

40th Anniversary Edition



THE
ANGLO-OMANI
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REVIEW 2015



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COVER PHOTO:
Arabian Leopard ascending Jabal Samhan in Oman
Photo Credit: Andrew Spalton

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Society Address

34, Sackville Street

London W1S 3ED

+44 (0)20 7851 7439

www.angloomanisociety.com

Advertising

Christine Heslop

18 Queen's Road, Salisbury

Wilts. SP1 3AJ

Telephone: 01722 324822

E-mail: chrisieheslop@aol.com

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DESERT PAGEANTRY

ARTICLE BY HENRY DALLAL

My quest in life is to have adventure through travel and experiencing different cultures of the world, and of course, always with a camera. To support this habit, one destination became the lovely country of Oman. Hence the development of my new book 'Desert Pageantry'.





The Massed Mounted Band included female musicians.

A seven year journey into this beautiful country, its people, the nature, and of course, the horses of The Royal Cavalry. To then be able to share the moments that I shot on film with others is a particular joy to me. Hence giving an exhibition or a multimedia presentation using images and music in a stirring audio visual experience gives me particular enjoyment. I was honoured to share these and some stories

when invited to The Anglo Omani Society last year.

I am very proud that the book *Desert Pageantry*, which has been translated into Arabic as well, has been awarded a gold medal for most outstanding design by the Independent Publishers' Book Award in 2013. The award was given at a ceremony in New York out of a pool of over 5,000 coffee table books.

Beating the Retreat on Horse Guards Parade.





The Omanis ride past Buckingham Palace.

A very proud moment for me was in 2012, when The Royal Cavalry was invited to participate in the Diamond Jubilee Pageant at Windsor Castle for Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee, to see female members of the Royal Cavalry on the drum horses with the kettle drums, leading the mounted band during the procession. I know of no other mounted regiment that can boast of having female mounted drummers that would lead the mounted band.

Since I was familiar with The Household Cavalry etc. through my book *Pageantry and Performance*, I suggested to The Household Cavalry and the GOC of The Household Division and The Royal Cavalry of Oman, to stay on in the UK following the Diamond Jubilee Pageant, and participate for the first time in Beating Retreat on Horse Guards Parade. This idea became a reality with a kaleidoscope of bright colours of The Royal Cavalry to dazzle the crowds during three nights' performance at Horse Guards. This included The Royal Cavalry escorting The Household Cavalry on one day during the guard change at Horse Guards Parade.

On another morning, The Royal Cavalry paraded in front of Buckingham Palace as a rehearsal to Horse Guards. I don't think throughout history there has ever been this many horses and their riders in traditional Omani saddles parading in front of Buckingham Palace and Horse Guards Parade with both rider and horse without shoes.

The Royal Cavalry of Oman is close to the heart of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, whose vision is to keep the equine tradition alive among his countrymen.

The wonder and splendour of a 1,000-horse jamboree exploded into my senses during my first visit to Oman. From the gleaming uniforms and traditional dress of the riders, to the equally ornate Arabian horses galloping, trotting, dancing and marching past, in time with the band's triumphant music, it was captivating to experience. This dress rehearsal foreshadowed the magnificent Annual Royal Horse Racing Festival to take place on New Year's Day at Maidat Al-Adiyat, home of The Royal Cavalry of the Sultanate of Oman. With the waters of the Sea of Oman as a backdrop, the smell of burning frankincense mingled with the sea air and the excitement of the galloping steeds, I was overwhelmed as I tried to absorb the enormity of the pageant with my camera.



So began my relationship with Oman, which over the next seven years was to involve many such memorable moments as I endeavoured to experience and photograph as much of The Royal Cavalry and the country as possible. It created for me a connection with the country which I look forward to continuing and embracing in the future.

Oman is a dramatically beautiful country with a rich history and culture, as well as a country noticeably comfortable in its own skin. It has historically been a nation of seafarers, trading horses across the seas as reported by Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo. Hence I should not have been surprised to hear, in addition to a range of Arabic dialects, Swahili, Baluchi, Persian, Urdu and English commonly spoken.

The Omanis value the rich traditions passed down through the generations, while embracing the challenges of modernity. It was a thrill to be able to travel into the heart of the country to experience equine pageantry and desert racing, the traditions which The Royal Cavalry oversees, and to see tribal communities gathered in their hundreds to proudly participate in ancestral games and displays.

The Royal Cavalry of Oman is close to the heart of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, whose vision is to keep the equine tradition alive among his countrymen, in part, by the welcome and encouragement that The



One of many highlights for me in the creation of my book was the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, which is held every five years on New Year's Day.

Royal Cavalry offers to children. Women participate actively alongside men – and Oman boasts the world's first and probably only all-women mounted band – in addition to mounted pipe bands, both on horseback and camels.

One of many highlights for me in the creation of my book was the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, which is held every five years on New Year's Day, and in 2011 came shortly after the 40th anniversary of His Majesty's ascent to the throne, in 1970. It was a joy to watch the Omani and international participation in 27 different displays. Every rehearsal had its

excitements, not merely from a photographer's perspective, but through the sheer thrill of being there, weaving in and out among the 2,011 members of the massed bands to capture that special photograph during the programme's finale.

Oman provided me with cherished memories, from the vast Empty Quarter to the craggy mountains of the Hajar and Dhofar. Peering several thousand feet down a deep, multi-layered chasm in the Musandam Peninsula; to stumbling into an abandoned shepherd's hut built into the rock, with remnants of life from anything up to a thousand years ago, all gave me a sense

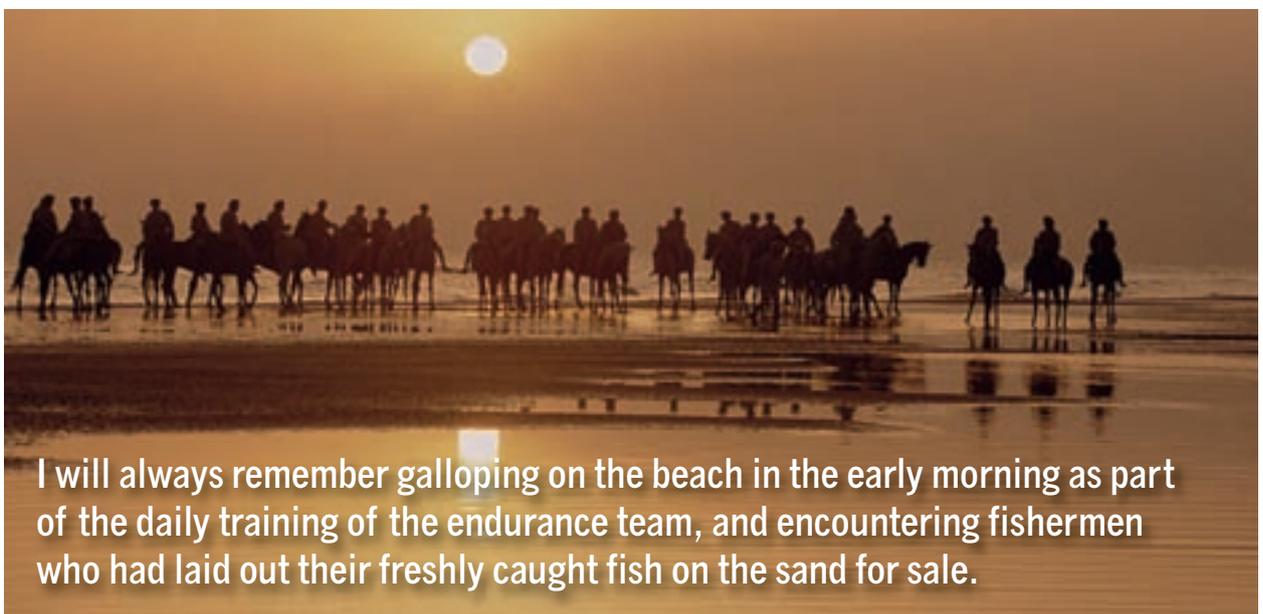


of being a voyeur into a bygone era. Another, almost mystical, experience was a visit to Salalah, in Dhofar, Southern Oman, during the annual khareef, or monsoon, which coincided that year with the holy month of Ramadan. Thick, low-hanging clouds, mist and rain transform the dry countryside into a verdant oasis. The lush landscape, fog and mist rewarded me with some of my favourite photography moments.

I will always remember galloping on the beach in the early morning as part of the daily training of the endurance team, and encountering fishermen who had laid out their freshly caught fish on the sand for sale.

During the creation of this book, photography continued a major transition from film to digital technology. I continue to use slide transparency film, although this preference is becoming more difficult to sustain. All the photographs in this book were taken with film, with the exception of those of the Royal Equestrian and Camel Festival, where I used digital cameras to capture images which would otherwise have been too dark.

To fully portray The Royal Cavalry, it is important to provide a glimpse of the beauty of the country which is the wellspring of the regiment's traditions. Images of nature, tribes, village life and the hugely varied landscape, interspersed throughout the book, will, I hope, provide a window into the spirit of The Royal Cavalry and the splendour of The Sultanate of Oman. ■



I will always remember galloping on the beach in the early morning as part of the daily training of the endurance team, and encountering fishermen who had laid out their freshly caught fish on the sand for sale.

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TRAVELS ALONE TO MEET THE PEOPLE OF OMAN

ARTICLE BY DAVID HARFORD

People are universally kind – another invaluable lesson learned.
If you are alone, polite and if possible funny, almost any other human being, almost
anywhere in the World, will help you. The less they have the more that help will be.

Robin Hanbury-Tenison “Worlds Apart”

David has been a keen photographer all his life; when only 13 yrs old he was making black & white enlargements over the family bath using a biscuit tin as a light source and a folding camera as the lens! He now uses the very best Nikon cameras and lenses. He has gained an LRPS distinction from the Royal Photographic Society, and been appointed as a judge for the Surrey Photographic Association and The South London Federation. He enjoys giving lectures to local camera clubs on his three journeys to Oman.



‘Father and Son’ Fishermen.

SOUQS OF THE INTERIOR

I was leaving Dubai at the wheel of a 4.5 litre V8 Toyota Land Cruiser full of camera gear and all the supplies I would need to travel alone throughout Oman for the coming month. No hotels, no travel guides, just adventures and the friendship of the many people I would meet on this 5000 mile journey.

I had never before driven a high-powered 4 x 4 on-road, let alone off-road. I had never before camped in my life, and I knew relatively little about where I was going. Actually that is not quite true: I had read and been inspired by Wilfred Thesiger’s books, particularly “Crossing the Sands” with its iconic monochrome photographs. I had also made my own very detailed digital maps, using ‘Google Earth’ and map calibrating programmes, of the more difficult areas of mountains and deserts I would be travelling through.

The journey from Dubai to Muscat by road can take as little as seven hours; on my first journey to Oman this trip took me seven days.



With the children at Ibri.



Nizwa Animal Souq.



Selling her goats.

I wandered, as if in a dream, down Route 21 towards Nizwa, branching off to explore small villages in the foothills of the Jabal Al Akhdar, driving alone into the wadis to enjoy the stillness and beauty of these desolate places, exploring the destroyed village of Tanuf and climbing to the Beehive Tombs at

Bat. In all of these places I was alone and able to spend the night wherever I pleased. One morning as I drove carefully back onto the track I met an Omani who would obviously like a lift. I drove him a few miles into the foothills to a new hospital where he worked. This was the first of many such

encounters, some of which have led to lasting friendships and given me an insight into the way of life and ethos of the people.

Eventually I arrived in Nizwa, once the main town of the Interior of Oman. I remembered reading in Thesiger's books



Selling her goat and kid – Nizwa Souk.



Girls of Masirah Island.



Boy and his goat – Sinaw.



Trading Homecombe – Sinaw.



Nizwa.

TRAVELS ALONE TO MEET THE PEOPLE OF OMAN

that in 1949 a Christian would only enter Nizwa if armed to the teeth or if he was entirely mad! The chances of an Infidel coming out alive he rated as minimal. I think that was one of the reasons why my wife Jill had decided not to come with me!

Here for the first time I discovered the photographic delights of the Souqs, the village centres for bartering and trading in everything from a camel to a toothbrush. Their beauty from a photographic point of view is that everybody is so engrossed in their dealings that a photographer, if he is suitably dressed, can fade into the background and obtain interesting images of people going about their daily life. The people, mostly older men, are full of character with their weather-beaten faces and animated expressions, some still sporting kanjars with the occasional rifle to emphasise their masculinity.

The Middle East is a very good area for

taking photographs: the bright light means good photographs with almost any camera, even in AUTO mode. During the day the lighting challenge is extremes of contrast giving dark shadows as well as bright highlights. As in all photography the best times are the golden hours of dawn and dusk. If the camera allows, take the images in RAW instead of JPEG to adjust contrast, brightness, exposure, sharpness etc. in editing software. Shoot in the lowest ISO to give the best resolution and keep the lens wide to blur the background. I use my Nikon SLRs most of the time, but in the Souqs a smaller camera is often more suitable; I used a Panasonic LX3 for some of these images.

To the many visitors who arrive in Muscat by air, sea or road, the only Souq they might visit would be the large sprawling area off the waterfront at Mutrah. It is still worth a visit with its narrow

passages winding around the back streets, but to experience the raw tribal life of the 'Old Oman' you will have to visit the Souqs of the Interior. You must get there early. The animal markets, which are really the most interesting part of many Souqs, start just after 7am, usually on a Thursday or Friday. Nizwa, Rustaq, Sinaw and Ibri are excellent for goats and cattle, one of my favourites being Sinaw which also has a thriving camel market. It is also where a jovial group of attractive Omani women asked me if I wanted another wife!

At Rustaq old Souq (now demolished) I was photographing the noisy hubbub of cattle trading, when an old Omani said, "Come, I will show you," and led me through the ancient narrow lanes of stalls to a remote area. We entered a dimly lit room where three men sat having coffee surrounded by rifles, cartridge belts, swords and kanjars. I was introduced and



Camel loading – Sinaw.



Goat Trading – Ibri.



Ibri.



Camels at the start of the day – Sinaw.



It's a man's world.

invited to join them on the floor having coffee and dates. This hospitality is typical and repeated throughout Oman. The guns were very old ancient relics from tribal days but, together with kanjars, still proudly owned and carried by many men in the Interior.

My most memorable encounter occurred at Ibri Souq (difficult to find but near the fort). I had been there very early taking photos of the goat market. Two men with their children, who had just bought a goat, spoke to me and asked me back for coffee. They were important men in the town and had houses a few miles away. They both spoke perfect English, I was entertained in the

magalis and even invited to stay in the private area of their houses, a rare privilege not experienced by many expats.

Four days later I had to regretfully insist on leaving! The children had shown me the nearby ruins, I had attended the funeral of a

local Sheikh, greeting every tribesman standing around the perimeter of a large room with a handshake and "Salem Alikum, how are you?" I was shown their offices and workplaces, slept in their houses, met their families, visited their friends, saw the children off to school and helped take delivery of water supplies by tanker. A quite remarkable experience. No wonder the Omani people have been described as the crème of the Arab World.

My travels continued with more surprising and memorable encounters: following the camels at a Royal camel racing event, the first westerner to visit a girls' village school, with the Harasis Bedu training their camels in the desert near Haima, invited to join a men only Wedding Feast in Dhofar; stories and images for another time. ■



Women walking.



Tribesman – Rushtaq.



The Old Gun Souq – Rustaq.



Rustaq – Old Souq.

Should you wish to see more of my Images from the 3 Journeys go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/flavius200/albums>

EARLY RECORDS OF OMAN'S ARABIAN LEOPARDS

ARTICLE BY ANDREW SPALTON

We passed through the tall grasslands, negotiated the slippery limestone cliffs but failing to find a trail through the soaking wet forest, we were forced to abandon our trek. But we returned the following winter when the lush green mountains had turned brown and easily found the rock overhang with the ancient depictions of hunting leopards and leaping ibex.

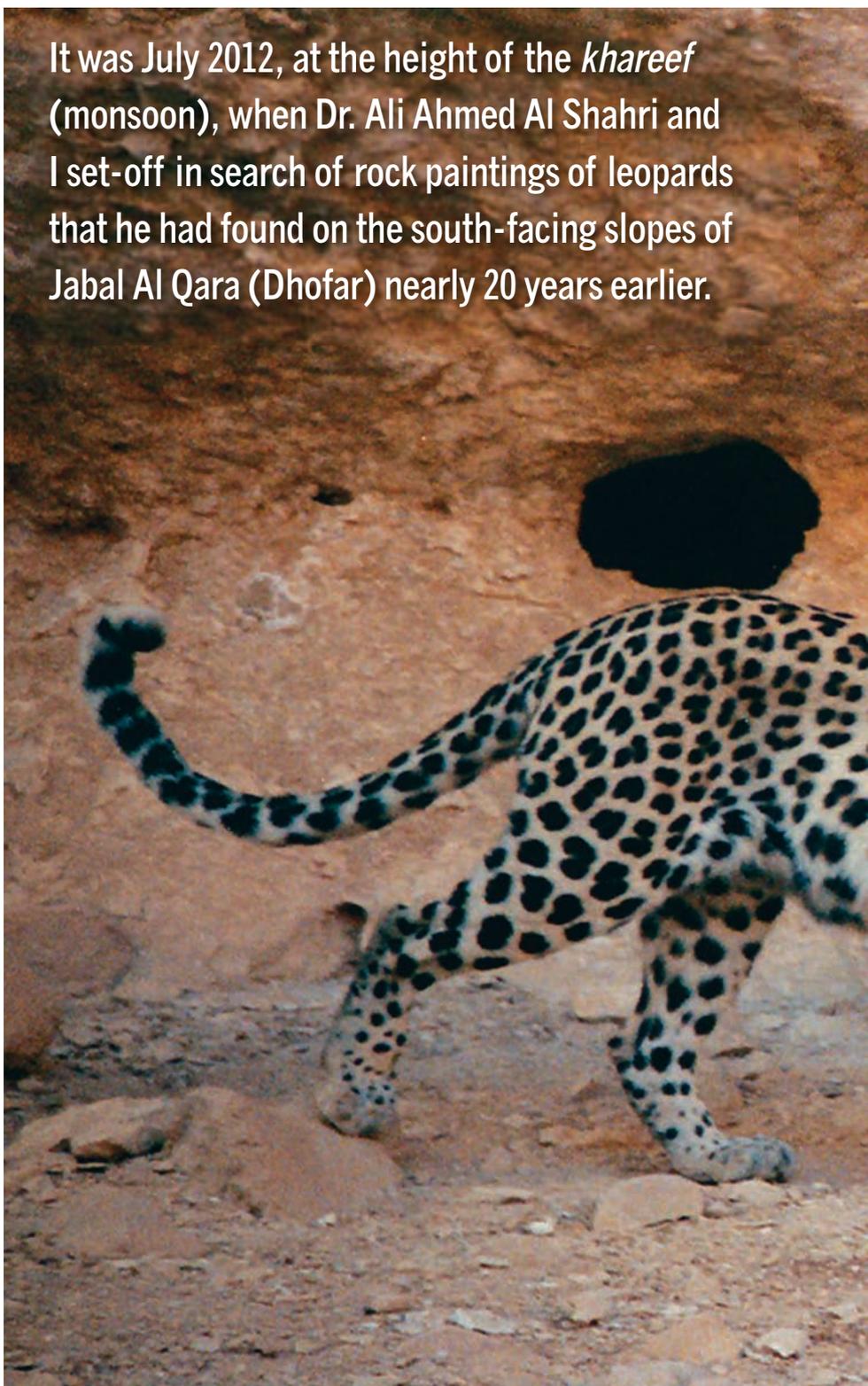
Hadi Musallam Al Hikmani and I had been given the opportunity to write the book *The Arabian Leopards of Oman* and the rock paintings found by Ali Ahmed, considered to be from pre-Islamic times, were the earliest record we had of leopards in Oman. Similar rock art is also found in northern Oman and one engraving, depicting a leopard-like beast, adorns the cover of the *Journal of Oman Studies*. This was recorded and photographed by the late Dr. Rudi Jäckli in the 1970s.

In fact, the leopard, while known to the people of Oman's mountains who have lived alongside it since time immemorial, managed to elude European travellers and naturalists who visited Oman through the 18th and 19th Centuries. The earliest reference is that of Colonel S.B. Miles who in 1876 journeyed across the Al Hajar mountains and wrote, referring to Al Jabal Al Akhdar, 'Wolves, hyenas, wild goats, ibex, wild cat and leopard are said to be found; but the last named, if existing at all, is very rare.'

Both Bertram Thomas and Sir Wilfred Thesiger reported leopards in the 'Qara Mountains' but it was only in 1947 that the first specimen was obtained when Major T. Altounyan, leading a geological survey looking for oil, was given a skin from Jabal Samhan.

The next record was nearly 20 years later when in 1965 Captain Michael Butler travelled by camel from Thumrait to Ibri. At that time he wrote to the late Dr. David

It was July 2012, at the height of the *khareef* (monsoon), when Dr. Ali Ahmed Al Shahri and I set-off in search of rock paintings of leopards that he had found on the south-facing slopes of Jabal Al Qara (Dhofar) nearly 20 years earlier.



EARLY RECORDS OF OMAN'S ARABIAN LEOPARDS

Harrison of the Harrison Institute (Kent, England), 'I felt that you would be interested to know that I have at last managed to obtain the skin of what is reputed to be a cheetah! The animal was shot over a year ago and since then the skin has unfortunately

become rather tattered and torn, so I do not expect it will be of particular value. The head is missing and the skin of the hind legs has come adrift, but the forward part of what is left has been inexpertly stuffed, so you should get some idea of what it looked like.'

The skin was in fact that of a leopard and had been shot south-east of Ibri. Michael later wrote to me that, 'Further research reveals that I had to part with Rps 10 in order to obtain the skin from someone in Ibri souq.'



A leopard stuffed with straw, Musandam, 1980.



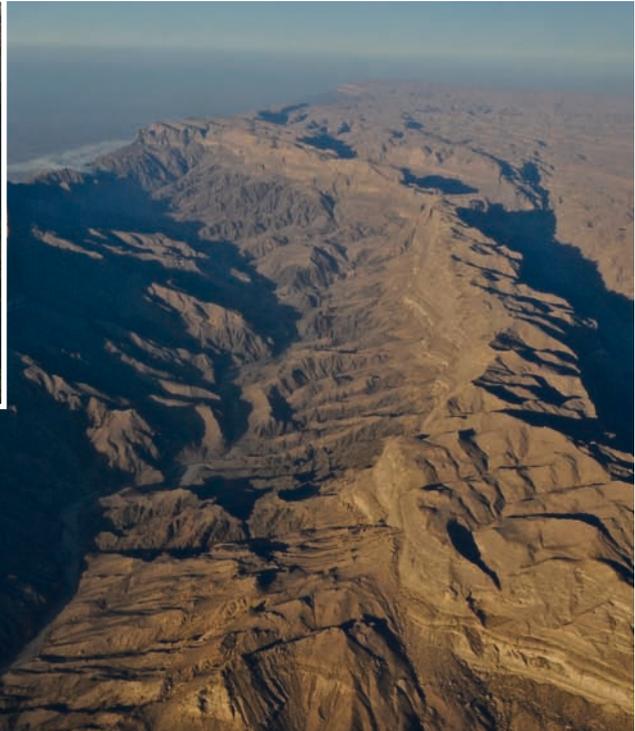
A Dhofari man on Jabal Al Qara, 1978.



A pair of leopards in Wadi Arah, Jabal Samhan.



Jabal Samhan from the air, and the south-facing slopes which are the last refuge for the leopard.



A rock drawing of a leopard, Jabal Al Qara.



There was a small number of reported killings during the late 1980s and what is believed to be the last confirmed record of leopards in Musandam was in 1997 when two leopards were caught by leg traps and shot by men from outside Oman.

This was only the first confirmed record for the Al Hajar mountains and sadly a shot leopard recovered by Major David Insall in 1976 would be the second and the last. He collected the remains of a large male from Jabal Shaybah south-east of Nakhal and recorded that a second leopard was tracked for three months after this event. Dr. Paul Munton who studied the ecology of the Arabian tahr in Wadi As Sirrin Nature Reserve from 1976 to 1978 found 'leopard like' footprints while experienced tahr hunter (who later became a wildlife ranger in the reserve), Sh. Hamid bin Habib Al Na'abi, reported that his father shot a leopard many years earlier.

In Musandam the leopard fared little better and by the late 1970s there was a steady flow of accounts of leopards being killed. Many of the records were provided by AOS and SAF members who I contacted

while writing *The Arabian Leopards of Oman*. For example in April 1975, Lt. Col. Neil McNeill wrote, 'The elusive nimr has at last put in an appearance. On a recent visit to Lima, it transpired that one had been shot in the jebel to the west. By a stroke of luck the head had been cut off and brought back to Lima where it was inspected hanging up under a thorn tree.' The head was recovered and cleaned by Peter Rowland who was in Musandam 'checking on some well digging' and later it was sent to the Oman Natural History Museum together with other specimens recovered from the wild.

In March 1979, Ralph Thompson was given a freshly stuffed leopard shot in Wadi Maqlayli 30 km south of Khasab. He noted that the local people called the animal a *fahad* (Arabic name for cheetah) and that the *nimr* (Arabic name for leopard) was a larger animal.

It seems that the persecution of leopards peaked in 1980 when at least eight animals were confirmed killed, south and south-east of Khasab. Major Sandy Gordon worked in Musandam for many years and with his assistant Ibrahim Mohammed Al Shuhi collected the remains of several leopards including a female from Hawshak that was for a long time on display at Khasab Fort. In the same year the late Major Tim Michels was given a leopard crudely stuffed with straw.

There was a small number of reported killings during the late 1980s and what is believed to be the last confirmed record of leopards in Musandam was in 1997 when two leopards were caught by leg traps and shot by men from outside Oman.

In 2006 an international volunteer group, Biosphere Expeditions, teamed up with the Arabian Leopard Survey to establish

whether the leopard still occurred in Musandam. Led by Tessa McGregor and Hadi they recorded that in 2007, 'two team members heard leopard calling and fresh pugmarks were found by a local man under three kilometres away'. However, subsequent surveys did not confirm this report.

My account of the demise of leopards from the Al Hajar mountains and Musandam may make for a depressing, though I hope also interesting, read but this is the reality faced by much of the world's wildlife, especially large carnivores. Fortunately today the situation in the mountains of Dhofar (southern Oman) is very encouraging but even there the leopards weathered a storm through the 1970s and 1980s.

For example Captain Peter Sichel recounts,

'1973, December. Operation Thimble was the name given to the operation to open the Salalah to Thumrayt road across the jebel. I did not take part in this operation, but I was told by someone who had, that at one stage during a contact between government forces and the adoo, a leopard was driven from cover and ran across the open ground. Immediately the two sides stopped firing at each other, and shot at the leopard instead. There is no report of it having been hit.'

'1977. I was enjoying a Jumma lunch in the Officers' Mess at Umm al Ghawarif camp in Salalah when a Jebali friend appeared. He had a gift for me. He opened a sandbag and out dropped a fresh leopard skin. He said it had been molesting his camels in the area north of Juffa, below Jebel Samhan, and he had shot it with his FN rifle.'

Peter Sichel was not alone in being given a leopard skin as a gift. In the same year Major Trevor Henry was given a skin from an animal that had been shot in the Nejd, just north-east of Jibjat. This animal was in fact a cheetah, the last known record of the Asiatic cheetah on the Arabian Peninsula. Also in 1977 a skin was passed to a team of scientists, led by the late Michael Gallagher, that was conducting the Oman Flora and Fauna Survey (Dhofar).

In the early 1980s there was increasing concern about the widespread killing of



The Royal Air Force of Oman is always ready to assist Hadi Al Hikmani and his team.

In the early 1980s there was increasing concern about the widespread killing of leopards and a decision was taken to establish a captive breeding group at the recently built Omani Wild Animals Breeding Centre near Muscat.

leopards and a decision was taken to establish a captive breeding group at the recently built Omani Wild Animals Breeding Centre near Muscat. A capture team led by Dr. Jeremy Usher Smith and Ayoub Rajab Al Baluchi was unsuccessful in Musandam but in 1985, guided by members of the Firqa, they captured four animals in Jabal Samhan. These were moved to Muscat and became the world's first captive breeding group of Arabian leopards.

Surprisingly, although Arabian leopards had now been captured none had been photographed in the wild. Australian artist David Willis endeavoured to be the first to do so and after a number of unsuccessful visits to the Dhofar mountains he installed homemade camera traps in Jabal Samhan in 1994. He was immediately successful and recorded the first of many stunning images of the leopard and other mammals.

In 1997, realizing that the leopard seemed to be on the slippery slope to extinction, a Royal Decree was promulgated establishing Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve. In the same year the Arabian Leopard Survey was established at the Office for Conservation of

the Environment of the Diwan of Royal Court. I began a programme of camera trapping and four years later we captured and satellite collared leopards in Jabal Samhan and later in Jabal Al Qamar. Consequently we began to understand better the status of leopards in Dhofar.

In 2001 Hadi joined the survey team as a volunteer and one year later he became the first fulltime employee. He was joined by Khalid Mohammed Al Hikmani in 2007 and since that time the Arabian Leopard Survey team has grown with rangers and other staff recruited from across the Dhofar Governorate. Today the Office for Conservation of the Environment is under the wise leadership of Yasser Obaid Al Salami.

Though we estimate that there may be as few as 44-58 adult leopards surviving in Dhofar, and only 200 in the entire region, the good news is that leopards still remain in the wild, there is photographic evidence that they are breeding successfully and thanks to the efforts of many people there is increased interest in and commitment to conserve Oman's last big cat. ■

NOMADS OF OMAN: A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

FROM THE JIDDAT IL-HARASIIS

ARTICLE BY DAWN CHATTY

Like so many states of the Middle East, Oman has been inhabited by successive waves of peoples. Settlement in Oman from the desert fringe came from two directions: one along the southern coast of Arabia from Yemen and the other through the northern gateway of Al-Buraymi.

The northern part of Oman is distinctly influenced by the northern migrations and is clearly Arab, Muslim and tribal. The southern region, Dhofar, also Muslim and tribal, has much closer cultural ties with Yemen and is home to a number of Himyaritic or south Arabian language speakers. These pastoral tribes in the middle of the country are the most remote and marginal peoples in Oman physically; culturally they form distinct heterogeneous groups seemingly at odds with contemporary government efforts to create a unified state. Other migrations into Oman include the Baluch and Persian from Southwest Asia, African and Zanzibari from the East coast of Africa, and Hyderabadis from the Indian Subcontinent. The latter have settled in the coastal regions and the mountain valleys mainly in the north of the country.

Until 1970, The Sultanate of Oman could justifiably be described as the 'Tibet of Arabia', so complete was its

isolation from the rest of the world. Unlike many of the states of the Gulf its population of about one million was markedly heterogeneous. It included an elite urban merchant class with pronounced cultural orientation and trade links with India and the coast of East Africa; along the coast, subsistence fishing settlements prevailed and in the valleys and mountains terraced farming communities. A few towns of the interior of the country were the centres of local and regional trade and religious learning. These communities mirrored Oman's large and successful colonial empire and incorporated Baluchi, Persian, and East African elements into the dominant culture. In the central desert of the country were a number of nomadic pastoral tribes with cultural and social links that were derived from the Arabian Peninsula.

In 1967 oil production came on line in The Sultanate. And



Mobile camel camp 2012.

Camel caravan crossing the Jiddat 1981.



after Sultan Qaboos bin Said came to power in 1970, the state moved rapidly to make up for lost time. Whereas the previous ruler had been wary of ‘modernisation’ and progress, preferring to only carry out what development schemes he could actually pay for in cash, his son, Qaboos set about commissioning schools, clinics and hospitals, roads and other infrastructural developments. Omanis living abroad were encouraged to return to the country and many highly educated men and women came back from exile to work in the spirit of building up their nation after decades of stagnation. By the early 1980s the literacy rate had climbed to 20 per cent – from a single digit figure in 1970. A network of tarmacked roads had been completed and Muscat was connected by modern road to Salalah, Oman’s second capital 1,000 kilometres to the south. The social and economic transformation of both Northern Oman and Dhofar – funded by the petroleum wealth of the country – was staggering. The desert interior was largely untouched.

In 1980, Sultan Qaboos turned his attention to Central Oman, home of the major pastoral nomadic tribes of The Sultanate. Having extended social services, education, health and welfare to his people in the north and the south, he sought out ways of reaching his largely mobile pastoral communities in the middle of the country, without forcing them to settle down and utterly transform their way of life. A series of ‘Tribal Centres’ were in the planning stage in 1980 when I arrived in the country. Haima, in the middle of Jiddat il-Harasiis was in the process of being built. It was to be the first of six such tribal centres and was selected because of its proximity to a police station already existent at Haima to help

Early morning tea and coffee at camel camp 2012.



Paterfamilias of desert camel camp 2012.



inhabitants of the central desert of Oman, which was named the Jiddat il-Harasiis in the 1930s by the reigning sovereign. This remote tribe, organised around a subsistence economy based on the raising of camel and goat, had a wide presence not only in Oman but also in the present day United Arab Emirates (UAE). Mobility

patrol the long border with Saudi Arabia. But planners were concerned that the area around Haima was not going to be attractive to the pastoral tribes of the region because it sat on a sabkha (salt flat). I was invited to visit the construction site of Haima and consider whether I could help the government achieve its goal of providing social services for all its nationals.

