

REVIEW 2022

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY





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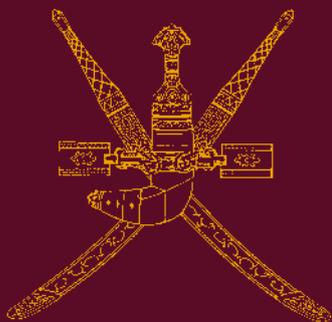
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Their Majesties Queen Elizabeth II and Sultan Haitham at Windsor Castle

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REVIEW 2022

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY



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FROM THE EDITOR

The end of the pandemic has seen the Society, like both our countries, start to resume more normal activity. Despite many continuing challenges, we are back to live events at Sackville Street and the resumption of at least some of our exchanges of young people in particular. Our Review this year tells some of the stories of difficult times, and some of the growing march to the future. There are important changes to both our Board and staff to report, and we look forward with confidence to a full programme... though already the variety of activity reported here covering the last year is impressive: we trust you will enjoy reading it.

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OMANI AMBASSADOR AND SOCIETY PRESIDENT FOR 12 YEARS

His Excellency Shaikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah bin Zahir Al-Hinai has been posted back to the Sultanate after a most successful 12 year tour in London as the Omani Ambassador and as the President of our Society.



He leaves with our grateful thanks for the care, time and friendship he has spent cultivating and enhancing Anglo-Omani relations through his many relationships with the Society.

His career as a diplomat representing his country abroad started in 1988, and is finally coming to a happy end with many

memories to cherish and many to speak about to his two grandsons.

After graduating from the University of Jordan with a degree in Political Science and History, he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1983. He began his diplomatic representation as Chargé d’Affaires in London in 1988. So he was no stranger when he arrived in London as the new Ambassador in June 2010. He brought with him his wife, Maryam, and their five children.

His Ambassadorial career began in the Hague when he was tasked to establish the first Omani diplomatic posting in the Netherlands in 1990 and remained until 1994. Then moved to Moscow until 2000, Cairo until 2009 and then London. In all of these, he forged great friendships and attracted numerous supporters.

In his current posting, he explained that, “The UK is a major partner and friend to Oman. Our main priority is to maintain that momentum and strengthen the sustainability between the two countries. It is a mutually beneficial relationship based on respect.”

He went on to express the Sultanate’s message to the world of peace, prosperity and development. “My country considers itself a peace facilitator in the Middle East. We hope to see our surrounding nations living in harmony, respect, peace.”

His Excellency has been a familiar figure at most of our Society’s major events over the years and always maintained good and friendly contact. We wish him and his family the very best of health and happiness in the future and assure him of a warm welcome whenever he returns to visit. ■

DEPUTY HEAD OF MISSION AND SOCIETY BOARD MEMBER



Issa Saleh Abdullah Saleh Al Shibani, the Deputy Head of Mission at the Oman Embassy in London until August, was also the Embassy representative attending the Anglo-Omani Society trustee and board meetings, and will be greatly missed. He was a regular attender at meetings and other events and was always available to give advice.

He has very great experience in Britain quite apart from his recent tour lasting nearly five years. He was Head of the Trade and Media Department at the London Embassy for over four years from 2011. He holds Master’s degrees from Heriot-Watt University (Language Interpretation and Translation, 2005) and the University of East Anglia (International Business and Diplomacy 2013).

Issa took his bachelor’s degree in education and English language teaching at Sultan Qaboos University (1997-2002), worked at the British Council in Muscat, and then became head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Translation Office. He remained there for eight years, during which he also founded a professional interpretation company – the British Embassy was one of his clients.

He also served at the MFA and at the Paris Embassy, so he has wide experience, and we are expecting promotion to Ambassador status to follow his successful time in London.

WELCOME... NEW SOCIETY TRUSTEES



RICHARD STANFORD

Major General Richard Stanford CB MBE WO is the new Chairman of the Society's Trustee Board. He spent a 35 year career in the British Army serving around the world in a variety of roles, including two periods on Loan Service in Oman from 1996-1997 and most recently on his last posting in the Army as the Senior British Loan Service Officer to the Sultanate from 2017-2021; a pivotal time in the country's history with the death of Sultan Qaboos and the accession of Sultan Haitham.

On leaving Oman he was appointed to the Order of Oman (Military) Second Class. Keen to keep close links with Oman, a country close to his heart, he is determined to ensure that UK and Oman retain a close and long lasting friendship in the Renewed Renaissance – "Unshook till the end of time".

Richard and his wife Fiona have a son and daughter. Fiona is the author of *Don't Say Goodbye: Our Heroes and the Families They Leave Behind*, a compilation of her experience as a military wife and stories of wives, girlfriends and children of other Welsh Guards deployed to Afghanistan. He moved on to a new career as Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission in August 2021.

CHRIS BREEZE

Mr Christopher Breeze is Managing Director of Ellipse Projects UK Limited, which builds infrastructure in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. Before joining Ellipse he spent 10 years working for Shell and 25 years in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

In Shell Christopher was Government Relations Adviser on Middle East and North Africa before becoming Shell's Country Chairman in Oman 2014-2019. He was also Chairman of the Boards of Shell Oman Marketing SAOG and Private Oil Holdings Oman Limited, and on the Boards of the Omani British Friendship Association, Petroleum Development Oman LLC, Oman LNG LLC and Qalhat LNG SAOC. He oversaw Shell's acquisition of new exploration acreage in Oman and launched Shell's Solar into Schools programme and a 25MW solar farm in Sohar Free Zone. After returning from Oman he spent 18 months as Shell's Vice-President for the East Mediterranean.

In the FCO he had postings to Cyprus, India, Turkey and Egypt. At various stages he spoke good Turkish and operational Hindi, although his Arabic never got beyond basic. He read Economics and Modern History at Exeter College, Oxford, is married and has two adult daughters. He has two Omani wadi dogs and splits his time between London and Dorset.



SHERARD COWPER-COLES

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles KCMG LVO is Chairman of the Oman British Business Council, and now a Trustee of the Anglo-Omani Society. He has been at HSBC since 2013, working as Senior Adviser to the Group Chairman and Group Chief Executive, and more recently heading the Group's global government and public affairs functions. He also chairs HSBC Bank Oman.

Sherard spent over 30 years in the British Diplomatic Service, which he joined straight from reading Classics at Oxford, finishing his career as Ambassador to Israel, Saudi Arabia and then Afghanistan. Before joining HSBC he worked for two and a half years for BAE Systems.

Sherard is Chairman of the China-Britain Business Council and Financial Inclusion Commission and sits on the boards of the Saudi British Business Council and Asia House. He is on the International Engagement Committee of the British Academy. Sherard is the author of two books: *Cables from Kabul* and *Ever the Diplomat*.



THE STAFF



Welcome to three new staff members, shown here with Dina Macki, our Communications Manager (left to right), Sarika, Dina, Neil and Farah.

SARIKA BREEZE

Sarika was an intern with the Society 2020-21, and returned as Business Development Manager OBBC/AOS earlier this year. In the meantime, she completed a Master's degree from SOAS and worked both in Muscat and the UK.

FARAH AL ZADGALI

Farah is an International Relations & Politics graduate from Keele University, originally from Muscat. During her undergraduate studies she worked alongside the Omani Cultural Attaché in London where she was General Secretary of the Omani Student Advisory Council in the UK, and President of the Omani Students Society in Manchester. Last year she attended the Foreign Press Association Awards 2021 in London as well as the round table discussion that the society held, and that was when she deduced she really wanted to work with the AOS and begin stepping stone to a career in international relations. She started as a Society intern in May, and found it exciting, eventful and a great place for networking.

NEIL COXON

Neil joined the Anglo Omani Society as Director in May, leading the Executive office in Sackville Street. As an ex-member of the British Sailing Team with a proven management track record, Neil was headhunted to join Oman Sail in 2009, and thoroughly enjoyed living in Muscat for over 10 years with his wife and family of three children, two of whom were born in Muscat. As Commercial and Sailing Director, Neil managed 120 staff in different locations throughout Oman, from Sur to Al Batinah.

Neil moved back to the UK in 2020 at the start of the COVID pandemic and when he heard of the vacant Director's role, it was very appealing as it provides a unique opportunity to use his knowledge of Oman and his affection for the country and its people.

Neil and his family live in Emsworth on the south coast. When he is not working, he is never far away from a tennis court. His children are keen players, one being currently ranked in the top 20 in the UK for his age group.

The Anglo-Omani Society Annual General Meeting

NEW CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

BY RICHARD STANFORD



Richard Stanford

It is a great honour and privilege to take over from Stuart Laing as Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society.

As readers will know, Oman is a country which is very easy to fall in love with. My association dates back to 1996 when I first went there on Loan Service, it was our first posting after getting married. From the stunning scenery of the countryside, complemented by the most generous

hospitality of all the Omanis we met; we loved the experience which made a deep impression on us both. We always wanted to return to Oman and I was most fortunate to be the Senior British Loan Service Officer in October 2017.

I was in Oman at a fascinating time in our shared history. The period included the very large joint Omani British exercise Saif Sareea 3, the death of HM Sultan Qaboos and the accession of HM Sultan Haitham. I was able to witness at first hand the drive and energy HM Sultan Haitham has brought to the Renewed Renaissance based on Vision 2040 which he was so intimately involved in developing.

It is a real privilege to be Chairman of our Society which has done so much to further relations between our two countries. We have very solid foundations on which to build and I am most grateful to Stuart Laing and the Trustees who have all given so much time and effort to ensure the Society has continued to thrive during the really challenging times of the pandemic. It is to their immense credit that we have emerged in such a good state and have adapted so quickly and effectively.

Some of the practices adopted during the pandemic, such as online and blended meetings and lectures, will continue into the future to ensure we can reach as far and wide as possible.

We will remain wedded to our Charitable Objects which can be summarised as promoting friendship and understanding between our two countries and in particular between our peoples. We have spent some time with the Board of Trustees to review how we currently achieve these objects and how we might develop new ideas. We will remain true to our roots and will build on these for the next generation.

We will remain wedded to our Charitable Objects which can be summarised as promoting friendship and understanding between our two countries and in particular between our peoples.

As always our aspirations must be bounded by the reality of our resources. Our income is reduced due to lower rents in Central London and so we must both temper our expenditure and look at other ways of generating revenue to spend on charitable activities. There are a number of very good ideas emerging from this work.

As Stuart notes, the Oman British Business Council is now a part of the Anglo-Omani Society with its Chair, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, an ex officio Trustee. Vision 2040 places significant emphasis on economic development and as a result the Society is giving greater weight to grant applications from Omanis for activity such as training, technical development, economic planning, entrepreneurship and internships. We will also be highlighting the opportunities for investment in Oman and in the UK for both sides.

My thanks again to Stuart and the Trustees for all they have done and for their continued support and to our members who are at the heart of the Society. ■

The Anglo-Omani Society in 2022

CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

REPORT BY STUART LAING

Last year I wrote just after the fading of the false dawn, when we had hoped for the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, only to have them re-imposed for a few additional months. This year I can report on the Society's activities gradually returning to normal, although a number of our members remain very reasonably cautious.

Meetings of the Board of Trustees began 'live' in December 2021, but with several participants choosing to do so by Zoom. I expect this hybrid pattern to continue, since the Zoomers can save on travel costs and time, as well as reducing the risk from contact with others on public transport and indeed in our own enclosed space. But it is good that we have started to experience again the conviviality of real-life meetings, both at Board level and in lectures and seminars. Our staff, following a long period of WFH, are now back in the office, but with flexible work patterns reflecting current trends.

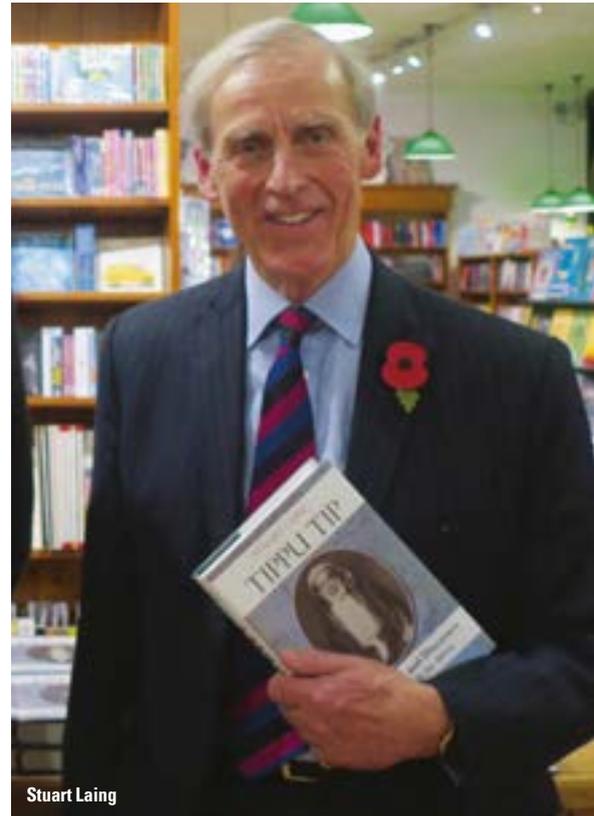
I am able to report on a year in which there has been lively activity, and some significant changes in the Society. At Board level we took forward the discussion begun last year, on how to respond to the Omani wish to see the Society assist in spreading

information about investment and trade opportunities. This resulted first in the recruitment in December 2021, of two new Board members with recent experience of living in Oman, to take the lead in this new agenda: Maj-Gen Richard Stanford and Chris Breeze. Richard, now CEO of the Forestry Commission, was formerly Senior British Loan Service Officer in Oman, and Chris Breeze was Country Chairman of Shell in Oman, and thus has intricate knowledge of the Omani business (especially oil and gas) sector.

Partly as a result of this addition to our repertoire, we initiated a 'Strategy Review' in January, aimed at enabling the Board and our staff to re-assess our aims and objectives, and the resources we could bring to bear on them. Some very useful discussions followed at Board level. The process is not yet complete, and the Strategy Review not yet finalised, although we have introduced some interim changes, described below. Members may be reassured that the changes should result in better targeted use of resources, and some additional activities, but will not lead to a reduction in the type of events which members have come to appreciate over the years.

One such 'interim change' has been the forging of a closer connection between the Society and the Oman Britain Business Council (OBBC). OBBC has now become effectively a sub-set of the Society, and its Chairman is *ex officio* a member of the Board of Trustees. We welcome Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles on to the Board in this capacity. Sherard has long experience of the Middle East as diplomat and then businessman, and his contribution to our Board will be much appreciated.

At the same time we decided to create a new post on the staff, that of Business Opportunities Manager. As the first occupant of this post (on a six-month contract pending a permanent appointment)



Stuart Laing

we welcomed Sarika Breeze, who was formerly an intern at the Society, and whose main task as I write is preparation for the OBBC summer conference which included bringing a number of Omani business people to the UK to meet and discuss with British counterparts.

I should mention a couple of procedural improvements that the Board has made this year. First, we have taken a careful look at our procedures for admitting new members, so that in the future we shall have more clarity between members who may participate in Society activities and vote at General Meetings and Associates who may attend Society events. We are also continuing a process of renewing some Corporate Memberships that have lapsed, and recruiting new Corporate Members. This will all help in tidying up our data base of Corporate Members, Members and Associates, and improve our communications.

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

Second, we have re-cast our Risk register and agreed on regular and more frequent reviews in future. I realise that this may sound a dull achievement to many of you, but I assure you that a well-kept Risk Register ensures that a Board can more effectively prioritise actions needed to reduce risks of things going wrong. Our thanks go to Chris Breeze, Trustee, for the leading part he played in this.

Returning to the effects of the pandemic, and recalling outcomes relating to rental income which I mentioned in 2021, I should mention that the Society is now suffering from a form of 'long Covid'. As a result of remarkable diligence on the part of our Treasurer, Martyn Bishop, we do now have tenants in all floors of 34 Sackville Street, ensuring regular income. However, we have had to accept lower rents than in the past, and we are therefore having to budget more carefully, for example reducing the sums available for grants. In addition, those of you who look carefully at our accounts will notice that, as a result, we have decided to re-evaluate the capital value of the property, now at £16.5 million as against £18.5m in last year's balance sheet.

The building itself is unfortunately still suffering the effects of the electricity surge of May 2021. Most of the services have been restored, but there is still remedial work to be done on the air conditioning

(heating and cooling) system, and on the audio-visual system in the Society's conference room. The delay in resolving these problems, despite considerable efforts by Martyn and by the staff, is mainly due to the involvement of various insurers, the age and complexity of the equipment, and a reluctance by the insurers to settle claims. We continue to give priority to sorting out these difficulties – essential if we are to avoid further complaints by our tenants (and indeed our staff) at lack of heating in the building this winter.

Let me turn to more positive things to report. We had a successful Annual Lunch last October, filling the room at the Royal Air Force Club with a happy crowd of members, glad to be able to assemble in person again after a two-year break. Our British Guest of Honour was the Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Minister of State at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, who had recently visited Oman and spoke in positive and enthusiastic terms about the relationship between the two countries and the friendly nature of the Omani people.

Activities which resumed after the pandemic included a delegation from the New Generation Group (NGG), who visited Muscat in March this year, and participated in a programme that was useful to them professionally and interesting in providing glimpses into a range of aspects of Omani

culture. Our thanks go to Dina Macki, Communications Manager, for her role in organising the visit, and to Sheikh Ma'an al-Rawahi and Elisabeth Simpson, both Trustees, for keeping the NGG active during the shut-down.

Another happy resumption has been the attendance by British students at the Arabic language school at al-Manah, near Nizwa. After a two-year break, a group of students from UK universities was selected to go to al-Manah in July and August. Many thanks for Elisabeth Kendall, Trustee, for her persistence in this useful activity. And, while I mention her, let me add our sincere congratulations to Elisabeth on her election as the next Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge. Congratulations to the Fellows of Girton, if I may say so, on an enlightened appointment! We all wish Elisabeth every success and happiness as she moves from the dreaming spires to the Fens!

The Society's Arabic language courses continue successfully, all still on-line. There are now eight courses running, with 70-80 students, including a new course designed for Arabic for business. Other on-line 'products' have included webinars, podcasts and interviews such as *Tales of Kibruna (Tales of our Elders)*. And our lectures in Sackville Street have resumed, not yet properly hybrid (because of those electricity problems), but nevertheless



available for watching later through videos on YouTube. Thank you to Jane Kinninmont, our Trustee responsible for events, and to Dina Macki for supervising all this on-line activity.

Richard Muir, Vice-President, has maintained the contacts between the House of Lords and the Majlis al-Dawla (State Council), and a visit by Majlis members was planned for June. Unfortunately this had to be postponed because of the requirement for the Omani members to be in Muscat for some important legislation, but we hope that the visit can be rescheduled for the autumn.

There was a nice post-script to the Society's Essay Competition, on which I reported last year. Some of you will have read the winning entries in the 2021 *Review*. We had promised the winners that a bonus would be offered to them in the form of a lecture by a Trustee at their school. Your Chairman and Vice-Chairman undertook this pleasant duty, with the result that John McKeown lectured at Ampleforth College on *The Dhofar War and Its Significance*, and I went to Repton School to give a lecture on *Shifting Sands: the turbulent world of the Middle East*.

Another small but interesting assignment we took on was assistance to the Lord Mayor of London's office in the award of two Mansion House scholarships, which are bursaries offered to Omani students wishing to study for Master's degrees in the UK in subjects connected with the City of London, for example financial services or law. The Cultural Office of the Omani Embassy kindly selected a short list of candidates from which a panel of Trustees chose the two best. Mansion House have thanked us, and the Cultural Office, for this collaboration.

The Society has maintained its connection with Omani students in Britain, by giving a grant to the Student Council for



the National Day celebrations, and I hope that we shall be able to expand these links in the future. Fostering this kind of connection is in line with what the NGG does, at a different level, and exactly in accordance with our charitable objects.

Our grants programme remains a significant aspect of Society activities, although it has had to be curtailed partly for budgetary reasons but also because we received fewer applications while pandemic restrictions were in force. For details you can read the separate report [on page 81]. We have continued the mix of grants with some going to support for academic research, and in our budget for 2022-23 have kept some money available for projects in support of the investment promotion agenda. I should like to give particular mention to a new and imaginative project with the South Downs National Park Authority, for work with Omani counterparts in developing a National Park infrastructure in Oman. Details of grants were given on pages 5 and in note 7(a) to the accounts which were circulated for the AGM on pages 15 & 16.

I record our thanks to our staff, who have again handled the Society's affairs with a high level of competence despite the drawbacks occasioned by the pandemic and its restrictions. We are sorry that David Newton decided to step down from his post

as General Manager early this year, and I take this opportunity to thank him for the considerable contribution he made during his time with the Society. Changing the job description, and title, we have recruited a new Director, Neil Coxon, who comes to us with long experience of Oman from his employment in Oman Sail. We welcome him, and wish him every success in this new post. Elsewhere in the office, we continue our internship programme, saying goodbye to Lydia Jaques and James Marriott after their time with us, and welcoming Ms Farah al-Zadjali as our new intern.

Finally, I need to report, with great regret, that this is my last report to you as Chairman. Earlier this year we heard from Muscat that it was felt, at high level, that it would be preferable that someone with recent residential experience of Oman be Chairman. Consequently, I decided to step down, and at the Board meeting in May I formally resigned both as Chairman and a Trustee. The Board have kindly invited me to become a Vice-President of the Society, an appointment I accept with pleasure. The Board have elected Richard Stanford as the new Chairman, and by the time you read this he will have acted in that capacity at the Annual General Meeting and of course at Board meetings. I have greatly enjoyed my tenure as Chairman, and I wish Richard every success as he takes over. ■

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We were able to hold our AGM in person at Sackville Street for the first time in three years! Despite the baking weather, which might have persuaded members to rest firmly in the country, and the cancellation on the morning of all trains North of Peterborough, we had a jolly turn-out of 25 members to meet the new Chairman and Board members socially over lunch, hear the reports, put probing questions to trustees and vote.

SULTAN WELCOMED BY THE QUEEN

Sultan Haitham made his first visit to Britain as Monarch last December and although it was not a State visit he was welcomed by both the Queen and by Prince Charles, and had a meeting with the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson.

The Queen welcomed the Sultan and his wife, Sayyida Ahdah bint Abdullah bin Hamad Al Busaidiyah, to Windsor Castle. This was particularly notable as the Queen was carrying out only light duties after being ordered to rest by royal doctors and spending a night in hospital undergoing tests in October. Her face-to-face meeting with the Omani ruler is a demonstration of the importance the UK places on its relationship with the Gulf state, and on the personal relations between the Royal families. Prince Charles also entertained Sultan Haitham at Clarence House.





The Queen welcomed the Sultan and his wife, Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah bin Hamad Al Busaidiyah, to Windsor Castle.



Tobias Ellwood, Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, in a major article celebrating the visit in the Times, pointed out that our closest relations are often with small but significant nations, critical not only to our security, but to the West as a whole, and that Oman is one of those places.

“The country is a focal point of stability, consistency and quiet diplomacy in a region which has faced many challenges and crises. Oman is not only a greatly valued friend and ally of the UK, it is home to the biggest overseas deployment of Britain’s military...”

“In 2018 Saif Sareea 3 was the UK’s largest joint exercise in the last 20 years when over 5,000 British troops lived, worked and trained alongside tens of thousands of Omanis across land, sea and air. The exercise sent a powerful message about Oman’s strength, historic partnerships and national identity. And the relationship grows stronger still as the British army prepares to move its biggest training base outside the UK from Canada to Oman”.

Mr Ellwood pointed out that Britain’s relations with the Sultanate are not confined to military and security matters. After Prime Minister Johnson welcomed

the Sultan to 10 Downing Street, a British government statement said the leaders discussed efforts to boost our economic recovery amid the pandemic, including a new free trade deal between the UK and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Investment opportunities in green and renewable technology in the UK and Oman were also

touched upon. On regional security issues, the two mentioned the continuing crisis in Yemen and talks in Vienna aimed at reviving the Iran nuclear deal.

The Sultan’s visit was quickly followed by the Strategic Advisory Group ministerial visit and signing of the UK-Oman Sovereign Investment Partnership. ■



HH THEYAZIN BIN HAITHAM AT SANDHURST

On Renaissance Day,
23 July 2022, His
Highness Sayyid
Theyazin bin Haitham
Al Said followed in the
footsteps of
HM Sultan Qaboos by
passing out of the
Royal Military
Academy Sandhurst.

The passing out parade marked the completion of Commissioning Course Short 222: eight weeks of intense training, physical endurance and mental resilience. The Commissioning Course was made up of 103 Officer Cadets and included nine international cadets from Oman, Jordan, Bahrain and Kosovo. HH Sayyid Azaan bin Qais al Said also completed the Commissioning Course.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham presided over the parade and inspected the front rank which included HH Sayyid Theyazin and HH Sayyid Azzan. His Majesty was





escorted up the King's Walk to the dais by the Academy's Commandant Maj Gen Duncan Capps to receive the royal salute.

HM the Sultan also met the Royal Oman Army instructor at Sandhurst as well as officer cadets on other commissioning courses. He presented the Academy with a gold Khunjar which will take pride of place beside the gold sword presented by HM Sultan Qaboos.

His Majesty was accompanied by Her Majesty Sayyida Ahad bint Abdullah and HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said. The Anglo-Omani Society Chairman, Maj Gen Richard Stanford, also attended the parade.

"I feel honoured to have been part of the Academy and graduated from here." HH Sayyid Theyazin said. "I think I have managed to explore my inner strengths and weaknesses and I am greater for the experiences that have put me in this position – to have come out of my comfort zone and learn new things. I have noticed that this course has had a positive impact on myself." ■

HM the Sultan also met the Royal Oman Army instructor at Sandhurst as well as officer cadets on other commissioning courses. He presented the Academy with a gold Khunjar which will take pride of place beside the gold sword presented by HM Sultan Qaboos.



FIRST 100 DAYS IN OMAN

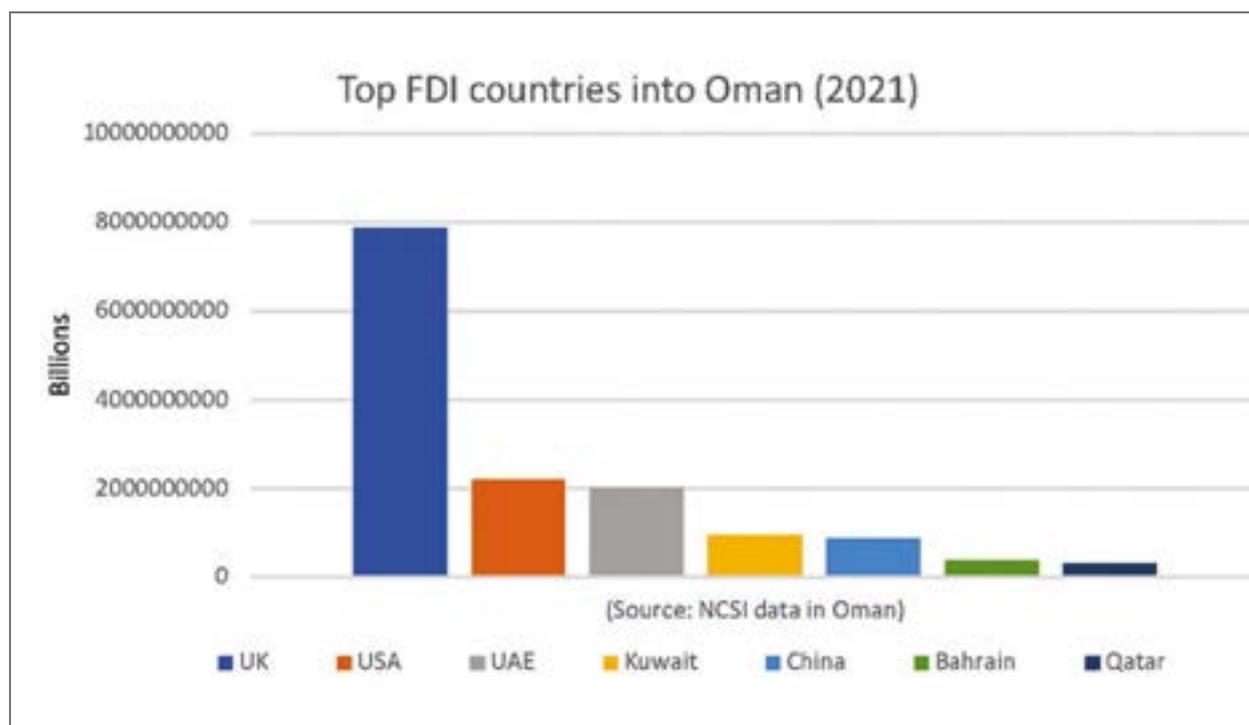


It is often in the first few months in post that professionals bring fresh perspectives, focus on the future and start to build on what has already been achieved. Michael Eyley was appointed Director of Trade and Investment at the British Embassy in Muscat early this year and in May wrote about his... first 100 days in Oman.

To start my 100th day in Oman as Director of Trade and Investment at the British Embassy, I am sharing early thoughts and perspectives of where the market is heading – and what role UK PLC could play in the future Omani economy.

For the many wonderful British businesses who have successful operations in Oman, it is a sound environment: beautiful landscapes; tolerant, educated workforce; and a strong UK-Oman history add magic to each day. And the outcomes are solid: last year, UK PLC accounted for almost half of all foreign direct investment

(FDI) into Oman (c.49%), creating thousands of quality jobs both here and across the UK. But for the UK companies yet to lay ground here (and whom we want to attract in our constant endeavour to diversify and drive more prosperity), the draw to market is more methodological than these societal factors. On a company's proposal risk excel sheet, 'a strong Omani workforce' is a measurable positive, 'a healthy bilateral relationship' is a notable plus point, and 'a beautiful landscape' does not fit into a single column, unless you are the tourism industry. When there are literally





A green energy investment roundtable meeting.

hundreds of markets for global UK-based companies to invest in, many additional questions beyond this are raised (and have been since my arrival), such as:

- 'If my company is targeting Gulf markets, why choose Oman over its neighbours?'...
- (...or more specifically), 'as Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) economies become more aligned, what will be Oman's future regional speciality?'

- 'If the opportunities are so great in new growth sectors in Oman, why have the investment opportunities not been snapped up already?'

The British Embassy invited the City's Ambassador – the Lord Mayor of the City of London (Rt. Hon. Vincent Kearney) – to Oman in March 2022, and his visit, alongside industry delegates, crystallised which details UK PLC would ideally like to see established first.

The conversations that these questions have come from – which probably includes many of you who are reading this article – have been invaluable. And fortunately, Oman has been a confident step ahead in planning answers. For the first two questions, Oman sets the tone by looking



Lord Mayor with previous Omani recipients of City of London scholarships.

I am privileged to be in Oman for the next few years – and during this time, my fantastic team and I will do all we can to drive initiatives with UK PLC and the Omani Government to boost the strength and diversification of UK FDI into Oman.

to how it can complement GCC neighbours, rather than fiercely compete. The normal field of market competition – regulations, infrastructure, branding – is a fast changing game, with winners falling down the pecking order on the whim of a competitor’s policy announcement.

Oman’s Vision 2040 strategy is clear that this is not the field Oman is targeting. Rather, it focuses on areas where Oman is complementary and naturally advantageous, providing a sustainable, collaborative business environment; perfect for any UK company looking to set up a regional HQ which serves the entirety of the GCC. And when Oman looks at its natural advantages (for a post-fossil fuel age) – its environment beyond the beauty – certain permanent factors

stand out: regular, beaming sun; the strongest, consistent wind flows in the region; abundance of space; and leading proximity to global shipping lanes. This points to a golden opportunity: renewable green energy, and the logistics to export it to the world.

And this opportunity is broader: beyond the equipment and process engineering involved, and the investment capital, a repositioning of the Omani economy towards renewable green energy will bring a flood of investment (two-way) and export opportunities across infrastructure, education, vocational training, cyber/AI, security, tech start-ups and beyond – all supporting many new quality jobs, and all benefitting from UK Export Finance’s (UKEF) presence in market.

And this brings me to answer the third question – why have these opportunities not been snapped up already? The answer is simple: the emergence of these areas is in an early stage, and details are still forming. For example, the prime light of renewable green energy – hydrogen – was incorporated into an Omani legal entity called ‘Hydrogen Development Oman’ only in May. And initial renewable energy project proposals are just beginning to seep through (do reach out to learn more!).

The British Embassy invited the City’s Ambassador – the Lord Mayor of the City of London (Rt. Hon. Vincent Kearney) – to Oman in March 2022, and his visit, alongside industry delegates, crystallised which details UK PLC would ideally like to see established first. Three stood out: the process for designing renewable energy regulations; clarity on the role of green finance and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors; and data packs on specific investment opportunities. Going back to industry’s proposal risk excel sheet, answers to these three factors will bump up any investment score.

To secure this, the British Embassy and

Department for International Trade Oman have two clear associated work streams:

- Working with the Omani Government and the Anglo-Omani Society/Oman British Business Council to bring the Omani renewable investment conference with Senior Ministerial attendance to London in July, tailored to the mind-set of the City. In the months following, we will lead focused trade missions to specific sites in Oman, and channel Government-to-Government engagements on to the details that matter most to UK industry and investors.
- Working to ensure that the Free Trade Agreement negotiations between the UK and the GCC maximise the potential for renewable energy collaboration in the region – and tackle wider market access and regulatory barriers.

I am privileged to be in Oman for the next few years – and during this time, my fantastic team and I will do all we can to drive initiatives with UK PLC and the Omani Government to boost the strength and diversification of UK FDI into Oman – with the golden thread of quality jobs and prosperity being supported back in the UK. And at its core, as the Government-to-Government engagement creatively develops, it will be the world-class quality of UK products, services and expertise (in both current and future sectors), and the buccaneering approach of investors, that will define the role of UK PLC in the future Omani economy. I look forward to the journey ahead!

If you have any questions, please get in contact directly with me and the team. Or if you want to hear more about the direct British business experience on the ground from an alternative source, reach out to the recently relaunched British Business Forum Oman, which offers an abundance of advice to members based on their decades of experience in the market. ■



The Lord Mayor and Abdulsalam Al Murshidi, President of the Omani Investment Authority.

THE OMANI-BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

ARTICLE BY BY SIR SHERARD COWPER-COLES, OBBC CHAIR

The Omani British Business Council (OBBC) was formed to promote the close economic and commercial relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and United Kingdom, and to develop bilateral trade, investment and other economic partnerships between the two countries.

It is the main semi-official platform in the UK for facilitating and fostering the commercial relationship between Britain and Oman – which has always been a vital thread in our unique partnership.

I am Chairman of OBBC and a Trustee of the AOS. OBBC is the UK counterpart of the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA), chaired until earlier this year by HE Maqbool bin Ali Sultan and now by the Honourable Saleh Zakwani. The OBBC consists of all AOS corporate members. The OBBC, together with OBFA, offers a business development network that can deliver insights and competitive advantage to Omani and UK companies.

There have been some developments in the status between OBBC and AOS this year. The recent review of the Society's strategy included a shift in emphasis agreed by the Board in February that includes support for both business promotion and improving the awareness of investment

opportunities in Oman alongside its other work. This has led to changes in AOS's structure, placing its corporate membership's activity with OBBC, which in turn forms a distinct part of AOS, but one that is still linked to AOS's cultural and friendship activities. This commercial section of the Society is managed through a new sub-committee made up of trustees Sherard Cowper-Coles, Oliver Blake, Chris Breeze and Richard Stanford.

