

REVIEW 2019

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY





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COVER PHOTO:
Jokha Alharthi, winner of the Man Booker International Prize

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REVIEW 2019

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY



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Editor

Brig John McKeown CBE ferrybarn@btinternet.com

Society Address

34, Sackville Street, London W1S 3ED

+44 (0)20 7851 7439

www.angloomanisociety.com

Advertising

Christine Heslop

71 East Street, Beaminster, Dorset DT8 3DT

Telephone: +44 (0)7968 293972

E-mail: chrissiehslot1616@gmail.com

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**THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY
 ANNUAL LUNCHEON**

The Anglo-Omani Society Annual Luncheon will be held on **FRIDAY, 4th OCTOBER, 2019**
 12.30 for 1pm
 at the Royal Air Force Club
 £50 including drinks

*Advance booking necessary.
 Maximum attendance 120.*

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The Anglo-Omani Society in 2019

CHAIRMAN'S OVERVIEW

REPORT GIVEN BY SOCIETY CHAIRMAN, STUART LAING, AT THE AGM ON 10 JULY 2019

I am delighted and honoured to be giving you this my first report as the Society's Chairman. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve a Society which I warmly admire.

This time last year my predecessor opened his report with the words, "The Society thrives"; and I'm glad that I can say the same now. Our membership remains strong, there are plenty of stimulating activities, and the few changes that the Board has made during the year will I am sure lead to continued success in the future.

These activities show a healthy variety, providing events of interest to a cross-section of our membership. A significant proportion of you will be familiar with our lecture series, probably the clearest and most obvious use of these lovely premises that we are lucky enough to enjoy. Our thanks go to all our lecturers – I don't often have a chance to thank myself publicly in this way, but this year I was fortunate enough to be on the lecture programme – and our sincere appreciation to Louise Hosking, member of the Board of Trustees,

who puts together the lecture programme, and has some true delights in store for us in the coming year. This year's programme also included a most interesting Panel Discussion on *Oman and its Neighbours*, a format we have used before and which I hope we shall be able to repeat. And we also had a novel addition in the form of an Organ Recital, at St Andrew's Church, Holborn, given by Ian Hockley, organist at the Sultani Diwan.

Our formal set piece of the year is our Annual Lunch, held again last October at the RAF Club. Our guests of honour and speakers were HE Dr. Abdulmunam Mansoor Al Hasani, Omani Minister of Information, and the Rt Hon Alistair Burt, Minister of State in the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was a very pleasant and successful occasion, with over 100 members of the Society present.

The Society has been privileged to support a programme of exchange visits between the British House of Lords and Oman's *Majlis al-Dawla*, the State Council. A delegation of peers visited Oman in February, and HE Yahya al-Mantheri led a group of *Majlis al-Dawla* members to London and Cambridge in June. I was delighted to be able to host the group for lunch in my College, and to show them some of our manuscript treasures.

The Society continues to stress the importance of building the foundations of a continuing relationship between our two countries. This is why the activities of the New Generation Group (NGG) are so important. I thank our two Trustees, Ollie Blake and Ma'an al-Rawahi, and the new member of the team, Lissie Simpson, for their continuing efforts with the NGG. Hamish Cowell, the British Ambassador in Muscat, kindly hosted a reception in his residence for the NGG last October, and other events continue. A group of young Omanis came to Oxford in August under NGG auspices. We are taking steps to merge the NGG into the mainstream of the Society, for example in our membership arrangements, and in the presentation of activities on the revamped website.

Modernising the web-site: for some time the Trustees and the staff have been working to improve both the data (mainly on the membership) held by the Society, and the Society's website. By the time you read this we should have completed a project to create a new web-site, which will make it much easier to interact with the Society's administration, for example in applying for membership, booking places at Society events, and so on.

Other mainstream activities of the Society continue to go well. The Society liaises closely with the Oman-Britain Business Council and the Muscat-based Oman-Britain Friendship Association, who report successful meetings in the summers of 2018

(discussing the future of tourism) and 2019 (on investment in Oman and the Vision 2040), each time with top-level business representation on both sides. This year the Society hosted a reception attended by HRH The Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haitham.

Our grants programme continues to be a huge success. Our grants go to a wide variety of projects, many in scientific research in Oman. Perhaps our most striking success this year, in terms of picking winners, was our decision to pay for Prof Marilyn Booth's translation of Jokha Alharthi's book *Celestial Bodies*, which went on to win the Man Booker International Prize. Another regular grant

goes to the annual Royal Geographical Society Oman National Heritage lecture – this year members had an opportunity to hear three scientists from the Oman Botanic Gardens speaking about the flora of Oman. Our particular thanks go to Richard Owens, the Trustee who chairs the Grants Sub-Committee handling this area of the Society's work.

Other schemes benefit a cross-section of students, such as the Gap Year Scheme and the programme for Arabic learning at the al-Manah summer school. And of course I should mention our beautiful Review, which all Society members enjoy, and which is so ably managed by our Vice-Chairman, John McKeown.

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CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

The Society's membership continues to grow. We now have 638 single and 254 joint members, over 1200 signed up to the New Generation Group, and 31 Corporate Members. While our Corporate membership has shrunk a little, all the individual membership figures are up on last year.

We can look forward to good times for the Society. As well as the continuation of the programmes and activities that I have mentioned, we have started planning the Society's celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the accession to the Sultanate of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, next year. We shall of course keep the membership informed as the plans develop.

My report would not be complete without several words of thanks. I realise that this risks sounding routine, but I want you to know that every bit of what follows is sincere and heartfelt.

Obviously, in prime place is our Patron, HM Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose munificence in enabling the purchase of this building has provided the revenue that makes all these projects – and in particular our generous grants programme – possible. We owe His Majesty a deep debt of gratitude, and I'm sure you will all join me in sending our greetings and our thanks to him.

Our President, HE Abdul Aziz al-Hinai,

Ambassador of Oman, is in regular touch with me and other Trustees, and offers essential support and helpful advice in many matters concerning the Society. We are grateful to him, and to members of his staff.

Since taking over the chairmanship, I have been struck by the diligence and hard work exercised by all members of our Board of Trustees. In some Trustee Boards, members are content simply to arrive at Board meetings and give their opinions on matters under discussion. Not in this Society. Each Board member has a specific rôle and defined responsibilities, most of which entail considerable work in between Board meetings. I have mentioned some of them in my round-up of activities. On top of that, our Trustees all contribute frankly but positively towards our discussions of strategy and tactics for the Society. I find all this very impressive. In a minute I should like you to express your appreciation for what they do and what they achieve – but not before I have mentioned my predecessor in this Chair, Robert Alston, friend and co-author. He saw the Society through a period that was not always straightforward, and his wisdom and careful handling of affairs left the Society in a very good place when I took over. Thank you, Robert; thank you, Trustees.

Finally, how would the Society manage

without its staff? We have had several changes during the year, which has not always made continuity easy, but I congratulate those who have filled slots for the speed with which they came to grips with their responsibilities. Sadly, Ben Wright, our Manager, who has been with us for six years, left us recently in order to relocate to the North of England. We thank him for his contribution to the Society's work during that time. Earlier we said goodbye to Isabelle Habib, Programme Manager with special responsibility for the New Generation Group, after four years, and we welcomed Dina Macki in her place. Previously, we saw Tom Saville finish as Events and Project Manager; his place was taken by Beth Richards, who in turn was replaced by Clara Bamberger – but only for a short period; Clara left in July to return to her native Germany. The Society has continued to employ interns, who generally stay with us for just a few weeks or months, and we hope develop a love for Oman as well as for the Society! Our interns this year have been Shuaib al-Rawahi, Eleanor Thomas, and Callum Printsmith. To all of these staff members, we extend our thanks for their hard work and our best wishes for what lies ahead for them.

Every good wish to the Society for the year to come. ■

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

More than 40 members attended the Annual General Meeting at the Society offices in Sackville Street in July, and received a comprehensive report on our activities and performance.

Stuart Laing gave his Chairman's report, which is reproduced here in the Review suitably adapted for print rather than a spoken presentation. Martyn Bishop guided members through the detailed financial report, which included a summary of future plans: "The Society intends to continue its current level of activities in 2019/2020 and to increase steadily the sums allocated to awards and grants, as its financial resources permit. Membership levels have gradually increased over recent years."

His conclusion was to state: "We are in good condition financially and trustees can look to the future with confidence."

The members present voted unanimously to re-appoint three trustees who had retired by rotation in the usual three-year cycle, and also re-appointed Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi, who was appointed during the course of the last year. A vote of thanks was proposed by Sir Terence Clark.

The meeting was not all business: it was preceded by a light buffet luncheon and followed by the showing of the second episode of Levison Wood's television series "Arabia", in which he explores the Empty Quarter, the largest sand desert in the world, and travels through the Dhofar Mountains and into war-torn Yemen.

The AGM was a social and informative gathering... members may wish to put the date of next year's in their diary (16 July 2020) and consider coming along.

 www.anglo-omani.org

NEW WEBSITE FOR THE SOCIETY

We are glad to announce the launch of our new website due to go live in October 2019 and be accessible at www.anglo-omani.org

We aim to provide a clear and compelling online front for the Society, with the following features:

- Make it easy to see what events are coming up in the calendar
- Enable straightforward booking-in, payments and other actions from members
- Keep members and visitors informed about the latest Society news
- Provide access to audio recordings of past speakers and to copies of all the annual Reviews
- Simplify the way of applying for membership
- Make payment easier for overseas, especially Omani, members
- The library catalogue, and possibly later online access to books, including Society history.

As a result of strict new data laws and because the Society’s database is populated with some out of date information, we are asking all existing members to sign up for membership once again by way of an online form – a process that will take no more than five minutes.

Members will be sent a link which will direct them to the membership page where they will be asked to sign up with personal information and payment details. We are sorry for this inconvenience but it should be a fast and easy process which will allow us to secure accurate information about our membership. We will of course give

any assistance necessary to members who do not have customary access online.

With the launch of the new website, the Society will ask that members pay their annual subscription online via Direct Debit or by Credit / Bank Card payments. This can be administered easily through the new member’s portal on the website. Members will also be able to use the portal to see the data that the AOS keeps on record, which helps us to ensure transparency in line with GDP regulations. The new system will enable Omani members to pay using bank cards from the Sultanate, making membership much more accessible for them.

This is an important change to the annual subscription payment process. Historically, AOS membership payments have been made by Standing Order (SO), which has led to some serious anomalies including difficulty in reconciling individual payments with the payee member, incorrect amounts, and payments being received from former (even, in some cases, deceased) members’ bank accounts.

Please note that Standing Order are an agreement between members and their bank to pay the Society a fee on 1 April each year, and unfortunately we cannot cancel it on behalf of the member. Therefore, if you are an AOS member and have a Standing Order set up to pay your subscription please contact your bank to cancel it before that date in order to avoid a duplication of payment. ■

JOKHA ALHARTHI AWARDED THE MAN BOOKER INTERNATIONAL PRIZE



Society funded translation won one of the world's most prestigious awards for creativity, development and overall contribution to fiction on the world stage.

Omani author, Jokha Alharthi, was awarded the 2019 Man Booker International Prize, for the English language translation of her novel 'Celestial Bodies', which was funded by a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society, and reviewed in the Anglo-Omani Society Review last year.

Historian Bettany Hughes, who led the judging panel, said that the winning novel was "a book to win over the head and the heart in equal measure." 'Celestial Bodies' beat five other finalists from Europe and South America, including last year's winner, Poland's Olga Tokarczuk.

A message to the Society afterwards from Jokha said it had been a whirlwind few days in the United Kingdom and on return to Muscat. "I am honoured to have received the 2019 Man Booker International Prize for 'Celestial Bodies' (Sandstone Press) in Marilyn Booth's beautiful translation. I greatly appreciate your kind congratulations and warm words of support."

JOKHA ALHARTHI AWARDED THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

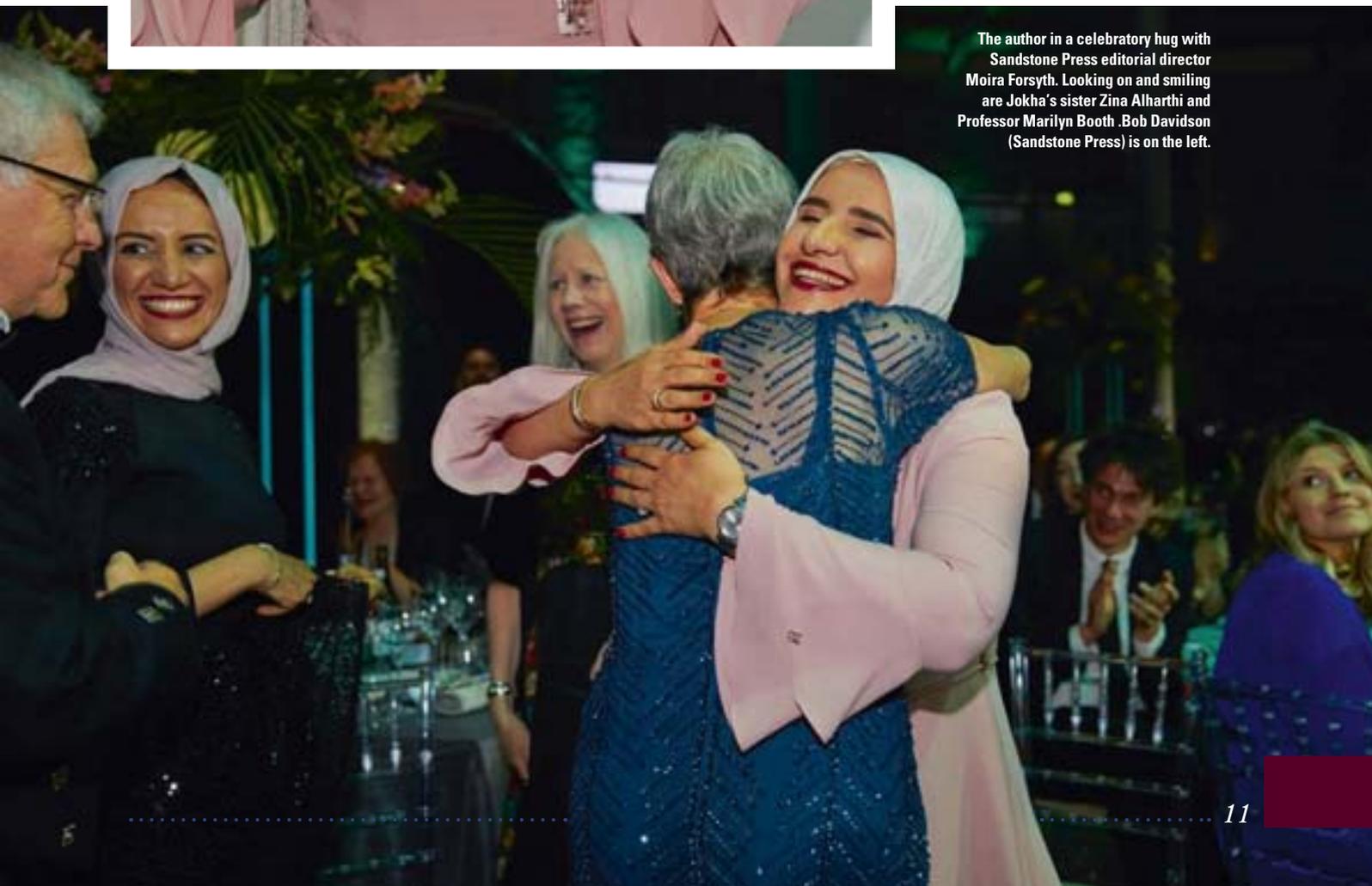


Society trustee Louise Hosking wrote: “I was lucky enough to be there on the night and she was very appreciative of the Society’s support. I spoke more to her sister (who was a translator at the British Embassy when Stuart Laing, Chairman of the Society’s Trustees, was Ambassador) and her husband who was very admirable on the night, supportive and keeping a back seat.”

As a doctoral student in the UK, Jokha was supervised initially by Dr Elisabeth Kendall (Lis), another Trustee of our Society, who arranged for her to give a presentation to the AOS in May 2013. At dinner afterwards, Jokha related how keen she was to have her latest novel translated into English. Lis and Jokha then approached expert translator, Prof Marilyn Booth, to apply for a grant from the AOS, which was agreed by the trustees.

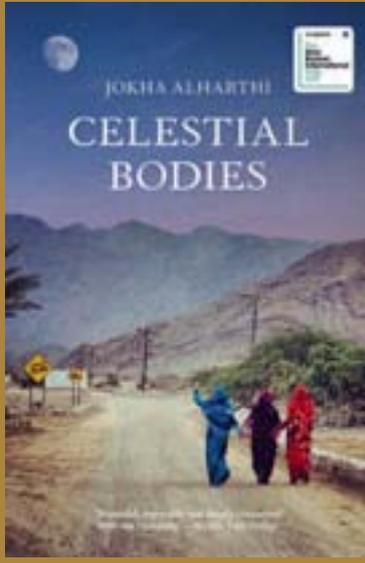
“What a great investment!” writes Lis. “It is unlikely that this would have happened without the AOS.”

The author in a celebratory hug with Sandstone Press editorial director Moira Forsyth. Looking on and smiling are Jokha’s sister Zina Alharthi and Professor Marilyn Booth. Bob Davidson (Sandstone Press) is on the left.



JOKHA ALHARTHI AWARDED THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'CELESTIAL BODIES' WAS THE WINNER OF THE 2019 MAN BOOKER INTERNATIONAL PRIZE.



It's a terrific boost for the international profile of Omani literature, culture and indeed women."

Robert Davidson, founder and MD of Sandstone Press, who published the English version of the book, which is available in both paperback and e-book format, sent congratulations to both Jokha Alharthi and Marilyn Booth.

A statement from her publishers said, "Celestial Bodies' is set in the village of Al Awafi in Oman, where we encounter three sisters: Mayya, who marries Abdallah after a heartbreak; Asma, who marries from a sense of duty; and Khawla who rejects all offers while waiting for her beloved, who has emigrated to Canada.

"These three women and their families witness Oman evolve from a traditional society slowly redefining itself after the colonial era, to the crossroads of its complex present. Elegantly structured and taut, 'Celestial Bodies' is a coiled spring of a novel, telling of Oman's coming-of-age through the prism of one family's losses and loves."

'Celestial Bodies' was the winner of the 2010 Best Omani Novel Award.

Jokha Alharthi obtained her PhD in classical Arabic literature from Edinburgh University, and is currently an associate professor in the Arabic department at Sultan Qaboos University. She is the author of two previous collections of short fiction, a children's book, and three novels in Arabic. She has been shortlisted for the Sheikh Zayed Award for Young Writers and her short stories have been published in English, German, Italian, Korean, and Serbian.

Professor Booth is an author, scholar and translator of Arabic literature. Since 2015, she has been the Khalid bin Abdullah Al Saud Professor for the Study of the Contemporary Arab World at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Magdalen College.

Jokha, the first Arabic-language writer to take the Man Booker International prize, will split the £50,000 pound award with Professor Booth. The prize is open to books in any language that have been translated into English. ■

LANDSCAPES OF OMAN

OIL PAINTINGS BY MATT ALEXANDER RAY



Matt Alexander Ray is an award-winning artist who grew up in the Middle East and remains fascinated by the region. A student of 19th century painting techniques, he uses a limited palette to capture the area's unique light and rugged beauty.



mattalexanderray.com



mattalexanderray@gmail.com



Matt has returned to Oman several times to travel and paint, completing a number of commissions featuring particular scenes and locations. Existing works are available for purchase, or contact Matt to discuss a unique commission.

WEDDING IN CANADA

Ollie Blake, Society trustee and chairman of the New Generation Group UK, met his future wife, Emily, whilst studying for a master's degree in Public Policy at Oxford University from 2016 to 2017 and they were married on 22 September 2018, exactly two years after meeting on the first day of the course. They returned to Emily's home on Prince Edward Island on the East coast of Canada to be married at Clinton Hills, a beautiful barn on 90 acres of rolling countryside. Friends and family journeyed all the way from Scotland and England, the United States, Taiwan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, from Germany, France, Spain, Ireland and, of course, from Oman to share their special day. After a beautiful ceremony in the woods and champagne reception overlooking the Southwest River, they sat down to a delicious meal of locally produced food followed by a fantastic ceilidh!

The trustees and vice-presidents commissioned a silver dish with an embedded Maria Theresa thalar obtained from Oman as a wedding gift. ■



Moatasim al Balushi and Sheikh Ma'an al Rawahi with Emily and Ollie.

DINA MACKI

Dina Macki has recently joined the AOS taking over as Programme Manager from Isabelle Habib. She is an Anglo Omani, born and raised in the UK to Omani parents. Dina's background began in a creative field working at Sony Music as well as taking a degree in Fashion & Marketing at Regent's University, where she graduated with First Class Honours. She went on to explore the world of international relations with The Royal Conservatorium of Den Haag, in which she managed communications, new partnerships and investments between the Embassies and the Conservatoire. Having moved back to the UK in Summer 2018, Dina began consulting within music again, as well as for technology and import/export companies, where she provided her knowledge across branding, communications and seeking new business for her clients. Combining her creativity, professional experience and passion for her home country, Dina is now ready to embark on a brilliant future with the Anglo-Omani Society.



HIGH-LEVEL PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGES

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

Over the last two years the Anglo-Omani Society has supported a major initiative to develop and deepen the links between the Omani Parliament and Westminster.

The Hon. Dr Yahya Al Manthri, State Council Chairman, has strongly encouraged the process, as have Lords Luce and Dear in the House of Lords. It adds to the wide range of bilateral activity covered by the Joint Comprehensive Agreement that HMG concluded with the Sultanate in May 2019.

An initial visit to Oman by Lord Luce and myself in October 2017 was followed up through visits to London by five senior members of the State Council in March 2018 (reported in the 2018 Review) and then to Oman by senior members of the Lords in February 2019.



Chairman of the State Council, the Hon. Dr Yahya Al Manthri, and Richard Muir.

The round table meeting at Sackville Street.



HIGH-LEVEL PARLIAMENTARY EXCHANGES

This Lords team was led by Lord Dear, Deputy Speaker and former Chief Constable of the West Midlands, and included Lords Judge (former Lord Chief Justice) and Dholakia and Baronesses D'Souza (former Lord Speaker) and Finn. I accompanied the delegation along with Isabelle Habib and Eleanor Thomas from the Society. There were extensive talks with the State Council as well as a dinner hosted by the Chairman and meetings with the Shura Council, HE the Minister of Commerce and Industry, Ithraa, the Duqm Authority and the Vision 2040 Unit; we managed to fit into the programme a boat trip from the Wave and a lunch at the splendid Anantara Resort on the Jebel Akhdar. The delegation agreed with the

The delegation called on Anthony Smith, the CEO of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), to explore future collaboration including induction of new Omani parliamentarians and staff training; WFD will be following this up in the autumn.

At Sackville Street we gave a briefing on the work of the Society, in particular Ollie Blake on the New Generation Group, and hosted a round table discussion with senior members of the House of Lords and Sir Alan Duncan. This was followed by a private lunch given by Lord Home. The visit concluded with a visit to Cambridge including a tour of colleges and a visit to the historic Parker Library at Corpus Christi College followed by lunch in the



The Lord Speaker of the House of Lords, the Rt Hon. Lord Fowler, and the Chairman of the State Council, the Hon. Dr Yahya Al Manthri.



Lunch on the Al Zahraa Yacht during the February visit. Left to right: Hon. Nada Bint Hassan Mohammed al Jamali, Hon. Naashiah Bint Saud Mohamed Al Kharusi and Baroness Finn.

College hosted by Stuart Laing as the Society's Chairman.

The visit produced agreement on a series of next steps to continue and deepen the contact between the two upper houses with extension to the two elected houses after the October election in Oman and the immediate consequences in the Commons of the Brexit crisis at Westminster. The Anglo-Omani Society was asked to continue its role in support of this Parliamentary programme as an important element in its objective of improving the understanding between Oman and the UK. ■

State Council a list of action points for closer cooperation between the two houses.

These points were further discussed when the Chairman of the State Council made a three day visit to London in June accompanied by four senior Council members (three of them members of the March 2018 delegation) and three staffers.

The Society organised the programme in coordination with Lord Dear and with support from the Oman Embassy and the Lord Speaker's office. The Lord Speaker, Lord Fowler, hosted talks and a lunch in the House of Lords followed by meetings with Lord Hennessy, Lord Astor, Baroness Hayman and other members of the Lords.



Round table meeting of the House of Lords delegation led by Lord Dear and the Chairman of the State Council, the Hon. Dr Yahya Al Manthri, and senior members in Oman.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON OMANI-BRITISH RELATIONS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

ARTICLE BY STUART LAING

In October 2018 the Omani National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) organised a conference, the seventh in a series of International Conferences, on Oman's relations with Britain in the 17th-19th centuries; in the event, contributions concentrated mainly on the 19th century, and some covered part of the 20th.

The NRAA invited a number of scholars and writers from around the world, and among them were Jeremy Jones from Oxford, Francis Owtram from the British Library, and three officers of the Society – Sir Terence Clark, Robert Alston and Stuart Laing.

The Conference proceedings went on for three days, with many aspects of the relationship addressed by participants. Each contributor submitted a 5000-word paper in advance, but we were given only 15 minutes in which to present our work. This resulted in some rather hurried presentations, with some contributors

exceeding their time limit (to the frustration of the Chair and sometimes the audience). We hope that the papers will be published in a volume of "Proceedings".

The Conference heard presentations by more than 40 participants, of whom 15 were from Oman, and a number from other Arab universities and institutions. The contributions by the five British participants were well received.

Jeremy Jones, who also chaired one of the sessions, challenged the view that Omani leaders' policies in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf in the 19th century were simply responses to the expanding British



HH Sayyid Haythem Al Said, with Hamish Cowell, current British Ambassador in Oman, and three former Ambassadors (Sir Terence Clark, Robert Alston and Stuart Laing) at the reception in the Ambassador's Residence.



View of one of the Plenary Sessions of the conference.

presence in the region. Terence Clark described British representation in Muscat, in particular the design of the Residence constructed in 1890 and used until 1995. Stuart Laing’s piece was on the process of negotiation between the British government and Omani Rulers that ended with the abolition of the slave trade, and ultimately slavery, in East Africa and the Indian Ocean.

Francis Owtram analysed the British role in the separation of the Sultanate into the two Sultanates of Muscat and Zanzibar, following the arbitration (or intervention) in 1861 by the Governor-General of India (known as the “Canning Award”). Robert Alston spoke about the pivotal change in the British-Omani relationship at the end of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th, during the reign of Sayyid Faysal bin Turki.

Of particular interest to Western scholars were the Omani presentations, drawing on Arabic and other non-English sources, which sometimes carried a different slant on historical events.

Before proceedings got under way, the NRAA organised a high-profile Opening Ceremony, attended by two Omani Ministers – HH Sayyid Haythem (Minister of Heritage and Culture) and Dr Rawya al-Busaidi (Minister of Higher Education) – and a number of other senior government figures. In addition to the contributors, a large number of Omani academics and officials attended the conference; there were probably about 300 in the hall for most of the three days, and more for the Opening Ceremony. By happy chance, the first day of the Conference coincided with the last day of a visit to the Sultanate by Mr

Alistair Burt, Minister of State at the FCO. Mr Burt addressed the Opening Ceremony with warm words about the continuing close relationship between Britain and Oman, with complimentary comments about the continuing involvement by the three former Ambassadors present.

LAUNCH OF ARABIC TRANSLATION OF ‘UNSHOOK TILL THE END OF TIME’

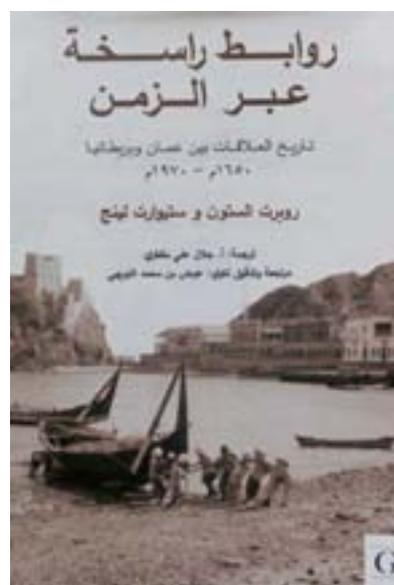
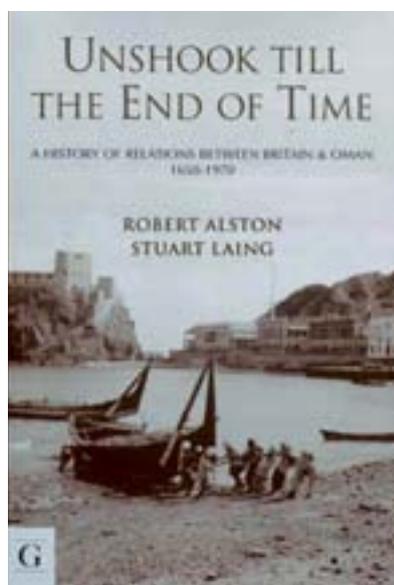
The Conference organisers kindly inserted another element into the Opening Ceremony. The first copies of the Arabic translation of Robert Alston’s and Stuart Laing’s book *‘Unshook Till the End of Time’* had just rolled off the press, and the authors were able to present a signed copy to Sayyid Haythem, who had generously under-written the costs of translation and

publication. This received a certain amount of attention in the Omani press subsequently.

Two days before the Conference, the current British Ambassador, HE Hamish Cowell, gave a reception at his Residence in order to bring together members of the Society’s New Generation Group, some senior Omanis, and the British Conference contributors. We were honoured that Sayyid Haythem also attended the reception, during which a more formal launch of the Arabic translation of *‘Unshook’* was made. The Society is most grateful to Mr Cowell for the attention he and his colleagues give to the New Generation Group, whose activities continue to prosper.

On another evening, the three former Ambassadors (Clark, Alston and Laing) called on Sayyid Badr, the Secretary General in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for a useful discussion of regional and global issues.

We owe thanks to Dr Wafiq Keliny, the conference organiser, for running a rewarding and interesting event. In conversation with us, he opened the possibility of organising a follow-up conference in London in due course. Overall, the NRAA Conference was not only successful in itself, but served as a focus for other events demonstrating the strength of the relationship between Britain and Oman, stretching back to the 19th century (and indeed into the more distant past) but also continuing robustly into the present – and the future. ■



ARAB WOMEN AWARD FOR OMANI FORMER MINISTER



Dr. Sharifa Al Yahyai, Former Minister of Social Development of Oman

- Academic Specialist in Women & Youth leadership.
- Resource Person to the 2nd International Conference on Gender and Sexuality 2019 to be held 3-4 October 2019 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, organised by TIIKM (The International Institute of Knowledge Management).
- Editorial board member of the Scientific Journal Rawafed in Social Sciences – University Centre of Ain Tumoshint, Algeria, December 2018-present.
- Board Member of Arab Women Foundation.
- Member of Advisory Board in University of Business & Technology, Jeddah.

As a researcher, writer and motivational speaker, Al Yahyai is an academic expert in women's rights in both the Sultanate of Oman and GCC. She played a significant role in improving national policies related to women's rights in Oman during her position as a Minister of Social Development during the period from 2004 to 2011.

In the course of the service as a Minister, Al Yahyai had an important role in the history of Omani women, which resulted in the designation of October 17 as the Omani Women's Day by His Majesty, the Sultan of Oman.

She has been participating actively in a number of national and international conventions related to women's empowerment, child rights, civil society and overall social development in Oman. On the policy-making level in Oman, Al Yahyai was appointed as a board member in a number of national councils such as the Higher Education Council, The Research Council and chaired the National Committee of Family Affairs, and the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee.

Most importantly, in November 2005, Al Yahyai received the Civil Order of Oman – Class II by HM The Sultan Qaboos. In 2008, Al Yahyai was awarded the Arab Woman Distinguished Award from Arab Women Foundation in Social Work. In December 2018, Al Yahyai received the Arab Women Award of the Year 2018 by London Arabia Organisation and Regent's London University.