THE HARASIIS TRIBE OF OMAN

The Harasiis nomadic pastoral tribe have been, for centuries, the sole human

over a vast and largely inhospitable rock and gravel plain – the Jiddat il-Harasiis – had been the principle feature of their resilient livelihood focussed on camel husbandry and latterly with trucks

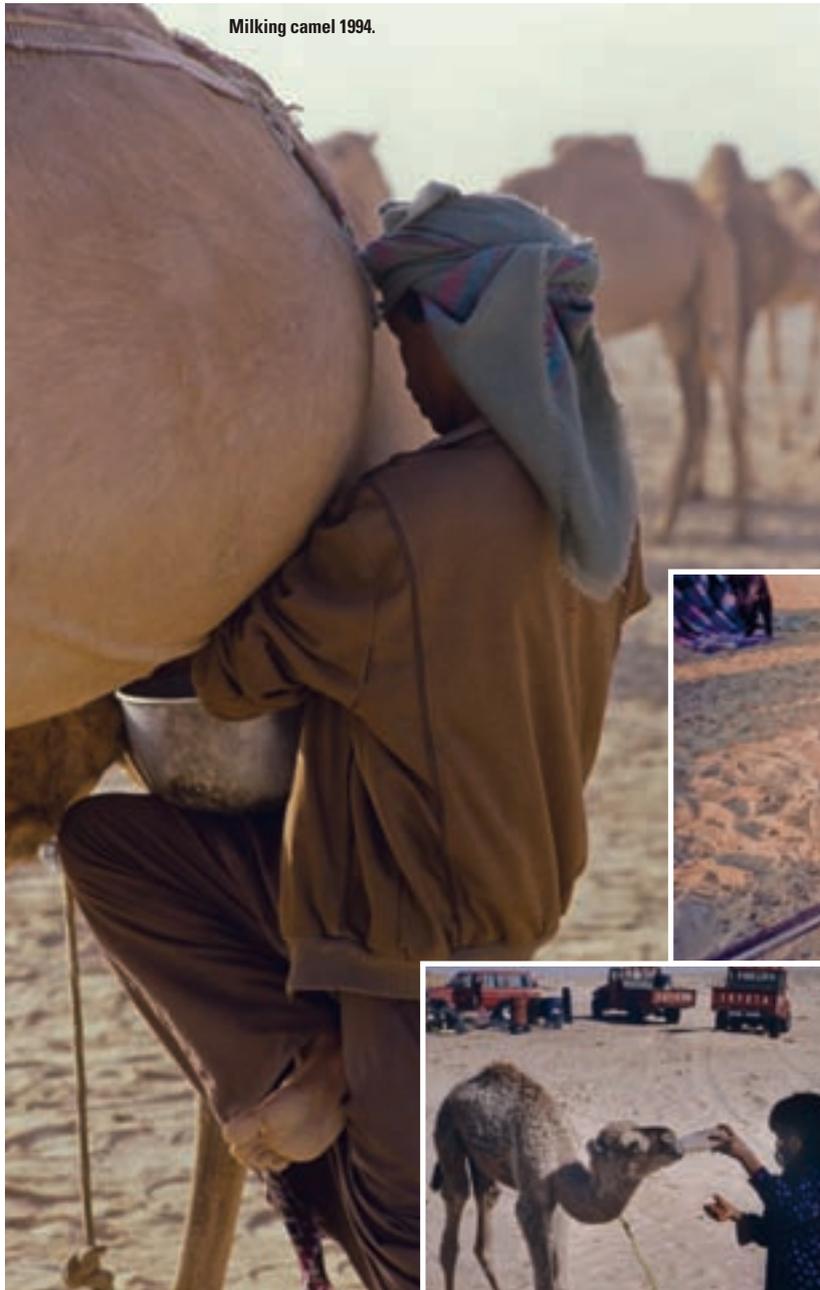
The Harasiis along with the Wahiba, the Duru and the Jeneba are the four main nomadic pastoral tribes in the central desert of Oman. The Wahiba tribe of about 7,000 people occupies the southern coast of Oman and the desert interior known as the Wahiba Sands. To the West of the Wahiba Sands are the Duru camel-raising tribe, numbering about 9,000. Spread out along much of Oman’s southern coast and adjacent interior

Shelter in the Jiddat 1982.



Shelter in the Jiddat 1990.





Milking camel 1994.



Milking goat for afternoon tea 1981. Above: First year and class room at school for nomads 1982. Haima School.



Above: Woman weaving 1982. Left: Young girl bottle feeding orphaned camel 1989.



are the Jeneba, a large and widely dispersed tribe; their numbers are easily in excess of 12,000. To the south of the Duru and Wahiba are the Harasiis tribe. Moving over what was – until the 1950s – a vast, waterless plain of more than 42,000 square kilometres, the Harasiis are a ‘refuge’ tribe. They are people, largely of Dhofari origin who have been pushed into this most inhospitable core area of the central desert of Oman. They are the most remote and isolated of already marginal peoples. The region they inhabit separates north Oman from Dhofar and is the backwater of both regions. As such, the region has attracted individuals and groups

expelled from their own tribe as punishment for major infractions of traditional codes of conduct and honour. The Harasiis tribe speaks a southern Arabian language related to Mahri, an indicator of their lack of contact and relative isolation certainly in the past few centuries. The tribe’s usufruct or rights to access, graze and browse found in the Jiddat il-Harasiis were established in the 1930s when The Sultan and his political advisor, Bertram Thomas, decided to confer the name Jiddat- il- Harasiis upon the territory which had fallen to them as much by occupancy as by the lack of desire of any other tribe to be there.

The Harasiis tribe is small, numbering about 5,000 people. Although their claim to the Jiddat has been, on occasion, contested by other groups, no other tribe has actually attempted to move into this most desolate of landscapes with little if any seasonal grasses, no natural water sources, and unfit for human habitation during the scorching summer months. It was only with the oil activity of the 1950s that the fortunes of the Harasiis and their grazing lands on the Jiddat were transformed. In 1958 an exploratory party came to Haima in the middle of the Jiddat il-Harasiis and sank a water well there to support its oil activity. A second well was sunk at a point 70 kilometres towards the coast, called al-Ajaiz. These two wells were the first water sources on the Jiddat il-Harasiis, an area approximately the size of Scotland.

The traditional economy of the Harasiis was based on the raising of camels and

Woman feeding goats surplus dates 1982.



goats by natural graze for the production of milk rather than meat. At the core of their way of life was migration determined by a combination of seasonal and ecological variables in the location of pasture and water. Survival of both herds and herders made movement from deficit to surplus areas vital. Households were, and are still, generally extended family units, the average family being composed of nine members. At the core of the household was the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children. Generally two or three adults, of one degree of kinship or another, made up the rest of the household. On average a household kept 100-150 goats which were owned by and the responsibility of women and older girls. The average household also had 25 camels, of which five or six were generally kept near the homestead – these are the heavily pregnant or lactating ones. The remainder of the camels were left free to graze in the open desert. The whereabouts of these animals were very carefully monitored and an elaborate camel information exchange system operated among all the tribesmen. When they met, tribesmen first exchange news about the conditions of pastures, then the whereabouts of various loose camels, and finally news items of various family members. Homesteads are generally moved a significant distance three or four times a year.

In 1981, I began a fourteen year association with the Harasiis pastoral tribe on this southern edge of the Empty Quarter. My role during those early years was to assist the government of Oman to extend social services to this remote community without forcing them to give up their traditional way of life. Extended family units

of 10-12 people moved with their herds over the desert following the graze and browse which appeared after rare rain or heavy fog [50 mm a year at best]. The smaller livestock was owned and managed by the women and older girls, while camels were nearly universally owned and managed by men and older boys. Under certain conditions, families had to split their herds, the men and older boys going off with the camel herd for graze and water, while women and young children set off with the goat herds in search of the browse most suitable for these smaller ruminants. These split households were a common feature of life for the Harasiis and women often managed the households for weeks and sometimes months on their own before meeting up with the menfolk again.

Even when households did not split for the sake of the herds, women regularly ran households for long periods of time during the absences of husbands, fathers and brothers for work or pilgrimage. It was not unusual for an adult male household member to be away for months at a time seeking employment. When both husband and wife were present at the same time, the

sexual division of labour was such that the complementarity of their roles, rather than any presumed subordination of women, was obvious. Women were regularly conferred with before meetings of tribal elders. When such meetings were held in their households, older women often took an active part in discussions concerning tribal affairs. They made their own representation to minor government officials when necessary, and regularly represented the family in the absence of their menfolk to government officials and other travellers.

The institution of marriage and the rules regarding divorce, though governed by the general features of Islam, evolved and were adapted to best serve the needs of this highly mobile community. Marriage at puberty [along with the donning of the burqa by the bride] generally entailed a period of bride service by the groom and matri-local residence. After a period of 5-10 years, once a young nuclear family had been established, the married couple generally moved and set up its own residence. Although polygamy was recognized as permissible, it was rarely practised, the community preferring serial monogamy well into old age. Older men and women rarely lived on their own, either joining their children or entering into marriages for companionship. Divorce could be initiated by either party. The Islamic formula (the words, “I divorce you” spoken in front of witnesses three times) for divorce was generally recognized and practised by men. Women, on the other hand, could initiate divorce proceedings by simply picking up their belongings and returning to their natal home with her herd of goats. Both families would then enter into a period of negotiation and counselling to try to bring the couple back together again. Women and



Young girls awaiting the first immunisation programme in the desert 1981.

NOMADS OF OMAN: A CONTEMPORARY VIEW



men in these pastoral societies displayed an independence of action and thought regularly described in the literature on nomadic pastoralists but not often so overtly obvious.

When I first began to work with this community, four-wheeled drive vehicles had only just appeared. In 1976 the first private, off-the-road vehicle was introduced by a tribesman returning from employment abroad. Within five years 80 per cent of households

owned a vehicle. These, however, were associated with men. Often camel holdings owned by men had to be sold to purchase cars and thus they were considered men's property. Clearly vehicles were to transform the life of the Harasiis profoundly. For our purposes here, I will briefly outline two aspects of the effect vehicle transport had upon the Harasiis tribe: its impact on the traditional subsistence economy; and the way in which it drew households into the national market economy.

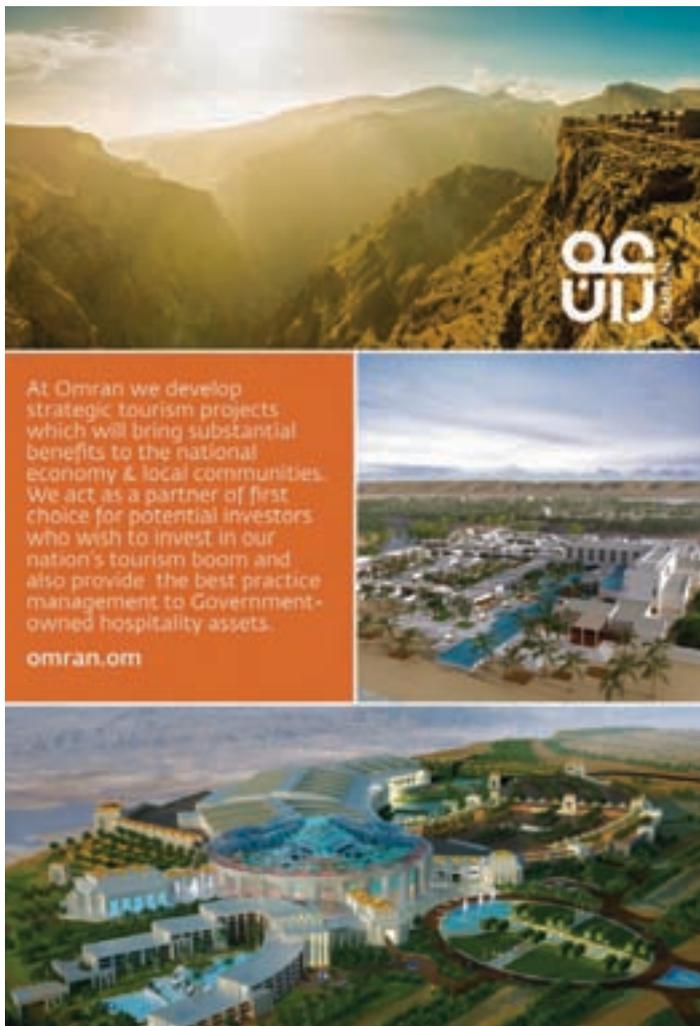
The motor vehicle was spontaneously and universally accepted by the Harasiis tribe because it was viewed as a tremendous aid to their traditional economy. Vehicles could move men and animals around the desert to watering holes and to new pastures in very short periods of time. Journeys of three weeks could be cut to nine or ten hours. But vehicles could not be run on camels' milk or goats' milk. Hence, in order to operate their vehicles, men had to find paid employment. The standard rate of pay for well guard, driver, or watchman – the local jobs available to the Harasiis – was about the same sum of money needed to pay for petrol and spare parts to keep a vehicle running. Thus with the motor vehicle came even longer and more frequent absences of men from their households.

Within five years, most households had one male working for a cash wage. By the early years of the 21st century, most households had 1-2 males working for cash wages. But this income was nearly all

tied up with the running and maintenance of vehicles. Most goods (e.g. wheat, sugar, tea, coffee, dates, manufactured items and other speciality products) from villages and town – which all pastoral groups require to survive – were bought on a barter basis. It was largely a subsistence-based existence with goat and camel milk at its foundation. Slowly over a period of five or six years, other modern items began to appear at campsites – gas stove, cooking elements, thermos flasks, infant nappies, gold jewellery, watches, radios and cassette recorders. These were rapidly followed by satellite phones, smart phones, solar panels to run generators for lighting, air conditioning and occasionally refrigeration. Many of these items simplified and improved the quality of the lives of women. But these were limited by the amount of money a woman could realise from the sporadic sale of her young male kids in the desert foothill market towns.

Traditionally, the income from these young animals was sufficient to resupply the family with basic food stuffs and a few luxury items until the next season. Gradually, however, it ceased to be enough, as more and more modern goods began to appear in the regional marketplaces which the Harasiis families wished to buy.

Motor vehicles then, drew the Harasiis family more closely into the market economy, with women's small livestock representing a significant contribution to the family subsistence. In addition, vehicles offered men greater freedom to move about more widely in search of jobs by which to support and maintain their vehicles, leaving women for long periods to run the household and also manage the hired expatriate labour often imported to look after the camel herds in the absence of menfolk [mainly Baluchi and Rajistani camel herders].



A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

By the first decade of the 21st century the Harasiis tribe had changed their way of life dramatically. The same can be said for all the nomadic pastoral tribes of Oman's central desert as well as all Omani nationals in general. The transformation in these desert societies was not only in the ways of life, but also in the technology of subsistence and mobility. For example, most of the younger generation of these desert communities have skipped out on the stages of communications via personal computers and moved directly from satellite phones to hand-helds and smart phones. They have embraced technology not only to support mobility with regards to camel and goat husbandry, but also in terms of enhancing employment and social networking. The Harasiis tribe, as the most remote of all these pastoral groups in Oman, were the last to undergo and embrace these changes which have now been documented through the digitisation of images and video clips taken between 1978 and 2013, by me and members of my various research projects and expeditions. These images are now all part of a digital resource www.nomadsinoman.com documenting the transformation of life and livelihoods among the Harasiis tribe in Oman. The website was launched in 2010 on the occasion of the 40th National Day Celebrations and since then the website has been viewed by 10,000 visitors mainly from the UK, the US and Oman. Comments from viewers has spurred me on to create an interactive tab which would permit viewers with images of their own spanning the past three decades to upload them to the website for others to view and to share more widely. I hope the reader finds the site both interesting and encouraging. ■

Further reading:

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 Johnstone, T. (1977) *Harsusi Lexicon*. London: Oxford University Press.
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Website: duqm.gov.om

DISCOVERING OMAN'S ANCIENT OASIS TOWNS

ARTICLE BY JOCELYN AND JEFFERY ORCHARD



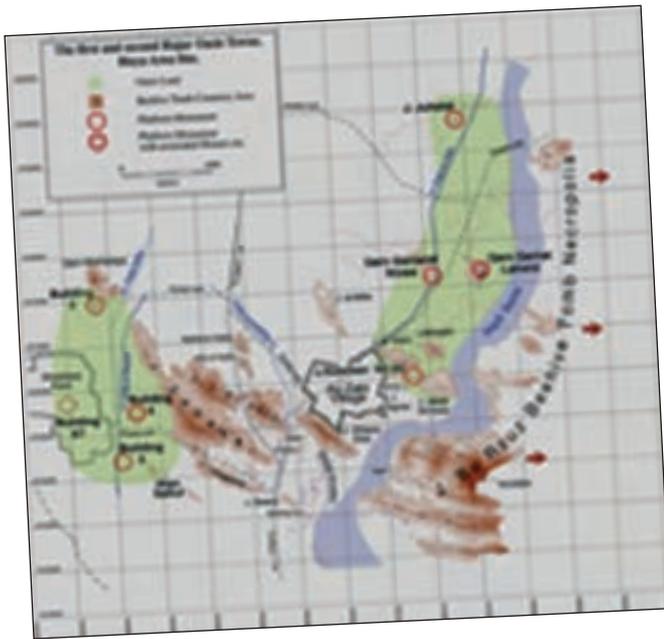
Our first visit to Bahla town was in the winter of 1976. What we saw was a mudbrick wall surrounding a sea of emerald green palms and, rising out of this, the crumbling mass of an impressive fort and the slender minaret of a hidden mosque.

We entered the oasis through the north gate with its wooden doors supported on stone pivots and drove slowly along winding lanes flanked by houses, sunken gardens and *falaj* channels to the west gate, where the track dipped in and out of the dry wadi bed on its way to Jebrin, Bisya and the south. Four years later, when we returned as directors of The University of Birmingham Archaeological Expedition to the Sultanate of Oman (subsequently renamed The Hajar Project), the town wall had been breached, Bahla was divided in two by a tarmac road, the wadi was spanned by a sturdy bridge and the wooden doors of the old gates had disappeared.

We and our team – operating under the patronage of the Oman Ministry of Heritage and Culture – were in the Wadi Bahla to conduct a multi-disciplinary programme of research with a view to contributing to the

Hajar region's emerging archaeology. Intriguing evidence of a new civilization had been discovered by expeditions from Denmark, America, France, Germany and Britain and discussion was rife as to what it all meant.

In our first winter seasons of 1980-81 and 1981/82, we camped on our Bisya Area Site. In later seasons we would rent houses and, on two occasions, we even occupied the Strabag Camp, courtesy of the Department of Roads, but in those first years, Wimpey Alawi LLC with Tarmac Overseas Ltd (now Carillion Alawi LLC) set us up in the field from tents to toothpicks and, throughout our years of research, they and Yahya Costain LLC (now Yahya Construction LLC) have remained our most stalwart supporters. Without their generous aid-in-kind we could never have survived for over three decades. A substantial grant of £3,000 from Cable and



Map of the Bisya Area Site, Wadi Bahla.

Wireless Ltd ensured our first season, while support from a number of academic institutions, companies operating in Oman (such as Airwork Limited) and individuals – too numerous to mention here but all listed and gratefully thanked in our forthcoming publications – enabled us to keep going.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to our colleague Jennifer Scarce, David Whitfield, the late Kamal Abdulredha Sultan, Shawqi Sultan, Frank and Rosemary Heaversedge, Mrs Siw Rantapää Buring and Ms Rosemary Hector, and we particularly wish to thank our academic patron The University of Birmingham, The British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI) for three seasons' support of our *afaj* project, and the Anglo-Omani Society for their generous grants enabling us to proceed with the mapping of our archaeological sites in 2000 and with the preservation of monumental structures on our sites by conservators Helena and Richard Jaeschke in 2011 and 2013. Sadly, our planned four-year conservation programme was halted before it could be completed.

It was during our second season that we began to question the prevailing consensus of archaeological opinion: that, in an increasingly arid climate, 3rd millennium BC settlements comprised disparate tower hamlets with wells; that *falaj* technology only arrived in the Hajar region c. 1200 BC; and that Umm an-Nar tombs were a later development of Hafit and *beehive* tombs, which together constituted a single class of

burial structure.

Our own researches were revealing that on large landscape sites such as Bisya, 3rd millennium BC settlements characteristically comprised areas of 200-400 hectares demarcated by imposing religious monuments – of various sizes and designs and laid out in four-point diamond

formation – with extensive cemeteries of *beehive* tombs deployed on nearby jabsals. We have named such assemblages the *Hajar Oasis Towns*. The Hafit and Umm an-Nar tombs, unrelated to agricultural settlements, in fact represented prospectors and traders drawn to the area in search of copper and other natural resources.

With excavated botanical evidence from the sites of Hili and Bat confirming that the date palm was the primary perennial crop in 3000 BC – just as it is today – it was easy to envisage within each area demarcated by monuments, an emerald green sea of date palms reminiscent of our first view of Bahla. Furthermore, with such large areas to be irrigated in a region with a complex aquifer, no permanent surface flow and unreliable baled wells, these ancient oases must have been watered by *afaj*.



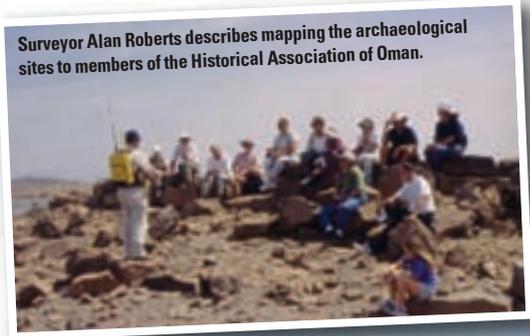
Surveying the 5000 year old *Falaj A* at the site of Al-Ghubrat Bahla.



A tunnel in *Falaj A* at Al-Ghubrat Bahla.



Conservators Richard and Helena Jaeschke demonstrate their treatment of the fragile limestone blocks of a monumental structure to Ali Maqbali and Sultan Al-Bakri (Director of Excavations and Archaeological Studies) from the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.



Surveyor Alan Roberts describes mapping the archaeological sites to members of the Historical Association of Oman.



Above: A beehive tomb.



HH Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said (Minister of Heritage and Culture) and Ministry officials pay a visit to the Bisya Area Site.



Employing Ground Penetrating Radar to detect buried falaj channels.

It was a step too far. The reaction of our colleagues was negative and we were accused of “shaking the foundations of Arabian prehistory”. However, our excavation in 2004 of a 14C dated 5000 BP falaj at our Al Ghubrat Bahla site not only proved our hypothesis, but also pointed to Arabia, and not Iran, as the falaj system’s

region prior to their arrival, their homeland must be sought elsewhere. This would seem to be the Sayhad region of Yemen, since conditions there would have supported agriculture during the Hajar region’s hyper-arid phase, and since extensive cemeteries of beehive/turret tombs, suggestive of the presence of oasis

towns, form a great southward sweeping arc from the Hajar region to Sinai.

Such a widespread occurrence of beehive tombs testifies to the existence of a pan-Arabian civilization with shared customs, religious beliefs, rituals and trade.

Therefore, it is conceivable, that the cemeteries represent the long lost material remains of the legendary nation of ‘Ad. Furthermore, all the data pointing to a religious role for the Hajar Oasis Towns indicate that they were the ancestors of the haram or hawtah – traditionally, the sacred oasis enclave of Arabia – of which examples – notably, the oasis of Mughshin in Dhofar – still exist to this day.

Our realisation that our research results were establishing our Bisya Area Site as one of the most important in Oman, was confirmed when, in 2010, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture invited us to write for them an application to UNESCO, requesting that it be placed on the Tentative List, prior to being named a World Heritage Site. Our application makes clear that Bisya – through the layout of its Hajar Oasis Towns and the earliest known use of the falaj system – exhibits important developments in technology and landscape design illustrating a significant stage in history (Criteria ii and iv); that by demonstrating continuity from the 4th millennium BC to the present day, it bears exceptional testimony to the surviving cultural traditions of an ancient civilization that has now disappeared (Criterion iii); and that it exhibits clear and positive human interaction with the environment (Criterion vi) both physically and through the spiritual responses of its oasis inhabitants. Despite growing threats from modern development and environmental hazards, it is our view that the site still retains its essential authenticity and integrity but that immediate steps should be taken for its protection.

It has been important to us to offer support to our colleagues in Oman whenever possible, so we were deeply grateful to the British Museum when, at our request, Andrew Oddy (then its Keeper of Conservation) visited the Sultanate in 1994 to assess the conservation situation there. His perceptive report stressed the need for

the recruitment and training of conservation staff, while the British Embassy and British Council provided a grant to enable Mrs Biubwa Al Sabry (then Keeper of Stores and Later Director of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies) to visit the British Museum on a short study tour. The result was the upgrading of the Ministry's archaeological stores and the construction of an archaeological laboratory which, until the building of the new National Museum, remained the only one in The Sultanate.



Jeffery Orchard and members of The Hajar Project's 2007 team at Bahla Fort.

The Hajar Project provided a starter pack for the new laboratory and, in 1997, invited Kirsty Norman (a conservator working with UNESCO) and Elize Rowan (then Chief Librarian of the Royal Museum of Scotland) to visit Oman in order to conserve our excavated objects and offer our Omani colleagues initial training and advice. Again, both their reports stressed the need for the ongoing training of staff.

It has been a great pleasure to welcome colleagues, friends and other visitors to our sites, among them the Minister of Heritage and Culture along with other members of the Ministry, the Historical Association of Oman, Sir Terence and Lady Liese Clark, Richard and Joanna Owens, Frank and Rosemary Heaversedge, the greatly missed Sarah White, Hatim Al-Tay, HE Mohammed Al Zubair, HE Yousef bin Alawi, HE Maqbool Sultan, Dr Walid Al Tikriti, David Whitfield and friends, Lady Ruth Hawley and friends and a group of museum curators from Saudi Arabia, Phillip and Mary Robinson and friends.



Archaeologist Clare Goff recording artefacts from an excavated Umm an-Nar tomb.



Hydrogeologist Gordon Stanger at work.

...and last, but not least, we wish to thank our wonderful team of scholars and specialist practitioners without whose knowledge and expertise we could never have achieved our important results. All are warmly acknowledged in our forthcoming publications and we thank them all. ■

LANDSCAPES OF OMAN

OIL PAINTINGS BY MATT ALEXANDER RAY

Matt Alexander Ray is an award-winning artist based in London. Having spent his early life in Abu Dhabi, he retains a strong fascination for the landscapes of the Middle East. A student of traditional oil painting techniques, he uses a limited palette to capture the unique light and rugged beauty of the region.

Exclusive to readers of the Anglo-Omani Society Review, a number of works are available from the artist's series of Omani landscapes, painted on location in 2014.

 mattalexanderray.com

 mattalexanderray@gmail.com



OUTWARD BOUND OMAN WINS INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR INNOVATION

ARTICLE BY MARK EVANS

The past 12 months have seen another period of continued growth for Outward Bound in Oman.

Established in May 2009 as an overseas branch of The Outward Bound Trust in the UK, and launched by The Minister of Education, what started as a five year experiment, set up by the Founding Partners of Dentons, Shell and Sheikh Suhail Bahwan, and supported by the Anglo-Omani Society from the outset, has evolved into one of the most vibrant and innovative Outward Bound schools in the world.

From early beginnings in a small office generously donated by WJ Towell, with no furniture and three employees, Outward Bound in Oman now employs sixteen full time staff, and works with about 1600 people each year, delivering multi-day outcome driven courses for young people in government schools and colleges, as well as for the emerging talent of many of the leading companies in Oman. Of the 85 courses delivered in the past 12 months, three courses are delivered under the name of Connecting Cultures, a programme that now represents Oman's gift to UNESCO, and the UNAOC. With the support of The Sultan Qaboos Cultural Centre in Muscat, and the MBI Al Jaber Foundation in London, three five day courses for 54 future opinion formers are delivered in the

Sharqiya Sands. A memorandum of understanding has been drawn up with Moray House School of Education at Edinburgh University to undertake research into the long term impact of the Connecting Cultures programme (see www.universityofthedesert.com), and the programme has also been the focus on PHD research via Indiana University in USA.

Focusing on the promotion of peacebuilding and intercultural dialogue, Connecting Cultures was declared at the Outward Bound International (OBI) conference held in Baad in Austria as the winner of the OBI Award for Innovation. Outward Bound Training Manager Mohammed Zadjali made the presentation, and received the award from Iain Peter, the Executive Director of OBI, beating off stiff competition from Outward Bound Brazil, New Zealand and Czech Republic.

As the Outward Bound team has grown, staff have been able to increasingly specialise and focus on working with niche areas of society in Oman, running courses for organisations that work with orphans, the hearing impaired and those undergoing drug rehabilitation, all of which have proved to be immensely rewarding courses. This

OUTWARD BOUND WINS INTERNATIONAL AWARD

has extended to supporting the government initiative to promote and help develop SMEs within Oman; Outward Bound partnered with Injaz and Youth Vision to develop and deliver a series of courses designed to address the issues behind why many SMEs fail to become sustainable.

Twice each year, Outward Bound organises events where they thank those who support them. One of those events is kindly hosted at the residence of Her Majesty's Ambassador to Oman, and in February 2015 Jon Wilks welcomed a diverse crowd who had gathered to hear Felicity Aston speak about her Royal



HH Sayyid Faisal signs a Patrons Company agreement with Duqm Refinery.



Mark Evans, Director of OBO, with Patron His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki and PDO CEO Raoul Restucci.

Geographical Society/Land Rover supported Pole of Cold journey, from London to the coldest inhabited settlement on earth, in eastern Siberia. Felicity had been awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honours List, closely followed by the Polar Medal.

The second of our annual thank you events is the Patrons Company Dinner, held in May each year under the auspices of our Patron, His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki Al Said. Once again OBO hosted a powerful gathering of CEOs and HR managers representing the major companies in Oman who support Outward Bound.

Each year Outward Bound Oman designs an especially challenging journey to celebrate National Day; the 44th National Day journey saw the recreation of a famous 1954 overland journey from Duqm to Fahud in search of oil. The 2015 version saw three teams of Omani nationals haul a four wheeled cart some 450 km across the desert, with each team covering approximately 150 km in six days, before handing over to the next. This unique

challenge, undertaken by teams from Vale, HSBC Bank and Daleel Petroleum provided a unique environment within which to develop leadership, dynamic risk assessment and strategic thinking skills, in real time situations away from a mobile phone and power-point presentation. Those of you who know the interior of Oman can imagine the comments made by passing Bedouin as they spotted the cart being hauled along.

Under orders from His Excellency Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi at The Ministry of Foreign Affairs to 'fly the flag high', in June a team of ten intrepid individuals flew from Muscat to Tanzania to kick start celebrations for the 45th National Day by carrying the flag of Oman to the 19,000 plus foot summit of Kilimanjaro. In cold and wet conditions, a far cry from Oman in June, 9 of the 10 successfully reached Uhuru Peak.

Planning for the coming academic year is well underway, and as with the previous six years the next one is going to be considerably busier than the last. The number of companies supporting Outward Bound through their Corporate Social Responsibility programme is increasing, which means more Omani young people are benefiting. In addition, a growing number of corporates are sending their own employees to develop their skills and leadership capabilities. In addition to the usual international schools that travel to Oman for their International Award expeditions, 2015/16 will see OBO welcome schools from as far afield as Zimbabwe, UK and Bangladesh.



OBI World Symposium in Germany.

A MOBILE EXHIBITION TO INSPIRE OUTDOOR LEARNING

Outward Bound Oman's first female instructor Jawahar Al Ghafri with Darsait Girls Government School.



Helen Couchman has travelled to work with Outward Bound Oman on and off since early 2012.

Having followed up on an open call for a photographer to work with the charity based out of Muscat she flew from her home in Beijing to meet Mark Evans the Director and the then small core OBO team. From there a very fruitful partnership has emerged. Working closely with the Omani Instructors she has been proud to watch the charity and team grow in numbers, talent and in strength. Invited to observe and document photographically she worked on expeditions with participants from local boys and international schools in their outdoor learning challenge Tahaddi courses.

Then the following year Couchman approached the Anglo-Omani Society applying for a grant to support the charity directly herself and in the autumn of 2013

she met with Mark Evans in London to understand better what was needed. Couchman's one wish was that the brief included working with Omani schoolgirls who were then increasingly beginning to attend Outward Bound Oman courses in government school groups.