To recognise the importance of this work, we have created a new permanent post in the executive team. The Business Opportunities Manager will look after our corporate membership and hold responsibility for promoting the UK and Oman's close economic and commercial relationship. In March, we welcomed Sarika Breeze as she took up this post on an interim basis to ensure delivery of our workload over the summer. Sarika joined with a lot of experience, having lived in Oman for many years and previously having worked for OBFA there, supporting events and promoting bilateral trade. The role will be advertised on a permanent basis in August. Details will be on the website for interested candidates.

A key part of our recent work has been on planning an investment event at the Mansion House, London. It had become a tradition that the OBBC host an annual event at Sackville Street each summer to welcome Omani guests to connect with OBBC members here in the UK. After Covid, unfortunately putting a halt to these events for a couple of years, we are delighted to be able to do this again in 2022. In previous years these events have focused on a variety of topics including tourism and logistics. This year the focus is on new energy, an important industry for Oman and part of the Vision 2040 work.

At the beginning of 2022, the UK and Oman signed the Sovereign Investment



Partnership (SIP), agreeing to work closer together on increasing high value investment into both countries. The new partnership aims to strengthen the economic ties between the UK and Oman and identify and support commercial investments in areas such as clean energy and technology, which are already an important part of our trading relationship.

The OBBC has been working with the British Embassy in Muscat and the Omani Government on the event. To help plan an event of this nature, a dedicated working group was established alongside Michael Eyley, Director of Trade & Investment at the British Embassy in Muscat.

The event was planned for leading industry stakeholders, partners and supporters, to discuss new energy in Oman, including panel discussions and Q&A sessions on renewables, decarbonisation of oil and gas, green finance, and Oman's investment opportunities, together with senior speakers from the private sector, expert panels, and officials from Oman and the UK.

At time of writing, OBBC staff and trustees are hard at work preparing for the event. You can read about what happened at the New Energy Conference here in the Review... ■

MANSION HOUSE CONFERENCE ON NEW ENERGY IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY SARIKA BREEZE

The Annual OBBC conference at the Mansion House took place in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MCIIP) and the UK's Department for International Trade (DIT).

'New Energy in Oman' was a play on words to convey both the focus on renewables and the revitalisation of the Omani economy and society: as one conference speaker put it, Renaissance 2.0. Despite rail strikes, the event was well attended – more than 250 guests were welcomed to the Egyptian Hall, and fold out chairs were needed! Nearly half the audience was Omani, many having travelled to London for the conference, and the other half were British and other non-Omani investors, representatives of energy and finance companies and other interested parties.

The UK and Oman share a particularly close economic and commercial

relationship in energy, with Shell and BP maintaining a presence in the Sultanate since the early days of oil. 'New Energy in Oman' celebrated the unique bond between our countries, and included discussions on renewables, decarbonisation, green finance and other aspects of the Sultanate's energy future.

The event was held under the auspices of HE Abdulsalam Al Murshidi, President of the Oman Investment Authority (OIA, Oman's sovereign wealth fund), and compered by Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles. It included opening addresses by Sir Sherard, Representative Lord Mayor Alderman Sir William Russell, HE Qais Al Yousef





Minister Ranil Jayawardena and HE Qais Al Yousef

(Minister of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion), and Simon Penney (Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for the Middle East), who has spent recent months working on negotiations for the UK-GCC Free Trade Agreement.

Undersecretary for Investment Promotion at MCIP, HE Asila Al Samsami, outlined the current new energy atmosphere in Oman and the road ahead, pointing out that the UK is Oman's largest investment partner. She spoke about the 50MW Dhofar Wind Power Project, the first industrial scale wind farm in the Middle East. It mitigates 110,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions a year and provides electricity for 16,000 homes. She also spoke about the Ibri II Solar Independent Power Plant project, which will leverage Oman's immense solar capabilities.

HE Asila gave an overview of the mechanisms across the value chain to incentivise the energy transition while the Sultanate develops its green hydrogen capabilities. The resounding message from her address, and from the conference as a whole, was that Oman is strategically placed to offer excellent potential in wind, solar and hydrogen. In the past couple of years, incentives and mechanisms have been set up to facilitate investment in these resources and the government showed great commitment in accommodating and supporting those interested in working with it in the field of new energy, as a means of achieving the aims of Vision 2040.

Haifa Al Khaifi, Finance and Executive

Director at PDO, moderated a Renewables Panel including OQ's Najla Al Jamali, PDO's Moutaz Al Riyami, EDO's (Energy Development Oman) Dr Firas Al Abduwani, Shell's Tom Clarke and BP's Anthony Harbridge. Haifa prompted the panellists to outline the clean energy opportunities in Oman, specifically those with scope for international partnerships. Solar, wind and green hydrogen were highlighted as major industries to enable Oman to become a clean energy powerhouse and boost other industries such as steel and cement. The importance of collaboration within and between governments, companies, and individuals was underlined for a successful renewables future.

Zoë Knight, Group Head of HSBC Centre of Sustainable Finance and Head of Climate Change MENAT, reminded us that climate change is an urgent problem – recent heat



Simon Penney

extremes in Europe have led to death and destruction – which we can solve by transforming the energy system. Her work focuses on channelling finance to solutions which Zoë called 'mission critical'.

According to Zoë, green finance is about transparency and precision on what investment is used for: it is about financing green projects and making the finance sector green. There are major roles for the public sector, engaging in multilateral dialogue to encourage and commit to solutions, assigning state funds to energy transition, and creating policy frameworks to support supply and demand for green, sustainable and transition finance.

Lord Grimstone, Chair of the Oman Strategic Advisory Group and former UK Minister for Investment, recounted the UK-Oman Sovereign Investment Partnership he and OIA President HE



Renewables Panel

CONFERENCE ON NEW ENERGY IN OMAN

Abdulsalam Al Murshidi signed earlier this year. Prospective investors in Oman were encouraged to take comfort in the National Programme for Fiscal Balance, which seeks to achieve sustainability, and has already contributed to S&P Global Ratings' upgrade of Oman's credit rating. Lord Grimstone commended Oman for its commitment to diversifying the economy through privatisation, well designed partnerships and new energy initiatives.

He shared lessons from his years as Minister for Investment: "Attracting overseas investment is a globally competitive sport, and to win at it requires more than wishful thinking". He warned against investment ideas "which made great soundbites but, frankly, had no substance". In government, Lord Grimstone tackled such ill-fated projects by bringing investors to the heart of policymaking, so an investor-focused lens could be applied at the earliest stage. This resulted in the UK becoming one of the best places to invest, and Lord Grimstone encouraged Oman to follow suit.

The Decarbonisation Panel, moderated by Dr Lamya Harub, recounted their journeys into decarbonisation. Dr Frigyes Lestak (Flare2Value), Mark Batt-Rawden (Envorem), Dr Andrew Stevenson (Sustainable Pipelines), Dr Juman Al Saqlawi (OQ) and Andrew Randle



(Advisian) outlined how their companies aim to find solutions to the need to decarbonise the oil and gas sector. A lively discussion explored the role of industrial hubs, the need to work on every step of the oil and gas process and the importance of supporting innovation.

Dr Lamya asked the panellists, most of them non-Omanis doing business in Oman, to outline the major challenges they faced and what their advice is, both to Oman to make it more attractive to investors, and to companies looking to set up there. The panellists placed emphasis on finding dynamic and proactive partners, surrounding yourself with others passionate about carbon sequestration or the particular areas of new energy in which your company excels.

Joaquin Oliveira, Group Senior Vice-President for Finance, Gas and Low Carbon Energy at BP, spoke on 'Energy in Partnership', celebrating the decades of collaboration between BP and Oman. He highlighted BP Oman's emphasis on generating in-country value, a topic which was further explored at a BP Business Breakfast for OBBC/AOS corporate members at the Anglo-Omani Society headquarters the next morning.

Guests were introduced to Arwa Al Balushi, the new (and first) Omani Commercial and Investment Attachée to London. Arwa gave a dynamic and engaging talk which outlined not only the immense opportunity Oman offers in new energy, but also in sectors such as logistics, tourism, mining and fisheries

forming a core part of Vision 2040. Having come to London straight from OIA, she spoke about Oman's investment mandates which have financial and environmental sustainability at their core.

In the conference's closing remarks by the Honourable Saleh Zakwani, recently appointed Chair and longstanding board member of the Omani British Friendship Association, the main points of the day were reviewed. Hon Saleh thanked the audience for their attention, and the speakers for their informative and engaging talks, especially those who had flown into London specifically to attend the event. He encouraged interested guests to get in touch if they had any questions, signposted the upcoming hydrogen conference in Muscat, and urged Brits in the audience to take part in the upcoming trade mission to Oman in October, currently led by DIT.

As the conference concluded, the Mansion House Egyptian Hall set the stage for the signing of several Memoranda of Understanding between various parties in Oman and the UK. Guests then enjoyed an afternoon of lunch and networking. In the evening, the AOS, OBBC and OBFA welcomed 100 guests to Sackville Street. As well as the distinguished officials who presided over and spoke at the conference, we were joined, amongst others, by Ranil Jayawardena, the UK Minister for International Trade; the Omani Ambassador, His Excellency Shaikh Abdulaziz Al Hinai and the British Ambassador to Oman, HE Bill Murray. ■



STRATEGIC ADVISORY GROUP MINISTERIAL VISIT NEW UK-OMANI PARTNERSHIP

The UK and Oman signed the Sovereign Investment Partnership (SIP), agreeing to work closer together on increasing high value investment into both countries, during a ministerial visit from the Sultanate.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the British Office for Investment (OFI) and the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) was signed in London by the UK's Minister for Investment, Lord Gerry Grimstone, and the President of the Oman Investment Authority, HE Abdulsalaam Al Murshidi. It coincided with a meeting of the UK-Oman Strategic Advisory Group, chaired by Lord Grimstone.

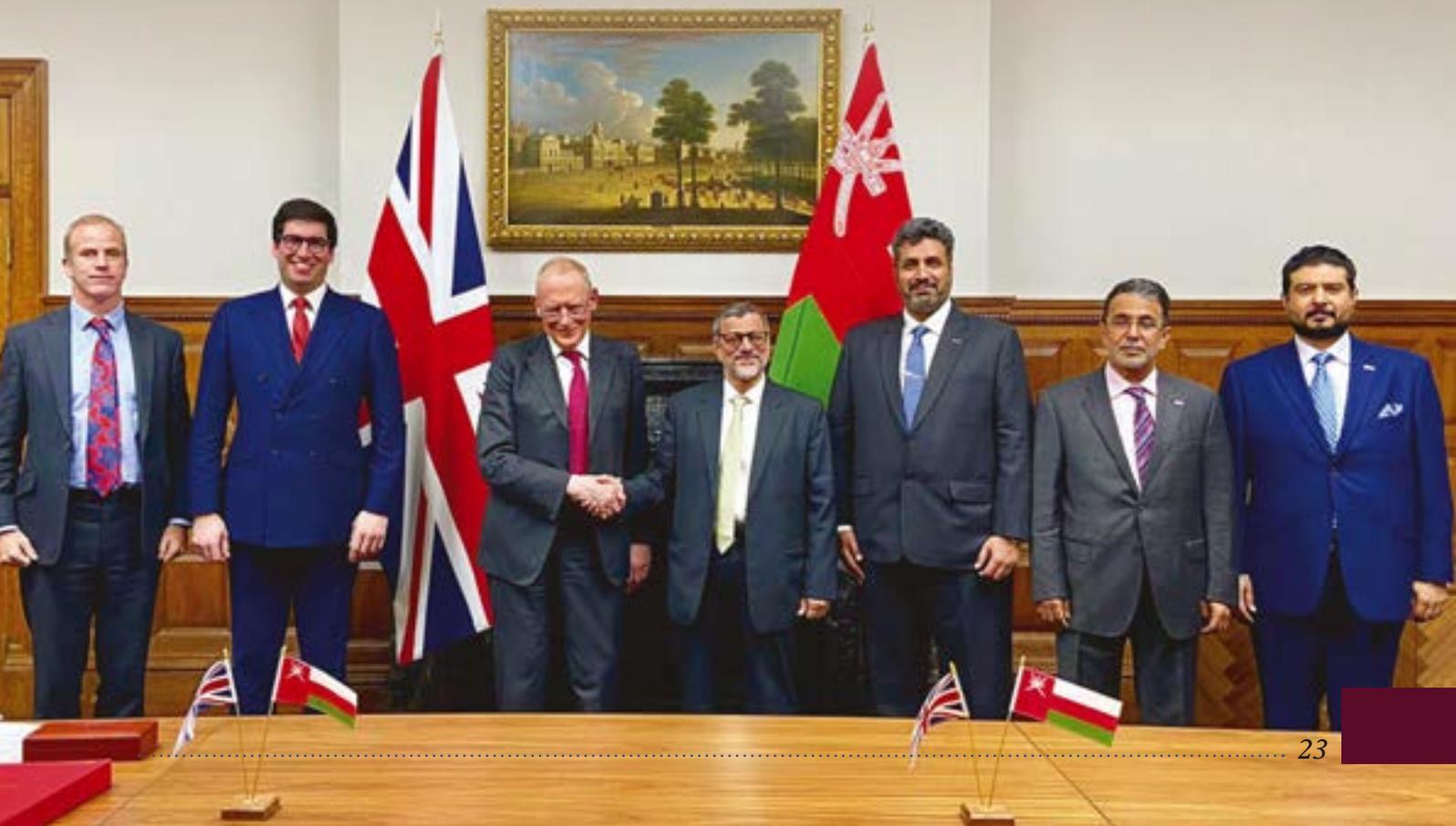
The new partnership will strengthen the economic ties between the UK and Oman and identify and support commercial investments in areas such as clean energy and technology, which are already an important part of our £1 billion-a year trading relationship.

The signing followed soon after Prime Minister Boris Johnson's meeting with Sultan Haitham at Downing Street, where they had discussed enhancing the bilateral relationship between the UK and Oman. It came as the UK and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), of which Oman is a member, prepared to launch formal talks over a new Free Trade Agreement. Negotiations are expected to lead to a deal set to boost links in areas such as investment and services.

Statements from participants afterwards emphasised the importance of this new partnership in the historic friendship.

Lord Grimstone: "Oman is a long-standing and strategic partner in the

The new partnership will strengthen the economic ties between the UK and Oman.



“This partnership is a perfect embodiment of OIA’s mandate under Vision Oman 2040, especially for financial sustainability and attracting foreign investors who consider OIA their partner in potential investment.”

THE PRESIDENT OF THE OMAN INVESTMENT AUTHORITY, ABDULSALAAM AL MURSHIDI.

Middle East and I am pleased that the UK is further deepening our investment relationship. Our two countries share a vision for a sustainable and prosperous future. This Sovereign Investment Partnership ensures our respective private sectors and international investors are part of that journey.”

The Foreign Minister of Oman, Sayyid Badr Albusaidi: “The signing of the MOU is in line with the aspirations of both Oman and the UK as set in the Comprehensive Agreement on Enduring Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation.

“We truly believe that by focusing our efforts on strategic joint investments, we will be able to reach further fruitful and tangible outcomes, in support of our mutual desire to continue developing a dynamic and stronger partnership.”

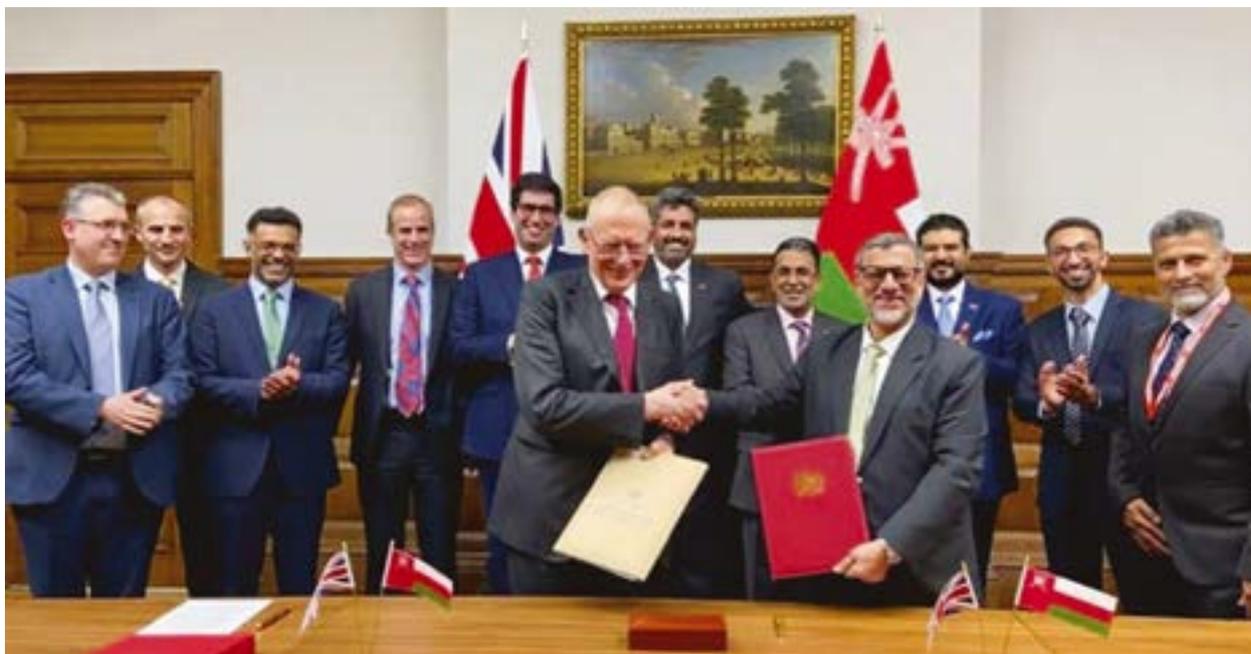
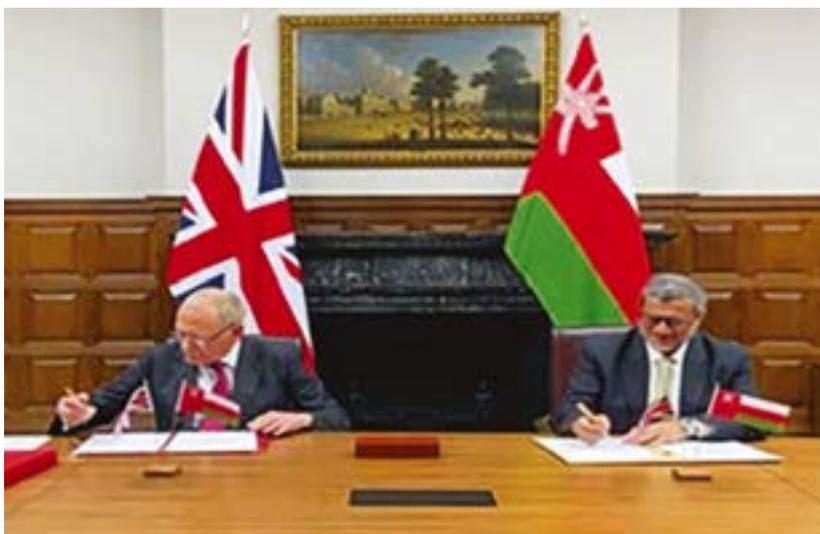
The President of the Oman Investment Authority, Abdulsalaam Al Murshidi: “This partnership is a perfect embodiment of OIA’s mandate under Vision Oman 2040, especially for financial sustainability and attracting foreign investors who consider

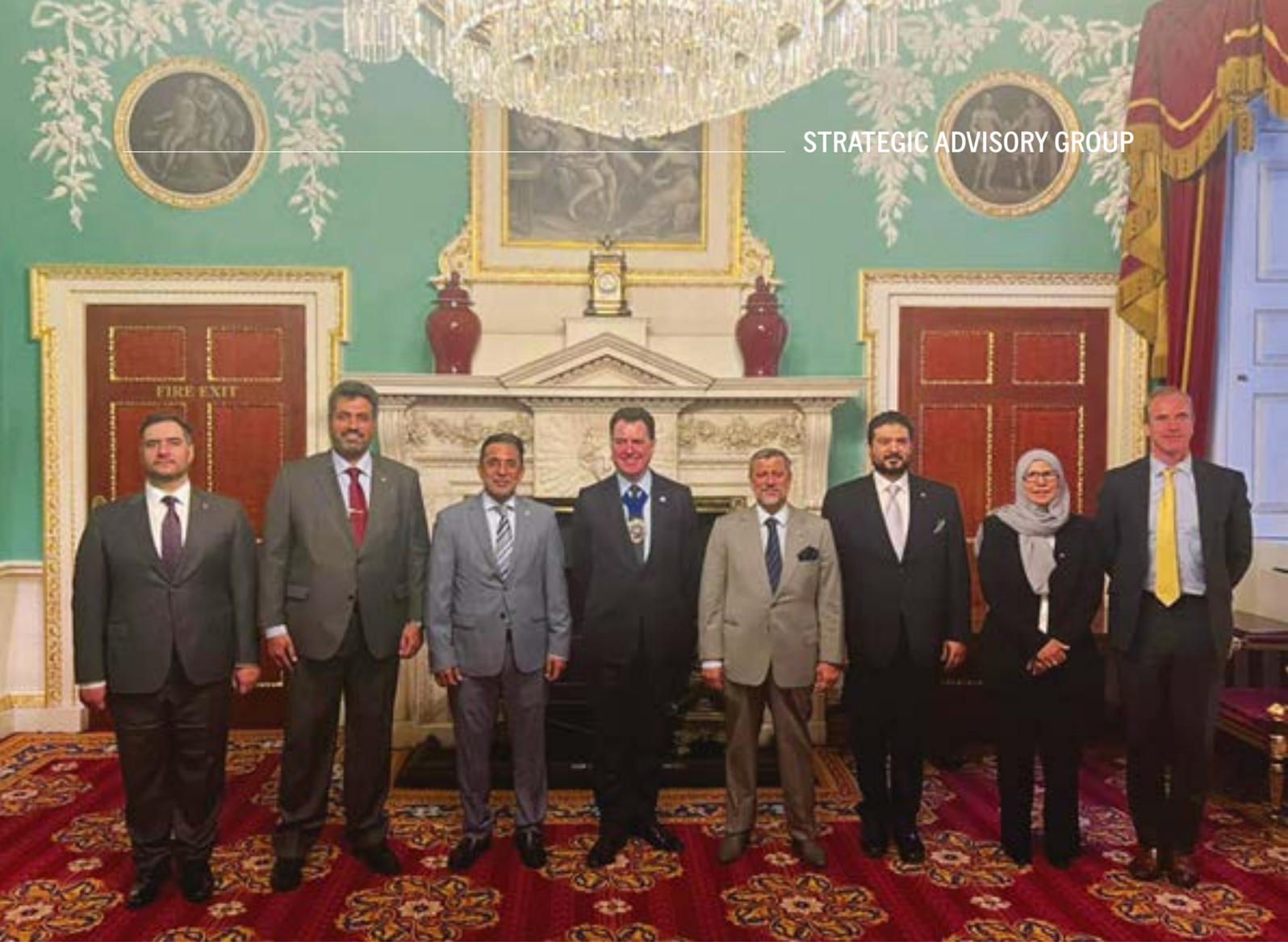
OIA their partner in potential investment.”

British companies have a long history of investment in Oman, with Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) from the UK accounting for about 50% of FDI into Oman in recent years. For example, according to the Omani National Centre for Statistics and Information, UK businesses invested 7.9

billion Omani Rials of FDI stock in Oman, equal to 49.6% of Omani FDI capital expenditure in 2020Q4. The UK and Oman shared a trading relationship worth nearly £979 million in the four quarters to the end of Q2 2021.

Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment





The Lord Mayor of London, Alderman the Right Honourable Vincent Keaveny, also hosted a meeting with the Ministerial group. The Lord Mayor's principal role is ambassador for the UK's financial and professional sector, with an external outreach to the rest of the world.

Promotion, and the other ministers on the London visit, attended a round table conference hosted by the Arab British Chamber of Commerce and the British Embassy, Muscat. In a call to action, the Minister stated that Oman is open to business with the UK as Oman reimagines growth, streamlines its business procedures and creates a pro-enterprise environment to attract British investment. Oman is keen to support the ambitions of British investors looking to inject capital in sectors such as clean energy, mining, manufacturing, logistics, tourism and fisheries. The Minister has set up a UK desk to support British enterprise.

"I speak to you from the heart to say that His Majesty simply wants Oman to be a

place where more than ever British businesses can grow, succeed and thrive."

Bill Murray, British Ambassador to Muscat, said that Sultan Haitham was focused on the economic growth of the country and the investment opportunities that Oman enjoys, and it is very much related to the UK as a key part of that.

The Sultanate, over the pandemic, adopted various fiscal measures to support the economy: interest-free emergency loans; tax and fee waivers or reductions; flexibility on paying tax in instalments; a Job Security Fund for citizens made redundant. It also introduced long-term visas for overseas investors and streamlined services for new businesses setting up in the country.

Azzan Al Busaidi, from the Ministry of Commerce, said more than 50 investment opportunities in the industrial sector, worth £400m, had been identified as ripe for British investment. Last year Oman attracted total FDI inflows of £31.2bn, with the majority coming from the UK.

Chris Breeze, former Country Chairman of Shell in Oman, now Managing Director of Ellipse Projects UK (and a trustee of the Society), praised the Ministry and the Government more widely on the early stage implementation of Vision 2040. "I'm also really impressed with the move to open arms to renewables, which has to come and is part of diversification, at the same time as supporting the oil and gas industry which is the bedrock of government revenue and will remain so for at least a few years to come."

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MINISTER'S UPDATE ON ENERGY DEVELOPMENTS

ARTICLE BY SARIKA BREEZE AND ROBIN TRAILL

The Anglo-Omani Society was delighted to host an exclusive update and Q&A on developments in the Omani Energy Sector given by the Sultanate of Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, H.E. Dr Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhy.

Dr Rumhy was introduced and welcomed by Society Trustee Chris Breeze who, as Shell's Country Chairman in Oman between 2014 and 2019, had the pleasure of working closely with Dr Rumhy over a number of years.

The audience included OBBC/AOS Corporate Members, representatives from the Omani Embassy, the boards of Oman LNG and Qalhat LNG who were meeting in London, and a range of UK companies including Shell and BP.

Dr Rumhy said that he was happy and pleased to be invited to speak and likened the event to a "town hall" type meeting. He commented that the format with its improved communication could be adopted more widely back in Muscat.

Dr Rumhy explained that he had been the Energy Minister for almost 25 years – twenty four and a half years to be exact – and over that time he was pleased to report that the oil and gas industry in Oman had been transformed. All aspects of exploration, production, processing and transportation had been improved, made more efficient and less polluting, reducing venting and flaring and reducing costs.

One of Dr Rumhy's key messages was that the world needed ever increasing amounts of energy to continue improving the living standards of the global population. While great strides had been made in renewable energy it was clear to him that the world would continue to consume oil and gas for some time to come – beyond 2050. So rather than prematurely pronounce the death of oil and gas, as some western governments had appeared to do at COP 26, we should be focused on capturing the carbon and mitigating its impact.

Dr Rumhy was clear about the responsibility to minimise the effects of climate change and understood the desire for zero carbon emissions. But he was equally clear that it was vital to base policy on the science rather than whimsical wishful thinking. He joked that carbon neutral LNG was an odd concept given LNG's CH₄ chemical formula, and essentially depended on greatly expanding projects like the Nimr Reed Beds*.

Turning to the production of green hydrogen, the Minister commented that many said Oman had a competitive advantage given how much the sun shone and the wind blew and its abundance of open spaces. But to Dr Rumhy, all countries had sun and wind and Oman needed to invest in human capital and work hard to be a leading green hydrogen producer. Even if Oman could produce green hydrogen cheaper than others, that would not exclude other producers.

He likened this last point to Saudi Arabia's cost of oil production being between \$5-10 per barrel compared with Oman's \$20-30 per barrel. Oman was never going to compete with the geophysical advantages that Saudi Arabia has. But even



at the higher cost level Oman could generate significant revenue for the Sultanate and help the country prosper.

Another key point from the Minister was that while Oman, Chile and Australia were making good advances on the manufacture of green hydrogen, there was still a long way to go to the economic production of hydrogen as a widely available energy source. Before final investment decisions could be taken on major projects there would need to be greater understanding of the likely markets and pricing structures. He did not see this happening in the next year to 18 months.

Dr Rumhy then invited questions making it clear that people should not feel constrained by position or protocol when asking their questions.

Asked which period of the Minister's time in office had seen the most rapid developments. Dr Rumhy replied that the last two or three years had been particularly hard, with the collapse of oil prices during Covid when, for the first time ever, the benchmark price of West Texas Crude had been negative. This, combined with the pressure of climate change, had created significant strain. Paradoxically, Russia's invasion of Ukraine had woken up investors and governments to the continued importance of oil and gas for global prosperity. And pressures from the climate change lobby continue to mount.

Dr Rumhy was asked how realistic it was for Oman's economy to diversify away from oil and gas. He felt that while tourism, agriculture, minerals and fisheries were good opportunities and provided employment they were never likely to make a serious impact on the dominance of oil and gas.

One participant observed that while the tax rate on oil and gas was 80-90%, for other industries it was 15%, so to remove oil and gas and maintain government revenue the economy would need to be five or six times bigger. Dr Rumhy agreed but said it was vital to encourage diversification for wider employment objectives – it should be both rather than either/or.

He added that ways acceptable to the population had to be found to increase the government's revenue but this would never be popular. The correct time to consider things like tax rebalancing was when the oil price was high and other pressures, both internal and external, were not so



Issa Al Shibani, Deputy Head of Mission, Omani Embassy, London, with Nisreen Alkhanbashi (Oman LNG) and Kawthar Allwati, (Qalhat LNG).

great. He felt that in the past opportunities had been missed because such serious discussions had been started when the economic pressures had been the greatest. He referred to the tirade of social media attacks he had received in the last oil price collapse in 2015 when he mentioned the idea of taxing Omanis' second homes.

Finally, to underline the seriousness of Oman's approach to climate change, Dr Rumhy said he was in the process of preparing a paper for this year's COP 27 in Sharm El Sheikh. As indicated earlier, he intended Oman's position to be science based and practical rather than simply aspirational.

**The Nimr Water Treatment Project is considered to be the largest industrial constructed wetland system in the world, consisting of sloping reed fields and evaporation ponds the size of 640 football pitches, which processes over 110,000m³/day (more than 690,000 barrels/day) of*

water produced from the Nimr oilfields in the southern Oman desert.

This natural treatment system has reduced the amount of hydrocarbon-polluted water being disposed to deep well aquifers. As a gravity flow system, it uses minimal fossil fuel and therefore results in an enormous saving in energy consumption compared to the conventional, energy-intensive disposal method of pumping the water more than 1.5km below ground into deep aquifers under high pressure.

PDO planted more than 1.2 million seedlings to create the wetland which has become a desert habitat for close to 100 species of birds, including flamingos, sand martins, cuckoos, wagtails, barn swallows, rednecked phalaropes, and black-crowned sparrow larks, as well as insects, small reptiles and fish. The reeds themselves form a wetland covering 2.4 million square metres of previously arid desert, irrigated by water that is a by-product of oil production activities. ■



Oman TV correspondent Mr Alaa Aldakhkhni meets the Minister.

SPOTLIGHT ON LOCUM'S NEST

Locum's Nest was one of the companies featured in the Society's first OBBC Spotlight On series which focused on entrepreneurs, innovators and pioneers.

Locum's Nest unique approach to healthcare technology – with a mobile app that helps staff healthcare workers across the NHS and over five years has filled over half a million shifts – made it a company to feature. Dr Ahmed Al Shahrabani, co-founder with Dr Nicholas Andreou, now describes how the company has adapted to the changes posed by Covid-19 and outlines plans for the future.

I have always believed that it is a life privilege to be a doctor. As the pandemic struck, I redeployed myself onto the COVID-19 respiratory wards at my local hospital – spending weekdays, nights and

weekends on the wards with fellow colleagues. The level of comradeship during the first and second waves of the pandemic amongst colleagues was nothing like I had seen before.

It really felt as though we were in the midst of a battle against an invisible enemy, yet there was absolute confidence that the healthcare system would eventually prevail – something we are now seeing more and more of, not just in the UK but across the world.

Outside my work as a clinician, it has been a bit of a whirlwind year. The company was selected in the top 50 of the



Financial Times' list of the 1000 fastest growing companies in Europe, and I was fortunate enough to have been selected as one of the Forbes 30 under 30: Science & Healthcare honorees across Europe. Both accolades I am sure came down to the relentless work of colleagues and me simply being in the right place at the right time!

Above all, friends, family and colleagues have all stayed safe throughout the pandemic thus far and it's great to see spirits so high after what has been an undoubtedly tough time for all.

The entire company focus shifted at the start of the pandemic towards how we could deliver as much value as possible to our NHS partner hospitals, helping them deal with the challenges COVID-19 brought in the immediate term, as well as supporting them in preparing to deal with the longer-term challenges as we came out of each peak.

We co-developed a Workforce Intelligence Navigator which triangulated data from Public Health England, the GMC and NHS Trust to help predict surges in demand with outbreaks of the virus within certain geographies, allowing Trusts to plan proactively rather than acting reactively – resulting in the best possible levels of care.

We have also developed and launched the platform across all other worker groups in addition to medics to support entire organisations and have launched Locum's Nest Link, our tech integration product that allows for digital connections to be made with any existing other pieces of software being used to make life as easy as possible for all Locum's Nest users, from healthcare professionals to HR teams.

There is no magic bullet to get innovation in the NHS; it is very much a people's game. We learnt that every Trust is very different in its own right, but there are many similarities – the magic is to highlight what those similarities are. I have been to so many talks in the NHS and have shamelessly used the same quote over and over again that the NHS 'has more pilots up and running than the RAF and the British Armed Forces combined'.

You really have to push for the similarities between Trusts and show people why they are facing the same



The entire company focus shifted at the start of the pandemic towards how we could deliver as much value as possible to our NHS partner hospitals.

struggles; there might be something a Trust down the road has already done that could help their neighbours as well.

I would love to see an NHS where doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists all work together, across NHS Trust and organisation boundaries to make sure the right healthcare worker can be at the right place, at the right time, in a way that's as smooth and safe as possible.

I feel it has the potential to be a world leader in healthcare provision. The resources are there, and there are many highly motivated junior doctors and nurses. I would love to work with the Ministry of Health and discuss healthcare

policy at a high level, what could be improved and where our strengths currently lie.

It is very important to me that we also look at healthcare delivery outside of Muscat. I was recently in discussions with the medical team on the island of Masirah (a beautiful place) and would love to complete a secondment on the island, working with the local population and resident doctors and nurses to improve patient outcomes on this beautiful island. I have no doubt that as the pandemic subsides, we will re-initiate our work with the Ministry of Health and commence our partnership. ■

SPOTLIGHT ON ONSOR TECHNOLOGIES

Onsor Technologies, which featured in our first OBBC Spotlight On series, show how the turn towards technology in the past year has given them new opportunities to push the boundaries of tech development in Oman and the specific partnerships they have managed to form as a result of this transitional time.



