

REVIEW 2018

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY





BY APPOINTMENT TO
HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
GOLDSMITHS & SILVERSMITHS
WILLIAM & SON
LONDON

WILLIAM & SON

LONDON

WILLIAMANDSON.COM



The Luxury Destination for Town and Country Living



COVER PHOTO:
RAF Red Arrows flying over the Arches of Oman
Photo Credit: Julian Glyn-Owen

6 CHAIRMAN’S OVERVIEW

9 AWARD OF ORDER TO COL. NIGEL KNOCKER

10 THE ARCHES OF OMAN

15 DUQM – WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

18 THE GROWING PROBLEM OF PLASTICS POLLUTING OUR OCEANS



20 OMAN’S SPECIAL SEAS: DIVING IN THE HALLANIYAT ISLANDS

25 VISIT TO OMAN BY THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL

29 OMAN’S WHALES, DOLPHINS AND TURTLES

34 MAJLIS AL JINN – ‘THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LARGE CAVE IN THE WORLD’

40 THE SOOTY FALCON: A FLAGSHIP SPECIES FOR BIRD CONSERVATION IN OMAN

44 ‘CORRIDORS OF POWER’ – AN ART EXHIBITION BY OMANI ARTIST EMAN ALI

48 DHOFAR – OMAN BOTANIC EXPEDITION 2018

53 MUSCAT TO SALALAH – CROSS COUNTRY CYCLING RECORD ATTEMPT

56 OMAN STATE COUNCIL DELEGATION MARCH 2018

58 OMAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

60 THE OMANI-BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

62 BP’S AL KHAZZAN PROJECT BUILDING OMAN’S FUTURE

65 MUSCAT IN SEVILLE

66 ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON 2017

69 THE SOCIETY’S GRANT SCHEME

70 AOS LECTURE PROGRAMME

72 ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME

75 GAP YEAR SELECTION PROCESS

76 GAP YEAR SCHEME REPORT



80 NEW GENERATION GROUP

91 YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SULTANATE

93 ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITIES

96 MUSCAT AIRPORT

99 AOS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME: MEET OUR ALUMNI!

102 RENAISSANCE DAY CELEBRATIONS “OMAN: LAND OF PEACE”

105 OMAN’S APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE

108 HEALTHCARE IN OMAN: 1970-2050

111 OMANI SOCIAL MEDIA, THE NEXT GENERATION

113 OBITUARY – THE HON. IVOR LUCAS, CMG

115 THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

117 BOOK REVIEWS



REVIEW 2018

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

Patron

HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said



President

HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai – The Omani Ambassador

Vice Presidents

Hussain bin Mohammed bin Ali

Sir Terence Clark KBE, CVO

Mr Richard Muir CMG

Mr Robert Alston CMG, QSO, DL

Col Nigel Knocker OBE, WO, WKhM

Board of Trustees

Chairman: Mr Stuart Laing

Vice Chairman: Brig John McKeown CBE

Vice Chairman OBBC: Mr Matthew Foster

Hon Treasurer: Mr Martyn Bishop FCA

Company Secretary: Mr Alan Milne FCIS

Mr Oliver Blake

Mrs Louise Hosking

Dr Elisabeth Kendall

Wg Cdr Ian Kendrick

Mr Richard Owens OBE

The Board of Trustees also has representatives of the Oman Embassy and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on a rotating basis.

Editors

Brig John McKeown CBE ferrybarn@btinternet.com

Ms Taylor Heyman taylorjrmheyman@gmail.com

Staff

Mr Ben Wright Manager

Ms Isabelle Habib NGG & Communications Officer

Ms Beth Richards Membership & Events Officer

Ms Kamilie Leon Receptionist

Society Address

34, Sackville Street, London W1S 3ED

+44 (0)20 7851 7439

www.angloomanisociety.com

Advertising

Christine Heslop

18 Queen's Road, Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 3AJ

Telephone: 01722 324822

E-mail: chrissieheslop@aol.com

Printed by

Brunton Business Publications

1 Salisbury Office Park, London Road, Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 3HP

Telephone: 01722 337038

www.brunton.co.uk

2018 REVIEW ONLINE

Visit the Anglo-Omani Society website and see 'The Review 2018' online using the latest page turning technology. Pass the link to this year's issue on to colleagues and friends.

www.angloomanisociety.com



PROTECTIVE NOTICE

Unless stated to the contrary, the copyright of all articles in this Review is the property of the Anglo-Omani Society. No part of this Review may be reproduced in any way whatsoever without the permission in writing of the Society.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge ownership of copyright material; the publishers will be glad to make suitable arrangements with any copyright owner it has not been possible to contact.

Views expressed in contributions from outside writers are their own, and do not necessarily reflect the Society's opinion or thought.

The legendary journey continues...

Operating since 1948, we are proud to have been part of Oman's banking history, uniquely positioned as a strong local bank with unmatched international connections. We share our global knowledge and expertise to better serve our customers in Oman.



Together we thrive

Issued by HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.G., P.O. Box 1727, PC 111, CPO-Seeb, Sultanate of Oman, OMM/CMP/180003
© Copyright, HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.G 2018 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, on any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.G.

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The Anglo-Omani Society
Annual Luncheon will be
held on **THURSDAY,**
11th OCTOBER at the
Royal Air Force Club

Advance booking necessary.

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES A
CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE COST OF
PUBLICATION OF THIS REVIEW FROM

ALIDADE LIMITED



GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN SOLUTIONS

Since we began in 1945, Charles Kendall has grown into a complete, end-to-end supply chain management group.



- Procurement
- Consulting
- Freight
- Packing
- Event Logistics

+44 (0)20 7589 1256

www.charleskendall.com

The Anglo-Omani Society in 2018

CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

VALEDICTORY REMARKS BY OUTGOING CHAIRMAN, ROBERT ALSTON, AT THE AGM ON 19 JULY



Our Society thrives. I can report to you an active and successful year since we met last July. Our membership is strong – 587 single and 254 joint members, 1,119 members signed up to the New Generation Group, and 31 Corporate members.

We have had a fascinating and varied lecture programme, including three speakers from Oman, with lectures ranging from Oman's role in the very earliest steps in the population of areas outside Africa by homo sapiens, to the issues facing the public and private sectors in Oman today.

We have pursued our aim of expanding the use of 34 Sackville Street as Beit Oman in London including a seminar with HE Sayyid Badr bin Hamoud and a visit by a Delegation from the State Council, as well as the London celebration by BP of the inauguration of the Khazzan gas field in Oman.

Sayyid Badr also spoke at our annual lunch, held for the first time at the RAF Club, together with Lord Astor of Hever, a member of the Society, who is the Defence Secretary's Representative to Oman as well as the Prime Minister's Trade Representative.

A Reception was held on 12 July in honour of members of the Oman British Business Council and the Oman British Friendship Association, gathered in London for their annual exchanges. We were privileged to welcome their Patrons, HRH The Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haithem. We have in the past twelve months brought together our Corporate membership and membership of the OBBC.

The New Generation Group has held its own meetings both in London and Muscat, and a highly successful visit to Oman took place in January by a delegation from the British public and private sectors on the theme of Energy and Technology: an efficient future. We are working towards common membership of the Society and the NGG and an integrated website.

We are continuing to develop and expand our links with the Omani Student groups in British Universities, working alongside the Cultural department of the Omani Embassy.

We also continue to expand our grants programme in support of activities in both Oman and the UK to nearly £180,000 annually. More details of this can be found in the Annual Report and Accounts.

This is my last report to you at the end of four years as your Chairman, a position which I will relinquish at the end of this meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my appreciation to many people who have helped to make it such a rewarding experience.

First to our Patron, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, without whose support we could not undertake the range of activities I have outlined. I take this opportunity to send respectful greetings to him from the Membership of the Society.

Next to our President, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, for his guidance, advice and support, together with that of his team at the Embassy, including Mr Taeab Al Alawi, the DHM, and Sheikh Saud Al Mashani, who have attended our Board meetings as his representatives, both of whom are shortly to leave the Embassy. We offer our best wishes to both.

Our Vice-Presidents continue to be a valuable source of wisdom and support to the Chairman, but I note with sadness the death this year of one of them, Ivor Lucas, a former ambassador in Muscat and a former Chairman of the Society. I was pleased to be able to represent the Society at his Memorial Service.

The Society could not achieve what it does without the voluntary contribution of the members of the Board, all of whom are responsible for specific areas of activity as well as part of our collective leadership. I am very grateful to them all, and very pleased that all have indicated their readiness to serve for a further year.



رمز الجودة

A SYMBOL OF QUALITY

Towell Auto Centre LLC
YOUR TRUSTED PARTNER

HONDA **BRIDGESTONE** **MAZDA**

ABB **JAC MOTORS** **GEELY**

GROHE **TOTAL** **IRWIN**

Twyford **GERBERIT** **COMAN**

@lgood **Devon** **gala**

Towell Drilling **ALABIAN TOWELL** **Gyking**

Agility **Goal** **MARS**

Dole **Maxmah**

Lesieur **Uncle Ben's** **PIPAR**

Towell Tools & Engineering Co. L.L.C.

Honeywell **Valley Products**

magmaweld **WERNICO**

DORMER **Mans**

IRWIN **IRWIN**

EROPER

Towell-TAKE

Wilhelmsen Ship Service

AL FAHER FURNISHING CO. L.L.C.

MAZOON **مزون**

BK

Genetco

Nestle

JOTUN **Jotun Paints Co L.L.C.**

W.J. TOWELL & CO. (L.L.C.)

Towell Group Bldg., Exhibition/Service Road, Ghala
P.O. Box 1040, Postal Code 112, Ruwi
Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24326001, Fax: 24326051
E-mail: general@wjtowell.com
Website: http://www.wjtowell.com

شركة دبليو. جي. تاوول (ش.م.م.)

بنية مجموعة تاوول شارع الغال - غالا
ص.ب. 1040 - روي - الرمز البريدي 112 - روي
سلطنة عمان هاتف: 24326001 - فاكس: 24326051
بريد إلكتروني: general@wjtowell.com

New Chairman – and Two New Vice-Presidents

Stuart Laing was unanimously elected Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society at the Trustees quarterly meeting which immediately followed this year's Annual General Meeting.

Stuart had a distinguished career in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office largely, but not exclusively, focused on the Middle East and especially on Oman, where he was Ambassador from 2002 to 2005. He also served in Cairo, Riyadh, Prague, Brussels and Brunei, and his final appointment in the FCO was as Ambassador to Kuwait. He has been Master of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge – his own college – for 10 years, and handed over that post this year.

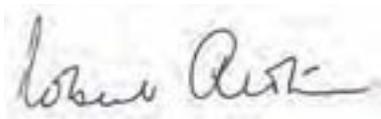
He and his predecessor as Chairman, Robert Alston, are the joint authors of *'Unshook Till the End of Time'*, a history of relations between Britain and Oman 1650-1970, which was published in 2012. Stuart is also the author of a new book on Tippu Tip, the controversial character of Omani and Zanzibari origins, which is reviewed elsewhere in this Review.

Two new Vice-Presidents were elected at the same trustees meeting. Robert Alston, immediate past-Chairman, and Nigel Knocker, former Vice-Chairman who also stood in as Chairman at a difficult time in the Society's affairs. They were proposed by John McKeown and unanimously elected as Vice-Presidents by the trustees – the highest honour which they can offer for distinguished service to the Society.

Finally the staff, among whom I include our interns, who have all contributed cheerfully and effectively, at times beyond the call of duty, to our activities this year, under the leadership of Ben Wright, whom we are all very happy to see apparently restored to almost normal physical activity after his recent accident.

I commend to the Board and the membership my successor Stuart Laing, like me a former Ambassador in Muscat but with a decade's youth advantage over me. I am confident that the Society will be in experienced and steady hands under him and that the end of his distinguished tenure as Master of Corpus Christi represents a positive opportunity for us.

Pat and I have every intention of remaining active Members so I see this as a change of seat rather than a farewell. My thanks to you all for your friendship, involvement and support. ■



Robert Alston



Sir Terence Clark thanking the Chairman.



HAMISH COWELL CMG BRITISH AMBASSADOR TO OMAN 2017



Married to Shadi Khan Kasmal Cowell
Children: Three daughters

- 2013-2016 Tunis, Her Majesty's Ambassador
- 2012-2013 FCO, Head, North Africa Department
- 2011-2012 FCO, Head, Libya Crisis Unit
- 2010-2011 FCO, Private Secretary, Minister of State
- 2005-2009 Paris, First Secretary, later Head, International Policy Team
- 2004-2005 Secondment to Quai d'Orsay
- 2001-2004 UK Rep Brussels, First Secretary, Middle East Issues
- 2000-2001 Middle East Research Associate, International Institute for Strategic Studies
- 2000 No. 10, Downing Street Press Office
- 1999-2000 FCO, Foreign Secretary's Speechwriter
- 1996-1999 Cairo, Head, Political, Economic & Development Sections
- 1994-1996 FCO, Desk Officer, Common Foreign & Security Policy Unit
- 1992-1994 Tehran, Deputy Head of Mission & First Secretary Political
- 1989-1992 Colombo, Second Secretary, Political and Press
- 1987-1988 FCO, Assistant Desk Officer, Iran/Iraq, Middle East Department

AWARD OF ORDER OF OMAN TO COLONEL NIGEL KNOCKER

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has conferred an Oman Military Order on Colonel Nigel Knocker in appreciation of his efforts during his duty as Chairman of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Association from 1994 until 2017.

The Order was handed over to him on a specially arranged visit to Muscat by Sayyid Badr bin Saud bin Harib Al Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs, when he received him in his office at Mu'askar Bait Al Falaj. The Order's handing over ceremony was attended by Lt. Gen Ahmed bin Harith Al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of SAF.

Nigel joined the British Army in 1949, was commissioned into The Life Guards and served with them for two years. He transferred to The Royal Sussex Regiment (later the Queen's Regiment). When he was adjutant in Gibraltar in 1957, Robert Alston joined the Regiment as a National Service Officer, and they have known each other ever since – a happy coincidence when they were respectively Vice-Chairman and Chairman of the Society.

Colonel Knocker's involvement in Oman began as a regimental commander (of the Desert Regiment) on Loan Service in 1971 at the height of the Dhofar War. He had a very successful tour and was responsible, among other things, for establishing the strategically important Sarfait position on the Yemen border, for which he was decorated. He was the Defence Attaché at the British Embassy from 1977 to 1980, and later served as a staff officer in the office of the Chief of the Omani Defence Staff (General Sir Timothy Creasey).

Nigel joined the Anglo-Omani Society when it was formed in 1976, was elected to the Board of the Society in 1996 and became Vice-Chairman in 2006. He stood in as Chairman in 2012 when the Chairman unexpectedly resigned. He has taken a very active part in AOS activities and sponsorships. ■



THE ARCHES OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY JULIAN GLYN-OWEN

This unique and spectacular feature in the gardens opposite The Royal Opera House is a 40ft high water and steel sculpture by the British artist Giles Rayner, created over a 26-month period by an Omani and British team. Here is its story.

The Arches of Oman stands on a teardrop-shaped piece of land between Al Kharijiyda Street and Sultan Quaboos highway. It was commissioned by Muscat Municipality at the end of 2015. His Excellency Mohsin Mohammed Al-Shaikh, Head of Muscat Municipality oversaw the project's progress throughout until the completion last October.

The sculpture was selected from concepts presented by Giles Rayner, whose work has been displayed and commissioned around the world. The piece was designed both to complement the music of The Royal Opera House and to celebrate the aesthetic forms seen in Omani architecture. Seventy jets of water from the structure create unique patterns, switching throughout the day. The structure weighs over 12 tonnes and sits in a pool, anchored by a massive concrete steel frame and structural foundation system, all the efforts of a combined Omani and British team of designers and engineers.

The project is unique, requiring the development of every aspect of the design from scratch. The entire project was led by Commission Director, Julian Glyn-Owen, visiting Oman no fewer than 16 times through the course of the project. It was his task to glue everyone and everything together and ensure that the end result was aesthetically perfect, fitting Giles's vision.

The water effects, designed to jet out of the hull of the sculpture, were meticulously planned and designed using a full-scale scaffolding rig built by the team working throughout the winter months in Gravesend. In mid 2016, the pumps, control and power systems were assembled and shipped with the massive stainless





THE ARCHES OF OMAN



View from Boom-lift of the Arches Sculpture 18th September 2017.

The sculpture twists throughout, but within carries the 70 water nozzles, hoses and fittings. This is all mounted into a bespoke pool, with water supplied by the hidden plant room.

steel sculpture foundation. Over a kilometre of piping was laid under the pool to the hidden subterranean plant room to provide pumped water to the sculpture's jets.

The sculpture's fabrication took a team of highly skilled engineers in the UK months to plan and form into its complex twisting shapes. The piece took form in three parts, the 'tusks' main upright elements, and the Apex, the tip of the sculpture. The sculpture is made from 10mm thick Duplex, a very high grade of stainless steel ordered specifically for the project from Outo Kumpu in Sheffield. The sculpture twists throughout, but within carries the 70 water nozzles, hoses and





Mr Julian Glyn-Owen, Commission Director, during the sculpture hose fitting, 13 September 2017.



Mr Giles Rayner, Artist, taking a well earned break mid-way through hose installation inside the sculpture, 13 September, 2017.



fittings. This is all mounted into a bespoke pool, with water supplied by the hidden plant room.

In Muscat, Omani companies provided installation services for the unique control systems, the pumps and piping and all crucial on-site works. The use of Omani Oil & Gas sector expertise was vital to the timely assembly and installation works throughout Ramadan in 2017. Work was planned and overseen by Chris Fidler, Managing Director, and Martin Frain, of Truck Oman North. When specialist parts or welding equipment were needed Universal Engineering Services, led by Neville Storey, stepped in to assist.

The intense heat and humidity during the assembly in Muscat in June and July took everyone close to their limits of working. The piece was delivered to Muscat using six 40ft long vehicles carrying over 50 tonnes of parts and equipment. Five different cranes up to 220 tonne capacity and two boom-lifts were used to assemble the jig and sculpture. The orientation lift and swing of the whole rig to the final pool location was achieved on the 22nd June 2017.

Throughout the operation large numbers of Omanis and ex-pat British residents visited the site in the cooler evenings to learn about the project and chat with the team. This was a most sociable time for everyone and often the most pleasurable, sharing reflections and then thoughts on the next day's work.



Eng. Kadhem Al-Lawati, Muscat Municipality with colleagues exiting the plant room with Mr Julian Glyn-Owen.



Mr Sudheesh Karanat, Muscat United Development LLC and colleagues from GDS LLC overseeing the installation of the cover plate beneath the sculpture.

Throughout the operation large numbers of Omanis and ex-pat British residents visited the site in the cooler evenings to learn about the project and chat with the team. This was a most sociable time for everyone and often the most pleasurable.



L-R: Mr Julian Glyn-Owen sharing a laugh with Director General Eng. Nasser Al-Hinai, Eng. Kadhem Al-Lawati, Muscat Municipality and a colleague.

Daily liaison and progress was shared between Julian Glyn-Owen and Engineer Kadhem Al-Lawati of the Municipality, thus fostering a close and positive working relationship between the artist's team and the Municipality.

With the sculpture firmly bolted down in position, the Municipality then landscaped the grounds, tiled the pool and prepared the top-soils for planting. In September Giles and Julian returned to fit out the interior of the sculpture with another kilometre of heavy high pressure hydraulic hoses, each hose to supply one individual water jet.

The final days of the project were busy with converging tasks as the pool was completed, a 13m steel plinth was placed over the deep recess beneath the sculpture, filters and lights were fitted. Water began to arrive in tankers and pumps began their

job in earnest. Water flowed through the sculpture for the first time in late September to the joy of Giles, Julian and the team. Fine tuning of the water jet trajectory was a welcome and cooling task for everyone as the pool steadily filled. Lights brought their own magic to the scene and programmed sequences were run for longer and longer periods of time.

The Red Arrows performed a display over Muscat at the end of the hugely ambitious and challenging project. The completed sculpture was visited by His Excellency and signed off on 5 October 2017. It ran a particular sequence of lights for National Day on 18 November. In 2018 the sculpture is being run by the artist's team to ensure all is well and no snagging arises before hand over in October 2018 to the Municipality.



Giles summed up his thoughts, *"I am intensely proud of what we have achieved with the Omani Government's support, with local companies and with our industrial heritage in the United Kingdom. Back in the UK I want us to keep our ability to create unique, bespoke creations, not just in the art world. Our versatility and imagination as a nation is significant; we must not squander it."*

"The opportunity offered to create this massive working sculpture in Muscat is a tribute to those here who are bold enough to step forward and commission such projects. I wish this design to be recognised not just as my vision, but also the creation of those vital people in the team both Omani and British. And I hope that it is celebrated as everyone's sculpture, most especially by the people of Muscat." ■



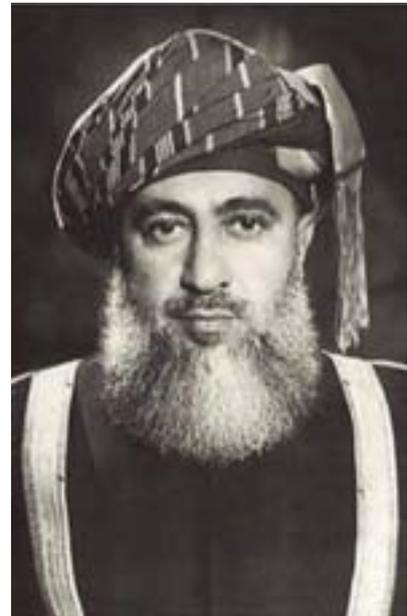
DUQM – WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

The 1954 expedition and landing at Duqm by The Iraq Petroleum Company and the Muscat and Oman Field Force was a key moment in the development of modern Oman, described here by Robert Alston.

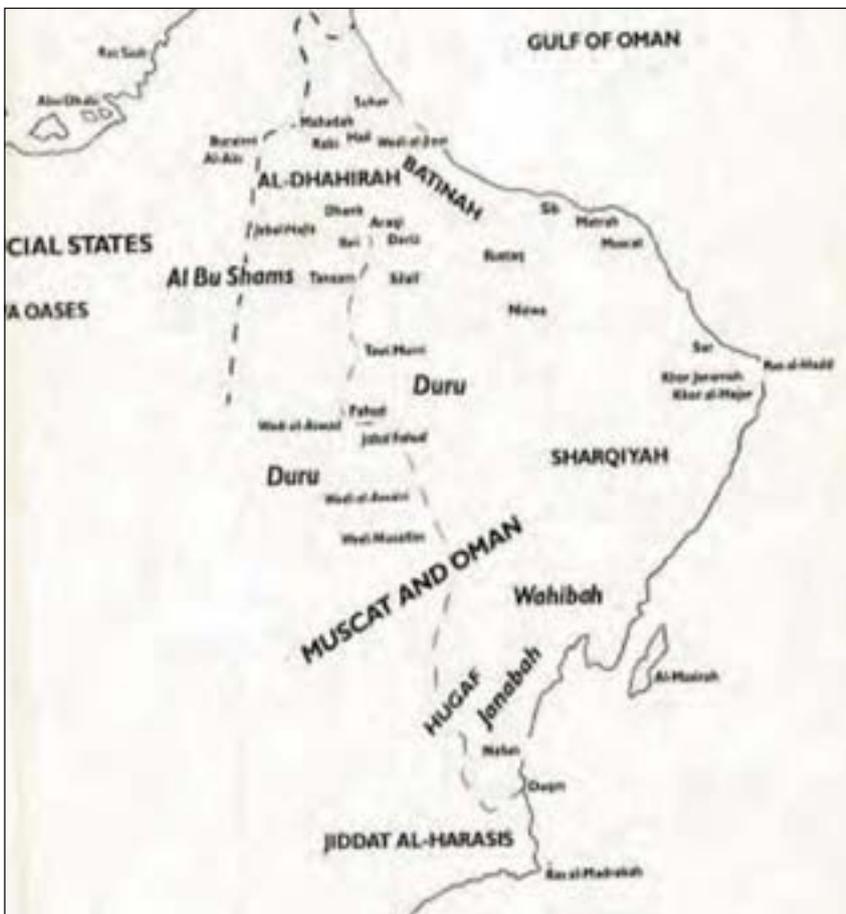
Until the 21st century Duqm was a small and inaccessible fishing village on Oman’s southern coast well away from the axes of the country’s politics. But it had once before been the focal point of a venture which proved central to both the political and economic evolution of Oman.

This was the first systematic oil exploration expedition undertaken by the Iraq Petroleum Company, from which leads the whole history of the oil and gas industries of Oman today. It also proved to be the first step in the expansion of control of the whole of modern Oman by Sultan Said bin Teimur.

In 1950 the country seemed frozen in the accommodation reached at Seeb in 1921 between the Muscat based Sultanate and the Nizwa based Imamate, which effectively divided Oman in two. Economic change and development was non-existent.



Sultan Said bin Teimur



The prospect of political change was remote so long as Imam Muhammad Al-Khalili was alive. There was no formal boundary between Sultanate and Imamate. The lives of most Omanis were determined by the allegiance of tribal leaders, to accept the justice of and pay taxes to one or the other. Large swathes of the south and east of the country were part of neither.

Sultan Said had shrewdly bolstered his financial position in the 1930s by concluding a concession agreement with IPC. Nothing much happened for the next 25 years. The search for oil was closely linked to the issue of the political allegiance of key tribes. Sultan Said was thinking about how he might extend the area under his control from the 1940s.

It was evident that key tribal leaders would not be detached from the Imamate so long as Imam Muhammad lived. His focus was on what would happen when the Imam died. He thought he had an understanding with key tribal leaders that the office (revived in 1911 after a century without one) would remain unfilled. Till then oil

exploration save in areas where his writ clearly ran would have to wait.

MILITARY SUPPORT

Sultan Said regarded the British Government as responsible for the security of his regime. For cold war and oil security reasons the British government agreed, but declined to provide direct British assistance to build up his forces to extend his control. They suggested that IPC should bear the costs of any added military expenditure to support oil exploration. In the meantime IPC were becoming increasingly impatient to derive some benefit from their 1937 concession.

Following a 1948 sighting from the air, they were excited about the prospects of finding oil at Fahud, located in the desert to the south of Imamate controlled territory. Fahud was in an area under the exclusive control of the Duru, a Bedouin tribe covering a swathe of sparsely populated desert territory between the Jebel Akhdar mountains and the Empty Quarter, but with key interests in the area of Ibri, a town on the edge of the Imamate heartland. They gave allegiance to neither Sultan nor Imam.

In the early 1950s IPC decided that the only way they would be able to access Fahud without entering Imamate territory was by landing on the southern coast of Oman and making an overland crossing of areas hitherto unvisited by any European or any motor vehicle. Putting the exploration team together was costly but straightforward.

A force of 400 men, called the Muscat and Oman Field Force (MOFF) was created and trained from scratch under British command. The Sultan was persuaded that plans should be made for the expedition to land at Duqm, the only place with a beach suitable to put men and equipment ashore, early in 1954. In his mind though, the political conditions to justify moving further inland did not yet exist. For IPC, however, access to Fahud was the whole point of the venture.

The landing took place on 16 February 1954. Three wartime landing craft hired by IPC put ashore their own teams and the initial component of MOFF. The operation went smoothly. The local fishing community reacted with studied indifference. The Imam protested mildly but took no other action. Those on the ground experienced a frustrating and

uncomfortable summer based on Duqm, surveying in what they knew to be unpromising territory and preparing for the hoped for move inland but with no idea when or even whether it would happen. The Sultan was reluctant to accept that the prospects in the coastal area were so unpromising, had no contact with the Duru, and was fearful of conflict with the Imam.

THE IMAMATE

What was to break the logjam was the news, in May 1954, of the death of Imam Muhammad followed swiftly by news that any hopes the Sultan had that the Imamate would be allowed to lapse were not to be realised. Key tribal leaders supported the swift election of a new Imam, Ghalib Al Hinai. Moreover it soon became clear that the tacit understanding between the Sultan and the former Imam not to test the relationship which had existed since 1921 no longer held.

The new Imamate's aim was autonomous statehood and control of any oil resources in its territory. The British Government's fear was that the Imamate would look for Saudi support and the

Fahud from the air.



What was to break the logjam was the news, in May 1954, of the death of Imam Muhammad followed swiftly by news that any hopes the Sultan had that the Imamate would be allowed to lapse were not to be realised.

MOFF soldiers on LST at Duqm.



involvement of an American oil company.

It was to be eighteen months, in December 1955, before Sultan Said felt himself in a position to challenge the Imamate directly. What became immediately critical was the issue of control of Ibri. The Duru were rightly suspicious of the aims of the new Imamate. In August 1954 an Imamate force approached Ibri which they occupied in October with some casualties.

Senior Duru Sheikhs visited Muscat in August. They agreed to declare their allegiance to the Sultan and to allow the IPC expedition into their tribal territory. In return they would look for support if necessary against the Imam. Some flew to Duqm to join the expedition. The Sultan agreed that the expedition should go to Fahud, but insisted that it must avoid any risk of direct conflict with the Imamate.

THE MOVE TO FAHUD

The first wave of the expedition left Duqm on 19 October for the 200 mile journey to Fahud. Using prepositioned refuels of petrol they crossed previously unexplored, waterless, and apparently uninhabited gravel and sand plain to get to Duru territory. The IPC team lost no time in making an initial reconnaissance to Fahud. Meanwhile the Duru sheikhs were pressing to move on at once to Tanam and Ibri, threatening to change sides if it did not. This risked the expedition breaching the Sultan’s instructions by clashing with Imamate forces .

To get round this at Tanam the IPC Land Rovers, not MOFF vehicles, alone

entered the village. In fact Tanam had not been attacked or occupied by the Imam’s force. Ibri was more complicated. MOFF waited visibly outside the town whilst the Sultan’s representative negotiated its surrender with the Imam’s representative.

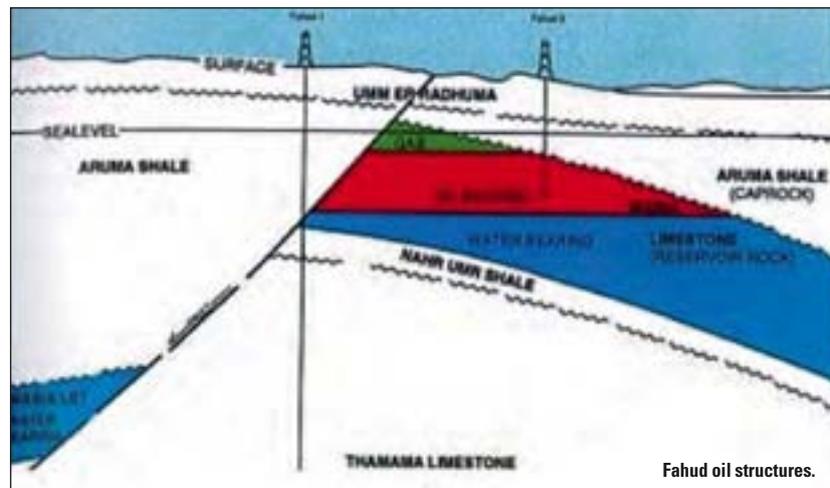
It was judged imperative to ensure over the next few days that other towns and villages in the area would declare for the Sultan and raise his (then red) flag to ensure that the Imam had no support on which to base any effort to recapture Ibri.

Sultan Said in Salalah was in the meantime furious that things had run so far ahead of his instructions. Caution and an unwillingness to act until everything was in place and adequately resourced was characteristic of him. He was not yet ready to risk direct conflict with the Imamate and he continued for some months to refuse advice to use the Ibri success to extend the areas which had declared for him.

JOURNEY ACROSS THE DESERT

However after a year’s preparation he made his move in December 1955. MOFF set off from Fahud, which had become their base, via Ibri and Firq for Nizwa, which swiftly capitulated. This was the context in which Sultan Said made his famous journey across the desert from Salalah to Nizwa by truck, accompanied by James (now Jan) Morris, as correspondent of The Times.

