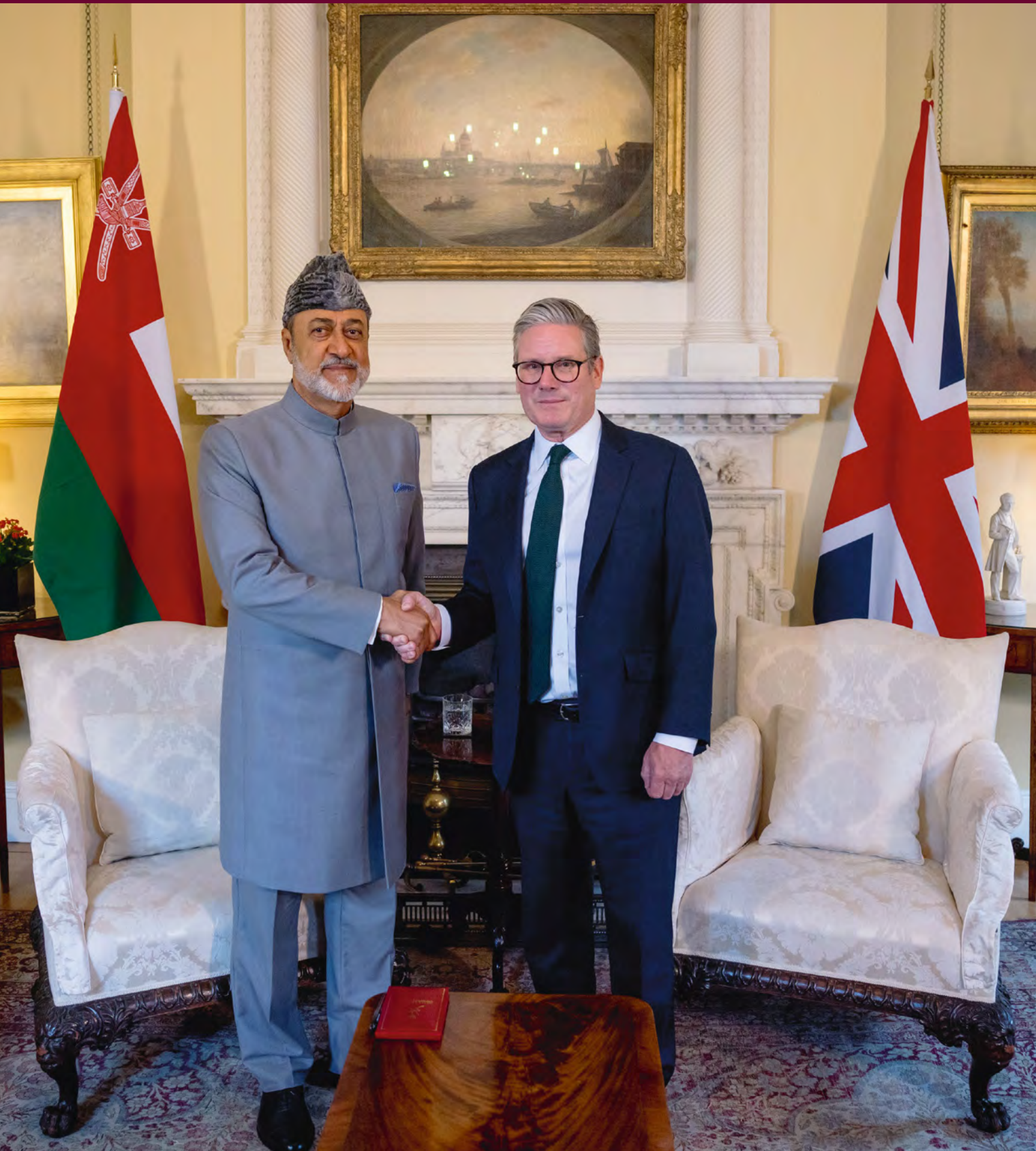


# REVIEW 2024

THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY





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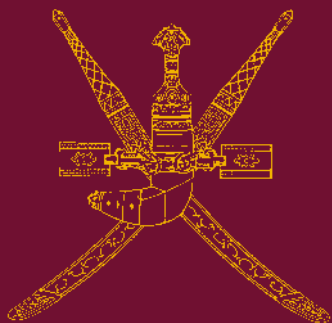
THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY



COVER PHOTO:  
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met  
with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer

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Q&A WITH MARK EVANS





# REVIEW 2024

## THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY



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### ABOUT THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY

The British Omani Society (BOS) is a charitable organisation working with the objective of enhancing and preserving the longstanding friendship between Britain and Oman. The Society was formed in January 1976 with HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said as the Society's founding Patron. Our Patron is now HM Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and HE The Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman in London is our President. Our charitable object is to advance the education of the British and Omani public about each other's people, history, geography, economy, literature, art, music, antiquities, languages, cultures, religions, beliefs, customs, industry and commerce. We do this by arranging lectures, seminars and meetings, which may be open to the public; and by assisting individuals and organisations by providing bursaries, awards, scholarships, training, apprenticeships and financial and logistical support.

For further information visit: [www.britishomani.org](http://www.britishomani.org)

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The British Omani Society in 2024

# CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

REPORT BY RICHARD STANFORD



I am pleased to present the progress and impact that your Society has made in the past year in carrying out our charitable objects.

I would like to thank our trustees, staff and interns for their dedication to the Society and helping us achieve our mission.

I would also like to thank you, our members and supporters, who are central to all that we do and achieve and provide such a valuable resource to us as volunteers, contributors and supporters. Our progress this year is the result of this collective effort.

During 2024 we have begun a process to streamline our strategy, improve our systems and re-examine and refresh our activities to ensure we are focusing on those things that best achieve our charitable objects and Oman's 2040 Vision priorities. We have also been working hard to cater to the interests of our varied membership with a diverse programme of events and activities that provides 'something for everyone' both in the UK and where we can in Oman as well.

## HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK MET WITH UK PRIME MINISTER KEIR STARMER

On 6th August 2024, Prime Minister Keir Starmer welcomed His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik al Said, to Downing Street. The visit, so early in the tenure of the new Labour government, clearly demonstrates the importance of the close relationship between our two countries. This positive meeting was a valuable opportunity for the two leaders to discuss broad areas of cooperation.

## OXFORD LECTURE BY OMAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER HE SAYYID BADR ALBUSAIID

A highlight of this year was the timely and very important lecture delivered by HE Sayyid Badr at Oxford's Centre for Islamic Studies on 15th February 2024. The fully booked free public lecture, titled *Talking to Anyone for the Good of Everyone: Diplomacy in a Multipolar World* focused on the

situation in Palestine and on finding a practical solution to the suffering going on. This was a very powerful lecture which set out the issue with real clarity and proposed solutions. It was very well attended by academics, think tanks, and a number of senior reporters and commentators, as well as many of our own Trustees and members. It was covered widely in the media of both countries. More about the lecture can we found within this Review.

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

It was with great sadness that our past Chairman, Vice President and huge supporter, Richard Muir, died suddenly in October 2023. Richard played a central role in developing the Society during his Chairmanship and after it. He was instrumental in acquiring our premises in London, generously funded by HM Sultan Qaboos, to house our activities and provide a continuing income stream for our work. His obituary by Robert Alston is included within this Review and was also published in the Guardian newspaper. He is very much missed.

This year we also said thank you and farewell to Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, who stepped down from his role as OBBC Chairman. Sherard worked extremely hard to promote UK investment into Oman and led a number of conferences and smaller meetings with key officials to try to unlock the huge potential for foreign direct investment into Oman. We would like to thank Chris Breeze, who has taken on the role of Chair of the OBBC.

We were also delighted to welcome Riyad Daud as our new Trustee and OBBC board member in October 2023. Riyad brings with him a wealth of UK and international business experience and an impressive network in the UK and Oman to enrich the work of the Society.



Richard Stanford in Oman with Dr. Munther al-Busaidi (right), Deputy Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up unit and BOS Trustee Sheikh Ma'an al-Rawahi (left).

## MEMBERSHIP

This year we have begun conducting a close analysis of our current membership and are making improvements to our database and data handling. This work is key in allowing us to better cater to, retain and expand our contacts and to thrive as a membership organisation. We apologise for some of the glitches where members may have received more than one reminder of their membership renewal. We continue to encourage all members to pay their subscription by direct debit to make it easier for everyone.

In the meantime, we are pleased to report that our membership is made up of approximately 20% Omani nationals, with over 70% as UK nationals and the final 10% are Associates (non UK or Omani).

## LECTURES AND EVENTS

This year we have continued to deliver a varied array of events. Our hybrid model has increased our ability to attract non-London based members, including those in Oman, while allowing our local members to be with us in person.

Attendance for our BOS hosted events programme during the first half of 2024 has been on average almost 80 people per event, with around 60% of these people attending online. The staff team are now focussing on addressing technical challenges to make sure these events are delivered to a high standard. We are also looking into making our in-person events more accessible by introducing a hearing loop system.

Event highlights include another successful and fully booked Annual Lunch

on 6th October 2023 at the Royal Air Force Club. We were honoured to have HE Sheikh Khalifa al-Harthy, the Undersecretary for Political Affairs of Oman's Foreign Ministry, attend the event as our guest of honour from Oman. The 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture held at the Royal Geographical Society, shed light on the internationally important mangroves and coastal wetlands of Oman. The lectures have been the brainchild of Nigel Winsor who has done so much to promote closer collaboration between environmental scientists in the UK and Oman. He has been tireless in his encouragement of up-and-coming research scientists in Oman and has always sought opportunities to give them the chance to demonstrate how good they are through the annual Oman

Natural Heritage Lectures in London to a large audience. Sadly, Nigel has decided to step back a bit from running these lectures which is a great shame but understandable. Our deep gratitude for all he has done to further the links between Oman and the UK.

The New Generation Group (NGG) Delegation explored the Future of Transport & AI and produced a report of recommendations. We hosted our youngest speaker to date, Omani student Aziza al-Mughairy who spoke clearly and eloquently on the complex subject of how modern science – neutrons and muons – are being used to 'Unravel the Secrets of the Ancient Worlds'. A wonderful example of the range of bright young Omani talent. There have been many other successful events during this period, all covered within this Review.

## THE OMAN BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL (OBBC)

This year the OBBC continued to work to promote information about investment and trade opportunities in Oman to British investors and businesses. Highlights included a talk by Hamid Hamirani, the former advisor to the Omani Minister of Finance, on 'Navigating Oman's Fiscal and Diversification Reforms'. We also collaborated with law firm Addleshaw Goddard to provide insight into the new Labour Law in Oman that was introduced in 2023 and has significant implications for both businesses and employees. We were also happy to welcome 15 new corporate members to the OBBC since the last Review. We continue to work very closely with the Muscat-based Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA), now renamed Omani British Society, chaired by Hon Saleh Zakwani.

## PROGRAMMES AND GRANTS

Our focus on education remains central to our work. The Student Volunteers Oman Scheme (previously named the Gap Year Scheme) welcomed its 100th student to the Sultan's School in Muscat this year. Our new scheme video 'trailer' and short videos and blogs produced by the students demonstrate in their own words just how valuable they have found

*As you have read, your Society is in good shape with an active membership and a wide range of interests and connections.*

the scheme to be. We were pleased to have Trustee Debbie Martin lead the scheme this year and provide her valuable skills in video production to help facilitate this.

The Manah Arabic Language Scheme, guided by Elisabeth Kendall, continues to provide excellent opportunities for people to improve their Arabic skills, again we have captured the students' experience on video and in this Review.

Our online Arabic classes, taught by the dedicated teacher Mohammed Abu Amara, have continued with the summer term concluding in July.

We have supported a number of other projects, studies and research work through our grant schemes which all contribute to meeting our charitable objects. More details of the grants awarded can be found in Jamie Bowden's article in the Review, showing how these grants can be mapped to Oman's 2040 Vision. Our grants budget this year was £131,242 and the Grants Committee awarded £86,584 of this total.

## 34 SACKVILLE STREET AND FINANCES

As voted in our 2023 AGM, we raised our annual membership subscription to £25 in April 2024 (the first raise in a number of years). We would like to thank our members for their continued support. Membership income contributes to all of our charitable activities.

We would like to give particular thanks to our Trustee Martyn Bishop who has continued to play a vital role in managing our building and finances this year. As our longstanding Treasurer, he has dedicated much of his valuable time in the last 12 months to managing our tenants' rental renegotiations, claiming back final insurance money owed to us, and managing a complete refurbishment of our third floor offices.

We are currently advertising for a high-

quality tenant to rent our newly refurbished third floor office space – members looking for London offices are welcome to apply! In the meantime, we continue to operate with a significant drop in rental income.

We are also pleased to report that work on repairing the heating and cooling system in the building was completed successfully.

## STAFF

A number of staff changes have taken place this year. We extend our thanks to our Director Neil Coxon who moved on to another role in December 2023, but who remains active as a volunteer at the Society heading up our important work in sports, along with Trustee Sheikh Ma'an al-Rawahi.

Rosa Braune was promoted from our Communications Manager to become our Director. We welcomed Talal Alhumaid as our new Communications Manager. Tia Chevasson also joined us in a new role as permanent Events and Programming Assistant. We also benefitted from the hard work of our interns Asma Ibrahim and Maryam Jumani.

## CONCLUSION

As you have read, your Society is in good shape with an active membership and a wide range of interests and connections. We are always open to grant applications and new ideas from people about how to promote and deepen the close links between our two countries. This is especially important in this year when the appalling human suffering in the Gaza area, and varying popular and governmental responses to it, have strained some aspects of the relationship. As our charitable objects make clear we have a mandate to ensure the friendship between our two countries is as strong as possible and that it should remain 'Unshook till the End of Time'. ■



# HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK MET WITH UK PRIME MINISTER KEIR STARMER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik met with Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), at No.10 Downing Street in London on the 6th August 2024.

During the meeting The Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, thanked HM Sultan Haitham for “making time for this visit so early into our government,” which was only formed four weeks ago. The Prime Minister



*The Prime Minister highlighted the historic relationship between the UK and Oman, noting the special friendship, spanning over 400 years.*

highlighted the historic relationship between the UK and Oman, noting the special friendship, spanning over 400 years.

They also discussed means of consolidating areas of bilateral cooperation to serve the joint interests of the two countries' friendly peoples, including defence, security and trade, which they

both looked forward to strengthening.

Turning to the situation in the Middle East, the Prime Minister emphasised the clear and urgent need for de-escalation and urged all parties in the region to exercise restraint.

On Gaza, The Prime Minister reiterated the need for a ceasefire and the return of civilians. Both agreed on the need for a

two-state solution through a peace process.

The meeting was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Hamad Al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, and Badr bin Mohammed Al Mandhari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. ■



# OXFORD LECTURE BY HE SAYYID BADR ALBUSAIIDI FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

HE Sayyid Badr Albusaidi,  
Foreign Minister of the  
Sultanate of Oman,  
delivered the lecture  
'Talking to Anyone for the  
Good of Everyone:  
Diplomacy in a Multipolar  
World', at the Oxford  
Centre for Islamic Studies  
on February 15th, 2024.

The fully booked free public lecture focused on the current developments in Palestine, with HE Sayyid Badr emphasising the need for "a transformation in thinking, and a development of forms of practical diplomacy that are suitable for a multipolar world."

Lecture attendees included academics, think tanks, members of the media from both countries and embassy officials from both Oman and the UK.

The lecture was introduced and chaired by Dr Farhan Ahmad Nizami, Director of the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies. It was followed by a Q&A with audience members with concluding remarks by General Lord Houghton.

HE Sayyid Badr was also featured in The Economist at the time, writing:  
*"Like all its neighbours Oman is suffering the consequences of the deepening crisis in Gaza. The prospect of further escalation threatens the entire region. So a ceasefire is a humanitarian necessity, and a strategic necessity too. The step from ceasefire to emergency conference must come swiftly and decisively."* ■

TO READ THE FULL SPEECH,  
SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW:



TO WATCH THE FULL SPEECH,  
SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW:



# DIRECTOR'S REPORT

## THE FIRST MONTHS AS DIRECTOR

ARTICLE BY ROSA BRAUNE

I began work as Director of the Society in December 2023, following an eight-month stint as its Communications Manager.

Previous to this, I had worked in a variety of communications roles in the education and cultural sectors – including with research scientists at the University of Cambridge, and at two London-based non-profit organisations promoting contemporary Arab cultures. Beginning work at the Society was also my first role following maternity leave and caring for two active young children: a welcome opportunity to reapply my experience, reengage my brain... and rest my feet!

So far, the role is proving to be busy, interesting and varied. I am still learning, and I think this is one of the fascinations of working at the Society. There is always more to learn. Thankfully there is also an abundance of good teachers. A real pleasure of this job has been the access to incredible people. Our board, the Embassies of both countries, speakers, collaborators and of course our members – both Omani and British – whose knowledge and passion for Oman is always inspiring.

### VISIT TO OMAN:

January 2024 started on a high with a trip to Oman. This was a really important opportunity for me to meet with some of our key Oman-based supporters and of course many of our members. Thank you all for being such fantastic hosts. It was also a good opportunity to experience first-

hand some of Oman's impressive natural heritage and cultural sites, which I had not had the chance to visit before. I was particularly happy to visit the beautiful and cleverly designed Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah. I hope to return again soon.

### BEHIND THE SCENES:

As members of the Society, you will often only see what's happening on the surface – our events, blog articles and newsletters.

I would like to give you a glimpse of what has gone on behind the scenes over the past 12 months.

Guided by our Trustees, I have spent much of the first half of 2024 working on making improvements to the day-to-day functioning of the Society – its systems, processes and staff structure.

Our staff team of four are responsible for a wide scope of work and it has been essential to make sure that we are focusing on the right priorities and have the experience and skills to achieve them. This year we restructured our staff roles to better meet the needs of the Society and I am very happy to have three fantastic team members working with me. We all continue to work in a hybrid way, with dedicated time for face-to-face meetings and team working at Sackville Street.

We have paused paid internships to allow us to recruit a new permanent Events and Programming Assistant to manage this core aspect of our work. In the meantime, we are looking forward to welcoming more volunteers, of all ages and experience, into the Society for specific short-term projects. These opportunities will be advertised in our newsletter. We hope volunteering will prove an interesting and fun opportunity for you to use your existing skills and knowledge, or for our bright Omani and British students to build experience and

bring fresh ideas to the work that we do. I especially wanted to thank our interns Asma Ibrahim and Maryam Jumani for their contributions this year (especially Asma, who came back to provide temporary cover for our events and programming role while we recruited!).

Further work remains to be done on getting our membership database functioning well, and on our event AV equipment, which we are looking into improving. We aim to get this completed in the coming months.

*January 2024 started on a high with a trip to Oman. This was a really important opportunity for me to meet with some of our key Oman-based supporters and of course many of our members.*





Visit to Oman Across Ages Museum

### OUR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

A real highlight of this year has been meeting with promising students and recent graduates who have applied to take part in our two long running youth opportunities: the Student Volunteers Oman scheme at the Sultan's School and the Arabic Language scheme at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers in Manah. Speaking to them about their studies, passion for learning and future career aspirations is a really enjoyable part of the job. It is lovely to be able to offer them an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of Oman at such a formative stage in their lives. Having recently attended our 2024 alumni reunion it was interesting to see the variety of impressive careers many of our scheme, intern and volunteer alumni have gone on to work in, from think tanks to government, academia and the commercial world. In the coming year we plan to continue to build on our offering for young people through our New Generation Group.

### OUR SPEAKERS & MEMBERS

Meeting with our speakers is always a fascinating part of the job. We also really enjoy the lively discussions and questions our members bring to our events – as well as what are often glimpses into their own intriguing stories.

Over the previous months, we have spent much of our time working on programming and the practical side of getting our events set-up to run smoothly for you. The whole staff team have worked hard with our Trustees and supporters to find events that are of interest to our varied membership as

well as aligning with Oman's Vision 2040. We are very pleased to be bringing you, in the coming months, film screenings, a number of business focused events, an exhibition of emerging Omani artists, and a private view of the Royal Geographical Society archives, amongst many other events. Please check our website for full details: [www.britishomani.org/events](http://www.britishomani.org/events)

Conscious that we would like to provide something for our members in Oman, a

priority in 2025 is working to improve our digital event offering as well. Please look out for our YouTube event recordings and event collaborations in Oman over the coming year.

### NO DAY THE SAME...

Finally, the day-to-day is often punctuated by the glamorous – and to keep us on our toes – the unexpected. An event at the Savoy or a meeting at the Embassy one minute, the next a mad dash to pick-up last minute lunch orders and compile emergency PowerPoints to host impromptu delegations. This keeps our jobs exciting. We are situated well to bring people together and as well as hosting our own planned events programme we look forward to strengthening connections, welcoming more delegations, workshops, meetings and visiting Omanis in the year ahead. ■



Meeting with Mr Faris Al Khodr at the Omani Embassy in London

# STAFF AND TRUSTEES

## INTRODUCING OUR NEW TRUSTEE:

### RIYAD DAUD

Riyad has over 32 years of experience in the financial services industry as a practitioner as well as a management consultant. He is the managing director of a London based family investment office, and has a particular focus on Europe, MENA, and India. Mr. Daud is also actively engaged with his family companies operating across the Gulf and India. Prior to his current role, Riyad was a management consultant with the Mitchell Madison Group, a New York based strategy consulting firm specialising in global financial institutions. Riyad holds a BA from Brown University and a Masters in International Business from Columbia University.



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER:

### TALAL ALHUMAID

Talal joined the British Omani Society as Communications Manager in April 2024.

Talal is responsible for editing the BOS Annual Review and managing the Society's social media channels, website, and weekly newsletter. He was previously the Communications Officer at a legal charity Just for Kids Law, and a Media Coordinator at the King Faisal Research Centre for Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia.

Talal has a Master's degree in Media and Communications from City, University of London, and a Bachelor's in Journalism from the University of the Arts London.

In his spare time, he enjoys creative writing and is currently working on his first novel.



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING ASSISTANT:

### TIA CHEVASSON

Tia joined the British Omani Society in June 2024, following her graduation from the University of Edinburgh with a First-Class MA in Arabic & Politics and a distinction in spoken Arabic.

Interested in diplomatic affairs, Tia was elected to represent the American University of Cairo during a week-long conference focused on refugees' rights, at the UN headquarters in New York.

Tia has maintained a lifelong connection to the Middle East, particularly the Gulf region, having lived in Dubai, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. She holds dual citizenship (French and British) and is bilingual.

In her spare time, she enjoys photography, capturing her extensive travels through her lens, and was the youngest winner of the Franco-Omani photography competition.



# OUR THANKS TO...

Thank you to BOS Vice Presidents, John McKeown and Stuart Laing



We would like to give our heartfelt thanks to John McKeown and Stuart Laing for their invaluable support in the production of the BOS Annual Review. John McKeown was the previous editor of the Annual Review and he provided much needed advice and guidance in the editorial process. Stuart Laing proofread the Annual Review and gave valuable editorial guidance throughout the production.



Our sincere thanks go to Nigel Winsor, who from 2016 to 2023 convened seven eye opening Oman Natural Heritage lectures, along with the ONHL co-convenors: Roderic Dutton, Sean Nelson and Robert Baldwin.

These lecturers shine a light on Oman's diverse and important natural heritage, from Arabian Leopards and the Nubian ibex, to its unique geology, internationally important coastal wetlands and much more. These give the opportunity for Omani field scientists to present their findings to a wide audience in London and to showcase Omani talent and the wonderful environment of Oman.

Though Nigel has stepped aside from the hands on organising of these lecturers, he continues to support and highlight Oman's talented and dedicated young field scientists and environment experts - a number of whom have been previous ONHL speakers. We look forward to continuing to work with him.



His Excellency Abdullah Shaban and Richard Stanford presenting Nigel Winsor with a salver to celebrate his work on the Oman Natural Heritage Lecture series and wider contribution to protecting Oman's natural heritage.



# LECTURES AND EVENTS PROGRAMME

ARTICLE BY JANE KINNINMONT AND ROSA BRAUNE

It is a real delight to see that the Society's programme of monthly lectures has been regular and successful, often attracting up to 100 attendees when the in-person and virtual audiences are combined. Mindful of our international and non-London-based audiences, we have continued to live stream our events via Zoom where possible.

Jane Kinninmont



Our hard-working staff are once again planning events up to 12 months in advance, recognising that both our Members and partner organisations appreciate the ability to plan ahead, though as always we allow some space for last-minute visits from important speakers. The Society's staff

have taken on a more proactive role in organising the monthly events, with our new permanent Events and Programming Assistant, Tia Chevasson, supporting this area of our work. The programme of talks, screenings and exhibitions can be viewed on our website and in the enclosed events card.

## LECTURES AND EVENTS PROGRAMME



*Our regular monthly events are free to attend for all Society members.*

We have tried hard to include something for everyone with an interest in Oman, be it fledgling or fully formed, as the Society seeks both to engage its Members, with your extensive knowledge of Oman, and to educate more people about the Sultanate. We also welcome suggestions from Members for future speakers and topics – please email [rsvp@britishomani.org](mailto:rsvp@britishomani.org)

In our recent programme you heard from both UK and Omani experts, who gave you a flavour of the country, both contemporary and historical. They covered diverse subjects, ranging from Oman's unique school of Ibādī Islam (al-Muatasim bin Said al-Maawali) to its internationally important coastal wetlands (Oman Natural Heritage Lecture). You heard from World Record breakers (Jon Shubert), authors (Dr Akbar Rafay) and explorers (Mark Evans making a return visit), musicians (Ian Hockley) and the new generation of bright and brilliant Omani students studying in the UK (Aziza al-Mughairy, our youngest lecturer to date). We were also delighted to re-start our visual arts programming, welcoming a selection of emerging artists from Oman to the UK for training and an exhibition at 34 Sackville Street. We hope you will find our upcoming programme just as stimulating.