During her academic role (2001-2004) as a Lecturer in the Department of Arabic Literature at Sultan Qaboos University, prior to her appointment as a Minister of Social Development, Al Yahyai published a number of studies relevant to Gulf literature, Omani poems and women's social and cultural values.

She holds a PhD in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Leeds, 2001 and an MA in Modern Arabic Literature from Sultan Qaboos University, 1995.

Since 2011, Al Yahyai participated and presented several papers on Women Empowerment in Oman, GCC, international conferences and summits, for example:

1. Presentation titled “Omani Women’s Rights Between Legislations and Social Practice and Values”, GRC meeting at Cambridge University – July 2011.
2. Presentation titled “Omani Business Women: Opportunities and Challenges”, 18th International DAVO Conference, Free University, Berlin – October 2011.
3. Lecture titled “Social and Cultural Values that Hinder Arabian Gulf Women”, in The Cultural and Media Centre for H.H. Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al-Nihyan – October 2011.
4. Presentation at Gender and Women Studies in the Arab World Conference at the American University Sharjah – March 2012.
5. Presentation on Oman Experience in Women Empowerment, 8th Annual Conference, Kuwait University – March 2012.
6. Presentation at Women and Leading Change Conference, Bahrain – March 2012.
7. Speaker in Omani Women’s Rights Between Legislations and Practice on the Occasion of Omani Women’s Day (Work Shop) – October 2014.
8. Speaker at the Roundtable Discussion on Arab Business Women in Making Decision – ME Days, Tangier, Morocco – November 2014 .
9. Keynote speaker at Developing Youth Leadership Forum, Qatar University – November 2014.
10. Speaker at the second session (Our Economy on the International Map) in The 63rd FCEM World Congress, Bahrain – March 2015.
11. Presentation at The Masculinisation of Values and Traditions in the Gulf Societies, paper presented in The Escalation of Violence Against Women in the Mena Region, May 2015, Fez Morocco. ISIS Centre for Woman and Development.
12. Published paper Education and The Empowerment of Gulf Women, paper presented in Gulf Studies Forum, Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies, Doha, Qatar – December 2015.
13. Keynote speaker at The University of Manchester, Centre for the Advanced Study of the Arab World, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures. Symposium on Women, Empowerment, Citizenship and Development – January 2016.
14. Referee for Arab Centre for Research & Policy Studies. Doha, Qatar.
15. Speaker on Omani Women’s Rights 1970s & Beyond at Centre for International Learning (CIL), Muscat – April 2016.
16. Speaker at a workshop held at the Building Women Capacity Workshop in The Gulf Education & Exhibition Conference in February 2017 held in University of Business & Technology, Jeddah.
17. Speaker at Oman Experience in Women Empowerment at The Qatif Investment Forum held in Qatif – February 2017.
18. Speaker at 3rd World Conference on Women’s Studies 2017 about “Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Omani Women’s Social Life”, Colombo, Sri Lanka – May 2017.
19. Panelist at The Gulf & Jordanian Economic Forum, Amman, Jordan – September 2017.
20. Speaker at “How to be the First in Your Field”, in Women’s SME 2017 Conference, Dubai – October 2017.
21. Speaker at “The Role of Women in the Regional Economy: The GCC Women Case” in Enriching the Middle East Economic Future Conference, Doha, Qatar – November 2017.
22. Moderator at The Gulf Crisis Forum – The Gulf Studies Centre, Doha, Qatar – December 2017.
23. Speaker at “Violence Against Women in Media & Drama”. Aman Centre for Social Protection & Rehabilitation, Doha, Qatar – December 2017.
24. Speaker at Global Youth Summit 2018, February 2018 – Pokhara, Nepal.
25. Keynote speaker at the International Women’s Day at Sidra Medicine, Doha, Qatar – March 2018.
26. Speaker at “Inspiring Young Arab Women to Take Role in Leadership” at 4th edition The Arab Women in Leadership & Business Summit, Dubai, UAE – April 2018.
27. Speaker at the Roundtable Discussion at Forum ME Days on “Leadership & Gender Agenda: Unlocking African & Arab Women’s Talent”, November 2018 – Tangier, Morocco.
28. Participant in An Open Discussion at the 5th Annual Forum on the Gulf and The Arab Peninsula on a discussion about “Identity & Values Problematic in The Arab Gulf Countries”, Doha, Qatar – December 2018.
29. Speaker at “Empowering Women for the Digital Era” at The Annual International Leadership Conference 2019 – Bahrain Management Society – February 2019.

ABOUT THE PRIZE

The Arab Women Award was launched in 2015 by London Arabia Organisation. In its 4th edition a number of renowned Arab women were awarded for their achievements at a prestigious event in December 2018 in London. The high-profile event showcased the capabilities of Arab women as leaders and brought together illustrious representatives of governments, businesses and civil society.

The 2018 awards are created by London Arabia Organisation, supported by the Mayor of London. The 2018 event was held in partnership with Regent’s University London, the Bicester Village Shopping Collection, the Jumeirah Carlton Tower Hotel, Y Asset Management and Rosette Merchant Bank. The event aimed to honour and bring recognition to Arab women and acted as an avenue to promote cultural understanding between Britain and the Arab world.

I have received the 2018 Arab Women of the Year Award as an international recognition on the achievements of social development including implementing women’s rights in national legislation as well as enhancing policies related to the empowerment of women, children, disabled and the elderly through introducing new strategies, policies, regulations, amending existing laws and joining new international conventions aligned with the international policies in social development such as CEDAW, CRC and the Convention of Disabled. ■

OMAN EXPERIENCE

ARTICLE BY JOHN CARBIS

John Carbis is a familiar figure at Society events, in his scarlet coat as an in-pensioner of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea. Here he writes about his time in Oman over 40 years ago.



This offering is my impressions of working as a Garrison Engineer in Oman between 1973 and 1976, from first landing on the old Bait-al-Falaj airfield in the Ruwi valley, now buried in urban development. After supper on that first day, I walked across to Brigadier Colin Maxwell's quarters and introduced myself as a new member of the Defence Engineer team.

Within a week of arriving, I found myself looking after a large estate with a variety of

demands on the skills of the directly employed labour (DEL) force, from the normal day-to-day maintenance of military establishments to the demands of senior individuals throughout the Headquarters.

To help implement His Majesty Sultan Qaboos' 'hearts and minds' programme, the services of an architect were now required by Halcrow. The Liaison Officer (LO), a European, had experience in dealing with bedouin as a people who, at

the best of times, were never very static. Thus, it was a case of sitting down with him on a number of differing occasions and with his help picking the brains of the people who really mattered.

It was from all of these sittings that, eventually, I was able to present a collective design suitable for a community of small families. With a rather sketchy brief, I put together a proposal for a series of separate single-story blocks of sufficient size to house one family. Each block would be constructed on the principle of an enclosed rectangle, with access for a small vehicle at the end and between each block. Each of the two opposing blocks were designed to be slightly longer. The principle idea behind this design layout was one that would allow individual families to generate a feeling of belonging.

Returning to Muscat, it must have been about this time that I first encountered His Highness Said Fahher, uncle to His Majesty Sultan Qaboos.

I was sent to the Oman Gendarmerie Regiment (OG) under command of Lieutenant Colonel Richard John as a replacement for the recent demise of a Mr. Toy as a result of a traffic accident. The familiar blue and white shemags and grey 'mazri' shirts distinguished the soldiers of the Oman Gendarmerie from the olive-green anonymity of the remainder of the SAF.

On a visit to the Battle Training unit located on the Saiq plateau on the Jebel Akhdar in the Hajar Mountain range, I met Major Graham Vivian MC, ex-Gurkha, who since 1973 was the LO on the Jebel.

There had been a request from the Ministry of the Interior to consider whether water could be made available to local people and their animals, showing that HM Sultan Qaboos' policy of 'hearts and minds' was really being made to work. The scheme I outlined of creating a 'watering fountain', was approved. The idea was centred on a water pipe rising vertically with an inverted sprinkler discharging down on to a series of cut open half burmails – 40 gallon oil drums named as a corruption of Burmah Oil which was painted on them.

Each one rested on others at differing heights to form a cascade, at which the animals could all slurp at the same time:

- camels from the top,
- donkeys from the middle, and,
- sheep and goats from the lowest

The first one was built just outside the perimeter wire of the OG outstation at Sohar. Having been inspected and approved by the Minister, this design was also used elsewhere in the Sultanate.

The Nizwa parish that I had inherited included a number of small forts, three small airstrips, and a battle training area, together with three other outstations around the parish which were the quarters of the local LOs, usually accompanied former British Army officers, who had their accommodation close by the community they served, to collect the ground swell of feelings within the local communities and also of the nomadic bedouin.

On a visit to the Battle Training unit located on the Saiq plateau on the Jebel Akhdar in the Hajar Mountain range, I met Major Graham Vivian MC, ex-Gurkha, who since 1973 was the LO on the Jebel. He explained that he lacked a facility to meet local people who wished to see him on security and other matters. I put together a design for a small single self-contained residence, which he took to his Minister for financial funding. The outcome some months later was completion by a contractor and one more satisfied customer was added to my list!

If it sounds as if there was nothing but work, this is not strictly true. As an alternative, late on a Thursday afternoon, I would pack a bedroll, cooker, coffee pot



with a few small cups, a little food, dates, some oranges and apples, into the Land Rover. Having first advised the unit's duty officer, I would drive out into the desert, to spend a quiet night under the stars.

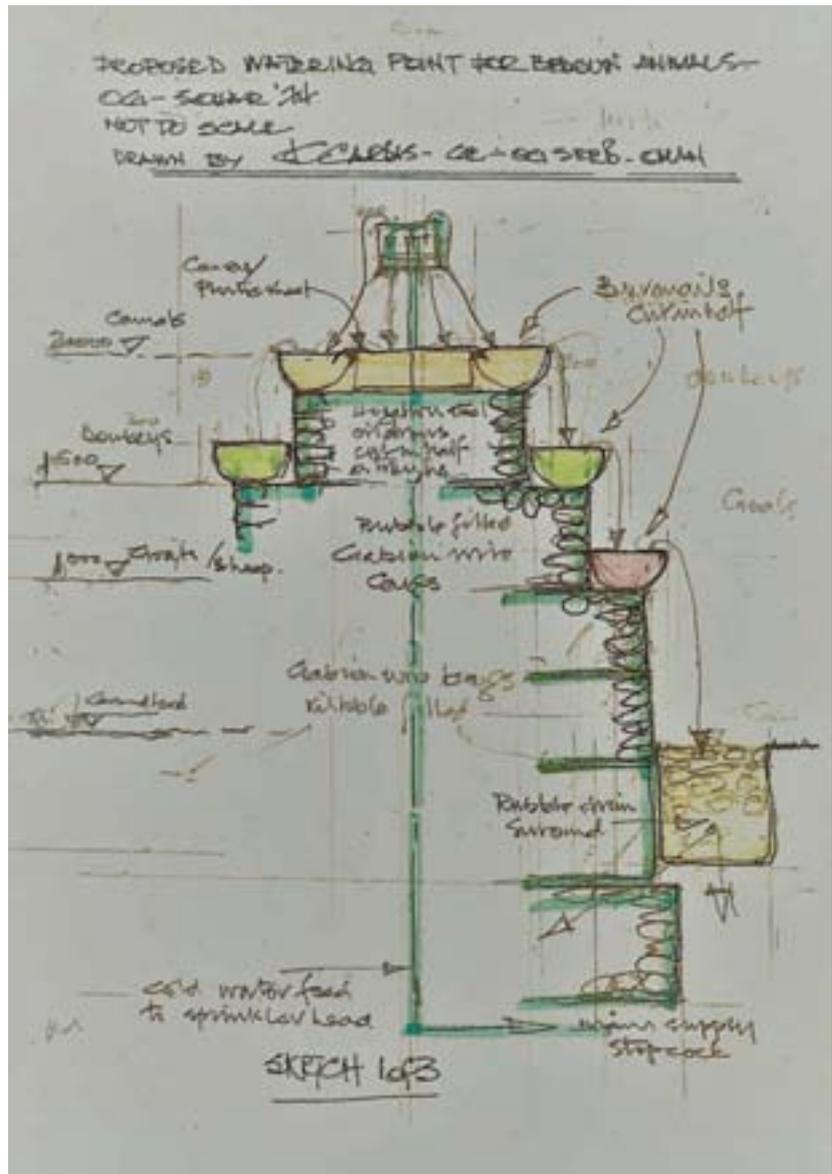
It was a fact of life that social and business revolved around drinking coffee, the bitter Arabic coffee and, as in all things, there was the unwritten etiquette for greeting visitors. 'As -salaam alaykhum' 'peace be with you' and so on... and then offering coffee or tea, some dates, sections of orange or apple. After which, they would be on their way, each saying 'Ma'a as-salaama', leaving me to the desert and the night, whilst overhead, a glorious canopy of stars, all of God's works, without a doubt, especially so when viewed from one's bedroll laid out on the sand.

Never let anyone say that the sands of the desert are not alive. Wake up in the morning and see the footprints of the tiny visitors. The winds of the night move the grains of sand and in the stillness can be heard these rustlings, all very much a small part of the sounds in the dark hours.

It is these deserts that I do not expect to see again and, in accepting that fact there is a wonderful Arabic statement that I would quote: 'La ilaha illa Allah' often repeated almost as a rubric 'There is no God but Allah', which fascinates men with its poetry and its philosophy summing up the belief of Muslims.

Well you win some and you lose others is a good military phrase! Part of winning for me was my recommendation, towards the end of my stay in Nizwa that Mohammed Nawaz be interviewed by a selection board with a view to upgrading him from a clerk to something akin to an Assistant Clerk of Works, a small part of the Omanisation which was then in process.

The first watering point was built just outside the perimeter wire of the OG outstation at Sohar. Having been inspected and approved by the Minister, this design was also used elsewhere in the Sultanate.



It had been a most interesting three years, working with a people that, for me, seemed to be the cleanest, neatest and smartest of all Arabs, and always the most courteous, all of which inspired a feeling of confidence, goodwill and, above all, respect. Much of the delight in working in that

environment was that you were able to impart just a little know-how at a time when it was needed. However, with the advent of the new roads and hugely improved other amenities of the Western world becoming available, I was not too sorry to leave when I did. ■



Disc in situ.

THE WORLD'S OLDEST MARINER'S ASTROLABE

Readers of the 2016 and 2017 editions of the Review will recall that a stunning variety of artefacts were recovered from the wreck site of the *Esmeralda*, and now David Mearns explains that one of them in particular is of enormous historical importance.

Of the 2,810 individual artefacts recovered from the wreck site of the *Esmeralda*: a Portuguese armada ship which sank off the north-eastern coast of Al Hallaniyah Island, and that was successfully excavated over the course of a three-year collaborative project between Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MHC) and Blue Water Recoveries (BWR) of West Sussex, UK, a solid metal disk could prove to be the most historically important of them all.

The disk was found on 8 May 2014 by the author of this article while searching one of the shallow gullies where the ship came to grief during a fierce storm which had struck the Island in May 1503 some

511 years previously. As soon as the disk was carefully extracted from beneath the 40 centimetres of loose sand covering it, it was clear this was a very special object and quite possibly unique in the field of maritime archaeology.

Despite the excitement generated by this remarkable discovery the research team had to wait two more years before high-tech laser scanning equipment could be brought to Muscat where the disk had undergone specialist conservation partially funded by a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society.

The stunning variety of artefacts recovered from the wreck site included a bronze ship's bell dated 1498, gold *cruzado*

THE WORLD'S OLDEST MARINER'S ASTROLABE

coins minted in Lisbon between 1495 and 1501 and a rare silver coin (the *Indio*) that was commissioned by the Portuguese king Dom Manuel I in 1499 specifically for trade with India. Even seemingly perishable organic material like the peppercorns and cloves that drove the Portuguese to make the treacherous ocean journey to conduct trade with India survived the harsh conditions and were found entombed within a large concretion that held the bulk of artefacts.

But the disk was by far the most intriguing artefact, in part because it was marked with two iconic Portuguese symbols: the royal coat of arms and an *esfera armilar* (armillary sphere), famously chosen by Dom Manuel as his personal emblem before he was elevated to the throne in 1495. However the function of the disk was destined to remain a mystery until researchers at WMG Warwick University arrived in Muscat in Autumn 2016 carrying a portable Nikon laser scanning head complete with a 7-axis articulated measuring arm for accurate laser scanning. At the time such a highly accurate and precise laser scanning system was unavailable in Oman.

Over a three-day period the WMG team, working together with staff of the MHC underwater archaeology department, scanned 47 objects including the disc. The Nikon scanning head works by producing a laser stripe consisting of a point cloud of ~900 points per cm². This means that one side of the 17.5cm diameter disc, once completely scanned, would be measured in excess of 216,000 times and that marks on the surface of the disc that were not otherwise visible to the naked eye could be



clearly seen. The marks we hoped to find should have been inscribed along the perimeter of the disc at equal angular distances from 0 to 90 degrees. Any marks or gradations of this type would confirm our initial suspicion that the disc was a mariner's astrolabe: a very rare instrument used by ancient mariners to determine the latitude of their ships by measuring the altitude of the sun.

Just over 100 mariner's astrolabes have been recovered and most are highly prized and valuable objects found in museum collections. They predominately date from the mid-16th century through the early 18th century, while the earliest extant astrolabe is from another Portuguese ship, the *Bom Jesus* wrecked off the coast of Namibia in 1533. The most common type is an open-wheel astrolabe that has a heavy

'ballasted' section at the top or bottom and is known from a drawing found in archives to exist from at least 1517. Unsurprisingly, none of the first mariner's astrolabes that were made of wood and created after 1481 have survived.

Because no astrolabes from the period 1490 to 1520 had ever been found the world knew virtually nothing about the main tool used for navigating at sea during the golden age of European exploration on voyages led by famous figures like Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan. The disc recovered from the *Esmeralda* wreck site therefore had the potential to fill this gap in our knowledge as long as there was proof of it being one of these early missing astrolabes.

After the disc and other objects were scanned, the WMG team returned from Muscat to Warwick to begin processing the images. More months passed and when the final results were revealed they were better than expected. Hoping for at least a few marks the resulting 3-D point cloud images of the disc showed a total of 18 scale marks or gradations inscribed along the limb of its upper right quadrant at regularly spaced intervals. When measured the angular distance between the gradations yielded 17 angles, the mean of which is 4.99° ($\sigma \pm 0.30$). Having found that the gradations were 1) precisely spaced at 5-degree intervals, 2) correctly located along the limb of the disc, and 3) in the correct quadrant, there was little doubt





Loss of Sodre's Ships.

they had been purposely put there by the maker of the disc. Excluding the first gradation at the top of the disc, which was corroded away, the gradations represent the full set of scales for measuring altitude from 90° to 0°.

In view of the disc's other characteristics: size, shape, reinforced central hole,

suspension ring, and decorations marking it as an important object of high status, there wasn't any doubt that the disc was a marine astrolabe. Its identity as a mariner's astrolabe was independently verified by experts at Texas A&M University, and published in a peer-review article in the highly respected *International Journal of Nautical*

Archaeology (<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1095-9270.12353>). This ultimately led to another accolade for this groundbreaking project: a Guinness World Record for the oldest mariner's astrolabe ever discovered.

From a historical standpoint, our discovery of this uniquely decorated mariner's astrolabe from a reliably dated wreck-site fills a chronological gap in the evolution of these iconic instruments. Named after the Portuguese commander of *Esmeralda*, the *Sodré* astrolabe is believed to be a transitional instrument between the classic planispheric astrolabe from which the first mariner's astrolabes made of brass were adapted and the open wheel type astrolabe that came into use sometime before 1517. As it is known that Vasco da Gama also carried brass astrolabes on his navigation to India in 1497, the placement of the *Sodré* astrolabe in the chronological record suggests that da Gama also made due with the same type of primitive and transitional astrolabe when he made his legendary voyage. ■

SHELL AND SOHAR PARTNERSHIP TO REPLACE GAS WITH SOLAR ENERGY

Shell has partnered with Sohar port to establish solar power projects to replace gas in powering local businesses, according to a report in arabianindustry.com

SOHAR Port and Freezone signed a 600-hectare land lease agreement with Shell Development Oman (SDO) to set up commercial and industrial (C&I) solar plants in the range of 10-40MW. An initial 25MW PV project will be used to power smelting company Al Tamman Indsil Ferrochrome LLC. Oman is a major exporter of Chromite Ore.

SOHAR deep-sea port and freezone is managed by Sohar Industrial Port Company (SIPC), a 50:50 joint venture between the Port of Rotterdam and the Sultanate.

Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO said: "Sustainability is one of our key values in driving development at SOHAR and this partnership with Shell will create solar-powered solutions that are the first-of-its-kind in the country. This also marks an incredible milestone and the first step in our proactive long-term programme, that we have already begun implementing, to transform our 4,500-hectare development into a 'green Freezone'. We hope that the changes we are implementing today will encourage current clients and future investors to adopt cleaner technologies and sustainable practices tomorrow."

Chris Breeze, Shell Oman Country Chairman, added: "These solar PV projects will free up natural gas resources for better economic use, support the green agenda of the Sohar freezone and enable further economic development in Sohar, by unlocking large-scale solar opportunities."

Recent Shell activity includes acquisition of German energy storage firm Sonnen and rebranding its consumer-facing supplier First Utility to Shell Energy. It also switched its residential customers in the UK to 100% renewable power.

In March, a consortium led by Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power won a 500MW solar tender in Oman announced by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP).

OMAN'S NATURAL HERITAGE LECTURE 2018

AT THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY



His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi, Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the speakers before the Lecture. Right to left: Mr Haitham Al Rawahi, Al Sayyid Taimur Al Said, Dr Mansoor bin Hamed Al Jahdhami, His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi, His Excellency Abdulaziz Al Hinai (Ambassador), Mr Yasser Al Salami (DG OCE) and Mr Hadi Al Hikmani (Chair for the evening).

The Third Oman Natural Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society was held on 24 October 2018 by kind permission of Mr Yasser Al Salami, the Director General of the Office for the Conservation of the Environment, Diwan of Royal Court, Sultanate of Oman (OCE).

BY DR MANSOOR BIN
HAMED AL JAHDHAMI

The lecture focused on Oman's hidden conservation heritage, including the Arabian Tahr and the Nubian Ibex. The main speakers were Dr Mansoor Al Jahdhami, Mr Haitham Al Rawahi and Al Sayyid Taimur Al Said from the OCE. The lecture was organised by the UK Oman Group with support from the Embassy of Oman (London), the Anglo-Omani Society and the UK Geographical Magazine.

The evening was chaired by **Mr Hadi Al Hikmani** from the OCE. Mr Hikmani, an authority on the Arabian Leopard and the speaker for the First Oman Lecture in 2016, is currently at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, University of Kent.

His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi gave the opening address, in which he stated that the environment had been a high priority in Oman for a long time. "We were truly

blessed that His Majesty the Sultan had the vision and foresight to establish an Office for Conservation of the Environment as long ago as the early '70s. At the same time, a range of steps were taken, such as the regulation of hunting, to assist in conservation.

"Then, in 1984, a full-scale Ministry of the Environment was established, the first in the region as I recall. This evening's event is made all the more special because several of those who were involved in these early initiatives are with us now. Welcome to you all, we shall forever be in your debt.

"Tonight, we will learn about the Arabian tahr and the Nubian ibex from two field scientists who are currently actively studying these magnificent creatures in their natural habitat. And as we hear them, I hope you will join me in reflecting that, without the imaginative efforts for conservation in days gone by, the Tahr and

Ibex would simply no longer be here. They would have become extinct.

“So, the natural heritage we have today is almost entirely a reflection of the foresight and hard work of those who came before. Indeed, in the natural world we are always dependent on those who go before. For instance, who plants a tree for his own benefit? Even in the best soil no acorn becomes a fine oak tree within the span of a single human lifetime. It’s all about the future and those who come later.”

He thanked the organisers and supporting organisations.

AN OVERVIEW OF OMANI THREATENED WILDLIFE CONSERVATION EFFORTS

Dr Mansoor bin Hamed Al Jahdhami, Managing Director of Environmental Affairs at the OCE, gave a short overview of conservation work in Oman. “OCE was established in 1974 with the vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to conserve our natural heritage. This office is honoured to have the mandate of achieving His Majesty’s vision in safeguarding top threatened Omani wildlife species in their natural habitat.”

OCE has three main regional directorates. The first is in the North of Oman (Muscat Governorate), the second in the Central

Desert (Al Wusta Governorate) and the third is in Southern Oman (Dhofar Governorate).

The Directorate in Muscat is responsible for three protected areas: Wadi Al Sareen Nature Reserve with an area of 780 sq. km, holds the largest population of Arabian tahr in Arabia. The second, Ras Al Shajax Nature Reserve, with an area of 93 sq. km, holds the largest density of Arabian gazelles recorded in Arabia. This reserve was privileged by the visit of His Royal Highness Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, in November 2016. The third reserve is Al Khuwair Nature Reserve in Muscat.

The Directorate of Al Wusta is responsible for Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve, formerly known as the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, with an area of 2824 sq. km. This reserve witnessed the first reintroduction of a large mammal (Arabian oryx) in the world in the early 1980s. It holds various wild biodiversity and captive breeding programmes of Arabian oryx, Sand and Arabian gazelles.

The Directorate of Dhofar is responsible for the Arabian leopard conservation project in the whole area of Dhofar, the last stronghold of this species in Arabia in the wild.

Over the past 10 years, OCE staff earned or are pursuing postgraduate education mostly at international universities with a total of five PhDs and five MScs. All

handled an Omani species as the main topic of their dissertations: Arabian oryx, Arabian leopard, Nubian ibex and Arabian gazelles and birds. Those studies covered different specialisations such as genetics, molecular biology, ecology, behaviour, satellite tracking, physiology, diseases and immunology.

ARABIAN TAHR... THE HIDDEN JEWELS OF OMAN'S HAJAR MOUNTAINS

Mr Haitham Al Rawahi, wildlife biologist at the OCE, discussed previous and recent distribution of Arabian Tahr and studies which have been conducted in the Hajar Mountains. Arabian Tahr (*Arabitragus jayakari*) is an endangered species found only in the Eastern and Western Hajar mountains. Fewer than 2500 individuals were estimated to be found worldwide.

Tahr belongs to *Bovidae* family and sub-family of *Caprinae*. With a dimorphic body shape, Tahr males have wider and longer horns than females. Males have a distinctive beard, socks like hair, and a dark mane along their back. Males weigh between 35-45 kg, twice the females' weight. In the Hajar Mountains, there are three main hot spots with a high density of tahr population: Al Sareen Nature Reserve,





Arabian Tahr

THE NUBIAN IBEX, AN ICON OF THE HUQF ECOSYSTEM

Al Sayyid Taimur Al Said, wildlife biologist at the OCE spoke about the Nubian ibex. The Huqf is a massive desert escarpment ecosystem in Central Oman, home to nomadic herders and overlapping with the famous Arabian Oryx Sanctuary (Al Wusta) and the flat gravel desert known as the Jidda. The area seems like a desolate wasteland, but the Huqf provides important habitat to many forms of biodiversity adapted to the arid conditions. Taimur and his team of biologists have initiated an ambitious first camera trapping survey and research project of the area covering over 5400 sq. kms of desert, cliffs, mountains and plains. The research is focusing on the Nubian ibex, an elusive mountain goat living in the Huqf escarpment which we know little about, but which is increasingly threatened and disappearing.

The team have set 170 camera traps to identify the distribution, status of ibex and conservation hotspots for the species. They identified four hotspots, the main at the highest density out of the Al Wusta Wildlife Reserve. The Nubian ibex was captured in 40 per cent of the cameras and the number of Nubian Ibex visiting those cameras averaged about 3.4 ibex per 100 days, which suggests that the population is very low.

Jabal Qahwan Reserve and Nakhal Surrounding Mountains. OCE have run many studies of the habitat, distribution and ecology of Arabian Tahr.

A systematic camera trapping survey showed that Tahr prefer steep, rugged mountain habitats with occupancy increasing higher in protected areas, peaks between 800-1000m above sea level and decreasing with proximity to villages and increasing number of domestic goats. In addition, the roles of scraping behaviour by Arabian Tahr were investigated and the result showed that there are 17 different scraping behaviours, which associate mostly with the two breeding seasons (October and February): establishing males' mating rights, communicate reproductive status of males and females, and signalling individual health and condition status.

To track Tahr movement and activity pattern 42 Tahr individuals were trapped and 27 were collared. The outcome of these studies were delivered to the public through special awareness and education programmes including Oman's Environmental Forum (2017), School Environmental Awareness Programme (six different schools with more than 12 lectures for grade 5 and 10) and

more than 20 press coverages, radio and TV interviews, and documentaries. Moreover, through these studies new areas were proposed to be Tahr protected areas. The conservation programme resulted in several publications such as the 2018 IUCN red list assessment of the species and Tahr distribution modelling in Hajar mountains.



Male Nubian Ibex



The Oman Volunteer Group in the UK with the Oman Delegation just before the lecture at the Royal Geographical Society, London.

In addition to Nubian ibex, these camera traps have also captured many other large mammals including the Arabian Red fox, Ruppell's Sand fox, Honey badger and several birds of prey. An interesting mammal they captured was the vulnerable Arabian gazelle. Additionally, they captured nocturnal carnivores such as the Gordon's wildcat and the first record of Blandford's fox in the area. The high number of Wagner's gerbil and Spiny mice in the area seem to favour the high number of Gordon's wildcat.

The team aim to live-capture Nubian ibex to attach small GPS-collars that will track movements, showing the species daily needs and requirements, area use and seasonal behaviour. They will implement management and conservation actions

within the reserve to protect the Nubian ibex then continue their field work in the southern mountains in Dhofar.

The evening was concluded by a vote of thanks from Professor Robert Allison (Vice Chancellor) and Mohammed Mustafa Salman from Loughborough University.

"The presentations by Mansoor, Haitham and Taimur remind us all of the outstanding conservation work being done in a country with such a distinctive and beautiful natural heritage. Not only is this pioneering work but it bodes well for the future. We are all guardians of the environment and what we have seen this evening is work that secures Oman's natural beauty for future generations.

"Many people have made this evening possible: your Excellency the Oman Ambassador and other embassy staff in London; the Office of the Conservation of the Environment in Oman; the Anglo-Omani Society; Geographical Magazine; the Royal Geographical Society; two of my Loughborough students Mohammed and Rasheed; the UK Oman Group, in particular Nigel Winsor, and last, but by no means least, Your Excellency Sayyid Badr. Thank you for your personal support and opening address.

"Mansoor, Haitham and Taimur – congratulations to all three of you, not just for an outstanding lecture but also for the pioneering work that you are doing as some of Oman's conservation leaders of today." ■

Mr Yasser Al Salami and Al Sayyid Taimur Al Said show His Excellency Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Albusaidi photographs taken by staff and rangers from the Office for Conservation of the Environment during the tour of the Oman's Hidden Conservation Exhibition in the Council Room of the Royal Geographical Society.



Photography acknowledgements: For Oman photographs and the Oman's Hidden Conservation Heritage – Office for Conservation of the Environment (OCE), Diwan of Royal Court, Sultanate of Oman. Photographs of the event at the Royal Geographical Society by Nico Wills.



Right to left: Paul Bates, Said Ahmed Raful, Khalid bin Mohammed Al Hikmani, Beatrix Lanzinger, Pipat Soisook, Said bin Mohammed Al Mahri, Talal bin Said Al Shahri and Andrew Spalton.

BATS, RODENTS AND SHREWS OF DHOFAR

ARTICLE BY ANDREW SPALTON

Andrew, a wildlife biologist, went to the Sultanate in 1987 to join a team reintroducing the Arabian oryx to the Jiddat Al Harasis. His work in Dhofar began when he established the Arabian Leopard Conservation Programme in 1997. He also worked on Steppe eagles of Dhofar (a project supported by the Society) as well as rangeland management and climate change. He currently serves as Adviser for Environmental Affairs at Oman's Diwan of Royal Court.

