



THE  
ANGLO-OMANI  
SOCIETY

# REVIEW 2017



34 - 36 BRUTON STREET LONDON W1J 6QX 020 7493 8385 WILLIAMANDSON.COM



— the MYA collection —



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

WILLIAM & SON

LONDON



COVER PHOTO:  
Oman Through My Eyes  
Photo Credit: Anas Al Dheeb

<p>6 CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW</p> <p>8 OMANIS FOR OMANI REEFS</p>		<p>55 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY FOR CONTEMPORARY OMAN</p> <p>59 THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RENEWABLE ENERGY</p> <p>62 NEW GENERATION GROUP NEW GENERATION GROUP – 2016-2017 OMAN THROUGH MY EYES THE OMANI STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL MY EXPERIENCES ABROAD</p> <p>73 EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>74 ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON 2016</p>
<p>12 NEW "ACROSS AGES" MUSEUM PROJECT</p> <p>16 OMAN BOTANIC GARDEN PROJECT</p> <p>19 CONSERVING THE <i>ESMERALDA'S</i> TREASURES</p> <p>22 NORTHERN OMAN'S ANCIENT STONE TOMBS</p> <p>26 OMAN IN THE 1990s: CONSISTENCY AND FORESIGHT</p> <p>31 COSMOPOLITAN CONNECTIONS IN OMANI TRADITIONAL DRESS</p> <p>35 THE AOS TOUR OF OMAN 2017</p> <p>39 OMAN OPENS ITS FIRST CENTRE FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING</p> <p>42 MAPS, FORTS AND FRANKINCENSE</p> <p>44 OMAN CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF OIL EXPORTS</p> <p>46 TEACHING SHAKESPEARE IN OMAN</p> <p>48 LOOKING EAST: OMAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA</p> <p>50 THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY 40TH ANNIVERSARY EVENT, MUSCAT 2016</p> <p>52 AOS BIENNIAL VISIT TO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER</p>		<p>77 THE OMANI-BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL</p> <p>79 EMPOWERING THE SCIENTISTS OF TOMORROW</p> <p>82 THE AOS ALUMNI EVENT</p> <p>84 THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME</p> <p>85 THE OMANI BRITISH LAWYERS ASSOCIATION</p> <p>87 ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME</p> <p>91 THE AOS GAP YEAR SCHEME</p> <p>94 OMAN SAIL</p> <p>97 AOS 2017/18 TALKS PROGRAMME</p> <p>98 BOOK REVIEW</p> <p>99 MEET THE AOS STAFF</p>



# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

# REVIEW 2017

## THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

### Patron

HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said



### President

HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai

### Vice Presidents

Hussain bin Mohammed bin Ali  
Hon Ivor Lucas CMG  
Sir Terence Clark KBE, CVO  
Mr Richard Muir CMG

### Board of Trustees

**Chairman:** Mr Robert Alston CMG, QSO, DL  
**Vice Chairman:** Brig John McKeown CBE  
**Vice Chairman OBBC:** Mr Matthew Foster  
**Hon Treasurer:** Mr Martyn Bishop FCA  
**Company Secretary:** Mr Alan Milne FCIS

Mr Oliver Blake  
Mrs Louise Hosking  
Dr Elisabeth Kendall  
Wg Cdr Ian Kendrick  
Col Nigel Knocker OBE  
Mr Richard Owens OBE

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

### Editors

Wg Cdr Ian Kendrick      [ian@theKendricks.plus.com](mailto:ian@theKendricks.plus.com)  
Brig John McKeown CBE      [ferrybarn@btinternet.com](mailto:ferrybarn@btinternet.com)

### Staff

Mr Ben Wright      Manager  
Ms Isabelle Habib      NGG & Communications Officer  
Ms Ami Amlani      Membership & Events Officer  
Ms Kamille Leon      Receptionist

### Society Address

34, Sackville Street, London W1S 3ED  
+44 (0)20 7851 7439  
[www.angloomanisociety.com](http://www.angloomanisociety.com)

### Advertising

Christine Heslop  
18 Queen's Road, Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 3AJ  
Telephone: 01722 324822  
E-mail: [chrisieheslop@aol.com](mailto:chrisieheslop@aol.com)

### Printed by

Brunton Business Publications  
1 Salisbury Office Park, London Road, Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 3HP  
Telephone: 01722 337038  
[www.brunton.co.uk](http://www.brunton.co.uk)

## 2017 REVIEW ONLINE

Visit the Anglo-Omani Society website and see 'The Review 2017' online using the latest page turning technology. Pass the link to this year's issue on to colleagues and friends.

[www.angloomanisociety.com](http://www.angloomanisociety.com)



### PROTECTIVE NOTICE

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

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

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



## Enjoy instant fee-free transfers to your HSBC accounts globally

Fast, convenient and secure money transfers with HSBC Global View and Global Transfers.

Here's why you should sign up for this service:

-  Log-in once to view and manage all your accounts on one screen
-  Fee-free transfers<sup>1</sup>
-  Transfer up to USD 100,000 in 6 seconds<sup>2</sup>
-  Live rates that refresh every 120 seconds<sup>3</sup>
-  24/7 access

To apply:  
Visit: [www.hsbc.co.om/gvgt](http://www.hsbc.co.om/gvgt)



<sup>1</sup>Fee-free transfers applicable to HSBC Premier and HSBC Advance accounts. Transfer Charges to accounts in Egypt in Egyptian Pound (EGP), India in Indian Rupee (INR), Pakistan in Pakistan Rupee (PKR) and Philippines in Philippine Peso (PHP). Correspondent banking charges are waived when 'GVGT' is selected for transfer charges to accounts in Egypt in Egyptian Pound (EGP), India in Indian Rupee (INR), Pakistan in Pakistan Rupee (PKR) and Philippines in Philippine Peso (PHP).  
<sup>2</sup>Global Transfers are offered instantly typically within 6 seconds from submitting the required information for supported currencies. For a list of supported currencies, please visit [www.hsbc.co.om/GVGT](http://www.hsbc.co.om/GVGT). Exceptions, in circumstances outside of our control, it may not be possible to effect your transfer through Global Transfers, in which case you should contact our Customer Services to effect your transfer. For terms and conditions, please visit [www.hsbc.co.om/GVGT](http://www.hsbc.co.om/GVGT).  
<sup>3</sup>Live foreign exchange rates are now available for online and in-branch money transfers. Rates are refreshed every 60 seconds at the branch, 60 seconds in Personal Internet Banking and 120 seconds in Global View and Global Transfers during International weekdays (Monday-Friday). On international weekends (Saturday and Sunday) or when the currency markets are closed, live foreign exchange rates are not available and the rates will remain unchanged until the next international working day.  
© Copyright, HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.C. 2017. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of HSBC Bank Oman S.A.O.C.

## THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The Anglo-Omani Society  
Annual Luncheon will be  
held on **THURSDAY,**  
**12th OCTOBER** at the  
**Royal Air Force Club**

*Advance booking necessary.*

## DO YOU HAVE A CONNECTION WITH OMAN?

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING THE  
ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY?

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

[www.angloomanisociety.com](http://www.angloomanisociety.com)

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

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

The Anglo-Omani Society in 2017

# CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

BY ROBERT ALSTON

The Anglo Omani Society passed its 41st birthday earlier in the year and I feel confident in saying that it is in good health with adrenalin flowing briskly from its many and diverse activities.

The highpoint for me of the past 12 months has been the second celebration of our 40th Anniversary following the memorable Lancaster House event in January last year. This was held on the terrace of the British Ambassador's Residence in Muscat in October and saw some 150 British and Omani friends and members come together to mark the anniversary. Those present reflected a wide range of age groups and we were privileged by the presence of senior Ministers of the Omani Government.

Thanks to the healthy finances which we enjoy as a result of the generous endowment from our Patron HM Sultan Qaboos a decade ago, we are able to increase incrementally from year to year the grants we make to a wide range of educational and cultural activities involving people from both countries, reaching the sum of £150 000 in the financial year to the end of March 2017.

Our core programmes thrive. We have enjoyed a fascinating and wide range of talks as part of our monthly lecture programme at Sackville Street. We have continued to send gap year and other students term by term to the Sultan's school in Muscat. We sponsored a further successful cohort of young Arabists from British universities at Manah last summer. Our grants programme contributes year by year to the programme which introduces the Sultan's scholars from poor backgrounds at the Sultan's School to the United Kingdom.

Much of this and more is focused on fostering ways in which the next generations of young people from each country can better get to know the other. The activities of the New Generation Groups in London and Muscat remains at the heart of this with active and energetic programmes of lectures and social interaction, and in the case of the Muscat group, active involvement in support of a project supported by one of the Prince of Wales's charities here.



An Omani NGG Delegation visited Cambridge in July 2016 for an excellent programme of discussion with British counterparts of issues around communication between governments and people. The animation and quality of the conversation at the closing dinner in Corpus Christi Hall was my other highlight of the last 12 months. Active planning is under way for a further visit to Oman by a Delegation from Britain in November 2017.

Our official guest at the annual lunch last October 2016 was, for the second time, the Minister of Higher Education from Muscat. Struck by her statistic that her Ministry alone was funding some 2500 Omani students in Britain for the academic year then beginning, we have been seeking ways in which we can increase the Society's interaction with Omani student groups in universities here.

In this and other ways we seek to increase the use of Sackville Steet as 'Beit Oman' in London for a wide range of activities designed to increase awareness and knowledge between the two countries across the broadest possible range of subjects.

We have this year reviewed our corporate membership structure in the light of the setting up of the Omani-British Business Council, under the Chairmanship of Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, as the partner of the Oman British Friendship Association in Muscat. They are now the twin vehicles for promoting business relationships between us. Our corporate membership will be merged with that of the OBBC from April next year and Matt Foster has been appointed Vice-Chairman of OBBC and also a member of the Society's Board to oversee these twin streams of activity.

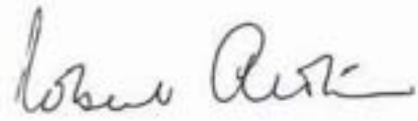
Our relations with the Omani Embassy in London and the British Embassy in Oman remain strong. I am grateful for the support of His Excellency Abdul Aziz Al Hinai, supported by Sheikh Saud Al Mashani, for the Society and its activities. I am also grateful to Jon Wilks, British Ambassador in

Muscat for the past three years, for hosting our birthday reception last autumn and for advice and support in many other ways. We wish him well as he prepares to leave Muscat for a new appointment elsewhere in the Middle East.

Finally thanks to our own team, first the Board in which John McKeown has succeeded Nigel Knocker as Vice-Chairman. Nigel, who remains a Board member, has served as Vice-Chairman for a decade, including a year as Acting Chairman before I took over the position three years ago, and as a Board member for many years before that. The Society owes him a great deal. I single out also

Geoff Brindle, indefatigable organiser of annual lunches and other events, who stood down after the 2017 AGM. Thanks are also due to our small team at Sackville Street led by Ben Wright and to four excellent and committed interns who have all served the Society well over the past 12 months.

I look forward with relish to another activity packed year ahead. ■



Robert Alston

## رمز الجودة A SYMBOL OF QUALITY



Towell Group Bldg., Exhibition/Service Road, Ghala  
 P.O. Box 1040, Postal Code 112, Rowi  
 Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24526001, Fax: 24526051  
 E-mail: general@wjtowell.com  
 Website: http://www.wjtowell.com

# OMANIS FOR OMANI REEFS

## COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH AND CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY SAM MITTMERHAM

Since 2009 award-winning international conservation organisation, Biosphere Expeditions, with the support of the Reef Check Foundation, the Marine Conservation Society and the Anglo-Omani Society, have been surveying Omani reefs and training Omanis in reef survey techniques.

This has resulted in the establishment of marine protected areas in Musandam and community-based surveys near Muscat. Now Omanis, spearheaded by Jenan Alasfoor, have taken the next step, setting up local endeavour Reef Check Oman and giving Omani reefs the science-based care they need.

I was six metres under the sea when Dr Matthias Hammer tucked me firmly under his arm. I wasn't about to argue – mainly because I couldn't speak – but also he was

bigger than me and a former special forces soldier. An Oxbridge-trained biologist, international rower, ski instructor, wilderness medical officer and survival expert, Matthias – luckily for the world – has decided to use his powers for the good and set up Biosphere Expeditions.

I had arrived four days earlier to join a diving trip run by the organisation. A not-for-profit organisation, it specialises in adventurous conservation holidays that give volunteers the chance to participate in

Our live-aboard diving dhow "MS Sindbad" and limestone cliffs of the Musandam peninsula.



Technicolour reef.

scientific surveys, whilst training locals in conservation techniques for free. My group would be assessing the state of the beautiful coral reefs that fringe the Musandam peninsula.

It wasn't easy. For the first three days we breakfasted at 06:30 and as our dhow sailed past the towering limestone mountains that plunge straight into the sea, creating the area's fjords, we had classes with the expedition's marine biologist who taught us to recognise the fish, invertebrates and sea-bed terrain, and later we took exams in these subjects. We needed to pass at least one test to qualify to start Reef Check, an international reef-monitoring scheme that allows scientists to compare the state of the eco-systems around the world. Yet the first time we sank below the sea's surface the hard work seemed worth it. The landscape above was endlessly arid and unrelieved by vegetation, but underwater everything was in glorious technicolour.

We spotted a combative lionfish displaying its stripes and psychedelic parrotfish grazing on coral. Floating past rocks studded with black, spiky urchins were Arabian angelfish, larger than dinner plates. And to my excitement, I was suddenly surrounded by a fast-moving stream of silver fusilier fish. The corals themselves were beautiful – intricate structures in primary colours.

Dr. Hammer explained that coral reefs provide a habitat for 33% of the world's fish, and generate income for 20m people – but they are vanishing at an alarming rate. Created by delicate living organisms called polyps, they are easily killed. On the tiny



Dr. Matthias Hammer giving a dive safety talk.

propeller plane that flies between the peninsula and Oman's capital, Muscat, two women told me lurid tales of snorkelling tourists walking all over the coral.

And this is just one threat to the reef. While Musandam has no heavy industry to pollute the water, and no huge fishing companies, spearfishing is a problem in the region, and a recent cyclone by the name of Gonu and algae bloom have affected the

reef. Climate change also damages the coral, and our job was to track the health of the Musandam reef.

It took hours of staring at pictures, but eventually I learned to spot the differences between grouper fish (grumpy looking) and sweetlips (they pout like Angelina Jolie); urchins and sponge; hard coral and soft coral. And before we knew it, we were diving along the reef, surveying, a 100 m



Surveying the reef along a 100m transect line.



Arabian angelfish.

tape our line of science along which we record fish, invertebrates and ground composition, each of us collecting one data point after another. Over the days of the expedition, the surveys each year, over multiple years, a picture of the reefs' health emerges, reports are written and handed over to government, consultants and other decision-makers in Oman.

And later, when the surveying is done, back in the water with Dr. Hammer holding onto me, my face was inches from waving sea anemones, and for the first time I saw

## OMANIS FOR OMANI REEFS

the coral flicker as the tiny creatures that build it retracted at our presence. Before I knew it I was dangled upside down to peer under rock ledges, looking for coral-banded shrimp and lobsters, and I spotted the inquisitive face of a moray eel. With my flailing arms finally calmed, I could swim without terrifying the snub-nosed butterfly

Check Oman and giving Omani reefs the science-based care they need.

Jenan Alasfoor from Muscat told me on the phone from Oman, “I am an avid diver and I was trained by Biosphere Expeditions and thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society to Reef Check Trainer level. I also recently became the Reef Check co-ordinator for

Oman. The ocean is my passion and reefs are under threat from climate change, pollution, development and other impacts. Reefs are a beautiful asset of our country, but it often seems they have no voice. We need more Omanis speaking up for our reefs and protecting them, not just because they are beautiful, but also because they



Moray eel.

fish, bright snappers and sulking groupers.

My experience with Biosphere Expeditions was in 2009, the year Biosphere Expeditions started working on coral reefs in Oman. Since then the organisation, with the support of the Anglo-Omani Society, has been surveying Omani reefs and training Omanis in reef survey techniques. In 2011 this resulted in the establishment of marine protected areas in Musandam and the first community-based surveys near Muscat in early 2017. And as I write this, Omanis – spearheaded by Jenan Alasfoor, a graduate of the Biosphere Expeditions placement programme for locals, which is funded by the Anglo-Omani Society – have taken the next step, setting up local endeavour Reef

Some graduates of the Biosphere Expeditions placement and capacity-building programme, sponsored by the Anglo-Omani Society. Jenan Alasfoor is in the middle.



provide income through tourism, protection from storms and form the basis of fishermen livelihoods around the coast.”

Dr. Hammer adds: “This is exactly what we need: local people surveying their own reefs and supporting government efforts so that the natural beauty of Oman can be better protected and passed down to the next generation, as well as safeguard livelihoods and traditions, for example of fishermen or those depending on income through tourism.”

In another positive development, both the Grand Hyatt Muscat, as well as Euro Divers Oman, have agreed to provide corporate support for Reef Check Oman’s community-based survey efforts. Karin Straub, Managing

Director of Euro Divers says: “Healthy reefs are the basis of our business, so we are proud to be working with Reef Check Oman towards this.” Paul Murphy, Managing Director of the Grand Hyatt Muscat agrees: “I am happy to confirm Hyatt’s support for this important effort to preserve the beauty of Oman, something our business is based on too.”

“And that’s great”, says Alasfoor, “because the more support we receive for our efforts, the better, and we are grateful to Hyatt and Euro Divers for their assistance, and of course to the Biosphere Expeditions and the Anglo-Omani Society for getting it all off the ground. I know the economic climate in Oman is tough at the moment, but if there are any more companies out there, who would like to become involved in community-based environmental protection schemes, they should contact me so that we can work with their CSR departments and staff.”

Beyond garnering support, the plan of

Reef Check Oman is now to co-ordinate concerted, community-based survey efforts around the country and to work with the government and Biosphere Expeditions to provide science-based information and solutions for reef protection.

Jenan Alasfoor concludes “the more Omanis we can train and the more capacity we can build, the better. So we invite divers and businesses all across Oman to join us in our efforts. With their help we can create something big and positive for our country. Reefs in Oman are threatened, and with them the country’s economy and well-being. Problems are overfishing, pollution and development without concern for the environment. The time to be aware of this and act accordingly is now, and if community-based surveys and the scientific data they will provide can help government to make the right decisions based on scientific facts, then everyone wins in the end.” ■

## MORE INFORMATION:

Biosphere Expeditions  
[www.biosphere-expeditions.org](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org)  
 Annual Musandam reef survey, open to all qualified divers on [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/musandam](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/musandam).  
 Placement programme for local people [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/placements](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/placements).  
 Annual reef health reports [www.biosphere-expeditions.org/reports](http://www.biosphere-expeditions.org/reports).

Reef Check Oman  
[www.reefcheckoman.org](http://www.reefcheckoman.org).  
 Businesses, other groups and individuals interested in supporting the community-based surveys can contact Jenan Alasfoor (GSM +968 99822116).

More information about placements for Omanis to be trained in reef survey techniques and to participate in other ways is on [www.reefcheckoman.org/participate.html](http://www.reefcheckoman.org/participate.html)



Volunteer divers surround Karin Straub (second left) of Euro Divers Oman and Jenan Alasfoor (third left) of Reef Check Oman to celebrate the launch of Reef Check Oman and corporate support for its efforts. The Anglo-Omani Society logo is displayed in recognition of the Society’s support for the placement and capacity-building programme.

# NEW “ACROSS AGES” MUSEUM PROJECT

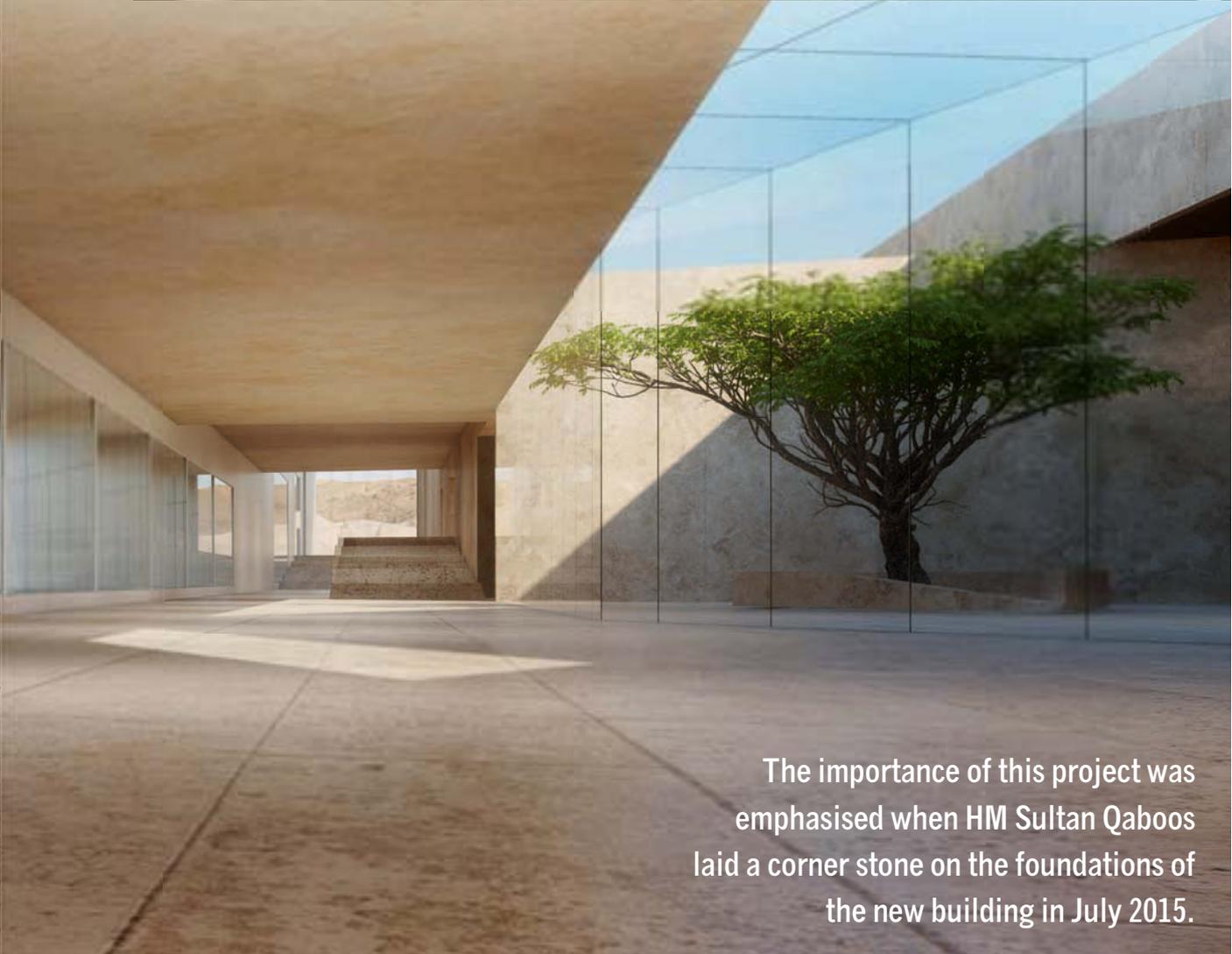
The Oman Museum: “Across Ages” will tell the story of Oman from prehistory to the present day, with a focus on the period of Renaissance since 1970, during which Oman has experienced a sustained period of development and transformation. A range of display techniques will be used including film, sound, collections, interactive features and models. This major new museum is currently being planned and developed in Oman, and the

specially designed buildings are being built near Nizwa.

In August 2016, Omani citizens were asked to present any artifacts of cultural and natural heritage value to be part of the Museum’s growing collection. Traditional handicraft products, old and rare photographs, correspondence and documents, tools, traditional weaponry and guns, old banknotes, coins and stamps, and any other object that might be related to Oman’s cultural heritage will be welcomed.



The striking buildings illustrated on this page hint at some super-modern contents, but in fact, they are an architect’s impression of what Oman’s latest, and perhaps most ambitious museum will look like when it opens in the year 2020.



The importance of this project was emphasised when HM Sultan Qaboos laid a corner stone on the foundations of the new building in July 2015.



## SOCIETY MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO SUPPORT THE PROJECT

The Project Director recently wrote to Chairman Robert Alston with information about the project and including the following request:

*“We are extending this call to Anglo-Omani Society members in the UK to present any artefacts of cultural and natural heritage value to be part of the new Museum’s collection. We are interested in all types of collections from any period of Oman’s history (from pre-history to today), including items that represent Oman’s natural, cultural, and geographic diversity. Many members were in Oman during the mid-20th century and early Renaissance period, and any objects from this period would be of particular value*



*to OMAA narratives. We are also specifically looking to source a copy of Kalima Al-Sultan (Sultan Said bin Taimur’s manifesto published in 1968) and any materials from the 1960s and 1970s, in addition to the objects previously described.*

*“Many of you continue to hold Oman in high regard, evidenced by your membership of the AOS and commitment to its mission and values. We would be most grateful if you would consider participating in this remarkable project.”*





“Many of you continue to hold Oman in high regard, evidenced by your membership of the AOS and commitment to its mission and values. We would be most grateful if you would consider participating in this remarkable project.”



The project is being undertaken by Oman’s Royal Court of Affairs, with Barker Langham, a cultural consultancy based in London, developing content for the Museum. If any member feels they have any objects of interest to the Museum, please send details and specifications, but not the items themselves, to Barker Langham:  
Barker Langham  
1 Naoroji Street  
London WC1X 0GB  
Tel: 020 7278 7847

*If you have any questions, please contact Aisa Martinez, Consultant at Barker Langham (aisa@barkerlangham.co.uk or at the phone number above).*

# OMAN BOTANIC GARDEN PROJECT

ARTICLE BY HATTIE FIELD AND STEPHANIE LEONIDA

A joint Anglo-Omani team embarked in January of this year on a ground-breaking field study in the central desert of Oman run by the Oman Botanic Garden.

The group consisted of 20 members from across the UK and Oman with a few others from Canada and Germany. Several botanists from the Oman Botanic Garden welcomed the international members and took the lead with research methods.

The expedition set out to achieve two main objectives. The first was to strengthen cross-collaboration between Omani and UK academics. The second objective was the botanic survey and collection of both data and specimen for the herbarium in Muscat.

The survey took place across the central desert of Oman, in collaboration with the Oman Botanic Garden. By strategically surveying numerous transects from the coast to the inland desert, the team aimed to determine a detailed profile of the vegetation cover, and specifically the

presence of seven key species which could provide insight into the geoclimatic zones in the area.

While small square areas were surveyed to identify endemic plant species, the environmental setting was also taken into consideration. The relationship between the presence of plant species is influenced by the surrounding environmental factors, such as exposure to light and the underlying geology. Soil samples were taken carefully at each transect by the team's geologists, Clarissa and Daniel, and the surrounding geomorphology noted.

The team saw and experienced dramatic transformations of the landscape, with the expedition reaching across the northern Hajar mountains (near Seeb) to the southern coastline (by Ha-sik). The bold, jagged mountains of the North and



A hardy plant clings to bedrock in the desert environment.



crumbling fossil beds of the South contrasted with the plains of sand and gravel flats in the central desert, where most of the field work took place.