As a reminder, our regular monthly events are free to attend for all Society members. Lectures will normally be on the third Wednesday of each month unless other events conflict. The evening will begin with drinks and light refreshments at 5.30pm – a good friendship and networking opportunity – with the event starting at 6.00pm. There will be plenty of opportunity to learn and socialise as you come together and join us to explore Oman.

We look forward to welcoming you to Sackville Street. ■



Please remember always to check our website in advance of your visit for any last minute changes to our planned programme. [www.britishomani.org/events](http://www.britishomani.org/events)

# ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCH

The British Omani Society  
hosted its much  
anticipated and fully  
booked Annual Lunch on  
the 6th of October 2023  
at the Royal Air Force  
Club, Piccadilly, London.

As in previous years, the lunch brought together government representatives from both countries including our Trustees and members. It was a chance to reconnect with old friends, to network and make new connections as well as to strengthen and renew existing ties. This year we were particularly pleased to see the range of ages in attendance, a good indication that the UK-Oman relationship remains strong not only in the past and present but will continue to do so into the future.

We were honoured to have HE Sheikh Khalifa al-Harthy, the Undersecretary for

Political Affairs of Oman's Foreign Ministry, attend the event as our guest of honour from Oman. In his speech, he emphasised the enduring bond between Oman and the United Kingdom, along with Oman's commitment to enhancing economic ties with the UK. He also emphasised that Oman would continue to play the same important diplomatic role in the region under Sultan Haitham as it had in the past under Sultan Qaboos, referencing Oman's involvement in US-Iran relations, regional diplomacy and hostage releases.





*Lord Grimstone was our guest of honour from the UK. In his speech he underscored the significance of the mutually beneficial special relationship between the UK and Oman.*



Lord Grimstone was our guest of honour from the UK. In his speech he underscored the significance of the mutually beneficial special relationship between the UK and Oman. He also highlighted current investment opportunities between the two countries, including in renewables.

Both speakers commended the Society for its efforts in continuing to nurture UK-Oman collaboration and friendship. HE Sheikh Khalifa

al-Harthy also fondly reflected on his early career years in the UK and his then membership of The Society, at that time chaired by Sir Terence Clark.

Among our other special guests, we had the privilege of welcoming HE Badr Mohammed Badr Al Mantheri, Oman's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Lord Astor and Saleh Zakwani, Chairman of the Omani British Society (OBS, formerly the British Friendship Association). ■



## BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCH



Guests on our top table, including HE Badr Mohammed Badr Al Manthari, Oman's Ambassador to the United Kingdom and other distinguished guests.



HE Sheikh Khalifa al-Harthy,  
the Undersecretary for  
Political Affairs of Oman's  
Foreign Ministry



Lord Grimstone



Society Chairman,  
Richard Stanford

The 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society was shared with a live audience of more than 400, broadcast online around the world and filmed and broadcast on Oman TV. The focus was on the unique and vitally important mangroves and coastal wetlands of Oman being studied by mangroves experts in Oman from the Environment Authority and the Environment Society of Oman.

Photo: The Mangroves of the Barr al-Hikman by Mr. Abdullah al-Subhi.

## OMAN NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURE AT RGS

# THE MANGROVES AND COASTAL WETLANDS OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY MS. AZIZA SAUD AL-ADHOobi, MR. BADAR YOUSUF AL-BULUSHI AND MR. NIGEL WINSER



His Excellency Abdullah Shaban, guest of honour at the 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture – with left to right, Mr. Faris al-Khodre, Major General Richard Stanford, Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi, Mr. Badar al-Bulushi, His Excellency Abdullah Shaban, Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi and Mr. Hussein Muqabil (Photo: Robin Edwards, Imago Portraits)

The lecturers were Ms. Aziza Saud al-Adhoobi, Wetland Management Head Section, Environment Authority, Oman and Mr. Badar Yousuf al-Bulushi, Mangrove Forest Conservation Specialist, Oman.

Professor Joe Smith, the Director of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) welcomed His Excellency Abdullah Shaban and distinguished guests from the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, including Mr. Hussein Muqaibil and Mr. Faris al-Khodre together with Major General Richard Stanford, Chairman of the British Omani Society.



Ms. Aziza Saud al-Adhoobi, Wetland Management Head Section, Environment Authority (centre), Mr. Badar Yousuf al-Bulushi, Conservation Specialist, Oman and Chair, Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi, the Executive Director of the Environment Society of Oman at the start of the lecture with the volunteer helpers of the Oman UK Group. (Photo: Martin Hartley).



Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi, Executive Director of the Environment Society of Oman and co-chair for the evening introduced the two speakers, Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi and Mr. Badar al-Bulushi, two of Oman's top mangrove and wetlands experts, with many years of fieldwork experience along the whole coast of Oman. An excellent choice as recommended by the science community in Oman, to speak about the value of the mangroves of Oman, past, and present and future, with an update on current mangrove and coastal wetlands research and future projects.

**Mr. Badar al-Bulushi** took to the stage first to speak about the present and future value of the mangroves of Oman and the Middle East, based on his lifelong work as a field scientist. He began by reminding all present that the Sultanate of Oman boasts a vast and diverse coastline that spans 3165 kilometres along the south-eastern border

of the Arabian Peninsula with a history of coastal resource utilization going back to prehistoric times. Most of the Omani people living in coastal areas have played an important role in trade and cultural

exchange with the people and civilizations bordering the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

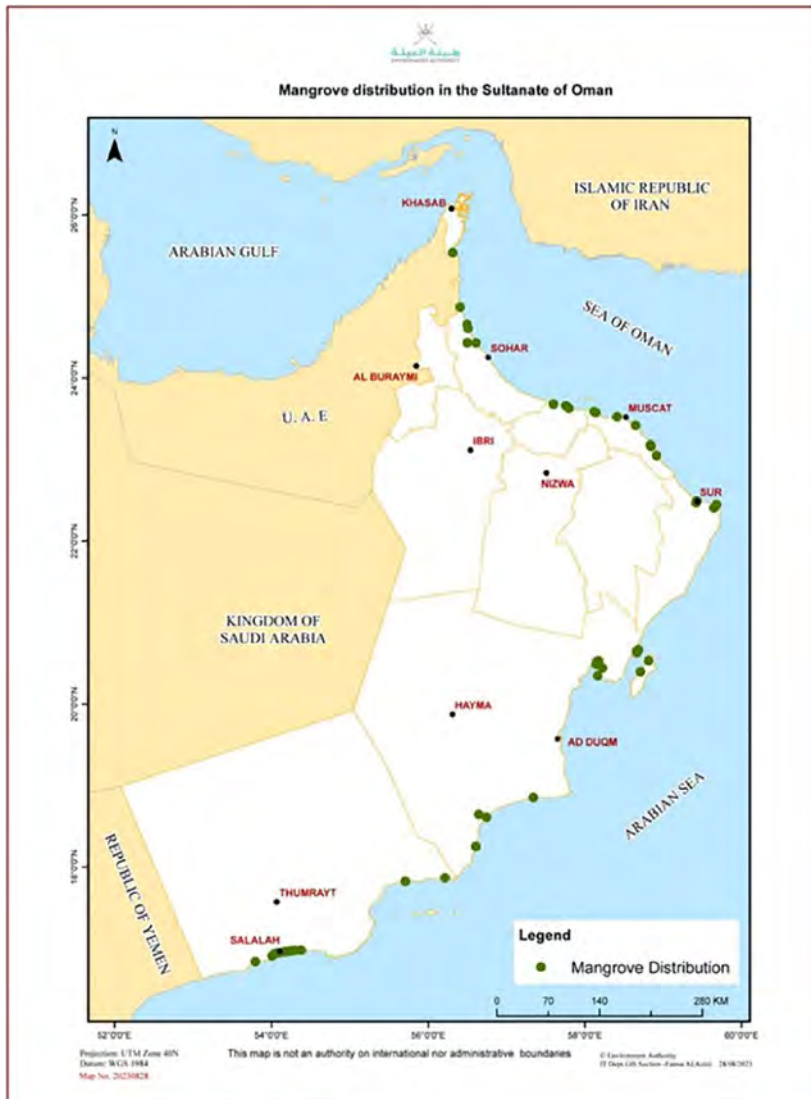
Throughout Oman's coasts and islands, there is a small but notable presence of mangrove forests, and these are an important feature for the nation. Oman traders sailed with goods all over the Arab



In safe hands. The next generation of field naturalists benefitting from the enthusiasm, experience and skills of Oman's mangrove and coastal wetlands experts, Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi and Mr. Badar al-Bulushi. (Photo by Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi).



Mr. Nigel Winner opened the 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture on behalf of the Oman UK Group, Dr Roderic Dutton, Mr. Sean Nelson and Mr. Robert Baldwin, by welcoming the Oman delegation to the Ondaatje Theatre of the RGS, together with Fellows, members and guests of both the RGS and the British Omani Society, the London Speaker Bureau, readers of the Geographical Magazine, guests of Oman LNG, the Wildlife and Wetlands Trust, the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, the Natural History Museum, IUCN and many other UK scientific institutions and conservation organisations.



Map of the Sultanate of Oman, showing the range of the mangroves found all along the 3165 km coastline.

region for sale or barter and this included mangrove tree timber, which was previously used for various purposes such as house building, ship building, fuel and animal fodder. Mangrove leaves, seeds and roots have also been used for the preparation of numerous medicines. Furthermore, mangrove forests are of great importance to the world's marine ecosystems, functioning as nurseries of biodiversity in marine fauna and contributing to the enrichment and sustainability of the marine environment. Also, they provide a nursery and refuge for marine fauna, juveniles and larvae to grow before moving to deep water; and for lobster, crab, oysters, in addition to providing nutrients, they play a vital role in protecting beaches from erosion. Finally,

Badar spoke of their role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions as mangroves absorb carbon dioxide 10 times more than the equivalent area of terrestrial forest.

Oman's mangroves, like those found in other regions of the world, are confronted with a variety of potential dangers. These threats include the loss of habitat due to urban expansion and land reclamation, pollution from coastal industries, and the effects of climate change such as rising sea levels, elevated temperatures, and cyclones. Cyclone Gone, which struck Oman in June 2007, was the most powerful tropical cyclone ever to hit the Arabian Peninsula. The eastern region and Muscat governorate of Oman experienced the worst flooding in the nation's history because of heavy rains, strong winds, and

high waves, leading to severe damage.

A year after this devastating storm, Aziza and Badar became acquainted when Aziza joined the Environment Authority. Badar, who had experience in mangrove rehabilitation, imparted his knowledge to Aziza and they worked together to implement steps recognized by the Omani government to protect and conserve coastal habitats. They started by cleaning up and transplanting the affected areas of Qurm Nature Reserve and continued touring Oman to implement the government's vision for coastal wetlands conservation.

**Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi** then spoke about current mangrove and coastal wetlands restoration research based on her work with the Environment Authority and her PhD studies at Sultan Qaboos University. Aziza also spoke about future projects with the mangroves, their importance for Oman's biodiversity performance, and the tourist potential in the future.

Oman has made significant strides in the conservation and management of its valuable mangrove and coastal wetland ecosystems. Through initiatives like mangrove transplantation, direct seeding, and the establishment of protected areas, the country is safeguarding these vital



**Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi** is the Wetland Management Head Section of the Environment Authority and a PhD student at Sultan Qaboos University. (Photo by Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi).



Kayaks are a good way of exploring Oman's mangroves – for scientists and future tourists. (Photo by Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi).



All in a day's work as a wetland field scientist. Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi assessing water health of Oman's estuaries. (Photo from Ms. Aziza's photo collection).

habitats and their biodiversity. By July 2023, efforts included transplanting over 820,000 seedlings and directly sowing 4.5 million seeds. The country currently manages around 800 hectares of mangroves spread across 32 sites and nature reserves. Among these, Barr al-Hikman stands out as a highly biodiverse Ramsar site, providing a habitat for over 500,000 wintering birds. Ongoing research efforts are enhancing our understanding of the challenges faced by these ecosystems, such as biodiversity, pollution, and climate change impacts.

Looking ahead, projections indicate the potential impacts of climate change on mangrove suitability. **The Sultanate of Oman Blue Carbon Project** represents an ambitious and forward-thinking approach to climate change mitigation, leveraging the carbon sequestration potential of mangroves while generating economic benefits. By prioritizing the protection and restoration of its mangrove and coastal wetland resources through

transplantation, direct seeding, and protected areas, Oman is safeguarding vital habitats and biodiversity. The country is positioning itself as a leader in sustainable environmental management, aligned with its national vision for a sustainable future. Continued commitment and collaboration among stakeholders are essential for ensuring the long-term resilience and productivity of these natural assets.

**Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi** then chaired the Q&A session with lively questions both from the live audience in the Ondaatje Theatre and also watching online in UK, Oman and as far as Tasmania. The questions focussed on the challenges of the fieldwork, the range of work achieved to date and the future role of these wetland areas for wildlife tours, especially for the international birding community.

## VOTE OF THANKS

Suaad then invited **Mr. Richard Deverell**, the Director General of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to the stage to give the vote of thanks to the two speakers on behalf of all present, emphasising the enormity and importance of the work achieved to date by Oman's field science community and the privilege it was to hear first-hand stories by Badar and Aziza. Richard said that it had been a pleasure welcoming the Oman delegation to Kew to share information about plants in the Herbarium and to introduce Kew's botanists with knowledge of Oman's mangroves and coastal flora. Richard also mentioned the forthcoming visit to the Natural History Museum, hosted by Mr. John Jackson and his colleagues. Richard then presented to the Oman delegation a signed copy of Shahina Ghazanfar's new book 'The Plants of the Qur'an', published by Kew.

## CLOSING REMARKS

**Major General Richard Stanford**, Chairman of the British Omani Society ended the evening by thanking again the Oman delegation for such an important lecture about Oman's important coastal wetlands and also all the sponsors and partners involved this year. Richard said how very proud the Society was to be so closely associated with the annual Oman Natural Heritage Lectures, thanking personally the Oman UK Group for their hard work over the years. ■



THE YOUTUBE BROADCAST OF THE 7TH OMAN NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURE 'THE MANGROVES AND COASTAL WETLANDS OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN' BY MS. AZIZA SAUD AL-ADHOABI AND MR. BADAR YOUSUF AL-BULUSHI AND CO-CHAIRD BY MRS. SUAAD AL-HARTHI (ESO) AND MR. NIGEL WINNER CAN BE VIEWED HERE:

(please go to 14 minutes 50 seconds to the start of the lecture)

PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW THE LECTURE



### THE EVENING'S SPEAKERS

The Oman UK Group were honoured that Ms. Aziza al-Adhoobi from the Environment Authority and Mr. Bada al-Bulushi accepted the invitation to give the 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture 2023.



Mr. Badar Yousuf al-Bulushi is a retired environmentalist with over 20 years of experience in the field of wetland management and mangrove rehabilitation. He started working for the Environment Authority (previously known as the Ministry of Regional Municipalities, Environment, and Water Resources and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs) from 2001-2021. He held several positions throughout his professional career, as an administrative services supervisor at the National Petroleum Company- Kuwait (1981-1991), head of the Administrative and Financial Affairs section at the Ministry of Water Resources (1991-2001), an environmental affairs technician (2001-2006), head of the wetland environment section (2007-2018), and assistant director of the Marine Environment Conservation Department (2018-2021).

In 2002, he received training from the International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in mangrove conservation and transplantation techniques on Okinawa Island. He continued the positive cooperation by assessing JICA in the establishment and implementation of the master plan for the rehabilitation, conservation, and management of mangroves in the Sultanate of Oman (2002-2004) and the Qurm Environmental Information Centre Project (2012-2014). He worked as a regional consultant in the field of mangrove rehabilitation by training the employees of the Supreme Council for the Environment in the Kingdom of Bahrain on how to collect seeds and plant them in the nursery in Tubli (2013), the employees of Environment Public Authority in the state of Kuwait on how to plant mangrove seedlings in the Jahra Nature Reserve (2015) and the employees of Ministry of Municipalities Affairs and Agriculture in the Kingdom of Bahrain (2022-present).



Ms. Aziza Saud al-Adhoobi received her bachelor's degree in animal sciences from Sultan Qaboos University-Oman (2006). Even though she was an animal scientist her first job was as a research assistant on the Omani Encyclopaedia project (2007). That opportunity influenced her subsequent professional development where she got the chance to communicate with different people from different professions and that landed her current job 15 years ago at the Environment Authority (2008) as an Environmental Planner, head of section of the marine environment (2013), head section of Qurm Nature Reserve (2017-2020), and head of the wetland management section (2021-present). These positions allowed her to communicate with various stakeholders at different levels and work towards achieving her environmental goals. She oversees the strategic planning for various projects including Oman's wetlands inventory, mangrove rehabilitation, update of national laws and regulations, Oman's national wetland strategy, environmental indicators assessment and reporting, and environmental education and public outreach.

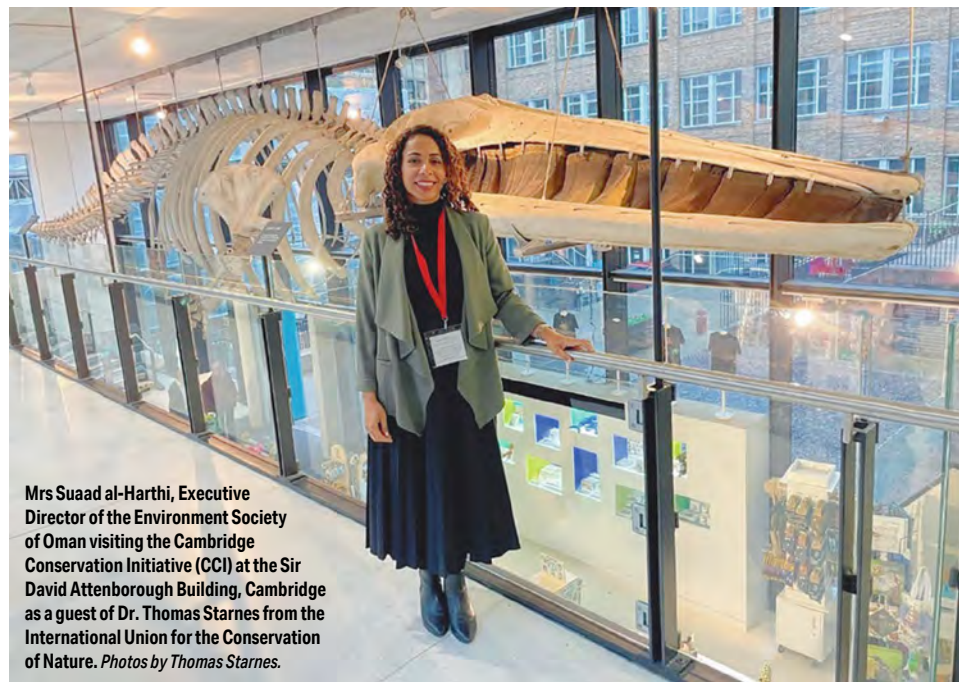
Aziza participated in several field research projects such as shorebird surveys, benthic surveys in Barr al-Hikman in coordination with Wetlands International and NIOZ, and marine turtle satellite tracking on Masirah island in coordination with WWF. In addition to serving as a Ramsar Convention STRP national focal point of Oman (2013), she also served as a Standing Committee member for the East Asia region at the Ramsar Convention (2019-2021). Additionally, she represented Oman as the Deputy Director of the Sultanate of Oman Pavilion at Expo Shanghai, China (2010) and Expo Yeosu, South Korea (2012). Moreover, she was a project manager/ team member at the National Program to Promote Economic Diversification (Tanfeeth) (2016-2020) and a member of the executive team for the Oman Environment strategy (2021). She did her MSc in Environmental Sciences at Louisiana State University, USA (2016). She is currently completing her PhD at SQU, where she focuses on climate change effects on freshwater ecosystems using modelling software.

Shukran Gazeelan – The Oman UK Group of Volunteers would like to acknowledge and thank the following organisations for their unfailing support for the annual Oman Natural Heritage Lectures at the Royal Geographical Society: The Environment Authority, Oman, the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman, the British Omani Society, the London Speaker Bureau, the Geographical Magazine, Oman LNG, Earthwatch Europe, the Environment Society of Oman, the Natural History Museum (London), Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, the Cambridge Conservation Forum, Fauna & Flora, IUCN and our colleagues and co-workers at the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG).

# THE ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY OF OMAN

MRS. SUAAD AL-HARTHI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY OF OMAN

Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi visited the UK as a guest of the British Omani Society to co-chair the 7th Oman Natural Heritage Lecture and visit the Cambridge Conservation Initiative at the Sir David Attenborough Building in Cambridge to deliver a lunchtime seminar on the work of the Environment Society in Oman.



Mrs Suaad al-Harthi, Executive Director of the Environment Society of Oman visiting the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI) at the Sir David Attenborough Building, Cambridge as a guest of Dr. Thomas Starnes from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Photos by Thomas Starnes.

Mrs. Suaad is a specialist on the marine environment and spoke of the pioneering work of the Environment Society of Oman (ESO) at the 2nd Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society in October 2017 alongside Eng. Aida al-Jabri and Mr. Robert Baldwin for a talk about Oman's Marine Heritage. It was with great pleasure to welcome Suaad back to the Royal Geographical Society in 2023 to chair the Oman Mangroves lecture. During her visit to UK, Suaad was also able to visit the David Attenborough Building as a guest of Thomas Starnes at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to give a talk about the important work of the ESO to members of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative (CCI) including Fauna & Flora.

During her UK visit, Suaad was able to visit the CCI at the David Attenborough Building in Cambridge, where she met

with representatives from the IUCN, of which ESO is a member, Fauna & Flora, Birdlife International and the Key Biodiversity Areas Secretariat. There was also a visit to the adjoining University Museum of Zoology with its iconic 21 metre fin whale skeleton. During the visit, Suaad delivered a lunchtime seminar on the work of the Environment Society of Oman that was so well received by the CCI members that the questions and discussion session continued well beyond the allotted time.

On 6th June 2024, the U.S. National Geographic Society Based in Washington, announced 15 new National Geographic Explorers as recipients of the 2024 Wayfinder Award. This included Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi for her role in protecting Oman's marine and terrestrial biodiversity through research, education and awareness raising initiatives. Our congratulations go to Suaad and her ESO colleagues.





Arabian Sea Humpback Whale (ASHW) Field research in the Arabian Sea.  
Photo taken when the ASHW approached the vessel while engines were turned off.

## MRS. SUAAD AL-HARTHI

Mrs. Suaad al-Harthi is the Executive Director of the Environment Society of Oman (ESO). ESO is the first and only non-government organization in Oman with a vision to conserve Oman's natural heritage. Suaad's position involves facilitating research and conservation on threatened and endangered species, and the delivery of community engagement and education programs. She has managed and coordinated diverse marine and terrestrial research projects including flagship initiatives such as sea turtle research and conservation, Arabian Sea humpback whale research and conservation, Egyptian vulture and lappet-faced vulture research, and frankincense tree research projects. Suaad has been actively engaged in the development of conservation management plans and advocacy with key stakeholders.

Suaad was awarded the Oman Woman of the Year 2019 Award in the category of Environment for her conservation contributions. Suaad holds a Master's Degree in Coastal Environmental

*The Society undertakes pioneering marine and terrestrial research to enable practical conservation efforts to protect threatened and endangered species in Oman. They engage young Omanis, volunteers and the public in their projects and aim to educate communities about the importance of adopting more sustainable lifestyles.*

Management from Duke University and a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from the University of San Diego. Since 2004 ESO has played a pivotal role in preserving Oman's environment. The Society undertakes pioneering marine and terrestrial research to enable practical conservation efforts to protect threatened and endangered species in Oman. They engage young Omanis, volunteers and the public in their projects and aim to educate communities about the importance of adopting more sustainable lifestyles. Also they believe passionately in investing in Oman's next

generation of environmentalists and deliver education initiatives and a capacity building programme to support this. Working with both local and international partners, they aim to ensure that the remarkable biodiversity found in Oman is protected for future generations. It was a great honour to have Suaad back at the Royal Geographical Society and we do thank her sincerely for her great support. Please do check out the inspiring work being done by the Environment Society of Oman and do donate to their great work if you can.  
<https://eso.org.om>

# THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE IBĀDĪ SCHOOL OF ISLAM IN OMAN

Mr. al-Muatasim bin Said al-Maawali delivered the Society's September 2023 lecture on The Historical Development of the Ibādī School of Islam in Oman. During this lecture, he illuminated the part that Ibādism, a school of Islam found dominantly in Oman, has played in contributing to this unique Omani character.

In this Q&A before his lecture, he talked us through his background, topic and other interests.

**Q** Please can you briefly introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about how you came to specialise in your area of expertise?

**A** I am from the Sultanate of Oman and work as a religious supervisor at Sultan Qaboos University. I came to specialise in my area of Islamic studies in general and Ibādism in particular due to the fact that I was raised in a conservative Ibādī community. In my secondary school, I studied at Islamic Sciences Institute. Subsequently, I specialised more in the field of Islamic studies by studying this area in both my undergraduate and master levels at Sultan Qaboos University and the University of Birmingham respectively. This motivated me to further my education in this field by pursuing my PhD study at the University of Birmingham where I am currently based.



**Q** You will be giving a lecture on **The Historical Development of the Ibādī School of Islam in Oman at The Society on September 20th.** Briefly, why is Ibādism so unique compared with other branches of Islam, and so important to Oman's national identity?