My first encounter with Dhofar's small mammals was on a wet day in 1988 beneath a large fig tree on Jabal Al Qara. I had driven south from the Jaaluni field headquarters of the Arabian Oryx Project on the Jiddat Al Harasis to meet Robert Whitcombe who was conducting experiments on the capture and use of the *khareef* (monsoon) fog water. Robert showed me what he was up to and took the opportunity to present me with a spiny mouse that he had found dead in the tall grassland. I made sure the mouse reached the late Michael Gallagher, then the curator of the Oman Natural History Museum in Muscat, but it would be nearly 30 years before I took a real interest in the smaller mammals of Dhofar.

The first and only survey of Dhofar's small mammals had been in 1977 when a small team participated in the Oman Flora & Fauna Survey (Dhofar) and made the

first formal collection of bats, rodents and shrews. They recorded 15 species that were described by David Harrison of the Harrison Zoological Institute of Sevenoaks (Kent, UK). David, who died in 2015, was an Arabist and taxonomist who became a world authority on the classification of mammals. David published the early records of Oman's mammals in the 'Mammals of Arabia' that he wrote with Paul Bates, who today runs the Harrison Institute.

In early 2017 Paul Bates and I hatched a plan to take a second look at Dhofar's small mammals. We were joined in our planning by two Dhofari colleagues; Hadi Al Hikmani who was busy with his PhD on the genetics of the Arabian leopard and Khalid Al Hikmani who was overseeing a programme for camera-trapping leopards in the mountains of Dhofar. In addition we brought on board the expertise of Pipat

Soisook, a specialist in bat research from the Prince of Songkla University, Thailand and Beatrix Lanzinger of the Harrison Institute. The Anglo-Omani Society very generously provided a grant and the Office for Conservation of the Environment and the Office of the Governor of Dhofar provided in-kind support. The Royal Air Force of Oman very kindly provided a helicopter so that we could get to the deep wadis of Jabal Samhan.

We assembled in Salalah in September 2017 just as the *khareef* clouds were lifting to reveal verdant grasslands and woodlands. Our first site was Ayn Ishat, just west of Salalah and one of many springs on the south facing slopes of Jabal Al Qara. We made camp near the spring and were joined by Khalid al Hikmani and rangers of the Office for Conservation of the Environment. By nightfall we had set-out lines of Sherman live-traps for rodents and were putting up nets and harp traps to catch bats. Thus began our month long survey that would take us from Khadrafi, close to Oman's border with Yemen, in the west to Wadi Samhal, just east of Hadbin, in the east and north to the mighty Wadi Arah in the hyper-arid *Najd* desert.

At each location we would camp for up to three nights and capture bats, sometimes until nearly 2am, before getting up before dawn to check for further bats and to recover the rodent traps. We identified, measured and photographed all captured animals and in most cases took tissue samples (for DNA analysis) before

releasing the animals back to the wild.

Over the course of the survey we recorded 15 species of bat, five rodents and a single shrew. Perhaps unsurprisingly we found the greatest number of species and individuals in the *khareef* woodlands and grasslands of Jabal Al Qara and Jabal Al Qamar where there is abundant food, especially at the end of the monsoon. Here the rodents live under rocks and the dense monsoon vegetation while bats roost

distinctive look. For example the family of horseshoe bats are recognizable from their horseshoe shaped noses. There are at least three horseshoe bats in Oman including Geoffroy's horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus clivosus*) that is found in Dhofar but not in northern Oman. Another distinctive family is the mouse-tailed bats that have particularly long tails. In Dhofar this family includes the Egyptian mouse-tailed bats (*Rhinopoma cystops*). The smallest of the



Setting up a harp trap.

Photo credit: Paul Bates

during the daytime in caves such as Suhoor cave (Wadi Naheez) and Hamran cave (Ayn Hamran) and emerge at dusk to hunt insects. As we witnessed at Tawi Ater sinkhole, home to at least five species of bat, the sight of many hundreds of bats emerging is quite a spectacle.

The bats of Dhofar are from several different families and each family has a

bats we encountered in Dhofar were the Pipistrelles that weigh about 5 grams and are the size of a human thumb. It was particularly exciting to capture the Dhofarian pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus dhofarensis*) which occurs only in Dhofar and the mountains of Hawf in neighbouring Yemen.

However, one of our most exciting finds was not on the Jabal but in the arid *Najd* that lies to the north. In Wadi Arah and Wadi Andur, that both flow north from Jabal Samhan, we found the spectacular Ghost bat (*Otonycteris hemprichii jin*). This very pale bat has a slow floppy flight and its large ears allow it to listen for and capture its prey. It is known as the hardest bat in the world because of its preference for scorpions and apparent resistance to scorpion venom.

However, most bats have poorly developed hearing and sight and use echolocation, similar to sonar, to fly and to hunt for insects in the dark. As they fly they make calls and can tell how far away something is by how long it takes for the echo to return to them. Just as radio stations broadcast at different frequencies

Photo credit: Andrew Spalton



Survey camp at Ayn Ishat.

BATS, RODENTS AND SHREWS OF DHOFAR

bat species call at different frequencies and in Dhofar we used a bat detector to produce a log of bat calls.

The most common bat we encountered was the Egyptian fruit bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*), the largest of Oman's bats. They emerge from their daytime roosts, such as caves and old buildings, just after sunset and with a very sophisticated sense of smell go in search of fruit. These may be wild fruits such as figs or the abundant fruits of the farms close to Salalah including mangoes, papaya and coconuts.

Bats are wonderfully beneficial creatures but are among the most misunderstood of animals, often feared as sinister and unclean creatures of the night. Far from being our enemy, bats are our friends. Many plants, wild and agricultural crops, rely on them to pollinate their flowers, others to spread their seeds. They are also pest controllers and eat insects



Survey Camp in Wadi Darbat.

Photo credit: Paul Bates

Photo credit: Andrew Spalton



Egyptian mouse-tailed bat in Fazayah (Andrew Spalton)



Dhofarian pipistrelle

Photo credit: Pipat Soisook



Ghost bat

Photo credit: Pipat Soisook

Photo credit: Pipat Soisook



Geoffroy's horseshoe bat



Spiny mouse and Golden Spiny mouse.

Photo credit: Andrew Spalton

Photo credit: Paul Bates



Egyptian fruit bats in a cave, Wadi Naheez.

Photo credit: Andrew Spalton



Geoffroy's trident leaf-nosed bat.

that are harmful to agricultural crops and to man. Ultimately bats are a good indicator of the health of natural habitats.

We had rather less success with rodents perhaps because there was so much food following the monsoon. I surprised an Indian crested porcupine (*Hystrix indica*) in Wadi Andhur but otherwise we recorded just four rodent species. We found the ubiquitous Arabian spiny mouse (*Acomys dimidiatus*) at all sites and its cousin golden spiny mouse (*Acomys russatus*) in arid areas of Jabal Samhan and the Najd. We captured the black rat (*Rattus rattus*) at Wadi Uyun and what we believe was Wagner's gerbil (*Gerbillus dasyurus*) at Ayn Ishat. Unfortunately it escaped before

we could examine it closely!

Shrews are notoriously difficult to capture and there are only eight records of shrews for the entire country. They are insectivores and little interested in the peanut butter and oats that we use to bait rodent traps! We found a single Dhofarian shrew (*Crocidura dhofarensis*) at Al Saan on Jabal Al Qara, a species only known from Dhofar and the mountains of Hawf.

Though we found few rodents and shrews the bat work was very successful. We discovered one new species for Dhofar and important new location records for other species. The results of the survey were published in Oman's Arabic language newspapers and we hope they raised the

profile of some of the country's less understood small mammals. The survey also attracted the attention of a regional initiative known as the West Asia Bat Network which Oman has subsequently joined as a country-level partner. New surveys, including investigations into corona-viruses that may be carried by bats, will commence in November 2019.

However, most important of all was that the project enabled Khalid al Hikmani to develop his interest in bats. After the field work he travelled to Thailand for further training in bat biology, research and conservation. Thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society support Khalid has become Oman's first bat biologist. ■

SMALL MAMMALS OF DHOFAR

SHREWS

Arabian shrew	<i>Crocidura arabica</i>
Dhofarian shrew	<i>Crocidura dhofarensis</i>
White-toothed Pygmy Shrew	<i>Suncus etruscus</i>

RODENTS

Cheesman's gerbil	<i>Gerbillus cheesmani</i>
Wagner's gerbil	<i>Gerbillus dasyurus</i>
Baluchistan gerbil	<i>Gerbillus nanus</i>
Sundevall's jird	<i>Meriones crassus</i>
Lesser jerboa	<i>Jaculus jaculus</i>
Indian crested porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>
Bushy-tailed jird	<i>Sekeetamys calurus</i>
Arabian spiny mouse	<i>Acomys dimidiatus</i>
Golden spiny mouse	<i>Acomys russatus</i>
African grass rat	<i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>
House mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>
Brown rat	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
Black rat	<i>Rattus rattus</i>

BATS

African sheath-tailed bat	<i>Coleura gallarum</i>
Naked-rumped tomb bat	<i>Taphozous nudiventris</i>
Tomb bat	<i>Taphozous perforatus</i>
Arabian trident bat	<i>Asellia arabica</i>
Geoffroy's trident leaf-nosed bat	<i>Asellia tridens</i>
Persian trident bat	<i>Triaenops persicus</i>
Yemeni trident leaf-nosed bat	<i>Triaenops parvus</i>
Arabian free-tailed bat	<i>Nyctinomus thomasi</i>
Egyptian slit-faced bat	<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>
Egyptian fruit bat	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>
Straw-coloured fruit bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>
Geoffroy's horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus clivosus</i>
Egyptian mouse-tailed bat	<i>Rhinopoma cystops</i>
Botta's serotine bat	<i>Eptesicus bottae</i>
Sind serotine bat	<i>Rhyneptesicus nasutus</i>
Desert long-eared bat	<i>Otonycteris hemprichii jinn</i>
Desert pipistrelle bat	<i>Hypsugo ariel</i>
Dhofarian pipistrelle bat	<i>Pipistrellus dhofarensis</i>

ISLANDS IN THE DESERT

Oman studies into the South Arabian plant diversity hotspot, from Thomas Starnes

A scientific paper on the joint UK/Oman Botanic Garden study in Al Wusta governorate on the flora of the Central Desert has now been accepted in the journal *Annals of Botany*. A team of 16 researchers from the UK took part. Details of the trip were in the Review in 2017 and were presented to the Society last February.

From a cursory look at a satellite image of Oman, there appears little vegetation to keep a team of botanists occupied for two weeks. What little greenery is apparent exists on the arc of mountains surrounding Salalah in neighbouring Dhofar governorate (a report on the second OBG/UK expedition there was in last year's Review). But our collaborators at the Oman Botanic Garden knew better. Once on the ground with boots on the gravel and exploring into the wadi systems, the Central Desert begins to reveal its secret – it's alive.

Southern Arabia is a biodiversity hotspot with high diversity of xerophytic (desert-adapted) and endemic (locally unique) plants. Our study attempts to explain some of this high botanical diversity with evidence for a Pleistocene (last ice age) climate refugium. Climate refugia are relatively climate-stable zones (we say they have a low 'climate velocity'). Climate stability tends to lead to the evolution of high species diversity (such as the ancient rainforests of Southeast Asia). This means that the species there – if protected – could be more resilient to climate change. To test our hypothesis, we needed data.

Funding from the Anglo-Omani Society allowed researchers from the UK and Oman to conduct extensive data collection across the Central Desert. From this we built a dataset of presence and absence locations for seven endemic species identified as being of high conservation value by our Omani collaborators.

© James Borrell



The fieldwork involved laying out quadrats, then determining whether our target species were present and taking a GPS location. The quadrats were at 1km intervals along 20km transects, themselves at 100km intervals, perpendicular to the coastline. This allowed us to build a dataset to show the distribution of the species, particularly with respect to distance from the coast.

We combined the field data with high resolution global climate datasets to understand the relationships between the locations of our study species and the environmental conditions such as

temperature or rainfall. We examined data including land surface temperature, precipitation and topography.

A crucial component was a sophisticated method for analysing satellite earth observation images to create a map of fog distribution within the region at different times of year. Earth-orbiting satellites gather much more than photographs, and by comparing the reflectance of two wavelengths recorded by the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) satellites we were able to differentiate low fog from higher clouds, an important factor in terms of plants' access to atmospheric moisture.

Based on this 'habitat suitability modelling', we identified a region of the Jiddat Al Arkad as environmentally suitable for all our study species. This is a relatively climatically stable region with low intra-annual variability, meaning the environmental conditions are relatively stable year-round. This 'southern system' is characterised by lower aridity and mean annual temperature.

Through this study we have been able to add weight to the hypothesis put forward by the Oman Botanic Garden Director, Annette Patzelt, in 2015 that parts of the Central Desert are at the fringe of the monsoon-affected area thus benefiting from occasional low clouds, cool winds and coastal fog during the southern monsoon. We interpret this climatic refugium as the northernmost remnant of a continuous belt of mesic (moist) vegetation formerly stretching all the way from Africa to Asia; an 'island in the desert'.

The Indian monsoon is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the climatic stability of the Central Desert southern system, but this didn't in itself explain the distribution

of all our study species, some of which occur in areas with little monsoon-related fog. Different species in fact had different environmental signatures, commensurate with their various desert-adapted physiologies such as low leaf area, short stature and moisture-collecting hairs.

The Horn of Africa biodiversity hotspot, which includes the southern coast of Oman, is internationally recognised for its conservation importance but is being severely degraded by overgrazing and climate change, including reduced rainfall. The climatic refugium identified through this research project represents a conservation priority for Oman, both in terms of its demonstrated ability to foster species survival under adverse conditions, and in terms of the genetic diversity which its geographic isolation has led to.

We thank the Anglo-Omani Society for funding secured by Andrew Stokes-Rees for this expedition which was crucial to the entire project. We also thank our collaborators at Oman Botanic Garden, the Omani authorities and the kindness of the people of Oman who made this work such an enjoyable endeavour. We hope that studies and collaborations such as these can help protect and conserve Oman's spectacular biodiversity for many more visitors to enjoy.

Islands in the desert: Environmental distribution modelling of endemic flora reveals the extent of Pleistocene tropical relict vegetation in southern Arabia is written by Borrell et al. and has been accepted with the journal *Annals of Botany*. The team are pleased and proud to have a new paper accepted with the Oman Botanic Gardens – a direct result of Anglo-Omani Society support and a credit to a great team of botanists out in Oman.





OMAN BOTANIC EXPEDITION 2019 – MUSANDAM

The third OBG/UK major field study took place this year in the Northern peninsula, and we have before and after articles by participants...

...before by Cindy Cosset

Oman Botanic Expedition 2019 – Musandam is a 14-day field study by Omani personnel and an international team, who will survey rare and threatened plant species in the Musandam region of Northern Oman. In collaboration with Oman Botanic Garden (OBG), the focus of the two-week expedition is to survey rare and threatened plant species, so we can better understand their distribution and habitat preferences. This programme is intended to cultivate international co-operation, cross-cultural and scientific exchange, and skilled leadership in the conservation of Oman's natural environment.

Plants of the Arabian Peninsula are often desert-adapted species that are not found anywhere else and are understudied. Expanding our understanding of these species, including their distribution and habitat requirements, is significant for global and regional conservation efforts. It is important to catalogue the biodiversity of the country before it is lost, due to the ongoing threats of overgrazing, habitat loss and desertification in Oman. In addition, gathering botanical data adds value to the development of the Oman Botanic Garden.

Since the rugged terrain of the Musandam peninsula is extremely mountainous, and has extensive coastline,



climate can vary greatly over very short distances. Therefore, there may be the opportunity to investigate the relationship between climate and habitat preference of particular plant species at relatively small spatial scales (at micro and meso spatial scales).

The habitat requirements of most of our study species are poorly known. Therefore, we will aim to survey as many different habitats and microclimates as possible. Botanical and environmental data will be collected systematically at each survey site. The team will be collecting plant samples, soil testing, mapping, recording various climate and terrain data, and conducting interviews to learn about local plant names.

The key objectives of the botanical field study are:

- *Determine where our study species are found and their abundances by conducting plant surveys across the Musandam region of Northern Oman.*
- *Predict the distribution of our study species by incorporating micro- and mesoclimate data into Species Distribution Models.*
- *To document and record the local Kumzari plant names within the Musandam peninsula.*

The Kumzari language is an ancient and endangered language, spoken by around 5000 people in Northern Oman. Speakers of this dialect are mainly found in the Northern area of the Musandam Peninsula.

There will also be an ethnobotanical aspect to the expedition study, as the team will record various plant names from members of the local Kumzari speaking population. The Kumzari language is an ancient and endangered language, spoken by around 5000 people in Northern Oman. Speakers of this dialect are mainly found in the Northern area of the Musandam Peninsula. Learning about local plant names and uses of the plants, from the local Kumzari speaking population, can contribute to our knowledge about the understudied Kumzari culture (the origin of which is much debated), and to botanical research efforts.

To achieve this, we aim to formulate a Kumzari lexicon of plants in the Musandam region. Local plant names and any additional information about these plants will be documented opportunistically. Firstly, by interviewing local members of the Kumzari population about local plants they know about. Secondly, by showing the local informants the key plants we are studying, to gather any further details about these target species, including their names. The vernacular names will be assessed in conjunction with the Language and Nature Project at Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, that works to record Omani endangered languages. The collected data will be provided to the Oman Botanic Garden for its Ethnobotany section.

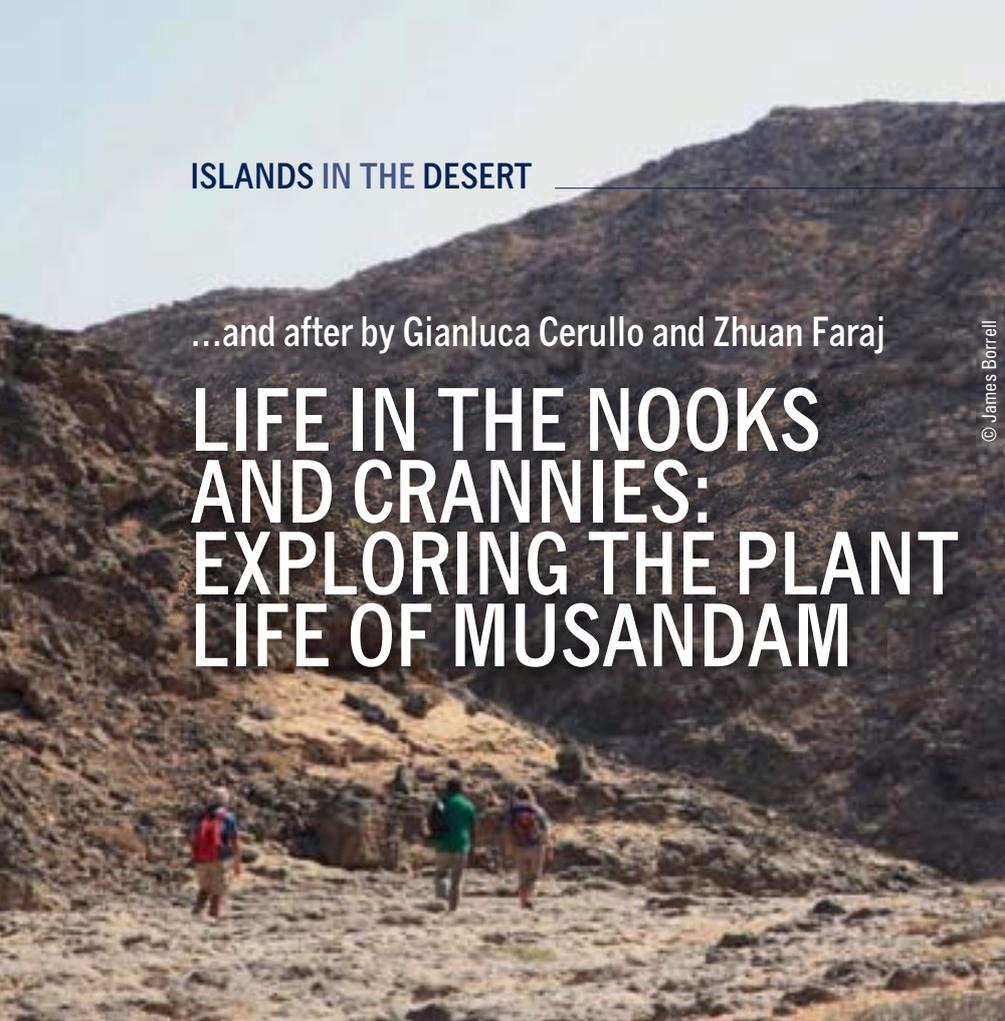
We believe that Oman Botanic Expedition 2019 aligns with the goals of the Anglo-Omani Society, as we foster multi-cultural collaborations between an international team and Omanis, contribute to science and research, while communicating our experiences of Oman with the wider world. We would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society for being a supporter of this expedition.

News and updates about the expedition will be uploaded to our blog, that can be read online by a worldwide audience: oman2019.wordpress.com

...and after by Gianluca Cerullo and Zhuan Faraj

LIFE IN THE NOOKS AND CRANNIES: EXPLORING THE PLANT LIFE OF MUSANDAM

© James Borrell



When the terrain is too tough even for 4x4 vehicles, the team proceed on foot.

Nestled between sheer rockfaces on a mountainous plateau in the Musandam peninsular, this wasn't the sort of place we were expecting to find a meadow. Yet fenced off from marauding goats and fed by a centuries-old irrigation system, here in this arid landscape of crumpled crags and bone-dry wadi beds, we were up to our knees in irises.

We had already spent many days and kilometres scouring the jagged surroundings in search of some of Musandam's rarest flora. By night, we slept on roll mats under the stars and huddled

for warmth by the campfire. By day, we explored the mountainsides for small succulents and other hidden plant life, following ridges etched into the rock.

Our 19-strong team included botanists, ethnobotanists and assistants from the Oman Botanical Garden (OBG). On the British side, we had an array of experience, from conservation to social sciences and many things in between. Indeed, both by day and night, the expedition was fertile ground for cross-cultural education.

We quickly learned that the high-altitude terraces of Musandam are a floristic gem in

the rugged crown of Northernmost Oman. When, at first, we'd scouted for plant survey locations on Google Earth, these ancient farmlands looked like a drab patchwork quilt of browns and greens. Yet trekking into the clusters of crumbling brickwork huts and goat houses, we were struck by the vibrant colours of life bursting around our feet. Small bees and hawkmoths flitted between the blanket of purple, white and red flowerheads. We wondered what rich pollinator communities these systems must support as we dug up bulbs and plant specimens for storage and propagation at the Botanic Gardens.

These terraces were once roaring hubs of mountain living. In bygone centuries, the crumbling farmhouses around us would have played host to the comings and goings of seasonal migrants, returning to cultivate dates and wheat after months fishing on the coast. Walking among long-abandoned buildings, pottery remains, date palms, grindstones, stone walls and cisterns, the terraces still echoed with the hardiness and ingenuity of these traditional agricultural settlers. Just as the sharp rockfaces nearby had been forged by wind, sun and sand, we knew that it was generations of grit, sweat and heavy-lifting that had reshaped the landscape around us into what it was today.

Outside these man-made oases, our short expedition threw up constant reminders that nature thrives in the nooks and crannies. In collaboration with our friends at the OBG, we wanted to build a picture of the distribution of 20 of Musandam's rarest plants. To do so, we split into small groups and spread our exploration across hundreds of square kilometres of undulating coastline and mountainside. From the environs of Khor najd lagoon to the valleys of As Sayh, we hiked along mountain crests and navigated many miles of gravely switchbacks by car. Yet often, we would only find our rarer target flora in small microhabitats between cracks, or along ledges of loose rock.

For days and days and to no avail, we carefully picked our way over the terrain in search of *Salvia mirzayanii*, a species with whorls of purple flowers that has only ever been recorded once in Musandam. When at last we found it, it was along a tough



A typical beach camp. All surveys began on the coast and worked inland.

© James Borrell

mountain ridge, whose rock face dropped steeply below us. A few solitary plants clung precariously to the cliffside, offering a stunning vista over the entire valley. Botanist Saif Amur Al Hatmi descended with ibex-like grace to take the first photos of the species in the region and mark its location for future seed-collecting efforts.

On another occasion, we followed a wadi bed cutting through the mountains in the shadow of Jebel Harim. For kilometres, there was little more than the occasional green speckle of a lone tree or cliffside-clinging bush. As the wadi rose sharply, an out-of-view spring dripped life into the dry riverbed. Dark mosses and ferns tumbled down the rockface, framed by thickets of grass and shrubbery. Here, flora found nowhere else in Musandam defied the surrounding dryness, thriving on the slippery rock. To us, it was yet another testimony that life flourishes in the most unexpected places.

We worked along our journey to record the cultural histories and values attached to Musandam's plant life. In our exchanges with farmers and local people, we learnt about the multiple uses and names many of the plants held. Some are important in construction or used medicinally to treat diabetes and seizures. Others, such as *Nirium oliander*, are instilled with strong superstitious potency and reportedly used to fend off djinn (demons) in exorcism rituals.

Ali Al Dhori of the Dhori tribe still practices the old ethnobotanical ways: something which is becoming increasingly uncommon as the Omani economy develops and young people adopt more modern ways of living.

One of the most notable practices was the use of the Sidr tree, which is not only used as a building material, but also houses bees in the months of October to December, following which their honey – a highly valuable commodity – can be harvested.

Ali also told our group of *Tephrosia*

apollina, known locally as 'dhafra'. When made into a paste, this can be applied to fractures with the aid of a hot stone, or used to treat snake bites. Needless to say, we left the encounter with a wealth of knowledge.

By speedboat we snaked around the rugged coastline of the peninsula towards the fishing village of Kumzar. With this settlement enveloped by sea and rock and isolated from the rest of the mainland, we

Herbarium reference specimens were collected with key information such as date, elevation and location.



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***Hyoscyamus gallagheri* – a jewel of the desert sporting stunning blossoms in an otherwise featureless landscape.**

© James Borrell

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EARLY ISLAM IN OMAN: RECENT DISCOVERIES FROM FULAYJ ON THE BATINAH

The recent chance discovery of 1500-year-old remains of a small heavily defended fort South of Sohar on the Batinah provides a rare opportunity to examine events leading up to and surrounding the early adoption of Islam in Oman from an archaeological perspective (Figure 1).



ARTICLE
BY SETH
PRIESTMAN

Figure 1. Kite aerial photograph of Fulayj fort from the northeast (photo by Mark Woolston-Houshold).

The outlines of this period of history are widely known. The fertile Batinah plain – where most of the country’s population and agricultural resources are concentrated – came under Persian political and military control during the late pre-Islamic period. This was connected with the strategic ambitions of the Sasanian Empire which controlled large parts of South-West Asia. Recent archaeological research focusing on Sasanian military infrastructure and frontier defences show that their capability was unrivalled in the Ancient World with major resources devoted to lines of defence and large standing armies along Northern fringes of the Empire, particularly during the 5th and 6th centuries (Sauer, *et al.* 2013; 2019).

Investment in the Arabian Peninsula was comparatively insignificant, yet the Batinah plain held a specific importance, situated in close proximity to valuable mineral resources and with the potential to generate large agricultural surpluses in the political heartlands of the Sasanian Empire in Southern Iraq and Iran via cheap and efficient maritime transport.

A rare literary source compiled in Oman around the mid-10th century by al‘Awtabi,

describing the situation at least 300 years earlier, details the political arrangement at the time (Munt, 2017). Coastal Batinah was controlled and to some extent populated by Persians, while the interior, dominated by mountains and deserts, was left to the local Arab tribal population. The most powerful tribal confederation, the Azd, were invested with authority to govern the area as clients of the Sasanian state through the office of the Julunda. While the mutual benefits allowed the maintenance of a status quo for several centuries, the presence of a colonial force on the Batinah fostered growing resentment.

As we know from subsequent events, the balance of power in the region shifted decisively in the 7th century with the spread of Islam and emergence of a unified Islamic polity. The successful conversion of the Azd tribes was particularly important and decisive, bringing inside one of the most powerful factions in the region. Within a short time, the Julunda kings, galvanised by this new religious and political mission, turned on their former overlords and expelled the Persians from Oman.



Figure 2. Southwest corner tower and fort walls.

A CHANCE DISCOVERY

So far, these events are only really known from surviving narrative sources, which are at best fragmentary and incomplete, leaving open questions of interpretation, and ignoring the experiential reality of most of the population. Archaeological discoveries now made at Fulayj bring to life the entire sequence under discussion with remarkable clarity and provide one of the most important archaeological contexts yet known for documenting the early process of Islamisation in the region.

Many important archaeological discoveries of the past have come more through accident than design and while the chances of stumbling across hidden treasures are diminishing as the world is increasingly intensively explored, Oman

still offers a rich canvas for new and important discoveries. A team of archaeologists from Sultan Qaboos University lead by Dr Nasser Al-Jahwari unlocked the surprising secret of Fulayj. While mapping the dense array of Bronze and Iron Age funerary monuments that pack the surrounding landscape, they spotted an anomaly: a regularly planned, well preserved building of about 30m square with 1.65m thick stone walls, a single entrance and projecting corner and entrance flanking towers (*Figures 2 and 3*).

The site appeared so intact that it might easily have been dismissed as an enclosure from recent centuries. It has nothing in common with the Iron Age or more recent vernacular building traditions in the area. It was when some of the pottery collected from the surface was inspected by Dr Derek

Kennet of Durham University that the telltale signs of its much more ancient – and significant – origins started to become clear.

Excavation at Fulayj in 2015 and 2016 revealed a building with formidable defensive capabilities (al Jahwari, *et al.* 2018). The fort sits on a low bluff overlooking Wadi Al Mahmoun, surrounded by arid open undulating land roughly half way between the sea and the mountains. The structure has a regular plan (*Figure 4*) with flat vertical wall faces formed from large blocks with the spaces in between filled with small packing stones and the remaining gaps pointed and possibly also skimmed with lime mortar (*Figure 3*).

The preparation of lime mortar required substantial skill and investment. Locally mined limestone was fired for several days in purpose-made kilns using large quantities of fuel. Remains of the kilns were discovered a short distance from the fort. The rock was then crushed and mixed with water provided via conduits or *afraj* running for several kilometres from the foot of the mountains. The flat top profile of surviving walls, and the absence of large quantities of rock tumble, suggest that the stone walls of the fort served as the lower base for a taller mudbrick superstructure. The same construction technique can be observed in some traditional buildings in the area today. A good analogy for a fort of similar size, date and design can be observed at Ain Labakha in the Kharga Oasis in Egypt with imposing walls still standing just under 12m high (*Figure 5*).



Figure 3. Excavation of the main entranceway with flanking towers.

Radiocarbon samples from carbonised botanical remains associated with the initial construction of Fulajj demonstrate that the fort was built between the early 5th to mid-6th century.

Radiocarbon samples from carbonised botanical remains associated with the initial construction of Fulajj demonstrate that the fort was built between the early 5th to mid-6th century. Unfortunately, it is impossible to achieve greater precision in this dating. What is clear is that the fort was built during the late pre-Islamic period by an external military force projecting the interests of the Sasanian state. As such, Fulajj represents the first tangible evidence for Sasanian activity in Oman.

In isolation the precise function of the

fort remains difficult to interpret. It could hold a detachment of perhaps up to 50 troops. The area it protects does not seem strategic; there are no nearby major routes or areas of immediate agricultural potential. It seems likely (though this remains unproven), that it was in a chain of similar forts either bisecting the Batinah plain into Northern and Southern parts, or more likely extending North/South along the outer fringes of the rich agricultural zone maintaining a line of division and protection as alluded to by al-'Awtabi.

What is equally significant is what happened during its later history. After some time as a military installation, the fort was reoccupied and modified. Changes were made to the entranceway and new mudbrick architecture and domestic facilities (an oven) were inserted in at least part of the interior (*Figures 6 and 7*). More narrowly constrained radiocarbon dates associated with this later occupation show that this occurred during the early to mid-7th century at the time of the conversion to Islam and the expulsion of the Persians. Given the dating and associated interpretation of the fort, the most likely scenario appears to be that the modifications to the structure were directly connected with the political upheaval and status reversal at this time.

FUTURE PLANS

So far, the crucial deposits that cover the 7th century transition period have only been exposed in a small area of four metres square, and even here the base of the sequence below the later mudbrick additions has not been completed. With the generous support of the Anglo-Omani Society, we intend to return to the site for three more seasons to open a larger part of the interior to learn more about the day-to-day changes in peoples' lives during this period of significant transition.