IPC swiftly decided to drill at Fahud and the first well was sunk in early 1956. It proved to be dry and was abandoned, though it subsequently proved to have missed significant oil reserves by only a few metres. But IPC moved to other areas and the serious development of Oman’s resources was soon under way. Supplies and equipment were increasingly brought in by air and then from the north coast and the Duqm beach head was abandoned by the beginning of 1957.



The occupation of Nizwa was far from the end of the story and it was 1959 before the Sultan could definitively conclude that he was in control of the whole territory of modern Oman. But it is hard to argue with the verdict that the events of October-November 1954 were a real turning point.

From them flowed both the production of oil which permitted the development of Oman as a modern economy and state, and the victory of the Sultan’s vision of a united Oman over the dream of Imamate leaders of a separate state in interior Oman, favourably regarded by Saudi Arabia and Egypt and with control of Oman’s oil prospects. It is in this sense that it was at Duqm where it all began.

THE GROWING PROBLEM OF PLASTICS POLLUTING OUR OCEANS

ARTICLE BY TAYLOR HEYMAN

The most significant global trend in recent years has seen Governments, brand owners and consumers around the world seeking a more sustainable environment by reducing the use of single use plastics.

Media reports, television programmes, sound bites from politicians and ongoing research has highlighted the problem of plastic waste littering our oceans. While manufacturing and retailing businesses across the globe strive to reduce or eliminate single use plastics, we consumers and small businesses must not forget the impact that we can have on single use plastic waste by being more aware of our purchasing decisions.

The eagle-eyed among our membership may have noticed that this year's edition of the Review arrived in a 100 per cent recyclable paper envelope, rather than a single use plastic wrapping. This is just one of many small ways that the Society is supporting the call for everyone to do their bit to reduce the impact of plastic on the natural world.

Most recently we had the opportunity to talk with marine conservation ecologist, Robert Baldwin, about the impact plastic is having on Oman's turtle population. Baldwin has spent 30 years working in Oman, 16 of which have been spent at consultancy Five Oceans Environmental Services LLC, which he set up with several partners – notably Dawood al Wahaibi, also a marine specialist.

Oman is ideally located to attract turtles, both on sea and on land. It is at the heart of the Northwestern Indian Ocean (NWIO) and is a unique part of the world from the perspective of marine life. "The NWIO is an ocean cul-de-sac and is part of the only large ocean basin not connected to polar waters," says Baldwin. "Consequently, species here have become isolated and we see high levels of endemism."

GROWING PROBLEM OF PLASTICS POLLUTING OUR OCEANS



The Editors of the Review hope you agree that eliminating the single use plastic wrapper from this edition is one small but positive step in joining with so many others to make our environment sustainable for future generations.

The area also provides nutrient-rich waters for its occupants. This is due to it being one of a very few major upwelling regions of the oceans, in which sustained, seasonal upwelling of cold water brings deep, nutrient rich waters to the surface of the sea, resulting in an annual explosion of life. On land, sandy beaches from the soft, deep sand favoured by green turtles at Ras al Hadd, to the pocket beaches of protected offshore islands such as at the Daymaniyat islands favoured by hawksbill turtles, to the rugged, isolated beaches of Masirah Island, the home of the second largest population of loggerhead turtles in the world provide ideal nesting places.

It is clear that one of the dangers to turtles in Oman (and many marine species across the globe) is plastic waste that is accumulating in our oceans in vast unsightly quantities that is increasing every year.

“Turtles may be more vulnerable than most species to plastics because they travel vast distances and are subject to potentially greater exposure to plastic,” explained Baldwin. “Turtles also tend to feed almost exclusively in the top 200m of

the ocean where plastics are probably most prevalent. They ingest plastics during apparently ‘indiscriminate’ foraging on what appears to them to be food and cannot regurgitate mistaken items once swallowed, so plastic materials must pass through the gut once ingested. Ingestion of soft or hard plastic may cause intestinal blockage or internal injury.”

As well as the risk of ingesting plastic,

turtles can become caught in plastic netting and other debris, leading to injury, drag or drowning. “We do not have figures on the amount of plastics in the marine environment of Oman, but I don’t think any part of the world is immune from this problem,” said Baldwin. “Go to almost any beach in Oman and you will find plastic that has been washed ashore or discarded as unsightly litter.”

The Editors of the Review hope you agree that eliminating the single use plastic wrapper from this edition is one small but positive step in joining with so many others to make our environment sustainable for future generations. After all, there’s only one planet Earth – and we need to protect it. ■



OMAN'S SPECIAL SEAS: DIVING IN THE HALLANIYAT ISLANDS

ARTICLE BY PAUL FLANDINETTE

An unspoiled wilderness, the Hallaniyat Islands' remote location means their pristine waters are largely undiscovered and offer divers the opportunity to encounter large schools of fish and rare species.



Dragon moray eel *Enchelycore pardalis*, one of the most beautiful of morays.

There is a certain magic about Oman. We all feel it, whether as visitors or by those of us who have been fortunate to have lived here for any length of time.

Its epic expanses of mountains and deep valleys, deserts, long stretches of unspoiled golden beaches and over five thousand years of history entice us to explore and learn more about this amazing country. Then there are the Omani people for whom a friendly welcome and hospitality is part of their DNA. The Sultanate is easy to fall in love with.

My first experience of Oman was when I was commissioned to make a film for the Royal Air Force of Oman in 2009. A number of business trips followed before my wife, Gill, and I took the opportunity to move from West Sussex to Muscat in December 2013.

I am a filmmaker by profession but my true passion is for the underwater world. I've been diving for more years than I care to remember and have visited many of the

OMAN'S SPECIAL SEAS: DIVING IN THE HALLANIYAT ISLANDS



Oman Anemonefish, *amphiprion omanensis*
found only in the Arabian Sea.



Divers returning to the boat.

publication. It is rare to discover a project that has never been undertaken before so, never shy of a challenge, I began to develop the concept. I've called it 'Hidden Jewels of Oman'. It will be a large format photographic book and I believe has the potential to be one of the most beautiful and surprising books on Oman's natural world. It is due to be published in early 2019.

I have been photographing this rather undocumented underwater world for over five years and have made hundreds of dives in all of Oman's main diving locations – the Musandam peninsula, the Daymaniyat islands and other capital area dive spots, Masirah Island, Mirbat and Salalah. I had been to the Hallaniyat Islands before, in 2014, but had the worst underwater visibility there for three years. I had been itching to return ever since.

world's top dive locations so it did not take many dives for me to realise that Oman's magic exists not just topside but also below the waves.

I was also surprised to learn that there was no photographic book dedicated to Oman's underwater world. All top diving destinations seem to have at least one

Late last year I was fortunate to secure a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society to help cover the costs of two diving expeditions to the Hallaniyat Islands – a small archipelago of five islands some forty kilometres east of Hasik. Just two vessels, the *Saman Explorer* and the *Oman Aggressor*, are licensed for these trips. They each can take up to 22 passengers for five days of diving. Given their remoteness, 'live aboard' diving is the only effective way to cover the Hallaniyat Islands.

The first of my trips was in January on board the *Saman Explorer* and the second was in March. We had fine weather for both trips but the water temperature in January, at around 24°C, was still a bit chilly from the effects of the Khareef. The water temperature in March was a much more comfortable 26°C.

Both vessels are very well equipped and able to meet the needs of the most demanding of divers and photographers. Their friendly and helpful crews provided a very high standard of service for guests who came from eight different countries. Nationality never seems to matter because, when strangers come together to dive, we invariably find ourselves instantly connected to each other by our love of the underwater world.

Four dives a day was on offer except for the first and last days of the trips when we had some long transits to make. Over the two voyages I did 33 dives and accumulated nearly 30 hours underwater.

For the January trip a change of boat schedule meant that my diving buddy was

OMAN'S SPECIAL SEAS: DIVING IN THE HALLANIYAT ISLANDS



Asaad surrounded by a large school of Golden sweepers *Parapriacanthus ransonetti*.

no longer available. Fortunately, for the second trip, my good friend Asaad Al Hasni, a professional Omani diver, was able to join me. Acting as my 'spotter' his experienced eyes saw subject matter that would have been easy to miss especially if I was preoccupied with another subject. Having Asaad as my buddy also meant that I could take two camera systems on dives (one set up for macro and the other for wide-angle) which made a huge difference to the productivity of this trip.

Oman's seas have some of the richest, most bio-diverse marine life in the world. Nearly 1200 fish species have been recorded here and new species are still being discovered – I have taken photos of two fish and one sea urchin species that are new to science. Twenty-two species of whales and dolphins either reside here or migrate through Oman's seas. Oman's beaches meanwhile provide nesting grounds for four of the world's seven

species of turtles – all of which are classed as endangered or vulnerable.

Oman offers some really world class diving. The sheer variety of marine life here is breathtaking, from the 'mega fauna' of Arabian humpback whales, whalesharks and oceanic manta rays to exciting encounters with Zebra sharks and moray eels. Then there's the 'macro world' that includes crustaceans and nudibranchs. The coral reefs of Musandam and the Daymaniyat Islands in particular are extensive and generally in healthy condition.

Probably the most iconic of all of Oman's marine species is the Arabian humpback whale. They are a unique and endangered community of around 80 individuals. Unlike other humpbacks that must migrate to feed or breed, Oman's humpbacks are permanent residents thanks to the warm water and abundance of food.

Each summer, between May and September, Oman's Dhofar region

experiences the effects of the Khareef, or southwest monsoon, one of the world's most powerful weather systems. During this time more rain falls on Dhofar than the rest of Arabia combined in a year. It transforms the arid hills and valleys into a lush wonderland of flower-filled meadows and waterfalls making it a time of plenty for Dhofar's flora and fauna.

A little told story, however, is the enormous impact the Khareef has on Dhofar's underwater world. The monsoon winds drive strong surface ocean currents that induce powerful upwellings that draw up vast volumes of Phytoplankton from the deep which, in turn, sustain a diverse food chain. The water temperature drops from an average of 28°C to as low as 13°C. Life for the tropical marine species gets harder during this time as they have to contend with the colder water. Lower temperatures stimulate the rapid growth of temperate seaweeds. This occurrence, when

OMAN'S SPECIAL SEAS: DIVING IN THE HALLANIYAT ISLANDS

temperate and tropical species live side by side for a few months, is unique and doesn't happen anywhere else in the world on this scale.

The underwater world of the Hallaniyat Islands remains largely unexplored and offers the possibility of some amazing encounters with marine life. On two occasions I saw Arabian humpbacks from the upper decks but sadly we never got close enough to snorkel with them.

The underwater terrain is quite different from Musandam or the Capital area. Large rocks dominate the Hallaniyats' underwater environment and at first glance there do not seem to be many corals here. However, there are more hard and soft coral species here than in the Capital area but because of the sedimentary nature of the sea bed (corals prefer other corals or rock as a substrate to grow on) and large fluctuations in water temperature, large coral colonies don't develop.

So, while there are no expanses of coral reefs there were large schools of fish such as Trevally, Jacks and Snappers and enormous schools of Golden sweepers that inhabit the rock overhangs and caves. Octopus and large rays were regularly sighted and we were even treated to a close encounter with a sleeping Nurse shark. Of



Nurse shark *Ginglymostoma cirratum*, resting under a crevice. Nurse sharks are mostly nocturnal.

all moray eels the Dragon moray is, for me, one of the most beautiful. Despite their open mouths filled with needle-sharp teeth, they are quite approachable but are often tucked away in crevices so getting a good composition isn't always easy.

The Hallaniyat Islands have a few historical surprises up their sleeves too. It is here that *'The City of Winchester'* became the first British vessel to be sunk (scuttled actually) by the Germans in World War One and the shipwreck of Vasco da Gama's *'Esmeralda'* that was discovered in 1998.

I didn't get to see or photograph everything on my species list but I came away with lots of new images that will help to show the diversity of Oman's seas.

The waters of the Hallaniyat Islands are a true wilderness and offer a rare kind of 'frontier diving' where their remoteness means we're not sharing dive spots with dozens of other divers as is the case in many other top dive locations.

It is a precious and pristine environment brimming with life and, I'm sure, has many secrets yet to be revealed. ■

Semicircle angelfish *Pomacanthus semirculatus* also known as the Koran angelfish.



The Hallaniyat Islands have a few historical surprises up their sleeves too. It is here that 'The City of Winchester' became the first British vessel to be sunk (scuttled actually) by the Germans in World War One and the shipwreck of Vasco da Gama's 'Esmeralda' that was discovered in 1998.



Yellow boxfish *Ostracion cubicus* so called because of its juvenile stage of yellow with black spots.

Paul Flandinette is an award-winning filmmaker, writer and underwater photographer. His underwater photography has received a number of recognitions including as a finalist in the prestigious Natural History Museum Wildlife Photographer of the Year exhibition and an image shown at the Smithsonian Museum's special exhibition 'Planet Ocean' in Washington DC. He is on the panel of underwater photography experts for Inon UK, a leading underwater photography training organisation, and has been a regular speaker on underwater photography at a number of events including the London Eco Film Festival.

Hidden Jewels of Oman. This large format photographic book, approximately 220 pages with 250 high quality images, is due to be published in early 2019 by Gilgamesh Publishing of London.



VISIT TO OMAN BY THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL

ARTICLE BY JAMIE BOWDEN



Jamie Bowden was Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman 2011-2014, and then Deputy Private Secretary to The Prince of Wales for three years. He was appointed this summer as Ambassador to Chile. He gave a fascinating talk in our regular series at 34 Sackville Street on the Royal visit, and in his article shows how the visit highlights the width and depth of Anglo-Omani relations generally.

I consider myself extraordinarily lucky to have had the unique experience of visiting a country as the Deputy Private Secretary to Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and Duchess of Cornwall in which I had formerly been the British Ambassador. Furthermore, their previous visit had been during my tenure in Muscat. I have therefore experienced a Royal Visit from two surprisingly different perspectives.

Anyone who has worked in the Gulf may appreciate the value that the Royal Family bring to our relationships in the region. Unlike Ministers and diplomats, members of the Royal Family are in their roles for life. This means they can establish long standing relationships with ruling families and, in the case of the Prince of Wales at least, develop a profound understanding of the region in part based upon decades' worth of personal conversations.

The Prince's credibility is further enhanced by his interest in Islam. In 2014 I still heard people in Oman referring to his 1993 Oxford speech on relations between Islam and the West as one of the most thoughtful commentaries on the issue in recent history.

The personal relationships between the British Royal Family and His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said go back many decades and are strikingly warm. His Majesty and Her Majesty the Queen are especially close friends. It is partly for this reason that TRHs so enjoy their visits to Oman but like everyone else they are captivated by the charm and hospitality of the people, the uniqueness of the culture and the splendour of the scenery!

The 2016 visit to Oman was the Prince's fifth to the Sultanate, the Duchess's second. Of course, the Prince's engagement with Oman is not confined to visits. Members of this Society will remember his attendance in February 2016 at its 40th Anniversary celebration. HRH's Prince's Trust has undertaken projects in the Sultanate in collaboration with Dr Ali As Suneidi, The Minister of Commerce and

In the magnificent avenue in front of the Qasr al 'Alam they saw traditional Omani dancing and listened to traditional Omani music.

Industry and the Public Authority for Small and Medium Enterprise Development (now Riyada) and young Omanis have participated in the international leadership programmes of HRH's Mosaic charity.

Official visits by members of the Royal Family are selected and paid for by the Government. Therefore, a clear set of objectives for the visits is always agreed in advance. I firmly believe, though, that the value to the UK is much greater than the achievement of a set of laid-down goals. The surge of goodwill generated by the visits yields enormous benefits to our diplomatic, security, environmental,

cultural and commercial interests. The best visits of all were those when their hosts felt that they had also benefitted. I think that this was always the case in the Gulf.

The official objectives of the visit were designed to coincide with the priorities of His Majesty: religious tolerance, supporting the role of women in leadership, youth opportunity, military cooperation with the UK, the preservation of Oman's cultural heritage, wildlife conservation and literacy.

The highlight of the visit was unquestionably the dinner that His Majesty graciously gave for TRHs. This provided a wonderful opportunity for a long discussion about Oman and the relationship. HRH was absolutely delighted to find His Majesty so well after his illness.

After being met at the airport by HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tarek Al Said their programme began with plenty of colour and action. In the magnificent avenue in front of the Qasr al 'Alam they saw traditional Omani dancing and listened to traditional Omani music. The Prince then walked to the magnificent National Museum.





The museum has a number of connections with the UK. It contains items on loan from the Science and Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum produced five replicas of cuneiform tablets connected with the Magan civilisation and the Tate Gallery and the British and Victoria and Albert Museums all have training and capacity building agreements with the National Museum.

Furthermore Sir Nicholas Serota is a member of the Board and BP Oman is an official sponsor of the Museum's Learning Centre. Regrettably, time did not allow HRH to stay in the Museum as long as he would have wished but he was able to see some of its most significant exhibits: three ancient tombstones on long-term loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum; the sixteenth-century niche of al-Uweyna Mosque with the most detailed geometrical decorations; artefacts illustrating Oman's history of religious co-existence (including Zoroastrian and Jewish artefacts); and the wooden gate of ash-Shibak Fort, which features Islamic design motifs as well as elements from the British Royal Coat of Arms.

The Museum had also kindly laid on live

demonstrations of traditional handicraft-making from the different provinces of Oman, more Omani music, poetry and calligraphy in the Intangible Heritage Gallery and a reading of classical Omani poetry. Finally, he saw two museum conservators at work.

While the Prince was in the Museum, Her Royal Highness visited Oman Cancer Association's Dar Al Hanan Hostel. This wonderful institution provides accommodation and support in Muscat for the families of children being treated for cancer. Many live miles from the capital. The hostel also serves families from other countries, such as Yemen.

Her Royal Highness also met Omani female entrepreneurs and women in business at an event to showcase their success in becoming role models to other woman in Oman and to highlight their contributions to the nation.

Their Royal Highnesses together attended an Anglican service at Bait Al Noor Church to mark the 125th anniversary of the final visit to the Sultanate of Oman by the First Bishop of Lahore, Thomas Valpy French. He was the first Anglican missionary to visit Oman and

died in Muscat 1891. At the church The Prince visited the graves of British servicemen who died in the Jebel Akhdar campaign and was given a brief history of the fighting by Colonel Ian Buttenshaw.

The Prince is recognised around the world as a leading advocate of Heritage-Led Regeneration. This is the concept of using a site with historical or cultural significance as a focal point for projects to revive local economies and create employment while conserving the site itself. He was delighted to be able to visit such a programme while he was in Oman. Misfat Al Abriyeen is a mountain village of the Al 'Abri tribe near Al Hamra.

The village, which is the focus of the regeneration programme, is over 200 years old, although there have been much earlier settlements on the site. It is a traditional Omani mountain village with falaj (irrigation channels), agricultural terraces and mud houses. Like many old villages, it had been largely (and understandably) abandoned for new and more comfortable houses nearby.

The Ministry of Tourism is coordinating a programme to promote the Old Village as an attractive but sustainable tourist destination. One of the key people leading

THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES VISIT TO OMAN

the work is Dr Haitham Al'Abri, an Honorary Research Associate at Liverpool University's ArCHIAM (The Architecture and Cultural Heritage of India, Arabia and the Maghreb) who has a PhD in Omani architecture from Nottingham Trent University and was also a Research Assistant at the Manchester School of Architecture.

In keeping with ArCHIAM's philosophy a strong emphasis is placed on the cooperation of local stakeholders and understanding the sensitivities and requirements of the local inhabitants. The programme is underpinned by sustainable approaches to energy generation (solar, hydro, biogas), the reuse of agricultural waste and the revival of weaving and culinary traditions.

Having visited such a wonderful example of the conservation of Oman's human heritage HRH went on to see an example of Oman's conservation of its natural heritage, again with the local community playing a key role.

Oman has an integrated national system of protected areas which preserve wildlife in its natural habitat whilst encouraging eco-tourism and providing employment for locals. Ras Al Shajar Sanctuary is one of the

longest-established of these areas, dating from 1985. It comes under the umbrella of the Office for Conservation of the Environment at the Diwan of the Royal Court. It is significant for its biodiversity, animals, plants and geology. Arabian Tahr live in mountains, but are hard to see, and there are populations of Arabian Gazelle, fox and Arabian lynx.

His Royal Highness was driven from the coast up a wadi to Manqas. Here he was received by Ali Al-Ghedani, whose life reflects the story of Oman's development during the reign of His Majesty. Ali was born in a cave beside what is now his modern house with electricity and running water. He and many of the community who live and work in the sanctuary met His Royal Highness and showed him examples of local crafts and food.

Their Royal Highnesses finished their visit of Oman with engagements to celebrate the achievements of young Omanis and to promote literacy. The Prince of Wales began the day at a reception to meet young Omani leaders and representatives from a number of organisations, including Outward Bound, The Prince's Trust International, Mosaic and the Society's Next Generation Group. One of the young people was Anisa

Al Raisi, who hopes to become the first Omani to reach the North Pole.

Following the reception, His Royal Highness met members of the Crossing the Empty Quarter Expedition, including its leader Mark Evans. This team had recreated the journey of the British explorer Bertram Thomas.

Meanwhile The Duchess was introduced to the Let's Read programme by its founder, Jane Jaffer, and Shatha Abbas, founding member of Dar al Atta'a charity, both of whom accompanied her on a tour of Maktabati, Oman's first mobile library. In 2015 it distributed more than 21,000 books to children. The Duchess also visited the Let's Read charity book shop in the Al Qurm Complex, which gives everyone in the community an opportunity to purchase good books at low prices. Proceeds of sales purchase children's books for Maktabati.

Finally, Her Royal Highness visited the Children's Public Library as a guest of Her Highness Sayyida Muna bint Fahad and met winners of a writing competition.

As on their previous visit, Their Royal Highnesses were overwhelmed by the hospitality and kindness of everyone they met. I know that the Sultanate will remain one of their favourite destinations! ■

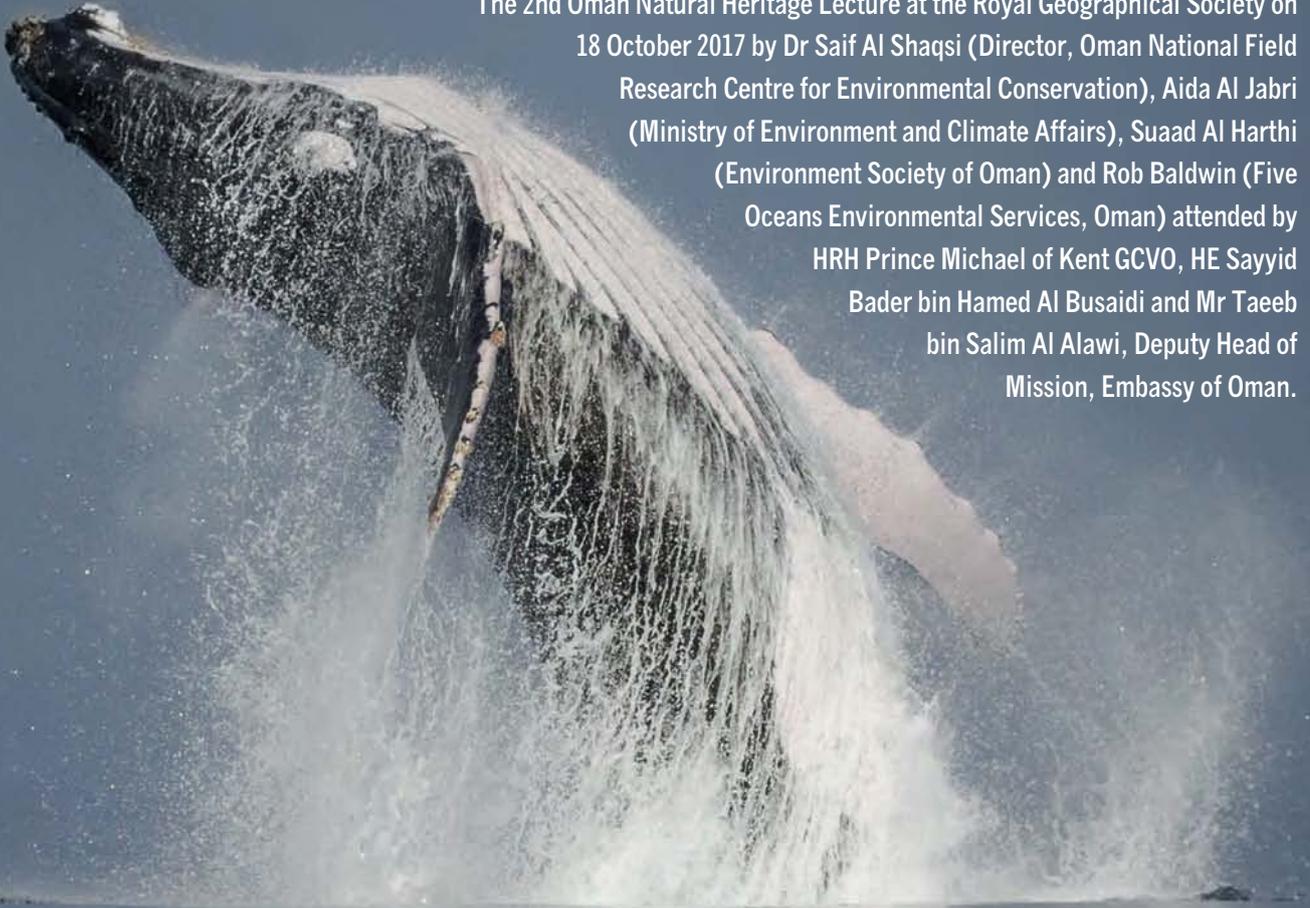


HRH speaking to HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Omani Ambassador to UK.

ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

‘OMAN’S WHALES, DOLPHINS AND TURTLES’

– AN IMPORTANT HERITAGE FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR PLANET



The 2nd Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society on 18 October 2017 by Dr Saif Al Shaqsi (Director, Oman National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation), Aida Al Jabri (Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs), Suaad Al Harthi (Environment Society of Oman) and Rob Baldwin (Five Oceans Environmental Services, Oman) attended by HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO, HE Sayyid Bader bin Hamed Al Busaidi and Mr Taeab bin Salim Al Alawi, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Oman.

Photo by Rob Baldwin/Environment Society of Oman

One of the rarest whales in the world, an Arabian Sea Humpback Whale breaches off the coast of Shuwaymiyah, Sultanate of Oman.

Scientists from the Environment Society of Oman are working hard to ensure the conservation of Oman's loggerhead turtles through systematic tagging and monitoring.



Kamela Al Barami from the Embassy of Oman, welcomed the London audience to the diverse coast of the Sultanate of Oman and the natural miracles to be found in the Arabian Sea, referring to the pre-lecture photo presentation by Khalid Ateeq which illustrated Oman's unique biodiversity of the marine environment.

Dr Saif Al Shaqsi, introduced a short introductory film to showcase Oman's unique marine heritage, describing the impressive work being undertaken by field scientists in Oman. He introduced Rob Baldwin, a specialist marine scientist at Five Oceans Environmental Services in Oman.

Rob Baldwin began with a remarkable story of working with a local fisherman to help release turtles and whales trapped in discarded fishing nets. Fighting to release a Humpback Whale completely entangled in a large net and, after many hours, the continuous breaching by a very relieved 20-ton Humpback Whale, is a moment Rob will never forget. This began a lifetime of fieldwork studying the unique Arabian Sea humpback whale population.

Unlike other whales, this species lives year-round in the warm yet rich waters off the Arabian Peninsula. It is a more solitary whale, rarely moving in groups and little

studied. The Arabian Sea humpback whale outlived the last great ice age, surviving through 70,000 years of change but now it is at risk of extinction. Rob introduced the two main speakers of the evening.



Aida Al Jabri spoke about the work being undertaken in Oman in her capacity of Acting Head of the Marine Conservation Department of Oman's Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. Aida shared her 10-year passion for the marine

world and her early commitment to learn more about the Cetaceans, their challenges and how to train those involved in dealing with 'strandings' that occur along the coast of Oman.

Aida explained the procedures used to track the 100 or so Arabian Sea Humpback Whales to show the narrow corridor, some 1,150 kms along the southern coast of Oman and the northern Yemen. Aida's maps drew attention to future challenges from increased shipping along the coast. She reminded those present of the tourism potential of Oman's dolphins and whales and explained that she and her colleagues are drafting regulations to manage tourism activities and to train young Omanis, including fishermen and local communities, about the importance of conserving these endangered species.

Aida spoke of the importance of protecting whales and dolphins and their habitats for the wider health of the marine environment and the ecosystem services our healthy seas provide, including its role to absorb carbon and regulate the planet. She reminded all present that future studies of marine mammal 'strandings' need well trained and experienced teams to assess the causes of death and a place to undertake laboratory work in the future.

Suaad Al Harthi



Suaad is the Programme Director at the Environment Society of Oman (ESO). Her role involves promoting environmental awareness and advocating conservation through the development of community outreach, environmental education and research, and conservation programmes.

She drew attention to their 'endangered and critically endangered' status as observed by teams over the years and more recently by the Environment Society of Oman in collaboration with Five Oceans Environmental Services, MECA and international partners. Suaad discussed the global importance of conserving critically endangered marine turtles, as well as highlighting the threat to the marine environment due to global plastic pollution.

Over the past decade, many Oman scientists have played a lead research role on turtles on the Island. This work has

accelerated our knowledge and understanding of turtle biology, ecology and conservation needs in Oman, whilst at the same time revealing a dramatic decline in numbers that require urgent conservation response. In the case of loggerhead turtles, the work has documented a reduction in nesting females from pre-1980 estimates.

Following an assessment of the loggerhead sea turtle completed in 2015 by the Marine Turtle Specialist Group of IUCN Species Survival Commission, the North-West Indian Ocean loggerhead sub-population was assigned 'Critically Endangered', thus facing the highest risk of extinction in the wild. Suaad ended her talk with a positive approach: if the current systematic survey work can continue and grow, backed by the effective education work and active conservation management

Suaad Al Harthi followed Aida with a summary of the 30-year conservation journey of the Sea Turtles of Masirah Island, which hosts the world's second largest population of loggerhead turtles.

Kamela Al Barami and Nigel Winser opening the 2nd Oman Natural Heritage lecture following the pre-lecture photographic presentation by the distinguished Oman photographer and diver, Mr Khalid Ateeq.





His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent GCVO, His Excellency Sayyid Bader bin Hamad Al Busaidi and Minister Plenipotentiary Mr Taeeb bin Salim Al Alawi, Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Oman with the speakers and organisers of the evening.



His Royal Highness Prince Michael of Kent GCVO, a lifelong supporter of field science and conservation work in the Sultanate of Oman attended as the Royal Patron, here with the four main speakers of the evening from left to right, Robert Baldwin , Suaad Al Harthi, Aida Al Jabri and Dr Saif Al Shaqsi.

within the Sultanate, there is a good chance to arrest population decline and Marine Turtle populations can recover, so safeguarding one of Oman's most fascinating marine wildlife species.

In concluding, Suaad emphasised Oman's need to continue to work hard at all levels to ensure Oman hosts one of the largest nesting population of loggerhead sea turtles in the world. Sea turtles occupy a variety of environments during their life cycle - land, nearshore and open seas - and face threats in all three areas; conservation efforts need to cover all three.



Dr Saif Al Shaqsi (centre), Aida Al Jabri (left) and Suaad Al Harthi (right) together with organisers and volunteers of the Annual Oman Natural Heritage Lecture.



Some 350 guests attended the 2nd Oman Natural Heritage Lecture held at the Royal Geographical Society and included Diplomats from the Oman and Gulf Embassies, members of the Anglo-Omani Society, the Royal Geographical Society, the Natural History Museum and many UK environmental organisations, readers of the Geographical magazine and members of the public interested in the conservation and marine environment of Oman.

ENDING THE INSPIRATIONAL LECTURE – WITH HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Nigel Winsor thanked the speakers for their excellent, thought-provoking presentations and praising the effective work of the marine science community in Oman. "It is our collective admiration of Oman and our respect for a new generation of field scientists working with Dr Saif Al Shaqsi and the National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation, the Ministry of the Environment and the Environment Society of Oman, that has inspired tonight's lecture".