**A** I believe that paying special attention to Ibādism and Ibādī studies is very important for a number of reasons; first, the Ibādī school is deemed by many to be the first legal school in Islam owing to the fact that its distinct principles were laid down by the prominent scholar Jābir bin Zayd who died in 93 AH/ 712 CE, thus predating all founders of major Islamic legal schools. Second, the subject of Ibādism and Ibādī studies have historically been under-studied in both eastern and western academies. As for the question of the importance of Ibādism to Oman's national identity, this is due to a number of reasons; firstly, the first founding theorist of the School, Jābir bin Zayd, was of Omani origin. He was born in Oman and towards the end of his life, he was exiled back to his home country, Oman. Secondly, it is claimed that most Omanis follow the Ibādī

interpretation of Islam, hence, establishing its significance to the Omani national identity.

**Q** You are also very fascinated by the subject of Islamic Banking (you have authored a number of volumes on the subject). What are the core principles and how do they differ from the non-Islamic banking system?

**A** The Islamic banking system's core principle is the prohibition of interest or usury. In Islam, interest is considered one of the major sins. Thus, it is inconceivable for an Islamic bank to offer interest-bearing modes of finance. Islam states that lending money to others has to always remain an act of kindness. Hence, the prohibition of charging any interest. Additionally, the religion of Islam prohibits any transaction that has ambiguous elements, as uncertainty renders the transactions null and void. Thus, the newly emerging Islamic banks had to invent creative solutions and financing products by which they can finance their clients while at the same time avoid charging interest and what are considered in Islamic as unethical transactions. ■

### ABOUT THE SPEAKER:

al-Muatasim bin Said al-Maawali is a Religious Supervisor working for The Omani Studies Centre at Sultan Qaboos University. After being a member of the Shariah Supervisory Board at Sohar Islamic University, he has been recently appointed as the Chairman of the Board. He holds an MA degree in Islamic Studies from the University of Birmingham, 2016. al-Muatasim authored an eight-volume series of books on Islamic Jurisprudence called *al-Mutamad*, including the sixth volume on Islamic Financial Transactions and Insurance, and the seventh and eighth volumes on Islamic Banking. In 2016, he published his English book *Articles on Ibādī Studies*. In February 2017, he published his translation of the first volume *'The Reliable Jurisprudence of Prayer'* from Arabic into English. In 2019, he also translated *'Christians in Oman'* from English into Arabic. Al Muatasim presented some academic papers at some international conferences in Islamic Studies, including the Islamic College of Advanced Sciences annual conference (London) in May 2023. He is now a PhD candidate in Islamic Finance at the University of Birmingham.

The British Omani Society gratefully acknowledges a contribution towards the cost of publication of this Review from Alidade Ltd

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# INSIGHTS ON TOURISM IN OMAN

We had the privilege of interviewing H.E Azzan Qassim al-Busaidi, Oman's Undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

In this article we lead with His Excellency's insights on the future of tourism in Oman, following his visit to the UK during the annual World Travel Market Conference in November 2023.

## **How are you making sure tourism plays its part as a key pillar of Oman Vision 2040?**

The Ministry of Heritage & Tourism is laser focused on creating an environment where tourism can flourish and grow, enhancing the attraction of the sector to both investors and visitors through a range of tourism-driven legislation including the easing of visa restrictions for citizens of over 100 countries.

I should point out too that significant government investment has been made in first-class infrastructure – roads, airports and ports – as well as tourism assets with both domestic and international appeal. Amongst these are Khasab's 1.8-kilometre

zip line and the Oman Across the Ages Museum in Nizwa. A calendar of cultural and entertainment activities has been compiled to reinforce our offer as a year-round destination while participation in roadshows, promotional campaigns, a strong web presence and the opening of representative offices raise Oman's profile with key demographics in established and growth markets. On top of this, we are vigorously promoting Oman as a destination in key markets and diversifying these markets to achieve larger inbound tourism numbers and we are forging links with a whole variety of verticals, companies with exceptional products and services that can enrich our tourism landscape.

Importantly too, we are prioritising capacity building so our talented youth can benefit from the opportunities that will open up as tourism plays an ever-greater part in our economy.

This is all bearing fruit. 3.5 million international tourists are expected to visit Oman by the end of this year, a 20.8% increase on 2023. We expect these numbers to grow by 7.4% per annum over the next few years. I am also delighted to share that the United Nations World Tourism Organization ranked Oman among the world's top 20 best performing destinations for tourist arrivals between January and July.

### How is Oman's tourism sector set to develop in the next few years?

We have ambitious plans in place, with over £4 billion of investment funnelled into 360 projects. These range from the construction of integrated tourism complexes and luxury resorts, places like the Envi Al Jabel Al Akhdar Ecological,

Yiti's Nikki Beach Resort & Spa and the Mandarin Oriental Muscat, to the preservation of heritage sites and historical monuments. And we currently have some 40 adventure projects in progress – from zip lines and cable cars through to mountain trails and campsites.

I should like to emphasize that when we make plans for tourism development, we are fully committed to sustainable practices. And as all this takes shape, we are mindful of the responsibility we have to preserve Oman's natural beauty and protect our globally significant treasure chest of biodiversity – a heritage we are enormously proud of.

**In Q1 2023, the Middle East was the best tourism performer worldwide, registering a 15% increase in tourism**

### arrivals compared to 2019 ("Jet, Set, Go" research report by HSBC). What unique experiences can Oman offer tourists that other Gulf countries can't?

Starting with our stunning natural beauty, from rugged mountains and desert to pristine beaches and coral reefs, Oman offers an unparalleled visitor experience. Add to this the country's rich biodiversity, variety of animal, bird and marine life and a unique range of flora and fauna. Then consider Oman's fascinating history and culture reflected in incredible architecture, crafts, music, and cuisine, living traditions that are brought within reach in our ancient villages as well as at our numerous historical and cultural sites. It is a potent mix.

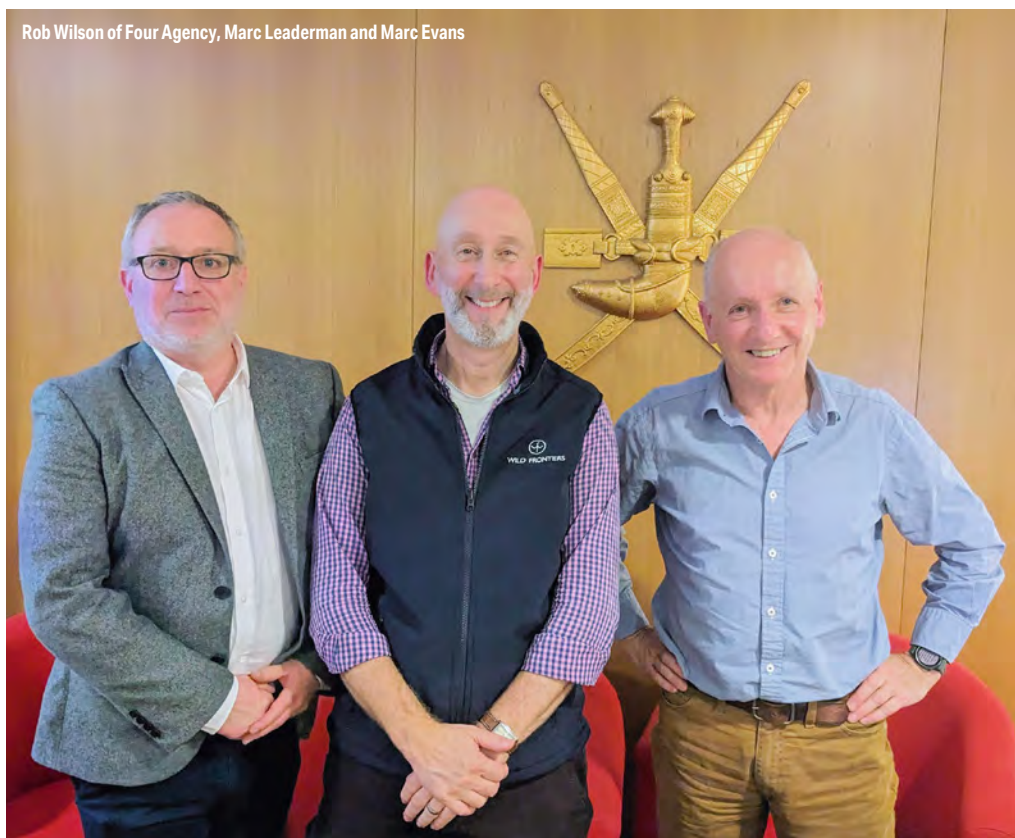
Drilling down, I think diversity and authenticity are really the key words in terms of why Oman offers such a distinct visitor experience. The range of things to see and do is truly outstanding, from adventure sports such as trekking, rock climbing, kite-surfing and scuba diving to cultural experiences such as festivals, gala performances, our five UNESCO World Heritage sites and more. And we should not forget that Oman has become a hub for luxury tourism with world-class hotels and resorts offering the ultimate in exclusivity and relaxation. Of course, the warmth of the welcome here, our hospitality is something very special that fosters an unforgettable connection – a gift for life, if you will. ■



# DISCOVER NEW WAYS TO TRAVEL OMAN

We hosted a special event for our members to showcase contemporary travel in Oman, highlighting top sites, tours and the personal experiences and recommendations of our two extremely well-travelled speakers: Mark Evans MBE, Ex-Outward Bound Oman Executive Director, and Marc Leaderman of specialist adventure tour company Wild Frontiers.

Rob Wilson of Four Agency, Marc Leaderman and Marc Evans



Highlights of the event included Mark Evans' overview of his 80-day slow journey on camel and by foot from Salalah to Muscat and a 49-day crossing of the Empty Quarter, the largest sand desert on earth. With a fantastic array of images, historical facts and colourful anecdotes our audience were lifted from a dark and damp winter evening in London to the dazzling sunlight, sparkling wadis and desert sands of Oman. He also shared plans for his upcoming 30-day Jewel of Oman project.

Marc Leaderman then gave a very useful overview of the country and talked through some of the highlights and practicalities for visitors. His interesting and practical suggestions on places to visit in Oman and current adventure tour options were of great interest to many of our members.

The talks were followed by many questions from our audience and further discussion with the speakers. We plan to host future events on this interesting subject. ■



# FESTIVE PIPE ORGAN RECITAL

The British Omani Society welcomed back organist Ian Hockley to play at the beautiful Notre Dame de France church, Leicester Square, for a festive pipe organ recital on December 13th 2023.

Members joined Ian Hockley who played some of the favourite music of His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, including music by Mozart, Bach and Handel; plus some music for the Festive season.

This was the second time The Society have had the pleasure of hosting a recital by Hockley, the first being in 2019 at St Andrew Holborn. Our attendees were delighted to have the opportunity to see him play again.

During the event, Hockley also spoke to our members about his work for His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos. Including providing a background on why the pieces of music were chosen, along with a brief introduction to the unique pipe organs of Oman.

The evening provided a relaxed and festive opportunity for members to meet with each other, our Trustees and staff. We were very happy to welcome back several members who hadn't attended a Society event for some time.

Hockley is a British organist and he studied at the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Conservatoire in the UK. His organ teachers were David Saint, Peter Hurford and Annette Goerke.

Hockley also holds further diplomas from Trinity College of Music and The Royal College of Organists.

Hockley's performing career has been varied, encompassing a wide variety of styles, and including several hundred appearances in the original production of Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Phantom of the Opera*. He took up a position with the

*Ian Hockley is a British organist and he studied at the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Conservatoire in the UK.*

## FESTIVE PIPE ORGAN RECITAL



Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra in the Sultanate of Oman in 2000 and stayed there until His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said died. Hockley has been involved in the Royal Opera House Project in Muscat from the earliest days on many levels, and amongst other things assembled the House's extensive keyboard collection and conceived and oversaw the installation and tonal finishing of the large new organ in the House.

Hockley writes from time to time; his biography and edition of the literary works of the French organist and composer Jehan Titelouze was published in 1996, and has contributed to many

journals and publications over the years. Ian still gives occasional concerts overseas when time permits, sometimes in collaboration with the French soprano Fabrice di Falco, recently at La cathédrale Saint-Louis des Invalides in Paris as part of a concert to raise money for the victims of the Haiti earthquake.

Since leaving Oman Ian has overseen the installation of the new organ in Cairo Opera House and following two years back in the UK working at Pangbourne College from 2020 - 2022 he is now back in the Middle East and working at Raffles International School in Dubai. ■



# CYCLING WORLD RECORD ACROSS OMAN

We welcomed Jon Shubert  
as our speaker at the BOS  
on January 18th, 2024.

Jon is a presenter, scientist,  
teacher, adventurer, and  
multiple Cycling World  
Record holder, best known  
for breaking the three-hour  
barrier for cycling 100 miles.

He shared his experience  
of setting a Cycling World  
Record in 2018, cycling  
across Oman from Muscat  
to Salalah.

Jon explained that his decision to undertake this challenge was driven by a desire to make a positive impact, inspired by his years teaching at the British School Muscat. Despite the comforts of expatriate life, he felt compelled to contribute to both the local and broader Middle Eastern community, especially given the region's geopolitical challenges. His story of wanting to help the Iraqi Yazidis led him to this philanthropic cycling record attempt, testing both his physical and mental limits.

Jon also discussed the unexpected obstacles he faced, including the complexities of fundraising regulations that nearly derailed his plans. Nevertheless, he persevered, determined to make a difference despite these challenges.

His journey across Oman, documented in a film, showcased his resilience. Starting at Al Alam Palace in Old Muscat, Jon battled gastroenteritis and the harsh Omani terrain and climate, facing dehydration and exhaustion. Over two days, he encountered extreme desert heat and difficult crosswinds, requiring immense physical and mental strength. Support from both Omani and expatriate communities helped him continue on despite the struggles.

As Jon reached the Dhofar mountains on the final morning, he was greeted by enthusiastic local crowds. The record

attempt, widely broadcast on local radio and social media, had engaged local communities. However, for Jon, the real success was in the impact on people's lives. His journey raised funds to equip 400 Iraqi homes with lighting, restoring power that had been absent for four years.

Today, Jon continues his passion for storytelling and adventure as a production director for Concept80, a London-based media production company. His journey into film and media began on the roads of Oman, and its influence endures, highlighting the power of human resilience and the drive to inspire change. ■





# HOW MODERN SCIENCE UNRAVELS THE SECRETS OF THE ANCIENT WORLDS

## Q&A WITH AZIZA AL-MUGHAIRY



Aziza al-Mughairy, the first GCC national to be employed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), speaks about How Modern Science Unravels the Secrets of the Ancient Worlds.

Aziza spoke with us prior to her February 2024 lecture about her early interest in science, Gulf Arab representation in scientific fields and her own research, among other topics.

**Q** When did your interest in science begin? What sparked your decision to become a scientist?

**A** Very early on. My father always found a way to incorporate science into my life. He would always try to explain very complex ideas to me. He discussed anything from objects in the night sky to the trajectory of a tennis ball. (As a child, I did not find understanding projectile motion entertaining, especially when trying to hit the ball with the racket.)



**Q** Can you give us some insight into the research that you'll be sharing with us at your lecture on 21st February?

**A** It will be a rather exciting lecture. I will cover the brief history of subatomic particle physics, how neutrons and muons were first discovered and produced, and why they are useful. I will then explore expanding our understanding of the makeup of artefacts and what these studies have helped us decode in human history. Notable, and perhaps personally my favourite – are the animal statues of Ancient Egypt.

For centuries, it was uncertain what those statue-like objects contained within and whether there were any animal remnants inside. The saying, "X-ray vision" is possible

with physics! X-rays were used to see the internal structure of those statues, and neutrons as well! Another fascinating piece of research was studying Roman coinage. Neutron studies have revealed mesmerising facts about the ancient Roman economy during the year of the four emperors, a time filled with civil unrest and political upheaval. Neutrons were used to study the debasement of the coins of that period. Coins from the Northumbrian Kingdom will also be discussed, among other items.

**Q** You studied at Cardiff University and are currently based at STFC Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) in Oxfordshire – what prompted your decision to pursue your scientific career within the UK as opposed to the Gulf or elsewhere?

*I decided to pursue an academic career when I completed my schooling, and my higher education in the UK.*



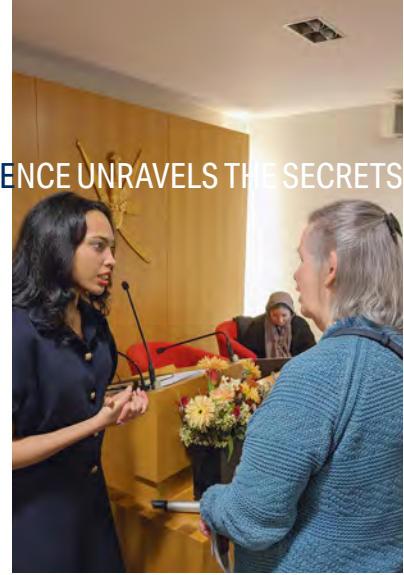
**A** I decided to pursue an academic career when I completed my schooling. Pursuing my higher education in the UK seemed natural, as most of my immediate family had done so. Essentially, the plan was to keep learning. I had never anticipated doing a year in industry – I had planned to stay in academia. I visited RAL in my first year and told myself that it would be incredible to work here. Little did I know that I would apply for a role and be a successful candidate around the same time the following year.

**Q** You're the first GCC National to be employed by UK Research and Innovation – a milestone – what do you think could be done to increase Gulf Arab representation in scientific fields?

**A** It is about early education. Is science made challenging to understand for children? Are their instructors genuinely passionate about teaching? Are the students lacking the freedom to do some basic experiments?

I have only recently come to understand the significance of early education in the





later stages of an individual's interests and abilities. Hence, the focal point should be who the instructors are and how they teach, rather than looking at the youth and anticipating their interest in science. It is imperative to find passionate instructors, if one instructor is enough to teach hundreds of students. Some of those students would go into science, innovation and R&D.

It is also important to keep promoting and supporting those talented youth. Funding more prospectus masters and doctorate students is also a fundamental aspect. When there appear to be young, gifted individuals, it is essential to recognise their achievements as this would encourage the rest. There is a preliminary belief that those who study the sciences have minimal career paths; lies! Science is related to all aspects of life, from the planes you fly on to drug delivery and studies on shampoos you use daily.

Another example is that subatomic physics is a convenient tool when studying petroleum. Conclusively, to answer the question, the youth must receive the best possible quality of education as early as possible, and must be awarded for learning and growing. This will inherently increase interest.

**Q From your perspective as an Omani scientist whose work is based in Britain – what is the current situation regarding UK-Oman and UK-GCC scientific cooperation? What do you think could be done to promote and enhance UK-Oman collaboration and partnership in science?**

**A** Oman Vision 2040 stresses the importance of scientific advancement and innovation. Before doing so entirely independently as a nation, we must foster

research collaborations. This would first hoist our knowledge and create a robust international network of researchers, especially British ones.

At the present moment, there are Omanis (amongst other Gulf Arabs) contributing to research across the UK as academics and PhD researchers, which is a good foundation for the 2040 vision.

Given the longevity of the British-Omani friendship, I feel confident that we will continue learning from Britain. Scientific collaborations between the two great nations as partners are on the horizon.

We should also encourage more STEM students to pursue further qualifications that equip them to join and research for world-leading institutions. Any work experience in such hubs would prove critical when establishing such facilities in the Sultanate.

**Q Science, research, and innovation are all key to Oman Vision 2040 and have been given an important role – from that perspective, what do you think is the role of young Omani scientists like yourself in helping to actualise the objectives of the broader national vision? Can you tell us more about the progress that's been made so far?**



**A** One of the paramount aspects of Vision 2040 is lifelong learning. Therefore, young Omani scientists must keep learning and expanding their knowledge. However, Oman's scientific progression is dependent on the whole Omani scientific community.

My generation has a lot we can learn from the previous ones. We must unite as an Omani scientific community and discuss our capabilities and potential. The vision will be achieved from a cumulative effort of all Omani citizens. Hence, each Omani, especially the younger ones, must realise that it is their duty in front of the nation to contribute to Vision 2040.

**Q Finally, what achievement are you most proud of (so far)?**

**A** I do not feel proud per se, as I have not achieved anything significant yet. My pride stems from the advancement of my nation, and I am only humbled by the recognition I have received in the past. ■

# JOURNEY IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF HARRY ST JOHN PHILBY

## Q&A WITH MARK EVANS



Mark Evans is an explorer, writer and speaker who gave an insightful talk at the British Omani Society about the 28-day journey of British explorer Harry St John Philby across the Heart of Arabia.

Philby's service in Baghdad and Basra led him to be dispatched south on a mission to meet Ibn Saud in Riyadh, a mission that would see him cross Arabia and be awarded the Royal Geographical Society Founders Medal. Mark's talk explored this journey through his own expedition that followed in his footsteps.

We had the opportunity to ask Mark a few questions about Philby, his remarkable journey and what it meant to him.

**What was the relationship like between Philby and Ibn Saud?**

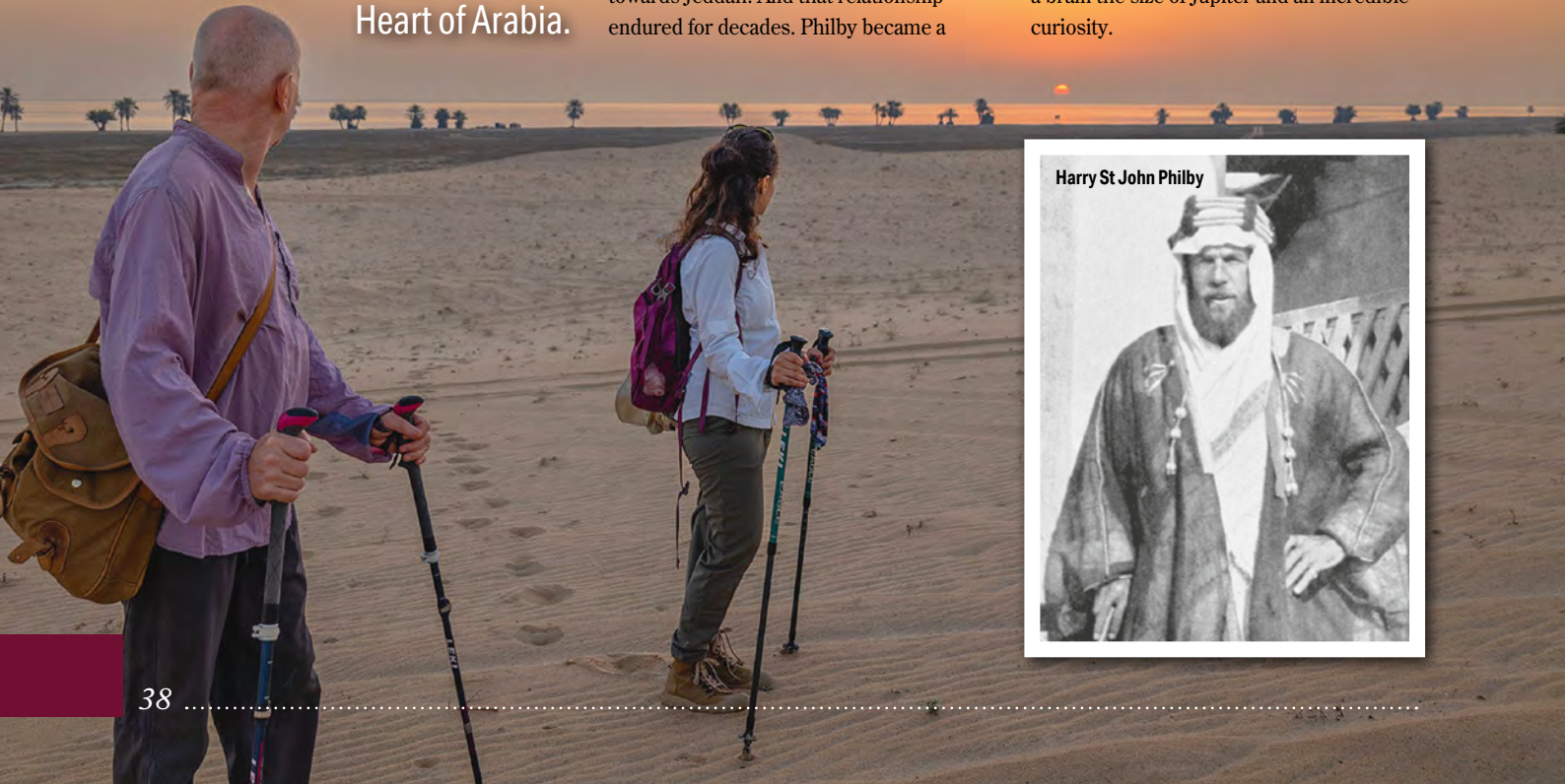
It was long and very fruitful, and it was really based on mutual respect. There was clearly, and many people have written this, a great chemistry between the two men when they first met. Their first discussions went on for hour after hour after hour, and what was supposed to be a short stay turned into a stay of at least a week before Philby moved on and pressed on west towards Jeddah. And that relationship endured for decades. Philby became a

trusted confidant of Ibn Saud.

