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In this paper, my intent is to give a broad overview of the diverse characteristics of both prominent mosques and more simple mosques across the Arabian peninsula as a whole. Space does not allow an equal coverage of all areas to the same degree.

The recording of Arabia’s architecture has tended to be undertaken in terms of individual countries and regions rather than the Peninsula as a whole. I have tended to follow this process just as much as other scholars, although I readily recognise that there are disadvantages in this. To some extent, this situation has arisen as a by-product of the support that has been provided to researchers in individual countries of the Peninsula and while welcome, this has acted against seeing the architecture of the Peninsula as a totality but in terms of individual countries. Yet in looking at the mosque traditions of the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, the complex diversity of the Peninsula’s mosques becomes apparent.

A record of Islam’s older mosques has become a matter of urgency in recent decades as great wealth in the Arabian Peninsula has given the means to rebuild old mosques in modern style to serve the Islamic community in the present. As a result of this virtuous intent, much of Islam’s older religious architecture has vanished in all parts of Arabia, replaced by modern mosques.

In a sense, this is no new process. As this paper reflects, the destruction of the old for the new has been a part of the history of Arabia and Islam’s religious architecture in all periods, led by the pious intent to provide the finest mosques for the umma in their fulfilment of Islamic worship. This is especially the case with respect to the Holy Mosques of the Haramayn of Makka al-Mukarrama and al-Madîna al-Munuwarra but the point is as true of many other mosques as well.
The Haramayn and Jidda

I begin with aspects of the patronage and the building of the holy mosques of the Haramayn of Makka al-Mukarrama and al-Madîna al-Munuwarra and some of the less well recorded mosques at al-Madîna al-Munawarra. Today, we can gain only an intimation of the original form of the Holy Haram Mosque at Makka al-Munuwarra and of the Mosque of the Prophet (S.) at al-Madîna al-Munawarra, using in the main literary sources that relate to the earliest Islamic times and to the Umayyads and the ʿAbbâsids.

Intervention in Arabian architecture by Muslim rulers from outside Arabia has inevitably been marked at the Holy Haramayn because of their unique sanctity in Islam and because of the obligation on rulers to create adequate facilities at the Holy Mosques for the Muslims and especially for the pilgrims making the hajj.

Yet originally, the first Mosque of the Prophet (S.) was built using the most basic materials by the Makkans and the people of Yathrib who had united together in their conversion to Islam. They used mud-brick (libn) with palm-tree columns, materials still encountered in old settlements west of al-Madîna al-Munuwarra towards Badr and still used in modern times across much of Arabia as a whole.

The re-building of the Haramayn mosques under the third Khalîfa, ʿUthmân b. ʿAffân, does not seem to have involved any builders from outside Arabia but was done by the Muslim community in the Hijâz alone as far as one can determine. It was not until the reconstruction of the Mosque of the Prophet (S.) by the Umayyad Khalîfa al-Walîd b. ʿAbd al-Malik in 88-/707-709 that specialist craftsmen from Syria and Egypt and possibly from the “Rûm” were imported into the Hijâz for the rebuilding of the Haramayn mosques.

The Umayyads’ patronage set the precedent for a succession of re-constructions of the Holy Mosques under the patronage of Muslim rulers from outside Arabia which led to the introduction of “international” Islamic architectural forms to the Holy Cities. Our knowledge of the first mosques at the Haramayn is almost entirely based on literary sources although an invaluable ground-plan exists of the Haram at Makka al-Mukarrama as it was in the period of the ʿAbbâsid Khalîfa al-Mahdî (161-164/777-780); and this was probably the basic form of the mosque when we have the first detailed textual descriptions dating from the 5th/11th C. and the 6th/12th C.

The earliest surviving minaret in the Hijâz is that of the Shâfî Mosque at Jidda. According to ʿAbd al-Quddûs al-Ansâry, the Shâfî mosque is also known as al-Jâmiʿ al-ʿAtiq. He suggests that its oldest surviving elements should be dated to 649/1251 and associated with the early Rasûlids, who, like their Ayyubid predecessors in Yemen, promoted the Shâfî madhhab of Sunnism. In the aftermath of the Ayyûbid collapse in Egypt at the hands of their own Mamlûks, the Rasûlids emerged as a major Sunnî power in the Hijâz as well as in Yemen and they maintained their adherence to the
Plate 1: al-Shaf’i Mosque, Jidda, Saudi Arabia
Shâfi‘i madhhab. As a strong and (a) prosperous regional regime, they took it upon themselves to undertake the restoration of the Holy Haram at Makka al-Mukarrama as well as the al-Shâfi‘i mosque. They achieved this prestigious position of patronage between the demise of the Abbasid Khilâfa 656/1258 and the emergence of a strong Mamlûk Sultanate under al-Zâhir Baybars in Cairo after 658/1260.

The minaret which is extant in the al-Shâfi‘i mosque at Jidda seems to be the surviving evidence of Rasûlid sponsorship. It is set in context of a mosque that includes 10th/16th C. workmanship and later. The architect of the minaret had more than a passing acquaintance with minarets in Cairo, but he seems to have been sent from Yemen by his Rasûlid masters, if he was not indeed a Hijâzî working for the Rasûlids.

Judging by the 10th/16th C. reconstruction of the Shâfi‘i mosque, it seems that Indian craftsmen formed a part of the work-force employed, judging by the surviving wood-carving in the courtyard of the mosque. It is also one of the mosques scattered across Arabia that has a built minbar constructed within the mihrâb, an especially Arabian device which is discussed below. By its nature as the port for the pilgrimage to Makka al-Mukarrama, Jidda has always been an intensely international place, exposed to cultural influences from the whole of the Islamic world. This inevitably had an impact in terms of cross-fertilization of the crafts of Jidda and its architecture, and this is reflected in the complexities of the Shâfi‘i mosque.

In a forthcoming discussion of Mamlûk patronage of building works at the Mosque of the Prophet (S.), Professor D. Abou Seif has stressed that the Mamlûk Sultâns repeatedly sent craftsmen and materials from Egypt and Syria to work on the Haramayn mosques, as a matter of prestige and piety. In 887/1482, the Sultan Qaytbay sent craftsmen from Egypt to work on the Mosque of the Prophet (S.) and shortly afterwards he rebuilt the south-east minaret which still stands. She cites al-Samhûdî who noted not only that

Plate 2: Qibla wall, Mosque of the Prophet Muhammad (S.), al-Madina al-Munawarra. Minaret of Qayt Bay (Right).
the minaret was very fine but that it was built in black stone. This is the local stone of
al-Madina al-Munawarra, the black basalt from the harra, the lava plains produced by
the ancient volcanoes around the Holy City. While Egyptian craftsmen are specifically
cited in this rebuilding, one cannot but wonder whether there was any input in this
and other re-buildings at the Haramayn on the part of Hijâzî craftsmen. Both cities
are stone built and their domestic architecture was generally the work of local masons
rather than foreigners and this was the case in all periods, as far as one can estimate.
The interventions by foreign masons at the Holy Mosques were exceptional and hence
they were noted in the texts recording the Mamlûks’ piety, but less prestigious projects
would have been executed by masons resident in the Holy Cities. This would have
gained no comment from the chroniclers.

The Ottomans were to continue the same direct involvement in construction at both
of the Haramayn under the Sultâns Sulaymân II al-Qanûnî and Salîm II between
938/1531-2 and 980/1572 respectively, but once again, one must allow for the
possibility of a local Hijâzî input in terms of masons working in the building teams.

These major Ottoman interventions gave the Haramayn the appearance that they
retained when the earliest photographs were taken of them in the late 13th/19th C.
The most obvious visual impact of Ottoman fashion at the Haramayn and in the
Hijâz generally was the introduction of the “pencil” minaret and this passed into
the repertoire of local builders as we can see from mosques in Jidda, al-Wâjî and al-
Tâ’îf.

In all periods, one must allow for the consequence of the interaction of local Hijâzî
craftsmen with Egyptian and Syrian architects sent from abroad by the Mamlûk and
Ottoman Sultâns. The point is worth raising for although so much old architecture of
the Hijâz has vanished - religious and domestic - what we know of the past building
skills of the area shows that the local masons were sophisticated at their best and were
never absent from the local construction scene as far as one can estimate.

The masonry tradition of western Arabia is complex. The stone domestic buildings
of the Holy Cities and of al-Tâ’îf were the sophisticated cousins of the more rustic
but skillfully built stone houses and towers of the highlands of al-Baha and cAsîr
in the southern Hijâz. Skilled coral stone cutting has also existed for centuries
among the masons on the coast at Jidda and at other towns along the Red Sea. J. P.
Greenlaw has argued with good reason that Swâkin on the Sudanese coast was built
by craftsmen brought from Jidda, in the past a source of highly skilled masons and
wood-workers.

In the extensive building campaigns in the Hijâz by King ʿAbd al-ʿAzîz Āl Sacûd,
commenced after 1925, he stimulated a local building boom that is recorded by
Nâsîr al-Hârîthi in detail and seems to have been based on a combination of Hijâzî
craftsmanship with Najdî elements, supplemented eventually by foreign craftsmen.
Stone used at Makka al-Mukarrama in the past included a reddish-yellow stone known as Qâhût or hajar Shumaysî, quarried at Jabal Shumaysî. There are some arcades surviving in the Haram mosque on the south side with their bare stone still visible and showing the elegance of Qâhût as a building stone. They are from the Ottoman period but the workmanship is reckoned to have been local. Other masonry was quarried at Jabal al-Ka’ba, a quarry close to Makka al-Mukarrama. This is black stone with white inclusions.

It is unfortunate that so little of the old architecture of the Holy Cities survives to investigate this issue of local masonry and workmanship very far, but there is enough known to indicate that there was indeed a long established local masonry tradition in western Arabia, just as there is still in Yemen and Hadramût. This Hijâzî tradition must have interacted with and been influenced by instances of foreign intervention under the Mamluks and the Ottomans, but it should be regarded as having an independent life of its own.

Possible evidence of an Arabian Islamic architecture executed by local masons arises at al-Madîna al-Munuwarra in the cases of the al-Ghamâma mosque, the mosque of Sayyid-nâ Abû Baqr al-Sîdiq and the Mosque of Sayyid-nâ ʿUmâr b. al-Khattâb. These are three of the surviving old mosques in the central part of the city, lying close to the Mosque of the Prophet (S.).

The Ghamâma mosque marks the site where the Prophet Muhammad (S.) would lead the ʿĪd prayers and it was first built as a formal mosque in the Umayyad period. There were reconstructions under the Mamlûks, the first being by Sultân Hasan (748/1347-8) but in essence, the mosque as it stands now is largely as it was re-built by ʿAbd al-Majîd I (1255-1277/1839-1861) and by ʿAbd al-Hamîd II (1293-1327).

The al-Ghamâma mosque has an ambiguity in terms of its current form. It is built in the black basalt of al-Madîna al-Munuwarra and neither its minaret nor its ground-plan and elevation is of a clear Ottoman plan. Dr Zahir cUthman has told me that he regards it as a product of Madinan masons. The prayer hall is roofed by six domes with five domes in an autonomous system forming a portico preceding it.

The outlines of the six domes over the prayer hall are treated in the same way externally as the single dome of the nearby mosque of Sayyid-nâ Abû Baqr, dated to 1204/1789-1790 and whose masonry is of very similar character to the al-Ghamâma mosque. The prayer-hall domes on axis with the mihrâb of the al-Ghamâma all rise higher than their neighbours. This prayer hall design - with the accentuation of the axial domes - recalls very precisely the prayer hall of the Rasûlid al-Muṭābiya mosque at Taʿizz of 796/1393. It also has parallels with a scattered series of Fatimid six-domed and nine-domed mosques recorded in Egypt and in distant Bengal, the latter being of 9th-10th C./15th C.-16th C. date.
Plate 3: Al-Ghamama Mosque, al-Madina al-Munuwarra, from the north.

Plate 4: Al-Ghamama Mosque, al-Madina al-Munuwarra, interior

Plate 5: Mosque of Sayyid-na Abu Bakr, al-Madina al-Munuwarra

Plate 6: Mosque of Sayyid-na cUmár b. al-Khattáb
Nearer at hand in Arabia, the Ghamâma prayer hall design recalls the six-dome cAlawîya mosque at Sabyâ on the southern Tihâma coast which belongs to the multiple dome mosque tradition that prevails in that area. A related category of mosque type had nine domes and includes the cAli b. cUmar al-Shâdhîli mosque at al-Mukhâ on the Yemen coast, dated after 821/1418.

The al-Ghamâma mosque is thus a difficult building to assess, for although it may draw on Ottoman models it is worth bearing in mind its precise parallel to the older and indigenous western Arabian building type of the multi-domed mosque. As to its construction, as Dr Zahir cUthmân has suggested, it workmanship is that of local mosans of al-Madîna, used to working the basalt from the harra lava fields around the Holy City.

The same local mosans appear to be responsible for the Abû Bakr al-Siddîq mosque and mosque of cUmar b. al-Khattâb mosque in al-Madîna al-Munuwarra. They seem to be products of Madinan craftsmanship in all respects, constructed by local builders who had adapted to “Ottoman-period” style, using their familiar local building materials. The minarets of these two mosques very precisely echo Ottoman models, but it is the form of their minarets alone that leads them to be defined as “Ottoman” in a semiotic sense. They are not built by “Ottoman” architects, but by the more complex category of local master craftsmen working in the western Arabian towns.

The same process of absorption of the international Islamic Ottoman style into western Arabian buildings can be recognised in some of the mosques of the coastal towns of the Red Sea, including Jidda, and inland in the highlands at Makka’s summer resort town of at al-Tâ’if. The local Arabian architects absorbed the marker of the Ottoman-style “pencil” minaret, attaching it to very local mosque forms which were otherwise Hijâzî.

Such “pencil” minarets were adopted in mosques as diverse as the al-Budaywî and the al-Ashrâf mosques at al-Wajh and at Jidda at the Mi’mar mosque, the Hanafi mosque and the Bâshâ mosque where it is a standard form. In terms of their construction, all of these mosques seem to be the product of local building skills.

The building capacities and the frame of references of architects working at Makka al-Mukarrama, al-Madîna al-Munuwarra and Jidda less than a century ago have been demonstrated by the important study by Nâsir b. cAli al-Hârithî which show a Hijâzî building tradition that flourished still in the period when King cAbd al-cAzîz Ál Sa’ûd began to build extensively at Makka al-Mukarrama after 1924 when he took over the Hijâz. Al-Hârithî has given an interesting typology of minarets used in this period, all of which were the products of the Hijâzî tradition of workmanship in the period when Ottoman administrative influence had long since ceased. In these years, the projects sponsored by King cAbd al-cAzîz seem to have given a stimulus to the building tradition of the Hijâz, especially when prosperity set in with the beginning of oil income.
Darb Zubayda

Foreign Muslim rulers’ interventions in the sponsorship of Arabian architecture have by no means been confined to the Haramayn. Cities, towns and villages that lie on the routes to the Holy Cities have been affected to varying degrees over time by external sponsorship. The well documented 3rd/9th C. hajj-related structures of the Darb Zubayda running across Arabia show the imposition of a major building plan by Harûn al-Rashid and his wife Sitt Zubayda.