The brief set by Evans was to facilitate Couchman to make images that best communicate what the charity does, the particular terrain Outward Bound Oman work in and how they change young people's lives through outdoor learning. Their shared proposal more specifically was to create an Outward Bound Oman exhibition designed to be reused ongoing as a travelling exhibit. This was a challenge that had been flagged up by the Patron of OBO, His Highness Sayyid Faisal bin Turki

OUTWARD BOUND WINS INTERNATIONAL AWARD

Al Said and by the Omani Ministry of Education previously directly with Outward Bound Oman. Couchman was to devise a small mobile, outreach exhibition to be driven to and set up in government schools, colleges and shopping malls throughout the country to raise awareness of what Outward Bound is, what it does, and how it prepares Omani young people both boys and girls to enter the world of work. It was to be lightweight and easily portable and with the flexibility to use it with Arabic and or English text to provide more detailed information amongst the images. The concept focused on conveying the pillars of Outward Bound, which are, Personal Challenge, Service and Compassion, Self-reliance and Self Discipline, Physical Fitness, Environmental Appreciation and Leadership.

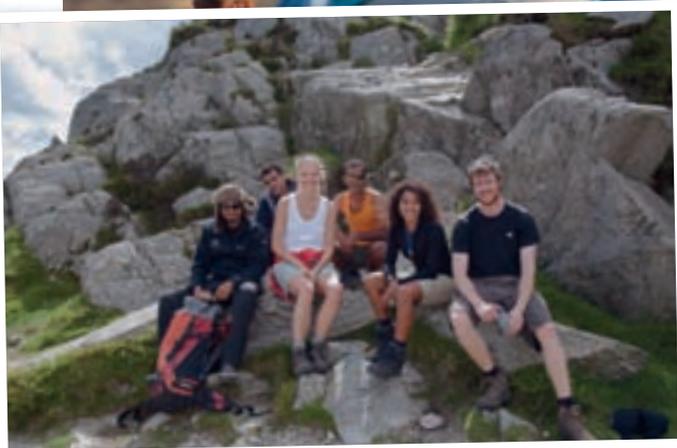


Presentation at the Anglo-Omani Society April 2015. Photo credit Chloe Brookes, AOS.

Al Ahnaf Bin Qais Boys Government School making camp.



It will raise awareness of what Outward Bound is, what it does, and how it prepares Omani young people both boys and girls to enter the world of work



Half way up Tryfan with OBO. From left: Sultan Al Jabri, Mohamed Al Touqi, Couchman, Sultan Al Hasni, Anisa Al Raissi, Chris Brooker. Photo credit Simon Lake, Instructor at PYB.



The summit of Mt. Toubkal with Sokayna El Haddad, OBO Instructor and Mustapha El Haddad.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the experience was both powerful and emotional



Above: Darsait Girls Government School on exped.



Left: Outward Bound Oman mobile girls school exhibit packed and ready to go.

Below: Instructors Sultan Al Hasni and Sokayna El Hadded with Al Ahnaf Bin Qais Boys Government School.



Couchman presented the finished mobile exhibit with a lecture and drinks reception at the Anglo-Omani Society in London on 23rd April 2015. The final display follows two government school courses, one boys school and one girls school through their expedition experiences, highlighting inspirational moments. It would be no exaggeration to say that the experience was both powerful and emotional, particularly for the girls school group Couchman worked with. ■

Artist Helen Couchman frequently works with charities on photographic commissions. See: www.hcphotowork.com/charities for further images of this and other projects. She would like to thank the OBO team for their welcome, friendship and some of the most interesting and beautiful expeditions experiences. Also for the invitation to climb Mt. Toubkal the highest of the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco in October 2014 and the relative jaunt up Tryfan in the Snowdonia National Park, Wales, June 2014 when the team trained at the National Mountain Training Centre at Plas Y Brenin.

SOME TREASURES OF THE BRITISH EMBASSY MUSCAT

ARTICLE BY SIR TERENCE CLARKE

The curiosity of visitors to the British Embassy or Residence in Muscat is often aroused by a number of unusual features that clearly belong to long bygone times. Each has an interesting history.

The first British diplomatic representative in Oman took up residence in Muscat in 1800 but the post was held only intermittently over the next 60 years or so, partly because a number of the incumbents died from the effects of the insalubrious conditions and partly because The Sultan moved to Zanzibar in 1843. The British Consul returned to Muscat in 1861 and took up residence in a property on the waterfront below Fort Jalali in Muscat Bay. It was at first rented from a local resident and

eventually purchased in 1878. The building was constructed of materials of poor quality and needed frequent repairs, not least because the structure was shaken at times by salvos from the cannon batteries on nearby Fort Jalali and Fort Mirani. Eventually it was decided to knock it down and replace it with a new building, which was ready for occupation in 1890. It was described by Lord Curzon on a visit in 1892 as 'the handsomest structure in the town'.

The Mission, the status of which changed





over the years from that of a Political Agency to a Consulate-General and finally to an Embassy in 1971, remained in that building, with alterations and extensions, for just over a century. However, in 1991 the Oman Government reviewed its requirements for land in the vicinity of Al-Alam Palace in Old Muscat for the Silver Jubilee of the accession of H.M. Sultan Qaboos Al Said and approached the British Government to reconsider its earlier decision to keep the Embassy on the Old Muscat site rather than to move to the new Diplomatic Quarter at al-Khuwair. They offered an attractive package, which included compensation for the loss of the Muscat site, land at al-Khuwair for a new Embassy and a spectacular site for a new Residence at al-Rawdha. After long and careful consideration, the offer was finally accepted and incorporated in an agreement, signed in January 1993. Architects were commissioned, plans drawn up, building contractors engaged and work proceeded

swiftly on both of the new sites, so that it was possible to make the move from Old Muscat in March 1995.

During the planning stages, I, as the incumbent Ambassador at the time, was keen to incorporate some of the distinctive

features of the old Embassy in the new buildings, so as to form a kind of historical link between them. Foremost among these were the handsome floral tiles (pictured left) that had covered most of the bedroom floors of the former Residence and of the one-time Agency Surgeon's house across the courtyard, in which I had previously lived in 1972-73. They had been supplied by McKenzies in Karachi and were also to be found in the British Embassies in Baghdad and Kuwait, as well as in the former High Commission in Kuala Lumpur and the former Consulate in Mosul. Enough of them could be saved from the demolition to be re-laid on the verandah of the new Residence and, despite the lapse of about a century, they look as fine as ever.

The entrance to the Residence is flanked by two unusual brass mortars, which had previously stood in the entrance to the former Embassy. One of them bears the name of Hutchinson. George Hutchinson had been appointed Superintendent and Director of the East India Company's Gun Foundry in 1822, when he was a Captain in the Bengal Engineers. In 1834, the foundry was moved at Hutchinson's instigation to Colssipore, where it remained until 1939. Thus, at least that mortar must have been cast somewhere between 1822 and 1839.

The other mortar bears the name Sherwood and was probably cast earlier at the same foundry. It is not known how they made their way to Muscat but in Hutchinson's time the EIC presented brass guns to several independent Indian Rulers and it seems likely that these two pieces



One of the brass mortars that stood at the entrance to the former Embassy.

were also intended for presentation, as they are of too high quality for ordinary military service.

Standing across from the entrance to the Residence is an upright tombstone, with some barely decipherable words in Portuguese that indicate that it once marked the grave of Pasqual Gomes. It is one of two such tombstones that were found by Major Bremer, the Political Agent in the early 1930s, in the sandy beach on the eastern side of the Agency in what was known even in my time as Chinaman's Cove. This tombstone was inserted in the western wall of the Embassy compound, where it remained until 1993, when it was removed and put into storage. It was rescued in 2007 by Dr Noel Guckian, when Ambassador, and mounted at the Residence. There is no record of what happened to the other tombstone but a similar one can still be seen in Fort Mirani as part of the Portuguese heritage of Muscat in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.



One of the most impressive features of the former Embassy was the magnificent pair of heavy teak gates through which every visitor had to pass to gain entry to the compound (above). These gates were open during working hours but were otherwise guarded by an Omani watchman, who

would open them or a small wicket-gate set in one of them on recognizing the visitor.

These gates were removed and re-erected in the garden of the new Embassy, where they look rather less imposing in their new setting. Until the upgrading of the old Embassy compound in the early 1970s and the need for greater security, another pair of high wooden gates with a British crown carved on top also gave access to the compound. In the days when the then Sultan sat in the old Qasr al-Alam, the British Consul-General would go through these

gates as he walked to make his calls on The Sultan, as it were, next door. He was escorted by his Consular *Qawas* carrying a silver-mounted stick to clear the way. Unfortunately the stick has disappeared, but the gates have been preserved and now decorate a wall inside the house of the Deputy Head of Mission in the new Embassy compound.

A somewhat more modern relic is the brass bell that once hung in the old Embassy inner courtyard (below) and now graces 'The Thirsty Camel' staff club. It dates back to 28 June, 1943, when a Japanese midget submarine fired a torpedo through the narrow gap between Fort Jalali and the headland forming the eastern rim of Muscat Bay. It hit and sank the British-India Steam Navigation Company (more popularly known simply as BI) steamer *Dahpu* just as the Captain was ashore, taking his leave of the Consul, Neil Pelly, on whom he had been calling. A 12-pounder naval gun was also salvaged and taken over by the Muscat Infantry; and some pieces of the wreckage were visible in the Bay for many years after but have all disintegrated. ■



Tombstone which once marked the grave of Parqual Gomes.



Further details of these treasures and other aspects of the Mission's long history in Muscat may be found in *British Missions around the Gulf, 1575-2005* by Hugh Arbuthnott, Terence Clark and Richard Muir, Global Oriental, 2008.

THE MAKING OF PORT SALALAH

ARTICLE BY PROCTER HUTCHINSON



The new cranes have transformed port efficiency.

I stayed at the old Holiday Inn to the North East of Salalah before it was refurbished. The port was very, very quiet and not quite what we had hoped for. In container handling terms it had one very tired Japanese container crane and a big fork lift truck.

You could add to that some paved areas to stack containers, the elderly S&P cargo cranes and that was it. Walking to the edge of the quay I looked down at an aquarium of coloured fish, not the oily waste and scum of most ports I visited. The beach inside the breakwaters provided a place for the

fisherman to draw up their boats, clean or dry their catch, and for dhow masters to careen their dhows with a scrub of the hull and the application of lime to keep the worm and weeds away. My report back to Dubai office was not encouraging. However, if it were to be the only route for cargo we could find a way.

That visit never came to anything, and Raysut continued to simmer quietly in the sun until the ships got bigger and the cargos more plentiful. Meanwhile I had left Dubai for Rotterdam.

Some time in 1988 I found myself in Oman to look at Port Raysut on behalf of my employers Sea-Land. Malcolm McLean was the founder of Sea-Land and the inventor of container transportation. The Straits of Hormuz were being affected by an ongoing dispute and we were not sure if our ships would continue to reach Dubai. Could Port Raysut in Salalah solve the problem for us if the worst should happen?



In 1996, logistics had taken a new turn brought about by the need for faster transit times, bigger ships and what was known as “hub and spoke” services. It was no longer economic for us to send the big ships up to Dubai to feed the Gulf if we could find a better way. Additionally, the through traffic cargo owners wanted to see their freight at destination and ready for sale, not for it to take a four day vacation cruise to Dubai and back. I was therefore back in Salalah with a brief to examine the possibility of taking over the whole port operation from the

government, tugs, pilots, harbour master, dhow handling, general cargo, stevedore labour, administration, power distribution and of course the new container berths, and the fishermen.

I wrote a second report saying that we could most likely do it by merging the old and the new container terminals to provide a viable port overall. We had already agreed to build the new container berths, but this was quite a departure from our usual modus operandi.

Port development involves a lot of

different agencies or “stake holders” with varying interests in the process or the eventual purposes of the project. Many of them were in Salalah, aside from Muscat and the ministries, and for that I needed local knowledge and help. Hassan joined the project team to make two of us. Hassan worked for the old port and was introduced to me as my guide and mentor for all things Dhofari. A quiet courtly man with wide connections he took me to see the Wali, the water board, the electricity board, the tribal sheikhs affected, the environmental agency

and places we might rent for our staff to live in. He was of immense help and happily we were able to provide his son with a position in the new operation. We took pains to ensure we met with the local people to discuss the effect that the new developments would have on them and their businesses. The site of the port had been tribal land so there was some local feeling that they should be accommodated in recognition of their new position. In the event everything was settled amicably.

The German construction company, Hochtief, had built the last port extension in

1984 and provided some exemplary site accommodation for their staff which had deteriorated badly by the time we got there. In setting up a new operation, we had to recognise the needs of our future local and expatriate staff. The port already employed a large number of both, who were either housed in the town or on site in what we called the barracks. This was not going to work for the future so we had to find suitable accommodation for all grades as well as schooling for their children. The local community rose to the occasion, schools were expanded, villas built, and the

port authorities refurbished existing buildings and later on created new ones.

Under the Omani labour law, we were obliged to employ a high proportion of Omanis: over 60% as I remember it. Being completely new to Oman, we needed experienced assistance and retained the services of locally established training companies who also assisted with recruitment. The tribal elders were extremely active in pushing their young people into the process and regularly arrived in our managing director's office requesting a greater share of the jobs for their youngsters. Of the 1,245 applicants, a total of 250 Omanis were employed through the programme, many of whom had never worked since leaving school. Retention was excellent and training has brought career advancement for many of them.

Construction started in earnest with the appointment of the civil works contractors and the arrival of a massive cutter suction dredger, the "Taurus". She was there to cut the deep approach channel and with the spoil resulting, reclaim the area for the new container terminal. Quay construction proceeded in step with the reclamation.

In the main, the project was able to progress without the sort of pitfalls often experienced in port work. The ground conditions in Salalah are excellent, and for most of the year the weather is ideal. The khareef, or monsoon period, means high winds and high waves during the months of June and July. The Hochtief breakwaters already existed to protect the dredging and construction, and the lee breakwater was useful in constructing the new quay face and retaining the fill from the dredged channel. We had one unexpected problem.

The arrival of the terminal cranes in any port is a big occasion; it begins to look like a port instead of a construction site. We had ordered both the ship-to-shore cranes and the stack cranes; the latter arrived first having sailed through the monsoon from China. The insurers didn't like that and with good reason. Somewhere in the Indian Ocean a big wave took the loading ramp off the bow of the ship and dropped it in deep water. This ramp was used to roll the 120 ton stack cranes onto the ship in China and would have been used to roll them off in Oman – except not this time. The Chinese crew set to work, night and day, to build a



The German construction company, Hochtief, had built the last port extension in 1984 and provided some exemplary site accommodation for their staff which had deteriorated badly by the time we got there.

The old Stothert & Pitt bath level luffing cranes.

Local fishing boat careened for cleaning off and antifouling with lime.



new ramp out of whatever heavy steel section we could find for them. They used all the available welding rods in Muscat. A new ramp was built weighing 30 tons, and this was lifted aboard the ship, which was moored bow on to the quay. The ship also had anchors out astern and wires to the bollards on the quay. It was dark when the roll-off started, and we were all in attendance under the flood lights. However, there was a problem. As I watched, the toe

of the ramp began to range to and fro on the quay, six inches at first and then more until it was several feet. That was when the five inch circumference steel mooring wire snapped. These things are lethal and can cut a man in half. The surge stopped, and we also stopped to consider the next move. It was obviously a pendulum motion excited by wave action but we could see no waves of any significance. The ship and mooring arrangement must be such that they hit the

resonant frequency of the invisible excitation. Could we change the resonant frequency of the ship by putting a tug on the stern of the ship pulling at one quarter power? It worked and we got all the cranes off without anyone being cut in half.

The very low frequency wave action came back to haunt us later with the big container ships when, during the khareef, they would range up and down the quay making cargo working impossible and snapping their mooring lines. That instigated a four year research programme into the very little known hydraulic phenomenon of infra-gravity waves. This included the installation of a revolutionary vacuum mooring system developed in Australasia.

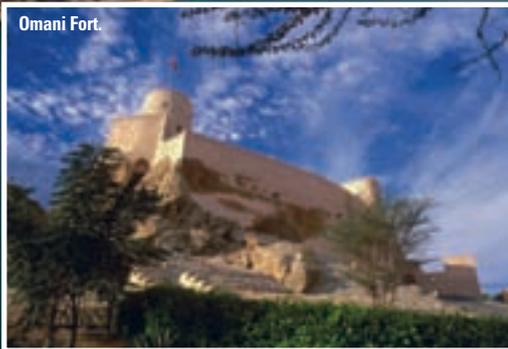
Twenty years ago Port Salalah was little more than a fishing village. Today it is one of the fifty or so major container ports in the world moving 3.6 million twenty foot equivalent units (TEU) a year in the 2012 peak. For comparison all the UK ports together move around 9 million TEU each year (World Bank for 2013). Additionally, the general cargo berths work over 10 million tons of cargo a year and are due to be expanded. The container terminal has some 20 massive container quay cranes and three times that of stack cranes. The port's Omanisation achievements are impressive, providing private sector training, employment and career advancement to Dhofaris and Omanis at large. The Journal of Commerce ranked Salalah as the 15th most productive container port in the world.

Port Salalah has driven local investment in export generating business, thus the success of the general cargo berths. The port is a major contributor to the Oman government's drive for non petro-chemical business developments in the country. It is to the very great credit of the Omani government that the need and opportunity for the port was seen and acted upon with efficiency, speed and great support for the developers.

Today Port Salalah, as Port Raysut is now called, has twenty or more massive 900 to 1200 ton ship to shore cranes and around three times as many 120 ton stack cranes and handles more than 3 million twenty foot equivalent container units a year. The general cargo terminals are reported to be over subscribed at 10.3 million tons per annum. ■

PHOTOS BY KHALIL AL ZADJALI

BEAUTIFUL OMAN





Omani Fishermen.



Khalil.



Musandam.



Camaraderie – Royal Cavalry of Oman.

OMANI WOMEN

ARTICLE BY HELEN COUCHMAN

I first visited Oman in February 2012 and was immediately struck by its welcome and warm beauty. I'm a British artist who at the time was living in Beijing, my home for nearly seven years.

I had gone to China and other places to satisfy my interest in responding directly to my location through my work and in Beijing's case follow my persistent curiosity with fast changing landscapes. However while working there a shift in my practice was marked by the publication of my book, *WORKERS* which consisted of a series of portraits of migrant workers who were in Beijing in 2007 constructing the huge Olympics sites.

Then later in my first days in Oman I happened upon two Bedouin women walking as if from nowhere through the unmarked dunes towards a destination unknown. I was on an expedition in the desert at the edge of The Empty Quarter, and being the only woman among men was perhaps the reason that they invited me alone for the ritual welcome of cardamom coffee and fresh dates. They showed me

around their farm hidden behind a couple of dunes and I was struck by their welcome and their husbandry. I left the country on that first trip determined to return and work on an artist's journey, to meet women and to understand better what I had glimpsed in that first meeting.

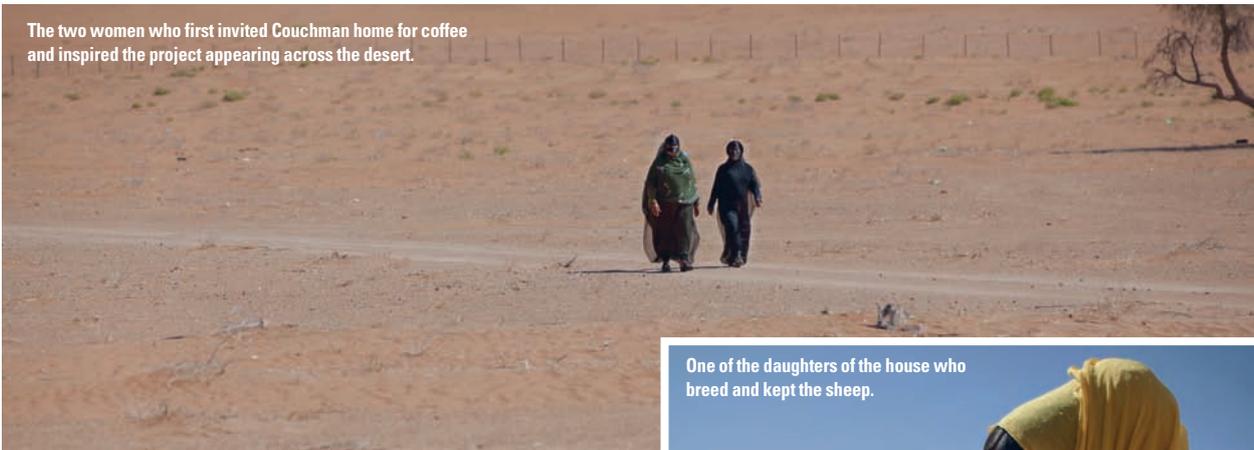
In England I researched images of Omani women in Oxford and London libraries and museums and found next to nothing, and as the time passed I felt it was now all the more important to make this project. It was then that I proposed my idea to the Anglo-Omani Society and I am very grateful for the grants I have won to carry it out. The project has now become my third book and will be launched in Muscat on 14th October along with an exhibition of the work.

The book consists of portraits of women who I have met on three separate journeys across the country from the tip of



Helen Couchman dressed up and made up by some of the women she met near Hayma.

The two women who first invited Couchman home for coffee and inspired the project appearing across the desert.



One of the daughters of the house who breed and kept the sheep.



Musandam to the border with Yemen and from the desert towards Saudi Arabia and over to follow the eastern and southern coast. The series explores the depiction of Omani Arab women, the diversity of self-presentation and fashion, modesty and beauty in the region. I met women from different communities; from Bedu desert families to those in mountain villages, to city girls in Muscat. The portrait is of a very diverse group of women and their individual style. They all decide how they would like to look.

At one large modern house I was talking with the brother or uncle in the family while his family member changed clothes. He asked me incidentally where I was from. "UK" I said, and then, "British". "Ah" he replied, "we've had a British visitor pass through here before. I don't remember his name, it was something like Thesss..." He paused stuck on the name. I hesitated and then said "Thesiger?" "Yes that's it," he said. Conversations such as this reminded me of a certain privilege I had as a foreign visitor, and then as a woman to be welcomed and accepted into homes and being permitted to photograph women if they wished it in a country where this is not customary.

I photographed decorative embroidered cuffs, mothers and babies in matching outfits, sisters, mothers and grandmothers. I feel that photography by its nature allows the viewer of the portraits to consider the beauty in the details of how the women I met were dressed.

I never knocked on doors but met women in the street or out working. Some of the women in Muscat had patterned abayas or green or grey power lenses in their eyes. A good

third of those I met invited me in but declined the portrait, and everywhere there was talk about what I was working on and family introductions.

In some cases the elderly wrote an 'X' in place of their signatures and others made a little scribble to agree to be pictured. I was sometimes dressed up, made up and bedecked with Omani jewellery myself by the women as I talked with them about what they might like to wear for their portrait. I was sometimes offered small gifts, my favourites being metallic hand sewn fabric burkas in different designs reflecting the styles of the particular regions I was in at the time. I was also given intricately drawn henna from my fingertips running elegantly up my arms to the elbow on two occasions. I talked to one young woman in a remote mountain village about what to do with a PhD qualification once you have a family and a baby in your arms. The



portraits are the product of a journey, all these conversations and the quiet nights camping out later thinking back over the day.

I would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society for its wonderful support and crucially two grants that have enabled me to complete this project, which at first seemed a dream away. ■

The book 'Omani Women' will be launched in Muscat on the 14th October with an accompanying exhibition of thirty-three of the portraits at Gallery Sarah, Museum Bait Al Zubair, Muscat. There will be a book launch in London in November, details tbc. Details of the book and a purchasing page can be found at www.SoloshowPublishing.com For this and other projects see: www.helencouchman.com

THE OMANI CHILD: HOW FAR WE'VE COME

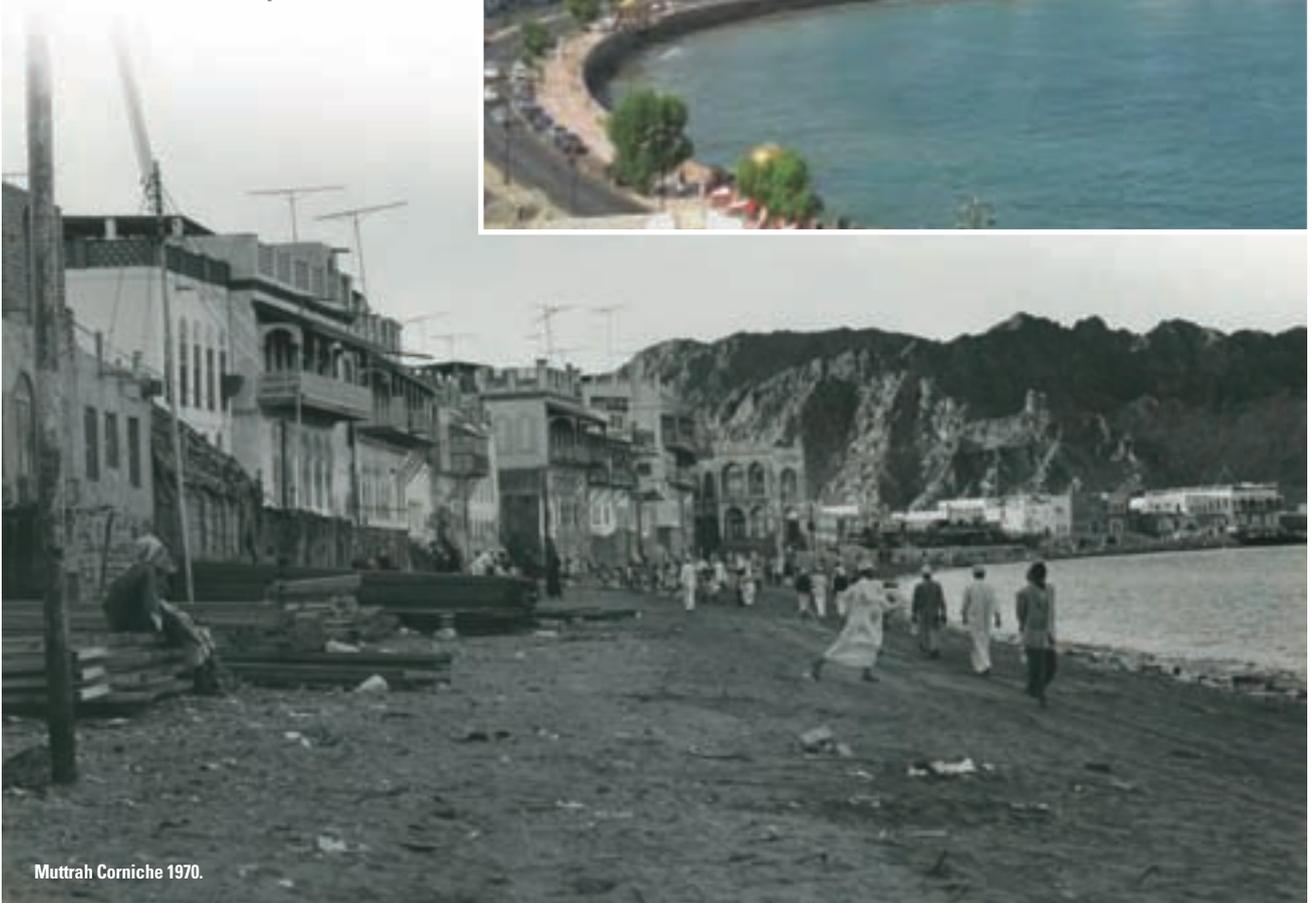
In 1970, Sultan Qaboos unveiled the country and embarked on a new reform.

His Majesty's policy to modernise Oman through the development of infrastructure, health, and education had primarily affected the Omani children. This change offered the Omani child the opportunity to prosper in all aspects of life.

ARTICLE BY DR. MASOOMA AL SALEH
EARLY CHILDHOOD AND DISABILITY EDUCATIONALIST

The development of infrastructure is obvious for those who have come to Oman in the past three decades; the before and after pictures depict all that needs to be expressed about Oman. It's the mushrooming effect that takes aback returning visitors.

The shift in health services has also been immense. The provision of basic health care in 1970 can be summed to two hospitals with only 12 beds. However, this number had increased dramatically in 2010, to 50 hospitals of 4,692 beds, 176 health centres excluding private hospitals and clinics.



Muttrah Corniche 1970.



Kuttab – Quran Recital class.

Antenatal care in 2010 flourished in which expecting mothers' visits reached a number of 67,480. Children's immunisation programmes were initiated and recorded as the highest in the Gulf region, growing from zero% in 1985 to more than 98%, for all types of vaccines at the national level in 2010. The infant mortality rate dropped to 7.80 in 2010 (World Bank report 2012). This was also documented as the lowest in the region. Life expectancy showed a drastic rise of 20 years from 1970 to 2010; from 50 to 70 years for adults. Current plans for a medical city include a 1billion Omani Rial project by 2020.

The effect of this growth and development extended to women. The women's involvement was a foremost point of change in The Sultanate. Women have been considered as the partners in building the nation. This can be reflected through recognition of their potential. Oman was one of the first countries in the region to appoint women Ministers, Ambassadors, Shurra (Consultative Council) representatives and business women and entrepreneurs. A good example of this accomplishment is my own family. I have three sisters, of which my two older sisters never got a chance to attend school. The Quran recital group (Kuttab) was their only prospect for literacy. My other sister and I were fortunate to have been born in his Majesty Sultan Qaboos's

era, and hence, had the opportunity to finish our doctorate degrees at Sheffield University-UK.

The growth and progression of any society is measured through the provision of services for its children. These services should include the right and access to education and health, as well as social and leisure activities and interests.



The shift in education since 1970 has been immense; His Majesty's priority was to change the Close Door Policies. The initial goal was to eliminate illiteracy. The provision of education to both genders demonstrated a rise to 81% literacy. In 1970, there were 900 students in 3 male schools; by 2010 there were 347,445 students in 1040 schools for both genders. Schools were

spread to all regions of the country, to keep up with neighbouring developing countries. His Majesty also encouraged the return of migrated nationals. The emphasis increased on training the local cadre to take the place of expatriate skilled professionals; the growth of teacher training colleges and institutes emerged.



Despite this reform, there was little change for the child with disability in terms of rights and access to available services. Children with disabilities need specialised services and support beyond what is currently provided by the Ministries of Health, Social Development and Education. The public health services cater for the prevention and management of common illnesses, but do not provide support for children with disabilities and their families in order to maximise their development and functioning, and facilitate their inclusion into society.



In 2002, I was appointed as the director of The Early Intervention Centre for Children with Disabilities. From the start, my focus had been not only on the provision of quality early intervention services that covered each child's social, medical, physical and academic requirements, via rehabilitative services, but to advocate awareness and understanding within the community. Parental support was dire in most cases that came to the Centre. Many of these parents, while being assisted and supported by the immediate and extended families, lacked the emotional and practical understanding



of the disability. The training and development of the local cadre became a necessity. I found the idea of having volunteers solely running the Centre unacceptable. Their presence while being helpful could not be depended on. These children, in my opinion needed skilled personnel and professionals who not only empathised with our children, but actually knew how to provide care and therapy for them.

Our mission was to provide these children with skills to enable them to enroll in mainstream schools whenever possible, and hence improve the quality of their and their family lives.

While it is subjective to measure achievements, however, there were a number of accomplishments that we are proud of. The Centre did record higher numbers of children and families each successive year; a growing unfortunate waiting list that we felt frustrated to turn back. More families came forward to consult; distancing themselves from the negative stigma imposed by society. Another recognisable achievement was that we were able to train our local staff. The young girls who had initially joined the Centre were high school graduates; offering them further academic training not only boosted their abilities and competencies, but also provided them with opportunities to develop as qualified individuals and practitioners in the field of disability.

Involving the community was an important aspect of our success. Parents did not only need guidance but active

involvement. Fundraisers, activities and events that were targeted at society had immeasurable effect on changing mindsets and attitudes towards disability. This in turn, had its ripple effect on decision makers both in private and public sectors. To its credit, the local government had initiated basic goals and strategies concerning the future of people with disabilities. I genuinely believed that active and effective governmental involvement could aid family empowerment and societal acceptance.

Both private and public sectors must take into account involving parents as partners in the development of programmes and implementation of policies. Throughout my experience at the Centre, I saw parents yearn for accurate information, whether diagnostic or functional tasks, to assist their children's development. Parents need a support system via groups or counselling to understand and cope with their individual situation. Financial aid is another common necessity for most of these parents that the government must set policies for.

I had many aspirations during my time as Centre director. The main objective that we worked towards was to create a model centre. While there is no such thing as an ideal model, the idea of an exemplary

We wanted to create a Centre that is both functional and efficient with the objective of providing inclusive early intervention services to support young disabled children and their families



facility that could host all my aspirations under one roof seemed incredible and mind-blowing. We wanted to create a Centre that is both functional and efficient with the objective of providing inclusive early intervention services to support young disabled children and their families. The Centre would include therapists and professionals to serve children's holistic needs both therapeutic and academic. It would also include a resource unit to aid the learning and enablement of professionals, parents and students in the field. Another essential facility would cater to ongoing professional development. This would be to ensure the provision of varying training needs for all stakeholders; families, professionals, and other interested parties from the community.