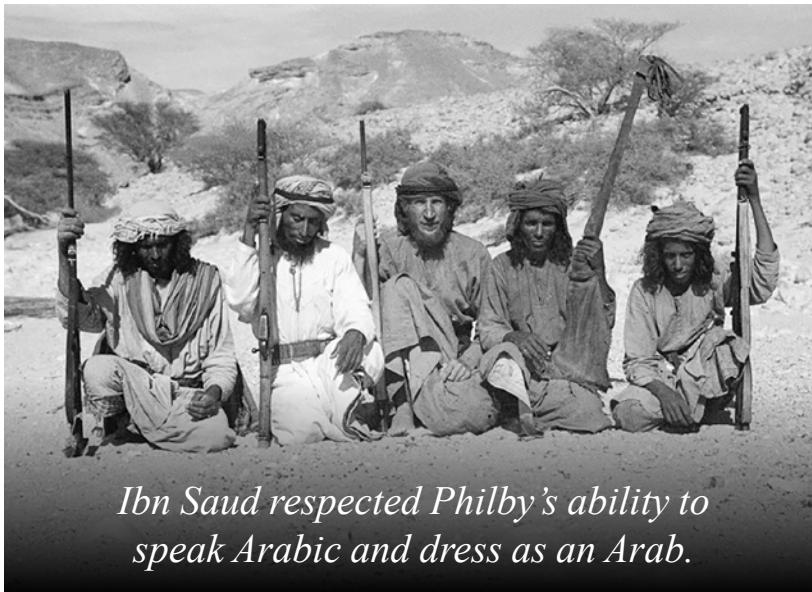
Like any relationship, they had their moments and challenges. But really, it was a very strong relationship that was very much based on mutual trust and respect. Ibn Saud respected Philby's ability to speak Arabic and dress as an Arab.

**You mentioned in your lecture how Philby was very meticulous in documenting all aspects of his travels. Why do you think this was so important to him?**

I think partly because he was a pure academic and he had an incredible curiosity. Part of me thinks that, in some way, it was just instinctive. It was what he did. It was the way he operated. And he did that all the time. In those days, he was a political officer, so his job was to gather and record information. What he did was considerably above and beyond, but he had a brain the size of Jupiter and an incredible curiosity.



Harry St John Philby



*Ibn Saud respected Philby's ability to speak Arabic and dress as an Arab.*

I think the Royal Geographical Society was very important to him. I think the RGS at the time employed more than a couple of dozen cartographers, just waiting for people like Philby to come back from Arabia. So, with his field notes, he knew that there was a value to what he was doing and that the RGS would take what he gathered and convert them into maps and update the existing maps.



**Philby's granddaughter Reem Philby joined you on your journey. Can you tell us more about her and how she viewed the experience?**

Reem Philby was an absolute gem. She works at the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, just north of

**Philby's granddaughter – Reem Philby**



Jeddah. She's quite an explorer. I think she'd been up Kilimanjaro before. She'd been trekking in South America when we tracked her down. She loves taking her children to the desert. She really is a chip off the old block. Very fit, incredibly determined and smart, as well as great company. And I think she knew a lot about her grandfather, but she knew a heck of a lot more at the end of the expedition and felt much more connected to him.

And I just sensed with Reem an incredible pride. Everywhere we went, everyone spoke about Philby and I'm sure that, for her, it was lovely that a lot of people were speaking with great pride about her grandfather. And that's the way he is regarded in Saudi Arabia.

**Were there parts of the journey that you found particularly meaningful or memorable? Did you learn more about Philby through the experience?**

It was really the point when we were exactly standing where Philby was. I think that was a real connection there. When we got the old photographs and aligned them with the landscape and the shape of the hill or the wadi, we knew we were pretty much there. Those moments were truly special.

As was being in the Empty Quarter, that was the time when we had no visitors at all, very remote. So just the team being together and being able to walk away from the fire into total darkness and seeing stars come down to the horizon all around you, 360 degrees. It was quite fantastic. And

equally, whilst the highlight was being alone, a highlight was also being together. Great teammates, great traveling companions, but also amazing hospitality from everyone that we met en route, which was expected. But nonetheless always incredibly pleasant.

**You talked a bit about the great hospitality you experienced with the locals on your journey. Can you tell us more about that? What did they think of your journey?**

The hospitality was often coffee, it was food, it was conversation. It was people wanting to give us tours of old buildings being renovated, people just taking great



pride in what Saudi Arabia is doing under Muhammad bin Saud. There's an incredible energy and traction. Young people, in particular, are giving up jobs in the private sector to work for the government because they want to be part of the change. They want to play their part in the evolution of their own country, which is fantastic to hear.

And I think everyone was very proud of the journey. Everyone was very impressed with what we were doing. Everybody above a certain age knows of Philby, because he's the man whose advice and friendship helped Ibn Saud shape a nation. He really was pivotal in the evolution of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, so they were very proud of the journey.

They were especially surprised when we had Reem with us and a Saudi girl doing it on her own. And it was great for Reem to be able to challenge us, challenge people's perceptions and misperceptions of that. But overall, it was very, very positive.

**What would you like people to take away from your talk about Philby? What was it that made him unique as an Arabist and explorer?**

I would say just his incredible curiosity for pretty much everything. We've lost that curiosity today. I think it's very easy for us to wander around and not see much of what we're going past. I mean, Philby

would just turn in his grave if he saw life today. He was at home in the desert. He was controversial politically, he disagreed with people, he wasn't a great team player. But he found peace and tranquillity and himself in the desert.

And I think he's much misunderstood. Much of people's opinion of him is affected by the behaviour of his son. So, I hope our talk really puts a spotlight on an incredible individual who, on his own, was an extraordinary geographer. I would say, without doubt, what Kim scratched on his grave in Beirut, "the greatest of all Arabian explorers," is absolutely true.

And I think if there's one thing that I remember from the project, it's a comment from when the Saudi members of the family came to London and I overheard someone saying, "what happened to all the money?" since St John Philby was a confidant to one of the richest people on the planet for decades. "Where did all the money go?" And the family historian at the UK end said, "you know what? There never was any money."

Ibn Saud, out of his natural generosity, frequently offered Philby money to thank him for his friendship, but Philby refused to accept it. And he said, "No, if I accept that money, Your Majesty, I will never be able to challenge you again." I just find that approach incredibly refreshing in the snake pit of politics that we have today, the sort of air of suspicion and the lack of trust that we put in leaders today. He is exactly the kind of person that I would like to go to dinner with. ■



# THE UNIQUE WHALES OF OMAN: HISTORY, MYSTERY AND UNCERTAIN FUTURE

## Q&A WITH ROB BALDWIN

We had the opportunity to put a few questions to our recent guest speaker Rob Baldwin about his lecture "The Unique Whales of Oman".



Rob is a well-known marine conservationist, specialising in marine mammals and sea turtles of the Arabian region, and also has wider interests both taxonomically and geographically. He has skills in many environmental fields, from protected areas planning to education and sustainability, all with the ambition of making positive contributions towards a better world.

Rob works on numerous committees and advisory boards of a number of national and international organisations, makes it his business to get involved in networks, such as the UN's Eye on Earth, and is regularly consulted, particularly in the Arabian region, by host governments and other organisations on matters related to the marine and coastal environment.

Picture Credit: Rob Baldwin



**Can you talk to us about what makes the Arabian Sea Humpback Whale unique compared to other species of whales?**

The Arabian Sea humpback whale population is non-migratory, and feeds and breeds only in the Arabian Sea region. Genetic study suggests that the population separated from Southern Ocean humpback whales approximately 70,000 years ago and has since been isolated in the region.

**You talked in your lecture about tagging the whales and learning more about them through these tags. Did this reveal anything surprising about their behaviour? Are there more mysterious aspects of their behaviour?**

Satellite tagging studies have provided a

relatively large amount of information about Arabian Sea humpback whales in a relatively short time period. Among key findings is the high site fidelity of the whales: in other words they tend to remain in and return to favoured, limited locales. These include small areas that are most often frequented ('hotspots') off Oman in the Gulf of Masirah and off the coast of Dhofar. However, the studies also revealed occasional exceptions to this residency pattern, including one female whale that travelled across the northwestern Indian Ocean from Oman to the southern tip of India and back. The studies also revealed that whales spent most time in shallow water (<20m) but also undertook deep dives (>200m) further from shore. Further

studies will gradually reveal more information about the highly unusual behavioural ecology of Arabian Sea humpback whales and, given that this population does not migrate, it could potentially provide insight to the globally unanswered question of why other whales do migrate.

**This species is known not to migrate. What are the factors that keep them from migrating? Is this unlikely to change?**

It is thought that Arabian Sea humpback whales have been able to survive without the need for migration due to the sustained, seasonal upwelling of cold, nutrient rich waters associated with the southwest monsoon weather system, which fuels marine ecosystems and provides the whales with a reliable food supply. However, this may not be the entire or only reason, indeed it may just be a mechanism that enables year-round residency, rather than a reason for it. There may be other factors, such as avoidance of predation for example, that contribute to non-migratory behaviour. Regardless, the situation may change in future, for example if the reliability and abundance of food changes, perhaps due to intensifying fisheries pressure on certain prey species, or if climate change causes large scale trophic changes.

**You mentioned the various factors that threaten this species. In your view, what are the best ways to protect these whales and what more can be done to ensure their conservation?**

A comprehensive multilateral Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is currently being developed for the Arabian Sea region which includes a range of important conservation management measures and mitigation actions to help combat and reduce threats. Participation in the CMP by the host governments of all range states that surround the Arabian Sea region will be essential to ensure a better regional outlook for the Arabian Sea humpback whale. The CMP will also detail management measures specific to particular countries and it is crucial for each nation to follow its guidance as closely as possible and ensure effective implementation of conservation action on the ground. Every one of us can assist with these endeavours by taking all available opportunities to



Picture Credit: Rob Baldwin



spread and raise awareness of the plight of these unique whales within the context of our own social and business communities within which we live and work. You never know who might be listening, and it's surprising how a single voice can magnify and make a difference.

**Can you tell us more about the work you do with Omani organisations? In what ways have they helped you and vice versa?**

Omani organisations have been the main driver for discovering and understanding this globally unique population of whales. This has included a combination of government, non-government and private sector organisations, supported almost entirely by commercial entities within Oman. My own organisation, Five Oceans, has been involved in the scientific and conservation research of Arabian Sea humpback whales for over 20 years and has worked with the Environment Authority, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources, the Environment Society of Oman and Future Seas LLC. Each organisation plays a characteristic role in tandem with the others. Many other

international organisations, from over a dozen different countries, have also played essential supporting roles over the years. The cooperation amongst all these parties has been hugely beneficial and continued collaboration, shared responsibility and partnerships for action are all key ingredients for long-term conservation success. No single entity can accomplish this mission alone.

**You mentioned in your lecture about how whale tourism could be a double-edged sword. In your view, what are the most noteworthy negatives and positives that can come from this type of tourism?**

Sustainable, responsible whale watching tourism has the potential to generate income for Oman which could provide additional motivation for protection and conservation of Arabian Sea humpback whales, which are a unique global asset and potential magnet for tourists. If properly managed, whale watching operators could also participate in scientific data collection to help better understand the population, leading to refined and improved conservation management measures. On the other hand, too many tourism operators,

and/or inappropriate behaviour of whale watching vessels, could put additional pressure on the whales, leading to disturbance and injury, elevated stress levels, and ultimately population level effects due to reduced reproductive output. Poorly planned and executed operations can also lead to social concerns, safety issues and reputational impacts. Whale watching tourism must therefore be subject to thorough planning and carefully controlled management, accompanied by policing and enforcement. The industry itself will achieve far greater results, including economic results, if the whales are well protected.

**What is the best way for people to keep up with your work? And where can they visit if they want to learn more about these whales?**

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) currently hosts the Oman National Cetacean Database, a responsibility that it has shared over many years with the Environment Authority (EA) and the Oman Natural History Museum. ESO, together with EA and Five Oceans, have also recently produced the magnificent Oman Marine Mammal Atlas which contains a wealth of information for readers and is designed using an interactive format. More information about the Atlas can be found on the Five Oceans and ESO websites from which it can be downloaded free of charge. ■

[www.5oes.com](http://www.5oes.com)

**SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW THE LECTURE ON YOUTUBE**



# ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL MENA AND OMAN STUDIES TASTER DAY

We were delighted to host our second 'MENA and Oman Studies Taster Day' at the Society in April 2024.

This event was designed and led by one of our previous interns, Asma Ibrahim, and is now an annual fixture in our programming schedule. This year, we were joined by students interested in the Middle East from various sixth form colleges across London and beyond. We received excellent feedback on the day's programme.

The event aims to stimulate early interest in Oman among young people planning to pursue further studies related to the region, including politics, history, languages and international relations. It also provides an opportunity to promote

our youth programmes and introduce a new generation to the British Omani Society.

The day kicked off with an introduction to the BOS from our Director Rosa Braune. This was followed by a presentation from one of our recent student scheme participants, Manon Fraser, who provided an engaging introduction to our fully funded opportunity for young people to volunteer at the prestigious Sultan's School in Muscat, as well as explore Oman. Attendees also heard from our Vice Chairman Chris Breeze who spoke about diplomacy in the Middle East, referencing his own experience working in Oman and with the Foreign Office.



After lunch and a film screening, we had two insightful presentations from BOS interns Asma Ibrahim and Maryam Jumani. They provided students with a valuable

overview of their experiences studying Middle Eastern-related courses at university, along with details about their subject areas and dissertation projects.



The programme was wrapped up with an energetic introduction to Arabic from the BOS's long-time Arabic language teacher Mohammad.

Feedback from the students confirmed that the taster day provided them with a solid introductory understanding of the Middle Eastern related courses they had chosen, potential careers following their university studies, diplomatic approaches in the Middle East region, and the challenge of Arabic language learning.

They also gained a deeper insight into some of the BOS run and funded student schemes which take place in Oman. We are delighted to report that one of the participants has now been selected to take part in our next Student Volunteers Oman Scheme. This year we were also happy to provide a 'certificate of completion' from the Society which many of the participants planned to reference as part of their University applications.

### Feedback:

*"Very insightful, fun and varied"*

*"Very informative, deepened my understanding of Oman and the Arab world as a whole"*

*"I really enjoyed it! I've learned a lot about the Middle East and potential opportunities available to me"*

### Previous Participants:

We were also delighted to hear this year from one student who attended the inaugural 2023 Taster Day who had been offered a place at their chosen university, Oxford. ■



# THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY GRANTS

INTRODUCTION BY BOS TRUSTEE JAMIE BOWDEN

This year saw the grants scheme finally return to something that looks like business as normal after the hiatus of the pandemic.

We maintained our budget at £100,000 but Trustees approved grants totalling £131,242, and we paid £86,584 during the year. This compares with £55,543 paid last year.

While we continued to apply the Society's long-standing criteria for taking decisions on grants, Trustees also paid increased attention to how a grant would support the objectives of Oman's Vision 2040 when doing so was compliant with our charitable objectives. Awards that contributed to leadership training, education, scientific research, environmental projects and the study or exhibition of Oman's heritage all supported Vision 2040 priorities. In total, 75% of the money paid out was for projects in these fields.

Measuring who benefits from an award is not a precise science but roughly two thirds of last year's grants, in both value and the number of recipients, went to Omanis and one third to British people. This represented 49 Omani and 23 British recipients.

Looking at what we supported during the year, there were three grants that we have paid annually for a long time: for British students to work as teaching assistants at the Sultan's School; for British students to do an Arabic course at the language school in Manah; and a contribution to the costs of publishing the Sultan's Armed Forces Association Journal. The one annual event that did not happen this year was attendance at courses in the UK by students from the Sultan's School.

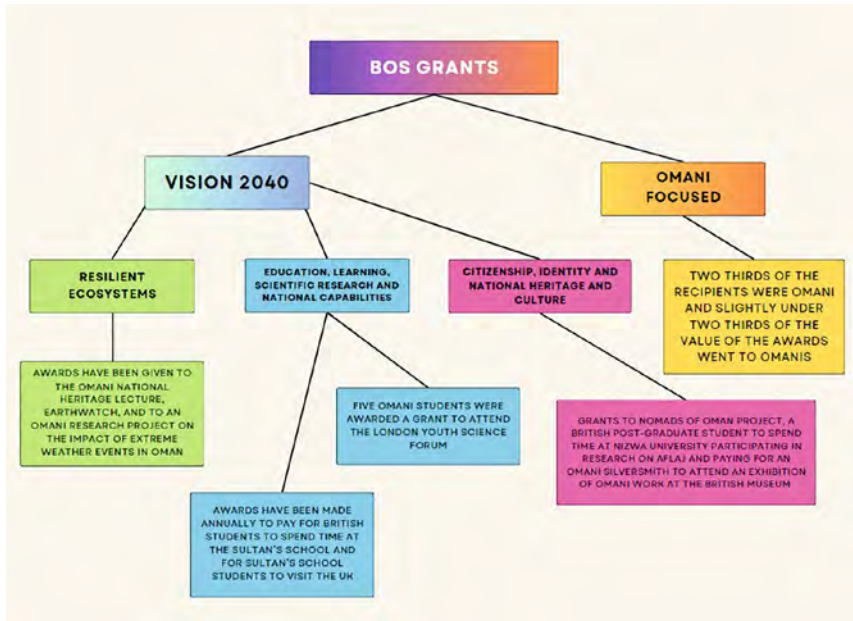
However, the Grants Committee corresponded with them and we remain open to reviving this grant in the future.

There has been a strong focus on environment and tackling the impact of climate change. We again supported the annual Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographic Society (£8713). We awarded £20,300 to Earthwatch for five Omanis to attend one of their Science Camps in the UK. Our funding was matched by Earthwatch themselves and the package includes a preparatory visit by Earthwatch to Oman to advise on who might participate and enable the Omanis to best prepare for the course, and support for participants when they get back to Oman. The aim is to bring together government, communities, business and scientists to tackle biodiversity loss and the negative effects of climate change. We also paid for an official from the Omani Ministry of Education and Training to present a paper at a conference on climate change at the British Society for Middle East Studies.

On the cultural front smaller grants were awarded to Professor Dawn Chatty to update her Nomads in Oman website, to a British postgraduate student for a flight to Oman where she is spending time studying aflaj at Nizwa University and an Omani woman silversmith to attend an exhibition at the British Museum that included her work.

In addition to these the Society made a contribution to the cost of a National Day event hosted by the Omani Students'

*Measuring who benefits from an award is not a precise science but roughly two thirds of last year's grants, in both value and the number of recipients, went to Omanis and one third to British people.*



Association in Birmingham, £14,975 for five Omani students to attend the London Youth Science Forum, £5,000 for trainers from outward Bound Oman to attend a course at Outward Bound in the UK (we regularly contribute to such visits) and £3,000 for flights and some in-country costs for three British participants on the Oxford Diplomatic Studies Programme to visit to Oman at the invitation of the Foreign Ministry (both His Majesty the Sultan and the Foreign Minister attended the course).

In the coming year Trustees will be looking at how we might better measure the impact our grants are having: who benefitted, what were the long and short term effects, whether it supported Vision 2040 and how it contributed to the bilateral relationship.

Please do encourage anyone who you think might be eligible for a grant to look at the Society's website:

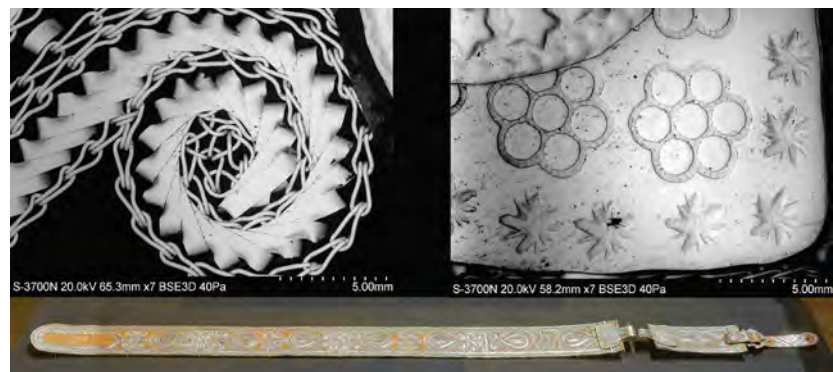
[www.britishomani.org/grant-application](http://www.britishomani.org/grant-application)

Trustees would welcome a greater variety of bids.

## CELEBRATING LIVING TREASURES AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM: WOMEN SILVERSMITHS FROM OMAN

ZEINA KLINK-HOPPE, AUDE MONGIATTI, FAHMIDA SULEMAN, MARCIA DORR AND MOZA AL-WARDI

The exhibition Making their mark: Women Silversmiths from Oman, recently held at the British Museum (19 October – 17 December 2023), celebrated three generations of women from the Sultanate of Oman: Tuful Ramadan (1949-2021), Mahfoudha al-Balushi (b. 1965) and Fatma al Najjar (b. 1992). The works by these three designers and silversmiths remarkably illustrate the resilience, adaptability and innovation these women have developed in a craft historically



'I love this profession very much because my forefathers started it. I don't want it to disappear.'

– Mahfoudha al-Balushi

'أحب هذه المهنة جداً لأنها من أجدادي وآبائي الذين بدأوا في الصناعة، ولم أرد لها أن تندثر.'



## Mahfoudha al-Balushi

Mahfoudha al-Balushi (born 1965) is a successful businesswoman from the northern coastal town of Al-Khabura in the Al-Batinah region. She specialises in the design and manufacture of silver-embellished accessories for Omani men. A professional silversmith for over forty years, she comes from a family of silversmiths and was taught the craft by her father.

Mahfoudha produces sumptuously adorned daggers (*khanjars*), including their sheaths, and intricately embroidered leather belts that are worn by Omani men on special occasions. She is also known for her beautifully decorated ceremonial sticks for men.



dominated by men. Makers tend to remain unnamed or invisible, even more so when they are women, and this display was a rare opportunity to make the public encounter makers in a very intimate way by showcasing their beautiful silver work alongside their inspirational personal testimonies.

Making their mark: Women silversmiths from Oman was co-curated by Dr Zeina Klink-Hoppe, Curator of the Modern Middle East and Central Asia, and Dr Aude Mongiatti, Metals Scientist, and was made

possible thanks to the generosity of Asahi Shimbun, one of the largest and oldest newspapers in Japan, a longstanding supporter of the British Museum. It was the last in a long series of regularly changing free displays, which revolved around a particular object, concept or person and were meant to be slightly experimental and innovative in nature. Making their mark specifically presented some results of fieldwork carried out between 2019-2022 as part of an ongoing, all-women-led, research project launched by the British Museum in collaboration with scholars from Oman, Canada and the USA. The fieldwork, carried out by Dr Aude Mongiatti (British Museum), Moza Sulaiman Al-Wardi (Oman Across Ages Museum), Marcia Stegath Dorr (Independent Scholar, Ann Arbor, Michigan), and Dr Fahmida Suleman (Royal Ontario Museum), was funded by the British Museum and the British Omani Society. It enabled the gathering of first-hand knowledge of Omani women silversmiths, their backgrounds and lives but also their sources of inspiration, practices and techniques. The exhibition highlighted their knowledge and technical skills, as well as their dedication and passion for their profession, through the display of their beautifully designed and crafted pieces and videos of excerpts from their lively interviews.

Straight upon entering the museum, when looking towards their right, visitors'

eyes were immediately drawn to a wall made of shimmering silvery images at the back of the room where the exhibition was presented. These images were close-ups of the jewellery on display taken using a digital microscope and a scanning electron microscope in the laboratory facilities of the British Museum. As the vision of the visitors adjusted to the lighting in the space, they could notice a mannequin with plaited hair dressed in a dark indigo-coloured dress and covered with a significant amount of silver jewellery: necklaces, plait ornaments, earrings, anklets. This festive jewellery from Southern Oman in the Museum's collection dates from the 1950s and is typical of the Dhofar region. It represented a married woman's personal wealth and offered her amuletic protection. The handcrafted work of the three women mentioned previously: Fatma, Mahfoudha and Tuful, draws inspiration from these older forms and motifs, which find their equivalent in even older historical examples, a testimony to their enduring continuity.

The visitors could then choose to either 'meet' Tuful and Fatma on one side of the room with their stunning and strikingly fine jewellery made for women, or 'meet' Mahfoudha on the other side of the room and her magnificent accessories for men. The table case on the left of the room contained delicate rings, a pendant and a bracelet made by Tuful, as well as a belt



and matching earrings designed by Fatma. The other table case, on the right, contained a leather belt for a khanjar, finely embroidered with silver wire, and a ceremonial wooden stick embellished with silver sheet and wire made by Mahfoudha. In the same case were also displayed a belt and khanjar from the British Museum's historic collection, highlighting the continuity in designs and techniques.

Video interviews with the silversmiths, close-up images of the pieces and 3D scan renders, complemented the beautiful examples of their handcrafted jewellery. The scientific images and videos revealed the range of production techniques, tools and skills used by the women to create their intricate designs, furthering our understanding of Oman's silversmithing heritage. The interview films, and highlighted quotes in Arabic and English by Mahfoudha, Tuful and Fatma, also brought the visitors closer to them and created a direct and more personal connection, as the visitors could hear them talk about their work in their own words.

For almost sixty years, Tuful bint

Ramadan Awadh Bimkhalef (1949–2021) was a highly skilled and successful silversmith running her own workshop in Taqah, Dhofar. She married into a family of silversmiths and learnt the craft from her brother-in-law. Widowed in her mid-twenties, she raised her three sons through her trade, receiving prizes for her dedication and hard work. According to Tuful, "Accuracy is in a woman's nature. A man also works well, but women are known for making delicate objects."

Mahfoudha al-Balushi (born 1965) is a successful businesswoman from the northern coastal town of Al-Khabura in the Al-Batinah region. She specialises in the design and manufacture of silver-embellished accessories for Omani men. A professional silversmith for over forty years, she comes from a family of silversmiths and was taught the craft by her father. She said: "I love this profession

very much because my forefathers started it. I don't want it to disappear."