This building programme, originating in the Caliphal court in Baghdâd, led to the creation of a road system running from al-’Irâq to the Hijâz and whose conception included an infrastructure for accommodating and provisioning pilgrims. It was the first transportation project of such grandeur of intent since the Romans established their road system at the height of their Empire.

The Darb Zubayda halts included a series of mosques whose design must have reflected the orthodoxy acceptable to the contemporary cAbbasid religious authorities. However, the mosques were translated of necessity into local building materials in the areas of Arabia through which the Darb Zubayda passed. There are two mosques at the important halt of al-Rabadha, recorded during the excavations directed by Professor Sa’d al-Rashid which seem to be of different dates and styles but are among the earliest mosques recorded in central Arabia.

The most important mid-way station on the Darb Zubayda between al-Kûfa in al-’Irâq and the Haramayn was Fayd, recently excavated by Sa’ûdî archaeologists of SCTA (Supreme Commission for Tourism and Antiquities). At this important but remote site, the cutters of the masonry with which Fayd’s recently excavated stone mosque was constructed are likely to have been local north Arabia masons who would have been used to working the basalt that abounds at Fayd. It was not essential to import craftsmen from al-’Irâq for such work.

Dhû Jibla

By a very different means, the process of absorption of an international Islamic architectural style into an indigenous Arabian building tradition occurs at the spectacular mosque of the Yemeni Sulayhids built for Sayyida Arwa at Dhû Jibla in the Yemen highlands. It is dated after 480/1087-8, and it is a very specific example of the process whereby a notable Cairene mosque form was brought from Egypt into Arabia, but was executed in indigenous terms using Yemeni building skills.

In this case, the Yemeni architects working for Sitt Arwa worked with clear knowledge of international Islamic architecture of their day, to the extent of quotation of a great Cairene mosque form - that of the Mosque of al-Hâkim bi-’amr Allah built between 380/990 and 403/1013 as a replacement for al-Azhar. This precise architectural
reference arose from the adherence of the Sulayhids to the Fatimids’ Seven Shī’a doctrine and their political alliance.

The mosque of Sitt Arwa was constructed during the expansion of Dhû Jibla at the height of the powers of the Sulayhids. The city was sustained by a fertile agricultural landscape, and they derived their wealth from the lucrative trade of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. They had access to a local source of gold that sustained the treasury of the regime. The Sulayhids maintained an effective independence and at the same time close relations with the Fatimids when the latter were still the dominant power in the Red Sea and the Hijaz.

Sitt Arwa emerged eventually as the effective ruler of the territories of the Sulayhids, and she completed at Dhû Jibla the main mosque which became her burial place. The historian al-Hakami’s account suggests that the mosque of Sitt Arwa had previously been a palace, but if so, then it was demolished before the mosque was built. This was clear from our examination of the interior and the exterior of the mosque on several occasions between 1995 and 1997.

The mosque of Sitt Arwa is impressive. It has been adapted to the steep site thanks to the skill of architects used to dealing with terracing and the precipitous settlements that are common in Yemen and southern Hijaz. In location (if not their present construction) the minarets of the mosque of Sitt Arwa match precisely the position of the minarets of the mosque of al-Hâkim in Cairo. The axial form of the mosque is an interpretation of the ground-plan and elevation of the mosque of al-Hâkim, an achievement of high order given the nature of the site at Dhû Jibla.

The extremely complex mihrâb of the Mosque of Sitt Arwa is now gaudily painted but it is of a type that is de sui generis among mihrâbs, a Yemeni translation of a Fatimid model. The now-destroyed tomb of Sitt Arwa against the qibla wall was of similar Fâtimid type, re-interpreted locally.

The remarkable painted ceiling of the mosque’s prayer-hall is easier to parallel both within Yemen and beyond as Professor James Allan first demonstrated in a seminal study of the significance of Yemeni ceilings. The Sitt Arwa mosque ceiling is complex and deserves an extensive study. Because we recorded it in less than ideal circumstances, we could not establish the sequence of its construction, but the ceiling was obviously from a series of periods and is a work of the greatest importance in terms of Arabian religious decoration.

It consists of a series of painted floral and geometric patterns with inscriptions. Like the mosque as a whole, the ceiling deserves a detailed analysis of its structural history to give a clearer idea of its evolution over time. Like other Yemeni ceilings, it may reflect the practice of ceiling construction in the early Islamic world, in this case executed and interpreted in an Arabian manner under the Yemeni Sulayhids.

A strand of descent of such work and the concept of painting interiors generally, may
include the painted house interiors that are encountered further north in ‘Asîr and al-
Bahâ’ in Saudi Arabia in more recent times and which are unique to these highlands.
The whole issue of the genesis of Arabian interior painting - of mosques and of
domestic structures - is an important aspect of western and SW Arabian building in
the Islamic period.

**Mosques in Central Arabia**

The international connections and complexities of these Hijâzî and Yemeni mosques
and related buildings arise both from the contacts of western Arabia through the
pilgrimage to the Holy Cities, and through the major Islamic period trade routes that
ran through the region following still more ancient incense trade routes. The same is
true of mosques built along the Darb Zubayda and the other pilgrim roads that lead
to the Haramayn.

Such internationalism did not apply to much of what is now Saudi Arabia. Away
from the major routes, in the mountain regions and the agricultural settlements of
the central deserts, architectural styles of mosques were far more precisely regional in
the past and not prone to the impact of styles from the outside world. When the Darb
Zubayda pilgrim road with its sophisticated emplacements was built through Najd
in the 3rd /9th C. it probably had as little impact on the villages and towns away from
its course as the Ottoman fortresses built along the route to the Hijâz from Damascus
had in later times.

It is hard to make certain statements about the mosques of central Arabia beyond the
pilgrim roads before the rise of the first Sa‘ûdî state in the 12th/18th C. as so little is
recorded of mosques in much of the country. However, from the 12th/18th C., it is
possible to make firm statements about the design of these mosques.

They are largely built of clay, usually of bricks, and the round arch was not known in
most places in central Arabia, being replaced by keel arches made of steeply set long
stones to form a triangular vault. These rested on composite stone columns, rendered
smooth by a mud plaster coating.

Mosques in central Arabia were often built with a separate enclosed prayer hall for
winter use, termed the khalwa. Prayer was also conducted on the roof of the prayer hall,
or on the khalwa roof. Single and paired staircases are encountered leading from the
courtyard to the roof of the main prayer hall. Mosques with these basic characteristics
were once encountered throughout Najd down to the mid-20th C. when new styles
of modern mosque - usually in concrete and with little or no connection to the past
- started to replace the old mosques.

This area has been dominated by the Salafî doctrine of Shaykh Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-
Wahhâb since the mid-12th/18th C., and it follows that the mosques of the region as a
whole conformed to the teaching of the Hanbali Salafî madhhhab of the Shaykh. Many

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of these older mosques, especially the Friday Mosques of towns in Salafi Najd, had minarets, contradicting (an) a misunderstanding of earlier generation of Western scholars who associated the absence of minarets with the doctrines of Shaykh Muhammad. The distinctive squared minarets of the central and southern Najdi mosques and various types of circular minaret found in Sudayr and al-Qasim all point to the opposite, that the minaret was entirely acceptable in terms of the Salafi doctrine.

To find mosques entirely lacking in minarets and harking back to a pre-minaret tower tradition, one has to look to south-west Arabia and the coasts of Abu Dhabi and Ra’s al-Khaimah. At mosques as far apart as the southern Tihâma, Najrân, Dalmâ island in Abû Dhabi, Ra’s al-Khaimah Emirate and at Bukhâ’ in Musandam, Oman, the absence of minarets are encountered. The connection between all of these places is hard if not impossible to establish, but the architectural evidence speaks for itself. One can conclude that there is a widespread tradition of mosque building in these places that extends across all of Arabia and which does not include minarets. Rather than minarets, across this great space of Arabia, mosques are consistently encountered that have low pray-call platforms rather than minaret towers. These platforms are sometimes built with steps, sometimes without.

Such “minaret platforms” are encountered in Sa‘udi Arabia at the ‘Alawiya mosque at Sabyâ on the Sa‘udi Arabian Tihama13 and at the Asfal mosque at Masqî in ‘Asîr in the south-western highlands. In the Arabian Gulf, such a “minaret platform” once existed at the al-Muraykhî mosque at Dalmâ in Abu Dhabi Emirate14. A “minaret platform”
was recovered during archaeological excavations of the Friday Mosque of Julfār in Ra’s al-Khaimah Emirate, of ca 14th/15th C. CE date. At no stage in its history did this well stratified mosque have a minaret tower constructed despite its five phases of re-construction. The “minaret platform” sufficed instead and that for only a relatively short period15. A “platform minaret” has also been noted at the mosque at al-Falayya in Ra’s al-Khaimah, the seat of the Āl Qāsimī rulers of Ra’s al-Khaimah.

An older interpretation vouchsafed by E. Schroeder was that the lack of a minaret-tower could be attributed to the reformist doctrines of the Shaykh Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhāb’s Salafî movement, spread through his alliance with the Āl Saʿūd. However, given the existence of minarets in Saʿūdî mosques in the heart of Najd, the association of a lack of a minaret with Salafî doctrine does not hold true, as already noted. Thus it does not seem reasonable to attribute the lack of minarets and their replacement by “platform minarets” in 19th and 20th C. Ra’s al-Khaimah mosques to Salafî influence.

I am inclined to suggest that all of these mosques lacking minarets are a part of a very old Arabian tradition of building mosques which has not been adequately noted in the study of Islamic architecture. I am therefore inclined to propose that some common, but unknown antecedent for the “platform minaret” within Arabia should be sought from a period when Arabian mosque architecture had not yet been influenced by the minaret tower tradition that eventually evolved in the rest of the Islamic world.

If the “platform minaret” seems to be specifically Arabian, so to seems the case of the mihrāb combined structurally with the minbar, set into in the qibla wall. However, it has not yet been possible to attribute such a system to a very early date. Mihrāb-minbars built into the qibla wall occur at places as far afield in Saʿūdî Arabia as the al-Shafî mosque at Jidda (the oldest mosque in the city, discussed above and dated 649/1251; restored 940/1533-4 and with later work), the mosque of ʿAlī b. Abī Tālib at Khaybar in the northern al-Hijâz16, the mosque of ʿUmar at Dumat al-Jandal in al-Jawf (1208/1793-4), and the Jāmiʿ at Sudūs in central Najd (13th/19th C. or early 14th C./20th C.)17

The same combination of mihrāb and minbar is encountered in eastern Arabia in the Saʿīd b. ʿAlī al-Muhannadi at Dalmà in
the Western Region of the Abu Dhabi Emirate. On the Bátina coast of the Sultanate of Oman at Bandar al-Jissa and in inner Oman at al-Sulayf near Ibrî the mihrâb-minbar combination has been recorded. Lorenz notes that this arrangement is also common in southern Oman.

It is interesting to note that when King ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Āl Saʿūd had a mosque built in Makka al-Mukarrama in the Qasr al-Mawiyya in the last century, the mihrâb niche in the mosque included a fixed minbar platform within the niche. This echoed the type of mihrâb familiar in Najd and it is likely that it reflected Najdî practice.

In short, this mihrâb and minbar combination type is encountered across all of Arabia, but is absent beyond the Arabian Peninsula, and is certainly not a part of the religious architectural tradition of Syria or al-Irāq or the Islamic lands of the west.

As to the antiquity of the mihrâb-minbar formula, in the absence of dated early examples and datable excavated archaeological evidence, it is not possible at present to establish the antecedents of this combination. Given the examples that I have cited here from the varied milieux of Arabia, I merely suggest that this formula is broadly Arabian in origin, but its genesis within the Islamic religious architectural tradition has yet to be clearly traced into earlier times.

**Eastern Arabia and Oman**

In eastern Arabia, it is extremely difficult to generalise on the mosques of the region as whole. Rather, there are concentrations of regionalised typologies. The remarkable Sūq al-Khamîs mosque in Bahrain, for good reason, it is one of the best known mosques of the region but it is so exceptional in its design that it defies categorization.
The old mosques of Kuwait seem to form a group which was sufficiently distinctive to be seen as a very localised manifestation of the city’s building traditions, but they are confined typologically to Kuwait which seems to have looked for architectural influence from al-‘Irâq rather than southwards. The Kuwaiti mosques have no similarity whatever to the complex diversity once encountered in the mosques further south in Sa’ûdì Arabia at al-Jubayl, al-Qatîf, al-‘Uqayr or in the al-Ahsâ’ oasis.

Sufficient survived in the 1970s in these Sa’ûdì towns to recognize the existence of well established localised mosque typologies particular to their own districts, although it would be hard to demonstrate this today as so much has been rebuilt. However, three decades ago, enough old architecture, including mosques, existed in al-Qatîf, for example, to sustain the contention that there was a localised mosque style peculiar to the town and with certain parallels with the mosques of al-Ahsâ’.

As to al-Hufûf, the main city of al-Ahsâ’, its prosperity was such that it had a diversity of local mosque types, some very impressive. However, the most famous mosque of the city, the mosque of Ibrâhîm with its approximation of an Ottoman dome chamber, is a complex exception. Curiously, its minaret, unusual in the immediate area of al-Ahsâ’, parallels the stumpier minaret of the old Khalaf al-‘Utayba mosque in Abu Dhabi city, although there is no obvious parallel between these two buildings in any other respect. Rather, they seem to share a minaret design that may have once been more general in the Gulf region as a whole.

There is an interesting coincidence of minaret form of one particular style, represented by the minaret of the Sharafîya mosque in al-Hufûf – virtually cylindrical in shape and without a shurrafa balcony. It was very close to a minaret type that existed in Qatar and of which several still survived in al-Wakra and elsewhere in Qatar in 2007. The coincidence of minaret typology suggests a connection between at least one group of minaret builders working in Qatar and in al-Hufûf, but the nature of the relationship needs to be established.

At Dalmâ island, I have drawn attention to the surviving old mosques which are clearly related to each other chronologically, in terms of construction, and are attributed locally to Huwâla Arabs from the Iranian shore of the Gulf. These mosques at Dalmâ represent a unity in terms of design which is localised to the island. However, it is striking that despite the geographical proximity of Dalmâ and Qatar, the Dalmâ mosques had no parallel to the old mosques of Qatar which survived until 2007-8. This contrasts with the shared minaret forms at Wakra and at al-Hufûf, the basis of which is related to factors other than proximity.

A similar localised style occurs in the mosques of Ra’s al-Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates which have parallels across the border at Bukhâ’ in the northern Sultanate of Oman territory of Musandam. Here again, there is a regional mosque typology in a specific geographical area.
As to the mosques of the Omani Bâtina and interior, they present a series of markedly complex styles within a highly sophisticated tradition of decoration, especially in relation to mihrâb plasterwork. This has been most recently demonstrated in the studies by S. Damluji, P. Costa and L. Korn.

The mosque architecture of Oman is exceptional, for it reflects both connections internally, within southern Arabia, and more broadly, with influences stemming from the Indian Ocean littoral. The sophistication of the decorative tradition of Oman’s ornate mihrâbs includes the insertion of Ming porcelain which is an elaboration peculiar to Oman in terms of Arabian traditions. The sophistication of the Omani wood carving tradition in mosques and houses is also exceptional. It is matched in Arabia in its complexity only by the fine wood-working of southern and south-west Arabia, and to some extent, of the Red Sea coastal towns, especially Jidda.

