMBROKE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

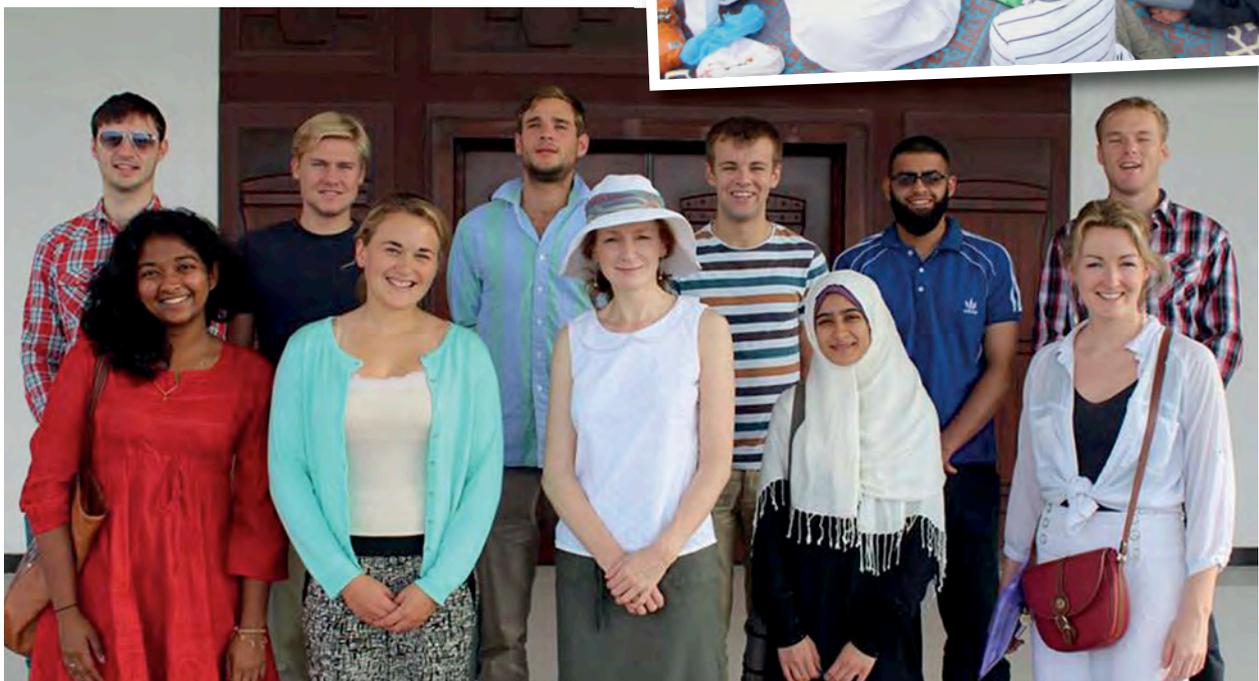
The Anglo-Omani Society, in collaboration with the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diwan of the Royal Court, was delighted to send 10 British students to Oman again in Summer 2013 on a mission to improve their Arabic.

This was the fourth such delegation to Oman, but only the second time that the intensive month-long course had run at the new Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers near Manah village, just outside Nizwa in Oman's interior.

The students, who were drawn from universities all across the UK, were thrilled at the warm welcome they received from their Omani hosts. Many of the British students had attended language courses in other Arab countries and were impressed at the superior quality of teaching and organisation of the programme on offer in Manah. Classes were intense, but never dull, with topics ranging from classical Arabic grammar and the Omani dialect to food, poetry and the

Arab 'Spring'. Regular meetings with Omani language partners ensured that life did not just switch back into English when the students returned to their comfortable hostel after class.

The extra-curricular schedule was enormous fun and truly awakened the students' awareness of Oman's distinct traditions and hospitality. They attended a series of lectures by some of Oman's top thinkers, including Assistant Grand Mufti, Sheikh Dr. Kahlan al-Kharusi; while visits to



local homes and schools revealed authentic insights into Omani culture. Weekends were packed with colourful excursions that included Muscat's souqs and museums, the sights and secrets of Jabal Akhdar, a turtle beach in Sharqiyyah and even a tour of the lush mountains of Salalah during the kharif season.

Everyone returned home with memories unique and impressive enough to last a lifetime, not to mention much-improved Arabic language skills. To quote one of the students, "It is an honour to be part of the historically close relationship between Britain and Oman, which I am determined to help promote during our future careers." We extend a very warm thank you to H.E. Ambassador Abdulaziz al-Hinai, the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs and H.E. Habib al-Riyami for facilitating this valuable opportunity.