The experience so far has taught us we are unlikely to recover huge quantities of finds: the important information is contained in small details that require careful recovery. All deposits are sieved through fine mesh to retrieve small finds and assemblages of miniature snail shells which provide important information on ancient environmental conditions¹. Samples of soil are processed via flotation to obtain carbonised plant remains². Preliminary results have provided the first known evidence for the introduction of a new species of sorghum from India into the Arabian Peninsula at this time (*Sorghum bicolor ssp. bicolor*).



Figure 5. Ain Labakha in the Kharga Oasis in Egypt, a possible analogy for an imposing mudbrick structure similar to Fulayj.



The focus for future investigations will continue to be on fundamental aspects of subsistence and diet as well as the wider connections obtained via processes of long-distance exchange, particularly those associated with Indian Ocean maritime networks. The planned fieldwork project at Fulayj will bring together a diverse array of specialists to work in collaboration with partners from Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and trainees in archaeology in Oman. ■

Please feel free to contact us if you have any particular knowledge, expertise or resources that you feel may contribute to the success of the project. For updates on the project please follow our progress at <https://www.instagram.com/fulayj/>

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Figure 6. Excavation in the northeast corner coming down onto the later reoccupation levels.



Figure 7. Excavation of the 7th century oven cut into a mudbrick wall inserted into the northeast corner of the fort.

¹ Archaeomalacology, the study of ancient snail shells, is being undertaken by Dr Patrick Faulkner in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Sydney University.

² Archaeobotanical and palaeoenvironmental research is being undertaken by Dr Vladimir Dabrowski of the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris.

MILITANT JIHADIST POETRY AND THE BATTLE FOR HEARTS AND MINDS

Dr Elisabeth Kendall is Senior Research Fellow in Arabic and Islamic Studies at Pembroke College, Oxford University. She has lectured at numerous universities and think tanks around the world, and presented her research to national and international institutions including the House of Commons, House of Lords, FCO, NATO, the US State Department and the EU Council – and to Society members during this year's programme. She is a published author and features regularly on international television, radio and in print media. Her research takes her far beyond the dreaming spires of Oxford.



Elisabeth Kendall in NE deserts.

Militant jihadist groups must succeed in entrenching themselves among local populations in parts of the Middle East, if they are to survive. Sheer force is not always enough, particularly when the target populations are themselves well-armed and no strangers to fighting. Hence the battle for the hearts and minds of local populations becomes crucial. This does not necessarily have to win recruits for the mujahidin; it simply needs to win sufficient toleration for jihadist groups to function.

In this battle for hearts and minds, one strategy that has largely been neglected by analysts and scholars alike is poetry. Both al-Qa'ida and the so-called Islamic State produce significant quantities of poetry. This practice permeates jihadist movements, from the grass roots to the very top. Both the former and current

leaders of al-Qa'ida globally, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, have penned their own poetry.

It is therefore no accident that verses of Arabic poetry appear on one in every five pages of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula's magazine, *Sada al-Malahim* (the Echo of Epic Battles). Although overwhelmingly overlooked by analysts, these poetry verses are not simply included for fun or as space fillers. They perform profound and important functions in the service of militant jihad. The poetry endures in the collective memory and can be passed on orally at no cost and without technology.

Before looking at these functions, however, one needs to understand the position that poetry holds in Arab tribal society, past and present. The use of Arabic

poetry by today's jihadists continues a long tradition of poetry employed to win social and political capital. In pre-Islamic Arabia, poetry was used to promote and celebrate political agendas such as the settling of blood feuds or the formation of an alliance. This poetic tradition continued to thrive into Islamic times. The evidence does not support the notion – still held in some quarters – that the Prophet Muhammad reviled poets as liars or magicians. On the contrary, there is much evidence to show that Muhammad understood well the power of poetry and actively deployed it to spread the new religion of Islam.

But does poetry remain equally influential today? If so, this would help to explain how al-Qa'ida spreads its appeal, particularly in remote regions among populations with low literacy rates, little print culture and barely any internet penetration. After all, poetry, with its catchy rhythms and rhymes, is designed to spread primarily through aural consumption. To find out about the contemporary influence of poetry, this author decided to travel to Yemen and ask the opinions of a scientifically randomised sample of more than 2,000 tribesmen and women across every province in the

remote eastern-most Governorate of al-Mahra. The survey, conducted from late 2012 to early 2013, consisted of face-to-face interviews so as to capture illiterate respondents.

A startling 74 per cent of respondents believe that, out of the six possible answers, poetry is either 'important' or 'very important' in their daily lives. Among men only, this figure rises to 82 per cent.

What, then, are three of the key functions that the poetry performs? First, poetry bestows on the militant jihadist agenda a framework of authenticity and legitimacy. 89 per cent of poetry in the jihadist magazine *Sada al-Malahim* adopts the classical ode form, with verses comprising two half lines ending in a monorhyme. And almost all the poetry is composed in classical Arabic, the linguistic register sanctified by the Qur'an, rather than in local dialects. This supports the global jihadist project by giving the poetry relevance across the entire Arabic-speaking world. In this way, modern jihadist themes – like the exhortation to fight or the celebration of death – are packaged into a traditional form that resonates culturally and carries with it centuries of respect.

In the poem below, for example, images of the modern suicide bomber are placed alongside natural imagery reminiscent of desert poetry dating back to pre-Islamic times. The power of the bomber is compared to lightning, thunder, a torrential stream, a flood and a volcano.

*I will fasten my explosive belt,
I will shudder like a lightning bolt
and rush by like a torrential stream
and resound like stormy thunder.
In my heart is the heart of a volcano.
I will sweep through the land like a flood.
For I live by the Qur'an
as I remember the Merciful.
My steadfastness lies in faith
so let the day of the Qur'an come.*

This picture of overwhelming power, drawn in evocative poetic language that links the past with the present, engages listeners' emotions more readily than dry theological arguments. Moreover, the short snappy lines of such modern-style compositions are also ideal to set to music and pass on through song as rousing jihadist anthems (nashids). The above poem was placed at the end of an article recounting the USA's economic weakness



Elisabeth Kendall in coastal capital.



and predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism.

This links into the second key function of jihadist poetry, which is to spark support by provoking passion. Grass roots support is at least as likely to be inspired by passion as by ideology. The following lines demonstrate how al-Qa'ida can appeal to deep-rooted tribal values of honour and shame, and then situate these within the broader loyalty framework of Islam.

*Where are you as Muhammad's
community burns in flames?*

*Where are you as dignity screams
at the Sons of the Cross?*

*Where are you as Jerusalem lies captured
and is raped time and again?¹*

When set against local grievances, such as collateral damage from US drone strikes, the notion of being part of a global apocalyptic battle between “Muhammad’s community” (Muslims) and “the Sons of the Cross” (Christians and their Jewish allies) starts to feel real.

A third key function of jihadist poetry is to present an alternative reality, which can help to reassure current recruits and enlist future ones. Poems pose as documentary in ways that can contradict the objective reporting of events. A quick elimination by drone strike, for example, can be re-cast as heroic death in an epic battle between the forces of good and evil. Poetry can even

¹ ‘Abu al-Bara’, ‘Sawt Usama li-Ahl al-Shahama’ (The Voice of Osama to the people of Gallantry), Sada al-Malahim 4 (July 2008), p.26.

construct an attractive image of the suicide bomber. Instead of dying, he is transported into the arms of the virgins of Paradise; instead of being spread around a bombsite, he is amid green meadows with sweet waters.

Such attractive other-worldly images replace the brutal reality and help to ensure a steady stream of recruits aspiring to glory and sexual gratification.

The three key functions described here give a sense of how jihadists can engage poetry to win over local hearts and minds. Deeper study further suggests that tribal and cultural values play a much stronger role in the jihadist movement than is generally acknowledged. This in part explains why the so-called Islamic State was slow to take ground from al-Qa’ida in Yemen, despite the former’s strong

appearance on social media and sometimes slick video productions. Al-Qa’ida has produced jihadist narratives that are culturally attuned to their Yemeni context and adapted to prevailing local conditions.

Jihadist poetry is therefore no mere hobby or pastime. It performs important functions that operate at once on emotional, practical and ideological levels. It therefore seems surprising that counter-terrorism efforts have not yet made full use of poetry as a vehicle for counter-propaganda. There is a long history of competitive poetic jousting in Arab culture in which poets battled to win their audience’s hearts and minds. Currently, however, jihadist poetry appears to face little poetic counterweight that responds at a concerted collective level. Perhaps it is time to answer back. ■

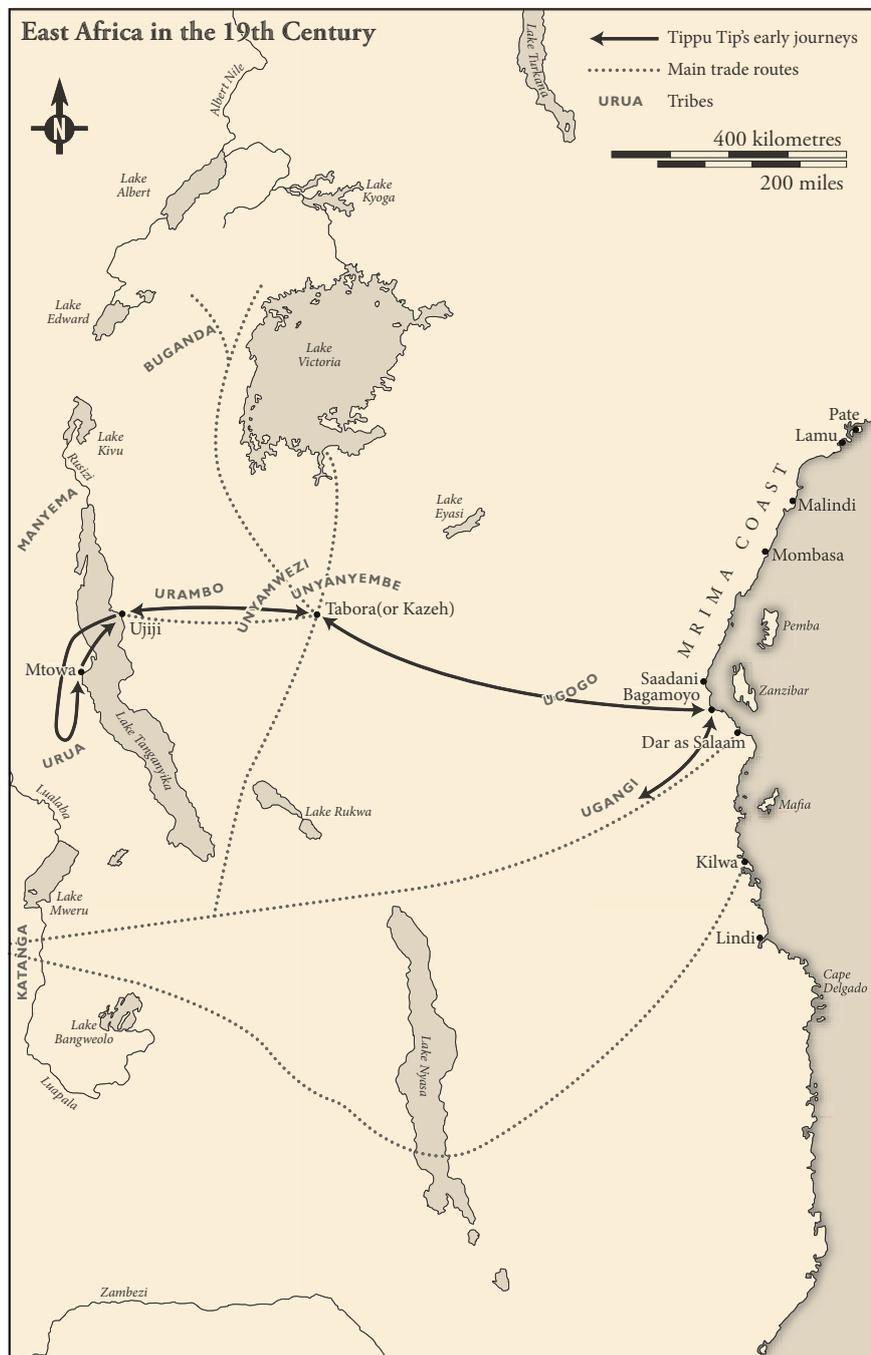


Elisabeth Kendall with tribal companions.

ARABS FROM OMAN AND THEIR EAST AFRICAN COLONIES

THIS ARTICLE BY STUART LAING IS BASED ON HIS LECTURE AT THE SOCIETY

Arabs from Oman were travelling to East Africa from early times. My research is aimed at getting inside this Arab-African world, to understand these Omanis and their exploits, and to trace some of the history of expansion and decline.





1. Tippu Tip: portrait photograph taken by 'GPA' in Zanzibar, perhaps in the 1870s.

This process is well illustrated through the eventful life of the most famous of them all, Tippu Tip, who like many Arabs in this area, was involved in ivory and slavery, came into contact with European explorers, and witnessed the European "Scramble for Africa".

With the rapid spread of Islam in the 7th century, trade expanded in the Indian Ocean, much of it conducted by Arab Muslim seafarers from Oman. An Arab presence grew in East Africa, shrinking during the Portuguese occupation of that coast and of Oman itself from roughly 1500. In the 17th century the Portuguese were removed from Hormuz by the Persians, then expelled from Muscat, and finally – after fighting lasting several decades – from the coastal towns of Africa, as far south as Cape Delgado, which became the border between Arab and Portuguese territory.

After the terrible Omani civil wars of the 18th century, Sultan bin Ahmad Al-Busa'idi came to power in 1792, and his son Sa'id bin Sultan established a half-century of stability and prosperity for Oman and its East African possessions. From the family and tribal names recorded by explorers and others, we can tell that the colonisers came from not just the coastal regions of Oman, but from well inland. Omanis travelled frequently by sea between Omani ports and East Africa – a long journey (about 4400km, 2750 miles), but it can be done in 3-4 weeks of continuous sailing in a dhow.

By the early 19th century, the Arab colonies in East Africa became more prosperous, after spices, especially cloves, began to

be cultivated on Zanzibar and its sister-island Pemba. Zanzibar soon had a near-world monopoly in cloves, and became a thriving market for other African products, notably ivory and slaves.

Tippu Tip was one of these Zanzibari Arab traders. Through his life we can open the window on the great themes which characterised this pivotal period of African history: **Ivory**, the high value product which motivated the Arabs in the expansion of their trade through central Africa; **Slavery**, in which also the Arabs were the principal traders; **Discovery**, because the European explorers, coming before the colonisers, were for decades the main source of knowledge in Europe and North America about central and East Africa; and the **Scramble**, that extraordinary rapid process in which European states absorbed African territories in a frenzied acquisition of empire in the last two decades of the century.

What makes Tippu Tip, additionally, a great subject for a biography is that – uniquely among his Arab/African contemporaries – he wrote memoirs, the *Maisha*, meaning "the life", the first word of the title in Swahili. Thus we have his own voice, which tallies extraordinarily well with episodes involving him recorded by European explorers and others.

Tippu Tip was born Hamad bin Muhammad al-Murjabi, a thoroughly Omani name. Although his mother was also Arab, his looks clearly reveal African blood. Like many Arabs in East Africa at that time, he was given a nickname. It may have originated in a

nervous twitch, or habit of blinking, recorded by several observers. He himself preferred to attribute it to the rapid fire of his men's guns – an onomatopoeic tip-tip-tip.

He was born in Zanzibar in about 1840, and died there in 1905. He made five major trading journeys, one of them of 12 years. So for half his adult life he was away from home. His life and journeys give an idea of how the Arab presence spread inland into what is now Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, northern Zambia and the DR Congo. By 1840 the Arabs were well established in Tabora, an important town where trade routes crossed, and had begun to settle Ujiji, on Lake Tanganyika.

After an early journey with his father, Tippu Tip began trading on his own account in his early twenties. With his first profits he raised credit from the mainly Indian merchant bankers in Zanzibar to finance his next journey. He was advanced goods valued at 50,000 Maria Theresa dollars (MT\$), which would have included beads, lengths of cotton cloth, copper wire – the goods needed for bartering for food, paying *hongo* (tolls), and exchanging for ivory along the way. Bartering was the only way to trade, since the MT\$, common currency in Zanzibar, along with Indian rupees, had no value in the interior.

On his third (and longest) journey, Tippu Tip pushed further west, beyond areas so far explored by his fellow Arabs. He reached and crossed the great River Lualaba, and lived for a while between that river and the Lomami. Here he met the explorer Verney Lovett Cameron, and here in late 1876 he received Stanley, with whom he

travelled for just over two months. Stanley was on the famous journey which revealed that the Lualaba was in fact the upper part of the River Congo, and was not (as Livingstone had believed) part of the Nile river system. Tippu Tip had met Livingstone, and given him some help, in 1867, south of Lake Tanganyika.

Tippu Tip returned to Zanzibar in 1882, travelling slowly because of the vast amount of ivory he had acquired. There he met with Sultan Barghash, who was concerned about the threat to Arab interests in the region both from the Belgians (developing the Congo from the west) and from the British and Germans (expanding their influence in East Africa). He commissioned Tippu Tip to return to the interior, to

reinforce the Sultan's authority up to and beyond Lake Tanganyika. Barghash wanted to prevent Belgian occupation and control east of the Lualaba, while retaining Arab rights to have the choice of trading on the Congo or of sending goods back to the east coast.

When Tippu Tip got back to Zanzibar in late 1886, he found Sultan Barghash deeply depressed, presciently seeing his mainland dominions melting away. But Tippu Tip was immediately presented with a new project. In February 1887 Stanley reappeared in Zanzibar, with a proposition for him to join in the extraordinary episode of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. Emin Pasha, German-born Governor of Equatoria (Egypt's most southerly province), had been forced southwards by the Mahdi rebellion (who had killed Gordon of Khartoum in 1885) and was thought by some Europeans to need relief. An expedition was assembled, Stanley appointed leader, and the decision taken to reach Emin Pasha via the Congo – an idea favoured by Leopold, who wanted to demonstrate the feasibility of navigation on the Congo, and also hoped to link up the Congo with southern Sudan and the Nile.

Stanley came to Zanzibar to engage porters, buy barter goods and weapons, and – on behalf of King Leopold – to recruit Tippu Tip as Governor of Stanley Falls, since his authority over the Arabs in the upper Congo would help secure safe passage for the expedition.

After a fair start, round the Cape and up the Congo, the expedition became a disaster. Many men were lost in the almost impenetrable jungle, Stanley and Tippu Tip fell into dispute over responsibility to supply men, guns and ammunition, and when Stanley – exhausted and in tatters – arrived at Lake Albert, Emin



Pasha, dressed in a smart white suit, said he didn't really need relieving at all. Tippu Tip stayed clear of the latter stages, remaining for a couple of prosperous years on the Congo before leaving for Zanzibar in mid-1890.

The Arabs and the Belgians had been eyeball to eyeball in confrontation in the upper Congo since 1884. From his retirement on his estates in Zanzibar Tippu Tip could only watch the deteriorating political situation. Bit by bit the Arabs were forced back, eastwards, and by mid-1893 the eastern border of what was by then called the Congo Free State had been extended to the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

Meanwhile in the East, German representatives signed protection agreements with African chiefs in Sultan Barghash's area of influence, and a Delimitation Commission (initiated by the Europeans)

fixed the boundaries of the Sultan's influence, awarding what is now Kenya to the British and what is now Tanzania (except for Zanzibar itself) to the Germans. The British declared a protectorate over Zanzibar in 1890, leaving Al-Busa'idi Sultans on the throne while keeping the administration largely in British hands. This ended in 1964, when, following the independence of Tanganyika in 1961 and of Zanzibar in 1963, a violent anti-Arab revolt resulted in the death or exile of large numbers of Arabs, the flight of Sultan Jamshid, and the merger of the two entities to form Tanzania. Many Society members will know Omanis of Zanzibar origin whose families "returned" to Muscat after 1970.

Tippu Tip's closing years in Zanzibar were partly taken up with law-suits. He was sued by Stanley, for breach of contract over alleged failure to supply adequate men, guns and ammunition for the Emin Pasha Expedition; but the case was dropped. To the other court case we owe a debt of gratitude. A suit against Tippu Tip was heard in a German consular court, and consul Heinrich Brode persuaded him to write or dictate the memoirs we now have in the *Maisha*. Brode reported that Tippu Tip had substantial investments in property; and he died from a cerebral haemorrhage in June 1905.

To conclude. We have seen the Arabs in E Africa start with the spread of Islam soon after the days of the Prophet, come through Portuguese occupation, build up a strong trading and colonial presence stretching west of the Congo, and then fall back in the face of the imperial strength of Europeans. Through the faith that they brought, and the influence of their language, many traces of their presence remain. Many Omanis to this day are proud of their African history. ■

TRADITIONAL STAR KNOWLEDGE IN RUSTAQ



Harriet in Dhofar 1973.

It was my experience on a groundwater project in Dhofar in the early 1970s that made me decide to become a hydrogeologist.



Harriet in Sharqiya sampling groundwater for isotope analysis in 1985.

But despite a full year working for the Public Authority for Water Resources in the mid-80s, it was not until 2005 that my eyes were opened to the wonders of traditional falaj management and I started to investigate timing of water shares, particularly the use of stars in the 11 settlements continuing the practice. For millennia, agricultural production in the north depended on springs and groundwater channelled to fields by gravity flow systems called aflāj (s. falaj) and despite the more recent spread of pumped wells there are still c. 3000 such systems in operation. The aflaj are managed and shared by the community, with individual water shares traditionally timed mainly by the sun and stars, but now watches and clocks are preferred, especially at night.

Many communities keep records of ownership of water shares, but the method of timing is rarely written down. I had come across only one manuscript describing star use, so the recent discovery of another was exciting. It came to me via Derek Kennett (Durham University) who was given a copy when working in Rustaq in early 2018 and asked me to comment on the contents. It contained lists of stars from two earlier sources used on Falaj al Hammām, but was not complete.



A page of the manuscript with list of 27 stars.

With a grant from the Anglo-Omani Society I went to Oman in November last year to find out more about the manuscript, hoping to locate a complete copy and even identify some of the stars mentioned. Helped by Wadha Al-Shukaili, an archaeologist and historian who used to live in Rustaq, we met the elders concerned with managing the falaj.

The manuscript was said to have been taken from Rustaq by a woman marrying someone from the area of Al Hamra and later returned by her brothers. A few more pages were found with our informants in



The research team.

Rustaq and then the trail led to Misfat Al Abryeen near Al Hamra on the south side of the mountains. Here Walid Muhammad Al Abri had a suitcase full of old documents left to him by his father. He had not been told about my visit by his friends in Rustaq and was reluctant to meet me until Khalfan Al Hattali, a close friend in Misfat who had spent many hours showing me stars, intervened and set up a meeting in his home to look through the documents. Sadly, there was no sign of the two earlier sources, but he did have the original of the manuscript under investigation, which was in a fragile condition. Although several pages have chunks of paper missing, and some whole pages are missing, the substance is quite repetitive and it was possible to make sense of the whole.

In Rustaq, the people responsible for the division of water gave detailed descriptions of use of the sundial and the clock now used at night. The sundial is still used by all farmers and is similar to many others, with lines on the ground marking time divisions: the day is divided into 24 athars, which vary in length with the season. Here, the athars are printed on a wall to help people get it right. The night clock has a schedule for different seasons and as with the sundial, it is imperative for people to come to the clock before going to water their fields.

We found that star use in Rustaq stopped in the time of Said bin Taimur, in the 1950s or 1960s, before the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in 1970, when most other places in Oman changed to watches. This meant that practically everyone who had watched stars had died. It was initially rumoured that two men still used stars, but that they would not meet with women. All attempts to identify them failed and the



A meeting with elders: from left: Abdullah Al Khatary, Shaykhan Al Rumhi (in charge of water distribution), Wadha and Harriet.

only person we met with personal experience, Saleem Al Hattali is in his 90s and blind, but he described as much as he could to his nephew, Talib Al Rumhi.

The stars were watched from the Shaweer mosque facing north west, and the manuscript lists stars rising above other landmarks to the east or setting over others in the west. Talib and his nephew Ali

took me to the mosque and with information provided by Saleem, we managed to identify most of the landmarks in the document. I am currently preparing a photorealistic horizon to import to astronomy software to view the stars in the equivalent of real time and identify them more accurately.

For comparison, the nearby Falaj Al Moyasser, which is inscribed in the



The night watch on Falaj Al Moyasser.



The night clock and schedule for Falaj Al Hammam.

UNESCO World Heritage list, was also visited. There is an impressive clock in a room where Zahir Al Harrassi stays all night to control the water distribution. A sundial similar to that for Falaj Al Hammam is also used except when it is cloudy, and watches come into use.

It was sad to see the decline of star knowledge, but on the other hand it is clear that in other respects traditional falaj management continues almost unchanged, testimony to a system that is fully sustainable and accepted by all.

And for the future? I have been invited to give a presentation in Oman about my work by the Falaj Unit of Nizwa University in November, and hope to visit Rustaq again to spend more time with Saleem to learn more from him. ■

LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

A KEY TECHNIQUE FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PAST

From Derek Kennet,
Durham University,
Department of
Archaeology

In archaeology, as in all professions, there are common misconceptions amongst the general public that one repeatedly encounters. One is the idea that there are certain places, called ‘monuments’, ‘heritage sites’ or designated ‘archaeological sites’, where there is archaeology, whilst the rest of the countryside is completely free from archaeological remains.

Especially in Oman one will often be asked, ‘Is this an archaeological place?’ or ‘is there any archaeology here?’ Well, the answer to both of these questions, with very few exceptions indeed, is a simple ‘yes’ – there is archaeology everywhere, not only in the specially designated locations.

The reason is that ancient populations lived in and exploited the countryside pretty much as modern populations do: they had houses in a village, town or hamlet (or tents in a camp, in the case of Bedouin), and beyond that they had cultivated fields, roads and tracks, store houses and goat pens, wells and aflaj, mines and quarries, cemeteries and sacred places, forts, dams, and other structures. Beyond these, people wandered still further grazing their animals, or to collect honey or firewood or other commodities, leaving behind them campsites, rock etchings, or fireplaces as a testimony to their presence.

The end result is that, whether it was the Bronze Age (3200-1300 BC), or the



A deserted mudbrick farmhouse and associated zagara well on the lower Batinah near Suwaiq. The irrigation of the date palms of the Batinah once depended on these bullock-driven wells.



Inside a running falaj near Hazm. The agriculture of the area around Rustaq once depended mostly on aflaj like this.

Ya'aruba period (AD 1624-1742), people were everywhere across the Omani landscape in all periods of the past and they left evidence of many of their activities. If we are to understand the full extent of ancient societies and their economies, then obviously we have to take all of this evidence into consideration and cannot restrict our interest only to a few larger settlements. These ideas have led to the development, over the last 40 years, of what we call 'landscape archaeology' – the study of the ancient landscape.

Landscape archaeology takes us away from the traditional picture of an archaeologist digging in a deep trench uncovering ancient graves, pottery and coins. The landscape archaeologist works in a very different way: his or her tools are a map, a compass, a GPS receiver (now fundamental), a camera, binoculars, a notepad, and plastic bags – and of course an old 4-wheel drive vehicle. (By the way, never let a landscape archaeologist go off in a car in good condition – it will soon be ruined!)

Their method is simple but thorough; small teams of three or four systematically cover the landscape in a network of regular sweeps – working sometimes from a car and sometimes on foot. Wherever any sign of any archaeological evidence is found, a number is allocated and a corresponding dot is put on the map; details of the site are recorded, pottery or flints are picked up (to

Especially in Oman one will often be asked, 'Is this an archaeological place?' or 'is there any archaeology here?' Well, the answer to both of these questions, with very few exceptions indeed, is a simple 'yes' – there is archaeology everywhere, not only in the specially designated locations.



An Iron Age pottery sherd collected by Durham students from the surface near Rustaq. The sherd is between 3000 and 3600 years old.

provide dating evidence), photos are taken and another archaeological site is born.

Collecting evidence in this way, step by step over a period of time, it is possible to reconstruct a reliable map of the ancient landscape – or landscapes, because of course the pattern of settlement changed

LANDSCAPE ARCHAEOLOGY

period by period so there are as many as 10 or 15 different landscapes to be found in any one place. By allocating different colours to the map dots depending on their date, the Neolithic, the Bronze Age, the Iron Age and so on, it is possible to draw up a map that shows how use of the landscape has changed through time, where main settlements were situated, where agricultural fields were located, where the dead were buried, where the fortresses and defences were positioned.

This is a powerful technique for understanding the past; it is simple human geography but with the added dimension of time. It allows the archaeologist to see how settlement and agriculture was organised

Ingenuity! Using a camera on the end of a window-cleaner's pole to take vertical photographs of archaeological sites.



Durham students recording the stone walls of an Iron Age house clearly visible on the surface. The house is about 2700 years old.

and how it developed and changed. Some periods show up as densely occupied, with large, active populations, whilst in other periods the countryside might appear to have been almost deserted – perhaps in periods of persistent drought or political insecurity. In some periods people focused their settlement on agriculture, in others, fishing, mining or quarrying might have been more important.

The technique is particularly well suited to Oman where both vegetation and soil cover is, for the most part, less than in the temperate climates of northern Europe. It is regularly possible to come across the remains of 4,500-year-old stone house walls lying on the surface surrounded by broken sherds of pottery water jars and cooking pots once used by the inhabitants.

Landscape archaeology is now a key technique in modern archaeology. It is

exactly what was used by the Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey – the five-year archaeological investigation of Rustaq and the surrounding Batinah plain generously funded by the Anglo-Omani Society between 2013 and 2018. It was a research collaboration between Durham University, Sultan Qaboos University and the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Culture.

During the course of the project more than 25 Durham students travelled out to take part in fieldwork which generally took place over the Christmas vacation. An extensive area was covered around Rustaq and Suwaiq and an amazing total of 2,766 archaeological sites was recorded. This large number emphasises the point that was made above – archaeology is everywhere. Of that vast number, 25 sites have been deemed important enough to

have been formally protected by the Ministry, but the other 2,741 sites now have their place in the long history of Rustaq and give a voice to the rural populations who lived in and lived from the countryside over many thousands of years.

The author would like to thank the Anglo-Omani Society for its generous support of the Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey. ■

Dr Kennet, a lecturer in the Department of Archaeology at Durham University, researches the archaeology of the Gulf and Indian Ocean from prehistoric times to the modern period, but particularly during the Sasanian and Islamic periods. He has conducted fieldwork in many countries, including the Sultanate, the UAE, Kuwait, Iran, China and India. His current research looks particularly at the development of Indian Ocean trade between China and the Islamic Middle East in the medieval period. In 2013 he was awarded a prestigious five-year research grant by the Society to research the archaeology of Rustaq and the surrounding areas of the Batinah coastal plain. The fieldwork for this project has just come to an end and the results are being prepared for publication, following a presentation made to Society members in June of this year.



Dr Kennet in a fall near Hazm.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SUCCESS FOR SUE O'CONNELL



Sue with Ahmed al-Busaidi, Director of the Photographic Society of Oman, and HH Sayyid Kamil Fahad Al Said at the "Lights of Oman" exhibition.



Exhibition in London.

Sue O'Connell, educationalist, author and prize-winning photographer, had a panel of images featuring the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque "Commended" in the Travel Photographer of the Year competition selected from 120,000 images entered. They were featured in an open air exhibition by the Thames against a backdrop of Tower Bridge this Spring, and further showings are anticipated worldwide.

I'm not sure where my passionate love of travel comes from but from quite an early age I was losing myself in tales of faraway places, in imagination crossing the Arabian peninsula with Freya Stark or venturing into Tibet (disguised as a man) with the amazing Alexandra David Neel.

My lucky break (although I didn't know it at the time) was to become a teacher of English as a Foreign Language – a career that was to take me far and wide, training teachers or giving presentations at international conferences. Best of all it allowed me to work with locals – what better way to get below the surface of a country?