The case of the mosque architecture of Oman is complex. It is influenced by the fact that the country faces towards the Indian Ocean as already noted, and should also be seen in the context of the trading relationships with places along the coast of Hadramût and Yemen which have a similar complexity of regionalism styles.

According to a Saudi scholar, in older, standard academic studies on Islamic architecture, Arabia makes a brief appearance at the inception of Islam with the foundation of the Mosque of the Prophet (S.), and thereafter vanishes completely as the shift of architectural emphasis, and therefore of modern study, moved to the Islamic countries far beyond Arabia. As this paper has tried to demonstrate, sufficient information has been recorded over recent decades to form a perception of the complexity of mosque building traditions within the Arabian Peninsula that would be the basis of both preservation and regeneration of the diverse indigenous architectural traditions of Arabia.

Some of what is described here has vanished, while some has been preserved and recorded in varying degrees. In recent years, great prosperity has benefitted Arabia and its people and development has led to the rebuilding of villages, towns and cities. Even with the most rigorous intent to preserve, this historical evolution inevitably entails loss of heritage sites, including mosques which are rebuilt as an act of religious concern. However, in recent years, there has been an increasing appreciation among the people of Arabia of older mosques and indigenous architectural traditions as part of the Arabian Peninsula’s heritage. This is more likely to generate a genuine interest and positive concern for a vanishing architectural tradition.

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Endnotes


2. I am very grateful to Professor Abou Seif, Khalili Professor at SOAS, University of London, for showing me her chapter “The Minaret of Sultan Qaytbay at the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina”, a part of her forthcoming study of minarets.

3. The extent of the complexity of Arabia’s building traditions has been best demonstrated in recent times by Dr. S.S. Damluji in her authoritative study, The Architecture of Yemen: From Yâfi to Hadramût, London (2007).


5. I am indebted to Muhandis Tariq ‘Ali Reza and Mr Muhammad Shabîb for drawing my attention to the Qâhût–built arcades in the Holy Haram Mosque at Makka al-Mukarrama Qâhût colonnades and their observations on the stone source.


11. Al-Azhar had initially been founded in 359/970 as the Friday mosque of the new Fatimid city of al-Qâhira. As its role became that of a centre of proselytization of the Fatimid da‘i, the present mosque named after al-Hâkim bi-‘amr Allah was founded as the Friday Mosque of the city by al-‘Azîz, al-Hâkim’s father and predecessor.

12. “The Amir al-Mukarram removed Dhu Jiblah, and he built the second royal palace upon an uncultivated tract of land. It was surrounded by a garden and by numerous trees, and looked down upon the two streams and upon the first palace. The Queen Sayyida [Arwa] ordered the latter to be converted into a cathedral mosque. It is the second cathedral mosque. It contains the tomb of the queen, which exists to this day. May God be merciful to her!”. See Najm al-Dîn Omarah al-Hakami, Yaman. Its medieval history. Also the abridged history of its dynasties by Ibn Khalîdîn and an account of the Karmatians of Yemen by Abu Abd Allah Baha ad-Din al-Janadîa, the original texts, with translation and notes, by H.C. Kay, London (1892; Farnborough, 1968), pp. 40-41. The monumental tomb of Sitt Arwa was smashed in 1993.

Geoffrey King


15. Geoffrey King, Old Mosques of the Coasts of Abu Dhabi, English, pp. 84-85; Arabic, pp. 84-85.


20. R. Lewcock and Z. Freeth, Traditional Architecture in Kuwait and the Northern Gulf, AARP, London (December, 1978) remains a useful of study of the houses and mosques before Kuwait began its rapid modernization in the mid-20th C.
The Philatelic History of the Trucial States, 1948 – 1966

Douglas N. Muir

Introduction

On 5 December 1960, a press and broadcast notice was released by the British Post Office in London. Headed “New Stamps for the Trucial States”, it announced the forthcoming issue of the first specially-designed pictorial stamps to be used in Dubai. It then went on to give a short explanation and history.¹

A new series of stamps for the Trucial States which will replace the specially overprinted British stamps at present used at the British Postal Agency, Dubai, will be on sale there on 7th January, 1961.

This series is the second of the new issues of stamps which, as announced in November 1958, are to be introduced in the British Postal Agencies. The first of the new issues, that for Bahrain, has been on sale since 1st July 1960.

The new series will consist of eleven denominations. There will be two designs, one depicting a dhow for the four stamps with values in rupees and one depicting palm trees for the seven stamps with values in naye paise. The designers are respectively Mr M.C. Farrar-Bell and Mr M. Goaman.

Further paragraphs gave a potted history of postal arrangements in the Gulf.

By agreement with the local Rulers, the British Post Office provides postal services by means of agency offices in the following territories: Bahrain, Qatar, Trucial States, and the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman.

The Agencies were originally operated by the British Indian Post Office which used overprinted Indian stamps. In 1948, when the Agencies were taken over by the British Post Office, British stamps overprinted to indicate the local value and, in some cases, the name of the State were introduced. These overprints are gradually being superseded. They were withdrawn from sale in Bahrain on 30th June, 1960, and will be withdrawn in the Trucial States on 5th January, 1961, but will continue to be used in Qatar and in the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman for the time being.

The new designs for the new stamps were chosen by the Rulers of the Trucial States.
This short note hides a far more complex and interesting story. Kuwait, for example, was omitted as, by this time, it was already both postally, and politically, independent. Until very recently, however, it had been another, vital British Postal Agency. To understand the history of the Trucial States, all Agencies need to be considered together (as they were by London at the time) though different agencies had somewhat different experiences and, clearly, here the emphasis will be on what affected the area which is now the United Arab Emirates. All went in tandem, on the other hand, and what happened in one affected what happened in another.

The British Postal Museum & Archive in London holds, and cares for, the records and archives of the British Post Office. These include all the British stamp artwork and stamps from 1840 to the present day, produced under the auspices of what is now Royal Mail. As such, we also hold records and artwork and stamps for the postal services of the British Postal Agencies in the Gulf from 1948. These include registration sheets of all stamps issued through the British Postal Agencies – all those overprinted on current British stamps – and the artwork and proofs for the first issues in the early 1960s of Qatar, the Trucial States and the separate issues for Abu Dhabi, while postal services were still run by the British Post Office. This paper, inevitably, is based on these records and must look at events from a British, rather London-based, point of view.

Why are stamps, or postal history, important? Stamps reflect immediately the political and geographical reality of the time – they are a microcosm of time and place. The posts were, in the days before emails and computers, the normal means of communication over any distance. One way or another they connected, or involved, us all.

**Historical Overview**

**Muscat** was the first Indian Postal Agency to be opened – on 1 May 1864. It used Indian stamps without any other overprint until 1947, then Pakistan stamps for a short period until 1948. On 1 April 1948 the agency was taken over by the British Post Office and used British stamps overprinted in Indian currency from then until postally independent on 30 April 1966.

**Bahrain:** Manama, the capital, was the second Indian Postal Agency – opened on 1 August 1884, some 20 years later. Like Muscat it used Indian stamps until 1933. Then those stamps current were overprinted BAHRAIN and these were used until 1948. British stamps, overprinted BAHRAIN and in Indian currency were then used until 1960. From 1953 stamps bearing the Shaikh’s portrait were used on internal mail. Finally, from 1960 pictorial stamps produced by the G.P.O. were used until postal independence on 31 December 1965. A sub-office was opened at Muharraq on 1 June 1946.

In the Trucial States **Dubai** was the only postal agency until 1963. It opened on
19 April 1909 and, like Muscat, used Indian stamps without overprint until 1947 and then Pakistan stamps until 1948. There followed the same British stamps overprinted in Indian currency as Muscat from 1948 till 1961. From 1961 to 1963 it was the only office to use Trucial States stamps but it became postally independent on 14 June 1963 with stamps produced by stamp dealers.

Kuwait: Kuwait city opened on 21 January 1915 using Indian stamps without overprint until 1923. As with Bahrain, it then used Indian stamps overprinted KUWAIT. This was until 1948, though there was a short interval from 1941 to 1945 when it reverted to Indian stamps unoverprinted because of the rebellion in Iraq. Thereafter, British stamps overprinted KUWAIT and Indian currency were used until 1959 when pictorial stamps produced in London were introduced on the hand-over of postal affairs on 31 January 1959.

Later offices in Kuwait included Ahmadi (opened 1 May 1950), Jewan (7 April 1954) and seven offices in 1958.

For Qatar Doha opened on 20 May 1950 as a British Postal Agency. It used the same British stamps overprinted with Indian currency as Muscat and Dubai until 1957. Then, the current British stamps were overprinted QATAR and Indian currency and used from 1957 until 1961. Pictorial stamps produced by the G.P.O. in London were then used until postal independence on 23 May 1963. A later office, Umm Said, opened on 1 February 1956.

Abu Dhabi was only the second Postal Agency opened in the Trucial States after Dubai - on 30 March 1963. It first used British overprinted stamps (value only) until 1965 and then used pictorial stamps produced by the G.P.O. until postal independence on 31 December 1966.

Other offices were set up in the separate sheikhdoms in the Trucial States from 1963, but although postally independent offices, these were all created by stamp dealers with stamps designed to gain revenue from philatelists rather than provide a postal service. These were not British postal agencies.

Sharjah – Opened 10 July 1963
Ajman – Opened 20 June 1964
Umm al Qaiwain – Opened 29 June 1964
Fujairah – Opened ?22 September 1964
Ras al Khaimah – Opened ?21 December 1964

British Postal Agencies

The very limited number of British Postal Agencies were controlled from Bahrain, which acted as a control hub both politically, under the British Political Resident,
postally, under the British Postal Superintendent. From 1948 they used the current King George VI definitive stamps overprinted in Indian currency (16 annas = 1 rupee = 1s 6d Sterling) up to a value of 2 rupees. In the collections of the British Postal Museum & Archive are the official registration sheets of these stamps taken for record purposes.

But it was not only the definitive stamps which were overprinted for use in the Gulf. Commemorative stamps were also overprinted though these were few in number. The first were for the Silver Wedding of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1948, (Figure 1) and then the London Olympic Games of the same year and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Postal Union the following year. For all of these we have proofs of the overprints, and official sheets of the issued stamps. This also applies to the same stamps overprinted for use in Kuwait and Bahrain. The last stamps of King George VI to be overprinted for the Gulf were those of 1951.

However, it was not only stamps which were issued to the Dubai post office but postmark cancellers and all sorts of forms. On the first day of the British Agency (1 April 1948) the old Indian cancellers were still in use. (Figure 2) Soon, however, British-style postmarks for Dubai were also provided.

The same pattern continued in the reign of Queen Elizabeth II. When appropriately denominated stamps were issued in the United Kingdom they were also overprinted for use in Gulf postal agencies. So most of the so-called Wilding low-value definitive stamps dating from 1952 and the so-called Castles high value stamps from 1955 were similarly overprinted. This was also the case for the first commemorative stamps of the reign, those for the 1953 Coronation. We have all the complete official sheets of these. British air letters from the outset had also been overprinted.

In 1957 Indian currency was decimalised. This also applied to the Gulf. Now the rupee was divided into 100 Naye Paise. This required new stamps and the current values in the United Kingdom were overprinted with the new values. All registration
sheets are kept by the British Postal Museum & Archive.

That same year, 1957, saw the last of the British commemoratives overprinted. This was an issue for a Scout Jamboree being held in Britain. Overprinted stamps were produced for Dubai and Muscat, Qatar and Bahrain and these were placed on sale. They were also produced for Kuwait but the ruler of that country had joined the Arab boycott of the British Games and so he refused to allow the stamps to go on sale in Kuwait. These stamps had already been printed and so we have unique record sheets in our Archive, even though they were never issued.

This controversy prompted the British Foreign Office to suggest in October 1957 new local stamps and the hand-over of postal services to the territories concerned.

**Thoughts turn to Local Issues**

Since 1946, when Britain was negotiating to take over the Agencies, Shaikh Salman of Bahrain had been asking to run his own postal services and have his own stamps bearing his portrait. After some six years it was agreed, but the decision had had to go to King George VI for his approval. The Shaikh had strong views on this perhaps best expressed in a letter of 1950.

The fact that British stamps are used gives the impression to all, except the few who happen to be aware of the situation, that Bahrain is a British possession. His Highness believes that it is not the wish of the British Government that this wrong impression should exist. In most British colonies and protectorates, Zanzibar, Aden, Cyprus and many others, individual stamps are used which in some cases bear a design incorporating a portrait of the ruler; yet in Bahrain, which is neither a British Colony or a British Protectorate, but an independent Arab State in treaty relations with the British Government, British stamps are used.

His Highness would like Bahrain stamps to bear an individual design with a portrait of himself upon them.

This view was reiterated on several occasions and after much deliberation over various possible plans it was grudgingly agreed by the Post Office. One of the main stumbling blocks was the sale from a British post office of stamps which did not bear the monarch’s head. A plan to circumvent this problem was to allow Bahrain to take over its internal postal service and issue appropriate stamps for that. The proposal was put to King George VI, himself (like his father) a philatelist.

The King has expressed the hope that it may be possible to restrict the proposed stamps on which the Ruler’s head is to be depicted so that they may be used for internal postage only. His Majesty has no objection to this but would wish to be further consulted before any permission was given which would result in the stamps receiving international recognition. The King has added that he considers it may be wise to go extremely slow in this matter, particularly if the issue of such
Thus, Bahrain had a stamp featuring Shaikh Salman from February 1953 used only on internal mail, now under the control of the Bahraini authorities. Foreign mails continued to be dealt with by the British postal agency. The stamp was designed and printed by the British printing firm, De La Rue, in intaglio (or recess, the same process as for the world’s first postage stamp the Penny Black, way back in 1840). Negotiations about design and printing were direct between ruler and printer with no British Post Office involvement.

The basic plan agreed (though not strictly adhered to) was to hand over responsibility to Bahrain in the following order:4

(i) Issue of stamps bearing the Ruler’s likeness in the internal service.
(ii) Transfer of local services.
(iii) Transfer of all mail services except the despatch and receipt of foreign mails.
(iv) Transfer of remaining services.

No timescale for Bahrain was agreed, however. The fear, or expectation, that other territories in the Gulf would want to follow suit proved correct. By 1956, Kuwait was also asking to take over its postal service with its own stamps. The plan for Bahrain was adopted and implemented in conjunction with the building of a new head post office in Kuwait city. Voluminous files detail every aspect of the transfer, including the training of staff in London. Again, stamps bearing the Amir’s head were designed and printed in London by De La Rue without GPO involvement. The Queen’s approval for this was obtained in February 1957. They were first issued in 1958 for internal use, but from 1959 also prepaid foreign mail when the Kuwait Post Office became completely independent. This coincided with the opening of the new post office at Jahra Road at a grand ceremony with senior GPO officials from London present.