Fatma al Najjar (born 1992) is an innovative designer who draws inspiration from centuries of Omani cultural heritage, interpreting it for contemporary audiences. Fatma is Dhofari, like Tuful, but grew up in the capital city of Muscat, where she runs numerous artistic projects, including her jewellery business RAHINA. Fatma told us: "My jewellery is a living experience, a conversation between me and my ancestors. It embraces a truth within myself and the women I am surrounded by."

The ability to associate individual makers with the pieces they produce and the direct expressions of their thoughts, aspirations, reflections created a more personal and intimate experience for the visitors. Overall, 73,557 visitors explored the exhibition, gaining a better appreciation for the delicacy and intricacy of Omani silversmithing.

Dr Aude Mongiatti | Department of Scientific Research  
The British Museum | Great Russell Street | London WC1B 3DG | UK  
[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

# OUTWARD BOUND OMAN

REPORT BY OUTWARD BOUND OMAN

We are delighted to provide this feedback to express our profound gratitude for the financial support provided by the British Omani Society.

This funding enabled us to send five of our Outward Bound Oman instructors to the United Kingdom for a two-week shadowing and training experience with the esteemed Outward Bound Trust in the UK. This report outlines the details of their visit and the significant impact it has had on our team and our programmes.

## OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING EXPERIENCE

### PARTICIPANTS AND LOCATIONS

Our team of five instructors was divided between two renowned centres in the UK:

- **Loch Eil Centre:** Two instructors
- **Eskdale Centre, Lake District:** Three instructors

### DURATION

The visit lasted for two weeks, during which our instructors immersed themselves in the rich learning environments of these prestigious centres.

### TRAINING AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The instructors received a warm welcome and were provided with extensive learning opportunities by the experienced staff at both centres. The training encompassed a variety of activities and instructional techniques, including but not limited to:

- Advanced outdoor skills and safety protocols
- Leadership and team-building exercises
- Curriculum development for outdoor education programmes
- Methods for fostering personal growth and resilience in participants

### IMPACT ON INSTRUCTORS

The training experience in the UK has had a profound and positive impact on our instructors. They returned to Oman brimming with energy, enthusiasm, and a wealth of new knowledge. Some key takeaways include:

- Enhanced outdoor skills and instructional techniques

- Increased confidence in their ability to lead and mentor participants
- New ideas for programme development and implementation
- A deeper understanding of global best practices in outdoor education

### IMPLEMENTATION IN OMAN

Our instructors are eager to implement the insights and skills they gained during their training in the UK. They have already started integrating new methodologies and activities into our programmes, which will undoubtedly enhance the quality of our offerings. The knowledge and confidence they acquired are crucial as we strive to deliver high-quality outdoor education to our participants in Oman.

### SUSTAINING THE CONNECTION WITH THE UK

The connection we maintain with the Outward-Bound Trust in the UK is very special and valuable to us. This relationship allows our instructors to gain a wealth of



knowledge and confidence from their time abroad, which, in turn, benefits our entire organization. We are committed to nurturing this connection and look forward to future opportunities for collaboration and learning.

*The financial support provided by the British Omani Society has been instrumental in facilitating an exceptional training experience for our instructors.*

## QUOTES FROM OUTWARD-BOUND OMANI INSTRUCTORS

### Marya al-Aufi

*"The excursion presented me with myriad prospects as an instructor to amass skills and strategies for professional advancement. It facilitated knowledge exchange and afforded a precious opportunity to broaden my professional connections, potentially leading to new avenues for future professional cooperation."*

*"I wish to convey my utmost gratitude to the British Omani Society for bestowing upon me this invaluable opportunity, facilitating the exchange of experiences and honing my professional capabilities. This distinguished privilege significantly impacts my future development and elevates my*

*performance within my professional domain.*

*"I eagerly looking forward applying the knowledge acquired during this enriching period to make substantial contributions within my responsibilities of unwavering commitment to furthering the company's objectives and fostering our collective success."*

*With profound gratitude and utmost."*

### Mohammed al-Amri

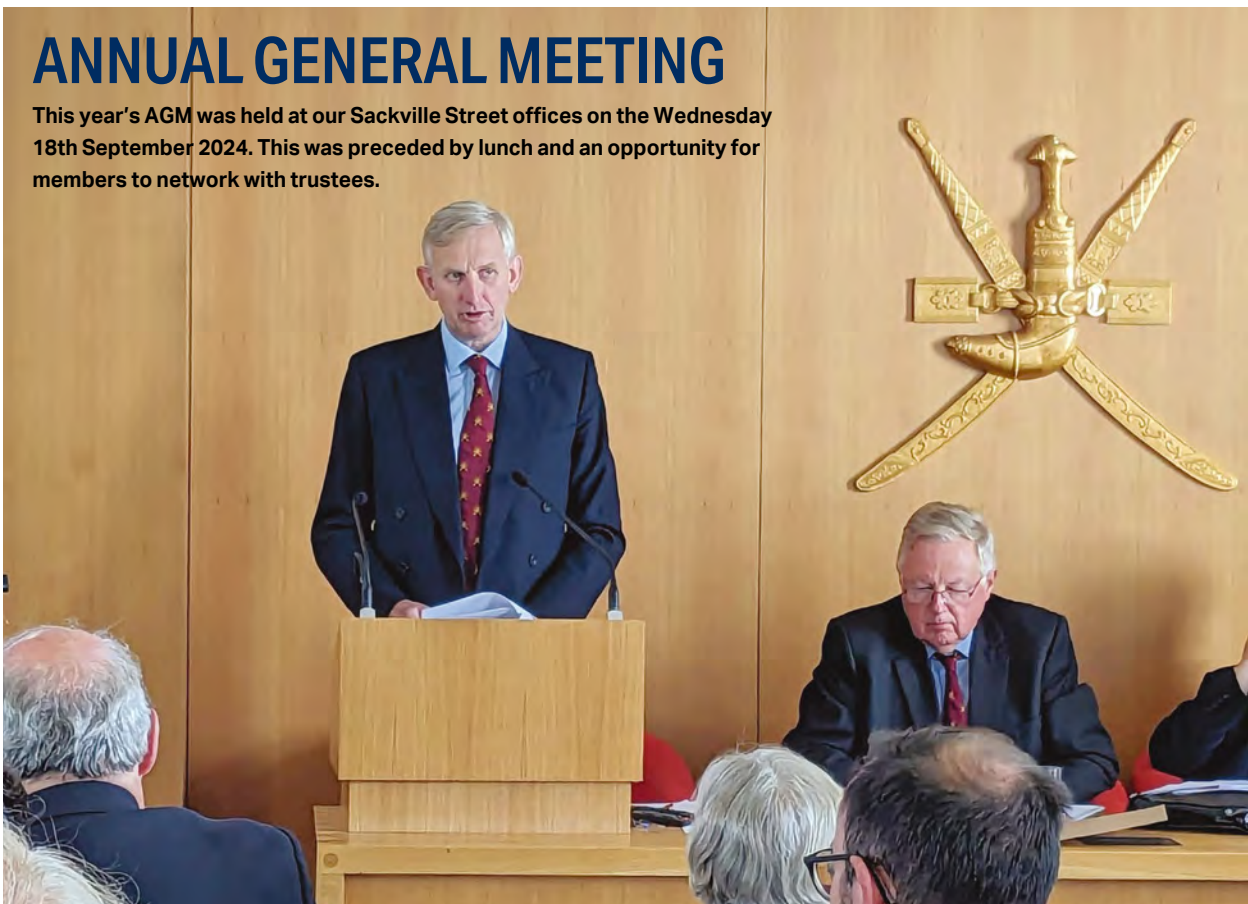
*"I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude for the British Omani Society for providing me with this unforgettable experience. It has been instrumental in my personal and professional growth in many aspects. The training programme has significantly improved my outdoor activity skills and enhanced my instruction and*

*coaching strategies. Additionally, the opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse cultures was amazing. Sharing the Omani culture with people from other countries was a wonderful experience for us."*

The financial support provided by the British Omani Society has been instrumental in facilitating an exceptional training experience for our instructors. The impact of this experience will be felt across our programmes and participants, helping us to continue delivering high-quality outdoor education in Oman. We are deeply grateful for your support and look forward to sharing more success stories in the future. ■

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

This year's AGM was held at our Sackville Street offices on the Wednesday 18th September 2024. This was preceded by lunch and an opportunity for members to network with trustees.



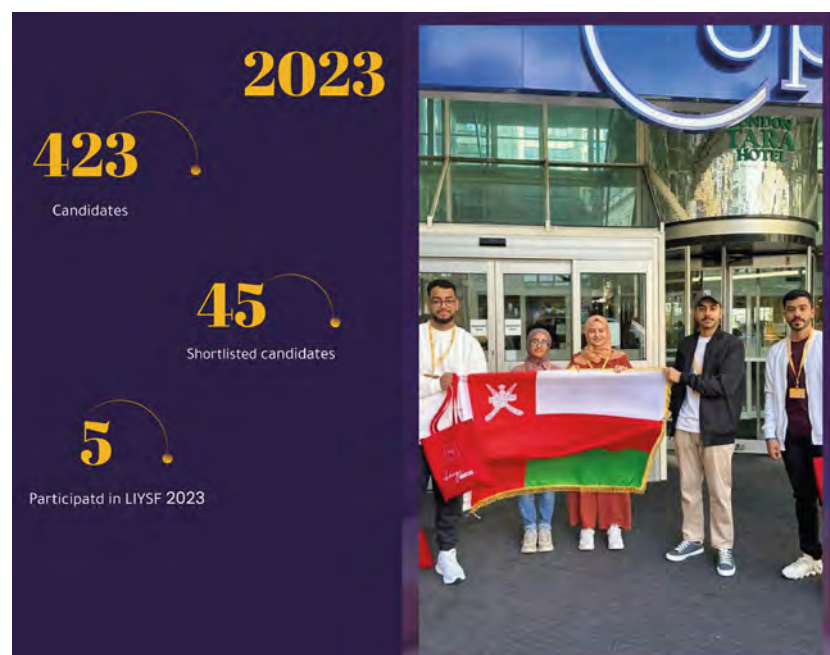
# LONDON INTERNATIONAL YOUNG SCIENTISTS FORUM (LIYSF) "SCIENCE FOR UNITY"

ARTICLE BY MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH & INNOVATION

The Forum is an important international scientific event. It is held annually in London, organised by London International Young Scientists Forum (LIYSF) which targets young people from various countries in the fields of science and innovation. In 2023 BOS supported five Omani students to attend this event.

LIYSF is one of the many international gatherings in which Oman, through the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has participated. The students participating in the forum

presented their scientific projects in the various halls of the forum. Participants attended lectures, workshops, scientific field visits, laboratories, and research centres at leading universities. This



scientific forum plays a crucial role in preparing Omani youth across diverse fields of science and innovation. It refines their abilities through direct engagement with researchers across various disciplines, acquaints them with scientific pioneers, and fosters the development of new ideas and practical sciences. This effort is particularly significant given global trends towards establishing robust, knowledge-based economies.



## FORUM OBJECTIVES:

- Promoting the exchange of ideas, opinions, successful research experiences, and distinguished scientific programmes between young researchers from different cultures.
- Providing a stimulating environment for young researchers to participate in global forums, build knowledge links, and transfer knowledge with their fellow young researchers.
- Encouraging and motivating researchers to be creative and develop their skills.



## THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY GRANTS



### INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS



I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF) 2023, held last summer. As a representative of Oman, the experience was profoundly enriching and has had a significant impact on my academic and professional aspirations. The site visits and company tours were particularly enlightening. Visiting esteemed institutions and leading companies such as Imperial College London, University of Oxford, Rolls-Royce, etc., provided invaluable insights into cutting-edge scientific research and industrial practices. Observing the application of theoretical knowledge in real world scenarios

deepened my understanding and appreciation of my field of study. The diverse and international environment at LIYSF facilitated meaningful interactions with peers from various backgrounds. This exchange of ideas and perspectives was not only intellectually stimulating but also fostered a sense of global scientific community and collaboration. Furthermore, the lectures and workshops led by world-renowned scientists and industry leaders were exceptional. They covered a broad spectrum of topics, from the latest advancements in technology to pressing global challenges. The knowledge and inspiration I gained from these sessions have already influenced my current studies and future career plans. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education for supporting my participation in this prestigious forum. This experience has been a pivotal moment in my academic journey, and I am confident that the skills and insights I have gained will contribute significantly to my future contributions in the field of science and technology. I highly recommend continued support for this program as it provides young scientists with unparalleled opportunities to grow, learn, and collaborate on an international scale. Thank you once again for this wonderful opportunity.

*Yours sincerely,*  
**Ibrahim Amur Ali al-Barwani**  
**Military Technological College**  
**Aeronautical Engineering**

### INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

Participating in LIYSF was a spectacular experience that broadened my insight into new scientific topics. The specialist lecture related to hydrogen energy has motivated me to start thinking about different sustainable energy alternatives. As a chemical and process engineering student, the scientific visit to the department of chemical engineering at Imperial College London was the most thrilling one. I got the chance to visit the carbon capture plant, as well as three other labs. This excursion helped me with my University studies, as I undertook a carbon capture unit design project. In this forum, I had engaged with other young talented students from all around the globe. In such a diverse environment, we were able to share our knowledge and our cultures which enabled me to improve my communications skills.



**Ilaf al-Kindi**  
**Chemical and Process**  
**Engineering Student**  
**Sultan Qaboos University**

## INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

Attending the London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF) was a transformative and enjoyable experience that enriched both my knowledge and network. Throughout the forum, I had the invaluable opportunity to engage with and learn from some of the 10 most esteemed scientists in the world. I participated in many activities, listened to inspiring lectures, and met fellow young scientists from across the globe. This experience ignited my passion for innovation and motivated me to always think big.

### Opening Lecture: The Joy of Discovery

The event began with an inspiring lecture titled "The Joy of Discovery," delivered by Nobel Prize laureate Professor Ben Feringa. His insights into the excitement of scientific discovery set a motivating tone for the forum.

### National Physical Laboratory

Our visit to the National Physical Laboratory, the UK's leading facility for measurement science and materials, provided a deeper understanding of precision in scientific research.



### University of Sussex, School of Life

We toured the School of Life Sciences, exploring groundbreaking research in renewable energy, drug design, quantum chemistry, and biology. Visits to the Biology and Chemistry departments showcased innovative solutions to global challenges.

### HR Wallingford

Visiting HR Wallingford, a company specializing in water-related research and consultancy, was particularly memorable. We saw their wave basins, wave channels, and the Fast Flow Facility, used for testing renewable energy foundations and tsunami simulations. The UK Ship Simulation Centre demonstrated virtual reality ship simulations for pilot training and port design.

### Impact of the Experience

The forum was filled with knowledge and enjoyment. Engaging with advanced scientific environments and esteemed scientists fuelled my passion for science and innovation. Meeting many young scientists from around the world added to the richness of the experience. This forum motivated me to think big and pursue ambitious goals in my future endeavours, reinforcing my commitment to contribute to the scientific community.

**Abdullah al-Hasni**



Right to left: Hamed Saleh al-Kalbani, Ibrahim Amur Ali al-Barwani, Nabras Hamdan Salem al-Shukaili, Ilaf Yahya Ahmed al-Kindi and Abdullah Said Abdullah al-Hasni

# STORIES FROM SCIENCE CAMP: WELCOMING OMANI ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTISTS

Our friends at EarthWatch wrote the report below on their most recent Science Camp, which the British Omani Society supported six Omani scientists to attend.

WRITTEN BY MARIA PONTES  
AT EARTHWATCH

Our latest Science Camp, which took place at Hill End Outdoor Education Centre near Oxford during 26-30 May, welcomed Omani environmental scientists for the first time. It was an exciting opportunity for everyone involved to discover new cultures and experiences in the context of community engagement in environmental science.

## WHAT IS EARTHWATCH SCIENCE CAMP?

We believe that community engagement should be central to environmental research. We work to empower scientists from diverse backgrounds to engage communities with science through our science camps.

Science Camps offer early-career environmental researchers the opportunity to learn about and explore the role of community engagement. Science Camps are hands-on learning programmes, combining classroom and outdoor

learning. Key themes include citizen science, science communication and enhancing connections with nature.

Participants' relationship with Earthwatch continues beyond Science Camp. Our alumni belong to a network that offers peer-to-peer learning and support, and further opportunities to continue their skills development.

At this camp, attendees heard from a mix of contributors with expertise in community engagement, citizen science and storytelling.

Several Science Camp alumni shared their career experiences since attending. Science communication experts including Dr Praveen Paul, co-founder of the annual global science festival 'Pint of Science', and Jack Marley, environment and energy editor at The Conversation UK also ran sessions. Earthwatch colleagues from our community citizen science programmes, FreshWater Watch and Tiny Forest, contributed their insights too.

Photo credits: Yoke and May 2024 participants





institutions in Oman made this possible.

An international group promotes sharing of knowledge across borders, development of language and confidence, and growth of international networks. It enables participants to explore environmental career paths and opportunities in different contexts across the globe.

We tailored the curriculum for our Omani scientists. For example, exploring key environmental challenges facing the world today that are important for Oman such as climate change adaptation, nature-based solutions, and water management.

Having Omani participants at this Science Camp has shown us that the key themes of community engagement, science communication, and using citizen science as a research tool is relevant to anyone, wherever they live.

## WELCOMING OMANI ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTISTS

Our Science Camps have always been about bringing people with diverse backgrounds together to share their unique perspectives and experiences. This year, we were thrilled to welcome six Omani scientists, alongside six UK-based participants and other international scientists from Malawi and Iraq. The support of the British Omani Society and new partnerships with



## TESTIMONIALS AND QUOTES FROM EARTHWATCH SCIENCE CAMP – MAY 2024

*My primary motivation for participating in this camp stems from my deep love for Earth and my commitment to its preservation. I am passionate about environmental conservation and believe that this camp offers a unique opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to make a tangible difference.*

*The participants at this camp have a profound impact on me, providing both inspiration and motivation. Being surrounded by individuals who share my passion for environmental conservation reinforces my commitment to the cause. It is incredibly encouraging to see so many people dedicated to making a positive difference and working hard to achieve our shared goals.*

*Their enthusiasm and dedication remind me that I am not alone in this effort, and this collective support drives me to keep pushing forward. Additionally, the interest and excitement shown by fellow participants regarding my book have been particularly motivating. Knowing that there are people eager to read and engage with my work inspires me to complete and publish it, so I can contribute my voice to our shared mission.*

*It is very, very important that the young people can participate in this camp. So we can help Oman to become a good place because it deserves to be a good place for the next, and future generations.*

**Shatha al-Ghafri,**  
Applied  
Geosciences  
graduate and  
geologist, Oman



*I was motivated to join Science Camp to explore more about the environment. Being inspired by environmental science I saw the camp as an opportunity to dive deeper into it. Additionally, participating in the camp provided me with the chance to meet like-minded individuals, engage in hands-on experiments, or learn from knowledgeable*

*mentors. I gained lots of new knowledge.*

*I plan to actively share what I have learned from the science camp course with my peers, institution, and colleagues. I want to develop a plan where Aquaculture enables the escape from hunger and provides a way towards improvement.*

**Yasmin al-Alawai,**  
Sultan Qaboos  
University and  
Ministry of  
Agriculture,  
Fisheries and  
water resources



*I'm just starting my career. I just finished my bachelor's and I have absolutely no idea what to do next and this is a great opportunity to just learn about the different environmental challenges and learning about what other people are doing in a similar field, which kind of helps guide me.*

*I absolutely recommend that other Omani students to join science camp. Whether you know they're just taking their bachelors like me or, you know, they're studying higher degrees like masters and doctorate degrees.*

**Maram Alfarsi**  
(recent SQU  
graduate, Oman)



**earthwatch**  
EUROPE

*I am from Oman and I felt welcome to participate in this science camp. The friendly environment encourages people to share knowledge to speak out to each other and build relationships.*

*I want to develop our environmental activities at the Oman Botanic Gardens. For my next steps I want to concentrate more on Community engagement in the research and I want to explore Omani Native plants as food future resources. This Science camp has given me good contacts and resources.*

**Mohammed  
al-Saidi, Oman  
Botanic Gardens**



*I have 16 years of experience working with nature and engaging with communities and volunteers. Participating in the Science Camp has been a worthwhile experience for me professionally and I feel more connected to nature. My story is about identifying freshwater fish winners and losers to climate change and I want to explore long-term community engagement in my research.*

*Three words I would use to describe my experience on Science Camp are: Informed, Interesting, Life-experience.*

**Aziza al-Adhoobi,**  
Sultan Qaboos  
University (PhD  
student) and  
Environment  
Authority  
(Wetland  
management  
Head of Section)



Are you an early career environmental scientist interested in using community engagement in your research? You can apply to join the next science camp in September.

<https://earthwatch.org.uk/sciencecamps/>

# THE BOS LIBRARY

The BOS Library is the  
UK's Only Dedicated  
Omani Reference  
Library.

Our library is the best place to discover Oman through literature with 600+ titles covering UK-Oman politics, diplomacy, history, culture, economics, natural heritage and more.

We continue to accumulate an increasingly useful collection of books on the Sultanate and the British connections in particular. Many are gifts from members

and authors, and we are also prepared to buy as appropriate.

It is often a great spot for our members to get together and have conversations on various Oman-related books they've read over the years, especially before our lectures or events. We also regularly receive external visitors who are interested in our collection.

If you would like to visit and browse our library, then please get in touch at  
[rsvp@britishomani.org](mailto:rsvp@britishomani.org)





# STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

## OMAN SCHEME: A SPECIAL YEAR

2024 marked an important milestone for our long-running student scheme, as we sent our 100th volunteer to the Sultan's School in Oman! During this period, we also changed the name of the scheme (from the Gap Year Scheme) and welcomed our Trustee, Debbie Martin, as the new Society Scheme lead.

Since the last Review, we have sent eight students to the Sultan's School: Elizabeth Steel, Manon Fraser, Rafe Burfield and Araminta Lyne (2023 cohort) and Najma Elmi, Eesa Iqbal, Clara Anderson and Andrew Ali (2024 cohort).

We would like to extend our special thanks to Sean and Laura Griffin and all the staff at the Sultan's School for offering our students such a consistently warm welcome, valuable experience and wonderful introduction to Oman over the past 13 years.

### 100 VOLUNTEERS, OVER THE YEARS BY LAURA AND SEAN GRIFFIN, SCHOOL SCHEME COORDINATORS

Thirteen years ago, we were sitting on a beach with colleagues who were leaving Oman. They asked if we'd like to take over looking after the volunteers. Since then, twice a year we have welcomed a group of young people, liaising with the school to help sort out visas and accommodation.

The scheme is a wonderful opportunity for the student volunteers. They are welcomed into the Sultan's School community, joining staff for sports and outings, and taking a role in classes and on school trips. The student volunteers often strike very close friendships with the boarders who come to the school on scholarships.

We try to make sure that each group gets to visit as many of the different parts of Oman as possible; usually the old capital of Nizwa, definitely to the beach, the mountains and the desert for camping trips. This is where being the gappy liaison is so great for us; after 20 years here it helps us to keep seeing Oman afresh through the eyes of the student volunteers who are always captivated by the beauty and charm of this country. But apart from that the volunteers are some of the most interesting and fun young people imaginable. Many of them we continue to count as friends and their presence is firmly woven into our memories of the Sultan's School, Muscat and Oman.



## SCHOOL VISIT BY SOCIETY TRUSTEE DEBBIE MARTIN

In November 2023 I made a visit to the Sultan's School in Muscat, nearly seventeen years to the day since I was last there on a filming assignment for BBC's Blue Peter.

The school made such an impact on me the first time around – not only for its size and state-of-the-art facilities, but most of all for the amazingly warm welcome from both staff and pupils. And it didn't disappoint this time around.

I was there to meet the latest cohort of student volunteers supported by the British Omani Society – Minty, Elizabeth, Rafe and Manon. They were eight weeks into their three-month volunteering placement, brilliantly supported by the effervescent Laura and Sean Griffin, both teachers at the school, who make all of this possible.



*What started out as a brilliant initiative back in 2002, called 'The Gap Year Scheme', has grown beyond anything we could have hoped for. As the scheme approaches its 13th year, it's had a name change, becoming 'The Student Volunteer Scheme', to make it more inclusive and it's recently welcomed its 100th student volunteer!*



After being whisked through to join the school for morning assembly and the flag-raising ceremony, I was then shown around the rest of the campus by the student volunteers – popping in on an interactive maths class, before visiting the boarding house and the impressive library.

Over a delicious school dinner in the canteen, I was able to chat to some of the support staff, before joining the

Senior Leadership Team for coffee and dates in the headmaster's office to learn more about the impact the student volunteers have on school life.

What started out as a brilliant initiative back in 2002, called 'The Gap Year Scheme', has grown beyond anything we could have hoped for.

As the scheme approaches its 13th year, it's had a name change, becoming 'The Student Volunteer Scheme', to



*We try to make sure that each group gets to visit as many of the different parts of Oman as possible; usually the old capital of Nizwa, definitely to the beach, the mountains and the desert for camping trips.*



make it more inclusive, and it's recently welcomed its 100th student volunteer!

To celebrate, there was a gathering of Student Volunteer Alumni at Sackville Street on 19th June – and the icing on the cake... Laura and Sean, to whom we share our warmest thanks for their continued dedication and hard work, were the guests of honour!