HERE IS WHAT THE STUDENTS THEMSELVES HAD TO SAY:

Shane Kevin Farrell, King's College, London (postgraduate)

I feel extremely fortunate to have spent the past eight weeks at the Sultan Qaboos College (for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers). Academically, the centre is excellent. Class sizes ranged from five to ten people and there was a strong emphasis on writing and making presentations in Arabic, which I particularly appreciated. It was challenging without being overwhelming, and staff were on hand at every stage to ensure students reached their full potential. In some of the staff members I have found new friends; friends whose generosity and friendliness is almost unparalleled. But what sets this school apart from other centres at which I've studied in the region – in Lebanon, Yemen and



The college seeks to imbue students with an appreciation not just of Arabic language, but of Omani culture and customs as well"

Egypt – is the level of staff members' dedication to making sure students' needs are met at every level, from the academic to the social. More than that, the college seeks to imbue students with an appreciation not just of Arabic language, but of Omani culture and customs as well. This multi-dimensional approach to learning is remarkable, and has left me with a connection to the country and a desire to learn more about it.

Eleanor McClelland, University of Oxford

This summer spent at the Sultan Qaboos College studying Arabic was incredible from start to finish. Having never visited Oman before, I was delighted to find that the programme at the Sultan Qaboos College not only pushed us in our study of the language but afforded us fantastic opportunities to visit some of the most beautiful parts of Oman surrounded by our Omani teachers and friends. Each of the excursions was carefully planned and the staff went to every length to ensure that we really enjoyed the fullest experience. From the

small class sizes and endless enthusiasm of the teachers to the phenomenal excursions and impressive guest-speakers, every aspect of the programme was top notch. We were made to feel completely at home by staff whose hospitality and kindness was immeasurable. However, what really sets this course apart from other immersive intensive language courses is the language-partner scheme. Three afternoons a week we met with our language partners. These were young men and women from the local area who were also engaged in university study. We took part in numerous cultural activities and learned about Omani dancing and customs as well as Omani food and festivals. I would recommend this course to anyone looking to study Arabic and explore Oman.

Georgie Thompson, University of Cambridge

Without a doubt what has impressed me the most about Oman has been the limitless Omani hospitality. All the staff at the College, the language partners and every Omani we met have treated us as part of their family; I have never felt more welcome in any country I have visited, nor more reluctant to leave. I have also been greatly impressed by the quality of lessons at the College. Not only were the lessons beneficial in improving my Arabic, but





I also enjoyed them immensely. Lessons are fun and stimulating, covering a variety of topics and activities, from class debates to making videos on Omani culture. The curriculum is also flexible, so we are able to focus on our own weaknesses or the areas where we would most like to improve. Personally, I have found the conversation and speaking the most useful as it is not something we focus on at my university, and the programme has been ideal in giving me more confidence in speaking Arabic for the start of my year abroad. The cultural programme was another highlight. The opportunity to attend an Omani wedding in Muscat was an experience I will never forget, especially the way in which we were warmly welcomed by the bride and guests as part of their family, despite being complete strangers. To top it all off, the weekend trips have been fantastic, especially watching the turtles laying eggs on the beach in Al-Sharqiyya and swimming in Wadi Shab.

James Atkinson, University of Exeter

This was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I am so grateful to all those who made it possible. My time spent in Oman surpassed all expectations and I returned to university with a deep understanding of Omani culture. Our programme was full of Arabic, dialect and media classes, cultural and academic lectures, calligraphy, as well as other cultural events. I thoroughly enjoyed the language-partners scheme, which greatly helped with my spoken Arabic. The staff at both the Hostel and the College were incredibly kind and helpful, including those who accompanied us on the fantastic weekend trips to Nizwa, Muscat, Salalah and Sur.

This was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I am so grateful to all those who made it possible. My time spent in Oman surpassed all expectations and I returned to university with a deep understanding of Omani culture”



Oman’s diversity is breathtaking and I do hope that I can return in the near future. I would love to guide my family around such a beautiful country. This has been a life-changing experience that I will never forget.

David Smith, University of Edinburgh (postgraduate)

My experience of the teaching programme was wholly positive and I feel my Arabic skills greatly improved during my time at Sultan Qaboos College. This was in large part to the excellent standard of teaching. Classes were well organised and balanced between reading, writing and speaking. The resources of the school are top of the range, including smart boards in every classroom that aided our listening skills with songs, poems and news clips. The lessons were relevant and topical such as engaging with the Arab Spring debate. The Omani dialect classes and cultural classes were extremely valuable to my understanding of Omani Culture. The language partner programme helped us engage and build working relations with young Omanis, which is a vital component of language learning. The opportunity to spend weekends travelling around Oman gave a sense of the country as a whole. I have been left with a wonderful impression of Omanis as warm friendly people and I was particularly struck by Oman’s beautiful landscape. I felt very welcome and I was met with generous hospitality wherever I went throughout my stay in Oman. I would like very much to return.