With Bahrain and Kuwait having (or about to have) local stamps, the British Foreign Office began to think about the future of the whole Gulf area. On 3 October 1957, D.M.H. Riches wrote confidentially from the Foreign Office to A.H. Ridge of the GPO.5

Arab nationalist sentiment, both in the Gulf and elsewhere in the Middle East can only regard the stamps now used in the British Protected Sheikhdoms, as a symbol of Britain’s imperialistic position in the Gulf. These stamps have already evoked some criticism locally and they are certain to arouse more in the future with the increase of nationalist fervour in the Gulf. If the Rulers are not yet embarrassed by them as an advertisement abroad of their bonds with the British I have little doubt that they will be in future. Finally during the recent troubles in Oman, the anomaly was noted that Muscat and Oman, which is a completely independent

* The “Persian Gulf” was the term used in those days by the British Post Office to refer to what is now called “The Gulf” in this region, and this terminology has been followed throughout the article.
state (and which apparently has no postal agreement with the United Kingdom) was using British overprinted stamps. The situation is only slightly less anomalous in the Persian Gulf Sheikhdoms, since these, though Protected States, do not consider themselves members of the Commonwealth.

Thus, whether or not we envisaged a handover of postal services we would see advantage in introducing a new range of stamps as soon as possible.

The Acting Political Resident in Bahrain had pointed out that once people in Bahrain noticed that Kuwait is using its own stamps there would be a move for them to do the same.

We should, I am sure, be prepared for a request from the Bahrain Government to take over the external postal services when Kuwait stamps come into circulation. I have little doubt that there will be a move in the same direction in Qatar. While we would welcome the handover of these postal services after proper preparation, we may soon find the Governments of Qatar and Bahrain, urged on by nationalist opinion in their States, pressing for an earlier and more speedy handover than would permit an efficient continuation of the services. However, were we now to print and issue (in agreement with the local Governments) special stamps for each of the British Protected States in the Persian Gulf (treating the Trucial States as one), and for Muscat, perhaps pictorials with the local Ruler’s head or a national symbol replacing the head of The Queen, we might hope to avert much of the criticism based on the present nature of our stamps, and we might thereby help to secure a breathing space.

Riches went on to note that “it may be that in this there lies an important source of revenue for assisting development in the more needy of the Gulf States.” The development of the Trucial Coast was likely to rank high among British priorities. He concluded:

I realise that the production of philatelic issues, and the use of the income from them in the way suggested may not fall entirely within the usual lines of policy in territories where postal orthodoxy must naturally prevail.

The Gulf, however, was “far from possessing the characteristics of orthodoxy. Things are moving fast there and we must keep a jump or two ahead of the game.” This seminal proposal was received by a GPO “hallowed by tradition”. British postal officials looked at matters from a purely postal service point of view. Postal needs of the resident population, or lack of them, were the only factors considered. Their stamp-issuing policy in the United Kingdom was conservative in the extreme and officials feared that any break in this tradition in the Agencies might lead to demands for change at home. Foreign Office officials were much more far-sighted and had, naturally, a much wider perspective.

Given the Foreign Office attitude it was decided within the Post Office that
“compliance if practicable” was a lesser evil than giving up all their functions in the Gulf as a whole. They laid great store on stamps bearing The Queen’s head being sold in British post offices and saw objections and practical problems about producing others with the head of local rulers. From the Director of Postal Services came the view:

The question of replacing the Monarch’s head on stamps sold by our Post Offices is clearly a crucial one which will need decision at the highest level. The position of our Post Offices in the Gulf is, however, so curious already that I don’t think separate issues of stamps ought to be a breaking point.

At a meeting with Foreign Office officials it became clear that they had two aims in mind. The first, the main object, was the desire to withdraw stamps which might appear to be provocative to nationalist-minded Arabs. But there were also subsidiary ones, for instance “to flatter the local Rulers by asking them to approve their own designs of stamp. In the Foreign Office view there could be no question of imposing a design on the local Rulers, who might well feel affronted if this were done. It was recognized that, in some places, particularly Bahrain, Rulers might be stimulated by the offer of local stamps to ask for full independence, but that was a risk worth taking.”

From the British Post Office point of view, the Gulf Agencies were an embarrassment. Running them involved carrying a “burden” out of all proportion to the importance of the postal work. Nevertheless, they realised the political importance of continuing and reluctantly agreed to the creation of local stamps for the different territories. They decided to have the designs produced by the printing firms, and as they could be regarded as British stamps, the low values would be printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd in photogravure and the high values in recess by De La Rue Ltd, as were the current British stamps. Such stamps would require the prior agreement of The Queen. The sequence of events was agreed as follows:

1. The Foreign Office to ask each Ruler to specify the type of design he would like.
2. The Post Office to invite the four main stamp producing firms to produce designs to each Ruler’s specifications.
3. The Post Office and the Foreign Office to co-operate in weeding out unsuitable designs.
4. The Foreign Office to submit all the designs considered suitable to the Rulers so that each Ruler may make his choice.
5. The Post Office to arrange for stamps bearing the designs chosen by the Rulers to be produced by one or both of the firms producing current United Kingdom stamps under existing contracts.
6. The Post Office to continue to stock, supply and account for the stamps of each
Agency as at present.

7. The cost of producing the special issues would be about £15,000 per Agency in the first year, but less than the present cost of overprinting in subsequent years. It would be met by the Post Office, provided that it was covered by the annual surplus on Agency trading as a whole.

In early 1958, discussions took place with government advisers in both Bahrain and Qatar. Later, on 14 July that year, the position was confidentially explained to The Queen’s Private Secretary, Martin Charteris.

As you know, the stamps now used in British postal agencies throughout the Persian Gulf are over-printed British stamps. This is mildly offensive to Arab nationalist sentiment in the shaikhdoms in question, which are independent states though under our protection, and outside the Gulf is taken as evidence of a “British imperialist position”. It is indeed, on the face of it, somewhat anomalous that independent states should be using postage stamps the form of which implies a degree of subjection to Her Majesty. The position is even more anomalous in the case of Muscat and Oman, a state which is not only nominally but actually totally independent, and for whose defence and international relations Her Majesty’s Government are not responsible.

The Sultan of Muscat and Oman has recently informed the Foreign Secretary that he is thinking of taking over the Post Office in Muscat; he is of course free to do so at any time and if he does so he will be at liberty to use any stamps which he wishes. The Governments of Bahrain and Qatar, and Rulers of the Trucial States, have not recently expressed a wish to take over the Post Offices, though the Ruler of Bahrain did so in 1950 following which a phased scheme to hand over the services was agreed. The final phase of this scheme has not yet been implemented but if British over-printed stamps continue to be used, Bahrain will probably soon seek complete postal independence. Qatar too is likely soon to wish to take over her Post Office. When they do there will be no grounds for refusing. However, it is much to be desired that, when the postal services are eventually handed over to any of these states, they should be handed over after reasonable preparation without ill-will and without any precipitate action. The Foreign Secretary has been considering this problem with the Postmaster General for some time, and they have jointly agreed to recommend the replacement of the postage stamps now used in British Persian Gulf Post Offices by stamps bearing the effigies, or being otherwise specifically representative, of the Rulers in question. This change would remove one of the most obvious targets of Arab nationalist criticism both inside and outside the Gulf. It is preferable that British influence should appear as unobtrusive as possible, particularly so in the case of Muscat and Oman, whose use of British stamps was widely noted during the Omani rebellion of 1957 and was quoted as evidence that the Sultanate is a puppet state.
Kuwaiti stamps have already come into use on the Kuwaiti internal postal services, on February 1, and it will be only a short time before the Kuwaiti Government take over complete responsibility for external postal services as well and put their own stamps into circulation for this purpose. This will call attention throughout the Gulf to the implied difference of status between Kuwait and the other shaikhdoms.

The Foreign Secretary would accordingly be grateful if you would seek Her Majesty’s permission for the postage stamps now in use in the British Post Offices in Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial States and Muscat & Oman to be replaced as soon as possible by stamps bearing the effigies of the Rulers in question or otherwise directly representative of them.

This permission was duly forthcoming, as noted on 18 July.

**Stamps for the Trucial States**

For postal purposes the GPO in London treated all seven shaikhdoms in the Trucial States as one entity. And at this time there was only one post office, that of Dubai. It was recognised immediately that there was little point in trying to obtain specific proposals for designs for the stamps within a reasonable time limit. So, in September 1958 the Political Agency in Dubai made its own suggestions, asking that a design, or designs, be worked out in London which they could then put before a gathering of the Rulers later in the year for their approval. One of the suggestions was that it should be based on pearls, dhows and palm trees. J.F. Walker at the Foreign Office relayed this to the Post Office with the comment that “I believe that you might consider that a ‘pictorial’ of a dhow near a palm-lined coast surrounded by pearls, or cornered by pearl oysters would fit the case.”

Apart from this pictorial theme there were other necessary instructions, and this then was the design brief:

1. The words “Trucial States” should appear in English and Arabic.
2. The word “postage” should appear in English.
3. Spaces should be left for the denomination in European and Arabic numerals and “NP” and its equivalent in Arabic should also figure. The design submitted will need to be large enough to be inspected by a meeting of the Rulers concerned later in the year.

One small point was the type of paper to be used. British stamps were printed on paper with a watermark recently introduced featuring royal crowns. It was decided to use unwatermarked paper for all the Gulf issues to distance them as far as possible from any hint of a British connection.

A number of artists were employed at Harrisons, the security stamp printers, and four of these were asked to provide designs. They were Pat Keely, M.C. Farrar-Bell, W.H. Brown and Michael Goaman, all of whom had produced stamp designs for the
British Post Office in the past. The next meeting of the Trucial Council was on 24 November and it was the aim to have designs ready for that.

Eight designs were submitted by Harrisons at the beginning of November, two from each artist – one for low, the other for high, values. These were considered by GPO officials and four were to be rejected immediately. The designs were:

- Pat Keely: 5 NP Dhow (low values) – drawing No. 341
  10 Rs Dhow and pearl oyster (high values) – drawing No. 343
- M.C. Farrar-Bell: NP Falcon (low values) – drawing No. 346
  [no value] Dhow (high values) – drawing No. 342
- W.H. Brown: 40 NP Falcon and desert riders (low values) – drawing No. 350
  2 Rs Lobster and pearl oyster (high values) – drawing No. 348
- Michael Goaman: [no value] Palm trees (low values) – drawing No. 347
  2 Rs Dhow with pearls (high values) – drawing No. 349

Those designs recommended were the low value Dhow design by Pat Keely (No. 341) (Figure 3) described as “by far the most attractive” with that by Michael Goaman depicting palm trees as a possible alternative for the low values. The seven palm trees represented the seven shaikhdoms of the Trucial States (Figure 4).

![Figure 3](image1)

![Figure 4](image2)
For the high values the Dhow design by M.C. Farrar-Bell (No. 342) was regarded as the best, but it might be better in one colour only. (Figure 5) The surround was said to be a local traditional pattern. A possible alternative was Michael Goaman’s Dhow design (No. 349) where the dots were supposed to represent pearls. However, the boat seemed to be rather western in appearance and might not appeal to the shaikhs.

These were now submitted by the procedure originally outlined by the British Post Office through the Foreign Office to the Rulers in the Trucial States. As this meant that news was likely to leak out it was decided to issue a general press release in London announcing the fact that local Gulf stamps were in preparation.

Although meetings of the Trucial Council had taken place no decisions had been taken. This was because Shaikh Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi objected to the idea of uniform stamps for all the Trucial States and wanted individual stamps for Abu Dhabi, even though there was then no post office in existence. At the end of January 1959, the British Political Agent in Dubai, D.F. Hawley, informed the Foreign Office in confidence that it had not been possible to kill Shaikh Shakhbut’s idea of separate stamps for Abu Dhabi.11

When once he takes an idea into his head, he is as tenacious of it as any other man I have ever met. There is also no doubt that, if Abu Dhabi is going to become an ‘oil’ state, there will be increasing pressure from the Ruler and Shaikhs for it to be treated on a somewhat different basis than the other Trucial States.

In the meantime designs for local stamps for Bahrain and Qatar were progressing and it was hoped to issue them all at the same time. This was to prove a vain hope.

Finally, on 19 March, H.B. “Hooky” Walker was able to report from Dubai that the Rulers had chosen design No. 347 (Goaman’s palm trees) for the low value stamps and No. 342 (Farrar-Bell’s Dhow) for the high values. However, he went on to make various points about the Arabic script. The name Trucial States should be in Arabic at the top of the stamp and in English at the bottom. Cufic script should be used and he made detailed criticisms about the diacritical points.

It was, perhaps, not surprising that English artists in Britain had made mistakes in the Arabic. On the other hand, as far back as April 1950 the Crown Agents in London had warned the Post Office (referring to the possible issue of local Bahrain stamps then) that “if a design includes Arabic script, this must be checked locally as London
opinion is classical, and script acceptable to experts in London has been held to be illegible in the place where the stamps are to be used.”

Problems with the Arabic, even though checked by the Foreign Office in London, were to plague the production of all stamps for territories in the Gulf over the next few years.

Hooky Walker had not mentioned that the Trucial States Rulers had expressed a desire for an additional design featuring a camel. Although this request was subsequently passed on it was decided that there would be a serious delay if they began with new designs de novo. So the idea was quietly dropped.

As a matter of courtesy it was intended to show the designs to The Queen. However, when the Bahrain essays were ready before those of the Trucial States and were forwarded for her approval, her Private Secretary confirmed that the Qatar and Trucial States stamps need not be submitted to her before issue. But, he pointed out that “if at any future time consideration is given to using The Queen’s effigy on any of these stamps [the British Foreign Office] should submit designs for approval.”

Denominations were agreed to be the same for all Gulf territories. Low values would be printed in photogravure in sheets of 100 by Harrison & Sons Ltd, high values in intaglio (recess) by Thomas De La Rue Ltd in sheets of 50. Printing warrants with designated colours were then issued.

Colours for the Trucial States stamps were altered to make them deliberately different from their equivalent values issued for Bahrain.

Problems with the Arabic script delayed matters through the summer and autumn of 1959 – in particular the correct plural of Rupees. When colour essays (or trial stamps) were produced in October the colour of the 50 NP was changed to a lighter shade of bistre brown to avoid any confusion with the 15 NP stamp. It was not until March 1960 that an error was discovered in the Arabic on the 5 NP. The engraved Dhow design for the high values also had to be improved. All this conspired to delay production of bulk quantities and it was only in October 1960 that proofs of sheets of high values taken from the amended plates were approved.

In the BPMA collections are all the final approved colour essays mounted on cards provided by the two printers. None of the rejected essays are extant. We also hold imperforate approved registration sheets of all values in the issued colours. For the high values we retain the original intaglio printing plates.

Issue date was now set as 7 January 1961 and a press release to that effect giving printing details was issued in London on 5 December (as quoted above). By this time stamps for Bahrain had been on sale for six months but those for Qatar suffered further delays because of various difficulties including the initial designs being rejected. The Trucial States stamps were on sale at Dubai alone until they were withdrawn on 14 June 1963.
As well as stamps, postal stationery in the form of air letters were also produced being printed with the relevant low value stamp by the printers of the British contract, McCorquodale & Co. near London.