In one year, Onsor went from:

- designing and manufacturing single board computers (SBC) to designing and manufacturing 2-in-1 personal computers;
- from three founders to 17 full-time Omani employees and two trainees;
- from a broad vision to providing unique products and customised solutions.

Onsor Technologies is now a company that works to be a trusted and innovative leader in emerging technologies by delivering cutting edge IoT and computing products and solutions for consumers and businesses.

continuity but also put Onsor and Oman on the technological map. Hence, they decided to go for the new challenge of designing their first personal computer that could be used in offices, colleges, schools and by individuals.

The timing of the project was ideal as the world moved to studying and working from home during the pandemic. The Ministry of Education in Oman decided to go for distance learning. By His Majesty Sultan Haitham's command, they floated a tender to supply close to 40,000 students with laptops. "It was a competitive tender that

we are now proud to have won and become part of this noble project."

There was another generous donation from Sultan Haitham for higher education students, and Onsor was proudly part of that project too. Onsor "O50" won the trust of the people in Oman. The name "O50" came from "Oman" as it is the only country that starts with an "O", Onsor also starts with the letter "O" and it was during Oman's 50th national celebrations. Pre-orders were offered upon the launch of the product and sold out in a matter of days.

One of the pivotal moments for the company was investment from Oman ICT group, which shaped the business strategy to align with the group's strategy and Oman Vision 2040. Onsor Technologies are working on emerging technologies – mainly IoT products and solutions – in addition to computing products. The solutions that are being developed

now are for the oil and gas sector, telecommunications, logistics and remote monitoring.

There is growing interest from businesses, and deals have been closed with companies and other public and private institutions.

The Onsor founders – Maadh Ahmed Al-Hinaai (CEO), Yazin Khalid Al-Musafir (COO) and Ahmed Puma Al-Shukalil (CTO) – worked on building a competent team to serve the company's objectives and this team is the company's greatest asset. "We made sure that all employees are driven with passion, pro-active, self-motivated and hold the company's values of innovation and creativity."

The future belongs to emerging technologies like IoT, ML and AI. Onsor Technologies aims to be a trusted partner to help businesses adopt these technologies to increase their efficiency, reduce time, effort and save money on processes and operations. Onsor listens to partners' points and offers a unique and customised solution. As for the computer products, the solutions will always have modern features and address local and regional requirements with a growing number of competent Omani talents. ■

The timing of the project was ideal as the world moved to studying and working from home during the pandemic.

The Ministry of Education in Oman decided to go for distance learning.

While 2020 was a tough year for numerous businesses, it was a year of opportunities for technology companies. After manufacturing the first batch of the SBCs in 2019, Onsor needed a product that could be used in large volumes to help the company grow.

After nearly six years in the electronics business, the team decided to start a bigger project that would not only ensure business



HANAN SULTAN'S BEAUTIFUL DESIGNS REIMAGINE THE OMANI KUMMA

I had the pleasure of meeting Hanan Sultan and her fellow graduates at the *Pause, Rewind, Play* exhibition in Gallery S O, Brick Lane.

ARTICLE BY LYDIA JAQUES



The exhibition was held by the graduates of Central Saint Martins BA Jewellery Design 2020 course and their work was a testament to a very talented cohort of students.

Amidst the high quality of all the graduates' work, Hanan's *Neo Traditional* collection was particularly striking. Consisting of three pieces – a pair of earrings, a necklace and a crown – Hanan's collection used gold and frankincense to create pieces of jewellery which not only look beautiful, but retain the aroma of Omani frankincense.

Hanan spent nine months experimenting with and manipulating frankincense resin before mastering how to create and maintain the shape of the material she uses in her jewellery today. It resembles burnt amber in colour and can be remoulded into different shapes throughout its lifetime. Although, in Hanan's words, frankincense 'was and still is everywhere' in Oman, it has

not been used in this way before. This ingenuity truly is a testament to Hanan's creativity and skill as a designer.

Her frankincense and gold crown reimagines the Omani *Kumma*, a headpiece usually worn by men. By fashioning the *Kumma* into a crown presented to a bride on her wedding day, Hanan seeks to represent equality in marriage. She shifts the meaning of the dowry from its material worth to its symbolic meaning. Frankincense is usually burned during weddings to symbolise the merging of two souls and to strengthen the spiritual connection between the couple. By having frankincense as part of the dowry, Hanan places importance on spiritual connection rather than financial exchange. Hanan's reimagining of the *Kumma* thus seeks not to do away with Omani tradition but to strengthen and improve existing customs.

“At the time I started this for my final year project, I was a student at Central Saint Martins and being in that environment pushed me to want to do something that identifies me. The parallels came from researching the history of frankincense and how historically it was treated like gold.

“This made me think frankincense was the perfect material to represent my cultural identity. Frankincense is not only visually intriguing but also engages with the sense of smell. I found that it reacts with the heat of the human body and jewellery is concerned with the relationship between objects and the body.

“Frankincense was a challenging material to craft and manipulate. However it was a learning process and through the

journey the materiality of the frankincense guided my approach towards my designs. As a designer, I'm concerned about problem solving and took this as a challenge.”

Now that Hanan had completed her BA with such a successful final project, I asked what would be the focus of her MA.

“My current MA is focused on jewellery & metalsmithing, but other forms of creative arts and design also do fascinate me. MA is a space for further experimentation and growth so I would like to investigate multiple new processes, techniques and mediums.”

I asked Hanan what was the most exciting collaboration she had done so far.

“When I was a second year student, the course collaborated with the furniture

company Vitsoe. The aim of this project was to create a wearable jewellery piece using recycled materials and that would create conversation and interaction. Our course was represented at Munich Jewellery Week by the exhibition Fabricate. We hosted a live event at Vitsoe's showroom in Munich and wore our pieces. I found this project very exciting because of the live interactions I had at the event. I decided to reuse an old deck of playing cards that I had laser cut and wore in my hair.”

I cannot wait to see what Hanan and her fellow graduates will design next. Hanan Sultan is definitely a young artist to watch as she embarks on a promising career fuelled by her determination, creativity, and great skill. ■



Hanan's Neo Traditional collection was particularly striking. Consisting of three pieces – a pair of earrings, a necklace and a crown.



More of her beautiful pieces can be seen on her Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/hananmustafas/> and she can be contacted on hanan.sultan1997@gmail.com

LONDON PRESS BRIEFING ON OMAN VISION 2040

Talal Al Rahbi, Vice-Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, in a major speech at the Society premises in Sackville Street, highlighted the plans for national fiscal sustainability, foreign direct investment promotion, and increased national employment.

The Omani Ambassador in London, Abdulaziz Al Hinai, attended along with members of his Embassy staff, members of the Foreign Press Association (FPA) and corporate and individual members and friends of the Anglo-Omani Society. It is more than two years since the last major Press event at the Society (See Review 2020, p30). The presentation followed the awards ceremony of the FPA held the previous night with leading sponsorship from Oman.

The presentation by Talal Al Rahbi began with an exposition of basic facts to introduce the members of the FPA to Oman. It included the Sultanate's advantageous location as a gateway between East and West with unique economic, cultural, and geographical features. This introduction laid the foundation for the outline of Oman Vision 2040 and its importance to Oman's future development.

Beginning with the phases of its development, Talal Al Rahbi provided a summary of the key building blocks and goals of Oman Vision 2040. This included the Ministry of Economy's five-year plans, the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification (*Tanfeedh*), and various international and national reports.

Central to the presentation was the issue of how Oman Vision 2040 was to be implemented. The Implementation Follow-Up Unit reports to the Council of Ministers and follows up with public and private bodies to support their work towards the goals of Oman Vision 2040. This includes shaping policies and incentives, facilitating communication between the private and public sectors as well as between government departments, and checking progress throughout. The presentation concluded with the



Thank you

www.oman2040.om



methodology the Unit uses to evaluate the progress of Oman Vision 2040 and their work on top of that.

The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session and general discussion held under Chatham House rules. First, a three-way discussion was chaired by Chris Breeze, Managing Director of Ellipse Projects SAS, Talal Al Rahbi and Stuart Laing, Chairman of the Anglo-Omani Society. After these initial exchanges, the conversation opened up to the room.

Members of the FPA expressed their interest and thanks to Talal Al Rahbi for his presentation. In posing questions they were curious how their work as journalists, and the network of the FPA, could be used to promote the messages of Oman Vision 2040. Specifically, it was asked in the short term what would they like to see reported in the foreign press about Oman.

Furthermore, questions regarding Oman's place in the region, especially in comparison to countries like Saudi Arabia, raised important issues of investment policies, tourism development, and areas for diversification in the economy.

One question that animated a broad discussion picked up the central point of how effectively to implement Oman Vision 2040. Comments were made about previous medium and long-term goals that

Stuart Laing concluded the talk with words of thanks to both Talal Al Rahbi and Chris Breeze, as well as the many distinguished guests.

were proposed but not achieved. Despite the past missed opportunities, it was emphasised by members attending, and particularly by Talal Al Rahbi, that progress is being tracked with tangible and measurable indicators.

After lively and detailed discussion into the most important topics of the

presentation, Stuart Laing concluded the talk with words of thanks to both Talal Al Rahbi and Chris Breeze, as well as the many distinguished guests. The talk was followed by a buffet meal that allowed those attending to continue informal talks and discussions and promote contacts likely to be of continuing importance. ■



SULTANATE SPONSORS PRESS AWARDS

The Foreign Press Association of London (FPA) is the first and oldest association of foreign journalists in the world, founded in 1888.



Talal Al Rahbi with Samira Shackle (Guardian Long Read), Winner of the Travel/Tourism Story of the Year and Rory Bremner.



Abdulaziz Al Hinai with Journalist of the Year Robert Moore (ITV News), Kate McCure (FPA President) and Rory Bremner.

All major international news outlets are represented, from print to radio, from TV to web, in its 500 members from more than 60 countries.

The Sultanate of Oman were Gold Sponsors for the FPA Media Awards 2021, which are highly prestigious prizes for journalism the winners of which are selected by a panel of distinguished external judges. The awards were presented by Rory Bremner at a glittering ceremonial dinner at the Grand Sheraton Hotel, Park Lane, London.

Every year, the guest list for the Awards is made up of around 350-400 influential

members of the British and International media, UK politicians, business leaders, foreign government representatives and other leading opinion makers. Guests have included the Prince of Wales, Queen Rania of Jordan and King Felipe VI of Spain.

The Omani Ambassador in London, Abdulaziz Al Hinai, was a guest of honour at this year's event, which was also attended by the Society chairman, Stuart Laing, and trustees Debbie Martin and Jane Kinninmont. ■



Abdulaziz Al Hinai with Niklaus Nuspliger (Neue Zürcher Zeitung NZZ), winner of the prize for the Story of the Year in a foreign language.



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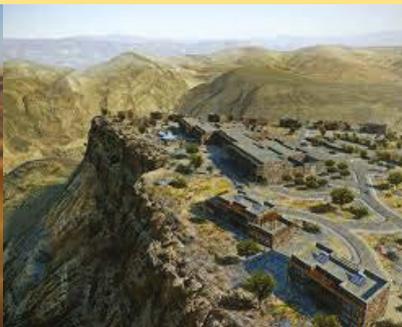
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CLEANER WORLD INITIATIVE LAUNCHED

The launch meeting of an exciting Anglo-Omani development aimed at replacing gas flaring with productive uses of the gas leading to enormous environmental benefits was held at the Society premises this Summer.

It was led by Dr Frigyes Lestak, CEO of F2V (Flare to Value) and a recognised climate change leader, and included his Omani partners including Eyhab Al-Haj, also a director of F2V as well as Group Managing Director of HEMA, founded in 2011 by internationally experienced Omani engineers to provide solutions in upstream petroleum. Dr Lestak has set up and managed successful collaborations with governments and the World Bank.

“The meeting is to kick off our first project that will be built in Mukhaizna, Oman, and will reduce waste, CO₂ emissions and create jobs. It will be the first of many other projects to follow,” Dr Lestak stated. The Mukhaizna Oil Field is in Al Wusta Governorate, with production of nearly 120,000 barrels per day, and production is expected to continue until the field reaches its economic limit in about 40 years time.

“F2V is an Anglo-Omani company, with operations in both countries. We are proud of our dual heritage and that we can build on the local opportunities and capabilities that the UK and Oman offer. Flare reduction is a global problem, that we believe can only

Dr Frigyes Lestak, CEO of F2V (Flare to Value)



be solved through collaboration. We joined AOS to be part of a like minded community in London, expand our network and give back something to the countries we call home.”

F2V’s aim is FOR A CLEANER AND PROSPEROUS WORLD, according to their website... “to sustain economic growth, reduce poverty and avoid catastrophic environmental damage, we need to transition to cleaner and accessible energy systems... \$ 30 billion worth of gas continues to be wasted annually in 16,000 flares around the World, causing waste, environmental damage and contributing to climate change.

“Over 70 countries, companies and finance institutions have joined the World Bank ‘Zero Routine Flaring by 2030’ initiative and committed to eliminate flaring. Thousands of projects will need to be developed and hundreds of billions invested to achieve this goal over the next 10 years. This is a formidable challenge that requires innovation and that is what F2V delivers.”

The government of Oman and many of the oil and gas companies operating in Oman are members of the World Bank Zero Routine Flaring Initiative, aiming to

“We aim to demonstrate the new model first in Oman and then deliver material reduction in flaring over the next 10 years. We plan to invest at least \$ 250 million in Oman, followed by growth in the region and elsewhere. Additionally, we aim to set up an F2V Centre of Excellence in Oman.”

reach zero routine flaring by 2030. Oman is the tenth largest flarer and the value of gas wasted annually amounts to 0.4% of the Sultanate’s GDP.

“F2V offers a one-stop solution to flare reduction through a new business model, using proven open access technologies,” stated Dr Lestak. “We aim to demonstrate the new model first in Oman and then deliver material reduction in flaring over the next 10 years. We plan to invest at least \$ 250 million in Oman, followed by growth in the region and elsewhere. Additionally, we aim to set up an F2V Centre of Excellence in Oman.”

Dr Lestak’s doctorate was in chemical engineering and he was a lecturer at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology before moving into industry, becoming expert in business development, technical commercial and finance matters in the oil and gas industry. He had a key role in delivering a 30% reduction in flaring at Shell.

Eyhab Al-Haj is a serial entrepreneur, with noted experience in new business development in the upstream oil industry. He holds degrees from Imperial College, London, and Nottingham Business School. ■

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ENERGY TRANSITION AT NGG DELEGATION 2022

ARTICLE BY DINA MACKI



The Delegation at Work.

After a whirlwind three years we were finally able to hold our annual New Generation Group Delegation! Although we had begun planning this in 2020 in the hope that we could host it in 2021, we had to adapt, change the theme of our delegation and organise everything in short order for the three-day event in Muscat in March 2022. The theme was Energy Transition in Emerging Markets.

We flew out eight British delegates, who were joined by ten Omanis, for two days of intense learnings and discussion led by leaders in their fields, and by a cultural day and chance for the delegates to get to know one another. The discussions took place at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), where the beginnings of success and friendships were formed between delegates.

Day one began with the keynote speaker HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki Al Said. After a week at Oman Sustainability week, he spoke to our delegates about his thoughts on energy issues and Oman's transitioning journey. Our delegates had great questions for him and entered into an enlightening discussion on Oman's niche political economics. BP Oman's Sultan Al Harrasi followed with gave an introduction to BP's transition to clean energy.

The third session of the day was an interactive fireside chat between Johana Dunlop, founder and advisor to Gaia Summit and MENA Regional Liaison, and Mohammed Al Balush from BP, support on the Gaia Summit and also participating as a delegate. Johana discussed scaling to the

new energy system and the pair warned against the dangers of greenwashing and encouraged delegates to 'move the needle' and not delay making changes to speed up the energy transition.

Next we had Younis Al Rawahi who initiated a discussion about the groundbreaking Bauer-Nimr Project, which raised great interest in delegates: the world's largest commercial constructed wetland which offers tailored wastewater, sludge and water treatment solutions that utilise the reed beds.

The last speaker of the day was Siddiqa Al Lawati from OQ, who spoke about green hydrogen developments in Oman. She described her wind power projects and highlighted how Oman is well placed both to lead the hydrogen transition and be a global supplier for green hydrogen.

Day Two was dedicated to enhancing the new bonds between delegates and giving the British delegates a chance to experience and embrace the culture of Oman. After exploring Matrah Souq and haggling over prices of souvenirs, we took a choppy boat ride to a private beach in Bandar Khayran to relax, soak up the sun,

swim in the sea and feast on a local grilled lunch, while the delegates got the chance to process the previous day and get to know each other. Our journey back to the hotel followed with an impressive art exhibition put on by a collective of Omani female artists in Matrah Fort before dinner at the beautiful Rozna restaurant.

Day three at OCEC began with a talk by Dr. Khalil Hanshi, Senior Renewable Energy Advisor at PDO. Dr. Khalil spoke about the importance of mixing experienced staff with new recruits for the right combination of skills and vision. Dr. Khalil spoke alongside his colleague Dr. Zakiya Al Azri who gave an informative talk on future lives and livelihoods. Delegates had questions for Dr. Khalil and Dr. Zakiya which started a conversation about Oman's path toward a safe, smart, and green energy future.

Our youngest speaker, BP Oman's Taimur Al Shidhani, gave an excellent talk on BP Oman's Wells Operation and answered delegates' questions with great knowledge and clarity. Haidar Al Zaabi, founder of MAYS electric vehicles, described his innovative designs which had just been showcased at Dubai Expo. He was followed by Hamed Al Naamany, CEO of Oman LNG, who encouraged delegates on how to institute and manage the energy transition even during challenging grounds.

After lunch, Shatha Al Maskiry, CEO of Proviti Oman, initiated discussion on organisational excellence during the energy transition. She encouraged delegates to think about how to unite



Dr Adham with Society Trustee Ma'an Al Rawahi

different generations in the workplace. The final speaker at this delegation was Talal Hasan, CEO of 44.01. He spoke to delegates about 44.01's work in injecting CO₂ into peridotite rocks in Oman, innovative technology that is sure to feature in the future of Oman's energy transition.

On the last evening of the Delegation, we hosted a formal dinner for delegates, speakers and friends of AOS at the W Hotel Muscat. The evening was enjoyed by all and was a great opportunity for delegates to network with those in Oman. Bill Murray, the British Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, joined us and delivered his message on the bright future of British-Omani friendship.

We give special thanks to our headline sponsor, BP Oman: their continued support across all our NGG delegations is greatly appreciated. We also thank HH Sayyid Dr Adham bin Turki Al Said for being our keynote speaker on Oman's journey of Energy Transition. We are grateful to all our speakers for their time in preparing for and speaking at our delegation, and look forward to see what our delegates will go on to do after gaining from their expertise.

The Delegation policy paper on the event will be published in the Autumn to provide a permanent record... and in the meantime we are working already towards future NGG projects! ■



The delegation (left to right): Noufal Al Noufali, Oumaima Al Sawisi, Ghalib Al Habsi, Katie Rogers, Mohammed Al Balushi, Lydia Jacques, Angus Gardiner, Shuaib Al Rawahi, Samah Al Rawahi, Robert Cashmore, Jawaher Al Raisi, HE Sayyid Dr Adham Al Said, Alaa Al Hadabi, Ma'an Al Rawahi, Sara Al Raisi, Benedict Skales, Abdulkarim Al Hinai, Lamya Harub, AlZubair Al Mahri, Dina Macki, Alasdair Pearson, Mohammed Al Hinai, Naadirah Vali, James Ramsay.

SOCIETY ARTS EXHIBITION IN MUSCAT

ARTICLE BY SHUAIB ABDUL RAHIM AL RAWAHI

In celebration of the 51st Omani National Day, The Anglo-Omani Society – New Generation Group inaugurated an Arts Exhibition in Muscat under the the patronage of HE Bill Murray, the British Ambassador to Oman.

The venue, Bait Muzna Gallery, is one of the most significant art galleries in Oman; established by Sayyida Susan Al Said in 2000. Bait Muzna has been committed to promoting modern contemporary art and preserving the essence of Arab art through various design mediums and commissioning large projects on the local and international scale. Bait Muzna Gallery sits in a traditional yet timeless Omani house in Muttrah near to Al-Alam Palace.

In this event, co-organised by AOS-NGG and Bait Muzna, we were bringing a diversity of exceptional artwork that was all Omani themed. The overall impression of the event's opening was outstanding. Mr Murray stated that he was very pleased to attend the opening of the exhibition.

“This is an excellent exhibition. I think the level of art today is impressive. I think this is a good opportunity for me to meet new artists here in Oman, and an excellent





Above: Ambassador, Sheikh Ma'an and Shuaib Al Rawahy.

Main picture: Ambassador Bill Murray speaking at the Exhibition opening.



opportunity for me to see the close relationship in the field of art between British and Omani artists.”

Sheikh Ma'an Al-Rawahy, Chairman NGG-Oman, said, “The Society organised a competition in which artists from the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom participated to highlight the tourism, cultural and historical elements of the Sultanate by drawing artistic paintings. This exhibition was held to highlight these creative artistic pieces.”

The exhibition offered artists across Oman and the UK the opportunity to showcase their Oman-themed work and participate with the Society’s online platforms. The exhibition included the Society’s Arts competition winning paintings and other works by Omani artists. Furthermore, some of the art pieces were on sale, with a percentage of the proceeds donated to charity.

The exhibition’s objective was to promote and support the talents of British and Omani Artists, reflecting their interests related to Oman, as well as representing selective pieces to the contemporary audience. The original idea of the NGG in 2020 was to celebrate Oman’s 50th National Day by launching the First Arts Competition entitled: ‘*Masterpiece Oman: Art Competition*’. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the exhibition was postponed to 2021.

The competition was open to artists of all ages who were resident in Oman and the UK, and the winners received cash prizes to support them in progressing their practice and becoming leaders in their

field. Results were fully reported in the AOS Review 2021, pp 82-85. First prize was awarded to Arabella Dorman with her painting *The Animal Souk, Nizwa*; second prize went to Elizabeth Davis and her four-panelled polyptych *Omani Artisans*; third prize was won by Anjali Babu and *Omani Traditions*.

In the Bait Muzna exhibition, a total of 12 art pieces by different artists who participated in the competition and were shortlisted were on display. The Society offered a selective group of young Omani Artists the chance to showcase their work with the intention of supporting art in Oman, as well as encouraging young people to advance their abilities and proceed further in this field.

MOHAMMAD BIN HUSSEIN AL-HAJRI ARCHITECT AND ARTIST

Mohammad is interested in all kinds of visual arts and he is skilled in watercolours. Art is an inheritance in his family, as he learnt watercolours from his father, the visual artist Hussein Al-Hajri. Mohammad has participated in many exhibitions and artistic activities in the Sultanate and abroad, and gave many workshops on ‘*How to draw with pencil and watercolours*’.

His artwork in the exhibition dealt with natural elements inspired by the Omani nature in particular. The two art pieces are characterised by depth and colour consistency in installation and execution.



Artwork by Mohammad Al-Hajri

Mohammad aspires to create an artistic spirit and a contemporary artistic language that highlight the deep cultural characteristics of the Sultanate and reflects his own different artistic orientations. Through this, he is trying to present a collection of artworks that touch the art connoisseur and art lovers alike.

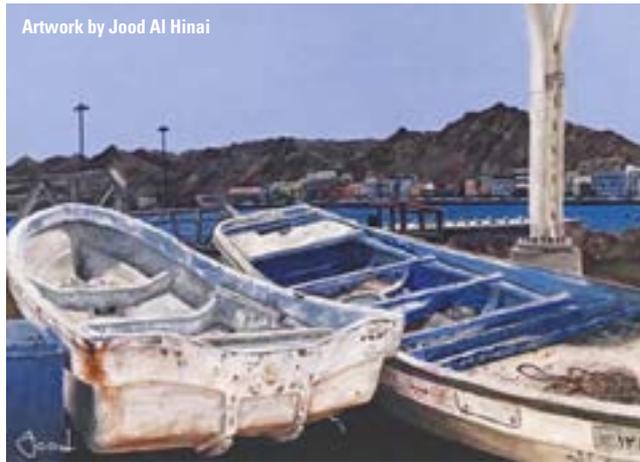
**LAITH KHALIFA AL SHIADI
STUDENT**

From an early age, Laith has been paying special attention to his feelings towards different elements in his environment, especially objects and places. Sketching and collage have been excellent mediums for him to visualise his perspective on them. Laith is navigating his way in the arts scene in Oman as an emerging artist and he is currently pursuing a degree in Urban Planning and Architecture at the German University of Technology, Muscat.

Laith quotes in his specialised art piece

**JOOD RASHAD AL HINAI
STUDENT**

Jood Al Hinai is a self-taught realistic artist who was born and raised in The Sultanate of Oman. She is currently an Interior Design student at the Scientific College of Design in Muscat. Despite her young age, Jood has participated in many



**MAJID JUMA AL OMARI
ARTS TEACHER**

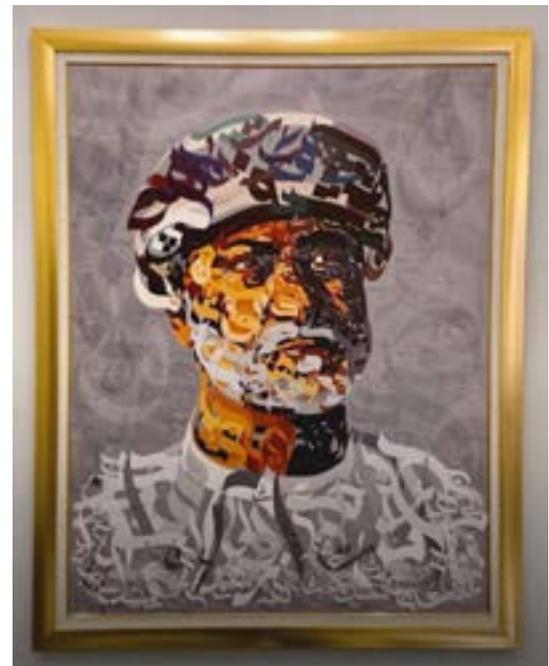
Majid Al-Omari is an Omani visual artist who is a graduate of Sultan Qaboos University. He participated in many domestic and international exhibitions.

Two of the showcased paintings were abstract art, the preferred style for Majid,

and both were painted using acrylic colours. The first painting is called 'Kema' and expresses the Omani hat and this painting was sold on the opening of the exhibition. The second painting, 'Burqa', is an illustration of the Omani burqa



Artwork by Laith Al Shiadi



Artwork by Majid Al Omari

for the AOS Exhibition: "Muscat has a character that is perceived and recognised by its people and visitors. However, I felt that there are other ways of illustrating the city which are not based on 'the street/road point of view'." His piece tests the viewer's perspective as it resembles a semi abstract landscape but also based on the coastline of Muscat City.

exhibitions and her artwork illustrates the talents of passionate Omani women in this field.

She participated with two paintings in the AOS Exhibition, HM Sultan Qaboos & Mutrah Corniche's artwork. Both of the art pieces are painted with acrylics and they reflect the landscape and culture of Oman.

which is a mask that Bedouin women wear. The third art piece was a portrait of HM Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in the style of digitalised Arabic calligraphy.

The two week exhibition was widely reported on the Society's social media accounts, in newspapers, as well as news on OmanTV. The New Generation Group. ■

BACK TO MANAH!

ARTICLE BY ELISABETH KENDALL

It gives me great pleasure to report the happy news that we are back in action! We had ten eager students raring to travel to Oman to immerse themselves in intensive Arabic lessons for six weeks this Summer.

Half of the students are from our 2020 cohort, whose plans were rudely thwarted by the pandemic, and half are new applicants, thrilled that this unique international study opportunity was up and running again. We hope that this was a chance for them not only to improve their Arabic, but also to appreciate the beauty and hospitality of Oman.

It is a wonderful opportunity for our students to build lasting relationships that will carry the special relationship between Britain and Oman forward into the next generation. We wish them all the best and

look forward to hearing about all that they see, learn and discover in Oman.

As ever, our thanks go to the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman for their invaluable support, and to the dedicated staff at Sultan Qaboos College in Manah who make it all happen. ■

Dr Elisabeth Kendall is the Trustee responsible for the Society's Arabic Language Scheme, which had ten successful years, training 100 young Britons in the Arabic language, until the pandemic forced the temporary halt.



BEST ANNUAL LUNCH EVER?

Was this 'the best' Annual Lunch the Society has had? Certainly this was said by many guests at our Annual Anglo-Omani Society lunch that took place in October 2021.



Despite a two-year wait and much hesitation on whether we would have a full house under such uncertain circumstances, the lunch was an overwhelming success and a much-needed reunion for all members who had not seen friends in such a long time.

More than 120 Omani and British members gathered at The Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly, as usual hosted

by our Chairman Stuart Laing and the Omani Ambassador, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai. We were fortunate to welcome our guest of honour, James Cleverly, the Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa. We also welcomed distinguished guests from Oman's neighbours; HE Khaled Abdulaziz Al-Duwaisan GCVO (Ambassador of

Kuwait) and Fahad al-Bin Ali (Deputy Head of Mission for Bahrain).

James Cleverly gave a profound speech that spoke about his recent visit to the Sultanate and how our bilateral relationship was so important to nurture and hold onto. He highlighted the wonderful hospitality, the great political and economic strength between us and the bright prospects for



More than 120 Omani and British members gathered at The Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly.

BEST ANNUAL LUNCH EVER



His speech was followed by HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai expressing his support for the principles and work behind the Anglo-Omani relationship.





BEST ANNUAL LUNCH EVER

future cooperation. Dipping into his Duolingo Arabic, the Minister brought the room to laughter and his humour and wit provided a light touch to the important topics of bilateral relations.

His speech was followed by HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai expressing his support for the principles and work behind the Anglo-Omani relationship. Drawing on the long and deep history between the two countries, he stressed the importance of further cooperation for the future of both countries.

The luncheon overall was filled with joy, wonderful company and prosperity for 2022 and building upon our Anglo-Omani friendship.

We were happy also to host Oman TV journalists who filmed the speeches and interviewed key guests and members of the Anglo-Omani Society. Their presence helped share the work and message of the Society to Oman.

The luncheon overall was filled with joy, wonderful company and prosperity for 2022 and building upon our Anglo-Omani friendship. It was certainly an event we shall not forget – and we look forward to this year’s luncheon. ■





FROM DUQM TO THE SOUTH DOWNS



Colonel David Bennett

After Colonel David Bennett gave a SAF Association talk at the Society about establishing the strategic UK defence hub at the Port of Duqm between 2016 and 2019, he kindly invited the AOS staff team to visit him at his new place of work – the stunning Stansted Park stately home and its 1800 acres of extraordinary landscaped parkland and ancient forest in the South Downs National Park.

David swapped his Army career to manage the estate in West Sussex where he is responsible for the day to day management of 26 staff and a budget of £1.2M. He leads a team of four senior managers orchestrating and coordinating commercial, residential and farm tenancies; property and grounds management; chattels conservation; building and development projects; public engagement and an events programme.

The AOS team had a wonderful day visiting him at the beautiful estate. Stansted Park has been visited by numerous monarchs throughout the



years, Henry II in 1177, Richard I of England in 1194, and John, King of England in 1214 and 1215. Edward VI visited in 1552 and in 1591 Queen Elizabeth I visited a house, built by John, Lord Lumley on the site. Today, visitors to the park can enjoy the forest, parkland, arboretum, maze, bookshop, farm shop, tearoom, garden centre, light railway, chapel, and the beautiful house itself.

The day was not all play: in a podcast available on the Society website, Lydia Jaques and David Newton discussed with Colonel David the challenges faced during the Duqm project, his instrumental role as the UK's in-country project officer for the UK's Defence Hub at Duqm... and his fondest memories of Oman.

The last word from our staff: "Thank you to the team at Stansted Park and David Bennett especially for giving such a warm welcome. We would highly recommend a visit to Stansted Park to all our members. A walk in the beautiful gardens and lunch or afternoon tea in the greenhouse café make for a truly wonderful day out." ■

The pictures show a dining room, and downstairs in the kitchens with Dina, Lydia and James.

GOVERNORATE BROCHURE SERIES: ASH SHARQIYA SOUTH



The sixth edition of our Governorates series is available on our website. In this bulletin, we find out more about the Royal Air Force at Sur. We read about the experience of a former inner-London school teacher who visited Oman and never looked back. And finally, we learn about the Tombs and Archaeology in Western Ja'alan.

Oman's 11 Governorates are each blessed with a distinct identity and steeped in its own unique culture, history and character. From the jebali tribes of Dhofar to the fjords of Musandam, the thriving cosmopolitan streets of Muscat, and the historical ports of the Al-Batinah, Oman is a country of stories waiting to be told. Ash Sharqiya South follows the release over the past two years of the first five brochures – see AOS Review 2021 p56 and p106.

AL BALEED FOOD FESTIVAL – OMAN'S FIRST

ARTICLE BY DINA MACKI



The Al Baleed Food Festival was the first of its kind for the country.

The Anantara hotel in Salalah launched a week-long event last December celebrating food, culture and Oman. The event was brought together by Oman Tourism, Oman Air and Amouage perfume with six highly talented chefs from The Netherlands, France, Egypt, Malta, Britain and Oman.

Each chef came with their own theme and style of cooking; the first night was headed by Fanny Ray, a 1 Michelin star French Chef, followed by 2 Michelin star Chef

Edwin Vinke – the owner of the incredible De Kromme Watergang restaurant in Slijkplaat, Hoofdplaat in the Netherlands by the sea and border of Belgium. We then welcomed Egyptian chef and winner of MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Centre) Top Chef 2018 Moustafa Seif, MBC Top Chef judge and celebrity chef Bobby Chin, Maltese and head Chef of the Anantara Luke Borg and myself, Omani British Chef, Recipe Developer and Writer.

The vision was to introduce Salalah and Oman to eclectic talent, flavours, and dishes, with each of us bringing our own take on how we see our cultures and how we choose to cook in certain ways. The event was truly special and a space for inspiration, tantalised taste buds and an overall incredible experience.

While the resort wanted to bring international cuisine to Salalah and introduce new chefs and styles to both locals and guests it was also important for them to represent Oman and its talent. I was approached by the team and owners who had previously tried my cooking and was asked if I would like to represent Oman and its cuisine. While Omanis know their own food, it is still quite a mystery to the rest of the world and often gets confused between Levantine, Arab and Indian cuisine due to our diverse history.

There was a lot of hesitation from my part, as it's one thing sharing recipes with my social media following or writing them on my website or for a magazine but to be classed as the person to represent a whole country felt very scary! However, I couldn't say no to a challenge and decided I would bring Dina's version of Omani food meets my western upbringing to the festival. Having spent weeks testing, changing and adapting the recipe I finally had a four-course menu I was proud and excited to share. I was able to bring along a sous chef and so had the incredible assistance of Abdullah Al Lawati, who is a banker by day for NBO and budding chef in his own time. Between lots of translations, helping me pick the right produce and understanding the flavours and textures I was looking for, he honestly was my hero for that week.

The menu was a true reflection of my creative madness: it was essential for me to bring my influences of growing up in a western society in a country that has every type of cuisine you could possibly imagine, combined with my love for Omani food, the beautiful dishes and ingredients we grow too. As the event was based in Salalah it would have been crazy not to take advantage of the incredible fruits grown there, as well as harbouring in on their famous bread and creating a fun way for people to enjoy it, other than the traditional.