It was in this region that the field study team intended to gather data to try to trace a 'biogeo-climatic boundary'. In addition to environmental factors, a key influence for plant presence is the regional climate. Because both palaeartic and tropic air systems circulate in the country, it is believed that the boundaries between them can be traced by the presence of particular plant species, as specific ones would favour one of the two microclimates over the other.

Countless sets of data were collected, with the presence of seven key indicator plant species and observation on ground cover noted. Months after the field survey was completed, the team continues with the process of compiling and analysing data in collaboration with the botanists of the Oman Botanic Garden.

The expedition began with a meeting at the Oman Botanic Garden to learn more about the project and to meet the Omani field scientists. These researchers were the backbone of our trip, offering extensive knowledge on the plant life which grows in the Central Desert as well as providing everyone with training in identification methods for the species. Our experience of the work being done in the Oman Botanic Garden was impressive. It was particularly exciting to be offered the opportunity of involvement with this project and we are all looking forward to seeing the Garden as it comes closer to completion.

After a morning spent with the Botanic Garden we made our way out of Muscat and began the two day drive to the start point of our first quadrat. For most of our team this was also to be our first experience of Oman, and already we found

ourselves completely taken in by the landscape surrounding us. The first sunset on the road was particularly mesmerising and we watched the sun fall through the vehicle's windows as we drove to our first campsite of the expedition. That evening we laid wadi mats upon the ground to provide our sleeping bags with a barrier from the sand and spent a long time admiring the clear and bright night sky above the remote location.

A few instances on the road and off the track provided a unique insight into the marriage of life and land of the Omani people. Their knowledge of nature is a stunning repository of information retained over many generations. This knowledge is something that the individual peoples of the West, represented by our diverse team, would appreciate and imbibe.

Our first example of ethnobotany came in the form of *Hyoscyamus ghallaheri*, one



The base camp in Wadi Ghudain.

The next night we were joined by the Oman team and were able to spend our first night as a complete group sharing stories of past expedition and fieldwork adventures whilst cooking a meal over a large fire. This provided us with further insight into the variation within Oman's landscape, both culturally and physically. It also offered us the chance to get to know individual members of our team. Before the beginning of this expedition many of us had not previously met, and so this night was a further opportunity to develop friendships amongst the group and get to know one another better.



On-site discussion of methods.

Collecting specimens using portable plant presses.



of the plant specimens endemic to Oman that we needed to locate and collect. Local Omani botanist Saif al Hatmi explained that the plant could be boiled and used to create a yellow dye for colouring clothing. Another example came in the form of using date palm fronds to construct make-shift shelters for the ever roaming bedu, to shade not only themselves but their cattle. Dates are a vital resource in Oman, for obvious nutritional purposes and for welcoming guests, the perfect extension of hospitality.

Lastly, a plant that held a special place for everyone on the expedition team, particularly Saif Abdulrahman, another local Omani botanist who joined the team mid-way through the expedition, was a species of *Caralluma*, a succulent-like plant, found on a rocky escarpment in one of our sampling areas. This plant was special. One evening in camp, a local

woman told us that this plant could be used to treat eye infections and Saif alluded to its possible use in helping relieve the symptoms of diabetes. Extraordinary gems like this kept popping up throughout the journey and continued to inspire the team with the importance of its endeavour.

During the expedition we were consistently impressed by the generosity given to us by the Omani community. Whilst conducting our field surveys we were amazed at the number of offers of coffee and dates we received from local communities, as well as the interest they held in the work we were conducting. On one occasion, a small group of us returned by hitch hiking to the vehicle we had to leave behind us on our way to a remote

point. It had been impassible to us, yet navigated smoothly by local driving knowledge and a sturdier vehicle.

Another memory that stands out is camping on the edge of the village Sharbathat with our evening meal of fresh fish gifted to us by the local fishing community and much enjoyed by all after a hot day driving across the coastline. This warm welcome offered to our team is something unique to Oman and gave us a true experience into the kindness which is embedded in Oman's culture.

Our visit to Oman has allowed us to engage and experience the richness and diversity of both the landscape and culture that Oman offers, and already we are looking for the next chance to return. ■



Study team members on the cliff edges of Wadi Watiif.



Fading light over Wadi Ayanah.

# CONSERVING THE *ESMERALDA'S* TREASURES

ARTICLE BY DAVID MEARNS AND HEATHER STEWART

In last year's Review we wrote about the discovery of the Portuguese East Indiaman *Esmeralda: a nau*, which sank off the north-eastern coast of Al Hallaniyah Island in 1503 and was successfully excavated during a three-year collaborative project between Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MHC) and Blue Water Recoveries (BWR) of West Sussex, UK.

The underwater excavation, conducted by teams of divers working in two to six metres of water within 100 metres of the coast, yielded 2,810 individual artefacts including rare silver and gold coins, the ship's bell that was dated 1498, ceramic sherds from Portugal, Africa, India and China, beautiful trade beads, armaments, navigation equipment, and hundreds of munitions made of lead, stone and iron. Even seemingly perishable organic material like the peppercorns and cloves that drove the Portuguese to make the treacherous journey to conduct trade with India survived the harsh conditions as they were found entombed within a large concretion that held the bulk of artefacts.

The announcement of *Esmeralda's* discovery, made by the MHC in a March 2016 press conference, was covered by media outlets around the world in over 500 print and on-line articles and in several videos that have been collectively viewed over 8 million times. This exciting discovery, due in large part to its direct connection with the famed explorer Vasco da Gama who led the Portuguese fleet and whose uncle Vicente Sodré – as commander of the *Esmeralda* – died in the shipwreck, brought worldwide recognition to the MHC and Oman's rich underwater cultural heritage. As the media attention died down, the focus of the project switched to the cataloguing, conservation



The entire MHC staff was involved in packaging the collection of more than one thousand ceramic sherds.

## CONSERVING THE *ESMERALDA*'S TREASURES

and scientific study of the complex and varied collection of artefacts that paint a vivid picture of life on board the ship.

As this was the first major underwater excavation of archaeological material conducted in Oman, specialist skills and equipment were needed to deal with the artefacts that had been immersed in seawater for over 500 years. With the generous support of two grants from the Anglo-Omani Society, an MSc trained marine conservator – Ms. Heather Stewart – travelled to Oman with suitcases full of equipment to oversee the conservation work and to train the Ministry's staff in basic conservation skills that will be transferable to future archaeological projects.

Marine archaeologists and divers that have worked on the project from its inception, including Ayyoub Al Busaidi (MHC Supervisor of Underwater Archaeology), Ahmed Al Siyabi and Mashal Al Shaaily, have all taken part in learning the process of finds recording and care to ensure that finds recovered on future projects in Oman receive the best possible treatment from excavation through to storage and display. This training has been particularly relevant to Mashal, a highly experienced diver who is currently studying for a degree in archaeology, which would allow him to become an official MHC marine archaeologist. Other archaeologists, archaeological surveyors and photographers within the MHC's



**Mashal Al Shaaily of the MHC photographs an artefact for the Ministry's catalogue.**

archaeology department, including Amira Abelushi, Salim.M.Alhajri and Qais Hilal Almazrouai, have also benefited from working alongside Heather on this remarkable collection.

The actual process of conservation is one of recording, planning and decision-making. In each step conservation options were discussed with the staff who were then guided in the recording process mainly through photography and written records. This careful approach was particularly necessary with conservation of the eighteen bronze breech chambers recovered from the wreck site. Breech chambers are a gunpowder charge loaded

into a cannon and early types of this age are particularly rare. Many of the examples from the wreck were sealed with the original wooden bungs, which allowed Heather to excavate gunpowder samples from the chamber that will be chemically analysed to determine the ingredients the Portuguese used in making their gunpowder. Qais Hilal Almazrouai has taken the majority of the photographs for the collection, after initial training by Phillip P.Koch a professional archaeological photographer. This has allowed him to improve his skills and build a portfolio of photographs, including those used to illustrate this article.

Archaeological photography is particularly important as it makes it possible to view any changes within objects at a later date.

The AOS grants also helped fund visits from laser scanning expert Dr. Jay Warnett and his team from Warwick University and the Curator of the Mary Rose Museum, Dr. Alexandra Hildred. Part of the collection consists of forty-one 15-kg granite cannon balls identically carved with letters that may help determine where they were made and the identity of the stone masons used to supply the fleet with these early stone shot. Each cannon ball was scanned using a state-of-the-art laser and the resulting images revealed a range of stone carving techniques such as peck marks from chisels. This was the first time MHC staff were exposed to such sophisticated imaging equipment and were all given



**Ayyoub Al Busaidi, Supervisor of the MHC's underwater archaeology programme, excavates the gunpowder contents from one of the sealed breech powder chambers.**

training in its use. Dr. Hildred, who is a recognised world expert on weaponry from the early 16th century, visited to record the breech chambers and to recommend a sampling methodology for the gunpowder.

During Heather's seven-month stay in Muscat several trips to the Sultan Qaboos University hospital were made to X-Ray the concretions and finds. Concretions are large masses that form when objects decay near iron and can contain numerous finds. The process was intended to make the staff familiar with the idea of X-raying finds and to understand the significance of these seemingly inconsequential lumps. As there is no access to powerful gamma X-ray technology in Oman, the hospital machine was used to make assessments of thinner materials or to view the metallic components within wooden handles. The resulting X-ray images aid in making treatment decisions and in mechanical cleaning. Visits to the Sultan Qaboos Geology and Physics department with Dr. Hildred also helped to organise testing with EDXRF and XRD with Dr. Bernhard Precejus and Dr. Zac Ioannou. These techniques allow for the identification of metals prior to a treatment decision. It is hoped to test the metal composition of the breech chambers in the next conservation period.

Conservation training emphasised the responsibility of the MHC to care for the artefacts as they are curators for the entire collection. A series of lectures given by Heather to the MHC staff dealt with decay issues when conserving and curating

marine material. This is particularly important for marine finds, which are sensitive to the environment and thus require special packaging. The team also assisted in other areas of collection maintenance, such as changing water for finds that need to remain wet. Teaching proper handling techniques was also essential, such as not lifting artefacts by their handles or to plan movements when a team is required. The staff also took part in finds processing through packaging finds, which can be as simple as correctly bagging and numbering materials to an archival standard to producing creative packaging solutions for large objects.

The conservation work is still on-going, although the majority of small finds – including four copper arquebus guns, lead musket shot, copper coaks and a large rigging sheave – have been completed. Each of the breech chambers has been sampled and six underwent electrolysis: a process to remove all residual sea salts ingrained with the metal. So far the only objects that had to be taken out of Oman for treatment are extremely delicate wooden items such as knife handles, which had to be brought to the UK as there are no specialists or facilities for handling this material within Oman. The next phase of work will focus on completing the conservation of 900 lead-iron composite shot and packaging the finds for long-term storage. The MHC team have already helped to package the majority of the

ceramics and have secured a storage facility within the adjacent archaeology department. Other work planned includes opening the concretions, cleaning of objects contained within and conservation of the remaining breech chambers.

The funding provided by the Anglo-Omani Society has benefited individuals and Oman as a whole. It has allowed this culturally and historically important project to make a great step forward and has ensured Oman retains a positive reputation within the archaeological community. Selected artefacts from the *Esmeralda* collection, including the ship's bell, are already being displayed within the new National Museum. The publicity and popularity of the site and resulting conserved artefacts will prove educational to the public and of great interest to the growing tourist trade. Ministry archaeologists have already provided talks to SQU University while Heather has taken part in public talks within the National Museum; both have received good feedback and a request for more talks in the future. It is hoped that the skills learned by the MHC's underwater archaeology department will put them in good stead for future projects and help them design suitable facilities for conservation and research. This in turn will provide new opportunities for Omanis within the heritage sector and a wealth of information for maritime archaeology. ■



The team wearing SCUBA equipment swim to the wreck site.

# NORTHERN OMAN'S ANCIENT STONE TOMBS

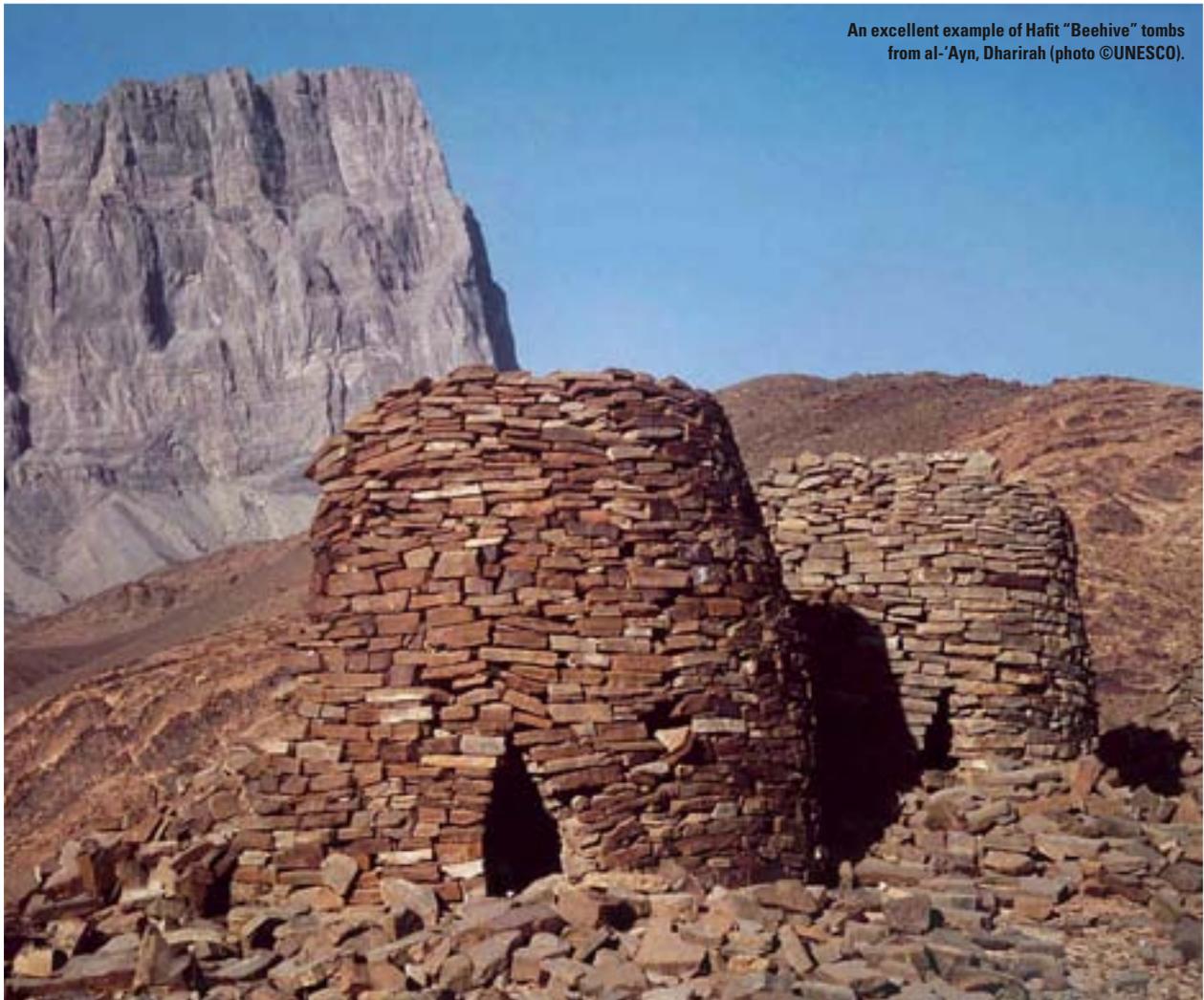
ARTICLE BY WILL DEADMAN

Doctor William M. Deadman has just completed his PhD at Durham University, and is Assistant Director of the Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey.

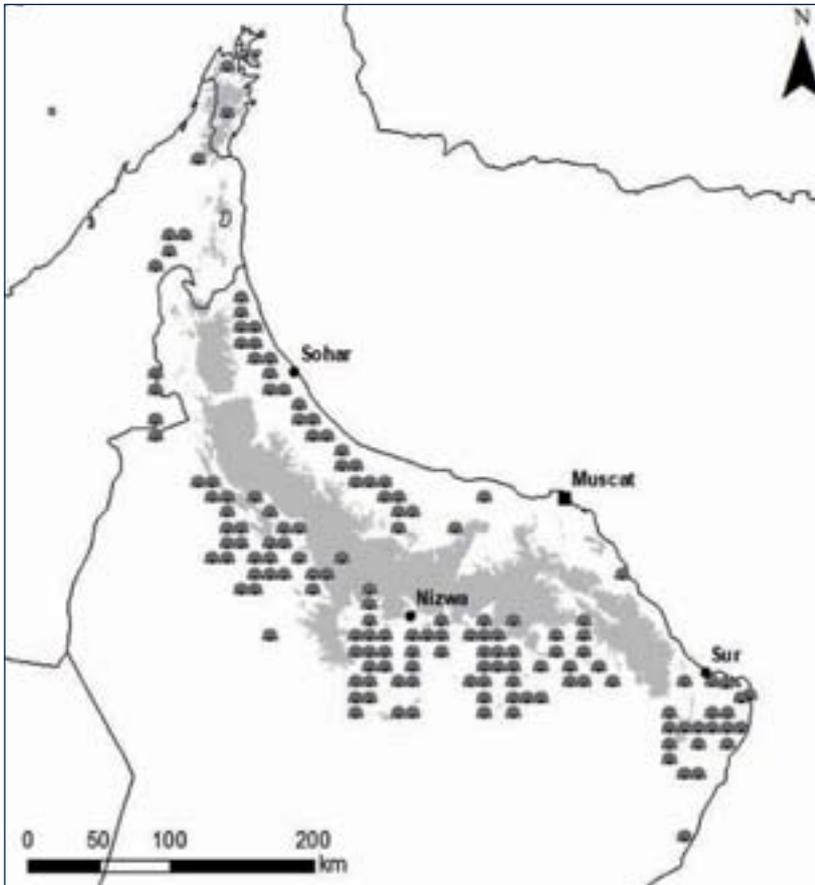
If you have been lucky enough to spend any time driving around the beautiful, rugged landscape of northern Oman, you will almost certainly have noticed the remains of the famous round, stone “Beehive” structures along the top of hills and ridges. These are ancient tombs that were built more than five thousand years ago in a period that archaeologists call the ‘Hafit’, which is datable to the start of the Early Bronze Age (c. 3200-2500 BC), so named as it is the time when copper took

over from chipped stone as the primary material for human tools in Oman and Eastern Arabia. This makes the tombs contemporary with Stonehenge in the UK and the earliest of the Egyptian pyramids.

These tombs were first formally recorded by a team of English and Danish archaeologists in the 1960s on the border between Oman and the United Arab Emirates near al-Ain/Buraimi on the distinctive hill of Jabal Hafit, that now lends its name to the archaeological period.



An excellent example of Hafit “Beehive” tombs from al-‘Ayn, Dharirah (photo ©UNESCO).



A map of the distribution of Hafit tombs in northern Oman.

rather utilised a drystone technique called ‘corbelling’ which allowed the walls to curve gently inwards to form a false dome over a small, single, round burial chamber. Corbelling is a simple building technique, the simplest of all methods of covering a chamber, but it nonetheless requires a great deal of skill and knowledge of stone to construct walls that are stable enough to stand for 5000 years. The burial chamber itself was accessed through a small rectangular or triangular opening built into the bottom of one side of the tomb. This domed profile and small entrance engendered the terms “Beehive tomb” that is still sometimes used to describe these monuments.

There is considerable variation in Hafit tomb architecture within this basic model. Simpler examples consist of only a single circular wall, but more complex monuments have as many as three additional concentric walls built around the first, a bit like a Russian doll, with a packing of looser stones between each. The size of the tombs also varies, an average tomb is four or five metres in diameter and two metres high, but some are much bigger and the largest is ten metres wide and three to four metres in height. The tombs were built from whatever local rock was available, and their architecture and preservation is to some extent dictated by this. Rounded wadi cobbles or irregularly-shaped rocks are much harder to build with than flat slabs or blocks, and so tombs built from this material are often smaller, simpler and are now in a poorer condition. Interestingly, the exact position of the entrance varies, in

Although they often appear now to be mere piles of stone, Hafit tombs are in fact quite sophisticated stone monuments that were very carefully constructed.

regions – sometimes complete or in good condition, other times preserved only as a rough cairn where time has not treated them so kindly.

Although they often appear now to be mere piles of stone, Hafit tombs are in fact quite sophisticated stone monuments that were very carefully constructed. They are circular in plan and required no mortar, which was not known at that time, but

One of the largest known Hafit tombs near al-Khaburah, al-Batinah North (RBAS photo).



When Omani archaeology opened up to the rest of the world following the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, it quickly became apparent that Hafit tombs were present in substantial numbers across the whole of northern Oman from Sharqiyah to al-Batinah. In fact they are one of the most common ancient monuments in Oman and the UAE. They can be seen in almost all

A Hafit tomb at Zukayt, Dakhiliyah.



such a way that informs us about the religious beliefs of the Hafit population. In some areas the tomb entrances were oriented towards the east, the exact direction varying a small amount but precisely matching the seasonal variation in the direction of sunrise. This suggests that the sun played an important role in the religious ideology of Hafit society. However, even more intriguingly, this is only the case in the eastern half of northern Oman. In the western region tomb entrances are much more randomly oriented, showing no clear pattern and suggesting that in this area the sunrise was not important, telling us that there must have been regional variation in the beliefs and funerary practices of the Hafit population.

Hafit tombs were “collective” graves, that is to say that they were used repeatedly for multiple individuals. The total number of people interred within varies with as many as twenty-nine being recorded, but between two to five individuals being more typical. Men, women and children were all buried within the same structure. Grave goods were often included with the interments

including, sometimes, small jars of imported Mesopotamian pottery (from modern-day Iraq) that in fact provided archaeologists with the first evidence for the date of the tombs. Other furnishings include stone beads, frequently in large numbers, and copper knives and pins, but all too often the tombs have been plundered in antiquity and contain no finds at all.

The burial chambers of the tombs are small and cramped, usually only a metre and a half across and a metre and a half high – not a large space in which to fit numerous burials! When the tombs are excavated fragments of bone are often found pushed to the edge of the chamber as space was made for later interments. Interring someone in such a monument cannot have been a pleasant experience, pushing or dragging a body through the small entrance, into a hot, cramped, dark and presumably quite smelly chamber filled with human remains in different states of decay.

The beliefs and practices of the people that built and used these tombs are unknown, as this is a time before writing in Eastern Arabia and the frequently poor state of preservation of the tombs and

their contents makes it difficult for archaeologists to gain a clear understanding, but we can guess from the grave goods that they shared a belief in some sort of afterlife, leaving the dead with exotic foreign goods and precious copper tools and weapons.

Hafit tombs are known all over northern Oman from Ra’s al-Jinz in the very east to Musandam in the north. They are particularly numerous in the hills of Sharqiyah, Dakhiliyah and Dhahirah, with the most important cemeteries including Wadi ‘Andam, Zukayt (near Izki), Bisyah (near Bahla), and Bat and Wadi al-‘Ayn (near Ibri), but they are also found elsewhere in considerable numbers, including an impressive site on the outskirts of the village of Halban (between Muscat and Barka). They are most often located in elevated positions on hills and ridges, making them highly visible monuments in the landscape. The tombs are in fact grouped together into extensive “cemeteries” which are often large and diffuse, stretching for several kilometers alongside wadi channels and other water sources. There is some evidence of a relationship between the distribution of the

tombs and that of the copper ore that is found in abundance in Oman's mountains suggesting that the Hafit people were interested in copper.

Archaeologists are unsure as to how the Hafit population that constructed these tombs actually lived, because although the tombs are very common, evidence for contemporary settlement is very rare. The distribution of the tombs could suggest that the people lived in small, mobile groups of goat and possibly cow herders, fishermen and hunters. There is also some evidence that at least part of the population may have lived in small farming villages towards the end of the Hafit period, but it is likely that most if not all lived in small, wooden and skin huts and camps, which explains why their settlements are so hard to detect – there is very little left of them to find.

As multiple individuals of different sexes and ages are often found buried in the same tomb, and as the tombs in most cemeteries are roughly the same size, it seems unlikely that there was a strong hierarchy in Hafit society. The ostentatious placement of the monuments on hill tops and highly-visible ridges might suggest that they were used to advertise territorial rights to rival groups – there was no Land Office or government department in which to register ownership of land, so these tombs may have proved the most effective way of making such a claim, especially if the population moved seasonally and could not always be present to defend it.

More than two thousand years after the Hafit period, but still a thousand years before the coming of Islam, similar tombs were constructed during the Iron Age (1300-300 BC).

An interesting aspect of the Hafit economy is the relationship between Oman and its regional Bronze Age neighbours. Not only have large numbers of Mesopotamian pots and beads been recovered from Hafit tombs, but the analysis of bronze artefacts from Iran and Iraq strongly suggest that they were made with copper extracted from Omani ores, clearly indicating that there was a significant trade relationship between distant parts of the Arabian Gulf. Early Mesopotamian cuneiform texts indicate that copper for the ancient Mesopotamian city states was sourced from traders in modern-day Bahrain and Eastern Saudi Arabia (later known as Dilmun), but as no copper ores exist in these areas, it must have originated from the mountains of Oman.

Although the most common, these tombs are not the only stone funerary monuments to be found on the hills of northern Oman. More than two thousand years after the Hafit period, but still a thousand years before the coming of Islam, similar tombs were constructed during the Iron Age (1300-300 BC).

These monuments, each one intended probably for only a single individual, are smaller than Hafit tombs, usually between three and four metres long and about one and a half metres tall. They are more crudely constructed, with straighter sides and a flat top, with only a few examples having a side entrance. They are often found in similar parts of northern Oman and in similar positions in the landscape, and archaeologists often find that the stones were 'robbed' from nearby Hafit tombs to build these later monuments. Unlike Hafit tombs, these Iron Age structures were often built in groups, conjoined like honeycombs, with individual tombs sharing a wall with at least one neighbour.

Part of the work of the Durham University Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey, an archaeological project generously funded by the Anglo-Omani Society, is to map and record the stone tombs in the Rustaq area of the Batinah. The project has so far recorded literally hundreds of Hafit and Iron Age monuments and our knowledge of their distribution has been further augmented through a PhD project using satellite imagery to map the tombs over the whole of Oman. A unique characteristic of the Batinah tombs is that unlike elsewhere in northern Oman, they are concentrated on the lower hills, further away from the mountains than is typical elsewhere. A likely explanation for this is that the geology in this area forms a natural underground dam that forces ground-water to the surface, meaning that it would have been an attractive area for ancient mobile populations who were looking for water and grazing for their livestock.

Despite the project's efforts, there is a great deal of research still to do before archaeologists can fully understand the ancient people that built the stone tombs of the Batinah and the rest of northern Oman. ■

A later stone tomb.