In terms of the stamp designs used there was one interesting sequel. When Ras al Khaimah came to have its own stamps in December 1964, Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammed al-Qasimi wanted to have his stamps printed by Harrisons, whose artists had designed the Trucial States stamps.

The Ruler suggested using the obsolete Trucial States range of stamps if stocks were available and could be overprinted “Ras al Khaimah”. Alternatively the designs could be re-used with “Ras al Khaimah” replacing “Trucial States”, and with a small inset of the Ruler’s head.14

In the end the Trucial designs were re-used with slight modifications.

At this time, in 1961, there was only one postal agency in the Trucial States – that at Dubai. Postal traffic at this time was still very limited. A report dated July 1961 noted that:15

The post office at Dubai despatches each week approximately 13,600 ordinary letters, 560 registered letters, and 40 parcels, and receives for delivery about 5,100 ordinary letters, 600 registered letters, and 200 parcels. Because this traffic is small it would be uneconomical to make up a separate mail for each of the many countries to which correspondence is addressed, and direct mails are made up only between Dubai and Bombay, Delhi and Karachi as well as Bahrain and other Agency offices in the Gulf. Mails for most other designations are sent via Bahrain or Bombay. Similarly mail [from] most other destinations is received via one of these places.

Employed were locally recruited staff, being one Postmaster, two Clerks, two Sorters, one Postman, one Sweeper and one “Allowanced Deliverer”. Delivery was normally to numbered post boxes at the post office, a system which survives largely to this day.

Neither Sharjah nor Abu Dhabi had a post office though these had been mooted for a couple of years. In 1958 it was reported that Sharjah had an airport (though there was none at Dubai).

Therefore, all incoming airmail arrives at Sharjah by Gulf Aviation flight and is conveyed to Dubai about 12 miles away across the desert by airport land-rover. The airport is run on behalf of the Ministry of Aviation by International Air Radio Ltd., to whom we pay a monthly transport charge. The driver who conveys the mail to Dubai remains there till all incoming mail is sorted when he returns to Sharjah with any mail for the airport staff there - a handful of letters from each despatch. Any incoming mail received at Dubai addressed to merchants and private residents in Sharjah is delivered by hand by our Sharjah “Postman”, to whom we pay Rs. 50/- monthly, but the amount of correspondence of this kind is
almost negligible as most of the Sharjah merchants at present use the Dubai Post Office facilities. In the reverse direction all outgoing mail is made up at Dubai and conveyed in airport land-rover, which has left Sharjah airport earlier that morning to run to Dubai and return to Sharjah with the outgoing mail.16

The total population of the Trucial States was estimated at 80,000 at this time, of which about 20,000 were in Abu Dhabi. As far as Abu Dhabi was concerned possible postal facilities were regarded as a problem. By 1960, the Postal Superintendent in Bahrain, F.W. (Rick) Thorpe was able to report on the oil field found offshore from Das Island. There was a thrice weekly flight from Bahrain to the Abu Dhabi airstrip and this could be used for the conveyance of mails but he saw little demand at that time. The Foreign Office in London had a different view and they, and the local political resident, urged that some form of postal service be set up as soon as possible. This was reiterated by A.T. (Archie) Lamb, then Commercial Secretary at the British Residency (Bahrain) in January 1961. Three merchants had now set up offices in Abu Dhabi and mail traffic was going to increase. In London, however, the GPO was reluctant:17

Glamorous though our Arabian empire may be, I am sure that it is best to avoid the temptation to extend it, except where circumstances absolutely compel us to do so.

Philatelic Revolution

Rulers and governments have always regarded the posts as being a source of wealth and an alternative to taxation. Indeed, the reason why King Charles I in Britain opened his royal mail to the public as far back as 1635, and thus founded the British Post Office, was to raise money. So, it is hardly surprising that more than 300 years later Rulers in the Gulf had suspicions of hidden profits in the running of the British postal agencies. In this they were apparently supported by the appearance of Lebanese agents in the Gulf in late 1960, early 1961.

These agents, representing the British stamp printing firm Harrisons and stamp dealers in Beirut, first approached the government of Qatar. Although not successful, offers were then made to the Ruler of Dubai. In both these territories there were of course existing post offices. Later offers were made to other Rulers by various, diverse characters.

At the same time the Foreign Office in London floated the idea of a Trucial States postal union (with the concept of political union in the background). But this was not to be achieved until August 1972.

It was not until June 1961 that the British Political Agents managed to get hold of a copy of what was on offer to the shaikhs. The specific offer was to the Ruler of Sharjah by a combination of one Abdurrahman (Bruce) Condé and Anhoury & Antoun Company, Beirut (Middle East Stamp Co.). In essence, they promised to
print stamps to a given value, with 13 special issues in one year, which they would sell to stamp collectors around the world. They would provide both a post office and a postmaster to run it, at their cost, together with free stamps for postal use. Most importantly, they guaranteed a minimum payment to the Ruler of 1 million rupees a year. To Rulers with no immediate source of revenue, this seemed like an answer to their prayers. When told by the British Post Office that such revenue could not accrue from philatelic sales, it is obvious why they viewed such statements with suspicion, especially when they were told that no individual trading account could be provided for the different postal agencies.

Initially, the British Political Agents also looked on these offers favourably. In Dubai, the Ruler was influenced by the apparently attractive offer. But there was another factor. On a visit to London in July 1961 he told Hooky Walker that he wanted his own Post Office under his own name and with his own stamps.18

He would not be content merely for us to run it as his agent. He wishes to engage his own staff, (perhaps British or foreign Arab) and is willing to bear any loss himself. He has been told that he cannot count on any significant profit and that he may make considerable losses. In particular he has been told not to count on making large profits from the sale of special stamps.

The prospect loomed of all shaikhdoms having their own independent postal administrations with their own stamps. Ken Hind, under the Director of Postal Services, went on to provide a solution, as discussed with the Foreign Office:

a) the Postal Superintendent should continue to be responsible for the operation of the Agency Offices;
b) the Trucial Sheikdoms of Abu Dhabi and Sharjah should be given Agency Post Offices of their own;
c) separate stamp series should be provided for Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Dubai, replacing the single Trucial States series at present sold at Dubai;
d) in addition to the regular stamp series, three special issues of stamps should be made each year for Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Qatar;
e) the profits from the sales to philatelists of all these stamps should be divided equally between the Sheikhs concerned and the British Post Office;

In the Gulf the Postal Superintendent, Thorpe, was, by his own admission, out of his depth. Various schemes were discussed through him over the next year or so but the Rulers of Dubai and Sharjah kept firm to their original view and signed agreements with different philatelic agents. Other Rulers followed, and agreements with a succession of agents were signed. Post offices were eventually opened as detailed above and vast quantities of “stamps” flooded the international philatelic market, often manipulated for the agents’ gain.
Quantities of “Stamps” Produced

It is not completely clear how many so-called “stamps” were produced over the next ten years in some cases, so this list is only approximate. Equally, the listing does not include artificial varieties such as imperforates. Subject themes included anything which might appeal around the world with no relevance to the local area, peoples or customs. The vast majority were never on sale over post office counters in the Gulf and saw no postal use, and thus are not listed by reputable stamp catalogues, except in appendices.


Abu Dhabi: Post Office & Stamps

In the case of Abu Dhabi, as has been seen, Shaikh Shakhbut had objected to the use of combined Trucial States stamps. In February 1961, Archie Lamb, from the Residency in Bahrain, reported that he would now like to have and run his own post office. The need was regarded as acute but matters proceeded slowly. Through 1962, a plan was gradually formulated by the British Post Office, and in October T.P. Hornsey of the Postal Services Department visited Abu Dhabi and discussed it with Col. J.E.H. Boustead, the British Political Agent, and W.T. Clark, Secretary to the Ruler. The offer was summarised as follows:

GPO, London is willing to open a Postal Service in Abu Dhabi and to provide staff. The persons would be housed in one of the buildings owned by the Ruler. The full range of postal service include sale and encashment of postal orders and money orders, acceptance of mail, delivery of mail by Post Office boxes, registration and parcel services and the despatch and receipt of mail by appropriate carriers.

Initially one Clerk/Sorter would be needed and GPO will pay and train the Clerk and so far as possible, obtain and train additional staff locally, as required. Their aim would be to have a local man in charge of the office as soon as one is available and qualified.

Transport of mails to and from the airport will be undertaken by one of the present users of the airport, who will be paid by the Postal Authorities.

The standard rental will be charged for Post Office boxes, i.e. Rs. 30/- a year, plus Rs 10/- returnable deposit.

Initially, U.K. stamps overprinted with value only would be used (as still then at Dubai and Muscat). However, as soon as designs for a series of Abu Dhabi stamps had been agreed with the Ruler, the British Post Office would arrange in London for
their production. “Initially two or three issues of commemorative stamps of three to five stamps each will also be arranged with themes and designs to be agreed – by the Ruler.” Net proceeds of all philatelic sales in London would be handed over by the Post Office to Shaikh Shakhbut. The office would be under the supervision of the Postal Superintendent, Bahrain (Thorpe).

The following day, Shaikh Shakhbut agreed. Colonel Boustead was able to report that “This is a very satisfactory conclusion to an exercise that has taken some seven years to reach an agreement since it was first discussed.” Premises were provided for the post office and accommodation for the postmaster, initially Shafi Rajab, on secondment from Bahrain for three months, later a local man – Khalifah Obaid. Once again Colonel Boustead reported on the opening ceremony:

the Ruler opened the Abu Dhabi Post Office on Saturday, March 30. Among those present were the Political Agent, Shaikhs Mohd. bin Khalifa, Khalid and Sultan, Mr W.T. Clark, managers of the Banks and commercial firms in Abu Dhabi and only one Arab merchant. The occasion was marked by a simple ceremony in which after the customary coffee and sweets the Ruler unlocked the door of the building (the interior of which had been re-decorated since its evacuation by the British Bank of the Middle East)…..The Ruler showed a surprisingly lively interest in the office and its organisation and insisted that everything be explained to him at great length. He took particular interest in the explanation of the money order system and was impressed by the fact that he could transfer money by this method direct to London if he wanted to. He was also interested to know whether the Post Office rate for this service was less than that charged by the bank…..

A cachet was applied to all mail posted on the first day and modern British-style datestamps were used to cancel the stamps at both Abu Dhabi and Das Island. (Figure 6).
New pictorial stamps, specific to Abu Dhabi, had to be designed and produced. First ideas had included “photographs of the ruler, the fort, the tower in the estuary and a falcon”. There might also be more falcon photographs required for a special issue. Thorpe set about obtaining a supply from the Abu Dhabi Marine Association (ADMA) and the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Development Co. (ADPDC) formerly called P.D.T.C.

From Adma I obtained a promise of an early supply of views of Das Island and the famous off-shore drilling rig, The Enterprise, and from A.D.P.D.C. I obtained several photographs of the falcons, a couple of the Ruler, not very good, and some views of the fort. I have also obtained from one of Gulf Aviation’s pilots some rather striking photographs of the Ruler…. In the meantime, I am digging around in various oil companies in Bahrain, who have interests in Abu Dhabi, in order to find some more photographs. The tower in the estuary is proving extremely difficult, nobody has apparently thought it of sufficient interest, a view I share, to warrant the taking of photographs….

In the end it was decided not to use The Enterprise, nor the Maqta’a (Water Tower). From the Political Agent, Thorpe discovered: I understand that there is some feeling that the gazelle should feature on one of the stamps, Abu Dhabi, translated to the English means “father of a small gazelle”. These were at one time found in this territory. Another subject being discussed was a very good photograph produced by the oil company of an oil well and in the foreground, two Bedouin Arabs with camels. This is apparently in favour with the Ruler at present.

Final agreement on the subject matter to be used for the first permanent series came on 26 May.

1) The Ruler’s portrait on 5, 15, 20 and 30 NP.
2) An Arabian gazelle on 40, 50 and 75 NP
3) The Palace on Rs. 1 and 2
4) The oil rig and camels on Rs. 5, 10.

The photograph of Shaikh Shakhbut to be used had been taken by Captain Layther of Gulf Aviation; those of the palace and oil rig by P.D.T.C. Thorpe could not find one of the “Arabian Gazelle” but thought that this could perhaps be better obtained in London. On all values above 30 NP, the Ruler’s portrait should also appear in miniature in the top left corner. Specimens of the troublesome Arabic script were also required. Shaikh Shakhbut did not approve of the stylised script used on the Trucial States stamps and wanted a script similar to that appearing on the current Saudi Arabian stamps. This also applied to the English lettering which should be in the same style as the inscription “Royaume de L’Arabie Saoudite”.

The Philatelic History of the Trucial States, 1948 – 1966
Low values were to be printed in photogravure by Harrisons, but the British high value stamp contract was now held by Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co. though printing was still in intaglio. The photographs and Arabic script were passed on to them, with the request to Harrisons that they obtain one of an “Arabian gazelle”.

When Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co. submitted their two designs for the high values to the British Post Office, the 1 rupee design was returned as unacceptable.24 (Figure 7a).

We cannot accept the placing of the Ruler’s portrait in the branches of the palm tree on the 1R stamp. As the portrait must be in the top left hand corner the palm tree should be moved to the right hand side of the stamp. We should also like to see the palace made a little larger. Will you please obtain a further artist’s drawing of this stamp.

![Figure 7a](image1)

![Figure 7b](image2)

The artist concerned, Clive Trevor Kavanagh, was given a sketch drawing by the Post Office as guidance and he duly revised his design. (Figure 7b). The other high value design featuring the oil rig and camels was by Miss Phyllis Mary Goth.

For the low values, Harrisons’ artist was M.C. Farrar-Bell. Again, proofs and essays were produced and approved by Shaikh Shakhbut but there was a problem with the “Arabian gazelle” design which only surfaced when the stamps were issued. He complained that the gazelle “looked like a donkey and was of the African species”. He would have a real one photographed. In fact, it would appear that the Arabian gazelle was already extinct, which explains the difficulty in finding a suitable illustration. However, when Shaikh Shakhbut saw the 40 NP issued stamp in this design he said he would have liked the colour (violet) to have been a little deeper. There was a local flower of this colour and it was his favourite. A specimen of the flower is still in the files at the BPMA, though the colour has now completely gone.

The introduction of the new pictorial stamps of Abu Dhabi on 30 March 1964 was not without incident. A few days after a ceremony, leather presentation album being given to Shaikh Shakhbut, telegrams flew. The Ruler was not convinced that he was receiving his proper share of the proceeds. So for a few days the old British overprinted stamps were substituted. Then, all in agreement, the new stamps could be used.
Special Issue: Falcons

For the first of the proposed special issues, a theme of falcons seemed appropriate. The Abu Dhabi Petroleum Co. supplied various photographs in June 1964 featuring falcons on the wrist. Photographs of falcons “in action” were provided by Gordon Howey in England and these were intended to be used in a subsequent special issue.

It is not Shaikh Shakbut’s wish for the retainers to be shown, he only wishes the handglove and the hawk and this I have shown on photograph “A”. The spectator shown behind the hawk on photograph “A” should also be blanked out.25

These instructions were passed on to the printers but were not carried out. The first designs by Victor Whiteley still included the handlers. (Figure 8). These were submitted in November 1964 together with three drawings correctly showing a falcon on a handglove only. Those without handler were approved, but errors in the Arabic script had to be corrected. When issued on 30 March 1965, they proved immediately popular. For both the definitives in 1964, and the special falcon issue in 1965, Thorpe printed and serviced first day covers locally in Bahrain. The “falcons in action” issue never came to fruition.