Maximilian Wrey, University of Leeds

I felt extremely honoured and privileged to have been included in the Anglo-Omani scholarship and wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those involved in making it happen. The experience proved to be a hugely positive and beneficial opportunity. At no moment did I feel as if we were being spared any of the indulgent and bountiful treatment that so typifies Omani hospitality. From the comfortable hostel to the small classes manned by talented teachers and fully equipped with the latest technology made for a perfect learning environment. Most rewarding, however, were the extra-curricular lectures, activities, trips and adventures. From the kharif in Salalah to the Wahiba sands in Sharqiyya we were given every opportunity to experience the awesome diversity of the Sultanate and, most importantly, to learn from Omanis themselves. I am left firm in my belief that the future holds many opportunities to engage positively with Oman.

Tabassum Rasheed, University of Oxford (postgraduate)

From the very start, I knew the Anglo-Omani Society's Arabic Language Scheme would be a truly special experience. I had been learning Arabic for only a year, mainly focusing on reading and writing, and the new world that the five weeks in Oman opened up was incredible. It was not just the well-organised, personal nature of the school, which, with its small classes and attentive teachers really did enable me to start feeling comfortable trying to express myself orally in Arabic, but also the social and cultural aspects of the scheme which really made it stand out. Being able to chat to language partners about fashion

trends and marriage customs, bumping into the British Ambassador while visiting a wadi and getting our 4x4s stuck in the middle of the desert near a herd of wild camels – incredible experiences which I knew I could not have had without the scheme. And, of course, the famously hospitable nature of the Omanis made the five weeks seem fleeting indeed! The beauty and warmth of the country and my hosts really did make this scheme wonderful.

James Flesher, University of Cambridge

It was a real privilege to be able to spend such a long period of time learning Arabic in Oman. The programme was well organised to allow us to develop our own interests within the study of the Arabic language, and the teachers were always eager for discussion and feedback, meaning that the content of classes was incredibly varied, ranging from individual study time to grammar classes and impassioned debates. As well as the programme in the College, it was great to have the opportunity to see so much of Oman across the course, and wherever we went we were made to feel incredibly welcome.

Shazan Iqbal, University of Manchester

Having only just completed a four year degree in Arabic Studies, I was looking forward to studying in Oman and improving my level of Arabic. Although I only spent 5 weeks at Sultan Qaboos College I improved beyond what I thought was possible in such a short time. The teaching was excellent and exceeded my expectations. In addition, the hospitality was amazing. From the moment I landed in Muscat we were treated according to the famous Omani hospitality and this continued throughout my stay in Oman. We were taken

on weekly excursions to various places all over the Sultanate and were given excellent treatment not only by our hosts but the general Omani population. If ever the need arose to alter anything it was done immediately and there was a constant desire to ensure we were content with the studies and our experience in Oman. I am extremely grateful to all those involved in this project especially the Anglo-Omani Society and Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs for funding it.

Hiba Mohamed, University of Oxford

I must begin by saying that the famous Omani hospitality about which I had heard prior to my trip was on full display throughout the five weeks I spent in Oman. The teachers were generous with their time and were incredibly helpful and always willing to assist further to improve our language abilities. Ustadha Aisha and Ustadha Shahla ensured that the lessons were challenging and enjoyable by employing innovative teaching methods. The chance to debate and discuss in class was the perfect opportunity to use and even show off the Arabic that we were learning over the five weeks. Ustadha Fatima helped us to meet locals by organising activities such as a henna afternoon where we were invited by a local Omani woman to her house to have our hands painted. This was a beautiful experience for me. The trips at the weekends, accompanied by our language teachers and sometimes language partners, meant that we were able to practise our language skills at all times and in such beautiful places! I consider myself very fortunate to have been part of such an excellent scholarship programme that has left me with many fond memories of Oman, its people and culture. ■



OMANI BRITISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION RECEPTION

Reception for the
Chairmen and
Members of the
Omani British
Friendship
Association at
Sackville Street on
18th June

The Society hosted a Reception for the recently appointed Chairmen and Members of the Omani British Friendship Association on the evening of 18th June at 34 Sackville Street. The two Royal Patrons of OBFA, HRH the Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, were welcomed by The Society's Vice-Chairman, Colonel Nigel Knockner, OBFA Chairman, HE Maqbool Sultan, and his UK counterpart, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles. The Duke and His Highness met a number of OBFA members from Oman and the UK. ■



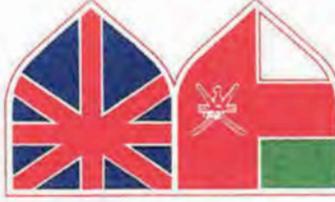
OMANI BRITISH FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION RECEPTION



The two Royal Patrons of OBFA, HRH the Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, were welcomed by The Society's Vice-Chairman, Colonel Nigel Knocker, OBFA Chairman, HE Maqbool Sultan, and his UK counterpart, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles.