# OMAN IN THE 1990s: CONSISTENCY AND FORESIGHT

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

I was very fortunate to be Ambassador to Oman from 1994 to 1999. I enjoyed four and a half years in a fascinating country at a key stage in its development and was in a position to witness at first hand the launch of several crucial policy initiatives including 'Vision 2020', the Basic Law and the creation of the State Council (Majlis ad-Dowla).

Looking back after some 20 years, it is clear that these measures were very carefully considered; they were far sighted for their time and remain highly relevant to policy making today as the Sultanate faces significant economic and social challenges. So I thought it could be useful to record how we in the British Embassy saw these developments as they happened and read the intentions of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.



Presentation of credentials 1994.

I first visited the Sultanate in September 1980 during a secondment to the Department of Energy. I accompanied our Minister, Norman Lamont, on a series of visits to oil producers following a peak in oil prices. We met Zaki Yamani in Riyadh just as Iraq was launching its invasion of Iran. Oman, our last stop, was at peace but deeply concerned about the consequences of a Gulf war. In economic terms, the country was still catching up with the rest of the GCC. I recall Seeb airport a long way outside the main conurbation, the brand

new Intercontinental Hotel still isolated in the desert and a trip to Nizwa from Muscat on dirt road nearly all the way. Our meetings, including one with the Oil Minister, then Said Shanfari, showed that Oman had good advice to offer its friends both on oil prices and the regional crisis. There was no catching up needed here.

I was then posted to Riyadh and later to London, becoming Chief Inspector and Principal Finance Officer at the Foreign Office. My brief visit to Muscat stuck in my mind and I kept abreast of developments in

Oman. When the Sultan's initiative in the late 1980s to move the Embassy from the old building in Muscat to the new Diplomatic area at al-Khuwair came across my desk I naturally took a close interest. It was a very generous offer to make available, as an exceptional gesture to the UK, a separate new site for the residence plus a handsome donation towards the costs.

So Caroline and I were delighted to be offered a posting to Muscat in early 1994, relishing the opportunity to get

to know the country and its people much better and aware of the respect in which Oman and its leadership were held in government in London from No. 10 down. We arrived in June in order for me to present credentials before the Sultan moved to Salalah for his summer break. As I stood outside in the mid-day sun for both national anthems (all verses) before meeting His Majesty inside the Al 'Alam Palace, I was powerfully reminded of the sheer physical demands of the Muscat summer.

The new Embassy compound at Al Khuwair, and the Residence on a rocky promontory near al-Bustan, were then nearing completion. The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, and the Omani Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, Yusef bin Alawi, were to inaugurate both buildings in January 1995 and we were able to hold the first Queen's Birthday Party at the new Residence that April, taking full advantage of the garden to feature bands from all three Omani armed services. A year later The Prince of Wales came to lunch at the Residence on his way to meet the Sultan in Salalah and expressed himself agreeably surprised at the quality of the building which continues today to mark the special nature of the relationship.



First Queen's Birthday Reception at the new Residence 1995.





With the Prince of Wales in Salalah 1996.

In 1994 the Omani economy was growing at about four per cent. With oil prices down this was well below the eight per cent achieved in 1992. Spending had begun to run ahead of income with warning noises from the World Bank. Nonetheless on the ground all looked well; a regular procession of tankers picked up cargoes at the beginning of each month from the PDO installations at Mina al Fahal. Greater Muscat was already well endowed with handsome dual carriageway roads lined with flowered verges which extended past Seeb and as far as the turning for the Bait al Barakah palace. In contrast to Dubai, where tower blocks were springing up, Muscat was low rise with strict building standards reputedly still personally policed by the Sultan as he drove round town. It was neat and tidy; the ROP could and did fine motorists for driving dirty cars. The local press carried a steady stream of announcements of new infrastructure – roads, ports, electrification and the like – up and down the country. The road to Nizwa was now tarmacked and relatively fast although still a twisty single carriageway. Nizwa itself sported a new

stadium and a refurbished fort. Businesses around the country appeared to be flourishing, particularly those focused on construction and servicing the oil and gas sectors. New areas, like insurance, were rapidly opening up.

It was very clear in the mid-1990s, as the Sultan approached the 25th anniversary of his reign that he was held in high esteem by his people, perceived as a strong ruler with a profound sense of justice, who had

achieved much for the country. Omanis were well aware that it was only 20 years before that a serious communist-backed insurgency had been defeated and peaceful construction of a unified country had truly begun. People understood that the recent development of the country's institutions had been accelerated and recognised that oil wealth had been ploughed into a more generous and equitable social contract than those offered in many other resource rich regions around the world. They were also aware that Oman had stable and secure borders for the first time in its history, full international recognition as an independent sovereign state, and that its ruler had consolidated a reputation as a wise and respected voice within the councils of the GCC and in the wider Arab world.

But there was still much to be done. Outside the capital area many settlements still depended on dirt roads; there were shortages of well qualified Omani teachers, doctors, engineers and other professionals; youth unemployment was already an issue and the economy remained heavily dependent on oil; the private sector was dominated by a small number of conglomerates focussed on importing and construction; manufacturing, fisheries, agriculture and services contributed only a small fraction of GDP; and there was a growing fiscal deficit.

Governance too was a work in progress. The elected Consultative Council (Majlis ash-Shura) had been created in 1991 out of the original Council set up 10 years before. In 1994 the limited franchise was extended to women with Shukoora al-Ghamhari



(Muscat) and Taiba al-Maawali (Seeb) becoming the first female elected representatives in the GCC. But the Majlis remained an advisory body drawn from the traditional elite plus a few representatives from the new educated class. The terms of discussion were set by the Sultan with whom lay all effective power. The Sultan was (and has remained since) his own Prime Minister as well as Defence, Finance and Foreign Minister. He ruled by decree, communicating policy in major keynote speeches to the nation. In 1994 the country had no written constitution; the rule book was essentially the collection of royal decrees issued since 1970 amplified by the Sultan's speeches.

In May 1994, just before I arrived in Muscat, 430 Omanis had been arrested on suspicion of militant extremism. This was not officially acknowledged until August 1994. Some evidence suggests that over 80% of those arrested were graduates, 70% Sunni and 50% from Dhofar. Whatever the exact figures, this indicated that beneath the apparently calm surface lay some serious social and political divisions with a religious dimension and possible external involvement – Muslim Brotherhood connections were suspected. This was an educated group but composed largely of

those outside the established and traditional elites. Trials were held in secret and tough sentences handed down.

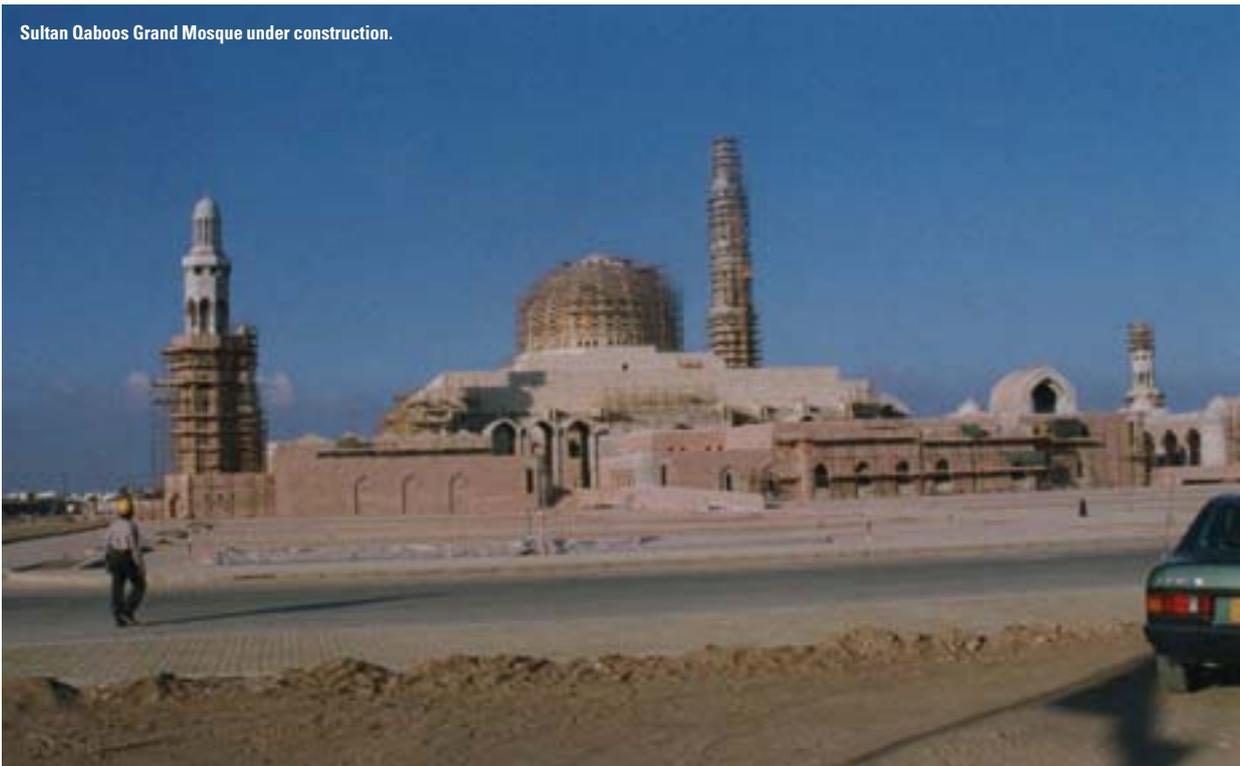
But the state's reaction did not end there. In a major speech at the 1994 National Day Parade in November, six months after the arrests, the Sultan spoke of the citizen's duty 'not to allow alien ideas...to jeopardise the security and stability of this country'. He then made a forceful call for *ijtihad* – 'the interpretation and development of Islamic doctrine in light of contemporary demands through dialogue'; he warned that without *ijtihad*, Muslim societies risked falling into backwardness, violence and intolerance. He issued this call just as the Taliban were

first emerging in Afghanistan and as Saudi Arabia was vigorously promoting its own brand of salafism. His prescient words deserved much wider attention than they received at the time. The Sultan also announced that Oman's lawyers and judges (who had previously come up through the shari'a system) would be professionally trained by the state respectively at a new college of jurisprudence and law in Muscat and at a new higher institution in Nizwa. It will have been around this time that the Sultan approved designs for the Grand Mosque which bears his name and reflects the same open, forward looking approach to Islam; he closely oversaw every aspect of its construction until its inauguration in 2001.

By National Day 1995 all those arrested in May 1994 had been released from prison, the three death sentences having already been commuted. This episode has stuck in my mind as regional and western governments have sought over the last 20 years to confront extremist violence based on distorted understandings of Islam. It is worth considering whether other leaders, in the region and in the West, might have been more successful since in their efforts had they taken inspiration from the Sultan's approach.

The Sultan approved designs for the Grand Mosque which bears his name and reflects the same open, forward looking approach to Islam.

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque under construction.



On 6th November 1996 the Sultan announced the 'Basic Law of the State', from his camp on an autumn 'meet the people tour'. This was a comprehensive document which bore all the hallmarks of having been drafted predominantly by Qaboos himself, drawing on his own reading of Omani history and religious scholarship. The day before publication a messenger from the Diwan had brought an advance copy to the Embassy addressed personally to me in the Sultan's distinctive red ink handwriting. The Basic Law answered many of the questions we had been raising about governance including the case for a written constitution, the succession and further evolution of the Consultative Council, now to be complemented by an appointed State Council (Majlis ad-Dowla) to form the new Oman Council (Majlis Oman).

We saw The Basic Law as a seminal document establishing a clear basis for future legislation defining the nature of the state, the roles of the Sultan ('his orders must be obeyed') and of his ministers as well as rights and duties within modern Oman. Perhaps most significantly it appeared to balance the principle of a hereditary monarchy with that of citizen participation in government and to do so in a framework which left open the possibility of evolution from a consultative to a constitutional monarchy – should Omani citizens and their elected representatives choose to push the boundaries in that direction. For example, Article 33 granted to all citizens 'the freedom to form associations on a national basis for legitimate objectives' leaving an opening for the country to develop political parties at some time in the future. Overall, the document reflected the Sultan's capacity to take the long view, leading with ideas and principles well ahead of current opinion. The Sultan's first and so far only amendment to The Basic Law, made in November 2011, nudges things a little further by giving additional roles to the legislature (the Oman Council), but in the context of a lot of detail uncharacteristic of him and nearly doubling the length of the original succinct document.

There was a parallel development on the economic front. By early 1995 we could see that a strong team led by Qais Zawawi, the

As the 'Vision 2020' document put it, the aim was 'state partnership with a dynamic and efficient private sector, coupled with a well-developed human resource and a stable macro-economic framework'.

Deputy Prime Minister for Economic and Financial Affairs, supported by Mohammed Musa al-Yusef, the experienced Development Minister, were working on a major programme to accelerate diversification of the economy. We read this as based on work done by the World Bank, on development processes evolved within Oman since 1970, and on inputs from other successfully developing countries such as Peru, Singapore and Malaysia. The results came together in 'Vision 2020' launched with a major conference in the concert hall at the Al Bustan hotel in June 1995. The UK government saw this as a serious initiative, and Jonathan Aitken, then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, came out for the event. The launch, which had the Sultan's full support, and the accompanying publicity were designed to get the message over to all Omanis that the country could not continue to depend on oil income, that the economy had to diversify and that citizens had to be ready to take on a much higher proportion of the jobs in both public and private sectors; in short, change was necessary if the country was to maintain living standards as population increased and oil revenues declined. As the 'Vision 2020' document put it, the aim was 'state partnership with a dynamic and efficient

private sector, coupled with a well-developed human resource and a stable macro-economic framework'.

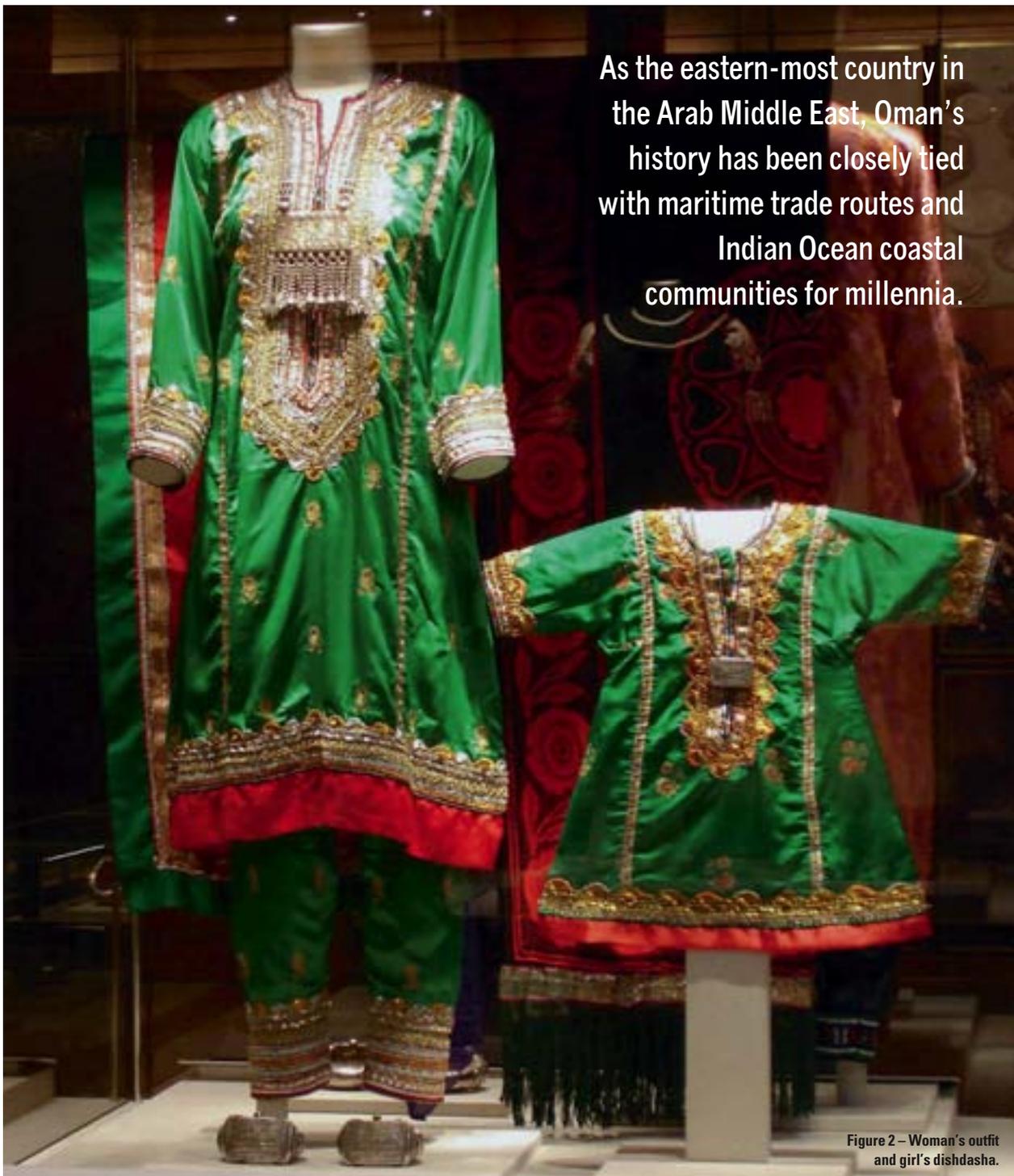
The Basic Law took account of 'Vision 2020' and was emphatic that free market principles should be the basis for economic policy. In his speeches during this period the Sultan emphasised "the improvement of the citizen's technical and professional ability, the stimulation of their creative and scientific capabilities, and the improvement of their diversified skills". Twenty years ago this forward looking set of policies was ground breaking for the GCC where no other government had yet so squarely faced up to a future of declining oil revenues.

It was recognised that implementation of this ambitious programme would require tough decisions and rigorous follow up. That would mean driving forward education (particularly vocational), persuading entrenched mercantile interests to relax their grip on the economy and creating an investment regime which foreigners as well as insiders would find attractive. Unfortunately, Qais Zawawi died in a car crash three months after the launch of 'Vision 2020' (rumours that it was anything other than an accident were totally unfounded); Mohammed Musa al-Yusef moved to the private sector in 1997; and the period of low oil prices, perhaps the major driving force behind 'Vision 2020', came to an end in 1999, with the price surging to over \$100 a barrel by 2011. Momentum was lost as the fundamental economic challenge seemed less urgent.

Today, with oil prices having dramatically fallen once again, Oman is returning with vigour to the economic task it set itself in the 1990s, setting out a new 'Vision 2040' and establishing the Tanfeedh programme. These policies will no doubt again be taken forward within the institutional framework shaped by the 1996 Basic Law which remains very much in play, including the role of a now well established legislature and the Omani spirit of consensus and inclusion. Seen from London the challenge seems now to be to avoid loss of momentum, building further on the strong foundations His Majesty Sultan Qaboos presciently laid in the mid 1990s. ■

# COSMOPOLITAN CONNECTIONS IN OMANI TRADITIONAL DRESS

ARTICLE BY AISA MARTINEZ



As the eastern-most country in the Arab Middle East, Oman's history has been closely tied with maritime trade routes and Indian Ocean coastal communities for millennia.

Figure 2 – Woman's outfit and girl's dishdasha.

With the exception of brief occupations by the Persians and the Portuguese, Oman has also remained independent of foreign rule since around 1650. Many of us are familiar with the story of modern Oman – how it was established in 1970 under Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said, its current ruler, and how he has modernised the country at breakneck speed following the isolationist reign of his father, Sultan Said bin Taymur (r. 1932-1970). Many of us may also be familiar with how the Oman of the early 20th century was a far cry from the ruling Al Busa'idi dynasty's prestige under Sayyid Sa'id bin Sultan in the early 19th century. The Sultanate of Muscat and Oman reached its apex as a global trading empire, maintaining and expanding its dominance in centuries-old commercial links with the Indian Subcontinent and East Africa.

Cosmopolitan communities that make up the Omani population reflect this history of trade and interaction. In 1832, Sayyid Sa'id moved the Omani capital to resource-rich Zanzibar and encouraged Omanis to settle there, creating a new Arab elite on the East African coast. While his sons eventually split the empire between Zanzibar and Muscat after Sayyid Sa'id's death in 1856, migration links between the two continued well into the twentieth century, since many Omanis left the country due to economic hardship. Zanzibari-Omanis returned to Oman after the 1960s African nationalist movements and 1964 revolution. The Omani empire also grew to occupy Gwadar and the Makran coast, now part of modern-day Pakistan and Iran. Baluchis are the largest non-Arab community in northern Oman and were recruited as mercenaries for the imams of the interior. Hindu merchants from Gujarat, or Banyans as they are known throughout the Gulf, have been in Oman since the 15th century. Lawati groups from Hyderabad had considerable economic influence during Oman's eighteenth century expansion into Africa.

All of these historical connections are physically evident in Oman's dress traditions for women and men. However, these dress traditions are rarely studied in relation to history, modern innovations, and national heritage and identity. Dress is a non-verbal form of communication that reveals aspects of our individual and

communal identities. The materials, colours, textures, shapes, styles of both men and women's dress tell us stories of the people who wore it and who made it. We learn about how materials and styles are locally produced or imported and how these elements and details have evolved into modern trends of modern Omanis today.

Dress studies is a relatively new academic field of study, which is inherently complex and multi-disciplinary. The history of dress in the Middle East and Arab World has been discussed extensively in publications such as Stillman and Stillman's 2000 book *'Arab Dress'*, the 1997 edited volume *'Languages of Dress in the Middle East'*, and more recently, Volume 5 of the 2010 Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and fashion. Despite this, there remains relatively little scholarship on dress in the Arabian Peninsula in general, and in particular, Oman. Julia Stehlin-Al Zajdali's 2010 book *'The Traditional Women's Dress of Oman'* and Roche, Roche, and Al Saidi's 2014 *'Journal of Arabian Studies'* article are two publications focusing on women's traditional dress. Men's dress in the Arabian Peninsula is also rarely covered in the scholarship, with the exception of Bruce Ingham's chapter in *'Languages of Dress in the Middle East'* and Suleiman Khalaf's 2005 article on Emirati national dress. Thus I aimed in my lecture in

January, and in this short paper, to bring a bit more insight into how dress is important to understand Oman's history and its unique place in the region.

### WOMEN'S DRESS

The basic pieces of an Omani woman's outfit consist of three or four main elements. The *dishdasha* is a long-sleeved loose fitting shirt that reaches the knees (or sometimes the ankles) and typically decorated at the neckline, chest, hemline, sleeve cuffs. The *sirwal* are trousers that are tight fitting at the ankles and loose at the waist and thighs. The different ways in which these areas are embellished – with embroidery, laces known as *zarri* or *telli*, and metallic threads – vary throughout the different regions of Oman. Omani women cover their heads and bodies when going

The traditional Baluchi style still resembles styles worn in Pakistan and Iran and is distinguished by its colourful embroidery and triangle shaped panel at the front of the skirt



Figure 1 – Colourful embroidery on a Baluchi style woman's dishdasha or pashk.

into public spaces, such as the suq, or receiving male guests who aren't their relatives. There are different names for the different styles of head and body coverings depending on their size and purpose, as well as in which region they are worn. The *lehaf* is usually worn to only cover the head and shoulders, while pieces such as the *wiqaya*, *kanga*, and *leso* are intended to cover the head, shoulders, and body. Today, Omani women and women around the Gulf wear a *shayla* head covering to match their abayas and outfits.

Embellishment of women's dress varies from region to region and within certain social groups as well. For example, in the Muscat capital region, historical communities have distinct dress styles. The traditional Baluchi style still resembles styles worn in Pakistan and Iran and is distinguished by its colourful embroidery and triangle shaped panel at the front of the skirt (fig. 1). The Lawati *dishdasha* is usually made of a solid-coloured fabric (usually green) and is distinguished by its

heavy use of metallic thread embroidery and embellishments at the hemline and also on the ankle cuff of the *sirwal* (fig. 2). I immediately thought of this particular style after spotting a pair of trousers on display in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. They are actually a child's trousers from northern India that date to around 1900 and worn for special occasions. The similarities in these styles of garments shows the deep connections between the two locales, and there is still much more historical research to be conducted on how and when the interplay and interaction between southeast Arabia and parts of India resulted in this tangible evidence of clothing and culture.

The *kanga* has clear connections with East Africa and features a Swahili saying underneath a large graphic print in the centre of the textile. Women who wear a *kanga* may have direct or indirect family connections with East African coastal communities. Today, the *kanga* and other smaller similar type fabrics known locally as *leso* are still sold in Muscat suq. Figure 3 shows how the *kanga* fabric has been used for a *dishdasha* from the Batinah coast.

## MEN'S DRESS

Unlike women's dress, Omani men's dress today has become more uniform, and what is seen as 'traditional' dress can also be known as 'national dress'. Omani women today do not tend to wear the different traditional styles indicating these Indian Ocean connections save for special occasions such as weddings and religious festivals. Omani men and boys, on the other hand, demonstrate these connections every day in their national dress. Public sector employees are required to wear the white *dishdasha* and printed *massar* supported by the *kumma*. This uniform of sorts has become ubiquitous – it distinguishes the Omani citizen from non-citizens and it also distinguishes Omanis from their Gulf neighbours (fig. 4).

We can clearly identify the African influences in the *kumma*, the Indian through the *massar*, and the Arab through the *dishdasha*. Despite these disparate elements, this combination creates a distinct cultural biography of Omani national dress and identity as multicultural and cosmopolitan and demonstrates unique evidence of Oman's history.



Figure 3 – Baluchi style outfit with dishdasha made of a kanga.



Figure 4 – Two officials at a camel race wearing national dress.

Omani men working in the public sector are required to wear a white *dishdasha*; those working in the private sector can choose to wear white or other neutral colors. Bolder and brighter colors such as indigo, dark green, and pastel colors are also worn for varying occasions as we can see in the previous photo. Embroidery in satin or cotton threads decorates the neckline, down the front central opening, around the wrists, and straight across the back across the shoulder blades. A tassel is attached to the neckline by a button and is usually scented with traditional perfume. Underneath the *dishdasha*, men wear a white undershirt and *wizar*, a hip cloth wrapped around the waist with a hemline shorter than the *dishdasha*. The *kumma* is a colorfully embroidered brimless round cap, often worn on its own or underneath the *massar* to maintain a clean and neat shape. *Massars* are large square cloths traditionally made of high-quality cashmere wool embroidered in floral patterns, though now they are also made of more inexpensive cotton-wool blends or other synthetic fabrics. They are wrapped around the bare head or a *kumma* in a turban style. The head coverings are testament to Oman's maritime past and transnational connections – the *massar* continues to be imported from the Kashmir region, and the *kumma*'s Zanzibari origins formerly indicated a man's connections to East Africa (fig. 5).



Figure 5 – Kummas on sale at Muttrah suq.

One cannot escape the ever-present image of Sultan Qaboos prominently displayed in public buildings and private homes (fig. 6). Most portraits of the Sultan include him in full court dress of white *dishdasha* and embellished *bisht*, with the royal *khanjar* at his waist, and the meticulously tied royal turban.