THE MENU I PRESENTED:

First Course

A Mini Salalah Ka'ak Bread (a sweet, hard yet crumbly bread with nigella seeds) with Salt Cured Tuna (known as Maleh in Oman), Coconut Curry Puree, Pomegranate Kachumba

(THIS DISH WAS INSPIRED BY A MEXICAN TOSTADAS)



Second Course

Sidr Honey, Omani Spiced Lamb Ribs with Camel Fat Potato Fondants, Jarjeer (Omani Rocket) Puree, Crispy Fried Onions



Palate Cleanser

Coconut, Pineapple & Omani Lemongrass Granita

Fourth Course

Omani Ragag Bread (paper thin traditional bread) Mieulle Fielle layered with Salalah Papaya Coulis, Salalah Banana Cream, Pistachio & White Chocolate Crème Pâtissière finished with shavings of dark chocolate

(THIS DISH WAS INSPIRED BY A FRENCH MILLE FEUILLE)



AL BALEED FOOD FESTIVAL

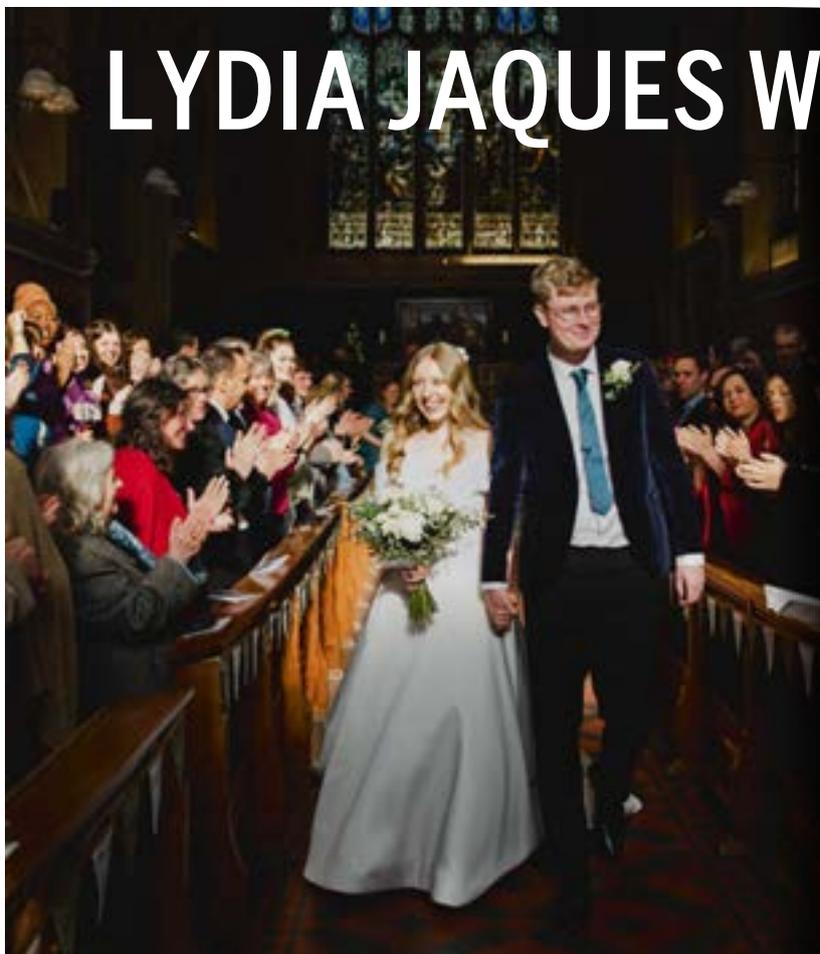
The brilliance and joy of this menu was the discussions from Michelin chefs, tourists, locals and Omanis from the capital. Everyone enjoyed each dish, locals were shocked by how something they have everyday could be transformed into something so different yet delicious, other Omanis were proud of how their culture was showcased in such a beautiful and vibrant way, while tourists commented on how it was the perfect introduction and understanding to Omani cuisine.

The event presented challenges. We were lucky to have a very capable hotel team who made sure no challenge was too big for them. I think that for most of the chefs, being presented with ingredients with which they were not familiar or could not source was the hardest, and adapting to alternatives was so important. I don't think many diners ever realise how many things go wrong in a kitchen, but it really is blood, sweat and tears a lot of the time to be able to achieve perfection on your plate. Is it worth it? YES!

From the success of this event and it being the first, I guarantee that it will get better and bigger and maybe eventually happen in different parts of Oman, including more chefs and offerings. It was an incredible experience for us all – we made new friends, learnt so much about each others' cultures and especially learnt a lot of new skills that we can carry forward with us. ■



LYDIA JAQUES WEDDING



Lydia Jaques, one of this year's Society interns, was married in February to Jonty Large, who was her boyfriend and then fiancé while they were studying at Durham University.

The wedding was at Bancroft's School in Woodford Green where Lydia's father has taught for 30 years.

Lydia read modern languages and cultures at Durham, specialising in German and Arabic, and joined the Society after graduating with a first class degree. She had previously been selected for the Arabic language course at Manah. She and Jonty were introduced by a mutual friend in their first year. Jonty is now a geography teacher in an inner London school. ■

ELISABETH KENDALL MISTRESS OF GIRTON

Her role, as described by Professor Smith, “is to support and promote the interests of all who live and work here. This includes striving for good governance, promoting scholarly excellence, encouraging all-round personal development, and overseeing a supportive, inclusive educational community.”

Elisabeth is particularly proud to have been elected Mistress of Girton College as it was the first Cambridge college to admit women and also the first UK residential institution to offer a university education to women. Girton College has also kept the title of ‘Mistress’, where other colleges use Master/President/Principal, in honour of its pioneering history.

“I’m thrilled to have been elected the next Mistress of Girton. I’m profoundly conscious of the privilege and responsibility in taking on this role at a

college with such a pioneering history and spirit. I can’t wait to join Girton’s incredible Fellows, students, staff, and alumni so that together we can steer the College on to new firsts.”

Dr Hilary Marlow, Chair of the search committee and Vice-Mistress of Girton College, said: “We are delighted that Elisabeth Kendall will be joining the Girton College community as its next Mistress. She brings wide-ranging experience and a passion for education and community engagement that will enable Girton to continue to be a pioneer.”

Dr Kendall has been Senior Research Fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Pembroke College, Oxford University. She has lectured at numerous universities and think tanks around the world, and presented her research to National and

international institutions including the House of Commons, House of Lords, FCO, NATO, the US State Department and the EU Council – and to Society members at Sackville Street.

She is a published author and features regularly in international television, radio and print media. Her research has taken her far beyond the dreaming spires of Oxford... she is an intrepid traveller in places to which few academics would dare venture.

As a Society trustee, Dr Kendall has been responsible for the Arabic Language Scheme since its inception more than ten years ago. Students are selected from universities all round the UK to hone their language skills and immerse themselves in Omani culture at the Sultan Qaboos College in Manah. ■



Society Trustee
Dr Elisabeth Kendall
has been elected as the
20th Mistress of Girton
College, Cambridge and
will succeed Professor
Susan J Smith in October.

OMAN NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURES AT THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY

One of the most prestigious events sponsored by the Society is the annual Oman Natural Heritage lecture at the Royal Geographical Society, reflecting both the unique collaboration between British field scientists and naturalists and the growing expertise and international reputations of young Omani scientists and practitioners.

Female Arabian leopard in the Dhofar mountains, Oman

A report on the lecture is normally one of the major features in our annual Review. Because of the pandemic restrictions, no lecture was held in the past year, so we have taken the opportunity to ask the lead speakers from the series to present an update on current fieldwork in the Sultanate in their specific field. We are also glad to announce that the 6th annual lecture will be able to be held at the RGS this year: details are given at the end of the article.

Edited by Nigel Winser on behalf of the Oman Natural Heritage Lecture Group (UK), Dr Roderic Dutton, Mr Sean Nelson, Mr Rob Baldwin, and Mr Winser.

2016

Dr Hadi Al Hikmani launched the first lecture alongside **Mr Abdul Aziz Al Huseini** in October 2016 with their talk *Arabian Leopards and Aflaj Hydroponics*. Soon after this, Hadi began his Doctorate studies on Leopard genetics at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology at the University of Kent. After graduating in 2019, he continued to lead surveys in the Dhofar mountains for the Office for the Conservation of the Environment. Last year, he and his team secured the first photographic record of the Arabian leopard, north of Jabal Al Qamar. Here is his update.

The elusive Arabian leopard is the only big cat that remains in the Arabian Peninsula. Although once widespread throughout the mountains of the region, it is found today only in fragmented, small populations in Oman, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. In Oman, it can only be found in the Dhofar mountain chain. The Nejd region to the north is part of the leopard historical range but current records of leopards here are limited especially in the areas north of Jabal Al Qara and Jabal Al Qamar.

After several years of field surveys and camera trapping in these areas, we photographed a male and female leopard in wadi Amat north of Jabal Al Qara in December 2013. The same female was



Office for the Conservation of the Environment
Rangers setting up the camera traps in
northern Jabal Qamar, Oman.

recorded a few months later with a cub in the same area which suggested the existence of a breeding population in the Nejd region. These results encouraged the leopard team from the Office for Conservation of the Environment to focus survey efforts in this region, and the team recorded leopard in several locations east of wadi Aydam. The area west of wadi Aydam, especially those wadis that drain from northern Jabal Al Qamar, contain good habitat for leopard especially with the presence of the leopard preferred prey species such as the Nubian ibex and Rock hyrax.

Therefore, in winter 2021 survey efforts were focused on northern Jabal Al Qamar. With over 20 camera traps deployed in clusters along the main wadis, for the first time we confirmed the presence there of Arabian leopard. One record was a few

hundred metres from the fence between the Oman and Yemen border. It is unlikely that the leopard can cross that fence today but certainly the leopards of Dhofar and Hawf in Yemen were connected before the border fence was installed. The Arabian leopards of Dhofar have low levels of genetic diversity and connections with the leopards of Yemen is favourable to maintain and increase the genetic diversity of these critically endangered leopards of Arabia.

2017

Dr Aida Al Jabri, Suaard Al Harthy and Robert Baldwin gave the 2nd Lecture in October 2017 entitled *Oman's Whales, Dolphins, and Turtles*. Since then Aida has redoubled her efforts to further marine conservation in the Sultanate, training

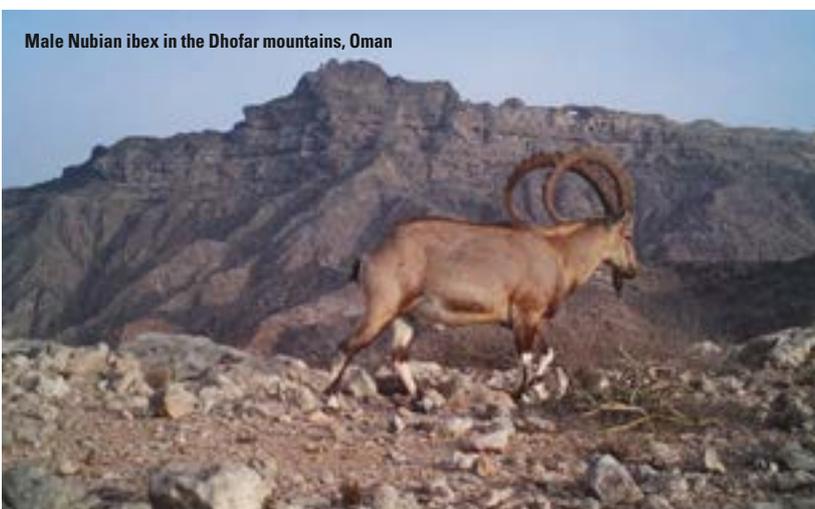
more than 120 field rangers, studying and monitoring stranding of marine mammals and turtles, freed an entangled Humpback whale (Sabor) in Duqm Port, worked on a documentary film to raise awareness, worked on a study to declare a marine mammals protected area in Hasik, and written and published a new bilingual book on the whales and dolphins of Oman. Here is her update.

Surveys and research on marine wildlife in Oman continue to build on decades of dedicated study, with a primary focus on cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and sea turtles. These are good ambassadors for Oman's marine natural heritage as well as being excellent indicators of the health of marine ecosystems generally; cetaceans because they sit on top of the food chain and turtles because they span a wide range of habitats, from the Sultanate's sandy shores all the way to deep oceanic waters.

They also provide an indication of threats to these habitats from human activities such as coastal development, shipping, and fisheries activities. Such industries are essential to the continued economic growth of the country and provide livelihood for many thousands of Omanis and expatriates. Finding ways to ensure they do so in a sustainable manner, with the long-term future of the Sultanate in mind, is a responsible, and ultimately an entirely necessary, endeavour.

To help better understand the threats faced by marine wildlife, study of Arabian Sea humpback whales over the past year has focused on indicators of health and population trend. This included use of drones to photograph whales and assess and measure body condition using a sophisticated body mass index, as well as to detect the prevalence of skin disease and scarring caused by vessel propellers and interactions with fishing gear.

The results of ongoing analysis of acoustic research and satellite tracking studies are also continuing to teach us about the movements and habitat use of whales off Oman, as well as locations where whales and shipping traffic potentially collide. This has allowed identification and mapping of areas where whales may be at particular risk of vessel strike.



Male Nubian ibex in the Dhofar mountains, Oman



Acoustic devices deployed off the coast of Oman have detected both Arabian Sea hump-back whales (here) and Indian ocean blue whales and are both likely represent a unique genetic stock.

The acoustic devices deployed off Oman have picked up the sounds of more than just humpback whales. Indian Ocean blue whales are among others to have been detected and the acoustic recordings have enabled scientists to demonstrate that, like humpback whales, blue whales are also isolated in the region and likely represent a unique genetic stock.

The publication of the Marine Mammal Atlas of Oman in August 2021 has helped to identify key habitats of value and to provide decision makers with much needed information on which to base conservation management planning. The online interactive atlas is accessible on the Environment Society of Oman's website.

Work on turtles has focused on two main rookeries where turtles nest in their thousands: Ras al Hadd and Masirah Island. Plans are in place to satellite track female green turtles to help streamline

conservation efforts. In the meantime, volunteers (turtle 'commandos') have contributed to efforts to address the impacts from cyclonic storms on turtles at Ras al Hadd, as well as to help manage the impacts of artificial lighting on hatchlings. At Masirah island, studies of the effects of lighting on loggerhead hatchlings have led to recommendations for potential solutions to address light pollution.

2018

Dr Haitham Al Rawahi, Taimur Al Said and Dr Mansoor Al Jahdhami gave the 3rd Lecture in October 2018, *Oman's Hidden Conservation Heritage*. Dr, Haitham, a wildlife biologist, is now the leader of the Tahr Conservation Project in the Office for Conservation of the Environment at the Environment Authority. Here is his update.



Aida Al Jabri and volunteers undertaking monitoring work with the 'turtle commandos'.

Since 2018, the Tahr Conservation Team has continued its efforts to discover the unstudied aspects of the tahr's habitat and ecology. An initial assessment of the genetic diversity and structure of the remaining tahr herd was conducted along with an assessment of landscape connectivity and its impact on gene flow using 53 genetic samples collected in south-eastern Hajar.

These landscape connectivity models showed that the Jabal Qahwan and As Saleel natural reserves were quite isolated from the northern reserves in the study area due to the cumulative effects of distance and resistance to movement. This separation was supported by low genetic exchange between the north and south.

Five separate tahr populations were found to be affected by highway obstruction along 11 corridors, including the Abu Daud and Al Satari populations. Therefore, a study was conducted on the presumed large population there to reassess the distribution of tahr, its critical zones, and the effects of habitat fragmentation on this population, as this area was the north-eastern extension of the As Sareen Mountains until it was fragmented by the Muscat-Sur highway.

The total study area of 484Km² is divided into 121 grids and the project into two phases. The first phase covered 256 km² divided into 64 grids and has already been completed. The Arabian tahr was only captured by 16 cameras, and more frequently at lower sampling sites on the central plateau and in association with areas where 30-60 traps were captured at night on the edges of the plateau, as well as areas where less was captured. This indicated a healthy and non-fragmented population, but could be an indicator of a single herd of related individuals, as the tahr is a territorial species. These areas are quite steep and relatively far from the nearest village, while several water sources are scattered in and around them. Therefore, this distribution pattern could be due to the animals' desire to avoid human disturbance and maintain proximity to permanent water resources.

Along with the Arabian tahr, there were three competing species: Arabian gazelle, wild donkeys, and cattle, and two predator species: red fox and Blanford's fox. As expected, there was overlap between the detection of tahrs and other livestock, which shows the interference in the food



Dr Haitham Al Rawahi and Waheed Al Fazari setting a trail camera for the continuing study on Oman's illusive and remarkable Arabian tahr.

web of the species and the adaptability of livestock to different environments. The compatibility between the distribution of Blanford's fox and the higher tahr presence is also probably related to the similar habitat characteristics, the ability to withstand cold winter weather and the wide distribution over high altitudes.

These efforts culminated in the translation of the acquired knowledge and understanding of the tahr's habitat requirements into a new 10-year conservation plan. This is currently being finalised and consists of six main points, most of which address the tahr in the wild either directly (habitat management and breeding programme) or indirectly (resource regulation procedures and awareness and education programmes).

In 2020, seven students were trained in the conservation of Oman's wildlife species and in the best practice of tahr field research techniques. Efforts were

strengthened through a series of lectures for Sultan Qaboos University students and internationally through the Sultan Qaboos Environment Conservation Award Ceremony and the Global Biodiversity Festival 2021 to share knowledge and raise awareness. A workshop on fieldwork principles and tools was conducted to educate wildlife biologists and rangers on the most important aspects and technologies used in fieldwork from a tahr perspective.

2019

Dr Laila Al Harthy, Dr Khalid Al Farsi and Dr Annette Patzelt from the Oman Botanic Garden gave the 4th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture *The Flora of the Sultanate of Oman* in October 2019. Here is their update.

Respect and value for plant diversity conservation at the OBG represent a significant global step forward in plant conservation efforts. As a result, the OBG is an important part of the Sultanate's response to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. Approximately 90% of Oman's native species have already been databased and are represented in the OBG's living collections, herbarium, and seed bank. The herbarium currently houses 4308 voucher specimens from 111 plant families (97% of the total in Oman), while seeds from 751 plant taxa (53% of the national total) and 89 plant families (77% of national total) are currently stored in the OBG seed bank.

Over the last few years, and as a result of hundreds of field expeditions and continuous research and documentation of Oman flora



Dr Laila Al Harthy, Dr Khalid Al Farsi and Oman Botanic Garden colleagues replanting Juniper trees on Jebal Shams.

and vegetation, the garden has become the main focal point for many of the country's plant-related projects and research. The science team has been involved in several national projects. For example, the garden is leading a field team to control one of the most aggressive invasive species in Dhofar (*Parthenium hysterophorus*) in collaboration with the Environmental Authority and Dhofar Municipality. Also, the garden is supporting the development and implementation of the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS), with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, working to protect the country's important plant areas, among many other projects.

The OBG brings together international researchers with common interests in environmental and plant conservation, as well as cross-cultural collaboration. The OBG hopes to support and encourage plant conservation research and training throughout Oman, as well as to promote a partnership approach to plant conservation in the region.

The role of the OBG living collection is to propagate and maintain an excellent living plant collection to support the garden vision in conservation, research, and education. Over the last year, new protocols for propagating and maintaining native plants were developed. The nursery currently has about 420 plant species under cultivation, which accounts for about 30% of the total flora. The team was successful in cultivating 89 species of endemic and threatened plants in the country for conservation purposes. For example, the team recently successfully rescued



Based on the fieldwork of Dr Haitham Al Rawahi and his team, a new year conservation plan for Oman Arabian tahr is due to begin soon.



Dr Laila Al Harthy collecting seeds on top of Jebal Samhan in Dhofar for the Oman Botanic Garden

Polycarphae jazirensis, a critically endangered species on the Oman Plant Red List. The team was also recently involved in a replanting initiative in Jabal Shams to contribute to the recovery of important plant areas with Juniper and Olea trees that had been destroyed by natural fire. Along with ex-situ conservation, the garden continues to promote in-situ conservation and education.

2020

Dr Mohammed Al Kindi and Nabil Al Saqri gave the 5th Lecture, *The Caves and Geology of Oman*, in October 2020 during the COVID lockdown. This was broadcast from the RGS with an online audience of over 2,000 on the night. Dr Mohammed Al Kindi



The Cave of Sufay Sahara by Mohammed Al Kindi.

is based at the Earth Sciences Consultancy Centre in Oman and works with Nabil Al Saqri and the Oman Cave Exploration Team (OCET). Here is their update.

Recent geological surveys and research conducted by the Earth Sciences Consultancy Centre (ESCC) and Oman Cave Exploration Team (OCET) have revealed interesting findings. Among them is the documentation of new source rock potential for petroleum systems reported in unexpected outcrops and geological setting in north Oman, within rock sequences that have been overlooked for petroleum source rock potential. The results of this research were published in the Journal of Petroleum Geology in January 2022 (Al Kindi et al., 2022).

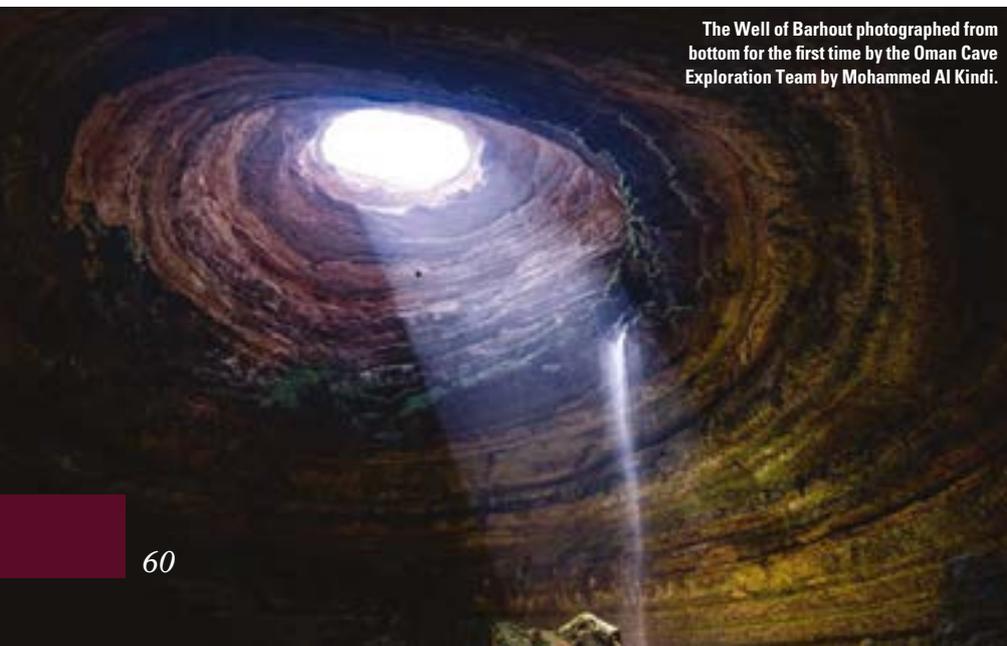
In mid-September 2021, the OCET visited three caves in Al-Mahra Governorate in the Republic of Yemen, close to the border of Yemen and Oman, to document and learn about their most prominent natural features. The visit was arranged with the authorities in Yemen for scientific purposes. Khasfat tha Fugait (also known in the Mahri language) or the alleged well of Barhout, one of the most famous caves in the Arabian Peninsula, was among those documented by the team during this visit. This hole has been associated with many

legends and tales. The team went to the bottom of the well and, for the first time, documented its geological and environmental features. This sinkhole was formed in limestone sequences from the Tertiary (Cenozoic Era), and includes marvellous natural features such as waterfalls, cave deposits and a few animals.

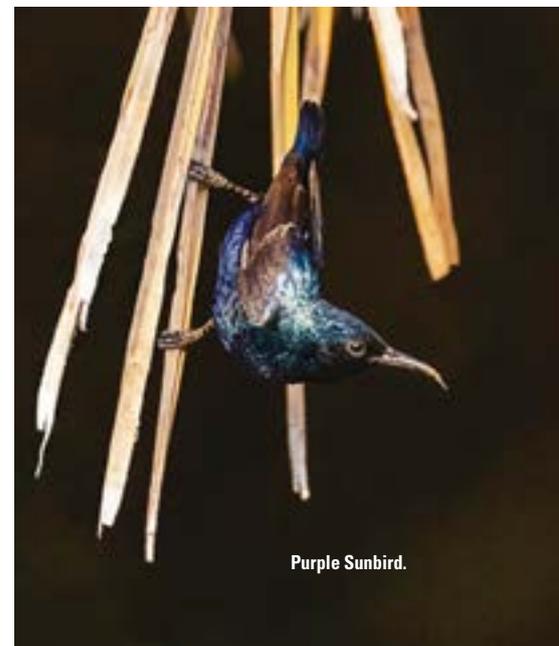
The OCET also documented several new caves in Oman, one of which near a local village in Jebel Akhdar, has been named the Cave of Sufay Sahara, after the village.

2022

The 6th Oman Natural Heritage annual lecture *'The Birds and Natural History of Oman'* will be given by **Mr Nasser Al Kindi**, author of *'Birds in Oman'* and **Mrs Azzah Al Jabri**, Director of the Oman Natural History Museum, live and online as a public lecture in the Ondaatje Lecture Theatre at the Royal Geographical Society on Wednesday 26 October 2022 at 6.45pm. The lecture this year is being supported by the Anglo-Omani Society, the London Speaker Bureau, the Geographical Magazine of the Royal Geographical Society and the Natural History Museum. Discounted tickets for members of the Anglo-Oman Society are available from Eventbrite www.omanbirds2022.eventbrite.com



The Well of Barhout photographed from bottom for the first time by the Oman Cave Exploration Team by Mohammed Al Kindi.



Purple Sunbird.

LECTURE AND EVENTS PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY JANE KINNINMONT

The Society’s monthly lecture programme, which regularly attracted up to 100 members to our Sackville Street premises, took a real knock during the pandemic, but we are glad to report that we have been able to restart lectures. There were several earlier this year, reported elsewhere in the Review, and a full Autumn programme up to Christmas is given below.

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We hope that members will take the opportunity once again to attend on a regular basis: the evenings begin with drinks and light refreshments – a good friendship and networking opportunity –

before experts and enthusiasts in their fields lecture on topics which expand our knowledge and understanding of matters relevant to our purpose. Lectures will normally be on the third Wednesday of each month (note the change from Thursdays) unless other events conflict.

The expertise gained during the pandemic of digital lectures and webinars is not lost. Not only are there occasional web-only events, which give the opportunity to introduce speakers from afar (the Sultanate!) but we are also trying to put the regular lectures on line so that



HERE IS THE AUTUMN PROGRAMME:

Wednesday 28 September	Mark Evans Outward Bound – developing the National Talent of Oman
Wednesday 12 October	Dr Giamila Quattrone Virtual exhibition event on Harat Al Bilad, Manah
Wednesday 16 November	Dr Seth Priestman The Fulayj Fort Project
December date to be confirmed	South Downs National Park Authority technical collaboration with the Omani Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning

those unable to be present in person can access them.

Meanwhile, the Society’s staff has taken on a more proactive role in organising the monthly events, particularly those with a cultural or artistic focus. Scheduling has become shorter term as speakers’ schedules are seldom now fixed 12 months in advance, and these long lead times are rare outside the academic world. We know that members would still like a 12-month forecast but practices have changed and the popular card of our events for the next year which was distributed with the Review is not currently appropriate. ■

THE LET'S READ PROGRAMME

PROMOTING THE LOVE OF READING TO CHILDREN



Jane, a primary school teacher from Blackheath, founded her own nursery school in Muscat in 1982 before setting up the nursery at the British School in 1987.

In the 1990s she ran her own holistic centre for courses, classes and therapies. She was involved in setting up the Samaa Health Spa, the first women's only health spa.

In 1999 she started the Elixir Holistic Centre for courses, classes and therapies. In 2003, Jane trained to become a yoga teacher and in 2005 she became a professional therapeutic counsellor.

Jane has written several books including *Women on the Edge*, *Dana and the Dolphin*, *Scent of a Rose*, *Memoirs of an Omani Gentleman from Zanzibar*, *Love in the Time of Zanzibar*, *Sariya and the Turtles* and *Raifi's Amazing Dinosaur Adventure*.

Jane Bickmore-Jaffer, the London school teacher who has lived in Oman since 1990, gave an on-line talk to the Society on her programme to promote children's literacy. In 2018, Jane was awarded the MBE by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for services to education in the Sultanate.

A strong advocate of children's literacy, she set up the Let's Read Programme in January 2007, under the auspices of Dar Al Atta'a, the charity established five years



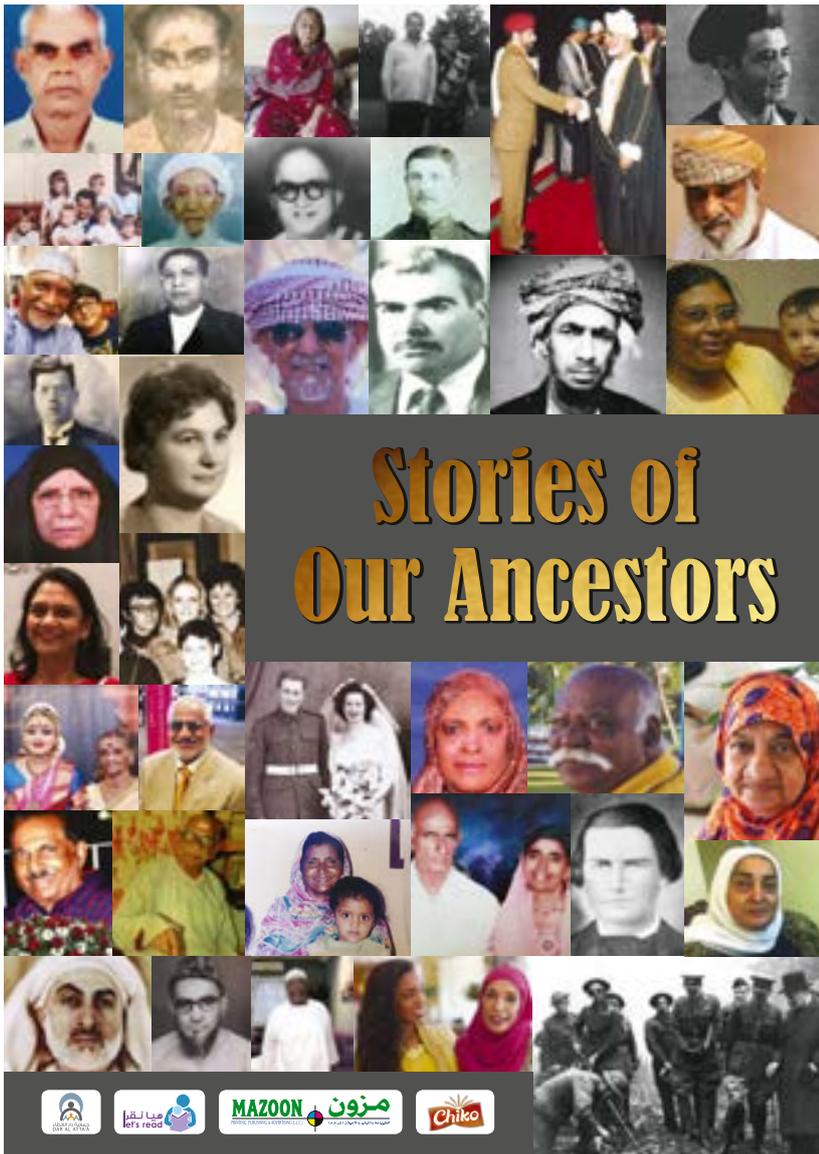
earlier with the objective of 'Improving the lives of the underprivileged in the Sultanate, and encouraging giving through positive and constructive partnership with donors and those in need'.

The aim of the Let's Read programme is to promote the love of reading to children in Oman. Let's Read supports reading initiatives by making school visits to tell stories and talk about the importance of reading and writing. Let's Read has created playrooms and libraries in hospitals, schools and other institutions.

With sponsorship from the Women's Guild in Oman, Let's Read set up Maktabati, Oman's first mobile library, in



The Annual Children's Writing Competition entries have been received from many hundreds of students. Winners of the competition have seen their work published in newspapers and magazines. Collections of winning stories have been published in the Stories of Our Ancestors.



December 2013. Maktabati visits schools across the Omani country, giving children access to good books and the opportunity to develop a love of reading.

Maktabati has visited schools in 22 different regions including Muscat, the Batinah coast, Dhakhaliya, Al Dhahirah and Salalah. In 2015, with BP Oman sponsorship, the Maktabati team, led by Hatim Al Mamari, librarian, and Hatim al Saidi, the driver, distributed more than 20,000 books to children.

Let's Read handles the Maktabati schedule, raises funds and works to find company sponsorship. In March 2017, OPAL (Oman Society for Petroleum Services) generously donated a custom made mobile library bus to the Let's Read Programme. This second bus gave the Maktabati Programme more opportunities to reach out to children across the country. Firas Al Farsi joined the team as librarian.

Then, in 2014, Jane and her team set up Oman's first charity book shop, which now spans the third floor of Oman Avenues Mall. The Let's Read Book Shop, in the Al Qurum Complex, was originally staffed by local volunteers. The books were all donated and sold at between one and two rials. This fitted in with Let's Read's aim to make good books available at reasonable prices. The money raised from selling books in the book shop helps provide new Arabic children's books for Maktabati.



*The Annual Children's Writing Competition.
This year sees the 16th year of the annual
Children's Writing Competition.*

Let's Read now has a team of 40 volunteers and high school students who help with the following annual competitions, monthly events and daily activities:

The Annual Children's Writing Competition. This year sees the 16th year of the annual Children's Writing Competition. Entries have been received from many hundreds of students across the country. Winners of the competition have seen their work published in newspapers and magazines. Collections of winning stories have been published in five books:

Tales with a Twist, Stories from Oman, My Hometown, Stories of Our Ancestors and My Favourite Place in Oman.

The Let's Read Book Shop. The book shop has hosted hundreds of events and activities ranging from: Writing Workshops, Author Visits, Lectures on Education, Children's Rhyme Time, Puppet Shows, Craft Workshops and Demonstrations, Parent Support Groups, Story-telling Workshops and Toy Sales. This is in addition to school visits and events held in certain areas, for example, the region that was badly hit by Cyclone Shaheen.

Fundraising activities: School Readathons, Quiz Nights, Lentil Lunches, Jazz Night, Bollywood Night, Incognito Oman (art exhibition) and auctions.

In October 2018, the Let's Read Book Shop expanded its programme by moving to much larger premises. With the support of Lulu Group International, the Let's Read Charity Book Shop now operates a children's library and a charity bookshop for teenagers and adults at the Sky Lounge in Oman Avenues Mall in Muscat.