**OMANI BRITISH
FRIENDSHIP
ASSOCIATION**



**جمعية الصداقة
العمانية
البريطانية**

تحت رعاية صاحب السمو السيد هيثم بن طارق آل سعيد
Patron: H.H. Sayyid Haythem bin Tarik Al Said

3rd August 2014

The Board of Trustees
The Anglo-Omani Society
34, Sackville Street.
London W1S 3ED

After compliments,

On behalf of the chairman Mr. Maqbool Sultan and all members of the Oman British Friendship Association (OBFA) I would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society for organising a splendid reception on the evening of the 18th of June 2014 at the Head Quarters in Sackville Street in the presence of HRH The Duke of York, the UK Patron of OBFA and His Highness Sayyid Haitham Bin Tarik Al Said OBFA's patron in Oman and almost 130 distinguished members and guests.

Mr. Maqbool Sultan, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the UK Chairman and HRH the Duke of York each in turn spoke of the excellent relationship enjoyed between the two nations over more than two centuries, the willingness in increasing the already very active investment partnership between the two and of opportunities that could be explored outside the realm of their boundaries by seeking to establish joint ventures and moving forward together.

Not only was the reception well attended but it was also very well organised. The canapés were delicious and the service impeccable.

Thank you once again and we look forward to reciprocating the hospitality when you visit Oman next.

With kind regards.

Shawqi A Sultan
Secretary General

Chairman: Maqbool Ali Sultan – PO Box 1040, Ruwi, PC 112, Tel: +968 24526016, Fax: 24526261
Email: masmct@gmail.com

Secretary General: Shawqi Abdul Redha Sultan – PO Box 1668, Ruwi, PC 112, Tel: +968 24607030, Fax: +968 24696776
Email: shawqi.sultan@gmail.com

REMEMBERING...

MICHAEL GALLAGHER, M.B.E., F.R.G.S., F.L.S.

Michael Gallagher, who has died aged 92, was an outstanding naturalist, for whose services to wildlife conservation in Oman he was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire in January 1994.



His wartime service in the Royal Army Service Corps took him round the Cape of Good Hope to join the 8th Army in the Western Desert of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, after which he went to Sicily and mainland Italy, before returning to England to join the British Liberation Army for the Normandy landings to end the war in Germany. His further service took him back to the Middle East, Guyana and Christmas Island where his interest in natural history flourished in places where little study had so far been carried out.

On retiring from the British Army in 1976 in the rank of Major, he joined the Office for Conservation of the Environment in the Sultanate of Oman, where he continued his study of natural history, wrote *The Birds of Oman* and set up the Oman Natural History Museum. By the time he retired from the Oman Government in 1998 no fewer than 29

wildlife species had been named after him, including mammals, reptiles, insects, a scorpion, a fish, molluscs and a plant. The author of many scientific papers, popular articles and books, his achievements were celebrated with a seminar, resulting in a Festschrift book in his honour entitled *The Natural History of Oman*.

Michael Desmond Gallagher was born on 02 September 1921 and went to Ardingly where he shot in the school VIII. Following his father Brigadier Henry Gallagher, CBE, BSc, he joined the RASC as a volunteer on the outbreak of war and went to Sandhurst. Later he shot for his corps at Bisley. After the end of World War II he saw service in regimental and staff postings in Palestine, Gibraltar, BAOR, Guyana, Christmas Island, Bahrain and Sharjah. Adopting nature as a hobby, he led adventure training projects and was selected to join the 1974-75 Zaire River Expedition. His posting as DAQMG, Military Assistance Office, HQ British Forces Gulf in Bahrain led to close contacts with Oman. In 1973 he led a reconnaissance to study an area of the Jebel Al Akhdar with a view to recommending boundaries for a national park. In 1975 he joined the first British Flora and Fauna Expedition to northern Oman and two years later led the second British Expedition to Dhofar. In January 1977 he joined the Office of the Adviser for Conservation of the Environment as Assistant Adviser (Field Studies) and was commissioned to write *The Birds of Oman*.