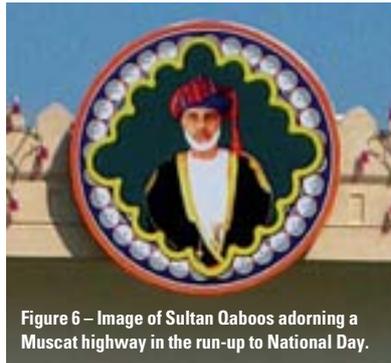


Figure 6 – Image of Sultan Qaboos adorning a Muscat highway in the run-up to National Day.

In official portraits and media appearances, the Sultan's appearance has been consistent. His public image clearly influences dress habits of Omani men, furthering 're-inventing' or at least re-asserting a specific dress tradition. It also shows historical accuracy. In archive photographs of former sultans of Oman and Zanzibar, we see basic similarities in the elements of formal Omani dress that is still worn today: white main garment, long-sleeved, black or dark-coloured robe on top and open in the front, a striped cloth wrapped around the head and the presence of a *khanjar* at the waist. Much of the Arab elite in Zanzibar wore dress similar to these and Sultan Qaboos' appearance today does not stray much from the styles of his predecessors over a century ago. Figure 7 shows Sultan Hamad bin Thuwaini of Zanzibar in 1891. While Oman and Zanzibar are now



Figure 7 – Sultan Hamad bin Thuwaini of Zanzibar, 1891.

separate political entities, we cannot deny what we see in the visual evidence of dress, that these historic connections still play an important part in Omani identity.

The cultural biography of Omani traditional dress shows how the different elements – *sirwal*, *dishdasha*, head coverings, for women and men – each have their own cultural context and backgrounds connected to the Indian Ocean network and influences from Arabia, Africa, and South Asia. In dress studies, the scholar Joanne Eicher created the term 'cultural authentication process' to encapsulate how these individual pieces and elements are combined in Omani traditional dress styles. It pulls together the separate meanings and histories, transforming them into something we can call uniquely Omani. ■



Men at the Nizwa goat market.

# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY TOUR OF OMAN 2017

In March of this year an intrepid group of approximately thirty members of The Anglo-Omani Society toured the Sultanate of Oman.

It was a terrific adventure, with an itinerary that took in many of the best sights and sounds that Oman has to offer. It would probably be quicker to list what wasn't done than the reverse here – so much was accomplished. Where would we begin? With the distinctive aroma of Frankincense smouldering at Muttrah Souk perhaps? Or tours of the sumptuous Opera House and Grand Mosque in Muscat? Convoy drives into the Jebels and toward the fort at Nizwa? A stay at the luxurious Alila Hotel

high on the Jebel Akhdar plateau? Or, in contrast, a night 'roughing it' under the stars deep in the Rub Al Khali? There are too many highlights to pick from, but wherever they went, the group were met with extraordinary local warmth and hospitality.

The Society wishes to pass on our thanks to the participants, who built up a camaraderie together and made the excursion one that will live long in the memory. We hope also on behalf of the



Pristine gardens at the Grand Mosque.



The souk at Muttrah.



Today in Oman, Frankincense is grown in plantations like this one.

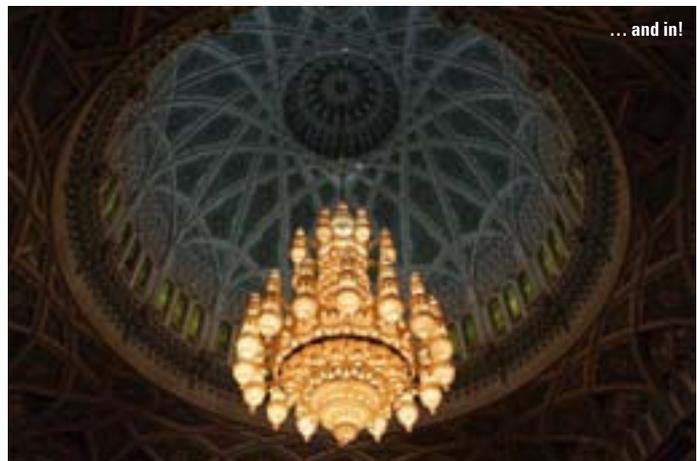
For a flavour of Oman,  
please enjoy the images.  
Nothing compares to actually  
being there, but perhaps they  
will inspire you!

participants to place on record here our deep gratitude to Neil Fawcett and to Ian and Liz Buttenshaw, who worked tirelessly and planned with military precision, ensuring a rich experience for all. Shukran gazelan!

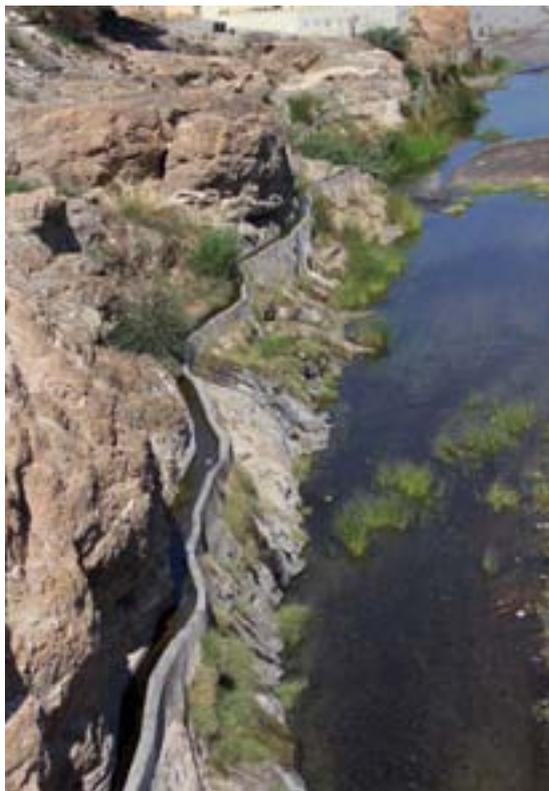
For a flavour then, please enjoy the images. Nothing compares to actually being there, but perhaps they will inspire you to book flights this winter? Or will see you on the next tour? We very much hope so! Inshallah! ■



At the Grand Mosque there is stunning design both outside...



... and in!



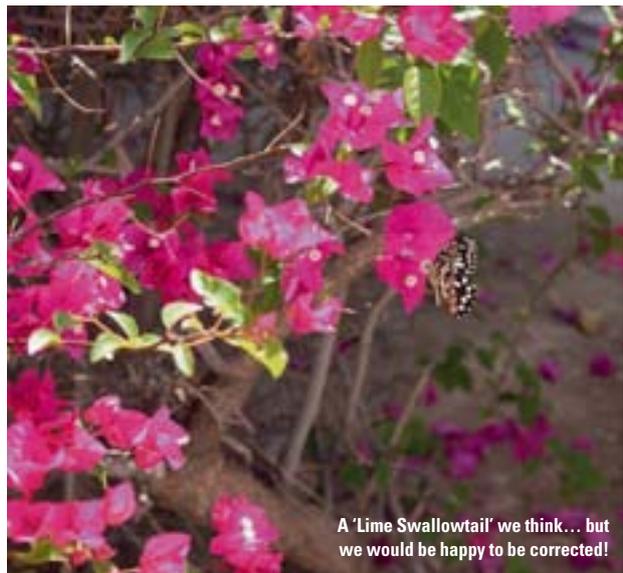
Mutual appreciation of the Mosque!



Al Alam Palace – splendid!



A moment in the shade of the walls of the fort at Nizwa.



A 'Lime Swallowtail' we think... but we would be happy to be corrected!



Al Said in harbour.



The remains of a very old town (Ghul) can be seen on this image.



The convoy enters the Rub Al Khali.



Qahwa made in the traditional manner.



The participants with their guides – in good hands!

There are too many highlights to pick from, but wherever they went, the group were met with extraordinary local warmth and hospitality.



Bustle at Nizwa market.



Views from the top of the Jebels take the breath away.

# OMAN OPENS ITS FIRST CENTRE FOR OUTDOOR LEARNING

ARTICLE BY MARK EVANS

Located on the shores of the Indian Ocean, and now less than two hours' drive south of Muscat, lies a unique sand sea that is the home to Oman's first purpose-built centre for outdoor learning.

Bounded to the north by the 6,000ft Eastern Hajar mountains, and to the east by the Indian Ocean, the Sharqiya Sands is an isolated sand desert with an area of 12,500 square kilometres; it is one of those unique, increasingly scarce, silent places where mobile phones don't work, and where there is little evidence of human activity. As such, it provides the perfect platform for Outward Bound Oman, a not for profit foundation established by ministerial decision, and supported on several occasions by The Anglo-Omani Society, to run powerful wilderness courses each winter, when temperatures drop to a tolerable level.

The Sharqiya desert is possibly the most intensively studied arid environment on earth, and has been at the heart of scientific interest since a three year research expedition in the 1980s. Undertaken by the Royal Geographical Society in London, the expedition documented the diversity of the terrain, and the fauna, noting 16,000 invertebrates, as well as 200 species of other wildlife. They also documented 150 species of native flora. This surprising biodiversity is due to the desert's proximity to the sea; as temperatures drop rapidly after sunset each day, a dew and sometimes a thick fog can appear at dawn that can equate to up to 0.5mm of rainfall each day,

Desert Centre.





Photo credit: 23 Degrees North (www.23degreesN.com)

Design consultant image of Muscate Training Centre.

so bringing precious, life giving moisture to species of plants and animals that are uniquely adapted to their environment.

For the first eight years of its life, Outward Bound Oman has delivered mobile courses in the desert and mountains, working with 2,000 young people each year, supported out of 4x4 vehicles carrying water and supplies for the groups. That all changed in 2014, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Al Said, Sultan of Oman, learnt more about what makes Outward Bound unique. It was quickly agreed that Outward Bound was the perfect vehicle to nurture and shape the character and mind-set of young people in Oman. A series of decisions were made; firstly to establish Outward Bound as a wholly Omani entity, as an educational foundation set up by ministerial decree, and secondly, land was allocated, and funding provided for the construction of three national training centres; one in the Sharqiya Sands, one in the capital city of Muscat and the third at 8,000ft altitude on Jebel Akdhar.

Demonstrating Outward Bound's commitment to minimising environmental impact, it is Oman's first building totally powered by renewable energy, and all water is treated and re-used on site.

By the time you read this article, the first of those centres will have been formally opened in the desert, and construction of the second centre, in Muscat, will be underway.

Located on an area of 5,500 square metres, some 2km from the nearest power supply, and 12km from the nearest blacktop road, the iconic desert centre, designed by Muscat based architects 23 Degrees North, has taken 12 months to construct, and the remote location has presented a series of challenges. Demonstrating Outward Bound's commitment to minimising environmental impact, it is Oman's first building totally powered by renewable energy, and all water is treated and re-used on site. The dominant factor to be considered at the design stage was the position of the sun. As a result, south facing walls are especially thick, and windows both narrow and small. Bathrooms and taps are designed with water conservation in mind, and key buildings oriented to provide maximum shade in the late morning, when most groups will arrive at the centre. Water has had to be transported in by tanker, and workers on site have focused their efforts into the cooler hours of early morning and evening, with most outdoor work being

Site of Outward Bound Oman Desert Centre – pre-construction, January 2015.



Photo credit: John C. Smith (www.photonz.net)

Whilst the desert centre is now up and running, construction of the centre in Muscat has just begun. Due to open in Q4 2018, this centre will act as the administrative base for Outward Bound in Oman, and as the central equipment stores for all three centres.

done in the cooler winter months, and the interior work taking place when temperatures rise to 45-50 degrees Celsius outside in the summer.

Amongst other things, the centre has been equipped with an equipment store, AV room, two teaching/classrooms, four learning pods, a dining room, kitchen, medical room, outdoor climbing wall, fire-pit, prayer room and amphitheatre. It has also been designed to provide multiple revenue streams, to act as a centre for Outward Bound youth courses, corporate training groups and residential academic environmental research groups from schools, colleges and universities. One year before opening, the centre received its first booking by a group of expedition medicine doctors who had identified the base as a perfect location for their annual training course.

An automatic weather station has been fitted to the roof of the building, enabling groups, and Outward Bound, to monitor the prevailing conditions remotely, and to compare and contrast them with their home area. In January 2018, supported by grant aid from The Anglo-Omani Society in London, and in partnership with the UK's Royal Geographical Society, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Geographical Association and Institute for Outdoor Learning, a group of four innovative geography teachers will fly out from UK to Oman for a week's fieldwork visit, the outcome of which will be a series of curriculum linked lesson plans that will go some way to embedding Oman in the UK geography curriculum, and so further promoting the centre, and Outward Bound.

There will be no fluffy pillows, en-suite bathrooms or comfortable beds at any of the three Oman centres; our core wilderness courses will remain just that, with nights spent under

the stars, or under canvas. The centres will however enable us to work with much greater numbers, and act as good start and end points for our courses. In terms of accommodation, there will be outdoor sleeping areas on the roof of the centre for those who wish to sleep under the stars, and simple indoor alpine hut wooden sleeping platforms able to sleep up to 60 people for residential research groups, or for younger age groups unable to cope with the physical demands of a full-blown Outward Bound expedition.

Whilst the desert centre is now up and running, construction of the centre in Muscat has just begun. Due to open in Q4 2018, this centre will act as the administrative base for Outward Bound in Oman, and as the central equipment stores for all three centres. Part of the building will be an urban training centre, with an AV/lecture room that we hope will host a programme of monthly lectures, and act as a hub for the outdoor community in Oman. Two learning/activity rooms and an indoor climbing tower and challenge zone will complete what we hope, in time, will become a very busy facility, as well as being a great place to work. ■



# MAPS, FORTS AND FRANKINCENSE

ARTICLE BY DR. FRANCIS OWTRAM

Accessing Archival  
Material on Oman with  
the British Library.  
Dr Francis Owtram, Gulf  
History Specialist at the  
British Library, highlights  
the rich archival material  
on Oman being made  
available online.

Some in the Anglo-Omani Society will remember fondly the Muscat waterfront of old: the Sultan's Palace and British Consulate as seen in this photograph taken in 1900 which until a few years ago could only be accessed by a visit to the British Library in London. Now, it is possible to browse this photograph and many other photographs, maps and archival documents on Oman from a computer or mobile device anywhere in the world. This arises from the work of the British Library/Qatar Foundation Partnership which is developing an online portal (Qatar Digital Library – [www.qdl.qa](http://www.qdl.qa)) of records on the

Gulf drawn from the India Office Records and Private Papers, 1763-1951.

Launched in October 2014 the Gulf History material on the Qatar Digital Library is constantly expanding, and indeed the partnership will soon celebrate its millionth image. The cumulative effect of this is potentially the transformation of the study of Gulf History. As it is a British archive, the correspondence mainly contains the perspective of the English East India Company and British officialdom; however, letters in Arabic from Omani rulers and advisers add to the richness of the collection, making it a hugely

'Sultan's Palace, Muscat', British Library, Photo 355/1/42, in Qatar Digital Library.



significant resource for anyone interested in Omani history. There is also a wide variety of materials giving detailed reports of the geography and mineral wealth of Oman based upon expeditions to remote regions, together with fascinating photographs, such as those of the ancient frankincense port at Khor Rori in Dhofar.

In the current phase of the project the entire series IOR/R/15/6 (Political Agency, Muscat, 1858-1951), consisting of 540 files and volumes (equating to approximately 120,000 images or 60,000 folios), is being digitised. This includes records on arms traffic, aviation, honours and awards, foreign interests, Muscat state affairs, naval and shipping, political matters, roads and communications, slave trade, trade and commerce, visitors, government property, medical and public health, meteorological information, agriculture and war. Two examples of these files are given here.

One volume being digitised (IOR/R/15/6/38) contains letters regarding the threat of attacks on Muscat and Mutrah around the First World War. The Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, Bushire, requested that the Sultan of Muscat issues a notification to the Omani shaikhs not to attack these towns, or to otherwise hinder the trade undertaken by British subjects. Drafts of the notification are passed between the Sultan, the Political Agent, Muscat, and the Political Resident.

Correspondence in IOR/R/15/6/24 includes letters from the Imam of Oman Salim bin Rashid al-Kharusi in 1913. Also featured is correspondence with Shaikh 'Isa bin Saleh al-Harhi, the representative of the Imam of Oman, asking him for permission in order for the oil company to be able to send a geologist to explore the areas under the control of the Imam. It would have been concerns such as these that would have prompted the British Political Agent, Major G.P. Murphy to draw a map to illustrate the extent of the Sultan's influence in Oman in 1928.

Ula Zeir, Content Specialist: Arabic Language, has been involved in cataloguing these 'Muscat files' and compiling a database of Omanis figuring in the records for copyright purposes. She took the opportunity to invite Dr Jokha al-Harhi, Associate Professor at Sultan Qaboos University and currently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Edinburgh, to see the records for herself. From an Omani academic's perspective, Jokha al-Harhi comments: "I've been privileged to be introduced to the British Library's Qatar Partnership. I believe the Arab Gulf related documents that are being digitised by the team are rather a historic treasure for academics. Whether you are in Muscat, Cairo, Manama or anywhere else across the



**'Map showing extent of Sultan's influence in Oman', British Library, IOR/R/15/1/441 in Qatar Digital Library.**

globe you can access the portal by a click.

The process involved in getting the archival documents digitised and available online involves a team of history, language, translation, conservation, copyright and photographic specialists. Articles written by the Partnership's experts provide an entry point to the archival resources on Oman including 'Frankincense in Dhofar' as well as 'Muscat and the Monsoon' and 'Bertram Thomas and the Crossing of the Empty Quarter'.

The portal includes more than archival documents. In the early part of the project the ethnomusicologist, Rolf Killius, curated material relating to the musical traditions and oral history of Oman, uncovering long-forgotten recordings in the British Library's collection of shellac discs. Based on extensive field

work in Oman and covering such themes as the sea music and lives of musicians, these recordings and Rolf's commentary can also be accessed on the portal.

Following lectures by Francis and Rolf, the links between the Anglo-Omani Society and the British Library have continued to flourish. These have included two visits of staff from the Anglo-Omani Society to the 6th floor of the British Library in St Pancras and a regular delegation of British Library staff to the Anglo-Omani Society's Thursday evening lectures. Through this mutually beneficial exchange it is hoped that in making key archival source material freely available online, new insights to historical questions will be gained by the next generation of scholars of Anglo-Omani relations from both the UK and the Sultanate. ■

*Francis Owtram is a Gulf History Specialist at the British Library and author of A Modern History of Oman: Formation of the State since 1920 (IB Tauris, 2004). Follow the Gulf History project on Twitter @BLQatar*



**'Francis Owtram examines a historic map of the Arabian Peninsula with Mark Balfour and Jonathan Taylor.'**

# OMAN CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF OIL EXPORTS

*Times of Oman* reported the celebration of 50 years of oil exports to other countries, as 27 July marked Petroleum Development Oman (PDO)'s first crude oil shipment from the Sultanate.

In 1967, the first crude oil exports from Oman were loaded onto the 83,000 ton Norwegian tanker *Mosprince* at Saih Al Maleh (now known as Mina Al Fahal) to be transported to Japan. The invoice document dated August 8th 1967, shows that the cargo consisted of 543,800 barrels of net clean oil of API gravity 33.2.

At a price of US\$1.42 a barrel, the shipment was worth almost US\$750,000, quoted at pound sterling equivalent of

£275,784. The amount equals US\$5.5 million or OMR 2.1 million today.

That is a well known story, but less well known is that that first shipment was almost a fiasco, as is related by eye-witnesses of the time in Sir Terence Clark's book *"Underground to Overseas: the story of Petroleum Development Oman"*.

Because of problems elsewhere in the international oil market, it was decided to start exports a full six months earlier than

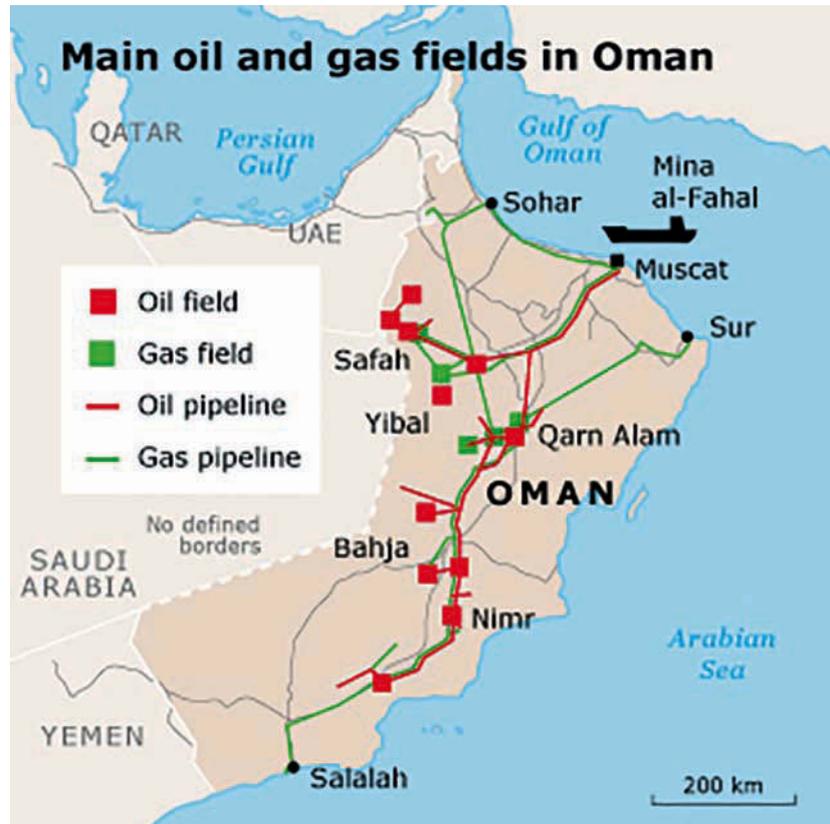
planned and it was a scramble to be ready. On the day, the tanker's captain sought help to navigate his way in as Saih Al Maleh was not shown on his charts. As a consequence he came in too fast and struck the single-buoy mooring to which the undersea pipeline from the tanks onshore was attached. Fearing an oil leak, the onshore crew ordered up a light plane to see whether an oil slick had formed and were mightily relieved when none was found.

The tanker seemed however to be receiving too little oil and it was then found that the still inoperative electrically controlled valves at one of the tanks had not been fully opened, probably because they had to be turned by hand no less than 360 times! The valves at the beach end of the pipeline were also not yet fully operative and it took a piece of pure inventive genius on the part of the onshore crew to adapt the turning mechanism of a simple hand-held electric drill to do the job. It was a fantastic achievement but also a real cliff-hanger!

Since then, PDO has grown into one of the most sophisticated oil and gas companies in the world utilising hi-tech enhanced oil recovery techniques to increase Oman's daily output to more than a million barrels a day. Oil production from PDO sites amount to nearly 70 per cent of Sultanate's total production while it is currently responsible for producing nearly all the natural gas in Oman.

It currently produces on average more than 600,000 barrels of oil every day from approximately 10,000 wells in 178 oilfields across Oman. As of 2016, PDO capital expenditure reached \$5.6 billion while operating expenses rationalised to \$1.8 billion.

"PDO has a long and very proud history and has played a central role in the development of the Sultanate over many decades under His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said's wise leadership. PDO Day provided an excellent opportunity to reflect on the origins of the company and to recognise the contribution of everyone who has helped to make the company what it is today," PDO's Managing Director Raoul



**PDO has grown into one of the most sophisticated oil and gas companies in the world utilising hi-tech enhanced oil recovery techniques to increase Oman's daily output to more than a million barrels a day.**

Restucci said on celebrating PDO day recently.

PDO was formed originally through an agreement signed between His Majesty Sultan Said bin Taimur and Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) on June 24, 1937. In 1980, PDO was restructured into an LLC via a Royal Decree, and the company took its current name. In 1991, it began producing gas. And in 2002, it started implementing its Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) strategy.

The Company is owned by the the Government (which has a 60% interest),

the Shell group (which has a 34% interest), Total (which has a 4% interest) and Partex (which has a 2% interest). Gas fields and processing plants are operated by PDO exclusively on behalf of the Government.

Sir Terence Clark, our Society's vice-president, published *"Underground to Overseas: The Story of Petroleum Development Oman"*, with Stacey International in 2007, and *"Oman's Invisible Energy"*, PDO's role in the discovery and exploitation of gas", with Explorer Publishing in 2014. ■



# TEACHING SHAKESPEARE IN OMAN

Tracy Irish and Aileen  
Gonsalves of Butterfly  
Theatre Company

We first visited Oman to work with teachers and students for The World Shakespeare Festival, one of the Olympic projects of 2012. Having fallen in love with the open-hearted culture of Oman and the warmth and enthusiasm of so many of the teachers and young people we met, we were delighted to return to Muscat in September 2016 for phase one of a new project working once again with the Ministry of Education and The British Council.

As the world's most performed and studied playwright, Shakespeare's genius can be found in his extraordinary ability to write lines for characters that continue to live each time a living, breathing actor of any culture, age, or ability speaks those lines as their own. So many cultures across

different times and places have found themselves reflected in his words that he has become a global treasure, a shared resource through which we can have conversations about our thoughts, experiences and values. Through these conversations we can discover what we have in common, and what we can learn to understand about our differences. On our previous visits we'd discovered so much about Omani people through these practical conversations, and we were looking forward to finding out more.

At Butterfly we work in a very particular way with a technique designed to keep actors alive to the moment, seeing clearly, and responding to the unique aspects of tone and physicality each actor brings to inhabiting the text. Finding a reason to



Exploring the fight between Titania and Oberon.



speak that text, an 'objective', is a core aspect of the process. Consider, for example, the universal story of a teenager trying to get money out of their parents. Their reason to speak, their objective, is 'get them to give me money' but they try different tactics to achieve this goal such as charming, flattering, threatening or bargaining, and in those tactics the words they speak come alive with meaning. The Butterfly technique offers a clear vocabulary for teachers and students to explore Shakespeare's text on their feet, finding meaning in a fully interactive way that engages them cognitively and emotionally. Working with Omani young people, we had found them highly receptive to these ideas. We had also been impressed by a culture more at ease with the heightened poetry and dramatic boldness of a Shakespeare play than we often find in his home country.

This visit found us working with 22 teachers from around the country. Many faces were new but there were some old friends we had worked with on the previous project and it was a real bonus knowing that these people already understood and valued the principles of our practice and could help the new participants to get involved. Over three days, we engaged our participants in gentle physical ways of working that explore the connection between mind, voice and body, using *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as our focus. The rhythms and imagery of narrative are integral to how we understand the world and our approaches tap into human instincts for music and metaphor



which open up connections to Shakespeare's writing.

An example of how this musical quality of the language is not just about 'pretty poetry' can be found with insults. Shakespearean insults are often a fun way to get young people enjoying speaking text aloud and exploring the quality of words. We offered our teachers a selection of Shakespeare's more obscure insults 'watery pumpkin' or 'mustachioed purple-hued maltworm', for example. We asked them to speak these phrases, using tactics through their tone and body language to achieve the objective of getting their partner to come towards them or go away. It quickly became clear that the quality of the words made it much easier to speak them to make the partner go away! They described the words as feeling 'heavy' and 'bad' finding a meaning in their quality beyond a dictionary definition and discovering that how words sound make us

feel a specific feeling even when we can't understand the meaning fully.