In the 1980s while working in further education, I helped establish a link with the Oman Ministry of Education whereby each year my college received a cohort of aspiring Omani engineers, arriving for a three-year foundation course including English. How I longed to visit the exotic country from which my wonderful students came and in 1998 I finally did. And so began a love affair that I'm happy to say lasts to this day.

A few years later, and now a full time author, I made a fortuitous connection with that great friend of Oman, Maggie Jeans, who runs the British Business Forum in

Muscat and has been awarded an OBE for services to Anglo-Omani relations. With Maggie's support and invaluable assistance I was able to return several times as an education expert giving presentations to teachers in Muscat, Nizwa and Salalah, each visit increasing my knowledge and admiration for the country.

By now I was a keen photographer, achieving some success in international competitions. In 2016, I was awarded a medal in the "Lights of Oman" contest and decided on a whim to attend the award ceremony in Muscat. This was a wonderful experience and led to a new and important connection with the excellent Photographic Society of Oman. Later that year I returned with my husband and fellow photographer, Peter Brisley, to give our presentation "Travels Towards the Edge" to the Society, and PSO members have since been enormously helpful in providing the kind of "insider" information about photogenic places and events that photographers dream of!



Arabic Publicity for the Travels Towards the Edge Exhibition.

Last year I was thrilled to have a panel of images from Oman “Commended” in Travel Photographer of the Year (TPOTY), a prestigious competition with entries from 129 countries! The subject, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, is an awe-inspiring building in every way, fully deserving its status as an icon of modern Islamic architecture, yet it also has a wonderfully tranquil atmosphere and an intimate spiritual quality. It’s a must-visit whenever we’re in Oman, and as photographers, every visit brings different inspiration, depending on time, mood, and lighting conditions.

But however impressive the sights, it is our encounters with the ordinary/extraordinary people of Oman, so gracious, individual and endlessly fascinating, that mean the most to us and which make Oman a country so dear to our hearts. ■

We printed a selection of Sue’s pictures taken in the Sultanate in the 2016 edition of the Review.



Footsteps in the Grand Mosque.



*The Sultan Qaboos
Grand Mosque in
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modern Islamic
architecture.*

TRADITIONS AND TRAJECTORIES: THE FEMALE SILVERSMITHS OF DHOFAR

FROM FAHMIDA SULEMAN

Throughout the Arabian Peninsula, silversmithing is universally identified as a male occupation, although a large proportion of the articles produced are for women. In March this year, four women embarked on an uncharted area of research – the tradition of female silversmiths in Dhofar.

The research project, funded by the British Museum and the Society, was a joint collaboration among four international institutions and experts: Dr Aude Mongiatti, Scientist for Metalwork and Metallurgical Technologies, British Museum, London; Dr Fahmida Suleman, Curator of Islamic Art & Culture, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada; Moza al-Wardi, Director of Collections, National Museum of Oman, Muscat; and Marcia S. Dorr, independent scholar and co-author of *The Craft Heritage of Oman* (2003), Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The research project aimed to extend our knowledge and understanding of the traditions and trajectories of the silver tradition in Oman with a focus on the unique practice of female silversmithing in the city of Taqah. Omani silver jewellery are markers of status, regional, marital and ethnic identity and during the mid-20th-century, there were several female silversmiths in Dhofar who were trained by men and often belonged to families of silversmiths. Today, there is only one practising silversmith left, Tuful bint Ramadan Awadh Bimkhalef, now in her early 80s.

Tuful began silversmithing at the age of 14 and was first taught by a male silversmith. She was widowed in her mid-twenties and managed to raise her three sons on her own as a skilled silversmith. She also became an avid collector of 20th-century Omani material culture, from pottery, woodwork and weaponry to textiles and everyday items, such as mobile phones, transistor radios and gramophones. In 1998, Tuful received the 'Perfect House Award' from the Ministry of Municipalities and subsequently received the 'Best Mother Award' from a women's



From left to right: Marcia S. Dorr, Fahmida Suleman, Tuful bint Ramadan Awadh Bimkhalef, Aude Mongiatti and Moza al-Wardi standing in Tuful's gallery-workshop, Taqah, Dhofar. Note: She chose to wear a *burqa* (face-veil) only for the purpose of publishing her images and video recordings.



The design of this gold *mariyya* necklace on sale in the gold suq is inspired directly from older silver examples. Tuful's granddaughter wears a similar necklace in silver with coral-coloured divider beads.

Tuful still sells her handmade silver earrings, pendants, necklaces, finger-rings and toe-rings from her home and at many annual festivals held in Taqah.

charity for her dedication and hard work in raising her children as a widow for over 25 years.

Tuful still sells her handmade silver earrings, pendants, necklaces, finger-rings and toe-rings from her home and at many annual festivals held in Taqah. Living in her extended family home with her three sons and their families, Tuful no longer relies solely on silversmithing to run her household. Although her children bear most of the financial burden, Tuful still chooses to maintain her craft as best as she can and enjoys meeting visitors to discuss her jewellery and collections. Wearing a beautiful Dhofari dress with a long train and an infectious smile, Tuful welcomed us into her home each day with typical Omani hospitality, serving us food and drink and wafting us with the best Dhofari frankincense.

She shared several of her silversmithing techniques with us in her little workshop on the ground floor of her home, which also served as a gallery to display her finished pieces and her ethnographic collection. Tuful demonstrated her skills and strength in producing a fine twisted silver wire toe-ring, using a drawing plate to create the wire, and how adept she was at using a doming block, punch and



The team interviews and records Tuful as she demonstrates her silversmithing skills and techniques.

hammer to make small and delicate hemispherical beads, often applied on special-occasion embroidered dresses and headdresses or soldered together as spheres hanging off chains. Tuful also explained how Dhofari women traditionally wear their silver jewellery by adorning her granddaughter from head to toe with her own pieces – a headdress, earrings, multiple necklaces, bracelets, finger-rings, jingling anklets and toe-rings.



Tuful's granddaughter is dressed from head-to-toe in the silversmith's jewellery to demonstrate how the pieces are traditionally worn on special occasions.

Although gold jewellery has surpassed silver in popularity since the oil boom of the 1960s, Tuful stressed that some women still prefer to wear silver ornaments for special celebrations and occasionally hire out more elaborate pieces from her. This was confirmed by a now long-retired

THE FEMALE SILVERSMITHS OF DHOFAR



Moza and Marcia interview Ghaliya al-Bas in her home in Salalah, Dhofar.

female silversmith, goldsmith and entrepreneur in Salalah, Ghaliya al-Bas, whom we also interviewed, and on our visit to the gold market in Salalah, where we visited countless shops and interviewed a large number of Omani and Pakistani jewellers. Silver jewellery dating to the 1950s is preciously guarded by jewellers and hired out for weddings and special occasions at a premium daily rate. However, the jewellers also confirmed that their older clientele prefer traditional styles of silver jewellery made from gold, whereas younger clients wear European style jewellery in gold or hire glitzy, bejewelled tiara sets made in the Far East.

Omani silver jewellery from the mid-20th-century is still available from reputable antique dealers in Muscat's Muttrah suq, although the market is also rife with imitations. Tariq bin Mohammed

al-Balushi, who hails from a family of Omani silversmiths and antique sellers, commissions new pieces for the tourist market of high quality that are based on long-established patterns for modern tastes.

With the support of the Omani Women's Association of Salalah, Tuful has tried to pass on her skills to at least three younger women but various circumstances have prevented them from pursuing the trade as a living. There are too many jewellers in the market catering to the constantly shifting tastes of modern Omanis and the younger generation of female silversmiths simply cannot compete without the help of governments and other influential institutions.

We spoke extensively to a promising young silversmith in Taqah named Lubna Kharj Abdullah, who was trained by Tuful but lacks the initial funding to purchase

silver and does not have easy access to a workshop, a gas torch or crucibles, despite having all the tools and moulds needed to make typical Dhofari patterns of jewellery. Our discussions with members of the Women's Association were lively and engaging and there seemed to be a renewed commitment to help Lubna and others like her, who are eager to revive the tradition of female silversmithing in the region if they can find a willing teacher.



Moza chats with Lubna Kharj Abdullah, a young trainee silversmith who was taught by Tuful under the aegis of the Omani Women's Association.

Although the research project is only at its beginning, our first exploration in this study opened our eyes to the story of female empowerment, identity, change and resilience through the narrative of an Omani woman, now in her 80s, who entered a predominantly male-led profession, succeeded in her craft through her persistence, adaptability and entrepreneurial skills and is today an inspiration for the women of next generations. ■



The team conducts field research in the gold suq of Salalah.



Marcia and Aude discuss the date and quality of an antique silver Maria Theresa thaler pendant with Tariq bin Mohammed al-Balushi in his shop at Muttrah suq, Muscat.

ATELIER ZUHRA



Two of Rayan's designs being shown at London Fashion Week.

DESIGNER FASHION FROM THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

London Fashion Week is one of the top international celebrations of all that is glamorous and stylish, drawing designers and spectators from around the world.



Rayan at her presentation at the Society.

Omani fashion designer Rayan Al Sulaimani, Chief Executive of Dubai based women's wear label Atelier Zuhra, this year secured a solo show – a huge achievement.

The achievement of securing the solo show is amplified by the newness of the label. Atelier Zuhra has grown rapidly since it was founded in 2015 by Rayan Al Sulaimani's mother, Mousa Al Awfi, attracting a clientele that includes the likes of Sonam Kapaur and Alia Bhatt.

In a celebration of Omani design, the Anglo-Omani Society hosted the mother and daughter team for an evening discussion during London fashion week. Those

attending had the chance to watch the Atelier Zuhra show and ask Rayan about her experiences. The label is based in Dubai and has a showroom in Muscat, catering mainly to brides. "Oman will always be an inspiration. I have a lot of respect for the country and its people and I am so happy to receive the same kind of respect from Oman."

The catwalk show was a gemstone-inspired masterclass, consisting of a glimmering array of vivid evening gowns in amethyst, sapphire, citrine yellow, emerald and ruby hues. The feathered, embellished, embroidered, beaded and sequined gowns were an ode to extravagance, designed to make any woman feel like royalty.

Discussing inspirations, Rayan stressed the integral role her mother has played as a source of motivation and support. "My mother has been my most prominent inspiration of motivation in the field of design and fashion," Rayan told Society staff.

Asked about her experience as a female entrepreneur, Rayan said: "Being an

entrepreneur is a tough job itself, but as a woman, I feel there is an added pressure. It is difficult to maintain our social responsibilities along with our work which for a man might not be as extreme as it is for a woman. Having said that I do not feel threatened in any way by the men. My mother being a female entrepreneur herself has passed on this legacy to me which only shows how strong, independent and fearless she was and still is."

Looking to the future, the brand's rise to fame shows no signs of slowing down as the women in charge continue to strive to be globally recognised. ■

CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: THE GULF AND THE OMAN DIMENSION



Society members strongly support the inclusion in our programme of informed analysis of Oman's political and economical position in the region and world, and a full house greeted Professor Ehteshami's lecture on this important topic.

The lecture focussed on Sino-Middle East trade, the volume of which has increased 17-fold from \$18 billion to \$312 billion between 2000 and 2014. The relationship continues to grow, nourished by traffic in energy eastwards and a vast trade and investment footprint by the East Asian countries and India in West Asia and the wider MENA region.

In 2010 China replaced the US as the region's largest trading partner. Bilateral economic ties are still defined by China's enormous energy demands but this is the underpinning of greater interdependence. In 2015, 51% of China's worldwide crude oil imports came from the Middle East, making the Persian Gulf China's principal supplier





Landscape of Chengdu, the largest city of South West China, starting point of the Road and Belt Initiative supported by Chinese president Xi Jinping.

of hydrocarbons. This trade is so vital to China, as it once was to the West, that it has ensured the delivery of hydrocarbons by signing bilateral memorandums of understanding with all major crude oil supplying countries in the region.

These memorandums of understanding are backed by numerous framework deals involving China's state-owned companies and their Middle Eastern counterparts. China is entrenched and is increasingly at the centre of the MENA political economy, the fact that China is now the main trading partner of more than 10 MENA countries speaks to the reality of deepening trans-Asian relationships.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative is intended to create powerful links to the West through ambitious infrastructural projects. Central to this are the "belt" of overland corridors across Asia to Europe and a maritime "road" of shipping lanes across the Indian Ocean to Africa.

Professor Ehteshami stressed the importance of this to the whole of the Gulf region: while Oman exported over \$17bn worth of oil to China in 2018, Arab countries north of the Strait of Hormuz

supplied far more: oil exports from Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and the UAE totalled over \$70bn. Overall, 37 per cent of Middle Eastern oil exports are destined for China.

The geographical location of Oman therefore makes it key not only to its own oil exports but also those from its neighbours to the North. The stability of the Sultanate in a region of turbulence and threats is of great importance to China: disruption would have much greater effects than the loss of Omani oil, important though that is.

This is at least part of the reason for major investment in developments announced by China for Oman, particularly in the area of development in and around Duqm. In any case, China is investing heavily in port facilities across the wider region, from Gwadar in Pakistan to Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, and a strong position in Duqm would be of obvious value. Foreign overseas investment in the Sultanate is a priority in the country's forward planning, and therefore China is important in this regard. While Britain remains the biggest net investor, China's plans if carried through will make it a huge supplier of the capital which Oman needs.

Tourism is one of the strands of development which is of increasing importance, and this is a further area where China could become very important. Chinese tourists are seen worldwide, and are free spenders who could make a significant contribution.

The three factors of oil exports, inward investment and tourism need to be seen in

relation to China's overall strategy within and beyond the region, and Professor Ehteshami skilfully outlined the opportunities and potential threats to the various countries in China's reach along the 'belt and road', both in his lecture and the questions which followed. ■



Anoush Ehteshami is Professor of International Relations in the School of Government and International Affairs and Director of the Institute for Middle Eastern & Islamic Studies at Durham University. He was Durham University's first Dean of Internationalisation, 2009-2011, and was the founding Head of the School of Government and International Affairs. He has been a Fellow of the World Economic Forum, and served as a member of the WEF's foremost body, the Global Agenda Councils, 2010-12, focusing on energy. He is also the Editor of two major book series on the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, and is a member of the Editorial Board of seven international journals.



OMAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST INFRASTRUCTURE BOOM

ARTICLE BY SCOTT DICKSON

In January, as part of our lecture programme, we heard from Scott Dickson on Oman's impressive record on infrastructure development – and why it is important for economic growth and diversification as well as for the wellbeing of society and jobs.



Scott is a commercial lawyer by background. He studied law at Glasgow and Oxford, stood for parliament in the 1997 general election for the Conservatives in Scotland and then practised as a lawyer in Edinburgh and the city of London. He advised the Government of the Sultanate of Oman on its power and water projects between 2005-2011. He is now a senior civil servant in the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) in the UK Government based in London and was government's commercial lead on the £4bn Thames Tideway Tunnel project, London's new "super sewer". He gave the lecture in a personal capacity.

Good infrastructure is crucial for a modern functioning economy and society. We all take our infrastructure for granted – train networks, roads, airports, ports, power generation and networks, water and sewer systems, communications, hospitals and schools. Except when we don't have it or it doesn't work as it should.

The Middle East has seen a boom in urban and industrial development in the last 20 years – much of the physical landscape has changed.

Within the GCC Oman has an impressive story to tell – one of steady, incremental and tasteful development of its economic and social infrastructure – but it still needs to fully capitalise on its political, legal, social and economic maturity.

The strategic importance of infrastructure is recognised by His Majesty, quoted in an article in 2015: "The building of a modern state, which we pledged to establish since the first moment of the dawn of the Blessed Renaissance, required us to exert big efforts in the field of establishing infrastructure, which is the pillar and first cornerstone of comprehensive development."

Oman's record on developing its physical infrastructure is matched by its record on its institutional infrastructure – the Basic Law was introduced in 1996, democratic engagement has increased (as has the role of the Majlis al-Shura) and legislation has made doing business in Oman easier. As recently as July Oman introduced five new royal decrees to support foreign investment, public private partnerships (PPPs), privatisation and bankruptcy.

Oman developed the first PPP project in the GCC in 1996 – the Al Manah power project – and went on to create a market-leading programme of projects in the power and water sector. There are now over a dozen operational power and water

projects in Oman, with renewables (both wind and solar) at last playing a more prominent role in the sector.

Oman has also developed iconic new public buildings, new airports, brand new highways and has ambitious plans for development at the Duqm special economic zone and port. Oman has new jewels – the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, the Majlis Oman, the National Museum and the Royal Opera House. The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. The new – and award-winning – Muscat International Airport opened in 2018. There is a new airport in Salalah and the new airport in Duqm opened in January this year. The new Al Batinah expressway opened in 2018 – it runs 270km to the north of Muscat, from Barka, through Sohar, to Shinas and then on to Dubai. It has four lanes in each direction, 23 junctions, 17 overhead bridges and 12 underpasses.

The plans for Duqm are so exciting that the question "Can Duqm become the Arab world's next "great city"?" was posed in one recent article. Also at Duqm there are plans for new power generation – either a 1,200MW clean coal plant or a 600MW thermal solar plant. Duqm is not currently connected with the main power network in Oman – the Main Interconnected System (MIS). Duqm as a port also has a strategic advantage in its location in the Arabian Sea, providing access to the GCC without the need to go through the Strait of Hormuz.

The development of rail in Oman and across the GCC remains under discussion. Rail can, of course, be totally transformative to a country – as was seen in 19th century America with the ambitious railroad developments by the now-famous JP Morgan, Vanderbilt, Stanford, Huntington and others. Rail really could be a game changer for Oman and the wider GCC.

Public and Cultural Buildings



Effective infrastructure is important for a country's productivity and competitiveness. Those in turn attract investment and lead to increased trade. They also create new markets and new jobs. Oman needs to constantly reinforce the message that it is open for business and can provide an attractive environment for investment and trade. Securing more foreign direct investment, in a relatively crowded market, will be important for Oman to maintain infrastructure development at a time when it can place less reliance on oil revenues.

Oman has scored well in key indicators in the most recent World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Index. Overall it is placed at number 47 out of 140 countries (in the 2017 index it was placed at number 61). For infrastructure generally, Oman is placed at number 24 out of 140 countries. For the quality of its roads, it is at number 8 globally (Singapore is number 1). Regrettably, that

performance, and the efforts by the government to improve its integration and effectiveness, have not yet had a positive effect on Oman's credit ratings.

Oman has an impressive record on infrastructure development. Crucially, it has approached it with careful thought and has achieved steady progress. It has adopted solutions that work for Oman. What does the future hold? The institutions of government need to continue to be more joined-up, dynamic and open, creating the most attractive place for inward investment in the GCC. It must in doing so avoid the easy trap of institutional congestion.

There should be more focus on investment in social infrastructure – housing, health facilities, schools and colleges. There should be continued efforts to capitalise on Duqm and other ports, offering logistics solutions to access the GCC and beyond. There should be more

focus on renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Finally, as we have discovered in the UK, there should be more attention paid to regional infrastructure, ensuring that regional and rural communities feel connected and share in opportunities for economic development. In Oman, that is best done in the short term by increasing tourism and cultural facilities and improving transport networks throughout the rural communities.

Maintaining Oman's record on infrastructure development, helping to reshape Oman's economy, will require ambitious and dynamic support from government, innovation, true partnership between the public and private sectors and attracting more foreign direct investment. In meeting those challenges there is lots of support and encouragement we in the UK can offer our friends in Oman. ■

THE GULF RESEARCH MEETING AT CAMBRIDGE

FROM OSKAR ZIEMELIS, DIRECTOR OF COOPERATION AT THE GULF RESEARCH CENTRE



2019 Gulf Research Meeting participants.

At a time when the Gulf region not only continues to gain in strategic relevance and importance but is also subject to wide-ranging transitions, it is more urgent than ever to expand knowledge about this critical part of the world and to become more familiar with the issues defining its overall development.

Of equal importance is the promotion of scholarly and balanced research about the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council, their neighbours that constitute the wider Gulf region, and their relations with one another as well as with the wider external environment.

To enhance knowledge and research, the Gulf Research Centre Cambridge has established the annual Gulf Research Meeting (GRM) with the clear objective of providing an academic environment to



A Peace Process for the Gulf – workshop participants.

foster Gulf studies and encourage scholarly and academic exchange among those researching the developments defining the Gulf region and its constituent societies.

Set within the historic outlines of the University of Cambridge, the GRM highlights issues of importance to the region and provides a basis for engaging in academic and empirical research in the fields of international relations, economics, energy, security and the wider social sciences. Through parallel workshops dedicated to specific topics, the GRM addresses existing shortcomings, provides insightful information about the region, and promotes mutual understanding between the Gulf region and the rest of the world.

Emphasis is placed on encouraging young scholars, in particular from the GCC countries – including those studying abroad – to engage and take part in research collaboration. It is further the intention that the GRM workshops promote various research efforts among different institutions from within the Gulf and across the globe to heighten awareness of Gulf-specific issues. Here, the partnership between the Gulf Research Centre and the University of Cambridge and the strong commitment by the university to foster such cooperation is one specific example that has already begun to produce results.

The tenth annual GRM took place at the University of Cambridge on 15-18 July 2019 and consisted of fourteen research workshops. Of primary importance was the workshop entitled “A Peace Process for the Gulf: International Initiatives and Gulf Conflict Resolution”. This workshop was co-directed by Prof. Tim Niblock (University of Exeter), Amb. Talmiz Ahmad (former Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE), and Prof. Degang Sun (Shanghai International Studies University). It brought together 22 Gulf scholars from across the globe to address the pursuit of stability and peace in the deeply divided landscape of the Gulf region.

The workshop reflected a wide range of opinions and perspectives. Most of the main geographical areas whose interests are significantly affected by security issues and conflict resolution in the Gulf were represented and the relevant perspectives discussed. This included Saudi Arabia and Iran – here, it was clear that confidence building and the promotion of dialogue to address matters of mutual concern is the key to regional stability and peace. The perspectives of China and Russia on

conflict resolution and peace initiatives in the Gulf area were also presented and analysed. The role of Turkey in the security dynamics of the Gulf region was addressed, as were India’s and Pakistan’s peace initiatives.

In addition to specific peace initiatives, the workshop also looked at conflict resolution theory and its application to the Gulf region. This included analysis of logistical connectivity and energy sharing as a means of promoting peace, as well as cooperative security arrangements as a means and outcome of conflict resolution. Issues capable of aggravating regional divisions in the Gulf region and which require resolution within any peace initiative were also discussed. These included: security fears, external interests, energy interests, minority groupings with cross-national links, radical movements, and religious/sectarian differences.

The Gulf Research Centre Cambridge expresses its sincere thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society for its support of the 2019 Gulf Research Meeting and specifically of the workshop entitled “A Peace Process for the Gulf: International Initiatives and Gulf Conflict Resolution”. ■

Details of the Gulf Research Meetings from 2010 to 2019
can be found at www.gulfresearchmeeting.net

PANEL DISCUSSION

15 NOVEMBER 2018

OMAN AND ITS NEIGHBOURS

ARTICLE BY RICHARD MUIR

There was a full house at the Society's November meeting for an update on the January discussion (featured in the last edition of the Review) about Oman's relations with its neighbours.



The four November panellists, Julie Scott from the FCO, and three Society members – Jeremy Jones, Abdulla Baabood and Noel Brehony, assessed recent developments and the light these cast on the Sultanate's approach to foreign policy. The panel, chaired by Richard Muir, particularly noted the recent joint military exercise (Saif Sareea 3) and Israeli Prime Minister

Netanyahu's unexpected October visit to Muscat; they also considered current Omani relations with Iran and the outlook for the GCC as Saudi Arabia continued to blockade Qatar while a summit was planned for December. The panel went on to cover implications for Oman of the war in Yemen, then at a crucial point, as the Saudi/UAE led coalition moved on

Hodeida in the face of growing international criticism amplified by outrage at the recent killing of the Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

The panellists demonstrated that in an increasingly tense and turbulent region, Oman still contrived to balance its foreign policy. The Sultanate had succeeded in maintaining working relationships with all its GCC partners, as well as with Iran. It had recently enhanced strategic ties to the UK and was managing to preserve those with the US under the Trump administration. Oman had avoided being drawn into the Yemen conflict while playing a valuable humanitarian role, acting as a link to parties on both sides. But the challenges were increasingly complex; the wise leadership of HM the Sultan remained vital to the success of a consistent and measured policy.

In conclusion, the panel noted the deepening partnership between the UK and Oman as the Sultanate began to implement Vision 2040 and the UK moved towards Brexit. ■



5G NATIONAL WORKING GROUP VISIT TO UK

Dr Hamad Al Rawahi, President of the Telecoms Regulatory Authority (TRA), and the full Omani National Working Group for 5G technology held a working day at Sackville Street in January.

The group was led by the CEO and senior executives of Ooredoo, one of Oman’s mobile phone operators, and included four further representatives of the TRA, the CEO of Oman Broadband Company, members from the Ministries of Transport & Comms, Regional Municipalities, Housing, Environment, and their Municipalities.

Richard Muir welcomed the Omani delegation to Sackville Street and gave an overview of the work of the Society, emphasising the strength and depth of the bilateral relationship before handing over to representatives of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for a series of presentations detailing the ways that 5G rollout is being managed in the UK from a regulatory perspective, and the process that permits mobile operators to use existing infrastructure (such as lamp posts, advertising boards) to deploy a 5G network.

John McKeown hosted the delegation to lunch and further discussions on the Society and its roles in enhancing British-Omani affairs, and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles gave a summary to the group of the activities of the Oman British Business Council.

The objective of the visit was to learn from the UK’s experience in relation to preparations and trials for 5G. It also included meetings with OfCom; the 5G Innovation Centre based in Guildford; and a trial site for 5G technologies in Bristol. Further events to develop collaboration in the telecoms sector between the UK and Oman included meeting during the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona; a 5G Congress the TRA hosted in Muscat before Ramadan; and a Ministry of Transport & Communications workshop on telecommunications due to be held in Q3 2019. ■



OBBC AND OMAN'S VISION 2040

ARTICLE BY MATT FOSTER

The Oman British Business Council is now in its second year and, following the successful tourism and logistics focussed business event in 2018, held its second annual business gathering on 15 July 2019.

The focus for the 2019 event was "Vision 2040 and Oman's Changing Economy", and particularly how the UK – private and public sector – could work together to support Oman in achieving the aims set out in Vision 2040. Fittingly, the event was held in the historical surroundings of the Locarno Suite in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on King Charles Street in London.

Vision 2040 is the latest economic vision for Oman, following on from Vision 2020. It is underpinned by five-

Three key themes have been adopted:

1. **People and Society**
 - a. Enhancing Family and Community Health and Well-being
 - b. Upholding the Omani identity and heritage
 - c. Developing the National Technical and Entrepreneurial Capabilities
2. **Economy and Development**
 - a. Creating Wealth through Economic Diversification and Private Sector Partnership
 - b. Ensuring Balanced Governorates Development
 - c. Preserving Environmental Sustainability
 - d. Building World-Class Infrastructure and Liveable Cities
3. **Governance and Institutional Performance**
 - a. Improving Governance Effectiveness and the Rule of Law



HE Talal Al-Rahbi speaking at the business event.



Left to right: Mr Ollie Blake, Sheikh Ma'an Al Rawahi, HH Sayyid Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, and Mr Martyn Bishop.

year economic plans. His Majesty, via Royal Decree, has stipulated that Vision 2040 “be thoroughly developed and precisely formulated in the light of wide community consensus and participation of the different social groups, so that the vision is fully integrated into the economic and social realities and objectively orientated towards the future foresight, as a key guide and reference for planning in the next two decades.”

The event began with welcoming addresses from the HE Maqbool Sultan and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the Chairs of the Omani British Friendship Association and the Omani British Business Council respectively, and also (by video) from Dr Andrew Murrison MP, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa in the FCO.

The two Governments then provided a view of pan-Governmental efforts in support of Vision 2040, with presentations from: HE Talal Al-Rahbi, Deputy Secretary General of the Supreme Council for Economic Planning; Helen Winterton, Head of the Middle East Department in the FCO; and, George Hollingberry MP, Minister of State for Trade Policy in the Department of International Trade.

The stage was then passed to delegates

from Oman to provide the audience with perspectives from the Sultanate. Four Omani business leaders joined HE Talal for a session chaired by Ollie Blake. Quais Al-Zakwani, Executive Director of the Office of Electricity Regulation, provided an overview of recent developments and future plans in the renewable energy sector in Oman. Muneer Al-Muneeri, CEO of Rakisa – Oman’s Infrastructure Fund, spoke about Oman’s privatisation drive. Ahmed Al-Jadhani, CEO Downstream at

Oman Oil, gave an insight into downstream oil developments. Ollie then moderated a series of questions from the audience and invited Andrew Long, CEO of HSBC Oman, to provide a view from a British multinational operating in Oman.

An insightful, energising and exciting event was brought to a close and many of those attending headed to the Society’s premises in Sackville Street for the Annual Reception in the presence of HRH The Duke of York and HH Sayyid Haitham. ■



The Duke of York and Sayyid Haitham.

GHAZEER – KHAZZAN PHASE 2

Dave Campbell, who was Vice-President Operations during the start-up of BP's Khazzan field – which we reported on in last year's Review – visited the Society to give an update on BP's plans and progress.

BP has been involved in oil and gas production in Oman for many decades, from an early focus on oil and then gas exploration to downstream areas including lubricants, fuel bunkering, Purified Terephthalic Acid (PTA) licence technology, as well as technical services related to the aviation sector.

The agreement to produce natural gas from the Block 61 concession area in central Oman, a Joint Venture with BP as major partner and including Oman Oil

Company E&P (30%) and PC Oman, a wholly owned subsidiary of Petronas (10%), started the Khazzan project, one of the biggest tight gas projects in the Middle East and BP's largest-ever investment in Oman.

It is one of BP's most technically challenging and significant projects globally. BP was lead operator due to its expertise in tight gas development, pioneered from years of work in other operations around the world. Gas was

Mr Campbell with Society trustee Ollie Blake in animated conversation after the well-attended presentation at Sackville Street.

known to exist in the Khazzan field beneath Block 61, but expert help was required to map it, then access it from where it was tightly held in extremely hard, dense rocks (hence ‘tight gas’).

Today, Khazzan’s potential is finally being realised, with gas flowing from Khazzan since September 2017. A huge infrastructure project was undertaken to develop the field in just four years. In a harsh desert environment, BP, together with its contractor partners, built the equivalent of a small town from nothing, including an entire infrastructure of roads, utilities and accommodation even as drilling was beginning; over 400km of pipeline; and the drilling of 50 wells by mid-2017.

This marked the end of the first phase project and, to the credit of all parties involved, was delivered ahead of schedule and below budget. Khazzan now has 100 wells drilled and the field is producing around a billion cubic feet of gas and 30,000 barrels of condensate a day. BP Oman has continued to draw on BP’s pioneering experience, further advancing existing technology and processes, resulting in the organisation setting the national record drilling time and completing some of the fastest-paced and largest fracturing operations ever recorded in the region.

LOOKING AHEAD

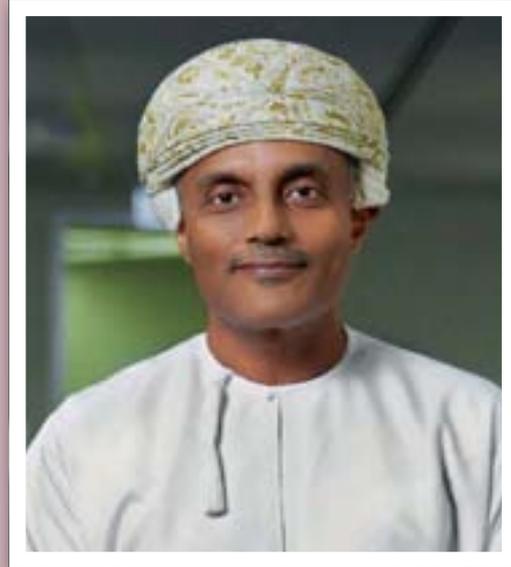
So, what does the future hold for BP in Oman? In April 2018, the second phase of Khazzan field development, Ghazeer, was sanctioned.

Development work is well underway with around 100 wells due to be drilled over the project lifetime to access it. The Ghazeer project is expected to come onstream in 2021 and deliver an additional 0.5 billion cubic feet and over 15,000 barrels of condensate per day.