Events planned for 2022 included: Muscat Literature Festival; the distribution of 1,500 bags, complete with stationery items, to children in the outlying areas via the Maktabati Mobile Library; Arabic Conversation Classes for Adults and Children; reading passports to motivate children to read. ■

WATER FOR PEACE

There was a real sense of things starting to return to normal when the first lecture evening post-pandemic was held at Sackville Street on 11 November 2021 – appropriately on Armistice Day with talk of peace. The lecturer was Ciarán Ó Cuinn, CEO and Head of Mission at the Middle East Desalination Centre (MEDRC), Muscat, established in 1996 as part of the Madrid Peace process after the Kuwaiti war.

Mr Ó Cuinn was introduced to members by Jeremy Jones, who detailed some of Ciarán's appropriate and interesting background. As a very young advisor to the Irish Government, he was congratulated on his part in introducing an all-Ireland energy policy which was important in the Irish peace process.

In 2013 he joined the NGO MEDRC. Oman hosts the water part of the Madrid peace process; appropriate because of Oman's effective quiet diplomacy, work in establishing mutual trust, its long-term views, plus total understanding of the importance of water on a daily and continuing basis of life.

Ciarán described the work of the MEDRC, which is a Multilateral International Organisation mandated to be



a model organisation for states seeking to use transboundary environmental issues in the service of a peace process. In particular, it finds solutions to fresh water scarcity, conducting research, training, development cooperation and transboundary water projects from its Muscat Headquarters, where it operates a state of the art research facility including desalination plants, laboratories, lecture halls and administrative offices.

Without water, there is no life, and international cooperation is essential in border areas where there is scarcity. Those areas often coincide with political tensions, especially in the Middle East, hence the importance of the organisation, and the interest in the talk. ■



CHRISTIANITY IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY THE REV DR ANDREW THOMPSON
AFTER HIS TALK TO SOCIETY MEMBERS

For the last 20 years,
I have resided and
worked in several
Islamic countries as a
Christian priest in the
Anglican church.

It has been fascinating to experience the diverse way in which different Islamic authorities relate to the Christian communities in their midst. This diversity has led me to ask the question: "What factors determine the response of an Islamic government towards the local Christian community?" My research led to the publication of the book *Christianity in Oman: Ibadism, Religious Freedom, and the Church*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

When I ask Gulf Arabs the question, "What is the most important factor influencing Christian-Muslim relations in their country?", the answer I usually get is that it is economic concern which drives the quality of interfaith relations. It is believed that a secure and diverse economy results in an openness to trade with the religious other. Yet when one surveys the Arabian Gulf States, we see significantly varying levels of religious freedom in Gulf states with similar economies. Rather, this disparity in religious freedom across the Gulf appears to me to reflect the interpretation and application of the particular school of Islam to which each state subscribes.

For example, if we compare Saudi Arabia with Bahrain we see Islamic theological understandings and practices range from a complete ban on Christian worship in Saudi Arabia through to Christianity and other religions enjoying freedom to openly worship in Bahrain, despite both countries having similar trading interests and economies.

When I raise the possibility with Gulf Arabs that their school of Islam might play a significant factor in their approach to Christians, I am immediately confronted with an abrupt dismissal of this suggestion. So, does Islamic theology determine the treatment of Christians in a Muslim country?

The research suggests that, along with other theology that other factors in Oman were as, if not more, important than Ibadi beliefs.

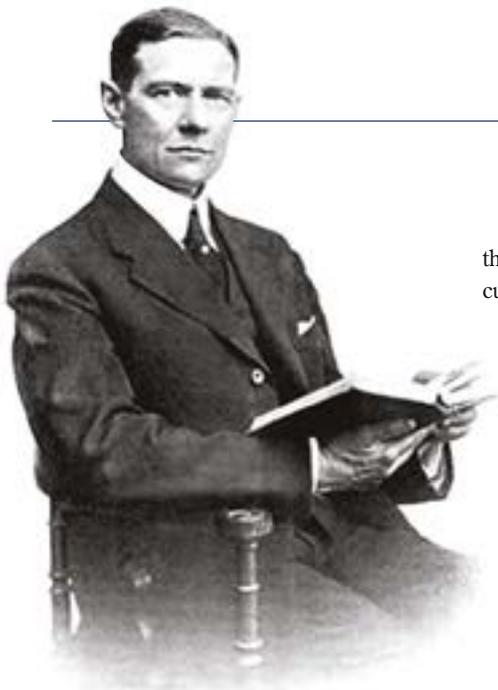
These include historical encounters with



Christianity, most significantly with the American missionaries of the Arabian Mission who set up the first hospitals in Oman. It also includes relations between the Sultan of Oman and the church. In particular, we reflected on the experience of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos when he was a young man in England enjoying the hospitality of a vicar in the Church of England, and the life-saving treatment of his mother by the American Mission hospital in Muttrah. These events led to the royal decree in 1971 to establish a Protestant church in Oman, which was a unique ecumenical partnership between the Anglican Church and the Reformed Church in America.

The early missionaries were a remarkable group of men and women who introduced Oman to large-scale medical care and technological innovations ranging from concrete buildings, clinical equipment, telegraph communications, and a six wheeled automobile. Their ministry possibly helped overcome negative perceptions of Christianity caused by the brutal presence of the early Portuguese settlements.

The missionaries included Dr Sharon Thom, who established the first hospital along with his wife and whose legacy was continued by Dr Wells Thom. Other notables include Dr Paul Harrison and Dr Sarah Hosman all who were led to the



Samuel Zwemer

Arabian Peninsula by the inspiration of Samuel Zwemer the founder of the Arabian Mission. They were joined by an equally dedicated group of men and women from India, of whom the best known is Dr C. Thomas who was awarded Omani citizenship for his pioneering medical work with the Arabian Mission hospital.

We noted how the location of churches are all close to coastal ports with a long-established history of maritime trading. Trade succeeded when a level of pragmatic relations between Muslims and Christians enabled prosperity. This exposure was limited only to the coastal ports and explains the absence of Christian presence in the interior of Oman.

The discovery of oil led to an expansion of the expatriate community, and the growth of the expatriate church mirrored the immigration of Christian workers especially from India, the Philippines and the West.

My lecture examined the assumption that Ibadi theology is the distinctive influence which shapes the religious freedom of the church in Oman. The evidence is mixed. On the one hand, the writings of the influential Ibadi theologian Nur Al Din reveal both hostile attitudes to Christians and support interfaith trade and even permission for Ibadi Muslims to pray in a church building. This suggests that Ibadi Islam has a history and theology that is predisposed to a tolerant Islamic society. The presence of a thriving Christian community and a well-established Hindu temple today all point to an inclusive Islamic society.

Interviews with Omani Islamic leaders stress their conviction that Ibadi Islam is

the main source of all that informs their culture and practice. As one interviewee said, 'to be Omani is to be Muslim... an Ibadi Muslim'. The theme that emerges from interviews is that the religious climate in Oman is deeply influenced by Ibadi theology.

There is no dispute that the church is present in Oman. It is large and flourishing and, on the surface, religious freedom is a lived reality. Dig deeper and we see that religious freedom is prescribed by geographical limitations, namely that churches were only allowed on the coast. There is also a high level of bureaucratic control determining which pastors and priests are allowed residence and ministry visas, as well as other restrictions pertaining to marriage, and conversion.

However, this limitation of religious freedom is not unique to Oman. We find similar environments across other countries in the Middle East and in other Muslim majority countries like Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. They vary in the matter of which government body is responsible for implementing these restrictions, but sharia law is consistent across the schools of Islam when it comes to the religious freedoms granted to Christian and Jewish communities.

The distinctiveness of Ibadi theology lies in their understanding of the nature of the Qur'an, the role of the imam and a particular history which has created an Islamic culture which adapts to different political contexts. For example, the imamate can stay hidden and emerge only when the political climate allows it. This theology has emerged in the context of tribal conflict, intra-Islamic rivalries, invasion by foreign powers, and the waxing and waning of the Sultan and his empire.

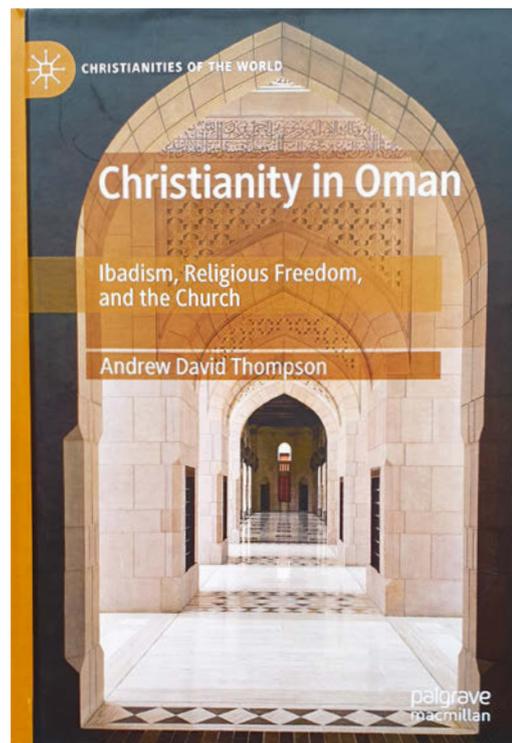
In practice, the variation of the experiences of the church reflects not so much an Islamic theological commitment to religious freedom, but simply freedom to worship which the state

grants the Christian community and other religious groups.

This level of freedom to worship seems to reflect the level of trust generated by the Christian community. This trust is generated through Christians who served the nation by initially providing medical care and education, and then by introducing emerging technologies to the benefit of the local people. In Oman, the level of trust has also been generated through a long history of trade – an industry which is largely based in the coastal regions, leaving the interior district mostly insulated from the presence of foreigners.

Today the legacy of the Arabian Mission continues in the work of the Al Amana Centre which is still based in what was their former clinic. The Al Amana Centre has been a valuable resource in facilitating ongoing positive encounters between Muslims and Christians.

In conclusion, this study finds that the level of religious freedom experienced by the church in Oman is not solely influenced by a distinct outworking of Ibadi theology mediated through government mechanisms. Rather, the freedom to worship experienced by the Christian community and others has equally been shaped by historical maritime trading, the influence and personalities of the ruler(s) and tribal interests. ■



DOCTOR AT THE EDGE OF EMPIRE

ARTICLE BY CHARLIE SAMMUT

Outside the British Ambassador’s office in Muscat hang three rows of black-framed pictures, skirting round the alcove of the wall. They are, with one exception, middle-aged white men, many bearing splendid moustaches and imperial medals. The exception hangs at the very start, to the right of the Ambassador’s door. It is a picture of a portly Indian gentleman, with a yellowing information card carrying the words ‘Lt-Col Surgeon Atmaram Jayakar’.

Each time I stood outside that door, the incongruity of the image nibbled away at me, until I began to research away at the questions his picture posed, opening webpages and books, haunting the British library and the Qatar Digital Library online. What I found made every hour worth it.

Atmaram Jayakar is, quite simply, one of the most incredible historical characters in Oman’s colourful and kaleidoscopic past; a diplomat who mixed with Sultans and Shaykhs, a surgeon who treated soldiers, merchants and lepers, a polylinguist ‘without compare’, a naturalist feted in the British museum, a father, husband, Hindu,

Christian, Maratha; a man who bore Indian and English surnames, and whose life in Oman was that of the Empire; and most, of all, a story of an incredible man that deserves to be told.

Jayakar’s story started in 1845 in Bombay amongst the Pathare Prabhu, a Hindu sect originally from Maratha and, at that point, deeply entwined with the British administration. Their imperial encounter was one of mixing as much as separation, their men working as imperial clerks and their women wearing dresses influenced by English fashion. Schooled at John Wilson’s Free General Assembly’s Institution in



Charlie Sammut is an Arabic-speaking Civil Servant who served in Muscat from 2017-2020 as the Political Counsellor, establishing and leading the UK-Oman Digital Hub during his time in Muscat. The Society was glad to make a small grant enabling some of his extensive research.



The Muscat where Jayakar arrived.



Sultan Turki.



Hermitragus Jayakari and Hippocampus Jayakari.



Ambroli – an institution guided by a desire to convert as many of its pupils as possible to Christianity – Jayakar excelled, graduating to Grant Medical College in Bombay (after passing the English reading test on *Paradise Lost*...) and excelling again, gaining multiple scholarships and the Gold Medal on graduation.

A lucrative path to private service amongst the British Indian middle class looked open. But, perhaps because of his upbringing, Jayakar's life took a fascinating turn after this, as he forewent the comfortable life and instead joined the imperial Indian Medical Service. Travelling to Netley in England for eight months of study ahead of competitive entry exams, Jayakar found himself boarding with a Mrs Grandin. Treated like a son by her, on his return to Bombay, he not only sought to take her name, but also converted to Christianity, making good the legacy of his schooling.

Passing eighth out of 12 in his class and becoming only the second Indian to join the I.M.S, Jayakar started his first post in Allahabad and quickly secured promotion and a new posting, ordered in 1872 to Muscat as Civil Surgeon 'until further orders'; orders which eventually came 27 years later.

The I.M.S Jayakar joined was dominated by the later sons of Scottish and English-Irish families, one of the less fashionable services, instinctively anti-innovation and free-thinking and, like all imperial

institutions, racist. That his orders came 27 years later does not seem a great surprise after reading his annual reports. The I.M.S, it seems, posted Jayakar there and then almost forgot about him. To some, a difficult posting at the edge of empire – one which British staff routinely tried to avoid – would have been enough to disappear quietly from history. But the edge of empire also provided unparalleled opportunities.

Far away from the imperial metropolises, the distance provided autonomy, freedom and time. Jayakar took advantage of all three, in the process transforming himself into the 'polymath of Muscat'. As a Surgeon he was seemingly superlative and almost upon arrival, he became private surgeon to the Sultan Turki, a man in regular ill-health and one convinced his Wazeer, Sultan Sa'id, had bewitched him. Jayakar's care left an impression; Turki lavished gifts on him, including an emerald ring and gold watch.

But his greatest gift, at Jayakar's urging, was an old house that Jayakar could turn into the Muscat Charitable Hospital, backed by funds from Indian merchants and Arab tribes. Of all his successes in Muscat, this was perhaps his greatest. Despite the poor equipment, Jayakar managed to treat nearly 1800 people a month, including the lepers who lived in holes outside the city gates – and at a time when the population of Muscat and Muttrah was thought to be only around 40,000!

But his medical treatment was just the foundation of his work. Jayakar stood in as Political Agent for nearly five years across his 27 years in Muscat, and regularly used his medical access for political work. With an unparalleled knowledge of Arabic, English and Hindustani (the lingua franca of the 17 languages spoken in Muscat's port) and incredible knowledge of Oman's tribes and power structures, Jayakar maintained a network of relationships and power across Omani society, from the Sultan, via his Indian merchants and landowners to the key Shaykhs, and the Lawati merchant communities that lived around him in Muttrah.

James Onley, the historian specialising in Gulf history, heritage, culture, society, and politics, has written extensively about how the British Empire relied on men like Jayakar to establish and implement a form of 'informal empire', their local knowledge

and contacts enabling direct influence over rulers and division of sovereignty between the local ruler and the British crown. The records Jayakar left behind showed that he achieved this more effectively than anyone else across the Empire, using medical care, imperial influence, local knowledge and language skills to provide the basis for a British-Omani relationship that beats strongly now, a position illustrated best in his care of Turki in his final days, as he nursed him to his death, and supported the transition of power to his son Feysal.

Even these roles were not enough for Jayakar. In his spare time, he was an avid naturalist, linguist and, well, collector; one good enough to be 'forever immortalised in the Grand Temple of Science' according to Kirtikar – also a doctor in the I.M.S. and a noted and published author and botanist – Jayakar sat at the heart of a web of imperial institutional and academic networks, generating an unprecedented amount of knowledge on Oman, from a dictionary of Omani Arabic and the Kumzari dialect, via the discovery of seahorses and goats that ended up named after him, to the production of geographic and tribal knowledge that is still recorded.

The knowledge he produced on Oman was, at the time, pretty much all there was about Oman, and his collections in the British Museum were integral to the common understanding of Oman at the point, and the projection of the imperial imaginary into Oman; in the end, he did not just collect items and knowledge, but ended up collecting Oman into the Empire too.

Lt Col Atmaram Sadashiva Grandin Jayakar should not be remembered, as he often is, as a footnote in the periphery of imperial histories, but as one of those few people who explain how the Empire came to be, and how it truly operated. A man who truly loved Oman. A man who is not just a single photo outside an Ambassador's door, but will always be a Surgeon, Naturalist, Linguist, Historian, Diplomat, Husband, Father, Son, and an integral, intimate part of British, Omani and Indian history. Jayakar was a fascinating, brilliant man, an imperial enigma who gave his love to an Empire and a country that were foreign to him, but in which he felt happiest and where, as he told friends, he wished 'to end his days'. ■

PUTTING PARA SAILING ON THE MAP THROUGH SAILFREE

ARTICLE BY DR KHAMIS AL JABRI

The SailFree team has changed perspectives, inspired young people and shown that people with disabilities can excel on the water.

Oman has a long and storied seafaring history as explorers and merchants, but when Oman Sail – a non-profit organisation that has made sailing accessible to the Omani public – launched in 2009 with the blessing of the late HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said the goal was very different. Charged with rekindling this maritime eminence and to provide opportunities for Oman’s youth to learn from the sport, Oman Sail started a programme to develop competitive sailors from youth to elite level, male and female teams, across several disciplines.

They did it with great success. Omani teams won the Extreme Sailing Series five times in seven years from 2009 to 2015, Mohsin Al Busaidi became the first Arab to sail non-stop around the world in 2009, accomplishing the 24,000 nautical mile feat in just 76 days, and Oman Sail teams achieved two world records. First, in 2015, breaking the 22-year-old Round Ireland record by completing the 700-mile course

in 40 hours, 51 minutes and 57 seconds, almost four hours faster than the previous record, and then beating that time in the 2016 Volvo Round Ireland Race with a new time of 38 hours 37 minutes and seven seconds.

The accolades continue to flow and most recently Oman Sail was named gold winner of “Best Organiser of the Year Award” and silver winner of “Best Event of The Year” at the prestigious Middle East Sports Industry Awards 2022 for delivering nine major sailing events and setting another new Guinness World Record™ – this time for having the Most Nationalities Collecting Litter in a single location: 73 removed over 344kg of litter from Mussanah public beach during the Youth World Sailing Championships in 2021.

However, one of Oman Sail’s greatest accomplishments has not won any awards, trophies or gained too many headlines. It has however changed the lives of hundreds of Omanis and will continue to have a





positive impact on many, many more in the years to come. It is the 2019 launch of the region's first para sailing programme, known as SailFree.

Planning for this began in 2011 when Oman Sail looked into the possibility of starting a para sailing programme. In just three years, the SailFree programme launched jointly by Oman Sail, BP Oman and the Oman Paralympic Committee, has taken huge steps towards making sailing fully inclusive and accessible for all. It has offered people with disabilities from communities across Oman opportunities to try a sport previously unavailable to them.

Around 200 men and women aged from 16 to 30 have already joined the programme. Oman Sail has invested in specialist coaching to handle the RS Venture Connect boats, which can be easily adapted to suit a variety of abilities, and hosted a Paralympic Development Program (PDP) Clinic organised by World Sailing to ensure coaches and classifiers can support current and future para sailors.

Eleven coaches from Oman Sail's sailing schools also completed a specialist workshop in collaboration with the Al Amal Occupational Therapy & Rehab Centre at the Armed Forces Hospital to help train persons with disabilities to reach their full potential on the water.

The SailFree squad has made swift progress and Oman Sail is certainly embracing the opportunity. In 2021, Mussanah Race Week, Oman Sail's youth sailing showcase, was the first to feature para sailing with eight sailors from Oman Sail's SailFree programme taking part.

The sailors have also gained vital experience overseas, travelling to Italy in 2021 to take part in the Hansa World Championships in Palermo, where the team represented Oman alongside 180 athletes from 25 countries, and competing at the Belgian Sailability Cup on Lake Spaarbekken, Nieuwpoort, in May 2022.

The squad competed in the 2022 Hansa UK National Championships held in June at the Carsington Sailing Club in Derbyshire. Before that it took part in training camps in France and Belgium, as part of the Belgian Sailability Cup, and in Lac Lemman, Geneva, France, where the opportunity to learn from experienced para sailors in a new environment proved valuable.

Training and competing in Europe has given SailFree the experience needed to continue improving while also raising awareness of disabled sport within Oman and across the region. Opportunities to learn from experienced para sailors and coaches in the UK, and exposure to other programmes across Europe such as Sailability, will go a long way to shape the careers of Oman's para sailing initiative.

Sailability has helped hundreds of para sailors gain the knowledge and confidence to take part in boating, feel welcome and share in a passion for getting on the water. There are over 90 sailing clubs in England, Scotland and Wales offering the Royal Yachting Association's Sailability programme.

Members of the SailFree team, the programme director, Khamis al Anbouri (bowman on Oman Sail's Extreme 40, The

Wave, Muscat, winner of the 2010 Extreme Sailing Series) and representatives from BP Oman took part in a Q&A event at the Society's premises in Sackville Street in June to speak about opportunities for people with disabilities in sailing and the RYA Sailability Programme, as well as sharing their own success story.

Once the squad returns to Oman, their focus will shift to home waters. Oman has been chosen as host of the 2022 RS Venture Connect World Championships in November, the first time an exclusively para sailing championship has been held in the country. During the event, a second PDP clinic will be held by World Sailing to follow up on the training and certifications which began in April.

Four therapists from Al Amal Centre started their journey towards becoming International Classifiers and in November there will be a full International Classification Seminar where all four will undergo a final assessment. There are currently only 11 International Classifiers worldwide, so adding four new young classified as a result of the first ever PDP to be held in Oman will be a huge achievement for the country and another step forward for para sailing globally.

World Sailing's Paralympic Development Programme helped the therapists from Al Amal to align their existing classification criteria for people with disabilities with the International Paralympic Committee's classification for international sporting events.

Oman Sail's ultimate goal for SailFree is the same as their vision for every elite

PUTTING PARA SAILING ON THE MAP

sailing programme run in the country: to win a medal for Oman at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Of course, sailing is already an event at the Olympic Games and has been since the first Olympiad in Athens in 1896. The journey for para sailing has not been quite so straightforward.

In an interesting parallel, the event was included at Atlanta 1996 as a demonstration sport, before gaining full status for Sydney 2000 and then featuring at Paralympic Games until Tokyo 2020 when the event was not included in the programme. Sailing was dropped, along with football seven-a-side, for the Japan Games because the International Paralympic Committee claimed it could not fulfil their minimum criteria for worldwide reach. Football was represented by the five-a-side version but sailing was removed entirely.

Sailing will not be in the calendar for Paris 2024, either, but World Sailing has launched a campaign to change this for LA2028 – the first to be held in the United States since 1996. Another coincidence in para sailing's Olympic history, and what better place for the event to make its return.

World Sailing's 'BacktheBid' #SailtoLA' campaign, launched in October 2021, has captured the imagination of athletes from all sailing disciplines around the world showing support on social media, with public messages at international championships and even on the liveries of

their boats.

A decision on whether sailing returns to the Paralympics is set to be made by January 2023 and, while a sport has never successfully been reinstated, there is always the chance for one to be the first and sailing has addressed the issues over worldwide reach, inclusion, accessibility and development and increased the number of Para Sailing events. The sport must prove it can satisfy the five guiding principles of the Paralympic Games: Excellence, diversity, universality, integrity and sustainability.

Programmes like SailFree and the RYA's Sailability are proof of all the impact sailing can have on people with disabilities. There are currently over 750 para sailors registered with World Sailing, 15% of whom are under the age of 30 and 20% of whom are female.

Oman Sail and SailFree has given its support to the campaign and the current squad of athletes will be doing all they can to prepare for upcoming regattas in the hope that they, or those who come after them, have the opportunity to compete on the grandest stage. Whatever the outcome, the first team to compete under the Omani flag has already made its mark on the sport and those who have the opportunity to compete in the future will always appreciate its efforts in making sailing and a career on the water possible for so many more people across Oman. ■

Dr Khamis Al Jabri was appointed Chief Executive Officer of Oman Sail in April 2020 after a career in the Royal Navy of Oman where he attained the rank of Commodore and served most recently as Director of Operations and Plans. His naval career began in 1990 at the Britannia Royal Naval College Officers' Training Academy in Dartmouth, England, graduating with a first-class diploma in Naval Science and Operational Studies. He returned to Oman upon graduation and enrolled in Warfare School at the Royal Navy of Oman, continuing his lifelong love of learning.

Dr Al Jabri also graduated from the UK's Higher Command and Staff course (2005), the Art and Strategic Management and Leadership Course in Spain (2013), the Higher Command Course at the National Defense University, Washington DC, USA (2015), and a Combined Force Maritime Component Commander Course in Bahrain (2016).

He holds an MA in Defence Studies from King's College, University of London (2005), an MA in Strategic Security Studies and a Diploma in International Security and Combating Terrorism from NDU Washington DC, and a PhD in Strategic Studies from the University of Exeter, UK (2012).

Dr Khamis Al Jabri brings with him a wealth of experience to the role of Oman Sail CEO. Throughout his career, he has assumed various leadership and management roles, including successfully commanding two warships in the waters of Oman and abroad.

He is a published author with the release of his 2018 book 'The Role of Sea Power in Oman's Security and Economy' which focuses on the commercial aspects of sea power and its military dimensions. He also regularly attends national, regional and international conferences regarding defence and security matters.



CLIMATE DISASTERS: RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION



Glada Lahn presented findings from her recently published study on Cascading Climate Risks and Options for Resilience and Adaptation in the MENA Region at the June Society lecture at Sackville Street. She set out the kinds of compound impacts expected to affect societies in the GCC and beyond.

Focusing on Oman as an example in disaster response and climate strategy, she discussed the opportunities for investment, enterprise and economic diversification to address multiple challenges.

Glada is a Senior Research Fellow in the Energy, Environment and Resources department at Chatham House. Her specialist areas include access to energy in developing countries, sustainable transitions in oil and gas-exporting economies and climate change, reconstruction and environment in the Middle East. Since joining Chatham House in 2004, Glada Lahn has worked on a range of international resource-related projects which intersect with geopolitical, economic and development concerns.

Her research areas have included petroleum sector governance, Asian foreign resource investment, access to energy in developing countries, sustainable transitions in oil and gas-exporting economies, Arctic extractives policies, the pricing and valuation of natural resources,

and transboundary water relations in the Middle East and Asia.

Glada has led influential research on energy policy in the Gulf, energy access amongst displaced people globally in 2015, and how climate change and decarbonisation affect the prospects and choices for developing country's oil and gas producers. She is currently working on CASCADES, a multi-partner EU initiative to assess the transboundary risks of climate impacts and make recommendations for actions on resilience building.

She was senior research fellow at the Gulf Centre for Strategic Studies 2002-2004, and has worked for a number of organisations as a freelance consultant. She has a BA in Arabic and international relations, including a year spent at the University of Damascus between 1999 and 2000, and an MA in Near and Middle Eastern studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

You can watch the lecture on the Society's YouTube channel. ■



VOYAGE OF PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP

ARTICLE BY NEIL COXON



Your editor with Brig Ahmed Ibrahim Ambu Saidi and Captain Said Sulaiman Al Shabibi, Omani defence attachés in London.

Shabab Oman II embarked in April from the Said Bin Sultan Naval Base for its sixth international voyage, *Oman, Land of Peace*, and hosted visits in London and Portsmouth as well as competing in international races and making goodwill visits to other European nations.

Shabab Oman II was awarded the prestigious Friendship Trophy at the closing festival of the Tall Ships Races 2022 in Denmark. The trophy is awarded to the vessel – based on the votes of all captains and ship crew – which contributed most to promoting international friendship and understanding during the Tall Ships Races.

Shabab Oman II visited 30 ports and 18 countries on the European voyage. The highlights included taking part in the first Tall Ships Races since 2018, before the pandemic, in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands, and the Kiel Sailing Festival in Germany.

Shabab Oman II is one of the longest sailing ships of the clipper class, with a length of 85.5 metres. It contains three masts, the highest of which is 51.2 metres long; it carries 16 main square sails, as well as ten triangular sails on the bow and between the three masts. The spinnaker is located aft. There are 34 sails which cover a total area of 2630 square metres and enable the ship to sail at speeds of up to 18 knots.

The ship has a crew of 58, with an additional crew of 35 trainees from the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides who will undergo a training programme.



Shabab II at West India Docks



Crew members, Ghada Khalfan Alsadi and Khadija Abdullah Al Muqbali, in traditional dress to welcome visitors to Shabab II.

Shabab Oman was moored in West India Docks, London, 9-13 June. On Friday 10 June, the AOS executive team, Trustees and VPs were invited to attend. The ship's captain, Commander Issa Suliem Al Jahwary, welcomed all onboard and conducted an informative tour of ship. A delicious lunch was served.

The following weekend were open days for the public before the ship set sail for Germany. This was

exceptionally well attended with 3,215 guests present.

Shabab Oman II was in Portsmouth in August. Captain Said Al Shabibi, the Omani Assistant Military Attaché in London, invited 40 members of the SAF Association to visit the ship there for lunch and a tour on 12 August.

Shabab Oman II friendship and peace voyage was a great success, and the crew's hospitality is a true credit to the Sultanate. ■



GEOLOGY TOUR OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY PROFESSOR MIKE SEARLE



Left to right: Bruce Levell, Hamed Al-Hinai and Mike Searle

Mike Searle, a member of the Society, has been studying the geology of Oman since his PhD in 1977-1980 and has visited the country every year since then. Bruce Levell was Exploration Manager of Petroleum Development (Oman) Ltd in Muscat, and then moved to Oxford as a Visiting Professor. Both continue to work on aspects of structure, metamorphism, sedimentology and tectonics of the Oman Mountains.

The Oman mountains are a geological wonderland, with the Worlds' largest, best exposed, and most extensively studied ophiolite sequence. An ophiolite is defined as a thrust sheet of oceanic crust and upper mantle rocks that have been emplaced onto a continental margin. The desert mountains of Oman are unique showing the most extensive and continuous exposures of rocks and structures that elsewhere are covered in vegetation.

I and my Oxford colleague, Professor Bruce Levell, will in January 2023 lead an Indus Experience Ltd 14-day Geotour of the mountains. A similar trip in December 2019 just before the global pandemic shutdown was very successful covering a

wide range of the geology of the northern Oman. The trip in January will cover different places, travelling in a fleet of comfortable Land Cruisers with expert local drivers, staying in first class hotels throughout, and including plenty of tourist diversions. Local guide Hamed Al-Hinai has previously led tours throughout the country.

The trip will examine the ophiolite section along Wadi Hemli, including spectacular pillow lavas, sheeted dykes, and the Moho, the geophysical boundary between the crust and the mantle. We will examine the incredible folds and structures along Wadi Mayh (the largest sheath fold in the World), and visit the eclogites along the coast at As-Sifah. These rocks record

the deep subduction of the Arabian continental crust beneath the ophiolite during the emplacement process. That day will end with a boat trip back from Sifah to Muscat along the spectacular drowned coastline of Bandar Khuyran and Bandar Jissah and the spiky black ophiolite peaks around Muscat.

The trip will then traverse the Jebel al-Akhdar structure driving along Wadi Hawasina to Rustaq, then along Wadi Bani Kharus and Wadi Bani Auf to the delightful mountain village of Bilad Seit set amongst the green terraced fields with a backdrop of the 1-2 km high cliffs of Jebel Shams. Crossing over to the north side we will stay at Nizwa, and have a chance to roam



around the souq, the famous circular Nizwa fort, and market, before we drive to the Grand Canyon of Wadi Nakhr, surely one of the great wonders of Oman. This wadi cuts over 2000 metres down through the entire shelf carbonate section from the summit ridge of Jebel Shams at an altitude of 3000 metres.

We will drive up to the rim of the Grand Canyon where there are incredible views down into the gorge and across at the exotic mountains like Jebel Misht and Jebel Misfah. We will also visit the Saiq plateau and stay at Anantara Hotel amid the apricot, cherry and pomegranite trees and terraced fields of alfalfa. Some of the best ‘Snowball Earth’ outcrops lie close to the hotel. We will walk around the delightful hill villages of Saiq, and view the 1000 metres of terraced fields descending down to Wadi Mu’aydeen. ■



The trip will end with a drive back along the Semail Gap to Muscat where the final evening will be spent, once again at the Crowne Plaza hotel in Qurum. There are still a few places available on the tour, and anyone interested in joining should visit the website: <https://www.indusexperiences.co.uk/tours/a-geology-field-trip-to-oman/> and contact Yasin Zargar at yasin@indusexperiences.co.uk or telephone +44 020 8901 7320.

FLORA OF OMAN: A JOURNEY COMPLETED?

ARTICLE BY SHAHINA GHAZANFAR

Oman is one of those rare countries where three major phytogeographic regions converge. These floristic regions have greatly influenced the plants found there. Floristic influences from northeast tropical Africa, the African Sahara, and southwest Asia have given a unique diversity to the flora and fauna of the Sultanate.



Shahina Ghazanfar

This is not surprising as, about 50 million years ago, tectonic activities led to the closing of the Tethys Sea, when fragments of Gondwana (present day India, Arabia, southern Europe and Turkey) collided with Eurasia. About 30 million years ago Arabia began to spilt away from Africa, and the Red Sea was formed. Thus, the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula has a greater affinity with northeast Africa (Somalia and Ethiopia) than with northern Arabia.

Global warming started after the last glacial maximum, some 18,000 years ago, and during the Holocene (10,000 years - present) glaciers started to retreat, sea levels rose, the climate warmed, and deserts were formed in some areas. The flooding of the Persian Gulf Basin (forming the Persian Gulf) started about 15,000 years ago due to rising sea levels of the

Holocene glacial retreat. The events that separated the Arabian Peninsula from Africa and western Asia gave Oman and the larger Arabian Peninsula a biological diversity with elements both from Africa and Asia.

The flora of Oman can be roughly categorised into four different flora regions: the northern mountains (western and eastern Hajar, including the Musandam mountains), its wadis and associated plains; the central desert including the eastern escarpments and coasts; the southern mountains (Dhofar), wadis, gorges, and coastal plains; and the western and eastern sand sheets and dune deserts.

Nineteenth Century travellers to Oman repeatedly expressed the diversity of its geomorphology. One of the first plant collectors, Pierre Martin Remi Aucher-Éloy (1792–1838) visited the western Hajar mountains in 1838 on foot and donkey and wrote in his journal:

We climbed the mountain for two hours following an extremely steep path and set up camp near the village of Oukend [Wakkan]. Palm trees had by then disappeared and temperate zone plants appeared. I climbed as high as I could, but I could not reach the summit of the mountain. I kept coming upon precipitous rocks which proved to be insurmountable obstacles. "... I brought back a pretty violet and a primula which will probably turn out



Western Hajar summit plateau with villages and terraced agriculture.

to be a new plant. (Extract from *Relations de Voyage en Orient de 1830 1830 à 1838*, published posthumously in 1843 by C. Jaubert, the then director of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris).

Many plants that Aucher-Éloy collected were new to science and were described for the first time by a Swedish botanist, Pierre Edmond Boissier. Boissier's *Flora Orientalis* (published 1867-1888) remained for a long time the principal source of our knowledge on the floras of the Middle East. Specific epithets *mascatense*, *aucheriana* and *aucheri* of the plants that Aucher-Éloy collected from Oman were given to several species based on their geographical location or honouring their collector.