As we moved into a fuller exploration of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it was interesting to explore how the emotional sense of Shakespeare's rhythms and imagery is translated into the Arabic texts the teachers were using. We worked with extracts from the play, demonstrating the exercises in English while the teachers worked with Arabic translations, and we must express our gratitude to our wonderful translators Oraib, Haifa and Rachman, from the Ministry of Education. Their wit, skill and good humour helped us encourage the teachers away from their tendency to analyse the text before speaking

and doing. They helped us emphasise the importance of experimenting with a range of possible ideas rather than deciding intellectually what the characters intended and how a scene should be played. Working together, we found a shared global heritage in Shakespeare that offered a lens to explore the human values and dilemmas of love, friendship and family.

The next phases of our project will involve visiting the regions to see how the teachers have shared this work with their students, taking a small company to work alongside them to perform Shakespeare in local, familiar venues such as caves, forts and market places. Currently we are waiting for news about when the next phase of this project will proceed, but we really hope to be able to report on that tour in the next edition. We are grateful to the Anglo-Omani Society for their offer of help with funding once confirmation has come from the British Council. ■



# LOOKING EAST: OMAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA

## LEADING TOWARDS A DIVERSIFIED OMANI ECONOMY

ARTICLE BY ISOBEL RANSOME

Isobel completed a  
six month internship  
with the Society  
from August 2016 -  
January 2017.

Contact between China and Arabia was established before the advent of Islam, with maritime trade flourishing across the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Omanis were renowned for their proud history of building ties east- and west-wards across the oceans. There are records of an Omani merchant having made the journey to China in approximately 850 AD.

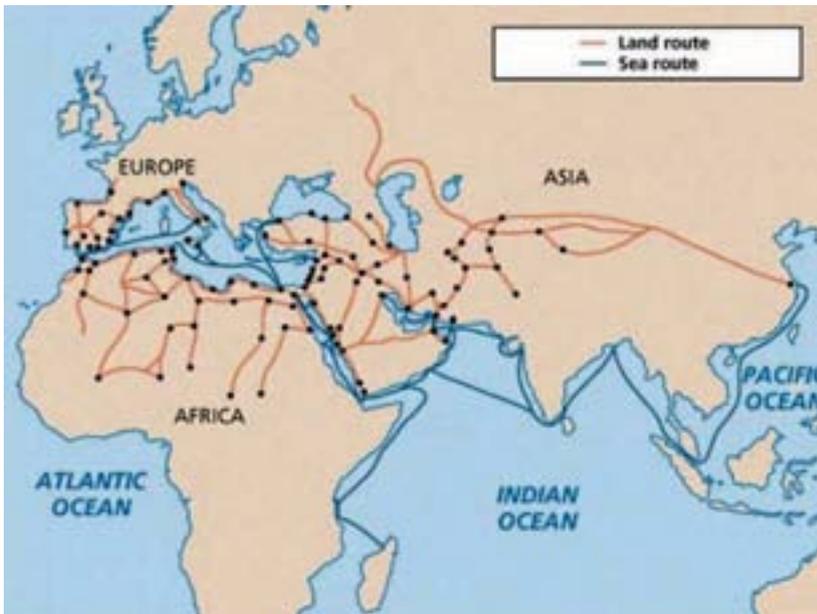
In more recent history, official diplomatic relations were established between Oman and China in May, 1978. This paved the way for significant developments between the countries. Oman became the first Arab nation to export oil to China in 1983, and China is now the nation to which Oman exports most of its oil. Despite Oman's move away from an economy dependence on oil, this central component to the present Omani-Chinese relationship will remain significant over the coming years.

Oman and China share a wish to strengthen ties. This is clear in a general sense through Oman's much respected foreign policy, and also the implementation of Oman's wide-ranging economic diversification initiative known as 'tanfeedh', as well as China's plans for her 'One Belt, One Road' project.

### PRESENT DAY ECONOMIC SETUP

Economic diversification has been a focus in the Sultanate for some years, and is of increased importance with the global shift away from reliance on Gulf oil. Developing tourism has become a priority for Oman, alongside other industries such as transportation and logistics on an international scale, encouraging youth towards establishing small and medium enterprises, as well as expanding fishing, mining and agriculture.





Oman's Free Zones reflect this outward looking focus, each offering unique selling points and strategic location to capitalise on Oman's geographical position on global shipping routes. Al Mazunah Free Zone in Dhofar provides access to the Yemeni market, with Yemeni nationals able to work without the need for visas and work permits. Salalah Free Trade Zone is well placed for trade to and from East Africa, which is relevant when considering the projected pathway of China's 'One Road' maritime route. Sohar Port and Free Zone is a deep-water seaport on the Gulf of Oman, and has had a sister-port agreement with Shenzhen Port since 2016. The Chinese Ambassador to Oman, Yu Fulong, has stated how this is part of China's 'One Belt, One Road' programme. The management of both ports are committed to regular contact.

Duqm Industrial Zone currently under construction is another example of Omani-Chinese cooperation. Agreement has been announced on a large site designated for development, with heavy investment promised by China, to include a port and an airport, and with three areas: heavy industries and areas of medium, light and mixed use including building materials, glass, chemicals, aluminium products, tyres, and a training centre; 10 hectares to be developed for tourism, including a five-star hotel; an oil refinery and petrochemical complex.

As of April 2017, Chinese firms have signed deals worth over \$3 billion to invest in Duqm, and thousands of jobs expected

to open up from this will be available to Omani nationals. Duqm's development will be ongoing over coming years due to the vast scale of the whole project. Santander's Foreign Investment in Oman summary (updated June 2017) stated that 'Investments [in Oman] have accelerated, in particular, due to the development of the Duqm Special Economic Zone... This dynamic is expected to continue. The Sultanate is offering tax incentives and customs duty exemptions.'

The 'One Belt, One Road' project in China is the outlined establishment of a global network, both on land along the historic Silk Road ('One Belt'), and an extensive maritime route comprising 'One Road'. The projected network, should it come to fruition as planned, will encompass over half of the world's population, with some analysts stating it will be 65 per cent. Construction is underway across several Central Asian states, and investment, planning and realisation continues.

### CULTURE: EDUCATION, LANGUAGE AND TOURISM PROSPECTS

Educational opportunities are opening up to facilitate ongoing growth. The Oman China Friendship Association (OCFA) has been active in this sphere, with annual delegations to China and more specialised visits. The OCFA has focussed on the younger generation, for example

representing Oman at a summit for Arab and Chinese youth.

China has the most students studying abroad in the world, in almost all cases involving studying in a foreign language, primarily English. Oman also has thousands of students studying abroad at tertiary level, with Arabic and English speaking countries the top destinations. Were some focus on language education to be turned to Arabic in the case of Chinese students, or Chinese in the case of Omani students, there could be the prospect of a direct relationship between the countries. Language learning is a powerful tool for youth to have the opportunity to travel abroad, make connections and enhance ties.

Sohar University has in recent years received visiting Chinese students, who study Arabic at the University for an academic year. Similarly, the so-called 'Sino-Omani industrial park' at Duqm has included a pledge to fund 1,000 Omani students to study and train in China, in order to return and use the skills acquired in the construction of the industrial zone. Both Chinese and English language instruction is part of the programme, and 40 Omani students have started studies in China on a two-year scholarship.

Chinese nationals are travelling abroad at an ever-increasing rate, and with Oman's reputation as a luxurious, safe and friendly place to visit, Chinese tourism to Oman will be an area to watch.

### CONCLUSION

- Oman is an important regional actor in efforts for peace, stability and cooperation. Given China's focus on trade facilitated by infrastructure (invested in by China), Oman's efforts to maintain stability and enable economic growth are important.
- Saudi Arabia is by a long way the biggest supplier of oil to China and as such China's strongest trading partner in the Gulf, but Oman is still significant.
- There are interesting projects to watch for the future, and the foundations for further Omani collaboration with China: business, language, tourism. However, oil will remain a most important tangible element of the relationship. ■

# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY 40th ANNIVERSARY EVENT MUSCAT, 2016

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MR RICHARD WOODHEAD

Marking the 40th Anniversary of The Anglo-Omani Society a celebration was held at the British Ambassador's residency in Muscat on Sunday 23rd October.

The event was hosted by British Ambassador, Mr Jon Wilks and Mr Robert Alston, Chairman of The Anglo-Omani Society. The evening was attended by the Minister of Commerce and Industry HE Dr Ali Al Sunaidi and HE Mohammed Zubair, Advisor to His Majesty The Sultan Qaboos bin Said for Economic Planning Affairs. Over 120 guests were present at the event including Omani and British Society and New Generation Group members and business representatives from the UK and Oman.

The Society took the opportunity to give their thanks to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos for 40 years of continued commitment to a strong relationship between Oman and the UK. The event was in honour of those years of preservation of friendship between the two countries that is sustained through the Society's cultural, education and charitable activities. The event was also an opportunity to publicly announce Mr Ian Buttenshaw's new role within the Society, allowing for active involvement within the Anglo-Omani community in Oman.



Speeches were made by HMA Mr Jon Wilks and Mr Robert Alston. Mr Wilks took the opportunity to highlight the importance of the role of strengthening the relationship between the UK and Oman that the Society plays. Mr Alston's speech gave thanks to His Majesty The Sultan for his generosity that has enabled the successful exchange between Britons and Omanis. Highlighting the Society's achievements, the Gap Year and Arabic Language schemes and New Generation Group Delegations, which have all contributed to an active and positive relationship between the UK and Oman, particularly for the next generations in both countries. ■



# AOS BIENNIAL VISIT TO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

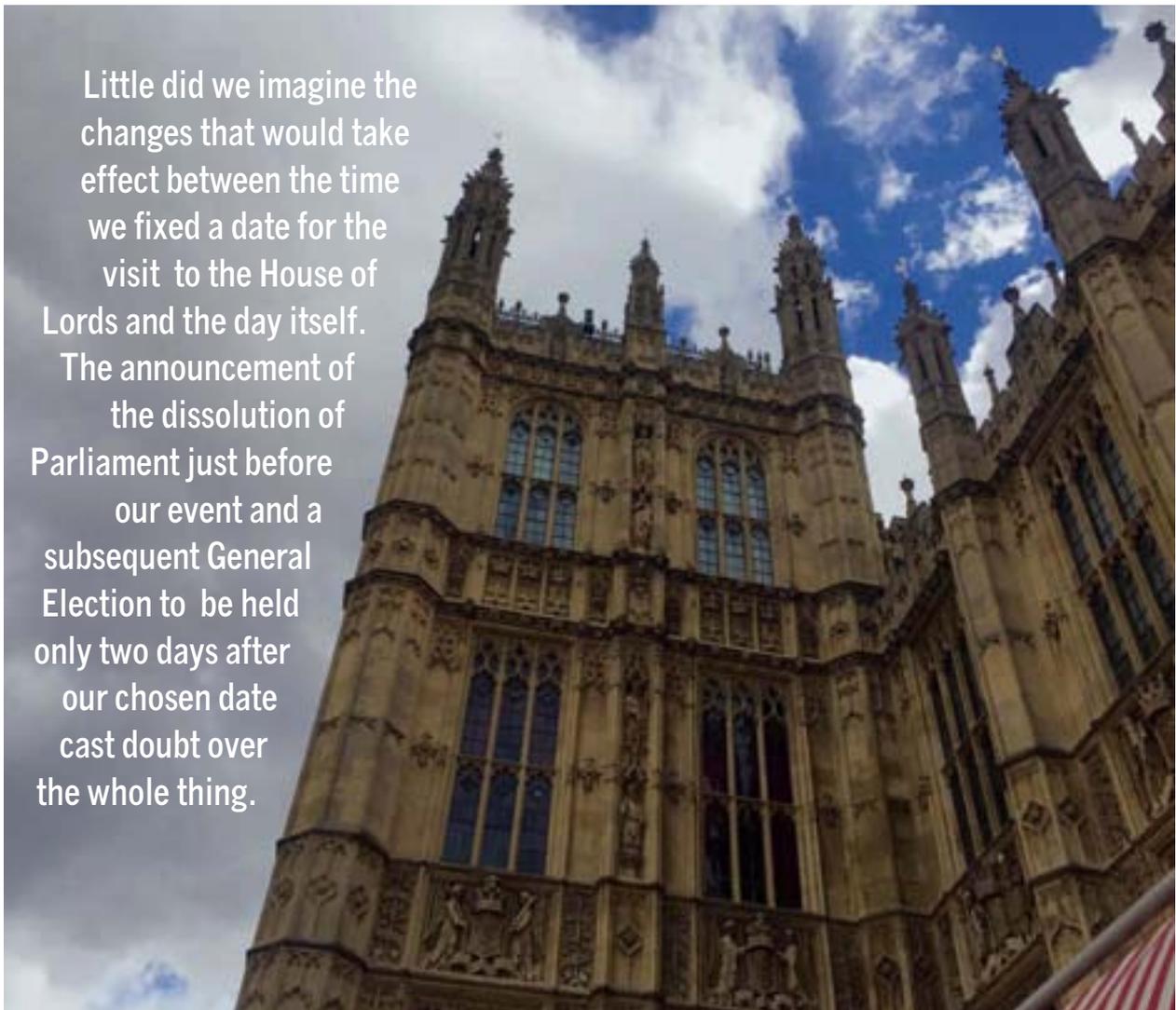
Thanks to some timely advice from our host and sponsor – Baroness Jolly – we pressed on with the arrangements and were pleased to receive confirmation that full access to the Palace of Westminster would be granted for the tour and access to the Terraces for the tea party. Lord Lee of Trafford was kind enough to step in as sponsor and generously gave up his time to host.

Those 50-odd members and guests who attended the tour were treated to a splendid discourse on the fabric and structure of buildings, old and new, by our

guide who had been, up to quite recently, the Architect in Residence. The fact that both Houses were in recess meant that we enjoyed an uncluttered, leisurely and informative wander around our seat of government.

On completion of the tour we joined forces with Lord Lee, His Excellency Ambassador Abdulaziz Al Hinai, our Chairman, Robert Alston, and his wife, Pat, and another 25 members of AOS and their guests in the Cholmondeley Room and on the adjacent Terrace. It was good to see a

Little did we imagine the changes that would take effect between the time we fixed a date for the visit to the House of Lords and the day itself. The announcement of the dissolution of Parliament just before our event and a subsequent General Election to be held only two days after our chosen date cast doubt over the whole thing.



Our thanks go to Baroness Jolly and Lord Lee for their sponsorship and hosting which contributed greatly to a very successful day at the Palace of Westminster.



number of the New Generation Group present as well as representatives from the FCO.

Clearly with the whirlwind of international activity surrounding the event there was lots to talk about and there was some animated discussions on the possible effects of Brexit. It was obvious from the remarks of both the Chairman and His Excellency the Ambassador that the bond of friendship between our two Nations is strong and will survive the current uncertainties.

Our thanks go to Baroness Jolly and Lord Lee for their sponsorship and hosting which contributed greatly to a very successful day at the Palace of Westminster. ■



BIENNIAL VISIT TO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER



# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HISTORY FOR CONTEMPORARY OMAN

ARTICLE BY J.E. PETERSON

Much has happened in Oman since 1970 and it is today a vastly changed place. The accomplishments and progress are both tremendous and obvious. Given this, why should we be concerned with the past?

We should be concerned, first of all, because the extent and depth of the transformation has been directly dependent on what constraints and opportunities the past presented: in other words, we are where we are now because of where we were.

Second, we should be concerned because the direction of development in the last half-century is determined both consciously and unconsciously by the nature or structure of Oman's society, economy, and politics over more than a millennium: that is, what we were, guides as to where we are going.

Finally, we should be concerned because an appreciation of where future change may lead depends upon an understanding of what has transpired in the past and has established the pattern for change that

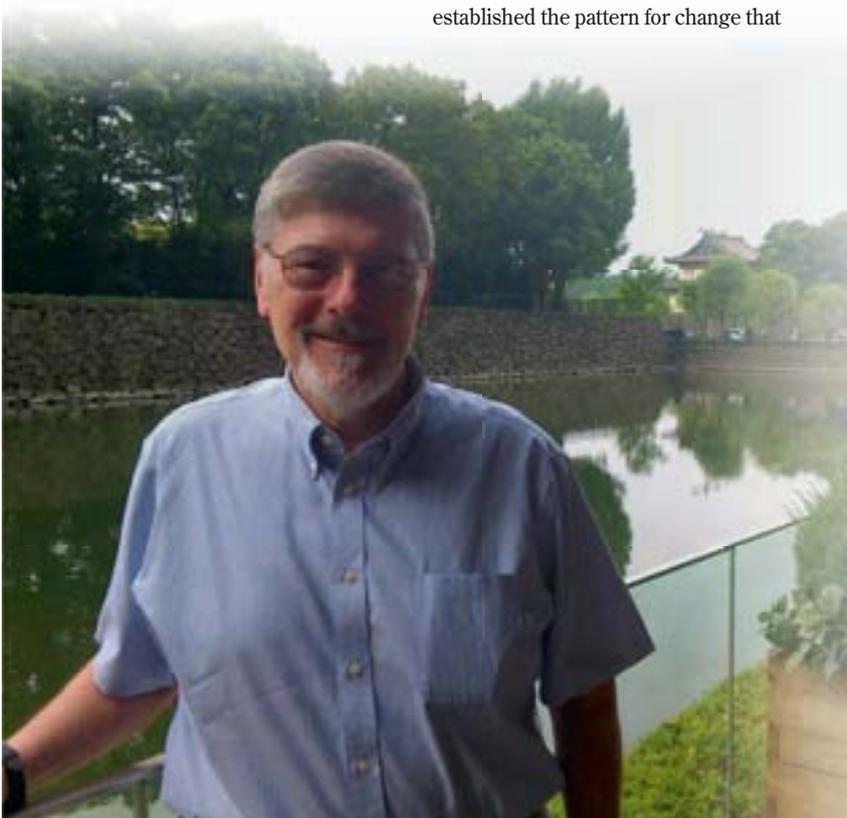
continues into the present and into the future: we are going where our past tells us it is right to go.

Nearly 50 years may seem like a long time but it is but a brief moment in Oman's long history. Despite all the glitz of change, development and modernism, there are more fundamental factors that determine the course of Oman's modern history, as well shed insight on its future. The following paragraphs explore some of the factors of the past that help explain contemporary Oman.

## POLITICAL SYSTEM

Clearly, Oman is a monarchy with an authoritarian government. This is simply to say that the monarch, Sultan Qaboos, is the principal and final decision-maker. The system is not something imposed from outside or based on a seizure of power. Instead, the ruling family emerged out of the tribal framework. The ruler acts as father of his country, in similar manner to the shaykh who serves as father of his tribe, just as the head of the family is the father. This provides social legitimacy for the regime. But the present system is also a legacy in a broader sense of the Ibadi imamate and this provides a moral (religious) legitimacy as well.

But the monarch of today is far different from the ruler of yesterday. Previous rulers were financially dependent on merchants (and often were themselves merchants) as well as on British Indian subsidies. Relevant here is the complaint of Sultan Sa'id b. Taymur (r. 1932-1970) that he did not have enough money to administer the state. As a consequence, he sold the Gwadar enclave on Pakistan's Mekran coast in 1958 and held the proceeds in reserve against the rising expenses produced by his unification of the country



in the 1950s. His poverty generated his excuse for not developing the country until he had enough oil money in his treasury to pay entirely for specific projects. As a result of oil income, suddenly the ruler controlled the purse-strings. This provided more independence for the ruler and greater control over the country. It also permitted the creation and maintenance, in a limited way, of patronage networks.

As a consequence, this development gave rise to a new kind of political legitimacy where the state is expected to provide for its people. Inevitably this type of legitimacy gradually comes to depend upon accountability and some degree of popular participation. This point draws us back to older, more traditional, forms of political organisation, particularly the ideal of egalitarianism within the tribe and the principle of the election of imams.

Equally important, the era of oil income has produced concentration of political power in a central government and with it the deepening development of a state apparatus. The state exercises greater control over the economy and of benefits from that economy. It becomes the predominant employer, both in the civil service and the security forces. The state assumes enhanced influence over people's behaviour and activities and takes on a role of guidance of society. There is an increased role and visibility for the ruling family, leading to privileges for members of the family and family members being placed in charge of vital state organs. In the end, the ruler emerges with an unchallenged adoption of a singular vision.

### ECONOMY

Before 1970, Oman was characterised by extreme poverty. The mostly subsistence economy depended on such traditional activities as farming (especially date cultivation), herding, fishing and small-scale trade. There was no pearling as in other Gulf states. Extensive labour migration to East Africa and later to the Gulf (when oil income was generated in other Gulf states) was a long-standing and necessary measure.

The emergence of the oil era spelled the destruction of the old economy. For one thing, it marked the rise of concept of



salaried occupations, first by a few years in the army and then in the oil industry. This was followed by the introduction of a structured civilian government and later by employment in private companies.

The result was the creation of a 'new' oil-fuelled economy in which the state necessarily had to take the initiative in distributing oil income. A first priority was to create social benefits such as housing, education, and health care. A government bureaucracy was instituted and it deepened over the years. Government purchases injected money into the economy and the proceeds were distributed widely through a multiplier effect. As the government grew more sophisticated, the state found itself directing development planning to achieve discrete goals. Even the more recent objective of privatisation demonstrates the heavy hand of government.

### LONG-TERM ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

Oman still exhibits a transitional economy, albeit one that is not now – if ever – strictly speaking a rentier economy. The dependency on hydrocarbons continues unabated. There are three principal economic themes in Oman's long history: subsistence agriculture, subsistence fishing, and the accumulation of wealth from overseas activities. Oman's paucity of resources before oil meant that wealth could not really be generated within the country and that there were severe restraints on population size. In times past, overseas activities included conquest, long-distance trade throughout the western Indian Ocean, and a relationship with East Africa that depended on widespread trade, the migration of Omanis to the Swahili coast and inland where some generations

of Omanis settled and other Omanis simply spent a few years or decades there before returning home. Another source of wealth in the twentieth century was of labour migration to the Gulf in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

What has happened since 1970? Now agriculture and fishing support only a tiny minority of the population. The last five decades have seen an immense population growth from less than ½ million in 1970 to some 3 million now, of which approximately 1.8 million are Omani citizens. The land and the sea cannot support that size of population without income from outside. In contemporary Oman, the injection of wealth in the economy is from another type of overseas activity: the export of oil and gas. Furthermore, Oman's economy, like its politics, has become heavily dominated by the state, which in turn is heavily dependent on hydrocarbon income. It is by-and-large a dirigiste economy where the creation and distribution of wealth is more heavily than ever the domain of the state.

### SOCIAL CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

When we look at Oman and its people today, we see considerable mobility, a government based on providing services equally to all its people, and freedom of employment, residence, education and so forth. But this does not mean that Oman is copying Western society. Rather, it has its own distinctive social structure.

Oman is fundamentally a tribal society – not unlike elsewhere in the Gulf. It is one of

the great myths held about the region that Arabia was only bedouin. While bedouin ethos and tribal identity informs much of Gulf society, Oman is different. The great majority of Omanis have a *hadar* (settled) heritage; there are only a few *badu* (bedouin) tribes.

Prior to 1970 or even the 1960s, much of Oman was only tangentially tied to rulers. Until the late 1950s, the sultans exercised limited authority over Muscat and the Batinah Coast. Meanwhile, the imams exercised most moral authority over the interior but had limited practical control. The most significant unit of identity and political affiliation for most Omanis was the tribe. Outside of the capital, sultans tended to rely on the support of key tribal shaykhs while the imams were even more dependent on shaykhs.

This illustrates the primacy of tribes before 1970. Tribes protected their own territory and interests from neighboring tribes. They formed alliances with other tribes in their area and the two great tribal moitiés emerged: Hinawi and Ghafiri. Beginning in the 1960s, the tribes gradually became fully subordinate to the central government. Their political role was greatly reduced and tribal shaykhs were incorporated into the government system. But the tribes did not disappear from the scene. They remain a key component of identity, particularly self-identification. Omanis are classified by the government according to which tribe they belong, a criterion that also includes creating tribal recognition to non-tribal groups. Finally, tribes and tribal membership form a key

component in social cohesion, personal bonds, marriage patterns, and an attachment to home settlements.

### GLOBALISED PROCESS OF URBANISATION OF OMAN

Like most developing countries, Oman has experienced rapid urbanisation. Oman was notable for its settlements where the civilisation was predominantly *hadar* and only *badu* on the fringes. Many of Oman's main towns sprang up to service an agricultural hinterland, such as Nizwa, Bahla, Izki, 'Ibri, Ibra and al-Rustaq. At the same time, there were a number of port towns, based on local trade, fishing, long-distance trade and shipbuilding. These various settlements have been transformed and repurposed into the new cities, particularly Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Nizwa.

But what kind of cities? The characteristics of urbanisation in Oman and the Gulf is far different from elsewhere in the Middle East. These are more 'world' cities, rather than being similar to Cairo or Damascus. Traditional markets are missing, as are crowded lanes and intimately jumbled housing. A look back at Oman's only two pre-oil 'cities' shows that both Muscat and Matrah were divided into quarters, identified by ethnic group or occupation. Today, rather than neighbourhood restaurants and coffee shops, Omani cities are characterised by chain restaurants and Starbucks or Costa. Residential patterns are not arranged into traditional quarters based on tribal, confessional, ethnic, or occupational grounds.



The port at Salalah.

Instead, these cities display a propensity for high-rise buildings and single-family housing in villas. The cities are built around the automobile, much like cities in the United States and Australia. Residential patterns feature no distinct 'quarters'. Omanis mix together in the city regardless of tribe or region of origin, and residential areas feature a mixture of nationals and expatriates.

### THE EXPATRIATE CONUNDRUM

Like most of the other Gulf States, Oman has huge numbers of expatriates and the proportion of expatriate to national population continues to grow. In essence, this is a logical consequence of a small population and the influx of oil income. In 1970 and the following years, indigenous education and expertise were lacking, thus forcing a dependence on expatriates to organise and staff the government. This was not unusual throughout the colonial or developing world. Meanwhile, in the private sector, business concerns expanded, also requiring more and more workers. Personal incomes grew, permitting the hiring of domestic help. Before long, Oman was importing expatriates to do the sorts of jobs that Omanis had done in the Gulf.

But what is the cost of the dependence on expatriates? In short, it is both financial and cultural. At some point, Omanis will need to take back many of the jobs that have gone to expatriates – a trend that is already happening, for example, in the hospitality industry.

But is the status of expatriates in Oman an open-and-shut case of 'we' and 'they'? The numbers of expatriates may be a new development but their cultural presence is not. Much depends on how we define expatriate or foreigner. It will be easily recalled that Muscat and other coastal settlements, as well as the interior, bear evidence of interaction and influence from the Indian subcontinent and East Africa existing for a very long time.