Nigel thanked the Oman Embassy for their help in planning the evening, the Anglo-Omani Society for their support to the Oman speakers, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Affairs and the Environment Society of Oman for their support to Aida and Suaad, to Dr Saif Al Shaqsi and the National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation for their support and wonderful film, to Khalid

Ateeq for his audio-visual presentation and to Paul Presley at the Geographical Magazine for their important outreach work. ■

*Nigel Winsor and Dr Roderic Dutton
For the Oman Natural Heritage Annual Lecture
nigel@winsordialogue.com*



Dr Saif Al Shaqsi, the Director of the Oman National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation presenting a short film about Oman's marine heritage and acknowledging the next generation of Oman field scientists taking the lead to undertake new surveys in the future.

Andy Eavis is one of the world's most experienced and accomplished cavers. He spoke to the Society after his epic visit to the Majlis Al Jinn cave in Oman. Readers may also have seen and heard his expert commentary on television during the rescue of Thai boys trapped this Summer in an underground complex. Here is his story.

MAJLIS AL JINN – 'THE MOST BEAUTIFUL LARGE CAVE IN THE WORLD'

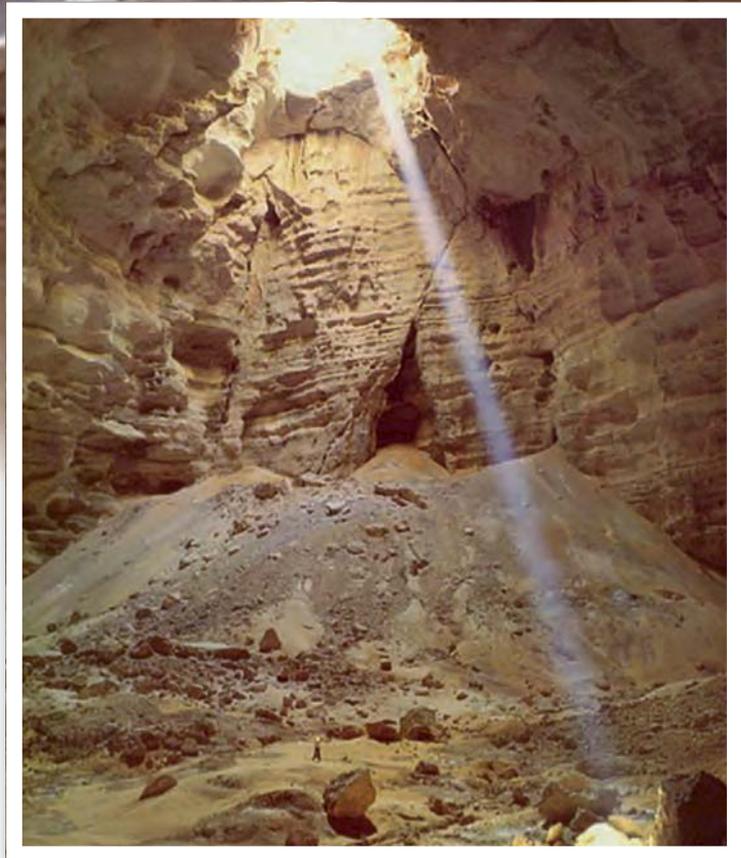
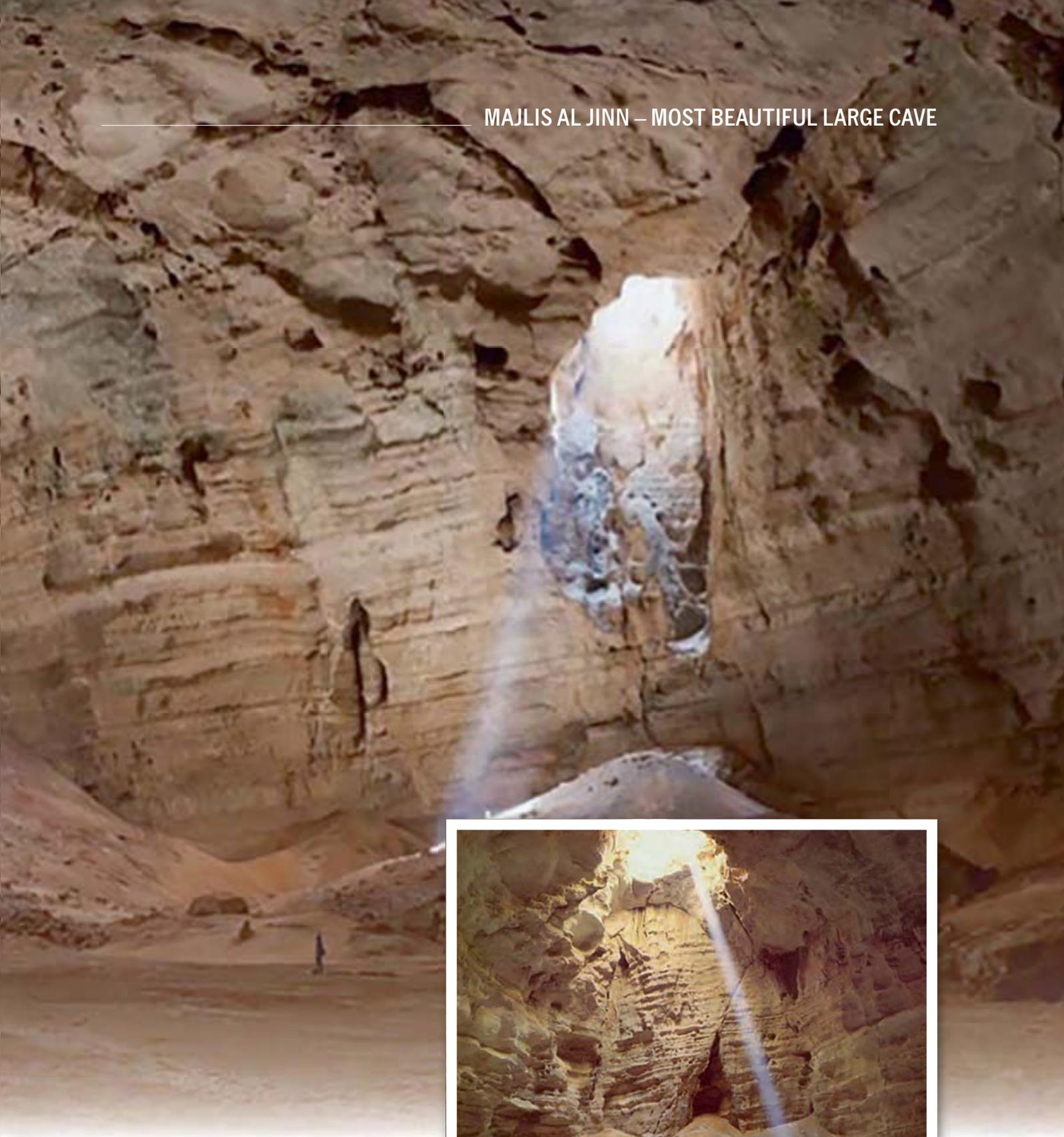
ARTICLE BY ANDY EAVIS

I started caving well over 50 years ago when I first went to college and realised I enjoyed exploring things. There is now a limit to what can be originally explored “to go where no man has gone before”; deep oceans, space and of course, caves. The only one of these that was really open to me was caves, so that started me on a life of

cave exploration which has taken me to countries all over the world. The teams I have been involved with have explored more than 500km of cave passage.

This interest in cave exploration led me to get involved in many countries other than just Britain and I ultimately became President of the European Federation of

MAJLIS AL JINN – MOST BEAUTIFUL LARGE CAVE



Cavers, a post I held for eight years. After this, I went on and held a similar post in the world caving association for a further eight years. Recently I have just retired after nine years as the Chairman of the British Caving Association. A daunting job!!

This interest in caves and my contacts with international cavers lead me to become interested in measuring the largest cave chambers in the

MAJLIS AL JINN – MOST BEAUTIFUL LARGE CAVE

world. Back in the early 1970s I had been involved in the cave system in the French Pyrenees called Pierre Saint Martin, with a huge chamber there called La Verna which at that time was the biggest known cave void in the world. This we surveyed, and as I was working as a mining engineer I put forward various theories as to how it was not possible to get anything larger.

Lo and behold in 1980 we discovered Sarawak Chamber – at least three times the size. This was interesting, and it is still not known how these massive voids can stay up without collapsing. It is currently the subject of a fair amount of research including a PhD thesis being undertaken by my colleague Richard (Roo) Walters.

In early 2004, we revisited Mulu with a British expedition, continuing the exploration of the large and extensive caves in this part of Borneo. The team included Kevin Dixon with his laser scanner. We scanned Sarawak Chamber and Deer Cave and the results were amazing. The detail from this work is incredible and showed me what can be attained.

Kevin was subsequently very successful in getting funding from the National Geographic Magazine to undertake laser scanning of several large chambers in China. This was accomplished successfully and is the subject of a National Geographic Magazine article July 2014.



In 2014, I became really interested in the project and decided that we would continue surveying the 10 largest cave chambers in the world, scattered all around the globe including Mexico, Belize, France, Spain, China, Malaysia, Iran and also of course Oman.



Another full-scale expedition to Mulu Sarawak in October 2013 rescanned Sarawak chamber to a much higher detail than previously and also Api Chamber. The results of both were very interesting and Api Chamber was discovered to be over 1000 feet high, something that we hadn't realised before and puts it well into the top 10 biggest chambers on volume because of its extreme height.



Of all the chambers we visited, we thought Majlis is probably the most beautiful and the most fitting ultimately to become a show cave.

Permission in Oman was complicated by the fact that because of various people going to the cave illegally, it was completely closed to visitors. We had to seek permission through the relevant channel – great thanks to Nigel Winsor who has been involved with Oman since he led the Royal Geographical Society expedition in Oman in 1985. Nigel continues a wonderful relationship with



After this we carried on in April 2016 doing Carlista Spain and La Verna in Southern France, followed by Cloud Ladder Hall and Marco Polo Chambers in China. We went on and did Belize Chamber in 2016; Majlis Al Jinn in Oman in November 2016; Ghar-E-Dossar in Iran in February 2017 and the final one of this series Muneca in Mexico in March 2017. The results are on the enclosed table which shows Majlis as number 7 in the world by volume.



The Largest Chambers in the World					
Name	Volume (x10 ⁶ m ³)	Surface (x10 ³ m ²)	Flat Area (x10 ³ m ²)	Country	
1. Mtisi Room	18.57	542.06	545.04	China	
2. Sarawak Chamber	9.91	384.88	108.07	Malaysia	
3. Cloud Ladder Hall	6.23	341.45	98.74	China	
4. La Muneca Pico	5.90	283.75	85.06	Mexico	
5. Hong Meigu	5.25	252.72	88.34	China	
6. Ghar-e-Dossar	4.33	237.96	78.14	Iran	
7. Majlis Al Jinn	4.11	273.37	59.41	Oman	
8. Salle de la Verna	3.65	187.37	48.18	France	
9. Api Chamber	2.88	252.38	42.73	Malaysia	
10. Tian	2.43	176.36	52.41	China	
11. Torca del Carasso	2.14	282.12	84.31	Spain	
12. Museo Pico	1.44	238.07	45.89	China	
13. The Big Room, Carlsbad	0.93	196.10	48.36	USA	
14. Belize Chamber	0.81	167.83	46.30	Belize	



many Omanis. Thanks are also very much due to Dr Saif Al Shaqsi (*Executive Director/CEO of the One Million Date Palm Project, and of the Oman National Field Research Centre for Environmental Conservation, who spoke to the Society in our programme two years ago*).

Nigel and I travelled to Oman on the way back from an excursion in Mulu to talk to the authorities and line up permission for the laser scan. So, in November 2016, a team of myself, Richard (Roo) Walters, our software scanning guru, and Tim Allen, the

official expedition/trip organiser, arrived in Muscat. Here we met up with Katherine and Steve Jones, two long term caving friends of ours living in Muscat who had very kindly agreed to help us with logistics. We also had Joe Daniels from the Twenty3extreme organisation who also assisted with logistics. Great thanks to these people.

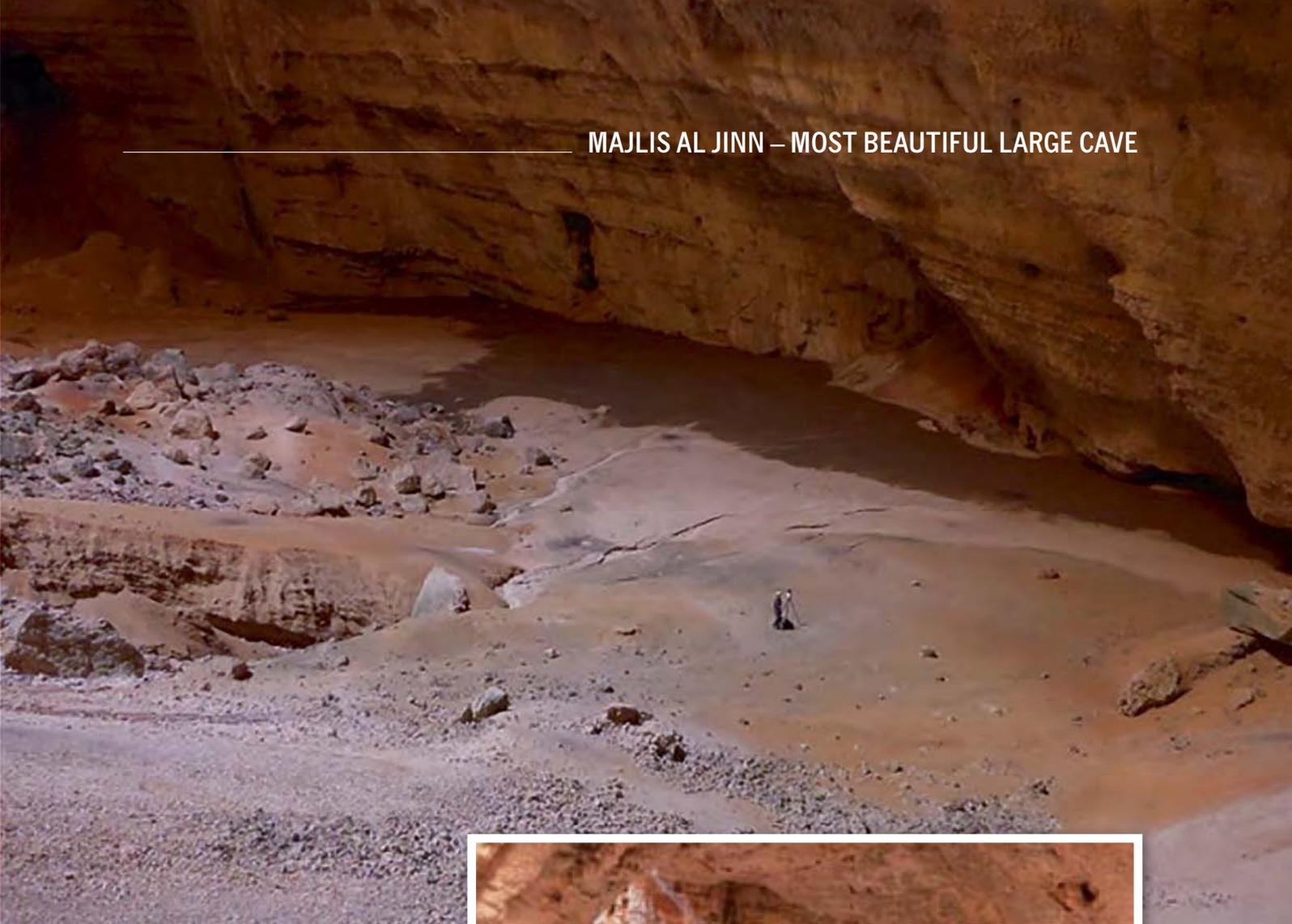
We travelled up to the limestone plateau on 14th November and immediately started surface surveying using the scanner. We were then joined by Carsten Peters, a

photographer of the National Geographic Magazine, who had been with us throughout the project and documented the scanning with hopes of another National Geographical article in the future. (Hopefully this autumn.)

We all went underground and realised what a beautiful cave Majlis Al Jinn is. The fact that on the surface is desert means that the atmosphere is full of fine sand particles and this projects wonderful beams of light down into the chamber. These act like giant fluorescent tubes which illuminate the whole chamber to a pretty high degree of brightness in natural light. So, for the first



MAJLIS AL JINN – MOST BEAUTIFUL LARGE CAVE



time in any of the chambers, we were able not only to use the laser scanner to measure distance, but also the camera on the scanner to take photographs to enable the resulting scan to be in full colour.

A second day was used to complete the photography and laser scan both on the surface and underground. We returned to Muscat on the 16th and did a presentation and debriefing in the Muscat Conference Centre. On 17th November we returned to the UK with our results.



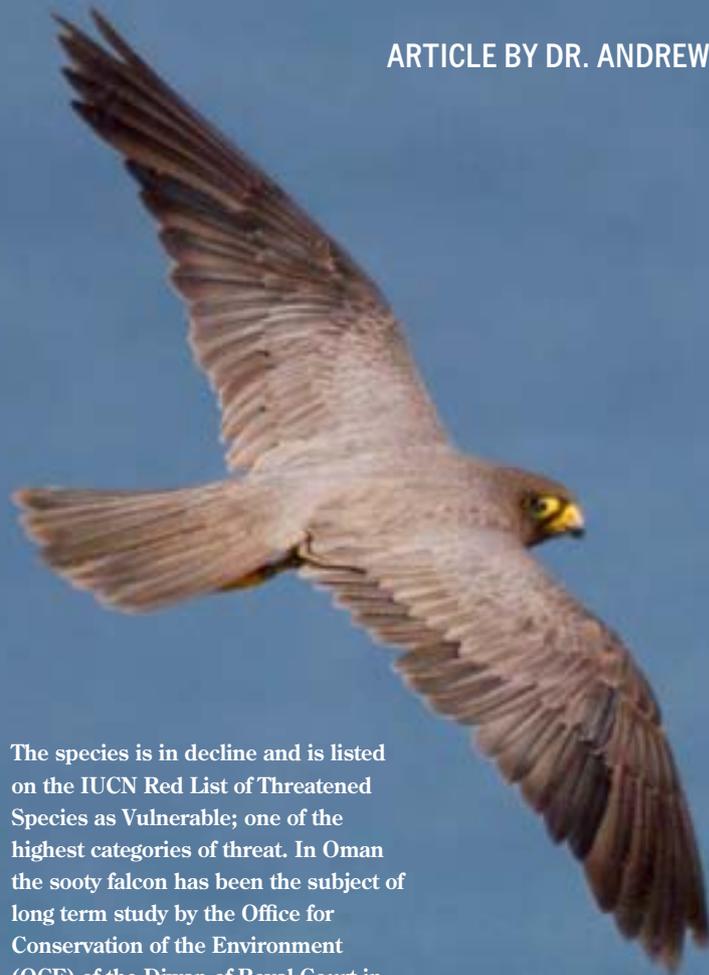
Majlis al Jinn is currently the seventh largest chamber in the world by volume but there has recently been another large chamber discovered in China which may be larger. This October we will go and laser scan it and see how big it really is, but it is quite likely it is on a similar scale to Majlis. It also has a daylight entrance, so maybe it is another beautiful cave: we shall see.

Such is the nature of cave exploration that you never know what is going to be discovered next. It is estimated that less than 10 per cent of the caves in the world have so far been explored. There is still an enormous amount to do and there will be many more huge chambers discovered in the future, possibly larger than the ones we have already got, but certainly there will be very few as beautiful as the gem in Oman. ■

THE SOOTY FALCON: A FLAGSHIP SPECIES FOR BIRD CONSERVATION IN OMAN

The sooty falcon (*Falco concolor*) is a smallish, migratory falcon that annually undertakes a perilous 7000 kilometre journey from its wintering grounds in Madagascar to the coasts and islands of northern Oman, where it breeds at the height of the Arabian summer.

ARTICLE BY DR. ANDREW SPALTON



The species is in decline and is listed on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as Vulnerable; one of the highest categories of threat. In Oman the sooty falcon has been the subject of long term study by the Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE) of the Diwan of Royal Court in collaboration with the International Avian Research (Austria) and Natural Research (UK).

The sooty falcon, that gets its name from its soot-coloured plumage in adulthood, feeds almost exclusively on aerial prey. On their breeding grounds, they hunt other birds while on the wintering grounds flying insects are the main food. As hunters of aerial prey that are often highly motivated to escape, sooty falcons have long, narrow, pointed wings adapted for speed and agility, and when viewed on the wing they can be seen for what they are: masters of the sky.

Sooty falcons breed entirely in the Middle East and north eastern Africa, and winter almost exclusively in Madagascar. They have a near-unique ecology in that they breed during the height of summer (rather than spring), taking advantage of the autumn passage of migrants in September and October as a source of food for the growing falcon chicks. However, by doing so, breeding sooty falcons expose themselves, their eggs and chicks to the hottest temperatures of the region, at times reaching 50°C. Sooty falcons share this high summer

THE SOOTY FALCON: A FLAGSHIP SPECIES

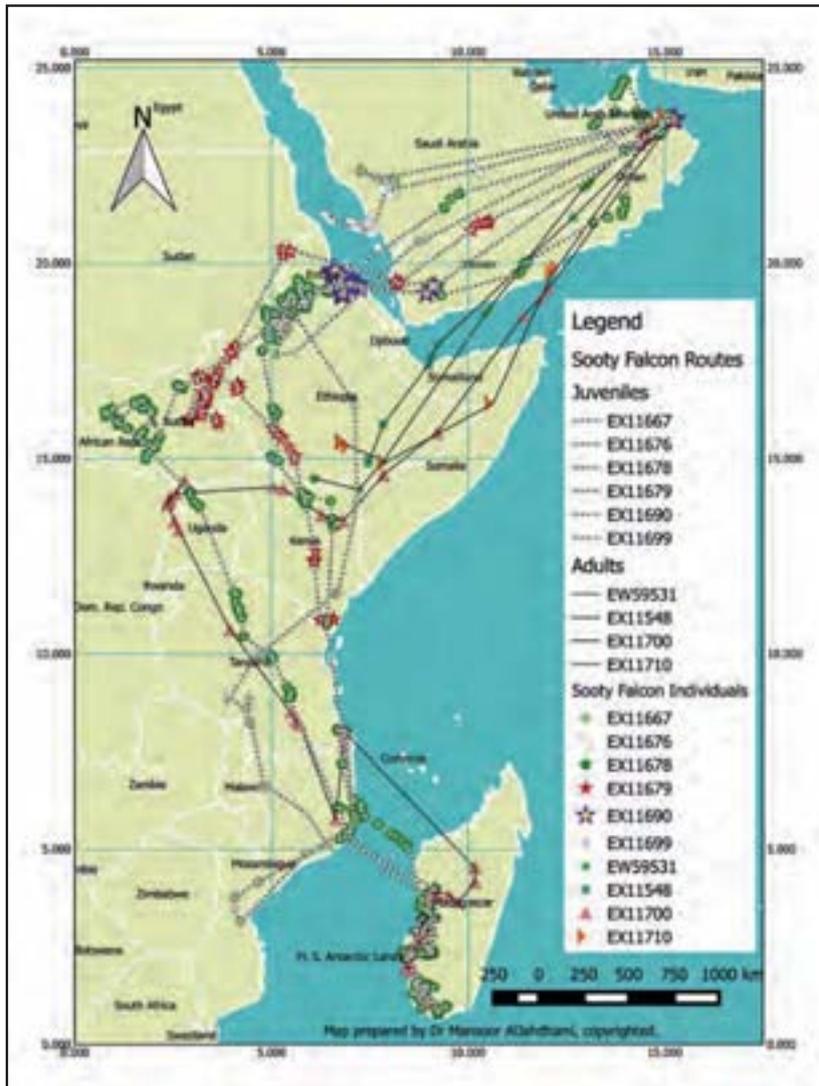
breeding strategy only with Eleonora's Falcon, whose breeding range is farther north west, in and around the Mediterranean. Sooty falcons arrive in Oman from their wintering areas in late April or May, and two to three eggs are generally laid in shady cracks and crevices on cliffs and crags in July or August. On islands with no ground predators they might also nest on the ground though only where there is shade. Despite the heat, a high proportion of eggs usually hatch, and nestling mortality is apparently low, a testament to the efficacy of the late summer breeding strategy.

In Oman sooty falcons breed on mainland and island cliffs along the north coast, mostly from Quriyat to Al Sawadi. Somewhat surprisingly, few seem to nest on Musandam. Across their range, sooty falcons will breed singly, but also sometimes aggregate into loose colonies, where nests can be only a few metres away from one another. Colonies tend to be on islands, and single nests on the mainland. The reliance on migrant birds as food means that preferred

colonial nesting grounds are on islands along migration routes, where tired birds having made the long journey from Iran seek rest. Thus Fahal Island, close to Muscat, and the Daymaniyat Islands, about 50km offshore of Muscat hold important colonies and are where most sooty falcons nest in Oman.

In October sooty falcons leave Oman and other breeding areas and return via East Africa to their wintering grounds in Madagascar. Satellite tracking data suggest that they winter mostly in the south and southwestern part of the island, but they can also be seen roosting in trees around the airport of the capital, Antananarivo.





Little is known about their ecology during their wintering time, but it appears that they feed mostly on flying insects, and may move around a bit, driven by weather and local food availability. The lack of information about sooty falcon wintertime biology and ecology is an impediment to conservation, and needs to be rectified. What is known is that juvenile mortality after leaving the breeding areas is high. This is not unusual in most birds, but may be important if adult mortality is also high, thus limiting the availability of next generation breeders.

Although the sooty falcon's breeding range spans a number of countries, sooty falcons are understudied. Patchy information on their ecology and distribution comes from only a few rather old studies and surveys conducted on the islands in the Red Sea, and on the mainland

in the Negev and Libyan deserts. Much of what is known about sooty falcons comes from work in Oman. In 1978 a survey of breeding sooty falcons in Oman by Hartmut Walter was supported by Ralph Daly, the then Adviser for Conservation of the Environment in the Diwan of the Royal Court, and that work stood for more than 20 years as the single most concerted research effort on sooty falcon in the world.

Then, during 2007-2014, the Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE) teamed with international biologists of Natural Research and International Avian Research, to repeat the surveys of Walter so as to determine whether the local population was stable, and to embark on new research to fill in knowledge gaps. Filling those gaps was part of the on-going effort to conserve sooty falcons across their range. Supported by boats of the Royal

Yacht, the team surveyed Daymaniyat and Fahal Islands for breeding falcons, captured and marked them and their offspring, monitored breeding and recorded nesting success and diet, tracked some via satellite and surveyed other areas for falcons. OCE biologists travelled to Madagascar in winter and surveyed for falcons there with local biologists. That body of work has resulted, so far, in four publications in the peer-reviewed scientific literature. Those publications presented results of estimations of survival, information on reproduction and population dynamics, an assessment of change in falcon breeding distribution since 1978, and the effect of human disturbance on falcon breeding. This work stands as the most significant undertaken on sooty falcons anywhere. The story of sooty falcons, their conservation and the work by the OCE is also the topic of a film, *The Migrant*, which was produced as part of the OCE initiative, and was shown in 2018 at the Anglo-Omani Society annual meeting.

In spite of the comprehensive work in Oman information on the conservation status and distribution of sooty falcons remains limited and variable. In 2017 its extinction risk on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species was made more severe and it is now classed as Vulnerable. Although Oman is considered a breeding stronghold, across its range the sooty falcon's conservation status is deteriorating and its conservation is handicapped by a lack of work elsewhere. For example, we still know nothing about movement between breeding areas and the survival estimates, which are so important to conservation. We also know little about geographical variation in food or threats. Although we are under-informed, probably the main threats to sooty falcons are the loss of nesting habitat, disturbance and changes in food availability. Locations of falcon colonies are often also prime places for human development, including for tourism, and even the most sensitively designed developments can have a negative effect on sooty falcons by taking away habitat, encouraging breeding time disturbance by humans or introducing and subsidising ground predators.

Changes in availability of food, which



can be driven by continental-scale forces are likely also having an impact. Climate change is likely changing the timing and composition of the migrating birds upon which the falcons feed, and may be affecting overall numbers, resulting in less food for the falcons. Changes in extent and types of agriculture and forestry are also having effects on falcon prey, including birds from Eurasia and insects on their wintering grounds in Africa.

Oman holds an important proportion of the world breeding population of sooty falcons that is better studied than in any other country, so Oman has both a responsibility and opportunity to lead in sooty falcon conservation. It is particularly important that the breeding colonies are safeguarded and that Fahal Island and the Daymaniyat Islands are kept free of predators and human disturbance (sooty falcons have almost disappeared from the islands of the UAE because of development and disturbance).

Making the most of those responsibilities and opportunities can fall to the OCE, but could also be usefully addressed by other agencies (or a partnership of multiple agencies) including the Ministry for Environment and Climate Affairs and the Environment Society of Oman. Despite being rather diminutive, the sooty falcon is an iconic species, and could be used as a flagship species to promote more general conservation awareness and achieve conservation goals, both in Oman and across the region.

However, more can and needs to be done in this regard. Sadly, conservation is not a priority for many in the region, at least in part because public awareness is low. It is important for sooty falcons, and indeed Omani society and human society, that the public and governments across the region become more aware and act to conserve species and their habitats and seek to promote biodiversity. ■

*Office for Conservation of the Environment
Diwan of Royal Court
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman*



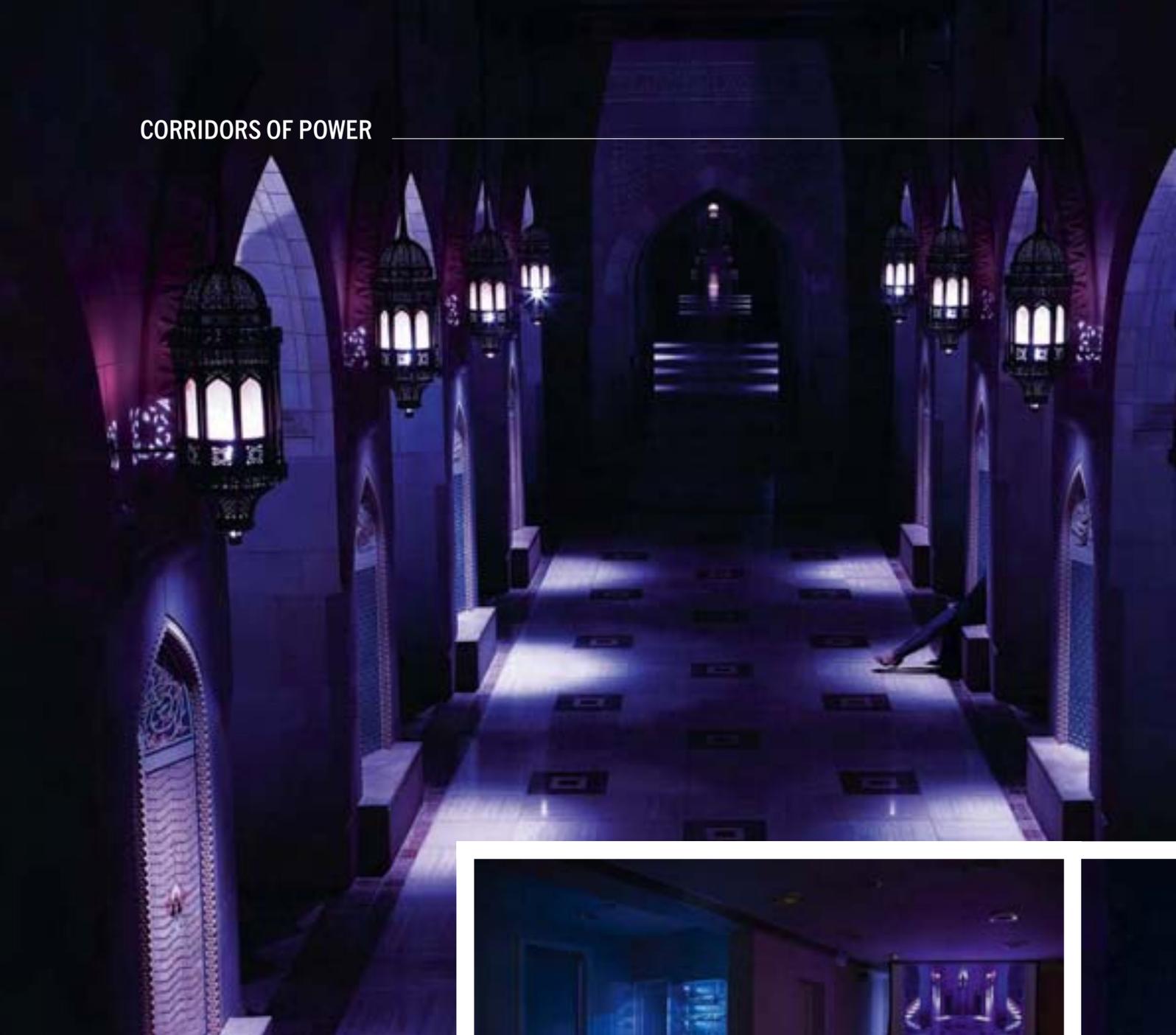
CORRIDORS OF POWER

The Society's 2017-2018 programme of events began with a unique exhibition by Omani Artist Eman Ali, a graduate of the Royal College of Art where she studied MA Photography.