More recent collectors travelled and collected plants in Oman in four-wheel drive vehicles making it far easier to get to less accessible areas. One of the major collectors was Michael D. Gallagher, who collected both plants, animals and insects during 1973 and 1995 and established the Natural History Museum of Oman. With J. R. Maconochie's collections of about 800 plants made during 1980-1981 as part of a rangeland survey in Oman, Gallagher established the foundations of the National Herbarium (ON) at the Museum.

Several other collectors, among them: Robert P. Witcombe (coll. 1977-1980) collected and compiled a checklist of plants of northern Oman; J. P. Mandaville (coll. 1972, 1975-1979, 1985) made comprehensive collections in the Hajar and Musandam mountains; A. Radcliffe-Smith (coll. 1976, 1977) made major collections in Dhofar; A. G. Miller (coll. 1979-) made important contributions to the flora of southern Oman; K. O. Stanley-Price (coll. 1981-1986) collected in the central desert, Jiddat al Harasis; I. Mcleish (coll. 1984-1995), mainly in Dhofar.

I collected plants (coll. 1987-1999) while teaching at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and established a teaching herbarium in the Faculty of Science, and a Botanic Garden at the University. With the establishment of the national Oman Botanic Garden (under construction) the staff of Oman Botanic Garden have been collecting plants and seeds to showcase the diversity of the flora of Oman and to conserve the endemic and threatened plants.

Aucher-Éloy did not get the best of Oman's foothill and mountain flora in March 1838. He wrote in his journal:

I have not collected more than 250 species over the whole of the Imamate of Muscat. The local people say that very shortly after rains (which occur once or twice a year) the land is covered with flowers – but who could resign themselves to spending a year in a country where you have to suffer such extreme heat, breathe such air that is almost mortal for Europeans. In any case I am convinced that in this country, the most barren in the world, it would be difficult to find more than 500 species.

Aucher-Éloy's estimation was not far wrong for the northern mountains. Oman is home to about 1400 species of plants. The greatest plant diversity lies in the northern and southern mountains each with about 700 and 800 species respectively.

The non-flowering plants (gymnosperms) constitute about 0.2%, ferns 1.5% and flowering plants 98.2% of the total flora. There are about 191 range-restricted species (13.6%) restricted to SE Yemen & S Oman and to the UAE & Oman). 5% of the flora is endemic – being the plants found only in Oman – found in three local centres of endemism: the Northern mountains (Western and Eastern Hajar) with 16 endemic or regionally endemic taxa, the limestone plateau of Central Oman with 12 endemic taxa, and the Dhofar mountains of southern Oman and associated wadis with 63 endemic or regionally endemic taxa and 2 endemic genera (*Oman Plant Red Data Book: Oman Botanic Garden, 2014*).

The northern mountains form a range about 700km long with elevations up to 3000m. They are dissected by both deep and shallow gorges forming wadis which eventually widen out in the foothills and flow into the central plains. The vegetation of the wadis is generally richer, and that is where most local habitation and small sustainable farms are present. Juniper (*Juniperus seravshanica*), wild olive (*Olea europaea subsp. cuspidata*) and büt (*Sideroxylon mascatense*) form the dominant woody vegetation at higher elevations of the northern mountains. The flora of the northern mountains and



Western Hajar with juniper and olive trees and associated shrubs.

foothills has close links with the floras of southwest Iran and Baluchistan (southwest Pakistan). This is evident from the distribution plant communities with juniper and associated plants that are found on both sides of the Persian Gulf.

The Eastern Hajar mountains are unique in the presence of *Ceratonia oreothauma* which shows a very disjunct distribution in being present in Yemen and Somalia as well, *Ceratonia oreothauma* subsp. *oreothauma* in Oman and *Ceratonia oreothauma* subsp. *somalensis* in Yemen and Somalia. Disjunctions like these are examples of vegetation relicts present more widely (and perhaps continuously) before the aridity in this region began. Most plants showing disjunct or relictual distribution are present at higher elevations where the climate is more equitable

The foothills and central gravel plains of Oman are vast and arid – best expressed by an early 20th Century traveller, Miles:

Our road lay over a gradually declining sandy plain, sprinkled with dwarfish acacias, brushwood, and desert herbage... The cool breath of the morning was delicious, and as we sped along, the desert air, and the consciousness of being on the edge of the great wilderness, with a boundless expanse of open country unrolling gradually in front of us, caused an exhilaration of spirits which made the ride an extremely pleasant and enjoyable one. (S. B. Miles on his journey to Adam in Oman, 1901).

The foothills and gravel plains are sparsely vegetated with the dominant vegetation being the *Vachellia (Acacia) tortilis*, *Euphorbia larica* and *Maerua crassifolia*

plant communities. The Western Sand Deserts bordering the central plains are a continuation of the large sand desert of Rub' al Khali with the *ghaf (Prosopis cineraria)* as the main tree, providing valuable fodder and shade to the local inhabitants. The Eastern desert of Wahiba also has *ghaf* woodlands and species of tamarisk tolerant of saline and arid environment.

The central limestone plateau, though sparsely vegetated, has 12 endemic taxa. This area receives fogs during January and May which provides moisture that sustains the vegetation. Rain is uncommon but occasionally heavy, forming shallow pools which give life to the desert crayfish (*ship ship*) and plants that had laid dormant over years!

The southern region of Oman, Dhofar, is richly vegetated with about 800 taxa, 63 of which are endemic or regionally endemic. The vegetation can be broadly classified as the *Acacia-Commiphora* deciduous bushland and thicket. The mountains are covered with a deciduous woodland dominated by the endemic *Anogeissus dhofarica*. Several other plants are the same as those found in NE Tropical Africa such as *Adenium obesum*, *Ruttya fruticosa*, *Hybanthus durus*, indicating close links with tropical African vegetation. Dhofar is famous for its frankincense trees (*Boswellia sacra*) producing the whitish oleo-gum resin from slashes made in the tree bark. Trade in frankincense from Dhofar to the Middle East and Europe goes back thousands of years through the renowned 'frankincense route' across the Empty Quarter. Though the value of frankincense has declined, it is still a

valuable commodity, popular as an incense, and used in most households in Oman.

I started teaching at the newly established Sultan Qaboos University in the Faculty of Science in 1987. Whilst teaching plant biology I realised that there were no floras that covered the plants of Oman comprehensively. To fill this gap, I began my research and documentation of the flora of Oman! Collecting good representative plant material throughout the country and describing each taxon with vernacular names, distribution, flowering and fruiting times, habitat, uses (if any) and their conservation status, took me more than 15 years to complete.

My position at the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (from 2001), helped me greatly in filling a lot of gaps in my knowledge of Oman plants. The fourth and final volume of the *Flora of the Sultanate of Oman* was published in 2018 (all four volumes published in the Belgica series by the National Botanic Garden of Belgium, Meise). Thus a descriptive flora of the country was complete (reviewed in the AOS Review 2018, p117).

Floras give us the baseline information of the floral diversity of a region or nation. This information is vital for discoveries of potential medicine & food plants, plants for forestry, agriculture and crop wild relatives, restoration of degraded landscapes, horticulture, conservation of habitats, ecosystems, and ecoregions, assessing climate change, and preserving local plant names in dialects and local languages.

Floras, though completed, are never final – new species and new distribution records are discovered, and with new tools to establish plant relationships and their phylogenies means that changes will always have to be incorporated to any regional or national Flora, and to keep the plant diversity of a region updated. Databases are very useful in this regard – where new information can be added to existing knowledge. With this in mind, I have established a database, www.plantsofthemiddleeast.com with the mission to make available checklists, floras, conservation status, uses and other information on plants of the Middle East for research and education, and to help conserve and restore the ecosystems of this region.

So, the journey continues! ■



Ghaf woodland in Wahiba Sands.

THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

BY STUART LAING, CHAIRMAN OF THE GRANTS COMMITTEE

Overall, as last year, and for the same reasons, we were under-spent on our Grants Budget for this year. Mainly because of travel restrictions due to the pandemic, several projects were cancelled, and others that were postponed are being carried forward into 2022-23.



In 2021-22 our grants budget was £120,000, (reduced from £180,000 the previous year) and we spent £89,281. As last year, two of our favourite regular projects, the Gap Year Students programme, and the al-Manah language programme for British students of Arabic, had to be cancelled in 2021-22, although happily the al-Manah programme is being revived this year.

Looking ahead for the current year (2022-23), the Board has agreed on a budget for grants allocations of £100,000. Mainly this is because the Society is receiving a lower income from property rental, and so has less to spend on grants, although I note that applications for grant-supported projects have still not picked up since pandemic restrictions were lifted. Grants awarded this year contained a mix of real-life projects and those which used on-line methods to deliver content.

A few words about our major projects this year. We were glad to support Walking With The Wounded, who originally planned an ambitious walk across the Omani desert, but for Covid-19 reasons had to settle for something more modest, ending with a walk down the Thames tow-path and a reception in 34 Sackville Street. We were privileged to meet soldiers with remarkable experiences, and glad to support this worthwhile cause.

In my Chairman's report I mentioned the

collaboration between the South Downs National Park Authority and the Omani Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, aimed at developing national park planning and infrastructure in Oman – an excellent example of sharing expertise in a way that we encourage (where possible) in all our grants. Another major grant went to Plexal, an innovation company based in East London who have developed an on-line tool-kit for young Omani entrepreneurs. This reflects a trend in our grants programme, towards projects aimed at supporting Oman's economic development while of course staying within the boundaries set by our charitable objects.

Wide diversity is seen in our smaller grants. We continue to support academic research (current examples include projects on biodiversity in the Hajjar mountains, research into Ancient Flora of Oman and archaeology in the Seeb area). We gave a grant to the Omani Students Association, and paid expenses of a Shura Council visit to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In the context of parliamentary exchanges, a visit from the State Council was planned for June, but has been postponed until the autumn.

We have provided a subsidy towards the cost of publication of the Sultan Armed Forces Association annual Journal, and for pre-publication costs of a book on camels in

Oman. We are paying, from our grants budget, for industrial internships, enabling young Omanis to gain experience from working in British companies. And in November 2021 we were delighted to welcome to 34 Sackville Street HE Talal al-Rahbi, Vice-Chairman of the Implementation and Follow-up Unit for Vision 2040, to lead a well-attended seminar on Oman's economic development.

For 2022-23, we have a few approved projects carried over from 2021-22. We still welcome new applications. In particular, Trustees would like to see projects geared towards development, technology, and the economy, to align ourselves more closely with current policy priorities in Oman.

I thank the two Trustees who have sat with me on the Grants Committee, Martyn Bishop and Jamie Bowden. During the year we have introduced an Excel scorecard which we apply to all new applications, to enable the Committee and the Board to use objective criteria in judging whether to proceed with a grant. Having stepped down from the Board, I shall no longer be chairing the Grants Committee, but I am confident that this area of the Society's activities will continue to flourish, and show the Society in its best light in fulfilling its charitable objects. I wish Jamie very best wishes on taking over the Chairmanship of the committee. ■



OMANI RESEARCHERS' STUDY VISIT TO STORMONT

Four Omani researchers in the field of legislative-parliamentary studies, practices and institutions undertook a study visit to The Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast, at the invitation of its Director of Parliamentary Services, Mr Gareth McGrath.

It was sponsored by the Society and followed participation by the same group at the 2019 Workshop for overseas parliamentarians at Wroxton College organised by the International Parliamentary Union and Hull University (see AOS Review 2019, p 103).

The objectives of the study visit were to understand the basis of the assembly's philosophy and principles to serve the nation, the structure of the secretariat and the working flow among different divisions; and to benchmark best practices for effectiveness and efficiency of the legislative-parliamentary body.

In a busy four-day programme, the researchers held discussions with the divisions of the assembly's secretariat, held meetings, discussion sessions and working

lunches with the Clerk Chief Executive, clerks, researchers and librarians. They also had a guided tour of the historic Northern Ireland Assembly building at Stormont to understand the facilities provided at the assembly.

The programme included briefings on the NI Research and Information Service, the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, Geographic Information System capability and other technology and digital capabilities, media and public engagement, information management and engagement with universities as well as the organisation and functioning of the secretariat and assembly.

It was a tremendous opportunity to experience an overseas legislative-parliamentary body with an openness to

The Society was glad to facilitate the 2019 visit and to continue support of the development of such exchanges between Omani and British persons.

engage and share knowledge and good practices with counterparts worldwide. The group took full use of the opportunity arising from their activities to prepare a major report covering both the relation between legislative-parliamentary bodies and people, and the way a professional Secretariat builds a parliamentary record through engagement and innovation.

The Society was glad to facilitate the 2019 visit and to continue support of the development of such exchanges between Omani and British persons. We acknowledge research dialogue which enhances our understanding of government development including contributions to the AOS Review. ■



THE GROUP OF RESEARCHERS:

Waheb Mubarak – Legal Researcher and Legislative Specialist (Shura Council)

Mubarak Khamis – Specialist in Social Studies (Shura Council)

Rahma Said – Researcher in Socio-Cultural Studies (Sultan Qaboos University)

Jawaher Khamis – Researcher in Political Sciences, & Social Media and Marketing Specialist (35Films, marketing and advertising agency)

INTERESTED IN MEMBERSHIP?

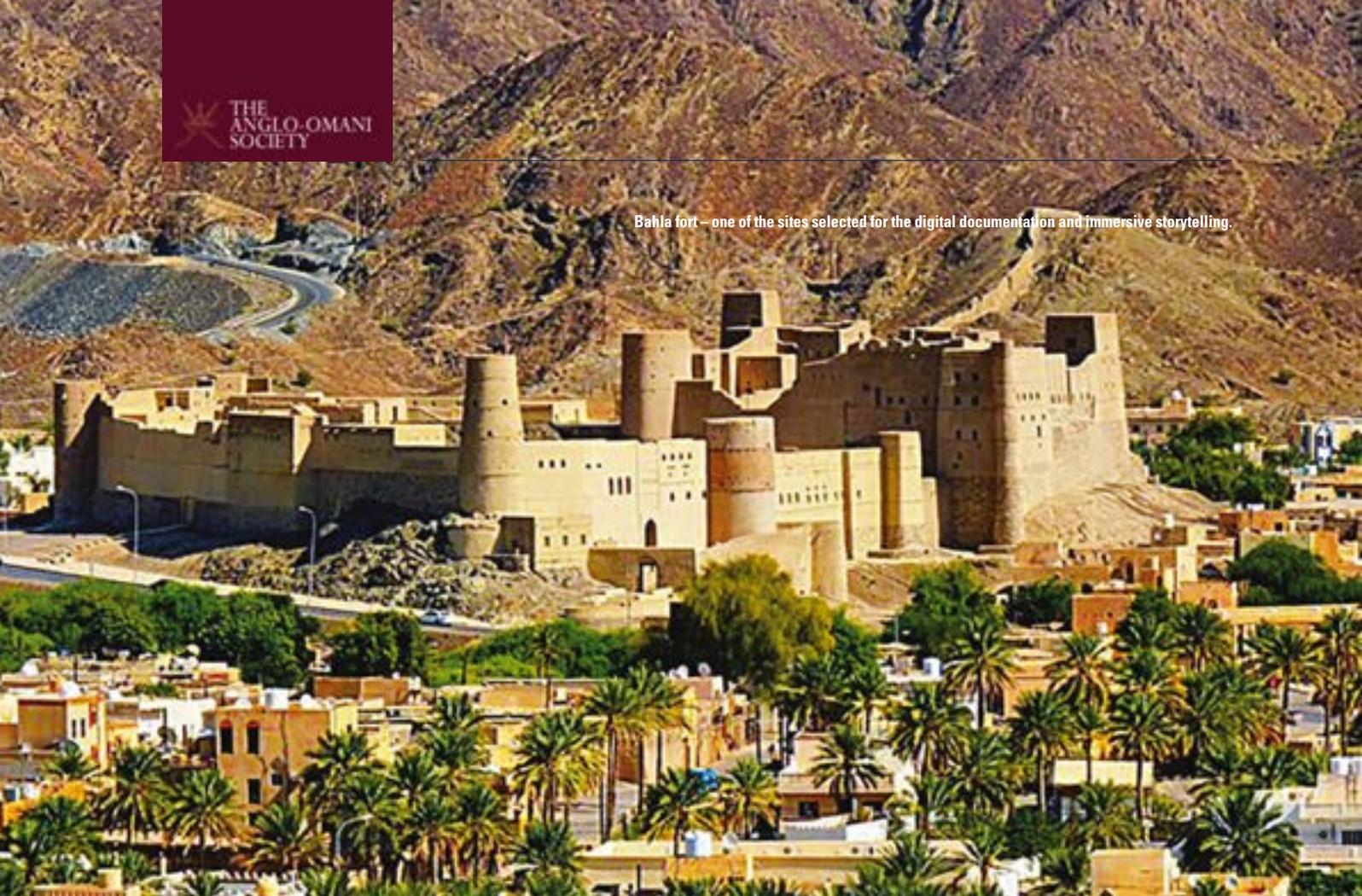
The Anglo-Omani Society* has nearly 1000 members. Do you have a connection with the UK and Oman and wish to support and grow the long-standing friendship between our nations? If you do please join us at the Society. Details of membership and how to apply are on the Society's website:

www.ao-soc.org/membership

You can also receive membership details and application forms by post. Please contact the Director at 34 Sackville Street, LONDON, W1S 3ED.

* The Society is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (number 6708685) and a registered charity (number 1127561). Our members pay a subscription fee and also undertake to contribute £1 to the assets of the Society in the event of it being wound up.

Bahla fort – one of the sites selected for the digital documentation and immersive storytelling.



SHARING OMAN'S HERITAGE USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

ARTICLE BY NICHOLAS MELLOR

Few countries have such a rich historical and natural heritage as Oman, and that is recognised by the vision of Oman 2040.

Nicholas Mellor is the founder of 4DHeritage, which pioneers the use of agile, immersive approaches to document and monitor fragile ecosystems and endangered sites for education, research, advocacy and to safeguard livelihoods. He has a particular interest in how heritage can be shared across generations, within local communities, and internationally using new approaches. He is a Life Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and alumnus of Professor Ulrich's Tangible Things course at Harvard EdX, and holds Masters degrees from Oxford University, Cranfield School of Management and the Open University.



The 'Young Omanis as Digital Curators' project supported by the Anglo-Omani Society (AOS) sought to show how that heritage could be shared more widely building on advances in digital technology and the enthusiasm of young people.

It was inspired by the success of the Oman Natural Heritage Lecture series which since 2015 has showcased different aspects of Oman's rich fauna and flora, giving young Omanis the opportunity to share their insights and stories on the world stage, including through the Royal Geographical Society in London. Topics have ranged from Arabian leopards to Aflaj hydroponics, from the botanical gardens to subterranean caves. AOS events have also shaped this initiative with lectures highlighting aspects such as the regulation of water rights by the stars and historical stories.

Digital media and particularly immersive storytelling can open new ways to share these rich stories around the world. Digital documentation and immersive storytelling also link to Oman 2040 vision priorities: including digital education, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The genesis of this project goes back to an official Omani visit to the UK to explore practical ideas behind digital education, innovation and entrepreneurship. Dr Rawya Saud Al Busaidi, now President of the Council of Sultan Qaboos University and then Oman's Minister of Higher Education, visited Imperial College's 'Advanced Hackspace' with Buthaina Al Jabri from the Omani Embassy. Advanced Hackspace's mission is to help students turn their ideas into reality and to help anyone make anything! It is closely coupled with the programme to encourage student entrepreneurs and business start-ups at the University.



The visit of Dr Rawya Saud Al Busaidi to Imperial College.

The Omani visitors were shown the 4DHeritage initiative documenting endangered heritage, modelling heritage sites in 3D and turning the models into an augmented reality experience that could be used for conservation management, heritage displays and education. It reflected threats to heritage sites around the world from encroachment, erosion, climate change, iconoclasm, or even conflict such as witnessed in Mali, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Part of the solution to this crisis is better documentation and engagement of the local community. More specifically: what digital tools could be made accessible to communities to map, model and monitor endangered ecosystems or sites?

The way this project encouraged innovative thinking and entrepreneurship attracted additional support from AWJ Innovation (STID), under the leadership of Dr. Yousuf Al-Bulushi, of Oxford University.

The way this project encouraged innovative thinking and entrepreneurship attracted additional support from AWJ Innovation (STID), under the leadership of Dr. Yousuf Al-Bulushi, of Oxford University. GUTech were the local academic partner with the support of Dr Heba Aziz, Professor of sustainable tourism and development and Head of Department at GUTech, and Director of the UNESCO Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) in Bahrain.



Dr Heba Aziz

FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE

Different approaches were tested in countries ranging from Mali, Zanzibar, Egypt, Italy and the UK. It became clear that it was important to work with young people. They may live in the shadow of a world heritage site, or next door to a notable but obscure building, but not see a connection with their present lives or future aspirations.

Professionals working in the heritage sector are often mainly concerned with research, conservation and education. Heritage stewardship needs to be framed that makes it relevant to new generations

whose perspective may be different. Heritage encapsulates the stories that can bring people together when they feel part of a shared history they are able to articulate.

The Coronavirus crisis undermined the tourism industry and put many services that relied on travel on hold. It undermined education and community outreach activities. At the same time, it created opportunities for innovation and a greater readiness for people to work in a virtual format. Young people may be best to lead the digital reinvention of heritage. They have the required energy, enthusiasm and often the entrepreneurial thinking; they are attracted to the digital/virtual world, and they can inspire their peers more than teachers or formal educators. Whilst the threats endangering heritage in many parts of the world are acute, the opportunities to document, share, learn about and experience heritage have never been greater.

THE DIGITAL CURATORS PILOT PROJECT

Digital technology is transforming not just documentation, but how we interpret its significance; how we can share it peer to peer; and how it can inspire us. In this project we set out to train young Omanis in the latest approaches to 'immersive documentation' and storytelling.

There were over 100 applications from young people for the course and participants were selected, engaged and supported by Prof Heba Aziz and her team at GUTech and Andrew Hadley MBE, founder of the Centre for International Learning and Leadership.



Andrew Hadley



A practical training session in the classroom at GUTech.

The pilot project involved three components: practical training in 360 image capture to record places in an 'immersive' format; storytelling; and a sharing of case studies of entrepreneurs in the heritage, conservation, and education sectors.

Practical training in the GUTech classroom was complemented by visits to heritage sites and a webinar series. The webinar series gave the participants the opportunity to learn about and ask questions of thought leaders and innovators in digital heritage from around the world. It also gave participants the opportunity to present and even moderate the events, helping to build their soft skills and confidence.

The webinars also created an open forum so that those involved could invite friends and colleagues too, so they could appreciate what was being worked on and ultimately showcase their immersive projects. The webinar series involved 100 participants from over 12 countries, and its

topics range covered conservation, education, economic regeneration and the sustainable development goals to showcasing specific sites.

By putting young people at the centre of this project, heritage became a resource for youth development. What excites young people to begin with may not be heritage itself but the process of digital innovation and the chance to learn 21st century skills. And through this they come to appreciate their heritage as a source of identity, community, employment, and self-worth and build a sense of ownership.

The project provided the young people with opportunities to develop their entrepreneurial skills so they can identify economic opportunities involving the heritage sites, as virtual or real-world guides, employees of conservation organisations or in hospitality and tourism. As they come to see their identity and prosperity being linked to heritage conservation, so young people can play a

more central and valued role within the local communities that surround sites; communicating across generations, they will be a positive force for community cohesion.

This project built on the programmes run in Europe and across the Middle East, so the participants could see what they are doing as part of a bigger picture, with opportunities for additional learning and positive networking with their peers.

Oman's 2040 Vision provided the backdrop to this project. This vision includes a focus on education and in particular Inclusive Education, Life-long Learning, and Scientific Research; and recognises the importance of celebrating the Omani identity and drawing inspiration from the history and heritage of Oman.

HOW WE COULD BUILD ON THIS IN OMAN AND ACROSS THE REGION

The project supported by the AOS and our Omani partners created a link between academic centres of excellence in Oman with those in the UK – notably the Heritage Institute at the Royal Agricultural University. It also created an active regional and international network of heritage students, practitioners and academics engaged with the heritage of Oman.

In the short term, Arab Tourism Day this year focused on the massive digital migration that needs to take place in the tourism sector as well as the business and job opportunities which will flow from this.

In the longer term, we believe this approach could provide a blueprint for the systematic documentation and promotion of Oman's heritage, creating virtual reality exhibits to engage, inspire and inform which can be used locally, nationally, and internationally to promote heritage tourism in Oman.

We owe many thanks to our sponsors, students, interns, and faculty, all of whom were committed to promoting Anglo-Omani friendship and engaging a new generation with the conservation and promotion of both Oman's natural and built heritage. ■



Scene from the immersive tour of Bahla.

RARE SALUKI LITTER IN MUSCAT

A rare litter of 10 pedigree Saluki puppies were born in Muscat on the 23rd of April, International Puppy Day.

The sire, Tayyar of UAE stock, belongs to Maggie Jeans MBE, an AOS member. The dam, Farah of Bahraini stock, is owned by Australian, Rebecca Elferson, former Wardrobe Mistress at the Royal Opera House and owner of My Inner Muse Boutique. There are four males and six females in the litter and they are all thriving.



Readers will remember the article about the Saluki, the oldest breed of hunting hound, featured in AOS Review 2020, p 85, by Society Vice-President Sir Terence Clark, an expert on the breed and author of the book *The Salukis in My Life*. The breed, once common in Oman, became rare largely as a result of the ban on hunting in the Sultanate since 1976, but is enjoying a modest recovery in response to the opportunities for Saluki racing in the UAE. ■

GAP YEAR SCHEME

The Gap Year Scheme is starting again after the pandemic! In September our new selected students will head out for three months in Muscat where they will be supporting the Sultan's School students, with a specific focus on helping the scholar students navigate their International Baccalaureate studies.

This year we have had an impressive number of applicants, making our decision very tough as we simplified it down to four students. The gappies are either yet to go to university or are doing things in reverse and having finally completed their degrees are now gaining as much experience as they can.

All students have shown a direct interest in Oman, the region and Arabic with one of them having studied Arabic at university and the others looking to study it further. This opportunity should give them all a chance to see what life is like in Oman, practise their language skills, embrace the culture and hopefully begin to shape a future that might lead them to working with Oman in the future!



The veterans at Horse Guards

THE WALK OF OMAN... ACROSS BRITAIN

ARTICLE BY JOHN McKEOWN

The Society-supported Grenadier Walk of Oman by a team of wounded serving and ex-military under the aegis of the charity 'Walking With The Wounded' eventually took place across England instead, from Hereford to London.

Twice the team undertook tough training and conditioning ready to go to the Sultanate for an arduous trek across the desert, generously supported by HM the Sultan and by the Sultan's Armed Forces (see AOS Review, 2020, p61) only for their hopes to be dashed by the global pandemic travel restrictions. So WWTW decided to re-imagine the hike in Britain.

Starting on World Mental Health Day (October 10) the team walked over 300km from Pen-Y-Fan in Wales to the Anglo-Omani Society premises in London – the equivalent of 10 marathons in 12 days, to raise funds and awareness for WWTW's employment, mental health, care coordination and volunteering programmes supporting veterans and their families to get back on their feet and contribute in their communities once more.

Members of the team, from various branches of the Army and the RAF, had suffered life-changing physical and mental injuries in their military service, and showed awesome determination as they walked on the Welsh mountains, then through Hereford and Gloucestershire before arriving at the start of the Thames path – a long-distance walking trail that follows the river Thames from its source in the Cotswolds before arriving in the heart of London.

The team visited en route the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. The walkers were met there by Kieron Shaw, representing the SAF Association. They laid a wreath at the SAF Memorial, in recognition of all who served in SAF and in memory of those who died in that service.

Society General Manager, David Newton,



John McKeown with Naval Captain Said Al Shabibi, Omani Assistant Military Attaché, and Mike Lobb, Chairman of the SAF Association.

accompanied the team as they walked in the Windsor area, and I joined them for the last day at Buckingham Palace for a walk through London, including a reception at Horse Guards and the Changing of the Guard Ceremony, followed by a solemn stop at the Cenotaph in Whitehall before the final few kilometres to Sackville Street.

They were greeted by WWTW's CEO, Fergus Williams: "The Grenadier Walk of Oman expedition team has faced an incredibly uplifting and gruelling journey to reach the finish line in London. They have walked from Wales across the country to the Capital, faced the best of British weather, and worked together and helped each other when things got tough."

A reception was held at the Society's premises that evening to honour the team. The Chairman of the board of trustees of WWTW, Dick Turpin, joined Stuart Laing,

Society Chairman, as host. Representatives from the Omani Embassy attended, together with SAF Association members, Society members and other sponsors and representatives of organisations supporting the walk.

Sean Gane, a former member of the Rifles and one of the walking team, presented a commemorative flag to the Society.

In addition to the strong WWTW medical and general support group, the team was also accompanied by a film crew and a photographer, all of whom had been commissioned to record their progress on the walk. Videos of each day of the walk are still available on the WWTW website – well worth a visit to be inspired (and perhaps donate). ■

Sean Gane presenting a commemorative flag to Stuart Laing.



FIND OUT MORE AT www.wwtw.org.uk



John McKeown with Brian O'Neill, who served in the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and the Royal Military Police.



The team at the Society offices.

DR RUMAITHA AL HOSNI OXFORD RESEARCH FELLOW

Dr Rumaitha Al Hosni, Extraordinary Junior Research Fellow in Physiology at The Queen's College, Oxford, spent the first 15 years of her life in the coastal city of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, followed by some years in Oman before moving to the UK in 2011 to pursue higher education.

In this interview we asked her about her experiences of London, Oxford, Dar Es Salaam, and Muscat, while also finding out more about her incredible work in ion channel physiology and pharmacology, but first asked what sparked her interest in biomedical sciences.

"My appreciation for the sciences in general stemmed from my struggles with it in high school. Having to put in the extra effort, over time, transformed into a passion of mine. I was most intrigued with the human body and how diseases manifest when the general balance is perturbed, and so, biomedical sciences seemed like the best fit. A biomedical sciences degree allows you to appreciate the extensive networks in our body to a molecular level and how drugs are then developed to target certain aspects of it.

ARTICLE BY LYDIA JAQUES

"I have enjoyed learning and appreciating the complexities within the human body and meeting inspiring people along the way. There are so many intricacies that we are unaware of in our daily lives yet which play profound roles in our ability to function normally. During my BSc I spent a lot of the time learning the theory – that extended into my MSc in Biomedical sciences as well. However, towards the end of that academic year, I spent a substantial period in a lab environment. This is where I truly appreciated all the theory I had learnt over the years and realised; this is what I want to be doing."

After living in the UK for ten years, we asked if she could see herself moving back to Oman or Tanzania, or did she you feel settled here?

"I am very well settled here, but I always told myself, as soon as I was done with my PhD, I would be on the next flight to Oman. But when opportunities present themselves that you wouldn't have imagined, it's hard to let them pass you by. Having said that, I am quite open to heading back to Oman should opportunities arise. I am aware the research environment is growing every day, so I know I will always have a lot to gain if I do decide to go back.

"I miss being able to see my parents often and having a home cooked meal, in particular barbecues. I think about food a lot! Oman and Tanzania, as you can imagine, have such diverse and multicultural dishes. One other thing I miss, is the beach and being out in nature at all times of the year. I think it's something I always took for granted."

We asked about her life in Oxford, and whether it was good to be outside London after six years... or did she miss the bustle of the capital?

"I am quite enjoying it. It was very strange





at first, living away from my twin for the first time in my life, but I found a way to adapt (with several video calls a day). I moved here during a lockdown, and so I didn't get to explore it as much, but now restrictions have eased.

"I have been cycling around the city and exploring different parts of it every weekend. There is so much to see, it's incredible. It is hard to believe I had never been here before. I love that in a large city (relative to those outside of London), you can still find some peace and quiet. You have nature all around you and cycling isn't a terrifying thought. I don't miss the bustle of London at all – it is a beautiful place with so much to offer, but the commutes after a long day at university were the worst of it, I think. I am more than happy to visit every fortnight, but for now I appreciate the calm in Oxford. It has forced me to slow down, and I am able to wind down a lot easier at the end of the day.

What was she enjoying most about her position at The Queen's College?

"I love the opportunities to converse with people in different disciplines with astonishing minds, from linguists to historians and other scientists as well. Working within a department all day doesn't offer the chances to meet other people as much. Since I joined Queen's College, I have met people who can easily be considered extended family. Their

generosity is unparalleled. I am also looking forward to teaching in College from November, which is exciting. On a not-so-serious note, dinner at the high table has been incredible!"

We asked Rumaitha to explain her current research in ion channel physiology and pharmacology.

"My current research is focused on a novel group of chloride ion channels known as TMEM16A. Ion channels are proteins that form pores on biological membranes. They allow specific small molecules to pass through creating an electric current that regulates bodily functions. Unlike other channels, TMEM16A is highly sensitive to its lipid environment, including signalling lipids. Furthermore, their ubiquitous expression in the vasculature poses severe implications for vascular disease (including Niemann-Pick Disease, type C1-disease, stroke, and Alzheimer's). Thus, my research aims to elucidate the extent of lipid sensitivity of this channel by lipids and exploit this knowledge to develop lipid-like small molecules with therapeutic potential."

Asked about her plans for the future and whether there were certain things she would like to achieve or to continue studying, Rumaitha said, "That is a difficult question to answer! I never really knew what it was I

wanted to do exactly after every stage in my academic career, simply because I always underestimated my potential.

"A big question for me is whether I want to stay in academia or move into industry at some point. As for now, academia seems to be the right fit, but that would mean looking into teaching and research fellowships in the future to progress up the academic ladder, so to speak. It does have its challenges, and is not the easiest route to be in, but my passion for research and being able to share that with the next generation of scientists is my driving force now."

Rumaitha said she was open to the idea of going to work in Oman. She was appreciative of the opportunities over the years in the UK, and wanted to be able to translate and share that with the Omani community. "I think for now I want to gain as much experience as I can in all areas of academia, to allow me to have some credibility and comfort in transferring over my skills and knowledge to the science community in Oman."

It was exciting to speak to a young academic who is conducting such vital research. We cannot wait to see what she will do next. Dr Rumaitha Al Hosni is a young Omani to keep your eye on as she moves from strength to strength in her academic career and scientific prowess. ■

WORLD CUP HOCKEY TOURNAMENT IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY HANAN AL HARRASI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OMAN HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Field hockey is one of our
oldest sports, which has
been played in Oman
since 1914.

There was a time when it peaked and we were known for having great players. It was endorsed both by His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos and also played under our current Majesty Sultan Haitham. A new golden period may be in prospect after the Sultanate was selected to host a world championship - and this has led to the formation of a women's team.

The FIH – the International Hockey Federation which is the governing body – has announced that Oman will host the inaugural FIH Hockey5s World Cup to be held in January of 2024. Winning the rights to host this innovative and attractive hockey tournament will open up great horizons and showcase the Sultanate around the world.

Until recently Oman did not have a Women's Field Hockey team, and it is a short time frame to make champions but we won't know unless we try; if we aim for the stars, maybe we will reach the sky! Many of the girls who join the team come from challenging backgrounds, and the hockey field allows them to express themselves, show their skills, be recognised and seen, and gives them a real opportunity to thrive in sport and perhaps generally in life.