To hear more from the Student Volunteers and to watch the short trailer we filmed at the school, scan the QR code. ■



To find out about applying for future Student Volunteer Oman Scheme opportunities please visit the Society's website:

[www.britishomani.org/  
studentvolunteersoman](http://www.britishomani.org/studentvolunteersoman)



# NAJMA SHARES HER MEMORIES

A REPORT FROM STUDENT VOLUNTEER, NAJMA ELMI



My name is Najma Elmi and I'm a recent graduate from SOAS, University of London with a degree in International Relations and Development Studies. Initially, I applied to the Student Volunteer Scheme because I've always had an interest in the Middle East, and learning Arabic has been a top priority. Oman, being known for its hospitable people and remarkable nature, seemed like a great place to live and explore.

Prior to this scheme, I had worked in schools across London but being at the Sultan's School here in Muscat was such a culturally immersive experience. I had the opportunity to attend many school trips to landmarks across Muscat as well as take part in school extra-curricular activities. Taking part in these activities was a fantastic way to get to know the students outside the classroom environment. After expressing my personal interests and hobbies to other staff members, I began volunteering with the Year 7 girls football team –

accompanying them to their tournaments with schools across Muscat. I really connected with the students living on campus as we spent time after school during study time helping with English and Maths – but also beyond academic support, we would play sports and chat amongst ourselves.

Similarly, during my free time I had the chance to really travel across Oman and get to know the country – having visited nearly 7 different cities, all with distinct regional customs. During these solo trips, I met wonderful people who taught me so much about their regions and traditions.

My time at the Sultan's School coincided with the holy month of Ramadan and it was a beautifully wholesome experience to break fast with so many different people and families – although, it was extra special to have iftars with the scholars living on campus.

I've left Oman feeling like I've found a place I could potentially call home in the future, as this country really embraces



*I've really felt like a member of the Sultan's School community and have developed great relationships with staff and my students – many of whom I've already promised that I'll return to Muscat soon!*

you with its overwhelming generosity and kindness. It's taught me so much about myself, my faith and Arab culture. The interactions, conversations and experiences I've had with people here have been wonderful and insightful as I now have a much deeper understanding and appreciation for Omani culture. I believe that part of truly understanding a society is interacting with its young people and that's something that can only really be achieved with programs such as the Student Volunteer Scheme. It was also a great

opportunity to share parts of my culture and upbringing with the students – some of whom had yet to travel beyond Oman.

I've really felt like a member of the Sultan's School community and have developed great relationships with staff and my students – many of whom I've already promised that I'll return to Muscat soon! Taking part in the Student Volunteers Scheme has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life thus far. I'm so grateful that programmes like this exist because I can't think of a better way to

immerse yourself in a new environment – but also I can't think of a better period in life than this to do such an experience. Although my current plans for the near future include working with grassroots organisations helping vulnerable people (e.g. refugees, asylum seekers etc) in London – this scheme has helped me also to consider other career paths, such as teaching in the Middle East. I've gotten far



more out of this experience than I could've ever wished for, and for that I am eternally grateful. Thanks to all the connections and networks I've made – Muscat for me now feels like a home away from home.

My advice to anybody interested in this scheme is to apply with an open mind and heart, and be ready for all the adventures that await you on the other side. I'd encourage you to really put yourself out there and accept offers to attend/visit as many places as possible. Oman is a hidden gem of the Gulf, with so much to offer, so make sure to travel beyond the capital whenever you get the chance! ■



# CLARA SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF OMAN

A REPORT FROM STUDENT VOLUNTEER, CLARA ANDERSON

My trip to Oman was one of the most enriching and interesting experiences an 18 year old can have and I am extremely grateful to have been able to have this opportunity and for all the people I was able to meet. Travelling to such an interesting, hospitable, safe and welcoming country for free is an opportunity no 18 year old should say no to.

This gap year scheme gave me the opportunity to learn about the Omani/ Islamic culture whilst travelling around the country visiting Oman's mountains, beaches, deserts and wadis. As a gap student in the Sultan's School, I worked during the week as a teaching assistant for English, maths and science and on the weekends we toured around Oman's amazing landscapes. Personally, the highlights were getting to know the students in the school and traveling around Oman, the weather is also a big plus! You end up spending a lot of time with the students and thus you create bonds with them and friendships form quickly making it an enriching experience. Living in a completely different

country with a completely different culture is something I deeply enjoyed.

This scheme helped to broaden my horizons by learning about the Omani culture, simple things like the way they eat, the way they structure their day and how they get ready to go out. Experiencing this stark difference in culture as a white christian was challenging at times, I was away from home and out of my comfort zone and many things felt alien to me, however, you quickly settle in, make friends and the Omanis are very welcoming and therefore you are able to get so much out of the experience. The opportunity to learn Arabic was also a challenging yet interesting experience. After a lot of practice, (I was a total beginner) I learnt the alphabet and could read and write a bit. I want to continue with my Arabic and hope to keep improving. Being a teaching assistant made me realise that being a teacher could be something I would want to do in the future, especially an international teacher traveling the world. Next year I have a place at Exeter University and I will study



History and a Modern Language.

Overall, I would highly recommend this experience for anyone taking a gap year pre or post university if you enjoy spending time with children, outdoor activities, meeting new people, learning about other cultures and travelling because you certainly won't be disappointed then! If the aim of the scheme was to provide friendship and understanding between the British and the Omani, it's certainly been the case for me. ■



# ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME

The scheme takes place at the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers, formerly known as Sultan Qaboos College, located in Manah, about 20 minutes from the city of Nizwa.

The programme includes full board at the student hostel attached to the college in Manah. There are five hours of tuition per day, focused mainly on Modern Standard Arabic, but also including classes and practical language exchange in Omani dialect. The scheme is generously funded by the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Scan the QR code to watch an informative video on the Arabic Language Scheme on our YouTube channel



## AIMS OF THE COURSE:

- To provide British nationals with the opportunity to improve upon their current level of Arabic proficiency.
- Level of Arabic must be at Mid-Advanced level.
- To provide British leaders of the future with an understanding of the history, environment, and culture of the Sultanate and its people.
- To develop strong links between a variety of British universities and the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers.

## DR ELISABETH KENDALL, SCHEME LEADER, THE MISTRESS OF GIRTON COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY, AND BOS TRUSTEE

It's hard to believe that the Arabic Language Scheme is now in its fourteenth year, and what a joy to report that it's still hugely popular and continues to go from strength to strength. This burgeoning success is a testament not only to the hard work of the staff at "Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic Language to Non-Native Speakers" but also to the consistent vision and sustained support of the Diwan of the Royal Court of Oman and the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In July and August 2023, 10 talented students, brimming with enthusiasm, journeyed out to Oman to immerse themselves in intensive Arabic language study at Sultan Qaboos Institute, located in Manah, around 20 minutes from the historic town of Nizwa in the Omani interior. As ever,

they returned to the UK full of praise for the dedication, expertise and professionalism of the staff at Sultan Qaboos Institute. Equally significant, during their sojourn in the Sultanate, they formed lasting impressions of Oman's warm hospitality, enchanting culture, stirring history, and scenic beauty. They will carry these positive images of Oman with them throughout their future lives and careers. I hope you will enjoy reading their glowing reports as much as I did.



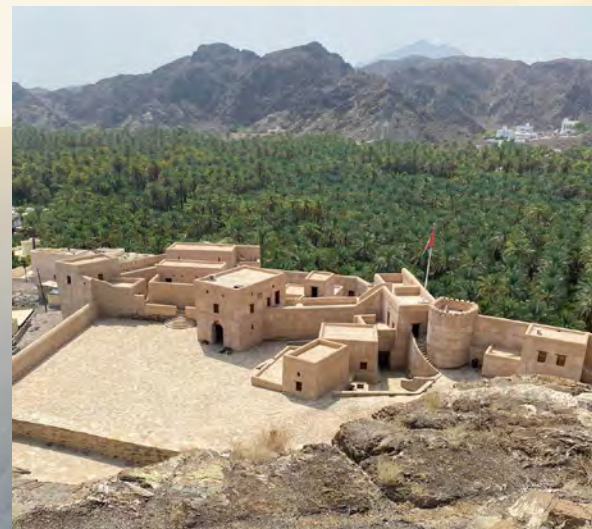
## JAMES SHAW

ARABIC AND PERSIAN  
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

For me, the weekend trips provided a real highlight from the Language Scheme. These varied from little day excursions to nearby historic towns, such as Nizwa and



Izki, to longer overnight stays in Sharqiyya and Muscat. Each trip had a full itinerary that allowed us to experience Oman in its entirety and showed us the breadth and depth of its cultural heritage and history.



## ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME



The activities were also varied, ensuring that everyone got to do something that they genuinely enjoyed. There was usually a museum visit, some swimming in a wadi or two, a tour of a historic building, and plenty of delicious food. Many of the places we visited were utterly unique and will stay with me for a very long time.



### JACK WILLIAM JOHNSON SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON MSC POLITICS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

I could not be more grateful for the opportunity awarded to me by the British Omani Society to study Arabic full-time in Oman. Previously, I had been endlessly searching and applying for opportunities to come to the Middle East in order to consolidate my speaking and listening skills in Arabic. Having now been immersed in Oman for two months, I certainly feel that my abilities have improved considerably and my knowledge of the language and the local dialect have

helped me to obtain a conversational and professional ability in Arabic at an Upper Intermediate level.

The wider opportunities to travel around Oman, meet like-minded people from all over the world, and engage with the local culture have also enriched my experience on the programme. The weekend trips were awe-inspiring and included balanced mix of history and tradition, contemporary culture, and excursions into rural areas to explore Oman's wildlife.



The Sultan Qaboos Institute makes a great effort to involve the students in the local community through holding Arabic lectures and workshops concerning everything from economics to calligraphy. We even visited Nizwa University and local artisan businesses. The latter in particular opened our eyes to the lives of people who provide the foundation of unique and resilient communities living in some of the harshest terrains in the world.

When we were not ultra-busy with action-packed trips and events, we resided in a tranquil part of Oman (Manah) in which we were well housed and provided with a great variety of food every day. The day-to-day living was a bit of a concern for me before the trip, but I have really enjoyed sharing this huge guesthouse with other people and looked forward to every meal – so there is nothing to worry about in terms of the quality of life here. I could not recommend this scheme highly enough for someone at an intermediate level of Arabic.

### JACK DICKENS UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD MPHIL MODERN MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES AND ARABIC

Halfway through our eight-week stay in Manah, I was invited to attend an Omani wedding ceremony in the nearby town of Adam. In a room full of Omanis dressed in their bright white dishdashas and colourful masars, I had the great honour of watching the groom perform his "khutba" as well as conversing with my fellow guests about various aspects of their culture and traditions. It was a special day, one made even more special by the warmth and generosity of Omani hospitality.





This was just one among many unforgettable and enriching experiences over the course of two months, but for me it captures why the British-Omani Society's Arabic Language Scheme is so special. Not only were we able to practise our Arabic every day in the classroom, but we were also provided with unique opportunities to use that Arabic during a whole host of special cultural occasions and everyday interactions.



It was also a real pleasure to be surrounded by so many students who are interested in the Arabic language and the Arab World in general. Our time in the Bayt al-Diyafa (Guesthouse) in Manah was generally filled with fun and fascinating conversations and I know that many of us will remain good friends for the rest of our lives.

This has truly been the trip of a lifetime and I will carry many fond memories from Oman with me forever. Thank you to the Society for this extraordinary and lifechanging opportunity.



## ALI HUGHES

Spending the past two months in Oman has been amazing and I am immensely grateful for this opportunity.

I really appreciated how much the professors went out of their way to support us both in and out of the classroom. The

language partner scheme was a great opportunity to make friends with a local person and get a better insight into their culture. The guesthouse provided us with everything we needed, from three delicious and healthy meals a day, to air-conditioned dormitories and even a gym. The guesthouse staff were extremely welcoming and caring.



The trips organised by the institute were a brilliant way to spend the weekend. From trying our hand at pottery, to watching turtles at a sanctuary, to being shown around various tourist attractions in Muscat – the staff went out of their way to make the cultural programme fun, interesting and exciting.



My personal highlight of Oman has been its natural beauty. Once again, the staff at the institute were extremely helpful when some of us wanted to explore this – organising a minibus to take us to a hiking spot in Wadi Maidan and lending us their gear so that we could go camping in Jabal Shams.



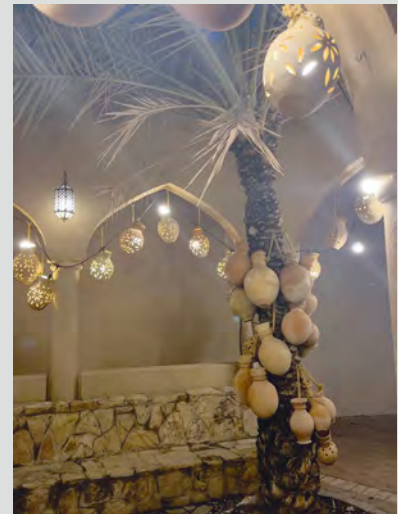
## KIERAN ELLIOTT DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Having spent an amazing four months in Jordan only last year, it initially seemed unlikely that any other place could beat it. Yet, as the urban landscape of Muscat slipped away as we drove into Dakhiliyah from Muscat Airport, the striking natural beauty of rural Oman was unlike anything I'd seen before. Jordan certainly had some competition after all!



At the Sultan Qaboos Institute, I was pleasantly surprised that the classes were focussed on new, interesting topics that encouraged us to use new vocabulary naturally and to enhance the communication of our ideas. Topics ranged from the economy and human rights to elections and the importance of the Arabic language internationally. All of this was under the supervision of our attentive teachers who encouraged discussion and cross-cultural dialogue.

However, although the aim of the scheme was to improve our Arabic level, it was emphasised to us that Arabic doesn't exist in a vacuum in Oman, but rather interacts with the hospitality, food, music, and people of the Sultanate more generally. In this respect, the school has a dedicated team that run a cultural programme to ensure that no stone is left unturned. A particular highlight for me



was our weekend trip to the Sharqiyah region, where we visited Sur, Wadi Tiwi, and Ras al-Jinz Turtle Sanctuary to see both turtles laying their eggs and the hatchlings making their way to the sea.

Outside of the trips organised by the school, we had ample time to explore the surrounding area or organise our own trips. We frequently visited Nizwa Souq as well as organising weekend trips to Muscat, Jabal Akhdar and Salalah. By doing so, we are able to see the diversity across the whole of Oman, not only in terms of landscape but also in terms of dialect which changes from region to region.





It's safe to say that my experience in Oman was nothing short of incredible. From the hospitable people, the breathtaking landscape, and the experiences I shared with new friends along the way, I feel immensely grateful for this opportunity. Very few are the places that can teach you so many different things in eight weeks, but Manah really was an exception to the rule.

## AMBASSADOR VISIT

BY ALEX THOMAS, 2023 ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME STUDENT

Our cohort of ten British students currently studying in Oman as part of The Society's Arabic Language Scheme are nearing the end of their time in the Sultanate with only a few weeks left of study. Nevertheless, they were able to organise a meeting with the newly appointed British Ambassador to Oman, Dr Liane Saunders, before their return to the UK.

We were invited to the British Embassy in Muscat to talk to the Ambassador about Omani-British relations as well as our own experiences so far in Oman. We also heard about Dr Saunders's wide-ranging career in diplomacy in the Middle East; it was particularly interesting to hear her speak about one of the highlights of her career, which was her time as a negotiator for the Kurdish peace process in northern Iraq.

In addition to speaking to the Ambassador herself, we were able to talk to other members of the team at the British Embassy to understand more about what a

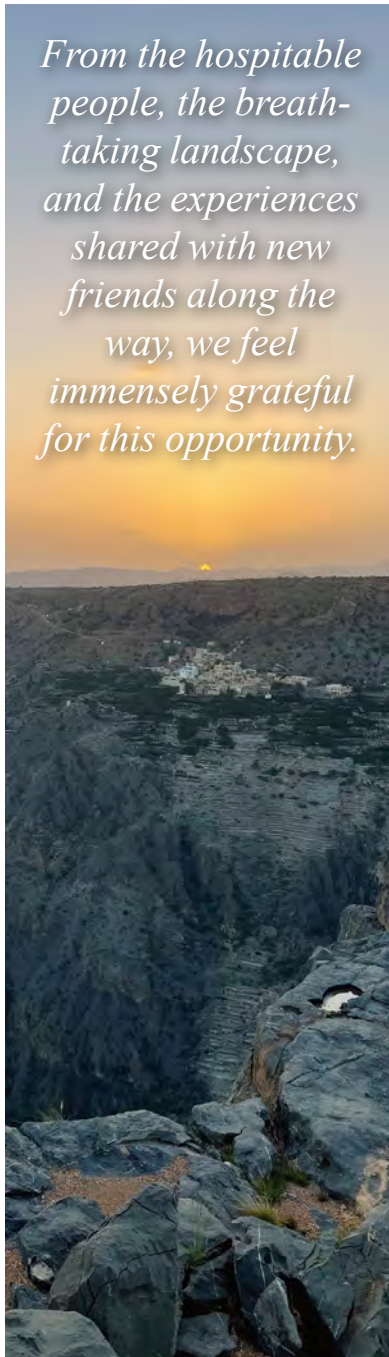
*From the hospitable people, the breathtaking landscape, and the experiences shared with new friends along the way, we feel immensely grateful for this opportunity.*



career in diplomacy entails and how the Embassy functions on a day-to-day basis. We were also kindly given a comprehensive tour of the Embassy building and grounds which I am sure was a particular highlight for several of the students.

Having already spent several weeks in Oman so far, it was very interesting to learn more about the special relationship that the UK enjoys with Oman. Considering what we have learned during our time here about Oman Vision 2040, the Ambassador's insights were fascinating regarding what role Britain can play in helping Oman to achieve their vision.

I am very grateful for the Ambassador's hospitality at the Embassy and all of us thoroughly enjoyed our time there. It truly felt like a taste of home! I found the visit very insightful and it shone a light on a career path about which many of us knew very little. After our visit, I am certain that very exciting things lie ahead within the strong British-Omani relationship in the future. ■



# OMAN BRITISH BUSINESS CONNECTIONS

ARTICLE BY CHRISTOPHER BREEZE

BOS VICE CHAIRMAN AND OMANI BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL CHAIRMAN

Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, who founded the Omani British Business Council (OBBC) in early 2016, stepped down as its Chairman in September 2023.

Sir Sherard worked tirelessly to promote bilateral trade and investment between Oman and the UK and was instrumental in bringing OBBC, hitherto a separate legal entity, under the umbrella of the British Omani Society during the COVID-19 pandemic. The British Omani Society Trustees formally adopted OBBC in early 2022, appointing Sir Sherard as a Trustee and unifying British Omani Society corporate membership with OBBC membership. OBBC's board became a sub-committee of the British Omani Society. We extend our thanks to Sir Sherard for his contributions and wish him success for the future.

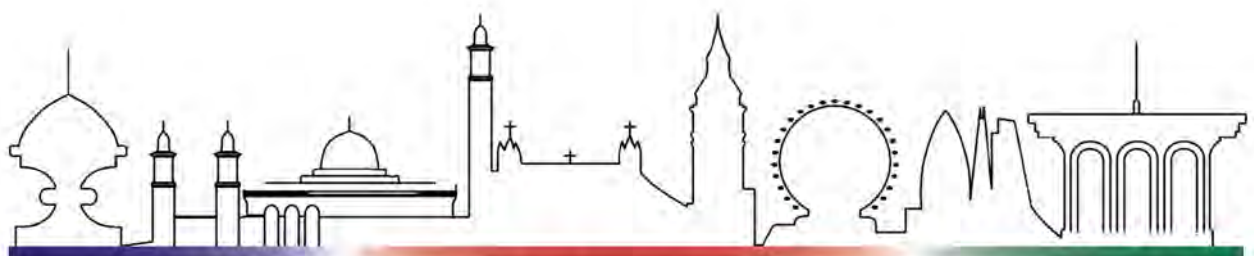
I was appointed Chair of the OBBC sub-committee following Sir Sherard's departure, and have been supported by Trustees Ollie Blake, Richard Stanford and Riyad Daud. The purpose of the sub-committee is to focus on the economic, industrial and commercial aspects of the Society's charitable objects, aiming to promote the close economic relationship between the UK and Oman and develop bilateral trade and investment. We work closely with our Omani counterpart, the Omani British Society (OBS, formerly the Omani British Friendship Association), and a variety of other organisations to enhance the unique friendship and commercial links between the two countries and to support our corporate members.

In November 2023, OBS organised a UK-Oman Business Roundtable discussion at the British Ambassador's residence in Muscat. The meeting was facilitated by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and attended by leading business executives and members of OBS and the British Omani Society. The discussion was lively and provided valuable insights into the



progress of the Sultanate's economic and commercial reforms, the remaining hurdles in easing the business environment and the effectiveness of its communication strategy. BCG summarised the discussion and conclusions and OBS distributed this as feedback to the appropriate authorities in Oman.

In the spring of this year, we hosted a talk by Hamid Hamirani, a former advisor



## OMANI BRITISH BUSINESS COUNCIL

to the Omani Minister of Finance and co-founder of EHA Advisory, which advises sovereign and institutional investment funds on how to realise their mandates effectively and responsibly. Hamid gave an insightful presentation to our members on “Navigating Oman’s Fiscal and Diversification Reforms”. He set out Oman’s approach to policy in comparison with other Gulf countries, as well as Oman’s commitment to economic diversification. Hamid also highlighted the next steps towards attaining long-term economic growth, referencing Oman’s Vision 2040 strategy. The presentation provided a comprehensive overview of Oman’s road towards a thriving and sustainable economic future.

We collaborated with Addleshaw Goddard, a leading UK law firm with a global footprint, to provide insight into Oman’s 2023 Labour Law. The law has significant implications for both businesses and employees in Oman, many of which affect British Omani Society members who operate or plan to operate in the Sultanate.

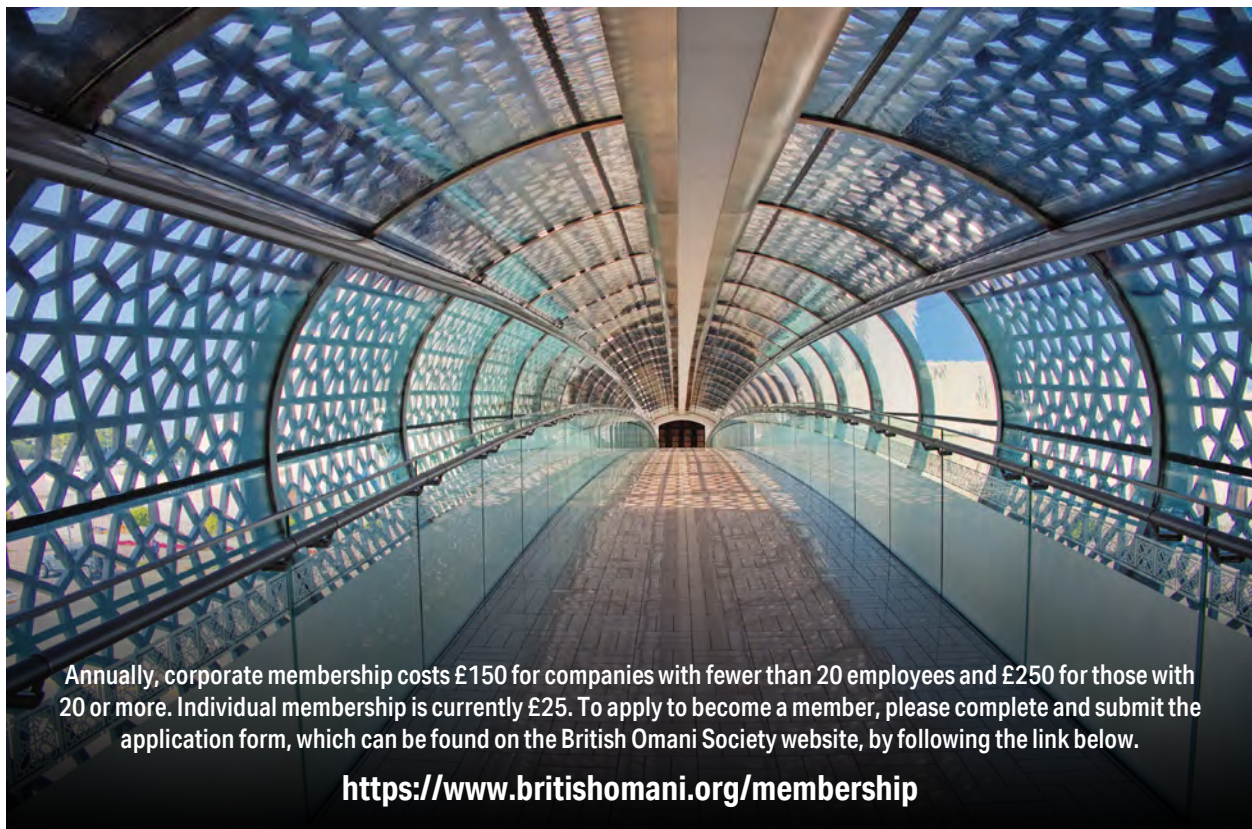
In May 2024, we hosted a delegation of Omani business people and entrepreneurs, led by Areej Mohsin Darwish, Oman

Chamber of Commerce and Industry Board Member and Chair of the Business Women Committee. We showcased the British Omani Society’s activities and how they support Oman’s Vision 2040. The delegation was in the UK to attend the Oman-UK Business Forum, an event organised by the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, featuring presentations from leading Omani organisations. It was well attended, including by the Chairs of the British Omani Society and OBS, Richard Stanford and Saleh Zakwani. Key themes of the Business Forum included Oman’s strategic position, free zones, investor protection regulations, and entrepreneurial success stories. The Forum highlighted the empowerment of Omani women entrepreneurs and the creation of a portal for collaboration.