About me: I am an Omani visual artist whose work interlaces religious, socio-political and consumerist ideologies under the umbrella of sexuality and gender in the Arabian Gulf region. I question cultural complexities by exploring their manifestations in contemporary khaleeji (from the Gulf) society through a hybrid of artistic expression ranging from image-making to text, light installation, sculpture and sound.

This project is really about my own personal, emotional response to the new infrastructural developments in Muscat.



About the exhibition: this project is really about my own personal, emotional response to the new infrastructural developments in Muscat in order to question what these buildings signify at a time of economic and political uncertainty.

I love Oman because it is so untouched compared to other Gulf countries. To me it really represents this Arabian paradise with its simple yet stunning landscape. I am deeply in love with my home so when these grand architectural buildings started to appear in Muscat, I didn't quite know how to make sense of it.

On a superficial level, I appreciated their beauty. However, I wanted to look further and think about how architecture, in this case, is used not only to assert power and stability but to also signify change to come. Composed like a still from a film, it was important for me to place myself in these photographs because





conceptually it is about my relationship to these spaces as an Omani woman and how my body inhabits and navigates its way through the unfamiliar.

Through the poetics of space, I wanted to create my own meaning and expression and the more I inhabited these physical spaces, the more I felt that although they exist in the realm of reality, they somehow felt simulated. I wanted to convey this feeling of the artificial through the intensity of colour in my photographs and the highly reflective surface of the paper in which I chose to print on to further enhance the sense that these public spaces were somehow illusory. ■



DHOFAR – OMAN BOTANIC EXPEDITION 2018

A CROSS CULTURAL COLLABORATION

PHOTO BY FRANCIS PAYNE



The team poses for a group photo at Fezaya in the Jebel Qamar.

The Oman Botanic Expedition to the Dhofar jebel brought together expert young people from Oman and Britain to share their knowledge, experience and enthusiasm in an important contribution to the unique and ambitious Omani Botanical Garden project. The Anglo-Omani Society was glad to help fund this arduous and valuable expedition, described here by Simon Phillips.

The Botanical Gardens being constructed in Muscat are one of a kind in the Middle East. The plans are hugely ambitious, and when realised will house two gigantic biomes, comparable with the great glass houses of Kew and Eden. Several years of meticulous scientific collection of plant life from across the ecosystems of Oman has contributed to the herbarium and the living collection of plants being propagated and grown on site.

One biome will be regulated to the specific conditions in the Dhofar Mountains, thereby host to the Arabian Dragon Tree (*Dracaena serrulata*) and other species endemic to the region. The aim of the gardens, aside from scientific study, is to provide an experience of the whole of Oman's natural ecosystems in just one day for the Muscat visitor, particularly those who do not reach Dhofar.



PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES

Chloe, Elliot and Nasser collect data on a stand of *Dracaena* trees high in the Jebel al Qara.

PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES



Bird spotting at Ain Garziz, just north of Salalah on the first day of the expedition.

Winter in Dhofar and the mountains along the south of Oman brings comfortable temperatures for research and journeys in the outdoor environment. With that in mind, the Oman Botanic

PHOTO BY MARIAM SIEDENTOPF



Clouds build on the steep escarpment of the Jebel Samhan, the final zone of study for the *Dracaena* project.

Garden (OBG) proposed a joint field study project that would bring together an international team finally to seek out the location and population size of two rare and almost mythical plants: the Arabian Dragon Tree and the Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*).

With support from the Anglo-Omani Society and an enthusiastic response from NGG members, an expedition was launched that would explore these questions while integrating educational elements in the skills of environmental research.

Jebel Qamar, Jebel Al Qara and Jebel Samhan mountain ranges are some of the



PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES

Exploring cave formations near our base camp in the Jebel Samhan.

most spectacular natural terrain in Arabia – and home to an estimated 70 per cent of the world’s population of the Arabian Dragon Tree. Living on the steep mountain sides towards the sea at elevations of 1000m and above, the tree is on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red list as an endangered species, yet nobody really knew the extent of the trees’ habitat and what condition they were in.

This study was to be multi purpose in scope – adding to knowledge about *Dracaena* for the Middle East region, to improve OBG knowledge of the flora of Oman and its contribution towards the remarkable biome and Public Gardens being built, and therefore aid in the conservation efforts in the Dhofar region while strengthening partner relations.



PHOTO BY FRANCIS PAYNE

An early morning start as trucks are loaded and the team heads off to begin the days journey.

Bringing together young doctorate students in natural sciences, forestry and biochemistry, a professional in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), forestry surveying experts and leadership for the expedition environment really fused the project, with specialist knowledge and project leadership coming from the team of OBG botanists and horticulturalists from Muscat. The overall team of approximately 25 reflected the

The typical expedition day would begin at 6am after call to prayer, and the first to rise would light the fire and set a pot upon the flames.

excellent opportunity for collaboration between organisations.

Dracaena had been highlighted as a cause for concern, as part of a wider Middle East regional study, and the OBG had been keen to investigate, but with the availability of only a small team and limited time. The value of having a larger international group expanded the potential for a significant research venture. The team arrived well prepared and ready to live



PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES

A beautiful section of the expedition route in the Jebel al Qara.

The results yielded showed that far more of the trees were evident than thought. While it was believed 10,000 *Dracaena* inhabited the Dhofar Mountains, we counted over 40,000 during ten days of survey.



PHOTO BY FRANCIS PAINE

Members of the project team explore a cave in the Jebel al Qara.

PHOTO BY MARIAN SIEDENTOPF



Marc Clover takes a break during the Baobab tree survey in Wadi Hinna.

rough in the mountains for two weeks and trek for up to seven hours a day under the heat of the sun. With more boots on the ground, a much wider territory could be covered and a greater census of the tree achieved.

Camping at Fesiyah shores, to the west of Salalah, the team began the expedition: two nights out from Salalah; tasting the Arabian sea below the sweeping jebel for the first time as south easterly winds whipped up the camp; plunging into the clear waters where marine life thrives. It was to set the stage for more than 14 days sleeping out with basic conditions – wadi mat, sleeping bag, pot, kettle and access to deadwood on the surrounding hillsides from which to kindle a fire and cook.

The typical expedition day would begin at 6am after call to prayer, and the first to rise would light the fire and set a pot upon the flames to brew morning tea and coffee at dawn. It was a pleasure to see how Omani people and particularly our partners with whom we were fortunate to camp thrive in an outdoor setting, taking naturally to cooking on an open fire and enjoying time outdoors, using techniques of outdoor cooking from multiple generations – not to be missed by anybody wishing to experience real Oman.

With the daily routines set from 8am, we took to the escarpments by driving in as close as we could get by

herder track, then hike to strategic survey points assumed in mapping, in teams using geo referencing access zones where *Dracaena* grows. Using binoculars or in plain sight we scoured the terrain for signs of the trees.

The results yielded showed that far more of the trees were evident than thought. While it was believed 10,000 *Dracaena* inhabited the Dhofar Mountains, we counted over 40,000 during ten days of survey. While a paper is being written up of the results, a GIS Map is being generated which will highlight key aspects of *Dracaena* in the mountains. All this will feed into the OBG's efforts to conserve Oman's precious wildlife.

Aside from working for conservation, this cross cultural collaborative expedition was as much a chance for all to learn and



PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES

Thom and Hattie hike up the steep rock ledges of Wadi Hinna during the Baobab survey.

PHOTO BY ANDREW STOKES-REES



Cindy, Abdelrahman, Simon and Chloe take measurements of a Baobab tree in Wadi Hinna.

develop their outdoor leadership skills. Whilst PhD students from Cambridge and Sheffield are able to offer extensive knowledge of surveying techniques and analysis using up to date computer software which is a standard to share across partner organisations globally, Oman teams can benefit from learning this kind of skill. The same goes for GIS tools when demonstrated by a skilled professional such as Thomas Starnes who is employed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

In return, key knowledge is shared by Dhofari based field workers who inherently have experience and a mental map of the land, flora and fauna found there as passed down from generation to generation. Their many years of experience and insight are incomparable in value to our forays into the wild.

The Anglo-Omani Society and chief leader Andrew Stokes-Rees have facilitated a fantastic project with the Dhofar Botanic Expedition. It not only empowered individual members of Omani institutions but also fired the progress of young scholars and adventure leaders from European Universities and institutions who are passionate about the wild and conserving it for future generations. It is with this spirit that the Dhofar Botanic Expedition looks forward to a future opportunity to return and further develop and enhance Dhofar's prospects for conservation. ■

MUSCAT TO SALALAH CROSS COUNTRY CYCLING RECORD ATTEMPT, OMAN

ARTICLE BY JONATHAN SHUBERT

In despair at the tragic conflicts playing out in areas of the Middle East around his beautiful and peaceful home in Oman, teacher and professional cyclist Jonathan Shubert, 31, decided to use his talents to raise money and awareness to help.

The former British 24-hour cycling time trial champion and long distance cycling record holder decided to establish a world record by cycling the infamous passage across Oman from Muscat to Salalah, 1300km in under two days. He gives his account of the gruelling attempt, which raised over £4000 for the humanitarian charity Lifting Hands.

At 6:10 on Sunday 11 February to the support and applause of a rapturous crowd of friends, cyclists and media, I departed from Al Alam Palace, Old Muscat to begin the monumental task in front of me. Riding through the twinkling lights of Mutra corniche was magical.

I did, however, have serious concerns about the gastroenteritis I had developed the night before. The level of dehydration this was adding to my body before the start was surely catastrophic, but something I had to hope I could marginally compensate for with the water and electrolyte supplements I was taking.

The passage across Muscat was unmarred by issues, but memorable for all of the people who were waiting at the sides of the road to cheer me on. The gastric distress I was suffering forced me to briefly stop near Wadi Fanja, 90 minutes into the attempt and worryingly, lose close to another half a litre of liquid. Putting this to



MUSCAT TO SALALAH CROSS COUNTRY CYCLING

the back of my mind I continued on, beneath the foothills of Oman's mighty Hajar mountains until the afternoon. Rice cakes and energy drinks fuelled me along at close to 38km/h for the first six hours, until my first stop for a sit-down meal.

My first afternoon and pedalling into night one meant hundreds of kilometres along the same lonely desert highway, past Sinaw and towards Duqm. I had been informed that temperatures would peak at 27°C. The reality saw the mercury rise to 31°C in the open, unforgiving expanses. Ice cubes placed into tights and placed down my back, as well as regular spraying with water from my support team was failing to allow me to effectively thermoregulate. Climbing from my bike at close to 2pm, not feeling right, I was placed in shade underneath one of our trucks. My support team worked with wet towels and ice to bring my core temperature down. Within minutes, intense pins and needles developed all over my body, I began to lose feeling and control of my muscles and speech, my arms and hands became rigid and my chest began to cramp.

After 20 minutes and much effort from my team, they managed to help me recover. I am under no illusion that I was very close to death through heat stroke and despite hiding it well at the time, this was very scary for everyone around me. Resuming and continuing into the night, the crosswinds were now fierce and unforgiving. I knew that my two bouts of sickness had taken a tremendous toll on my body and in order to continue, I had to



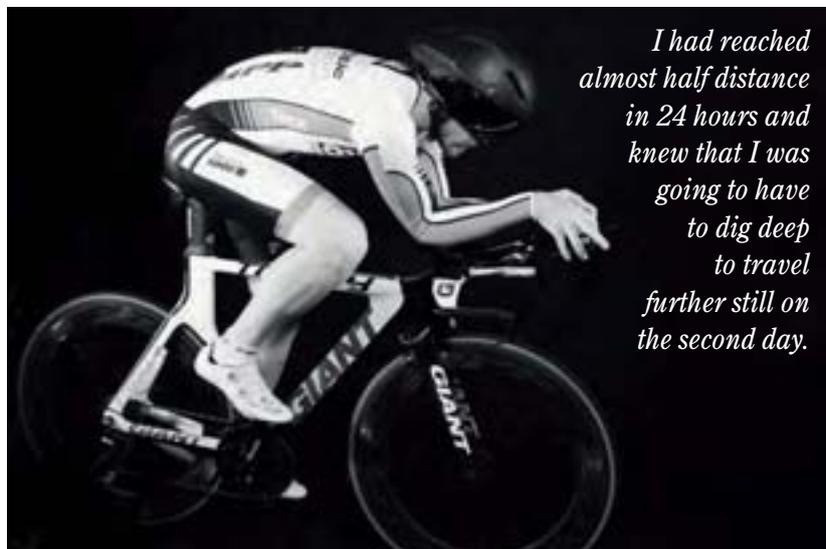
consider altering my designs not to sleep, and now incorporate power naps to aid my recovery. The first of these naps was timely, as by the time I returned to the road the winds, to a large extent, had abated.

After a beautiful night travelling along Oman's central coastline, surrounded by the vivid light from the Milky Way and the occasional crab scuttling along the road, I found myself through the city of Duqm and enveloped by thick fog as the sun rose in

the early morning. I had reached almost half distance in 24 hours and knew that I was going to have to dig deep to travel further still on the second day.

It provided an incredible boost in motivation to encounter spectators who were tracking my journey, coming to the side of the road, even out in the wilds in such remote locations, to photograph and cheer me on. With stomach cramps which had plagued me all night abating, I was able to adopt a more aerodynamic position on my bike and try and make some headway into the day's journey, before the inevitable midday desert heat slowed my progress.

Due to temperatures rising faster and higher than the previous day, unbeknownst to me at the time, I was consuming almost more water than my support crew were able to source from the infrequent shops along the route. The heat after midday rose above 37°C, for a day that was to be entirely staged in vast desert. I knew I couldn't afford to lose the precious hours of pedalling in this mid-part of the day; to avoid a repeat of the previous day's complications I chose a strategy of 30 minutes riding, followed by short stops to be cooled by my team.



I had reached almost half distance in 24 hours and knew that I was going to have to dig deep to travel further still on the second day.



This wasn't easy, but did allow me to push on without developing further sickness. With 400km to go and the road now narrower and void of a hard shoulder for the most part we were pulled over by the police and instructed to place one of our follow cars in front of me. This didn't prove to be an issue until the late hours where my view of the road was obscured and I crashed heavily at 50km/h after hitting some large potholes. Bruised and bloodied, I quickly picked myself up, switched to my road bike and continued. Any further rest had to be kept to a minimum, breaking the two day mark was going to be touch and go.

Eighty kilometres from Salalah and my finishing point, I reached my final road into the city and was met by an incredibly enthusiastic Medina Ilyassova, who had not only believed in me and backed my idea with her company UB-COOL months ago, but had now flown down to Salalah and driven out to meet me.

At 700m above sea level there were a few very steep kilometres of climbing across the Dhofar mountains to reach the final 900m summit, before descending to the coast. Cresting the summit at 4:30 in the morning I was overwhelmed to be confronted by tens of Omanis who had heard about what was happening and who had come out to cheer me on. A 90km/h descent and I was in Salalah, confronted by crowds of people, young and old who had all come out at such an ungodly hour to welcome me with huge elation as news of what I was doing had been spreading both across the country and internationally.

After 47 hours and 21 minutes since departing Muscat's palace, at 5:31 on Tuesday morning I arrived at the Al Hosn Palace in Salalah and finally earned the reward of climbing from my bike one last time and having a Union Jack flag, kindly

Arriving at the Al Hosn Palace in Salalah and having a Union Jack flag draped around my shoulders.



lent by the British embassy, draped around my shoulders.

I had been through some difficult times over the two days, finally finishing dehydrated, with 6% less body fat, nerve damage in my feet, a bruised tibia, and some deep flesh wounds but it was an incredible adventure across a beautiful and magical country.

As always the unsung heroes of such feats are the people who surround you and support you and this couldn't be more true for this experience. My Omani brothers, Khalil and Talal, who refused to leave my side throughout the two days to even sleep, my film crew of two and new friends, Omar and Mahmoud from Kuwait, who found themselves quickly emotionally invested and taking a very active role in everything, Randall Bernard who volunteered to train as a UMCA official and come along for the ride, my dear friend Christiane Prager who flew from Dubai to lend a hand and most notably of all, Heather Louise Duncan, who has invested more of her own time and effort into this project over the past couple of months than I could have ever asked, who trained as a race official, publicised and promoted the journey throughout and kept everyone watching updated and informed, who was also a calm voice of reassurance throughout and someone who has become a great friend.

My sponsors UB-COOL, Prismic Media, Husaak and Oman bike shop who all made this possible, all the great friends I have who were often bending over backwards to help with my preparations and finally, thank you the officials of the Ultra Marathon Cycling Association who were so accommodating with the training of officials and establishment of this record. ■



OMAN STATE COUNCIL DELEGATION MARCH 2018

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

A delegation from the Oman State Council visited London on 13 and 14 March 2018. The five Council members were: the Hon. Nada Al Jamali, the Hon. Mohammed Al Balushi, the Hon. Naashiah Al Kharusi, the Hon. Air Vice-Marshal (rtd.) Yahya Al Jumaa and the Hon. Saleh bin Taleb Al Zakwani. They were accompanied by two State Council staff members: Altaf Al Marhoon and Alya Al Rahma.

The first day was spent at Sackville Street in a series of briefings and discussions organised by the Civil Service College on behalf of the Society. The visiting presenters included Meg Munn (a former Labour MP and Foreign Office Minister) and Lord Lisvane (the former Clerk of the House of Commons, now Deputy Speaker of the Lords) on the workings of Parliament, Andrew Tyrie (former Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee) on parliamentary scrutiny of the budget, and representatives of the investigative side of the National Audit Office on holding civil servants to account for departmental spending. Discussion ranged over the workings of both houses at Westminster, parliamentary debate and questions, the role of Parliament in



Presentation of the State Council Plaque. Lto R: Altaf Al Marhoon, Alya Al Rahma, Mohammed Al Balushi, Richard Muir, Saleh al Zakwani, Nada Al Jamali, Naashiah Al Kharusi and Yahya Al Jumaa.



The delegation at Sackville Street, briefing by Lord Luce and Meg Munn.

approving the Government's budget, and Public Accounts Committee enquiries into departmental spending.

The following day included a tour of the House of Lords with Lord Luce (who had visited the State Council with Richard Muir the previous October) and a lunch sponsored by the Society with Lord Luce, Kate Hoey (Chair of the All Party Oman Group), Lord Astor and several other members of the House of Lords as well as HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Richard Muir and Robert Alston.

In a round up discussion with the delegation there was agreement that the visit had been valuable in increasing contact between the two parliaments and

in giving Omani parliamentarians insights into British practice. It was suggested that the dialogue between the House of Lords and the State Council should be extended to a wider circle of peers, particularly those with an interest in the region but no direct knowledge of the Sultanate; the fact that both upper houses represented wide experience of public life and careers outside parliament, as well as continuity of membership without electoral pressures, provided a strong basis for building long term relationships between the Lords and the State Council.

At the same time there should be further efforts at closer links between the House of Commons and the Consultative Council;

the all Party Parliamentary Group at Westminster was important here and the aim should be to bring fresh participants into the dialogue so that new intakes of MPs are better informed of the importance of the Sultanate to UK interests in the region and of the historic and mutually valuable relationship. In short, both British and Omani parliamentarians stood to gain, both from better knowledge of the bilateral relationship and from further exchanges of experience and skills.

The Anglo-Omani Society was warmly thanked for its initiative in organising and supporting an excellent programme which made full and valuable use of the two days. ■

A NEW WEBSITE FOR 2019

The Anglo-Omani Society is pleased to announce that the design of a new website is underway, which we hope to launch early in 2019. We think that a new design can offer multiple benefits to members, helping to create a more engaging and navigable browsing experience; and prospective members will be able to access useful information about our activities and services. We will be getting in touch prior to the launch with more details.

OMAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

Oman is a country of peace and stability with a reputation for friendship with neighbours and powers beyond its region. However, it is at the centre of a difficult and dangerous part of the world. A new feature in the Society's programme this year raised a great deal of interest.

As an innovation the Society held a panel discussion rather than a lecture at the January meeting. A distinguished group considered Oman's current approach to foreign policy and, in particular, the unprecedented challenges inherent in the Sultanate's relations with the other GCC states, with Yemen and with Iran.

The panellists were: Jeremy Jones, well known to the Society as the co-author of *'Oman, Culture and Diplomacy'* and *'A History of Modern Oman'*; Dr Abdullah

Baabood, another regular contributor to the lecture programme and Director of the Gulf Studies Programme at Qatar University; and Dr Anoush Ehteshami, Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, an internationally recognised expert on Iran and the Gulf region. The meeting, which attracted a large audience, was under the Chatham House Rule to permit a frank discussion among the panellists who all spoke on a personal basis.



Our speakers at a happy moment in the panel discussion (left to right): Jeremy Jones, Abdullah Baabood and Anoush Ehteshami.

Several key points emerged from the discussion:

- Oman is seen to maintain a pragmatic approach to its relations with its neighbours, accepting that neighbours are neighbours, regardless of political persuasion or affinity. It conducts a principled foreign policy based on dialogue and maintains its commitments to foreign powers.
- Under Sultan Qaboos, Oman's aim has been to have stable and secure neighbours so that all can prosper. Oman has always tried to cooperate with Saudi Arabia and Iran as well as with the smaller Gulf states and so to maintain a balanced position in the region.
- Oman has supported the GCC since its establishment in 1981 with the aim of greater intra-Gulf economic coordination and security.

- The blockade of Qatar is regretted in Oman as contrary to this core principle, leading to loss of public trust in the GCC as an inter-state organisation and negative effects on the GCC's relationships with other extra regional bodies and states, such as the EU.
- Oman has participated in joint GCC exercises and naval patrols of the Strait of Hormuz but has never had an active military presence outside its borders.
- On Yemen, this policy continues. Oman supports humanitarian and diplomatic efforts, led by the UN, to resolve the conflict peaceably.
- Oman's connection with Iran can be termed a 'special relationship'. A crucial aspect is the mutual respect felt by both countries in terms of religion, culture and civilisation. These connections are often overlooked and should not be underestimated.

- The overall Omani approach has been to seek to contain GCC aggression towards Iran while simultaneously conveying to Iran the concerns of GCC states. But efforts to bring Iran and the Gulf states together have often failed.
- Looking ahead to the coming post-oil global economy, Oman's aspiration is to develop into a regional trade hub, taking advantage of its beneficial position outside the turbulent Gulf. One aim is to become a key point along the new economic corridors being developed as part of the Chinese-led One Belt One Road foreign policy.

It was agreed that, given the continued level of crisis in the region, the panel should be invited back later in the year or early in 2019 for a further assessment of the situation in the Gulf and Oman's role in it. ■

THE BRITISH MUSEUM: INTERNATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAMME 2018

Ali Al Kathiri, Director of the Museum of the Frankincense Land, Dhofar, was sponsored by the Society to take part in the British Museum International Training Programme this year. The museum is in Al Baleed Archaeological Park, a site on UNESCO's world heritage list.

As Director of his museum, Ali manages its strategy and is responsible for the galleries, collections, storage and documentation. He also gives tours for official visits and coordinates the activities of museum employees and the educational programmes. He represents the museum during conferences and interviews, and is currently supervising several international research projects. Ali is a member of the National Committee for Museums in Oman and a member of the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

At the British Museum, Ali was based in the Middle East Department working with Curator Zeina Klink-Hoppe. His five-week partner placement was at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. In his last week on the ITP, Ali worked alongside fellow participant Suruchika Chawla (New Delhi, India) on their *Object in Focus* exhibition proposal project.



The picture shows Ali Al Kathiri with Richard Muir and Richard Owens.

THE OMANI-BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

ARTICLE BY MATT FOSTER



HE Maitha al Mahrouki is shown giving the keynote address at the OBBC Summer event at the Institute of Directors, watched by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles and HE Maqbool Sultan

The Omani-British Business Council (OBBC) is now up and running. It has been formally established as a company limited by guarantee, with Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles and Matt Foster as Directors.

The OBBC's aim is to promote closer economic and commercial relations between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. The focus will be on supporting UK businesses operating – or seeking to operate – in the Sultanate.

The OBBC maintains a formal relationship with the AOS with Matt Foster also acting as a Trustee of the AOS, and AOS Corporate Members benefiting from membership of the OBBC. OBBC will continue to work closely with the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFrA), its sister organisation in Oman. The Patrons of OBBC and OBFrA, respectively, remain HRH the Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haithem bin Tariq Al-Said.

The forward programme for OBBC will feature a number of different elements, with a mixture of networking, information sharing and policy discussions. The main focus in Summer 2018 was on the business-focused elements of annual UK-Oman events, which took place on 12 July.

The OBBC event took place at the Institute of Directors on Pall Mall and included a discussion on the role of tourism in diversifying Oman's economy. The event was co-chaired by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, and His Excellency Maqbool Sultan, Chairman of OBFrA. OBBC and OBFrA were delighted that Her Excellency Maitha Al



Prince Andrew being welcomed to the reception at Sackville Street by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles. Mr Pankaj Khimji is on the right, Robert Alston on the left and Ben Wright in the background.



Maitha Saif Majid Al Mahrouki speaking to Robert Alston.



Sayyid Haithem with the Omani Ambassador to Britain, Abdulaziz al Hinaï, and the British Ambassador to Oman, Hamish Cowell.



Prince Andrew meeting Sayyid Haithem. Maqbool Sultan is on the left.

Mahrouki, the Under Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism, gave the keynote presentation. The audience also heard from the Oman Aviation Group about how they are supporting the development of the Tourism sector in Oman.

After an informal lunch, Jamal Aziz and the team from Sohar Port and Freezone showcased recent developments and opportunities for Investment at the port and Free Zone – and set out their plans for the future.

OBBC continues to attract new members and looks forward to strengthening and deepening the business relationship between the UK and Oman.

July 12th also saw the Annual OBBC / OBFrA reception. The Boards of the Anglo-Omani Society, the Omani British Business Council and the Omani British Friendship Association welcomed around 100 guests to the Anglo-Omani Society in Sackville Street for the annual reception. We were honoured to be joined by His Royal Highness The Duke of York and His Highness Sayyid Haithem bin Tariq Al-Said in their respective capacities as Presidents of the Omani British Business Council and the Omani British Friendship Association.

The Boards of OBBC and OBFrA will continue to work closely together, and with the Anglo-Omani Society, as they develop future events. ■



Maqbool Sultan and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles.

BP'S AL KHAZZAN PROJECT BUILDING OMAN'S FUTURE

Khazzan is one of
the biggest tight
gas projects in the
Middle East.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Situated in the middle of a desert, this greenfield project presented various challenges with gas held tightly in hard dense rocks. Using a wealth of technical expertise, BP is applying innovative technology and propriety expertise to unlock the vast reserves of tight gas at Khazzan to deliver long term gas supply which will benefit Oman over many decades. In late September 2017, first gas from phase one of the project was produced, well ahead of schedule.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In January 2007 BP signed a major exploration and production sharing agreement with the government of Oman for the appraisal and development of Block 61 and Khazzan gas field. The agreement covers an area of about 2,800 square kilometres in central Oman that contains a number of 'tight gas' reservoirs first discovered in the 1990s. The project is owned jointly by BP Oman (60%) and Oman Oil Company Exploration and Production (OOCEP, 40%), and is operated by BP Oman. The total investment on the project is estimated to reach about \$16bn.



Oman's Minister of Oil and Gas, Dr Mohammed Al Rumhy sums up the significance of the project: "Firstly, it has unlocked one of the largest natural gas deposits in the country – a precious resource that has been challenging to develop for many years."

Important Milestones				
1990	2007	2008	2014	2017
Discovery of natural gas resources in Khazzan	Signing the exploration agreement with BP	Test drilling commenced	Commencement of field development	First gas

A CHALLENGING LOCATION

The Khazzan natural gas field located in Ad Dhahirah Governorate, Oman, was discovered in 1990s and is the biggest new upstream project in Oman. The field is situated about 350km southwest of Muscat and can be accessed via a desert road from Qarn Alam in the south or Fahud in the north. The Khazzan tight gas reserves lie at depths of up to five kilometres in narrow bands of extremely hard, dense rock.

The complex and challenging conditions surrounding the ‘tight gas’ of Khazzan require specialised drilling equipment, the precise drilling of both vertical and horizontal wells, and well stimulation to free the gas.

WORLD-CLASS TECHNOLOGY

As one of the leading specialists in the production of tight gas, BP is applying innovative technology and propriety expertise to unlock this potential. BP brings global experience in advanced seismic, hydraulic fracturing and horizontal well design expertise, which has been vital in the work to date. The world’s largest onshore seismic survey and precise 3D modelling of the subsurface was conducted to understand where the gas is and how it is distributed. Highly accurate horizontal drilling is undertaken and fluids are injected at pressure to coax the gas out.

OUTCOMES AND EXPECTATIONS

Construction on the field development commenced in 2014 and first gas was produced in late September 2017 (within just 42 months from execution) from Phase One of the Khazzan gas field. Phase One of Khazzan is made up of 200 wells feeding into a two-train central processing facility, with production reaching 1 billion cubic feet of gas per day (bcf/d) and 35,000 barrels of gas condensate on a daily basis. Once the second phase of the Khazzan is fully up and running, production from Phases 1 and 2 is expected rise to 1.5 bcf/d. The total gas produced will make a significant contribution to ensure stable supplies from domestic sources.



Part of the central processing facility at the Khazzan field.

A CITY IN THE DESERT

The facilities developed in the greenfield tight gas project in Oman will incorporate a 1,200 mmscfd (34 million cubic meters per day) gas processing plant, export pipelines and provision of 350 drilling wells, and 600 km of flowlines and gathering systems over the life of the project. In addition to the kitchens, accommodation blocks and the clinic built on-site, BP also built a water treatment plant to deal with wastewater as well as a facility to manage hazardous waste.

QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY

From the outset, BP has designed Khazzan to be an inherently low-emission concept. For example, a central processing facility was built where water and condensate is removed from the gas produced at all well sites in order to create market quality gas. This low-emission approach also brings business benefits. The Khazzan central processing facility is twice as efficient as a typical oil and gas field as it is powered by recycled waste heat from the gas turbines within the facility. This reduces the amount of methane emitted – especially when

BP is one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world and has a long history of oil and gas exploration and production in the Middle East.

compared with remote tight gas development projects that use natural gas as their power source. In the case that the site is too remote to connect to the central facility, BP installs solar panels to power equipment.

BENEFITS TO OMAN'S ECONOMY

BP is one of the largest oil and gas companies in the world and has a long history of oil and gas exploration and

production in the Middle East. It is a major investor in Oman and has had an upstream presence in Oman since 2007. As one of the world's pioneers in tight gas production, BP brings technology and experience to develop the Khazzan field in Block 61, one of the Middle East's largest unconventional gas resources. BP's deep technical knowledge is key to unlocking the vast reserves of tight gas at Khazzan to deliver long term gas supply which will benefit Oman over many decades.