Postal handover and Shaikh Zayed

In mid 1965, projects for the expansion and rebuilding of Abu Dhabi were in preparation and the old post office had to go. Alternative accommodation was offered, being the building recently vacated by the Eastern Bank when it was transferred to new premises. By this time, the roof of the existing building was near collapse so the offer was welcome. Although deferred, this was to coincide with the handing over of postal affairs to local control at both Bahrain and Muscat at the beginning of 1966. It was necessary that the same arrangement be made at Abu Dhabi.

Thorpe’s deputy at Bahrain, H.W. Wynn, was seconded to Abu Dhabi to take charge of the post office in the intervening period and for the first year or so of postal independence. A series of delays then occurred meaning that although Bahrain became postally independent on time on 1 January 1966, Muscat did not follow until 30 April and the Abu Dhabi post office still remained under British control throughout the year.
Two things then occurred in mid 1966 within a couple of months of each other. On 1 July, Wynn reported that Abu Dhabi now used Bahrain currency of Dinars and Fils. Elsewhere, shaikhdoms changed to Saudi Riyals. Muscat, however, continued to back the Gulf Rupee. Then, on 6 August, Shaikh Zayed succeeded his brother Shaikh Shakhbut as Ruler of Abu Dhabi. Both these factors necessitated a new issue of stamps. On 30 August, an urgent telegram from Wynn to London indicated that within Abu Dhabi the desire was voiced to replace Shaikh Shakhbut's portrait on stamps as an interim measure.26

Supplies of sheets of perforated stamps were rushed out from the Post Office Supplies Depot in Hemel Hempstead to Bahrain for local overprinting, both to obliterate the portrait and provide the new value in the new currency. For convenience Wynn arranged this at The Arabian Printing & Publishing House in Bahrain.

Using sets of stamps as examples, I have myself inscribed the roman and arabic calligraphy and believe I have achieved a balance. On most of the designs, the bars across the face will not be too bad. A compositor was detached at once and the proofs should be ready in two weeks or less by which time my stocks will have been counted for hand-over to the printer. I firmly believe that the overprinting costs should be deducted from any philatelic sales which may result.27

These then went on sale (together with an overprinted air letter) on 1 October. The cost of overprinting was over £700 but philatelic sales more than doubled that. Eventually, the postal hand-over took place on 1 January 1967.

In the meantime, Wynn was arranging for a totally new series of stamps bearing Shaikh Zayed's portrait. For this he obtained an approved portrait of Shaikh Zayed and contracted direct with De La Rue in London to print the stamps in intaglio.

When the new stamps arrived, but one week before issue date [1 April 1967], nobody here had seen them since the essays were approved. De La Rue's artist made a poor job of engraving four values bearing the Ruler's 'likeness'. You will have a cover by now and compare these four with the photogravure of the high values. The Ruler was angry and I was the object of much criticism...28

The result was the replacement of the offending low values by a much more attractive design, printed in photogravure by Harrisons, on 6 August.

Under Shaikh Shakhbut and Shaikh Zayed, Abu Dhabi was to continue an admirably conservative stamp-issuing policy. In the eight years from 1964 to 1972 and the postal union of the United Arab Emirates, they issued only some 96 real stamps but these nevertheless reflected the political and economic changes of the time.

Illustrations

Figure 2 is courtesy Thomas Johansen. All others are © Royal Mail 2011, courtesy of the British Postal Museum & Archive.
The Philatelic History of the Trucial States, 1948 – 1966

Endnotes
1. POST 52/563 Trucial States New Issue 7 January 1961
2. POST 122/2817: Persian Gulf Agencies: Transfer of postal agencies to British control. 2 October 1950. C. Dalrymple Belgrave, Adviser to Government of Bahrain to Political Agent, Bahrain
3. Ibid. 6 November 1951. Secretary of State, Foreign Office to Sir Rupert Hay, Bahrain
5. POST 122/865 British Postal Agencies: territorial stamps Part 1
6. Ibid. 25 November 1957. Director Postal Services to A.H. Ridge
7. Ibid. 5 December 1957
8. Ibid. 25 June 1958. Director of Postal Services memorandum.
13. POST 122/865 op cit. 9 October 1959. W.F. Marshall, Foreign Office to Miss D.M. King, PSD
15. FO 371/157054 1961 Trucial States postal services. 3 July 1961. GPO to R. Balister, General Dept, Foreign Office
16. POST 122/15625: British Postal Agencies. Sharjah. Question of need to set up Post Office there. 15 July 1959. From F.W. Thorpe to GPO.
21. Ibid. 7 February, 1963. R. Langan, PSD to F.W. Thorpe, Bahrain
23. Ibid. 11 April 1963. F.W. Thorpe, Bahrain, to T.P. Hornsey
25. Ibid. 15 September 1964. F.W Thorpe, Bahrain to R. Langan, PSD
27. Ibid. 5 September 1966. H.W. Wynn, Bahrain to W. Meadows PSD
28. Ibid. 23 April 1967. H.W. Wynn, Abu Dhabi Posts to W. Meadows, PSD
I arrived in the Sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi then in the Trucial States in October 1962, staying for a year and returning again in the second half of 1964 for a further 6 months. I was 23 years old, employed by the Ottoman Bank and had previously served with them in London and East Africa, with a break for National Service in the Far East. I flew from London, via Bahrain and Doha, where I spent a few days with colleagues awaiting my Gulf Aviation flight to Abu Dhabi in a De Havilland Heron.

The town was built on a triangular-shaped island and the airport was a mile or so away. It consisted then of a sabkha air strip, reinforced with crude oil, the flare-path being demarcated with red- and white-striped disused oil barrels. The largest aircraft that could land there was a DC3. The terminal was a single-storey concrete building, the roof of which could barely support the sign: “Abu Dhabi International Airport”. Wireless ground-to-air communication was non-existent. A flag would be waved by the airport manager to indicate to the low-flying pilot whether the runway was firm enough to land on. There were no night flights. However, in emergencies, as many vehicles as possible would be rounded up to line both sides of the runway and switch on their headlights to guide the pilot down.

In 1962, Abu Dhabi was ruled by Sheikh Shakhbut Bin Sultan. The entire population...
of the Sheikhdom was thought to be around 25,000. There were probably no more than about fifty expatriates living in the capital. At that time, Abu Dhabi had yet to agree its mutual boundaries with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Dubai. The town looked very much like a setting for a “Beau Geste” film, dominated by the Ruler’s Palace, a picturesque white building that contained the original ancient fort. Buildings were constructed of palm fronds, mud, or cinder blocks and there were lots of camels. Vehicles were nearly all four-wheel-drive Land Rovers, or Chevrolet Power Wagons, although the Sheikhs had large American limousines with huge, bulbous sand tires. The currency of the day was the Indian Rupee and Britain looked after foreign policy through the Political Agency, headed by Colonel (later Sir) Hugh Boustead, a wonderful character. As I got to know him better, he would ask me to accompany him on some of his “inspection” trips to “the interior”, as he called it. His entourage would be transported in several Land Rovers, brim full of equipment, and we would dress for dinner, sitting on rugs among the sand dunes. Britain’s influence also extended to the Abu Dhabi Police Force, which was being expanded and trained under the eagle eye of Colonel Bill Edge. He even formed a police pipe band, mainly Pakistanis. I still have my Abu Dhabi driving licence, issued by the Police Department, Traffic Section on 14 November 1962.

The first shipments of oil were taking place from Abu Dhabi Marine Area’s (ADMA) Umm Shaif field, and the atmosphere in the town was one of hectic activity and entrepreneurship. There were three banks in the capital, the British Bank of the Middle East, Eastern Bank and my bank, the Ottoman Bank, all vying to attract the first oil royalties (US$2.5 million in the second half of 1962), which were about to be paid to Sheikh Shakhbut. The manager of the Ottoman Bank was David Gillespie, an Arabist who had forged a close relationship with the Ruling Family during the previous six months. David and I were invited to the palace to witness the handing over of the first oil royalty cheque by Chris Willy, ADMA’s manager. Bob Davies was also there, representing Eastern Bank. On receiving the cheque, Sheikh Shakhbut looked at both David and Bob and, with a twinkle in his eye, as if to say: “Who shall I give it to?” made as if to tear it in two and give them a piece each! Chris Willy was then told to split the money between the two banks. On our way out, Chris turned to me said: “Pity he didn’t tear the cheque, then neither of you could have cashed it!” BBME,
which had enjoyed a monopoly of banking in Abu Dhabi for some time, received nothing as they had fallen out of favour with the Ruler.

Fresh water was shipped from Dubai in barges, augmented by a small local distillation plant (I believe the capacity was about 14,000 gallons a day), and delivered to our homes in jerry-cans, transported on the backs of donkeys. Our day-to-day gastronomic and beverage needs were catered for by Spinneys, African & Eastern and Gray Mackenzie from their warehouses along the Corniche. Social life was hectic - three, sometimes four, receptions in an evening, dinner parties, picnics and so on. During my first year in Abu Dhabi, the Beach Hotel was opened by CAT Company; Jashanmal opened a new store; the first Post Office was inaugurated (UK postage stamps were used, overprinted with “Abu Dhabi”, “Annas” and “Rupees”); International Air Radio put some aircraft telecommunications into the airport building and set up a radiotelephone station at Al Ain; and the few Scots among us formed a Caledonian Society, took over a beached water barge and converted it into a sort of club house. Burns Night 1962 was celebrated with gusto at the Beach Hotel, a piper from a Scottish regiment stationed in Bahrain having been flown over to pipe in the haggis. Following on from that, the Abu Dhabi Club was inaugurated. In 1963, an open-air cinema was opened along the Corniche, towards the Beach Hotel.

Shortly after my arrival in Abu Dhabi in 1962, I was given the task of setting up a branch of the Ottoman Bank in Al Ain, principally to look after the financial needs of members of the Ruling Family who lived there. This would be the first bank to be established in the oasis and we beat Eastern Bank to it by just two days! I sourced most of the equipment and furniture in Dubai and had it transported over the desert tracks in Bedford trucks. The late Sheikh Zayed was then governor of Al Ain and invited me to stay at his guest house while I set up the office and found somewhere for my Jordanian assistant, Ibrahim, and me to live. We rented a substantial local-style house, with a courtyard surrounded by seven rooms, one of which we converted into a majlis. We installed a bathroom (to the amusement of the local builders, who had never see a Western-style toilet before), dug a well, installed a generator, a water pump and some water-coolers and, bingo, we had a home! In the interim, we bathed in a bath house in Al-Hili village, fed by cool, crystal-clear water from one of the eight falajs coming from Jebel Hafit, which provided the irrigation system for the oasis. Just up the road was the police station and local jail, known as “Al-Marabbah”. We had a Yemeni cook, a Baluchi house boy and a local driver, who also doubled as the branch messenger.

The journey between Abu Dhabi and Al Ain took an average of 5 hours, over the desert. I preferred to do most of the driving myself, as I was a keen
driver and had previously taken part in rallies and circuit races in the U.K. and East Africa. I was always trying to beat my record and, once, managed it in 3 1/2 hours. Abu Dhabi Island was connected to the mainland by a narrow causeway known as Al-Maqta, which was about ten miles from the town and manned by a police detachment based in an old customs house. Once you had passed over to the mainland there was nothing but open desert. We were guided by markers along the way - a solitary tree, some piled-up tyres, or a discarded oil drum and, about half way, there was a rest house. One soon learnt that the best way to tackle a high sand dune was to drive at it at full speed, lift off just before the top and let the vehicle slide down the other side, remembering not to touch the brakes.

The Trucial Oman Scouts were in residence in Fort Jahili and I spent many happy hours there with the British officers. My weekly routine included paying courtesy visits to Sheikh Zayed, Sheikh Mohamed Bin Khalifa, Sheikh Sultan Bin Shakhbut, Sheikh Mubarak Bin Mohammed, Sheikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed, Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed and, of course, the local merchants who had become customers of the bank. I would often receive a summons from Sheikh Zayed and others to join them on hunting trips in the desert surrounding, and beyond, Jebel Hafit. We mainly used Land Rovers to get about and hunted with rifles and falcons. Falconry was one of Sheikh Zayed’s passions. He was also an expert and stylish horseman.

Having set up the Al Ain branch of the Ottoman Bank, I then returned to Abu Dhabi. Banking in those days was of a purely commercial nature - investment banking had not yet reached the Gulf. We provided general banking services to the Ruling Family, local merchants and private individuals, as well as payroll and payments services for the employees of the oil companies. The bank had to maintain substantial stocks of new Rupee bank notes (flown in from Bahrain) as clients would occasionally come in to the office, unannounced, to check that their money was still there! I made fortnightly payroll trips to the oil workers’ camp at Jebel Dhanna by Land Rover, with the bank driver and an armed policeman. Each worker would be paid in cash,
and he promptly handed it back to us to be transferred home. On one such trip, there had been a huge storm over Abu Dhabi and, unbeknown to us, the coastal area had become flooded as the ground water rose. The road from Jebel Dhanna was a mere track, strengthened with layers of crude oil and with lots of ruts and pot-holes. We were driving in pitch darkness when, suddenly, there was a massive crash and we slid into a very large pot-hole. Soon, we were sitting up to our waists in water. Pandemonium ensued as I tried to save the cash from getting wet, the driver started flapping about what the “mudir” would say about his driving, and the policeman was desperately trying to keep his fully-loaded rifle above water! As luck would have it, the driver of a Chevrolet Power Wagon had also come to grief just ahead. We managed to help him to get going and got safely back to Abu Dhabi. The amazing thing was that, two days later, after the flood water had subsided, the driver and I went back to recover the Land Rover and it started with a splutter at about the fourth attempt.

Our relationship with the Ruling Family was a very close one. They would seek David’s and my advice about anything from motor cars, to boats, furniture, hunting rifles and ammunition, and soon they were asking us to source these items for them. The volumes grew to such an extent that a special trading department was set up at the bank’s London central office to handle the orders. On one occasion, Sheikh Shakhbut asked us to buy him a mobile crane for the new quay being built by CAT Company. Two days after it had been delivered, David and I arrived at the office to find the crane parked outside the door. On enquiring of the Sheikh whether there was a problem, he replied that he did not like the colour.

My second period in Abu Dhabi was a six-month stay in Al Ain in the second half of 1964, as relief branch manager. The airport had been improved a little and a number of new buildings had been put up along the Corniche, among them a spanking-new Ottoman Bank office. Between Abu Dhabi postings, I had been in Jordan and Lebanon, where I had got married to Birgitta, a Swedish girl I had met three years earlier in Uganda. My now pregnant wife and I returned to the house I had set up eighteen months earlier. Unfortunately, there were lots of mice around, which, of course, she did not appreciate, so the day after our arrival I went out and bought a cat in the souk - a delightful Arabian type, with long, pointed ears. Problem solved! The house had become a sort of hotel for visiting businessmen who had dealings with the bank. I would accompany them to their meetings with the local Sheikhs and assist with negotiations and financing of any deals that were agreed. Birgitta often visited the families of Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Mohamed Bin Khalifa. They were fascinated by her blond hair and asked jokingly whether her sun glasses were her burka! In October 1964, Birgitta and I were invited to the wedding of Sheikh Khalifa ibn Zayed. His bride came from the Liwa Oasis and the celebrations lasted two weeks. The band of the Trucial Oman Scouts opened the proceedings by marching down the High Street.