Indeed, it may be fair to say that the Omanis exhibit a mix of populations in terms of culture, ethnicity, sect and language – with even more differences appearing only recently (for example, educated vs. uneducated). We tend to think

of the Gulf divided into an Arab side and an Iranian side (as exemplified in the acrimony over the name of the body of water separating them). But in fact, the communities on both sides of the Gulf form a *mélange*. There have long been communities of Arabs on the Persian littoral and Persians on the Arab littoral. Some are Sunni, some are Shi'ah – sectarian affiliation is not defined by the Arab-Persian ethnic distinction.

As a country with a long coast and history of trade with much of the Indian Ocean, this *mélange* should not be surprising. The British political agent in Muscat at the beginning of the twentieth century remarked that 14 languages could be heard regularly in the Muscat suq. Most of them – and quite a few others – can be heard around the capital today. The numbers of Persians in Oman is relatively small but the Baluch number perhaps several hundred thousand. Communities of Indian origin, whether Hindu or Liwadiyah, have been merchants in Oman for centuries. Omanis of African extraction are found everywhere.

In the past, they all constituted harmonious communities with only small differences. This harmony continues to exist today. But at the same time, new distinctions in society are emerging along lines of educational attainment, occupation, wealth and so on. Some of these distinctions are overlaid onto older distinctions, such as hadar-badu and pure blood or not. And even in Oman, where Ibadis, Sunnis, and Shi'ah have co-existed harmoniously for centuries, slightly more consciousness of sectarian differences has emerged. Still, this has not fundamentally altered Oman's noted balance and tolerance, a quality that extends into its conduct of international relations.

### ISLAND OF STABILITY IN A SEA OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT AND DOMESTIC ERUPTIONS

The long isolation of Oman meant that before 1970 relationships with neighbours were minimal at best. There was a long history of enmity with what became Saudi Arabia while the rulers of the smaller Gulf states were looked upon as subordinates

**There is plenty of reason to ponder how the past has shaped – and continues to shape – Oman's present and future.**

on the level of Omani shaykhs. Since then, relations with Gulf neighbours have been strengthened through the Gulf Cooperation Council – yet Oman is still an outlier in this grouping and intra-GCC tensions have never disappeared.

With regard to Iran, there are long memories of occupation and lost Omani outposts. Traditionally, Iranian states were adversaries. This pattern was not broken until the establishment of an alliance between the shah and Sultan Qaboos at the Persepolis celebrations in 1971 – the immediate impact was Iranian assistance for prosecuting the Dhufar War. Somewhat surprisingly, the two countries have maintained unbroken relations after the Iranian revolution, a tie that has produced benefits for the region and beyond.

There has been little contact with Yemen in the modern era apart from Dhufari-Yemeni historical ties. The emergence of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen brought cross-border conflict as the South Yemeni state provided vital support for the insurrection in Dhufar. The denouement of the war and painstaking negotiations leading to an agreement on the Omani-South Yemeni border inculcated a wary interaction with Aden. But there still has been no strong connection with the north of Yemen, the old Yemen Arab Republic, or its leaders. This has resulted in sympathy for the south in Yemen's 1994 civil war and probably a major factor in Oman's decision to stay outside the Saudi-led Arab coalition in the civil war that broke out in 2015.

There is plenty of reason to ponder how the past has shaped – and continues to shape – Oman's present and future. The year 1970 marked a bold break with Oman's political and economic past but it did not erase a thousand or more years of historical continuity or end the impact of past experience on present policy, society and actions. ■

# THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RENEWABLE ENERGY IN CONTEMPORARY OMAN

ARTICLE BY AMY WHIGHT

Amy Whight worked as an intern in the AOS offices in London from July 2016 to January 2017. She used her involvement with the society over that time, plus a working visit to the Sultanate, to study sustainable development in the country. Here is her report.

Since the Renaissance in 1970, HM Sultan Qaboos has repeatedly called for sustainable development to bring stability and prosperity to the Sultanate. Sustainability has long-suited both an Islamic and Omani mindset: being guardians of the earth and preserving the environment are central pillars of religious and cultural heritage. However, rapid





industrialisation and urbanisation following the oil boom in the 1970s led to an era of comfort and luxury that was previously inaccessible. Higher quality of life took priority over environmental sustainability, and energy consumption soared. According to the International Renewable Energy Agency's Assessment of Oman in 2014, oil consumption almost doubled since the early 2000s, electricity use increased in accordance with GDP, and the use of natural gas residentially more than tripled.

A lack of energy efficiency is problematic as new developments are not consistent with previous sustainable lifestyles. Traditional architecture dating back to the 13th century, building in shaded areas using compressed earth and mud blocks and water circulation systems, has been disregarded. Construction methods replicate environmentally unsuitable western-style buildings. Although Oman's architectural heritage is a great source of pride, reintroducing sustainable initiatives are frequently associated with poorer lifestyles before the oil boom, where wealth has been used to erase the memory of poverty.

**Domestic consumption of electricity to regulate indoor temperatures often outstrips natural gas production, leaving households to deal with power cuts and shortages.**

Currently, energy efficiency is least tackled residentially even though this is the largest consumer of electricity. Cavity wall insulation was at the core of traditional Omani houses, and is the most basic practice to sustainable development, as demonstrated by a study conducted by AER and UCL which found that adding insulation to housing cut energy demand by up to 20%. Such a basic technique is being ignored as building regulations do not stipulate sustainable U-values. This means domestic consumption of electricity

to regulate indoor temperatures often outstrips natural gas production, leaving households to deal with power cuts and shortages.

Another factor that hampers efforts towards renewable energy use is that electricity is undervalued. Low domestic gas prices in the Sultanate have been a key policy instrument to promote economic growth and diversification, and the Ministry of Finance grants subsidies for the generation and distribution of fossil fuels. In 2015, this subsidy was over 45% of the costs of producing and supplying electricity. Furthermore, the cost at which fuel is sold for electricity generation is below the economic opportunity cost of fuel in the international market. With electricity so cheap, consumers have less incentive to monitor their electricity use.

Oman's increasing population and infrastructure expansion mean that energy consumption figures steadily increase whilst national fossil fuel resources are depleting. In combination with the 2008 global economic crash, there was a need to investigate alternative energies to reduce dependency on oil and gas in Oman. AER studies found that solar

and wind power had the most potential for electricity generation. Both the public and private spheres have been testing renewable energy initiatives for some years, ranging from small-scale pilot studies such as photovoltaic cells (PV) to power some street lights and parking meters, to the large-scale such as Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) partnership with Glasspoint in Mirraah to generate solar steam for enhanced oil recovery.

One of the most significant pilot studies was the 2015 winner of The Research Council's Eco House competition, HCT's GreenNest Eco House, which successfully addressed issues with energy consumption and efficiency in the residential sector. Instead of sun exposed solid walls and curtains which trap heat, northward-facing optimises natural light and ventilation whilst using vegetation to shade windows and doors. PV solar systems on rooftops and on household appliances generate enough energy to power the house several times over. This excess electricity cannot be sold to the grid yet, but with the right infrastructure and policies, more than enough electricity could be produced to sustain a modern Omani family's needs. Renewable energy technology costs are higher in the short-term, but excess electricity could be sold to the grid to provide income and work off the extra costs. With the fall of oil prices, now is the time to be innovative about energy initiatives.

A step that could be taken would be to adjust fossil fuel subsidies and allow renewable energy to compete against oil and gas. Cheap electricity has made people unaware of the global cost of oil and gas and encouraged electricity wastage. A

It was previously suggested that renewable energy should account for 10% of Oman's national energy by 2025.

solution may not need to be the removal of subsidies, but instead be subsidy reinvention to promote renewable energy initiatives such as net metering, investment subsidies or tax incentives. This could help to mitigate initially high energy costs when transitioning to green technology, as otherwise people may be little inclined to switch to clean energy.

A national target should be set for renewable energy use. It was previously suggested that renewable energy should account for 10% of Oman's national energy by 2025, but this was never approved and discussions remained in limbo. One of the biggest challenges will be to establish better communication between governmental agencies, private business and academic researchers, as it remains unclear who has been pushing renewable energy plans forward. This has meant policies are slow to be produced and restrict Oman from acting as a real market for sustainable development. Slow progress could have implications for the Paris agreements, which are not being adhered to properly. AER has recently announced a completed final draft of new regulatory framework for small-scale solar PV systems connected to the grid, which will give

customers permission to install systems and export surplus to the grid, but policy implementation is yet to take place.

As well as subsidy and policy adjustment, the population will need to be ready to embrace renewable energy use in Oman. HM Sultan Qaboos' push for SME development could be tied to renewable energy development to encourage millennials to generate ideas for new technologies. This could help break the myth that sustainability and luxury are incompatible with each other. Sustainable living needs to be experienced for people to accept lifestyle adjustments such as renewable energy use, and the best way to do this is through educating younger generations. There are some great enterprises such as Electricity Holding Company's corporate responsibility project, Nama Estidama, which turns youths into ambassadors for green lives and working on renewable energy projects during the Summer months, and Outward Bound Oman, which holds leadership programmes for youths in the desert which is 100% powered by renewable energy. However, programmes involving younger generations need to be made more accessible on a much larger scale throughout Oman to awaken public awareness to the fact that sustainability can suit Omani culture, traditions and modern lifestyles, both residentially and commercially.

Oman does not seem far from making the switch to renewable energy. However, greater collaboration between energy stakeholders is essential to realise that renewable energy is the best way of conserving Oman's natural heritage and helping to guarantee long-term secure energy supply. ■

*A huge thank you to the following people, who gave up their valuable time to discuss the importance of sustainability with me:*

*Nadia Maqbool – Architect and Director of 23 Degrees North*

*Muna Al Farsi – Project Manager of HCT GreenNest Eco House*

*Bushra Al Maskari – Senior Specialist at Authority for Electricity Regulation*

*HE Sultan Al Harthi – Special Advisor to the Supreme Council for Planning*

*Hilal Al Ghaithi – Deputy Director of Customer Affairs at Authority for Electricity Regulation*

*Dr Ahmed Al Busaidi – Manager of RE Strategic Research Programme at The Research Council*

*Omar Al Wahaibi – Group CEO at Nama Holding*

*Abdullah Al Shekaili – Sustainability, Corporate Affairs and Marketing at Nama Group*

*Juman Al Saqlawi – PhD candidate at Imperial College, Centre for Environmental Policy*

# THE NEW GENERATION GROUP – 2016-2017

The New Generation Group has spent another fantastic year growing and achieving in a number of areas.

We have been engaging young people all over the country, through expanding our network and attending events from Reading all the way up to Glasgow. This network is further supported by our social media presence which continues to thrive as well as our online community with over 2900 twitter and 1320 FB followers. NGG has also recently established a new LinkedIn Page to keep connected with our Alumni, members and partners.

Within the UK we have held a range of events which included hosting the Acting Director of the National Museum of Oman – Mr Jamal Al Moosawi, Mr Paul Hilder – Director of the British Council in Oman, and creating a unique exhibition by award winning Omani photographer Anas Al Dheeb. These events reflect a broad range of interests, talents and projects to come out of the Sultanate, and we were honoured to have the opportunity to hear and engage with them. NGG UK has continued to strengthen its relationship with the Omani Students, and our other partners including Takatuf and the Oman British Law Association. NGG involvement in student events this year was commended by HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai at the Oman Open Day in Cardiff, symbolising how important these links are to connecting young generations of

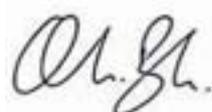
British and Omanis together at the Society. We are looking forward to this continuing next year.

NGG Oman has made tremendous efforts in raising the profile of the Society in Oman over the last year having organised two high profile events in Muscat. The first event, which was held at the National Museum, brought together the private and public sectors. The event had a keynote address by Mr Yousef Al Ojaili, BP-Oman President who spoke about the BP presence in Oman. Under the auspices of HE Eng. Salim Al Aufi, Undersecretary at the Ministry of Oil & Gas, the second event entitled “In-Country Value: The Journey Towards Local Industrialisation and Job Creation” was held at the Royal Opera House. The key note speech was delivered by Mr Mohammed Al-Ghareebi, In-Country Value Manager, Petroleum Development of Oman. In addition to the events held, NGG Oman is also pioneered the implementation of the Enterprise Project in Omani Schools. Members also had the honour of meeting HRH Prince Charles on his Royal visit to Oman, where he was introduced to a number of young inspiring Omanis and heard all about the work of the NGG.

In other news, over the last year we have said goodbye to four superb interns who



Ma'an Al Rawahi  
NGG Chairman, Oman



Oliver Blake  
NGG Chairman, UK



NGG Event May 2017 with Paul Hilder.





NGG Social September 2016.



NGG Oman meeting HRH Prince Charles on Royal visit to Oman, November 2016.



Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi, NGG Oman Event at The Royal Opera House Muscat March 2017.

NGG Oman, November 2016 at Oman National Museum.



have represented the very best of what the UK Universities have to offer. Jonathan Taylor and Mark Balfour recently finished their placements with us and both made significant contributions to the Society's Oral History Projects, digitisation of our Oman Library, and found new ways to increase the Society's profile both on and offline. Isobel and Amy who completed their internships last February both produced excellent project reports, on two very interesting topics. The reports are within this publication and we hope that you enjoy them! To see recent interviews and videos with our interns, head over to the AOS Youtube page.

The next year promises to see new and exciting events on the horizon. This includes the development of the Enterprise Project where we expect to see the implementation of the initial stages before the end of the year. In November we will be heading to Oman for the 2017 NGG Delegation with a great team to discuss innovative ways in which the Sultanate is saving in times of austerity. We look forward to welcoming new members and partners and building on already excellent relationships around the UK and Oman! ■

*Remember that you can keep up to date with what the NGG is up to via our website [www.aos-ngg.com](http://www.aos-ngg.com) and on social media.*

# OMAN THROUGH MY EYES

PHOTOS BY ANAS AL DHEEB

From 16-24th of February 2017, The Anglo-Omani Society hosted an exhibition of pictures taken by up-and-coming Omani photographer Anas Al Dheeb.



A member of the Omani Society for Photography, Anas began his photographic journey in 2013. He has given workshops, lectures and training in college and universities, covering a range of techniques including theoretical and practical photography, editing and photographic software programmes. In addition, he has participated in different competitions both locally and internationally, winning more than 35 awards. His showcase exhibition entitled *'Oman in my Eyes'* was held in Japan during the 'Ship for World Youth' programme in 2015.

The special exhibition at The Anglo-Omani Society was entitled *'Oman Through My Eyes'*, focusing on Anas' home province of Dhofar.

The photographs showcased the rugged natural beauty of Dhofar. The Al-Qara Mountains, the vast emptiness of the Rub al-Khali desert and the dramatic landscape changes due to the Khareef were all

highlighted in a stunning array of beautiful colours.

Another key aspect of the display was the admirable way that Omanis have retained their traditional ways of life and customs in the face of overwhelming modernity. An insight was provided into the ancestral life ways of fishing and date cultivation.

The people of Dhofar were the third theme within the photographic collection. Men, women, boys and girls of all ages were presented, in traditional dress, and going about their daily lives. From two elderly gentlemen holding hands whilst chatting, to a group of boys performing traditional camel stick dances, and to girls popping their heads round doorways and laughing, the true nature, friendliness and love of life that characterises not just Dhofaris but all Omani natives came to the fore.

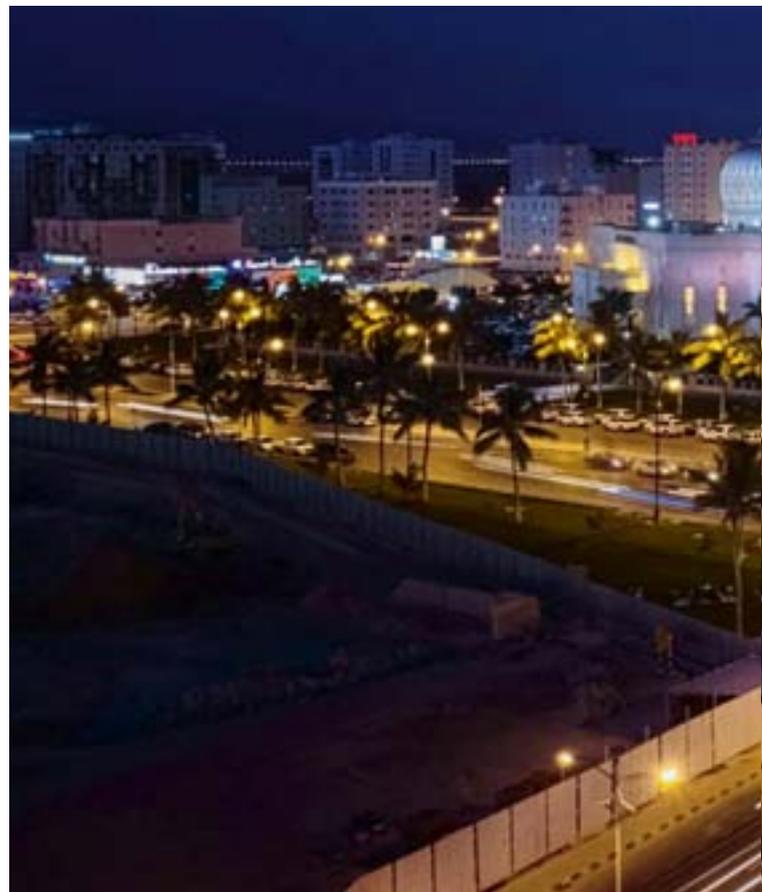
We hope this will be the first of many more exhibitions of this kind at Society!

Follow Anas on Social Media @Anasaldheeb



©Anasaldheeb







# THE NEW GENERATION GROUP AND THE OMANI STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

ARTICLE BY JONATHAN D. TAYLOR

The New Generation Group has worked closely with Omani student groups over the last year.

The following demonstrate the events and activities enjoyed by the NGG and Omani Students alike. Reflecting the close work of the NGG and Omani students, the following article is co-written by Mohammed Baabood, Reading Students' President, Ali Al Zaabi, OSSSL President and Society Intern Jonathan Taylor.

November, aimed to showcase both the benevolence and generosity of the Omani people. The event presented a fantastic opportunity to raise the profile of the Sultanate, giving information and interesting facts to those who had little or no knowledge of the unique and diverse country or its generous peoples. Despite the typical dreary autumn weather, the spirits of the students were by no means dampened, lifted by the presence of Omani football players Ali Al-Habsi and Emad Al-Hosni, who together made the event a great success.

## OMAN'S 46TH NATIONAL DAY EVENTS IN READING

The Omani Student Society in Reading hosted a series of events in celebration of the 46th National Day of the Sultanate. With the support of The Anglo-Omani Society, three events took place on the 17th, 18th, and 26th November. These events brought together Omani students and the wider public of Reading in a friendly, celebratory environment, whilst promoting Omani culture and values of kindness and generosity.

The first event on the 17th



Ali Al Habsi joined students in Reading City Centre.



Reading Students celebrate National Day 2016.

On Monday 6th February, The Anglo-Omani Society travelled to Scotland for the first time to attend 'Explore Oman' Open Day at Strathclyde University, Glasgow.

On the 18th November, the Omani Cultural Exhibition aimed to display the incredibly diverse aspects of Omani culture through photography, calligraphy and traditional handicraft, to name but a few. The Anglo-Omani Society also had a stall and was a keystone to the event, raising awareness of both the Sultanate and the very special friendship between the UK and Omani peoples. The event was finessed by a touch of traditional music, just what was needed to get both Omanis and non-Omanis in a festive mood.

The finale on the 26th November was a celebratory dinner witnessing many attendees from different countries coming together to enjoy a friendly and thoroughly enjoyable evening. On the stage, students performed poetry and music, in addition to presenting Muttrah-born Salah Al-Zadjali's newest music video "Sultanatna" in which the Society was featured! Guests were all invited to enjoy a lovely dinner with a scintillating Omani flavour.

## GLASGOW

On Monday 6th February, The Anglo-Omani Society travelled to Scotland for the first time to attend 'Explore Oman' Open Day at Strathclyde University, Glasgow. The event exhibited a great range of categories such as history, calligraphy and traditional clothing, as well as encouraging visitors to engage with Omani students. The Anglo-Omani Society played a crucial part in the proceedings, increasing the Society's standing as well as affirming and emphasising the great friendship that exists



AOS Intern Jonathan Taylor talking to students in Glasgow, February 2017.

between our two peoples. Indeed, there was a great deal of interest shown by visitors and Omani students alike in the Society, what it offers and what it stands for, and as a result the NGG garnered a great many new members.

## CARDIFF

Taking place at the Mercure Hotel in Cardiff on the 18th March and held by the Omani Student Society in Cardiff, with support from the Omani Student Advisory Council, along with the Omani Students Society in London,

the event – predominantly in Arabic – was a celebration of the academic success of Omani students studying in the UK. The event, attracting upwards of 300 people, started off with a poster competition, demonstrating a range of Omani Students' academic work in UK universities.

The event was also attended by H.E. Mr Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al Hinai, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UK, who gave a speech extolling the dedication and success of the Omani students studying in the UK. Indeed, these successes were highlighted by a video, on



HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai and NGG at the Omani Student Open Day, Cardiff 2017.

the differing traditions and customs of Oman, and a short tongue-in-cheek film about life for an Omani student living in the UK. During the event, the Student Presidents and The Ambassador gave their thanks to The Anglo-Omani Society for their continued support.

## OMAN STUDENTS SOCIETY IN LONDON

OSSL have worked closely with the NGG over the last year, to host numerous events that aim to showcase Oman’s uniquely diverse culture and heritage, as well as to reaffirm and emphasise the close ties between Oman and the UK.

Events mutually hosted between OSSL and the NGG have been great successes, from educational events such as ‘The CoRT programme’ with attendees receiving a certificate from the trainee Mr Tallal Al-Amri, to cultural events like ‘One Traditional Oman?’, which showcased how customs differ throughout the Sultanate, as well as showcasing a short film on Oman. Events have often been attended by The Ambassador of Oman in the UK, H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Hinai, and The Omani Cultural Attaché, Mr Musallam Al-Amri.

Over the last two years the advancement of OSSL has gone from strength to strength.

Each year OSSL hosts a ‘Talk of The Season’ event which talks about any cultural or educational topic. This year’s talk was on ‘The routes to take after Graduation’, with the acting-CEO of Riyada – the Public Authority for SME’s Development in Oman – Mr Khalid Al-Haribi. The event proved a great achievement, and is a testament to the younger generations of Oman to build upon the outward-looking, entrepreneurial spirit of their forefathers.

Over the last two years the advancement of OSSL has gone from strength to strength, with more events being held annually, as well as the creation of more ways to communicate with both students and members through social media, as well as the inauguration of a website to showcase past and future events of the Society – [www.ossllondon.com](http://www.ossllondon.com)

## CONCLUSION

What all these events really demonstrate is that Arabia cannot just be defined by deserts, camels and skyscrapers, or its peoples be compartmentalised into binary ideological and religious stereotypes. Oman with its ancient heritage and traditions, its colourful and unique cultures, diverse natural landscapes, and the generous and kind-hearted nature of its peoples, does not so much challenge these stereotypes as render them utterly without meaning, and the NGG plays a crucial role in this. In reminding people of the lasting friendship between two countries approximately 3600miles apart, and stressing the importance of maintaining these ties, and celebrating both the similarities and differences in a time of great uncertainty for the younger generations, it plays its part in ensuring a prosperous and peaceful future for our two countries. Long may it continue.

The NGG would like to thank Ali Al Zaabi, Hamed Al Darei, Alghith Alharthi, Rashid Al Junaibi and the rest of their team for all their hard work and invaluable contributions to strengthening the relationship between our two groups. ■



One Traditional Oman event with Omani Students in London.

# MY EXPERIENCES ABROAD

ARTICLE BY BUTHAINA AL JABRI

The dream of travelling to study abroad has been on my mind ever since I was 12 years old. It did not matter to me the destination, or what I was going to study. I only knew that I wanted to discover a new person in me who was independent, outgoing and confident.

At that time my favourite hobby was playing volleyball. It was to me, a way to escape the present, and to daydream about what I wanted to achieve after high school. Playing volleyball in a sports club, and coming from a conservative family in a traditional society was never easy. It was a revolutionary idea and was not always welcomed. But that did not stop me! It actually strengthened my personality, instilling enough confidence for me to question things.

Though I played in an Oman sport club for only three months, it was one of my very best experiences as a teenager and motivated me to achieve my goals.

In 2008 my dream came true; I was one of the lucky students to get a scholarship to study in the UK. At that time my scholarship was to study mechanical engineering. I didn't know where this subject was going to lead me, but I was happy and thrilled by the idea that I had achieved what I always dreamed of and the destination was the country where His Majesty Sultan Qaboos completed his education. I just couldn't ask for more.

That was just the beginning of a long journey. I studied English in Bournemouth in the first year and the rest of my studies were in the City of Manchester, the city that I love to call in my dairies a devious or lost city, for that was how I actually felt in my early stages. I spent nearly seven years there scrambling, changing the subject and the university. I was officially a Mancunian by the time I graduated in 2016. I remember a taxi driver once told me after he had asked me how long I had been in the UK, 'When you live in Manchester, you don't have to try to get to know the city, the city gets to know you, so you are a Mancunian now.'

The opportunity to study abroad is a tremendously rich and valuable experience. I was able to overcome many obstacles, including the fight to complete my studies in the end. I discovered new qualities in myself that made me succeed further. Every time I felt that I was alone, destiny granted

Manchester, you don't have to try to get to know the city, the city gets to know you, so you are a Mancunian now.



Picture of me on my 16th birthday.

me a gift in the form of people who would support me to complete my journey, including my family and friends. This includes those who I coincidentally met through the years who have made a big impact on me and on who I have become. They became as close as family to me, and I cannot imagine myself without them.

It was not only the life of independence that gave me all these opportunities and strength, but the system of universities in the United Kingdom that provides many options for students to overcome various kinds of challenges. Volunteering also offered the opportunity to discover talents that I would have never have known. I have spent nearly four years in the voluntary sector, as well as taking a major role in Omani Students' activities. These extra curricula activities were fuelled by a motivation that always kept me going; a longing for home and gratitude for the scholarship.



Oman National day in Manchester, November 2014.

The choices students can make during studies abroad are precious opportunities that can never be matched, especially for undergraduates. It is the time in which an individual forms his or her professional principles and ethics that ensures a positive and productive generation of professionalism and high productivity. I think it is very important to inspire students to experience new things other than their academic studies, as it is an essential

balance towards discovering their potential skills that can only be revealed through practice.

After graduating, I was lucky enough to be offered training with The Anglo-Omani Society in Oman for which I am very grateful. It gave me the opportunity to compare how different charities in Oman run their activities. I learnt some important techniques from Lamya Harub and Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi on how to manage events



Buthaina and explorer Mark Evans at 'Crossing the Empty Quarter' Event, May 2017.

in Oman, follow up on Society matters from different sectors, and many other little details that they helped me on – I am blessed to have worked with them.

My journey in the UK is still ongoing. After joining the Cultural Attaché's office at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in London, I have had the chance to work closely with the Society's New Generation Group. This work will connect the dots between our two branches of the Society with the aim of achieving our common goals to strengthen relations between our two countries for future generations. ■



Buthaina and NCG Officer Isabelle at a Society Event, June 2017.

# EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

K

## TRANSFORM YOUR FUTURE STUDY AT A TOP UK UNIVERSITY!

Guaranteed entry to your chosen university\*

Prepare for your degree by improving key academic skills

Safe and modern accommodation

Partial scholarships and discounts available!

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Aston University

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

BU Bournemouth University

University of Brighton

CITY

Cranfield University

University of Glasgow

UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

The University of Nottingham

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

University of Salford

LWU Bristol

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

University of York

\*When you successfully pass your university pathway course at the required level

[kaplanpathways.com](http://kaplanpathways.com)

[f](#) [t](#) [v](#) [p](#) [i](#)

Search "KaplanPathways"

KAPLAN

INTERNATIONAL PATHWAYS

## THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

# REVIEW

### Classified Advertising Rates for Educational Section 2018

For all educational establishments wishing to be included in this section of The Review, we offer the following rates:

	Colour	Mono
<b>Full page</b>	<b>£500</b>	<b>£400</b>
<b>Half page</b>	<b>£350</b>	<b>£250</b>
<b>Quarter page</b>	<b>£250</b>	<b>£200</b>

**MECHANICAL DATA**  
(dimensions are shown as depth x width)

Full Page – Type area 255 x 178mm  
 Full Page – 303 x 216mm Bleed  
 Half Page (landscape) – 125 x 178mm  
 Half Page (portrait) – 255 x 85mm  
 Quarter Page – 125 x 85mm

**COPY REQUIREMENTS**  
**Full colour and mono, 180 screen**

A full advertising design service is available, if required please ask for details. Digital Copy may be supplied in Mac format, Quark Xpress 8 collected files, complete with all fonts. Transfer media CD. Copy can be sent by email to: julie.pearce@brunton.co.uk or be mailed to: Brunton Business Publications, 1 Salisbury Office Park, London Road, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP1 3HP, England.

Sheffield Hallam University

Education UK

### Advance your career at Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield Hallam is one of the most popular universities in the UK with over 34,000 students from 100 countries. The University has a growing community of Omani and Middle Eastern students on campus so it is a supportive and safe place to study in the UK.

All courses are designed with industry to prepare you for professional success. You will have access to one-to-one careers advice and interview guidance with opportunities for paid work placements and part-time work.

Experience life in Sheffield - a vibrant, student-friendly and safe city which is near to some of the UK's most beautiful countryside and is just over two hours from London and one hour from Manchester by train.

For more details visit  
[www.shu.ac.uk/international](http://www.shu.ac.uk/international)

# ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON 2016

The Society's Annual Luncheon was held on the 11th of October at our accustomed haunt of the Army and Navy Club in Pall Mall, courtesy of our renowned deputy Chairman – Colonel Nigel Knocker.

More than 80 members and their guests attended and we are delighted to report that HE Oman Ambassador arranged for the Minister of Higher Education, HE Dr Rawya Al Busaidi, to be the principal speaker at the lunch. In addition, we were fortunate to get a strong representation from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and more than 12 members of staff from the Oman Embassy. All the GCC Nations were represented by their Ambassadors and we were also joined by our own Society staff.

Her Excellency the Minister spoke warmly of her own experiences of Higher Education here in the UK and expressed the wish that the co-operation which exists between our two countries in the fields of Education and Science continues. The future of both of our countries depends so much on keeping pace with all the technological advances of today and tomorrow and it is vital that we prepare our young people for the challenges they will

face as Oman continues its development.

Unfortunately, Tobias Ellwood MP was called away to an urgent Division in the House of Commons on the Syria crisis, but Neil Bush from the FCO stepped in to deliver a message of co-operation and friendship. He echoed the Minister's words on the value of higher education and was happy to encourage greater partnerships between UK universities and the relevant Ministries in Oman and their University Boards.

The Chairman, Robert Alston updated the Members on the general health of the society, and HE Abulaziz Al Hinai, the Oman Ambassador, passed on good wishes to the Society and mentioned the value of the various expeditions and training opportunities sponsored by the AOS both in country and here in UK.

Overall, it was a well-supported event and we look forward to a repeat performance on Thursday 12th October 2017. ■





ANGLO-OMANI LUNCHEON



# THE OMANI-BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

A new business council has been created to boost the economic and commercial relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom.

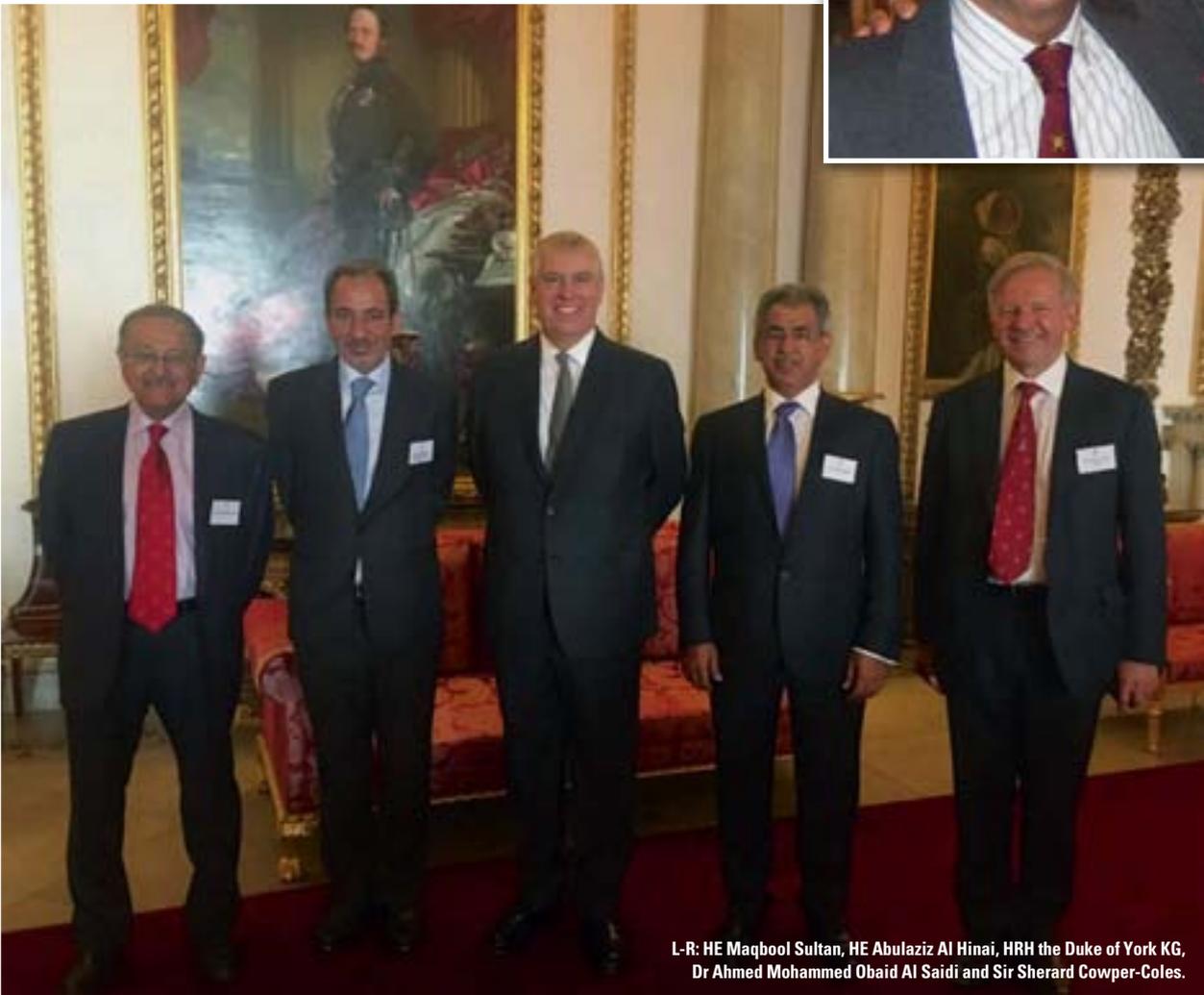
The Omani-British Business Council (OBBC) has been formed from the UK branch of the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA), bringing it into line with other business councils.

The OBFA was formed in 1991 to foster commercial and industrial relations between the business communities of Britain and Oman. The Association had two branches (UK and Oman) and two Patrons – HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tarik Al Said and HRH the Duke of York – and these two will now be Patrons respectively of OBFA and OBBC.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles is the chair of OBBC, while HE Maqbool Sultan continues to chair OBFA, based in Muscat, with Shawqi Sultan, who remains Secretary General of the OBFA. Matt Foster,



Shawki Sultan, Secretary General of the OBFA.



L-R: HE Maqbool Sultan, HE Abulaziz Al Hinai, HRH the Duke of York KG, Dr Ahmed Mohammed Obaid Al Saidi and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles.

Executive Director for Strategy at UK Defence Solutions, has become Vice Chair of OBBC and a Trustee of AOS.

The new organisation will promote bilateral trade, investment and other economic partnerships, with a particular emphasis on supporting UK businesses operating in Oman or looking to develop a presence there. As part of a closer, more formal relationship between the new OBBC and the AOS, Corporate Members of the AOS are being offered the opportunity to join OBBC. The two organisations look forward to working together in future.

### **BUCKINGHAM PALACE RECEPTION**

A reception to mark the formation of the OBBC was held at Buckingham Palace on Friday 7 July. One hundred members of the OBBC, OBFA and the AOS attended, and distinguished guests included Oman’s Ambassador to the

**A reception to mark the formation of the OBBC was held at Buckingham Palace on Friday 7 July. Members of the OBBC, OBFA and the AOS attended.**

**Distinguished guests included Oman’s Ambassador to the United Kingdom, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai and the Sultanate of Oman’s Health Minister, Dr Ahmed Mohammed Obaid Al Saidi.**

United Kingdom, HE Abdulaziz Al Hinai, and the Sultanate of Oman’s Health Minister, Dr Ahmed Mohammed Obaid Al Saidi. The event was also an opportunity to celebrate the economic relationship between the UK and Oman.

HRH the Duke of York KG welcomed all guests and spoke of the important bond between the UK and Oman, and the shared history of the two countries. He highlighted his work to promote entrepreneurship in the wider Gulf, through his Pitch@Palace scheme.

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles thanked His Royal Highness for his hospitality, and set out the importance of business links between the two countries. He also welcomed the close partnership between the OBBC and the AOS. HE Maqbool Sultan spoke about the importance of entrepreneurship to both countries – and welcomed the Duke’s efforts to support start-ups in the region. ■



# EMPOWERING THE SCIENTISTS OF TOMORROW

ARTICLE BY MIAD AL BALUSHI

Since the inception of The Research Council (TRC), one of its main objectives has been to build the capacity of researchers through knowledge to transfer and promote the knowledge-based economy in Oman, and with TRC's transition to Innovation Park Muscat, it is essential to build the capacity of future researchers and scientists in Oman.

With that in mind, The Research Council, through the Department of Promotion and Brand Identity, has nominated selected students to attend *'London International Youth Science Forum'* (LIYSF) to engage Omani youth in a prestigious international scientific forum, to represent Oman positively and equip the students with the right skills to be future scientists and innovators by exposing them to prestigious international conferences.

This is the second year that the TRC received an invitation from LIYSF to make a representation from Oman. TRC selected three students in 2016, and one of the Omani students who participated in 2016 was selected as a counsellor by LIYSF during the forum for 2017. This year TRC sent five students for the programme, sponsored by BP Oman and Oman Air, the official carrier.

The trustees of the Anglo-Omani Society



agreed at their meeting in July to sponsor a further three Omani participants for LIYSF 2018, and the TRC's aim now is that at least six to eight students will attend next year.

Established in 2005, TRC is Oman's premier organisation that aims to have the largest research capacity in the region, have a regional hub for innovation and achieve the Sultanate's vision to advance research and development. TRC provides research funding in six sectors: Energy and Industry; Environment and Biological resources; Health and Social Services; Culture, Basic and Social Sciences; Education & Human Resources; and Information and Communication Technology.

In addition, and so that the TRC can build sustainable partnerships with academia, the private sector, industrial and government organisations, it is building the first innovation park in the Sultanate called Innovation Park Muscat (IPM). IPM will act as an independent environment where academics, entrepreneurs and large corporations can work together, share their strengths and generate business for the benefit of the community and the world. IPM will focus on four main areas that hold

London International Youth Science Forum was the brainchild of the late Philip S Green, founded in the aftermath of the Second World War by representatives from Denmark, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to set up group home-to-home exchanges between schools and communities in European countries.

significance for Oman, which are: Energy, Food and Biotechnology, Water and Environment, and Health.

Other TRC initiatives include the establishment of a number of scientific centres such as the Institute for Advanced Technology Integration in cooperation with Helmholtz Association in Germany and Oman Animal and Plants Genetic Resources Centre. It also holds an annual competition called Oman ECO House Competition to enhance the social and economic sustainable development culture and connect it with a research and innovation culture within the fields of building designing, environment, water, renewed energy management and codified national policies. The competition aims to renew the inherited Omani culture of old buildings architecture that contains many concepts and features of modern Eco houses in terms of design, elements used in building, the procedure of managing water and the use of power in cooling processes.

TRC has specialised funding for long-term research projects proposed by Higher Education institutions and other national Research institutions in order to support



research programmes of specific specialisations. For that, it has launched two Professorial Research Chairs. The first research chair is on Nanotechnology for Water Desalination in Sultan Qaboos University with a budget of 30,071,000 Omani Rials for five years. The second is on Material Science Applications at Nizwa University in cooperation with Cambridge University with a budget of 5,000,000 Omani Rials for five years.

Targeting students aged between 19 and 21, LIYSF is a two-week residential event held in London. Themed 'Science – Making Life Better' for 2017, the programme included lectures and demonstrations from leading scientists, visits to industrial sites, research centres, scientific institutions and other organisations, including world class laboratories and universities. LIYSF aims to connect youth with their peers from around the world and provide them with the opportunity to learn in a critical environment that leads to creative thinking.

The forum, hosted by Imperial College, included visits to research centres in both Oxford and Cambridge universities, and site visits to R&D centres such as Rolls

Royce and Airbus to ensure students are inspired through their studies to pursue careers in STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). The speakers are leading scientists in the world from organisations such as UNESCO, World Academy of Sciences and CERN and European Space Energy. It also included speakers from a number of leading universities in the UK.

### LONDON INTERNATIONAL YOUTH SCIENCE FORUM

LIYSF was the brainchild of the late Philip S. Green, founded in the aftermath of the Second World War by representatives from Denmark, Czechoslovakia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to set up group home-to-home exchanges between schools and communities in European countries. In 1959 Mr Green decided to provide a coordinated programme for groups from half a dozen European countries, based on science.

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh agreed to be Patron of the event and spoke at the first Opening Ceremony in 1959. Within a relatively short period, interest in LIYSF

spread. It became a residential meeting with its participants living in halls of residence of the University of London. In the early 1960s the range of participation extended beyond Europe, firstly across the Atlantic to the United States and Canada, and soon the Middle East, the Indian Sub Continent and countries of the Asian Pacific Rim were represented.

In the seventh decade of its existence the structure of LIYSF and its participation is constantly evolving. Former participants have been used to staff the meeting for over 35 years and several former participants now act as lecturers and provide programme input. Those selected are frequently winners of national and international competitions. The calibre of the participants is extremely high, the academic level being that of entrance to a university.

As a result of this LIYSF has attracted the interest and support of many leading figures in the world of science and politics, including no fewer than four Nobel Laureates, (Sir John Cockroft, Sir Lawrence Bragg, Sir Joseph Rotblat and Lord Porter), and many leading figures in science and British political life. ■



# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ALUMNI EVENT

Tuesday 27th June 2017

The Gap Year and Arabic Language Schemes now have over 150 alumni, and so we hosted an event to bring past participants together to celebrate the successes and achievements that the schemes have provided over the years.

The celebration was held at the Society's premises in London, as an evening drinks reception, 60 people attended, including embassy staff and Trustees.

Praise was given to Sean and Laura Griffin, teachers at the Sultan's School who every year support our gap year students during their placements in Muscat. Col Nigel Knocker thanked Richard Owens and Alan Henderson for their help in selecting students and also Pat Alston, who was part of the original team.

Glenn Canterford, the Principal of the Sultan's School, commended the Gap Year Scheme, stating that 'you only have to see the bond and relationship that builds between our scholars and the Gappies to

realise that our students benefit. I hope the relationship between the Society and the school remains strong in the years to come.'

Dr Elisabeth Kendall, the trustee responsible for The Arabic Language Programme said 'I have seen courses all across the Middle East and this course that we have in Manah, run by Dr Mohammad Al Saqri (who was present for the reunion), is fantastic and really sets up the students brilliantly. With so many doors now closed in the Middle East, Oman is really an oasis for us.'

The evening was enjoyed by all and we intend to organise more reunions of this kind in the future. ■



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ALUMNI EVENT



# THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

ARTICLE BY RICHARD OWEN

During 2016/17 the Society enhanced its financial support for UK and Omani nationals and organisations through its grants scheme for educational, cultural and environmental projects that met the Society's charitable objects.

The Society increased its budget for grants from £125,000 in the 2015/16 financial year to £150,000 in 2016/17, and has budgeted £160,000 for the forthcoming year.

The Society's three well-established student programmes, at the Sultan's School, primarily for UK gap-year students, at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers at Manah, for under-graduate and graduate students, and the Oxford and Cambridge International Baccalaureate summer schools for Omani students, continue to flourish. The Society has also made grants during the last year to:

- Durham University (fourth year of a five-year project) for archaeological research at Rustaq and the Batinah Coast in conjunction with Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture involving up to 20 students.
- Biosphere Expeditions, UK, for training of Omani students to work on marine conservation in the Musandam.

- Outward Bound Oman for training Omani instructors in the UK and support for a lecture tour illustrating the 2015/16 expedition to retrace the route of Bertram Thomas's 1930 expedition across the Rub Al Khali.
- Dr Andrew Polaszek of the Natural History Museum, London, for further study of the Agriculture, Biodiversity and Conservation of insects in Dhofar.
- Professor Marilyn Booth for translating a book by Omani author, Jokha al-Harhi, into English.
- Rolf Killius and Dr Francis Owtram in support of a research visit to Dhofar based on material from the British Library for cultural aspects of the region.
- Nigel Winsor, Hadi Al Hikmani and Abdul Aziz Al Huseini for a lecture at the Royal Geographical Society on current field work in Oman.
- Blue Water Recoveries for the recovery and conservation of artefacts from the "Esmeralda", a Portuguese vessel wrecked off Al Hallaniyah island in 1503.
- Andrew Stokes-Rees for joint British-Omani field studies in support of Omani Botanic Gardens.
- Butterfly Theatre for a project in conjunction with the British Council to perform Shakespeare with Omani schools.
- Nuffield Centre for a Health Management course in Oman.
- Mark Evans for an educational study pack for UK and Omani schools.
- Eman Mohammed Ali for a fine art photographic study.
- Dr Roderic Dutton for a project to improve the falaj at Luzugh.

The Society's grants are available for a wide range of activities which contribute to the overall aim of promoting Anglo-Omani relations. Applications for grants are welcomed from individuals and academic, training or cultural institutions in the UK and Oman, and grants are made throughout the year. ■



# THE OMANI BRITISH LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

The Omani British Lawyers Association (OBLA) was founded as an unincorporated association in the UK in 2011 with the aim of providing a platform through which people in Oman and the UK can build legal, business and cultural links.

OBLA organises events throughout the year in Oman and the UK giving members an opportunity to network with experienced and specialist professionals from both jurisdictions. These events enable members to benefit from the vast pool of legal and commercial knowledge these professionals hold.

## RECENT EVENTS:

### Construction industry panel discussion in association with Navigant

#### September 2016 – Muscat, Oman

A panel discussion that explored current issues in Oman’s construction sector. The panel was composed of David Thomas QC and Jane Lemon QC from Keating Chambers; Shahswar Al Balushi, CEO of Oman Society of Contractors; Edward Butler, Partner at Hamid Al Shaji & Peter Mansour; and Guy Elkington, Managing Director of Navigant Dubai.

### Law in Oman and the UK – Historical Trends and Recent Developments

#### November 2016 – London, UK

In November, the Anglo-Omani Society hosted OBLA’s autumn seminar where speakers Alastair Hirst and Philip Shepherd QC discussed the historical development of law in Oman and recent changes in UK contract law. Alastair Hirst, a renowned lawyer-Arabist, discussed in depth the development the legal industry has seen in Oman and the rest of the GCC, while Philip Shepherd discussed the impact that the landmark case, Patel v Mirza, would have on UK contractual law. The seminar ended with a fascinating discussion between the two speakers on the similarities and differences in these two jurisdictions.





### **An evening with Robert Milburn, Advisor to Audit Committee at OMRAN** **December 2016 – Muscat, Oman**

Robert Milburn gave an engaging talk in relation to setting up and running an audit committee in Oman. Robert currently advises OMRAN's audit committee and was previously a partner at Pricewaterhouse Coopers. The talk was followed by a dinner enabling members and other guests to network with other professionals.

### **Private wealth seminar with John Riddick and Tom Gauterin, Irwin Mitchell** **January 2017 – Muscat, Oman**

John Riddick and Tom Gauterin of Irwin Mitchell explained recent changes to the UK tax regime on personal and commercial investment into the UK. Many in the audience were surprised at the significance of these changes, and this seminar highlighted the need to take expert advice in this area.

### **Second Annual Joint lunch with OBLA and the Omani Lawyers Association (OLA)** **January 2017 – Muscat, Oman**

The Guest of Honour this year was His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamed Al Busaidi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 60 members of OBLA and OLA listened to H.E. Sayyid Badr's inspiring speech on the importance of the rule of law and the strong relationship between the Sultanate and the UK.

### **Lunch with Lord Justice Peter Gross**

**January 2017 – Muscat, Oman**  
H.E. Jon Wilks, the British Ambassador, kindly invited a small group of OBLA

members to meet Lord Justice Gross who is a member of the Court of Appeal of England and Wales. Lord Justice Gross spoke about his career as a lawyer and the development of the legal profession in the UK.

### **Breakfast seminar – Overview of Partnership for Development in Oman**

**February 2017 – Muscat, Oman**

The Authority for Partnership for Development (OAPFD) gave a most helpful presentation on the background to, and development of, the Partnership for Development (Pfd) programme. The members and guests who attended were particularly honoured to listen to a presentation given by Dr Dhafir Awadh Al-Shanfari, CEO of OAPFD.

### **Student Career Workshop**

**March 2017 – London, UK**

OBLA held a student workshop at the Anglo-Omani Society that gave a breakdown of how to qualify as an Omani lawyer and as a solicitor or barrister in England and Wales. The event aimed at giving students an idea of how to pursue the career that they wished for. It ended with a CV review, providing students with a template to use and giving them tips on enhancing their CVs as well as interviewing skills.

### **VAT seminars with Michael Patchett-Joyce**

**April 2017 – Muscat, Oman**

**May 2017 – London, UK**

In light of the forthcoming introduction of VAT to the GCC, Michael Patchett-Joyce discussed key issues that businesses and their advisers will face. Michael Patchett-Joyce is an experienced barrister, international commercial arbitrator and

CEDR accredited mediator. He explained the practical issues and common concerns in relation to this significant new development, as well as discussing the key provisions of the GCC Unified Agreement.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS:**

### **OBLA Annual General Meeting** **13 October 2017 – London, UK**

OBLA will be hosting its Annual General Meeting, followed by a dinner, in London. Further details to follow.

### **Student Career Workshop** **October/November 2017** **London, UK**

OBLA plans to host a second student career workshop in October/November where solicitors and graduate recruiters will provide individual students with an opportunity to discuss their applications, CVs and to enhance their interviewing skills. The workshop will involve one-on-one discussions between the professionals and students, so that each student can get feedback on the areas they need to improve. The purpose of the seminar is to help students in working towards the career path they wish to pursue.

## **OBLA LOOKING AHEAD:**

A large number of Omani students travel to the UK to pursue further studies, many interested in studying law in the UK. OBLA events and workshops can provide a support system for these students, to help them pursue a legal career in either jurisdiction. OBLA is also working on the launch of a secondment programme for young Omani lawyers to visit the UK.

## **MEMBERSHIP AND FURTHER INFORMATION:**

OBLA in essence exists for its members and highly values their opinions; it works towards providing the best possible opportunities for its members.

To obtain a membership application form or other information on OBLA, please contact OBLA's Administrator, Sarah Hall, [sarah@the-halls.org](mailto:sarah@the-halls.org) ■

# ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME

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

It was a privilege to run  
the Anglo-Omani  
Society's Arabic Language  
Scheme for the seventh  
consecutive year in  
summer 2016.

*It was my great pleasure again last summer to select ten bright young British students of Arabic to hone their language skills in Oman. This was the the seventh successive year in which the Anglo-Omani Society has run its Arabic Language Scheme. Yet the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic, located in Manah just outside Nizwa, has lost none of its enthusiasm and energy! As ever, the students returned invigorated, with*

*deep enthusiasm both for the Arabic language and for the beauty, culture and unparalleled hospitality of Oman. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman, to the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, of course, to the warm and devoted staff of Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic for ensuring that this scheme continues to move from strength to strength.*

### DR ELISABETH KENDALL

Trustee, Anglo-Omani Society  
Senior Research Fellow in Arabic &  
Islamic Studies, Pembroke College,  
University of Oxford



### **CHARLOTTE BANNER-SMITH** Durham University

Spending five weeks studying in Oman was undoubtedly one of the best experiences of my life, and fantastic for improving my Arabic! The quality of teaching was excellent and the lessons incredibly varied ranging from Arabic poetry to proverbs. Having the language partners was amazing as we were able to get a feel for the true Omani culture, including being invited to their houses for a delicious traditional dinner! Omani hospitality went above and beyond anything I had ever seen and everybody we met welcomed us into their culture at once – obviously with copious amounts of sweet tea and dates! Some real highlights were visiting Wadi Shab and spending the night camping in the desert after sand duning during the day. It was a phenomenal experience in every way due to the kindness of everybody involved and with special thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society for their generosity.

### **NEIL SADLER** Manchester University (postgraduate)

I found the Arabic Language Scheme a hugely rewarding experience and would recommend it to any Arabic learner.

Lessons were well planned and delivered and the teachers were responsive to adapting materials to suit the needs and preferences of the group. The well-organised language partner sessions were particularly useful as they provided frequent opportunities for extended, free-form interaction with native speakers of a similar age. This made it possible to acquire a much deeper understanding of contemporary Omani culture and family life than would have otherwise been possible. The accompanying programme of cultural activities was also excellent and included visits to some of Oman's main sites of historical and natural interest, including the Wadi Shab and Wadi Bani Khalid gorges; the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and National Museum of Oman in Muscat; and the Jabal Akhdar and Jabal Shams mountains. I developed a real link with Oman through participating in the programme and have no doubt that I will value the personal and professional connections I now have there for many years to come.