In His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s address at the convening of the eighth term of the Council of Oman in November 2023, the Sultan noted rapid advances in frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), and their potential to enhance productivity and efficiency. He recognised the need to

position the digital economy as a pivotal and central pillar of Oman’s national economy. Inspired by this vision, we are exploring with OBS different ways in which we can bring together the expertise of the two countries’ digital transformation and AI sectors. Key potential partners in this would be ITHCA, Oman’s Information and Communication Technologies Group, and Oman’s Ministry of Transport, Communications and IT.

The British Omani Society welcomes corporate membership applications throughout the year. Corporate membership includes all the features and benefits of individual membership plus access to the business offering, which aims to deliver insight, networking and competitive advantage to Omani and UK companies through briefings, events, and updates from senior visiting officials and business leaders. Members are part of an exceptional network of Omani and British people at senior levels of business, academia, and government. Corporate membership also includes the use of the Board Room and Lecture Room in the British Omani Society offices in the heart of London. ■



Annually, corporate membership costs £150 for companies with fewer than 20 employees and £250 for those with 20 or more. Individual membership is currently £25. To apply to become a member, please complete and submit the application form, which can be found on the British Omani Society website, by following the link below.

**<https://www.britishomani.org/membership>**



# VISION 2040: NAVIGATING OMAN'S FISCAL AND DIVERSIFICATION REFORMS

Q&A WITH BOS SPEAKER HAMID HAMIRANI

Christopher Breeze, Chairman of the OBBC, introduces Hamid Hamirani on March 27th 2024 as he navigates us through Oman's Fiscal and Diversification Reforms.

## **What were the key drivers behind Oman's decision to implement reforms, and how have these reforms been progressing?**

The key drivers include fiscal resilience, increasing the contributions from non-hydrocarbon activities, job creation, social reforms to enhance quality of life, investments and funding for SMEs, and a boosted private sector role.

High oil prices in 2022 and expenditure rationalization, with current spending falling from 36% of GDP in 2020 to 27% in 2022 and capital spending from 8% to 3%, contributed to the fiscal balance shifting to a surplus of 10.1% of GDP in 2022, up from 3.1% in the previous year, despite a substantial rise in fuel subsidies to 2.9% of non-hydrocarbon GDP in 2022 from 0.2% in

2021. Government debt decreased from about 67.9% of GDP in 2020 to 36.7% in 2023 and is projected to fall below 30% by 2031.

The fiscal space will allow Oman to continue to focus on key areas of reforms:

**Economic Diversification:** Reducing reliance on oil and gas by enhancing sectors like manufacturing, tourism, and services to create a more balanced economy.

**Labour Market Reforms:** Enhancing employment opportunities through updated labour laws, fair wages, improved working conditions, and increased female workforce participation.

**Job Creation:** Stimulating job growth through entrepreneurship support, vocational training, and investment in high-employment sectors.

**Social Reforms:** Improving healthcare, education, and social security to ensure inclusive growth and a better quality of life for citizens.

**Investing in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Supporting SMEs with funding, business development services, and regulatory reforms to drive innovation and job creation.

**Private Sector Contribution:** Encouraging private investment through regulatory reforms, infrastructure development, and incentives to create a dynamic and resilient economy.

Overall, the nation's strategy focuses on diversification, fiscal stability, and inclusive growth through comprehensive reforms and targeted investments.

### Can you tell us more about your time working as an adviser to the Minister of Finance?

During my tenure as the advisor to the Minister of Finance (MoF), we established a strong foundation for corporate governance for the State General Reserves Fund and the Oman Investment Fund. This involved empowering management while introducing checks, balances, and

oversight mechanisms. This laid the groundwork for the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) as it stands today.

We adopted a collaborative and business-oriented approach between the MoF, private shareholders, and Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) for planning and decision-making regarding long term capital and operational expenditures, asset integrity, as well as health and safety. This collaboration significantly boosted oil and gas production, led to new gas discoveries, and notably reduced the unit technical cost.

Within the MoF, we enhanced institutional capacity by establishing the Micro Fiscal Unit, the Debt Management Office, the Sovereign Rating Team, and the IMF Article IV Consultation Team. Additionally, we initiated the Government Financial Management Information and Program-Based Budgeting project.

Despite the prolonged period of low oil prices from 2015 to 2020, Oman successfully completed several major infrastructure projects such as the Duqm Development, Muscat International Airport, and an extensive network of roads. According to the IMF 2023 report, Oman's infrastructure quality scores are higher than those of other emerging market economies, and

comparable to or slightly better than the averages for GCC and advanced economies.

### Can you discuss the strategies Oman has employed to diversify its economy and what impact these initiatives have had so far?

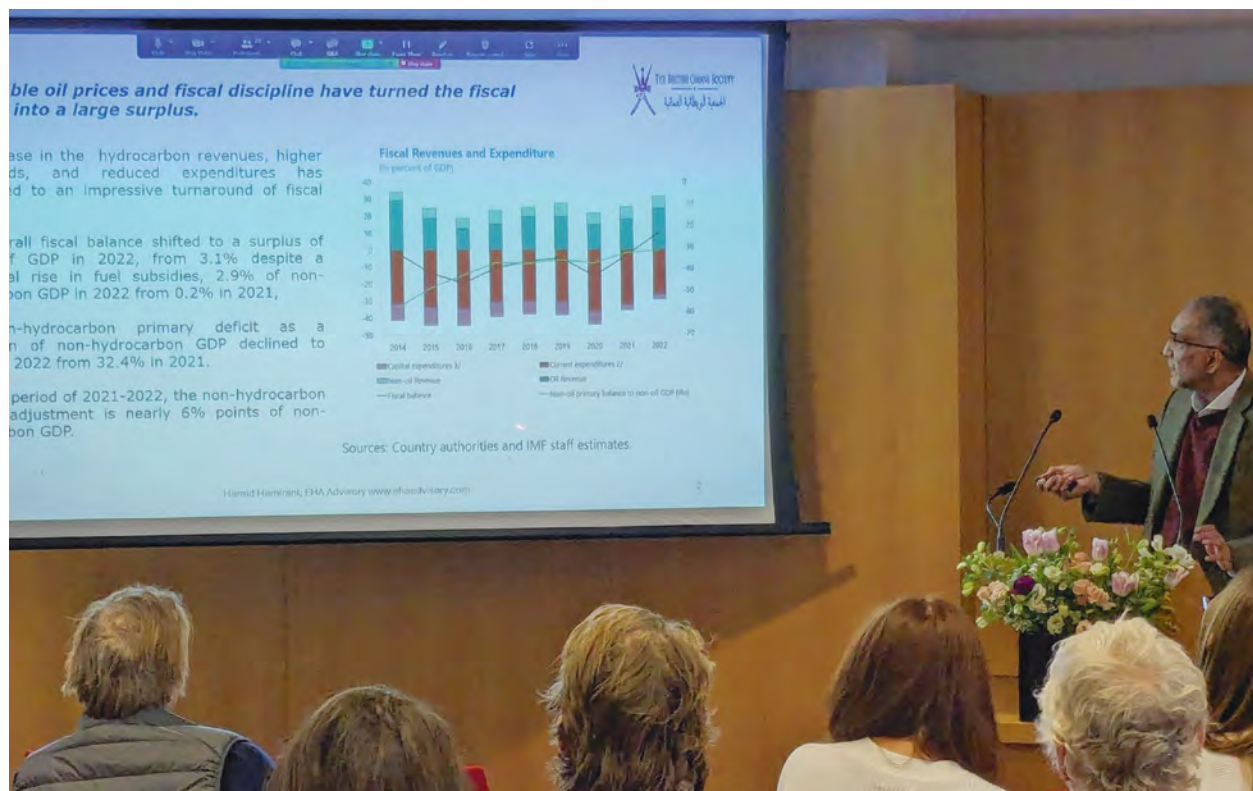
Investing in quality infrastructure, human resources, regulatory reforms, and financial incentives for SMEs and increasing private sector and women participation rates have been the key pillars of Oman's reform strategy.

In 2020, the MoF transferred most state-owned entities to the Oman Investment Authority (OIA). This move was aimed at leveraging the OIA's specialized investment expertise to manage and control these entities, allowing the MoF to concentrate on fiscal policy and public finance management.

The key sectors focussed on are tourism, manufacturing, logistics, fisheries, and renewable energy.

### Tourism

Oman has significantly invested in its tourism infrastructure, highlighting its distinctive cultural heritage and natural landscapes. Key initiatives encompass developing luxury resorts, eco-tourism projects, and international marketing campaigns.



As a result, the tourism sector has experienced steady growth, substantially contributing to GDP, as well as generating employment opportunities. Oman's status as a high-end travel destination has been enhanced, drawing visitors from Europe, Asia, and elsewhere in the GCC.

### Manufacturing

The establishment of industrial estates and free zones, such as the Sohar Free Zone and the Duqm Special Economic Zone, have attracted foreign direct investment and fostered the growth of industries such as petrochemicals, steel, and aluminium. The manufacturing sector's contribution to GDP has increased, although it still faces challenges, such as competition from more established industrial nations.

### Logistics

Investment into quality infrastructure, including ports, airports, and road infrastructure, outside the state of Hormuz is contributing towards Oman becoming a regional logistics hub. The development of ports in Salalah, Sohar, and Duqm has improved Oman's connectivity and logistics capabilities. The sector has become a significant contributor to the economy, enhancing trade, and attracting logistics companies.

### Fisheries and Agriculture

Oman has invested in modernizing its fisheries sector and developing aquaculture. This has led to increased production and export of seafood products, contributing to food security, and providing livelihoods for coastal communities.

### Private Sector Development and SME Support

Regulatory reforms, financial incentives, and entrepreneurship programs have been introduced to encourage private sector growth and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The private sector's role in the economy has gradually increased, fostering innovation and job creation. However, challenges such as access to finance and market competition remain for SMEs.

The OIA began its divestment strategy in 2022 to boost private sector involvement. In the previous year, the sale of OQ Gas Networks, which generated USD 749 million, became the largest listing since

2010. There are 30 assets in the pipeline, with a focus on initial public offerings. These include significant deals within the energy and logistics sectors.

### Development of Human Capital

Investing in education and workforce skills is a cornerstone of Oman's diversification strategy. Initiatives include improving educational infrastructure, enhancing vocational training, and aligning curricula with market needs.

These efforts are gradually improving the skill level of the Omani workforce, making them better suited for roles in diversified sectors. Nonetheless, there is still a need to reduce the dependency on expatriate labour in certain industries.

The new labour law aligns maternity leave with international standards to facilitate women's participation in the economy, thereby boosting productivity.

### Renewable Energy Initiatives

Oman is exploring renewable energy sources, particularly solar and wind power, to ensure sustainable energy supply and reduce its environmental impact. Projects like the Miraah Solar Plant and wind farms in Dhofar are steps towards a greener economy. The renewable energy sector is still in its nascent stages, but holds significant potential for future growth.

By leveraging renewable energy resources to generate green hydrogen, Oman is positioning itself as a leader in the burgeoning hydrogen economy. Investments totalling approximately USD 30 billion have already been committed, with total investments projected to reach around USD 140 billion by 2050.

### How does Oman's approach to fiscal and diversification reforms differ from those of other countries in the region?

Oman has traditionally taken a gradual and cautious approach to economic reforms, such as the phased introduction of VAT and subsidy reductions, aiming to balance diversification with social stability. In contrast, countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have implemented rapid and bold measures, exemplified by Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and its other ambitious initiatives.

Oman instead emphasizes its support for SMEs and entrepreneurship alongside inclusive growth and job creation so that it ensures all economic benefits are distributed widely among its citizens. While other GCC countries also focus on job creation, their approaches vary. For instance, the UAE places emphasis on its technology and innovation sectors, attracting global talent and investment, but with less focus on citizen-specific employment compared to Oman. Additionally, Oman prioritizes sectors like tourism, fisheries, logistics, and manufacturing, leveraging its cultural heritage and strategic location. Other GCC countries diversify based on their unique strengths: Saudi Arabia focuses on technology, entertainment, and mega-projects like NEOM; the UAE emphasizes finance, real estate, and tech innovation; and Qatar invests in education, sports, and media.

In renewable energy, Oman is gradually integrating solar and wind power, taking a more conservative approach compared to the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which have more aggressive renewable energy projects.

Oman cautiously approaches fiscal policy and subsidy reforms, ensuring measures like VAT implementation are socially manageable. In contrast, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have rapidly introduced fiscal reforms and austerity measures. Oman's measured pace in privatization and foreign investment aims to align with national interests and long-term goals, whereas Saudi Arabia and the UAE pursue more aggressive privatization and attract substantial foreign investment through their free zones and more liberal business environments.

### What opportunities do you see for the further advancement of Oman's economy?

Oman has several opportunities for advancing its economy, leveraging its existing strengths and strategic initiatives.

### Leveraging global innovation & Oman's Strategic Location for economic growth

According to the IMF 2023 report, incentivizing more investment in research and development would boost innovation



## NAVIGATING OMAN'S FISCAL AND DIVERSIFICATION REFORMS

and set the ground for a more productive and diversified economy.

In 2016, Oman made significant investments in Oxford Science Enterprises (OSE) and the Cambridge Innovation Centre (CIC), both affiliated with globally recognized and respected universities. Among the top investors in OSE are Google Ventures, Sequoia, Temasek, and Oman Investment Fund (now part of Oman Investment Authority).

OSE has a diverse portfolio of over 140 companies, some of which have already achieved commercial viability and are ready to scale up their operations. Oman's strategic location, with three large deep-water ports and free trade zones outside the Strait of Hormuz, offers a unique advantage for exporting innovative products. This positions Oman as an ideal hub for manufacturing and distribution to a market of approximately 2 billion people, including countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and East Africa.

Moreover, the relatively lower energy costs in Oman compared to the UK provide additional incentives for companies looking to expand. This creates excellent trade opportunities between Oman and the UK, further strengthening their long-standing economic relationship. By capitalizing on these factors, Oman can significantly advance its economic development and establish itself as a key player in the global technology and innovation landscape.

### Oman's Green Hydrogen Vision for Sustainable Growth

Oman's green hydrogen project is a visionary initiative aimed at reducing carbon emissions and generating long-term sustainable economic growth. It has already attracted commitments for investments totalling around USD 30 billion.

The establishment of a robust supply chain creates abundant opportunities for the private sector, SMEs, and job seekers. It will not only support a cleaner environment, but also positions Oman as a leader in the export of clean energy. It will drive innovation, foster a greener future, and contribute to global sustainability, all while tapping into the growing demand for renewable energy sources. It will also add to providing energy security to Oman and

attract foreign direct investments.

Managing challenges related to investments, infrastructure, market dynamics, and technology will be crucial for its success.

### Digitalization – a catalyst for sustainable economic growth and quality of life

The Omani government has been proactive in supporting the digital economy. Initiatives like the National Program for Enhancing Economic Diversification (Tanfeedh) emphasize the importance of digitalization and e-commerce as a critical component of the country's economic strategy. The government is also working to improve its digital infrastructure and regulatory frameworks to facilitate e-commerce growth.

While this represents significant strides in digitalization, there remain substantial opportunities for further digitalization so that Oman can achieve sustainable economic growth and enhance the quality of life for its citizens.

**Government Financial Management & Information System:** Likely to be operational by 2028, the project is aimed at streamlining public finance processes, providing real-time and reliable data to improve transparency and efficiency in budgeting and decision-making, fostering trust in government institutions.

**Support for SMEs:** Digital platforms can offer SMEs better access to financing, tools, and e-commerce opportunities, driving growth and innovation. Digitalization enhances data integrity, which can accelerate financing decisions by local banks – a current challenge for SME financing.

**Public-Private Partnerships:** Digitalization facilitates public-private partnerships, encourages entrepreneurship, and simplifies regulatory

frameworks. This attracts foreign investment and boosts economic competitiveness, driving sustainable development and economic prosperity.

Despite the notable progress, there are challenges that need to be addressed. These include improving digital literacy, ensuring cybersecurity, enhancing trust in online transactions, and overcoming logistical hurdles in less accessible areas.

### Looking ahead, what are the priorities and next steps for Oman to sustain its economic growth and development trajectory?

#### Institutional Capacity

In the latest IMF 2023 report, it is stated that nonhydrocarbon growth in Oman is weighed down by declining total factor productivity, mainly the result of a lack of institutional capacity and regulations. Implementing institutional reforms would lift productivity by more than 8.5% cumulatively over the medium term.

Reducing the state's role in the economy and improving the business environment, as outlined in Oman Vision 2040, will strengthen the country's resilience to oil price volatility, empower the private sector, and attract foreign investment. These measures are essential for enhancing productivity and diversifying the economy.

#### Labour Reforms

The new labour law provides employers with greater flexibility to dismiss non-productive workers, which will boost productivity and address labour market rigidities. However, executive regulations to clarify the implementation of the new law have not yet been issued. It would be beneficial if these regulations were released soon.

#### Tax & Subsidies Reforms

Tax revenues increased by only 2% of nonhydrocarbon GDP between 2015 and



2022. It remains well below those of top tax collectors in the GCC. The low VAT C-efficiency ratio (40%) points to a large tax gap, requiring measures to enhance tax administration but also rein in tax expenditures.

A Personal Income Tax law on high-income earners would generate additional tax revenues of about 0.4%. Introducing personal tax would also provide valuable data for introducing means-tested subsidies.

Subsidies constitute a larger portion of the GDP, standing at 16% compared to the GCC's 12%. Additionally, there is no value-added tax (VAT) applied to energy products. Subsidies are up from 5% of the GDP in 2021 to 8% in 2022. Energy subsidies as a share of nonhydrocarbon GDP particularly picked up from 2.7 % in 2021 to 5 % in 2022. Electricity subsidies were around 2% of nonhydrocarbon GDP in 2023.

Rationalizing subsidies and expanding tax and administrative measures will create fiscal space for investing in more productive initiatives.

### Educational Reforms

Education spending in Oman is comparable to that of its GCC peers and advanced economies. However, 90% of the

budget is allocated to salaries, primarily focusing on primary and secondary education, with limited capital spending. While Oman has excellent enrolment rates (about 100%), its student performance on international standardized tests is below that of comparable countries. Enhancing efficiency and reallocating resources to early childhood education could lead to better outcomes.

Incorporating key performance indicators (KPIs) to

measure students' functional skills by the end of each academic year, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), could be included in Vision 2040 targets. Additionally, introducing a voucher system that allows parents to choose schools based on educational outcomes could incentivize private sector participation, increase competition among schools, offer more choices for families, and potentially improve overall educational quality by motivating schools to attract students.

Adopting a dual higher education system that integrates classroom learning with onsite training would help address skill mismatches and enhance educational outcomes. Simultaneously, upskilling and reskilling Omani workers would enable them to transition to more competitive and productive sectors, supporting efficient resource allocation in the labour market. Expanding vocational training and improving its responsiveness to the evolving needs of the market would generate higher educational returns and bolster efforts to improve productivity.

### Health Reform

Oman currently falls below the health efficiency frontier. Gradually increasing the

level and efficiency of health spending, supported by rationalizing non-priority expenditures, will be crucial for improving health outcomes. This approach will help limit fiscal costs in the medium to long term, especially considering the expected demographic shift towards an older population.

Research and innovation endeavours, along with efforts to address redundancies in medical procedures, harmonize prescription practices, improve operations management, tender processes, and financing, as well as implementing digital systems, are expected to enhance the efficiency of healthcare spending.

### How have oil prices impacted the Omani economy, and what is the country doing to mitigate the effects of oil price fluctuations?

Oman's heavy reliance on hydrocarbons, as a percentage of its GDP, fiscal revenue, and exports, exceeds that of its peers in the GCC. During periods of high oil prices, Oman experiences economic expansion, increased government revenue, as well as investments in infrastructure and social programs. Conversely, during oil price downturns, Oman confronts challenges such as diminished government revenue, budget deficits, and economic deceleration.

Crucial to diversification is the reduction of the state's footprint, enhancement of institutional capacity and productivity through innovation and the continuation of regulatory, fiscal, educational, and health sector reforms. Further digitalization will play a critical role in public finance management and supporting the private sector, especially for SMEs.

Opportunities exist to attract foreign direct investments in sectors such as tourism, fisheries, manufacturing, logistics, and services. Additionally, there is a promising opportunity for Oman and the UK to expand their partnership beyond oil and gas, leveraging the expertise of the UK's top universities in innovation. Oman's strategic location further enhances the potential for significant economic growth and establishes the country as a key player in the global technology and innovation landscape. ■

# OMAN'S LABOUR LAW: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF FOREIGN NATIONALS AND OMANISATION POLICY

The New Labour Law in  
Oman was issued on  
31st July 2023 by Royal  
Decree 53/2023 and  
became effective  
immediately thereafter.

Gorvinder Pannu, representing the legal firm Addleshaw Goddard, the 2024 winner of the Law Firm of the Year, gave a lecture at the BOS on July 25th 2024, one year following the enactment of this law.

She offered our members comprehensive details on the revisions and consequences of the new legislation, particularly focusing on its implications for the employment of foreign nationals and the Omanisation policy. She provides us with an overview of the Labour Law below:

## 1. WORKING PATTERNS

Remote working, temporary, casual and incidental work have been recognised under the Labour Law but will be subject to further regulation from the Ministry of Labour. To date, the regulations to the Labour Law have yet to be issued.

## 2. JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

The Labour Law prohibits advertisements for jobs or promotions which to refer to creed, colour or remuneration packages.

## SIGNIFICANCE

The prohibition on advertising remuneration indicates that the Oman Government aims for a wider pool of job seekers to apply for vacancies without first being dissuaded by the remuneration associated with the job.

## 3. DOCUMENTS

### (a) Arabic language

All regulations, decisions and circulars must, as a minimum, be in the Arabic language, although it is permissible to use other languages. Arabic will be the only approved text.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Employers who do not have the Arabic

capability within their organisations will need to search for outside support from a translation service where they do not have in-house resources, which will invariably increase costs for translating employment contracts, HR policies and written communications to their employees. It is noteworthy to mention that an employer may still choose to have English as their language of business, and that commercial contracts may be written in English text.

### (b) Policies and procedures

There is now an additional obligation on employers with 25 or more employees to have a performance appraisal system. The obligation to have a staff handbook/HR manual, (locally called, the Work Regulations) applies to employers with 50 or more



employees (when previously this was required for employers with 15 or more employees).

### SIGNIFICANCE

The burden of designing and implementing work regulations is removed for small firms i.e. those with fewer than 50 employees, as previously stipulated in the previous Labour Law. However, those with 25 or more employees will now be required to conduct annual performance appraisals and have a system in place for this.

### 4. FIXED TERM AND PROJECT TERM CONTRACTS

Fixed term contracts no longer automatically become unlimited upon express renewal. However, an employee's employment will become unlimited if the total period of service under each successive fixed term contract (which continues without interruption) exceeds five years. Additionally, the Labour Law makes it clear that a project term contract will become unlimited if this also exceeds a duration of five years.

### 5. FEMALE REST AREAS

An employer with 25 or more female employees must set aside a separate rest place.

### 6. EMERGENCY AND UNPAID LEAVE

There is no longer a statutory entitlement to six days emergency leave entitlement. However, employees have a new right to take unpaid leave with the employer's agreement. Where an employee is granted

unpaid leave, they will be responsible for paying their own employee social contributions to the Social Protection Fund as well as the employer's and Government's contributions.

### 7. PARENTAL LEAVE

Parental leave entitlements have been improved under the Labour Law. The period of paid maternity leave has been increased from 50 days to 98 days with the cap on the number of times maternity leave may be taken and the previous one-year qualifying service being removed.

A female employee may take up to one year of unpaid childcare leave, provided she pays for her own employee social contributions, as well as the employer's and Government's contributions. Mothers returning to work from maternity leave are now entitled to a daily one-hour nursing break as part of their working hours. There is also a paid paternity leave entitlement of 7 days for new fathers, provided he takes this leave within 98 days of the child's birth.

For paid leave entitlements, the employer will be liable to pay the salary until such time as the relevant provisions of the Social Protection Law come into force when employers will be entitled to reimbursement from the Social Protection Fund.

### 8. SICK LEAVE

Employees' entitlement to paid sick leave has increased from 10 weeks to up to 182 days. Employees shall be entitled to:

- 100% of their wage for the first 21 days;
- 75% of their wage between the 22nd to 35th day;
- 50% of their wage between the 36th to 70th day;
- 35% of their wage between the 71st to 182nd day.

Employers will be obliged to pay salaries during sick leave until the relevant provisions of the Social Protection Law come into force (after which the employer will be liable only for the first 7 days and thereafter, salaries will be funded from the Social Protection Fund).

### 9. REDUCTION OF NORMAL WORKING HOURS

Daily working hours have been decreased from 9 hours to 8 hours, with a maximum of 40 working hours per week. Ramadan working hours remain the same.

### 10. OVERTIME

An employee may be entitled to be paid overtime or receive paid time off in lieu, depending on when they work their additional hours and provided they do not exceed a total of 12 hours worked per day.

The overtime rates have been increased both for voluntary/ordinary overtime and for extraordinary overtime (where an



employee is required to work to meet one of the reasons specified under Article 72 as follows:

- the basic hourly rate plus an uplift of 50% for daytime hours (for voluntary overtime, this remains at 25%);
- the basic hourly rate plus an uplift of 75% for night-time hours (for voluntary overtime, this remains at 50%); and
- the basic daily wage plus a 200% uplift for work on a weekend or official holiday (or two additional rest days in lieu of overtime pay where overtime is worked on an official holiday).