Along with its developing business, BP Oman has a strong commitment to its role in the development of Omani talent through an ongoing programme of recruitment and career development. The expertise gained by Omani engineers will enhance the capability of Oman's oil and gas sector and will benefit Oman well into the future.

- At the height of construction, more than 13,500 people were working on the Khazzan project contributing to 91 million hours of work.
- More than two-thirds of in-country workforce are Omani nationals
- In the first half of 2017, 13,000 hours of training have been delivered to build local capability. ■



BP drilling engineer and completion supervisor inspect a 5 1/2" tubing hanger prior to installation.

MUSCAT IN SEVILLE

BY SIR TERENCE CLARK, OUR VICE-PRESIDENT, WHO WAS HEAD OF CHANCERY IN MUSCAT 1972-1973 AND AMBASSADOR TO OMAN IN 1990-1994, AND ALSO SERVED IN MADRID.

Muscat bay, just as we knew it when we first lived there.

On a short visit with some of my family to Seville recently, we were looking for somewhere to eat, when I spotted a sign in Arabic advertising a restaurant called al-Wadi (named, I discovered later, after al-Wadi al-Kabir or Guadalquivir in Spanish, on which Seville stands). Hungry and intrigued, we went inside, whereupon a waiter immediately responded to my greetings in Arabic by welcoming us to a large table at the back of the room. I had hardly taken my seat when I noticed a familiar looking picture on the wall next to me. It was a black and white photograph of Muscat bay, just as we knew it when we first lived in the large house across the courtyard from the former Embassy in Saudi 1932!

I told the Syrian waiter that this was all wrong. This was a picture from Oman and not Saudi Arabia. In some confusion, he said he would ask the boss to come and see me. His boss turned out to be another Syrian from Latakiya, who was so impressed that I should know the scene so well that in a typically Arab gesture of generosity he offered me the picture! I would have loved to have taken it for the Society, but sadly restrictions on hand luggage would have precluded bringing it home. So I had to decline the offer and content myself with taking this photograph. However, if any members should be in Seville, do look out for this reminder of a scene that has disappeared for ever – and the food is good too! ■



ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON 2017

ARTICLE BY JOHN McKEOWN

Emphasis on Youth at the Society's Annual Lunch

HE Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Omani Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Lord Astor, the British Government Trade Envoy to Oman, were the speakers at the annual lunch held at the RAF Club, hosted by our President, HE Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Zahir Al-Hinai, Ambassador, and our Chairman, Robert Alston.

The annual lunch was held at the RAF Club, a change of venue which was very successful, and the many members and guests present were treated to excellent speeches and a fine lunch in a most convivial atmosphere. The Society subsidised tickets for students and alumni of our gap year and

Arabic language schemes, so there was a strong representation of young Britains and Omanis.

This fitted well with the speech by Sayyid Badr, who laid emphasis on youth and the future of Oman. He recalled arriving 40 years ago in Britain as a student, and his time at Oxford in the 1980s. He stated that universities are one of our greatest assets, developed over centuries, retaining core values, rich, challenging and rewarding to develop students so that they can contribute to their countries' life and future. He was keen to encourage more young Omanis to benefit.





Oman faces huge challenges, he said. The country will rely on the next generation, which needs to be well educated, innovative and open to new ideas. First class education and training allied to a positive spirit by Omani youth would lead to a bright future.

Sayyid Badr also spoke about the enduring friendship between Britain and Oman, based initially on military partnership and oil development, and now more widely in commerce and education. He thanked the Society, which he said operates at many levels as a forum for shared memories and values.

Lord Astor also spoke of the Society's contribution, which does so much to maintain and strengthen the bond between our countries. He also mentioned the wide and long-standing links in defence, security and foreign affairs as well as in economic and commercial areas. Initiatives by British and Omani businesses underscored the strength and importance of the economic links. He pointed out that Britain was the largest source of foreign direct investment in Oman, with 45 per cent of the overall total.

He spoke of the value of personal relationships and friendships, and neatly reminded everyone of the importance of such occasions as the annual lunch in renewing existing friendships and making new ones – a point which was also made by Sayyid Badr. ■



THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

ARTICLE BY RICHARD OWEN THE LEAD TRUSTEE FOR THE SCHEME

The Grants Subcommittee consists of Richard, Martyn Bishop – the Society's Honorary Treasurer and Louise Hosking. They assess grant applications and come to a consensus on recommendations for submission to the full body of trustees who make the final decisions and allocations.



The remaining 55 per cent is distributed widely to projects in the fields of conservation, archaeology, zoological and botanical field expeditions and research, books, photography, medical seminars and lectures. The Society specifically supported projects during the last year for:

- Durham University (final year of a five-year project) 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.
- Biosphere Expeditions, UK, for training of Omani students to work on marine conservation in the Musandam.
- For a lecture at the Royal Geographical Society on marine conservation in Oman.
- Natural History Museum, London, for training staff from Oman Botanic Gardens.
- Dr Paul Bates of the Harrison Institute, UK, for a mammal survey and training of Omani Rangers in Dhofar.

- Oman National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre for a workshop in Oman by Liverpool John Mores University.
- Paul Flandinette for the publication of underwater study of marine life in Oman.
- Dr Roderic Dutton for a project to improve the falaj at Luzugh.
- Marwa Al Yarabi for an architectural student placement in London.
- Andrew Stokes-Rees for botanic research in Dhofar.
- Research Council, Oman, for three students to attend the London International Youth Forum.

For the 2017/18 financial year, the Society again increased the budget for grants for UK and Omani nationals and organisations for educational, cultural and environmental projects that met the Society's charitable objects. The budget was increased from £150,000 in 2016/17 to £160,000 during the last year and will be raised again to £175,000 for the current year.

The Society allocates approximately 45 per cent of its budget to grants to students/ education projects including programmes at the Sultan's School, primarily for UK gap-year students, at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers at Manah, for under-graduate and graduate students, and the Oxford and Cambridge International Baccalaureate Summer schools for Omani students.

The Society's grants are available for a wide range of activities which contribute to the overall aim of promoting Anglo-Omani relations. 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. ■

AOS LECTURE PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY LOUISE HOSKING



Our balanced programme of lectures and presentations attracts many members to Sackville Street each month, and it requires much study, liaison and work to arrange. Our responsible trustee, Louise Hosking, describes some features of this year's programme.

Since its inception the Anglo-Omani Society's lecture programme has sought to play a key role in realising the Society's declared mission to preserve the long-standing friendship between Britain and Oman. Many of our members have lived in the Sultanate and during their stay have developed an enormous affection for the country; once they have returned to the UK the Society enables them to keep

in touch with Oman and widen their understanding of it.

Our May lecture addresses a traditional aspect of the attraction of Oman for many Britons as Mark Evans focuses on what an experience of the desert can teach the explorer and adventurer. The desert has fuelled the imagination of many past visitors to Oman but the Executive Director of Outward Bound Oman will refer to recent developments in the outward-bound profession and the progress on three educational/youth related projects that the Society has actively supported in Oman in recent years.

Of course, no flourishing friendship is static: friends change and the ways in which they interact develop. In this year's programme we aim to address how Oman

has developed in recent years and the part Britain has played in this development. Scott Dickson's lecture in January will investigate the enormous changes that have been introduced in Oman as oil revenues have funded infrastructure projects: building transport networks and supplying water and electricity to remote areas. In November we shall repeat an event that proved popular in January 2018 (and is reported elsewhere in the Review): the panel discussion examining Oman's relationship with its regional neighbours, to be chaired once again by Richard Muir. Omani academic Abdullah Baabood will speak about the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and regional analyst and former diplomat Noel Brehony will discuss Yemen, while Neil Bush, Head of

2018/19 Speakers Programme

2018

20th September 2018 ELISABETH KENDALL
Arabic Poetry as a Weapon of Jihad

18th October 2018 STUART LAING
Arabs from Oman and their East African Colonies

15th November 2018 RICHARD MUIR WITH
ABDULLAH BAABOOD,
NOEL BREHONY AND
NEIL BUSH CHAIR
*Oman and its Neighbours:
A panel discussion*

13th December 2018 IAN HOCKLEY
*An Organ Recital at the
Church of St Andrew,
Holborn*

2019

17th January 2019 SCOTT DICKSON
*Oman and the Middle East
Infrastructure Boom*

14th February 2019 SHAHINA GHAZANFAR
*Plants of Oman –
A Journey Completed*

21st March 2019 ANOUSH EHTESHAMI
*China's Belt and Road
Initiative and the Gulf:
The Oman Dimension*

18th April 2019 ANDREW SPALTON
*Bats, Rodents and
Shrews of Dhofar*

16th May 2019 MARK EVANS
*The University of the
Desert – Tales from the
Oldest Seat of Learning
on Earth*

20th June 2019 DEREK KENNETT
*Rustaq – A Key Location
throughout Omani History:
The Results of the AOS-
funded Rustaq Batinah
Archaeological Survey*

Unless otherwise notified all lectures will take place at The Society's premises at 34 Sackville Street, London W1S 3ED, starting at 6pm. Drinks will be served from 5.30pm.

Please visit the Society website or contact the Events and Projects Manager for up to date information of any changes.

the Arabian Peninsula Department at the FCO, will draw on the Saif Sareea joint British-Omani military exercises to examine current insecurities in the region, both diplomatic and military.

Anoush Ehteshami will speak in March on *China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Gulf: the Oman Dimension*, to provide an insight into Oman's relationship with an assertive modern power seeking to renew its ancient connections with the Middle East.

In addition to its lecture programme, the Society maintains a generous grants scheme for projects that seek to improve mutual understanding between Britain and Oman. Two of our 2018/19 lectures report on such projects: Andrew Spalton's in April will summarise a study of small rodents in Dhofar, and Derek Kennett's in June will

report on the Rustaq Batinah Archaeological Survey. Both projects have enabled British and Omani students and academics to collaborate in studying Oman.

Our February lecture by Shahina Gahzanfar has a similar context. A botanist from Kew Gardens, she has been working on a study of the *'Flora of Oman'*, including the conservation status and economic importance of its species. A review of her Flora is elsewhere in this issue.

Other lectures will address shared histories. In October, Stuart Laing will speak on how 19th century Omanis, like their British contemporaries, used seafaring skills to establish overseas colonies based on trade.

Elisabeth Kendall's September lecture perhaps provided a counterpoint to the theme of our annual programme, an

acknowledgement that there are some who mistrust the nature of the existing relationship between Oman and the west. In a lecture entitled *'Arabic Poetry as a Weapon of Jihad'* she analysed how poetry, the oldest Arabic literary form, is currently used as a forum to question political authority and affirm a traditional, non-western identity in the Arabian Peninsula.

Finally, it is, of course, also an important function of the Anglo-Omani Society to celebrate the long-standing friendship between Britain and Oman. December's event will do just that in the form of an organ concert at St Andrew's Holborn by Ian Hockley, Organist at the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra. We hope that you will join us at this celebration and also participate in the Society's other events in the coming year. ■

IT'S YOUR LIBRARY

ARTICLE BY IAN KENDRICK

How many members are aware of, or have used the Society's library? It's there and has a very varied selection of books and research material about, and related to, the Sultanate.

A number of the books are now out of print, but contain fascinating information about living and working in Oman both before and since the start of the Renaissance. The library has been used by people researching aspects of the country's history, but it is little used by members and there is a very simple reason for this. For security reasons the books cannot be taken out of the building, and very few members have the time or inclination to sit reading a book inside our building.

All this may yet change as there has been a recent recommendation that the library should be digitised and put online so that books can be accessed and read by our members from anywhere in the world. This should not be too difficult as the Society has already adapted to the digital age with our staff routinely sending and receiving information using emails, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. There are, however, some associated matters that could delay the process.

The scanning of books is relatively easy to do, but can be quite costly because of the need to turn the pages being copied. If done manually, it is labour-intensive which can

be expensive. If a mechanical page-turner is used, these machines are very expensive to buy. Fortunately, the ever-advancing development of computers has resulted in at least one book scanner that is user-friendly, which produces good results, and which costs hundreds, rather than thousands of pounds.

One extremely important side-issue is the question of copyright. It would quite simply be illegal to put books online without the permission of the copyright holder. Fortunately, it should be fairly straightforward to gain permission for books that are no longer being printed and sold, and it may be that the regulations will be easier for us if the library is limited to members. There are certainly some special rules for registered charities, which, of course, includes the Society.

I hope that in next year's Review we will be able to announce that the digital library is open and available to members. Meanwhile, have a look at our catalogue which can be found on the main Society website, and if you have any comments or suggestions, we'll be pleased to hear from you. ■

ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME

Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers, Manah, Oman.

This was the eighth year in which the Anglo-Omani Society has run its Arabic Language Scheme.

DR ELISABETH KENDALL

Senior Research Fellow at Pembroke College Oxford and Trustee of the Society

It was a great delight in 2017 once again to select a group of enthusiastic young British students to enjoy an intensive six weeks of Arabic language study in Oman. This was the eighth year in which the Anglo-Omani Society has run its Arabic Language Scheme, which means that we now have almost 80 alumni! It is wonderful to see their enduring enthusiasm for Oman, long after the course itself is over. Year after year, our students

profess that they will never forget the hospitality and friendship shown to them by Omanis and by the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic, located in Manah just outside Nizwa. I wish to extend my warmest thanks to those who continue to make this important initiative possible: the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman, the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and of course everyone at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic whose professionalism and commitment never fail to impress. We hope you enjoy hearing more about last year's scheme in the words of some of the students themselves.





ROBERT UNIACKE
Durham University

It was an honour to attend the Sultan Qaboos College in Manah. The experience was marked by fond memories of outstanding hospitality, excellent tuition and the forming of long-lasting friendships. The Omanis truly go above and beyond their reputation for kindness and a positive attitude which lasted without fail from the greeting at the airport to the final goodbye. It even held out during our bold attempt at performing a Ceilidh dance during the Cultural Evening. Their natural chattiness and curiosity without doubt enhanced our Arabic progression. Never have I been in an environment where native speakers are keen to interact patiently with foreigners in such an encouraging manner- we spent countless hours enjoying coffee and dates while talking with staff at the Guest House. This was the perfect time to test out our new phrases from the morning classes, which were very well taught with challenging content, including a fascinating week focusing on discussing cybersecurity. Possibly the best aspect of the course was the language partner programme. Not only were our biweekly meetings brilliant Arabic practice, but also an opportunity to meet charming and engaging young Omanis who were real credits to their country. They even welcomed us into their homes to share a meal with their families, one of the most memorable experiences of the scheme. I personally remain in touch with both my language partner and someone else's, and I am sure we will

remain good friends for the years to come. The Anglo-Omani Society gifted us with a truly unique and fulfilling cultural and academic experience, and I would like to thank the generous donors along with all of the staff involved in making it a brilliant six weeks (including the lovely team of chefs, who pulled off delicious meals every day without fail).

ARTHUR BICKERSTETH
Cambridge University

While Manah and the Dakhiliya province may be sparsely populated and more culturally conservative than other parts of Oman, living there for six weeks provided us with a unique and fascinating experience. Upon arrival at the Guest

House I was immediately struck by the genuine warmth and hospitality of Muhammad al-Suqri, the Guest House supervisor. Over some coffee and dates we were introduced to the slow paced but charming mannerisms of Omani culture. This effusive generosity and hospitality shown by Omanis wherever I travelled in the country remains one of my abiding memories. However, we had not enrolled on this course solely to enjoy coffee and dates; the daily routine of Arabic lessons, followed by homework and language partners in the afternoon meant that we remained focused on improving our language skills. The evenings did offer us time to relax and were spent playing football at the local pitch, in the nearby café or simply enjoying the Guest House – the vast quantities of food on offer each mealtime meant that lunch and dinner became protracted affairs filled with interesting conversation. The College generously organised an extensive programme of trips and excursions for us. Highlights included attending a wedding celebration attended by half the population of Manah, turtle watching at Ras al-Jinz, and enjoying the “cooler” climes of al-Jabal al-Akhdar. Alongside this we met with our local language partners multiple times each week; this allowed us to converse in a candid and open manner with local Omanis in Arabic. Through them and lectures by Omani academics I returned to the UK with a far greater understanding and appreciation of Oman – I can think of no





better way of being introduced to all the country has to offer through the Anglo-Omani Society Language Scheme and thoroughly recommend it.

HINNAH SHEIKH Leeds University

Studying at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Natives was a most beneficial and enjoyable experience. The quality of the teaching was to a very high standard and the extra-curricular activities made an engaging and exciting break from studies. From hiking in Wadi Shab to watching turtles lay eggs on the beach in Ras al-Jinz, to marvelling at the stunning views from al-Jabal al-Akhdar, these trips enabled us to see the rich cultural history and diverse landscape of Oman. What struck me most, however, was the Omanis themselves. They are some of the most hospitable and friendly people I have come across in my life! The teachers at the

college were approachable and always so helpful and our language partner programme developed our speaking skills further, gave us an insight into Omani culture and was an opportunity for us to make some Omani friends too! The experience was great and one I wish I could relive. I would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society, all the staff at the College and the Omani Foreign Ministry for providing us with a fantastic and memorable few weeks in Oman.

LUCY TOWERS SOAS and City University, London

Being able to take six weeks away from 'real' life to focus exclusively on Arabic language learning is a rare opportunity and one I am incredibly grateful to have been given by the Anglo-Omani Society. The bonus of life in Oman being literally mapped out for us was that choice was taken out of our hands - from meals to laundry days to class itinerary and evening and weekend activities. That meant that there was more time for Arabic than I've ever had before. Our teachers remained patient and celebrated our progress with many 'wows' and smiles. Talking with our language partners was a great way of practising what we were learning in class, as well as a way of learning more about Omani life.

We were extremely lucky to go to a local wedding and visit our language partner's home, eat with her family, walk in her garden and drive around her village. Long days of lesson and study gave way to adventure at weekends. I'm forever grateful

to our hosts for showing us so much of their country in such a short space of time and happy I was able to spend my time with new friends who also shared my love for the country and region. From ascending sand dunes to exploring wadis, watching sea turtles lay their eggs to climbing mountains, my experience of Oman was one of quiet peace, intense study and newfound admiration for this unassuming country.

AIMEE TWAITES Durham University

My excitement in having been chosen for the scheme did not dwindle as I arrived in Muscat to an unthinkable hot climate and a new country.

Over the time spent in Manah I benefited greatly from the daily classes, the exposure to native Arabic-speakers through the language partners' scheme, the introduction to Omani culture through meals and trips together, and the lectures on Omani history, economics, and society. I particularly enjoyed my visit to my language partner's home which not only gave me an insight into Omani traditions and hospitality but also the country's historic and ongoing links with Zanzibar through my language partner's mother.

We enjoyed a long weekend in Salalah, exploring the coastal and mountainous areas to the east and west, as well as the Batinah region to the north of Muscat, the capital city itself, Jebel Akhdar, Sharqiyah and Dakhiliyah, where we were able to witness some early morning camel racing thanks to our fantastic hosts.

Finally, it was wonderful to meet Dr. Kendall during her visit to Manah, particularly to gain more insight into her work and benefit from her expertise and knowledge on the region. We were also fortunate enough to meet Mr. Wilks, the outgoing British Ambassador to Oman, and hear about his time in the country.

I'd like to offer my sincere thanks for selecting me as a recipient of this great opportunity. I have now graduated from university and am continuing my Arabic studies alongside working at the British Council in Egypt, before returning to the UK next October to continue my studies at master's level. ■



GAP YEAR SELECTION PROCESS

ARTICLE BY NIGEL KNOCKER

Nigel Knocker explains the method of choosing the participants in the Society's gap year scheme at the Sultan's School. Eight or nine are selected each year from the many applications from both girls and boys.

Students, whether those in their gap year between school and university, or in a number of cases undergraduates or graduates, apply to the AOS for the scheme, details of which are on the website.

We look at the applicants' details, their CVs, reasons for wishing to go to the Sultan's School in Muscat, if they have a UK driving licence, and then decide if we wish to see them.

We arrange a suitable date which usually fits a number of applicants so they can be seen together at the AOS Offices at 34 Sackville Street, London. On occasions they can be seen on Skype depending on the circumstances.

The interviews are conducted in relaxed a manner as possible, usually with two or three together so as not to be too intimidating! Such questions asked are whether they have seen the school website, to elaborate on their reasons for wanting to

go, their previous knowledge of the country, whether they have relations living in Oman, their driving experience and so on. We encourage them to ask us questions.

We then decide if we think the applicant will fit the criteria for the scheme. If he or she does, we send details to the Sultan's School authorities in Oman for them to agree that they will accept the applicant. Their decision is final. If agreed, the applicant is told and the AOS staff start the administrative process including flights, usually by Oman Air. The school contacts the students direct to explain details of what they can expect on arrival, for example visas, arranging their individual programmes, accommodation, Arabic lessons and other relevant details.

Before going we send each student a "Welcome Pack" which gives much detail about the country, habits, places to see and useful contacts. ■



GAP YEAR SCHEME REPORT

Georgia Onslow, Harriet Cooke, Max Man, Mary Amos and Oisín Flynn participated in the Society's Gap Year Scheme from January-April 2018. They tell us about their wild and wonderful experiences.

'Calm before the storm' would be an accurate way to describe our first night in Oman, which was spent munching on takeaway shawarmas and politely chatting with Sean and Laura in their living room. While this may have prepared us for the obscene amount of shawarma we would eat over the coming months it was a rare moment of peace before three of the busiest, noisiest and most exciting months of our lives. Cut forward just a week and



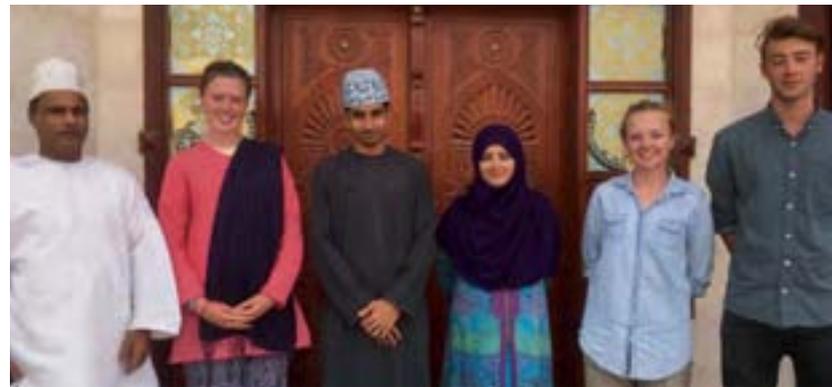


the five of us were in the middle of the Muscat Marathon, attempting to shepherd a bunch of young runners through a sweaty crowd, fighting to make our voices heard over the noise of the speakers and asking ourselves at what age children learned to only need the bathroom when it was convenient...

Our school day started at breakfast, a time we decided to use to get the scholars talking and practising their English. This was maybe not our finest idea as – no matter what culture – very few teenagers like to be vocal at that time of day. The mornings really helped us to really get to know the boys – who was lazy and liked to sleep in instead of getting to school on time and who would be first out of the door, leaving a beautifully made bed and a happy gap student.

Beyond our commitment to the 50 boys on scholarships, our timetables of primary lessons were very varied, and it was wonderful within that to focus on things we enjoyed. For Georgia, this involved conducting the Junior Choir at the Spring Music Concert while for Mary it was overseeing the madness of the lower primary art lessons. All the teachers were amazingly kind, helpful and, when they saw us at lunch, sympathetic – this was a noisy, busy affair involving many questions and many arguments between the year four girls over who got to sit next to which Gappie... The staff were so welcoming and it was extremely interesting to see the workings of the school and how each child

had been doing ourselves only months before. We were able to practise our Arabic and pick up local slang, and the friendships we developed with the boys meant that we



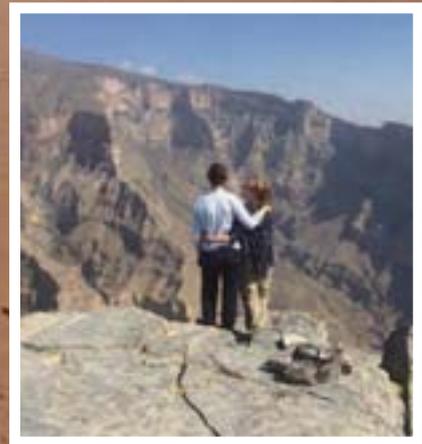
is catered for and supported individually. While all the teachers were amazing, we all felt it important to mention the incredible energy and kindness of Bill and Nerina, the Boarding House Supervisors. Their commitment to the scholars was inspiring as they constantly went out of their way to make life in the boarding house interesting, safe and fun.

Afternoons were arguably the most enjoyable time of day and would be spent lounging around the boarding house, chatting and playing cards with the boys before challenging them on the football field. After dinner we would spend an hour or so helping out with homework and their conversational English. It gave an odd sense of nostalgia as many of the boys were just a few months younger than us and were doing work that we

were invited to multiple scholars' houses in the Interior – experiences that enabled us to see a completely different side to Oman. Our age gave us a unique relationship with the boys, as we were not quite staff but not quite friends, which benefited both them and us as we were given a different perspective on their lives to the other teachers.

Twice a week we swapped teaching for learning ourselves at our Arabic lessons. Our eccentric teacher, Abdul Aziz, was nothing if not thorough, giving us a great basic knowledge and even suggested some useful phrases for us to use at school, such as 'be quiet' and 'sit down' – needless to say these came in handy more than once...

Despite the fact that only Max and Harriet are going on to study Arabic, everyone got involved with learning the language. This was so worth it, as having just a few basic phrases really came in handy when out and about in Oman – from getting us invited into homes for coffee and dates to helping us out when we broke down at the side of the road.



Having a car gave us the independence we really needed in our free time to see and experience so much of Oman – more of the country than anticipated with our questionable navigation skills... Some weekends Sean, a highly recommendable tour guide, took us off camping or hiking. This really helped us to find our footing, meaning soon we had the confidence to camp and explore by ourselves. Through our expeditions we really got a sense of the natural beauty which Oman is so famous for: watching the sunset over Wahiba Sands; floating on our backs in



Watching the sunset over Wahiba Sands...





equipment, though thankfully both the car and our friendships survived the trip. Breakdowns and boredom were made worth it by dramatic beaches, wild camping and turtles!

With their experiences life-guarding and swim teaching, both the boys ended up being pretty useful during the Sultan School's swimming lessons and were given the chance to stay on for an extra month. This offer was eagerly accepted and resulted in many more exciting opportunities, including accompanying the swim team on a two-day gala in Dubai and getting involved with a local water polo club. What's more, they were able to return to Ibri to attend the engagement party of Samh's elder sister, stopping at the farm of another student on the way.

The boarding house is a constantly bustling, noisy and cheerful community, so to see that happiness broken by the death of a student was incredibly difficult. Maadh was a lovely and hard-working student, not once was he seen without a smile on his face. The visit to his village to pay our respects was hard, yet we were enveloped in such love by his family, devastated as they were. The meal was very moving, surrounded by all the women of the village, with that pure feeling of togetherness which is so hard to come by in today's world.

All five of us are incredibly fortunate, from getting along so well as a team to being given the opportunity to discover Oman in the first place. Our gap year travels didn't end in Oman, some of us having taught in India and Sri Lanka or travelled further through Asia since. Yet when we reunited recently in the unfamiliar cold of London, all of us could agree that Oman will forever stick in our minds as one of most captivating, beautiful and friendly destinations we have ever visited. Watch out Muscat – we will be back! ■

the cave at Wadi Shab; stargazing from our tents on Jebel Shams and swimming in piercingly clear water at the beaches around Salalah. Our experiences of the variety of Omani geology and landscape were incredible and the influence all this has on the traditions of the people is quite fascinating.

One of the real highlights was visiting Ibri and the home of Samh, a year ten scholar. We were so lucky to get such an insight into the home life of a student, meeting his family and exploring the town with his local expertise. An afternoon of

endless coffee and dates with relatives was followed by an evening at two engagement parties! Our shabby, dusty travelling clothes were a sore sight when surrounded by the beautiful dresses of the women, yet they didn't mind in the least and chatted away with us and provided yet more delicious food.

We spent the spring break road-tripping down to Salalah, taking the less exciting desert route there and returning via the stunning coastal road. 2000km is a long way to go in a somewhat unreliable car, full to the brim with long legs and camping



THE NEW GENERATION GROUP – 2017-2018

This year has proven to be yet another exciting and fruitful one for all those involved in the New Generation Group (NGG). With a great team based in Oman and the UK, we have hosted a number of events and facilitated activities which have furthered our outreach, encouraging many new members and inspiring old ones.

Kicking off 2018 with the most recent delegation in Muscat, we were fortunate to be joined by a fantastic group of Omani and British delegates and expert speakers to talk about 'Energy and Technology: An Efficient Future'. The NGG delegations have always tackled topics of real relevance to Oman and this year's conference was no exception. Encouraging rich discussion, the group were able to share their experiences whilst learning from one another. It was another example of the positive work that can be accomplished when bringing two young groups together to build lasting relationships between two nations.

Complementing the delegation, the NGG hosted events covering a wide range of subjects in London and we were fortunate to have been joined by some fantastic guest speakers whose topics drew audiences from many different ages and backgrounds. Dr Hadil Al-Moosa spoke about her doctoral thesis on female entrepreneurship

in Oman and Dr Eugene Rogan presented on the topic of First World War and the effects it had on the make-up of the Middle East as we know it today. Two joint events were also hosted with the AOS: September's exhibition with Eman Ali which drew in lots of new faces to experience her art work, 'Corridors of Power', and a fantastic event with long-term friend of the NGG, Mr Rashad Al-Zubair, who spoke about the private sector in Oman.

In Muscat, the NGG hosted a strategy meeting with HE Tahir Al-Amri, President of Oman's Central Bank and a Ramadan Iftar with The Leadership Academy for Special Skills and Bank Muscat. We also officially welcomed two new board members to join the team. Dr Hadil Al-Moosa and Mohammed Al-Issaei who have both been involved in the NGG over the past two years, are leaders in their lines of work and we are fortunate to have them on board.



Oliver Blake
NGG Chairman, UK

Ma'an Al Rawahi
NGG Chairman, Oman





Guest speaker Dr Eugene Rogan.



Dr Hadil Al-Moosa and NGG Board member Lissie Simpson.



NGG Oman Board members with CEO of the Central Bank of Muscat.



Guests at Society event with Dr Hadil Al-Moosa.

The AOS Internship programme continues to be a great success, seeing all of our interns go on to pursue successful careers in a number of sectors. Over the past year we have said goodbye to three fantastic interns and friends, Shireen Al-Habib, Beth Richards and Jareer Al-Daoud and welcomed the fourth, Tom Saville, into the new role of Events and Membership Officer at the Society. We would like to say a big thank you to all of

our interns this year who have worked extremely hard and who have contributed hugely towards the Society and the team, each bringing their own unique passion for Oman and the region.

Our day to day activities are supported by our widening network of friends and new members. Our outreach amongst the Omani communities in the UK, predominantly Omani Students, continues to grow through our close relationship with

the Cultural Attaché's Office (CA) and Omani student groups. In October we hosted the first ever Omani Student President's Workshop, an initiative which the AOS and CA are keen to continue every year. In addition to this, the NGG represented the Society at a number of student events, including the National Day activities in Liverpool, the Open Day in Leeds and hosted a very well attended evening for Omani students in London, who



Interns Beth and Jareer enjoying an evening at the Ambassadors Residence in Muscat, with HMA Hamish Cowell and guests.

invited guest speaker Sharifa Al-Barami to talk to students about upcoming technological ideas and businesses that are leading the way in Oman.



Omani Students at the OSSL event in London, April 2018.



Omani Student Society in London (OSSL) event with Sharifa Al-Barami.

The Society's online presence continues to grow and we are now reaching more and more people of all ages through our digital content. One particular area of growth has been our catalogue of interview series and online podcasts. Society staff have now interviewed more than fifteen guest speakers, including high profile ministers and tech entrepreneurs. Our online lecture recording is now at twenty episodes and is helping to engage members who are unable to attend the monthly events hosted in London.