Around 5,000 people are currently employed by contractors on the Phase 2 development of the Ghazeer field, which is located south-west of Khazzan.

Looking further afield there are opportunities for more exploration and production: BP and ENI recently signed a Heads of Agreement with the Government of Oman to access Block 77. This block, with a total area of almost 3,100km², is located in central Oman, 30km east of Block 61.

BP is proud to support the sustainable development of Omani society, through the current and future production and by contributing to the wider development of Oman with its In-Country Value programme. A broad range of Omani companies supports BP Oman’s business, providing specialist skills and knowledge. The total spend from across the businesses with the Omani supply chain is significant: last year over 43% by value of contracts awarded went to Omani companies. Some 89% of current awarded contracts are with Omani registered companies. BP’s businesses across the country also directly employ over 600 people. ■



Yousef al Ojaili – current head of BP in Oman.

THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The Anglo-Omani Society Annual Luncheon will be held
on **FRIDAY, 4th OCTOBER, 2019** – 12.30 for 1pm
at the **Royal Air Force Club**
£50 including drinks

Advance booking necessary. Maximum attendance 120.

OLD MUSCAT

Dhows off Muscat.

By Richard Merry,
who served in the
Royal Oman Police in
the 1980s, and was a
regular member of the
Muscat rugby team
and of the Muscat
Hash House Harriers.

My late father David Merry attended The Nautical College, Pangbourne, during and immediately after the war. He sailed from Surrey Quays, London, in July 1949 on the maiden voyage of the newly commissioned *SS Edward Wilshaw*, a telephone cable laying and repair vessel named after the Cable and Wireless company chairman. He was an apprentice navigating officer.

They sailed round Gibraltar into the Mediterranean, through the Suez Canal, Red Sea, Aden and took up station at

Mombasa. For the next two years they criss-crossed the Indian Ocean, laying and repairing telephone cables, whilst he learnt the navigational ropes.

One of their regular routes was to sail from Aden along the coast to Muscat and on to Karachi. While anchored off the coast of Aden near Mukalah, he saw a signal being flashed from the shore. He sent a boat out and it returned with a man in full colonial regalia complete with solar topee. He said in halting English his runners had



Richard Merry in the Muscat team in the Dubai Sevens (back row second on the right). Jonathan Knocker, son of our Vice-President Nigel, is on the front row (left). Chris Morton, who ran Muscat RFC, and who sadly died last year, is second on the left in the back row.



David Merry off Steamer Point, Aden.

My father said as their time ashore was limited off Muscat, they normally received visitors aboard instead. A regular was the then Sultan, Said Bin Taimur, who enjoyed mess life and cards.

My father went home on leave in July 1951, taking a Union Castle ship from Mombasa via the Cape. Leave started the day you docked back in England. After three months he set off back for Mombasa, but just passed Beira they had to stop for a couple of days, and he missed the Wilshaw sailing from Mombasa. He set off on a 10 week Indian Ocean odyssey, trying to catch up with his ship, finally doing so in Ceylon in early February 1952, much to his fellow apprentice's relief, as he'd been unable to take leave until my father returned.

Later in 1952 things changed with Airworks introducing regular flights on a DC3 from Nairobi, stopping each night, Nairobi to Juba, Wadi Halfa, El Adam, Marseille and then a train home. He said it was a lot quicker, but wasn't quite the same experience as the Union Castle trips home and back. ■

notified him of the ship and he'd followed them for a couple of days. He apologised for his English as he'd neither seen or spoken to an Englishman for over a year. He was a district officer working on a water project up on the jebel. They updated him on the world outside and after two days they sent him back ashore, with promises to look him up next time they were passing.

Oman was then a closed kingdom with little contact with the outside world and for the most part inaccessible except by sea. In most ports, an immigration officer would board ship, check the crew's paperwork and then the crew was free to go ashore. This did not apply in Oman, where each trip ashore had to be officially sanctioned beforehand. Trips ashore were for limited periods, usually for official business only and always under escort. I have a few pictures of Muttrah and what looks like the road to Nizwa, so my father must have made it ashore sometimes.

My father said as their time ashore was limited off Muscat, they normally received visitors aboard instead. A regular was the then Sultan, Said Bin Taimur, who enjoyed mess life and cards.



Said Bin Taimur leaving SS Edward Wilshaw.

OMANI BRITISH LAWYERS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL LONDON RECEPTION

Promoting cooperation between legal professionals in the UK and Sultanate, The Omani British Lawyers Association (OBLA) held its Annual London Reception at the Anglo-Omani Society's Sackville Street premises on 14 March 2019.



Sir Alan Duncan and Paul Sheridan during the address to Omani and British lawyers.



Sir Alan exchanging views with the Omani Ambassador, Abdulaziz al Hinai. Others in the picture (left to right): Stuart Laing our Society chairman; Ali Nassir Saif Al-Bualy (former Attorney General of the Sultanate); Rashid Hamed al Junaibi (Embassy) and Nigel Harrison.

The Society was honoured to be joined by His Excellency Abdulaziz Al Hinai, Omani Ambassador to the UK, and the Rt. Hon Sir Alan Duncan, MP. The event also drew guests from leading UK and Omani Law firms, academics and Omani law students studying at prestigious UK universities.

In his address, Sir Alan Duncan praised the long standing and multifaceted relationship between the UK and Oman, reiterating the importance of looking beyond defence and continuing to strengthen commercial, educational and cultural ties between the two countries. Working together to facilitate the rule of law remains a priority for British foreign policy.

Sir Alan also remarked on the value of British educational institutions on building relationships, with reference to the high number of graduates from UK universities in high level roles in Oman.

Chairman of OBLA, Paul Sheridan, said "The reception epitomised what OBLA is all about – bringing together Omani lawyers and British lawyers so we can all get to know, and learn from, each other. It was particularly special that Sir Alan Duncan attended and spoke on an evening of high drama down the road in Parliament (Brexit!). We have more events in our calendar for the remainder of this year and we shall work hard to ensure that they will be as enjoyable as this one."

The event provided an opportunity for networking, and the sharing of experiences. ■

LONDON ORGAN RECITAL

ARTICLE BY IAN HOCKLEY



Ian Hockley, organist at the Royal Opera House in Muscat, gave a wonderful organ recital at St Andrew Holborn as part of the Society's London Programme. The selection of music gave a broad overview of the great riches of the organ repertoire, from Henry Purcell in the 17th Century to Naji Hakim, a contemporary composer, and was acclaimed by more than 120 members of the Society who were present.

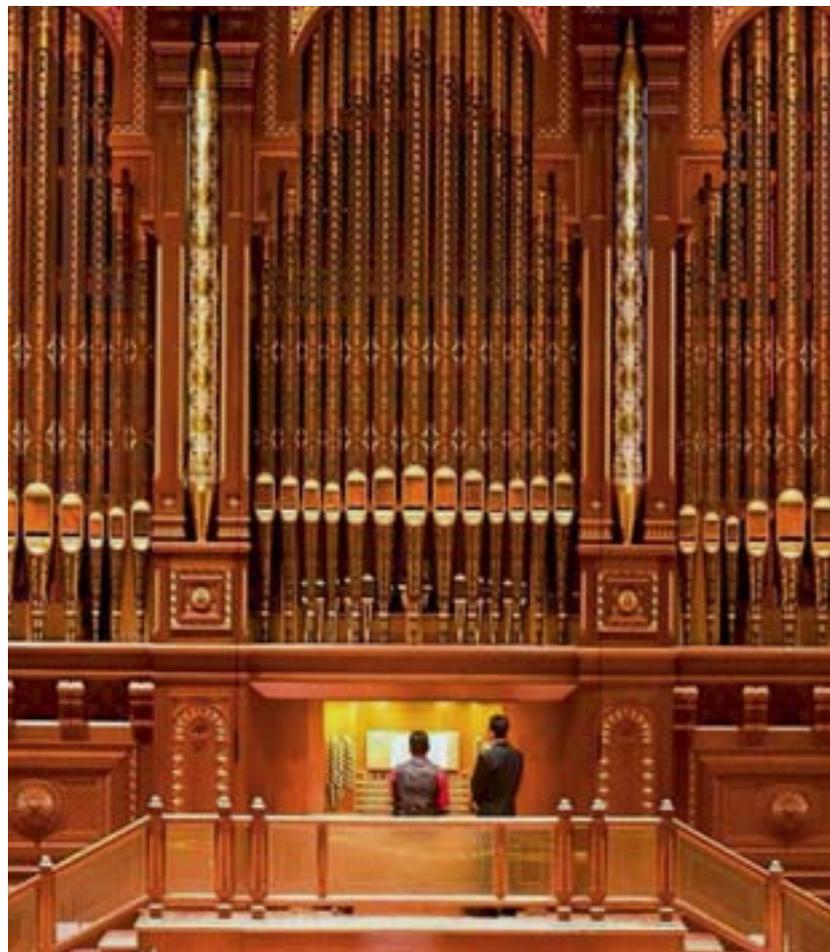
Ian took up his position with the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra in 2000 and oversaw the design and installation of the massive 70 stop pipe organ within the new Royal Opera House in Muscat, constructed by the German organ builder Philipp Klais. He opened this instrument in December 2012 in a shared recital with Jean Guillou, Isabelle Demers and Zuzana Ferenčiková.

He began studying piano aged six, and graduated to the pipe organ when he was 14. He studied at the University of Birmingham and the Birmingham Conservatoire. His organ teachers were David Saint and Annette Goerke. In 1989 he won the Hurford / Forsyth travelling scholarship awarded by the Royal College

of Organists for study in Europe. Ian also holds diplomas from Trinity College of Music and The Royal College of Organists.

Ian has always combined playing with writing and teaching and has worked in schools in England, where he was a music master at Ampleforth College, and in Australia, where he was Organist and Master of Chapel Music at Guildford Grammar School, Perth, for three years.

He is interested in most aspects of keyboard music but the classical organ is his first love and his particular métier lies in the performance of music by Bach, French classical and romantic composers and modern French contemporary music. He has recently recorded a new CD of





music of organ music by Bach, Buxtehude, Vivaldi, Schumann and Jean Guillou.

THE PROGRAMME

The recital opened with Scherzo Symphonique, by the French composer Felix Guilmant, a rambunctious concert piece and appropriate curtain raiser.

J S Bach wrote the greatest and most substantial body of organ music of any composer, and was represented by two contrasting works: Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, surely the most famous item in the organ repertoire, dramatic and exhilarating; Watchet auf! ruft uns die stimme, perhaps better known in English as 'Sleepers Wake', a gently lilting meditation on the chorale melody for Advent.

Felix Mendelssohn led the revival of Bach's music in the early 19th Century after it had fallen into decline following Bach's death, and his music represents a synthesis of baroque and romantic styles. Ian chose Mendelssohn's Sonata 3 in A major, which started life as a march, but has an exciting freely contrapuntal middle section and a gentle conclusion in 'Song without Words'.

The next three pieces in the programme all had London connections. John Stanley, who was blind from the age of two, was appointed organist at St Andrew Holborn in 1740 when he was only 14, later became organist at the Temple Church, and wrote a substantial amount of organ music of high quality: his Voluntary 8 in D minor was an ideal choice for the delicate sounds of the

Mander organ. Henry Purcell, organist at Westminster Abbey in the late 17th Century and arguably the greatest composer to come from England, was represented by the Trumpet Tune, a perennial favourite, and a gentle Almand. The London trilogy concluded with the Hornpipe taken from Handel's Water Music. This was written originally for orchestra, but the version played by Ian was by Jean Guillou who, as noted above, featured at the opening of the organ at the Royal Opera House in Muscat.

Another Muscat connection came with the next piece, Sindbad, the result of a visit in 2013 by the French-Lebanese organist Naji Hakim. He wrote: "This fantasia is inspired by the legend of Sindbad the Sailor. It uses free thematic material and three Omani popular songs: Al-Wailliah, Al-Madima and Al-Naham. They were suggested to me by Professor Dr Issam El-Makkah during my visit to Muscat... composed and developed in a rhapsodic frame with contrasting characters and registrations."

The concert ended with another 19th Century French piece, Widor's Toccata in F, an archetypal organ piece using all the resources of the instrument and which never fails to thrill.

The Chairman of Society Trustees, Stuart Laing, thanked Ian at the conclusion for a splendid evening.

THE VENUE

St Andrew Holborn is a well known and respected venue for choral and other recitals, as well as its daily services and

concerts. It has been a site of worship for over 1000 years. A wooden church was built there in the 10th Century, but replaced by a stone building in subsequent years, and both extended and rebuilt several times, most notably in the late 17th Century by Sir Christopher Wren – it was the biggest of the 52 parish churches built by him after the Great Fire of London.

Like many London churches, St Andrew Holborn was badly damaged during the Second World War, when it was bombed and gutted, with only the exterior walls and tower remaining. The task of rebuilding, completed in 1961, was on the whole faithful to Wren's design, though some 19th Century alterations did remain. It operates as a non-parochial Guild Church, dedicated to the people working nearby.

The organ is a 20th Century instrument in an 18th Century casing, built by Mander Organs in 1989 and mounted in the West gallery – which meant that the audience faced away from the organist: this was overcome by two large frontal screen displays showing his performance. The key action of the organ is entirely of wood, but incorporates the benefits of modern mechanical action including an 'Undulent' stop which draws the Swell Open Diapason on a reduced and finely adjustable supply of wind. The upper part of the organ casing incorporates original casework from a 1750 organ built for the Foundling Hospital chapel in Bloomsbury to a design by Handel.

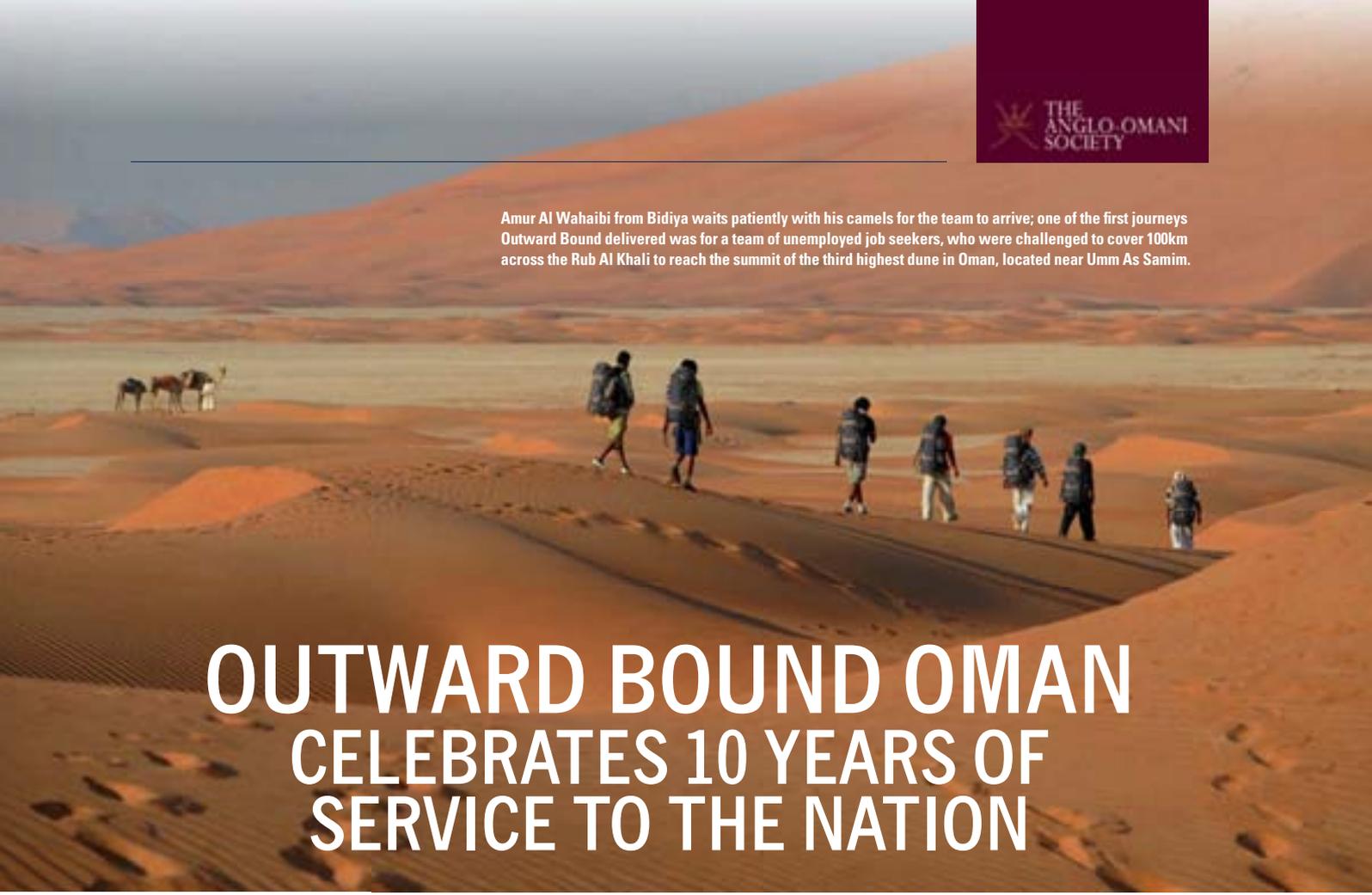
THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT

The project to build the Royal Opera House began in 2001 under the instruction of HM Sultan Qaboos, who is well known to be a classical music aficionado.

Since its opening in 2011, it has hosted an impressive array of world renowned performers including Andrea Bocelli, Anna Netrebko, Renee Fleming and Yo Yo Ma, as well as the London Philharmonic Orchestra and New York's Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra.

The Royal Opera House programme runs from September to May and typically presents six operas each season, in addition to at least two ballets and performances of contemporary dances and musicals. ■

Amur Al Wahaibi from Bidiya waits patiently with his camels for the team to arrive; one of the first journeys Outward Bound delivered was for a team of unemployed job seekers, who were challenged to cover 100km across the Rub Al Khali to reach the summit of the third highest dune in Oman, located near Umm As Samim.



OUTWARD BOUND OMAN CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE NATION

Mark Evans, founder and executive director of Outward Bound Oman, has been involved in the field of outdoor education for 40 years. He is widely known and celebrated for his achievements, including the 1,700km crossing of the Empty Quarter on foot and by camel from Salalah to Doha in 2016. He gave an inspiring address to the Society, which he entitled...



Mark Evans, Executive Director of Outward Bound Oman, photographed whilst training for the 2016, 49 day crossing of the Rub Al Khali, from Salalah to Doha.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE DESERT – TALES FROM THE OLDEST SEAT OF LEARNING ON EARTH

Outward Bound Oman was formally launched in Muscat – the first Outward Bound school in any Arabic speaking nation – on 11 May 11 2009, in the presence of His Excellency Yahya Al Sulaimi, the Minister for Education. The venue for the event was carefully chosen; it was not held in a hotel, but in a government institution (the lecture theatre of the Law College in Al Wattayah), to convey the message that Outward Bound was an initiative for grassroots, every-day Oman, from which everyone, and the nation, could benefit.

Seed funded by the Founding Partners of Dentons, Shell and Sheikh Suhail Bahwan, Outward Bound Oman was launched with quiet optimism; Outward Bound had been running successfully in other countries for 68 years, and was

known to have a profound and long-lasting impact on those who took part, but would it work in Oman? Ten years on, thanks to the support and belief of countless organisations and individuals, the answer is a resounding ‘yes’.

In those ten years, Outward Bound has delivered 752 powerful training courses in the mountains or deserts of Oman, to 13,728 people. They have delivered life changing experiences for young people from government schools and colleges in every governorate, and worked with active job seekers, young entrepreneurs, young people recovering from drug related issues, the blind, the deaf, orphans and the emerging talent of many of the leading companies and government institutions in Oman.

During that time, Outward Bound has grown from a staff of one to a team of 32 full time employees, and today is proudly 85 per cent Omani staffed, creating more jobs for talented young Omanis year on year. The harsh reality of the job market in Oman in 2019 is that a recent advert for a trainee instructor, circulated via social media, saw more than 450 CVs pour into the Outward Bound office, a far cry from when we started in 2009, when no one had heard of the organisation, or really understood what we did.

Outward Bound Oman now operates under Ministerial Decree, under the guidance of The Ministry of Social Development. Each year, thanks to the support of The Anglo-Omani Society, new Omani instructors, once they have completed their 12 months basic training, travel to the UK for an immersive two weeks observing best practice at an Outward Bound school in the UK, which is where the organisation was born in 1941. Having seen Outward Bound being delivered in a very different environment, they return to Oman inspired, and with fresh ideas to put into practice out in the desert, or up on the Jebel.

Courses last for four days, in the winter months taking place in the desert, and in the hotter summer months taking place at 8000ft on Jebel Akhdhar. For many young people it is their first time away from home, and the first time they have been exposed to outdoor learning. As a result, the impact is significant.

With 50,000 young people entering the job market each year, employment is a national priority for Oman, but hand in hand with job creation there needs to be a parallel focus on employability, which is where Outward Bound comes in. Our courses are designed to give the young, emerging talent of the nation the toolkit to enter the world of work successfully, both in terms of soft skills and in terms of behaviours and ethics. Recent surveys of leading employers in Oman reveal that young people lack exposure to essential soft skills such as creative thinking, problem solving, working with others, dealing with failure and effective time management.

Outward Bound is seen as a bridge to connect the world of education to the world



Jawaher Al Ghafri, one of Outward Bound Oman's talented female instructors, teaches the finer arts of GPS navigation on Jebel Akhdhar.

of employment, so creating a pool of talent with the basic skills in place that are needed by employers. The survey also revealed an expectation gap, where young people have an unrealistic vision of their likely career path; issues such as this, and many others are discussed on our courses.

The vast majority of courses are targeted at Omani youth. Our Skills for Life courses target 14-16 year old students in government schools, and will see a group of 18 young people nominated by their school, selected against a range of criteria, ranging from those lacking self-confidence to those who are already demonstrating leadership potential, to those who are volunteering in the community, to those who have behavioural difficulties. Our Next Generation courses target young people who are aged between 17-25 years old, who are just about to enter the job market. These courses are much more focused on employability and work ethics, and are delivered for unemployed job seekers registered with the Ministry of Manpower, and to young people about to leave education.

Many of these courses are supported by the private sector in Oman, enabling young people to take part irrespective of their financial situation. Companies like Babcock, BP, BAE Systems and HSBC all directly fund courses for young people through their corporate social responsibility programmes, and when possible all send along Omani employee/corporate mentors to join the courses. These mentors add real value to the

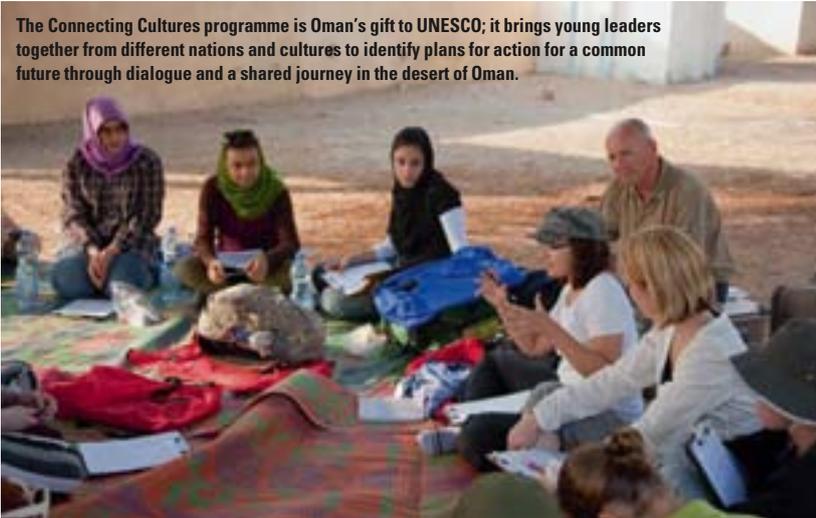
discussion under the stars through being able to share their own career paths, and bring to life real examples of why things like time management and personal responsibility are so important, and what happens if you get it wrong...

Leading local private schools, such as The Sultan's School and Al Sahwa, send their students to Outward Bound, sometimes as part of the Duke of Edinburgh/International Award, and these schools are supplemented by some of the leading international schools around the gulf region, such as St Christopher's in Bahrain, and The British International School in Riyadh.

Beyond schools and youth, an increasing sector of work for Outward Bound is the emerging talent from within leading corporate and government entities, such as Omantel, State Audit, PDO, HSBC and others. Away from the distraction of mobile phones and scheduled meetings, a four-day course provides an ideal platform for reflection, action planning and awareness of self, of opportunity and of future challenges; leading organisations within the region, such as BAPCO in Bahrain, choose to send their graduate apprentices to Oman as part of their professional development.

Perhaps the jewel in the crown of the courses delivered by Outward Bound are the three courses that take place each winter as Oman's gift to UNESCO. The Connecting Cultures programme embodies the core philosophy that underpins Oman's foreign policy – namely that dialogue and

The Connecting Cultures programme is Oman's gift to UNESCO; it brings young leaders together from different nations and cultures to identify plans for action for a common future through dialogue and a shared journey in the desert of Oman.



tolerance are the solutions to misunderstanding, that peace and stability are essential pre-requisites to prosperity, and that sound, informed leadership is

essential to achieve peace and stability. The five-day course sees 18 highly motivated young future leaders from 18 nations build on this platform, seeking to



TE Lawrence described this scene as The University of the Desert; for thousands of years, the hearth has been the place where news is exchanged, disputes settled and stories told, enabling even the most humble to develop into master orators.

identify the causes of and solutions to the polarisation of cultures, and crucially identify what they can do as individuals to step forward and make a real difference to society in their respective countries.

The desert of Oman is the perfect place to deliver such a course. There are no doors to hide behind, and no distractions; people walk and talk, building on the old Arab saying *that you only really get to know someone when you have journeyed with them*, and stereotypes are broken down as participants quickly recognise that our main aspirations in life are essentially the same, whether you come from Muscat, London, Tehran or New York.

If the past 10 years have been a great success story for Outward Bound Oman, the next 10 have the potential to be equally so as Outward Bound strives to make the government's Vision 2040 a reality. Thanks to the generous support of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, by November 2020, the 50th National Day, Outward Bound Oman will have three international standard training centres open – one in the Sharqiya Sands, one in Muscat, and a flagship centre on Jebel Akdhar, enabling much greater numbers of people to benefit in the future years.

When His Majesty came to the throne in 1970, he identified education as the key to the future of the nation and encouraged it to grow, *'even if under the shade of a tree'*. Those trees, be they in the desert or high on the Jebel, are the shaded classrooms of Outward Bound, and still have an important role to play in nurturing the character of the nation as it evolves. ■



An essential part of any Outward Bound course is finding the time for reflection, to look back over the past few days, and to look ahead and formulate a plan of action to make a difference.

Outward Bound Oman
(www.outwardboundoman.com)



ANNUAL SOCIETY LUNCH

The annual Society lunch at the Royal Air Force Club in Piccadilly again included numerous young members as well as those of more senior age and rank.

The principal guests were HE Dr Abdulmunim Al-Hasani, Oman Minister of Information, and Alistair Burt, Minister from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office responsible for international development. Both spoke warmly of the relations between the United Kingdom and the Sultanate.



Top: Minister Burt speaking to Lis Kendall with Stuart Laing. Seated are Hamad Sayyar and Mohammed Al-Busaidi.

Above: Stuart Laing and Dr Abdulmunim Al-Hasani in conversation with the Omani Ambassador, HE Sheikh Abdulaziz Al-Hinai and HE Sulaiman Hamid Almazroui (UAE Ambassador).

Right: Minister Alistair Burt addressing the gathering.

Below: The Oman Embassy Information Attaché, Abdullah Al-Abri, with Baroness Simone Finn and Commodore Said Bin Ali Al Maqbali.

Bottom right: HE Abdulmunim Al-Hasani.



WOMEN'S VOICES – THE SOCIETY'S PROGRAMME FOR NEXT YEAR

By Louise Hosking, the trustee responsible for arranging the lectures and presentations which take place each month – note that some of them this year will be lunchtime sessions.



If the 2019/20 lecture programme has a fresh look about it this freshness is entirely intentional since over the coming year we will be giving precedence to women's voices. Almost all the speakers will be women – Omani and non-Omani, academics and activists, historians and artists – women who are engaged in very different aspects of life in the Sultanate. We hope their lectures will provide perspectives and insights into Oman that we might not have provided in the past.

The first speaker, Maimuna Al-Sulaimani, is a lawyer in Oman's Supreme Court and a member of the Omani Human Rights Commission with a background in the application of corporate governance in the private sector. Drawing on her professional experience, she will examine how effective government plans to foster inclusion and diversity in the private sector have been in the practice. Recent decrees have provided a framework for change but how much of a culture shift has actually occurred?

In both October and April scientists whose work has been fostered by the Omani government's encouragement of women's education will present their work on the biology of the Sultanate. First Dr Halima Al Balushi, a young Omani expert on pathophysiology, will present her groundbreaking work in highlighting a sickle-cell genetic mutation in Oman, a mutation that has developed as a consequence of the relative isolation of the country's population. The second lecture in April on Omani flora will be given by Dr Shahina Ghazanfar, a botanist who was formerly a professor at Sultan Qaboos University and is now based at Kew.

Please note that Dr Halima's lecture, in common with Ali Alkathiri's in December and Helen Lackner's in March, will take place at 12.30 for 1.00pm rather than in the early evening. This change is partly in

response to requests from some members for lunchtime lectures. The new timing is an experiment so we would welcome your feedback on this new arrangement before the lecture programme for 2020/21 is finalised.

November's lecture will discuss the place of women in the Sultanate from an historical perspective. In her presentation Deena Al Asfoor, an advisor on health policy in the Omani Ministry of Health, will showcase the role of Omani women in social and political spheres, discussing the impact some key female figures have had on the politics and history of Oman. She will also seek to shed light on the current legal framework for women's rights comparing it with the reality of the women's lives, exploring the changing role of the Omani women and discussing the possible impact of modern laws on the future economy and social structure of Oman.

December's lecture has a connection to the Society's grants programme as the speaker, Ali Alkathiri who is Director of the Museum of the Frankincense Land in Salalah, recently took advantage of AOS support to attend a course at the British Museum. This seasonal lecture will trace Oman's traditional trade in frankincense from the Bronze Age onwards.

In January Clara Semple will be returning to speak about a theme we have touched on in the past: traditional Omani silver jewellery. On this occasion, however, our speaker will focus on a major component of the jewellery, the Maria Theresa *thaler*. The coin was so much more than simply a coin of trade. Much prized by women as a component in jewellery, it came to play a crucial part in the dowry payments during marriage and also as an amulet to protect the wearer from the evil eye. For nearly two hundred years this coin with its portrait of the voluptuous European queen circulated throughout Arabia and the Horn

of Africa – countries which at that time had no currency of their own.

Since the organ concert by Ian Hockley last December proved so popular we have this year included another arts event in our lecture programme. The February slot is given over to the Omani photographer, Eman Ali, whose work we have featured in an exhibition at Sackville Street in the past. In Eman's words her practice 'interlaces gender, religious and socio-political ideologies under the umbrella of sexuality' so she was very excited to be asked to contribute to a programme that concentrates on women's voices. She is currently working on a portrait project that focuses on the Jebali community in Salalah which will be the basis of her exhibition.

In March we will once again be looking at Oman in the context of its neighbours with Helen Lackner providing *A Few Observations on Omani-Yemeni Relations since the 1960s*. Helen has been involved with Yemen since 1973 and has a long history of working as a consultant in social aspects of development, with a particular focus on rural development. Her lecture will cover the many different stages of an often fraught relationship.

The last two lectures of this year's programme have complementary themes. In May the author, Jokha Alharthi, and her translator, Prof Marilyn Booth, will discuss the *Celestial Bodies* novel which won the International Booker prize earlier in this year. The book follows the lives of an influential rural family over three generations, focussing particularly on three sisters in the middle generation as they negotiate their paths between the expectations of tradition and the new opportunities and pressures they encounter. The Society is particularly proud to welcome Jokha and Marilyn since it provided a grant to translate *Celestial Bodies* from Arabic. In

June Jane Bickmore-Jaffer looks at the growth of literacy in isolated areas, taking as her theme the Let's Read scheme she has long worked on to promote literacy among children in rural Oman.