In 1982 he joined the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture under His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Al Said, where he established the Oman Natural History Museum and later extended it to include the Whale Hall and the Fossil Exhibition. Within the Museum he established the National Herbarium of Oman and its associated Botanic Garden, as well as the Shell and Coral Collections, the Insect, Invertebrate, Fossil, Osteological and other collections.

Michael's quiet manner sometimes masked his strong passion for natural history. He received specialists and

students alike with warmth and dedication to push forward research in the hands of all who were interested, whether as a hobby or as professionals. Once, when at dinner with a prominent Omani family, his hostess asked what species the bat was that had just swooped over them. Without a flicker he replied 'Look at page so-and-so and you will find out.' Only later did she discover that it was not a bat but a bird. Michael was such a gentleman that he would never have contradicted her in front of others. Even after retirement, he was able to display his meticulous command of detail and plain language, as both author and a Contributing Editor for *The Journal of Oman Studies*. The carpet of wild flowers on the sea front by his house would never have been there but for Michael's persistence that influenced local affairs in his latter years.

In 1975 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and was awarded the Zoological Society of London's Stamford Raffles Award for 1993 in recognition of his "contributions to zoology, in particular to Arabian ornithology". In 1994 he was elected a Fellow of the Linnaean Society of London. His bibliography extended to over 114 books, scientific papers and articles in popular journals, a record that would be the envy of many a university professor. He never married.

He died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of 27th July 2014.

David Insall

**Mr Robert Alston CMG QSO DL,
Chairman The Anglo-Omani Society and
former HBM Ambassador to Oman:**

'...I served as British Ambassador to Oman in the late 1980s whilst Michael was still here, working at the Natural History Museum. He was at the same time a real gentleman and someone with a real determination to create for the first time a modern understanding of the country's natural heritage. His 'Birds of Oman', produced at about that time, remains the standard work and is in a class of its own. Oman owes him full recognition as one of a pioneering generation...' ■

ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON

Tafaddal ma'ana
(literally please join
us) became part of
the vocabulary of
all who had the
privilege of working
and living in Oman

We talked about going to a 'faddal' and called the large Omani hospitality trays 'faddal trays'. These words seemed to embrace the wonderfully warm hospitality we all enjoyed in our dealings with our Omani colleagues and in our journeys throughout that spectacular and wonderful land.

The practice of holding an annual luncheon seeks to continue this tradition in providing an opportunity for old friends to meet and new acquaintances to become friends. The annual luncheon has a strong role in strengthening the social glue that binds our two countries and peoples together. Just a quick glance at the photographs will show how much the luncheon contributes to the on-going work in this area. It's so important that different cultures, genders and age groups are able to meet and interact together so the formation of the New Generation Group (NGG) has been a wonderful addition to the Anglo-Omani Society and has brought fresh impetus to the luncheon. At the latest occasion in May 2014 our principal speaker was H.E. Dr Habib Al-Riyami, Secretary General of the Sultan Qaboos Centre for Islamic Culture who outlined the work of his Ministry, which of course includes the teaching of Arabic and related heritage studies. The response was given by Eleanor McClelland who





Our Society luncheon always concludes with halwa and dates bringing back memories of the dates and qahwa tradition in Oman.

We have not served qahwa in recent years but it could make a re-appearance if members wished

held us all in rapt attention as she talked of her summer vacation course in the Sultan's Arabic Studies centre at Manah, near Nizwa, where she and her fellow students immersed themselves in the Arabic language and culture. They all took away a great deal from the course – not just an improvement to their communication skills but a deep and abiding interest in the country and its people.

Our Society luncheon always concludes with halwa and dates bringing back memories of the dates and qahwa tradition in Oman. We have not served qahwa in recent years but it could make a re-appearance if members wished. In recent years to cater for the large numbers who want to attend, the event has been held in the Army and Navy Club and it is likely that it will be our venue for the next annual luncheon in May 2015. Tafaddal ma'ana. ■



AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP

ARTICLE BY LESTER HILLMAN

Royal Air Force of Oman
(RAFO) and Royal Air Force
exhibition launched at
the RAF Museum London

Within the 'Milestones of Flight' exhibition hall at Hendon a new year-long exhibition opened on Tuesday 15th July 2014. It charts 'A History of Friendship Between the RAF and RAFO' since 1959, and the Sultan of Muscat and Oman's Air Force, through to today's RAFO. The panels explore the close

relationship in military aviation, part of the bonds between the Sultanate of Oman and Britain which extend back more than two centuries.

Following a noon fly past and precision drill by the RAF Regiment, Commander RAFO Air Vice Marshal Matar Al Obaldani, assisted by Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Andy Pulford, cut the tape and launched the exhibition. The lunchtime event featured Omani coffee and delicacies with cultural displays in a tented souk, whilst above in the gallery Omani and British military musicians offered a musical selection.