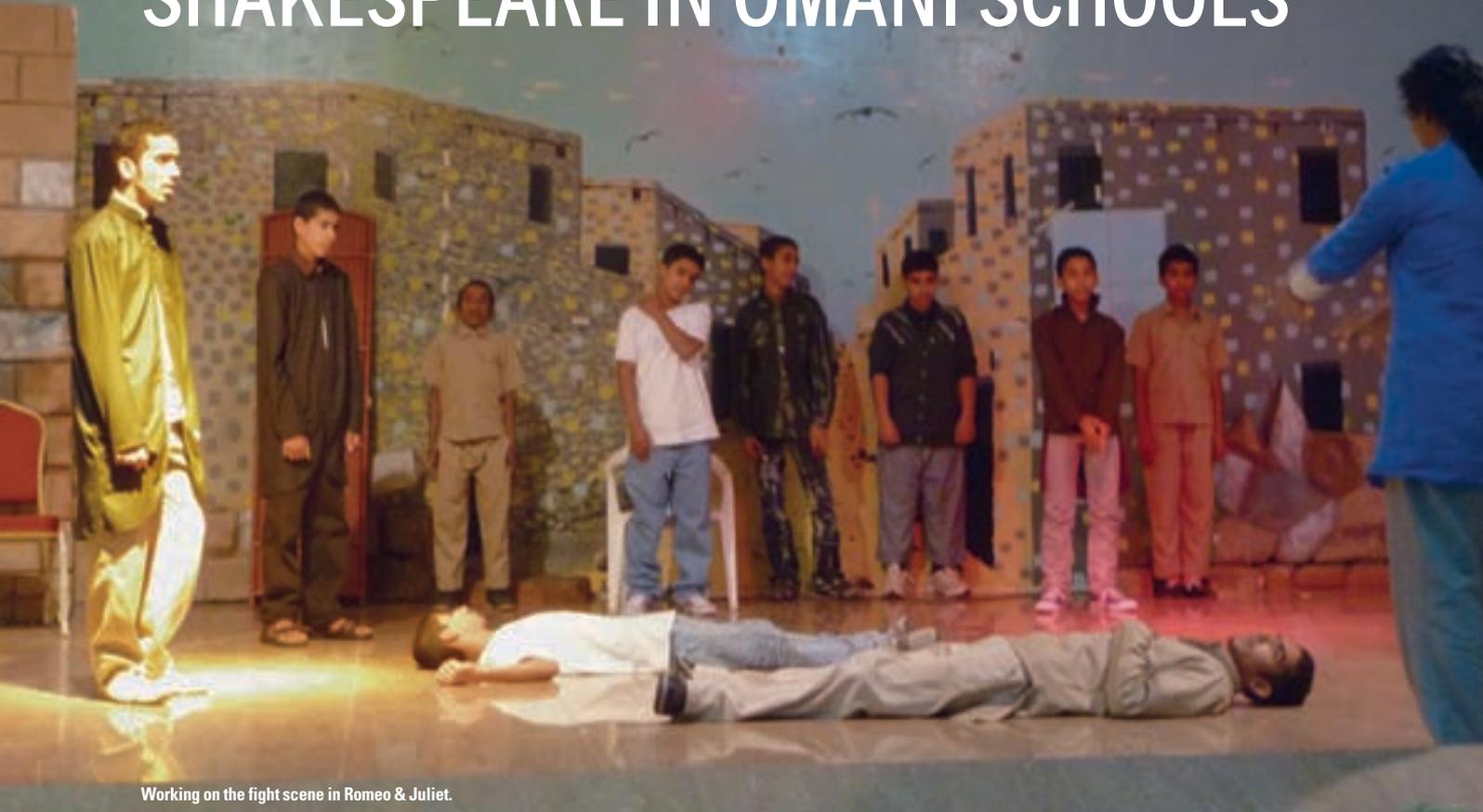
The Centre would also undertake the educational and advocacy role of eliminating the widespread negative attitudes about disability in Oman. Programmes and events would work towards publicising and improving societal awareness of people with disability.

Whilst the aspirations of creating a Centre seem to be an enormous advance, it is also only a small segment of what the real needs of these children are. The country must set in place the actions and processes that implement Child's Rights Policies. The training of the local Omani cadre needs to be increased to fulfill the gap in need for professionals in the field of disability. Every child should have access to inclusive education, hence the government has to take the initiative of spreading inclusive schools around the country. Similarly, the needs for recreation and leisure facilities must be considered, hereafter, introducing inclusion in a broader implication.

The challenges we face and still live are immense. Change can only be set in place if decision makers establish the needed pathways to put the needs of the child with disability on the national agenda. Government bodies and decision makers must plan and strategise for the future vision of all, now that Oman has made its leap to pace with developed countries; it has to meet the expectation of all its citizens.

The ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of children and their families by creating a moving positive force in shaping the future of Oman. ■

SHEIK EL ZUBAIR? SHAKESPEARE IN OMANI SCHOOLS



Working on the fight scene in Romeo & Juliet.

Aileen Gonsalves is an actor, director and teacher; Tracy Irish is a Shakespeare scholar and teacher, and both have a long association with the Royal Shakespeare Company. This project came about through a collaboration between the RSC and the British Council.

Shakespeare is a familiar name around the world but in schools not always a popular one. Many young people first meet Shakespeare sitting at their desks, reading his plays. They are told he is Britain's most famous playwright, loved and respected the world over, but often they do not feel this for themselves, instead they find him difficult and boring. Shakespeare is not on the curriculum in Oman, but through this project young Omanis met him up on their feet, through performance, and found a real connection to his work.

There is a story that Shakespeare was really Sheik el Zubair, an Arab born poet. A key objective in the way we work is to encourage young people to feel a sense of ownership of Shakespeare, as a piece of global cultural heritage that belongs to them as much as to anyone else, and as an artist that speaks to their lives today. For us, Shakespeare's genius lies in his ability to write characters and situations that allow

infinite possible interpretations as different cultures, different generations, and different individuals bring their own unique experiences to understanding his words. The heightened language of the text gives a beauty and a distance that allows the words room to breathe. Our playful approach, putting discovery first, allows us to find meanings in the text that have just been waiting for their time and place to be released.

The structure of our project was in four phases. The first and fourth phases provided professional development in theatre approaches to teaching Shakespeare for teachers from four regions: Batinah North, Batinah South, Dakhiliyah and Muscat. In phase two, the teachers worked with their students to create a performance of a Shakespeare play for a regional festival. From those regional festivals a final winner, the best performance, was chosen and those young people travelled to London for phase three.

Arriving in Oman, we found it to be, what I'm sure you all know, an incredibly hospitable culture, so warm and welcoming; but also very different in many ways to our own. We knew that we needed to acknowledge values pluralism, that we all have different values born from our individual cultural contexts, and our backgrounds in theatre as much as anything else have taught us to listen, share ideas and negotiate the values which allow us to work and play together. Our journey with the teachers was not always easy. On our first day of working we quickly realised that there was a high level of discomfort. Many adults find the prospect of being on their feet connecting their minds and bodies daunting to begin with but quickly relax and find the approaches enjoyable and productive. The Omani teachers were no different in this respect but the close proximity required by many of the activities was deeply uncomfortable for some in a mixed gender group. This was resolved when we negotiated a flexible approach that allowed the teachers to engage at their own

level of comfort, working with whomever they chose, but it alerted us to the dangers of misinterpretation. Although we soon realised that we all liked and trusted each other enough to see what happened when we worked together in a practical way, we could not avoid cultural differences, particularly as we were working through translators.

We wanted to be open, to listen and share ideas but we were also in the position of 'experts'; what we regarded as suggestions and opinions were sometimes translated as facts. One example was in our exploration of the relationship between King Lear and his daughters: we were interested in the complicated power relationship with serious faults on both sides, but for the Omanis, the suggestion that a father could be wrong in wanting to stay with his daughter was incomprehensible. Our mistake was not in raising the issue - Omanis like a good discussion - but in assuming a shared value that a child might feel disrespected by a parent as well as a parent feeling disrespected by a child. As we dug deeper

into the text, King Lear's cursing of his daughter with childlessness developed more sympathy for her and broadened our discussion in ways that would have proceeded differently, but no more or less valuably, in other cultures. Shakespeare is often applauded for his 'universal values', but while fundamental values of fairness and justice are inherent to us all, cultural conventions of fairness are contingent and we all need to work at understanding others' perspectives.

Working with the Omani young people in phase two was a revelation for us. We toured the regions, giving feedback and leading workshops with the students to help develop their performances. What we experienced were raw, connected versions of the stories without any of the usual reverence or reference to productions that those involved had seen or heard. It is rare to find people who have never really seen or heard any Shakespeare before and it gave us a unique insight into how the stories, the rhythms, the language, the characters' flaws and strengths, fears and desires could be

Creating the first scene of Hamlet.



Playing with the ghost scene in Hamlet.



seen afresh. Not only through the different cultural implications, like *King Lear* with his daughters, but in how intensely and passionately the plays could be performed whilst retaining a deep level of truthful connection.

In modern times Shakespeare is sometimes presented by new actors in a 'realistic' televisual style which can equate to minimalistic sometimes mumbling performances. There is a real fear of being 'over the top' so instead productions can become under-energised and disconnected from the heightened language, playing down the theatricality of the texts. In Aileen's theatre company, *Butterfly*, and in her teaching of student actors, she demands that actors get braver and bolder in their performances, particularly of Shakespeare. Truth does not have to be small, truth can be any size and shape as long as it is true and that the actor brings himself or herself wholeheartedly to the role. This is what we kept seeing very unexpectedly among these young performers in Oman. There was an open hearted willingness to bare all, to risk exposing their true emotions through this unusual language.

We played various theatre games to redirect scenes and bring out characters' objectives. One scene was particularly interesting. 'Claudius' watching the 'play within the play' in *Hamlet* appeared so obviously guilty, he wore his heart, liver and spleen on his sleeve! We played a game whereby if anyone watching became

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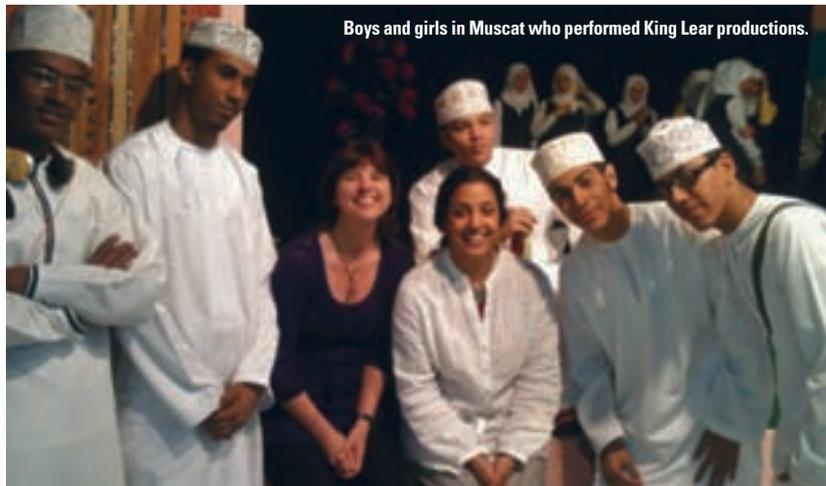
suspicious of him, they stood up. The actor soon responded to their standing up by getting much more adept at hiding his feelings and it became like watching a pressure cooker. Because the actor had started so fully engaged in the truth of the scene, it was wonderful to watch him realise the power in the struggle of a character to hide what is going on in their body with

their face and words. The tension in the room was palpable and the actor truly found the 'need to speak' and that as ever, Shakespeare's text gave him the exact right words to express what he needed to say.

In phase three, four boys, including the Claudius mentioned above, travelled to London accompanied by their teacher. The boys joined other students to form an international youth ensemble of nineteen young people from seven countries and created a short performance of Shakespeare's great tragedy, *King Lear*. The young Omani actors' openness and passion inspired the other young people in a way that allowed them to be bolder and more truthfully engaged in their own performances.

Ways of understanding how others see the world are crucial for us to exist and learn together and our experiences in Oman reminded us how Shakespeare can provide a useful site to explore our similarities, crucial in today's world where cultural differences too often create barriers rather than opportunities. The genuine openness, lack of self-consciousness and enthusiasm to engage from the young Omanis and their teachers made it both exciting and rewarding to explore politics, gender roles, family conflicts, and all the big themes of human existence found in Shakespeare. It was fascinating to discuss these issues with them through the structure of rehearsing and working on the plays. Because the Omanis came with open, full hearts, their interaction with Shakespeare created a heady mix that we have not experienced elsewhere and certainly would like to explore further. ■

Boys and girls in Muscat who performed *King Lear* productions.





BRITISH EXPLORING SOCIETY

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE OFFICE FOR
CONSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT, OMAN

In February and March 2012 and 2013 an Anglo-Omani team from the British Exploring Society and the Office for Conservation of the Environment, Oman was based in Wadi Sayq in the south-western corner of the Dhofar Mountains in Oman.



Their objective was to undertake an extensive biodiversity assessment covering all key taxonomic groups, with a special focus on the critically endangered Arabian leopard.

Local fisherman from Rakhyut transported the team along the coast enabling them to set up a base camp at the mouth of the wadi at Khor Kharfut. The expedition team of approximately

25 members then broke down into smaller groups to increase their survey coverage. They carried camping equipment, water, food rations and science equipment to satellite camp locations throughout the extensive wadi system, where they would stay for several nights surveying the surrounding habitat on circular day hikes.



One of the primary expedition objectives was to deploy over 20 camera traps to examine the large mammal communities of the wadi with a particular emphasis on estimating the population of Arabian leopards present in the area. Camera traps needed to be positioned meticulously to ensure maximum effect – in locations such as caves and trails where large mammals may frequent but also at an angle that can provide a side profile of leopards for spot pattern recognition of individuals. Despite the hard work required, the results speak for themselves.

Of equal importance was to survey other taxonomic groups. Dragonfly surveys were undertaken at all water bodies discovered by the expedition, and indeed these precious water bodies proved to be valuable for all wildlife, acting as a focal point for numerous bird and reptile surveys. Conveniently the water sources were also used to sustain small expedition teams camped in these locations. It is interesting to note the benefits afforded to wildlife by the cattle trough in the heart of the wadi fed by piped water from the small hilltop village of Hakab.

Conversely the presence of livestock throughout the wadi is a significant cause for concern, with the impacts of overgrazing degrading valuable cloud forest habitats. Unfortunately, recent research in Dhofar suggests that once defoliation of the canopies from overgrazing has occurred, the ecosystem can no longer collect cloud droplets from the monsoon fog (Khareef) through a process called horizontal precipitation, which results in twice as much water received below the canopy (net

precipitation) compared to above (rainfall). The upshot of this is that in severely overgrazed areas, the cloud forest is unlikely to ever recover. This was one of the key drivers for this Anglo-Omani expedition at Wadi Sayq.

Fortunately the camels at Wadi Sayq are managed through a transhumance system, meaning they are moved out of the wadi valley during the monsoon season. At this time of year the steep slopes within the wadi become soft and camels are at risk of slipping and becoming injured. Their absence affords the vegetation a rest from grazing during the peak growing season enabling substantial recovery of the vegetation.

This is one of the reasons that Wadi Sayq persists as quite possibly the greenest and most biodiverse valley in Dhofar, as illustrated by the results of the 2012 and 2013 expeditions. In total the expeditions successfully recorded 31 butterfly species, 15 reptile species, 5 small mammal species, 5 bat species, 903 dragonflies (40 hours of surveys), 118 bird species from 7,927 bird sightings (151 hours of surveys) and 14 large mammal species from 844 trap nights of camera trap footage.

Alongside two extensive science reports, four Omani national newspaper articles, two magazine articles and countless blog posts, we are thrilled that the dragonfly and bird research has been published in international scientific journals, with reptile data currently in review.

Our dragonfly paper (<http://biotaxa.org/cl/article/view/10.4.857>) discusses reasons for the observed temporal and spatial variation in community

composition and notes on species habitat preferences are included. *Tholymis tillarga* is a new species for the Arabian Peninsula and a single record of *Rhyothemis semihyalina* increases significantly the known distribution range of this species in Arabia to the West.

Our bird paper (<https://goo.gl/ETmPmP>) provides a thorough description of the habitats and a systematic inventory of bird species and their abundances within Wadi Sayq. It highlights a notable richness of raptor species, the importance of the area for a number of globally threatened species, and the localised distribution of several species due to limited habitat availability.

Publishing in high quality international peer-reviewed scientific journals is critically important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is proof of the hard work of everyone involved in the expeditions. It shows that thought and ability was injected into the expedition at every stage, making it possible for expedition teams to collect data of publishable standard whilst in the field. Secondly, it makes the results available to the global scientific community. This is especially valuable in a region as understudied as Dhofar, and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole. These results can inform future research in the local area and act as a comparative dataset for neighbouring areas. The results can also enter global biodiversity databases such as those maintained by the IUCN, as has happened with the dragonfly results. Finally, journal papers raise awareness of a region, habitat or the species within it. They inform not just academic researchers, but television producers, newspapers, magazines, charitable organisations and wildlife enthusiasts worldwide.

The British Exploring Society expeditions have highlighted how precious the biodiversity of Dhofar is to Oman, and the world. The work of the expeditions in addition to previous camera trap research undertaken by the Office for Conservation of the Environment has resulted in a proposal for Wadi Sayq to be assigned protected area status. It has been a privilege to work with Omani conservationists as well as young explorers on this project, and the hope is to seize another opportunity to work in Oman again. ■

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY (1970-1995)



1970 was a year of
change in Oman.

There was a long-established, though small, British community living in Muscat because Sultan Said bin Taimour had regularly recruited British subjects to fill key advisory and administrative posts. Outside Muscat, the numbers of British and other expatriates were growing as The Sultan's military forces expanded, and as the prospect of oil revenue strengthened.

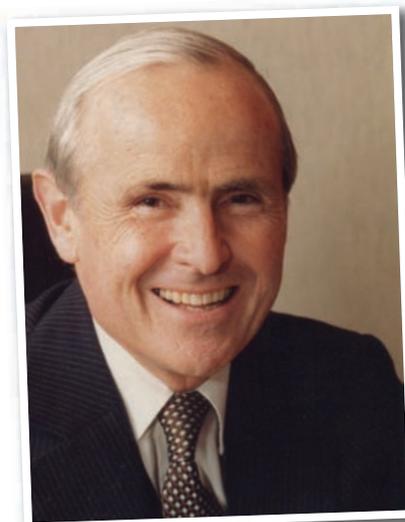
When Sultan Qaboos came to power in that year, he had ambitious plans to modernise and improve The Sultanate, with British personnel in a good position to supply the expertise needed to realise these policies. Increasing numbers of British and other expatriate consultants, contractors and advisers were anticipated and many would be wanting to bring their families into what had until then been a largely unaccompanied posting.

Diplomatic links with the outside world – as this stage only Britain and India had any formal representation – were going to be increasingly important. Her Majesty's Government therefore decided to upgrade the British Consulate General to an Embassy and Donald Hawley was appointed as the first Ambassador to The Sultanate. In early 1971 he and his family moved in. During his four year tour he witnessed, together with the growing international community, the beginnings of the enormous surge of development, particularly in health,

education and infrastructure, starting the process of transforming Oman from an isolated and impoverished country into a modern Islamic state.

He returned to Britain in 1975 wanting to create a forum where Britain could continue to foster its relationship in all spheres with Oman to enhance its progress. On the 6th of November 1975, he held an informal meeting in London with some key figures in the business world, as well as diplomatic and military people who shared his interest. The meeting agreed to form a new organisation, with the serious objectives of spreading knowledge of and interest in Oman, to promoting friendship and good relations between the two nations, and to supporting progress in Oman. This was not to be just a social meeting place, but should be a society with a good programme of events and lectures.

From then on things moved quickly: ten weeks later on the 27th January 1976, at the Royal Commonwealth Society in London, the inaugural meeting of the Anglo-Omani Society was held. Donald Hawley was voted into office as the first Chairman and the Omani Ambassador as President. Eighty-six founder members were enrolled with



Sir Donald Hawley was the first Chairman of the Society.

twenty of these voted onto a new committee. Rules and subscription rates were agreed, and minutes were taken, to be approved at the first committee meeting a month later.

The new committee obviously had experience and good contacts, as during the Society's first full year the members enjoyed nine events, all with an Omani theme. There were three lectures, a buffet lunch, and the first annual dinner, all at the Royal Commonwealth Society, and two film shows, one at the Shell centre, and a reception at the Royal Photographic Society. There was also a reception and supper with the Bahrain Society at a private house, attended by the Oman Minister for Commerce, Mohammed Al-Zubair. There was further Omani support during the year when the Oman Ministry of Information donated £1,000 to the Society and His Majesty Sultan Qaboos consented to become Patron.

By the first annual general meeting on the 9th of May 1977 there were 159 ordinary members and 14 corporate members so the Chairman was able to give a very positive report. The Society had quickly become well established and was attracting growing attention.

The formation of the Anglo-Omani Society coincided with the war in the south of Oman ending with the defeat of the Marxist insurgency. It was therefore no surprise that many of the lectures during the early years of the Society were about military matters. Expatriates who had been part of, or connected with the war, and who then returned to Britain, were very happy to explain their connection with victory. UK-based members in turn were pleased to hear direct, unfiltered information from those who had been involved, sometimes deeply. Then as the months and years went by, the frequency of the military lectures reduced, to be gradually replaced by increasing interest in, and lectures on, the major and speedy development being experienced throughout The Sultanate.

In 1979, Donald Hawley was succeeded as Chairman by Donald Orde, who had recently returned to England from working in Dubai, which included responsibility for Oman. He had been the Gulf General Manager for Gray, Mackenzie & Co (part of the Inchcape Group). Then, as he approached final retirement, he was

appointed to a senior head office position in London.

Donald Orde was in turn succeeded by Gordon Calver, who was a banker and had been a senior executive with The British Bank of the Middle East. It was during Gordon Calver's time as Chairman that in 1986 the Society registered as a charity with the Charity Commission (Reg No: 293509).

Following Gordon's death in 1990, Ivor Lucas, who had just completed a two-year appointment as British Ambassador to Oman, became Chairman and held the post for the following five years.

The formation of the Anglo-Omani Society coincided with the war in the south of Oman ending with the defeat of the Marxist insurgency.

It was something of a handicap that with income limited to members' subscriptions and the occasional grant, the Society could not afford the luxury of a permanent office and event facilities. Committee members worked on their responsibilities from home, and for a number of years the monthly Society lectures took place in the premises of the Middle East Association in Central London. Fortunately, some of the more ambitious Society events were funded by the generous sponsorship of Shell and the Inchcape group.

In the summer of 1995, Ivor Lucas asked Sir Terence Clark, lately Ambassador to Oman, whether he would be willing to stand as his successor as Chairman of the Committee. As a founder member of the Society, well-acquainted with its aims and objectives, and with his experience of Oman in the early 1970s and again in the early 1990s, he had no hesitation in agreeing. He was duly elected Chairman at a meeting of the Committee on 15th June, so that he could preside over the Annual General Meeting on 4th July.

His first task was to secure speakers for the annual lunch in September and what a cliffhanger it was! A week before the event, it was still unknown who would make the reply to his speech of welcome to the guests. However, Emma Nicholson, MP, was happy to play that role and HRH Prince Michael of Kent also agreed to attend. So the British side was well represented. However, the position on the Omani speaker kept changing up to the day before the event. That morning, the Chairman was assured by the Oman Embassy that HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmud Al Said, then Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs, would represent Oman, but half an hour later he was told that HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, then Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would be coming instead. Finally, later the same morning he was told that HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Said, Commander of the Sultan of Oman's Navy, would definitely be coming! In the event, it all went off beautifully; but it was a pattern with which he was to become familiar over the next eight years of his incumbency.

1995 was a particularly auspicious year, as it was HM The Sultan's Silver Jubilee. Ivor Lucas had put together a splendid album of commemorative photographs as the Society's gift, for which the Chairman wrote a covering letter for Sir Donald Hawley to present to His Majesty at the Jubilee celebrations in November.

However, things then took an unexpected turn, which presented Sir Terence and the Society with a dilemma. In January 1996, Sir Terence was offered the appointment of Director for Bosnia of the International Crisis Group, based in Sarajevo. This non-governmental organisation, based in the United States but with a distinguished international Board of Trustees, wanted him to lead a team to monitor the implementation of the Dayton Peace Accords. It was an exciting prospect in a country he knew well, having served twice in former Yugoslavia as a diplomat: so, he accepted and informed the Committee accordingly. As he would be coming back from time to time, the contract was for only a year and he could be in email contact, it was thought that he could probably manage to continue as Chairman, with his Deputy, Peter Sincoc, acting for him, whenever

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

necessary. By March, however, Sir Donald Hawley, as Vice-President was beginning to wonder whether he should stand down and let Duncan Slater, a former Ambassador to Oman, take over. In the event, Sir Terence continued and by October he was back in London ready once again to tackle the question of speakers at the annual lunch in November. This time it was easier and there were two brilliant speakers in HE Ahmed Macki, Minister of National Economy and the Hon. Douglas Hurd, former Foreign Secretary. In his own speech of welcome Sir Terence recalled his involvement in the establishment of the Society in 1976, when the membership was only about 60; whereas it had risen to about 600 in 1996. In November many of them came to a reception to honour the founders on the Society's 21st anniversary, which was celebrated more formally at the annual lunch the following year, when HE Maqbool Ali Sultan, then Minister of Commerce & Industry and Mr Derek Fatchett, MP, then Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office were the principal speakers. This was the first major event to be organised by the new Secretary, Richard Owens, who had been appointed at the AGM in May to succeed Morrie Johnston, who had retired after carrying much of the burden of administering the Society for

some ten years. Richard Owens also organised in March 1999 the Society's first tour of Oman, which was not only fun but also a great opportunity for publicising the Society in Oman.

That year was also to be a turning point for the Society in a different way. In July, in answer to Sir Terence's request he was invited to call on His Majesty The Sultan during a visit to London to inform him about the Society and its activities. At the end of the call, when The Sultan had likened the Society to a bridge with Oman, he called his Equerry and asked for "the envelope". When it was brought, he opened it and looked inside, saying with a twinkle in his eye that he wanted to check that "it" was there. As Sir Terence made his way out, he took a peep inside the envelope and was amazed to see a cheque for the Society for £70,000! With this huge boost to its resources the Society was then able to embark on a much enhanced programme of activities.

The first major initiative was to mark the Millennium and the 200th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Britain and Oman by holding with the British Museum, on 17-19th July 2000 a well-attended three-day seminar entitled "Historic Oman: Cultures, Contacts, Environment". HRH Princess Alexandra

and HH Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Al Said, then Minister of Culture and National Heritage with a delegation from Oman attended a reception on the opening evening in the splendidly appropriate John Addis Islamic Gallery of the British Museum. A full record of this important event was subsequently published in the Journal of Oman Studies. The Millennium lunch in October was also a notable success with Dr Muhammad Al Rumhy, Minister of Oil & Gas, and Mr Peter Hain, MP, then Minister of State at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office as the principal speakers. They both spoke extempore in glowing terms of UK-Oman relations and the huge turnout of members and guests thoroughly enjoyed it.

The highlight of 2001 was an evening at the Army & Navy Club in December. Nigel Knocker and the Chairman had managed to persuade Lord Carrington, Defence Secretary 1970-74 and Foreign Secretary 1979-82, to address the Society on his impressions of Oman. When they called on him at his home, he was rather diffident, claiming in the typically modest style of the elegant amateur that he knew nothing about Oman. However, they talked him through the recent history of Oman and on the night he gave a witty and well-informed talk which was further amplified by Sir Donald Hawley reading an account from his diary of Lord Carrington's visit to Oman in 1973, when Sir Donald was the Ambassador.

The Society's enhanced financial resources also enabled the start of a scheme to fund two students annually to study Arabic in Oman during part of their gap year. Nigel Knocker took charge and the first two students went out in 2002. They later gave a lively and well-presented account of their time as ambassadors of British youth.

Early in September 2003 Sir Terence decided that he should stand down as Chairman. He had too many other commitments and after eight years it was time for a change. He spoke to Sir Donald Hawley and HE Hussein Abdullatif and proposed Richard Muir as his successor. They were content and so was Richard Muir. Sir Terence duly informed the Committee on 4 September and announced the change at the annual lunch on 18 September. He was subsequently made a Vice-President of the Society.



Sayyid Faisal bin Ali Al Said, Minister of Culture & National Heritage with Sir Terence Clark, Chairman at the reception on 17th July, 2000 on the occasion of the seminar on Historic Oman at the British Museum.



HRH Princess Alexandra at the British Museum.

The Committee carried smoothly on as Richard Muir took over as Chairman with Peter Sincock as Vice Chairman and Richard Owens as Honorary Secretary. A highlight of Mavis Warner's 2003/4 lecture programme was Ian Kendrick's talk on Omani music vividly illustrated by the RAFO Arabic music group in the perfect setting of Leighton House. Under the guidance of Nigel Knocker and Pat Alston two further gap year students were installed at The Sultan's School. All agreed that there should be greater focus on the younger generation to assure the Society's long term future.

At the September 2004 Annual Lunch Baroness Symonds (then the Middle East Minister at the Foreign Office) and HH Sayyid Haitham (Minister of Heritage and Culture) were the two chief guests, this time without cliff hangers; both spoke in warm and positive terms about the bilateral relationship, comments widely reported in the Omani media. In February 2005 Richard Owens led the Society's second visit to The Sultanate, extended to include Zanzibar, a greatly oversubscribed, meticulously planned and successful expedition. Given the forthcoming 30th Anniversary of the Society in early 2006 there was no annual lunch that autumn. Richard Muir and Peter

Walmsley were invited to Muscat by Sayyid Haitham to give a joint lecture to the Oman Historical Society covering respectively the story of Bertram Thomas as Finance Minister and explorer and the discovery of oil; this well attended and publicised event gave a further boost to the Society's profile in Oman and to the Society's role in recording and documenting Oman's history.

In 2006 the Society celebrated its 30th anniversary coinciding with the 35th anniversary of the Renaissance in Oman. The Committee had decided to do this in style with a reception on 26th January for the Society's members, corporate members and Oman's wide circle of old friends. The venue was Lancaster House in St James's, made available through the Foreign Office under special dispensation. His Majesty delegated HH Sayyid Shihab as his personal representative to the event; HRH The Prince of Wales accepted the Society's invitation to be chief British guest. Both His Majesty, in a message delivered by Sayyid Shihab, and The Prince of Wales spoke with great feeling about the quality of the relationship and the Society's role in it. Perhaps remembering how much HRH had enjoyed the performance of the Royal Diwan's

Folklore Group in Salalah during a visit in 1995 His Majesty sent the same group to perform at the reception. Overcoming fears of the Lancaster House management about disturbing the neighbours, the group vigorously brought Salalah life and colour to a damp London winter evening. The Omani Embassy provided generous support including dates, halwa and other Omani delicacies. All this produced positive front page headlines in the Omani media.

Later in the year, the Society further marked the anniversary with a well-attended lecture at Leighton House in which Sir Donald Hawley recalled the Society's origins and early days. The Society also heard Lord Hurd on 'Change and Continuity in Oman' recalling his first meeting with Sayyid Qaboos as the young driver of the jeep ferrying him in Salalah from aircraft to an audience with Sultan Sai'd. In May Peter Sincock stood down as Vice-Chairman after 11 years of constant and steady support for the Society. He was replaced by Nigel Knocker who remains in the post.

The annual lunch resumed that November in a new format. Following the turnout of corporate members at Lancaster House, the Committee wanted to offer them further opportunities for links with The Sultanate. For his part, HE Maqbool Sultan as Minister of Commerce and Industry was keen to meet more British business people. The result was a morning seminar before the lunch at which the Energy Minister, Malcolm Wicks joined Maqbool Sultan in speaking about the value of commercial links. This format was repeated at the 2007 lunch at which the Omani guest was HE Ahmed Makki, Minister of National Economy. This seminar and lunch attracted a strong cohort from the banking and finance sector and impressed the minister with the strength of the City's commitment to The Sultanate.

The Chairman was greatly but very pleasantly surprised two months later to learn through the Society's President, Ambassador Hussain bin Abdul Latif, that His Majesty had decided to donate a further £500,000 to the Society to be invested to produce annual income to complement members' subscriptions and so boost the Society's activities. This had two consequences.

Firstly, the Committee was able both to increase the Sultan's School gap year

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

placements from two to four and, through grants, to create several new opportunities for young people from less advantaged backgrounds in Britain and Oman to see each other's countries, history and culture. These included two student expeditions to the Eastern Sands and to the Jebel Akhdar and another to Muscat for East London school children.

Secondly, it was judged prudent with a larger budget and a substantial sum invested to change the Society's status to that of a company limited by guarantee; this removed the personal financial liability of committee members as trustees of an unincorporated charity. The Society's charitable status and objectives remained unchanged. This transition, impeccably guided by the Secretary to the Trustees, Alan Milne, was approved at the 2008 AGM. This fortuitously prepared the Society for the next major development in its history.

Before that came the 2008 annual lunch, again preceded by a seminar, this time featuring the Minister of Higher Education HE Dr Rawiyya Al Busaidi, who spoke frankly to a strong cohort of senior figures from British universities about Oman's interest in developing a genuine two way exchange in higher education; Oman had made a major commitment in supporting British universities and sending Omani

students to Britain and wanted to see a better return. As always under Labour Governments it was hard work securing Whitehall interest in Oman and in 2008, as in 2007, the Society had difficulty in pinning down British ministers for these occasions; their absence was more than offset by a strong academic and British Council presence. The Committee were conscious that the combination of an agenda driven seminar and an annual occasion for members had its tensions, particularly given the limited capacity of the RAG dining room; each year the organisers, Valerie Robinson, Geoff and Carol Brindle somehow managed to square the circle.