Our social media accounts are the best way for us to relay information to our followers as our Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn pages continue to draw attention. On this page are some of our most liked posts this year, showing the scope of activity that our online followers are interested in!

Looking ahead to the 2018-2019 programme, the NGG hopes to continue to achieve its aims, starting the year with an exhibition by two Omani students Rayyan Al-Hinai and Alghith Alharthi. We look forward to widening our outreach, hosting a number of events and of course, hosting next year's delegation which will be held in the summer of 2019 at Oxford University. ■



NGG Oman celebrate a Ramadan Iftar with The Leadership Academy for Special Skills and Bank Muscat.

NGG DELEGATION 2018

ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY: AN EFFICIENT FUTURE

The NGG was privileged to host its 6th Anglo-Omani Delegation in Muscat this year, on the theme of *Energy and Technology: An Efficient Future*.

As the low oil price environment continues to catalyse new solutions to lowering costs and diversifying revenues, the delegation sought to explore the role of technology in reducing personal, commercial and national overheads.

Both days were opened by senior diplomats, HE Dr Mohammed Al-Hassan, the MFA Undersecretary for Diplomatic Affairs and HMA Hamish Cowell from the British Embassy underlining the strategic relevance of this topic to the future of Oman.

Over two fascinating days of presentations, conversations and discussions, we covered the economic theory of technology and efficiency and debated various policy implications, technical feasibilities and behavioural change.



HE Mohammed Al-Hassan and NGG Delegates Bushra and Lamyia.



HMA Hamish Cowell interviewing for Oman TV.



2018 New Generation Group Delegation, Muscat, 12-16th January 2018 ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY: AN EFFICIENT FUTURE

Friday 12th January

Arrival of British Delegates in Muscat

Saturday 13th January

Cultural Day around Muscat

Sunday 14th January

09:00 HE Mohammed Al-Hassan, Acting Undersecretary of Diplomatic Affairs, Formal Introduction

10:30 HE Salim Al-Aufi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Oil and Gas, Energy Efficiency and its Future Role in Oman

12:00 David Eyton, BP Group Head of Technology, Energy Futures: A Technology Outlook

14:30 Dr Abdullah Al-Abri, In Country Value Technical Lead, Petroleum Development Oman Energy Development Oman and the Future

16:00 Talal Hasan, Lead and Commercial Manager, Innovation Development Oman Beyond Oil and Gas: An Introduction to IDO Investments and Dr Ahmed Shahrabani, Co-Founder, Locum's Nest, Using Technology to Revolutionise the Workforce: The Case of the NHS in Britain.

19:00 Dinner hosted by Al-Yousef Group at Ubhar

Monday 15th January

09:00 HE Hamish Cowell CMG, Her Majesty's Ambassador to Oman Formal Introduction

10:30 John Cunneen, Former Executive Director, Authority for Electricity Regulation Oman The Economic Potential of Renewables in Oman

12:00 Dr Firas Al-Abduwani, CEO of HTC Solar PV Market Overview in the Sultanate of Oman – A local SME Perspective Dr Michael Tsang, CEO of Three Pillars, Providing Training in Solar Technology for a Sustainable Future

15:00 Peter Robertson, Global Sales Director, OAIRO, Energy Efficiency for Human Well-Being

16:30 Closing remarks from NGG Chairmen Ma'an Al-Rawahi and Oliver Blake

19:00 Gala Dinner at the Intercontinental Hotel

Tuesday 16th January

14:00 Departure of British Delegates for London





HE Salim Al-Aufi

excellent and BP even provided one of their global experts in technology. As someone coming at this not knowing what to expect, I now couldn't recommend the NCG's function and remit highly enough."

Harry Leverment
No.10 & Cabinet Office

future of energy, with a particular focus on renewables. We had the opportunity to engage with some prominent local and regional speakers and learn about the excellent progress made so far by some organisations in Oman such as AER, PDO and BP."

Eng. Mohammed Al-Ghareebi, PDO

"The event was fantastic. Not only did we meet with our UK friends, but we also had the opportunity to discuss and exchange great ideas and possible solutions to one of the more pressing challenges in Oman – the

"An energetic and insightful delegation thanks to the fantastic range of speakers, and bright and ambitious delegates."

Sandie McKenzie, FCO

We heard from a wide range of subject-matter experts and international industry leaders including the Undersecretary of Oil and Gas, HE Salim al Aufi and David Eyton, BP's Global Head of Technology. The Delegation ended with a formal dinner attended by ministers, CEOs, AOS members and friends who all play a major role in maintaining our deep and historical Anglo-Omani friendship.

A huge thanks to our sponsors, BP, which continues to support these key events. We look forward to the 2019 delegation to be held in Oxford.

"From start to finish, the delegation captured the imagination and was an ideal platform to discuss ideas honestly and openly with some of the key decision makers from the Omani Government and with the British delegation as well. The content and the speakers throughout the two days were



Group with Talal Hasan and Dr Ahmed Shahrabani.



Gala Dinner Reception.



Group with HE Salim Al-Aufi.

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY AND OMANI STUDENTS AROUND THE UK

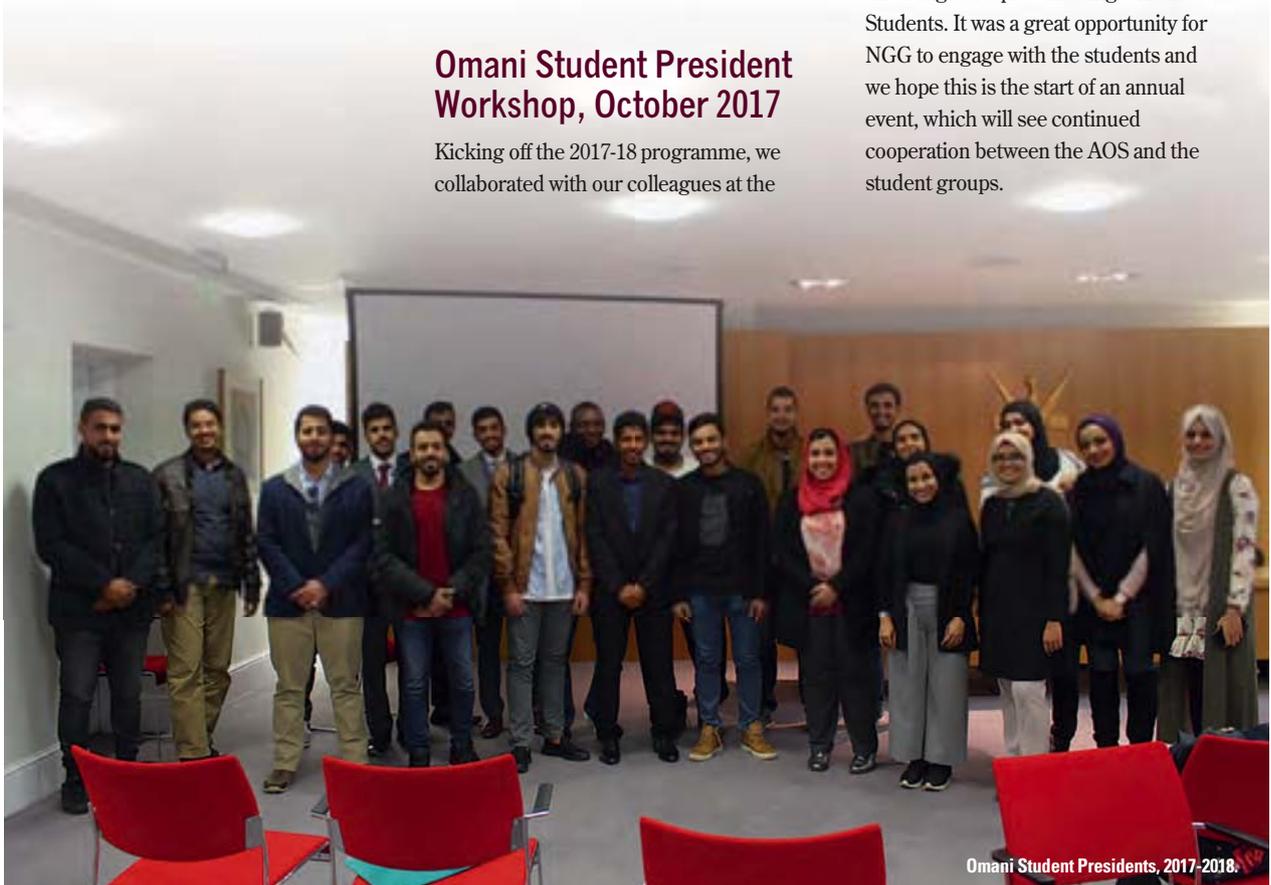
The New Generation Group has worked closely with Omani students from across the UK over the past year to put on events and activities celebrating Omani culture and heritage.

Our relationship with the students has gone from strength to strength, encouraging student engagement with each activity. A particular highlight from the past year was the opportunity to take part in the National Day Celebrations in Liverpool where we showed a video that explained the close connection between the Students and the AOS – make sure you watch it on our YouTube channel! We would like to thank all those involved in the Student Societies for including us in their activities over the last year, and in particular, Buthaina Al-Jabri from the Cultural Attaché’s Office for all of her hard work over the past year. Below are a few highlights from the year!

Cultural Attaché’s Office to host an interactive University President Workshop, bringing together presidents of the 23 Omani Students’ Societies from different UK universities and the members of the Omani Students’ Advisory Council to share their ideas and experiences. The discussions addressed the concerns of Omani students and the challenges they face when moving to UK. Students also heard from the Oman Student Advisory Council (OSAC) President, Alghith Alharthi, Academic Adviser, Buthaina Al Jabri and Cardiff Student Union President, Fadhila Al-Dhahouri, on a range of topics affecting Omani Students. It was a great opportunity for NGG to engage with the students and we hope this is the start of an annual event, which will see continued cooperation between the AOS and the student groups.

Omani Student President Workshop, October 2017

Kicking off the 2017-18 programme, we collaborated with our colleagues at the



Omani Student Presidents, 2017-2018.



Fadhila A Al-Dhahouri, Cardiff Student Union President.



Shireen talks to Students about the AOS.

Celebrating the 47th Oman National Day in Liverpool

On the occasion of the 47th Oman National Day, the New Generation Group participated in the student celebrations held at the Liverpool Guild of Students on Saturday, 18th November 2017.

The morning exhibition displayed images of Oman's natural landscape taken from the different regions of Oman and showcased a range of beautiful Omani costumes and traditional jewellery. Students also prepared a selection of Omani delicacies and distributed halwa, dates and coffee. Omani artist, Rayyan Al-Hinai, displayed her vibrant paintings inspired by different towns in Oman. A band consisting of Omani musicians and dancers gave a lively performance, with which many students



Shireen Al-Habib (AOS), Rashid Al-Junaibi (OSAC), Buthaina Al-Jabri (CA Office), Alghith Alharthi (OSAC), Isabelle Habib (AOS), at National Day Celebrations in London 2017.



Intern Shireen Al-Habib sampling Omani cuisine.



Omani band performs traditional music in Liverpool.



Stall of traditional Omani crafts at Liverpool National Day.

New Generation Group Officer, Isabelle Habib, and the two latest Society interns – Beth Richards and Jareer Al-Daoud – ran the Society’s stall. The Society gathered a great deal of attention, and lots of new students signed up for New Generation Group membership, with many entering the featured International Women’s Day competition, with the top three suggestions for inspirational women winning a brand-new copy of *Omani Women*, a book by Helen Couchman.

The Anglo-Omani Society’s stall was in good company. Next door, first-time author, Manar Al-Hosni, was promoting and signing copies of her new book, *Siren of the Desert*. The open day also featured poster presentations for the Scientific

joined in. Following the exhibition, students enjoyed watching a performance on stage which included a play, Omani songs, poetry and finally an awards ceremony.

The New Generation Group hosted a stall at the exhibition to display the work of the Society to the students, and to encourage them to register for membership. Following this, the evening festivities involved performances of music and poetry from talented students, as well as a play from Omani artistic group Diversity. The audience was also addressed by Deputy Head of Mission, Mr Taeeb Al-Alawi, and thanks was given to the Society for its contributions to the day’s activities. As always, the New Generation Group was very excited to participate in the event and to share the excitement and happiness of the students on such a glorious day.

Omani Student Open Day 2018 in Leeds

On Saturday 10th March, the Anglo-Omani Society travelled up to the University of Leeds for the Oman Open Day. The event was co-hosted by Leeds and Manchester Omani student groups, as well as by the Oman Student Advisory Council and the Cultural Attaché’s Office. This open day was designed to bring together Omani students in a celebratory environment to promote Omani achievements.



Academic poster competition in Leeds.



AOS Intern Beth signs up new members in Leeds.

AOS Interns Beth and Jareer in Leeds.



Poster Competition, which demonstrated an assortment of academic university work by Omani students. These projects ranged hugely in scope, from medicine and psychology to advertising, marketing and education!

The afternoon activities were then proceeded by an assembly of sorts, which included a fascinating speech by His Excellency Abdulaziz Al-Hinai about the importance of education, and a multi-cultural musical performance by a group of Omani students. The assembly culminated in the awarding of certificates of excellence to all those involved in the organisation of the day. The Society even managed to pick up a few themselves! It was a truly fantastic celebration of Omani students and their incredible achievements within the UK. ■



HE Abdulaziz Al-Hinai and Mr Musallam Al-Amri at Leeds Open Day 2018.

Open Day Awards Ceremony in the presence of Ambassador HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai and Mr Musallam Al-Amri, Cultural Attaché.





TEF Gold Teaching Excellence Framework

Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

The College
y Coleg

Your quality UK education begins with an international pathway from The College, Swansea University

**Noor | Muscat, Oman
Medical Genetics**

"The College, Swansea University has a very welcoming environment. They've been helpful in preparing me for my studies, settling me into UK life and I've made new friends from all over the world. The College lecturers are informative and friendly with small classes allowing my questions to be answered immediately. Studying in Swansea has been a wonderful experience."

**Apply today...
swanseauni.uk/the-college**

Advance your career at

Sheffield Hallam University

<p>Sheffield Hallam is one of the most popular universities in the UK with over 34,000 students from 125 countries.</p>	<p>The University has a growing community of Omani and Middle Eastern students on campus and it is a supportive and safe place to study in the UK. All courses are designed with industry to prepare you for professional success.</p>
<p>Experience life in Sheffield – a vibrant, student-friendly and safe city which is near to some of the UK's most beautiful countryside and is just over two hours from London and one hour from Manchester by train.</p>	<p>You will have access to one-to-one careers advice and interview guidance with opportunities for paid work placements and part-time work.</p>

For more details visit shu.ac.uk/international

MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY HONOURS OMANI STUDENT AS BEST IN CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

The University of Manchester, an internationally acclaimed and premier educational institution in Britain, on Tuesday honoured Omani student, Abdullah bin Ali bin Rashid al Matani, as the best graduate in the field of chemical engineering. The University also honoured Matani on the occasion of receiving the award for the best graduation project among the projects submitted by the varsity students at the graduation ceremony. In a tweet, the Omani cultural attaché in London congratulated Matani saying, "We congratulate Abdullah al Matani for getting the first-class award in chemical engineering from the University of Manchester, and BP has given him the Scientific Excellence in Chemical Engineering award." The University of Manchester also congratulated him through a letter sent to him for his scientific excellence and gave awards to him in recognition of his achievements. On his achievements, Matani said, "I am happy and feeling overwhelmed by this honour which I got after huge efforts I made during studies in the University and at the project work."

Published in The Times of Oman

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE SULTANATE

Rashad al Zubair is a prominent businessman involved in the wider Omani economy as well as in the long-established family business, The Zubair Foundation. He gave a valuable presentation to the Society on the importance of the youth of Oman to the future, a synopsis of which is given herewith.



The Sultanate of Oman has been bouncing back from a recessionary period in 2016 to a promising recovery in 2018, with a projected GDP growth at 4.2% in 2019. This growth is accompanied with an expected budget deficit drop from 18.6% in 2015 to 14.3% in 2018.

Major recovery in oil prices is not the only reason for this growth. The rising production from the Khazzan gas field, and the government’s fiscal reforms and efforts for economic diversification have begun to bear fruit, along with efforts to grow the export potential, and improve the investment climate.

The main asset of the country though is its youth; of the total population of 4,658,595, 50% are under 25 years of age. The changing composition of the demographic structure in the country is forming a critical period in which this structure can be turned into a “youth dividend” or a “youth liability”. A promising emerging trait in this period is the growing appetite of young Omanis for starting their own businesses.

This inclination towards starting-up business is strongly perceived as a key solution to some of the main socio-economic challenges that the country has been facing. Such challenges include the growing working-age population while jobs at the public sector are becoming less available; an unemployment rate of 17%; and the evolving market dynamics that have raised employers’ expectations for more competitive qualifications and skill sets, while jobseekers anticipate high-paying jobs in a private sector that has been struggling in the previous few years. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI, 2018), Omani jobseekers reached around 44,000 of which 81% have not been previously employed – very new to the market

dynamics and requirements – 48% are between 25-29 years of age, and 50% hold university degrees.

With a profound realisation of such challenges and the ongoing

endeavour to achieve sustainable socio-economic development, there has been a growing consensus in the Sultanate that the main avenues for reform are in educational progress, labour market stabilisation, and economic diversification. But for any strategy to be effective, it should aim to achieve an impact that is both “sustainable” and “scalable”.

Towards that end, some important social investment efforts have been in place by the public and private sectors to create opportunities for the youth in the Sultanate. And realising the significance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to achieving economic diversification and societal stability, many initiatives have been launched to extend various types of support to start-ups and SMEs in the country.

SMALL & MEDIUM ENTERPRISES

SMEs have a direct effect on GDP growth and in most developed countries they are the biggest contributors. They also have a key role in employing labour, creating new jobs, and stimulating innovation. Wide recognition of these facts has led governments worldwide to stimulate SMEs ecosystems and extend to them all possible support.

The Sultanate of Oman is no different; the country places strong emphasis on its SMEs sector and lists SMEs development as a key goal in its strategic development visions and plans (Oman 2020 and Oman 2040). Focus on SMEs is largely to diversify from oil and gas as the main sources of income. As such, the development of a stable and sustainable SMEs ecosystem is essential to enable successful and impactful socio-economic growth.

A snapshot on SMEs in the Sultanate today shows that there are around 32,441 SMEs registered at Riyadh. While there is a wide recognition of their role in achieving economic growth, SMEs’ contribution to Oman’s GDP barely reaches 15-20%. And

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

while 40% of the total workforce is employed by SMEs, 70% of SMEs owners are below the age of 30, which reflects a very young population of business owners who mostly lack sufficient market and managerial experience.

Moving from traditional to new promising business domains is essential for achieving economic diversity. In general, SMEs' stamina for taking higher risks and stepping into new business territories is stimulated largely by a support ecosystem that caters to the various needs of novice entrepreneurs and start-up owners. The SMEs support ecosystem in the Sultanate started developing five years ago upon the call by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to public and private organisations alike to extend their utmost support to SMEs. Today, the country has a variety of initiatives and programmes designed especially for that purpose.

A recently published study by Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC) has analysed the SMEs ecosystem in Oman and mapped key support organisations across five main pillars: Capital, Support, Talent, Connecting, and Expertise.

The complex map is not suitable for reproduction here. It serves as a diagnostic tool to identify areas for further development. It also helps SMEs know where to go for what services, and can be further used to promote collaboration amongst the various mapped stakeholders.

FEATURED INITIATIVE: ZUBAIR SMALL ENTERPRISES CENTRE

Zubair Small Enterprises Centre (Zubair SEC) is a flagship social investment by The Zubair Corporation, launched in June 2013 with a clear mandate to support Omani small businesses through building confidence, providing one-on-one advisory,



exploring business development opportunities, advocating for progress, and promoting social impact and sustainability.

Zubair SEC provides business advisory services through a team of high-calibre professionals who have regional and international expertise, in addition to a group of volunteering advisors who come from various business backgrounds.

In addition to its various services, Zubair SEC has three main initiatives:

- **TAJSEER:** A business development initiative through which Zubair SEC's team facilitates business contracts and business development opportunities for small-business owners;
- **THE DIRECT SUPPORT PROGRAMME:** An annual programme that allows small businesses to apply and pitch in with their business models and development plans, seeking to get one of the ten winning seats every year. Each seat provides its winner with a financial grant, and extensive advisory and business development support. The programme today has 48 signed-up members;
- **TAJRIBATI:** a dialogue and advocacy building initiative that offers a platform for SMEs and key stakeholders to gather every month and discuss topics of interest. The initiative aims at voicing SMEs' concerns and queries to decision makers and

influencers in the public and private sectors.

Zubair SEC has expanded over the last five years to assume bigger duties and provide services to a larger audience, signing-up more than 880 direct members, and a wider audience of more than 7,000 non-member SMEs through its reach-out and awareness-raising efforts across the Sultanate. Today Zubair SEC is proud to see many of its members running successful and sustainable businesses in the market.

The Centre realises that the impact it achieves would be limited if it works in silo, but when collaborating with others, impact can be further scaled-up. As such, Zubair SEC has signed collaboration agreements with various stakeholders in the public and private sectors who share the passion and mandate for supporting and nourishing Omani SMEs.

Collectively, various SME-support organisations work fervently in the Sultanate today to build an ecosystem that can cater to the needs of entrepreneurs and small-business owners who are key pillars and custodians of the nation's future economy.



There is a national and general awareness in the Sultanate of the high social and economic return on investing in the youth. Some solid initiatives have been implemented by the public, private and academic sectors in the country.

The unanimous objective is to create sustainable and scalable impact that would contribute to the wider development of Oman and provide better opportunities for the generations to come. ■

ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITIES

ARTICLE BY HADIL AL-MOOSA, PhD

The place of women in Omani business, a study by Hadil Al-Moosa, who has been awarded a PhD at the University of Bedfordshire

I am an Omani, a woman, a journalist, a researcher, a mother, among other things; we are not one identity; and we are not one of them most of the time. We are more than one identity at certain points of time, and all at different points of time. These identities play out simultaneously and cannot be separated. The significance of certain identity is suggested to be situational and contextual. Meaning, we play out the ones that are significant in relation to the situation, the context and the time we live in. Thus, some of our identities became more salient than others at certain points.

One of contemporary sociological perspectives in identity formation is inclined towards the idea of we are who we are because of the things we do and do not do.

This perspective accounts for the process of doing rather than being. The doing perspective focuses on the practices that we perform in our daily lives.

These practices represent the cultural meaning in a given society. These cultural practices determine the appropriate code of conduct, which are considered the normative behaviour within a given society. These culturally-accepted behaviours are socially embedded and historically

rooted. They represent the local logic and common-sense knowledge.

These practices embody our understanding of how certain identities should be. For example, I am a woman in Oman, while I am a Muslim Arab woman when in England. My Muslim-ness or Arab-ness are less of an issue in the Omani context, but important in the British context. Hence, the way I practise them is what the 'doing' perspective highlights. The significance of these identities is that they determine our relations to the surrounding, how we conduct ourselves and consequently, our position in the society.

Recently, scholars in critical and contemporary entrepreneurship studies suggest that entrepreneurship should be treated as a form of doing. Thus, it is a verb rather than a noun. Therefore, we should be calling it 'entrepreneur-ing'. Therefore the 'doing' of 'entrepreneur-ing' manifests the cultural and the social practices of what are considered entrepreneurial practices in a given context.

However, the idea of doing might also contain different identities such as gender, race, ethnicity and religious affiliation, among others. Some of these identities are already identified in the contemporary entrepreneurship studies, such as gender, race and ethnicity; some have been added recently, such as religious affiliation; but there may be others that are not yet acknowledged due to gaps in current studies in including, or recognising, different groups.

One of the interesting identities that seem to be significant to Omani women entrepreneurs is the Omani national identity. Based on my PhD thesis, most of the Omani women I interviewed included their Omani heritage in their entrepreneurship, however with a modern outlook.



“... my work relates to His Majesty... we do things in the business that are related to his appearance... this is what His Majesty taught us, to include Oman in everything we do... I adopted that national direction...”



PHOTO CREDIT: 'THE WORLD OF HANDICRAFT' DAR EL HERFYA



PHOTO CREDIT: 'THE WORLD OF HANDICRAFT' DAR EL HERFYA



PHOTO CREDIT: 'THE WORLD OF HANDICRAFT' DAR EL HERFYA

The Omani-ness in these women entrepreneurs' businesses stands out strongly from the first glance.

It has been suggested that the construction of the Omani National Identity is developed on the cohabitation between Omani heritage and modernity, according to some anthropological and social studies on the social fabric of Omani society. The construction of this modern Omani National identity began in the 1970s with the Renaissance era. Interestingly, the representation of the Omani National Identity evolves around the persona of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Therefore, the way in which the Omani national identity seems to be understood and practised usually

refers to the interests and the practices shown by His Majesty. Thus, His Majesty has become the symbol of the Omani national identity. In this regard, nationalism refers to the Omani-ness that His Majesty represents. Thus, when the Omani women entrepreneurs identify their businesses as Omani, they were actually referring to His Majesty's vision, calls and practices. The following quotes highlight the ways in which these Omani women embody their Omani-ness in their entrepreneur-ing:

Myamona is in her 40s, higher local education, retired from the government, married with children and comes from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior.

"... my work relates to His Majesty... we do things in the business that are related to his appearance... this is what His Majesty taught us, to include Oman in everything we do... I adopted that national direction..."

The second example is Ramla, she is in her twenties, with a local moderate education. She has never worked before, is not married and comes from an Arab conservative tribe from the interior, and was born and brought up in Muscat.

"Nowadays, the youth are interested in this combination [traditional and modernity] and care about Omani stuff... that makes me proud... because I feel that this is the pay-off of His Majesty's efforts, he was the first to call for paying attention to our heritage... the most important things are our heritage and identity... now the youth are embodying the Omani identity in their products and services... and so do I... I was the one who introduced the past to the youth through my products..."

She adds later:

"...I told you, our path in the business is towards nationalism..."

The last example for nationalism orientation is for Lujina. Lujina told me how her products were perceived when she showcased them in regional exhibitions and events. She said that in one event, the guest of honour commented on her products: "your stuff is 'Qaboosi' ". She said that moment made her feel: "...like oh my God! I've reached where I wanted to be". Lujina is in her fifties, with a Western education and is retired from the private sector, from an ethnic tribe from Muscat.

These Omani women entrepreneurs described themselves as being creative. Creativity to them seems to refer to the ability of cohabitating their Omani heritage with modernity.

These Omani women entrepreneurs described themselves as being creative. Creativity to them seems to refer to the ability of cohabitating their Omani heritage with modernity. This appears to lie at the very core of their entrepreneur-ing. Based on my observation and analysis, these women were putting constant thought and effort into how to modify, renew, update and mould the Omani heritage within modernity in ways which do not result in losing their Omani-ness, and yet fit into the demands of our contemporary lifestyles.

It was interesting to see how different contemporary commodities are modified within an Omani spirit and touch, yet it was more intriguing to know that the targeted segment is the Omani nation rather than tourists. The idea that might spring to mind is that these Omani commodities are more souvenirs than for Omanis' daily use. On the contrary, the commodities included some Western items to suit everyone, like technology related ones; but there were some very specific Omani commodities that will be used mainly by Omanis, such as clothing and furniture.

The sense of pride among these women is felt strongly and practised overtly. It appeared to me that every global idea, product and service can be Omani-ised, in the view of these Omani women entrepreneurs. I also felt that Omani heritage can be modified and renewed for global fashionable trends without changing its authenticity. The overall thrust is that these women are offering Omani-ised commodities that can fit our contemporary lifestyle without losing

a sense of who we are. To me, it appears that these women entrepreneurs are practising their sense of Omani-ness through the 'doing' of their entrepreneur-ing.

According to mainstream entrepreneurship studies, the emphasis placed on cultural identities is mostly practised among minorities and immigrants; their sense of who they are might be under threat, therefore effort is directed to practise their cultural identities through entrepreneurship. However, none of the studies I have reviewed addressed practising cultural or national identity within one's own home county. Thus, I would say that this case – where national identity is salient and practised through entrepreneur-ing – is unique and could be practised in other contexts also.

The significance of this Omani-ness appears to me as a form of resistance and resilience at the very same time. In the former, it seems that these Omani women are holding on to their sense of cultural identity and refusing to melt away in the global market; while in the latter, the act of modifying and modernising our heritage might indicate the willingness to cope with modern trends, although with Omani manifestations. The global commodities in these women's business suit the Omani contemporary lifestyle, rather than the Western. In this scenario, one could suggest that Omanis are aligning with global trends, but without losing who they are. This form of resilience might indicate the awareness or perhaps the concern of these Omani women to who and how we should be and live in our contemporary lives. Despite that, the Omani identity might not be under any form of threat locally; but as is the case in the global marketplace, all authentic voices are indeed under a threat of one kind or another in the era of globalisation. ■

Notes:

1. For ethical considerations, confidentiality and anonymity, the names of the participants have been changed.
2. Please note that this piece is developed from qualitative PhD research; the points made in the article represent the author's interpretation and do not claim generalisation.
3. For further information please contact the author.

MUSCAT AIRPORT

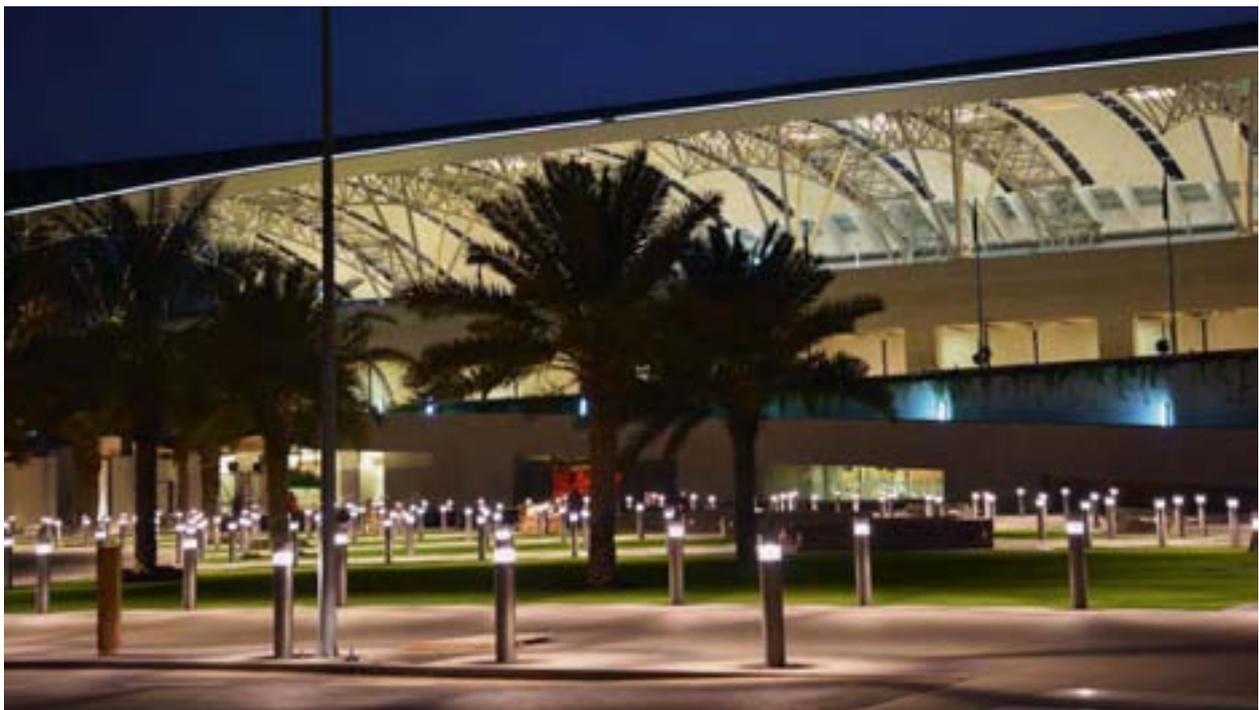
Eng. Zaina Hamood
Salim Al Harthi,
Senior Architectural
Engineer

Muscat International Airport is designed in a contemporary way that gives a precise initial impression of the Sultanate of Oman, the design is linking authenticity and modernity.

