

# 50th Anniversary Photography Exhibition



Mr (later Sir) Donald Hawley Presents  
Credentials to HM Sultan Qaboos

22 July 1971



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

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On the 22nd of July 1971, HM Sultan Qaboos's personal car was sent to escort Donald Hawley to the Royal Palace.

Hawley's own report illuminates the smooth and orderly fashion in which this historic ceremony was conducted. After being driven through Muscat's '*narrow and winding streets*' Hawley was greeted outside an imposing Muscat residence with a red carpet and a Guard of Honour. At the invitation of Major Richard Anderson, OC Muscat Garrison, Hawley inspected the guard then entered the building, ascending a winding staircase to the main reception room.



In the middle of the room stood HM Sultan Qaboos and HE Sayyid Tariq bin Taimur Al-Said, the Sultanate's Prime Minister at the centre of a long, narrow carpet.

The Sultan wore a *bisht* (cloak) edged in gold and a purple *mussar* (turban). After the private ceremony, at which short speeches were exchanged, the Sultan accompanied Donald Hawley out of the room; then as he left the building Hawley was greeted by '*a rousing reception from the crowd which had gathered*'.

On this single day, Donald Hawley presented his credentials not only as the first British Ambassador to Oman but as the first Ambassador to Oman from any country.

To learn more about this milestone of Anglo-Omani history, the Anglo-Omani Society spoke to Lady Ruth Hawley, Sir Donald Hawley's widow, about their experiences in Muscat and Oman's first ambassadorship.

## Lady Ruth Hawley Interview

What were the initial motivations to set up an embassy in Oman?

*"I think Her Majesty's government had decided some time previously that with oil exports and with Oman beginning to open up under Sultan Said, it would be a good thing to have an embassy there rather than a consulate-general and to send an ambassador. That way it would give Sultan Said perhaps more confidence to develop the country. Everyone was keen that Oman should be opened up, not least because there was the war going on in Dhofar. And there was the persistent 'Question of Oman' arising in many international organisations. That was the reason for trying to encourage the early establishment of an embassy.*

*When the idea of a posting to Oman was first floated with my husband I think we thought Oman sounded a bit adventurous, a bit different. My husband had quite a lot of friends who were in Oman whom he had known earlier because he was originally in the Sudan government and then joined the Foreign Office and spent a lot of time around the Gulf as Political Agent for the Trucial States."*

*Early twentieth-century view of Muscat with the Sultan's Palace and the future British Embassy building on the far left.*



What do you remember about arriving in Oman?

*"We flew into Bait al Falaj airstrip which had been put down by the RAF originally in the 1930s, a tiny little airstrip, the only planes that could fly in were Fokker Friendships. So we were coming directly from Baghdad and we had to come via Bahrain, and we flew in on the Fokker Friendship. As you looked out of the windows of the aircraft and you wondered which wings were going to touch which bit of mountain: it was quite a perilous descent!"*

What were your first impressions?

*"We first arrived in May 1971 and I suppose our first impressions were 'what a beautiful place'. Coming into Ruwi with the mountains there and this tiny little aeroplane bumping along was quite extraordinary. And then we arrived at what was then a very, very simple little airport. It was just a couple of airport buildings. But it was a fascinating country, we were slightly open-eyed with wonder, it was very beautiful. I think that as soon as we settled in, we saw we had this fantastic view. We were right on the harbour. We had Fort Jalali on one side and Fort Mirani on the other. So our first impressions were what a fabulous place: very beautiful, but very simple."*

***"I think my husband was absolutely thrilled to be there because it was a new era. It was a new era for everybody."***

What do you remember about the presentation of credentials ceremony?

*"When we arrived in May Sultan Qaboos, who had replaced his father the year before, was out of the country. So my husband came in as Consul-General knowing that it was going to change. As soon as the Sultan came back my husband left briefly and went up to Dubai so that he could come back to be properly received as the first ambassador to Oman. The Omanis wanted to do it correctly, as other countries would do it. So, shortly after returning my husband presented his credentials on the 22nd of July 1971; that was literally the day before the anniversary of the accession of Sultan Qaboos to the throne on 23rd July 1970. It was a special day for the Sultan as well, obviously, almost a year after he had taken over the throne."*

*The Sultan's Palace Bait Al-Alam. It was undergoing renovation when Sir Donald Hawley Presented Credentials. The ceremony was instead held in the residence Bait Chauncy.*



*"At that time the Sultan's palace was being restored to upgrade it so the Sultan would have somewhere suitable to receive people. He was using one of the old houses of Muscat which had been lived in by Leslie Chauncy who was an advisor to the old Sultan and that was where the presentation of credentials took place. Bait Chauncy was quite a simple building with steps going up to it and then there was a hall. Nothing that could be spoken of as a grand palace."*