In early 2009 the Chairman learned that 'a decision had been taken' that the Society should receive an endowment with which to purchase a building 'to produce a constant source of revenue to fund the Society's activities'. A subcommittee (Chairman, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer) working with Cluttons, proceeded to scour the West End for a suitable property. The requirement was enough space for the Society's offices, lectures and receptions as well as sufficient lettable areas to bring in a steady income. It proved remarkably difficult to find something not too big yet not too small in a location accessible to members and guests

and desirable to potential tenants. In the event the Society was one of the few beneficiaries of the great financial crisis; after months of fruitless searching 34/35 Sackville Street came onto the market; the owners, Aviva Insurance, needed cash. The subcommittee were able to move quickly; an offer was accepted and the deal done within a month thanks to a magnificent donation of £11million which reached the Society through the Omani Embassy.

As a company, the Society was able to purchase a property; it would not have been able to do so as a simple charity; the 2008 change of status had paid off. Writing to His Majesty in August 2009 the Chairman said:

"My colleagues on the Committee and the members of the Society have asked me to convey our respectful greetings and deep gratitude to Your Majesty as the Society's Patron for this generous and far seeing support. The purchase of a permanent home enables the Society to move forward confident in its future financial security and renewed in its objects of furthering in Britain a better understanding of The Sultanate and its achievements, and in fostering the close ties between the two countries."

Unusually for the West End the property was freehold as well as being ideally located in a quiet street just off Piccadilly. A downside was that it was subject to strict



HE Sayyid Badr and Society Chairman Richard Muir at the official opening of 34, Sackville Street.



HRH The Prince of Wales speaks at the Society's 35th Anniversary. Left to right: HE Hussain Abdul Latif President; Richard Muir, Chairman; HRH The Prince of Wales and HH Sayyid Shihab.

Grade II planning controls and carving out space for meeting rooms was challenging. The subcommittee ploughed on, engaging Overbury as contractors, and were relieved to see work completed in time for the AGM in June 2010. The Society's first permanent home with space for lectures, informal meetings, offices and a boardroom was opened formally that October by HE Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The prospect of regular rental income had enabled the Society to appoint Duncan Allen as its first full time salaried Administrator in April 2010.

As the Society acquired and fitted out Sackville Street, the usual pattern of activity continued. In May 2009, Sayyid Badr spoke in memory of Sir Donald Hawley with eloquent testimony to the work of the Society's founder who had sadly died in January 2008. In October the late Minister of Tourism HE Rajiha bint Abdul Ameer bin Ali gave a seminar for British tour operators setting out The Sultanate's strategy to attract more investment in up market facilities including eco-tourism; the Minister was also a much appreciated guest of honour at the annual lunch.

The regular programme of lectures continued and from September 2010

transferred to the new lecture room at Sackville Street replete with dimming lights, automatic blinds and other technical wizardry. By March 2011 all three upper floors had been let to reputable tenants and were soon to begin producing revenue. The advantages of a permanent home were quickly apparent. The Society had much greater flexibility in holding meetings and events and was able to host a two day session for the Oman National Human Rights Commission under its Chairman, The Hon. Mohammed al Riyami with British officials, parliamentarians and NGOs, and later in the year a seminar given by Sayyid Badr for senior British foreign policy specialists on Omani economic and foreign policy in light of the 2011 Arab Spring (or 'youthquake'). Regular and predictable income also permitted a steady increase in the size and number of the Society's grants which continued to focus on youth schemes as well as the more traditional academic research.

Perhaps appropriately, the year of the 'youthquake' saw the formation and inaugural meeting of the Society's 'New Generation Group' bringing British and Omani young people together, giving much greater impetus to the Society's long held aim of further encouraging such contacts

and exchanges. This owed much to the commitment and enthusiasm of its Chairman Ollie Blake, an alumnus of The Sultan's School gap year scheme.

The Arabic language summer school reached its third year under Lis Kendall's leadership in 2012 and transferred from Dhofar University to the Sultan's College for the Teaching of Arabic to non-Arabic Speakers. There it had the distinction of being the first course to be held at this brand new College run by the Royal Diwan located symbolically at Al Manah near His Majesty's Palace at Husn Ash Shumukh. By summer 2015 this course for British university students of Arabic will have given 50 students the opportunity not only to improve their Arabic, but also to gain a unique appreciation of Oman at a formative time in their careers.

Having seen the Society through major change and on to a new and promising course against the background of assured funding and a flourishing bilateral Anglo Omani relationship, Richard Muir decided in September 2012, not without some heart searching and regret, that the time was right to leave the ship and hand over to another pilot. In 2013 His Majesty awarded Richard Muir the Order of Na'aman (First Class).

The most generous and far sighted gift of



The Oman Ambassador cuts the tape at the inaugural meeting of the New Generation Group (NGG).

No 34 Sackville Street has given the Society the opportunity of fulfilling the true traditions of Omani hospitality in London and extend 'baytee, baytak' to all who cross the threshold. It is truly a 'home from home' as this base enables us to carry out the Society's remit to foster and encourage education and cultural projects and activities between our two countries. The premises in Sackville Street have a long and varied history and there is a sense of purpose and pride in taking that history forward. The street takes its name after Captain Edward Sackville, younger brother of the fifth Earl of Dorset, who leased a house there in 1675. Numbers 34 and 35 Sackville Street, the Society's premises were built as a pair around 1732. These were the town houses of politicians and aristocracy of the day. Indeed, as I pen this article in July 2015, No 34 Sackville Street is preparing to host HRH The Duke of York, Prince Andrew KG and HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said to a reception on the occasion of the Omani British Friendship Association Financial Services Roundtable; thus, the story continues. But it is so much more than a convenient place to host receptions. To secure the future, the Society must involve and invest in its youth. The inaugural event of the New Generation Group took place in Sackville Street in July 2011 and has grown apace (current membership stands at 539) under the guidance of Oliver Blake,

organising an exciting programme of lectures and events such as the exhibition in March 2014 with the Royal Geographical Society and a Photographic Exhibition in May 2014. The exciting development in the past year is the appointment of an Omani Chairman, Sheik Ma'an Al Rawahi, to take the Muscat branch of the NGG forward. The NGG in co-ordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Sultanate of Oman have also been instrumental in arranging and hosting a 'high-flyer' exchange programme. The Omani Student Societies of London and the Omani British Lawyers Associations have held very successful events in recent months. It is a progressive and outward looking time for the Society.

Now firmly established in our home at 34 Sackville Street, we confidently look to the 40th Anniversary of the Society which will occur in January 2016 and we acknowledge the contribution of our most recent chairmen, Noel Guckian, Nigel Knocker (Acting) and, currently, Robert Alston in taking the work and activities of the Society forward. In addition to our annual series of lectures on various aspects of living and working in The Sultanate, crafted by Louise Hosking, the Society has engaged with outside bodies in some very exciting areas. The University of Durham Department of Archaeology, is involved in the Rustaq Project. The Society has signed a collaboration agreement with this

department for five years towards an archaeological survey and excavation of Rustaq on the Batinah coast with Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. To continue the entomological work carried out by Bertram Thomas and Wilfred Thesiger in the Rub' al Khali or 'Empty Quarter,' the National Museum of Wales and the National History Museum in Oman carried out a joint expedition to hunt for existing and possibly new insect species, funded by the Anglo-Omani Society in the Dhofar region in 2013. They successfully updated existing data and recorded new Omani species. Usually one of the conditions in making a grant or award is that the recipient or recipients come and give a talk to members about their findings and experiences. So, Dr David Agassiz and Dr Mike Wilson came and gave a stimulating lecture on their findings to the Society in January 2014, showing that there is still a good deal of undiscovered insect diversity in Oman. The Anglo-Omani Society has created a bursary programme to support Biosphere Expeditions, a multi-award-winning not for profit participatory conservation organisation offering wildlife expeditions in Oman, by sending UK wildlife volunteers to their Arabian Leopard and Marine projects. Conservation is a theme which is very close to many members' hearts as they recall a land that changes from dry wadis to green oases,

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from plains to high mountains and from golden sands to an unending, ever changing coastline. So when the British Exploring Society who run an annual expedition to Oman's Empty Quarter with Oman's Office of Conservation of the Environment for fieldwork, film and photography approached us, we supported them by covering the costs of the Chief Scientist and, through the Anglo-Omani Society's Bursary for UK, team members. Both the NGG and the Society have been treated to lectures and never to be forgotten slides by Dr Chadden Hunter, producer of the BBC TV Series, 'Wild Arabia.' The Arabic Language Scheme continues to thrive. Those members who attended the annual luncheon in May 2014 were thrilled to hear Eleanor McClelland talk about her experiences in Manah, near Nizwa, where she and her fellow students immersed themselves in the Arabic language and related heritage studies. Each year the scheme operates, these young people will not only improve their communication skills in Arabic but will take away an abiding interest in the country and its people. Our Gap Year Scheme continues

with students working at The Sultan's School in Seeb and returning with enthusiastic accounts of a productive year. These examples are not intended to be exhaustive but to give a flavour of our interests and to encourage members to put forward similar ideas or proposals.

Of course, our usual events continue with our Annual Luncheon to be held in October in 2015. In the past this event has been held in the Army and Navy Club and it is likely that the event this year will also be held there with the help and kind sponsorship of Colonel Nigel Knocker. Besides our annual luncheon there has been a biennial visit to House of Lords for tea and a tour of the Palace of Westminster. For many years the Society has been indebted to Field Marshal The Lord Inge for his kind patronage of this popular event including our visit in June 2013 but, after his semi-retirement to Yorkshire, Baroness Jolly, whose husband, Ian served in Oman, assumed the mantle and over 70 members viewed the workings of Parliament and enjoyed tea on 22 June 2015. There is something to interest everyone. In June 2011, the Traditional

Music Group of the Royal Air Force of Oman gave an entertaining concert to Society members during their visit to London, when they also performed at the British Museum and in St Clement Danes Church. I hope I have given you a brief glimpse of the diverse work of the Anglo-Omani Society in recent years as it seeks to foster and encourage education and cultural projects and activities between our two countries.

Tafaddal ma'ana. (Please join us.) ■

Editor: This Brief History was compiled in a short number of weeks by four writers who had very little in the way of historical files and records for research, particularly for the earlier decades. However, the subject of the Society's history is now receiving more attention, with the distinct possibility that a more complete and structured history may soon be started. If that happens, Society members will certainly be circulated with a request for information and material that can be used in the project. Meanwhile, if any member has suggestions or such material now, please contact the Manager in the Sackville Street offices.

The front entrance of 34, Sackville Street.



The Anglo-Omani Society in 2015

CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

BY ROBERT ALSTON

The Society is indebted to those who have contributed to the short history of the past 40 years contained in this issue of the Review.

This article marks a switch from the past to the present tense and summarises what the Society is doing now. It serves also as my review of the year since I assumed the Chair in June 2014.

I can say with confidence that these are busy and productive times for the Society. The figures for most categories of membership are strong. We had at the time of the AGM in July 2015 463 Members, 235 Joint Members, and 539 Members of the New Generation Group in Britain and Oman. Corporate Membership is less flourishing - 24 in July – and this is an area we shall look to re-examine in the months ahead. I take this opportunity to express appreciation to my fellow Trustees, singling out Neil Fawcett who stands down after 15 years in this role, as well as our small staff and the interns who have supported them in the past twelve months. It is they who generate the energy and vitality to continue to build on the efforts of those who have given so much in the past.

The Review, of which this is the second edition, is another symbol of the confidence with which we face the future, and of our belief in the depth and health of relationships between Britain and Oman over a very wide range of people and activities. Communicating as well as doing is an important aspect of the Society's activities. Ian Kendrick, supported by Neil Fawcett, deserve our warm thanks for all the work they have put into producing this handsome publication.

Our lecture programme – ten in the past twelve months – remains at the heart of our activities and underlines the breadth of topics embraced by our mission to foster mutual education between the two countries. They range from photography and the Omani wedding to the Buraimi affair of the 1950s and the digitisation of the British Library's records of early British diplomatic presence in Oman. Topical highlights have included a welcome return by Sayyid Badr Bin Hamad Al Bu Saidi to give an insider's perspective from the Foreign Ministry in Muscat on the tumultuous events of the region (see p 103), and a parallel British perspective from Sir Alan Duncan, the Prime Minister's Special Envoy to Oman and Yemen. Another

Robert Alston



fascinating perspective was offered by Trustee Lis Kendall based on her work with the Mahra tribes in the areas of Yemen bordering Dhofar. At the time of writing in August 2015 we have yet to hold our 2015 Annual Lunch but have supplemented the lecture programme with the biennial House of Lords Tea Party for Members, sponsored this year by Lady Jolly.

It is important that the generosity of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in endowing the Society to pursue its objectives is reflected in the ways in which we make use of 34 Sackville Street to support Oman's presence and activities in London. In July 2015 we were privileged, jointly with the Oman British Friendship Association, to welcome for the second time His Royal Highness the Duke of York and His Highness Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Heritage and Culture in the Government of Oman, together with many friends from both nations (see also p 72). This followed a day of excellent conversations on key business and financial issues at the Mansion House, a product of the visit to Muscat earlier in the year of Alderman Alan Yarrow, Lord Mayor

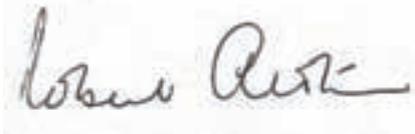
of London. Other welcome visitors during the year have been from the Oman-British Lawyers Association, Omani Fellows of the John Smith Memorial Trust, and a delegation from the Supreme Council for Planning.

The New Generation Group, with its twin track programmes in Britain and Oman, is now a jewel in the crown, and goes from strength to strength. Well attended meetings take place regularly in London and Muscat. The annual exchange of delegations of young leaders thrives, with a group from Oman visiting Oxford in August 2014 and the British team returning to Muscat in January 2015. Excitingly, the NGG now has an Omani Chairman for its Omani wing, and I warmly welcome Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi to his new role.

Our financial position is sound, and allows us to increase modestly from year to year the grants we make to individuals and organisations. This year these total some £125,000. In part this supports ongoing programmes for IB students from the Sultan's School in Muscat, British Gap Year students at the Sultan's School, and British

Undergraduates studying Arabic who attend a summer programme in Manah. The remainder is allocated in response to specific applications for funding to help academic and other programmes in a wide range of disciplines in Oman.

This is a healthy picture. But we have no intention of sitting back on our laurels. There is scope for further growth and development. Issues on which I hope there will be progress to report in 2016 include the corporate membership programme and our relationships with the OBFA, support for programmes in Oman of developments in law and governance, and encouragement of today's British community in Oman to join the Society when they return to Britain, to support and in time replace those whose direct experience in Oman goes back to the first ten or twenty years of the Society's existence. Watch this space!



Robert Alston

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY 40TH ANNIVERSARY RECEPTION

The Anglo-Omani Society will celebrate the 40th Anniversary of its formation on Wednesday 27th of January next year. This occasion will be marked by an evening reception in Lancaster House in Central London. Society members will be individually informed of all details when these have been finalised, and will then be able to book their attendance.

DO YOU HAVE A CONNECTION WITH OMAN?

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN JOINING THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY?

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

www.angloomanisociety.com

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



THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

Lawrence watching Verraux's eagles from the northern valley side in the central stretches of Wadi Sayq, Jabal Qamar, Dhofar. Verraux's eagles are a good indicator that hyrax are present in the area.

The Society continued to pursue one of its primary charitable objects, the provision of funding to UK and Omani nationals through a grants scheme for educational, cultural and environmental projects. £100,000 was budgeted and awarded in grants during the course of the financial year. This figure will be increased to £125,000 for the next year.

In addition to the Society's well established student programmes, at the Sultan's School primarily for UK gap-year students, and at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers for undergraduate and graduate students (see separate articles about these projects), the Society has awarded grants during the last year to:

- Ten scholars from the Sultan's School to attend International Baccalaureate summer schools in Oxford and Cambridge.
- Durham University for continuing archaeological research at Rustaq and the Batinah Coast in conjunction with Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture involving up to 20 students.
- The Natural History Museum, London, and the National Museum of Wales to support training of two Omani students in crop sciences.
- Biosphere Expeditions, UK, for bursaries for three Omani students to work on marine conservation in the Musandam, and support for a UK marine expert from the Marine Conservation Society.
- Outward Bound Oman for training Omani instructors and support for an expedition to retrace the route of Bertram Thomas' 1930 expedition across the Rub Al Khali.
- Professor Marilyn Booth for translating a book by Omani author, Jokha al-Harhi, into English.
- The Omani British Lawyers' Association to support a visit to the UK.
- The British Council / UKTI to support a delegation from Oman's Ministry of Higher Education to visit universities in the UK.
- Professor Dawn Chatty to enhance her "Nomads in Oman" website.
- Lawrence Ball of Oxford University for research into over-grazing in the Dhofar mountains.

This wide range of projects illustrates the extent of the activities supported by the Society, with all making valuable contributions towards promoting Anglo-Omani relations. Three photographs were taken during Lawrence Ball's project.

Applications for grants are welcomed from individuals and academic, training or cultural institutions in the UK and Oman, and grants are made throughout the year. ■



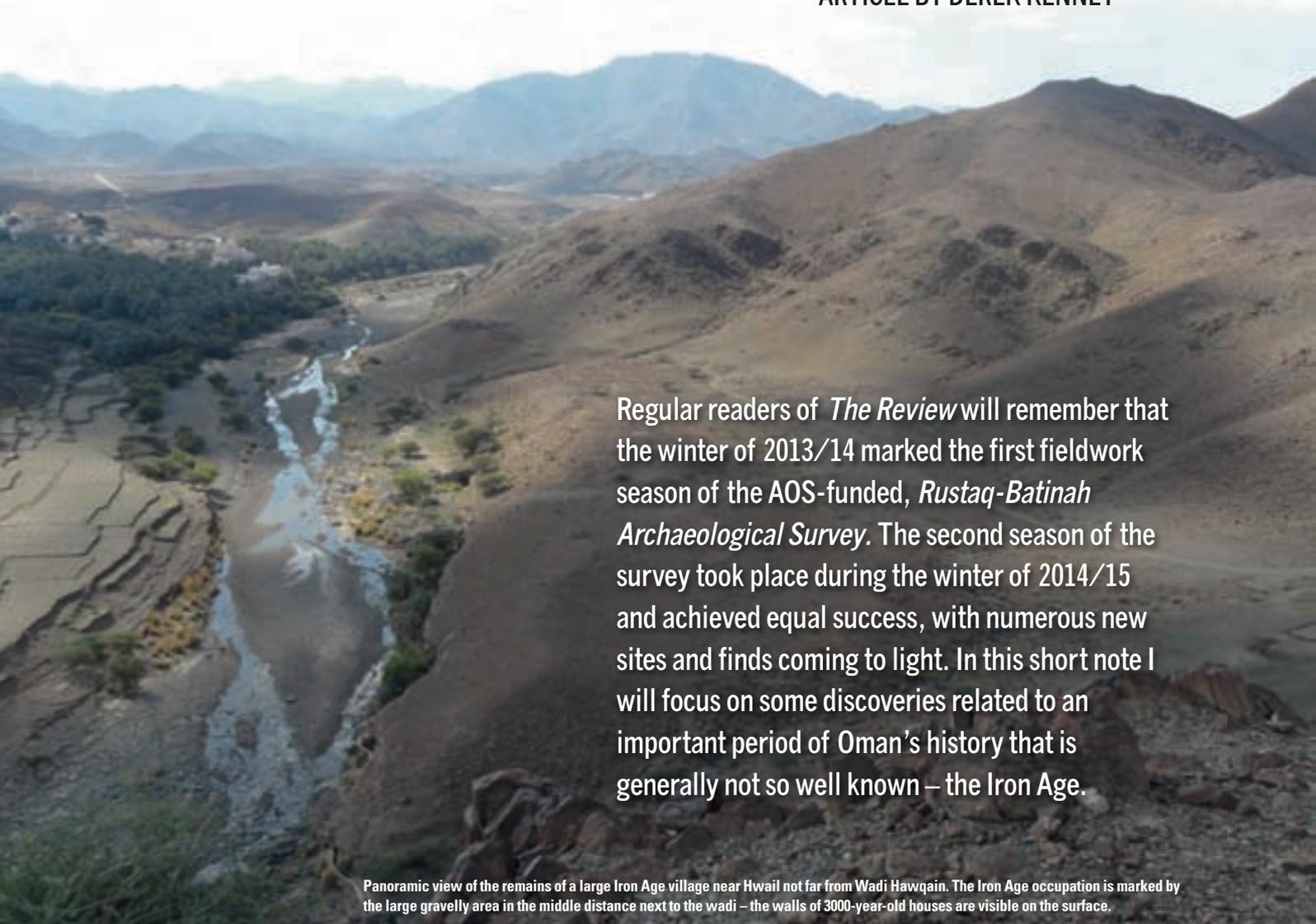
Right: Lawrence and Ahmed Mohammed Suhil Hardan from the Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE) hold an interview with a livestock owner in Jabal Qamar, Dhofar. Details of livestock grazing activity is collected using participatory mapping methods on an ipad.

An Arabian camel stands under the shade of a tree on the plateau above Wadi Sayq, Jabal Qamar, Dhofar. Large numbers of camels, cattle and goats pose a serious threat to the ecosystems of Dhofar due to the impacts of overgrazing.



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY RUSTAQ-BATINAH ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

ARTICLE BY DEREK KENNET



Regular readers of *The Review* will remember that the winter of 2013/14 marked the first fieldwork season of the AOS-funded, *Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey*. The second season of the survey took place during the winter of 2014/15 and achieved equal success, with numerous new sites and finds coming to light. In this short note I will focus on some discoveries related to an important period of Oman's history that is generally not so well known – the Iron Age.

Panoramic view of the remains of a large Iron Age village near Hwail not far from Wadi Hawqain. The Iron Age occupation is marked by the large gravelly area in the middle distance next to the wadi – the walls of 3000-year-old houses are visible on the surface.

The Iron Age is a relatively little known period in Oman's history. It has not left behind it highly visible monuments such as the famous, hilltop 'beehive tombs' of the Bronze Age, or the great forts of the Ya'aruba period. Despite this it was a highly important period in Oman's history because it saw a number of key innovations that really make Oman what it is today – most notably *falaj* irrigation, which, as anyone who knows Oman well will know, is the basis of

almost all traditional village life in Oman; and the domestication of the camel and its first use as a transport animal, which was obviously the basis of most Bedouin life. It is difficult to imagine what life in Oman would have been like before these two developments.

The Iron Age lasted about 1000 years between about 1300 and 300 BC. At the start of this time evidence tells us that population

View of the newly-discovered Iron Age hillfort at Hawqain just above the famous wadi popular with tourists. Defended hillforts such as this were another innovation of the Iron Age suggesting that organised warfare became more common at this time.



levels were relatively low but they grew significantly after about 1000 BC and by 800 BC the countryside was literally bursting with bustling villages and hamlets. At the same time almost all suitable land was covered in date palm groves full of the sound of gurgling *falaj* bringing irrigation water down from the hills. The incense trade was also booming as the newly domesticated camel had allowed a new form of overland trade – camel caravans – that were busy carrying incense across Arabia from Yemen and Dhofar to the great, wealthy population centres in the north – Mesopotamia and Syria.

How did this all come about and why so suddenly? The truth is that we don't really know. It may have been a purely economic and technological development, or there may have been climatic reasons underlying the changes that took place. *The Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey* has found very abundant and very clear evidence of this prehistoric boom. Almost everywhere that has been explored by the survey has yielded vast quantities of distinctive Iron Age pottery and the remains of Iron Age stone houses and villages as well as abandoned *falaj* systems and their related agricultural fields. We hope, during the

course of our five season's work, to gain a clearer idea of exactly what did take place during this remarkable time – and why.

In fact it was not only *falaj* and camels that made their first appearance at this time, we also see evidence that organised warfare became much more important – with numerous well defended hill-top forts popping up across the country for the first time. Interestingly, it is also at this time that we find the first evidence for organised cultic activity in the shape of small temples that were built in some villages. It seems from designs on pottery and metalwork that some form of snake cult was practiced in them – but we still have more to learn about this.

Clearly then, the Iron Age was a key period in the formation of Oman as we know it. It also shows us that life in the Omani countryside has not always been as relaxed and as unchanging as might sometimes seem – indeed, the evidence from the



A selection of typical Iron Age pottery sherds collected from the surface by the survey project. Black painted decoration of wavy lines is still visible on some of them.

Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey suggests that, whilst there may have been periods of stability, the countryside has also seen periods of quite dramatic change.

The third season of the survey is planned to take place during the coming winter. I look forward to reporting on new developments in next year's *Review*. ■

ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY VISIT TO THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER AND HOUSE OF LORDS TEA PARTY

The biennial visit by the Society to the Palace of Westminster took place on Monday 22nd June 2015. Many members will be aware that the usual day for the visit is a Thursday but given the General Election and associated dissolution of the Government and subsequent re-opening of Parliament we had to settle for the 22nd June.

However, this did not deter attendees and some 50 members and guests from enjoying a conducted tour of the Palace, and a total of 70 members, hosts and guests sat down on the Cholmondeley Terrace for a splendid tea party.

Our sponsor and host this year was Baroness Judith Jolly who lived in Oman for three years whilst her husband, Ian, was on loan service to the Royal Navy of Oman. During that time she worked in the British Council as a teacher of English as a foreign language and as a mentor for students who wanted to obtain a NVQ. Since then, she has had an active interest in issues of the Gulf region and is a member of our Society. We are indebted to her for her kind sponsorship of our visit and were delighted that she made time in the day to join us at Tea in spite of a short notice sitting in the Lords. We were also joined by Sir Alan Duncan and three representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth office including Jamie Hamill our outgoing FCO ex officio Committee member (posted to Khartoum) and Lucy Lawton who is Jamie's replacement. We were delighted to also welcome a number of attendees from the NGG which bodes well for the future. ■

The Society's Annual Lunch for 2015 will take place on the later than usual date of Thursday 29th of October. For this reason it cannot be reported in this edition.





HERE YESTERDAY, GONE TODAY...

ARTICLE BY HUGH LOCKHART

Take 1. 1972. A newly arrived officer, seconded to SAF, wandering round the souk in Muscat. Hesitates in front of shop and urged to sit down. Tea – or was it coffee? – Is poured from a grimy brass pot with an ornate lid and a long pointed spout like a bird. This is a recurring experience. What better, thinks the rookie, than to buy a coffee pot as a souvenir of Oman? Which he managed to do with some difficulty.

Take 2. 1973. The day before the officer's departure. Same souk scene but electric kettles everywhere, and those brass coffee pots now line the walls in their thousands, awaiting souvenir hunters.

Take 3. 1978. A leisurely visit to Muscat and same old souk during a business trip. Not a brass coffee pot to be seen. All gone, and so much else completely unrecognisable. All in 6 years.

The change had, of course, really started in 1970 when Sultan Qaboos took over from his father Said Bin Taimur, with a programme to pull Oman into the twentieth century.

I consider myself very lucky to have arrived in Oman in Autumn 1972 with the opportunity to witness the fairly gentle replacement of a way of life, almost biblical, with modern living and technological advance. In December the Sultan paid a surprise visit to the Muscat Regiment on Simba, and later he and his entourage came for refreshments to the officers mess, tented and surrounded with a rough wall as protection against 'incomers'. The conversation came up about change and

someone on his staff murmured, "You've seen nothing yet!" And, of course, he was right, more than any of us could have imagined, and not just about disappearing coffee pots.

I kept a diary of my time in Oman which I normally wrote up in the evening, mostly by candlelight. Like most soldiers, even on active service, the majority of time is spent sitting around with ample opportunity to observe the local soldiers, from their everyday customs, like what they cooked and ate, to how they practised their religion, and these 'non-worry' memories form the bulk of my diaries which are now in the

Imperial War Museum
and Saint Anthony's
College, Oxford.



The diaries are available as an illustrated E book on <http://www.amazon.com/After-Lunch-TheSiger-Hugh-Lockhart-ebook/dp/B00R9Q4FBS>

But, more important as a pictorial record of this transition, I bought an amateur cine camera on a trip to Dubai, and returned from Oman eight months later with some 50 minutes of film which I had edited into 2 short documentaries, Oman the Awakening and War in Dhofar. I contacted the embassy in London and was invited round for a showing to find the whole embassy staff, led by the ambassador, eagerly awaiting the film show. There were many "oohs" and "aahs" as the staff recognised people and places they knew, and the ambassador talked about the documentaries being shown on Oman television. Nothing came of it; I believe that a German film team arrived shortly and produced a documentary of a much higher professional standard, so my films lay abandoned in a box for some years until the Imperial War Museum showed an interest. Unfortunately, the editor lost the original shotlist and, on

the redoing, I was confronted by forts I did not recognise, young firqua now like me in their 60s, and unknown children now adult and leading modern Arab lives.

I have put films clips (11 in all) on YouTube. Just type in Oman 1973 and I hope that those who knew Oman in the early '70s will help in recognising the places and the people in the films, some examples of which are printed here. The existing Shotlist can be found at <http://www.first-scottish.co.uk/oman-retrospective/>

Any "recognitions" or comments please e-mail to contact@first-scottish.co.uk with subject "OMAN FILM 1973" for inclusion in the shotlist.

But just as important, the universality of the Internet means that Omanis have now access to these films, and will have the pleasure of seeing many places and people, even themselves, in the early 70s, in an Oman, which has now changed beyond all recognition, and be reminded of the days when the brass coffee pot and the "fuddle" ruled supreme. ■

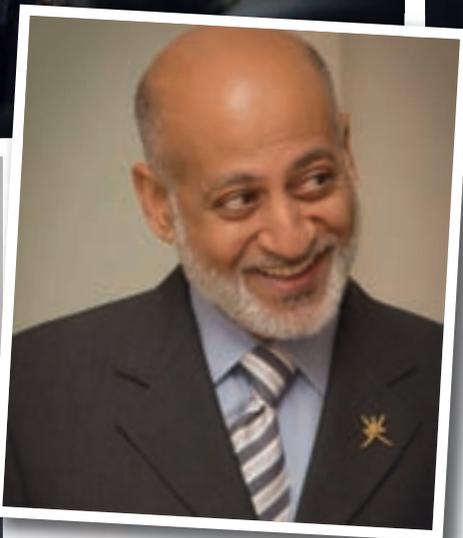


ROYAL PRESENCE AT A RECEPTION

HOSTED BY THE SOCIETY
AND THE OMANI BRITISH
FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

AT 34 SACKVILLE STREET ON 27 JULY

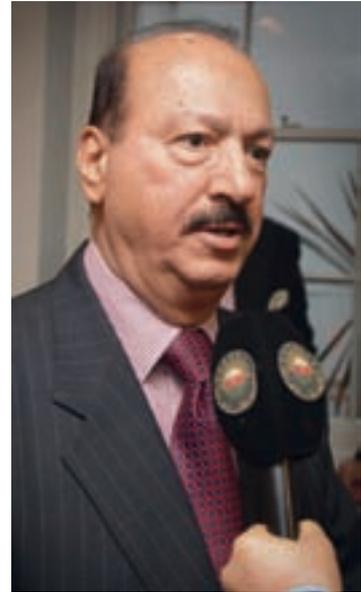
HRH The Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said attended a Reception hosted by the Society and the Omani British Friendship Association.



The Reception was the conclusion of OBFA's Financial Services Round Table which had been held at the City of London's Mansion House during the day. In his welcome to Omani and British guests, the Society's Chairman, Robert Alston, said that "The Anglo-Omani Society is pleased to partner OBFA in today's important discussions about the further development

of the economic ties between our two countries."

Guests of the Society and of OBFA, including the Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman and the UK's Ambassador to The Sultanate, heard Maqbool bin Ali Sultan and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, Chairmen of OBFA, stress the importance of diversification of the economy and of human



resources development in Oman. They also emphasised the opportunities for British companies and encouraged investment in these areas. The Duke of York and Sayyid Haitham both spoke warmly of the special relationship between The Sultanate and the UK, and they took the opportunity to meet many of the guests attending the Reception. ■

THE GAP YEAR SCHEME

The Society, in conjunction with the Sultan's School in Muscat, runs a Gap Year scheme for British students, both male and female, to spend up to three months at the school during their gap year usually September to December and February to April, but this can vary.

The scheme is also open to the graduate level of student, but the main emphasis is on the school leaver. The conditions are as follows:

- To have a proven interest in the Middle East, particularly The Sultanate of Oman, its history, development, architecture, geology and place in the world.
- To be interested in the environment and conservation in Oman and the Middle East.
- To intend a career in government service, the private sector or academia, linked to the Middle East and the United Kingdom's strong links with that region.
- To show evidence of an interest in the Arabic language and culture. For example having studied Arabic at university, school or elsewhere or intending to do so.