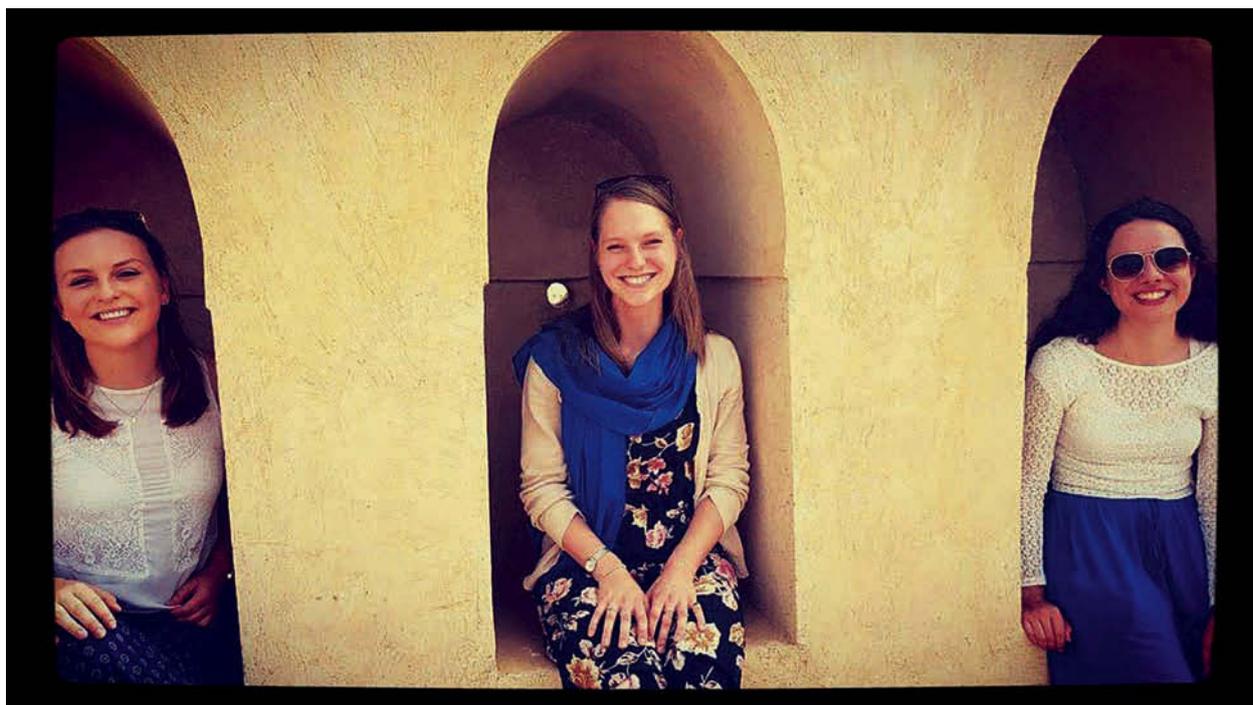
### **SOPHIE DOWLE** Oxford University

The five weeks spent in Oman at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic was not only hugely beneficial for my Arabic,

but also interesting and good fun. I benefited hugely from the excellent teaching, as well as the strong support available and the wonderful trips organised for us. It boosted my confidence in both written and spoken Arabic, through its intensive nature and the many hours spent with an Omani-language partner (with whom I still keep in touch). We were constantly overwhelmed by the hospitality and warm welcome that we received both in Manah and across the country. The trips and cultural activities organised alongside the Arabic language classes enabled me to learn about and explore Oman, its rich culture and history and its stunning nature and scenery.

### **FAIZUL REDHWAN KARIM** SOAS

The Anglo-Omani Society sponsored programme in Oman was an invaluable experience both educationally and culturally. The academics at Sultan Qaboos College were excellent, engaging with all the different aspects of Arabic language: reading, comprehension, listening and grammar. The teachers were first class, with regular assessments to maintain and track progress. The cultural experience was equally rewarding, and we were able to experience first hand the varied and



vibrant life experience in Oman. The college truly went above and beyond in facilitating regular seminars and external workshops. The language partners added a further valuable dimension to provide a truly immersive experience. Finally, with all this, there were regular excursions and trips that truly made the experience memorable, from sand-boarding in the desert, watching dolphins in the Gulf of Oman, visiting the Grand Mosque and the Opera House in Muscat, to walking through bustling souqs and ancient forts of Nizwa. It was truly a privilege to be able to participate in this wonderful programme.

### **ELIZA SHEPHERD** Cambridge University

The time I spent in Oman as part of the Anglo-Omani Society's Arabic Language Scheme has certainly been the highlight of my experiences as an Arabic student. From the moment I arrived, I was struck by the warmth of the teachers and staff at the residence and such hospitality characterised the trip. We were lucky enough to meet Omani students, who soon

became close friends and welcomed us into their homes. They helped us greatly with our spoken Arabic and, through listening to them, we gained a unique insight into life in Oman.

The teaching offered by Sultan Qaboos College was excellent and after five weeks I felt that my Arabic had improved considerably. The topics which we discussed in class were engaging and there were many opportunities to contribute. After an intensive day of lessons, we were

The chefs also very kindly allowed us to do some of our own baking to share traditional British food with the Omanis – Welsh cakes and some slightly less successful scones.

fortunate to be able to return to a very comfortable residence, equipped with ping-pong tables and table football and to enjoy a delicious lunch. The chefs also very kindly allowed us to do some of our own baking to share traditional British food with the Omanis – Welsh cakes and some slightly less successful scones. At the weekends there was time to relax in between the unforgettable excursions. Oman has a beautiful landscape, and it was spectacular to be able to spend a night in the desert, swim in a lush oasis the next day and visit the mountains on the following weekend. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Elisabeth Kendall, the Anglo-Omani Society, the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs and all the staff at the Sultan Qaboos College for this wonderful experience.

### **MUHAMMAD MURSHID HABIB SOAS**

From the moment one arrives in the Sultanate, the definition of the Arabic word '*diyafa*' is exemplified. What appears to be a tiny outpost in the sprawling desert soon



becomes a second home, with the Omani dialect and a continuous flow of dates and coffee becoming the fuel for the few weeks one has the pleasure to spend in Manah. From the crafted syllabus taught in the classrooms to sitting under the stars in the vast sandy expanse, the desire to comprehend why so many Brits are enthused by Oman becomes apparent. The initial shy greetings from your fellow students soon become a distant memory as this friendship blossoms into one that is carried all the way home after the journey. This experience provided graciously by the Anglo-Omani Society is not one to Arabise you, rather it is a stepping-stone in what is likely one of many future trips to this safe haven of the Middle East.

### **OLIVER HOPWOOD** School Teacher

The time I spent in Oman, courtesy of the Anglo-Omani Society and The Diwan of the Royal Court, was immensely enriching and fulfilling. Teaching and learning were of the highest quality, seamlessly and professionally delivered in the superbly equipped, modern and comfortable surroundings of the Sultan Qaboos College in Manah. Lessons were well planned and covered a range of stimulating topics, as well as grammar and even calligraphy. My Arabic skills progressed immeasurably not just in terms of my ability to write and read, but also to understand and converse, thanks to the language partner element to the programme. Staff went out of their way to ensure the learning was tailored to meet the needs of individual students, such that we all progressed and felt proud of our work. The lessons had pace and were always a challenge – but on every occasion they were executed with characteristic Omani warmth and good humour. This is far more than a language programme. It is a cultural exchange between Brits and Omanis, and it is sufficiently well-rounded and open-ended to enable students to move



far beyond the clichés of life in Oman or the Gulf more generally. Having participated in the programme I not only formed a strong bond with the language, but also, and perhaps more significantly, a profound affection for and appreciation of this most captivating of countries.

### **FRANCES KEYWORTH** University College, London

I had a fantastic time spending five weeks in Manah at the Sultan Qaboos College. All of the staff were friendly and welcoming, embodying the Omani hospitality, which made my whole time there – whether in the accommodation, lessons or weekly trips – so enjoyable. The teachers provided engaging lessons and challenged us to speak Arabic throughout by encouraging debates and presentations. This was in addition to the language partnerships with Omani students to whom I continue to speak even now. I came away from the course feeling much more confident in my ability thanks to their support and this has been crucial going into my final year studying Arabic. The weekend trips allowed us to experience some of Oman's beauty in its architecture and natural landscape. A few highlights (as it's difficult to pick just one) were our trip the Sultan

Qaboos Grand Mosque, camping in the sand dunes and our walk around Jabal Akhdar. It was my first trip to Oman and I can't think of a better way to see the Sultanate for the first time. I not only had the opportunity to absorb Omani culture and traditions, but also to forge friendships with my fellow British, American and Omani students. I will definitely be going back in the future and urging others to do the same!

### **LARA TANDY** Edinburgh University

The month I spent in Manah on the Arabic Language Scheme was intellectually engaging and deepened my interest in Oman and its people. The opportunity to participate in an intensive Arabic language programme alongside learning about Oman's rich history, through visiting its diverse cultural and religious sites, was a privilege. A highlight was the language partner scheme which enabled us to practise speaking with Omani students and to learn about their varied experiences first-hand. Needless to say, the hospitality we received from these students and their families was inspiring. The Arabic Language Scheme is unique in the way it combines language tuition with cultural activities and excursions, and I would highly recommend it to any Arabist.

### **JAMES SHIRES** University of Oxford (postgraduate)

I had an excellent experience at the AOS intensive Arabic course in summer 2016. My Arabic improved significantly, partly as a result of the enthusiasm of our teachers, but also through exposure to more advanced fellow students and the opportunity for concentrated study in the residence provided by the college. I also enjoyed travelling around Oman: our group was lucky enough to visit wadis, historical sites and Oman's unique aflaj, and I even managed to organise my own trip to Salalah. ■

# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY GAP YEAR SCHEME

The Society's Gap Year Scheme witnessed yet another very positive year, successfully sending eight students to Oman for the Autumn and Spring terms.

The Scheme is thriving with each group coming back from spending three months at The Sultan's School with fantastic stories to tell and having had a truly unique experience. These students are huge assets to both the School and the Society, as they represent the passionate youth who will go on to be ambassadors for Oman through their connection and admiration for the Sultanate.

The following is a recent account from Elizabeth Davis, who participated in the scheme during spring 2017.

What to expect? Having heard little about Oman previously, discovering the country through life at The Sultan's School was a great joy and privilege which has left me, I'm sure, with a lifelong affinity with Oman and working with young people in an international environment.

I can't praise the school staff enough for the way they made us feel welcome on campus. We were living in a humble apartment five minutes' walk from most classrooms and amongst our neighbours from the international teaching community,





who we knew we could call on for favours and advice at any time.

As an Arabic language graduate, I was keen to use and improve my language skill whilst on placement. There are plenty of opportunities to use it, sitting in on Arabic, Social or Islamic Studies classes;

borrowing books; reading newspapers; engaging staff in conversation in Arabic. Certainly, using Arabic, although not absolutely necessary in most situations, will earn you popularity points (especially with students)!

More than specifically 'teaching'

assistants, we worked with students from KG through to Year 13 on a wide variety of school activities: guided reading, in-class English support, art, ICT, swimming, sports lessons and competitions, performances, celebrations and events, and the Eco Committee. We were encouraged





to follow our strengths and interests, and the flexible nature of the programme meant that we were in a position to make suggestions and offer help to school life to make the most of our time there, in a way beneficial to both the school and our own development.

The Society was always there to support us remotely and I thank them for their encouragement to go out and experience as much of Oman as possible, alongside school activities. We only had a handful of 'lazy days' over the three months – thanks

goes to Sean and Laura Griffin who took us out exploring and wild camping. Over weekends and the term break we managed to visit several forts and wadis, mountaintops, beautiful (and stormy!) beaches, the desert, Royal Opera House Muscat, Muscat Festival, Sur, Ras al Hadd, Salalah 1000km to the south, and several of the luxury hotels around the country... to name but a few of our adventures! We were also asked on a few occasions to accompany school trips – giving us an insight into workplaces and

attractions not often seen by foreign tourists.

What did I gain from the experience? Opportunity and a framework to contribute my own strengths and interests to individual students and the school community; professional experience working in an international, multi-generational team; renewed confidence and focus towards the next steps in my career; knowledge of Oman and the Gulf context; wonderful new friendships and connections which taught me a lot and sparked ideas for the future. Thank you to everyone involved! ■



# OMAN SAIL

## TRANSFORMING CORPORATE AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE SULTANATE

Regarded worldwide as one of the most innovative sailing projects in recent history, Oman Sail is a government-sponsored initiative with one core objective – to further the development of Oman and the Omanis through the power of sport.

Since its establishment in 2008, Oman Sail's programme has inspired a new generation and developed homegrown sailors who have enjoyed remarkable success on the competitive international sailing circuit. To date, achievements include training an Omani to become the first Arab to sail non-stop around the world, emerging as the most successful nation to compete in the coveted Extreme Sailing Series™ and entering a crew featuring Omani sailors who, whilst competing in the MOD70 circuit, have set three Round Britain and Ireland world records.

In 2014, Oman Sail's Corporate and Personal Development Department (CPD) was created to address the national need

for wider skills training; youth employment is a key government priority and Oman's private sector requires its employees to offer more than academic qualifications. As a flagship of the Sultanate, Oman Sail's experience of cultivating world-class sporting talent has enabled it to realise the very best in people's potential. Using the same principles with which they coach sailors to the top of their sport, Oman Sail's CPD team now delivers unparalleled corporate personal development programmes in Oman.

Delivering alongside their UK based training partner, AytonLee, and the renowned British motivational speaker, Marcus Child, Oman Sail's corporate



training client list includes OCEP, Oman Air, BAE Systems, OAPFD, Oman LNG, BP, Sohar Aluminum, HSBC, OIG, Oman Oil and NAMA Group. Unique experiential learning methods enable delegates to tackle real life challenges that remove them from their comfort zones and encourage them to look at situations with a new perspective. Learning by doing is central to Oman Sail's unique Corporate and Personal Development approach; programmes incorporate sailing and outdoor activities, which are designed to enable participants to experience real life consequences as a result of their decisions and actions.

CEO, David Graham, says, "Oman Sail's Corporate and Personal Development philosophy is aligned with a key government objective – to increase employability and productivity in the Omani workplace. Our integrated partnership approach ensures that our CPD offerings are tailored entirely to the specific development needs of the companies we work with, and link directly with the company's values and long-term business objectives."



David Graham, Oman Sail CEO.

Alongside offering corporate development programmes, Oman Sail works with investors to fund key Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects. Since 2014, over 3000 Omani schoolchildren and college/university undergraduates have benefited from participating in a variety of CSR funded leadership programmes. Projects are designed to be consistent with government objectives in order to ensure their contribution on a national economic scale.

BP's investment in young people from the Khazzan Field region has enabled 1700 students to develop their employment skills and workplace readiness. Winning international recognition at the prestigious Beyond Sport Awards in London, the Khazzan Young Leaders' Programme is a sustainable, meaningful project, which



creates opportunities for job seekers, ensuring that they are better equipped to enter employment and become valuable members of organisations within the Sultanate.

Yousuf Al Ojaili, President of BP Oman, said, "We are proud of the achievements of the students, the course facilitators and Oman Sail, with whom we have worked hand-in-hand to bring leadership and the development of interpersonal skills to the very forefront of developing people. Our investment in the future of Oman centres on sustainability and long-term benefit, and since conception, this has been a trailblazing programme which continues to change the lives of young Omanis for the better."



A pioneering partnership between Oman Sail and the Omani Authority for Partnership for Development (OAPFD) offered a comprehensive ‘through-education leadership programme’, complementing the academic curriculum. The Zimam National Leadership Programme pilot project has seen students from the North and South Al Batinah regions take part in outdoor activities on land and at sea. Nine hundred 12 year old Omani students were equipped with valuable new skills in a course which

developed teamwork, communication, motivation, resilience, planning and time management. College students from the region took part in a three-day residential course also focused on leadership, to work together to achieve a common goal.

Dr. Dhafir Al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer of OAPFD, said, “The pilot project has been an incredible success with the potential to transform thousands of young lives at key stages of their personal development. The long-term benefits to Oman’s economy, skills base, creative



**Over 3000 Omani schoolchildren and college/university undergraduates have benefited from participating in a variety of CSR funded leadership programmes.**

industries and capability to become competitive in global markets will be driven by initiatives like this and we are supremely proud to be able to deliver

such a life-changing experience.”

Subject to receiving support from the private sector, Oman Sail has plans to launch programmes in areas of the Sultanate such as Sohar, Mussanah and Salalah. Proposed CSR ventures will enable the provision of industry-specific projects, increase opportunities for Omani females, promote STEM subjects and support the development of entrepreneurial skills in the Sultanate. ■



# THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY 2017/18 TALKS PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY LOUISE HOSKING

In planning the Anglo-Omani Society's programme for 2017/18 we have tried once again to embrace a wide variety of perspectives on Oman, focussing on topics ranging from its prehistory to its current strategic environment, from its deepest caves to its expansive central deserts. You are warmly invited to all these events and we hope you will contribute to the lively discussions they often trigger.

It is impossible to plan a programme without including lectures about the land of Oman itself. In October, Andy Eavis, Honorary President of the World Caving Society, will introduce us to Majlis al-Jinn, the extensive cave chamber south east of Muscat that was first explored by cavers in 1983. In February, James Borrell and Stephanie Leonida will give a presentation on another harsh environment when they report on a joint Anglo-Omani field study of the plant biodiversity of the Central Desert of Oman. This 2017 project undertaken by both British and Omani students was sponsored by the Anglo-Omani Society and was a joint collaboration between Oman Botanic Gardens, Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the British Exploring Society. Finally, the archaeologist Jeffery Rose will visit the Society in June to give a lecture on a more fertile Oman when early humans left Africa during the Stone Age, travelling along the coastlines of Ethiopia, Yemen and Oman.

The programme includes three lectures on very different ways in which Oman engages with the outside world. In the first of these in November, Pankaj Khimji, whom many of you will know as a Director of Khimji Ramdas, will introduce us to his passion for Omani cricket, charting the Sultanate's rapid climb up the international rankings until its qualification for the 2016 T20 World Cup in India. In December Jamie Bowden, Deputy Private Secretary to the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall, will give us an insight into Their Royal Highnesses' visit to Oman in 2016, while in January, Richard Muir will chair a panel in which a group of eminent academics will discuss relationships between Oman and its regional

neighbours – Saudi Arabia, Iran and Qatar – at a time of heightened tension in the Arabian Peninsula.

Since many of our members have business relations with Oman it would be unwise to devise a programme without reference to Oman's economic development; three lectures in the spring of 2018 will therefore address various aspects of Oman's economy. In March, Robert Alston will focus on the beginnings of the oil industry, juxtaposing the present emphasis on the development of Duqm with the story of the very first Iraq Petroleum Company prospecting through Duqm in the 1950s. Subject to confirmation, we hope that HE Dr Talal Al Rahbi, Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Council on Planning, and Rashad Al Zubair, Chairman of the Zubair Corporation, will discuss economic planning and the Omani private sector, in April and May respectively.

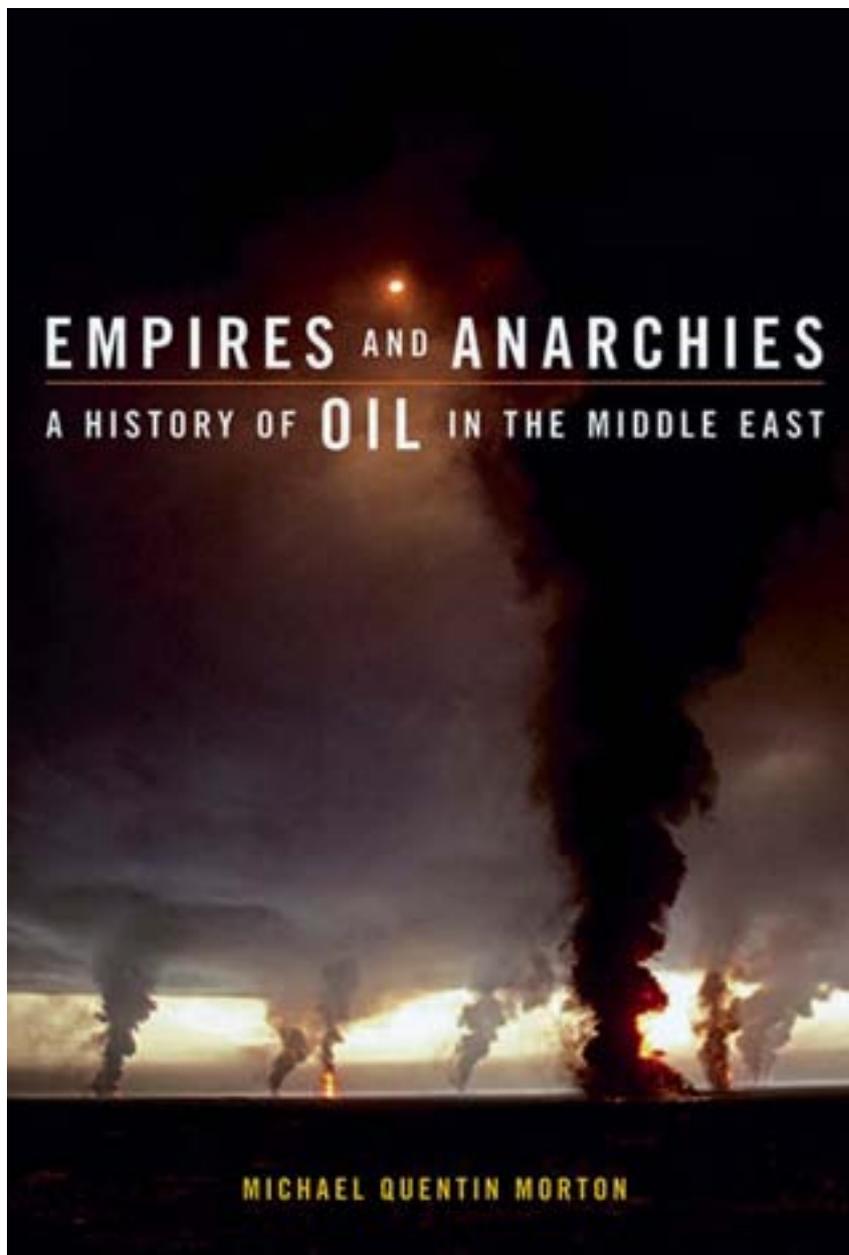
This stimulating programme will begin on the 21st September with a reception in Sackville Street at the opening of an exhibition by the young Omani artist, Eman Ali, whom the Society has sponsored in the past. We hope you will join us then to catch up with fellow members after the summer as you admire Eman's work. ■



# BOOK REVIEW

## EMPIRES AND ANARCHIES A HISTORY OF OIL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By Michael Quentin Morgan. Published by Reaktion Books



Readers can order "Empires and Anarchies" online with a special 20% discount. To do this visit [www.reaktionbooks.co.uk](http://www.reaktionbooks.co.uk) and enter the code 'UAE' at the checkout.

The United Arab Emirates is an amazing success story. The Middle East has the greatest oil reservoirs in the world. But, having created immense wealth, oil has not brought universal happiness to the region. *The History of Oil* is about, not only the great discoveries, but the transformation of people and societies, the empires built on oil and the anarchies it has engendered.

From the first explorers trudging through the desert wastes to the excesses of the Peacock Throne and the high stakes of OPEC, the burnt-out remains of Saddam Hussein's armies and the human tragedy of the Arab Spring, *Empires and Anarchies* describes the history of oil in all its aspects: how it enriched and fractured the Middle East, eroding traditional ways of life and facilitating the rise of Islamic radicalism.

Michael Quentin Morton's account presents a fascinating insight into the historical background of the region through the people and politics of oil. It is essential reading for anyone intrigued by the promise and the curse of oil, as well as for those interested in how oil has played a crucial part in shaping the modern Middle East. ■

### Praise for Empires and Anarchies

'An excellent, readable introduction to the history and development of oil in the Middle East... It is a complicated story but Quentin Morton handles it well with engaging, insightful, and humorous details that bring the broader international, political, and social aspects into high relief.' – J. E. Peterson, editor of *The Emergence of the Gulf: Studies in Modern History*

# MEET THE AOS STAFF

## Ben Wright

Ben has been the Manager of The Anglo-Omani Society since 2013. It is Ben's role to lead the strategic and operational delivery of The Anglo-Omani Society's wide-ranging programme of activities designed to promote bilateral goodwill, understanding and cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom. Ben holds degrees in Archaeology & Classics and History, and during his time at the Society has developed a love of Middle Eastern culture and language.



## Ami Amlani

Ami joined the team in early 2016 as an administrator, and has since grown into a role which encompasses management of the AOS membership and co-ordination of the Society's programmes of events. Graduating with a BA in Philosophy and Politics and an early career specialising in citizenship education, Ami went on to complete an MA in Museum Studies and to work in institutions such as the V&A, The Houses of Parliament and The National Trust. Ami's varied academic and professional experience is now converging to facilitate intercultural exchange at The Anglo-Omani Society.



## Kamille Leon

Kamille is the building coordinator for the Society's premises at 34, Sackville Street, and works closely with tenants and contractors to ensure that the building operates smoothly all year round. Kamille provides additional support to the Society on occasion, participating in various lectures and special events. When not behind the desk, Kamille is also a dedicated volunteer at the African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust, where she has recently been awarded Registration Volunteer of the Year.



## Isabelle Habib

Isabelle joined the AOS in June 2016 as our New Generation Group (NGG) and Communications Officer. Isabelle manages NGG activities, co-ordinates with the Omani Student Societies and has done a great job in helping the Society to gain a digital presence through social media outreach over the past year. Graduating in 2014 from the University of Leicester having read Modern History, she then went on to achieve an MA in Middle Eastern Studies from SOAS. Concentrating on Language and Culture, Isabelle is passionate about Middle Eastern art, literature and popular culture.



## Tom Saville

Tom has recently joined the Anglo-Omani Society as an intern, where he is involved in a wide range of activities including event planning and liaising with the societies various partners. Tom studied at the University of Exeter, where he received a 1st Class degree. Following this, he also received a distinction during his MA course in Conflict, Security and Development from King's College London. Having finished this long academic career, Tom is now keen to apply the skills and knowledge he has developed into promoting international understanding and relations. His new role within the Anglo-Omani Society complements Tom's longstanding and deep passion for the Middle East region, an area in which he has been lucky enough to travel extensively.



## Shireen Al Habib

Shireen joined the Society in September 2017 as an intern, having graduated in 2014 from the University of Manchester with a BA in Environmental Management and then going on to study for an MSc in Environment and Sustainable Development at UCL. Shireen was an active member in the Omani Students' Society in Manchester, organising an exhibition to promote Omani culture on campus and planning various cultural events with other societies at the university. Shireen also completed a Graduate Diploma in Law at the University of Law and worked as a Paralegal in Dentons Oman and is passionate about promoting sustainable development in Oman at policy level. From this internship, Shireen hopes to learn more about Omani British relationships and to explore venues for cooperation between the two countries in the field of development. ■



Mounted Piper of The Royal Guard



Sword Thrown High During Al Razha Dance