We look forward very much to welcoming as many members as possible to these talks and hope that you appreciate the innovative approach we have adopted in putting the programme together this year. As I am sure you will have observed, the success of individual lectures can be dependent on the questions posed by our engaged, informed membership, male and female alike. Please do come along and contribute to the debate. ■

We look forward very much to welcoming as many members as possible to these talks and hope that you appreciate the innovative approach we have adopted in putting the programme together this year.

SAVING THE PLANET

Our small contribution to saving the planet by dropping the use of single-use plastic last year for distribution of the Review makes us aware of continuing information on the problems.

The marine plastics research group at Plymouth Marine Laboratory has reported on scientific research on every dolphin, whale and seal washed up on Britain's shores, and also a report on similar research on sea turtles which died by stranding or being trapped in fishing nets off North Carolina, Northern Cyprus and Queensland, Australia. In every single case, in both studies, the animals were found to have ingested plastics. It seems that plastics are absolutely ubiquitous in the world's marine ecosystem, and they are not the only threat.

The Times of Oman reported that over 190 tonnes of waste, mainly old fishing gear and nets, ropes and fishing lines, were removed in a beach clean-up on Masirah Island organised by The Environment Society of Oman. "Abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear are globally known to be a major threat to marine species such as whales, dolphins and sea turtles, and through this programme we are attempting to work with the local fishermen to provide avenues for proper disposal of fishing gear, as well as cleaning up the sea turtle nesting beaches," said Antonia Vegh, Events and Volunteer Coordinator at the Environment Society. "We have been managing turtle conservation projects on Masirah Island for over a decade, and this clean-up is just one way for us to address the various threats that they face."

There are continuing similar reports, for example from the Oman Daily Observer in February: Muscat Municipality, PDO and Beah have launched the 'Better Than It Was' campaign to clean up Al Ghubrah beach. Officials from Muscat Municipality are taking part in a six-month campaign as well as representatives of the Majlis Ash'shura, local citizens, activists and local associations, covering all beaches of Muscat Governorate.



ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHEME – NINTH YEAR

BY ELISABETH KENDALL,
SOCIETY SCHEME SUPERVISOR



Last summer saw the successful completion of the Anglo-Omani's Arabic Language Scheme for the ninth consecutive year. Ten bright and enthusiastic British students of Arabic were selected from universities all around the UK to hone their Arabic skills – and soak up the unique beauty and hospitality of Oman – for seven weeks at Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic in Manah.

As ever, the students were thrilled with the experience of learning and living in Oman. My warmest thanks are due to the dedicated and welcoming staff of Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic, and also to the Diwan of the Royal

Court of Oman and the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs who continue to make this important scheme possible. Now it is my pleasure to hand over to some of the students to tell you about this formative experience...

FELICITY ROACH

University of Edinburgh

I will never forget that first drive from Muscat airport to Manah through the stunning mountains, palm trees and vast landscapes which characterise Oman. Manah was the perfect oasis of calm for our Arabic study: a small town enjoying a view of the mountains with friendly residents who regularly waved and greeted us as we passed.

We stayed in a lovely, newly-built residence with all required facilities, good food and, most importantly, friendly and accommodating staff who helped us feel at home. After class, we spent time playing table tennis with the other students, chatting to the residence supervisors in Arabic and drinking Omani coffee while completing our homework.

The teaching was excellent. I was glad that we had to sit placement tests, as we were then placed in stimulating classes matching our level. Our four hours of class a day involved exercises and activities covering aspects of the Arabic language ranging from grammar and analysing literature to creating environmental campaigns and writing formal letters. I particularly enjoyed learning to write short poems and stories, something I never got the opportunity to do at university. The teachers were approachable, created a comfortable atmosphere in class and were always ready to adopt suggestions. My Arabic certainly improved!

In the evenings we had sessions with Omani language partners to practise our Arabic conversation skills and learn phrases of Omani dialect. I had a lot of fun with my language partner whom I now call a friend, and we often ended up sharing a laugh while trying to explain cultural differences.

Weekends were never idle as the college organised wonderful excursions. One of my favourite memories was a trip to the Sharqiyya region. After an adventurous day driving around the desert in jeeps, we gathered in a big tent and danced and sang to a mixture of traditional Omani songs, Arabic pop songs and Western music late into the night. Next day we headed for the coast, where we had the incredible opportunity to witness giant sea turtles arrive on the beach and lay eggs on the sand before returning to the sea.

Everything was well-organised and designed to give us the best possible introduction to Omani life, culture and language. I feel incredibly grateful to have been given this opportunity.

AMELIA POWELL

University of Oxford

This summer spent at Sultan Qaboos College was a wonderful opportunity. It is rare to find a group of students so committed to improving their Arabic language skills, and even rarer to find a host organisation so welcoming and willing to help us learn. These weeks of intensive

language study will be immensely helpful for those of us going on to complete our degrees in the coming year but, even more than that, the cultural insight shared by teachers and language partners alike will have a lasting impact on our impressions of Oman, and of its special relationship with the UK.

On the academic side, I particularly enjoyed the week spent studying poetry, during which we learnt not only about poetic metre and some of the most well-known poets across the Arab world, but more specifically about the tradition of “vagabond” poetry in tribal Omani society. The combined study of formal Arabic with local knowledge and history proved a defining feature of the curriculum. We benefitted from a comprehensive cultural programme, including an introduction to calligraphy and regular exchange sessions with our local language partners.

As well as our classroom studies, the staff put in vast effort to ensure we experienced as much of the country’s beautiful nature and scenery as possible. Our weekend excursions were a welcome contrast to vocabulary cramming, and I was amazed by the varied landscapes. Our trips ranged from an evening sand-bashing in the desert, to a trek and swim in the Wadi Shab gorge, to the night spent watching turtle hatchlings at the Ras Al Jinz coastal reserve, and even a visit to Oman’s own Grand Canyon. On each excursion we were met with the same welcoming and accommodating attitude – Omanis are known for their hospitality, and this stereotype consistently proved true, whether by a neighbour in Manah giving us dates from his garden, or by our hosts at the College organising extra trips and excursions in their free time.

NIHAL VALJI, SOAS

SOAS

This rigorous course provided an excellent opportunity to enhance my Arabic language skills through an intensive, structured learning programme tailored to the needs of foreign students.

Outside the classroom, I had ample time to explore the beautiful sites and culture of Oman, an experience made more enjoyable by the warmth, hospitality, and



One of my favourite memories was a trip to the Sharqiyya region.

conversation of the local Omani population who were happy to welcome us into their homes and show us around. From the day we arrived, we were treated to a traditional Omani welcome of warm smiles, many cups of *qahwa* and delicious Omani *halwa*.

Not only were the Arabic classes engaging, interactive and exceptionally well-taught, but also an array of external activities was arranged to facilitate a first-hand experience of Omani life and culture, including visits to the local souk and several trips around Oman.

Weekend excursions enabling us to appreciate both Oman's unique natural and cultural landscape included a visit to the Sharqiyya desert where we spent the day riding the sand dunes in the vast and beautiful Wahiba sands, and the night relaxing under the stars, listening to traditional Omani music and feasting on Omani cuisine. Whether it was swimming in the caves of the picturesque Wadi Shab, gazing down at the valleys of al-Jabal al-Akhdar, camel-riding in the Sharqiyya desert or witnessing baby turtles hatch on the beaches of Ras Al Jinz, my adventures in Oman left me with beautiful, life-long memories, many new friends, and a keen desire to visit again soon.

In one short summer, I fell in love with Oman's natural beauty, cultural integrity and, above all, the warm and generous spirit of its people. Moreover, my immersion into the Arabic language, whereby for seven weeks, I read, conversed, wrote, texted, and even laughed (!) primarily in Arabic, reignited my passion for a language I love, inspiring me to consider how best to pursue my language studies further.

RAKHIN SAYED

University of St Andrews

My time in Oman was transformative. First, from a purely academic perspective the college provided a high standard of education and my understanding of grammatical concepts has improved. The staff, from the administration to the teachers, were always accommodating and friendly.

Second, I was really thankful for the opportunities to explore different parts of Oman as they varied dramatically. The

trips were well organised and we were well briefed before setting off. Seeing the different cities and regions of Oman was a real privilege and offered so many great opportunities to speak the language in different contexts.

Omani people are tremendously accommodating, hospitable and generous and were always willing to help and entertain our conversations in Arabic and so we became more and more confident as the days passed.

The Anglo-Omani Society students were interesting and everyone had a genuine and authentic interest in learning Arabic which made the experience much richer. We were able to support each other and forge meaningful friendships for which I am extremely thankful.

I was really impressed by how hard-working the staff were (particularly the workers in the accommodation and around the school). The teachers were knowledgeable and always happy to help us. They were happy to sacrifice their time to sit with us until sure we understood a concept or idea properly and provided a rich and useful learning environment.

The school did everything to make us feel at home and ensure we got the most out of our time. We were given the opportunity to see how Omani hospitality works on a more nuanced level with prepared settings with tea and sweets that taught us the traditionally correct way to sit, ask for more or say you have had enough food or coffee.

I am grateful for the opportunity to study in Oman with regard to the academic and cultural experiences – and also to the great people met along the way.

VIRESH JOSHI

Durham University

Having been apprehensive about spending a whole summer in a country I had never visited, I was pleasantly surprised by how easily the staff at Sultan Qaboos College and the Guest House put us at ease. Aside from the obvious natural beauty of the Sultanate, the people we met are the true treasures of Oman

The teaching was rigorous and adapted to the interests of each class. Our teachers, Mustafa and Uthman, were true experts. I particularly enjoyed studying Omani Politics and Foreign Policy, and the week dedicated to poetry. We were also taken to two factories in Nizwa and allowed to interview staff and tour the production process.

We were provided with a plethora of opportunities to explore Oman, its culture, history, biodiversity and natural beauty. My own highlights were the trip to Muscat, where we were given a broad tour of the city's cultural landmarks, including the beautiful Opera House. Our trip to the Turtle Reserve was spectacular, as we witnessed the baby turtles' first perilous journey to the sea. At the desert camp in the Sharqiyya region, staff, teachers and students stayed up late into the night listening to a troupe of musicians playing classics on the





oud, before connecting mobile phones to the speaker system and dancing *dabke*.

We thoroughly enjoyed the Language Partner programme, where students were matched with a local Omani for conversation sessions three times a week. This helped our language and caused friendships to blossom. I was lucky to go camping to Jabal as-Shams with a language partner and his friends. This was truly rewarding, and many of us stay in touch with our language partners.

I must thank the staff. The accommodation was always immaculately clean, with excellent gym and recreational facilities.

I fondly recollect evenings relaxing in the outdoor tent, playing table tennis and table football. The kitchen staff were unfailingly helpful and friendly, catering to all our dietary needs. The supervisors were always willing to help with any ideas we had. They assisted in clearing space to practise a ceilidh for our cultural night presentation, provided a cake with American and Omani flags to celebrate the Fourth of July with US students, and helped us organise a 'graduation ceremony' for those British students who had missed their graduations over the summer. The

drivers and guards were always friendly and chatty, and eager to show us their town. They took us on shopping trips, horse riding, and to cafés. I also thank the College administration for helping with our own excursions, in particular helping us find accommodation and transport for our trip to Salalah.

My experience was highly positive, and I recommend it to any Arabic student. I encourage them first and foremost to embrace the warmth and friendliness of Omani culture, as this was the stand-out feature of the summer. ■

Graduation Day



THE ANGLO-OMANI SOCIETY GAP YEAR SCHEME

One of the two groups selected for the Gap Year Scheme in the past year record their impressions of a memorable time in Oman. By Adam Pearson, George Asquith, Hana Khan and Rhiannon Rees



Sitting down to reflect on our time in Oman, it seems logical to begin with our arrival at The Sultan's School. However, it is hard to think back to unpacking, or to those first few days of not knowing students' names or our way around school, which is a testament to the warm welcome we received.

There was never a dull moment at TSS. PE lessons were spent trying to control 30 hyperactive children; art was no less chaotic. Reading with students in English class was particularly rewarding, with their linguistic ability putting our Arabic to shame.

The opportunity to build relationships with boys in the boarding house was especially rewarding. Activities such as cooking; the weekly shopping trip; 'rain day' bowling trip; Falaj volunteering project and performing in the Year 6 adaptation of Snow White gave us plenty of time to get to know the different personalities. Through games of football, cajoling them reluctantly out of their rooms in the mornings or just helping them with English vocabulary in the evenings, their cheekiness, warmth and intelligence shone through.

It was immensely rewarding to witness the English of the younger boarders develop so quickly. It was also fascinating to learn about the lives of the boys from far-flung corners of the country, leading very different lives to our own. In the fantastically welcoming and supportive atmosphere, fostered thanks to the round-

the-clock hard work of boarding parents, Bill and Nerina Cordner, the boarding house was a home for us too, where we were always made to feel welcome.

When not struggling to control screaming Year 3s charging around the sports hall, trying to recall whatever knowledge of chemistry we might once



Rhiannon and Hana at the School's National Day celebration.

have had in the homework room, or engaging in very serious discussions about computer game tactics, we made full use of the car provided to explore Oman's sights.

Sean and Laura Griffin, with their two lovely daughters, were amazingly welcoming, showing us around in the early days when we hadn't quite learned to predict the erratic driving habits of some Omanis. Trips to the beaches near Muscat made a nice change of pace from the hectic nature of the school week, and our desert camp was the perfect way to round off our time in Oman.

Oman never failed to impress us with the beauty of its natural landscapes: the mountain walk overlooking the old port of Mutrah; quaint old villages, invariably without any signs of life on a Saturday afternoon; and every wadi seemed to top the last. Boat trips brought encounters with dolphins and turtles.

National Day saw an electric buzz of excitement descend on the school and presented an amazing opportunity to see all the children and Omani staff in full traditional dress, parading horses around the school grounds and singing patriotic

Trips to the beaches near Muscat made a nice change of pace from the hectic nature of the school week



George and camel.

songs. It also ushered in a week of national holiday. With it, we decided to make the long 12 hour drive through the Empty Quarter to the city of Salalah. With its greener landscape, rows of frankincense trees, and endless opportunities for photos of camels in bizarre settings, this was undoubtedly one of the many highlights of our time in Oman. After three days exploring the region, we returned via the spectacularly rugged coastal route,

camping at the beach Sean had promised us was the best in all of Oman (although we reckon we found a better one!).

Perhaps the best part of Oman is the astounding kindness of the Omani people. Offers of chai karak never ceased, and friendly locals were quick to provide assistance on the numerous occasions that our car broke down or got stuck in the sand on one of Oman's countless beautiful beaches.

National Day!





A traditional fuddle.

On Masirah island, arguably the highlight of our trip, no sooner had we arrived than we were being surrounded by generosity. Parking up at a pristine beach, we were ushered over by a group of Omani fishermen who had just returned to shore. Inside their small bathtub boat we were shocked to discover a giant shark. Two fishermen, both named Mohammed, then proposed a trip out in their boat for a spot of snorkelling, an offer we quickly took them up on, on the condition they promised we wouldn't encounter any similar sharks underwater. What followed was the best snorkelling we could have imagined, as the two Mohammeds led us to a shipwreck we would never have found.

While we admired the array of colourful fish and coral, one of the Mohammeds dived down with a hook into rock nooks and crannies, each time bringing up a lobster. That night, having guided us to a camping spot with an untouched beach to ourselves, we dined on a total of nine perfectly fresh lobsters cooked over the fire between the six of us, and listened to stories about the stars.

Perhaps the best part of Oman is the kindness of the Omani people. Offers of chai karak never ceased, and friendly locals were quick to provide assistance.



Adam at the souk.

Packing up our belongings as we prepared to leave The Sultan's School meant sifting through an assortment of debris. We had accumulated withered plants from 'Tree Day'; programmes from school trips to museums and the Opera House; unwanted sweets pressed onto us by little palms; flags from National Day; more shells than we knew what to do with; and a host of memories to go with them.

We would like to thank the Society for their generosity, and the staff and children at TSS for their unwavering friendship and support. This was an unforgettable experience, and we will certainly be back to visit one day. ■

Students, whether in their gap year or later, can apply to the Society for the scheme – details are on the AOS website – and are first considered by a team led by Society Vice-President Nigel Knocker. Recommendations are sent to the Sultan's School authorities in Oman for them to agree that they will accept the applicants. The school then contacts the lucky individuals with details and the Society starts the administration process including flights.

THE SOCIETY'S GRANT SCHEME

The Society is able to make grants because of HM the Sultan's generous endowment, and careful financial management. The lead trustee for the scheme is Richard Owens, who reports as follows.



The Society again increased its budget for Grants for the 2018/19 financial year, from the previous year's £160,000 to £175,000. Emphasis continued to be placed on student educational placements at the Sultan's School for UK gap-year students and at the Sultan Qaboos College for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers, for graduate and undergraduate students of Arabic, and at Oxford and Cambridge Universities for scholars from the Sultan's School for summer revision courses.

The balance of the budget was spread over a wide spectrum of projects with the highlight being the acclaimed success of author, Jokha Alharthi, and translator, Prof Marilyn Booth, being awarded the prestigious Man Booker International Prize for "Celestial Bodies". The translation was funded by a Society grant, which was generously acknowledged in the acceptance speeches.

Other grants were made to support:

- Biosphere Expeditions, for training Omani marine conservationists.
- Deena Al Asfoor, for research into healthcare access for diabetes patients.
- Faisal Al Lamki, for research and conservation of migratory raptors.
- The 3rd Oman National Heritage Lecture at the Royal Geographical Society.
- Ali Al Katheri, for attendance at the British Museum's International Training Programme.
- Dr Seth Priestman, for a three-year archaeological research project with Omani students on the fort structure at Fulayj (Batinah Coast) and its importance to the early history of Oman.
- Eman Ali, for a photographic project to document the culture of Jebali tribes of Dhofar.
- British Museum, for a joint project with the National Museum of Oman to research silversmithing practices in Dhofar.
- Dr Harriet Nash, for research on historic falaj management in Rustaq.
- Outward Bound Oman, for training of Omani instructors in the UK.
- Oman Botanic Garden / UK botanic expedition to Musandam.
- House of Lords delegation visit to the Oman State Council.

Several of these projects are reported elsewhere in the Review.

The Society welcomes grant applications from UK and Omani individuals and organisations that can demonstrate projects that advance the knowledge of the UK or Oman to nationals of the other country. Full details of the application process are available on the Society's website. ■

YOUNG OMANI TEACHERS VISIT BRITISH SCHOOLS

ARTICLE BY ISABELLE HABIB



Mazana and Ahoud enjoying a traditional English meal with Isabelle and her mother Jill who organised the trip.

The Society sponsored two young teachers from Oman to visit schools in Britain last term to gain insight into the British education system. The aims were to encourage knowledge exchange and to provide an opportunity to create links that could lead to future collaboration between the institutions.

Mazana, a teacher from Dhaklia, and Ahoud, who is currently working in Sharqiyah, spent two days at St Albans Girls School, a secondary comprehensive for girls, and a day in Beech Hyde School, a co-educational primary school, both in Hertfordshire.

Al Iradah School has around 648 students, 51 teachers and 4 administrators. The school is in Al Mudhaibi in Ash Sharqiyah North Governorate (The school Mazana teaches at).

They also took the opportunity to attend Derek Kennet's lecture at Sackville Street.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE VISIT: **MAZANA AL-RAWAHI**

Faithful words of gratitude and sincere thanks to the Anglo-Omani Society and its staff as the visit opened a door to some of the wonders in the British educational

system. This experience provoked my thoughts and ideas about how education can be part of human life and looked at as something fun, not as a burden the person should take. Going back to the enriching short period I spent in St Albans, it was definitely a mind-blowing experience starting from the school's helpful and friendly staff to the hardworking students. This opportunity boosted me to see that it is never too late to change what could be changed in my country's educational system. The days I spent there offered me a wonderful, insightful experience that I won't easily forget.

When I visited the Society in London, I was amazed by the positive vibes anybody can feel when talking to the workers there. It was my pleasure to meet the people, so heart warming and kind. I will never forget the honour they gave me to attend the lecture about Oman's archaeology, which



St Albans Girls' School

added new information for me. For me, this experience is really difficult to describe in these short lines. Although it was a short journey, it opened my mind and encouraged me to rethink various matters about education and life.

Special thanks to Isabelle Habib and her mother Jill, who is Student Wellbeing Advisor at St Albans Girls School, who organised the visits.

AHOUD AL-MAMARI

Visiting the UK was a childhood dream of mine and to experience the education system first hand has provided me with insight that I will benefit from in my career. It was a great opportunity to see the UK educational system in depth and have an overview on how different subjects are taught. I saw what it means to have a positive work environment and how creativity can be contagious. Students were

I am deeply grateful to the Anglo-Omani Society for giving me this opportunity. I did not dream of such a chance. This favour won't be forgotten and will always be remembered and valued.

having fun to the extent I wanted to be one of them.

Although there is no flawless educational system, there is a system that adapts, changes, works towards improvement and is continuously being updated and that's what I was able to touch while visiting schools. Teachers there are not preparing students for tests, they are preparing them for the real life and that's what education is about. They shared with me some of their interesting techniques and teaching methods that I can use while teaching, and they even gave me an access to great sources to enrich my teaching methods.

I am deeply grateful to the Anglo-Omani Society for giving me this opportunity. I did not dream of such a chance. This favour won't be forgotten and will always be remembered and valued. The event in London was great too. I enjoyed it so much and I can't wait to be part of the Society. ■

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF OMAN'S YOUTH



Partnership with Al Rudha (Oman's co-working space). Back from left: Fatma Al Wahaibi (co-founder of Al Rudha), Omar Al Harthy (co-founder of Al Rudha), Mohammed Al Wahaibi (COO of Phaze Ventures) and Masoud Al Rawahi (Managing Partner at Phaze Ventures). Front from left: Mohammed Al Wahaibi (CEO of Al Rudha) and Abdullah Al Shaksy (CEO of Phaze Ventures).

Phaze Ventures is the first Omani private venture capital firm founded to transform the region by unlocking the untapped potential of Omani youth, start-ups and corporates. Headquartered in Oman, their goal is to enable innovation through early stage investments, strategic partnerships and corporate consultancy services.

They have several channels: a specialist consultancy; direct investment; start-up acceleration; and tech training. Phaze Ventures has identified several synergies with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), and together they signed an MoU last year.

The consultancy arm is currently working on developing the recently founded New Business Development department within PDO and on various ways to enhance In-Country Value. The

direct investment arm focuses on building the Omani start-up ecosystem and supporting youth to establish and sustain their entrepreneurial ventures. The accelerator arm, SparkLabs Energy, has been tailored to identify and scale companies solving the future energy needs.

Finally, the tech training arm was created after witnessing first-hand problems faced by employers when recruiting graduates and identifying the mismatch between the current skillsets of fresh graduates and those that are required by corporates. Phaze Ventures' training arm aims to bridge these gaps through a myriad of educational programmes that emphasise hands-on experiential learning with strategic partners including Harbour Space University, Google and Al Rudha (Oman's first co-working space).

The founders of Phaze Ventures have a strong academic background supporting

their initiatives, including the Chief Operating Officer, Mohammed Al Wahaibi, who completed both his Bachelor's and Master's degree in the United Kingdom, University of Surrey and University of Bath respectively. The partners are optimistic about the future of Omani youth who have studied in the UK and can bring back their skills to support the Omani job market.

They have recently established a partnership with Takatuf Scholars Programme, a subsidiary of Oman Oil Company S.A.O.C., who sponsor 60 of the brightest and most motivated students each year to study at top universities, including the UK's top five. The Takatuf scholars must engage in an internship opportunity each year as part of their programme, and Phaze Ventures is now an option for those UK graduates and students who wish to tap into the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

SparkLabs Energy was co-founded by

SparkLabs Global, Asia's largest start-up accelerator group, PDO, Oman Oil and Phaze Ventures in May 2018. This six-month programme aims to identify and scale companies solving the future energy needs of the region and the wider world.

Leveraging the unique advantages of Oman, the aim is to create a global centre of excellence in future energy technologies and efficiencies. For the first cohort, over 300 start-ups were screened which ultimately led to five start-ups accepted into the programme: Interface Fluidics, Sensytec, Voyager, eMushrif and Rihal. They are separately working with stakeholders from Enhanced Oil Recovery, Well and Reservoir Engineering, Production Chemistry, Logistics and IDD. The programme culminated with an inaugural Demo Day which hosted over 200 participants including investors, entrepreneurs and corporate partners across the region. ■

Speech at the inaugural Demo Day by Phaze Ventures COO, Mohammed Al Wahaibi.



The founders of Phaze Ventures have a strong academic background supporting their initiatives, including the Chief Operating Officer, Mohammed Al Wahaibi, who completed both his Bachelor's and Master's degree in the United Kingdom, University of Surrey and University of Bath respectively.

THE NUDGE FACTOR: BEHAVIOURAL THEORY AND PUBLIC POLICY

ARTICLE BY ELISABETH SIMPSON

In a world of increasing complexity and information overload, can nudges really be used to elicit desired behaviour?



We all want to make changes. We may want to eat more healthily, get regular exercise, quit smoking or be more environmentally conscious. These goals often drive our New Year's Resolutions or are pursued with renewed vigour during Ramadan. Typically, these are the times of year when we make an effort to reflect on the person we want to be and how we would like to live. And yet, all too often we fall into old bad habits, indulging in that extra piece of cake as if embracing an old friend rather than going to the gym.

So how can we achieve lasting behavioural change so that our actions fall in line with our intentions? This was the topic explored by this year's New Generation Group Delegation.

A cohort of high-flying delegates from Oman and the UK's private and public sectors came together at Pembroke College, Oxford, to explore behavioural theory and how nudges can be used to rethink public policy. Academics, economists and corporate

advisors to industry and government, all experts in behavioural science, addressed delegates on the uses, ethics and practicalities of establishing a nudge unit and employing this methodology.

Dr Elizabeth Castle, Behavioural Research Analyst at Public Health England, kicked off the conference with a conceptual introduction to behavioural science. In this discipline, a 'nudge' is understood as a technique used to change someone's behaviour to elicit a desired result without reducing the number of choices available to them. It is considered to be an easy and low-cost way of effecting behavioural change.

Dr Castle outlined the constraints of traditional economic theory, which assumes that individuals have stable well-defined preferences and will make logical decisions. In fact, we tend to change our preferences as the result of a number of different factors, including our immediate environment and time inconsistencies, even if we do not ourselves acknowledge the influence of these



external factors. For example, Dr Castle presented evidence that people tend to make healthier diet choices when choosing for their future self, rather than the present self. So when shopping online, where delivery is not immediate, people tend to buy more fruit and vegetables as opposed to choosing crisps and chocolate when in store. Similarly, the immediate environment can be important; junk-free checkouts at supermarkets have been successful in encouraging healthier habits for families in the UK.

Dr Castle then went on to deliver a presentation from Dr Jet Sanders, Assistant Professor at LSE, Department of Psychological & Behavioural Science. In this session, we explored the contexts in which nudge theory has proved most effective. Its success is affected by variables such as the messenger and the prevailing social norms. Dr Castle also suggested that it is most beneficial in circumstances where there is an accepted intention-behaviour gap, where the nudge helps someone to do something they already want to do.

However, nudge theory can go wrong and is not appropriate for every case. We looked at examples of where relative ranking had proved effective, for example in reducing the number of antibiotics issued by GPs after comparing their prescription rates against their peers. And others where it had a negative impact, such as when comparing the academic attainment of school children. For the latter, relative ranking prompted a fall in attainment across the study group, perhaps because it is not 'cool' to be the highest achiever. Additionally, behavioural theory can result in spill over effects and unintended consequences if not considered and tested carefully before implementation. For our Omani and UK delegates who are seeking to apply nudges in their own contexts, it was then important to understand the different frameworks that exist to inform the use of behavioural theory.

It is not only in the fields of healthcare and education that nudges have proved effective. Subtle forms of influence have been used in private industry as part of marketing and communication campaigns to promote a company culture and image, or to sell more products.

Kerry Dryburgh, Group Chief Talent Officer & Head of Upstream at BP, described the challenges of affecting real organisational

transformation and the strategies they have used to instil values of safety, excellence and courage in a company employing over 70,000 people globally. Our own BP delegates were able to contribute their experiences to this discussion and consider how these values have been vital to their own success.

Rory Sutherland, Vice-Chairman at Ogilvy and co-founder of the behavioural science practice within the agency, further opened up the debate by identifying a number of areas where small contextual changes had enormous effects on consumer decision-making. For Rory, value is created in marketing itself and he argues that perception is as important as reality. By changing the metrics used to evaluate a product, you can create a story and experience which speaks to people's behavioural instincts. Similarly, although governments have a number of mechanisms at their disposal, including economic incentives and legislation, Rory suggested that it is often worth trying the nudge tactic first. This is invariably cheaper to implement than other methods and can prove as effective when used correctly.

Private industry has long used behavioural theory to both increase profitability and to improve customer experience. Andrew Goodman, Partner at McKinsey & Company, explained how many of these improvements are underpinned by personal data and, as a result, data heavy companies have become leaders in this space. However, it is not only the customers to which private industry applies these techniques; it is also its own employees. Andrew presented examples of private industry incentivising employees, interestingly showing that badges and stickers are still effective with adults!

With all these examples to think about, our delegates explored how behavioural theory could be applied in practice in the Omani context. A number of opportunities were identified such as improvements in Ministry collaboration, up-skilling, reducing littering and increasing engagement with mental health services. These were then practically explored in a workshop led by Dr Elizabeth Castle and Dr Umar Taj, Behavioural Science Research Fellow at Warwick Business School.

The workshop generated some creative ideas for application, but it soon emerged



that there was a lack of consensus on the ethics of nudging a citizen's choice and how far choices should be guided by default policies, incentives and disincentives. In the session led by Professor Liam Delaney, Professor of Economics at the University of Dublin, he questioned the ethics of nudging and explored where regulation could be used to safeguard individuals' rights.

Our final speaker was Hugo Harper, Head of Health, Behavioural Insights Team. Hugo shared his experience of the use of behavioural theory in relation to UK government policy and how to go about establishing a nudge unit in government or a private company. Particularly where there are constraints on time and resource, Hugo stressed the importance of beginning with 'quick wins' – areas where data is regularly collected and the monetary value of the nudge can be measured.

The Supreme Council for Planning in Oman has begun to explore opportunities where behavioural theory can support Oman's Vision 2040 and where the use of nudges can complement traditional policy making. With this in mind, the delegation this year has explored the possible applications of the theory within the Omani context and primed our delegates as consumers of behavioural theory. The effectiveness of nudge theory is now well evidenced and their potential benefits for the future of Oman and the UK are clear.

The Anglo-Omani Society New Generation Group would like to thank all of our speakers, with special thanks BP for their continued sponsorship of this event. ■



LIYSF 2019 Fullfilment Report

Golden Sponsor

With the generous and continuous support of the Anglo-Omani Society, The Research Council concluded its fourth participation in the 61st London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF) which witnessed a high turnout of students from higher education institutions in the Sultanate.

This year seven students were selected, with the support of our permanent partners, who reflect their interest in supporting Omani youth and empowering them in the fields of research, innovation and science. This support has helped to enhance the experiences of our students through the collaboration with other young scientists from around the world, with a total of more than 500 young scientists in attendance.

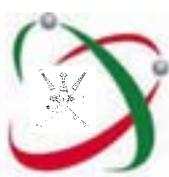
Investment in research and innovation is one of the most important drivers of a knowledge-based economy. We, at The Research Council, are proud that the Anglo-Omani Society is a golden sponsor and we are grateful for your generous support and contribution to raising the name of Oman in

international forums, through the sponsorship of our students to participate in the London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF).

HE. Dr. Hilal Al-Hinai
Secretary General of The Research Council

The Anglo-Omani Society supports several programmes in the Sultanate. One of its priorities is to support young people and allow them to benefit and participate in programmes and events held in the UK. The Anglo-Omani Society is glad to work alongside The Research Council and we look forward to further successful partnerships in other programmes.