() There were singers from Dubai; dancers from Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Dubai and Al-Buraimi; sword dancers from Muscat; horse racing; camel racing; and, at the end of it
all, almost the entire population of the town participated in the celebrations in open vehicles, with horns blaring and rifles firing.

By the time Birgitta and I departed in November 1964 for our long leave, Abu Dhabi was on the throes of feverish expansion - road building projects, housing and office construction, dredging, expanding the port, etc. We were sad to be leaving. Al Ain was a fascinating place and the friendship and hospitality shown towards us by the Sheikhs and local villagers will never be forgotten. Birgitta had also received wonderful support during her pregnancy from the Canadian Mission Hospital on the outskirts of Al Ain. On one of her check-ups the surgeon’s wife said to me: “You go in and have a chat with Bill. He’s in the operating theatre doing a hernia and would love to see you!” Birgitta was now in her fifth month and the question arose as to how she could safely travel to Abu Dhabi, still a 5-hour journey by Land Rover over the dunes, to catch our onward flights to Bahrain, Beirut and London. One of our guests in Al Ain was a professor of history from New Zealand who had been commissioned by the Foreign Office to write a biography of Sheikh Zayed. He would “not hear” about us risking the long drive over the desert and had requisitioned an RAF Twin Pioneer aircraft, stationed in Bahrain, to fly us to Abu Dhabi when the time came for us to depart. The RAF called it a “military fact-finding exercise” and had filled the aircraft with assorted high-ranking army officers, including a general. What, with many of the locals turning out to wave goodbye, it was quite a send-off!

After long leave in the U.K. and Sweden, Birgitta and I moved on to the Sudan, which would be our last Middle East posting.

Photo Credit: Mr. John Woolfenden.
On Secondment with the Trucial Oman Scouts 1966-1968

Michael Curtis

In late 1965 I had completed a year as Recruiting Officer for my Regiment. I was at an age (27) when it was considered useful for a young officer to get away from regimental life and get experience in other military arenas. I was eventually slotted into a secondment with the Trucial Oman Scouts for March 1966. This meant moving quickly in early January 1966 to Aden to the Command Arabic Language School to study for a Grade 3 Interpretership. Not being a gifted linguist I had to work doubly hard to get to grips with the language, which I must say I found very hard.

The headquarters of the TOS were in Sharjah and on arrival there I was posted to ‘A’ Squadron as Second in Command. The Squadron was then located at Mirfa – near Jabal Dhanna.

In Sharjah I underwent an excellent introduction to the Force, from the Commander downwards. This included intelligence briefings and visiting all departments of the Headquarters, including logistics, to ensure that I knew exactly how everything worked. I had to be measured up for the unique uniform that we wore and go through the business of selecting an Orderly, who was to be my servant. As this man was to be with me for 2 years it was important that I chose well.

A Rifle Squadron was made up of a Squadron Headquarters, which embraced the Administration (which I had to handle), the rations, petrol oil and lubricants (POL), medical, signals and vehicle operations. Squadron HQ were mounted in 2 FFR Land Rovers with radios. The operational arm of the Squadron consisted of 3 troops of approximately 30 men, each commanded by a young Arab Officer, with a Troop Sergeant, and each including 3 Sections commanded by a Corporal. 1 Troop was the Light Troop in Land Rovers – they were the eyes and ears of the Squadron. 2 & 3 Troops were mounted in Bedford 4-ton vehicles. In spite of their size they were remarkably good vehicles for use in the conditions we encountered. Each troop included a signaller, a runner, 3 sections of 8 men each armed with No. 4 rifles and a bren gun section of 2 men and drivers. The aim was for the squadron to be instantly mobile to face any requirement at a moment’s notice.

Having been kitted out, I set out early one morning in one of the 2 monthly ration re-supply trips. This was made up of 2 Dodge Power Wagons, loaded with rice, flour, dates, coffee, to name just a few of the provisions. This was my introduction to the desert – the journey lasted about 6 hours, with a stop at the Abu Dhabi Coffee shop and stops for prayers. Late in the afternoon, we traversed a large sabkhhah
plain and crossed a ridge of heavy dunes and dipped down into Mirfa – a tented camp by the sea. I received a most hearty welcome from the soldiers and Squadron Commander.

After 3 days of briefings, visits to the tailor, collecting kit, choosing an orderly and an interview with the Commander, Colonel Freddie de Butts, I set off for ‘A’ Squadron, where I was to be the Second in Command. They were based at that time at Mirfa – perhaps the worst outstation – and it was a very rude awakening to what life was to be for the next 2 years. The camp had very little air conditioning and was hot, humid and dusty even in April. There were three small shacks which were officer accommodation and they had air conditioning on from 2100 for 2 hours, and then the generator went off. This generator engine was also designed to operate a water desalination plant, but it never worked well and our water bowser had to go to Habshan – 50 miles away twice a day to collect water. Our job here was to patrol from Jebel Baraka/Sabkha Matti/Jebel Dhanna area to Tarif and it included the burgeoning oil fields at Habshan and Buhasa, dominated today by Badr Zayed town. This meant trips down what was called the Old French Road south towards the Liwa. I spent about 6 weeks here before ‘Roundabout’, when we all changed over and we were to move to Sharjah. ‘Roundabout’ meant that each Squadron spent about 6 months in each location and then moved to the next.
My first night under the stars was spent roughly where the Chicago Beach Hotel used to be, with the ‘A’ Squadron advance party, on our move to Sharjah, and it was quite an awakening! There were no buildings in this area at all.

The Sharjah based Squadron was what can only be described as the public duties squadron. Apart from patrolling northwards up the coast to Ras Al Khaimah and south beyond the Jebel Ali bombing range into the vast desert area, we had to be ready to provide guards of honour and the like for visiting dignitaries.

The Pipes and Drums of the Trucial Oman Scouts were an incredibly smart and proficient group. The drums were under the control of a Drum Major from the Irish Guards and the Pipes were under a Pipe Major from the Queens Own Highlanders. Apart from Parade duties they carried out musical parades within The Trucial States keeping the force in the public eye.

Aerial view of TOS British base, Sharjah 1970.
Our ‘extra’ tasks in Sharjah were happily few – checking dhows for contraband, keeping the peace during the change over from the Gulf Rupee to the QDR and the resulting chaos. Problems came when soldiers who had left their money buried in earthenware jars in their barastis needed to go home to find it. Extra leave was given so that they could return to their villages to fetch the cash to exchange. In some cases villages had moved.

On August 6th 1966, Abu Dhabi island witnessed a significant event - the gentle changeover of Ruler in with the sanction of the Al Nahyan Ruling Family members. On the British side, Glen Balfour Paul, the Acting Political Resident from Bahrein and Colonel Freddie de Butts, the Commander of the TOS were present along with Major Halstead, the Commander of the ‘A’ Squadron. Sheikh Shakhbut was typical of his time, a charming, polite and very kind man, but Abu Dhabi needed taking forward and Sheikh Zayed was the man for the job, and what you now see – a modern, progressive, cultured Abu Dhabi is his achievement. I was outside Al Hosn all day (the hottest and most humid day I have ever experienced) and put up a hasty Guard of Honour when Sheikh Shakhbut left for the Airport. That night we slept under the walls of Al Hosn after a huge mansaf with Sheikh Zayed. A very important day in the history of this country!

The only other extra task we had was to clear up a noisy crowd in Dubai after a collection of old chaps, sitting on the fence at the runway of Sharjah airport, saw bombers taking off loaded, and coming back without bombs. Their assumption was that they were taking part in the Arab/Israeli conflict in the Levant. They were of course practising bombing on the Jebel Ali Range. Major Halstead dealt with it very quickly.

In the autumn of 1966, A squadron moved to Fort Jahili in Al Ain on the next Roundabout. We were stationed in this magnificent fort which is the subject of a superb painting by David Shepherd. The main part of the fort was the officers’ mess which has always been associated with The Trucial Oman Scouts. Today it has been renovated and the rest of the complex is in the process of being developed into a cultural centre that already exhibits and tells the story of the expeditions of Wilfred Thesiger. Shortly it is hoped that it will house an exhibition of The Trucial Oman Scouts.

Our tasks in Al Ain were to patrol north to Sumaini police post and south to Lahama airstrip and down to Abu Dhabi island. This latter task involved checking the water pipeline from Al Ain to Abu Dhabi, the capital’s water supply in those days, apart from supplies brought in by dhow.

During our patrolling programme we had to check that the wells in use were in good order and that the water was drinkable. Movement in the sand was difficult during the day. The most important point was to drive over as much sand as possible early in the morning when the dew was still on the ground. This meant a certain
Fort Jahili.
amount of lying up by day. It was possible to drive to Sharjah over the Ramlat early in the morning and cut 40 minutes off the journey. The only alternative was to go through Wadi Mahadah, which we could do at any time of day. We had a simple and safe method of travel in that we signed out of a location by sending a signal to our destination indicating departure time and route to be taken. On arrival we signalled back to announce safe arrival. With Bedfords the trick was to let the tyre pressures down to increase the footprint and movement in the sand was thus easier.

We had a patrol out in the Liwa led by Major Halstead whose task was to ensure that the States borders had not been infringed. We had a message saying that a Dodge Power wagon had broken a half shaft. Colonel Pat Ive, our new Commander, and myself took a Twin Pioneer aircraft with spares to Umm az Zamul to meet the patrol.

We had no major problem in Jahili apart from a small political disturbance involving an attempt to unsettle the troops in ‘A’ Squadron. This was dealt with very quickly without problems.

In March 1967 ‘A’ Squadron moved to Masafi. I had by this time been appointed to take over the squadron when Dennis Halstead decided to retire early. Before he left I carried out a dhow patrol from Khor Fakkan to Dibba and back down to the Omani border. Our task was to visit all the coastal villages and keep our eyes open for illegal immigrants. We had a rough time during a storm at Kalba and had to spend the night hanging on to two anchors in the creek.
At this point in time I had a helicopter based at Masafi for 3 weeks out of 4, which meant that, having taken over command of the Squadron just after ‘roundabout’, I could have two patrols out at any time to cover the area from Dibba in the north to the Omani border in the south.

As Masafi was on the main route from Sharjah to the Batinah coast there were plenty of accidents with traders’ lorries which were mainly old army Bedfords, on the difficult tracks through the wadis. As everyone knows, there were no tarmac roads anywhere in the Trucial States, except in the suburbs in Dubai. We were on call at all hours to carry out first aid and vehicle recovery.

The wadi from Masafi to Dibba was a really rough ride which took ages. We had few incidents in this area, mostly disputes over fishing or water rights. Most were resolved by the use of the map – researched by Julian Walker and used by Martin Buckmaster from the Political Agency in Dubai, to ascertain the tribal boundaries.

We had one problem when we had to visit all the villages over a smallpox scare. I did a donkey patrol from Khor Fakkan to Dibba visiting all the settlements with an orderly to check for smallpox. Later I went up one isolated wadi by helicopter with the Desert Intelligence Officer, Jim Stockdale, equipped with the kit for doing vaccinations. We got to within 3 miles or so of the village in question when we had to land – no air for the helicopter. Jim and I walked the rest of the way and vaccinated the village.

Just before we left Masafi, a large operation was mounted on the Batinah because we had heard of many illegal immigrant dhows approaching our coast. We manned
the coast from north of Khor Fakkan to Kalba with troops. We had two Shackleton aircraft sorties a day, and we had a Royal Navy minesweeper offshore, together with the Force Dhow. The operation was under my command – we captured two dhows and sent the crews to the Political Agent in Dubai – the rest we managed to turn back.

‘Roundabout’ came again and we went down Wadi Siji to Manama to become the Resident Squadron in this complex, which also included the Training Depot and the Support Group. Our tasks here were to patrol up the edge of the Hajar mountains north to Ras al Khaimah and south to Jebel Fayah and Sumaini and westward to Tawi Falaj Mu’allah. In general our tasks were to support the Depot with seasoned troops and give demonstrations of field craft and weapon training.

In December 1967 it was time for me to go home and I wondered where all the time had gone. So with a very heavy heart, I left ‘A’ Squadron and travelled down to the new Headquarters at Al Haira to sign off and wait for an aircraft to go home.

I have been asked on many occasions what on earth did we do with our spare time if operational duties gave us any time. I would like to give a brief outline of what was available. In Mirfa there was absolutely nothing except for occasional visits to Tarif or Jebel Dhanna for curry lunch, Sharjah was completely different in that the town of Dubai was nearby, offering many souks and local restaurants. The Scouts had a mounted troop of about 12 splendid Arab stallions, which we were allowed to ride down the beach towards Ajman and beyond. This troop was on parade for
special events, commanded by the force Dentist, carrying our Guidon, which was
magnificent and was green with a gold embroidered kunja.

Those interested in birds would find the greatest selection of wading and sea birds in
the marshes at Umm al Quwain. On the shores of Sharjah creek there was the sailing
club which was very popular. We were able to invite the few expatriates from Dubai
to BBQ evenings on the shores of Khan Creek and this was a monthly affair with
the food being prepared by the Mess. I played in what was possibly the first game of
Rugby football when the Scouts took on the Dubai Exiles. I cannot remember who
won but sand is not a good surface for this sport. We organised some volleyball games
for the soldiers in the evenings.

Arabian Days, a book written by Antony Cawston and me, tells the story of my time
in the TOS in more detail and lays out in clear terms that I was not a volunteer – in
fact I was called for some time the Reluctant Scout. In many ways I wish I had been a
volunteer – I might have stayed on. However, such was my strong connection to the
people and the area that my civilian jobs happily brought me and my family back to
Arabia from 1972 to 1997, with a short break of about 5 years in UK. We loved every
minute of it and some of my greatest friends come from this area.

Photo Credit: Capt. Michael Curtis
Memories of the Political Residency -1971

Patrick Wright

I had my first and only posting to the Gulf at the beginning of 1971, on my transfer from the British Embassy in Cairo to be the last Deputy Political Resident in Bahrain. I will therefore concentrate almost entirely on the events of 1971, and my involvement in the sometimes complicated and frustrating negotiations and consultations which led up to the signing of our Treaties of Friendship with Bahrain, Qatar, and the Emirates. In trying to collate my memories of that eventful year, I have had the benefit of looking again at the many official reports, telegrams, letters and Dispatches preserved in the British National Archives at Kew, not far from my home in South-West London.

It is unfortunate that we can no longer hear from the likes of Sir William Luce, Sir Geoffrey Arthur, Sir Anthony Parsons, Jim Treadwell, Sir Julian Bullard, or Bertie Saunders, let alone our former Ambassadors to Iran and Saudi Arabia, such as Sir Denis Wright, Sir Peter Ramsbotham or Sir Willie Morris—all of whom played a crucial role in smoothing the sometimes rocky path of the Gulf States towards the formation of the United Arab Emirates at the end of 1971. I would also like to add a particular mention of my colleague, Edward Henderson, who was closely involved in the formation of the National Center for Documentation & Research.