There are a lot of inspirations inspired by the elements of Omani architecture, such as the high columns derived from the idea of the fortresses and towers of Oman and

these columns have been linked to the roof in a manner that simulates the movement of aviation, and the Omani marble was used in the airport building by more than 90% to create a sustainable local architecture.

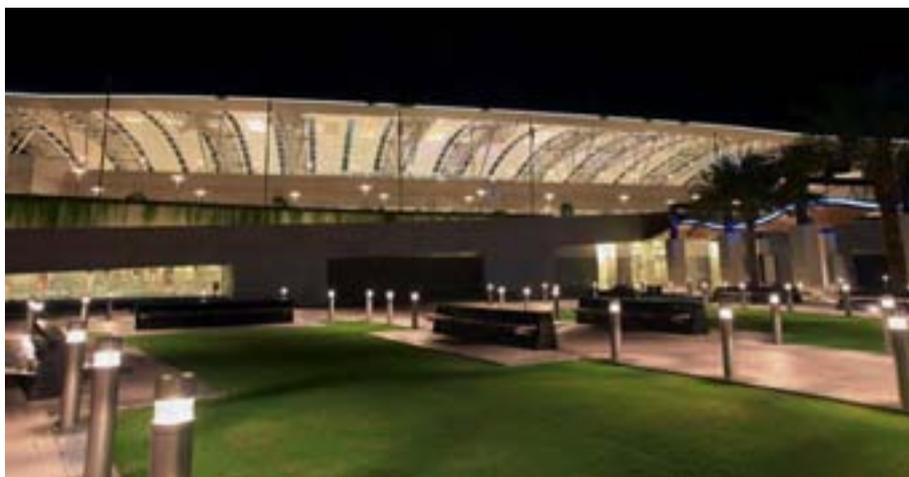
The mashrabiya inspired by the Omani culture and its repetition in the various airport facilities and in its external and internal walls were used to accurately





There are a lot of inspirations inspired by the elements of Omani architecture, such as the high columns derived from the idea of the fortresses and towers of Oman and these columns have been linked to the roof in a manner that simulates the movement of aviation.





reflect Oman's connection with the ancient originality and attention to international development and standards.

The airport has three piers that reflect the colours of Omani nature. Blue symbolizes the sea, green symbolizes plains and agriculture, and brown symbolizes deserts and mountains.

The frontcourt of the passengers building has been beautifully decorated with Omani style. The scattered palm trees and aqueduct inspired by the Omani Afalaj reflect the cultural heritage left behind by parents and grandparents.

The airport is equipped with the equipment and systems for the operation of international high-tech airports. Muscat International Airport is one of the most important transport projects opened this year in the Sultanate. The airport was designed with a capacity of 20 million passengers per year in its first phase. There are 40 bridges, 45 lounges, in addition to first class business and VIP lounges, and a 90-room 4-star hotel serving travelers. ■

AOS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME: MEET OUR ALUMNI!

Since launching the official Internship Programme in 2014 we have had fourteen exceptional interns join the team. They are all graduates from leading institutions who have gone on to pursue successful careers in a wide range of sectors. We asked our former interns to update us on what they are up to now and to tell us about their experiences working at the Society.

TOM SAVILLE, AOS INTERN
SEPTEMBER 2017 – DECEMBER 2017



Before my internship, I studied at King's College London and received an MA in Conflict, Security and Development. I was attracted to the Society's

internship programme because it offered an opportunity to work in a unique international charity which had a specific focus on the Middle East and Gulf region. This focus matched my own personal and long-standing interest in the Middle East, something that I had pursued throughout my academic career. During my internship I was given the support to follow and develop my own projects and skills. Working in a small team also gave me greater responsibility and ownership of my work, more than I think other internships in similar organisations do. During my time as an intern I contributed to the organisation and running of a high-profile event in collaboration with the Royal Geographic Society and assisted in the production of a major video project.

After my placement I was lucky enough to be offered a position as the Events and Membership Officer at The Anglo-Omani Society, building on the skills I developed during the internship. I have recently started at the IISS, a leading international security think-tank that focuses on security and defence. My new role is as Communications Administrator but I believe my time at the Anglo-Omani Society has been instrumental in being offered this position. I will miss the Society but I look forward to visiting regularly and remaining an active member of the organisation.

SHIREEN AL-HABIB, AOS INTERN
SEPTEMBER 2017 – FEBRUARY 2018



I joined The Anglo-Omani Society after completing my MSC in Environment and Sustainable Development from University College London.

I saw it as an opportunity to find out more about my home country Oman whilst furthering my professional development. After completing the internship earlier this year, I joined the Cultural Attaché Office to work as an Academic Advisor. My main role is to oversee the performance of students. I maintain close communication with them to make sure that they are performing as best as they can academically and that they are settling well into life in the UK. I also work closely with UK universities and higher education institutes, maintaining good relationships and ensuring that the best services are provided for our students. Alongside this, I am also studying to complete the Masters in Legal Practice.

My favourite memory of working in the AOS was attending the 2018 Delegation in Oman on the topic of "Energy Efficiency: Innovation and Technology". The discussions were very engaging and informative. It was lovely to meet the delegates, all of whom were enthusiastic and hardworking young professionals. I also enjoyed visiting the Muttrah Souk and National Museum as part of the cultural day; it was great to show off my country's rich history with the UK team.

AOS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME: MEET OUR ALUMNI!

CHLOE BROOKES, AOS INTERN JANUARY – JUNE 2015



Since completing the internship programme at The Anglo-Omani Society in 2015, I finished my BA degree in Politics, and obtained a Masters degree in Conflict

Resolution at the department of Middle Eastern Studies, Kings College London. While completing my MA I volunteered at Asylum Aid, a legal aid charity that supports asylum seekers. I will shortly be beginning a posting with the Foreign Commonwealth Office in Ottawa, Canada, as a policy advisor.

I have so many fond memories of working with The Anglo-Omani Society. I thoroughly enjoyed the day to day experience of working alongside the staff and interacting with members at events. The sense of community and the impressive calibre of those involved with the society was a highlight for me. I am also incredibly grateful for having had the opportunity to travel to Oman at the end of my internship!

AMY WHITE, AOS INTERN AUGUST 2016 – JANUARY 2017



I was an intern at The Anglo Omani Society from July 2016 - January 2017. After six months with the Society I concluded the placement by writing a report

titled 'The Role of Sustainable Development and Renewable Energy in Contemporary Oman' following a research trip to Muscat.

I am currently a Junior Advisor at I.G. Advisors, a social impact consultancy that delivers innovative and practical strategies for impact and growth for charities, corporates and philanthropists globally. Prior to this, I worked at Paiwand Afghan Association, where I coordinated youth and mentoring services for young

unaccompanied minors and refugees in London. As the role often required Arabic language skills to interpret the needs of newly arrived asylum seekers, I took part in the AOS Arabic Language Scheme in Oman in the summer of 2017 to further my language skills.

I hold an MA in International Studies and Diplomacy from SOAS, and a BA in Geography and Spanish Studies from Lancaster University.

My favourite moment of the AOS internship (apart from the research trip to Muscat), was during my very first week, when I was getting to know the AOS team and the NGG delegation in Cambridge. We took the Omani delegation punting, and a couple of the delegates rocked the boat so much, I thought we would all fall into the river!

ISOBEL RANSOM, AOS INTERN AUGUST 2016 – JANUARY 2017



Since my internship at the AOS, I was lucky enough to spend a month in Kuwait gaining experience in political risk with Zain Group and in journalism with

the Kuwait Times. It was a wonderful experience and I feel very grateful to have had the chance to get to know more about Kuwait and gain an invaluable insight into working life in those sectors.

I started the Security Studies MSc programme at UCL part-time in September. Alongside my studies, I have taken up a position with the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI), which I thoroughly enjoy. The experience gained from The Anglo-Omani Society internship has proved very helpful, not only for my day-to-day responsibilities but also in understanding how such an organisation operates.

BISI has connections to The Anglo-Omani Society given the former British Ambassador to Oman who is presently Ambassador to Iraq, HE Jon Wilks, is an Honorary Vice President of BISI. Similarly, one of The Anglo-Omani Society's Vice Presidents, Sir Terence Clark, also serves

as a Patron of BISI. It is a privilege to have had the opportunity to be a part of both organisations and the wonderful work that they do.

JONNY TAYLOR, AOS INTERN JANUARY – JUNE 2017



My time at The Anglo-Omani Society was not at all what I expected. I wasn't doing meaningless office administration or even perfecting the art of brewing tea. What the

internship gave me was the opportunity to learn about everything from event management, and business finance, to chairing meetings and interviewing senior members of both the UK and Omani governments. What is special about the AOS is that you are treated as a valued member of the team, and this extends beyond the office to the Society's trustees who are always willing to give you their time and invaluable advice.

This stood me in good stead beginning my work as Project Manager for the charity organisation Sufra NW London, overseeing a wide variety of community projects including the resettlement of Syrian refugees into London and equipping them with the skills necessary to finding work and rebuilding their lives and that of their families.

In my spare time, I have been in the process of creating a community fruit farm in the Lake District, bringing together a rapidly changing rural community and Syrian refugees living in London as well as bringing together two communities to challenge each other's perspectives and for each to recognise their many similarities.

The AOS has given me a knowledge and compassion for Oman and the eclectic mix of peoples throughout the Middle East: their conviction in a better future, their resilience in the face of adversity, and their generous, kind hearted nature is something that is not just heart-warming, but confoundingly inspiring.

My favourite memory working for the AOS, as cheesy as it sounds, was the team

AOS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME: MEET OUR ALUMNI!

spirit of the office; their integrity and their infectious enthusiasm, their drive and passion for pushing forward the aims of the Society and all it stands for. I will always be forever grateful for all the Society has given me, and I wish them all the success in the future.

BETH RICHARDS, AOS INTERN FEBRUARY – JULY 2018



I completed my internship with The Anglo-Omani Society whilst undertaking my MA in Middle Eastern Studies at King's College London, having previously studied

History in Bristol. I am now about to start a new two-year MA programme in Palestine Studies with Intensive Arabic Language. I hope to graduate from this programme with competent Arabic language skills and go on to pursue a career within the Middle East in either the diplomatic service or with a charity or NGO.

I have many fantastic memories from my time working at The Anglo-Omani Society. The community atmosphere throughout our office and the friendships I have made here are definitely highpoints of the internship for me, as well as the remarkable calibre of Society members and guests who I had the pleasure of meeting at our hosted events. The team at the office have been endlessly supportive throughout the internship and provided ample opportunities for us to enhance and develop our skillsets, for which I am truly appreciative. From my first day I was

treated as a valued team member, not only by my colleagues but by the Society's trustees who often gave up their time to talk to me and offer me advice. The chance that we were given to visit Oman, and to meet with various experts and officials, as well as even have our own written work submitted for publication in the AOS Annual Review was invaluable.

JAREER AL-DAOUD, AOS INTERN FEBRUARY – JULY 2018



After graduating from the University of Jordan and moving to London, I joined The Anglo-Omani Society as an intern while studying for an

MA in Middle Eastern Studies at King's College London.

During my time at the Society, I learned so much about what it takes to run a successful organisation from an amazing tight knit team that work so hard every day to ensure the continuation of the Anglo-Omani relations.

It was a truly great opportunity to learn more about Oman's history, culture and traditions. I also got to know more about Omanis and the differences as well as the similarities between them and Jordanians and other nationalities from the region and I really appreciated that. Moreover, as my first ever internship there have been many areas of personal learning over the six months, especially as a non-native living and working in a new city far from my family. Working while studying gave me a

taste of the "real world" and although a bit overwhelming at times, it has stretched my time management to a whole new level.

Looking forward, I hope to take some time off to volunteer with different NGOs in the UK that specialise in causes that I am passionate about before moving to Paris to start a two-year Human Rights programme at the Institut d'études Politiques de Paris.

Regarding nice memories, I have had a handful. I really liked the Oman Open Day in Leeds where I had the chance to interact with extremely bright Omani students. Interviewing and getting to know guest lecturers was a pleasure and not to forget the amazing chance to visit Oman. ■

ORAL HISTORY

The Society also has a programme of Oral History which is mainly concerned with history of the Sultanate, but which can easily include historic events specific to the Society. We have already recorded and video-filmed members and visitors who are happy to relate their experiences and memories of living and working in Oman. We also film interviews with visitors to the Society which become available on Facebook.

This programme is currently suspended while new and improved video equipment is being investigated and bought, and we expect the programme to restart before the end of this year.

DO YOU HAVE A CONNECTION WITH OMAN?

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY?

You will find full details and application forms to download on the Society's website:

www.angloomanisociety.com

You can also receive membership details and application forms by post.

Just contact the Manager at: 34, Sackville Street, LONDON, W1S 3ED.

RENAISSANCE DAY CELEBRATIONS “OMAN: LAND OF PEACE”

ARTICLE BY BETH RICHARDS

On the 30th of June, twenty-six men in seven cars set off to complete a drive from Muscat to London. This trip would take them through the UAE, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria, Serbia, Austria, Germany, Switzerland and France, driving over 10,800km in just twenty-three days.

Along the way, they would be promoting Omani food and culture, history and civilisation, tourism, historical figures and popular arts. The last leg of their tour would be in London, with a reception hosted at The Anglo-Omani Society, in cooperation with the Omani Embassy, on the all-important

Renaissance Day, as a dedication to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

This trip began three years ago, as an idea between three friends who wanted to introduce Oman’s rich culture to the world. In their initial discussions, they realised that it was too big an event for such a small group and decided to reach out (in the





traditional Omani fashion) through WhatsApp in order to find more recruits. They received thousands of messages and calls from people who wanted to join them on their journey. The men put together an interview process and so formed their group of 26. The interview procedure was based on what each individual could bring to the team. Looking for desirable experience for the trip, doctors, lawyers and pilots were among some of those recruited, as well as a wide age-range of people. This process was unfortunately economically driven as well, due to many failed attempts to find sponsorship for their trip. The expedition was thus self-funded, with the costs split between all members of the team who did not know

each other beforehand – a fact which makes the extensive nature of the journey all the more impressive.

Along the way, hundreds of people approached the decorated cars and

brightly coloured flags to ask questions about their journey and the reasons behind it. Everyone they met was extremely excited to talk to them. Many of these people were hearing about Oman for the



RENAISSANCE DAY CELEBRATIONS

first time, and so left with an endearing image of the beautiful country and its overtly friendly and adventurous people. This was fantastic given the aim of the trip was to promote Oman as a peaceful oasis in a troubled region, and to encourage tourism to the Sultanate. The team were received well across all of the nations they visited and gave out brochures to all those who were interested. Funnily enough, their traditional Omani dress attracted a lot of attention, and drew people towards them to ask lots of questions.

The drive was not without its challenges, however. The long stretch in Iran, over 2300km, was the most exhausting part, with the treacherous journey crossing over snow-covered mountains and waterfalls. Luckily though, the team experienced no breakdowns (and only a few slight bumps), and their journey was otherwise faultless (other than the occasional faulty air conditioning unit), with the teams maintaining radio contact between the different vehicles throughout their trip. The different team members all spoke some different languages as well, which made their trip much more successful in terms of communicating with locals!

Luckily, the group are not driving home. Their cars are being shipped back to Oman, and they themselves will be flying back. They hope to undertake a similar journey in 2020, with a revised route from Muscat to Cape Town, travelling through Saudi Arabia and Sudan. This is as of yet unconfirmed, but it is a dream for many of these team members. The group will be writing a book about their experiences and journey – most certainly one to look out for! ■



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY **ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

The Anglo-Omani Society Annual Luncheon will be held on **THURSDAY, 11th OCTOBER** at the Royal Air Force Club

Advance booking necessary.



OMAN'S APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE

ARTICLE BY JAREER AL-DAOUD

Former Anglo-Omani Society intern Jareer Al-Daoud reports back on his trip to Oman to discover more about the Sultanate's approach to climate change.

HOW IS OMAN APPROACHING CLIMATE CHANGE?

Climate change is arguably one of the most pressing issues facing the world today. Increased emissions of greenhouse gases, such as CO₂, into the atmosphere have been linked to human activities for a long time. These include, but are not limited to: rapid urbanisation, massive population growth, industrialisation processes, increased energy consumption and rapid economic and social developments in various sectors.

According to assessment reports conducted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the effects of climate change at a global level include an increase in average temperatures, large-scale melting of ice and a significant increase in sea levels, changes in average rainfall and degradation of some natural ecosystems.

HOW DOES OMAN FARE IN REGARD TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

In order to gain a better understanding of how climate change is affecting the

Sultanate, and what is thus being done in an attempt to mitigate its effects, I took a research trip to Oman to interview officials from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs. This is the first ministry of its kind to have been established in the Gulf, as well as the first to establish an award in the region for the preservation of the environment – The Sultan Qaboos Prize.

EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE IN OMAN

With its biological diversity, rich desert landscape, impressive mountain ranges, and hot weather all year round, Oman seemingly has it all. Unfortunately, though, Oman has not remained unaffected by climate change.

This has been clearly demonstrated by its experiences with tropical storms, hurricanes, high temperatures, rising sea levels, coastal erosion, water scarcity and desertification, impacts on the marine environment and agriculture, as well as numerous other associated environmental, economic and social impacts.

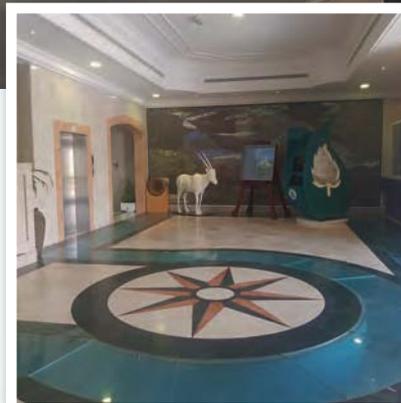
Over the last decade, the Arabian Sea,



which borders Oman, Yemen and India, has witnessed unprecedented storms which scientists believe may be attributed to climate change. In 2014, flash floods due to Cyclone Nilofar struck north-east Oman, resulting in the deaths of four people. One year later, Cyclone Chapala and Cyclone Megh followed within one week of each other.

These cyclones took place in October and November, long after Oman's monsoon season. Using a sophisticated climate model, scientists compared and analysed conditions in 1860 and 2015, and found 64 percent of unexpected hurricanes in the Arabian Sea to be due to climate change. More recently, a category three cyclone, Cyclone Mekunu, struck Oman, bringing three years' worth of rainfall in a single day and causing the deaths of several people.

Regarding temperature, as of June 2018, Oman holds the record of the highest low temperature over a 24-hour period. According to recent news articles, the city of Quriyat experienced a period in which the lowest recorded temperature was never below 108.7 degrees Fahrenheit (42.6 degrees Celsius). Although this



temperature has not yet been officially verified, if it is proven then this will likely be the highest minimum temperature ever observed on Earth.

OMAN'S APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Since the dawn of the renaissance, the Sultanate has attempted to reinforce the principles of cooperation and collective action with both local institutions and international environmental organisations. This is in order to highlight the environmental dimension in sustainable development programmes and plans. Oman has also recognised the importance of establishing a balance between development requirements and the

protection of environmental, ecological and climate systems.

His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has set directives to establish basic pillars of environmental action – all within an integrated strategy which is designed to consider the necessary advancement of economic and social aspects of society, while maintaining environmental, climate and ecological systems so as to achieve the set out sustainable development goals throughout the Sultanate. Article XII of the Basic Law of the State issued by Royal Decree 101/96 clearly outlined the Sultanate's commitment to environmental protection and the control of pollution throughout the country.

It is apparent that Oman is devoted to combating climate change and has thus increased its efforts to meet such challenges by actively working hand-in-hand with the international community. These efforts have culminated in several accomplishments.

The Sultanate is currently in the process of finalising procedures for the adoption of the National Strategy for the Adaptation and Mitigation of Climate Change. This includes a clear direction in terms of defining the main objectives and plans to link development with environmental, ecological and climate systems, thus incorporating environmental considerations into the planning stages in Oman, and establishing administrative, institutional and legal frameworks for environmental management in the Sultanate. This strategy will hopefully enable Oman to develop proactive plans for adapting to climate change, and preparing the government, private institutions and citizens to be as resilient as possible to the potential impact of climate change on Oman's water resources, agriculture, fisheries, housing, health and environment.

Oman has also begun the process of encouraging institutions and authorities throughout the Sultanate to use renewable energy sources, as well as to improve their efficiency and rationalise their energy usage. This is supported by the government's attempts to diversify the economy away from relying solely on oil production and sales.

Several programmes and plans have been implemented across the Sultanate to

raise awareness and increase education in the field of environmental and climate affairs for institutions and community members. This includes the presentation of lectures and visual presentations, the issuing of books, pamphlets and brochures, holding conferences and workshops, as well as participating in meetings, dialogues and discussions across different media platforms, including that of social media, in order to promote and raise public awareness on the issues and challenges in the field of climate and environmental affairs.

On a global scale, Oman has also sought collaboration and active participation in international climate affairs agreements and conventions. Most notably, Oman is involved with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol, as well as the Montreal Protocol on "Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer" which aims to protect the Earth's fragile Ozone Layer by reducing the consumption and production of ozone-depleting substances, with the ultimate aim of decreasing their levels within the atmosphere. Oman is also involved with the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer.

On a global scale, Oman has also sought collaboration and active participation in international climate affairs agreements and conventions. Most notably, Oman is involved with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

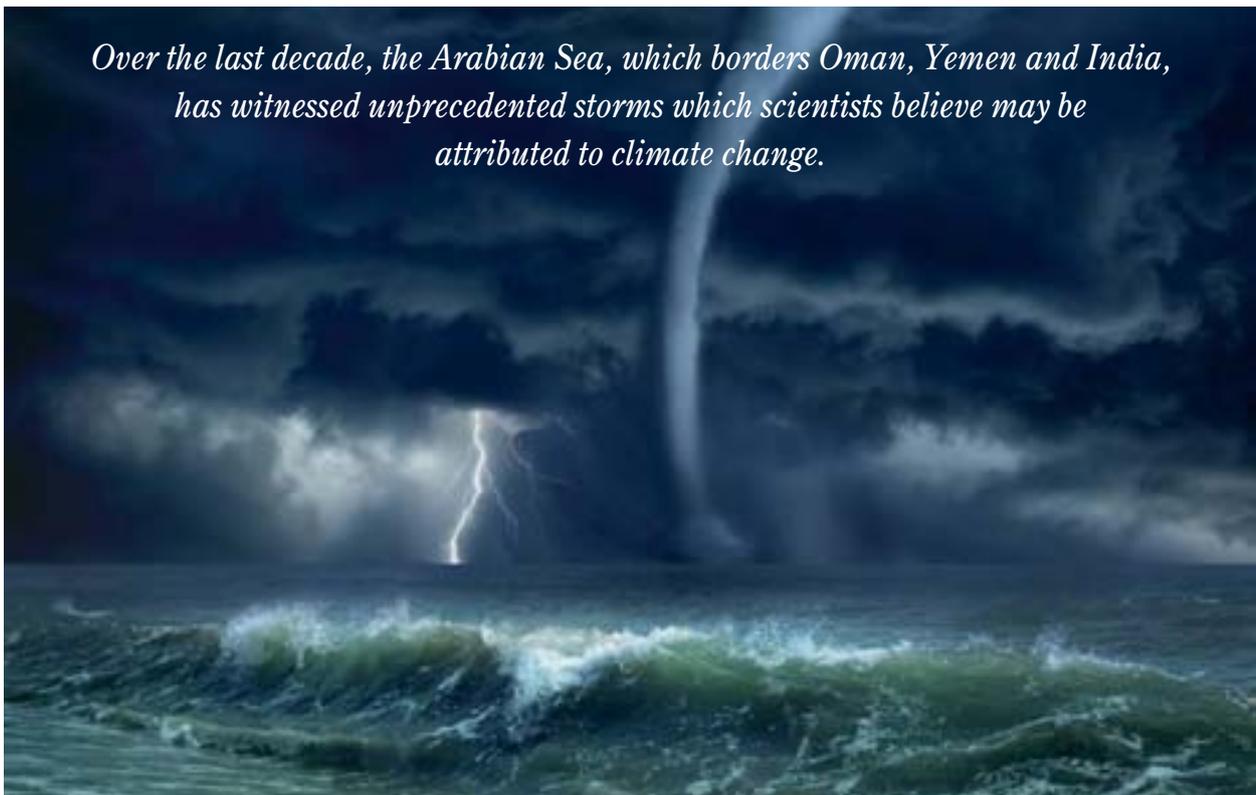
Individually, Oman has continuously updated its regulations for the protection of the Ozone Layer several times in cooperation with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). These regulations include the main procedures for handling and importing ozone-depleting substances in Oman. Other regulations include those for the management of climate affairs and organising the issuance of environmental approval of CDM (Clean

Development Mechanism for emission reduction) projects under the Kyoto Protocol. Perhaps most importantly, Oman signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in April 2016 and is currently in the process of finalising its national procedures to ratify this international agreement.

On top of these international affairs, Oman has established an electronic database for the registration of entities and institutions for dealing with ozone-depleting substances in Oman, which includes the import quotas, registering licences, and reports on quantities of consumption. There is also a significant move to inspect and control upcoming projects within the Sultanate to ensure their compliance with official environmental requirements and standards, as well as involving such projects in environmental impact assessment studies.

To conclude, climate change is a pressing global issue and very much worthy of our attention. Knowledge and active participation in order to adapt to the changes that are taking place is of vital importance. Oman is well aware of that as the Sultanate is taking steps in the right direction. ■

Over the last decade, the Arabian Sea, which borders Oman, Yemen and India, has witnessed unprecedented storms which scientists believe may be attributed to climate change.



HEALTHCARE IN OMAN: 1970 - 2050

ARTICLE BY BETH RICHARDS

This report by one of our interns, Beth Richards, seeks to outline the modern history of Omani healthcare, based on interviews conducted in Muscat and statistics from the Ministry of Health, Oman Medical Speciality Board and the World Health Organisation.

HISTORY

Picture this – a young woman goes into labour at home, attended by a local woman, and without pain relief. A healthy baby boy is delivered, but the mother continues to have stomach pains. To try to ease them, the makeshift midwife ties a rope tightly around the woman’s stomach. Next morning, another local woman unties the rope, and the woman swiftly gives birth to a second baby boy. She had been pregnant with twins, and they were born 14 hours apart.

Both babies survived and grew up to be healthy and intelligent men, despite the traumatic circumstances of their birth and the fact that vaccinations were simply not available then. One suffered from malaria – three times – and survived using local remedies. The boys grew up in a small village with no school. Despite the challenges, their father was determined to have them educated. After studying abroad for several years, the first of them went on to become a doctor. His name? His Excellency, Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Saidi, Oman’s current Minister of Health.



His Excellency, Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Saidi, Oman’s current Minister of Health, with Beth Richards.

Healthcare before 1970, Dr. Al-Saidi states, was primitive. The Sultanate had no more than 15 doctors, only 13 or 14 hospital beds and few clinics outside Muscat. Life expectancy was 49.3 years. There was limited access to electricity or running water. Most children were born outside hospitals and 20 per cent died before the age of five – 15 per cent died before they were one month old. If a woman could not produce breast milk for her new born, her only hope was that another woman in the village would be able to – a testament to the community spirit in Oman, but not to the pre-1970 healthcare system. His Excellency's daughters branded that time the dark ages.

PRESENT DAY

Renaissance Day is well known and celebrated throughout Oman, the day upon which HM Sultan Qaboos took the throne, and thus began extensive modernisation throughout the Sultanate. The Sultan made healthcare a national priority, promising significant reforms to improve the lives of the Omani peoples. Within 30 years, life expectancy jumped to 74 years and is now 76.7 years. This is similar to many advanced countries and Dr. Al-Saidi is rightly proud of this. The number of children who die before five has decreased from 200 per 1000 live births to just 9.5 and the mortality rate for those under one month is less than nine. Mortality of pregnant women has dropped more than 75 percent since the early 1990s. The vaccination rate exceeds 99 percent, and Dr. Al-Saidi reports that Oman was rated as having the best vaccination programme worldwide in 2016/2017. The country boasts over 75 hospitals compared to one small missionary hospital before 1970, over 6000 hospital beds, over 10,000 doctors and 20,000 nurses.

According to Dr. Ali Talib Ali Al-Hinai, Undersecretary for Planning Affairs at the Ministry of Health, the initial focus on primary healthcare was instrumental in making Oman's health system. Diseases which were the norm have been eradicated, including measles, malaria and cholera, the only present cases being imported. Every Omani born now has records and mandatory vaccinations. Dr.



Dr. Ali Talib Ali Al-Hinai, Undersecretary for Planning Affairs at the Ministry of Health, with Beth Richards.

Al-Hinai is clear that since His Majesty took power and fuelled development, the health sector has blossomed, boasting 49 hospitals run by the MoH, and a fast-growing private sector.

Oman's modern healthcare system has been rated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as one of the most efficient, and in 2010 Oman was rated by the Human Development Index as one of the fastest developing countries, as well as being ranked eighth in the world. Dr. Al-Saidi claims that it has the most cost-effective outcome – the government spends 720 dollars/person/year, compared to 4,000 average in advanced European countries including the UK. His Excellency says this was because of his predecessors' concentration on establishing a solid primary healthcare system, and the work of Omani input across all aspects of life, including education, water and food developments.

CONSEQUENCES

Dr. Al-Saidi is clear that healthy children perform better at school, get better education, brighter life prospects and

productivity. Omani people are living longer and are healthier – thus less absent from work, more productive and better for the economy.

The pattern of diseases has changed drastically. Infectious diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis were the most common cause of death. In 1987, there were 33,000 cases of malaria. Today, there are under 1,200 imported cases. Now, non-communicable diseases are the challenges – long-term, chronic illnesses including cancer, cardio-vascular diseases, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries lead the world in diabetes, with Oman ranked within the top ten countries for the disease.

Many diseases faced by the ageing Omani peoples relate to life-style choices, especially lack of exercise and unhealthy diets. Dr. Al-Saidi regrets that many have abandoned Oman's traditional diet and incorporated fast food into their eating habits. He praises the UK's Sugar Tax and states that Oman will soon have one. Hereditary diseases are an issue, although the factors are social and beyond the control of the Ministry of Health.

CHALLENGES

One significant challenge is that of trained human resources. For doctors to function independently as consultants, states Dr. Al-Saidi, it takes up to 16 years of study and experience. Another challenge is the change from short-term infections, relatively cheaper to treat, to long-term diseases which are expensive to manage. Financing is a pressing challenge. No country in the world, he states, can afford all the new technologies and medicines being created almost daily. Oman has up-to-date medicines for chronic diseases available and provided free-of-charge. His Excellency is clear that this is not economically sustainable. The country simply cannot afford to offer free healthcare to everyone regardless of their income.

The increase in Oman's average life expectancy is not without cost. Ministers are pondering the consequences of an ageing population, a new issue for Oman. Dr. Al-Hinai states that 82 percent of Omanis are under 40, and only 6.1 percent are over 60. This is set to double to 12 to 15 percent – similar to the UK. Diseases coming with age are thus at the forefront of medical attention.

Another aspect of the health system that needs to be developed, according to Dr. Al-Hinai, is the improvement of tertiary healthcare – hospital care for the most part. This type of care is significantly lacking compared to primary healthcare.

FUTURE

In 2012, the Ministry of Health prepared a so-called roadmap for health, Health Care 2050. Local task forces studied healthcare throughout the country and analysed its strengths and weaknesses, before putting their results into the new publication; it was sent to other countries, including the UK, for feedback, which was positive. Health Care 2050 is a flexible, adaptable, and implementable plan in the eyes of Dr. Al-Saidi. In every five-year plan, appropriate features of the report can be implemented to suit the Sultanate's level of development.