The exhibition, delivered with the support of RAFO Archives Division, devotes significant attention to photographic heritage. RAFO Historical Archive and Document Section was established in 2006 and evaluation of historic material has led to the identification for preservation of more than two million pictures and two thousand films.

The exhibition is free to attend and runs to 14th July 2015. It has been curated by aviation historian Ross Mahoney. The Museum wants to hear stories from those who may have served in Oman. Contributions are warmly invited and may be sent to ross.mahoney@rafmuseum.org ■

The SAF Association was strongly involved in the preparation of this exhibition, and there will be more information about it in the next SAF Journal.

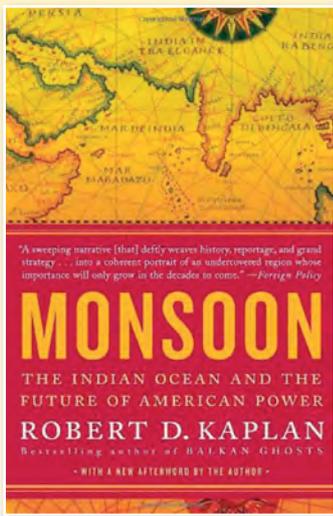


BOOK REVIEWS

‘MONSOON’

About the Author:

Robert D. Kaplan, is Chief Geopolitical Analyst for Stratfor, a private global intelligence firm, and a non-resident senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington. He has been a foreign correspondent for The Atlantic for nearly three decades. *Monsoon* explores the dynamic shift in global economic attention that is moving towards the Indian Ocean in the 21st Century. The focus of the book is not so much a comparative exposé but more an in depth look at the catalysts of change on the rims of the Indian Ocean.



The chapters are assembled in order of the countries that circumnavigate the Indian Ocean, commencing with Oman and moving on to Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and East Africa. The book contains an adequate description of various socio-economic-cultural backgrounds and the countries’ foreign policy positions in relation to China and the U.S. The book starts with an explanation of the monsoon winds and how they were intrinsic to those trading powers which were able to harness their strength for transportation, trade and migration.

The first chapter of the book focuses on Oman, and for me it remains the most significant in its analysis of the country’s geo-strategic potential if current thinking can be channelled into policy and action. Oman is currently developing a new state of the art deep water port in the city of Duqm, located to the south east of the country and considered to be perfectly positioned at the pivot of the Indian Ocean. This makes it an invaluable logistics hub and stopping point for shipping lanes looking East and West. More importantly, it exists in the Omani oasis of calm on the Eastern shores of Arabia far away from the ever greater tensions and antagonisms flashing across the region. This quite literally makes Duqm as potentially important as Singapore was in the 20th century, a world class ‘entrepot’.

The book goes on to explore the ongoing power struggles between China and India and both countries’ competition for control over the commercial sea lanes of maritime navigation in the Indian Ocean. Over 90% of world goods and consumables are moved by sea and the Indian Ocean has now become the new “Mega” economic highway of transportation. This then offers significant power to those who control the flow and is of significant national interest to those countries whose economies are export driven.

Monsoon presents some fascinating

statistics covering the progressive expansion of both countries’ navies alongside a comparative decline in US hegemony in the region. Kaplan goes on to expand the potential for India to strategically strengthen its grip on a horizontal axis while China focuses on vertical power in support of its vast energy appetite.

Finally, *Monsoon* explores China’s surge in soft power as it continues to invest in the development of deep water ports across the Indian Ocean, especially in countries that have little loyalty to either the United States or India such as Pakistan (Gwader) and Sri Lanka (Hambantota). Once established, these ports could play host to nuclear powered submarines and, of course, protect the commercial interests of the Chinese in these increasingly congested, contested and convoluted sea lanes from any interfering influences. Gwader is of particular interest as it can be developed into an alternative transportation route for Chinese trade flow through the western boundaries of Tibet, rather than navigating thousands of miles of risky, expensive sea lanes.

Monsoon is a well written strategic overview of the Indian Ocean’s significance in the 21st Century and is highly recommended to those who would like to learn more about Oman’s huge potential as the next great logistics hub in the region.