Before I start on the events of 1971, I would like to describe briefly how I and many of my diplomatic colleagues came to be posted to the Gulf. Having left Oxford University in 1955, I joined the Foreign Office and was posted to the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies in Lebanon. MECAS, as it was known by its initials, had been founded in Jerusalem in 1944, and later moved to a mountain village in Lebanon called Shemlan, a school designed by the Foreign Office to give its students a grounding in the Arabic Language, Arab History, Politics, Religion and Culture. Students included not just British Diplomats, but businessmen, soldiers, scholars and diplomats from a wide range of countries. Most of the young British Diplomats went straight from MECAS to the Gulf, to serve either in our Embassies in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia; the Political Residency in Bahrain or in one of the four Political Agencies in Bahrain, Qatar and the Trucial States.

I did not go straight from MECAS to the Gulf, or even to an Arab Capital, but was posted home to spend a year in the Foreign Office in London. I nevertheless took part in those aspects of Gulf-related training at MECAS, such as tuition in what were inaccurately called the Laws of the Persian Gulf, to prepare us to sit as Assistant Judges in the expatriate Courts of the Gulf, administering what were essentially Indian Civil and Penal Codes. I have served in various capacities in a number of Arab posts; but my first visit to this part of the world was as the last Deputy to Sir Geoffrey Arthur.
For centuries, British commercial and strategic interests in the Gulf had been supervised from India — first under direction of the East India Company and then the British Imperial Government in Bombay. A Political Resident had been posted to Bushire from the next century, and following Indian Independence in 1947, our Diplomatic Missions in the Gulf came under the supervision of the Foreign Office in London. A British Political Officer was posted to Sharjah with responsibility for relations with all seven Emirates which at that time included Kalba – later to be replaced by Fujairah. The Political Agency moved to Dubai in 1954 — a move in which my colleague Julian Walker was closely involved. In 1957, a Political Officer was also appointed to Abu Dhabi, and a separate Political Agency was established there in 1961, after the announcement that substantial quantities of oil had been discovered.

Meanwhile, a small military force was set up in 1951 under the name of the Trucial Oman Levies, whose most memorable intervention was to eject the Saudi force which had occupied the oasis of Buraimi in 1955. Patrick Nixon, who served successively as British Ambassador to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, has written of the deep gratitude which His Highness, the late Sheikh Zayed, expressed to Britain for this action which he regarded as having been fundamental to the security of the Trucial States.

When I arrived in Bahrain, it was clear that my duties would be primarily to help supervise the withdrawal of our military forces from the Gulf, the closure of the Political Residency, and the transfer of the Political Agencies round the lower Gulf to their new status as Embassies or Consulates-General. This process involved a very complicated series of agreements and understandings, transferring to Bahrain, Qatar, and the prospective Union of the Emirates powers which had until then rested, under our existing Treaties of Friendship, in the hands of the Political Resident.

Before my arrival in the Gulf, I had arranged for a series of briefings in London, including calls on the Ministry of Defense. Introducing myself as the next—and the last—Deputy Political Resident seemed to make little impact. It was only when the military discovered, with their passion for initials, that I was to be the last DPRPG that my request for briefing was taken seriously. The last two initials in my title stood, of course, for Persian Gulf — the internationally accepted description of this part of the world at that time. It was only later that the use of Arabian Gulf, or more commonly The Gulf, came to be used. But it was a potentially contentious subject. When I later became Head of the Middle East Department in the Foreign Office, I used to receive regular protests from the Shah’s Ambassador, whenever he had spotted a reference in some document or Atlas to the “Arabian Gulf”. Playing safe, I think it is now accepted among the geographical community that “The Gulf” is the appropriate title, though for Americans, both North and South, that carries the potential confusion with the Gulf of Mexico. In the Arab World, “Arabian Gulf” is still, of course, the accepted usage.
Harold Wilson’s Labour Government had sent a Minister of State, Goronwy Roberts, round the Gulf to assure the Rulers that we were not leaving. When Goronwy Roberts returned for a second visit, to tell the Rulers that we were leaving after all, he was no doubt misled by traditional Arab courtesy into thinking that his second mission had gone rather well. One of my colleagues has written: “It had not. The Rulers heard him with cool restraint, but they felt they had been shockingly let down, not to say betrayed, by Her Majesty’s Government”.

When the Conservatives under Sir Edward Heath won the General Elections in 1970, they initially wanted to reverse this decision yet again, but discovered, on taking office, that it was simply not practicable, if only because of the severe economic pressures which many Governments find have been left them by their predecessors.

The news that Britain was, after all, going to stand by the deadline of December 1971 to withdraw our forces from the Gulf came as a considerable shock to all the Rulers concerned, who had hoped that a Conservative Government would reverse the policies of its Labour predecessors. The decision was conveyed to them by Sir Geoffrey Arthur and Sir William Luce, the very popular former Political Resident who had been appointed by the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, as his Personal Representative, with instruction “to see if there was anything he could do to help the Rulers in reaching agreement on the provisional Constitution”.

Sir William’s appointment could well have made life awkward for the then Political Resident, Sir Geoffrey Arthur, but I know from personal contacts with both of them that there was absolutely no friction caused by any potential crossing of wires. Sir William was always supremely careful to keep Sir Geoffrey closely informed of his activities and contacts, and vice versa.

The one difference between them – and since these are supposed to be Memoirs, I hope I can be excused a slightly frivolous recollection – was in their respective characters. I had cause to observe this since all three of us were, to a varying degree, musicians. I had the good fortune from time to time to play piano duets with each of them. Playing with the ebullient Sir Geoffrey made it hard to keep my hold on the piano stool. Playing the piano with Sir William was a very different experience. The very straight-backed ex-Colonial Governor was a model of precision, and I never for one moment risked losing my seat on the stool. But I was extremely fond of them both, and had the highest respect for their extraordinary wisdom, experience and humanity. Sir Geoffrey in particular had the distinction of being one of the most gifted linguists – in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and several Classical and European languages – that I have ever known. It was very clear to me, from my own contacts in the Gulf, that both Sir Geoffrey and Sir William had also won the respect and affection of all the Rulers, not excluding His Highness Sheikh Zayed.

My own duties were to deputise for Sir Geoffrey Arthur during his frequent absences from Bahrain, and indeed from the Gulf; to liaise with the British Armed Forces,
and particularly with their respective Commanders, all of whom resided close to the Political Residency at the Bahraini Port of Jufair; and to chair the Joint Intelligence Committee (Gulf) which met regularly once a week, unless events called for emergency meetings – for me, a useful preparation for my Chairmanship of the Joint Intelligence Committee in London ten years later.

Direct and regular contact with the Rulers rested primarily with the four Political Agents, though both Sir Geoffrey and I paid fairly regular visits to all the Gulf States during the year, quite apart from regular visits by Sir William, not only to the Gulf Rulers, but also to the Shah in Tehran and to King Faisal in Saudi Arabia. Towards the end of my time, I also found myself quite heavily involved in discussions with the American Navy about their role in Jufair following our withdrawal. I also had frequent contact with the retired British Admiral who ran Middle East Navigational Aid Services (MENAS), a remarkable institution which is still responsible for all the light-houses and navigation points in the Gulf.

At the British Consulate-General building on the water’s edge of Muscat Harbour was an enormously tall flag-staff, on the top of which flew the Consulate-General’s Standard. The flag-staff in Muscat was still there, riding high, in 1971, and it occurred to us in the Residency that it was no longer appropriate for a British flag to fly so prominently over Muscat Harbour. We therefore decided that the flag-staff should be shortened to a more appropriate height, as befitted an Embassy to the independent Sultanate. I think that our instructions were about to be carried out when an alarm was sounded, probably by MENAS, who pointed out that the top of the flag-staff was an important, not to say vital, reference point on all Navigational Charts, and that lowering it, without due notice, could lead to serious naval collisions with ships entering Muscat Harbour.

So what was the situation when I arrived in Bahrain at the beginning of 1971?
A Union of the 9 Gulf States, including Bahrain and Qatar, had been agreed in principle in February 1968, and it was clear to me, on arrival, that both Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were still hoping for a Union of 9, though by the middle of March, both the Saudis and the Kuwaitis, though not King Faisal personally, regarded a Union of 7 as inevitable.

Some wits have suggested that Arab courtesy, which makes it very difficult for two people to decide who should enter a door first, complicated the decision of Bahrain and Qatar as to who should opt first for Independence.

In using the word “independence”, in a letter which I wrote to the Foreign Office, I warned against any reference in the congratulatory messages to the new UAE as “A sovereign and independent state”, since this carried the implication that the Trucial States were not already Independent. I think the best I can do is to quote a footnote to the Political Resident’s Dispatch of 23 September entitled ‘The Independence of Bahrain’, and which I think could apply equally to Qatar and the UAE:
"Independence' is strictly speaking a misnomer: Bahrain has always been internally independent. We should say "assumption (or "resumption") of full responsibility as a sovereign and independent state". But, the Note continues, all the world calls the recent change "independence" and any other description is both pedantic and clumsy".

By mid-July of 1971, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia was still adamantly wedded to the idea of a Union of 9, long after it had become clear to us in the Residency, and indeed to many in the Saudi and the Kuwaiti Governments, that both Bahrain and Qatar would go for a separate independence, and that the Trucial States were heading for a Union of 7. We had already shown the Bahrainis and the Qataris some draft Treaties of Friendship, and Sheikh Zayed and Sheikh Rashid were already discussing the division of Union Ministries, with Foreign Affairs going to Abu Dhabi and Finance to Dubai.

The events of 1971 really fall into two categories. The first covered the decisions of the Rulers themselves on whether to go for a Union of 9 or less; what contacts and discussions were required with neighboring Governments, and with the wider Arab World; what procedures and timing were necessary to achieve full independence, and how and when to apply for membership of the United Nations. Although the Rulers kept closely in touch with us as these questions unfolded, the decisions were theirs and theirs alone. As you all know Bahrain decided to go for Independence on 15 August (once Iran's long-standing claim to Bahrain had been dropped), and Qatar followed three weeks later.

The second category, with which I was personally much more closely involved, was all the work required on our side to ensure that our existing responsibilities and Treaty commitments reverted to the Rulers themselves in an orderly, legal and adequate manner.

Once it was clear that the Trucial States Rulers were heading for a Union of 7, we could now concentrate on putting all the necessary conditions and documents in place for us to exchange Treaties of Friendship with a Union of 7 – or 6, if Ras al Khaimah decided to stay out, pending a settlement of Iran's claim to the Tunb Islands.

Discussions on Iran's remaining claims, both to the Tunbs and to Sharjah's Island of Abu Musa, were conducted by Sir William Luce in London with the Shah's Ambassador, in the hope that a peaceful resolution to both claims could be reached. As is well known, negotiations over the Tunbs broke down, and the Iranians predictably landed. Although Sheikh Saqr of Ras al Khaimah attended the signature of the conclusion of our Treaty of Friendship with the United Arab Emirates, he declined, at that stage, to become a full member of the Union.

The proposal to go for a Union of 7 or 6 had the strong support of the Sultan of Oman, and I can confirm that we in the Residency saw no signs whatsoever that the
Sultan harboured any ambitions for a Greater Oman – in spite of some suspicions of a British conspiracy to hand over the Emirates to Oman.

The list of drafts and documents which had to be in place, to be exchanged with the Rulers at the time of inauguration, was a formidable one. I will not go into detail; but the following schedule gives, I hope, some idea of the challenge facing us in the Residency, and in the Department at home. Most of these documents were the subject of a meeting convened in Bahrain in mid-October, with representatives of the Department, including a Foreign Office Legal Adviser. I recall that Sir Geoffrey Arthur paid a special compliment to the Foreign Office Legal Advisers, who, he said, always paid more attention to finding solutions than to raising objections.

The letter terminating the Special Treaty Relations with the Emirates included two Annexes: the first, listing those historical agreements to be regarded as terminated, dating back as far as the General Treaty for the Cessation of Plunder and Piracy by land and sea dated 1820 and the Perpetual Maritime Truce of 1853. The second list was of those agreements which had already been exchanged but which would be the subject of further discussion, such as the Exchange of Letters returning our jurisdiction over non-Muslims to the Emirates authorities, and correspondence on Exchange Control.

Even these lists were not comprehensive. I have already mentioned that congratulatory messages which were drafted in London to be sent by The Queen, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and two other Cabinet Ministers at the time of signature, there was even correspondence with the Admiralty about the number of Naval Gun Salutes which the Rulers would be entitled to receive in future from the Royal navy.

So you can see that the necessary preparations from our side presented some formidable difficulties, particularly since, in 1971, we had no benefit of internet, mobile telephones, word processors, computers or faxes – we did not even have adequate copying facilities. All documents to be exchanged had, of course, to be translated into Arabic, and I can recall several instances when even the work of our highly skilled translators had to be corrected personally by Sir Geoffrey Arthur.

Once it became clear that Sheikh Zayed and his fellow Rulers were aiming for signature at the very beginning of December, our drafting and translation work went into top gear – not helped by the fact that much of the previous month coincided with the Holy Month of Ramadan. In fact, we faced a final complication, since we could not know which date in Arabic to apply to the texts, already typed on vellum for signature, until the ‘Eid had been declared.

There had also been some doubt whether the Foreign Office – always strapped for money – were prepared to let us have adequate supplies of the special vellum used for Treaties and the special Treaty Binders to be used on the day. It is a considerable
tribute to our typists and translators that we were finally able to send back quite a number of unused stocks of Treaty Paper and Two Treaty Binders.

But the day came when the Political Resident exchanged notes terminating the Treaties with all the six Rulers, including the Acting Ruler of Umm al Qawain, on December 1st. As Sir Geoffrey flew back from Umm al Qawain, he was told that Sheikh Saqr was ready to receive him. In the course of an emotional, but friendly, meeting that afternoon in Ras al Khaimah, they exchanged the appropriate Notes and Letters. As Sir Geoffrey left Sheikh Saqr’s Palace, a large crowd cheered Shikh Saqr who had accompanied Sir Geoffrey outside—cheering with relief that the rumors that Sir Geoffrey had come to Ras al Khaimah to arrest Sheikh Saqr were unfounded.

On the following day, the six rulers (excluding Sheikh Saqr) met in Dubai, brought the provisional Constitution into Force and then, meeting as the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates, elected the President, Sheikh Zayed; the Vice-President, Sheikh Rashid; and the Prime Minister, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid, and authorised the President to sign the first Treaty of Friendship with the Political Resident. Sir Geoffrey, accompanied by two Political Agents and other members of the Residency Staff, drove to Sheikh Rashid’s Palace at Jumairah and signed the Treaty, in the presence of a vast number of photographers, standing on the tables. Several of us very nearly lost our fingers to the photographers’ boots.

A last minute hitch meant that the door could not be opened, and we all had to leave by the window. As one wit observed, it was a reversal of the old myth that British Imperialism leaves by the door but comes back through the window. As Sir Geoffrey concluded in his reporting telegram: “Quite a Day”. Exactly one week later, the United Arab Emirates was admitted to the United Nations.