GUY WILKINSON

"I had a fantastic experience working at The Sultan's School, which provided me with the opportunity to learn Arabic and experience Omani culture. Sharing the experience with two other gap year students made my stay in Oman all the more special and they became really close friends. All the teachers at school were so welcoming and helpful in what was at first a slightly nerve-wracking experience. All the children were amazingly fun, enthusiastic and

keen to learn which made our roles in the school that much more worthwhile. Working with the students on the scholars scheme teaching English from scratch was particularly rewarding. Our Arabic teacher, Abdulaziz was of great help and even invited us to meet his family after our lesson at the Polyglot Language Institute.

I am eternally grateful to the Anglo-Omani Society for sponsoring such a magnificent scheme to work in a wonderful school, and explore one of the best countries in the world. I will without doubt be returning to Oman sometime in the not too distant future."



Guy with two friends in the Jebel.

The scheme started in 2002 and since then there have been eighty eight applicants of which about eighty have been accepted. They come from a wide variety of schools but mainly from the private sector. Strenuous efforts are made to publicise the scheme by circulating details to schools, but the main source of finding the right students is by word of mouth.

Applicants are interviewed at 34 Sackville Street by a team of Nigel Knocker, Richard Owens and Alan Henderson with Ben Wright in attendance

who handles administrative matters. Where possible a student who has been on the scheme also sits in to answer practical questions and give advice.

CV's are sent to the school for them to see who we have selected. So far so good!

On arrival at the school each student has a separate programme made for them depending on their interests and abilities, and also the requirements of the school. They take part in classes, particularly sports, expeditions in and around Oman, for example to the UAE.

The Society provides return air fares to

Oman; insurance cover; pocket money to cover incidental expenses, and most importantly half the cost of basic Arabic tuition. This is arranged in conjunction with Polyglot who are located close by the school. We also cover the cost of car hire as the school is located outside the Muscat area.

The scheme has proved to be a considerable success and students have benefited from it in so many ways as have the school. There are many testimonials on the Society website which illustrate the value of the scheme. ■

KHEIRA TARIF

"The months I spent in The Sultanate of Oman were a very valuable experience to me in a beautiful and peaceful country. As a group Matthew, Alexis, Marina and I were made to feel instantly welcome at The Sultan's School, not just by the staff but also by the delightfully charming pupils.

My time at the school was also instructive. I learnt a great deal about communication, not just with my colleagues (who were Omanis and non-Omanis, young and old, newcomers and semi-permanent residents of the Gulf region!) but also with the students. During my four months at The Sultan's School I taught a range of classes from ages 5 to 15, in PE, Music, Art, IT, English, Arabic and Business. Helping in these lessons taught me a great deal about tact and about matching my message to my audience.

Muscat is equally easy to live in, being as safe a town as anyone could ask for. We never hesitated to visit a new place of interest.

Some of my best memories are of sleeping under the stars on Sifa beach and taking in the phenomenal views from the dizzy heights of Jebel Akhdar. The Sultanate of Oman is a country of spectacular natural beauty, ideally suited to people who enjoy exploring.

During the final week of our stay in Oman, the other gappies and I were invited to attend the 5th Muscat Youth Summit, which was held in Duqm. Along with other, mostly Omani, students we travelled seven hours by ferry to the tiny port town in central-eastern Oman where we spent five days visiting local sites and developing ideas for the future of the Duqm area. I have many great memories of the MYS and was extremely sorry to say goodbye at the end of the week.

I was fortunate to receive the opportunity to live and work in a place like The Sultanate of Oman. I am very grateful to the Anglo-Omani Society, not only for introducing me to such a special part of the world, but also for facilitating such a rich experience."



Kheira with a Sultan's School class.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The NGG attracts a great many young people by the successful use of social media.



THE SOCIETY'S ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History is an increasingly popular way of recording and preserving what are sometimes lesser known historical facts told in a personal way by the people who were part of the history. Their recorded memories can now increasingly be found in various archives, and when transcribed and inserted into more formal histories, these personal recollections can give life to the story.

The Society lecture programme has shown that we have many members who have important, and often entertaining memories of their time in various fields in Oman. Oral history can preserve these often significant recollections and make them available to future generations. Society member Fiona Warton is already pursuing an oral history project with some assistance from the Society grants programme, and now another similar project, but with a different approach, is in the planning stage. We aim to film and record memories of, and information about, Oman in a series of shorter 20-minute sequences, which will be easy to archive and subsequently search. Initially, members will be recorded in our Sackville Street building, with the possibility that we may be able to arrange other locations as the project develops. If you have good and interesting memories of your time in Oman, start thinking now how you could tell these. We plan to circulate details to members, asking for volunteers in the not too distant future. We look forward to hearing your contribution to posterity.

I.K.

NEW GENERATION GROUP



As ever, it has been a wonderfully busy time for the members of the New Generation Group (NGG).



As ever, it has been a wonderfully busy time for the members of the New Generation Group (NGG). Activity in both London and Muscat has exceeded all previous years as we have increased the breadth and depth of our events, delegations and university outreach.

In January, we held the 2015 NGG delegation sponsored by the Shangri-La resort and BP who both gave us a huge amount of support. Over three days, the delegates studied Oman's increasing role as a Gateway to Asia and of course, strengthened our NGG bonds of friendship.

The NGG networking evenings are now an important part of the Muscat circuit and the most recent gathering was attended by His Highness Sayyid Feisal al Said and HMA Jon Wilks who both spoke about the importance of supporting the development of younger generations. The strategy talk series continues to attract some of Muscat's most senior CEO's and Ministers as they address our Oman board on matters of national development and growth. The last speaker, Eng Ahmad al Jahdhami, fascinated the team with some of the challenges his organisation faces and before him, Wael al Lawatti explored the growth of Oman's burgeoning tourism industry.

Back in London, we have hosted a range of events at 34 Sackville Street from National Day celebrations to the global sugar trade's impact on the Middle East and most recently, our inaugural NGG-Chatham House Annual talk. Jane Kinninmont gave a fascinating insight into the various socio-political developments across the GCC and her thoughts on Oman's progressive open mindedness and continuing success in engagement were well received.

Most important of all, our huge thanks go to the Anglo-Omani Management team and the interns who run everything so efficiently and in particular to Rocio for all of her continued hard work and support of NGG activity in both the UK and the Sultanate. Our social media stats are now incredible and we continue to build strong bridges to the Omani students around the UK – all Rocio's great work.

We have all kinds of exciting projects on the horizon and will be welcoming both the Prince's Trust and Ahmad al Harthy to the Society in the coming months. In Muscat, the NGG team are exploring ways in which they can support the younger generation of Omanis leaving schools and universities. I do hope you enjoy the articles in the pages ahead and please keep in touch via the website and social media.

Oliver Blake
NGG Chairman, UK

Ma'an Al Rawahi
NGG Chairman, Oman

4x4

It shouldn't take too long when in Oman to notice the abundance of 4x4 vehicles on the road.

The sheer number of standard and modified 4x4s is testimony to the role the car plays in the daily lives of many Omanis and those of us lucky enough to live in The Sultanate. For many, the ability to take their car off-road is essential to getting to their home or village, and for the rest, the 4x4 opens up huge parts of Oman to exploration and adventure.

A common sight on a Thursday afternoon at the start of a weekend is convoys of jeeps, trucks and other variations heading out of Muscat towards the natural playgrounds of the mountains, desert and wadis. Camping goes hand in hand with most 4x4 activities due to the large distances that are usually

evolved with these trips and what it adds to the experience. A certain amount of planning and preparation is inevitably required to make any vehicle mounted excursion successful, and knowing what to take, and importantly, what not to take, can make the difference between enjoying the experience or making it the first and last. Solar showers, portable beds, tented toilets and sets of portable furniture can turn a corner of Oman into a modern day Bedouin 'glamping' site. The quintessential camp fire is also mandatory, and another familiar



Editor: The anonymous author of his article has provided a clear and accurate description and introduction to this challenging and exciting activity. What we need now are some accounts of the memorable expeditions that I know many of our readers will have experienced in Oman. I invite any reader to send me a couple of paragraphs with a photo or two of their most memorable, most challenging, most picturesque, most peaceful, most dangerous (?), most interesting trips – I could add more, but you get the message. Send your expedition story to the Society Manager, address on Page 4 at any time from now, and I hope to include a selection in next year's magazine.

sight is seeing these cars loaded down with pallets and drift woods ready to be burned.

The qualities required to drive well off-road, like any skill, need to be practised, and there is no better way to do so than by being taught by an experienced driver. Additionally, if you can borrow or rent a 4x4 other than your own to throw around the desert or wadis, all the better. The damage that can be quickly suffered by these cars, despite their rugged look, is something to be aware about, as seen by the quantity of pieces of body trim and engine that seem to grow out of the ground in the remoter parts of Oman.

Letting down the air from your tires before starting the days driving is a necessary ritual that is comparable to putting your feet into ski boots before a

days skiing. In the desert, the sand dunes provide the driver and passengers with an exhilarating, challenging and unforgettable experience, which is the closest thing to skiing on sand. The sheer ability for these heavy lumps of metal to climb steep sided sand mountains, glide around slopes and take repeated punishment is always amazing.

A number of clubs and organisations can take the novice or visitors into the desert, providing all the necessary vehicles, food and instruction, Guide Oman being one of them. Obviously, it must be remembered that the desert, in particular, is a dangerous place to venture into and there are several rules and recommendations that must be followed; none more important than having sufficient vehicles and supplies

to cover all eventualities of the trip. A trip into the mountains is logistically easier and perhaps less prone to disaster, but should be approached with some preparation none the less.

Oman is blessed with spectacular natural beauty and there is no better way to enjoy it than by driving through it and over it in a 4x4. There are more places to visit, areas to explore, and camping sites to stop at than there is time, and, given the opportunity, a trip into the desert or up a mountain will be a unique and memorable experience which will not be forgotten.

The Guide Oman is a recommended off-road adventure specialist, and details can be found:
Rmayston@theguideoman.com
www.facebook.com/TheGuideOman
<http://Instagram.com/GuideOman> ■



A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY ACROSS DHOFAR

ARTICLE BY BY SIMON PHILLIPS AND ANDREW STOKES-REES

I think back to one December day of a plant survey high on the jagged peaks of the Jebel Samhan in Dhofar when, against the odds, the animals came to us.

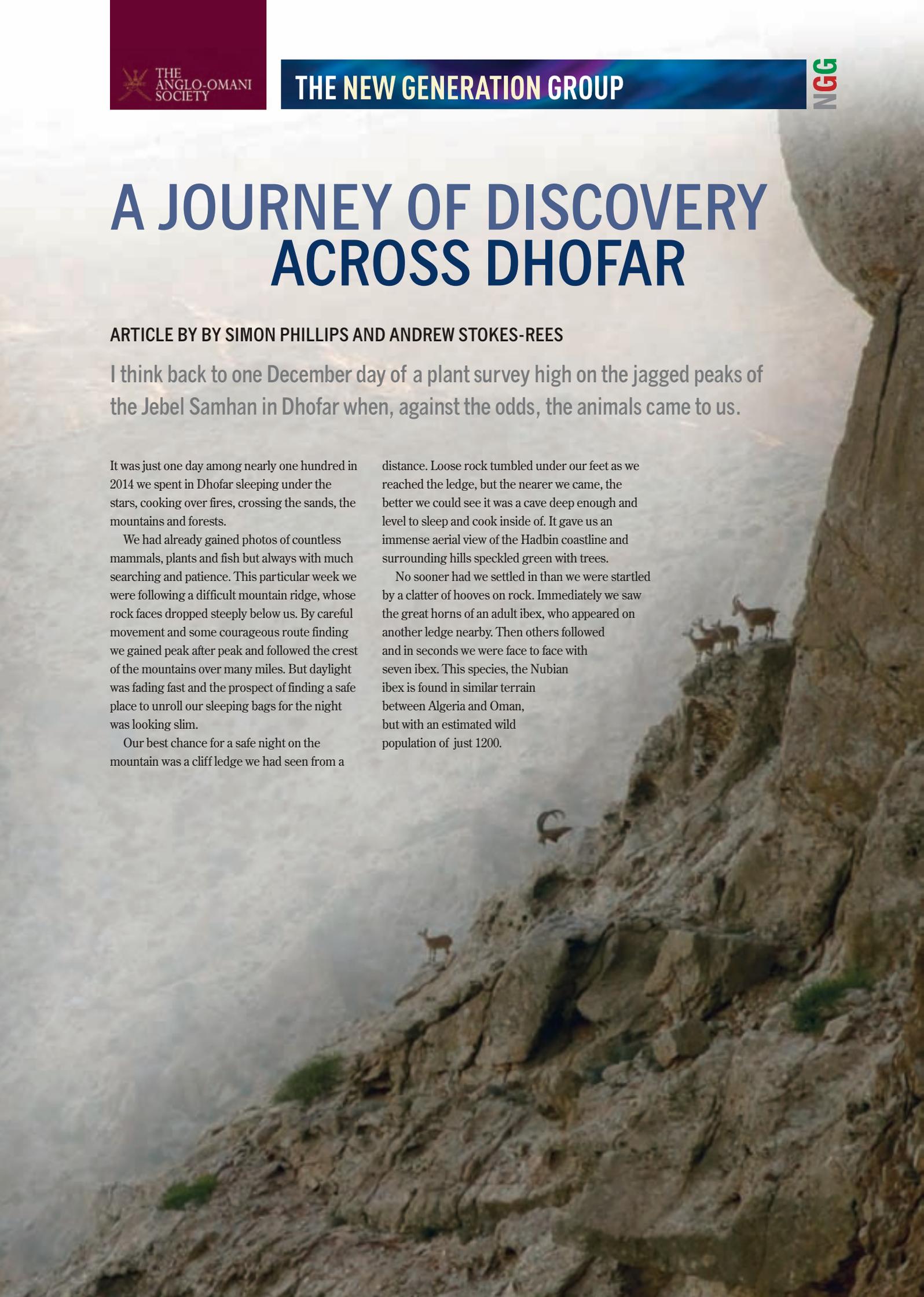
It was just one day among nearly one hundred in 2014 we spent in Dhofar sleeping under the stars, cooking over fires, crossing the sands, the mountains and forests.

We had already gained photos of countless mammals, plants and fish but always with much searching and patience. This particular week we were following a difficult mountain ridge, whose rock faces dropped steeply below us. By careful movement and some courageous route finding we gained peak after peak and followed the crest of the mountains over many miles. But daylight was fading fast and the prospect of finding a safe place to unroll our sleeping bags for the night was looking slim.

Our best chance for a safe night on the mountain was a cliff ledge we had seen from a

distance. Loose rock tumbled under our feet as we reached the ledge, but the nearer we came, the better we could see it was a cave deep enough and level to sleep and cook inside of. It gave us an immense aerial view of the Hadbin coastline and surrounding hills speckled green with trees.

No sooner had we settled in than we were startled by a clatter of hooves on rock. Immediately we saw the great horns of an adult ibex, who appeared on another ledge nearby. Then others followed and in seconds we were face to face with seven ibex. This species, the Nubian ibex is found in similar terrain between Algeria and Oman, but with an estimated wild population of just 1200.



When we first arrived in Oman we were warmly welcomed and given training by staff at the Oman Botanic Garden in Muscat. Botanists Ghudaina Ahmed Al Issai and Saif Amur Al Hatmi introduced us to the methods and objectives of their long term plant survey and specimen collections around Oman. Our contribution to this project would be small, yet the overall mission captured our interest from the start.

As we learnt, Dhofar's coastline and mountains hold an abundance of plant life. From Hasik to Sarfayt key areas were identified where observations of the biodiversity should be made, including a look at the links between the plants, animals, physical setting and the people living in those regions. Exploring each of these facets proved an extraordinary experience of discovery for our small British team. At the end of December we returned to the OBG in Muscat to a lively gathering of staff and visitors in which we reported on our findings and shared stories of the experiences along the way.

During this time we covered so much distance on foot, that it became apparent what an exceptional 'trekking route' might be followed by other adventurers in the future. Our perseverant survey hikes revealed an almost continuous trail route between Maghsayl (near Salalah) and Sarfayt on the Yemen border. At times we followed the crest of the mountains and at other times we dropped some 1000m down to sea level to follow the actual coastline. Dhofar's formidable coastline has so many sheer rock faces dropping to the sea, that we had difficulty in several places to continue our route.

From Shahab Assaib we spent a total of three weeks exploring north into the Jebel Qamar. This mountain range is carved deeply with gorges and meandering dry rivers beds. Our fascination with this range grew and grew as we became aware of the abundance of

frankincense trees held in those hidden valleys. The trees grow up to approximately six metres and every grown tree we saw had the telltale slashes of the resin harvest.

In some of those wadis we came upon harvester camps, where rudimentary buckets, funnels, pots, blankets, canned food and sacks could be found. There were widespread signs of donkey use for transporting the frankincense back to town, and on a few occasions we saw from a distance processions of harvesters and donkeys. We longed to catch up with those hardy harvesters and learn about their life back in these remote mountain valleys, but we were never so lucky. They always got away from us too quickly. Seeing their camps with improvised beds, benches, cooking areas and frankincense drying areas intrigued us no end. We came upon caves with mounds of the valuable nuggets laid out to dry. On steep mountain sides we found steps built of boulders to allow harvesters access to places that seemed impossible to reach.

When we returned from the wadis to villages and herder camps we were fortunate to spend time with Dhofari people in their everyday lives – beekeepers, fishermen, families and herders (both Omani and Bengali). During these many extended moments we were taught lessons in generosity, hospitality and the value of time.

At one such place called Al Hauta, Mohammed Yonus takes care of a small whitewashed mosque beside the tumbling sea. It is a simple role given to a migrant worker. All the same, there is something special about his life here – you can see it in the shine of his eyes, his face framed by a beard more in keeping with the look of an Arab than a Bengali.

Al Hauta (holy woodland) is an ancient burial ground on a great sea plain with a well. It is a sacred place accessed only by a steep

Our fascination with this range grew and grew as we became aware of the abundance of frankincense trees held in those hidden valleys. The trees grow up to approximately six metres and every grown tree we saw had the telltale slashes of the resin harvest.



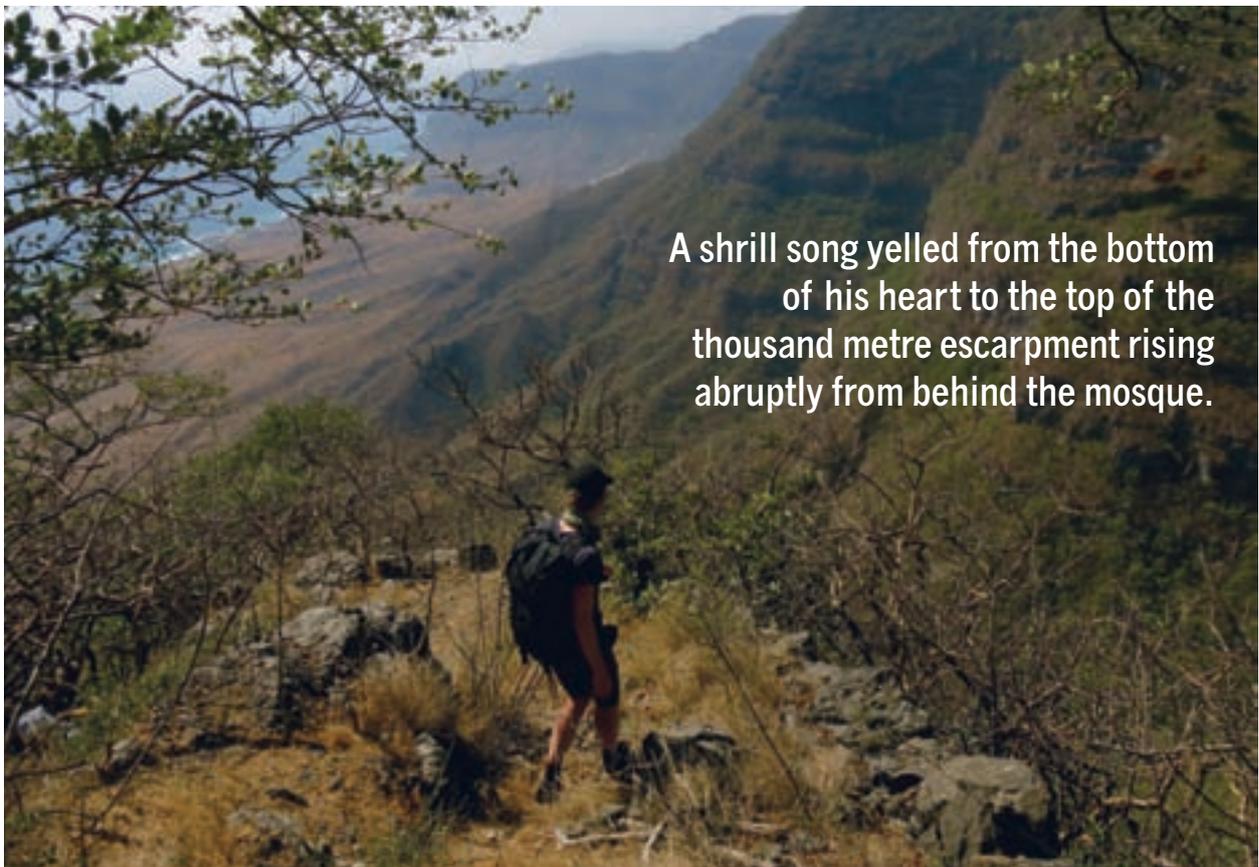


gravelly road from the plateau a thousand metres above. A cluster of buildings line the edges of its burial ground. They are occupied by a handful of pastoral families, where goats, cows and camel are reared. Apart from these homes, the mosque and the Imam's homestead there is little human impact. To my northern eyes, this place encapsulates an Arabia of old.

As we share tea, it becomes apparent that Yonus has inadvertently tapped into the very essence which has led tribesmen to bury their elders here for millennia. The simplicity of his life is layered by a

subtle richness which comes with the spirituality inherent to this location. A meeting place of sea and desert, cliffs and the lush foliage of palms. Two worlds drawn apart then united in a narrow band of land. Whilst the sea crashes in unordered waves, the call to prayer fixes his routine.

Before dawn, Mohammed Abdullah the eldest herdsman call his neighbours to prayer. A shrill song yelled from the bottom of his heart to the top of the thousand metre escarpment rising abruptly from behind the mosque. Abdullah's call is stirring, rooted in a



A shrill song yelled from the bottom of his heart to the top of the thousand metre escarpment rising abruptly from behind the mosque.



A meeting place of sea and desert, cliffs and the lush foliage of palms.

genuine belief in Allah and the world after. As a camel herder, his life is invested in his animals, yet his heart goes with god. He is short in stature, with sea and sun glazed eyes which shine from a stocky face. He wears a bottle green military shirt, he wears no shoes. A machete is tucked in his waist, in the traditional style of the Dhofari tribesman.

Abdullah and Yonus are two of the most connected inhabitants on

this remote stretch of coastline. Above their homesteads the crags reach to the sky and the fragile cloud forest ecosystem which clings to them. Yet both these men are impermanent and hang in balance only through their faith in nature and sense of place. We are fortunate to have met them and the other Dhofaris with whom we have let time drift laterally and shared our experiences of life in the landscape. ■



INTERNSHIP PROGRAMME

The Anglo-Omani Society Internship Programme was launched last year, attracting some of UK's brightest graduates from Oxford, Cambridge, SOAS, Edinburgh and KCL. As part of their six-month programme, interns develop a final project that may include a one-week trip to Oman. The projects of our first two interns, Elisabeth Simpson and Hiba Mohamad, focused on interfaith dialogue and tolerance in the Sultanate and education and the skills gap, respectively. Please read on!

EXPRESSIONS OF INTERFAITH IN OMAN

BY ELISABETH SIMPSON

In January I travelled to the Sultanate of Oman with the New Generation Group (NGG) Delegation of 2015. Whilst accompanying the NGG Delegation I attended an interactive session on 'Understanding the Reality of Islam' led by His Excellency Sheikh Aflah Hamad Al Rawahi. Alongside this I conducted primary research into interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange in the Sultanate as part of

the Anglo-Omani Society Internship Programme, which includes a final project with fieldwork in Oman. I observed the activities of the Al Amana Centre's seminary intensive programme and conducted an interview with the Centre's Director of

Education, Reverend Justin Meyers.

The Sultanate of Oman is widely celebrated for its tolerance of and openness to a variety of faiths and traditions. This unique appreciation and respect for religious diversity has been attributed to a number of factors, not least of which is the country's rich geo-political history.

Oman has for centuries played an

Participants of the Al Amana Centre Seminary Intensive Programme 2015 outside the gates of the Al Lawati community.



important role as a centre for maritime trade between East Africa, India, Persia and China. This global trade network gave Omanis wide interaction with other cultures and religions, which over time has fostered a very pronounced culture of understanding and acceptance of diversity as the social norm.

Today, Oman is home to Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Baha'i citizens, all of whom enjoy protected rights under the rule of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Al Said. Oman's basic law protects the free practice of all faiths according to their values, customs and traditions and prohibits discrimination based on religious affiliation. Although the official religion of the Sultanate is Islam, the government provides land and funding for houses of worship to many religious groups by way of its Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA). There are currently over sixty registered Christian groups, three Hindu temples and two Sikh gurdwaras in Oman. The rights afforded to religious minorities and the long history of peaceful coexistence in Oman have marked the country as a model of religious tolerance for its neighbours in the region.

However, the rights of religious minorities in Oman are not without limits as religious groups must not disrupt 'public order and accepted standards of behaviour.' Religious organisations must register with MERA and, subject to approval, will receive a licence to practice. Whilst the majority of faith groups may be affiliated with an existing community recognised by MERA,

this registration system can make it more difficult for smaller and less well established religious groups to gain recognition, for example Mormons or Scientologists. Worship spaces are also controlled; gatherings for a religious purpose are not allowed in private residences but only at government-approved sites. Muslims and non-Muslims are also subject to restrictions on proselytising. Yet even with these restrictions, Oman has managed to successfully translate its long tradition of religious tolerance into modern laws and foster a climate in which members of a variety of faiths can feel at home.

The prevailing environment of peaceful coexistence between the faiths in Oman is often credited to the Ibadhis, who make up the majority of Muslims in Oman. Considered to be one of the oldest sects, Ibadhi Islam has its roots in the 7th century and has since developed in its own context as a tolerant but conservative tradition. The Ibadhis preserve austere practice whilst priding themselves on promoting moderation, mutual respect, dialogue between people and engagement with other faiths.

There are currently over sixty registered Christian groups, three Hindu temples and two Sikh gurdwaras in Oman.

These tenets of the Ibadhi tradition are clearly expressed in the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos who has long been a champion of religious harmony. The Sultan has donated land for purpose-built Christian churches and Hindu temples and has even bestowed Hindu religious leaders with the title of Sheikh, an honour usually reserved for Muslims. Whilst these moves could be interpreted as tactics for political gain, they are in keeping with the Sultan's inclusive and consultative approach, which permeates through all areas of Omani policy. This approach led to one of the most valuable expressions of intercultural dialogue in Oman in the form of the Sultan's commitment to hosting talks between Iran and the US. This has not only increased the small country's international standing but has helped to ensure global security.

Perhaps it is the Ibadhi sect's position as a global minority that makes it particularly well placed to create this climate of inclusivity and mediate not only between Muslim power blocks but also between Muslims and those of other faiths. Ibadhi Islam is distinct from both Sunni and Shia Islam and, although found in Zanzibar and other parts of East and North Africa, is only dominant in Oman. In his session on 'Understanding the Reality of Islam', His Excellency Sheikh Aflah Hamad Al Rawahi was careful to highlight the humility that is at the heart of Islam, where one's own faithfulness is not defined by identifying what is 'other' but rather by one's personal conduct which includes embracing and welcoming difference. Indeed, it is not



His Excellency Sheikh Aflah Hamad Al Rawahi discussing 'The Reality of Islam' with the NGG Delegation in Muscat, 2015.

uncommon in Oman for Sunni, Shia and Ibadhi Muslims to attend the same mosques and pray side by side, a phenomenon that is especially important in an increasingly polarised and sectarian part of the world.

Nevertheless, the Ibadhi tradition should not be accorded sole credit for Oman's peaceful religious pluralism. Ecumenism also prospers in Oman, where Christian groups share religious facilities and participate in collaborative initiatives. This environment of religious pluralism relies on all groups demonstrating tolerance and respect towards their neighbours. Each of the religious communities in Oman deserves some of the credit for playing their own part in respecting other traditions around them.

One such expression of interfaith in Oman is the Al Amana Centre. Born out of a legacy of interfaith cooperation, which began as a medical and educational initiative of the Reformed Church in America in 1893, the centre now operates as an academic institute for interfaith understanding and Muslim-Christian dialogue under the blessing of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. After over a century of building trust with the people of Oman, the Al Amana Centre emerged in the late 1980s as the only Christian-initiated centre to formally partner with an Islamic government. Today it offers a semester-long curriculum at university level, a seminary intensive programme and a number of more informal courses to visiting students and scholars.

The Centre aims not only to educate through formal courses but to facilitate learning through first-hand interfaith encounters. Thus the seminary intensive programme provides visiting students with the opportunity to explore different areas of Oman alongside some of its more structured lectures and scriptural reasoning sessions. Participants often consider these informal activities to be among the most valuable parts of the programme because they allow them to ask sensitive questions and build enduring relationships with other participants.

Scriptural reasoning is a cornerstone of the Al Amana Centre's seminary intensive programme. These sessions involve participants reading passages from their respective sacred texts and discussing the contents, the way their traditions have worked with the text, and the ways in which the text has informed their responses to

contemporary issues. Members of other faiths are encouraged to ask questions and engage with each other on the meaning of scripture within their respective traditions. The objective is not to find similarities or areas of agreement but rather to grow in one's understanding of other traditions and more deeply explore one's own. Participants report a sense of strengthened religious identity as a common result of this process.

The Centre aims not only to educate through formal courses but to facilitate learning through first-hand interfaith encounters. Thus the seminary intensive programme provides visiting students with the opportunity to explore different areas of Oman alongside some of its more structured lectures and scriptural reasoning sessions.

However, all of these interfaith initiatives could be criticised for only attracting candidates who are predisposed to openness to and tolerance of other traditions. If this is the case and interfaith engagement does not reach those who could most benefit, how can we assess any real value added by these activities? Reverend Justin Meyers, Director of Education at the Al Amana Centre, gave one example of a case where a prospective Christian student admitted that he viewed Muslims as having worth only in so far as they were potential converts to Christianity. This sentiment is starkly at odds with the work of the Centre, which is in no way about conversion or proselytising, yet the candidate was accepted onto the programme. By the end of the programme

the student had changed his view on Muslims entirely and had come to respect them as faithful individuals. This one example suggests that the interfaith movement does have the potential to add real value and affect a change in attitudes, although it still remains difficult to empirically assess the impact of any given programme.

The Omani government continues to demonstrate a commitment to the promotion of interfaith understanding to a wide audience both in the country and beyond its borders. MERA publishes *Al Tasamoh*, tolerance, and *Al Tafahom*, understanding, which are Islamic cultural periodicals aimed at broadening dialogue within Islam as well as with other faiths, and which often include articles written by Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu scholars. The government also brings many ministers and scholars of different faiths to speak about religious tolerance in the Grand Mosque in Muscat, including in 2014 the British Government's first ever Minister of Faith, Baroness Warsi. In addition, the close friendship between the UK and Oman has allowed the UK to particularly benefit from Oman's sponsorship of interfaith programmes through an endowed Professorship of Abrahamic Faiths at the University of Cambridge and the Cambridge Inter-faith Programme (CIP).

Oman faces many challenges ahead, the most prominent of which are arguably the diversification of its economy and the instability in the wider region. Yet through this uncertainty Oman has achieved something quite unique by creating such a climate of exceptional religious tolerance in the country. Whatever the contributing factors, this reflects well on the character of the Omani people and helps to ensure the security and stability of the Sultanate.

Elisabeth Simpson graduated from the University of Edinburgh with a 1st class degree in Islamic Studies before she was selected as the first full-time intern for the Anglo-Omani Society. She has conducted extensive independent travel in the Middle East and hopes to continue to travel and produce research with a focus on Islamic societies and the region. Elisabeth is currently working as a Private Banking Assistant in the Middle East department at Coutts.

THE GAP BETWEEN THE NEEDS OF THE OIL SECTOR AND COURSES OFFERED AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

BY HIBA MOHAMAD

A relatively young country is also bound to have a young higher education system and Oman is no exception to this rule. The first university in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) was founded as recently as 1986. Since then, as a result of a sharp increase in the number of students completing their secondary education, the number of post-secondary private institutions have also grown. The rising candidate numbers year by year is no doubt a point worthy of celebration, however, a cursory glance at the modest growth rate of institutes – the numbers today stand at 19 higher educational institutes, of which 3 are internationally recognised universities is certainly of concern for the Omani government. These higher education institutions offer a range of options such as two-year diplomas to four-year Bachelor's degrees. While this represents a significant effort on the part of the government to meet the public's educational needs, the solution for this by the Government of Oman, like Arab countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, has been the

tendency to encourage the private sector to actively participate in reducing the gap between the demand and supply of higher education in the country.