Reviewed by Talal al Zubair

‘STATEBUILDING AND COUNTERINSURGENCY IN OMAN’

Political, Military and Diplomatic Relations at the End of Empire (London: IB Tauris, 2014)

The ISBN is: 978-1848856349. Current Amazon price is: £55.80. RRP is: £59.50. Publisher: I.B. Tauris

In the depths of the Cold War and in the wake of Britain’s announcement of its intention to withdraw ‘East of Suez’ by the end of 1971, Britain was faced with the stark reality of a Marxist rebellion in the Dhofar province of Oman. “State Building and Counter Insurgency in Oman” offers an exploration of the attempts by officials and politicians in Whitehall and the Gulf to reconcile attempts to protect national interests and create an effective, centralised Omani administration and security bodies, whilst maintaining the image of strategic withdrawal and the sovereign independence of Oman. This book thus provides vital information and analysis for students and researchers of Middle East History and Politics, the decline and end of empire and the policymaking processes at the heart of an imperial and military withdrawal.

Reviewed by Dr. James Worrall

SALMA'S STORY; MEMORIES OF VILLAGE LIFE

Mohammed bin Saif Al-Rahbi 2013. Muscat Bait Al-Ghasham for Publishing and Translation ISBN 978-99969-55-36-5 Pp. 167

The cover of this book shows a date plantation that extends almost as far as the horizon. In the far distance, there is a scattering of houses, and then the line of a wadi. The horizon itself is marked by a range of barren, jagged hills. This is Suroor, a village near Bid Bid, beside the road to Ibra, and *Salma's Story* is an account of Mohammed Al-Rahbi's childhood and adolescence in Suroor.

In many ways, therefore, this book is highly unusual. To begin with, although it is billed as a biography – or autobiography – part of it is clearly fictional. *Salma's Story* itself (Pp. 122-158) is clearly based on Al-Rahbi's grandmother's life, and features three narrators – Salma herself, the father and the grandson. It is not a dramatic story. Nothing much happens, but the three characters go about their business, living in a village in the interior of Oman, somewhere around the time of His Majesty's accession to the throne.

So far as it is possible to judge, Mohammed Al-Rahbi was born about 1967. He was therefore old enough to be fascinated when, in 1973, the foreign workmen arrived in Suroor, and began the construction of the road into the Sharqiyyah. These were the first foreigners he had ever seen. They ate food out of tins, and from time to time they would give tins of food to some of the children, who found that the contents were perfectly edible.

Looking at Oman at the start of the 21st century, it is sometimes difficult to appreciate the speed with which the country has changed. In May 2014 I gave a workshop for the English teachers at the Khalid bin Waleed School in Bid Bid. The school has parking facilities for its, mainly Omani, staff; a playing field; a shaded central courtyard and a computer suite. When Mohammed Al-Rahbi attended the

same school, it was housed in tents and staffed entirely by Egyptians. Not until his final years did his class move into a permanent building.

To use the clichés so beloved by the Indian copy writers for Oman's English language press, *Salma's Story* could be seen as "a trip down memory lane", but Al-Rahbi is not blinded by nostalgia. He accepts that life before the Omani Renaissance, and for a few years after 1970, was hard. Life expectancy was short. Infant mortality was high. His own little sister died from a combination of measles and the brutal traditional medicine that his grandmother insisted on using as a "cure". Food was limited and the diet, albeit organic, was monotonous. Meat was a treat at the Eids.

Salma's Story ends with Mohammed Al-Rahbi settling into his student accommodation somewhere in the Capital Area. "For the first time in my life, it was now up to me to decide when to go to sleep and when to wake up and I alone was responsible for my own conduct; nobody was in a position to tell me what to do and how to behave" (Pp. 113-114). It is impossible to read these lines without feeling the sense of someone who has escaped from a claustrophobic relationship – the impositions of life in an extended family, or in an inward-looking community where nothing escapes notice and/or censure. Just as 1970 brought Oman relief from a series of petty regulations, so the new possibilities at the start of His Majesty's reign brought a new sense of freedom to at least one boy from Suroor.

Reviewer: Neil McBeath

LIFE-PATHS OF EDUCATED OMANI WOMEN

Fatma Al-Abri 2010. Muscat Ministry of Social Development Pp. 500

When this book first came into my hands, I was afraid that it might be a celebratory volume based on the achievements of a dozen or so high-profile Omani women, who would be introduced as evidence of how far the Sultanate has progressed since 1970.

The last part is true, but the book is not concerned with entrepreneurial women who have found a niche sector of the market, and now run businesses decorating cakes to order, or designing headscarves.

Fatma Al-Abri offers what is clearly a reprint of most of a Ph.D. thesis. This is a serious sociological study of the options that are open to educated (please note, *educated*) Omani women, and it is based on quantitative and qualitative data taken from two cohorts of female graduates from the Sultan Qaboos University – 20 women from each of the classes of 1995 and 2000. The life-paths she traces reflect the order in which these women finished school, graduated, married, had children, began work and, in some cases, divorced or were widowed. Within these life-paths there are sub-topics regarding the husbands' levels of education, the number of children the marriages produced, the use of contraception, and the inevitable tensions that arise when women work and simultaneously care for children especially in a fairly conservative society.