*"My husband went along with the Chief of Protocol, Abdullah Ghazali I think, taking his whole diplomatic contingent: himself, the number two, and the commercial officer; the defence attaché came in later. So, it was a very small team, and as far as I remember they and the rest of the embassy staff all came back for a drink at the Residence afterwards."*

The archives have preserved the words exchanged between HM Sultan Qaboos and Donald Hawley during the presentation of credentials. First, Hawley's speech cited the long history of friendship between the two countries and stressed the progress made since HM Sultan Qaboos's accession. HM Sultan Qaboos then spoke, formally welcoming Donald Hawley as Oman's first ambassador and concurred with the sentiments of Anglo-Omani friendship.

## *Donald Hawley's Speech*

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ANNEX A

Your Majesty,

There have been close and friendly relations between my country and Oman for a very long time. It was 171 years ago that a treaty was concluded which envisaged the friendship between our two countries lasting "till the end of time". The same treaty provided that "an English gentleman of respectability" should always reside at the port of Muscat. Thus, since then I have had many distinguished predecessors, whether they were called Consuls-General, Consuls, Agents, Residents, or even Surgeons.

None the less, it had become anomalous, despite the understandable historical reasons, that the United Kingdom's relations with Oman, a country we have always regarded as fully independent, should have been Consular rather than Diplomatic. It is, therefore, a great personal pleasure to me and a privilege that Her Majesty The Queen has appointed me as my country's first Ambassador to Oman.

I have watched the progress made in Oman since Your Majesty's accession with interest and admiration. I now wish every success to the efforts being made by Your Majesty and Your Majesty's Government to cope with the many problems which face the country. I am confident that Oman's future can be a very bright one.

## *HM Sultan Qaboos's Speech*

ANNEX B

Your Excellency,

We thank you deeply for your kind sentiments. I am happy to welcome you as both the first Ambassador in Oman's history and the first Ambassador from the United Kingdom to be accredited to us.

We value the friendship which has existed so long between us and Britain and which has become stronger and more deeply-rooted with the passage of time. Both we and our Government will do our utmost to consolidate our relations to mutual advantage.

We wish your Excellency and the members of your Embassy every success in your mission and I would be happy if you would be kind enough to convey my friendly regards to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to the Government of the British people.



*The old British embassy in Muscat in the 1970s with offices on the ground floor and the Ambassador's residences above.*

Do you remember the reactions after the establishment of the embassy-level relations?

*"I think my husband was absolutely thrilled to be there because it was a new era. It was a new era for everybody. Particularly for Oman. Once it was an embassy and no longer a consulate-general, it implied a new era for everybody, a new era for Oman because it was becoming a truly independent country. Nobody could say it wasn't an independent country, it was not under the auspices of the Political Residents in the Gulf like the Trucial States still were. Bahrain, Kuwait, and the seven sheikhdoms of the UAE were all under the jurisdiction of the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, but not Oman."*

What was the initial embassy work like?

*"What was lovely about it, from my point of view, was that we were pioneering. We were starting up something new. And everything you did you felt you were doing it for the first time because it had not been done before, which you don't often get a chance to do."*

*"I know my husband felt that because he was the first ambassador up until then. The UK had previously had a consul-general and the Indians were the only other people who had a consulate. There was no diplomatic corps, it was all very simple and quite a relief. At most posts you go to there is a huge diplomatic corps and there are lots of diplomatic parties which could get awfully boring. But here we had nothing, just ourselves. We had to build a whole new diplomatic environment and it all happened under incredibly wise guidance because Sultan Qaboos was determined that everything should be as smooth and as in keeping with the traditions of his country as possible. Everything he built was built in harmony with the country. He was very keen on preserving the traditions and all the very best of Oman."*

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This moment carried significant strategic importance for both the UK and Oman. In the preceding months, with the Sultan away on a tour of Europe, there had been a quiet diplomatic race between the UK, India and the United Arab Republic (UAR) to establish an Embassy and have an Ambassador present credentials, although there was in fact little doubt that the UK would be the first to establish an embassy in Oman.

The formal joint announcement of full diplomatic relations came on 28 June as a prelude to Hawley's reception as Ambassador on 22 July. Oman's diplomatic renaissance followed swiftly, with Oman joining the Arab League on 19 September, the United Nations on 7 October, and the establishment of friendly relations with Saudi Arabia in December 1971. It wasn't until 25 July 1972 that Hawley, on leave in UK, went to Buckingham Palace and formally 'kissed hands' with HM Queen Elizabeth II as Her Ambassador to Oman.

The establishment of full diplomatic relations was not only a milestone in the historic Anglo-Omani relationship but also the first step in Oman's full integration into the international diplomatic world of the twentieth century.