Reducing this gap is a solution to just one layer of the problem facing the Omani government. An official from the Omani Ministry of Higher Education recognised this issue by stating: *The greatest challenge faced by the government in human resource development in the past decade has been the widening gap between the increasing number of graduates from the secondary school system and the limited number of places available at institutions of higher education in the country.* This statement highlights that the government has noticed the gap which is slowly becoming acute as time passes. Nevertheless, it is praiseworthy that the government has continued to prioritize higher education for its citizens and has given it its due importance by including it in the national agenda. This action itself is a clear indicator that the Government of Oman considers addressing the



gap as an important factor to its achieving Oman's 2020 vision.

Another layer to the problems present between the higher education and Omani industries is the gap between the needs of the Oil sector and the courses offered at Universities. Today, the challenge lies in ensuring that the higher education system not only helps to diversify Oman's economy in order to achieve the government's goal of Omanisation but that it at least produces graduates capable of fulfilling the roles for its largest industry – the Oil and Gas industry. This is especially vital considering the country is still heavily dependent on revenues generated from oil and gas production. Oil exploration began in the Sultanate as early as 1925 when the first oil concession license was granted to Darcy Exploration Company. In 1953, the name was changed to Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to reflect its position as the major exploration and production Company in the Sultanate. The company has achieved many successes in the two aforementioned fields since it intensified its efforts in 1962. As the Sultanate's hydrocarbons is associated with complex reservoir structures, PDO has participated in shouldering the responsibility of reducing the knowledge and competency gap by investing significant sums in training its staff to ensure that they have the technical and non-technical skills required for their roles. PDO's on the job training is delivered through seminars, conferences and distance learning courses through the company's e-learning and web-based network.

While PDO has built up a nationally recognised programme of training its staff, thus earning the right to call itself the best employer in Oman, the higher education system in the country has lagged behind in addressing this competency gap. A young Omani can be expected to spend a minimum of 4 to 5 years studying for his/her undergraduate degree followed by another 4 years at PDO being trained in specialised technical knowledge and skills needed for this role. Overall, the programme of training staff in PDO can last up to 7 years in total. Muhammad al-Ghareebi, PDO's In Country Value (ICV) Manager (also a New Generation Group delegate) stated that: *we will be collaborating with other sectors in Oman to share our learnings. Over time, however, we should be able to see a more*

integrated and collaborative approach to ICV between the AGCC countries as we discover what works best. This illustrates the level PDO has reached in addressing a problem that has always been a bone of contention for oil rich countries in the Middle East region.

Al-Ghareebi suggests that it is now time for the higher education sector in Oman to step up and begin to collaborate with PDO to reduce the competency gap. He adds: *what is needed now is for industry experts from the oil and gas sector in Oman and the Boards of Directors at Omani universities to come together and discuss how some of PDO's training can be incorporated into the undergraduate level degrees offered at Omani universities.* He recommends that industry experts should identify the theoretical components of PDO training which can be taught at universities which would in turn help to cut down on the time spent training a recent graduate. Furthermore, as PDO's success rests on their job training programme, the idea of including aspects of this training into Omani university courses would no doubt lead to a significant improvement in the quality of higher education available to young Omanis. On this point, Al-Ghareebi noted that the inclusion of the PDO curricula into high-school and undergraduate courses would expose Omani students to soft-skills needed to survive and thrive in today's global world.

In January 2015, I interviewed Mr al-Ghareebi at the PDO office to learn more about his thoughts on how best the Omani government can go ahead to address this gap. Here is what he had to say: *PDO is the largest oil production company in Oman. It is a joint venture between the Government of Oman which holds 60% of its stake and Shell which holds about 34%. The rest is distributed between other parties. PDO is also amongst the earliest oil companies in Oman and we work mainly in the upstream side of the business. We produce almost 60-70% of Oman's crude oil and almost all of its natural gas. So by all standards, PDO has a large footprint in Oman. Additionally, we work in a concession area that is close to 100,000km. It is important to point out that oil represents a significant percentage of the State's revenue which adds to PDO's level of importance in the country.*

The Oil and Gas industry by default is a high-risk industry and it involves complex and

hazardous operations so having skilled individuals is extremely important in this business. The vocational training which is part of the Human Development Capital at large has always been the focus of His Majesty's government. One can see this emphasised through the various 5 year plans since at least the 70s where a lot of focus has been placed on how to develop Omanis professionally. This has been the case to allow Omanis themselves to take up meaningful jobs.

PDO, like the Government, also places an emphasis on the ways in which Omanis can become qualified enough to take up these jobs. In particular, PDO has its own learning and development centre, and we have various programmes for young Omanis whether they are graduates or staff members already working on projects to maintain the required levels of competencies. For example, we have a programme called The Technical Omanisation Programme which is a programme where graduates from vocational institutes in the country are enrolled to prepare them for PDO's operation environment. Such a training programme can last up to 18 months and has turned out to be very successful, so much so that many companies within Oman are also trying to replicate it. Other training courses can last from a week to two years at a time. The disconnection between academia and industries is faced by many countries and PDO itself has faced questions over why its training duration is so lengthy. The solution to this lies in companies approaching higher educational institutes with their training materials and requesting that university-level courses begin to include some of that training material. This would then result in incoming graduates to PDO only needing for example a 3-6 months orientation programme, saving valuable time and resources but ensuring that the industry needs are met at the same time.

Thankfully, the government is receptive and it is a work in progress.

In conclusion, it seems to appear that the gap between industry needs and academia will only be shortened when both sides work together proactively to address this issue. It's great to see that the matter is being taken into serious consideration by all parties concerned to ensure young Omanis have the best possible chances in life.

With thanks to Mr al-Ghareebi for his thoughts. ■

A SLOAN FELLOW JOURNEY

FROM CENTRAL BANK OF OMAN TO LONDON BUSINESS SCHOOL

ARTICLE BY: AADIL K. AL-SAAD

Spending eight years studying and working abroad has proven itself to be a challenging yet rewarding experience. However, embarking on a journey from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) to the London Business School (LBS) required me to rise to a whole new level of challenge.

As the Head of Program Management and Business Continuity at the CBO and an active member of IT Strategy and Business Continuity committees, strategic planning and its execution has been firmly ingrained in me. Then, as part of the CBO's strategy to provide managerial positions within the Bank with exceptional strategy and leadership skills, I was selected by the CBO to apply for the prestigious LBS' Sloan Programme in London.

Although the prospects of the scholarship opportunity at CBO excited me, I was tempted to stay away from putting myself through the scrutiny process within CBO, and the subsequent

rigorous admission process of LBS. Given the very low acceptance rate of LBS, my odds of gaining admission appeared minimal. Moreover, of the six candidates that showed interest within CBO, I seemed to be the youngest and most inexperienced. However, after a few days of self-reflection, I set my mind and soul to the challenge. The reputation and prestige of the London Business School as the top ranked business school in Europe and one out of three top niche universities to offer the Sloan Fellow Program had ignited my motive.

I was driven by the possibility to be the first Omani to obtain admission to the Sloan Fellow Program and the LBS. To learn that I would also be the youngest student in the history of Sloan to be admitted was gratifying.

I have to admit, I hit a few stumbling blocks during the seven months of preparation, examinations, and screening processes, but every hurdle I faced gave me strength to push further ahead. One key thing I have learned throughout this

process is that it takes heart, soul and dedication to commit oneself to such a process and earn one of the 57 Sloan seats represented by 25 countries. I cannot describe the pride and self-fulfilling joy on the first day of the programme when the Deputy Dean gave me a special welcome as the first student to represent Oman, and the youngest Sloan Fellow to be admitted. Walking into the Sloan lecture on the first day and seeing the Omani flag amongst the other 24 Sloan flags was a proud moment which I consider my greatest achievement so far. Sloan Fellows at the LBS are rich in expertise, coming from across the world, with a wide range of job functions and industry sectors. They are highly regarded and extremely motivated senior managers, professionals and entrepreneurs with an impressive track record of success. Participation in this demanding programme requires a real commitment to personal development and business excellence. When a company recruits a Sloan Fellow there is an immediate benefit in terms of experience and demonstrated success, but also terms of gaining understanding of the latest challenges in management. Sloan Fellows develop the required leadership skills and expertise to operate effectively in today's complex global environment.

I know that there is a rough and challenging journey ahead of me given the heavy workload of the Sloan Program and LBS' ever-rising standards of academic excellence. Although I am used to working long hours and delivering results under tight deadlines, it was not until I was pushed to my limits that I realised what I was capable of doing and what it takes to be an executive with multiple overlapping responsibilities. The wealth of real case studies, range of class executive visitors, and complexity of business strategy that we get assigned demonstrates why LBS' Sloan Program is an elite world-class programme. Having successfully completed my Sloan Program and few international projects in San Francisco with business leaders like Google, Tesla Motors and Apple, I look forward to entering a business world where I can make a profound impact in strategy, leadership and change to drive the corporate performance. ■



OMANI GOLD... AN UNDISCOVERED FLY FISHING DREAM

ARTICLE BY CLARE CARTER



During my travels to remote fishing locations over the past few years I had heard many whisperings about fly fishing in Oman, I was intrigued to say the least.

Was this a secret hidden fly fishing gem just waiting to be discovered? All my online searches had drawn a blank and the only knowledge I could glean was through a few avid angling contacts who had dared to brave the unknown and explore the Omani waters themselves. All of which had tales that would send shivers of excitement down any fisherman or woman's neck.

After hours of scouring various maps and charts, looking at google earth and setting out our plan of action we set off. A 4x4, tent, gas cooker, enough fishing rods to start a small shop, some canned food and we were off. Driving the length of Oman on the inner road from Muscat to Salalah we passed through the mountains and along winding stretches of road flanked by vast deserts and sand dunes with the odd group of camels and small villages along the way. It was breathtakingly beautiful yet rugged and adventurous.

Over the next four weeks we travelled the coast, starting in Mirbat and ending on Masirah Island. The fishing was outstanding, from beautiful

golden beaches to rocky outcrops and ledges. The waters teeming with many species of fish, Trevally, Blue Fish, Bream, 3 spot Pompano, Milk fish and best of all the ultimate fly fisherman's prize, the fish that makes grown men go weak at the knees and forget how to cast a fly rod... the Indo-Pacific Permit. People travel thousands of miles, across continents fishing for weeks even years to catch their first Permit. We had been keeping our eyes peeled but it wasn't until we were half way up the coast that we had our first sighting.

Walking one of the many long sandy beaches we could hardly believe our eyes. delicately picking its way along the shore line was what we had been looking for... what I now refer to as a little piece of Omani gold, a Permit. Crouching down so as not to spook him I stripped some line off my reel and started to cast, using a fly pattern I had tied that imitated a small crab. Calmly I cast the fly just beyond him and let it sink. Waiting with my breath held and not daring to move a muscle, I could feel the adrenaline pumping. As he began to

meander in the direction of my fly I slowly started to strip the line back in, moving the crab along the sandy sea bed. Almost immediately he saw my crab and shot over onto his side to get a better look, then with a flick of his tail he dove nose first onto it and inhaled the fly. One yank on the line and I had set the hook. With an angry shake of his head he took off at full speed racing towards the open ocean, line flying through my fingers and my reel screaming. The next few minutes felt like hours, it was a battle of wills as he tried ever manoeuvre to dislodge the fly. First shooting off at high speed, then heading for the rocks trying to cut me off and even rubbing his nose in the sand to try and dislodge my fly. Neither of us was giving up as I ran up and down the beach and in and out of the water after him whilst gingerly trying to bring him back in to shore. After what seemed like a lifetime he finally admitted defeat and sulkily let me guide him towards my feet. There laying in the water in my hands was my first Omani permit, he was absolutely beautiful. Gently removing the hook, a quick photo and the obligatory kiss I always bestow on my unfortunate fishy friends. I released him back into the ocean and off to fight another day.

The following weeks were filled with action, we discovered a number of areas teeming with permit, along with many many other exciting species of fish just perfect for the saltwater fly angler. Everything we caught was on a catch and release basis and all of our hooks were small and de-barbed so as not to damage them. Fish conservation is extremely important to us from both an ecological as well as a personal standpoint for many reasons. Not least that I wish my children, their children and all future generations to experience this amazing sport and the beautiful surroundings that accompany it.

Throughout our travels we met many extremely friendly Omani locals, all of who were more than happy to chat, give us advice and even ask us to sit and have coffee and fresh fish with them. We camped in almost every possible location along the entire coastline and never have I felt safer or more at ease. It was a truly magical trip

and I now fully understood exactly how special Oman really is... a true hidden gem!

Returning to Muscat we were in high spirits, we had fallen in love with the country, its people and the beautiful fish in their ocean. Both myself and my partner went home, quit our jobs and embarked on a new mission to bring the magic of Oman to the fly fishing world. We returned to Muscat and found a local Omani sponsor who is as passionate as we are about the ecosystem, fish sustainability and the beauty Oman has to offer. Together we are in the process of building a fly fishing company that will give fishermen and women from around the world the chance to come and experience the wonders we have seen for themselves. Starting a business here is by no means an easy task as there are many rules and regulations but working closely with our Omani partner has been very rewarding, especially when understanding the local culture and traditions.

We aim to bring tourism to many areas across Oman, both central and remote, with the intent of opening up Oman to both fishers and their families. Many fishing locations in this area of the world do not have the ability to host non fishers, whereas Oman has so much to offer every member of the family. We will be chartering deep sea boats out of Muscat and running our fly fishing operations from a smaller boat that is more capable of getting into the many bays and sand flats down south between Masirah and Salalah. Utilising local hotels, employment, boats and companies, we want to build a strong link with Oman, its nationals, tourists and tourism in general. At present there are no companies offering fly fishing here so the response we have had to our initial marketing materials has been rather overwhelming. As they say in Oman Inshalla we will be fully operational by September's start of the season and in the fishing community 'Tight Lines'! ■

*For more information please feel free to contact us at:
arabianfly@gmail.com or by telephone: +968 9209 5933*



OMAN AS A GATEWAY TO ASIA

ARTICLE BY: JANE KINNINMONT



In January a group of young Brits and Omanis from a variety of public and private sector organisations met in Muscat for seminars and discussions that looked at Oman's trade with Asia as a key element of its economic diversification.

Oman has a long history of trade with Asia. As one speaker said, there were Omanis living in China as far back as the eighth century. In recent years, there has been renewed attention paid to Omani and Gulf links with Asia, as the Asia's industrialising economies have become the main drivers of growth in global oil demand. Beyond that, there are more varied opportunities to develop broader economic links with the growing Asian markets and their rising number of middle class consumers. This is of critical importance to Oman as it seeks to diversify its economy further beyond oil.

Senior Omani officials emphasised the long term trends of growth in Asia, especially the staggering rise in the middle class. A speaker cited forecasts that by 2020 half the world's middle class would be in Asia. It was also said that the middle class in Asia-Pacific countries would grow six times by 2030, and that China will then be facing a shortage of labourers, driving it to invest more in African countries with lower labour costs. In light of these trends, Asia is also becoming more of a focus for the State General Reserve Fund (SGRF), Oman's sovereign wealth fund, which currently

invests mostly in Europe and North America. It is targeting new investments in Asia as it has adopted a more pro-active approach to its investment strategy, based on analysis of emerging global trends and detailed research into the specific opportunities they generate, whereas in the past, it was said, it tended to be a passive investor, waiting for opportunities to be brought before it. British firms seeking such investment may need to work harder in this regard.

Various non-oil sectors were cited by discussants as presenting opportunities for Oman's economic development. Above all, tourism and trade and logistics were seen as key priorities. Both could benefit from the growing Asian markets. Oman Air already operates 27 flights a day to destinations in Asia, often connecting Gulf-based Asian expats to their families. In terms of trade and logistics, Oman is targeting 5-10% annual growth in the ports business, both through the existing ports at Sohar and Salalah and through the rapidly developing port of Duqm, envisaged as an international business and industrial hub, which will be closer to Oman's energy and mineral

resources than the other two. In terms of capitalising on the GCC customs union, it was said the proposed GCC railway could be a game-changer for Oman, allowing goods to reach Riyadh from Sohar in as little as 24 hours.

The need to diversify Oman's economy has been reinforced in recent months by the fall in the oil price since mid-2014, which was an issue on everyone's mind during the group's visit. Oman's breakeven price is over \$100 per barrel, and its oil is relatively expensive to produce because of the costs of enhanced oil recovery technology.

Various non-oil sectors were cited by discussants as presenting opportunities for Oman's economic development. Above all, tourism and trade and logistics were seen as key priorities. Both could benefit from the growing Asian markets.

Some of the economists and economic policymakers saw a positive side to the lower oil price. It is often said of resource-based economies that when revenues are high, the perceived urgency of reforms tends to be low. More than one person suggested the lower oil price could be a 'wake-up call', encouraging the authorities and the society to work together to 'accelerate and intensify' diversification. Since the government's capacity to invest in diversification projects will be limited, this demands more of a role for the private sector, local and international, Western and Eastern. The SGRF could potentially leverage its foreign investments to attract more international investments to Oman, bringing international partner organisations into local joint ventures, it was argued.

Tourism has huge potential, but there needs to be a more joined up strategy to promote its development, according to some participants. Whilst Omanis are keen to preserve their cultural traditions and want to avoid mass-market tourism, there are other options for Oman to attract high-end travellers capitalising on its historical and natural beauty, as well as its location.

In terms of moving beyond oil, the toughest area for economic reform will be the government budget, given entrenched expectations of a hefty state role in the economy. This was a recurring theme throughout our discussions on economic diversification; one of the reasons the country needs to diversify and leverage its international trade opportunities is to create jobs for nationals who will not necessarily be able to rely on public sector employment.

It was said that the government needs to concentrate on 'needs not wants' in the years ahead. Oman is confronting this issue at a time when it has important new spaces for public debate: an elected parliament and the social media. In their different ways, both have presented an opportunity for discussion between policy makers and representatives of the wider society. Such discussion can be a valuable force for transparency: in response to MPs' interest, the State General Reserve fund now has a website where the public can see a map of its investments.

As in every country, greater public debate can also create headaches for officials. MPs are often sceptical about suggested fiscal reforms, seeking to protect their constituents' benefits and taking a populist approach to economic policy. Commentators on social media have tended to be critical of proposals to rationalise public spending, such as a public-sector pay freeze (the salary bill is 10% of GDP, according to one speaker), or to raise new revenue, such as a tax on expatriates. They have flagged the importance of sharing the burden of fiscal cuts, saying that other areas of public sector spending need to be rationalised too. A number of Omani officials are very active on Twitter, and officials in any country can learn a lot from social media trends. One participant said listening to young people was one of the best inputs for long term thinking and planning. A more sustained public

discussion about economic expectations is likely to be needed as the structure of the economy evolves away from oil.

Job creation priorities are also a key area for debate: we heard different views from people we met over whether Oman should prioritise developing projects that create (higher paid) jobs for Omanis, or simply projects that create jobs. The population is still majority Omani, and more Omanis work in the private sector than in most other Gulf countries, but most private-sector jobs still go to expatriates.

Oman is facing these issues ahead of most of its neighbours, and has already been a regional leader in developing its economic diversification plans and its Vision 2020. As it prepares for the last five-year plan under that vision and looks towards its next long-term plan, increasing attention is likely to be paid to ensuring these policies are put into practice. Vision 2020 was predicated on US\$16/barrel oil, but wealth was in reality more abundant. Now that such revenues are less certain, the urgency of diversification is clear, as Oman seeks to capitalise on the country's strengths, including its strategic location between Asia, the Middle East and the West. ■



Jane Kinninmont is a senior research fellow and deputy head of the Middle East and North Africa programme at Chatham House. Her previous positions include associate director for the Middle East and Africa at the Economist Group, Middle East and North Africa editor and economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit from 2006 to 2010 and managing editor for Middle East and Africa at Business Monitor International from 2003 to 2006, and she contributes regularly to the media, including The Economist, the Guardian and Foreign Policy. Her research interests include the international relations of the Middle East; deconstructing the politics of sectarianism in the Gulf and Levant; the development of opposition movements and new actors; and the challenges that political economy structures pose to transitions in the region. Jane was a delegate at the New Generation Group Delegation, Muscat, 2015.

NEW GENERATION GROUP DELEGATION 10-13 JANUARY 2015

ARTICLE BY: NEJOOD M. AL-KHASIBI

The New Generation Group Delegation (NGG) met again in January 2015 for the annual summit organised by the team focusing this time on exploring Oman's role as a hub for Eastern Trade. This took place in Shangri La's Barr al Jissah Resort in Muscat for the fourth round of meetings that brings together both the Omani and British Delegation.

The annual gathering is a chance for the potential future leaders of Oman and Britain, from the public and private sectors, to come together and share ideas and thoughts on particular subject matters that are current and of interest.

The NGG summit agenda which was inaugurated by H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad

Albusaidi, was to date our greatest success as it brought together nine very high profile speakers to share their thoughts from their own perspectives, which ranged from studies of the land, sea, air and infrastructural strategies. Below is a summary of the speakers and their topics of discussion:

	Speaker	Job Title	Topic
Introductory Day			
1	H.E. Shk Aflah bin Hamad Al Rawahi	Honorary Consul of Belgium to Oman	Understanding the Reality of Islam
Oman : A Gateway to Asia Conference Day 1			
2	H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi	Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Introduction
3	H.E. Talal bin Sulaiman Al Rahbi	Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Planning	Oman's Springboard Strategy
4	Eng. Jamal Aziz	Deputy CEO of Sohar Industrial Port Company	Oman: An Eastern Hub
5	Dr. Khalid bin Abdulwahab Al Balushi	Senior Manager of Government Relations and Sustainability at Oman Air	Looking East across the Skies
Oman : A Gateway to Asia Conference Day 2			
6	H.E. Ambassador Jon Wilks	British Ambassador to The Sultanate	Oman As a Regional Leader
7	H.E. Abdulsalam bin Mohammed Al Murshidi	CEO of the State General Reserve Fund	Insights into Eastern Investments
8	Mr. Maqbool bin Ali Sultan	Chairman of the Omani British Friendship Association (OBFA)	A History of Eastern Trade: Then and Now
9	Dr. Hatem bin Bakhit Al Shanfari	Professor of Economics and Finance at the Sultan Qaboos University	Iranian Trade: The Future

A view of Shangri-La's Barr Al Jissah.



Having the opportunity to hear from some of Oman's most senior speakers in their respective fields, gave the delegates an insight into Oman's strategies and future plans to develop various projects that will in no doubt become platforms for trade. H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad briefed the delegation on Oman's unique foreign policy of friendship – which in the wider context acts as a stable and fertile ground for Oman to grow into a hub for Eastern Trade. This

was reiterated by H.E. Ambassador Jon Wilks who addressed the delegation on Oman's role as leader in the region.

The economic perspective was the dominant one within the two day summit, as light was shed on the current 2020 Omani Vision and economic plan. The delegates and speakers spoke realistically on the economic pressures of the region – specifically in the context of low oil price – and the solutions and diversification needed

for sustainable growth. This included looking eastward in terms of flight, shipping, cargo and investment opportunities as it looks to 1.8 billion consumers.

On another note, the annual gathering is an opportunity for the delegates to come together not only to explore specific working themes, but also to continue to build ties and grow friendships between one another. The delegation programme

H.E. Ambassador Jon Wilks addressing the delegates, with Ollie Blake and Ma'an Al Rawahi.





The Delegation at the Al Rawahi's Farm.

started off by a very enlightening and informative talk by H.E. Sheikh Aflah Al Rawahi on *“Understanding the Reality of Islam”* were able to find some time to explore Muttrah Souq and experience the Omani culture at first-hand, and a dinner at the NGG Oman Chairman’s farm, which only added to the strengthening of the historic bilateral ties and bonds. The

delegation finished off with a farewell dinner at the hosting hotel’s heritage village and attendees included Her Highness Dr. Mona bin Fahd Al Said, H.E. Muhammad Al Zubair, H.E. Sayyid Badr Al Busaidi, H.E. Dr. Ali Al Sunaidi, H.E. Yahya Al Jabri along with many other undersecretaries, CEOs and businessmen.

The event had the privilege of having

sponsorship and unconditional support from BP and Barr Al Jissah’s teams which was the main catalyst for the success of the event. In conclusion, the delegation was able to come to a joint agreement that the current economic pressures along with other regional issues present many positive opportunities for Oman to continue to play a larger role both regionally and globally. ■



The NGG Delegation with H.E. Sayyid Badr Bin Hamad Al Busaidi.

OMAN'S ECONOMY THE ROAD AHEAD

Oman boasts a long and uninterrupted record of development planning – second only to India – spanning the last four decades.

ARTICLE BY INTISAR AL-WAHAIBI



INTISAR AL-WAHAIBI

Director General of Development Planning
General Secretariat of the Supreme Council for Planning, Oman

Since the 1970s, the economy has been managed according to Five Year plans, within the framework of long term visions. A major event this year has been the preparation of the 9th Five Year Development Plan (2016-2020) which is the last within Vision 2020 and paves the way for Vision 2040. This is partly why this plan acquires specific importance. The sharp decline in oil prices, the perturbed geo-political situation in the Middle East and the rising expectations of Omani citizens – especially the youth – are giving this plan additional significance.

It is against this backdrop that I became heavily involved in the preparation of the 9th Five Year Plan. I was not a stranger to development planning as I had worked on the previous three plans under the Ministry of National Economy at that time. However, this time there are more difficult challenges. Paramount among these is how to respond to the directive of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos that all future plans should strike a balance between ‘the economic’ and ‘the social’ aspects of development. A secondary challenge is the necessity to reconsider the objective of maintaining high growth, necessary for securing a decent standard of living for Omani citizens and creating job opportunities for the youth on the one hand, while maintaining fiscal sustainability on the other hand, at a time of declining oil prices (by 55% since June 2014).

The starting point was to undertake an evaluation of the performance during the past 15 years of Vision 2020 and the 8th plan, and draw a realistic picture of the Omani economy on the eve of the 9th plan. This exercise was undertaken by international experts and scholars from Sultan Qaboos University. Their conclusion is that the overall objectives of the vision have been achieved as the average GDP growth was 5.3%, higher than the 3% targeted in Vision 2020. Almost all the other human development indicators have shown positive signs. However, some challenges remained: the low progress in employing Omanis in the private sector given the strong preference of youth for government jobs, the modest level of diversification away from the oil and gas sector, the need to push for a more balanced development among the governorates through increased investment in economic, social and cultural infrastructure, and finally, providing adequate protection and safety nets for vulnerable and limited income groups.

The response to these challenges required the mobilisation of exceptional talents from home and abroad. International experts worked hand in hand with Omanis, and successful development experiences were presented and debated in terms of their relevance to Oman. To achieve participation by stakeholders in both the government and private sector, a variety of workshops and seminars were held, with a particular emphasis on the sectoral strategies that have been developed by the line ministries and entities.

As a result of the consultancies, the 9th Five Year Development Plan targets a rate of growth for the economy (between 3% and 4% a year) necessary to maintain a decent standard of living for the people of Oman; ensures the creation of sufficient jobs for Omani youth; adopts a specific strategy to accelerate diversification through concentration on five strategic sectors (Manufacturing, Logistics, Tourism, Fisheries and Mining), ensuring fiscal sustainability and mobilising public and private investment for strategic sectors and mega projects; and introduces a novel approach to plan at the local level by identifying the development gaps in each governorate and allocating investments accordingly.

The methodology of planning has also evolved. The 9th plan will be distinguished as an example of ‘Planning under Uncertainty’ where different scenarios, and not only one, have been developed. Actually, a strong guiding principle for me in my planning career is to strike a balance between Oman’s engagement with the global economy while protecting its specificity and cultural integrity. In my work I have to assume that the world, at least the world economy, is constantly changing and the challenge is how to respond to this global dynamic at the national level?

This takes me back to the approach we adopted in designing the 9th Five Year Development Plan (2016-2020). We were, and still are being faced with a highly volatile oil market. Our response has been not to be straight-jacketed by one projection, but to explore various scenarios, and work out the likely outcome under each scenario. This provides our policy makers with a wide spectrum of choices to choose from according to their vision of the over-all situation.

I must conclude by expressing how lucky I feel to be part of this development. I believe that I have grown with this plan, both on a professional and personal level, and I feel honoured to participate directly in the planning of the future of The Sultanate of Oman. ■

OMAN'S RECENT SPORTING SUCCESSES

ARTICLE BY ABDULLAH AL AJMI

There is no doubt that youth represent the Sultanate's power and its hope for the future. Furthermore, the youth also represent the largest age-group of Oman's population.

In light of this, the Sultanate's Ministry of Sports Affairs has paid much attention to both youth and sports. Listed below are Oman's main sports achievements within the past year:

- The Oman National Team for Catching Stakes received first place in Pakistan's International Catching Stakes Championship held in February 2014, where the team won 3 gold medals and 3 bronze medals.
- The National Team of Weightlifting participating in the Asian Championship in Thailand also scored various medals in March 2015.
- The Youth National Team for Golf participated in the 18th GCC Championship for Golf in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 25th February through 1st March 2014. The team won a gold medal in the individual men's category.
- Oman's National Sailing Team participating the 6th GCC Sailing Championship in Qatar from 12th-15th March 2014. The Sultanate received first place and carried home 3 gold medals, 2 silver medals and 2 bronze medals.
- The National Hockey Team received first place in the West Asia Countries Championship for Hockey. This championship was held in Qatar from 14th-20th February, 2014.
- National Swim Team participated in the 13th GCC Swimming Championship in open water. It was held in Bahrain from 8th-10th May 2014, where the team won 6 gold medals and 3 silver medals.



- The National Team of Athlete Games participated in the 16th Arab Males and Females Youth Championship in Egypt from 23rd -26th April 2014 and won a bronze medal.
- The National Team for Physical Fitness participated in the Asian Championship for Physical Fitness, which was held in the Philippines. The Sultanate scored third place in the youth class, and won 9 gold medals, 16 silver medals and 11 bronze medals.

Moreover, The Sultanate has hosted some major sports events in late 2014. Highlights include:

- First GCC Golf Championship for Youth (15 years old and below):
This championship was held in Muscat from 24th-26th April, 2014. Five teams participated, representing the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. The Sultanate's team won first place, scoring 348 points, while the Qatari team came in second place.
- Oman Sports Conference 2014:
The two-day conference took place in

Muscat under the auspices of the Omani Minister of Sports Affairs. This was the second conference, building on the success of the first conference and the positive response received from targeted groups. The conference aimed to act as a springboard for sport research and discussion to encourage better sports practices and methods for managing private sports authorities. The event also aimed to involve more youth in

designing and implementing youth sports events here in Oman.

In conclusion, Omani youth enjoy the full support of His Majesty The Sultan through the Ministry of Sports Affairs, which enjoys a substantial budget to run different sport activities and events in the country. The rising generation appreciates such efforts through achieving hereinbefore sports accomplishments. ■



Al-Nabhani has won four singles and four doubles titles on the International Federation tour in her career.



Oman National Football Team Winning GCCC Championship 2009.

SOVEREIGN WEALTH FUNDS RISE AND FALL

ARTICLE BY: MOATASIM AL BULUSHI
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER, SGRF

Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWF) are state-owned investment arms. They invest in various assets in order to generate long term returns.

There are some 78 SWFs across the world and according to SWFI's website, that lists their names and bio data, it indicates that the number of SWFs has increased dramatically since 2005. As more than 40, which represents about 46% of the total SWFs, have been created during the last decade, this raises the question: What are the motives behind the increase in the number of SWFs?

Perhaps the high oil prices, particularly in the past five years would be the most prominent reason, because 50.5% of these funds are generated from oil and gas revenues (source: SWFI). But, will the number continue to increase, or be maintained with the decline of the oil price? There is no doubt that this is already the subject of a PhD thesis somewhere.

Fiscal surplus and foreign currency reserves also had a role, but the important reason, which is more interesting, is the impressive economic performance in emerging markets (China/India/Brazil/ME/Africa, etc.) which as a result has accumulated massive financial assets in these nations, leading them to create SWFs to manage their growing assets. This phenomenon has not just contributed to the increase of SWFs, but has also created an impact on the matured SWFs in the way they plan their investment strategies in recognition of the attractive economic growth profiles of these nations. According to a study conducted by INVESCO, many SWFs have increased their target allocations in emerging markets. Some 17% of total sovereign infrastructure

investments are allocated to emerging markets. The attractiveness of sovereign investors to these countries is increasing. In India for instance, the attractiveness rate has increased from 4.9 out of 10 in 2014 to 5.4 in 2015 (INVESCO), China has increased slightly from 5.7 to 5.8, and Brazil from 5.4 to 5.9 in 2015 leaving behind Italy which scored 5.7.