Dr. Yousef Al-Weshahi, Director of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) department of the Oman Medical



Dr. Yousef Al-Weshahi, Director of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) department of the Oman Medical Speciality Board (OMSB), with Beth Richards.

Speciality Board (OMSB) has revolutionary ideas on the future of Oman's healthcare system. He asserts that health is a basic human need, and wants to change the people's mindset. He believes in a holistic approach to healthcare, and the consideration of demographic factors alongside those that are more obvious.

Dr. Al-Weshahi knows over 500 people who are related to him, and receives two or three calls a day from family members on healthcare issues. So why not utilise this traditional, tribal family-centric social structure? A family doctor system could be introduced, he postulates, so each family has, at minimum, one doctor responsible for their healthcare needs. There are enough medical graduates for this to be feasible, and he is a strong advocate for Oman's social structure to be utilised as a key resource.

Dr. Al-Weshahi believes healthcare should be a national priority, as it was in 1970. The health sector receives five percent of Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – minimal compared to other sectors – and can suffer short term cuts in

its budget. Oman's advantage is that His Majesty is in control, the government is strong, and the population is relatively small. He believes Oman has the resources for a strong, efficient and sustainable healthcare system, but is struggling with the distribution of such resources.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Palliative care is an example of how healthcare in Oman is still developing. Maggie Jeans lost her husband, Dr. Bill Jeans, to a rare form of sarcoma, and they experienced first-hand the lack of palliative care. Maggie has begun to tackle this problem in his memory. She describes the palliative care movement as being in its infancy though progress had already been made by the Oman Cancer Association (OCA) who trained 180 nurses

and three doctors in palliative care.

Dr. Al-Hinai states that palliative care in Oman five years ago was primitive but with help from NGOs and cancer societies, such care is now being sought by more of the population. Dr. Al-Saidi acknowledges this is an area in which Oman is behind, but one that he is ardent about given his specialism of rheumatology. The Ministry plans to improve such care and its availability, especially within government hospitals.

CONCLUSION

Oman's healthcare seems to be evolving quickly as it did after 1970. The possibilities for the forms for the sector to take are many, and it is safe to say it is a very exciting time for the healthcare system in Oman. ■

Thanks to His Excellency Dr. Ahmed Mohammed Al-Saidi, Dr. Ali Talib Ali Al-Hinai, and thanks to Dr Yousef Al-Weshahi for their time and contributions to this report.

OMANI SOCIAL MEDIA, THE NEXT GENERATION

ARTICLE BY JAREER AL-DAOUD

Since the Arab Spring there is a strong worldwide interest in how social media is used in the Middle East. Six hundred million people worldwide use the photo and video-sharing social networking service Instagram and 63 million are from the Middle East – 10 per cent of global users.



Jareer Al-Daoud

The job role of social media influencer is a new but rapidly growing one. It has become more and more lucrative, leading many to leave full-time employment to pursue it as a career.

Social media influencers are individuals who have made a name for themselves on the digital sphere. They have a significant number of followers on social media and dedicate their time to perfecting their online presence. They produce content ranging from beauty and fashion to food and lifestyle, with the aims of resonating with their respective online communities.

These influencers take their personal brand very seriously and work extremely hard to develop their digital community. They build strong relationships with their followers over a prolonged period of time, giving them full access into their lives and sharing their opinions and recommendations surrounding their every experience.

This phenomenon is taking the Gulf region by storm and Oman is not missing out. NapoleonCat, a social media marketing and analytics platform published a report in April 2017 which revealed that more than one-million Omani people accessed the social media platform Instagram, a favourite of social media influencers, and that this number is only on the rise.

To get a better understanding of this phenomenon, I travelled to Oman to interview two of Oman’s most popular influencers: Layla A and Halima Al Abdul Salam in order to learn more about their goals and aspirations and what they want to achieve through their online presence. These two successful women are influencing their peers and challenging social norms and traditions. They are using their social media platforms to give rise to positive change and youth empowerment

in Oman, especially that of women. Both women are unique in their approaches and have completely juxtaposed personalities and interests.

LAYLA A

- Instagram: @beinglayla_a
- Twitter: @beinglayla_a
- YouTube: beinglayla_a
- Facebook: beinglayla_a



Layla A, born in Qatar, grew up in both the Middle East and Canada. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration, Management and Marketing. She had always wanted to venture into fashion, and so went on to pursue a degree in Fashion and Apparel Design.

Layla is currently the creative director of Iconic Middle East, a leading company for digital marketing which she started with her husband. The company specialises in social media content creation, as well as in organising bespoke events. Iconic Middle East are equally committed to working with companies, as well as other influencers and bloggers alike, to aid in their growth and manage their social media accounts, as



well as organise different events. “Where Icons Are Made” is the slogan her company has adopted in an attempt to encourage Omani businesses to learn about social media, but also to educate themselves on how to manage their accounts in order to reach new audiences.

Turban-wearing Layla is passionate about fashion and beauty. She has a bold and edgy style, and although Omani women tend to be more traditional in their fashion choices compared to women in other Gulf countries, Layla has noted that more and more are embracing colours and more statement patterns. On Instagram, her posts are namely about her outfits and fashion choices, some of which she even designed herself. Layla has gained a large following from the fact that she combines traditional conservative fashions with more international style, but also from the fact that she is a young and successful mother to two young children, making her more relatable and real than your average celebrity.

Layla aims to promote a positive self-image, individuality and unique flair. She wants women to both feel and look great and be comfortable in their own skin. She focuses on attempting to make her audiences feel better from the inside by promoting healthy eating and good skin care routines, stating that feeling beautiful is not solely about make-up and material things.

One thing that Layla admits is that being an influencer can be extremely overwhelming at times, and when she feels like this she likes to undertake what she calls a social media detox – she logs off and takes some time to disconnect before starting up again with a refreshed mindset. Layla wants the Middle Eastern community to take influencers more seriously, as she uses her platform to creatively shed light upon topics that she is passionate about in a way that is aesthetically pleasing to her audience.

Layla likes Instagram the most in terms of influencing, as this is where she initially broke through online when women started following and connecting with her. One thing Layla herself would like to see is more honest influencers, who truly speak their mind about their experiences as she does.

HALIMA AL ABDUL SALAM

- Instagram: @halima.alabdulsalam
- Twitter: @halima_oman
- Snapchat: @halima.oman



Halima is an ambitious Omani woman who grew up with a love of social media and broadcasting. She started her career as a Customer Care Supervisor in an oil company, and then worked for ten years in one of Oman’s leading banks until she resigned in 2016. She is now a full-time manager at a company she established back in 2007 in the field of marketing, promotion, PR, events and influencer management.

Halima herself loves to entertain and to add colour to people’s lives, influencing their daily routines through suggestions as to fun things to do in their free time. This is especially the case with regard to dining, movies and travelling – all topics for which she uses hashtags to promote her recommendations, thus widening her sphere of influence considerably and increasing her interactions with her followers. For example, using #halima_dineout she raves about the restaurants she has tried and using #halima_movies, she reviews the latest movies that she watched at cinemas in Muscat.

Halima is active on a range of social media platforms but favours Instagram as it’s where she built her follower base. In regard to maintaining and running her social media accounts, she says that she prefers to do so on her own because she feels as though it is much better for her to add her own personality into what she writes as no one can represent her better

than herself. Despite this, she believes that this is potentially an option that, if used wisely, could provide Omani youths with jobs and even benefit Oman economically.

Despite her love for her career, one of the main disadvantages for her is that many people believe that because influencers are public figures, they can own them and throw judgements at them. But all that glitters is not gold, she says, and often finds herself wondering why she didn’t stay in a more conventional career path. Halima thinks that if she had indeed stuck to a more normal job that she would have “less tension and more peace of mind” but quickly remembers that she chose this career path because it fulfils her dreams. She uses social media to motivate people to believe in themselves, to be positive and to work hard to achieve their dreams, just like she did.

Halima believes that more needs to be done to support Omani social media personalities, such as has been done with other Gulf personalities, in order to help them to reach international fame. “Omanis are also talented and can do wonders,” she said. She is confident that if more international brands were to use Omani influencers, they would exceed all expectations.

Moreover, they are becoming role models for millennials and their influence on their purchasing decisions is phenomenal. When influencers attend promotional events, or rave about a certain product or service, sales tend to skyrocket – a testament to the influence that they have on their trusting followers.

Brands and companies are becoming increasingly aware of their impact and status as a powerful marketing tool for endorsing places, products and services. Influencer marketing CRM, MuseFind, found ninety-two percent of consumers to prefer an influencer rather than a traditional celebrity for endorsement of products. They truly are the new kind of celebrity.

This seems almost too good to be true. I’ll be sure to keep you informed though, as I am just off to study the ten steps to becoming a social media influencer. Fingers crossed! ■

OBITUARY

The Hon. Ivor Lucas, CMG

ARTICLE BY SIR TERENCE CLARK

Ivor Lucas was Chairman of the Committee of the Anglo-Omani Society from 21 June 1990 until I succeeded him on 15 June 1995. His was a hard act to follow, as he was a most meticulous and methodical manager of the Society's expanding affairs, qualities which I had already come to appreciate when I was his Assistant for a year in 1975-6, during the time he was Head of the Middle East Department of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

In his admirable memoir – *A Road to Damascus* (1997) – he called the chapter devoted to his time in that Department *Four Years Hard* as they were punctuated by a series of significant events in the region with far-reaching effects on Britain's relations with it. He had hardly settled in when in March 1975 King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated and Ivor was immediately faced with assessing the consequences for Britain's interests and initiating appropriate action; and in the middle of all this George Brown, then Foreign Secretary, rang him to say that he proposed to make an immediate trip to the area to keep the temperature down! With great skill, Ivor managed to discourage this initiative, as he was to do in even more difficult circumstances some three years later.

The revolution in Iran culminating in the departure of the Shah in January 1979, placed a huge strain on Ivor's Department and matters were not helped when once again George Brown rang Ivor to suggest he should perform his usual *deus ex machina* act by descending on Tehran to settle the crisis. Ivor managed to stall, whereupon Brown remarked somewhat petulantly: "You're a downy bird, aren't you? – never use one word where half a word will do!" By then Ivor was already fully alive to the fact that Britain's post-imperial realities, particularly since the



Ivor and his wife Christine at a MECAS reunion in Oxford.

Suez debacle of 1956 when he was serving for the first time in the Foreign Office, diminished the sway of its emissaries.

Ivor Thomas Mark Lucas was born in 1927 in Southampton, the third of four children of George Lucas, a motor engineer who had helped William Morris to build his first car. He was ennobled by Labour in 1946 for his work for the automobile industry during the war. His wife, Sonia (née Finkelstein), was the daughter of a Latvian fishing-fleet tycoon.

Ivor's interest in languages and travel made joining the Diplomatic Service his ambition. Educated at St Edward's School, Oxford, he won a history scholarship to Trinity College, Oxford. Before taking it up, he joined the Royal Artillery a week before the German surrender in 1945. While soldiering in Libya, he had a formative experience dining in the desert with Bedouin. "We sat crosslegged on

carpets," he recalled, "around a whole roast sheep on top of a massive bed of rice... which one attacked Muslim-style, with the right hand only. Gastronomically, it was nothing to write home about, but somehow the simple and friendly atmosphere of the Bedouin encampment in the middle of nowhere... struck a chord in me." Unwittingly the experience was to influence the course of his life.

After Oxford, where he switched to politics, philosophy and economics and was involved in the Labour Club, Ivor joined the Foreign Office in 1951. He volunteered to learn Arabic, partly as a result of the more positive memories of his military service in Palestine and Libya. He was sent to Lebanon, and the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies at Shemlan. Between lessons he found time to woo his future wife, Christine Coleman, who was working in the British Legation in Beirut. They

married in 1954. She survives him with their three sons: Mark and George, who are literary agents in London and New York respectively, and Crispin, who works in finance in Vancouver.

Ivor's first substantive posting was to the Political Residency in Bahrain in 1952, where he became acquainted with the concept of 'responsibility without power' in the dying days of the Raj. From there he went on in early 1953 to the Political Agency in Sharjah in the Trucial States, where the office and accommodation overlooked the evil-smelling creek and there was no running water or air-conditioning. But he found the job fascinating, combining as it did maintaining relations with and between the rulers of the seven shaikhdoms with the role of administrator and judge. However, his main preoccupation at the time was with the Buraimi crisis, following the Saudi incursion into the oasis in August 1952.

Back in the Foreign Office, Ivor began a connection with Oman that lasted off and on for the rest of his life when in 1958 he found himself on the Oman desk dealing with the visit to London of Sultan Said bin Taimur and the negotiations with Julian Amery, Under-Secretary for War, resulting in Britain's commitment to the expansion of the Sultan's Armed Forces that secured the enduring 'special relationship' with Oman.

In 1959 he went to Pakistan, not long after the takeover by the military regime under General Ayub Khan. In the course of over three years he travelled widely to observe the many intractable problems facing the nation, not least among which was the population explosion. Ivor always had an eye for a *bon mot* and noted that when Ayub Khan was delivering a particularly dull speech on the need to increase industrial output, he suddenly departed from it to declare with a smile: "Yes, that's what we want, more production and less reproduction!"

In 1962, Ivor returned to Libya, which he had last seen as a soldier 14 years before. It was now a very different place. King Idris still ruled but was very frail. Indeed, the opposition spread rumours that he was dead and that the figure seen in his Rolls-Royce was a wax effigy put there by the British, anxious to perpetuate their 'special relationship'. But the writing was on the

wall and the relationship came under such strain that Ivor spent much of his time until his departure in July 1966 on the negotiations for Britain's withdrawal from its military bases there.

Next came another spell in the Foreign Office, this time dealing mainly with Greece and Turkey, including a State Visit by President Sunay, in making the arrangements for which Ivor observed that the most difficult customer of all proved to be George Brown! However, Ivor never felt that Whitehall was his scene, as his pace was not suited to a system in which nearly everything had to be done yesterday.

So, after a couple of years, he was glad to receive the news of his promotion to Counsellor and his posting to the newly-established Embassy in Aden, capital of the newly independent People's Republic of South Yemen. It lasted only 15 months, when Ivor felt under-employed, because, as he wrote: "contacts with the former terrorists who had put such a violent end to British colonial rule were few, fruitless and frustrating". So, he was quite happy to move on to his new assignment as Deputy High Commissioner in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, even though the country was locked in the final stages of the Biafran civil war.

In 1972, Ivor had another break from the Islamic world with a posting to Copenhagen as the Ambassador's deputy, when the first half of his time was spent trying to persuade the Danes to join the European Community with Britain and in the second half the Danes were trying to persuade Britain to stay in the EC with them!

In 1979, after his arduous stint back in the Foreign Office for which he was awarded the CMG, he was glad to have returned to the Arab world as Ambassador to Oman, where in April 1981 he took charge of the first visit by a British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Soon afterwards, Ivor received the unwelcome news of his transfer early in 1982 to Damascus. He arrived shortly before a major upheaval in Syria, when the Muslim Brotherhood instigated an uprising in Hama, which was brutally suppressed by the Asad regime. This was followed by Israel's invasion of Lebanon and once again Ivor was grappling with the fall-out from the Arab/Israel problem. By now somewhat disillusioned by the professional and

domestic frustrations of Damascus, Ivor decided to take early retirement in 1984.

In retirement in 1985, he was made an Assistant Secretary-General of the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce, which kept him in close touch with the Middle East for the next three years. He then worked for the next seven years as a reviewer of papers coming up for release from the Foreign Office archives; and between 1991 and 1994 he was a fellow at the University of Cambridge's Centre for International Studies, supervising postgraduate students on Middle Eastern topics. He was a member of the Central Council of the Royal Over-Seas League for many years.

He was to put all his wide experience to further use as Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs from 1995 to 2002, where at the age of 80 he published a collection of his 80 book reviews for *Asian Affairs* under the title *80@80*. Here and in his lectures and teachings, he allowed free rein to his criticisms of the conduct of foreign affairs and in particular the twin pressures of promoting British commercial interests – he was particularly critical of the arms trade – and the requirement to do more with fewer resources.

"As a diplomat one observed, analysed and reported without ever being able to influence, let alone persuade," he noted. "And as a British diplomat one was increasingly exposed to the perverse doctrine that, because Britain was not the power she had been, the need for diplomacy on the scale we practised it was no longer necessary. The truth was precisely the contrary."

To all who knew Ivor, he was a modest man of firm principles and deep faith. As Sir James Craig, a contemporary fellow Arabist and former Ambassador to Damascus as well as to Saudi Arabia, wrote in the introduction to Ivor's memoir: "Here is a man, deeply conscientious, who thinks and worries about the world's problems and strives hard for fair and kindly answers... a decent, responsible, honest and honourable man. He has earned all those adjectives by skilful and loyal service to his country." His many friends in the Society, of which he remained an active Vice-President until the end, would wish to join me in echoing those sentiments. ■

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

ARTICLE BY IAN KENDRICK

The Review magazine of 2015 included an article outlining A Brief History of the Anglo-Omani Society.



First Chairman
Donald Hawley

The article was compiled in a very short number of weeks by four writers who had very little in the way of historical files and records for research, particularly for the formation and first two decades of the Society. However, by collecting the personal memories and photographs of some of our senior members, along with a variety of fading documents and excerpts from books, eight pages of brief history were produced in time for the printing deadline.

When published, the article outlined how an association originally formed mainly by a group of enthusiastic expatriates has grown and developed throughout the years. Our initial membership was mainly expatriates who had worked in Oman in government, commercial and military fields, but in recent years the percentage of Omani members has increased, and continues to increase. This is largely the result of the Society's New Generation Group (NGG) attracting Omanis below the age of 30 to join.

The original formation was supported by the Oman Ambassador and his staff and the post of President has been filled by successive ambassadors ever since. His Majesty Sultan Qaboos agreed to be Patron and has been generous with his support. His gift of a building to become a permanent base transformed the working of the Society and greatly increased the financing of Society grants for British/Omani projects. Our latest expansion has brought a representative of the Oman Britain Business Council to attend board meetings.



HRH Prince Charles
at the 35th Anniversary
of the Society.

Unfortunately, there are many gaps in this list, particularly in the early years, and this is where we ask members: Please help our research.

All this expanding activity coupled with support from varied sources, including governmental, and a rich variety of personalities over the years calls for the Brief History to be expanded to a complete history, and steps are now being taken to do this. A number of members and all trustees are being asked to write a narrative of any aspect of the Society's history with which they are familiar. Some scripts have already been received, and more are expected. At the same time, a chronological list of dated factual events has been compiled and is being continually expanded as more information is received. Unfortunately, there are many gaps in this list, particularly in the early years, and this is where we ask members: *Please help our research.*

If you can remember events, names, anecdotes, policies, in fact, any aspect of the history of the Society, please send it by



The opening of the inaugural meeting of the New Generation Group.



HRH Prince Andrew at a reception for the Society and the Omani British Friendship Association.



HH Sayyid Shahib bin Tariq speaks at the 40th Anniversary of the Society.

letter or email to our Manager, Ben Wright. To hopefully jog memories, take a look at the chronological list of events which is being made available on the Society website which itself is being updated and expanded. If the list is not available when you read this article, members will be receiving an email to announce when it happens.

The eventual aim is to make the full history available to members and hopefully to publish it, but this is a decision that will be made when the history is complete. Meanwhile, your support will help us on the way and be very much appreciated. ■

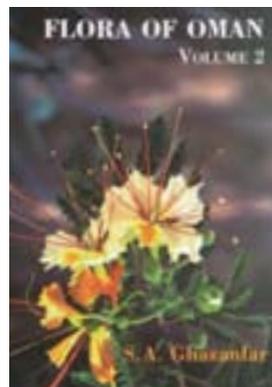
BOOK REVIEWS

THE FLORA OF OMAN:

Detailed and Authoritative

By Shahina A. Ghazanfar, *Flora of the Sultanate of Oman*. Published by the National Botanic Garden, Meise, Belgium
4 volumes: 2003, 2007, 2015 and 2018.

A review by John R. Edmondson, Honorary Research Associate, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew



While the hopes expressed in the Foreword to vol. 1 of the Flora, for a second Arabic edition, have yet to be fulfilled, this first English-language Flora of one of the botanically richer areas of Arabia has reached a world-wide audience through its skilful mix of botanical descriptions, maps, illustrations and supporting material. Of all the Floras treating parts of the Arabian peninsula, it is undoubtedly the most detailed and authoritative, based as it is on a combination of twelve years of fieldwork by the author, coupled with research at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

The Flora is organised in Cronquist family sequence, but the later volumes also highlight places where it differs significantly from the APGIII arrangement (a more modern sequence and definition of families based on DNA evidence). It includes some cultivated species, such as the pomegranate, and each volume is accompanied by a CD containing photographs (taken in the field) of most of the species treated. Species are mapped on a 25 x 25km grid based on the UTM system, providing a commendable level of detail and highlighting under-explored areas, of which there are still many. Keys

are provided, and external distributions summarised.

The phytogeography of Oman is complex, embracing elements of the sandy, stony and salt deserts straddling the middle of the country, the monsoon-affected hills and coasts of Dhofar, and the mountainous north of the country with its extensive emplacements of ophiolite and its limestone massifs. The Musandam peninsula also contains elements linking the flora with that of Iran. For that reason, and because there is a significant endemic element to the flora, this treatment is of relevance to many adjoining countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and even Iran and Baluchistan.

The exploration of the flora of Oman happened relatively late compared to other areas of the Middle East. The pioneering collections of Aucher-Eloy in 1838 allowed Oman to be included in Edmond Boissier's monumental *Flora Orientalis* (1867-1888), but the inaccessible nature of much of the interior meant that most progress took place in the last quarter of the twentieth century when Oman entered the modern era. In some respects, this was an advantage, in that the burden of synonymy

(several scientific names for a single species) is less onerous than for the more heavily worked countries of S.W. Asia.

Although the bulk of the text has been written by the author and editor, several families were compiled by guest contributors, notably by Annette Patzelt who was herbarium curator and botanic garden director at the Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat. The account of Poaceae is based on the work of Tom Cope (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew) for the only partly published *Flora of Arabia*, and Norbert Kilian (Botanical Garden and Botanical Museum, Berlin) co-authored the Asteraceae.

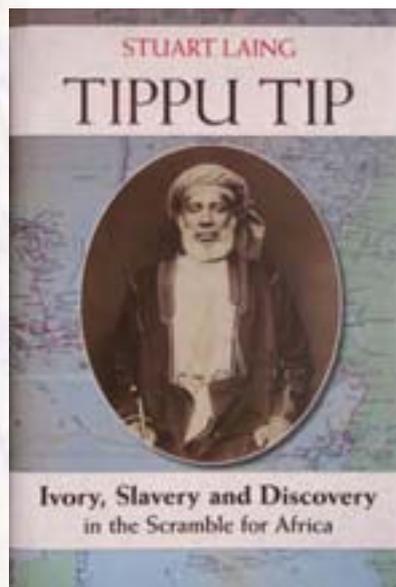
When I visited Oman in 1980 under the auspices of the Open University's geological mapping project, the lack of a modern flora made fieldwork something of a scattershot process: without such a work, it was difficult to know how to focus one's efforts. With the triumphant completion of these four volumes, nicely designed and published by the National Botanic Garden, Belgium, no resident botanist or visitor need be in any doubt about the existing knowledge of the country's flora, and everyone studying the flora of Arabia will benefit from its existence. ■

TIPPU TIP

Ivory, Slavery and Discovery in the Scramble for Africa

By Stuart Laing. Published by London, Medina Publishing Ltd., £25

A review by Dr Felicitas Becker, Professor of African History, University of Gent



Among the small band of historians of modern East Africa, Tippu Tip is a household name. As Stuart Laing's meticulously researched and fluently written biography sets out, he was a trader-warlord, originally from Zanzibar, who criss-crossed East and Central Africa throughout the 1870s and 1880s.

In the process, he amassed a fortune through ivory sales and clove plantations worked by slaves, maintained quasi-diplomatic relations with representatives of a number of European powers, met some of the most famous European explorers of the period and spent some time as governor of Eastern Congo on behalf of the Belgian King.

In other words, his life embodies the interlacing of trade, warfare and politics in late pre-colonial Eastern Africa, and the personalised nature of the Zanzibari imperial presence on the mainland. As Laing notes, he took great care of his appearance: surely, a wise move in an environment where politics often had a theatrical quality. The impressive resulting picture features in many a power-point

used in teaching the late pre-colonial history of East Africa, and his memoirs are much referred to as a rare non-European written source.

Yet despite his prominence, Tippu Tip remains enigmatic. His memoirs are essentially an enumeration of things he did, written with the encouragement of a European diplomat and addressing an audience familiar with the conditions and practices of Zanzibari imperialism in East Africa. They state the fact of fighting where it occurred, but give little information on the extent and nature of the violence visited upon the African populations involved, and they leave the reader guessing as to the exact balance of violence, patronage and diplomacy involved in the maintenance of Tippu Tip's embattled hegemony.

Laing argues, convincingly, that Tippu Tip was more of an ivory- than a slave trader, and that he used violence for political reasons, rather than as a routine means of procuring ivory. As has often been noted, he was somatically black; the child of a line of African concubines. His ability to pass as Arab arose from Zanzibari Arab society's emphasis on patrilineal descent, and from his language skills, habitus and wealth. As Laing also notes, he nevertheless showed contempt for Africans encountered in the interior, in keeping with his colleagues. It is hard not to wonder, however futilely, just how he parsed the brutal inequalities he witnessed.

Further: how did he affect the African societies he interacted with; how is he remembered by the people he fought? How does he figure in the origin stories and identity of the Muslim minority in the Eastern Congo, who trace their origins to the Arab presence there?

There are projects in oral history and archaeology in these questions, awaiting a more peaceful time in the region. In the meantime, Laing's biography, combining archival and published sources from

Belgium, Britain and Zanzibar, has little choice but to skate over these questions concerning Tippu Tip's involvement with and effects on African interlocutors much as other authors have done.

Instead, he uses his background in diplomacy and knowledge of Arab countries to give us an account of Tippu Tip's life set firmly within the relationship between Oman, Zanzibar and the East African mainland on one hand, and within the constant expansion of the European presence in the region on the other.

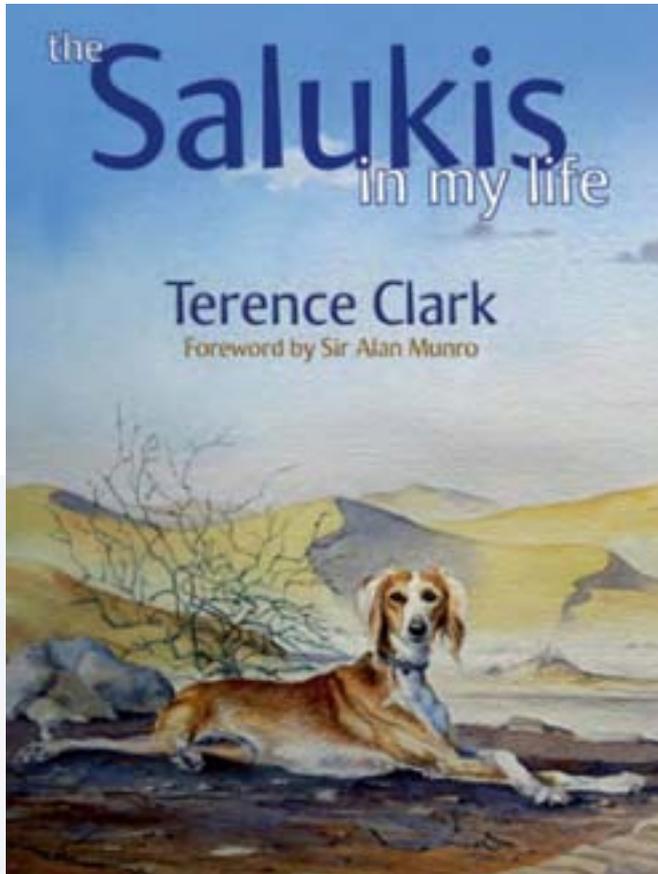
The result is impressive. Laing's familiarity with Omani notions of politics and loyalty allows him to trace how the Zanzibari sultan's claims to control on the mainland became so easy to dismiss for the rising European power-brokers: notions of power based on control over people clashed with those based on control over territory. He uses Tippu Tip's encounters with accomplished writers like David Livingstone to include choice quotations from their work.

Setting Tippu Tip's career in its context, an outline of how he parsed his violent and chaotic times emerges. Laing shows that Tippu Tip never lost the instincts of the businessman; profit remained his central motive even when he was operating in situations where others saw him as a warlord or diplomat. That he ended up side-lined, much of his fortune lost in lawsuits, despite his single-mindedness, energy and diplomatic skill, vividly illustrates the overbearing force of European imperialism in this period, once it got going in earnest.

I still found myself marvelling at the breadth and diversity of his commercial, personal and diplomatic contacts and his evident skill at managing them all. Laing traces these complicated interactions, Tippu Tip's choices and likely motives with admirable clarity. He has an eye for illustrative facts and figures. ■

THE SALUKIS IN MY LIFE

By Terence Clark. Published by Medina Publishing



Sir Terence Clark's *The Salukis in My Life* is part-memoir, part-travelogue, and explores in lively and unprecedented detail the history and significance of the Saluki across the world.

Indigenous to the Arabian peninsula, the desert-bred Saluki has for centuries been revered, and remains as highly valued today for its elegance and intelligence. Sir Terence's own life and work have been profoundly influenced by this ancient breed. His commitment to the study, enjoyment and preservation of these 'Companions of Kings' has taken him far and wide and introduced him to extraordinary people and places – in Iraq and Oman (where he was British Ambassador), throughout the Middle East and across Turkey, into Central Asia, Russia and China.

Beautifully illustrated with personal photographs, artwork and calligraphy, this book interweaves Sir Terence's fascinating life story with the history of the breed throughout the region. His passion for Salukis is infectious – whether for hunting, showing, coursing, breeding or simply companionship, the reader cannot help but share the love. ■

GENTLEMAN OF FORTUNE:

An Unofficial Guide to Army 2020

By Henry Beeching. £7.99 from Amazon
(Kindle edition available)

This amusing and provocative book – described as a junior officer's gripping no holds barred and brutally honest account of how the British military has changed and adopted new tactics, methods and mindsets – shows the wide and serendipitous way that Oman features in so many parts of our society. While at Sandhurst, the author served with an Omani fellow cadet, which led to several cadets going out to Oman for some weeks and having whirlwind experience of the country and in particular all parts of the Army. Beeching had already taken a degree in Arabic, undertaken parachute selection and other challenging courses, and finally served as a military Arabic and French Cultural and Linguistic Adviser. He is now working in the City. ■

CELESTIAL BODIES

Published by Sandstone Press, £8.99

The English translation of this acclaimed second novel by the Omani novelist and academic Jokha Alharthi was recently launched at the Edinburgh Festival. As its translator, Marilyn Booth, has summarised: '*Celestial Bodies* traces an Omani family over three generations, shaped by the rapid social changes and consequent shifts in outlook that Oman's populace has experienced across the twentieth century and in particular since Oman's emergence as an oil-rich state in the 1960s.'

It is the choices of the middle generation of three sisters that drive the plot, demonstrating the ways in which the women, admittedly of an atypical upper-class family, were able to negotiate their paths between the expectations of tradition and the new opportunities and pressures they encountered. The novel has an unusual structure as alternate chapters are related by the husband of the oldest sister, a constant reminder of the constraints of the external, patriarchal world.

The Anglo-Omani Society is proud to have sponsored the English translation of *Celestial Bodies* in response to an application from University of Oxford academic Marilyn Booth. The gripping novel provides thoughtful perspectives on Omani women's experiences in a time of enormous socioeconomic change. It is a fascinating subject and we hope to return to it again in our lecture programme. ■



BP & Oman. There's energy in this partnership.

In 2017 we delivered first gas from Khazzan, one of the Middle East's largest gas projects. Our innovative technology is enabling production of up to 1 billion cubic feet of gas per day, energy that is vital to power homes and businesses in Oman. And as part of our long-term commitment to Oman our social investment programme is empowering generations of Omanis to come. We're proud to help build a bright future for Oman.