## 11. LEAVE ROLL-OVER

There is now a cap on the number of days of annual leave that may be carried over into the next holiday year. Employees are allowed to carry up to 30 calendar days of leave into the next year.

## 12. TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

### (a) Poor performance

Employers have the right to terminate an employee for poor performance, provided the employee has been notified of the required areas of improvement in writing but has failed to improve their performance within six months of that notification. If terminating an Omani national for poor performance, the employer may only recruit another Omani as the replacement.

### (b) Discriminatory reasons

The termination of an employee's employment for a reason related to their gender, origin, colour, language, religion, disability, creed, social status, labour union affiliation or activities, pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding for a working woman, or because the employee has previously raised a complaint against their employer will now be treated as an arbitrary dismissal.

### (c) Disciplinary reasons

A failure by an employer to follow the company's disciplinary procedure when terminating an employee for a disciplinary reason will now be considered as an arbitrary dismissal.

### (d) Victimisation

Dismissing an employee because they have raised a complaint or a claim against the

employer will be considered as an arbitrary dismissal.

### (e) Constructive dismissal due to failure to pay wages

Employees now have the right to terminate their employment without notice should the employer fail to pay the employee's salary for two consecutive months.

### (f) Redundancy

Redundancy under certain circumstances is expressly recognised under the Labour Law, although there is a set process that needs to be followed to ensure such a termination is not considered arbitrary.

This includes the requirement for approval of the termination by a special committee (appointed by the Ministry of Labour) prior to it taking place. Alternatives to redundancy, such as reduction in working hours and salaries, are also options that the special committee will consider and may apply.

### (g) Omanisation

Omanisation is the Government's policy to increase the employment of Omani nationals in the country and reduce its dependence on foreign (expat) labour. Employers are required to comply with Omanisation quotas as well as employ Omanis in roles reserved solely for Omani nationals.

It is permitted for the employment of non-Omanis to be terminated if the termination relates to the company's Omanisation requirements and involves hiring an Omani replacement for the same role.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Termination for Omanisation has long been recognised by the Oman courts as a justification for termination. This has now been codified in the Labour Law which gives employers greater certainty on their legal position, particularly when requested by the Ministry of Labour to replace expat employees with Omanis to fulfil the Government's Omanisation strategy. There will still be visas available for skill gaps in the workforce. On the termination of a contract, the

employee will also be entitled to their notice period. If not, they have rights to claim compensation for breach of contract.

### (h) Time off for job searches

An employee who has been served with notice of termination is entitled to 10 paid hours per week to search for a new job.

## 13. CAP ON TERMINATION COMPENSATION

Arbitrary termination compensation is now capped at 12 months' pay. However, the minimum award remains at 3 months' pay. Note though that reinstatement still remains available.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Compensation for arbitrary termination was previously uncapped. Since the Labour Law now limits compensation awards, settlement agreements are more likely to be entered between an employer and employee if they want to avoid the time and expense of litigating before the Oman courts.

## 14. NON-COMPETE CLAUSES

The Labour Law permits non-compete clauses to be included in employment contracts subject to specific conditions. Non-compete clauses must be no longer than 2 years, although such a lengthy restriction will probably be difficult for an employer to justify in most cases. ■

## ABOUT THE LECTURER:

Gorvinder Pannu serves as a Partner in the Middle East employment practice of Addleshaw Goddard, located in Muscat. With over 25 years of experience in employment law, including 17 years dedicated to the Middle East, her expertise is well-recognised. In 2023, she received the prestigious Employment Lawyer of the Year Award from the LexisNexis Women In Law Awards. Additionally, Gorvinder is an esteemed member of the global Employment Lawyers Alliance. Addleshaw Goddard was honoured as the Law Firm of the Year in 2024

*Termination for Omanisation has long been recognised by the Oman courts as a justification for termination.*

# THE BRITISH OMANI SOCIETY HOSTS OMANI BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEUR DELEGATION

The British Omani Society was delighted to host an Omani delegation of business representatives and entrepreneurs at 34 Sackville Street on May 29th, 2024.

Our Vice Chairman Chris Breeze gave them a presentation on the Society and how we are supporting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. There was a question and answer segment afterwards and there was a lot of interest in the Society's history and its ongoing support of Oman-UK relations.

This came after a delegation from Oman attended the Omani-UK Business Forum on Tuesday May 28th, a business conference held in London to discuss the opportunities offered by Oman for foreign investors. The event was held at the prestigious Savoy Hotel in London and was organised by the Embassy of the Sultanate





## OMANI BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEUR DELEGATION

of Oman in London in collaboration with the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

The event saw numerous presentations from leading organisations from both the UK and Oman, which included InvestOman, OCCI, and the Arab British Chamber of Commerce. The presentations emphasised Oman's strategic position, free zones, and five separate regulations to safeguard investors, as well as entrepreneurial success stories such as Omani fashion house Amal Al Raisi. Also addressing the audience was Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, a member of

the OCCI Board of Directors, who underlined the strong connection between the UK and Oman, with the UK leading foreign direct investment in Oman, and conveyed Oman's desire to increase investment in wider industries.

A key theme of the event was the empowerment of Omani women entrepreneurs, highlighting measures that aim to provide assistance for entry into the British market through effective partnerships. The Arab British Chamber of Commerce also announced the planned creation of a portal for Omani businesswomen to further increase collaboration. ■





## NEW GENERATION GROUP HOSTS SUCCESSFUL DELEGATION ON THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORT & AI

The British Omani Society (BOS) recently concluded a two-day high-profile New Generation Group (NGG) delegation in London, focusing on the intersection of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the future of transport.

The event, titled “AI on the Move: The Future of Transport”, brought together a distinguished lineup of speakers who shared their expertise on various aspects of AI and its implications for the transportation industry.

Sponsored by BP, the two-day programme included participation of 20 promising youth from both the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom (UK) from 14-16 September 2023, and featured a series of lectures, panel sessions, and discussions.

Sheikh Ma'an Hamed al-Rawahi, NGG Chairman, set the stage for discussions on the significant role of AI in shaping the future of transportation by welcoming the delegates. Mr. Faris Jamal Khodr, Head of Political and Economic Section at the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the UK, emphasized the importance of Oman-UK relations in the context of AI and transport, aligning with Oman Vision 2040.

The New Generation Group delegation concluded with a gala dinner attended by BOS Chairman, Major General (Retd)







Richard Stanford CB MBE, who stressed the importance of hosting this delegation to create opportunities for knowledge and idea exchange, further strengthening youth relations between Oman and the UK. In addition, NGG Oman Team Leader, Eng. Shuaib al-Rawahi, expressed gratitude to all the guests, speakers, partners, and sponsors for their continuous support and pivotal role in making this delegation a resounding success.

Reflecting on the event, an Omani delegate, Aisha al-Amri, Functional Specialist in Wells, BP Oman, shared, "The



delegation was an enriching experience, as I had the privilege to meet extraordinary individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences. It exemplified the power of collaboration and knowledge exchange between nations, particularly within AI, and its role in shaping a more sustainable, efficient, and interconnected transportation future."

Deena Shahrabani, Data Product Manager, Trainline, UK delegate said, "I found the discussions at this delegation both enlightening and inspiring. It's evident that AI is not just transforming

transport but reshaping the entire landscape of our society. This gathering reinforced the importance of international collaboration in harnessing AI's potential."

The New Generation Group's delegation on "AI on the Move: The Future of Transport" successfully brought together experts, policymakers, and industry leaders to explore the transformative potential of AI in the transportation sector. The Society remains committed to fostering international dialogue and collaboration in key areas of mutual interest. ■



# DELEGATION OF OMANI DIPLOMATS HOSTED AT BOS

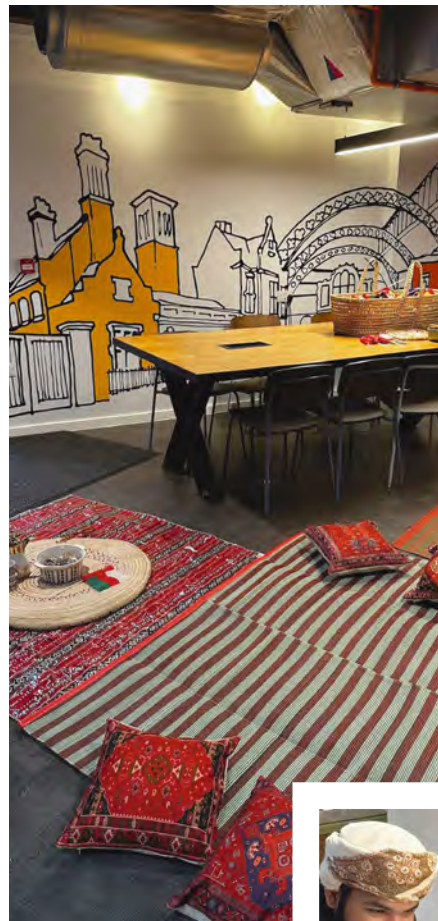


On 20th November 2023, we were joined by a delegation of 15 diplomats from Oman's Foreign Ministry as part of their visit to London for a diplomatic course.

Attendees were greeted by our staff and received a presentation about the Society and our latest activities from our Chairman Richard Stanford. ■

# OMANI NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS

ARTICLE BY ALHADI ALLAWATI  
PRESIDENT OF THE OMANI STUDENT SOCIETY IN BIRMINGHAM



The celebration hosted by the Omani Student Society in Birmingham for the 53rd Omani National Day was a resounding success.

Approximately 100 attendees, from over 10 different nationalities, came together to commemorate this significant day in the Omani calendar. Our rich culture was showcased in multiple ways, including the delightful array of traditional foods and desserts offered to all participants.

We are especially grateful to the British Omani Society for their collaboration and sponsorship, which enabled everyone to immerse themselves in and learn more about our Omani culture through this event. ■

*Approximately 100 attendees, from over 10 different nationalities, came together to commemorate this significant day in the Omani calendar.*



# DR SYED MOHAMMED RAFAY A LIFE OF SELFLESS SERVICE IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY DR AKBAR RAFAY

This is the remarkable story of Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay, who came to Oman from his native India and dedicated his life to providing medical services to the Sultanate of Oman.

*This article follows the BOS talk by Dr Akbar Rafay, to discuss his new book devoted to his father, which took place in October 2023.*

Medicine was practiced at that time with a limited medical budget and inadequate medical supplies. Infant mortality was extremely high and infections, such as waterborne diseases, typhoid and hepatitis were common and malaria rampant.

Fortunately, he maintained a set of diaries that served as an inexhaustible supply of information from which I was able to chronicle my father's incredible journey from establishing the first medical clinic in Somail to being appointed as personal physician to HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and entrusted with the care of his mother, Her Majesty A'Sayeeda Al Jalila Mazoon. In 1974 Dr Rafay was granted Omani citizenship and in recognition of his commitment, dedication, loyalty and honesty, the Order of Oman was conferred on him in 1992.



**Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay during active service.**



Dr Rafay was born in 1926 in the Indian State of Bihar where he attended the Aligarh Muslim University and the Prince of Wales Medical College. After four years service in the Indian Army, he decided to move to Oman and boarded the British India Steam Navigation vessel in January 1958 bound for Muscat, which he knew as an important strategic junction for Arabia and India commerce.

*After four years service in the Indian Army, he decided to move to Oman and boarded the British India Steam Navigation vessel in January 1958.*

On an early visit to his brother-in-law in Nizwa, he was in a convoy of military vehicles when the one immediately in front of his hit a land mine: "That was his thunderous welcome to OMAN". He returned to Muscat by aeroplane.

Dr. Rafay was then requested to fill in for the doctor in charge who was on leave, at that time. During this time, he explored Muscat and also used to visit the mission Hospital in Mutthra and

worked alongside Dr. Thoms, diagnosing tropical diseases from his experience in India.

Ably assisted by his wife, Saida bint Abdul Haleem, Dr. Rafay performed surgeries in his garden, where bed sheets were tied to date palms, converting the area into a makeshift operating theatre. There are many anecdotes in this book both medical and non-medical of his service in various parts of the Sultanate

**His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said and Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay behind him on the Royal Yacht.**



**Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay served in the Naga Hills as a Captain in the Indian Army in the Gorkha Regiment.**

**I quote from my father's diary:** *One afternoon, I remember an Englishman came to my clinic. He saw me doing my work in the open garden. He witnessed the extraction of decayed teeth and saw me draining an abscess. When I finished work, he introduced himself as Mr. Hugh Boustead, who was later knighted. Being impressed to see how challenges could be transformed into opportunities, he started sending doctors to me for training.*

In 1963 there was a major turning point in my father's medical career in Oman. The British Consul General in Muscat, Mr Duncan, appointed my father to the role of Medical Officer in charge of the Muscat Charitable Hospital. He was also appointed Chief Medical



Life in 1960s at the British Consulate in Muscat.



Officer for Mackinnon Mackenzie and became the 'Medic in charge' at Cable and Wireless. In this new role, as a Quarantine Medical Officer, he visited and gave medical clearance to incoming vessels arriving at the Port of Muscat.

Sultan Qaboos appointed Dr Rafay as his Personal Physician in December 1970, a position which he held until his retirement. The doctor eventually died in 2014, after a lifetime of service.

There are those who are citizens by virtue of birth and others like my father, who wear the title as an honour bestowed upon them for responding above and beyond the call of duty and in so doing, contribute unselfishly to the betterment and development of OMAN. ■

## OUR CENTRAL LONDON PREMISES ARE AVAILABLE FOR HIRE

The Society is glad to offer its facilities for hire year-round to its members. Our impressive fully refurbished period building at 34 Sackville Street, Mayfair, includes a boardroom and lecture/events space. Both have AV equipment installed, and the capacity to hold online/hybrid meetings. We are pleased to offer this benefit to our members at a competitive price.

**SEE HIRE RATES AND FURTHER INFORMATION AT:**  
[www.britishomani.org/venue-hire](http://www.britishomani.org/venue-hire)

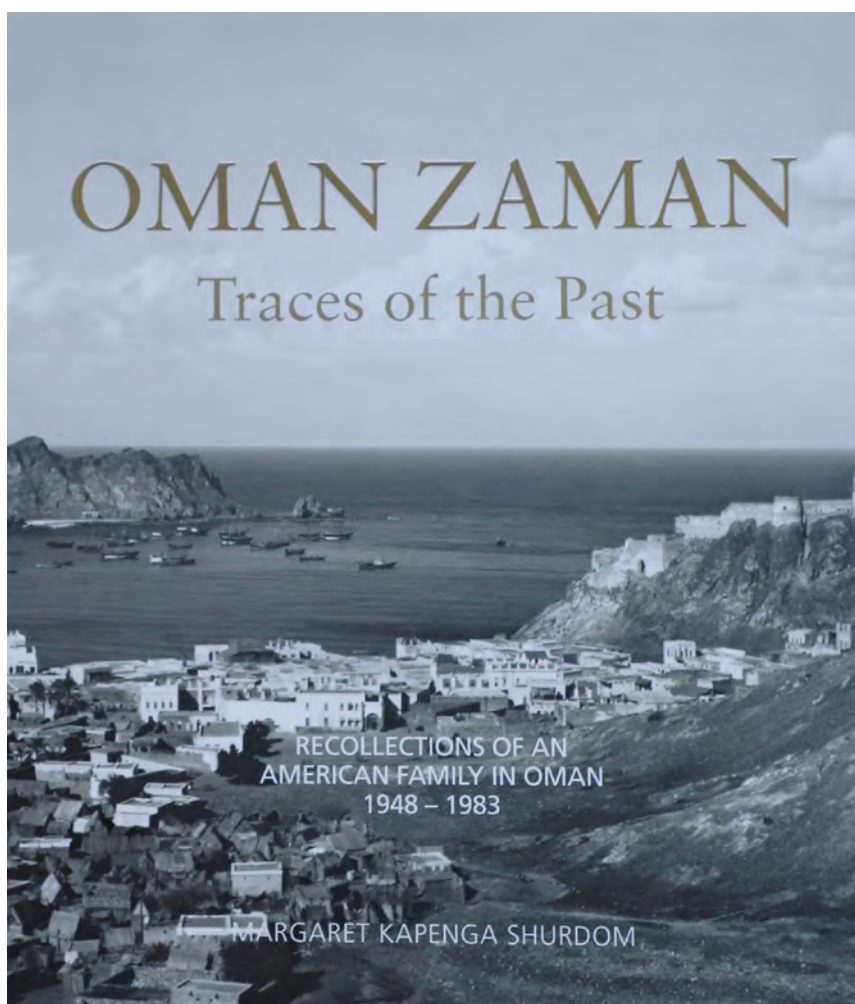


# BOOKS AND FILM REVIEWS

## OMAN ZAMAN Traces of the Past

Recollections of an American Family in Oman 1948 - 1983  
by Margaret Kapenga Shurdom

This 335 page book has been published and can be purchased from the Oman Ministry of Tourism and Heritage. Note that '978' is the newly introduced ISBN country prefix for books published in Oman.  
ISBN 978-9957-67-719-0



This delightful exploration of Oman's recent history shares an enchanting window into the vanished world of Oman before the modern age. Through the personal photo archives of the Kapenga Shurdom family – beautifully presented alongside an engaging text – we discover the heritage and history of the Sultanate in

an account that is by turns informative and heartwarming. A feast of a book for all who love this remarkable land.

"In January of 1948 when my parents, newlyweds Jay and Marjory Kapenga, stepped off the British India boat, Barpeta, in Muscat harbour to work with the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church

of America (RCA), no one imagined their stay would turn into a 35-year love affair with Oman. At that time, the country was ruled by Sultan Said bin Taimur. There were few roads, few telephones, no banks, no air conditioning, little electricity, and no city water supply. My parents always remembered life at that time as being difficult but good.

During that time, Muscat and Mutrah were considered the two main towns along the coast. Nizwa was the major town in the interior and the commercial hub of many other towns. But as foreigners were not allowed to go far into the interior without permission from the Sultan, our family rarely saw that part of Oman. Later, when the country opened up with the coming of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, we were finally able to venture into the interior and our parents spent eight years working with the weavers in those once remote areas."

The book is filled with photos giving a rare glimpse of Oman between 1948 and 1953 through the recollections of the family of a Reformed Church of America Mission. It has been compiled and written by their daughter,

Margaret Kepenga, who was born in 1950 in Michigan USA. She grew up in Muscat and was home schooled until the age of nine when she was sent to an American boarding school in Kodaikanal, a hill station in South India.

Review by BOS Member Maggie Jeans OBE

# HOUSE OF WONDERS

This ambitious award-winning project, began in 2019, and explores in depth the Omani presence in Zanzibar and East Africa. The name is taken from the House of Wonders or Palace of Wonders, a landmark building in Zanzibar. Opened in 1883, it is the largest and tallest building in Stone Town and occupies a prominent place, facing the Forodhani Gardens on the old town's seafront in Mizingani Road, between the Old Fort and the Palace Museum.

The building was intended as a ceremonial palace and official reception hall, celebrating modernity. It was named

*House of Wonders* because it was the first building in Zanzibar to have electricity, and also the first building in East Africa to have an elevator. On 25 December 2020, a section of this iconic structure collapsed with the tragic loss of two lives.

In February 2023, the Oman Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with UNESCO awarded a tender to rebuild Bait al Ajaib – House of Wonders – as part of its programme to restore and rehabilitate several historical monuments of Omani architectural heritage in Zanzibar.

The Ministry of Information, represented by Nizwa Magazine, launched both the premiere of the three-part film and the book which is available in three languages – Arabic, English and Swahili. The unveiling of the film took place at the Royal Opera House Muscat in a ceremony held at the House of Musical Arts on 18 February 2024. The history of this period is rich and the book is a handsome heavy, hardbound volume, embellished with a gold outline of the House of Wonders on a navy-blue cover. It is well-researched and packed with history and photographs.

The films are also trilingual with the use



of subtitles. The trilogy sheds light on the Omani civilisation's contributions in political, commercial, social, and cultural realms. The Omani influence is evident in the dissemination of Islam, culture, and Arab civilisation throughout East Africa.

Each film features a central character entwined in political, social, and cultural events. Saeed bin Sultan is the central character in part one and Tipu Tip, the notorious trader is the main character in the second part. Sheikh Sir Mubarak bin Ali Al Hinai, former Governor and Representative of the Sultan of Zanzibar is the central character in the third film.

The films were shot at various locations worldwide, including Zanzibar, Africa and various Asian countries, as well as sites in Europe, America, and the Sultanate of Oman. Friedrich Klütsch, the German Director of the Project, explains, "The goal of producing this film was to announce Oman's great history and its connection to East Africa. It is one of the grand stories in the Indian Ocean, and due to the events of 1964, much of it has been lost and forgotten. Therefore, we wanted to revive this event once again, to remember and

explore all the documents and elements that prove the close relationship between Oman and East Africa."

Regarding the origin of the project, the Director added, "Actually, we started with the film and discovered that there were many things, people, and stories that we couldn't fit into only three episodes. We wondered how to deal with it? Where can we place all this information we gathered through our research? We then decided to produce a book to include all the things that we couldn't include in the film. The film took three years in its primary production stage, in addition to another period spent on research, text development, and review processes. Much time was dedicated to producing and translating the work into three languages, all this process began in 2019."

**The British Omani Society plans to screen the films in the January and the book is available from the Ministry of Information in Muscat.**

Review by BOS Member Maggie Jeans OBE

# REMEMBERING...

ARTICLE BY ROBERT ALSTON

## RICHARD MUIR

Richard Muir CMG, who has died age 81, and I both held two positions central to the process of sustaining and nurturing the skein of relationships between Britain and the Sultanate of Oman. These go back centuries but have grown exponentially since the 'Renaissance' of Oman from 1970 under the late Sultan Qaboos. We were both British Ambassadors in Muscat in the 1980s and 1990s, and both Chairmen of the Anglo Omani Society (now the British Omani Society) in the 2000s and 2010s.

Richard John Sutherland Muir was born in August 1942 in Muswell Hill, son of John Muir, Manager of a

paper manufacturing company, and Edna nee Hodges, a librarian. He went to Stationers School in Hornsey, and read French at Reading University. In 1964 he joined the Diplomatic Service for what was to be an unusually focused career. In 1965 he went to MECAS, the Diplomatic Service Arabic language school in Lebanon. While there he married Caroline Simpson in 1966.

He had five postings in the Middle East, all bar one (Tunis) in the Arabian Peninsula and the





Ambassador in London on the personal instructions of Sultan Qaboos.

After giving up the Chairmanship, Richard remained active until very shortly before his death, particularly on building relationships between the nominated house of the State Council in Muscat and the House of Lords. Reflecting his interest in the wider Gulf area, he worked for the Al Tajir

Gulf. His only other overseas posting was in Washington – covering the Middle East! For the last eight years of his career, he was Ambassador successively in Muscat (1994-1999) and in Kuwait (1999-2002). Clarity of mind, coupled with empathy and understanding, made him an influential if low key player in an important set of relationships for both sides.

In Muscat Richard had frequent access to Sultan Qaboos by whom he was awarded the Al Noman Order First Class in 2013. He also had close friends among other senior Omanis. He was liked and respected for his active work to further develop relations with the new Oman.

As Chairman of the Anglo Omani Society between 2004 and 2012, Richard worked to make the ties between Oman and Britain more relevant to younger generations in both. His main specific contribution was the acquisition, funded by the Omani Government, of premises off Piccadilly both to house the Society's activities and to provide an income stream to fund them. On this he worked closely with the then Omani

Foundation in the UAE and with the William Luce Foundation at Durham University. He wrote, edited, and sponsored work on Oman and the wider Gulf region to sit alongside the magisterial pioneering work of earlier generations of British officials working in the region.

Richard Muir died on October 2023. He is survived by Caroline, their daughter and two granddaughters, their son, and by his brother Andrew.



## JOHN EDWARDS MBE

6 May 1938 – 15 July 2023

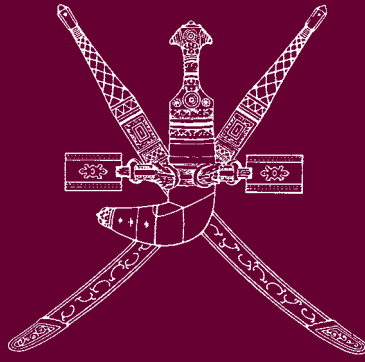


John Edwards died in Salisbury Hospital on 15 July 2023, aged 85. John was an Honorary member of the SAF Association and served in Oman for 40 years. He was the founder and Head of the first English-Speaking School in Salalah.

John was born in Wales in 1938 and went on to train as a school teacher. In 1975 he applied for the role of school teacher in Salalah, Oman. He was successful and on arrival found a very small, tin-hutted school with minimum resources. With great energy and dedication, he managed to cajole funds to build the school and within a year its reputation was such that numbers of Salalah-based children wishing to attend exceeded capacity. The Dhofar war was just ending at this time so John applied to HM Sultan Qaboos, who approved a new infrastructure project for a large, purpose-built modern school. It was duly completed in April 1981 and officially opened by HM The Sultan.

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, on her visit to Salalah in 1981, had been invited by John to find time in her busy schedule to visit the school which she duly did. Interestingly she continued to correspond with John for the next seven years to enquire about the progress of this remarkable school. John was awarded an MBE for 'Services to Education Overseas'.

He finally left Oman in 2010 and retired to Wiltshire. He was a wonderfully kind and thoughtful man and a very sincere friend to all who knew him. He is survived by his wife, Terri, and stepson, Justin.



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