Al-Abri admits that, by taking her informants from a single tertiary institution, her data might not be entirely reliable, and that it would be foolish to generalise from her findings. She also admits that the two cohorts may offer a sample that is compressed into too short a time frame. Even so, her findings are remarkable. Firstly, the life-paths differ. She identifies six broad categories, two of which are particularly interesting.

The first of these consists of women who either married while they were still at secondary school, or immediately after graduation. Two such women appear in the 1995 cohort, and none in the 2000 cohort. This is probably a fair indication that virtually none of the current female undergraduates at SQU will be married, and this has huge demographic implications. Put simply, it suggests that a large number of women of child-bearing age are not part of Oman's continuing population growth.

Secondly, Al-Abri has proved that a growing number of Omani women are choosing to remain single. Having graduated and started work, they value their freedom and they are prepared to postpone marriage until such time as they are prepared to undertake another commitment. This is a remarkable change

in a single generation. Prior to 1970, girls would be married soon after puberty, and while the marriages were generally consanguineous (and usually to first cousins) the question remains whether such unions were ever more than arranged – if not forced. That has changed, and it has changed to the extent that Al-Abri actually suggests that it might now be time for the Omani Government to institute some form of legal, civil marriage in addition to the traditional religious ceremony. She might well be right. It is difficult to imagine how anyone could object to such a measure.

So far as employment opportunities are concerned, Al-Abri informs us (almost too often) that women continue to choose from a limited range of options. Teaching and medicine are preferred, partly because of the social status that comes with being a doctor, but also because both spheres remain gender specific. Female teachers teach girls in single-sex school, and female doctors treat female patients. Women also enter government service, but in this case the incentive is primarily financial. Civil service

jobs pay far better than the private sector, and they come with an attractive range of allowances and benefits – like maternity leave and pensions. If there is a downside to this, it lies in the fact that many women who enter school teaching only intend to work for 15 years and then retire. They have no real interest in the job, and that might adversely affect their pupils. Interestingly, this phenomenon was not observed in the women who were working in tertiary education.

Life-Paths of Educated Omani Women is therefore a groundbreaking work which raises almost as many questions as it answers. This is an exploration of an area of Omani life that previously relied on anecdotal and impressionistic evidence rather than on hard data. The book might have been slightly better edited – it sometimes repeats itself – and the general reader is unlikely to be enthralled by the chapter on Research Methodology (Pp. 175-216). As a reference text for education, gender studies and/or education, however, this book will be invaluable.

Reviewer: Neil McBeath

THE PRINCIPLES OF ARAB NAVIGATION

Anthony R. Constable and William Facey (eds.)

ISBN: 978-0-9571060-1-7

Hardback, jacket 160 pages; 258 x 200 mm
Colour throughout; 11 maps Appendices,
Notes, Bibliography, Index Publication:
February 2013. Price: £35.00

The book deals with the Navigational principles spelled out principally by the Omani poet/navigator Ahmed Ibn Mājid al-Najdī as translated by Gerald Tibbetts. The chapters aim to convey an understanding of Ibn Mājid's account of navigational methods and includes one chapter on the voyage of the Jewel of Muscat from Oman to Singapore in 2010.

AVAILABLE FROM:
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FROM YOUR EDITORS

Since the decision to replace The Society newsletters with an annual magazine was confirmed, it has taken about a year to go through the processes of planning, selecting a publisher, collecting content material and all the associated procedures resulting in what you are reading. Despite a few fraught moments, we made steady progress with the active, and very welcome support of Society members, board, and staff. And despite some doomsday predictions we received a continuing flow of quality articles and material from Society members and friends. Our thanks go to all who helped with the project.

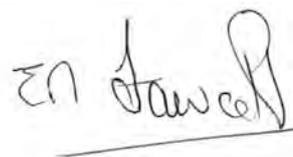
With a new venture and a short time-scale, there are a few gaps in what we hoped to include in this



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first edition, but these are already on a list for the next edition.

It is very gratifying that Society members and friends offered such good quality material for this first edition, and we would like to extend this into the future. We welcome your articles, and we will also welcome your letters to the editor, book reviews, in memoriam notices and suggestions at any time throughout the coming year. Copy material can be sent to our Manager in Sackville Street, and you can also contact us by email. We hope that you have enjoyed reading this magazine, and with your help we intend to produce future editions to the highest standards possible. ■



Neil Fawcett
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Oman Air wins Middle East's Leading Airline Business and Economy Class 2014.

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