We have players with great potential and though the team is still in its development phase they prove it to us every day. We are a team of 32 players, we have a Malaysian Coach who used to train the Malaysian & Indonesian National team before he joined us in Oman.



It was only in 2019 that the FIH Executive Board decided to create an FIH Hockey5s World Cup, with a view to boost the development of hockey globally through promotion of its five-a-side format. It is known for its non-stop end to end action since the ball is in play for about 90% of a match, thanks to rebound-boards against the outside of the side- and back-lines. There are usually more goals than with the more traditional 11-a-side format of hockey, since players can score from anywhere after the attacking line.

Played in about 70 countries in the world, Hockey5s was the most attended sport at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with no fewer than 200,000 spectators!

OMAN HOCKEY ASSOCIATION (OHA)

OHA is the national governing body, responsible for the management and development of field hockey from grassroots to elite activities in the Sultanate. It is a member Association of FIH and also the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) & the Arab Hockey Confederation.

It was the first game that had the honour of having its competition bear the name of the Sultan in the oldest domestic tournament in Oman – His Majesty’s Cup Hockey Championship.

It is a non-profit organisation working under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

OHA has successfully hosted many international events in the Sultanate; the most recent of these are the TMDone women Asia Cup 2022, Men’s HERO Asian Champions Trophy 2018, and Asian Games Hockey Qualifier March – 2018, Men’s Jr. AHF cup 2019 and a highly accomplished AHF Congress in 2017.

Once hockey was introduced to the country so many years ago, social ties were consolidated among the Omanis and they formed hockey teams one after another to compete with visiting teams. The Sultanate was the first Arab Gulf country to play hockey at the local, Asian and international levels.

It was the first game that had the honour of having its competition bear the name of the Sultan in the oldest domestic tournament in Oman – His Majesty’s Cup

Hockey Championship – which has a glorious history and has stood witness to some of the most exciting and memorable matches, club rivalries, individual brilliance, foreign stars, fans’ love and fury.

It was established in 1971 by Sultan Qaboos, and clubs have been hiring international stars, including Olympians and World Cuppers, in their pursuit of His Majesty’s Cup title honours. We have completed 51 of the HM’s Cup Hockey Championship, the oldest and most coveted tournament in the country.

The Oman National Men’s Team represents the country in international Field hockey competitions, and is governed by OHA. Its current rank in the world is 27 and in Asia the team stands at seventh position. And now we have the Oman National Women’s Team – who are keen to be associated with the Anglo-Omani Society! ■

ARABIC LANGUAGE CLASSES IN LONDON

Arabic language classes were launched at the society In 2019. We wanted to offer more to members and give them a place to learn modern standard Arabic (MSA) and Omani dialect. It was an initiative to allow our members to feel more connected with the region and most importantly Oman.

Despite the pandemic we have continued to grow our classes, led by Mohammed Abu Amara. In 2020 classes were moved online and have continued with students going from being unable even to read the alphabet to holding conversations with Omanis. One of our current students, Brid Beeler, has continued her progress and was accepted to attend our Arabic Language Scheme in Manah this summer.

Mohammed is dedicated to ensuring students can achieve the most from each term, even offering free extra weekend reading classes.

We have started Arabic for Business, which are private classes for companies in the UK who do business in Oman and the region and have employees wishing to learn the language or improve their professional Arabic. The first, that began in June, was with a company established by Innovate UK, the national innovation agency.

We start a new term in September and will be encouraging more in-person classes for those that can attend as well as continuing our online classes. If you would like to sign up please email us and check out our syllabus on the AOS website.



Opening ceremony

GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT ON CRICKET IN OMAN

ARTICLE BY PAUL SHERIDAN

Paul Sheridan with Pankaj Khimji, Chairman Oman Cricket, and the T20 World Cup Trophy.



Paul arrived in Oman in 1983 as a newly qualified solicitor. In those days, there was a British Cricket Club which he captained for a number of years. He returned to Muscat in 2006, became a Board Member of Oman Cricket Club in 2021 and recently was elected as Vice-Chairman. Paul is also a member of the MCC, Club Cricket Conference, Shepherds Bush CC, Band of Brothers CC and Dromedary CC. He has been a member of the Anglo-Omani Society since 1989.

16 July 2021 was a very big day for Oman Cricket. The International Cricket Council (ICC) T20 World Cup competition due to be held in India in 2020 had been postponed due to the pandemic and the ICC and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) had been on the look-out for other venues. Oman Cricket put its hand up and, following visits to our ground by the Chair and CEO of the ICC and the President and Secretary of BCCI, on 16 July 2021 it was announced that Oman Cricket would become the first ICC Associate Member to host and participate in a T20 World Cup.

The Opening Ceremony and first matches would be held in Muscat and were only 91 days away. We knew we had much to do, and once we started work on the project realised we had seriously underestimated what was required to host a World Cup! We took great comfort from knowing that we had the total support of the Oman Government, including the local government in Al-Amerat where our ground is located; without this, it would have been impossible for us to complete all that needed to be done.

We learned that for global sports events like the T20 WC, it is all about television. Our initial thoughts that a few temporary stands, some upgrades to our changing rooms, basic catering services and a small media centre would suffice were misplaced.

To start with, the entire floodlighting system needed to be upgraded from 1,000 to 2,500+ lux to meet the requirements of the broadcasters – hence we had to tender for a completely new system, including infrastructure, with the new poles being designed and manufactured in Sohar, Oman and the lights coming from India. The construction and commissioning was completed on 9 September 2021 and the floodlighting at our ground is now one of the brightest of all cricket grounds in the world; with the added advantage that the



The ground by floodlight.

original lighting was relocated to our second ground.

The lighting was perhaps our greatest concern, however there were many others – high-speed Wi-Fi with rock-solid connectivity had to be established and installed; as did cameras, light and sound equipment, broadcast and production zones, a dedicated press room, parking, ticketing, security, catering and much more.

To do all this, we formed an Executive Committee of the Board which worked hand in hand, and often day and night, with our Oman Cricket Office colleagues –

including our Chief Development Officer, the ex-Captain of Sri Lanka, Duleep Mendis, who has helped Oman Cricket to achieve so much – and some additional recruits who had particular experience; for example, managing ICC events and large scale event catering.

Given the pressures all were under, the team gelled incredibly well and on 17 October 2021 (Omani Women's Day), the Opening Ceremony took place followed by the first matches involving Oman, Papua New Guinea, Bangladesh and Scotland* – and what an evening it was!

Line-up before the Bangladesh match.





The visit of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Youth & Sports.

We learned later from the broadcaster that the total global audience for the T20 World Cup was 167 million; many of whom saw not only the cricket but also the sun going down in spectacular colours over the Al-Hajar Mountains. If only 0.1% of those viewers decide to take a holiday in Oman!

Our Chairman, Pankaj Khimji, very sadly had lost his father, Sheikh Kanaksi Khimji, only a few months before Oman Cricket was awarded this event. Sheikh Kanaksi Khimji was himself a passionate cricket

supporter and perhaps the main reason for Oman's Men's Team being where it is today. Suffice it to say, when the going gets tough the tough get going and without Pankaj Khimji's energy and commitment and love for cricket, we would certainly have struggled to achieve what we did.

If I had to sum up in two words my experience of what was an immense project, I would say Total Co-operation. We had total co-operation from every level of government including the Ministry of

Culture, Sports & Youth, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Health (remember the pandemic!), the Office of the Wali of Al-Amerat, the Royal Oman Police and Muscat Municipality, and also from the local community, an army of volunteers and our sponsors - Oman LNG, Omantel, Omifco, Jindal Steel, Sohar International Bank, Sohar Port & Freezone and Sohar Aluminium – each of whom put a hand forward generously to assist in the development of our ground and facilities.

Since the T20 World Cup, our ground has continued to be a hive of activity with visits from both the England Men's and Women's squads, a number of one-day internationals in the ICC Men's CWC League 2 where Oman currently sits top, the first ever Gulf Cooperation Council Women's T20i Championship Cup in which "wOman" (Oman's Women's Team) won four of five matches to finish second.

When you are in Muscat, please come and visit us and perhaps even have a net in our world class state of the art Cricket Academy! ■

** Oman defeated Papua New Guinea, but lost the other two matches. The eventual winner of the overall competition was Australia, who defeated New Zealand in the final played in Dubai.*

INTERESTED IN MEMBERSHIP?

The Anglo-Omani Society* has nearly 1000 members. Do you have a connection with the UK and Oman and wish to support and grow the long-standing friendship between our nations? If you do please join us at the Society.

Details of membership and how to apply are on the Society's website:

www.ao-soc.org/membership

You can also receive membership details and application forms by post. Please contact the Director at 34 Sackville Street, LONDON, W1S 3ED.

* The Society is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (number 6708685) and a registered charity (number 1127561). Our members pay a subscription fee and also undertake to contribute £1 to the assets of the Society in the event of it being wound up.



IN SEARCH OF A WRECKED HELICOPTER

ARTICLE BY MARK EVANS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OUTWARD BOUND OMAN

A journey along the south-east coast of Oman

My passion for sea kayaking started at university, where most weekends were spent kayaking around the coastline of Anglesey, and developed further whilst working at Outward Bound Loch Eil in Scotland where I was lucky enough to spend two summers paddling around places like Knoydart and the Summer Isles in a beautiful five-metre Inuit design kayak called an Anas Acuta (the Latin name for the Pintail duck, such were its slender and graceful lines).

Bigger journeys evolved along the coastlines of north-west Canada, and then around Northern Svalbard (in search of the starting point of William Edward Parry's 1827 attempt to reach The North Pole); that particular journey was undertaken in a double kayak that could carry 14 days' worth of food, and required us having a rifle strapped onto the deck in a waterproof bag in case of polar bear attack.

By the late 1990s I had driven much of the coastline of Oman in my old Land

Rover Defender when visiting from Saudi Arabia and had seen how varied and spectacular it was. Many sections of the coast were not accessible from land, and landing in boats was difficult due to vertical cliffs or shallow water and strong surf.

To kayak the Oman coastline, which had not been done before, seemed a wonderful opportunity, and in 2004 I was lucky enough to secure permission from the Omani coastguard to paddle from Musandam in the north to Dhalkut in the south, a small community next to the border with Yemen. An extraordinary journey of 55 days living close to nature ensued, and included close encounters with hump backed whales, sea snakes, countless turtles and porpoise, osprey, a tsunami, tuna the size of dustbins, wolves, scorpion stings and, of course, meeting the most hospitable and generous people.

Once the deck compass swung to the south at Ras Al Hadd, everything felt much more remote and the number of people on

IN SEARCH OF A WRECKED HELICOPTER

both water and land dwindled rapidly. Setting off just before sunrise, each day I would paddle some 30-40 km before coming off the water early afternoon to try and find a campsite for the night, something that was often a white-knuckle affair in huge dumping surf in places such as Ras Madrasah.

On the shoreline trying to follow me in a Land Rover Discovery kindly loaned by Mohsin Haider Darwish, the Land Rover dealer in Muscat, was Kiwi photographer John Smith who covered 17,000km to my mere 1,700, and had an adventure as big as my own. More often than not we were able to be together each night, but there were several occasions where the terrain made that impossible, and I camped alone on a small beach inaccessible from the land.

The journey ended near the border



Two great Omani travelling companions.

between Oman and Yemen in the remote community of Dhalkut, where the wreckage of a crashed Russian MII-8 helicopter lay rusting on the beach.

Living in Muscat for the past 16 years had enabled me to regularly travel to the coastline as far as Duqm at weekends, but getting beyond there required time that never seemed available. Finally this February I had the chance to drive back down south along the coastline, with the target of re-visiting Dhalkut to see what remained of the helicopter.

It was not too long ago that a journey along the coast from Duqm to Salalah was almost entirely on washboard gravel that shook the fillings out of your teeth and was incredibly hard on your vehicle. Today it is a joy along blacktop roads that enable you to access some beautiful areas of Oman, where tourists (and many locals) rarely venture. The vehicle for my journey was one of the last Land Rover Defenders off the production line in Solihull. It is well-equipped for extended journeys, with an Eezi-Awn rooftop sitting on top of a Brownchurch expedition roof-rack, sandladders and an Engel fridge/freezer that keeps food and drinks chilled via a second battery that is squeezed under the driver's seat.

If a really interesting spot is found and we want to linger a few days I carry three solar panels that when set up generate enough power to keep the second battery topped up whilst the fridge does its work.

For company on this particular journey I had my two wonderful Omani rescue dogs; Freya (named after Freya Stark) was found in a bad way in the streets of Muscat many years ago, and Dora (named after the first wife of explorer St John Philby) was one of a litter of seven found under a bush near my home in Seeb. Both make the most wonderful pets, are my constant companions in the mountains and in the desert, and add another dimension to any journey.

Loaded up with three days' worth of food and water (it is now relatively easy to re-supply en-route), at the crack of dawn on 18 February we slipped out of sleepy Muscat, heading along the winding interior roads to Mudhaibi and Sinaw before heading full steam ahead south towards Duqm, where, unbelievably for those who visited a decade or more ago, it is now easy to get lost, such has been the speed of development.

Pushing on for another hour saw us reach the first planned overnight stop at Wadi Dharaf, just south of Ras Madrasah – a long day, but well worth the drive. The wadi is a shallow but important feature in the landscape, a natural routeway for both people and for water that drains off the Jiddat Al Harasis into a series of freshwater lagoons that sit just behind a long sandy beach. The water (known as Khor Dharaf), fringed by mangroves and a narrow band of reeds, attracts a great deal of wildlife and is a wonderful camping spot, with the sea on one side, and the lagoons on the other.

Missing nothing in the local landscape, one or two fishermen come to check you out, but more often than not you have the place completely to yourself, as was the case when we arrived. The lagoons are the most important wintering site for ducks between Muscat and Salalah, and on this particular visit flamingos, curlews, marsh harriers and more were in evidence. I last visited the spot two years previously in March 2020, when rumours abounded that Muscat was about to go into lockdown (which it duly did); then my most numerous companion was a large swarm of desert locusts that drifted past on the wind for several hours.

South of Khor Dharaf the landscape is pretty wild - a long flat bay extends south for nearly 100km, ending at the fishing community of Lakbi, near Ras Sawqrah

Feeling immensely proud after some serious hole digging – Khor Dharaf.



(full of ospreys and countless wading birds). Places like Lakbi see few tourists but do provide a great place to re-supply and take a break before climbing up onto a large rocky plateau, a formidable challenge for explorer Bertram Thomas and his team as they travelled along the coast on foot and by camel back in 1928 as a prelude to his 1930 crossing of the empty quarter.

Driving south for a few more hours on roads that are pretty quiet, the community of Shalim eventually appears out of the haze. A left turn here leads to a steep descent down into another bay, home to the small community of Shuwaymiyah; here we paused to take in the views and catch the breeze with the vultures before dropping down to a most beautiful white sandy beach, with azure waters overlooked by a rather large house supposedly belonging to the Emir of Kuwait. For many years Shuwaymiyah was the end of the road, and anyone hoping to head west to Salalah had to go back up that hill and take a long arc around through Marmul and Thumrait.

That was the case back in 2004 on the kayak journey; then, at the western end of the bay, sheltered by the huge cliffs that came vertically down into the water, the team and I waved goodbye for a few days. They headed off inland, arcing first north then all the way round past Mirbat to Hasik, whilst I paddled under cliffs that were swarming with hundreds of Socotra Cormorants.

So strong was the wind that we'd barely slept, fearing our tents would get blown away. Morning brought no respite, and several dhows had sought the protection of the cliffs. Thankfully a narrow channel of smooth water at the base of the cliffs enabled me to make good progress, eventually landing on a rocky beach near a beautiful palm fringed lagoon, before pushing on next day to meet the team at Hasik, but not before some more great experiences with several whales and dolphins.

Today, an extraordinary feat of engineering sees a spectacular road connecting Shuwaymiyah to Hasik. A journey of an entire day is now done in just over an hour, offering wonderful views down to the sea below, and so we progressed in the Land Rover, pausing in

Hasik to refuel and watch some porpoise playing in the water. The drive from Hasik west to Salalah is beautiful. Progress is slow on a winding road, but there is no need to rush in such a spectacular spot.

The enormous bulk of Jebel Samhan appears just after Hasik, and, in the late afternoon we followed a water filled wadi inland towards the base of the Samhan escarpment before enjoying a lovely night under the stars, with sandpipers and a few howling wolves for company.

The target for Day Three was a location high above the frankincense covered cliffs above the small fishing community of Rakhyut, west of Salalah. The road out of Salalah was still damaged in several places by Cyclone Mekunu (May 2018), but after a few detours we reached our spot, nudging the Land Rover along narrow country roads past herds of cows. I had camped here several times in the past, positioning the car under the shade of a large fig tree, high above the crashing waves. This is leopard country, and the last visit saw a lynx appear less than 50 metres from the tent, but no such luck this time. What was visible to the west was the headland that marked the border between Oman and Yemen, where my kayak journey had ended 17 years before.

Passing through the military checkpoint next day took me west towards the border community of Sarfait, before turning left towards to sea, and descending through thick woodland to the small community of

Dhalkut, where nothing seems to happen in a hurry. The last time we had camped here we were serenaded by nightingales, and lost count of the nightjars swooping around in front of the full moon.

Little seemed to have changed; cows wandered the streets, goats huddled in doorways and several camels had waded out into the cooling waves. Dora and Freya were mightily relieved to be let out from the back of the Land Rover for a run on the beach, at the eastern end of which lay my rusting old helicopter, much reduced in size since my last visit 17 years earlier.

The story behind the helicopter varies depending on who you talk to, but the most common thread seems to involve someone of power in the Yemen civil war, who backed the wrong side and had to make a hasty escape to the nearest safe-haven, the beach in Dhalkut. If that journey was undertaken in the Khareef, visibility would have been poor, and the only safe passage would involve hugging the coastline at low altitude. Engine failure prevented the helicopter taking off, and it remains where it landed.

The return journey for us back to Muscat was taken at a similarly leisurely pace, which is undoubtedly the best way to see Oman. It involved neolithic burial tombs and flint arrowheads, shipwrecks, abandoned sailors and the largest living things in Oman, but that will have to wait for another time. ■

Approaching journey's end.



THE PROGRESSION OF OMANI WOMEN IN SPORT

“The majority of society is supportive especially when you achieve good results and are successful, because you bring Oman success too.”

Fatma Al Nabhani

Aaishah Sharif was a Society intern after taking her degree at SOAS and having wide experience throughout the Middle East and in China. This is her report following her end-of-internship study visit to the Sultanate.

PROGRESS

Omani women have been at the forefront of developing the Sultanate for the past 50 years. Their desire to see the nation grow and prosper has been vital in the current growth and success of the country. The establishment of the Omani Women’s Association has helped to further women’s role. The association was established in the early 1970s as a social, cultural and voluntary organisation to empower Omani women in multiple areas.

These facets included gaining necessary life skills for personal development, providing job opportunities and exchanging ideas and opinions for the betterment of their wellbeing. As a result, there have been many success stories of Omani women leading the way and making strides in technology, medicine and sport, which undoubtedly have positively impacted wider society.

FOCAL POINT

This article will focus on the progression and development of Omani women in sports and assess the growth of this field as recent years have seen a stark increase in their participation in sport. The progression of women in sport in Oman pertains directly to three main factors: a combination of new government policies and implementations; societal shifts including changing attitudes towards women in sport; and thirdly, the rise in female athletes and their positive impacts on the younger generation and broader society.

The result of these factors leads to a conversation about improvements to allow for more Omani women to partake in and experience sports. As a result, this article

also delves into the following questions: how do we enable Omani women to succeed at their chosen sport, and what more is there to do to support the sporting journeys of these women? A number of Omani sportswomen, sports journalists and others in this field have informed the answers and suggestions in this article.

DEVELOPMENTS IN SPORTS

A notable development in the women’s sporting industry in Oman was that the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth made it mandatory for all sports associations in Oman and the Oman Olympic Committee to have at least one elected female board member. Ashok Purohit, ex Sports Journalist for the Daily Muscat, explained how this played a pivotal role in engaging more Omani women in sports and bringing them to the forefront of Omani society. The Omani Women’s Association was formed in 1971 to represent women and allow them a voice in parts of society where they often went unheard. The association strives to empower Omani women to partake in voluntary social work and advocates for cultural, social and health awareness as well as developing a thriving sports culture for many women.

Purohit believes there was no particular turning point but more of a gradual progression which led to the increase of Omani women in sports. His conclusion was simple: the more Omani women became successful in their sport, the more women gained an interest in sport, forcing the ministry as well as schools to pick up on this interest. He confidently declared, “You need to get winners. Until you get



winner, we won't be able to expand to a higher level."

Furthermore, Saada Al Ismaili, the former Director of women's sports in the Ministry of sports affairs and the first elected female member of the Omani Olympic Committee (OOC), argues that, "If the government did not believe in women, they would have never created the women's association in the ministry, neither would they have formed the Olympic women's committee." She firmly believed by creating these spaces for women, the Omani government played a pivotal role in the increase of women in sports.

There is, however, still progress to be made. Omani weightlifting champion Marwa Al Wadhahi, first female member of the Omani national weightlifting team, says she would like the government to "...make it their priority to see more younger women being encouraged to participate in sports."

ROLE MODELS

The importance of young women having role models to look up to can also not be ignored. The influence of female athletes such as Thuriya Al Abdali, one of the top taekwondo fighters in Oman and one of the few female taekwondo instructors, as well as Ibtisam Al Salmi, one of the first professional female sailors in the Middle East, on young Omani girls cannot be understated.

Another one of Oman's prized female athletes is Fatma Al Nabhani, the region's only professional female tennis player, who discovered her talent at the age of nine

when she won the West Asian Championship in the under-13 category. Fatma stated that it was challenging for her as she was among the first to break those cultural barriers. The value these women have in society and to Omani women is priceless as they have paved the way for the younger generation, as they have shown young women in Oman that anything is possible if you want it enough.

CULTURAL CHANGES

The cultural shift and changing attitudes of Omani people toward females in the sporting industry has undoubtedly had a huge impact on the number of women partaking in sports. Al Ismaili has been working hard to change parents' attitudes to their daughters' involvement in sporting activities and has been quite successful. By enabling parents to understand the importance of sport and fitness and answering doubts they may have with reassurance, Al Ismaili gained many parents' trust and support in her quest to improve the female sporting industry in Oman.

Some Omanis believed that women playing sports went against religious teachings and values; however, female Muslim sportswomen such as Marwa Al Wadhahi and Nadhirah Al Harthy – the first Omani woman and the second Omani to climb Mount Everest – have made it evident that you can uphold religious values and morals whilst simultaneously being a female athlete. It was a matter of having open conversations with communities to create this progressive



Aiishah and Fatma Al Nabhani, Tennis player.

journey where women can become more accepted and involved in sports.

The acceptance and support from families and wider society make it more achievable for young girls to fulfil their sporting dreams and careers as family pressure is a significant factor. Al Nabhani explains that her mother was her biggest cheerleader and if it weren't for her support, she wouldn't be where she is today, highlighting the importance of family backing to Omani women.

OBSTACLES

There is still significant reticence toward Omani women in sport and obstacles preventing them from achieving sporting success. One obstacle includes the lack of facilities available to women, such as sports clubs, sports scholarships and more importantly other females to play



Marwa Al Wadhahi

competitively against. Fatma Al Nabhani stated the absence of these facilities 'creates difficulties as women in Oman often have to compete against men or leave the country to compete against other women'. Al Wadhahi states that the lack of sports clubs is a significant hindrance in the progression of women's sports.

Consequently, although there has been substantial growth in the interest of female athletes, there is still a need for more female participation. Government recognition and support via funding to set up sports clubs and promote female participation are vital if Omani women are to progress further in sports. These changes and implementations will trickle through to broader society in Oman and create positive effects.

UNDER REPRESENTATION

Omani women were not represented in the Olympics until the Beijing Summer Olympics of 2008. Before this, Purohit notes, "there were small events for girls but nothing major," and whilst girls were talented and enthusiastic to begin with, societal and academic pressures halted their sporting journeys after their late teens.

Al Ismaili sheds light on these pressures, arguing that perhaps more crucial than support from the government is support from parents and the community. Parents often view sports as a waste of time for their daughters as well as seeing it as something that could tarnish their reputations. Whilst men are often encouraged by their families to pursue sports, women are steered towards

careers in medicine or law which parents deem a more safe and suitable route.

Part of Ismaili's work when dismantling female barriers to women in sports involves sitting down with parents and unpacking these notions. She explains, "we sat with parents and spoke with them and helped ease their minds." She also notes that simply reasoning with parents and building a rapport with them has greatly helped women in sport, evident through the following figures of girls involved with sport when Al Ismaili first began her role at the Ministry until the present day. In 1997 there were around 250 girls partaking in sporting activities compared to over 10,000 in the present day. These figures ultimately speak for themselves and show what great work Al Ismaili and her team have achieved over the years.

MEDIA

Another factor impeding the progression of women in sports in Oman is media coverage. There is little coverage of Omani women in sport, and it is essential to note the apparent disparity between male and female coverage in sports. This disparity naturally negatively affects progression as Omani women aren't getting noticed at a regional or global level. However, it can be argued that this lack of media coverage is not due to media bias but because many Omani women's tournaments and events aren't allowed to be recorded or broadcast for religious and cultural purposes. It is difficult for journalists, especially males, to cover certain women's events as it's not

permissible in Oman. The gap is slowly closing, especially with the boom of social media whereby athletes can self-promote.

SUCCESS

Omani sportswomen have been able to grow and progress significantly through their successes. An example of a monumental win for Oman was the 2022 GCC Padel tennis tournament, where the Omani women's team claimed first prize. This event was a huge success for women in sports and Oman. Manager and coach of the women's Padel team, Mazin Al Shaqsi, explains how he witnessed significant growth in their social media pages and a boost in interest in the sport after their huge success. This also helped gain attention from the ministry on how they can further support women's sporting endeavours.

Al Shaqsi states that it is not easy to gain government recognition, however, with their vast turnover in Qatar, this emphasised just how far the Padel team could go nationally and globally, which would benefit Oman in many ways. Moreover, Fatma states how, "...the majority of society is supportive especially when you achieve results and are successful because you bring Oman success too."

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it is evident that there has been significant progression for Omani women in sports and whilst there has been no central turning points in the increase in women's involvement, there has undoubtedly been a steady progression. The consistent effort of female athletes and coaches combined with support from the government and families over the past few years has led to this improvement. However, there is still a way to go if Omani women want to be considered worthy global competitors. For these women to succeed internationally, societal attitudes and government policy need to improve further. ■

I would like to thank the following people for giving me their valuable time and wisdom to help compose this article: Ashok Purhoit, Fatma Al Nabhani, Marwa Al Wadhahi, Mazin Al Shaqsi, Saada Al Ismaili and Suad Hamed Salim Al Rawahi.



Aishah and journalist Ashok Purhoit.

THE SOCIETY LIBRARY



We have a growing library of books dedicated to subjects related to Oman. Over the last 12 years this has accumulated to nearly 700 different publications on subjects including politics, foreign affairs, history, culture, botany, arts and the economy.

Our library has become a place for research for both students and those interested in Oman as well as a space to hold archive material which now includes PhD pieces, media, maps and more.

As new things are written and discovered we are constantly adding to the collection to ensure we have one of the bigger Omani collections in the UK and possibly Europe. This has all been made possible through our members and friends of Oman who donate to our collection, and to limited targeted purchases.

As we have now outgrown our two column humble bookcases we have made plans to build a larger unit upstairs in our event space – once we are able to afford the

expenditure – to give us room to expand and create more of a reading room/club feel where members can book in to read, research and have access to a plethora of Omani knowledge.

If you would like to donate to our collection please do contact us as we are always looking for new undiscovered gems in Oman. Including donations, we also occasionally come into a surplus of books, sometimes sent from the embassy or publishers, and offer them to members for a minor fee to cover delivery costs. So please do check our library page on the website where you can see books we have available to purchase and the catalogue of books available in our library. ■

UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF THE OMANI NOVEL

ARTICLE BY LYDIA JAQUES-LARGE

FOLLOWING HER END-OF-INTERNSHIP STUDY VISIT TO THE SULTANATE

Oman is not a nation known for its literature. Other Arabic-speaking nations such as Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine are renowned for their novelists and poets, but Oman is quieter about its achievements.

In reality, Omani literature is abundant and predates literacy in the region, its oldest form being classical poetry transmitted via oral tradition. Until recently, classical poetry was the only form to be taken truly seriously in the Sultanate.

While the first Omani novel was published just over 50 years ago, its development in this short time has been staggering. My report seeks to touch on the issues of publishing in Oman, to outline the history and highlight the recurring theme of duality in the Omani novel. It concludes that its development has been staggering and its future is bright.

development of novels in Oman, as it is difficult for young writers to find benchmarks of excellent writing. With the establishment of awards and competitions in recent years, this is set to change.

Omani novelists who wish to have their novels translated and published overseas experience greater challenges. In conversation with the founder of *Dar Al Arab* Nasser Al Badri, he explains that writers in Oman have limited sources of funding, with the Anglo-Omani Society itself being one. In this report it is important to understand that the novel in Oman is developing in this climate.

Omani novels definitely appeal to a wider audience, but it is important that there is funding if the work is to be translated and shared. In this way, the issues of publishing in Oman differ based on whether writers aim to have their novels published in or outside Oman. It is within this context that the Omani novel is developing.

PUBLISHING IN OMAN

Wail S Hassan, Professor of Comparative and World Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, notes that publishing in the Gulf has favoured historically the short story, which can be easily printed and distributed in newspapers (Hassan 2017:359). Yet, with the large influx of oil revenues in the 1970s, the Gulf states now boast some of the most stable economies in the world.

Badria Al Shihhi explains that this means publishing in itself is not an issue in the Gulf. Many novelists can afford to self-publish and do not need to navigate the difficulties of agents, editors, and publishers that novelists of other nationalities might face. This has led to something of a surplus of novels, many not subject to high critique. This in some ways hinders the

FROM PATRIOTISM TO A UNIVERSAL AUDIENCE

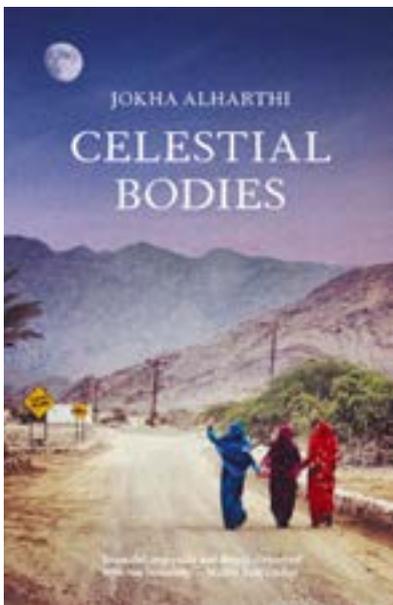
The development of the Omani novel has occurred in the shadow of a long history of poetry in the region. Jokha Alharthi explains that in comparison to the newer form of the novel, poetry has been very powerful in Oman for a long time. She recalls memories of her late grandfather responding to her question of 'how are you?' with the poetic line:

المرو الانسان المرو يعمل ويعيش وطول عيش قد يطور. تذهب
'بشاشته ويبقى بعد الحلو العيش مر.'

'A human would like to live more but living that much would harm him.
After the sweetness of life, the thing that remains is the bitterness of life.'



Jokha's memory of her late grandfather and his talent as a classical poet surfaces in her novel *Celestial Bodies* (2010). The conversations between Azzan and his daughter often consist of quotes from classical poets and move from the everyday to the classical in just a few lines. In this way, Jokha displays the tendency of poetry to be passed from generation to generation in conversations like these. On account of this long tradition, it is no surprise that a new genre was not immediately taken seriously. Jokha explains that until recently emerging writers would pursue classical poetry and the novel remained a second-rate genre.



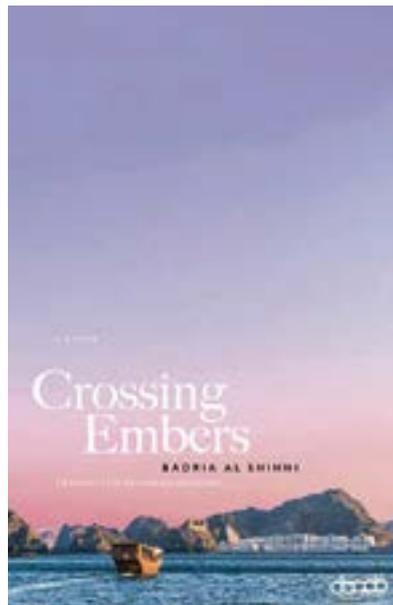
Nonetheless, the genre emerged, and Hassan locates its beginning in the works of Abdullah Al Tai'i. He considers *Malaikat al-jabal al-akhdar* (*Angels of the Green Mountain*, 1963) and *Al-Shira Al-Kabir* (*The Great Sail*, 1972) most notable. Hassan suggests the Omani novel's development coincides with the rapid developments that took place after Sultan Qaboos' accession to the throne in 1970 (Hassan 2017:359).

In terms of content in the first Omani novels, Abdullah Al Tai'i's are known for their scenes written to evoke 'patriotic feelings', to remind readers of an 'heroic past' and warn against 'social disintegration' (Hassan 2017:359). Those of Ali Maamari writing just after Abdullah focused on the war in Dhofar. His lengthy descriptions of battle were not to everyone's taste. Historically these initial writers and their contemporaries are important, for they

Truly, the shift from patriotism and historical novels alone to novels which balance the factual with the poetic has changed the face of the Omani novel.

hedged the way for later novelists to come.

In terms of style there was a major shift with the publication of Badria Al Shihhi's *Crossing Embers* in 1999, considered by many, including her colleague Jokha Alharthi, as the first true Omani novel. In terms of style and sophistication, it was a major jump from those which came before it. One can see a shift from the patriotism of Abdullah Al Tai'i's novels to those of post-1999 novelists Badria and Jokha balancing historical fact with the personal.



Their creation of sympathetic central figures appeal to a universal market and allow vivid descriptions of human emotion. Both Badria and Jokha explain that they did not set out to write historical novels, but that the characters were the focus. I would argue that the strength of Jokha's *Celestial Bodies*, for example, lies in her vivid description of human emotion. If we consider the following passage of a father's reaction to his daughter's despair.