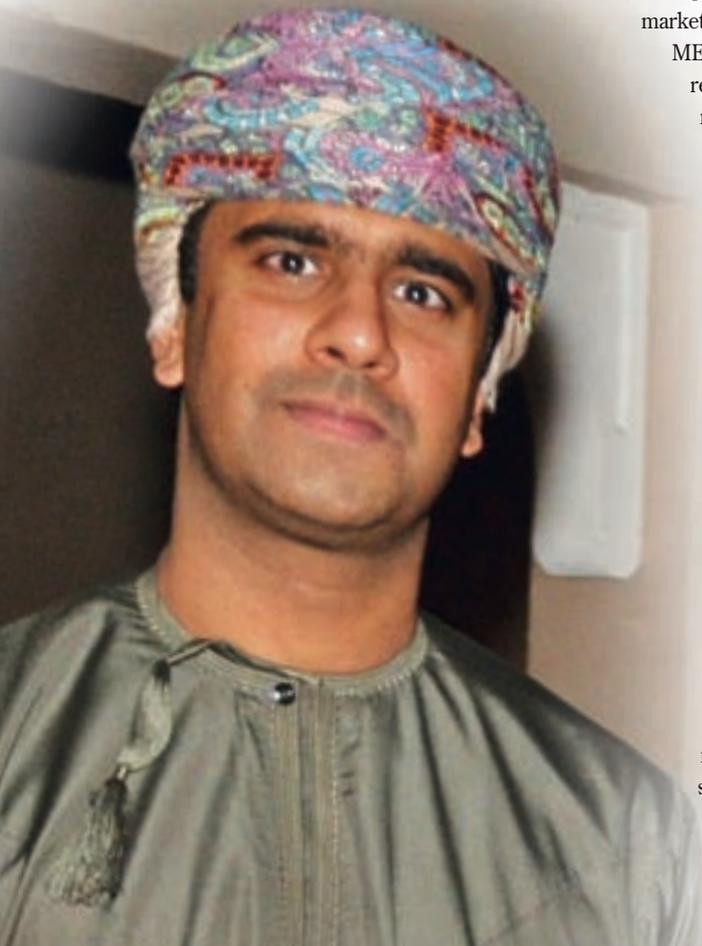
The facts on the ground indicate that the emerging markets will continue to grow, perhaps on a slower basis now. But the drop in oil revenue, the main supply line of many of these Funds, raises the question on the substitutes, especially in the GCC region. The lucrative oil revenues during the last decade, created the opportunity for this region to grow its sovereign wealth funds.

Since the oil prices started dropping in Q3 2014, a number of Sovereign Funds including Norway, Russia and Nigeria announced that they might find themselves withdrawing more from their Funds. The regional oil exporters are already feeling the heat on their budgets after many are suffering a deficit on their budgets in the first six months of 2015.

The consequences of withdrawing from SWFs do not reflect on these countries' future savings only, but spillover to their current international investment. Most of SWFs dependent on oil and gas revenues, invest in long-term real-estate investments across the world. The heavier the impact of oil revenue drop, the more SWFs start pulling out of these investments to provide liquidity for their countries, leaving behind real-estate projects hanging in other countries, lacking funds to complete. And there may be more conservative investors in international markets for the time being.

SWFs have grown rapidly in the last decade, in size and quantity. And even with the slower growth these funds will witness due to the decrease in oil revenues, they will continue to invest to keep up with the growing budgets.

Now, it is only a matter of finding new sources to fund SWFs beyond natural resources to sustain its growth during crisis and fluctuating oil prices. ■



COLLECTED CONVERSATIONS...

REFLECTIONS ON THE DHO FAR INSURGENCY 1965-1975

ARTICLE BY FIONA WARTON

At the time I was awarded a grant last December I had done 44 interviews in the UK and seven in Oman. With your support, 2015 has seen the project grow and even take wing.

Since I featured in the First Edition of this Magazine, I was privileged to travel to Oman, sponsored and escorted by fellow member, Ian Gordon and greatly helped in Oman by Major Mohamed Othman. I was quickly to find that Ian's name opened doors and he was looked upon by the Omanis with great respect and affection. Though the trip was only seven days, we accomplished seven interviews, three in English and four in Arabic (conducted by Ian of course), four

in the north and three in the Dhofar area.

In between interviews, Ian showed me the Oman of his youth during the insurgency and he took me to places that I often hear about during the course of my interviews. From Iziki in the North where I met Brigadier Raqashi and his family, to the Wadi Naheez in the South, where we conducted an interview out of doors, very close to where Mohamed Said Bait Qatan had been born and raised. After that we



Fiona with Raqashi's girls. The young lady in the red headdress is a qualified Interior Designer working in Muscat and speaks fluent English – I hope to show her the design shops in London one day.



Ian Gordon with Brigadier Mohamed Raqashi at his home holding the rifle he used in Dhofar.

drove down the camel track to the Salalah plain where Mohamed's family were gathering in their returning camels from their day's grazing. Amongst those were new born camels, and one dam who'd lost her calf, was very miserable. I tried to comfort her, scratching her ears and received a full facial wash in return!

We went to Wadi Dharbat, a cool oasis teeming with bird life, where we saw a cave shelter used down the centuries. Capstan, near Sarfait, was a vital landmark during the insurgency. Close by was a small wadi which had been mined by the enemy to devastating effect, leaving two children to witness the slow death of their mothers having stepped on mines. Ten days later, by chance, Ian had sent a Firqat patrol to check the area and they rescued these children, a boy and girl, from the minefield. This girl, Miriam, heard that Ra'aid Ian was back in Salalah and made contact via an intermediary asking to see him again 40 years later!

Unfortunately when we went to her house, she was at her Koran lessons,

so we missed her this time though they had met on a previous occasion.

Since the start of 2015 I have collected a further 32 interviews, visiting interviewees in their homes, them coming to me, or meeting at the AOS in London. I have covered thousands of miles from Bodmin Moor in Cornwall to Edinburgh in Scotland, West Wales, the Welsh Marches and Herefordshire to Crewe and beyond.

I have now done 76 interviews and three of these are ladies who were in Oman, one being Lady Shirley Akehurst with her photograph album – but that is for another day. Another was Susan Hiscock, a charity nurse working in the Dhofar hills. She never knew where she was being taken or whom she was seeing. She had a driver and a translator. She told me of one patient who complained of grass growing from under the skin between his toes and the pain it caused! This seemed to be the result of barefoot hill walking. If he is still around today, he is probably driving a Toyota pick-up truck!

One bonus of meeting these old and bold warriors, is that you meet some wonderful characters. One such is Wing Commander Neville Baker much loved and respected boss of the first squadron of helicopters in Oman. A bachelor with no family, we'd planned a surprise 91st birthday party for him, only to find that three days beforehand that he wasn't answering his phone. This resulted in the police being called to break in, finding he'd had an accident. I am pleased to tell you, though badly shaken and bruised, he is thoroughly enjoying being

spoilt in Respite Care at Sussexdown, the RAFA Care Home in the heart of the South Downs.

Oman beckons once again in October/November, assisted by the AOS and a number of individuals who are sponsoring and assisting me both here and in Oman. I shall be there for three weeks and will be very busy collecting important stories from the Omani side. For example, from one young boy who joined SAF at the age of 13, rose to the highest rank and supported Sultan Qaboos in building the Oman of today. It is a great privilege for me to be able to hear these stories first hand, and ones which I treasure.

This is a vital archive in the making, and the Anglo-Omani Society is behind it all the way, as is COSSAF, Lieutenant General Ahmed bin Harith Al Nabhani.

I shall also be visiting The Sultan Qaboos University, History Department, to introduce them to the Middle East Centre Archives at St Antony's College, Oxford and thereby expanding the number of Colleges at Oxford University cross-fraternising through the AOS Young Generations Group.

Of course, if I could be granted one wish, then it would be to meet the man who had the great foresight, courage, compassion and leadership to bring his country from medieval times into the 21st Century - His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

I have lots more stories to tell you, perhaps one AOS evening next year? ■

Fee Amaanillah



Ian Gordon interviewing Mohamed Said Bait Qatan in the Wadi Naheez where Mohamed was born and raised. He went on to become a Colonel in The Sultan's Special Forces.

‘PEACE IS A PRE-REQUISITE FOR PROSPERITY, THIS UNDERPINS OMAN’S FOREIGN POLICY’

SAYYID BADR ADDRESSES THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY

As the AOS Review was being published last year, and too late to be included in that edition, Sayyid Badr bin Hamed Al Busaidi, Secretary General of Oman’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, delivered a lecture to Society members and guests on ‘Omani Views on Regional Issues.’

When this talk was announced, the demand for places was so great that the venue for the lecture had to be transferred from the Society’s own lecture room to a much larger function room in the nearby Le Méridien Hotel.

During his talk, Sayyid Badr outlined Oman’s belief that local issues need local solutions and regional issues require regional solutions, a press release stated.

On instability in countries like Syria and Iraq, Sayyid Badr said that while peace should be the main aim, it cannot be

imposed. “Oman’s approach is based on realising that peace and stability are preconditions for prosperity. Also, those foundations are best built by people who are going to live in that house,”

Sayyid Badr answered a series of questions from members of the audience before being thanked by Society Chairman, Robert Alston. ■



Above: Sayyid Badr bin Hamed Al Busaidi, Secretary General of Oman’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



The Omani Students' Advisory Council in the UK (OSAC-UK) has organised different events all around the UK which varied between academic, cultural, national and Islamic celebrations. 2014/2015 activities started on September by the 16 Omani Students' Societies that welcomed new Omani students in most of United Kingdom universities.

L-R: Buthaina Al Jabri, OSS President, Rocio Corrales (AOS) and Abdul Rahim Al Droushi, OSAC President.



THE OMANI STUDENTS' ADVISORY COUNCIL IN THE UK

The Omani 44th National Day was hosted by the Omani Students' Society in Manchester in collaboration with the Omani Students' Society in Sheffield, the Cultural Attaché and Omani Students' Advisory Council in the UK. It was held in "the old Trafford" under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Abdullah Al-Hinai, Ambassador of The Sultanate in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. The number of attendees reached 1200 Omani students from all around the UK. The event theme was "Oman, the Shine of Civilisations". Representatives from different countries joined the exhibition. The first activity of its kind among Omani

students around the world started in the UK on the 18th of November 2014 within the 44th National Day celebrations (the promotional activity). Omani students from nine cities in the UK distributed red roses holding a card that sends greetings for the locals telling them about Oman and this special event.

The annual celebration of Oman National Day this year will take place in Swansea. The event will be held by the Omani Students' Society in Swansea and organised in collaboration with OSACK-UK under the supervision of the Cultural Attaché in London. About 1500 Omani students are expected to attend the celebration which will include different activities in one week. Social media accounts have been created to cover this event by the society. The event concentrates on the Omani Renaissance and

the successful developments in different sectors in Oman. It also illustrates the Omani students' talents in the UK.

The Omani Students' Society in Loughborough hosted Oman Open Day on 30th-31st January 2015. The event was organised in cooperation with OSAC-UK, Omani Students' Society in Nottingham and Omani Students' Society in Leicester. Oman Open Day 2015 witnessed participation of more than 350 students, as well as more than 400 visitors. The first day of the event included an Omani Exhibition and Omani traditional games which were open to the public. The second day of the event welcomed Omani students from all universities in the UK for three events. The recruitment fair started at 10:00 am with more than 150 students participating from all universities in the UK with the cooperation of LNG, PDO and Electricity Holding Company. The second event was the poster presentation competition with the participation of 15 PhD Omani students. The third event, which was part of the closing ceremony, was the graduation ceremony with participation of 110 Omani students. The event witnessed contributions from different authorities such as the

Cultural Attaché in London, and societies including Omani Students' Societies and the Anglo-Omani Society.

The Council has created an award for Oman's ambassadors to contribute at achieving the visions and goals they've created, as the council is always keen on holding this competition every year to honour the winners in Oman National Day's event. The competition consists of two main

sections; one for the Omani Students' Societies in which they compete to show their role in organising successful events that can help the Omani students in the UK to live the best student experience as well as to promote the Omani civilisation. The other section is for individuals' participations in which participants present parts of their work in any field.

Among other activities that OSAC-UK is working on now is the scientific journal that will include Omani students' research abstracts, with the aim of launching it as part of the 45th Oman National Day celebrations. The scientific committee, which is part of OSAC-UK committees, is now promoting for the magazine and participation criteria. The journal includes different sections and presents the most important researches that are conducted by Omani students in UK. Moreover, OSAC-UK is planning to organise sport open days for families, ladies and men during the coming academic year. The 45th Oman National Day will witness one of these sport events when 16 football teams representing 16 Omani Students' Societies in the UK will compete in Muscat in two days 28-29th of August 2015. ■

The Council has created an award for Oman's ambassadors to contribute at achieving the visions and goals they've created, as the council is always keen on holding this competition every year to honour the winners in Oman National Day's event.



Omani students at the 44th National Day Celebration, Manchester.

VISIT TO UK BY OMANI LAWYERS

The Anglo-Omani Society was proud to sponsor a visit of 25 Omani Lawyers to the UK organised by the Omani British Lawyers' Association (OBLA) and the Omani Lawyers' Association.

The programme of the visit took place in London and Oxford, with a focus on 'legal London', and included trips to the Old Bailey, the Law Society of England and Wales, the Bar Council, the Takeover Panel and Oxford University Law Faculty. The Anglo-Omani Society hosted a lunch reception at 34 Sackville Street for the

Omani delegates and selected guests from the UK legal profession. The Society was also delighted to assist in arranging a tour of the Supreme Court for the Omani delegates and a Q&A session with Lord Clarke. Given the success of the visit, The Society will host a second delegation of OBLA at the end of October this year. ■



MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION OFFICIALS TRAINING VISIT TO UK UNIVERSITIES

Eight officers from the Omani Ministry of Higher Education have successfully completed a five days visit to four UK universities.

The visit was organised by the British Council in collaboration with UK Trade & Investment in the British Embassy Muscat, with the support from the Anglo-Omani Society.

Objective: The objective of this visit is to promote awareness of studying in the UK. The programme was designed to provide insight into the experiences of Omani scholars studying in the UK; and opportunities for knowledge transfer and networking with the International and Admission Office of the universities in the tour.

The Programme: This training visit included meetings hosted by the Cultural Attaché's office at the Embassy of The Sultanate of Oman in London and on campus visit hosted by Coventry, Cardiff, Exeter and Reading universities. ■



BOOK REVIEWS

'THE ARABIAN LEOPARDS OF OMAN'

By Andrew Spalton and Hadi Al Hikmani
Stacey International, 2014

This concisely written and beautifully illustrated book highlights an Omani aspect of the increasing and unequal competition worldwide between mankind and the natural world for space and resources. In the forefront is the plight of the Arabian leopard – *Panthera pardus nimr* – which in living memory has been either totally eliminated or severely reduced in numbers all over the region, whether directly by shooting, trapping or poisoning or indirectly by loss of habitat and sources of food. The only brightness in this otherwise gloomy picture is that of all the countries in the Peninsula Oman presents the best hope for the survival of this rare subspecies in the wild.

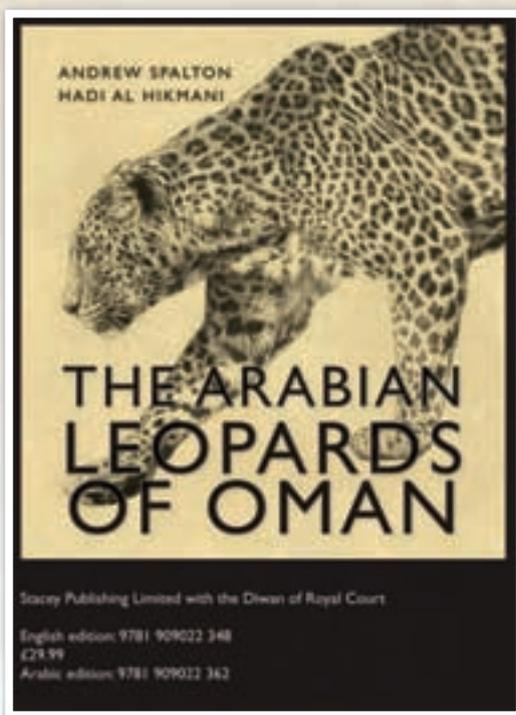
The authors have carefully assembled all the written evidence for the historical existence and range of the Arabian leopard, though much of it derives sadly from a count of dead bodies and have narrowed down the area where it continues to hang on today to Oman's Dhofar Mountains Chain and its extension into Yemen. This conclusion is the outcome of increasingly sophisticated studies and surveys since the late 1970s, when the accumulation of evidence of the critical endangerment of the leopard through widespread extermination had reached an alarming level. The first step was to establish a captive breeding programme at the Wild Animals Breeding Centre near Seeb in 1985 and in the mid 1990s at the Breeding Centre for Endangered Arabian Wildlife in Sharjah, which proved very successful in increasing numbers, though with little prospect of them ever being returned to the wild. Next, efforts

were made to assess the size and distribution of the remaining wild leopard population, concentrating on the Dhofar mountains, as the indications were that it was already extinct elsewhere. The authors were personally involved, often in conditions of extreme hardship, in devising and carrying out the work of surveying the fauna of these rugged mountains and, with the enthusiastic support of the brilliant photographer, David Willis, many of whose pictures embellish this book, arrived at some alarming results. The distribution of the leopard has contracted by at least 80% since the mid-1990s and is now found only in the most inaccessible scarps and wadis of the Jabal, with the consequent danger of the fragmentation of the population (the security fence along the border between Yemen and Oman is unhelpful in this regard). Their most optimistic estimate of numbers is only 118-158 adult leopards, while their probably more realistic estimate is just 44-58. The surveys also threw up a wealth of information on the leopard's prey,

principally Nubian ibex, Arabian gazelle and hyrax, and its competitor predators, principally wolf, caracal and hyena; and, importantly, showed that, contrary to popular belief, domestic animals were only infrequently attacked.

With all the information now at their disposal, the authors have analysed the causes of the leopard's decline and, unsurprisingly, confirm what any visitor to the Jabal today can readily see that the main problem is the degradation of the environment from overgrazing by the unsustainably large numbers of often unattended herds of camels, cattle and goats. Their solution for the successful conservation of the leopard is the familiar one of the better management of the relationship between the local communities and the surrounding natural world. This calls for the urgent implementation of a programme of engagement by the authorities with those living on or exploiting the resources of the Jabal to show them the benefits of conservation, e.g. through compensation for killed livestock or jobs associated with ecotourism. At the same time they would also have to educate them to the need to reduce their livestock to numbers they can retain on the Jabal naturally, as they used to do, without recourse to the expensive food supplements that have now become normal. That is a tall order anywhere but there is hope in Oman, where the older generation was previously used to a way of life that had room both for livestock and wild animals and the Omani authorities are alert to the task before them. This book will be a useful tool for them, especially in an Arabic edition, as well as a treasure for all those with an interest in preserving the special biodiversity of Oman as well as of the planet.

Reviewed by Terence Clark



THE ARABS AND THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

By John C. Wilkinson
University of Oxford (retired)

HB 9781781790687. 512 pages
Retail price £70; discounted price £52.50
Published January 2015 by Equinox Publishing Ltd

For many visitors to Oman, and even for those who have lived there – and this probably includes the majority of members of the Society – it is easy to neglect the Arab/Omani involvement in East Africa. Zanzibari Arabs who came to Oman after being ejected in the political upheaval of 1964 have now been well integrated, and the late 20th and early 21st century European perspective of Oman focusses on the country's situation in the Arab and Gulf world rather than on Africa. Yet the Arab commercial and colonial presence, initially on the coast of East Africa, goes back to very early times. In the 19th century, Arab traders ventured inland to the Great Lakes, mainly in the search for tusks to meet growing demand for ivory in India, Europe and North America; sources of ivory (both from old stocks and hunted elephants), which the traders bought or stole from African villages, became exhausted East of Lake Tanganyika, drawing the Arabs westwards into the Congo basin. Trade in ivory was significantly more important to them than trading in slaves. As a result, they inter-acted with the indigenous peoples, and also with Europeans who came as explorers, traders, missionaries and as imperialists. This interaction, which became particularly intense in the 19th century, left its traces well into the 20th, and had lasting effects both in the region and back in the Arab homeland.

John Wilkinson has a long and honourable record in writing on Oman. Members of the Society may be familiar with his Ibadism, and The Imamate tradition of Oman. Those expecting a careful and detailed analysis, reflecting his wide reading and deep research in the sources, will not be disappointed. He tells the story of the "Scramble for Africa" – that period of roughly 1880 onwards, when the European Powers annexed vast tracts of the continent – but does so, unusually, from the

perspective of the mainly Omani Arabs who were by then well established in the region. He disentangles the ethnicity and origins of Africans, Arabs and Swahilis; and has done detailed research on the family and tribal background of the Omanis in East Africa, demonstrating that they were not – as one might suspect – only from Muscat and the coastal areas, but from all over inner Oman. The lively characters in his account include not only traders such as Hamad al-Murjabi (known as Tippu Tip) but the more settled Arabs in the Al-Busa'idi sultanate of Zanzibar. The European dramatis personae include the British (who declared Zanzibar a protectorate in 1890), the Germans (who annexed what became Tanganyika), the French (who occupied territory North of the Congo river), and of course Leopold King of the Belgians, who took over the vast area enclosed by the great loop of the Congo, in one of the most shameful acts of exploitation in the whole Scramble.

Not that there are many heroes in this story! Acts of dreadful violence were committed by Europeans, Africans and Arabs. Wilkinson's account takes us through episodes such as Stanley's extraordinary expedition to "relieve" Emin Pasha, the Egyptian Khedive's Governor of Equatoria; and it climaxes with the small war between Omani Arabs and the Belgians (with African foot-soldiers on both sides) that broke out in 1892 as their interests conflicted in the region of the upper Congo river. Belgian supremacy was established, and the Arabs killed or driven out; and as the century ended the scene was set for 60-70 years of European imperial government.

Wilkinson covers all this narrative with extraordinary thoroughness. The available sources do not make the historian's task easy. Arabs left little in writing. Europeans left detailed records, but on examination they often turn out to be tendentious – for example, defending dubious behaviour or avoiding responsibility for things that went wrong (Stanley's write-up of the Emin Pasha

Relief Expedition comes to mind); and they often misrecorded names of people and places. Wilkinson does wonders in recovering and deducing information, particularly on Omanis' nisbas (family/tribal names). His ability to get us to look at the Scramble through Arab eyes gives a new perspective which will be welcomed by historians of Oman and of Africa alike.

It is disappointing that Wilkinson has been sadly let down by his editors. The Arabs and the Scramble contains more misprints, repeated or omitted words, and inconsistencies in spelling than we expect in a scholarly work of this kind and cost. The index is difficult to use, being divided into sections so that you have to know into what category a name or item falls (for example, whether French or Belgian) before you can look it up; and some characters (eg Governor Coquilhat; French Foreign Minister Ferry) are not there at all – unless I have simply failed to find them! Maps are always a problem in a book on this area and this period, since the sources record far more names of villages than can actually be reproduced on any one-page map in a modern book; 19th century editions had huge (and beautiful) fold-out maps. The Arabs and the Scramble reproduces three such maps, but even a magnifying-glass does not enable the reader to place many locations that appear in the text.

John Wilkinson's writing is rich and concentrated; and he assumes a degree of prior knowledge of his subject. Enthusiasts and experts in the history of Oman and East Africa will benefit hugely from this book. All will admire the combination of breadth of vision and depth of detail which Wilkinson brings to a fascinating era.

Reviewed by Stuart Laing

Equinox Publishing is pleased to offer Anglo-Omani Society members 25% off the retail price of this book. For more information and to order visit the book webpage: <http://www.equinoxpub.com/home/arabs-scramble-africa/> Please use the code Wilkinson when prompted in the ordering process to receive the 25% off. This code is valid for purchases up to the end of 2015.

'AN ENDURING RELATIONSHIP' – ONE YEAR ON

Last year's Review announced the opening of an exhibition at the RAF Museum London celebrating the ties between the Royal Air Force and the Royal Air Force of Oman. Originally planned to run for one year, this very successful exhibition has now been extended till the end of 2016. Admission is free and visitors can also view the main Museum exhibits.

WEEDS OF NORTHERN AND CENTRAL OMAN

By Ahmed Yahya Al-Maskari and Mansoor Hameed

2013 Muscat. Sultan Qaboos University Academic Publications Board. Pp. 153.

If there were a literary prize for the book with the least alluring title, then this book would certainly be a strong contender, and had the present reviewer not been engaged in teaching English for Specific Academic Purposes to SQU students from the College of Agriculture and Marine Sciences, he would never have given this book a second glance.

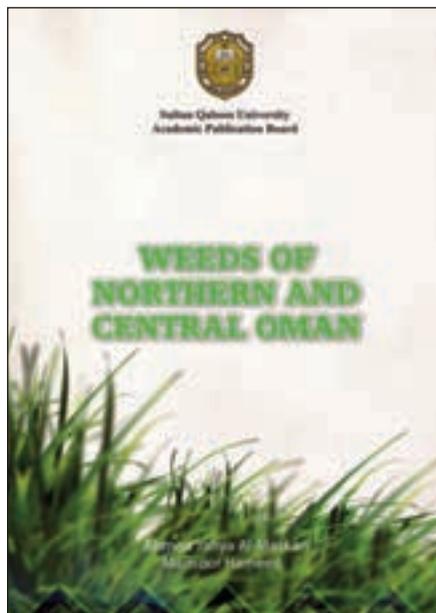
First impressions, however, may be misleading, and the book is actually an impressive example of scholarship. It total, it describes 55 weeds from 25 different families. Each entry takes up two pages.

Entries begin with the plant's Latin name(s), followed by an explanation of that name's origins. The English name is then given, followed by the local Omani name, both in transliteration and Arabic.

This is followed by a very dense and detailed botanic description of all parts of the plant; so dense, indeed, that it makes difficult reading for the non-specialist. For example, and taken entirely at random, the description of Capeweed, or Carpet Weed (P. 109) begins "A stoloniferous, prostrate, perennial herb, up to 2 cm in diameter. Leaves opposite, decussate, petiolate; petiole 1-5 mm long, winged; leaf blade 2-5 cm long, 10-20 mm wide, obovate, margins entire-serrate, apex acuminate, acute or obtuse, hairy or gland dotted."

This is followed by briefer information on the plant's ecology, and information regarding its economic importance. Facing this description are detailed line drawings of the plant, its leaves, flowers and seeds, and there are usually two small colour plates.

The book comes with an extensive bibliography (Pp. 115-121), a Glossary of Botanical and Medicinal Terms (Pp.122-135), an Index of Species' Names (Pp. 136-143); an Index of English Names (Pp. 144-150) and an Index of Arabic Names (Pp. 151-153).



The Glossary is particularly welcome, in the light of the terminology quoted above, but what is most surprising about this book is the extent to which the term "weed" loses its pejorative

connotations. In the Introduction (Pp. 2-4) the authors admit that "Negative values of weedy species prevail over their positive values" (P. 2), but a dictionary definition "a plant that grows easily and is usually found in places where you do not want it" (Rundell 2002; 1624), emphasizes that weeds owe their evil reputation to a poor choice of location, rather than to any intrinsically negative quality.

Weeds of Northern and Central Oman makes it perfectly clear that many weeds have medicinal value; that in some cases the leaves and seeds are edible; that dyes can be extracted from some roots, and that very few of the plants listed in this collection have no economic value at all. That having been said, the authors cite works like Ali (1999), Hill (1952) and Singh et al (1983), and so it is still not entirely

clear just how many of the weeds are, or were, actually used in Oman itself. That could be the theme of an anthropological study.

In the meantime, the book will undoubtedly be "of great value to students of botany, ethnobotany, allelopathy and pharmacognosy" (Preface P. vi), but it could also find favour with amateur gardeners both inside Oman and in its neighbouring countries. It would sit well alongside Winbow's (2008) introduction to the native plants of the Sultanate, for some weeds, particularly the blue pimpernel, *Anagallis arvensis*, have their own charm, and would grace any garden, as well as affording an ingredient for salads.

Reviewed by Neil McBeath

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A DIGITAL LIBRARY?

Did you know that the Society has a library of books relating to the Sultanate? It has been growing as books have been donated ever since we occupied our Sackville Street premises. The books are listed on our website, and members are very welcome to visit the building and read or research the books, but we are not able to allow books to be taken away from the building. This is an obvious limitation, particularly as we have members living all over the British Isles and abroad. In the new Digital Age, there is an answer to this problem, which is to scan the books and put them online in our website. However, scanning bound books can be very expensive, and there is also the question of obtaining copyright permission. These are being investigated at the moment with significant success. With digital equipment becoming ever more powerful, and also less expensive, we may soon have our own scanning equipment. Copyright has to be carefully complied with, but is quite manageable. So while you wait for an announcement about a new digital library, have a look on our website at the books that the Society has already. Come to Sackville Street and read or research them. If you have any books relating to Oman, perhaps you might consider donating them to the Society to help expand our knowledge base for members.

I.K.

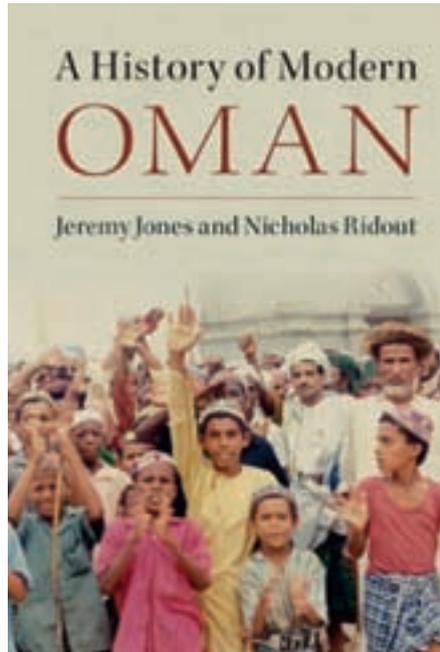
A HISTORY OF MODERN OMAN

By *Jeremy Jones and Nicholas Ridout*

At the time of Review publication, this book had not yet been released, but could be ordered in advance online.

This is a scholarly and comprehensive history of Oman. And I suggest compulsory reading for all those who want to know Oman, work in Oman, know Oman better and refresh one's own knowledge of this fascinating and important country. A unique country in the GCC which looks outwards toward the Indian Ocean, and towards Yemen and East Africa, and inwards towards its own desert and its own Interior. A Maritime Empire which stretched from Basra to India and along the coast of East Africa, from Somalia in the North to northern Mozambique in the south; and westward even to Rwanda. It is no wonder that Oman was a leading leader in the Indian Ocean Rim Organisation in the mid 1990s.

Both Jeremy and Nicholas are to be congratulated on a well presented, structured and knowledgeable book about Oman, the



complexity of its history, its recent past and the challenges for the future. They have done it well.

I think all readers will find this book looks to the past, but more importantly the recent past to bring a greater understanding of Oman's place in the present Middle East, from the scourge of Al Qaeda Terrorism; the problems of Oman, Iraq and Afghanistan; the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; the threat from a collapsing state in Yemen, let alone Somalia. And the great work that Oman has done to ensure that the diplomacy of Oman on Iran has been successful; as two conversations with His Majesty Sultan Qaboos by the British Prime Minister and by the Vice President of the United States in July has clearly underlined. A foreign policy which says friends to all and enemy to none. How very true. And well brought out in this book.

And finally, the book looks forward to Oman, in its success of dealing with the second Arab Awakening (commonly known as the Arab Spring) which is of course a challenge for any writer, as they may get it wrong, but I think they have got it right. Oman has a great future, and this book will show this to be true.

Reviewed by Noel Guckian

Publisher: Cambridge University Press. ISBN-10: 1107402026. ISBN-13: 978-1107402027

http://www.amazon.co.uk/History-Modern-Oman-Jeremy-Jones/dp/1107402026/ref=sr_1_8?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1434561873&sr=1-8&keywords=oman+history

OMAN'S INVISIBLE ENERGY

By *Sir Terence Clarke*

Dubai, UAE, 2014. ISBN 978-99969-1-193-4

This book charts the discovery of gas in Oman and the role of Petroleum Development Oman and other companies in its exploration and production over more than half a century since the first recorded strike in 1956. At that time and for years afterwards, the oil companies were not really interested in finding gas so much as oil and it was only in the early 1970s after one or two spectacular and expensive blowouts, clearly indicating the presence of volatile gases, that they began to pay attention to exploiting this valuable asset. Even then it was not until an amazing stroke of luck in 1984, when an enthusiastic drilling team decided to experiment with a new kind of drilling bit and suddenly broke through into an unforeseen gas reservoir, that the gas industry took off. The knowledge from this well enabled a complete rethink of the concession area and gradually gas began to make an increasingly important contribution to Oman's revenues, so that today it has almost equal standing with oil in the country's hydrocarbon yield.

This success has however brought with it some significant challenges for the future. Most of the easily accessible gas has probably already been discovered and it has provided the basis both for Oman's profitable liquid natural gas export industry and for local industrial and domestic consumption. The demands for gas continue to grow and the oil and gas companies are having to resort increasingly to cutting-edge techniques and technologies, such as hydraulic fracturing or fracking, to discover and exploit Oman's deep unconventional gas. In the end, as this book shows, Oman may have to import gas from other sources around the Gulf to meet these demands.



A blowout in the Yibal oilfield in 1970 demonstrated violently the presence of Oman's invisible energy.



Traditional Omani silver, donated by Sheilagh Bailey, on display in the Society building.