Sheikh, Maan Al-Rawhai
Anglo-Omani Society Trustee



مجلس البحث العلمي
The Research Council

LIYSF 2019

Founded in 1959, LIYSF aims to give a deeper insight into science and its applications for the benefit of all mankind and to develop a greater understanding between young people of all nations.

LIYSF SNAPSHOT

LIYSF is a two week residential student event held annually in London which attracts 500 of the world's leading young scientists aged 21-26 years old from more than 75 participating countries.

LIYSF is held at Imperial College London and The Royal Geographical Society – with day visits out to other leading UK research centres and Universities, including Oxford and Cambridge Universities. The modern world still presents new challenges and the scientific advancements continue to increase. How science moves forward in the future with the thinkers of today and the questions to be asked comes from those attending LIYSF.

Participants join in a programme of:

- Lectures and demonstrations from leading scientists.
- Seminars, debates and discussions on scientific topics of world concern.
- Visits to industrial sites and research facilities across the UK.
- Visits to academic research centres in London, Oxford and Cambridge.
- Visits to the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum.
- Opportunity to present project investigation work at our Science Bazaar.
- Social activities, including discos, inter-hall competitions, a light-hearted international cabaret and an evening of Traditions of Home.
- Optional sightseeing tours of London, Stonehenge, Oxford and Cambridge.
- Optional visits to some of the best shows in London theatres.
- Travel within the programme to all scientific visits and programmed events.





RECOMMENDATIONS

To continue expanding our students' participation and provide the necessary support for a large turnout of students in order to enhance their experience, scientific skills and build links with their fellow scientists from around the world.

To further develop our partnership with the Anglo-Omani Society to be a permanent partner in supporting our students' participation in the Forum in the coming years.

LAST WORD

Once again, we would like to extend our gratitude for your generous sponsorship and continuous support.

Your contribution has provided a once in a lifetime opportunity and invaluable experience to Oman's next generation, which will in turn drive them forward towards finding innovative solutions to future national challenges and help develop a knowledge-based economy. Our students' successful involvement in LIYSF 2019 could not have happened without your generous support.

Thank you again and we look forward to future collaborations between TRC and the Anglo-Omani Society. ■



YOUNG OMANIS IN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY UNION WORKSHOP

Four young Omanis took part in the 14th Workshop for Parliamentary Scholars and Parliamentarians organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in cooperation with the Centre for Legislative Studies at the University of Hull held at Wroxton College in July.

It focused on the latest practices of parliamentary work, both at the level of the parliament and its roles, and at the supporting secretariats, and included current issues and best practices in dealing with issues according to different parliamentary practices and National political systems.

There were three main themes: the role of parliaments concerning post legislative scrutiny; the controversies of the relationship between members of the parliaments and the executive; the roles and best practices of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

Oman presented its first voluntary report about Sustainable Development Goals 2030 at the United Nations in July 2019 and so

valuable discussion could take place on the legislative and oversight functions needed to be a part of the Parliament in Oman role to address the challenges, propose policies, and practise oversight on the state's programmes and plans about this subject.

Specifically, there was a focus on the relationship between youth, legislations and sustainable development goals, and how to formulate a model to link these three themes, taking into account best experiences and best practices around the world, and building on the current political, legislative and developmental situation in the country.

The following suggestions arose for repositioning the roles of youth in Oman.

- Review the legislative frameworks for the participation of young people as voters or parliamentary candidates, and propose a new legal framework through institutions active in this field, including the National Youth Committee, which under article 2 of the Royal Decree No. 117/2011, specialises in: "Contributing to the development of legislation regulating the fields of youth in the Sultanate."

- Encouraging the continuous participation of young people, focusing on the issue of civic education within educational institutions at all levels, and on raising legal awareness in education systems and curricular.

- Supporting civil society institutions, based on youth efforts, freeing them from administrative bureaucratic constraints and tight control, and opening spaces in civic practice related to promoting political and legislative awareness as a pillar of empowerment.

- Optimal investment in digital spaces, and the effective presence of youth in them, to create a sustainable and effective regular dialogue between parliamentary

councils and their representatives and between youth from their various sectors.

- Promote youth participation in election campaign management, and create effective programmes that ensure youth participation in active peer education and political awareness. This ensures the rotation of political culture and its transmission through parallel youth lines, rather than from an outside authority. There is a need to use enjoyable, interesting and multiple strategic methods to attract the attention of young people in the political, legislative and regulatory process, and enhance their understanding to link them to their future.

- Involve youth in the advisory boards of electoral management bodies, and as voting station staff, and enhance their presence in the media, to present their views on the election scene, in terms of electoral programmes of candidates, their attitudes and aspirations towards the work of parliamentary councils, or even from the evaluating aspect of the parliamentary work, with the involvement of official and other domestic media.

- Create specific and clear means to escalate youth issues through parliamentary councils, make the voices of youth heard in these councils, and consider establishing parallel youth councils whose purpose is to examine, monitor, and evaluate the main parliamentary councils and to take part in their works. ■

PARTICIPANTS:

Waheb Mubarak, Legal Researcher and Member of Legislative Advisory Committee, Shura Council

Mubarak Khamis, Researcher in Sociology, Shura Council

Rahma Said, Researcher in Cultural Sociology, Sultan Qaboos University

Jawaher Khamis, Independent Researcher, Political Sciences Graduate, SQU

STUDENT SOCIETIES: THE CORE OF CHANGE



Presidents of Omani student societies in their workshop meeting at the Society's offices.

Student activities and organised societies abroad are essential for the enhancement of students' intellectual, academic and social development.

BY BUTHAINA AL-JABRI,
ACADEMIC ADVISOR AT THE
OMANI EMBASSY IN LONDON

They are essential experiences in a student learning journey; they have a significant impact on developing soft skills, time management and also strengthen self-esteem of individuals; to name a few benefits.

The Omani Cultural Attaché's Office in London has a big role in helping setting up such activities and manages a set of support functions and processes in order to assure the effectiveness of this investment. Liaising with sponsors, students, and the appropriate UK educational and Omani interest establishments such as the Anglo-Omani Society, ensures the progress and effectiveness.

The focus this last year was to improve the quality of the main two events in terms of content and the collaboration with different Omani societies.

The AOS is one of those important partners that continuously helps us deliver our goals and messages throughout the UK and we cannot thank them enough. This is my opportunity to thank Isabelle Habib for her tremendous support as a programme manager.

We collaborated with AOS and hosted the second student societies' presidents workshop at Sackville Street to discuss the two main events: Omani National Day and the Omani Open Day.

We came up with new ways of organising these two significant events. The student workshop has proved the value of such a discussion and the strategic location of platform for our future leaders to meet, discuss and find solutions for their concerns.

We had excellent outcomes presented in several collaborations between societies and universities, for example, The Omani Open Day that was hosted in Newcastle University this year was such a success. In this event we wanted to highlight career centre services at universities so the students can benefit from this service before graduating and returning back home and with a hope that scholarships regulations would reconsider in the upcoming years to allow students to pursue industrial experience in the UK.

For the Omani Open Day in Newcastle, at this link you will find many pictures:

<https://photos.google.com/share/AF1QipMVCJfbuGSgBiVOIRruRgQgECQ7CBQtxDZeKkORwDa7xjma39HZsXrDAIpiejWXQg?key=UGVjVvtcjVlc0Rwa243ZUJTSUotYnloZ2tHQ2p3>

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY – OMANI STUDENT PLACEMENT INITIATIVE

The University of Newcastle has put in place, through Professor Grant Burgess, a tailored programme of assistance and help for Omani Students registered as students at Newcastle University.

It is recognised that students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels can often benefit greatly from industrial placements, workplace experience activities and also projects working with industry and industry led training.

However, it is often difficult and challenging for students to develop the proactive skills and discipline needed to successfully secure such placements.

To address this skills gap and to further strengthen links with the Sultanate of Oman, Newcastle University is therefore launching a rolling programme of tailored support and workshops working with Omani students directly to help and assist them to develop the skills they will need to secure industry placements.

This will be carried out by Professor Burgess in collaboration with a network of

academic staff at Newcastle, as well as our award winning team in the careers service.

The project has already started with initial meetings and CV clinics having been held at the Omani Student Open Day in Newcastle.

While we cannot promise or guarantee to secure placements for every student, we aim to significantly increase the number of Omani students who can get placements during their time at Newcastle University.

This support will be provided to all new students from Oman, and in addition, all Omani students currently registered at Newcastle University. ■



Professor Grant Burgess addresses the open day at Newcastle.

QUBBAH

AN EXHIBITION BY OMANI STUDENTS IN THE UK

ARTICLE BY ELEANOR THOMAS

The Society's 2018/19 programme began with an exhibition by young Omani artists Alghith Al Harthy and Rayyan Al Hinai, exploring Oman's unique cultural heritage through the image of the mosque.

The event was a colourful exploration of Oman's architecturally exquisite mosques, showcasing Omani heritage through a series of images inspired by the artists' summer travels through Oman.

The collection's masterful blend of photography, painting and block prints created an experience that was both visually modern yet deeply rooted in tradition. Particularly striking was the use of colour which gave visitors an insight into Oman's vibrancy and offered British audiences a different perspective on Oman than the typical portrayal of a desert

environment. As our Vice-President, Sir Terence Clark, explained, "One tends to think of Arabia as all brown and a desert, whereas, of course, it isn't. Oman in particular has a lot of green and colourful places, and in these pictures we see some aspects of that."

The artists aimed to inspire a curiosity in Oman's culture and allow guests to get a sense of life in Oman. In an interview with Oman TV, Alghith said, "The basic concept of the exhibition is to convey Omani culture, heritage and history through architecture that we found in mosques in Oman." He explained that he was inspired



Rayyan and Alghith with the Omani Ambassador, HE Abdulaziz al Hinai and Karen O'Mahoney, Society member (left).

QUBBAH – AN EXHIBITION BY OMANI STUDENTS



Alghith Al Harthy discussing an exhibit with Society trustee Louise Hosking.

by the many and varied unique architectural elements that can be found within the mosques and wanted to show them to a British audience.

The duo decided to embark on the project long before their expedition to Oman. Knowing that they wanted to collaborate on a multi media project, they began considering topics at the beginning of 2018 and the journey to completion took nearly 10 months.

Describing the process that brought about the exhibition, Rayyan told reporters that although the pieces were composed over summer, they had begun considering the subject of the project at the beginning of the year.

The Anglo-Omani Society's support of the project was part of an ongoing effort to encourage and promote young Omani artists in the UK in an effort to increase cross-cultural understanding.

The collection's masterful blend of photography, painting and block prints created an experience that was both visually modern yet deeply rooted in tradition. Particularly striking was the use of colour which gave visitors an insight into Oman's vibrancy.

THE ARTISTS

Rayyan is a student of Architecture at the University of Kent and is part of the contemporary establishment of a new generation of artists who want to welcome modernist means and standards of creativity into the Omani society.

Alghith is a Politics student at the University of Manchester Metropolitan and has been involved in photography since 2011. With a passion for portrait and landscape photography, his style is driven by evolving technologies and the beautiful environment from where he grew up in Oman. ■



Rayyan with presented flowers.



Eleanor (second from right) during the State Council visit.

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE OMAN PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

The interns who work on the staff of the Society each year are given the opportunity of a working visit to the Sultanate at the end of their term, and helped with access to conduct a study of their choice. Eleanor Thomas selected government, and here are her findings.

I accompanied a delegation from the House of Lords on a visit to the Omani State Council in Muscat in February. As we attended meetings with ministries and both parliamentary chambers, I looked into the internal workings of the Omani Parliament with the aim of constructing a concise summary of its structure and functions. As the 2019 Shura elections are approaching, I paid particular attention to the participatory aspects of the system looking at the elections themselves, but also considering more broadly how public participation is facilitated within this absolute monarchy.

THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE OMAN PARLIAMENT

Since the establishment of the Council of Agriculture, Fisheries and Industry in 1979,

the Omani parliamentary system has undergone a number of transformations, permitting increasingly more public participation until universal suffrage in general elections was brought in in 2003.

The current parliament known as 'The Council of Oman' shares many structural similarities to the British system, consisting of two separate assemblies; an appointed upper house (State Council/ *Majlis al Dawla*/سلجـم), an elected lower house (*Majlis A Shura*/سلجـم (كروشللا), which assist an appointed governing body known as the Council of Ministers, which mirrors an appointed cabinet.

Established in 1997, *Majlis al Dawla* (سلجـم) is the appointed upper chamber of the Council of Oman. Its 83 members are appointed by Royal Decree for renewable four year terms. The number

of appointed members cannot exceed the number of representatives in the elected Majlis A Shura. Membership of the Majlis al Dawla is based on an individual's capacity to contribute to the legislative process, with members appointed because of their competence and experience in a specific field. Crucially, membership is not offered as a purely honorary position. Typically, members have been former businessmen, ambassadors, judges, academics or otherwise known for exceptional achievement. Additionally, individuals must meet certain criteria, such as being over 40 years old, an Omani National, not affiliated with security or military authority and being of sound mind.

Established in 1991 to replace the Consultative Council, Majlis A Shura (مجلس الشورى) is the elected lower house. The 85 Members are elected for a four-year term, with elections held during the final 90 days of the term. Like the Majlis Al Dawla, the Majlis A Shura possesses limited legislative authority. Its powers extend to reviewing draft laws submitted by ministries, making proposals, reviewing the budget, contributing to the development programme and offering opinion on matters referred by The Sultan. However, it also has the authority to call in and question ministers, which creates a level of government accountability.

The defining feature of the Shura Council is its function in allowing direct participation of citizens. However, its members are not local representatives in the way that British MPs are: the Shura council is not designed to be a mechanism through which the views of constituents are transmitted. In fact, there is little expectation for members to lobby for the interests of their districts, rather they are expected to concern themselves with matters of national interest. Local issues and services are more often dealt with by a locally appointed 'Wali' who functions more like a mayor. Whilst there is naturally cooperation between the Wali and the member of the Majlis A Shura, the relationship is not formalised. Interestingly, before the 2011 reforms, Shura members had a more direct link with their districts.

The internal structures of the Majlis al Dawla and Majlis A Shura are relatively straightforward, with most activity

performed by Standing Committees coordinated by Bureaus and supervised by a Chairman. Standing Committees focus on particular areas of expertise and deal with issues that relate to their particular specialisation. Committees examine draft laws before they are presented to their respective council/Majlis, propose new amendments and review existing amendments. The two councils/Majlis hold meetings periodically at the invitation of their Chairmen, and emergency meetings when necessary.

Setting the agenda and supervising all activity in each council/Majlis is a Bureau consisting of seven members and headed by a Chairman assisted by two Vice-Chairmen. In each council/Majlis, the Bureau develops an activity plan for each one-year session and supervises its implementation, authorising committees to study particular topics and coordinating lists of committee members. The Chairman of each council/Majlis acts as the official spokesperson for that Majlis and is responsible for supervising its overall performance and ensuring its work complies with law. The two councils/Majlis are assisted by The General Secretariat, headed by the Secretary General, which performs the technical, administrative and financial tasks.

Despite the structural similarities with the British System, the Omani parliament fundamentally differs in function, specifically in the mode of participation. The Omani parliament is by its nature consultative. Since H.M. Sultan Qaboos's accession to power in 1970, Oman has remained an absolute monarchy with all executive and legislative power lying with the Sultan. Unlike the British parliament, the Omani parliament is thus neither sovereign nor a true legislature. Functionally it is an advisory body that facilitates public participation in the political process through consultation or 'Shura' (شورى), creating a mode of participation that complements rather than challenges that authority of the Sultan. The concept of Shura is rooted in the Ibadhi tradition in Oman, having played a major role in election and decision making under the imamate system in Oman, and describing a decision making practice in which leaders sought advice from

community representatives in a process of participatory consultation that emulates decision making in the home or village.

Principles connected to Shura continue to shape not only modes of participation but also modern parliamentary culture, as the Council of Oman is expected to commit to reaching a genuine compromise in order to provide counsel. H.M. Sultan Qaboos passes all new laws. In order for the executive Council of Ministers to propose a draft law for consideration by the Sultan, the draft must first be approved by both the elected and appointed house of the Council of Oman. The two houses scrutinise the draft law, propose amendments and may call ministers in for questioning. If there is disagreement between the decisions of the two houses, they meet collectively to come to a unanimous decision. A vote is taken, and if an overall majority approves the draft law, it may be submitted to the Sultan with the assessments of the two houses to be taken into consideration. Measures have been taken to safeguard a reasonable level of freedom of expression, as members of the two houses are not liable for sentiments expressed in front of the council, on issues that fall within the scope of the council.

WHAT DO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS

As the current term of the Shura Council draws to an end, preparations have begun for the next elections.

The voting age in Oman is 21, and voter turnout is generally quite high, averaging 65 percent. Candidates are elected in small constituencies known as Wilayats (تایالو), with constituencies of up to 30,000 citizens electing one member and constituencies of over 30,000 electing two members. Anyone can put themselves up for election, providing they are an Omani National, over 30, with at least a secondary school education and no previous convictions or mental illness. Applications for candidacy must be approved centrally, though rejected applicants have the right to appeal to an independent board if they feel their rejection was baseless.

Once approved, candidates receive a small sum of money from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but most of the campaign must be self-funded and there is no cap on



Eleanor meeting the Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, General Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani.

spending. As there are no political parties, candidates stand as independents. This system generally favours the wealthy, although this is not universally true – the current cohort includes a former taxi driver. To avoid conflict of interest, members of the Majlis A Shura cannot continue to be employed in the public sector once elected.

As the elections approach, there are several developments that onlookers may be interested to consider. Firstly, the participation of women in the Shura Council is falling under increasing scrutiny. The appointed Majlis Al Dawla contains reasonable gender split relative to other GCC states, with the 14 female delegates making up 17% of the council membership. However, this stands in contrast to the elected Shura Council, where currently only 1 of the 85 delegates is a woman (1.2%), following the 2015 elections in which women accounted for only 20 of the 590 candidates (3.3%).

In recent years, the Sultanate has taken several high-profile steps to increase female participation in the workplace and improve women's access to higher education, leading to the question of whether this expansion of opportunity will be reflected in the election results. Whilst

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the standardised, bureaucratic process of standing for election does not explicitly disadvantage women, there remain barriers to entry.

There are many examples of civil society stepping in to try to right the imbalance. The Arab Women's Organisation runs capacity building schemes training women to become parliamentarians, teaching participants campaigning, how to interact with citizens and use the media to their

advantage. On the local Wilayat level, there have been examples of Women's Associations taking responsibility to support women candidates, give them a platform and raise awareness. These efforts stand as a solid repudiation of the often-repeated phrase that women don't support other women, but it is yet to be seen whether they will succeed in bringing more women into the Shura council.

A further issue of interest is the continued role of tribes. Due to the absence of political parties, candidates receive only limited funds and must otherwise fund their own campaign. Furthermore, candidates stand as independents, creating their own platform and relying more on biography and suitability to serve, than on policy or manifesto. These factors create a dynamic in which the involvement of tribes can have a major impact on election results through creating a platform or offering support or funds to a particular candidate. There are some examples of individuals feeling that the tribe has decided to favour one candidate, meaning that other candidates do not stand a chance.

Elections are set to be held in October 2019, and will determine the members of the Shura council for the next four-year term. ■

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

ARTICLE BY IAN KENDRICK

As we look forward to next year's 45th Anniversary of the formation of the Anglo-Omani Society, there is increased interest in the history of how our Society was formed and how it has developed.

The Anglo-Omani Society is one of a number of similar organisations linked to other countries which have been formed largely by British expatriates after having lived and worked in those countries. Some have remained fairly small existing on a limited budget, while others have been able to expand their activities and reputations. There is no doubt that our Society is in the top band of these associations and I think that the reasons why this has happened will become clear when a new history of the Society, which is currently being researched, is published in the Autumn of next year.

Trustees and members who have played a part in the development have been asked to contribute their memories of events and developments as they remember them, and there has been a full and excellent response to this. The initial draft is taking shape and now is a very good time for other members or perhaps retired post holders to add something.

If you have a memory of an event or policy that you think could or should be included in the history, then please write it down and send it to our Office Manager or email direct to:
Ian@theKendricks.plus.com

The trial interview taking place: Ian on the left and Ben Wright, Society Manager for the last six years, on the right.



THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY

We do not need long scripts and usually between one and three paragraphs are sufficient. Please remember that this history is of the Society, not of the Sultanate in general.

If, on the other hand, you have interesting memories about your time in the Sultanate in general, you might be willing to add your experiences to our archives, and there are two main ways of doing this. The first is to simply write your story down and send it to our Office Manager to be put in the archives. Include any relevant photographs, or lend them to us to be copied. There could also be the bonus that if our Editor is interested in publishing your script in our Review magazine, you will be contacted for permission to do this.

ORAL HISTORY

The second way is to be recorded for oral history, which is becoming an increasingly popular way of storing interesting historical events. To hear events spoken about by the person who was there adds a new level of interest for the listener, with a further level of interest if the recording is done with video.

The Society started recording some oral history interviews several years ago, but these have not taken place for some time while some new and more advanced equipment has been researched. This has now been identified and obtained and we can now record again in high quality audio and video.

Were you in the oil business, or the military, or the commercial world? Were you exploring the deserts or the jebel? Were you in contact with local people in their villages? Oman is rapidly changing into a modern state that is very different to the traditional Sultanate, and, as in most counties, there is increasing curiosity in 'the old days'.

If you would like your experiences to be added to the archives and perhaps put on

the web site or published in our Review magazine, please contact our Manager and make arrangements to visit our building for a recording session. It is easy to do and quite a relaxing and enjoyable experience.

The Society is in touch with museum staff in Oman who are already being trained with museum skills including how to action oral history recordings. It is highly likely that future recordings will be exchanged between the two countries. ■



Callum Printsmith, Society intern this year, video recording a trial oral history interview.

50th ANNIVERSARY PHOTO EXHIBITION

The Society plans to hold an exhibition of photographs and other images illustrating Anglo-Omani cooperation over the 50 years at Sackville Street for a period of two weeks in November 2020 with a VIP opening ceremony in the first week.

We have received some good leads and contributions from members but still need further good quality images covering oil and gas, education, culture, ceremonies, diplomatic and military activity, royal and other VIP visits.

Our intern, Callum Printsmith, has done some excellent research at the Kew National Archive on the period up to 1985. We still look to some former HMAs to cover gaps in the 1986-2019 timeline.

We are working with the consultants (Wayne Larkin) to begin planning the layout and design of the exhibition, and extending the search to archives in UK and Oman and pursuing other sources of material.

We are considering a panel or part panel on the 1800 'Treaty of Friendship' to mark the 120th Anniversary. Many thanks also to Isabelle Habib and Clara Bamberger for their enthusiastic work on this.

OBITUARIES

Britons who serve in Oman tend to be in one of three categories: those who return home after a tour; those who spend the rest of their working lives there and then retire to the United Kingdom; and those who settle and become citizens. Following are obituaries of people in all three categories. One thing they all had in common was a love of the Sultanate and its people.

GENERAL SIR CHARLES HUXTABLE

General Huxtable reached the highest ranks in the British Army, and his final appointment was as Commander-in-Chief of UK Land Forces. And yet possibly the highlight of his career, for both himself and his wife and his family, was his time as Commander of Dhofar Brigade in 1976-78.

Command of the brigade was much sought after by British officers on secondment, because the post offered active service, considerable independence from distant headquarters, and an integrated inter-Service command. The campaign was almost won when he arrived in August 1976, but there was still much to achieve. He followed the balanced counter-insurgency policy of harnessing security with economic and social measures to bring about a durable peace in Dhofar; he also startled his brigade staff by his physical energy and fitness, despite being about 15 years older than most of them.

Soon after arrival, he was in a helicopter over the jebel when the cable driving the tail rotor sheared. Almost invariably this would lead to a fatal crash, as the helicopter spiralled down out of control, but the pilot

somehow managed to achieve a safe landing with several bumps in a dry wadi, allowing the occupants to climb out unhurt. Jets were scrambled to search for wreckage, then the standby helicopter landed to continue the journey. Throughout all this, the brigade commander remained totally calm.

Charles Richard Huxtable was born in Bayswater, London, in 1931, the son of Captain Dick Huxtable of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and educated at Wellington College, where he was captain of boxing, and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He was commissioned into his father's regiment in 1952. Seven years later he married Mary Lawlor, a daughter of the regiment, but Irish by birth. They had three daughters: Amanda, Cathryn and Lucy. They all survive him.

He began his active Service career with 1st Battalion the Duke of Wellington's Regiment in Korea in 1953. The sector held by British and Commonwealth forces included a 200ft-high feature known as The Hook, which dominated the Sami-ch'on valley. 1st Dukes took over its defence two



Brig Huxtable with HM the Sultan and Lt Col Said Mohamed Raqaishi in Dhofar in 1975.

weeks before the third and final battle for its possession, which began with a devastating Chinese artillery bombardment followed by an infantry assault in overwhelming strength. With supporting artillery fire, and in pouring rain, the Dukes held their ground.

In 1967 he was a company commander in Cyprus in the aftermath of the terrorist campaign when he was sent to deal with a confrontation between Greek and Turkish Cypriots engaged in heavy fighting. He inserted his company between them at serious risk of casualties and faced down each side until the shooting stopped.

For an emergency tour of duty as Commanding Officer of his battalion in Belfast, where the introduction of internment without trial in August 1971 led to an upsurge of violence, including rioting, burning of cars and missile attacks on the army and police, he was appointed an OBE for gallantry.

At the memorial service for Sir Charles at York Minster in March, HM the Sultan was represented by Commodore Said al Muqbal from the Omani Embassy. The Queen was represented, as were the various Regiments with which he was associated. Numerous members of the Society and the Sultan's Armed Forces Association attended to pay tribute to a gallant and distinguished officer.

SHEILAGH BAILEY

Sheilagh played an important part in setting up the Palace Office in Muscat after the accession of HM Sultan Qaboos, for which she was awarded the Order of Oman. After retirement, she was an active member of the Anglo-Omani Society London until frailty meant that she could no longer take part. She presented our Society with a valuable collection of Omani silver.

Sheilagh Elizabeth Bailey was born in Tanga, Tanzania (Tanganyika) in 1929, where her father was a serving Police Officer with the Tanganyika Police. She grew up there until she was seven, went to boarding school in Sussex, England and then went to school in Umtali, Zimbabwe.

When her father retired as Deputy Commissioner in 1951 and moved to the UK, Sheilagh remained behind serving as a

secretary with the Tanganyika Police and latterly with the Uganda Police. When Uganda got its independence in 1963 Sheilagh moved to London and joined The Foreign and Commonwealth Office. She was seconded to Aden then to Sarawak, Borneo, again as a secretary.

She finally left the FCO and went out to the Sultanate of Oman soon after HM Sultan Qaboos took office. She served in His Majesty's Palace Office, which she helped to form, as secretary to his Equerry and Chief Adviser, Brigadier J.T.W. Landon, until finally retiring to London in 1984. She was awarded The Order of Oman by the Sultan on her retirement in recognition of her services rendered to the Sultanate, which included help in designing the Sultan's Palace in Muscat.

She retired originally to a flat in London, and travelled the world including several return trips to Muscat, almost yearly visits to her sister Pat in Australia, and amongst other places such as Kashmir and whale watching in the Arctic Region. In May 2014 she became resident in a small care home in Newport-on-Tay, a short distance from her brother Irvine. Sadly, following a stroke, she passed away peacefully suffering a heart attack on 2 January 2019. She was cremated and her ashes scattered at the Dundee Crematorium. She was 89 years old.

She has deposited biographical and other material including photographs in the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford.



Sheilagh, taken in 2005, with Jutta Murphy during one of the Society's visits to Oman.

LT COL NICK MOULTON-THOMAS

Nick Moulton-Thomas, a well-known figure in the British expatriate community in Oman, died in Al-Nahda Hospital on 29 October 2018 after a long illness.



Nick arrived in Oman as a young lieutenant leading an eight-man Army patrol from Sharjah in 1969. Two Land Rovers and a Bedford truck made their torturous way to Ghubrah Bowl, having struggled mostly along the coast – beaches making for better travelling surfaces than wadis. After reaching the Ghubrah Bowl the patrol went onto Bilad Sayt, a little village that in those days specialised in growing garlic.

On that first trip, something about Oman stole into Nick's soul, perhaps the wide open spaces, or maybe the warm hospitality. When he saw an advertisement 13 years later seeking an instructor for the Royal Army of Oman's Junior Staff College, he jumped at the chance. He was teaching the very same course at the School of Infantry in Warminster.

He was posted to Oman in 1982. It was a fortunate time: the ink had barely dried on the papers that Nick wrote for his junior officers course when he was whisked away to work on Saif Sariya (Swift Sword), the first of the series of big joint military exercises between the British and Omani armed forces.

Having served in the British Army since 1964 in various postings all over the world – UK, Northern Ireland, Germany including Berlin, Belize, Australia, Canada, Bahrain, UAE, Libya and Oman – Nick decided to

retire and stay in the Sultanate. Now a major, he joined SAF in 1984. For the next 23 years he served as an operations and training staff officer. He was Project Manager when the Junior Staff College was set up.

In 2001 when Saif Sariya 2 returned for its even bigger sequel, Nick was on the team that wrote the exercises. He retired as a lieutenant colonel in 2007 after 40 years of military service. Retirement did not mean heading back to Wales. An old army friend offered him a job managing Technique LLC, and there was too much he loved about Oman to want to leave. "I love the fact that it's always sunny. Perhaps it's because I was born in August, I can't do without sunshine." His office was in Ghubrah, and he lived nearby in a villa at Al Hail for 23 years – a much quieter place then than now.

Nick was an unabashed gastronome, another thing he loved about living in Oman. "The multiculturalism of the food – great restaurants everywhere." A member of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, he ran a lunch club which met every couple of months. Multiculturalism also extended to the people. "At dinner parties for ten you are likely to find nine different nationalities." His own life was multicultural too, as his charming wife Alyona and her son Anton are Russian. Home finally was across the highway on the other side of Al Hail close to the beach and big enough for when Nick's daughters and grandchildren visited.

Born in Wales, Nick spent an average of not more than two weeks a year in Britain over the last 26 years. He was an Omani citizen for over ten years.

This obituary was adapted from a script by Jayant Jayakrishnan. It was kindly sent to us by Maggie Jeans OBE.

DR PAOLO COSTA 1932 - 2019

The first archaeological expedition to Oman was led by the American oil magnate, Wendell Phillips, who wrote about his experiences in 'Unknown Oman' published in 1966. Following in his footsteps diplomats and other expatriates working in Oman for SAF or the oil company were discovering and writing about historic buildings and archaeological remains, but it was not until ten years later that a government department was established and proper studies of Oman's rich past began to be made.

In 1976 Dr Paolo Costa was appointed the first adviser for archaeology in Oman. Assisted by Germana his wife, he set up a department of antiquities which was later to become The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture. They established photographic archives and a library. Besides starting an inventory of regional sites, Dr Costa directed initial archaeological excavations and surveys all over the Sultanate.

Dr Costa served as deputy chairman of the First International Conference on Oman Studies held in Muscat in November 1980 and was coordinator of the Heritage of Oman Festival held in the same year. He was the editor of the Journal of Oman Studies and author of numerous publications, including 'Historic Mosques and Shrines of Oman' published in 2001.

At the end of his service in Oman in 1986 he was awarded the Civil Order of Oman by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. On return to Italy he continued his studies of Oman during his appointments as Professor of Islamic Art History and Archaeology first at the University of Palermo and then at the



University of Bologna until his retirement.

Paolo Costa had arrived in Oman with a wealth of experience in Arab history and archaeology. From 1964 to 1969 he was a professor at the University of Baghdad. Working with the Directorate General of Antiquities he arranged the display of the exhibits in the new Iraq Museum. He also carried out surveys on a number of Islamic sites. Between 1970 and 1975 he was archaeological adviser to the Yemen Arab Republic where he established the archaeological section of the Yemeni National Museum. He carried out a number of surveys including a study for the conservation of the Great Mosque of Sana'a. Before his appointment in Oman he had worked with the World of Islam Festival Trust to organise the 1976 exhibition 'Nomad and City' at the Museum of Mankind in London.

Julian Paxton

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.

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