'When this anger overwhelms me, as it's beginning to do right now, amidst all these clouds. I don't know what to do with all of it. It won't quit, and I can't find any window for it to escape through. This anger – this rage that comes every time I picture her

face as she talked, sitting there in the car. This single, fierce emotion stifles everything else, even my breathing. I have never felt so helpless in front of my anger as when my daughter was crying, and then confessing. I gave into him, she gasped between her sobs, because I was afraid of failure.' (Al Harthi 2019: 61)

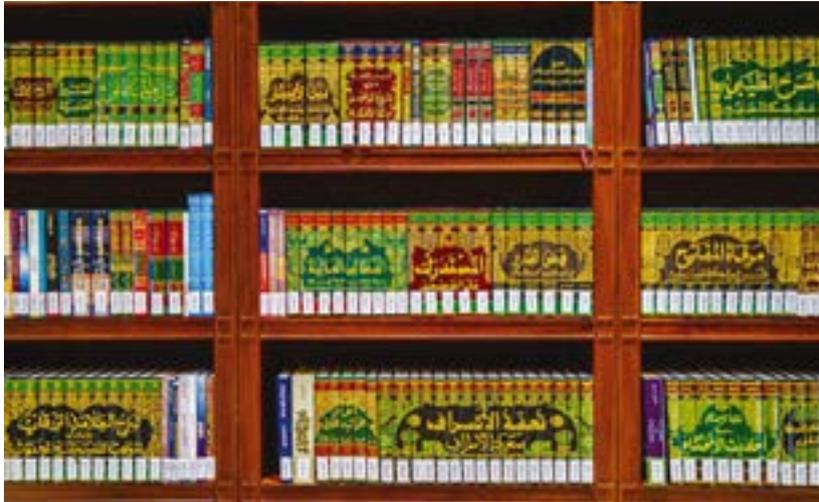
Her language is almost poetic in its layering of descriptive phrases and focus on a singular emotion. It personifies the 'anger' that makes Abdallah 'helpless' and this despair resonates with readers across Oman and around the world. When speaking with Jokha about this particular passage, she highlighted the following quote from Nobel prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa:

'When...Anna Karenina throws herself in front of the train... the shudder is the same in the reader who worships Buddha, Confucius, Christ, Allah, or is an agnostic, wears a jacket and tie, a jalaba, a kimono, or bombachas. **Literature creates a fraternity within human diversity** and eclipses the frontiers erected among men and women by ignorance, ideologies, religions, languages, and stupidity.' (Stockholm, December 7, 2010)

Truly, the shift from patriotism and historical novels alone to novels which balance the factual with the poetic has changed the face of the Omani novel. The Omani novel has, in less than a century, gone through an incredible transformation and as Omani writers begin to tap into the universal world of literature, the possibilities are endless. It should not be forgotten that Jokha's novel has now been translated into over 20 languages and is being enjoyed around the world. If the novel continues to develop at its current rate, we will be seeing ever more Omani novels on the international market.

POLARITY IN THE OMANI NOVEL

Badria Al Shihhi explains that Omani novelists are blessed with a wealth of



In Western nations where the introduction of new technologies has been more gradual, the idea of a nation going through such monumental changes in the space of 50 years is hard to appreciate.

material. Oman's unique geographical position, complex history, rich heritage and deep sense of national identity afford the novelist an immediate base of material. After reading even a few novels from the country the repeated involvement of Omani history and heritage cannot be ignored. It emerges as the backdrop of many novels from the Sultanate, even novels as far back as Abdullah Al Tai'i's *Al-Shira Al-Kabir* have grappled with the conflicts between generations that result from such a rapid development.

In May 2019, the literary magazine *Words Without Borders* identified the recurring themes of change and development in Omani novels as a sense of 'unsettledness'. The issue, titled *Unsettled: New Writing in Oman*, reported that novels exhibited this 'lack of centredness' due to their focus on changes affecting their protagonists from both within and without. It argued that for Omani writers an exploration of developments and changes is not symptomatic of a lack of 'centredness', but rather indicative of the Sultanate's recent history.

In Western nations where the introduction of new technologies has been more gradual, the idea of a nation going through such monumental changes in the space of 50 years is hard to appreciate. In

Celestial Bodies the grandfather is a former slave owner, while the grandchildren spend their days on games consoles and driving BMWs. While this could be understood as something that might leave a nation feeling without a base, quite the opposite has occurred in Oman. Oman is idiosyncratic, but not confused. In other words, Omanis are at the cutting edge of modernity while still firmly rooted in their heritage. A way of understanding this is via this recurring image from Jokha's novel:

'Some of those who fancy themselves philosophers claim that God, mighty is He, created every soul in the shape of a ball. And then, he split every one of these spheres into two, and apportioned to each and every body one half. It is decreed that each body will meet the body that holds the other half of that rent soul. Between the two a passion arises from that ancient bond.' (Al Harthi 2019:38).

This image occurs throughout the novel alongside pairs of supposed opposites such as the comparison of old and new generations, new technologies alongside old ways of living, different styles of art, and new medicine compared with old remedies. Entities that are considered opposite are connected and indeed two sides of one coin. The old and the new coexist in Oman without great conflict. So,

while this was understood as 'unsettledness' it is a unique feature of Oman's national identity and one of its greatest strengths.

For example, consider the following section of the Oman 2040 vision, within the section that has 'Citizenship, Identity and National Heritage and Culture' as its priority. It reads:

'While there is a need for modernisation and integration approach in an era of advanced science and technology, such direction **must be counterbalanced** by a deep-rooted sense of belonging to an authentic culture, in order to enrich the Omani identity and preserve traditions and privacy.'

The image of a single soul split into two in Jokha's novel teaches readers that this aim for a people deeply rooted in their shared heritage pursuing innovation does not indicate weakness but rather an ideal to be pursued. Innovation and preservation of heritage both have the good of the Sultanate as their aim. Nowhere do we find the two so equally maintained as in the idiosyncrasy of Oman. To see this played out in its literature is what sets its novels apart.

CONCLUSION

This report has considered the issues of publishing in Oman and highlighted the need for greater translation opportunities for Omani novelists. It has evaluated the history of the novel in Oman and finds that while the novel was, for a long time, considered secondary to the more established genre of classical poetry, more recent years have seen it emerge as a form with sophistication and appeal to a universal market. Finally, this report considers the major theme of duality in Omani novels and found it not to be a symptom of 'unsettledness', but indicative of one of Oman's greatest strengths – an idiosyncrasy, which writers are able to unpick and explore in their writing.

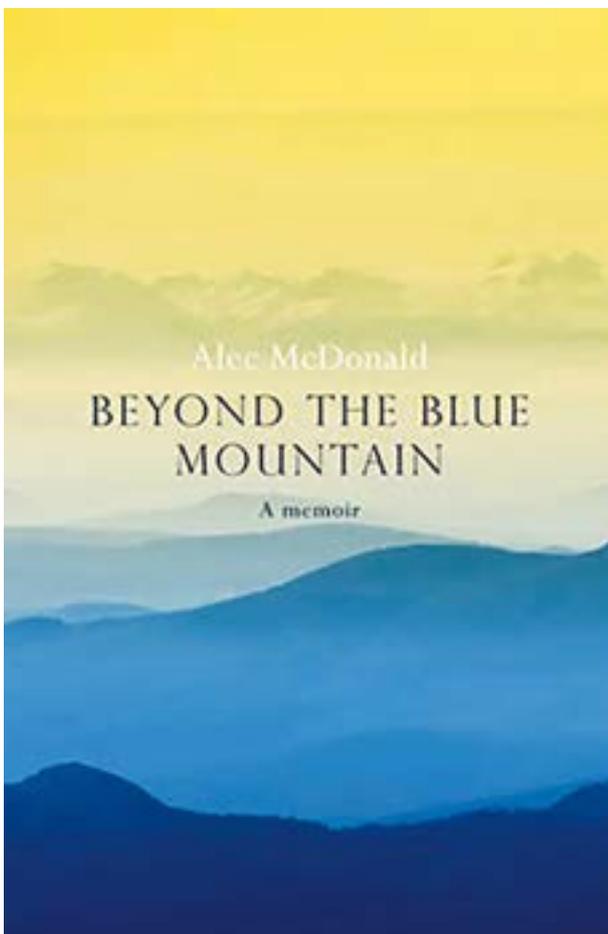
To conclude, the Omani novel is a genre to watch as writers fine tune their craft at an incredible pace. Those seeking to find out more about this nation nestled at the south-eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula could do well to pick up a novel by an Omani novelist and discover a world of heritage, beauty, and wonder. ■

BOOK REVIEWS

BEYOND THE BLUE MOUNTAIN

By Alex McDonald, 2021. Matador, £14.99.

A review by John McKeown



Alec McDonald describes his autobiography as a memoir, but actually it is an adventure story, of a boy with no privileges of birth or rank, and deafened by early illness, who led a life of increasing interest and advancement culminating as the last British head of the Oman Internal Security Service, feted and decorated by the Sultan, Britain and the United States.

He was born and initially brought up in Liverpool, but employment moves by his father and World War II evacuations meant that he had a peripatetic childhood. He writes about this in a modest and unassuming fashion, but it becomes clear in the early chapters how he develops in initiative, self-confidence and stature: hitch-hiking across Europe and (via trawlers and cargo boats) to Iceland and Greenland, acquiring languages, taking part in

scientific expeditions, meeting varieties of people, mountain-climbing and acquiring a place at Cambridge.

After university, he worked for a while as a trainee merchant banker at Rothschilds, which was agreeable and well-paid but not very exciting. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he was approached and invited for interviews for a slightly mysterious job interview and assessment, which was of course for the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6).

McDonald served in Greece during the Cyprus/Enosis troubles, Venezuela, Benghazi and Tripoli during the overthrow of the monarchy and the expulsion of the British, various postings relating to Africa, and Northern Ireland during the troubles. The postings are described directly and interestingly though discreetly, and with humour. He was head of MI6 training for two years, then Controller Africa in London before being offered the post of Director-General in Oman.

“It had never entered my mind to aspire to this appointment,” he writes. “...I could not turn down this amazing proposition.” Once he had been approved by the Palace Office, he began the most striking of all his posts, with the principal task of completing the Omanisation of the Service. This he achieved with honour, the Order of Oman and his addition to the short list of Sultan’s Private Guests invited back to the Sultanate annually for National Day.

He also made full use of his non-working times in the Sultanate, notably in his serious and life-long interest in mountain-climbing: his book *Rock Climbing in Oman* is out of print but copies are still available from Amazon.

There has been a trickle of books by senior intelligence officers in recent years, mostly frowned upon and certainly discouraged. *Spycatcher*, by Peter Wright, a scientific officer in the Security Service, was a revelatory (spiteful?) book which did cause damage and opened secrets better kept. An officer colleague of mine learned from it, to his total surprise and his father’s intense annoyance, that the latter had been MI5’s senior German representative in the Cold War rather than a junior vetting officer.

McDonald’s book has been published without asking for permission, but I think it safe to say that it enhances rather than damages his old Service. The last words in his book are: “To my old Service I owe the career I enjoyed and the gift of Oman. We were a band of brothers with diverse talents and languages held together by a remarkable esprit de corps... Who should have such fortune!”

Indeed, he has led a remarkable life and has written a compelling account of it – I read it in a single day and enjoyed all of it. ■

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Modern Military History Series No. 7

By Athol Yates, 2020, Helion & Company, £35.

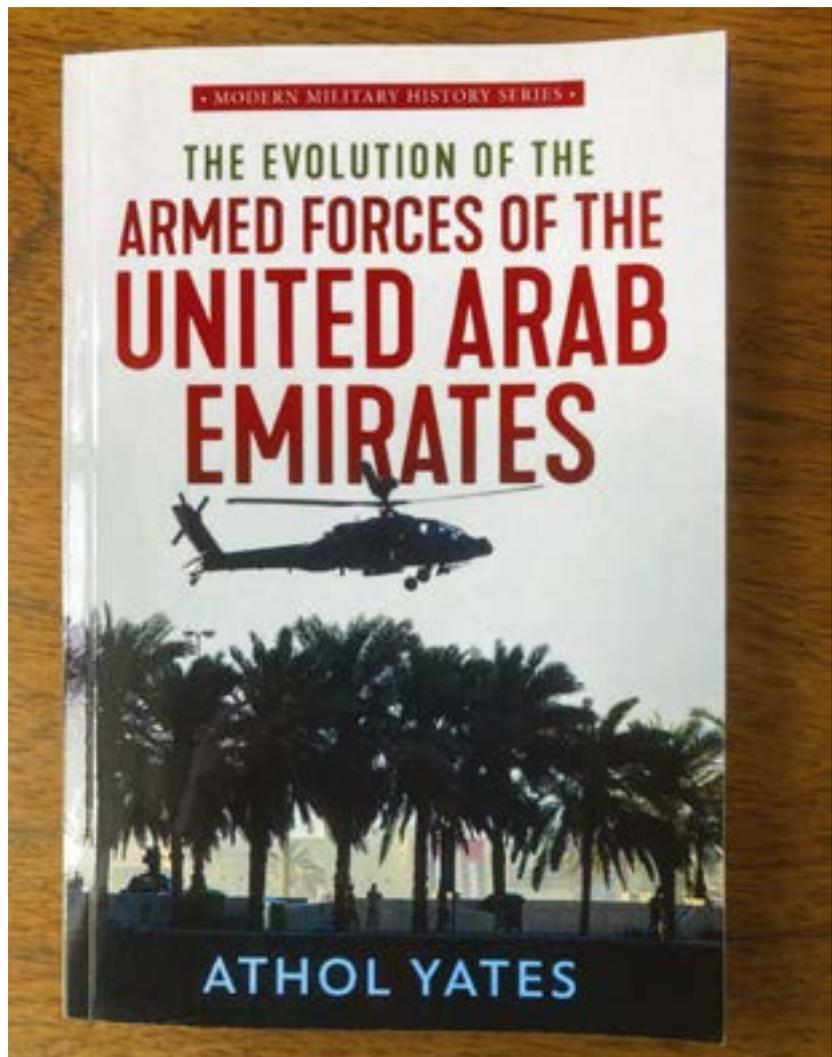
A review by John McKeown

Athol Yates's book is a detailed and comprehensive account of the evolution of the UAE armed forces over the past 60 years from groups of armed retainers of local rulers and small British-led and locally-raised Arab forces to the present significant, capable, well-equipped and experienced unified military capability.

Dr Yates is an assistant professor at Khalifa University in Abu Dhabi, specialising in security and related matters, particularly in the UAE. He was educated himself at Monash and the Australian National universities. His book is the result of deep research using a most impressive range of primary and secondary sources, ranging from all available Government and other official archives and documents to interviews, books and articles.

Through a combination of direct oversight by rulers, investment in its nationals, engagement of expatriates and the purchase of cutting edge military hardware, the UAE Armed Forces has become, arguably, the most capable Arab military. In the last decade, it has also gained considerable experience through its military operations in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

This book describes the history of the country's military from 1951 to 2020, giving unparalleled detail on the various forces that evolved into the UAE Armed Forces in 1976, and how that unified force has evolved to the present. It provides essential background information on how the country's geography, demographics and political system have shaped its military, the enduring roles of the military and the history of each military service. It also details the political and command structure governing the military, and its manpower and material characteristics. The book concludes with an explanation of how the UAE has been able



to develop such a highly capable military for its size in a relatively short period of time.

There is a great deal of interest for British and Omani readers in the history of the evolution of the forces. Both in the raising and officering of local forces such as the Trucial Oman Scouts and the basing of British regular forces – naval, army and air – British involvement has been very important, and there is considerable detail

on their basing, command structures and evolution. Omani subjects, particularly in the early days, served in significant numbers. The book also traces both the cooperation and the disputes, sometimes serious, over the years.

Dr Yates' book is undoubtedly the definitive book on its subject, of impressive scholarship, and will be the standard reference book. ■

THE ARABIAN DESERT IN ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITING SINCE 1950: A BARREN LEGACY?

*By Jenny Walker: to be published by Routledge in 2022/2023
Under the Research in Travel Writing (RRTW) Series*

A pre-publication note by Jenny Walker

‘So why do they do it?’ The heat intense, the sand excoriating, few distractions from self and soul amid the long days of needless deprivation and unsung accomplishment. With the Empty Quarter crossed and crossed again, there are no firsts to be had in the Arabian wilderness today, no accolades from august societies nor earnest readers to impress, so what motivates today’s desert travellers to adopt Arab headwear and rope up reluctant camels; what makes them head into the Peninsula sands when a comfortable, air-conditioned alternative often follows closely behind?

Personally, I can see the appeal: the breath of the dust devil as it spirals across the landscape, the chance encounter with startled fox and lizard, the vibrating heat of a cracked salt pan – these are the pared-back joys of those who set out across the desert on foot. But there are deeper attractions too: ever since sixth-century Egeria laid down an account of her journey to the Middle East in letters home, the desert has attracted journeys of discovery, personal pilgrimage or an escape from the built and the sown.

But does any of this have relevance today in a world where over half of us live in cities? Can the patient plod of desert encounter and the resulting travel account compete in an era of instant messaging and virtual reality? How do today’s Western travellers make sense of journeys through an Arabia that is bigger than the sum of its geographic parts in a post-colonial, post-Saidian age? These were some of the questions that I set out to explore through doctoral studies and this book is the result of that enquiry.

I ought to flag a vested interest here as this was no abstract endeavour. My own interest in the region dates back 40 years to a time when I had the pleasure of running across the Saudi escarpment, butterfly net in hand, to assist my father in his

entomological studies. Wrapped in a sheet on top of the vehicle at night, the boundless night sky at its most intense and the cicadas wheezing in the acacia-scented air, I remember almost the exact moment when the desert slipped into my soul. And of course, I owe that partly to heritage.

Western explorers of the past 300 years have been at pains to document ‘this cruel land’ – a land, which as Wilfred Thesiger famously suggested, ‘can cast a spell which no temperate climate can match’. But while much scholarly attention has focused on travel literature relating to T.E. Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger, among other Arabian desert explorers, there has been little critical attention regarding the work of those who follow in their footsteps. I wanted to bring the story up-to-date, to try to understand the motivations and expectations of those who since 1950 have written about the land of extremes. In so doing I wanted to understand my own role, as a Lonely Planet guidebook writer covering Oman and the wider Middle East for over two decades, in terms of the ethical and emotional dilemmas confronting today’s travel writers in an often-miscommunicated region.

Covering concepts such as belatedness, authorial anxiety, dark tourism and the accelerated sublime in relation to postcolonialism, *The Arabian Desert* looks at the legacy of the past through the lens of the present. It considers the desert as mechanised, politicised, urbanised and historicised and explores the reason for gender imbalances in a genre where women travellers are often relegated to the role of ‘pay, pack and follow’.

The book also encompasses an ecocritical analysis of the desert and its inhabitants in the age of the Anthropocene, revealing a blurring of distinctions not just



between ‘desert and sown’ but also between amateur and professional as each interacts with the environment – a blurring of distinctions as equally observed between traveller and tourist in the democratisation of expedition activity and desert encounter. This book, then, will hopefully appeal not just to scholars of travel literature but anyone with an interest in Arabia and the magic of wild spaces.

For members and friends of the Anglo-Omani society, there is the added attraction that three travellers whose work is under scrutiny in this book are no strangers to the society. Nigel Winsor’s Wahiba Sands project, still one of the most complete desert surveys ever undertaken, Mark Evans’s pioneering ‘footstep’ travels that share the focus of Empty Quarter travel with his fellow Omani expeditioners, and Helen Couchman’s photographic project that underscores the lack of representation of women in desert accounts, are showcased as among the best examples of modern travel writing on the region. Their accounts will no doubt inspire the next generation to engage with a land we all love. ■

Dr Jenny Walker, PhD, MPhil (Oxon), BA Hons, FRGS, MBGTW, is Consultant to the CEO for Technical Affairs of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)

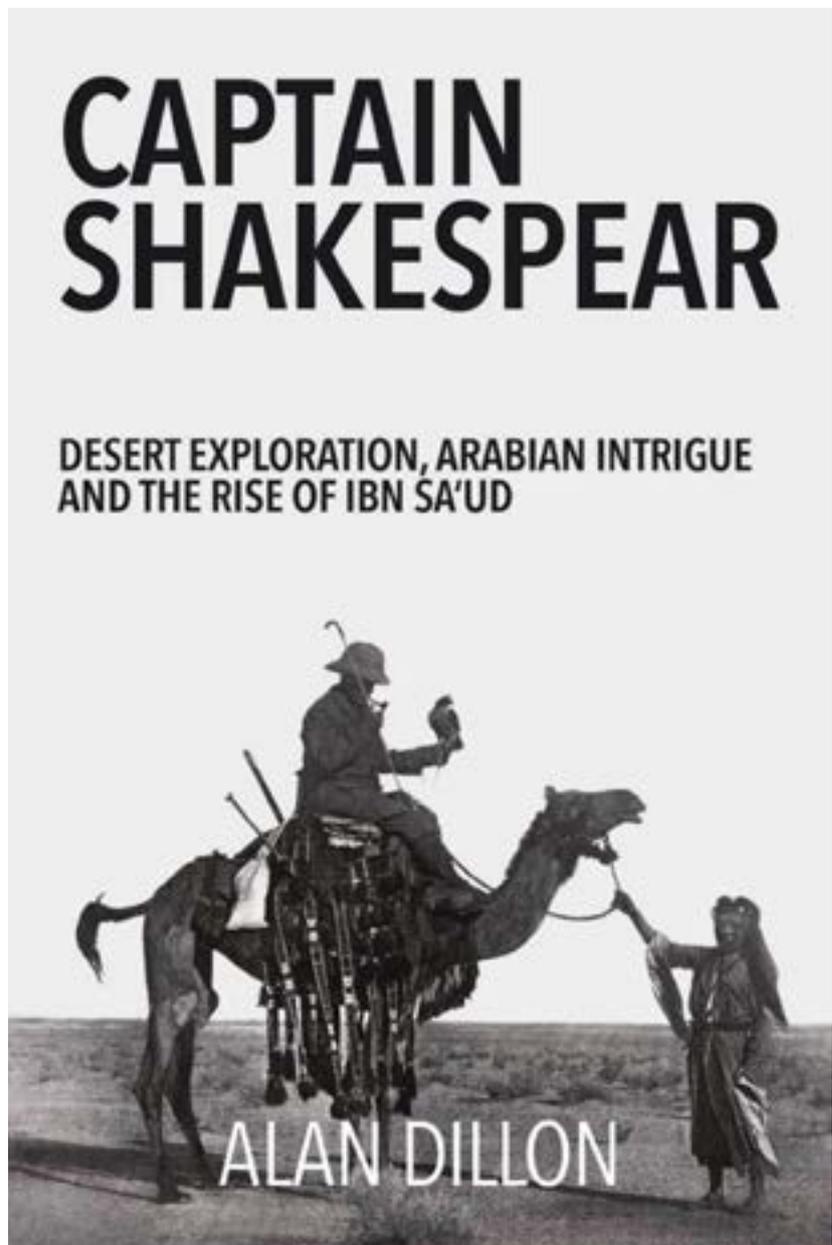
CAPT SHAKESPEAR: SOLDIER, DIPLOMAT, DESERT EXPLORER

The first major post-pandemic event at the Royal Geographical Society this year, celebrated by a large audience returning for an evening at the Society, was the Saudi Arabian sponsored presentation and open discussion on Capt William Shakespear (1878 - 1915), soldier, diplomat, desert explorer, photographer, adventurer.

He was British Political Agent in Kuwait, covering the whole Gulf area, mapped uncharted areas of Northern Arabia, made the first British contact with Ibn Sa'ud, future king and founder of the modern state, gained his trust and friendship, became a vital and unique intermediary between Britain and the Arab world, and

died in a battle at Jarrab between Ibn Sa'ud's forces and his adversary Ibn Rashid.

Ibn Sa'ud was deeply saddened by his death and regarded him as the greatest European he had met. Capt Shakespear is still held in high regard in Saudi Arabia and his life celebrated to this day. The



friendship shared benefitted not only those explorers who followed Shakespear into the deserts of Arabia but continuing British interests as a whole.

Capt Shakespear was a skilled and keen photographer, and was the first person seriously to record the area and its people including major families. The evening at the RGS included the opening of a month-long photographic exhibition, showing many of his pictures for the first time in a century.

The evening was of great interest to Anglo-Omani Society members, many of whom were present. Dr Elisabeth Kendall, Society Trustee, chaired the open discussions on the magnetic attraction of Arabia for explorers.

Dr Fahd bin Abdullah Al-Samari, Secretary-General of the King Abdul Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, talked about the impact made by the explorers on Arabia's relations with the



Western world. Alan Dillon, First Secretary at the British Embassy in Muscat and author, shared his expert knowledge of Shakespear and his times. Mark Evans, Executive Director of Outward Bound

Oman, was due to present modern perspective on the challenges and rewards of exploring and crossing one of the world's most challenging deserts, but sadly was unable to be present on the night. ■

THE SULTAN'S ARMED FORCES ASSOCIATION

The Sultan's Armed Forces Association was founded in 1968 with the aim of maintaining the spirit of mutual friendship among those who served and continue to serve in the armed forces of Oman. There are now almost 1,000 members, young and older, who served together in peace and war.



The Association organises two functions each year in London – a curry lunch in June and a black tie dinner in November, both at the Army and Navy Club – supports individual arm/regimental and regional functions round Britain including a weekend Scottish reunion, publishes an annual Journal, provides speakers at the National Defence College, organises occasional lectures at the Anglo-Omani Society premises, and maintains a memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum.

Close links are maintained with Oman: the Association President is the current Chief of Staff of SAF, Vice-Admiral Abdullah Bin Khamis Bin Abdullah Al Raisi. Air Marshall Jock Stirrup is the British vice-president.

The Association website – www.oman.org.uk – includes details of the association and its officers, information on events and functions as well as reports of members and activities including copies of the Journal with news of current activities in the armed forces of Oman as well as historical articles and images.

The website contains details of eligibility for membership of the Association and the membership application form. Life membership is at present granted following payment of a single payment of £25.

AIR MARSHAL SIR ERIK PETER BENNETT KBE, CB, CVO

A SHORT TRIBUTE BY NIGEL WINSER

Erik Bennett was a distinguished RAF officer who became Commander of the Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) and a trusted adviser to Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. He was born to Irish farmers in County Laois on 3 September 1928 and educated at the King's Hospital School in Dublin. He died of a heart attack in Oman on 28 January 2022, aged 93, and was buried at the church in his native village of Donoghmore on 10 February 2022.

At the funeral, Sir Alan Duncan spoke of Sir Erik's remarkable career in the RAF and his leadership role in the Middle East, notably in Jordan and Oman. After a spell as an airman, Erik was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in 1948. In 1958 he was loaned to the Royal Jordanian Air Force, and later became Air Advisor and occasional pilot to King Hussein. On his departure, the King invested him with the Order of Independence. Erik retained a deep affection for Jordan and was Godfather to King Abdullah.

In 1974 he became Commander of SOAF and held that position until the early 1990s. His greatest achievement was his commitment to lay the foundations for the highly respected Royal Air Force of Oman, setting the highest standards. In 1991, after retiring from Military Service, he became a principal and trusted advisor to Sultan Qaboos, establishing and maintaining close links between the Governments of Oman and Britain and their two Monarchs. For his services, Bennett was awarded the Order of Oman in 1980, the Companion of the Order of the Bath by the Queen in 1984 and the Order of Sultan Qaboos in 1985. He was knighted in 1990 in the Queen's Overseas Awards.

As the Sultan's advisor, Sir Erik gained insights into HM's vision for the future development of the Sultanate. I came to know of Sir Erik's interest in Oman's natural heritage in 1987. I recall my first meeting with him, then CSOAF, taking a keen interest in the results of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) survey of Oman's 'unique sand sea of a thousand colours,' the Sharqiya Sands. A naturalist at heart, he asked searching questions about the urgency to study in detail the unique geology and biology of Oman.

The findings of that three-year survey were published in a volume of the Journal of Oman Studies, Special Volume III edited by Dr Roderic Dutton, the science director of the survey. Mr Ralph Daly, His Majesty's



Sir Erik Bennett (centre) and Mr Ralph Daly with Sultan Qaboos.

Conservation Advisor at the time, enabled the Society to engage with all the Oman Government Ministries. "I have an Air Force on standby. How can we help with your survey?" asked Liwaa (Tayar) Erik Bennett (CSOAF) in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafa'a, near Seeb.

That connection with the RGS was maintained. Sir Erik became a Fellow of the Society, proposed by Frank Steele in 1993. In 2005 he helped establish the *Thesiger-Oman International Research Fellowships* as a memorial to the late Sir Wilfred Thesiger. Two fellowships are awarded each year for geographical research in the

Middle East and other arid areas of the world, open to university academics of any nationality. These Fellowships were made possible by an endowment from His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and continue to this day. The fine bust of Wilfred Thesiger that stands in the main hall of the Society was donated by Sir Erik personally.

A few years later Sir Erik approached the Earthwatch Institute in Oxford to develop field surveys to understand and protect Oman's unique natural heritage. This led to the *Oman Earthwatch Programme 2009-2015* overseen by Dr Saif Al Shaqsi, Director of the Oman National Field Research

Centre for Environmental Conservation, working closely with the Office for the Conservation of the Environment, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs, Sultan Qaboos and Nizwa Universities, the Oman Botanic Garden, and the Environment Society of Oman.

The speakers for the annual Oman Natural Heritage lectures in London are drawn from the growing nationwide network of active field scientists in the Sultanate, working hard to document, on land and sea, the unique and diverse wildlife of Oman, thanks to the early seeds sown by Sir Erik, Mr. Ralph Daly and others. ■

MR CHARLES HARRISON

ARTICLE BY ROBERT ALSTON

Charles Harrison, who died in March 2022, had a long and distinguished career with Shell. He headed Shell Markets in Oman in the late 1980s, was a key member of the British Businessmen's Group, and was a long-term member of the Anglo-Omani Society.

Shell has been involved in the development and expansion of the oil industry in Oman from the earliest days. It assumed the leading role in 1960, when other companies involved in the Iraq Petroleum Company withdrew, and has been a key partner in PDO in the 60 years since. Once production of oil in Oman got under way, Shell Markets became the vehicle for the company's downstream interests, most visibly petrol retailing on the burgeoning road network. It was this that Charles came to Oman to head, accompanied by his wife Sarah and three young sons.

It was a period of falling oil prices (who remembers \$12 a barrel?), slowing economic growth after the post 1970 surge, and emerging interest on the part of Omani companies in entering the retail fuel market, all of which Charles negotiated sure-footedly. It was also a time of treasured family memories under the spell of Oman's landscape and people.

As British Ambassador in Muscat, I was particularly aware of, and grateful for,



the leading role played by Charles through the British Businessmen's Group, in support of wider British commercial interests in Oman. Two examples stand out in which his wise and to the point advice made a real contribution. The first was the evolution, in response to the growing need to build the skills and talents of Oman's next generation of leaders, of what came to be known as British Scholarships for Oman, awards offered in parallel to governmental programmes and funded directly by British firms operating in Oman.

The second was the support for 'Oman With Britain', the major programme of bilateral activities in many different fields, which the Embassy co-ordinated in 1988, and which featured in the Fiftieth

Anniversary photographic exhibition mounted by the Society in 2021. With Richard Owens, subsequently Secretary and Trustee of the Society, Charles played a pivotal and supportive role in the strategic planning and implementation of Oman with Britain. Shell Markets' specific and high profile contribution was the importation of two London buses which plied Muscat's roads during the programme, at least one of which was still to be seen in Muscat for many years afterwards (see page 31 of last year's Review).

When he left Muscat Charles served Shell in Canada, New Zealand (where to our delight our paths crossed again) and in top levels of management of the parent company.

Charles was educated at The Perse School and Downing College, Cambridge. He was a noted school and university golf player, and in retirement golf was his passion: he was captain at Sunningdale, Chairman of the Golf Foundation, the charity committed to the sporting and social development of young people through golf, and a member of the R&A's General Committee. He will be missed by many. ■

Robert Alston was British Ambassador to Oman 1986-90; Past Chairman and Vice-President, Anglo Omani Society.

MRS FIONA WARTON



Fiona Warton, widow of a SOAF (RAFO) pilot from the 1960s, who created a unique and invaluable oral/video record from scores of interviews with British officers who served in Oman, and deposited it safely and securely at St Antony's College, Oxford, died in May after a short illness.

Fiona and her husband, Flight Lieutenant Keith Warton, who was a seconded officer from the RAF, produced the first item together – the glossy and lavishly illustrated *OMAN REUNION. A young man's experiences at war in the early years of The Sultan of Oman's Air Force September 1966 – May 1968*.

After his early and untimely death, she began to make video interviews of colleagues who served in Oman at the same time as Keith as an extension of his family history. She then decided to extend this beyond his colleagues to record as much as possible of the oral history of that period before it was lost entirely (see AOS Review, 2014, p68). At the time, she wrote: "I passionately feel that these stories must not be lost to future generations so they can benefit from the lessons learned at such cost and difficulty."

So began an audio-visual recording project which she pursued with great determination and at some cost over the next few years, interviewing most of the senior British officers who served in Oman and many others of all ranks in all three services. An early result of her work was featured in the year-long RAFO/RAF exhibition *An Enduring Relationship* at the RAF Museum London in 2014 and 2015.

She received some support from both the AOS and the SAF Association in the early years, including a valuable visit to the UK Defence Academy where she received guidance on interviewing and recording. Her interviews were conducted in a professional and courteous manner, with a kindly but probing approach which enabled her to bring out the best of recollections, anecdotes and considered opinions.

She handed over the recordings in 2017 to St Antony's College, where they were received by the Director of the Middle East Centre, Professor Eugene Rogan, and the archivist, Debbie Usher (see AOS Review, 2021, p76).

Professor Rogan said at the time: "I am so impressed by all you have achieved, and

so grateful to you... The Dhofar Campaign Oral History Project is a remarkable achievement, preserving the first hand experiences of those who served in the Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces in a crucial moment in the country's history. Filling the gap between the private papers held in Oxford's Middle East Centre Archive, the Imperial War Museum, and the public record held in the UK National Archive in Kew, these unique interviews form an historic collection and will stand as an essential reference for researchers for generations to come."

Fiona (nee MacDougall) was the daughter of a wartime RAF pilot. She was born in Boscombe, Hampshire, in 1949 – RAF Boscombe Down being the home of the British aviation test and evaluation centre and also location of the internationally renowned Empire Test Pilots' School. She followed a secretarial career including serving as Personal Assistant to Professor RV Jones, who had been a senior scientific advisor to Prime Minister Winston Churchill during WWII and a leading light in developing radar guidance systems for RAF Bomber Command and disrupting the Luftwaffe's systems.

Fiona always had a keen interest in aviation, including performing as an 18-19 year old 'wing-walker' on a Tiger Moth biplane at summer air shows. Soon afterwards, she met Keith and they were married in 1969. Based mainly in Aberdeen, they brought up two daughters and Fiona served as a local councillor. After Keith's retirement from the RAF they settled in Storrington, West Sussex, ran a successful B&B business and raised more than £30,000 for RAF charities.

When Keith died in 2010, a cherry tree was planted in his memory at Douneside House and Military Club on Royal Deeside. SAF veterans planted a second tree in Fiona's memory on the same day as her funeral in Storrington.

Fiona is survived by her two daughters and five grandchildren. ■

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCHEON

WILL BE HELD ON

FRIDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2022

12.30 FOR 1PM

AT THE

THE CAVALRY AND GUARDS CLUB

£60 INCLUDING DRINKS (NGG AND ALUMNI £30)

OUR LUNCHEONS AT THE RAF CLUB HAVE BEEN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL AND ENJOYABLE – SO MUCH SO THAT THEY HAVE INVARIABLY BEEN SOLD-OUT, LEAVING LATE APPLICANTS DISAPPOINTED. WE HAVE THEREFORE

MADE THE DECISION THIS YEAR TO MOVE TO THE CAVALRY AND GUARDS CLUB – NEXT DOOR! – WHERE THERE IS A LARGER DINING ROOM AVAILABLE. TICKETS WILL CONTINUE TO STAY AT £60 PER PERSON AND £30 FOR ALUMNI. WE DO HOPE YOU ARE ABLE TO JOIN US AT THE LUNCHEON OF THE YEAR!



